

OUR STORY

The sun came up as it did everyday over 23 Thom Street, Alexandra, only today the 27th December 1961 was going to be a day that four innocent children would remember as a day that their lives would change dramatically for the worst.

It began as everyday did. We were up and dressed with our bathers (they were received as a Christmas gift) underneath our clothes, with all good intentions of going to the Alexandra Public Pool later in the day. Breakfast had been had and our mum (who was separated from our father) was leaving for work. She told us that our father would be by soon. Our father came and spent some time with us before he also had to leave for work.

Shortly afterwards a police car pulled up in front of our house, 2 policemen approached us and told us all to get in the police car. They were taking us away. WHY? Does mum know? Does dad know? .

There were no explanations, answers given, just confusion!! A while later with some persuasion and promise of an ice-cream, we all climbed into the back of the police car.

Our brothers, John just 2 years old, Frank 4 years, I had just turned 6 on the 21st December (this date would become more relevant to me later on in life as the date we left Orana) and my older sister Jeanette was 8 years old.

The journey from Alexandra to the Royal Park Depot took approximately 2 hours.

At Royal Park Depot we were coerced into taking our clothes off, after which we were deloused, scrubbed raw, hair cut and then processed and taken to Allambi Children's Home in Elgar Road, Burwood Victoria.

During all this happening to us, no-one explained why this was occurring to us. It was a time of utter bewilderment and fear. Someone please tell us what is going on. What had we done to deserve such barbaric treatment?

On arriving at Allambi, Jeanette and I were separated from our brothers. Jeanette was also put in a separate dormitory to me, this was extremely distressing as we had never been parted before. Everything was terrifying and horrific at Allambi. Everyone wore identical clothing, so that trying to find my sister in a crowd of children was almost an impossible task.

Lining up for meals and then standing behind your chair while grace (Praises to the Lord) was said and you stood behind your chair until told to sit. Any child failing to comply would receive punishment.

Punishment consisted of being beaten, locked in cupboards or given other menial chores, eg: cleaning everyone's shoes.

Whenever we got the chance we went looking for each other and our brothers, we eventually located them in another building, not far away.

While Patricia was endeavouring to see them, she was caught and locked in a cupboard as punishment for leaving her designated area.

We remember going back to Alexandra to attend court. We did not understand or were not told why we were there. According to our records (these were obtained 39 years later) we were admitted to the Social Welfare Branch on the 5th January 1962.

We were officially declared Wards of the State.

Our State Ward Numbers were: John 80533
Frank 80534
Patricia 80535
Jeanette 80536

On our admission to Royal Park Depot, however, we were all found to be healthy, normal children. We CANNOT STRESS this point enough, because of what ensues later. Allambi was to be a short stay. When we left there, their floors still shone.

We were placed in Orana Methodist Home for Children at 87 Elgar Road, Burwood Victoria on the 19th January 1962.

This was to be home to all of us for the next 7 years.

Orana was a Methodist Children's Home (we were Church of England) and their motto was "Suffer Little Children".

Well we can tell you they lived up to their motto, suffer is what we did.

Once again we were separated as a family. The oldest 3 were placed in Lentara Cottage, while our younger brother John was placed in Cato cottage. Cato was the section of ORANA where babies and young children under 4 years were placed, until they were deemed old enough to join brothers and sisters, or just re-located into one of the other cottages.

This was the beginning of another change with each of us living our own nightmare, and our own ordeals.

We were to endure 7 years at ORANA,

The nightmare had just begun for four small innocent children.

Now to be very clear at this turning point in our lives, all court papers declare that we are healthy children. We were picked up and taken away by the police on the 27th December 1961. Royal Park Depot was our first destination and then to Allambi.

Back to the children's court in Alexandra on 5th January, 1962, where the judge made us all Wards of the State. Our numbers are as mentioned above.

We were then returned all four of us to Allambi as Wards. On the 16th January, 1962 we were all injected with vaccine after vaccine, including the trial testing for whooping cough.

On the 25th January 1962, we are now situated at Orana, 6 days after being used as human guinea pigs, we were all admitted to hospital chronically ill with "Whooping Cough". We were to remain in hospital for quite some time and to this day the remaining 3 of us still suffer with the after affects of this drug trialling.

Melbourne and Monash Universities have finally admitted and apologised for this drug testing on all state ward institutionalised children. We cannot forgive them for what they did to us. It is a nightmare we live with everyday. To use innocent children for drug experimentation is a horrific crime and should be punishable by law.

We lost our younger brother to these experiments and Frank, Jeanette and Patricia all have health issues including heart, liver, and lungs. We are still paying for the appalling crimes committed against us.

Looking at what Medical Records we have from ORANA, (which there is none for Jeanette, her being the eldest we believe there was a lot more on her medical file and that is why it has gone missing.) Our younger brother John was in hospital 17 times in 7 years. His weight gain and growth was nil for 1 year. Next year he grew $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch and put on 1 pound – not much for a growing 4 year old child. The big question we are left asking is WHY?!!!!!! Hospitalised 17 times!!!! Frank 7 times and myself 9 times!!!!!!!!!!!!. The relevant hospitals can find no records of us being admitted, we find this extremely difficult to understand and comprehend how these large establishments do not have the records that we require.

Upon our admission to hospital we always had the same symptoms of swollen glands, headaches, nausea and gastric upsets. Amazingly, all of us with identical

symptoms, at the same time. Was it coincidental or circumstantial???

By looking at the page and there is only one page, there is little or no weight gain by any of us. This can only be due to the quality and quantity of the food that we consumed. Fruit was a luxury and occurred once or twice a year. Breakfast was always porridge regardless of the time of year. All lining up after breakfast for our daily dose of Hypol, I still remember the vile taste of that medicine. It was a race to see who could get in line first so that you could get to the toilet and spit it out, this was a bonus as the staff were busy giving it to the other children, so it gave you time to dispose of your mouthful without being caught. If you were caught you got another portion and a backhander or pulled by the hair to receive your new dose.

In March of 2007 I received my Ward File which was part of the family file it consisted of 51 pages for four children for 7 years. Approximately 50% of this file is blanked out. Our relatives' names have been deleted. We have been informed that this is to protect their identity, but why is this necessary when they signed the visiting sheet before being able to visit us. Some relatives came to visit but never got to see us, or if they did they were told no longer than 10 minutes.

SCHOOLS:

Walking to school, and it was quite a long walk for young children, unsupervised to cross roads etc.. This generally was the responsibility of the older children. Mornings and afternoons involved walking past the MLC Girls, they would tease us twice a day and often remind us that we were gutter scum, not worth the spit that came out of their mouths.

School days consisted of utter misery from the time you arrived at school you were ridiculed and teased by the children and teachers alike. We were treated like "lepers". You were a "Homie" and a naughty child, tormented by horrid remarks, as being no good, sat to the back of the

classroom because teachers considered you to be stupid and not able to learn. Teachers not caring whether you paid attention or not. We were outcasts, and did not understand "WHY". No-one paid any heed to you unless it was to put you down. The only time you received any attention from anyone within the education system was if something went missing or wrong at the school, also if you retaliated in any way you would be severely punished at school and also when you arrived back at Orana.

Believe us, we have heard every derogatory remark that you could think of. At lunchtimes it was all the same again, more teasing from the "normal" children as they spent their tuck shop money. We often sought out our older or younger siblings or "homies" to play with at recesses or lunchtimes.

One day during winter a teacher, Mr. _____ asked me, "Are you a witch, because you keep staring into the fire." I can remember feeling so small and humiliated in front of the whole class. Jeanette's memories of school are horrific as well, being called up to the principals office every time something went missing or was broken or destroyed, it was always blamed on the "homies and we suffered the consequences even though most of the time we were not at fault. Male teachers treated us with disrespect and disdain and thought that we were all sluts and sexually active. We did not understand what we had done to deserve this kind of treatment. The walk home from school was at a very slow pace, no-one was in a hurry to get back to ORANA.

On the 18.6.64, Frank invited a school friend home and had asked the young boy to stay for tea, all *hell broke loose*. He was severely punished for doing this. We know now that this is a very normal behaviour for a child, and we can not understand why the authorities at Orana reacted the way they did.

On arriving back at Orana after school, there were all sorts of chores to be done, wood to be chopped and carried indoors, shoes to be polished, clothes to be put away,

tables to be set for tea, smaller children to be looked after and try to do your homework as well. There were always chores to occupy our time.

A typical day in Orana began at 6:30am. The cottage mother of the day would ring the bell to rise. The bell would resound off the walls of the dormitories. On rising you would dress and make the beds perfectly smooth with no wrinkles, bigger children assisting the little ones. The bedrooms would then be cleaned and tidied up before you went to the bathroom to wash for breakfast; this was served at 7:00am sharp. Breakfast consisted of porridge always; occasionally we received a slice of toast, but very seldom. Immediately after breakfast was medicine time, we all had to line up for our daily intake of (Hypol) and whatever else they needed to test, we never were told what we were taking or for what reason. (We did not dare ask).

We were then handed our lunch in a brown paper bag, this contained a sandwich of cold tinned spaghetti or when there was an abundance of tomatoes, we had a soggy tomato sandwich. Nothing else, just one round of bread.

At 6:00pm the evening meal was brought around in the white van. (Meals were cooked at a central kitchen, not in the cottages). The prepared food was then transported in hospital like containers to each cottage. The cottage mother would then distribute the meals onto our plates. Meat generally consisted of sausages, or mince of some description in the form of rissoles, 2 vegetables always lumpy mashed potatoes and either carrot, pumpkin, silver beet, or cauliflower. (All would be overcooked and mushy). Dessert was sago and prunes or baked rice pudding.

Meals always began with prayers; no-one was to start eating or sit down until this prayer was recited by us all, this consequently meant that the meals were always cold.

Also meals could be delayed because some child was being reprimanded and beaten. All meals had to be completely eaten and you could not leave the table until everyone had finished the entire meal. We then had the chores of clearing the table and doing the dishes.

If it was bath night the older children had to run the baths and bathe the little ones and then themselves, all in the one bath water. The bathrooms were segregated boys and girls. Clothes were made ready for the next school day.

Bedtimes began at 7pm for the youngest and 7:30 and 8pm being the latest time allowed for any child of any age.

Again prayers were said kneeling beside your bed and only your bed. We were constantly told that they were not our beds and we are only using them. We do not possess anything, nothing belongs to you. This is a basic of how we spent every school day.

Weekends how we dreaded them,

Saturday was cleaning day, floors, windows, wardrobes, bathrooms, toilets, kitchen, bedrooms, living & dining rooms all had to be scrubbed from top to bottom literally. The living room where we sat on the 1st Saturday afternoon of the month waiting for visitors to come had to shine. This was so that the visitors could see how clean it was. If it was not visiting day after lunch we had a few hours to ourselves, during this time we were allowed to play on the oval and mix with the children from the other cottages, often we would sneak into the park beside us. We decided to take up netball as we would be driven to Royal Park to play by Uncle . We regarded this as a day out and away from the regime of the home.

Sunday was a very big day. Everyone up at 6am, with the ringing of the proverbial bell. All 12 children up and gone to Sunday school by 10 am in our best clothes, these were for this day only and we only saw them on Sundays. At 11am we would be in the church, Oakleigh Methodist, for more

sermons. We were then sent to any and everybody's places from the congregation, for the midday meal. We were expected to sit on the couch in the home of the family and not move or speak unless spoken too, regardless of what their own children would be doing, we were only spoken to when we were ordered to the table to eat. The one good thing about this was that we received a good meal, but many of the children were abused by these supposedly god-fearing people. After returning to Orana there were more religious ceremonies to attend, beginning with chapel (at Orana) and following that the older children had to attend bible class.

With regard to Uncle _____, who was the cottage parent in Baltara cottage and was responsible for taking us to Royal Park and also for delivering our meals, in the van. He was a Paedophile who sexually assaulted many of the girls including ourselves. We have tried to have this animal charged but have since found out that he has escaped justice by dying. So now unfortunately justice can not be accomplished. This is another horrendous nightmare that we must live with, along with the fact that had we spoken up, many years ago, and had been able to trust someone, that we would have been believed, we would now not be blaming ourselves for the girls that came after us. We have to live every day remembering that we would not have been his last or only victims. Our fear was so intense that we did not reveal this information to each other until we began this journey nearly 5 years ago.

The orphanages were a paedophiles play ground.

On receiving our file we noted that the church had supplied a running sheet on Patricia and our brother Frank. It disclosed that Frank had attempted to commit suicide twice whilst in Orana. The first time was on the 30.4.1965, he tried to hang himself with a tie, the second attempt was on the 31.5.1965, and this time he again tried to hang himself

with a skipping rope. His cries for help went unheard and completely ignored, his actions were instead punished. Such injustice was done to him that he has been scarred for life.

Patricia has also attempted to end her life twice and we have spent our lives looking for something and not knowing exactly what. Four marriages later and I still do not know who I am or where I belong, I now know that I will never know the truth.

While Jeanette has been married for forty years, it has not been easy for her, as she still looks for the same things as Patricia and in reality she only married to be able to leave the house in which she was living. There was not really love on her part (how could it be she was only 16yrs old and just out of Orana and did not even know what love was) it was just a way out of the world she was in at the time, maybe her husband does love her but she can not believe he does or anybody ever will. I have not spoken of any of this to my husband or anyone until now. I find it extremely difficult to communicate to people the trauma and experience that we suffered and to try to make them understand what we went through.

We all want to find LOVE and to be LOVED!!!!

This is only a basic rundown on what occurred during our time at Orana.

There was the physical and mental abuse to deal with, whether it was towards you or someone else. The nightly sound of a child sobbing and in agony is very haunting to this day. The emotional abuse, the put downs, not worthy of anything, of being told that no-one wanted you and constantly being blamed for being a Ward of the State. It was always your fault.

To have to deal with the physical and the sexual abuse was extremely devastating and has done irreparable damage to our lives. There was no-one to turn to, you could not trust anyone and you were all alone to deal with these enormous

problems. It was so much for a small child to have to cope with.

"How did we survive..."

What the future held for our younger brother was a life of no peace, of being constantly on the move, looking for a place to belong and for the love that he was denied as a child. Death claimed him early. At his funeral, the open coffin clearly showed on his face the tortured torment that he bore during his life. Even in death there was no peace for him.

Jeanette left Orana 6 weeks prior to Patricia, Frank and John. This was an extremely difficult time for her as she felt that she was abandoning her siblings and she was very concerned for them. Her siblings finally came home on the 21st December, Patricia's birthday.

We were discharged as Wards of the State on the 21st May 1970. The day before Jeanette turned 18 yrs old.

"Suffer Little Children"

By Patricia Slattery (Halliday)
Jeanette Blick (Halliday)