

The Secretary,
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee

Parliament House
Canberra A.C.T.

My Life----- My Words



Lost somewhere between 1942 and 1945. Mittagong No6

Often you hear ill inform people making unwarranted remarks about the lost generation. Well maybe it was good for them, or what did they expect, When I hear those remarks it immediately brings forth an anger that is almost uncontrollable, Words spoken to-day can open old wounds that are hard to bear, wound so deeply embedded that no matter how much time we have on this earth, some of us if not all will carry the pain to the grave, and only then will we find peace. To me lost generation does not only apply to our indigenous brothers and sisters. White kids were stolen from families and hidden away from society and forgotten, even by those who should have loved them most. Like my brother Colin and myself. Kids institutionalized in the early days, were not only forgotten, they lost there bond with mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, and were abused by those who were given authority over them, they were eventually cast back into a society that had left them behind, and many of us had no place to go except back into our own miserable shell.

My mum was a single mum, having six children; aged from 15yrs to 4yrs and our sole income was through the generosity of my uncle Bill who was a poor fisherman. Growing up was okay, but there was no control over my Brother Colin and I, I began waging school. In time we were classified as uncontrollable children and sent to an institution. We were both sent to a shelter in Sydney first, this place was like a prison and run like one, I had no idea that people could be so cruel, an officer who I think was called Mr. Donohue delighted himself flicking a towel at us when we were having our cold showers, He thought it was funny making us eat soap and swallowing it, just because we spoke while showering, and flicking us with a wet towel when we had to vomit because of the swallowed soap. Every day in there some kid was being bashed. It was some relief when I was sent to Mittagong, but the terrible part about this was they separation of Colin and I. One day they called my name out, I went out of the yard never to return.. It was the last I saw of my young Brother.

Mittagong was a horrible place, everything was regimented, no one was encouraged to think, it was always yes matron, yes Sir, No Matron No Sir, not only did we have to answer to the bosses but were forced to obey the charge boys orders which were never ending if he disliked you. Bashings were frequent, every day someone was getting a

hiding, usually the weakest, and if anyone tried to defend the innocent then that person would find themselves in lots of trouble, I had learnt to fight, and on the very first day in mittagong I had to fight the pug (best fighter in the home) This helped me a lot because I beat him, and no one was game to pick me after that, but it did not help me much from punishment handed out by the charge Boy, I had hot porridge poured over my hands. Raw eggs smashed in my face, reported to sir for things that I didn't do, and punished by sawing wood with a cross cut saw on my own every day for a week. Usually four boys did this two on each handle, but only one on the saw when punishment was dished out. Another punishment was dragging a log around a paddock until you dropped from exhaustion, These kids that were being punished were aged from ten to twelve years old, they did the work of adults and were treated like slaves.

I can remember my first caning was for asking another boy to pass the jam at dinner time, The charge boy ordered me away from the table because I was not permitted to talk at the table. I pick up my dry bread to take it with me, and he snatched it from me and threw it on the floor, I hit him. After Sir had finished with me my hands were busted and bleeding from the caning I got. There were many beatings like that in No 6, some for breaching the rules but most through false accusation made by the charge boy, and believed without question by Sir.

I endured this hell until I joined with six other kids and run away home. We were on the run for six weeks but eventually caught because I could not find my way out of Sydney. On return to No 6 I was beaten and given twelve cuts of the cane, Watched by the superintendent Mr. Jones I was caned till the blood blisters burst on my hands then the caning stopped.

I remained at Mittagong in this situation, until I was old enough to work, it was then I was fostered out to Mr and Mrs Rehmet at Manly in Sydney, I thought I was free, but I had an awful awakening. I was fostered to become a slave. My day would start at about 6am, wash the dishes when everyone had finished breakfast, then go to work with Mr Rehmet at his office in pitt st, there I would fill capsules all day in a little room, (He was a chemist and was employed by Scott laborites), after about 3 pm. it was back to manly and house cleaning. This was my daily routine until I was shown how to prepare a meal, then I was cook as well, the only break I would get was on Sunday afternoon. He was a cruel man, if I broke a plate washing up, he would abuse me. If I forgot to turn a light out I copped it. Any time that he had guests I was always the waiter. I was never allowed to sit at the table with the, I always served there meals in the dinning room and I ate in the kitchen alone, some times if they had visitors, I would not get to bed till early in the morning because I would have to clean the room after the guests left. Mr Rehmet's son George began smoking and I am sure he was stealing money from his father to buy them. One time he came to my room outside on the veranda and lit a cigarette and smoked it, after he had gone inside Mr Rehmet came onto the veranda and smelt the smoke and accused me of smoking, I denied it, the next day he found out there was some money missing, I got the blame, I told him it was his son who smoked the cigarettes and I got the hiding of my life for telling lies and sent to shelter at glebe.

From glebe I was sent to a poultry farm owned by Inghams at Casula. State ward kids ran this farm, there must have been about twelve working the farm, The wages as usual was four shilling a week. A working day was from 5am until 12.30pm 2.30pm to finish about 7.30pm six days a week, I don't remember collecting any pay apart from one occasion I

went to Sydney with another kid on a Sunday. I was sacked from Inghams because I refused to tip live chickens into a vat of boiling water to cook them as pig food. Mr Ingham held me by the neck and kicked me with his knee until I collapsed on the ground. I was sent back to Glebe. My next placement was at Ging King near Oberon. , It was a farm where Mr Rowe grew peas and potatoes as well as sheep. Again my day started before daylight, wash up. Then pick peas all day. It was backbreaking work and there was no let up for me, The boss would always find an excuse to inspect something to have a break, but none for jeff, when the peas were finished it was potato digging, this went on for a month or more and again it was backbreaking work for a kid of about 15 or 16yrs, at times in the afternoons I had to dig out rabbits from their burrows, I was told that if I wanted to skin them I could sell the skins and keep the money. I had collected a large chaff bag full of skins and expected to go to town with him and get some money, instead he told me there was not enough room for me and he would sell the skins for me. When he arrived back that night I asked for my money and he told me he banked it for me with my wages. I was disappointed. I continued my working six days a week twelve hours a day, and never seen one penny in wages, I eventually had a big argument with him over the working conditions and not being paid. I was told to pack my bags and go back to the shelter. I had months of work and nothing to show for it. When he took me to the Oberon railway station, he got a ticket and told me to report to glebe shelter then left me. . I waited for the train, a truck came with some bags of vegetables on it, after the two youth unloaded they asked me what I was doing, and I told them I was looking for work, I was offered a job on the spot working for their father, I climbed aboard the truck and that ended my days of slavery, Three weeks later I was in Queens land.


Mittagong was not a home for boys; it was a brutal institution that should never have existed. Not once in my years there did I ever see an inspection by the children services regarding the welfare of the children. Boys fostered out were treated like slaves not like human being. Even writing this letter brings back the pain, the hopelessness, the feeling of being abandoned by the ones you love, and the terrible feeling of being unworthy of even the smallest consideration.

We may have deserved some punishment for waging school and getting into mischief., but never did any child who were placed in these homes deserve the complete disregard that was shown toward them ,we were things not children.

It is said, that time heals all wounds. Don't believe it.

, This letter is typed because I have Osteoarthritis in both hands making it difficult to hold a pen.

Sincerely,



Geoff Gascoyne.