

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION BY
MARGARET DAVIDSON -
GOODWOOD ORPHANAGE
RESIDENT NUMBER 33

Background

My name is Margaret Helen DAVIDSON. I was born on June 27, 1949 at a private hospital on Portrush Road, Toorak Gardens, South Australia. My mother's name was Elsie Davidson nee Parlett and my father was Jack Davidson. My mother's address as shown on my birth certificate was 8 Chapman Cottages off Cardwell St Adelaide.

I do not know when I went to live at Goodwood Orphanage but I was certainly there when I was about 4 or 5 years old. I do not know why I was placed at Goodwood. I do not know how many siblings I had or how many, if any, were placed at Goodwood. My number was 33. I lived on the St Mary's side of the orphanage and Sister Patricia (known as Sr Pat) was in charge of that side.

Mother Francis was the Mother Superior for my entire residency.

I ran away from Goodwood when I was about 13 after I had been sexually assaulted by a man I was placed with from Goodwood.

I lived on the streets or in boarding houses until I was 20.

I became aware of this enquiry when my daughter rang me from South Australia and told me about news reports about it. She gave me the hotline number and I rang it.

I now live in Queensland.

The Goodwood Experience

I will now give you as much information as I can remember about the horrific time I had as a child in the care of the state.

My first memory of Goodwood is of the food – the lack of it. I can now only recall being hungry all the time. I can remember licking plates but I could not have been much older than 4 or 5.

My other strong memory is the rule of not being allowed to speak after 5pm. The fear I felt about that rule stays with me even now. It was terrifying.

As I got older I found out that other girls were selected by Sr Pat to act as spies for the nuns. If you were reported by one of the spies as having spoken after the

5pm deadline you were punished. The punishment was “the feather duster.” This meant a severe beating by Sr Pat. The children would be in bed and she would come in and call out the numbers of the children to be punished for speaking. We were required to line up in the middle of the dormitory until all the girls whose numbers were called were in line and each had to hold out their hand, one at a time, and not move a muscle. If you did move Sr Pat would strike you wherever she could reach you – lying on ground, huddled and trying to protect your body. Nobody escaped the ‘feather duster’. Some older girls would try to protect the little ones but they would then be hit with the duster. It was vicious and cruel. Then, Sr Pat would turn out the lights, leave the room and all you could hear was children sobbing. We were not permitted to get out of bed to comfort each other or to talk. This was the nightly routine - every night. Even bath time, from leaving the dining room after tea and walking along the corridors to brushing out teeth, not a sound was permitted. Children were required to be silent from 5pm until the next day when we left the dorm in the morning. But, I got conditioned to this program of cruelty to the point I would not speak at all in the dormitory – we’d talk in whispers in the toilet, nowhere else. This is one of my most profound memories of my childhood.

The other horrific memory is of the ‘white line’.

It ran down the centre of the courtyard that separated St Mary’s and St Anthony’s.

The white line was the worst punishment. We were told if we were sent to the white line we were “very, very bad.”

I was sent to the white line only once after I messed my pants – through fear and distress.

We were required to stand to attention, without bending the knees. No one allowed to talk to or look at a child on the white line because those children were “a disgrace,” to the nuns. “Those girls on the white line are a disgrace,” the nun said to us. No-one wanted to be friends with anyone who had been sent to the white line. Those children were isolated and vilified by the other terrified children.

It was after my one white line experience that I started secretly washing my pants so no-one would know and I would wear them wet rather than be found out to have messed my pants (more later).

The only good memory I have from age 4-13 was “Mr Dunn’s concerts” at the start of the summer holidays. People came from everywhere to one of Mr Dunn’s concert for the Goodwood orphanage. It was nice because it was happy – even the nuns seemed happy and it was the only time they were nice to us. We’d dress up and perform and get lollies.

When I was older (about year 5) I went to a school (I can't remember the name). Before that school was held at the orphanage for the little ones.

We were kept in groups of 6 and the oldest of the group was responsible for the other five. The oldest, about 8 or 9 years old, was responsible for their feeding, clothing and you were responsible to make sure "your charges" did not speak after 5pm – if they did, you were the one punished as well – or that they asked for extra food. Older girls were responsible to bath the charges, dress them, make their beds and teach them the "chores". It was barbaric.

Once, I lost one of my charges sox and I was sent down into the dark yard (my very first experience of the dark, winter night) to look for the sox. I was told that I was to stay in the dark until I found the sox – an impossible task at night. I have always, not surprisingly had a terrible fear of the night. Even now, aged 55 I do not venture out alone after dark.

I remember one child named "Betsy" with curly blonde hair who was always in trouble. I saw her sent to the white line a couple of times and after that she was always in trouble. I saw Betsy badly thrashed with the feather duster. I will never forget it.

No-one could help her - we were all crying for Betsy but we could not help her. Betsy didn't seem to care after that – she tried to fight back, especially Sr Pat. We could hear Betsy yelling out. Betsy was severely punished but I don't recall the details.

My memories of Goodwood are of getting up, going to school and not speaking, standing to attention in line – no-one could move anywhere alone, children moved only in groups. Once the groups left the dormitory to go to breakfast we could not go back, not even to use the toilet. Children learnt to hold onto their bladder or just wet their pants. I can remember having the skin peeling away from the inside top of my legs from where I had urinated. It burnt and then the skin peeled away.

Sometimes older girls with charges, would take the crust off their bread (if we got bread) and hide it in their cloths and later slip it into the mouths of the little ones so they would not be so hungry and WOULDN'T TALK and get us into trouble. It was inhumane.

The attic. This was a secret place loaded with toys and games for the children, I thin the toys were donated but were not distributed to the children.

Children who were "very, very good" or "upset" were allowed to go to the attic to play. Small groups were allowed in at a time and the children were warned not to tell the other children about the attic. I went to the attic once.

Sister Mary

Sr Mary was in the kitchen. She was kind. She would sometimes walk out into the yard when none of the other nuns were around and we would run up to her and she would put a child's hand into her apron pocket where she kept broken biscuits. We knew Sr Mary was doing this small kindness secretly.

Mrs Laurel Brogan (dec) – 28 Terminus Street, Grange, South Australia

The first real family I can remember being sent to during my time at Goodwood. I think I went to Mrs Brogan's because I was the only child left behind during the Christmas holidays.

I first went there when I was about 8. It was the happiest time of my young life. Mrs Brogan's daughter Francis (now aged 49) has told me her mother responded to a media campaign to take children out of the orphanage for short visits and Mrs Brogan wanted a little girl to play with her only child Francis. I was the only child available so I went and became good friends with Francis and Mrs Brogan. Because I did not have any cloths I would try to squeeze into Francis' cloths that were way to small for me but Mrs Brogan didn't have the heart to stop me. She bought me my own cloths but they were taken from me when I was returned.

On this first visit I stayed the 8 weeks of the Christmas holidays. As I was well behaved I was requested again for another holiday. The next time I went for a school term and I went to the Star of the Sea, Henley Beach school with Francis. Laurel worked on the canteen at the school. Then I was sent back to Goodwood. Francis has told me Mrs Brogan asked to take me permanently but she was told she was too old to "have me".

Every second Sunday was visiting day and Mrs Brogan came to visit me. We were all given a new ribbon and dressed up for the visitors. She would bring me food and hide it in my pants so I could eat later in the toilet.

At some point, when Mrs Brogan came to visit me she was told I was not there. I don't know where I was then but after that I was with the Oschar family.

Mr Oschar – Barrow Cres, Lockleys, Sth Australia

Between about 1960 and 1963 I was sent to the Oschar family consisting of Mrs Oschar and two boys. Before I was sent off with the Oschars, Mother Francis made it quite clear that this was an important family and I was required to do whatever I was told.

One of the boys was about my age, Lenard, and the other was older, about 15. I went there for holidays at first and I was sent to the Star of the Sea, Henley Beach school. Mrs Brogan saw me when she did the canteen.

Francis has told me that at this time Mrs Brogan noticed I was cleanly dressed and obviously well cared for. While Mrs Oschar was still with the family I seemed to be looked after but she left with the boys. I remember the day she left. I asked her to take me with her. She said "No, you will be going back to the orphanage."

Later I heard Mr Oschar on the phone to the nuns and I heard him tell them his wife was still living with him but she was not at home. No-one ever came to the house or contacted me to check on my welfare.

The next thing I remember was being in the bath at Mr Oschar's place. I think I was about 10, 11 or 12. He came into the bathroom and just looked at me. I was frightened by that but did not know why. He bathed me. He said "stand up, I'll dry you." He laid me on the bed and started to fondle me. From that moment, I was no longer who I had been. I never slept that night. From then on, every night he would come in, dry me and fondle me until one night I was in bed and he told me to go into his room. I knew something terrible was going to happen. I remember thinking this is like my number being called out. I eventually had to go into his room and he put ladies pants, stocking, bra and a dress. He kissed me and then he raped me. I bled. The pain was terrible. After that he told me not to move and he got something like ice and he put it inside me. He told me not to move. He left the room and much later I crept naked into my bed. I didn't go to school the next day. Some days I went to school but there were many days I didn't go to school. I think these were the days after he had raped me. When I did go to school and Laurel saw me I became more and more unkept and dirty. I didn't go to the bathroom after that so I got more and more filthy. My cloths were dirty because they were never washed. Mr Oschar told me if I ever told anyone about what had happened I would be sent to a sheep station to work. I was never to tell anyone.

I don't know how long this went on but it was months. But one day after a rape I ran away to Mrs Brogan's place. Mrs Brogan took me to a doctor, Dr Brian Peters, Tapley's Hill Rd, Seton, Sth Australia. She reported the assaults to Father Hoy who was parish priest for Henley Beach and she reported to the head of women's police, Miss McGrath. This was about 1962. As far as I know nothing was done because I was then sent back to Goodwood and I would walk everyday to the School and Mr Oschar would be stalking the school and try to abduct me. I would run to tell a nun but she would say I was telling lies. Everyday I had to run the gauntlet of getting from the orphanage to school. It was at this time I began to lose control of my bowels and started to mess my pants. This happened repeatedly – about 3 or 4 times.

Some time after this, in 1963, I was staying with Mrs Brogan and my natural mother, Elsie Davidson, came and took me away. I lived with her at Dunrobin Road Brighton. I went to St Teresa's School, Brighton, Sth Australia.

My mother ran off after a few months and left me with a man she was living with. He had four sons so I was not going to stay. I ran away to Mrs Brogan's house. She got me a job at Isle's Co-op but after a few weeks I met another girl who convinced me to leave Mrs Brogan.

I stayed with this girl for a few weeks and then went to live in a boarding house at Glenelg. I was about 15. We lived there for about 3 years.

I married at age 20. My husband, David Jukes, and I had to go to the Adelaide police station and get some forms signed so I could marry because I was still a ward of the state.

Life-long affects

I have never been able to get close or trust anyone, including my children.

I'm terrified of men, even now.

I have remained silent and I have never been able, until now, to talk about what happened in my childhood and at Goodwood and the Oschar's.

I never ever believed I was good at anything. I have been convinced all of my life that I'm a bad person.

Recommendations

I call on this Senate Committee and the South Australian Government to acknowledge what happened, to say they are sorry for not properly caring for children. For the state to acknowledge the neglect and pain it inflicted on me and hundreds of other children. For the state to provide adequate remedial care. For the state to engage in proper education programs so that people are not afraid to speak out. For state authorities to change the culture that assumes small children do not tell the truth.

For the state to give an assurance to the citizens that they will take whatever measures are necessary to prevent any recurrence of this nightmare. For the state to take responsibility for its failures.

Children must never be allowed to grow up in a state of constant fear from those charged with caring for them.

I request my report of rape in about 1961, 62 or 63 to be investigated and action taken against the perpetrator.

I request to be kept informed about the progress of this inquiry and to be included on the mailing list for any correspondence, including the final report.