

Submission from Gwenda Collier.

I was born in 1941; the youngest of seven children. We lived in Brunswick and our home and we all experienced a happy home life. Our mother died in 1948. After this our father experienced a breakdown and for a time I and my sister [REDACTED] went to live with an older sister ([REDACTED] who was living with and caring for our grandfather. Towards the end of 1948 we were placed into the Salvation Army East Kew Girls Home in Sackville St, Kew where there were about 100 children. We stayed there until 1951.

In the Home I suffered constant bullying from other girls, the Matron was a cruel and wicked woman and we were given no support and comfort as we tried to adjust to living in this place. There was no adult supervision of the children instead, Matron [REDACTED] encouraged particular girls to act as bullies as a means of having the rest of us under control. We were managed through fear.

None of my private property was respected and even gifts of sweets and lollies were taken from me by the bullies. The matron did nothing.

On one occasion I was being chased and in order to escape the bullies, I climbed up a ladder. I fell off the ladder and cut my hand on some corrugated iron. My sister witnessed this and saw that I was bleeding a lot. She went to get adult help. After a delay, I fainted. I was given something called "bluestone" to stop the bleeding and my hand was bandaged. That is all that was done! My hand and arm became more and more painful and eventually, when our sister [REDACTED] visited us, she saw how bad it was and immediately took me to a Dr [REDACTED] in Brunswick. When he was told that I was at the Salvation Army home, his response was, "The bastards need horsewhipping."

I stayed with [REDACTED] until my wound and my bruises and back pain resolved and then I returned to the Home. I also had pain and problems with my feet. This was so severe that I could not walk to get to school. I was punished for this and accused of being a whinger. Again [REDACTED] took me from the Home to see Dr [REDACTED] who had to surgically remove papillomas from my feet. Again I went to stay with [REDACTED] to recover. [REDACTED] was paying all of these medical and pharmacy bills – not the Salvation Army!

We later found out that for the whole time we were at the Home, our sister [REDACTED] was paying 22s per week to the Salvation Army for our "care". This was in addition to the Child Endowment money being received for each of us – about 5s per week per child.

Our father came to see us once at the Home and he was terribly upset. Sometime later, and unbeknown to us, our father committed suicide in 1950. When [REDACTED] visited the Home with the intention of telling us about our father, she was instructed by the Matron not to say anything.

The Army personnel gave an assurance to [REDACTED] that they would tell us about our father's death; **we were never told.** For weeks and weeks, each of us waited for and expected our father to visit again. When he did not appear on visiting days we were very upset and agitated. Time after time when the matron saw us in this emotional state, at the end of a visiting period, she would strap us on both arms and across our shoulders. All of the time she knew that we were never going to have any more visits from our father.

My sister and I then worked out a plan to escape and try to find our father. My sister did escape and she reached the home of an aunt and uncle. Her she learned that our father was dead. She was returned to the Home by the aunt and then I too learned of his death.

My life in the Home was very hard with a lot of deprivation, little comfort and affection, poor supervision of the children and no attention to health matter. Because of the clothes we wore, we stood out at the local state primary school. I have been affected all of my life by these terrible childhood memories.

In 1951 we were moved to the Abbotsford Convent where we spent two years being looked after by nuns.

Between 2002 and 2006, I wrote and contacted the Salvation Army several times seeking copies of records of my years in the Home. I received virtually nothing and the response was always that the Army "held minimal records". Any reader will understand why this claim is made – the information in those records is incriminating.

With the advice and assistance of the people from Broken Rites, I then approached the Salvation Army seeking financial compensation for the trauma and maltreatment that I have suffered at the hands of their members and employees. Always I was required to deal with their solicitors at Nevitt-Ford. It became clear to me that the Salvation Army was not going to consider my claim and then work towards a mediated settlement. Instead they wanted me to pursue my claim in the courts.

This is a tactic that they use to stop so many claimants because they know that we cannot afford to pursue a case in the courts. This is particularly the case when we have so little recorded, factual evidence. The evidence does exist of course in the records held by the organisation and they are never going to let these out.

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