

By Barry Curtis

A condensed version of what I call my revolving door syndrome. From about 1950 to about 1961 there was mainly four of us living in absolute fear. These four were Mum, my two sisters Anne and Jennifer and myself. Our younger brother and sister were very young and remember next to nothing of trying to live and exist at Marrickville.

I was seven yrs of age and it was the start of Xmas school holidays 1951. Roy (father) sent me to live with an elderly couple (who I did not know) at Tempe. I stayed there for 12 months and attended Tempe primary school. I was taken home to Marrickville at the start of Xmas holidays 1952 to stay. This was the first time I saw & knew anything of having a baby brother. Mum said his name is Robert & he was born in July. The surprise of this took me days to get over. So, I was home for this Xmas! 1953. Early in the year I was up to my old tricks of wagging school again, due to the same problem from the same kids, & the teachers telling me to stop telling tales, so, with being bullied & chased home by kids with sticks everyday & shooed away by the teachers, I didn't go to school. My mother caught them once, giving me a hiding.

Roy found out about me wagging school again. He made me strip off in the bedroom & lie across the bed & using the strop, flogged me, then, the mental torture would start. He would close the bedroom door saying " I'll be back shortly to give you more" After 5 or 10 minutes he would walk up the hallway, & slow down near my bedroom door. Sometimes he would stop, other times he would go to his bedroom, open & close drawers & doors & then come back, stop at my door, touch the doorknob, then walk away for awhile. He would then start again, go to his room, come back to my door & then he would open it , tell me to lie across the bed & flog me again saying " shut up your blubbering or I'll keep it up! " Mum was punched & bashed for trying to protect me on these occasions. That was hurtful & painful as well knowing this was all my fault.

After he used the strop on one of my sisters, I found & buried it. Later he used a length cut off the old black rubber hose. It was just after the next flogging for some trivial thing, I climbed out the window. I was missing ( I knew where I was) for 3 or 4 days when, the police picked me up. They fed me & took me to Yasmar. What a shock! I learnt in a hurry to say Sir to anybody that carried a big black stick, not to talk unless spoken to & how to make a bed taut, with hospital corners, how to fold clothes correctly, how to place my shoes, left on the left right on the right. Tuck the tops of the socks into the shoes & fold the feet of the socks over the top & lay over & along the laces of the shoes. For what purpose, I don't know! Three weeks later I finally had my day in court. I was happy to see my mother in the courtroom. Magistrate Murphy said a lot then said he would put me on a good behaviour bond for 12 months so, home I went with mum. Roy was not happy about this at all! It didn't take long for the tension to be back to normal. There was a slight difference, no talking at the table unless spoken to. We all

copped floggings, mum was bashed, so everything was normal, until November. I was being a good boy, going to school almost on a regular basis, then one lunchtime the bully boys came at me again. The leader pushed me over & kicked my leg telling me to get up. I did & jumped up to punch him in the face, missed & punched him in the throat. He was too tall! A teacher took me to the office, another stayed to help the kid on the ground. I got 6 cuts of the cane & told to stand outside the office. Mothers were sent for. A lot of raised voices, sobbing & quietness coming from the office then, the door opened the kids mum stopped in front of me & hissed "you should be locked up you little bastard!" Not long after that mum came out, all she said was "come with me". At home I could see she was upset. Nothing was said when Roy came home around 6pm. During dinner mum answered a knock at the door. When she came back she looked like she'd seen a ghost. She looked at Roy & said "It's for you" Mum just sat there waiting. I knew I was in trouble at that moment. I had that sick feeling. Roy came back to the kitchen & said to me "in your room, move it!" He came in with the old plug in ironing cord, & told me to strip off. Mum was screaming, "Don't Roy, don't". He ripped my shirt off while I was taking my shorts off. Mum came in, he pushed her back into the hallway & slammed the door shut. I could hear mum crying "Please Roy, don't!" He threw me over the bed, I slammed against the weatherboard wall. I grabbed a pillow & stood on the bed using it as a shield. I punched Roy's face. Wrong move! He was trying to whip me with the cord in one hand & his other was a fist that hit me in the face, just under the right eye. I could still hear mum & now, my sisters crying. The flogging & the punching was killing me I thought. Mum came in, I was in a hazy type of daze by now. I can still today hear mum saying "for God's sake, stop. You'll kill him." The bastard turned on mum then. I don't know what happened next, but mum was wiping my face with something wet & trying to be gentle. Roy must have gone out. Mum gave me shirt & shorts, shoes & socks & told me to get out of the house before he comes back. Mum looked awful, bruised & battered, she helped me dress then said hide in the park, saying she will try to come round later, gave me a jumper & said "Go"

Mum did come to the park. She said Roy was out looking for me." Don't let him find you!" Mum stayed with me for a long time. She went to sleep & when she woke, said she had to go before "He" wakes up & finds she's gone. I was on the loose for about two and a half weeks. Needless to say, back to Yasmar.

Mum wasn't in court this time, Roy was. He told the magistrate "I don't want him home your honour, he's uncontrollable" So, off to Burradoo for me. I was in trouble here as well with older kids. Every week doing punishment, cleaning toilets upstairs & downstairs. I arrived early December 1953. Natti was the home for me. At school, 3rd class work was the standard.

I'm not sure about the dates after I was sent home, toward the end of 1954, back to the house of horror at Marrickville. I was not home long before I was back at

Yasmar again. From there I was sent to Manly, a place called St. Andrews boys home. I think this St. Andrew worked for the Devil!

Talk of slave labour! Washing & polishing floors until late at night, using caustic powder in the water to wash the floorboards . This stuff was burning the skin off me, then I would get floor polish in the open festers. After I'd been there about 3 weeks, my mother came to see me. She looked at me & started crying saying "What have they done to you?" My legs, arms & hands were weeping sores. Mum went crook at the boss man. They gave me a break at the next school holidays. I was to make a vegemite sandwich & take a banana early every morning to go with the Boss mans son to dig the foundations for his house that he was building, Work from the time we arrived (half hour for lunch) & dig till about 4:30 or 5 pm. I never did get paid for this privilege. School was at Manly Public, that's right, 3rd class again! One lunchtime at school, I borrowed someones towel & swimmers. I told the headmaster, "I'm going" He was on the phone & told me to get out, so I did.

Some weeks later I was back at Yasmar. From there to Mittagong, No. 9 home. It was tough but, I loved the place! The only thing wrong was my mother never visited. No one did. Mum wrote to me every week & I her. My letters became short notes because they were censored before posting.

In May or June 1956 I go a letter from mum. It was late at night & I was stoking the donkey (boiler for the hot water) The boss, Mr. Oliver gave it to me & said "you have a baby sister" I read the letter, my new sisters name is Linda.

I was sent home on Xmas eve, not without a loud protest saying "I don't want to go home! I like it here!"

Throughout my years of incarceration, one man came to see me on a regular basis (except for Manly) He was the only person to ask how all this started, who talked to me (not at or down) He would ask if I would like to walk with him while we talked, or would I rather sit. Every time he turned up he would shake my hand & say "Good day Barry" then he would ask "are you being treated well? I would like you to tell me the truth to that question" His name was Mr. Denning. He was my probation officer. He got most of the wrongs righted & best of all, he got our old man a bit quieter. A bit was better than nothing. . Mr. Denning saw me on my 15th birthday & said I was doing well with my promise to him by trying to keep out of trouble & thanked me. He shook my hand & said he will not see me anymore, Goodbye Barry..... Thanks Mr. Denning!