

17 August 2004

To Whom It May Concern,

Born 15 September 1933 in the Coolgardie district Western Australia I was placed at approximately 8 years old in the Salvation Army Seaforth Children's Home at Gosnells Western Australia which was home to orphans, neglected and discarded kids, from babies to teenagers then paid work was found for them.

By the grace of the Salvation Army, we were placed there, 30kilometres out of city limits during World War 2 for protection from the enemies.

At the end of the war all of us approximately 300 kids were transferred to the Nedlands Salvation Army home, opposite the Hollywood Service Men and Women's Hospital on one side and opposite the War Cemetery on another side both other sides were surrounded by private homes.

We were discouraged from watching our war dead being buried, but were never chastised. We used to watch and listen to the solemn march and band music as the Italian prisoners who had recently dug their graves, stood by in sorrow and reverence.

We often crossed the road and enjoyed speaking to them, one could sense their plight. There were no big walls or confinements at either home, just simple farm wire strand fences.

As far as I know, my young brother and I were the only ones to run away simply to contact mother who we found out was renting a place in Cottesloe, 10kilometres away not to get away from the Salvation Army but to find our mother, which I did at 12 years old.

For the record, in the Salvation Army's concern and hunt for us, a full blood aboriginal lad 14 years old named Kevin Hill, ran me down, my pleas caused him to free me. We both kept that secret.

During the years approximately 1942-1946, we were in the care of the Salvos. We lived in spotless clean conditions, we were well fed, clothed, schooled and enjoyed warm beds. Also we were subtly taught decent morals.

Regularly had the bible read to us but were never religion ear bashed, one could say they were delicate. Some of us were caned for disobedience, on the hands always on the hands. Swearing or talking after lights out 7.30pm, was a no no.

Women officers never hit us, a couple of them were caustic tongued. Some of the men owned a cane with an extremely small staff, order needed to be maintained. Bullies were monitored and discouraged the administrator, Major Parkes? A good and kindly man, caned me only once, we never saw a lot of him.

Captain Sumption, basically a good man was strict, used the cane quite hard but not often. He later married kind Captain Francis and his good wife, never hit us. One time six of us were given a ride on a horse and cart by Captain Francis. The horse passed wind quite strongly, being kids, we all laughed so did the Captain with a wink and a twinkle in his eyes.

Lieutenant Hillman, who slightly resembled a man, as along with his cane (often used) he secretly owned and used a piece of the old fashioned black rubber hose on some of us. Thus nicknamed "Hosie Hillman".

Matron nicknamed "Mace", was head woman caustic in facial and tongue tactics, but a good decent woman. Major ?, a big kind man, I first met encountered him at Nedlands, no cane, who prior to 1943-4 had spent 20 years as a missionary in China, his stories were fascinating about his time there in China.

He used to send me to a corner shop a half a mile away to buy his cigarettes and a packet of Irish moss to hide his breath, also some lollies for brother and I.

Caustic adjutant Burr, well named but nicknamed "cacky burr" as she messed herself running to the toilet because a couple of kids dosed her pea soup with soap powder. As I remember, she was not in the habit of wearing underwear (kids miss nothing). We used to serve food up to the officers dining room. Very kind Miss Lieutenant Fowler was with us most part of a year. She told me she was not happy being a Salvo, I believe by her say so, she was a second or third cousin to me.

Never to my knowledge did any of the men or women in charge of the homes, ever sexually abuse any children! Nor did any of the children express or even hint that they did. Kids (I have 7 of them) are more aware of things about them, than some adults give them credit for and kids will and do talk to other kids. Among our small to large dormitories, were the single officer's rooms. They personally kept their rooms neat and clean. Their doors seemed to be always open.

We had daily toiletries, showers etc, in peace. No officers, men or women came upon us, if they did, they must have been most discreet.

We never wore boots or shoes, as was the fashion for kids in those days. That fashion is even among our young today. They could not afford to shoe us all, anyway. After I left the home, it was also fashion to be caned in public schools.

The Salvos were kinder and more caring than my parents, and were on par with the state schools.

It was true they shoed us when they took some of us in small numbers, to the Perth Citadel. I for one truly enjoyed the outings and was taken often. It may have been their plan to mix us older kids, among people of different ages and gender, to prepare us to enter society more easily.

The Salvos took all of us on yearly holidays to Bunbury or Mandurak, where all of us were given total but caring freedom, to wander in the towns seas and estuaries.

I still fondly remember them, for those magnificent joyous times and often relived the fun in the same places with my children. How they managed for so few adults to look after so many kids, god only knows, how tired they must have been at times. Mothers and fathers 24 hours a day 7 days a week, year in year out.

Only one kid, Ken Flemming was hurt on holidays by treading on a cobbler, as we chased and caught big blue manner crabs, which we cooked and ate. I remember, many officers

were away with our service people. The Salvation Army do not have huge places of worship, they seem to plough the donations back into society for the needy and unfortunate.

Let me not forget Miss Summers, beautiful in every way, a magnificent stamp of women, a kind caring efficient loving teacher/ I held her in deep respect and still think warmly of her. After Miss Summers, we were taught by Headmaster Gill, a nasty english migrant, a runt of a man in mind spirit and body, who enjoyed using the cane but was too miserably thin and weak to hurt much. The teacher, I believe were privately hired. All kids were rostered to perform duties, milking cows making our own beds, scrubbing and polishing floors, minding smaller children. I remember washing babies when 11 years old. Chopping wood, preparing meals by cleaning and cutting the ingredients etc.

They took some of us to the West Perth Markets to obtain fruit and vegetables. The old Salvos were flaming good scroungers! Think of the valuable all round life skills this Salvation Army run kids homes gave us.

Which, believe you me, has held me in good stead. They encouraged us to play sport and held many field days at the home to abbet and entertain us. They took us to swimming lessons at Crawley baths, we were also allowed to swim and enjoy the creek at Seaforth Gosnells, catching Marron like shell fish and other explorative things kids enjoy. Vandalism was zero. All officers and teachers with reserve for Gill and Hill, deserve medals.

Brain damage to many children such as myself, from neglect by starvation and bashings, then discarded was caused by horrid parents and others, long before the Salvation Army picked up the shredded pieces and molded us to some resemblance of decent humans. For which I gratefully remember them by and sincerely and humbly thank them.

Recently after reading a newspaper story about abuse by Salvation Army officers at the Nedlands Western Australia Children's Home, 40-50 years ago, I contacted the Salvation Army and offered my memories of the past under their care. It seems to me some people are after a quick dollar and is using the dim long ago as a weapon.

Sincerely and truthfully on 11 August 2004 as I remember,

William J Rowe.