

# **PROTESTANT FEDERATION HOME**

(Formerly at Garnet Street, Dulwich Hill) By Irie Olde nee'Jarvis

My three sisters were placed in the above home in the early 1920's. Our mother died in 1923, leaving six children, 4 girls and 2 boys. I was the second youngest, aged 2½. The boys and I were looked after by various relatives.

I lived with an aunt at Ashfield and was often taken to see my sisters at the Home. Matron Laing and her husband were in charge. I don't remember much at all about the Home except being taken there on the tram. I know the girls went to Sunday School at Dulwich Hill Methodist Church, and am almost certain they went to the same school that I did, Canterbury Primary, although I was in kindergarten. But .... I saw Beryl there one day. Or did I?

My father re-married and took the three girls from the Home, but his wife died a few months later. I did not ever see her. The girls told me years later that they were very happy in the Home and were well looked after. They did not have a very good time afterwards, and more or less looked after themselves. In later years, one sister went back to see Matron Laing who said, "Why didn't you come back and see me, you could have boarded here and had decent positions to go to".

My daughter is very interested in family history etc, and in her indomitable way found out that some ladies who had been in care at Dulwich Hill meet every year for afternoon tea and to reminisce. I then had an invitation to attend, and although there were no ladies there from my sisters' era, we (my two daughters and I) enjoyed listening to these happy ladies talking and laughing about their days at the Home, and all said how well they were looked after. Some of them had stayed there and went to work from there.

One thing of interest, they showed us some beautiful crocheted lace that Mr Laing had made.

Wonder of wonders, when looking through one of the many photograph albums, my daughters said, "There's Auntie Enid – and there's Auntie Marie – and that one is Auntie Beryl!!" The owner of the album had a spare photo and gave it to me. Wasn't that kind? What a find, and what a treasure! I had copies done and sent them to the members of my sisters' families, as my sisters had all passed away.

Through circumstances, I had to leave Ashfield and live with other relatives in the country when I was 12 years old.

Although I was looked after, and was never in a "home", when a family of six children is split up and more or less wander from place to place, we, as many other families did, had a rather mixed up life, and I was 18 years old when having one Christmas at an aunt's place, we were all together at the same time, the very first time since our mother died.

*Perhaps this is the reason I have empathy for ex-orphanage, home and foster children. And also having experienced working at Havilah Homes in the 1930's, McCredie Cottage in 1979 for several years, and at Faulds House for a few months after McCredie Cottage. Linnwood Hall was still open for girls in those years, and I have been a member of "Save Linnwood Hall", now "Friends of Linnwood" since it was formed. (I lived in the area nearby for over 40 years.)*

My sisters were:

Enid, Marie and Beryl Jarvis.

## ***HAVILAH CHILDREN'S HOME – 1938***

*I was only about 16 years of age when I worked at Havilah Homes in Hinemoa Avenue, Wahroonga. That was a very long time ago.*

*At that time, the area was really “out in the bush”, so much so that our wages were one pound a week and our keep, and six shillings extra per month as travelling expenses, because we were so far out of town. I remember walking to Hornsby on some days off, to go to the shops!*

*Havilah Homes were for neglected children from about 3 years of age to about 8 years. The building I worked in housed 24 boys and girls about 4 and 5 years old. There was a Sister Peberdy in charge, with another girl about 18, and myself. The Sister should have been reported, but I was too young and scared to do so.*

*The building in the photo was supposed to be for a babies' home, but was never opened to my knowledge. In fact on wet days, I had to take a lot of the children down there to play on the large verandah at the back. A very eerie empty place.*

*The largest building housed 60 children, girls one end, boys the other. Staff consisted of Matron, two Sisters (doubtful) and about 3 girls aged 18-20 years old. Also a cook and a housemaid, who both had children in the home and lived in a small cottage in the grounds. Their children were State Wards and had to sleep in the dormitories, but were allowed to be with their mothers after school for a while. There was also a full time laundress who washed clothes for 84 children by hand – no washing machines or dryers! Imagine the winter woollies? Also a lady came 2 or 3 days per week who washed and boiled bed linen and towels in the copper, for 84 children plus staff. I can still remember the lines full of white sheets blowing in the wind.*

*There was a schoolroom on the premises where a Miss Self taught the kindergarten children. The older ones went to Normanhurst Public School, the boys barefoot. This was Depression time. It was a fair way to walk, taken by staff members, and they had to come home for a hot meal in the middle of the day.*

*There was a lot of ground at Havilah, enough to have a couple of cows, I think chooks, and plenty of orange trees. We had to squeeze about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a kerosene bucket full of orange juice every morning for the children. Meals were a bit boring, but the children were very healthy. Breakfast was sometimes porridge, sometimes milky Weet-Bix, bread and jam, a mug of milk. Midday meal was mince with vegies, sometimes scrambled egg with vegies, followed by a beautiful creamy baked rice custard one day, sago the next, sometimes with stewed apples (not often). Tea time was bread and jam and a mug of milk. Gerard, a very good man, looked after the cows, vegie gardens etc.*

*The children were bathed with Sunlight soap, heads washed with the good old Lifebuoy soap. They always “smelt” clean.*

*On Saturday mornings, all heads were combed with fine tooth combs, ensuring there were no “nits”. Finger nails and toe nails cut. Two or three staff doing this for 84 children.*

*There was a lot of fun polishing the dormitories upstairs in our building. The children were given three old woolly jumpers, one for hands, one for knees and one for feet. My mate and I put the polish on the floors and the children slid up and down and round about. The floors were soon shiny.*

*Staff took turns to sleep next to the dormitories and the only trouble when I was there was Chicken Pox, so we had to tie socks on the hands of our littlies to stop them from scratching.*

*Parents were allowed to visit on Sundays. A lot of these children were from broken homes, and I have seen both parents visit on the one day. One parent would wait hidden behind a tree or something and wait until the other left, and then he/she would have the turn. Poor kids! One day I was “minding” all these children in the grounds, when a mother and her boyfriend got away with her two children. Parents were all given plenty of leeway taking their children all over the grounds, finding a little corner or space of their own, but this particular day when the bell went, all were strolling up to the buildings as usual for hand washing etc before tea (they were never made to hurry to say their “goodbyes”) – all of a sudden there was a cry from some – “Nursie, Louise and Georgie have gone out the gate!” I chased after them, but a neighbour told me there had been a taxi waiting outside her home. Very neatly done, and seemingly well planned. I believe the father was very upset, naturally. The police had to be called, as children in these places were all Wards of the State.*

*I remember one very devoted father came every week to see his boy. No mother ever came and this man always seemed very sad.*

*The children were well looked after, well fed, well clothed, but so many children and not enough staff to have the time to show a lot of love.*

*On night duty we mended clothes, and always had company, as being so far away from transport etc we couldn’t go out, so we kept one another company at night.*

*Some ladies from the church used to come occasionally to do a lot of sewing and mending. Havilah Homes were owned and administered by the Church of England, and after all these establishments were closed the area was developed and is nothing but houses.*

*When these children turned 8 years old, they were transferred to the Carlingford Homes which were opposite the now large shopping centre.*

*Time has taken a lot of memories so I can't tell much more. These photos were taken just after I left and I remember these children, especially twins, boy and girl on the right, had beautiful auburn curly hair, and also "Graeme", front left of the photo. The photo of our Matron bathing the children was only for effect, as the "top" staff did very little actual working with the children.*

*Having worked in another establishment later in life, I have very mixed feelings about the closure of so many, in fact all of these places. Of course children are better left with their own parents, but abused and neglected children? To be continually abused and neglected?*

*It must be remembered that whether children in these establishments were shown love and care depended on the person in charge, and then the staff, whether they were the right people to care for the children, or were only there to have somewhere to work. And as for fostering, greater care should be taken as to why people want to foster children.*

*This article is only from memories of a girl about 16 sent to work at Havilah, who is now in her 80s and definitely would not like to be in charge of the undisciplined children of today!!*

**Irie Olde (nee Jarvis)  
February 2003**

## McCREDIE COTTAGE

(by Irie Olde nee' Jarvis a former Child Care Worker)

McCredie Cottage opened in 1970 as a home for neglected children between the ages of 2½ to 6 years of age. There were 26 children there, with a staff of Matron, two Deputy Matrons, and 11 child care workers who worked five different shifts. There was also a cook, a laundress, a seamstress, 3 ladies to do the cleaning, and a maintenance/outdoor man who looked after 6 acres of grounds.

McCredie had been open about six months when I began working there as a child care worker. What a morning! 6am and, most unkind of other staff, I was asked to go to the dormitory of the "big boys"! Now I must say that these children were delightful in small doses, a few at a time, but this time, me being a new person, these 6 boys (5 and 6 years old) tired me out. It was a shock I just couldn't handle! Toilet, washed, dressed and ready for breakfast, they really tested my endurance and I almost left straight away. How glad I am that I didn't!

There were 2 school rooms and 2 pre-school teachers. These rooms were accessible from inside the building and opened out into a playground with sand pit, shelter etc. Our Matron, who loved all the children, decreed that instead of just walking through the building to school, they were to have the same privilege as other children so, after breakfast, go to the bathroom, clean teeth, have hair combed again and "get ready for school!" We would then take them from a side door and walk around the building to the playground. Of course the "big boys" wanted to run and be there first, although we had to keep them more or less together. If wet weather they still had to walk around the building, so 26 children had to be dressed in yellow raincoats, hats, and hardest of all, little rubber boots. Then after 10-15 minutes walk, put on again at lunch time – repeat process, and after school as well. We all dreaded the little rubber boots!

Bath time was the noisiest time of the day. I'm sure neighbours must have wondered what was happening as all 26 had to be in the bathroom at the same time, instead of a few at a time. When finally in their pyjamas and dressing gowns, they looked cosy and like little angels.

Some of these children had been very neglected, some abused, and I found it very interesting to watch some of them changing from being very withdrawn and keeping to themselves at first, their little minds must have been numb, not knowing why they were there, but the gradual "re-awakening" was wonderful to see – the tentative taking part in activities – the change from using all black for colouring in pictures to slowly adding colour – then coming to us to talk, to having a kiss and a hug – I thought was really wonderful.

One day I had to show a newcomer, a boy of about 5 years old, where he had to sleep. He sat on his bed, looked around and said, "You don't have to go to bed in a cupboard here, do you?"

One common practice with a lot of children, and I guess copied from one other, was that if they were in trouble and so exasperated they didn't know what to do, they would "flop" down, take their shoes off and throw them as far as they could, then take their socks off, throw them as high as they could to cling to the brick wall! Interesting! What would the psychologists say?

A few parents visited at weekends. Not many at all, and it was so noticeable the Christmas Days I worked, not one parent visited.

When on night duty the children's shoes were cleaned, clothes sorted and placed ready for each child the next day. Cough medicine given when necessary, bed wetters looked after, and occasionally a child who couldn't sleep would be "spoilt" and let stay in the night duty office for a little while. One 3 year old had a dreadful nightmare one night. I couldn't calm him down so I buzzed for Matron. I explained that he screamed when he looked at me, but was told, "He is not seeing you, but we don't know what dreadful thing or person is terrifying him." A warm bath calmed him and he went to sleep quite happily, and all was well.

One time I queried why the children couldn't have their meat cut up for them instead of holding the cutlet or whatever in their hand. The explanation was that a lot of these children had never been given anything they had to chew, so had to be taught how to do so.

Two little girls were found in a shed, the older one (about 4 years old), asked a passer-by for something to eat as they were hungry. They had been left there by their mother, who did not return. There was a baby with them too, and a bottle of sour milk. The baby went to another establishment. These girls were beautiful.

One boy had scars of cigarette burns on his back. Another little girl was terrified of my husband (who was the maintenance man) and wouldn't go near him for a long time, but after about two months she loved to go and talk to him. I remember this little girl always carrying a lady's old handbag – wherever she went, it went too. Perhaps it brought something to her mind – some security perhaps. I took one little girl out one day to a store with an escalator. She had never seen one before. Well, for about an hour – "Can we go on the moving steps again please?" I think I was a bit giddy after that!

*If a child was to be fostered, an escort would come one day, take the child to Head Office, come back with a new suitcase full of new clothes – the next morning another escort would come to take him/her to the foster home where they hadn't even seen the people they were to live with. One child was flown to Broken Hill where had not seen the people to whom he was being fostered to. One staff member was getting a little girl ready to go with an escort when the child said, "Will you kiss me goodbye when the strange lady comes to take me away?" This programme was eventually altered fortunately, and the prospective foster parents had to come to McCredie a few times then take the child home for a weekend before the placement was finalised.*

Occasionally a child would be sent back. One I remember Matron telling me, he was sent back to the system (not to us) after 3 days because he wouldn't share his toys with the parents' own child who was the same age. What a mistake to send a child just because the foster parents wanted a playmate for their own child.

I could tell many harrowing stories, but when these children got over the trauma of whatever had happened to them, they were all so lovable – their parents did not know what they were missing.

We had our funny moments as well as the sad ones. On night duty one night I heard a noise in the babies' room. There I found "Tony", imp of mischief, in the centre of the room, hands in hands with a tiny girl, dancing in the dim light of the night light from the centre of the ceiling. How lovely it was. A kiss and a hug and I put them back to bed.

One morning Tony (again) was missing! Big search everywhere - even my husband took the car and searched the nearby streets. One person going past the smallest dormitory heard a soft giggle – here he was, hiding behind the door, not a sound for about 45 minutes, and thought it was a great joke. Another time he and he mate, in pyjamas and dressing gown, disappeared one afternoon. A neighbour near the end of the street brought them back, they had been looking for a lolly shop!

The children loved it when we had a barbecue lunch. They sat on logs near the "jungle". This was quite a big area of tall bamboo. They loved playing there, they had made tracks through the jungle and had a great time. This bamboo was all cut down for some reason, taking away some of their imaginative play which (in my opinion) they really needed.

"Picnic tea" was also fun for them. Our cook would pack a separate packet of sandwiches etc for them. We would have it outside, but if the weather wasn't suitable we would give it to them in the wide corridor. (It wouldn't be a "picnic" in the dining room would it?)

Sitting on the bedroom floor after bathtime one day, trying to read stories to the "babies", one new little girl sat on my knees saying in a plaintive little voice, "I don't know what to do." She knew she shouldn't be there, and the noise and rough and tumble appeared to be too much for her.

The children who were not fostered, went to a larger establishment for older children when they were 6 years old. We didn't like to see them go, and wondered what the next stage of their life would be. This was at Mittagong (also closed down).

One little girl, known as “poor Peg” (not her real name) was a bit of a trial when she came to us, from a babies’ home. She was 3 years old, still in nappies, and was deaf. Well, the nappies were ordered off straight away. She had been carried everywhere most of the time, so that was not allowed either. As for the hearing aid, the type that was kept in a special pocket, this was thrown anywhere at any time! Across the room, across the playground, just wherever and whenever the mood took her. A caring couple came to see her every weekend, and when she was more settled these people adopted her. The Matron and staff received a letter from them later, thanking us for “helping ‘Peg’ to become the happy little girl she is today”. They brought her back to see us when she was about 7 years old, and she was adorable. How we wished all these children could be loved like that.

One funny (and tragic) moment. I was talking to Matron one day when a mother was visiting her two children (which she rarely did). She came to us and said, “By gee Matron, you’re doin’ a good job with these kids, I’ll see if I can get me other two sent out here”!

All these caring establishments have been closed, and I often wonder what becomes of children these days with problems like the 200 or more (I stopped counting them) who went through McCredie Cottage in 2 years.

I must give credit to our Matron who had the interests of the children at heart at all times, and they all loved her too. We among the staff would play with the children after tea, with games, books - Matron would appear and that was the end of our games etc. They would instantly drop what they were doing and crowd around her.

She often came down and talked to whoever was on night duty, and I liked to listen to her experiences and her views on children.

It was important that when passing any of the children, that we touched them on the head, shoulder etc, or picked them up for a minute or two, so they knew that someone cared. How different from today’s rules.

## GIRLS OF LINNWOOD

Irie Olde – March 2003

It was a pleasure to be at Linnwood the day the former Linnwood girls had a “get together”, and I was moved and privileged to hear some of their experiences.

Snippets of conversation were fun and a delight to hear, such as:

- *What years were you here?*
- *You must have been here when I was here but I don't remember you.*
- *My hair was long then.*
- *I ran away – when did you run away?*
- *I ran away along the pipeline at Guildford, but when I got to the station the cops were waiting for me.*
- *Once I had a week in the klink, because when I wouldn't do what was wanted I said “Naah!” so I was left there.*
- *We had a mattress on the floor (in the klink). (There was laughter when I asked, “Were you let out to go to the toilet?” – the answer was “There was a potty in the corner”.)*
- *No, we didn't have a light.*
- *I rang away and got lifts with truck drivers. A state-wide search was made for me and one of the drivers said I was his niece and the cop said “Come on L...”*
- *Look, that's where my bed was, right in that corner.*
- *That's where I slept, right near the door.*
- *Somehow I got in the good books and was moved to the top dormitory with the good girls.*
- *I had to undo Miss .....’s bra every night before she went to bed. It was a great long white thing.*
- *Remember Miss D....? She was nice (the deputy).*
- *Funny how she and Miss ..... worked well together, she was so different.*
- *Look, I sat in that corner over there. (This was looking into the big back room, which was the dining room).*
- *Yes, Miss ..... sat in that corner over there, watching us all eating.*
- *And if she had a visitor, the visitor had to sit with her back to us.*
- *Even her little niece was not allowed to face us.*
- *We had callisthenics every day for half an hour.*
- *You know, it must have been good for us, we were never sick.*
- *Where are all the flowers? There were lovely flowers.*
- *And what about the dahlias? They were beautiful. Remember we had to put all the vegetable peelings on the garden.*

And so it went on – plenty of laughter. I gathered from some conversations that “*It wasn't too bad here, we had a roof over our heads, a bed to sleep in and plenty of food, and were taught sewing,*” etc etc.

One interesting point. These ladies all were in agreement that places like Linnwood Hall should never have been closed.

Talking about their lives, one lady said she (and they) were always “put down”, *told we were nothing* (not necessarily only at Linnwood). Most of the girls in that situation married early (young), because they had never known love, so they married the first person who showed them love. Some ended in divorce. One lady told me when she was divorced she decided she really was someone and decided to “break out” and is still studying for various things. Good for her, and for them, they have got on with their lives, but will never forget the sadness of their early years.

As I said, it was a privilege to meet them, and share a lovely lunch with them.