

"FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS"

Australian Senate.
Community Affairs.
References Committee.
PARLIAMENT HOUSE.
CANBERRA ACT 2600.
Elton Humphery.
Committee Secretary.



Dear Sir,

I wish to submit my memories of the experience in an Orphanage, run by the "Sisters of Mercy", some miles out of Albury, N.S.W., I believe it is now called, "Mercy Centre, at Lavington.

In 1942, my father went to war and was captured by the Japanese, when they took over Singapore and finished up on the Burma Railway and never came back.

Meanwhile, I was left with a neighboring family for a while, while Mum found work. She finally got a job in a hotel in Albury and I joined her there in a little room at the back of the hotel, "Staff Rooms", it was from there my mother took me some miles out to the Orphanage.

My first horror came when a big burley Nun held me tight, while I watched my mother going up the path to a taxi. In a traumatised state, I was taken to the rear of the building, my clothes were taken off me and all my personal things, and I was given a navy, cotton, straight dress to wear, my shoes were taken off me (we only had shoes on Sundays, for "Mass")

On my second day there, I was caned, 3 times on each hand for stepping over a form (long backless seat). A bell would ring and all the kids would line up to go to a meal. There were long wooden tables, tin pannikins with wire handles, tin plates, another bell to say "Grace", another bell to sit down and another bell to start eating, - same every day, the meals were "slop", grey, lumpy excuse for "stew", the other variation on the Menu was the same "stew" only with some curry added, no vegetables, breakfast was the best, consisting of a tin plate with "Weeties" with 1/2 milk, 1/2 water, dab of sugar, lump of course bread (which the kids made) with watery, apricot jam soaked in.

More bells, - locked in "LIOLA" for 3-4 hours, "LIOLA" was a round structure, - no windows, 1 door, seating all around the inside, broken cement floor with puddles of muddy water, from

being hosed out,- no toys,- the children inside, with nothing to do, fought with one another, I was tortured by the kids because I was fretting and crying all the time, they would come over and pinch me, spit on me, pull my hair and a few of them would drag me through the muddy puddles, while kicking me etc., this happened daily for quite some time, being warned not to say, "tell" anything or I would get worse. Bath time was once a month, two children would occupy one of 2 Baths, while other kids would bring buckets of hot water from the copper to top the water up, the water was filthy by the time it was my turn, after dozens of kids would be in and out. Caster Oil Day was also once a month (if you needed it or not), it was ^{horrible} ~~horrible~~ but it was the only time we got a biscuit (an Arrowroot). approx. 1 month we had our hair combed out with kerocene (needed or not).

I remember two girls that ran away, they were older girls, the Nuns did not report it to the Police, instead, the Priest and Nuns picked up the girls in Town, when they were brought back, the bell rang for tea, but we were not allowed to sit down, instead, they brought the two girls out in front of us and caned them mercilessly on hands, legs, back etc., it was terrible, the girls were not allowed to eat anything and next day they had to scrub every bit of cement in the place, using a nail to clean out all the cracks. It was inhuman punishment, but was meant as an example to any of us that may have the same idea. I had jobs to do, I had to keep clean the chicken coop, (as we never ever had any eggs), I admit to taking an egg or two (raw) because we were all a bit hungry most of the time, I also had to clean all the shoes (for Sunday Mass) and wash and scrub floors, I had little or no schooling to talk about, I only remember being in "School" a couple of times. The smaller children, which I was one, had "Charges",- older girls to see to washing clothes, ironing, etc., my "charge's" name was Stella, she was about 13 or 14 y.o., part Aborigine, she hated me, resented having to do anything for me and used to give me a clip over the head every chance she got, I was afraid of her.

Sometimes for a treat, a tray of the course bread, topped with dripping would emerge, sometimes, the older girls that worked in the Nun's kitchen, would smuggle out the remains of a couple of lamb chops that the Nuns had for breakfast, there would be very little meat left on them, but just to get a taste of the chop, the kids would say, "I bags it after you, ,so the bones would be passed on to numerous kids before being discarded. At times, the farms near the Orphanage,

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would get 1/2 Doz. or so kids to work in their Orchards, picking pears all day, and we could'nt even eat any because they were picked green and we would get stomach ache.

There are a lot more memories I have about my nightmarish experience there, the whole experience affected my life to this day, it made me distrust people, over-defensive, even aggressive, when I was younger, I have been married and divorced three times, unable, it seems, to have a normal relationship with anyone because of distrust and insecurity.

Because of the betrayal of trust and the abuse of the most vulnerable, particularly by people that profess to be of God, I am very glad that it seems to be coming out in the open and that it will make it harder for anyone to get away with this kind of treatment, to little children, who had no power to change their situation, it should never happen again, ever.

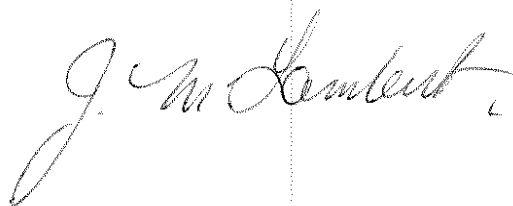
I believe, the Catholic Institute, should pay some kind of compensation to all those who have suffered by their hands, ruined lives, that they are responsible for.

The Statement I have made, is as accurate as I remember the events from age 7 to 9 yrs.

I remain,

Your's Faithfully.

June Margaret Lambert.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "June Margaret Lambert".