

John James LOOBY

A brief summary of my life at Dalmar Childrens Home, Carlingford, Sydney, by John Looby. My sister (7), brother (2) and myself (5) were placed in Dalmar in 1942 after the death of our Mother from cancer and our Fathers ongoing trips to Repatriation Hospitals in Sydney as the result of his service in Gallopoli, Belguim and France in WW1.

I didn't see much of my sister except in the playground at school, nor of my brother till he was of school age, at which time I became very protective of him, perhaps too much so, which caused me to get into numerous fights with bigger boys.

We had to work very hard, milking cows by hand, as there were no milking machines, very early in the morning and afternoon, then carrying the ten gallon cans of milk back from the dairy to the kitchen from a very young age. Then there was the digging of acres of garden for vegetables. There was still time made for sport, cricket and soccer for boys, vigaro (softball) for girls.

From my early adult life I have suffered with bad back and shoulder problems. After questions from various Drs and Specialists, over many years, they all reached the same basic conclusion of "you obviously did a lot of heavy work as a boy" of course this was all too true. I have since had several shoulder operations, and have been restricted for years as to what I can and can't do because of these ongoing problems, I now have fortnightly treatments to help me keep going, without too much pain.

We always had plenty to eat, though not very well cooked, by the girls in the home, and very monotonous, to this day there are some foods I cannot face up to eating, eg, pumpkin, as it was served with what was known as "bones" in it and we had to eat them all, or else!!

I have fond memories of Sister Agnes (later Matron Dorothy Barnett) and of Mr McDonald the agricultural supervisor. In 1958 my wife and I visited Mr Mac, at Nambucca Heads, NSW, while on our honeymoon, and also called in to Dalmar.

Matron Barnett caught a group of us boys and girls skinny dipping in the creek at the back of Dalmar, we didn't have swimmers. I later learned that she had laughed all the way back up to the home with us running bare bummed, carrying our clothes, fearful of the beltings and punishments we would all get. The incident was never reported to Don Stewart, the Superintendent, who would have belted the living daylights out of us all. One could not have had a better surrogate mother than Matron Barnett, she was firm, but fair and acted accordingly.

I do, however, have frightening memories of a Mr Brough, the agricultural supervisor, and pseudo superintendent, prior to Mr McDonald, he was a very cruel and viscous person. In Senior boys home, called "Cull" there was a Superintendent named Ted Hanson, he was a mild man, but his wife, who I now consider to have been a sadist, used to goad her husband to whale into us with the waddy, calling for him to give us more and heavier punishment.

Punishments were very severe, usually physical and I still have self knitted bones in my hands and arm, that were never treated after punishment. It was not unusual to be punished for something one didn't do, but there was an unspoken code among the boys atleast, that you didn't pimp on (dob in) anyone else, so one just took the punishment, and that was the end of it. I steeled myself not to cry or react to these punishments, and to this day at 67yrs of age the only time I can recall crying was 2003, when our eldest daughter died of a rare cancer, just after her 43rd birthday.

I did not particularly like my approx 10 yrs at Dalmar, they were very hard and at times frightening, but I do not and never have regretted my time there, however I don't think I could handle it a second time around.

Since reading the Senate Report, I now understand why I was never able to give or display love and affection to my own family, because I never received nurturing, love and/or affection whilst I was in Dalmar when I was a child. I still can't do this, but it is a start, and hopefully sometime in the future I may be able to do so.

I now realise the things I missed most were love and affection, however I believe the tough life in Dalmar set me up for later life and was atleast partly responsible for my being successful in business and life, along with a loving and stable marriage of over 46 years now. Not everyone in Dalmar was able to cope well with the life there, my sister and I were survivors, whilst our brother hasn't done so well, and is now an alcoholic, not in touch with his children, one of whom, I believe, has been in trouble with the law. We had 3 daughters, all of whom have been divorced, 2 remarried, 1 of which is happy, the youngest will never remarry as she is insecure. There are 10 grandchildren all of whom I get on well with but cannot show "love" to.

However, I would feel for any other child who had to go through what I had to cope with.

At no time during my years at Dalmar was I aware of any inspection/s of the children and/or of our lives and work there, for sure if they did happen nothing changed for us all.

Regards

John