

To
Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee

Dear Sir/Madam

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One of the thousands of British Child Migrants shipped out to Australia, in my case under The Fairbridge scheme, I, along with my six year old brother and six other children of similar age, arrived as a terrified, skinny little eight year old, at The Fairbridge Farm School, Molong ,NSW on September 30th, 1951.

My brother Paul, who sadly passed away in 1992, I believe from a broken heart, and I were growing up in an Orphanage at Hunstanton, Norfolk, and had been in orphanages since we were old enough to remember, although not together initially.

Very briefly my mother lived with my father in London for seven years and besides myself and Paul they also had a daughter Pauline, two years older than me.

However , according to my “ Files “ which I managed to obtain in 1985, my father had a wife and two daughters living back in Tralee, Ireland.

Anyway this is not really relevant, except to say that when my mother left my father, Paul , just barely one year old and myself three year old , ended up in orphanages.

One day somebody said you boys are going to Australia. No explanation. No choice.

The authorities apparently were able to contact my mother, who signed her consent for us to immigrate to Australia.

After overcoming the initial shock and fears, not to mention homesickness, which probably sounds strange, having not been living at home, I have to say the first two years at Fairbridge were not too bad, due I feel to the fact we were fortunate to have a very kind and considerate “ Cottage Mother “, named Miss Barr.

Following her retirement in 1953, she was replaced by a _____ and suddenly my life and that of many other children in “Gowrie” cottage became what I can only describe as hell.!

For the next six years of my life this alcoholic, Chain smoking , sadistic woman, who without doubt, should never have been allowed near children, let alone be left in charge of fifteen boys between the ages of five and sixteen, continuously physically and mentally attacked me, to the point that I eventually absconded from Fairbridge , not once but twice.

Some of the forms of physical abuse included being struck with anything in reach, including broom handles, ironing chords, a riding crop, straps, kicking etc.

On one occasion she even attacked my brother with a steel poker used for stoking a coke fired stove ! I believe she could have killed him or at least caused serious injury had I not intervened and wrenched the poker from her hand., for which I received the mandatory “ six of the best “ from the Pricipal !

The mental abuse consisted of daily statements such as “ You are scum scum from the gutters of London and that’s where you’ll finish up “.

“You are nothing but gutter-snipe that’s why your parents never wanted you “.

“ Think of the starving millions in India, they should put the scum like you out there and bring some of them here “.

“ You are mad Moriarty, you will never be anything but a gutter snipe with no brains. You need to see a psychiatrist “ , and so on.

Incidently they did send me to a psychiatrist, whose only comment at the conclusion of the visit was “ Whoever sent you to see me is the one who should be here seeing me today ! “

However, of all the physical and mental abuse inflicted upon me was to prevent me achieving my dream of one day becoming maybe a teacher or lawyer.

Having won a scholarship which enabled me to attend Orange High School, which in the thirty six years Fairbridge operated, only a handfull of children ever had that priveledge, unfortunately she made it virtually impossible for me to attain the marks required to continue after year four, at which time decided to take me out of school and put me to work as a trainee on various jobs around the farm etc.

So ended my education, something that still haunts me today, over fifty years later.

In addition to , other staff members inflicted considerable physical abuse, especially .

Now here was a man who weighed around 120 kgs, stood about 1-90 metres tall , who on a daily basis, had no qualms about telling a child, boy or girl, regardless of age ,to “bend over you scoundrel “, and proceeded to cane them.

In his office had a board on one wall with a series of hooks, spaced evenly apart, upon which hung probably no less than ten different types of cane, ranging from thin bamboo, increasing in diameter up to a sawn off broom handle, (25mm)

However his favourite was the dreaded “ hockey stick “, which in fact was actually only one half of a hockey stick, flat on one side and rounded on the other.

Of course the stick chosen often depended on the seriousness of the offence. I must have been a terrible child as I could almost guarantee it would be the hockey stick.

Another sadistic part of repertoire was the Public Thrashings , dished out for some of the more serious misdemeanours such as running away.

While this practice was highly illegal it made no difference to . If he considered something serious enough he went ahead with it. Fortunately I was only on the receiving end of two of these. However I do recall one occasion where from memory some fifteen children were given “ six of the best “.

put so much effort into it that he had to stop for a rest half way through. We thought, and I guess he did also, that he was getting close to having a heart attack, such was his condition.

And then there was the dairy manager, , described by most of the boys as a low life, callous bastard, who without warning would punch, kick and strike you with whatever was in his hands for anything he considered was not exactly how he wanted it done, even if you were new to the dairy.

His favourites were normally in confined areas such as the separating room or the slaughterhouse, where you could not escape.

But worst of all was his dreaded “boot “, certainly very large and very freely used.

Of course the language he used was always very colourfull, like the colour of his face on such occasions.

And then there was the sexual abuse ! Denied by many for years, myself included

I feel the reasons for this denial have previously been well documented but from a personal point of view, guilt, shame, fear of people’s reactions if they found out, including one’s own family, as happened in my case.

I was in fact, sexually abused on more than one occasion, by an animal, (please excuse the expression), who came out from England in 1938 in the first party of children to arrive at Fairbridge, Molong. After spending several years at Fairbridge he, like all the children, left to go to a job . While it is not known what year he returned but when he did he was employed by Fairbridge as a maintenance/ repair man for some time.

Information has come to light recently that he did in fact sexually abuse a number of children over a period of time , and that he was eventually sacked because of it.

To my knowledge no charges were ever laid. One has to wonder why.

So here I have mentioned four people, all of whom were employees of Fairbridge Farm School at Molong and all of whom played a part in my life as a child and ultimately how that has affected my life since.

For fifty years now I have suffered bouts of severe depression, anxiety, lack of confidence, low self esteem, alcoholism and severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In addition I once attempted suicide, fortunately I failed, just as I have with many things over the years.

I have been receiving psychiatric treatment for PTSD for some three years and this is ongoing Perhaps the most obvious reason so many of us have been in denial for so long is that if we had reported these incidents “ back then “, nobody would have believed us. It seems not a great deal has changed over the years.

Firstly the Fairbridge Foundation has denied repeatedly there was any abuse as mentioned, and is therefore under no obligation to provide redress or compensation.

What they also say is that in answer to claims by many Old Fairbridgians that they withheld information , (ie The Files) which, had we received years earlier, would have enabled many of us to return to UK and reunite with family, or certainly to attempt to locate them, in their opinion much of the information would prove to be too emotional for most of us to handle.

As an example , throughout the entire time I was at Fairbridge I was repeatedly told they had no records or any information of my family. However when I received my files in 1985 I found this to be totally untrue.

And then we have the Governments, both State and Federal.

While both the New South Wales State Government, through Nathan Rees, and the Federal Government through PM Kevin Rudd and the then Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, have both apologized, saying not only that they are sorry but that they believe what we are saying happened .

I believe the apologies were genuine and made with the best of intentions and are certainly necessary as part of the healing process. However , without some form of redress or compensation for the abuse, harm, poor education, lack of health care, emotional and psychological damage we suffered as children, and in fact many of us are still suffering today.

In this country one has to ask why are children different from State to State. Of course the answer to that is we are not. How does that song go ? “ We are one , but we are many “.....

So why is it that we have redress in some states and not in others.

Why is it that of the states that do have redress, there are not two the same ?

Why is it that if the Governments, State and Federal, believe , why are they not pursuing the abusers.

Why is it that Governments who have the power to change Legislation relating to “ Statutes of Limitation “, which currently mean that it is almost impossible to pursue the abusers and give justice to the abused , do not use that power ? Did this not occur in South Australia ?

Finally, we know it took five years from the conclusion of The Senate Committee Report on The Forgotten Australians, (2004 - 2009), for the Federal Government to carry out Recommendation No 1, ie The Apology.

Will we have to wait a further five years before Recommendation No 2 happens.

Or for that matter, how long are we prepared to wait for , what to me is of far greater significance, viz Recommendation No 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 and that;

The scheme be funded by contributions from the Commonwealth and State Governments and the churches and agencies proportionately “ etc, etc.

If I have bored the Committee with my experiences and / opinions I make no apologies
I , like many, have suffered in silence for far too long.

Sincerely yours