

SUBMISSION BY HUGH MCGOWAN
TO THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY
INTO CHILD ABUSE IN CHURCH RUN INSTITUTIONS
FIRST SUPPLEMENT

I recognise that Australia is my adopted country. I was deported to this country from my home, Scotland in 1961. When I was twelve, I was asked whether I wanted to go to Australia, I immediately said yes. I'd do anything to get out of Quarriers Homes. But after some reflection I wasn't so keen, so on my 13th birthday I told the cottage father that I didn't want to go. His words still ring in my ears:

“Too bad, you're going”

It wasn't till forty four years later that I received a copy of a letter sent to my mother (see Attachment one) asking her to agree to my removal. On the top of the letter is a copy of the envelope that was clearly marked “return to sender”. My mother never knew I was being sent to Australia. Had she known, because she had previously rejected requests for my adoption, it is likely that I wouldn't be writing this or attending the inquiry I never saw my mother again.

So I was sent to Australia and arrived on 15 October 1961. I was taken to Dhurringile Rural Training Farm Home for Boys, half way between Murchison and Tatura. Dhurringile was a large mansion of 68 rooms (see Attachment 2) operated by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. The room the arrow points to has significant importance to me.

Dhurringile was a large mansion (68 rooms) on a small rural property of 119 acres with sixty head of dairy cattle, a piggery of about 30 pigs and a 7 acres orchard. The home was run by a superintendent, 2 part-time housekeepers (mainly cooking) and a farm manager. There was a management committee made up of local Presbyterian leaders and a ladies guild. The church was represented by the Minister of the Tatura parish and his wife on the ladies guild. I believe the director of Presbyterian social welfare in Victoria may have also have been on the committee.

When we five arrived it increased the number to 14 boys, all of whom were child migrants from Quarriers Homes near Glasgow in Scotland. Early in 1963 another 5 boys arrived. At any one time the highest number of boys there was 17. But by the time it closed there were 6 left.

The superintendent of Dhurringile when I arrived was a man named [REDACTED]. Apparently he was chosen because of his involvement in the scout movement. He was a very strange fellow. He was a strict disciplinarian and stuck to his rules rigidly. There was very little privacy afforded to us. This include us all showering at the same set time each night. [REDACTED] seemed to delight in supervising our showers. He would quip about the shape and size of our genitals, especially of the older boys. He found it amusing that a couple of boys became erect in front of him. One day it would be amusing, the next he would belt the boy because he was being disgusting.

[REDACTED] did not last long at Dhurringile. He left suddenly. At the time of his departure, he took all the boys into his office and explained that he was leaving. He declared we would never be as well looked after as we were under him. Before long he had all but one boy in tears. The boy who was not crying was actually laughing. He came to each of us, put his arms around us, kissed on the cheek and said goodbye. When he came to put his arms around the boy who was laughing, the boy pushed him away.

[REDACTED]

The next superintendent was a man named [REDACTED]. He was there as a stop gap measure until the Committee selected a permanent replacement for [REDACTED]. His stay at Dhurringile at that time, for me, was nothing that caused any concern. He left and was replaced by Mr and Mrs [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] had come to Dhurringile from the Victorian Police Force. Apparently he was a detective sergeant. He often bragged about his exploits in the homicide squad and especially as the solver of a pyjama murder case near Bacchus Marsh. He played favourites among the boys and I certainly wasn't one of them.

While at Dhurringile I was subjected to a lot of bullying from other boys. I have always been short, so I was an easy target. It didn't help that I constantly reacted against the bullying. That might be understood when you read [REDACTED] first report (see Attachment three) about me being "not very popular with the other boys." As an example, [REDACTED] found me in tears and asked what was wrong. When I told him that I had been bullied by three other boys, his response was for me to "get over it," "stand up for yourself," "be a man." They were phrases he often used. He kept pushing me to "stick up for myself as all men have to do." He expected me to tolerate the bullying.

You'll note that in his last report at the end of 1963 (see Attachment four) [REDACTED] stated that I "had learnt to shoulder the teasing and provocation from other lads." In other words, bullying was acceptable behaviour. The truth is I did not shoulder the bullying. It didn't happen to me as often because a new, younger, smaller boy had arrived from Scotland. He became the target more than me. But still [REDACTED] did nothing about the bullying.

[REDACTED] had a mean streak in him that was displayed when he allowed a boy to have a dog. Lassie was a gentle pup that would hurt no one and was liked by all the boys. [REDACTED] also had a dog, a corgi named Bobby. One day a local farmer came to Dhurringile complaining that a pack of dogs had killed several sheep and claimed that Lassie and Bobby were two of them. We didn't believe him, but [REDACTED] insisted that the farmer was adamant and so he decided that both dogs had to be put down. [REDACTED] had no hesitation putting Lassie down, but when it came to Bobby, he made the excuse that it was too stressful for his daughter. Never once did we see his daughter with that dog.

I struggled at school because Dhurringile wasn't the only place I was being bullied. A teacher who was the form-master for first and second forms while I was a student at Shepparton Technical School seemed to take a dislike to "Dhurringile" boys. There were two of us who were constantly in his sights. It would take the smallest excuses for him to hit us with lines or to stay in class during lunch time, which, I think, was as much as he could do without escalating it to the Headmaster. I always thought that if it had got to the Headmaster he would have seen what was going on. When we came home with another 500 lines to do, [REDACTED] response was to chastise us for getting into trouble again. [REDACTED] never questioned why we were coming home with lines so often. I would have thought it should have set off alarm bells.

As a child I was a bed-wetter it continued through until I was in my teens. In Scotland I used to be physically punished for doing so but when I arrived in Australia the first thing I was told was that I would not be physically punished. However, I was required to strip my bed, wash the sheets and hang them out to dry before I left for school. To help stop me wetting the bed [REDACTED] decided to use a machine that consisted of a box with a couple leads coming out of it – one to a wide strap that had metal buttons on it and the other to a small rubber, cylindrical shaped thing. The idea was that the belt was put around my waist with the buttons against my skin and the rubber was put over my penis. It was then switched on and, after I'd fallen asleep, as soon as urine touched the electrode, it would send a small electric shock to my waist and wake me. Suffice to say it didn't work. By the time the shock came my bed was already wet. It took some weeks for [REDACTED] to be convinced that it didn't work and I suffered the electric shocks.

For the school holidays we were sent to live with families usually in the local area. I lived in with a farming family near Shepparton during the Christmas period in 1963. I had a wonderful time with them. When it was time for me to return to Dhurringile I was in the back seat of the car crying my eyes out because I didn't want to return under [REDACTED]. There was of course no choice. When we arrived at Dhurringile there was no one there to greet us. We waited for almost an hour before the van finally arrived and I saw [REDACTED] someone we knew from the Presbyterian Church in Echuca who told me that [REDACTED] was no longer the superintendent. Several years later I was told by the farmer that when I was told about [REDACTED] departure, my face lit up and my whole demeanour dramatically changed.

[REDACTED] replaced [REDACTED]. He was 24 years old and the first thing he said to me was that I now had to call him [REDACTED], even though I'd always known him as [REDACTED] had been chosen because of his past association with Dhurringile as an infrequent visitor who would help around the home. He often organised games such as cricket with local community groups. He was heavily involved in the Presbyterian Church in Echuca. [REDACTED] was too young and inexperienced for the job. He was a stop gap measure while the church decided what to do with Dhurringile. The decision was eventually made to close it down as there were only six boys left by the beginning of 1964 and, unbeknown to us of course, Quarriers Homes in Scotland decided not to send any more children to Australia. I now understand that decision was made on the premise of some disturbing reports about Dhurringile.

In Dhurringile, each boy was tasked with chores to perform; cleaning, dusting, polishing etc. My job was milking cows in the morning. I was good at it. Around the end of March it was decided that Mr [REDACTED] the farm "manager" (and I use that term loosely) convinced [REDACTED] that he needed help on the farm. So they decided that because I was not doing well at school they would take me out and have me work as the farm boy. I was to be paid 30s per month. If I was paid that wage I never saw it. I was slave labour being made to do all the menial tasks such as feeding the pigs, cleaning out the sties, digging out the tussocks, milking the cows while he sat on his backside doing nothing but smoke or the tractor work, which one would think was an essential part of my training..

Because I was now working on the farm and having to get up at 6.00am each morning. I was given my own room. The room which is arrowed on the photo of Dhurringile (see Attachment one) was a small room segregated from where the other boys slept.

Sometime in 1964 the decision was taken to close Dhurringile down as a boys' home. It finally occurred on September 1964. I had spent six months working on the farm. When the decision was finalised, Peter Hannan returned to Dhurringile. I believe it was to help close the place down and transfer we were left to Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys. Hannan was there, as I recall for about a week.

It was during that time Peter Hannan sexually abused me. It started when he planted the novel "Return to Peyton Place" in my room and he "happened" to visit and caught me reading it. For the next 4 days Hannan groomed me for his pleasures. On the 4th day after he abused me I complained and said "I am going to tell on you". This unleashed a huge response from him. He made me get dressed and follow him to the van. He told me I was being taken to Turana, the youth detention centre in Melbourne. Being threatened with detention in Turana was something that was frequently used at Dhurringile by all the superintendents and that immediately terrified me. I really thought I was going to Turana because he kept driving. When we got to Nagambie I relented to his demand not to tell anyone about what happened and we returned to Dhurringile. I told no one for over forty years. I didn't know that staff at Dhurringile could not have us sent to Turana.

I arrived at Kilmany Park on 29 September 1964 and spent another 18 months there before I was released from institutional care. Kilmany Park was located just west of Sale. The mansion was smaller than Dhurringile and housed thirty six boys age from around nine or ten to seventeen or eighteen. As I understand most of the boys had either been removed from a dysfunctional family or had come from Turana Youth Detention Centre (especially the older boys). There were six of us transferred from Dhurringile.

The superintendent was [REDACTED]. He was also the general manager of the whole facility. He was supported by his wife as the matron and Mr and Mrs [REDACTED] as the assistant superintendent and matron. There was also two part-time cooks, a farm manager and a "jack of all trades" who maintained the farm machinery. The staff lived in residences on the property except the [REDACTED] who lived in the mansion.

As I had already been removed from school it was decided that I should work on the farm. It was a much larger dairy farm; five hundred acres much of which was irrigated. There was a herd of about four hundred cattle of which one hundred and twenty were milked. We farm boys rose at 5.00am and worked a 12 hour day six days a week. On a rotating basis we also spent a week in the kitchen helping with the food preparation. Again it was a twelve hour day. At Kilmany our "wage" was 27s per month.

[REDACTED] had what could be called some idiosyncrasies. One of the worst was his intolerance of what he called "self-abuse", One day I slept in (till about 10 past 5) and was rudely awakened by [REDACTED] by ripping the blankets off me and seeing me with my hand over my genitals. Not that it should've mattered, but I was not masturbating. He immediately gave me a sound thrashing calling me a grubby little individual and back-handed me all the way to the dairy. Later that day he lectured me for over an hour on how unhealthy self-abuse was and how it would affect my future likelihood of marriage and a healthy life.

[REDACTED] was an impatient man. For example, the first time I was given tractor work to plough a field, with no instructions other than a passing "do a good job." When he returned at lunch time he displayed his severe displeasure at the job I had done. He told me that I had not ploughed deep enough. He took me off the tractor and I was never allowed to do any more cultivating. I was upset that he didn't explain himself well enough and even when I asked for another chance, he point blank refused.

The other matter I want to raise in respect of [REDACTED] are the letters and report (see Attachment 4, 5 and 6). The report is completely at odds with other reports written about me and the letters are simply untrue. There were also a series of letters between the Presbyterian Social Services, Kilmany Park and the Minister of the Yarram Parish of the Presbyterian Church that warrant further discussion.

I finally left the institutional system in 1966 when I was 17 years old. I began working on a farm near Yarram for real but meagre wages, I stayed there for about six months when I realised farming was not for me so I left and moved to Melbourne. I lived at the YMCA in South Melbourne and met two other ex-Dhurringile boys there. One of the first things I did was to contact [REDACTED] at the Presbyterian social service office. He seemed marginally interested in my situation. He appeared to record my whereabouts and my employment situation (unemployed), but that was about the extent of our meeting.

After a couple of weeks settling into to the YMCA I got a job with the Victorian railways as a station assistant. At first I liked the job and was progressing in the ranks. I completed the signalman's course but the employment opportunity they offered was unacceptable so I left. I went back to see [REDACTED] but his response to seeing me was even less receptive than the first time I saw him. He said to "you can't keep coming here every time you're unemployed. Go to the CES and see if they can help you" It was an unexpected response.

I became employed in the Commonwealth Public Service where I stayed for 42 years.

In making the points that I have in this submission, I am trying to demonstrate the lack of adequate care I received within the Presbyterian social welfare system. In my oral submission I wish to expand on how my experience affected me in my life, the difficulties I experienced with work colleagues, friends and others. I also wish to demonstrate the failures I suffered in my relationships because of my naivety.