

For my sister Jennifer
By Barry Curtis

Jenny is four years my junior. Roy (our father) tried and tried to break this girls spirit. The harder he tried, the more she resisted. The more she resisted & would not cry or scream, the harder & more he flogged her. I know from experience these whippings hurt. After I came home from my periods of incarceration, whatever instruments of pain & torture I found that Roy used, I burnt or buried. Not long after my bury & burn deed, he was going off at Jen over some trivial thing, as usual. He told her to go out the back & bring back the biggest stick she could find. Anne & I were sitting at the table, (not being allowed to talk while Roy was present) wondering what the hell could she find. In came Jen, dragging a six foot fence paling & said "Will this do? It 's all I can find" It was so hard not to laugh, Anne & I were shaking with it. Jen just stood there staring at Roy. I think for a minute he was dumbstruck. He glared at her & said "get it out, then get in your room & stay there" He turned to Mum & said "There's something wrong with her!" Mum replied "What do you think's wrong with her?" He said "I don't know, she's your daughter!" We all knew, except him, Jen would do anything to stir or piss him off. Chalk another one up Jen!

If any of us slammed a door, he made us go in & out, opening & closing the door behind as quietly as possible for very long periods, while he sat at the table reading as if nothing was happening. During one of Jen's door punishments, we were all sitting silently at the table when, Anne kicked my leg. When I looked up, she nodded at Jen. Every time Jen was coming in or out, she was pulling all sorts of faces behind Roy's back. It was so hard to suppress our laughter!

Because I wasn't at home often, I had no idea why Jenny was sent to a home. I was on loan to Roy & his partner, working (wall & floor tiling) They had a contract with the Public Works Dept. at Glebe. Roy said to me, "Your sister' s in one of these joints" One of the girls there told me I had missed her by one week. Later, we were working at Ormond, the girls home at Thornleigh. I asked another girl if Jen was there, it turned out , she was. After I got permission to see her, we talked for ten minutes. That's all they would allow us. I asked her if she would like me to bring Mum on Sunday. She said yes & asked if we could bring a few items. Back in the car, Roy didn't speak. Not a word. I thought, you low life bastard, you really don't give a shit! "Dad" What a joke!

I took Mum to see her & left them for about twenty minutes so they could talk. When I came back, Jen was into me straight away! "I thought you came to see me you bastard!" This made my day, this is the sister I know! It felt strange being the visitor, not the visited. I have no idea why she was later sent to Parramatta. We are trying to find out, Anne & myself. I know she went to Hay for doing a runner from Parramatta. How long for, & a lot of other questions, I would like some sort of answer to. Jennifer turned 27 in Oct. 1975 & four days later went to see Mum about Xmas arrangements. She had had two abusive relationships &

three children by this stage. Roy was there. He & Jen got into another argument (as usual) He told her to get out & never come back. She did. Jenny walked around the corner, sat in the middle of the road (It was a dark & rainy night) was run over and died instantly.

Roy was already an alcoholic & not long after Jenny's death, he lost all his short term memory, even forgetting that that she was dead. He was eventually sent to Callan Park. He escaped once, terrorised mum, my brother Robert helped out there & he was taken back. He ended up in a war veterans nursing home at Lake Macquarie near Newcastle. After he died, the matron told me she didn't know he had family & how sad it was that nobody ever visited him. All I said to her was "He got what he deserved" I put his belongings in a paper bag & took them to Mum. His cremation was rent a crowd. Us, three old sailors from the nursing home, the matron & a nurse. It was a proper military service. He did deserve that, at least. My thoughts; It just goes to show, shit does burn!

Mum got on with getting on until she died from cancer eighteen months later.
Bless her always.