

John Allison

**The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

A Brothers Trust.

I titled this submission as above as this is what I failed to provide for my younger brother who trusted me.

This submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care spans three institutions and approximately 6 formative years of two brothers, born 12/7/1948 and 29/8/1949 respectively.

It is not known if the Institutions named were licensed under relevant legislation. To the best of my knowledge the Institutions that my brother and I attended were 1. Dalwood home for boys, 2. Cronulla / Sutherland Red Cross and 3. The Salvation Army Home at Bexley North.

In general, the recollection of the first two homes is somewhat vague however the last (The Salvation Army) is still quite vivid. I offer the following point form and brief descriptions of treatment as recollected with more detail in further parts of this submission.

1. **Dalwood.** Very young, we enter via two gates mounted on stone pillars either side, some sort of gravel drive with a building at the end of drive then entrance. How long, what conditions / treatment, I have no memory.
2. **Cronulla / Sutherland Red Cross.** Whilst in care the visit from a governor (State/Federal, who knows?) My picture in the Red Cross paper for standing straightest to greet the governor's arrival in a line, (front page). Lots of ice cream and coka cola on the day and a visit from girls from another Institution. In house school, (as I remember) well run, I mean I actually had a little fun there.

3. **Salvation Army.** By this time we are approx; 8 and 7yrs respectively. Ruled by the court (Downing Centre) to be children in neglect, we are taken (by Police, I think) to foster care for a short duration, thence to Bexley North Salvation Army institution. Approximately the next two years are a disaster.

Of the memories of 1 & 2; I only have a very Fleeting memory of Dalwood and the RED Cross homes as every now and then my parents would reconcile and take us (my brother and I) back until the next disruption.

Of 3 the memories last longest.

Two burly men deliver us to the front entrance whereby from the top of the steps we are then escorted through the front doors. There is no explanation as to why we are here and no introduction as to the facilities or layout.

We are taken to a change area and supplied basic clothes (shorts, shirt) and pyjamas to change into as it is late afternoon early evening. Personal effects including the pencils, colouring book and clothes we arrive with are stored in a locker only to be worn on Sunday for church. As we leave the change room we are split up, as I am too old for 2 home and my brother too young for 1 home. The only time we get to talk to each other (for the next 2yrs) is on Sundays after church over the fence between the two homes, provided I don't get caught having climbed a tree at the back of the exercise yard.

I am taken to a dormitory on the first floor near the front. There are bars on the windows and a lot of beds about 30" apart in rows the full length of the dorm. My understanding was at the time the younger kids in the other half of the home had a similar set up.

Frightened and fearful for my brother the next day I am introduced to what will become the pattern for the next two years.

Early rising to the sound of marching bands to perform assigned duties. Eat breakfast then attend a Public School right next door through a gate in the fence. Back to "home" for morning tea, back to school till lunch, back to "home" for lunch, back to school till end. Return to "home" do more chores has tea, shower, and go to bed. Two nights a week attend mass after tea, and march to Bexley on Sunday mornings to fill the local church.

My work duties revolve around - cleaning toilets and block, - feeding, plucking, killing chooks, - polishing floors, - cleaning musical instruments, - cleaning and preparing vegies, - clean and mop showers and bathing area.

The life is regimented; there is no place for any personal effects. The only social interaction takes place on Saturday or Sunday afternoons in the exercise yard. The yard is a large quadrangle with a strip of grass around the perimeter the centre being tar. The grass must be rested on Sundays so everyone must use a pavilion at the rear to avoid the weather. There is a swimming pool in a paddock at the rear of the exercise yard. However this is rarely used for what reason I don't know.

Occasionally sport is played, mostly cricket. Most boys compete against each other running around the grass strip around the quadrangle, though this is hard in plastic sandals.

Visitation rights are far and few between and strictly controlled in a secluded area to the front and (to my recollection) east of the main building. Often boys would be called up to the main foyer to wait ages for a visit that never occurred.

Punishments were metered out for various offences mostly by cane to the older boys (the age range being 8 to 17yrs+ in one home) in front of assembly to set examples for non-compliance with the rules. I remember a particularly nasty episode inflicted on some boys (three as I recall) who had escaped and been recaptured though one managed to stay aloof for several days before return. This fellow was considered a bit of a hero until he was caught. I myself would be locked in a broom, mop, cleaning closet overnight when I got out of hand.

Birthdays were mostly non-events with the significant person being given a small sponge cake to share or dispose of as they wish.

Eventually my mother remarried and my stepfather had to pay 85 or 87 pounds to get us out the place. I can not recall if that was for each of us or both. After that episode my brother's attitude changed, I have no idea what happened to him on his side of the home which we never really talked about to this day.

I use to be able to look out for him but in that home I was powerless.

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Re: A Brothers Trust.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I offer the following observation for your consideration as an adjunct to a previous submission tendered by me.

Further to a recent conversation with my partner, who knows little of my experience in early childhood or of the details in my submission, she raised an interesting point.

My partner (Deirdre) of 37yrs of marriage now, and because of recent media attention asked me "do you think State Wards were treated worse than others whilst in institutional care?"

I had to reflect on this as I had no idea. Personally I don't think so. However, the thought did occur to me that at least they had some sort of follow up representation from a State association as to the conditions and care provided by an Institution. Whereas, not being a ward of the State children relied on their parents or relatives as to treatment or care provided by those same Institutions.

I can recall boys being called up for interview, though I cannot ascertain what the reason/s were. I myself was never asked, "how things are going".

Regards,

John Allison.