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Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Po Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Senator Bartlett

Congratulations getting your legislation through the house of Senate, seeking an inquiry into Indigenous Australians Stolen wages.

I was born on 23 December 1914. I was taken away from my mother, who was an Aboriginal woman, Annie Georgina Donley, at the age of 6 mths, admitted to the Diamantina Boys home Woolloowin, Brisbane, didn't know who my father was and never to see them.

My life was planned out for me by the Queensland Govt, I was hired out to a number of foster Parents, only to be exploited by them, example; doing messages, getting pot meat from the local slaughter house, to feed the fowls, gather eggs, plus washing and drying dishes twice daily.

At the age of 10, transferred to the Salvation Army home for Boys at Indooroopilly, that was a lesson I will never forget, I scrubbed floors, helped in the kitchen, worked from daylight till dark, washing clothes in the laundry, which was slave labour.

Instead of doing home work, we would have singing lessons in choir and doing acrobatics for Concerts for the Army to make profits, if we made mistakes, we would have our ears twisted or a boot up the backside, by Adjutant Rogan.

Rogan, his wife and Captain Hunter, would cane the lads for frivolous things, the line up would be big, the officer using the cane would tell us to come back the next night because his arm would be tired.

I experienced with all other lads in the home of a shocking caning of an Aboriginal boy, who was told to strip off, lay across a chair and was flogged from his shoulders to his bottom, we were all told if we said the same thing we would get the same treatment, this lad was subject to shocking treatment while in the home.

By the time I and others who left the home we could neither read nor write, it seemed a policy of the government to keep us uneducated.

When reaching the age of 14 I was transferred to a Mr Thomas Bell on a dairy farm at Kholo, Ipswich, Queensland, the day I was handed over to Mr Bell, I had nothing to eat till round 9pm that day.

I was shown my sleeping quarters, which was on the end of the car garage, which was approximately 3 meters by 4 meters, I was given a chaff bag, told to fill it with oaten hay and a sugar bag filled with the same material, no sheets or pillow slips, my blankets were corn bags, sewn together with string.

It had a wooden shutter for the window, propped up with a prop, no door, a kerosene box, with a blackened kerosene lantern, had 3 inch nails in the studs to hang my clothes on and during the wet season I had to sleep in my wet clothes, because they would be wet next morning and cold to put on.

The day started at 3.30am to round up cows in the dark, barefooted, chilblanes on my feet, falling over logs and when a cow from lying on the ground, upon rising, would do her dropping, it being warm I would rub it up my legs and the warmth from it would ease the pain temporary.

After sitting on a 12 inch block, barefooted on cold concrete doing my share of milking 60 cows, separating the cream from the milk, feeding calves, pigs, washing up the utensils, washing the dairy floor it was time to sit down to breakfast.

I had to put corn through a corn cracker, boil it and sweeten it with golden syrup, then topped up with skim milk, never allowed to have fresh milk.

When finished breakfast, had to round up a pair of draught horses, still barefooted over frosty ground to do a days ploughing, doing a man's size job at the age of 14.

My lunch consisted of bread and syrup and bread and dripping, the cultivation paddock had no shade, so while the horses were feeding I had to sit in the boiling hot sun on the ground to eat my lunch.

The boss knowing I was a good young worker, would bring down a pair of fresh horses, that would go faster and I would plough more ground.

At sundown I would round up the cows again and go through the whole rigmarole again, sitting down to dinner about 9pm from rising early to finishing doing a 14 hour day.

It was like working on a prison farm, never saw anyone, read a paper or a magazine, it was the same year after year, 365 days with no time off.

I never saw an Inspector the 18 years I was under the State Department, it was like out of sight out of mind.

My life was a very secretive, I didn't know what wages I was being paid into a trust fund, the wages was an agreement between the farmer, being 6/- a week, second and third years increased by 2/- a week and the final year was 15/- a week and the agreement was I could only draw a portion of my money from the bank, the balance when I reached 18 years.

I never received a bank book or a statement, I have been trying for 70 odd years to get my hard earned money from the Qld government, the latest reply I got from them, seeing I wasn't brought up under Aboriginal Torres Strait Island Act, I cannot get my money.

A child at 6 mths wouldn't know what Act he was placed under.

Yours faithfully

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Melrose Desmond Donley