

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee

RE CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

I enclose my submission to the above Inquiry. My submission is in the form of a copy of a paper that I gave to the 1st National Conference on the Mental Health Aspects of Persons Affected by Family Separation.

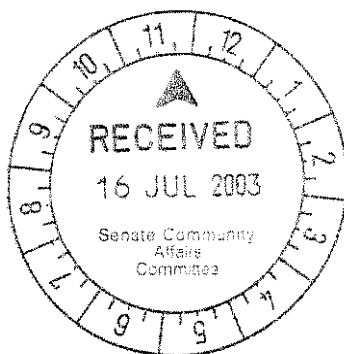
This conference took place on 10 October 2002 at the Darlingford Hospital, N.S.W.

Please advise whether this is an acceptable form of submission. I am prepared to appear before the Inquiry should the Committee so wish.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Morwood

IAN MORWOOD



*Copy of paper delivered to the 1st National Conference
on the Mental Health Aspects of Persons Affected by
Family Separation - Liverpool Hospital N.S.W. 11/6/68*

On 19th December 1945 I came out of St Joseph's Orphanage in Surry Hills, Melbourne. An older brother, Frank, and I had been placed in this orphanage four years previously by our alcoholic father.

I was a week off my fifth birthday when I entered the orphanage. Our mother had died just weeks before of meningitis. I was the third youngest of 12 children - a normal, fun loving little boy with no physical or emotional impediments. Yet, when I left that orphanage, I carried the emotional baggage that no nine year child should ever have to carry.

The emotional abuse - whether it was intentional or not - started from day one of entering the orphanage. It was the policy of the nuns to immediately separate brothers so Frank and I were not allowed to talk to each other, play with each other, or even to be seen to be near each other. The nuns were paranoid about this.

A week after entering the orphanage my grandfather brought me a big red metal toy truck for my fifth birthday. That night my dormitory mates and I played with the truck under our beds. A nun came in and told me to put the truck in a cupboard. The next morning the other boys and I ran to the cupboard but the truck was gone. We were all crying and the nun said to me "Ian, we had to take the toy away because none of the other boys have toys and if they don't have toys neither can you". That was the last I saw of that toy. It was the last toy I saw for four years.

Even though this happened in the first week of being in the orphanage, it has remained my strongest memory of that horrible place. I seemed to have known right there and then that these nuns were going to knock out of me any sense of individuality. Though it would be years before I would hear the term "the lowest common denominator", already at the age of five my friends and I were being controlled by that demeaning principal.

One of the greatest problems I have in coming to terms with my time in the orphanage is that those four years are virtually a blank as far as my memory goes. The memories that I do have include being lined up outside the toilet block to drink hot salt water. The salt water would turn my stomach and I was always strapped around the legs by the nuns for spitting it out. I also recall the terrible chilblains. My hands, feet and ears were swollen and blistered with chilblains, which were never ever treated.

Another vivid memory is from my last year in the orphanage. My brother Frank had been moved to the older boys orphanage at the Christian Brothers St Augustine's Orphanage in Geelong. On this particular day we were told that some boys from St Augustine's would be having lunch with us. I was hoping that Frank was amongst them. We were lined up on one side of the quadrangle as the St Augustine's boys filed in. Frank and I saw each other at the same time and rushed to each other.

A Christian Brother grabbed Frank and a nun grabbed me and both proceeded to hit us as hard as they could, calling us horrible little brats. Why??? I was then 8 years of age and Frank was nine. Our terrible sin was that we wanted to be with each other, to be with our brother.

These are about the only memories I have of those four years. Last year I attended the first reunion of St Joseph's Orphanage. I was shocked to learn from former inmates of a particular practice of the nuns. A practice which, no doubt, has had an enormous detrimental effect on my life.

These ex inmates, who were in the orphanage at about the same time as myself, were discussing the practice of the nuns hitting any boy who stuttered - and the stupidity of the nuns for doing this - as the more the boys were hit the more that they would stutter. I was incredulous as I could not recall this happening. However, they were emphatic that this happened to any boy who stuttered.

My mind must have blanked out any memory of this, as I came out of that orphanage with a most debilitating stutter. I was told by the former inmates that my life must have been misery in the orphanage as I would have been constantly strapped by the nuns in their efforts to cure my stuttering.

Stuttering must have been of epidemic proportions in so-called "care" institutions. I was surprised at the first public meeting of CLAN to hear that over half the speakers (approx. 20 speakers and all ex inmates) had speech problems.

Frank and I had no social skills whatsoever when we left the orphanages. The other kids in our street treated us like lepers as we didn't know how to play cricket or football, or how to ride a bike or the other one hundred and one things that kids knew at that age. On top of being shamed for having no social skills, and being a social outcast after being locked up in an orphanage for four years - from age 5 to age 9 - I also was shamed to the core by my inability to speak without stuttering. I was so ashamed and humiliated that I prayed not to wake up in the morning.

This stutter was a result of the emotional and physical abuse inflicted on me by nuns at St Joseph's Orphanage. It was further aggravated by being sexually abused by our parish priest who used my stutter as a pretext for his own sexual kicks.

At ten years of age I, together with my brother Frank, became altar boys at St Monicas, Moonee Ponds where we both attended school. The parish priest was Father Willis who had a reputation for touching the altar boys on their bottoms. In order to leave the sacristy after Mass we had to pass by the priests' room. Fr Willis would be in the priests' room reading his "office". We would try to sneak pass the room without him hearing us, but if he heard a sound he would call out "here boy". We had this understanding amongst ourselves that only one boy would go in whilst the others ran out the sacristy door.

Fr Willis would be sitting in a straight back chair which had arm rests and would have this big book on his lap. He would make the boy stand beside him on his right side facing the same way as him. He would then start to stroke the boy's bottom as he talked. As far as I am aware that is all that happened to the other altar boys - I didn't hear of him doing anything else - which only made me even more ashamed of what he did to me.

I would get very tense if it was my "lot" to go in whilst the other boys escaped. Fr Willis would always say that my stuttering wasn't improving. He would stroke my bottom and say that I was tensed up and that was causing my stuttering. He would then move his hand to my front to stroke my genitals. I would be willing my body not to respond to his touch but I would get an erection. He would continue to stroke me on the outside of my clothes - he made no attempt to open my pants - saying that my whole body was tense, and that I had a very bad problem with my dickie, and that unless I learnt to relax I would never overcome my stuttering.

I cannot find words to describe my sense of absolute shame. I was ashamed of my orphanage background, I was deeply ashamed of my stuttering and I was shamed beyond belief that I was unable to control my body when Willis was stroking me. It was enough to be sniggered at in the classroom when I couldn't read from a book or for Brother Botrill, the Christian Brother teacher, to make disparaging remarks that, as he didn't want to be there all day listening to my stuttering, he would skip having me read. But for Willis to dump on me that my stuttering was caused by my inability to control my penis was more than I could handle. I hated myself and only wished to die.

The episodes with Willis happened about once a month and continued for four years (from age 10 to age 13). My school life was a series of running away from home and wagging school whenever I could. I hated school, I hated myself and truly wanted to stop living. I left school at the age of 14 a complete mental wreck. I couldn't hold down jobs having 12 different jobs from age 14 to age 20.

In the early 50s there was a well known stage hypnotist by the name of the Great Franquin. My brother Frank went up on the stage and was immediately hypnotised. This impressed me as Franquin also advertised that he could cure stuttering, smoking etc. I went to see Franquin in his St Kilda Rd apartment and he assured me that he could cure my stuttering. However, after three months of sessions once a week, he gave up as he couldn't get me to relax in order to put me under. He said that I had too many dark secrets and that I wouldn't let go!! It cost me a lot of money for nothing.

When I was in my early 30s my doctor introduced me to an elderly Welsh woman who was a retired speech therapist. She had many famous clients in England including Richard Burton. Again, after about a year of seeing her every week, she gave up saying that my problem was too deep for her to overcome. I joined a public speaking club called Rostrum, to force myself to speak in public. This did help a little, but it has only been the passing of time that has allowed me to control my stutter to a certain extent.

CLAN advised me how to get access to my records from St Joseph's. I looked forward with great anticipation to receiving those records, hoping that they would give me an insight into those four terrible years that my memory had successfully blocked out. But my hopes were in vain. My total records consisted of one line - who my parents were and the date of my admission to the orphanage.

I sat down and cried my heart out. It was as though the emotional abuse of the orphanage was still continuing. As though Frank and I never existed. I was told by Mackillop Family Services that there were ample records for all the other boys who were at the orphanage, however, as Frank and I were private admissions by our father, we only rated one line each.

The media has given justifiable coverage to the many cases of sexual abuse perpetuated by various representatives of religious organisations. However, I believe that the public is not aware of the extent of the emotional and physical abuse of innocent children who were placed in the so-called "care" institutions of these same religious organisations. Nor is the public aware of the long term effects that this emotional and physical abuse has had on the tens of thousands of ex inmates of those institutions.

In my case, it has caused me untold shame and misery throughout my life. However, after listening to other members of CLAN telling their horrific stories at CLAN meetings, I realize that I was relatively lucky. I was particularly lucky in returning to everyday society at the age of nine. At least that gave me from nine to fourteen years of age to adapt into so-called normal society.

However, the boys that I left behind in that orphanage had no such chance. They were moved to St Augustine's Orphanage at the age of nine. At the age of fourteen, with absolutely no social or work skills, the kids were turfed out onto the streets to fend for themselves. This system, replicated by other religions and charities, perpetuated an underclass of poor, uneducated and an unloved sector of society.

I was distressed to read sometime ago of the cavalier attitude of the Federal Minister for

Employment and Work Place Relations, Tony Abbott, to the son he "adopted out". The term "adopted out" is, in many cases, just a cold hearted euphuism to justify an even more cold hearted decision to give away an unwanted baby. It was obvious that, rather than accepting his responsibilities for the child he had fathered, Tony was more interested in pursuing his university career. Tony does not seem particularly perturbed that he has denied his son the natural right to be raised and cared for by his father. And this same man has the gall to lecture other people for shirking their responsibilities.

Furthermore, neither Tony nor his government seem to give a damn for the estimated 30% of the children who were "adopted out" or placed in "care" and who eventually end up in prison. Nor for the estimated 40% of the prison population who were "adopted out" or placed in "care" as children. Yet people who were "adopted out" or placed in "care" represent less than 1% of the Australian population. What an indictment of the system!

Imagine the huge outcry, the screams for government action if 30% of the students of Riverview - Tony's alma mater - ended up in prison, or that ex Riverview students represented over 40% of the prison population. But this has been the plight of ex "care" children for generations, and no one has given a damn.

Suffer the little children for they shall see God - so the church taught us. And by God, they made sure we suffered and still suffer.

Signed
Ian Morwood
IAN MORWOOD
11-7-03