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2nd September 2003



The Secretary
Senate Committee Affairs References Committee
S.1. 59
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT2600

Dear Sir or Madam,

**SUBMISSION - SALVATION ARMY'S NEDLANDS BOYS HOME
CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE - 1950'S**

With reference to the above, I now attach my Submission for your perusal and consideration.

I also enclose the following documents, which will verify my allegations:

- 1) Copy of my Cardiologist's letter referring to my current state of health
- 2) Copy of my Community Health Counsellor's statement
- 3) Copy of my former Counsellor's statement whilst in the workforce
- 4) Copy of my immunisation card whilst under the care of the Salvation Army in Nedlands Boys Home, Perth, WA.
- 5) My partner's Observations/Submission document

I trust the above information will be helpful to the Committee enquiry into the treatment of children in institutional care in the 1950's etc.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours faithfully,


Brian M Hart

Encs.

MY RECOLLECTION OF THE PERIOD I SPENT AT THE
SALVATION ARMY BOYS HOME, NEDLANDS PERTH, WA IN
THE 1950's

My mother and father separated when I was a small child. Mother was unwell and spent a considerable time in hospital when I was growing up. I was born in 1946 in Perth (the youngest of three children in the family) and spent most of my young life in Mullewa. As mentioned above, due to my mother's continual illness she was unable to look after us and in the circumstances we were pushed 'from pillar to post' and spent time with various relatives i.e. my maternal grandparents, aunties, etc.

Because of the above circumstances my brother and I were then temporarily placed in Greenough Convent, Geraldton. From memory I recall that the nuns in this institution were strict but treated us well. Unfortunately this placement came to an end all too soon and my brother and I were subsequently placed with the Salvation Army at Nedlands Boys Home and here the nightmare begins. My grandfather (who was himself in the Salvation Army) accompanied us by train from Geraldton to Perth. When we first arrived there we were taken into a room – my grandfather said goodbye to us in the foyer of Nedlands Boys Home. All our belongings were taken away from us, including our shoes. We were then ordered to put their clothes on. All our personal effects were subsequently put into our suitcase, the suitcase was numbered and put into storage. After that we were given an individual number by the Salvation Army personnel). **NO. 36** was my personal identification number throughout my time at Nedlands Boys Home. Please note that we were not allowed to wear our shoes and were barefooted the whole time we were there, except when we were in a public place i.e., outside the confines of the Home. At that time (and at this tender age) I felt my life had come to an end after the door was closed behind me. I missed my mother enormously and used to cry myself to sleep at night, the feelings of loneliness and isolation were terrifying. I was scared and I wondered what would become of me.

As a result of the above situation (having to go barefooted,) I developed a stone blister at

a later stage, which was treated by cutting the blister with a razor blade and dabbing on an antiseptic called I believe Curachrome. The wound then became poisonous and this continued for roughly a week. My foot reeked and green pus kept coming out of the wound. Eventually I was taken to Princess Margaret Childrens' Hospital. Incidentally during that time I was given 'opening medicine' and when I got out of bed during the night, as there were no lights and with my sore foot and limited movement, I had an accident and messed my pyjamas. I was so terrified of the repercussions; I endured that week using the same soiled pyjamas, knowing they would be changed the following week. My mother was not informed that I was in hospital and was unaware of this fact until the Salvation Army wrote and told her the facts, AFTER I HAD BEEN DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL.

Touching on the subject of not being allowed to wear shoes, during winter my feet were continuously wet and cracked. Some of the boys had foot deformities, i.e. one boy had had his feet burned when he was an infant, and the condition of his feet was appalling – his feet bled regularly. Moreover we had to prepare wood for burning in the furnace, and had to jump on the wood in our bare feet to make it a suitable size for burning in the furnace at Nedlands Boys Home. No axes or other suitable equipment were available for cutting this wood.

I would like to mention also that when there was a flu epidemic we were all lined up and given eucalyptus oil and sugar which we were obliged to take. You had no choice in the matter.

Coming to the numbers situation now, no one was referred to by name – usually it was "you" or your number was called out. Also you were not allowed to talk during meal times. You were only allowed to talk at specified times, i.e. during playtime. For example if anyone talked in the dormitory at night, all the boys in the dormitory were punished, and our privileges were taken away from us. The whistle was blown, we marched in for our meals, (and as you can gather, prayers were said 4 times daily – before our three meals a day and prayers were said at night before we retired to bed). We then stood behind our chairs and we were told when we could sit down. We were also told when we could start eating; indeed the officers did not eat the same food as us. They were

seated on a stage looking down at us eating their lovely roast meals, whilst we were eating horrible stews. At one stage there were wrigglers in the stew and we were expected to eat it but all the boys stuck together and refused to eat the stew. Incidentally we were not allowed to leave the table until all our food was eaten. There was no such thing as being unable to eat it, as the Salvation Army officers ensured you did eat it. When I could not bear to eat this food, I would give it to another boy who was willing to eat it – I did not get any other food and was often hungry. (If you didn't eat the food that was put in front of you, you did not get anything else to eat)

One of many incidents that springs to mind whilst I was in the care of the Salvation Army at Nedlands, is that one of the boys in my dormitory was rather delicate and frail and we had a visit from the polio van. We were all lined up and given a needle. Subsequently this boy went to the toilet and was eventually found dead in the toilet. His bed was next to mine and we had formed a friendship of sorts. You can image the effect this had on my young mind. Also when the dentist visited the home, to check our teeth, extractions were performed there and then, and we had no say in the matter- there was no such thing as asking permission from our mother to perform such extractions.

When the boys received mail/packages, lollies, biscuits etc., from home, it was censored before we received it, as was our outgoing mail. Also if you went on leave, you were thoroughly searched upon your return, and if you had any comics etc, they were taken from you. We were not allowed to congregate in crowds; we were told you move on. The officers always had a cane in their hand and always carried a whistle. A Salvation Army officer was watching you all the time.

Occasionally we were given a treat of broken biscuits and again we lined up and held out our hands together forming a cup and were given a handful of broken biscuits, (donated I suspect from Mills & Wares).

I feel I must mention that a certain young lad was forever polishing the officers shoes

whilst the officer was sitting in a chair watching us boys. Bullying was rife within the institution and the more marbles one had the more power one had – marbles were as good as money in our situation.

If any of the inmates ran away from the institution, the police knew he was a Salvo boy because of the clothes he was wearing, and promptly brought him back to Nedlands Boys Home. These events occurred during the night, and you knew who ran away because when you got up the next day, the boy was standing in the 'quad' (the central spot in the building) with his hands on his head. The punishment for this was not carried out until that night when he was caned on the hands in full view of the rest of us. If you pulled your hand away you were then whacked on the legs. You can imagine what it is like because I, and many of the other boys too, have undergone such beatings.

When we had an outing we were packed like cattle into an old Bedford truck with high wooden slats (like a cattle truck). No seats were available and you stood up during the journey.

We were taught by outside teachers whilst in Nedlands Boys Home. Prior to school you hopped out of bed, stood beside your bed, as it was likely there would be a bed check to ensure our beds were made properly. If not, the bed was completely stripped until you made it properly, then you had breakfast. After that you cleaned your teeth with a very small amount of toothpaste, washed your face and hands, combed your hair, then returned to the pavilion where you changed your clothes, folded them properly, (shorts on the bottom, then shirt folded on top) handed them in, then you were given other clothes to change into to attend school. You went through a door where your hands, ears and hair were checked. When you returned from school in the afternoon, the same process was repeated. Incidentally again no shoes were worn during school hours. The school was situated within the jurisdiction of the Salvation Army. If you did not comply with the above regime, again you were punished.

Showers were another matter and during this process there was absolutely no privacy. As

I was one of the youngest boys in Nedlands, I never had a hot shower; the bigger boys had that privilege. By the time my turn came, the showers were as cold as ice. A limited number of boys went into the very few showers at any one time, and we would be lined up and waiting (out in the open, winter and summer). The toilet facilities were also very limited.

It was often talked about whilst I was there that one particular Salvation Army officer threw stray cats and kittens (that the boys picked up) and promptly disposed of them by throwing them into the furnace and burning them alive.

Another memory I have of my time at Nedlands Boys Home is when a new boy came to the Home, he had a distinctive 'odour' – it seemed a clean, fresh smell of soap and shampoo. New boys cried a lot initially, and like myself, refused to eat what the other boys ate, and looked very unhappy, my thoughts then were "you'll learn the same way as I did". Also thinking back to those days, I must have looked the same when I was initially placed in the Home. I know I must have been an extremely unhappy and frightened child, not knowing what was going to happen next.

To sum up, several years ago my brother bumped into one of the Salvation Army officers at Nedlands Boys home who told my brother that he had left the Salvation Army because of the Salvation Army's policy whilst he was at Nedlands Boys Home.

I have often wondered how my fellow inmates coped with their lives, where they are now, what happened to them, etc.

My life has been extremely hard, due I believe, to the treatment meted out to me whilst I was in the care of the Salvation Army. I am still trying to come to terms with it, I am now on a disability pension, my health is deteriorating, I have had bypass surgery, suffer with anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. I have also had ongoing counselling throughout the years and am still having counselling to this day. I have had several broken marriages and relationships, find it extremely hard to trust other

people and am a loner. I believe that I am a survivor despite what happened to me as a young child.

The programme in August 2003 on ABC **Four Corners** "**The Homies**" certainly opened 'a can of worms' for me. However, I feel (after 47 years or more), at long last, that someone is listening to us and we can talk about these events, although I find it extremely upsetting and incomprehensible and have shed many tears since I saw the programme.

I admire those people who were brave enough to come forward to be interviewed on **Four Corners** to tell their story. I have been there and understand what they have been through.

Finally thanks for allowing me to share with you some of my experiences of the Salvos and their treatment of young disadvantaged boys in the 50's.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Hart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Hart – Boy No. 36
28 August 2003