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4-8-03

Hi I am Terri. This is my story.

In 1964 I lived with my family at Liverpool, just out of Sydney. My family were my 2 parents, 2 brothers & 2 sisters. I was the 2nd eldest child (4yo). Liverpool was semi-rural at that time, and we had plenty of space to adventure. I can only remember snippets of that time. I know our family didn't have a lot of money, because I remember the neighbours kids having a lot of presents on this particular day & we didn't later realise that day was Christmas. I don't remember much of my father. I remember a man who was friendly that used to visit. I don't know if this was my father, as he apparently walked away or whether it was some other caller. This one night I remember laying in bed listening to fights & the front door being kicked in. I think this night my father had arrived home to find another man. I have learned since that my father banished our mother from our home & she was forbidden to have us. My last memory ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> of my mother was waiting at our front gate for her, as I did actually for her to get off her bus. (Maybe she worked I don't know). I waited & watched every single bus pass by, but my mother never got off any of them. I even waited into the darkness. I resigned myself with despair & returned to our house, to my ~~elder~~ <sup>other</sup> brothers & sisters, my brother & I both have this weird memory of paper bags taped to the walls with biscuits in them. We had to get on chairs to get them down. There was no adult present & wonder if it was my mother who left them there or my Grandmother. So

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many unanswered questions. I would never see or hear from my mother ever again. I felt very close to my mother, although I don't have a dear picture of her image to even hold on to. No photos, nothing! I have never recovered from this loss & have carried that with me for 39 years now.

What followed from there, I attribute to my not recovering this abandonment. Furthermore entrenching it: I developed a poor sense of self worth.

We found ourselves, my siblings & grandmother (father's mother) on a train. We were apparently on our way to Cairns. Our father had a house there awaiting us. My grandmother fell ill on that trip. Next thing the courts ordered that we be made wards of the state & placed in care. I don't even know if my mother had been contacted. I assume not. The location being Orange in NSW. This is when our family became completely fragmented. My older brother was placed in Beauriville ORANGE. I went to St Michael's girls home in Bathurst. My younger brother & sister went back to Parramatta to be re-allocated to wherever & my youngest sister, whom would not have even been a year old, well, I don't know how she fitted into this picture. I was re-united with my brother at the age of 11 yrs, purely as a coincidence as a family that billeted home kids for weekends came to realise that we were brother & sister. That family ended up fostering us both. To my disgust the department never endeavoured to provide any contact between us, even though we only lived 1 hr apart. I re-united with my sister only in adult life, but have been unable to maintain a relationship. I never got to see my brother, as he died at the age of sixteen. I want to grieve for him, but somehow it is like grieving for an imaginary character & yet there is a real emotional connection. Maybe it has something to do with his foster parents still holding his ashes. He does not have a grave to go to. So adding to the already displaced mountain of grief. My youngest sister was apparently adopted. I still don't know who signed the papers for her adoption. My brother & I



were searching for her & were told we could not have any identifying information about her. Yet another door slammed about we have no right to what belongs to us. I used to rock her in her bassinet as a baby, but I have no right to claim!

I arrived at St MICHAELS immediately being put into a bath. I received the nickname 'TIGER' because I bit them. My fighting spirit soon turned to silence. I apparently did not speak a word for a further 6 weeks. I had 'no voice' & became a complete introvert. They thought I was unable to speak & were totally surprised when one day I began to talk, so I was smartly sent to school, still not 5yrs old. Suffering what I now know to be Post Traumatic Stress, I was put into another alien environment that I couldn't cope with & soon learnt how to dissociate. My unaddressed inner pain & confusion was so great that this was my only coping mechanism. To this day I still dissociate which is most often inappropriate. My time at St Michaels I can only describe as a time of concentration, may I ask what society would incarcerate a 4yr old child. For this reason I speak for all kids placed in institutions. This is why one, firstly develops a sense of 'There's something wrong with me' to be punished so. This is most likely reinforced by the fact that no-one even explained why you were there, where your family were & what would become of you. No one acknowledged your loss & grief & comforted you in any manner. You became regimented into that system. Therefore you knew that you didn't have permission to have an emotion, so inevitably you had to let a part of you die. 'You were here now & the sooner you forget your origins the better!' I have great compassion for Aboriginal peoples who have also been ripped away from their identity, which I feel do them as an even more extreme displacement & shock. It's sure this accounts for a large proportion of homelessness felt among them. Even though I feel akin to their cause, I also feel the shame of my story.

There is so much ~~noise~~ telling about being in an institution. What I have spoken up to now may be more on the benign side due to ignorance as 'The Times' but I can assure you institutions were a haven for those whose only intention was to dwell amongst those that they could gratify their own need to have power & control over. It is difficult to write about everything that went on short of writing a book. So here are some of things that include the life at St Michaels:

Firstly you are this marginal group in the community. Represented by the Church. Constantly being indoctrinated by Christianity, only to be confused by the hypocrisy of it. You soon learn to be the object of peoples attention in whatever their perception might be. We were identified as 'HOME GIRLS' in all situations, including our time at the local state school. Some people use what they perceive as soft targets to project their own worthless intentions on. We were those soft targets and the state failed to protect us from these people. The woman who ran this home, her name was Sister Margaret. She was of 2002 ~~has~~ been ordained as a priest. Every girl in that home feared her. She was a heartless, cruel, powerful person. The fear of various punishments governed you well. The effects of this has carried through in many areas of my life & feel as though in spending the second half of my life starting out the first half. Full handed blame to the head were a common occurrence. Being strapped with your pants pulled down was usually the result of being summoned to the office. Food deprivation was as going. The expectation of impeccable behaviour at all times, including table manners etc. Witnessing punishment to other girls made you feel checked & even more obedient. I remember <sup>them</sup> bashing a physically/intellectually impaired girl around the head until she fell to the floor. I know she didn't understand & what they did to her was wrong. Did that not? I was only 9 yrs old. The removal of anything that was given outside the home was set back inside its walls. The weekends or school holidays that we spent with my then to become

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foster mother, who showed kindness & love & often gifts, were to be relinquished on my return back. I would usually ask each Sunday if I could wear my boots that were given to me from my <sup>then to become</sup> foster mother, to church. These things were kept locked away in a cupboard. The reply was always 'I don't think so'. I only got to wear them once & that whilst in the home. Same with other items of clothing given to me eg. Christmas gifts, always taken away. I see this as deliberate deprivation. Those of us who wet the bed were subject to various forms of corrective methods, including isolation from the usual dormitories, to having alarm clocks placed in nappy drums, (to ~~keep you awake~~ get at various times to use your bladder. To washing your sheets by hand & hanging them out in frosty morning, prior to having your breakfast which by then was cold porridge having been served up an hour prior. If all this failed then you were subject to an icy cold shower. This occurred at as much as minus 5° in the winter of Bathurst. Strange that prior to the cold shower treatment you didn't get to shower ~~if you'd~~ wet your bed. You had to go to school stinking and sometimes developing urinary burns to the inside of your legs. Sometimes so bad that the skin would crack & chaff. No cream was offered maybe they didn't even know that they even existed. To save yourself this fate, remembering it wasn't just cold water, it was icy cold water coming from those taps, you would lie & say you hadn't wet your bed. Cotton sheets over a cold plastic sheet in a cold dormitory was a better option than the humiliating, brutal punishment for what was beyond your control. When found out you would be stripped. I have struggled with speaking out because this Deceitress made herself my Godmother & there's this strange loyalty to your ~~carer~~ abuser. This is why I feel it is important to make it as easy as possible to speak out. I have written to this woman addressing this issue last year only to have her deny it. My letter got forwarded to the Bishop of Bathurst (who apparently didn't read it & was then forwarded to Cunto

As a result I was offered 2hrs counselling.

The consequence of being incarcerated by the state to this institution

are:

- many unanswered questions about my family subsequently identify crisis
- permanent separation & disconnection of belonging to a family
- lack of self worth / insecurity
- repeating patterns of abandonment / loss & grief
- ungrieved grief
- lack opportunity to learn to my capacity
- my children & partnerships has suffered indirectly
- groomed to be vulnerable & feel powerless

I put to this enquiry that even though there may have been people & intentions that sincerely cared, and all institutions will make this claim, and thank God to those, but they are not the issue. The issue is that we kids were state words. The state being the acting parent subjected us to emotional, physical, sexual & spiritual abuse. If acknowledgment & accountability doesn't happen that we as a society that accepts that there are certain groups of people who can be used as soft targets. On the other hand if ownership & compensation are addressed, it will send out the message that silence will be broken & accountability will have to be taken. We have already been failed by a Government who wanted to put us away & forget about us. I hope that we are not going to be put away & forgotten again. This has been a collective experience of many of thousands of children worldwide. There is so much to learn from these experiences, so please don't let it be in vain. We don't want pity. We want to be acknowledged as the silent warriors that we've had to be. We are asking for: Accountability, documentation, <sup>support</sup> resources & compensation/retribution. I have been writing almost 6 months for my file. Thankyou for this opportunity to speak about this experience.

Toni Tanne *Toni Tanne*