

YOU CAN'T FORGET THINGS LIKE THAT

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS AND FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS | **Oral History Project**



Supported by

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**Department of Families, Housing,
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This booklet introduces the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History collection held at the National Library of Australia. More than 200 people told their life stories in interviews recorded by specially trained historians. The quotations in the booklet are excerpted from interviews in the collection. Many interviews are available in full online, when interviewees have given permission. We hope this booklet encourages people to listen to the full interviews, to know and understand the life history and experiences of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants.

The electronic version of this booklet provides 'live' links to the full recorded interviews in the collection. It is available at: www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project

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Editorial note: Some minor edits (such as elisions, added punctuation, insertion of missed words indicated in square brackets) have been made to some quotes for ease of reading, sense, context and continuity.

Although it is common general usage to refer to children as having been 'in care', people who had this experience in childhood do not consider they experienced care. For this reason we use 'care' and similarly Home, to make clear that this was an institutional residence and not the home of a family.

The descriptive terms for individuals used after the quotes are those chosen by the interviewee.

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THE FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS AND FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

On 16 November 2009, as part of the National Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that the National Library of Australia would undertake a major national oral history project on the lifelong impact of institutional and out-of-home 'care'. Three years later more than 200 interviews have been recorded for this project.

These oral history interviews enable those who lived the experience to tell their stories in their own words.

“ Nobody loved you,
you were unlovable;
you weren't worth anything,
nobody wanted you.
You didn't belong to anybody.
You just [survived] from
day to day ... ”

VERA
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

The recordings put flesh on the bones of other forms of historical records, present a deep and complex picture of the experience, and show the scars.

The Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project brings a diverse range of memories into a single collection. The majority of those interviewed experienced institutional life as children. There are also some interviews with policy-makers, administrators and employees of children's Homes as well as those who now provide support or act as advocates for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants. Some advocates were also in institutions and foster homes during their childhood.

Forty-one interviewers conducted interviews across Australia, recording the experiences of people who had been in 'care' from the 1920s to the 1980s. The oldest interviewee was 98 and the youngest was 34.

Most interviewees were in Homes, institutions, 'orphanages' (although many were not, in fact, orphans) or placed with foster families during the 1940s to 1960s, prior to the major changes in child welfare policy introduced by governments in the 1970s. After this time, more emphasis was placed on keeping families connected, and children were placed in smaller 'cottage homes'.

The oral history interviews are archived and preserved for posterity in the National Library's collection and, when interviewees have given permission, their interviews are available online through the National Library website, at www.nla.gov.au

“ It was so regimented we could've been in the army. Get up at six, be on your job by half past, be back at ten to seven to make your bed ... and put your apron on. And then breakfast, and then half past seven you went to work again [before school]. And we were cleaning floors and everything. There was nothing we didn't do. ”

MAVIS
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT



THE INTERVIEWEES

Many thousands of people in Australia were placed in children's Homes and institutions. The 2004 Inquiry by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee found there were an estimated 500 000 'Forgotten Australians' and 6000 Former Child Migrants, who spent their childhood in some 800 institutions across Australia throughout the twentieth century. For the oral history project more than 200 interviewees represent the many experiences and lifelong impacts of being separated from family in childhood.

Interviewees represent differences such as age, gender, length of time spent in Homes, experiences in the various state systems, city and country locations, and within different types of 'care'. One hundred and thirty institutions across Australia are represented: small and large, run by state governments, churches, charities and other non-government organisations.

Interviewees come from many walks of life, with a wide range of experiences. Some were successful

in careers in business, education, religious life, journalism, policing, agricultural work, labouring, nursing or the welfare sector. Others had difficulty finding work, or keeping jobs, due to their poor education or mental and physical health issues. The array of childhood experiences was also carefully represented—ranging from stability living in a single Home or foster placement, to situations of frequent movement as children were shunted between institutions, or between Homes and foster care, reception centres and juvenile justice institutions, or across states. Many interviewees experienced the disruption of multiple placements in their childhood.

Interviews were also recorded with people who worked in the institutional system, as administrators, social workers and teachers; or who are campaigners, advocates, and supporters of those who were in Homes as children. Some interviews were recorded with partners, siblings and relatives of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants; separated family members and with people



ROB WILLIS INTERVIEWING PATRICIA KIRBY IN QUEENSLAND.

whose parents had been in institutions as children.

The interviews reveal a wide range of influences and impacts which have shaped lives. They illuminate factors like the role of key individuals in a child's life, such as teachers or friends; the lifelong impact of loss of contact with family and siblings, the degree of access to education or health care,

and the age of the child when key formative experiences occurred.

A significant number of interviewees had never previously spoken of or documented their childhood experiences.

It is impossible not to be affected by the pain, power and poignancy of these life histories.

FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS

In the years following World War II, children from the United Kingdom and Malta were sent to Australia under approved child migration schemes. Children were seen to assimilate more easily, were adaptable, had a long working life ahead of them and could be accommodated cheaply in dormitory style institutions and Homes. These government schemes addressed Australia's needs at the time for population growth and labour. Few were orphans; many were

deported directly from the Homes they lived in and permission from parents for their migration was seldom sought. The last official child migrant party travelled to Australia by air in 1967. Many Former Child Migrants are still coming to terms with their deportation; loss of identity; and separation from family and homeland. In 2010 the British and Maltese governments made formal apologies to Former Child Migrants and their families.

“ ... you have been chosen to go to Australia. Now it may have been Mars or the moon as far as I was concerned ... You're going to ride horseback to school and you're going to pick fruit from the trees. Well nothing was more further from the bloody truth.

TONY

FORMER CHILD MIGRANT,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The thing that gets me is that a lot of these child migrants came here unrecognised, not even acknowledged.

When I came and asked for my passport, I didn't exist ... My name was not on the migration [register] ... That's part of the many stories that child migrants can tell you.

MICHAEL

FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

'CARE' IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AUSTRALIA

For much of the twentieth century there were few services to support families who hit hard times, were poor or undergoing crisis. Until the Commonwealth government introduced a supporting mother's benefit in 1973, few women on their own could afford to raise children, unless they could draw on support from other family members, or their local community. There was little affordable childcare available to a working father if his wife died or left him, and it was widely believed that lone fathers were not capable of caring for their children. Women who had children outside marriage were also pressured to give up their children for adoption because of social stigma; some placed their children in a Home so they could at least keep contact with them.

Children were brought before courts not only for crimes and misdemeanours but also charged with being neglected, of no fixed abode, likely to lapse into a life of crime or vice or if authorities considered their home lives involved violence or

“ Not long after that [my father] up and left. My mother then realised that she needed to get a job. And she couldn't find anyone to mind the children at all, because we were just so little. She ... asked her stepfather if she could live in his home in Woolwich until she got onto her feet and found something else, somewhere to live. And Pa ... said to her, ... 'I'll take you and the boy, Eva, but I will not take the girls'.”

PHILEPPA
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

alcohol abuse; or it was perceived they had no-one to properly care for them. Children were then made 'state wards' and placed into institutions or other out-of-home 'care' until they turned 18 or 21. It was also common practice to place children in institutions if they had physical or mental disabilities. Young girls could be charged with being exposed to moral danger and placed in 'training'

institutions, as were children who were deemed by welfare authorities to be 'uncontrollable'.

Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants talk of their understanding of, or ignorance, or confusion about, the reasons they were placed in children's Homes, and relate how their circumstances attracted the attention of authorities. Some interviewees were too young to remember, or still do not know why they were taken from their families. Some reflect on what would have happened if they had not been institutionalised. Some came from families who experienced generations

[My step father] was a violent alcoholic ... That relationship ended and mum moved to a hostel in Sydney. And they wouldn't take boys. So I got put into Bexley North Boys Home ... I'd have to have been 6 or 7, I suppose.

JOHN
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ But again [my mother's] health let her down and she ended up not being able to look after us. So it was through an uncle that chose to be influential in getting us sent out to Pinjarra in Western Australia ... we understand it was some sort of mental breakdown caused through stress in life, I guess. Post-world war babies, single mother, black sheep of the family syndrome. Typical British attitudes to those sorts of things in those days. So the uncle that was influential in arranging our removal, I think, frowned upon the very fact that she had had these liaisons and we were the result of that.”

TONY
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

of being in institutions, while for others it was the family's first experience of the welfare system, arising from a family crisis. In the interviews welfare workers also provide their perspective on the removal of children.

While many family situations were not good, once taken into 'care' children often experienced harsh and demeaning treatment, were deprived of adequate food, clothing and education and often subjected to cruelty and abuse.

THE INSTITUTIONS

[I remember] these big gates closing, and I am yelling out 'Mummy, Mummy!' and she said: 'Think yourself lucky, this is a better home you'll get than anywhere else' ... I remember those gates closing and thought, even then: 'Well, here we go', and I was five or six.

ROBERT
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

Institutional 'care' was provided by charities, state government and religious organisations, and sometimes by individuals, who were usually, but not always, assisted with government subsidies. While there was generally some degree of government involvement in the institutionalisation of children, such as through the licensing of Homes, there were also children placed in 'care' through informal arrangements. Later in the twentieth century there were changes in approach—from large institutions, to smaller cottage and foster homes, with major changes in child welfare policy occurring in the 1970s.

Large, old, high-walled forbidding 'orphanage' buildings asserted a strong physical and psychological presence in Australian cities and towns. Some children were sent to institutions housed in former colonial prisons. Children's Homes were often on the outskirts of towns and interviewees felt that local communities did not want to know

Home children. Many institutions ran their own school classes and children rarely or never went out into the community, adding to their isolation and feelings of abandonment. Children felt stigmatised by being in 'care'. In many families, a misbehaving child was threatened with being sent to an orphanage. Children in foster families often felt unwanted or isolated, not part of the family, and might also be exploited, abused or mistreated by foster family members.

Interviewees describe what their childhood experiences meant. Some felt they fared well; others were brutalised, and considered they were not so much 'in care' or cared for, as incarcerated. Many describe how, when finally leaving institutions, they were ill-prepared for life outside. Some reflect on what worse things may have happened had there not been a system of out-of-home care available.

“ When I was naughty she would threaten me ... 'I'm going to send you up to St Joseph's Home for Wayward Girls!' ... and that was the worst punishment you could think of. ”

WINSOME
DAUGHTER OF A
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

THE IMPACT ON SIBLINGS AND PARENTS

Some siblings were separated, with one being removed while brothers and sisters stayed with parents, or were sent elsewhere. Some were placed in the same institution but grew apart; the nature of institutional life breaking family connection or affecting siblings in different ways. Boys and girls were usually separated in Homes and contact between siblings was often not encouraged. Family separation had impacts at the time of separation and throughout later life. The loss of contact with family meant some people never knew they had siblings, did not find them until later in life or found their

I wished for a mother many, many times. I thought about having a mother ... if I had a mother, what would she look like?

PATRICIA
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

“ I was told, like everyone else, that there was no one, you were orphans and that was it ... I distinctly remember asking one of the nuns ... in England if I had parents and she said ‘No’ and I accepted that all my life until 10 years ago ... and then things changed dramatically of course because most of us found out that we did have parents and family. ”

MAURICE
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

siblings had died. Some people did not want to reunite with their siblings. When siblings did reunite, they often faced challenges in rebuilding relationships.

The prevailing attitude of predominantly middle-class social workers about the need to break family bonds to protect children from situations which were perceived to be unhealthy led to harsh judgements about the adequacy of family care. When the state removed children from their families both children and parents were deceived. Many children were told they were orphans or that their parents did not want them. Parents seeking the return of their children were falsely told the children had been adopted, or were living in a happy and stable family. Many Former Child Migrants believe their mothers

Oh ... he used to often take us for Chinese lunch. And we just talked. We did different things. I remember we went round the cemetery one day. Just looking at the different ages. We’d go for a walk. It was just lovely to be with him. Cuddle him and kiss him and know he loved you ... it was like being in Disneyland. You knew for however long Dad was there you were safe, and loved.

RUTH
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

were told their children had died. Some children were never told their parents wanted them.

A common policy of preventing parents from contacting or visiting children in institutions had enormous impact. In later life, many interviewees discovered letters on files kept about them by institutions or government departments showing that their parents had tried to make contact, or have them released and returned home to them. Letters sent to children in Homes from family members were opened and vetted, with content cut or censored. Other children were allowed to keep some contact, writing letters home, but their letters were also vetted.

“ I can remember this strange lady every six months ... I was too young to realise I think what a mother would have been. ”

KEN
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT/
WARD OF THE STATE

“ I didn’t know [my mother] had died until one of the nuns called me up, said I was wanted in the office. It was very matter of fact: ‘It’s a fact, so get on with it’, she said, ‘... your mother died last night go to the church and say a prayer for her’. And that was it, I didn’t know how to take it ... should I be crying? ”

DILYS
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

To me there was no emotion, when I saw my brother I just didn’t know how to react ... He said to me years later ‘I felt safe at Bindoon because you were there big brother.’ ... It’s very hard to describe but ... There was no bonding allowed to take place ... well, it didn’t take place at Bindoon ... There was no bonding, no kinship.

LAURIE
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

THE LIFE-LONG IMPACT

Being institutionalised as a child shaped lives in many different ways. Many care-leavers suffer from poor physical health or bear psychological scars. Poor education, resulting in low levels of numeracy and literacy, may have affected their ability to find work or meant they could only work in low-paying jobs. Some people have been on social welfare benefits for much of their lives. Some rebelled against the sorts of structured systems in which they had been raised and did not like being directed at work, or told what to do. For others, institutional life pointed the way towards employment in environments such as correctional services, nursing, the

police or defence forces. Despite their institutionalised childhoods, many interviewees had successful careers in a wide range of occupations.

The repercussions are also felt by the partners and children of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants. Some who were in institutions as children find it difficult to be parents or have chosen not to have children. Some experience difficulty sustaining relationships, have had several partners, or transient relationships. For others, a stable marriage and creating a trusting, strong and loving family has been a defining characteristic of their adult life.

My wife Betty, she taught me how to sign my name ...
and she taught me how to read a bit, and spelling ...
because of lack of having no schooling through the boys Home ...
I was never taught of schooling, ... I was robbed, I would say,
of my education, my childhood and my youth.

RON
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

When we have our annual meetings you can see the effect of being locked up in the Home. You can see what it does to your mind. It affects you physically and mentally ... I was unable to talk after I had been there for 6–12 months, from the age of about 7; I couldn't hold a conversation. I suffered from a severe bout of stammering, I could never even say my own name. That lasted until I was nearly thirty years of age. People say I talk a lot these days, I got 30 years to make up for it ... I taught myself how to overcome it.

DOUG
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN, WANGARATTA



FORMER CHILD MIGRANT
PAT CARLSON
WITH A PHOTO OF HER MOTHER.

“ Unhappy, desperate, disturbed children don't bond. They're all trying to save their own skin. They don't know who to trust, because someone could tell on you to save their own skin ... it's a horrible system. It's what happens in totalitarian regime ... Goodness can go when survival is involved. ”

JOANNA
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ I thought I owed a debt to society because of the way I was when I was a ward of the state, I was uncontrollable at times ... that was the reason I joined the army, I sort of had a choice: continue on my merry way ... down the path of criminal activity ... So I made the choice [and enlisted for Vietnam] and I thought: 'Well, I've paid my debt to society'. And I came back and get treated like I was worse than when I went away. ”

TONY
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ If I come back into the next world, I perhaps would have a mother and father wouldn't I? ... My sister had a daughter called Valerie, and I thought: Well, it would be lovely just to get a little contact with somebody that's your own. ”

BETTY

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN, VICTORIA

I didn't even understand that I would have been carrying issues, particularly anger ... I was very angry in those days. And often wonder how ... my kids lived with me ... In a shop, if someone was served before me, I would just go berserk ... It's sort of only in hindsight that you think of the damage that I could have done to not only my kids but to ... anyone and everyone. I think growing up that way must have had a huge impact on my marriage. I was freaky about lots of things ... 'Don't touch me!' 'Don't look at me!' ... Not able to express how I felt ... you don't know that at the time, I certainly know it now.

CAROLINE

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ I still say the rosary every night in bed. If I wake up during the night I say it again. I keep my rosary beads under my pillow. ”

KATHLEEN

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN



JOHN WALSH

WITH A PHOTO OF HIS MOTHER.
HIDDEN CHILD OF THE WAR YEARS

... the sense of insecurity is always there. Because ... realistically you've got no support system. Unless you actually get married and have your own family which then creates your own support system that way, and your children might look after you in your old age ... I suspect there's a lot of people from institutions like Westmead, like me, who ... are alone, who haven't got married, and haven't been successful in relationships I suspect. There's a disproportionate number of us who haven't been all that successful. And ... in the final analysis we're on our own.

DENIS

THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

If I've learnt nothing else, it's taught me a really good lesson. It's taught me the life I've had—being through the Home and what I've gone through—it's really taught me ... to have a really good attitude. It's also taught me to have a determined attitude. Which I haven't had from relatives or anybody, and in my past life I've really had no help.

ROBERT

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN,
FORMER VICTORIAN STATE WARD

“ I didn't want children anyway because the thought of anything happening and them ending up in the sort of organisation or situation that I was in, was just horrendous. ”

MICHAEL

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

DAILY LIFE

The quality of care provided in Homes varied greatly. Differences might arise from size or location, accessibility to family, or the degree to which children made friends, received an education, or were offered sporting or recreational opportunities. Sometimes little things made a big difference to whether institutional life was bearable or a terrible experience.

Individuals were affected in very different ways. Some found their experience provided a welcome

“ When I was little we used to do what every other child does—play on swings and stuff. And we went on excursions, like to the park ... And they had a swimming pool built then. I remember seeing it get built ... I enjoyed being with other kids as well. ”

ANNIE

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN,
FORMER VICTORIAN STATE WARD

It was a violent place, there were lots of fights ... when you put a hundred boys altogether there's going to be competition and rough house stuff ... I found the threat of violence almost as bad to bear as the actual violence, 'cos you never knew when you were going to get it.

FRANK

FORMER STATE WARD

order which they had lacked in the family environment, or provided them with opportunities and helped them prosper. Others resented the regimen of bells, sirens and whistles. Many interviewees talked about bed-wetting, a common response from children under stress, often resulting in humiliating punishments. There were many comments about poor or inadequate food. Some enjoyed farm or outdoor building work; others felt the hard physical cleaning and labouring work required of them was exploitative or enslaving. Few children in Homes experienced affection, or interest from staff.

“ It will be hard for people listening to this to understand, but when you're institutionalised ... you obey every rule, every direction; you do it on time, every time. You don't argue, don't think about it. You just do it. ”

JOE

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

No movies, no nothing. Nothing for kids ... You were all in the one [class] ... There was no education here. They just kept you going until [the boys] were old enough to go and work on a farm, and the girls were old enough to go down and be nannies to people in Portland and places like that, look after their kids ... They weren't there to educate you really.

JEAN

FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

There was brutal behaviour and crimes were committed—cruelty, physical, sexual or psychological abuse inflicted by secular and religious staff, visitors, foster parents and other children. There was high staff turnover. Employees who challenged or tried to change the system for the better were pushed out. Abusers were unaccountable—when children reported incidents of violence, abuse or sexual assault they were not believed. There was little to no action taken to stop the abuse or punish the perpetrator; sometimes the perpetrator was moved to another Home exposing more children to the risk of abuse. Looking back, many

“ We were all lined up. We had our baths and then we all lined up for our Hypol and our molasses. And to this day I can't stand either. ”

BARBARA

FORMER CHILD IN CARE

interviewees consider themselves to have been inmates; neglected, humiliated or exploited; worked like slaves; and deprived of proper medical or dental healthcare, and of a decent education.

The institutions also affected the employees working within them.

“ He did [the superintendent] encourage me, I think he saw that I had some potential so he was adamant that I finish school. Because each year he always wanted someone to graduate, if you like, and I was the star pupil from my final year, which was in 1959. ”

GEORGE
FORMER WARD OF THE STATE

In the primary school dormitory [first] night ... I was in a bed next to this little guy who started to cry and call for his mum, the doors flung open, and all the lights turned on, a Salvation Army officer came in and just started beating him. So that was my first introduction to the Home ... It needn't have happened. Where was it written down that kids had to be beaten up?

CLEM
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ I can remember boys getting smacked across the ears and so on. And having to line up and march here and march there. And we were frightened of getting hit. That was when I was real little. ”

RALPH
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN,
KNOWN AS BOY NUMBER 59

“ A lot of kids suffered from bedwetting ... the machine consists of a plastic, cylindrical piece of equipment ... put onto your penis ... you'd wrap a belt with small metal bits around your waist and this was all attached to this tin sort of box which was plugged into the wall. If you urinated in the night it would ... cause you to have an electric shock around your waist. ”

PETER
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

... I suppose it would be a bit like hospital food or nursing home food nowadays. I wouldn't say it was survival rations. I mean, I tend to remember porridge quite a lot. You know, or tapioca, those type of things. Or rice pudding. Once again, I think, you know, you had meat meals with vegetables, that type of thing. I won't say the meals were unhealthy, just very pedestrian.

MARK
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ Sexual abuse and perversions like that were in the dead of night ... there was no escape ... and unfortunately in that situation there were a couple of men ... who should have never ever have been allowed near kids ... I suffered under a paedophile monk, who would take me to his bed. ”

BERT
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

SURVIVAL AND RESILIENCE

Interviewees tell of a variety of ways in which they tried to cope—to survive physically, psychologically and emotionally. A few formed a bond with a staff member, such as a teacher. Many acknowledge the importance of childhood friends, some of whom subsequently met with premature death, sometimes at their own hand. Some coped by maintaining a sense of humour or applying themselves to studies. There was bullying; some survived by aggression, learning to fight, asserting their strength over others, or forming gangs. A few enjoyed music, reading, sport or hobbies; or in rural areas, hunting and foraging, taking fruit from orchards to supplement meagre institutional food. From their childhood experiences, some built lifelong resilience.

Probably the only possessions I really valued would have been my books ... I do remember having a few books and reading a lot ... always wanting to read ... and, because we had so little, needing to read books over and over again.

DEIDRE
FORMER FOSTER KID

I was utterly alone except for these other boys. And again, my accent didn't help me. Most of them came from England, there were about two Scots in the party ... But I learnt some surviving skills. The main one was to attach myself to the toughest of the others there. And keeping my head under the line of trenches.

NEIL
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT



NAOMI RYE
WITH DOLLS SHE
HAD IN DALMAR
CHILDRENS HOME,
THE LARGER A GIFT
FROM HER FATHER.
FORGOTTEN
AUSTRALIAN

“ We used to make shanghais ... with a piece of rubber. No one had any tongues in their shoes, 'cause that was the bit that was perfect ... and we were allowed to shoot birds ... parrots, finches, and all those sorts of things ... We'd eat 'em. ”

GRAHAM
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

“ I was so miserable there ... But there were a few bits of light. There was a girl called Penny ... And her mother made chocolate. And sometimes she would give me some of this chocolate ... And it was like the only sweet thing in my life. ”

VICTORIA
FROM TASMANIA

AN INADEQUATE SYSTEM

Almost everyone involved—those committed to Homes and institutions, as well as employees—was affected by the experience, and many were troubled by it. Interviewees express a wide range of responses, and give diverse perspectives on the relationships between children and those working in the system. Present-day advocates supporting Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants also discuss the shortcomings of the system, and its effects.

“ The whole system seemed to be geared to keeping us [my brother and sisters and me] apart. And I resented that at the time and I resent it still. Because each time I went somewhere [another Home] the others were one step ahead of me. In spite of promises otherwise. ”

IVOR
SURVIVOR OF THE
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS SYSTEM

And then I remember a big black car coming to the house. And the men were in suits. It was very intimidating. And they ... walked in, they looked around the house. They asked [questions], like police, like detectives. But they weren't, they were welfare workers. And I didn't like them. They were tall, they didn't introduce themselves to us. And we were very smart children, and children should be treated like human beings, not like ... animals. And then I remember they told us all to get in the car ... all five of us into the car and not told anything. Nothing whatsoever.

MARY
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

[The staff] were mean, awful. But I can look back ... now, and say they were uneducated. They didn't have any parental skills; they did all that they knew how to do. A lot would disagree with me with that, I imagine, because they would have been dealt a lot worse than we were.

PAM
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ ... the Church was almighty wasn't it, it was all powerful ... All the people that do this stuff are at the top of the [hierarchy]. You've got the lower forms of paedophiles. But these abusers, these ones, they know the system so well ... they make the rules for the system to suit their needs. I mean, it's the way it is. ”

KEITH
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

The philosophy was very much one of control, and child-care workers were sometimes judged by their superiors as to how well they controlled children: that is kids not behaving in a way that would either harm other children or disrupt sections ... There wasn't a great understanding of child development in the formal training that we did.

JOHN
CHILD WELFARE WORKER

“ [My experience] kind of sat there as something unresolved. Nothing good came out of it, nothing ongoing or long-term or meaningful to me came out of it ... And I suspect nothing positive or of lasting value happened for those girls as a result of my being there. And that's not comfortable. ”

MARIE
TEACHER IN AN INSTITUTION

Knowledge had to be handed on by word-of-mouth. The assumption was that the social worker coming in would know what to do because they've been trained what to do—but it was difficult for them to find material that tells them how the place was working or should work ... Because people didn't understand what they were coming into, as late as 1970.

DONELLA
SOCIAL WORKER

ACCESS TO RECORDS

Many Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants seek access to official records of their time in 'care' hoping they will find in them the key to their identity and clues for tracing lost family. However, many are let down not only with the content of their records but also with the process of gaining access to them.

With so many separate jurisdictions, welfare systems, and institutions—all with diverse record-keeping arrangements—people often find it difficult to gain access to personal files. They may be denied access to files they regard as 'theirs' by institutional policies, concerns about the privacy of others, or perceived

I don't really want to [find my records]. Haven't found the need ... What am I going to find in there that I need to find out?

DAVID
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ And she came out and brought a file ... there was enough information there just to tell me, and to answer some of the questions that I had always been asking myself ... it confirmed where I was born. ”

WILFRED
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

risks that reading files will lead to legal action or claims for compensation. Those who were given access to files had mixed feelings about the information they contained. Some found the files insufficient, containing scant information, or content which was false, or misrepresented the situation they remember. Others were heartbroken to find files contained letters from family members which they never knew about, revealing that a parent had sent letters or presents which had never been received. Some records have been lost or destroyed, the history of the children's lives burned in institutional incinerators.

“ I wanted to know who I was, and what happened. You know, and what were written in files about me. ”

PATRICIA
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

I did ask the orphanage ... for their records. And they said that the church was being done up. Or their offices were being done up. And it was all down in storage, and something else like that. But I tried and tried and tried. And then I tried the welfare, but I seemed to run into a brick wall.

MICHAEL
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

“ I don't know, it's hard to fathom out, because you see all this stuff there and you say 'Is that really me?' And I've been into hospital so many times. I saw the hospital visits—there must have been about six to ten visits I think, maybe. ”

MICHELLE ROSE
STATE WARD, QUEENSLAND

... when I applied for information by the Freedom of Information at the time I got one file which basically begins at about the age of 8. And the file previous to that had apparently been burnt, lost in a fire in ... Parkdale where they apparently used to keep all the files.

ALLAN
FORMER STATE WARD, VICTORIA

CONNECTING AND RECONNECTING WITH FAMILY

Connecting or reconnecting with family raises many issues. For many Former Child Migrants, distance, the expense of travel and the difficulty of getting access to records held overseas, made it particularly hard to locate family. Forgotten Australians also face obstacles finding family. Many interviewees express a profound sense of loss on discovering that they no longer have surviving family members. Even when family members are located some feel sadness and loss at not being able to relate easily: parents, brothers and sisters may

“ When I first met my natural mum ... she said: ‘I wondered what would happen to you, and whether you would end up in prison.’ ”

LES
FORMER STATE WARD, TASMANIA

“ Now I understand that what I have done has not been a small thing, to find my family. ”

OLIVER
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

have become strangers to each other. Some do not want to reunite. For others, reuniting with family was more positive, providing answers to many questions, including the central ones of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where do I come from?’

We were fortunate enough to find my mother. After fifty years almost to the day ... the other side of the coin is we also found that we had a half-brother ... and the sad part about that is that he was also not aware that he had two brothers, Terry and I in Australia.

MICHAEL
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

“ [My father’s] funeral was an interesting experience because I ran into my sister Marie [who] hadn’t seen me since I was probably 6 or 7 ... And she looked at me, and said: ‘I know you from somewhere, vaguely. Who are you exactly? I kind of remember you.’ I said: ‘Look, I happen to be your brother.’ And that of course was the end for her, she was in tears. ”

JAMES
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

Somebody knocked on the door ... Red Cross or Salvation Army ... they said there was a young man in Australia who has this address on his birth certificate ... were you living here in 1944? ... And of course they were. So my mother said yes and she got very emotional, ‘It must be Peter’ ... It absolutely opened a real can of worms ... My mother waited to tell Nora [Peter’s mother] who cried all night ...

BARBARA
SPEAKING ABOUT HER FORMER CHILD MIGRANT COUSIN AND HIS MOTHER

“ Do I have a brother still? ... If that’s the case he may know something more about me than I know ... Is he still alive, would he know my father, my mother, if we had one? ... I want to look into it ... I would be happy to find my mother’s grave; I don’t think for one minute she’s alive today. ”

BOB
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

JUSTICE AND HEALING

Many interviewees are working to achieve justice for those who were in institutions as children, in a range of different ways—as advocates, counsellors, support service workers and in self-help groups.

Achieving ‘justice’ in a legal context is a difficult issue and the concept of ‘redress’ (compensation payments) is complex. For some, redress has not been an issue, they have been able somehow to accept matters and

move on. Some found reconciliation, acknowledgment or a degree of consolation in the National Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants given on 16 November 2009, and associated gestures from state governments and religious organisations.

For others, there remains a deep sense of hurt, grievance, and anger at the ‘care’ system—fuelled by thoughts of how many past providers breached

“ [As Premier] I signed off ... compensation payouts to wards of state abused in state care. I read many of the case files ... I read the form letters that the Department prepared for me about how I was personally sorry, and each one of them I wanted to ring them up, or write a personal handwritten note on the bottom of them and I didn’t.

DAVID BARTLETT
A FORMER STATE WARD WHO
BECAME PREMIER OF TASMANIA

”

their duty of care towards children and of the people who abused institutionalised children, but were never brought to justice or punished for crimes against children. Many who were in ‘care’ as children remain concerned about what will happen to the children of today who are removed from their families by child welfare departments, or through the juvenile justice system.

I went through the Redress program ... and finally got a letter ... from the Government ... it was a pre-signed letter, which [the Premier] probably sent out to everybody ... They have not shown me they were serious—to get a pre-stamped letter from a premier ... it meant nothing.

DENIS
EX STATE WARD

“ I told my story for the first time. And everybody, including me cried the whole way through. This was the time I started to heal. Slowly but surely.

YOONTHALLA
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

”

“ We have to judge by the standards of the time. But ... the failures were appalling. Because there has never been a time when society thought it was appropriate to sexually abuse children ... [or] to beat the shit out of some kid ... Trying to prove 20 or 30 years down the track that the beating was a beating, and not [‘justifiable’] corporal punishment ... That is something that my clients struggle with and I struggle with it as well ... Even by applying standards of the time, there were gross failures.

ANGELA
LAWYER

”

“ See, the hardest thing for bureaucrats to deal with is number one: truth. Number two is memories. Number three is those that have the guts to say, ‘hey, we’re going to take you on and we’re going to win.’ And number four is persistence. ”

ALLAN
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

This is not Catholicism, this is not God ... this is a few people who have operated in an environment where they were not stopped ... [My father’s] anger was not necessarily at the men who committed the crimes, who perhaps were even victims themselves ... [but] at the bureaucracy of the church that didn’t say ‘This is wrong!’ ... They would just move [the priests] into other areas where there were more boys, more children and that is what he was angry about ... disgusted and appalled and angry at the men who committed these terrible deeds, but he was more angry, I think, that [authorities] turned a blind eye.

NATALIA
DAUGHTER OF ADVOCATE

The Child Migrants of Malta were successful in getting a monument built in Malta and an apology from the Maltese government. For some people that was very symbolic and very significant ... it was an acknowledgment of guilt of error, of poor public policy, of ill treatment of children and so on ... for others of course ... it simply will not go far enough and they’ll want to pursue it to the next stage ...

DAVID
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT



PETER HICKS
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

REFLECTIONS

For years, many Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants did not talk about their past, as they felt ashamed, were concerned about stigma; how people would respond, or that their telling of past experiences would not be believed. Some denied their past, making a new identity by deliberately leaving the past behind. Many people now feel they can talk more openly in public, as well as with families and loved ones. Malcolm Turnbull's statement in his speech at the

National Apology 'we believe you' has been validating and empowering.

Some of those interviewed had previously told of their experiences: to the media, to government inquiries, or in blogs, memoirs and autobiographies. Others had never before told their story; some needed encouraging that it was worth telling.

It wasn't until we went away for our twentieth wedding anniversary that it came up in conversation ... I told him pretty much everything I could remember, and it was really nice to be able to talk about it. It made me feel validated. Kind of sad that it took 20 years to get to that point ... There were so many traumas, poor thing! It took a while to get through all of them!

JANET
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ When [Opposition Leader, Malcolm Turnbull] said those three words, 'We believe you', that was very, very much to my heart, because ... the disbelief, the helplessness, and having nobody to turn to—and then this man ... says that ... on behalf of his party, and also from a personal level ... I was really, really affected by that, much more so than I thought. ”

SUE
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ ... he [British Prime Minister Gordon Brown] gave a very dignified, eloquent, sincere, moving Apology. I was deeply moved, it brought me to tears ... welcoming us back to the land of our birth. ”

MICHAEL
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

You didn't have a voice as an 'orphan' ... it was a secret, you didn't tell people you were an orphan ... If you told an adult that you were an orphan, the first thing they said was: 'What did you do wrong?'

BRETT
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ Bob’s first wife knew nothing, his children knew nothing ... and yet the first day [we met] he ... started to tell me about his childhood ... And I was absolutely staggered, I believed him but it was like a Charles Dickens novel ... It was unbelievable to me that it had happened in my lifetime and I knew nothing about it ... ”

CAROL
WIFE OF FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

I was starting to have nightmares [about my husband’s story] ... I had to tell my doctor ... [who said] ‘the Salvation Army, they couldn’t do anything bad to kids ... they’d be caring ...’ And I knew then why he probably had closed up and didn’t say anything for so long: ... she did not believe ... [and my husband] said, ‘Now you know what I mean ... I tried to tell people years ago ... and they just [said]: “Get away and stop telling lies!”.’

HAZEL
WIFE OF FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ I hope that in years to come if someone reads this story that they get some ... inspiration from it. ”

RAY
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

For ... a significant number of people who were in ‘care’ as children, they don’t talk about it, they don’t even acknowledge it. As one of our ... members said to me ... he has never told even his wife and his children ... that he was brought up in ‘care’. And he said, ‘How can you tell an employer that you were brought up in ‘care’, because they immediately think you were bad.’

MARIA
SOCIAL WORKER



FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN
WARREN PORTER
AND HIS WIFE HAZEL

RETURNING AND REUNIONS

The sense of place often remains very important to people who were in Homes, irrespective of individual experiences and memories; the sight and sense of the institutions they lived in as children is part of their identity.

While some interviewees never want to revisit institutions, others need to do so, or talk of the memories triggered by visits. A few interviewees are formally associated with children's institutions as board members or fundraisers. Some organise reunions, maintain networks and foster a sense of community among those who left the Homes. Some are members of support organisations, or have established their own support networks; others do not want to be part of any group. Some are involved in preserving the buildings or interpreting and telling the stories associated with children's Homes; fighting proposed demolition of old buildings, insisting that past history is recognised in any re-use of buildings, or working to build small museums displaying salvaged artefacts. Some 'Homies', as many describe themselves, are active in social media,

“ I just wanted to see what it looked like. A lot of the buildings are wrecked, inside is all wrecked, windows been smashed ... Too much memories ... just brought memories back. Never forget it, anyway, 'cause you don't forget things like that. ”

KEN
FORMER STATE WARD



DEBORAH FINDLAY
AT THE BALLARAT ORPHANAGE
GRAVESITE MEMORIAL.
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

establishing Facebook pages, blogs and websites about the institutions. Others conduct open days at former Homes, have picnics and social gatherings; encourage the recording of memoirs and reminiscences; collect and archive documents and historical records, or maintain a contact register.

“ I've been more than compensated with family life. Northcote [Children's Home] is still my family ... people accept you as family. So everybody is wonderful ... I haven't missed family. I've still got family. ”

TAFFY
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

... I thought, now there must be others around somewhere. So I put an ad in the paper, and got to meet a lot of the ladies. And it was lovely. And the first day we ever met out at Northgate, and we were all sitting there having lunch. But when we first all got there we just all stood there cuddling and crying and kissing ... It was lovely, lovely getting in touch with them all. Yeah, I organise all that ...

JOY
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

I couldn't get over the way that the cemetery [for the Home] was in a shocking state. It had been neglected: just like we were neglected as kids. It haunted me, you know. The wind was blowing and the bird life was lovely. But [it] looked unkempt. I thought: 'These poor kids. Lonely in life, lonely in death'.

TONY
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

“ I had lost touch with the group that I now call my friends for about 20 years, 21 years, something like that. I caught up with many in 1986 when they had a big reunion at the Ballarat Orphanage, and stayed in contact with in particular my friend Vicky. And today we still catch up and talk on the phone quite a bit. As I do with several others. ”

PHYLLIS
FORMER CARE LEAVER

AFTER THE PROJECT

“ I am in awe of the resilience, inner strength and positive outlook of every one of the people I interviewed—who included child migrants from the UK, and children whose parents could not care for them. I also interviewed people involved in policy development and service provision within the child protection service sector. Each had a unique story about their struggle to survive in the face of enormous challenges in their lives. What appears to have given them strength and courage to continue was love from at least one significant person, and small acts of kindness that may have come from most unexpected places. ”

CHRISTINE CHOO
INTERVIEWER

“ I was left with an overwhelming sense of pathos. I realised how sheltered my own life has been, and just how vulnerable children are—and all ‘done for the best’. Somehow in the midst of tragedy there are survivors. The survivors are remarkable, and their stories extraordinary: some great successes, and some incredibly brilliant people. But there’s the dominant, recurring theme of childhood separation, hurt, and misunderstanding: a child’s perception of a dismissive adult world. I can’t say I enjoyed the experience, but I am very glad to have learned and understood a little of it. It made me think about how we as a society have still not got it right. ”

ROB LINN
INTERVIEWER

“ Having been interviewed, I feel like I have been able to participate in a composite which is larger than just my own story and those of the others told. I wanted to be a voice for those without, some of which never got to live through their terrors to come out the other side, unlike the opportunity which I myself have had. It makes me feel sad to think that I should be grateful to have survived. Sometimes life itself is the reward, and the struggle to survive the necessary journey. My journey has been a struggle to survive within the system almost half a century later, but this time as a professionally employed social worker in child protection, who has a unique perspective from lived experience which isn't always welcomed by the ruling bureaucracy. I'm no longer the child, but rather the protective adult. Telling my story gives me the opportunity to reflect on a system which I am not always convinced (in spite of its many advancements since my own earlier childhood experiences) has fully committed itself to the learnings of the past and confining the abuse to the time-vault where it belongs. ”

DAVID JACKSON
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

“ Thankfully the voices of care-leavers around Australia will have a permanent place in the National Library. It is important that our voices are heard, in order for our children and the families we have created to understand what we endured as children. Our stories have a real place in Australian history. By listening to our stories people will have a better understanding of us and our experiences. To those who haven't shared their story, please don't take it to the coffin. Tell yourself the story first and then it will be easier to share with others. Be proud that you survived to tell it. ”

LEONIE SHEEDY
VICTORIAN STATE WARD

FINDING ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS



You can listen to these interviews in your home, in your local library, or in the National Library of Australia; anywhere you have online access. For example, if you enter the project title: *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project* into a search engine like Google the results will take you to a Library webpage that describes the project. This page will also provide other links to the project and the interviews.

To get more specific information use the Library's catalogue <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au>. Enter either the project title *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project* or the project call number *ORAL TRC 6200* into the search box to get a list of all the interviews.

To find a particular interview, or information about a specific place or subject, type the name of the place, individual or subject in the catalogue search box. If you want to restrict the results to the Oral History Collection,

select: **audio** in the **Add Limits** box in any search you do.

Many recordings are available online. Selecting the: **Listen Online** button on the catalogue record will take you to a permission form. To protect against misuse, you must **accept** the conditions specified before you can listen to the interview. Almost all the project interviews have a summary and some have time linked transcripts which allow you to search for subjects and keywords in each interview. Click on the highlighted word or phrase to hear the interviewee talk about that particular subject. You can also search for information in each interview. If you would like to search in the available summaries or transcripts in the collection, then Trove <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> is the best place to begin your search.

Interviews are only online when interviewees have given their permission. Some interviews are only available on request as interviewees

have chosen to be asked before people use their interviews. In this case click on the tag at the bottom of the catalogue results page which shows: **Get This**. Then select either: **in the Library** or **Order a Copy**. Ordering a copy enables you to have a copy of the interview sent to your chosen address, only after we get permission from the interviewee.

If you need further help locating items in the Library's collection you can telephone the Library during business hours on +61 (02) 6262 1266 or go to: Ask A Librarian www.nla.gov.au/askalibrarian to submit a question online.



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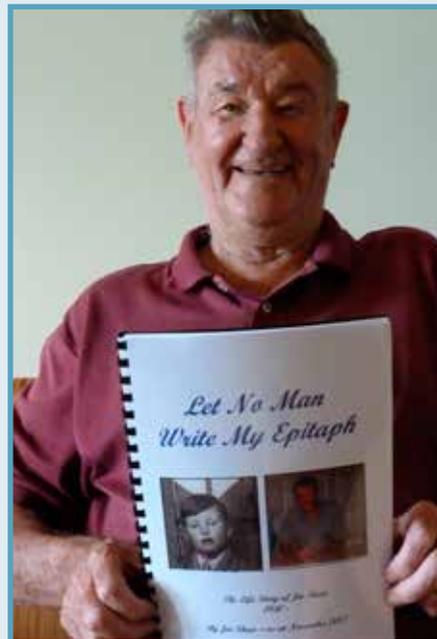
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COLLECTING OTHER MATERIAL

Many Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants have written or published memoirs and autobiographies. The National Library collects these books to ensure they are preserved and available for use, now and in the future. Any such works received by the Library will be catalogued and can be located and discovered via the Library's catalogue and online. Legal deposit, a requirement under the *Copyright Act 1968*, requires publishers including self-publishing authors to deposit a copy of any print work published in Australia with the National Library and the state library in your home state. Further information about legal deposit and where to send works is available at www.nla.gov.au/legal-deposit

Some Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and others involved in the care system have donated their papers, photographs and ephemera

to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project manuscript collection, reference number MS 10115.



JOE SHAW
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN



MICHAEL SNELL
HOLDING HIS DIARY
FORMER CHILD MIGRANT

FRONT COVER: (ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY SURNAME)
RUTH BLACKMAN, CAROLINE CARROLL, FRANK GOLDING, HAROLD HAIG,
GAYE HOLLINS, LAURIE HUMPREYS, DAVID JACKSON, JOHN O'MAY

“ This project aimed to provide social justice. We have built a mosaic of memories that reveal the many and varied ways in which people have been affected by the child welfare systems.

Through including many different voices and perspectives, we hope that this project will become part of a broader national healing through understanding, in similar ways to the reconciliation movement.

JOANNA SASSOON
PROJECT MANAGER
FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS AND
FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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