

WENDY

ELDRIDGE

INQUIRY INTO THE HANDLING OF CHILD ABUSE BY RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

I wish to submit my story as a State Ward of Victoria

[REDACTED]

11/02/1965 :Charged with no settled place of abode

11/02/1965 : Transferred to [REDACTED]

12/02/1965 :Transferred to [REDACTED]

16/12/1965 : Home Release

11/03/1966 : [REDACTED]

25/08/1967 : Home release to Father

06/02/1968 - [REDACTED]

01/07/1975 : Left [REDACTED] aged 17 years 4 months old.

My name is Wendy Eldridge

At the age of 6 I was removed from my parents care and I was placed at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I was alone and absolutely terrified.

My first experience with abuse began a short time after I had arrived, one of the girls had uttered the word 'shut up', I looked up at the nun who was standing nearby who then forcibly removed me from the dining room and proceeded to hit me on both hands with the handle

of the brush. My hands were sore, blue and swollen for days. From that day on, I kept my head hung down so as to not look at a nun for fear of being belted again.

I was punished for being a 'bed wetter', the wet sheets were rubbed into my face and when I attended class, those who had wet the bed had to stand beside the desk where the nun would poke you with a stick and call you names.

I suffered with many kinds of abuse:

- *My head knocked together with another child or have my head smashed into a wall.*
- *I had to scrub floors even though I was only 6 years old and if not done to their satisfaction, I would be kicked in the bottom and have to do it again.*
- *I would have to line up before bedtime and display my underwear so the nun could check to see if I had soiled them....even at 6 yrs old I found this humiliating. If my underwear wasn't to their satisfaction, I would have to keep standing with my hands on my head in the hallway whilst the nun prayed. If I moved I would receive belting and then sent to bed. I would cry myself to sleep with the pain.*
- *My hair was pulled so hard and so vicious that the nun would be left holding some of my hair in her hand.*
- *I was also hit on many occasions with the ruler across the front and back of my knees.*
- *I remember one of the sisters had died and I had to assist in veiling her, I found this a very traumatic experience.*
- *At night, I was so sad that I would be crying and rocking myself to sleep.*

- *Whilst sleeping, I was required to sleep with my arms crossed over my chest, if I was seen not to be doing this, I was dragged out of bed by my hair and have my head pushed under water in the sink till they thought that you had had enough.*
- *I would stand with hands on head in the one place for hours at a time.*
- *No talking at mealtimes or you would be punished.*
- *I was fitted with ill- fitting shoes, I told the nuns that my shoes were too tight and that I had blisters on my heels and toes, only to receive the response that I was lucky to have shoes. I used toilet paper in my shoes to try and stop the blisters from hurting me. I now need special shoes made, now have severe cramping and I need a stick to enable my walking.*
- *Sometimes I would miss tea because I was outside playing and the nuns would just send me to bed hungry. What parent chooses to do that for a child?*
- *I was told that I was 'evil' and that I would go to 'hell'.*
- *My nights [REDACTED] were very cold as I only had one blanket on my bed and as a result of my bedwetting I would spend my nights shivering and shaking.*
- *Sometimes my father would visit and give me some money; the nuns would take this money from me and never return it.*

What I have described above is the abuse I received at the hands of the sisters [REDACTED]

*The nuns who abused me were called **Sister [REDACTED]** and **Sister [REDACTED]** and others, who I no longer remember their names.*

My time at [REDACTED] robbed me of my innocence. I should have been allowed to be a child, one who is happy and content, not

looking over my shoulder to see where the next belting was coming from. I should have been happy with not only where I was living but happy within my- self.

I had no self- esteem, confidence or self- beliefs. I was like a trained animal, knowing when to eat, sit, stand or pray.

My personality was destroyed by the very people you asked to protect me; they constantly abused me physically and mentally.

[REDACTED] was surrounded by a large cyclone fence; I would stand there whenever we were sent outside. I would hang onto this fence with my little fingers poking through hoping my father would come and take me away from this horrible place.

[REDACTED]

My father was a returned soldier, a war neurosis case, he was never going to be able to look after a child or children, and we were only there a short time and then sent onto the next place of abode

After being on home release with my father for a short while, he became ill and I was then sent to [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]

I was now 9 years and four months old.

I was sexually abused on my first holiday, with the holiday hosts which [REDACTED] had chosen for me, the holiday host (man) would come into my room at night and sexually molest me. I was scared and didn't know what to do or say. I was frightened and thought that I would go to 'Hell' as I knew that this was a bad thing

he was doing to me. I was scared to tell any-body because I felt no-one would believe me.

████████████████████ were just as cruel as the nuns in ██████████

**Sister ██████████ would constantly push her knuckles in between my shoulder blades and cause pain*

**Sister ██████████ and ██████████ would belt you for the slightest thing you did wrong, it could be because you couldn't spell or you forgot the words for the rosary. I would have to kneel on my knees with my hands on my head for hours on end and I became more despondent than ever.*

**I was still suffering from sore feet, I told the sisters of mercy and they also continued to give me shoes which didn't fit properly.*

**Sex education was non-existent, when I got my first period I was scared and unsure what to do, I hid my undies under the bed for fear of getting into trouble. The nun found them and I was taken to the clothing room where I was given a pad....no explanation except to say wear this when you bleed.*

**I lived in a climate of fear. Punishments for the smallest of misdemeanours were harsh.*

**No-one loved or cared about me, I was a no-body.*

**When the nuns at ██████████ set up ten girls in a flat within their premises I was still suffering a low opinion of myself, I relied on others to provide answers as I lacked self-direction and I needed approval. Even though I was smart enough to win a scholarship to go on with my education I didn't have any self-belief.*

I lived my life in both these institutions in a state of loneliness', abandonment, worthlessness and a constant state of fear. I was often hungry and cold.

I hold you the Government of Victoria, [REDACTED] Nuns and the [REDACTED] accountable for your actions. I as a child didn't do any wrong, it was you, the adults, whether it be holiday host, the nuns or the government it is easy for you to blame the 'children' or 'those times' to excuse your actions.

You were supposed to nurture and protect me, not abuse me.

The nuns [REDACTED] implied that I should be grateful that they were providing me with the basic needs. What you expect me to be grateful for being abused??

I would have preferred the life of neglect (that I came from) at least we were family

As Gods representatives I cannot comprehend the lack of compassion and care to myself whom the nuns already viewed as damaged goods.

Well I certainly was damaged by the time I left your care

As a minor I had the right to live in a safe and caring environment, free from physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Where was my safe and caring environment?

You the GOVERNMENT were responsible to see that I was cared for.....you abandoned me.

It is obvious that the very system put into place to protect me and act in my best interests, failed me miserably.

In 2009 the Government admitted and acknowledged what happened to me by a means of public apology for the abuse and hurt, but I hold the nuns [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] accountable for the abuse done to me, your actions influenced the rest of my life.....I suffered depression, humiliation, isolation, feelings of self-worthlessness, and attempted suicides.

The separation from my brothers and sister was devastating to me and we can never be that family we once were.....the loss of my family destroyed my trust

I am still suffering with major ill health mentally and physically.

Forgotten Australians should be compensated for the lack of medical assistance and also lack of education as children.

More assistance needs to be given for all Forgotten Australians, especially those who are homeless or living in a room in a boarding house. There needs to be more funding for those who need urgent medical treatment.

It should be compulsory for the past providers and abusers to provide a fund to assist those in need.