

The Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
P.O.Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a Forgotten Australian whom none of the Government funded organisations wants to help because my story is not the usual. I am not a “careleaver” and not a “wardie”...but I was placed in an institution in Victoria for my own protection and that was the beginning of the end of my life as a happy, productive Australian, proud of myself and my achievements and, most of all, proud to call Australia “home”.

Australia was the only “home” I had.

My country failed to protect me and value me, more interested, in those days, in getting Italian migrants to boost the workforce, more interested in allowing the Catholic Church to “import” religious who would minister to these Italians and make them comfortable in Australia than in monitoring their conduct to see that they abided by the country's laws, especially in regards to recruitment into their ranks, of Australian girls, to further their interests and work in this country.

Because these Italian religious nuns were not monitored, because their migrant associates who had gained citizenship and had made careers for themselves, especially one particular solicitor whom I believe was called _____, were not watched, by the time I was twenty three years of age, my country denied me and asked me when I re-entered Australia after a seven year absence, to prove that I had a right to be here and to call myself Australian.

I was **abducted** by nuns, **stolen** from my single mother who had placed me in their care and given them strict instructions and sent to Italy on falsified documents. Whilst in the “so called” care of the Pastorelle Sisters so I was an easy target at a time when these nuns were desperate for more recruits. They had me inoculated for an overseas voyage to their Novitiate in Italy...without my mother's knowledge and told me that it was better to marry God than a man. They stole me from the life that my mother wanted for me. I had a nice boyfriend and when we got our diplomas in design we were going to be allowed to be officially engaged and then get married. We had great dreams...the nuns stole my dreams. My mother had always impressed on me to obey priests and nuns. The nuns told me to lie to Mum, not tell her that I was going to be “A Bride of Christ” instead...that this was God's will.

So now, 36 years down the track of a miserable, lonely life, I am an ex nun of the Order Pastorelle Sisters, all used up by “God” because the nuns **abducted** me for their ranks from the Melbourne Girl's Hostel in Carlton when I was sixteen and who now live at Bundoora in Melbourne and who continue, from there, to minister to the broader migrant community.

In 2008, these nuns published a history of their Order in Australia :- “Building Community” Fifty years of the Pastorelle Sisters in Australia by Annamaria Davine, wherein they deny ever having had an Australian girl at the Hostel from where they abducted me. They got an Italian solicitor to put my illegal papers together, they lied on the papers writing that I was going to Italy for “Holiday – 3 years”...and I have a copy of that. They got Mrs. Lena Santospirito to pay my passage, (my parents wouldn't have done it!), they put me on a ship and sent me to Italy and

I would not be able to get back to Australia for a long time...long enough for them to make me accept my fate....nobody is as persuasive as a crafty nun! The one I remember most from the Hostel is _____, she did all the work talking me around in her broken English, feeding me sweets and treats, even cuddling me because she knew I'd not had much affection and that I craved it...Mum had had a hard life. _____ could talk anybody into anything or out of anything and she's at _____ today...too old to remember what she did...so they claim in their book....besides, they deny ever having an Australian girl enter from the Hostel...wonder why?

My life was hell and I could not escape. After seven years I managed to convince the nuns that I could be useful in Australia...they'd "caught" more girls from Australia...who later left except for ONE...and she'd been a Nurse in the Army so I suppose the treatment suited her. At the airport when I arrived back, the officials disputed that my passport was valid and that I was trying to get INTO the country illegally. The passport had been compiled in 24 hours at the Embassy in Rome when they discovered that I'd been stateless for two years...and they had put an expired cover on the passport. I had to produce my Birth Certificate before they would let me back into Australia. Seven years in a convent had changed me, seven years of different customs, different food and abuse...I was not the healthy sixteen year old who had left. I turned 21 in Italy and had never voted. Nobody in Australia knew I even existed. I had no other family but Mum and she had suffered a nervous breakdown when she'd found out and she'd disappeared. I found her again in 1986 after I'd left the Pastorelle Sisters destitute with nothing but some second hand clothes, ill health, no money, unable to work, getting a Disability Pension of \$43 a fortnight when single rooms for rent cost \$20 a week. Mum's mind had gone, she was really bad, so the doctor helped me put her in a nursing home...and she was only 70...I am 67 now. Mum should have lived a long happy life but the nuns stole her only child from her and she never recovered.

The Pastorelle Sisters have much to answer for...but you can't get nuns or any other historical abusers...there are too many legal hurdles. An Apology is not enough Mr. Prime Minister...whoever you will be by the time the "forgottens" receive some redress and help.

On March 21st 2004, I lodged a Submission to the Inquiry into the Abuses of Children in Institutional Care. On those pages I poured out my soul in the hope that my mother country would hear me and help me.

That Inquiry resulted in the two reports about children abused in all manner of institutions run by the States and by the various "Christian" Churches in Australia- "Forgotten Australians" and the second report - "Protecting Vulnerable Children – a National Challenge"... My submission is quoted in the second report on page 10 under the heading- "Recruitment into Religious Orders".

In my case that should read "**Abducted** into Religious Orders".

My Submission to that Senate Inquiry is No. 373.

I am a Forgotten Australian whom no Government-funded advocacy group will "adopt" and assist...because, they say, I do "not fit"...I am a FORGOTTEN Forgotten Australian.

Following, the Hon. Bruce Scott MP, Federal Member for Maranoa speaks for me:-

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SPEECH

The Hon Bruce Scott MP
Federal LNP Member for Maranoa

Motion on the National Apology to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants

Delivered Main Committee: 18 November 2009

MR. BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (12.50 PM)

(The following is an excerpt from Mr. Scott's Speech that pertains to me, Robin Ruth Henderson of 33 Denham Street Stanthorpe, Queensland.)

“For any parent just to think about your own children and how you have loved them and nurtured them through those very formative years, it is hard to comprehend how those children..(those institutionalised children) lacked that nurturing. There are the maternal instincts of a mother that are lost because of so many children being taken away and put in orphanages. Maybe, as was considered at the time, it was for their welfare, but, as we all know now, the physical. Mental and sexual abuse that some of them suffered is just incomprehensible in a modern Australia.

Another person that spoke with me was Robin from Stanthorpe....and I want to share with the chamber Robin's story. Back in 1959 when she was 15 years of age, her mother had been divorced for some ten years from her husband and she was not able to help her -”

(the debate was resumed the next day...)

Mr. Bruce Scott (Maranoa) (10.01 am) - “During my contribution on the motion for the Apology to the Forgotten Australians yesterday I was talking about Robin when we were called to a division in the House. I want to pick up and talk about what Robin has told me. Robin's Mother, as I said in my contribution thus far, had been divorced from her husband for more than ten years. This was back in 1959. Robin's mother decided that the best thing for her daughter, because she wanted to make sure that Robin had the best chance in life, was to entrust her to the Pastorelle Sisters at their Hostel for girls in Carlton Victoria. They were to make sure that she had a job, went to work and to night school and continued her studies. In the space of eight months the Pastorelle Sisters had convinced Robin that she should become a nun. She was convinced. She was then asked to, basically, using Robin's words, 'lie' to her mother. She was then sent to Rome. The Pastorelle Sisters really failed Robin, and, using Robin's words, her passport application and documents were falsified as far as she was concerned.

Robin's mother had no assets. She was a divorced lady, a single woman, having, at that time in history to make her own way and maintain a job for her own wellbeing. When her (Robin's) mother found out she was powerless to act. Robin was sent to Rome. It was at the convent in Rome that she was sexually molested, physically abused and ill treated. She was 'neglected', as Robin says, to the point where her youthful vigour waned and she became very ill. She was detained in this situation because her passport had been taken away. She had no money, no civilian clothes and no friends on the outside, and she could not speak the language. All of her correspondence home was censored. As Robin says, she was subjected to “behaviour modification’.

In the last two years of the seven she spent in Italy, she was, really, a stateless person because she did not have a passport...” (it had expired and I was not allowed to renew it). “She was not even able to register to vote for federal elections in Australia. Robin is a constituent of mine, and when she came back to Australia she lived with this.....” (the horrors of my abduction, the loss of my identity as an Australian, the horrors of convent life and a life of ill health)...”for more than 30 years. She is now on a Disability Pension but when you talk to Robin and read her story - there is a lot more than I have time to put on record today - you can see that it was an appalling situation : a whole life destroyed because of the treatment that she received. Her mother was a single mother who entrusted her daughter into the pastoral care of the Pastorelle Sisters at the Carlton Hostel in Victoria.”.....

“ I thank the chamber and I hope that, as a nation, we continue to work on this issue and make more restitution to those who have been so mentally and abused by churches and government. Care from government is what we must make sure of in the future.”

From the SPEECH given by The Hon Bruce Scott MP, Federal Member for Maranoa 18-11-2009

I thank the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee for the opportunity of making this Submission.