

In response to a recent Senate Report “Forgotten Australians” I refer to ‘Recommendation 6: That the Commonwealth Government establish and manage a National Reparations Fund for victims of Institutional abuse in institutions and out-of-home care settings.’ I write on behalf of a family member; who does not know his way around a computer and required assistance in wording his statement. His submission statement is below for your consideration.

*

was the eldest of three brothers who were orphaned into ‘Ward of the State’ care in 1965. The boy’s mother was quarantined in the Hamilton Hospital with Tuberculosis; causing her then six children to be separated. The youngest children were fostered individually to homes and three of the boys were sent to St. Cuthberts Orphanage, Colac.

Upon first arriving at St. Cuthbert’s the three children aged 10, aged 7, and aged 5 were ridiculed by staff as they ‘weren’t even wearing underpants,’ verbally bashing them due to their poor appearances and poor upbringing; all of which the children had no control over at their age. In the orphanage the two older boys were forced into strict boundaries, with no pleasant interactions with their ‘carers’ despite their vulnerable ages; as if they were in a childhood prison. They weren’t able to talk to adults if they were scared or homesick. They couldn’t confide in anyone of authority, those they were forced to look up to were poor role models who instead struck fear into them. (The youngest brother, my father, was also the youngest boy in the orphanage; and thus received better, more appropriate care.)

Due to the nature of their treatment in the orphanage, the two eldest boys began bed wetting. This was a result of their anxiety within their confinement, away from their family home, away from their brothers and sisters. The family home wasn’t the ideal situation, but it would be expected that where parent’s struggled to care for their children through illness or neglect; the orphanage should have been a safe retreat...but it wasn’t.

When bed wetting occurred, the ‘carers’ disgraced two of the boys; stripping their beds and hanging out the soiled sheets for the entire orphanage to see. They were ‘named and shamed;’ appearing as being weak, naughty, dirty and disgusting. This public display of cruelty to such young children took its emotional toll – and the bed wetting continued along with the ‘punishment.’

Due to the actions of the ‘Carers,’ everyone knew who the ‘vulnerable’ kids were, and the boys became targets for other orphans to abuse and bully. One day just outside the building along a track; was cornered by two of St. Cuthbert’s senior orphans who were almost ready to leave state care and enter the world as independent young adults.

They knew who was as a result of the bed wetting ‘display’ and gave him a choice. They were going to ‘rape’ him, and if he didn’t comply, they would target his little brothers, aged 7 and 5, and beat him. was raped and kicked around on two separate occasions, under the care of St. Cuthbert’s; just to protect his brothers from being sexually and physically abused. Who was there to protect ?

At night, was terrified that he would wet the bed and encounter the embarrassment; the display of his soiled sheets. It was at night that would hold on to his bladder so tight to try to prevent himself from having an accident as it was so ‘naughty’ he thought it was his fault...He would attempt to hold his genitals and try to ‘tie them in a knot’ so he wouldn’t wet the bed, and be emotionally tortured. Still, he’d wake

up in the morning with wet sheets, and a public embarrassment...each day fearing the wet bed sheets more than the older boys who were molesting him and threatening his only family. was the oldest, and he felt it was his responsibility to take care of his brothers...even at 10 years old he was taking more responsibility for their safety than the ‘caretakers.’

The boys were sent home when their mother recovered from hospital, after twelve months of living in a childhood prison. Confused as to where home was; the boys left the orphanage only to discover the whole family was relocating to New Zealand. had no memory of New Zealand; yet his mother told him he was born there before they had moved back to his father’s place of birth, Victoria, Australia. The blessing for was his mother’s recovery – he did not have to endure his entire childhood under the care of the orphanage, he was able to reunite with his family. Unfortunately it wasn’t a simple adjustment back to life, as one would expect...Upon returning to New Zealand, was miserable, depressed and even suicidal for the most part of his growing and adult years. What had happened to him in Australia was a dirty secret; he was so ashamed and guilt-ridden with no self esteem left; that he felt distanced, castrated, angry, abandoned and confused. He felt it was his fault, and had identity issues.

 would sit on the outskirts of the family picture, discontent within himself, ashamed and abused with no one to talk to. Not only had his body been violated, but his trust had been abused; and he couldn’t even bring himself to hug his mother, or ask her for a hug. So, alone in his darkness, began using substances to shut out his memories. He became an alcoholic, used hard drugs and covered himself in tattoos that would give him a sense of being tough, being an untouchable. He stopped caring about himself at the orphanage, and continued a life of longing to die in his sleep or take a lethal overdose to end it all.

When his siblings and parents began moving back to Australia in their early adulthood, could not return with them. Australia damaged him, and for fear of people seeing through him, seeing his dark secret, couldn’t return to face his demons in Australia. As a result of his open wound; he let his family go and disconnected himself from them, feeling it was for their own good. While his siblings went back ‘Home’ and settled into life with new wives and husbands and growing families;

 relationships were toxic. He could never truly believe he was capable of being loved, or feeling love. He abandoned his children due to commitment issues with their mothers, and his internal feeling of inadequacy as a father and a husband. He has been in and out of therapy, on and off prescription anti-depressants; and yet had never opened up about his time in Colac because he was still so ashamed and raw, he didn’t want to admit it to a soul.

 decided it was time to get clean and return home to Australia to be with his family when he was in his forties. He knew that the task wouldn’t be easy, and that he would have to face what happened in his childhood at the Colac orphanage. In 2003

 was clean, attempting to make amends with his family and those he cares about. He spent time apologising for his behaviour, his actions over the years, and the real reasons behind them. To finally speak up after decades of silence and inner turmoil – his family began to understand why he lived the life he did. is at one with his family, trying to live and work amongst them as he has always desired – as one of the integral family members.

After working and living in Australia for 7 years, [redacted] is now faced with a further dilemma...His health problems have forced him out of work, and when applying for a pension or carer's allowance from Centrelink he was denied. It seems [redacted] brave move back to Australia to reconnect with his family was a few years too late; for if he had have returned earlier he would be considered "Australian." We know he was born in New Zealand, but if it weren't for what happened to him in the orphanage as a child; he would have returned 'home' to Australia with his mixed Australian/New Zealand-born family. Now that [redacted] is being denied access to the most basic of needs; I have sought and welcomed the assistance of Care Leavers Australia Network, and endeavour to become and stay part of their membership group. In the meantime we must obtain

[redacted] Citizenship; where he will have to PAY to be here. That; to me, seems unfair and unjust.

*

This is one man's story among thousands. Despite his time in care having been a 'mere' twelve months – the damage was done and severely decreased his value of life for decades to follow. Isn't that something that needs addressing? Someone needs to be held accountable for these ruined lives, and the lives taken by suicide. The time spent in care should not be relevant, nor should it matter in what Australian State these monstrosities were committed. All that should matter is that it DID happen, and no discrimination should be made against individuals as a result of where they lived at the time of the incident. In our laws today we cannot discriminate against people of a different race, nationality, religion, or social standard. How can we let this major discrimination against our own Victorian people slide without battering an eyelid? My family now has to wear this as a battle scar; not just those who were victims in the 60s – but every generation thereafter.

My uncle's case happened to occur in a State whereby the people have no voice to be able to speak up about it. This down-grades his suffering, causes one to feel guilty about his longing for redress, as though he is not worthy. It takes away ones power to be able to cope with their past, one which everyone seems to force them to forget. I have some news for you; we will never forget. Not the victims, their children or their families. We as Victorian's have no redress scheme. How can we 'down play' what happened to these poor, innocent children? Who will acknowledge their struggles, and the ripple effect it had/has on their immediate families who make up the people in my own generation? Money does not solve anything or cure their pain; but for people like my Uncle [redacted]; it would make life more affordable and comfortable...some stability in an unstable life.

Statement written by: [redacted] (Victim's Niece)

On behalf of: [redacted] lle

Dated: [redacted] Friday 11th June 2010