

My Name is Ethel Robertson I was born 14th November 1921. in Koondrook on Murray River in Victoria. My brother John Bernard Robertson (Jack) was born on 23 March 1923.

For the next nine years I lived a normal life and had a happy life ,my parents and our family with my mother's parents. I knew that there were people who loved me. And so I never dealt on anything thing. It was only when we went to Stawell and my father forgot he was married and my mother was left alone and she was very lonely. My father was a soldier in the first war and he was also ten years older than my mother.

My mother packed up and went to Bendigo, she has friends there and she stayed there until she got on her feet. I was about 5 years old then.

We were placed St Aidans with our mother and Mum cooked in the kitchen, she stayed until for about 4- 5 months and then she went down to Melbourne to her sisters place, with intention of getting back to live once she was settled in a job. I was confident that Mum would come back.

. We went to live with Mum's parents at Mentone and I went to school there , and I was about 8 or 9 .

My grandparents, three uncles and my Mum and Jack and I lived in the two houses on the one block. Life was good. After some time Mum had to go to the country for work and we children were left in the care of our grandparents.

My grandmother began ill very quickly and very suddenly., she had cancer I knew it was going to be hard..

One day I was walking home from school and two women were at the gate and my grandfather was standing there with tears in his eyes. I never heard any conversation between anyone.

I don't remember going to St Vincents' De Paul Orphanage., South Melbourne. I think it must have been too much for me to take in. I wonder why are these people taking me away. For years I have wondered how I got to the orphanage. That night in bed I dreamt that my grandmother died. The next morning I was called to the Rev Mother's office and the two women who had bought me to the orphanage were there . They said "we've come to tell you that your grandmother has died. No comfort was given and I told them I dreamt that last night, I then turned on my heels and left. and cried . I felt so alone I knew no one there.

Jack was handed over to the Christian Brothers at St Vincent's', South Melbourne. I didn't have any contact with Jack until my mother found out where we were. I was there for about 18 months , when our mother found out her Mother was dead. She also found out that we had been put in an orphanage

She went into see the Child Welfare to find her two children. They told her where you were and that the children had been made state wards and she couldn't get them back So my mother went back to the Home and spoke to the nuns and she asked who had made the children wards of the state? They had nothing to do with it. The child welfare did it.

I was there for 18 months and when I saw my mother for the first time I cried and cried

The nuns wouldn't allow me to go home with my Mother and the Welfare said the state wouldn't allow the nuns to let us go home even for the Christmas. Mum would come and visit us both. On the first Sunday of every month.

I coped with life in the orphanage I had to make up my mind I was there and I made up my mind that no one was going to coward me. I wasn't a bully
I spent a lot of time while in the home for 4 years , thinking of ways to get out of the Home. I even helped another girl escape, her name was Irene Hodder. Tessie Scott and I helped bunker up the wall to get out.

I remember I thought something good would come out of being there, the nuns on a whole were good to me except Sr Denise.

The food at St Vincents' was shocking,, there was little food and fat was put on the bread, the food was every morning was porridge, two pieces of bread with fat, a bowl of watery soup and tea was couple of pieces of bread with fat and a cup of tea. At school the day scholars would eat their lunch while we girls went back to the orphanage to eat our soup, when we returned to the schoolyard, we were told to pick up the day scholars papers. I refused to do this once and Sister Denise she told me to get around and pick those papers up , I refused and told her their not my papers and I didn't put them there
She threatened to strap me with the strap around my legs and she was going to put me in the cloakroom until I did the task. I still refused to do it. And she then slapped around the legs.

I spent lots of time crying under the blankets for my Mum, I felt trapped in the orphanage.

.I found out the orphanage was going to have a fete, I said to Mum, if you come in to fete in Clarendon Street . I said to Mum we will hang around the door way in the school yard, Quick we've got to get out the door and we got away quickly, the tram from St Kilda it was going to take us to Fitzroy. She had a room there waiting for us.

We had to jump on, the tram quickly before we were discovered missing by the nuns. Jack we 're going home, are you coming with us, aren't you. He said No I'm too frightened, that's when I said if you don't come now I might not see you ever again. He hung his head down and said goodbye. He never got on the tram

We waved our goodbyes to him, as he walked up the street. As it was so close to St Vincent's we couldn't draw attention to ourselves .by crying or anything.

It was shocking to leave him that day.

My uncle went back to the Home not long after I escaped and asked them about Jack. With no luck.

In 1945 I went back to St V;'s to ask for information about Jack and they told me they knew him well as he would bring every Friday night fish and chips for the boys. The Brothers had to stop him from coming as it was causing too many fights amongst the boys. I learnt that Jack had a bike and worked in the Stone's Timber Mill in South Melbourne. I visited the Stones Mill and no luck.

I made further inquiries with St Vincent's over the years to see if they knew whereabouts of Jack.

While living in Ballarat, I found a man who said he would try to get some information on Jack. He ended up getting me papers from FOI. The information gave me a clue of the attitudes of the Child Welfare Dept.. The information was not current and finished in 1936.

I went to the Salvation Army Missing Persons and I think they had me strung along for while and in the finish they told me they couldn't do anything for me and took me and ran.

I put an advertisement in the Sun newspaper, but it didn't come to anything.

I have never stopped thinking of my brother, Jack.

Mum and I made a life together. Mum had met another man who became my step father and she had another two children.

Not long after we escaped from the orphanage Jack was sent away to work on a farm at Mansfield and he must have stayed for 2 years and then he went to another farm down Warrnambool way. This happened in about 1936.

While I was at St V's a woman used to come into the church for Mass every day and I used to look at her and think I wonder what my mother looks like....

I fitted in very well with my mother and my step father and their two children. Life was good..

I always think you can never give up completely, you can put it aside, but it is always there. I would like to have as much information on my brother to ease my mind and. It's better to have information than not have any information.

At 83 years I don't have a long time to go and I would like to rest my mind about this.

On the day Aboriginals got the vote in Australia, in 1967, my mother was hit by a car in Footscray and she never really recovered and a week before she died a Dr told me she had already died, but when I went to visit her, she was still alive.

I asked him why did he say this to me and he replied that Oh well you might as well be prepared it will happen in a week's time

She died the next week, but before she passed away from her terrible injuries she asked "Where's Jack? Where's Jack?"

I have had 8 children. I love them all and they love them.

To find Jack it would make me very, very happy.

Ethel Robertson.