

My name is Janice Elizabeth Kitson and I was born on 15 September 1944 to Valerie Jean Kitson who was a 30 year old unmarried mother.

When I was about six and a half years old my mother took me one day to a place where I was asked to sit in this room and wait until she had finished. I sat for ages and ages then I started to fidget and move around, eventually I climbed up to a window and looked out and saw my mother walking up the driveway and leaving this place. I was horrified because she had forgotten me and I started to call out and bang on the window to attract her attention but mum continued to walk away. People eventually came in to the room and pulled me away from the window as I continued to struggle and fight to get to my mother. I was then taken to another building, placed in a room and told to stay there and I fought to get out but was locked in so I threw myself through the closed window but was caught and taken inside and spent the whole night locked in a toilet. That was my introduction to what was the place I stayed for many years, Kildonan Presbyterian Children's Home, Burwood, Victoria.

We had a house mother and I can only say that I learnt to fear and dread that particular woman more than anyone else in my life. My fear of her came from the swift punishments and beatings that she inflicted on me and other children in the home. I was a bedwetter and received every punishment known to mankind for this which included withdrawal of food and drink even in summer, humiliation, stripped naked in front of other children, face rubbed in urine soaked sheets, beaten, made to walk outside, paraded and walked with the sheets to the laundry block, cold showers where you were pushed under with a stick or beaten with a stick when you were made to stay under, called dirty and filthy, dragged out of your bed at night when you were sleeping to go to the toilet, locked in a toilet overnight but the worse punishment was being locked in the outside toilets near the school building in the dark all night which I feel has given me a lifetime fear of closed spaces and it still takes considerable effort for me to get in a lift. The one thing I was constantly told about the bedwetting was that I wet the bed deliberately and I never understood that as I often felt it was crazy to suggest that I wanted to be punished in the way that I was.

Punishments were given for almost anything e.g. talking, not cleaning correctly and making mistakes in your work etc. Other punishments included deprivation of food and made to watch others eat, being force fed your own vomit if you threw up and then deprived of food for the next few days, not given property belonging to me, not being allowed to see my mother when she visited me even though she was able to rarely visit because she worked in the bush and if she left a book or other item it was rarely given to me, as I had no other family she was the whole focus of my life. On one particular occasion I remember being repeatedly beaten with a wooden handled brush used for sweeping and whilst I constantly begged for the house mother to stop hitting me she refused and I remember blood pouring out of my ear. Punishments like that were not unusual, I saw other children hit with a crop or pieces of wood around the knuckles and

with hands so sore you could hardly write when you were at school. Not all children were treated the same, children appeared to earn favours by reporting on other children and this was actively encouraged which prevented cohesion between the children. I do not remember many days at the home free from punishment.

I did report the abuse in the home to my mother once but the retributions were so severe that I very quickly learnt not to do it again. I honestly thought I was going to die at the time; I was beaten until I could only crawl.

My name was rarely used in the home. I was called a bastard daily and it was emphasized to me that no one wanted me and that was why I was there. I also know other kids were treated the same and they were told they were no good and no one wanted them. I often wonder where these kids went and how they coped.

On holidays we would be lined up, people would come and pick out children they wanted to take for a short period. I went to various places on holidays but was usually sent back early because I wet the bed. I remember one place I went on summer holidays; I was about ten years old, where there was a grandfather, mother and a grownup child. The grandfather used to drive around and take me with him wherever he went except for work (he used to work at the abattoirs). I remember going out in the car with him one day as usual when he started to put his hands down my blouse and the front of my pants, I didn't know what was happening but I was terrified. From then on I would go near him, eat with him or talk to him so they sent me back to Kildonan. On my return I reported what happened, I was promptly given a beating and told I was a dirty, filthy, dishonest child. This confused me greatly.

My placement at Kildonan was voluntary and my mother paid for my keep every week I was there. My mother sent also money orders to put in my personal bank account while I was a resident and when I left I found there was no money in my account. I can't say where it went to but it never went into my account where it should have been a considerable amount of money.

The home did not prepare me for adult life and I believe impacted negatively on my life as an adult and mother. The home provided me with lack of care and affection, neglect (emotional, intellectual, physical and psychological), humiliation in front of peers and certainly no love was ever shown. The abuse is something I don't think I will ever get over; for many, many years, right into my married years I had nightmares of the abuse. When I first left the home and lived with my mother the nightmares were so bad and the screams so loud we had to move several times as the landlady's would not put up with it.

The legacy of my childhood experiences are low self-esteem, lack of confidence, anger, shame, I do not cope well in society, parties or groups and I have been treated for depression, anxiety, phobias and emotional problems over the years.

I do not have much faith in authority; I do not feel they have an applicable role in caring for people. I have done my time and I never want to go into care again, not under any circumstance no matter how old and infirm I may become. There is a life long impact from being a home child and this is passed through to the next generation be it negative or positive. Due to my experiences in childhood I believe this created a negative impact on my children and I believe this can be attributed directly to the neglect I experienced at the hands of authority as a child.

It is only by learning from our history and accepting responsibility and acknowledging mistakes made that we can address our duty of care to the future generations of young people. If we do not protect and care for the young people in our society and provide a basic human right of feeling safe then we fail our young people and it is the responsibility of the community to ensure this does not occur and the community is accountable for wrongs inflicted on the young people in our society. As a home child I believe I have the right and responsibility to state this.

***If we were never allowed a safe childhood, what legacy do we bring to our adulthood?***