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To

For

The C.L.A.N. Care Leavers Australia Network Inquiry

My married name is Souris – however I am known by my maiden name Vernon] I have been married for 39 years, my Husband is Theodore Souris. We have three grown up sons' three daughter-in-laws, Four Grand-Daughters and Two Grand-Sons.

I currently sit on the joint CLAN & ACWA Advisory Committee as Secretary.

Because our mother was desperately ill with M.S. [Multiple Sclerosis] in the final months leading up to her confinement and subsequent death, and because our

father suffered the effects of long term alcohol abuse, he was, at that time incapable of coping with his loss, he did in fact suffer a complete mental collapse.

My memories are that our Dad loved our Mother and he loved us too. He also had a grown up family of three daughters and a son. A few years earlier, he had tragically lost his first wife in similar circumstances to our mother.

After our mother's death at 27 years of age, our father was committed to Callum Park mental asylum. We, his younger family, were all in a very vulnerable position, suffering severe malnourishment and living in impossible impoverished circumstances in a shack in Canley Vale with friends, the Hanks Family. This was also a family affected by alcoholism.

My vivid memories of that time, were of often being left unclothed, wandering in the back yard amongst the long weeds of paspaleum [a sticky, flocky type plant] sticking to my body. I always felt dirty, unable to get clean and suffering from the open paspaleum sores. I have memory that the second oldest boy, Jacky, from the Hanks family, a horrible 14 year old, indecently interfered with me, as I now understand it.

Subsequently with all that had eventuated, it was inevitable that there was no other alternative, with none of the extended family willing or capable to take us on, we were placed under the protection of the State and as State Wards finally placed into care at Dalmar, under the supervision of Don Stewart, The Superintendent.

From what we have been told, which is limited, and from what we have been able to discover on our own as a family, At the Hospital when our mother died, Our Father who was on the verge of a complete collapse, also relinquished his parental rights to the twins [our Younger brother & Sister].

As it happened, the twins were adopted by the Superintendent of the Dalmar Children's home, and his Wife, Don Stewart. This couple also had a grown up family and wanted more children, so this situation was ideal for them to adopt our new brother & sister – the twins.

Six months later, I clearly remember the night that we were driven to Dalmar. Our Father got the driver, who was a neighbour called Mr. Skeggs to stop up on the top of Mobbs Hills Carlingford. He was sobbing and holding onto all three of us. He was telling us to look out at the lights and onto the city in the distance. I remember him saying that it looked just like fairy-land.

We all stayed up there in the darkness, looking out at the fairy-lights for a very long time. I remember him telling my older sister Yvonne, who was nine years old that she would now have to be the mother of all of us, me, my brother Leith and the two new twins, at that time we didn't know their names, all we knew was that they were already at the place that we were going to.

Our father even said how lovely it was going to be for all of us looking after the new babies, just like we had looked after our little brother Leithy, when our mum was so

sick. He had been like our own toy baby. So in a way, that was something for us to look forward to when we got to the home. But our dad promised us that this would only be temporary, until he could manage to come and get us all out, and that wouldn't be too long.

When we got to Dalmar, I remember driving down a long dark, tree lined driveway to a circle outside a Huge Mansion. There were no lights on, so it must have been very late. The man [Minister] who drove us there got out of the car and rang the door-bell.

The next thing I saw was a woman all dressed in white, with a white flowing vail carrying a hurricane lamp, walking down the big steps, there was a man following her. [When I recently saw the movie – “Rabbit Proof Fence” I had to leave the theatre, because there was a similar scene in the movie that just triggered an anxiety attack, that threw me into a state of collapse – I suddenly remember the emotions and anxiety associated with that night and what it truly meant to me].

At the time, I knew something terrible was happening to me and my family, I was crying holding onto my daddy so tightly. My father was kissing me and cuddling me and not wanting to let go of me. The Man pulled me away from him and told me how pretty I was and how pretty my long blonde curls were and that everything was going to be alright. I just wanted my daddy.

I had a knitted dolly called Mrs Guffoopy, it was very old and worn. The man [Mr Don Stewart] looked at it, then took it away from me. He threw my dolly in the waste paper basket, saying that I wouldn't be needing a dirty old toy like that anymore. Just recently my sister Yvonne found a similar little knitted doll and happen to buy it for a grand-daughter of mine – We told her the story of my Mrs Guffoopy, and she told me and my sister Yvonne, that she would let me play with her, anytime I wanted. She also told us that she will keep Mrs Guffoopy, for ever, not matter how old or worn it may become. My grand-daughter is only seven, and she understood the sadness that I suffered, losing my Mrs Guffoopy, we both had a good cry together. I still miss Mrs Guffoopy and still feel the pain of that loss, but my grand-daughter is helping me come to terms with it.

That first night at Dalmar, I remember feeling all alone, crying for a long time, not knowing where I was also feeling a tremendous fear and loss. If I couldn't have my Daddy, then I wanted my big sister Yvonne, or my little brother Leithy. I kept crying and calling out for them. Someone came out to me from a doorway, I thought it was my sister, but it wasn't. The women pulled the covers from me and slapped me really hard on my bare legs, telling me to shut up, because I was keeping everyone else awake. She also said that I wouldn't see my sister or brother again, if I didn't shut up. I cowed and trembled, but I couldn't stop crying, so I muffled my sobs into the pillow.

The next morning was very strange, the woman came out of the door again, pulled the bedclothes off all of the girls, one by one and slapped their bare legs, yelling at them to get up, I saw many little girls standing by their beds waiting to be checked, if they had wet or not. No one took any notice of me. I was just left there standing by my

bed, while everyone else got dressed. I remember the little ones that had a wet the bed, having their noses rubbed in it and then being yelled at and beaten, then being pulled under a cold shower as punishment. Even as a six years old, I thought then, oh dear, I can never do that, I can never ever get hit again, as I was still hurting from the night before.

The next thing I remember was having a pot put on my head, and having all of my hair cut off. I found myself crying, and thinking that Mr. Stewart had said that I had lovely blonde curls, and here they were cutting them all off. I was unable to say anything, in case the lady would hurt me again.

I can also remember that it took a long time before I saw my big sister Yvonne. When I did, I ran to her, wanting her to take me away and look after me. I was dragged away from her and beaten, and then told that she was with the bigger girls in big dorm, and that for our own good, the junior girls were not allowed to speak or play with the older girls, it just wasn't allowed, and that's that.

My sister Yvonne, gave them some cheek, as they called it, and she was beaten even more than me, and the more she answered back, the more they beat her and told her how bad she was, they told her she came from filth and she was filth. She was told that there was no hope for her to ever become a good girl, as she was already a bad seed. She had already become unclean by living in the gutter with all the drunk, bad, evil and crooks from Redfern. We grew up in Redfern, before going to Dalmar.

This sort of thing often happened to us, because, every time I saw her, I just couldn't help trying to run to her, and be with her, as I knew that she would stick up for me, and as always, it was the same outcome. I was slapped badly, but she was always beaten much more and was reported to Mr. Stewart, who gave her the cane and a beating every day, that I can remember.

Every time my sister got into trouble, it was policy that the staff had to report her short-comings to Mr. Stewart The Superintendent. Mr. Stewart would make an example of her. He would brutalize her by pushing her, kicking her and some times would make an example of her, he would lock her under the staircase in a narrow dark room, and leave her there for ages, all day and even over-night. She was left there until she was either prepared to apologise or own up to something she didn't do or say what he wanted her to say. He would do this in front of all of us, so that we wouldn't get any fancy ideas, as he put it.

When my sister was released from this hell, we all noticed that each time, the crazy look in her eyes started to take longer to go away. We couldn't talk to her for hours after she came out, because she would sulk and writh, wringing her hands and cussing Mr. Stewart that one day she would get him back, and that

she hated him. We all felt the same way, but we were always too frightened to say that, only my sister Yvonne was brave enough to keep it up, or stupid enough to keep saying those things and sticking up for herself. Of course she was the one who suffered, It was almost like a battle that never ended.

Just before she left the home 6 years later, he had not managed to break her, but by that time, everyone else was afraid of her, as we were for many years and are today, at times. You couldn't look at her in a funny way or get close to her, she would just turn on you, thinking you were up to no good, or that you would turn on her and do her in – which many kids often did. For some reason my sister

Yvonne was a huge threat to that man Mr. Stewart, and it rubbed off on us as well, or so we thought. Having been put through this situation many times, I eventually realized that the more I distanced myself from my sister, the more I would be accepted by the staff, the other children, Matron Barnett and Mr. Stewart.

They always kept telling me that I was the good girl of the Vernon family, and that my Sister Yvonne was the bad girl, the bad seed. There was no hope for her and that I should not associate with her, because she would get me into trouble and make me bad like she was, if I mixed with her. Even as a little girl, I knew this was wrong! Deep down I knew that one day my sister would be the one who would free me up from this hell that I was in. But I also knew that I had to keep my distance from her and pretend that I wasn't apart of her, so as to save myself and protect myself from being locked away and beaten up.

I suffered deep-rooted shame and guilt about dis-owning my sister, and to this day I still suffer this pain and sorrow. I try to make it up to her, but I know that my sister knows the truth, even though she says she has forgiven me, I believe that she still holds this against me. I wish I could make it up, but I do not believe I will ever be able to undo what has come between us over the years.

It is like the glass has been broken and I cannot put it together again, no matter how hard I try. We are both victims of circumstances, beyond our control and I believe that we both need in depth counseling, together to find our way through this.

One other thing about my sister, is that if ever she heard that I was having any trouble with someone, like a kid at school or a teacher, she would come up from the senior school and either beat up the kid or get right into the teachers face, and put the fear into them – no one, not anyone had better touch her sister, or they would be sorry.

It became really embarrassing for me, because everyone was afraid to treat me normally, so I had to learn how to work around that too. But one thing I know, and that that was that my sister loved me, and just like our father told her, she was certainly living up to his expectations, and being a mother as well as sister,

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the protector of her family. This is another tragedy she had to live up to, which is another story in itself.

When my sister left Dalmar, Matron and Mr. Stewart took me and my young brother Leith aside. We were warned that she was gone, at last....[good riddance to bad rubbish, as they put it.] They warned us that there was a Red Alert that she may one day come up to the school or that she might come to see us outside the church on Sunday's or that if she may even come to us at Sunday school, and if that were to

happen, we were to run to one of the staff members or teachers and tell them. The message and fear they instilled in us was that she may come and kid-nap us. Because she was such a bad person. She was the bad seed of the

family, and that if she took us away from Dalmar she was up to no good. We were warned that we had a lot to loose if we went with her.

At the time, I think she must have told them that one day she would come back to Dalmar and take not only her little brother Leithy and her little sister Pammy [me] also that she was coming back one day to take back the twins as well. In other words, we were under threat of being taken by our older bad sister.

I don't know what power they thought she had over us, but we were always being warned to look out for her. I must admit, that at times I felt such fear about this whole situation. It took me a long time to come to terms with these fears and suspicions when it came to me poor sister Yvonne. No wonder, that even today, she is suspect of our feelings toward her. We have always told her that they had no control over what we thought of her, however, she always tells us that they did. And if I am being truthful with myself, the brainwashing where my sister is concerned, was effective, and has had a lasting effect. This has had ramifications over the years and to this day.

As a result there have been a distancing over long periods of time, family reunions and catastrophic bust-ups, however, over the past seven years we have made commitments to work through these issues, and no matter what, still remain a family unit. Some times it works and sometimes it doesn't. But who knows with the right support and counseling it may happen. Well, that is what we are hoping for.

As far as my relationship with my little brother Leithy was, well, from that first night that we went into the Dalmar, I must say that all I knew about my little brother was that he was in Baby's Home

Dad and my sister and brother and came on his first visit to his Children, expecting to see the new twins as well as his three other young children only to be told that he had in fact given the twins up for adoption and that he would be able to see his three other children, but not the twins as they were not legally his anymore, they were now the Children of the Superintendent and his wife. This revelation caused our Father to become extremely disappointed and aggressive.

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From memory there was a punch up and he was prevented from being able to visit or see us again.

What happened thereafter has been a source of tremendous heartache and sorrow, especially for the three of us that remained in the home.

Equipped with the knowledge that the new little babies who lived in the cottage of the Superintendent with his family, were our own little brother and sister,

caused utter confusion, fear, heartache, pain, shame and guilt on a daily basis. Week after week, year after year with no resolve or solution, except maintaining the code of silence and secrecy. Through the passage of time, the resemblance of all siblings was unmistakable, and is today, as it was then. We were never allowed to acknowledge each other as siblings, because to do so, as was the case with my older sister, who constantly showed the courage to emphatically bring this to the attention of whoever would be willing to listen to her, suffered ongoing physical and mental abuse. In fact, even though I wasn't beaten like my older sister, I too suffered in silence, just forever watching, but wanting desperately to become invisible, so as not to be connected to any trouble she was in or anything of what she was being subjected to. I was always told that my older sister was no good, that she was the bad seed of the family and that it would be in my best interest to keep well away from her, if I knew what was good for me. These conflicting feelings created tremendous confusion for my siblings and me and still does. Thus we all walked on eggshells, so to speak. The code of silence that was experienced by our family was also impacted upon all of the children we grew up with. This was apparent at a recent Dalmar Old Boy's & Girl's reunion. We again discovered that this knowledge has had an adverse and lasting effect on many of our past care providers. The fear surrounding our circumstances is still a cause of great discomfort, anger and remorse for all concerned. The code of secrecy still perseveres.

In later years, aged 30 or so, I found that I could no longer cope emotionally and psychologically. I was placed into intensive Psychiatric Treatment, with Doctor Yolanda Lucier aka Hempton. I was treated with compulsive obsessive water fetish and other obsessive behaviors and disorders [Compulsive Overeating-Food Addiction] and Clinical Depression and a chronic migraine sufferer, all stemmed from anger, resentment, fear, guilt and shame. I seriously thought that if I was not acknowledged as sister and prevented from any close contact with my siblings, then, I must have done something outrageous, I must have been responsible for doing something very wrong and that I was of serious threat to these little children, the twins.

It was through this therapy that I discovered that in my painful struggle to be recognized and accepted, I was playing out the role of mother, not sister. That my intentions to become perfect, righteous, clean and Godly, and that would validate me enough, and only then, maybe I would be able to one day, be pure, honorable and acceptable enough to again, re-claim these twins as my children. As strange as it may seem, this is an insight into how an impressionable young child's mind interprets situations they are placed in, beyond their control.

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To say that this trauma, has severely affected each and every sibling in my family, is an under-statement, however, it is not up to me to tell anyone else's

story but mine. Their truths, understandings and life's journey belongs to them and to make known their story, remains a decision that they must make. I just trust that by sharing my story, it will in no way cause them harm, hurt or injury.

One of the many illnesses that I have suffered over the years has been clinical depression and chronic migraine...resulting in much hospitalization over the years.

Since I was put into Dalmar, I have never ever felt worthy enough to be cradled in a mothers arms and told that I was a unique and worthwhile human being.

The only person I can remember ever telling me this was my sister Yvonne, who is only 3 years older than me. When I cried for my mother, I also cried for my sister, who I was not permitted to associate with me once we were put into Dalmar. So the person who had looked after me for the year before my mother died, who fed me and loved me was also taken away from me, even though I would see her from a distance, I was never allowed to be with her. Because we children were separated from or abandoned by family and placed into substitute care, I have since been diagnosed with suffering from "Post Traumatic Stress" and that this has, in my later life, manifested itself with mystery pain and unexplained symptoms & illnesses, I now have a breakthrough, an insight, awareness or understanding of this disorder. In fact, I have sought help and healing and feel that I may with further help recover. It may be a long journey but what I want is to be truly re-united with my family and be validated in some way, that I was not the problem and that maybe we can be [re-united as a family] be the solution – is that too much to ask?

We have never really made any of this travesty of justice known to any legal people before, because to do so would have prevented any re-union with the twins, in fact we felt such guilt and shame that we have not spoken to them too much about how we suffered, because we did not want to come between them and the family that adopted them. Mrs Stewart died a few years ago, and we have become closer to our adopted brother, however, to shatter his regard for his adopted parents was something we have always been afraid to do, considering that all we have ever wanted is to be re-united as a family. Our sister [Pamela] she was given the same name as me! [Pamela] two sisters with the same name – a little confusing you may ask, well just imagine how it has been for us? This situation has been the brunt of most of my identity crises, the mental abuse and subsequent physical and mental disabilities, as I am sure my sister suffers, she does not want much to do with us, she appears to be very confused about many things, aren't we all, even today.

This is a fraction of my story.

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What I have seen happen to others, the brutality and cruelty resulting in them suffering permanent mental a physical disabilities is immeasurable but if asked to, I could provide the witness for their submissions.

I am willing to be called before the hearing, as much of what I have to tell is documented evidence, not just here-say.

Yours sincerely
Pamella G. Vernon