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Stain on the Brain - The David Owen Story

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

STAIN ON THE BRAIN: THE STORY OF DAVID OWEN

By
Jody Jackson

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

STAIN ON THE BRAIN: THE STORY OF DAVID OWEN

Jody Jackson

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David Owen, Australian child abuse survivor’s life story spanning seventy years, is a testament to “the will to survive.” Taken from his mother and sent to Neerkol, one of the most notorious government backed Catholic-run orphanages out in the desolate bush of Queensland, he was subjected to extreme abuse, emotionally, physically and sexually. Upon leaving Neerkol, this functionally illiterate young man became a professional Rugby League player and union organizer. He unexpectedly reunited with his mother and became a devoted son. Later in life he courageously challenged the powerful Queensland Government and Catholic Church. A fifty-two-page petition authored by Owen defending “The Rights of a Child” sits with the United Nations in Geneva. To date, all he has received is a televised public apology from both Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Pope Benedict XVI directed at all of the orphanage survivors for the horrors they suffered as innocent children while in institutional care.
My interdisciplinary approach to the Owen story comes from a solid base of documentary filmmaking with BBCTV and PBS. As a freelance writer and producer enthralled with research, both historical and biographical, I jumped at the challenge of creating a culturally important cinematic narrative for the life of the Australian orphanage survivor David Owen. I understood that this would be a highly sensitive story of church and state’s sordid abuse of power. In order to play the politics of getting the story to the screen, I would need to adhere to a determined filmmaker’s credo, "Always respect the intelligence of your subject and audience. Whenever possible keep it kind and gentle, but most importantly, keep it honest and true."

The dissertation is comprised of three parts: a biography, written in the first person, recreating in detail the major moments of David Owen’s life story; a treatment that converts crucial parts of the biography into a seven-part T.V. miniseries designed to create maximum exposure for the story; and a “producer’s journal” that details the exhilarating ten-year endeavor in the creation of Stain on the Brain.

The “biography” was initially created around a series of one-hour telephone interviews over a two-year period. The next portion of interviews were more personal, face to
face, for a period of three months when David Owen came to the United States, producing fifty hours of tape. I traveled to Australia for an additional three months where David and I wrote a rough draft of the manuscript together. The biography is comprised of 27 chapters, along with an Australian linguistic glossary.

The seven-part mini-series television treatment, taken from the spine of the manuscript, converts the biography into a dramatic series that incorporates crucial scenes from over seven decades of David Owen’s tumultuous life. The goal is to focus on these moments as decisive elements that explain both the protagonist’s personal development and the paths that his life eventually took. Key to the biographical narrative is the setting. In this case it is contemporary, but surrounded by a buried, lurid past of Australian history. A final important ingredient is the tease that convinces the viewer to stay tuned until next week. It uses a cliffhanger a glint of hope that there still is a chance for the underdog to win.

The “producer’s journal” will explain a ten-year process of ups and downs. Continuous poor health as a Type 1 diabetic on an insulin pump constantly in and out of emergency rooms, financial ruin and losing my home and moving to
Hollywood to write a treatment for a seven-part mini-series are highlighted mishaps and triumphs.

Throughout final stages of this dissertation I have kept in touch with David Owen who, sadly enough, has given up the fight. He tells me, “Why don’t you just forget about it JJ. I’m just a busted, baldy old man waiting to go up to the ‘Valley of the Bones.’ I try to keep his spirits up and spout off, “You just can’t give up.”
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CHAPTER 1: PRODUCER’S JOURNAL

JODY JACKSON

“STAIN ON THE BRAIN – THE DAVID OWEN STORY”

INTERDISCIPLINARY Ph.D. – FILM and HISTORY (ABD)
A 12-Year Commentary

(2000)

REFLECTIONS IN A DREAM – JODY JACKSON

I never thought that I would ever attempt to portray the inspirational Australian biography, Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story. I took on a powerful and courageous life story beyond belief. Thinking back, it was nothing short of a miracle that I should make it to the end of this journey without being institutionalized myself.

I was a highly protected Midwest girl who had no point of reference to the Land Down Under, except for seeing a faded black and white photo of a kangaroo and boomerang with one small caption at the bottom of the page in my third-grade geography primer. I guess that’s the strong ethnocentric mentality of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. It felt that Australia had no major importance to St. Pius X Elementary curriculum, which interestingly was a private Catholic school.

However, growing up with organized religion my entire
life, my wildest imaginings would never have had me believe that I would find myself as a graduate level academic relating to the world audience a true dramatic story of sexual abuse within the Church, and charting Australian history through the disciplines of print and film. Intricately laced with the cultural context of a country I knew very little about, I would be faced with the challenge of a lifetime. I was completing my MFA in Motion Picture Producing from the University of Miami with Program Director Dr. Paul Lazarus as my advisor. At the time, I wasn’t really sure how I would proceed with my career. In actuality, I really didn’t know what to do with my life. So I decided the best route would be to continue in Graduate School at UM in pursuit of an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Film and History.

My original plan was to construct a thesis around a film script. Counseled by Dr. Lazarus about being a full-fledged producer, I set out to find a compelling story and then to put together a contract that optioned all personal story rights.

SO I’M A PRODUCER NOW...

My advisor Dr. Paul Lazarus saw me through an MFA in Motion Picture Producing and understood (periodically cringing over my no-holds-barred methodology) how I wanted to tell a story. He hung in there with me. I think he believed I might actually have a chance of making a good film, as I was as crazy as anyone in Hollywood. I was in a quandary over what would work for me. I had always enjoyed the truth in documentary work after having years of journalism training based in ethical research. But now I wanted to move into a different visual arena. I wanted to be a feature filmmaker. I believed this was where my creative challenge lay, to make a motion picture ‘based on a true story,’ but taking the liberty to use creative license. I saw this exciting technique as a way to blend fact with fiction. I was now certain about my plan of action as a feature producer. I stopped by and told Dr. Lazarus before
I left for the summer. He emphatically said, “Jody, first and foremost, you must find a story and option it.”

**FIND THE STORY**

It was a rather interesting conversation I had on Labor Day weekend. I was enrolled for the Fall Semester of 2000, which would begin on a Monday. My upcoming thesis work would begin with ‘finding the story.’ Convinced by my friends to come along to a holiday barbecue at the local Irish pub O’Brien’s, I reluctantly said “O.K.” I really wasn’t too interested in attending. When the festivities were in full swing, I ditched the crowd and found my way to the backyard Tiki Bar (it was Florida after all.) I sat for a while staring at the twinkle lights with American flags strung across the thatched roof. I wanted to make my way out before my friends noticed I was gone. But my girlfriend Susan who was looking for me had bumped into a guy hanging on the outside edge of our group who seemed to be uncomfortable. So she decided to tell him about her friend, the writer/producer, who she couldn’t seem to locate. She asked him if he would help look for me. As I was making my getaway and was almost out the door, Susan grabbed my arm and stopped me. She said, “I have someone here, and I told him all about your writing, I would like you to meet him.” I grimaced, as she was always trying to set me up somehow.
This time however, it would be different. I sighed heavily and agreed to be polite. I turned around and heard a velvety-smooth, unrecognizable accent towering above my head, “So...I hear you’re a writer.”

I looked up to see a six-foot rugby player who was definitely still in good athletic shape, but it was obvious he had seen his day. Catching my attention he continued, “My name is Gordon. Well, I have a great story for you. Actually it is my Mum’s story. She was in an orphanage out in the Australian bush.” I had my producer hat on and definitely thought it was worth a few minutes to listen. We stepped back to the Tiki bar. The man from Down Under ordered two Budweisers (He hated Fosters Beer, saying “it wasn’t real Aussie beer – just crap.”) His candid demeanor was mesmerizing and I was now becoming fascinated by the exotic tale he was spinning. I listened intently to his pitch. I definitely wanted to know more.

MUM’S THE WORD.

With a proper introduction from Gordon, I telephoned his Mum and we got acquainted. She was a lovely, apologetic soul who had a sad personal story as a young girl. She openly admitted that she wasn’t sure if she really wanted to dredge up all of her pain from long ago. I understood. I tried to keep it on the lighter side wanting to make her
more relaxed. We laughed about so many differences in our cultures. She felt the Aussies were too nonchalant about life, and I felt that Americans were too uptight over the wrong things. Before saying goodbye we agreed that I would give her breathing space to think it over. I’d call back in a week. During the next conversation I was happy to hear how much more comfortable she was in sharing her story. She had one was caveat; anything we discussed was off the record. I agreed.

She began with her experience of growing up in sheer Australian poverty. Back in the 40s her mother had no other recourse but to give her and her younger brother up to the Catholic orphanage in the Queensland territory. At least they would have food and shelter. She would leave them at the doorstep with the Sister’s of Mercy out in the isolated bush hoping someday to return for them when she could afford it. This of course never happened. The floodgate of tears we shed together led to a much deeper and trusting woman-to-woman confession. She explained. "You see Jody it was really hard back in those days in the Aussie bush. My poor mother had many children from many different men. There was no other way for a woman to survive. She had no other choice but to divide us all up. I never knew much of my older siblings as she gave them all away to other people
to look after them. My brother and I were the youngest and were fathered by the man she was living with at the time so she kept us with her. I clearly remember that horrible day she took us away to the orphanage. I was sitting on the bare wooden floor playing with my friend, a pet mouse, in our one room cabin. Mum shouted for me to put it down and get into an old black Holden parked at the door. My younger brother and I got into the back seat holding hands not knowing what was going to happen to us. When we finally got to our stop we were told to get out of the car. We watched our mother and her man friend drive away. They became smaller and smaller until they were invisible. Scared, hungry and confused we were gruffly hauled away by a scary old nun and her helper. Showing only annoyance, they led us to separate dormitories - girls and boys. They were so harsh and scolded us to make sure we understood that we were not allowed to speak to each other again and that we would see the wrath of God should we disobey. I was heartbroken as we never did have contact with one another ever again. As a grown, married woman I kept searching for my brother. When I finally located him I was informed he had just died.”
I was aghast at what she had just shared when my international phone card began beeping, and I knew that it was a warning that 60 seconds remained. I had to say goodbye quickly. The next time I called she would have her answer for me as to whether she was in or out of the film. Whatever her decision, I knew that I found myself on a road leading to Down Under. I was stepping into an historical drama.

I just needed to be sure I could use a tone that remained more entertaining than depressing, more absorbing than alarming. If the story was developed with a strong dose of compassion, there was no doubt in my mind that the narrative would be a powerful atmospheric film delivering a barrage of images that would kick ass.
BROKEN HEARTS

Gordon’s Mum was no longer the traumatized little girl. She had moved on her life with trying to forget a horrific past. When I rang the following week, before I could say hello I was hit immediately with an outburst of panic, “Jody, I cannot do this! Seriously, I have had much thought on your proposition to tell my life story, but I cannot do this. What I haven’t told you about is my poor health. I have always been ailing with a weak heart. I have had so many bypasses already, I don’t think that I am strong enough both physically and emotionally to handle the stress that would go along with it all. However I think I just might have a better solution for you. I want to pass you on to a friend of mine who was at the same orphanage. He is currently being highlighted in the BBC World Press headlines. In fact I just reconnected with him after thirty-some years. I had been following a series of shocking interviews on the television with a Neerkol orphanage survivor David Owen who had come forward to expose his personal story of the horrendous child abuse he suffered by the nuns, priest and government worker who he was in the care of. I wondered if it was the same David Owen that I knew back at Neerkol, which was being called
‘The Gates of Hell’ by the Australian press. I finally got up the nerve to ring him and asked if he remembered me from so long ago. He responded straight away, ‘Of course I do.’” I agreed to at least speak with David Owen. We said g’day. I went to bed for the night while she made her midday lunch. She followed up with posting a package to my home in Florida. It held recent articles and a current best selling book called *Orphans of the Empire*, with a chapter called “Daredevil Dave” highlighting a small part of David Owen’s tragic life story as witnessed by the other orphans.

The envelope included BBC World Press headlines, Australian Freedom of Information Documents clipped together describing the “Lies, Deceit and Concealment” perpetrated against David Owen from age 6 months to 14 years old by Catholic nuns, priests and Australian government workers.
Sweetly laying on top of the papers was a folded Australian flag. It was the first of many touching messages to follow. I flipped through Orphan’s of the Empire first. It was proof that this was a true story that would make a good film. In the book, author Alan Gill speaks of a seriously abused child, David Owen. He is depicted as the inspirational, feisty boy who stood up to his abusers, corrupt nuns and priests. “Daredevil Dave” was a rough-going expose told by the other children who considered David their hero. I had to stop reading. I was shaking. I read about David being stripped down, tied to the desk in the front of the class as an example and flogged until he passed out. I wasn’t sure I liked this movie business anymore. Did I make a big mistake taking on this project? I doubted my ability to produce anything but it was too late to renege. I was heading into some dark places, but so did Neerkol’s history.

A global perspective became my new way of life and The David Owen Story was the impetus to develop a strong and telling narrative in the hope of creating audience discussion about child abuse cover-ups all over the world. Maybe this story would move people enough and help open the forum for a solution to a very uncomfortable, unspoken problem. I found myself glued to the Internet doing
research day and night. I sought out pertinent Australian historical perspectives while working in my pajamas. I loved it.

I came to a staggering conclusion. Neerkol orphanage was just a tiny spec in the ongoing timeline of child abuse involving church and state conspiracy. As it stood, the whole institutional sexual child abuse story was an embarrassment and had gotten old in Australia. Actually it had gotten old all over the world. No one seemed to care anymore. Society was on overload. Media and the politicos were not in the least bit interested. They just wanted the whole thing to go away. The media looked at the whole issue as ‘a story that had been done already.’

I AM STILL ALIVE!!

David and I finally connected over the telephone. What always stuck with me as we hung up after agreeing to draft
the contract immediately and get right to work, was David’s determined voice demanding closure. He barked out, “I just want my one day in court. I really think that you can help me!” I heard the volcanic eruption. His anger was burning up the phone line, resonating from all the way Down Under. It was my first of many unsettling moments, as I began to understand the extent of damage done to this beautiful child trapped in the man. I worked hard to suppress my apprehension behind whether David’s final wish for justice would ever be enough, but I decided to go ahead thinking I felt I could help. David would shout, “It might not be important to anyone as they seem to think it is already in the past JJ, but THIS DOES NOT MAKE MY STORY ANY LESS…I AM STILL ALIVE!”
As a producer and writer, I was always thinking historical context within the storyline of ‘Stain on the Brain.’ As an American, I was intent on the film looking Aussie. I would squirrel away quotes that could work in voiceover of a particular scene in the movie, however I was jumping ahead of myself, I was still only in the fact gathering stages of development. Sometimes would have luck unearthing ‘bull’s-eye’ quotes like this one that I would immediately add to Stain on the Brain’s narrative short list.

*History is a clock that people used to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. Most importantly, history tells people where they still must go and what they still must be. The relationship of history to the people is the same as the relationship of a mother to a child.*


1985 dedication to the newest branch of the Cornell University Library’s “John Henrik Clarke Africana Library”

DIGGING THE TUNNEL DOWN UNDER
The voice of “the Great D.O.” on the other end of the telephone line had been more animated than I could ever have imagined. It was as if I had been trolling for an inspiring narrative my whole life, one that wouldn’t just skim the surface of an unbelievable character and his story. And I had hooked a big fish. David and my first conversation was kept brief. I kept it that way as I wanted to focus on the business of a contractual working relationship first, and as soon as possible. He was very excited to hear my voice, realizing I was an actual film producer (or so he imagined) who was calling him from the United States. He just kept repeating, "Holy dooley...pinch me I must be dreamin’." From our first conversation it was clear that David Owen worked from his gut and was already sold on our immediate connection. He was confident that between the two of us his story would finally be told.

First off I would need my subject’s permission to tape interviews as it was mandatory for legal and ethical contractual purposes.

For David it must have appeared a particularly propitious moment. Here I was, an American journalist entering the picture just at the time the Catholic Church was being exposed for sheltering priests who had committed pedophilia all over the United States. It was big news across the pond
in Australia. I perceived that Owen hoped that having an author from the U.S.A. would advance his cause. The thinking was “Maybe Hollywood would nibble at producing such a dramatic and topical saga.” And an American author might just be the best choice. He understood that I was a graduate student working towards a PhD with virtually a non-existent budget, yet he whole-heartedly agreed to a five-year option for all personal story rights with a payment of $100. When we hung up after scheduling another call the following week, I couldn’t wait to report back to Dr. Lazarus an impressive progress report. Now I needed to find a real lawyer who would draft a binding document for me, pro-bono of course. I could then Fed-Ex the paperwork to David in Australia for his signature before we spoke again. My luck was still rolling. Dr. Lazarus was pleasantly surprised (slightly shocked) over how quickly I was able to follow-through on his last producing mandate. At the same time, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that he was also a lawyer. He drafted the bare-bones two-page contract that could hold up in a court if need be. As a producer, I was on track and moving forward at a pretty rapid speed. However this would not always prove to be the case as my lousy wild card would surface.
I have been a Type 1 Diabetic for over 30 years, wearing a life support insulin infusion pump and in constant communiqué with my doctors at the University of Miami’s Diabetes Research Institute. I try to stay positive with ongoing hope of getting on the islet transplant list, or better yet to live long enough to see the cure. It continues to be my day-to-day reality that the only way for me to demonstrate peak performance as a producer is in with the understanding that I pretty much need to work at my own pace and unsupervised. There are always too many unpredictable emergency room visits at ungodly hours of the night that can knock me out of the box for the next 24 hours. This has always been the biggest part of my production resume that I keep hidden away.
CROSSING PATHS A MILLION MILES AWAY

Our next phone call lasted for two hours, and without hesitation we slid right into the first of a series of interviews. I needed to put a hold on any more discussions, keeping it to light banter, until I found a contraption that would connect to the phone and record each of the riveting, deeply personal sessions. As I dug deeper into the documents and most importantly listened to David’s recollections, I was beginning to understand how the mind of an innocent and frightened child, illegitimately born through rape in Kidston, a gold mining town in the hinterlands of Queensland would see life in such a skewed manner.
It wasn’t always easy to hold up to his intensity. I could always breathe so much easier during sessions where D.O. lightened up. Whenever he talked about how his first and only joy was sport, particularly Rugby League I got a break.

He was so proud to have rugby league mates who knew his story so well, understood his legal plight and supported him in every way to get his story out.
MAYBE I WAS THE ONE WHO NEEDED COUNSELING?

D.O. feverishly wanted to tell me his whole story, but as we continued with our phone interviews every week I found myself only able to listen to so many tragic moments at a time. In any case, story after story, D.O. kept me in awe. David was positive that our work together would give him the impetus to finally “Get his one day in court.” It had been a long hard struggle for David Owen (D.O.) thus far, and with minimal success in Australia, even though he had been assisted by long time psychologist and confidant Dr. Roger Peters.
Roger had succeeded in putting David Owen in front of the media and had secured additional legal representation. At the end of the day, the television interviews made only a temporary splash in public opinion.

GOLIATH AND DAVID

David was obsessed with getting justice. In one particular session, I knew we were going into a huge chunk of his life dealing with nothing but anger and frustration over ten years of legalities which left him disappointed. He had nine seemingly determined solicitors who signed on to his case lifting his spirits with the hope that justice was finally coming into his life, only to come crashing down on him when each one would go no further with his case. The pat excuse for dropping him was over the expenses incurred without any foreseeable settlement ahead. In the end, they
had complete lack of confidence in winning over the Australian Government’s Statute of Limitations defense. After hearing how the Government would not admit to any responsibility in David’s case, I was furious. How many more adults would hurt the damaged psyche of the orphan boy once again? Feeling powerless to do anything other than further investigation on the crooked law firms involved, I made myself a note to develop a scene in the screenplay that would expose the users. I asked if he would send me the list of solicitors. Within five days there was a special delivery envelope on my doorstep from David. How much time and patience it took for him to write this I can only imagine, as he is a functional illiterate.
Wow.

A VOICE IN MY HEAD

Our weekly conversations flowed as if we were just down the block from each other and as if I had been a sounding board
for him for many, many years. One particular night after hanging up the phone, I wanted to experiment. I wanted to write as if I was the voice of D.O. I was going to attempt to transcribe (as if it was David speaking) our last session.

Putting pen to paper in quiet meditation I had stepped into the head of David Owen.

However, after proofreading my ‘David Owen’ soliloquy it was obvious that my literary effort sounded nothing like the man. It sounded exactly like a stream of ‘my own consciousness,’ in reshaping David’s recollections. It was a bust. His story could only be told in a first person vernacular and only by the old Aussie himself. It was our only chance of producing a real spellbinder. But how could I make this happen if he could not read or write with any proficiency? D.O. would have to do his own ‘yarning.’
D.O. loved what I wrote. It was a real compliment, but as the biographer who had to successfully replicate the timbre of Owen’s tongue as if he was sitting directly in front of his audience, looking straight into their eyes? No way.

STAIN ON THE BRAIN

Written By Jody Jackson
(An attempt at translating the voice of David Owen)

The forgery was staring me in the face. Among a stack of documents behind the door on my porch in Newcastle was one of the keys to the long-buried secret of my identity. The Australian government medical certificate showed that the Catholic nun’s signature and the State doctor’s signature were all one in the same. Stone the crows, I was shocked but not surprised. The long arms of Church and State were once again trying to keep me down. Mind you, I still read slowly. After all, I learned the rules of this game word for word. As an inmate of Neerkol, Australia’s most notorious State-run Catholic orphanage, I learned the Latin at the crack of the “cat-o-nine-tails,” but for most of my
life, I’ve been what they called illiterate: no skills - just scabs.

My proper name is David Robert Owen, but for fourteen years, from the age of four-and-a half months, I answered to "Number 34." Behind my back it was even more shockin' as the only kind of name the likes of me heard was "bastard." Grown men and women - paid guardians, tried to break us. We were all stolen children in a way, conceived in "sin" and kept from society, to protect good people like you. In ways that defy the imagination, we were taught that we should not have the right to exist. Like so many others, I was their prisoner. The nuns - my so-called protectors, saw fit to clean up their guilt with a scrub brush, lye soap, my flesh and polished floorboards. I learned the game with their rules; however when I finally hit the outside world I didn’t find those same rules at all, but in the hope of winning you just keep trying to make points. As a child, my identity was stolen. As a man, I found it. From orphan, to street-boxer, Rugby League player, loyal son and brother, prisoner, pipeline crew-boss, dockyard leader and union man, I know now that I can always scratch the top layer of this weathered skin and find that strong will to survive.
Living well today is my best revenge. Sitting in a fancy Sydney restaurant with my sister, I ordered the thickest steak on the menu. Now mind you I’m not bothered to eat this way very often. I’m quite happy with my standard mashed spuds and sausages twice a week. Call it ritual if you must, but this mongrel’s liking is simple, safe. I can rely on it. I still say, “Don’t worry about me. I can get by on the smell of an oily rag,” Too bad it’s the truth.

Rituals keep me safe now, but for years, they nearly broke me. No longer a sweet looking lad but a baldy-old bastard, I’ve never quite let go of the worry that officials will find a way to snatch me back into the next institution, state reformatory, prison or other trap. But I’m still here, still standing and as long as I draw breath, I’ll keep fighting. In all fairness there are good institutions that literally save lives. It was the Australian Rugby League and Australian Worker’s Union who grabbed hold of me, nurtured my sensitive underbelly and unearthed a raw talent. Otherwise I probably would have become a killer. In the end, I’m just a man: an old age pensioner, crazy enough to spend my last pennies on one final fight. They may have buggered me, but I’ve still got balls. The story you are about to read, now sits before the United Nations
Human Rights Commission. I can go no higher with mankind. Fair dinkum, God has stepped in. So much of my life at Neerkol, I was sure I would never make it out of there alive. My story is a tribute to all of the children who weren’t as lucky and remain faceless somewhere out there in the bush.

(2004) BACK TO SCHOOL

It was time to make the Ph.D. proposal to Dr. Steve Stein, History Professor and Senior Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Studies at UM. I showed him my project explaining how I wanted to pursue the Interdisciplinary Doctorate using film and history. We talked about the non-traditional nature of my proposal, how I would proceed and what I intended as the outcome. I was beyond fortunate when Dr. Stein agreed to step up and take on the key position of Committee Chair on Stain on the Brain - The David Owen Story which he termed a “culturally and historically important project with an intriguing angle of information and research dissemination through creative techniques using filmmaking.” With Dr. Stein’s blessing, I was able to bring together an amazing IDS Committee made up of the most creative, professional and open-minded thinkers that the School of Communication had to offer. My committee and I
met for approval to proceed. It was granted and I was accepted into the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. My thesis was to be a 21st century creative media exploration divided into three parts. From the onset of optioning a story (in my case an Australian tale based on a true story), I would write the biography, which then would be adapted into a Hollywood screenplay. A third part of the project was to be a producer’s journal. My personal story would outline the producer’s process and experiences before, during and after my search for the best method to get the story out to a mass market and would chronicle my attempts to get Hollywood studio participation. If there was interest, the ante would go up as I would need to demonstrate the potential commercial appeal which then translated into profit. (Which, in LA, is a key factor in consideration, even if your dad is Ron Howard.)

In the end it was the decision of the Executive Producer, Producer and Associate Producer (I was all of them) whether the page to screen adaptation would be done as an art house production, a feature film or a television mini-series and in what ways any of this could be applied to the classroom.
AMBITIOUS

After spending months on the telephone with David, my phone bills were so ridiculously high, I figured that it would be cheaper if I just saved the monthly bill to Ma Bell and bought an airline ticket for David to come to America. My plan was simple. He would come to America where we could spend three months together, armed with my mini-dv camera set up in the sunny screened in balcony of my apartment overlooking a swimming pool surrounded with palm trees. I felt confident that this adventure, for the ‘orphan who never had any life,’ would be the perfect way to get his story fleshed out. I still wasn’t sure where the money was coming from...

HOLIDAY DESTINATION NEERKOL? ‘LOTSA SUN AND NO FUN’

I was now a serious producer I had to create a budget for the production. I had such a nervous stomach on the
particular day I got up the nerve to pick up the phone and call Qantas. I wanted them to sponsor David Owen’s airfare to the United States. I had a lucky break as the front line receptionist and marketing assistant was on her break and I was put right through to the Marketing Director of Qantas. Bingo, it was a direct hit, but I knew I’d have about sixty seconds to get my foot in the door. I would say whatever it took to hear me out. My pitch was that of a fledgling graduate motion picture student from the University of Miami and had no budget allotted by the film program to bring my main character, the ‘Great D.O’ to South Florida to complete my thesis and graduate. I rapidly explained that the subject of the story was a sweet sixty-five year-old Australian man who had always dreamed of coming to America after watching Tom Mix cowboy movies over and over again as a boy. As a stevedore for most of his working life and supporting his ailing Mum, he could never get away or have enough money saved to visit ‘Hollywood.’ And now it was too late. He was retiring on a tiny pensioner’s stipend. I never brought up what the film was about, and she never asked. My time was up. She said “Thanks for thinking of Qantas but we can’t help you out at this time.” I was bummed. It seemed like I almost closed the deal but lost out in the end. She was just about to hang up the
phone after brushing me off and paused, “O.K. I’ll take it from a special project fund I have access to. Just send me one page with the information I will need to fill out the requisition. Now when exactly did you want him to travel?” I immediately emailed a brief thank you note with the pertinent travel details for David before she changed her mind again. Unfortunately, I never thought twice about attaching a synopsis of Stain on the Brain - David Owen Story and how it negatively pictured Australia. I wasn’t even thinking that she would not like the story. I found out the next day just how much she did not like it. I was already researching the flight time from Sydney to Los Angeles and then on to Miami. It was a staggering amount of travel by air, and I wondered if David would be able to handle the long journey when the phone rang. I never expected the outraged frantic voice coming at me full blast. This is Qantas Marketing. She shrieked, “Are you crazy??! I just read your project synopsis. Whatever were you trying to pull off with me? It’s horrible!” She kept on, “I am very upset about this whole misunderstanding. I would never have agreed to any involvement with you, David Owen and your film project had I realized that the main plot was about accusations against Church and State, and for child abuse. Oh my God, Qantas is a ‘Sun and Fun’
Vacation Destination Airline! You do realize that I could have lost my job on this one. I’m sorry.” She never even said goodbye. Ok, I got it; she was only doing her job. But thinking as a producer, this did not help one bit to underwrite David Owen’s trip to Florida.

**ANGEL MONEY**

Word began to circulate through all my contacts in South Florida. I was soliciting assistance from philanthropic organizations regarding the important international humanitarian media project which I was deeply involved with. Then I received an unexpected and much appreciated invitation to attend a Ft. Lauderdale Sister Cities International meeting in City Hall where the Mayor Jim Naugle would be presiding. I was allowed a five-minute platform in front a room of civic leaders to pitch *Stain on the Brain* and the efforts of child welfare advocate and orphanage survivor David Owen. As a writer, producer and University of Miami graduate student, I had a project that coincided with their international efforts to promote brotherhood through cultural, educational and humanitarian initiatives. They were interested in his profile and petition to the UN in Geneva fighting for the rights of children all over the world.
It was a good arrangement for everyone. The group had been in the throes of filling a vacancy of their Australian Committee’s unpaid position. Ft. Lauderdale had a strong established relationship with Gold Coast, Australia. They had been Sister Cities for over twenty years. The Mayor’s office needed to fill the volunteer Australian liaison position as soon as possible as there was a major concern over a weakening marine industry presence from Down Under. Sister City, Gold Coast, Australia, always contributed large dollars to the local economy in the high attendance at the Ft. Lauderdale International Boat Show. Angels were surely present in the room that evening as I was voted in as Australian Chairperson that same night. I accepted the post, and in return it gave me an opportunity to lobby the membership for the financial support to further the project. Obviously promoting the book and film would be free publicity and visibility in the film’s end credits. Right then I knew this was the jumping off point I had been looking for to bring David Owen to Florida. Six months later my added responsibility as Australian Chair created an amazing opportunity. I was given the position of GFLSCI Trade Liaison for the City of Ft. Lauderdale where I would lead a group of business leaders, including the Mayor, Down Under to the Gold Coast.
The mission’s primary role was to reciprocate the Aussie’s commitment to Ft. Lauderdale over the years, which had maintained their strong marine industry ties. It was time for Fort Lauderdale to come to the Gold Coast International Boat Show. I was ecstatic when I heard the news. I wasn’t kidding myself; I understood what tremendous time and effort this would involve. However, this was an all-expenses paid trip. Amazing. Not only would this be my first time to Australia, but leading a trade mission was a perfect vehicle for me to be recognized by the power players. I would have an additional job to perform, exploring new possibilities with cultural and educational exchanges while carving out new entertainment industry
collaborations. This incredible break brought me directly to a strong connection into Screen Queensland as a film producer with a true Australian story.

(Australian Chairperson Jody Jackson interviews Gold Coast’s Economic Development Officer Di Dixon, and Vice Mayor Grant Pforr. Fort Lauderdale, Florida)

Assembling the travel packages for the mission members, I studied the detailed map of the Gold Coast and surrounding areas of interest. Looking closer over the location, I froze. I brought out the magnifying glass as my arms had goose bumps. I realized what I was seeing was no joke. The map clearly showed that Gold Coast, Australia, touted by the travel industry as having a world-class coastline with breathtaking ocean views, was literally only a six-hour drive from the dried up bush and vile dirt road which led to the ‘Gates of Hell,’ Neerkol. Omen?
Now that my ticket to Australia was booked and paid for, I knew that this was a sign from above. I had been given a way to get David back to Florida with me. Acting on complete impulse, I went to the Internet, checked my savings account and changed my ticket to a multi-destination LAX – BRISBANE – SYDNEY. Then I went back to the Qantas website, checked out the airfare, took a deep breath and booked a ticket for D.O. to Miami. I was familiar with the time zone difference, so I waited patiently to give him the exciting news. I rang; he saw
‘out of area’ and picked up immediately. He was always ready in case his ‘author’ called. I opened with, “David, you’re coming to America.” The other end of the line was silent. I heard sobbing followed by a few honks as he blew his nose. “Are you kiddin’ me? Pinch me I must be dreamin’.”

I explained the plan, “Your ticket is paid for.” He listened intently short breathed, overwhelmed. “I figure that after I complete the Gold Coast Trade Mission, you could meet up with me at the Brisbane airport. I’ll check that everyone is ok and send them off for the long flight home. You can wait for me outside the airport gate and we will finally meet. After that we’ll pack you up and hop on a plane headed for Florida.”

NEW TEETH AND DUDS

There wasn’t much time for David to prepare for his ‘trip of a lifetime’ to America, and his sister Margaret stepped in to help out. “No brother of mine is going to the United States with a mouth of rotten teeth.” It was as if he had become a male Cinderella after leaving the dentist’s office with a new set of dentures, with a price tag of $10,000. “Let’s get you a proper suit, casual shirts and pants too. If you’re going to be speaking to groups in the US you can’t look like a bum.” When his suitcase was fully packed,
all he could say to me was, “I am ready for action. Image that I can smile without being embarrassed and chew food for the first time in 40 years.”

THE BIG BOYS IN SYDNEY – TRYING TO TAKE MY MARBLES

During one of our last taped phone interviews when we were about to begin working out an itinerary for my time in Australia and bringing him back with me, D.O. interrupted, needing to tell me about an unexpected call he received from one of the biggest Entertainment Law Groups in Australia. They were producing movies, had heard of his story, and wanted to discuss the prospects for a film with him. They asked him to come to their corporate offices in Sydney. He explained that he would go and talk to them;
however, he was adamant that he had an arrangement with an American author/producer to tell his story. This did not faze them in the least. They considered it inconsequential and set a date to meet. He was offered a kiss-and-tell deal that would be an all-out attack on the Catholic Church. Their approach would do nothing more than feed flames of bitterness and anger. They already had an author who had just written the unauthorized biography of Rupert Murdoch, and was being sued in the wings, ready to begin on the book. David would be put smack dab in the Government’s hornet’s nest – as the press was hot on the story. D.O., his psychologist Roger and I all believed that proceeding in this manner would not do his story justice. And I am certain to this day that their book and film approach would have gouged into his fragile psyche and ruined any hope of any true healing. The bloodletting entertainment law firm had no real concern for him; they just saw the dollar signs. They did offer him a deal worth consideration. Later that week I received a call from the ‘big boys’ in Sydney wanting to ‘discuss’ the proposal and potential arrangement with me. I still chuckle when I think of how the high-powered entertainment firm thought I was just some eighteen-year-old student film wanna-be. The conversation with a slick solicitor who was putting the deal together
proved quite different when he realized I wasn’t a child who knew nothing. I was able to converse in real terms, using the negotiating skills I had acquired with an MFA in Motion Picture Producing, coupled with my past production experience with BBC and PBS. The unbelievable twist (which also could be seen as divine intervention) in all of this - and why I felt the need to include this in my journal - is that the entire skunky deal could not be made good in any way shape or form without my consent! When I faxed them the simple 2-page contract, showing that I had paid $100 for a five-year option while beginning a Ph.D., they were irate. Their hands were tied. Thank you Paul Lazarus.

(2004)

**FLYING ON FAITH...**

Boarding the non-stop Qantas Flight 149 from LAX to Brisbane, I remembered what I was warned over and over again by some rather seasoned travelers. “It’s a helluva long flight, so be prepared. Drink lots of fluids, and knock yourself out with either alcohol or drugs to make it through till you reach Down Under.” Well, I’m no fool - I did all of the above. However being stone cold drunk crossing over the International Dateline would never really prepare me for my first meeting with David Owen, a.k.a. the great D.O. I was now to experience the real Australia.
Getting off of the plane and passing through Customs I felt the fright and excitement wrapped up tightly in my chest. I could hardly breathe. I realized that it was here and now. I was finally going to be face-to-face with David Owen himself. Up until that moment I had only heard him and saw photographs. But now here I was, in Australia as Owen’s recently acquired American author/producer, arriving to fetch him and take him back to the U.S. to write his book. You could only begin to imagine the power of the moment. It was as if he was seeing a long-awaited salvation for the first time. I, acting naively courageous, saw whole endeavor as having a myriad of positive outcomes, mainly my well-intentioned act to assist in the final burial of his grieving soul, which he carried around like the tear-soiled handkerchief stuffed in his pocket. In the midst of these musings, I was confronted by the great lengths Aussie jocularity could be taken. Through the crowd I thought I recognized a D.O. welcoming party coming towards me. It shouldn’t be too hard as I had just locked up my condo, gave keys to my neighbor to water my plants while stepping over crates of press clippings, old photographs and Freedom of Information documents stacked in my hallway leading to the front door. My ears were still popping. With crimson
eyelids, I searched the crowd thinking, “Yes! That’s him! It had to be the one-and-only David Owen!”

At least I thought it was David Owen, until I stepped up to the man wearing a brown fedora and greeted him with a hug. With a blank expression and a crooked smile he pointed over to a scruffy bearded man standing next to him. With a straight face he calmly announced, “I’m not David Owen…he is!”

Well, fifteen long hours on a plane makes you wacky, so I didn’t think much of what I had just heard, and in my state you don’t remember the man’s face from the photos you’ve seen. I dropped my carry-on to the floor and without any reservation cheerfully wrapped my arms around the other older guy he was pointing at. From that moment on, all I can remember was this wide toothless grin, which exposed a puddle of brown tobacco’d saliva filling up on his lower gum line. Yuchhh! Something seemed amiss, but I thought, “Maybe it’s a cultural thing,” so I just kept hugging him not really knowing what else to do. It was obvious I was on my own on this one. It was also obvious that the old geezer was happier than a clam in high tide over all of the attention – he refused to let go of me! Thoroughly tired and confused by now – it finally clicked! Duh! This was not D.O. I got out of the grip he had me in and looked around
to see the “real” David Owen standing on the sidelines making no beans about the laugh he was having under his breath. Shaking my head in disbelief I thought, “Oh what the hell…” Looking back at the old toothless wonder, I burst into a belly laugh that sent me into tears. I was definitely slap-happy and nothing seemed to matter anymore. Anyway, D.O. was just being D.O.

I knew then that my life would never really be the same. I had just met my first-ever Australian larrikin.

God help me…

The trade mission was a success, and my Australian Film Commission’s connection was firmly in place. I returned to the U.S. as a puffed-up producer who was high on gaining yardage in project development. Little did I know at the time how far away I was to making a movie.
WELCOME TO LAX – AN AMERICAN ZOO

It was a long haul back home with my new Aussie friend David Owen sitting next to me and not wanting to close his eyes for even one minute. I was exhausted. It was as if I had the ten-year old boy who was overtired but too excited to sit still. When I couldn’t take him anymore, I turned toward the window and put on my eye mask, “Why don’t you try to sleep? Believe me when we get to Los Angeles you will need the rest.” This didn’t put him off at all. He just got up and cruised the cabin. He found a passenger who hated flying and couldn’t sleep. D.O. had his captive audience with hours ahead to tell his story.
LAX can be overwhelming for even a seasoned traveler so when we finally landed and grabbed our gear, which took forever coming off of an international flight, it was inevitable that sometime soon a weary producer and her hyper ‘talent’ would butt heads. I found myself on the up escalator hauling my ridiculously heavy suitcase when I lost David. I looked around feeling irritated only to see him way in the distance on the down escalator three floors away. When we finally met up on the same floor, we exchanged our first growls at each other, but kept moving with the flow as we still needed to get through the security check. Once we finally had stopped nit picking each other over uncontrollable things, our moods switched back to excitement about the upcoming journey for D.O. in America. We were now anchored together in an unending line of passengers waiting to be cleared by a few irritated security clearance officers. We got to the security arch and D.O. was moving through with a big grin on his face when the security alarms went off. Well you know what I’m thinking as a filmmaker… “Pull out the camera and start shooting.” I wanted to capture every bit of action when I looked over to D.O. who was being frisked by two extremely tall airport security officers. One officer was definitely looking for a confrontation. I immediately thought that the
officer’s aggressive behavior might have something to do with him constantly having to deal with the looks of confusion by tired passengers going through his line, and taken aback over the dilemma of not knowing where to focus on his face; as he had those shocking wandering eyes. And seeing D.O.’s wide unassuming grin seemed to have set him off, “STEP ASIDE AND REMOVE YOUR SHIRT AND BELT. THIS IS NO JOKE.” I followed right behind David through the security arch and the alarms went off on me too. I found myself standing alongside of David as they called out for a female to run the wand over my entire body, asking me to remove my insulin pump as they thought it might be some kind of plastic explosive tied to my body. After they realized it was a life support medical device I was told to move on, but I wasn’t going to leave my ‘star’ behind. I became wildly slap happy while witnessing this insanity. I couldn’t stop myself from laughing hysterically as David was now being stripped down to his undershirt, which exposed his ‘hidden’ money bag strapped to his torso while all of the other passengers were loving the entertainment. What they did not understand was the real joke involved. It was in a prior scene before David and I left the Sydney airport, when David pulled up his shirt and exposed a strapped on undergarment purse that his sister Margaret
made him wear for safety. I told him that I didn’t think it was necessary for a tough Rugby League hero, ex-con and dockyard wharfie to need this kind of protection. As I watched this crazy ‘welcome to the U.S.’ scene, I pulled out my video camera hoping to catch the awesome beginning to the D.O. story, as a ‘fly on the wall’ documentary piece. “THIS IS SO GREAT. I can use this as bonus content,” I whispered to myself. I knew enough to keep the camera hidden in my tote while I kept looking around and rolling film. I heard a loud authoritative voice, “HALT! PUT THAT CAMERA AWAY!” I looked behind me. A huge female security officer with her badge and gold front tooth brightly gleaming under the unflattering fluorescent lighting was barreling straight at me. I thought, “Maybe I should pick up my gear and run,” as she could barely keep her shirt tucked into her pants; she was way beyond any airline’s ‘over the weight limit.’ However, I stayed put. D.O. and I were already in deep water. She was glaring at me as I protectively held the tiny camera close to my chest. All the while I could not contain my incessant giggling. With tears in my eyes from laughing so hard and long I begged, “Please maam, I really need to videotape this scene.” I pointed over to the security sidelines where a balding little man, arm raised and hands on his head, was
being frisked. It was way too funny. I thought, “At least D.O. knew how to handle rough interrogation. He was a pro.” I continued to plead with the security guard, “You see maam I am a student doing a film and this scene will fit in beautifully.” She wrenched the camera away from me and said, “Either you put this away or I will confiscate it for good.”

AN ORPHAN BOY’S FANTASY

The flight from L.A. to Miami was so much better. A wonderful surprise came about which wasn’t part of the script. We boarded the plane with no problem. David announced to the stewardess and all of the passengers seated around us that it was his first trip to the U.S.A., and whether I liked it or not, he needed to introduce me as his ‘American author’ who brought him to Florida to write his life story.

I would’ve liked to take credit for the next scene, however I had nothing to do with it. Upon landing, the pilot came into the cabin and welcomed the passengers to Fort Lauderdale. “Ladies and Gentlemen, the temperature is a beautiful seventy five degrees and sunny. Please enjoy your stay.”

As the people began to disembark, the loudspeaker came on again. It was the pilot. “Oh, and I forgot a very important
message. On behalf of American Airlines, we would all like to welcome our Australian newcomer David Owen to the United States. We wish him great success on his upcoming book and film, *Stain on the Brain.*” It was a scene out of *Norma Rae.* The entire cabin stood up and cheered. “Go David!” The Great D.O. waved heartily to his new-found fans.

Setting foot at the Fort Lauderdale airport, I had arranged a special welcome. We were greeted by a small but impressive welcoming committee of City Hall dignitaries and Sister Cities’ members. They carried Australian flags and a banner ‘Welcome to America, David Owen.’ It was the first time he was speechless since we first met. He needed a place to sit down quietly for a moment as it became all too much. He was overwhelmed for sure. It was a dream beyond anything he could have ever envisioned back at 25 O’Hara. He pulled out a clean hanky, wiped a tear rolling down his cheek, blew his nose and then shouted out, “Holy dooley, ‘Pinch me I must be dreamin’.”
FIRST REAL NEGATIVE CHALLENGE – MY HEALTH!!

BETTER YET...WHAT THE HELL IS DIABETES?

I will never forget the first morning he woke up in my Florida condo; he was completely overwhelmed at what and where he had landed. Over coffee, I explained what the days would be like – three hours of interview, lunch, two hours more of interview. He was all for it.

I wasn’t sure if this was relevant to my story – but when you are an uncontrolled Type 1 diabetic and are being treated by UM’s top Diabetes Research Facility, it matters.

I didn’t think it necessary to tell this story, as it embarrasses me on many levels, I feel lesser on so many levels – academically, professionally, but most importantly
the incident was a personal let down of misunderstanding between me and my dearest friend and the subject of my upcoming work. Fortunately I can say that now after ten years of a close working, crying and laughing friendship, we now joke about the incident...but at the time I must have scared the hell out of him. I had never really discussed in detail that I had a serious health issue. I have lived with Type 1 diabetes for over thirty years, doing continuous blood testing and wearing an insulin pump. It is a grueling routine that I would not wish on anyone who wishes to retain their sanity. Plus, it is even more difficult to explain to someone who doesn’t know anything about the disease and make him or her understand emotional pressure cooker that might explode during an unexpected physical roller coaster ride of a dangerously low blood sugar crash. David always woke up happy in Florida, until the ill-fated morning when I shocked him out of his wits. Stumbling into the living room, I was slurring my words. The room was spinning. I tried not to make a big deal of it to him, as I deliriously ransacked my galley kitchen for sugar. And I did a pretty good job I guess, as he had no clue about what I was going through. So while I shoved food into my mouth and waited for the shaking to stop, David was sitting on the couch and loudly rabbiting away about child abuse.
Well, I lost it! I staggered out to the living room where he sat, oblivious and screamed at him, “Look at me!!! Do you see that I am not feeling good right now??!! Well, LOOK AT ME!” I just wanted him to stop talking until the sugar starting working and I felt better. He was just staring hard at me while I raved on. I ended the tirade with, “…And take that look off your face!”

Oh my! I didn’t even remember what happened when I finally came to. I guess I didn’t know just how put off David was. He told me years later of his reaction to the incident and said he was so shocked over it all that he thought about calling the Australian Consulate and getting on a plane to return back home the next day. Well, then I explained my severe health issue called DIABETES in detail and with instructions that should it ever happen again, he needed to know what to do. D.O, having the big heart and sense of humor, forgave me immediately. After all he said, “I grew up with some of the cruelest nuns alive. Our misunderstanding is nothin’ in comparison.” I knew he was right. We had had our first meeting of the minds and hearts. We stepped up to a lot of deep crying, followed by hearty laughing as he told his story. Wasn’t this the Aussie way? “No worries mate.” Fortunately I can say that now after ten years of a close working, crying and laughing
friendship, we now joke about the incident...but at the time I must have scared the hell out of him. I had never really discussed in detail that I had a serious health issue. Bright sunshine and a slight breeze came through the patio windows the entire week of our initial meetings before I set up the camera. It was as if God had given a gentle signal to proceed. We knew we had a bond that would not break now. Together we would take a walk down David’s garden path that was lined with some of the deadliest snakes, weeds and demons.

**TELL IT LIKE IT IS - FORT LAUDERDALE INTERVIEWS**

D.O. was a natural on camera talent. He looked into the lens of the camera and winked, “Ok Mum...we’re finally going to get justice.”

After taking long walks around the neighborhood so as to familiarize David with his new ‘American’ surroundings we were ready to get into gear and begin interviews on the
patio balcony. As the producer with an invisible budget, I was now the entire crew. I would have additional roles of DP, director of photography, setting up the shots, angles, lighting, audio and set design in positioning a comfortable couch for interviews. As my third role of biographer who set up the questioning, I knew that we would tread into some heavy, dark discussions and fortunately this spot was usually filled with a brilliant white light.

I felt it was a very important spiritual aspect of telling his tragic story and draw in as much positive energy as we could muster, just in case any restless, unwelcomed souls wanted to join in, we were protected.

*STAIN ON THE BRAIN – THE DAVID OWEN STORY COMES TO LIFE.*

We started at the beginning.

David’s Mum, little Katie Owen, a 13-year-old housemaid, was raped by the ‘well-respected and well-feared’ Constable Badge 3322 in that one-horse rough-and-ready gold mining town.
More documents kept coming by mail following David’s arrival, confirming his at times unbelievable recollections.

The story goes back to 1937. Mum swore to David that his biological father was Constable Badge 3322, and at the time of the rape she was too young and naïve to file a complaint (as if it would have done any good anyway). Instead she went to her room and wrote his badge number in pencil on the top of her birth certificate that she kept in a drawer by her bedside. After he described the situation, he jumped up, went over to a box stacked atop three high in the living room. He fervently dug deep and located an envelope
yellowed and creased which was encased in a protective plastic sleeve. I was sure to keep the camera rolling as he came back into the room and proudly plopped himself down on the couch, handing me the original document from 1929 with the pencil scrawl in the top left hand corner. It was just as Katie confessed to her son David, and it was clear that the handwriting was a faded as the whole document. This was no forgery. It was however a fabulous and unexpected twisted sidebar that would lend credibility to the whole ‘based on a true story’ Aussie narrative. And whether the film feature or documentary, this would be an awesome scene if we decided to do a flashback on Queensland territorial history in the screenplay.

Time flew by after the Katie’s birth certificate episode, and we kept moving with the story,
getting all the way up to D.O. and his Mum finding each other again after many years. David was now a man in his thirties, carrying around an incredible amount of trauma from his life at the orphanage. As a boy growing up at Neerkol, the nuns had told David that his mother was dead. He said, “When I found her again, my Mum, my treasure, I would never let her go.” He repeated, “She was my treasure Mum was my treasure.”

He wept without any regard that I had the camera pointed on his face in an extreme close-up. “Honestly JJ when I met Mum after so many years, I was more scared than when I fronted that big bruiser of a nun who enjoyed beating the hell out of me for no reason, playing in some tough as nails Rugby League matches, heading some of the nastiest dockyard riots ever, or even when I was attacked by cannibals on Bouganville Island.”
As David’s story unfolded, I came to believe that I could be David’s fairy godmother, savior, writer and producer and big sister psychologist who could fix – actually ‘heal’ the boy who was shattered by so many evil adults. When our on-camera interviews proceeded into his reality, a child growing up in such an evil place, Neerkol, huge amounts of bile inside of him came pouring out; so much pain, beginning with the nuns in the nursery terrifying the little boy if they thought he had disobeyed. They would make him stand in front of a picture in the nursery of a terrifying, leering “Nick the Devil” holding a pitchfork with a child stuck on the end of it as he threw him into the fires of hell below his spiked tail and clawed feet. Little David would have to stand there looking up until he would pass out.

My feelings interfered with my objectivity at this point, and I knew I must stay centered when conveying this horrible story. As a writer of a book, I had to tell the truth as he experienced it. As a screenwriter of a film, how on earth could these scenes be depicted without having an audience turn, horrified, and run out of the theater within the first five minutes of the film? This was going to be a real task as to how to write and edit the visual effects. I could hardly listen to the disgusting memories
he held so vividly in his mind. He went on to the even more severe abuse at ten years old when he became an altar boy having, the sweetest soprano voice in all of the choir. That’s when Father Anderson took him as his own, when the continues raping and beatings went on until he left the orphanage at fourteen years of age, without the ability to read or write, and carrying only a suitcase packed with government issued clothing. He would have to learn how to make a nappie to keep the bleeding from his backside concealed from his new employer. The government worker in charge of his case was close friends of Anderson and scared David with reformatory if he said anything to anyone over what he had gone through at Neerkol. Sister Amelia, the head nun, forged his medical release form and Mr. Patterson the Queensland protective services worker told him that if he began to bleed and the farmer saw this, he should explain his condition as having piles. My mind screamed at me, “STOP! I CANNOT HEAR ANYMORE!” David had an unending list of abuse stories that he wanted to get out. Buried under floorboards with feral cats, hidden away as his bruises were too visible, when the Hibernian monks would visit to hear a concert. The Sisters of Mercy made sure that David’s child abuse would not stop with sexual and physical; they made sure the
damage was inflicted emotionally as well, especially at Christmas time. I was grabbed right down to my gut over D.O.’s depressing Christmas story from Neerol. It brought to mind the classic Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, and just how similar the two boys’ characters’ were in their will to survive and rising above their extremely painful lost childhoods. *Stain on the Brain* could use comparative visuals as did *Oliver Twist*, in regards to an historical depiction of Victorian England within context. Rough and tough Queensland territory, Australia, would be used as the backdrop for moments that pull on the viewer’s heartstrings. In this case, reflecting on their own childhood Christmas stories which determined how they felt about holidays.

Sitting in front of the Christmas tree, the children would wait patiently on the floor as a nun pushing a cart passed out one holiday package to every child. When Monsignor gave the go ahead the children would happily tear away the wrappings, thrilled to find a used doll or truck. When sweet little David opened his present there was nothing in it. He began crying, ran up to the Sister crying, “Sister there is nothing in my box!” She snarled at him, “What did you expect Owen, empty boxes for empty heads.” As she turned her back to him she muttered, “Maybe you should stop
telling those lies about Father Anderson. You rotten little boy. God is punishing you for your evil tongue.”

After that terrible day, David would never have anything to do with Christmas again. It always hurt too much, and it still does.

I had to put the camera on pause, get up for a glass of water, and try to shake off my nausea. I wanted to go lay down for a while, as my head ached too. I blatantly showed an out of control disgust right in front of my subject. I could not hide my pent-up fury over what this innocent child had gone through. Trying to be a professional biographer, I believed that this situation was one of the most hard to handle interviews that ever existed. Was I way over my head? I could not fathom how David Owen ever continued with his will to survive. If it were me, I would have retaliated and killed them all or simply gone insane.

David, didn’t care if the camera was on or off. He continued his justifiable rage, screaming aloud and sobbing, calling the nuns, priests and government workers filthy, lying and brutal warden/caretaker pigs. He hated those “filthy, rotten, fucking baaastard pedophiles” and referred to them as “the men in suits.” After that, he never trusted men in suits – and if he encountered anyone wearing a suit and tie he would have a fit – some of it
being plain fear and anxiety. David would throw a dirty look into the lens that would frighten me.

After hearing the saddest Christmas story, the Australian version of *Oliver Twist* I made it a point for David and me to have our own Christmas together every year, even if we were miles apart. I make sure I save up enough money to send over boxes and boxes of beautifully wrapped ‘real’ presents. He had to wait to open them up until I called on Christmas morning. It’s really become our holiday ritual between two good friends, not necessarily as the film producer and her main character in a screenplay. It is ritual that means a lot to David, but even more to me.

![Two men sitting on a bench, one wearing a Santa hat.](image)

**ONE BIG DARING QUESTION**

Was Mum really a treasure as David called her? In fact, she was pretty mean to him, and we spent hours exploring how mean she was to him when they got back together. She would
curse at him. She would scream out the window at him and
the neighbors, “No Sheila will ever get my son David.” When
she had to have round the clock nursing care, and was put
into the hospital, David, being the loyal son he was, would
bring “his treasure” the food she liked every day during
his lunch hour. The nursing staff would hear her screaming
at him, “You just want me to die so you can bring some
rotten Sheila into the house and screw her in my bed.”

We had one brief moment when he candidly spoke of being
with Mum, raising his half-sisters, and buying a house for
them. Had to stop to think about what he was saying. The videotape would capture D.O.’s change of heart. It showed a beaten-down man who now felt the freedom to speak brutally honest. He recalled some unpleasant situations with Mum. “You know my life could have been different. I was a very independent bloke until meeting Mum. Sometimes I sit and think about what a good husband and father I would have been. Instead I took on another role (a supportive son instead of a husband, a loving brother instead of a father.) He sighed, “I thought it was the right thing to do and I really wasn’t capable of having a real relationship with any woman. Father Anderson had made sure of that. The filthy baaastard.”

After hearing story upon story of her mental illness and how she inflicted it on David until she died, I would take liberty to ask him once again, “Was Mum really the person who you keep calling your ‘treasure?’”

I am still overcome with the wisdom and kindness he continued to show as he held on to a life-saving fantasy, imagining his real Mum to be a beautiful woman who loved him so.

He gently said “Always remember this J.J., you only have one mother.” Funny, here I was thinking I was the ‘big writer’ who was psychologically helping this troubled
orphan with his misconception of what ‘a treasure’ meant. Thinking back on David Owen’s sage reply, I had my own epiphany. I had my own childhood anger still stuffed inside as I dealt with issues of emotional abuse coming from a mentally unstable mother. David made me see that she actually did her best. Yep, the old guy from Down Under made me see some unhappy childhood memories in a much different light. He helped me release from the judgmental attitude that I had held on to for so long with his one simple adage, “You only have one mother, treasure her.”

Josie Neibert (1932-2006)

AUSCHWITZ VS. NEERKOL

It wasn’t long before I realized that I must have the camera with me at all times, even if it was just to gas up the car. I came to this understanding the first time D.O. and I went down to the pool for a swim. What I wasn’t aware of was the fact that he did not know how to swim. He sat on the edge of the pool, white legs and baseball cap hiding
his baldy head. As I swam, I kept him in a line of sight. It wasn’t more than one lap before I saw him leaning over the edge of the shallow end joking with a ninety-year old woman who was doing leg lifts. She was a sight in her 1950s swimming cap with huge rubber daisies all over it. I was surprised with such thick rubber covering her ears that she could still hear David’s voice, I could. He was explaining his life story at Neerkol when she piped up.

“So, you think you had it so bad. Try living in a concentration camp at Auschwitz. I should be writing my own book. Tell your author to come over here and listen to my story. It will make your life seem like a big party.” David and she were only beginning to rev up. It became a huge pissing match over who had it worse. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing and hearing. The lady with the crazy looking water helmet and David Owen covering up his white legs with a Mickey Mouse towel; both stomped out of the pool area at the same time. Where are the cameras when you need them?

**HURRICANES BREWING – INSIDE AND OUT**

One week into his trip after barely surviving the unexpected storm of a raging diabetic, the next blow would come, literally, with four hurricanes in a row hitting South Florida.
Instead of David and I sitting together in front of the camera and getting more of his story in the can, we had to stop in full swing to prepare for four hurricanes coming our way. David could now encounter South Florida’s frenetic madness at Home Depot, as we scarfed up whatever plywood, candles, water and masking tape that was still available. When we came back, David was feeling a real purpose. As I was taping up the last patio window, he was nowhere to be found. A short time passed when the back door flung open. There he stood looking pleased with himself holding on to a forty-gallon garbage can. I thought, “What the hell is this crazy old coot doing?” He proudly said, “I hauled this up those three flights of stairs by myself after I filled it with the water from the swimming pool.” I was dumbfounded on this one, but didn’t say a word. I just watched as he dragged the container into the bathroom, lifting it up and
pouring the contents into the tub. He gloated, “There, now we’re sorted.” At that moment, the scene spun out of control. I stood at the doorway and watched his face turn completely white. He was trembling and grabbing at his chest. I thought, “Oh my God, he’s having a heart attack, and I never got the production insurance to cover him for his stay!” I knew I would be screwed if anything happened to him, as I was not bonded. It was a line item in my budget that I had to scratch out.

Of course my primary concern was his health. I had him lay down on my bed until he began to feel better. I was so worried over whether I should call 911 that I didn’t even realize that I was lying right next to him holding his hand. When he came around he was overwhelmed in many ways. First, the drama of possibly having a minor heart attack, but also finding me lying close to him on the bed. “If the nuns at Neerkol would see this, we would both have been flogged.” He added, “Golly JJ, I have never had a woman lay next to me on a bed like this. Boy, it feels good.” I immediately sprang up and moved to the other side of the room. Immediately sensing a real concern over any misunderstanding he might have, I thought to myself, “You need to nip this right now.” Before he arrived at my home, some of my friends had warned me about being careful with
David having an unrealistic fantasy about me. I spoke in a very gentle manner, “You understand David that I am your producer, and we are working together for the next three months. I need to make sure that you do not have the wrong impression. I do truly care about you, but in a professional way.” I carried on, “From this point on we must always keep this in mind.” I did not want to embarrass him. It was also crucial for him to stay open when telling his story and not ashamed of being so sexually naïve. I had to turn this serious one-on-one into joviality. I laughed, “Look you old bugger, I know you think you’re still that tough-as-nails twenty year old Rugby League star, but please from now on, speaking as your pain-in-the-ass author and producer, no more being a hero OK?” We had a hug and a chuckle. All was forgiven.

I walked out of the room, leaving him to rest quietly after such a scare. I left a hot cup of tea and a few biscuits on the nightstand. I knew this would make him feel at ease, while I jaunted down to the beach to see what damage had been done outside. I was now familiar with the storm damage that could wreak havoc inside.
ON THE TOPIC OF SEXUALITY...

Now that David and I had gotten through the hard part of establishing some healthy boundaries, it wasn’t quite so uncomfortable for either of us (not really) when he had to tell me about the horrible sexual experiences he was subject to at Neerkol. After what he had been through, as a ten-year old boy who was continuously raped, beaten and sodomized by Fr. Anderson, the patriarchal priest in full charge of the nuns (who worshipped him), and many of the children at Neerkol (who had not been molested by him.)
Anderson was an icon, a model priest revered by all in surrounding communities where he would visit and say Mass. David told a story of the pedophile taking his virginity. When he first attacked the child, and when David did not want to cooperate, he stopped on a bridge and made him get out. He grabbed the boy by his ankles and hung him upside down over the railing screaming that he would drop him into the fires of hell if he didn’t let Father have his way. David Owen’s scream of terror echoing across the ungodly countryside did not stop Anderson from yanking him back up, pushing him into the car and sodomizing him until the boy could not stop vomiting. When they arrived back at Neerkol, David ran to the nuns and told them Father had just done to him. They reacted by beating David saying, “How dare you
speak of Father Anderson in that way? You filthy little boy. You need to be punished.”

I was so overwhelmed as he just hung his head between his knees. I couldn’t shut the camera off fast enough as we were both crying pretty hard. I needed to get fresh air, and I was sure David did too. The only thing I could think of to make us feel better was getting in the car and going directly to this fabulous ice cream parlor down the street, where he could order the biggest hot-fudge sundae ever. The following morning, placed next to the coffee pot, I found a note from David.

Anderson went to his grave being celebrated by the parishioners he served as the pious and Christ-like pillar of the Australian Territory. Father Anderson ate on fine
china, drank out of crystal goblets and was served on silver platters with the best beef and vegetables on the property. David Owen, the abused orphan who was bleeding from the backside because of Anderson, would have to pick hibiscus buds off the bushes under the beautiful stained glass windows of the rectory dining room so be able to eat anything at all. Anderson was never identified as the pedophile he was, as he protected himself with his hypocritical ‘sacred vows’ and a properly starched collar. David was ruined for good. The Vatican sanctioned child abuser took away the orphan David’s right to ever have a female companion in his life. As a biographer, I was happy that the camera would pick-up such earth shattering confessions by the sweet boy who later became a bitter man. As a woman and mother, I was mortified that David at sixty odd years old had absolutely no point of reference as to what a healthy sexual relationship was. I would fall asleep at night after having a grueling day of sickening interviews, and pray that I wouldn’t have scary nightmares over what I had just heard. I struggled with the same question over and over, “As a filmmaker, how do I express such powerfully sad scenes without nauseating the audience?”
NUNS OUT FOR A PEEK

I remember saying at one point, “Wow that’s some real sicko stuff.” David talked of a time when he had become a teenager and was taking a shower at Neerkol. As the boys bodies began to change, the big bruiser nun Sister Assumpta would make them all line up stark naked in the cold shower room to do an ‘inspection’. The boys caught on to her sick motives right away, as she would just stare at their penises. David knew for sure and he would not expose his naked body to her when she shouted at him to let her see his private parts. He would cup his hands around his penis area, “No I won’t show you, no matter what you do to me!” The old crow shouted back at him, “Owen get your hands away from there. It’s my job to see if any of you are shaving down there!”

David never exposed himself to her. That night as he slept he was woken up by three nuns who beat him bloody. Sister Assumpta stood over him, “That’ll teach you to disobey me Owen.”
His whole time at the orphanage the girls and boys were separated and not allowed to even speak with one another. So David really had no female contact, even after leaving Neerkol. He was so damaged emotionally that he was always embarrassed around females and was consequently shunned by most of the girls he met.

ETHICS EXPLORED

I knew that my action was not within the boundaries I had set for myself as an author. However, my gut level feeling of stepping into the shoes of a daring, intuitive dime store psychologist had even more of a positive effect that
I would have thought. In reviewing this bold move, I do question whether it was the best ethical journalistic move. All I know is that it did make a profound impact on D.O. It was a life-changing shift of thinking for the deprived orphan – even if he got the concept rather late in life.

SCREENWRITER FUN

(OPENING TITLES)

A STARBUCKS MOMENT IN TIME

Starring David Owen and Jody Jackson

with special guest, Starbucks the Napkin

DAYTIME

(Starbucks coffee shop outside the mall.)

We see a bustling room full of females congregating after playing in a local charity tennis match. David and Jody sit center stage in the midst of the chatter. They had decided to take a break from another telling morning interview
sessions that revolved around the topic of sex (or lack of it.) JJ was teasing D.O. about finding a girlfriend now that he is finally shedding the rotten stuff out of his system in writing a book. They are having a ‘flat white.’ (The Australian describes a cup of coffee in this way.)

JJ: “You could find a nice lady now. It’s never too late.”
(beat)
She looks around the room and smiles back at David.
JJ: “So D.O., who in here interests you?
David nods as he looks over to a shapely, cute twenty year-old in a short tennis skirt and t-shirt.
D.O.: “She’s looks a good one.”
JJ: “Hmmm. Interesting observation.”
(She looks up to the heavens.)
JJ: “See Lord... no matter where you are on the planet, it doesn’t change. Why is it that older men always go for the young ones?”
D.O.: (Blushing) “Oh, forget about it. I would never want to hurt anyone with my doodle the way Anderson hurt me.”
CU of JJ with a look of astonishment on her face. It occurs to her for the first time that David knows absolutely nothing at all about the female anatomy. She grabs a Starbucks eco-friendly brown napkin and earnestly draws a
crude diagram of the lower part of a woman’s body. D.O. looks down intently at the simple explanation of the three orifices of a female and what each is used for.

JJ: (Pointing to the picture.) “See? There really are three different places down there for a woman to use and in much different ways. When a man makes love to a woman it shouldn’t hurt her. That is what her vagina is for, to give her pleasure and make babies.”

They are now in deep discussion with their heads together and do not realize that the women around them are listening in, highly entertained. D.O. doesn’t give a stuff who is watching and stands up with an indignant attitude. He cannot believe his ears. How could this be? It was the first time, as a grown man, that he is finding this out! He is so upset that he can’t finish his coffee and violently tosses it into the nearby garbage bin. David, the man, chokes up with a sadness he could not hide.

D.O.: “So many years, my whole life...shattered by that pig of a thing who called himself a priest. And because of what he did to me all those years, I always told myself that I would never be with a Sheila. I would never hurt another person like he hurt me. EVER!”

JJ: (Trying to be cheerful)
“Well you know now and you still have a chance to meet someone nice. Sex feels good if performed in a loving fashion by two consenting ADULTS!” (She leans across the table and gently touches his hand.)

Classical music playing quietly in the background, emphasizing dead silence in the room. Heads are turned their way wondering how the scene will play itself out between D.O., JJ and the brown napkin.

Leaning over JJ whispers in David’s ear, grabs the napkin and stuffs it into D.O.’s shirt pocket.

JJ: Let’s go mate.

All eyes are on them. They are walking out the door arm in arm when D.O. stops to looks back over his shoulder.

(He chirps at his audience.)

D.O.: “How lucky are you that we didn’t charge admission.”

DAYTIME CONT.

(Starbucks parking lot.)

D.O. and JJ are doubled over with laughter.

END

HITTING THE BOOKS

When we got back home, we both needed to take a nap. I was going to figure it out. How could I give David a real tutorial on the bird and the bees. I decided the best way to do this would be to get some books from the library.
written by pros. I approached a helpful librarian, acting as if I was a big sister who wanted to bring her teenage brother, now going through puberty, up to speed on how he should behave around girls.

We found three interesting books. When I told D.O. to sit down, I had a surprise for him. Boy, was he surprised. He shed a tear and said that he would never forget his author’s thoughtfulness to do such a thing. He and I sat on the couch together reading and looking at the drawings, which were much more exact than mine. I told him that when we finished the books I would answer any questions he might have. What I realized in going through this exercise with David was how much I didn’t have a clue about either. After all, what did I know? I was taught by the same Catholic Church.

**SPEAK OUT**

In between daily interview sessions, I wanted to try and book speaking engagements for D.O., pro-bono, as our production funds were so low, we could use any help with free publicity. We were very lucky with an unexpected cancellation of the guest speaker for the Fort Lauderdale Rotary International luncheon. The biggest challenge was that it was scheduled for the following day. This would give D.O. and me just enough time to take his new suit,
shirt and tie out of his unpacked suitcase and get it to the drycleaner for overnight service. As far as working out the logistics of his speaking time and topic, we went over it until he felt comfortable with it all. He assured me that he had talked in front of small groups before and this would be no different. I said, "Are you sure you can do this? Would you like us to review how you’re going to tell your story in only twenty minutes? It’s going to go pretty fast so you’ll need to have your shit together." He wasn’t paying much attention to what I was telling him. He just came back at me with, "No worries, I can handle this like a dream."

My gut told me that we really needed a strategic plan B in case he got stuck. I said, "OK here’s what we’re going to do. When you are closing in on the last five minutes of your speech, I will give you the signal to wrap it up. OK? D.O. are you listening to me? I will sit at the head table right in front of you, to give you the countdown to wrap it up. If you see the waiters removing dessert plates and the men in the audience beginning to fidget you have got to say your goodbyes. Got it? If you see then getting restless, wrap it up." I emphasized like a mother hen, "And remember to keep it moving and not too heavy. Remember that they are eating lunch. The publicity garnered with your
petition to the United Nations in Geneva defending the rights of a child was the impetus in asking him to fill the speaker slot at such short notice. So stay on that track. OK?” He replied nonchalantly, “JJ, no problem, I know what I am doing. You don’t have to tell me what to do.” My intuition kicked in and I was worried. For the first time since I met David I was feeling like he was way too full of himself by the way he was handling his first speaking engagement in America. I knew that it wasn’t anything like what he had done in Australia. But I had to let it go and hope for the best.

It was a total disaster. He was introduced to a welcoming group of men, however he was already intimidated looking out into the audience. He freaked, but hid it well, as all he could see at each table were “the suits” he always hated.

He shook it off and became that larrikin bloke from Australia who could always hold a group in the palm of his hands. He joked and cajoled at the beginning. I was able to take a breath until he got stuck in his story about Father Anderson raping him, beating him and burying him under floorboards. I could see a total lack of comfort over the topic. I heard one Rotarian whisper to another member. “Gee if I thought I was going to pay twenty dollars to be
thoroughly depressed at lunch I could have bowed out of this one. They really should warn us ahead of time over who is speaking.”

With five minutes left, I couldn’t believe that the whole lunch he just kept going over the topic of rape. His Mum being raped by Constable #3322, Father Anderson raping him from the age of 10 through 14, his confrontation with a solitary confined inmate who was raping a young prisoner which nearly got him killed. And then back around to Father Anderson and what he did to David.

DING! It was finally over.

Yet David wouldn’t give up. He kept talking to anyone who would listen as they filed out of the banquet room. He would deliberately not look over at me while I jumped up and down waving at him, mouthing, so as not to embarrass him, “CUT!”

THE UPSIDE

I was happy to see a few men come up to the podium, shake David’s hand and thank him for speaking to the group. I couldn’t help but wonder if perhaps these men (the suit’s) had been abused as children, and even though D.O. got an F in public speaking that day, by telling the roughest part of his story over and over again, he may have made a
difference in their lives. He was inspiring, even if he did it one child abuse victim at a time.

THE DOWNSIDE

As a producer working the public relations angle it seemed as if my twenty-minute nightmare was shot in slow motion. Thank God that I didn’t record it.

On the drive home I was visibly unhappy with David and he knew it, but I kept my cool as well as could be expected. The whole potential for other speaking engagements was no longer an option as far as I was concerned. He wanted me to tell him what I was mad about. I let it out, “Ok, time was up. I told you before we left it was ONLY a twenty minute speech. These men were at a noontime business lunch and had to go back to work after the hour. You knew I was right there to give you the signal and you just wouldn’t even look over to me. You defiantly did it your way and we lost out on future opportunities for them to get you other speaking gigs.” I backed off slightly, “Forget about how you spent the majority of your time stuck on the subject of rape, I am not judging or blaming you for how you felt at the time, but I am more pissed about how completely arrogant you acted yesterday, blowing me off when I wanted to prepare you for any unexpected situations.” I looked over to him in a calmer state, “D.O., you know I am only
with you to help and support you. I do think you are a wonderful person.” But I had to get my last two cents while he had turned his body towards the window and sighed, “I’m sorry I disappointed you.” I said, “It just backfired on us, that’s all.”

A POWERPOINT? GOD LOVE A DUCK.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI speaking engagements in front of undergraduate psych classes proved to be magical as David had never entered a “school” much less a university. When he was at Neerkol, his emotional, sexual and physical damage was so tremendous – he shut down any love of learning and he was extremely bright.

BLINDSIGHTED BY A PUNK

Here I was worried about constraining D.O. to a fifty-minute allotment of class time, never expecting to be blindsighted by a real punk. In my experience with D.O., as an Australian orphanage survivor, I have only seen him freely express love to anyone he thought might need his help, many times showing the character of a saint. When he spoke to other child abuse victims, for instance, he would leave them with a favorite line of encouragement, “Remember mate, if it’s meant to be it’s up to me.” At times I worried about what seemed to me his deep-seated vulnerability. He wanted to be seen as a rough and tough Aussie that could
give a punch and take a punch. However, the longer we spent time together telling his story, I knew that his unyielding kindness made him very exposed to having his feelings hurt. It was bound to happen at some point.

It came about on the day David Owen stood in front of another class of UM undergraduate students. It was a small, group who were far more concerned with texting than listening to him. He was being largely ignored, and D.O. would not have it. He was known for thinking fast on his feet. Sitting on a desk, he leaned sideways and grabbed the book *Orphans of the Empire* that I had put on display next to him. Looking around him at the smug faces, he got their attention all right. Loudly slapping the book’s cover, he said, “G-DAY!” He didn’t look up; flipping right to the section called ‘Daredevil Dave’, he read one short passage to the class about how the other kids would have to watch him being beat bloody by the nuns. He was unfortunately the target child of one of the most evil institutions in Queensland, Australia. A girl sitting in the front row put her head down on her desk and began to cry. He closed the
book and looked at his audience, “Sorry about that, if I offended any of you, but I thought it would be the best way for me to tell you my story. Looking over to me he smirked and continued, “Seeing as that I only have FIFTY MINUTES.” He proceeded with his bold moniker, “I am Daredevil Dave.” For a moment we thought he had gotten through to the group, until a callous male voice with real attitude shouted out from the back row. “Okay man, so you had a rough life, but so have a lot of other people. Why do I have to listen to you go on about it?”

D.O. was unusually quiet the whole drive home.
Chilling out after finishing another one of our grueling interview sessions, D.O. laughed aloud as he called the private conversation area, ‘The Interrogation Room.’
Sometimes late at night I would find him out there, safe and comfortable, in quiet contemplation. Once again, I was blown away over the depth of this man’s soul.

TO HELL AND BACK

Overhearing a conversation D.O had with Dr. Roger Peters, his psychologist back in Australia, I was choked up. It was the best, yet strangest reaction, in helping to make someone else’s dream come true. The sense of pride and humility, at the same time, could only be attributed to David Owen’s success as the Australian orphanage survivor and functional illiterate who had been given an enormous opportunity by the University of Miami to witness first-hand how a proper learning environment functions. Proving
to always be that special moment in his life, D.O. spoke in front of the classes of both Dr. Steve Stein and Dr. Tom Steinfatt, two top educators at UM willing to work with me on *Stain on the Brain* – *The David Owen Story*’s international humanitarian initiative. The unique circumstance gave David Owen the validation he had been always looking for, that he was smart.

**NEERKOL TO KEY WEST**

I wanted to make sure that D.O. would go back to OZ with a big smile on his face. We ended up in Key West on a Friday night.

As *Stain on the Brain*’s producer and biographer, I made sure that there was a miscellaneous line item in the budget for a last day party of David’s three-month stay
in the U.S.A. The production kitty wasn’t very big however it did cover a two-day slick red convertible rental, a moderate-sized twin room we would have to share at a funky old Duval Street Bed and Breakfast, a ‘Cheeseburger In Paradise’ and a couple of margaritas. It was all perfect.

The day of our departure, David was up, showered and dressed ready to go at 7am. I hated to make him wait, but needed a little time to get it together and the car rental company didn’t open until 9am. As not to disappoint my excited ‘teenager’ who sat patiently studying the map I turned on the weather channel and gave him the assignment to keep abreast of any storms coming our way. The drive was so smooth, it was as if angels were leading the way. As we cruised over the seven-mile bridge down to the tip of Florida, you honestly could call it ‘a perfect day.’ Blue skies, sunshine, glistening water as far as the eye could see, no fooling.
We were already having a great ride when a Beatle’s extravaganza weekend came on the radio. Did I say that this scene was right out of a buddy film? Well it was. We drove island-to-island singing our hearts out.

Pulling into Key West and getting to Duval Street was easy. It was the parking that was a bitch. Three blocks away we finally found a space and hauled our suitcases, not bothered, just happy we had made it.

After settling in our room at the sweet but worn hotel, D.O. and I took a walk. Right out of the Hotel’s front door on the sidewalk facing Duval Street, a beautiful Hibiscus
bush hung over a white picket fence. The backdrop was that of a large American flag strung up on the porch awning. Again, the things that occurred around D.O. were out of my control, but I was sure glad I had a camera with me.

David went over to the flowering Hibiscus and was ready to pick one, “Look over here JJ, this is the same Hibiscus buds that the nuns would have me pick and have me eat for my dinner at that hell hole Neerkol. It was the only thing I had to eat so much of the time, that I was so sick of the taste, I would call it ‘pigweed.’” He shook his head and smiled, “Funny, looking at it here in Key West? It’s actually pretty.”

Back in the hotel room, acting like the gentlemen, and knowing that I would need to be nearer to the bathroom in case there was any problem with diabetes and my insulin pump overnight, he took the single bed on the far side of the room. As we were getting ready to go out for dinner he straightened his tie while looking in the mirror and said, “Geez, can you imagine what the nuns would if they saw me now? Sleeping in the same room as a girl?” He sadly went on, “We never had a mirror growing up at Neerkol and I didn’t really see what I looked like until I was about ten years old.”
I needed to interrupt him. I firmly but nicely said, “O.K. D.O., I forgot to tell you, there is only one rule on this trip. Neither of us are allowed to look backwards, we can keep looking forward.” I repeated, “That’s the rule.”

We had a lovely meal out on the terrace. The air was balmy, with a beautiful breeze. We took a stroll down Duvall as tourists and walked into a late night gift shop. We separated looking down different aisles when I heard a panicking high and squeaky voice, sounding just like D.O.. I looked through the display to the other side of the aisle where was surprised to see a big-bosomed woman with lots cleavage, makeup and teased out hair hugging David tightly, rubbing his bald head and trying to kiss him on the lips.
David was squeaking my name as loud as he could, “JJ...could you pleeeese come over here. I want to show you something.” This was hysterical, so I waited a few minutes and watched him perspire before I came to the rescue. I grabbed his arm from drunken woman, “Stay away from my brother.” She slurred, “Oh, he’s so cute. I love his shiny head too. Why don’t you go away and leave us alone. I just want to take him home with me.” Winking at him, “We’ll have a real good time.” She snuggled up to his chest and would not leave him alone. She whispered in his ear, loud enough to hear. “You’re a big boy let’s ditch sissy over there.” I had never seen David’s face get so red. Giving me a frustrated look he motioned for me to help him find a way out of her grips. I took his hand and never looked back, dragging him out behind me. Now out of the shop I couldn’t resist, “Wow D.O. you’re hot!” He tried his best to keep a straight face, “That was really not funny.” I replied, “Are you kidding? That was a real hoot.”

On our walk back, we passed a sign in a bar window promoting their drag queen show with Marilyn Monroe and Diana Ross. D.O. paused in front of the pictures, “Do you want to have a look? It would be a first for me.” For some reason the silly picture of D.O having no front teeth and dressed up as a woman at a party on the docks came into my
head. I said, “Remember when you had a bit of fun with your wharfie mates dressing up like women? Well this is kinda’ the same thing in reverse.” He opened his wallet and brazenly walked up to the doorman, “We’ll have two tickets.”

The show was great. I’m a Diana Ross fan and loved the lipsync, wigs, gowns, and makeup. David thought Marilyn Monroe did the best job. Mystified by it all he said, “I can’t believe that they’re really men and they can look so much like women. Where do they hide their doodle?”

As we filed out with the crowd he said, “I have no problem at all, with this kind of a show. It’s interesting, that’s for sure.” Back at the room and sleeping in my twin bed next to David’s, I felt like I was at a Girl Scout camp sleepover. Before nodding off I said, “Boy, this was really an enjoyable night.” His mind was still back on the drag show we had just seen, “You know JJ, at least those men are out in the open with their sexuality, not hiding their fucking evil behavior behind a priest’s collar, like Anderson.”

I fell asleep sadly understanding that such a severe case of child abuse could never go away, no matter what.
As we drove back from Key West on the seven-mile bridge at sunset, the view and serenity were fitting. We were on our way to the University of Miami and David’s last speaking engagement. Dr. Steinfatt, humanitarian and mentor, had championed the *David Owen Story* from the start. He was the
UM advisor to a campus Sorority, raising funds for underprivileged children. He saw this membership meeting as the perfect forum for Stain on the Brain.

As we turned the convertible into the university, we passed a billboard sign, TONIGHT – 8PM THE DALAI LAMA. Wow, it was the very last night of our D.O. tour. “What a send-off!” D.O. dumbfounded joked, “Well imagine that! Wait’ll they hear back home – this baldy old bastard on the same speaking schedule as the Dalai Lama.” D.O. chortled under his breath, “Holy Dooley, how can you beat that?” I was beginning to believe in ‘Divine Intervention’ more so.

It was a rather large lecture hall. He was quite impressed by the podium he stood behind. But the biggest thrill, which David would never forget, came at the end of his speech when a group photograph was taken. It showed the Great D.O. sporting a huge grin, ear-to-ear, as he sat right in the middle of a bevy of cute, young and perky collegiate girls lavishing him with flirty attention.

Dr. Steinfatt, Child Welfare advisor (and crowd control)
Feeling like the big sister watching her little brother at his first prom, I thought, “David has finally come of age. Thank you God!”

**BLACK AND BLUE**

Everything was so perfect Sunday night, as we packed up David’s suitcase for the long flight back home to Australia, this time traveling solo. We counted all of the videotapes we had filled with his interviews, adding up to fifty. We felt so good about how our three months turned out. We had accomplished a lot together and we were in full faith that this was just the beginning. So, why did it all have to go so wrong?
We never should have stretched the envelope with an unsupervised trauma victim. We were just plain overconfident with what we believed through our interview sessions to be positive strides in removing some of David’s childhood pain?

We were on our way to the Ft. Lauderdale airport we decided to leave early enough to take a scenic route. I had only used this road once before but I knew it was a lovely drive with big willow trees that made an arch over the road. How could anything go wrong? Well it did and it was the worst of the worst. As we were peacefully going along the route, beginning to say our goodbyes, as we had gotten so attached to each other, we saw a sign, “Pilgrim’s Abbey.” It was a 17th century church that had been brought over from Europe and rebuilt brick by brick. The abbey was open to visitors. We pulled over to the side of the road. I looked over to David and said, “We have a bit of time. How do you feel about stopping here for a minute. We’ll go in together.” What on earth was I thinking? David said, “Why not? I think we both feel sure enough with how much work we’ve done together.” It was certainly a courageous move on his, but if we stuck together David might get to another level of healing. We walked in the garden first. It makes me sick to even think about it, as the very last picture I
snapped of David Owen before leaving America was of the courageous man from Australia smiling into the camera for me. He leaned against a pillar, perfectly posed within the frame, and shockingly, the statue of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus was in clear view behind him. To this day, I am so thoroughly disgusted with myself in not being discerning enough to realize what might happen. I just wanted him to keep healing. That’s all.

When we walked up to the church hand in hand and opened the heavy wooden doors, the first thing that hit us was the thick, pungent, overwhelming smell of incense. I looked to David and he was already going into a panic but said, “Let’s just walk down this aisle to the altar, turn around and then walk right out.” I replied, “Are you sure?” He began to walk ahead trying to quell any emotion. I followed closely behind him when he started wrenching. He shoved
past me, running out, banging the wooden doors wide open. I looked to see what had set him off as I ran after him. It was a wall of carved Stations of the Cross. I tried to hold him and he aggressively pushed me aside saying, “Stay the fuck away from me. Don’t ever speak to me again.”

We got back in the car and never spoke again all the way to the airport. At the boarding gate we said a civil goodbye. I cried the whole way home. I didn’t sleep; I couldn’t sleep. I just kept downing straight shots of tequila with no regard for what it was doing to my blood sugars and kept the television on for company until I heard from D.O.

The following day I heard back from him. He had landed safe and sound back in OZ. We were both silent, not really knowing what to say. I began crying hysterically and probably a little hung over, “Oh my God David, I really screwed up!!! I cannot tell you how bad I feel about that whole mess!! I only pray that you might see it in your heart to forgive me, as I know I will never forgive myself.”

He said, “JJ, I had a lot of time to think about what happened back at the monastery, I am not mad at you for what happened. We gave it a shot and no one is to blame. I spent half of the flight staring out the window and it was nothing but blackness. Then a switch went off in my
head. I think it was Mum helping me. I knew I had to change my thinking, get out of the black box and back into the blue box, as you taught me how. You are a wonderful lady and nothing but a good friend. I will always thank you for everything you have done for me. Now let’s both get some sleep. And by the way, what’s your blood sugar?” I poured the last of Jose Cuervo down the drain.

**WRITER’S BLOCK**

We had built up a library of 50 hour-long interview tapes. I had a lot of viewing and notes ahead of me. Call it writer’s block if you will. I call it out and out fear. All of the hours of video would end up being used as an additional reference database. I needed to go to Australia for a three-month stay.

Most importantly, now as the biographer who understood how David Owen performed with verbal communication, our interview process would have to be entirely reconfigured for efficacy. No cameras or recorders would be used. I would only use a stenographer’s pad and my ears while listening intently, jotting down notes. No more free flowing of information and haphazard raw feelings that we initially worked with back in South Florida. This second
time around the interview process would be highly structured with strict chronological questioning.

**TIME FOR ME TO FLY**

Ft. Lauderdale Sister Cities International and the City of Fort Lauderdale were preparing to go Down Under again. I was asked to go along as a trade liaison and continue to ferret out new business connections.
I wasn’t returning for three months, and I needed a lot of the information that was all over my living room so I packed up a lot of necessary files and documents and sent them by sea. Eight cases arrived at the Port of Newcastle around the same time I got there.

MRS. GUINANE

THE NURSE WHO KNEW IT ALL

I couldn’t stop crying as I wrote this entry. I’m not really sure why this one hit me so hard, but it did. My tears flowed as I reflected on our final stop in Brisbane before going home to 25 O’Hara. David wanted this to be a surprise for me, and it certainly was. In the taxi
I said, “Well, you have to give me a little more background on what this meeting is all about.” David slouched down in the back seat with the side of his face pressed against the leather headrest looking over at me, “OK then, here it is.” It was yet another unbelievable chapter in his life, one I had not heard yet. This one was a doozie.

When David gave me his Reader’s Digest version of the events, I frantically began stuffing my pockets with as many tapes and extra battery packs as I had with me. I knew this was going to be major. It was the kind of story you can’t make up.

D.O. said, “The story began the day I dropped the phone, as the woman’s voice on the other end told me that she was the nurse who assisted Mum in delivering her baby boy. She introduced herself as Mrs. Guinane, a name I was not familiar with at all. She told me that she had just read about me in the Brisbane Courier Mail. She couldn’t be sure, but it would not surprise her to know that I was the same baby Owen whom she had cared for the first six months of life, my life. She told me that back then, when the state workers were looking for me, she would hide me away, denying I was there.”

D.O continued, “She was sure it was me, as she recognized me from my picture, now as a balding old man, I looked
identical to the bald happy baby she would rock to sleep.”

Hearing that, I couldn’t wait to meet her.

We got out of the cab in front of a beautiful Victorian house in the older and wealthier part of the city, and I met Mrs. Guinane. She was ninety-two years old and had an enviable memory. From their first contact, until they could meet face to face, they would talk to each other every week. David would sometimes call her more often if he was having a bad day and just needed to talk to her; she listened to his grief like a real mother. One day she happened to be looking for something in her attic and was digging though some boxes, when she came across a crucial piece of evidence that would fill in a big chunk of the David Owen puzzle. It was an original photo of her holding David in front of the Cairns Hospital.

Well, Mrs. Guinane knew it would be some time before she and David would meet in person and thought that she should surprise him ahead of time. So she made a good copy of the photo for herself and then found a dark wooden frame for the original. It was in a beautifully wrapped, secure box and placed near the bottom of the package with sweets and biscuits that covered it. Looking closer at the cropped photograph, the scene was of a group of nurses who worked
at the Cairns Hospital holding babies; clearly Nurse Guinane was holding a big happy David Owen.

David told me, “When I received the package in the mail and looked inside, I was gob smacked! I couldn’t believe what I
was seeing. I wanted to get on a plane and go to see her right away. “We were both were very anxious to meet Mrs. Guinane in person, but it would have to wait until she returned home after visiting with her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren on their horse ranch.

Serendipity: Nurse Guinane and baby Owen’s joyous reunion coincided with my arrival in Australia, so D.O. asked if he might bring his American biographer along. He had already told her all about the book and film and said that it would be extremely useful if she would allow me to record it all. She reluctantly agreed, only because she didn’t think she was very photogenic, which was not even close.

After meeting her, I teased Mrs. Guinane, “Oh boy, will I have a tough time casting your role, trying to find the Australian version of Kate Hepburn.” Smiling, she reached over to a photo of herself in full equestrian garb jumping her horse. Holding her magnifying glass up close to the image she said, “Hmmm, Katherine Hepburn? You must be blind, but you’re lovely to say that.”

I set up the tripod, framed the shot, turned on the camera and got out of the way. Mrs. Guinane sat in her wicker rocker with David Owen dressed in his suit and tie sitting like a child at her feet. She stroked his hand saying, “Oh David, Dr. Guinane loved you so. You were a special baby to
him.” His smile stretched across his whole face, and looking at the photo said, “I can’t get over it Mrs. Guinane, it’s me Baby Owen, It’s really me, and after all these years, you found me.” Her heartfelt response: “Oh my dear David, if only Dr. Guinane and I would have known what happened to you, your life would have been so different.” She showed him a photograph of Dr. Guinane before he had passed on, surrounded by their grown children and grandchildren. She went on, “You would have fit right in with the rest of the family, and you certainly would have had a good education.” David studied the photo in his hand, his eyes welling up. She handed him a tissue, and lifted his spirits: “I can see how you stand up to the evil ones who hurt you, and I think you would have been a marvelous magistrate.”

When I first heard the news that Mrs. Guinane had passed away in her sleep last year, I was burdened for days with a heavy heart, maybe even as much as D.O., as I kept replaying our last conversation before we said goodbye. I kept telling her, “Now, you need to stay healthy and keep your mind intact for when it’s time to walk down the Red Carpet at the Academy Awards.” She said, “You better make it soon Jody, I don’t know how much longer I can hold on.”
I still break down every time I realize that she died before we made it. She was possibly one of the most important characters in David’s life, and for the brief time that we knew each other, she had also made a beautiful dent in my world as well.

**CLOUD NINE**

We jumped back into a cab and got to the train station with more than enough time to have a ‘flat white,’ Waiting for our train to arrive, I took inventory of the equipment, making sure that every one of our precious tapes was accounted for, when the alarm went off on my infusion pump instructing me to change the tubing, do another blood test and take some insulin. It was time to do inventory on myself. David was still on a proverbial ‘cloud nine.’

**TOOWOOMBA PARADE**

After our meeting with Nurse Guinane, as far as David and I were concerned, I felt that there was no more getting to know one another. D.O. and I had crammed more memorable events and private conversations into a few years than most people do in a lifetime. I had gone back to Australia with a purpose, to write a biography. Our effort was interrupted by my work in the Gold Coast. When it was finished, I would meet up with David in Brisbane. I said, “I’ll do a quick
stop in Brisbane, and on to Toowoomba as you have already planned, but then we have to go back to Newcastle and hit it hard.” I added, “D.O. you can’t look to me as your ‘author sidekick’ anymore. Our next three months are critical in completing the manuscript. If this doesn’t happen, I’ll have to bow out. I’ve invested everything I have believing this project will happen. I won’t say that I wasn’t aware of the possibility of failure; that’s all part of the game. But as a producer, the book is the entrée into a film.”

We had a beautiful scenic route ride from the inland coast of Brisbane to the hinterlands of a tiny town with another one of those interesting Aussie names, Toowoomba, a remote Rugby League haven. I had heard so many of D.O.’s crazy Rugby League stories and saw all of the press clipping that went along with them that I was really looking forward to seeing all of his mates come to life right in front of my eyes, as up until that moment they were just celluloid characters who lived behind the worn, plastic sleeves of the ‘Great D.O.’s’ prized photo albums. Our day in Toowoomba was just what I had hoped for. I watched the Toowoomba old-timers becoming larger than life; their personalities certainly suited their reputations. I had no idea that a stop off in the tiny Queensland town would
provide invaluable insight into why D.O.’s first love was Rugby League. Getting off the bus we were greeted by one of David’s mates, a huge jovial man hobbling as best he could. He shouted, “D.O. you still look good ya silly old baastard! But where’s your hair?” Podgie, a Rugby League mate of David’s became our personal chauffeur, driving us around in his late 1960s Cadillac. He took us directly to the main drag of a ‘town center?’ where a parade was turning the corner. Podgie found an opening in the line of cars, and his Cadillac joined right in. Like old times D.O. got up on the hood, waving the football club’s pennant, cheering out to his long lost fans. They screamed out, “Hey, there’s Dave Owen! Look there’s Dave Owen, the famous hooker!” A small bunch of onlookers cheered him on, “Good on ya’ D.O! Welcome home!”
After the parade we went over to John Hilliard’s, D.O.’s best friend and teammate, for a ‘feed’ and a laugh over old times. They were all backslapping, roughhousing, telling Rugby League stories, boasting of playing with Wayne Bennett, who was now the most famous Rugby League Coach in all of Australia.

Everyone in the room heard the commotion and laughter coming from Hilliard grabbing David’s arm in a hooker’s move, “Oh yeah D.O. old mate? Who was it that was always helping you stay out of jail? Who?” John winked at me, “Hey JJ, did David tell you about the time he went to court and the Magistrate asked him who was his solicitor? And the silly old bugger told him, “John Hilliard.” Laughing and shaking his head, John continued, “Well I was just a cement mixing salesman for Christ’s sake, no bloody solicitor that was for sure. When I showed up in the courtroom during my lunch break to help get him out of the mess he was in, the opposing solicitor took one look at me and started laughing. I knew we needed to huddle for a minute to figure out what to do next. I grabbed D.O., took him aside and whispered to him, ‘D.O. did ya’ do it?’ He looked at me and said, ‘Course I did.’” D.O., doubled over in laughter while John went on with the story, “Oh yeah remember, John, how big your eyes got when I told you I’d done it? How you got
me out of it so I could play in the match that night; I still don’t know how you did it.” John brushed it off looking back to me, “Yeah, I pleaded with the judge to release D.O. into my care, I explained that David was an orphan with no family and didn’t know any better. I told him I would be responsible for him as a brother.” John Hilliard was one of the first men to open his heart to David.
The party had come to an end. It was an amazing final scene when the old dogs hugged each other in a circle and raised their glasses in a toast. Getting to interact with some of the main characters in Stain on the Brain the David Owen Story, well, the narrative’s credibility shot way up. I was given a day of invaluable research which a biographer could only hope for.

MASHED SPUDS AND SAUSAGES

25 O’HARA

D.O. lives in a port town called Newcastle. It was dusk when we arrived at his home at 25 O’Hara. Nestled in a working class cul-de-sac, I felt warm and cozy already. Hauling my suitcase up a worn flight of stairs, I stopped to glance over at a rickety porch directly facing the side of the house. David said, “Welcome home.” Before entering the doorway I looked back towards the porch, “Is that a river walk I see behind your yard?” He nonchalantly replied, “Oh yeah. Lovely isn’t it?” Dragging my suitcases inside, D.O. vanished into the front hallway. I was feeling strangely mesmerized by the backdrop of a glowing orange skyline, billowing thick, dark clouds of smoke and a distinctive smell of hot metal.
In journaling, I reflected back to my own childhood in Wisconsin and realized just how lucky was I to have the loving, self-sacrificing father I did, who toiled in a steel foundry for forty years to give me a better life. He is also a one-of-a-kind inspirational man. Like D.O., he rarely complained and most often pleasantly persevered. This insight has given me a much clearer understanding of my decision to get behind D.O.’s story, which represents the ‘everyman’s plight’. It represents David Owen, but it also represents my dad.

SETTLING IN

MY NEST

Wanting me to be comfortable and to feel a bit of a feminine touch inside the house, David went out of his way to spruce up my bedroom and the bathroom we would be sharing. Living alone as a bachelor all of these years, he enjoyed going up to the shoppes in the nearby village of Hamilton looking for little nicknacks, feminine bathroom toiletries and new linens.

I smiled to myself when I walked into my bedroom. It was sweetly adorned with a plastic flower arrangement of long stemmed red roses on the bureau, sachet packets laid out on the nightstand and had a 1970’s macramé hanging plant holder with an ornate wrought-iron holder and a plastic
green vine. I was dead tired, so I unpacked and thanked David for his thoughtful touches in my room. “I love what you have done for me D.O.” Before I could say goodnight, the alarm on my pump went off flashing, ‘low battery.’ Luckily I had an entire suitcase filled with pump supplies and AA batteries always nearby. I grabbed the diabetic gear I needed to get me through it. D.O. was worried and guided me to the bathroom, waiting outside the door until I was OK. “I’m fine now, and I can go to sleep,” I said, exhausted. A few minutes later, knocking at my bedroom door I heard, “JJ, how are you? OK?” David had made me a tray with a cuppa (tea with milk) and a few biscuits. He said, “I want to make sure that your glucose level stays good during the night.” I slid under the brand new pretty pink flannel sheets, still smelling like the packaging it had come from. It didn’t feel like I was Down Under. I was home, at least for the next three months. But no matter where I was, Australia or Florida, my morning drill of blood testing first, pumping insulin and then having breakfast would have to continue. I threw on my robe and slippers and found D.O. out in the kitchen. He was so happy to see me, “I’m making you a cuppa and fried eggs. You’ll need some grub for what I have in store for you today.” I was happy to sit at one end of his big wooden
table, covered by a vinyl tablecloth with a fruit motif, and eat my brekkie (as he would call it) as I looked out through the old-fashioned crank stained-glass windows. It was a glorious sunny day, with a wonderful view of the river.

I was so pleased to see that David had taken me seriously about getting the biography done and had already gotten the kitchen set up as a working ‘office’. The far end of the table had stacks of pertinent Freedom of Information Documents organized in piles chronologically and with sticky notes marking each subject. It was wonderful to see
him so absorbed in the project. Every note from then on was in D.O.’s handwriting, using his trademark thick black magic marker, and adorned with a smiley face.

SATELLITE OFFICE

HOUR OF POWER

If we were going to write his entire life story beginning in 1938 and go all the way to the present, we would have to have a daily regime, and we did. Equipped with my laptop, video camera and playback monitor, the only thing I needed was internet service and a printer. It was always entertaining to watch David have such a good time when we went out looking for office supplies. We would walk into the store and he would immediately chat up the salesman,
telling him all about the book and film. We did find a
great close-out deal on an office printer, a heavy-duty
Brother. We needed that virtual ‘tank’ to crank out the
amount of pages we were sending back and forth to one
another every day.

THE REGIME

BEGIN DAY

7AM       D.O. SEES LATEST CHAPTER ON KEYBOARD— WITH A NOTE
9AM       JJ MANDATORY PERSONAL TIME
10AM      PORCH (HOUR OF POWER) REVIEW/EDIT/D.O.FINAL EDIT
1PM       LUNCH
2PM       (HOUR OF POWER) INTERVIEW SESSION – NEXT CHAPTER
4PM       NAP – DIABETES SHUT DOWN
6PM       DINNER
7PM       TELEVISIONED RUGBY LEAGUE
10PM      BEDTIME D.O.
10PM      JJ WRITE, TRANSLATE NEXT INTERVIEW, PRINT COPIES
3AM       BEDTIME JJ

END DAY
HOKEY POKEY

We finished the entire biography in record time, completing twenty-nine chapters of a two-hundred-and-fifty page manuscript with an additional twenty page Aussie glossary in less than ninety days. If I should ever want to sing about our crazy accomplishment, it might go something like this:

You put your right foot in,
You take your right foot out,
You put your right foot in,
And then you shake it all about,
You do the hokey pokey and turn yourself around,
That’s what it’s all about.

PERSONAL SPACE

Usually I wouldn’t get to bed until three or four in the morning, and in the wee hours I would begin to hallucinate, feeling that perhaps much of my writing was a channeling experience. I realized how much I had begun to think and sound like D.O.

Weekdays were long hours, and weekends were supposed to be free time and space, but we were always together. This was a wonderful thing for D.O., in fact he loved having me all
to his own. I suppose any child abuse victim having so much attention showered on them continuously, as I was doing in writing his life story, would feel the same. I realized that in many ways I had taken the place of his ‘treasure’ Mum. I feel bad in saying this, but sometimes I was really fed up seeing him day and night. He didn’t really want me out of his sight, and openly showed it. There were many times that I just wanted my space and have a break away from him. If he thought that I was going somewhere without him, he would pout.

**ACADEMY AWARD**

One afternoon I felt a refreshing breeze on my face during one of our particularly rough-going ‘Hours of Power,’ and I decided that when we were through, I would take a walk, by myself. When I told David of my plan he started on me, “I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to go alone. Let me put on my shoes and I’ll walk with you.” I said, “I just want to walk around and look in the shoppes by myself, OK?” He wouldn’t listen to me and began putting on his shoes. I got mad. I wasn’t going to buy into his belligerent behavior, so I grabbed a sweater and quickly walked out the door. When I got past the house he was hanging over the porch railing, “JJ, come back here. I mean it. It’s not good for you to go into town by yourself. What will people
think?” I just kept walking as he kept badgering me. I ended the argument in the rudest way I thought possible. I was fed up! “You know David, I have traveled alone my entire life. I’m a big girl.” Now I was shouting, “I’m fifty fucking years old and I don’t need you to tell me what to do! Leave me alone!”

I walked fast and out of his sight. When I got up to the main road I felt bad, even though he was acting out of line and way too possessive. I knew that this wasn’t helping me, but I decided it would be better if I turned back. I stopped by the sweet shoppe. I could get him a bag of jellies I knew he liked.

On the way back, I passed a thrift shoppe window that had a cute display of an angel on a pedestal. The price tag said one dollar, so I bought it as a peace offering. When I looked inside the bag, I cracked up. The winged angel actually was a tiny fountain and the water trickled out through the angel’s bare penis. I thought, “This will be hysterical. I’ll hand it to D.O., and tell him that I’m sorry for the outburst and I brought him a little present to make up for it.” When I got home he acted like nothing had happened, which made me feel better. I couldn’t wait to hand him the angel and say, “David Owen wins the Academy Award for Stain on the Brain, his life story.” Teasing him,
I told him he had to hold his angel statue up in the air and make his acceptance speech. I said, “But when you do your speech, you have to press that little button on the angel’s tummy ok?” He went along with the award ceremony silliness, holding the statue and looking around to an imaginary audience saying, “Thank you, thank you,” while he pressed the button and a stream of water came shooting out of the little dinky doo (as he called it.) We both had a good laugh and were back to being mates. That night I noticed his “heavenly’ Academy Award proudly sitting on the mantle next to his picture of him and Mum.

Hairy Spiders

Back in the States, I had heard about deadly snakes being very common in Australia, sometimes people found them slithering right into the house if they left the door ajar. I understood the snake thing, but wasn’t really too concerned about spiders, that is until the middle of one night when I woke up and had to use the bathroom. David would always leave a tiny light on in the kitchen so I could find my way easier. Returning to my bedroom, I was half asleep, when I noticed a huge dark shadow on the kitchen wall. I couldn’t see what it was, so I flipped on the overhead light and let out a blood-curdling scream. David came rushing into the room, without his dentures
(which also startled me), and found me up on a chair freaking out over what I thought for sure was a big hairy Black Widow Spider. D.O. went to the cupboard and brought out two big cans of insecticide, handing me one. I couldn’t believe that he thought I was going to get anywhere near it. I shrieked, “NO WAY!” He was fully awake now, “Oh it’s just a white tail spider, it’s not much fun getting bitten by one, but it won’t kill you.” D.O. took the can from me and said, “Never mind, I’ll get rid of it. Don’t worry, just stand back.”

After he killed it, I needed a guarantee that the spider was truly dead. I wouldn’t go back to bed until I got David to take it out to the garbage can immediately, I didn’t care if it was four o’clock in the morning. We had a laugh and took a photo to immortalize the event. D.O. then patiently carried out the sealed up garbage bag, while I followed closely behind him. Even outside I was on his heels, my chin on his shoulder, making sure that the spider made it into the garbage can.
Every day we worked hard, and we were confident that the narrative was moving along as planned. We were good with our deadline, so when D.O. told me that his mates from Goninians, the Australian engineering firm where he had worked that built railway cars, wanted us to come for a visit, I thought it would be a good break. They told him to bring the biographer they had heard so much about. They thought she should talk to ‘the boys’ who had worked with Hard Hat Dave. We broke camp early and took the bus. When we arrived at the plant for a tour, I thought I was in a scene from Norma Rae, the one where she walked through the factory and everyone was cheering for her. It was the same scene only Sally Fields was played by David Owen. As we walked through the main floor of the plant, workers were
popping out, jumping off of their machinery, and cheering, “Yeah!! It’s Hard Hat Dave!!! It’s really Hard Hat Dave!!!”

The floor supervisor who David answered to, came over to us and shook D.O.’s hand. He said to me, “I hear you are the American author writing his story. Well, it’s about time somebody does!”

Seeing part of the **David Owen story** come to life right in front of my eyes was a cinematic dream. Machines went silent while the men came off of the platforms to pay their respects to Hard Hat Dave. The overwhelming flurry of emotion didn’t stop there. D.O.’s old boss stepped up and handed a familiar-looking safety helmet to David. It was the same helmet David had worn every day at work. Someone had found it on a rafter and the boss decided to hold on to it in case he ever saw David again.
D.O. walked off the floor the same way he entered, waving and smiling at his mates. But as we left the factory, he was wearing the helmet of Hard Hat Dave. And I had learned that D.O.’s stories about Mum’s mental health failing and the support he got from his workmates at the plant were all true, and then some.

MORE VALIDATION

We were moving along well with our strategy of daily interviews followed by writing, and then D.O.’s edits. It was an intense routine, but we were getting it done. In between sessions and writing, I was waiting to hear back from Ian Davies, a Queensland government social worker who was assigned to David Owen’s case during the Inquiry into Institutional Child Abuse in Queensland. I had some important facts that I needed confirmed by a professional with strong credentials. Ian was witness to David’s story about threats he had received right before testifying in front of the Forde Commission, when his mailbox had been tampered with and he found a stick of dynamite stuffed inside. The next threat he received warned him that, if he testified, he would get a ‘Mafia Necktie’ (which D.O. had to ask around to find out what it meant.)
Ian Davies had been involved in protecting David’s welfare through the long legal battles with the Government. He had accompanied David to testify in the Queensland investigation of Neerkol.

As a journalist working on a factual story, I was in need of professional confirmation about an ‘unexplained’ power outage and ‘convenient?’ loss of government records. These were the reasons given for not complying with David Owen’s specific request for a copy of the transcripts from his testimony about a disgracefully scandalous incident he had witnessed back at Neerkol. It involved the Head Nun and parcels, the size of shoe boxes, wrapped with holy medals pinned on top. David was forced to push the wheelbarrow
filled with the parcels and watch Sister place each one delicately on a pyre in the yard. Sister would set them on fire and then kneel on a pillow, saying the Rosary until they were nothing but ash. His recorded comment clearly stated, “As a child I was an innocent and had no idea at that time what a 'fetus' even was. As a grown man, I wonder if that’s what was in the boxes?” Davies stood behind David Owen’s testimony understanding how the notoriously evil Neerkol compound operated, and he never doubted the Sisters of Mercy performing abortions and concealing the facts. Being a social worker out in the field for over twenty years, he knew how the political machine worked and felt that the transcription of David’s testimony would never resurface.

BOUNDARIES

Into the second month of writing and listening to story after story of pain, I was up to my neck from living and breathing Stain on the Brain. I just wanted to watch senseless comedies and read stupid joke books. David probably felt insulted when I went in my room to do just that. One day he knocked on the door, and I told him to come in. He stood next to my bed and began to add more details to his prison story. I got up from resting on the bed and moved him back to the other side of the doorway,
out into the hall. He was visibly upset with me. He blurted, “What’s wrong now?” I calmly said, “New Rule. There will be no discussing anything relating to Stain on the Brain inside this room. It is my private place to unplug and get the horrors out of my head. This space cannot be violated any more. So if you have something you want to discuss with me and I am in here with the door closed, just make a note of it and we’ll talk when I come back out. OK?”

David respected my boundary rule, but many times I would find him sitting on a chair in the living room, directly facing my bedroom door, waiting for it to open.

**BREKKIE WITH THE BRONCOS**

Every night around seven o’clock we would finish dinner, it was the same bill of fare every Monday, Wednesday and Friday: spuds and sausages. I was ok with it, as I was livin’ the D.O. life in every way. On Saturday night we would switch to a slice of beef and salad, I looked forward to the change. First thing Saturday mornings D.O. and I would take a stroll up to the butcher shop, and when they saw him walk through the door, there was a package of lean corned beef wrapped in butcher paper sitting on top of the meat case waiting for him. Every storefront on his walkabout through the village waved G’Day. When we’d walk
down the street I felt like I was hanging out with Mr. Rogers.

Our Friday night Rugby League match on FOX became a ritual that I actually looked forward to. I had become a cheerleader jumping up and down on his sagging couch. We were both in the Brisbane Bronco’s cheering section. This was the only team he ever rooted for. He boasted that the Broncos Head Coach, and the nation’s biggest sport’s hero, Wayne Bennett, was an old teammate and dear friend of his. They played on the same side against the famous touring Pommie team. Later on, I saw for myself that his words were for real. Coach Wayne Bennett was everything David described, both as his dear friend and an Australian sport icon.

Wayne routinely invited D.O. to breakfast with the team every time the Broncos played in Newcastle. David would always stand up in front of the boys and gave a pep talk. Dave Owen, the well-respected hooker, kept his message tough, “If you’re gonna’ win you gotta’ stay mongrel and keep that ‘will to survive.’”

This time, when the Broncos came to town, D.O. brought his author along. He was able to happily lend proof to prove his sport stories that we had already written into the narrative. Coach Wayne Bennett really was a staunch
supporter of D.O., believed that his story was important, and that it needed to be told. As he told me this, I jumped at the opportunity to ask if he would become an executive producer for *Stain on the Brain*. Looking over to his mate D.O. he said, “Sure.” He then mumbled underneath his breath while smirking in fun, “You Americans, you always need to have titles.”

**WHAT IS THAT?**

We were getting close to the finish line in completion of the manuscript. We only had a few more chapters to go, when one morning I was only able to get out of bed to run to the bathroom to throw up. I knew what was happening but didn’t want to admit it. Due to the long hours I was keeping,
pushing myself a little too hard, my health was going down the tubes. I did a blood test and it showed the word ‘HIGH’, which meant that I was beyond calibrating a number. My target rate was 125, and I was over 700. I knew it was emergency room time again. When I finally got there, I was so out of it that I didn’t even understand what the doctor and nurses were saying to me; their Australian accents could have been Chinese and I wouldn’t have realized it. I was familiar with being hooked up to an IV drip of insulin, and for the next eight hours, I laid on a gurney in a holdover room, gazing out at the beautifully landscaped Queen’s Hospital front lawn, overlooking the Port. When I got back on track with blood sugar down to 150, I was going to be released. When the nurse came in to check me out she said very politely, “I must ask you something. What is that box attached to your body?” This was a big new hospital, yet they weren’t very knowledgeable yet on how to work with an insulin pump. So before I left, I gathered a few of the nurses together and gave a tutorial. Even though D.O. and I had gone deep into some rather personal issues of his sexuality, one day when I saw he wasn’t liking where I was going with the very difficult question on his sex drive, I stopped. It had to do with masturbation as a teenage boy and the fact that it was a
normal. Just at that moment his telephone rang and jumped up to answer it. He never returned.

Another ‘Hour of Power’ I seemed to have hit another nerve, as D.O. became extremely squeamish when I posed what I thought to be a safe question. I gently asked, “I have always wondered David, after all of the stories we have delved into over the months describing your close relationship your Mum, have you ever wanted to find your father?” He snapped back, “I was never interested in finding him. All I needed was Mum. I didn’t care to know about the prick.

At some point every day, the mood surrounding us became dark and strained. I wasn’t sure why, as we had already been to hell and back together many times. I had listened intently, absorbing his entire life story, crying myself to sleep many nights after hearing story after story about the horrible child abuse he experienced in the hands of adults who were supposed to be protecting him. I then would have to relive it again in transcription.

As these moments continued, I began to have real bouts of paranoia; I even called D.O.’s psychologist Dr. Peters to talk about it. I even thought that maybe the dark energy was coming from earthbound, guilt-ridden and unforgiven spirits: Badge #3322, Father Anderson and Sister Amelian.
They needed to block the ending of the story as they would finally be exposed to the world.

Roger told me that I was overreacting, but his reassurance was not enough. That same day I went to the store and bought a case of white votive candles and kept one burning continuously where I slept. I would not allow them to get to me. Was I going crazy? Or was D.O. acting a little crazy as we came close to my trip back to the U.S.?

The white candles burned non-stop, day and night. I was feeling much better. Call it placebo, but it worked. I could fall asleep much easier.

I was back on track, beginning at ten o’clock at night, cleaning up the remaining notes that had to be added.

David had gone to bed and I was typing away before I realized it was three thirty in the morning. I was packing it in when I heard this loud scream coming from D.O.’s bedroom. I rushed to his room and found him sitting up on the side of his bed with the bedside lamp off. He was slumped over, sweating and sobbing hysterically. I turned on the light and woke him up out of what seemed to be a terrible nightmare. He kept shaking, the color completely out of his face. Awake, but in a terrified voice, he screamed, “Don’t let them get to me.”
That was it. Now I was really off-balance and worried. I was able to settle him down and tuck him in. I went to my bedroom and pulled out the remaining six white candles left in the box and lit them all.

The comic relief came the next morning when I got up and looked at myself in the bedroom mirror. I screamed as I saw a thick black Hitler moustache on my upper lip. I ran out of the room to show David, and he hesitantly touched it with his finger. It smeared along my upper lip. He was as upset as I was. He calmed me down as he looked at the tip of his finger, “What the hell? Your moustache is nothing but thick gunky soot.” We went back into my bedroom and ran in circles throughout the room, ferociously throwing open all of the heavy velvet drapes. The sun came streaming in and exposed black sooty streaks dripping down the walls.

Now D.O. was beginning to imagine restless spirits roaming around. We called all the neighbors nearby to come in and have a look; maybe they could explain what it was. One of the neighbors was a nurse at the 24 hour Walk In Clinic up the road, and when she walked into the bedroom and saw six white candles flickering, she said “Oh my God, how long have you had those white candles burning?” I replied, ‘Oh for about a month now.’ She said, “They have been giving off carbon monoxide poisoning. It could’ve killed you.”
David and I blew out all of our spiritual protection.

**DARKIE AND THE SHEILAS**

Two days before I would fly out from the Sydney Airport, David and I were wrapping it up. D.O. was feverishly printing up copies of the completed manuscript. He wanted ten full sets so we had to go back to the office supply store where we had bought the printer. The same salesman who sold it to us walked us over to the replacement ink cartridges. David bought ten more cartridges and we got the salesman’s employee discount.

David was hard at work. He had his assembly line going strong. The phone rang and he asked me to pick it up as he was up to his elbows in black ink.

I heard a strong Australian male accent, “Hey you must be JJ, D.O.’s American author. How’s it going?” He identified himself as David’s good friend Darkie. I sat down on the sofa in the living room and we had a nice chat. I told him that David had shown me a glamorous photo of Darkie, his girl Beverly and D.O. all posing together. He said, “Oh yeah, all three of us were real lookers in those days.” I asked him, “Did you end up marrying Bev?” He answered, “Oh yeah, Bev was the best lookin’ Sheila in town.”
I innocently commented, "I was happy to hear that you would take D.O. along as a third wheel, even though he had never been with a woman. What a shame."

Darkie had a big laugh over what I had just said. "What are you talking about? D.O.? Not ever been with a woman? No way mate. He's been with a few women before, don't let him fool you." He went on, while I started to get a stomach ache, "Yeah, I'll never forget the time that a few of us had to go to his rescue. We could hear the landlady screaming in
the background, ‘Hey what the bloody hell is going on up there?’ D.O. needed our help getting the four sheilas running around in his room out the back door.”
I called to David, “Hey D.O. I have to use the bathroom. Do you want to talk to Darkie?” He said, “Tell that bastard I’ll call him later.”
After hearing what Darkie had told me about D.O.’s sexual prowess I had to go and lie down. I closed my door and felt horrible. The next thing I remember was the hugest fight D.O. and I ever had.
I was screaming, “Darkie just told me about what had gone on in your room at the boarding house. He said you had four sheilas running around in there, and he had to get you out of your mess before the landlady threw you out!” I stared him down with disgust before I slammed the door in his face. The last words he heard from me that day were “I will NEVER believe you again.”
I stayed in my room for the rest of the evening. He came to the door later and wanted to know if he could make me any dinner, and I politely refused. I knew I was leaving in two days, and I refused to be nasty to him anymore. I had said my piece and that was enough for me.
I got into bed real early that night, as I had to work on getting my raging blood sugars back into a normal range.
Due to all of the emotional stress I had experienced since my telephone conversation with Darkie, and my face-to-face confrontation with David, the protocol was to calm down, do a blood test every hour and adjust my insulin. It took until midnight for me to regain diabetic safety. I listened at the door to hear if D.O. was still up. It sounded so quiet that I was sure he had gone to bed so I snuck into the kitchen for something to eat. As I approached the doorway, I saw a light in the corner and realized that it was David whispering into the phone. I hid behind the wall and heard him growl, “That fuckin’ bitch...I wish she would go home tomorrow.” I couldn’t help myself. Upon hearing that, I stomped in to the room and looked right at him, the receiver still in his hand. I didn’t say a word to him, but he knew that I had heard the conversation. Teary eyed I said, “Why don’t you call a taxi now, I’ll be packed and out of here within the hour.” I was stuffing everything into my suitcases when I felt an insulin reaction coming on. I was shaking pretty hard as I grabbed four glucose tablets and laid down on the top of the bedspread. It took about thirty minutes to come back to where I could finish my packing when the door creaked open and David stuck his head in. “Please JJ forgive me. I was so wrong, I don’t know what got into me, but I was
definitely acting like a demon. I guess I can understand why you will never be able to believe me, but for the time being could you please stay and let me make it up to you?"

All I could think of was how we had left each other back at the monastery in Florida before he got on the plane, and I really did not want to have the same scene happen again. No matter how I really felt about it all.

The next day we took a train to the Sydney Airport. We hugged goodbye. I knew the long flight home would give me a chance to figure it out. I needed to remember who David Owen really was; a kind soul and inspirational orphanage survivor who suffered every possible kind of abuse from evil adults who were in charge of his innocence. When I arrived in LA, I had made my decision. I would look the other way, ignore ‘hearsay’ and publish the book as is.

**SWITCHING HATS**

Back in Florida, and I was no longer a biographer; I was a producer looking to use a favor owed to me by a very good editor associate of mine. Not only did I beg her to read my two hundred and fifty page manuscript but was brazen enough to ask her to write up a detailed coverage, a synopsis with recommendations, for *Stain on the Brain, the David Owen Story*, so that I could start pitching the book Stateside.
I couldn’t have asked for a better analysis and proposal on the project. Her report succinctly read:

Given the exotic locations, colorful characters, and high-drama, the story would translate well to film and should be considered both as a documentary and a feature-film, in addition to the memoir.

**LOOK MA, NO HANDS**

At the very point that I was setting myself up to send out a barrage of correspondence for a *Stain on the Brain*, diabetes chose to wreak havoc on my body. This time there was a serious new development. On a Monday morning I was at my desk preparing to do calls and emails. However, through the previous night, both of my hands had terrible shooting pains, and running through my fingers and wrists was a scary numbness I had never felt before. A prickly feeling in the cartilage between each finger was enough for me to call my endocrinologist at the University of Miami’s Diabetes Research Institute immediately. When she looked closely at my hands she said she suspected that I might have something called Dupuytren’s Contracture and referred me to an orthopedic surgeon who was the top hand specialist at Jackson Memorial Hospital. Dupuytren’s Contracture? I had never heard of such a thing until I got on the Internet and did a search. What I found was not what I wanted to hear. The pain of every tendon and joint in my hands and
curling up of each finger would never go away unless I opted for surgery. So, I had all of the necessary tests, x-rays and physical therapy consultations before I made my decision. The diagnosis was exactly what my doctor had thought. I had a severe case of Dupuytrene’s Contracture, which I found out was common in diabetics who had been living with the disease for more than twenty years.

Dr. Owens, my hand surgeon, (I couldn’t believe his name) explained that it wasn’t an easy surgery, and being diabetic, the healing time usually doubled. So if I had both hands done, it would be a good year before I could get back on my feet again. Unfortunately, I really didn’t have much of a choice. I couldn’t stand the excruciating pain that kept me up at night, and if I wanted to continue in my chosen profession as a producer, I had to take the gamble. The two surgeries were scheduled, one hand at a time, so I wouldn’t be completely incapacitated. The upside was that there was a high success rate after having the surgery. The pain would go away and the fingers would straighten up after removing the built up scar tissue in each joint. *Stain on the Brain* would have to be put on the back burner indefinitely. This period of my life was far more than a mid-life transition; it was total demoralization.
I had become the perfect candidate for a *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* study, as I rapidly lost my whole safety net and tumbled to the bottom of the triangle. Personal security, financial security, health and well-being--the safety net against accidents/illness and their adverse impacts--were gone. The Serenity Prayer became my mantra.

To make matters even worse, right at this time I learned that if I didn’t refinance my condo, I could lose it. So I tried everything to avoid it. In order to stay afloat (barely), I made sure that as much as possible of my funds would go directly into an account for twelve months of mortgage payments. After that, if my health did not rally, I was probably looking at foreclosure.

I was so antsy about the operation and the condo that I couldn’t just sit around and worry. So I decided to make
one more attempt at pitching the project. Underneath it all, I felt defeated, that deep down my life sucked. Trying to lift my spirits and not think of myself as an utter failure, my friends suggested that I send the book to Oprah. “At least give it a try,” they prodded me on. So I thought, “What the hell? If I hit it hard before going under the knife, sending out just one more Stain on the Brain package, maybe when I came to later on, I will have a miracle response expressing genuine interest.” It was a long shot, but on my way to the hospital, I posted a Stain on the Brain, the David Owen Story package to the ‘Big Dog,’ Oprah. Now, I had joined the ranks, as another desperate producer who wanted to get their project in front of Harpo Productions.
TOO BUSY TO REJECT

I would never see that D.O. pitch package again, but I thought at the least a rejection letter was protocol. I will admit to checking my answering machine the minute I walked through the door, hoping.

CATHOLICISM

My poor hands were so sore after the operation. The bandages had to be changed every four hours. Now I understood how a soldier, having a grenade go off in his hand, bore the horrible agony and fear his wounds would never close up and heal.

In order to alleviate the continuous low level throbbing, the doctor prescribed Percodan. I had no problem whatsoever partaking in pain relief. This would however cause an elevation in my blood sugars. I was a hamster on a wheel day and night, feeling tremendously frustrated as I tested my blood and changed the pump time and again. I looked like and was living like ‘the mummy.’
Thank God for my dad’s support.

When I was really down in the dumps thinking my life was over, Dad would tease me, “Hey, how about getting a side
job to bring in some extra money and keep your mind off of everything. You could work at the local ‘House of Horrors.’”

Most of my days were filled with watching mindless reruns on television; thank God for Green Acres and the Andy Griffith Show. If I was lucky enough to be awake at midnight, I had the pleasure of watching Hercule Poirot and Masterpiece Mysteries. Thank God for PBS.

As I couldn’t work a remote control yet, I would catatonically watch whatever channel was on, and it turned out that one of Dad’s favorite programs was on EWTN, a Catholic network I had never heard of. The program he loved to watch was hosted by this quirky, outspoken nun, Mother Angelica, who would sing praises to the Pope first, then move right into a rage about eternal damnation if one did not follow Church doctrine, and then finish with her finger pointed at the camera reminding us about the consequences of burning in the fires of hell. Before the two-minute commercial break, Mother Angelica would bring her face right up to the lens, and laugh hysterically while she told a really corny Catholic joke. It was all so surreal. Mother Angelica was a Catholic rock star in her own right with
fans all over the globe as the Catholic Network, EWTN, had a signal as strong as CNN.

I actually got hooked on watching her. She reminded me a cross between the Flying Nun and Don Rickles. But when she started preaching what I believed to be Catholic crap, I would go to the fridge.

One day she ended the show with her thought for the day,

“If we aren’t cleansed by the end of our days, then we will have to pass through the ultimate purification beyond death, which we call purgatory. We will then have to mourn and suffer to make up for what was lacking.”

CATHOLIC COUNTRY

After hearing Mother Angelica’s frightening message, I flashed back on the Sisters of Mercy and what they did to David Owen. I wasn’t sure if my anger was stemming from too
many painkillers running through my system, uncontrolled blood sugar swings, or scary memories bubbling up over the terror I also experienced attending a Catholic School. I looked back on the fear I had as a young girl during Catechism class. You would not want to face the tyranny of Sister Agnes Marie, who really did resemble the Wicked Witch of the West, warts and all. She made me believe that because I had committed a venial sin (I forgot to feed the neighbor’s cat and promised I would) I was going to purgatory forever.

Fed with my daily dose of Mother Angelica, I began to wonder if my own experience was another reason why I have been so dedicated to getting David’s story out.

Hearing his stories, I began to recognize my own suppressed ‘fear of God’, the same kind of fear that had David experienced his whole childhood. But I was able to go home to a loving family in a safe neighborhood with lush greenery and sidewalks. I can only imagine how my same ‘fear of God’ would have been, had my home been out in the dry, brown bush at Neerkol.

Dad would always try to placate me when I got that mad for no real reason. He was familiar with my different
behaviors, whether I was having an insulin reaction or a temper tantrum.

One day before falling asleep, I began to think about what my next move would be. I made up my mind. I was going to call EWTN the next morning and make an appointment to meet with Mother Angelica in person. I could drive to see her as soon as she had an opening on her calendar. After tuning in to her unabashed spiritual gumption everyday on television, I had no doubt that when we finally met, I could explain my Australian project and ask for counsel on how I should approach the Catholic Church asking for humanitarian assistance. I was not a nun, but I was a card holding lifetime member of the Catholic Church. This could not be taken away from me without a fight. I had attended fourteen years of Catholic schools, with six of the seven Sacraments under my belt. Extreme Unction was the only Sacrament I had left, but this could only take place on my deathbed. I figured, at least we weren’t living in the 14th century, so I didn’t have to be concerned about being burned at the stake for insubordination and heresy in my audacious petition, pleading for justice in David Owen’s case.

I called EWTN the next day and tried to be pleasant. I requested an appointment with Mother Angelica and was told
they would let me know. It took them two weeks to call me back, but it didn’t matter as I was given an hour slot with Mother Angelica at the end of the month. I was thrilled.

Dad was dead set against my taking the eight-hour drive to Alabama, as my doctor’s orders were implicit, “Stay put for at least another four weeks.” But I couldn’t be stopped. I was going to push forward on Stain on the Brain, at all costs. Exasperated with me, my father said, “What will it take for you to call it quits?”

Being the brat he allowed me to be with him, I teased, “Aw c’mon Dad... don’t you want to drive along with me and meet your girlfriend...?”

I had packed a cooler with insulin, the rest of my diabetes supplies, and now with the additional hand maintenance bandages, salve and aspirin when the inflammation of my 'still raw hand' flared up. I was prepared to tour EWTN and meet with Mother Angelica in person. I had my video camera ready to use with permission and the manuscript of Stain on the Brain, the David Owen Story.

Arriving at EWTN in Hanceville, Alabama, out in the middle of nowhere, I thought, “How interesting. Both of these Catholic compounds that were located in remote places, but the genteel Catholic digs in central Alabama compared to
Knocking on the big wooden door of the monastery, with at that point unbandaged right hand, an older nun answered, I was told that my meeting with Mother Angelica was cancelled. Her health was failing, and she would not take any visitors. I was so disappointed as I had such great expectations as to what could come of our meeting.

Before leaving I found a quiet bench and said a prayer for Mother’s health to return. I drove back home with two bottles of ‘blessed’ holy water, one for me, one for D.O..
David and I hadn’t spoken for quite some time as we really didn’t have much to talk about. There wasn’t anything to report on the project, and my health waned once again. We both understood that I was letting go. Doing anything more with *Stain on the Brain* didn’t look very promising for the year ahead.

As David knew that I was completely out of commission, maybe forever, he began his own marketing campaign Down Under. He was printing manuscripts and passing them out to anyone who showed interest in his story. This would include, park attendants, garbage collectors, and the women who ran the bakery in town. He didn’t care who they were, he just wanted to get his story out to as many people as possible.

One afternoon, I received a package in the mail from ‘D.O..’ There was a note with a smiley face drawn on it. David wanted me to see his updated presentation of the manuscript. The two hundred and fifty page document, which had been formatted and registered with the Writer’s Guild of America, was now laminated and adorned with a bright yellow hooker badge positioned above the title credits on the cover page. It was sad to see just how far down I had gone as a producer. But, I knew how to get my ego out of
the way and change my thought, “Hey it’s D.O.’s way, his life story, and most importantly he’s happy with it.”

Paper clipped to the manuscript were a few D.O. business cards. He had designed and laminated the card with a photo, a poem, and his contact information. I thought they were sweet, yet I was agitated. I couldn’t stop thinking like a producer, knowing how much money I had put into creating a professional presentation. With everything else out of control in my life, I was in no mood to see where my project had headed professionally. It tore me up.

D.O. called to ask me what I thought about the package. I replied, “You know David, it looks just like you. Good job.”

It would a long time before David and I would reconnect. It looked like Stain on the Brain was just not going to happen. If we ever spoke again, it might be years.

**THREE STRIKES**

The game was over. It was Strike Three time.

Strike One. My health was poor, and when I returned for a six-week follow-up appointment with the top-notch orthopedic surgeon, he took one look at my hands and said, “You know Jody I have done more than five hundred surgeries like this, and have had a 98% rate, that’s why patients
come to me. But with your hands? I am really shocked. I have never witnessed any surgery of mine so unsuccessful. Your hands are no better than when we started. In fact they look a little worse.” I couldn’t blame him, as I knew it all had to do with diabetes and my healing regime (or lack of). Shaking his head and stroking my palms and fingers, he shook his head and jested, “You know, with these hands, you’re making me look bad.”

Strike Two hit me even harder. The bankers were no longer outside, threatening foreclosure. They now had one foot stuck in the door jam telling me it was official. My condo had been foreclosed.

Strike Three. Whatever progress I had made in achieving my Doctorate was now useless. I would leave South Florida
UNREQUITED PASSION

I have always operated by jumping in first with passion, and then trying to figure out how I would make it to the finish line. This time however I was really scared. I tried hiding all of my insecurities, a process which in most of my previous experience I seemed to have been able to pull off by keeping myself genuinely enthusiastic and pretty fearless. This time, not thinking it through had horrid consequences. Having no regard for time, money or any semblance of a normal life as I proceeded with the project, a big chunk of my reality was swallowed up as I experienced tremendous emotional and physical pain. In the midst of this process, I felt myself at the edge of a depression so deep that my diabetes also took a turn for the worse. The final blow was the day I lost my house to the bank. A few days later, I found myself back in the ER at Mount Sinai being hospitalized with raging blood sugars. I had taken too big a hit; at this point I was truly defeated. As many doors seemed to shut around me, my instincts also froze up. Negative thinking played on my brain like a scratched
record skipping with the same question, “What is the matter with you?!? Have you lost your mind?!?”

It didn’t surprise me that I had to pay another visit to the Emergency Room at Mount Sinai. This time, I didn’t want to be released. The longer I could avoid reality the better. But I could not run away. Everything, my entire life, had to be removed from the condo by the end of the month.

I started with the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, in truth looking for whatever painkillers I might have left from the surgeries. Thank God there were only four left in the bottle, with no refills. I didn’t hesitate to put them to good use as I had a panic attack that lasted for seven hours. All the Percodan were gone by noon the following day. Talking to myself became a scary relief valve. I would burst into tears as I looked around and realized my life was ruined. One morning, while trying to sort through my things, I called my neighbor, crying so hard, she hung up her phone and quickly ran down the hallway. She found me sitting on the kitchen floor, thinking we were still having a phone conversation when I looked up to see her standing there looking at me. All of my friends were worried; this was the very first time they had ever seen me fall apart
like this, I was always their gleaming example of courage, to a fault.

It was true. I no longer had a roof over my head, and I had better figure out what to do next. I called everyone I knew to come to my ‘dissolution party’ and bring their truck, van or SUV. If they could haul it, they could have it.

While the friendly scavenging went on inside the condo, I walked over to the corner liquor store, found my friend Jose Cuervo and brought him home for the night. I figured, if I was going to sleep on my living room floor, it wasn’t going to be alone. And we would have some fun.

Before this nightmare was over, I considered getting a tattoo saying, ‘Fake it till you make it.’ There was such a hard road of uncertainty ahead for me, but ultimately I knew how to step carefully in keeping with a will to survive. God knows I had been doing it my whole life. D.O. and I were kindred spirits.

As I packed up the last remnants of my life before giving the keys to the bank, I sat down in the center of the living room and began to laugh. Was I nuts? I couldn’t help but think aloud, “This will not stop you from going forward with the story, ‘cause deep down in your gut, you know you’re right!” Somehow, I had to move forward. I packed it
up, handed off my keys to a very rude, rotten and ruthless bank, and loaded the U-Haul.

I was heading for Hollywood.
I got on the road with all the enthusiasm I could muster. I was still drained from my last days in Florida before leaving for Hollywood. I’ll admit my age and health kept me a little apprehensive about the journey ahead. I felt that even with GPS and cell phone technology, driving solo across the country might be a dangerous, but an unbelievably exciting undertaking. I was going to the West Coast with no clear idea what was ahead for me. Before I drove away, my friends gave me a special map pinpointing the best cities with easily accessible hospitals and emergency rooms, should I have to make an unexpected medical pit stop.

I was on my way to a new life, surprisingly with new hope and new energy. I was starting all over and with the idea that I could become the producer that I always believed I was. I intended to get *Stain on the Brain* to the next level by adapting the Australian orphanage survivor David Owen’s biography into a Hollywood screenplay. Believe it or not, I was sure I could make it happen.

I already had a clear idea of how I would approach the narrative.
I bought a mini cassette recorder for the drive. It was a good investment, as on the long uninteresting stretches of road, I would engage in the creative thought process. My goal was that by the time I arrived in L.A., I would have figured out exactly how to write the script. And then, once I got it down on paper, it wouldn’t be hard to sell, or so I thought. In my mind’s eye, I was dictating full scenes into my little helper recorder, with a great feeling of excitement as I visualized many of the compelling stories I had heard from D.O. Wanting to make sure that my stream of consciousness had structure, I always kept in mind one of the single most important tenets of screenwriting: if the scene does nothing to move the story forward, no matter how much you love it, take it out. With this in mind I had a dilemma, as I was attached to my own special scenes spanning seven decades of David’s life story. But these were not necessarily the best choices to sustain the momentum of the narrative.

My hardest task, first as a writer and then as a producer, which were two integral parts of the total filmmaking process, was to somehow make the parts work together, from opposing sides. Normally, the writer would not be concerned with the producer’s decisions about which scenes would make it to the final ninety-minute film. The only issue of
creative importance to the writer would be that the completed Australian two hundred and fifty-page biography (based on a true story) would be an all-inclusive cleverly scripted narrative. Many times, I found myself working with a dual sensibility of writer and producer, sometimes feeling a bit of borderline schizophrenia. I wondered, “How is it that Kevin Costner (*Dances With Wolves*), Sylvester Stallone (*Rocky*) and Goldie Hawn (*Private Benjamin*) hadn’t been diagnosed as certifiably crazy?”

**SCENIC AMERICA**

One of my favorite bathroom breaks took me off the interstate to some real Americana, Lafayette Louisiana. I gassed up and stretched my legs. I told the gas station clerk that I was looking for a store where I could get some food for the road. She never looked at me, she was much too busy slamming down a fudge cake and watching her soap opera. She kept her eyes focused on the television and pointed, “Go down the road a spell. There’s a super market.”
I pulled off of a newly tarred road. I couldn’t believe it. It was such a flash from the past. I pulled into the parking lot and looked up to see a real ‘piggly wiggly.’ I went in for protein bars and a few bananas. I came out with five bags of homemade Louisiana pork rinds.

**REVOLUTIONARY ROAD**

One of my last stops was outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was so tired from driving across Texas. I had no idea how long and boring that part of the trek would be. I felt lucky to find a low priced motel that had cable. The vacancy sign outside advertised “clean, no smoking rooms.” Clean and no rancid odor was key, and I could afford it.

When I opened the motel room door, the first thing I saw next to the bed was MAGIC HANDS, a coin-operated machine on the nightstand. For only fifty cents the mattress would vibrate, supposedly massaging your back as you watched television. Wow!

After digging through my purse for loose change, I stretched out on the mattress, trying to ignore the horrible pillows, and turned on HBO. A movie was just beginning called, *Revolutionary Road*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet and Kathy Bates. I missed the opening credits, but a few minutes into the film wouldn’t ruin it
for me. I was too tired to care anyway; I probably wouldn’t be able to keep my eyes open until the end.

So I opened my last bag of home made Louisiana pork rinds and popped two quarters into MAGIC HANDS. The mattress started thunderously convulsing and I couldn’t turn it down. It only had one setting. I laughed, “Of course Jody, if MAGIC HANDS looked like a 1960s invention, why wouldn’t it sound like a 1960s Hoover vacuum cleaner?” An automatic timer on the machine made it stay turned on for two hours. What a deal!

Tired to care, despite the noise, I drifted in and out of sleep, but really wanted to stay awake and concentrate on the film. Now in my screenwriting mode, I had the opportunity to hear powerful dialogue coming from A-list actors, and it was crucial that I pay attention. I turned up the volume so I could hear every word coming from Di Caprio. His lines were great. I laid back down feeling dizzy, but luckily coherent enough to realize I needed to check my blood sugar. It was a good thing because the number was much too high. It read 400. I knew the drill: hydrate, hydrate, hydrate, keep checking your blood and taking more insulin. I wasn’t going to the ER. I could do
this by myself. If not my cell phone had 911 programmed into speed dial.

Anyway, I highly recommend this movie for reflection.

A particular line struck a vein, leaving me to look carefully into my life’s journey at the time. I grabbed a piece of scratch paper and scribbled as fast as I could.

It went something like this:

Revolutionary Road
Set in the 1950s
Frank Wheeler is played by Di Caprio.

Frank Wheeler:
(Speaking into a 1950s dictation machine about the ‘Quandary in Life’)

(V.O.)
Knowing what you got (comma)
Knowing what you need (comma)
Knowing what you can do without (dash)
That’s inventory control.

PLASTIC SURGERY AND BENTLEYS
Back on the road with a strong cup of coffee and Crosby Stills, Nash and Young, time passed rapidly and all of a sudden I was about one hour outside of Los Angeles. I had a lot to think about. I was entering Hollywood, the movie capital of the world, with my dream of producing a real
motion picture. I was not arriving empty handed. I had a true Australian narrative already put into manuscript form, and I owned all personal story rights. But I had a lot of writing to do when I got to my friends’ place in Marina Del Rey where I had planned on staying for the next six months. LA could be so inspiring, seeing so many unorthodox artistic people everywhere, but also very intimidating with garish wealth, perfect white teeth, big breasts, lipo-suctioned everything, gargantuan diamonds and the mandatory West Coast nip and tuck that made every lady (or man) look younger than their grandchildren.

Yes Jody, you weren’t in Wisconsin, or even in Miami anymore. I felt that my world had suddenly become unpredictable, indefinitely, and I wasn’t sure I liked it. Excitement and fear kept my stomach rolling much as the foothills I was approaching. Interstate I-10 would be the last breathing space before I was swallowed up by LALA madness. Overwhelmed by the packed freeways and frenzied drivers, I stopped hyperventilating when I saw my exit sign for Venice Beach and Marina Del Rey and headed straight for the Pacific Ocean. What I didn’t realize, when the friends of a friend offered to let me stay with them, in order for me to seal up my Australian/Hollywood connections and write the screenplay, was that my new digs would be an entire
loft overlooking the ocean with a bedroom complete with a ladder that led up to a rooftop garden patio.

I had left Florida homeless and ended up in one of prime addresses in all of Los Angeles.

Not only the great view but also the Venice Beach bohemian lifestyle proved to be a good stimulus for writing, especially after I walked the beach promenade every morning with a mug of coffee, witnessing the insanity of humanity; snake charmers, tattoo voodoo shops, legal medical marijuana storefronts, groups of Japanese tourists snapping pictures of whatever, and the occasional ‘end-of-the-world’ preacher. I couldn’t wait to get back to safety of sorts.
For relief, all I had to do was go up the stairs to my quiet loft overlooking the ocean. I understood every day how privileged I was to live this kind of a dream, to produce a book and film overlooking the Pacific. There were so many colorful anecdotes to sort through with *Stain on the Brain* and decide which would better support the message of the film. Which genre would it fall into? Drama seemed to be the obvious answer. But I questioned the premise that if the focus of the film was only about Neerkol, a.k.a. the Gates of Hell, couldn’t it then fit into the horror genre?

It was time to get out there as a producer and pursue the ideas and connections I had established back in Florida. The timing of *Stain on the Brain* was in line with the US’s new Australian interest. The Outback Steakhouse franchise had built its name and lots of money using the Australian character, with tag lines such as *Shrimp on the Barbee*, and the *Bloomin’ Onion*. I started to relentlessly research, trying to find any Australian films shown in America that had been successful in terms of audience response and Hollywood’s reception. But my results weren’t very promising. I was looking for a way around what appeared to be a profound lack of interest in Australia. Of course, there were a few exceptions. One that came to mind is the cult film *PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT*, which was first
and foremost way ahead of its’ time, starring Hugo Weaving and Guy Pearce, who have become highly recognizable and accomplished A list actors from Down Under. I kept watching for any Australian films being shown in the US, but in every case, box office sales were minimal. The general consensus was that Australian films had a reputation of being rather flat and too culturally focused for American audiences.

**SWITCHING GEARS JUST IN TIME**

My first week in Hollywood I got up the nerve and called the Vice President of Development for Dune Entertainment, one the largest Australian film financing and production companies in Hollywood (*Avatar, X-Men Origins: Wolverine*). He had agreed to read the synopsis and a few scenes of my screenplay, *Stain on the Brain, the David Owen Story*. I got to this key Australian contact in Hollywood through my connection with the Australian Counsel General of Atlanta, who had become a strong advocate for David Owen’s story.

It would be my first real Hollywood production meeting. I was thrilled. We met at a tiny café around the corner from his office in the security-tight MGM skyscraper. After introductions, he began by politely handing me back my package, “Jody, it’s a compelling story, but you need to
forget about doing it with Hollywood, maybe you need to go back to Australia. As for Dune, I’m afraid I will have to take a pass.” (Hollywood-speak for no.). His script assessment was brutally honest; The David Owen Story would be a very tough sell. When I asked him why, he told me flat out that nobody was interested because in a movie about orphanage sexual abuse of children. Now I think that it was one of the most important things anyone did for me during my Hollywood time.

I will never forget that day. It was only my first week in Hollywood, and already my filmmaking direction had undergone a complete change. Dune Entertainment’s wisdom had turned around my whole way of thinking as a producer. God bless them.

I began to put together a totally different strategy and it went like this:

I scrapped the tragic ninety-minute screenplay focusing on child sex abuse in an Australian bush orphanage. Instead, I created a treatment for a seven-episode television mini-series. Now, the seventy years of David Owen’s life story would be broken up into seven parts, each filled with inspiring drama with a smattering of laughs along the way. Each episode could cover a decade of D.O.’s life. So the
audience could tune in to cliffhangers that would include, prison, Rugby League, headhunter attacks, reuniting with his mum after forty years, all the way to a fifty two-page submission to the UN in Geneva defending the rights of a child.

*Stain on the Brain* would no longer be all about Neerkol!"
The treatment took a little over eight weeks to complete. As I had much of the dialogue already in place after writing the biography, writing the synopsis and the television treatment for seven episodes--with character breakdowns--came easily.

Using a bit of creative license made the narrative work:
The main character, David Owen was still the central figure and Australian storyteller who would drive the episodes. D.O. at the age of seventy would relate his life to a fictional character, a famous, *American* over-the-hill, recluse romance novelist (ala Barbara Cartland) who was in the throes of losing her Manhattan co-op overlooking Central Park and every material possession she had accumulated in her writing heyday. Threatened with financial ruin, she needed to come up with new book. Learning about David’s story, she decided to use it for her comeback book. She would go to Australia, meet David, and
produce the narrative. For many of the episodes, their characters, coming from such different backgrounds, would clash. But in the end a new friendship would be formed based on discovering each other’s parallel needs. This would all happen, as D.O.’s true story would unfold.

I thought that the two-character focus of the mini-series could facilitate my ability to pitch the idea to Australians living in Hollywood. Now I would need two stars: an Australian David Owen and an American Margaret Collins. These two A-list actors would face off in every episode, but only in the beginning, with the remainder of each episode done in flashbacks. Hopefully this would be an attractive plus in the stars’ performance time needed on set, as their entire time spent on the shoot could entail one eight hour day (doing all seven episode openings, one after another.) Now all I needed to do was secure the lead star to play D.O. (Russell Crowe or Clint Eastwood) and find a perfect Margaret (Annette Bening or Meryl Streep).

Before I went to bed every night, I would climb the ladder to the rooftop and look up at the stars. I visualized effortlessly casting big Hollywood names for Stain on the Brain, The David Owen Story mini-series. I whispered to the heavens, “Why not?”
As I worked on the episodes, I was also researching different television venues to present the David Owen Story. I became a frequent viewer of HBO, SHOWTIME and PBS. I noticed that A-List stars were increasingly taking roles on the television screen and were not taking on so many big screen parts. It seemed like the film industry was changing from boy meets girl films to large franchised comic book hero films, or vampire slasher films. The current Hollywood studio climate was tough for stars that had real acting ability, and there were few enticing roles available for them.

I thought long and hard about a how an Australian/Hollywood collaborative could work. I believed wholeheartedly, even before I found myself traveling to LA, that actors Russell Crowe, Hugh Jackman (who was also on the of People magazine as Hollywood’s sexiest man), Nicole Kidman and Naomi Watts might find Stain on the Brain an interesting project. I thought that, if presented properly, Stain on the Brain would at least pique their interest. I remembered reading that one of the biggest box-office draws, Cate Blanchett, and Academy Award winning director Peter Weir (Witness), made money in Hollywood and then took it back to Australia to invest in potential projects they were interested in producing.
A CRAZY WORKABLE STRATEGY

I still had a notion that if I could make the series as an American producer with an Australian true story that I could keep some ‘Hollywood’ while interweaving a colorful Australian story with a historical timeline of seventy years in diverse locations and period wardrobes. This could work, and if it did, it would pull audience interest from the US, Australia and the UK (actually all English speaking countries.)

Back at the loft, now that the mini-series treatment was written, I could actually have a beach day. Walking the shoreline was a good way to clear out my head, and it was also a good diversion to my anxiety in what to do next. Serendipitously I didn’t have to do a thing as I had already planted the seeds back in Florida with my Australian connections before I headed west, and now the momentum started to happen. The next day I received an invitation to G’DAY LA, the weeklong US promotion for everything Australian. Other invitations to Australian events began to come in. I was invited to attend the Aussie Film Industry Conference and Trade Exhibit, members only. And after a full day of networking, I had meetings set up with every Australian organization doing business in LA.
The Australian Consulate sent me on to the Australian Trade Commission and then on to their Creative Industry’s arm, the Australian Film Commission. My project Stain on the Brain, The David Story barely made it into the Hollywood machine; yet was being passed from one Australian Government office to another after reading the two hundred and fifty page manuscript, a huge feat in itself. When it reached the final destination of the Ausfilm LA office, the Film Commissioner read the Australian biography, and after hearing the true-life story of David Owen, she laughed and cried, and saw it’s potential as a book and a film. She was pleased to hear that I had adapted it into a seven-part television mini-series in Hollywood. (Little did she know that the Hollywood screenwriter was me.)

It took months before I would finally pick up Ausfilm LA’s letter of recommendation, which had been forwarded on to the Sydney office, and also sent on to Screen Queensland, another funding arm of the Australian film industry. The biggest challenge I would face now was the fact that I was an American producer with an Australian story; and in order for the true Aussie story to get funded I would need to have an Australian production company that would act as an umbrella in order to secure the funding that could be made available for Stain on the Brain.
July 23, 2010

RE: JODY JACKSON RECOMMENDATION

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to provide a reference for American writer and producer Ms. Jody Jackson regarding her optioned film project on the life of Mr. David Owen.

Ms. Jackson demonstrates a keen awareness of Australian culture and I believe her film will create jobs for Australian talent and crews in addition to providing an insightful record of our recent history.

Sincerely,

Tracey Vieira
Film Commissioner, Ausfilm
With Ausfilm’s support now, I told myself, “Just go back to Dune with your news.” However, I was way out of order, as when I called them and explained my latest development with Ausfilm, they were cordial, but reserved. They sincerely wished me luck on the project, but admitted that they truly were not at all interested. This was a big blow, but I really didn’t feel totally rejected. I continued to feel deeply grateful for their wise counsel when I first arrived in LA. Later on when I got quiet with myself, I realized how ridiculous I must have seemed to them, as they only worked with mega-movies having multi-million dollar budgets.

After living in LA for a few months it became very clear to me that the movie industry, whether in California or Australia, definitely revolved around Hollywood, California. And if a neophyte producer was serious about succeeding, they would also have to live in Hollywood. Australia came to Los Angeles to court Hollywood; I came to Hollywood to court Australia.

One of my more discouraging, and I suppose typical experiences in LA was with Mel Gibson’s production company, Icon. Before coming to Hollywood, I had some crazy idea that when I got there I would be able to speak with someone
in their office. I drove to their offices in Santa Monica, which was a simple unassuming building having major high-end security. I just wanted to drop off a Stain on the Brain package. But I didn’t even get to speak to the security guard. He came through the intercom and said, “If you don’t have an agent, don’t bother.” This happened before Mel fell out of favor with all of Hollywood, big time, as he was pulled over on the Pacific Coast Highway, drunk and screaming about how the Jews had killed Jesus. His anti-Semitic public rage cost him his reputation and any future work, as most of the decision makers in Hollywood are largely made up of a Jewish population. I had to cross Mel Gibson off my wish list. He was a pariah and had gone underground.

Now that I had the biography and television treatment, I was following any angle possible. Failing with Mel Gibson, I approached a friend who lived in Topanga and was part of a drumming circle where she had casually met Nicole Kidman and Naomi Watts, who also lived in the Canyon. I would try to meet her for dandelion tea (yucch) at this little funky cafe built into the side of a big rock before her drumming began, always hoping for an Australian celebrity spotting, keeping a Stain on the Brain package in my satchel. It never happened, no spottings. The closest I ever came to
even hearing an Aussie accent was from Greg, the busboy from Adelaide.

Then I joined Women in Film, Los Angeles. The initial dues were a bit pricey, but I thought it would be a good connection into the Hollywood filmmaking community. I attended a few events; mostly breakfast meetings in Beverly Hills. The speakers were always interesting, but without sounding mercenary, at forty dollars admission for coffee and a croissant, I was never able to make any beneficial connections. The closest I got to something significant was attending the yearly Women In Film LA membership meeting where I sat next to award-winning top Hollywood Producer, Marion Rosenberg. When she got up to speak and discussed her last film, *Revolutionary Road*, I immediately flashed back to Albuquerque, *MAGIC HANDS*, the awesome screenwriting and my deliriously scratching down a stanza. When Marion returned to her seat, I leaned over and whispered, “*Revolutionary Road* was a marvelous film.” She smiled and nodded. I smiled back but had my own reason for the compliment. “By the way, how did you come up with that amazing dialogue?” She began, “I was an executive producer, so I didn’t have much input…” Before she could finish her answer, a cackling flood of starlets surrounded her, shoving their headshots in her hands and asking for a
photograph. Her personal assistant immediately stepped in and whisked her way. Almost out of the door she looked back at me, “Sorry Jody, but it’s always like this.”

I drove back to the loft, went directly up to my makeshift desk under the ladder that opened to the sky and slowly reread the first and last episodes for *Stain on the Brain*. I still thought it was good.

Then, one day, I got a call from the Director of Women in Film LA’s Mentor Program, “Jody!! I have found the perfect mentor for you. She is a Hollywood powerhouse with an amazing resume, seventy years old; an entertainment attorney turned motion picture producer with four Academy Awards, serves on the Executive Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science. She came out of retirement and is now Director of UCLA Department of Film, Television and Digital Media.”

I had an appointment to meet with my mentor Barbara Boyle at UCLA. My hopes were really high. As she was also a mature woman, I thought that I would be meeting with someone who could understand what I was doing in LA, even at such a later time in my life. I couldn’t wait to connect. In the meantime, luck seemed to continue in my favor. The episodes flowed quite easily. I was on a sound
routine, and even my health was cooperating. Everyday I would have a good breakfast, take a short walk along the beach and then get to work. The day came for me to meet my new mentor. I found a parking meter and hoped that three hours of quarters would be enough to cover the time I was to have with Barbara Boyle on the UCLA Campus. I felt good about being back in academic surroundings; it gave me a nice comfort level. I was shown into Ms. Boyle’s office. After hearing her credentials, I thought that if anyone would be able to point me in the right direction, she could. Well in the end this was the farthest thing from the truth. After she listened to my story of wanting to find a production company that would see my ‘worth’ and bring me on board, she looked directly in my eye and said, “You are kidding yourself, you realize. No one will hire you in Hollywood based on what you are telling me. No internships. No unpaid internships. No high-end volunteer positions. Don’t you see the ages of the kids out there that have just come out of film school at USC and UCLA? Not to mention the new transplants from NYU?”

I was pretty angry with her response. I didn’t owe her a damn thing at that point, and as I looked across the room at a wall filled with her posing with what seemed every known director, star, producer etc.— from Clint Eastwood
to Ron Howard, from Spielberg to Oliver Stone-- I pointed to her ‘Wall of Fame’ and asked, “Are you going to tell me with all of these pictures and your connections, you couldn’t or wouldn’t open even a crack in one of any of these doors, given my situation?” She sternly pushed back, “Absolutely not. Do you realize that every one of those people on that wall all have kids that want to be in the movie business, and then all of those children have friends just coming out of film school, and those friends have friends? You would not even make it on the very bottom of the list.”

She walked me to her door and said, “As your mentor, I’m only here to guide you while you’re in Los Angeles. My advice? Go back to Miami and get your Ph.D..”

This was a real blow! My ‘so-called’ Women in Film mentor threw me into a real negative spin. I now felt that any effort to work creatively was a no-go. And my blood sugars began to take a roller coaster ride without any warning. LA was beginning to make me feel like a real outsider, and with my health going downhill, I felt that was being pushed further away from my goal.
Mind, Body and Spirit is Real

I’m not sure how much of a negative influence the meeting with my ‘so-called mentor’ affected my stress levels, but the whole next day and into the night I kept taking insulin to bring down some rather high blood sugar readings. Worrying about what to do next, I gave myself until midnight for positive results or I would drive myself to the emergency room at Cedars Sinai in Beverly Hills. As it happened, the sugars wouldn’t come down and I knew I needed professional medical help. I had slipped into ketoacidosis and needed to be hooked up to an IV drip until I could be stabilized. I thought about all of the ups and downs of life in LA as a ‘producer’ with no ‘wins’, I was falling into a deep depression. I felt it coming. “I was just too old for this shit,” I told myself. I could see myself joining the ranks of the ‘barely surviving’ very soon. I never thought that I would be living in LA with so many people around me, yet feeling so absolutely alone. Granted, I was inside a fishbowl where everyone wanted to be a ‘star,” but the most disheartening part of the Hollywood experience was feeling surrounded by neurotic behavior everywhere I looked, probably caused by the overwhelming competition to be recognized. I could see why the yellow pages were filled with psychotherapists, drug
and alcohol rehab centers and tons of plastic surgeons. The self-help industry was alive and well in LALA land, treating every kind of neurosis imaginable. So with all that I had experienced as a producer thus far, it wasn’t hard to find a neighborhood therapist with a good address.

**WHAT’S A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN?**

I was referred to a top psychiatrist affiliated with UCLA, Dr. Robert Carroll. He was not taking new patients, but when he heard my desperation after getting out of the emergency room at Cedar’s Sinai, treated for ketoacidosis, he actually agreed to meet with me. I think he realized that the fragile state of mind and body of a disillusioned producer and severely distraught Type 1 Diabetic were at a critical level.

He handed me a Kleenex while I sniffed, “Doctor Carroll, why don’t you just commit me now and get it over with? Please!” But he didn’t, and every week I had a standing appointment with him. Boy, did I need it. By the end of each seven day period I couldn’t wait to see my first real ‘friend and confidant,’ in LA. I knew, of course, that our relationship was strictly ‘professional.’ But I was just happy to have him in my court.

I was sure I must not have been the first ‘Hollywood’ patient he had to regularly talk off the ledge.
Our sessions would begin by focusing on my chronic health issue, for about the first twenty minutes. Then we left the last ten minutes for me to update him on my career, any production job prospects, and what was happening (or not happening) on Stain on the Brain. Week after week, he sat patiently listening to me rant over my latest talent agency query and immediate rejection by a haughty twit: “Thanks, but no thanks, and please don’t call us again.” Dr. Carroll would always reply, “Don’t take it personally, it’s just Hollywood.”

One day he leaned back in his chair and gave me a great casting idea, “How about getting that guy who played Crocodile Dundee and the blonde, I think she’s his wife, who was his counterpart in all of those films. At least we know they work well on screen together and they both have to be in their late 60s early 70s now.” I really thought the combination of the two stars would be a winner. I went back to my computer, looked on IMDB and found the agents who represented them. This was the best part of being in LA as a producer, as you could actually ‘take’ a meeting should you ever get a return call.
THE LAST NO SHOWDOWN

I was so excited about the prospect of the combination of Paul Hogan and Linda (Kozlowski) Hogan. As the Hogans lived in Malibu, I thought that after reading the mini-series synopsis, they would be intrigued to perhaps work together again and in a very unique way. *Stain on the Brain, the David Story* had all of the trappings that could be a perfect fit. I contacted their respective managers. One representative of Hogan liked the synopsis and the idea enough to ‘take a meeting’ with me. I was to meet him at the Peninsula Hotel where a cup of tea was fifteen dollars (with 2 butter cookies on the side of the saucer.)

I parked about five blocks away and walked, so that I would not be near the front drive valet with my 1998 Nissan. I
dressed nicely however and I looked like I fit in the tearoom.

I waited and waited. Two hours passed and I was still nursing my cup of tea. Finally I just gave up. I left the grand entrance and said to myself, “OK, have you had enough yet? Pack it up and go back to Florida. That’s it!! No more abuse.”

I called my sister back in Florida and said, “Can I come for a visit?”

Back at the loft, I cleaned up all of my last minute incidentals and scraped together every cent I had to get new tires on the car. But all had not been in vain. Added to the boxes of *Stain on the Brain* being pulled along behind me, I now had 1) the David Owen biography, 2) a very workable television treatment for a seven part mini-series, and 3) a newly acquired letter of the endorsement from Ausfilm LA.

I got prepared as best I could for the long haul back to Florida. This didn’t bother me much, as I had already experienced the cross-country trek. Driving back, I thought, “Why don’t I just give up this Hollywood nonsense and take a job as an over-the-road trucker cruising the country, making short films between stops?”
Billy Joel sang, “Say goodbye to Hollywood, say goodbye my baby.”
I loved that tune.

(2011-2012)

**WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS**

My saving grace was staying close to the University of Miami (possibly the furthest distance on the globe from my story in Australia). Committee Chair, Dr. Steve Stein was crucial at every stage. This interdisciplinary endeavor would never have been accomplished without his superlative
guidance. He was the academic equivalent of a sensitive director; his experience in film and training in history has definitely strengthened my ability to be a filmmaker/historian addressing the critical issues of *Stain on the Brain*, *The David Owen Story* and its illumination of children’s rights and the abuse of power.

**JUSTICE?**

Just when I had almost arrived at the light at the end of my tunnel, D.O. called during Christmas last year to wish me a happy holiday and wondered if I would be spending it alone. When I asked him how he was doing he said, “I’ll just come out with it. I had stroke walking up to Hamilton to do shopping. The ambulance came and rushed me to hospital for a fortnight.” He didn’t sound much like himself. He seemed so weary, He said he needed to tell me something, “I was so crook and I didn’t want to tell you what was happening. You were going through your own health problems. Well after going through that, I realized that I had no burial arrangement set up. I was in such a panic over it all JJ, I haven’t been myself since.” I said, “Oh my God D.O. I am so sorry to hear this.” I was distraught that couldn’t do anything to help out. I couldn’t even help myself. He continued, “Well there’s more to the story. I needed money to make some final arrangements, so I had to
call the Sisters of Mercy and ask for the settlement they
gave to the other orphans. You know, the settlement I
wouldn’t take when I believed I would get my day in court.”
Earlier, he had angrily rejected this option as he felt it
wouldn’t bring true justice. Probably the fact that Bishop
Heenan, who at the beginning of David’s horror story had
denied all claims of child abuse at the orphanage later
recast his position with a public apology, made it easier
for David to agree to the settlement. In the end, it was
Bishop Heenen who signed the check.
We spoke a week later after he shared his news. He thought
I was upset with him for what he had done. I said, “Are you
kidding me? Thank God that they were there for you, funny
how things turn around.” But then David started sputtering
again over ‘the fuckin’ televised public apology from
Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and the ‘stinkin’
apology from the Pope. In reality, I was so happy to hear
D.O. back in form. But I said, “Gosh D.O. that was years
ago. Don’t you think you could finally let it go?”
The Pope announced the apology in Rome yesterday, ahead of his 20-hour flight to Sydney for World Youth Day. "It is essential for the church to prevent, to reconcile, to help," he said. It is not the first time the Pontiff has used an international visit to address the issue. In the US earlier this year, the Pontiff pledged to heal the Church from the damage done by sexual abuse there. (The Telegraph, Garry Linnell, May 8, 2008.)
Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to apologize to Forgotten Australians who grew up in brutal institutions. Rudd says the nation looks back in shame that so many children were left cold, hungry and alone. (Herald Sun, Matthew Schultz AAP, November 16, 2009)

David’s answer to these apologies? “NO!” David Owen still shouts out, “It just doesn’t cut it!”

I call D.O. periodically, just to check in, and hearing him is sometimes very painful for me. “Hey David, you o.k.?” There is a distant silence at first. He perks way up when he knows it’s me. “Oh JJ! The ankle is killin’ me, but I’ll be right. I’m just waiting to go to the Valley of the Bones anyway. There’s nothing left. The fire has gone out of my belly.”

But I never let him get away with it, “Aw, ya baldy old bastard, you’re a survivor, remember?” I try to bring him right out of his funk, “You’ll probably outlive us all! Go
ahead, have your pity party and be done with it ‘cause I want you to know, I have NOT given up.” When he hears this I can almost see his smile through the telephone line. But on some days?

Often I’m the one depressed, with feelings of failure of letting D.O. down. What we wanted to happen never did. Life has moved on. I wonder: should I boast or whine when I realize I have devoted a decade of my life to his arduous saga which I believe has held me spiritually captive?

For David Owen, Australian Orphanage Survivor and Child Rights Advocate it represents his entire lifetime. So the end scene is still heaven compared to walking that dusty trail to hell, Neerkol.
IN THE END, WHAT IS THE DISSERTATION AFTERALL?

You’re probably thinking...

“This is a totally unconventional discourse ending.”

However, I believe I have demonstrated how historical biography is possible in many forms and voices. My “final chapter,” or journal, is now the first chapter of my dissertation. It ended up being the raw emotional walkabout of a producer and writer as she went about translating the voice of a functional illiterate man, allowing him to release all of the years of pain, then...
putting it into a book form, and finally adapting his life story into a screenplay.

If I have been successful, my work will have an impact, in the way Doris Lessing, Zimbabwean–British novelist, poet, playwright, biographer and short story writer explains it:

“...that is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood your whole life, but in a new way.”

-Doris Lessing

Nobel Prize Literature 2007

The Four-Gated City, 1969.

END

EPILOGUE

MATES

I said, “Maybe after I receive my Ph.D., I could come over and we could celebrate.” Suddenly the telephone line began beeping. It was a sixty-second warning that the phone card was about to run out of time. It had us both laughing, remembering all of the times during our phone sessions we would hear the beep and abruptly get cut-off while he was
in mid-sentence baring his soul. This time we were savvy on the beep routine, so I quickly said goodbye. “Hey D.O., one last request. Could you recite that poem about the Wattle Tree? You know, the one that always made me smile?” I knew that this was his favorite. It reminded him of the day he met Mum for the first time. They sat on the park bench together, holding hands surrounded by the fragrant smell of blossoms from a Wattle Tree. And it’s the resilient Wattle Tree that stands up to Australia’s cruel droughts, winds and brushfires, just like D.O. stood up, almost from the day he was born. And for Australians, like D.O., that same Wattle Tree means remembering and reflecting.

He chirped,

“Sing a song of Wattle time
sing of sweet September…”

But before he could finish Ma Bell stepped in.

‘CLICK.’
Australian Orphanage Survivor and Child Rights Advocate David Owen, age 10.

Sing a Song of Wattle Time
Sing of Sweet September...
Sunny Days and Scented Nights
Pleasant to Remember...
When the Sunshine Smiles in Spring
Sprays out Wattle Berries...
You Can Smell the Perfume Sweet
As the Breeze is Bearing.

FADE TO BLACK
Road to Neerkol
The Senate Community Affairs References Committee

“Forgotten Australians” August 2004

A REPORT ON AUSTRALIANS WHO EXPERIENCED

INSTITUTIONAL CARE AS CHILDREN

Any nation that does not care for and protect all of its children does not deserve to be called a nation.

-Nelson Mandela
STAIN ON THE BRAIN - The David Owen Story*
(as told to Jody Jackson)

CHAPTER LIST

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Pearlie Owen my grandmother lived in a place called Kidston, in North Queensland, about two hundred miles from Cairns. It was a gold mining town of about 60 to 80 people and was situated between the Knobs and the Copperfield River. This was across Charlie’s Creek where the good soil from the western side settled out. It had about four hotels and a police station.

Kidston was a mining town, but the place was also rich in farming, vineyards and dairying. The biggest problem the people faced out there was lack of transportation and communication. This didn’t hold them back one bit. The women and men were tough as iron.

Painting a picture of 1938, Grandma Pearl chuckled as she spoke of life back then. There were lots of cattle duffers out and around the countryside. Typhoid and malaria were common. The pubs in town had fights and blues going on most every night. Miners from all over the world were there: Chinamen, Germans, Yugoslavs, and of course the tough brawny Aussie. They all had come to Kidston to get the “big nugget” and make themselves rich.
Each week there was a Saturday night dance. With so many scattered properties around the township girls used to come from all over. They would arrive by car, horse and cart, and on horseback.

There were many blues between the miners, over things like, whose lady was better looking, accusing one another of cattle duffing and trying to spec on each other’s mine rights. It was also known to have a drink laced with arsenic handed to the loser of the fight.

Pearlie Owen held nothing back. In 1937, times were hard and Pearlie’s mum, Great Grandma Campbell ran a boarding house to bring in extra money. Pearlie had split up from her husband Billy Owen, as she had fallen in love and gone off with another man, Fred Hambrook. She bore two girls by him, Thora and Gladdy and made no beans about it, never hiding it from Billy. Grandma used to boast about being a jealous woman and her scorn that came out when it came to her men. She would joke heartily, “...After I killed off two men, I decided to marry the next two I had.”

Pearlie never did have one bad word to say about Billy. They always remained good friends. He was a good man and father, as he looked after their three kids; Katie, Roy and Lancy, paying for their shelter, clothing and food while
they stayed with Pearl’s mum at her boarding house in town. Me mum Katie was about twelve at the time and worked as a domestic in her Grandma Campbell’s boarding house. Her job as a domestic was to make the beds and wash the floors. She also had the task of walking over to the Kidston Police Station every week to pick up the Constable’s soiled laundry for washing and ironing. When Katie would pick up the dirty clothes, she would always have to remove the policeman’s badge off of his shirt—Badge 3322.

One day in 1937, while returning the clean laundry to the police station, little Katie was forcibly raped. The little girl might not have been slight of build but she surely was no match for the crushing force of the big strong man. All she could mutter from memory afterwards was the Badge Number...3322. It was an admission that would disgrace and haunt her and her family for many years after. She had no chance you see. He was a very powerful figure in the town. A man so ruthless and cunning that her story would never be properly investigated, much less believed. This man would hide his own guilt as he personally conducted the investigation of the crime. Mum would make sure she never forgot who did this to her, so she wrote the badge number
on the top of her birth certificate. It is the only proof I have that I did have a father and she knew who it was.

When Katie returned to Grandma’s boarding house and confessed what had just happened to her, Grandma didn’t believe her. Constable 3322 was too highly thought of in Kidston to ever think of such an accusation. Katie, being a shy and timid girl, would not bring the subject up again to anyone. As the months wore on, she began to put on more weight. She hid it well, but soon the truth would come out. Pearlie would come over to visit her children at the boarding house, never realizing that her daughter might be in trouble. She just thought Katie was getting fat.

It was Billy Owen who came to visit his children and was shocked to find his daughter in such trouble and needing help. He took his daughter to the hospital in Cairns. It was here where little Katie remained in the maternity ward for 54 days.

While Katie was in the hospital, a group of young nurses kept rounds to make sure she was looked after. The head nurse, Mrs. Guinane told me years later just how innocent and inexperienced me mum really was. She would look in on her and find her propped up in bed reading comics. She didn’t talk a lot. But you could see that she was pretty
naïve and uneducated when it came to worldly things, including having a baby. It was as if she didn’t know much about anything. She was a child herself.

Back in Kidston, Pearlie and Grandma Campbell got into a big donnybrook about Katie’s situation. Pearl blamed her mum for the whole mess. She thought her mum had not taken proper care of the granddaughter to have her in such a state. They never spoke to one another again.

As it occurred, Pearlie’s de-facto Mr. Hambrook, agreed with his partner, that Katie and the baby would come back to live with them and their two daughters. They would help her raise the child. Pearl Owen let this be known to her daughter Katie in the Cairns Hospital, along with Badge 3322 at the Kidston Police Station.

The one person, however, who knew nothing of Pearl’s plans for Katie and the baby, but was financially responsible for the debt incurred, was my grandfather, Billy Owen. Being the Head Stockman on Carpenteria Downs, gave him a lot of responsibility and trust. People respected him. However he had no real education, so he discussed his daughter’s situation with the Manager of Carpenteria Downs and asked for advice. They both agreed that Billy could not keep the daughter and the baby with him on the station due to his
living arrangements and financial situation. The Manager advised Billy that the only alternative was to place the baby into an institution. Billy could not read or write so the Manager wrote the letter to the State Children’s Department of Townsville requesting an application to admit the child into an institution. At this point, there was no other alternative.

Upon receiving Billy’s request, the State wrote back wanting to know more information regarding who was the father of the child and who would pay for the support of the child in the institution. This correspondence went back and forth between them for quite a few months while Katie and the baby were still in the hospital with no one paying for their keep.

In order to complete the transaction between the State Department and my grandfather, the case had to be placed, once again, in the hands of the Kidston Police. They were told to finish the investigation into who raped my mother and forward the final report to the Department.

Imagine the outrage I felt when I received the Freedom of Information documents, and enclosed in the final police report that actually put me into that hellhole, was the
signature of Badge 3322, the very man that both mum and grandma told me was my father.

Back in Cairns, little Katie sat in her hospital bed for two and a half weeks before giving birth. The poor little girl did not know what was to come on that 21st day of July 1938, as Dr. Guinane called the matron and nurses together. He informed them that due to the child’s small frame, this would be the first time a Cesarean birth would be performed at the Hospital.

The operation was successful and by all reports, I was a very healthy, well-adjusted newborn. The doctor was so proud of me; he would take me on his rounds and show me off when he visited his other patients.

While Katie got stronger in the hospital, she looked forward for her and the baby to return home to Kidston, but she still hadn’t named me. My birth certificate would become official two months later in September. I was given the name David Robert Owen.

The State Children Department of Townsville report, in collaboration with the Cairns Police Department one month after I was born, shows information stating that Katie, a thirteen-year-old minor, was questioned by a Constable 1083
as to who the father was. Can you imagine it being your own
daughter? A frightened little girl, who had been raped by a
constable, being questioned without any adult witness to
protect her innocence? What law back then would let a minor
be questioned without her guardian being present? As to
upholding the Infant Life Protection Act, which the
authorities pressured my family with, was this upheld? The
report also stated that she wouldn’t say who the father was
or any action for support. Mum told me much later that she
was too frightened to even talk to the police about
anything.

Now back in Kidston, before Pearl left to pick Katie and
the baby up to bring them home she was now confronted by
Badge 3322. He let her know that she could bring the
daughter home, but she could not bring the baby home. He
went on to say that before she could pick up her daughter
she had to call in to the Cairns Police Station.

When she arrived at the Cairns Police Station to inquire
about picking up her daughter and the baby, the Inspector
of Police told her that she could not take the baby with
her. She was officially warned that if she took the baby,
she would be had up for kidnapping and would get fifteen
years jail.
Pearl was dumbfounded to hear this. She went directly on to the hospital and left the car parked out in front. When the Matron of the hospital and Katie came down to meet her, the Matron said, “What about the baby?” Pearl exploded. She told her that the police said she could not take the baby. Of course, Katie believing that she was taking the baby home with her, heard what Grandma said and turned on her heels. She ran back up into the hospital, grabbed me out of the cot and wouldn’t let anyone touch me.

They sedated her and carried her out to the car. I never saw her again. It’s a shame to think that after being taken from her arms so long ago, I would not hear my name called again for the next fourteen years. I would just hear a Number...34.

Pearl and Katie had to go back to Kidston where the neighbors had prepared a welcome home barbecue for Katie and the baby. The party was cancelled when the bad news spread through the community, there was no baby.

A week or so after Katie was at home, a few ladies mentioned to Grandma that they would’ve adopted the baby, but they knew the father was Badge 3322 and they didn’t want to involve themselves in the scandal. After hearing this news, and as a last resort of wanting to find a home
for the baby, Pearl went to the local Catholic priest. She paid him a sum of money to make an announcement from the pulpit asking if anyone would like to adopt a baby boy. When the Sunday service was held, there was no announcement. After the service Grandma waited behind and had words with the priest. She never, ever went back to the Catholic Church again.

With absolutely no help from the church now, Pearlie was really, really angry. Poor grandma got so mad that she went in to a crowd one day and slapped Badge 3322 across the face in front of everyone. She confronted him as to the fact that he was the father of her daughter’s baby. He then accused her of spreading rumours around the town and locked her up in jail for the weekend.

Grandma wildly laughed about this, saying she didn’t mind being locked up because she let him and everyone in earshot know that he was the father, but with him it was just denial, denial, denial.

She took pleasure in letting me know just how rough the jails were back in those days. “You only had bread and water. You slept on a cement floor on a bare mattress with a blanket to throw over you.” She remembers, “All you had to shit in was a dirty stinkin’ pan in the corner of the
cell. They would clean it out and give you a fresh one if you wanted it. There was no privacy. Constable 3322 made sure of that."

The times were wild, but so was grandma. Cattle duffing was a big business back then. As it happened one day, the police were looking for stolen cattle and Grandma happened to have three of them in her back yard. She swears she didn’t bother paying for them ‘cause they were given to her. The police tried to throw her in jail for this, but she put up a bloody fight. They didn’t take her cows away when she threatened to put a piece of hot lead between their bloody eyes. Now it makes more sense to me why my blood comes to the boil.

Sadly enough, Pearl would stay close with her daughter Katie, but she was never able to get back together with her own mum. Grandma Campbell had a nervous breakdown over their bad blood. She left Kidston never to be heard of after that.

There are so many questions unanswered in my documents from the Freedom of Information Act that at times it has made it impossible to separate my overwhelming grief from the shock of it all.
What a terrible situation my poor grandfather Billy was put into, just trying to do the right thing. I can only sympathize with him, as a grown man with my own obligations, wondering how hard it must have been for him to make the decision to send his own grandson to a State Institution. Again, at the time, he had no other choice. I get angry just to think of it!

Before going out to a cattle muster, Billy made sure that he handled the situation with the authorities the best he could. With the help of the Station Manager, he sent back the application with a letter of explanation to the State Children’s Department immediately. He knew he could not pay for the baby’s upkeep at the hospital, as Katie was no longer there. In fact, I didn’t leave the hospital until mid-December, almost four months after my mum had been discharged.

Mrs. Guinane, that lovely nurse who came into my life several years ago, told me that during those four months while I lived at the hospital, people in authority would inquire as to where the Owen baby was. She and the nurses, knowing that they were trying to put me into an institution, would make excuses as to my whereabouts and keep me hidden.
On November 18th, The State Children’s Department in Brisbane put its final stamp on Billy’s application for the baby to be taken to the Townsville Receiving Depot. The five-month-old child would have to forego the rough ride from Cairns to Townsville, 300km by steam train, and then be transferred to Meteor Park, Neerkol, outside Rockhampton, which was another 800 km stretch. The long ride to what was referred to later as “the devil’s playground,” was inevitable and all because my mother happened to be a Catholic.

In the meantime, while the paperwork for baby was being processed, the money situation was coming to a boil. It involved the baby being left at the hospital for over three months with no visible means of support. It was a real matter of concern between the Secretary of the Cairns Hospital, the Police, the State and Billy Owen.

On November 28, The Cairns Hospital Board Secretary wrote a letter regarding the “Neglected Infant” to the Cairns Police Station and the State Children’s Department Townsville. It clearly stated that 13-year-old Catherine Pearl Owen was released from the hospital on November 4th and at the time her mother absolutely refused to take the infant. The baby was left behind. The hospital then sent a
registered letter to William Owen, the father of Catherine, telling him of the circumstance, that the responsibility was entirely in his hands and instructing him that this was his final notice to make arrangements to take the child or otherwise have it provided for. William R. Owens never replied. The hospital felt it had no other alternative but to contact the authorities.

It now was a serious problem. No provision had been made for any payment to the Hospital for maintenance of the infant. The only money paid to the Hospital was a partial payment from the grandfather Billy of four-pound ten-shillings for the 54-day confinement of the girl Catherine. The Hospital Board’s letter asked for immediate action from the authorities, as it would not continue to incur the baby’s expenses.

Upon receiving the letter, the Inspector at Cairns Police Station knew of the latest news of the baby, so he sent a letter directly to the Police Station in Kidston where Badge 3322 was in charge. The request from the Cairns Inspector to Badge 3322, my alleged father, was as follows:

Cairns District
Cairns Station
29th November, 1938

Relative to: Attached letter received from the Secretary of the Cairns District Hospital, relating to the illegitimate infant of Catherine Owens, being left in the Cairns District Hospital, and no Provision having been made for the maintenance of the child.

Sir:

I beg to report with reference to the above that the attached letter was received by me through the post on even date. The letter speaks for itself and you may be pleased to cause inquiries to be made by the Oaks Police, and the mother of the child interviewed with a view to some arrangement being made for the removal of the child to a home and its maintenance.

There would have been no question of maintenance if the authorities had allowed my grandmother Pearl to take me home with Katie as she had planned. The man she was living with as common law owned two gold mines in Kidston. They had no trouble whatsoever supporting their other two daughters as well.

On December 7 the reply came from Badge 3322:

Sir:

I beg to report that following an application made by William Robert Owen (Grandfather of the neglected Infant, David Robert Owen) to the State Children’s Department, Townsville, that Department has approved of the Child being admitted to State Control, subject to the Child being delivered to their Institution at Townsville. Mr. W.R. Owen departed from Kidston on the 3rd, Instant, for Cairns, for the purpose of conveying the Child to Townsville.

Badge 3322 knew that his criminal secret would remain safe after filing his report. But how did he know that Billy had
already left for Kidston on the 3rd? The only thing Pearl remembered was that Billy had stopped off to see his two sons and his daughter Katie before going on to Cairns. He told Pearl that he had no other choice but to pick up the baby from the hospital and take it to the Townsville Receiving Depot. No one would be aware of his detour on the way to Cairns.

After leaving Kidston, Billy decided to return to Carpenteria Downs to finish up some work first. He did not arrive in Edmonton, where he boarded with a fellow called Wolff until the Friday, December 9th. This date would be very important, as it was the day that my whole life would hopefully change dramatically for the good.

Billy, who was now staying with Wolff, woke up that morning, still prepared to bring the baby to the Receiving Depot the following week. He sent a telegram at ten o’clock to the Matron of the State Children’s Receiving Depot, Warburton Street, Belgian Gardens. It read:

Could you kindly arrange admit David arrives Cairns mail Wednesday next. Would like to return next morning. W Owens

By the telegram, my transfer to the institution would be done on Wednesday the 14th. From here, I can only surmise
by the dates and times of the FOI documents what transpired between Billy and the Secretary of Cairns Hospital.

It would appear that the Hospital Board had never received any word back from the authorities after sending the letter regarding the “Neglected Infant” without a provisions plea. They had decided to take the situation into their own hands by placing an ad in the classified section of the Cairns Post for the weekend of December 9 and 10, 1938. The ad read as follows:

WANTED, some kind person to adopt baby boy 4 1/2 months old. Apply District Hospital, Cairns, before Wednesday the 14th.

Who did these “high people in authority” think they were, putting an ad in the newspaper’s wanted section as if they were selling cattle? I was really aggravated over this. What an insult! Today, after it’s all said and done, I think it was the only thing left to do.

After my grandfather Billy sent that first telegram on Friday morning confirming his plans of turning me over to the Matron of the Receiving Depot, he must have directly picked up the phone and called the Cairns Hospital Secretary to tell him that he was in town and let him know what he was going do.
I can only surmise the following events. During the conversation, the Secretary must have told Billy about the Hospital placing the ad in the paper and convinced him to see what would happen over the weekend. If it didn’t work out and there were no suitable candidates as adoptive parents, he would still be able to turn me into the State on the Wednesday following. However, if there were a suitable couple, would money have changed hands for my stay at the hospital? Of course, this is only my way of looking at it after many years of therapy. You might even think that this twisted journey is just a colorful imagination on my part. Thank God for the Freedom of Information Act!

Grandma Pearl could only tell this next part of the drama to me, as she was the only one alive that heard the whole story from Billy. Of course, she wouldn’t have heard it all until he was let out of jail for attempted murder.

Going back to that weekend in December, when the ad was put in the paper to find a couple to adopt me, I was surprised to see just how many people were interested in raising a baby. The ad brought in 16 couples that wanted to adopt me. On Monday December 12, Billy chose a couple called the McKenzies who he believed would give me a good home. He delivered me personally to them with his blessing. They had
hired a solicitor to file the adoption papers. Mind you, going back in those days, you would have been pretty well off to have cash to pay someone to represent you. This blows any notion that the McKenzies would not provide for me. As a police investigation into the McKenzies would later report, “...I must admit the baby was clean and well nourished.”

Billy had left Cairns to go back to Carpenteria Downs. As he was Head Stockman, he was needed on a huge cattle muster that had to take place before the monsoon season began. Before leaving town, he sent a second telegram to the same Matron of the Receiving Depot, Warburton Street, Belgian Gardens. This time it read:

Will not be arriving Wednesday made other arrangements letter following. W Owen

I still wonder, now that I had a mother and father and was part of a family why didn’t the authorities just leave us alone?

The drama heated up once again as the Cairns Inspector of Police received a letter from the Secretary of the Cairns District Hospital, informing the police that the baby had been adopted by people called McKenzies who resided in Cairns. Questions now had to be asked. The Inspector would
take the time and expense to put one of his constables on
the job to interview the McKenzies and file a full report.
I can’t help but wonder whether the Inspector was a good
mate to Badge 3322, or if it was just his way of conducting
police business.

The constable’s investigation was then forwarded to the
State Children Department of Townsville with an attachment
from the Inspector of Police. It read:

Cairns District
Cairns Station
21st December 1938
Relative to: - Mrs. Clara Agnes Spiers, known as Mrs.
McKenzie, who is seeking the adoption of a make
illegitimate child, and born to a girl named Catherine
Owens, at the Maternity Ward, Cairns District Hospital, on
the 21st July, 1938.

Sir,

I beg to report having interviewed Mrs. Clara Agnes Spiers,
at her place of residence - Railway Flats Bunda Street,
Cairns - in connection with the adoption of the
illegitimate male child above referred to, named David
Robert Owens, she informed me that this child’s was given
into her care by Mr. William Robert Owens, the child’s
grandfather on the 12th instant, and that she had since
placed the matter in the hands of Mr. J. Bennett solicitor
of Cairns, with the object of adopting the infant.

Mrs. Spiers is living with a man named Charles Alexander
Mackenzie, and they are living together as man and wife.
She admitted such as being the case, when I taxed her with
it. She informed me that she had informed Mr. B. that her
name was Mrs. McKenzie when she called at the Cairns
Hospital with the man she is living with, in answer to an
advertisement appearing in a recent issue of the “Cairns
Post” asking for applications for the adoption of the infant.

I have since interviewed Mr. B., Secretary of Cairns District Hospital Board and Mr. J. Bennett solicitor and both have informed me that they were unaware that the woman in question was not Mrs. McKenzie.

Mr. B. informed me that he gave the child into the possession of the grandfather on Friday the 9th instant and he advised him that Mrs. McKenzie of Bunda Street was anxious to make application for adoption and it was evidently on the information supplied Owens by Mr. B. that he later gave the child into the care of a woman called Spiers; it is obvious that he was unaware that this woman was not Mrs. McKenzie.

Mrs. Spiers has informed me that she is living apart from her husband – John Spiers – who is a resident of Babinda district, and that she has been living with McKenzie as his wife during the past four years.

As a result of my inquiries I am of the opinion that Mrs. Spiers or McKenzie, is not a fit or proper person to have in her care and under her control the child in question. I was shown the child by Mrs. Spiers and I must admit that it was not in the appearance of neglect, it was clean and well nourished in appearance, but owing to her manner of living she (Mrs. Spiers) is not a suitable person to have the child under her control and I recommend that her application be refused. I understand Mr. Bennett has obtained an application from the man and woman for the adoption under the name of Mr. And Mrs. McKenzie.

The Inspector of Police, Cairns added:

Submitted.

Mrs. Spiers otherwise McKenzie is not receiving any payment of reward for this child. Application has been made on her behalf for the adoption of this child. She is a married woman living apart from her husband and has been living with McKenzie, as his wife, for the past four years.
When the report circulated back to the State Children’s Department Inspector of Townsville life became very dark for all of us involved.

It was December 29, during the joyous Christmas holidays when the State Children’s Department upon receiving the Police report, sent their “Glad Tidings’ to the new happy family, the McKenzie’s living in Cairns.

Dear Madam,

Information has been received at this office to the effect that you have recently taken charge of an infant named David R. Owen from his grandfather, Mr. W.R. Owen. I therefore have to inform you that you are committing a breach of the “Infant Life Protection Acts, 1905-1921, viz, that, “you have received into your care an infant under the age of six years for the purpose of nursing such infant apart from its parents for a longer period than forty-eight hours.” I therefore have to request you to take immediate steps to have the infant either returned to his parents or relatives, or, admitted to the Townsville Receiving Depot.

Yours faithfully,

I really loved the final salutation of the Inspector, “yours faithfully.” Oh, he certainly was “faithful” all right. I did end up where they wanted me!

Well, Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie, my new parents, would not reply in any way shape or form to this request. They had it in the hands of their solicitor.

The same letter was sent to Billy Owen at the two places he could be found, Carpenteria Downs where he worked, and
Edmonton where he would board with a friend called Wolff during his days off from the Station.

Billy was still out on that cattle muster, trying to get things done before the big rains came, so it was impossible for him to receive the letter from the State. The Station Manager would not open his mail without his permission. What a happy Jackaroo he was out on the range, knowing that his grandson had been adopted.

However, the circumstances surrounding the identical letter from the State, which was sent to Billy at Wolff’s Boarding House in Edmonton, would unfold in a very different way. Wolff didn’t hesitate to open Billy’s mail; he then went straight to the Kidston Police Station.

There is really no way of knowing whether Wolff really was a good friend to Billy or whether he deliberately took it upon himself to make sure Billy’s letter from would be seen by Badge 3322. Whether it was out of his sheer stupidity or real wickedness, I’ll never know.

When Badge 3322 stepped into his “official capacity to uphold the law,” he took Wolff along with him to make sure that his plan to remove the baby from the McKenzies, would
not fail. He would see that I would be sent away once and for all.

When Badge 3322 and Wolff arrived at the front door of the house, Mrs. McKenzie answered. It was here that Badge 3322 kept her occupied, telling her she had to give up the baby, while Wolff went inside and snatched the baby out of the cradle. Badge 3322 told Mrs. McKenzie that she shouldn’t bother to call the police. “The police already know what was going on.” Both men pushed the screaming mother aside. They jumped into the car and sped away leaving the woman sobbing on her doorstep.

The FOI Documents show the one last telegram sent that same day to the Matron of the State Receiving Depot, Belgian Gardens. It read:

Will be arriving with David Owens Tuesdays Train kindly arrange delivery the same night would like a return on Wednesday

G Wolff Edmonton

Badge 3322 made sure that he was never implicated in any way. He took Wolff and the baby to the train station in Cairns and put them on the train to the Receiving Depot. He then washed his hands of the whole matter.

I can still get in a rage over this. If the State was so bloody concerned about this Infant Life Protection Act of
1905 being violated by the McKenzies, why was it that Wolff, an ordinary person (of no blood relation) could snatch a baby out of its home (with the assistance of a police officer) and act as the legal guardian in accompanying this minor quite a distance by train, for the delivery to the Matron of a State Receiving Depot? Does this constitute a baby who has been stolen? At this point what hope was there for me?

These FOI documents will show the very last telegram as to my whereabouts on January 14, 1939. It read:

MATRON JACKSON AND THREE CHILDREN LEFT LAST NIGHT FOR ROCKHAMPTON...

The State Children Department Inspector now had enough to close the file. His reply on January 19th:

Sir,

I beg to advise that the three children, David Robert Owen, Maria#### and Ada ##### arrived safely on Saturday afternoon last. They were met on arrival at Stanley Street Station by the Sister in Charge, Meteor Park Orphanage and conveyed to that institution.

He then forwarded this final memo:

To the Sister in Charge, Meteor Park Orphanage, Neerkol State Child, David Robert Owen, who was transferred to your institution on the 14th instant:

Name: David Robert Owen       Date of Birth: 21st July 1938
Place of Birth: Cairns       Name Mother: Catherine Pearl Owen
NOTE: This child is illegitimate and its mother is only 13 years of age.

How tragic that this note would be the only information ever sent to the institution regarding who I was. Back in those days, it was common knowledge that illegitimate babies were a huge taboo in the Catholic Church. Armed with this kind of information, it’s no wonder that the Sisters of Mercy would make sure that I had no identity from then on. I was put into the hands of the Catholic Church, a family that would torment me for the next fourteen years of my life.

God only knows how I’ve retained a sense of humor through this all. Some people call it my larrikinism, but whatever it is, I was able to have a chuckle over what happened when my grandfather returned from the big muster he was on at Carpenteria Downs.

Billy usually went back to Wolff’s place in Edmonton for a rest. This time however he decided straight away to drop in at the McKenzies and visit his grandson. When he got there, he was flabbergasted when Mrs. McKenzie told him what had happened. She was still in a terrible state of shock. Outraged over what he had heard, he went to Edmonton and confronted Wolff. He beat him up terrible and left him for dead. Billy jumped on his horse and rode back to
Carpenteria Downs. When they found Wolff broken, bloody and hardly breathing, Badge 3322 personally drove out to the cattle station to arrest Billy for attempted murder. He dragged him back in handcuffs. Billy was thrown in jail believing that Wolff would not survive. He was kept under lock and key until Wolff took a turn for the good. Billy was released. He stayed bitter over what had happened, never really knowing what had become of the baby.

By 1939, my mum Katie had to resume her life somehow. Her longing for her illegitimate son through all of her inquiries would only fall on deaf ears. She went back to work as a domestic working in her uncle’s hotel. She said that as a young girl of about sixteen, she began to go to the Saturday night dances. It was there she met up with a fellow named MacDonald who worked out on a property. She ended up marrying him and they had two children, Anne and Leslie.

Over the next fifteen years, whenever she would find herself in Cairns, she would go to the Courthouse. She would always ask the same question - what have you done with my son? They would always tell her to go away.
Going back in those days mum could have aborted me but she didn’t. Thank God I was able to come on to this earth in a positive way. A Cesarean birth may have been rough, but I really can’t remember. I do know however that I went from the loving hands of the doctor and nurses at the Cairns Hospital to the gentle arms of my newly adopted parents the McKenzies, before the pendulum of life swung in the other direction. I believe that this beginning pulled me through to where I am today.

The value system changed dramatically when I was put into the Nursery at Neerkol. The sad truth was that the louder you cried the less you would be attended to, as there were as many as fifteen babies to care for at one time with only Sister Mary James and two older girls to assist her.

I don’t expect you to be convinced of everything I say. I will repeat myself over and over again when I tell you, “This is my story and I can only tell the truth.” For those in doubt, the authorities have summed it up in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, May 1999. The Commission investigated St. Joseph’s Orphanage, run by the Rockhampton
Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, a religious order within the Catholic Church:

Neerkol was an entirely inappropriate location for an orphanage. Its isolation and distance from Rockhampton deprived the children of any real opportunity to integrate into the local community...the setting of Neerkol inevitably gave rise to a closed community with a culture of its own... With the potential for abuse in circumstances where there was a perceived need for conformity and caregivers were under stress... Management practices whether through ignorance or by design were to suppress individuality... There was a constant climate of fear. That atmosphere seems to have affected not only the children; some of the nuns who gave evidence at the Inquiry spoke of their feelings of intimidation and powerlessness as junior members of the Order.

The Inquiry Report went on to say...

Older girls, some of whom were employed as domestics at the Orphanage after they reached working age, undertook a large part of the Nursery work. A number of witnesses expressed concern at the rough handling of babies and toddlers by some of these girls, who were untrained and were unlikely to have had much experience of tender care themselves. While there were nuns who did have a desire to work with children in need, there were others not by nature suited to the work they were doing, who were at Neerkol because their vow of obedience gave them no choice than to go where they were directed.

Under investigation one nun added...

To see all those babies... and they’d always be...putting their arms up... and you didn’t have time to give them any individual love...that was my big sorrow always... that I couldn’t love them as I wanted to ...because you couldn’t do it to the lot of them.

My first recollection of being in the Nursery was when we learned how to toilet ourselves. We were trained on a long
green wooden bench with eight potties in a row. We all had to learn how to go to the bathroom, both pee and poop, before being able to get into our beds.cots.(cribs) When you sat in a row of children that had performed their toilet duties completely, and you couldn’t get it done, you would have to sit by yourself out on the verandah until you finally succeeded. One night, I couldn’t get the pee to come, and was left out with the door closed. As such a small child I was really scared.

I ran to the door crying. The nun opened the door, grabbed my little hand and went over to check to see if I had done what I had to do.

Well, I hadn’t. I couldn’t. But when she started to spank me because I had not been able to pee on her command, It scared me that much more, I peed all over her. Well she started screaming at me and this scared me even more. I remember running back into the Nursery and hiding under my cot, crying all the way.

I am now aware of their brutal way of thinking behind this harsh bedtime rule which said that every child must both pee and poop before going to sleep. You see, the mattresses would be covered with a plastic liner and a sheet. All of the babies were put into bed without nappies while they
slept. They would be bare except for a blanket covering them. Can you imagine a baby of two years old being responsible for whether he had to go to the toilet throughout the night? And if so, can you imagine that same baby getting spanked every time he had to relieve himself while he was stuck in his bed without any assistance? How could such an inhumane practice that began in the Nursery not scare us as we moved on to the small boy’s dormitory? This anxiety never left us. The ongoing fear of flogging would only perpetuate more bed-wetting.

There was a big round playshed. The walls were made of weather board. We had to sleep on the bare wooden floor. No nuns or girls would stay and watch over us, but if they caught you with wet pants or if you had pee’d on the floor, you would be flogged. Some of us got crafty and instead of coping the flogging we would climb up the weatherboard with our little fingers holding on to the wooden slats for dear life and pee through the cracks. The only way the nun finally caught on was when she happened to walk around the outside of the shed and saw the pee running down the wall.

One of my most vivid recollections of the Nursery was one of the scariest for all of us children. In our dormitory there was this big picture on the wall of “Nick the Devil.”
It was a large eerie and dark picture of a devil holding a pitchfork with a baby on the end of it. He was holding the pitchfork over the fires of hell. We were taught that if we were naughty boys and girls through the day, Nick the Devil would come out of the picture at bedtime, put us on his pitchfork and drop us into the fires of hell. We were all terrified of Nick the Devil, especially when we did the slightest thing that would make the nun angry.

I remember specifically the fear that was put into us if we hadn’t cleaned our potties out the right way after we had gone to the toilet. I think it would be fair to assume that most children being taught their first nursery rhyme might remember “Mary had a Little Lamb…its fleece was white as snow.”

In the Nursery at Neerkol this melody would sound familiar, but the method that the nun used to teach us this song’s lyrics would be very different. After every last one of the eight children who were seated together had finished their toileting, we would pull out our pots and line up. Holding the dirty pots in front of us, we would march out the door singing “Jesus wants you to clean your pots…if you want to go to heaven.” Sound familiar?
After cleaning out our pots we would march back inside repeating the song and the nun would inspect our pots. If your pot was dirty, the nun would make you stand in front of “Nick the Devil.” Most children would be too scared and would faint on the spot with fright. One day I was punished and I was made to stand in front of Nick the Devil and they put my pot over my head because it wasn’t clean enough. I was only four years old and stood there for such a long time that I dropped to the ground with exhaustion. One of the older girls picked me up and put me in my bed. I remember pulling the sheet up over my head wondering when he would come to get me. That’s the way I started to understand real fear.

It wasn’t only the nuns that would put the fear into you. The older girls would have to show their aggression and brutal domination or they wouldn’t be kept around to work. So the girls would whack you with a stick or a twig, or whatever they had in their hand. There were babies in the Nursery that were never touched for the simple reason that they were only boarders, and the mothers used to come out and see them during visiting hours on the weekend. I would never know what that felt like.
As a four year old, I thought that Mother Superior was my mother because I had learned what the word mother meant and I had no reason to think otherwise. She never really fit that description as I understand it today.

I do have one good memory of a particular nun called Sister Peter. She was blind. And although she was around eighty-years-old, she was the closest woman to treat me like a mother. As a matter of fact, she was tiny like my mother. Once a week when the children from the Nursery went over to the church, I was given the chore of going to pick her up in her cell on the way. I would hold her hand and walk her over to the church. I didn’t find it a chore. I truly enjoyed it. She used to give me a quarter of an apple every time I helped her. I really was fond of her. When the nuns noticed the attention I was getting, they gave my job to another child. But when another child would go to pick her up in my place she would send them away. She would always ask for “David” no matter what. She knew my touch.

It was a great thrill to go into small boy’s dormitory at the age of six. Mind you, these were my better days at Neerkol. Of course you got your floggings and your whacks across the knuckles, but I was starting to learn a lot of things that a normal child is interested in. They had a
good program of music with concerts. The children would perform in front of visitors like the Mayor, the Bishop and the Monsignor. They would come far and wide to hear us sing.

At the first concert I can remember there was six of us: three girls and three boys. The girls would curtsy and the boys would bow. The first girl would say, “...And I’m a sweaty box...” The next girl would say, “...and I’m an eye winker...” The next girl would say, “...and I’m a nose wiper...” The next boy would say, “...and I’m a mouth opener...” The next boy would say, “...and I’m a chin wagger...” and of course me being the larrikin on the end, I would turn around and they had a big pillow on my backside. I would look at the audience and say, “...and I’m a winky winky woo. And that’s what they taught me when I went to school.” And we all joined in singing, “With my hand on myself what have I here.” Well this was a good time for me. I loved to make people smile. Oh and by the way, the “sweaty box” was our foreheads.

In small boys dormitory you really learned: the prayers, the catechism and the poetry. As you started getting into 8 years old, you began to learn Latin. The greatest thing for me as far as religion concerned was making my First Holy
Communion. It was so great. I learned about sin. On that special day we were done up like ninepins. It was clothing that we had never had before. The girls were done up in lovely white dresses with veils and the boys were in white shirts, black bow ties, black shorts, long white socks and shiny black shoes. It was such a great occasion to receive your first sacrament, the Body of Christ. The thrill of this was so great for me.

Our First Communion Breakfast was held in the Refectory. It was the best breakfast I’ve ever had at Neerkol. But even that same day a nun would flog me. At the special breakfast we were served a sweet, red cordial – which I had never had before. So as kids sometimes do, I accidentally spilled a bit on my white shirt. After the ceremonial breakfast we had to get undressed and return our clothes to the nun. When I returned my clothing, I was terrified to return the shirt for fear of a flogging. I was right. When the nun received the soiled shirt, I ended my happiest Holy Day getting flogged.

Small boy’s dormitory had its own sort of cruelty that continued into the learning being done in the classroom. We were doing arithmetic, spelling and tables. I used to get my syllables mixed up and was petrified to get anything
incorrect as the nun stood behind me with a ruler and whacked me across the head if I made any mistakes.

I was eager to learn and grasp onto things as any young inquisitive boy would be. Along with the reading and writing, a visiting priest would also teach us about religion. He would scare all of the little children in class with all kinds of sins, mortal and venial and about not going to heaven. I used to get confused over the stopover places that a sinner could go to: like purgatory, or going to limbo while waiting to go to hell. There were many rigid Catholic rules that we had to obey; like not eating meat on Friday and only water before receiving Communion.

Venial sin was telling lies. Anything done below the belly button was a mortal sin and a sin of impurity. In the classroom you could never have your hands on your lap – only up on the desk. The thinking by the nuns was just plain evil. Did they honestly believe that innocent children at that age were doing something sexually wrong?

One day as the nun was watching me when she accused me of having my hands below the desk. She screamed out, “Owen where are your hands?” I looked over to my right at a little girl with a nice smile who always had a great big
bow in her hair, my friend Daphne. She never got in trouble and was always in good favor with the nuns. I closed my eyes and held my breath praying that she would come through for me, even though she was really a shy and frightened girl. The nun shouted, “Dillon! Did you see Owen’s hands on the desk?” Her tiny voice squeaked out and saved me from a real flogging. Fifty years later, we would chuckle over how scared she was when she stuck up for me that day.

We used to have a little pigeonhole on the veranda of the dormitory where you would put your school clothes and play clothes. When a visitor would came you would put on your good clothes - a shirt and trousers, always without shoes, socks, underpants, singlets. I never knew what underpants were.

I never owned a comb or a toothbrush. We used wash our faces with kerosene soap which was made at the orphanage. It was made into long loafs. We would use charcoal to clean our teeth. When we had a bath, the same water would be used for about twenty children. The worst of it was that there was only one towel to dry us all! Mind you all of this had to be done before dark as we only had carbide lights and candles. There was no electricity until 1946. Oh good god how things were hard. It was even harder for the Aboriginal
boy who came to Neerkol. One of the older girls had the job of putting the boys in a tub of water. The nuns would instruct them to scrub the color off of the child with a scrubbing brush, kerosene soap and disinfectant.

When we got old and strong enough to carry a bucket of water, we were given rag, a scrubbing brush and a cake of soap. It was a merciless chore for children as young as seven to eight year olds to scrub the endless floors of the verandahs. They would go from one building on to the next, all the way from the school to the last dormitory. Our knees would be so sore from the constant scrubbing. I was now being targeted pretty regularly for punishment seeing as that I had nobody to come to see me from anywhere. I was about nine years old when I was scrubbing the verandah one day and a nun came up and had a rag filled with dirt. She deliberately threw the dirt where I had just cleaned. She shouted at me, “Owen, what’s this dirt here!” Well I saw her throw the dirt on the floor I had just scrubbed and was mad. I didn’t respond. I just went back to the section of floor she had thrown the new dirt on and I scrubbed it once again. About six feet further down the verandah she appeared again and repeated the very same thing with more dirt. I heard, “Owen! What’s this dirt?” Well me being as
cheeky as I was, I stood up to her and let her know that if she did this again I would throw the whole bucket of water at her. Bang! Bang! Bang! She started whacking me with the cane screaming, “How dare you speak to me like that!” So, I grabbed the bucket and threw the water over her, handsprunged the rails to the ground and hid under the dormitory. Of course, that night in bed she caught up with me. I copped a hiding and I suppose I deserved it, but she had it in for me. You couldn’t win.

Some children couldn’t help it and used to wet the bed. I would see them get flogged to an inch of their life. No child would ever criticize another child for wetting or dirtying the bed because you never knew who would be next.

A few times I did wee the bed. But why we all seemed to have this problem of bedwetting was because the nuns used to put the fear in us about “The Man with a Torch.” We were told that this person was actually the devil roaming around looking for the children who had played up that day. At bedtime, we were too frightened to go out to the verandah alone to go to the toilet. You would only go out there if someone went along with you. If you couldn’t get the kid in the bed next to you, you would just wee the bed.
Mind you, “The Man with the Torch” never got me, but Sister Assumpta did!

The first time I dirtied the bed, I got flogged something shockin’. For punishment I was made to stand with my dirty, smelly sheet over my head in front of the rest of the children in the large dining room called the Refectory. On top of being so humiliated, I didn’t get any breakfast. I was made to go out afterwards and pull weeds in front of the convent garden. Being so hungry, I found myself eating pigweed and hibiscus buds. At least it was something to fill the belly. And because I had dirtied the bed the night before, the nuns felt that without knowing what the problem was they would not give me my tea that night. I was only given a cup of cocoa, which was really nothing but colored water.

Just for the record, the barbaric punishment that the Sisters of Mercy used to dish out didn’t only happen to me. Sometimes I thought that my friend Johnnie was in a far worse situation. He also didn’t have a mother or father. Sometimes he would be punished for a few days in a row. Knowing what it felt like to be so hungry, I always tried to help him. I would sneak a piece of bread with a smudge of treacle on it out of the Refectory under my arm when the
nun wasn’t looking. It was a rule that when the children left the Refectory they had to march out in military form. As I was leaving that day the nun shouted out, “34, swing your arms!” When I lifted my arm, the bread fell out. There was a big hush. All the children were terrified for me, as they knew what I was in for. The big bruiser of a nun came over and flogged the living daylights out of me. What a bloody shame I got caught.

We were taught to read and write but I wasn’t that good at it. I could pick up anything by memory and was happy to recite poems with tricky verses. I could repeat a story easily and could parrot back information with a blink of an eye. Sometimes the syllables of words would confuse me. The nuns would show no patience whatsoever. If I was wrong it was too bad…whack! whack!

I was so handy at memorizing poems and songs that I would be singled out to perform when we had visitors. The first time I ever saw the Children’s Department State Inspector was at a school assembly where I was to recite solo. The children lined up. “Good Morning Mr. Patterson, God Bless You...Good Morning Sister Assumpta, God Bless You...”
The nun would command, “Number 34, Dave Owen step forward and recite The Village Pump.” I loved to perform so I stepped forward and bowed. Without a missing a beat...

The village pump, the village pump, pump, pump, pump, pump...
They brought a new policeman to the week,
A sloppy looking fellow so to speak
Who thought he was all there
But by jinx I do declare
Is what you called a kind of livin’ freak
The neighbors said he’s off his chump
One night he stumped across that village pump
He said move on your type
But when he showed his light
He found that he was talking to the pump
The village pump, the village pump, pump, pump, pump, pump...
Funny thing, after reciting my poem I would not be able to turn around. I had to walk backwards to my place. Little did he know we had the arse out of our strides and the backs off of our shirts. But from the front we looked wonderful.

The State Inspector applauded. “Very good Number 34! Very good indeed Sister,” as he commented on how well the children looked.
This would be the only time I had any contact with State Inspector Patterson at Neerkol. We never met again until I was 14 years old. No questions were ever directed to me over whether I was being mistreated, getting proper food and clothing or about my studies. Today as I now understand it. According to the law, it was Patterson’s job as the State Inspector to do so.

The government doctor would come out to see us once every three months. A part of the dormitory would be closed off like a hospital, with a wire and a sheet hanging over it. This was done so that the doctor could perform tonsillectomies. He would perform a variety of medical services to the orphanage. One day I was in line to see the doctor. It was my turn to get a vaccine and I was that bruised on my back, backside and the back of my legs from being flogged so severely, that I tried to get the doctor’s attention. After he gave me the shot, I tried to get out the words, asking him to look at my back. Before I could get the message to him, the nun in charge overheard me. She grabbed me by my ear and pulled me away. Trying to cover it all up she snapped, “C’mon Owen there are more children besides you!”
When the government doctor came to see us, I was hoping that I would have someone to turn to. Apparently not! That was the way it was. You couldn’t tell anyone what was going on. No one in authority asked any questions. No one wanted to hear about it.

The nuns would clean us up and take us to the Recreation room. It felt as if we were put in a corral like cattle; as if you were to be sold to the highest bidder. People would come out and look us over to see whether we satisfied their needs for adoption. It would always break my heart when someone would ask about me and I would hear the nuns say, “Oh no he’s not with that lot.”

At Neerkol when a family came out and delivered a brother and a sister, they would be separated and never allowed to mix with one another. If they were caught talking to one another or by chance pass each other and touch each other’s hand they would be flogged. That’s the way it was out there.

I can remember the day when Sister Chanel was leading a group of us back to the dormitory from the Church as she caught sight of little Arthur running across the yard. He had spotted his sister, my friend Daphne, sitting in front of the school. They had been split up their very first day
at Neerkol. The instructions were to stay away from each other. Well this day Arthur decided to forget the rules. He ran to his big sister and joyfully began to jump and play around her. Sister Chanel called out to him to come over immediately. He had no choice but to obey. I remember the horrified look on Daphne’s face as she watched her brother get beaten with a cane the whole way back to the dormitory. It would be the last time she ever saw him at Neerkol.

Aboriginal children from seven to nine years old also didn’t stay very long. They were either given to a mission or got rid of somehow.

A new Aboriginal boy arrived and was put in the dormitory with us. He and I became very good friends right away. The next morning in class the nun asked him what his name was. He told her that he didn’t have a name. She announced to him and all the rest of the children, “Let’s call you Billy Barlo.”

Billy and I would do everything together if we could. We always tried to sit alongside each other in school, play dinks with each other, and line up together with the other children to march to church and the refectory. We were just good mates.
One night the nuns came up to the dormitory and got Billy out of bed. They told Billy he had to come with them. Billy was crying and I was crying. I saw and heard the whole thing. I shouted out, “Where are you taking my friend Billy?” I followed the nuns and Billy down to the convent and kept yelling, “Leave him alone.” As he went into the convent with the two nuns dragging him in, it was the last time I heard Billy crying and singing out for me. I went back up to the verandah and was in clear view above. I sat there watching for any cars to come or go from the convent. No cars left or arrived. The next morning, I confronted the same nun that had taken my friend Billy. She snapped back at me, “Owen! It’s none of your business. His mother came and took him.” Well we all knew that Billy didn’t have a mother. Whatever happened to Billy to this day I do not know.

A better moment that I do remember, was during the war in 1944. I was six when the American troops came out to Neerkol. It was their financial help that the new Change and Dressing rooms were built on the grounds. What a difference that made to a lot of us! We would wait at the top of the road till we would see the trucks and jeeps arriving. We would all be so excited and run towards them
screaming happily, “Here comes the Yanks! Here come the Yanks!” They were around because they had set up camps out around the orphanage when the Japanese were invading New Guinea. They would give us rides in their jeeps around the grounds. I remember them bringing these little cups of ice cream in a big baskets filled with dry ice. The smoke from the ice was a real strange thing for us to see way out there in the bush. I was a favorite of the soldiers, as I had no fear and would happily belt out a few verses of ‘Yankee Doodle Dandy’ for them every time we would see them. As GI’s sometimes do, one soldier became particularly fond of me. In front of the other guys he asked me my name. Well I was a charmer. I saluted and shouted back at him loudly with a big smile “...NUMBER 34!” From then on the guys would always look for Number 34, which was great for me, but bad if the nuns saw that I was getting any personal attention.

One night before the soldiers came, I had wet the bed and was being punished. I wasn’t allowed to go with the other children to see the Yanks. When they drove in however, I got caught up in the excitement of it all and ran with the other children to greet the soldiers. The nun who was punishing me was running behind me trying to grab me before
I got to the jeeps. I was faster than she was and was right up in the soldier’s arms when one of them called out, “Hey there number 34!” Well the nun caught up with me just at this moment - as the soldier picked me up and gave me a big hug. She shrank back into herself and knowing that I was out of her reach she pulled herself together. She looked up at the soldier and wryly answered, “Oh yes...what a lovely child.” He agreed. That night I took a terrible hiding. I told myself that I wasn’t going to let the pain hurt as much this time, as I had a nice fantasy, thinking that one of those nice soldiers were going to take me away and adopt me.

The floggings got more frequent as I got older. I became rebellious. When I realized that I could bring a lot of light and laughter to the other kids, I would go out of my way to do so. That was just me.

I remember once when the nun left the class and I got up on the blackboard and started riding it like a horse. Hooting like a cowboy, lo and behold the nun came back in the room, caught me and shouted to get down from there. Well I froze. I couldn’t move. She came up to the board and started rocking it. Well I jumped down quicksmart and all the kids were laughing their heads off. She yelled out to the class
to stop the laughter. The room went silent. She was chasing
me around the blackboard. The class was laughing louder
than ever. I was trapped so I slid under her desk and ran
back to my place and sat down.

The nun never followed me to my seat. She just went on with
the class. When the class was almost over and I had let my
guard down and was unsuspecting, she came up from behind me
and was into me with the cane. It wasn’t funny anymore. The
nuns were as cunning as shit house rats. (Excuse the
language but I never heard this until I got much older.)
You never could beat ’em.

For breakfast we used to get a plate of porridge and one
slice of bread. We would always find weevils in the
porridge. It was an everyday thing. The other boys and I
would make bets on how many weevils we would get around the
top of our plate. As we pulled out these black things with
brown heads on them, we would count them. If my mate won, I
would have to give him one of my marbles.

Mildewed bread was called ping-pong bread. The rice would
be loaded with brown specs, which were actually grubs. You
would try to pick them out. We used to sing to try to keep
our spirits up, even through all of the bad days of such
putrid food.
Ho Ho for China...Rice and Ping Pong Bread

We’ll make the children laugh... we’ll make the children laugh...

Ho Ho for China...Rice and Ping Pong Bread.

We would sing it on our way to the Refectory and if we were heard singing it we would get whacked with a strap or a cane or whatever they had in their hand.

It’s a long way to the Refectory
It’s a long way to go
It’s a long way to the Refectory
Where we get bread and fo
Good-bye cup of cocoa
Farewell piece of bread
It’s a long way to the Refectory
Where we are half fed.

The happier times in the small boys dormitory were because it was what we made of it.

I was about nine years old when I was really getting on to Latin. I was good at it. I could rattle it off by heart but I didn’t know what any of it meant in English. It was drummed into me like as if they were training a killer dog. If you didn’t learn, you were whacked...you were whacked...you were whacked! It was flogged into you.
I was so good at Latin and singing hymns that I was always asked to sing solo in church. I think this is where I captured the priest’s attention singing, “Immaculate Mary...our hearts are on fire...Ave Maria.” As I sang my heart out it never occurred to me that soon my virgin voice would no longer be pure. It was time to go into big boys dormitory.

It was such a big thrill that you were with the bigger boys. They were playing bigger games and going down to the shed in the yard to play cricket.

I just had no idea how big and brutal the games would get.
The Catholic staff at Neerkol was made up of some tough Irish nuns who brought along with them from their rolling green homeland of Ireland a remedy for everything: Kerosene lollies were used to stop us from getting colds; A teaspoon of sulfur would stop boils and carbuncles. The Sisters of Mercy were known for their robust manner of teaching the children the good old Irish songs like McNamara’s Band. Out in the flat brown Australian bush however, the tune would be renamed, “Neerkol’s Band.” We had many a good time singing our hearts out to this.

I’m not sure who was more excited, the nuns or the children, when we were invited to the Winter Garden in Rockhampton to perform at St. Patrick’s Concert. We would sing “The Shamrock of Ireland.” There was this big shamrock on the stage. The children would stand on benches and poke their head through holes in the shamrock. We would sing, “Dear little shamrock...sweet little shamrock...” The nun standing behind us was poking us in the backside with a stick so that we would sing louder. When she poked me, I let a big fart go. She smacked me hard on the back of my legs and almost knocked me off the stool. With my head still stuck through the shamrock, my reaction was to kick
backwards at her. I made contact with the top of her head. She fell immediately to the floor. The commotion caused quite a scene - all sixteen heads in the shamrock pulled their faces out from their holes to look behind and see what had happened. Of course, the audience then was full of laughter. The curtain was pulled closed until order was restored. After that I was never picked to go to another St. Patrick’s concert. (I wonder why?) On the bus coming back to the orphanage that night, had to sit in between two nuns. They knew I would try to run away. When we got to Neerkol, they really gave it to me. You see, the nuns were as well versed in their form of cruelty as they were in their form of music.

The Institution was a cruel place, at times more cruel than a prisoner of war camp. Central Queensland would get really hot and the bitumen roads around the place would heat up to a boiling point on a sunny day. It would be get so hot when the tar melted that one of the nuns found a great way to torture us.

We never wore shoes and the bottoms of our feet were very hard and cracked. For punishment the nun would make us go out and stand on the hot road. The first time I had to do this I screamed in agony, hopping back and forth from one
foot to the other. If you jumped over to another spot it was just as hot and would burn you again. By the third or fourth time I was made to do this, I got smart. I realized that if I could just stand still, sink down in the tar and not move at all, it wouldn’t hurt as much.

I thought I was cunning one day when three of us were told to get out and stand on the hot tar. I was standing closer to the edge than the other kids. They were all screaming and jumping, but of course me, I just stood there pretending I wasn’t feeling the pain. Well the nun saw this and didn’t like it one bit. She came up and whacked me behind the legs with her cane. I moved a bit further away from her. She leaned over and whacked me again. I suddenly realized that I wasn’t out of her reach. So, I moved further to the center of the road. Of course all the kids around me were laughing their heads off. She was getting nastier and nastier. As she didn’t want to step on the hot bitumen herself, she took one terrible lean to whack me again. She couldn’t reach me with the swing of her cane and fell over. There was an uproar of laughter. I laughed along with the kids and shouted, “Ha, ha you can’t get me.” Well she was furious. That night three of them came up to my bed
in the dormitory and flogged the living daylights out of me. Of course they had the last laugh.

What is violence? One whack? Two whacks? Three whacks? Four whacks? Five whacks? What is violence? Can you get away with using a strap or a cane to get through to a child? Respect is there from a child to the teacher providing there is no physical violence. Once physical violence is used there is no respect. If you keep hitting a mongrel dog, it bites back. It’s the same thing!

There is other ways to discipline without using violence in the classroom. Children can be kept back at school, kept in after dinnertime, left out of sports or class trips. The teacher can argue with the pupil with words, but the minute he strikes the child, all respect is lost. The child will start going backwards. I know this by what happened to me.

I was a boy becoming a young man with no real guidance and a lot of anger and rebellion coming out of me. When I was whacked, I was always trying to whack back. It seemed that I would always be the first one to be picked on. It was usually six whacks with the cane. So I’d stand in front of the other kids as brave as I could, full well knowing that I had put pins in the end of the cane. After a few whacks, the cane would start splitting. The kids would start
laughing. I would start laughing. The nun would throw away the cane and bring out a machine strap from under her habit. As soon as I saw the strap I would be off around the desk with her chasing me. Under the desk, up the desk...I don’t know how many times this happened before I woke up to the truth. This woman was the devil in nun’s clothing. I would go back to my place. She would wait a few minutes and come up from behind with the strap and continue where she left off.

A pimp was classed as someone who would squeal on you. They were always around to make your life miserable with the nuns. Sometimes I would really get up them. When the nun would offer a reward to the pimp for telling on me, I would have enough cheek to boldly up the ante. She would offer two lollies, I would counter offer with three marbles.

It was about that time I was sent over to Big Boys. I was nine and a half when I moved in. I thought it was just everything! You would get more marbles. The big boys would go for walks on the weekend up in the bush and bring home jujus. Jujus were little apples with a thorny seed in them. They were really good tucker. When I would shake the tree they would fall off and I would pick them all up and put them in my bag. Even if they were green, I would take them
and put them into a dark place to ripen. At least if the nuns would try to starve me, I had jujus to fall back on. Wild plums and wild cactus fruit also kept me from hunger. When the cactus was red they were ripe. We would have to rub them on the bitumen road to scratch the prickles off of them, but they were good!

You did feel more protected with the Big Boys even though you still had the fear of “The Man with the Torch.” I was thrilled to get over to Big Boys as I had taken so many floggings already. I was proud that I was just as tough as the ten and eleven year olds, except at bedtime.

I can remember crawling in bed with the hills glowing outside the dormitory. The big boys called it, “The Dingoes Benediction.” It would happen in the spring when the hills would smell of the smoke of bush fires burning the winter grass off. The dingoes would howl so loud you would have to cover your head to block out the sound. You’d tuck yourself in tight, but a terrible fright would always come creeping underneath the blanket.

In Big Boys, you would have to march four in a row and always in silence. No noise, no sound. It was God for breakfast, God for dinner, God for tea and God before you went to bed at night. Of course the Devil would also be
there to put you into hell if you didn’t follow the rules. Sometimes you wondered if hell would really be any worse. As I got bigger the punishment got bigger. The new nun to reckon with in the Big Boys Dormitory was Sister Anslem. She was given the nickname, “Sister Pipe,” when she flogged a kid with a pipe one day and broke his leg.

As we were getting older we were getting stronger. So the men who were given the responsibility of doing the flogging were a lot stronger than us. Three real bastards of men worked down in the yard, Kelly, Patel and Murphy. They showed no mercy when they flogged you within an inch of your life using a stock whip, cat o nine tails, cane or yardstick.

Sister Assumpta was a huge woman about fourteen stone. She was the nun who would get the boys to put the boxing gloves on to fight the girls. Assumpta made a boxing ring in the Recreation room. I was popular with the girls around this time because I hated to see anyone hurt them. I would stick up for them. One day, Sister Assumpta’s lapdog was in the ring against one of the girls. When I saw this I jumped in the ring. I told him, “C’mon …hit me!” This was enough for Assumpta to see red. She said, “All right Owen, if you think you can beat my boy, we’ll put the gloves on you.”
So I put the gloves on. I happened to put a punch into his solar plexus. The big fat slob went down in a heap rolling on the floor. All the girls cheered, “Good on ya Dave. Good on you Porky!” I got the nickname “Porky” from eating pigweed so much. The boys were all somber. Assumpta shouted at me, “So you think you’re good eh?” She put the boxing gloves on. She started throwing punches at me. She said, “All right come and hit me.” Well you knew never to hit a nun. She wound her big arm up and hit me with one of her bolo punches. I went rolling across the floor. I jumped up fast. She charged into me with the bottom of her skirt rolled up and tucked into her Bombay bloomers. She picked me up and was into me with another bolo punches. I couldn’t stand it. She was a big, big lady. She really killed me. I was flattened down to a pulp. The girls started crying. The boys started cheering for Assumpta. The next Saturday night when they bunged on the fight, I said, “anyone hurts a girl I’m gonna get into the ring and hurt them.” No boys would hit the girls after they saw me take on the big bruise Assumpta.

There really were very few good memories for me in Big Boys Dormitory. My life was heading into the worst danger zone yet. I was quite familiar now with the abuse by my mother
the nun, but soon I would have to go up against my father
the priest. When it came time to protect me, I would be the
only one to suffer. This was made clear to me when the
class was to go to the beach at Emu Park for school
holidays. I was excited to go on this trip. That day I
lined up with the other children to get on the bus. As I
started to board the bus the nun pulled me back and said,
“Number 34, you’re meant to be on the next bus.” I stepped
down and waited. No other bus would come.
It was an evil bar of cruelty that was raised up one notch when young girls got to the age of eleven. The defiant ones deprived of their schooling for good. Those poor girls were sentenced to do domestic labor under the supervision of the nuns. When I think of being flogged, I shed a tear for one special older girl who saved me many times from the nuns. She’s still alive and doesn’t want me to use her real name. I would like to call her ‘Mary Angel.”

Mary Angel and I had a common bond in Small Boys Dormitory. She helped get me through a lot of pain as she could confirm a lot of the horror. She was eleven when she left school. They sent her to work under Sister Chanel’s supervision. She was only a novice nun at the time. The two of them had to do everything except cook. Chanel was cruel. If she disobeyed the nuns order, severe punishment would be handed out to her. Her chore of ironing fifty shirts was done for the sole purpose of impressing the State Inspector when he came out to Neerkol. What a great way they had to keep the evil deceit ‘cleaned and laundered.’ Back then you had to know someone higher up in the cloth to be a State Inspector. This meant you had to be a Catholic.
It must have been a real plus for the State knowing that they had “God” on their side.

Punishment was very harsh for any little boy who wet the bed during the cold winter months. Mary Angel was ordered to go down and fill the tubs up with cold water. It was so cold that the water was frozen in the hose. She wouldn’t do it. She would sponge us off and tell us that we could not tell the nun what really happened or she would get a flogging along with us.

There were six bathtubs for fifty boys. Mary Angel had strict instructions to bathe the white boys first and leave the Aboriginal and Island boys till the last. When it was their turn, she was told to put disinfectant in the water and use a scrub brush to take the color out of them. Even though she didn’t want to do it, she had to put at least one drop in the tub so that when the nun checked up on her, she could smell it. If she didn’t follow orders she would cop it.

Mary Angel showed me the scar on her right arm where she got bashed by Chanel. She said, “Do you remember David? I had that wavy hair with butterfly clips in it. That day, Sister Chanel went at my head. I put up my hand up to save myself from being hit. The bash was hard enough on my lower
arm that I had to go to the nurse. She poured methylated spirits over it. Eighty percent of the movement in my arm was lost. When I returned with a lot of pain to the dormitory, I still had to prepare fifty pair of pants. I remember you trying to help me, but she threatened to flog you! The next day the Doctor told me that if the wound was any deeper I would have been paralyzed."

Boys were being punished in front Mary Angel all of the time. Once, the nun put my head in the toilet and flushed it. Mary Angel couldn’t do anything to prevent it from happening as she was only a little girl herself. Any help we got from her was a blessing.

We cried together when she reminded of the time she tried to save me from the nun flogging me with a piece of pipe. I was already black and blue, but I was sent over to the head nun’s office for more punishment. I couldn’t actually remember this particular incident as there were so many.

She sighed, “Christ knows what they did to you in there.”

Mary Angel met up with Sister Chanel many years later. Sister apologized and Mary Angel forgave her for all of the pain she caused her. She asked the nun why she did not attend the last Reunion at Neerkol? Sister Chanel replied,
“I was one of the workers in the concentration camp. I wasn’t going to go back there.”

Mary Angel protects me now as she did back then. I told her how I was going to tell my story to help others. She said, “Karma does it the right way. We’re here for a purpose and you David have to carry your purpose out.”
I already knew the Latin. I became an Altar Boy. What a thrill to participate fully in the Mass. I knew it all by heart. To ring the bells!

Neerkol had only one priest, Father Anderson. He was a god, a king, the almighty father. He was about thirty-five years old and considered to be the bees’ knees. This man could do no wrong. All of the nuns adored him. They would take his meals over to him every night on a silver tray using only the best china, finest crystal and polished cutlery.

He was our inspiration at the orphanage. He would help with the mustering, castrating and dipping of the cattle, select pigs to be slaughtered and take the cattle into the sale yards. Father Anderson began to take a real interest in me. I thought this was a good thing. Imagine the pride and joy I felt being chosen by Father Anderson himself to take me along to outlying areas as his altar boy to say Mass.

The first time I went along, there were two of us assisting as altar boys, myself and another boy (who I cannot mention as he is now a priest.) After that Father would only take one altar boy with him. I was his choice. When I went with him the first time on my own he sexually abused me.
When Father asked me to come over and sit close to him I jumped at the chance. I thought he was going to let me steer the car as he sometimes did with the other altar boys. When I moved alongside him, he placed my hand down on his crotch. Naturally I pulled my hand straight away. I didn’t know what to think. I was alarmed! I started to be a little bit frightened. He grabbed hold of my hand again and held it down where his penis was. I was very scared. As I tried to pull away he kept holding it there. He gradually undid his fly. It was the first time I ever saw a man’s penis. I started to cry. I was so frightened and shocked to think that here was the priest who a few years earlier had given me my First Holy Communion. I was an altar boy and knew what sin was. Here was this priest that I looked up to as my father wanting me to commit a mortal sin. He continued to hold my hand on his big doodle. I was so frightened and shocked. He started moving my hand up and down on his penis. He was a big and brutal man. He grabbed my head and pulled it down on top of his penis. He put his penis in my mouth. I kept trying to fight, pull my head up and scream. He pulled over and stopped the car because of my struggling against him. I was so frightened. He started whacking me around the head and pulled me back down. He
shoved his penis into my mouth. It was so shocking. I vomited.

What could I do? Where could I go to? Who could I turn to? He had me in that car as a nine and a half year old boy. He wasn’t satisfied with that. He dragged me out of the car and put me in the back seat. He penetrated my backside with his big penis. I thought I would black out! After he had finished with me, he whacked me again trying to shut me up from crying. Every time he whacked me I’d cry again. He sort of settled me down a bit. We drove to a place called Kabra.

I was crying when I got there. People in the congregation asked me what was the matter. Father Anderson told them that I was carsick. He wouldn’t let me go with anyone. He just kept holding my arm making me follow him. He kept pushing me along into the Sanctuary where I had to put on my altar boy clothes. He carried his port with the cruets, hosts and his holy vests. I got dressed and went out and said Mass with him. Here I was a boy of the Lord and this thing happened to me. I was so confused. When he drove me back to the orphanage I was still crying. He told me I was not to tell anyone. We were taught that whatever came out
of the priest’s mouth was God’s word. I was so afraid. That was how we were educated.

I was terrified beyond belief. I had committed a mortal sin. Being a child of God, everything I learned seemed to tumble down on me. As any child would do, I told Sister Assumption and Sister Channel. I was in hysterics. I was looking for protection from my mother – the nuns. I was shocked even further when both nuns turned on me. “How dare you talk about Father that way, you dirty filthy thing. You dirty filthy animal!” I copped a flogging that made me pee myself – and I was even more distorted. They screamed at me louder, “You’re telling lies Owen! Tell the truth! Father would not touch you!” Whack! whack! whack! I had to stop them from hitting me so I told them what they wanted to hear, “No Sister, Father didn’t hurt me.” It didn’t end there. The nun was now satisfied. She barked, “How dare you lie Owen!” Bang! bang! bang! bang.

It got worse. As the weeks went on, I was called to the Presbytery again and again. I was so sore and upset after the penetration, all the while confused as to what was going to happen to me. I would pray to the Lord for protection. There was no protection. I was just fed to him.
Later in that same week I came out of saying the Rosary and heard, “Number 34 you’re wanted at the Presbytery to learn the Latin!” I was afraid to go there. I took my time about getting there...not knowing. I was still so innocent that I prayed maybe I was being called in because of a mistake I made as an altar boy. When I got in there, it was the same nightmare. Father would call me over; pull me up on his lap and start kissing me. Before I realized where I was, I found myself in his bedroom. He would take out a tube of Bryl Cream hair oil to rub on his penis to enter my backside. There was no stopping him either. Once he had an erection, he was an animal. He did not care what he did or how he did it. I was his boy and I was there for his lust.

When he finished with me I went back to the dormitory crying. I kept thinking that if I told the nun what had happened I would be saved. I hoped it would all just go away. I was met with another flogging. I couldn’t understand what was happening to me. My mind was so confused. Somehow, I still believed in a God. I used to pray, “Please God don’t let him touch me.” My prayers were never heard.

Over the next six months of this continual horror, I lost it. I’ve been asked whether there were any good nuns out
there. I couldn’t say yes to this when all of the nuns knew what was happening to me, but not one of them would forgo their vows to stop it. It happened to me time and time again. If I told another boy he would only go running to the nuns and I would get flogged even harder. I withdrew into my own inner hell. After every time he penetrated me, I dirtied the bed. This went on twice a week for two years.

Every time the State Inspector would come out I was locked away, either under the floorboards or in the port room under the dormitory. I was a child placed in the hands of the State. The State Inspector was a good friend of the priest who was abusing me. They dined together many a time. How inappropriate!

I got to the point where I wasn’t going to take any more if I could help it. I ran away with my friend Johnny after we had been flogged that severely that we were locked in one of the showers. It had a small window above the door. Bruised and beaten, you couldn’t lay on your back because of the pain. You would lie on your side sucking your thumb and rocking yourself to sleep while crying and crying and crying.

We decided to escape from the prison hellhole. We climbed out of the window and ran to a place called McCluid's,
about three miles away in the bush. We held up in an old
house eating plums. It was known that if you were missing
for more than twenty-four hours, they would get the police
from Rockhampton and a Black Tracker to look for you.

The yardmen came out looking first and found us before the
twenty-four hours were up. They rode on horseback and had
us on a long rope. We had to run barefoot on the cattle
pad. They kept flicking their whips at us to keep us going.

When we got back to Neerkol the school was called together.
The devil himself came up with a cat o’ nine tails. While
two older boys held us over a desk he pulled all off all of
our clothes in front of the girls as well. The children
watched. We were flogged until we were semi-conscious.

That following weekend, The Hibernians came out to Neerkol.
They would bring lollies and ice cream for the children. Of

Of course the nuns didn’t want the Hibernians to see us so
they put us under the floorboards. They made sure you were
scared to death, telling you about the wild cats and snakes
that were down there. As they put us down there, we were
screaming and crying. No one could hear us. There was no
food or water. The only daylight you would see was from the
holes in the air vents of the brickwork. It was so pitch
black down there that you could actually see the eyes of
the cats in the dark. The “Sisters of Mercy” began our punishment at nine o clock in the morning. Then the kind Sisters made sure that their night time prayers were completed before getting us out.

The nuns had been wondering why I wasn’t going to Holy Communion. When I told them it was because of Anderson, I would get a slap across the face from talking like that. I was only allowed to go to confession with Father Anderson. When I went to confession I would say, “Bless me Father for I have sinned...I’ve committed a sin of impurity.” He would say, “Who with?” I would say, “You Father.” He answered, “What a priest does to a child is not a mortal sin...but if you tell anyone it would be a mortal sin and if you die you will go to the fires of hell.”

Totally crazed, I went back to bed that night and cried myself to sleep. I prayed, “If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take, If I die in mortal sin, I’m lost forever. Jesus have mercy on me.”

At this point I couldn’t learn a thing. I was only eleven. I had become that mixed up and confused over what was happening to me that I went from loving to learn, to losing all interest or desire in my education. It was decided that I would be of better use working on the property. I would
go to school in the morning and was dismissed to go to the yard. I was taught to do sucker bashing. This was done with the back of an ax hitting the small shoots on a tree to knock them off. Kelly the yardman would give me a hoe and a water bag. I had to go down to the paddock and chip magurra burr, as it was a noxious weed.

Anderson wouldn’t stop abusing me even then. He would come down to the paddock on horseback and sexually abuse me under a juju tree. Father would stop the horse under the tree and tell me to come over to have a juju. He would then grab me and molest me. This happened about three times when I woke up to the fact that from where I was working I could see Anderson standing on the back verandah of the Presbytery.

I saw him coming this day. I jumped into the dam covered in Hyacinth so I could hide from him. He couldn’t find me. With my head above the waterline, a big brown snake swam past. I was more frightened of Anderson than the snake. I stayed in the dam until I knew he had left. It seemed like forever. When I finally got out of the dam, my body was covered with leeches. I sneaked up the back way of the orphanage and into the boiler room where they used to heat the water for the showers. There was this fifteen-year-old
boy Max, we called him Whooshie, in charge of the boiler room. When he saw the all the leeches on me, he poked a stick into the fire and put it on the leeches. The leeches would come off. They were all over my back, legs, chest and arms. It took a long time to get them all.

I didn’t want to be found, so I arranged with Max to hide in the boiler room. I hid there for about three days. The black trackers and the police couldn’t find me. Wooshie would bring me a bit of bread, a few jujus, and some wild plums to live on. One day Wooshee let me know that the nuns were offering five boiled lollies for anyone who would tell them my whereabouts. I asked him if he was going to turn me in. I said, “You wouldn’t dog your old mate in would you?” He said, “Of course not.” Well the bastard turned me in for five boiled lollies after all.

I was dirting the bed a lot now because of what was happening to me. Well I wasn’t any different than anyone else. I would be led down in front of everyone in the Refectory and made to stand on a table with a dirty sheet on my head. I got no breakfast. I got a bit of slops for dinner, and that’s what it was slops, and got no tea before bed for fear of my dirting the bed again. At twelve years
old the nuns knew very well that I did not have any other physical problems other than Father Anderson!

After morning breakfast, the children would get ready for school while I was made to go pull weeds around the convent garden. The garden would be filled with pigweed and hibiscus buds. I found that I could eat them, as I was so hungry. It was a vicious circle.

I was being abused so often that I was always dirtying the bed. I would then be punished over again. Funny thing, if you didn’t eat the hibiscus buds within two or three days, the bud would blossom. So you had to eat them pretty darn quick. I found myself stuffing my shirt pockets with hibiscus buds.

I still laugh about the day the nuns were looking for Hibiscus flowers to put on the altar. The bushes were bare, but my pocket was full of hibiscus. As I was walking away the nun stopped me, “Owen, what have you got in your pocket?” “I replied, “Nothing Sister.” She demanded that I empty my pocket. I pulled out a big bunch of buds. Did I get a flogging for that!

My schedule as an altar boy would change with the mood of Father Anderson. If he was violating me during the week, I
would not be his altar boy on the weekend when he went out to say Mass. If he violated me on the weekend, I would not be an altar boy during the week. Sometimes I would just be too bruised and battered for him to abuse me. Somehow he would always catch up with me.

There was a time when a Jesuit priest had come to Neerkol to give a retreat. I was in church kneeling down ready to go to confession with him. A nun came up from behind and grabbed me by the ear, pulling me away. I was told that I was not allowed to go to another priest for confession other than Father Anderson. More confusion...more lies. I was only a child.

With Anderson forcing me to suck his doodle and putting it into my backside, I knew this was a mortal sin. Because I told the nuns about what he had done to me, this was also a mortal sin. We were taught that the priest was higher than Sister Superior. You were to believe whatever he said. That’s what I believed!

The nightmare continued. One night the nun sang out, “Number thirty four! You’re wanted at the Presbytery.” I refused to go. She sang out louder, “Owen go to the Presbytery!” I just stood there. She grabbed me by the belt and started whacking me. She dragged me over to the
Presbytery. I was crying. Sister Assumpta was in the Presbytery when I got there. She turned to me and said, “Owen, you be a good boy for Father Anderson.” I grabbed hold of her. I pleaded with her, “Don’t let Anderson touch me.” She responded by whacking me around my head with her hand until I let her go. She gave me to Anderson.

When he finished with me, that same nun with two others came up to the dormitory later that night. They pulled my pajamas down and flogged the living daylights out of me. Two nuns sat on top of me while Aquinas flogged me. They kept saying, “You have the devil in you. The only way we’ll get the devil out of you is to flog it out of you.”

Sister Assumpta was one of the cruelest and most vicious women that God ever put breath into. If there ever was a woman who wasn’t a lady of God and was dressed up in nun’s clothing it was she! She was a vicious, vicious woman. She stood six foot four. Even if you pleaded she kept flogging you without any let up. She was relentless. Sometimes she would pick you up by the belt, swing you around and let you go. If you didn’t get up, she would come over and be into you again with more flogging.

When Anderson left for Ireland I had twelve months of freedom. Another priest came out to take his place Father
Durham. I was called to the Presbytery. There was a man waiting to see me wearing a priest’s collar and an army uniform. He told me to come over and sit on his lap. I jumped back and screamed, “You touch me and I’ll tell Father Anderson on you.” He said, “Oh yes, that’s right you’re Father Anderson’s boy.” He sent me on my way. It was the first time I left the Presbytery without being abused. I wasn’t sure if other boys were being abused. But I did learn a rhyme just before leaving Neerkol from the other boys:

Father Anderson and Father Durham go to church on Sunday. To pray to God to give them strength to F little boys on Monday.

The next day Assumpta tried to whack me. I tried the same thing on her, “You touch me and I’ll tell Father Anderson on you.” Well Holy Dooly, she didn’t cop the bluff, she was just into me.

At thirteen I was pretty defiant. I was sore and bleeding from the anus. The nuns taught me how to wear a nappie made of calico sheeting lined with newspaper to absorb the blood. When Father Anderson returned from Ireland he started on me again. I was older now and a lot stronger. Anderson knew if that if he wanted me to perform oral sex,
I would not cooperate! I was going on thirteen years old and I didn’t care what kind of threat they made to me. Where could I run? I now had the fear of being put into a reformatory.

My defiance was obvious on the last trip. I wouldn’t even talk to him. I was forced to go and assist him as his altar boy. Of course he would want more than this. He asked me to sit close to him. I would not sit anywhere near him, staying up against the passenger door. He continued to ask me to sit alongside of him. I refused. I warned him that if he touched me I would tell Mother Emelian on him. I told him that he was making me commit mortal sins. He didn’t reply. He just kept driving. When we got to the middle of the bridge called Neerkol Creek, he stopped the car and dragged me out. He grabbed me by my belt and dangled me over the railing. It was a big drop. He threatened me with if I told anyone he would drop me into the fires of hell. I was screaming. You could hear the echo move down the creek in the mist. I pleaded, “Please father, I’ll be a good boy. Don’t drop me.” He was a big strong man. He pulled me back up. We went back to the car and I did what he wanted.

It didn’t stop there. A few days later, I was called back to the Presbytery. He wanted me to sit on his lap. I was
defiant. He got up and went into his bedroom. He walked out with his coat and grabbed my arm. He told me he was taking me out to drop me into the fires of hell. I had that much fear of the devil that I succumbed to him once again. He dragged me in the bedroom and took my clothes off which was no more than a shirt and a pair of shorts. We all knew what happened if you died out there with a mortal sin on your soul. God help you.

I was about thirteen and a half years old when it all ended. I was rebelling over what Anderson was doing to me. I was so angry. I could not read or write my name. I couldn’t spell or add up. I didn’t know how to tell the time. I didn’t even know when my birthday was.

This day, Assumpta told me that I was wanted at the Presbytery. I refused to go. She came out with her cane. I was whacked that much that I could have absorbed the pain, but I had enough! When I put out my hand and she whacked it, I grabbed the cane and started whacking her back. Her habit that was so thick she couldn’t have felt much. The kids were roaring with laughter. Next thing I knew, two yard men came up. They stripped me down and held me over a table in front of the whole school. Mr. Murphy flogged me until I could not stand up.
The next day I was removed from the dormitory and school for good. I was sent down to the yard to live in the men’s quarters. Father Anderson came down to the yard the next day. He said to me, “No boy lays a hand on my nuns.” He started hitting me with a closed fist. He gave me a real hiding. I was no longer an altar boy, but I was no longer Anderson’s boy either! I stayed in the yard for the next year until I was fourteen and a half. It would take the nuns the entire twelve months to stop the bleeding from my anus before I could be sent out to service.

To this day, I believe he would have taken my life and no one would’ve known. There would have been no post mortem. I would just have been buried at the grounds because I had no one.
When I was living down in the yard I had six nappies made of calico sheeting. I used to have my own kerosene tin and cut up soap. I would have to wash three or four out every night and boil them for the next day. It was 1952 and I was getting on to fourteen years old. It was time for me to go to service but they could not send me out to a dairy farm in the state I was in. There was no doctor treating me. The nun who handled the first aid would treat my backside every week with Mercurochrome. She would then send me over to Mother Superior’s office. I would pull down my pants and bend over so that she could inspect my progress.

I enjoyed yard work. I got up every morning around 4:30 to get about fifty cows from the paddock for milking. I would feed the calves. There was the separation to get cream to make butter for the home. I cleaned the bales out, washed up, and took the cows back to the paddock. By the time I was through it was time for breakfast. It was a plate of leftovers from the men, two slices of bread and a cup of cocoa. After breakfast Mr. Patel and Mr. Murphy would organize my workload. I would chop wood or sometimes do rim barking.
At three o clock, I would have to bring the cows in again for milking that afternoon. Every Thursday I would help Mr. Kelly to get a bullock to be killed on Friday. The meat was for the orphanage. Once a month, I would go mustering with Mr. Kelly so that all the cattle would be dipped for ticks. Once a week they used to kill a bullock for meat. I would help in the slaughter yard and then clean up afterwards. When we killed the bullock, we would build a big bonfire of timber and put the unused parts: the guts, the hooves and the head on the fire and pour power kerosene on it.

It was strange to me then and strange to me now. It happened at least six times in the last year I was at Neerkol. On the day we would kill the bullock, I was told to go up to the convent with a wheelbarrow to pick up some parcels.

I would go up to the convent and have to wait at the bottom of the steps. I would just stand there and wait with my wheelbarrow. Sister Superior would come down the steps and bring down these parcels, one by one. I was not allowed to help in any way as she did this. They were bundles about the size of a shoebox wrapped up in crisp clean calico sheeting with a medal of Our Lady of Fatima pinned on.
After she had gingerly placed all of the parcels in the wheelbarrow. I was instructed to silently push the wheelbarrow alongside of her. She prayed all the way down the path. She had a cushion tucked under one arm to kneel on when we got down to where the carcass was going to be burned. When we reached our destination, she was the only one allowed to touch the parcels. She gently placed each parcel on the fire.

I stood behind her and when she gave the order, I handed her a bucket of power kerosene and matches. I left and went back to the slaughterhouse. She would carefully pour the kerosene over the parcels, all the while praying, and then continue to pour a line out on to the grass while she moved away another ten feet. Poof! It was a big blaze. Black smoke swirled outward. Sister would kneel down on her cushion clenching her rosary beads. You could hear the continuous low hum of her voice as she prayed aloud. She just stared at the fire all the while praying. When she was sure that there was nothing left but ashes, she would go back to the convent alone. Back at the slaughterhouse, I watched her final ceremony with curiosity. Until one day, one of the yardmen caught me just staring at the bizarre
scene. He told me to move on. He said, “It’s none of your business,” as if he knew it was a terrible secret.

Now I did not see what was in those parcels, but for all of my life it has been in the back of my mind. What was in those parcels? As a teenager I was so naïve. I actually never thought anything other than that they might have been boxes of old hosts or old statues. Sister was just offering them up to the Lord above.

Now that I am a grown man, I realize what a lot of other things there are in this world. I hate to think what could have been wrapped up in calico sheeting with a religious medal pinned to it. I still have nightmares over this. Wouldn’t you wonder what was in those parcels?

I have reported this to the Inspector of Police in Rockhampton, the Children’s Commission and the Forde Inquiry over the years. I told the Inspector of Police in Rockhampton that I could take him right to where the bonfire was lit. Maybe a medal would have been found. Nothing was ever done. Time moved on. Thank God, I had a credible social worker with me during my time in front of the Forde Inquiry. When I received the official transcripts from the hearing, I was shocked to find that my testimony regarding the mysterious parcels had been omitted entirely!
When I phoned the Commission to inquire about this, I was told that it might have been due to a possible power outage that day. Whether it was a mistake on the part of the Commission or the fine work of the evil, but now deceased, Mother Superior, I’ll never know. If she did commit a mortal sin, I refuse to go down to the fires of hell to ask her.
Through all my years at Neerkol I only made contact with State Inspector Mr. Patterson once. It was back when I was in Small Boy’s Dormitory and I had performed a solo for him at a holiday concert. Now that I was fourteen and about to leave the orphanage, he would have to see me in order to release me out to work on a dairy farm. I was down in the paddock chopping wood when Mr. Kelly told me that the Inspector wanted to see me in the Men’s Quarters.

Thank God I was wearing nappies at the time; I was that frightened I peed myself. I walked very slowly up to the Men’s Quarters. When I came around the truck shed, he was standing on the verandah. As it had been drummed into me to treat him with respect

I said, “Good Morning Inspector. God Bless you.” He replied, “Owen, where’s your room!” I didn’t know what was going on. I led him to my room not knowing if he was going to be a Father Anderson or not. He told me that he wanted to send me to work but that he couldn’t because of the state of my backside. I had to get better before this could happen. He asked me what had happened. I told him what Father Anderson had done to me. Of course, he already knew. He warned me that if I mentioned anything about Father
Anderson and my bleeding from the backside to anyone, I would be sent to a Reformatory. He instructed me not to tell anyone about my bleeding backside. I was to tell them that I was suffering from piles.

The next time I saw the State Inspector was right before I was to go out to service. This time he asked me how my backside was doing. I told him that it was still bleeding and that Sister Superior was checking me once a week. He told me I was a good worker and that he had a dairy farm waiting for me. He told me that Sister Superior would pass me fit and it would not be long before I was released. I never saw a doctor, ever. One month later I was sent into town for an outfit of clothes.

Funny, instead of feeling happy to finally get out of there I was hit with a sadness that I was being sent away. They told me to be ready the next day as Mr. Patel would drive me into the State Children’s Department, just like that! After fourteen years of my life, I was released without a clue as to what the outside world was like. Mother Emelian did take a moment to make sure that I could make a nappie out of a singlet. Her instructions were very clear. I was to get a long singlet, pull the sides towards my belly, pull up the piece hanging between my legs and pin the three
parts up near my belly button. She told me that I would also need newspaper to put on my backside under the singlet to stop the bleeding from going through to my pants. Of course, a government doctor did not prescribe this, as I must emphasize that I was never seen by one.

I left the next day in the Black Holden that was a huge part of my worst nightmare at the orphanage. It was the same automobile that was the scene of the crime with Father Anderson. I drove away from the only home I ever knew. I cried the whole way into Rockhampton.

I was dropped off at the State Children’s Department and was taken to Mr. Patterson. I sat in his office as he finalised my paper work and we waited for the farmer, Mr. Leahy, to arrive. While I sat there Patterson made sure that he put the fear of God into me as he explained to about the government’s ‘fires of hell’ – the State Reformatory.

He warned me that if I committed a misdemeanour on the farm and was sent back to him, I would be sent to a reformatory. He described it as a terrible place where you would get flogged three times a day with a cat-of-nine tails and only get one slice of dry bread and a cup of water. He frightened me with yet a new set of rules. A misdemeanor
included: being cheeky, swearing or disobeying the farmer and his wife; leaving the farm without permission; going to town without the farmer and his wife; telling lies or stealing from the farmer and his wife; fighting on the farm; drinking on the farm; being lazy and not doing the work properly.

I was already feeling lost, but now I was terrified. The farmer picked me up and took me back to the property. My stay there wasn’t too bad. I was still bleeding from the backside, but had gotten quite good at maneuvering with makeshift nappies. I never said anything about my problem, even if I thought he might have saw blood on the back of my pants. I refused to tell him or anyone else that I had piles, even if Patterson’s threats of the reformatory were fresh in my mind.

I remember when I arrived at the Leahy’s home that day and was shown the sleeping arrangements. I couldn’t believe that the farmer and his wife slept together, and in the same room. I was flabbergasted! According to everything I had been taught by the nuns up to this point, they were committing a huge mortal sin. Back at the orphanage the boys and girls were never allowed to even speak to each other. If any boy was caught laughing with a girl they
would be flogged. About week after settling in at the
Leahy’s place I had my first real eye opener as I had no
idea of what sex between a man and a woman was about. I was
drifting off to sleep one night when I thought I heard
sounds of pain coming from the Leahy’s bedroom. It got
louder and I jumped out of bed thinking something terrible
was happening. I burst into their room to protect Mrs.
Leahy from what I thought was a terrible flogging. I
screamed at Mr. Leahy, “What are you doing to her? Leave
her alone!” Well the farmer jumped out of his bed in a
flash and dragged me out of the room. He told me that I was
never to enter their bedroom again or I would get a real
hiding! I went back to my room and got into bed feeling
very embarrassed and somewhat confused. There were no more
sounds of pain coming from the hallway, just a lot of
laughter.

That Sunday we all went to Mass. I noticed that Mr. Leahy
had gone to Communion without going to Confession. I was
put off with a real religious indignance! I believed that
he had committed two mortal sins, one sin of impurity for
sleeping with Ms. Leahy, and one sin for not confessing to
it. On the drive back I couldn’t help myself. I felt that I
had to question him about the obvious mistake he had made
when it came to his religion. I tried to warn him about the mortal sins he had committed. Well, the two of them had another great laugh over the whole thing the whole way home. They tried to explain it to me. I didn’t know what to believe.

After seven months there was no more work for me. Mr. Leahy was share farming and his lease had run out. He had to deliver me back to the orphanage. I went back to work in the yard. I didn’t mind, as I was back home safe with my secret.

Mother Emelian returned to her duty of treating and inspecting my backside as it was still bleeding. We would meet twice a week for the next three months. I found plenty to do down in the yard. I was in no hurry.

During this time the nuns and Father Anderson were planning a Retirement Party and Concert honoring the State Inspector Mr. Patterson. I was told that I would recite the tribute solo, even though I was much older than the other children. The nuns thought this would be a good thing for me to get back in Patterson’s good favor, as they knew of his backhanding me. During the concert I stood up tall and performed. I get disgusted remembering what I actually recited for the bastard:
Here’s to the man we can freely forgive,
Those who have tried to offend him,
Long may he flourish,
And long may he live,
And jolly good fortune attend him.
A chorus of little children followed. They sang,

...and jolly good fortune attend him.

Back then I understood the word “tribute.” Today it has a different meaning, as it was really an “arrogant display of the misuse of authority.” The only good that came of this was that Mr. Patterson was no longer in charge. Or so I thought...

Back at the men’s quarters, I was told that I was going to another farm. I was still bleeding from my backside, but I was prepared with my singlets and newspaper. Three months had passed when I was taken to the State Inspector once again before being released. I was told again about misdemeanors and what the State Reformatory was like. I never forgot the fear. I still hadn’t seen a doctor.

I was working on my second farm for about six months before my ‘problem’ was discovered. We were dipping cattle. I was out rounding up cattle on horseback. When I returned to the farm and got down from the horse. Mr. Hanrahan noticed me
bleeding from the backside. He said, “What happened to you?” He seemed a good man, so I decided to tell him what had gone on at Neerkol with Father Anderson. I explained that every time my bowels worked I would start bleeding. He was shocked and angry to hear how the nuns would flog me when I told them what the priest had done to me. Nothing was discussed that night. I went to bed feeling relieved for the first time in my life. I had the courage to speak out.

The next day, we milked the cows and took the milk cans down to the road to be picked up. After we were finished with the chores, he put me in the truck without any of my belongings. We drove into Rockhampton to the State Children’s Department. I honestly think he was trying to help. Somehow, Mr. Patterson happened to be there in the office when we arrived. But he was retired! I knew then that this must have been arranged; and Father Anderson was pulling the strings.

Mr. Hanrahan was genuinely mad. He told me to tell Mr. Patterson what I said to him the day before. I told Patterson about what Father Anderson and the nuns had done to me full well knowing that he was a big part of my secret. I wasn’t sure what would happen.
All I got was a backhand from Patterson. He said, “How dare you talk about a priest like that! Where would you be without the priest and the nuns?!” Mr. Hanrahan was screaming and shouting at Patterson, “I don’t want him back! Do what you like with him but I don’t want him back. I’ve got an eight-year-old son at home and I don’t want him anywhere near him. I don’t want my boy abused.” Mr. Hanrahan stormed out. I felt more abandoned and dirty than I had for a long time.

I bled during the entire meeting, with no relief from the discomfort. Instead I was told to sit on a stool and wait while Mr. Patterson drove back out to the farm and collected my belongings. He returned four hours later. Then, it was decided that he and another worker would escort me back to Neerkol, as they feared I would run away. We drove out of Rockhampton actually passing the hospital. We never stopped. In their custody however, I quietly bled all the way back to the orphanage. I was once again back in the yard at Neerkol. Nothing had changed.

The awful shock of what took place in the State Children’s Office with Mr. Hanrahan, Mr. Patterson and I that rotten day back in 1954 would be only a small part of what I would have to deal with forty years later. Unfortunately the
ruthless lies would not be uncovered until all of my accusers were dead. But the law remained in place. How betrayed and violated I felt all over again, when in 1993 I received my government records under the Freedom Information Act. My blood pressure hit the ceiling as I found two completely false State Inspector reports discussing why I had to be returned to Neerkol from the Hanrahan’s farm. The evil deception found in two completely separate documents would accuse and convict the State Child David Owen of TWO MISDEMEANORS. It would say that I stole twice from the Hanrahans. These all-out lies in black and white were buried for years. Think of it, there was no way the State Inspector could report the truth without implicating himself and Anderson.

For the record: POINT, I was returned because of the bleeding from my backside from the years of sexual abuse by Father Anderson. POINT, Sister Amelian was the person treating me for my wounds. POINT, I was never examined by a government doctor for release to go out to work. Yet there is a government document in my file confirming this lie. I understand that the word fraud is very powerful, but it is the only explanation.
I kept my hopes up while waiting at the orphanage for my next farm work assignment. A month later I was told that I would be sent to my third dairy farm. I was dropped off at the State Children’s Office. I was a bit surprised when I walked into the room and was greeted by Mr. Patterson. Now he was definitely retired, so it was a bit curious as to why he made a special point of being at the office when I arrived. He asked the necessary questions about the bleeding from my backside, knowing full well that Anderson had damaged me beyond belief. He put me through the same drill of explaining misdemeanors and what happened if you were sent to a reformatory. He personally accompanied me with another state worker by train all the way to Gladston, making sure I was handed over to the farmer. As a State child placed out for hire, I carried my port filled with the regulation gear: 1 hat, 1 brush, 1 thick comb, 1 fine comb, 2 pair of socks, 1 suit, 1 coat, 2 pyjamas, 6 pocket handkerchiefs, 2 pair boots, 2 working shirts, 2 good shirts, 1 belt, 1 braces, 2 pairs of working trousers, 1 raincoat, 1 Bible, 2 flannels, 2 singlets, 1 tie, 1 jersey, 1 toothpaste, 1 toothbrush.

At the end of the line I was met by the Camplins. It would be another life. Patterson would go back to his mate
Anderson with the news; Number 34 was officially gone. I couldn’t help but wonder what it was about me that made people want to send me away.
I was led to my room out on the big verandah at the back of the house. It was nothing more than a servant’s room. The rest of the family lived inside the house. My position was spelled out from the start.

Mr. Camplin was good and bad. He told me exactly what he wanted and expected from me. Mrs. Camplin put on a good show coming along to pick me up at the station, but by the time we arrived back at the house it was obvious that she wanted nothing to do with me. Her message was clear. I was nothing more to her than an orphan who had came to work for them.

There was another young man named Glenn who worked on the farm and a Blue Heeler Cattle Dog named Kelpie. Glen was in his early twenties and was like a son to the Camplins. He had a bedroom inside the house and he ate his meals with the family. He was treated much different to me. I never held it against him as he was easy to get along with and tried to be a big brother to me once in a while. Once a month he would take me along with him to Gladston to the pictures. We would buy ice cream and popcorn. This was the first time I ever saw anything on a big screen. I could escape from the real world for a few hours. I remember
seeing my first shoot ‘em up Western with Tom Mix where the good guys won out over the “evil law men.” I was reminded of Neerkol.

Driving home that night I thought oh geez, I’ve got to be up at four in the morning to milk 130 cows. Back on the farm Glen drove the tractor and plowed the fields while I would did the hard labor. I couldn’t help but feel like a slave, hauling large sacks of sorghum on my back to feed to the pigs, cleaning the bales and gathering up all the cow dung. If nothing else, it made me a fit young man. And miraculously after the first month on the farm my backside stopped bleeding for good.

My day would start in the dark. The verandah was set up with an electric jug, toaster, bread tin and fridge with milk. I would grab some toast and a cup of tea for breakfast and head down the hill, across the creek with a torch. Kelpie the Cow Dog was the only help I had to bring all the cows into the yard for milking. When the milking was finished and the milk cans were sent on to Gladston the remainder of milk was separated into cream. This was my job. Kelpie and I would take the cows down to the Lucerne paddock. While they were grazing, I’d go back to the shed to crush sorghum for the pigs. When I’d finished up with
the pigs, I’d have to go back to get the cows and remove them from the Lucerne so that their bellies wouldn’t get bloated. By then it was afternoon and it was time for dinner. Mr. Camplin would bring down sandwiches and set them in the barn where there was an electric jug set up for a cuppa. Sometimes if they got stuck in town and we were hungry, Glenn would drive up to the house and pick up the tucker. While he was gone I imagined running away. Every day of my life on the farm was long and hard. I felt like a slave.

It was about seven o’clock at night when Glenn and Mr. Camplin finished and went up to the house for tea. Mrs. Camplin had their nice hot meal on the dining room table when they arrived. I however had another hour or so of clean up. I had to make sure the barn, the yard and the farm equipment was washed up and ready to go for the next morning. I was not allowed to eat inside with the others.

By the time I got back up to the house, Kelpie the Cow Dog had beat me to where Mrs. Camplin would put my tea on the washhouse steps leading up to the verandah. The covered plate would usually have a fair amount of sausage or roast meat with vegetables. Well by the time I would get up to the stairs and get my plate, the lid was off and my tea was
gone. There would be a few veggies left maybe some peas or cabbage. The meat was gone!

I picked my plate up and knocked on the door. I told Mrs. Camplin that the bloody cow dog Kelpie had knocked off my tea! I thought she would be sympathetic as we both looked down at my empty plate. Instead of being understanding she was sarcastic and said, “If you can’t hurry up and cleanup down at the farm, that’s not my fault. If you don’t get up here before Kelpie, that’s your fault.” She closed the door laughing in my face.

I was that hungry, I ate all the bread she put in the bread tin on the verandah for my breakfast the next morning. I decided that something would have to be done. So to get square with Kelpie I would beat him to the scrap tin where Mrs. Camplin would put their leftovers out for him. Sometimes I’d find a sausage or a bit of steak. Fair dinkum. I got my own back on the dog!

This went on for some time, Kelpie beating me for my tea, and not getting anywhere with Mrs. Camplin, I would scheme all day long while I picked up cow dung in yard, what in the hell I was going to do next.
I was that desperate my wicked mind had me thinking of feeding Kelpie to the pigs. But fate beat me to it. That same day Kelpie picked up one of Mr. Camplin’s dingo baits and died. Kelpie was never to take my tea again, but I felt very sad that he had passed away. I buried Kelpie under the gooseberry tree. With all of my religious training I made sure he had a proper goodbye, in Latin of course.

After I finished cleaning up that night, I went up and my tea was on the steps. I ate it all and relished the moment. After washing my plate, I knocked on the door and Mrs. Camplin came out. I had a big grin on my face as I handed her my clean plate. I said, “Thank you Mrs. Camplin for the lovely tea.” As I walked away I wondered if she could hear me laughing.

That night lying in bed I wondered what Mr. Camplin would do to me when he found out about Kelpie. I worried that if he blamed me, I’d be sent to a reformatory. At four o’clock the next morning, there would be no Kelpie to help me to get the cows in. I went down to the paddock and shouted my lungs out for the cows to come home. It was five o’clock when we started milking and daylight was coming upon us fast. When it did come, there were still seventy cows down at the gate waiting to be let in. Mr. Camplin asked me why
I didn’t get all of the cows the first time. I told him that I couldn’t find Kelpie. He tied me up to the bales and whipped me.

Glenn kept a watch on me to make sure I did not run away. He gave me a hand for the first time that night while I cleaned up. We went back up to the house together and had our tea. Glenn threw a roll down to sleep on the verandah to make sure I was there in the morning. It wasn’t long before the Camplins got another cattle dog. They called him Brutus. This time I made sure that he was tied up until I was finished with all of my cleaning up chores. I trained him to walk behind me the whole way back to the house.

My life was changing dramatically. It was a ‘first time’ for me to go along with the Camplins and Glenn to the Digger’s Arms Dance Hall on a Saturday night in Calliope. Sometimes we all used to go in Glenn’s car. The place was crowded with people. There was a stage with a live band and an MC who would call out the dances. It looked like a lot of fun, until the first dance was called. I sat along the wall with the other boys when the MC shouted out, “All right ladies select your partner for a ‘Gypsy Tap.’” The ladies got up on the floor and looked around at all the boys. As they started picking out their dance partners, you
could hear them whispering to each other and pointing, “Oh, that’s the orphan boy.” I felt like such an outcast. I was dressed in my out-to-service good clothes: black shoes, long white socks, trousers, a white shirt and tie. All the other boys would be wearing long pants. I stood out like a neon sign. As the last few girls walked around the room and picked the last of the boys, I would be the only one left sitting. No one would pick me. I was so embarrassed! After a few times with no relief, my mate Peter yanked me out on the dance floor and we made our own fun sliding across the floor to the ‘Pride of Erin.’ I was a pretty good dancer back at Neerkol. After this, I developed a real inferiority complex when it came to teenage girls.

I kept going along on Saturday nights even though I felt so bad about myself. It was horrible to admit that no girl would ever pick me to dance. I pleaded with the Camplins to let me stay home and listen to country western on the radio. After all, whether I went to the dance or not, the next morning I would have to get up at four o’clock to bring the cows in for milking. Sunday was always a real torture day for me. Mr. Camplin would not allow me to stay home without supervision. I had to go to the dance hall with them no matter what. I started hanging around with a
few of the boys in the front lobby and next door at the cafe. Some nights there were a few brawls out behind the tank stand. My mates and I loved watching these fights. Back at the café, having a milkshake, one mate would tell about working in his dad’s sawmill, while the other one had stories of working in his father’s grocery store. I would go back to my room at the Camplins and think about how I could get out of working on a farm for the rest of my life.

My prayers were answered when the Korean War was on. I was keen to tell Mr. Camplin that I wanted to join the Air Force. It was a perfect way out! It wasn’t as easy as I thought, as I was a few months shy of eighteen years old and I had to get special permission from the State to allow me to travel to Brisbane and enlist. Even though the Camplins were never really like a family to me, I was thrilled that they went out of their way to see that I had been given the opportunity to go for what I wanted. He wrote the appropriate government agencies to acquire the special permit that I would need to take the trip to Brisbane by myself.

I really thought that my life would get better. I had seen all of the advertisements for the Royal Air Force and I believed that this would be a dream come true for me. It
never occurred to me when I took the required government aptitude test for admittance that I wasn’t going to be considered fit for service. I was a strong young man and my backside had completely cleared up. I never even thought about failing. My hopes were high. The physical exam went well, but when I sat down to fill in the forms I couldn’t read any of it, nor answer the questions on my own. I had to ask someone to fill in the application for me. Because of this, I failed miserably. There was no chance of being admitted. It felt like Neerkol had come back and slapped me harder than ever. I was illiterate. I was a loser. As always, the nuns would win.

I had to go back to the Camplin’s with real disappointment. I think that they also began to feel sorry for me, as they knew that I did not want to work on a farm after I turned eighteen. After a few weeks back on the farm, I mentioned to Mr. Camplin that at the Saturday night dance one of my mates told me that the sawmill was looking for another boy. Now Camplin could be mean at times, I had floggings to prove it. But he proved to me that as a man, he could also be good. He went out of his way to help me leave the farm and get the job at the sawmill when I turned eighteen. For
the first time in my life I would leave without being punished. I just wasn’t sure what fear was coming next.

Before I left the Camplin’s and went to work at the sawmill I had my first real holiday. I was seventeen years old when I finally experienced the true meaning of the words

“Merry Christmas.”

Back at Neerkol, my memories as a ten-year-old boy would run parallel to Oliver Twist. My life however would be more gruesome, as I was not only being deprived of food and clothing, being flogged till I could not sit down, but being sodomized as well. During the Christmas holidays the Sisters of Mercy would go to new heights in their sadistic torture of a child. Father Anderson had been sexually abusing me and I would tell the nuns. They would make sure that I would be punished even harder at Christmas for “lying about Father Anderson to them.” The Refectory would have a large Christmas tree and the Bishop would come out two nights before Christmas to give all of the children their presents. A nun would call out your number and you would go up, genuflect and kiss the Bishop’s ring. He would hand you a wrapped gift. You were that excited walking back to your place, wondering what was under the wrapping. After everyone had received their present, Mother Superior would
say, “Children, you can open your presents now!” We didn’t waste any time in removing the ribbon and ripping the paper off. I was surrounded by tall he oohs and ahhs of the children when they saw their pretty dolls and shiny cars. When I unwrapped my gift and opened the box, it was empty.

I didn’t understand. I ran over to the nun crying, “Sister there is nothing in my box!” She snapped at me, “What do you expect Owen? Empty boxes for empty heads!” To this day I still weep over the lack of compassion and all-out hatred the Sisters had for me. I was just a little boy, and this was their “merciless” way of letting me know that I was a bad boy by talking against Father Anderson. I went through this for three Christmas’s in a row. The children would all be called up to get their presents. Everyone would have something in his or her Christmas package except me. I would only receive an empty box.

My last Christmas at Neerkol saw the end of the sexual abuse from Anderson. Defiantly, I refused to go up and pick up my present when my number was called. I wasn’t going to be hurt this time. I was used to getting an empty box. My friend Margaret was up near the Christmas tree when she called to me and told me that my present was still sitting under the tree. I told her that I didn’t want it, as I knew
there was nothing in it. She said to me, “How do you know unless you open it?” I told her that she could open it for me. I didn’t care. When she opened it, she was in disbelief. “Who would do this to you?” I just turned and walked away. I can admit now that even though I acted tough, I really did care. I knew that I was going to be hurt when Margaret opened my gift, yet my broken heart still wanted to believe that Santa would somehow show up. I would never get over this.

It was 1954. I was almost eighteen years old. That morning at the Camplin's, I woke up in the dark knowing that it was Christmas, but having it in my head that it would be no different than any other working day. I went out on the verandah to turn on the electric jug and there sitting on the table was a gift box tied with a beautiful bow. It had a card, “TO DAVID. MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE CAMPLINS!” My hands shook as I opened the package. I was afraid to look inside. It was a beautiful comb set for a young man. I couldn’t help but shed a tear of joy. I had never received a present from anyone, let alone at Christmas! I tiptoed back to my room and carefully put my cherished gift in my port with all my worldly belongings. I would move on with a bit of faith. Santa had finally found me.
How strange it felt to be on my own for the first time and away from farm work for good. When I arrived at the sawmill in Calliope, I couldn’t help but wonder if somehow the authorities would realize they mucked up and blame it on ‘mistaken identity.’ I knew that I hadn’t changed overnight. I was still the illiterate bastard orphan from Neerkol. Can you imagine how astonishing this was to me? Everything was so different. I even had a few quid jingling around in my pocket after I paid my board. The rest of my money was put into a government trust account for when I turned twenty-one. It was the official plan anyway…

I felt like such a dunce. I had already failed with the Air Force and the Army as I couldn’t read or write. But now working in the sawmill, it was obvious that I had not learned any arithmetic either. The first day the boss put me on the big saw. I had to work the machine that measured inches. I didn’t know how to measure 1/8 inch, 1/2 inch, 3/4 inch or 1/16 inch. I couldn’t understand what the numbers meant. I had to learn on my own, and real fast. The boss never explained much to me as he thought I knew basic math, and I would just catch on to the rest. How was I to know that when he looked at me and held up his open hand
and thumb in the air that it meant I was supposed to change the blade setting to six inches. I had no concept of working with numbers.

I’ll never forget the scene. The saw buzzed so loud that it was all you could hear. The boss waved his arms, looked right at me and signaled. He gave me an open hand of five fingers and one thumb up. I looked back at him, not really knowing what the heavens name he meant and mocked him back with an open hand of five fingers and one thumb up. By now he was screaming at the top of his lungs at me, “Can’t you understand!? Are you daft? Set the bloody blade to six inches now!” At that moment a big log came flying through and I changed the setting just in the nick of time.

After a while I started to get good at my work. My day didn’t begin until half past seven in the morning and I would knock off at four o’clock. It was heaven compared to what I had been doing on the farm. I was boarding in a house owned by a couple. They were good people and really looked after me. The tucker was good. Life was good.

It couldn’t get any better than this I thought, until I got to work the first day and the boss told me that the State Children’s Department had arranged with him to deduct thirty shillings out of my pay each week so that I would
have a dinner Monday through Friday. I wasn’t sure that I
had heard right when the boss invited me to join he and his
family at their dinner table every afternoon. I felt a bit
nervous sitting across from my boss and asking, “Excuse me
sir, could you please pass the bread?” I almost fell off of
my chair when he came back at me with, “Don’t call me
bloody sir. My name is Clarey.” His two sons along side of
me had a bit of a giggle and the Missus couldn’t hold back
at all. She let out a cackle, which made me laugh along
with them. When the meal was finished I stood up and said
‘grace,’ thanking the Lord for what he had put on my plate.
It was understood by all how much the respect I had been
shown meant to me. I almost felt as if I was part of a
family.

The two boys and I got to know each other pretty well as we
worked together all week long. The older son Colin was
about twenty-six years old. He was thin, wiry and had a
habit of playing practical jokes whenever he could. His
younger brother Bill was about four years younger, short,
stocky and much more serious. They weren’t sporting types
but they sure liked their Scottish music. Sometimes after
dinner, we’d go out back and they would play their
bagpipes. Mrs. Myers would be washing up in the kitchen and
you could hear her singing happily along to the old tunes. I found a real delight in these cheerful Highland melodies, as there was no comparison whatsoever to the sound of the dark religious hymns I grew up with.

I found myself tapping my feet in rhythm and wanting to play along. Well, I knew I could not read the music so I asked the boys if I could play a drum. They thought this was a great idea. Before I knew it, I was a member of the Gladston Thistle Pipe Band. It was a real thrill for me to march with an eighteen-piece band in the Anzac Day Parades. What a good time we all had! We would wear the Mackenzie tartan kilt with the sporran and spats. I must admit the kilt really suited me!

My personality was beginning to show. I turned eighteen and must have gotten surer of myself, as I actually chose to go back to the Saturday night dance. I had more spunk than most. The girls had changed a bit when it came to dancing with me. I was a good jiver and limbo rocker. Sometimes a few of them would actually rush over to get me up. As far as anything else was concerned, I wasn’t interested. Girls didn’t appeal to me. The nuns had been successful in brainwashing me into thinking that sex was a dirty, filthy, animalistic thing. There were other things going on that
did interest me. I found another way to get rid of some energy, as teenage boys sometimes do. I began having a few blues out in the back around the tank stand. I copped some hidings before I got a win. I gradually made friends after I had a couple of wins and knocked out a few of the local boys. I was a pretty good fighter. I guess that all the hidings I had copped from the nuns and priests gave me a strong will to win. I had finally found something from Neerkol that I could use to my advantage. So, I took up amateur boxing.

One of my best fights was at the Gladston Town Hall, just before the Queensland Heavyweight Championship Main Bout between Bull Hughes from Gladston and Casey from Rockhampton. I was on the list to fight a bloke called Jacko Norris. It was a three-minute, three-round contest. We couldn’t knock one another out. Because of this, there was a shower of people throwing twenty-cent pieces into the ring. We had to collect the money in a towel, count it and split it down the middle. Well, I had a better idea running through that crafty little mind of mine. When we got out of the ring I told Jacko, “Look, seeing as that we couldn’t do one another with the gloves on, what’dya say we go out the back? Winner takes all?” He wouldn’t go for it. We split
down the middle. The next day the Gladston paper reported it as a great fight. From then on, I was winning amateur boxing trophies all over the surrounding towns.

Even though I had this reputation of a tough bloke, no one ever knew what agony I went through every time I had to go into the dressing room with the other boxers. If any of them would strip down I would leave the room. I wasn’t going to have another ‘Anderson’ happen to me.

At twenty I had my first fight in the Jimmy Sharmin’s Tent. The crowd was gathered up close in front. There was a tall stage of wooden planks. The drum rolled. When it stopped Sharman looked down into the audience. He barked, “Who wants to come up here and fight one of my men?” I screamed out from the crowd, “How much?” He yelled back, “Five quid if you can knock him out.” I raised my hand, challenging him, “I’ll do it!” He taunted me, “OK...well come on up the ladder...see what you can do!” The crowd all knew me as an amateur boxer and screamed up to me, “Good on ya Dave...get into him Dave...good on ya D.O...” Sharmin walked around his boxers with full showmanship. The crowd jeered at him. He ceremoniously picked his out his favored boxer and we all stepped inside the tent. I laughed even back then, as you could never knock out one of Sharmin’s boxers. He made sure
that if you knocked ‘em down he would only count to eight...then he’d make you go back to your corner. When he went back to counting out on his boy lying in the ring, he would begin back at four ...not from nine or ten.

If I got knocked out, I got nothing. As a contestant, I just had to keep on my feet at the end of three rounds. It was an easy fiver for me, so I took on the next two fights. I won all three that night and put fifteen quid in my pocket. After that I was banned from the tent.

I’m not afraid to admit that I was illiterate, but I wasn’t stupid. I gave boxing away when I started fighting guys that were a lot bigger and heavier than me. I was copping a hiding to give a hiding. So I concentrated on playing Rugby League.
The isolation I felt at the orphanage was now ‘my past.’
My life working at the sawmill, playing with the pipe band
and hanging around with mates was ‘my present.’ Little did
I know that Rugby League would be ‘my future.’

I had quite a busy schedule in Calliope, even after I gave
up amateur boxing. I worked every day, practiced with the
band once a week and performed on the weekend. The
remaining nights I was throwing a ball around with some
mates who played for a football team in Gladston. Well, I
fell in love for the first time! My affection was strong
and true. Finally I had found something that I could
believe in. It wouldn’t let me down. I would obey its rules
no matter what. I lost all my fear – when it came to Rugby
League.

My job at the sawmill gave me a new sense of purpose. But a
few times without warning the town experienced flash
flooding, and the mill would close. I had no work. As I was
still in care with the State Children’s Department, and
illiterate, my boss helped me write the letter requesting
that they release some money from my government trust
account to help me get by. They were in charge of my money
until I turned twenty-one. They released a bit at a time,
but never the full amount I asked for. This happened a few
times that year.

The bad weather never stopped my mates and I from training
a few nights in Calliope, and going to Gladston to play
reserve for the Western Suburbs Rugby League team. I was
showing some skill and promise for the game. So much so,
that I was moved up to A grade. I turned twenty-one as a
real fitness fanatic. I would train as much as I could and
no one would stop me.

After a game one night, a League scout named McGuire
approached me. He told me that he could see I had a real
future in the sport. He strongly suggested that I go to
Brisbane to play for the Valleys. I couldn’t hide my
enthusiasm, as I hung on his every word. Agreeing with him,
I would find my way to Brisbane. I knew however, I needed
some time to make my next move. When I went back to the
sawmill the following day, I told the boss about being
offered a position to play Rugby League in Brisbane. He
didn’t like the idea much, as I was one of his best
workers. He told me that I would really be missed but he
would have my pay ready at the end of the week if I wanted
to go. Up until now, no one had ever missed me. I wasn’t
sure that I wanted to leave. It was nice in Calliope and it was all I knew.

I worked at the sawmill another three months. It wasn’t easy to say goodbye. How strange. I would honestly miss something and someone for the first time in my life. My mates drove me to the train station in Gladston. My port was bigger and held a few extra items than when I had arrived from the farm: some football gear and long pants like my other mates. I had enough money saved to gently move me to the next train stop of my life, Roma Street Station, Brisbane.

It was a twelve-hour train ride. I slept upright in my seat, as I was excited to think about moving into a new territory. How would I stand up in this new class of football? I was stepping into a group of players that were well-know footballers in the fifties who played for the Valleys and for Queensland. I would be amidst guys like: Fullback Normie Pope, Hooker Hugh O Dougherty, Front Rower Moose MacGuire and Center Mick Rieseless.

Not only did I have a football career starting, but I also had a job to go to as well. It was late January and I was twenty-two years old. Mr. McGuire, the League Scout, met me at the train station. He was standing on the platform
holding a placard with the initials, “D.O.” How thrilled I was as he led me out to his Chevrolet and on to the boarding house I would be staying at. I booked in and paid one week up front. I took my port up to my room and I was off to meet my new boss. Mr. McGuire took me to a big factory called Cyclone Scaffolding. I was introduced to the manager. He said, “You can start tomorrow, just stop in the office and fill out the employment form.” I had to ask Mr. McGuire to fill out the form, as I still couldn’t read or write. Once again, I was embarrassed. The good news was that I was going to make ten pounds a week more than my last job at the sawmill.

I was so pleased about the raise, it helped me to overcome the anger I still felt over the State mishandling my finances when I turned twenty-one. The official ‘Release From State Custody’ document informed me that I was free, but there were no remaining funds in my trust account. They brazenly showed no ledger or proof. It was the last hard slap I took from them. We were through!

Mr. McGuire made sure I felt comfortable as he helped me to get organized in my new home. He was a real professional when it came to making a new player fit into the new surroundings. Dropped me off at the boarding house, he told
me to be ready at seven o’clock that night. We were going to the Valleys training and I was going to meet the boys.

Glory be, some real heavyweight League players surrounded me. This was good but it would also be bad. They were all the best and I had no chance of getting into A Grade. I played Reserve Grade most of the time. After sitting on the bench, I actually did get to play a few A Grade games. It makes me laugh and cry when I remember how important we felt playing in A grade, even though we were paid no money. How different it is from League players today. I know were talking about almost fifty years ago, but the game really has not changed.

The professional way the players are looked after these days however is very much different to yesteryear. As far as pay and a job went, in my day we had to work from 8 to 5, five days a week and sometimes another four hours on Saturday morning, the day of the game.

We played the game for the love of the sport. It was our responsibility to buy football boots, socks, shorts, shoulder pads, plus anything else a player needed. We even had to put a shilling in for insurance. All we got from the club was a jersey thrown at us to play in, and a half of an orange at halftime. In those days there was no such thing
as a contract, unless you were a player-coach. League players started to get money in the 1960s. Even then, when the player got the opportunity to make some money out of the game, the Queensland Rugby League wanted their whack out of it by bringing in a ‘transfer system.’ Say you were offered $1,500 for the season, the transfer would take about half. So the Queensland Rugby League would take their $700 out first. Boy did we hate this! The ‘transfer system problem’ sounds a far cry, actually a pathetic whimper, when looking at the salaries of footy stars today!

I can’t say that the players in the game now are any better than the players from forty years ago, but what I can say is that a lot of players back then would not make A grade today because of the change in the rules and the stricter judiciary rulings. The standards were different: a player could not have a drink of water within the forty minutes on the field, hell you couldn’t even have a swig out of the ambulance bottle. If you had blood coming out of your nose you had to stay on the field; and we didn’t have replacements going in every ten minutes. I don’t want to sound like a muglair, but geez we were tough!

Players have got to have an ego to play Rugby League. What I mean by ‘ego’ is the will to win, the dedication to train
hard, and plus to have a bit of mongrel in ‘em. If you
don’t feel this way – don’t waste your time or the coach’s
time. Parents don’t like to believe that their sons have
the “M” word in them. I say, “Hey mum and dad, Rugby League
is a hard contact sport! You don’t want Big Billy Jr. to be
a sissy going through the game like he’s playing marbles
because when that 110 kilo Forward hits him, he’ll have
marbles all right, rolling around in his head.”

Today you read about players getting sent off the field
where they’ve made hard physical contact with an opposition
player. Then their supporters and sometimes even their
coaches come out and say, “Oh that’s not in his makeup!”
My opinion? “Stretch the rules to the limit but don’t go
beyond those bounds. If there’s no bit of mongrel in your
makeup, what in the hell are you playing Rugby League for?”

Back in the 50s and 60s we were taught that if you were
sent off the field make sure the player you hit was carried
off. Mind you, if you had a one-eyed referee that had it
in for you it didn’t matter. One bad decision could change
the whole bloody game. What a huge impact the big screen
‘instant replay’ technology has made on the fans. The all-
in brawl has become a thing of the past. Back then when we
played a home game the spirit of the crowd was so powerful
that it would lift us to hit 'em harder, but if we were away and the crowd turned on us, we had to keep one eye on the game and one eye on what was being thrown at us from the stands.

Everybody sing...
If I was the Rugby type sir
Thank the Lord I’m not sir
The only man that I would be
Would be a Rugby League Hooker
I’d hook hard
And he hooked hard
And we hooked hard together
Oh what fun in the middle of the night
Hooking hard together.
It is a great game, a tough game, it’s Rugby League.
I can’t help but remember one funny memory going back to the few times I played football with the Big Boys Dormitory at Neerkol. I was not allowed to play much due to strict orders from Mother Superior and my bleeding backside. This day however Neerkol was to play against the Christian Brothers of Rockhampton. The competition all wore football boots and we were barefoot. Sister Aquinas, who loved to coach boxing, was now coaching Rugby League. Sister and all of the children were standing near the sideline cheering for the team, when one of the opposition players came
running straight down the sideline past us. The bully nun Aquinas could not control herself, leaned over as he passed and tackled him herself! After she brought him down, she stood up and clapped her hands together as she dusted herself off. We were all laughing hysterically over what we had just seen. Pleased with herself she yelled out with a satisfied smirk, “Now, that’s the way to tackle ‘em!”

Living in Brisbane had gotten comfortable for me. I was used to the city, the job and the team. After six months of playing for Valleys, I still loved the game, but really wanted to see more action. So when my boss at Cyclone Scaffolding offered me a position in Toowomba, I snapped at it. I knew that the Toowomba football players were as good as the Brisbane players and I could see a better opportunity for me. At the next training session I told the Coach about the Toowomba job offer. I wondered if he could help me to play for club in Toowomba. He was great about it all and introduced me to Wolf Gerlach, Head of Southern Suburbs Football Club in Toowomba.

I settled up my affairs in Brisbane and said hooray to my mates at work and the Valley players. With my port packed once again, I boarded the bus for Toowomba. I was moving up in the world. Rugby League was showing me how to hold
myself down so that I could get in a better position to
tackle my life. I didn’t realize how much aggression I had
when I left Neerkol. It affected me mentally and I was
looking for some way to get rid of it. If it wasn’t for
football, God knows where I would have ended up?
CH. 11 LOCKUP HOLIDAYS

Life and league were all the same to me. Both games kept moving and it was a fast world for a bloke of twenty-two. I no longer woke up with a fear of the dark, I was now more afraid of who I really was. David Owen, the larrikin, the daredevil, the performer, this I could understand. It was my way of making friends and keeping them. I gave them a laugh at my expense, no worries. I faced challenges as they came, and I’d front ‘em head on. It was the same when I’d hook for the team. I would cop a smack in the mouth or a hard tackle but I could also give it back. I liked my reputation, as it helped me to hide my inadequate feelings. Otherwise I would have to admit that I was an orphan. This was nothing positive for me to hold on to. My family had abandoned me and left no forwarding address.

When I hopped off the bus in Toowomba, the Manager of the South Suburb Football Club, Wolf Gowlett, met me. The stout man with a balding head asked, “Are you Dave Owen?” I smiled, and took deep breath, “Yes sir.” As we shook hands I felt a big drop in the temperature. The wind was chilly. I zipped my jumper up to my neck and shivered. Looking at the quiet little city around me, I set down my port. How
different it was from Brisbane. Gowlett chuckled, “You’ll get used to it mate. The elevation is a lot higher here.”

Off we went. First stop, Cyclone Scaffolding. I met the bloke who was running the store. We hit it off. He told me to come in the next morning. It wouldn’t take long for him to discover that I was a good worker but illiterate. Thanks to Neerkol, yet another job with more frustration and embarrassment. I couldn’t fill in the inventory sheets by myself. I had picked up some basic math at the last sawmill, so while I counted the baseplates and couplings, he wrote in the numbers. Because of my inadequacies, he was the brain and I was the brawn. Underneath it all, I always knew I was just as smart.

Mr. Gowlett got me into a boarding house for one-pound-ten a week. It wasn’t bad. I had a little room with single bed and shared a kitchen, toilet and shower. Of course once I got settled in, I immediately borrowed my mate Podgie’s drill and put a latch with a bolt on the bathroom door. I wasn’t going to have any of the other blokes living on the floor perve on me. This was a big deal to me. When the landlady found out about the new lock on the toilet, she asked me if I knew anything about it. I told her flat out that I did it and it was because of my Catholic upbringing.
Someone was knocking off my tucker in the fridge. I was the type that would have given him the food outright if he asked, but this was different. So I marked my T-bone steak with a screwdriver to catch him. I came home and the bastard was cooking my steak. Another bloke had to pull me off of him as I was trying to shove the piece of meat down his throat. I ended up living at the house for another two months before I moved on to Wilga’s Guesthouse with a lot of the other footballers.

Mr. Gowlett blew his horn outside the boarding house waiting for me. He was taking me to the South’s training that night at Water Street Oval. It was my introduction to the boys and I really wanted to make a good first impression. I entered the dressing room wearing my Valley’s jumper, as I wanted them to know I was an A Grade footballer right from the start. What I would not let them know was that I was wearing football shorts underneath my long pants. I had a real problem with exposing any part of my body after what happened to me with Father Anderson. This would never leave the back of my mind! I refused to undress in front of anyone, so I packed an extra jersey, footy socks and shoes for the training session. Afterwards,
I changed back into my Valley’s gear and slid my trousers back over my shorts. I would shower when I got home.

After training they took me down to their local, the Carlton Hotel. Some of those blokes are still with me today. I didn’t try to make them like me, they just did. They knew about my life as an orphan, listened and accepted me. On and off the field I’ve been blessed with an all-star roster of mates from the South Suburbs Football Team: John Hilliard, Podgie Stevens, Donnie Farrell, Richie West, Jimmy Evans, Kenny Weatherall, Jimmy Brooks, plus a lot more good blokes. We lived for each other. We were a real bunch of knockabout mates we were!

All footballers love their grog. I was the odd sort. I never drank anything but Coca Cola. I’ll never forget one day at the Australian hotel with Darkie and Donnie. I drank sixteen small bottles of Coca Cola. We lined them up along the window ledge. I always believed that the “high” was in the mind. I never liked the taste of grog anyway. I believed that when a person hung around with a drunken mob you’d have to act like one to come down to their level. Being me, it wasn’t hard to put on a performance of a drunken idiot without actually drinking any alcohol. My Coca Cola would cost 10 cents while their grog would cost
three times as much. And they sure drank a lot. I never shirked though when it came to my shout. I always kept the party going. Too many times I’d be the one throwing out money for rounds for my mates. They got drunk and I got recognition. Of course, this always seemed to keep me broke. As I think about it now, it pains me to realize how much money I spent on buying ‘acceptance,’ making sure everyone was happy. I guess I felt that this was the way to stay in their superior graces. You see, they all had families, and no matter which way I looked at it I was still the poor stray with absolutely no one to turn to. It was rather sad when everyone would go off to their Christmas dinner. No invitations would ever come my way. I would eat my corned beef sandwich back at the boarding house.

That first night in Toowomba before the mates dropped me off back at the boarding house, we all went to have a feed at the Foodatorium. I was starving from the long day, and fair dinkum, I had the best T Bone Steak, couple of eggs and milk shake that a bloke could dream of. We piled back into the car and when I got out at the boarding house the boys said, “See you Friday night at training D.O.!” It was official. I was in.
When I got upstairs to my room, I looked at the clock and it was going on midnight. I was exhausted. I tiptoed to the bathroom and realized that everyone was in bed. This was my chance! Stripping down as fast as I could, I turned the water on and raced through my shower; all the while trying to keep my tired eyes open watching the bathroom door. I was pretty happy. I felt proud of myself. I showed everyone that I wasn’t a pushover. I had put everything into training plus a little bit more. I wanted them to think I was keen. I think it worked. The water started to run cold. I shut it off. I pulled the curtain open and wondered, “Now, how would I get back to my room without being noticed?”

Every Friday night a lot of my mates would meet at the Gladstone Hotel. It was the All Whites local. They would sell raffle tickets for the club there. The publican Mrs. Healy would put out a good little lunch spread every Friday around five thirty in the evening for all of her bar patrons that would stop in after work. It was a free feed and we’d just pay for our drinks. The Hotel was in between work and my boarding house so I would stop in, as it would save me from cooking before going to training.
I was in good standing with the publican Mrs. Healy, a good woman who would extend a small loan to me every so often if I ran short for the week.

She knew that I was always good for it as I was a regular. Plus I borrowed a quote from Hilliard, which not only got me the fiver, but also would always put a smile on the publican’s face. I would ask politely, “Mum, Could you lend me a quid till me sister gets work?” Well she would always fix me up until payday. I would always pay her back. No worries.

This particular Friday night, I was sitting at the bar with my mates. Mrs. Healy had taken ill that day and was not working. I called out to her son Dennis who was behind the bar. I thought I had the same payment arrangement at the bar with him as I had with his mum. He walked over to our group at the bar. I asked him nicely, “Dennis, could you lend me a quid till my sister gets work?” He didn’t laugh at this one bit, instead he was a real bastard to me. To my shock and embarrassment in front of my mates he said, “No D.O., I’ll give you nothin’!” I was stunned. Was he fair dinkum? Maybe I heard him wrong. I asked him again. I needed the money to pay for my turn to shout. He looked at me again, “I’m going to give you nothing D.O.!” I looked
at him square in the face, in front of all my mates and said, “All right Dennis, I’m coming back tonight to knock your bloody pub off!”

That night I went back and did knock it off. I opened the louvers above the front door with a bottle opener, slid the louvers out and climbed through. It brought back memories of how I escaped from Neerkol. I walked behind the bar and saw a bag of money sitting on the shelf under the register. I grabbed the moneybag and opened the front door from the inside to let myself out. Walking out casually, I put the louvers back in above the door and went home.

When I got to my room, I took it out and counted it three or four times. It was the most money I had seen in a long time, 260 pounds. After the way I had been humiliated in front of my mates at the Gladston Hotel that night, I felt justified. I actually had a good night sleep. I felt I had done really great in my first criminal activity. The next day I felt different. My conscious was at it again. It told me that I had done a cowardly thing because the Publican, Mrs. Healy, was always good to me. I felt crook in the guts over the whole thing. I put the money in my bag and took it to work with me. I planted it under a drum for the day agonizing over if I would get caught. When I knocked off
from work around six that night it was dark. I walked straight over to the Gladston Hotel to return the money to Mrs. Healy. She didn’t deserve any grief.

The bar was full of patrons when I walked in the front door. I bypassed the crowd and walked directly to a back staircase, which led up to Mrs. Healy’s apartment. With the bag of money in my fist I began to climb the steps. I would put the bag of money on Mrs. Healy’s doorstep. Just at that moment, who should be coming down the steps but sonny-boy Dennis. He knew who I was and saw the bag of money in my hand. He said, “What do you think you’re doing?” I had no way out. I passively said, “I’m returning the money I knocked off you last night.” I handed him the bag, walked downstairs and sat at the bar with a few mates who had called me over to say hello. I ordered the usual Coca Cola.

I laugh now wondering, “How naïve could I be?” For the next half an hour I didn’t think anything of skiting to my mates over how good I did. I felt so proud of myself that I had returned the money. I never imagined I would be arrested after giving it back. Dennis had come downstairs and was now eyeing me off from behind the bar. I could see he was spitting bloody chips. One of the boys shouted, “Here’s to D.O., a real Robin Hood.” We were all laughing while the
son was really boiling. I pointed out to me mates the louvers above the door and how I had removed them to get inside. I was also pointing to the staircase where I had just given Dennis the bag of money. The laughter stopped short when the bar came to a hush. Two detectives walked in and bunged handcuffs on me. I was off to the watch house. As I was led out by the detectives, I looked back to see Dennis excitedly spreading the word around the bar, “Oh yeah…D.O. knocked my pub off last night.” He couldn’t wait to tell them all.

I was charged with theft. They took my fingerprints. Before I was led to my cell, the Sergeant asked if I wanted to notify anyone. I said, “Yeah, my mate John Hilliard.” When I heard the cell door lock behind me I thought, “Oh shit. Here comes the cat o’ nine tails with bread and water.” I slept with one eye open as the memories were vivid from my orphanage days. When would they sneak in to flog me?

I woke up startled the next morning. Nothing had happened! I was served a breakfast that was better than what I was feeding myself. I was then put to work. The Sergeant handed me a mop and bucket. He told me to wash the floor of my cell. I chuckled at this as the space was so tiny compared to the long verandahs I would scrub as a child. About half
past eight I was handcuffed and taken to the front desk of the watch house. The desk Sergeant asked me if I had a solicitor. Well, I had never even heard the word before! I spit out the name, “John Hilliard.” He was the closest thing to anybody I knew that sounded well up. After all, he was a cement mixer salesman and was on the Board of the Carnival of Flowers.

Hilliard arrived at the watch house wearing a coat and tie. I was standing at the Sergeant’s desk when he walked up and said, “D.O. what’s happened?”

The two detectives were standing there. I sneered, “I’m not talking while their listening.” They heard me and moved away. John looked around us first, bent over to me as if we were in a scrum., and whispered, “Did you do it?” I whispered back to him, “Yes!” His eyes got wide as he straightened up and looked from side to side. Always acting like a big brother to me, he told me to sit tight while he looked into what he could do. As it happened, he knew the magistrate Dan Carney.

I was led into the courthouse in handcuffs at ten o clock that morning. It was terrifying to front court after hearing stories of Boggo Road. It felt as if all of the devils I had been threatened with over the years had
finally caught up with me. The Magistrate’s court was declared in session. I stated my name and the charge against me. I was asked, “Do you have anyone to represent you?” I answered, “Yes, Mr. Carney,” as I knew him to be a great league supporter of All-Whites. I would always see him in the stands. He said, “Mr. Owen, Do not call me Mr. Carney. You must call me Your Worship.” He asked me again, “Who is your solicitor?” I said, “Your Worship, my solicitor is John Hilliard.” John stood up. The entire court, including the Judge and all the solicitors looked at each other in amazement over my genuine and inexperienced cheek. For once my illiteracy worked to my advantage. John advised me to plead guilty, as I had been caught red handed. My solicitor was to approach the bench. Hilliard presented my case, explaining that I was an orphan and a pretty good footballer. He promised to keep an eye on me, as I had no family. He was eight years older and would act as a big brother. How lucky I was. The Magistrate gave me six months’ probation with the warning, “D.O. if you commit other offences you will go to jail.”

Over the next month, Detective Jackson and Dorries kept the heat on me everywhere I went. They knew how frightened I was of authority and since I had no one, I could be led to
do stupid things. The harassment was unbearable every time I went to play football. They would be standing on the hill of the athletic oval as I walked past with my gear. I would be walking among all the fans and spectators that were cheering me on to play that day, when they would call me out. They yelled, “D.O. got a minute?”

Well, everyone in the crowd and his dog would look. I was so embarrassed; I would walk over to them to shut them up. They would continue to talk loud, asking me personal questions about some burglaries they were trying to pin on me. I would walk away and barely make it to the start of the game.

The following week, it was the same thing. They’d be standing like vultures on top of the hill just waiting for me. This time I walked behind the oval to avoid them, but the demons would catch me and embarrass me again in front of the crowd. Well, this time I got the jack of it! I got right up the two of them in front of everybody. I told them that when they wanted to talk to me during a game, they would have to wait outside the bloody gate or better yet, they knew where I lived!! This worked for a while.

Hilliard had been talking to me about getting a real solicitor to keep Jackson and Dories off of my back. We
knew that I would have to try to get a quid for this. I didn’t have any ideas on how to do this. I said, “I don’t know Hilliard, you’re the one with the brains.”

Well, he came up with a brilliant plan using my popularity as a footballer. We went to a jeweler and had him make up 200 D.O. Hooker Badges for a cost of $18, which I would then sell out in front of the game that day for one dollar each! The money would go to the D.O. Legal Fund. It was a terrific plan! That Saturday, outside the gate the badges were selling like hotcakes. My mates were laughing their heads off as I was in rare form. At the gate, I had even sold a badge to Magistrate Dan Carney, His Worship, who pinned it on himself as he walked inside. I was really fired up. I had sold eighty D.O. Hooker Badges out of the two hundred. With forty minutes left for me to run out on to the field, along came none other than Jackson and his arsehole Dories. I offered to give them a discount on the badges, two for one as we always called them ‘the twins’ anyway. They didn’t think it was funny. In fact they confiscated the badges and the eighty dollars, and wanted me to follow them. Well I loved playing my football that much, I shoved the bag at them and said, “Here, have the bloody lot!” There was only thirty minutes left for me to
get dressed in my football gear. I was off! After the match was over, I climbed over the back fence to get home. They never came after me. Of course they were eighty bucks richer and I was still without a solicitor.

Hilliard was on the Committee for the Carnival of Flowers in Toowomba. He never stopped thinking up ways to make me look good...or so I thought.

On the morning of the Carnival of Flowers without any notice he came over to the boardinghouse and woke me up. He said, “Come on D.O., get up! Put on a t-shirt, a pair of shorts and sand shoes. We’re going out to Oakey.” I asked why. In his larrikin way he said, “I’ll tell you when we get there.”

Well we got to the Oakey Post Office. He pulled out a sign and started to pin it to my shirt. It read, CALTEX WALK. Lo and behold he pinned another sign on my back that read, BUTANE BOOSTERS. Next thing I knew this bloke in a Holden Ute pulled up. There was a big poster on the backside of the car. It read BUTANE BOOSTERS. I looked at Hilliard, “What’s going on John?” Hilliard laughed, “Oh I forgot to tell you. You’re walking from Oakey to Toowomba for the Carnival of Flowers.” He had put me into the radio promotion that was called the CALTEX WALK. People would
call in to the station, pledging 2 bob to guess how long it would take me to do the distance. Every ten minutes the radio station would give an update on my progress as the support car followed me all the way in. Holy Dooley, here was the Mayor of Oakey shaking my hand and giving me a letter to deliver to the Mayor of Toowomba when I got there. Leave it up to Hilliard. Three miles from the finish line a police car drove up alongside of me.

Can you imagine my shock? I wasn’t prepared for any of this, as they were there to escort me through the city. As I entered the show grounds, a crowd of people was cheering. I strolled in waving and smiling back. Good old Hilliard, within a few months, I had gone from a villain to a hero. When I got to the finish line, you’ll never guess who was sitting in their car just watching me. Of course it was Detective Jackson and his lapdog Dories. When our eyes met, my smile and wave just got bigger.

A bunch of my mates would go to the racetrack on a Saturday if we didn’t have a game. My very first bet was on a horse called ‘MISTING.’ I had five pounds on it at 10 to 1. Glory be, I was over the moon when I won fifty-five pounds on a wild guess! Seriously, if it wasn’t for racehorses, I wouldn’t be able to read at all. It was so difficult for me
to get up the nerve to point at the horse’s name and ask a mate to read the word to me. Staring down at the Form Guide of the Races and not being able to understand what the words meant brought out new anger over my feelings of stupidity. Some guys would get cheesed off over my constant questions saying, “What’s wrong with you D.O.?!?” I didn’t want to be criticized any longer so I stopped asking for help. I retreated into my own shell. I would win a quid and lose a quid, but when I won, my mates always knew I looked after them. Even if I borrowed a quid from the bookies, they knew that I was good to pay it back. As far as racehorses went it was a good recreation, but I wasn’t a compulsive gambler.

John Hilliard was a good hooker and we were mates. I was in my room at the boarding house when there was a knock on my door. I had not been picked on the reps side. Hilliard had been picked as reserve. John said, “Get your footy gear D.O. I want you to come out to Rep training with me. He handed me five bucks and said, “ I want you to injure the hooker they picked to play instead of me.” Of course Hilliard had just gotten me out on probation so I wanted to help him out. I went with him to training. As we packed down a few scrums I tried my best to injure the hooker so
that John would play. I tried everything, head butting, kicking and stiff-arming him. The Coach was the bloke’s father and was watching me. He shouted, “Come on D.O. cut the rough stuff out.” Hilliard had a big smile on his face and prodded me to keep getting into him.” Well, I did my best to damage the player for Hilliard’s sake. When training finished and the hooker walked off the field with no injuries, Hilliard turned to me and said, “D.O. you didn’t do your bloody job. Give me that five bucks back.”

I started coming up the ladder with Souths as a hooker in ’62. One night Hilliard and I were sitting at the bar of the Carlton Hotel when he said, “Listen D.O., I’m telling you now, there’s no room for the two of us. One of us has gotta go and it’s not going to be me!” John was my dear friend and the team hooker. But I wanted to prove that I was a better hooker - so that off-season I changed clubs. I joined All Whites. Fair Dinkum, after I went through all the effort, Hilliard left me high and dry. He went to North Queensland for nine years. In the end it turned out to be a godsend. I proved my ability as a hooker and was picked as a reserve for the Bulimba Cup the following year.

During my days representing Toowomba, there wasn’t a game I didn’t come off the field spitting out claret. Duncan
Thompson was about seventy years old when he coached us. He owned a sports store and was an Australian and Queensland selector. He was the type of coach who knew exactly what he wanted. At that time there was plenty of talk that Duncan had persuaded Mick Veivers to play with Souths. Mick was a good second row forward from Brisbane.

Now Souths were meant to play Valleys in Brisbane that weekend. Mick took me to the side before the trial match. He said, “Look D.O. I need to have a good game, Australian selectors are out there.” I was wearing headgear because I had a cauliflower ear with congealed blood from a few past trial matches. When the game started Mick called for the ball as he ran through. I gave it to someone else from dummy half. He’d come back at me poking his finger up inside my headgear and shout, “Can’t ya hear me calling you? When I call for it I want it!” Well, to be a good dummy half you go out knowing what you’re going to do but that split second you change your mind. The next play of the ball was exactly the same. Veivers was into me by now. “You silly bastard, I told you when I call for the ball - I want it!” He was cranky as anything with me.

Without doing anything different the next play, lo and behold, I ran wide of the ruck. Veivers came screaming
through. This time I was in a good position to turn and give him the ball. He ran forty yards and put it down between the posts. The crowd roared. Well, he came running back to me and yanked my headgear. This time screaming and laughing in my ear, “That’s the way I want it D.O.. Like that!!” He was as ‘happy as larry’ from scoring that forty meter try. I was thrilled that I had gotten him off of my back! After the game, he said, “Good on ya D.O.” Boy, what a different man he was when we won! Veivers went on to represent Queensland and Australia. Later he was a Minister in the Bjelke Peterson Country-Liberal Government.

Duncan Thompson had strict coaching methods. He said, “If you’re going to go out there and be a footballer, you’ve got to look like a footballer.” This meant all of his players could not wear knee guards, elastic bandages around your boots or your hands. Garters had to be worn around socks to prevent them from falling down. If your socks did fall down, he would call the player off of the field and replace him. He was tough, a character right out of the movies. He would sit down on his one-legged stool and shout out orders from the sideline.

I was picked once again to play reserve against Brisbane. This time I was sitting next to Duncan when he looked down
at my football boots. I had wrapped an elastic bandage around one boot that was coming apart at the seams. When he noticed the way it looked, he said, “D.O. what’s wrong with your boot?” He growled, “Go put your civvies on. Don’t come back without proper football boots. You can’t wear those!” He added, “You know where to go to get them. I sell boots down at my sports store!” Politely I replied, “Yes sir, Mr. Thompson.” (Of course the ‘you bastard’ was quietly under my breath.) He wasn’t called ‘the old fox’ for nothing.

The next week I found myself picked to play reserve again, this time against Ipswich. I panicked to think about how I would get some boots before the game on Saturday, as I didn’t have enough money. Of course I would have to front Thompson once again at the game. I remembered that he mentioned his sports store during my last scolding. So Darkie and I went down to the shop during the week. We both had a good yarn with the ‘Old Fox’ himself, who was standing in an aisle of the sports store. On my way out I grabbed a pair of size 8 football boots and kept walking.

The next game I was sitting next to Mr. Thompson again. He was cracking his gum as usual when he looked down at my feet. He said, “D.O. I see you got yourself a pair of
football boots.” With some real cheek, I looked right into his eyes and said, “Yes Mr. Thompson, and I got them from your store.” He peered down at me, “I don’t remember serving you.” I said, “While you were busy Sir someone else helped me out.” Well, I never said who the ‘someone else’ was! He must have been pleased with our conversation, as within the next few minutes I was put into the game. With his blessing, I made sure I broke in those boots pretty quick.

Sitting on the sidelines as a reserve over and over again, the time came for me to ask Mr. Thompson why I was still a reserve when he knew that I out-hooked the bloke he picked to play out there that day. His answer was, “Well D.O. we never know if you’re going to be here or in the watch house.”

I really had no criminal in me, as I always had the habit of returning anything I had pinched when I had the chance. Quite some time later, I won some money at the track and decided to go back and pay Mr. Thompson for the football boots that I borrowed from his sports store. As he wasn’t a selector anymore, I wasn’t worried about what he would do to me. You can only imagine the look on his face when I told him about the boots. He said, “If I had known about
that D.O., you would have never been picked in one of my sides!” Of course he took the money. My conscience was free again, not that I really even knew I had one.

The first time I met my mate Darkie was on the football field. He played for New Town and I played for Souths. He was tough, I was tough and we mixed it with one another. After the game at the barbecue we realized that we had more in common, amateur boxing. He had won a few titles in and around Toowomba and I had my fair share of wins. We had a good laugh over the fact that we both fought in the Jimmy Sharman tent. I was older than Darkie by a few years, so I had been boxing a while before him. Sitting at the bar over a drink, we had a yarn or two over our said ‘criminal behaviours,’ as we had both fronted the same Magistrate, Dan Carney.

My charge of theft had been due to a stupid fit of temper over a publican with a bad attitude, but Darkie’s charge was more laughable as he was taken in for breaking a flowerpot at the dance. Oh yeah, we were really hardened criminals! I can’t help but smile when I remember what he looked like off the playing field, with his dark black hair, red velvet jacket, blue suede shoes and motorcycle. He was the Fonzie of Toowomba. He would have to fend off the
cops as they knew he was my mate. They would pick him up off the street, always trying to get him to give out some kind of dirt on me. Of course, there was none. It was no secret that Detectives Jackson and Dories really had it in for me.

I was playing for the All Whites when my streak of luck turned sour, but mind you, it wasn’t on the field. I was a physical fitness buff and would run in the mornings every time I had the chance. There was a new bloke from Mt. Isa just starting on the team. Brownie asked if he could work out with me. I was taking my run one morning and I stopped at what I thought was his house to pick him up. Well the back door was open to the house and I innocently walked inside. When I called out to him and there was no answer, I came straight out the back door. Unfortunately when I came walking out the door, I was confronted by a big bloke walking in the door. He laid into me without warning, never even asking me what I was doing there. We got into a pretty bad blue on his porch. I left him lying there and went on for my run wearing my Number 12 football jumper. I decided to give up looking for Brownie by this time. After I finished my run, I was coming up to the boarding house when I saw this police car do a dramatic U-turn from the road
and came barreling at me. The car screeched to a halt. I heard, "Stop D.O. or we’ll shoot!"

Jackson and Dories handcuffed me and took me down to the watch house. I wasn’t sure what was going on this time. The charge? ‘Malicious Wounding with Intent.’ Later I would find out that the bloke I got stuck into accused me of entering the premises and stabbing him. I never had anything resembling a knife. I did have a biro in my pocket when we fought it out. So much for a weapon! It didn’t matter I knew I was stuffed!

I had no chance of any defense. I was put in front of a different Magistrate who sentenced me to Boggo Road Jail for six months. Finally, Jackson and Dories had been granted their wish. They worked hard to stir up my orphan upbringing and get me back into an “institution.” Those bastards called it jail. Little did they know that after growing up at Neerkol, Boggo Road would be a ‘holiday home.’
I was driven out of Toowomba in a police escort, only this time I wasn’t waving to footy fans cheering on the sidelines. Before the door of the van slid closed, my two darlings would not miss their opportunity to put it to me. Alone, handcuffed, and with no way out, I watched the bastards jeer, “Bye D.O., we won’t be seeing you for a while!”

I wore only a T-shirt, shorts and runners. I was stripped of any spirit I might have left, feeling naked all the way to Brisbane. I didn’t feel tough, I was scared to death.

The hard face of Mr. Patterson from the State Children’s Department flashed in front of me. He had drummed the fear into me over the penalty of committing a misdemeanor and now I had. What a shame ‘the little man that loved authority’ wasn’t around to see his words come true. What pleasure he would’ve had to watch me sweat and shake.

I passed through two security gates to get inside. Once I got in I was lined up with a few other men. The prison screw shouted out, “Stand on the white line, strip down, turn around, bend over and grab your heels.” I thought to myself, “Oh Shit!”
Boy, was I relieved when I found out why the guards were called ‘screws.’ Another convict straightened me out on this one thank god. ‘Screw’ was not a bad term as one might think. They were called ‘screws’ because they opened the cell doors for the inmates and turned the keys into the locks. I was led to my cell in Number 1 Jail. When they put me into the cell, my information card was slid into a plastic case on the door. It read: DAVID OWEN. 6 MONTHS – GREVIOUS BODILY HARM. I felt like the cattle we would muster on the farm for butchering. We would mark the cow pens the same way.

My cell was tiny. It had a bed, a table, a tin mug for water, a window and a bedpan. By the third day, I had already broken the rules. After lights out, I found a way to look out through the bars of the cell window at the lights of Brisbane. I stood on top of my bedpan that balanced on the bed to catch the night sky.

I fronted the Superintendent for my wrong doings. I waited for him to pull out the cat o’ nine tails. It never happened. He informed me it was against prison regulations to look out the window. The Superintendent let me off with a first warning. He asked me, “What are you doing it for?” I harmlessly replied, “Oh...to see a bit of freedom.”
I was now officially accepted into my ‘second’ institution, Boggo Road Jail, where they would issue my first prison uniform. Once again...with no underwear. Neerkol never allowed us to wear underpants either. The prison regulations stated that if you wanted to wear underwear you had to get permission from the Deputy Superintendent. They would not supply the clothing however a family member or friend could send it in. Seeing as that I had no idea where my family was, I was out of luck. Bugger me, once again the authorities had found a demoralizing, yet tidy, rule to continue their mental abuse.

Rule #1: Don’t let them look to the sky.

Rule #2: Strip them of all their dignity in the sexually high-risk environment called prison. Make sure they do not receive basic personal shielding such as underwear.

Society had surely put me back in my place. Only I was no longer a child, but a man. My reputation was in shambles. I didn’t care about anything anymore. Life was strife. I would not go through the embarrassment of asking a mate for help. I was ‘less’ once again.

Neerkol came back to haunt me every time a prison worker would come past my cell with the library book cart. I would have to send him away. Mind you, I even had a bible in my cell to read for comfort but what was the use? Not being
able to read or write was a terrible burden for me, which just got worse as I got older. I longed to be able to learn and understand things like others around me. I was always overcome with sadness when the mail would arrive and my name was never called out to pick up a letter or parcel.

The heartache was unbearable when I fantasized receiving a letter from my mother somewhere out there. My dream would always end with a tear of a loner, not really understanding where I found the will and determination to keep on going. Thank God.

I had a new schedule. First thing in the morning, I stood outside the cell door holding my dirty bedpan. Sound familiar? We would all file past and leave the pots for two prison workers to pick up and clean. As we filed out to get our breakfast, I found myself singing, “Jesus wants me to clean my pot...If I want to go to heaven.”

I whispered to one of the inmates, “When do they flog you?” He replied, “Aw shit, there’s no such thing. You only have to watch out for the screws if you play up.” So as long as I didn’t buck the system I could survive without beatings. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! At Neerkol, whether you bucked or not, you still got flogged. Back then I was forced to say, “Yes Sister, No Sister!” Knowing that there
weren’t any beatings coming my way, it was a joy to say ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’ over and over again. I pretended to be in the military. I could handle discipline. What a good soldier I would have made.

Breakfast wasn’t too bad. Bread, treacle and a dixie with some hot porridge. I would take it back to my cell, as would the others. Because of my good behavior, I was immediately put on kitchen duty with three other inmates. I worked as a slusher, chopping wood, keeping the stove going and washing up dixies. I liked the work as it gave me some extra tucker and there was a workout yard behind the kitchen in Jail Number 2 where I could stay in shape with exercising, skipping, push-ups and weights. I tried to stay as fit as possible for when I got out and back to Rugby League.

The guards would come to get us at 4 am to begin the breakfast preparation for the inmates. We would walk through the underground tunnel from Number One Jail to Number Two Jail, where we served the hardened criminals, the lifers, rapists and murderers. When the food was prepared, usually about 60 to 70 dixies, it was put into a coffin-like box with handles on each end. Two of us would carry the box into the compound and stand at either end, as
if we were pallbearers. The screws warned us that if one of the inmates took more than their ration, we were not to say a word, for fear of our own safety. Every day, serving breakfast was the same solemn ceremony, a strange ceremony. It reminded me of a distant, but much similar mood, when the air felt thick as I stood at attention gripping the handles of my wheelbarrow, watching Mother Superior place those parcels on the bonfire.

Six months in prison was not hard for me at all. I was what you might call a ‘born-again’ institutionalized person. I followed the rules and I got rewarded. They gave me a two-week remission on my six-month sentence. I was let out the same way I was dressed when I was brought in, except the seasons had changed. It was winter.

They woke me at 5am. It was dark and cold. I found myself standing outside the prison gate wearing a t-shirt, shorts and running shoes. I was freezing. I had about eighteen pounds in my pocket from prison wages, so I wasn’t too bothered. I waited until a clothing store opened and bought a tracksuit. Back in action, I caught a bus back to Toowomba. I looked out the window and couldn’t help but worry if I would be harassed as soon as I arrived. I was hoping to be forgotten by the two that put me away. The
bus pulled in and no one was there to greet me. Alone again, I walked back to the boardinghouse on Hume Street as if time had been frozen. My landlord Mario had kept my room and things for me. I had enough money left over to pay him two weeks in advance. The next day I called my boss Donnie. He found me work as a plasterer’s labourer in between brickie labourer jobs. Jobs were no problem. That Friday night I went back to All-Whites training. I was picked to play A grade that Sunday. Life seemed to be back on track.

Getting back into football right away was a real pick-me-up. Boy was I bloody sore after the game. As I walked off the field I heard some mates call to me, “Hey mate, you’re back. Great game! Good on ya’ D.O.!”

I actually felt like I was a part of something, as if I belonged. It felt so good! I smiled and waved back at the familiar faces.

As I raised my hand up to give a ‘Hooray,’ I heard another shout from behind me. The voices came from the top of the oval. To my dismay it was the two hound-dogs Jackson and Dories, They barked out in unison, “D.O…When did they let you out??”
My mate Darkie didn’t care much for the horses but he was a sport and would drive the mates to the trotting track. If I won a few quid his Volkswagon would never thirst, as I made sure the tank was always topped off.

One day there were about six of us sitting in the front row of the stands, when the trotters paraded past us. As we checked out our picks for the next race three men in suits approached me. It was none other than Jackson and Dorries with another big bloke. I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up. Jackson said, “Get up D.O. There’s someone I want to introduce you to.” I figured the new bloke was probably just another stand-over merchant so I said, “No, I’m not getting up.”

A big hairy hand grabbed my shoulder and pulled me up. I was face to face with a bloke who had a massive scar running from one corner of his eye all the way down to his chin. It took me a moment, before I came back with, “Jeesus...You’re a pretty sight!” My cheek had Darkie and the boys chuckling to themselves. However, it didn’t go over too well with the others. The big bloke yanked me close in to him, looked at me eye to eye, and snarled, “My name’s Detective Sergeant Gearey and I’m telling you now, you
don’t want to tangle with me.” He shoved me away and looked around for the other two detectives. All three gorillas stood at the bar as we walked out.

The guys no longer thought it was funny. They asked, “What was that all about D.O.?” I couldn’t give them the answer, as I had no idea myself! I only knew that I had to cop it because they were the law.

Later it would all fit into place when I realized that I had the pleasure of meeting the one-and-only “Scarface Gearey” that day. Detective Senior Sergeant Gearey was in charge of Jackson and Dorries. This only meant trouble for me. His legendary reputation and nickname came from a brutal blue in Charleville where someone split his face open with a broken beer bottle.

The Crown Hotel was a popular place to have a bit of fun. Ma Keel the publican had a great sense of how to keep a crowd going on the weekends. The bands were always good. People lined up around the block waiting to get in on a Saturday night cabaret. My mates liked meeting up there, as the joint would fill up with lots of girls.

Ma Keel had her hands full with the likes of us and was a good sport most of the time. She was in her early sixties
and had a real complex about her looks. Always wanting to
look younger and more attractive to her patrons, she did
every possible beauty regimen. Between new hair-dos,
manicured fingernails and makeup, we had a field day
teasing her. Rumour had it that she was having a sidestep
with, of all people, Detective Jackson. When I heard this I
never in the world could imagine such a thing! He was
married and she was old enough to be his mother. This was a
mortal sin!

One morning before opening, Darkie and I walked past the
Crown Hotel. There was loud laughter and voices coming
from inside. Looking through the window we saw a group of
army blokes in uniform sitting at a table in the back of
the bar playing cards and drinking beer. It looked like
they were having a good time. We knocked on the front door
and called out to Ma to let us in. She came to the door but
would not open it. She told us to go away. Through the
crack of the door I said, “You can’t lock us out. What’s
good for the goose is good for the gander. You’ll need more
than the bloody army to keep us away.” She warned us, “You
come in here and you will get a hell of a hiding.”

We went around the back and up the back stairs. We knew the
way to get in ‘after hours.’ When we walked into the bar,
Mrs. Keel told the army blokes, “Throw the pair out!” I looked at them all and with a cheek I said, “Who’s going to be the first one?”

Darkie was standing alongside of me and was ready for a fight. The first one came at me. I got stuck into him like a packet of salts. Darkie was into the other bloke. I flattened the first bloke when a second one came at me. I dropped him too. I looked over and Darkie was in trouble. He was having a bit of a bother dropping the bloke he was into. I went over to help him out when the bloke gave it up. Well wouldn’t you know that the first bloke I fought came over and said, “C’mon boys, we’ll buy you a drink.” Well Darkie and I didn’t buy one drink the rest of the day. For Ma, it was just business as usual.

Before I knew it, I had the army boys marching on the stage. I taught them all 10 verses of a favorite song I remembered.

The Germans came in one by one, some with sticks and some with guns, with a doodah, doodah, doodah, day, with a doodah, doodah, day…
The Germans came in seven by seven, Some for hell and some for heaven, with a doodah, doodah, doodah, day,
Little did they know that they were learning a children’s marching melody from my tortururous days at Neerkol.

I really had no finesse when it came to women, especially when I thought I was giving out a compliment. Back at the Crown Hotel one night, Darkie and I were having a yarn at the bar. Mrs. Keel walked in all dressed up. She looked so different, a lot prettier than usual. When I mentioned this to Darkie, he commented that she could have had a facelift. This was not impossible as she was always trying to look more attractive. He pointed out to me the lumps under her neck where they would have pulled up the skin when they did the surgery. I thought this was bloody marvelous. So I called Mrs. Keel over to our side of the bar and said, “Ma, you look so beautiful. Did you have a facelift?” Well, I knew no better. I didn’t mean to insult her. It didn’t matter whether I was ignorant to a woman’s feelings or not. She was shit-offed over my comment and kicked us both out of the bar. We wouldn’t leave. The next thing we knew the boyfriend Jackson and Dorries showed up. Well we weren’t going to cop it from them. I had done nothing wrong besides being ignorant and rude. But how was I to know? I was no beauty myself. I only had two teeth in my own head at the time.
Darkie and I sat at the bar as a team when we told the detectives that they weren’t going to throw us out. We knew that the two of them couldn’t beat us. I looked at them and said, “If you’re gonna take us, you better go and get more.” Jackson looked over at Dorries. They didn’t want to take us on. He looked back at me, “Well all right, we’ll get more boys.” While they waited for more cops to arrive, they went over and spoke to Ma. Next thing two squad car pulled up out front. I looked to Darkie, “Well the bastards have arrived.” Darkie said, “Let ‘em bring it on.” Jackson walked back over to us and said, “Are you coming with us or not?” I boldly answered, “Yeah, right-oh, I still don’t think you’ve got enough.” Jackson came right back at me, “Well, there’s plenty more where they came from.” I looked over at Darkie and saw this strange look on his face. It knocked me for a six when he said, “I think you better go with them D.O.” Well they handcuffed me and took me back to the interrogation room at the police station. I wondered what the charge would be this time. I also wondered what had happened to Darkie.

Since the Gladston Hotel, the detectives’ interrogation room had become kind of a second home to me. Jackson and Dorries were on a mission to clean up all the unsolved
crimes by closing the books on me. They were relentless in their attempts to frame me with three separate jobs: Breaking and entering; Stealing cars; and Knocking off beer kegs. I sat in the room waiting to be questioned. When the door swung open this time, Scarface Gearey greeted me. Jackson and Dorries followed their boss in. With grins on their faces, they took a seat to watch the show. Scarface spit out, “Come off the grass D.O. you might as well admit you done ‘em all!” He promised, “If you go along with this we’ll make sure you get a bond.”

I would not admit to something I had not done. I told him, “You’re nothing but dirty rotten coppers.” Breathing into my face he said, “Why do you hate policemen?” I said, “I don’t mind policemen. I play football with and against them. I like all of them. I just hate dirty cops.”

In true larrikin form, I gave him a quote I had picked up somewhere. I asked, “Wasn’t it Shakespeare who said, ‘The man that turns the key on his fellow man came out of an arse?’” I had embarrassed him in front of his juniors and he retaliated by slapping me so hard across the face that I went for a row of shithouses. When I hit the wall Jackson was waiting to get his go at me for insulting his girlfriend Ma. We had a real blue and I knocked him out.
The next thing I felt was this cold metal against my temple. Scarface held a gun to my head and said with a low steady voice, “We’ve got a license to kill bastards like you.” I was at my boiling point as I gritted my teeth and said, “Well then, pull the trigger.” We both heard a voice from the sidelines. It was Detective Dorries warning me, “D.O., Don’t ask him again.” Scarface calmed down and put his gun away. He looked at Dorries and said, “Take the bastard outta here and charge him with all of the offenses. He’ll sign if he knows what’s good for him.”

Jackson finally came up for air and before we walked out of the interrogation room he had the pleasure of knocking out the only two teeth I had left in my mouth. I guess he and Ma Keel would have the last laugh over the facelift I ended up getting from him that night. Now being toothless my mates started calling me ‘gummy.’

The next day, Jackson and Dorries came to my cell with a statement that they wanted me to sign, admitting my guilt. I balked, “There is no way in the wide world I’ll sign this. Piss off!” They knew there was no chance I would change my mind. So Jackson got cunning.

He said, “D.O. Don’t you want to play football tomorrow?” Well I jumped at the chance. I said, “Of course I do!”
Jackson went on, “If you sign the statement we’ll let you out to play footy tomorrow.” He added, “And not only that D.O., but we’ll make sure that you get out on a bond.” The only problem we had was to figure out how I would stay in the watch house until Monday when I had to front the Magistrate. We came up with a fair deal, I thought. I agreed to sign the document if they agreed to let me out for the game on Sunday, with the understanding that I would return to the watch house on my own after the match. I signed it.

When Sunday morning came, I was excited that I would play that day. But time went on, and no Detective Jackson or Dorries. I knew it was getting late. I banged on my cell door shouting out, “When are you going to let me out?” Finally the Sergeant came in. He was even upset as he thought I should be out hooking for the team. He said, Sorry mate, we can’t release you without Detective Jackson signing the papers. I’d let you out if I could, but it’s not up to me.” Well, the bastards never showed up! I felt like I had been duped with more filthy deceit and lies. If I could have busted the door down I would have.

The next morning I fronted the Magistrate. Handcuffed, I stood in front of Dan Carney again. After reading out my
charges I was asked, “How do you plead?” This time I was ready, “Not guilty Your Worship.” I didn’t stop there. I continued to blurt out my entire story, how I had been tricked into signing the paper so that I could play footy that Sunday. The Magistrate looked down at me and said, “Yes, we missed you at the game.” I continued to rave on as to what a bad deal I had been given by the detectives. The Magistrate told Dorries and Jackson to approach the bench. They followed him into his Chambers. I waited for the decision hoping that I had been heard. When His Worship came out of his Chambers he said, “D.O. step forward.” I did. He said, “All charges are dismissed with no recording.” My prayer had been answered. As I turned to walk away he said, “...and D.O...” I turned back to look at him, “...I’ll see you at training tomorrow night.”

I was trying to lay low and avoid any conflict with the police. I did my best but with no luck. The following Saturday I was coming out of the racetrack when a squad car pulled up. It drove slowly alongside me. Guess who? Jackson rolled down the window and said, “D.O. We want to talk to you. Hop in the backseat.” After our last episode I didn’t have any choice so I got in. Jackson started on me, “How’d you go at the track? Did you win a quid?” Dorries took his
turn, “There was a job done last night. We’re looking for the numbers on the notes that were taken. We want to see what you have on you.” I didn’t want to be taken down to the interrogation room so I handed over all my winnings from the track. As Jackson counted my cash he said, “Don’t worry we won’t leave you broke, take this note.” He handed me a one-pound note.

Their setup worked perfectly. Late that night they showed up at the boarding house and pulled me out of bed. They handcuffed and arrested me for stealing. You see, when they picked me up earlier that day Jackson had cleverly switched one of my notes with a silver nitrate note. This was the bill he handed back to me. Bloody hell, I never heard of anything as cunning as this. But when I looked down at my hands, sure enough they were stained with brown ink. I was brought down to the watch house, fingerprinted and locked up. It was a replay. I missed the game on Sunday, and Monday morning I fronted the Magistrate. He released me on bond.

Every weekend I would see them, as they had to keep their reputation as stand-over merchants alive. This particular morning they showed up at the Boarding House. They told me that the Fruit Store had been knocked off. They came to
search my place for evidence. I had nothing to do with it, but I got to the point where their harassment was so obvious, I would try to find ways to entertain myself. Seeing as it was Sunday, the day of rest, I decided to show my guests some hospitality. I asked the pair if they would like a lovely cup of tea. Of course I had my own game in mind, as I had winnings of $180 from the track the day before. This time I wasn’t going to be the fool and let them get their grubby hands on it.

They were searching under my bed and looking in my pillows and mattress. They had their backs to me as I pulled the money out of my pocket and buried it in the box of loose-leaf tea I was holding. I carefully shook the box up to make sure the money was hidden. The two idiots kept an eye on me while they opened up all of my cupboards searching high and low. How terribly pleased I was with myself, as right in front of their eyes, I took two teaspoons of loose tea out of the box and put it into the teapot. Before Dorries closed the cabinet door, I closed the tea box tightly to preserve the ‘freshness’ and placed the box on the shelf he was looking at. Dorries politely closed the cabinet for me. After we all drank up and they hadn’t found anything, they put their cups on the table. What a strange
pair they were. Thinking that we had a nice civil chat they said, “Hooray D.O. we’ll catch up with you later.”

It seemed that from one day to the next I couldn’t be sure when Jackson and Dorries would sink the boot into me again. My mates and I were at the Crown Hotel one night. I went into the men’s room and was happy to find myself alone. I still had a real problem with exposing my doodle to anyone. So I quickly pulled down my zipper and started to pee when the bathroom door opened. I was not alone anymore. Guess who? Detective Jackson had followed me in. He pulled down his zipper and started peeing in the urinal next to me. While he was in the middle of this he looked over to me and said, “D.O., I want to ask you something.” I thought what utter bullshit this was. I turned away from him finishing up as fast as I could. With my back to him I snarled, “Piss off and leave me alone.” Before we could both get our zippers up, Jackson grabbed and slammed me against the wall. Well I knew I had one very important thing to do first. And mind you, it was to make sure that he could not see my doodle! After I took care of my private business first, I gave him a few good punches. He dropped to the floor and I left the bathroom. I went back to the bar and sat with my mates. I didn’t mention a thing about what had
just happened. They found out quick enough when Jackson came out. He and Dorries talked before coming over to get me. They shoved the handcuffs on me and we were off to the interrogation room.

This time I took a terrible hiding from Detectives Jackson, Dorries and Senior Detective Scarface Gearey. It was three against one. Forget about it, I was done. I copped a flogging that would put the nuns and yardmen at Neerkol to shame. I might have left the orphanage as a downtrodden illiterate boy, but make no mistake, when I was released from police custody that night, I was a grown man who had finally graduated with a diploma in physical abuse.

By now I wondered what would be their last hurrah, as I had no more patience or strength to go on with it all. Thank God for Rugby League. It was my sanity, a safe harbor. It was the only place that I could hide from it all. The anger and frustration I held within me every day makes me wonder how I never actually killed anyone. I waited for the final blow. When I contemplated it all, I didn’t mind going back to jail. I liked it there. It was a good place for me to be alone, but not to be hurt by being alone.

I was lying in my bed when Jackson and Dorries knocked on my door. It was after midnight. They had just come back
from the Canberra Hotel where they had gotten the Publican Ronnie Lock drunk. The two of them had carried Ronnie upstairs to his bed. They wanted me to help them steal money out of his safe. They threatened jail if I didn’t help them out. I had taken enough beatings to do what they said. They drove me down to the Canberra Hotel and led me up to the bedroom of the publican. The door was open and the loud snoring coming out of Ronnie Lock was unbelievable. He was so loud that I was surprised the entire hotel wasn’t awake. Jackson and Dorries told me to go in and get the keys out of his pocket. He was such a big man I didn’t want to know what would happen to me if he woke up. I tiptoed in and grabbed the keys. They led me downstairs. Jackson tried a few keys before he found the right one to open the office door. He handed me the key to the safe and I opened it. Three bags of money sat inside. They didn’t want the bag of coins, so I only handed them the two bags of notes... This was my total involvement in the crime. Except for one other thing, I was still involved with my own stupidity. When we left the hotel Jackson and Dorries did not drive me back to my boardinghouse. Instead they gave me money to take a taxi home. At the time I never thought anything of it.
The next morning I was in bed when the triplets, Jackson, Dorries and Scarface arrived. They charged in and arrested me for knocking off the Canberra Hotel. They had a taxi driver that could identify me at the scene of the crime. When I tried to defend myself, they just laughed at me.

"Who do you think they are going to believe D.O? With your criminal record?"

I was taken to the watchhouse and charged with breaking, entering and stealing. I wondered what my punishment would be this time. Everyone knew that Boggo Road Prison had been nicknamed ‘Nairobi’ by the magistrates and the courts. When you were put there, it was equal to being sent to one of the most remote places in Africa. Even the lifers on the inside used the word Nairobi when they talked about prison life.

Funny how things can turn around as my bail was taken care of by my landlord Mario, a New Australian. Who would have thought he would do something like this without being asked? And all of my mates? They wanted to throw a ‘D.O. Going Away Party’ as they didn’t know how long I would be gone. Fancy this, an ex-detective had recently bought the National Hotel. He despised Jackson, Dorries and Scarface Gearey. He had worked around them and knew how rotten the
bastards were. Knowing I had gotten a bad break, he offered to have my Going Away Barbeque at his pub.

Everyone tells me it was a great party with a lot of singing and dancing. I don’t remember much as I was pretty sad underneath it all. I do remember putting on a good face when I held up my glass of Coca Cola and toasted my mates. I sang out:

Charge your glasses one and all
and drink a hearty cheer.
Here’s the Fred the Publican
the man who doesn’t like beer.

With a big smile I continued...

I want to thank you all for joining me tonight.
    But I must run. I’m on my way to Nairobi.

    I left them laughing as I had always done. I made sure that I remained in their superior graces, as I was still the poor orphan boy who was being carted off to prison once again.

When I fronted the Court on Monday the District Court Judge sentenced me to three years at Boggo Road Prison. I never stood a chance. Before I was escorted back to the watch
house, the Judge said, “Mr. Owen, do you have anything to say for yourself?”

I shook inside with anger and resentment when I looked around the room. There I stood, naked, but properly dressed in my blue shirt, a larry tie and long trousers. Of course I wore no underwear, as I never got used to it. All I could see were the bad men in suits and ugly women in habits gawking at me. The pain inside was shocking as I stared back at those bloody 'authority' figures that I grew to hate: the Father Andersons, the Mother Superiors, the Inspector Pattersons, the Detective Dorries, Detective Jacksons, the Senior Sergeant Geareys. Being condemned by the hypocrites was nothing new. I took a deep breath and pressed my lips together tightly. I would have to answer the Judge without embarrassing myself further, as I had no teeth in my mouth.

I would like to believe it was the grace of God that turned my rage into mischief, as the larrikin came out in me. I knew how to protect myself from it all. Barely able to stand, I replied, “Yes your honor. I do have something to say. As far as the Canberra Hotel robbery goes? I did take the keys out of the Publican’s pocket and I have only one thing to say about it.” I paused and played to my
audience. I continued, "I don’t know how Mrs. Lock can put up with Mr. Lock’s bloody snoring! I think he better see a doctor." The courtroom roared. The bastards.

I heard that Jackson and Dorries had reported that only three thousand pounds was taken from the hotel safe. Mr. Lock told everyone it was more like twelve thousand pounds. I couldn’t care less who was telling the biggest lie, as I never received any of the money. I was not the criminal. I was the pawn. But mainly, I was the orphan.

For the record: The truth is that I was beaten severely by those police officers in Toowomba. The truth is that Jackson and Dorries lined their pockets with the stolen money from the Canberra Hotel and blamed it on me. The truth is I was harassed and hung out to dry. The truth is I should not have spent three years of my life in Boggo Road Prison.

Lo and behold, almost thirty years later I could read a little bit. It was 1994 when a friend sent me an article from the Brisbane Courier Mail. My stomach turned over the story. Can you imagine my anger when I read:

SENIOR POLICE GO FREE

By P. Whittaker
The dropping of corruption charges against two former senior Gold Coast police officers yesterday officially closed the final chapter on Fitzgerald Inquiry prosecutions. Judge Brian Hoath in the Brisbane District Court discharged former Chief Superintendent MARK JACKSON...

...JACKSON, 64 was sentenced to eight years on November 7, 1992, after they were found guilty by a Brisbane District Court Jury of being involved in corruption with confessed bagman Jack H....The trial lasted 5 1/2 months. However, both men served less than three weeks in Numinbah prison farm after being granted bail pending appeal...Judge Hoath in the 1992 trial said on the evidence and the verdict that he was satisfied that the two had entered into a corrupt relationship with bagman Jack H. in 1984 which continued until 1987. He said he was also satisfied the two had protected brothels, Gentlemen International and Geisha Bathhouse...The Judge said it was not possible to estimate how much Jackson and L. had received in bribes over the years but he was satisfied they were given a minimum of $20,000 in 1985-86...Jackson, awarded an Australian Police Medal for bravery, retired from the force in 1987 soon after the Fitzgerald Inquiry hearings began...

...and he collected a reported $250,000 superannuation payout.

They tell me Jackson is dead now. Dorries is dead now. Gearey is dead now. I flash back on State Child Worker Patterson who is dead now. I might be illiterate but they all have one thing in common. They all worked for the Queensland government. They all were the ‘responsible people’ we had to trust. These adults made their living by doling out punishment to orphans, whether children or grown ups. Why can’t I seem to make peace with this issue? I was an orphan. I was innocent. I was illiterate. I was used. They might be dead, but I’m still alive. The law is still alive. Where is the justice?
I was use to institutions. Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir. You had to be inside for six months before you got an egg. There were all kinds of little things like this to keep a prisoner in line. If the screws showed up at your cell without warning you always prayed to God it was over something good you did. But I was known as a clean skin so I didn’t worry too much. I was in shock the day the screws took me to the medical center without warning. I found myself sitting in a dentist’s chair. This was a first! I was fitted for a set of false teeth. After the dental plates were finished and put them in my mouth, I thought I had died and went to heaven. I could chew food again. No more gumming my tucker. How strange! How good could life get?

After twelve months in a cell I was moved into a dormitory with other prisoners. My first night was a terror. When the lights went out this bloke jumped into my bed. Before I even knew what was happening I jumped up and was into him. It turned into a big donnybrook. The prisoners were placing bets with their boob weed over who would win. The bloke I was fighting was not only the stand-over merchant of the dormitory but the bookmaker. I was not going to let him get
on top. Before he got into me I removed my new teeth. No way was I going to be called ‘gummy’ again. The screws showed up, pulled us apart and dragged us out. We were put in separate cells until the next day when we faced the visiting magistrate. We got seven days each in the ‘black peter’ where you don’t see daylight. It’s only bread and water with a brief exercise period. The other bloke couldn’t take it, but I didn’t mind it. Nothing was worse than being put under floorboards at Neerkol. At least I wasn’t getting rooted up the backside at the same time. I did the ‘black peter’ standing on my head.

When they let me out, I fronted the Superintendent. I requested to be kept out of the dormitory after what had happened to me with Father Anderson. I explained, “If you put me into a dormitory and anyone comes near my bed I’ll kill ’em. No one is going to do what that filthy priest did to me!” My anger was loud and clear. I was returned to a single cell to do the rest of my time.

It was my first time seeing a psychiatrist. I was warned by the other inmates about his stupid questions. I was ready for him. I laid on the bed in the infirmary while the bloke asked me a few questions about myself. He wanted me to relax and play a game with him. He began, “Now David, what
would you do if you saw a battleship in the desert?” I couldn’t help but wonder what in the bloody hell this had to do with anything, but I answered politely, “Oh sir, I would sink it.” He slowly nodded his head up and down while he took notes. He continued, “Goooood…That’s good David.”

I must admit he was entertaining. He said, “Now David, what would you sink it with?” I thought to myself this bloke is off his friggin’ head. I went along with the game and replied, “Oh sir, I’d sink it with a torpedo.” My answer seemed to really puzzle him. He nodded his head again, “Good David…verrry good!” I thought he was trying to catch me up with his next question, but I was ready for him. He said, “Gooood David...But tell me, where would you get the torpedo from?” I sat up and looked him straight in the eye. I was pleased with my answer. I said, “Well I would go to the same bloody place where you got the bloody battleship from!!”

I walked out scratching my head. Later that day out in the exercise yard I told another mate about this crazy conversation. He had the same experience. He said, “They’re mad. Bloody bananas. That’s why they’re psychiatrists!” I said, “And they think we’re blotto!” We laughed till we cried.
It was no use. I still couldn’t write a letter if my life depended on it but I knew I needed to fight the false charges that sent me to prison. I was framed but I still didn’t have a proper solicitor. I was getting to know the ropes inside, so I asked around for help and was led to one of the prison solicitors. I found out later that he was nothing more than an inmate with an interest in the law but it was better than nothing. At least he could read and write and between my memory and his words we wrote my appeal. I pleaded for a retrial as I had been convicted based on the criminal behaviour of two Toowomba detectives Jackson and Dorries. My appeal was dismissed as the bastards had set up an eyewitness. I was no prison solicitor but even I could understand that I was out of luck.

I hadn’t been in the place that long when a mob of my football mates came down to Brisbane to watch Queensland play N.S.W...After the game they decided to visit me. Full of turps and too much grog, they banged on the front gate of the prison shouting, “We want to see D.O.!” The guards told them, “If you don’t leave you’ll be locked up with D.O.!” Later that week the screws deprived me of my boob tobacco
ration for a fortnight as a punishment for their rowdy behaviour.

During my three-year sentence in Boggo Road the Queensland Government began building another criminal institution called Wacol. The screws would keep saying, “You shouldn’t be in here D.O.! You’re not a criminal.” They saw me as a model prisoner. So I was told to gather my belongings, which weren’t much, and get ready for my transfer to Wacol. My new single cell had a washbasin, a flush toilet and a window that you could see outside. The food was beautiful. I had definitely moved up a notch. We may have had to toil long and hard hours but we always got fed well. Funny how I never seemed to get away from the same old question, “What on earth are you doing in here D.O.?”

Wacol had tennis courts and a big sporting oval. The new prison even had a cricket team and I was the wicket keeper. It was great. I could keep fit until I returned to football. The three-year sentence would keep me out of footy for the next two seasons. I never really thought much about my life outside anymore. I was isolated but happy.

The day came when I heard my name called out over the intercom system, “Dave Owen...Visitor.” I thought I had been hit by a bombshell. My heart came up into my mouth
wondering who had come to see me. All kinds of thoughts raced through my mind. I hoped that it wouldn’t be the bastards Jackson and Dorries. And if not, who would it be? I can’t tell you how relieved I was to walk into the Visiting Yard and see my old solicitor and good mate John Hilliard. He stood there with his darling wife Beverly and the family. We hugged like long lost brothers. He asked me how it was going. I let him know that I had found a home and I didn’t want to leave. Time had moved on.

I worked with a crew of inmates that were putting in sewage ducts. After the first week of some bloody hard labor the new prison boss Rollie pulled me aside, “I’ve been watching you D.O. and you’re a damn good worker.” He added, “What in the hell are you doing in here? There is no way you should be in prison.” I shook my head in agreement but down deep I knew there was nowhere else for me to go. Pouring cement kept you on the move to get the job done. Most of the other workers were fair dinkum but there was one real bastard, a big brawl artist called Sylvester. I tried to steer clear of him, as he was trouble.

One day the boss sent me to the shed to pick up some bags of cement with the wheelbarrow. The inmates used to hide their smokes and booze behind the bags in there. When I
got to the door I heard someone crying. I went around a few of the bags to see what was going on. I didn’t realize it at the time but the boss was right behind me. I went nuts when I saw this young bloke no more than eighteen years old being sexually molested by Sylvester. The mongrel had a bad reputation as a fighter. I didn’t care if he was Joe Louis. I saw red. I screamed out to him to get off the kid. Startled, he looked over at me and got off of him. Well he came at me like he was going to kill me. I always hated bullies so I went punch for punch. He was a filthy pig of a thing. I thought for sure he would kill me.

My boss was now standing in the doorway watching all of this. He sent for backup help to come to my rescue. Thank God they showed up before he sank the boot into me. When they hauled him away I was still on the floor in a heap, but I was pleased with myself. I might not have ever had the chance to give Anderson the beating he deserved, but I did help in my own way to stop the sexual abuse of another boy pleading for help.

Sylvester got sent back to Boggo Road Jail. I stayed at Wacol. Two weeks later I was called into the Superintendent’s office. Rollie’s report had explained to the parole board how I had put myself in danger while
defending an inmate who was being sexually abused. They also knew about Neerkol. They gave me a three-month early parole. I said, “No thank you Sir. This is my home. Don’t make me leave.” I even considered smacking the boss to stay in jail. I thought, “Why go out again when I was getting three meals a day with lovely tucker of roast meat and potato? If I went back out there I would have to start taking my own dirty sandwiches to work.” I couldn’t hide from the truth however as now we all knew I just wasn’t a criminal. Something also told me that if I didn’t take the offer and get out quick, I might never get out. I got my job back with Donnie Farrell as a brickie’s labourer. It was the terms of my early parole. He picked me up and took me back to Toowomba.

Donnie knew me as a hard worker. He would tell everyone that I was strong as a lion, and being a brickie’s laborer you bloody well had to be. I didn’t mind the tough jobs, as my boss was fair and easy to get along with. He was known to like racehorses. He owned one himself. ‘Wine and Dine’ was boasted the fastest horse over three furlongs in Queensland at the time. One morning we were working on a job twenty miles from Toowomba at Gatton College when the boss told me to cleanup for the day. He said, “I’ve gotta
go and back my horse. The trainer said it’s a certainty. Wine and Dine will win today.” I didn’t have any way of getting back to Toowomba so Donnie told me to come along with him. I didn’t mind going but I didn’t have any money. So he gave me my pay a couple of days early.

As everybody thought it a certainty, I put every cent of my pay packet on the bloody horse. Glory be to the father, it looked good as it came fast out of the barrier. Wine and Dine was in front six lengths after going about four furlongs. We all thought that we’d be celebrating a big win. As races do turn out at times, the last furlong the horse folded up like a pricked balloon.

I looked at the boss who was shook up as anything. I said, “I’ve done the shirt off my back. What am I going to do for a quid for the rest of the week? I haven’t even paid my board.” Donnie replied, “What do you think I’ve bloody done? I’ve done my pay as well as everyone else’s pay packet!” He continued, “Well D.O. all I can say is that you’ll be working for me for the next fortnight for bottle tops.” The next day the boss came up to me and handed me ten bucks to help me to pay my board. I will always admire Donnie’s great sense of humour. He said, “Whatever you do D.O., don’t go ‘wining and dining’ on this!”
I still loved Rugby League. Without a doubt it was my dearest, most loyal and dedicated sport. By now I had been picked 22 times reserve for Toowomba when I finally broke the streak. I was picked to play for the Bulimba Cup Team against Brisbane. Both teams had a good chance of winning. It was a tough game. The local newspaper wrote it up better than I could have ever hoped for. My footy career was taking off. If only I had brothers and sisters or a mum to be proud of me. Every time I made a team I had no one to ring up.

Toowomba Rugby League
OFFICIAL PROGRAMME
April 13, 1969 - EDITORIAL
TOOWOMBA vs. BRISBANE

...Good to see D.O. get a run with the Cup side at last; only sad feature was that his record of reserve for Toowomba team for 22 times has now been broken. Anyhow, Dave gave a very good account of himself as a hooker and in general play. He did not go so well in the first half, but won vital scrums in the second half when Toowomba needed the ball possession to retain their lead.

I met Wayne Bennett in 1969. He was picked as a reserve a few times to represent Toowomba. He was a fast winger. There wasn’t much of him, 6’ 3” and wiry. He was a policeman and God help any robber he was chasing on foot as he could run like the wind. I say this because every time we went out on a training run I was always the first one
home. I always figured it was because there were three policemen on the team running behind me.

I’ll never forget when we all went down and played in Brisbane. We came back from a training run. The whole team was starving. The hotel kitchen was closed. Well this was no good for the boys. They were a good bunch of blokes. So being the rogue and villain I said, “Don’t worry boys, I’ll find us something to eat.” I managed to get myself through a door into the kitchen and raid the fridge. The guys were all sitting around playing cards when I walked in with big trays of roast meat, cheese, breads and veggies. I was the hero! The trays were cleaned down to the bare metal without a scrap of food left when the team was finished eating. I still laugh over this as no one ever asked me where I got the food. We all just had a beauty of a feed. The next morning at the stroke of dawn I snuck down to the kitchen and waited for the cook to open up. She was a kind old lady. I told her straight away what I had done for the team; that I had helped myself. She didn’t blink an eye over what I told her. She said, “Of course you boys need a good feed after a hard training run. I would’ve done the same thing.” She was a big footy fan herself. As she started to prepare for breakfast she said, “Now, get out of
my kitchen.” Once again it was Rugby League that came to my rescue.

Darkie’s girlfriend Beverly was a good sort. She was pretty, had a good body and was a lovely well-mannered lady. She and her girlfriend Jan lived down at the end of the golf course in a flat. They were both nurses. They were the first ladies I found it easy to have a laugh with and not feel embarrassed. Darkie had a way with the ladies. I admired this in him, as I didn’t have any idea of how to be around women. So I did anything he wanted me to do. One thing was for sure, we were both always broke. He’d ask me for a quid and I’d ask him for a quid.

One hot Saturday night during a dance Beverly wanted Darkie to take her and Jan to Halladin Baths for a swim. Of course Darkie was Darkie. He was interested in another sort at the time and said no. I offered, “Bev, I’ll take you and Jan down.” Darkie joked that if I wanted to take his girlfriend to the Baths I would have to buy her off of him. I said, “I’ll give you twenty bucks for Beverly.” To my surprise he took it. He said, “All right D.O. she’s yours.” Beverly being the good sport and knowing her boyfriend’s behavior took the whole thing in her stride. Jan and I thought it was just a good laugh. Darkie gave me the keys of the
Volkswagen and warned me not to prang it. Of course I had to fill the bloody tank up with gas before we left. We all had good fun that night at the bars. To this day we all still have a laugh over whose girl Beverly really is, Darkies or mine?

Beverly and Jan may not have been my girls, but that didn’t stop them for looking for the perfect sheila for me. I was always the odd man out. They introduced me to another nurse who worked at the psychiatric hospital. Her name was Ava and she was nice. We started going out together as a group: Beverly and Darkie, Jan and Benson, Ava and I. Dating was a very ‘normal’ thing for people my age to do. I just wanted to be normal. It was a ‘normal’ thing for a bloke to think that a lady was nice to look at, but I could hardly handle it. ‘Normal’ was against everything I had ever been brainwashed with back at Neerkol.

My mind was an utter mess when it came to sorting any of this out. And I sure wasn’t going to tell anybody about the mortal sin argument I had running through my head every day. It was brutal whenever I got sexually aroused as any other healthy young man of twenty-four years old. I was still a boy inside who was emotionally stunted when it came to understanding the birds and the bees. Holy Dooley I had
no idea as to the nightmare I was stepping into. Being a loner seemed the only way to keep my sanity.

As it went I met a lady who I found the courage to be open with for the first time. It was a disaster. She and I tried to have a healthy, physical relationship but from the very beginning the demons literally flew out of my arse. It was so demoralizing when willie would get hard but my feelings of guilt and mortal sin would shrink it down faster than you could say Jack Robinson. With love and patience she always tried to help me get through it, but in the end she could not handle the mental anguish. I couldn’t shake off my terror over the act of intercourse. Voices inside my head would tell me that I was no better than Father Anderson. I really believed that the poor girl would be hurt like I was. Everyone tried to convince me that lovemaking was a very normal and acceptable thing to do, especially between consenting adults in their late twenties. Back then all my mates were either engaged or getting married.

How should I get over this? I think that if I could have overcome my deep sexual trauma maybe I wouldn’t be alone today. I’ve always wondered what it would have been like to have a lovely and healthy relationship with a woman. I know
I would have been such a loving and giving husband and father. If only...

I was a mongrel bastard on the football field and hated the opposition. I feared none of them. I felt this way after being raised at the orphanage and copping so many floggings. I took my frustration out on the football field. If you’re going out to play, you don’t want to think that the blokes you’re playing against are any better than you. It was always politics. Once you got in, you stayed in for a few years. I’ve played some magnificent football. You always know one thing as a player when you compete against different teams during the season. It is obvious whether they are on their game that day, or whether you’re just off yours.

I was picked for three years in a row to represent Southwest Queensland for the Queensland Trials as the hooker. The weekend we played a trial against Central Queensland, Darky was the captain and Kev Boschhammer was the coach. We won, but I came off the field with a broken nose. The bastard who did it walked into the dressing room and said to me, “D.O. I’m sorry that I put one on you.” I jumped up off the bench and said, “Allright ya bastard, you put one on me out on the field. Why don’t we go out the
back and you try putting one on me again?” I was ready to fight. A few players got in between us and stopped anything from happening. For the record we took all three trials that weekend and became the 1968 Queensland Champions.

When Bobby Hagan took over coaching Toowomba in 1969, I finally got a permanent place on the team. He realized the value of having a tough hooker. He didn’t mind a bit if you had that mongrel in you. Duncan Hall, an old legendary Australian player was our team motivator. He used to pull me over to the side and say, “D.O. you’ve got to go out there and knock ‘em pissin.”

When we played the Bulimba Cup football against Brisbane we called them the ‘Queenstreet Boys.’ One mug lair wore colored football boots. I used to love to get stuck into him because I wanted to show the rest of his team that he wasn’t the star the press made him out to be and that it takes thirteen players to do the job, not just one. The bulk of the Queensland team was made up of Brisbane Players. How great it felt to beat them.

Most people today don’t realize how the tide turned on the professional aspect of the sport. Back then League was professional and Union was amateur play. I know this subject all too well. Past Grammars Rugby club wanted to
get into the grand final but had lost their hooker. The coach asked me if I would hook for them. I had never played Rugby Union in my life. He told me, “All I want you to do is win us the ball out of the scrum.” It made the headlines in the Toowomba Chronicle in 1969.

FORMER R.L. STAR IN UNION PROTEST

The decisive Toowomba Rangers- Past Grammars Rugby Union match at Barbour Oval, T.G.S., on Saturday ended on a note of drama when Rangers, who were beaten 9-6 and thereby lost their place in the semi-finals, fired in a protest to the Downs Rugby Union.

The basis of the Rangers protest was that Past Grammars had allegedly played a registered Rugby League and Bulimba Cup player, Dave Owen, formerly a hooker for Southern Suburbs Club. Presently Rugby Union Policy is that where League and Union are both played, a player may not transfer from the professional to the amateur code unless there are sufficient reasons for the governing body to decide otherwise...In country areas where the code is still developing only the receipt of money will prevent a player from changing to Union.

Well I had never received any money from the Souths Club or the Toowomba Rugby League for the Bulimba Cup Victory. God love a duck, a tense secret ballot dismissed the Rangers’ protest and left the points for the match stand. However the executive clearly pointed out to delegates that the ‘spirit’ of Rugby Union is an amateur one and that well-known representative professional Rugby League players should be excluded from Rugby Union. However, professionals from other sports such as athletics and boxing were not
excluded. How times have changed as the “spirit’ of Rugby Union is now so professional it is all about money.

I owe so much to another older Australian Representative halfback, Cyril Connell. He was the man who started me on my hooking career. Oddly enough I met him as a teenager all the way back when I lived and worked down in the yard at Neerkol. I’ve said earlier that I do believe there are angels all around me. Well Cyril is a good example. He taught me the fundamentals of League and how to pack a scrum. His guidance carried me through my football career.

I knew I had finally made it into the 80 minute player club when I was picked to play Representative footy for Toowomba against the English Touring side. I had gone down to the paper shop to check that morning to see whether I was in the team. I looked down and read my name! I was that excited I ran all the way back to the boardinghouse. I couldn’t believe it, I was not only picked as hooker but I was picked as vice-captain as well!

Dickie Rose was picked as captain. It was the first time an aboriginal was a captain against an International Touring Side. We had a good strong team to play against the Pommies. I’ll never forget that day. We were lined up on the field. The Pommies came out and were jumping up and
down in front of us. Kicking and lifting their legs like a bunch of show-offs. One of the competitors said to me, “Did they leave you off the chain to play today me lad?” I didn’t forget things like that. When it was time to shake hands before we went out to play, he put out his hand. I said, “Shove it up your big fat arse.” Well the first scrum was packed in and the English hooker was a fighting hooker. I said to him, “I hear you can fight a bit.” He just looked at me. I got close to him and said, “Well you haven’t seen how this bastard can fight.” I pushed him and said, “Cop a bit of this.” And we were into it. I had been instructed by the team motivator Duncan Hall again, “D.O. this is what you have to do. First smack him in the mouth and then bloody well get into him.” He told the other forwards to back me up and not to leave me high and dry. Well it was on for young and old! Wayne Bennett played on the wing. I ran wide from dummy half and I turned the ball inside to him. He made a twenty-yard dash before they brought him down. Danny Ryan was a big front row forward and a real asset to holding me up in the scrums. Dickie Rose used to say in his native lingo, “D.O. get them feet of yours striking like a snake’s tongue so we can win a bit o’ ball!” How different we played back then. How rough the game was. In the end it didn’t matter. The Pommies beat us.
Wayne Bennett went on to bigger and better things. Before we took the field that day we all wished each other the best of luck. Wayne said to me, “How do you think I’ll go D.O.?” As vice-captain I said, “Don’t worry, I’ll look after ya!” Of course I never had to look after him. He played a blinder against the Pommies, and he’s been playing blinders ever since. He ended up representing Queensland and Australia, coached various clubs in Brisbane, assistant coached in Canberra and for the last fifteen years or so he’s Coach of the Brisbane Broncos. In 2005 he coaches the Australian Side. He and I have always walked such different paths, yet we are still good friends to this day. Thank God. He always told me, “D.O. you were never a criminal just a silly sort of a bastard who had a tough life.”

I was 32 years old but they reported my age as 29. I was playing Rep football but by now had played with and against the best in the world. I would never get picked to play for Australia because of my prison record. I was working as a tyre technician “Where do I go now?” I asked myself.

The deciding factor to leave town came on the day that Jackson and Dorries pulled up in the squad car and introduced me to the new detectives in town. They said, “Meet D.O., he’s the ex-con we told you about.” Whatever
they wanted to call me, orphan, illiterate or ex-con, one thing I knew was that no matter how hard life got I always held down a job. My name was never, ever put on the dole check. I was a clean skin now and wanted to

I looked ahead with a bit of vision for a change. When my gut told me to get away for good, I listened. I started asking around about different places to work outside of Toowomba. I heard about jobs being offered at Bouganville Island. One bloke told me, “Tell them you’re a rigger. Just submit your name to the newspaper.” I got a response to my inquiry pretty quick. I was asked to come to Brisbane for an interview. Well I was good with the bullshit, but I never imagined I would get the job that fast. Glory Be to the Father, and now to the Holy Spirit! They wanted to fly me up to Bouganville Island in a fortnight. This was worth big money.
CH. 15 HIM ONE GOOD FELLA MASTER

My swag was a little heavier now with some footy memorabilia, Rugby League press clippings and official programmes. I was still the same orphan who had no family, but with my new treasures alongside me I was somebody. When I arrived at the Brisbane Airport and joined up with ten other blokes it was time to face a new fear, flying. It was my first time on an airplane and I was scared to death. The closest thing I ever came to flying was back at Neerkol when I made an airplane from scrap paper for a bit of fun. I threw it up into the sky and imagined I was the pilot taking the plane as far away from the orphanage as I could, before running out of fuel.

I wouldn’t be fantasizing about flying anymore as I heard my name called out from the passenger-boarding list. The plane was ready to depart. I boarded with the others. I was happy to have the window seat. I buckled myself in tightly as we climbed up into the sky. Looking down I worried about the plane crashing. But a funny thing, I never worried about leaving Toowomba for good. When the pilot’s voice came over the loud speaker and gave the all clear, I relaxed. I felt light as the plane sailed through the blue skies dotted with white puffy clouds. I couldn’t
help but feel closer to God. I was relieved to have gotten away from the evil persecution of Detectives Jackson and Dorries back down on earth. A silly thought passed through my mind. I wondered, “Is this what Jesus felt like on Easter Sunday when he was resurrected from the dead?”

After arriving in Port Moresby, New Guinea, I felt like a seasoned flyer, until we got on the smaller plane to fly the rest of the way to Bouganville Island. Aside from going into a cold sweat over whether the little prop would actually get us there, it was a beautiful view looking down. Flying into the tiny island was breathtaking. We were picked up by a truck and taken to the workers camp at Pangoona. The roads were steep in this fantastic jungle paradise. It was a shame that I missed a lot of the scenery as I shut my eyes every time the truck hit a bad bump on the gravel road while making a hairy turn. I kept seeing the truck crashing down over the mountainside. I whispered to myself, “D.O. you’ve come too far to see your life pass before you now.”

Bechtal Pacific was a good American company to work for. They looked after their workers. I had a little hut. My washing was all done for me. What a treat this was. I was working as a rigger with an American crane operator. We
were putting these big pipes into trenches. My job was to fit them together. The pipes were so big in size that you could stand up inside them. The job entailed butting them up with a rubber ring seal. There could be no gaps otherwise the force of the water would come through and blow them apart. We were having a serious problem with the pipes not fitting. The smartass manager that I was working under was a real Aussie bastard on big money. This bloke was giving the orders and didn’t know what he was doing! I was following his orders and getting more frustrated as the days went on with no results. I went right to the engineer manager Michele who I respected a great deal and said, “That smart ass down there wouldn’t know shit from clay. He’s doing it wrong.” He said, “What are you talking about Dave?” I explained, “We’ve sent a dozen pipes down and now we have to bring all the bastards back up. Why? We’re wasting our time! We’re wasting your time. We’re getting nothin’ bloody done!” I was shouting by now, “I’ve told the boss what to do but he doesn’t want to listen to me. He just wants to do it his way! It ain’t working and I’m sick of the bastard.” The engineer concentrated on every word I said. He asked me, “What d’ya reckon Dave, do you think you can fix it up?” I never thought it over. I just said, “Of course I can. Let me get on to it.” Well Michele called the
foreman up and told him that I was going to take over the project and have a go. There was no argument as we all knew the bloody pipes were still not in.

I put my three-foot level on top of the pipe and had a look at the bubble. I went up to the crane driver and gave him the instructions on how I wanted him to pick up the pipes and lower them down. Once they were in place you had to camellong? them in with the rubber ring. Michele was nearby as I watched the first pipe go in and to my surprise it butted right up – there was no gap! I called out, “Michele, Michele, Come over here and have a look at this.” He was as excited as I was as we watched one huge pipe after another fit together. We were up to fitting the fifth pipe in when he waved his arms and shouted, “Dave don’t put anymore pipes in till I go and bring the big boss down.” I had no idea how good this really was for the company as they were just about to arrange a bloody boat to return all of these big pipes and rings to the manufacturer.

The smartass boss I had been working under had reported that all of the big pipes were faulty and had to be replaced. This would have stalled the job indefinitely. Michele looked at me amazed, “You’ve just got five pipes in and he couldn’t get one of ‘em to work!” The big boss from
Bechtel Pacific walked down to the site wearing his shiny silver helmet. The crew wore white ones. His silver helmet flashed in the sunlight before he stepped down into the hole where the pipes were to have a good look. He asked, “Who got this done?” Michelle pointed to me. The bloke had a grin a mile wide as he shook my hand and said, “The job is yours! You’ve just saved the company a lot of money. Now let me see you put a couple more of those suckers in.” As the crane picked up the next few pipes and put them into place they fit together as good as gold.

I was moved to the leading hand position. My wage went from seven hundred dollars a week up to twelve hundred dollars a week. I was put in charge of twenty-two native boys. Of course I had to admit, “Look I can’t fill out the time sheets for the boys.” They didn’t care. They wanted me to do the job. We agreed that I would keep putting the big pipes in and someone else would fill out the time sheets.

The Chimbu, Tallai and Wopai tribes were mingled in together in the workforce. On a Saturday night it was an experience just to watch the native boys. They would go and get three cartons of beer and take it over to a table in the beer garden and keep drinking till it was all gone. About midnight they would start stoning the canteen. Well
the riot squad would show up with their batons and crack a few heads.

The boys would only get ten cents an hour so there wasn’t much they could buy out of the canteen. I used to knock off cartons of biscuits out of the manager’s office for their smoko. I think it was from being in Neerkol and doing without that I wasn’t going to see my boys starve while they worked for me. They put in the effort to help me achieve what I needed to achieve by laying those huge pipes and I wouldn’t let them down. Sometimes I would have up to seventy workers on the books but only get fifty of them to come to work that day. I knew about this but I’d still pay them the small pittance no matter what. Call it my way of giving incentives. Before I knew it, I had a reputation. They would all tell each other, “You go work for this fella’ master David. Him one good fella’ master.” I tried to give the boys as much work as I could.

I had a little ‘boss boy’ called Pao who had a bone in his nose. I loved having him around as he used to get up the other natives somethin’ shockin’. They were petrified of him. He would bark at them with a native lingo that I had never heard before. To my surprise after listening to the boys, I found myself being able to speak their island
‘pidgin’ pretty easily. I supposed it was because it sounded so similar to the Latin I learned as an altar boy.

I was beginning to understand the ways of the natives who lived on the island, but this threw me. It was about how the boys would handle their money on payday. About twenty of them would all give their fortnight pay packet to just one particular boy to have a great time. I wanted to know more. What characters they were! Chewing on a beetlenut would make their mouths pink from the juice. They had a funny way of making a sucking sound from the corners of their mouth. They explained, “Ah Master David… one fortnight…him rich fella boy…him got plenty money…him go back to place belong him…bird in sky…him buy pig then him go to one fella fadda…him buy mary…him have jiggy jig…him have push push…” I understood most of what they told me but worried about what they would do for the next two weeks without money. I was getting good with their pidgin lingo. I said, “But you fella boy…you got no fella money for a fortnight!”

What spirit! He said, “Master David…because him had jiggy-jig…push-push…him come back from place belong him…him only over there one weekend…him good fella boy…we get money off him for next fella fortnight…next fella turn…then next
fella...then next fella...next fella...next fella...” How crazy it sounded. But I understood.

One day I was down putting pipes in when this boy came to me and said, “Master David...this fella boy...him wants some fella money...” I said, “Ah!...Master David him gots no money. “ He went on, “Him wantuk belong me in calaboose...me wanna get wantuk belong me out...” I knew that Wantuk meant ‘friend.’ He said, “Me gonna get wantuk belong me out of jail. Me want money.” I told him again I had no money to give him. I needed him to get to work. I said, “You go kissem one fella williecar...you kissem one fella sand...you kissem this fella pipe...to Master David...you go kissem on fella williecar!” I needed him to bring some sand down to me in the wheelbarrow for the pipe we were going to lay. I went over to the pipe and signaled for my American crane driver to lower the pipe down into position. I looked around for the boy and the wheelbarrow. No sand had arrived. I yelled out, “Wantuk come! You kissem one fella sand!!” He didn’t obey. He just looked at me. I went over and asked him what was wrong. He said, “Ah Master David give me no money.” I told him, “Master David not give one fella boy, one fella money. Master David give biscuits, food...but no fella money.” Well over in the islands it would
rain out of blue sky so I always wore a raincoat. As I turned and walked away from the boy my crane driver yelled out, “Look out D.O.!” Well I turned around to look and ducked down just as he swung a long handled shovel at me. He cut the raincoat clean off the back of me. I wheeled around as he was just pulling the shovel back to come at me again. I pounced on him and barreled him. I gave him a good right cross. Well down he went in a heap. But little did I realize where I was. This was no footy field with a referee. Instead, when I looked around me there were about a dozen Chimbus jumping up and down chanting, “Ooody booody...ooody booody...ooody booody.” I thought, “Oh shit! I’m in a lot of trouble here. What am I going to do?” Well the ring of natives started closing in on me. Every time they jumped up and down they would move in closer to me, chanting even louder, “Ooody booody...ooody booody.” This was a scrum I had never been in before!

I was in real strife when suddenly the ring was broken up by my little boss boy Pao who was only five foot nothing and much of him was this big bone through his nose. He jumped to my rescue. Waving his arms wildly, he screamed at them all in his own lingo. They all feared him so much that the group dispersed on the spot. I was blown away by
it all. I wondered what he had said to them to make them leave in a hurry. I said, “Pao, thank God you arrived! You tell ‘em this fella master why them big fella Chimbus frightened of this little fella boy?” I laughed, “You only lick lick fella! Them Chimbus ‘em big fellas…”

He proudly looked up at me and said, “Ah Master David…go back old fella time…in big jungle we go out with bow and arrow…we hunt for Chimbu…” I watched him pretend he was hunting. He went on, “We pull back bow and arrow…and we kill Chimbu.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. He went on, “We carry Chimbu to village…we put Chimbu in big pot…we stir pot…Ah master David…him Chinbu good fella kai kai…AHH!! good fella kai kai.” I was speechless as I understood what Pao what telling me. He really was a cannibal and had ate him! That’s why he was so feared.

I knew it was against the law to hit a native. So I had to front the court and explained what happened. Thank god the crane operator was there as my witness. Without him I might have done time in New Guinea. After that episode, I knew the time had come for me to go home. Wherever home was for me now, I wasn’t real sure. I worked on the island for a little over a year. I left with about eighteen thousand dollars when I arrived back in Brisbane.
I felt so independent when I booked myself into a hotel room in Brisbane. I was worried over some detective picking me up with that much money on me so I put it into a bank account. Fancy that, me being a customer of good standing with a bank. The only person I knew in Brisbane at the time was my old friend Darkie. I couldn’t wait to look him up. He hadn’t seen me for quite some time and he thought that I was back in Nairobi. I told him about working in Bouganville Island. When I pulled my bankbook out and showed him the proof, I surprised him. He said, “Stone the crows D.O., you’ve got a quid there!” How things had changed from our days in Toowomba.

I stayed with Darkie and Beverly for a while. Bev helped me set up a savings trust where I couldn’t touch my money. We just kept enough out to keep me going. Well Darkie was playing for a Brisbane Club called Eastern Suburbs. We’d go down to the Clubhouse like old times. He’d have his grog and I’d still drink my Coca Cola. A funny thing happened one day. Frig me, I thought I was over the anger when it came to the abuse I experienced at Neerkol. Darkie and I were just walking down the street to the pub when we passed this man of the cloth. Now I wasn’t a boy any more, I was a
thirty five year old man! Well I shocked both of us when I turned back to the priest and shouted out, “How many children have you abused in your day you filthy animal? Darkie looked at me in amazement. He said, “Shit D.O. thank God you’ve got nothin’ on me!”

I was feeling my age but could still keep up with the young blokes out on the field. This particular training night I saw Darkie on the sideline talking to a couple of blokes. They were looking for a hooker. Darkie was pointing me out to them. When I came off of the field Darkie said, “D.O. I told them you were a hooker and these blokes from Boona want to know if you will play for them.” They said, “If you come and play for us we’ll give you free room and board in a pub, and we’ll find you a job.” I thought, “Fair dinkum, League players were still not getting paid big money but at least I had free lodging and tucker.” I told them I’d sign up and play the game that Sunday and if they didn’t like what they saw they didn’t have to bother. I played for Boona and they couldn’t wait to sign me up. I had all my belongings with me as I was already prepared to go back with them.

I played for Boona for nearly two seasons. I was now playing Rugby League on a cow paddock. Sometimes we’d go to
the game early so we could clean the cow dung off before we had to run on the field. Every tackle you made you would get some skin knocked off. Boy did you have a reason to run hard as you could to clear those patches of mud. It was nothing like today’s footy field that looks like a bowling green.

They got me a job on this dam site where I learned to be a powder monkey. I was going back and forth from work to the pub with another bloke who lived in Boona. We would blow the hillsides away with dynamite. Lo and behold I knew how to put all the wires and detonators together. I was so precise in my wiring that I could blow concrete pipes in half as if they were cut with a Carborundum saw.

I was supposed to be living rent free but I was doing all of this bloody work for the publican: cutting chips for the fire, chopping wood, setting up tables for functions, cleaning up, serving behind the bar and even feeding the bloody chooks. I was working for the bastard for nothing. The situation finally came to a head one day when the publican told me to go downstairs and bring up some tables for the party function in the lounge. I told him to get his son Sam to do it. He snapped, “If you’re going to stay here you’ll pull your weight.” I said, “Look I’m doing more than
my bit!” I gave him a bit of my psychology, publican or no publican! I said, “My deal with the footy club was to live here rent free. If you want me to do all of this extra bloody work then you’ll have to pay me $100 a week.” He refused to do anything of the kind! He was a greedy old sod.

In the meantime there were two old spinsters living alongside the pub. I used to chop a bit of kindling for them every morning and in the afternoon I would clean out their fireplace and get it ready for the next morning. I would mow their lawn and look after their garden as well. The two sisters never got along. One sister was jealous of the other one. I wasn’t really sure as to what this was all about, but the younger sister liked me and would give me things. Practically every day one of them would give me something. They would say, “You’re a handsome young man David. Now don’t say no, we just want you to take it!” It got embarrassing as giving me gifts became a competition between the two spinsters. One day I would get a little cake on a plate, one day it was a shirt, one day a watch! It was out of my control the day the younger sister took me aside and gave me fifteen gold sovereigns dating back to the 1800s. She instructed me, “Do not tell my sister
anything!” She said, “David take these. You do so much for us and I don’t want my sister to have them!” I politely accepted the gift but wasn’t sure what to do with them. I didn’t know much about the value myself. I went back to the pub and showed them to Sam. I wasn’t hiding anything from anyone. I was that concerned over the gift I even told Mr. Sherry the Boona Postmaster. He wanted to see them for himself so I took him back to the pub and showed him. The next day, apparently the two spinsters were at loggerheads over what happened to the gold sovereigns. While arguing at the counter of the post office, Mr. Sherry overheard the older sister accuse me of stealing the coins. The younger sister spoke up and said that she had given them to me. The argument continued when the Postmaster stepped in and told the spinsters that he had seen the coins for himself and that they were in my possession. Well, the next day I came home from working at the dam and was greeted by two big brawny detectives from Ipswich. They wanted to know about the gold sovereigns. I didn’t hide a thing. I just pulled out the coins for them to look at. I gave them my side of the story to no avail. Since I had a past criminal record they were going to charge me. It was the old copper cliché, “Look Dave, we’ve caught you with the goods in your possession. Return the coins, plead guilty and you will get
off on a bond.” I was all too familiar with what I had to do next.

The football club used to have a Cabaret of a Sunday night after the football game. I still loved my footy. The publican had built a big refrigeration system down at the showground where we played the game. He used to sell his beer at the Cabaret and would easily go through three or four eighteen-gallon kegs though the night. He was making heaps of bloody money but the money coming in from the ticket sales and food wasn’t enough to pay the band. The football club had a meeting and decided that they would stop the Cabarets as they couldn’t support themselves. There was never a profit. I was steaming over the thought of the greedy publican making all of the money. He should at least pay for the band. I stepped up and told the committee, “Leave it with me, I’ll pay for the band.”

I had taken enough from the publican and would make it right, no matter what I had to do. The next Sunday Night Cabaret after the game, it was time to pay the band. I had to come up with the money. Well, I knew where the key was to the safe back at the pub. I felt it was only justice for me take the $100 for the band out of the wages I wasn’t getting paid for working at the pub every week. I was bold
enough to ask the publican’s son, who also played on the team, to drive me back to the hotel. He’d wait for me outside in the car while I went in, opened the safe, took out the $100 to pay the band and then drive me back to the show grounds. Everything was as sweet as pie.

Well this went on for about eight cabarets. I never had a guilty conscience through any of this, as I would also help to bartend on the nights of the Cabaret. I thought I was just in what I was doing. This night the son drove me back to the pub and I went through the motions of getting the $100 out of the safe, but I thought I saw him watching me out of the corner of my eye. We drove back in the Ute and I knew that I had been caught. I paid the band as usual. The next morning, Mr. and Mrs. who owned the pub called me into the kitchen. They told me that there was money missing from the safe. I admitted freely, “Oh yeah, I’ve taken money out of the safe.” They asked, “What for?” I went on, “The reason I took the money was because I’m supposed to get free board here in the bloody pub, you’ve got me working everyday washing and cleaning up, sometimes till one o’clock in the morning, and you haven’t ever paid me any money! I thought at least I could give something to the football club with what you are getting out of me!!
They were not going to give it up, “It’s wrong D.O. We want the money back! How much have you taken?” I snapped back at them, “About eight hundred bloody bucks!” They said they’d call the police if I didn’t pay it back. I signed a bit of paper saying I would have it taken out of my bloody pay. My signature was getting pretty popular.

When the police recovered the missing sovereigns everyone started to panic including the engineer boss of the dam. He was informed about my criminal record. Having no prior knowledge of this, he decided to check out the magazine box to see if there were any detonators missing. I told him, “Look I haven’t taken one detonator and I’ve had the keys to the box the whole time!” I reasoned with him, “I know that everything on my record makes me look like a criminal but I’m not that at all! What they’ve got on the slate, I’ve only done two out of a dozen.” He filled me in on his conversation with the police. He said, “Dave, they tell me that you might be getting ready to do a big safe job.” Glory be, they reckoned I was taking detonators and gelignite from the magazine to blow up a bank safe. It took over a week to check out the numbers of every detonator and stick of dynamite before they realized I was no Al Capone or Ned Kelly.
It was a fluke of nature how it all came together. One rainy day we were all holdup in a shed on the dam site. A dozen blokes or so were all standing around watching the downpour and having a yarn over where they came from. One bloke said, "Aw Dave where were you born?" I told him, "I was born in Cairnes and put in an orphanage. That’s all I knew." Jimmy Soo, a sixty-year-old Aussie Chinaman who lived on the dam site with his family looked up at me. He said, "Geesus Dave. Your name rings a bell. I’m going home for a bit of a holiday shortly and I’ll see what I can find out. I think I know your people." I looked at him and said, "No Jimmy. I’ve got no one."

I didn’t bother about what he said that day as I didn’t dare believe he would find anything out, but I did look for him every day at work till he returned. I couldn’t wait to hear the news. He said, "I contacted your grandmother. Her name’s Pearlie Owen." I stood there in disbelief. I said, "Aww c’mon Jim you’re having a go at me. I haven’t got a grandmother." He said, "Yes you do mate. She tells me that your mother is alive."

I was still living at the pub when the phone rang. The Missus said, "Dave, it’s for you." I didn’t want to answer the phone as I thought it wouldn’t be good news. I was
still waiting to front court over the sovereign bit and in
the shit over paying back the money to the publican over
the Cabaret incident. Thank God I had safely stashed away
the little money I had. The bastards couldn’t get to it.

I walked over to the phone and grabbed the receiver. The
voice on the other end said, “This is brother Neville.” I
was confused. I thought he meant he was a Christian
brother. I said, “Do you mean you a brother from the
Catholic church or what?” He said, “NO, I’m your BROTHER
Neville. I’m Katy’s son. Me and you have got the same
mother!” I was silent. He went on, “Here…I’ll put grandma
on.” Well this lady’s voice came on the phone. It was my
grandmother Pearl. She said, “G'day Son!” I was freaked
out. I didn’t know what to say. I just listened closely.
She said, “How would you like to meet your mum?”
Grandma Pearl said, “Your mother is married to a wharfie in Newcastle.” Grandma had made a couple more phone calls and wrote a few letters before we met. I still had to front Court over the spinsters and the gold sovereigns and I worried that I wouldn’t be able to meet mum as planned, that I would be sent back to Boggo Road. I remember saying to the Magistrate, “I’ve got this chance in my life to meet my mum after all of these years growing up in an orphanage. I would love to be given the opportunity. What would she think of me if I went to jail instead?” Because I was a good worker, he gave me 6 months good behavior. If ever there was a ‘best-ever’ sentence handed down to me this was it! I caught the flight from Brisbane to Newcastle. Meeting mum after all of these years would be a worse scare than running on to a football field or boxing in the Jimmy Sharmin tent. To meet me mum? God love a duck I was petrified!

It was right out of a movie. The prodigal son comes home for the very first time a few days before Christmas and with a pocket lined with cash. I couldn’t wait to lavish mum and my new darling sisters with whatever they wanted. Of course she was married to a wharfie as I had been told,
but what I didn’t realize was just what a bastard he was when he was on the plonk. I would see right away that his abuse to mum and the girls was out of control and I would have to do something about it. I had always stood up to stand-over merchants when it came to defending girls all the way back to the nuns at Neerkol and this was no different. In fact it was worse, because this time it was me mum!

When the taxi pulled up to the wood framed house at the end of O’ Hara Street the sun was just setting behind on Throsby Creek. As I walked up the front steps to the door of the verandah the sky was lit up like a ‘new moon’ with orange and red glowing from the furnaces of the steel mills in the distance. Newcastle was definitely an industrial town. Grandma Pearl opened the front door. I felt as if we had met before. She gave me one of her big bear hugs and welcomed me, “You must be David.” As I passed through the front door, there was this little lady standing in a nearby doorway. It was mum. Glory be it was me mum! Pearlie moved away and I was face-to-face with the mother I had been dreaming about me whole life. She led me into the front room as so we could have a moment alone. We both shed a tear of joy. She kept hugging me and saying, “They told me
you were dead, but I never believed it! I always knew you were alive!” I was still crying as we walked out of the room together to meet the rest of my family. Pearlie was standing guard in the doorway to the lounge as she looked down on three little girls sitting in front of the television and said, “Well girls, what do you think about your brother?” The little angels jumped up and ran towards me giggling. A big bloke laying on the sofa got up and left the room. I was surrounded by hugs and kisses from a family I had always dreamt about having. I couldn’t believe what was happening to me. Later grandma told me that mum’s husband had given them strict orders that the girls were not to know that I was their brother. Well Grandma Pearl made sure that this wasn’t going to happen! What a toughie she was.

Pearlie asked me, “How about a cuppa?” Mum and I sat next to each other as if we would never be separated again until we heard the order coming from the kitchen. It was Pearlie calling out, “Katie, aren’t you going to come in here and help me?” As she headed for the kitchen, she passed the big bloke of a husband who came back to his seat in the lounge. With mum out of the room it was man to man! He put out his hand and solemnly said, “I’m Albert. Katie’s husband.” We
got along well enough as we talked about sports, my playing Rugby League and his work as a wharfie in Newcastle. It was beyond my wildest dream to have a Christmas dinner with my real family. I couldn’t wait to play Santa Clause to everyone. I would make sure that it was the best Christmas mum ever saw! At least that was my plan until Albert started on his grog.

I brought $5,000 along with me and spent it freely all within a fortnight. I didn’t mind one bit. It was for my family. I was thrilled to be known as “Brother David’ and buy the girls pushbikes and clothes for under the tree. Mum would see new furniture, kitchenware and clothes. I began to see the relationship between mum and Albert that I did not like one bit. I didn’t want to interfere with their personal affairs as I had just come into the picture, but it was clear to me that Albert was nothing more than a stand-over merchant, who when turped up could be dangerous to mum and the girls. If he lost his temper, which happened every time he lost his bet on the dogs, mum would gather the girls together under her arms and protect them like a bantam rooster. Albert stayed on his best behaviour when I was around but I could see through his act. He was an
alcoholic and a gambler. He would bet on a fly crawling up the wall if he had the chance.

He and I got along just fine while the money flowed. I even went to the point of clearing up all of the back bills. I would do anything to make it easier for me mum. Down deep I was worried about the home situation. I knew all too well what it was like to be victimized. I knew the signs of abuse. Before I said goodbye, I gave mum an envelope with $500 for safekeeping. I told her to keep the money to herself and not to tell Albert, as he would just take it off her. She and the girls promised to write. I was surrounded by hugs and kisses before I walked out the door. How lovely it all felt. I was no longer an orphan.

I returned to Boona a different person. It was such a joy every time I got a letter from mum and my sisters. I couldn’t wait to find Jimmy Soo so he could read it to me. They kept asking me to come back home. Home? Jimmy would help me to write back as I didn’t want them to know I was illiterate. I wanted them to see me in the highest regard. I had a responsibility now. I had a mum. I decided to take them up on their offer and give it a try. Once I had made up my mind to move I gave the team a fortnight to get another hooker to replace me. I hung up my football boots
for good. When I stepped on to the Greyhound bus heading for Newcastle I thought, “You bloody beaut, you’re really going home!”

My agony and suffering over a lost life was gone. Full stop. I had a purpose now. I would become the son I always wanted to be and would look after me mum. How many times in my life I had imagined her waiting for me when I got off of the bus or train? This time me little darling mum would actually be standing there! When I stepped down off the bus, there she was. We both had smiles we couldn’t lose for a long time. We went across the road and had a cuppa. I felt like the luckiest man alive. She apologized, “I really thought you were dead son.” Her hands were rife with arthritis. I grabbed her crippled up fingers and said, “Don’t upset yourself mum. I’m here now.”

We just sat holding hands and enjoying the magic of the day when I caught a whiff of a lovely Wattle Tree in full bloom next to our table. Mum looked at me and said, “Son are you okay?” My mind was somewhere else. I was eight years old again and had been picked to do a solo for the Spring Concert at Neerkol. Sister shouted out, “Number 34 step forward and recite!” I would search the faces of the
audience in the hopes that maybe my mum was out there watching. She never was. I loved this poem.

Sing a Song of Wattle Time
Sing of Sweet September...
Sunny Days and Scented Nights
Pleasant to Remember...
When the Sunshine Smiles in Spring
Sprays out Wattle Berries...
You Can Smell the Perfume Sweet
As the Breeze is Bearing.
I heard this voice again, “Son are you okay?” I never told mum what I was thinking about. I was too stoked out to explain it then and there. We got into the taxi and she shouted out to the driver, “25 O’Hara Street.”

The first fortnight back I was welcomed into the household with no problem as I was contributing more money now and my labor. I volunteered to upgrade the property by laying cement around the entire house. Albert couldn’t have been happier. He helped by holding the hose while I did all the work. I mixed all of the cement by hand wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow.

Now there were two grown men living under one roof and the ‘man of the house’ Albert showed himself as the prick of a thing he really was. Every day I would watch the abuse he
would dole out to mum and the girls. I wouldn’t keep quiet much longer. Albert would show no more niceties to me either. He was in full power and he was a cruel bastard to everyone.

Mum was scared of everything and pretty backwards when it came to knowing how to deal with life. It was clear to me just how hard her life had been, going all the way back to when she was raped and had me. I tried to talk to her about her rights as a human being. I thought everything I told her pretty much fell on deaf ears. I explained her rights to her as Albert’s wife; that she should be paid housekeeping money. Apparently mum had been listening to me, as one day she mentioned this to her husband and he flew off the handle. He screamed, “Who’s been telling you that rubbish?!“ Now that I was around she was getting bolder. She said, “My son David!”

From then on I was ‘the enemy’ who kept exposing him for the cruel animal he really was. He would come at me with all sorts of threats. This particular day thank God mum and the girls were out shopping. He was turped up as usual and followed me into the kitchen. He shouted, “I’m gonna kill you.” He couldn’t have known much about what I had gone through at Neerkol or Boggo Road so I decided to show him a
thing or two. I called his bluff. I would give him a little taste of himself once and for all. I pulled out the two biggest knives I could find in the house and slammed them down side by side on the kitchen table. I said, “Alright you dirty, big pig, one knife’s yours and one knife’s mine!” I told him, “Go on grab one ya big bastard.” He wouldn’t go anywhere near the knives. He saw the mongrel come out in me. As if nothing had ever happened he staggered back into the lounge picked up his wireless and tuned it to the next race.

Our final showdown came when mum, the girls and I had gone to the racetrack for the day. We had such a lovely time that on the way home we decided not to cook that night and I got everyone take-away pies for tea. The girls had been looking forward to watching a special movie on the television, “Planet of the Apes.” When we got home, Albert was laying in the lounge drinking his plunk and mad as hell that his bets on the dogs kept losing all day. He was ready for a fight. We all ate our tea in the kitchen without him. Mum then set up a beautiful plate for hubby with the pies and lovely mashed spuds and took them into the lounge. You could hear the shouting down the block. He screamed, “What’s this shit? I’m not eating this!” He opened up the
lounge window and in clear view of the neighbors threw the plate of food out the window. He screamed at mum to get back in the kitchen and make him a proper tea. I tried to reason with him. The pies were nice. We had just eaten them. He shouted, “She’ll cook me what I bloody well want.!” The girls knew enough to run into their room when the ruckus started. The girls were crying, mum was scared and I had enough of the bastard.

I walked in the living room and told him that he had promised the girls that they could watch the movie. We all wanted to see it and he was out-voted 4 to 1. Out of sheer dirtiness because his dogs were losing, he got up off of his fat arse and deliberately turned the channel to something else. He and I were now head to head. It was two bulls with neither one backing down. He said, “I’m going to call the cops and have you thrown out of this house once and for all. It’s my house!” I called his bluff and sent one of the girls down to the pay phone to send for the police. When the police showed up to investigate Albert demanded that they throw me out of his house. But, Katie being his wife, owned half of the property so it had to be a joint decision. When the police asked mum if she wanted me to leave she said, “No!” I told them I wouldn’t leave
because I feared for mum and the girls’ safety. The police said, “If the mother wants the son to stay, he stays! Albert was furious and the cops could see his shitty behaviour. They couldn’t do anything about the situation. As the officer walked down the steps he leaned over to me and under his breath said, “When you get him on his own give him a bloody hiding.” When I walked back in the house the argument continued. I sat in the lounge protecting mum and the girls when he came out of his bedroom with a handful of notes. He had $3,000 and plopped it down in front of me. He said, “Take this money ya’ bastard and get the hell out of here and don’t ever come back.” I told him to get stuffed. I wasn’t going anywhere. He left the room and came back again with another clump of cash. He plopped another $3,000 down in front of me. The pig thought I would walk away for $6,000. I told him I wouldn’t ever leave my mum and the girls alone with him. He went to his room and closed the door. The girls were pleased to see the end of their movie without being harassed. We tried to ignore his loud snoring as if nothing had ever happened.

After that I’d leave for work at seven thirty in the morning. Mum would sit out on the front step refusing to go inside until I came home that afternoon. She ended up
having a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. While she was gone Albert and I looked after the girls but things just kept getting worse. Mum was checked in for about a month and was suffering from depression and anxiety. She flat out refused to come out of the hospital if she had to go back to the house with him there. I did what I believed any good son and brother would do. I knew what it was like to return to some place where all you knew was pain and suffering. No way was my mum going to be put through that kind of abuse anymore.

I bought a house in a nearby neighborhood for mum and my three sisters. I slapped my last $12,000 down and got advice from a solicitor on how to handle the move. I had definitely made it my life to look after mum and the girls. I would make sure that no harm would ever come to them. It was the best thing to do. I sat all three girls down and explained the situation and made sure that they understood they had a choice of living with either mum or dad. There would be no pressure whatsoever. I loved those girls and knew how painful it was for a child to feel abandoned. Lucky them to have a choice.

I particularly felt close to the oldest of my three sisters, Maggie. She just turned thirteen, a young girl
herself, but acted as another mother to the littler ones. Maggie used to love music and dancing. She was a pretty little thing with a long blond plait down the back of her head. I felt a strong connection to her as we seemed to have similar personalities; a strong larrikinism mixed in with a little bit of mongrel and defiance. I guess you could call it a family resemblance. For a young girl living in a house with alcoholism and mental illness, she had guts like I had guts back at Neerkol. She wouldn’t cop anything. On many occasion she would climb out her bedroom window to get away. So many times I would defend her if I could.

I always remember when she got mad about something that she felt was unfair to her. She would stick her little tongue out of the corner of her mouth and scrunch up her nose. I would try to make her smile by saying, “If only I had a camera to get a picture of that pretty face.” She fronted a lot of abuse and somehow came through it all. I am proud of her to this day.

As for the other two girls it was so long ago and they were very young. I did my best trying to fill in as a loving and responsible big brother, and son to mum, by keeping a roof over their heads, food on the table, clothes on their backs and pocket money for extras each week. I always wanted them
to have the nice things I never had. Their personalities never developed around me to really understand much about them. Mum and I however would spend the rest of her life getting to know one another. It was a challenge at times as I was a single man in my late thirties and she was very jealous of any sheila that got near me. There was a lot of sacrifice on my part as all I did was go to work at the State Dockyard and come home day in and day out. But that is what I believed a family was all about. To this day I will always say, “You only have one mum.” For this I cherish the eighteen years we had together.

The day I would move the girls and mum out of 25 O’ Hara Street was like a scene out of ‘Mission Impossible.’ We had to wait for two weeks until the day that Albert’s number finally came over the wireless for him to go to work on the wharf. The moving van was sitting up the road. The girls left for school and said hooray to their dad, but were waiting by the truck for the signal. The minute he left the house I pulled up with the van and took the girl’s school clothing and toys. The solicitor told me that I only had to leave him a bed, a table and chair, a cup, saucer, plate, knife and fork. I left him a lot more than that as I had bought new things for the new house. The girls and I drove
to the new house and unloaded the things. They stayed there while I went over to the hospital to get mum out.

She was so happy to step into the new house without having to fear anything. The girls seemed to be okay as it was business as usual getting ready for school the next day. That night I felt genuinely so sad. I couldn’t help but think about how I would’ve felt if I was married and came home to an empty house without my family.

The next morning after the girls left for school, mum and I were sitting in the lounge having a cuppa when a taxi pulled up in front. Mum took one look and panicked. It was Albert getting out of the cab with a few of the girl’s things in his hand. She ran and locked herself in the bathroom. He was on my turf now. I stepped outside and walked straight up to the cab. I said, “Listen you prick of a thing if I see you anywhere around my house I’ll kill you.” He looked to the taxi driver and said, “You heard him threaten me didn’t you.” I looked at the cabbie and said, “It’s not a threat mate. It’s a promise!”
I was walking through the park with mum a few weeks after I had moved to Newcastle when we bumped into this man hitting golf balls. His name was Bing Crosley. Yep that was his name. We had a good laugh about it and had a bit of a yarn. I told him that I was looking for work, that I had just found me mum and had moved down from Queensland for good. I said I didn’t think I would have much of a problem finding a job; as Newcastle was an industrial city and I was an industrial bloke. I was in luck that day. He told me he could get me work at the State Dockyard. He kindly said, “Just come to the union office and fill out the forms.” I had to take my little sisters along with me to write out the application. It was now 1975 but the embarrassment of my not being able to read or write continued. I was hired as a crane chaser.

Newcastle was pretty run down in the 1970s. The wharf was filled with fishing crafts and repair boats. Licensed clubs would close at eleven at night and the workers would get kicked out and move on to one of the Greek Clubs that had black and white tables with betting till dawn. They could only sell bottled beer. I didn’t know anything of this
world as my life only consisted of going to work, coming home and looking after mum and the girls.

The Dockyard was government-run and you could say that I was going into another institution of sorts. But it was more like a country onto itself, filled with strong union men. Whether negotiations were on the table for the Federated Ironworkers Union, the Boilermakers Union, the Fitters Union, the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, the Plumbers Union, or the most militant-of-all the Painters and Dockers Union, the place was alive with noise, anger and laughter. I felt right at home. I might have been illiterate but it was here where I began going to union meetings with a speech for the workers made up in me head. It pleased me so when the men would actually stand up and clap after I spoke from my heart. They were amazed how I would do me homework and have statements from the other workers to back me up. I took it all to heart. Everything that went on at the Dockyard was me life. I looked after the Iron Workers and they elected me as their union delegate. The organizers from the union office were okay with me and wanted to send me on to school to learn how to approach management. I said, “No. I’ve been elected from
the shop floor to represent the men. I’ll think from the shop floor.”

Everybody at the Dockyard had a nickname. In fact you didn’t know anyone by anything else. I was called ‘Dockyard Dave’ right from the start because of my strong mongrel way of fronting the management for the underdog. I already knew Lionel Crosley who they called ‘Bing.’ He was up there as the Boilermaker’s Delegate and on the Works Committee of the Dockyard. His two sons were nicknamed ‘Bong’ and ‘Bang.’ Another good mate Dennis was a Tradesman and a delegate for the Fitters Union. We called him ‘Keghead,’ and later on it was shortened to ‘Brother Twist Top.’ I really liked his way. He was an unusual man in that we were very different from each other, but alike. He was a tough second row forward playing Rugby League for North Newcastle and genuinely cared about the workers and their families. Keghead’s brother worked there too and was known as ‘Clean Hands’ because he wore gloves when he worked. He never got his hands dirty. There was this crane chaser ‘Horseshit Harry’ who had a son called ‘Ponyshit.’

Another bloke who was a top machinist but a real pain in the arse was called old ‘Gravelbum.’ There’s no other way to say it other than he was a real shit-stirrer. I worked
alongside him because I had to. He was that sort of a bloke that you could like and hate all at the same time. He was a skinny bloke with a big mouth and we were never sure who he was behind, the management or the workers. One day he and I got into an argument over a matter of worker’s concessions. He put me into such a rage that I saw red. I grabbed hold of him, put him up on my shoulders and spun him around and around till I thought I had him that giddy I toss’d him into a nearby scrap bin. The mongrel came out in me and I threw some kerosene into the bin and lit a match. Of course Gravelbum was that unpopular with the other workers at the time that you could hear them shout, “Kill the bastard D.O.” When the match hit the bin there was a big explosion but Gravelbum had already jumped out to safety. He of course went running to the foreman shaking, “Dockyard Dave tried to kill me!”

The foreman sent us both over to the Industrial Office. I brought another delegate with me as was the rule, but Gravelbum couldn’t get any delegate to go with him as he was known as a brown-nose to management. I ended up getting a strict warning over my behaviour with the threat of being fired for any future offence. Management’s decision of course wasn’t good enough for Gravelbum as he would find
other ways to get back at me. Workers that were lifting
jobs to put on the machines were classified as ‘dogmen.’ I
was one of them. As I moved things around on the floor I
would have to pass Gravelbum’s machine. Every time I walked
past the bastard he would bark at me like a bloody dog. The
time finally came when he barked at me and was a little too
close. I sank my fangs into his shoulder. Deep. The bastard
went running to the foreman again. This time he was
whingeing about me biting him. He said, “I want to go to
the hospital and get a tetanus shot.”

Dockyard workers are a bunch onto themselves. So funny
enough after all of the rough play between Gravelbum and
myself neither of us held a grudge. As a matter of fact not
long after I bit him for barking at me, he came over and
sat down beside me at smoko and we had a good yarn. I told
him that my Grandmother was down visiting from North
Queensland. He said, “Oh Right, I’d like to meet her! I’m
not working tomorrow. I could come over around ten o’clock
in the morning.” I didn’t mind. I said, “See you then.” He
showed up on my doorstep the next morning. He had a couple
of hours before he had to pick up the missus. We all had a
cup of tea.
It was Grandma, Mum, Gravelbum and I sitting around the table when he said, "Hey grandma do you play Euchre?"

Pearlie rolled up her sleeves. She had arms on her like beer barrels. With a vicious bull look she said, "Of course I do!" He said, "Okay then, me and Dockyard Dave here will play you and Katy." You could see the fire in Grandma’s eyes ready to take him on. Well Gravelbum and I clean-sheeted Grandma and Katy! Grandma didn’t take to losing very well. Gravelbum taunted her, "You know what you gotta' do now grandma? You’ve got to stand on the table and strip all of your bloody gear off!" Well, I couldn’t believe my ears when I heard the silly bugger who was not very tall, as thin as a broom handle and had no bloody muscle telling my bruiser of a grandmother to take off all of her clothes. Katie of course just sat back with a fag hanging out of her mouth and watched. It was like a scene out of the Wild West. Grandma jumped to her feet and the table went flying. Cups and playing cards went everywhere. Mum had been knocked off of her chair and was on the floor. You heard Grandma shouting, "You bastard, I’m gonna' knock your bloody block off." The last I saw of Gravelbum he was running down the hall screaming, "You’re all mad! I’m getting out of here." It didn’t matter that Grandma was eighty-years-old. She followed him outside and was that
furious that she didn’t go down the three steps one-at-a-time, she took ‘em all in one leap. Later on I tried to explain to her what being ‘Clean Sheeted’ meant. It took me the rest of the day to get her blood pressure down.

One day all of the workers went down to Parliament House in Sydney to try and save our jobs at the Dockyard. Over a dozen buses pulled up in front that day. I remember it fondly as one more episode where I had to front ‘men in suits.’ Not as Number 34 David Owen, or D.O. Rugby League hooker, but as Dockyard Dave this time, storming the Bastille Gates of the State Government and fighting for the rights of the men and their families. I was proud to be alongside a whole army of union workers. Keg was standing near the gate of the fence talking to the gatekeeper Johnny O’Keefe. He always remembered his name ‘cause he had the same name as the singer who helped start rock n’ roll in Australia. The scene was chaos. The men had climbed up to the top of the iron fence and were singing out, “We want to talk to the Premier!” The word was spreading around, “Get ready. We’re going in!” Bing warned Johnnie O. to stay out of the way. He didn’t listen. Instead he brought in the police behind him. What a bad move he made as he was caught in between the police and the dockyard blokes. The mob
stormed the gates and put him in the hospital. It put a real sour taste on the whole trip. News cameras were everywhere as policemen with batons pushed us around. I looked over to my right and saw a policeman holding Gravelbum in a headlock. I went over to help him out. I got the officer to look over at me as I sung out, “Hey, we’re a peaceful lot! Look it’s unfair!” I got his attention. I looked into his face and said, “The only way I will ever be in another demonstration is when I can wear the same gear that you coppers do, and that means a baton and a revolver on me bloody hip!” He let go of Gravelbum and grabbed hold of me. Luckily there was a bigger ruckus going on nearby with four policemen chasing Bong around the Parliament House courtyard. He was running around like a chook with his feathers plucked. Out of three hundred workers Bong was the only one arrested. All two hundred and ninety-nine of us went down to the pub at the corner and waited for Bong to be released. Our union protest that day wasn’t very profitable for the dockyard workers, but the publican of the bar next to Parliament House must have made a hefty quid over all the wounded egos skiting and drinking afterwards. Of course losers aren’t winners.
The Dockyard would always get the ball rolling when it came to union fights. The little industrial places didn’t like it much because they weren’t as keen to be involved in strikes. But when a person was seriously ill and had used up all of his sick leave the union would be there to help. As Dockyard Dave I found a place where I could rightfully stand up for anybody who was copping injustice. I was in heaven as I found an audience to inspire about worker’s rights, and fair dinkum, from a pulpit! I had a new religion.

One day the boss wanted to sack this bloke for being in the shithouse too long. He wondered where he was so he opened the door to the toilet. He looked in and thought the bloke was asleep on the dunny. He immediately wanted to sack him. As his union delegate I went to get my mate Keghead who was on the Works Committee with me. The rule was no delegate would go to front management by himself and that there had to be two delegates together at all times. Keghead wasn’t really sure why he was there but backed me up while I fronted the management. In full form Dockyard Dave form I began my performance. I said to Bronco and Athol, “Have you ever asked what the poor man sitting on the loo was suffering from?” They looked at me stunned. I went on,
“The poor man is suffering from piles. Not only that but when he is sitting on the toilet having a Number 2 and he wants to scream with pain, he bites on that broom handle that sits in the stall.” All eyes were on me in shock. I said, “Have you seen the broom handle with his teeth marks in it? It's in there so when he screams out in pain he won’t attract other workers?” There was dead silence. I came in with my final king hit to management, “Athol do you want it to get around the Dockyard and the dyke end that you perve on men in the loo?”

I looked straight at him, “Go on, sack him! We’ll take it to the Industrial Commission and they’ll hear about how you perve on men trying to take a crap.” Well by then I had him wrapped around my finger. He was crying. He looked around the room and said, “I haven’t been spoken to like this in years and I don’t expect to be spoke to like this again.”

Keghead sat in the background watching my performance, shaking his head and wondering what he had gotten himself into. He was relieved when he heard the boss tell the worker, “Just go back to your job.” The bosses always tried to avoid me as much as possible after that. If they came anywhere near Dockyard Dave they would look for a way to
escape. Sometimes it meant having to walk behind the entire annex I was working in.

I couldn’t help the larrikin coming out in me while I worked in my bay. One day I was at the marking off table in my greasy overalls when the boss came walking through. I shouted out to him, “Hey boss, I hear you used to play a bit of football?” He said, “Yeah D.O. I used to play footy for Nelson Bay.” Without a beat I took off me helmet covered in shit and passed it to him as if we were out on the field. Just as he caught it I hit him with a tackle. He went down. When we got up off the floor his nice clean blue shirt and tie were covered in grease. Keghead and the others had stopped working and were laughing their heads off. The boss went red and took off. It was the talk of the shop for days.

That’s why I really loved being in the union as I was sacked that many times for doing stupid things. They would always find a way to bring me back to work. Ned Andrews was on the Board representing the Dockyard workers. I realize now that he was my guardian angel made of steel as he was defending me constantly. Mind you I never got sacked because I didn’t work. It was the other way around. I would get sacked because I worked too much but always stuck to my
principles. It didn’t matter whether it was the general manager or the ironworker’s toilet cleaner, everyone heard Dockyard Dave’s industrial language in full force.

It was in the eighties when the Dockyard was on the verge of closing. They brought up a hitman to take over management for a short period of time. He was a little bloke who kept himself surrounded with security who carried side arms. It was getting pretty bad. We were told that there was a riot squad staying in a nearby motel that could come in at any time if the unions started to put the heavies on the management. At the Workers Committee meeting we all sat around this big table while they told us about the layoffs and cutting the workforce. I stood up and spoke for the workers when the big boss stopped me in mid-sentence and said, “Who are you?” I said, “Dave Owen, Iron Workers Delegate.” Well my name struck his memory. He shuffled through the papers in front of him while staring at me. He pulled a sheet out of his stack and said, “Hang on a minute…David Owen? I’ve got your redundancy right here in front of me.”

They had been trying to get rid of me for a couple of weeks by now. They had even sent people out to my home to give me the slip but I wouldn’t answer the door. The bastard
thought he would give it to me there and then. He leaned over the table and handed me the paper. I wouldn’t take it!

So he got up and started to come around the table to where I was sitting but I took off around the other side. The whole room watched in utter amazement as the boss chased ‘Dockyard Dave’ around the room with no luck. All you could hear was me shouting “Shove it up your arse,” as I left the room.

About ten days later I knocked off from work and stopped to sign for my pay packet. I walked out the gate and put my token back on the timekeeper’s board. I didn’t know at the time that this would be my last ritual as Dockyard Dave. The bastards had put it over on me. I found the redundancy letter neatly folded inside my final wage.
I was in strife once again. But this time I was on my way home to me mum who would be there for me no matter what. I would never stop appreciating the sight of her. She was me mum. How many times in my life had I been on a downer with no one to turn to?

I walked into the house, smoko bag under me arm, and not feeling too good about what had just happened at work. Mum was sitting in the lounge as usual with a fag hanging out of her mouth and watching her favorite soap opera. She always waited for me. She looked up from the television, took a puff and said, “You don’t look too happy son?” I sat down next to her and said, “The bastards finally caught up with me mum!” She lit up another cigarette as I handed her my pay packet as I did every payday. She looked inside and pulled out the money. She always wanted to see cash. She hated bank cheques. The envelope was bulky as there was another packet inside. It was a cheque in the amount of $12,000. As her programme was coming to the end she stopped what she was doing to catch the final scene. When the commercial came on she looked back over at me, patted my hand and said, “Have a week or two off son before you go looking for another job.” I said, “No mum I’d sooner put
the money away for a rainy day." That was the end of the conversation. That night we cooked tea together and watched television with the girls as if nothing had ever happened. The next morning I mowed the lawn and got on with life. I was worried about having that much cash around with mum as she would hide it for safekeeping. I wanted to make sure that it was put to good use right away so I paid $9,000 off the mortgage. Katie wasn’t bothered by my decision as long as she could have a durrie hanging out of her mouth. I wasn’t bothered either, as I was relieved that mum could not get her hands on such a large wad of money and hide it somewhere in the house only to forget where she put it and accidentally throw it out with the garbage.

I traded in the old bomb for a newer car. Two days later Huey McCarthy the Union Organizer for the Steel Workers stopped by and offered me a job at Comsteel. I was happy to get right back to work. I left mum with the extra thousand dollars to save for us. I wasn’t too worried even if she hid it somewhere as I’d have a pay packet from the new job within a fortnight.

Katie would stuff dollar notes between letters, newspapers, magazines or anything else nearby. I didn’t have the heart to yell at her over this but at times it got on me nerves.
She wouldn’t let me throw out one single piece of paper as she worried if she had buried a few quid inside. The newspapers were all stacked up in the garage. The piles were huge, six foot tall and twelve foot long. It got to the point where I couldn’t park the car inside so I put my foot down. I was no garbo. It took me six trips to the bloody dump to get rid of them all. Mum insisted she come along for the ride. She sat in the front seat puffing on a durrie with her head out the window keeping a close eye on the rear vision mirror, just in case a dollar bill would fly out from somewhere.

If mum thought that I showed even a tiny liking to any female she would go crook. She would always say, “No way in the wide world is any sheila going to have my son while I’m alive!” And she meant it. Mum had a real dry way of making me laugh. I can see her leaning against the sofa with a durrie in her mouth just watching the cars go by outside. I would come in to say something to her and all of a sudden she would blow wind. Her timing was perfect! Without cracking a smile she would turn look back at me and casually say, “Son was that you?”

The girls were in primary school and needed a lot of guidance so I had to fill in as a parent real fast. I made
sure however that they knew that I was ‘Brother David’ not their father. They needed to remember that we were all out of the same mum, Katie. I sat them all down and told them that they were not going to be able to play their father against their brother. If they had any problems we would all sit down and talk it over. The eldest daughter Margaret decided to go back to live with her father. Mum and I were disappointed but respected her wishes.

I loved the idea of the girls being able to enjoy school friends. I thought this was terrific when remembering Neerkol and how we were flogged for just talking to each other. I suppose I spoiled my sisters a bit. Each girl got five dollars a week in pocket money. When they started high school it was raised to ten dollars. Every Thursday night they went shopping with their girlfriends. I worked twelve hours a day and sometimes seven days a week to make sure they could have their fun. I did have to lay down some rules. If they were cheeky to me or mum they wouldn’t get their pocket money. No matter how cheeky they were I never hit them. I would rouse on them but that was it. The girls would always be nice as pie to me so I’d weaken when they wanted to be let out of being grounded. I had one main rule. They had to respect mum. I would tell them, “Anytime
you leave the house – always give mum a kiss goodbye ‘cause you never know what could happen.”

I had a month’s holiday coming from the Dockyard so I decided to take the family up North to visit Grandma. Imagine that a family holiday! Mareeba was an ordinary Outback town. A squat of houses was built around the railway station and sawmill. There were dairy farms, cattle and plenty of tobacco growing. Grandma’s husband Bill Brose was a guard on the railroad.

When we arrived at Grandma’s place I would find a whole new sense of pride over being an ‘Owen.” Unlike mum’s housekeeping, Pearlie’s house was meticulous. The lounge was her pride and joy. It was beautifully kept with polished ornate hardwood furniture and perfectly displayed gold-framed photographs of the family. One side of the room had a beautiful piano. Imagine how happy it made me to realize that there was much more to my family tree than a lot of pain. I was delighted to look through all of the professionally taken photographs of the time. The pictures were of stock cattle houses, station sheds, genteel-looking men in double vested suits, and women in high-neck laced collars with jeweled broaches. Grandma entertained the girls and I with some wild stories as she flipped through
the pages of the photo album. They all were laughing as I held back a tear. I thought, “Bloody hell, here’s the proof that my family was not in a poor financial state and unfit to raise me like it said in the State Children’s Department report. Grandma and mum could have reared me. Instead of being put into an institution, I could have learned to play the piano!

Pearlie brought out a tin filled with gold nuggets she had found when she’d go speccing in the creek. Mum piped up, “Don’t let her fool you, half of them are mine ‘cause I was out there with her!” They were like a cat and dog hissing and snarling at each other. Grandma said, “Oh yeah? While you’re here Katie I’ll be sleeping with this tin under my pillow! Don’t bother tryin’ anything!”

The holiday was filled with more surprises as my sisters and I were introduced to another brother and sister, Leslie and Anne. Hearing the sound of a big cement truck pulling up outside Grandma flew out the back door and said, “David, girls, come out and meet your brother Leslie.” It was great. A new family member to meet, hug and say G’day to, plus he was my blood brother! We were both happy to see each other for the first time. I noticed a bit of a resemblance between us. He was fit with a much lighter
frame as he rode horses and was a jockey. He was so thrilled to meet his three new sisters that he came back to take them to the drive-in movie. Later that afternoon Grandma took us over to meet my sister Anne. It was as if the day just kept getting better for me. How wonderful it was to meet this good-looking woman in her early twenties who was educated, refined, and was my sister! Anne was strict in her house rule of no smoking, so mum spent most of the visit sitting outside puffin on a durrie. When we were leaving Anne grabbed my hand and we both had a tear. She said, “David, if only we could have met years ago.” Before we left to go home Grandma announced that our one last brother Neville would not be back in time to meet us as he was out jackarooing on a cattle drive. We would have to wait till another time.

On the train ride back so many things went through my head. I had to face another difficult realization about my new brother and sister. Neither Leslie, Anne or myself had been raised by mum, yet we still all respected and loved her. We were the children that had grown up to accept that Katie had just gone through too much trauma in her life to be able to show love and affection to any of us. I was born out of her being raped at thirteen. Anne and Leslie were
children from mum’s first marriage to Billy MacDonald who was a cattle stockman. She was already emotionally damaged, so when they got to school age she didn’t find it too hard to send them away to live with their Uncle Les and Aunt Maureen who ran a hotel in Almaden. Everyone had agreed that since there was no governess out on the station so it was best for the children to get an education in town. Katie would stay back on the property with her husband until one day he died in an accident while he was having an epileptic seizure driving his Landrover. Being traumatized once more, Katie then moved close to her children in Almaden. She took a job in her Uncle’s hotel as a domestic. As time went on the living arrangements between Uncle Les and Aunt Maureen rearing Leslie and Ann turned into a permanent situation. Katie losing her children once again moved on to Cairnes and worked at a hotel as a cook. It seemed the best place for her to go to as it was the most familiar to her. Within two years Katie would have an affair that would produce another baby boy.

She named him Neville. Grandma and her husband understanding the situation took him in and reared him from birth. They even gave him their last name of Brose.
It’s sad that Katie was not emotionally balanced at this point in her life but it was a fact. In a weakened state of mind she went on to meet a wharfie and got married again. This time she would have three darling daughters. By the time I met up with mum at Christmas in 1973 she would have already had a number of nervous breakdowns which included electro-shock therapy at one point. Mum and I came back into each other’s lives just in time so as I could give her the chance to rear her last three daughters all the way through until they were of age, got married and moved out. It was a first for both of us.

When I bought the house I thought it was a good idea as it had two bedrooms for mum and the three girls and a built-in verandah for my bedroom. I bought new beds and dressers for the girls, one twin and a set of bunk beds. Mum had her own lovely bedroom set. There was a real problem though, Katie had suffered so much with her nerves that she wouldn’t sleep alone. She would make one of her daughters sleep in bed with her. I knew that this wasn’t a healthy thing for either of them, especially since Mum smoked in bed. I put my foot down and told mum it was time for my sis to have her own bed! I won the donneybrook this time but it
was always an uphill battle with mum’s backward ways when it came to the girls.

I did not realize what effect this would have on mum as she went into a depressed state, thinking that her husband was going to come through her bedroom window and kill her. Mum became that upset over not having her daughter in the same bed with her at night that she started to imagine all kinds of things. This day I came home from work and mum was over the road at the neighbor’s place. I asked her what was wrong. She told me that she was watching TV when she looked down in front of her and the floorboards opened up and all kinds of devil-like heads came up through the floor. I did not know what to do. So the neighbor and I talked mum into going back home. I made her a cup of tea and calmed her down. When my sisters came in I told them what had happened. Girls being girls and not understanding, they started laughing. I told them it wasn’t funny. I rang the doctor to come and look at mum. He told me to take mum up to the psychiatric hospital the next day. That night mum wanted one of her daughters to sleep in bed with her. They both refused. Mum would not go to bed because of what she had gone through that day. It must have been about two o’clock in the morning when she came up with the idea for
me to get Woody the dog and tie him up outside her bedroom door. She wouldn’t go to bed. Well I thought, “Anything to please mum.” So I went and got the dog, put it outside her door and mum went to bed. I myself had a bastard of a night.

The next day I took mum to the hospital and they kept her in for the week. I brought her home the following Monday. She seemed a lot better. But then on the Tuesday when I came home from work that afternoon, I walked in the house and as I was walking down the hallway I could smell incense. I got to the lounge and there was mum and a priest on their knees praying. I had just had enough! I grabbed hold of the priest dragged him up the hallway and threw him down the steps. I told him, “I don’t ever want to see you back here again!” I think he got the message. I went back inside and said to mum, “What in the bloody hell did you have a bastard like that in here for?” She said, “Son, a lady at the hospital told me how to get the demons out. I had to get a priest to come and put incense through the house and bless it.” Maybe it did help as mum was all right after that.

It was important to me that the girls get a good education so I set a nine-thirty bedtime curfew. But I’d get up now
and then to go to the loo and here they were sitting up watching television well after ten o’clock without their homework done. I would get up ‘em and say, “What about your homework?” They would admit that they hadn’t done it. I’d be mad as hell at them and then I’d look over in the darkened corner of the lounge to find mum eating chips and smoking a durrie enjoying her daughters’ company. She was no bloody help to stop their delinquency when it came to studying.

Thinking about it now, I had years that I shouldn’t have had. I could’ve got up and walked away. But I didn’t! I had a responsibility to mum and the girls. I used to be at work by seven in the morning so I’d put the kettle on for mum but she would stay in bed. The girls would get ready by themselves for school while mum slept in. I’d give money to mum for the tuck shop. I just kept going on as the good son and brother, ‘The Family Man.’

I had a good three months with Com Steel before I got into another bit of trouble. Actually I was sacked for it. I still had my strong view about worker’s rights when I took the job at Comsteel as a crane chaser but I kept quiet about the pay cut of forty dollars a week. I could not remain silent when I found out about the men on the floor
getting a bonus of a measly five dollars a week for the same work the machinists were getting paid a bonus of fifty dollars a week for. One day after work we all had a meeting outside the gates. I was made the delegate to speak for the workers and stir things up about the bonus issue at the next meeting with management.

The next morning as I loaded a jackhammer and hose into a barrow I heard someone say, “You dockyard piece of shit!” Well I turned around to see it was this bloke who was a labourer like me but was known as a management ass-licker, so I paid no notice. I started moving with me barrow when I heard the voice again, “You’re nothing but a prawnhead from the docks.” I looked over to see this big bastard along side of me. Well I had heard enough. I thought to myself, “I won’t be copping this anymore.” So I stopped next to this big heap of timber and waited for him to catch up with me. He stepped up into my face. I put the wheelbarrow down and wrapped my hands around his head, pulled his skull towards me and head butted him with all my might like in the old days on the footy field. The bastard staggered back like a drunken fool. I gave him a couple more smacks around the head and down he went! I was that wild that the animal had come outta me! I dragged him in behind the pile of
timber and left him lying there. I picked up my wheelbarrow and went about my job. Well at nine o’clock that morning I was sitting with the other boys in the smoko room when two security guards walked in. They came to take me to the boss’s office. I said, “Piss off. I’ll follow you as soon as smoko is over.”

The workers rallied around me singing out, “Go on D.O. We’re behind you all the way. If they do anything to you we’ll go out on strike!” I looked back at them with a little smile and said, “Aw, don’t bother yourself about it what I did was a sackable offence.” As I walked out with the guards I turned back to the mates and said, “But I would do it to the bastard again if I had the chance.” I walked into the boss’s office and walked out without a job. That night I went home to mum and told her I had been sacked for another blue at work. She didn’t say a word. She just shrugged her shoulders as if it didn’t matter and lit another durrie. It was now the weekend so I took mum and the girls to the horse races for the day. I needed a change of pace. I’d worry about getting another job on Monday.

I was having a good run with the horses and feeling pretty lucky. The girls were happy to have their lollies and ice cream while mum smoked away while holding on to my
winnings. We were a team. I would do the betting and she was the bank. I backed a winner and handed mum the money. I laughed as I watched her stuff it down the neck of her blouse into her bra. I kept winning every now and then, at times doubled my winnings. It came to the last race and I said, “Come on mum give us a quid for a good bet.” She looked at her racing form and thought it was too much of a longshot. So Katie looked up at me, shook her head no and said, “Sorry son, titty’s gone dry!” I was shocked as I thought, “Where did it go? I had never milked it off of her.” When we got back to the house she pulled out about four thousand dollars from under her dress.

I was only home a few days before the President of the Ironworkers Union Huey McCarthy showed up at the house. He said, “Dave I think I got a job for you at Allis Chalmers, another top engineering firm that produced farm machinery. Come down with me and I’ll help you fill out the forms.” As I sat in the office waiting to speak to the personnel clerk I leaned over and whispered in Huey’s ear, “What if they want to know why I was sacked from my last job? I can’t put down ‘fighting.’” He said under his breath, “Don’t worry D.O. they already know. I’ve cleared it with them.”
Huey McCarthy was one of a kind. He was a remarkable man who stuck up for his members to get better conditions and wages. I know this because if it wasn’t for him I would’ve been destitute. He knew that I was a good worker as he knew me all the way back to me dockyard days. He saw that I needed protection as I was illiterate and that I had a short fuse. I was the underdog that he fought for so many times. I always admired how he could get through to management. He was the first man I ever had respect for who wore a suit.

It might seem strange but every day I woke up cherishing mum. She was this short little old lady with a wrinkled up face who would put her arms around me and say “Son I’d been looking for you for years.” She was saying exactly what I always wanted to hear as a boy so I accepted everything about her just as she was. I wasn’t sure that I really believed what she was telling me though. There were still times when my thoughts would go back to the same questions. Why didn’t mum find me? Why didn’t she go looking for me? Why was I put into an orphanage? Why did this have to happen to me? Why did I have to go through so much persecution? I guess I wasn’t really over it all yet. I needed to tell mum about what happened with Father
Anderson. It was time. I finally found the courage. As I shed the grief of a little boy with tears rolling down my cheeks I looked for the compassion from my mum, but it did not seem to be there. All she said was, “Son, that should not have happened to you.” I must admit I felt let down. That was the end of it. I never brought it up again.

I was thirty-six-years-old when Brother Neville decided to come down from Mareeba to stay with us. He was twenty-three years old and a Jackaroo. He had no money and no clothes. I got him a job. He was a real toughie with a cow brand on his arm who loved his grog, sheilas and blues.

He was my brother so I looked after him. He slept in the rumpus room down next to the garage. The second week he was with us we were having tea when one of the girls said something that he didn’t agree with. He told her to shut up. The little girl said, “Brother Dave said we could have our own point of view. Maybe you don’t agree with it but we are allowed to say what we think.” Neville hauled off and whacked her. I jumped up from the table and said, “Don’t you ever lay a hand on my sisters again. Look, I don’t whack ‘em and not going to stand by and see you whack ‘em.” I told him he was nothing but a stand-over-merchant.” He got up, shoved the table and left the room. We finished
eating but everyone was upset. Soon there was a knock on the door. It was Neville again. The bastard said, “Can I borrow your car? I want to pick up a chick.” I told him no as he didn’t have a driver’s license. He argued, “I drive without a license.” I said, “No! That’s me car to get back and forth to work and to drive mum and me sisters around. I don’t want it pranged.” With this he stormed out. About eleven o’clock that night there was a big bang on the door. Mum was still upset with him for whacking me sister, and the girls were terrified. They thought Neville would give me a good hiding but I was working hard at the dockyard and was really fit. He stood at the door demanding to be let into the house to watch the World Title Fight between Cassius Clay and Joe Frazier on television. You could see he had one too many and was going to force his way in to watch the fight. I had to get him out of the house as I knew he would bust up all the furniture if he had the chance, so I told him that there was a note from a girl that I put on his bed in his room. He fell for it and left the house. I followed him. I wanted to make sure he didn’t come back into the house after he found out there was no note. The mongrel wasn’t getting past me as far as I was concerned. He started to come towards the front door when I blocked him. He was ready to smash up the place. I said,
"You’re not going in." He said, "Who’s gonna stop me?" He smirked at me, "Get out of my bloody way before I smack you in the mouth." I told him, "Go ahead." I saw the punch coming. He got stuck into me. I gave him the thoroughest of a hiding. I knocked him down about three or four times then picked him up and knocked him down again. I said, "Now listen ya’ bastard I’m going to work tomorrow. If I come home and catch you here you’ll get another bloody hiding. Understand?" Me sisters jumped up and down giving a big hooray to Brother Dave over how he saved them from Brother Neville. The next day he was on his way back up to North Queensland to live with Grandma Pearl.

That year we were all invited to Grandma’s place in Mareeba. We got there two days before Christmas. Everything was fine. Neville was staying there. Mum and Grandma had cooked chooks and duck for a Christmas dinner. Christmas morning Katie’s Brother Uncle Lancy who was sixty-years-old and Brother Neville got out of the Jeep. They were arguing. Neville king hit Lancey and knocked him down once and knocked him down again. My sisters were watching this and came running to me. They were screaming, “Brother David get up and stop him.” I went out and pulled Neville off of Uncle Lancey. Neville looked at me and said, “Aw! Just the
bastard I want. You might have done me on your own
dunghill, now you’re on my dunghill. Let’s see how good you
are up here!” He started throwing punches at me. Well I
knew how to take a punch and throw a punch. I retaliated. I
gave him the biggest hiding you’d ever wish to give anyone.
He was taken way in an ambulance. He ended up in the
hospital with tubes running out of him. None of us enjoyed
the Christmas dinner. Grandma said, “I’m taking you up to
see Neville!” She told me, “You have just about killed him.
They don’t know if he will live.” I started to panic. We
all went up to see him. He didn’t look too good. On the way
back to Grandma’s house I said, “Look mum, we have to sort
our priorities out here. What if Neville dies? I’ll go to
jail. I’ve killed me brother!” I went on, “You don’t have
custody of the girls yet, I’ve just bought a bloody house,
and I’m going to be in a lot of strife.” She listened
carefully and agreed. I said, “If Neville comes back to
Grandma’s while we’re still there, we’re libel to get into
it again ‘cause the bastard doesn’t know when to stop. He’s
likely to get a gun and shoot me. I’ll be dead. Then what?
Who’s to look after you and the girls?” She said, “Oh no
son, we don’t want that. Let’s say we go back to Newcastle
tomorrow.”
When we got back to Grandma’s and told her that with Neville coming out of the hospital we would have to cut our two-week trip short to two-days. The next morning was Boxing Day. We would get back on the train to Newcastle.

Well Grandma went sour on all of us. She called us all the bastards under the sun. The next day as we looked out the window while the rail motor was pulling out, there was Pearlie running down the station swearing her head off at us. That was our Christmas holiday.

It took a few months before Grandma had cooled off and wanted to come down and spend Easter with us. When it was time for her to go home she wanted to take Margaret back with her but Katie and I didn’t want to break the girls up. During those long six weeks I really got a taste of what living with a pair of hens was like. Grandma and mum were always arguing the point. If Pearlie put too much in the new washing machine, Katie would go crook. Grandma would sulk and sit up at the bus top with her port wanting to get back to Mareeba. Of course the bus she was waiting for was only on the Newcastle run. I would go and pick her up in my car and take her for a ride up to the beach to cool down. She never even looked at the bloody waves or the ocean as I tried to talk it out with her before bringing her back to
the house. She didn’t want to go inside. I would sit with her in the car and tell her, “Grandma, mum loves you. She wants you to stay.” After about an hour she got out of the car. When she got up to the door she stopped and said, “She better not be standing in the hall when I walk in. If she is I’ll knock her bloody head off!”

I poked my head in first. Thank God mum wasn’t there. Grandma and I went into the house. I sat her down in the lounge while mum was sitting on her little wooden box in the kitchen with a smoke in her mouth. Mum yelled out, “Would you like a cup of tea.” Grandma yelled back at her, “I would sooner drink piss than your tea!” Well it was on again. So I got up and made us all a cup of tea.

They kept sniping at one another through the door. I was at my wits end not knowing what to do! I’ve seen some stouches in me days but nothing as good as grandma and mum. As a last resort I collapsed on the floor in front of them making out I was having a heart attack. They both started screaming at one another, “See what you’ve done!” They were both crying. Well you wouldn’t believe it! When I finally sat up, they had their arms around one another kissing and saying how much they loved each other. How relieved I was that my ploy worked because I was starting a new job the
next day. Huey McCarthy had come through for me once again and found me work as a crane chaser at Goninans, one of the biggest engineering firms in Australia.
CH. 20   HARDHAT DAVE

When I first went to Goninans I worked as a labourer cleaning up the floor of shavings from the machines. Every day after the first twenty minutes of work I was a lather of sweat. Within no time I was that popular on the floor that everyone wanted me to clean up for them. Finally one day I told one of the machinists asking for help, “Hang on a minute, you’ve walked past four other labourers and you come to me. I’m flat out here. Why don’t you get one of them?” He said, “Aw jeesus Dave they’d come down and give me a cleanup but they’d take two hours. They may take a barrow of shavings out but that’ll be it. After that they’ll go to the shithouse and read a paper.” I’d seen it for myself so I said, “When I’ve finished here I’ll come down and give you a cleanup.”

Life wasn’t too bad at the time. I had a food, a job and a roof over my head. I could pay the bills and look after mum and the girls. So it was time to get stuck into my first union meeting. I enjoyed standing up and saying what I bloody well wanted to say. I understood what was going on and I was prepared to get up ‘em. I would make sure they all knew what a bunch of strike-ridden bastards they all were. I would also have ideas on improving the working
conditions in the shop. After the meeting the engineer manager Lindsay came up to me. He said, “I hear you’ve been talkin’ at meetings.” I wasn’t sure what he meant so I challenged him, “Yeah, Why not?” I said, “Is it in me contract of employment that I’m not to be talkin’ at meetins’? What are ya’ gonna do? Sack me now?” Lindsay was a fair boss who saw my worth. He said, “Oh no Dave. No way in the wide world. If we sacked you, we’d have to put a dozen more on to take your place.”

I knew he was looking to me for some inside help but I wasn’t a pimp. I sure was not going to tell him what a lot of bludgers he had working for him. I would tell them at the meeting what I thought of them. But you don’t tell management about your workmates. If he can’t see it well that’s his problem. When I was a union delegate at other places I would never protect a bludger. But of course when you work in industry where you have two hundred workers you will have a certain amount of men that like to bludge or spend a bit of time in the shithouse.

It wasn’t long before I was put on crane chasin’ in the shop. The job was more demanding and I got fed up real quick with the bludgers I had to work with, as I couldn’t get anything done. A truck would pull in with a load. I’d
look up at the crane driver and call him. He’d just sit there. Whether we had a job to pick up, unload a truck or put in a machine he was useless. So when the foreman came out and asked, “When’s this truck going to be loaded?”

I barked back, “George, get off my back! I did what I’m supposed to do. You go and talk to that prick of a crane driver up there and get him to come down. I’m sick and bloody tired of callin’ him!” The arsehole would lean out the window of the crane and get up me. The other workers heard me shout, “Shut your bloody mouth. When you come down off the bloody ladder I’ll be waiting for you down the bottom!” Lindsay the boss heard me say this and warned, “D.O. control yourself. You know what happened to you at your last job. If you’re fired from this place the union organizer told me you’re finished.”

The crane driver and I never got into a blue on the shop floor, but the bastard and I got into an argument in the lunchroom. The big bludger was hated by all. He was about sixteen stone and a stand-over-merchant with the other men. I hated the sight of the big bastard so I lit up my cigarette next to where he was eating his tucker. He didn’t like the smell around his food. He said, “There’s no smoking in here!” I kept puffing away and said, “Well, I
hate the smell of you and your deodorant. It makes me sneeze and gives me hay fever but I have to put up with it!” The other blokes sitting around the room were having a chuckle over it all. I said, “The reason I have to have a smoke is so that I don’t have to smell you!” I think he knew he couldn’t win. He packed up and left. How good I felt to hear that old familiar cheer coming from my new workmates at Goninan’s. They sang out “Good on ya’ D.O.!

When management called a meeting in the big hall with all of the unions I found myself standing up for the men as I always had in the past. The room was packed with about two hundred workers while the management sat up on a platform looking like the ‘suits’ of authority that I always went up against. The big boss got up in front of everyone and gave his speech about workers and productivity. He went on to say, “I don’t want this place getting like the dockyard that closed. It’s because of all the bludgers working over there.”

Well of course when I heard this I saw red! I stood right up and shouted out, “Excuse me Mr. Fitzgerald. Take a look around the bloody hall here! We’re all supposed to be bloody workers. Take a look at the six dockyard workers you have here. Look at our overalls! We’re a lather of sweat.
Have a look at your so-called ‘crony’ Goninan workers. Quite a few of them don’t have one bit of bloody sweat on em. Look at ‘em! What do they do?” All the eyes of the room were on me. It gave me that much confidence I got louder. I said, “Yes! I’m a dockyard worker! I wear four pair of overalls a bloody week here. But look at some of your bloody workers who come in on a bloody Monday and they’re wearing the same pair of overalls on a bloody Friday!”

I finished my speech not caring what management thought of me. I said, “Yes. Some of us are from the dockyard but don’t you ever go saying that we’re bloody bludgers again!” The big boss looked straight at me and apologized in front of everyone. He said, “Aw Dave, I didn’t mean to insult any of you. You know that you are a great credit to all of the hard workers here at Goninans.” I was happy to see Mr. Fitzgerald have the balls to apologize in front of his workers. For this he had my respect. Well, after the meeting everyone in the place knew that I was this hard-working mongrel bastard who would stand toe to toe with the boss when it came to defending the worker. From then on they all called me ‘Hardhat Dave.’

My job was really what kept me sane as when I got home at night my life just got harder and harder with mum. Her
arthritis continued to cripple her up which made her even more demanding. On top of this she started having trouble controlling her bladder and bowels. This meant that her possessiveness over ‘only wanting her son to do things for her’ got worse. She was running me ragged. The girls were teenagers and would make sure that they stayed away at friends’ houses as much as possible.

It seemed like I was always working one way or another. Mum made sure of that. One day she decided that while I was at work she would only lay on ‘son’s bed.’ She would smoke all day looking out the window until I returned. This became a real problem when she started wetting the bed. I was so tired when I came home from work the first time and discovered the problem that I didn’t have it in me to argue with her. But the next night as I got ready for bed the smell was so strong I had to confront her. She said, “Whadya talking about son? I think you have a leak in the roof!” Well I knew better but checked it out anyway. The next night we had the same donnybrook. This time she blamed it on my sisters. I knew better. Her next excuse was, “Son, there must be a big rat in the house!” Well I threw out my mattress, bought a new one and immediately covered it with a plastic liner. Of course mum never owned up to the fact
that she was the big rat and I wasn’t going to bang my head against a wall. I did enough of that at work!

After twelve months of working in the machine shop they wanted a rigger over in the engineering department where the big jobs weighed eighty to one hundred tons. Big gears, wheels for coalmines, steel drums and condensers for power stations. Big fifty-ton shackles. You would have to have two cranes picking up each end to load on a truck. It was a serious job with that much weight to move but I would still try to give a laugh here and there. The other workers thought I looked a bit like Benny Hill at the time.

It wasn’t long before I found myself working with Albert Winchester. He was a good engineer manager and wanted his work done properly. I didn’t know the theory but I did know the practical work. I couldn’t read a plan. I was as dumb as a mully bull. One day Albert called me up to his office. One of the machinists caught me before I went in and said, “Make sure you ask the boss for the dimensions.” Well I didn’t even know what the bloody word ‘dimensions’ meant! So I walked into the room and he was standing in front of the plans. Albert said, “Listen here D.O. this big jobs comin’ in tomorrow.” He started pointing to this and that on the plan. I thought I was doing a pretty good job
bluffing when I had this serious look on my face and said, "Aw yeah Albert what’s the bloody dimensions on it? Where are they?" He knew something was up right away. I didn’t know what the hell I was asking for. He stopped what he was doing and looked annoyed. He pounded his finger down on a corner of the plan where numbers were written down. He said, "They’re right here! Ya’ silly bastard!” I smoothed it over by moving on, saying, "Aw yeah, it’s right Albert. Leave it with me.” He looked in my face and said, “The bloody thing’s gotta come in and it’s gotta be rolled over. It’s an eighty-ton job! It’s that bloody high that it may not go past the limit switch!” I acted like I had experience with this kind of job, “How much gap do we have between the limit switch and the bloody job?” He said, “Well it won’t be bloody much. It could be six inches or it could be a bloody foot!” “I stuck it right back to him, “Well, don’t you know how long the bloody job is? Don’t you know how far it is from the bloody floor to the bloody crane?” He was pissed off, “Of course I do you stupid old bastard!” We finally came to an agreement. He gave me strict instructions, “I don’t want you to take it off of the truck and roll it over without me being there on site!” Well, I was Hardhat Dave. So I said to him, “Aw go and get stuffed. I’m the worker. If I can’t do the job then get rid
of me!” He chased me out of the office shouting, “Aw get out of here ya silly old bastard!” All the men down on the floor were laughing at the two of us.

The next day would prove who knew what. The job came in and Albert watched me take it off the truck from his office above. I saw him up there and thought, “Frig him I’m not going to chase after him. He can see what’s going on down here.” I got the slings around the job and lo and behold there wasn’t much room before it hit the limit switch. I could see that if I couldn’t roll it over in the shop they would have to go through the expense to get a big bloody semi-trailer and take it outside to roll it. I thought, “If I put big sleepers underneath it we wouldn’t get the bloody limit.” So I got this thick rubber and put it on the floor so as not to damage anything and then I put one-inch timber on top of the rubber. Glory be, up it went! I had to be tricky so the big gear could kick over when I got it up there. I took the risk and tilted it at the right time with some timber. Over she went! I got the crane driver to follow it a bit and the job came down as beautiful as anything. I felt the same pride of scoring for the team like I did when I was a hooker back in my footy days. I never thought about the fact that the boss Albert was
watching the whole play like a coach through his office window above the shop floor. The job was that much of a success Albert came down and put his arms around me. He said, “You old bastard! I told you to come up and get me. You bloody beauty!” I was pleased and relieved that it worked out to my favor. I crowed, “What’s the use of calling you? The bloody thing’s over isn’t it? I did my job didn’t I?” He shook his head and laughed, “How’d you do it ya’ bastard?” I laughed back at him wondering if I really knew myself! It was the beginning of a long and respected working relationship between Albert Winchester and Hardhat Dave.

Albert had an inspector that came to the shop. One day he said, “Listen D.O., I’ll leave you in charge today. I have to go out for a while. He was only joking with me when he said, “If the inspector shows up while I’m gone just tell him to piss off.” Wouldn’t you know the inspector did show up and wanted to know who was in charge. He was looking for Albert. The boys pointed to me. I was always looking for a laugh and said, “Yeah, I’m in charge and Albert told me to tell you to piss off.” He wasn’t affected by my sense of humour, he just walked off to get his equipment out of his car. The assistant foreman was coming into the shop as he
passed the inspector. He said, “Hard Hat Dave told me that Albert told me to piss off.” The foreman replied, “Aw take no notice of him.” It was just another day on the job as far as I was concerned. When Albert returned I laughed when I told him what I had done to the inspector. He always replied in his lighthearted way, “Ya’ stupid old bastard.”

I go on about Albert because once again I found myself in the company of ‘the best,’ this time in heavy machinery engineering. How honored I was every time he came down to the shop floor and specifically offered to help me with what I was doing. Of course I would never let on to it. He’d say, “Here D.O. I’ll give you a hand.” When he did this I would lay down on the floor. He’d laugh, “What in the hell are you doing there?” I’d tease him, “Albert if I let you do this job, you’ll be wanting my job.” I’d give him a hard time. I’d go on, “When they want to get rid of you, you’ll want to take D.O.’s job! Oh yeah! This is my bloody job, not yours! If I want anyone to help me I’ll get another worker, not a bloody manager!” He grabbed my hand and pulled me up off the floor. Once again I’d hear him laugh and say, “Ya’ stupid old bastard.”

Back at the house, things weren’t doing so well as mum was getting worse and I was the main man. The two girls were
at the age of ‘doing their own thing’ and the oldest girl
Maggie lived in Sydney. Mum would stay in contact with
Grandma and my sister Anne over the telephone. But that
didn’t stop her from spending a lot of time thinking about
all the sheilas she thought I had. I never had to look far
to see where mum got that jealous streak as Grandma was
still stirring it up with the men in her life well into her
seventies. I’ll never forget the time she had a yarn about
how her husband Jim Brose almost lost his life getting off
the railway one day. He worked as a guard. She laughed as
she told me, “He wouldn’t die from getting hit by a train,
he was gonna die from getting hit by a butcher knife I had
hurled at him!” One day Grandma was that furious and
jealous when he left for work in a hurry and forgot to take
his lunch that she jumped into her red Falcon station wagon
and sped all the way to the Mt. Surprise station racing
alongside the train the whole way. She was sure that he
was on his way to meet a sheila and she was going to beat
him to it! She got there way before the train and was
pacing up and down on the platform waiting for him with his
lunch tin. When he got off of the train he was greeted
with, “I’ll kill ya’, ya’ bastard.” She threw a knife at
him that missed and went through the station window. All he
would mutter was, “Yeah Pearl…yeah Pearl.” Brose was a nice
man and over the years both my brother Leslie and I would wonder, “How the hell did he ever get involved with Pearl?”

Getting back to work, sometimes I would get called in on a Saturday and the boss would be there. I’d ask him, “Albert, what in the bloody hell are you doing here? Don’t you trust us?” He said, “What are you talking about? I’ve gotta see that everything is doing all right. Don’t tell me when I should come in if I want to.”

The time had come to restructure engineering industries throughout Australia. Some unions were for it and some against it. The management had a meeting with the workers. They wanted to send the labourers to TAFE, a technical school to learn how to weld, work light machinery, do light drilling and drive a crane. I thought, “Shit, like bloody hell I want to go back to school!” Everybody knew that I could work magic with practical things. That was enough for me! One day we were putting in this big machine and Albert wanted to know how I was going to do the job. As usual I growled back, “She’ll be right. We’ll get it done. But I won’t get it done if you’re standing there bloody watching me!” I told him to piss off and leave me alone on the floor to do me work. I said, “Just go back to your office and do your paperwork.” Well I got the job done no problem.
I just stood there grinning when Albert came down and wanted to know how I got it done. And they want me to go to technical school? My ass!

Another difficult job had Albert and I frustrated while we watched this fitter trying to remove the bolts out of this big gear before we could move it. Albert said, “C’mon Harry get a move on. We’ll never get this job done” Harry said, “The bolts won’t bloody budge.” I stepped in and said, “Harry give me the bloody hammer. I’ll shift the bolts for ya!” Bang! Bang! Bang! Well within the half-hour I had the bloody lot out. Albert just stood back amazed. When I walked back over to Harry he said, “Ya’ bastard D.O. you just took my bloody overtime off me for the week!” I said, “Never mind, I gotta get home to me mum to feed her. I can’t be here after four o’clock!”

The other workers would knock off and go to the pub, have a drink and a bit of a laugh before going home. I often wished I could do this sometimes but I couldn’t. I felt that I had a responsibility to look after mum. It was to the point that I knew I didn’t have any other life. After a bloody hard day’s work the mates would say to me, “D.O. why don’t you come and have a drink with us?” At the time I knew no better.
One day I came home to find mum waiting at the door. She told me that Grandma had died. Strange. Katie didn’t seem to be affected by the news. She said, “Grandma took a heart attack in the kitchen. As they put her on the stretcher she was telling her husband, ‘You keep your eyes off that sheila down the street while I’m away!’” But she never came back.

By now Grandma was on her fourth husband. Brose had died and she had remarried a lovely old gentleman called Benjamin. He was ten years younger. She was eighty and he was seventy. God bless Pearlie. Once again we couldn’t figure out why Benjamin was with her but she must have been doing something right. I laugh when I think of her saying, “David, I love the body of a man next to me. Even if they can’t do anything to me, I still love feelin’ ‘em!”

I knew I would miss her as she was a great old soul. I couldn’t take off work and go to the funeral so I sent mum and my sister. The service was held in a church. When mum got back home she told me, “You wouldn’t believe it son! When the hearse pulled up and brought grandma out to be put in the hole the grave men realized they had dug the hole in the wrong place. The priest had to stop the burial while we stood there in the heat and rain waiting for them to dig
another hole for grandma.” Katie knew her mum all too well. While lighting up another durrie she said, “I guess she was that determined not to go under!”

Albert knew my capabilities and I knew just how far I could go with him on getting a laugh. One day this big bloody semi pulls into the shop. These two huge truck drivers get out and walk over to us. Mind you they were barefoot and were walking over a floor of metal shavings without a flinch. Albert looked over at me and stepped back. I looked at them and said, “Listen here, which one of you two bastards can fight?” They just looked back and forth at one another. With a straight face I said, “Well when you sort it out you’re not fightin’ me.” I pointed to Albert, “You’re going to fight him!” I pissed off to unload the truck. Albert was left standing there. The blokes saw the joke while Albert walked away shaking his head.

Goninan’s was no fairy tale world, that’s for sure. Many of the workers had problems with drinking, gambling and bashing their wives at home. The management was trying to find a way to get some help for the workers, so they brought in a bloke who was supposed to give the men someone to talk to. Well I wasn’t going to cop any crap from a bloody counselor. I wasn’t keen on any of this.
Lo and behold, the next day there was a big meeting that we all had to bloody attend. I was standing in the back. Up the front was this big bloke about six foot tall wearing a suit. He was talking about problems in the home with fighting and drinking. He said, “I wouldn’t be a bit surprised that a quarter of you men I’m talking to today have had some form of abuse in your young days.” Well I seen red! I pushed me way through the the men shouting out, “Let me at this bastard!” The blokes around me were all screaming, “Get into him Hardhat Dave! Get him!” I pushed my way all the way to the front. I shouted out, “Listen here ya’ mongrel bastard, who in the bloody hell do you think you are? What are ya’ some sort of stoolie for the bloody management? What sort of a bastard are ya’ done up in that bloody suit?” The crowd was cheering behind me. I was on a roll. Flinging my arms around I said, I don’t want anything to do with ya’ about bloody counseling or about bloody abuse.” He had struck a nerve so deep in me that it made me go crazy. I said, “What are ya’ some sort of bloody priest?” The men were still cheering for me as I stormed out of the meeting. The word was that I had really upped the management. After I pissed off one of the boys standing in the front row watched the psychologist whisper something
to the boss. He overheard the reply, “Yeah you’ve just met Hardhat Dave.”

An hour later I was back at work when Albert walked up to me. He said, “Ya’ stupid old bastard. What were you on about with that psychologist?” I was still fuming. I said, “Bugger the bastard. I don’t want to see him!” Albert went on, “But Dave it’s people like you that are highly strung that should see people like Dr. Peters.” I wasn’t going to listen to him. I shouted at him, “I’d sooner go to confession with you, ya’ bastard, than go talk to a bloody bloke done up in a bloody suit like that!” I knew I hadn’t given the bastard a chance but I didn’t give a stuff. It felt good sticking it to him as he looked like a priest and that was good enough for me. What I didn’t feel so good about was the anger I felt deep inside me over the memories of abuse with Father Anderson. Back in Boona I had worked with enough detonators attached to high-powered explosives that I actually worried about what I would blow up first. Hopefully it wouldn’t be me!
Mum was going downhill fast, I was having nightmares about being back at Neerkol and they were talking about restructuring at work. I was snapping at everyone. When I got up Albert one day for no reason I knew I was heading for a fall. I didn’t dare tell him what was going on in my head because he thought I was mad enough already. So I went to speak with the union organizer Mark Stoker. I was in a terrible state and he seemed a nice man. I said, “I’ve gotta' see someone Mark.” I had no idea that it would all come pouring out. I told him about what happened to me at Neerkol with the nuns and Father Anderson. It was the first time I had ever mentioned anything about it since I had told mum. No one knew anything about me at Goninans other than I had grown up in an orphanage. It meant a lot to me to have their respect as Hard Hat Dave and I didn’t want that to change. Mark promised me he would keep everything in confidence. I believed him. He knew about the law regarding child welfare and was going to try to help me. After our meeting I had that much confidence I decided to tell Albert about Neerkol. It was a hard thing for me to do but I realized that not only did I trust him as my boss, but as a friend.
Mark didn’t waste any time contacting the plant’s consultant psychologist Roger Peters about seeing me. After all that’s why they hired him to try to help out bastards like me. The next day I was working on the shop floor when Roger walked in. We went into the lunchroom to talk. I laughed when I said, “I bet you didn’t think you’d see me after getting’ up you the last meeting?” He reassured me, “Naw, that’s all right!” He wasn’t a bad guy after all. We talked a little bit about the serious problem I was having. I agreed to make an appointment to come and see him at his office that week. Before going to see Roger I stopped at Mark’s office to let him know what I had planned to do. I liked him. He was an educated man who was easy to talk to. I said, “Y’know Mark, I’ve told you about Neerkol but I don’t really know nothin’ about meself!” He said, “Well D.O. there are such things called ‘Freedom of Information’ documents that you have a right to see as an Australian citizen.” I said, “No shit?”

He opened the phone book and looked up the Queensland Government. He rang them and asked to have the forms sent to me so I could get my documents. This happened on my birthday in 1993. Fair dinkum, I wouldn’t have been able to fill out the forms without the knowledge, patience and
kindness of Mark Stoker. Four months later I received the first set of documents. Little did I realize that this would start me on a ten-year journey to piece together the terrible cover-up I was in at Neerkol. I had kept quiet until now but I was going through so much turmoil I began thinking about other options. My FOI paperwork had been sent by the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal Affairs. I can’t help but wonder how they classified me within the government filing system as I was a white child, but believe me, I was part of the ‘lost generation.’

As a union delegate on the floor I never ever moved a motion to go home. If it was warranted I would either speak for it or against it. I used to tell the workers, “What’s the use of you’se electing us as delegates just to send you home?” I always tried to stay calm and fair when a few of the bludgers wanted to brawl. I would say, “Look, if we delegates don’t have the finesse to work it out with management to save everybody from going home what’s the use? Were here to work! So leave it with us.”

I had hoped that my fair-minded ‘Hardhat Philosophy’ would’ve work the same for me when it came to management laying workers off. Albert kept telling me not to worry and that I was not going to get axed. I might have been
illiterate but I could still see the writing on the wall. If you couldn’t fit into the plant restructuring your days were numbered, the bastards! Work was my life. Life was my work. I was Hardhat Dave. Redundancy was something I didn’t want to bloody think about.

I couldn’t help but feel bitter over how things were turning out for me. Nothing could be worse than being sent home for good! It was the end of the world as far as I was concerned. I loved my job at Goninans as much as I loved Rugby League in my younger days. Neither of them had ever let me down, up until now. I enjoyed working that much I would arrive two hours early to make myself a cuppa, have a yarn and prepare to achieve something that day. I started to think about all kinds of shitty things. I thought, “If I were let go what would I do? Maybe if I hadn’t gone through the sexual abuse with the bloody priest at Neerkol I would have married and had a lovely wife and kids of my own. Then the idea of retirement wouldn’t have been so bad? Maybe I would have enjoyed the end of my life?” But when I thought about filling time for the rest of my life with me ailing mum and nothing else to look forward to, I’d go crook. With this sort of negativity going through my head I
made sure that I kept every appointment with my psychologist Roger Peters.

Back at home I still looked after mum the best I could even though I would get no rest around her. She would begin calling out to me the minute I stepped into the house. I was that tired all the time that when my pregnant sister and her husband moved in with us temporarily it was a good thing. It gave me a bit of a break as there were two more people for mum to put her attention to. As her daughter got closer to having the baby, mum and I could see that the young couple needed a house to start their family. I sold the house to them as any generous brother would do and moved mum and I into a smaller flat. Yep, things were getting worse. I was a fifty-five year old bachelor who had no way to escape even if I wanted to.
Mum was all right until I sold the house to my sister and we moved into the unit. She was started to go down even faster. Crippled up with arthritis, I would have to do everything for her. She was really bad. I would have to toilet and dress her. I said, “Mum I shouldn’t be doing this. Your daughters should be doing this.” She would say, “Oh no. I only want to live with my son!”

She used to lean out the window smoking a cigarette while I would be doing the washing and I could hear her screaming, “David! David! You’re wanted on the phone.” I was in the middle of folding laundry talking to another lady who was doing her wash. I would hear it again, “David! You’re wanted on the phone!” I would run out and up the stairs. When I got to the phone there would be no one on the line. I’d say, “Mum there’s no one on the phone.” She’d shout at me, “What are you doing in the washhouse with that bloody sheila?” She got that possessive and mad she would say, “What are you doing playing around with her down there?” I was at the end of my rope with her possessiveness. She was off her bloody brain and I was the victim.

The football stadium wasn’t that far from the flat. Mum and I would sit out on the balcony. If a couple would walk past
and the lady would happen to look up at us Katie would
swear at them. “Whadya’ looking at ya’ bitch.” You couldn’t
stop her. I would try to reason with her, “Mum we live
here, please, don’t talk like that.” Her mouth would be
that foul that even I would be embarrassed and go inside
the house.

I told me sisters that I couldn’t do it anymore. I would be
lying in bed and she would be screaming for me, David!
David!” I would dose off and she would wake me with more
calling out of my name. I couldn’t keep up with changing
the bedding and clean her up and get to work. It just kept
getting harder with mum. I asked the management of Goninans
if I could have a key to the back gate of the plant so I
could run home every dinnertime and check on her. I would
eat my sandwich walking back and forth to work, but at
least I would make sure she was fed. I only had thirty
minutes. This went on for six or seven months.

I called the doctor to come and look at her. He said, “It
is no good your mum being home on her own in the condition
she is in. She could fall over and not get up while you’re
at work. I think you’ll have to seriously consider putting
her into a home. Mum heard what the doctor said. After he
left she said, “Son don’t let them put me into a home.” Mum
was crying. I said, “Mum I don’t know what to do. I would feel bad but I would feel worse if I came home from work one day and found you dead on the floor. I would never forgive myself.” I rang my sister up and told her what the doctor had advised. Mum stayed with me for another two months. During that time mum got assessed to see if she could be put into a home. She challenged me again and I told her, “No, you’re not going into a home.” Of course I wasn’t too sure about it and she thought differently. She put it to me that the assessment was my fault. One Saturday morning there was a knock on the door. I got up to answer it. Mum yelled out, “Who is it?” I said, “It’s the lady here to assess you.” She yelled back, “Tell her to piss off.” The lady and I looked at each other. She was embarrassed and so was I. I offered her a cup of tea. Mum was sitting in her chair drinking the tea I had just made her. All of a sudden mum went off her brain. She accused me of doing a line for our visitor. She wouldn’t answer any of the woman’s questions. She was bad. She said, “Oh yeah son I know why you want me to go into a home, so you could have the lady in the end unit to come and sleep with you.” Holding her half-full cuppa she screamed at me, “You bloody well offered her a cup of tea, where’s mine!” The poor lady had put up with enough. She said, “Mr. Owen I’m sorry I
have to go. I may come back at another time when Katie is in a better mood.” Mum said, “Well go! And don’t bloody well come back to this house!” Because of her shitty attitude I really felt sorry for the people who would come and see her. All they would ever get was abuse and no cooperation. Sadly enough, I was numb to it.

It was the same with day care workers. I tried so hard to get her to help. No matter what I said she wouldn’t accept it. Even then I didn’t realize fully the mental state Katie was in. I put up with it ‘cause she was my mum and I loved her. She was deteriorating that much that one of my sisters wanted to look after her but she also worked. She wanted mum to move in with her. Mum agreed. After all that I had done for her, I didn’t want her to go to her daughters. I was that upset over it all that on the day she was leaving I told her, “Mum I’m sorry to say but I think you’ve been very unfair. You’ve used me up for the last few years looking after you, not getting any sleep, now you’re turning around and leaving and it hurts mum!” Later I was sorry for what I said to her. But it didn’t take long for her daughter to transfer her into a home. It upset me a great deal at the time. After a few days of thinking it over I knew it was the best thing for her.
I would go up every night to visit her and on the weekend I would take her out and bring her home with me. One weekend I brought her home and made her a cup of tea. When she finished it she said, “Son, I want to go and lay down. I wheeled her into her bedroom. As I picked her up to put her into her bed she started screaming at me, “Don’t put had put up with so much of her possessiveness it even affected me at work.

She was in the home for about six weeks when I was called to say that she had taken a turn. I went up to the doctor and said, “What’s wrong with her doctor? Mum tells me that you won’t let her smoke.” He explained to me that when she moved into the home they had taken her cigarettes away from her thinking it would be better for her health, but in reality she had been smoking over two packs a day for so long that when they did this she went into a drastic withdrawal of tobacco. She took a turn for the worse after this and never got better.

My three sisters and I were all at the home when the ambulance came to take her to the hospital. Things didn’t look too good. We were all there when she took another turn for the worse. We were told to prepare ourselves, as she might not live. I contacted our sister and brother up North
to let them know that it was that serious. Leslie and Anne left Central Queensland immediately. Mum was in critical condition. We kept telling her to hang on that they were on their way. She made it through to the next day. I kept checking, “Doctor, how’s she going?” The doctor said, “David, we didn’t think that she would last the night but there seems to be something keeping her alive.” Anne and Leslie finally arrived. They drove through the night from eight o’clock straight through to four o’clock the next afternoon.

She was so happy to see all of her family together. Throughout the years she was suffering terribly with arthritis and she could never open her arms up to cuddle any of us. Somehow in her final hour she found the strength to do so. She called each one of us over to her, cuddled us and told us that she loved us. When it was my turn she cuddled me and said, “Son what happened to you at Neerkol should not have happened. Promise me you will do something about it!” She repeated the words, “Promise son!” I said, “Yes mum I will.”

After she had finished her business with all of us she closed her eyes and passed away. She had such a peaceful look on her face. Having this experience with a ‘real’
family around me I thought, “If this is death then I’m not afraid of it.”

I can honestly admit now that I was never angry with mum because I didn’t grow up with her. I met her long after going through my adolescence and teenage years. We were spared the denial, blame and anger that happens between kids and parents. As it has been pointed out to me now I think yes, it was a hard life with mum at times. No, it wasn’t easy. I have accepted that. But it was because she was me mum and I grew up an orphan. I would have lived the rest of my life wondering what didn’t I do for her? Being part of a family I watched my sisters grow up with mum and I began to understand the hardship they must have felt being around depression and mental illness. As for me, I would still choose to grow up with mum as the lesser of two evils, as Neerkol was like being raised by the devil himself!

Mum’s two oldest daughters, Anne and Margaret took care of all of the funeral arrangements. It was a Catholic service held at the Broadmeadow Church. My sisters wanted me to be the one as the head of the family and say a few words. I said, “Well I’ll have to break me vows because I hate being
anywhere near a Catholic Church. But I would do anything for mum."

I said to me sisters, “This is going to be bloody hard for me I’ll need some support.” They all wanted to help me but I said, “I’m pretty upset and the only one I think could help me to get through this is my psychologist from work Roger Peters.” I had taken time off from work. So I called Roger from home. He was the only one I could trust to help me. He knew of the trauma I had gone through because of the church. I asked him, “Roger look mum’s passed away. They want me to talk at the eulogy at the church. Would there be any chance of you coming over to the service and give me a bit of support?” He replied, “Of course I will D.O.”

That day at the church when I got up to speak the eulogy I looked out to the congregation and was surprised to see so many people. I was that teary-eyed. I couldn’t make out any faces. The one person I did recognize was Dr. Peters. Looking at him I gained my composure. It took every bit of me strength to speak about Katie. I said, “Mum, I know you had a hard life on earth. As your loving son when I go and meet up with you again we will be a lot happier together than what we were down here.”me in there!” I said, “Mum, what’s wrong with you!” She said, “I can smell you’ve had a
Sheila in my bed!” I told her not to be silly. All I could hear her say, “I’m not going to sleep in that bed where you had that bitch.” I said, “Well then mum I will take you back to the home.” She replied, “Oh you think I’m that stupid. No! I will sleep in your bed!” You just don’t know how much her defiance was getting me down. Some weekends I could not wait until four o’clock came to take her back to the home. If I arrived ten minutes late to visit she would start on me, “Where were you? Were you with some bloody sheila?” She’d press on with her jealousy, “Have you got a sheila moved in with you already?”
Fair dinkum, Dr. Roger F. Peters was the first suit I grew to love. Can you imagine me saying this? The two of us couldn’t have been further apart, but at this stage of my life it didn’t matter who it was. I needed help. Roger and I continue to have the special kind of relationship that makes me shed a tear even today. He will always be one of the most important men in my life.

NOTES: ROGER F. PETERS

David has a certain Australian larrikinism that people from this country respect and cherish. While this includes disrespectfulness towards the establishment, is more directed at his a dislike of hypocrisy and exploration of those less able.

Not only did he wear a suit and tie, but to add insult to injury, I found out that he was of all things, a devout Catholic! I thought, “How in the bloody hell did I end up with him?” It didn’t take long to realize that our paths must cross, as somehow I had a tiny bit of faith in God left in me. Roger would help me find what little remained at the bottom of the mucky sack of trauma I carried around with me. We would spend many long grueling hours together while I released forty years of rage I had kept inside me over the sins of Father Anderson and the Sisters of Mercy back at Neerkol.
NOTES: ROGER F. PETERS

David Owen is a man of great courage and fortitude. David has a deep sense of his faith one that he has long since failed to reconcile with the Church that betrayed him, but a faith in God that still nonetheless sustains him. David has been able to speak widely, in many venues and despite the repeated telling of his story; it remains I know painful for him to do so. His reason for telling it is unselfish and only told so that others may realise that not only did it abuse occur, but it can and still does. To him it’s a matter of constant vigilance.

Roger was the younger man that showed me the caring of a beautiful soul as he listened to my disgusting stories. Our therapy started a flood of confusing and terrifying memories. At the end of our sessions Roger would say, “You may not remember everything that happened to you in the hour we’ve had together D.O., now when you go home and remember things, write them down.” I found myself scribbling notes as best I could.

I would take my horrible spelling into Roger’s secretary to transcribe but I’d be so embarrassed that I would insist on sitting next to her to translate. I knew from the start that this extra effort was beyond Roger’s official call of duty, but there was something more between us. Of course he always maintained the highest professional standards, but as a patient I must acknowledge his extraordinary insight into my personal healing. Not only did he teach me that I had a right to my feelings but more importantly he
explained that my rights as a child were violated and I could do something about it legally. My deep admiration for Roger will always be there as he continues to be at my side. No matter what happens he helps to inspire me. I now can say on my own with hope, “I’m entitled to receive the justice I deserve as a human being, no matter how long it takes.”

NOTES: ROGER F. PETERS

David’s story cannot be read or heard without experiencing a profound emotional reaction. To know and understand David’s story is to also share with David just a minute sense of his pain. Through all of it he has demonstrated great courage and grit. He provides us with a valuable lesson about survival and determination.

Back then I told Roger, “If I didn’t talk to someone about the stress and trauma I was going through, I was going to do something I did not want to do.” He said, “And what’s that?” I said, “It enters my mind now and then that I want to kill a priest.” Thank God for my angel Roger! From my no-holds-barred statement he helped me to channel my rage constructively. The challenge was there. He gave me the confidence to move on with my life. It was 1993 when we began looking through the Freedom of Information Documents that I had received with the help of Mark Stoker back at the plant. It was a starting point. We would begin the
journey together in finding the truth as to what happened back at Neerkol. I was no longer working anywhere and mum was dead so I had all the energy and free time in the world. This was my new job. It would become the ‘cause of a lifetime.’

It seemed as if Roger always knew how to lift my spirits when I was down on myself. He introduced me to the Survivor Psalm by Frank Ochberg, MD:

I have been victimized.
I was in a fight that was not in a fair fight.
I lost.
There is no shame in losing such fights.
I have reached the stage of survivor
And am no longer a slave of victim status.
I look back with sadness
Rather than hate.
I look forward with hope
Rather than despair.
I may never forget,
But I need not constantly remember.
I was a victim.
I am a survivor.

I still appreciate these special words and made sure I posted them to other Neerkol victims as well. I didn’t
realize how important they would become to me when I decided to take on the Queensland Government and the Catholic Church. The ‘Survivor Psalm’ was my saving grace as I stepped into the bloody world of the legal profession looking for some justice.
Who would have ever thought that an uneducated old man like me would learn how to read and pick out the errors hidden inside a legal brief like the ‘best of ‘em?’ My kitchen drawer is full of yellow highlighters which are as important to me now as my cuppa every day. I’m not lairising. I promised mum I would do something about what happened to me and that is what I am doing. I won’t give up. I have gotten first-hand experience with the hypocrites, liars and parasites.

I’ve trusted nine solicitors in twelve years. The story never changed but the bullshit responses keep coming. Of course, “It was always in my best interest!” I say, “Whose interest? Why have I still not had my day in court? God only knows!” I still maintain that just because a man wears a suit and is classified as solicitor doesn’t mean they ought not to be challenged. If I was allowed to revert back to my dockyard days and get furious I would holler out, “We’re meant to use what you call bloody diplomacy, I say frig the diplomacy when it’s obvious it’s not gonna work!” How different I have become over the years as I have learned to temper myself, be realistic about it all, and not go over the top. Of course this hasn’t happened
overnight. I can honestly say that consistent therapy has done the trick. Every time I sat in Roger’s office another light bulb would go off. Especially when we decided to go after the bastards.

My crusade for justice began to move forward the day Roger contacted a solicitor who had done work for him and asked if he would meet with us. In the meantime I contacted the press. I was ready to set off all of the explosives and tell my story to the public if it would help the cause. The story finally broke in Brisbane with the Courier Mail. My phone was ringing off the hook. Roger was alongside of me with strength to help me through it all. The article gave a straightforward account of the atrocities I suffered at Neerkol. I will always give great credit to Sean Parnell as he was a bright young writer, but still, a stranger who I would spill my guts to. He was that good that I kept my dignity and didn’t feel quite as dirty about sharing my years of shame with another bloke.

SOLICITOR NUMBER 1: September 1993 – September 1994

K. and Associates. Mr. K. worked with the Newcastle Police Department to find the whereabouts of Father Anderson so as I could proceed with criminal charges. Well, the bastard was dead! That was the only thing accomplished. After
twelve months of sitting on my file I was informed that due
to Mr. K’s workload he would no longer represent me. One
year lost!

I kept the war drums beating with the press whenever I
could. This time I contacted a reporter from the Sydney
Morning Herald. The abuse I suffered at Neerkol was written
up in a feature article and it drew a fair amount of
response. One particular query came from a lovely Christian
couple who were helping people who suffered from sexual
abuse. They called the newspaper wanting to contact me.
Well we had a good yarn and they gave me a name of another
solicitor who might be interested in taking on my case. I
couldn’t wait to tell Roger that we might be lurching
forward again.


McC and B Solicitors. There were two people assigned to my
case, Mr. K. and Ms. M. I left everything in their hands.
Mr. K. put a media release into the Courier Mail. I was
thrilled to read the newspaper.

EX-STATE WARD SUES OVER ALLEGED ABUSE

By SEAN PARNELL, COURIER MAIL 9/21/96

A former ward of the state will sue the Queensland
Government alleging it let him suffer repeated sexual abuse
and humiliation while in the Neerkol Orphanage near
Rockhampton. On Thursday, Sydney law firm M&B sent a letter of demand to Families, Youth and Community Care Minister Kev Lingard, informing him of legal action. M&B partner Mr. K. said yesterday that his client Dave Owen of Newcastle was entitled to damages for atrocities suffered while at St. Joseph’s Orphanage at Meteor Park, Neerkol. ‘Dave was a ward of the state at the time and sent to this horrific institution,’ Mr. K. said. “He is a brave man and we’ll take this to high court if we have to.’ Mr. Lingard was in North Queensland yesterday and unavailable for comment.

I called Mr. K. to see how things were going periodically. He assured me that everything was going right. He had taken writs out and was in contact with the church and the nuns so I did not bother him for quite some time.

One day however I received some information that I felt should be passed on to my legal representation. I rang the office and asked to speak to Mr. K.

I almost fell off me chair. I was told that he didn’t work there anymore and had been gone for the past two months. When I asked where he had gone, I was told, “Mr. K has joined the ministry. Now that he was no longer with the firm my files would be sent back to me.” You can imagine the shock over this one. Three more years lost! To believe that my solicitor had become a priest was beyond my wildest imagination. I would have to think about this for a while before moving ahead. Thank God for my angel Roger.

I would watch the footy game of an afternoon and mull this latest predicament around in my head. At times it would
make me crook. One day the phone rang and out of nowhere it was an author named Alan Gill. He told me he was writing a book called “Orphans of the Empire” about migrant children in institutions and had been given my name by a victim from Neerkol who he was working with. He came up to Newcastle to meet with me. I helped his research with some painful stories of the cruelty I suffered at the hands of the Sisters of Mercy as I had plenty of ‘em. When he headed back to Sydney his notebook was filled with enough to write an entire section called, ‘Daredevil Dave.’

ORPHANS OF THE EMPIRE
By Alan Gill, Random House, 1998

‘DAREDEVIL DAVE’

Orphanages and institutions, like schools, clubs, regiments and even countries, have their folk heroes. At St. Joseph’s, Neerkol, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was David Owen.

Some years ago Ann Patterson jotted down the following reminiscences of the boy who influenced her strongly.

‘Dave Owen was a lad of about 13 or 14, I guess. He was one of the older boys, thickset but solid, with a rough air about him. But I remember his ready smile, shock of black hair, and cheekiness in that innocent way. I guess you could say he had a ‘spirit.’

For some reason one day he got a belting from Sister Assumpta. He must have felt that he had enough because he suddenly snatched the stick from Sister Assumpta’s hand and began beating her around the body with it. She had a thick black habit and the sting would hardly have been felt, but it was the defiance that decided his fate. School was
dismissed and we all had to stand, formally, on the benches, as we usually did for concerts and when the Bishop visited. There was a deathly hush. Mr. Murphy was sent for and Dave Owen, who had rushed out at his humiliation, was brought before the school. This was the only job I saw Mr. Murphy ever do, even though he lived down at the bottom of the long road. But he took the cane and thrashed Dave Owen black and blue. He did not try this time to fight it. Mr. Murphy was a strong, taller man, and if he did, where would you go from there? My heart cried for this young lad whose last expression I had seen was a bold grin. Having taken one beating too many he had decided he had had enough and this was to be his punishment. We stood terrified and helpless watching this scene from the tall rows of graded benches. The three players were in the middle of the huge room; there was the swish and force of the cane against a terrified silence. The lesson was to be clear to all. If ‘the migrants’ thought they could do the same or were expecting a life of some comfort, they were in for a rude awakening. When it was all over Dave stood there with his chin on his neck, sobbing quietly. Mr. Murphy handed the bamboo cane back to Sister and left the room, his brute strength having been used, he was no longer required to stay. Sister stood there in the middle of the room, her authority restored and dignity intact. I’ve always wondered what happened to Dave Owen. We girls never saw him again and we assumed he was sent off to a reform school. He may have cried, but how we admired his courage. ‘Doing a Dave Owen’ became part of our speech. Everyone at Neerkol knew what this meant.’

Things were not looking bright when it came to finding my next solicitor, but I went on with life. Having a yarn with my old mates about a bad referee call from a Rugby League match or giving Keghead the horseracing tips on Saturday morning kept me smiling. One morning while looking through a Sydney newspaper I noticed an advertisement with the headline, “INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND.” The ad wanted anyone with information to call this phone number. I
laughed, “Was this a signal from God coming right into the lounge?” The following day I rang the number and gave the woman on the other end my story about Neerkol. She took down my information and said they would be back in touch. I wasn’t going to hold my breath. I had gotten a taste of how these things worked. Glory be to the Father, as it happened there were over 100 calls that came in from the ad. Because of the tremendous response the Queensland Government decided to create a Children’s Commission so that formal complaints could be lodged by all of us. I couldn’t wait to see Roger as I was now waiting to hear back from the Children’s Commission as to when I was scheduled to be interviewed in Brisbane. The public interest in the Neerkol scandal was growing and I was happy to think that mum was looking down to see that something was being done about what happened to me at Neerkol. Sometimes I wondered if Katie wasn’t even the one stirring it up from above?

With the good comes the bad. Why should I be surprised? I was getting myself ready to take the trip up to Brisbane. Every day I would walk out to me mailbox waiting for the notice from the Children’s Commission. This day when I stuck me hand in to get the mail, I pulled out a bullet.
A few days later I began getting the telephone threats. It was always a man’s voice. The first time he said, “You’re never gonna reach Brisbane alive.” Another time he said, “If you go and testify at the Commission you’ll end up with a mafia tie.” I asked, “What’s that?” He explained, “It’s where you get your throat cut and your tongue is pulled through.” Being the cheeky bastard I told him, “Look mate I don’t know who you are or where you’re from but why don’t you come over for a cup of tea?” He hung up on me.

I made two phone calls; one to the police and one to Roger. Constable Dawson came to the flat and took down the information. She didn’t know what a ‘mafia tie’ was either. I filed the complaint and I was getting a bit worried over my travel plans the next week. At my session with Roger we discussed my state of mind and whether I was mentally fit to go through it all. I felt that I really didn’t have a choice if I was to keep my promise to mum. The threats were serious enough that the police arranged for a private train compartment for my trip to Brisbane and kept surveillance on me when I met with the Children’s Commissioner, Norm Alford.

I was sorting out the last minute details with Child Protection Officer Louise Nilsson when I received a call
from the reporter Sean Parnell. He invited me to a small lunch that the Courier Mail was sponsoring for a few of us Neerkol victims who were speaking to the Children’s Commission that week. It was an opportunity to meet one another after so many years. Before I went to sleep that night I rang up my old mate Darkie and his lovely wife Beverly to let them know what time I would arrive in Brisbane the next day. As I always stayed with them when I came into town, I hoped that seeing familiar faces and having a laugh would keep my spirits up before I had to front the Commission.

I wasn’t interested in meeting other Neerkol victims as I didn’t want to be a part of any sort of a ‘pity party.’ So I was pleased when it didn’t turn out that way. We were adults now and wanted to talk about our lives ‘after’ Neerkol. I met a few people that I remembered from my days at the orphanage but most of them had been there at different times. People pulled out photos of wives and grandchildren. I told them about how I found me mum. One woman said she was in the Nursery while I was in Big Boy’s Dormitory and wanted to stay in touch with me. I said hooray, got in a cab and headed for Roma Street Station. When I got on the train I had a bit of a cry along with a
big sigh of relief. I would have a long train ride home to think about what possibilities might be down the track when it came to seeing any real justice done. Boy would I have a lot to talk to Roger about at our next appointment.

The Children’s Commission had its office in one of those tall buildings in Central Brisbane. I was nervous when I had to go through security at the front door, but after getting off the elevator and being greeted at the reception so warmly by Louise, the woman I had been speaking with over the phone, I settled down. I was led into the conference room where I met Commissioner Alford. He had a nice way about him, a genuine manner. Louise offered me a cup of coffee and I sat down at the table with the Commissioner. She took notes while he asked questions. It wasn’t too bad. I appreciated being treated with a real concern for my well-being. After two hours of a hard-going question and answer session we all were relieved to head over to the Courier Mail’s luncheon and meet with the others. They drove me to a restaurant in the Valley and we walked into a much easier situation than I had imagined. I wasn’t too thrilled about
It was a feeding frenzy with the press over what had been going on in Queensland institutions. I was getting call and letters from all over Australia. One day as I was looking through a stack of mail I pulled out a beautiful letter from a woman who wrote that she was at Neerkol with me and had been following my story in the newspapers. She didn’t think that I would remember her as we hadn’t seen one another for over fifty years ago. How happy I was when I realized it was little Daphne. I could still picture the curious little girl with the wide eyes and big bow in her hair. She written her phone number in case I wanted to speak with her. Well I rang her immediately. It was so nice to talk with one another that we started up a dear friendship which goes on to this day. We don’t live close to each other, so once a week we have a yarn on the phone. To break my loneliness I would give her a call and she would always lift my spirits. She knew exactly what I was talking about as was there and could picture everything and everyone I would go on about. She also had her own haunting memories of her brother. Daphne and her husband Andy lived up in the mountain town of Stanthorpe. What a dear couple.
They acted as my lookouts for any Neerkol information coming out of Queensland which may be of use to my case.

The police were investigating the abusers. There were fewer than 20 Sisters who worked at Neerkol still alive. They charged a priest and a yardman from Neerkol with over 100 offences but the bastards ended up getting off in the end. At first the Sisters of Mercy were rejecting the stories that came out of the Children’s Commission, but in the end they issued an apology to the former residents of Neerkol. They also paid a number of victims compensation and offered to help with counseling.

Well as far as the government’s response to the findings of the Children’s Commission it was like cheese and clay. Some victims got a bit of a nibble but no one ever got a big slice. The authorities slid through a nice big loophole, as there was no real accountability to anyone. The findings would just get rolled over into another inquiry. More bullshit!

Thank God the Aussie press wasn’t backing away from the outpourings of anger coming from victims of child abuse not only in this country but around the world. It was big news. It seemed like every time I picked up a paper my two new favourite words were “suckin’ repulsive.”
How great I felt that day I was having a cuppa and opened the Sunday Mail to another article about Neerkol, but this one showed a bit of guts. Children’s Commissioner Norm Alford was pushing for a full investigation. I perked up thinking that someone in authority was finally going to tell the truth to the public and not cover it up! Not only had Alford listened when I told him about the forged doctor certificates in my FOI documents but he was going to do something about it. Mind you this was not a stupid man! Before taking on the role of Children’s Commissioner he was the former Education Department Deputy Director General. I thought, “Imagine someone like him sticking up for someone like me?” Maybe I was smarter than what the world had led me to believe?

Michael McKenna of the Sunday Mail reported March 22, 1998:

COVER-UP CLAIM ON NEERKOL

Children’s Commissioner Norm Alford has accused the State Government of a cover-up in his investigations of abuse at the Neerkol orphanage. Mr. Alford said the Families, Youth and Community Care Department was hindering the investigation by refusing to hand over sensitive files on the orphanage. He said the department’s stand, which came amid suggestions that corruption might have allowed the abuse to continue for decades, was delaying his report to Parliament...Mr. Alford said he intended to seek legislative change to force the department to supply files on Neerkol and former residents...The Commission was expected to report its finding to Parliament late last year into the alleged physical and sexual abuse at the orphanage near Rockhampton. But Mr. Alford said that a ‘new line of
inquiry” had further compounded the delay in the report that government and church officials had received complaints for decades about the abuse. We sought the documents but the department saw fit to seek legal advice and they have since refused to hand them over under the secrecy provisions. One point of view is that in using this provision it promotes a cover-up and prevents us from getting the truth out there.” Mr. Alford said that when the Children’s Commission was approved in Parliament, he had thought there was a clear expectation it would have to access the necessary documents. But much of the investigation had to rely on the documents obtained by residents under Freedom of Information... “There are allegations that doctors’ reports on files were bogus and that, in fact, they were made despite the doctors never actually seeing the residents.’

First thing every day I checked the headlines for a follow-up to the Norm Alford story. I waited for over a year. One morning while I was feeding the topknot pigeons off the balcony the paper arrived. It was a beautiful sunny day. I made a cuppa, took it out to the verandah and opened the paper. I got the shock of my life. The ‘man of authority’ who I had put my faith in, Children’s Commissioner Norm Alford, had stepped down!

THE MONITOR, July 10, 1999

OPERATION ALFORD

Norm Alford believes his ousting from the post of Children’s Commissioner came as he closed on the truth. Michael Ware reports:

‘...Mr. Alford’s life has been under scrutiny for more than nine months now. He was forced to stand aside as the nation’s first Children’s Commissioner in November amid revelations an investigation into his office was under way over an alleged sex and drug scandal. Police and later the
Criminal Justice System investigations focused on the nature of a 65-year-old man’s relationship with his former boarder and junior administrative officer, who was accused of dealing drugs out of Alford’s government supplied Ford Fairlane. Alford formally resigned. At the time, he said he could not go on because the prohibitive cost of defending himself. It appears Alford has long since stopped being surprised by the weight of the condemnation. He said, ‘To me, it’s all a product of a conspiracy…’

I was horrified to think that I had bared my soul about the abuse from Father Anderson to a bloke who was being accused of having sex with another bloke. But when I look at it now I’m saddened that he was removed as Commissioner as his accusations to the press about the Neerkol cover-up were spot on. Stone the crows! Why did the man who was doing the most for us victims have to be gay? Well I say, God bless him anyway for striking out at the truth and actually getting it into print. I couldn’t have done it any better. I was pleased to see Alford stick it to the government after stepping aside. The last words of The Monitor article read:

…Mr. Alford said, ‘I’d gotten too close to something, but I don’t know what. Obviously somebody was getting scared that either we had got close or were getting close. That’s the only rational explanation for all of this. When you look back it was very convenient at the time to remove me from the scene.’ He was referring to a new report on paedophilia he claims his staff was finalizing; the onset of the Forde Inquiry (which he helped initiate); and the beginning of a review of the Children’s Commission legislation.’

In the end the charges were dismissed against Norm Alford. I never read another thing about him. He disappeared. Just
like everybody else who tried up to this point to get to the bottom of this bloody mess only to get squashed in the end.

During all of this political crap I had agreed to help renovate my sister’s house from an earthquake that had happened a few years earlier. I thought it would be a good way to keep my mind occupied with something other than rehashing Neerkol. The house had been boarded up before I moved in to oversee the project. I had to begin by throwing out the squatters who had taken up residence inside. Between rubbish removal and reconstructing the inside plumbing, the place was finally starting to shape up. I would be on the phone with carpenters and electricians when I got a call from the victims that were at Neerkol in my time. They had formed a ‘Neerkol Action Support Group.’ They wanted to inform me that they were negotiating with a solicitor to build a class action lawsuit in which they would sue the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton, the Sisters of Mercy and the State Government alleging a breach of fiduciary duty that allowed them to be abused. They wanted me to add my weight to their claim. I politely told them that I was not interested in getting involved at all. I was definite about this. I hung up the phone. I went back
outside and waited for the bricks and mortar to arrive. I sat on the porch and turned on the wireless for the latest footy scores.

I opened the Courier Mail. My eye went straight to an article that raised my curiosity. It said:

**COURIER MAIL 8/8/1998**

By Peter Morley

Families Youth and Community Care Minister Anna Bligh who announced the Forde Inquiry this week, concedes it may ‘open a can of worms’ but believes it is time to stop ‘passing the buck.’ The inquiry has a budget of $2.8 million and a six-month time frame...

I thought, “Geesus, maybe there’s hope for us after all!”

The article went on to say:

...Leneene Forde is generally seen as a good choice for the role of inquiry commissioner. The 63-year-old wife and mother of five was governor of Queensland for five years until 1997, when she retired. She has more than 20 years of experience as a solicitor and is former director of the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties.

But senior sources have expressed concern that Forde has a formidable task. She has never sat as a judge or even a barrister, although she has chaired committees and tribunals. Perhaps the main factor in Forde’s favour is her image as a caring listener. She will have the support of two part-time commissioners – who Bligh has said will come from outside the legal profession, possibly with psychology, academic or social work backgrounds – and is expected to employ a behind-the-scenes team of legal investigators. It is likely that the Catholic Church will be compelled to give evidence on what practices have been in place to prevent members abusing children and how the church has reacted to particular allegations of such abuse. Bligh has said the inquiry will pass certain information
and cases to other authorities – the police, Criminal Justice Commission, Queensland Crime Commission and Department of Public Prosecutions – when prosecution is likely.

All I thought was, “What utter bullshit.”

It wasn’t long after reading about the Forde Inquiry that I was called and asked if I would come up to Brisbane to testify. I wasn’t sure if I would go, seeing as that the last time I ended up paying for everything myself when I fronted the Children’s Commission. I was never reimbursed for any expenses.

After reading about the millions of dollars they were going to put into this ‘new’ inquiry including salaries for all kinds of government people this time, I didn’t want to think that I would have to dip my hand into my pocket again and drain my pensioner’s income. If that was the case, I wasn’t going to go! But after talking it over with my psychologist I made the decision that I had to go on the record, even if I had to go through some dry gullies to get there. I found the will to pick up the phone and tell them I was coming.

That night while I was eating me sausages and mashed spuds the phone rang. It was the Neerkol Action Support Group with another plea for me to be one of their numbers in a
lawsuit. They wanted me to know that their solicitor was negotiating with the legal representative for the Church and the Sisters of Mercy for an out-of-court settlement and if I didn’t get on board I would miss out. I said, “No thank you, my argument is with the State.” They said they understood my position but wanted me to just talk with him.

Seeing as that I was going to be flying into Brisbane to give evidence at the Forde Inquiry, I agreed to meet with SRM and their solicitor Mr. N. but only under one condition. He could have a look at my documents as long as he understood I would not become part of the group lawsuit. The firm of SRM would have to represent me separately. I told them, “It’s not about the money, it’s about the respect for a life that is due to me as a human being.” I thought, “I don’t want to be in some sideshow pissing match over what happened to who. I wanted my dignity as one single man returned to me after all the years of pain and suffering.” I would not allow my story to be thrown into one big stinkin’ pot of froth and bubbles!

He agreed to my terms and took my case. I left my port of documents with S.R.M., SOLICITOR NUMBER 3.

The office of S.R.M. was in walking distance to where I was going to testify in front of the Forde Commission so I
stopped to have a cuppa hoping this would settle my nerves. When I got to the building another one of my angels Ian Davies, co-founder of the Victims of Crime Association of Queensland (VOCAQ) was waiting outside for me. Ian’s volunteer organization provided support for victims during and after their involvement with the Queensland Criminal Justice System. I had called him earlier and explained how tense I was about giving evidence and needed a good counselor by my side at the Forde Inquiry. He agreed to be there as support when I testified that day as understood that this would not be a picnic in the park for me. And thank God he was there to back up my testimony as later on when I received my official transcript there was a whole part missing.

Having Ian alongside me was very important, as I was petrified. We walked through security with no problem. I stepped into a small room with three people to answer some questions about myself before they led us into the conference room. Ian sat right next to me as I looked across the table at Commissioner Forde. I was relieved that she wasn’t a man in a suit. Every chair around the rest of the table was filled with ‘important people’ acting interested in what I was going to say. At one end of the
table a person operated a recording machine. I felt that much pressure and trauma over it all that I just kept my eyes directly on Mrs. Forde’s face while I told my story.

At first I felt confused when she repeated the same question I had just been asked before I came into the room. I thought, “Maybe she was trying to catch me out.” But it didn’t worry me because with what I went through? You never forget! It’s a stain on the brain that can’t be removed no matter how hard you try. And the only way I can support this theory is my own tragic personal experience. So frig anyone who believes differently!

I had to keep my thoughts straight in my head. There was a strange moment of silence in the room when I looked into Chairman Forde’s eyes and said underneath my breath, ‘What if’ you somehow lost your little ten-year-old boy who you love with all of your heart and soul and the police were out looking for him everywhere. ‘What if’ after a few years of searching he is found and you are informed that he has been in protective custody with the State under the Child Protection Act of 1905 and is being looked after by the nuns and priests of a State-run Catholic orphanage. Of course you would be overjoyed to hear the news and couldn’t wait to get him back home. But ‘What if’ after all of the
crying and hugging you asked him how he was treated at the orphanage and his answer was beyond shocking?

The kind lady Chairman was good at listening but I needed to make sure that she could really see the whole picture. I had one chance. She would be the closest thing I had ever come to in ‘baring my soul’ to a mother figure about all of the unbelievable childhood abuse I copped as a ward of the State. This ‘parent-child’ conversation* took place in front of an entire table of total strangers while being recorded. It went like this:


CHAIRMAN FORDE (mum): How old were you when you had your clothes stripped?

Oh, I would have been about 10, 11 when I got my flogging like that.

CHAIRMAN FORDE (mum): What would you get flogged with?

He would flog you with a whip, you know, You’d be bent over the table Mrs. Forde, all your clothes off and flogged till you were semi-conscious, you know.

CHAIRMAN (mum): What was the bruising from?

The bruising was from telling the nuns about Anderson sexually abusing me.

In the end when I walked out of the hearing, I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I knew my dear mum would’ve been proud of me but I couldn’t help but feel the sadness come over me. My gut was telling me that I was only
kidding myself if I thought I was really going to get any justice. I went back to Newcastle looking forward to watching the Broncos and having me sausages and mashed spuds.

A strong westerly wind was blowing the day I walked out to the mailbox and pulled out what looked like an important letter from SOLICITOR NUMBER 3. I made a cup of tea, grabbed my reading glasses and got comfortable before reading what was inside. After reading the niceties, the eight-page document made sure it ‘warned’ me of the Statute of Limitations.

It was a pretty cunning way for them to intimidate orphanage victims into a settlement right away. Their words were strong and if I hadn’t been such a fighter my whole life I might have caved and signed off when I read:

STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS:

In Queensland this piece of legislation is called the LIMITATION OF ACTIONS ACT. It states that you only have 3 years from the time that causes of action, which relate to negligence, trespass, breach of statutory duty, arise in which to bring a claim. Too much time has passed since you were in an orphanage and the abuse occurred. The Act does provide for an extension of time in certain circumstances, however, as you have known about the abuse for some time, we are of the opinion that it is unlikely that the court will grant an extension.
Instead I got pissed! I thought, “If they really understood my case, there was no way that I was old enough to do anything within three years. Even when I was released from their care at fourteen years old I was illiterate. What really set me off was the boldness of the last sentence, “We are of the opinion that it is unlikely that the court will grant an extension.” Who they hell were these people that claimed to be in my defense?” The final insult came when I read over the Offer of Settlement.

OFFER OF SETTLEMENT:

Last year we made individual submissions assessing each identified person’s claim on a commercially realistic basis, and including room for negotiation. These individual submissions were made up of the following bands of damages as agreed between the parties; ‘assault,’ ‘deprivation of liberty’ and ‘sexual abuse.’

The S of M and the Church have, in response to those submissions, made an offer, framed as a lump sum. It is our assessment that the offer appears to be 50% or half of the amount proposed in the submissions.

Therefore, according to our assessment of the offer you are now being offered: $25,000. After costs you will receive approximately: $24,000

In response to this offer we made a counter offer for a larger amount. Our counter offer was rejected. The offer which has been made by the Nuns and the Church is at the lowest end of the amount which we think is reasonable. It is lower than the figure that we recommended to the Nuns and Church, but it is reasonable in the circumstances. As the offer presently stands it requires every party to agree otherwise the offer cannot be accepted. This could change however, as we are presently negotiate with the S of M and the Church so that individual offers will be made enabling each of you to make an individual decision. Please note
that the Nuns and the Church are in a position to withdraw their offer at any time until it is accepted. Please consider the present offer and the options listed below. Could you then notify us of your preference on the attached sheet and return it to us as quickly as possible.

Remember, this letter arrived on my doorstep two weeks before the Forde Inquiry Report was presented to Parliament. The bloody offer continued:

The existing offer from the S & M and the Church and the amount of settlement is subject to clearances by the Health Insurance Commission and the Department of Social Security, but we are not in a position at this stage to comment as to whether these clearances will be given.

If you chose to accept the Church’s and S&M offer, it is a term of settlement that you will in turn cease your legal proceedings brought against them. By accepting the offer you will not be able to recommence proceedings against any Defendants in the action, which includes the State of Queensland.

I thought, “Hold on a minute! I thought SRM were negotiating with the Nuns and the Church! How did the ‘State of Queensland’ enter into this?”

The letter went on to smooth it over thinking I wouldn’t see through it:

Some of you may have separate claims against the State of Queensland and we are happy to discuss these issues with you at the end of this case.

Reading this kind of bullshit was like putting a red flag in front of a bull. I picked up the phone and rang Mr. N. to have it out. I got up him about putting me into a class
action suit. He denied it, “No Dave you’re not in the class action suit.” I said, “Do you think I’m that stupid? Why is it that you’ve got me down on paper as Plaintiff #30? If that’s not a class-action what is?” He remained cool and silent. I went on, “And where would I stand if I sign this document and send it back to you?

He didn’t have a chance to reply as I blasted him again, “What would happen down the road if the Statute of Limitations were lifted and I accepted what you were offering me? Could I still go ahead and sue the State for their failure in the fiduciary duty of care?”

He replied, “No. Once you sign the document you cannot sue the Church, the Sisters of Mercy or the State.” I told him, “Under those circumstances I will not sign it! My argument is with the State! I might be sixty-seven years old but I still have nightmare experiences of what went on when I was a child.” He told me, “In that case, your files will be sent back to you.”

I was too mad to be bothered about it. I just hung up.

Once again my trust was yanked away from me, as I was sick about the way they handled the agreement over my case. It was too late to do anything about it as I wondered if they
had cunningly used my psychologist and psychiatric reports to prop up their negotiations for the others. I was fuming! I was sure glad that I had an appointment with my psychologist the next day. Maybe after I had a good night’s rest I would calm down. How lucky it was for those bastards that I had mellowed since my mongrel dockyard days. I was now always in the habit of using my brain instead of my brawn so I carefully wrote a letter of protest over what I thought about the legal profession.

How cunning and crude they really were, as most of the Neerkol victims signed off immediately on the out-of-court settlement arranged by Solicitor N. for fear they would get nothin’! They would find out later that the documents had been rushed to them for signatures two weeks before the Forde Inquiry Report was to be put in front of Parliament. The solicitors knew about this and had too much at stake to have their deal blown. So when the ex-residents of Neerkol continued putting pressure on them over financial resolution, they stuck it to ‘em.

The Sisters of Mercy were quite surprised when they were told that the legal firm of SRM had tacked on another fee that each victim paid out of their compensation award. This was done after the Nuns shelled-out one lump sum, which was
to include all legal costs of the ex-residents of Neerkol. Somehow the money was sniffed out and scooped up while everyone just looked on. Thank God for the Neerkol Action Support Group, as it helped a lot of victims who could not help themselves.

Of course, I was already out looking for SOLICITOR NUMBER 4. I was using a great line from my psychologist that was coming in real handy.

I kept telling myself, “If it is to be it’s up to me.”

One day I was shoveling a pile of construction rubbish out of the kitchen window into a bin when there was a knock at the door. It was the postman with a parcel I had to sign for. It was the report I had been waiting for. I fired up the teakettle, put my broom and dustbin down, made me corned meat sandwiches and sat down to the 380-page document. I opened to the first page, which was written on official government stationary. It read:

On May 31, 1999, Chairperson Leneen Forde presented the Report of the Commission Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions to The Honourable Anna Bligh MLA, Ministers for Families, Youth and Community Care, Parliament House, BRISBANE.
The Report gave 42 Royal Commission Recommendations. But after flipping through the entire book I was surprised to see that there was nothing in it about Neerkol. We were informed that due to pending criminal prosecution against a certain high-ranking priest the Neerkol report would come out at a later date. This took another eighteen more months! This didn’t concern me, as the conclusion of the Forde Inquiry Report was enough to keep me going. It read loud and clear:

CONCLUSION

Over the years significant numbers if children of the State in government and nongovernment institutions have been subjected to repeated physical, emotional and sexual abuse...Some key commonalities among the abuses included an abuse of power, a betrayal of trust, a reluctance of people in authority to acknowledge or deal with the abuse, and an official response which showed more concern for the protection of the institution and the abusers than for the safety of the children, particularly where cases of sexual abuse have not been referred to the police for prosecution....As a State, we must face up to past wrongs and make proper redress, and ensure that when children are in our care we do them no harm (pg. xii, xiii)

My testimony must have made some kind of impact as part of my transcript was used by the Forde Inquiry, which by the way, had the power of a Royal Commission to substantiate their Recommendations:
CONSEQUENCES OF VICTIMS OF ABUSE, 12.7, pg. 287.

One witness recounted his experience when he reported that he had been sexually abused: ‘How dare you tell a lie about a priest, you filthy animal, you shocking thing. You’re a boy of the Devil [name], that’s what you are.’ You know, that’s what I got and I just got flogged because of it.

I wouldn’t have had such a problem seeing them use my words in the Report if they would have at least paid for my trip up to Brisbane to testify as they were working within a budget of over two million dollars, but once again I had to pay for my flight and expenses out of my pension check.

Because this story is about my will to live and not a political blue, I’m only going to point out RECOMMENDATION 39 which I believe is the worst disgrace to the dignity of the State. It’s about compensation of course.

Mind you, the ink on the Forde Commission Report hadn’t even dried properly before the government abuse of power started up again. Even though their own Report is what nailed them, it doesn’t seem to end!

RECOMMENDATION 39 (Chapter 12, p. 288)

The Queensland Government and responsible religious authorities establish principles of compensation in dialogue with victims of institutional abuse and strike a balance between individual monetary compensation and provision of services.

RECOMMENDATION 39 gave me what I needed to see for my very own eyes. It clearly used the phrase ‘the importance of
individual monetary compensation,’ but what did they mean in ‘striking a balance?’

The Report Summary gave the final knockout punch I needed. There it was for all to see!

SUMMARY 12.8, pgs. 287-88

Reparation will require the government and responsible religious organizations to enter into a restorative process with survivors to redress harm done. The principle of compensation is accepted in our society as a means of restitution for damages resulting from the types of abuse many children suffered in Queensland institutions.

I felt like I had just won the lottery. Parliament not only endorsed the Royal Commission Report which connected the two vital pieces I needed to bring my case to court:

1) ‘principle of compensation accepted in our society as a means of restitution’; 2) ‘for damages resulting from the types of abuse many children suffered in Queensland institutions.’

I wanted to make sure that I really understood what I had just read! I had gotten pretty good at looking over legal documents by now but I wanted a second opinion. I rang for a taxi and without calling ahead I went over to see my psychologist. When his secretary led me into the office and closed the door behind her, I smiled at him and handed him the Forde Inquiry findings. I said, “Roger, I think they’ve finally painted themselves into a corner!”
In the end Parliament confirmed 41 of the 42 Recommendations. My hopes were high as I figured I would not only be able to work with the government’s legal definition of the principle of compensation and restitution within our society, but also have the added backup of Recommendation 39 to finally get my one day in court.
The morning wasn’t turning out very well as a strong westerly the night before had blown down part of the fence in the back yard. On top of this I heard a knock at the door and had to sign for a box of documents from SRM SOLICITOR NUMBER 3. I guess I was on my own again, no worries. The last straw did hit me when I sat down to open an invitation that came in the mail. It was from Commissioners Leneen Forde AC, Jane Thomason and Hans Heilpern. They wanted me to attend a ‘victim reception’ hosted by The Hon. Anna Bligh MLA, Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services.

What a load of rot! I could not have cared less about a ‘Thank You For Coming Forward’ tea party being held at Parliament House. I wasn’t fooled one bit over how smooth they were in their so-called ‘follow-up’ to the Forde Inquiry. I had finally gotten over the initial trauma I went through over testifying, I was still paying for the airline ticket to Brisbane when I gave evidence, and I had yet to receive any concrete information as to how I could proceed with the legal redress of my case under RECOMMENDATION 39!
So a lovely cup of tea and a crumpet wasn’t gonna’ do it.
No thanks mate.

I finally got news that Parliament approved 41 of the 42 Forde Inquiry Recommendations. The only Recommendation that wasn’t approved was regarding an alternative teen detention center at Wacol. All I can say is that Mum must have been up there pulling some strings as Recommendation 39 would be a great help to my fight for justice. Or so I thought at the time.

It was getting easier to live in the house on O’Hara Street as the renovations were in the last stages. The new bathroom was finally finished. I could enjoy a beautiful, hot shower to relax my nerves, especially when I got cheesed off over the aggravating news coming out of Parliament House over the Forde Inquiry. One story had me that annoyed that I swear I didn’t come out from under the shower until the water had run cold. I happened to pick up the Courier Mail. It was the winter of 1999 and Reporter Christine Retschlag was quoting Minister Anna Bligh. The photo showed Minister Bligh holding the Forde Inquiry Report in her hand with the words underneath:

“ACTION VOW...ANNA BLIGH WITH THE REPORT...”
BLIGH PUSH FOR APOLOGY, COMPO FROM CHURCHES
Families Minister Anna Bligh has admitted the State has a "long way to go" in remedying decades of chronic under-resourcing of children's institutions. Ms. Bligh yesterday vowed to bring a detailed implementation plan of the Forde Report before the Parliament in August amid claims the State's children deserved 'Rolls Royce' treatment.'

Yes, there is sand in the gears and water in the petrol and now that Rolls Royce is rattling and roaring. It looks like it'll never get to Recommendation 39 to give the children that were abused in State institutions the top-of-the-line treatment that they've been promised.

The Minister also said she would make approaches to the major churches within the next week in relation to an apology, reconciliation and compensation - as recommended by the report. Our government acknowledges we have a long way to go to remedy the situation but that is something I will be reporting back to Parliament and will form part of the deliberations of our Budget processes, Ms. Bligh said.

The following day I received another letter. The Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care was letting me know about the government's latest scheme. It said:

I am happy to announce the Cabinet has approved the establishment of a trust fund to benefit former children in care. It will be known as the Forde Foundation. The Government will contribute $1 million to establish the Foundation. It is intended that the Foundation will exist for many years to come and as such the trustee will be the Public Trustee rather than an individual. The Public Trustee will make distributions from the Foundation on the advice of a Board. The Board will be chaired by Ms. Leneen Forde AC.

Little did I realize at the time that I would not have access to any of the funding being handed out by the
government as my needs did not fit into their strict guidelines of the Forde Foundation. As Cabinet put a clause in that none of the $1 million dollars could be used for any legal purposes. They were really making sure that we couldn’t open that can of worms. I was hoping that I might get some news I could actually do something with.

Not so. It was just more red tape. Parliament now created another group to monitor the Forde Foundation. Professor Ian O’Connor, University of Queensland School of Social Work and Social Policy head, was named Chair of the Independent Monitoring Body to oversee and scrutinize the implementation of the inquiry’s recommendations. They just wouldn’t stop in their bloody manipulation of any justice that might come to me.

I wasn’t ready at that point to step into more political nonsense. So when Mary Eather from the Neerkol Action Support Group called me with the name of a Brisbane law firm that might want to take on my case, I made a strong cuppa, picked up the phone and made the call. After filling them in, they agreed to take on my case. Of course this meant packing up all of the documents once again and sending them off. It became a standing joke with the Postal Clerks each time I staggered up to the counter to
plop the same bloody heavy box down. They would say, “Where to this time?”

It was big news. Newcastle was abuzz as it was in the National Rugby League Grande Finale. Every house in the town had its blue and red flag hanging proudly. Seeing as that the Broncos had been knocked out, even I was cheering for the Novocastrians. How nice it was to have a bit of fun and a break to occupy my mind with sports scores. In the end the Knights took the title. It was great to see a ‘win.’ It would make me realize how much I had lost in the game with the government. Never mind. I bared down for the next scrum.

It only took six quick months to scratch SOLICITOR NUMBER 4 off the list. Ms. D. had done more work than anyone so far. I thought we were getting somewhere until the day I called up and was told Ms. D. was no longer with the firm. Well it was downhill from there. I got the final notice telling me the firm was not doing ‘that’ type of work anymore.

My case was referred to CML legal firm. I didn’t have much choice. I agreed for them to send my documents over to SOLICITOR NUMBER 5.
I couldn’t help but wonder if anyone had even looked into what my case had to offer? But of course when you are under an obligation to work with a solicitor who has taken your case pro-bono, beggars can’t be choosers.

I think a new record was set for the fastest time to return my case. It took exactly 30 days. My documents arrived back in Newcastle with a ‘Dear Dave’ letter. They didn’t mince words: 1) they felt I did not have substantial prospects of success in my legal proceedings and 2) they were not prepared to put any resources into ‘a case that was going to fail.’

How’s that for gaining confidence? I was madder than hell over this one. I called my psychologist hoping he could move our appointment up. I had so much anger. I couldn’t understand how it was possible that I was going to be featured on the ‘Sunday’ television programme the following week, yet I could not find one solicitor with a enough foresight to keep my case alive!

After the television programme was aired I got an encouraging phone call. R.D. had just watched the show and asked if I would speak to him about my case. He was a lecturer at a University in Queensland and wanted to see if he could do something for me. He was interested in getting
the legislation changed in Queensland on the Statute of Limitations laws. He wanted to take my case out to the Law Faculty of Queensland University where he would have one institution fighting against another institution and it would cost me nothing. How could I go wrong? In January 2000 I sent SOLICITORS NUMBER 6 all my files. More postage meant more skimping on everyday items. Eight months went by when R.D. called me up to say that unfortunately I was out of luck. The Law School looked at my files and told him that there was nothing they could do for me.

That afternoon I called my friend Daphne pretty despondent over it all. She would always let me get it off my chest and in the end we would somehow have a laugh over it all. I said, “I can’t get anywhere with this bloody government or legal profession in Australia.” She said, “Well Dave, I wasn’t sure if this was a good idea, but my son who is living in the United States has a friend who is a film producer and is looking for a worthwhile project. Why don’t you give her a call and see how you two get on? She might be the one to take your story over to America.” It didn’t sound like a bad idea. I said, “Sounds good Daphe.” She went on, “I just finished watching an Oprah Winfrey show and it was about child abuse in the U.S. Maybe if your
story was told over there you would get a better response
to getting your day in court?”

I had done everything else humanly possible up to this
point in Australia, so calling America didn’t frighten me.
I was actually inspired to do so. I dialed the phone
number in Florida and had a good yarn with a woman who
would become the next stage of my story getting told. I had
no idea what a tremendous undertaking it would become on
both of our parts. With help from above I managed to scrape
up enough money to photo copy all of my documents. God love
a duck, you should have seen the expression on the Postal
Clerk’s face when I set the box down on the postage scale.
She said, “Where to this time?” I said, “Hallandale Beach,
Florida...in the U.S.A.”

In the meantime I went to Queensland to meet with R.D. and
pick up the documents I had left with him. He wasn’t able
to do anything but he did introduce me to SOLICITOR NUMBER
7, MR. K. He was working on a case to get the Statute of
Limitations lifted for a Neerkol girl who was at the
orphanage after my time. He agreed to take my case, so I
left my documents with him and went back home.

It just didn’t seem like I was ever going to get anywhere,
as it was the same old thing. After only one month, I
received a letter with my documents enclosed. Solicitor K. politely explained that when the young woman’s case regarding Statute of Limitation time limit had failed, he decided to give up on my case as well. It was just too tough a fight. I wasn’t happy about this decision but I thought I would call to see if he might have a referral. How disheartened I was when I heard, “I can only suggest you look in the Yellow Pages Dave.” I was now cactus over it all. I thought to myself, “After all of the people, places and situations I have gone through so far in seeking justice, would I actually have to find SOLICITOR NUMBER 9 out of the phone book?

Back to the psychologist and totally frustrated I decided that the only thing left was to draft a letter of protest to the United Nations. I poured over all of the information. It was even too much for me to understand and I was the one that had gone through it all! This last ditch effort to the Human Rights Committee in Geneva Switzerland would have to be that brilliantly written because I was now going after the entire Queensland Government over the violation of my rights as child, but now in the World Court. I kept working on it.
Back at the house, I would sit in the lounge and poured over the government documents that were heaped in stacks all over the place. This particular day wasn’t any different than the others, except that for some odd reason while scanning over a government doctor’s report from my FOI files my eyes stopped short on the words, “A Child Leaving an Institution.” My attention was brought directly to my name written in the center of the document. It read ‘DAVID OWENS.’ I looked closer and thought, “Wait a minute, my name does not have an ‘S’ on the end of it. It is spelled ‘OWEN.’”

My mind instantly flashed back to another government doctor’s certificate I had just seen in the pile with the same sort of handwriting! I ripped through the stack to find the other document. There it was! I am no expert but I compared the two government doctor’s certificates side by side and they looked to be the same writing to me. I was overwhelmed to see that the writing was not the government doctor at all! It was the handwriting of Mother Emelian Griffin, the head nun of the State institution, who I knew was the only person treating my backside, ever, for the bleeding that occurred from the sexual abuse by Father Anderson.
I took the two documents straight away to my psychologist to see what he thought. He agreed they looked alike. I decided it was worth the money to get the government doctor’s certificates analyzed by a handwriting expert. I rang my sister and told her I was coming to Sydney as I had an appointment with Chris Anderson, a forensic document examiner. When the forensic document report came back it said:

Without the original documents we can only observe:...Three different writers have possibly written the name ‘David Owens’ written on each of these certificates. This observation suggests, on at two certificates (items 2 & 3) that one writer who wrote the entries for Place, Date and signed the certificate and a different writer wrote the name of the child. It was further observed that the person who wrote the original substantive handwritten entries on three forms dated 3rd October 1953, 16th January 1954 and 30th June 1954 titled “Report on a Child Admitted to an Institution” in the names of David Owens or David Robert Owens containing, on each form, a copy signature “Sister M Emilian Griffin” (see appendix “B” for copies of these documents) could have written the name “David Owens” on the original of the certificate referred to in item 3...

I would now have the biggest obstacle yet in obtaining my ‘original’ FOI documents so as to continue with the case. The original documents would give me the weapon I needed to fight the Statute of Limitations. How ironic that I was still a victim to the same cruel system. I might have grown up, but that same law was still in place today as it was back in the 1940s, when my rights as a child had been violated. How sad that the Queensland Government would
continue the abuse with State child, Number 34, David Owen, as they used everything in their power to make sure that the pitiful little orphan couldn’t get his dirty little paws on the key to get to the truth. They were still holding the cat o’ nine tails. I needed the original doctor’s certificate to match the signatures and the only way I could get it was through a court order.

Back in March of 1998, I was interviewed for a magazine called, *Inside Queensland*. Publisher Bruce Grundy formerly with the ABC, Radio Australia, foundation head of the department of Journalism at the University of Queensland and editor in chief of the Weekend Independent, put these beautiful thoughts into the most precise and honest editorial, which to this day, I still find myself holding on to for inspiration. It read:

A Letter from the Editor:

I am aware that Sisters and the Church have apologized to those who have complained about the dastardly things that happened to them at Neerkol...

"Many of those most seriously damaged and most grievously treated were wards of the State and migrant children. As a citizen of this state, they were my brothers and sisters. The State sent them to Neerkol to be looked after. They were not. I want to know who was responsible on my behalf? I want to know who failed these children and us, as we were contributing to their upkeep. We were, and are, stakeholders in this whole affair...
Sister Bernice Loch put it all very eloquently in her statement to the courts in 1995. She said the Director of Family Services was the legal guardian of all those who were not private boarders and the orphanage Superior Sister M. Emilian Griffin was required to be approved by the State. Exactly. So where was the State?

The uncovering of the role of the State in all this will be good for the State and for those who work for it, even today, for they may come to know that their actions or inactions may see the light of day sometime, even long after they have moved on or maybe died. And in a sense that eventual accountability may be even worse, for it will be the families who will have to pay the price of that scrutiny and humiliation, and they will not be pleased. So while it may not be pleasant for some, the scrutiny will go on. For this reporter, the apology does not wipe the slate. What happened must be on the record. In that regard the apology is irrelevant. If those involved wish to come to peace with the victims of Neerkol I have a suggestion that may help. Open the files and records. Open the archive. Invite the daylight in, whatever it may reveal. That way we will know there is nothing more to set the record straight. In the meantime we will go on reporting.

Lucky for me I’m surrounding by such good souls from all walks of life, especially when I go back in the black box and I can’t find a way out.
CH. 27 HOW DO YOU SPELL STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS??

My hopes of getting any justice were on a downwards spiral at the time. Being on a small pension made it pretty difficult for me to do anything else anyway. One spring morning in November the sunshine was beautiful and it cheered me up that much I decided to bring my two corned meat sandwiches out to the verandah while I read the Courier Mail. The news would only upset my tea.

NO CHARGES FOLLOW CHILD ABUSE PROBE

By Sean Parnell

Not one person has been prosecuted out of the Forde Inquiry into child abuse, and almost two thirds of complaints referred to police have been disregarded or withdrawn. And no victims have been compensated out of the $1 million trust fund established by the State Government, despite 15 months passing since the Forde Report was tabled in Parliament. The revelations come amid growing concerns the Government and the churches have backed away from their commitment to prevent such abuses recurring. Opposition Families Spokesman Denver Beanland said yesterday many people who gave evidence at the $3 million inquiry were concerned the anguish they went through had not brought any benefits. He said the Forde Inquiry had the powers of a Royal Commission, more than many law enforcement agencies, and the lack of prosecutions were disheartening. Mr. Beanland also criticized Families, Youth and Community Care Minister Anna Bligh for not implementing all report recommendations. ‘It’s very easy to establish the inquiry and receive the media headlines, the difficult work is all the follow-through,’ Beanland said. ...’Once these people have been through this again, and some of what they told the inquiry was horrific, once you awaken it, the Government needs to have the support services there to help them.’
I would be interesting to hear Ms. Forde’s answer to this attack. I read on:

Inquiry Chair Leneen Forde said yesterday she believed many victims would not have wanted to take the matters further. ‘It’s also very hard to prove a case so long after the time to the degree that’s required.’

I can’t even explain how upset I got over her comment. I thought, “Was this the same compassionate lady who I had put all my trust in as I testified and emotionally stripped myself naked in front of her and her Commission in order to detail the horrors I experienced as a State child at Neerkol?” And now she sounded as if she was taking a big step backward away from her commitment to the victims. I was so confused about it. The next day I would read another story out of the Courier Mail. This time Mrs. Forde would expose the government’s role in the manipulation over the Forde funding arrangements for victim’s compensation. It was one big political pissing match with no outcome of course.

FOUNDATION NOT ANSWER TO COMPO, SAYS FORDE

By Margaret Wenham

The Forde Foundation was not set up to address the principles of compensation for victims of abuse in institutions, the former Queensland governor and Forde inquiry head said yesterday. Leneen Forde - a foundation board member - said she had looked at the Beattie
Government’s response to her inquiry compensation recommendations and disagreed those recommendations had been met. Mrs. Forde was addressing a Department of Families-sponsored two-day forum for former residents of government and church-run institutions held in Brisbane, with more than 70 victims of abuse attending. The $2 million foundation was established by the Beattie Government in August 2000. Abuse victims can apply for grants for family reunions and education and other support services.

‘The Government has inferred the Forde Foundation was their answer to compensation – I’m saying I don’t agree with that,’ Mrs. Forde said.

‘The Forde Foundation is not set up to address the principles of compensation which was the underlying rationale behind Recommendation 39...the Foundation has more to do with Recommendation 40 (support services.)’

How much clearer could Chairman Forde Inquiry state the facts? I kept thinking about the greed and waste of the money that was intended to help the victims. Not only were they all running around in circles of deceit and lies but running around in those circles while getting paid salaries from the original $2 million dollar Forde Inquiry budget. What bloody cheek they had as they performed the monkey trick, “See no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.” And all at our expense! The article went on to say:

Mrs. Forde’s comments followed those of Queensland Crime Commissioner, Tim Carmody, who told the forum that the Government’s response to compensation issues was ‘clearly inadequate’ and permitted a ‘willful denial’ of the abuse. Mr. Carmody said the civil justice system presented impossible hurdles for claimants who already had their testimonies accepted by formal inquiries. Families Minister
Judy Spence said the Government maintained the view former residents should seek compensation through the legal system.

There was no error in the reporting, I could see that the Government was going to slither into the background and hide behind the Statute of Limitations. I knew what this cowardly move would do to my case as I lived on a very small pension, with no room for legal fees. And the way it had been going up to this point I wasn’t holding my breath. The next solicitor would have to be heroic, with deep pockets and a big heart or just plain crazy. I realized that it would take a miracle for anyone to come to the rescue and finally get to the truth. I wasn’t done yet as I believed mum was up there somewhere and you never knew what might happen.

It didn’t look very good. After a few months I still wasn’t having much luck finding another solicitor. One day I happened to be on the phone with an old mate of mine Les Ross who was a football fan and his son was playing fullback for the Melbourne Storm. Les was the accountant. I was telling him about my frustrating legal situation when he suggested that he might be able to get his law firm to review my case and point me in the right direction. Once again, I was assisted by another angel. I thought it was a great idea to pass my case over to SOLICITOR NUMBER EIGHT,
M&M. They were helpful in their effort but after one year of looking it over, they didn’t have much to add. They returned my documents with the same comment as every other solicitor, “The Statute of Limitations is the big problem.” Well, I already knew this.

Seeing as that I didn’t know where to turn to for money to hire a solicitor and it seemed they all kept throwing my case back at me, I thought, “Maybe I can get some money from the Forde Foundation as it was supposed to benefit child residents of institutions.” So I dug through my paperwork and pulled out a letter from Anna Bligh regarding the updated information on the Government’s implementation of its response to the Forde Inquiry and in particular the establishment of a trust fund to benefit former child residents of institutions. The letter said,

The Trust itself will be a body independent of the Government and therefore not subject to government control or direction. The Trustees will responsibility for investing Trust monies and making distributions to beneficiaries of the Trust. The purpose of the Trust is to support former children in care by providing financial assistance to cover costs such as family reunion, counseling support services, self-improvement expenses such as the cost of education, as well as health expenses not covered by private insurance or Medicare related to the person’s treatment as a child. The Trust Fund is not intended to provide compensation for victims to be used for the purposes of paying the personal bills or legal costs of victims.
It was actually nauseating for to read this. Let’s consider my position for a moment. As in the Forde Inquiry Report, a child abuse victim who was brutalized mentally and physically and sodomised while in State care. I was 65 years old, functionally illiterate and without any family. I am on social security and a pension. This includes medical. I live a simple life within my means. I have never been on the dole so I have been paying into the Government tax scheme for over 50 years, ever since I left Neerkol! In what way has the government accepted their responsibility towards my case? What exactly is the government doing for me? Glory be I started thinking like a solicitor and I couldn’t stop it. I wasn’t sure if I liked this.

It was a really bad day. When I finally received my official Neerkol transcripts from the Forde Inquiry I kept looking but couldn’t find the part where I gave evidence about the mysterious parcels in the wheelbarrow and Sister Emilian praying in front of the bonfire until they were burnt to ash.

I wondered if I was losing my mind or if someone made sure that they had deliberately omitted it. I called Ian Davies to confirm what I had testified to as he was there with me
that day. When Ian repeated the identical story I had given to the Commission, I thought it best to call up and find out what was going on. When I asked for the whereabouts of the omitted part of my transcript I was told that it had been lost in a power outage. With all that I had already been through with the government so far, this lame explanation didn’t sit very well. It was just one more way to keep the story from being told. Didn’t they realize that I had come too far to give up now?

The jabs were coming at me from every angle. Sometimes I couldn’t control myself and I wanted to see some action. So I would push harder on the issue of compensation. I had struck some kind of a nerve as I had been given over to the Senior Policy Advisor for the Minister of Families, Youth and Community Care to reply. He didn’t waste any time in dodging the issue: “I wish to reiterate that the decision taken not to pay individual compensation packages is a whole of Government decision, and not one solely made by the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care.”

What exactly does this mean? Maybe people can begin to understand why I repeat those two favorite words of mine, ‘suckin repulsive.’ My language was getting pretty industrial again as I sat in my lounge and racked my brain
for any new way to present my case. I always came head to head with the same opponent, the Statute of Limitations. Until one day I stumbled on a book that had been sent to me a while back. I wasn’t even looking for it, nor was I clear on how I received it. It ended up being the lifesaving report I needed. It would provide the last puzzle piece I had been searching for:

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE
REPORT ON CHILD MIGRATION August 2001
“LOST INNOCENTS: Righting the Record”

STATUTUE OF LIMITATIONS APPENDIX 6 (pgs. 306-307)

Limitation of Actions Act 1958 (Vic): Actions for tortuous claims must be commenced within six years, except actions for personal injuries consisting of disease or disorder contracted by any person. In these cases, the limitation period is still six years, but time does not begin to run until the date on which the plaintiff first knew that he or she had suffered the injury and that the injury was caused by the defendant. A court may extend the limitation period for an indefinite period, but only in respect of actions which include damages for personal injuries. The court may grant such an extension where it is ‘just and reasonable so to do.’ There is no requirement as to ignorance of a material fact, and an applicant is not required to provide evidence establishing a prima facie case. There are a number of matters to be considered in deciding whether to grant an extension of time.

Where do I begin? Shall we start with the sodomy twice a week for two years, the beatings I received when I confided in the Sisters of Mercy, the forged doctor’s certificates to release me to go out to work on a farm, the State
Children Department Officer’s false reports as to why I was returned to Neerkol. The report said I had stolen from the farmer, when in fact they all knew I was returned when my backside was bleeding and I told the farmer what had happened with Father Anderson. If all of this isn’t enough reason to justify an extension on the Statute of Limitations than I give!

LIMITATION PERIODS FOR CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

AND SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT

A matter of ongoing concern has been the application of limitation periods in relation to victims of child sexual assault. Depending on the circumstances, the sort of civil action instituted by a survivor of child sexual assault might include an action in battery, assault, false imprisonment, negligence, breach of fiduciary duty... Provision in limitations statutes do enable the limitation period to be extended in some circumstances. For example the Limitation of Actions 1974 (Qld) provides that the limitation period for an action based on a childhood injury does not start to run until the person has legally become an adult. It is also possible for a limitation period to be extended if the action is based on fraud ie where it is argued that the adult abuse fraudulently concealed the nature of the abuse. The Queensland Law Reform Commission considered how best to deal with claims relating to child sexual abuse or domestic violence in the context of limitation statutes and recommended that the issue should be dealt with as a matter of judicial discretion and not be the subject of special legislative rules.

My response remains simple. I want to be put in front of a court of law so that I can prove battery, assault, false
imprisonment, negligence and breach of fiduciary duty as a ward of the State. Isn’t it about time to clear the deck?

It was beyond ridiculous. My documents had traveled more in the past few years than I ever had in my entire lifetime. Now that they had been returned for the eighth time, I had no other choice but to start all over again. I called LEGAL AID OF QUEENSLAND looking for free legal representation.

Mr. M.B. was pleasant enough and located a SOLICITOR NUMBER 9 from the firm of G&L in Brisbane. I rang my sister and asked if she might be able to book a flight for me, as I couldn’t afford it.

The Neerkol Action Support Group had dissolved after the out-of-court settlement and Mary Eather had now moved her energy into an advocacy group called Historical Abuse Network, (HAN). She and my good friend Joe Kenny who gives his time to the Esther Centre, had agreed to meet me in Brisbane and go along to meet with the new solicitor, D.D. I walked into the office that day flanked by Mary and Joe, carrying my port of documents as usual. We all sat down and I showed him my files. When I got to the forged government doctor’s certificate from Neerkol he casually said, “Well I suppose going back in those days that might be how they filled out doctor’s certificates.” I just exploded. I said,
“Listen here, are you gonna’ be like the rest of the solicitors that I had in the past? Not wanting to look into anything, but just give an opinion straight off your head?” I was thumping the document on the table when I shouted, “Look at the bottom of the government doctor’s signature! Now look at the date when he was supposed to have examined me!” I was pounding on the spot, “You can see that the writing is done by the doctor himself, but in the middle of the certificate you can clearly see that it is not the doctor’s handwriting!” I looked into his face, “Are you gonna’ tell me whether the nun or the doctor examined me?” I was settling down but my voice was still raised, “I’m no legal expert but it really doesn’t matter to me because I know for a fact that I was never examined by any doctor!” I finished up by saying, “Now if you can’t represent me the way I know I should be represented, then I don’t want you!” He looked at me and in perfect solicitor fashion he said, “Calm down Dave, we will look over your case and act in your best interest.” As I walked out I turned to Mary and Joe and said, “You watch, it’ll be the same as the rest of ‘em.”

I was sure happy to get an overseas call from my author. She told me that she had a big surprise. She thought it
best that we write the book over in America. As I would be freer to speak my mind in totally different surroundings. With so much strife around me lately, I couldn’t imagine a better thing to happen to me. She told me to expect an airline ticket within the next few months. I would have to make my arrangements to close up the house in Newcastle as so I could stay with her for two months. I thought, “Fair dinkum. I’m going to Disneyworld!”

I called my psychologist. I had all kinds of new things to discuss: my statute of limitation findings, my upcoming trip to America and my leaving for Brisbane to meet with a new solicitor that Legal Aid had referred me to. So many things were happening I almost forgot that I was also going to be mailing a package to the United Nations in Geneva as soon as I was able to pick up my spiral-bound documents from the printer. I was flat out like a lizard drinkin’.

I had that much to do before going to the U.S.A. that when I received the SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT, FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out of home care as children, I wasn’t impressed. As for the size of the book, I was familiar with government reports saying a lot of nothin’. I did take the time to read the cover letter with an extract from Senate
Hansard transcript 30, August 2004. which came with the report. The political circus was back in town! I was still eating mashed spuds and sausages while they were patting each other on the back for ‘doing their jobs,’ which by the way we all pay for! They brilliantly came up with this:

Extract from Senate Hansard transcript 30 August 2004

COMMITTEES: Community Affairs References Committee: Report

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland) (12:31 p.m.) by leave I present the report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee entitled Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children. Ordered that the report be printed.

Senator McLUCAS I seek leave to give a notice of motion in relation to the report

Leave granted.

Senator McLUCAS I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move:

That the second part of the SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCE COMMITTEE on its inquiry into children in institutional care be presented by the last sitting day in DECEMBER 2004.

I now seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report.

Leave granted.

Senator McLUCAS I move:

That the Senate take note of the report...

...The request of the committee was in response to the many care leavers who traveled here today who would not be able to witness the tabling if it were a regular time later, as they wish to return to their homes this evening. I am very pleased that we have been able to welcome these care
leavers and their families into Parliament House to be part of this milestone in the history of provision of care in Australia...

...When I began this inquiry I was, to say the least, very concerned about what we were embarking on. My concerns were that we were not going to be able to do any good for the people whose lives we were looking into, that we would open wounds that we would not be able to heal and that we were not counselors, we were policy makers...

I thought to myself, “Clever. So now the term ‘victim’ had been changed to ‘care leaver?’ Whatever they wanted to call us, I’ll bet the victims had to pay for their own travel as I did when I bloody well spilled my guts out at the last government farce, The Forde Inquiry. But of course it was no worries for the Senators as they all have government expense accounts!” It went on:

I am proud to have presented this report on behalf of the committee, I want to place on record my thanks to all the members of the committee for their compassion and diligence throughout the hearings and through the compilation of the report and the recommendations. I also wish to thank Senator Hutchins for his work as the chair of the committee prior to March. This is an example of how Senate works at its best. We came to the inquiry as individuals and left our party affiliations at the door. Our recommendations are the result of our personal thinking and it is our hope that they will make real changes to the care leavers in the future...

What I was reading was making me that crook in the guts I had to put it down for a while. I did a load of laundry and looked over the racing form to try to get over it. It didn’t work. I sat down and picked up the report again hoping to read something that I could be happy about. Just
when I was ready to toss the whole damn thing out I came across this Senate recommendation:

We have recommended that the federal government establish a fund with contributions from states and territories, churches and organizations involved in the provision of care. This fund should provide an alternative method for accessing ‘redress’ that will not require applicants to meet legal proof requirements, and a claim that can be supported by a reasonable likelihood that the abuse occurred should be dealt with. We have recommended that a process for reviewing complaints about care experiences should be established independent of governments and churches...

When I saw the word ‘redress’ without the word “legal” in front of it, I wondered what they were referring to. I was interested in reading on:

We have called on the churches and other care providing organizations to open their books and allow care leavers all the information which has been collected about them so that any legal proceedings that should be progressed are progressed. We have said that if this does not occur then the only course of action is for the federal government to implement a royal commission so that justice can be done.

I couldn’t help but laugh about how far I had come in just trying to receive protection as a child of the State. I had gone from telling the nuns at Neerkol, to the State Children’s Department Officer in Charge, to the Children’s Commission, to the Forde Inquiry - and I was heading for a Royal Commission. Glory be to the Father! I really appreciated the words of a Senator from Western Australia:
SENATOR KNOWLES (Western Australia) (12:41 p.m.)

...There are so many sad stories to focus on but to me one of the saddest realities is that some care leavers have discovered more recently that while they were suffering there had in fact been offers from extended family members to provide a home for them to prevent them from going into or being in care yet these offers were usually ignored or denied by the department or agency. One can only wonder how different the outcome would have been for those so lucky.

Mrs. Guinane is 90 years old now, and we stay in touch. Every time we speak she tells me the same story about her being the head nurse at my birth and how she and the doctor loved me so much. She wanted to keep me but after a short training leave from the hospital, she returned and found I was gone. She was told I had been adopted. Like Senator Knowles said, “I can only wonder how different my outcome would have been if I would have been that lucky.”

When I looked at all of the family photos of Dr. and Mrs. Guinane at her home one day, I noticed their children looked so happy and healthy. They were all educated people with families of their own. Imagine that! It could have been me too. And even if I wouldn’t have been adopted by the Guinanies, what about the McKenzies? Or how about grandma and mum who wanted to look after me? I don’t know much about the game of baseball but even I have heard, “Three strikes and you’re out!”

Going back to the report Senator Knowles went on with his assessment:

The response that times were different and that the standards and people’s thinking and understanding of children’s needs have changed, fails to explain or recognize the severity of the documented behaviours.
Corporal punishment may no longer be in vogue. But when do a few whacks with a ruler become an assault? When did the ‘standards of the time’ change that condones the perpetration of neglect, cruelty, psychological abuse, sadism, rape and sodomy?

I submit that what is criminal today was criminal yesterday in this regard. To listen to such legacies of such treatment, legacies such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, depression, fear, distrust, anger, shame, guilt, obsessiveness, social anxieties, phobias, recurring nightmares, tension, migraine and speech difficulties – is beyond comprehension.

Well everything he referred to is still lodged deep inside of me. Over the years it has gotten milder but it can never be removed. I have been asked over and over again, “With what has happened to you David why haven’t you become an alcoholic, drug addict or murderer?” I maintain that it is my will to live. It is all about going forward to right the wrongs and make a difference. So in saying this I have to give credit and say thanks to the Forgotten Australian Committee in their noble attempts to at least look into it all. Another Senator from Western Australia also made some important points. I couldn’t help but think what tremendous insight he had:

SENATOR MURRAY (Western Australia) (12:52 p.m.)

Too many people have led and are leading lonely, marginal lives from which there appears no escape. They also live with the pain of lost identities. For too many, their childhood remains a private hell stained with memories of beatings sexual assault and molestation and exploitation as
child labor. Sadly, because of the planted guilt, blame and shame, most have learnt not to rebel against injustice, not to speak out. They have remained silent. It is those who failed in their duty of care that should carry the burden of guilt, blame and shame; not the survivors. This powerful report records acts of at times unbelievable violence against vulnerable children in care. The argument that this was how it was done back then holds little sway. Denial is shorthand for the abdication of responsibility.

Sometimes the words were too big. I grabbed the dictionary and looked up the word ‘abdication.’ It said: 1) dismissal 2) abandonment. I read the sentence over again, “Denial is the shortcut for the ‘abandonment’ of responsibility. No matter which way you said it, it was so true!

The Senate Committee Report gave 39 Recommendations.

Recommendation 6 was the one I was hoping to find:

8.125 That the Commonwealth Government establish and manage a national reparations fund for victims of institutional abuse in institutions:

- The scheme be funded by contributions from the Commonwealth

And State Governments and the Churches and agencies proportionately;

- The Commonwealth have regard to schemes already in operation in Canada, Ireland and Tasmania in the design and implementation of the above scheme;

- A board be established to administer the scheme, consider claims and award monetary compensation

- The board, in determining claims, be satisfied that there was a ‘reasonable likelihood’ that the abuse occurred;
• The board should have regard to whether legal redress has been pursued;
• The processes established in assessing claims be non-adversarial and informal; and
• Compensation be provided for individuals who have suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse while residing in these institutions.

If what I was reading was the truth and not just more dust in the wind, I was back in the game. Senator Knowles gave me a twitch of hope, even if it was just temporary. He said:

I hope that state, territory and Commonwealth governments, the churches and the agencies look very closely at the recommendations we have made. It is about time the wrongs were righted. It is about time everyone decided that what was illegal then is illegal today, and vice versa.

It took seven months before I received, “Protecting Vulnerable Children; A National Challenge,” which was the second half of the report of the inquiry into children in institutional care. I couldn’t wait to get into the meat of the book to find out what I could do next about my case with Recommendation 6. Well, I cannot describe my disappointment when those same Senators spoke in the second half of the Senate Hansard Extract, 17 March 2005 and there words were nothing but empty. There would be no follow-up whatsoever to legal redress and compensation.

In fact the opening lines from Senator MARSHALL (Victoria) (10:33 a.m.) went like this:
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS focused on children who were in institutional care, mainly from the 1920s, until deinstitutionalisation in the 1970s began to see large institutions replaced by smaller residential homes...That report included information on the role of governments and churches in placing children in care...'The issues of responsibility, acknowledgement and reparation were also canvassed...as were the issues relating to the accessing of records and information...The committee considers that the Commonwealth, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and with the cooperation of all jurisdictions, is in a significant position to take on the national challenge of advancing the child protection agenda across Australia...

The committee has therefore recommended the establishment of a national commissioner for children and young people to drive a national reform agenda for child protection.

The committee had commenced this inquiry exactly two years ago and this was the outcome. What happened to Recommendation 6? Should I have been saving out of my pensioner’s budget to pay for a large phone bill if I started calling all over the country trying to get to the bottom of this? Even Senator Knowles had quieted down in his bold words of justice through rightful compensation. He actually became invisible. He did a complete turnaround when he said:

These people (care leavers) need some closure, and I would certainly hope that these reports can give them closure in some small way. We would not expect that some book can write off the wrongs that have been perpetrated against these people over many years, but we can hope that their courage in coming forward has somehow been sufficient to insure that those who follow them are not going to suffer in the way in which they have.
If I’m to look at my situation with the government, I’m as disgusted as always. They’ve gone against their word again. But this time through all of my searching for the answer I keep looking for, I read something pretty disturbing that I can’t get out of my head.

The Forgotten Australian Senate Report admitted that even today in the “best interests of the child” within State child protective services, children rarely have a proper voice. That’s not the worst of it. Currently in Australia, there are eight different systems and over 200 pieces of legislation dealing with children’s interests across the states, territories and Commonwealth, many of which are conflicting and outdated.

One afternoon I was waiting for the footy game to start and I flipped the channel accidentally to a Parliament session. I couldn’t stand watching it for more than a couple of minutes after what I had been through.

As a laugh, I saw myself as the new Commissioner for Children. Could you see it now? I would start by making all the greedy government ‘suits’ scrub floors and eat ‘pigweed’ long enough to get the message. I bet this kind of an official directive would get the ‘conflicting and
outdated children’s laws’ changed and implemented properly before you could say, “Yes Minister.”

The year had passed quickly as I was preparing for my trip to the United States for the first time. This particular morning I accidentally rang a phone number that happened to be SOLICITOR NUMBER 9. I thought I had dialed one of my mates to get up him over a footy game that his favorite team had lost; instead the voice on the other end was my solicitor D.D.

I recognized his voice immediately so I switched into gear, “Oh Mr. D., How are you going with my case?” Taken a bit off guard he replied, “We’re still looking at it David.” I said, “Well I haven’t heard from you in twelve months. I thought you would’ve done something about it by now!” He put me off, “I’ll get back to you within a couple of weeks.”

I waited for a month before I rang him up again. He would not come to the phone. His secretary informed me that they had done all they could do. She said, “Because of the Statute of Limitations we find that we are not able to go any further with the case.’ It was the old cry as she said “We’ll send your documents back to you.”
I got a call from the print shop the next morning. The man said, “Your 50-page petition to the United Nations is ready to be picked up. The binding looks good.” He was right. I thought, “It looks more than good, it looks beautiful!” My opening submission was kept to three pages. This was a miracle in itself.

13th June 2001
The Human Rights Committee
Centre for Human Rights
United Nations Office
8-14 Avenue de la Paix 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Submitted for consideration under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

I. Information concerning the author of the communication

Name: Owen First Name: David
Nationality: Australian Occupation: Aged Pensioner
Date and Place of Birth: 21st July, 1938, Cairnes QLD Australia
Present Address: 25 O’Hara Street, Maryville NSW Australia 2293

I am submitting the communication as a victim of the violations set forth:

II. Information concerning the alleged victim if other than the author

Does not apply.

III. State concerned articles, violated/domestic remedies

Australia in the State of Queensland
Articles violated: Briefly the facts of this submission are as follows:

ARTICLE THREE: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. This was violated by taking me as a baby from my mother and my maternal grandparents without due regard for my safety and well being and placing me into an orphanage where I was referred to as an ‘inmate’ where I suffered gross abuse over 14 years. In particular I have complaint with the Queensland Government who had a duty of care to ensure my well-being and failed to do so.

ARTICLE FIVE: Torture is forbidden at all times and no one should suffer treatment or punishment that makes them feel less than human. These breaches occurred over many years as a child at the orphanage, some of which are recorded in folio 1, these were sustained and degenerative in nature.

ARTICLE SEVEN: You have the right to be treated by law in the same way as everyone else. The breach of this article has occurred in two ways; firstly at the time of my being made a ward of the State and secondly the way in which my claim has been treated since I have more recently made a claim against the government. Folio 4 gives some account of that as does folio 5.

In particular the Queensland Government failed in their fiduciary care from 1938 to 1952 and further they would remain liable for the acts of omissions of their servants and or agents (i.e. orphanage) to who duties of care and supervision of me was delegated, pursuant to the provisions of the Life Protection Act. The Queensland Government were bound by the State Children’s Act (1911-1955) and that in particular the Queensland Government had a clear duty to:

a) set a reasonable standard for the conduct of an orphanage;

b) ensure that the standard referred to in paragraph 2(a)-(d) was complied with by the Sisters of Mercy;

c) ensure that the standard referred to in paragraph 3(a)-(e) was compiled with;

d) supervise compliance by the Sisters of Mercy with such a standard;

e) set a reasonable standard for the qualifications and conduct of the persons who worked at the orphanage;
f) supervise compliance with such standard;

g) devise and put into effect a system of auditing the standard of conduct of the orphanage;

h) devise and put into effect a system of auditing the standard of qualifications and conduct of the persons who worked at the orphanage.

The Queensland Government at the time were quite aware of their responsibility or fiduciary care (Specifically naming me- see folio 2) and in fact used the Infant Life Protection Act to take me away from my foster parents (simple because they lived in a defacto relationship) and placed me in the care of the Sisters of mercy Orphanage at Neerkol. However in so doing they then failed to ensure that I was in a safe place and that my best interests were served by that placement.

The facts are that they did not try and re-unite me with my birth family, instead they put me in a place where I was maltreated, impoverished and in that way clearly failed in their fiduciary care.

My rights have also been rejected or at least ignored by the Queensland Government. In more recent years. While I have since made a claim I had been unable to obtain any legal assistance or aid, folio 4 again outlines some of the difficulties I have encountered. This had the effect of denying me access to justice. See letter folio 3. I specifically refer to the United Nations “Optional; Protocol” and regard I comply with Article 2 and submit this for consideration. A letter seeking assistance from the Government is included here folio5, to which I have again had no reply.

ARTICLE 8: If your rights under the law are violated by someone else, you have the right to see justice done. Not only were my rights violated but this was accepted by virtue of the findings of the Queensland Government Enquiry, i.e. the Forde Commission. Yet the Government failed to fully act on its recommendations, especially in relation to suitable restitution. In addition the Catholic Church has along with the Queensland Government made a formal written apology (see folio 8). However unlike the German Government and the Japanese Governments have in just recent times (to POWs), the Queensland Government have not offered any restitution. There can be no true apology.
without compensation that is commensurate with the gross acts of torture and humiliation that the victims suffered.

ARTICLE 25: Everyone has the right to a decent life, including enough food, clothing, housing, medical care and social services. This fundamental right was abused and discarded during my detention at the Neerkol orphanage and is evidenced, not just through my own record see folio 1, but also clearly recorded in the findings of the Forde Inquiry report and in a book, “Orphans of the Empire,” by Alan Gill.

Having exhausted all domestic remedies I now submit this communication. My most recent submission and request for assistance by the Queen of Australia, via the State Governor General were rejected, as indicated in folio 7 attached.

IV. OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROCEDURES

This submission had not been submitted elsewhere outside of Australia. I would submit that had my complaint been made in some other state of Australia, eg New South Wales, or Federally, I am sure I would have been provided aid and access to the judicial system in order to make my claim and seek damages. There are numerous cases like mine in other parts of Australia where victims have been not just given leave to apply outside of the statute of limitations, but also been successful in making a claim for compensation. The Queensland Government have been obstinate and rebutted any attempt by claimants. Queensland is a state and part of a federation of Australian States as such is a party to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Australia became a party to the International Covenant on Civil Rights on 13th August 1990 and acceded to the optional Protocol on 25th September 1991. My complaint against the Sisters of Mercy and the Queensland Government was made after 1993, when I became aware of my illness and my right to make a complaint.

V. FACTS OF THE CLAIM

The facts of this claim are attached see folio 1. The question as to whether I was maltreated of course is no longer contested. The Forde Commission in Australia found that mistreatment at Neerkol where I was an inmate for 14 years was widespread, cruel and for which the State and the Sisters of Mercy apologized. The Forde Commission also found that the appropriate checks and balances were not in
place in Neerkol that led to many including myself being mistreated. The government in this way failed in their fiduciary care.

In response to the Sisters of Mercy have since accepted this and paid some compensation to others. I was not a party to this, nor will I be, my complaint was and remains with the Queensland Government and specifically their failure to provide fiduciary (trusted) care. The Government has rejected any claim based on the statute of limitations has thwarted every step of this complaint. I submit this claim on the understanding that this Declaration if Human Rights was signed by Australia in 1948, when I was a child of 10 years. I regard that even if the Government was not bound by such a covenant prior to that, then they were from that date onwards when I continued to be a victim of gross cruelty, deprivation and rape. I therefore see justice from the Queensland Government. As I have repeated in this document several times, this is not a question of whether this abuse and consequently the Articles of human Rights were violate. This is simply about a Government who tenaciously clings to the statute of limitations by way of protecting itself from litigation and in so doing denies me justice not only by way of fair and reasonable access to the judicial process but also by way of financial compensation.

Sincerely,

David Robert Owen

I was beginning to agree with the saying, “It’s all about the journey, not where you get to at the end,” as I couldn’t believe where my life was leading me lately. Over the next few months I was pretty excited about my trip overseas. So when I went to see my psychologist that week I would be taken back by his news. He said, “Dave, you’re not going to believe this one. Do you remember when you asked me a while back if I would call the United Nations Human Rights Office for you to find out what, if anything, was
happening with your case?” This didn’t sound good. I said, “Aw yeah...what did they say?” He said, “They told me that they couldn’t find your file.”

Well, I didn’t have such good news for Roger either, as I handed over the letter I had just received from Aftercare Resource Centre ARC. It was informing me that they would only issue five final counseling sessions. That I should be healed sufficiently by now and hopefully my sessions had been beneficial.

Mr. M. from legal aid had called the house wanting to know what I was going to do next with my case. I said, “For now nothing. I’m going to America to write my book. Maybe this will change my luck.” He wished me well as he hung up.

For the life of me I could not understand why it was so hard to find a good solicitor with a bit of guts to front the courts in Queensland. If they would have only taken the time to scratch beneath the surface of the case with me, as I had done the hardest part of the work way back in the 1940s by actually surviving the torture out in the bush at Neerkol. They couldn’t have had a better witness. Now that I knew the Statute of Limitations could be lifted providing you can put up an argument of fraud, deceit and concealment, I was back on a positive note. My case was now
sitting in Geneva with the United Nations Human Rights Committee (admittedly misplaced at the time) and I was actually on my way to the other side of the world where I was going to begin writing a book about my traumatic life story. Hopefully it would come from a much gentler point of view as I would be telling it from the sunny beaches of Florida.
I was off to the United States with a different outlook on my life. It was not about whether anyone believed me anymore, it was about whether I believed them! The Government had let me down over and over - and over again. I still had such fond memories of the Yanks protecting us out at Neerkol back in 1944. They were our heroes. I thought, “Fair Dinkum, I’m going to America to see if I can find those feelings of happiness and freedom that the soldiers left behind for me as a boy without hope.” If I looked too far ahead about where I was going it would make me giddy. So I volunteered to plant trees and landscape around the park in the neighborhood.

I finally received the call from my author. She would be coming to the Gold Coast on some other business and wanted me to meet her. She would fly into Brisbane and I offered to make the arrangements to pick her up at the airport. When I hung up the phone, I froze. Honestly, I thought my heart had stopped beating. This was getting too real for me to believe. It was the closest thing to a ‘real’ surprise that I had ever experienced in my entire life. After she concluded her meetings, she had arranged for us to travel
back to the U.S. together. I would have an escort on my first overseas flight.

I got to the Brisbane airport in plenty of time, found a place to sit outside of Australian customs and waited nervously. As the passengers began pouring out, I spotted her directly as I had seen a photo. She also knew what I looked like as she had been working with my story for quite some time now. She walked straight through the crowd and towards me. She had been traveling from Florida and was a little disoriented from an unexpected stopover in New Zealand. So when she reached over and gave me a big hug, I decided to welcome her with a bit of Australian larrikinism. I said, “I’m sorry, but I’m not the bloke you’re looking for…he is!” I pointed over to a scruffy, bearded man who was standing next to me. Well she seemed rather embarrassed and apologized. She turned to the rough-looking old man, put her arms around him, gave him a hug and said, “Hello David! I’m Jody.” By now the joke was out as I was laughing while the toothless grin of the old guy gave it away for sure. We all had a good laugh about it. From then on the author and I would become inseparable as we had lots to talk about.
It was a long flight back to the United States but wonderful. The tucker was nice and the seats were comfortable enough with Qantas. It wasn’t too long however before Jody and I had our first ‘debate.’ It would be over a suggestion I had followed from one of my friends at the Baptist Church who had done some overseas traveling and insisted I strap a money pouch underneath my clothes to keep my money and passport safe. Well, it seemed like a good idea, but in the end it would be nothing more than a nuisance every time we had to front another airline security queue. I wasn’t comfortable to take heed at the author’s suggestion of making the passport more accessible and putting it inside her zippered purse along with her passport. I was afraid to do this as I thought, “What happens if we get separated in the airport?” Well the whole episode of the hidden money pouch would become a shocking, but hilarious scene, after we went through the security checkpoint at Los Angeles International (LAX).

The fourteen hour flight was easy as I said, it was the transfer at LAX that was tiresome. It made both of us a little cranky. Every time we were stopped and I had to show my passport, I would hold everyone up while I slowly unbuttoned my shirt and dug underneath my singlet for the
hidden pouch. It was the first time I would see Jody growl at me. But we got through it, as she was just overtired and understood it was my first time going through such tight security. Finally we hit the security x-ray checkpoint. She went through with no problems. I followed after and as soon as I hit the walk-through all kinds of bells and whistles went off! I thought, “Glory be! What have I done?” Looking around for my author I thought, “Would they throw me in jail before I even got to Miami?” Thank got I was so tired that I really didn’t get too upset. I looked over to the side and saw Jody sitting on a chair watching me as the guard had me standing on a security mat spread eagle and asking me to take bits of clothing off. I tried to concentrate on what he was saying but by now you could hear hysterical laughter coming from my author on the sidelines. She was that overtired and couldn’t control her laughter as she watched me strip all the way down to where I was standing in full view for everyone to see, completely exposing my ‘secret money pouch.’ I looked around at everyone staring and I had to laugh myself.

I was finally cleared by security and was putting my clothes back on when I heard security warning my author that she was filming and it was a federal offence. They
could have taken her and the camera away right there but I
guess they thought we had come through enough already and
let us go. What a funny memory this would eventually
become. After all of the aggravation, the same security
guard walked us to the next exit and with a big smile said,
“Now you have a good stay mate!”

The next flight on American Airlines took me across the
United States to Fort Lauderdale. It was daytime so I got
to see just how big the United States really was as I flew
from coast to coast. You could say I was on a magic carpet
ride as when the plane started its descent to Fort
Lauderdale International Airport (FLL), the pilot’s voice
came over the loudspeaker. He announced the usual greeting
with time and temperature, but I was nearly knocked out of
my seat when he added, “And the crew would like to welcome
Australian David Owen, on his first trip to the United
States and wish him a wonderful stay.” As if it had been
planned the entire plane clapped and cheered for me.
Walking to the baggage claim, people were patting me on the
back saying, “Welcome mate!”

As if this wasn’t enough when I arrived at the baggage area
the author had arranged for a Florida greeting party. I
walked into a welcoming committee of some lovely ladies
waving an Australian flag from Sister Cities International of Fort Lauderdale. They would become my U.S. guardian angels. I never had so many women hug and kiss me at the same time. From that day on I just kept saying, “Pinch me I must be dreaming.”

South Florida is a world on to itself with so many Spanish people from Latin America and the Caribbean islands. Not too many Australians lived there, so I would have a lot to get acquainted with. The main thing however was getting settled in my author’s condo and begin our work. It took a few days to get ourselves on track with the time difference. The thing that seemed the strangest to me was how friendly the people were everywhere I went.

After a couple of days before getting stuck into the interviews we turned on the television to get the news, Hurricane Charlie was coming our way! Well I had been through cyclones back in Australia, but I would see this as a far different experience. I was hoping that this bad weather report was not going to be a sign of what would happen when we began to write the book! We were lucky in that it made a turn before it hit the coast and devastated a part of Florida further north.
The author had a peaceful set-up for our daily interview sessions. We worked out on a lovely sunny enclosed balcony that overlooked a swimming pool surrounded with palm trees. Being the good houseguest, I would not be able to refuse her offer to go down to the pool first thing in the morning for a swim before we began the workday. It was the first time in years that I forced myself to wear a pair of swimming togs and expose my lily-white legs to the world. When the neighbors down at the pool saw how pale I was I was bombarded with sunscreen. Of course I kept my baldy head under a baseball cap as I didn’t want to scorch myself. The sun was hotter than being on the Great Barrier Reef in the dead of summer.

One morning as we splashed around the shallow end of the pool, I had a most interesting conversation. I was telling this elderly Jewish lady wearing a big floppy swimming hat about how I had come from an orphanage called Neerkol in the bush of Australia and just how terribly I had been treated as a child. She moved closer in to me and said, “How terrible that you were tortured as an orphan child in Australia. I’m sorry to hear that, but you have no idea what torture is really like until you have survived a death camp like Auschwitz where I came from.” This would be a
first time experience of comparing places of torture in different parts of the world, Nazi internment camps and Queensland Institutions. Thank God the time was cut short as my author had a few things for us to do before we had our next session. In the end I said, “Well, God bless you madam. It isn’t about which place was worse. It’s about the rights that were taken away from both of us. How nice that we met in such a different surrounding.”

After going through such a gut-wrenching conversation about victims, I went back up to the condo and got ready to talk about the cruel things I hadn’t discussed for years. I felt I had made the right choice sharing my soul with this American lady. She was kind and knew how to get it out of me without stopping when we reached the hard stuff. She would put on some soothing music and we would take an iced-tea break while shedding a tear before getting right back into it. I felt safe and we were making some interesting progress. I kept in touch with my psychologist back home to let him know that I was feeling the painful things from long ago but that I was also feeling a new sense of joy over it all.

My author thought that it would be a good experience for both of us to put me in front of an audience to tell my
story. She had arranged two different speaking engagements: a Rotary International Luncheon and a Graduate class at the University of Miami. I had spoken in front of a few groups back in Australia and wasn’t too concerned over it. The last time I spoke to a Catholic group of educators and there wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

I was invited to tour the UM campus with Professor Steve Stein who couldn’t have been more accommodating. He brought me inside the world of ‘education’ and made me feel welcome in his classes, as I felt embarrassed over my own illiteracy. He showed me that a man can be smart yet humble.

It was quite a different experience when I spoke to Rotary International. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. My author thought it best to put together a slide presentation so as to keep me focused and on track of the time. Well when we arrived the projector was not available and I would have to wing it. The Rotary was more than gracious, however when I looked out into the dining room all I saw was a room full of ‘suits.’ I could not seem to gain my voice or composure. I was lost. Things just got a whole lot worse when I found myself telling the story about Father Anderson holding me over a bridge and making me
perform oral sex on him, while my audience was trying to have dessert and coffee. It was all a blur after that. I just remember a line of blokes shaking my hand and thanking me for sharing my story as the rest of the room cleared out in a big hurry. On the drive back to the condo my author and I decided that we needed to reformulate our strategy on when I would exactly get up to speak, and more importantly, about what.

One morning we took a lovely drive along the ocean to West Palm Beach. We were to meet with a friend of Jody’s who happened to be a solicitor, but now in the U.S. I would learn the word, ‘attorney.’ I thought it would be interesting to see if there was much of a difference from one country to another. The only difference I found was that Attorney David Beckett would be a compassionate man who knew the law backwards and forwards, but when he wasn’t sure about something, he wouldn’t just give any answer off the top of his head. He would find the truth first. He was my first American bloke who wore a suit, and was still right by me.

We had just gone through another hurricane scare, when two weeks later the news flash came over the television. We would have to prepare for Hurricane #2 Frances that was
heading straight for us once again. I had the chance to see just how Americans panic when disaster was looming when we went to the grocery store to pick up the Hurricane supplies of water, candles and canned goods. It was mayhem! I was now going on two hurricanes in less than one month.

Before they shut down the University for safety precautions I was scheduled to meet with Professor Steinfatt and speak in front of his graduate class. I never got the chance to speak as the class was cancelled until the storm moved in a different direction and the school was reopened. The students had lost quite a bit of class time already so I was pleased that Dr. Steinfatt found a way to fit me in so that I would still have the chance to tell my story. I owe a great deal to Dr. Steinfatt for his insight and humour. He not only gave me the platform with a much younger audience, but he helped me develop my speaking skills. I never took the management’s advice of going back to school and being retrained when I lost my job as Hardhat Dave. But now after all of those years a well-respected faculty member from the University of Miami School of Communications was tutoring this illiterate old bloke from Newcastle. Imagine that!
My first opportunity of speaking to a group of college students was a good experience. I was much more relaxed with the informal setting of a smaller classroom where I could dress casually and see them all eye to eye. Once I got comfortable, I didn’t want to stop talking. When the class was over the time limit, my author kept giving me the signal to pack it up. I wasn’t taking any notice of her. I just kept going on as they all seemed interested in what I was saying. I went overtime by about 30 minutes before I had to respond to my first negative comment coming from a male student sitting in the back of the class. He was upset that I had kept the class overtime and wanted to get out. But before doing so he felt the need to give me a piece of his mind. Bordering on spiteful he said, “I’m sorry if this offends you, but why do you think that your story is any different than anyone else who has gone through sexual abuse? My neighbor has gone through the same thing. And we read about it every day in the newspaper. It isn’t something that we all want to hear about.” He grabbed his books and left. Everyone else in the class looked shocked and disgusted over what he had just said. They all came up and gave me a hug. I left the campus wondering how I could make him understand my reasoning. Back at the condo that
night I pulled out a sheet of paper and wrote out this explanation:

David Owen

On the 14/8/2004, A question was asked off me,
Why would my Story be any different,
To any one else’s Sex abused story?
All I can say is that I am no different to any other child
That have been Sexually abused.
But I also asked myself how many children went
Through what I went through, After they were Sexually Abuse

1) To be flogged over a period of about 3 years when each time
   it took place, when I told the nuns.

2) To be humiliated in front of other children, by
   standing on a table in front of every boy, with
   my dirty shirt over my head, After I dirted my bead.

3) Not to have any breakfast each morning I dirted the bead.

4) note to be alode to have aneey tea that night,
   because I dirted the bead.

5) Becase of beung hungry, I ate pig wede and Hightbicksus
   buds.

6) Note alode to go to show, and seaside at Christmas times
   becos off the Abused.

7) Getting emty box four Cristmass, bedcos I told the nuns
   about the Abused of Father Anderson.

8) Been brought in front of the entire school, and put,
   over a table, and a man brout up from the yard, and flog
   with a stock whip and till you ped your self, ore you
   were semy consuch.

9) To be held over a bridge and pretend with death, iff
   I told any one about it. And haiden under, flour bords
   so vistors could not sea how brused I was.
10) To be made to were dipers win I was 13 1/2, and also win I went out to work on a Dary Farm because of the Damage wate was don to me.

11) Not to be able to hug and cudle my sisters, wile bringing them up.

12) Not to be able to have a sexual relasion ship.

13) Not to be able to get maredy.

14) And at 66 years old not to have a femail friend, and to be lonely it reilly hurts. All becose off the Abused.

15) All becorse this one child had been abused,

16) No I don’t say I am any difring to any other child that has been abused, I under stand wate they went through mentley, and how hard it is four children that were abused but we are all individals, and it affect each individal more than other.

17) Wither my Story is difent to other that is four you and the people to Judge not me.

18) All I can do is to be truful and honest. When I tell my story.

19) The Story is not about running Bishofs or nuns ore prests down, There are good people in church, There are good prests and good nuns and good bishofs.

20) I hope my Story can help to bring people forward that have been abused, And iff I can help just one small child from beene Abused, The Story hase servd a purperse.

David Robert Owen

My author thought it a good idea that my reply was sent to every student in the class including the bitter young man. I never heard back from him.

Not everyone had the same reaction thank God. I have always told myself from the beginning, “If I only touch the heart
of one person with my story, I have achieved something.” So when I received a card from one of the other students in that same class. The front of the card said: I BELIEVE IN YOU. I shed a tear as I read on:

8/9/04
Dear David,
Hello my name is Marie. I do not know if you remember me I have dark hair and glasses. I just wanted to let you know that your story touched my heart… The fact that you are willing to share your story to help another is something truly beautiful. You are going to come across people who are negative and are going to say bad things to you. Do not let them get the best of you. You are a special soul. Just keep on your journey. Best of luck with everything. Don’t ever stop what you are doing. Best Wishes. Anne Marie.

I treasure those words to this day, as it is this kind of a connection that keeps me moving forward to try to help others. This particular classroom experience was a good lesson for me, as I continued my journey of trying to make a difference. I would have a rough road ahead in eliminating people’s negative attitudes when dealing with the serious issue of child abuse no matter where I happened to be. I was learning all too quickly about the same backwards behaviour when it came to protecting (or the lack of protecting) underprivileged children in the United States. It was no different than back home in Australia. It was just one more eye-opener.
The two months went quickly. I had gotten pretty good at speaking in front of college classrooms and lecture halls. The response was always a very positive one. The hurricane season wasn’t over in Florida and we got hit with yet another Hurricane Ivan #3. I was becoming a pro at taping up windows and filling the bathtub with water. We would be stuck inside for the major blow in fear of what might happen and then the weatherman would give another, “All clear.”

I was beginning to get the hang of living in Florida when the time was drawing to a close. My author and I had completed 50 hours of interview on videotape. She would have more than enough information to begin the work of transcribing it all. I was not envying her one bit as we had gone through some rather painful sessions with a lot of sadness and tears. I did feel lighter after going through it all. Sometimes the mood of the interrogation room was heavy, but we realized it was more due to the crazy weather conditions we were surrounded by, as we braced ourselves for yet one more hurricane on its way, Hurricane Jeanne #4. After the final storm hit us and was reduced down to a level 2, we went up to the beach to see the damage. I couldn’t resist taking home the t-shirt that joked about
the whole situation. It read: “I survived all 4 hurricanes on my Florida holiday! CHARLIE, FRANCES, IVAN and JEANNE”

As we were on the last weekend before I was to fly back to Australia, my author decided that we needed to have one last bit of fun where I could see a bit more of the state. We jumped in a convertible and headed down to the Florida Keys. Our destination would be the Sunset Celebration on the Pier of Key West. It was the last stop in the United States before you could see Cuba. It was a fantastic idea to drive the famous Seven-Mile Bridge as the weather was perfect. There was nothing but blue skies and glistening water all the way down. On the island we passed the U.S. Naval Air Base where two sailors stood guard out front. Like the little boy back at Neerkol, I found myself waving and shouting, “Good on ya’ mate!” as we drove by.

Key West was wild! It reminded me of Kings Cross in Sydney back in the 60s and 70s. The streets were filled with every kind of person of the human race imaginable. We pulled up to a small hotel that had two vacancies. After we checked in and changed, we were off to enjoy my last weekend in Florida. We walked out the front door of the hotel and down the path to the sidewalk. Lo and behold straight ahead was
a beautiful hibiscus tree in full bloom. The flowers looked like the ones back at the orphanage. It seemed to be put in our path for a reason. Jody and I walked over to the tree and I plucked a hibiscus bud off of a branch. Handing it to her, I said, “Here, this is the Hibiscus bud I’ve been telling you about. These are what I ate a lot of back at Neerkol to keep me from starving.” She chewed the bud and swallowed it. She said, “You know David, in certain upscale restaurants this would be a gourmet dish on the menu.” I thought, “How strange…”

Well, we were off to have some fun. We called for a taxi and went to the most delightful restaurant overlooking Duval Street. As people strolled past and I couldn’t believe that I was having what most consider a normal night out. It was a first for me and I cherished it. I ordered the thickest steak on the menu. W ordered a glass of wine for a toast. My author piped up, “Well D.O. they say that ‘living well is the best revenge.’” As we clinked our glasses together she said, “So here’s to your story being told!” As the waiter put the thick, juicy steak down in front of me Jody finished her toast, “And here’s NOT to the bloody nuns from Neerkol!” Well, I’ve never enjoyed a
meal as much. My orphan mentality had been removed for the night. Fair dinkum, I was normal and having fun.

I must admit that I don’t feel like I am very appealing to the opposite sex. Perhaps this is because I have been so closed down after what happened to me with Father Anderson. Whatever the reason, it makes my Key West horror story even more hilarious.

On the way back to the taxi stand we passed an all-night souvenir gift shop. Jody wanted to look inside. I followed her enjoying the atmosphere. She was wandering down one aisle when I found myself in a most unusual situation, when this attractive woman in her fifties came up from behind me, threw her arms around me and planted a big kiss on my neck. I thought, “What in the hell is going on?” I really had no idea what to do about this. My reaction was panic! I politely called over to my author for help. By this time the woman had moved around to the front of me while keeping me in her clutches, but now had wrapped one of her legs around me all the while saying, “Let’s do it here! Let’s do it here!” My stomach was up in my throat I was that shocked and embarrassed. I said to the lady, “Excuse me madam, but I think you must have me mistaken for someone else?” I was
frantically looking around for my author but she was nowhere to be found.

The woman continued holding me closely as she looked into my eyes and said, “Oh no, you’re the man I’m looking for. C’mon you don’t need permission from anyone to come home with me. You’re a big boy! I will warn you that my last husband died while we were having sex and I was on top of him. But you look healthy enough!” By now Jody had stopped laughing and could see I needed help. She walked up to us and grabbed my arm dragging me out of the shop and acting like a jealous girlfriend to ward off any more advances from the woman. When we got a few blocks away and the coast was clear we stopped for a coffee. Well Jody started laughing all over again. She said, “Well D.O. once again you’re proving things to yourself that you had never believed before on this trip to America. You’re not as unattractive to women as you think you are. There’s hope for you yet!” Even I had to laugh over this one.

The drive back over the water was breathtaking. We would have just enough time to make it to the University of Miami for my last speaking engagement with a sorority of young women who supported the cause of children’s rights. As we got to the University just in time the parking lot was
packed with cars. I thought, “Glory be, could all these people have come to hear me speak?” Well I was only that much more delighted when I found out that I had been a speaker at the University on the same night as the Dalai Lama.

After I told my story, the sorority girls all lined up to thank me and wish me a safe journey back home. It was like being surrounded by the entire cheerleading squad of the Broncos. Of course I asked for a photo to be taken so as I could brag to the mates back home. My flight would head out the next afternoon out of Fort Lauderdale.

The morning flew by as we tied up all the last minute details before getting me to the airport. Things were going so smoothly when my author thought she would make one final request on my behalf. She said, “You know D.O., you’ve come such a long way in your spiritual development while you’ve been here. I wondered if you wouldn’t mind stopping off with me on the way to the airport. I want you to see St. Bernard de Clairvaux, it’s this ancient Spanish Monastery down the road. Seeing as that she had done so much for me I wasn’t going to let her down. So I agreed to stop in with her and have a look. What she hadn’t realized is that I
hadn’t been back in a church since mum’s eulogy and had no intention of doing so.

When we got to the monastery the prayer gardens out in front were in bloom. We walked around the garden path as she took a farewell video of me. As we walked further and found ourselves in front of the chapel, I thought I would be strong enough to walk in and look around. I stepped inside to a dark and dank memory of the church. The smells of a strong incense wafted through the air and I got sick to my stomach as I looked up at the Stations of the Cross along the inner walls. It was all way too much. I had to get the hell out of there. My author followed me back to the car. It was the first time I ever exploded in front of her. I said, “Why in the bloody hell did you bring me here? My stomach and head are aching from it all.” She couldn’t stop apologizing as we drove to the airport. By the time we got checked in I was back to a sensible frame of mind and had forgiven her as I knew she did not mean to harm me in any way.

We said goodbye and I would have a lot to figure out on the long flight home. By the time I had crossed the international dateline I was thinking about how stopping off at the monastery had actually been a blessing in
disguise, as I had fronted my worst fear and gotten through it. I would call my author up when I got back home and tell her about my awakening. I would begin a new way of looking at life, working with the possibilities of trust, respect and open faith. The flight seemed a lot longer going back home. When I arrived in Sydney, my family greeted me. It was so good to see Margaret, Noi and little Nathan. They took me back home to O’Hara Street. I sat in the lounge in my familiar surroundings, but a much different man. I would need to find out how I was different and in what ways?

How strange to unpack my port as it was only filled with souvenirs and summer clothes. Every other time I unpacked, it had been filled with those bloody documents. But they remained back in the U.S. with my author. It might sound like a cliché, but honestly, “The weight of the world had been taken off of my back.” It was strange!

The first morning home I woke up and there was no swimming pool outside my window. Instead I opened the front door to a verandah and heard heaps of birds making all their different sounds, peewees, magpies, parrots, topnotch pigeons and willie wag tails in the trees around the house. It was as if they were welcoming me home. I noticed the mangoes needed tending out in the back yard. I sat out on
the porch in the sunshine having a good strong cuppa. People were pushing baby carriages and walking their dogs as usual along the creek path saying, "G’Day." I was coming back down to earth remembering my days in Florida. I said to myself, “What next?”
In my late sixties, I’m now reading things that I never imagined I would be able to understand. It takes me a long time to string the words together to make sense out of it all, but in the end I get the message. I still prefer to look at sports scores, but I will pick up the odd book at times. By having a look at other people’s stories, a bloke can hold on to his sanity through all of the madness. History does seem to repeat itself. I found these words from Charles Dickens that have helped me to finish the book:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, Or whether that station will be held by anybody else, These pages must show.

- Charles Dickens, David Copperfield

Charles Dickens’ encouragement means a great deal to me every time I hear, “What a remarkable and tragic life story!” As this is as far as it goes and no further action is ever taken. In telling my tale, however raw it might be, it is my truth and I finally do become ‘the hero of my own life.’ As I look up to the heavens and appreciate each new day that is put in front of me, I’m at peace. You’ve got to live your best in truth and honesty until your numbers up.
I smile when remembering a little poem I would recite back at the orphanage:

Time stops for no man
Tick the clock says
Tick, tick, tick
What you have to do
Do quick
Time is flying fast away
Let us act and act today
If you work you will get
Do it now and do not fret
That alone is hearty fun
Which comes after work is done.

What else can I do? With my financial limitations, I can only try to help others with talking about my own experiences of what a victim goes through. I say to all, “If you were abused sexually, mentally, physically or emotionally, have the ‘will’ to come forward and put it out there. Shout out, because you have that right under the law!”

To the Government I say, “As long as Church and State remain so close together it is useless for any victim out there to waste their energy looking for the justice that they deserve.” I would add, “Because of the widespread abuse of children today, you must act quickly in the
protection of the children through education. Knowledge is the best weapon against pedophiles and abusers and as it stands today the educational system is still very much a part of Government’s responsibility.”

As for the Catholic Church, I have never held them responsible for my sexual abuse with Father Anderson or the physical and mental abuse by the nuns. I realize that they were very evil people hiding behind the cloth. My complaint will always remain with the State, which has never seen fit to make proper restitutions to its victims.

I have nothing but respect for the Sisters of Mercy today. I give them a lot of credit for admitting the suffering that came out of that horrible institution Neerkol, and making financial restitution to a number of ex-residents. I do not blame them; in fact we are still in contact. They still call to ask if there is anything they can do for me. They are wonderful people who really care and boost my confidence in God when I’m feeling down. As for the Neerkol property itself, it was sold to a power company a few years back and the proceeds went towards helping the victims. At least this was a bit of justice as all of the priests and nuns who had done the worst damage were dead, and the evil spirits we all knew needed to be put to rest.
Of course the Government took the usual way out, it constructed a monument with part of the Forde Foundation funds, which was approved by another government committee. Better it went to their egos, in building yet another government statue, than to the Neerkol victims who would have benefited more in receiving the monies to use accordingly. But for the record, the memorial was opened by Mrs. Leneen Forde AC on 5th August 2003, and is dedicated to the children of Neerkol – St. Joseph’s Orphanage – Home.

The Memorial Plaque reads:

Over 4,000 children passed through these gates between 11 April 1885 when the first 11 children arrived, to its closure on 5 March 1978. It is our wish that in creating this Neerkol Memorial not one baby, little child, young adult or Neerkol worker will ever be forgotten. In our souls today this is a new beginning.

I never made it to their ‘victim ceremony’ as I was too fragile emotionally and spiritually with what I had just been put through at the Forde Inquiry, only to have no follow-up whatsoever to legal redress of compensation with Recommendation 39. Forgive my crude honesty, but by attending such a government big-noting affair it would be nothing more than being forced to bend over once again.

Getting back to my relationship with the Catholic Church, I have found a bit of peace through conversations with the
Bishop of the Diocese of Rockhampton. I admire Bishop Heenan for the man he is. He rings me up every Easter and Christmas, as he knows that they are my saddest periods of the year. Knowing how busy he is during these religious holidays, it means that much more to me deep down inside. I have told him, man to man, about the anger I still have over the sexual abuse I had experienced with Father Anderson. He doesn’t cut me short. Instead he says, “David, the Church is fronting the situation and doesn’t intend to sweep it under the carpet.” He keeps the communication open. We consult with each other about the problems the Church is going through. He reminds me, “I’m in a learning period as well. It’s only by us talking can we come to the middle of the road and begin to understand what Christianity is all about.” I fully agree.

Quite a while ago when the newspapers were full of Neerkol stories, I received a call from a lovely lady called Anne. She rang to let me know she had read my story and wanted me to know just how much she admired my strength when it came to dealing with child abuse. She was so nice to talk to that we struck up a friendship. I found out later that she lived in the mountain town of Stanthorpe where my friend Daphne lived. When I went up for a visit to see Daphne, as
she was having a lot of health problems with her heart, I took a moment out and called Anne. Well she came over and had tea. We had such a good yarn that day, she wanted to know if she could come and pick me up to go to church with her on Sunday. I thought, “No way in the wide world!” This was not my cup of tea, but I didn’t want to let her down. So that Sunday I went into my first Baptist Church.

As we walked up to the front doors I could hear the organ music playing. I didn’t want to go in. Anne gently took my arm and said, “C’mon Dave, you’ve come this far.” I trusted her so in I went. When the first hymn was being sung I was overcome with emotions. But after that I realized that I was actually fine. Thanks to Anne, I had just jumped a big stepping-stone to begin my peace with God. The Baptist congregation felt warm, friendly and sincere to me. It was much different and lighter feeling than what I had experienced in the Catholic Church. The Catholic faith was always heavy to me; it was more about domination, fear of God and the devil. I liked the service that much that when I got back home Anne had found a Baptist church in my neighborhood and I took myself up there the very next Sunday.
I am now a regular at the Islington Baptist Church. It has that same light, sincere and warm feeling with many friendly people. I even have bumped in to a few friends from where I used to work. It is so pleasant and that good for me that it has become my favorite outing every week. I enjoy the last hymn we all sing together so much that I call my time at church my ‘Happy Hour,’” as I find myself humming it all the way home across the park. Whatever little bit of spirituality that’s still inside of me on Sunday is lifted up for the week ahead. Imagine me enjoying church! I can honestly say, “Going to ‘Happy Hour’ gets me back to God.”

I’m as fit as a mully bull except for a bum ankle that’s riddled with arthritis so I keep working it everyday. It’s me training attitude that keeps me going as I take a daily walk up to the shoppes in Hamilton for the things I need. My walk has become somewhat of a social occasion for me. I have that many shop keepers I frequent, who have become friends as well, that I call the route the “Angel Track.”

It begins with a nice stroll around the oval and through the park to the main road. I begin with my first stop at the paper shop and have a go at them for not selling me the winning lotto ticket. “If you’re not in it, you can’t win
it," they tell me. Before I turn the corner, I have to make
faces at the ladies in the Fish Shop as we all back a
different team. It’s here where I get my daily bread and
they give it to me boots and all when my team gets beat. I
try to pick up the pace a bit before I get to the Sandwich
Bar to have a yarn with Cole and Mary over how our teams
went on the weekend. I move on to the lovely gift shop
where I have found some wonderful treasures for special
people in my life and sometimes I put some items on lay
buy. It’s now time to make it over to PINA the Italian
delicatessen where I get my exquisite corned meat. The
ladies are very friendly people. I stop at the Chemist to
say G’Day while I pick up my tablets for my gummy ankle.
From there I drop into the best butcher in town, for me
sausages and eggs. I make one last stop at the fruit stand
and pick up me bananas and spuds. When I feel like a loaded
packhorse, I head home.

Mind you I pass quite a few pubs on my way back, but never
do I feel like stopping in to bury the woes of the world.
Never have, never will. As far as gambling goes I like to
pick a few teams in my neighborhood footy pool and ring
Keghead on Saturday morning to give him a few tips on the
racehorses. Daphne gets her ring once a week on a Friday
where we try to figure out what numbers to pick. I get
calls regularly from my sister in Sydney to say G’day and
check to make sure I’m doing okay.

I still feel like I am gaining insights during my
counseling sessions with my psychologist. We keep working
on my anger and frustration over the government
bureaucracy; and my continued sadness over not being able
to get beyond the trauma of sexual abuse, as I might have
found a female companion to share a life with in my later
years. Well O’Hara Street may not be a king’s mansion, but
with the love and care of neighbors I feel that I am
blessed and wealthy having such good friends and blokes
around me. Yes I am a survivor, but not by hate, by being
kind to my fellow man. Thank God. As far as my petition
that has been sitting in front of the United Nations, there
is still no word. I just keep patiently waiting for a
response. But trust me, I am not holding my breath. It’s
been four years now. I found a copy of the personal note I
had attached to the typed submission to the Human Rights
Committee:

Dear Sir,

Did I come under the United Nations Universal Declaration
of Human Rights. Which was Adopted by, General Assembly in
1948. Which also was the Rights of the Child. The Reason I
asked is that I was brought up in a Institution, and when I
left there they classed me as an Inmate. Where Atrocities happened to me. Where they did not treat, me like a Human Being. And did not treat me with Dignity. And also felt that a lot of times I did not feel Human. An Institution is a prison and a prison is an Institution. And Inmate is a prisoner. and a Prisoner is an Inmate. Nerkoll, orr the Institution, was as bade as a P.O.W. Camp. But Nerkoll was worst because I was only a Child.

Kindest Regards,

D.R. Owen

Everyday my postman David rides up on his bicycle wearing his gear and crash helmet. We usually have a good laugh as he might tell me a funny joke one day, but by the next day give me a bloody pain in neck over his favorite team winning over mine. I never ask him if he has anything important in my stack of mail anymore. I don’t have any more expectations of getting a fair response from the Queensland Government or the United Nations as when I read the headline news it’s all about the problems of today: terrorist attacks, corporate corruption, pharmaceutical malpractice and the odd celebrity drug scandal. I have to face it, in their eyes I am all about history. How disappointing this reality is for me. But as they say in therapy groups, “I’m moving on.”

I try to live in the moment as much as I can now. So when I noticed my beautiful parrots climbing on a branch outside the front door of the verandah, I quickly went inside to
get the few crusts of bread I was saving for them. As they swooped down with their brilliant wings of bright red, blue, green and yellow feathers I realized that they were proof that God does exist and that ‘people of authority’ are not really in control of life.

I remembered mum telling me, “The Lord works in mysterious ways.” I thought, “Fair dinkum God, I guess I just haven’t been able to put it all together yet!”
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

“Stain on the Brain – The Life of David Owen”

Television Series

Seven (7) – One Hour Episodes

Based on “Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

Primary location: Australia

THE STORY

One time bestselling American author, Margaret Atkins (55), discovers she is broke and must produce a new book or lose her Manhattan coop and everything else she owns. Stalling for time, she looks down at the front page of the New York Times and sees a photo of DAVID OWEN (70) with the caption underneath, “Australian Orphanage Survivor David Owen Speaks Out.” She bluffs that she is planning a book on the orphanage abuse scandal rocking Australia and before she can come up with another solution, she is on her way to Australia to interview David Owen, the survivor of a Catholic-run, Government-supported orphanage who suffered two years of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of a priest.
David takes Margaret to various places from his past where she interviews him and he tells her his story: beginning back in 1938 with the rape of 12-year-old Katie by the Chief of Police Badge #3322; growing up in the orphanage and the abuse he experienced; his years as a ranch hand and amateur boxer; his adventures in Rugby League; his run-ins with crooked detectives and prison; his experiences in construction on Bougainville Island among the cannibals; his time as a industrial worker and Union organizer; his miraculous reunion late in life with his mother; and his psychiatric counseling which lead to his eventual testimony before several government commissions and his work as an advocate for survivor’s rights.

By the end, the two realize that a book on David’s life will not remove the pain he has suffered, and that his pursuit of justice will only result in keeping him angry and frustrated the rest of his days. David must put it behind him and move on. He does and settles into a pleasant retirement, finding again that resilience and love of life that got him through all those years. Margaret decides not only to forget about her book, but also her life in America. She decides to remain in Australia where
she has, for the first time in many years, found an honest joy.

**EPISODE BREAKDOWN**

**BASED ON A TRUE STORY**

“Stain on the Brain”

Television Series

Seven (7) – One Hour Episodes

Story By: Jody Jackson with Jim Buess (consult)

Based on “Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

Each episode is opened and closed with the framing story of Margaret (55) and David (70) in the present. His life story is then shown as he recounts his experiences to Margaret.
EPISODE 1 (1938)  “Badge #3322”

Primary location: Carpenteria Downs; Goldmining Kidston, Coastal Cairnes, Queensland

The year David is born to his 12-year-old mother Katie, a victim of rape. How the state takes him away from her and places him in a Catholic orphanage.

EPISODE 2 (1939-1950)  “Dingoes’ Benediction”

Primary location: Central Queensland hinterland/bush

David’s first years at St. Joseph’s Orphanage, Neerkol. The abuse from the Nuns, his attempts at running away, floggings, friendships and loss.

EPISODE 3 (1950-1952)  “Father Anderson’s Boy”

Primary location: Central Queensland hinterland/bush

The two years of sexual abuse David suffered at the hands of Father Anderson.


Primary location; Toowomba and Brisbane, Queensland

David comes of age and leaves the orphanage. His struggles to start a life on his own, ranch work, amateur boxing, and finally discovering Rugby League.

Primary location; Brisbane, Gold Coast, Boggo Road Prison

David’s continuing association with Rugby League, his run-ins with the law and his times in and out of prison.


Primary location: Bouganville Island, off North Queensland, Newcastle Dockyard Port, N.S.W.

David leaves Rugby and starts working as a laborer. His time on Bougainville with the cannibals, his return to Australia where he is reunited with his mother and her abusive husband, and his mother’s eventual insanity and death.

EPISODE 7 (1993-PRESENT)  “To Valley of the Bones”

Primary location: Newcastle, Sydney and Brisbane

David, working with a company psychologist, pursues lawsuits and government investigations of the abuse suffered by him and many others in the Australian Orphanage system, uncovering years of systemic child abuse and institutional cover-ups.
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

“David Owen: Stain on the Brain - The Life of David Owen”

Episode 1 - “Badge #3322” (1938)

Based on “Stain on the Brain - The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson with Jim Buess (consult)

TITLE CARD:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.

David Copperfield – Charles Dickens

A series of shots:

**Water running under a bridge from the POV of hanging over the edge

**A rugby scrum from the POV of the ball

**A couple necking in the back of a car

**A child’s naked bottom being spanked with a yard stick

**A boxer in a ring being beaten bloody

**Shadowy, hooded figures (nuns) moving about in the dark
(PRESENT) DAVID’S HOUSE IN SYDNEY.

DAVID OWEN (70) wakes with a start. His breathing is loud and fast. He is covered in perspiration. The room is dark and all that can be heard is his rapid breathing and the ticking of the alarm clock on the bedside stand. He gets up and starts to make his way out of the room. He stops, turns and rushes to the window. He sticks his head out and wretches violently.

Margaret Atkins’ New York penthouse

The front door is opened by DERRICK MASTERSON (48), Margaret’s personal assistant. He is tall, graying
slightly. He is the personification of “impeccable.” In his case, self-absorption is totally justified. He is very good at what he does; too bad he hates what he does.

ROBERT PENNINGTON (57) Margaret’s Business manager, agent, and only friend, is let in. Robert asks if “She” is in. Derrick says the Mistress of the Blue Horizons is not to be disturbed; she had a horrible experience with an egg at breakfast and has not yet forgiven it. Robert says he has had just about enough of Derrick. Derrick says so has he, but you don’t hear him complaining. Robert storms through the apartment to her Ladyship’s boudoir. The apartment is tastefully over decorated for the Christmas Holidays.

MARGARET’S BEDROOM coop

Robert bursts in on MARGARET ATKINS (55) sitting up in bed making cell-phone calls to shops for deliveries. Margaret is still a very attractive woman, but then, she wouldn’t have it any other way. Thirty years ago she was a hugely successful best-selling romance author; cut from the same cloth as Danielle Steel or Barbara Cartland. She has not had a bestseller in ages. Fifteen years ago she retreated to the seclusion of her Manhattan penthouse, as she just could not abide the world as it was, as opposed to the world as she created it in her books. At that time it was
fashionably eccentric for her to live the way she does, now it is just very sad. Robert tells her she has to listen to him this time. She’s broke. Impossible, she says. Robert comes back that she hasn’t had a best selling novel in twenty years and hasn’t written anything in ten. She argues her reputation is still worldwide. Yes, but you can’t cash a reputation at the bank. Also, to cover her extravagant lifestyle, Robert has had to sell off the royalties to all her past novels. She has no income...only expenses and the creditors are circling. She needs income right away. If she has a book to show her editors, she better do it now. She says she can, as a matter of fact she has a new piece in the works, and not a novel this time...a serious work. (She was always a good liar.) He asks what it is. She hesitates and looks down at the New York Times next to her. There, on the open page, is a story about Australian Orphanage child abuse and a photo of David Owen with a caption, “David Owen Orphanage survivor speaks out.” She says she is planning something on the child abuse scandal rocking Australia...all those orphans, you know. She has still to do research but it’ll be a corker. Three weeks, he tells her. She better have something in three weeks or she’ll have nowhere to live.
Robert leaves. She picks up the paper and looks at the article.

**TAXI TO THE AIRPORT**

Margaret and Derrick in a taxi driving through the snow filled streets of Manhattan, heading to the airport. They pass through an overly holiday decorated downtown, past decked shop windows and even past the skaters and huge tree at Rockefeller Center. Derrick asks why Australia. Because that’s where her next story is. And why this guy; David Owen. What’s he? He’s one of the abused orphans in the article.

**THE AIRPORT**

Margaret and Derrick stand at the Qantas ticket counter. She figures she’ll interview him, promise him a percentage of the sales...net of course...write the book... Derrick finishes her thought...and all your troubles go away? Well, she asks, wouldn’t Derrick like to still have a job? With her? He’d have to think about that. Margaret tells the TICKET AGENT she has reservations for two. The Agent fiddles with the computer retrieving the information. Derrick complains it has been years since he had to fly
coach. Margaret says she chose to fly coach. Derrick says no one chooses to fly coach.

SYDNEY AIRPORT

Bright sunshine. Carols on the airport museum. Margaret steps out of the SYDNEY airport. It is sweltering...and she in her full-length fur. She thinks it’s Christmas, but who turned up the furnace? Derrick hails a cab.

SYDNEY HOTEL

Derrick is unpacking Margaret’s things. He wonders, out loud, if she will be able to manage in just one room. Margaret is on her cell phone thanking the person on the phone for her directions and that she will see them tomorrow.

TAXI THROUGH SYDNEY

The next day, Margaret rides in a taxi with Christmas music on the radio. She asks the CABBIE to turn off the music.

DAVID’S NEIGHBORHOOD

The Taxi drives through an industrial seaport town to a small house, which has seen better days. Margaret looks at the neighborhood and is not impressed. Actually, she’s
slightly scared, but she wouldn’t admit to that. She tells
the Cabbie to wait as she goes to the front door.

DAVID’S HOUSE

She knocks. David opens the door. Margaret isn’t sure
what to say. David just looks at her. There is a very
awkward moment. Finally, Margaret introduces herself and
wishes him Merry Christmas. He turns around and walks back
inside, but leaves the door open. She stands at the door
not sure what to do. Shouting, David asks if she’s going
to stand there all day or come in. Margaret enters and
sees a worn, tired but tidy lounge (living room). There is
not one Christmas decoration. On the mantle above the gas
fireplace is a framed photo of an old woman. It is
conspicuous by the fact that it is the only item on the
mantle. The rest of the room is filled with boxes of
papers and files. They are stacked everywhere. David sits
is a worn strata-lounger eating a sandwich and reading the
racing form. He does not look up. So, he comments, she’s
the Yank author. He says he is not sure he really wants to
go through with this. Margaret says that’s okay, she
understands and will do her best to tell his story the way
he wants it told. Her cell-phone rings. She tells David
to “hold that thought” as she answers the call. She tells
the person on the phone she’ll see them in a little while...yes, with David. David has taken this time to look Margaret over; she is very expensively dressed, especially her shoes. He’s not sure what to make of this and it does not put him at ease. Margaret puts her cell-phone away (into one of those secret pockets women seem to have in their brassieres.) She tells David she’s ready to go. He asks where and she says to meet someone. As they head to the front door she asks David why there is no Christmas tree. He says he does not celebrate Christmas.

TAXI - DRIVING

David and Margaret riding in the same taxi to their meeting. She explains how she will simply let David talk and she will transcribe their conversations into his own words. He says he doesn’t understand why she would have to edit his own words into his own words. He asks where she is taking him. She says to meet someone from his past who might help him with the interviews.

PUB

David and Margaret enter a pub and go into a back booth where a very old woman sits drinking a rose’. This is Mrs. Guinane (92). She looks nothing like her ninety plus
years. She is bright and alert. Margaret says that Mrs. Guinane was mentioned in the article she read and, through her, she found David. A round of drinks is ordered...David having a Coca Cola. Margaret’s cell-phone rings. She excuses herself, gets up and steps away from the table. Mrs. Guinane explains to David that she was a nurse in the hospital where his mother gave birth. She was one of the first people to lay eyes on him. Margaret comes back to the table putting her phone away. She takes out her notebook and says they should get started. Margaret asks David about his mother. David says he doesn’t know where to start. Margaret says to start at the beginning.

(1938) Cattle Ranch, Carpenteria Downs, outside Kidston.

STOCKMEN/JACKAROOS wrangling cattle. A group is branding some. David VO: That’s going back along way, 1937...38... I don’t know much about that time...I was rather young. But I’ve been able to put most of it together from what I’ve been told and what I’ve discovered. TWO STOCKMEN throw down their tools and start throwing punches. They are really going at it. A HAND watching tells one of the Younger hands to go get Wild Billy. The Younger Hand runs to the stable.

STABLE
Inside, a man is saddling his horse. This is BILLY OWEN (35), foreman. He is a man’s man; totally sure of himself and not to be fooled with. The Hand tells Billy “they are at it again.” Billy throws down his saddle and stamps out of the stable.

Cattle Ranch

He storms over to the fighters who now have a small crowd of other Hands around them. He pushes his way through the crowd. One of the Men fighting tells him this is none of his business. Billy socks the guy who mouthed off to him and lays him out. He looks at the other Guy who takes a wild swing. Billy works a combination of three punches and the other one goes down. Billy looks at them and everyone standing watching, and says that everything that happens on this ranch is his business. He heads back to the stable.

An old truck clatters past and heads off down a dusty road.

CAMPBELL BOARDING HOUSE - KIDSTON

The truck comes into a small ranching and mining town; just a few frame buildings on a dirt street. The town is plain and rough; like the people who live here. The streets team with wagons and horses and lots of stockmen and miners on the streets. One building is large with a wrap around
veranda. A sign out front reads: “Rooms to let. Meals and laundry included.” On the veranda, in a rocking chair, is Grandma Campbell (58). Overweight and smoking, she can always be found in the rocking chair on the verandah of her boarding house in Kidston wearing a broad-brimmed hat and fanning herself. The grandsons, ROY (6) and LANCY (9), roughhouse on the street in front. Grandma calls for them to stop it before they do themselves an injury. The boys run into the house. The truck pulls up and a STOCKMAN gets out and brings out a basket of laundry. Grandma calls for Perlie. PERLIE OWEN (31) comes out onto the Veranda. She looks forty-one, but is still almost attractive. The Stockman tells Perlie that Billy says hi. He’s sorry he can’t get back tonight; he’s got a couple sick steers to tend to. Perlie calls for her daughter, Katie to come get the laundry, but the Stockman says he’ll bring it to her.

WASHHOUSE

A young girl scrubs laundry in a tub on a table in front of a shed behind the boarding house. This is KATIE OWEN (12). She is slight and very cute, but that won’t last for long, not in Kidston. She is naïve and has a serious fantasy life; about the only kind of a life a kid can have here. Katie is hanging out laundry. The Stockman drops the
basket on a table and moves to her. The Stockman flirts with Katie. Katie likes it. The back door opens and Perlie stands there with a shotgun. She tells the Stockman to get out and leave her daughter alone. If Wild Billy knew what he was up to he’d have his guts for garters.

WASHHOUSE - LATER

Katie wraps a bundle of laundry in butcher paper and takes it through the house and onto the veranda.

CAMPBELL BOARDING HOUSE

Boarders are coming home as Katie emerges. They all greet her and flirt. Grandma tells the Stockmen to mind their own business and leave her granddaughter alone. Katie tells her Grandma not to worry; they’re just being nice. Grandma says that’s the kind of nice that gets girls in trouble. As Katie goes down the steps Grandma asks where she’s going. Katie says she is going to the police station with the cleaning. Grandma tells her to drop it off and get right back...you can’t trust those police bastards. Katie heads off down the street to the station. Perlie comes out and watches Katie leave.

The Police Station, KIDSTON
Behind the front desk is a large officer with a badge; Badge #3322. This is the CHIEF (31). He is the best looking man in town, and he knows it. He can pretty much do what he wants when he wants. He knows this, too. He is talking with WOLFF who another Constable has brought in: drunk and disorderly...and in the middle of the afternoon no less. Wolff runs a boarding house outside Kidston. Perhaps the stupidest man in town and the Police Chief’s toady. The Constable comments that Wolff is a long way from his boarding house in Edmunton. He asks if Wolff had another row with Wild Billy? If he can’t get along with his boarders, what is he to do with him? The Chief says he can’t just look the other way. He pauses for it to sink in with Wolff who reaches into a pocket and pulls out a 5’er and lies it on the desk. The Chief looks at it. Wolff takes out another. The Chief turns to the Constable and asks why Wolff is in here. The Constable starts to explain but the Chief tells him he’s wrong and tells Wolff to get out.

STREET OUTSIDE POLICE STATION

Katie walks to the station clutching the laundry. Men on the street call at her. She smiles back. She likes the attention. She enters the station.
THE POLICE STATION

Katie comes quietly into the station. The Chief and his Constable are at the front desk looking over some papers. She stands a moment, unacknowledged. She begins to feel uncomfortable and accidentally drops the bundle of laundry. She stoops to pick it up. When she stands she sees the Chief staring down at her, smiling. The Chief dismisses the Constable and focuses on Katie. He tells her to take the laundry into his “Private Office”, which is just a stock room. Katie obediently does as she’s told, smiling back at the Chief. The Chief and the Constable share a conspiratorial look.

CHIEF’S “Private Office”

The Chief comes into the stock room as Katie is putting down the laundry. He sizes her up and tells her how gorgeous she is. She blushes. He shows her his dirty laundry waiting for her to take away. She goes to pick it up, but he stops her. He says he has one more thing for her and takes off the shirt he is wearing. His bare chest glistens with sweat. She takes the shirt, folds it gently and places it with the rest of the dirty laundry. She tells him how flattered she is he finds her attractive, him being such an important man in town. He runs his hands
over her face and then slides them down to her breasts. She is uncomfortable but doesn’t pull away. He gives her a gentle kiss on the lips. She still doesn’t pull away. He tells her, playfully, to get on home before her mom misses her. He gives her one last peck on the forehead then playfully slaps her bottom to shoo her out of the room. She starts out but turns back to give him one last, heartfelt smile; then scurries out.

CAMPBELL BOARDING HOUSE

Katie arrives home. She hears noises, voices, coming from the office behind the front desk. Carrying the laundry Katie goes to investigate. She finds her mother, Perlie, in the office with a MALE BOARDER. The Boarder has his hand up Perlie’s skirt. She teasingly says she shouldn’t let him do that. He asks who’s to stop him? She says her husband...Billy Owen. He’s Head Stockman at Carpenteria Downs and could kill a man with one blow if he so chose. The Boarder says he’s a good friend of “Wild” Billy and knows he’s not within a day’s ride of the house and besides, he’s not really her husband; she ran that guy out of her house a couple years back. She corrects him that Billy is still looking out for her and their children. He asks how many of those she has now...twenty? thirty? He
goes back to fondling her and she laughs as he buries his face in her neck. Katie watches from the door. Perlie sees her and shouts at her to get back to her laundry. Katie runs out and back to the washhouse.

WASHHOUSE

Katie opens the laundry bag from the police station and takes out the Chief’s shirt. The Chief’s badge is still on it...#3322. She removes it, holds it lovingly. She hears something in the hallway; her mother’s voice. She looks around and finds a tea tin, which is holding straight pins. She pours the pins into a glass jar and puts the badge in the tea tin and returns the tin to the shelf. Perlie is at the door. She berates Katie for spying. Face it, she scolds, Katie is just a dirty little girl. Katie argues back that she isn’t; she just heard strange noises. Perlie leaves and Katie sighs with relief.

KATIE’S ROOM

The tea tin is lying next to Katie in bed. She reads a picture book about knights and chivalry. It is well worn with pages earmarked. It is opened to an illustration of a knight in armor on his horse holding a shield. She touches the shield in the picture. She then reaches over and takes
up the tea tin. She opens it and removes the police badge. She touches it and lays it in the book, over the shield in the picture.

THE POLICE STATION

Katie is again at the police station with the laundry. There is something different about her. Her hair is neater, prettier. She has a fresh dress on. She probably even snuck a little of her mother lilac water to put on her wrists. She does not find the Chief at the front desk and so takes his laundry into his “Private Office.” She walks in and the door closes behind her. Startled, she spins around. The Chief is there, his shirt and belt open. He’s been waiting for her. She goes to him and throws her arms around him. She asks him to tell her again how pretty she is. If he really likes her, he’d take her away from this place. She just needs to know he likes her. She wants him to tell her she matters. Before she realizes what is happening, he pushes her over the table, hikes up her skirt and is having her from behind. She is confused and doesn’t know what to do. Then she feels the pain. It is small at first then is running through her. She can hardly speak it hurts so. She gasps. She begs him to stop, that it’s hurting her. He doesn’t. He just keeps telling her how
she’s wanted this all along. Why else does she keep coming to the station? Katie is crying and begging him to stop. The pain so intense she feels like she is going to pass out.

POLICE STATION - FRONT DESK

Outside, at the front desk, the Constable hears what is going on inside the ‘private office’ but makes a conscious effort to ignore it and returns to his paperwork.

CAMPBELL BOARDING HOUSE

Wild Billy Owen pulls up in the truck in front of the boarding house. Perlie is on the veranda in the rocking chair. It has been months since he was last there and Perlie is not pleased to see him. He says it has never bothered her before; she was always pleased to see his support money. But don’t worry, he says he’s not there to see her; he’s just coming out to look after his investment. He calls for the children. The sons, Roy and Lancy, come bounding down the steps of the veranda and into Billy’s arms. Billy calls for Katie. She slowly comes out the front door. She is obviously pregnant.
The hospital in Cairns

Billy and Perlie burst through the main entrance, Billy hauling Katie by the arm and to the front desk. As they check in Katie, she sees a POLICE OFFICER in the reception area. Katie stares uncomfortably at him.

HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Katie is now pushed in a wheel chair by NURSE GUINANE (23) through the doors into the maternity ward.

MATERNITY WARD

Nurse Guinane enters with Katie. She tells Katie to wait right there as she steps away. Katie looks around the ward where there are SEVERAL YOUNG, PREGNANT GIRLS...not much older than Katie, sitting up in the beds staring back at her. They all look small, alone and vulnerable...just like Katie.

MATERNITY WARD - LATER

CONSTABLE #1083 questions Katie, who is in a ward bed. The comic book she was reading lies in her lap. She stares at his badge. She is visibly nervous to be with a police officer. He is asking what occurred...who the father is.
She is too scared to answer. #1083 gets up and steps out of the ward.

Hall outside maternity ward

Officer #1083 reports to the Chief (#3322) outside that the girl will not talk about it...will not name the father. The Chief dismisses #1083.

WAITING ROOM

The Chief then joins Billy in the waiting area outside of Reception. Billy explains that he cannot look after Katie and the baby; he doesn’t have that kind of money. Some other arrangement has to be made, like putting the child in an institution. The Chief assures him that until the investigation is complete, the baby will be the responsibility of the Police Department. Just leave everything to the Chief. Billy thanks him and leaves.

OPERATING ROOM

Katie is wheeled on a gurney. David V.O.: Because she was so little she had to have a cesarean...the first for that hospital. Of course, the child was yours truly.

MATERNITY WARD
DR. GUINANE (32), with Nurse Guinane, presents BABY DAVID around to the Girls in the ward, showing them the miracle, cesarean baby.

POLICE STATION

Perlie storms into the police station. She demands to know what the Chief is doing about finding the father of her daughter’s child. The Chief says they are making all the usual inquiries. He also tells her that she can bring Katie home from the hospital, but not the baby. The baby is Police responsibility until the investigation is closed (in other words...his responsibility.) If she removes the baby from the hospital, it will be viewed as kidnapping. Perlie is furious but unsure what to do. She throws her lighted cigarette at the Chief. He laughs at her pathetic gesture. With her arms, she wipes everything off his desk. The Chief laughs harder. Perlie stamps out.

HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Perlie accompanies an ATTENDANT who pushes Katie in a wheelchair down the hallway. Perlie is taking Katie home. Katie asks about her baby? Perlie says the baby cannot come with them. Katie won’t believe this and continues to demand her baby. Nurse Guinane comes to the commotion as
well as Dr. Guinane and two more Attendants. Katie breaks away and runs.

NURSERY

The Chief is speaking with a NURSE as to when he can remove baby David. The Nurse says not for some weeks, as the baby is quite undersized. Katie bursts into the nursery. She runs down the row of cribs until she finds her child. She sees the Chief, pushes him out of the way. She grabs little Baby David yelling for everyone to keep away. She begins to run out again but is confronted by a wall of Attendants and Nurses. It takes several Attendants to pull the baby away from Katie and carry her out, screaming and crying. The Chief is left holding the Baby. Nurse Guinane steps up to the Chief. It is obvious she does not like him or like him here. She holds out her arms for the Chief to place the baby in. She then has to take the child from him and stares at the Chief until he leaves the ward.

NURSERY - LATER

That night, Dr. and Nurse Guinane in the nursery look at Baby David. Dr. Guinane puts an arm around Nurse Guinane. She tells him to stop as someone might see. So what, he says, they are married after all. She asks him when they
can expect a child. He asks if these here are not enough. She means one of their own. He says they have their hands full with the hospital right now. When would they find the time? She was thinking maybe they could adopt little David...he needs someone. Who better than themselves? Yes, a nice idea he agrees, but not right now.

CHURCH IN KIDSTON

Perlie at the local church asking the PRIEST to announce during Mass that a boy baby is available for adoption.

David V.O.: So the object now seemed to be to find someone, anyone, who would adopt me...or simply take me off their hands. Perlie asked the local priest for an announcement in the church but none was made. She never went to church again. The Priest shakes his head. Perlie storms out slamming the door as she goes.

THE HOSPITAL - RECEPTION

Baby David is being cared for by Nurse Guinane. David V.O. I became a fixture at the hospital for several months. No one seemed to know what to do with me. Grandma Perlie tried.
POLICE STATION - STREET

Perlie confronts the Chief in front of the Station, accusing him of being the father. A small Crowd gathers. He threatens to lock her up, but Perlie tells him how that would make it easier for her to tell anyone in earshot that he was the father. He says fine, who'd believe her anyway? He goes into the Station, leaving Perlie outside being stared at by the Crowd. She becomes uncomfortable and walks briskly off.

WOLFF’S BOARDINGHOUSE

Wolff eavesdrops on Billy on the phone yelling at someone. David VO: *Wild Billy contacted every State Department he could think of but no one wanted to bother with me.*

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICE

We see A STATE DEPARTMENT ASSISTANT on the phone yelling back at Billy then slamming down the phone. David VO: *I guess they had bigger fish to fry.*

HOSPITAL - GROUNDS

Cars pull up in front of the hospital. David VO: *Even the hospital tried.* The parking area is packed and a queue of cars runs out into the street.
HOSPITAL - RECEPTION

The reception area is filled with COUPLES all carrying the newspaper. Dr. Guinane shoves his way in and works up to the desk and Nurse Guinane. She says they all want to adopt David, isn’t it wonderful. She shows him an ad she placed in the newspaper. He looks where she’s pointing. “What, this one: ‘Wanted: Cow.’” She says not that one, this one. It reads:

WANTED, some kind person to adopt

baby boy 4 1/2 months old, Apply

Dist-Hospital, Cairns, before

Wednesday, 14th.

Dr. Guinane comments that it seems to have worked, as more people push their way into the Reception area. David VO: It was a good intention...but you know what they say about those.

Wolff’s Boarding House in Edmonton

Billy arriving home at Boarding House. Wolff behind desk hands Billy his Mail. Billy complains that one of the letters has been opened. Wolff denies anything to do with it. He tells Wolff that he is going to be out on a long
cattle muster so to look after his things for him. And if anything happens to Katie’s baby in the hospital to let him know.

HOSPITAL – FRONT ENTRANCE

David V.O.: I was given to a couple called the McKenzies. Nurse Guinane walking MR. McKENZIE and MRS. SPIERS/McKenzie (30s) to their car. As they get in, Nurse Guinane hands baby David to Mrs. Spiers/McKenzie. The car pulls away.

MCKENZIE HOME

David V.O.: Because I was still the responsibility of the authorities, the Police had to send an officer to interview the McKenzies and report back. A POLICE CONSTABLE is interviewing Mr. McKenzie and Mrs. Spiers/McKenzie. They show him the Baby.

STATE CHILDREN’S DEPARTMENT OFFICE

David VO: The report was then forwarded to the State Children’s Department where it was given careful review and consideration. The State Children’s Department is a large office filled with many desks. At each are MINISTERS shuffling reports and filing them. One MINISTER smoking a cigarette at a lonely desk pulls out a large envelope, sits and looks at the report. He pulls out a large rubber
It was discovered that Mrs. McKenzie was really Mrs. Spiers, estranged from her husband and living with Mr. McKenzie. The Department concluded the McKenzies were not suitable.

HOSPITAL - RECEPTION

A letter with the letterhead of the Children’s Department is in the hands of Nurse Guinane reading it to Dr. Guinane. David V.O.: The non-marriage of the McKenzies resulted in a violation of the Infant Life Protection Act. Nurse Guinane reads out-loud: “I therefore have to request you to take immediate steps to have the infant either returned to his parents or relatives, or admitted to the Townsville Receiving Depot.”

Wolff’s Boarding House in Edmonton

Wolff is behind the desk sorting mail into cubbyholes. He comes across the same letter from the State Children’s Department to Billy. He looks around and opens and reads it.

POLICE STATION

The same letter is in the hands of the Chief. He smiles confidently.
The Chief and Wolff with Mrs. Spiers in the living room. The Chief explains the situation: the child must be given up. Wolff slips out of the room as the Chief occupies Mrs. Spiers. He heads down the hall looking into each room. He looks in a bedroom/nursery and goes inside. He comes back out carrying Baby David. He heads out the back door. Meanwhile, Mrs. Spiers is furious and will not allow the Chief to take Baby David. She says for him to see for himself if she is unsuitable. She gets up and heads to the nursery.

She finds the crib empty. A car starts up and pulls away fast. She sees the Chief is not with her.

Mrs. Spiers rushes out to see the Chief is not there, either. She runs to the verandah, screaming as the car with the two men and the baby pulls away.

The Chief’s car pulls up. The Chief and Wolff with the Baby get out. They enter the station. David V.O.: If the
State was so bloody concerned about the Infant Life Protection Act being violated, then why was it that Wolff, a person of no blood relation, could snatch a baby out of its home, with the assistance of a police officer, and then for him to act as its legal guardian?

TRAIN STATION - PLATFORM

The Chief and Wolff shake hands as Wolff with the Baby gets on a train. David V.O.: He took me to the State Receiving Depot in Belgian Gardens...miles away. I was now a child of the State. Not a criminal, but a prisoner no less. Baby David in Wolff’s arms as the train pulls out.

Receiving Depot in Belgian Gardens

Baby David in the arms of a SECRETARY. There are TWO MORE SECRETARIES, each holding an Infant. TWO NUNS enter the depot and go to the Main Desk and are met by the Matron. The Secretaries walk to the Nuns and hand the babies over to them. The Nuns leave. David V.O.: From there I was handed over to the Sisters of Mercy from The St. Joseph Orphanage, Neerkol.

Wolff’s Boarding House

Billy has Wolff by the shirt-front hollering at him. “What did you do? Who told you to get involved? Where have you
sent my grandson?” Billy beats Wolff to within an inch of his life. It takes THREE OTHER TENANTS to pull Billy off. 

David V.O.: They let Billy out of Jail a few days later as Wolff did not die.

The Campbell boarding house

Perlie sits in the rocking chair on the veranda, smoking and drinking a beer.

WASHHOUSE

Katie is in the back, doing the laundry. David V.O.: As for Mom? She thought she’d never see her little boy again. How funny fate can be.

The Pub (PRESENT)

David excuses himself and heads off to the gents. Mrs. Guinane turns on Margaret. She asks how she can do this to him; make him remember all these things. Can’t she leave well enough alone? If she had known it would be like this she would never have agreed to assist her. Margaret says she’s trying to help David. Mrs. Guinane berates her, what does she know about any of this? She comes from America where every personal issue becomes a headline or a spot on the an afternoon talk show; just so much entertainment.

Before Margaret can answer, David returns.
The Neerkol Orphanage is in the wild, open range country of Queensland; blatantly flat, open and covered in scrub-brush. The Orphanage is a kind of island in a sea of burnt grass. A bitumen (asphalt) road runs up and through a modest front gate. The Orphanage consists of a large compound, fenced in. The buildings are all large frame and plywood structures; two stories each and raised about three feet off the ground with roofed verandahs running all the way around. There is the Administration Building with all the offices as well as the infirmary and nursery for newborn to 2 year olds. Near that is the Chapel, a large building with a rustic cross, nailed up over the front door. Another building is the Refectory (dining hall). There are two Dormitories, one for the boys and one for the girls. Each is divided; one side for the small children from 2 to 7, and the older children from 8 to 13. On the far side of the compound is a barn, a stable and paddocks for a few cows, sheep and horses. In the center of the compound, in front of the Administration Building, is a statue of St. Joseph, the patron saint of little children. CHILDREN fill the compound; some being marched off to class; others doing calisthenics; and many cleaning,
weeding and raking. NUNS are overseeing, as well as a couple of YARDMEN. David V.O.: Neerkol was probably the worst place for an orphanage. Way the heck and gone, where it was the only thing around for miles. Hell, even the farmers didn’t want the land. It was named for St. Joseph, the protector of Children, though I don’t think even he wanted the place.

The Nursery

About 20 cribs with CRYING INFANTS in each. David V.O.: I was placed in the nursery. That’s where all new arrivals, newborns, were put. Fifteen of us, looked after by Sister Mary James and two of the older girls to assist her. The sad truth was, the louder you cried, the less attention you got. Sister MARY James and the Two Girls trying to feed and change the infants. The crying is almost deafening. The two Nuns from earlier arrive in a car. They get out carrying the three Babies. They come to the Nursery. One of the Girls looks at the other Girl: “Not more.” Sister Mary James directs the Nuns to three empty cribs. She takes each child from the Nuns, places it in a crib and looks at the papers for each. “Diane...Number 32.” She marks a large red 32 on the paperwork and attaches it to the headboard of the crib. She gets to Baby David last.
He cries terribly. “My, you’re a noisy one. Well, we’ll change that. Now...David...Number 34.” She turns to the Girls and tells them not to feed this one until he quiets down.

Police Station

Katie storms past the desk Sergeant. He tries to stop her, but she heads straight into the Chief’s “Private Office.” The Chief is in the middle of enjoying another Young Girl. The girl pulls away in embarrassment. The Chief, putting his shirt back on, asks what’s wrong and then sees Katie. The Young Girl pulls on her top and runs out. The Chief asks what Katie wants. She says he knows what she wants...“Where’s our baby?” The Chief doesn’t even look at her: “What baby?”

THE PUB (PRESENT)

David explains that for years he was “Number 34.” Margaret’s phone rings. She tells him to hold that thought, gets up and moves away from the table. Mrs. Guinane shakes her head at seeing this. She also sees it is dark out and says she must leave. David thanks her for coming. She apologizes for not having tried harder to adopt him herself. David says there is no point in beating
herself up over that now. She did her part and he’s grateful.

TAXI

Margaret and David riding to David’s home. Margaret finishes a phone call and puts her cell phone away. She asks if David minds doing this interview; if he’s upset being asked to remember. He doesn’t know. He asks what else she has written. She tells him she’s a major author. He’s never heard of her. She means in America. She’s written mostly novels. So, he asks, what makes her think she can write this? Because she has said she would. He asks why she wanted Mrs. Guinane to join them. She thought it might put David at ease, make it easier for him. For me, he asks, or for you? She tells him to trust her. Just then, the Taxi stops at a traffic light. The doors to a pub on the corner burst open and several DRUNKEN REVELERS spill out onto the street, singing Christmas Carols. They swarm around the car. Margaret puts a hand on David’s arm and clutches it tightly in fear. The light changes and the Taxi heads off leaving the Revelers singing in the street behind. Margaret sees she is holding David by the arm and releases him, slightly embarrassed. He says tomorrow HE will take HER to meet someone. She says she doesn’t think
that will be necessary. He says he’s sure she thinks
that...but all the same. He says she asked him to trust
her, now she’ll have to trust him. He’ll see her tomorrow.

END OF EPISODE 1
The NEERKOL - NURSERY (1938)

About 20 cribs with CRYING INFANTS in each. Sister MARY James and Two Girls (one is the future Sister Mary Agnes/Sister Mary Angel) are trying to feed and change the infants. The crying is almost deafening. TWO Nuns arrive in a car. They get out carrying the three Babies. They come to the Nursery. Sister Mary James directs the Nuns to three empty cribs. She takes each one from the Nun, places it in a crib and looks at the papers for the name. “Diane...Number 32.” She marks a large red 32 on the paperwork and attaches it to the headboard of the crib. She gets to Baby David last. He cries terribly. “My, you’re a noisy one. Well, we’ll change that.
Now...David...Number 34.” She turns to one of the Girls and tells them not to feed this one until he quiets down.

DAVID’S HOME (PRESENT)

Babies’ crying fades as DAVID OWEN (70) splashes water in his face. It has been a rough night of bad dreams for him. He examines his face in the mirror. He looks exhausted.

SYDNEY HOTEL

Derrick is trying on sunglasses before a mirror. He shouts for Margaret to hurry up. MARGARET comes into the room and asks where Derrick thinks he’s going. She doesn’t need him today. He figures she can’t be serious; how can she manage without him? So what’s he supposed to do all day? Go Christmas shopping, she suggests. What will she be doing, he asks. She says she has an appointment with David. He is surprised; she’s really going to do this book. He thought she would have gotten tired of the whole thing by now. She bids him good-bye and tells him he is not to touch her things while she’s out. Derrick runs about the room patting a hand on each thing of hers.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David answers the door. Margaret is there, finishing a cell phone call. She puts her phone away and asks if he’s
ready. The two walk from David’s house to her taxi. Yesterday she took him to meet someone from his past, now he has someone for her to meet. They get in the taxi.

RETIREMENT HOME – DAY ROOM

They arrive at a Catholic retirement home. David speaks to the NUN at the desk as Margaret looks at the residents in the day-room; they sit staring at nothing, none speaking, some doing jigsaws, one randomly plunking keys on a piano. They are all alone and lonely...forgotten. Or, if you will, orphaned. In the corner is a forlorn Christmas tree with homemade decorations on it. As Margaret moves about the room, none of them notice her. She comes to a bookcase. In it she finds several worn copies of her novels. She picks one up. On the back is a photo of her when she was twenty years younger, smiling and happy. She grunts and slams the book back on the shelf.

NURSING HOME – PATIO AREA

The Nun at the desk takes David and Margaret outside to a patio area where SISTER MARY AGNES (late 80s) waits for them. She explains she does not live here, she works here as she can still take care of herself. She was at Neerkol, first as an orphan, then as a novice. She worked in the
nursery when David arrived and took care of him for most of his time there. David says he called her Sister Mary Angel. She says she has not thought about her time at Neerkol for years; as a matter of fact, she has tried to forget. Margaret asks David what are his first memories of Neerkol. He thinks a moment, then says: “Being taught how to pee…”

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY - NEERKOL (1940s)

DAVID (5) in a bed in the little boys dormitory. In the room are ten or so OTHER BOYS in other beds. David stares at a picture on the wall. David VO: When we were old enough...two or three...we were placed in the Little Boys Dormitory. Our constant companion was a print, framed on the wall of every room of the orphanage. “Nick the Devil” we called it; the shocking devil of our nightmares. It has stayed with me all these years. David pulls the covers over his head.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY - MORNING

A bell is rung and the Boys wake. They get out of bed, all wearing shirts but no pajama bottoms or underwear. David VO: Each morning we were woken together and our sheets inspected. Heaven help the poor kid who had wet the bed in
the night. SISTER MARY INNOCENCE, a tall, slender nun, checks the sheets. RONALD has soiled his sheets. Sister Innocence pulls Ronald over by the arm, points at the sheet and swats his behind. The other Boys are getting into their short-pants. They are helped by two or three of the older girls. One is AGNES. The Boys listen as Sister Mary Innocence scolds Ronald. They try not to be seen to be listening.

REFECTORY

A line of boys’ little bare feet queued up outside the Refectory. They are marched in and take seats. The OLDER BOYS sit at a table next to theirs and watch as the Little Boys come in. On the other side of the room the GIRLS are marched in to their tables. David VO: We had no shoes...just short-pants and shirts...no underwear. Breakfast was a warm porridge and milk. Dinner...some thin soup and bread, sometimes a bit of chicken. We were grateful for that. The girls all seemed to have the same ragged pullover dress. The Sisters watched our every move, day and night, and watching them was Mother Superior. She was all I ever knew as “mother”. “Mother”...more like “commandant.” Breakfast is dished up. At the head of the room is MOTHER SUPERIOR, very old, small,
frail...deceptively so. Older Girls bring carts between the tables with bowls of porridge and serve the others. One of the Children giggles and a Nun immediately calls for silence. In a moment, the Children hear one of their own softly crying. The Children turn one by one to look. Sister Innocence drags in a crying Ronald by the arm. She makes him stand on a bench at the end of the room. All the Children watch. Sister Innocence then places the soiled bed sheet over Ronald’s head. She shouts at him to be quiet and stop crying. He stands shivering. Sister then turns on the other Children...“Let this be a lesson to all of you. We do not wet the bed.”

CLASSROOM

A classroom of Little Boys and Girls...Boys on one side, Girls on the other, the picture of Nick the Devil on the wall. David VO: We were in the custody of the Sisters of Mercy, a group of fanatical nuns shipped in from Ireland. They drilled us in our lessons, marched us to and from meals and scared the living willies out of us. The Children are reciting their alphabet. SISTER ANNUNCIATA, skinny, short, hawk-nosed with glasses, moves through the rows carrying a ruler. David is looking across to the girls’ row and sees VICTORIA. They smile at each other.
Sister comes to David. She slaps the desk loudly with the ruler. “Where are your hands!?” He pulls his hands out of his lap. “Hands on the desk!” She moves on to another boy, EDGAR. She calls for all the children to stop. She makes Edgar stand and recite the alphabet. He keeps getting it wrong. Each time he does, Sister smacks the table and makes him start again. After three wrong tries, she smacks his behind. The other children watch and wince each loud smack.

CHAPEL

The Children and the Nuns attend Sunday Mass. The Children and David are standing and singing a hymn. David VO: The only break from routine came on Sundays when we were marched off to Chapel to hear Mass. There was singing and ceremony. I liked this welcome relief. A couple of boys in the back are whispering to each other and giggling. Sister Immaculata leans over and biffs them each on the back of the head.

BOYS DORMITORY - THE VERANDAH

Sunset. The sky is bright red and Dingoes howl in the distance. The little boys are standing, pants off, in a row in front of a line of pots built into a long board.
Sister Innocence paces back and forth behind the boys. Four of them stand peeing into the pots. David is with them, but he can’t pee. Older Girls help the others. As each one finishes, she wipes him off. The child goes away as the girl empties the piss-pot into a large bottle. She replaces the pot and another little boy steps up. DAVID VO: *So much of our lives in the little boys dormitory centered on peeing and pooping. At sunset, on the verandah we had to pee before we could go off to bed.* Sister Innocence looks at David’s pot. She picks it up. It is empty. She slams it back down then biffs David on the back of the head. She points at the pot. David tries harder. He can’t. But he tries and tries. Soon, he looks and sees everyone is gone. All the other Boys are finished and off to bed. He turns around to leave and runs into Sister Innocence blocking the doorway, arms crossed. “Where do you think you’re going? Finish!” David goes back and stands before the pot.

**BOYS DORMITORY - THE VERANDAH - NIGHT**

Agnes comes across the compound to the steps of the little boys dormitory. A light flashes across her face. She turns with a start and sees MR. HENNESSY, his torch (flashlight) shining in her face. She is relieved. She
tells him she has forgotten something. He lets her she can go inside. She steps onto the verandah and sees David still standing at the piss-pot. He is nodding off to sleep. She gets a blanket, puts it around David and takes him inside.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

Agnes brings David to his bed. The other Boys pretend to be asleep. Agnes leaves and the Boys lean over to David’s bed. They keep asking David what had happened to him. He won’t tell them. A Dingo howls outside. David asks what that is. Dingoes, they explain. Every night they howl. Sister calls it the Dingoes’ Benediction. Says they’re praying. But the Boys think they are the souls of the lost orphans of Neerkol crying for their mothers. The Dingoes continue to howl keeping David from getting to sleep.

CLASSROOM

David in class looking out the window and seeing the Older Boys working in the stable, unloading delivery trucks, raking the grounds, weeding flowerbeds. A ruler smacks down on his desk. “Where are your eyes?” Sister Annunciata demands. “In my head,” he shoots back. Sister Annunciata picks him up by the ear, gives him three quick swats on the
rear and sends him to sit on a stool in the corner to stare at the picture of Nick the Devil. Mother Superior knocks on the door and sticks her head inside. She asks to see Sister Annunciata for a moment. Sister Annunciata tells the Children to sit quietly until she returns and she leaves with Mother Superior. The Children sit obediently in their seats. But soon, David starts singing “Waltzing Matilda”. The other Children are not sure at first what is going on, then they see David in the corner singing to himself. He sees the Children looking at him and so starts to perform for the class. Soon, the rest of the class joins in singing. David plays the jackaroo now and mounts the blackboard and rides it like a horse. David and the Children are having a wonderful time. Just then, Sister Annunciata comes back into the room. A sudden silence hits the room, except for David who is too into his performance. But soon David realizes he is singing alone. He sees Sister has come back and stands, arms crosses, and staring down at him. David shrugs and smiles at her.

Mother Superior’s office

David is bent over the desk, pants down, being spanked with a yardstick by Sister Annunciata as Mother Superior
watches. Mother Superior recites the Hail Mary as he is spanked.

BOYS DORMITORY – VERANDAH – SUNSET

Red sky, Dingoes howling. David is at the piss pot alone, trying to pee. Mother Superior is behind him. She keeps nudging him in the back of the head, telling him to hurry up and finish. He struggles. Frustrated with all this, Mother Superior spins him around to face her. He sees her furious stare. He pees...all over Mother’s habit. Mother Superior slaps David across the face. He is stunned.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

Next morning, the Sisters inspect the Boys’ sheets as the Boys dress. They look at David’s bed.

REFECTORY

David stands on the bench, his bed sheet covering him and the piss pot on top of his head. The sheet does not cover his bare bottom, which is flaming red.

THE COMPOUND

David is on the grounds helping Older Boys cleaning up. They say he’s not supposed to be out here with them. He begs them not to turn him in. A BOY comes running through
the compound, shouting: “He’s coming!” The boys all stop what they’re doing and run to the gates. On a horse, riding into the compound is FATHER ANDERSON (35). He is gorgeous, what every boy would want to grow up to be. He rides in and dismounts. The Boys gather around. Father greets each of them. They are all very happy to see him. David is in awe. Father sees David. “You’re new here. Want to take my horse to the stable?” David can’t speak but takes the horse.

THE STABLE

David brings in the horse and places it in one of the stalls. He cautiously pats the horse. Victoria enters the stable looking around to be sure she was not seen. She startles David. He says she shouldn’t be there. She asks if he’s going to turn her in. They share a smile. She says she felt terrible about what happened to David in class. She thinks he sings very well. He confesses to her that he just wants to get away from here. He hates the Sisters. Where would you go, she asks. He doesn’t know, just anywhere. Just jump on a horse and... He sees Father’s horse. He tries to mount it but falls off. Victoria laughs and, soon, so does David. A shout comes from the door. Mother Superior is there with Mr. Hennessy.
Mother Superior takes Victoria by the hand and Mr. Hennessey takes David. They drag the Children out of the stable and back to the dorms. As David is taken across the yard, he sees Father Anderson and the Older Boys playing rugby.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

MR. PATTERSON (47), the state inspector, is walking through the dorm with the Nuns. Mr. Patterson is a very well fed man who smiles too much. All the children are in their “good” clothes. He smiles as he passes them. David VO: Three times a year we got a visit from the State Inspector, Mr. Patterson. He was responsible for us as we were all wards of the State. He’d come in and look us over, pronounce us fit and leave just as quickly. As soon as Patterson leaves, the Older Girls come in to collect the “good” clothes and shoes. David VO: For his visits, they brought out special clothes for us. Our “Good” Clothes. These would be given us on important occasions. God help us if we got them dirty. As soon as the occasion was over, we were stripped and the clothes taken and stored away.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY - LATER
That night, the Boys in bed. David asks what’s wrong with Marty. MARTY is sleeping deeply. Edgar explains that Marty got a flogging from Sister Immaculata. What did he do? He thought nine plus nine was seventeen. Sister spanked him until he got it right. Took an hour. The Boys are then talking about how tomorrow is Visiting Day. They are all anxious, but Edgar who is scared. He believes something awful is going to happen. Before they can explain to David what Visiting Day is, Agnes tells them all to be quiet, it’s time for sleep. She turns out the lights.

THE LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

Visiting Day. Cupboards are opened and inside are fresh clothes; their “good clothes.” The Sisters and Older Girls take the clothes out. The Boys are standing by their beds. They are each issued a clean white shirt and a pair of short black pants. They hustle to put these on. Agnes helps David. Another Sister brings shoes for each of them. David needs help putting them on. He can’t tie them.

THE COMPOUND

The children are out in the yard where tables of refreshments are set up and adults, mostly married couples,
are waiting. The Girls come out in new dresses with ribbons in their hair. David sees Victoria. He stares. She is beautiful. As the Children gather, the Adults move among the Children, looking them over. Soon all are seated having punch and cake. David stands before a small group of Adults reciting:

The Village Pump,

The village pump, pump, pump, pump, pump...

They brought a new policeman to the week,

A sloppy looking fellow so to speak

Who thought he was all there

But by jinx I do declare

Is what you called a kind of livin’ freak

The neighbors said he’s off his chump

One night he stumped across that village pump

He said move on your type

But when he showed his light

He found that he was talking to the pump

The Village Pump,
The village pump, pump, pump, pump, pump...

The Adults listening are a little embarrassed to hear this from a child. Sister Immaculata hears David reciting and moves over quickly. She takes him by the shoulders and moves him away apologizing to David’s audience. In another part of the compound, several Children are standing on the verandah steps and singing a hymn to the collected Adults. When they finish, there is polite applause. David is now speaking with a couple and spills his punch on the Woman and knocks cake into the Man’s lap. Mother Superior apologizes for David and takes him away and makes him sit on the dormitory steps. He can only watch Visiting Day from a distance.

THE COMPOUND - LATER

The event is drawing to a close and the children are being lined up and walked back inside, except for Edgar. David watches as Mother Superior speaks with a Couple. They shake hands and the Couple walks back to their car with Edgar. David gets into the Dormitory. He runs to a window and sees Edgar being put into a car. Edgar sees David and waves good-bye, a terrified look on his face. David tries to run outside again but is stopped by Agnes. He goes back to the window and sees the car pulling out and Edgar’s face
in the car window. David runs upstairs and finds another window to look out and see the car farther down the road. He runs, grabs the pole and pulls down the ladder leading to the attic. He clambers to the end of the attic and kicks out a vent and can now see down the road as the car vanishes over the horizon.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

That night, Agnes has the Boys lined up in front of a tub of water and is giving them each a wash down, another Girl dries off the Boys as they finish. One little Boy stands in the tub. Agnes sponges him off. He steps out of the tub and is dried off with the same towel. Another Boy steps in the tub. Agnes sees the bruises on his back and legs. She sponges him off and sends him to the dryer. David gets in the tub. He asks what happened to Edgar. His mother came to get him, Agnes explains. We got no mothers, David says. What really happened to him? Agnes says she can’t say; he knows what Sister will do to her. David says to her, “You like us, why don’t the Sisters like us?”

THE COMPOUND
A line of military trucks convoy past the Orphanage. The Children line the fence, waving to the American Soldiers as they pass. David VO: When you turned eight you graduated to the Big Boys Dormitory. That was around the same time the Yanks arrived. The war was on and the Yanks had this big base not far from our orphanage. We didn’t know much else about the war except that the Yanks were here and they liked to hand out chocolate. We knew the war was over cause the Yanks went away. The Yanks continue to drive past throwing chocolate to the Children. David waving and thrilled, starts singing “Yankee Doodle.” The other Children join him.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY

David enters the dorm with a little bundle of shirts under his arm. He looks around and there on the wall is Nick the Devil. A NUN nudges him from behind and points to a bed. He goes to it and puts his things down. David VO: I had thought the Big Boys Dorm would be different...well, it was. It was bigger, that’s all. Billy Barlow enters with his little stack of shirts. He is assigned the bed next to David. Billy is aboriginal.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY - LATER
Red sky and Dingoes, David tells Billy about the Dingoes. Billy’s heard Dingoes before. David asks him his name. Billy says David couldn’t pronounce it. David says he’ll call him Billy...Billy Barlow. Billy says he likes it, that’ll be fine.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY - MORNING

Next morning Hennessy the Yardman comes in yelling and rapping the bedposts with his bludgeon to get the boys out of bed. “I got a yard needs raking and a stable needs mucking out!” A Boy asks about breakfast. “Breakfast? Nancy here wants breakfast. Work first, then maybe you’ll get eats.” The Boys rush to get dressed and run out.

CLASSROOM

David, with a book on his desk, trying to read. Sister Augustus, a big bruiser of a nun, stands next to David. She has him stand to read. David struggles with a passage from Homer’s Odyssey. Each time he makes a mistake, she smacks the back of his head. David VO: Sister Augusts was new at Neerkol. I think she came to us from the Royal Marines as she had the temperament of a drill sergeant. Finally she says, “Oh, sit down. You’ll never get it.” She starts away, he recites from memory “Truth is beauty
and beauty truth. That’s all yee know on earth and all yee need to know...” She tells him to stop but he won’t until she comes up and shoves him back into his seat.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY

That night, the Boys getting washed by Ages, who now wears the veil of a novice. Agnes explains that she won’t be able to do this much longer. The boys are getting too old. One of the boys says, “Tell me, miss...” and she corrects him; it’s Sister. “You mean you’re becoming one of them?” David and Billy and others come in and get in the line waiting for the washtub. Agnes makes Billy get to the back of the line. The Boy in the tub says how cold the water is. “Can we have some fresh?” Now, you know the rules, she reminds him. Yes, but now you’re a Sister, you can make the rules. David asks Billy why he’s last. He says she always makes him go last. David gets behind Billy. They get to Agnes and she takes David before Billy. David protests. Agnes explains the white boys have to be washed first...Mother Superior’s rule. David is done and Billy gets into the tub of filthy, cold water. Agnes starts to wash him. David picks up a brush and starts to scrub Billy. Agnes asks what he’s doing. David says he’s going to scrub it off and make him white. “We’s friends
Billy...friends to the end.” Billy stops him and says, “Dave, it don’t come off.”

BIG BOYS DORMITORY

Billy and David in bed. David has to pee. You can’t go out...the Man with the Torch will get him and flog him. David sees there is a gap (vent) between the wall and the ceiling of the building. He climbs the wall and holds onto the rafter to pee through the gap. Billy joins him. Soon, several of the boys are doing this. Outside, a Nun passes and sees the streams of pee coming from the boys’ dorm.

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Next day, Billy, David and two other Boys are coming out of Mother Superior’s office and walking stiffly down the steps, rubbing their backsides.

Billy: Just because we took a little pee?

David: Would have been worse if we’d wet the bed.

Billy: You still wet your bed?

David: Well... When you gotta go...

One of the other Boys falls down, semi-conscious. The others pick him up and carry him to the dormitory.
Sister Augustus has set up a makeshift boxing ring and is instructing the Boys in fist-a-cuffs. The Girls in the class watch. David is in the ring sparring with another Boy. Sister Augustus shouts instructions at them. David gives the Boy a straight right and the kid goes down. He’s crying. David goes to help him up but Sister gets in the way and counts the Boy out. Then David goes and helps him up, apologizing for hitting him so hard. Sister tells him not to apologize. Two more Boys get in the ring, but the one, after seeing what David did, says he won’t do it. He’s scared. Sister yells for him to fight. He won’t. Okay, just for that Sister removes the other Boy and puts a Girl in the ring with the Scared Boy. The Boy still won’t fight. The Girl takes a few feeble punches. David gets up, not wanting to see a Girl get hit, tells the Girl to sit down and orders the Scared Boy to hit him. Sister doesn’t like this. Sister puts on gloves and gets in the ring with David insisting he hit her. He won’t hit a woman. “I’m not a woman, I’m a nun.” David still won’t. Sister Augusta smacks David a few times, staggers him, then socks him and lays him out. She then yells at him to get up.
BIG BOYS DORMITORY

Billy lies in bed, unmoving. He can weakly speak to David and tells him he got a flogging. What did you do? I spoke back. David says that’s it; we’re getting out of here.

THE COMPOUND

David helps Billy climb out a dorm window and scurry across the yard hiding to avoid being seen by the Man with the Torch.

THE WILDS - Sunset

Red sky, Dingoes. Billy and David in the wild, open country. David says he’s getting hungry. As they go Billy pulls some berries off a bush and eats them. He hands some to David. There’s all kinds of things to eat out here, he explains. Billy shows David all the different things to eat and which not to eat.

THE WILDS - LATER

David and Billy alone, under a tree, resting. They discuss about getting out by getting adopted. What would it be like to have a real family, where you’re not beaten all the time? Billy isn’t sure that would be so good for him. Now David, he’s white and would find a family easy. But Billy
isn’t. Who’d want him? David says if he gets out he’ll insist Billy come with him. They’re friends to the end. If they go, they go together. If they stay...well...

THE WILDS - MORNING

Next morning, as they sleep, Mr. Hennessy and another Yardman find the Boys, grab them by the legs and drag them to a waiting truck. The boys put up a valiant struggle, but it is no use. The Men throw the Boys in the back of the truck and head to Neerkol.

THE VERANDAH OF THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

David and Billy are spanked, bare-bottomed, in front of the whole school. The Sisters are conducting this punishment. David sees Father Anderson at a distance, by the stable, watching.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY

Billy and David in their beds lying on their stomachs. Agnes is putting ointment on their behinds, which have dark, red welts. She tells them they were foolish to try to run away. David says they will do it again...and she should help them. Again, Agnes explains she cannot do anything about that. They should accept things as they
are, it’ll be better for the both of them. David asks, better than what?

INFIRMARY

The medical examiner, a Nurse, is there to give vaccinations. Mr. Patterson is there as well, watching as each Child is brought up and given a shot in the arm. The Nurse administers the shots. She sees bruises on one boy's shoulder. Patterson: “You know how these boys are...they play rough.” David is next. He gets his shot and then asks if the Nurse will look at his backside. Patterson: “Move along now; we have many others to get to.”

BIG BOYS DORMITORY - SUNSET

Red Sky. David and Billy sitting up in bed, talking about running away again. Mother Superior and Sister Augustus come in and take Billy out. David tries to follow but is stopped.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY - LATER

DAVID waits until the Sisters are gone then sneaks down the hall and looks out the door to see Billy being taken into the Administration building. David sits at the door all night and never sees Billy come out. He nods off to sleep
as a car arrives and Billy is hustled into it and the car pulls away. David doesn’t see this.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY – MORNING

David doesn’t see Billy in the yard. He goes back to his bed and sees Billy is gone. The sheets are removed from his bed.

REFECTORY

At breakfast, David sees Billy isn’t there. As Mother Superior passes by, David asks where Billy is. Sister Augustus orders no talking. But David persists. Mother Superior walks away, but David gets up and follows her. She stops at the door and turns on David.

MS: “Who is this Billy?”

D: “My best mate. Billy Barlow...well, that’s what we call him. Where did you take him?”

MS: “We didn’t take him anywhere.”

D: “Yes you did. I saw you. Last night...”

MS: “Last night...Billy’s mother came and took him home.”

D: “That’s a lie.”

Mother Superior slaps his face
D: “Where is he? Where’s my Billy?”

Mother Superior motions for Sister Augustus to take David to the dormitory. Sister Augustus takes David away, kicking and screaming.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY - NIGHT

David sits at the door again watching for signs of Billy. He sees the same car that took Billy away pull up.

Patterson gets out. He is met on the porch by Father Anderson and Mother Superior. David chances it and runs across the compound to see what’s up. He gets to the Administration Building and looks through the windows until he sees Father and Patterson sitting at dinner together.

Hennessey grabs David, throws him over his shoulder and carries him back to the dorm spanking him with his cattle whip the whole way.

COMPOUND

Agnes pulls David by the hand across the yard. She tells him Father Anderson has something for him. He needs someone to help serve Mass. If they’re quick, David could get chosen. They get to the Administration Building and on the Verandah Father Anderson talks with Three other Boys.
Agnes brings up David. Anderson is pleased and asks David if he’d like to serve Mass.

SERIES OF SHOTS

David VO: *My God, a ray of sunshine in that valley of darkness. The next weeks were the most enjoyable I spent at Neerkol. I learned the Mass, Father helping me with my Latin. And every Sunday I got to wear the cassock and surplice and serve Mass.*

**Shots of David in the church with the other boys being instructed by Father how to serve.

**Father going over the Latin prayers with David.

**David trying to get into a surplice and Father having to help him.

**Then David on the altar during the consecration ringing the bells.

CHAPEL

Mass is finished. David and another Boy, CHRISTOPHER, are cleaning up. David brings things into the sacristy. As he puts these things away Father Anderson comes in. He explains that he not only says Mass here, but also at some of the surrounding parishes. He asks David if he’d like to
go on the road and help him with Mass in Kabra. David agrees.

THE COMPOUND

David and Christopher get into Father Anderson’s car and drive off. David is thrilled and excited.

RETIREMENT HOME - PATIO AREA (PRESENT)

Sister Agnes crying. She says she has never forgiven herself for volunteering David to assist Father Anderson. David says she is not to blame, she couldn’t have known what would happen. Sister Agnes sees it is late. She excuses herself, explaining she has to attend to some of the tenants. She shakes hands with David and Margaret. She starts back inside, but then stops and turns back to them.

After all these years, she says, she is still giving sponge baths. Some things never change.

END OF EPISODE 2
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

“David Owen: Stain on the Brain – The Life of David Owen”

Episode 3 – “Father Anderson’s Boy” (1950-1952)

Story By: Jody Jackson and Jim Buess (consult)

Based on “Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

COMPOUND (1950)

Father Anderson and David (12) getting into his car and driving out the gates. Dissolve to:

COMPOUND (PRESENT)

A taxi drives into the gates. The cab passes a road sign warning about “Swooping Magpies.” David (70) and MARGARET ride in the back seat next to each other. Neither speaks. Margaret keeps looking at David who seems lost in his thoughts as he looks out the window. The taxi pulls up a long road into the yard of St. Joseph’s Orphanage in Neerkol. Margaret can’t believe he wanted to bring her here...what is this place? “This is where it all happened. This is my childhood home.”
David and Margaret have gotten out of the taxi which pulls around the compound drive and heads back out the main gate and down the road. It all becomes still and silent. Margaret starts to move toward the buildings, but before she gets very far, there is a loud screech and a bird, a Magpie, swoops down on Margaret, startling her. She waves the bird away. Then another Magpie strafes her. David rushes over. Margaret is cursing and waving frantically as the birds will not leave her alone. David grabs Margaret and pulls her to the protection of the verandah of one of the buildings. Margaret asks what that was all about. David explains that Magpies are very protective of their nesting areas...at least that’s what the scientists say. Personally, he thinks the birds just enjoy bothering people. Margaret continues to pull herself together as David slowly walks into the building. Margaret looks up to see David is gone. She follows him into the building.

LITTLE BOYS DORMITORY

Margaret walks in; the sound of her shoes on the rough wood floors echoes eerily. She comes up behind David and stops beside him. They stand and look at the rows of little beds stripped of sheets and mattresses. David sits down on one
of the beds. It is hard to tell what memories are flashing through his mind; joy or fear. Margaret asks what this place is as she moves further into the room. He tells her this is one of the dormitories...he doesn’t remember which one. This is where the children slept. Margaret comes to a wall of cupboards. She opens one, which used to hold the Boys’ “good clothes.” She finds it empty save for one dusty shoe inside.

REFECTORY

The two move down the rows of tables. David stops at the bench where the boys who wet their beds were made to stand.

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

They wander through the building. The rooms are still furnished as if everyone just up and left, leaving everything in place. All is dust and dirt covered, with peeling paint.

MOTHER SUPERIOR’S OFFICE

They find a copy of Nick the Devil, still in its frame askew, on the wall of what had been Mother Superior’s office. Some files are still in the drawers.
FATHER ANDERSON’S OFFICE

They come to the office where Father Anderson usually worked. Margaret moves into the office commenting that all these offices are identical and amazingly small. She turns around as she realizes David is not beside her. She sees him still standing at the door. He will not go inside. Margaret asks what’s wrong. David does not say and simply moves off down the hall. Margaret hurries to catch up.

COMPOUND

They settle on the verandah of the Administration Building. In front of the building, in the yard, is the decaying statue of St. Joseph. Margaret looks at the statue of the Saint carrying his son, Jesus. David explains the significance of this to Margaret. Joseph was the earthly “step father,” if you will, of Jesus. This is why St. Joseph is the guardian of small children. David does not look at Margaret as he speaks. He asks what she thinks of the home where she grew up. She says she thinks of her parents, her friends...mostly good memories. He asks how it makes her feel. She says it makes her happy. David says that more than fifty years later he is still afraid of this place. It is where he grew up. Where he was a child, and all he can feel is fear and pain.
FATHER’S CAR (1950)

David and Father in the car, driving. David VO: I had been going to the surrounding parishes with Father Anderson, serving Mass for him. It had been two of us altar boys at first, then it was just me with Father. I loved it. It got me away from the Sisters and the constant floggings. I thought I had struck gold. Father was kind to me and I enjoyed the trips in the car. I was just a kid...what did I know? Father lets David steer. This brings David very close to Father. David is wearing shorts. Father puts a hand on David’s leg. David doesn’t mind. They share a smile. Father then puts David’s hand on his own thigh and holds it there. David is uncomfortable, but does not resist...he doesn’t know to resist; he is concentrating on steering the car. Then Father slides David’s hand up to his crotch. David tries to pull his hand back, but Father holds it tight. Father undoes his fly and slides David’s hand inside his pants. David can’t stop what is happening. Father then pushes David’s head into his lap. David chokes for a moment then submits. The car swerves on the road, then pulls over and comes to a sudden stop. Father pulls David up and kisses him. He then shoves David onto the seat and pulls down his pants. David tries to get away,
but there is nowhere to hide in the car. Father gets behind David who is now pushed up against the side window. Father enters David and sodomizes him. David is screaming and crying, but he cannot be heard on the empty road outside the car. Father finishes and pulls away from David. David reaches down, rolls down the window and vomits out of the car.

FATHER’S CAR - DRIVING

David, crying, sits as far away from Father as he can. Father tells David that whatever a priest does with a boy cannot be wrong. Father also tells David that he can tell no one what happened; that would be wrong and a sin. He asks if David understands. David slowly nods.

CHURCHYARD

The car pulls up to the church where they will say Mass. They get out of the car. Father gets his things out of the boot (trunk). David comes around to the boot. Father sees a trial of blood down David’s leg. Father takes his handkerchief from his pocket and wipes the blood away. David does not react; he just stands crying softly. Father hands David his vestments and they go to the church. They are met at the door by the Sacristan; a woman. She asks,
“What’s wrong with your boy, Father?” “Nothing...he’s just a little car sick.”

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

That night: the Boys are getting their usual sponge bath from Sister Agnes (19). She is just about done when David walks in. She asks how David is...did everything go well serving mass for father? David says nothing; he does not even look at her. She helps him undress, noticing he is unusually quiet. As she takes his shorts off, she sees blood in them.

MOTHER SUPERIOR’S OFFICE

Sister Agnes and David stand before Mother Superior’s desk. Mother Superior asks what happened to David. How did he start bleeding? He tells her it was Father Anderson. He made David suck his doodle and then he shoved it into David’s backside. Mother Superior takes it in, her rage rises and she slaps David across the face...several times. How dare he say such a thing about a priest! Sister Agnes tries to interrupt, but Mother Superior shuts her up. Mother Superior makes Sister Agnes hold David across the desk as Mother Superior spansks him with a yardstick. Both David and Agnes are crying.
CLASSROOM

All the Children are intently following in their books what Sister is reading aloud. David is mindlessly flipping pages and occasionally looking out the window. Mother Superior comes to the door and calls for him. He does not respond. She shouts for him. David jumps out of the desk and stands to attention. Mother Superior explains that Father Anderson wants to see him. He wants to “work on David’s Latin.”

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Mother Superior brings David to an office (the one we saw in the opening that David would not enter) and Father is inside. Mother Superior pushes David inside and closes the door.

FATHER ANDERSON’S OFFICE

Inside, Father undoes David’s pants and moves him against the desk. Father penetrates David. Father puts a hand over David’s mouth so his cries cannot be heard. David VO: As the weeks went on, I was called to see Father Anderson so he could “work on my Latin” again and again. I was so sore and upset after the penetration...I was all confused.
INFIRMARY

Sister Immaculata brings David to the infirmary. Patterson, the State Inspector, is there. Patterson has David drop his pants, turn around and bend forward. David VO: I kept bleeding and finally the Sisters couldn’t ignore it anymore and had a State Medical Inspector come in to look at me. Well, there was no doctor or nurse...just Mr. Patterson, the State Inspector of Orphanages. He looked at me. His diagnosis: piles.

BIG BOYS DORMITORY

Sister Immaculata walks David back to the dormitory. He passes other Boys in their beds reading or taking to each other. All the Boys stop what they are doing and watch as David and Sister pass. They reach his bed and Sister has David get under the covers. Sister leaves. All the Boys stare at David. He feels self-conscious and pulls up the covers and turns on his side so not to see the others staring. David VO: What could I do? The Nuns didn’t believe me. I would tell them and get a flogging for it. If I told one of the other boys, he would go running straight to the Sisters and I would get flogged even harder for lying. I withdrew into my own inner hell. After every time Father had me, I would dirty the bed...and another
flogging. I had to do what Father wanted. This went on at least twice a week...for two years.

COMPOUND

The Sisters are queuing the Children up outside the dorms in their “good” clothes; Boys in one queue Girls in the other. Victoria is next to David. He is looking at the ground. SISTER AUGUSTA goes by explaining they are to be on their best behavior for this trip to Emu Park. A bus pulls up and the Children are taken over. Victoria asks David what’s wrong. He shrugs his shoulders. She says she’s missed him. “Have you missed me?” He shrugs again. They come to the bus and Victoria boards. But Sister tells David to wait; he’s on the next bus. The bus pulls away and David is left standing alone in the yard. There is no second bus. He looks around and sees Father Anderson standing on the verandah of the Administration Building. Father goes inside, David starts toward the Administration Building and then takes off across the yard and out the gates.

FARM OUTBUILDING - SUNSET

The sky is red. Somewhere a few miles from Neerkol, David huddles in a farm’s outbuilding. He pulls some berries and
leaves from his pocket and munches on them as he pulls the straw up over himself to go to sleep. DAVID VO: I was alone, away from the Sisters, away from Father. I had no idea where I was or where I was going. But for some reason I wasn’t scared. I was, for once in my life, happy. David listens to the Dingoes howling in the sunset. He howls back.

COMPOUND

A police car pulls into the Yard. The POLICE OFFICER takes David out of the car and brings him to Mother Superior on the steps. The Officer asks if this is one of hers. She says he is. The Officer says that David was going on about one of the Priests. Mother Superior shouts at David, “You’ve been lying again!” She takes David by the arm, thanks the Officer for returning the boy and hauls David into her office.

THE STABLE

David is standing outside. Hennessy gives him a hoe, and a water bag. He tells him to go down to the streamside and cut back the magurra weeds.
STREAMSIDE

David at the streamside chopping down the weeds. David VO: This was the dirtiest job they had. I did it, even though the magurra are the foulest smelling things on earth. The stink would get all over you. So, I figured I was safe. Father would leave me alone...smelling like that. At least that’s what I thought. Father Anderson rides up on his horse, finds David and gets off the horse.

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

Sister Agnes helping David with his nappies (diapers). She has made them from old sheets, which hold squares of newspaper to absorb the blood. She shows him how to put them on and how they will help with the bleeding until his piles gets better. He says she knows it’s not piles. She says she knows no such thing. But you must know, he argues. She says, “I can’t. You know what they’ll do to me.”

COMPOUND

David is raking the yard with the other Boys. A car pulls in and Patterson gets out. He joins Father Anderson on the verandah. They sit together and are brought lunch by one of the Older Girls. All the Boys in the yard stop working
and stare at the amazing lunch brought to the two men. A bell is rung. The Boys move off to the refectory.

REFECTORY

The Boys file in and sit. As David waits, he can see Father and Patterson, through the window, dining on a very nice lunch of steak and wine. Lunch is brought to the Boys. They are each given a bowl of broth and a piece of hard bread.

CHAPEL

The Boys are queued up waiting for the confessional. As one Boy comes out another from the queue goes in. David is soon next.

CHAPEL - CONFESSIONAL

He enters the confessional. He kneels down and waits for the door on the small window in front of him to slide open. Soon it does and it is Father Anderson hearing his confession. David confesses to a sin of impurity. Father asks, “Impurity of thought or deed?” David says, “Of deed, Father.” “With whom?” “With you, Father.” Father then explains that David has not sinned, as anything a priest does with a boy is fine. The only sin would be to tell anyone.
BARN

David is pouring feed into bins for the milking cows to eat. Mr. HENNESSEY, comes in to see how David is doing. He tells David he’s wanted up at the Admin Building. “Who wants me?” Hennessey says Mother Superior. “Oh, and you’ll need the wheel barrow.”

COMPOUND – Administration Building

David pushes the wheelbarrow across the yard to the Administration Building. He parks the barrow at the foot of the steps. He waits and shortly Mother Superior comes out carrying two parcels, each about the size of a shoebox. They are wrapped in calico. There are medals of Our Lady of Fatima pinned to the calico. Sister returns to the building, muttering prayers the whole time. She returns with three more parcels. She also hands David a can of kerosene. He hangs that off one of the handles of the wheelbarrow. Sister, without a word, and carrying a cushion under her arm, walks off and David follows with the barrow.

CLEARING IN THE FIELDS

It is sunset and the sky is its usual, eerie red. David follows Mother Superior for quite a long time until they
come to a large clearing in the fields. David puts the barrow down and Mother Superior prepares a spot of the ground with her foot. She then comes to David and begins to take the parcels out of the barrow. David goes to pick one up to help her, but she tells him not to touch them. Mother Superior finishes placing the parcels in the clearing. She then tells David to go back to the orphanage as she takes the kerosene. He starts to walk away with the barrow, but when he gets some distance away, he jumps into the long grass and now cannot be seen. He looks up carefully to watch as Sister pours the kerosene on the parcels steps back and throws a match on them. They burst into flame. She then kneels down on her cushion and continues to pray. David VO: I never knew what was in those parcels. Perhaps unused consecrated hosts...or other sacred items that could not be thrown away. But I never understood the medals. Our Lady of Fatima, like all the appearances of St. Mary, is a patron of little children, especially those who die before being baptized.

COMPOUND

Christmas. The children are in their good clothes on the steps of the verandah, singing carols to visitors: Mr. Patterson, Father Durham, Father Anderson, Mr. Hennessy,
the Sisters and Novices, as well as others who work there or service the orphanage. David sings with the Children. 

David VO: It was Christmas again. I had never looked forward to Christmas, but that year I learned to hate it.

REFECTORY

Later, the Children all sit in the dining hall. There is a tree with decorations the Children made. The Children are not segregated Boys and Girls, but sit mixed. This allows Victoria to sit with David. They are concluding dinner, finishing their Christmas pie. Mother Superior moves along followed by Sister Immaculata who is pushing the dinner cart, only this time it is piled with little wrapped presents. Mother Superior places a present in front of each of them. Victoria opens hers and finds four lollipops inside. David opens his and finds it is empty. He gets up and walks across the dining hall to where Mother Superior is handing out presents. He says to her there must be a mistake; his gift is empty. The other Children hear this and become silent. Without looking at him, she answers there is no mistake. “Empty boxes for empty heads.” David, stunned, returns to his seat. Victoria gives him two of her lollipops. David VO: I was devastated. The cruelty of it. Since then, Christmas has never held any
meaning for me, except disappointment and resentment. Thankfuly, it comes but once a year.

COMPOUND

DAVID VO: After the holiday, unfortunately, life would get back to normal. The Children in the yard working. David is in the office with Father Anderson. Father is having him over the desk. David VO: Father became bolder with me, taking me wherever, whenever he liked.

STREAMSIDE

Father Anderson having David against a tree. David VO: He didn’t seem to care if anyone saw us.

COMPOUND

David, walking stiffly, gets out of Father’s car. David VO: I mostly hated having to drive anywhere with him.

Father gets out of the car and watches as David walks away.

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

David in the dormitory adjusting his nappies. He sees there is some blood on them. Some of the other boys see this as well.
FATHER ANDERSON’S OFFICE

David stands at the open door. He knocks gently. Father Anderson tells David to come in and meet Father Durham. Father Durham sits in a chair. Father Anderson says he has to look into something and will be back in a while and that David should...entertain Father Durham. Anderson leaves. Father Durham motions for David to come to him. David slowly edges over to him. He does not look at the priest. Father Durham first offers David a lollypop. David does not take it; he just looks at him. Father realizes he has done something silly and puts the lolly away. Father tries to make small talk, but David is unresponsive. Durham asks David to sit on his lap. David jumps away and yells that he won’t, he can’t make him, and if he does he’ll tell Father Anderson. Father Durham looks at David, “That’s right. You’re Father Anderson’s boy.”

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

Again, David is pulling on his nappies. Christopher, the boy who was serving mass for Father Anderson before David, sees what he is doing and quietly speaks a rhyme:

"Father Anderson and Father Durham go to church on Sunday,
To pray to God to give them strength to shagg little boys on Monday.” David flies at Christopher, tackles him and proceeds to beat the tar out of him.

Bitumen Road

David VO: Sister made us stand on the bitumen road. This punishment was saved for the most serious offences. The sun beat down on the asphalt and the tar would boil.

David’s feet actually sizzle as he stands there.

Christopher keeps jumping, shifting from one foot to the other, and crying. David tells him to stop moving. It hurts more that way. That’s what Sister wants. Just stand still and it isn’t so bad. Christopher does. So, the two stand there, their feet sinking into the soft tar.

Bitumen road - SUNSET

By the end of the day, David is holding up Christopher.

Sister Augusta comes with Hennessy and another yardman EMERSON (42), an aborigine, to get the boys. David gives her and evil grin as they pick up the boys and carry them back.

AN OFFICE

Red sky, the dingoes howl. Hennessy spans David and Christopher with leather belts as Sister Augusta and Mother
Superior watch. The boys are on kneelers facing the picture of Nick the Devil on one side and a crucifix on the other. Christopher is crying. David reaches over and takes his hand. Christopher is encouraged and stops crying. David VO: They beat us, of course. What else could they do? It was no longer a matter of discipline...I believe they were trying to break me and I wouldn't give them that.

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

David and Christopher are now in their beds, lying on their stomachs, their bare, burnt feet hanging over the end of the beds. They talk. Christopher says he was sorry about the rhyme. He wasn’t making fun of David. He was feeling sorry for him. Christopher used to be Father Anderson’s boy. But who can you tell? No one believes you. They beat you for saying horrible things about a priest. He was glad when Father fancied David; that meant he forgot about him. All David can do now is hope Father finds some other boy he likes.

STREAMSIDE

David cuts weeds along the river. In the distance he sees Father Anderson approaching on horseback. He thinks to run
but there’s nowhere to run...nowhere to hide, except... He dives into the river. He starts downstream, hugging the shore and hiding under whatever logs or vegetation there is. Father rides up, sees David’s shirt and tools on the riverbank and starts calling for the boy. He rides along the bank looking for him.

STREAMSIDE - SUNSET

David in the river still, shivering. He climbs out into the red twilight. He puts on his shirt and heads back to the orphanage, shivering.

STABLE - NIGHT

David arrives at the stable where Emerson, is working. David stumbles in and asks Emerson to help him. Emerson takes David to a long bench and has him sit. He sees a leach on David’s neck. He pulls off David’s shirt and sees he is covered in leeches.

STABLE - LOFT

David lies naked on his stomach on the bench. Emerson brings over a kerosene lamp and lights a cigarette. He puts the glowing red end of the cigarette on each leach, burning them off. He then puts salve on each wound. He asks David what happened. David says he fell in the river
while weeding. Emerson thinks it is strange he was in the river all day...just from falling in? Someone rides up outside the stable. David dives onto a pile of hay and buries himself in it. He begs Emerson not to tell anyone he’s there. Especially, don’t tell Father Anderson. The stable door slides open, it is Father Anderson returning his horse. Father asks if Emerson has seen David. He says he hasn’t. Why? Seems the boy is missing. Hasn’t come back from work. He says if Emerson sees him to send David to him right away. Father leaves.

STABLE - MORNING

Next day, Emerson brings food into David who is in the loft. David has a fever. He tries to eat but falls asleep.

STABLE - LATER

Emerson looks out of the stable and sees a Police car in the yard and officers speaking with Mother Superior.

STABLE - LOFT / NIGHT

Emerson sits with David. David is sitting up and eating. Emerson tells him he can’t stay in the stable forever. They are going to find him sooner or later. If David isn’t going to think of himself, Emerson says he should at least
think about him; the risk Emerson is taking keeping him there. He could lose his job. David says as soon as he is better he’ll be running away again. Emerson says that isn’t a good idea either. He tells David to get some sleep, takes the lantern and climbs down from the loft. Emerson is truly worried about the boy. He isn’t sure what to do.

STABLE - MORNING

Emerson stands in the stable looking at the Administration Building. He looks up to the loft where David hides, then puts down his rake and heads across the yard to the Administration Building.

STABLE - LOFT

David sleeps. Soon there is a commotion. He wakes to find Father Anderson, Mother Superior and Mr. Patterson staring down at him.

LONELY ROAD - BRIDGE

David is in the car driving with Father Anderson. Father reaches over and places a hand on David’s leg. David throws Father’s hand back at him. Father slams on the brakes and the car stops on a bridge that runs over a dry riverbed far below. Father turns toward David. David says
he won’t let Father touch him. Father gets out of the car, runs around to David’s side, throws open the door and yanks the boy out. They argue; Father holding the boy by his arms. David tries to break away but he can’t. Struggling only makes Father hold tighter and more painfully. David screams he won’t be Father’s boy anymore. Father grabs David swings him over the side of the bridge, holds him by the ankles and dangles him over the river. All David can see are the rocks and brush far below which seem to be rushing up to pull him down to his death. David pleads but Father demands he submit. Fearing for his life, David agrees. Father hauls him back over the railing. He looks at David then pulls him close in a tender hug. David relaxes and for the moment feels the worst has past. But then Father throws the Boy into the back seat of the car. David hits his head on the door on the far side of the car. He is stunned. As David tries to recover from the blow, Father pulls the Boy’s pants down violently and penetrates him, making David scream. David’s cries for help echo through the empty landscape.

MOTHER SUPERIOR’S OFFICE

David stands before Mother Superior’s desk. Mr. Patterson is there. Mother explains that David is fourteen and can
now be sent to one of the local farms to work and live. David does not believe this. “What?” Mother Superior explains again that he can leave here. David should be thrilled as he is getting what he has longed for, but instead, he is terrified. Patterson tells him he has a local farmer who is willing to take David in for a short time; a sort of trial period. Patterson leans over to Mother Superior; “He has stopped bleeding, yes?” Sister nods.

COMPOUND

It is Christmas again. The Older Boys are bringing a Christmas Tree from a truck into the Refectory. Children singing Carols can be heard.

CLASSROOM

The Little Children in the class practice singing Carols.

OLDER BOYS DORMITORY

The Children singing can still just be heard as Sister Agnes helps David pack a small portmanteau: a few good shirts, some socks, a pair of short pants. She gives him a holy card of Our Lady of Fatima as well as a candy cane. He places the two lollipops he got from Victoria last Christmas in the port. She also hands him a couple pairs
of his special nappies. He is all packed and Sister Agnes takes a last look at him to make sure he’s presentable. David rushes to her and embraces her tightly. He begs her not to make him go. She says she thought it was what he wanted. He says he’s never known any place else. This is the only home he’s ever had. He knows if he leaves something awful will happen. She says that’s nonsense.

COMPOUND

David stands in front of the dormitory with his port. The car pulls up. He begins to pull back then sees it is Emerson. David gets in and is driven out of the orphanage. David looks out the rear window and watches as Neerkol recedes behind them.

LEAHY FARM

The car pulls up at a farmhouse. MR. LEAHY (40), the farmer, waits in front as the car pulls up. David gets out and the car leaves. Leahy steps up to David. He invites him inside.

LEAHY FARM HOUSE

Leahy says for David to make himself at home while he gets his wife. Leahy goes off to find her. David moves into the living room. He stops dead in his tracks. He stares;
a look of horror coming over his face. The room is decked for the holidays with a huge, decorated Christmas tree. David starts to back away in fear.

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING – VERANDAH (PRESENT)

David is spent. How could they not have known, he wonders. Everything he told them, and they ignored it. All that was going on, his bleeding, and they didn’t believe. He doesn’t know what other boys might have experienced, but they must have said something. How could the Sisters deny it all? Margaret asks why he brought her here. This is all so painful, why remember?

DAVID: You don’t believe me, do you?

MARGARET: It’s all so...incredible.

DAVID: My God...you too. Is it that you can’t believe, or you just don’t want to? Why are YOU doing this? Why are YOU here? What am I to you but just subject matter for some...best seller you hope to write. Write my story and forget everything, and go back to your celebrity writer’s life. He rushes to her and grabs her hands and pulls her to him. Margaret is scared with the suddenness of it.

DAVID: Feel that? That’s flesh and blood. I’m real. I’m a human being...not a story. These things happened. They
happened to ME. Can you even begin to understand? Or have you been living alone, locked away in your penthouse too long?

MARGARET: Why re-live this? Why dredge it all up? Can’t you let it go?

DAVID: No. Because it doesn’t go away. It won’t leave me alone. It’s like...like a stain. Like a stain on my brain. Scrub it, rinse it, wash it...and it’s still there, only bigger and darker. I have to tell someone. Someone who’ll believe me. I don’t know what else to do. Help me.

MARGARET: I don’t know if I can.

DAVID: Please. Try.

END OF EPISODE 3
DAVID (15) stands in front of the dormitory holding his portmanteau (port). The car pulls up. He begins to pull back then sees it is EMERSON. David gets in and is driven out of the orphanage. PATTERSON VO: You’re now fourteen and we’re sending you to work and live on a dairy farm. Commit any misdemeanor and you’ll be sent right back here. That includes being cheeky, swearing, disobeying the farmer or his wife, leaving the farm without permission, going to town without the farmer or his wife, lying, stealing, fighting, drinking, being lazy or not working properly. Also, you are never to mention anything that may have happened to you here at the orphanage...or about any of the nuns or Father Anderson...especially Father Anderson. You understand me, David Owen?
David VO: David who, sir?

Patterson VO: Owen. *That’s your full name...David Owen.*

LEAHY FARM

The car pulls up at a farmhouse. MR. LEAHY, the farmer, waits in front as the car pulls up. David gets out and the car leaves. Leahy steps up to David

LOCAL RUGBY STADIUM (PRESENT)

DAVID (70), MARGARET and Derrick in the bleachers. It is raining and there are a few SPECTATORS watching the match on the field. It is a local Rugby club. Derrick holds an umbrella over Margaret. David is enjoying the match very loudly.

Derrick: What the hell are we doing here?

Margaret: David wanted to come. He wanted to bring me here.

Derrick: So, what am I doing here?

Margaret: Holding the umbrella.

Margaret asks David what is happening on the field. Rugby, David answers. Granted, this isn’t big league, just a local club. But he loves these matches more as the guys
here haven’t been corrupted by money like the majors. They play for the love of it. There’s something wonderful about it...it’s physical, you know what you can do and can’t do, you know when you’ve won...and when it’s over, you all go to the pub for a drink and you do it all again tomorrow. He knows she probably doesn’t care for this, but Rugby pretty much saved his life.

LEAHY FARM (1952)

The car pulls away from the farmhouse. Mr. Leahy steps up to David. He invites him inside.

LEAHY FARM - HOUSE

Leahy says he’s going to get his wife and goes off to find her. David moves into the living room. He stops dead in his tracks. He stares; a look of horror coming over his face. The room is decked for the holidays with a huge decorated Christmas tree. David starts to back away. He turns to run out of the house and comes face to face with PHILLIP (8), Leahy’s son. Phillip says it’s not as big a tree as they had last year, but he likes this one more. He takes David by the hand and brings him over to look at the ornaments, especially the ones he made. Mr. Leahy and Mrs.
Leahy come down the stairs and stop at the door to watch the two boys.

LEAHY FARM - BARN

David and Phillip feed the cows. Phillip explains he is an “only child”. David asks what that means. He says it means he has a mother and a father but no brothers or sisters. That makes him what they call an only child. David says he’s wrong. Phillip has his mother and his father. Now David...HE’S an only child. Phillip agrees.

LEAHY HOUSE

Night. David lies awake in bed. He listens to the incredible silence. No Dingoes howling, no one else in the room rustling covers or talking in their sleep. No sound at all. Of course he can’t get to sleep. Soon he hears sounds coming from the Leahy’s bedroom next door. He leans against the wall and listens. He hears what sounds like Mrs. Leahy in pain. David rushes out into the hall and listens at the Leahy’s door. He hears Mrs. Leahy call out again in pain.

MR. AND MRS. LEAHY’S BEDROOM

David bursts in the room. He sees Mr. Leahy on top of his Wife. David flies across the room, grabs Mr. Leahy and...
pulls him off her. Mr. Leahy lands on the floor. David says to stop it, he’s hurting her. Mrs. Leahy starts laughing. David looks at her confused. Soon, Mr. Leahy joins his Wife in laughing at David. David doesn’t know what is happening. Mrs. Leahy comes to David, puts her arms around him and says she can understand why David would think she was in trouble, but not to worry, her husband wasn’t hurting her. She wanted him to do what he was doing. It was all right. David stands embarrassed and uncomprehending.

LEAHY FARM - YARD

David and Mr. Leahy ride horses into the yard. They get down and take the horses into the stable.

LEAHY FARM - STABLE

Mr. Leahy tells David he’s learning to handle a horse very well. David thanks him and starts brushing down his horse. As he does, Leahy sees blood on David’s saddle. He then sees blood on the seat of David’s pants. He asks David what this means.

NEERKOL - COMPOUND

Leahy’s car speeding into the yard, pulling up in front of the Administration Building. Leahy gets David’s things out
of the boot, then gets David out of the car and takes them all into the building.

MOTHER SUPERIOR’S OFFICE

David sits on a seat in the hall. Leahy in the office gives a piece of his mind to Patterson and Mother Superior. Mother Superior says David has a history of lying. Leahy says he isn’t lying; he’s bleeding. He says they need to listen to what this boy says. What kind of place are they running here, anyway? Patterson asks why he brought David back. Leahy says he can’t have David in his home any more; he has an eight-year-old son.

COMPOUND

Again, David is waiting in front of the dormitory for the car with his port. It pulls up and he gets in. David VO: A few weeks later, they sent me to another farm. They were so anxious to be rid of me. As much as I wanted out of that place, I was terrified about where I was going and what might happen to me there.

Camplin Farm – BARN

David being taken through the barn by MRS. CAMPLIN (45). She is large and greasy with a cigarette dangling from her lip. She bangs open a door to a tiny room in the back:
just a cot, a table and a hotplate. She says this is where he’ll be staying. He asks where all the other hands sleep. In the bunkhouse, but that’s not for him.

THE RANGE

David VO: Every day I had to ride out before dawn to bring in the cows for milking, then again at the end of the day. The only help I got was from Kelpie...the Cow Dog. David stops to mop his brow. Kelpie pisses on the horse’s leg. David waves Kelpie away.

Camplin Farm - BUNKHOUSE

David VO: It was hard work and I was pretty much left on my own, so it wasn’t too bad. I never got back to the house until late. David comes to the bunkhouse and is handed a plate of dinner by Mrs. Camplin. He goes to sit at the table with the other RANCH HANDS only to have Mrs. Camplin tell him to take it out on the verandah. Suppressed laughter comes from a few of the Hands. David stands stunned in the middle of the room.

BUNKHOUSE - VERANDAH

Reluctantly, he takes his dinner out on the verandah. As he eats he has to keep shooing Kelpie away. The other
Hands inside ask why David can’t eat with them. Mrs. Camplin says he hasn’t earned it yet.

THE RANGE

David, on his horse, watches over the cattle. He munches on a piece of bread he has in a bag. David sees Kelpie looking at him and throws the dog a piece of bread. The bread lands on the ground near Kelpie, but the dog just looks at it and goes back to staring at David. David shakes his head in disgust.

TOWN - STREET

David VO: Once in a while, the other hands would take me town for dinner or a picture show. This is when I saw my first movies. I liked them. At the movies I could forget all about everything. Well, for a couple hours anyway.

David and a couple of the HANDS going into a cinema.

CINEMA

The Hands sit with girls and are necking while David, right next to them, stares at the screen, enraptured with the movie, not noticing the others.
PUB

David and the Hands at a pub with the Girls. David sips a Coke and talks to another GIRL. He is obviously self-conscious but enjoying himself. David VO: These were good times.

RANGE

David, off his horse, is setting out pieces of meat. This is poisoned meat to kill Dingoes. As he stakes the meat to the ground he secures a red rag as a warning flag to each stake. Kelpie comes up and is sniffing around the tin with the poisoned meat in it. David smacks him and tells the stupid dog to get away as he can’t eat this meat.

RANGE - LATER

David is taking a pee in some bushes. When he comes back to the horse, he finds Kelpie eating David’s bread out of the bag. David throws a rock at the dog.

RANGE - SUNSET

David and Kelpie riding in. The dog runs ahead to the bunkhouse. David follows behind.
CAMPLIN FARM - BUNKHOUSE

David gets to the bunkhouse and the Hands tell David he can eat with them. David goes to a seat and finds Kelpie already there, eating David’s dinner. Everyone laughs.

RANGE

David and Hands mending fences. They talk about getting away. They need the adventure and there just isn’t any here. Seems there’s a war on in Korea...wherever that is. The others talk about going to fight. David says: Where do I sign up?

Recruitment Office

The Hands and David at a table in the recruitment office. A SERGEANT hands them each an enlistment form. The others aggressively fill their forms in. David is stuck. The Sergeant sees David is having trouble. David says he is having trouble with reading the form. The Sergeant asks: Trouble with what? David says: With all of it. The Sergeant takes the form away and tells him sorry. If you can’t read you can’t fight. The others laugh at him.
CAMPLIN FARM - BUNKHOUSE

David eats dinner. There are only three other Hands in there with him. David has to keep pushing Kelpie away.

RANGE

David pees by a bush. Kelpie comes up and pisses on David. David kicks the dog away.

RANGE - LATER

David is synching up his saddle. He comes round to get on the horse and sees Kelpie eating some of the Dingo bait he had set days before. David is about to call to the dog, but changes his mind and lets the dog have at it.

CAMPLIN FARM - YARD

David rides in with the dead Kelpie across his lap. He gets off the horse and pulls the dog off the horse. Mrs. Camplin comes out of the bunkhouse and straight to David who stands holding the dead Kelpie. She asks what happened. David says the dog got into some Dingo bait before he could stop it. Mrs. Camplin gently pets Kelpie then slugs David who drops the dog. Mrs. Camplin pulls the whip off David’s saddle and proceeds to beat him with it, yelling that the dog was worth ten of David. David falls
to the ground bleeding. Mrs. Camplin, crying, cradles the dead Kelpie in her arms.

CAMPLIN FARM – DAVID’S ROOM

That night, David packs his port. He then walks out of the yard and off the farm.

NEERKOL

Next morning, David walks up to the front of the Orphanage. He sees the children working in the yard. He sees Father Anderson’s car parked in front of the Administration Building. He takes one step toward the gates then stops. He looks inside the compound, then looks back over his shoulder down the road. He turns round and walks back down the road the way he has just come. David VO: So, I went. No idea where I was going, but I was going. I was never so glad to see the last of that place. But I never really left it...it stays with me, stains me.

TRAVELING FAIR – Amateur Boxing Ring

David, bare knuckles fighting, pummels his OPPONENT in the ring to much applause. David VO: When you are a poor kid with no education to speak of...I mean you can hardly write your own name...you get by as best you can. You can’t rely
on your brains, so you turn to your brawn; strictly amateur, though.

SawMill

David working with a handful of CO-WORKERS, slicing raw logs into lumber. David VO: I managed to get a job at a local sawmill, which paid all right.

Boarding house

David at dinner with the HUSBAND AND WIFE owners of the house, and other BOARDERS. David VO: Then I got a room in a boarding house. The couple who owned it insisting I call them Mom and Dad.

Jimmy Sharmin’s boxing tent

JIMMY SHARMIN in the ring as a fight is just ending. The VICTOR jumps out of the ring as the VANQUISHED is carried out. The blood is wiped up off the canvas. Jimmy calls for anyone in the audience who would care to go three rounds with one of his fighters and make himself five pounds. David raises his hand.
SHARMIN’S RING


SHARMIN’S RING - LATER

A second bout. David takes a good licking, but holds his own. Soon, the fight is over and David earns another fiver. “Who’s next?” David asks.

SHARMIN’S RING - LATER

A third bout. Jimmy leans over the ropes of the ring. He speaks to the BOUNCER. He asks if he knows who this guy is. The Bouncer shrugs. Jimmy says he can’t afford this. Just then, Jimmy’s fighter falls down in front of him, out cold. Jimmy tells the Bouncer to get David out of there. David is acknowledging the cheers of the Audience. The Bouncer comes up, grabs David by the ankle, knocks him off his feet and pulls him out of the ring. He throws David over his shoulder and carries him out of the tent. The Audience roars with laughter.
Boarding House

David at the dining table strenuously trying to write a letter. The Husband and Wife who own the house help him. David VO: Life was fine. The job at the mill paid well enough, and as I was not yet 21, I was still a ward of the State. The people at the boarding house helped me write letters to the State Children’s Department requesting money to be released from my government trust account. Seems I wrote a lot of those letters.

SawMill - AFTERNOON

Shutting the mill down for the day, David and the others say good night to each other and leave.

Industrial Neighborhood

David walks home alone through an industrial/impoverished neighborhood.

Industrial Neighborhood - VACANT LOT

David walks along a high brick wall. He hears shouts and hollering from the other side. He’s curious as to what is it. He jumps and hauls himself on top of the wall. He sits and watches as a hoard of GUYS play rugby. He jumps down off the wall and starts to walk over to the game when
the ball comes rolling over and stops at his feet. He picks up the ball and punts it back to the team. They all stand shocked at how far and well he kicked it. They wave him over.

RUGBY CLUB OVAL

Days later, David playing with the team. David in the thick of it and at times drawing blood from the OTHER PLAYERS. David VO: For the first time in my life I was in love. Her name was Rugby! It was rough. It was physical. It was fun. David heaves an elbow into an OPPONENT’S face, making his nose bleed. This seems to especially impress MR. McGUIRE who is watching from the stands.

RUGBY CLUB OVAL - LATER

McGuire waits for David at the entrance to the oval. David comes out, still in his jersey. McGuire asks to walk with him.

STREET

McGuire comments that David smells from the match, doesn’t he shower with the rest of the team? David, slightly embarrassed, says no, he waits until he gets home. McGuire tells David he thinks he is one of the best players he’s seen in a long time, and he gets around. See, he’s a scout
for the clubs in Brisbane. He asks David if he ever thought of going professional.

BOARDING HOUSE – DAVID’S ROOM

David packs his port. He adds a team jersey and his rugby shoes to it and closes it.

TRAIN

David on the train to Brisbane.

Roma Street Station in Brisbane

David steps from the train to find Mr. McGuire waiting for him. He takes David to his car and they drive off.

McGuire’s Boarding House

McGuire shows David to his room. DAVID VO: This was a step up for me. McGuire met me at the station, took me, himself, to a boarding house he owned. Then he got me a job.

Cyclone Scaffolding Company

McGuire takes David to see the manager. The MANAGER says fine, since he’s a friend of McGuire’s. He gives David an employment form. David has to ask McGuire to help him fill it out.
Valley Rugby Club locker room

McGuire introduces the team: Fullback NORMIE POPE, Hooker HUGH O’DOUGHERTY, Front Rower “Moose” MacGuire, and Center MICK RIESLESS.

Pub

David and his Fellow Players drinking; beers all around except for David who has Coca Cola. Lots of laughing and flirting with the GIRLS. One Girl talks to David, but he becomes embarrassed and tongue-tied. One of the players makes fun of David’s Coke and David says they’ll see tomorrow at practice why he drinks Coke.

RUGBY CLUB LOCKER ROOM

David is fit and happily encouraging everyone to get out on the field. The others are hung over. Maybe now, David says, they won’t make fun of his Cokes.

Cyclone Scaffolding – manager’s office

Manager tells David they want to send him to the Toowoomba office. David says yes.

McGuire’s Boarding House – DAVID’S ROOM

David in his room packs his port.
Roma Street Station in Brisbane

David at the station waits for a train. Mr. McGuire gives him last minute instructions on who to meet and when his first practice will be.

South Suburban Football Club - Offices

David enters and is greeted by WOLF GOWLETT, the team owner/manager. David says he’s glad to be playing for them. Well, McGuire did say David is potentially one of the best he’s ever seen.

South Suburban Football Club - Oval

David, in a gorgeous new uniform, and the team head out onto the oval. (PLAYERS: JOHN HILLIARD, PODGIE STEVENS, DONNIE FARRELL, RICHIE WEST, JIMMY EVANS, KENNY WEATHERALL, JIMMY BROOKS) It is a large stadium and is packed with SPECTATORS. David is overwhelmed.

Boarding House - Hallway

David leaves the communal bathroom. His LANDLADY comes out of David’s room carrying sheets. She says she has changed the sheet. He thanks her. She asks if he knows who put the lock on the inside of the bathroom door. Slightly embarrassed, he says he did. He likes his privacy...blame
it on his Catholic upbringing. She asks just what is he’s afraid of?

Gladstone Hotel - Pub

David having his Coke at the bar, finishes dinner. The landlord, MRS. HEALY, comes over and asks where the rest of his teammates are that evening. Her son DENNIS comes over and Mrs. Healy asks him to clear David’s plate. He does, reluctantly. She explains to David that her son does not care for footballers. She gives him another Coke, on the house. He thanks her and asks why she’s so good to him. She doesn’t know...he isn’t like the other boys...he seems to need looking after. Dennis is speaking with a couple of men at a table: DETECTIVES JACKSON AND DORRIES. He gestures to David. The detectives get up and come over to David. They tell David they are going to be keeping an eye on him; him and all his football chums. David asks if they don’t have anything better to do. One puts out his cigarette in David’s Coke. The Detectives leave. Mrs. Healey comes back and tells David to never mind them, he’s okay...he’s a good boy. David starts to pay and she says she’ll put it on his credit. He says he still owes her five from a couple weeks ago. She tells him to not worry about it.
Series of Shots

David and Team playing; very hard, rough and bloody. David VO: We played rough, rougher than they do today. But we didn’t know any other way. We didn’t get paid hardly anything, but we weren’t playing for the money...just the love of the game and our mates. Maybe we weren’t as smart as the guys who play today, but I still believe we could have played the pants off them.

South Suburban Football Club - Locker Room

David coming off the field. The other Players strip and head off to shower. David puts his jacket over his uniform, changes to street shoes and heads out without showering.

Gladstone Hotel - Pub

David at the bar with his Coke. Dennis is behind the bar. David asks where his mother is, and Dennis says none of his business. Dennis slaps a bar tab in front of David. David pushes it back and puts five on the counter. Dennis says the five will cover tonight, but David needs to settle up his credit tab. David looks at the bar tab. Fifteen? He doesn’t have that kind of money. Dennis says he doesn’t
care what kind of money he has as long as it comes to fifteen pounds. The PATRONS all laugh at David.

Gladstone Hotel – Pub – That Night

David climbs in through the transom over the front door. He goes to the cash register behind the bar. He uses a knife from behind the bar and forces the register open. He pulls out the cash and stuffs it in his pockets.

boarding house – David’s room

He has the money in a pile on his bed. He just looks at it. He’s laughing at first; he showed that bastard. Then his conscience gets the better of him and he isn’t laughing anymore.

Gladstone Hotel – Pub

The place is packed. David walks in and heads to Dennis behind the bar. He starts pulling the money he stole the night before out of his pockets, and piles it on the bar. He just couldn’t bring himself to keep it. Everyone in the pub, especially his Teammates, slap him on the back and cheer. Someone orders David a Coke. Dennis looks across the room to detectives Jackson and Dorries.
COURTROOM

David stands before the JUDGE: “This is a first offence, and you did bring back the money. Six months suspended. Stay out of trouble or I’ll have to send you down.”

South Suburban Football CLUb - locker room

Gowlett, team owner, asks David if he can help out one of the new guys, Brownie. He needs to drop a few pounds, so can David work out with him? Davis agrees; says he’ll do some roadwork with him starting tomorrow. Manager gives David the kid’s address on a piece of paper.

STREETS

David is out running the next morning in his team jersey. He looks at the address on the paper. David tries carefully to read it. “37 St. Charles Place,” it reads. He looks at the street sign: Charles St. He heads down the street.

NUMBER 37

He comes to the address on the paper he was given: Number 37. He goes up to the house and knocks on the door. He calls for Brownie. There is no answer. David goes around to the backdoor. He knocks again. He tries the door.
It’s open. He goes in calling for Brownie. No answer. He turns and comes out and runs into a HUGE GUY carrying groceries. The Guys asks what David is doing coming out of his house. David asks if he’s Brownie. The Guy slugs David. They get into it and soon the Guy is lying on the pavement, out cold. David leaves.

BOARDING HOUSE – STREET

David arrives back at his boarding house. A Police car is waiting. Jackson and Dorries lean against the car.

COURTROOM

David before same Judge. David VO: Well, turns out I was at the wrong house. Guy swore out a complaint against me saying I stabbed him. Can you believe it? So there I was in Court again. Judge gave me six months...grievous bodily harm. David is escorted out by TWO OFFICERS.

LOCAL RUGBY STADIUM (PRESENT)

The match is still going on. David says how Jackson and Dorries were pleased. They had gotten him back institutionalized. They called it “jail” but, after growing up in Neerkol, jail was a picnic. He stops and looks at Margaret who stares at him. She suddenly gets up and walks away, leaving. David looks to Derrick. What’s
this all about? Derrick says that she has never been that close to an ex-con. David says he doesn’t believe she has ever been close to anyone. He asks if she trusts anybody. Derrick says probably not, but she certainly does not trust David. David gets up and moves off leaving Derrick sitting holding the umbrella. Derrick watches him leave then sits, returning to watching the match. He suddenly stands up, shouting out at the field: “What do you mean? He was safe!” The MAN sitting nearest to Derrick looks at him. Derrick realizes he has embarrassed himself and sits down again. The Man keeps looking at Derrick. Finally, Derrick looks at the Man and says, “Well, he was.”

END OF EPISODE 4
“David Owen: Stain on the Brain – The Life of David Owen”

Episode 5 – “A Battleship in the Desert” (1960-1970)

Story By: Jody Jackson and Jim Buess (consult)

Based on “Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

Boarding house (1960)

DAVID (23) arrives back at his boarding house. A Police car is waiting. Detectives Jackson and Dories lean against the car.

COURTROOM

David standing before JUDGE. The Judge pounds his gavel and motions for TWO OFFICERS. David is taken out by the two Officers and led down a hallway to jail.

MARGARET’S HOTEL ROOM (PRESENT)

Morning, raining. DERRICK is brushing off Margaret’s coat. Clothes are spread on the bed in preparation for packing in several open suitcases. MARGARET is on her cell phone. She tells the person on the phone to stop telling her she’s broke. She says she’s working on the book. The outline is
coming along, so tell her agent to relax…she doesn’t care what they tell her creditors. All right, she says, by the end of the week she’ll have something for them. She slaps the phone shut. Damn it! She has to stay in Australia. She marches to the door, grabbing her coat from Derrick as she goes. Derrick asks where they’re going. To see him, she says. She needs this story. Is that all, Derrick asks? She heads out the door, yelling for him to bring the umbrella.

TAXI

Margaret confesses to Derrick she can hardly bring herself to see David again. The man’s a convict. He’s gotten to you, Derrick observes. Face it, she feels something. He doesn’t know if it is pity, anger, or just curiosity; the most emotion she’s ever felt for anyone was indifference. Ridiculous, she protests. The man’s a jailbird. That’s right, Derrick says…and she’s never done anything wrong in her life. She counters that at least she has never gone to jail. Derrick retorts that she has just never gotten caught.

DAVID’S HOUSE
The rain has stopped. David (70) opens his front door and there is Margaret and Derrick. He says he thought he’d seen the last of her. She is only interested in his story as a writer, nothing more. Really, he asks? If that is all she wants they could have done this on the phone. She didn’t have to come to see him. Very well, he says and gets his coat. Margaret sees on the mantel a small, discount store Christmas tree; very cheap and tacky. She asks what that is. David stammers it is nothing, just something he picked up. She thought he didn’t celebrate Christmas. David shoots out the door.

STREET OUTSIDE PUB

The three get out of the cab. They approach a pub across the street from a rugby stadium. Christmas lights blaze from every window of the place.

PUB

They enter and there is an explosion of cheers. The pub is filled with YOUNG MEN in Rugby jerseys. David says to Margaret that Wayne is on his way over; seems he has the whole team there to meet them. David getting slaps on the back and handshakes. The Young Men pick up David and sit him on the bar. The Men sing: “For He’s a Jolly Good
Fellow.” David says this is more than he expected. They ask who the woman is and David introduces Margaret as his biographer. David tells them to get a seat for the lady, and the Men hoist her up on the bar next to David. Margaret is a little uncomfortable but everyone else laughs and she finds this a bit infectious. The front door slams shut. Silence falls over the room as all the men turn to see what it is. At the door stands a very distinguished older gentleman in a well-fitted business suit. This is WAYNE BENNETT. These Young Men are his players from the team he coaches. He does not seem pleased. Wayne moves to the bar, looking each Man over as he passes. The Players are visibly uncomfortable, some may even blush. He comments to them that he thought they were all in training. Is this what they call “in training”? One of the Men says, “Sorry, Coach.” “It’s about time you got here,” calls David from the bar. Wayne looks and sees David with a huge grin on his face. Now Wayne looks caught off guard. He steps up to David. There is a long moment of silence as the two men look at each other. Wayne says they’ll let anyone into this place. And with that he throws his arms around David. As they embrace the Players all cheer. The ice is broken. David tells the Man to get a seat for the coach. The men hoist the Coach onto the bar next to David,
despite his protests. Wayne looks at David and says that these players today...you can’t do anything with them.

David agrees and says they are all a bit too spoiled...though they do dress better. Wayne asks who the lady is and David introduces Margaret. Wayne explains to her and his players that David was one of the best hookers he ever played with. That was years ago. It was different then. Player weren’t spoiled like these guys on his team today. Margaret asks if he means players today don’t have prison records. Wayne says that back then they just about all did. David says all except Wayne. Wayne says he and David should never have gotten on, considering the trouble footballers got into...especially David.

BRISBANE JAIL (1960)

David (23) steps out of the Jail onto the street. Squinting from the sunlight, he looks around and sees Jackson and Dorries leaning against a car. They wave to David. David gives them the finger. A car comes screeching around a corner and slams to a halt in front of David. He looks in the car. It is DARKIE and TWO OTHER TEAM MATES. David gets in the car and it roars away.

David VO: It was wonderful seeing my mates again. For everything, the team was my family. Rugby was my home.
RACE TRACK

David, Darkie and the Team Mates at the horse races. Darkie is reading the racing form out loud to David. Jackson and Dorries come up behind David. They nudge him and tell him to stand up, they have someone they want David to meet. He tells them to fuck-off. David is pulled out of his seat and finds himself face to face with DETECTIVE SERGEANT GEAREY ("Scarface" Gearey). Gearey has a wicked scar that runs down his entire face. "Jeeze, you’re a pretty sight," David blurts out. Gearey has David by the shirt-front. He twists his shirt tightening it around David’s neck. Gearey threatens, "Don’t tangle with me. I’ve got my eye on you.” He shoves David back into the seat and the three cops leave.

Crown Hotel Bar

The team is at the bar. David asks Darkie who that was with the face and Darkie says it was Scarface Gearey. He’s a cop that even cops are afraid of. MAX, the publican’s son, watches the Team closely without much pleasure. MAKEEL, the publican, pushes past her son and brings the Team
another round, especially David’s Coke. They all shout, “Thanks Ma.”

BOARDING HOUSE

David steps out of his boarding house to take his evening run. The car is in front, full of his teammates. They tell him to get in; they’re going to see Ma.

CROWN HOTEL

They arrive to find the doors locked. They look inside and see five SOLDIERS having dinner. Ma is serving them. Darkie pounds on the door. Ma comes to the door and says she is happy to see them, but then Max sticks his head out and explains it is a private party. One of the Soldiers staggers over and tells the Team to get out or they’ll regret it. The door is slammed in their faces. David heads back to the car but Darkie says they can’t take that. The Team goes up a fire escape and in through an upper window.

CROWN HOTEL BAR

The Team comes down into the bar interrupting the Soldiers party. Darkie asks who wants to be first and soon there is a full-blown brawl going on.
CROWN HOTEL BAR - LATER

The Team is standing and the Soldiers are laid out. The Soldiers offer to buy the next round and soon they are all singing.

RUGBY OVAL

David and team in a rugby match. All faces and legs are scratched, scraped and spitting blood. Then David and others in a scrum. David VO: These were happy days. Me, my mates and the game. It was good fun. Nothing was as glorious as knocking heads in a full-on scrum. I can’t recall when I came off the field and wasn’t spitting claret. It was great.

RUGBY STADIUM

David VO: But behind every silver lining, there’s a dark cloud. David leaves the stadium after a game with Darkie. They come to the street and there are Jackson and Dorries leaning against their car, waving. David VO: I couldn’t shake my shadows. Followed me everywhere. It was only a matter of time.
The Crown Hotel Bar

David, Darkie and the Team singing and chanting cheers along with some FANS. Ma Keel and her son Max are behind the bar. Max shouts that it’s past closing time and they need to get out. The Team only sings louder. Max picks up the phone. A little while later, UNIFORMED POLICE arrive. Silence in the bar. The Team looks to Darkie who smiles broadly. “Who’s first?”

INTERROGATION ROOM

Scarface Gearey is there with Jackson and Dorries “questioning” David. David asks if Jackson and Dorries are attached at the hips. He suggests they get married and make honest men of each other. Suddenly, the chair is knocked out from under David and he falls, hitting the back of his head against the wall. Gearey tells David to get off it and come clean. If he groused on his friends the cops will go easy on him. David tells him to forget it and to do his worst. Gearey asks why David hates cops. He doesn’t hate cops, he says, he just hates him. David then says: “Wasn’t it Shakespeare who wrote: ‘The man that turns
the key on his fellow came out of an arse.'" Gearey lets into David, putting him on the floor and then kicking him.

COURTROOM

David, with black eyes and a plaster across his forehead, before a JUDGE. The Judge dismisses the charges then asks how he cut his forehead. David glances over to Gearey in the courtroom. David says he bit himself. The Judge asks how. David says he was standing on a box.

RUGBY STADIUM

Jackson and Dorries waiting outside. David comes out. They motion him over and ask have him get in the back seat of the car, Jackson and Dorries get in the front.

Jackson and Dorries’ CAR

They ask how he did at the track yesterday. David says he did okay. There was a robbery last night and they want to track down the numbers on his bills. They have David hand over his money. They go through the bills. Jackson takes an envelope out of his jacket. There is a ten-pound note inside. Dorries, wearing driving gloves, switches that note with one from David’s pocket. He hands the bills back to David saying they look good.
BOARDING HOUSE – DAVID’S ROOM

That night, David is woken by Jackson and Dorries and TWO OTHER OFFICERS bursting into his room at the boardinghouse.

Interrogation Room

David in the hot seat, again. His hands are stained brown. Scarface is explaining how the bills in the robbery were specially treated with silver nitrate and would stain anyone who touched them. Jackson and Dorries in background grinning. David asks for a lawyer, the cops all laugh. He asks for a cup of tea, they all laugh. He asks to take a pee...or should he just do it on the floor here. Jackson takes David to the gents where he stands and watches David. Jackson says he thought David had to pee. David says he can’t do it with someone watching. Jackson says they’re always watching; David is their special project. David tells him to piss-off. Jackson tells David he’s done peeing, grabs him and turns him around. David pees all over Jackson’s trousers. Jackson begins to beat David. David VO: I copped a right nasty flogging from Jackson. When he got me back to interrogation, Dorries and Geary
laid into me for good measure. I got released on bond.
But they weren’t through with me.

LOCKER ROOM

Next day, David drags himself in. His Teammates see the condition he’s in and start to minister to his wounds; plasters on his cuts, ice packs on his face and body.
David VO: Thank goodness for Rugby League. It was my sanity. It was a place I could hide from it all. The anger and frustration I held within me every day makes me wonder how I never actually killed anyone. But I knew Jackson and Dorries were just waiting to sink the boot in me. His Mates ask who did this to him and David says who do they think...detectives Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. David wishes they would just drop the hammer and finish it. His Mates say Jackson and Dorries won’t stop until they send him to prison for good. David says that wouldn’t be so bad; better than getting constantly worked over by three insane cops.

Jackson and Dorries’ CAR - DRIVING

David in the back seat; Jackson and Dorries in front.
David asks what it is this time. They say they want to make up for everything.
Canberra Hotel – BAR

They come into the bar at the hotel. David says it’s after hours, but Jackson and Dorries tell him not to worry. They find Scarface Gearey at a table with the MR. LOCK, the Publican who is very drunk. Scarface tells David to sit down and have a drink. David says no, besides it’s after hours. The publican roars that it is his place and if he wants a drink it’s okay, and he falls out of the chair and passes out. Scarface says they’ll have to close up for him. He tells Jackson to clean out the register and bring the money to the back office. He then has David help carry Mr. Lock to the office.

CANBERRA HOTEL – OFFICE

They carry Lock in. Lock is snoring loudly making it difficult for the men to hear each other. They throw Lock onto the couch. Scarface tells David to get the keys out of Lock’s pocket. David looks for the keys, Mr. Lock’s breath almost suffocating him. Jackson is back with the money from the registers and piles it on the desk. David finds the keys. Scarface tells him to see if one of the
keys is for safe and to open it. David asks why. Scarface says they have to put the register money away. So, David tries the keys and soon the safe opens. David pulls an empty flower sack out of the safe to put the money in. Scarface tells him to put whatever money is in the safe in the sack as well...keep it all nice and neat for him. As David does this, he finds a pistol lying in the safe. He looks at it a long time, starts to reach for it but then pulls back and slams the safe closed. The others start at the loud noise, but Mr. Lock goes on snoring.

COURTROOM

David stands in courtroom. The JUDGE is reviewing the evidence: Bills found at the defendant’s flat from the Canberra Hotel Bar. His finger prints on most everything especially the keys to the safe and the safe itself. The least sentence he can pass is three years in Boggo Road Prison. He asks if David has anything to say. David says he can’t see how Mrs. Lock can put up with Mr. Lock’s snoring.

BOGGO ROAD PRISON - YARD
David is led by rifle-armed GUARDS from a prison transport van with about Twenty OTHER PRISONERS through the yard to the cellblock.

BOGGO ROAD PRISON - CELL BLOCK/DORMITORY

They are moved into a large dormitory where they are assigned beds. David VO: I was used to institutions; yes sir, no sir, three-bags-full sir. I knew how to take care of myself and wasn’t going to let anybody muck me about.

BOGGO ROAD PRISON - CELL BLOCK/DORMITORY

That night, The Prisoners are standing next to their beds for head-count. Lights-out is called and they each get into their bunks. The lights snap off. No sooner does David get the blanket over him than REILLY, the dormitory Stand-Over Merchant gets into bed with him. David tries to get free of him and finally elbows Reilly in the gut. This lets David get out of the bunk. He grabs Reilly and hauls him out of the bunk and lays into him. The two have at it, knocking over most everything around and bloodying each other good. The other Prisoners start cheering and placing
side bets. The guard’s whistles blow and the sound of the Guards rushing in echoes through the dormitory.

BOGGO ROAD PRISON - SOLITARY

David and Reilly standing with Guards before steel doors. Both men are scarred and bruised, especially Rielly who seems to have gotten the worst of it. The doors open and the Men are shoved inside. Inside the cell, David settles down nicely. David VO: We got seven days solitary confinement on bread and water only. I didn’t mind; it was a picnic for me. The other bloke couldn’t take it, though. Sometimes he’d bang on the door screaming to be let out. Other times I could hear him sobbing for hours on end.

MAGISTRATE’S OFFICE

David stands before the MaGistrate’s desk. The Magistrate tells David that in his prison they will not tolerate fighting. David says he understands and he’s sorry, but he spent two years in an orphanage being buggered by a priest three or four times a week. If the Magistrate puts him back in the dorm he swears, if anyone comes near him, he’ll kill the guy.

Boggo Road Prison - LONG HALLWAY
David being taken down a hall into the prison psychiatrist’s office. David VO: *I rated solitary from then on. Only thing was I had to visit the Prison Shrink twice a week. I always found these visits entertaining.*

Boggo Road Prison – PSYCHIATRIST’S OFFICE

David sits before the PRISON PSYCHIATRIST. He asks David what he would do if he saw a battleship in the desert. David is taken aback, but then plays along. David says he would sink it. Gooooood, that’s good, David. Now what would you sink it with? David thinks a moment then says he’d use a torpedo. Ah, verrrrry good, David, but where would you get the torpedo? David looks at him as if to say: ain’t it obvious? David says he’d get it from the same place the Doctor got the bloody battleship. (And he thinks David’s blotto.)

BOGGO ROAD PRISON – YARD

David Vo: *The years passed well enough. I even got onto a work detail; pouring cement for new construction.* David is mixing a batch of cement in a trough. Another Prisoner, SYLVESTER, comes by, pushing a wheelbarrow. David VO: *Most of the other workers were fair dinkum, but there was one real bastard; a big brawl-artist called Sylvester.*
Sylvester goes past David, and as he does he casually pushes David into the trough. David VO: *I tried to steer clear of him.*

**BOGGO ROAD PRISON – YARD**

Prison Boss, ROLLIE, comes up to David as he trowels smooth a section of new sidewalk. Rollie says David is one of the best workers he has. He doesn’t understand what David is doing in this place; he really isn’t a criminal. David asks him to talk to the Magistrate for him. They share a laugh. Rollie asks David to go to meet him at the shed to help him bring up a few more bags of cement. David takes a wheelbarrow and heads off.

**BOOGO ROAD PRISON – WORK SHED**

David approaches the work shed. He pulls up the barrow and hears screaming coming from inside. He goes to open the door but it won’t budge. The screaming is now louder. David puts his shoulder to the door and bursts it in. Inside is Sylvester sodomizing a YOUNG PRISONER. David yells, grabs Sylvester and pulls him off the kid. He then hauls Sylvester out of the shed and throws him on the ground. Sylvester gets up and the two square off. David holds his own, but Sylvester is near to too much for him.
David doesn’t back down, though. The Young Prisoner staggers to the doorway and leans against it, watching, bleeding from the mouth. A Guard’s whistle blows. It is Rollie. David takes a hard right on the jaw and goes down. Just then, Guards show up and subdue Sylvester...it takes five of them. Rollie walks up. The Young Prisoner faints and falls to the ground. Rolli tells the guards to get the Young Prisoner to the infirmary. He then tells them to get that bastard Sylvester to solitary. They take him away and start to take David off that way as well. Rollie tells them no, David goes to the infirmary, too. Rollie saw the whole thing. David saved the kid’s life. David VO: I coulda kissed that beautiful son-of-a-bitch.

PAROLE BOARD

David stands before the PAROLE BOARD. David VO: Rollie’s report explained to the Parole Board how I had put myself in danger defending an inmate being sexually assaulted. They knew about Neerkol. They gave me a three-month early parole. I was sort of sorry to go. I was at home in prison, or as close to a home as I’d ever had. But, at least getting out let me get back to my true love: Rugby League.

LOCKER ROOM
David walks into the locker room at Toowoomba. The TEAM rushes to welcome him back. His friend Darkie is still on the team. He introduces the new players: Duncan Hall, an aborigine Dickie Rose and Wayne Bennett. Wayne says he hears David just got out of prison. David says yes, got out of “Nairobi” three months early. He says he’s now a brick layer. He asks what Wayne does for a living. Wayne says he’s a cop. This visibly disturbs David.

STREET

The team out for road work. David is with them at first, soon they see he’s way ahead, then they lose sight of him all together. They get to the finish and there’s David, leaning against the locker room door waiting for them. Wayne asks how he can run so fast. David says his feet grow wings when he knows a cop is chasing him.

PUB

The Team in a pub, David lining his Coke bottles along the bar. Darkie comes up to David, puts an arm around his shoulder and introduces David to GRACIE and HANNA. Gracie takes a shine to him and David, though uncomfortable, likes the attention.

PUB – STREET
Later, David and Gracie, who is a little tipsy, step out of the pub with Darkie hanging off Hanna. Hanna is going to get Darkie home and asks David to see Gracie home. Gracie pulls David to her car. He says he can’t drive. She says that’s all right, she can. She pushes him into the car, gets in and pulls away.

GRACIE’S CAR

The car is stopped on a lonely road. David asks why they are stopping there. Gracie teases: do I have to paint you a picture? She takes off her sweater. David is stunned and nervous. Gracie throws her arms around David and starts kissing him. David tries his best to return the attention. Gracie pulls her knickers off and starts undoing David’s trousers. David is growing nauseous. He is flashing on memories of being taken by Father Anderson in his car. Gracie tells him it’s more fun if he helps. She takes his hand and puts it between her legs. David gasp, pushes her off him, opens the car door and falls out. He scrambles to the bushes and throws up violently. Gracie shouts that if that’s how he feels about it, he can walk back. Gracie slams the car door shut, starts the car and, with wheels spinning and gravel flying, speeds off. David, on all fours, watches her leave.
RUGBY OVAL

David and the Team in a game. David running and scoring, in tight scrums and supporting the kicker. David VO: I was picked for three years in a row to represent Southwest Queensland for the Queensland Trials as the hooker. But I knew I had finally made it into the Eighty Minute Player Club when I was picked to play footy for Toowoomba against the English touring team. David, Wayne, Duncan, Dickie and Darkie standing on the field with the BRITISH TEAM as the national anthems are played. David VO: I was chosen vice-captain. 'course, Dickie was selected captain; the first ever aborigine to receive such an honor. He’d earned it and we were proud of him.

RUGBY OVAL - LATER

The match: David and the Others in a scrum with the Brits. The guys start mouthing off. David let’s one of the Brits have a sock on the jaw, and before too long, the scrum has turned into an all out donnybrook. David VO: We wouldn’t take anything from anybody. In the end, though, it didn’t matter. The Pommies beat us. But, Lord, it was something to see.

LOCKER ROOM
Years later, David cleaning out his locker. He takes down a number of newspaper clippings he has tacked to his locker walls. David VO: There would be more matches, but all good things end. My mates would all go on to other things, Dickie and Darkie...oh, and Wayne. Seems he did all right in years to come. A NEW YOUNG PLAYER enters the locker room carrying his equipment bag. David tells the kid he can have his locker. The Kid recognizes him as D.O. He asks where David is going. David says he really doesn’t know. The Kid says David still has years left in him. David says he knows, but like love, football is for the very young.

RUGBY STADIUM - STREET

David walks out of the Locker room and out onto the street. As always, there is the car with Jackson and Dorries leaning against it. This time they have TWO MORE DETECTIVES with them. They tell the New Men to take a good look, this is David Owen; the ex-con they told them about. They want to New Men to keep an extra special eye on him. It’s the same old song with them.

café
David scouring the want ads in the paper. It is very hard work for him...reading.

BECHTEL PACIFIC OFFICES

David enters the office building of Bechtel Pacific in Brisbane. He comes to the reception desk with the newspaper and shows the RECEPTIONIST the ad. She motions for him to have a seat. David VO: When my gut told me to get away for good, I listened. I heard of jobs being offered on Bouganville Island. I told them I was a rigger...it wasn’t a lie, exactly. I waited and I got an interview and, amazingly, a job.

BOARDING HOUSE – DAVID’S ROOM

David packing his port. He adds some Rugby trophies and a few medals as well as a team jersey or two. He also adds a photo of him with Wayne Bennett.

BRISBANE AIRPORT

David crossing the tarmac with other PASSENGERS. He gets on an airliner. The plane taxies and takes off.

PUB (PRESENT)

Derrick is finishing up in the Gent’s. As he comes out the door he hears singing. He comes into the main room.
David, Wayne and Margaret are still sitting on the bar. They along with all the Players are singing some team fight-song. Derrick stares in disbelief. He shakes his head, but gradually a smile comes across his face. Margaret is singing with them and actually enjoying herself. The song ends and the Players Cheer. Wayne says it’s great to see D.O. again...now, can they get down off the bar, please.

END OF EPISODE 5
“David Owen: Stain on the Brain – The Life of David Owen”


Story By: Jody Jackson and Jim Buess (consult)

Based on “Stain on the Brain- The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

Brisbane airport (1970)

DAVID (35) waiting in the terminal. He has his suitcase and his port. The announcement comes over the speaker for a flight to Bougainville. David gets up, goes out a gate to the tarmac and crosses with OTHER PASSENGERS to a waiting plane.

SYDNEY CAFÉ (PRESENT)

MARGARET and DAVID (70) sitting in an outdoor café in Sydney. The Sydney Bridge and Opera House are in the distance. Margaret ends a call on her cell phone and puts it away. She asks why Sydney needs an opera house. To perform opera, David guesses. She asks how many people in Australia go to the opera. David says, probably just enough. She tells him she enjoyed going to the Rugby Club the day before. She can’t remember the last time she had so much fun. It’s easy, David says, when you let yourself
enjoy yourself. Her cell phone rings. She takes it out, looks at the screen to see who is calling. She starts to answer, but then closes the phone and says she’ll get back to them. The WAITER refills their coffees. There is a long silence, nothing needing to be said; just the two of them enjoying the outdoors and the harbor and the atmosphere. Finally, David sees a COUPLE WITH AN INFANT. The child is just learning to walk and Mom and Dad are playfully helping it toddle about. The couple shares a kiss. David smiles at this. David says that sometimes he regrets not having fallen in love. He wonders what it would have been like; to have married and to have had children of his own. He can’t imagine how other people can do it. How can they go through that pain of sex? He could never hurt a woman, not after what Father Anderson had done to him. Margaret asks what David is talking about...what pain of sex? What Father Anderson did with David was sexual, but it was certainly not making love. David doesn’t understand. Margaret tells David that when it comes to intercourse, between two loving people, it is anything but painful. As a matter of fact, it is quite pleasurable. David still does not understand. Margaret realizes that David does not really understand how sex is done. She grabs a napkin and draws a diagram of a woman’s
sex organs. She says this is where a woman pees...this is where a woman poops. David gets that. She then draws a third hole. This, she explains, is where a woman has sex. When a man enters a woman there, it is enjoyable, not painful. David is amazed.

David: “You’re kidding me?”

Margaret: “No...three, ah, holes.”

David: “And one for sex?”

Margaret: “That’s right.”

David: “Fair dinkum?”

Margaret: “What...?”

David: “Fair...ah, honestly?”

Margaret: “Yes. Fair...whatever.”

David: “Well, God love a duck! A separate hole for sex! That makes it all make sense!”

Everyone in the café has been listening and they break into applause. David is too exited to notice, but Margaret smiles uncomfortably at everyone. Now, she says, where were we?

Bougainville – AIR STRIP (1970)
David (35) steps off a small plane with 10 OTHER MEN at an airstrip on the island. They get on a truck from Bechtel Pacific and drive off.

Bougainville - JUNGLE WORK SITE

Crews are laying six-foot diameter, above ground, water pipelines. David works with a crew of Five AusSies bringing a pipe down by crane and positioning it. Around them are many Native islanders who are clearing brush, digging trenches and pouring sand back-fill. David VO: I wound up in the middle of a fantastic jungle paradise, laying pipe with a crew of Aussies. But most of the really hard labor was done by hundreds of Native Islanders: tribesmen. Chimbu, Tallai and Wopai. Wonderful workers...and after a time, I managed to pick up a bit of their lingo. David wearing a white hard-hat and directs the crane operator. Next to him is PAO, a native who sports a bone through his nose. He takes instructions from David and passes them on to the native workers. David VO: Soon, I was the lead of a work gang, mostly native. Pao was my assistant. He was invaluable.
Bougainville - JUNGLE WORK SITE - LATER

Lunch Break. The Aussies (whites) eat at long tables with a good selection of grub. The Natives sit a distance away, munching beetle nuts and smoking cigarettes and just watching the Aussies with envy. David sees this. David asks an AUSSIE why the Native workers don’t eat with them. The Aussie says they aren’t allowed to. David VO: Poor buggers. We were getting seven hundred dollars a week, while the native workers, the guys who did so much of the real work, were getting ten cents an hour.

Bougainville - CANTEEN STOREROOM

That night, David and Pao break into the storeroom. They fill boxes with food.

Bougainville - WORKERS ENCAMPMENT

The Native workers, Pao and David sit by a fire eating what they just stole.

Bougainville - PAYMASTER’S TENT

Payday. David sits next to the PAYMASTER as he hands out pay envelopes to the Men lined up in front; Whites in one line and Islanders in the other. David looks over to see
Pao. He is collecting the pay envelopes from the island workers as they each step away from the pay table.

Bougainville - WORKERS ENCAMPMENT

That night, David asks Pao what he was doing. He explains that each payday, they decide which one of them is going to get everyone’s pay. That one will then be able to go back home, get married and start a family. They will do this for each of them in turn. David is filled with admiration for this display of selfless sacrifice.

Bougainville - JUNGLE WORK SITE

David directs the crane. A Native Worker comes to him. David takes him aside and the Worker explains he needs money to get a friend out of jail. David says he has no money to give him. The Worker insists and finally David has to get firm and order him back to work. David returns to directing the crane operator. The Operator shouts back for David to look out. David turns around to see the Worker coming at him with a long handled shovel. David ducks just as the worker swings the shovel at him. It misses his head but tears a large gash across the back of his jacket. The Worker comes on again, but this time David gives him a quick, three-punch combination and the guy goes
down. The Other Native Workers stop what they are doing and slowly encircle David. Pao pushes his way through the mob and harangues them in his native tongue. Slowly, they all back away and return to work.

Bougainville – WORKERS ENCAMPMENT

That night, David thanks Pao for what he did...but what did he say to them. Pao says he just reminded them that they are Chimbu. But he is a Tallai...they used to hunt Chimbu and eat them. David says he can’t be serious. Pao says, oh yes, they taste very good.

Bougainville – MANAGER’s TENT

Next day, David stands before a management board meeting in a tent. They explain they have to let David go as they have a strict policy that no white man can strike a native islander. David says the man was going to kill him...what was he supposed to do, kiss him?

BRISBANE AIRPORT

DARKIE, one of David’s footy mates, picks him up at the airport in Brisbane. He says he thought David was in “Nairobi” again. He tells David he has a place for him to stay, and a team that will have him.
BOARDING HOUSE – DAVID’S ROOM / DAVID’S DREAM

David in the car with Father Anderson getting abused.
David thrashes in his bed in his boardinghouse and falls onto the floor waking with dry-heaves.

BANK

David at a bank with Darkie who helps him open an account.

BANK – STREET OUTSIDE

They come out of the bank and, as they head for the car, a priest walks by. David shouts at him: “How many little boys did you bugger today, yah bastard!” Darkie is as stunned as the Priest. David VO: I snapped. I didn’t know where it came from. What was this? Hate? Or fear?

DAM SITE

Explosion. The side of a gorge erupts in dust and rubble.
David VO: I got a job working on a dam site. Laying charges. A powder monkey as we called it. Got pretty good at it. Had a good teacher; lad named Jimmy Soo. David and JIMMY in a steel basket lowered from a crane, boring holes in a cliff-side and packing the holes with dynamite. Jimmy asks how long David was in Bougainville. David says a few months. Jimmy asks what he did before that. Oh, a bit of

DAM SITE – SUPPLY TENT

Rain. Jimmy and David inside a Supply Tent wait for the rain to stop. David VO: You just sort of take life as it comes. But once in a while, something happens that knocks you for six. Jimmy asks David where he was born. Then, that his last name is Owen, right? Jimmy says he knows David’s family. David says he has no one.

Jimmy: There was an old woman, Perlie Owen. Ran a boarding house.

David: You’re having me on.

Jimmy: You know her?

David: My grandmother was Perlie.

Jimmy: And her daughter was Katie.

David: That was my mother’s name.

Jimmy: I thought so. Your mother’s living in Newcastle, now.
TAXI - DRIVING

David rides in a cab. The DRIVER has the radio on playing Christmas music. He also has Mistletoe hanging from his rearview mirror. David asks him to turn off the radio.

KATIE’S HOUSE IN NEWCASTLE

The cab drops David in front of a house in the industrial dock area of Newcastle. He carries a shopping bag of Christmas presents. It is sunset and the sky is orange and red. He knocks on the front door. After a long wait the door opens and there stands KATIE (47). She looks older than her years and very tired. David says, “Hi Mum.”

KATIE’S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Katie makes them tea. She says she saw David’s name in the papers...football or something...but she never thought it was him. He says he always thought about her. She asks how he could have, he never knew her. Well, he says, maybe it was just the idea of her. Katie’s daughters, DONNA (11) and SUSIE (9) come home from school. Katie introduces the girls to their brother. David corrects her, half-brother. The front door bangs open. ALBERT (50), Katie’s husband comes home. He is a dockworker, hard as nails and about the size of an office building. He’s cursing and
complaining that there won’t be any work on the docks for a week. Albert comes in the Kitchen and heads straight for the refrigerator. He is still complaining. He opens the fridge and reaches in for something. Katie tells him to say hello to her son. He comes out of the fridge with a couple beers and looks at David. He gives David a long look up and down, then mutters: “He’s got a name, hasn’t he?” She says it’s David. Albert nods, unimpressed, and goes out to the lounge (living room) and turns on the TV.

KATIE’S HOUSE – FRONT STEPS

David says goodbye to Katie at the door. He walks down to the waiting cab. As he opens the cab door he hears arguing coming from the house. Something smashes against a wall. He gets in the cab.

DAM SITE

David as received a letter from Katie. Jimmy Soo reads it to him. It is all rather nondescript. Just thanking David for visiting and how good it was to see him, but nothing heartfelt.

DAM SITE – EMPLOYEE LOCKER ROOM

David empties his locker at work. He shakes hands with Jimmy Soo and hands him his hard hat.
KATIE’S HOUSE IN NEWCASTLE

David with his suitcase and port in front of Katie’s house as the cab pulls away. Katie steps out on the steps.

outdoor restaurant

David and Katie sit at a table. There is a Wattle tree in bloom nearby. David asks Katie if Albert will mind him moving in. He will only stay a little while, until he can find a place of his own nearby. She does not answer him. He asks if she’s listening. Instead, Katie mentions that the Wattle tree is in bloom. David recites the Wattle tree poem:

_Sing a Song of Wattle Time_

_Sing of Sweet September..._

_Sunny Days and Scented Nights_

_Pleasant to Remember..._

_When the Sunshine Smiles in Spring..._

_You Can Smell the Perfume Sweet_

_As the Breeze is Bearing._

Katie finally looks at him. A tender moment...one of their last.
KATIE’S HOUSE – KITCHEN

Katie makes dinner. Through the window, she can see David in the back garden (yard) putting in a new concrete walk. Albert comes in for a beer. He sees David in the back. He asks Katie who David thinks he is. This isn’t his house. What does she know about him except that he’s been in and out of jail. Albert sees a new toaster on the counter. Where’d this come from? Katie says David bought it. He bought that beer, too. Albert pours the beer down the kitchen sink. “He can keep his bloody money!” Albert yells, as he picks up the toaster and throws it through the kitchen window. The toaster lands in the fresh concrete David is smoothing.

KATIE’S HOUSE – LOUNGE

David, Katie and the Girls are watching TV. They are all laughing tremendously. Albert comes home from work. The Girls get quiet. Albert goes to the kitchen, gets his two beers and comes back in. He changes the TV channel to the horse races and sits down to watch. The Girls complain; they were watching the movie. Katie asks Albert to change it back. He says no, it’s his TV. David gets up and changes the channel back. Albert gets up shouting; who
does David think he is? Albert puts his foot through the TV. “Now nobody watches nothing!”

STREET – BUS STOP

David walks the Girls to school. They wait at a bus stop. Behind them is a store. There is a Television in the window. David looks at this.

KATIE’S HOUSE – LOUNGE

That night, Albert comes home. No one is in the lounge. But there is a new television. Albert throws down his things, heads to the TV, unplugs it and starts to lift it. David, standing in the kitchen doorway, says he should not even think about it. Albert puts it down and David goes back in the kitchen. Albert asks where the TV came from. David says, the store. Albert moves in on David, “Who the hell do you think you are? Coming in here, out of nowhere. Where were you all these years?...when I was taking care of Katie...raising these girls? Where were you? Off in Boggo Road.” David says quietly, “You touch those girls, you hurt Katie, and you answer to me.” Albert comes back, “This is my house. You’re just a guest. I call the shots here.” David pulls two knives out of a drawer and stabs them into the center of the kitchen table. “Here you go,”
he shouts. “Now’s you’re chance. One for you, one for me. Come on, you gutless blowhard.” Albert goes to take one but pulls back. The front door opens and Katie and the Girls come in finishing their ice creams. Albert asks where they got the money for that. Katie says it was David’s treat. Albert rages again at David. He eyes the knives still sticking out of the table. “These are my children. She’s your mother, not your wife.” David tells Donna to go next door and call the cops. She runs out the front door. Albert says David can’t tell his daughter what to do. David says he’s calling his bluff. Albert goes for a knife but David gets one out of the table first. Albert backs off, turns and runs into the lounge. He picks up the TV and throws it through the front window. Sirens in the distance. Katie approaches Albert and tells him to stop. He can’t treat David this way. Albert does not say anything; he just gives Katie the back of his hand. The front door bursts open and the COPS come in as David flattens Albert with a good, left cross. Albert on the floor is stunned but not out. He tells the Cops to arrest David, they saw what he did. He wants him out of his house. The Cops say they didn’t really see anything. Katie explains that David is her son and this was all Albert’s doing. David asks Katie to put the Girls to bed.
The Cops say they are getting tired of being called over here every other night. Albert needs to watch his temper before he really gets into trouble. If David’s mum wants him to stay there isn’t anything the Cops can do. David goes out to the front lawn to pick up the broken TV. The Cops come out. One of them goes to David and tells him they would appreciate it if when he gets Albert alone to give him a right hiding.

KATIE’S HOUSE – FRONT STEPS

Next day, David is leaving the house with the Girls to walk them to the bus. Katie comes out and says she’s scared to stay in the house with Albert. David tells her not to worry; just go to the neighbor’s and call the Cops if he’s trouble. He kisses her and leaves with the Girls. Katie sits down on the steps to watch them go.

KATIE’S HOUSE – FRONT STEPS – LATER

David comes home that evening to find Katie still sitting on the steps. She does not recognize David.

HOSPITAL

David bringing Katie to a hospital. Two nurses take Katie away as David stands there and watches them go. David VO: I took Mom to the doctor and he recommended she stay at
hospital for observation. She was there three weeks.  
Nervous breakdown, they said. I don’t know, but she was never the same after that. I felt had to do something drastic.

KATIE’S HOUSE

Albert leaves for work. As he gets out of sight, David and the Girls whip into action. They start throwing things into boxes: everything in the kitchen cabinets, clothes from closets, bedroom drawers. David sends one of the Girls to the neighbor’s to make a call.

KATIE’S HOUSE - LATER

A moving van pulls up and everything is loaded in with the help of a couple MOVERS. The van soon pulls away, leaving two bottles of beer in the open refrigerator, one chair and the broken TV in the lounge.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David helps Katie out of a cab. They start up the walk and Katie sees where they are and stops scared. This is not her house, she says. No Mom, says David, this is our new house...your house. He walks her up the steps where the Girls wait on the verandah for her.
DOCKYARDS

David in the machine shop at the Dockyards. He is cleaning up the metal shavings around a lathe. David VO: A bloke like me could always get a job at the dockyards when he needed to. And I needed to, now that I had a family to support.

UNION HALL

David at a union meeting speaking in front of a group of his COWORKERS. David VO: If there’s one thing you can count on at the docks, it’s unions. And I fit right in. Care as I do for the underdog, I was soon voted in as Union Representative.

DOCKYARDS

David and coworker, KEGHEAD, in the Floor Manager’s office. The FLOOR MANAGER is explaining that Keghead is on disciplinary notice pending a full review. Seems the Manager caught him sleeping in the loo. David gets up and rips into the Manager: You ever stop to ask what he’s doing in there so long? The man has piles. You ever see the broom handle in there with the teeth marks? That’s what he puts in his mouth and chomps down on so nobody will hear his screams of pain...it’s that bad. By the time he’s
finished, he’s worn out from the pain. I wouldn’t sack him if I were you or word would have to get around that you are perving on the employees in the loo! The manager just stares, mouth open. David escorts Keghead out of the office.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David asleep. There’s a loud scream. He wakes and runs out to see what it is. More shouts from Katie’s room. David rushes in to see Katie huddled in the corner. She says Albert was trying to get in. She heard him at the window. He’s trying to kill her.

DAVID’S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Days later, David in the kitchen opens a cupboard and finds money between the plates and stuffed in glasses.

DAVID’S HOUSE - LOUNGE

David cleaning, gathers up old newspapers and finds money stuffed inside the pages.

DAVID’S HOUSE - FRONT GARDEN

David is cutting the lawn. Katie sits on the verandah smoking. The WOMAN NEXT DOOR comes home and, as she goes
up her walk, she says hello to David. Katie shouts for her to leave her son alone, bloody Sheila!

Dockyards - pay office

David at pay window getting his pay envelope. He opens it and finds his redundancy notice. David VO: I had become redundant. Just a nice way of saying sacked, unemployed, out of work. Nothing too much, just a small inconvenience.

DAVIS HOUSE - STREET

David comes home from the grocer’s. The WOMAN FROM ACROSS THE STREET runs up and tells David to come to her house quickly. They arrive to find Katie on the Woman’s verandah, sitting at a table, tearing pieces of paper, muttering and rocking back and forth. Woman says Katie was screaming about seeing things crawling out of the floorboards. She won’t go home until David is there. David gently lifts up his mother, Katie puts her arms around David’s neck and holds on. David has to pry her loose.

Com Steel works

David loads a jackhammer into a wheelbarrow and takes it across the shop floor. David VO: I found a job at Com Steel. I liked it well enough. But like always, there
would come along one bastard to muck things up. One of those guys who specializes in making life difficult. David passes a HUGE WORKER who calls David a bloody dockyard piece-o’-shit. David tries to ignore him and starts away again when the Worker calls him a Prawnhead Warfy. David stops, puts down the barrow, picks up a two-by-four, turns and clouts the guy up-side the head. After a few more punches, the guy goes down and out. David leaves him and quietly continues on with his barrow. David VO: Management didn’t care for my style of employee relations. I got sacked.

DAVID’S HOUSE - LOUNGE

David comes home to find a PRIEST in the house. He grabs him and is about to throw him out when Katie enters the room to ask if the Priest is finished. She asked him there to bless the house to rid it of the evil she feels is there. Maybe then she’ll stop seeing things crawling out of the walls.

HOSPITAL

David checks his mother into the hospital, again. David VO: I took her back to the hospital. I didn’t like it, but what else could I do?
David again in a factory operates a punch press. David VO: My Union contacts paid off and I got another job working at Goninans, a big engineering company. The employees are gathered on the shop floor so the manager can speak to them. He announces that the company has hired a new department head and he wants to introduce them to the new employee mental health officer: Doctor Roger Peters. Peters steps forward. David shakes his head and shouts: “Bugger the bastard. I don’t want to talk to him...bloody suit...What are yah, some sort of stoolie for the management?!” The Manager leans over to Peters and says to him: “Looks like you just met ‘Hardhat Dave’”

David VO: But back home. Mom was going from bad to worse. Katie is in bed. David is taking away the tray from her lunch. She asks David to tell her what happened before he came back home. She knows he played football, but what else? She says David never told her what happened in the orphanage. David VO: So, I told her. All of it. It just came rushing out of me. I’d been holding it back from her
for too long. Now, it all just came out and she sat there and listened.

DAVID’S HOUSE – KATIE’S ROOM

Sunset. Red sky. David finishes telling Katie about the orphanage. Katie is stunned. She says she had no idea. She never wanted that for him. But how was she to have known? What could she have done? She gets out of bed, crosses to the dresser. She rummages through a drawer and pulls out a rusty tea tin. (The same tin in which she hid the badge of the police officer 3322...David’s Father.) She gives it to David. She says to David: “They robbed you of your life. Do something about it. Get the bastards!”

Funeral Home

David and the Girls watch as a coffin is slid into a hearse. David holds the tea tin. David VO: A few days later, she died. It had been only a short time ago I had found her. Now she was gone.

SYDNEY CAFÉ (Present)

David is trying to hold back his tears. Margaret hesitates, then puts a hand on his. Her phone starts ringing. She says for him to hold that thought. She goes to pull out her phone, but before she can, David gets up.
He says he wants to show her something and starts to walk off. She is torn a moment between the phone and David. She puts the phone away and gets up to follow.

Sydney Bridge

David leads Margaret up the outside of the bridge’s structure. They are almost to the top. Margaret has her eyes tightly shut. She says she can’t go any further. David says: “Give me your hand...trust me.” She reaches out. He grabs her hand and pulls her to the top. They stand together, David holding on to her. He says: “Look.” She opens her eyes and all of Sydney spreads out before her. She is amazed and begins to smile. She says: “It’s beautiful.” Her phone rings. She fumbles for it, but it drops from her grip and falls into the ocean below. She watches it go. David starts to laugh. Soon, she is laughing. She says it’s very beautiful up here. Holding onto each other, they continue laughing.

END OF EPISODE 6
“David Owen: Stain on the Brain- The Life of David Owen”

Episode 7 – “To Valley of the Bones” (1993-PRESENT)

Story By: Jody Jackson and Jim Buess (consult)

Based on “Stain on the Brain – The David Owen Story”

by Jody Jackson

Hospital (1993)

Sunset. Red sky. DAVID (55) finishes telling Katie (67) about his time in Neerkol orphanage. Katie is stunned. She says she had no idea. She never wanted that for him. But how was she to have known? What could she have done? She gets out of bed, crosses to the dresser. She rummages through a drawer and pulls out a rusty tea tin. (The same tin in which she hid the badge of the police officer 3322...David’s father.) She gives it to David. She says to him: “They robbed you of your life. Do something about it. Get the bastards.”

SYDNEY HOTEL (PRESENT)

Margaret sitting at a desk in her hotel room. She is filing papers. DERRICK comes into the room. She tells him to sit. He sits opposite her at the table. She explains she is putting her affairs in order. Most importantly, she
has had to sell the condo/penthouse. She tells him she’s broke and it had to be done. He asks, “What about me?” She says he’s welcome to stay ‘til she finishes her research for the book. She has one more interview with David and then she’ll be done. “Yes,” he says, “but what about me?” She says for him not to worry, he always lands on his feet.

DAVID’S HOUSE

DAVID (70) at home putting Mom’s tea tin on the mantle. His lounge is filled with boxes of papers and files. He pushes some aside so he can sit down to eat his sandwich and cuppa.

DAVID’S HOUSE (1993)

DAVID (55) at home, putting a photo of his Mom into his port. Also a photo of him and his Sisters goes inside.

David VO: The house was empty now. Mom was gone. The girls were grown and on their own. They had been a great comfort to me over those years. They took care of me as much as I took care of them. It was just me now...and some unfinished business.
Goninan ASSEMBLY FLOOR

David directs a Crain Operator on the assembly floor.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE – HALLWAY

David in overalls and hardhat passes Roger Peters’ (Director of Employee Relations) office door. He stops, looks at the door and chuckles to himself then walks on.

Goninans ASSEMBLY FLOOR

David on the assembly floor breaks up a fight between two Employees. He has to deck one of them. Roger Peters is on a catwalk looking down at this.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE – HALLWAY

David again at Peters’ office door. He starts to go in, but stops and walks away. He gets a few steps away, halts, turns back, knocks on the door and goes in.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David paces back and forth in front of Roger who sits quietly behind his desk. David is rambling on about not knowing why he’s there. Roger is the last person David would want to speak to. He’d always managed all right, but now, if he doesn’t do something, speak to someone, he’ll do something he shouldn’t. Roger asks what that would be.
David says if he doesn’t do something, he’s going to kill a priest. David VO: That’s how it started. I didn’t know what was happening to me. I didn’t know what to do. I had to talk to someone, and Roger was there. They were paying him to listen to us; I figured I should make him earn his salary. I’d see him twice a week for the next several years. He’s the first suit I ever came to trust.

ROGER PETERS’ HOME - STUDY

Roger in his study, his wife walks by the door in her nightgown. She stops at the door to tell him she’s going up to bed. His desk is covered with papers he is not looking at. He does not answer. She goes inside to him. She spins his chair around and sits in his lap. He finally notices her. She says he’s one distracted guy. What’s wrong? He says it’s his patient David Owen. He’s the last person he ever expected to have come into his office, but he asked for help. So, she says, what’s the problem? He says he thinks David’s issues are a lot more than he, Roger, can handle. She says that’s nonsense. He helps people. That’s his job and he’s very good at it. Still, he doesn’t think he can. David’s troubles are enormous. Roger feels he may do more harm than good. She says that’s not it. You’re confused because you just don’t know where
to begin. She tells him to help David. That’s what he does, who he is. He says he doesn’t know what it will do to him, Roger. She says not to worry, she’ll take care of Roger. That’s her job.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

Roger tells David they will start by using the Freedom of Information Act. They will get everything they can about David, Father Anderson, Neerkol and his time there.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE – SERIES OF SHOTS

David VO: And so we did. Together we wrote every agency of the government and received piles and piles of documents.

**Roger sits at a word processor working with David.

**Roger prints out a letter and has David sign it.

**The two of them sort through documents and file them into piles.

Goninan’s ASSEMBLY FLOOR

David with all the company employees. There is a handmade banner reading: “Happy Retirement Hardhat Dave.” They sing to him and present him with a watch; handshakes and congratulations from all. Roger stands off to the side.
David walks over to him. He says now that he’s retired he can’t see Roger anymore. Roger asks, “Who says?”

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David and Roger in his office one night after the plant has closed. Roger says he wonders if they are doing this right. Why go after the nuns at Neerkol...or Father Anderson. David can’t believe this. Roger explains that after his birth, David became a ward of the State of Queensland. They are the ones who sent him to Neerkol. That makes the State responsible for what happened to him there. They have to go after the state as well. David VO:

This was getting bigger than even I imagined. What was next? The country of Australia? The Vatican? God himself? As far as I was concerned...let the chips fall!

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

In the office among the piles of documents, Roger pulls a book out of a desk drawer. He opens it and hands it to David asking if he can read it. David says he’ll try. He struggles through the Survivor Psalm:

I have reached the stage of a survivor

And am no longer a slave of victim status
I look back with sadness

Rather than hate

I look forward with hope

Rather than despair

I may never forget

But I need to constantly remember

I was a victim

I am a survivor

SOLICITOR #1’s OFFICE

David and Roger enter the lawyer’s office. They meet SOLICITOR #1. David VO: And so it started. We went after the bastards. I started to work with my first Solicitor.

COURIER MAIL OFFICE

David in the office of a NEWSPAPER REPORTER at the Brisbane Courier Mail. David VO: I went to the newspapers. They were eager to hear my story.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David comes into Roger’s office holding the Sydney Morning Herald open to the story about David.
DAVID’S HOUSE

David gets a letter from Solicitor #1. He opens it.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

Roger opens the letter and reads it. He tells David that it says Father Anderson died fifteen years ago. David is shattered. The bastard got away with it. He also tells David that the solicitor (#1) has dropped his case.

OFFICE OF SOLICITOR #2

SOLICITOR #2 dictating to his SECRETARY. David VO: So, I found a second Solicitor who immediately sent out a news release that we were suing the government of the State of Queensland.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David carefully dials the phone. He waits on the line and waits. David VO: Now, I thought, something is going to happen. And so I waited...and waited. Three months I waited. David finally gets through to his Solicitor’s secretary. He asks to speak to him. He is shocked when he is told he is no longer with the firm.
ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David drops a postal parcel of his case’s documents on Roger’s desk. He explains the solicitor dropped the case...well, not really. He’s no longer with the firm. Seems he left to join the ministry. Roger tells David to keep at it. Things will happen.

DAVID’S FAVORITE CAFÉ

David having coffee with ALAN GILL. Gill says that David’s story in the papers have brought hundreds of people to his attention who suffered as David did. He’s writing a book and wants to interview David for it. What’s it going to be called, David asks.

BOOKSHOP

David looks at the book “Orphans of the Empire.” David VO: Now they couldn’t ignore it anymore.

DAVID’S HOUSE

ABC NEWSCAST: “Allegations that Roman Catholic nuns systematically tortured orphans over a period of ninety years are being investigated by Queensland authorities. Charges state that children at Neerkol orphanage in northern Queensland suffered beatings, public floggings and
even rape. The orphanage is now under official investigation by the Queensland State Children’s Commissioner Norm Alford.” David watches the TV report and smiles.

DAVID’S HOUSE - LATER

David gets dressed before a mirror, having trouble with his tie. Roger flips through a newspaper article on Neerkol in the lounge. The phone rings. David answers and the voice on the other end tells him if he testifies before the committee he’ll end up with a mafia necktie and the caller hangs up. Roger asks who it was. David says he didn’t say. Then he asks Roger what’s a mafia necktie?

OUTSIDE COMMISSION HEARING

David and Roger arrive at the building where the hearing is being held. David VO: Roger took the threat seriously and so did the police. There was a contingent of Constables when we arrived and a larger crowd of reporters. I had no idea what I had started. There is a huge crowd of NEWSPAPER and TV REPORTERS waiting at the curb. POLICE CONSTABLES are waiting to usher Roger and David inside.
COMMISSION HEARING

David and Roger sit at a table before the longer table of the TEN COMMISSIONERS and NORM ALFORD. The spectator’s area is filled with the PUBLIC and REPORTERS. There is a lot of noise. David VO: But I testified. It was a wonder the commission could even hear me. But they listened. And it wasn’t long before Alford gave the government what for. David continues to speak before the committee as over is heard several news reports: REPORTER 1 VO: Children’s Commissioner Norm Alford has accused the State Government of a cover-up in his investigations of abuse at the Neerkol orphanage... REPORTER 2 VO: Mr. Alford Stated he believed the Department was hindering his investigation by refusing to hand over sensitive files on the orphanage... REPORTER 3 VO: Mr. Alford said he intended to seek legislative change to force the Department to supply files on Neerkol and former residents...

ALFORD’S OFFICES

Alford outside his office addresses reporters. “We sought the documents but the department saw fit to seek legal advice and they have since refused to hand them over under the secrecy provisions. One point of view is that in using
this provision it promotes a cover-up and prevents us from getting the truth out there.”

DAVID’S HOUSE

David makes coffee and takes it out on the verandah. He goes to the mailbox and gets the paper. David VO: *I could have kissed him and the whole committee. But as I’ve learned over the years, good things never last.* David opens the paper and sees the headline: “Commissioner Alford Resigns.”

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David sits as Roger paces back and forth reading the story in the paper. David asks what it means. Roger says it means he’s left the government and the Commission. Seems Alford is accused of an improper relationship with his junior administrative officer. His Male administrative officer. David is taken aback for a moment, then blurts out: *so what!* He was one person who was actually interested in truth. How can they do this to him? Roger shrugs and says it’s just politics.

SOCIAL CLUB HALL

David addressing a social club meeting.
CHURCH HALL

David addressing a church meeting.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David receives a phone call from The Neerkol Action Support Group asking him to join a class action suit. He declines.

DAVID’S HOUSE - LATER

David gets letter in mail from the Forde Commission asking him to testify. David VO: The one good thing to come from the collapse of the State Commission was that Minister Anne Bligh announced the forming of the Forde Commission under Commissioner Leneene Forde.

FORDE COMMISSION MEETING

David sitting in enormous hall with the Forde Commission at one end and him at the other. David VO: Once again, I was “invited” to testify. I went, and I wondered if they could even hear me. A few weeks later, I received a notice from my third solicitor.

ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

Roger reads that the third solicitor informs him of the expiration of the Statute of Limitations and enclosed is an offer of settlement from the state. David asks why he
listed as “Plantif 30”. He never entered into the class action suit. He tells Roger to tell the Solicitor to stick the settlement offer where the sun don’t shine. David VO: Needless to say, my Third Solicitor dropped me.

UNIVERSITY HALL

David speaking before a university group. David VO: The public awareness of the situation grew: news stories, books, reports, commissions... It was growing, but I seemed to be losing ground.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David getting the mail and reading reports from Solicitors. David VO: I went through two more Solicitors, each telling me there was nothing they could do as the Statue of Limitations for such a case had run out.

FORDE COMMISSION OFFICES

Anne Bligh standing with Reporters before the commission headquarters. David VO: Then the Forde Commission made its report to Parliament. They acknowledged abuse had occurred. However, there was no mention of Neerkol as, they said, there were too many lawsuits pending. I thought I was sunk, but there was a bit of light for me.
ROGER PETERS’ OFFICE

David and Roger working in Roger’s office. David VO: The Parliament endorsed the Commission’s report. This provided me with two things I needed to bring my case to court. Roger reads from the report: “Reparations will require the government and responsible religious organizations to enter into a restorative process with survivors to redress harm done.” David says, that means we got ‘em. Roger asks David if he really wants to pursue this anymore. It’s been years now and they are no closer. Why not just let it go?

TELEVISION STUDIO

David being interviewed by a REPORTER on Television. David VO: I retold my story, again and again to anyone who’d listen. I went through more solicitors...nine by the end of it. Nine Solicitors who all told me the same thing.

DAVID’S HOUSE

David making a cuppa. He walks into the lounge and there are boxes everywhere of papers, files and reports. He has to move them to be able to sit down. As he does, a box falls over and spills on the floor.
Roger PETER’s Office

Roger behind his desk with his head in his hands. He says he can’t do anymore. David wants him to help him draft a complaint to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights. Roger says that the Committees have all agreed the abuse occurred. The Australian Senate has accepted the Forde Commission’s Report. David has gotten apologies from everyone including the Archbishop of Australia. What more does David want? David says he wants his day in court. For what, asks Roger? Is this just about the money? Is that what he wants? Roger says he’s sorry, but no one can give him his childhood back. If they sue everyone in sight and get a few million dollars...will that do it? Will that make David happy...satisfied? Will millions of dollars make it go away? Will that mean it never happened? David pleads. Roger says he’ll do this one last thing and then David is on his own. Roger has a life too, you know. He’d like to get back to what’s left of it. David VO: So we wrote the United Nations. I don’t believe I ever told Roger how much his being there meant to me. It wasn’t if I won or lost, but just the time we spent trying to make it happen. Not the destination, but the journey.
MARGARET’S HOTEL ROOM (Present)

Derrick comes to Margaret in her room. He carries his luggage and tells her he’s going home. She tells him to wait a minute. She writes him a check and hands it to him. He thinks it’s a simple severance, but he is stunned by the amount. She tells him it is the money from the sale of her Penthouse. He asks her what he’s supposed to do with it. She tells him: Live!

AUDITORIUM

Margaret in a crowded auditorium. David is introduced and walks onto the stage. David begins his usual prepared speech; the one he has given every appearance. But this time, he stops and puts the paper back in his pocket. He says he has spent the past ten...fifteen years reliving his experiences as one of Australia’s Forgotten Children. He has pursued lawsuits, testified before commissions, appeared on television, been written about in books and magazines, spoken across the country. Each time, living again what had happened to him. He’s close to seventy now and he wonders if it’s really a good idea to do this. All it does is keep the pain fresh; pain from over fifty years ago. He doesn’t have many years left. Does he really want to spend them wallowing in the agony of that time? All
that seems to matter, all that he really has left is from this moment to tomorrow, and hopefully the day after and the day after. Reliving the past hasn’t made him happy, it hasn’t made him rich...it has only kept him angry. Who wants to go out that way? He pauses, bows slightly and leaves the stage.

TAXI - DRIVING

David and Margaret ride silently in a cab.

DAVID’S HOUSE - STREET

The cab arrives at David’s home. He does not get out. He just looks at his home. Margaret says she’ll be leaving tomorrow. David does not answer. She says she will stop by in the morning to say good-bye. He opens the cab door and gets out. The cab pulls away.

DAVID’S HOUSE - LOUNGE

David comes in the front door. He sees the mail on the floor inside. He picks it up. On the top is a letter from the United Nations. He puts it in his pocket. He stands in the lounge and sees all the boxes and papers.
DAVID’S HOUSE - GARAGE

David enters the garage. He finds a tin of gasoline next to the lawnmower. He picks it up.

DAVID’S HOUSE AND BACK GARDEN

David pulls a trashcan from the back of the house and puts it in the middle of the walk from the house to the back gate. He puts the gasoline next to it. David in the house gathers up all the boxes and papers having to do with his case and hauls them out to the trashcan. He throws them in. He comes back in the house and gets his old port. He opens it on the coffee table in the lounge. He looks through everything in it. He sees the tea tin his mother gave him on the mantle. He starts to take it to the port, but stops. He tries to open it but can’t. He puts it back on the mantle. He pulls the letter from the U.N. out of his pocket. He looks at it then drops it into the port. In the yard, the papers are piled up inside and around the trashcan. He puts the port on top of the pile. He takes up the gasoline and pours it on the pile. He then lights a rolled up newspaper and throws it on the pile. It erupts in flames that leap into the night sky. In exhaustion he drops to his knees on the walk and stares at the fire.
DAVID’S HOUSE – NEXT MORNING

The papers are a smoldering, blackened pile of ashes. David is asleep on the walk. He wakes and sees what is left. He smiles gently. Margaret pounds on David’s front door. David hears the pounding and her calling. He gets up, goes through the house to the door and opens it. Margaret asks if he’s okay. Yes, he never felt better, he says. He brings her into the lounge. She tells him she’s done with her work and will be going. He asks if she got what she wanted. She figures she got more than she expected. As a matter of fact, she has decided not to write the book after all. But what about her publisher, he asks. She says to hell with him. David tells her to watch her language. She laughs, yes, she’s been listening to him too long. He asks what she’ll do when she gets back to America. She tells him she isn’t going back. She thought she’d stay here. What will she do in Australia, he asks. She answers: Oh, just live. He wishes her well. She starts to leave, but turns back around. She says there is one thing more she’d like to know. In all their conversations he never mentioned his father. He says he really doesn’t know who he was. She says, yes but you found your mother, haven’t you wanted to find your father?
He tells her not to worry, “When I get to the VALLEY OF THE BONES... I’ll find him.” Margaret leaves. David sits in his favorite chair before his fireplace. On the mantle are the photo of his beloved mother and the rusted tea-tin she left with him.

END OF EPISODE 7
CHARACTERS

PROLOGUES (PRESENT)

--DAVID OWEN (70)

--DERRICK MASTERSON (48), Margaret’s personal assistant. He is tall, graying slightly. He is the personification of “impeccable.” In his case, self-absorption is totally justified. He is very good at what he does, too bad he hates what he does.

--ROBERT PENNINGTON (57) Margaret’s business manager, agent, and only friend in the world...and it’s doubtful he will be that for much longer.

--MARGARET ATKINS (55) is still a very attractive woman, but then, she wouldn’t have it any other way. Thirty years ago she was a hugely successful best-selling romance author; cut from the same clothe as Danielle Steel or Barbara Cartland. She has not had a best seller in ages. Fifteen years ago she retreated to the seclusion of her penthouse, as she just could not abide the world as it was as opposed to the world as she created it in her books. At the time it was fashionably eccentric for her to live the way she did, now it is just very sad.

--New York Cabbie
--TICKET AGENT Qantas

--CABBIES IN SYDNEY

--Mrs. Guinane (92). She looks nothing like her ninety plus years. She is bright and alert.

--DRUNKEN REVELERS

--NUN at the desk of the Retirement Home

--residents in the day-room

--SISTER MARY AGNES (late 80s) (a.k.a. Mary Angel)

--CABBIE to Neerkol

--people watching Rugby Match

--RUGBY PLAYERS

--SPECTATORS at local rugby club match in bleachers

--RUGBY TEAM, players in the pub

--WAYNE BENNETT (65) Revered Rugby League Coach, distinguished sportsman in a well-fitted suit

--WAITER in Sydney café

--COUPLE WITH AN INFANT in the Sydney Café

--CROWD in auditorium
CHARACTERS

**EPISODE 1 (1938)**

--“WILD” BILLY OWEN (35), the ranch foreman. A man’s man. Totally sure of himself and not to be fooled with. Perlie’s lover.

--STOCKMEN/JACKAROOS

--HAND

--YOUNGER HAND

--TWO STOCKMEN fighting

--STOCKMEN and MINERS in Kidston

--Grandma Campbell (58) David’s Great-grandmother. Overweight and always smoking. She can always be found in the rocking chair on the verandah of her boarding house in Kidston wearing a broad-brimmed hat and fanning herself.

--ROY (6) and LANCY (9), the grandsons

--A STOCKMAN bringing laundry

--PERLIE OWEN (31) David’s Grandmother. She looks forty one but is still almost attractive.

--KATIE OWEN (12) She is slight and very cute. Of course,
that won’t last long in Kidston. She is naïve and has a serious fantasy life; about the only kind of a life a kid can have here.

--BOARDERS

--THE CHIEF of Police #3322 (31). He is the best looking man in town, and he knows it. He can pretty much do what he wants when he wants. He knows this, too.

--CONSTABLE #1083

--WOLFF (40) He runs a boarding house outside Kidston. Perhaps the stupidest man in town and the Police Chief’s toady.

--CONSTABLE

--MEN ON THE STREET outside the police station.

--A MALE BOARDER

--POLICE OFFICER in the hospital reception area

--PREGNANT GIRLS in the Maternity Ward

--NURSE GUINANE (23) One of the few truly kind people.

--DR. GUINANE (32) The other truly kind person.
--BABY DAVID

--HOSPITAL ATTENDANTS

--NURSE in Nursery

--COUPLES at the hospital answering the newspaper ad.

--MR. McKENZIE and MRS. SPIERS (30s)

--VARIABLE MINISTERS, STATE CHILDREN’S DEPARTMENT

--ONE MINISTER, STATE CHILDREN’S DEPARTMENT

--THREE SECRETARIES at Receiving Depot in Belgian Gardens

--Matron at Receiving Depot in Belgian Gardens

--TWO NUNS at Receiving Depot in Belgian Gardens

--THREE OTHER TENANTS Wolff’s Boarding House

--THE CHILDREN (ORPHANS) of Neerkol

--NUNS

--Sister MARY James

--YARDMEN

--CRYING INFANTS

--OLDER GIRLS IN NURSERY

--YOUNG GIRL with the Chief
CHARACTERS

EPISODE 2 (1939-1950)

--DAVID (5)

--VICTORIA (5)

--BOYS in the little boys Dormitory
   --RONALD
   --EDGAR
   --MARTY

--OLDER GIRLS assisting in the Little Boys Dormitory
   --AGNES (soon to be Novice Sister Mary Agnes)

--BOYS in the Older Boys Dormitory
   --BILLY BARLOW Aborigine boy
   --BOY IN WASHTUB
   --BOY semi-conscious
   --BOY SPARRING WITH DAVID
   --BOY afraid to fight/box
   --CHRISTOPHER

--GIRLS from the Girls Dormitory
-- Girl in the ring with the Scared Boy

-- THE SISTERS OF MERCY

-- MOTHER SUPERIOR very old, small, frail...deceptively so.

-- SISTER MARY INNOCENCE a tall, slender nun

-- SISTER ANNUNCIATA, skinny, short, hawk-nosed with glasses

-- Sister Augustus, big bruiser of a nun

-- YARDMEN

-- MR. HENNESSY the Man with the Torch

-- FATHER ANDERSON (35) He is gorgeous, what every boy would want to grow up to be.

-- MR. PATTERSON (47), the state inspector, a very well fed man who smiles too much.

-- adults, mostly married couples on Visiting Day

-- AMERICAN Soldiers

-- medical examiner, a Nurse
CHARACTERS

EPISODE 3 (1950-1952)

--DAVID (12)

--FATHER ANDERSON (35)

--SACRISTAN female

--SISTER AGNES (19)

--THE CHILDREN AT NEERKOL Boys and Girls

  --VICTORIA (12)

  --Christopher

--Patterson, the state inspector

--THE SISTERS OF MERCY

--MOTHER SUPERIOR very old, small, frail...deceptively so.

--SISTER MARY INNOCENCE a tall, slender nun

--SISTER ANNUNCIATA, skinny, short, hawk-nosed with glasses

--Sister Augustus, big bruiser of a nun

--POLICE OFFICERS

--YARDMEN

--MR. HENNESSEY
--EMERSON (42) an aborigine

--Father Durham

--MR. LEAHY (40) a farmer
CHARACTERS

EPISODE 4 (1952-1960)

--DAVID (15)

--MR. LEAHY (40)

--MRS. LEAHY (38)

--PHILLIP LEAHY (8)

--MR. PATTERSON

--MOTHER SUPERIOR

--MRS. CAMPLIN (45) large, greasy with a cigarette dangling from her lip

--Kelpie the Cow Dog

--RANCH HANDS Camplin Farm

--girls at Cinema/Pub

--BOXING OPPONENTS

--A SERGEANT recruiting office

--CO-WORKERS at a saw mill

--HUSBAND AND WIFE owners of boarding house

--other BOARDERS
--JIMMY SHARMIN

--AUDIENCE at Sharmin’s Tent

--THE VICTOR

--THE VANQUISHED

--SHARMIN’S BOUNCER

--GUYS playing rugby

--OTHER PLAYERS opposing team

--MR. McGUIRE

--MANAGER Cyclone Scaffolding Company

--VALLEY RUGBY CLUB

  --NORMIE POPE

  --HUGH O’DOUGHERTY,

  --Rower “Moose” MacGuire

  --MICK RIESLESS

  --OTHER PALYERS

--South Suburban Football CLUb

  --WOLF owner

  --JOHN HILLIARD
--PODGIE STEVENS

--DONNIE FARRELL

--RICHIE WEST

--JIMMY EVANS

--KENNY WEATHERALL

--JIMMY BROOKS

--SPECTATORS

--LANDLADY

--MRS. HEALY Gladstone Hotel Pub Landlord

--DENNIS HEALY her son

--DETECTIVE JACKSON

--DETECTIVE DORRIES

--JUDGE

--TWO OFFICERS in court

--HUGE GUY at Number 37
CHARACTERS

EPISODE 5  (1960-1970)

--DAVID (23)

--Detective Jackson

--DETECTIVE DorRies

--JUDGE

--TWO OFFICERS

--TEAM MATES

   --DARKIE

--DETECTIVE SERGEANT “Scarface” GEAREY

--MA KEEL the publican at the Crown Hotel Bar

--MAX her son

--SOLDIERS in Crown Hotel Bar

--UNIFORMED POLICE

--ANOTHER JUDGE

--TWO OTHER OFFICERS

--MR. LOCK publican, Canberra Hotel Bar

--YET ANOTHER JUDGE
--ARMED GUARDS at Boggo Road Prison

--PRISONER at Boggo Road Prison

--REILLY the dormitory Stand-Over Merchant

--Magistrate Boggo Road Prison

--PRISON PSYCHIATRIST

--Sylvester big brawl-artist

--ROLLIE Prison Work Detail Boss

--YOUNG PRISONER

--PAROLE BOARD

--NEW PLAYERS Toowoomba

  --Duncan Hall

  --Dickie Rose an aboriginal

  --Wayne Bennett (27)

--GRACIE

--HANNA

--BRITISH TEAM

--A NEW YOUNG PLAYER

--TWO MORE DETECTIVES with J&D
--OTHER PASSENGERS at Brisbane airport
CHARACTERS


--DAVID (35)

--OTHER PASSENGERS at Brisbane airport

--10 OTHER MEN on plane from Brisbane

--WORK CREWS ON Bougainville

  --AUSSIE

  --NATIVE ISLANDERS

--PAYMASTER

--CRANE OPERATOR

--NATIVE WORKER who asks for money

--BECHTEL management board

--DARKIE

--PRIEST on street outside Bank

--JIMMY SOO

--CABBIE in Newcastle

--KATIE (47) Looks older than that, overweight and always smoking
--DONNA (11) Katie’s daughter

--SUSIE (9) Katie’s daughter

--ALBERT (50) the Warfie, Katie’s husband, a dockworker, hard as nails and about the size of an office building

--COP in Newcastle

--TWO NURSES

--MOVERS

--COWORKERS from the Dockyards

    --KEGHEAD

--FLOOR MANAGER at the Dockyards

--WOMAN NEXT DOOR

--WOMAN FROM ACROSS THE STREET

--HUGE WORKER at Com Steel

--PRIEST at David’s House

--EMPLOYEES at Goninans

--MANAGER at Goninans

--ROGER PETERS Company Psychiatrist at Goninans
CHARACTERS

**EPISODE 7 (1993-PRESENT)**

--DAVID (55)

--KATIE (67)

--GoninanS’ EMPLOYEES

--CRAIN OPERATOR at Goninans

--two Employees fighting

--ROGER PETERS

--ROGER’S WIFE

--SOLICITOR #1

--NEWSPAPER REPORTER at the Brisbane Courier Mail

--SOLICITOR #2

--SECRETARY for Solicitor #2

--ALAN GILL author

--NEWSPAPER and TV REPORTERS waiting outside commission

--POLICE CONSTABLES outside commission

--TEN COMMISSIONERS

--NORM ALFORD head of commission
--PUBLIC at commission hearing

--REPORTERS at commission hearing

--REPORTER 1

--REPORTER 2

--REPORTER 3

--reporters outside Alford’s office.

--Anne Bligh the Forde Commission

--Forde Commissioners

--Leneene Forde

--REPORTER on Television Interview Show

--CROWDS at David’s speaking appearances
APPENDICES
Glossary according to D.O.

Aboriginal (native Australian)
A Grade (Number #1 team)
All-in-brawl (fighting)
Anzac Day Parade (memory of fallen soldiers)
Arse (backside)
As sweet as pie (something good)
Athletic Oval (playing field)
Aussie Rules (football)
Bank Cheque (check)
Barbeque (party)
Baseplates (a steel plate upright)
Beauty of a feed (a good meal)
Beetlenut (a brown juicy nut)
Big noting (showing off)
Big Nugget (gold)
Biro (pen)
Bitumen (tar)
Black Peter (a dark cell)
Blinder (having a good game)
Bludger (loser)
Blue (fight)
Bloke (a man)
Bloody fight (unpleasant fight)
Bloody shame (something not very good)
Blotto (going mad)
Bob (ten cent)
Boiled lollies (hard candy)
Bombay Bloomers (women’s underwear)
Boobweed (jail tobacco)
Braces (suspenders)
Brickie’s labourer (mixing cement for brickie)
Brawl artist (wanting to fight all the time)
Brown-nose (running to the boss all the time)
Bugger me (not to happy)
Bulimba Cup (playing top football)
Bullock (a cow with testicles or balls or whatever)
Bunged (slammed)
Bush (out in the country)
By jinx (what you think)
Calaboose (jail)
Calico sheeting (a smooth soft sheet)
Cane (a bamboo stick)
Canteen (club)
Carbide lights (a gas light)
Carbuncles (a hard boil on the skin)
Care-leaver (victim)
Cat o Nine Tails (six leather strips fixed to a wooden handle)
Cattle dipping for ticks (cattle bath)
Cattle Duffers (stealing cattle)
Cattle Muster (rounding up cattle to put in a yard)
Cheeky (naughty)
Cheesed off (had enough)
Chooks (chicken)
Clean-sheeted (nothing on the slate)
Come off the grass (come clean on what you’re saying)
Confessional (place where you tell your sins to a priest)
Conspiracy (deceit)
Constable (policeman)
Cop (policeman)
Cop the bluff (trying to put it over someone)
Copperfield River (around Kidston goldmining area)
Cordial (sweet red drink)
Cot (baby crib)
Country-Liberal Government (a coalition government)
Couplings (to hold something together)
Crook in the guts (sick)
Cunning as a Shithouse Rat (as low as you can get)
Cuppa (have a cup of tea)
Cut of soap (chunk of raw soap)
Cyclone (big winds)
Devil’s Playground (Neerkol)
Dingo’s Benediction (bush fires in the hills)
Dinks (marbles)
Dirtied the bed (to have a mishap)
Dixies (food container)
D.O. hooker badge (a football badge)
Dogmen (hooks things up for a crane operator)
Dole check (government aid)
Domestic (maid)
Donneybrook (argument)
Doodle (penis)
Dunny (toilet)
Durrie (cigarette)
Ego (will to win)
Fair Dinkum (to be honest)
Flannels (a warm singlet)
Flat out like a lizard drinking (busy)
Flogging (beating)
Footy (football)
Footy Socks (athletic socks)
Fortnight (two weeks)
Stone (about 14 lbs. to stone)
Froth and bubbles (something that comes and goes)
G’Day (greeting hello)
Genuflect (going down on one knee in church)
Give it to me boots and all (not having any mercy)
Go crook (letting steam off)
God love a duck (you can’t believe what you’re hearing)
Good fella kai-kai (food)
Gooseberry tree (a bush tree)
Great Barrier Reef (coral reef in Queensland)
Grog (beer)
Gypsy Tap (dance)
Happy as Larry (things couldn’t be any better)
Hibiscus buds (a bud that turns into a big flower)
Hiding (being flogged)
Holden (car)
Hooker (player in the middle of the scrum of players who gets the ball out)
Hosts (wafers blessed by priests)
Hot lead (bullet)
Hung out to dry (no where to go)
I’m cactus (burnt out)
Jackaroo (cowboy)
Jack of it (understand what you’re about)
Jersey (football shirt)
Jiggy-jig (sex)
Jive and Limbo rocker (good dancer)
Jujus (little apples with thorny seeds)
Kilo (weight)
The Knobs (area in Queensland)
Kerosene lollies (candy soaked in kerosene to stop a cold)
Kerosene tin (a bucket)
Kerosene soap (made at the orphanage)
Knock ‘em pissin (getting stuck into someone)
Knock off from work (finish)
Lady of Fatima medal (a religious medal)
Larrikinism (a person who makes people laugh by doing funny things)
Leave off the chain (Aussie prisoner)
Licensed club (closes at 11pm)
Lick-lick fella (small person)
Like a packet of salts (something that moves through you fast)
Local clubs (after-hours joint usually run by Greeks that only sold grog)
Lollies (candy)
Lost Generation (aboriginals)
Lounge (living room)
Loo (toilet)
Mackenzie Tartar Kilt (Scottish skirt)
Magistrate (judge)
Magpies (birds)
Magurra burr (prickly seed)
Mate (friend)
Misdemeanor (doing something wrong)
Mixed it with one another (getting into a fight)
Men’s Quarters (where the yardmen lived at Neerkol)
Missus (wife)
Mongrel (bad man)
Monsoon Season (dangerous weather time of the year)
Mortal sin (doing bad things according to the priest, you went to hell)
Muglair (show-off)
Ned Kelly (famous bush ranger outlaw)
Nairobi (Boggo Road Prison)
Nappies (diapers)
Note (dollar)
Novocastrian (Newcastle Knight fans)
Off his chump (mad)
Outback (middle of nowhere)
Outfit of clothes (government issued clothing)
Over the moon (being happy)
Pack a scrum (twelve men in formation to gain possession of the ball)
Paddock (land fenced in)
Parrot back (mimic)
Peewees (birds)
Perve (peeping on people)
Pidgen (tribe language)
Pidgeon hole (closet)
Pigweed (a grass weed)
Piles (swollen sore)
Pimp (tattletale)
Ping pong bread (mildewed bread)
Pissin’ match (verbal argument)
Plonk (alcohol)
Pommies (Brits)
Pots (potties)
Pound (dollar)
Power kerosene (highly flammable)
Pride of Erin (dance)
Pub (hotel/bar)
Publican (owner of hotel/bar)
Pushbike (bicycle)
Push-push (having sex)
Quid (dollar)
Rail Motor (train)
Redundancy (laid off work)
Refectory (lunch hall)
Reserve Grade (Number #2 team)
Rigger (hooks things up to a crane)
Rim Barking (using an ax to take down a tree)
Rugby League (football)
Rugby Union (football)
Screws (prison guards)
Scrum (twelve player pack down)
Selectors (men who picked the Representative players)
Shilling (coin)
Shit-offed (upset)
Sidestep (affair)
Singlet (undershirt)
Sink the boot (kick you while your down)
Sheila (female)
Sister Pipe (Sister Anslem)
Skiting (bragging)
Slops (bad dinner)
Slusher (working as a cleanup person in the prison kitchen)
Smoko (work break)
Solicitor (attorney)
Sorghum (grain)
Sovereigns (gold coins)
Spec (claim)
Spitting bloody chips (not happy about things)
Sporran and spats (to be worn with Scottish kilt)
Spuds (potatoes)
Stain on the Brain (never forgetting)
Stand-over merchant (bully)
Station (cattle ranch)
Strides (pants)
Stone the crows (not again)
Sucker bashing (pruning lower branches on trees)
Sweaty Box (forehead)
Tea (dinner)
Teaspoon of sulfur (medicine)
Top-notch pidgeons (bird)
Transfer System (football club to be reimimbursed for player transfer)
Treacle (syrup)
Tyre technician (fixing tires)
Tucker (food)
Turps (alcohol)
Verandah (porch)
Watchhouse (holding tank before going to prison)
Wattle tree (yellow sweet smelling flowers)
Weevils (little termites)
Westerly (high wind)
Wharfie (man working on the wharf/docks)
Willie Wag Tails (birds)
Wild Cactus Fruit (edible tiny apple-like)
Winky winky woo (backside)
Yanks (Americans)
Yarn (conversation)
UN hears abuse case

THE man who first spoke publicly about abuses at Queensland’s Neerkol orphanage is taking his fight for justice to the United Nations.

David Owen, 62, pictured, broke his silence over years of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the now-closed Rockhampton children’s home in 1995, prompting others also to tell their stories.

The actions of the Neerkol residents helped initiate the Forde inquiry and a historic apology by the churches and the State Government to all those who suffered in Queensland children’s institutions.

In his 50-page submission to the UN, Mr Owen has asked the Human Rights Committee to pressure the Government to allow his legal claim to proceed despite the statute of limitations.
The religion of non-violence
Is not meant merely for the rishis and saints.
It is meant for the commonplace as well.
Non-violence is the law of the species
As violence is the law of the brute.

- Mahatma Gandhi
(1869-1948)