

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59 Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Sir,

I am writing my submission to your committee investigating the care of children in Institutions over the years.

Although I am now sixty six years of age and some of the things that happened to me happened sixty years ago have faded from my memory I still remember many of the incidents that did take place.

I was born in 1938 and my parents lived at Daylesford in Victoria. I have no early recollections of my Father who went away to the war. The only male adult in my life as I recall was an "Uncle Ossie" who in fact was living with my Mother even though we called him Uncle. As I look back now this relationship with my Mother seemed to be one of those where he was on the scene then off the scene and I must admit he did treat myself and my older brother kindly although beltings did occur when warranted.

When I was six and my older brother eight we were taken from my Mother who by this time had several other children by "Uncle Ossie", and placed in an institution at the Menzies Home for boys in Frankston, Victoria. Little did I know that this would be the start of many years going from one institution to another.

My memories of the Menzies Home are varied. I do not remember any names of other boys or any of the staff but I do know that the staff treated us with a cold indifference with more than a few beltings, especially if you wet the bed and at that stage of my life I was one of those unfortunate enough to be in that category which meant that every morning you stood out the front of everybody with your wet sheets and mattress and were ridiculed. The sheets and mattress were then left out in the sun to dry and you slept in them again that night. I remember that sheets were only changed once a week so they did get rather dirty. Another consequence of being one of the bed wetters was that you were not allowed to drink after the evening meal and of course when you cleaned your teeth before going to bed you managed to get a drink while using the brush.

The hardest and loneliest time during this period was on weekends when parents used to visit - those that had parents that is - and you would wait and wait in hope that somebody would visit you but it never happened. The whole time I was in that place I never had one visitor and in the end I didn't even bother to wait but used to go up the back of the Home and hide in the ferns to play with my pet blue tongue lizard.

After leaving Menzies my brother and I went back to Royal Park which was rather like a holding establishment that used to farm the boys out to various homes and this meant that you weren't there all that long which was just as well because the place was staffed by the nastiest bastards in the country. They seemed to treat you like an animal and it was almost as if they thought "this will teach you to

end up here”, as if it was your fault that you were not wanted by your parents. There are three things that I will always remember about Royal Park. Firstly, the staff. I always wondered how they selected people to work in this place and what they were like at home with their own children. Secondly is I will always remember the smell of floor polish because this was used daily on the floors and we were down on hands and knees to polish all the passage ways. I can still smell that smell today. Thirdly was the cold. I was always cold as we only had short pants to wear and no sweater, this is one reason why I cannot live in a cold climate, just the fear of being cold.

My brother and I were then sent to the St Pauls institution on Phillip Island in Victoria. This place was worse than Menzies even though the place was run by a Rev. Hall who was quite a nice person but his staff were absolute horrors. One of the staff whose name I can't remember but whose face I can still see as clear as day took great delight in inflicting as much pain as possible on the boys in any way that he could. He would belt you for trivial little things. His favourite punishment was that he would take you around to the medical room and make you drink a glass of Cascara which is the most vile smelling and tasting medicine you could imagine. This was supposed to get the devil out of you but all it did was make you run to the toilet all day. The Home had a small jail - two cells, one to store the Homes vegetables etc in and the other he used to use to lock you in. I remember being locked in there several times and left overnight. It was a frightening experience as the bed only had a mattress and no blankets so it got very cold.

We went to local Newhaven school which was used by the island children so we got to mix with boys and girls. I can still remember the headmaster, a Mister Jennings who treated us pretty good. I will always remember him because he looked like Edward G Robinson the actor.

About ten years ago I went back to Phillip Island and visited the school. I saw a lady who worked at the school and she sent me a copy of the attendance book for the time I was there. On the roll are approximately eighteen boys from the home plus the local kids but there isn't one name that I could put a face to as it seems that I just wanted to shut out that period of my life.

Once again I never received one visitor during my stay there. Christmas was exceptionally hard as presents were a non event. The staff never went out of their way to make Christmas any different to another day.

My brother and I actually left the Island in 1948 for a short time as my Father took us out but we were sent back after a couple of weeks as he couldn't look after us so going back was a real let-down and of course we copped the usual crap from the staff about being not wanted etc which does nothing to help your feelings of being a burden to everybody.

Eventually we did leave the Island. I remember being put on a train by ourselves and sent home. I have no idea where we ended up but at this stage my Mother and Father were back together again for awhile but that didn't last long. I found out at this time that my Mother and “Uncle Ossie” had placed three more of the kids in the orphanage at Brighton in Victoria and it was to be many years before I ever got to see them. I didn't even know that I had another sister until I met her when she was a young woman. This period of togetherness didn't last long and I was sent back to Royal Park. My older brother was not sent back as he could go out to work. Nothing had changed at Royal Park, the smell of floor polish was still there, the food was terrible and the staff even worse.

From Royal Park I was sent to the Tally Ho institution near Burwood in Victoria and speak of chalk and cheese. This place was totally different to all the other

places I had been in. The place was run by the Wesley Church and the staff were great. We still had to do as we were told but beltings were not the order of the day. The food was pleasant, we had our own school in the grounds of the home staffed by very good teachers who treated you like a human being. Originally all the boys slept in one big dormitory but overtime they built three lovely cottages each holding twelve boys and run by a house Mother and Father. I was lucky enough to be one of the few that managed to go into one of these cottages. My house Mother and Father were Mister and Mrs Lew Wimpey and I thank them for at least trying to give us some love and living in a family atmosphere.

The Home had it's own farm and all boys were expected to perform some task on it. I had to milk a couple of cows each morning and night including weekends and for this you were paid, not in money but you were given a paper receipt for the work you had done. They called this "Tin Money" and it was placed in your account. We were told that when we eventually left this place we would get what we had in our account but this never happened. I still remember quite a few of the boys from this home, I remember the staff and I remember all the teachers. What does this say. Does it mean that if you treat a kid with some dignity and give him some sense of being wanted that he will grow into a worthwhile citizen.

The only problem I found with having the school on the grounds of the Institution was that it only went to the 8th grade with no facilities to send you on to High school or Technical school. I finished my 8th grade at the at the age of 13 and was dux of the school. As I could not go onto higher education I was forced to stay at this school for another year although most of it was spent in the wood working shop making furniture etc. When I did leave at age 14 I was sent to my parents home at Wallan about 30 miles north of Melbourne. They were back together again at this stage as my Father had won two thousand five hundred pounds in the lottery and in those days that was a considerable sum of money and naturally my Mother thought it was worthwhile going back to him. He bought a small acreage with a rather shabby house on it - no electricity but evidently the Social Welfare people thought it good enough for me even though I slept in a lean-to on the side verandah. I went to work on a farm for the princely sum of four pound a week working twelve hour days but with my farm experience from Tally Ho I found it was something I really liked. My Mother took half of this weekly wage for my board which of course went to buy beer for them both. They seemed to spend all their time at the local pub and were always fighting and I wondered how long it would be before they broke up again. Weekends were the worse as all their drinking friends would arrive and have a weekend session at our place. I used to spend all weekend walking the hills of the Great Dividing Range shooting rabbits rather than listen to them fighting all the time. It seemed that being there was not much better than being in one of the Institutions so as soon as I could go I took off and joined the Railways and lived in a Railway hostel in Melbourne. At the age of 18 I joined the Army and found that it was like being in a big family, almost like being the family that I never had. I loved it and in fact served for 21 years and saw service in Malaya, Borneo and South Vietnam.

I think that the people who ran some of these homes should feel ashamed of themselves for the way they treated the kids. We never asked to be put in these places so why should we have been made to feel guilty about being there. All we ever wanted was for somebody to put their arms around us and give us a hug. I know that I lost my childhood. Even though I grew up with other kids I never grew up with my own brothers and sisters which is something that I still feel strongly about even today. I made a promise to myself that no children of mine would ever end up in an

institution and that I would tell them often that I loved them. Both my son and daughter now have four kids each of their own and none of them will ever know what the inside of an institution looks like. I try to tell them what it was like without going over the top but sometimes it gets a bit hard to explain.

My younger step brother and I have grown very close over the years and quite often talk about the different things that happened in the homes. It seems that his experiences are much the same as mine.

One can only hope that never again will kids through no fault of their own be treated the way we were in those days long ago and that they grow up with a feeling of being a worthwhile person and not made to feel guilty and unloved. These types of institutions should be held to account for the way they conduct the running of them. I suggest that Governments of all persuasions should be made to make sure that this is the case.

R.M. Dean

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