COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Children in institutional care

THURSDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2003

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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 13 November 2003

Members: Senator Hutchins *(Chair)*, Senator Knowles *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Humphries, Lees, McLucas and Moore

Substitute members: Senator Murray for Senator Lees

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bishop, Carr, Chapman, Coonan, Crossin, Denman, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Harradine, Harris, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Payne, Tierney, Watson and Webber

Senators in attendance: Senators Hutchins, Humphries, McLucas, Moore, Murray and Tchen

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

(a) in relation to any government or non-government institutions, and fostering practices, established or licensed under relevant legislation to provide care and/or education for children:

(i) whether any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in these institutions or places,

(ii) whether any serious breach of any relevant statutory obligation occurred at any time when children were in care or under protection, and

(iii) an estimate of the scale of any unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children in such institutions or places;

(b) the extent and impact of the long-term social and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect on individuals, families and Australian society as a whole, and the adequacy of existing remedies and support mechanisms;

(c) the nature and cause of major changes to professional practices employed in the administration and delivery of care compared with past practice;

(d) whether there is a need for a formal acknowledgement by Australian governments of the human anguish arising from any abuse and neglect suffered by children while in care;

(e) in cases where unsafe, improper or unlawful care or treatment of children has occurred, what measures of reparation are required;

(f) whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those who wish to pursue claims against perpetrators of abuse previously involved in the care of children; and

(g) the need for public, social and legal policy to be reviewed to ensure an effective and responsive framework to deal with child abuse matters in relation to:

(i) any systemic factors contributing to the occurrences of abuse and/or neglect,

(ii) any failure to detect or prevent these occurrences in government and non-government institutions and fostering practices, and reporting mechanisms

(iii) any necessary changes required in current policies, practices and reporting mechanisms

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to direct its inquiries primarily to those affected children who were not covered by the 2001 report *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, inquiring into child migrants, and the 1997 report, *Bringing them Home*, inquiring into Aboriginal children.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is not to consider particular cases under the current adjudication of a court, tribunal or administrative body.

In undertaking this reference, the committee is to make witnesses and those who provide submissions aware of the scope of the inquiry, namely:

(a) explain the respective responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states and territories in relation to child protection matters; and

(b) explain the scope of the committee's powers to make recommendations binding upon other jurisdictions in relation to the matters contained in these terms of reference.

WITNESSES

BRINDAL, Mr Mark Kennion, MLA, Member for Unley, House of Assembly, Parliament of South Australia 39

CORBETT, Ms Phillipa Miriam, (Private capacity) 1

LANGHAM, Mr Terence Gregory, (Private capacity) 11

WHITMAN, Mrs Monica Denise, Goodwood Orphanage 31

WOODS, Mr Brian Alfred, (Private capacity) 19

WOODS, Mrs Helen Patricia, (Private capacity) 19

Committee met at 2.43 p.m.

CORBETT, Ms Phillipa Miriam, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing and welcome everyone who is present today. The Senate Community Affairs References Committee is inquiring into children in institutional care. This inquiry addresses a very important issue which affects the lives of many Australians.

The committee has received hundreds of individual submissions, both in public and confidentially. These submissions have provided the stories of many people who have spent time in a range of religious, government and non-government institutions across Australia over many decades. The committee is grateful to these people for sharing their life stories with us.

I remind everybody appearing today that their comments are on the public record. Caution should be exercised in your comments so that individuals are not identified and cases before courts are not referred to. I indicate that local print and electronic media coverage may be within the room during the day. If anyone has any problems or concerns with that, please see the committee secretariat to indicate your problems.

I welcome Ms Pippa Corbett. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses in evidence. Is that correct?

Ms Corbett—Yes.

CHAIR—The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms Corbett—Do you want to hear about my life?

CHAIR—Whatever you would like to say. It is your turn.

Ms Corbett—I was put into an orphanage when I was eight. I had a younger sister, who was five, and a brother who was two months old. My father was an alcoholic, and he opened the front door and threw me, my sister, my brother and my mother into the street. He threw us all out. After years of abuse, my mother could not have taken any more anyway. She would have been dead. He used to bash me up as well.

We walked from Jannali to Central with our mother in the middle of the night and sat in the park for 36 hours. The police came along. Then the Salvation Army came along, took us off our mother and put us into a home. We went to a home called Scarba House at Wellington Street, Bondi. It was an absolutely dreadful, brutal place. We were bashed all the time. The food was terrible, and you would not give it to a dog. I was often made to eat food off the ground, because my sister was sick. She caught hepatitis in that home, and I used to eat it for her off the ground so she would not get bashed.

I got severely bashed all the time. For months on end a woman who we called Nelly used to come in at night, pull the bedclothes down and bash me across the back of the leg with a switch. I have had a disabled leg all my life. I used to work, but have been unable to for the last four years because of the pain. After four operations, I cannot get rid of the pain. This woman was a horrible, brutal person.

Lots of other horrible things happened to us in there as well. My brother was two months old when he went in there. He was put behind glass and we were not allowed to touch him. He was hardly ever picked up. He committed suicide at 18 years of age.

Senator MOORE—Ms Corbett, what made you come and talk to us?

Ms Corbett—I came to talk to you, because I cannot understand how those dreadful people were allowed to look after children. Why were they allowed to treat us like that? They told us we were dogs, we were ugly, we belonged in the gutter and we should never have been born. We had five years of this in different orphanages. The Catholics were just as bad. We had no recognition from anybody. We did not know what we were. We did not know whether we were people or what we were. We thought we were nothing. I was 35 years old before I could look in a mirror and realise that I was a human being. I have only gained confidence over the last few years because I have been going to a counsellor. I have three wonderful, beautiful supportive sons, who I have made sure turned out well and who are outstanding citizens. Two are builders and one is in Waverley College. They are outstanding sons who, because of my dreadful childhood, I made sure survived. I have worked my guts out for them. I am divorced. Their father was not much support, but he is still their father.

I cannot understand why these people were allowed to be put in charge of us in the first place. Nobody screened them. Year after year we were raped. I was raped by nuns in another orphanage—St Joseph's at Lane Cove—when I was 10 years old. I was held down by the mother superior and another nun and bashed. I was given food that was not fit for a dog and made to eat it off the ground.

Why would they treat people like this? Why were they allowed to treat us like that; innocent children? I was the best behaved kid you could ever get. I never said boo to anybody, because I was so scared for my brother and sister; to keep them alive. I would have done anything—taken any abuse—for them to be safe. Do you see what I mean?

We were in and out of these places—when our mother could finally get us out—but in those days there was nowhere for women to go. My mother was a beautiful woman. She was a very intelligent South Australian woman. Unfortunately for me, because I had a dreadful father, the whole family suffered and now they are all dead. My mother committed suicide six months after my brother died. She blamed herself. My sister is autistic and has not spoken to me for years. She cannot face the orphanages. She keeps to herself and that is it. It is very sad. She does not even speak to her own children.

As far as I am concerned, I have no family directly because of what happened to us back then. I do not know why they were allowed to treat us like that. Why? We want recognition as human beings, and I think we should get an apology from someone. That is why I am here today.

CHAIR—Thank you. Are there any support measures that you can consider might be helpful to care leavers to help them, in some way, come to terms with negative experiences in care?

Ms Corbett—CLAN is a wonderful organisation. The people in that organisation have all been in care, and they are doing all they can. They have recently opened an office in Bankstown in Sydney, but I think they need more support. They would like to have offices all over Australia, but do not have the support they need for that. I think ASCA are wonderful as well.

They used to call us kids who were in homes 'homies'. I am quite a good example. I have never done anything wrong in my life. I have worked hard, but a lot of my friends who were in homes have not turned out as well as I have. I was the favourite in the family, so I have turned out well, but I fought like hell because I had a younger sister and brother. I am unusual. They usually blame everybody. The men, particularly, are extremely angry and cannot relate to other people. A lot of them live on their own, which is very sad, because they were never given any affection as children.

They need support. I think counselling would be extremely good for most homies or foster care children. If you could get some sort of counselling for them and encourage them to have more confidence in themselves—because they all lack confidence—that would be good. That is what is missing, because they were not given any affection. They had no motherly bonding or anything, so they really do not think much of themselves at all. They need support in that way, to make them realise that they should fit into society better than most of them do. That worries me about a lot of them. They do not seem to be able to fit in anywhere. A lot of them die young too. I think the women cope a lot better than the men, for some reason.

There is not enough real support. When I tell people that my leg was fractured in an orphanage and I was bashed for months, they look at me like I have five heads. They do not know what I am talking about. They say, 'This is Australia; that could not happen.' I tell them, 'I am lucky. Some kids committed suicide when they were very young. I have seen it.' They do not believe these things could have happened, and that is the problem. We need people to understand and recognise what happened to us.

We have our own children, and we need to relate better to our children. I relate well to my sons, because I made sure I did. However, with most people I know in my situation, their children follow the same pattern as them, which is very sad. That is what you should avoid.

CHAIR—Have you ever had an opportunity to confront your abusers at all?

Ms Corbett—I am an enrolled nurse, and I used to work until four years ago. I was sent to North Sydney Nuns' Home 25 years ago, when my second son was born—he was a few months old—and I saw two of the nuns that raped me at St Joseph's, Lane Cove when I was 10. As I was going off in the morning one of them asked me to wash her, down there. I said, 'No, you dirty old bitch, I'm not washing you anywhere.' Wouldn't you? I mean, I do not like queers. Would you? As I was going out in the morning, Sister Oliver and the mother superior stood on the railing and said, 'Pippa Corbett, you're still the same as you were before,' and I nearly collapsed. I was in such shock, all I could do was grab my baby and get out of there. I took him to work for the night. In those days there were no nurses, and I had no family to mind him, so I used to take him to work with me.

They are the only two I have ever seen, and that was years ago. I had two young boys to look after, I used to look after my sister's kids and I was flat out working. I did not have time. In those days I thought, 'Who's going to believe me?' No-one would believe me. That is the problem. Now, people are starting to believe us. Before, however, they all thought we were idiots. It could not happen.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You have obviously made a commitment, because of your experience, to raise your family in very different circumstances.

Ms Corbett—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The committee has had experience of other witnesses, some of whom have clearly made that kind of commitment, to make sure that the cycle that might have led to their abuse is not continued into the next generation. Do you think that is a typical experience, though? I do not know how many people you still know who went through the homes that you went through, but do you think that is typical of people's reaction or do they tend to fall apart more typically and not be able to break the cycle of abuse and despair that has put them in that position?

Ms Corbett—As I said before, I am like one in 100. With most of them, if they have been abused, sometimes they abuse their own children. They do not break the cycle. That is the tragedy, and they need education and counselling to get them out of that cycle, because they still do not think that they are any good because of what happened to them when they were kids. They do not have any confidence. How can they, when they were told they were nothing, bashed, abused and raped? How can they have any confidence in themselves to be good parents to their own children, when they were brought up like dogs themselves? I think counselling is drastically necessary for them.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Those sorts of people are more likely to be the product of that experience?

Ms Corbett—Most definitely.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you keep in contact with people who went through any of the homes that you went through, or people with other sorts of experiences like that?

Ms Corbett—I know a few—three or four—but not particularly. I just happened to bang into them in later life. I was too busy bringing up a sister and a brother, at the age of eight, and then three sons. I am divorced, and my husband was not much support, so I had no family to help bring them up. They have all turned out exceptionally well, except my sister's middle daughter who, unfortunately, is severely schizophrenic. Her son and her daughter are outstanding examples. My sister and brother were duxes of the school, and I am not stupid. We were all educated, but I am different. I am not bragging about myself, but most of them do not turn out as well as me.

Fortunately, even though my father's side of the family from Sydney were all alcoholics—I have never met any of them—my mother's side of the family from South Australia were doctors, nurses and an architect. My cousin is a QC. I come from a better line from South Australia, so I

am fortunate I have those genes. Do you see what I am saying? With a lot of the people that I knew in the orphanages, both parents did not come from good lines usually. I think they were all abused. It is a cycle.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you think that either of your parents might have experienced or suffered from mental illness?

Ms Corbett—My father was a severe alcoholic and a psychopath. He had guns and everything. He was insanely jealous of my mother, and had the same problem with his first wife. He was bad. He threw us out. That is what started it. I would not say he had a mental illness. It was jealousy more than anything.

Senator McLUCAS—I think you are saying that we need greater public understanding of what happened.

Ms Corbett—We do.

Senator McLUCAS—That was certainly a recommendation of the *Bringing them Home* report; that we need to have factual information placed before the community so that we more broadly understand the reality of what occurred. I am not saying I do not agree with that, but we have also had evidence from people saying that it is very confronting for people who are care leavers. It is so awful that they do not want to confront it. Do you have views about it? How do we put it in front of the community's mind so that we do it carefully and so that we do not trigger bad events for those people who are not ready to confront what happened?

Ms Corbett—They need more counselling sessions, to help them realise that they have problems. I have been going to counselling for about two years, because my oldest son said to me, 'Mum, how can we be happy if you're not?' and it sunk in at last. If they have good counsellors to help them come to terms with their own lives, they are going to be able to mix with other people and help themselves and their own children. Unless they think something of themselves, how can they look after anybody else?

Senator McLUCAS—The understanding that has to be held by the community is more broad than just those people who are care leavers. It is everyone in the community. Is that your recommendation; that we all need to understand the truth?

Ms Corbett—Everybody should understand. We were innocent children, good children. We were not monsters. We did exactly as we were told. If we were told to do something, we did it. We were really well behaved, good little children, put in that horrible abusive state through no fault of our own. We were taken off our parents, with no affection from anyone. How would you know what or who you are? When you are told every day of your life, 'You shouldn't have been born; you will end up a prostitute; you're ugly; look at you, you ugly thing; you look like your father; what are you doing here?' how are you supposed to relate to other people?

Counselling is the only way they are going to get out of it, and they are going to have to come to terms with it. I know it is a very subtle issue, but I think if enough people cared and you had the right counsellors you would break through.

Senator McLUCAS—We have also had that advice—the right counsellors. There are some counsellors who seem to be far more talented than others in working with care leavers.

Ms Corbett—Yes. Malcolm Robinson is a shining example.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Sustained counselling, we are told, is also necessary.

Ms Corbett—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—Thank you for sharing your story.

Senator MURRAY—One of the characteristics of people who have been through homes is not just a sense of personal isolation resulting from their experiences but a consequential isolation. In other words, they keep themselves apart and alone from other people. As a consequence, some of the evidence before us—when we have tested it or when it is mentioned—seemed to indicate that people out of these homes do not stay in touch with each other, and there is no natural network. It almost has to be created. There was not a CLAN before, for instance.

Ms Corbett—No, definitely not.

Senator MURRAY—It is a recent thing. The Child Migrants Trust was created by an English woman who had not been in homes. If you were able to persuade the policy makers in the government to put in the money and the services that need to be provided, how do you think you can reach the community? It is a very large community. How can you reach them? How can you make sure that people who need help will get helped?

Ms Corbett—Maybe through the media. Maybe put it on TV that there are support groups for them, so that they can see that. CLAN is a wonderful organisation. They are doing all they can to help. They should be in every state, with more advertising so that people know they exist. I have spoken to people here today. They all picked up brochures and they are all going to join. They did not even know it was there. If you had an organisation like CLAN, with government support—maybe an office in each state so that they could have counselling through them or something like that—then those people would know about it. They would have to be told where to go.

Senator MURRAY—You have spoken with some confidence about what has happened to others, but are you in contact with lots of homies and wardies?

Ms Corbett—Not a lot, no. We meet in Sydney three times a year and have a picnic. I only know about 20 or 30.

Senator MURRAY—Yet you went to three institutions?

Ms Corbett—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—With a couple of hundred kids in each?

Ms Corbett—Yes, but we were moved all over Australia. My father was violent too. When my mother managed to get us out of the homes, he would knock on the door with a double-barrel shotgun and we would be over the back fence. He was a lunatic.

Senator MURRAY—Turning to your dad, is he still alive?

Ms Corbett—No. He died in the alcoholics' hospital, Lidcombe Hospital.

Senator MURRAY—Do you know what set him off? Was he a generational creation?

Ms Corbett—No, he was not abused. His father was an alcoholic and his two brothers were alcoholics, but his mother was a beautiful woman from Paris—a gorgeous woman. He was by no means dumb. He was a tailor and a very well dressed man, but he was obsessed with my mother. I think that is what it was. They all drank, except one of them, but he was definitely not abused. His mother was very protective of the whole family. She died young protecting her sons. I do not think he was the subject of physical abuse, but the alcohol went through the whole family. I never met his father or his brothers anyway, so I cannot really comment on that. I briefly knew the grandmother. We did not have much contact with our relatives, you see.

Senator MURRAY—I notice you mention Goodwood as an awful children's home. This committee had a look at child migrants, and Goodwood was heavily mentioned then for being an abominable place.

Ms Corbett—It was shocking. I would say that most of the kids there would have been abused, a lot sexually.

Senator MURRAY—When you say 'sexual abuse', by nuns or—

Ms Corbett—Yes, nuns.

Senator MURRAY—by males who visited there?

Ms Corbett—I would say the nuns. At St Joseph's, Lane Cove in Sydney, the priest was notorious. He had about six daughters working in the kitchen. God knows where they came from, but he was after every girl in the place. The mother superior was a lesbian, and she had a girlfriend. They were openly displaying affection. They always had their arms around the girls.

Senator MURRAY—We have had evidence that, in the same institution, you would have children who are treated differently. Some children would not be bashed or beaten as much as others.

Ms Corbett—Some were favoured, yes.

Senator MURRAY—Some would attract sexual attention and others would not, so some got out of the institution better than others did. Is that your experience? Can you confirm that some experienced a far worse time than others did in the same institution at the same time?

Ms Corbett—There were a few Aboriginal kids in the Goodwood home, and they got treated better than us. They used to get taken out at Christmas, and I was always left there. They always seemed to get fostered out. For some reason, they were treated better than us. My sister was a beautiful little girl. She had long white hair and was gorgeous. She was always treated better because she was so good looking. I was always the plain one. In our case, I was always treated a lot worse than she was.

Senator MURRAY—What have been the main effects of that experience on you? In a sense—you are talking to us—it has made you a very strong person. You are telling us it made you determined to do things with your life and for your children, which sounds to me as if you gave them a lot as a result. That is the plus side. What is the minus side?

Ms Corbett—The minus side is that I have friends, but I have never really trusted anybody in my life. When you are abused, beaten and treated so badly as a child, you cannot trust anyone.

Senator MURRAY—Did that affect your relationship with your husband?

Ms Corbett—He was a cold man anyway. I do not have any problems with men, but he was outstandingly cold and spoilt rotten. He did not believe a word I said about the orphanages. He was not a very good husband. I do not really have any problems relating to men, but with him I did.

Senator MURRAY—What about your education?

Ms Corbett—I am an enrolled nurse. I did my intermediate. That was all I could do, because you did not get educated in those days. I was lucky to get that. A lot of people I know from the homes cannot read or write, even today. I have met about half a dozen that cannot read or write.

Senator MURRAY—What about physical health?

Ms Corbett—My physical health has always been good, except for my left leg. That was fractured in the orphanage at Scarba. I have put up with the pain and worked all my life with it. I still have pain. I cannot get rid of it. I had four operations. The second and third of those failed. Now I have a steel knee, but I cannot get rid of the pain.

Senator MURRAY—It may be just a coincidence, but I have noticed personally that many of the witnesses who come to us from institutions are smaller than the average Australian. They are not as physically strong, they are not as tall and so on. You would know far more than I would out of the Australian institutions. Do you think that is true? Is that an effect of bad nutrition and bad conditions or is that just a coincidence?

Ms Corbett—I think it is true. The nutrition was appalling. At Goodwood, you would not even give the food to a dog. Boiled hogget, you had weevils in the food, and you were starving half the time. I tend to give my children really good food. I used to go to Flemington Market and bring them boxes of fruit, and I made sure they had good food. I had never tasted butter or bananas until I was 14. We never had any decent food. We had an orange once a week, lumpy porridge, lumpy powdered milk with bread in it and hogget and swedes for tea. That is all you had. It was horrible. You could not eat it.

Senator MURRAY—You had plenty of hard, physical work.

Ms Corbett—Shocking!

Senator MURRAY—You did not have the sustenance to go with it.

Ms Corbett—No. At Goodwood, they used to get me out of bed at 4.30 in the morning and make me go upstairs and clean the toilets out with two little buckets, and I had hardly any clothes. My sister's clothes were pinched and I gave her mine. I had no underwear for a year. All I had was one of those little tops with a skirt on the bottom. I had no shoes. I used to make sure my sister was dressed. We used to clean those upstairs toilets out five days a week. I used to carry my sister's bucket, because she couldn't. She was always sick. She had hepatitis from the age of five, and it was never treated. When she had her first baby, they told her she had it. She has never been well since. They used to make me scrub those toilets out at the crack of dawn every day, winter or summer, with heavy buckets of water. It was terrible.

Senator MURRAY—One of the things we are looking at is what are the long-term social and economic costs and consequences of treating a child badly. Whilst it is tragic for the people, if it ends at their lives at least it does not carry on, but of course there is that generational carry on. In your case, you are very proud of your sons and you have described them very well. What have been the effects on them? They are now adults. What are the effects of your experience on them, do you think?

Ms Corbett—They adore me, because I have done so much for them. I even gave them the family home after the divorce. They are builders. One goes to a good school. I have done everything for them, much more than the average homie, believe me. They adore me, and they are really sad—especially my oldest son—about what happened to me. I am on a pedestal, and they cannot believe that happened to such a good mother, and it really hurts them.

Senator MURRAY—You are saying to me, if I understand you correctly, that you have completely broken the cycle. There are no psychological or mental health or any other effects on your children from your experience.

Ms Corbett—I made sure there weren't, don't worry. For 24 hours a day I made sure my sons were completely stable.

Senator MURRAY—I ask you these questions not to be intrusive—

Ms Corbett—Yes, that is all right.

Senator MURRAY—but because other people have said it has affected their kids, and the kids end up needing counselling and so on.

Ms Corbett—Most children from my situation do need counselling. I am a good example, but in every other home that I have heard of—beside myself, Leonie and a few others—the children have not turned out as well as mine. I was known as the 'Robin Hood' in homes, and I fought like hell. I would have killed them if they had touched my sister and brother.

Senator MURRAY—We can only protect you with what you say, not with what you do, so do not go and kill anyone.

Ms Corbett—Don't worry. If you had given me a machine gun, I would have mowed the bastards down. It is too good for them.

Senator MOORE—How did you raise your experiences with your boys? You cared for them, and you are very proud of them, but how did you tell them about what happened to you?

Ms Corbett—Slowly. I did not tell them a great deal. I held my brother's and my mother's suicides from them as long as I could. They only found out about two years ago. It came out when I joined CLAN, because I told them I was involved in trying to get us recognised as human beings and I was going to these meetings and things, but I did not bring it into their lives. I did not see any reason for them to know that their mother was treated like an animal. I wanted them to have as good lives as possible and, because of my brother's suicide, I swore to God that they would turn out well.

I did not want to tell them that he had died so tragically. By the way, he was a good kid. He was dux at school. He just went off and did it one day and that was the end of him. We heard it on the radio from John Laws, three days later. My mother collapsed.

Senator MURRAY—What age?

Ms Corbett—Aged 18. He had no problems, he did not even smoke; he was a good kid—short hair, everything—a beautiful kid. Not like these tattooed idiots today. He was a beautiful kid. It was just the fact that he was treated so badly as a child and put in an orphanage at two months old and never touched. He was given one bottle a day, propped up, with no affection. I was not allowed to get him. I used to say, "Give me my brother," all the time. That is definitely why he died, because he was just so unhappy all his life.

Senator MURRAY—Have your boys read the statement that you have given us?

Ms Corbett—Not yet, no. I will give it to them later on. My youngest one is just doing his HSC. He is at a good school so I will let him get over that and maybe next year I will show him.

CHAIR—No further questions? Thank you very much, Ms Corbett.

Ms Corbett—Thank you very much.

[3.14 p.m.]

LANGHAM, Mr Terence Gregory, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Langham. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. Is that correct?

Mr Langham—Yes.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make an opening presentation to be followed by questions from the committee. We have your statement before us and we have had an opportunity to read it so if you would like to just draw on that.

Mr Langham—First of all, in one way I do not wish to be here. That part of my life I would rather just leave alone. I have dealt with it to some degree, but on the other side of it, I have a responsibility to do what I can—and I think you do as well. Initially in 1997, when I started researching my own past, it was on the *7.30 Report* and it made me think. They talked about one lot of religious institutions and it was in the papers so much, but there were all these other religious institutions that were never thought of. I was in one of the other ones. That is what pushed me along, because it had happened in many areas of society rather than just a few. It pushed me along to come here.

The group I am with is CLAN. As much as I like to move on with life and do not deal with this any more, there is still something inbuilt, within myself, to do what I can. I am looking back here today, to look for solutions of what can be done. We need to avoid the mistakes of the past. I would like to see appropriate legislation in place to develop policies and procedures of how to resolve these issues and to, as I say, prevent the mistakes that have happened in the past. I think there should be facilities provided for people who have been in care, and help for how they can deal with it and how their children or families can deal with it as well.

You have benefits in that—social benefits of looking after those people and their families; there are economic benefits in the sense that the children are going to grow up and it is not going to cost the community more. In today's society we are looking at social benefits, we are looking at economic benefits and you can rationalise it out on both sides. Social benefits are more, but we do have to look at how we are going to finance all these things. In the long term, it is going to be far more economical and better to be dealing with people and looking after people who have been in care.

I am probably one of the lucky ones. I have survived. I have a family. I have not been in prison. I am not an alcoholic. I have strong principles in life which I stick to. I guess that is from realising what has happened in the past; that it should not happen. I have taken on representative roles in the workplace and, because I have stuck to those principles, it has cost me my job in the long run—but I have no regrets about that.

I was in two institutional care places: one was in Mungindi in northern New South Wales. It was not a very nice place. My two sisters were with me. The only way I can describe place, after all these years, is by the word 'cruelty'. In the last two years I had thought of another word, but I cannot remember it. I found it in a book recently, when I was doing some studies. It meant someone who wants to inflict pain on somebody. I look back at those two people who actually ran the place—a male and a female—and the way they carried on. To me and what I was afflicted with—a sort of sexual degradation was how I looked at it—and you lived in fear all the time you were in that place. Today I do not know where those people are. About three or four years later, when I was living with some other people--they were in the downstairs flat—an incident came up where they blamed me for something that I was totally innocent of, but I managed to survive that by someone else sticking up for me. But their mentality was still in that sort of vein or mode of cruelty, or whatever it was they had.

The second home was at the back of Parramatta at Pymble Hill. The people there were reasonable, as such. The male was physically arrogant and so forth and you always got a slap on the side of the head. I think that is why I have always had a hearing problem in one side of the head. But there was sexual assault on me that took place there by a fellow resident. I do not know who he was. He was a lot older. But it happened and it was 32 years later, in 1997, when I came out in the open. I never had spoken to anyone else before that. I have tried to deal with it the best I can.

Surviving in those places: you develop a survival mechanism. You be quiet, you do not say anything. You make yourself a small target. You learn to be quiet and you carry that into adulthood. You become withdrawn. It is a survival mechanism. Basically, for myself, I developed an inferiority complex because I did not know much. I was not confident at school. I was not confident socially. It took many years for me to get over that. I suppose sometimes it still comes out because I lived in constant fear.

I suppose the long-term effect was that, as an adult, you used some of those survival mechanisms. I have talked about the workplace, where you can have problems with people or managers, or whatever the case may be. So you will go back to that survival mechanism; not saying much; not getting involved. You lose social skills and you do not capitalise on what you should have. You have restrictions on how you relate to people. Over the years I moved on from there. I made a decision in my mid-twenties, when I was working, where I thought, 'If I am going to do something I will do it well.'

Prior to that I lived with my father. I left those institutions and care around my 13th year and I went to live with my father. Unfortunately it was not a very pleasant experience. He was a very hard man. I had a step-mother. They were not married. She was not the most pleasant of people. He did not understand, when we complained to him about what she was like and so forth. At that age you just go back to the same mentality you had as a child. Being in care, you just be quiet and survive the best you can—which I have.. I grew up with my father from 13 years and I served my apprenticeship with him, but I ended up at the age of 26 where I could not get on with him. I went backwards and forwards to try and work with him but he was just too hard so I just went on my own back.

To this day, I have seen him once, I think, in 20 years or 23 years. I do not regret that. You regret it in the sense that you do not have parents. Myself and my two sisters have always looked

at it that we did not have a childhood at all. You have to move on, you have to live life. There are always children worse off, people worse off. You know that, but it is all relative. I suppose in my mid-twenties was when I made a decision that I was going to be a good tradesman at whatever I was doing. I took the decision to work. I would not say yes to anyone any more. I was going to run my own race. I was not going to be told what to do.

So from that point I went into self-employment. I got married. I have two children. I am still married. My children are fine. But I remember watching them grow up. You watch them grow up when they are five and six and 11 and 12, 13 and you think where you were at the time. You think of the unfairness of it all. Your children are running around having a good time—and so they should—but you did not have that. My sisters did not have it either. But they are grown up and they are fine. It does impact on how you bring them up. You are always conscious of how you treat them. You do go crook on them—and a couple of times I have seen them quite fearful of me—and I think, "What in the hell is going on?" But I have withdrawn back and tried not to make the same mistakes as who I was brought up, or how my father brought me up, to some extent.

But they have survived well. They are going well, but I still think there is some impact on them as well. They get a bit hesitant at things and maybe they are a bit wary of society. Even with my daughter, she is terrific, but she still gets a bit sceptical of me and how I react at times, if I am a bit fearful or something, but mostly we have a good relationship. There is that hesitancy, you can just see it there. But, overall, I think she is doing all right.

I have tried to deal with the past. I went back to Sydney. I got some counselling. It took 20 visits. I got funding from the organisation I was at and they were very helpful. I did not go for compensation. I could not. I had a barrister willing to do a pro bono case for me at the time. But I took the attitude that if these people were quite willing to support me I did not want to discourage them from supporting people in the future. That has paid off in the sense that, from that period,. I think they put in policies and procedures to follow it through. I have gained in that sense, by the track I took to deal with it. I was not interested in compensation.

When I went to counselling, I even took my wife there at one stage and I even took my children. I have not spoken to them much about it. My wife has been very supportive, but she had a nice, steady, middle of the road upbringing and I do not think she realises it at times, but I have no complaints from her. As I said, she has been supportive.

Overall, I am surviving life. I will keep supporting this particular group but, on the other hand, I want to do something else. There are other things I like to do in life. But it is one issue I do not think the community can ignore. We need to look at it productively. If there is criticism out there, we have to deal with the criticism and we have to find solutions. If we do not deal with it properly now, if we do not put resources into it, it is just going to compound later on. We are always going to have children in some form of care unfortunately, just because of the type of society that we are, and if they are going to be in care they should be in care where they do not get the negative impacts that a lot of other people in care have had. I have been to school and I went into an apprenticeship and so forth. In the last few years I have managed to go to university part time. I have not quite finished but I am nearly there.

I have written virtually what I have said today. I do not mind tabling that. I have learnt, with a bit of education, that there are ways of dealing with things, that you can deal with them. People say that in the 1920s or the 1950s, people didn't know any better. They did know. We have been making so many improvements, all the way along. People knew how to improve things, but they ignored it. They ignored the policies and procedures or they refused to administer things properly and I do not think there are excuses for what has happened in the past. We should not let it happen again in the future. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Langham. We would like to see a copy of that, if you would make it available to the secretary.

Mr Langham—Yes.

CHAIR—Where were you born?

Mr Langham—Katoomba.

CHAIR—When you went to your father, where was he living? Was he in New South Wales?

Mr Langham—I went to live with my father at Christmas 1966 and I was turning 13 in March 1967, so from the age of approximately five until I was nearly 13, I was in care. I was in two lots of children's homes and then lived with some different people.

CHAIR—And you live here in South Australia now. How long have you lived here?

Mr Langham—I moved over here in 1989. My wife is from South Australia. We have brought our children up here. They were born in Sydney.

CHAIR—You said you had to go back to Sydney for counselling.

Mr Langham—No.

CHAIR—I thought that is what you said: you went back to Sydney for counselling.

Mr Langham—I did go back to Sydney. The *7.30 Report* came up, following which I dealt with ARC, Aftercare Resource Centre, in Sydney, based at Parramatta. Through that association—I think it is partly with the New South Wales government—I went to counselling in Adelaide through Relationships Australia, and I got funding to go back to Sydney and visit the place I was actually a resident of at Pendle Hill.

CHAIR—Why I asked that, Mr Langham, is because the submissions we have received are from people throughout the country, but where they were in care was somewhere entirely different, and one of the difficulties, I understand, is that you were brought up in New South Wales, you went to these institutions in New South Wales, so you would not be able to receive counselling here in Adelaide because the problem occurred in New South Wales.

Mr Langham—Yes, I got counselling here.

CHAIR—That's not a problem?

Mr Langham—No, it has worked out quite well.

CHAIR—You can receive counselling here in Adelaide if you want it?

Mr Langham—Yes.

CHAIR—And you don't have to pay for it?

Mr Langham—No. I came to an agreement with the people who funded that, that they would pay an industry standard. I think it was 20 visits.

CHAIR—With people in New South Wales?

Mr Langham—Yes. They paid for it. Initially I put a submission in. I said I would like the industry standard, which is 20 counselling sessions, and I asked for air fares to Sydney, accommodation and just a few costs. I wanted to revisit the place where I was as a child. That went through their processes and was approved, and that is what I did.

Senator MURRAY—You have put that in a matter of fact way, but it must be quite hard to find out what you can do and what you can get access to. You would have had to do a fair bit of asking around, wouldn't you?

Mr Langham—I was self-employed for 10 years or so and have the commonsense, practical, tradesman's approach of just methodically going through things. As a workplace representative, I have been doing much the same. Because I have that approach I was able to do it step by step and achieve it like that. Doing it without that approach would make it far more difficult.

Senator MURRAY—Because it wouldn't be easy to find out, would it, that you could get air fares, that you could get accommodation?

Mr Langham—No, it is not. I knew that there was bureaucracy to deal with and, if you are going to deal with bureaucracy, you put yourself in their shoes. They have to justify paying that money out, so I went through that step-by-step process of putting a submission in and itemising what I wanted the money for, how I was going to spend it, when I needed it and so forth.

Senator MURRAY—You have said to us that you finally decided to get a grip on all this and to do something about it in 1997.

Mr Langham—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—You were then 43 and you are now 49.

Mr Langham—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—Up to 43, had you pushed it aside or was it bottled up in you? What was happening in those couple of decades between you leaving care and deciding to tackle the issue?

Mr Langham—It was just inside me. I was getting on with life. It had never gone away. As a young person I was living with my father, dealing with his issues, living in fear of him and trying to finish an apprenticeship. Then I was trying to make my own mark as a working person, trying to succeed in that. Then I got married and so forth and had children. You had something to keep you occupied. You just kept going, doing all those things, so there was not a point where I could just sit back and think, 'What am I doing in life and where am I going?' and so forth, which is when it can all flare up. My mind was always occupied in doing something, so in that sense there was no need for it to surface.

Why it surfaced at that particular time was because it was on TV, and the premises were shown. I was physically there. You are hearing all these sorts of stories from, mainly, the Catholic institutions at the time, but this was one where I actually was. You hear of someone else, but you do not hear about yourself, and so it hit me hard: 'Well, hang on, what happened was completely wrong and it shouldn't continue like that in the future.'

Senator MURRAY—The evidence seems to indicate that the experience is that it is when people get older and become more reflective that the stuff finally comes out, and it's very confronting and they need to deal with it, because you cannot put it back in again. Your quote here is striking. You say:

Issues do not go away. It's like they're in a box and the box is open again and you have to deal with the contents again.

Once that box is opened, you can't close it, can you?

Mr Langham—No, you cannot. It is right that you can put the lid down a little bit but it keeps coming back up. They say in counselling and when you read books, 'Right, it's an issue in life. You've got all these issues and you've got all these boxes. Just bring them out when you need them and deal with them, but then put them back, because you've got to run your family, you've got to run your work. You can't think of it 24 hours a day.' But the box is still there.

Senator MURRAY—And it is still open.

Mr Langham—It is still open. As much as I thought I had dealt with it and would be able to handle it sufficiently well, I came here to give a rational explanation for it and I cannot control my emotions as much as I would like to.

Senator MURRAY—You have described the effects on you, on your children and on your relationships with your children and so on, and we have an interest in the generational continuation of these things because that is an issue for the committee. In relation to your father and his behaviour and so on, have you any understanding or inkling that there was anything which set him off on a path which caused you so much grief?

Mr Langham—My father put us in care. He put us into care because my mother left.

Senator MURRAY—It was a broken home, essentially.

Mr Langham—Yes. My mother just disappeared. He did his best to look after us. He put us in one home and then from there I went to another one. He apparently paid for us to be put in there and he kept up the payments. Then when he had financial capability—and I think more because he had a female partner to share the parenting role—he got us out of those institutions and put us in as a so-called family unit. It was unfortunate that he was a very hard man and the family unit was not a very happy one. But his upbringing was very tough. It was during the Depression—'speckled fruit in London', as he said, on the streets. He was the oldest of four boys. He had to learn a verse out of the Bible before he got tea every night. He was the only one who went to war. Coming from all those experiences—his childhood and young adulthood and coming back from the war—maybe he just did not have the skills to handle being a parent as much as we would have liked.

Senator MURRAY—Did your father know what had happened to you? Did he ever find out what had happened to you?

Mr Langham—No, I have never discussed it with him.

Senator MURRAY—Is he still alive?

Mr Langham—Yes. In 1997 I went back to see my mother. My mother left when I was about five. I did not see her for 16 years. I still remember the day, at Broadway in Sydney, across Parramatta Road. We had a little bit of a relationship for the next six or seven years. It was very distant. You are an adult; you see her every Christmas or something. There was a small amount of politeness and so forth. I did not see her for another 16 years, until about 1997, and I approached her for answers, diplomatically, but she wouldn't come across. She was a woman of 78 or so then, and I did not want to push her. It is in the past. I accepted that I am not going to find the answers as to why she left. I have a reasonable idea: that my father was a very violent sort of person. She is very strong as well. She has got a colourful history.

Senator MURRAY—But your father would have had a reasonable expectation, would he, that he was in tough times; until he could get himself squared away, he put you in a place with good people who would look after you; it would be tough for you, but it would be fair, and at the end of it he would get you out?

Mr Langham—That is what he would have thought, that is right. In his mind he was doing the right thing as much as he could, and in the meantime he just worked seven days a week.

Senator MURRAY—When he has seen the programs that you mention, such as the one in 1997, has he never thought to say to you—

Mr Langham—I have spoken to him on the phone, but not about these issues, so I have no answers on that one. When he rings up or I speak to him, he is very self-righteous: he has been a great parent and so forth.

Senator MURRAY—I cannot put myself into his shoes, but if he had the expectation that we are discussing, it would surely be a great shock to find out that his son was abused and misused in that cruel fashion that you described.

Mr Langham—You would think it would, but he might be in the frame of mind of, 'Well, son, you've got to move on with life; you've got to deal with life. There are issues out there; there are problems out there. Life's not perfect.'

Senator MURRAY—Let me explain to you why I'm asking the questions this way, Mr Langham. One of the things that has come to us in evidence from witnesses and their submissions, including from people whom we are not going to be able to see, is the effects on their children. It means that not only do they need counselling to restore their own personal mental, psychological and emotional health but that their children quite often need it as well because of the knock-on consequences.

I am really asking you this question as to whether there are any back consequences, in other words, to parents who have put their children into institutions or in care, believing that they were doing the right thing perhaps or that that was the best thing for the child, and then discovering later that that was not so.

Mr Langham—I think people would be affected by that, but I cannot—

Senator MURRAY—But, from your own personal experience, you do not know whether your father has ever thought about it or worried about it? He has never raised it with you?

Mr Langham—No, he has not, mainly because we do not have much communication. I saw him for about 20 minutes 19 or 20 years ago. I think that was the last time I saw him, so there has not been an opportunity to discuss it or for him to reflect on it. He is 82 years of age. As he gets older, he might start reflecting a little bit on the past; how he brought his children up and so forth. It is difficult for him, because he put us there maybe thinking he was doing the right thing. If it came to the point of putting us there and the ramifications of us being his children and not being treated fairly, he might feel regrets about that. How much he feels about it I am not sure, but I think a lot of people would feel quite distraught knowing that.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Langham.

[3.46 p.m.]

WOODS, Mr Brian Alfred, (Private capacity)

WOODS, Mrs Helen Patricia, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Mr Brian Woods and Mrs Helen Woods. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses in evidence. Is that correct?

Mrs Woods—Yes.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr Woods—I first heard about the children who had been ill-treated on a TV show on the ABC, and then we went into it. I had not told my wife the full story. It was too hard. It was not how I was brought up. My parents did not want me. They handed me around and, as soon as an elderly couple wanted to adopt me, they tried to put me in Box Hill Boys Home in Victoria; they would not accept me. Somehow or other they got me into the Salvation Army in Kent Town. I was six years old, and I was 13 when I came out. The only reason I know that I got put there was because these people wanted to adopt me.

The Salvation Army put me on a bus, put a letter in my pocket and said, 'Give this to your mother when you get to Mildura.' I never found out what was in that letter. I have been in contact with my mother's sister—in fact, I was talking to her last night—and she could not explain what or why. I told her a few things that she did not believe.

In the boys' home, there were around 60 to 65 of us. The home was only allotted to carry 50. It was run by a major and a captain. Their families lived on the property at Kent Town. The boys had to do all the maintenance: bed making, cleaning floors and rubbing polish in by hand. There was no-one there to help us. I used to run away. I even got on the buses in North Terrace, which were Murray Valley buses. A couple of the drivers there apparently knew my father. My parents were not married. My father was 20 years older than my mother. They knew him, because he drove taxis. I said to the driver, 'He'll be there in Mildura,' but as soon as I got to Mildura I was put on the next bus back.

The major was waiting when I got back. I got a hell of a hiding, which always happened when you had done something wrong. You did not have to do much to get a hiding or a belting. You would get your pants pulled down in front of all the other boys and get the leather strap or a cane. There was no love and affection there. I hated it. I could not work out why I was there, because I knew I had a mother. I did not know why she did not want me, so I used to cause a lot of problems.

I have a photo of the Salvation Army home here. Upstairs on the balcony, on the left-hand side of the photo, you will see crevices in the wall. From the age of six or seven, I used to climb up that wall, get onto the roof and not come down until it was dark and I was frightened, and I would get a hiding. I would climb up trees, and I would get a hiding. It was only because I did not want to be there.

We never had school holidays; we had to work. When other kids had school holidays we had to work. I have heard different stories, but the food was edible. You went to school, no-one seemed to worry about you and you came home from school. When you came home from school, you had to sit down to a big old tub of potatoes—that was your job for the fortnight or month or whatever it was—and peel all the bloody potatoes, carrots and vegetables of all descriptions to feed the rest of the boys. You were on dormitory duty or you had to go up and take the quilts and things off the beds, fold them up and put them on the mantelpiece. If you were on yard duty, you would do that. We never had holidays.

I had one visitor in the seven years I was there, and that was my mother's younger sister. I did not know she was my auntie at the time. She came there twice in seven years. I never had a childhood at all. I cannot believe that the Salvation Army, which is supposed to be so good, could do this to anyone. We were the lucky ones at Kent Town. The boys at Mount Barker were not so lucky. They got it harder than we did, and we had it hard.

I have failed at education. I cannot spell. I get my wife to do it. If you give me a big word, I will find 50 words to get around it. I have explained that to you. I found that hard. That is why we have always tried self-employment, so that I do not get embarrassed. I have always kept it quiet. I have three children—two girls and a boy—and I have never told them. I always made sure that I never hit them. I might have growled at them and I might have said, 'You can't go out.'

I did hit one of my daughters once, when she was little. She was in the bath, and she forgot to take her singlet off when she sat down in the bath. We used to let them bath themselves, and I never had anything to do with that sort of thing. I was too frightened to touch any of my children. I cannot say the word that she used. It was not bad, just a common one that is used on TV. She said, 'I've left my singlet on,' and I happened to go past the door. I smacked her on the backside once. I think she is the only one I ever hit, because what was done to me kept coming back to me. I wanted to make sure I did not do it to them.

It is even harder now, because my daughters live in the same town. They can go shopping. They do not come around and visit us, and I do not know why. If we want to see the grand-kids, nine times out of 10 we have to go to see them; they do not come to us. I never got affection, because of this set-up with the Salvation Army, and when I had the kids I found it hard to hug them. I see them hugging their children, my grandchildren. I even find it hard to show love towards them, which is wrong, but that is because you are not brought up in a healthy environment in that respect. When love and affection are shown, you do not know how to return it. On the education side of it, as I said, I cannot spell, but I am not stupid. Woods run a business for one of the biggest transport companies around. I nutted it out and Helen put it on paper.

I do not know and I cannot work out how people could do what they did, not only to me but, at the time I was there, to around 60-odd boys. I approached the Salvation Army. I have a cousin

who is in the Salvation Army and I approached her about six years ago and said, 'I was slave labour—all of us were. They had no-one to do the maintenance and cleaning and everything else. The kids did it and if we did not do it we got a hiding. We should be compensated for what we did for the premises, for the Salvos.' She looked at me and said, 'Forget it. That happened; it doesn't exist in South Australia. It never happened in South Australia.' I said to my cousin, 'I think you had better get with the real world. This did happen. It hasn't been advertised enough in South Australia to bring all this out. It has in the other states, but not this state.'

She tried to find my records. She could not because she was looking under 'Woods' and my name is Lehman. My father was 20 years old. He was in marriage. My mother was Lehman and I just took her maiden name and that is what it was about. But she had looked under 'Woods'. I told her that and she still could not find records, so I approached the Salvation Army here just recently. I have letters here which came back from the Salvation Army. It took me a month to try and get it. It said they had no record. I will just read this small paragraph that is in here quickly. Anyway, they said they had no record of me—the Salvation Army did—at all.

For seven years where was I? What happened to my records? I cannot get records from the state. I have already had a letter saying they cannot because the Salvation Army looked after theirs. I have been in touch with the Salvation Army through my cousin:

We regret that we are unable to locate any records in relation to your request and are therefore unable to assist you in this matter.

I got in the shit and they have known me for seven years—for this:

Should information regarding your request become available, we will notify you.

Where was I for seven years? Why was this allowed to happen? I was robbed of childhood because I never knew any of my cousins. In fact I belted one of my cousins in Mildura after I got out of the home and he said, 'You don't know who your mother and father are?' I did not know he was my cousin. This was some relative in the main street and I got a belting when I got home, for belting him. This is what happens to you when you are put into these institutions.

Others in the institution want to know why it was allowed to happen. The Salvation Army was shut down in 1973, I think. It had been open for 30 years, but all the records they have in South Australia at Nailsworth, which I have tracked down as well, would not fill this folder. It is 30 or 40 years of a home run by the Salvation Army which filled the whole journal of what happened.

There were boys in and out all the time. I have managed to contact three in the last four months. One was mayor in Whyalla when I was living there. I did not know. I knew him because he was also the police officer. He did not know that I was one; I did not know he was one. He said the same as I am just telling you—'How the hell did you survive that long in there?' I said, 'What could you do? You were there. No-one wanted you.' I have struck another person—two more actually who are brothers—who were in Whyalla, or were at the time we were there. One is in Cowell now, just up the road a bit.

I spoke to him on the phone the other day. He was in there for 12 months. He said, 'You only had to sneeze and you got a bloody hiding.' I said, 'Yes.' He said the same, 'Kids these days say

they have a hard time' and he said he wished to Christ they were with us. There was no education, no childhood. For seven years all I owned fitted in a box that big. I am only one of many which were brought up under this system. Quite honestly, I think that these homes, whatever you want to call them, should compensate—and I mean should compensate—for what we have lived through just to line their pockets. Basically that is what it was all about.

It was not about looking after kids. They were not interested in that. They were interested in getting, at the time, a government handout. In fact a Salvation Army officer did tell me that one of the main reasons Kent Town shut down was that the government cut the funding; otherwise it would probably be still running. Nowadays you can get funding for most things and that could have happened.

Another thing happened the other day which all comes out of it. We have very elderly friends and one died, so I went to the church. I hate churches; I cannot stand them. Three times on Sundays and say prayers every day—three times when you do not want to and you are forced to. I went to this church recently and everyone was standing up singing hymns and what have you. My wife nudged me and said, 'Sing.' I said, 'No.' She said it again and I said, 'No. I am not here for religion. I am here for that person.' It is pretty bad when you hate religion that bad because it has been hammered into you and also you were hammered at the same time. I could probably go on for a long time but I think surely someone can understand the direction that a lot of us are coming from.

As I say, in this state, publicity is down; therefore we do not have enough backing to try and push us along so that it is recognised and does not happen again, to avoid it somehow or other—with these institutions. I do not know what you could do with them. I do not know. I did write down a quick list of things here: robbed me of complete childhood, which is right—one visitor twice in seven years; slave labour; beltings. If you wet the bed, which I did at the start because I did not know what the hell was going on, you had to get out of your bed in the morning, go down through the courtyard, sit in the old washhouse, wash your own sheets, hang them out with your pyjamas—and you only had one pair anyway—and if they were not dry and it was a winter's day, you did not have any. You got a belting and told it was dirty, filthy and what have you.

There were no school holidays, no family care or affection or whatever. There were no birthdays. We got a hammering at school unless we ganged up. They would call you 'homies' so usually that happened; 'can't spell'—which is true. Still in grade 7 at 13. The teachers did not worry about the 'homies'—we were just a number. I never had a report card. I never saw one; did not know what one was. I never had homework. The only homework we had was to maintain the building and do our night duties, the same as we had to do before we went to school.

As I say, we should be compensated. I have no proof that I was there. My number was No. 4—that was me. 'No. 4, you're in trouble. You've been fighting again,' or, 'You've done this; you've done that.' Down with the pants, out comes the strap. I never had toothpaste. We had to clean our teeth with our fingers and sometimes with a brush until they bled. We had a bath once a week, to my recollection. We had a little locker which we only had school clothes in, a set of yard clothes and a set of pyjamas. At school all we had were guardians for school who booked you in. I do have records. Because the Salvation Army had no records, they did not know anyone. I have records of 57 lads at school who were in the home with me. The Salvation Army

have not got that and they cannot be bothered getting it, or they do not want to let you know they have it—I do not know. We are trying to contact them anyway.

In 2000 I had a breakdown because I agreed that my wife could go overseas. I was at the airport with friends and I did not take much notice and I walked away when the plane door shut but then I lost it. I took to drinking for a solid week or so—smoking, which I had not done—and ended up in hospital with a mental breakdown for a week or two. One of my daughters got my wife to come home from overseas. I said some horrible things about her because I thought she had gone and I was left on my own.

The story does not stop there either. My parents did not want me when I was little. When I did get out of the home, I was only 13. When I was 14, I was at the Andamooka opal fields. Some people may have heard of it, some people might not. I had a pick and shovel digging shafts, 30, 40 and sometimes 50 feet deep. I was tunnelling like a rabbit, looking for opals. I had no choice. I slept in a creek on a wire bed for about six months. I just took it that you were treated bad because it was part of life. But it is not. Then I dug my own dugout in the hole in the hill and went out and got some timber and made a bit of a roof with a bit of tin and put some dirt on it and that was my home for the next couple of years. I had to dig holes for opals every day.

I managed to make friends with some people in Adelaide who were up in the opal fields visiting. They had an apple orchard and they said to me, 'You can come up there.' So I left home with £10 on a bud car from Woomera or Pimba. I got to Adelaide and that is where I started to try and put my life together.

It has had its good times; it has had its bad times. My wife has stuck with me. I was a transport driver for many years, interstate. I would be no good now because the police are that bad now that, if you spell 'Mildura' wrong or something, when you have a break for an hour at Mildura, they knock drivers off for that. There, again, education pulled me back down. I cannot understand a lot of this. I have not told the children the full story. I never even told my wife the full story. I just told her what I wanted to tell her.

I went to the house today before I came here. The people that own that house now are new Australians or something. It is heritage listed, and it should be. There should be nothing done to it. It is a beautiful building from way back. It is the gay people or something—I don't know—but they were quite happy to have me there and I told them everything about the building: the living room, the sick room, the bathrooms way down the back and everything else. They were quite happy because they want some history on the house, but it is not nice history; it is bad stuff. I said, 'Well, next time I come down to Adelaide I'll come out again.' This is what I would like to do: I would like to take you people and a camera and go through that building, explaining it all to you, instead of sitting here trying to talk, because I find it hard. I do not know where I am. I am sort of all over the place. That is how I get when I try to do something.

I cannot mix with people properly. I join clubs and I am like the drone. You show me something and I will rebuild it. I can pull motors to pieces and rebuild them, because we have had trucks. But if you put me in a position where I have to be in charge, the writing side blows it straightaway, and I do not understand figures; therefore, I never, ever had a chance of making a good life, to a point. We live in a retirement home now. I shifted there three years ago because I have spinal damage through an accident. I am starting to find it hard to live there because it is

confined. We invested money in it. I want to move out, but they can just hold the money until they are ready. It is starting to get to both of us.

I would like to go back to Whyalla, to open space. It is very frightening when you think you can do something but then everything sort of closes in and you become trapped, and then you want to get out. You want to move on and you want to move somewhere. You want to get away from that environment, although it may be a good one. I have never sought medical advice. People say that is wrong, but these scars are too big for medical assistance. There are other people here that want to tell their story, anyway.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Woods. Mrs Woods, would you like to say anything?

Mrs Woods—I really came more for support. I feel embarrassed, because I had such a good childhood, and my mum and dad were the best thing that ever happened to Brian because they were as wonderful as his were like they were. Brian has always been a loner; he is not a mixer. He has never really been an affectionate father, but at the same time he has been good, and I am really disappointed in the girls. I think Brian gave them too much, and they are very spoilt and self-centred. My son idolises us. He is 40. He lives in Whyalla. We have lovely grandchildren.

In 2000 I got a fright. When I went overseas, Brian did not come because we were on a trekking trip and he could not manage it—but we could have changed it. Anyway, Robert and Leanne said the minute the plane door shut Brian went really strange. He was supposed to go off on a fishing trip, a charter trip. He did not do any of that. My girlfriend found him a week later in a terrible state. Brian has never been a drinker, and he was out of it—drunk and not eating. They had to put him into hospital and I had to come home from overseas. I think it was just his life build-up, and he was scared that I was not going to come home and he was on his own again.

Another thing that Brian has forgotten to tell you is that his name in the home was Brian Alfred Lehman. When he got sent back to Mildura at 13—I think it was in May 1953—he was told he was no longer Lehman, he was Woods. When we got married I was 16 and Brian was 22. I had to show permission and my dad had to sign for me to get married, but Brian never gave his birth certificate, and we married under the name of Woods—Darryll, Karen and Debra Woods. In 1975, for some reason we sent for Brian's certificate. No, no Brian Alfred Woods. We wrote back and said, 'Try Lehman.' It came back. He confronted his mother and said, 'I'm not paying for this to be changed. It's up to you,' and she changed it. If you look at the extract it says the number, dash, '40', 'Brian Alfred Lehman'. Then it says 'Brian Alfred Woods—75', so she changed it then. But I do not know where we stand. My kids said they are all Woods and they are not worried about it. I do not know how you legally stand with that. We have always been Woods and it was changed in 1975, but we got married under the name Lehman.

Mr Woods—We got two birth extracts, one for Woods and one for Lehman, both the same date, both the same hospital.

Mrs Woods—We went back to the Salvos here on 13 October, to the archives, and I could not believe it. There was a box that big, by that high, by that wide, and there were two of those old-fashioned logbooks that they used to have, from 1929 to 1970 something. It is as if they did not exist. I could not believe it. I do not know if any of you saw the *Homeless* program on the ABC. I said to Brian, 'They did not! Out of all things that you said, do you know what upset me the

most? The 18-inch box. Fancy; that is all you owned, in that box.' I just could not believe it. I think the Salvos should say sorry and they should come out and admit what they did. His cousin is a major, and even she said, 'Oh, Brian, it didn't happen in South Australia.' That is their attitude.

I feel sorry for Brian. It is really hard and it must be dreadful. I know a guy who has got a Supreme Court case against the Salvos. I said to him, 'You know, I can't remember my childhood,' and he said, 'Aren't you lucky? You don't remember it when you've had a good childhood. It's only the bad things that stay.' I can remember sitting on my dad's lap and things like that, and sometimes I feel guilty because I had such a good mum and dad.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mrs Woods. Mr Woods, have you received any counselling at all? Have you sought any?

Mr Woods—No. I had that breakdown. They used to send a lady around to the house. I was all right until she got there and then, as soon as she started talking, I just blew it. It kept reopening it all the time, instead of trying to shut it. I cannot understand counselling.

CHAIR—Your relationship with the Salvation Army is that piece of paper that says there is no file on you. Is that it? And your formal approach is through your cousin?

Mrs Woods—No, we did it ourselves. She gave us the lady to write to. We went through—nothing. Then Brian said, 'But I went to church all the time,' and there it was: 'Brian Alfred Lehman, 15 January 1953, junior soldier'. And then we got the idea to go to Norwood school, and we got 57 names from Norwood school signed in by Major Healey and Major Stevenson as their guardian, so there is proof they were there. I have got 57 names. I have been writing to them, trying to get a reunion for Brian.

CHAIR—But there is no record that you went to the local school?

Mrs Woods—Yes, that is what we got.

Mr Woods—They are the school records which the lady gave me, and it has got the birth dates.

Mrs Woods—We have the names of 57 boys, and sadly the two latest that we got that were there—

Mr Woods—They were brothers.

Mrs Woods—They died in 1991 and 1992, only 13 months apart, aged 52 and 54.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Have you written back to the Salvation Army with that information from the school?

Mr Woods—No. They gave me nothing. Why should I give them anything? We have learnt that a couple of the boys have died, but we are trying to track others so we can have a bit of a

reunion or something. No, they have given me nothing. They have got nothing. They sent me a letter and said I do not exist. My cousin cannot find me.

Mrs Woods—She is the major for missing people.

Mr Woods—If you have a child or a person missing and you go to the Salvation Army, she is the one that tries to find them. If she cannot even find her own cousin's report, come on! I am not going to hand them information which I have had to go and find myself, which they cannot be bothered doing.

CHAIR—Do you have any action pending or planned against the Salvation Army?

Mr Woods—To be honest with you, not at this stage. I have not taken any action at this stage because—I don't know—I did not think people would believe it.

CHAIR—You did say you believe people should be compensated. You said that on two occasions.

Mr Woods—Yes, that is right. We should be compensated; that is it. Not just me.

CHAIR—No; you said 'people'.

Mr Woods—We are trying to track down a few. Out of five we have tracked down, two brothers are dead. I have asked CLAN to put a letter in their next bulletin asking anyone that knows anyone from the Kent Town Boys Home to get in touch through CLAN, which then they will forward on to me, in case they do not want me to know their address or anything else.

CHAIR—If you wanted recognition or compensation, at some point you would have to think about approaching the Salvation Army, wouldn't you?

Mr Woods—Yes, they are the main people.

CHAIR—Do you know if CLAN has made any approaches on behalf of anyone else to the Salvation Army?

Mrs Woods—They will not do that, no. If you are taking legal action, they will help; they will sit there and support you. But, no, not on that side. That is not what they are there for.

CHAIR—No, I was not thinking of compensation. I was thinking particularly of counselling, where this can help.

Mr Woods—I have rung Terence. I did not know it would be Terence I spoke to. On the back of their form there are different places to ring and I picked the South Australian one and it happened to be Terence. I was on the phone to him for about three-quarters of an hour. It did not really help me—knowing him and the position he was in—so I don't know. Mainly we are asking the government to advertise this a bit, to get it all out in the open, because everyone is hammering all the other religions and the Salvation Army did this to hundreds of us.

No-one said anything. Everyone says the Salvation Army are the best thing since whenever. All right; they do good, but at the expense of children. We were the ones that looked after the premises, built the premises, kept them tidy. We had to go out. I was one of the lucky ones, I suppose. There used to be a place called Golden Crust Bread in the early days, down Hackney way. We used to go down, two or three of us in a van, to put all the horses away and the carts. We would stack all the carts neatly and put them away. They would give us whatever bread and rolls were left over. They would get thrown in a big bin for the home. If we wanted any more to eat than what we were given, that was not on. We used to sort of rob.

Mrs Woods—Excuse me, here is another story. He is not here giving evidence but he went when Brian came—John Smith, the ex-Mayor of Whyalla. He was saying when he was there he had to go around to the Mayor of Norwood and they had to stack and clean his dairy every day.

Mr Woods—His milk dairy.

Mrs Woods—Every day. There was an old man and they would ride the pushbike to Maylands and give him a loaf of bread. Whether he was an old Salvo man or not, they did that rain, hail or shine. They did that in their Salvo clothes: no raincoats or anything like that.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Woods, like many witnesses, you have shown great courage in coming here and exposing what is very painful to you. I get the impression you have told us today things you have never told your wife, never mind your children. It is a tremendous personal journey to make to do that. I sense behind your motivation a desire for people to know what happened and for it to be believed; in other words, the acceptance of the past in the sense of the community understanding this is what happened to children. Is that your biggest motivation—getting that story told and understood?

Mr Woods—The public should know that there are all different institutions. As I said a minute ago, a lot of the other religions got hammered because they ill-treated children—Catholics and what have you. As you know, they sat behind the door; hypocrites, to a degree, because they would go into the hotels late in the afternoon and collect money from the drunks. On the other hand, they had kids like us doing their work for them. There did not seem to be any boundaries of being nice or anything. They should be brought out in the open as well as the other religions. Too many people believe that the Salvation Army were a perfect organisation. They do good, but they did a lot of bad in our days.

Senator MURRAY—Would it surprise you to know that the evidence to us suggests that at least 200,000 and maybe many more went through the institutions last century?

Mr Woods—No.

Senator MURRAY—Just 60 in your home, but probably about 200,000—perhaps more. Does it surprise you to know that?

Mr Woods—I only knew of five homes, not that they were all Salvation Army homes, not how much the turnover was. I knew there were Catholic homes, but I did not realise there were so many others.

Senator MURRAY—Would it surprise you to know, given what you have heard today and what you have found out since you began this quest, that many of them in those other homes experienced the same things you did? They were worse in some cases, better in others, but pretty much the same.

Mr Woods—I do not quite understand what direction you are coming from. I knew there was ill-treatment in other homes but did not know how bad. I thought we were bad, but there were some worse and there were some that got on all right.

Senator MURRAY—Mr Woods, the reason I am talking to you like this is that your experience is typical; not just typical in terms of what happened to you, but typical in terms of people keeping it quiet.

Mr Woods—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—The victims kept it quiet: they kept it quiet from their families, from their friends, from people they worked with and so on. The result is that it is a great shock to Australia to discover what went on. That is part of the great benefit of what you and others do by telling us. It helps fill in that big gap in understanding in our history. Do you understand that?

Mr Woods—A lot of us would not say anything, even me, because we were embarrassed to answer: 'Where were you brought up? What did you do?' You are not going to say that you were in a boys home and admit to that straightaway because then you end up on the end of that bit of string where you have to say, 'Because my mum and dad didn't want me.' I do not know.

Senator MURRAY—You have indicated the effect this has had on you, but you have also indicated the suspicion you have or the feeling you have of the effects on your children; namely, a bit of distancing between yourself and them and the relationship issues.

Mr Woods—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—Are you going to be able to show them the *Hansard* record of this interchange? Can you face up to that, because this is raw stuff?

Mrs Woods—This is what you are saying about the girls? It does not bother him.

Mr Woods—It does not bother me. My wife mentioned this yesterday when she said we want to get out of where we are. We have put a letter in to the board saying, 'Please give us our money so that we can relocate.' Helen did say to me, 'What about the girls?' I said, 'Well, what about the girls?' Every time we want to see the grandkids we have to go to them. No-one will come to us. They shop only 500 metres away from us, or not much more than that, but they cannot afford 10 minutes in a week. Sometimes we do not see one of them for a month or more.

Senator MURRAY—The chair spoke to you about counselling. It is quite clear from the evidence to us that if people in some pain find the right counsellor it helps a great deal. The emphasis has to be on the 'right counsellor'. Just watching you and listening to you, you need to be aware that it can be of great help to you. You know that—or you should know that.

Mr Woods—As I said, I tried. With this other one I had a breakdown and it was not doing me much good. I was better off breaking away and just going back into my shell and keeping to myself.

Senator MURRAY—Perhaps you should ask around a bit more.

Mr Woods—I suppose.

Senator MURRAY—That is a bit of advice from this side of the table because we have seen many people for whom it has been a great help. Others, like you, have come across the wrong person and it has not helped. It does not help in every case.

Mr Woods—Who is going to set that up? How do you say to the Salvation Army, 'I need counselling, because it is your fault'? How do you approach them? I know what the answer is going to be, 'We've got no records of you, so why are we going to pay?'

Mrs Woods—No, counselling.

Mr Woods—Yes, but who is going to pay?

Senator MURRAY—I cannot give you advice here, but I can indicate to you that, from our experience as a committee, it is a worthwhile thing for you to do.

Mr Woods—Yes, I understand.

Senator MURRAY—If you had to look back on the effects of that childhood on you, what do you think has been the worst impact? Looking at the two of you, the best consequence in your life has been having a loving long-term relationship with your wife, and that sounds terrific. But personally, as a consequence of your childhood, what has had the worst effect on you?

Mr Woods—A lot of it is that when I meet people outside of this room—what I am saying is for real—I just cannot talk.

Senator MURRAY—Is what you are saying to us that it is a sense of isolation and not belonging; of being detached from others by your experiences?

Mr Woods—Yes. I just feel I am in another area; not in the same world. I am basically not on the same planet, I am somewhere else.

Senator MURRAY—But does it help you to know that other homies or wardies—or people like us who have some experience in these matters, not that we are experts—understand that? Does it help you to know that it is actually not a personal difficulty; it is a kind of consequence of what has happened to you?

Mr Woods—I do not understand that.

Mrs Woods—What he means is that there are people who care. Is that what you meant? He did not understand.

Senator MURRAY—Yes.

Mr Woods—Yes, since I have been with CLAN, I get the wife to send an email—

Mrs Woods—I think that has helped Brian, joining CLAN. I have been writing letters for him.

Senator MURRAY—Is that why you are trying to go to the reunion—

Mrs Woods—That was just a reunion.

Senator MURRAY—Is that why you are looking for the reunion route and so on?

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Senator MURRAY—Just that sense of reconnection?

Mrs Woods—Yes.

Mr Woods—Terence here is just a phone number to talk to, which is great, but as someone else said—the lady that was on first—there should be a better organisation for us in the state.

Senator MURRAY—There is a purpose behind my questioning. One of the things we are looking at is whether we should recommend methods and means by which networks can be created: databases of people who have been through institutions; systems so that you know where to go and you can find names and places and how to connect with services you need and that kind of thing. The purpose is to end the isolation of people who feel pain and are in difficulty. Would that be of assistance to you?

Mr Woods—If you could set that sort of home base up for people like me, yes, it would. It would help to communicate on that sort of thing. We were talking about the front with another couple of people and we were sharing emotional talk, which did not interfere with what I have said, but it does help to see other people and meet other people in the same position. It is better than going and trying to join clubs and things.

CHAIR—Thank you, very much, Mr and Mrs Woods.

Mrs Woods—Thank you.

[4.40 p.m.]

WHITMAN, Mrs Monica Denise, Goodwood Orphanage

CHAIR—Welcome, Mrs Whitman. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I understand that you have received information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses giving evidence.

Mrs Whitman—Yes.

CHAIR—The committee has before it your submission. I now invite you to make an opening presentation, to be followed by questions from the committee.

Mrs Whitman—I do not know how to start this off.

CHAIR—We have your documents here. Everybody has read them. However you would like to begin.

Mrs Whitman—It relates to the English children that came to the Goodwood Orphanage. I do not want you to get me wrong: I am still friendly with some of them today, particularly one person that has been going to the media for the last 15 years. Every time I ring a reporter up when there is a story that relates to me. No-one believes me and yet witnesses were there. This particular girl always said that she was stripped naked by the mother superior and belted—yes, to a certain degree—but she was not stripped the way she puts it over. I was lying in bed and witnessed it in a dormitory full of 40 girls.

I am an Aboriginal. My mother is a half-caste. She was born in a wurley in the Finke, from a full-blood. She was tribally rejected and was brought up by a white father—Lord knows what would have happened if the Aboriginal Protection Board had got her—as a Catholic down at Mount Gambier. She met a man, a nice fellow, who wanted to marry her. He was a well-known pastoralist's son. He defied his parents. Threats were made to have the child removed by people in high places in welfare that see it was done. My mother went to see the priests at Penola and was put with the St Joseph's nuns. I was born at Fullarton refuge; went over there at 2½ years. Only because she was schooled by the nuns at Mount Gambier, I was given to the Sisters of Mercy. I could have gone to St Joseph's at Largs Bay. She put me there.

I did not know any different. She married a war serviceman just before the war finished. He was, unfortunately, an alcoholic affected by the war. I came out. We went to Paracombe when she was married. It was in an apple orchard that that man abused me, coming home from school. I lay in fields trying to get away from him sexually abusing me. My poor mother was being beaten. The baby was already born. I was hiding in caves just to get away from the drunk. I never pleaded with my mother so much to take me back to the Goodwood Orphanage. I was sick of being pulled out of apple trees, running, hiding in the dark. It was strange to me. I was used to three meals a day and a warm bed at the orphanage. I was not used to this. He was a non-Aboriginal. That did not make any difference.

The child was dragged out of my hands. I was punched over the bed; did a somersault. The child was slapped up against the wall; fell down; died 10 days later. It was a big brass bed; hit its head. I was a six-year-old kid and I just said, 'Well, she's gone to heaven.' I suppose the religious side of it came into me then. When I think of it now, she would have been close to me in age at the time. She died in the hospital. Mum did not know anything about it. She just would not wake up the next morning, and we went down to the children's hospital, where she was operated on and died within 10 days.

He was down there. She told him to take me for a walk at the Cross of Sacrifice, and every time I see the Anzac march I see that Cross of Sacrifice. I nearly ended up the sacrifice: bashed, abused, molested, shaken; not to tell the police. We were all herded into Angas Street. When I look back as an adult, we probably ended up there because of the bruising on the baby. It was put down as toxaemia. I arranged an uncle's funeral in the same burial plot, and I was able to get a bit of notification. There was no toxaemia. I know what happened.

I pleaded with my mother to take me back. The marriage broke down. She could not get a roof over her head anywhere, because she had a black face. She would send me up to the door, a six-year-old kid, and I wondered why she would end up abusing people. She had a job at the children's hospital. She had money in the bank. We slept on the Torrens by the bridge. I remember a policeman came and said, 'If you are here tomorrow night, that child will be taken.' We walked with our cases and pillows up to the cathedral here in Adelaide, to Catholic welfare. I never was so glad to jump into a priest's arms when I saw Father Roberts and pleaded with him to take me back to the orphanage. I had had enough. I was six when I went back. I was never so happy.

Maybe I was luckier than some of the other children. I will admit that. I had a mother that visited me every fortnight without fail. She worked at the children's hospital as a cook. I would have had plenty of chances, with the type of child I was, to go up and tell her if anything was happening with us kids, especially molesting after this animal of a stepfather. I did not say anything to the nuns. I just used to ask them to say prayers for Helen: 'She's up in heaven.' The big bright star was supposed to be her. I think the religion got me over that trauma a little bit, but she was always in the back of my mind.

There was another Aboriginal girl there, who was darker skinned. She was born in the refuge too, and we went there at the same time. We had devoted mothers and they would visit. There was another little non-Aboriginal girl whose mother had a cleft palate. She was born there too, and we all came together at about the same time, growing up there. At this particular time, the English children came. I felt sorry for them; do not get me wrong. They were jealous because we had visitors and our parents would bring us goodies. Mum would bring Milo and Vegemite and contribute a bit. She would pay what is now $3 towards my support. She was trying to be a mother to me, while these poor English children were under the stairs. They would wait until after I went to get my goodies after Mum visited and they would bash the hell out of us to get our things, eat it all and laugh at us.

In the end, I had to tell my mother not to visit me and one of the nuns overheard me. Then it started. We classed ourselves as having grandmothers. I used to say to this other Aboriginal girl: 'I think we're the only people in the world that have got two brown mothers,' because we saw non-Aboriginal people there visiting their children, plus we saw dads, but we did not have dads.

The Ten Commandments tell you to honour your father and mother, so we got curious as we got older and wanted to know who our dads were. The nuns would not tell us. They said, 'You ask your mummy when you get older,' and that was fair enough.

This nun overheard me one day telling my mother not to come. It started. It went from, 'Here come your nigger mothers,' and, 'Here comes your mother,' to this other girl that had the mother with a cleft palate, and they used to laugh at us. This is when the tide turned on us two kids. We were the only Aboriginals there at the time. It went on like that, and it is unbelievable the number of bashings that we got from those kids, only because we had our mothers visiting us. Our mothers were trying to be mothers to us too.

If there was any sexual molesting or anything like that, I would have been one of the first to know. I had a mother. With the type of child I was, I would have been able to open my mouth and, with the type of mother I had, yes, she would have gone in to welfare. She would have done anything, but then she still had the Aboriginal Protection Board. She had to be a bit wary because, as you know, those laws were not the best in those days for us. She got a Housing Trust home through the RSL, and she got us out. That was in 1951.

On the streets of Kilburn it started. I thought: 'Take me back to Goodwood.' The nuns could protect me back there, but I had no-one to run to. Every kid in grade 7, I think, must have pounced on me because I had a black mother. There were not many Aboriginals living around that area, or even in Adelaide, in those days. They were few and far between. I was 14 when the first sibling was born and 16 when the next was born. I looked 17 or 18. It was a hot day. I was walking down the road. The children were dragged and thrown over a fence, with my little baby brother in a pusher. I was bashed because I had a black mother and black brothers and sisters.

That is when my trauma started, and that is when I wanted to go back to the orphanage. You tell me how I had to cope. Then it was always in my mind, 'Where's my white father?' That was a big question to ask my mother. That was a fear she dreaded. He was a wealthy pastoralist who wanted me but not the black woman that went with me. My father lived to be a very bitter man. Mind you, going into the family history and looking into things, I was determined to find out. He is a multimillionaire, who has never paid an ounce of maintenance. He had estates left to him left, right and centre. I have found this out in the last five years.

I have met my brothers. I have known for 20 years. He thinks I do not know them. He is old. That big wall of money divides me from getting any bonding. I had to beg people for food to put in my mother's cupboards when we lived at Kilburn, just to have it there so the welfare biddies would see we had food, for fear of us being taken. I saw what my mother went through, and I have no qualms with her placing me in Goodwood Orphanage for protection. They were my protection, not the Aboriginal Protection Board or anything out in the streets of Kilburn.

I could not go back there, because I was getting older, so we started getting at loggerheads. I wanted to run away, so she landed me in Angas Street Police Station. The police said, 'Well, she's done nothing wrong.' They got me under the control of the Aboriginal Protection Board, which I was not under because, with her father being white, she was classed as white, and that went for me. I came under them and they were dictating to me what to do. I had a lovely officer there that was a Catholic, and she knew where I got brought up so she inquired and I went to a

Catholic hostel and stayed. I kept friendly with the nuns all the years. I go to their funerals. I went to one two weeks ago.

There was no way there was any sexual molesting in that place. Yes, I got smacked. I ran away to the Anzac Highway in my knickers and singlet, just to swim on a hot stinking day because I saw the creek was flooded. I knew I should not have done that. When I got home it was about half past 7 at night and my mother had been called. The police were combing the area looking for me. When I turned up for tea that is when the police came in, but they had been looking. Mother Michael pulled me in and gave me a good smack on both hands. She said, 'Go down to the parlour, your mother is waiting there.' Mum said, 'I ought to get the strap and give you a damn good belting in front of them too.' I should not have climbed the creek. I knew the rules.

It was an English girl that told me there was a Senate inquiry; I would not have even known about it. I rang around, got a copy sent over and read it. I found a lot of things that were not true in this by a certain person that went before you at the time. I have no malice or anything against the girl. We have joked about it over the years, but I never got to have my say about the way she butchered me with a pair of pliers. I call it 'butcher' because, as a child, that is the way I looked at it. She says that she got a belting from the mother superior and does not remember at the age of 14 or 15. How come I can remember what happened to me at the age of six up in the apple orchards?

I remember that place. I know every corner of the place. The day I came back from holidays in 1951 my mother was there to take me. I saw her and I ran. I had never run so fast. There was nowhere to hide. They had to send all the children after me. I was hiding up under the organ. One nun knew where to find me. She said, 'Come out, Monnie; you have to go.' Mother Michael was not there. In the 2001 Senate inquiry this woman stated that she stood there and jeered and clapped the day she left. That girl was gone within eight months of coming out from England. She was 15 years of age, and that was in 1949. Mother Michael did not leave until 1951, and that was the year I left, because I raced to ask if I could stay and she was not there. That is when another nun came up.

I have had these nuns sitting there all night while I was ill, taking my temperature, wiping my forehead and looking after me. I can tell you the stories, but no-one wants to believe a person when they say anything good about something. These English girls were told lies in England. We were rehearsed to be nice to these children. For six weeks before we were excited that we were having new playmates instead of the stale old ones we used to carry on about. They arrived on a bus. They were not told they were coming to an orphanage—yes; I have always known that.

We had to take them up and show them their beds. They wanted their cases. We did not have cases anywhere in our rooms or lockers. Our clothes were supervised. They were given a number. I was given a number for my clothing: to identify when it was laundered, not to be called number 14 like a jailbird or something. I was given a nickname because I cried like the cow in the paddock the day I arrived, and that was Monnie Moo. You talk to the nuns nowadays. If you say Monica Whitman, they will say, 'You don't mean Monnie Moo?' I do not complain about being given a nickname. They go on and on. Some of them were traumatised, yes, and I believe you blame the family life in England and why they were dumped at the orphanage doorstep—some of them were.

I have heard the stories probably a lot more than what you have about the Goodwood Orphanage over the years. I would like to make it clear that this girl this day got a pair of pliers. When we were getting out of the bath it was two kiddies in, two kiddies out—that sort of thing. I was 10. I was over the big side of the orphanage then. I dreaded going over there and Mother Michael said, 'You have to. You are getting older. We need the beds over the little side for younger children.' So we had no choice. This particular day she had to go up there and dry our backs getting in and out. There were four or five and I went to get in the back and she plunged in these pliers—I had never seen a pair of pliers and I kept saying they were scissors—and she was going like this. We never had pliers. The nuns kept the scissors. They were brought out if we were doing needlework and this, that and the other. It was supervised in that way. She was jumping from one girl to the other. Some of the girls had to be stitched up by Dr Kenihan. They were in the infirmary. I had a little nick there and a bit of bruising, but I was not the type of child that would sit there and take it from any big bully. I would hit them and run and yell and scream and carry on.

The nun came in and said, 'What are you screaming at? Stop that nonsense.' She saw the blood. Where there is a watery place, any blood running down would look a lot worse than what it was, I suppose. I do not know. I said, 'It's this girl that had the pliers.' She raced out. Sister Clothilde saw her. She raced out, raced down the stairs and threw the pliers on the landing. I raced down and got them. When I came back she had raced down to get the mother superior. She came after the nuns' prayers. I was allowed to sleep in the dormitory, not in the infirmary. I was lying just inside the door.

Mother Michael came from the veranda and put the light on. She said, 'I want you out here in the middle of the floor. What did you do to those 10-year-old children up on the third storey at bath time?' She denied it. All the mother superior did was to put her hand on her shoulder—yes, she had the strap. My bed was about where this first row of chairs is. I could see it. I had the blankets up like this. To be honest, I was laughing and hoping I could get out there and belt her, too. When she grabbed her by the nightie, like that, the girl moved back and she tore her own nightie off and ran up the other end of the dormitory. Mother Michael went after her. She was fuming. Children were getting stitched up over there.

The times that Dr Kenihan had to come over and see the Australian kids: the big kids bashing the little ones. Some of our Australian girls were just as bad in the fights that went on. We had to end up going to the toilet together. Four or five of us would not go to the toilet by ourselves any more. Our whole life changed. I was sick of going to bed when it was, 'You're nothing but an Australian bastard.' If, say, that is the toilet area, you would be lying in bed like this. There would be a punch in the face, with just a dim light on, and you would turn over and think they were going to come back through the other door. They would come back through the other door and punch you again. They do not tell stories like this about what they did to us.

I had plenty of time to tell my mother if the nuns had been cruel to us in any way. Once I did try. The time I was about 10 I said, 'Mummy, see that nun over there.' I remember that was the only time. She said, 'What?' I said, 'She gave me a smack during the week.' She turned around and said, 'Well, you must have been naughty.' It paid me not to go dobbing. We did not dob half the time, like the English children did, because they would only get us the next day and belt us twice as bad. I went to bed with a bruised back and a punch in the face so many times I learnt to

accept it. I left when I was 12. No, I did not want to go, because I wanted the nuns because of my traumas as a child. They were my protectors.

I do not know how these girls can get up there and say these things. We had nice clothes. They taught us to darn and do needlework. They taught us everything young girls would want to know if they got married. I did marry, and I married a good man. I was very protective towards my children. I would not let anyone babysit them. To be honest, I would not even let my brothers. That was just me, because of what happened with the stepfather.

When all this started hitting the media I was one of the first to go to their defence. I was called in to Angas Street for the nuns. Their adviser was there. I do not know if it was their lawyer or not. My story is in the Mortlock Library, open for anyone to read. I gave it to them. They did not know that. I said, 'I left it open, the whole lot, except the end.' I did not quite finish the end because it was concerning my mother and dementia was setting in and old age. I did not understand what dementia was. I thought she was a schizophrenic or something, but it was old age. I understand that now.

I just feel that some of the things these girls are saying ought to be checked out by the media; check the stories out with others. For 15 years I have been doing it. Finally, in our own local rag a big thing appeared about this same girl again in the Goodwood Orphanage, and I rang up and said, 'You want to find the right side of it.' Six weeks later they rang me and came down and five of us were able to have a chat around the table and have a say. That is the only little bit we have ever been able to get in, in defence of the nuns. Yes, we got smacked. There would not be a girl in an orphanage, or a boy, who would say they never got a smack. My mother gave me worse. By that time she had to handle me as a teenager. I just thought of her as one big bully. It was just strange. Then I had to get used to other things. It is not easy walking along the street with a half-caste mother and every kid belting you up.

I lived in a hostel. Next day I heard voices. The girls recognised my name on the board downstairs and there was a letter. They thought: 'That's her; it's got to be her.' I opened it up and it was all my friends from the home—Australian kids and a couple of English kids. So I knocked around with them in my teenage years and forgot about my daddy. That was my thing about running away, because I thought he might be able to protect me.

I can only talk about up to 1951 at Goodwood. I cannot talk about the other homes or the other people because I do not know what happened. I did not live in them. I cannot say anything about that. I got the strap twice and, when I look back, I deserved it. One time was for running away and the other time was trying to get my doll, which my mother had bought for my birthday, out of the third storey. I got up there and raided it with a whole pile of girls when I was 10 or 11. It was a big doll that mum had bought and they took it because they did not want the kids to break it. I was determined to get it. Of course, we fell and slipped on the bell and it was ringing out at about 10 o'clock at night. It was after the nuns' prayers. A girl raced up with a sheet and pretended she was the Archangel Gabriel and one of the nuns just would not believe she had not seen a vision. We were lined up and we said, 'Our Lady appeared at Fatima and Lourdes,' and all this. They said, 'We fail to believe the Archangel Gabriel would appear at the Goodwood Orphanage.'

We played our tricks on the nuns; don't worry about that. We got more punishment by standing in corners and getting to do lines. You would tell a nun, 'Shut up, I'm not doing it.' 'Right, another 100, another 100,' they would say. No wonder I did not want to go to high school. I swore: 'If I ever get out of this place, I will never go to school again.' But I had to, because Mum had to see to it. They are the things I would like to put over to you. That is why I want this all corrected.

CHAIR—You have certainly made your points, Mrs Whitman. You have been very thorough in your presentation today. We have a copy of your submissions. I will see if there are any questions from my colleagues.

Mrs Whitman—If there are, you can ask them.

CHAIR—As I say, you have been very thorough. I do not know if there are any questions.

Mrs Whitman—There is one other thing: they talk about Joe the gardener. Joe the gardener was always ripping me out of pinching, thieving, carrots. I would watch them grow and feed the chooks. Every girl must have thieved the carrots—or anything they could. If you put your big toe there, we would grab it. Sometimes two kids at a time were sent up to the mother superior because he had had enough of us raiding and messing up his garden. Sometimes she would put us down, 'All right, I'll give you another chance.' He loved teaching us to milk. He would come in with a handful of lollies and ask, 'Have you all been good?' Naturally, we would say yes just to get the lollies and he would toss them in the air.

As for the priest part in here, that upset me when they said they were told—this one girl again—never to go near the priest section. That was an out of bounds playing area from when I was a toddler. That is lies, because as I grew up we were able to go over. The priest used to have his breakfast and other meals over there, and girls used to take them over. Sometimes girls by themselves would take his tray. Often the nun in the kitchen would say, 'Go and get Father Morrison's tray.' It would come back.

Joe the gardener used to have his meals in the kitchen. There was no way anyone could get up there. As for molesting, there was a nun and a group of girls all the time. We were never let out of the sight of a nun. Never—not bathtime or any other time.

CHAIR—Okay; thank you.

Mrs Whitman—I do not believe that, when these girls tell their story, they are telling the truth.

CHAIR—I think you have made that point.

Mrs Whitman—I just feel that the way I did this—my daughter typed it up—was to answer those questions when I saw that. That can go on and on, so I hope I was able to get that over.

CHAIR—You have. Thank you, Mrs Whitman.

Mrs Whitman—If anybody asked me that I could tell you in my sleep, without even looking at it.

CHAIR—Great. Thank you.

[5.12 p.m.]

BRINDAL, Mr Mark Kennion, MLA, Member for Unley, House of Assembly, Parliament of South Australia

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Brindal. The committee prefers evidence to be heard in public, but evidence may also be taken in camera if such evidence is considered by you to be of a confidential nature. I am sure you are aware of information on parliamentary privilege and on the protection of witnesses giving evidence. I now invite you to make a presentation.

Mr Brindal—Senators, I have never appeared before a Senate committee or a federal parliamentary committee because, when you have the privilege of being in public office, you can normally sort things out for yourself. But such is the gravity of the nature of your inquiry and my concern about it—and you have heard some of the witnesses, I know, and there are others I hope you have heard—that I felt basically, as a citizen, compelled to come here. The Senate, being the federal parliament, has powers under certain treaties that we have entered into as a Commonwealth. I believe you have powers under the Constitution to intervene on behalf of disadvantaged Australian groups. I therefore wish to address you on the matters you are looking at. I would submit to you—and I am prepared to provide some additional material in writing later, if you like—that part of the failing is not a failing of the institutions as such, be they the Salvation Army, the Catholic church or the Anglican church, but the failure of the very institutions that established the rules under which they operated.

I would put to you that every one of the children and every one of the adults who now contend they were abused were probably legally wards of the state of South Australia, at least in this state, and in various other states wards of a minister and therefore protected by the lawfully elected government of the day of that state. If this inquiry is going to look at any failings in the institutions, I would submit to you respectfully that you should also be looking at a failing of the legal systems of the states and the inadequacy of state administrative procedures to protect those where, in many cases, the care was taken from the parents. Often the parents were given no choice.

There is a mixture of situations here. Some of them are going back to the seventies or eighties. Senators, has Keith Meekins put in a submission to you? I will not rehash the Keith Meekins case, but I would be most concerned if his allegations—which are currently before the police in South Australia—are correct: that he was abducted from an orphanage while a ward of the state and was systematically and sexually abused interstate for three months. When he came back and went to state authorities to report his case, he was put in the Gilles Plains Reality Therapy Centre and the police were denied access to him. He was denied access to the police on the grounds that it was better for his rehabilitation if he did not report a criminal activity on behalf of a man alleged to be a paedophile and who has never stood trial for that crime.

I have dealt with Mr Meekins over many hours. He is 36 years old and, as you know if he has been a witness here, he is still suffering. His is but one case. But if we go to a more contemporary situation, where perhaps these institutions do not exist any more, the states are much more benevolent now. They make children wards of the state and put them in a series of

foster homes. It is difficult to now blame the Salvation Army or the Catholic church or the Anglican church; you just blame individual foster carers. But what happens with the institutional arrangements as they currently exist is that you have, on the one hand, repeated examples of Keith Meekins's experience, where people were allegedly abused and nothing was done about it. On the other hand, you have examples of institutionalised arrangements which allowed the state to take children away from their parents on the flimsiest of evidence and put them in care when there was no real evidence supporting the fact that they were sexually abused.

I would contend that some of those children growing up, not having been sexually abused but having been deprived of their parental environment and parents and a family, were equally as abused by the state—whether the state be South Australia, Queensland or Victoria—as kids who were sexually abused, and that was ignored. I would draw your attention, respectfully, to the case of Hillman, which is before the High Court, and at least two other South Australian cases where parents who could prove that they were not sexual abusers have taken the minister as far as the High Court of Australia, and where the High Court of Australia has ruled that the normal duty of care cannot be held to apply because it is surmounted by the legislative duty imposed under the Child Welfare Act, which is that the welfare of the child is paramount. The welfare of the child being paramount, it did not matter that they had abused what you would expect to be the normal duty of care towards the family and the parent.

A very good case—which I can send you, if you would like me to—is the case of Crispin in 1988 where the man was charged with criminal sexual abuse of his daughter. In the course of cross-examination by the defendant's lawyer, the girl admitted three times that she had repeated the story in court because the story had been placed in her mind by the welfare officers and the doctors, and His Honour Judge Moore, who heard the case, apologised to Mr Crispin and said, 'I don't know what can be done to redress the 2½ years of pain and anguish you have been through. The people responsible for this should be brought to account.'

The method of accounting was that afterwards the child herself was reinterviewed by the police and the welfare department in South Australia came and took away the third child. Not only was the man found not guilty and no other charges ever preferred against him; because they could, welfare took away the third child. Those parents did not see their children again for the next 15½ years. I sincerely hope that those kids, now being adults, are going to come forward and start what I think is a rightful action in the courts against the state for abuse of its position and power.

I am not here to lecture you; I am here to share something with you—a real concern. I do not think South Australia is alone. I think there is an abysmal history in all the states of Australia of neglect and of the state not properly fulfilling its duties. And it is no one political party. It does not matter who was there. All of us have been there. I hope none of us knew; I hope even the public servants were not deliberately responsible. But the fact is that it happened. The fact is that we have had kids abused and nothing was done about it. We have had kids taken away from their parents who never should have been, and nothing has been done about it.

I see this as one avenue of at least coming and saying to you, as members of the Senate, 'Hey, perhaps we could do something about it.' We have looked at Aboriginal deaths in custody in this state. You have looked at the stolen generation. You have looked at the case of migrant kids. I think this is a case that, if not worse, is at least as bad as any of these others. I greatly fear that,

because it is a mixture of the community and because it is all too difficult, it will all be swept under the carpet and nothing will be done.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Brindal. If you would not mind supplying us with what you offered that would be very much appreciated.

Senator MURRAY—This bit was in camera, but it does not really matter if I talk about this bit. I suggested to two of the witnesses that were before us earlier in camera dealing with one of the issues you raised that what they were on about was some kind of independent review process being available—a commission or however you would describe it—which would be able to assess not just miscarriages of justice but miscarriages of process or miscarriages of settlement. For instance, in one case the settlement was inadequate, and it was a pressured and forced environment. In other cases, of course, you get miscarriages of justice. And then there are miscarriages of process such as those you were talking about where children may be taken away who should not be or children are left where they are who should not be. We as a committee are starting to talk about going in that direction, although we are a long way away from coming to a determination. But is that the area you are thinking about: having some mechanism to break the deadlock in these areas?

Mr Brindal—Yes; I think there needs to be something to protect all the rights. In essence, the state—and I can only speak about the state—gets away with it because it acts in protection of the children, who cannot really speak for themselves. By the time they can speak for themselves, in a sense it is all too late. I have heard many of you, I think quite legitimately, espousing family values. How you can look at the interests of the child and say that the interests of the child can in some way be independent of the interests of their family—in which, ideally, they should exist—is almost problematic. I think there does need to be an area of review.

There was a dreadful situation quoted to me by one of my colleagues just before I came down. The father was accused by a daughter who is being treated for mental problems. Welfare came and said to the mother, 'Either you agree with the daughter's accusations and sign the document'—basically accusing the husband—'or we will take the other child away.' It was an intolerable situation. The mother said, 'Look, I am quite prepared to say that I honestly believe my daughter believes that. She believes it because she has a mental illness, but I do not believe that my husband did it.' But it was basically, 'Well, either you say your husband did it, and ruin your marriage, or don't say he did it and lose your child.' I cannot see that that is a fair thing to put any parent through or any husband, or any wife, but that is the law as it currently exists. These people who are enforcing the law are doing no more than enforcing the will of the parliament of South Australia—and I would not mind betting you Senators that every state has similar legislation. If it is going on here, it is going on everywhere, because we are professionals: we are very keen to follow each other—and we do, slavishly.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Brindal, for coming along. It was a very thoughtful contribution.

Committee adjourned at 5.20 p.m.