

A vintage wooden rocking horse is the central focus, positioned on a bed of fallen leaves. The horse is light-colored with a saddle and is mounted on curved wooden rockers. In the background, a large, dark tree trunk is visible, and to the right, the lower legs and feet of a person in dark clothing are partially seen, suggesting a park or outdoor setting. The overall lighting is soft and somewhat dim, creating a nostalgic atmosphere.

LIVES OF
UNCOMMON
CHILDREN

REFLECTIONS OF
FORGOTTEN
AUSTRALIANS

THIS book commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Forde Inquiry, which investigated the abuse of children in Queensland institutions. Former Queensland Governor Leneen Forde took information from more than 300 people and looked at the histories of more than 150 orphanages and detention centres. Her report made 42 recommendations.

Micah Projects is a not-for-profit organisation comprising services that respond to injustice – The Esther Centre, Young Mothers for Young Women, the Brisbane Homeless Services Centre and Micah Mental Health and Disability Services. They are all located in Brisbane's inner city area.

The Historical Abuse Network, within The Esther Centre, advocates and provides support services for people who have experienced abuse in Queensland institutions, foster care and detention.

LIVES OF UNCOMMON
CHILDREN

REFLECTIONS OF
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

This book is copyright. Except for private study, research, criticism or reviews, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission.

© 2009 Micah Projects Inc. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-646-52551-8

CONTENTS



Dedication _____ iv

Forward _____ v

Stories of uncommon lives:

Gloria's Story _____ 3

Bryan's Story _____ 9

Colleen's Story _____ 17

Lana's Story _____ 29

Paul's Story _____ 41


Tina's Story _____ 45

Colin's Story _____ 49

Reggie's Story _____ 55

Marlene's Story _____ 65

Mimi's Story _____ 71



"Child".
Cast bronze, Gavin Fenelon 2004.
Emma Miller Place, Brisbane, Queensland.



*For those who didn't make it.
Who fought and campaigned for recognition but didn't live to hear what we
heard, finally: a national apology.*



FORWARD



TEN YEARS after the Forde Inquiry into the abuse of children in state care, the Federal Government finally issued a public apology to the 'forgotten Australians' in November, 2009.

It was a long time coming: three Senate inquiries and various state-based inquiries had already established the tragic truth about our treatment of children in care in the 20th century. The ensuing reports were a litany of grief and heartbreak, of the betrayal by so-called 'protectors' of children who had no power to resist, of the loss of innocence.

Those children are grown now and every one wears the scars of those betrayals. Deprivation – of education, love, tenderness, even decent food and clothing – has left many without the means to live out their early potential. Many were left without the skills to read or write, without the skills to survive in a world they found as harsh outside their institutions as inside. They live daily with the effects of prolonged and profound trauma.

This book records the stories, the memories and observations of some of these children. Now adults, they are making their way in a world which has, until recently, barely acknowledged the pain and cruelty that marked their childhoods. Governments and institutions have, historically, turned a blind eye not just to the abuse and neglect perpetrated by their own agencies, but to the ensuing havoc wreaked on each child's life as an adult.

These stories, written over several months of writing workshops at Lotus Place in Brisbane, are told simply, with disarming honesty and generosity. There is heartbreak here for sure, but there is also humour. There is bleakness, but there is also optimism. There is anger, but there is also acceptance. Even forgiveness.

These are the stories behind the inquiries, behind the reports, behind the apologies. They are a gift from some forgotten Australians to you. Read them and pass them on; urge others to read them too. You won't be able to un-know what you find here. You will not be able to forget. In this way, the writers of these stories will get their fervent wish: that vulnerable children will never, ever be forgotten again.

MICAH PROJECTS INC



Karyn Walsh

Coordinator, Micah Projects

Kris Olsson

Writer-in-Residence 2009

Alliance for
Forgotten Australians



HISTORICAL ABUSE NETWORK

FOR PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCED ABUSE IN INSTITUTIONS,
FOSTER CARE & DETENTION.

Micah Projects is funded by the Department of Communities, Queensland for services provided through Lotus Place.

Design: Vizable Communications, Brisbane

LIVES OF UNCOMMON
CHILDREN

REFLECTIONS OF
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS



GLORIA'S STORY



THE WORST OF TIMES, THE BEST OF TIMES

HE was murdering me. He was murdering me every day. I didn't want to wake up of a morning, because I knew what I might face. Another day of fear. Have to hurry, do the chores, then off to school – an escape. I'm free of fear there for a while, a positive advantage. School is the best time of day, learning to be smart and a little educated, making me feel good.

I absolutely love to learn, anything and everything, trying to fill my mind with knowledge, and remembering it all. I loved going to school; it was my sanctuary, but then I had to go back to my foster home, my home of fear and dread. And my foster parents. My foster father was a sinful man, using my body for his own sexual gratification. No one else knew he was doing it on a weekly basis. It was my hell; he was destroying my spirit, and my foster mother was very cruel, punishing me for not doing the chores right. Like scorching a white shirt, peeling too much skin off the potatoes and onions.

But to the people of the community, they were such wonderful people, because they fostered other children from the orphanage as well, and going to church every Sunday, letting people know they were looking after their foster children. What wonderful people, but behind the scenes, behind closed doors, we foster children were suffering daily. What a charade. We were their slaves, and I was his bedroom slave. I was the housewife in every sense of the word.

Hence my thinking of him killing me – killing every part of my being, my soul, my all. Who can I turn to? No one. Were the other foster children feeling the same as I? Are they living in their own

hell? Do they fear them as much as I do? I feel they would like to go back to the orphanage like I would. Oh, please God, help us all.

This is the part of my life which I was lucky enough to survive, this living hell. It is in the past now, and I thank my lucky stars that it came to an end when it did, and I grew to adulthood.



The happiest moments of my life were when I gave birth to my six children. I called them Donald, Selina, Brock, Daniel, Rodney and Cassandra. They gave me so much joy and pleasure; they were my life and salvation, my strength and protection. Though I must say thanks and be grateful to my two husbands, who made it possible for me to have those beautiful children. I had four children to my first husband, Don, and two children to my second husband, Peter.

I loved being a mother, it was something I could be very easily. Loving, feeding, cleaning, dressing, talking, singing and reading to them. They were the most enjoyable, most endearing times of my life. How I wish I could recapture those times and hold onto them forever and a day. When each of them was born, I felt the love pour from me. It was like a physical thing: the most beautiful feeling I had ever experienced in all my life. Being a mother came naturally to me; my children were not a burden to me, I wanted to give them my all.

As a child growing up I was deprived of a natural mother, any love, any nurturing, any closeness. As circumstances had it, I grew up in a living fear. Fear is the worst enemy a person can have, especially a child. This fear was put upon me, through no fault of my own, and because of this I was afraid of people, afraid of doing wrong.

The punishments and torture that were meted out to me made me so afraid I lost my voice. I was unable to speak for a time; so

much had fear had gripped me, my whole being. I was becoming emotionally numb – like a puppet. A puppet made of wood. Wood has no life when it is cut from the living tree. It is a product to be used, made into something, like I was as a child. I would feel like a thing with no soul or spirit, no life. Everything is trapped inside me, all my emotions. I am like a dumb creature, afraid to speak, afraid to do. When, oh when will I become a real person? Has someone to breathe life into me?

I carry on existing and surviving, I'm breathing every day, carrying my burdens of torture and fear. The children around me in the orphanage are living in fear as well. I would love to take all their fear away. I cannot, I am helpless to do so; maybe one day when I grow to be a big person, I may be able to stop children from suffering, to give them happiness. One day. I can only hope. I make that my wish.

Writing this, remembering part of my childhood, I now understand why I was so happy when I had my children. All the emotions that were trapped inside me, like the puppet I had been, all came pouring out. They brought me back to life; I felt like a real living human being. My spirit had come to the fore now. I felt wonderful, was full of joy. These wonderful miracles gave me back my inner strength, my soul. I can love these beautiful creatures, my babies. I will give them my best, my all.

And I did. I taught them everything I knew to be good; to care for and love others and to have respect for everything on this earth. So many wonders, so much beauty. And to learn from the wonderful little critters – like bees and ants, working together like teams, helping their own – to try to give them an understanding of the importance of caring for your own kind. And consideration of all that Mother Nature has given to us – not forgetting the simple animals that give us milk, meat and warmth. Also the sun and rain that make all our beautiful trees and flowers grow, and just like you, my beautiful children – you will grow bigger every

day with all the love and nurturing I can give to you. I can never forget the wonderful gift you all gave to me. My life, my joy and my happiest memories.



It was Monday the 22nd of February, 1965, and I was with child, the second time around. The baby was due to arrive in a few weeks.

I started to feel a contraction – or was I imagining it? I'm really not sure. Some time later, another one. Is my baby coming today? It might come quickly, I have heard that second babies come pretty fast, so I make arrangements to go to the hospital after I'd had several more contractions.

So I'm hospital, lying there relaxing. There are several more little pains, but after a good while, it seems my baby has decided to stop her journey down the birth canal. But as it turned out, the doctor decided to keep me in overnight, in case something started to happen again. But it didn't.

Next morning when the doctor visited he said I could go home, but to come back in as soon as I could if I got any more contractions.

All was well when I went home, so I just carried on with my normal household duties, sweeping, dusting, mopping, washing and cooking. I went to bed, had a night's sleep, but then I woke up early in the morning, around seven-ish, and I felt something happening to my body again. I thought, 'oh, my', is my baby going to be born today? I hoped so, but I had to be sure this time. I didn't want to go to hospital again on a false alarm.

As the morning of the 24th of February travelled on, I was feeling more contractions, but still I had to be sure. I visited my neighbour Eileen, who lived two houses up. I told her what was happening. 'Well, it seems like you may be in labour,' she said.

'I hope so, this time,' I said

Eileen said I should call the ambulance now, but I wanted to be absolutely sure before I did. Eileen said: 'Okay, I'll make a cup of tea.'

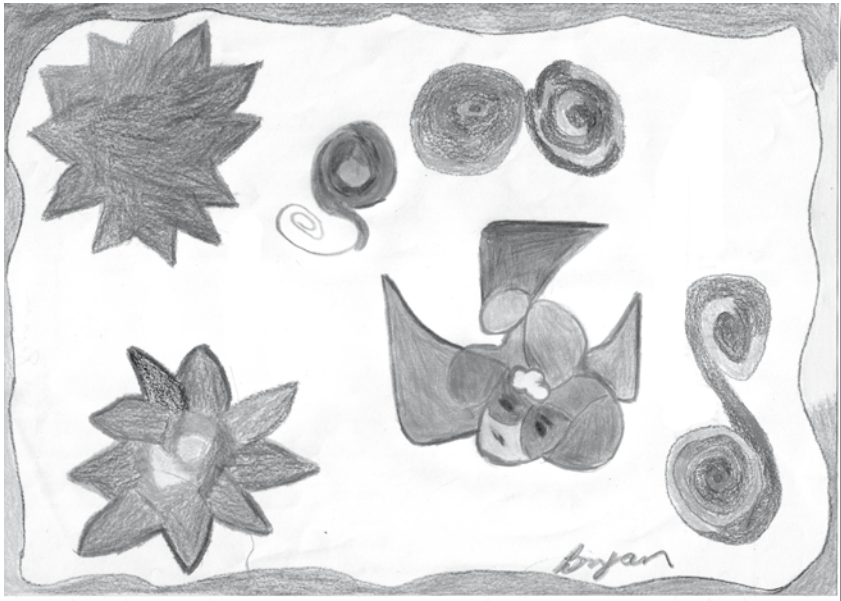
I knew I should try to relax, but I found it hard to do so, considering the state I was in. I thought, yes, I'm definitely in labour.

I told my father-in-law, Henry, to call the ambulance. I felt I was getting very close to my birthing time now. Then I had a sudden thought. I hoped whoever answered the phone could understand him. He was Scottish, and I could barely understand him at the best of times.

I knew this was it, now. It was happening. I hoped the ambo hurried; the pains were getting closer together. Well, I thought, it's only a five-minute trip for the ambo, he shouldn't be too long now, any minute. Fifteen minutes passed, and still no ambo. Where was it? I was starting to panic. I called out to Eileen to call the ambulance again; maybe they couldn't understand Henry's lingo.

I hoped it would get here soon. This baby is coming, oh please hurry, I was saying as I stood on the front steps of our house. I was thinking, I'm going to have this baby right here on the steps. The ambulance finally arrived. The baby is coming, please hurry, I said. Try and relax, the ambo said. I can't, I can't, I said, the baby's coming. Hurry, hurry! He told me again to relax, and to lie down, as I was sitting up in the back of the ambulance.

Minutes later, we arrived at the Women's Hospital. The ambo helped me out of the back of the ambulance, and I walked towards the door of the hospital, half bent over, holding my stomach, as if to hold the baby in. The nurse saw me and put me in a wheelchair and wheeled me to the labour ward. She helped me up onto a birthing table, took my undies off and whamo! my waters broke and gushed out like a geyser. The nurses were shocked. Wow! said one. And straight after that, the baby came. What a relief; I could breathe easy. The drama was over. Selina was born, safe and sound.



BRYAN'S STORY



HELL HOLES

I was born in Townsville and for the first seven years of my life I lived in our family home with my father, mother and brothers. I was happy in these early childhood years, I had a strong feeling of belonging. I had a mother I adored and who loved and cared for my brothers and me. I remember the red bike my brothers and I used to share. When we got tired of bike riding we would take the tube from the bike, put it into the casing of an old football and kick that around for hours on end.

I remember the ice-cream man, with his horse-drawn cart and bell ringing, and the fact that my brothers and I were always given enough money so we could buy an ice-cream each. I remember the ice man too, with his big tongs and blocks of ice, and the foaming sea that washed across the flats at high tide and into our yard. The stink beetles that came down from the lights in the late afternoon. And my mother standing at the boiling, wood-fuelled copper, using a wooden stick to stir the washing. But most of all I remember the happy and contented feeling of being part of a family.

I learned later that my father was a drinker, but I don't associate drinking or violence with my first seven years. Fear and violence came later. I just remember that one day my mother wasn't there any more. I can't remember any incident to account for her sudden disappearance. It was only years later, after I had left state care, that I was told my mother had been heavily pregnant with twins, and my father had kicked her in the stomach. She went into premature labour and bled to death during their birth. One of the

twins died too. When I obtained my files, I learned my mother died on Christmas Eve, 1951.

My next memory is arriving on the steps of St Joseph's Orphanage – Neerkol – in Rockhampton, 500 miles from my home in Townsville. As we stood there the mother superior came and admired the ring I was wearing. My mother had given it to me, it was gold with a red stone. She said, that's a nice ring, and took it from me. I never saw it again.

From that day on, starting with the theft of my ring, I was subjected to deliberate and callous cruelty, abuse, humiliation and deprivation of all of life's basic necessities – food, proper clothing, medical care and education, not to mention the emotional and psychological necessities of a child of such tender years.

Neerkol and the nuns robbed me of my childhood and my ability to ever live a normal life. In that childhood, in that hellhole on earth, there was no love, warmth or compassion, no one to trust or to turn to if I needed help or advice, no one to talk to or sit with if I felt lonely or frightened or sick.

The only feelings the nuns engendered in me were feelings of sheer, sick-to-the-stomach fear, humiliation and self-doubt. By the degrading way they treated me, I was made to feel like a worthless piece of rubbish that nobody wanted, and this feeling followed me long into my adult life.

Day after day I was bashed over the head, back, shoulders and legs with a cane, and full force over the knuckles with a blackboard square until they were swollen and bleeding. The nuns would punch me with a closed fist, ram my head into my desk grab me by the hair and shake me violently until I felt dizzy and sick.

They didn't administer these punishments in the cool, unemotional way a normal school principal would. Instead they lashed out in a frenzy, bashing and hitting seemingly out of control. They seemed to enjoy seeing the fear and the pain they caused. Standing in line I would be bashed over and over around

the legs with a cane in the same spot until my legs were so swollen that the skin would burst and bleed. I would be thrown down and held across my bed, my pants taken down, my shirt pulled up and then repeatedly bashed with the cane. I'd be in agony for weeks after that.

At school they told me they 'couldn't bash brains into me' so I was sent out to spend all my time on the verandah, sometimes for hours with my arms held above my head or out to the side. I'd be bashed if I got tired and let them drop, and called 'stupid', 'an idiot', 'rubbish' and 'no hoper'. I had to make cane baskets instead of having lessons. If I wet the bed as a young child, I was flogged and forced to stand for hours with the wet sheets over my head.

We had no warm clothes or shoes in winter, only ripped shorts and shirts, we were starved and left for days without food, and never saw fruit, cheese, milk or eggs. I was so hungry I ate weeds, flower buds, wild lemons and Burdekin plums and wild spiky cucumbers, and food I could find from the scrap heap.

Sometimes I had all my hair shaved off as a punishment for being stupid. Or they'd lock me in a cage at the end of the dormitory.

I got my last schooling in grade five and told I was a waste of time, and sent out with a man to ringbark, dip and cut timber for the Home. I wasn't paid for this work and only given the same meagre amount of food. Then I was hired out to farms as a labourer.

The first one lasted 13 months and I was treated very well, like a member of the family. I ate with the family and slept in the house – he even gave me a mossie net. The work was hard, cutting and loading sugar cane by hand. The job ended when the family sold the farm and moved into town. They tried to find me a job in town too but had no luck. He told the people at Neerkol I was a 'lovely little chap'.

But at the second I was starved again and badly treated, physically abused by the boss and even his adult children. I was sent out to

work in the bush all day without food or water, and also to blow wells with dynamite with a man named Jack. Neither of us knew much about dynamite and a few times I had to haul Jack out of the well just before it blew up.

I worked bundling up branches and tree roots to clear more land for farming, and I was scared out there on my own. The old fear that had haunted me at Neerkol came back. If I came back to the house to get a drink of water I'd be belted by one of the children.

At the third farm I was also abused, starved and bashed. The whole place was run down, even the horse was blind. But he made me ride that horse, with its girth in tatters, until once the saddle girth broke and I fell heavily, losing consciousness and smashing my shoulder. When I woke up I staggered back to the house where I was allowed to sit for a short time before I was ordered back to work. I still suffer pain from that injury.

I was treated worse than an animal on that farm, and rarely even spoken to. I was made to eat and sleep on a verandah like a dog, fearful that at any moment something would come out of the bush and attack me where I lay.

After a short stint back at Neerkol, where I slept on sacks on a verandah because they didn't give me a bed, I was told I was being sent to a 'nice farm' near Brisbane. I was taken on a train by someone from children's services, and I really thought I was going to a farm. But at Roma Street station we were met by the police. I was stunned and terrified, sick with fear. They took me to Westbrook, in the foothills of Toowoomba.

There the superintendent told me to 'tow the line' before he hit me across the side of the head and said 'now get out and mingle with the other boys'. I hadn't been told where I was or why I was there, but I'd never seen so many boys all together in one place.

I soon found out they were there because most had committed some kind of offence. It was some kind of prison, I realised. But I hadn't done anything wrong.

Westbrook was a hellhole like no other. No human should ever have to go through what I went through there: there were guards screwing boys, bashings, threats, older boys used by guards to hold other boys down while they were bashed. Boys were taken out of the dormitories at night for sex. I'd lie awake listening to them sobbing in misery and I cried myself to sleep every night, in sickening fear of them coming for me.

I lost count of the times I was sexually assaulted in the showers.

After a week I couldn't bear the abuse, the filth, the cruelty any longer, and I walked out the gates. I was brought back and flogged repeatedly by the superintendent with a cat-o-nine-tails until my whole body was bruised, swollen and bleeding. My arms were fastened behind my back with rope and a stick and I was thrown into a room without food or water for a long time.

The cruelty, misery and depravity of Westbrook was horrendous, and a hundred times worse than anything I'd suffered in Neerkol. Even the food was foul and inedible; it contained weevils, maggots and other grubs.

I escaped in two mass breaks in the early 1960s. I just wanted to get away from the inhuman filth, violence, bashings and misery. After the first I was caught, flogged and made to 'walk the path'. This entailed being made to walk up and down a line backwards and forwards, over and over until you were exhausted and couldn't walk any more. Then you'd be dragged off, flogged again and thrown into a dormitory.

In the second I ran with four or five other boys I didn't even know. We were cold, hungry, frightened and lost, and broke into a shop through its window looking for something to eat. I was such a naïve and unworldly child, I had no idea of the rights and wrongs of doing this. I just knew there was food in there.

Then we came across a Ute with the keys in the ignition. We got in and one of the boys drove – just to get further and faster

away from the tortures of Westbrook. I didn't get to drive. We were chased by police and shot at as we ran through long grass one night. The police knew we were children from Westbrook – they'd called out before they opened fire. The bullets whizzed past my head at very close range, and I count myself lucky not have been killed.

We were caught and put into the Toowoomba watch-house. The police wrote a statement for me and bashed me until I signed. Then I was sentenced to imprisonment in Boggo Road.

After the hell-holes of Neerkol and Westbrook, Boggo Road was a paradise. I had a cell of my own and could sleep at night without fear of being attacked or raped.

The food was basic but a great improvement on what I was used to. I even got steak and sausages without maggots, and pudding on weekends, plum duff and things that seemed like absolute luxuries. Porridge every morning with milk on it, half a loaf of bread, tea, sugar and cheese, a tin of golden syrup to do with as I pleased, and a ration of tobacco. There was no running water or sewerage; I had a tin in the corner to use as a toilet and a mattress to sleep on.

There was no gym, no books and no courses to take, no TV, nothing much at all, but I was still happier and more at ease there than I ever had been in Neerkol or Westbrook because, even though the rules were very strict, there was a certain amount of fairness. I was never once sexually assaulted or flogged or bashed or humiliated there, even though my fellow inmates at the time were murderers, serial rapists, paedophiles and other violent offenders. I felt safer in the company of these convicted murderers than I had ever felt in Neerkol or Westbrook.

The whole time I was in jail – four years – I had no visitors and when I had served my sentence and walked out the gates, I had no one to meet me or help me. I was completely on my own, the way I had been since I was seven years old. I had never had a life of my

own. I was completely institutionalised, a mental and emotional wreck. I went to a shop, bought some smokes and sat down on the side of the road and longed for the safe and familiar surrounds of the jail I'd just left.

I struggled to survive for a while and make a go of my life, but my life was a hopeless and meaningless vacuum with no apparent way of escape. I had spent 14 years in state government-run institutions following routines and orders. After a while I deliberately broke into a shop with the sole aim of being taken to court and convicted and taken back to jail.

When I finally left prison I took up the life of a swaggie, living in the bush. I loved that. I couldn't read or write, had no life experience and no chance of employment. I moved around from place to place, unable to settle down, sleeping in my car or in the open.

My life was a long and lonely continuous struggle. I had no contact with my brothers or other relatives until I found my grandmother, my mother's mother. She was a little old thing by then with long plaits.

I still suffer from panic attacks and agoraphobia. I have trouble sleeping because of the continual feeling of imminent danger. When I do sleep I wake suddenly, terrified, soaked in sweat.

I spent most of my life feeling worthless and not as good as the next person. If you tell a child over and over that they are ugly, useless, worthless, stupid, a piece of rubbish, and so on, they will grow to believe it. That's how it was with me.

It's been hard for me to trust people or build relationships. It took a long time for me to be able to settle and feel comfortable in a loving family environment.

Now, with my own boys, I make sure I tell them how much I love them. I want them to feel they are loved and that they belong.



COLLEEN'S STORY



*In loving memory of Dave
A considerate person
A loving boy*



COMPASSIONATE always, and passionate about his God, other people and his friends.

He prayed always for his family, loved them very much.

He blessed my life; I was blessed to be his Mum.

We spent many hours on our back steps, talking, sharing and praying.

I love my boy and I always will.

He was a mighty man of God. Through and through.

We all miss you very much.

WHEN DAVID WAS BORN

DAVID was a lovely baby. He was born at 1.19 in the afternoon. David, my husband, came up to the hospital with Kevin and Kathleen. Kathleen wouldn't have anything to do with me; I think she had her nose out of joint. She was only two years old. Kevin was four.

The next day when Kevin went to pre-school he ran across telling everybody that he had a baby boy. He was so excited.

When I came home I was so careful with David, I would not let them hold him because I was so scared they were going to drop him.

And one day I was sleeping and I heard this noise. I wondered what it was, and I got up. Kevin and Kathleen had taken David out of the cot and were playing with him on the floor.

To this day I don't know how they got him out without dropping him. From then on I let them nurse him, with help. They really loved their little brother. And I learned a big lesson.



DAVID, you would walk beside me and we would talk. Sometimes we wouldn't talk that much. Sometimes you were excited about things and sometimes you would need some advice and I would talk to you. You helped me a lot too.



DAVID was going to special school. I was worried about him getting into trouble, with people who could lead him astray. I wanted the best for my boy.

I talked to someone about a youth group and it sounded good to me. I decided I would take him to youth group – and David wanted to go. At church, at first he sat down the back. It took him a while, but with going to youth group and their acceptance, David gave his life to the Lord. And he never looked back – his life was totally changed.

David had a problem with his reading, but they went through the Bible with him. It took him a while but he started reading it slowly. Sometimes he would not know the words, and would ask if he didn't know. It took him a while to read the whole Bible but he was determined that he was going to do it.

David would always sit down the back of the church with me. I didn't know if he was listening, so I asked him and he said that he was. Just because a child sits down the back it does not mean he is not listening.

Then one day the youth group went to a Christian concert in at Festival Hall. They listened to the music for a while, and then there was a call from the stage, asking if anyone would like to give their life to the Lord.

David was sitting near a girl and she asked if he would like to go down the front. He said that he would. David's life changed from that moment. I was so proud of him because he made that decision for himself. He was a different person; he went from listening to Smashing Pumpkins music to Christian music. He was a man of God. And his life was in God's hands.



DAVID was called McM for a long time, and his favourite saying was cool. Then he was called 'Dodgie Dave', and then went from being Dodgie to Doco. He used to play football in his Doc Martens boots – he wore them everywhere. And he always had his Christian T-shirts on, just to show people. Somebody said to him once, 'don't stop wearing them, because the words on the shirts help a lot of people'.



DAVID went out of his way most the time, when people were in need. Young people he had met before would say they were hungry, and he would go and get some McDonalds for them – but he would not give them any money.

WHENEVER David went away, if it was a trip to Melbourne to a concert or to a conference in Adelaide or to Rockhampton – he would also visit Mt Morgan, sometimes with his cousin Colin – whenever he went, I always helped him carry his bags up to the bus stop, and I would meet him at the station when he came back. He would always tell me what a great time he had.



DAVID spent a lot of time on the phone with friends, talking to them or praying with them. He would send prayer messages through his phone. He always had a lot of time to talk to them and sometimes he would ring his aunt and talk to her. His phone bills were always high but he didn't care – he just wanted to help them if they needed it. He was a true friend to them, a very kind and loving person and that's how he'll be remembered.



WHEN DAVID WENT TO PERTH

DAVID was running in competitions for the school. He would bring home medals, and I would watch him at the track. He really enjoyed it. At the school they were getting ready to choose people to go to the competition in Perth.

They made an announcement at the school, and David's and Suzanne's names were there. They were very excited about going. David and I decided we were going to deliver the local newspaper – we worked hard to do this but didn't make enough money for the trip.

Then the cleaner from the school decided she would approach B105 to see if they could help. She had to get on to them a few times and they did help. They came to the school and talked to David and Suzanne about going to Perth. I think they were excited about being on the radio.

And the next thing they did was to get donations of lamingtons, and appealed to people to buy them, and they raised over two thousand dollars for David and Suzanne to go to Perth. David was very excited about going.

We went to church the next Sunday and to my surprise the church had raised money for me to go to Perth. I wasn't expecting it. They also gave me some bags to take and some spending money.

I was very nervous about going on a plane. I tried not to think about it but people would remind me that it was getting closer, and then I would worry about it. The day came to go and we were waiting outside our house. David was picked up by a limo, and I went out with my brother, and Kathleen came as well.

I was still very worried about the plane. When we got out there we met David from the limo. Then we went upstairs to the café. I was still nervous. I was sitting with Kathleen and my brother, and Kathleen gave me a little Bacardi and Coke, and then I was a bit more settled down about the trip. David couldn't wait to get on the plane. When we got on the plane, it was a funny experience. We sat down and buckled up, and I was holding onto the sides of the seat with my eyes closed, and before I knew it we were up in the air.

They came about with things to eat and drink for the boys who were going to Perth. They showed the boys how they fly the plane. It took five hours to get there, because we had to stop in Sydney.

When we got to Perth it was nearly ten o'clock at night. And my aunty was there to meet us. I hadn't seen her in nearly twenty years. She was very excited about us coming. Other boys were going to some accommodation. David wished he could have gone with them, but it was arranged that he would come with me to my aunty's place. She treated us very well, and was worried that something would go wrong. But I told her not to worry about

anything, because we were family and wanted people to be themselves.

I went out to the running competitions. David did very well – he got one gold, two silvers and two bronze. We even got to go to Fremantle by train and got to see the Indian Ocean. Then we dropped David off and went to Rottneest.

We were away for a week. Then we came home. The first thing I noticed when we got there was that the wall unit had fallen apart. Kathleen and Kevin had changed the place around. They had a smaller book case because they thought I would go off my head at them.

David was still running in competitions. Then they said to him at the running club that he would have to make up his mind about running on Sundays. They tried to make him choose. David decided it was more important to choose God. And he never looked back.



WHEN DAVID ASKED TANIA TO MARRY HIM

TANIA would always say she loved David, but he would not say it until he meant it.

David was planning to ask her, but it had to be just right, so he set out writing a poem for her. He asked his friends to help with the spelling. He knew there was a Christian conference coming up so he decided he was going to ask her there, in Sydney.

They went down to the conference; Tania didn't know what was going to happen. He didn't do it straight away. But the next day they were at the Opera House and he was going to ask her.

I gave him a call to find out what happened; he told me he hadn't asked her yet, but he would soon. He read out his poem to her and got down on one knee and asked her to marry him, and she said 'yes'. And then he rang back, so happy, and Tania was so happy too.

I WAS walking down the road and not thinking about anything, and said hello to this lady who said hello as well. And then she invited me in for a cup of tea, and we started talking. I was there for a while talking to her. She had three children, and needed someone to talk to.

Sometimes I would pass and she was getting treated very badly by her boyfriend, so I would help her with the kids when she went out. Sometimes she needed a lot of help, and I would do my best to help her.

One night I went down to look after the kids, and I would not put up with their nonsense. I put them in their room in the corner. They soon learned that I wasn't mucking around. The next day they told their mum but she said it served them right. It took them a while but they turned into good kids.

She was a nice person, but did not have much of a clue about how to look after three boys. All she needed was someone kind enough to talk to her and help a bit.



WHEN MY HUSBAND DAVID DIED

IT was about six in the morning when I went to wake him up. He wouldn't wake up, and he was blue in the face. I didn't know what to do. I went over to the neighbours to see if they could help. They came over, and told me to ring the ambulance. I waited with the kids outside. We were hoping they could make it all right.

When the ambulance came they went straight inside. They said he was still alive, but barely. They did mouth-to-mouth on him and compressions, they tried very hard. It seemed like forever they were in there.

Then they came out and told me that David had passed away. My kids were standing out in the yard with my neighbour. How

could I tell them that their Dad had died? I didn't know what to think.

My neighbour told the kids their Dad had gone to Heaven. Then they called the police, and they came and asked what had happened, and I told them.

I went inside to my room and a policeman was standing outside the door. I asked him if I could go in. He said it was okay. I went in to see my husband. It seemed so unbelievable. I felt very numb.

The fifth of March was voting day, and people were having a look over as they passed my house. Then I was told to take the kids over to my neighbour's place so they could take David away. That was an awful day.

I still had to go over and vote. I didn't know what we were going to do without him. I had to make all the arrangements myself. I felt so abandoned, and so scared that someone was going to take my kids off me, because we didn't have David any more.

It was hard bringing the kids up by myself. But we got there; they were wonderful children. We had our ups and downs. The Children's Services watched us like anything.

My children grew up to be great adults, knowing what they wanted to do. David, my husband, would be so proud of them.

I decided not to get married again, because I didn't want anybody to hurt my kids, and because there was no one like David. My husband. Once you get married, you marry for life.



MY LIFE WHEN YOUNGER

I remember being at my Nanna's house, and being told I had malnutrition. I was very little. I remember going up to the mango trees up the road and climbing the trees to get mangoes. And then going to the house and eating them in the half tank, and really enjoying them very much.

And when it was raining we would block up the hole and jump in with our uniforms on.

One day I went down to the neighbour's house and stood at the door and knocked, and when she answered I threw a great big plastic lizard at her. She started to scream, and her dad came out and I got into trouble. I thought it was funny, but nobody got the joke.

When we were living at Bridge Street, Mt Morgan, I said to my brother Colin, to put a box over his head. But he didn't, and I threw a stone at him, and because he hadn't put the box over his head the stone hit him. My father came out and chased me but couldn't catch me. I didn't know better, and I wish I knew back then what I know now.

We lived in different places up north and at the beach. We moved from place to place. When we went back to Mt Morgan we were taken off our parents. They came and got us from the Catholic school and they took us to court. I could see my mother and Dad looking at us with their heads down. My brothers and sisters were taken as well; we were charged with being neglected and then we were taken out to the home. We didn't know what to expect; we were taken out there in a Mini Minor; it was a long way out.

When we got there we were taken out of the car and told which dormitory we were going into. We were all separated.



THE day I was leaving I got dressed and was very excited. I got on the bus to go to town to catch the bus to Mt Morgan. I had to walk to my grandmother's house. When I got there I found out that my grandfather had died and I was very upset.

Different things happened up there. My uncles were very jealous of us. My uncle tried to make me drink metho because he thought that was what I was doing, but I was only bathing my ears

because I had just got them pierced. He was always drunk and we got blamed for things like stealing and he would belt us with a bullet belt, because he thought he had the right. And we were told we were ugly and not worth it.



FIVE-STAR PICNIC

WE would leave from Neerkol early morning, and would go to Emu Park for the picnic. St George's Home was there as well.

We would run up the beach, then we would have races, and there was plenty of food like lollies, cakes and sandwiches. We had a lot of fun. The Rotary Club sponsored the day.

By the end of it we were all tired. We went home in the bus, and on the way we would wave to the people in other cars. We would be singing songs like Ten Green Bottles, My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean, and others. If we pulled faces we would be in big trouble.

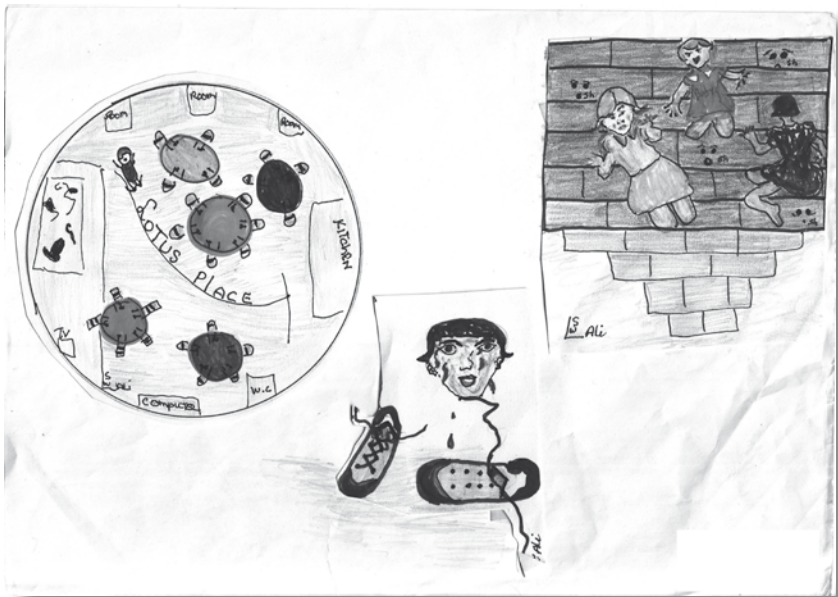


I always promised my brothers that if I got married I would get them out. I did get married and I decided that I was going to keep my promise.

I rang Children's Services and I was told 'no', and decided to call again. This time I rang Rockhampton Children's Services, and I convinced them I could take care of my brother and sister. I was already having Colin from Boys Town, and I was really determined to have my brother and sister. This time they said 'yes'. They came down by bus; they were very excited to come.

Andrew and Colin decided they were going to fix Jean's bed up. As soon as she got on the bed it fell down. She was so upset, and I had to sort them out. they went back to Neerkol, happy that they got to meet their niece and nephews for the first time.

When they got out of Neerkol Jean was sent to St Mary's convent in Brisbane, and Andrew was sent to Alkira, and they were treated very well. Colin was still in Boys Town, and it was very rough on him. When he got out he was able to come to my place, which he really enjoyed. He told David and me we gave him a good grounding in life.



LANA'S STORY



FOREVER IN TROUBLE

THE syrup was my favourite past time, it was delicious and sweet. I used to stick my whole hands and fingers as deep as I could, so I could eat and lick the syrup from the deep barrel and I had a party. I remember the barrel was old fashioned, and high and deep, I had to climb into the barrel and half my body went into the barrel as I was too small. But as I remember of course, I got caught, didn't I, and I got the usual flogging for it, so I used to laugh it off, the harder the floggings, the harder the laugh.

Somehow, the boys would smuggle some old bread into the tin, and bring them down to the incinerator at the back of the nuns cottages, so we used to sneak out of the dormitory, and run down to meet the boys at the incinerator, to go and eat the bread. Whatever we could find to eat, and even the left overs, or whatever food we found, we would have a ball.

Easter time, the holy month, was always special especially in the dining room where we all had the large donated Easter eggs made from icing sugar. It was a giant of an egg and so colourful. It had a flower on it also made from different coloured icing sugar. Wow. We would get a piece of that Easter egg, it would get smashed, broken and shared amongst all the children in the dining room, and for nuns as well. It came on our plates, first you still had to say grace, "thanked the lord for this beautiful donated egg", which was shared amongst us all.

In military style, you would fall into a line, as little girls and boys. Innocent little things we were, with no knowledge, no love, no knowing who and where you're from, and not knowing your age.

We had to live the life, we knew to survive.

Not knowing your age is awful, none of us knew. I got a lot of kids (to crawl under the verandah, with me. Under the house it was dusty with sand, and heaps of rubbish, even snakes. I got under there so deep that some older person, had to come and pull me out by my legs. As usual, curiosity "nearly" killed this cat, I guess I was bored, and nothing to do, I seemed to stir up trouble, I didn't know it was a challenge to new adventure.

After Nudgee I was adopted, didn't know my age then. Remembering back in time was difficult, as I had to learn my new name, my new address, and had to catch up to 12 years of life. For me it was very difficult as I had tons of problems – the nightmares, flash backs – trying to memorise things – that was hard. Because I had no knowledge at all, I was too old to learn, so I thought. I knew nothing, nothing at all. My parents were tired of me, I drained them too – learning to eat, learning to speak, learning the normality of everyday life, the eating of foods I never had before, digestion problems, understanding problems, it seemed I was from out of this world, from another planet. The sweats every night, the sheets all wet, the screams, yelling in my dreams, hours of sleep – the coldness – the questions. I had to get used to the new life.



ADOPTION

I have to laugh at this one, as I remembered it. Mum sent me up to do some shopping for her, to buy a loaf of brown bread. It was just about a few months living there, so she wrapped up the money and gave me a list, to give it to the shop keeper. When I got there I gave the list to the man, and he gave me a lolly. After that, I got the bread and on my way home, there was a horse and I was already picking the inside of the bread. It was soft and nice,

so I gave a bit to the horse. So the horse and I ate the inside of the bread. So I said to mum, "here is your bread", not thinking or being aware, or conscious. A few minutes later mum comes running in to me saying "where is the bread?". I said, "Inside, I gave it to you". She said, "but there is nothing inside the bread, you ate it! There is only the crust left."

"Oh, I ate it mummy".

So she had to go down to the shop again to buy new bread.

I knew nothing when I left the orphanage. I had the brains of a 3 year old child, when I was eleven years and ten months old – nearly 12 years old. I remember being given an ice cream by my (new) parents, which I looked at it for a long time, I could not lick it, as I was conditioned not to stick my tongue out. I remember also when I arrived at their place, there was a plate or a bowl of food, on the floor, so the first thing I did, was to grab the food on the floor. I went down and ate it, but before I knew I had two Alsatian dogs on me, grabbing my face, and ears, and more psychological damage. I was rushed to the nearest doctor at Northgate for an operation to my face. That was the first day out of the orphanage.

I recall three months after my dog attacks, it was my first birthday in my life, at 12 years old. Then all these presents, wow, I couldn't believe my eyes, so many. My first real doll, my own, a book called "Dot and the Kangaroo". The word "Dot" reminded me of (SRM. Dorothea). I was so so happy – so I called it my Dotti Book, as I used to call SRM Dorethea (Dotti). That book for me was so special and gave me so much pleasure. This was my own stuff. I treasure the first possession that I truly owned for myself.



THE Benediction again very long and lengthy, and on your knees till they were sore, and so too your back. Benediction is always in Latin and the incense used to get up your nose and the breathing

would get difficult for me, but you had to stay and sing in Latin 'The Tantrum; Ergo' and all sorts of songs, and keep your back straight, wear your hat – and you had to know it by heart, which we all did.

Sister would call you up, but you would never look into the eyes of a nun, as we were not allowed to look, "Don't you dare look at me. Keep your eyes down and head down". The reason for that, was because there were too many of us, and she could not love us or want to love us, otherwise she would feel for us – that's not allowed.

Sitting with SR. M sorting out long wire coils, for stems of a large flower, we had a zig zag scissors, and crepe paper, for the head of the flowers, we are going to make. They would be in diverse colours, like red, yellow, blue etc and were about four feet tall, and just beautiful.

I can remember early days when brushing your teeth, the old fashioned way – like using charcoal, rubbing and biting the charcoal, and chew it but do not swallow it. After chewing it, then you would rub your finger over your teeth till you hear the squeaky sound, then rinse and gargle with your water then say cheese, see how white your teeth are then – yes – wow.

Also I do remember the Army came, and gave us some blankets, and also I remember, Colgate toothpaste you used to be able to refill; they had a special machine you would connect, the empty toothpaste head to machine, straighten out the paste and hello, Bob's your uncle.



I actually thought SRM. was cooking something for us, but that was not to be. She said, "No, don't lick that – that is soap". She was cooking it in a BIG bucket like thing on gas, and made hundreds of soaps for the hair, clothes, basically the lot.

Christmas time for celebrations, if you didn't go on a holiday for 6 weeks then you stayed at the Home. For your present, you

would get a lovely juicy orange sitting on your plate when you came into the dining table – it would look very pretty and the long tables were massive. Also we never celebrated Christmas with Santa Claus, or Father Christmas, no way – not for us. Only thing that was celebrated was the nativity of Christ born in Bethlehem and maybe a play.

As a tiny tot maybe two years old, I remember that the grass was higher than me, there was a patch flat in the grass where SRM was teaching us how to catch a ball. It was soft rubber – and me being small, it seemed like everything else was big – so big, if we heard a ssss noise or something like that. SRM. would grab us and race us inside, all seven of us. Just to be sure, so no one can get bitten, or die even from a frizzy – lizzy.

One day my sisters Terencia, Lena and I noticed our mother talking to a boy, we decided to hide under the stairways as the children marched in. Lena, Terencia and I, we grabbed the boy and he didn't know who we were, so we said, "Why were you talking to that lady before?". The boy said that it was his mother. We all said no it was our mother, here we are arguing about whose mother it was. Then we asked him his name, he said his name was Johnny Ly and Lena said she was Lena Ly, Terencia said Terencia Ly – "Oh we must all have the same name so we must be all brothers and sisters". After that we got caught, we never saw each other.

It seemed like I was forever in trouble, with everything and every one, especially at school I guess. I used to have to go and sit or stand in the corner of the room with my finger over my lips for being naughty and then on top of that, I was made to wear a dunce cap on my head. I could not learn – I didn't know the ABC, it was so hard to learn the sums, I just could not concentrate because I couldn't learn.

In church time I used to pull faces and made the kids laugh and giggle, but SRM would come along and grab my ear lobes, and didn't I move!

One day, I got some of the boys to put some pictures over the stations of the Cross, in Church, the pictures of semi naked girls, beautiful legs and face. Of course I couldn't control my giggle, as SRM and Priest and altar boys came in – you should have seen their faces, it dropped so long, the kids and I were laughing and farting from the giggle – oh boy, didn't I get into trouble again.

We went down the stairs, they were packed with hundreds of kids rushing to go down. We kids would run and slide on the railing and did it so many times, and I was so good, quick and fast. What adrenalin I'd got, that was a lot of fun.

As a tiny tot, I remember the record player, HMV right in front of my face. The radiogram was nice and loud, it was playing a good old tune called:

On the baby's knuckle

On the baby's knee

Where will the baby's dimple be etc..

Good old song.

I remember one night, I had to check and see if a new nun was nice or cranky, so I said to the girls in the dormitory, to all be quiet. So when SRM. came in I mumbled, some one was sick, and when I spoke to her she was kind and nice. I called out to the girls, "she's okay, come on out" so we were all over her, out of enjoyment. So SRM put us all to bed, and we felt a little secure and happy with her.

We were "the forgotten ones", unloved, unwanted, whose parents and family were so called of "bad" character, or not married, parents with problems, but we got marked, not our parents. We were of bad blood, or a bastard, that was the system, but we were kids, innocent victims punished for our parents mistakes. They took it out on us and we felt the pain and paid the price. We were unloved and unwanted, it was not fair, not at all. And it was not free, my grandmother, or father paid the sisters, to look after us, it cost us money they didn't have.

The SRM were very tense, in a hurry and very tired, they had no energy left, they were impatient and cranky, they would run away from you if you tried to speak to them. How sad is that? So they could not speak to you, even if they wanted to because they were always on Retreats – if you're in their way, they would push you off, or chase you away.

Being at Lotus Place has been a great challenge, a place for ex-residents to meet and be with each other. Yes there are many different sorts of people with different personalities, No wonder! Somehow, you had to become someone – or somebody but most of us had many multiple personalities.

Lotus Place is a haven and a God send, it is a place to rekindle the friendships. We have to be aware of what we want to do now, we now must wake up, and start doing things for ourselves, there are lots of opportunities now with plenty of activities.

And we've done many different courses, with ARC – the ME Quilt, the photography story, the Moving On projects. The certificates in Hostel accommodation and computer courses – working along with HAN and HAN team. It seems like we really never stop – it is one thing after another, no time to breathe. It is up to us if we would like to do them.

The members of Empower Arts invite you all to attend the regular weekly meetings where they develop projects and seek ideas that can be supported. The meetings are held every Tuesday at 1.30 after lunch, here at Lotus Place. If you are outside Brisbane and would like to contribute your ideas, please phone to speak to one of the members, Reg or Colleen, one of our members, or drop them a line.

Empower Arts
c/o Lotus Place
P.O. Box 3449
South Brisbane QLD 4101

So, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, there is no excuse.

Everything is happening for us, come give it a go, you would be surprised with your own achievements – and proud of your self. OK, another old saying is “God helps those who help themselves, but believe in helping yourself too”.

By doing our workshops, some of us, wanted to lobby governments. It started with a thought of a “National Day” for those children who did not survive the institutions and for all those who did die and never were able to tell their stories. This I do in memory of my twin sister (Lena Ali) who died in St Vincent’s Home, Orphanage. SO.I.C.A was the main group, that work in conjunction with the QLD, State, Government Historical Abuse Network and Survivors of Institutional childhood Abuse along side of the artist Gavin Fenlon, artist of “the Androgynous statue” which was erected in 2003 to commemorate the Forgotten Australians.

On 5 June 2009 we celebrated a morning tea for the 10th Anniversary of the Forde Inquiry. It also was a day to celebrate how the individual have moved – about 120 came and our special guest was Leneen Forde and Hon. Karen Struthers, addressing the audience.

Lotus Place was packed with a lot of guests. The cake was so beautifully designed with a red lotus flower, and patty cakes all around the cake.

In 1969 -70 after trauma with my adoptive parent, (dad stabbing mum in the throat, she was hospitalised for six weeks) I ran away to Melbourne with nothing, no money, no clothes, nothing. Guess what, I hitch hiked on a road train semi-trailer – didn’t know where I was going but said, “Wherever you’re going, I’m going”.

The reason I left was dad strangled me, and I had an out of body experience. I went through the black hole round and round, higher, higher. First – I was just out of my body watching mum and dad – I see myself on the ground, mum running to get a glass of water, dad upset. Then I went right up to the black hole, saw angels

with long trumpets – pure gold – I saw the paradise and beautiful garden, beautiful music and a great huge figure of white light – no face, the voice said: "You have work to do!" then I descended back in to my body. Wow, what a feeling. When I awoke, I said to my parents, I come to you with nothing, now I will leave with nothing. I was so hurt shocked, disappointed with them from that day. I have never been right with my parents, or they didn't want much to help me then. You can say the love died.

My memories of how I felt about the Inquiry: firstly I was not sure about myself and whether or not I was brainy enough to speak up, too stupid and frightened to open up my mouth, in case I made a fool of myself. I wasn't so sure, I couldn't understand things and certainly was not confident in giving my opinions – until we had workshops and forums. Then I was put on the spot for a second, I couldn't think of what to say. I did say some small thing – and I felt embarrassed and shaky, but each time I went, other people stood up, and gave their opinion.

The Jehovah Witnesses come in lately to teach me how to read the Bible and learn by its teaching. They really are beautiful people, I don't care what religion I learn as long as it is with peace and love, and honour our Almighty God – the Father. All religions speak highly and abundantly about God, and our purpose here on earth and it is a good thing to know and learn more about. Why God did create us and what is our job here on earth, and why we are here. There is so much to learn and you can never get enough of God. Within us, to help us, to love us, as we indeed also need our God, After all, he did send his one son Jesus to die on the Cross for our sins so we can be with him forever in paradise and we must repent. So we can get there.



THE STORY OF THE NUN I KEPT MEETING ON THE BUS

ABOUT five years ago, I used to go to West End, walk in, and take the bus to the city or from the city to West End. Each and every time I kept bumping into a SRM Mercy nun. First I saw SRM coming on the bus, I would say, "can I help you sister?" (she was loaded up with some packages). She would say, "no, thankyou!" Okay another time in comes this Sister in the bus again and sits close to me, this time says nothing, just a smile. Third time she is loaded again with shopping I ran to help her, she says "thank you" and sits right in front of me, I said "hello Sister, hang on".

She says, "I know that voice, I never forget a voice". She suddenly turns around to me, and pauses for a moment, "I know you. You're not Lana are you?"

Oh! My god I was shocked, my face went red, I thought, I did something wrong, my mind froze then! How does she know my name? She said, "I know you" she said, "you are my little baby".

She had never forgotten me – isn't that just lovely. So she asked me to come over to the Mater Hospital to meet up with her, which I did. I thought I would die back then. Wow – I couldn't believe my luck! I rang my friend Gloria up, and told her of my encounter, of SRM from Nudgee that used to look after us little tots and babies and little girls. The next thing she says, "Lana, I have got some photos to give to you, it is a picture of you and your twin sister". My own family did not have a picture of the twin, but SRM did, she said she was cleaning out the photos she's had, and were destroying them but will keep the two photos of me and my sister Lena – Lana. The rest went in the shredder.

My great Aunty Anne Remanous, was Archbishop Duhig's personal secretary. She was such a lovely great Aunty; though I never got to meet her. I have photos of her, and of the shop at West End in Hardgrave road, the shop called "Saint Veronicas", which used to belong to her. She also adopted a son, from Papua

New Guinea, she paid his way to become a priest, though they never knew I was in the orphanage. It was one of the biggest secrets. My mother never told anyone in the family that we were in there. If Aunty Anne knew, she might have adopted us – being family. Although Aunt Anne was my great Aunty, because my grand mother Renee, Aunty Theresa, Uncle Mick, Aunty Rose were all family and cousins to Aunty Anne.

Being at the centre at Lotus place: we sit around having a yarn, with like minded people, and we have a cuppa, and talk about things, like, what we saw on TV... Like last night, about the three dogs (two were dead) because the owner had to go to jail, the police did not pass the information to the RSPCA. As a result, the dogs had to die, (the third dog) got lucky, he had a fit, then they found a chip in his neck and rang up the owners, and found out that the dog was stolen two years ago and was in luck as the RSPCA had rang up the owner. The dog had a lucky happy ending and went home with his owner and some medication to make him better. Wow, what an ending. How it touches the heart.

LIVES OF UNCOMMON CHILDREN



"Child". Cast bronze, Gavin Fenelon 2004. Emma Miller Place, Brisbane, Queensland.

PAUL'S STORY



A LETTER TO A MAGISTRATE

YOUR Honour,

Firstly, I'd like to apologise for the delay in proceedings, but three days before my last appearance I had, for the first time in my life, a grand mal seizure. This complication almost cost me my life. I spent two weeks in the Mater Hospital's intensive care unit, while battling along with the doctors for my life.

In one of my lucid states I made a pact with myself: if I was to make it out alive and with my faculties, I would do anything and everything I possibly could to try to make a positive difference in this world. At that stage I was absolutely terrified and, Your Honour, due to my upbringing I'm not usually or easily scared. While I was in a coma and in the rare lucid or awake moments, I began to be aware that this was a turning point, although I still was not sure whether or not I would pull through.

This sounds strange and unusual, but the doctors actually used Methadone as a circuit-breaker. I was unaware I was on Methadone until my last four days in hospital. Although before I had been on the subutex program, these decisions made by the doctors upset me at first, but then I realised the impact of the decision. It saved my life and I am eternally thankful for their help.

Your Honour I have made some terrible and stupid and disastrous decisions in the past, most of my childhood years and into my adult life. Although not all of them were avoidable, I take responsibility for my actions.

Although still very unwell and diagnosed with aspirational pnmonitis to the left vent in my lung, I stuck to the pact I made while in hospital regardless of my health. Instead of lying in bed feeling the 'poor me' syndrome, I was up every day and trying to make the best of every opportunity that I discovered. I have obtained a volunteer position, for now, at the Fairfield RSPCA, starting at their next induction. I am a qualified nursing assistant but the changes in the legislation left me unable to fulfil any further career in that area, due to my criminal history.

So I have thought about this for a long time and now wish to fulfil a career as a veterinary nurse and maybe, one day, a vet. I chose the RSPCA so I could gain experience from their perspective and to give back as much as I can. I am currently, with support, looking at small steps to take on a Certificate III in companion animal welfare in the new year, as enrolments are over for this year. I have a really great support network developed which has been particularly strong since my hospital stay, although the hard work and effort has and will come from me.

Sir, at the moment I am on minimal but crucial medication but my goal is to eliminate all medication, one day sooner than later. I hope you can understand this next statement for what it is: I am an addict and always will be, but taking small steps, and fighting those addictive behaviours, I can stay clean, this I know now and believe.

Your Honour these changes I take responsibility for. I do not drink, though I would have a smoke like someone else has a beer, although I'm aware it's illegal. The last couple of years I have conquered using any drugs intravenously and it will be an ongoing battle which I will win.

The possession of tainted property was a silly number plate which had been sitting in the gutter outside my unit block for two weeks or more, and one day I just picked it up and brought it inside. It made its way into the back of the cupboard and I forgot

about it. Now this was a long time ago; I can't quite remember when I picked it up. I didn't steal it or acquire it in any other way except picking it up out of the gutter. I don't know why I make silly decisions without thinking. Changing this behaviour trait has been a priority and has made my thinking different; I will continue to make these changes to make myself a productive and respectful member of the community.

I have worked myself into a beautiful unit that is reasonable rent and have wonderful neighbours in the block. It's the first place I have stayed for some length of time – nearly two years – and I have learned the art of keeping an orderly unit, from the simple tasks of shopping and washing to the vacuuming every second day. These are things I have had to learn after not being in that sort of environment growing up.

Lesson most certainly learned about drugs, and I beg you to not incarcerate me, as I am so close to getting things right. I have done jail and upon release for someone of my history it is extremely difficult to be in or to have the opportunities I have now. And the support that won't give in along the way, or to even have safe accommodation without bad elements. I am willing to accept any judgement that you see fit to invoke. But having the recent life-changing experience has taught me many valuable things and I'll never forget those lessons or stop trying to get it right. I am sorry for causing you, the police and community and myself all this trouble. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely
Paul McKenzie



"Child". Cast bronze, Gavin Fenelon 2004. Emma Miller Place, Brisbane, Queensland.

TINA'S STORY



WHAT'S IN A CHILDHOOD?

I WAS born into a world where my family was split up and we were taken away from our mother and father. As I got older, all I wanted was my older sister and not to be alone. Sadly, I went into a home at Woolloowin and was abused by the State and the Church. From there I spent a lot of my time in and out of care and never even knew where my parents were or what happened, where my sisters and brother had gone.

It wasn't until I was 18 years old that I thought, *where do I go from here? And why did this happen to me?* I'll never be able to understand that, or what people said to me.

A part of me feels like my whole world had been surrounded by people telling me I was a bad child. They'd punish me just for crying. The staff in the homes used to lock me up and would leave me in a small room they called 'the quiet room'. This was a room in a small corner close to where the staff quarters were. This is where children were put if they had been out of control.

My experience had been as a small child, kept away from other kids because I was constantly beating them up and getting into trouble, but I wasn't allowed to say a word.

My life was hard. There was a time for a moment where I wanted to do something. But I spent time in Wilson Youth prison until I learned my lesson.

Most of my anger is directed at my mother, because she didn't try to ever want to understand her daughter. She had done something stupid to cause me to be the person I am, but it was at that moment where my father thought he would lose me and so I

had to fight really hard to stay alive, and that was a struggle. The doctors didn't know how long I had, but I made it in the end. I still find it hard to figure out where I fit in.

Most of my life was spent in therapy centres where I learned to walk, talk and use my hands and feet, which was a struggle. They had left me in a cot in a corner and no one came near me due to the fact that I was different. Staff in these centres used to force-feed me and I choked and became distressed.

I was the tiny age of three when, on the 13th October 1976, my foster mother Phyllis, who I really loved, was getting ready to go to work at a coffee shop and had to leave me with a friend who lived next door. So she said goodbye and left for work. It was raining and I stayed with the lady until she came home. But she never came home.

A man wanted something to eat and mum had already cleaned up, so she had to race back to make the sandwich and then go home. As mum was driving home it really poured with rain.

Not far to go, mum would soon be home, but there was an accident between her mini and a semi-trailer. The truck driver was drunk, but he was okay. The woman in the mini, Phyllis, had to be cut free and taken to hospital.

Mum's friend got a call from the hospital saying that her friend had been badly injured. She had massive head injuries and died three days later. I wasn't told because I was too little to understand.

It was then decided I would live with Marni, who had children already, which meant she would become my foster mother because Phyllis had asked her to take care of me. It was hard to try and live with her because I was a difficult child to care for. No one ever told me what was happening, and why these things went on. Maybe it was because I had special needs and the families don't really want a child like me and don't want to understand children who need constant care. The social workers told all the couples who were interested in me.

I was only two years old when my mother decided it was time for me to be put into a home for sick children, and I didn't know what she was trying to do and why she was doing this to me. I ended up in a place called W.R. Black and then Warilda where I was left in the corner and no one was allowed to cuddle me or pick me up or let me know they cared. So that was where I stayed all day until the big matron came in to bath me. This I hated very much, and they really hurt me badly, so I didn't know what to do or how to fight back.

Having a disability made it hard for me to understand why no one wanted me. I then was put into an area where no one could see me or pick me up and was not even allowed to go outside and play because I kept falling over. So they thought it was best for me to stay in a cot in the corner like a little baby. The staff were horrible to me. I was way too little to understand how this could happen to me.

When I was almost ten years old I found my mate Dean, who had been at the same school I was at when I lived with the foster family who had looked after me. He was at Warilda and it was when we caught up with each other. It was fun. We used to play bad pranks on other kids. One day we got a boy and put him in one of the quiet rooms and shut the door, which was completely ununlockable without a key. So we thought this was funny, because we had no keys to let him out. He began to scream, let me out! and the matron told me off. I just felt I was a little toughie, so she told me I was a trouble-maker and needed to be locked up too.

Dean and I really got on well. We were really good friends and did the most silly things just to get a laugh. That was funny, and we both got into trouble for little things that we shouldn't have been doing. But we were kids in a home where we all got bored on weekends because there was nothing to do.

My life changed when I was twelve when I went to the family where Dean was. We teamed up and really had so much fun.

Dean and I would always play tag or cricket or we would just kick a football around the yard. In 1986 the family wanted another child, and Michael came to live in the family. Dean and I stayed so there were three of us and we all knew each other from the other places we'd grown up in. We'd always find ways to have fun. We all played little games where we would catch cane toads and play a game of cricket, which was a laugh. We caught flies and pulled their wings off and stuck them in Dean's locker, and we caught cockroaches and would stun them then watch them do backstroke in a bucket of water. Later we would laugh at what we did as kids.

Dean, Michael and I were all very close and this helped. We had tough times too; the parents would send us to bed without a meal all day, they starved us all the time when we did something wrong. We were punished badly for it. Then they decided to have a meeting with a psychologist to give us some heavy drugs to control our lives so they could stay calm. The drugs I was on were really dangerous and became a way to stop the violence they inflicted upon me. I didn't know what was going on.

All I ever wanted was my family, to be where things made sense and nothing changed. Many social workers told me it wouldn't happen so I knew that all I could do was give up. Not even think about the meaning of the word love. So I just forgot about my family and went into a world of my own where no one could touch me or hurt me.

For me, finding out that my birth father was alive and wasn't married with more children and that he did want me and never shut his door in my face made me feel special, because I had a feeling that one day we'd meet each other and get to catch up. That was after 36 years of constant lies from the welfare department because they had told me it would be impossible to find him, and this only made me feel rejected and very much unloved – because I was only a child who didn't know what was going on.

COLIN'S STORY



IT'S YOUR LIFE

BEFORE I went into the homes – I was three or four years old – no one was watching me, and I went into my uncle's bedroom. There were only curtains dividing the rooms. I was playing around with his matches, one lit up and I fell on the bed. The flames went up straight away.

My grandfather smelled the smoke, turned around and saw the flames and raced out. One of my uncles stood outside, and my grandfather picked me up, threw me out the window and my uncle caught me.

I was told I burned his silk shirts, and one had his pay packet in the pocket. This would have been 1962-64, I'm not sure. But he loved his clothes, a bit like me. I got the biggest hiding of my entire life and I haven't touched matches since. Or at least, played with them.



I GOT a tomahawk for Christmas or my birthday one year, and my grandmother had made these rag dolls for my sisters. I got hold of the ragdolls and chopped the heads off.



A year or so later I got a dump truck for my birthday. My matchbox cars were like gold to me – I still collect them, have over 4,000 cars. Helen, my younger sister, decided she wanted revenge. She threw the dump truck in the copper boiler.

I saw her do it. Did I fume! Kicked up a storm. I was only 6 or 7 years old, and it's one of my earliest memories. I don't remember much but I can see that scene.

Up until 10 years ago I never saw eye to eye with her and it was probably based on that, what we did to each other.

I love my family to death, but always there was friction between me and Helen. But we got older, and agreed to disagree.

We're both outgoing, everything is a lot of fun. When we were little, there were no holds barred. We'd fight, all of us. Coming from a country town, our grandmother would come out swinging a straw broom or with a bucket of water.



THE BIRDS

MY uncle's birds. They were in big cages. On school holidays we'd take the cages outside, worried that their claws would come out and grab me.

Percy was quiet, she'd talk: hello! My grandmother was crying one day and Percy would say, poor grandma! She was a beautiful bird. Twenty years old, at least.

Peter and Paul would say, get to the shithouse!

All the birds would call, grandma! If we were calling her.

When we were coming home for the holidays we'd be walking home from town and the birds would be yelling: the kids are coming, the kids are coming!

Even if we were coming home from church.



MARTHA – she'd wait for all of us at home and particularly for me, we were extremely close. When I went back too the home she'd cry and cry.

I went to BoysTown for a couple of years and I really missed my youngest brother and sister, we were at Neerkol together.

Over the past twelve months I've learned a lot about my feelings, and why my life has been in turmoil over the past 24 years. Before that, I didn't think about Neerkol. I tried to stay away from all the bad things. The deeper you get into that the more upset you get.

Then the Forde Inquiry report came out and it all started to come undone. I felt my privacy had been invaded. I didn't want any of what happened to me to come out. A lot of anger was bottled up over a long time.

In the past year I've started to feel really low; I think I really hit rock bottom. I lost my job too, and these feelings lasted a long time. I decided I wanted help.

I started to talk about it, about what happened at school and after, even the most horrific times. Neerkol was one of the worst things. After my grandparents died I was sent to other people for holidays. The first was a family on a farm at Monto. I was treated very badly by the other children in the family. I was a naïve little boy, and I really missed being around my other siblings, and my grandmother.

I was picked on and bullied in that family, and because it was outsiders it was even worse. At Neerkol I was picked on too, but that felt normal.

I was sent to Alpha the next holidays and the kids there saw that I was vulnerable. They actually shot at me with their rifles one day, and I had to run to hide behind a tank. Their older sister stopped them. They made me so angry I wanted to shoot them one day, but the same older sister stopped me when she saw me with the rifle. She said, that's not the way to do it.

Back at Neerkol they didn't believe me. I became completely withdrawn then, moody, and got into fights.



IN the past year and a half I've come through the toughest time in my life. I've admitted I've got problems and that I need to do something about it. The alcohol mainly. Two months ago I decided enough was enough. I was drinking five bottles of rum every week and started to ask myself, what are you doing? I am not an alcoholic, even though my father was.

And now I'm actually enjoying myself again. I'm reading again. And I'm not going to shy away any more. There's a whole other side of me. I used to be a good sportsman, touch football, ten pin bowling, I want to get back to enjoying that again.

Yes, I've had a rotten time, but now I can have a good time. I have good friends who are much better educated than me but who see me as an equal and don't look down at me. And a family I very close to and love.



ONE day when I was about seven, Sister Joseph gave me a port. It was just before the August school holidays. Sister Joseph was stern, but not cruel, at least not to me. She used to make all the clothes for the kids, and I used to go down to the laundry where she worked, and watch her.

She said, this is your port. It was brand new and had a name tag. She said, it's yours, yours for life.

I took that literally. And it has been mine for my whole life. It's gone everywhere with me, to jobs out west, on holidays – it's been to the furthest points of Queensland, and over to Perth. It's only ever been full once though, when I went to BoysTown. I had another port then, too, but it disappeared and I don't know where it went.

I used to hide it so no one else could get hold of it, and I even used to try to hide in it myself. It also used to hold my collection of model cars when I was a kid. My biggest loves were cars and marbles. I'd win marbles off other kids and they'd trade me a car to

get them back. I'd have a whole bagful of cars at the end of every year.

Now it's been retired, and into goes all my retired stuff, mainly my caps.

There are lots of emotions around that port. It symbolises getting away. It's also been like a security blanket. It's my best mate, it's always been with me.

Some people say, why keep that ragged old thing. I say, because it's mine.



REGGIE'S STORY



EUGENE

I MEET Eugene at St Kilda Crisis Centre on my first day in Melbourne. I am fresh meat to the Grey Street triangle and Eugene spots me a mile away sitting in a chair waiting to be seen by a social worker. Looking at the others all sitting in this small room smelling of alcohol and other odours there doesn't seem to be any stillness. Everyone's on edge, some asking where to get a hit from others talking gibberish out loud maybe in the hope someone will hear them. It's unlikely they will ever be heard.

Then the door opens to let the cold air blow across the room. I up look to see this guy in a dark blue duffle coat with wavy blonde hair down to his neck with a smile that brings life to a room that has none in it. Some get up to greet him, hi there Eugene, others put their heads down. He looks straight at me, he knows I am the fresh meat here today and he sits next to me. I can't help but talk straight away like I had known him for years. I just blurt out all that he wants to know about me; yes I am alone no I don't have family and so on and so on till I hear my name being called out.

When I come back out he is still there in the same chair; in some ways I have not stopped thinking about him, hoping he will still be here. There is only one other in the room, an old lady smelling sweet from her old age, crinkly like old brown paper crunched up and thrown in the corner waiting for someone to pick it up and care. I guess it won't be today for her. The makeup on her eroded face resembles a clown ready for the night's work at the circus and her eyes a deep blue only clouded by the tears that have run down her face for many years. I feel sad looking at her thinking about when

she will die, I was told once by a druggie don't make friends Mike and never give flowers because like flowers friendships die too.

I'm only half listening to Eugene as my thoughts are with the old lady, till she stands and walks to the door. My eyes follow as she extends her arm out to open the door daring to enter the outside world. The cold air shudders her body and her coat dances all around her, she puts her head down and with what seems to be her last deep breath walks on out. I won't get to see her again will I, I ask myself.

Eugene taps me on the shoulder you with me? Yeah yeah. Somewhat annoyed with him interfering with my thoughts. So where are you crashing for the night? They are taking me to a place out at Oakleigh a refuge for street kids. He looks away for a moment and turns back and asks if I want to meet in the city tomorrow. I say sure where at? What about Flinders St Station on the front steps? Sure I'm not sure how to get there though. Just catch a train to the city and get off at Flinders.

Just as I start to feel relaxed and want to hear more and talk more, I have never talked so much and told so much in such a short time, shit my name is called again. I look at Eugene say cheers and off I go. A last thought, hey what time? 10.00am. Cool see you then. In the car, I have not been in such a posh car I can hear her voice but I am miles away thinking about tomorrow with the man I've just met. The sun is setting, it is one of my favorite times of the day the light gentle not fighting for attention, a softness caressing my mind putting me at ease. I feel safe.

Yep it is my time it is a time my tears swell as I turn to look out the side window thinking, is my mother thinking of me, but I know all too well she doesn't care. It is important not to show how I feel to this stranger next to me I must admit she likes to talk, she never shuts up all the way to the refuge.

I don't remember much of the first night at all. They put me in the front room on my own, I eat as much as I can then lie down

on a soft bed that smells clean and then I open my eyes blinking and darting from here to there like butterfly wings fluttering on a sunny day, to find myself in a new place. A shift in time a feeling that it is not real at all but all I have to do is close my eyes again and I am back at Boys Town. One of my most favourite friends Michael Wilson I miss so much sometimes it hurts. A knock at the door I choose not to hear but again a knock someone else this time, one of the guys, a rush of sadness hits me it's Michael I think out loud. I jump out of bed forgetting to put my clothes back on and open the door. You see at Boys Town there was no reason to wear your clothing to bed as by the time you lay down and closed your eyes someone would be trying to take them off you. All he says to me is, breaky's up.

He has a smile on his face. As I close the door to this stranger I think of Michael, I sit in the corner and cry. In time I put my clothing back on and head down to the kitchen I just nod at the good mornings and take my place at the table.

I'm eager to go to meet my new friend though I've forgotten till the boy who woke me asks what I'm up to today. I have hot toast with jam that's dripping down my hands. With several laps of my tongue I lick the sweet sauce off I feel like I'm being watched and sure enough when I look up there they are the eyes, five sets all looking at me. I just shrug my shoulders and go back to my feast. Mrs. Dawson was my first and only foster mother, she could make the very best mulberry jam. We would spend the morning picking the fat berries from the mulberry tree that stood near the chook pen one at a time one for me and one for the bowl, then Aunty Phil would spend the afternoon making her brew. Sometimes I would watch her thinking she was a little witch making it all for me.

I gulp down my sugary cup of tea, put the cup down and look at everybody else. There are five of us at the table plus the youth worker. I get up and leave the table to walk out. Hey! I turn we

have to have a talk. What, now? but I said I would meet my friend at Flinders Street Station at ten o'clock. It's only eight o'clock.

Spending some time at the steps at Flinders Street Station watching the cattle come out from the gates pushing and shoving each other as if it's some race to a candy shop free smarties or jelly beans. The people coming through the gates and down the steps to their jobs the wind today cutting through my skin like the old fashioned electrical cords you used for the jug for your cuppa, I would use it at night to punish the bad person in me the one that I could see when I sat naked in front of the cheval mirror. The little boy who wanted to be seen and heard would come out in the reflection and tease the bad one.

There would be a stillness in the room one that drives pain home every time. Then the pills a couple at a time a beer and wait stare so hard into the mirror. Fear sets in crying and crying, it is then I see the little boy I can feel him but I can't touch him, he is so far away deep in the pool of reflection, then it feels like someone else is in the room with me.

I would pick up the knife and hold it to my tummy trying so hard to take my life yet in the back of my mind I could not work out if there was anything after I did this. I mean is there a heaven or hell, would I go to hell because of what I did and because I was so naughty as a child? A little boy who had sex with men.

I start to think about Eugene again, time is ticking, I am worried and become sad. He is my friend but like so many they never come back to me, then I hear his voice. Hi Mike. I stand to look at him and he gives me a hug. I feel so warm in his arms and safe. People are looking and I let go thinking I am doing something wrong. Hey, do you want to come out to my place? It begins to rain all soft and puffy.

We head off back down to the trains and catch one out to the waterside. Eugene gives me the news that we have to walk a little. We get off, the only ones to leave the warm belly of this electric

snake. Standing there on the platform, no one there the wind and the rain teasing my skin. I am only in shorts and a t-shirt.

Another time that makes me happy, a cloudy and rainy day, I don't know why it just does. Eugene captures me in another world a world I have to take in so that I can survive so that I can find my way back. It is so lonely here, nothing, with the exception of the old factories that have taken their punishment. I want to stay to be with them to feel the life that has been and gone to feel the wall to touch to find anything that could tell me about those who were here once.

We head off down the steps and on to a road that has no cars or trucks nothing, there is a silence one you might expect to hear on a Sunday morning in a country town. Here though all the activity is in the air, seagulls everywhere darting here and there, really it is a playground scabbling over scraps that lie over the shore line.

We walk down the middle of the road the wind gushing past, almost a wall of air stinging my ears with the fresh cold air of Bass Strait. In the distance the tanker lay on the icy water, it is as if the water is testing the strength of these mighty ships. I've never seen them in real life before. Eugene can we go on one of them. He laughs. I go back to the concert that is floating past my ears that is the wind, it is so beautiful and light.

Right about now I am hurting my skin frozen on the outside wanting warmth. Eugene looks at me he could see the hurt in me and offers his heavy navy duffle coat to me. He helps me put it on it is heavy on my body yet there is instant warmth from Eugene's body that had carried over to me. On the inner layer of this mighty coat is satin-lined and that feels good on my skin, slippery. It is a tad too big for me.

He does the front buttons up, I feel strange when he does this, no one has ever helped me dress before. It feels good. He rises back up from the last button and pulls the collar up around my neck, we stand there for a moment. I just want to hug. As I look

past him thinking how much further to go, the ocean rising and sinking it looks like it will engulf us at any time. Then I feel his lips on the side of my face I look back at him and give a gentle smile my eyes lead my thoughts back to the ocean, the mighty ship bobbing up and down. Eugene, how many people own one of those ships? Only a few he says.

There is a mist floating down towards us I don't want to go any further I want to sit and stay here in one of these factories to understand who was here to feel them to see them to watch them work.

The corrugated iron banging and lifting as each gust of wind comes through, its path disturbing its place in time, a piece of paper giving its version of Swan Lake, proud and ignorant of the fact that it is rubbish and that it has been left to be on its own.

There is not much talk between Eugene and me as we walk beside each other closer than you might if there were others around, my hands in my pockets craving any warmth that might be hidden there.

Eugene heads away towards an iron fence squats down and with his left hand pulls back a sheet of the iron. Go through, quick, as he comes behind me. He lets go the sheet of iron the noise it makes rings through my ears. We are standing in front of one of the old factories. He says, we have to climb up the side and go through one of the windows. You first I say then I follow. I catch the jacket on the glass edge I stop holding my position so as not to tear the jacket or I might lose him as a friend. Out of the corner of my eye I see a hand print on the glass, it is faint but it is there. Do you think that it could have been a worker? Maybe it was his job to wash all the windows and I tell you there are heaps. Nar, I doubt it, maybe I should lay my hand over it to feel him or her. No, Eugene grabs my arm, come on.

Now I am in for a show, we are inside, there are boxes and machinery tables everywhere, my eyes light up. There is anything and everything here, there in the corner.

The dust has snuck on to them over the years taking over and giving them a new skin, I cannot resist I have to touch one with my hand I glide it over the iron wheel disturbing the dust feeling the texture of the rust on the palm of my hand, I watch it with intent as it billows away not to fall to the ground but to rise with the cold air. I stop to try to feel its life its heart beat, the sound it may have made earlier in its life, but it is cold and lifeless.

The sun sends its beams through the dusty old windows lighting up everything in its path there are more than a dozen of these beams coming through. I stand still the light the shadow working together to bring out the past. Was it in hope to bring life to the old factory? The moths are disturbed and are rushing to find the dark and the dust particles are floating in the breeze that had pushed its way through the cracks in the walls, slowly but surely the light fades as if it were curtains at a theatre hall. Eugene's voice in the back ground come on Mike let's go. Maybe he does not see what I see at all.

As we walk on all you can smell is the ocean air. The path that we take has footprints to guide us through; I guess they are Eugene's. There is clothing and blankets in some of the areas and I begin to think that others are here hiding from my view. I feel a little afraid and I stick closer to Eugene. Who else is here? No one Mike, sometimes they come and stay, the old men, derelicts who have nothing and no one.

There have been small fires in drums to keep them warm grog bottles and flagons strewn across the ground, bottles that had been broken when thrown at the wall. Had there been a fight here a murder maybe, will I see a body? I don't think so Mike.

We go through the end to the outside and there in the corner is a small caravan old and weathered by time sitting alone. Nothing but space so much space you see the ocean the sand and the ships that lay off the shore the seagulls prancing around talking to each other there is a battle between them for the scraps on the shore.

As each gust of wind comes through the caravan quivers with cold air. Eugene opens the door. I am thinking is this home, I thought he lived in a house in some posh area. As I go through I look around, if I were to lie on the floor I reckon I could touch both ends of this caravan.

There is a bed at one end and a kitchen table with two bench seats on either side, worn, the veneer coming off the cupboards the mirror cracked and the silver worn off the bottom part, not the original maybe one from inside the warehouse. There are dishes in the sink not been washed for some time coffee cups empty packets of chips biscuits on the floor. Funny though it is warm in here maybe it is body heat.

Haven't not taken in all that I see when I hear the crunching of stones outside. A car has arrived Eugene tells me to take a seat and he will be back soon. Sitting there for some time, the door opens, there is another man well dressed and smelling of cologne I would reckon he is in his thirties. I look past him to see a Porsche red and shiny even though the day is cloudy. Mike this is John, he smiles and takes my hand, so you are the boy Eugene spoke of to me so where have you come from? Queensland. That's a long way for someone so young to come. I shrug my shoulders to his got any family? Strange Eugene asked me that yesterday, no, no one! I lived in boys homes all my life.

Okay. So do you know anyone here in Melbourne? No only Eugene he is my mate. Is he now? Yep, he gave me his coat to wear. Well well Eugene is kind. I smile and begin to relax. They talk and talk Eugene is next to me and has his arm around my shoulders it feels good to have him here even though I think that we will be blown away at any time by the wind hitting the side of the van like someone is hitting a cricket ball against a fence.

They have been drinking VB beer out of cans I had one two and my head is pounding with pain. Eugene asks me what is wrong I have not spoken for some time, I got a headache. I have some

tablets if you would like one. For sure what are they? They will just help with the pain. He hands me two of these little brown things take it with your beer Mike. And with the throw of the hand towards the mouth and a big gulp of beer I take them.

I wake on the bed my hands are handcuffed to the bed and my feet are tied and the two of them are naked next to me. Eugene gets on top of me cutting my shirt off with a pair of scissors and the other man is cutting my pants, I started to yell and scream at him. I am squirming and throwing my body about Eugene may think he is riding a bull in a rodeo. Snot is running down my face tears have engulfed me now, struggling to find a way out. Something in me clicks and I stop and lie there with him on me I cannot look at him anymore.

I can see the blue sky through a gap in the torn curtain how free it is, it is as blue as the ocean but it is the outside world. I can only feel my warm tears slipping down my face, feeling weak and tired from my fight maybe, I am like a fish on a line fight and fight they might but they become weak. Maybe they know their fate.

The other man moves away it is Eugene still on me his body heavy and warm. I can't fight him any more I take myself to my hidey hole, a world where they can do whatever they want and I am not there, only my body that's all they want. He is wiping my tears off my face with his gentle hand and his face comes close to mine my breathing is heavy and I am afraid. His lips touch mine then he moves back slowly from me and I see deep into his eyes. I watch the clouds drift past thinking I may get a ride. But no each one just goes by they don't know I am here. I close my eyes I feel the back of his hand gliding down my face back towards him. It's okay Mike it's okay Mike my arms are sore from the fight I am all worn out, I give in to you Eugene I'm thinking on the inside.

I give him a gentle smile, sure I whisper to him. He undoes the belts and the handcuffs that hold me so tight, I sit up and crawl back toward the corner of the bed. I can feel the warm sun on the back of my neck. Eugene moves closer to me, with the back of his

hand he strokes my face softly and the tears flow. The other man comes over to tell me that all is fine and that Eugene will help me. He hands me a pile of money and tells me that he will see me soon. He gets up and walks out, I hear the car start and move across the gravel. Eugene why are you doing this to me looking at him, it is only a thought in my head not something I say out loud. I put my arms around him thinking that I care for him, he gets up off the bed. Could I be so wrong again I don't know why I let them do it to me. My back to the wall of the caravan seeking to be consumed by its history to hide from him but I need to be liked to be held I look over at him standing at the doorway, what is he thinking now? I am in trouble a wave of electricity flows from my head to my tummy.

He goes outside I hear the car on the gravel again please not again please tell my mummy they are doing this to me please help please search for the clouds that passed before. Mike Mike my name is being called out. With a stutter I say yes to Eugene I going out for a little while, I'll bring some food back. Okay buddy sure mate. I sit in the same place I dare not move I feel my body shaking I bite down hard on my arm in the hope I won't scream. Shhh I hear the car going off over that gravel again. I can't move at all I want to take a peek through the curtain to see if they have gone.

I start to move to the edge of the bed naked and sore from them I can't do this anymore I just can't. But they're gone then the wind returns to me singing through the wall, I close my eyes and listen. Walking to the door I step out to the cold air my body shudders but there is no feeling, taking one step at a time.

The sun is on its way down for the day I walk out to see the ocean. Standing there extending my arms out gently from my sides closing my eyes feeling the wind on my body. For a short time it gives me peace then I cave in smashing out at the air punching myself screaming out at the top of my voice. The wind guides me back telling me to stay and I will be fine but I'm not listening right now. I drop to the ground.

MARLENE'S STORY



WHAT AN AMAZING LIFE

MY earliest memory is of grandma taking Ruth and me on the Inlander to Mt Isa. That was the only time I ate biscuits. Grandma always gave us Chocolate Monte biscuits to eat on the train during the trip.

While staying with Grandma in Mt Isa, Ruth became sick with chicken pox. I wouldn't leave her side; I didn't care if I got sick too, because it was my duty as her big sister to make sure I was there. She had to know she had someone there who loved her and would be there for her.

I always remember the lone sunflower on the hill on the way into town at Mt Isa. Everything else was red or brown dirt – there was no grass except dead grass.

Grandma told my sister and I about the time when we lived with her in Mt Isa. We were just toddlers, and we were standing near the two barrels of olives – one black, one green – at the entrance to the general store.

We were discussing the pros and cons of each variety. She said it was so funny watching these two little girls having such a grown-up conversation about something as trivial a subject. She said we were so serious about the topic.

I also remember Gran teaching me how to tell people's fortunes by reading their palms and by reading their tea leaves. Even as a young adult I had to be careful what I said to people.

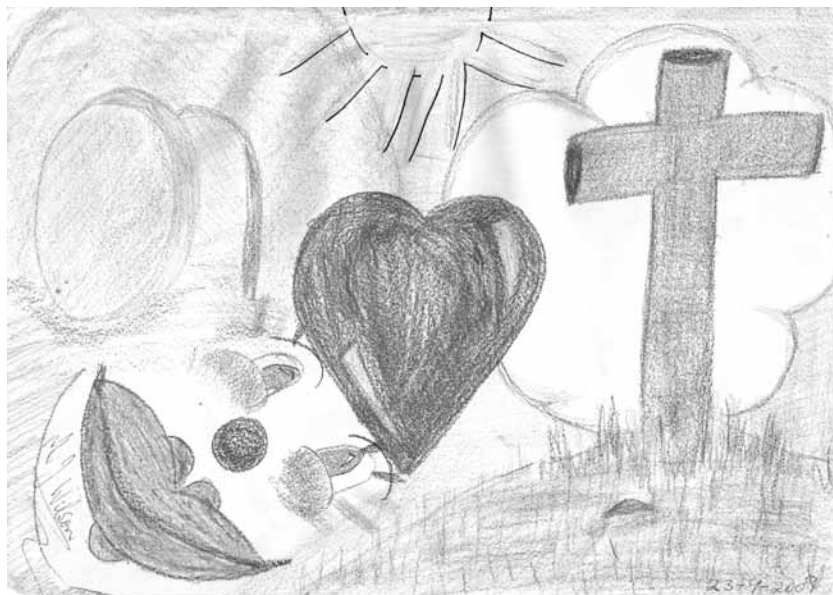
My children found they were able to know people who didn't know them, because I would know all about them, because I would know all about them when they hadn't even met me before.

LIVES OF UNCOMMON CHILDREN

Here's an example: I met a young woman in Adelaide Street, Brisbane, on my way to work at the Taxation Department. I brightly said hello to her and called her by name. The young woman asked me how I knew her name, to which I proceeded to tell her that she was a twin, and her twin's name and their birth date, where they grew up, and so on.

This absolutely horrified this poor young woman, and she frantically asked me how I knew so much about her and her life. She told me that she did not know me and that she had never met me before that time and day. As a result, I always go through a procedure now if the person doesn't recognise me first.

Dad taught me how to cook, clean, and look after my mum and siblings when I was only a few years old, so that as the family grew it was my responsibility to run the household when he wasn't there – and sometimes when he *was* there as well.



I remember nursing mum through a miscarriage after dad had punched her in the stomach. I was around four years old and we lived in Cairns, north Queensland. My aunty Georgina rang the police and they took us away from our parents. Sometime later my parents had to go to court to get us back. I don't know where we went or how long we were away. I have many wonderful memories of the time in that house in Cairns. We had a landing out the back over a small stream which had many penny turtles in it. We used to bounce small hard balls on that landing and lost many a ball in that stream.

I had a boyfriend at that house. I used to walk to the school bus and take his bicycle back home until I met him with it in the afternoon. I was refused entry into school at five years because I was too small and the school principal didn't believe I was of age. My dad had to wait until I was six years. He was told that an announcement had to be made on the local radio station so that if it was discovered I wasn't of age, dad would be prosecuted for giving false information. I started school in Cairns at the age of six. After that we moved to Cooktown, where I attended Cooktown State School.

When I was in Cooktown, I got the cane in Grade One for being a cannibal, because I bit two Grade Two children who stole the crystals I was playing with near the lunch shed. My lunch breaks were spent playing alone in the red soil of the playground where there were crystals scattered throughout the soil. I made Plaster-of-Paris statuettes. I don't remember if we sold them, left them at school, or took them home after we had painted them, but I do remember I had a lot of fun making them. The school asked me to leave my handiwork at the school so other children could see how the finished items could look.

My dad wanted a boy when I was born, so he treated me as his son by teaching me to farm animals and grow vegies, hunting, spear-fishing, bullet-making, sinker-making. He also took me

bamboo hunting with the Aboriginal men from Hopevale Mission, where we were inducted into the Aboriginal culture. I would like to go back to Cooktown and find my aunts and family members there, so I can find my family.

I was told a few years ago by my first husband that my mum was one of the Stolen Generation. When Baz told me I had this overwhelming affirmation that it was true and it explained why mum had lived with extensive abuse and abandonment throughout her short life. Mum ended up having ten children living and she lost twins and triplets by the time I was 15 years. I am the eldest of six girls and four boys, my mum had, and I am the second eldest of 55 plus children my father fathered. I have only met 15 of my dad's children during my life.

Dad helped build the road between Cairns and Cooktown and the Cooktown wharf. He used to have sharks laid out on benches on the riverfront with empty food tins under multiple slits in their skins. I think he used to see the shark oil. I remember dad teaching me how to slaughter turtles, tan kangaroo hides which we use to nail to the exterior walls of the house. Dad and I used to go hunting together in the hills around Cooktown and he taught me how to survive off the land (bush tucker) which I used to teach the Mormon ladies during the time I was a Mormon. I was twenty-eight years old when I passed this knowledge on to others, so it goes to show that when you learn something while you're a child it can still be useful when you grow up.

Dad always spent his money shouting the bar instead of supporting his family. As a consequence we were hungry, so Ruth went to our shop-keeper friends' store in the middle of the night and half filled two sugar bags with food to bring back home to the rest of us. We didn't realise the consequences of her action but the kids enjoyed the food. I was the only one worried about what would happen as a result of Ruth stealing the food. The year earlier (1959) I had taken some red nail polish from a store that I

like because I had been in the stores with my dad, heaps of times, where I saw dad take whatever he wanted from the store without paying. This is the example we had, so we thought we could do the same without any consequences to our actions.

As a consequence of Ruth's actions, we were taken away from our parents and were taken by boat to Cairns (overnight), where we stayed in the jail ward which was surrounded by bars. They took my five brothers and sisters into the men's ward which was across a short wooden walkway, where they allowed the men to hold my siblings. I was freaking out because I had been interfered with by my father's drunken mates. So I was wary of men who were strangers and my siblings were my responsibility. So the nurses had no right taking them away from me without my permission and putting them in danger. I was left by myself in that jail because I was too old to go into the men's ward. The next day, we were taken to 'Carramar State Orphanage' in Townsville. It was late at night when we arrived. I felt lost and confused because they separated all of us from each other.

When I woke in the morning, my sister Joy was missing and I was frantically trying to find her. I was crying and yelling out her name while I was searching for her but was told to stop being stupid, she was with some nice people in Mackay and it wasn't any of my business.



"Child". Cast bronze, Gavin Fenelon 2004. Emma Miller Place, Brisbane, Queensland.

MIMI'S STORY



TRIPLE JEOPARDY

First Jeopardy

HOT spearing pain grips me as I try to write this. "it must never be allowed to happen again," Prime minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, said last night on television.

He was referring to the cruelty and crimes perpetrated on innocent children in the children's homes, 1920s to 1980s.

I am one of those Forgotten Australians who were lashed by verbal, mental and physical crimes and abuse in the children's homes. The effects of this continue to impact on me today.

My life ended when I was eight years of age. Journalist, Francis Whiting, writes about this in an article about How my life ended at eight, in Sunday Mail magazine, November 4, 2001.

The article says: Until I was eight I strode confidently towards the future knowing early that I loved art and wanted to be of service as a nurse. *"But that was before the bad times of back breaking work, not enough to eat, times of beatings and cruelty, times of being told I was nothing, lower than the gutter I would end up in, times that still 60 years later have the power to hurt me."*

My dream and hope to be a nurse was thwarted by my time in W R Black Children's Home. The matron would not let us do our school homework. *"You don't study,"* said Matron snatching up my school books. *"You are nothing. You'll always be nothing."*

Instead of an education we were exploited to do back breaking work. This foreshadowed how I would again be exploited as an adult at work. Both times there was exploitation and lack of duty

of care. In the country that claims it is the land of 'fair go' I was a slave of democracy.

In the children's home Matron beat me across my small nose using the thick loose leg of a broken chair. Today I have a bent bone in my nose consistent with such an assault. I still have trouble holding my nose open to try to sleep. We were tortured by Matron making us stand with our arms raised high above our heads for hours on end. When our arms fell down we were beaten. This is like torture in Nazi prison camps.

The effects of the limited education is that I had to take low paying unskilled but dangerous work as an adult.

Second Jeopardy

The impact from being abused in the children's homes left me with Post Traumatic Stress. Working in toxic work conditions as an adult aggravated my P.T.S.D.

Working as an adult again I was exploited and again suffered because of the lack of duty of care, when the employer failed to protect us from injury by the harmful unsafe working conditions and dangers of hot chemical fumes.

I was traumatised by bullying and cruelty in the children's homes. And as an adult working in the chemistry department of a big institution, I was again traumatised by the workplace bullying.

"You deserved to be abused when a child," was how one person began her bullying of me at work. Earlier another person's bullying put me in hospital crippled for a week.

It was a toxic work environment both psychologically, and environmentally. The latter from the dangerous hot chemical fumes as I performed my work as a laboratory attendant. The workplace bullying and sexual harassment I was subjected to at work opened old wounds from the children's home and triggered aggravation of Post Traumatic Stress. Except for the unsafe working conditions

this aggravation would not have happened. This is because the employer has a duty of care to ensure those in charge know the proper method of being in charge and that the proper method is applied. Instead nothing was done about the workplace bullying even though I reported it. I was told, *"Go and fight your own battles."* And reporting it another time I was sexually abused.

But I wanted to keep my job. I felt pleased to be working for the university where I had wanted to study. I felt I was contributing. I erroneously imagined I was coping with the working conditions, but I felt shocks and pain from performing my job of washing used research glassware in fuming hot caustic soda and water. This created a cocktail of dangerous chemical residues that injured me. I coughed as the hot chemicals and caustic soda seared my airways. But mainly I felt severe burning lung pain with every breath and that finally caused great weakness and exhaustion. I began to spit blood from my mouth in large quantities. At one period of six weeks I felt intense pain to my eyes from the work chemicals. My feet became very painful, I became clumsy and not always coordinated. I suffered blurred vision that indicates toxic amblyopic. My thinking was like I was in a fog.

Today tests on my body to trace chemical shows work chemicals are still in my body. Chemicals seeped into my lungs and I maintain caused my chronic airways disability. This injury showed up at work by a doctor's diagnosis of hyperventilation, chemical cause and of rhinitis. Both are recorded medically. Research shows that by the time there is rhinitis lung damage is irreversible. So rejection of my case for compensation for the lung disability, on the grounds it happened earlier, ignores that it was already irreversible at work.

My lung damage was treated by the workers compensation self-insurer's system as a "Latent" injury and this work injury case was heard in about 2007. The report from this time says work did affect me at the time, but I was denied my compensation. I

want to present new evidence not presented before, about the rhinitis but the system is denying me the opportunity to present new evidence.

Work factors injured me five times, work stress, lung damage, two spinal injuries, and hernia, but only \$17 compensation was given for being crippled for a week in hospital.

Nine years of shocks and pain from the toxic work environment lead cumulatively to my suicide attempt about 17 December 1971 and the ongoing workplace bullying triggered effects from abuse in the children's homes. On a dark night on the Gold Coast I tried to end the pain by being knocked down and killed by cars. I thought darkly, this will be the last knock and pain I'll ever have to receive. Little did I know there would be decades more of pain and anguish trying to get the truth of my story recognised, while I was being betrayed.

The night of my suicide attempt cars swerved around me, some drivers abused me for being on the road. Finally despite my determination they thwarted my suicide attempt.

Lying ill in bed I felt freezing cold yet burning hot at the same time from the work stress depression injury. I felt I weighed as heavy as lead.

Nightmares about what happened at work constantly shocked me awake in late 1971 and throughout 1972. I lay in bed severely depressed and in pain from all that happened – weak, exhausted and traumatised from work injury. The pain from my childhood in the children's homes and pain and depression from the toxic working conditions imprisoning me.

Third Jeopardy

The third time that jeopardy hit me is when I applied for my compensation in 1973.

Work hazards that caused my injuries include the dangerous chemicals, hyperextension of my neck spine, reaching over

benches and stretching upwards to wipe the outsides of hundreds of chemistry bottles and equipment. Hernia was caused lifting and carrying full buckets of distilled water, and repeatedly carrying the buckets up a small ladder to fill the large copper bath in the laboratory where I washed the used research glassware in fuming hot caustic soda and water. The effects of all this and the workplace bullying caused my anxiety depression injury. These are connections between work I performed and work injury. But the work connections, to work I did, are being ignored, withheld, erroneously denied, or not adverted to.

I was not certain I could apply for compensation until a Law Reform Commission officer told me that my kind of injury 'aggravation of nervous illness' is allowed compensation. He said I could apply late and must still be heard.

I saw the Law Reform Commission officer in May 1973 to ask for a law to be brought in to compensate other people with my kind of work stress depression injury because work stress injury is just as crippling as any physical injury.

When I applied for my compensation in May 1973 I was again met with the same lack of duty of care I experienced in the children's homes and working as an adult for a big institution.

Many years of investigation and documents reveal that the institution's breach of duty of care was in not informing the workers compensation office that I reported my work injury. The institution by withholding the fact I did work in contact with dangerous chemical fumes prejudiced my genuine case. The institution, by claiming on their Form Three form to the W.C.O, that I was not employed when I was, covered up their breach in not informing the W.C.O about my report that I had work injury.

When the employer contradicted me about reports of injury or adverse work effects and work I said I did, the Workers Compensation Office (W.C.O) is required to apply a procedure to give natural justice and inform me about the employer's

contradictions. But I was denied my opportunity to have a say and get the errors of the employer corrected because the procedure was never applied. It took me years of anguished investigation to discover what happened.

The failure to apply procedure resulted in evidence not being obtained correctly and the mistakes not being corrected. As a result instead of being given a proper opportunity to have a say I was labelled and stigmatised as 'defective'. But is the system defective after all it breached procedure and prejudiced my genuine case?

My medical certificate clearly showed the W.C.O that my injury caused "anxiety depression", but the W.C.O's lack of duty of care resulted in me being stigmatised 'defective'. The wrong year of injury was also misused by the W.C.O to claim there is no injury, but my medical certificate to the W.C.O shows the year of disablement is late 1971. But an official list of the W.C.O shows that the W.C.O withheld my medical certificate from my hearing. This is serious withholding of evidence.

The employer withholding evidence and the W.C.O's lack of duty of care in not applying required procedure and ensuring it corrected errors by the employer is as though the system orchestrated my case unfairly to fail.

It took till now in November 2009 before the government accepted its culpability for lack of duty of care of children criminally abused and assaulted in children's homes. An apology was given in Parliament House Canberra, by Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd.

Similar cruelty as happened in the children's homes happened to me in work as an adult. I still have sense of betrayal because I am not being believed or understood, but had the system applied the procedure required the hidden truth would have seen the light of day and my genuine work injury compensated.

The decades saw me make many different efforts to get the truth out into the open. Mostly following official avenues. There were some street protests. In the children's homes I was told, "You

will end up in the gutter". There I stood by the gutter protesting the unfair way my work injury case was treated.

My efforts and protests did bring on some reviews, but the reviews that show my case is genuine are being ignored. Other reviews were not rigorous enough. These instead of correcting the errors mainly served to perpetuate the original errors of others.

In desperation I tried to draw attention to my plight by staking out a lowly little knee high tent on the lawn of Parliament House, Brisbane.

I was arrested. But later the speaker of the house, Mr Houghton, told me he resigned because of the way Parliament treated me. *"I told them I was not going to have democracy at the end of a gun"* Mr Houghton said.

A newspaper article about my arrest was shining a light on Parliament showing I was not being treated properly. Then Parliament wanted me to sign an indemnity that I would not sue Parliament or the police if they dropped the case against me of trespass and disturbing Parliament.

Their intermediary, a Labour solicitor, promised that if I would sign the indemnity he would get my workers compensation case into court, but after I signed he broke his promise. Later he became Premier of Queensland.

I am serious about my right and entitlement to compensation and about the gaps and flaws in the system that prejudiced and can also harm others' genuine cases.

I am one of the Forgotten Australians who felt betrayed because they were not believed about being assaulted in children's homes. Again I am not being believed though I have told the truth and am innocent of any crime in asking for my workers compensation for work injury. The most significant thing is to be believed when you tell the truth. Not being believed or understood when I was work injured caused me to become concerned for others and their rights.

The system trumpets, "nothing more has to be done because there have been reviews" of my case. But ignores the fact that four reviews positively support my case and that errors occurred.

One official letter claims that even if all the evidence had been obtained that the outcome (rejection) "would not have been any different".

But this ignores my medical evidence and other evidence that shows work links to the work I performed and its environment. Instead the victim is blamed.

The system is relying on the fact I was vulnerable. I had a pre-existing nervous illness from abuse in children's homes. But the *eggshell skull* precedent says a person's vulnerability cannot be used to withhold entitlement to compensation.

The workers compensation systems draws a very long bow in alleging because I had pre-existing injury I cannot be compensated because I am 'defective'. Whereas pre-existing injury from effects of abuse in children's homes does not negate right to compensation, because toxic work environment and conditions triggered work aggravation of pre-existing injury.

For three decades I tried to help others who were not treated fairly by the system – when work injured. The stress from the system's lack of duty of care about the gaps and flaws in the system caused me in 2009 to be hospitalised with a heart irregularity. Tests found no physical cause.

I will continue to try to get the truth out into the open light of day, so gaps and flaws in the system may be addressed and save others from unfair rejection of their entitlement to compensation and to show that my case was prejudiced by breaches occurring and procedures not being applied. There seems to be a culture of cover up blocking the truth. Abuse and lack of duty of care that started in the children's homes and continued at work still continues today as I try to deal with an intransigent system. I feel stretched to breaking point.

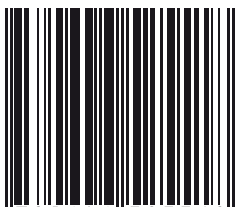
WHAT is left to you
after your childhood
is destroyed, your hope, faith
and innocence wasted?

Inside the covers of this book,
you'll find it: hope, tenacity,
grief, anger, determination,
humour, the resilience of the
human heart.

These writers – all survivors of
childhood abuse and trauma
– tell their stories with clear-
eyed frankness and honesty.

They offer their memories
and observations as a gift – of
knowledge, understanding,
and a recognition that we
are all linked, by story and
history, by our fragile hearts.

ISBN 978-0-646-52551-8



9 780646 525518