

A Brief Summary of Steven Bruce Fischer (a former state ward of SA)

I'm 34 years old and have been through quite a journey. At the age of 12 my foster parents decided to tell me for the first time in my life that I wasn't their natural child. Given the nature of abuse that had occurred during my childhood I wasn't too surprised but never truly believed them. Growing into adolescence I ran away from home for the first time aged 11 and discovered smoking for the first time. Getting rather cold, I returned home the same night.

Starting high school, I ran away from home for the 2nd time at age 12 sick of the hits & abuse at home. It was a decision I'd made in conjunction with the school counsellor so I went to the Clovelly Park Community Health Centre. It was there that I was introduced to my social worker from the Dept of Community Welfare who confirmed what my foster parents had attempted to tell me - that indeed Mr & Mrs Horner were not my natural parents. I didn't want to go back home to get hit again so I spent a week in Emergency Foster Care. Mum & Dad tearfully promised to change and welcomed me back home. However when the Dept stopped monitoring them, the abuse started again and escalated. The name that my foster parents gave me - Steven David Horner was not in actual fact my real name (although I wasn't able to discover my true identity until 3 years later).

I grew up with a foster sister Janet (my foster parents natural child) 7 years older than me and their adopted son Peter (adopted in England before they emigrated to Australia in 1968) who left home at 13 when I was aged 7. I witnessed him getting bashed up several times by my foster father, getting holes bashed in the door and I was often locked in my room. When he left it was Janet's turn, when she left it was my turn. Problem was I fought back and I'm glad I did!!

One reason why the Dept of Community Welfare actually caught up with me was because Peter kept getting into trouble at school and with the police. As an adult, I discovered that the Dept of Community Welfare discovered my origins by accident only when my natural parents signed a consent for adoption when I was 10 years of age and stopped maintenance payments. Of course my foster parents did not like this and demanded the Dept take action!! (found this out via accessing my file under Freedom of Information). Prior to this, they had no record of me as the exchange was made between my natural & foster parents in 1970. To date I have no knowledge of what took place.

Many a school day was spent going hungry without breakfast and at night the choice of punishment was usually going to bed without tea in favour of getting hit (unless of course I was starving). Mum used to keep all the food locked up in the cupboard. She was strange with food such as letting us kids eat the leaves on the cauliflower but never the actual cauliflower. She used to get days old bread to save money. Sometimes I was so hungry I'd eat half a loaf. I was a small boy and the cereal was always hidden above the fridge so I wasn't able to get my own breakfast. I'd even pick the pieces of bread out of the catfood or eat cat & dogfood but according to my mum I was just being a pig. The school nurse at South Road Primary school was worried about my weight but no action was taken as the government at the time did not know I existed. Mum and Dad used to place a piece of masking tape at the top of the door & lock the kitchen door, and leave me in the house at night by myself whilst they went out. If I tried to leave my room and they could see the masking tape broken I would get hit. I had a potty in my room until the age of 10, after that I was allowed to leave my room only to go to the toilet. One time I escaped out of my bedroom window and ate a lot of nectarines off the nectarine tree. Dad fixed that problem by fixing a chain to the window so I could only open it to let air in.

At age 14 after leaving home for the 3rd time and just not wanting to get hit anymore, I was 5 foot tall, wore size 6 kids clothes and weighed just 5 stone. For the next 2 years, I was thrust between foster family and any old place the Dept could place me in including brief periods with juvenile offenders although I had done no wrong. I also spent a year as one of the last teenage boys at "Joyville" the Salvation Army home at Fullarton when I was 15-16. Despite being tossed about from placement to placement it was nice to get 3 square meals a day.

I returned home to my foster parents at 16 years of age for 18 months before being thrown out of home in the middle of repeating Year 12. A week later whilst I returned to pick up my clothes, my foster mother threw the adoption papers in the bin. This was just devastating and an action I can never forgive. I meant nothing to my foster parents and they made it seem like it was somehow my fault. Adoption is not meant to be like that - you sign the papers and bring up a baby or child as if it was your own and love them unconditionally.

At 19, I was forced to change my birth name - Bruce Lachlan Fischer to what it is now - Steven Bruce Fischer as when I applied for a Health Care Card (as I was a tertiary student) the Government did not know who I was. Around this time I met my natural parents who were warm and welcoming and horrified to hear my story. This only lasted a short time and unfortunately they rejected me again and after being introduced to my natural family, suddenly I was thrown out and forgotten. My natural mother died 5 years ago refusing to have anything to do with me and my natural father has also disappeared.

When I met my natural parents at age 19, I was totally awestruck when for the first time in my life I'd had new clothes bought for me. For 2 months they welcomed me into their house, treated me like a son, introduced me to other relatives and for the first time in my life I felt special. They gave me a key to their house and I could come and go as I pleased. My natural parents paid my foster parents money every month for 18 years, yet very little of it was spent on me. They were horrified at my stories – their expectation was that I would be looked after but I wasn't. The sad part of this is that the guilt consumed them and thus refused to have anything more to do with me. Rejected TWICE!! Shortly after this time I suffered a period of anxiety attacks, became totally withdrawn and suffered an attempted rape. Even then, my foster parents accused me of faking the anxiety attacks and couldn't be bothered to support me during a police report I made regarding the attempted rape by an older male. In fact my foster mother argued with me and left me to find my own way home.

Here's the irony. My natural mother never wanted me as a baby yet she married her husband 6 weeks before I was born. They remained married for over 25 years without a child until she died 5 years ago. She carried the guilt with her to her grave. My natural father's parents offered to raise me but this would have caused too much grief in the family. My natural father has since remarried and I hear from him by presents at Christmas and that is all. At age 19, I was introduced to my natural family at what was one of my natural cousin's wedding. A family I never knew of about 50 people welcomed back Bruce but have had nothing to do with me since then with only 1 exception (my natural father's adopted sister).

The abuse that I suffered at the hands of my foster parents during my childhood has scarred me for life. I have nothing to do with them and can never forgive nor forget. Fortunately I was never sexually abused, but my foster mother was the best teacher in selfishness and deprivation.

No one believes the ambit claims of a child placed in State care. After all, they are just a statistic. Social workers are overworked they say. Duty of care doesn't apply to them!!!

In my case, I told my social worker the same story at 19 as I had at 12 years of age. Of course by that stage he had got his Social Work degree and apologised for not responding earlier. Too late he cries!! It's all in my file - documented yet no action was taken.

Now, I'm 34 have got a University degree and am furthering my studies. I have since married & divorced with a son Ben (9yo) who I only get to see once a fortnight. I have remarried and have a wonderful wife and 2 year old daughter Emily. I have made my own luck and my faith in God has got me through with no thanks to the institution of the church.

Yet, the pain will not go away. I have absorbed myself in tasks to hide the pain. Later in life I will have to deal with it, somehow and someday. I'm not ready yet. In terms of sharing my experiences - how can I? I know of no one else with a similar situation particularly around my own age group. Normal people just don't understand. As a teenager and in my early 20's I was regarded as trouble and overemotional and also a target for other people's manipulations. What matters most to me now is my current family such as it is!!

Panic attacks, trouble with drugs in earlier years, difficulties in communicating with others, TRUST, scared of social activities, not knowing what to talk about are just some of the obvious symptoms.

The answer I would really like to know is - how the hell could the Government not know who I was for 10 years. Is there anybody else out there like me I wonder? I am less than satisfied with the response I've received from the Government. Everything I've discovered however has been from them although to this day I have no idea how I came to be with my foster parents as a baby at 6 months of age. My foster parents and my natural father maintains their silence. Where is there accountability & duty of care? Take the money but don't give a damn about the child??

This is just a brief summary of my life as a previous Ward of the state.

Regards

Steve Fischer