

Our story started in early 1944, I was 6 and a half years old, the second eldest of 7 children. My Mother was 25 and had six weeks earlier given birth to her 7th child, a boy. My Father, as I was later told, left her for another woman. With no money and not knowing what to do, she placed the 5 eldest children in Dalwood Home, I don't know what she did with the other two little boys...they are somewhere out there in this world..(I only hope they were happy little children).

We stayed at Dalwood until the June of 1945, from there we were taken to the Albion Childrens Court and charged as neglected children..

My first memory of Dalwood was on arrival we all had our heads shaved, doused with kero and wrapped in like a cotton knapkin with a safety pin in front. We wore those for days and were kept separate from the other children. My other memories.....my Brothers 6th birthday, and I wanted to kiss him, the boys were in a different section, I went down there, even though I knew I was forbidden to do so, I found him and kissed and cuddled him and got sprung, I will never forget the slaps across the face and the verbal abuse. Just before we left Dalwood, we were asked if we knew where any of our relatives lived. Our Grandmother lived on top of Moran and Cato's in Manly, we were all taken there, our Grandmother opened the door and when asked if she knew us she said "No". We were taken back to Dalwood, lined up on the stairs and the 5 of us were beaten with coathangers until they broke. The youngest of us not being quite 4 years old. I remember the cold winter mornings out washing the young ones wet sheets under the tap. Val, my eldest Sister and I had to do this every time the younger ones wet the bed. A happy memory...I first heard the song "Don't Fence me In" whilst cleaning the cutlery.

We were then taken to the Childrens Court.

From the Childrens Court Val and I went to Bidura, the two younger girls went to Corelli at Marrickville and my brother went to Royalston. It was years before I saw my siblings again. Val and I were fostered out to a lady at Rydalmere, we stayed there for 3 months and then back to Bidura, Val was fostered elsewhere.

My time in Bidura as a young child was a nightmare, just turned 8 years old and scrubbing floors, the food was horrid and many times I sat at the breakfast table for hours because I could not eat the porridge, sometimes other kids had emptied their tea into my plate hoping that it would be taken away from me, that didn't work and I was expected to eat it. Every Saturday morning a dose of Epsom Salts was the ritual. When people came looking to foster a child, the ones available were lined up out the front of Bidura and we were eyed over like cattle in a saleyard.

My first experience in a foster home was at Rydalmere, I was 8 and my Sister Val 9, they were rather old people, when they went out they locked Val and I in the Chook pen with no water and they would be gone most of the day. One day just before the Christmas of 1945, our Mother turned up at Rydalmere with a gold bangle for Val and I, the bangles were taken from her and she was refused permission to see us. We were given the bangles, but all I wanted was my Mother, to be able to see her, talk to her and have her hold me.

What right did anyone have to deny a Mother access to her children, when her only crime was that she could not afford to keep us, with all the agony and guilt my Mother went through no wonder she died at 43 years of age.

We were there for 3 months, and then we were put back in Bidura. Val was fostered elsewhere, and then after a short time the lady from Rydalmere came and took me back again.

It was the year that Russia won the Melbourne Cup, they liked the races and I listened to the Race. I went to school at Rydalmere and had to wear her husbands old socks to school, sometimes they were different colours and all the kids poked fun at me. They were days of many tears, no one to run to, to hold me, to love me and tell me it was just all a bad dream.

At the age of 10 an Aunt by marriage fostered me from Bidura, it wasn't from the kindness of her heart but for the ration coupons and the money, she needed a little slushie to help with the house and her 2 young children. I have referred to her all my life as The Battleaxe. I ran away from there aged 11 and took myself back to Bidura..

I was then fostered to people at Kingsford. The woman was lovely but her husband was a very cruel man. She worked somewhere from early afternoon until midnight every day except

the weekends. He gave me six cuts with cane nearly every second day, and when my hands were too swollen he caned me on the feet. After 10 months of that I ran away, I went to my Aunts, the child welfare officer came out, I told him what I had been subjected too during the last 10 months, they took me over to Kingsford and asked him about it. He denied it, I showed them the marks on the wall from the cane, his wife said they were broom handle marks. Of course they were believed. I had to stay with them for another six weeks as I was sitting for a State Bursary and had to do it at the School in Pagewood.

He never touched me after that, just heaped all the vulgar verbal abuse he possible could on me. I went back to my Aunts after that, but 12 months later I ran away again, took myself back to Bidura. subjected of course to Dr. Green (Fingers)

as all girls were. At 13.. I was placed in Lynwood Hall, I still can see Miss Davies, tall, hair streaked with grey, done up in some kind of a bun, with her glasses perched on her nose and her arms folded across her bosom, stockings half hanging down, I hated her with a passion. I stayed at Lynwood Hall until I was 14, they let me out of there so I could further my education, I was on a threat, "Run away again and you go to Parramatta". I stayed with my Aunt after that.

And during all those years I begged for information about my siblings but was denied any information or access to them.

On reading the Senate Report it took me back to all those years ago, it was like reading part of my life in someone else's words. I cried through parts of it, I felt for the girls who were in Parramatta and my heart went out to all the little boys who suffered so much pain and degradation at the hands of those who were delegated to look after them.

We who have suffered through our childhood have a common bond, and through Clan we can at last talk about our childhood to others who understand, we don't have to beg to be believed because we have all lived through it and now the world is listening to the voices of the Forgotten Children.

I want my 2 daughters, who are 46 and 44 to read the Senate Report, they need to read it and hopefully they will understand why perhaps I let them down as a Mother, why I couldn't provide them with the stability that I should have. The Broken marriages, my desperate search for love and acceptance, my complete mental breakdown at 30.

My only answer to them all these years has been "I gave you a better life than I had, and I did the best I knew how."

Again I thank Clan for bringing this all out into the open, and to all the members of Clan and to all the Forgotten Children... we need each other ..and now we have a voice.

I have applied for my records through Docs and they were most helpful and it will take about 4 weeks to get them. They will also give me a copy.

Regards,
Kay O'Hare