

IVY THOMAS (nee Smith)

This is Ivy to tell you the story of my life.

It all started when I was taken away from my mother when I was born, the day I was born in 1944. After I was born they took me over to the McAuley Centre when I was 3 months old and I had no happy life at all. I was brought up by the nuns until I was 19. They put me in to the Home of the Good Shepherd and that's when it all started.

When I was in the orphanage I was made to look after babies, when I was very young (about 14 or 15). I had no social life. All the other kids had families who used to come up and see them. I had nobody to visit me and I always had to stay outside. I wasn't allowed to go near the other people's families while they were visiting their children at the orphanage.

I was made to wash and polish floors on my hands and knees, scrub floors on my hands and knees. They took me out of school when I was only 14 and I had no social life at all, because I was working all my life. I was a big girl when I got older.

I never knew who my mum and dad were or the rest of my family. I never knew where mum was, or what happened to them. I never even knew I had any brothers and sisters.

They put my mum in Heathcote after I was born and I never saw mum since the day I was born. When she came out of Heathcote my grandmother took her up to Kalgoorlie – she had to look after her.

There were seven of us in the family. There were four girls and three boys, and mum lost one at birth.

I didn't know anything about my family until I got married, because that was when I had to get my mum's and dad's birth certificate and marriage licence.

I lived in the Home all my life until I was 30. I had no social life at all. I met my husband when I was in the Home, and I was free at long last. I was locked up in that place all the time, all my life.

I got married in St Joseph's Church down at Wembley and Father Nestor married me and my husband.

In 1975 I had my daughter Elizabeth, now she's 28. In 1977 I had my son, and he is 26 now.

I had no happy life at all there, I was locked up, from the orphanage to the Good Shepherd's. I had to look work at the Home, I had to go to night shift all my life. I had no life at all.

I used to cry myself to sleep at night time because I missed my mum, because I never knew what mum looked like or where she was, because I had never seen her since the day I was born until this day on, until now. She's dead now. She got drowned. My cousin told me she was drowned in the dam.

I didn't find my sisters until very late in my hard life. My brother, Joseph, is deaf and dumb. He was brought up in the Deaf and Dumb School. He met his wife at the same place where he was staying at the Deaf and Dumb School. My brother had meningitis when he was a little boy, and that's how he became deaf and dumb. His wife is deaf and dumb as well, she had German measles and she lost her speech and that. I just found out about my other two sisters, Margaret – she died not very long after I found her and my other sister Ellen. I only knew them for two years and they died. Then I found my other brother Ron, I didn't even know where they were or what they looked like until just recently. I had no family life at all. No love from my mum or my dad, I had no grown ups in my family, or brothers and sisters. I was locked up in those two places all my life (30 years). I had no freedom. Every door would

be locked behind me. When I would go outside the door it would be locked. It was like a prison in there.

The nuns were cruel. They used to hit us with belts on our legs. They would stand over us and watch us wash our private rags.

The other kids used to go for holidays down to Rockingham for two weeks. The only time I went was when I was 14 or 15, only once I went to the Rockingham holiday house. The other girls were picked out and they were special, they were sent down every year. Me and my friend Marjorie were left behind, we had to stay home. It wasn't very good at all because I had no happy life. I had no visitors, nobody came to see me. I was miserable all my life. I had nothing, until I met my husband Gordon. They made me scrub floors on my hands and knees. They didn't teach me to cook, they didn't give me a proper education. They took me out of school when I was very young. At the orphanage we were made to go out and pick up on the weekends, pick up for the Italians in the orphanage every weekend, and every afternoon. They took me and Marjorie out of school too early, we were only about 14. Then we had to go and look after babies down in the nursery. Sister Augusta was in charge, but she is gone now, she has died. Then from the nursery we had to go to the foundling home and look after kids about 4, 5 and 6, to look after kids, putting them on the potties and all that, and getting them bathed.

I don't call that a happy life, I call it misery, and loneliness.

They wouldn't give us our pension, they took our pension off us. They reckoned I was mentally retarded, they reckoned I was a danger to the community. If I was a danger to the community why did they get me to look after babies, and little kids about 5 and 6. Do you call it mentally retarded? I don't! I never got paid, I went from the orphanage to the Shepherds. I left the orphanage when I was 19 and they took me straight up to the Shepherds. They wouldn't take me to the Shepherds unless I got a pension, otherwise they wouldn't have me there at all. I would have had nowhere to go. They made us look after uncontrollable girls. They would lock us in the room and make us baby sit them, and they were about 15 or 16 years of age. That was a bit silly.

There was a man called Mr Horgan, he was in charge at the Shepherds, the manager... he was in charge of the Shepherds then. I used to work in the Packing Room, in the Mangle Room. It was very hot and steamy in the Mangle Room. I was working for no wages. They wouldn't pay us anything. So we were slaving our guts out for nothing. That was not very nice.

The girls would get letters from their families and the nuns would take them off them and tear them up, they wouldn't let them read them.

I don't know if it was my mum or my aunty, sent me a beautiful walkie talkie doll and they took it off me. She sent me another Japanese doll and they took that off me. She sent me a beautiful manicure set with a ballerina – in the old days they had ballerinas.

I never ever saw my family and I blamed my mum for putting me in the Home all those years and then I found out that it wasn't her, it was the Welfare, Social Security at that time, or Child Welfare. I was a Ward of the State until I was 21. When I turned 21 I was still in the Home locked up like a prisoner. I used to cry myself to sleep every night because I missed my mum tucking me in and kissing me goodnight. The nuns were very cruel to us. They wouldn't let us go outside the orphanage, they just kept us locked up. We had to wear long dresses, long black dresses and black stockings.

For Easter they used to only give us an egg, a boiled egg and paint it. That's all they used to give us for Easter at the orphanage.

All they ever did was knock religion into your heads all the time. Nothing else but religion. So from this day on I have never ever put my head into a church since then, since I was in the Home because it was bashed into me.

The nuns used to go down to Rockingham and enjoy themselves. They used to go down every year, after the kids had finished their holidays they used to go down and stay there for about 6 weeks. They used to have good holidays, but us kids, me and Marjorie and Anne and a couple of the other girls were left behind. The other girls used to go down every year. The only time I went was once, and Marjorie and myself once. So we had no life at all and I never ever saw my mother or my father or my brothers and sisters until it was very late. It was too late because my two sisters died of melanoma (cancer) and my other brother died of cancer, so I had no chance of growing up with my sisters and brothers. All because of the nuns and the Welfare. I don't even know what my mother looked like. I have never seen her, never knew what she looked like or will never know what she was like. Only that my cousins have given me some photos of her. I have never ever seen my family at all, because they wouldn't tell me where they were or anything. That was pretty cruel to do that. I never saw my aunties and uncles, never knew where they were. It cost me a lot of money looking for my family. When I did find my sisters, only for my husband helping me, I found my sister Margaret, my brother Joseph and my sister Ellen, and a long lost sister Rosemary I never knew I had. I found out where my other brother Ron was, and Frank, another brother I never ever knew I had. I didn't even know what they looked like. I never saw Frank because he died before I could have a chance to see him. I only saw photos of them. So I call that really cruel, not letting you see your own family, to grow up with your own family, and go to school with your family and fun with your own sisters and brothers. I never had the chance. That was pretty cruel. I had no family life at all. I don't know what my mother looked like from this day on. I never knew what she looked like until I got the photo from my cousin of my mother and father.

I was told that two sisters Margaret and Ellen were put in the Salvation Army Home. Joseph was in the Deaf and Dumb School. He went to Clontarf, he was at Clontarf for a while, and Castledare, then he went to the Deaf and Dumb School. Rosemary got adopted out when she was 3 years old, and she is happily married now and she has one son. And we all look alike, the whole lot of us look alike – blue eyes and fair skin, dark hair, and short and stumpy. My brother Ron, he's married. He was in Clontarf as well. He was put in Clontarf when he was a young boy.

When I saw my brother Joseph he couldn't believe his eyes. He broke down and cried. He put his arms around me. The same with Margaret and Ellen. They did the same thing. They couldn't believe they had another sister.

Ron was put in Clontarf when he was a young boy and so was Frank. Frank was living in Bassendean and I didn't even know he was living in Bassendean, and I used to go to the football every Saturday to see Swans play down at Bassendean with my husband. He must have been living there when I was going to the football. I didn't know.

I've just met my Great Aunty Gloria. I put an advertisement in the paper about looking for my family, and she rang me up and told me about it.

I had to get my birth certificate to get married. I had to find out how old I was and who was my mother. So that's how I found out about my mother. My mother's name was Ellen Rose Tartar. So that's when I found out. I went to the Births & Death's Bureau and got her birth certificate and marriage licence.

I had a great friend, Mrs Chapman. She acted as my... her husband gave me away because I had no father that could give me away. So Mr & Mrs Chapman gave me a way, and it was truly lovely to have somebody give me away in marriage. She worked at the same place as I

was working at the Shepherds. She was an outsider so she was getting paid. She was a very nice person. She treated me like a daughter, she was like a mother to me, and her husband was like a father to me. Her daughters were like sisters to me, they were like a second family to me. She was working in the same place as I was working, in the Packing Room. She had to have a big operation and took very sick and she died.

The only thing that is keeping me happy is my little dog Bobby Chihuahua, and my husband. Bobby's my little... I call him my little baby because he's a beautiful little dog and he's always with me... everywhere I go he follows me, like a little angel.

My brothers and sisters were taken away from my mother and my father put her in Heathcote.

When I first met my brother he couldn't believe it. He hugged me, and he broke down and cried. He said to his wife, "Gee, she looks like me." Then Joseph gave me my other sister's address, that's how I find out where my other sisters Margaret and Ellen were. And when they saw me they couldn't believe it, they all cried with joy because they never knew they had another sister. They put their arms around me, and they broke down and cried, and they kissed me. Then Margaret told me where my brother was, I had to go to Tyrrell Lacey, she was working for the government, a social worker, because I knew I had another couple of brothers somewhere but I didn't know where they were. So I got in touch with Tyrrell Lacey and she found out where my brother Ron was, and my brother Frank, and my husband and I went to the adoption place to get the papers to find out where my other sister Rosemary was, because I knew I had another sister somewhere but I didn't know where she was.

We were all put in homes, different homes.

