

The Senate Enquiry.

My poor Mum cried.

How do you put your life on paper? How can anyone understand what it was like being taken away from your parents at a very young age or at any age for that matter. I was just 4 years old when 2 brothers, four sisters and I were forcibly removed from our parents care by the police.

I spent the next 12 years in the Ballarat orphanage. It was a terribly confusing time for me as my mother only visited 2 or 3 times in that period. Little did I understand that she could not afford the travelling expenses from N.S.W to Ballarat.

When I was 7 or 8, the staff would wake us up at night to put us on the toilet. If we had already wet the bed we were placed outside by ourselves in the dark and cold of a Ballarat night.

How frightened I was all alone in the dark and freezing cold.

On occasions I was placed in a cupboard with a man hole in it and told that the boogie man would get me.

On other occasions we were dressed in boys clothing, taken to the pig pen and told I would be fed to the pigs for wetting the bed.

I felt very intimidated, humiliated, fearful, and insecure at this time. Why couldn't I be home where I belonged?

When I was older I was further humiliated by being made to carry my wet bed linen to the laundry in full view of the other kids who teased me because I had wet the bed.

I used to try and hide until the other children had gone in for breakfast before sneaking across the yard, hopefully undetected.

We completed our primary schooling at the orphanage. We thought that we were able to cope very well with schooling and had achieved a good standard of education until we started secondary school.

We despaired as we realised how far behind we were in our academic levels and as I mixed with the kids from family homes, realised how different I was, not having family, not having anyone to turn to knowing that the other kids had a mum and dad to go home to and me having to return to the orphanage after school.

I had to leave school when I was 15 and work on a farm as a domestic hand part of which was to look after the children. All I had been trained for was domestic duties and to serve others.

The people I worked for were very kind and understanding.

This was again a difficult time in my life as I had not been prepared to face another different set of circumstances.

Once in the world I found it very hard to relate to people. I was very shy, withdrawn and frightened of trying to face the world on my own.

My world was confined to the orphanage.

I am now married with 3 children and 6 grandchildren whom I love and adore and will do any thing to make sure that they know a parents and grandparents love and security.

I was not prepared for marriage as there were many unresolved issues in my life that I could not talk about to anybody not even my husband so I was withdrawn and insecure. I was probably over protective of my own children to the point of smothering rather than mothering.

We joined the S.A. foster care system in 1996 and offered respite for approx 130 "placements" (that's what the system calls them). I felt the need to do this as I feel more comfortable relating to children than adults because of the childrens feeling of abandonment and despair.

We have had children for less than a week who have asked us if they could call us mum and dad. (how desperate they are to belong)

I visited Ballarat 22nd April this year and was dismayed to find a plaque erected outside the front gate of the orphanage commemorating the stolen generation of Aboriginal children.

I can only remember about 10% of the children in the home being Aboriginal the rest were the stolen white generations.

How can one group of children be recognised over another.

Being forcibly removed from biological family is not a racial issue.

What a shock to get my personal records under the freedom of information act and find out after all these years of feeling rejection and insecurity that we had in fact been removed from our parents and my mother had pleaded with members of parliament and government departments to return her babies.

Because we were taken away I now realise that we were stripped of any family values and dignity that we had because we were institutionalised and just became a kid in an orphanage.

I was devastated to think that I was cheated out of a relationship with my parents and siblings.

What did my poor mother go through trying to restore the family unit when fighting for her children to be returned to her?

I just hope that mum understood that I had forgiven her before she passed away.

Elizabeth. B.

Recommendations.

Having been involved in the foster care system we feel that there needs to be an overhaul/enquiry into the system as it is clearly not working.

Responsibility for foster parents has been outsourced to private providers. These providers are cut to the bone with finances and funding and have had to cut professional support to carers while the childrens case workers appear to be overloaded.

There are NOT enough carers.

Could the answer be professionally trained carers with 6-8 children in a home and relief support in the form of professionally trained workers to relieve the foster parents 2-3 days/week.

We could handle this arrangement if we had the support and I believe the children would benefit by having other kids in the home to relate to.

We have always encouraged parent contact providing the safety of the child is not compromised and the above model could incorporate and facilitate this contact.