

Thank you for giving me an official and recognized place in which to tell my story. I have only ever talked to my psychiatrist about this because it was so awful and I felt so ashamed this is slowly changing.

Regards Susan Connolly

My name is Susan Connolly. DOB 11.04.1961 I have 2 sisters and 3 brothers. We were all wards of the State of Victoria and we have all been placed in various State run institutions in Victoria. We all suffered but it is up to my siblings to tell their stories this is a bit of mine.

I was born into a very poor and chaotic family we lived in a very poor suburb of Melbourne called Jacana. My mother was very depressed and addicted to tranquilisers. She spent most of the day in bed. My father was a working class Irish immigrant who worked 2 jobs to try and look after his family, unfortunately he was an alcoholic so much of his money went on booze. My father also belted my mother senseless when he was drunk because the house was filthy, the kids were filthy and she was a hopeless drug addict. When I was four years old my siblings and I were made wards of the State due to hunger and neglect, which was true, but we were not ever beaten up or brutalised by our parents.

I was placed in The Alexander babies home in Ballarat. My 2 younger sisters and my younger brothers were there with me. Even though I was so young I really do remember things. I remember being hungry and cold all the time, I remember a roomful of small crying rocking children being smacked and punished for crying and rocking. This happened to me I remember being hit on the face arms and legs; I remember the whelps, the shock, and the bewilderment. I remember being made to sit in a freezing cold bath because I had wet my bed and then being made to sleep again on the wet smelly sheets..(I had never wet my bed before going into that home I wonder why I started!!!!) I was only 4 and this treatment was being metered out to children much younger than my self what sort of people where these so called carers.

When I was 5 I was moved across to the Ballarat Children's Home (formally The Ballarat Orphanage. I was placed in the infants section for children 5-8. This was the first time I had ever been totally separated from all family I was five and had been ripped away from siblings with out support or warning. I was very very distraught and cried and rocked and I could not sleep eat or talk. I was hit yelled at locked in the linen room mocked and teased by the staff because of my reaction to this trauma.really nice human being this lot eh. I felt like I had gone to hell. I had. The infants' building was a huge cold foreboding building. An institution for the poor and abandoned similar to any described by Charles Dickens in his novels. We slept in huge dormitory rooms with beds lined up very closely together in rows. It was so frightening to me. On my 1st night 2 staff members thought they would have some fun with me and told me that "ghost Clowns come into the dorm at night and try to snatch little girls...remember I was already very traumatised and disturbed by the separation from close siblings.... I went to bed terrified, I rocked, I twitched I whimpered terrified that these evil "ghost clowns" were going to take me. I wet my bed....well you just don't do that...and I was taken into a cold bathroom in the early hours of the morning..It was freezing cold.... I was made to take my Pyjamas off and stand naked and wash my sheets and Po's in a steel bath in freezing water. I was freezing shacking numb and terrified. I just did not get it why was I being treated like this what were happening where were my sisters and brothers. The 2 young night staff called me a dirty stinking sook... I was made to stand in a corning naked

and I was hit on the bottom 3 times with a wire coat hanger...I hated them. The infants home was a cruel place we had to eat food that was not cooked properly, vegies that had not been washed properly and still had dirt and slugs in them...If we did not we went hungry and were denied food the following day...to this day I cannot eat broccoli, spinach or cabbage the very smell and look of these vegies makes me physically ill.

I still remember the Matron who was in charge the Matron who made us eat this food and punished us if we didn't. It was a dog eat dog environment if you didn't adapt and learn how to protect yourself who to watch out for...both staff and other kids then god help you. We were always herded together in rooms, treated like cattle no care no love no nurture no individuality..bloody awful.

Finally my dad came to visit..but I was told not to talk with him about the home and to tell him I was happy..Dad also bought my sisters and brothers with him.actually my 2 older brothers were already at the BCH but I was not allowed contact with them. I was so happy to see them after 3 months of being alone.

I adapted I got tough I learned to hate and to take revenge. I learnt to fight, physically and emotionally. Eventually my younger siblings moved to The BCH I think I was 7 when this occurred so I had already been there 2 years. I mad sure they were ok to the best of my ability. I did try to stick up for them and to set them right re the staff, lies, kids and punishment.that is how to avoid but some times I challenged staff. I was punished I was locked in the dark musty linen room for many hours on many accessions, I was locked in the Boot room were shoes were kept and mad to sleep in this cold dark room I was denied food and on several occasions when a parent visited they were told I was to ill to see them and was thus unable to see them. This was so cruel and the worst punishment of all...Physically punishment was common, smacks with rods, rulers, coat hangers, was very common I and many other young children suffered this abuse regularly... not by all the staff but by a significant group...If I could meet them now I tell you...Bloody sadistic evil nasty bullies.

At the age of 8 I was again forcably separated from my sibling as I was moved to a cottage for girls 8 to 15. I was a bit tougher by now and accustomed to instutionalised living and the heard mentality that was part and parcel of institutional life. I still hated it but that was my lot. I was upset about being separated but more because I was worried about my younger brothers and sisters...what could I do... The new cottage was a better physical environment than the gothic infants section but still the same old issues existed, bullying, by staff and other kids, physical and emotional abuse by kids and staff, punishments again which included beatings being made to stand naked in cold bathrooms at night, being locked up in dark cold rooms for extended periods and being denied food and other privlages..They did not however try the ploy of telling my dad I was ill and could not see him on a visit as they new I would tell him at this age and he would be very angry and take action. Life hard. We were up at 6am and had to do one and a half hour of cleaning the cottage before breakfast. This included vacuum cleaning, mopping sweeping and polishing floors, taking basked and trolleys to a central laundry, cleaning bathrooms, toilets ect and doing the dishing in the infants section. We were tired cold and hungry by 7.30 at which time we had a meagre breakfast. We were then sent outside to either a yard or to the internal primary school yard wether it was rain hail or shine. If we got soaking wet bad luck...Remember this was Ballarat. A night the entire Home had the evening meal in a huge dining hall, boys on one side girls on the other. The girls had to were a cloth hair net and an apron the boys didn't ...just stupid rules that mad no sense but kept you regulated and institutionalised. We lined up for meals and were seating according to our cottage. The meals would not commence until we had a speech and prayers from the home superintendent...he was a big stern man who was always keen to riming us that we were bad and very lucky that the BCH himself and the staff were willing to take care

of us. I think he really meant it...he would then pray. During meal times our manners were measured and if we did not eat like ladies and put our utensils down during mouthfuls, or cock or small finger when drinking, or wipe our mouths constantly or chew with our mouth tightly shut we were smacked over the knuckles with a ruler...the boys were not. After the meal all girls 8 and over had to perform kitchen duties.... that is wash dry and put away hundreds of dishes cutlery and pots and pans. We then had to scrub mop and polish benches and floors. Working hard in the morning working hard in the evenings bad children like us had to earn our keep. The mantra went day in day out.

At about 10 I developed an eating disorder. Which I still battle with today. I started stealing food and hiding it and then binging on it when I was alone. I would go under my bed or into the toilet or behind the sheds. This habit provided me with a sense of security and a form of rebellion against the regimented system of the Home.

Life in the home was a battle. 4 Groups of gangs controlled, bullied and abused the other kids. There were 2 gangs of boys and 2 gangs of girls. Typically a gang of white girls and a gang of aboriginal girls the boy's gangs followed suite. You either joined the gang and followed its leaders and did their bidding or you were bullied beaten up, teased ostracised, stolen from and harassed. I was one of 3 girls in my age group 10-14 who did not join a gang. We were constantly bashed, abused, had our clothes books and personal belongings trashed and our siblings threatened. Although the activities of the gangs were very obvious and although those of us who suffered as a result of their actions complained. Nothing was ever done to rein these gangs in or punish the perpetrators of violence and gang related behaviour. I believe now that they were allowed a free rein because these gangs created a form of social control, which regulated other kids. Obviously this was of an advantage to the staff and hierarchy managing the home as it made their jobs much easier. The law of the jungle sorted us all out.

In order to be left alone my 3 friends and I decided to fight fire with fire. We started destroying the gangs property, we physically fought gang members, we constantly dobbed on them and drove the staff crazy it worked and eventually we were left alone. But we had to go through a lot of fights and serious incidents to get to this...I am surprised now looking back that no one was killed or seriously injured.

Many of the gang girls and their followers had sex with the gang boys..The girls claim they were forced into having sex, or raped. Some had consensual sex..it is hard to believe the later claim for the most part, as the boys involved were very aggressive and frightening. A couple that threatened to rape me, gangbang me rape me with a stick or the end of a tennis racquet, constantly harassed me. Twice a teenage boy I know his name I remember this clearly digitally raped me. When I developed breasts the boys were always lifting my shirts and grabbing my breasts it was horrible. I told my cottage mother what had happened. She told me I was a liar and was always seeking attention. I did not go near the play area the football field or tennis courts for nearly 2 years after these incidents I only saw the boys in the dining room. I was terrified of them.

Some of the girls become pregnant. they were sent to the young women's prison Wintaton. The boys well nothing happened to themof course!!!!

Sexual abuse was not only common between the children/teenages. I have very clear memories of the activities of two male paedophiles one-abuse girls the other boys. I know their names and some of the children they abused. The abuse of the boys was so obvious that we noticed it. This man was a sports coach he hated the girls and would spend most of his time with the boys. He often went out of the gym with individual boys returning ½ to one

hour later with out the boy. The particular boy who had been abused rarely came back to the gym and if he did went nowhere near this guy. We wondered about it and eventually this man raped my best friends brothers. He told his sister she told me, as I was her best friend. This boy went from being a really funny bright happy boy to a depressed morose anxious boy.....If we know this was going on surely the staff...the adults were aware. My brothers told me that boys were regularly raping and abusing other boys and a couple of the male staff members were raping and abusing boys Whether they were abused or not they have never revealed.

One man sexually and physically abused me. He was married to our cottage mother at the time. I was 15 very outspoken if I thought things were unfair.this got me into triouble but this man had a particular way of dealing with me. He would make me get into a flimsy nightie with half the front ripped he would then make me scrub the bath room floor as a I did he so he would crouch behind me and touch my breasts and my vagina through my underpants. I did not know it at the time but now I know he was masturbating while he did this. Once he had finished he would then make me take off my underpants and he would slipped very hard 10 times always 10 times...with his large open hand. He told me that if I told anyone he would abuse my younger sisters...this guy was of course an upstanding member of a church community who insisted we attend church on Sundays This happened to me at least 30 times and stopped when he was transferred to another cottage...a boys cottage so may be I was not the only girl he was abusing and he was moved on because the management knew what was going on. The most significant issue of neglect and abuse I suffered did not occur at the hand of someone with in the home but did occur as a result of the ignorance and out right neglect of my cottage mother, the homes nurse and the homes senior social worker.... When I was 15-16 these worker decided that it would be good for me if I had more contact with my mother.. She was a drug addict and a sex worker living in the St Kilda of the 1970's early 80's. A sleazy dirty poor and hungry St Kilda. not the trendy place we know now. I was sent down on the train and then had to find my way to her room. She lived in horrible smelly, dank. mouldy and dark. I had nowhere to sleep she provide no food or blankets and in fact took any money I had for herself. She bought cigarettes which we shared as I had started smoking in the home as had most of the kids at around 12 she was out of it most of the time but the real shock came that night. My mum made money through sex work.so at about 6.30 a taxi driver came to her and I was told to hide in a corner while her was there I watched as he had sex with my mother it was shocking...2 more men came to her that night same thing. My mother's told me I was being really helpful and for the first time praised me can you imagine how awful and confused I was. On the Sunday a man who was living in the rooming house grabbed me in the bathroom dragged me into the toilets and raped me. I feel my self chocking and am about to be sick just writing this. felt. I visited my mother several time more and was raped and abuse by an Irish boy friend of hers several times and by 2 other men in the rooming House. I felt that if I did something about these rapes I would never see my mother again and she would hate me she pretty much had said this. Anyway the next time I was to go to her I refused ...I did not immediately tell the nurse ect why but as they decided to punish me by taking away TV and pocket money and general social interaction I told them what had happened.... I could not believed it they laughed they accused me of lying of having a vivid imagination of always causing trouble.... I was forced to go back to my mother's room. I was driven to Melbourne by a social worker and dropped of at the front of the rooming house and told I needed to get on with my mother as I was going to leave the Home soon and would need her I may be even be able to live with her...they thought this was good. No one visited her or sort to verify that what I had claimed was the truth. Unbelievable...I was rapped again that night by my mother's drunken Irish boyfriend and so I rang away and spent the night and following day at Spencer St Station. I would not ever go back there again. a couple of time I went to Melbourne but stayed at the station all weekend pretending I had gone to my

mother's. She moved and failed to keep in contact with the home or welfare services so I did not have to go to her anymore.....It was so horrible so so horrible..My mother was a mentally and emotionally very ill and was addicted to drugs.the staff at the home to whom I confided were not yet they continued to make me go to an abusive situation..I was so confused so distressed; so ashamed and felt I had lost my mother again because I had been bad... The abuse by those men the digital rapes by the boy in the home and the knowledge that both other kids and staff were abusing other kids has left me with a very bad and unhealthy view of sex and of men. I have not ever been able to form trusting open long-term relationship and have as an adult allowed my self to be sexually manipulated and abused, as I did not know any other way that sex occurred.

I am an alcoholic and still have the eating disorder. I have very low self esteem and have battle all my adult life to survive emotionally and physically. I have attempted suicide and have been in psychiatric institutions. My father was killed in a car accident and I was with him when he died. I decided then and there that I was going to heal as best I could and be the best mother I could be to my 2 daughters. I started seeing a fantastic Psychiatrist who I still see weekly now. He believed me. He believed that all these horrible things and many more happened to me and others.no you're not mad he said, you're not a liar or a trouble maker you are not mentally ill he told me...just very abused. I'm getting better..but men terrify me intimacy trust love self esteem with other adults are concepts that over whelm me. But I try. I want to be emotionally and financially compensated for the horrors that I suffered at the hands of people and organisations that were given the responsibility of caring for young children like myself..but abused and abused or allowed abuse to occur to us instead. I want my children to have the some financial security which I have had difficulty providing for them as a result the affects the abuse I suffered has had on me and my ability to work and manage...and I want some security myself as I get older..I want to be believed by the Ballarat Children's Home organisation that constinues to exist in Ballarat. The Alexander babies home and The Ballarat children Home got away with so much because they were a Government Institutions. I so many stories and incidents of neglect and abuse that occurred to other kids I could write realms but I can't.

Not all carers were abusers but they must have known that sexual, physical and emotional abuse was occurring. I understand the heard mentally the pressure to confirm the need for job security the threats and pressures that other adults can excerpt and I am sure this happened to good staff who did not speak up. Others simply left. I do remember some kind caring people. But they did not speak up and I this was so hard as a child to understand...anyway enough from me now as I said I could write so much. I was in for some time as well...although I do not have memories of significant abuse inflicted on me or my sibling there just the usual put-downs shaming and neglect. But I am sure others do.

Thanks for letting me write this. It seems surreal but it happened.

Susan Connolly