

CATHERINE Brown

2003 14



SCABC

Enquiry
Child Abuse
(Convents)

to the Committee of Enquiry

The Enclosed 'Articles' and Questionnaire
are Intended to be of 'Assistance' (only)
in Aiding the Committee in its Enquiry
into 'Convent' Child Abuse. It is Not
a Submission but hopefully an
Addition to the Enquiry a General
of any Submissions Presented.

As such I hope it will prove useful.

Note that I am Available for Any Comment
or Question that the Committee
if it wishes they want
to Put to Me.

Yours Sincerely

Catherine Brown.

(Member of C L A N)
Care Leavers Australia Network
(Convent Girl)

The Secretary
S.C.A.R.C.
Suite S1 59
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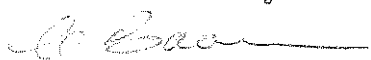
Submission To The Enquiry On Child Abuse (In Convents)

There are a number of points of importance that the enquiry could consider as it looks into abuse in the convent system. These are:

- a) What was the nature of the system - in regards to care of children.
- b) What was the role of the Bishop, nun and Mother Superior in them.
- c) What was the role of the State.
- d) Where are the records of schedule of the Bishops.
- e) Where are the records of schedule of the State agencies. Namely:
a. Welfare b. Health c. Education.
- f) What are the long term effects of confinement and isolation upon children. Especially over prolonged periods of time.
- g) What are the effects of fear, intimidation and abuse long term, upon children, over long periods of time.
- h) Who were, the bishops, the nuns, the children in convents.

I trust this listing is helpful to the committee in its Inquiry.

Yours Sincerely


C. Brown. (convent girl)

CONVENTS AS PRISONS

Throughout the 20th Century there were two penal systems. One was for adults, the other was for children. Until the closing years and, in a system more punitive than prisons, convent children – who were supposed to be protected by law – had their Rights violated and their persons abused.

While prisons were regulated and subject to public scrutiny, convents were answerable to no one. So arbitrary was the power of the nuns, even their own bishops feared to visit the convent. Nuns in convents ruled as despots in complete autonomy and in contempt of all those who had relegated responsibility to them. Even Hitler was given no such freedom for so long.

Convent children were no more illegitimate than yours or mine. They were children suffering from the loss of a parent. In pain from bereavement, e.g. separation, loneliness, sadness, fear and in need of care and understanding, all they got was abandonment by all three powers of the jurisdiction – Family, State and Church. They were condemned for the rest of their young lives to confinement and isolation.

Solitary confinement in prisons is used as a punishment and its use limited and its effects known. In convents solitary confinement was a normal condition. A prerequisite as a means of control. Children were separated from each other. In all my years of confinement I saw my siblings only once and then only from a distance.

It is unfortunate that we see the victim only as an adult. We fail to see the face of the suffering child beneath. These are the voices still waiting to be heard.

CHILDREN AND THE STATE

As a decent society we protest the detainment of children, even if they are illegal, refugee, and not of our own, as we know that this is unnatural to them. We also seek to protect their human rights and decencies, as we know that ours is their only voice.

If only we had been so diligent in protecting our own.

While under our own lawful code of protection, children in convents were being treated far worse than the criminals of our justice system. Confined in isolation, children were detained for years, and sometimes for life, without reprieve. Their human and civil rights were violated as their voices were being stilled in fear. We as a decent society would not let this happen to our pet dog or cat, yet we let it happen to children. At the same time as we denied them a voice we protected those who were negligent in their duty towards us. We still do. Why!

LAST DAY IN THE CONVENT

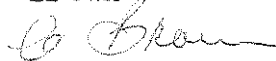
Could it be true, I was at last leaving the convent. A word in my ear a moment ago held me to that belief. After all this time in confinement and in isolation I had almost given up in despair, and now that the time had come for me to go I was suddenly afraid. What could I do, How would I cope in a world now alien to me and no doubt changed in my absence. I prayed only that the nun to come into the room would not be Sister Aquinas, fate could not be that cruel on this my last day, could it!

The door was thrust open and in walked Sister Aquinas. She glared at me, I cowered in defeat. Tossing something onto a chair (I saw it was a coat) she shrilled as she saw me looking at it; oh no my girl you can take your wishful eyes off of it, you are having nothing. I wanted to cry, even now she could not let go. I wondered if it was something I had innocently uttered all those years ago as a child upon first entering the convent. I could say or do nothing except follow her meekly out of the room.

Behind the half closed doors of the convent she called out her last words to me; Never Marry a Pro--Tes--Tant girl or you will go straight to hell. I had no idea what she was talking about.

Shivering with cold and fear I made my way down the gravel path, too heavy in heart to look back. No one would know I was gone. Not even my sibling other.

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Convent Girl