

CHILDHOOD LOST AT CLONTARF

A VICTIM OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

I was born in the West Australian town of Doodlakine in the year 1925 on the 28th July and started school in July 1931. I am the youngest boy in a family of six - four boys and two girls. By the time I started school, the big depression had started and my father, who was a wheat and sheep farmer, was forced off his farm. He took up rabbit-trapping but it became almost impossible to support a family of six. Relationships deteriorated between my parents and they separated. My mother took us children to my grandparents until the situation became too difficult. So in the year 1934, my elder brother Ron and I were placed in Clontarf. We caught the early morning train from Doodlakine arriving in Perth before midday, where we then caught the tram 22 to Fitzgerald Street, North Perth. Initially we went to mother's aunty and uncle, who lived in Randle Street. Uncle had a T-model Ford van. Late in the afternoon, together with my uncle and mother, we headed off to Clontarf. It was the summer in early 1934; I was dressed in a white shirt, white shorts and white sandshoes - after arriving at Clontarf, I never saw these clothes again. We were met by Brother Daley, who was the principal of Clontarf. I stood and watched my mother walk away from Ron and myself.

Clontarf for me became a place of hell. I was a young small 9 year old boy who had been brought up in the country with a lot of freedom and now I was locked up in Clontarf with no love or compassion, treated like hell by men of no understanding. To us it was a tragedy - no-one to tuck us in at nights, just pulled and bullied like little prisoners.

At Doodlakine we never went hungry, with plenty of rabbits to catch and home-grown vegetables from our own garden. My nanna had plenty of poultry and there was always plenty of home-made bread. At Clontarf we were always hungry; eating conditions were disgraceful. Our evening meal consisted of one and a half slices of bread and jam and a dreadful cup of cocoa. Just imagine putting up with that for 2½ years. Mid-day meals usually consisted of soup; just slushy water with pearl barley and few potatoes - no solid meat at all. Morning meals was just porridge and a mug of very poor quality cocoa, and perhaps some bread.

I recall Saturday very well. A sheep was killed each Saturday morning but the only part of the sheep I can ever remember eating was the head. This was placed whole in a steam-boiling vessel, wool still hanging on the jaws, together with some potatoes, onions and pearl barley. That "bardey soup" was our Saturday mid-day meal.

On weekdays at about 10 am, we would be lined up to receive a handful of broken biscuits. These were the sweepings from the floor of Mills & Wares Fremantle factory and included dust and mouse dung. We received this twice daily.

On Sundays we received a real treat - a piece of cake about 1½" square.

Returning to my mother - I am sure she was broken-hearted at that point of time. At this date, 27/1/1996, I am seventy years of age and believe me, I am crying again. I love my mother, who passed away at ninety years of age.

I was a very good little Catholic boy when I first went to Clontarf. It did not take me long to change my attitude. I learnt to hate the Brothers and the Catholic church in general. My 2½ years at Clontarf was so terrible it broke my heart and my soul. I have so much hatred for the Brothers.

I felt that I would not see my mother again. For the first year and a half I did not see her as she had shifted to the town of Northam where she washed and scrubbed floors for other people to exist. After our first 1½ years at Clontarf, we were sent home to Northam for Easter holidays - then back to Clontarf once again to suffer the shit the Brothers dished out - back to bed bugs and shit-house meals - if you can call them meals.

Saturday morning was another nightmare - we had to drink a big mug of Epsom Salts - never had very much in our guts at any time. The clothes we were given to wear made us look like little tramps; nothing fitted, we had no shoes or boots and our feet were always cracked and chipped. Our hair was cut like prisoner - just a very small fringe in front. Winter was misery - no pullovers. Rag hats all the year around. In summer we caught crabs and fish in the Canning River - that was good. Winter started again - more misery.

I can remember my first day at school at Clontarf. Old Brother O'Connor was my first teacher - a lot better than most, although he could be cruel at times, especially when you made a mistake in spelling or got a sum wrong and he never showed where you went wrong. Next year I had to face up to Joe Jackson - a little bastard he was. I remember leaving the classroom to go to the toilets and because I was a little slow returning, Jackson met me in the quadrangle and thrashed me until I could not stand up.

I am going to talk about Keaney - such a bastard. The principal Brother Daley left Clontarf and Keaney was his replacement. He could never pronounce my surname properly and called me "you Mattson". I hated Keaney. His habit was to lie under a tree and make me scratch dandruff from his hair - which happened quite often.

We had to work hard at Clontarf. We had to saw up really big trees with a crosscut saw, eight or nine boys on each end of the ropes. In summertime it was bloody hot in the black sand with black flies by the thousands in your eyes, ears and nose - no insect repellent and nothing to drink. I hated the Brothers, bastards.

I was at Clontarf at the same time as Karl Davies. Lucky for

me I never got to Bindoon. I left Clontarf in 1937.

I would now like to talk about evening prayers held on the top floor of the chapel. Usually you would go to the toilets before going to evening prayer but on one occasion I did not have time and needed to go during prayer. I was too frightened to go as I knew I would get a thrashing so I just sat on the bench and wet my pants. As a result, I got thrashed anyway.

We were always made to go to confession, otherwise another thrashing. No confession, no holy communion.

The Brothers' brutality at Clontarf was like branding you with a branding iron - it never leaves you. As I write that I cry, it is so very true. They never taught the love of God; it was always the fear of God. We were never told that God loves us but were ruled by fear - and the strap.

Now I would like to talk about the boys who wet the bed. Those poor little boys received very bad treatment. They were made fun of by Brothers in front of all the other boys. They had to place the wet sheet over their head.

New boys came and went. No mother to say goodnight, just brothers walking around with their bloody straps.

I would like to talk about letters. When I wrote to my mother, I was not allowed to seal the letter and when we received a letter from her, the Brothers had opened it before it was given to us. What were they so frightened of?

I can tell you that the Brothers dining table was always laden with plenty of good food, plenty of meat, bread and butter.

I was not sexually abused but I was physically abused many times by the Brother bastards - that is how I feel about them.

It is sixty one years since I first went the Clontarf. The memory has never faded. I know that I am not a good writer - I was never taught my letters by the Brothers - rather taught to pray all the time - hail Mary's and the Lord's prayer. They bullied and strapped us - that's how they got their pleasures, the bastards.

I remember kicking my big toe nail off on my right foot but got no treatment for it; as a result it is crooked to this day. I never cried at Clontarf - only when I was thrashed. I didn't even cry the day I was left there - but I have since for the great injustice of it all.

I would like to talk about a boy called Mick Courtney. The Brothers treated him very badly. Mick ran away from Clontarf

many times only to be brought back by the police. The Brothers shaved his hair off and thrashed him. Later, during the war, he was taken prisoner by the Japanese in Singapore and ended up in Japan for the duration. Like the Brothers, they never broke him.

My days at Clontarf ended in the middle of 1937 - that is, physically but not mentally. As I said previously, it is like a branding - it never leaves you.

At this point of time I have failed to mention Brother Moloney - a tall man, but a disgusting bastard - did many cruel things to boys, such as scrubbing their legs till the blood ran to their ankles..

On leaving Clontarf, I was sent to St. Patricks Boys Day School for 2½ years. The Brothers are like leopards - they never change their spots - still bastards.

I will never forgive the Brothers and I do not have any respect for our West Australian politicians because of their lack of interest in this issue - denying an enquiry - trading off justice for VOTES. How much lower can our politicians go.

MAX MATHESON
27/1/1996

PLEASE ACCEPT THIS AS

MY SUBMISSION

TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE TREATMENT OF
~~and~~ ~~written~~ STATE WARDS IN CARE

By Max Matheson

12-8-04

PS: MY DAD WAS IN CLONTARF
IN 1910 HE SAID THINGS
WERE JUST AS BAD THEN
