

Mr Ernie Tulloh

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To the Senate Community Affairs References Committee

This is my story of having spent time in the care of the Salvation Army. I am told that because I name people, this submission will have to be a confidential one, but I am OK with it being a public one if possible.

I was born on the 11 August 1937. My Mum was a bit of a play-about and my Dad was an alcoholic. I had one brother and two sisters. Our Nan lived with us and she did all the looking after of us, actually I think it was her house we lived in.

When I was about six or seven, my brother and I were put into Castledare, then we went to Clontarf – my sisters went to Burnbrae. I can't remember much about Castledare or Clontarf, perhaps I've blocked it out, but I certainly remember the Nedlands Salvations Army Boys' Home which is where my brother and I went next because apparently my relatives complained about Castledare and Clontarf being too far away. I was then about 10 or 11. This change also happened after being made a ward of the state in 1947.

The abuse started pretty much straight away at the Salvos home. Major Capes was in charge and he had a daughter Noreen and son Barry. Major Pearse was second in charge (he had daughters) and a son Paul who used to play with us, but his girls weren't allowed anywhere near us.

My abuser used to come and get me from my bed at night and take me to a little room in the reception area where visitors would come, it was right at the top of the driveway. He would then pull his foreskin back and put his penis in my mouth and he would make me masturbate him and then he would masturbate me. Waiting at night in bed was awful – I was so frightened that he would come and get me, and he did. Even if I faked being asleep he would shake me and I knew I had to get up or I'd get flogged.

I never told anyone about the sexual abuse as I was too frightened and as I got older, too ashamed. This abuse went on until they shoved me out of the home at 15 years old. To this day, I still can't talk about it as I think no-one will believe me. It's a terrible thing to live with. I am now 67 years old and it often comes back to me.

I'm sure there were others who were sexually abused, but no-one ever talked about it. Everyone was too frightened to say anything in fear of getting a flogging with the cane for telling lies.

Captain Sumption and Major Pearse were the ones to flog you with the cane. I used to always keep to myself as much as possible in fear of getting six of the best on your hands, your bum or back of the legs.

The food was just OK – we had three meals a day but nothing in between. We all had to help in the kitchen and also the laundry and had to clean the dorms. Everyone had their chores.

I went to school on the premises. The Headmaster was Master Holten and the teachers were Mr Spencer Parsons and Miss Wallace. When I started high school, I went to the Perth Junior Technical High School in Newcastle Street. I wasn't interested in school and I was no good at school work. I was good at sport though and used to compete against other Salvation Army teams in football, cricket and athletics. I did whatever I could to occupy myself and escape the cane.

We would go to church every week to the Citadel in Subiaco or the big one in Perth which was called the Perth Fortress.

Sometimes we would be taken to Matilda Bay for a swim in the river. I was actually later baptised at the same place a couple of years ago. I attend Margaret Court's Victory Life Church.

My brother was a bed-wetter, he used to really cop it, poor bugger. He was in the bed-wetters dorm. They also had a special dorm for the real bad boys that was always kept locked. The officers in charge were Bernie Carpenter and Sgt Robinson who was a great big fellow.

My Auntie Susie and Uncle Colin were the only ones to visit me while I was in care. Sometimes they would bring my Nan before she died and sometimes they would bring me a present but this had to be given to the carers. I was though allowed to keep a bag of lollies or other food.

At no time did my mother or father ever come for a visit.

When I left the Salvos, they gave me three outfits of clothing and welfare got me a job at G&R Wills in the city as a messenger boy and unpacking and packing goods. I was there about 18 months.

I then went farming at Hyden where I stayed for about two years. I enjoyed this work but got homesick for the city. So I returned and got a job in the tyre industry and worked in this field for close on 30 years. I also had a stint working up north at Dampier for about four years.

After I had an operation for hernia and ulcers that ended my working career and I went on the disability pension.

I got married to Margaret in 1960 at age 23, but our marriage only lasted 4-5 years. Most of the people I know have been brought up in homes and they haven't had long lasting relationships.

We had four daughters with one being born after we separated. We got divorced in 1975. My marriage was all stars in the beginning, but she was also from a bad upbringing. I started drinking heavily after we separated.

I've never kept in contact with my girls as I was always on the move. They will not have anything to do with me now. My oldest daughter, Kerry, was killed in a car accident and after a vivid dream about her I visited her grave. I have also got seven grandchildren but have never seen them apart from one boy, Christopher.

It upsets me that I don't have contact with them – I'm really quite alone. I do voluntary work for the church to keep active.

It is so sad to lose your family. Being raised in homes does nothing to help keep siblings or families close. I never see my brother or sisters or any of my step-siblings either. I have four step brothers to different fathers – an Indonesian sailor, a Macedonian who had a fish and chip shop and then there is Mr Cinkurs who my mother married and had two boys.

I found out from my sister that my biological brother died aged 49 from cancer. I never saw him after leaving the home. All I know is that he got married and used to work in the Perth Mint before being transferred to Canberra.

Sometimes my sister comes over from Melbourne to visit my other sister who lives here in Perth, but they never come and see me.

My old man died after falling in front of a car when he was drunk as a skunk. He was a thorough bloody alcoholic. I actually ran into him many years after coming out of the Salvos home. I was at a hotel and this man came up to me and said "hello Son". I said don't call me son and when he went to the toilet, I followed him and gave him a really good belting.

I never speak about being in the homes and what happened to me – I never even told my wife. About four years ago though I did try to approach the Balga Salvation Army about the sexual abuse I suffered. A woman in uniform told me that as Jack Sumption had died and was not here to defend himself, there wasn't anything they could do to help me. I decided to do this as the memories had started to rattle my brain and I thought I was going batty. After being fobbed off, I've done nothing since.

I have always been upset about what our parents put us through. And as for the Salvation Army, they have a lot to answer for.