



30th June 2003

To Whom It May Concern...

My name is Pippa Corbett. I was put into a children's home in 1957 in Bondi. It was called Scarba House. ...It was a hell hole.

My father, a severe alcoholic, gambler and violent towards my mother & I, threw us out into the street. He opened the front door of the house we lived in Janalli, Sydney and pushed out my mother, my sister, (5 years old), my brother (2 months old) and myself (8 years old at that time). Then he threw my brother's pram on top of us. My poor mother, after years of violent abuse walked to Central with us, and we sat in the park, waited and worried what would become of us. We sat there for 36 hours until the Police came, then the Salvation Army came and forcibly took us from our mother, breaking her heart.

We were put into 'Scarba House' in Wellington Street, Bondi. My brother was put into a separate area away from us. I could only watch him from behind a glass window lying in a cot. He was never held or picked up and I used to yell "*Give me my brother*" constantly. They belted me with a switch, that hurt terribly, at night for a long time. For four months, every night when us girls were in bed, a horrible woman called Nellie, would come in and pull my thin blanket down and make me lie on my stomach. She hit me with a thin stick that stung and really hurt. She hit me 24 times across the back of my legs.

Once, because I hid my sister and refused to tell them where she was, I received 44 cuts across my legs. The pain always got worse and I have suffered ever since. We were never taken to a doctor. To date I have had four operations on my left leg and suffer pain because of these injuries. I have to live with this. ...We were not people, in fact, we did not know what we were. I was constantly told we were ugly and outcasts.

I remember we were made to eat this dreadful tasting lumpy porridge. My sister vomited it up and they forced me to eat off the ground until I kept it down (because I protected her). My sister caught hepatitis from the food and bad hygiene. I used to hide her and carry her around as she was always scared, weak and sick. I had hardly any clothes to wear, and once they stood me outside all-night until 8 am the next morning with only a singlet on. Yes, it was winter. Finally, I took my sister and ran away. They sent dogs on to us to get us back, as I was always trying to get to my brother without success. I was more than worried about him.

After what felt like a 100 years, my mother came and took us to Adelaide to escape my violent father who would always chase and harass my poor mother. We were put in a housing camp for four weeks and he found us. We had to immediately run and leave everything. He had two guns - We were terrified.

Next, we went to an awful children's home called 'Goodwood' in Adelaide. It was terrible. My sister and I were placed there and my brother was placed in a home at Kent town. My sister and I were locked in a large dormitory at night with a lot of other kids. We were not allowed to go the toilet and told not to wet the bed! I told my sister to wee in my bed, if she had to, so they wouldn't belt her. In the morning, the nuns would walk straight up to me and the other kids and we would all get belted with the strap for wetting our beds.

I was made to work like a slave. At 4.30 AM, my little, sick sister and I were forced to carry two mops and buckets up steep stairs to the next floor and scrub toilets and bathrooms. I used to hide my sister and do her work as she was always sick and frail. I only had a thin top connected to a cotton skirt. No shoes or underwear for me. The food was terrible. For breakfast everyday we ate stale bread with lumpy hot milk. For dinner we ate boiled 'hogget' with swedes. A lot of the children were sexually abused - not me or my sister, as I was extremely alert to this situation.

I became very tough to help us survive. We got taken out of that awful home by my wonderful Uncle Roger & Aunty Joan who loved us dearly, but four months later, because of complicated reasons, we went back again. My Uncle cried because he had to take us back there. The second stay was as bad as the first, and because I kept yelling for my brother each day, I was constantly belted and starved.

Next we moved to Salisbury North to a house. The three of us with our mother! We loved it there. There were peach & apricot trees in the back yard, and my mother bought me a second-hand bike. I had never ridden one before, but I told my mum I could ride, so she struggled to buy it. It was so precious to me, I painted it and looked after it so well. I absolutely adored my beautiful mother. ...This was the happiest time of my life. I remember I used to play cricket in the back yard with my brother and I used to make bows & arrows.

I was such a good child, I did everything I could in the house to help my wonderful mother. Then after four months came a knock at the front door I'll never forget. ...Our horrible father was standing there with a gun. My mother slammed the door, herded us together and we ran out the back door. She threw us over the back fence and we were heartbroken to be on the run again!

We went to our grandparent's farm at Jervois for two months, my mother returning to Sydney with my brother. He was put into St Anthony's home. My sister and I went to St Joseph's Lane Cove. This was a nightmare. They made me work in the kitchen. The Mother Superior and another nun called Sister Oliver were lesbians. They twice came into my dormitory and forcibly held me down and tried to rape me with a hair brush. I was very tough by then, and I kicked them off me. Believe me I hid my sister so they couldn't get her as well!

I worked like a Trojan in that dreadful place. I was made to work every morning and evening in the nun's dining room and kitchen. I then had to serve them their meals. They ate wonderful food; fresh peaches and roast lamb. I had never tasted anything like this before. I used to steal all the scraps and give them to my sister and her young friend. I remember they used to belt me without mercy because by this time I spoke my mind and called them 'religious hypocrites'.

I hated going to Church everyday. The Priest had a lot of children, mostly girls who worked in a laundry. Some were monoloid. Two of the girls committed suicide jumping from the roofs! When I was 14, they opened the gate, pushed me outside; told me I would burn in hell, I'd end up in a prostitute and then threw me out on the streets. I had no cardigan and no shoes. I went to St Leonards park, slept on park bench for two days, then I met a friend who let me stay at her place. Her mother felt sorry for me. In 2 weeks I had a job in a printing factory at Forest Lodge, walking from McMann's Point over the Harbour bridge (to work) and back until, I had a week's pay.

Then I got a room at North Sydney, but only had enough money left, after the rent to eat every second day. After three months; I got another two jobs and moved into a house at Crows Nest with two other girls - they were 17 and 18. I was fifteen. I thought this was paradise.

My sister and brother went back to my mother. My mother was broken down by then, and things got worse for them. I used to visit them as much as I could. My sister turned out to be autistic and my brother was severely disturbed. ...He committed suicide when he was 18 years of age. He was a beautiful young man, but had no confidence in himself. He wanted to know all his life why his father never wanted him. My sister, was mentally unstable. Neither of them survived the orphanages.

Finally, our beautiful Mother died of a broken heart, seven months after my brother died. We never lived a normal life. We had no chance of love or recognition. All my life, as a child in those dreadful homes I was told I was 'ugly', 'would end up a prostitute' and 'should never have been born'. It took me years of struggle to even realise I was a person. I never knew what I was. I worried all my life for my brother, sister and my beautiful mother. I often wonder why we had to have such a dreadful life. It is only recently I have gained enough confidence to believe I am a decent person and as good as everyone else. ...we really never knew what we were.

In those dreadful homes, we weren't people, just numbers. It is unbelievable that these dreadful people were put in charge of children to look after. All they got was abuse - mental and physical and sexual. A lot of children were sexually abused. Most find it hard to trust or to believe in these people; chosen to lead them.

Because of my horrific childhood, I went on to be an exceptionally good mother. I now have three wonderful sons, who are all strong minded, well mannered, and hard-working young men. Two are builders, and one is in a good school. I love them dearly and they appreciate me.

I am divorced, and I am now gaining self worth. I cannot understand how the government allowed those cruel people to look after us in those so-called homes.

All we want and need from this, is recognition. Please allow us this.
We are human beings and deserved to be treated as such.

Yours Sincerely

Pippa Corbett