

**INQUIRY INTO REPARATIONS FOR THE STOLEN
GENERATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

STORY

1. My life before Cowper

1. My name is _____ and I was born on _____ 1954 in Guyra in New South Wales. When I was young I lived at Nambucca Heads and it was a good life. I was going to school, fishing, mud crabbing, eating all the natural foods. I had a good relationship with my family; my uncles, aunties and cousins. I also used to have really good times with my grandmother.
2. I was well looked after, there was always an adult around to look after us. I got to learn a lot of the cultural stuff. But not much because I was very young, just the stuff for a child.

2. Being taken to Cowper Orphanage

3. I remember in 1953 that a lot of government people used to come around. The next thing I know there was a lot of people who had gone missing. I never thought seconds about it. In those days my grandmother had moved to Alexandria in Sydney. It was a good time there. But these government officials kept on coming, because my mother and father had parted by then and he was off doing his own thing up in the New England area. My mother who had custody of us was more or less looking after us, we had grandma who looked after us, my uncle _____ who used to look after us and teach us things. Then all of a sudden we were gone.
4. Some bloke turned up, he must have been 6 foot or something. Next minute we arrived in a 3081 on our way to Grafton. Mum never told us what was happening all we knew was that we were on a train with some big tall 6ft bloody government official. Next minute we are standing out the front of this big wooden building just outside of Grafton with all these nuns walking around.

Whether you were neglected or not neglected they were going to take you anyway. My mother tried to stop it but she was a single mother and had no choice.
5. I didn't know what was happening and then next minute mum was gone. I forget what date it was, but Catholic Care never had any records, all they had was records on when we were there and when we had left. Nothing in between. We were just left there in the lurch. I really didn't know what was going on. I was scared. Wondering where mum was. I thought she was only

down the road buying an ice-cream for us. But then a couple of days down the track I realised. I remember I used to ask Sister "where's mum? How come she's not here? What's happening? What are we here for? Did we do something wrong? Did my mother and father do something wrong?" they just never gave an answer.

3. Cowper Orphanage

6. I was in Cowper orphanage from around 5 and 10 years old. But I don't know the exact ages or dates because no records were kept. It must have been about 4 years, just over four years I was there and believe me it was a long stretch those four years.

3.2 My daily experiences in Cowper

7. They'd make you work, hard. Every afternoon after school we used to come down, they had a pool there, but we were never allowed at the pool. We would have to do chores first, and this was carrying big heavy loads of logs down to the boiler room.
8. You seemed to be working all the time. There was no time for play because day in day out, even on Saturday and Sunday, you had to get the work done. You had to do your chores. You had to do chores from when you woke up in the morning until you went to bed at night. You worked and you worked and you worked. Whether it was sweeping the sheds down or something else. I think that's the way they just kept your mind off it. The kids there were anywhere between 5 and 16. It was like slave labour.
9. My older brother, his job was cutting chooks heads off in front of us, he was the official executioner at 10 or 11 years old. We'd have to grab the chooks while they were running around with no heads on and put them in a boiling pot so we could boil the feathers off them. That was part of our duties. I still have nightmares about that. After you left the homes it still played on your conscious that you did something like that.

3.3 Treatment from the workers

10. The nuns they were very vicious. They could be very violent because you were put in line and they didn't care if they hit you around the head with something or gave you a backhand. I got a few backhanders, I can't tell you how many and slaps across the face. If you did anything wrong you got the ironing cord. If you did anything wrong you get the switch or the cane. They'd hit you with anything. Hit you with a book, rulers, and the cane. If you looked like you were enjoying it on the hands your pants would be down and around the ass. I used to watch other kids get hidings too.

11. I don't know about the girl's side but what I experienced was very regimental. You lined up to go in, you lined up to go out and if you got out of line you just coped the worst after it. They could be loving at times but you just had to get out of hand with them and it didn't take much to get out of hand because we were kids. We were kids. Kids play up. It doesn't constitute getting a beating and that bloody ironing cord it was always a threat because when they whacked you they didn't just whack you once they whacked you about 10 or 20 times. You could hardly walk after it. You couldn't even sit down. When you went to have dinner you'd be standing up because you'd be too scared to sit down.
12. It was their way or no other way. That's the way it was. They ruled the roost. Their word was law. Even though you knew things were the other way. It didn't matter. Their word was law and that's all there was to it. If you got out of hand you suffered the consequences.
13. I was an altar boy while I was at Cowper orphanage and that was the first time I ever tasted wine and got beat up, got a black eye out of it. I was punched by the priest. He was a new young priest and he punched me in the face because I was drinking the altar wine. He was a vicious man, I mean he'd be no more than 27-28 and he was tough. He called a spade a spade and I don't think he liked koori's because he used to always have a go at different koori's. He was just a mean bastard. He was a real mean bastard. I don't know if any of the white children got beat up, but I know a lot of koori's who did get beat up by him.
14. There was another worker there, he was a mongrel of a bloke, and he was called People from outside, they used the think the sun shined out of his bum. Little did they know what he used to bloody do. The boiler room was where he waited for all the young boys to come down. I don't know what happened to the other young fellas, but you weren't allowed in there while one young fella was stocking the wood up. You were only allowed one boy in there at a time. had a lot of time for the girls too, you know. He and that bloody boiler room. There was never to be two boys in the room with him. He touched me up a bit but I don't know for sure if he did with the other fellas.
15. It was a really hard time and I don't have nightmares about it but I have back flashes. I have back flashes thinking "hang on, that happened to me." I remember one time my brother ran away and he was a pretty good runner too. They punished him. They punished him like it was going out of fashion. They punished him for a couple of days. But people were forever running away. But he just took it in the hand, when he wanted to go he went. Maybe I was a bit more scared. Scared of running away because I knew the outcome.

You never got away. The police came and police of those days they didn't muck with you.

16. I did try to run away a couple of times, couldn't even get over the fence. When they took you back they'd give you a beating with the ironing cord, bare bum. One nun would have you over and the other nun would be whacking you. The ironing cord used to be wrapped up and they'd backhand you. They were very violent. But they could be loving too sometimes, you know.
17. Seems like every time I tried to do something when I was young I got a hiding for it. Whether it was the nuns or the priest I just seemed to get a hiding all the time and it wasn't just a talking to. I'm talking 4-5 punches. They were just vicious. Maybe in the 50s I guess that's the way they were.
18. The three biggest people I was really afraid of, even today, was that young priest he was a tough bastard and she ruled the roost. If she thought you were getting out of hand she would never administer the punishment. I didn't know what she said but I remember at night sister would get up and look down the hallway and if you looked like you even had your leg out of bed or anything like that, you weren't allowed to go to the toilet at night we had to go before bed, she told us "I'm not getting interrupted by you little bastards running to the toilet at night now go to the toilet now."
19. I don't know about other people who were there, how they were treated, all I can talk about is myself. But from what I can remember some white people were treated better than us. Me, myself, I got a fair few beatings. Maybe I deserved it, maybe I didn't. I can't remember why I got the beatings but there's not too much you can do wrong when you're living in a home with a lot of other kids. I'm still trying to get my head around that. Why'd I get beaten? I never got beaten when I was living at Nambucca.
20. They've also got this friends of Cowper on the internet. I went into it and I don't know why you'd want to be friends with Cowper. What do you want to be friends with Cowper? Where you got beaten for nothing. You get touched up by the bloody workers who were there. You get beaten up by the priest. That priest was the toughest dude I ever came across and he didn't muck with you. I remember next to the priest's quarters they had a little garden and we used to go in there and eat the things off it. And if you ever got caught you got beaten. Any little thing they beat you. They had a punishment for everything and anything. The punishment they gave you didn't deserve the crime. It could have just been waving the finger at you and telling you "that's not the right thing to do." It was so trivial and they would still beat you for it. They just liked beating you.

3.4 Activities

21. There were some good times there. Like on a Friday or Saturday they used to put pictures on. But some of those pictures they showed, were monster pictures and scared the shit out of you. I used to sleep near a window and I'd be checking the window all the time to make sure it was locked because there was no curtains.
22. We used to take the football down to the field and if you didn't play well you got clipped around the ear. You got booted up the ass. There wasn't a pep talk or anything like that. They'd slap you around the ear or kick you up the ass and you pull yourself into gear and do this and do that. Now we were about 5 or 6 year olds. What's going on there? I can't get my head around that. It's just a bloody old game of football. I didn't know what was going on. All I knew was I had to run from point A to point B and that's all there was to it. The worst thing about it is that all these other people would be watching and they wouldn't do nothing about it. They thought it was alright by the staff of Cowper to do that, they just thought it was of the day, that you were allowed to do that.

3.5 Christmas time

23. Every Christmas we would get billeted out to different families and the three times I got billeted out while I was there was: one to Grafton and there are no files on who it was, there was one down at _____ who owned a cane crop and I don't know who it was and the other one was that I did actually have a good time at but I haven't been able to find them, they might have passed on.
24. _____) [the ones I had a good time with] were really nice to me. But the other two, they were terrible too. You did something wrong they'd clip you around the ear or boot you in the ass.
25. One year, when I was with my mum because I got sick and was in the children's hospital. My brothers and sisters were taken by my grandmother up to Woolbrook and the Government Okayed it. It wasn't up to my mum, it was up to the Government and the home to say whether they could go there. My grandmother wanted to take us all and from what I can remember of that those government officials came flying up there and they got my siblings back to Cowper really fast. Even my brother says "I don't know what happened."
26. I remember when we were over at Woolbrook they called the paddy wagon the black Mariah and they [the police] took us all and locked us in it. They used words "you black bastard" "you niggas" "get yourselves straight now you

niggas". These were government people. I remember my mum got called some pretty good names. That was the way it was, you had to stand at attention and they treated you like a man and you got beat around if you didn't stay on the straight and narrow and they didn't care where they gave it to you or how they gave it to you. They called it 'an example.'

3.6 Contact with my family

27. My two older brothers were workers while they were in Cowper, they only went to school for a certain amount of time and then they had to go out and help So it was only left up to me and my younger brother. I didn't see that much because he was off doing his own thing.
28. I saw them a bit but never had much to do with them. The boys were in one dorm and the girls in another. I didn't really see my brothers much either. We had to do chores together sometimes but we didn't get any family time.
29. I love my mum but I don't know her. She came to Cowper as far as I remember, once, and dropped off some toys and that was it. She wasn't allowed to stay. She had to get the government officials permission for her to visit, but she couldn't just turn up. She had to write to some minister or something and get permission. Those government officials ruled the roost with us.
30. My mother wasn't even allowed to visit me when I got sick. My two brothers and I had the measles and mumps and we've never produced kids. But it's never been recorded in Cowper that we were sick.

3.7 Health problems

31. I had mumps and measles. But I'll probably have to get a doctor's report to say I have had mumps and measles because none of this stuff was ever recorded at Cowper. Why was it never recorded? I had a broken arm, I had mumps and measles, and I can't remember what else I had. I just can't believe they never even documented anything.
32. When you got sick they had a part out the side, they just looked after you, no hospital. The doctor would probably come in and say "just give him a couple of Panadol's he will be right". If you've never had mumps you don't know what they're like. They hurt like buggery and measles you get really hot and cold flushes and you're forever piddling yourself, your bodily functions don't work right and you get jaundice in the eye. It's a really bad thing.

33. I've had chronic lung conditions from smoking, I've got a lot of medical problems now. I still have back flashes and everything that happened still affects me now. I'm still weary of Catholic Churches and Government officials. It plays on my mind when I see things that remind me of Cowper.

4. Leaving Cowper

34. Mum just turned up one day and said we are going home, I was maybe about 10.

35. Even after I left Cowper orphanage it seemed like they were still following me. There was always a government official coming around. I couldn't believe, it was like he lived there. I used to say to mum "how come that dude's here" she'd say "oh he's just checking upon you" and I said "checking up on what?" I said "there's nothing to check up on" he says "did you go to school the other day" I said "yeah but I walked out in the afternoon because the teacher never turned up, what am I going to do sit there on my hands?" it wasn't like I went up and stole something I only went over to the football park and kicked a football around for the rest of the day. But they'd be there. Seems like the government officials just wanted to follow me, they were there at least 2 or 3 times a week and my name seemed to get mentioned all the time because I was running around with a wild crowd. But we weren't destroying anything, we weren't doing graffiti or anything like that we were just a bunch of young fellas. We would go down to the high school or down to the oval and kick a football around.

36. After Cowper I also ran into a little girl called "That's your sister" mum said, and I said "oh I didn't know, who is she again" I didn't know. I still don't know her today but that's another thing.

5. My life after Cowper

5.1 My Family relationships

37. I have a lot of anger. Why have these things happened? I couldn't cotton on to my mum because I never had that bond. Even today I can't hug my mum. None of us can. None of us can hug mum but we will shake hands, it's reversed with her too. We shake hands more than anything.

38. People have a loving relationship with their mother, I haven't got that. I'm a carer for my mother now but we never hug and my mother can't hug me. That's the way it is. She's in hospital at the moment and I'm the only one who goes to see her because I'm her carer. But there's like a wall between us.

Because I haven't got that closeness with her. I'm her carer and that's all there is.

39. No one lives forever and even when my mum passes I don't think it's going to hurt me anymore than going to someone else's funeral and that's the way it is. I'm not going to say I don't love my mum but that's the way things are I just never had that connection with her. Even when we got out of the homes, her biggest thing about having us was going to school and going to church. She thought that Cowper orphanage was religious for us, well it wasn't. Not when the priest touches you up and beats you up because you drink the alter wine.
40. I also didn't see my siblings until mum got a housing commission place in Green Valley. I don't even talk to my older brother. We haven't got that closeness. We were all kept separately at Cowper and didn't really bond like normal siblings.
41. Even though this is my experience in Cowper. My 3 brothers and my sister were all there and had similar experiences to me. We were all treated terribly and completely missed out on having a childhood. We don't have a close bond today because we never had the chance but we did share this one horrible one.
42. I've got nothing. I haven't even got photos. I've never seen any of the photos from when we were young. My brothers have never had kids either. Because we all had measles. I think one brother has one child. But I and my other two brothers never had children and I know we had measles and mumps because we were all kept in the same little area at the time. I know what mumps and measles can do.
43. I always look at myself like I've just lost half my life because they never documented anything. That's just part of my life gone. I've got no kids. I've got nothing. All that Cowper orphanage says is you were here from this day this year to this day this year, when I left.
44. I haven't had a childhood because there is no records of me. I haven't even got photos from when I was young. I've got nothing. You know in the lounge room of a lot of people's houses they have photos of their kids or grandkids, I've got nothing. I don't even know if my brothers and sisters have any. But I've got nothing. I think there was a photo of me when I was very young with my Aunty, but I don't know where that is. I have no photos of my childhood.

5.2 My education

45. My grandmother wanted to get us an education. But she never got that time to get us an education. Because we were in the home and we were being beaten. We were getting an education, but if you didn't know anything in the school, you got beaten. You got beaten while you were in the school. And I still reckon it was the Government.
46. There's been too much sitting on the back of my mind to do anything. I couldn't wait to get out of school. I didn't have too many friends at school and there's no proof to say that I had friends or that I achieved anything at school because all of its gone. I've got nothing. I've got nothing from the orphanage, I've got nothing from the school.

5.3 Connection to my culture

47. I had the idyllic life before Cowper. I was living the good life, going finishing, getting schooled, teaching me my tribal ways like what to eat and what not to eat, who was my totem, going mud crabbing. It was an ideal life then all of a sudden my whole world was just turned upside down.
48. I know things like you don't touch magpies because that's our totem. I know all that and I was taught that. But I could have been taught more. Like to speak the lingo. They speak the lingo up home and I don't know that. I remember we used to talk the lingo and old people used to talk the lingo. They'd all be down there playing cards and talking the lingo and they had time for you. These old people had time for you. And it used to be great to go up there.
49. I can't speak the language. I go back up Nambucca and people are talking in the lingo and that and I felt left out. I feel cheated. They all know how to speak the lingo and here I am "what did you say? Speak English" because I don't know. I don't know they might be talking about me. I don't know. It's a terrible thing. In NSW there isn't too many places where you get the indigenous language but they have got it there [back home]. They've got the language and their teaching the young kids. But I never got that.
50. I forgot about little things like peeling the kangaroo, taking the skin off a kangaroo, how to go crabbing. We just got all our land back out there on the south beach and it doesn't mean nothing to me. The only thing I know about the beach is that we used to go pippyng. It doesn't mean nothing. We got all that land back and it doesn't mean nothing to me.
51. I also lost that taste for indigenous foods. I used to just go for walks with the old people and that and they'd show us all these things. Naked. I used to go naked. Never worried about being naked. Now I make sure I put my clothes on.

52. I still can't figure that out why they took us in the first place. I really cannot get my head around it. It's like 'why me?' Not me, but 'why us?' We were still being well looked after. We weren't walking around with snotty noses or our ass hanging out of our pants or anything like that. We had all our relatives. There was always something there for us. And we weren't lacking of food because we was still of tribal state. I don't mind going and knocking a kangaroo off. I know how to skin a kangaroo. I know how to skin a porcupine. I wasn't at risk. Not that I could remember, I wasn't at risk for anything. I had everything I wanted. I was a young indigenous bloke and I loved going to the mission school. Maybe it was because when my mother and father parted he was off running around with other women. But I thought all my extended family really looked after us. Never was wanting for food. Always had food.

5.4 My finances

53. My finances have been running amuck. I was never taught how to bank. The money was in one hand and out the other. They gave you cash in those days so it was easy to spend.

54. I've had some good jobs, but could never afford a house. I've always been able to get a job but I've just moved from job to job. I have a pretty good work ethic.

5.5 Relationships with people

55. Even today, anyone over 6ft 2 who is in a government affiliated job, like police or something like that, scares the shit out of me. I just get a bit nervous around them. I don't have nothing to do with police men. They've got their job to do but I don't. It's mainly these government workers. I get a bit eerie about going into Centrelink because I don't like to talk to them. The more I don't have to talk to government officials the happier I am.

56. It also took a long time for me to feel part of the non-indigenous community because there weren't too many indigenous people living around . There were a few that weren't aboriginal but I didn't mix with them.

57. I did get a letter earlier on this year that I have to go on Jury duty. That's a big deal to me. Jury duty is a big thing. Even though they don't call you up, I'm going to frame that letter because I know I haven't done wrong since I left the home and got out of Green Valley. That's a really big thing for me because it says to me that I'm still recognised and all the crappy things what happened to me in the homes I've kind of got over it but I haven't got over it. There's a lot in between the times I was at Cowper.

5.6 Being sent to a boys home

58. When I was 16 I went to see my father in Tamworth and another young fella offered to drive me out there, we got all the way to Tamworth. Went to the police station, seen my grandmother, went to the police station and only saw my father through a little hole in the cell they wouldn't let me in.
59. On our way back we were coming back through Taree and the police pulled us over. Stolen car. I was in a stolen car. They took us back to the police station and [the driver], didn't do nothing to him but the Crown sergeant got me in there and I was about 16 and I knew how to use my knuckles. He king hit me, got me in the head and asked me questions about who stole the car and where it came from and all that. Before we even said anything I walked in with a Constable and he full hit me in the head. Knocked me down and I jumped up and got into him.
60. Two other police men came in and gave me the beating of my life, but didn't leave bruises on me. Threw me back into the cell head first. It went on to Court and the police men said that I was the one who stole the car and they said we got the confession here but it wasn't signed and the Judge just looked at it, looked at me and said you'll have 6 months in the boys home. got off scott free. I ended up in a boy's home for 6 months, but it was never recorded.

6. Some final comments

61. All I can tell you is that I had a wonderful life before it and a bad life during it and still have nightmares about it. Not big nightmares but certain things will bring up issues. I had a shit time when I was in Cowper. I got beaten to the crap while I was in Cowper. I don't know why I was in Cowper. I asked my mum about it, she said she had no way of stopping it because the government of the day ruled the roost because I think it was the White Australia Policy and I was a little blonde haired blue eyed boy. They used to call me the cutest baby running around. People wanted to take me. But the government said no way, they just put me in a home and I still can't figure out why I went to the home. I didn't do anything wrong. I was living the good life.

62. I'm too old now. I want compensation because the Government are the bastards who sent us there. It wasn't because mum wanted us there she was bullied because she was a single mother with 5 kids. As far as I'm concerned the government is responsible for how I am today. They were responsible for putting me in Cowper and my mother had no choice. And I've never had a choice. It was just you go there, you're looked after by the nuns, who were vicious, and then you get out and go be a good Australian citizen.
63. The government of the day, their policies, ruined my life and ruined my childhood. I've never had a mother and father, my mother is still distanced to me, the government took it away. It seems everything's been taken and I've got nothing. I've been given nothing back. It all comes down to why did they put me there in the first place? What did I do? There were other families around, but they were never sent to homes. Why did they pick on my mother? She was a pretty good mother and I had a great life before they took me to Cowper.
64. I try to picture myself sometimes. If I never went to the homes. If I was never away from the family. What would it be like? But every time I think about it then it comes back 'no you still went, you were still taken there'. I just don't even go past it anymore. I don't think I'll ever be over it, I'll take this to my grave. I think the Catholic Church has a lot to answer to and the Government of the day has a lot to answer to.
65. I feel I've been over governed all my life. First they took me to a home, even when I left they hounded me and they hound me today. I can't say what I could have done. But I've learnt things the hard way. Through the years I've had to do it tough. I've lived in government houses, I've been unemployed. Just everything has been screwed in my life. Me personally I want compensation. I want to see this through before I'm dead. I've had a shit life because of the policies the Government had. Why was I in that place? I want an answer before I'm bloody dead.