

## My story in the foster home "Dalmar"

My story starts, I was about 2 ½ years old at the time I think of my first memory and that was of my little brother and I. We lived with our mother and father (or so called parents) in a suburb of Sydney in a small upstairs flat. I remember one day "the father" as I will call him, came home from work and walked into the kitchen to take something in he had brought home that day. He walked down the little hallway, and in the lounge room was a man waiting with a gun and he shot him, I think it was a couple of times. I had already seen the gun so I'd taken my brother into our bedroom and he hid under the bed. Then I sat outside the door. After I saw "the father" get shot I don't remember too much until the police turned up. I'm not too sure if that was the day they came to pick us up for the first time or not, but I still remember the policeman standing in the doorway.

My next memory is of my new home and that was "Dalmar", being in the up stairs dorm with all the beds side by side, that big old timber banister staircase, the tractor rides to feed the cows, the baby lambs I used to feed, the walks down that big long driveway, and most of all how can you forget that main building. It was and still is to this day a spooky looking thing. The big staircase stands out I think because I remember climbing up them and on this one day banging my shin on the steps. The tractor ride is a memory that really stands out. They were such fun, all the hay was piled up on the back of this big trailer, all of us children used to sit on top of the hay. We would push the hay off the back for the cows and watch them all line up to eat. Like the cows I also remember the big laundry with those big domestic dryers. That was a spot I used to go to and feed the baby lambs. I remember myself holding those funny little bottles and watching them and laughing, having to hold on to the bottle so tight thinking how hungry they were. Another was, those walks we used to go on down that driveway to a little shop and on our way back looking and talking to those two horses in the front paddock. I also remember the play area with the swings and the round about. I can see myself on that with the other children smiling and laughing as if it was yesterday. I can remember spending a lot of time in the baby's house because that is where they had put my little brother. It had it's own little play area where I used to spend a lot of time with him. I also remember getting stung by a bee on the bottom of my foot out the back of the main building. That seems a funny memory but it's one that I just never forgot of my time at the home.

Then there are some not so nice memories which all of us foster children have got. I can recall my "mother" coming to visit one day. It was next to the big round garden out the front of the main building. She was crying and so was I, I'm sure it must have been because I wanted to go with her. I can see her just walking down that driveway. The next time I saw her again I think she was in a courtroom with "the father". I never remember "the father" coming to visit I'm not sure if he ever did at Dalmar, but I did see him again and that was in the courtroom.

I also recall the day my foster family came. I'm not sure if that was just a weekend visit or this was the "big day". But it was a strange day, or should I say a scary day for this little girl. I had this place that was my home and all these other children and people that cared about me and when I think about it, it was a place that I was "happy" and now I was on the move again. I remember leaving in the car driving down "that long driveway" and that distinctive main sandstone or brick entrance never seeing it again until years later. That was the end of my days at Dalmar the place of my first "happy" childhood memories. Dalmar has always been one of my strongest childhood memories as well as lots of other good and very bad ones that I'm sure Dalmar children and others like us all have.

Now I'm about 5 or 6 years old I think, because I remember starting school with my new family. I now had this new mum, dad an older brother and older sister. It was good and they were very nice people, but as I got older and I think back about my life as a foster child I feel as if I never really fitted in. It is a hard thing to try and explain but maybe it was all I had been through as a young child and all the things I had seen but I felt like I never really "belonged". I think, if they had tried to keep my brother and I together things may have seemed a little brighter and I may not have felt so alone.

I find it very hard to understand how my parents could just let my brother and I go like they did. But then I think a little more and realise that maybe we were better off being taken away from them. But I don't agree with the system, I don't agree with the fostering of children. If the courts prove that the biological parents are UNFIT and that child or children are being physically, mentally and emotionally abused beyond a doubt then the biological parent or parents lose all of their parental rights. I do realise in some cases that some parents are only in need of a break from their child because of stress or pressure maybe caused from the child having a disability, or some kind of behavioural problems and in these cases respite is the option. But in all other cases I feel that the child or children are put up for adoption given to people that will give them the love, support and stable family life that a child needs and deserves. If adopting is not possible I feel that Dalmar or such homes alike would be a much better place for that child to live in. I think all these people in our Government need to take a good hard look at their protocol and their means of determining what they think is best for these children and maybe ask us the children of Dalmar and alike what we feel as we were part of there system. But for now I have decided that as a child of that system, I am going to do a course at Tafe and hope to be a youth worker and try and help the children of today, where years ago were just like me.

**MELISSA...**

## *Time to reflect, with heart and soul*

My story now has changed a little. Most of all the way I feel. As a foster child I had a lot of issues and memories in my thoughts, my heart and deep down in my soul, Things I needed answers to like what were the tablets given to me in the home and why was I put in a little cupboard or room as a child in the home by a big lady in a white uniform (maybe she was one of the matrons)

As I said in my previous story I needed to find out exactly what happen to me, to fill in the gaps. It is kind of like a movie but you are missing a few of the scenes and as a result part of your life. It is not always so easy finding out about yourself. DOCS took three months to pull my file and another two weeks to copy the information I requested. I thought it was a similar file to the one I received from Dalmar but as I sat and read it by myself for three or more hours I soon came to realise that I was wrong. That file was very hard to read because the contents were to me extremely graphic. I can't say the same about Dalmar and the staff I have dealt with. They have been so supportive.

When the day came I was so nervous. A good friend of mine came with me to face what I'll call my "rebirth" because that is what it felt like. This person (Me) who I truly never quite knew as a whole person because I was missing the most important years of my life, my childhood. It is such a hard thing to try and explain but I must say I had so much support from the staff at Dalmar, friends, and most of all my family, my husband and my four beautiful children.

This trip to Dalmar was to pull and go through my file (My life as a foster child) Finding out what went on in my life as a small child and a young teenage girl was a little bit of a surprise. Also it made me angry, frustrated, and upset. Most of all it hurt very deep down in a place I never thought could hurt so badly. I am surprised and discussed at the fact that reading this with "my support people" This being a strong point I would like to make. As I read my file everything that was said was from the foster families, I did not have any say on the way I felt or if I was happy with my life. No case worker, nocounsellor, no support person. Did I matter or did they care what I was feeling as a child. Because as an innocent child I did not ask to be a "child of the system". I was placed in the system by the courts. Because my biological parents neglected and physically abused my brother and I. With no support or interest in what I felt or what happened to me in foster care I was again abused in care as well. So who is accountable for this? As a mother and grown women I still cannot fathom what these people were thinking to do this or let this happen to their own children. I have on the other hand one thing to thank them for and that is "my life". Because I would not be where I am today.

A strong, loving, caring mother, wife and friend.

With a little more work and study my aim in life now is to become a youth worker or something in that field. With an end result to make a difference even if it is to just one child. To show them that they do matter, that there are people that care. I feel I missed out on that as a child caught up in the system. We need to give these children a lot

more support and understanding. They go through so much just growing and becoming a teenager let alone all the extra baggage of being neglected, abused, and abandoned and most of all just not LOVED as a child in our society.

As a Foster child I feel I missed out on so much FAMILY life. Yes, I have braved it and met my biological mother (not that she ever was a mother) because I feel that being a mother and for your children to call you their mother is a priceless privilege, and to me a loving honour

In my file I also found out that I have or did have a great grandmother. This is sad because I have missed out on this as a child and so did she. I never got to meet this woman so we will be strangers forever. In my file it states she sent me a Christmas card. I would have been six years old at the time, but I never remember receiving it. There are a few more things that Dalmar passes on to my foster family and I never received these things to this day.

It is hard to deal with all the pain and issues in your life as a foster child .I know that it is not easy. There are a lot of ups and downs, highs and lows. I know, because I have been there and yes done that. I hated myself so much growing up because I never thought I fitted in and maybe that is why growing up I never felt loved .I have tried to do some silly things to myself. For a lot of years I carried the scars not only on the inside but also on the outside. But today I am happy to say that I now only carry them on the outside.

Pulling my file was an important part of my final healing. That is what I thought. Now I have a few more things that I am looking into. As an adult I like finding out the person I am now, as I was as a child and where I was from. Not that I wish to contact these people. I would just like to know I came from somewhere and was a member of a real family.

I don't have any contact with my foster families or my biological parents or families. I feel the person I am today and the person I have to thank is the most important person in my life first and foremost and that is ME. Through hard work and a lot of pain and tears I am a good, loving, caring person who is now finally at peace with her inner self.

**MELISSA...**