Senate Community Affairs References Committee

Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

Prelude – Tokens of a Dream

The travelling salesman had arrived. He brought the goods for sale inside the house and displayed them over the threadbare lounge and floor. The mother chose some towels and a pair of bedsheets. Hire purchase was wonderful. The mother got to keep the goods and pay for them later: a little each week. The only difficulty was that you paid more than the goods were worth. However, this was the only way the mother could stretch her meagre resources. It was important for the mother to have these things.

The mother went to the bedroom. She opened the 'good' cupboard and looked at the boxes stacked inside. She placed the latest lot of 'goodies' on top of the others. The cupboard was full of bedlinen, towels and other assorted household items.

This was the cupboard that represented the future. Her future. The good life. She knew she was entitled to it. She had been told when she was little: you are special.

Funny, she didn't feel special - only sad. Most days she just wanted to die. Life was too hard. Her life certainly hadn't turned out the way that she had expected.

Her 'Daddy' had been a millionaire and here she was: living in a broken down house, five children and an abusive, alcoholic husband.

All she really had was the 'good' cupboard.

Joan, and the 85 other children who were her 'brothers and sisters', was one of the 'Hopewood Children'; war babies appropriated by an unique institution at the end

of the Second World War. Joan left 'Hopewood's' care when she was fourteen years old, barely literate, with few basic skills. What Joan wanted more than anything else was love. Someone to care about *her*. Her first job out in the 'real' world, was as a scullery maid. This was a job 'Hopewood' organised for her. Joan was paid a mere pittance to scrub skirting boards at a Doctor's surgery. Joan wasn't alone there; two of her 'sisters' also worked for this doctor; as maids.

Joan met Ray when she was sixteen. At eighteen Joan wanted to get married. To accomplish this, Ray and Joan needed the permission of L.O. Bailey, founder and Director of Hopewood, as Joan was under twenty-one, the legal age to marry. Bailey refused. He told Ray, who was working as a truck driver, he was not good enough for Joan. Ray wasn't aware of Bailey's own agend. To force Bailey's hand for permission to marry, Joan became pregnant. When five months pregnant, Joan married Ray. The child she carried was me.

I grew up on stories of 'Hopewood' and knew the despair my mother felt from her experiences there. On the one hand she had been told she was special. On the other hand she was told that she was nothing; the result of immorality. The children of Hopewood were the children that no-one wanted. 'Daddy' Bailey, along with 'Aunty' Madge, were their saviours. They should be grateful for the rest of their lives for the opportunities that Bailey had provided for them. Unfortunately, in the scheme of things, at least for Joan and my family, there was very little to be grateful for.

In February 1994, an article appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald under the title *Blind Vision*. Interviewed in the article were Colleen Kelly, Janice Berridge, Carmel Casey, Lloyd Jackson, Norma Nolte, Carmel Helman, Kerry Dwyer, Pat Warman, Sandra Pendergast, Jennifer Jennings and Richard Chambers. All, now adults, were former inmates of the children's home 'Hopewood'. The article reported the experience of psychological problems, social dysfunction and the abuses that life in Hopewood had bequeathed to them.

During the Second World War (1939-45), in Sydney, a social experiment was initiated by Leslie Owen Bailey. This social experiment took the form of the gathering and rearing, side-by-side, of 86 male and female babies born to unwed mothers during the war years. The endorsed version of the story is told in *A Gift of Love* (Trop 1971), in which Bailey is portrayed as a humanitarian, a visionary and a philanthropist. This book was commissioned by Madge Cockburn, President of what was then known as The Youth Welfare Association, which had been formed by Bailey to continue the ideas which formed the basis of his experiment. Trop's version of Hopewood and Bailey is highly romanticised and does not tell the full story. Whilst Trop's account dwells on his view of the positive results of the experiment for the children, from my own viewpoint, and that of the many of the 'Hopewoods', the consequences of the Hopewood experiment have not been positive.

My work portrays a version of Bailey, as an individual, within a particular socio-economic and political context. An examination of the intellectual origins of Bailey's experiment in the particular *milieu* of the ideas of eugenics formed an important focus of my PhD. I started this work as I wanted to try and find an explanation of how and why my mother acted the way she did. Another question which I attempted to answer was: what was the status of these children. They weren't wards of the state nor were they adopted. To whom did the duty of care fall?

It is necessary to examine the specific aims and objectives of the Hopewood experiment. The official version couches Bailey's aims in philanthropic terms, stating his desire for the welfare of the children and the promotion of a 'natural health' lifestyle. Placed in the context of the social and intellectual currents to which he was subject, Bailey's experiment appears as something rather different: his stance on gathering quantitative data from the Hopewood experiment via his subjects tells us very little other than the fact the children were physiologically well kept (although this is a contested point by a number of children themselves). The Hopewood

experiment, rather than being a philanthropic activity for a wealthy businessman, was an attempt by Bailey to eugenically improve a selected group of children. Bailey intended to use the data gathered from his experiment as a model for the eugenic engineering of the Australian population as a whole, as a defence against the perceived external, non-European threat. The analysis of the Hopewood experiment sought to explore the contradictions between Bailey's rhetoric and the reality he created. Bailey's choice of subjects, his natural health methods, and the rigorous scientific evaluations which he conducted are all examined.

As Rowley (1970:232) argues: "Forget the older people and concentrate on the children is still a common folk remedy for assumed social ills". The social ill which was being addressed was one of illegitimacy and the threat of the decline of the white race. Bailey stated in 1943 (Trop 1971:22) :

> If we want to produce a race of super people, capable of holding Australia 50 years hence, we must start right now. We won't admit coloured people and whites won't come in sufficient numbers. Consequently, we will need to produce a population composed of supermen and women. Since we won't have sufficient numbers, we must have quality.

Bailey's 'experiment' aimed to prove the value of the eugenic approach in quantifiable terms. From the outset Bailey involved doctors and dentists in longitudinal studies of the Hopewood children which he hoped would provide scientific proof of the efficacy of his method. Trop (1971:168-169) refers to a number of contemporary articles in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the *Dental Journal of Australia* and *The Australian Dental Journal* published between 1953 and 1958 which report the results of these studies. The studies report significantly lower rates of dental caries and *lactobacilli* bacteria (the bacteria which cause tooth decay) in the Hopewood children in comparison to children of similar ages in the general population. It was considered that good teeth equalled good health and given that the Hopewood children reported

less cavities than the general population at that time, it followed that they had good health (Trop 1971:197).

The children of the Hopewood experiment were subjects. Their utility lay in the fact that they were able to provide the quantitative data necessary to prove Bailey's hypothesis and contribute to the development of 'scientific' knowledge. As individuals, they had become objectified, individuals made into objects of enquiry.

C. Wright Mills, in *The Sociological Imagination* (1983), argues that in order to fully comprehend the nature of both historical and social events, it is necessary to understand the relationship between individual biographies and those wider forces of history and society. He states:

> ...people are seldom aware of the intricate connexion between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history...the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world (Mills 1983:10).

The ability to understand this larger historical context: "...in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals" (Mills 1983:11) is what he calls the "sociological imagination". The implications of this for sociological enquiry are twofold: firstly, the actions of individuals in society are just as legitimate a subject for sociological enquiry, as are investigations of social systems in their entirety; and secondly, as social and historical forces operate at both levels in society, it is legitimate to examine the operation of such forces at either level.

My intent has been to put forward a version of Bailey's social experiment that contrasts sharply with the official sycophantic version depicted by Trop (1971). Trop's *A Gift of Love* is heavily emotional and the alternate version of Bailey which the work presents redresses that emotional focus. I attempted to highlight the repercussions for the children of the experiment, and their children, mainly through the use of the vignettes. This negative aspect is something an objective investigation by Trop would have revealed, but somehow was overlooked. For a number of the

Hopewood children, those whom I have interviewed, the legacy of Hopewood is far from Bailey or Trop's idealised vision.

I interspersed the academic work presented with a series of vignettes, drawn from my own experience. Variation in the level of discourse presented in the work intends to emphasise my own unique emotional involvement in the Hopewood story, albeit a generation later. As Bailey stated in 1943, at the first Annual Address of the Youth Welfare Association :

> It is a call to lift your gaze beyond the present and the immediate future. When I look at Carol, Marcia, Richard and our other babies, *I am thinking not so much of them but their children and their grandchildren* (italics added) (Trop 1971:22).

As Mills states (1983:12), "an individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period". As 'my period' includes the events which L.O. Bailey initiated, my own experience is an important alternate viewing point from which to investigate and illuminate these events. Therefore, what Mills terms my 'personal troubles' can be seen as a 'public issue' when using the sociological imagination. There are two ways of demonstrating this - it is a matter of historical fact that Hopewood existed and that it led to personal troubles for those involved. Alternatively, Hopewood becomes the nexus of history and biography, highlighting the public issues of the time and their repercussions. This is my perspective.

VIGNETTES:

One

It was an important day. The man from the Welfare Department was coming. The mother and the child had cleaned the house from top to bottom.

"Don't say anything!" said the mother. That wasn't going to be too difficult. The child was terrified.

The mother had assembled her vision of domesticity to greet the man - the mother and her children shelling peas on the patio, in the sun.

The child knew this was a serious business. If the man thought anything was amiss, it was within his power to take the children from the mother - they would end up in a Home. A Home was a terrible place- scary, dark, full of mean people. It was the worst thing in the world that could happen. The child knew this to be true because the mother had told her so.

The mother had been in a Home, and a Home was a Bad Place.

TWO

It was early evening. The mother was in bed. The father and his friend were in the lounge-room drinking. The child was in with the mother. The bedroom door was locked from the inside.

The mother told the seven year old child to go to her bedridden Grandmother and get some sleeping tablets, a lot of sleeping tablets.

"Don't tell your father!" said the mother.

Dutifully the child did as requested but somehow knew something was not right. The child sat with the mother and watched anxiously as she lapsed into unconsciousness.

After many long moments the child ventured from the mother's bedside and fearfully told the father what had happened.

The next few hours were fraught with tension. The child watched horrified as the father and his friend poured soup laced with castor oil into her mother's slackened mouth, and then walk her unconscious form back and forth across the living room floor.

The mother survived.

A week later the family moved to Queensland.

A new town, new hopes, new dreams.

THREE

The bell had gone; it was lunchtime. Parents had been arriving all morning for Open Day.

"I promise I'll be there", the mother had said.

The child waited at the school gate, anxiously scanning the street for a glimpse of her mother. Her best friend's mother arrived. "Have you seen my mother?" the child asked. "No", she replied and rushed off to find her own child.

The child swung on the gate, waiting, watching, hoping that her mother would arrive.

The bell rang. Lunch was over. The children gathered on the asphalt to sing and dance for their parents. The children beamed with pride, intent on their task, nothing in their minds but their parents' proud faces.

Except for one child.

"She said she'd come", she thought, "she said she'd come".

The mother never did arrive.

FOUR

It was late afternoon. The children had arrived home from school. The house was locked up.
The eldest child, 13 years old, climbed through a small window at the back of the house and opened the door for her younger brothers and sister.

The child went to the mother's bedroom. The mother was in bed.

The child gently shook the mother awake. "We're home", she said. The mother sniffled. One pale arm emerged from under the covers to wipe her nose.

The child saw the blood that ran down the arm from the lacerated wrist.

Quickly the child pulled back the bedcovers. The mother was holding a butcher's knife in the other hand. The bedclothes were soaked with blood. Both wrists had been cut, many times over.

The child took the knife from the mother's unresisting hand. Methodically the child cleaned the wrists and bandaged them. The child removed the blood-soaked sheets and stained night-gown from the mother. The mother went back to sleep.

No-one knew where the father was.

The other children stayed outside and played.

The child moved off to the kitchen to prepare the dinner.

Just another day.

FIVE

It was late at night. The mother and father had been drinking for most of the day. The mother and father started arguing. First just yelling, then screaming and eventually beating at each other.

The children were huddled in the bedroom cowered in fear.

Then there was silence.

The child crept out of the bedroom to find out what had happened to the mother. The mother had locked herself in the bathroom. Locked doors always frightened the child. The child knew what would happen. The child banged on the door. Getting no response she returned to the bedroom to comfort the children.

The bathroom door opened. The child turned and saw the mother stagger through the house, dripping blood in her wake. The mother lurched out the front door, down the stairs out into the street. The mother started down the road screaming.

Eventually the father followed.

Time passed. The child had commenced cleaning the splattered blood from the walls.

The father returned with the mother, past the child and into the bedroom.

Blood was smeared over the door jamb where the mother had passed in her flight out into the street.

A knock on the door.

The police had arrived. The child called the father, as she stood cloth in hand wiping the blood off the door. The father emerged from the bedroom. The child faded in to the background.

"No Officer. There's no trouble here", said the father. The child nodded.
The door closed.

Everything went on as if nothing had happened.

SIX

The phone rang. "Our brothers have been taken away. Come home!", begged the brother.

The daughter raced home. Two Officials from the Child Protection Agency were present.

The mother had slashed her wrists. This time it had been with razor blades. The Police had found her wandering on the road. They had taken her to the Psychiatric Unit at the hospital.

The daughter rushed to were the other children were being kept. Her worst fears had nearly been realised. Foster Care was one step away from a Home. That could never happen. The daughter was allowed to take the children home into her care.

All the children gathered together. They looked to her for solace.

"It will be alright", she said.

In her heart she knew she lied.

SEVEN

The two younger children came home from school. The mother was in bed; asleep.
The children dumped their bags and raced outside to play with their friends.

At nightfall the children returned to a darkened house. They were hungry and wanted their dinner.
They approached the bed to shake the mother awake. She felt cold, her skin was blue.

The police came to the daughter's door.
"Your mother is dead", they told her.
"How?" she asked.
"An overdose, sleeping pills mixed with alcohol", replied the Policewoman.

The next day the daughter, her younger sister and brother drove to Queensland.

The daughter had a funeral to arrange.

CONCLUSION

Until 1994, the children involved in the Hopewood experiment, now mostly in their fifties, have refused to speak to anybody about their lives at Hopewood. One reason is that they saw their problems as 'personal troubles' rather than being part of broader social issues. This situation changed when an article appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald (Russell and Tomms, *Blind Vision,* 1994). This article highlighted the difficult times undergone by the children, and also clearly identifies the rift that exists in the narrative that is Hopewood. This article was also instrumental in causing the Hopewood children *themselves* to stop and recognise that many of their 'brothers' and 'sisters' had not experienced a sense of well-being. A schism occurred between the children who had always prided themselves on notions of solidarity. They have

been left to question what influenced Bailey to make the kinds of choices he did regarding them, and how these choices have affected their lives.

There are some who claim that the Hopewood experiment was not an experiment at all: they argue that Bailey and Cockburn loved them, and that is what should be remembered (Trop 1971:123). It should be clear from my work that it *was* indeed an experiment, and needs to be acknowledged as such. (Please see attached).

I am not claiming to have written the definitive account of Hopewood, but rather another text. It is like all texts, one that can be seen as either meaningful or meaningless, dependant on the interplay between the text and reader.

In the end, I told the Hopewood story as a story about children, and the ways that we think about their role in society, and in fact, what constitutes an ideal childhood. If childhood is the kind of ideal time pictured by Rousseau in *Emile* (1911), a time of freedom to learn and to grow as a human being, what occurred at Hopewood is far from this ideal. The question that the Hopewood experience raises is: to what extent do current social constructions of childhood and practises regarding children in fact mitigate against, rather than guarantee this ideal? The issue for judgement is not on Bailey the philanthropist but on a society and a government which would allow, or even encourage such a project to proceed, and which is still unwilling to fully accept the consequences of the project on the individual lives concerned.

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