

Joan finn

Subject: Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry
In the handling of criminal abuse of children in religious
And other organisations.

Submitter: Ex ward of state / Joan Colleen Finn
D.O.B: [REDACTED] 1944

In the year of 1950 at the age of 5 and a half years I was made a ward of state,
The department of child welfare of Victoria was my legal guardian.
I was interned at St. Vincents De Paul Girls Orphanage located at 69 Napier Street
South Melbourne Victoria, between the years of 1950 – 1958.

During this time I was repeatedly subjected to physical, physiological, and sexual
abuse by the sisters of mercy and two of the inmates at St. Vincent's De Pauls Girls
Orphanage for the time of my interment.

The perpetrators of the physical assaults were Sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
Examples Included: At times these nuns would strike me with a hair brush, and
strike my head against a wall. I vividly recall a time when I soiled my bed sheets as a
result of having had a grand mal epileptic seizure, Sister [REDACTED] then dragged me
from my bed to the toilet area and forced my head into the toilet bowl with her hands.
Whilst I was vomiting, she slammed my head from side to side continuously. During
this particular assault she was screaming at me repeatedly, that I was the devils child
and a filthy pig.

I was also sexually abused on two separate occasions by two older inmates.
The first occasion my sexual abuse took place following an attack of epilepsy whilst I
was in infirmary for recovery, this particular girl had entered my bed and had begun
sexually molesting me. At this time Sister [REDACTED] was in charge of supervision and
no intervention was made by her or any of the sisters. The second assault occurred
whilst I was at the orphanages holiday home, situated at the Black Rock Catholic
holiday home. I was sexually assaulted by an older inmate on the floor of the toilet
cubicle.

As a state of ward I was militarized from the age of five and a half years,
I was only ever addressed to and answered by the number 115. I was drilled and
ordered on a daily basis, if you disobeyed any of the orders you were severely
punished.

Examples as follows: I was heard talking after bedtime when the lights were out, I was ordered to leave my bed and to strip till I was naked and made to sleep the entire night in a cold enamelled bath. I pulled my knees up to my chin in to a foetal position in a desperate attempt to capture some warmth from the freezing conditions, which was how I remained until the following morning. I am still till today haunted by this cruel and sadistic act committed against me as a child.

On countless occasions throughout the years I suffered the discomfort, and pain of a full bladder from bedtime till morning. I was fearful of taking the risk of going to the toilet as I knew the punishment would result in a bashing by the nun on duty.

Example: Whenever I was caught leaving my bed during the night to use the toilet, the toilet door would be kicked open. I would then be dragged off the toilet seat by my hair and was then punished with a bashing.

The hard unpaid labour that I was subjected to during my time at the orphanage included working in the laundries, and the polishing of large floor areas on my hands and knees for many hours at a time. In turn this has taken its toll on my physical state of health in my later years.

In conclusion to my submission to this enquiry. The physical, physiological and sexual abuse I endured in the years that I was incarceration in the orphanage, had a profound and disastrous impact not only on my life. Unfortunately my children also fell victim due to my inability to display any signs of affection or love as it was absent throughout my entire childhood.

Although I welcome this enquiry into child abuse against then ward of states, I still strongly believe and feel that the department of child welfare my then legal custodian should still be held accountable in failing dismally in their duty of care. These criminal acts of inhumanity committed against innocent children by religious and non-government organisations were left unprotected by the state.

Please find attached a medical document confirming the above condition of epilepsy.

Yours Sincerely,

Joan Colleen Finn
Ex Ward of State
1950 - 1959

Report re Norma Joan FINN

Date of Birth: [REDACTED].44
Examined: 20. 8.58
Referred by: (1) Director, Children's Welfare Department
(2) Medical Superintendent, Alfred Hospital
Problem: Scholastic retardation associated with Epilepsy
Guardian: Director, Children's Welfare Department
Present Placement: St. Vincent de Paul's Orphanage, South Melbourne

Joan is a disturbed girl, the second youngest of a family of 6 children who became Wards of State in October 1950, as the mother was without means. From the C.W.D. report, the father, a seaman, had deserted in 1957, and the mother was living as the de facto wife of a man more than 20 years her junior: this man was at times violent when drunk.

Since her committal, Joan has remained in St. Vincent de Paul's Orphanage where she is reported as being "erratic in behaviour.... subject to temper tantrums.... and fits of deep depression.... she does not mix well with the other children". Although she has a talent for singing and dancing, she easily loses confidence and then becomes negativistic, at present she is in Grade VIII but is only doing Grade IV standard, although she is capable of better work.

Joan has been attending the Alfred Hospital for the past 2 years for treatment of her Epilepsy. While she was on anticonvulsants and sedatives she was unable to apply herself to her work because of drowsiness. She has not had a seizure for over 18 months and one month ago was taken off all drugs. It is said she has now been discharged from the Neurological Clinic at the Hospital.

Joan is physically about 2 years retarded in growth, and appears to have a delayed puberty. Her manner, tho' pleasant and friendly was shy and subdued. The heart sounds were not clear, and cardiological investigation is suggested, particularly since she needs urgent attention to her nasopharynx, all reflexes were hyperactive, but there was no clonus or Babinski reaction.

PSYCHOLOGIST'S REPORT: General: Joan was very co-operative and friendly in the test situation, though rather shy in manner. On some verbal items she appeared aware of her inadequacy and attempted to cover up by a spate of verbosity.

Test Results: W.I.S.C. There is a marked discrepancy between scales, Verbal scale results being at a dull normal level, while Performance results fall in the mentally retarded range. This discrepancy and the scatter observable on the Performance scale could be consistent with an organic factor.

Discussion: On present testing Joan's abilities range from the mentally retarded range to a dull normal level. While these results theoretically suggest opportunity grade placement, in view of Joan's age and her adjustment to the present institution it would be desirable for her to remain there.

M. B. MACMILLAN
for Helen FERGUSON
Clinic Psychologist

OPY