

## **Victorian Government Enquiry into childhood abuse in religious and non government institutions**

### **Submission of Phylis Read (DOB [REDACTED] 1966 ) and Rosemary Baker [REDACTED] 1968)**

Background to this submission:

Phylis [REDACTED] Read, [REDACTED] born on [REDACTED] 1966 [REDACTED] and placed in the Alexandra Home. Rosemary, born in 1968 was placed in her grandmother's care then at age one placed in the Alexandra home.

We give our consent for this completed submission to be released as a public document, including our names.

#### ***Part 1. PHYLIS READ:***

*We experienced abuse at various places we were homed, the Alexandra Babies Home and Women's Refuge, Warawee Reception Centre ( a processing center in between placements) , Lady Northcote Children's Farm, Ballarat Children's Homes Orphanage, and holiday placements we were sent to. We were also regularly sent back to our male parent's house and were as being neglected and physically and sexually abused there. When I was a child at his house I was worth a packet of black and white smokes and VBS and whoever paid for it, I would have to be on their lap and they would do things to me.*

At the Alexandra Babies Home, we were all put in metal cribs, lined up in rows; I was in front of a window. I would imagine that we were all on a blue train, which was going to take us away from there. I remembered that

when I was two years old, I was standing up in the crib, which we weren't allowed to do. I and the other children were imagining being on the train, the staff member, seeing us standing up and seeing us being happy in our imaginary train, in uniform like a nurse, came up to each child one by one and hit us across the back of the head, making each child fall against either the cot or the window frame onto their faces. I have always felt guilty about the other children being hit because of it being my fault that the other children were imagining being on the train. I can still see them and still hear them screaming and crying

If the matron thought we were going to touch our private parts, they would tie our arms, extending to each side of the cot all nights. I remember one nurse saying to the matron, I don't want to do this, but she was forced to. I would hear the other kids crying all through the night when this happened to them and me. I didn't cry much then because I was used to getting belted up at home, and sexually assaulted, given to his mates and our uncles as he called them.

When we were at Warawee (approximately five years old) and we were in grade prep, one night, it was midnight, they made us watch movies – the movies were first a cowboy and Indian movie, with a family being scalped and massacred, the other one was about Count Dracula. The staff made all the children sit there and not move, and stood behind us with their fists ready to hit our heads, and if you moved they'd hit you in the back of the head. We were not allowed to close our eyes and had to stay there and watch both movies. It felt like they were conducting a psychological experiment to control all the children. We didn't understand it; we were used to being

punished, belted, and not fed. What it did to use, all of us, is it scared and terrified us, we still remember it today. One thing I did was watch every horror movie to try to desensitize myself to try to lose the fear, but I actually became numb.

I was about 4-5 when they sent us the Lady Northcote Children's Farm (near Bacchus Marsh), which was a working farm, there were still some child migrants there. The boys had to care for the animals, the girls were the housemaids. We were also marched up to a local sheep farm at the left of the farm, and get under the floor of the sheep shed, for hours and hours, you couldn't breathe with the dust and ammonia from the urine. We had to collect all the sheep poo, and put it into 20kg hessian bags.

At Lady Northcote farm, the old lady there dragged me by the hair and threw me in the bottom of the cupboard. I was kept in the bottom of that cupboard, sometimes 7 days at a time. The animals on the property were better cared for than the children. One day, because we couldn't take it anymore, [REDACTED] I ran away and fell into the sewage pit that was on the property. I kept going under and was drowning in it, and couldn't get out. I had swallowed raw sewage, and was almost dead. One of the big boys that were sent after us grabbed me by the hair and pulled me out. If he hadn't done that I would have drowned in the sewage. He carried me back over the fences to the cottages.

They took us both back to the cottages. Both of us had poo in our eyes from the sewage. Mrs. [REDACTED] hit me and swore at me and told me it was my fault and was a filthy pig, and told me to stay on the veranda all

night. I was in a grey dress, which was covered with the sewage. By the morning my eyes were crusted over with it, and my dress was stuck to my body. Mrs. [REDACTED] son came and found me and was really angry. He took me to the bathroom and cleaned out my eyes, mouth, and nose and scrubbed me clean. He even cleaned my private parts as it was all stuck from the sewage. He gave me a drink because it had gone down my throat, put a nightie on me and held me to keep me safe, while he kept yelling at his mother this is wrong, this is wrong. Mrs. [REDACTED] daughter went mad at him, screaming out they are all bastard children.

The cottages had the boys and girls separate. Inside the children had to line up and the last child in the line was always grabbed by the hair and thrown into the cupboard. They would be kept there all night, usually for seven days straight. There was nowhere to stand up, so I had to crouch down, they would sometimes give you food and water, but not much. After seven days, you would be let out, but had to clean up all the pooh and wee and mess, and could hardly walk because of being in the cupboard so long.

Sometimes I would put myself in the back of the line, because I couldn't stand seeing it happen to the little children. So it meant I spent a lot of my time in the cupboard when I was there. I can't cope with being in small spaces at all. I can't manage counselling because of having the door being closed.

I was in the Ballarat Children's Homes, at age six, in the Albert Leech cottage when my life changed. I thought the sexual stuff had stopped, as it only happened in my parent's house.

When we first got to the homes, there was a man who would also come to the home; we would be all dressed up, the girls with dresses and white socks and shoes, the boys also dressed up. We would then be lined up in front of the Albert Leech cottage, and this big man, in a suit, who was very well dressed, would pick out one of the children. He often had on an expensive looking wool overcoat, when he picked me, I remember walking with him, holding his hand, walking to his car, when I looked back at the other kids, and they were looking at me really strangely, shaking their heads. I didn't understand at the time, I thought we were going somewhere nice. I was taken in his fancy car, I don't know where I went and I don't remember what happened, other than the next thing I was back at the home. My back bum (that's what we called our bottoms) was really sore and bleeding. The lady who took care of me, washed me and cleaned me up, she didn't get angry at me, she put me into bed, and would come in for days, to wash me, wash my bleeding bottom, fed me, give me medicine. I just slept until it stopped hurting, and then I could leave the room. I'm not sure how long I stayed in the room. I had known from my home that males did stuff to your front bottom, I didn't know that they did it to your back bottom. After that I knew people did bad things to little kids, and I didn't trust people after that. This getting dressed up thing happened regularly, he would be there to pick a new kid, who hadn't had it happen to them, usually the young kids. When new kids would come I would try to hide them so they wouldn't have to go with him. The staff still let him come and take a kid, even though everyone knew what happened.

One of the staff members there at the Children's homes was [REDACTED] she was really cruel to me, every day. I don't swear if I can help it, but I call her my nemesis.

When all the girls were in the shower, [REDACTED] would watch us shower. I was used to men doing that stuff to me, but didn't know that women did it.

After awhile she started bring in the boys to watch us naked. It was worse if you were being punished, as you had to shower on your own, and there was no hiding. She started bringing in the boys naked, like she was encouraging the boys to do sexual things with us. The boys started forcing the girls to have sex, one of my friends was raped by the boys, and she was forcing the younger boys to be involved. If they didn't they got belted on the back of the head. The boys were being raped by Mr and Mrs. [REDACTED] who looked after their cottages. You would hear them during the night crying out don't, please stop; it was so hard to hear it.

We had to dress ourselves, but occasionally she would "adjust us" which meant checking our underwear, where she would insert her fingers – with very sharp, long nails into our genitals.

When [REDACTED] was on duty at night, I wasn't allowed to eat. I had to sit outside the dining room, and if she did let me eat, I would shovel the food in to get it in fast, I was so hungry. Then she would hit me across the back of my head, and drag me out by the hair. I lived most of the time in the boot locker room. One day she shoved me into the broom closet, I was so upset because I was back in the cupboard. I broke the brooms and even the floor

polisher; she made [REDACTED] hold the door shut that I was kicking against.

At night, I was always made to go away from the MB John across the sewer to the paddock where there were cows, and I would have to stand in my thin nightie all night, without shoes and sox, even in winter, and I wasn't allowed to move. She would watch that I wouldn't move. She would also make me sit on the cold concrete ramp at night and polish all the shoes in the dark.

One day [REDACTED] hit me really hard across the head and I fell into a boot locker from the force, and went unconscious. Sister [REDACTED] (the nurse) was called in (she was brought in with medical problems, rather than us go to the hospital). I remember that night overhearing them talk, and hearing sister [REDACTED] say to [REDACTED] don't do it so hard next time otherwise we will be found out. We were not allowed to have what they called "any obvious injury", mainly because the school may get curious. If we were away sick, they would tell the school I was constipated.

We were not allowed to go to the toilet at night, so we would try to hold on all night. If we did wet the bed, we were dragged out of the bed and have our faces rubbed in the sheets, then dragged naked in front of everyone, called names and made to stand naked in the cold shower or the bath.

To protect our little sister Rosemary, we would bring her in to sleep with us, but she would wet the bed, and we would get the consequences. [REDACTED] I would try to push our beds together for protection during the night, but we

still got bashed. [REDACTED] was so vicious; I'm not sure how I left the home alive, I couldn't stop what was happening.

We would sometimes muck around like kids, being noisy, one day, when I was 12 we were running around, I ran around the corner straight into [REDACTED] fist, and I was knocked out. They got sister [REDACTED], and my nose was broken, she put me in the staff bedroom, I stayed there awhile. I still can't breathe properly and have lots of blood noses.

Sister [REDACTED] would give us needles and medication that would make us sick, sedate us and give us rashes and things. I think [REDACTED] they would experiment on is to see the effects. Sister [REDACTED] or other staff would also take us sometimes from the home into the back room of a doctor's surgery; his name was Dr [REDACTED]. When we went into his rooms, the next thing I would know was I would wake up, with my "back bum or front bum" (as we called our genitals) really sore and the staff would hurry us back to the cottages. On those nights it was unusual because we never got bashed and would be put straight into bed. The other children would all say the same thing; they never got bashed after they went to Dr [REDACTED] rooms, which was unusual for everyone.

[REDACTED] would beat me up regularly and call me a slut, especially as my periods were not regular and when they would come early and very heavy bleeding she would accuse me of having sex, I was only 12. I was never sent to a doctor or treated for this heavy menstruation, even though the excessive bleeding made me really tired all the time.



When I was about 12, we were at the Eastern Baths swimming pool with the school. I had my period, and I would always bleed very heavily, so I couldn't swim. I was teased by the other students about this, and a lady teacher punched me in the nose. The bleeding wouldn't stop, and one of the teachers, Mr. Ellis called the ambulance, I was taken to the hospital, and my nose was plugged. When I got back to the homes, I got into trouble because I had gone to hospital and drawn attention to myself and to the orphanage.

When I got my periods, [REDACTED] would bring the older boys in when I was having a shower and they would watch me bleed in the shower. It was embarrassing. To cope I tried to be like a boy and look like a boy.

They made us smoke when we were 13, giving us packs of black and white and told to go in a room and smoke with the boys, it became a bit of a sanctuary for us in that room.

Another thing the staff did when you developed pubic hair, you would be in your room, naked, looking for underwear to get dressed and they would just bring people in who were there checking the buildings, they didn't care that we were naked, it was actually planned, though some of the visitors appeared shocked. We had no privacy.

Rosemary was in the Leech extension. When I was 7 I threatened [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to leave her alone, cos I knew what he was doing, he was molesting the small children. One night I heard the staff members talking about Rosemary, that it was her turn. I just ran out right through the double glass doors, where I found her, with [REDACTED] standing at her door, I

beat him and kicked him, and told him I wasn't going to allow him to rape my sister. I knew I could go to kid's jail for doing this, but I didn't care. The strange thing is I was never punished for this, his wife saw me kicking and beating him, but they did nothing.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] would bring [REDACTED] into my room and bash her in front of me, the first time it happened I would cry, I couldn't handle it. One day in the passage way I decided to defy her, because [REDACTED] had told the lie about me. They had "won" and I knew I was on my own. The next time she couldn't get me to do something they brought [REDACTED] in and bashed her, I didn't cry, I said "are you finished yet" and walked away, there was nothing more she could do to me.

A lot of the bad stuff stopped happening around the time when I was 13, as there were social workers coming around to visit the homes and asking if we were happy or if things were ok there. They would take us in the room and asked us questions about the homes, though we wouldn't say anything because we knew if we did we would get punished.

[REDACTED] I would act .like really crazy animals- they called us spastic. They took us to see a psychologist in Errard Street. I think we became childish

because of all the things they'd done to us. The psychologist kept saying to us "you can trust me, I am here for you children, everything you say is confidential and I won't tell the children's home or staff members anything" he kept saying this every time we saw him, over many visit. After awhile, [REDACTED] I thought it was safe to talk to him. I was the first person, I told him all the truth of what had happened in the homes, about [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the dentist, Dr [REDACTED] (the dentist would put us under anesthetic and when we woke up our genitals would be sore). I thought I could trust this psychologist, so I told [REDACTED] I told him, she went in and she also told him what was happening.

When we got back to the homes, [REDACTED] just started bashing us both really hard, all the while saying exactly what I had told the psychologist – she kept going on and on with the bashing, hitting, fist, bats, kicking, the belt they called Stanley, anything she could do to hurt us. She did this till she eventually slid down onto the floor, heaving with exhaustion. There was nothing left of her to hurt me with.

I was left there, on the floor, no one was around, later [REDACTED] (one of the older boys) opened the door, and saw me laying there, and said "oh my god", then said "I am so sorry", after that he would never close the door on me again.

[REDACTED] broke my nose, would bash me in the boot locker room saying you will go to Winlayton and get raped with a broom handle. I knew the ones who went there came back really passive, so I never hit her back because I didn't want to give her an excuse to send me to Winlayton.

We were sent back to our male parent's house regularly even though we had been removed from his care because he had been abusing us, he had abused all the boys and girls. When we were there we would be alone, without food, or heating or electricity. When the neighbor would report our state, they would ask us where we wanted to go – with him or the homes. We were conflicted, home was bad with him, and the children's homes were bad.

We were also sent away to holiday hosts, at one of them the children abused me, and I had to sleep on the floor. Most of the children who went away would come back having been raped, tied up or having broken bones.

When I was 10, I had [REDACTED] who took me in as holiday host in Panmua, when I was there, [REDACTED] called up and said that she had been raped. [REDACTED] drove me all the way from Panmua and we took [REDACTED] back, she then up the homes to tell them, and I know that there were still other children being sent there after that.

One day when we were 16 years [REDACTED], a really nice staff member, came with us to see Dr [REDACTED]. We were there because they decided we had to go on the pill. [REDACTED] didn't want us to go, and said at the home that the girls don't need it, but she was made to take us. I had a boyfriend but wasn't sexually active and I didn't want to go on the pill, but didn't have a choice. [REDACTED] took us into Dr [REDACTED] room. We were made to put on a thin, very see through petticoat or slip. He told me he had to check my vagina and breasts, because we don't get the pill if we didn't get that done.

We were both really scared so I said I'd go first, he got the speculum into my vagina, while I lay down with my hand over my breast and genitals my right hand over my eyes. The speculum cut through the side of my vagina, I screamed and he said woops, but he didn't take it out and just repositioned it. He then put his whole hand inside me. I remember he was smiling when he was doing it. After that he proceeded to check my breasts thoroughly. I was standing there with the see through nightie on, and had to wait while it was being done to [REDACTED], I wasn't allowed to get dressed. My vagina hurt for ages, probably a week after, there was bleeding as the speculum had ripped my vagina. I had really bad stomach cramps afterwards too. I remember after being crunched over in pain, I remember telling my boyfriend that I had really bad stomach pain.

Once it was over, we were allowed to get dressed. [REDACTED] just grabbed us and kept apologizing, and was crying. She realized my vagina had been ripped and asked if we could leave. When Mrs. [REDACTED] came in to work, she used it as a weapon against us; she said because we were put on the pill, we were filthy, sluts and whores and gutter snipes. Because the other girls who had it done, had already left, the staff [REDACTED] just said this was normal. Rosemary had this done when she was fourteen.

I kept going to see Dr [REDACTED] because I didn't know I had other choices, we did everything habitually. When I was 17, pregnant with my first child, I went to the hospital to see the doctor, as I just felt I would lose my baby if he did that stuff he always did to me. The doctor at the hospital didn't do a vaginal examination to me.

I was diagnosed with a hereditary blood disorder, when I was pregnant with my 4<sup>th</sup> child, [REDACTED] in 1993. The doctors said that I was born with it, but I was never treated for it when I was in the homes. I have had my spleen removed and I have lots of health issues associated with this condition, including kidney and liver failure. Excessive bleeding is one of the issues that I have. I know that this occurred when I was a child, but as I said it was never treated. I have been diagnosed with fecal incontinence, due to being raped anally, which means my bowel needs reconstructing. I can't hold food in and can't be too far away from a toilet.

I have a lot of other health problems, my daughter has a rare genetic condition and I know it is related to all the medications we were given as children by Dr [REDACTED] and Sister [REDACTED] and others.

I suffer from severe anxiety and have trouble leaving my house. And especially I can't stand being in a small space. I have tried to get my records but can't get access to them. I remember at about 17 a man coming from Canberra to interview us but we weren't ready to talk about it then. He told us that he had accidentally found our files and he looked for us, he said that the files had everything that was done to us and he wanted us to come out publicly about it. We were too scared; we couldn't because the welfare were following us around, threatening to take our babies off us.

## ***Part 2. ROSEMARY BAKER***

I Rosemary Baker, formerly Read, give the following information.

When I was 5 years old, at the Ballarat Children's Home, [REDACTED], son of [REDACTED], (one of the top working staff at BCH), would always shower and bathe me, and never let me wash myself. He would wake me every night, and would tell me to pull my pants down. He would sit me in front of a mirror, with me over his lap and my private areas facing the mirror and then proceed to hit my bottom. I use to call him the bum wobbler man, he was a pervert. I have a psychological illness that I have from age 17 years. I cannot handle too much stress, as I pull my hair out and have often been bald. I hide my face with makeup as I have removed hair on my face, as I have always felt like a failure and an ugly fat bitch, as they always told me I was.

What makes me mad is that they took us children off our family, but what they did to us was worse than our families sometimes.

What was strange though was when I was out of the home, I couldn't handle it, and at 17 I asked to go back in but they wouldn't let me. I am so angry that I live with this condition all these years; I have even been bald when it has been very bad.

When I was 10-11 there was a girl called [REDACTED], who had an intellectual disability. One staff member threw her through a door and she never came back. Phylis found out she was put into a mental institution.