

Gabrielle Short – Ward of State(Victoria) – 1956 to 1973

Detail's of Physical, Mental and Sexual Abuse.

My father suffered from war neurosis which got so bad my mother couldn't cope any longer so she went to see the Catholic priest (Fr [REDACTED]) and his advice was to put the children in a home, and even helped to arrange it. So that's how my life in institutions began. From March 1956-1973(17 years).

Early March 1956 at 8 weeks old along with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] were first put into St Joseph's home Broadmeadows then about 3mths later were transferred to Nazareth House in Ballarat run by The Poor Sisters of Nazareth. Nazareth House was divided into 3 sections, girls from 5yrs up went to the girls home in Ballarat, boys 5yrs up were sent to the boys part in Sebastapol, and under 5's were sent to the babies home which was right next door to the boys section.

My earliest memory of the babies home was a whole line of pots that we had to go and sit on and do number 1's & 2's and had to stay there until we had finished, this was not always possible, and the nun would keep coming in and checking on us, and if we hadn't done it by a certain time she would get angry and pull out the stick, I remember her one day pulling me forward by the hair and gripping my head between her legs and belting into me with the stick all over my back and legs, I tried to scream but couldn't breathe because my face was right in her dress, finally she released her grip and kneed me backwards where I fell onto my pot causing it to spill which made her even more angry, she then got my head and rubbed my face into the urine on the floor. I have never forgotten this very first memory of this babies home. Sometimes I wonder what went on in those first couple of years of my life that I have no memory of.

From that day on I experienced an excessive amount of violent episodes at the hands of the nun's on a daily basis, and also witnessed it happening to other children in this institution. I cannot describe everything that happened as it would take a book 4 times thicker than the Bible, so I will do my best to keep it brief but still get my message across as to what we went through as children in these institutions.

I was a bed wetter until the age of 7 and every morning one of the nuns or senior girls would come around and check our sheets, and if we had wet the bed we would have our faces rubbed into the bed sometimes until our noses bled, we would get dressed and go to mass and I remember during mass blood would still be dripping from my nose and my sleeve would be covered in blood. Then after breakfast we would do our chores and go to school. The home had its own school up to grade 6 so there was no escaping the nuns. In the morning before class would begin the nun would call out who wet the bed, and if you were guilty then you had to stand up on your seat, if there were a lot of us she would pace up and down the aisles and if she poked her stick into you that meant you had to go and stand down the front where she had buckets of hot water lined up. We had to stand in this hot water until it had cooled then she would tell us to put our shoes and socks back on over our

burning feet, most of the time our shoes were too tight as it was very rare that we had proper fitting shoes.

Here is a list of some different forms of physical, mental and sexual abuse that went on at Nazareth House in Ballarat:

- I had my head bashed against the wall and they would also slam our heads together.
- Belted on the front and backs of hands, and made to clench our fists and would be belted on the knuckles, also many girls suffered chilblains in the winter and even though the nuns knew this they seemed to get more delight out of watching us go through even more pain.
- In the dining room one of the nuns would walk around with a table spoon in her pocket (She called it a spoon head amongst ourselves) and she would just hit girls on the head randomly for no reason at all, sometimes she would go crazy and keep hitting you over and over until your head would be covered in lumps.
- Locked in the broom cupboard under the stairs for hours on end, sometimes up to 2 days and if you were lucky someone would come along and throw food in.
- The nun would come around and check at night to see if your arms were crossed whilst sleeping and if you got caught not doing this you would be dragged out of bed and dragged down the passage by the hair where she would have a sink filled up with water and she would keep dunking your head in it until she thought you had enough. I remember on many occasions I actually blacked out.
- Thrown over bed, pants ripped down and nun would jump on you and hold you down with her knee in your back holding your head down into the bed so you couldn't breathe or scream. This one I found to be very embarrassing because we were told to always keep our bodies covered and yet this was a common punishment, The nuns seemed to get great delight out of it. (The sexual abuse has more to do with a later home but this is one example of an incident that may be deemed sexual abuse).
- Made to stand in the summer house in pants and singlet late at night in the freezing cold.
- Made to scrub floors from the age of 6. And while we were down on our hands and knees the nun would kick us in the backside if she thought it wasn't done properly and make us start all over again.
- Every night after prayers we would have to line up in the passage and hold our underwear out, so the nun could sniff to see if they smelt or had any stains on them, if guilty we would have to remain there until others had gone to bed. Then she would tell us to put our hands on our head and not move, we would stand there for hours while she sat there reading her prayer book or saying the rosary looking out the corner of her eye and if we got caught even scratching ourselves she would drag us out and beat the daylights out of us. I remember going to bed covered in bruises and found it hard to sleep because the pain was too excruciating.

- Many times a nun would come out of nowhere and just start belting into you with her stick across the head and kicking you at the same time. I remember many times being beaten so bad I could not get back up off the floor, my head would be spinning and my legs would feel so weak I felt like I had no blood in my head and eventually when I did make it up I would stagger to find a place to hide so no one could see me cry.
- If girls wet their pants in class they would be made to get down and lick it up. The nun would give one of the other girls the stick and tell her to stand over her and hit her if she brings her head up before she is finished.
- Rammed up against the wall with arms twisted up our backs and then they would keep banging our faces into the wall.
- Whacked across the front of the legs and across the knees with the stick or 3ft ruler.
- Nuns would sometimes put their hands around your throat and keep squeezing until you almost blacked out.
- Being swung around in circles by the hair, you would literally be in mid air.
- Being lifted off the ground by your cheeks.
- They would squeeze a certain point on the upper inside of your arm until it went weak or paralysed.
- Shoving our heads inside the desk then slamming the lid down hard as they could.
- I cannot keep going with this list of all the violence I experienced because I am starting to relive it and my brain cannot handle it.

I remember on a few occasions there were people who used to come there and they would walk around with the nuns, don't know who they were. But the nuns must of known in advance they were coming because when we got up in the morning we had to change the bedspreads and put these really nice one's on the bed and then we would place a doll on the bed too. Once these people had left we would have to go upstairs to the dormitory and change it all back. One time I got caught hiding the doll under the mattress, the nun walked over and lifted the mattress up and pulled the doll out and placed it carefully in the box. She then came back and grabbed me by the hair and started to swing me around she let go and as I came down I hit my head on the end of the bed, she then picked up a hairbrush and started belting me over the face with it. My face was so swollen I

couldn't eat or talk properly for a few days and had lumps sticking out of my forehead, that night I couldn't sleep because every way I turned my face and head would hurt. Funny you know that doll got treated better than I did.

Then there was the time one of the nuns sent me and another girl up to clean the sewing room on the third floor. We were looking out the window looking down at the swimming pool and we noticed the nuns were having a swim. They all looked the same and had swimming caps on so we decided to see if we could guess who was who. Next minute you know I was seeing stars as a nun had crept up behind us and smashed our heads together, she then left the room and came back with a hand broom and just kept belting into us and telling us how dirty we were, all because we were looking at the nuns in the pool.

I will also add that there were times while I was in this particular institution where there were opportunities for me to have a better life but the nuns put a stop to it. My mother used to visit us whenever she could, she did finally remarry and her husband told her that she could go and get us out of the home and he would help her raise us. So she came up to get us out and the nuns told her because she had remarried she was excommunicated from the church therefore had no rights to her children and it wouldn't be good for the children to be brought up in such a situation. She was also told to stop coming to see us as well. (I was 6yrs old) It wasn't until years later in my adulthood getting to know her all over again that I found out why she had stopped coming.

We also used to have what they called holiday parents who would take us for the Christmas holidays while the nuns went on their break. After I had been going with these people for a couple of years they asked the nuns if they could adopt me, they wanted me to have a normal life and education, they were really good people and I liked staying with them. But the nuns said no, they tried again a year later and the nuns said no, and never gave a reason. These people who I kept in touch with after I got out of the homes never ever forgave these nuns, they used to hate taking me back there but their hands were tied.

February 1968(12 years old)

One evening in the dining room I noticed [REDACTED] was missing [REDACTED] and when it was time to go to bed I noticed she was still missing, I asked my [REDACTED] did she know where she was and she said no so we went looking for her and asked everyone but no one had seen her. We went to bed and the next morning at mass we couldn't see her so we started to get worried and went to one of the nuns and said we couldn't find [REDACTED] and she said she is not here anymore, I said where is she and she told me that she was living in Melbourne somewhere. I tried to get more information and she told me to go and mind my own business. 4 days later [REDACTED] went missing and this was all getting too much, I went to the nun and asked what happened to [REDACTED] and her answer was a smack in the face, I asked other nuns but they just glared at me. One morning after church I approached the priest and asked him could he find out where [REDACTED] was, he said ask the nun's and I said they won't tell me, I kept begging him please please please, he didn't say much except to just go down to breakfast. 2 days later he came up to me in the yard and told me he had found out where she was and he got special permission to take me to see her. We went to see her and I was so happy. That night Sr [REDACTED] came in and dragged me out of bed by the hair down to the washroom, She was so angry that I had gone to the priest and kept saying to me how dare you, she shoved my head in the basin of water many

times belting and kicking me, she was like a mad woman and I thought she was never going to stop, next minute I remember waking up in the middle of the night with a headache, I still can't remember how I got back to bed.

I couldn't take any more of this plus not having my sisters around I decided to run away. I wandered around Ballarat for a while and then I thought I would go and see my oldest sister, I begged her to let me stay with her, she had a room in the nursing quarters of a hospital. She said if she got caught she would be kicked out of there, and she didn't have much choice but to take me back to Nazareth House. I ended up going back with her and as we were walking down the passage, Sr [REDACTED] was walking towards us, I started shaking and hid behind my sister, she told the nun if you ever lay a hand on my sister again I will grab you by the veil and swing you from here to kingdom come. And that she would come back and check on me. I think the nun got nervous and a week later I was transferred to Pirra girl's home in Geelong.

Pirra Girls Home Lara Geelong.

At Pirra the only freedom we had was going to school, we were never allowed to go to friend's houses or excursions. When casual day came I always waggged because we never had decent enough clothes to wear. One day I told the Superintendent that I had a [REDACTED], and asked if I could go and see her. She just looked at me and said no. I asked on a few occasions and the answer was always the same. I needed to see my sister as I really missed her badly. I had already found out what school she went to when I first visited her. So I decided to wag one day and go and see her which I succeeded in doing. I got caught out because I was seen by the driver walking back from the opposite direction, I was trying to make it back on time, but wasn't quick enough, this got reported and I was locked in the dormitory for the whole weekend. I kept running away so I could see my sister so in the end they sent me to St Aiden's in Bendigo. I should add I wanted to see my sister as she was the only thing I had left over the years, they had taken everybody I loved away from me, and I was finding this hard to deal with.

St Aiden's Bendigo.

St Aiden's was another very violent place. We also spent most of our waking hours working as slave labour in the laundries. We did hospital and commercial businesses laundry and never got paid a cent. The nuns were paid for all our work. And if we were caught talking or taking a rest we were punished severely. I could not take any more of this and I still was missing my sister so I planned my escape, it took me 3mths because they watched you like a hawk, but eventually succeeded along with 2 other girls. Once we were out of there we hitched a ride but the guy turned off on to a dirt track and stopped the car in the middle of nowhere, he was drunk and had a gun so we took off and was running through paddocks until we came to a farm house. They called the police who came and picked us up and took us to the Kyneton police station, then the police from Melbourne came and picked us up and took us to the remand centre of Winlaton. I have copied in some details for Winlaton. As far as I am concerned I was sent to prison for running away from a system that was failing me and many other ward's of the state in it.

Location	Victoria
Status	Closed
Security class	Remand to Maximum Security
Capacity	45 - Actual 100 +
Opened	1956
Closed	1993
Managed by	Youth Welfare Division, Social Welfare Department Victoria (later Community Services Victoria)

The first thing we had to do was strip off, I refused because I was too embarrassed but was told if I didn't they would call in the night watchman and he would do it for me. (This happened a lot in remand) so I did. After this I was locked in a cell for 48hours with only a mattress and blanket and a pot on the floor. It was the usual procedure to be locked in a cell for 48 hours if you were a ward of the state and had run away from another institution. Two weeks later I was transferred to Winlaton where I was forced to undergo a medical for venereal disease, I had heard from other girls what this was like and I begged the staff not to let me have to go through this as I had never had sex in my life. It just fell on deaf ears. When I got to the clinic I tried to run but the 2 staff grabbed me and dragged me inside where they forced me up on the table and put my legs in stirrups and held me down from both sides so I couldn't move. This was one of the most horrible experiences I have ever had in my life. We now know it as systematic rape(Sexual Abuse). When I got back to Winlaton I went to the toilet and noticed I had blood in my pants, I just cried, I felt sick to the stomach and couldn't eat for a week after this because I would just vomit the food up.

I saw and experienced a lot of horrible things in Winlaton such as seeing girls getting gang raped by other girls, bashings, being locked in our cells at night, only allowed 3min showers, disgusting food, the list goes on and because I spent 3 and a half years in there I could not fit it all in.

While I was in Winlaton I attended an outside school for a little while, until they started up a work release program. We had to look for jobs and we also had to be honest about where we were living, this was not a good thing because no-one would employ me. So I decided to leave the Winlaton

bit out of it (although I did give the address) and bingo I got a job. One day in the tea room I confided in another worker there about where I was living thinking I could trust her. The next morning when I came into work the boss called me up to the office and asked was it true that I was from Winlaton, I said yes and instantly I was fired, his reasoning was that he could not take the risk with someone who had been in Winlaton. I went for another job and didn't tell them about Winlaton except for the address and bingo again I got it. The Winlaton van used to come and pick me up from work, however one day the driver parked right in front of the shop waiting for me to finish, Then I heard a voice call out hey hurry up and the boss was standing right next to me, my heart sunk. The next morning he told me that he knew that I was living in Winlaton as he had checked the address out. Fired again.

Then one day one of the staff from Winlaton was talking to her neighbour who was a manager at Coles and she told him my story and he said he would give me a go because she told him I hadn't done anything wrong to be in there and she knew I was honest. So he told her not to worry about me coming for an interview as he would take her word for it. I was wrapt so I went to work and loved it and the boss was really happy with my work. Apparently head office found out that the store I was working at had a Winlaton girl there, they told my boss to get rid of me and he begged them to please give me a chance. So what they did in the end was send 2 men out to the store to watch me, this went on for 2wks, and in this time they found 3 other workers stealing who had nothing to do with Winlaton. They told my boss they believed me to be honest and were also happy with my work. I had to go through so much discrimination on the outside all because I was in Winlaton.

One day I came home from work and I found my things out on the front veranda , I was told that I was released and my time there was up at Winlaton, I didn't know what to do as I had never lived on the outside before, I gathered my few things and went to Nunawading train station and stayed there for the night, then next morning went to work.

One of my Winlaton friends who had already left used to come in and see me at work sometimes, she came in this day and I told her what had happened and she said I could come and stay with her, she gave me the address and after work I went there, it turned out to be an old run down boarding house filled with lots of old and drunken men. We stayed for 3wks while we could get enough money together for a bond then we moved into a bungalow. After 3mths we had to leave because we took in another friend who was homeless, and she started to bring men home during the day while we were at work. All our stuff was thrown out on the nature strip. The friend that we took in went her own way, and we never saw her again.

That night we slept at the back of a church that was at the end of the street we were living in. The next morning my friend said she was going to see her mother to see if we could stay there for a while and she would meet me back at the church that evening. I went off to work and when I came back to the church that night she didn't return. So I just kept going to work for the next week and coming back to sleep behind the church. I ended up ringing up one of the staff from Winlaton, the one that helped me get the job, she asked me where I was living and I ended up telling her. She came and got me and said I could live with her and her husband as long as I didn't tell anyone from Winlaton. The staff at Winlaton were not allowed to get emotionally involved with any of the girls or have any contact with them once they left.

When I was in my 20"s while I was living in Perth I got very sick and was losing a lot of weight, I went down to 6 stone, my normal weight was 9 and a half stone, I was feeling very week and found it hard

to keep up with everything, the doctors couldn't work out what was causing my weight loss and sent me for all sorts of tests and thought it may have been cancer, I was sent for food allergy tests and it turned out I was allergic to just about everything they tested me for, the doctor asked me was there a history of allergies in my family and I didn't know what to say, I umed and ahed and eventually I said I don't know much about my family because I grew up in homes, he asked me what it was like growing up in these places and I started to tell him and then I just clammed up, he sat there for a while and said nothing, I was about to get up and run out of the room when he said there lies your problem, he told me when you bottle everything up for a long period of time the body can actually turn on itself, and that's what is happening to you and until you learn to deal with all this and talk about it you will just keep getting sicker. He said with all the tests we have done this is the only explanation he can come up with at this stage. He suggested for me to have counselling, around this time my husband got a posting(Airforce) back to Melbourne.

2 weeks after I arrived back in Melbourne I was talking to a friend of mine who had noticed how much weight I had lost, he asked had I been to see a doctor and I said yes I had and everything was OK (I lied) he also noticed how I couldn't move my head properly and I told him it was because if I move it too quick I get dizzy, so he told me about a chiropractor who had helped him with his back and was very good with natural therapies as well, so to cut a long story short I took his advice and went to see this chiropractor, he sent me off for x-rays and when they came back he asked me was I in a very serious car accident or fallen off a roof, I said no and he showed me why he thought this and said the only time he had seen anything like this is in people who had fallen from either a high place or a bad car accident. He did treat my neck and I noticed after about a fortnight I could turn my head a lot easier without going dizzy, it kept on improving although I still get it a little bit from time to time but nowhere like I used to. A particular Doctor told me there was evidence of a hairline fracture to my skull.

Around this time I started meeting up with old friends from the homes and that's when I was able to talk about my experiences because we understood each other. I still have problems with my weight and I have to always work to keep it on, and still suffer from claustrophobia very badly and find it hard to sleep at night but have learned to manage things the best I can.

I believe all forgotten Australians who grew up in these hell holes should receive some kind of compensation. We lived in fear for our life every moment of our existence in these places. Treated worse than adult criminals who had actually committed crimes. We were treated with contempt, treated with lack of respect and dignity, and no mercy. Denied proper access to medical care, dental care, proper nourishment, and a decent education. Denied our family, denied freedom of speech, we were locked away out of site out of mind and FORGOTTEN.

If a parent done these thing's it would be considered child abuse. I was a ward of the state(Victoria). As my legal guardian they abused me physically, emotionally and sexually.