

My Story of why I was placed in a Salvation Army Home.

My name is Brian Alfred Woods (name was Lehman at that time)

My memories go back to a small child in Mildura. I was fostered by a Mr and Mrs Farrant I lived with them approximately 2 years. They wanted to adopt me that was when my Mother and Father who were not married but were both working decided to put me in the Salvation Army Boys Home Kent Town. For what reasons to this day I do not know what there reason was as both my parents are deceased. I was about 6 years old to about 12 or 13. I was there from about 1945 or 1946 to about 1952. It is hard to remember dates and times when you are put there for unknown reasons.

My name was Brian Alfred Lehman at that stage I was born in the Mildura Base Hospital on the 24-03-1940. My earliest recollections of being placed in the home where there was around 50 and 60 other boys ranging in age from about five to around 15.

The only people in charge of the home was Major Stevenson and Captain Knox they both had families and lived on the premises, there was also a couple of ladies who cooked meals. It was a large two story building with dormitories upstairs and kitchen and dining area down stairs, there was also a couple of dormitories and the office down stairs also. The only other people I can remember working there were two ladies cooking meals besides the two army Officers. Their wives never did any work only looked after their own children. Major Stevenson lived on the property and Captain Knox lived in a property across the road.

The whole complex was washed , scrubbed, dusted and polished , making of beds. We also had to maintain the grounds and gardens large swimming pool which we had to scrub out clean and paint. When we came home from school we had to peel the vegetables for all the boys done on a roster system, we also had to wash all the dishes after and clean the tables and sweep the floor in the dining room. We had to set it up for breakfast next morning. When all duties were finished of an evening we just played in the grounds in the winter time we played in a big large change room which was also where we kept our clothes in our lockers my number was number 4. Whatever we owned was in that locker nothing was kept in our dormitories, the locker sizes were 18 inches by 18 inches. All we owned fitted in this locker I never had any toys or games all I had was my clothes. Most of the other boys all they had fitted in their locker also.

In this large change room also had our open showers. The only clothes we had were grey shorts and shirts to wear in winter we got a jumper this was all the clothes I had in my years at the home.

Our day started off , you would get up make your bed and put your quilt on it had to be neat and tidy if it wasn't one of the officers would yell at you. I vaguely remember you would get a smack across the back of the head if it was not neat. Then you would go down to the change room never had a dressing gown, wash your hands clean your teeth with salt until your gums bled we were ever given any toothpaste, change into your school uniform then have breakfast in the hall. Three boys on duty one would wash, one would rinse and one would put them in a large drying rack.

We then marched to school in a group dressed in grey shorts and shirt supplied by the Salvos at all times from Kent Tee to Osmand Tee and along Buleah Rd to Norwood Primary School. Other kids at the school use to call us Homies and pick fights with us at the time the Teachers did not worry about it. I can not recall a teacher ever being nice to me I feel we were treated at school different from the other children. We were called Homies and the teachers never did anything about it. I was sent to the Headmaster for belting kids up for calling me a Homie I used to get the cane. We came home different we came home in small groups. Then when we got home we had duties to do, some of the boys had to peel all the vegetables in big old wash troughs, some had to set the dining room

tables, some had to go upstairs take the quilts off all the beds and fold them and stack them on the mantle piece. Some of the boys were rostered to go to I think golden Crust Bakery in a van to help put away the horses and carts and they gave the Home all the bread that was left over for the day. Also two boys would help the ladies with the school lunches for the following day my memories of these two ladies are good ones they were kind to us especially to the younger children. This was all done before tea.

We had to say prayers everytime we had a meal and it did not matter what vegies were on your plate you were made to eat them even if they made you sick, especially turnip, Swedes and brussel sprouts. Most of the boys carried a small tobacco tin to put the vegies in when the officers were not looking. After dinner some boys would clean the tables sweep the floor and do the dishes.

After tea we played in the yard till dark. Then we had to have our showers we had to go to our lockers take our clothes off and line up naked and then walked to the showers we lined up and waited our turn naked. When it was my turn I had to shower with other boys approximately ten at once, these showers were on a wall and open for every one lined up to see there was no privacy at all, it was embarrassing. We then walked back to the lockers naked to get into our pyjamas we never had toothpaste we had to clean our teeth with salt and our mouths bled every night. Then went to bed.

That was 5 days per week.

Saturdays was the main day for cleaning the premises inside and out what I mean by this is all boys had special duties. Some had to sweep, dust, hand polish the floors on our hands and knees I am talking LARGE AREAS until they shined, the hallways the staircase top to bottom, had to scrub the toilets and wash the floors. Clean the locker or change room, the laundry sweep and wash the floors, tidy the store room and there was an area where all the scraps were thrown and we had to clean that up and put it in big drums for the pigman to pickup. The boys home had a VERY big yard rake the yard of leaves and pick up rubbish. They never had maintenance of gardener for the whole premises it was all done by us boys. Keep in mind we still had to do all the other chores from the other 5 days of the week. If you did not complete your duties properly we had picture nights once a month and if you got into any other trouble they stopped you from going to that. You also lost playtime and had to sit inside if either of the officers decided to punish you. And get the razor strap around the legs or hands sometimes on the backside

On Sundays

Had breakfast and walked to the Salvation Army Hall in all weathers for morning service come home and had dinner then go back again for Sunday school come home for tea then go back for evening church plus whatever duties you were allotted for the week or was it fortnight cannot really remember.

I never wet the bed when I first went there, not very long after maybe a few months I became a bedwetter and had to sleep in the bedwetters dormitory I had to wash my own wet bedding. As soon as I got up in the morning I had to do this and there was no age limit to that even the little ones younger than me and I think I was about 6 years old.

Name calling went on in regards to wetting the bed the Officers did nothing about this even though they knew it was happening. I was told it was a dirty habit and should not do it by the officers. I was never shown any love at all you were just a number to them not even a name.

I often got the strap because I did not want to be there and rebelled. I used to runaway and walk to Murray Valley Buses because I knew they went to Mildura and the drivers knew my Father Alf Woods and I told them he would be waiting for me when I got there and they

used to take me. When I got to Mildura he would put me on the next bus to Adelaide and would ring the Salvation Army to pick me up and take me back to the home. I was disciplined for the next couple of weeks my punishment was to be strapped and do extra duties when completed sit in a corner on my own. I ran away about 3 times but was always sent back with the same punishment.

I used to climb up the high trees in the yard and would not come down because they couldn't get me, it is also hard to believe but I also climbed up the side of a two story building on the corners and would not come down till dark because then I got scared of the dark. I would yell out that I hated them that I shouldn't be here and that I had a Mother and father and I shouldn't be here. When I come down I would get the strap and be sent to bed. I was always fighting and rebelling because I hated it there. I also used to protect younger children from being picked on these children I protected were a bit slow and couldn't defend themselves. The Officers treated them as normal children and never protected them so that was why I had to. I used to get the razor strap across the legs or hands. The older kids were taking what private things they had like toys which was not much and making fun of them. Of a night time late at night now and then not all the time you would here someone talking loud and a lot of noise and there were a couple of older boys were taking the pyjamas off the younger boys they only did it to the weaker boys. I do not know what they did to these boys as I was a child myself but they were being held face down. There was nothing I could do because they were older than me and stronger and more than one and no one was game to say anything to the officers because the older boys would pick on you as their next target. I never saw Major Stevenson or Captain Knox sexually assault anyone that I knew about.

If a gardener or orchadist from the Adelaide Hills rang to say if they could bring a truck up with some boys they could pick up fruit that was on the ground. Wilkinson and Burnside they were major builders and timber merchants would supply a large truck and driver with side s to pick up the produce. We followed in the van to help pick up the fruit or vegetables and bring them back to the home and unload and stack them. In one instance we had a lot of pumpkins go rotten I was sent down to pick them up and put them in the drums for the piggery. I told the Captain Knox I would not do it and he pushed my face in the rotten pumpkins and said that you will do it and I had to . I would have been about eight or nine years old.

The officers personally did not like me and I personally did not like them I used to get a lot of work more than the other kids.

I feel it was run like an army camp. The only time I was ever taken out of the home in those years was by my Aunty Nancy my mothers younger sister, came and took me out for a couple of times for the weekend. I had no other visitors I never received birthday presents or cards or xmas presents. Each year people were invited to the boys home and we had to sing carols and prayed. They never gave us any presents. It was an atmosphere I never wanted to live in but had no choice as I had nowhere else to go.

We never had report cards never had homework, we did not have a library at the home no access to books or no games room. We basically had to amuse ourselves we played hide and seek we never had a cricket team or a football team. We never had any equipment at all to play any type of sport we were just a number allotted jobs to do go to school and come home and go to bed.

I was never taught to spell properly. I have always been embarrassed in the fact I am not a good reader and a terrible speller. I have hidden the fact I was always doing either manual jobs of truck driving. Since I married my wife we have been married 40 years and have 3 children and 7 grandchildren, she always writes the letters and fills out any forms for me.

My reason for writing this letter is to let Australians know how hundreds of children were ill treated and abused physically and mentally to the Salvation Army's advantage. We were in the homes to fend for ourselves and learn about life the hard way, especially when I had parents who were both working. I was well looked after and loved in the foster home so why did the Salvation Army take me in those circumstances.

When I was approximately 12 years old I was taken to the bus depot by one of the officers, put on the bus told to give a letter to parents when I arrived there. To this day I do not know what was written in it. Not even a goodbye or sorry to see you go or that I would not be coming back.

In later years I asked my Mother why she put me in a boys home and she became irate and said it was a boarding school and she paid for me to be there. If that was the case why did they treat me the way they did. If you go to boarding school you are not their lackies and have to do all the work.

Due to the period in the Home I lost my complete childhood. I never knew my Uncles Aunties, cousins. I have no happy memories of my childhood at all the Salvos robbed me of that.

The part that amazed me of the Four Corners program on Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2003 about the Homies. Is the men that told their stories were practically the same as I was brought up therefore they must have had the same policy throughout Australia.

I hope my story helps you in your Senate Enquiry and the truth come out about the treatment of the Homies by the Salvation Army. I feel the Salvos have double standards against drinking and everything yet they go into hotels sell their war crys and take money off of drunk people. People say thank god for the Salvos yet they used unpaid child labour and they owe me an apology which will never make up for what happened to me. My wife wrote this letter because of my bad spelling.

Regards

Brian Alfred Woods

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Alfred Woods', written in a cursive style.