

C-BERS SERVICES EX-PRESS

December 2001

NEWSLETTER

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS EX-RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS SERVICES



HOLDING ON TO OUR HUMANITY

Christmas is traditionally a time when we open our hearts and our homes in a shared celebration of all the qualities that make our lives most worthwhile. But Christmas also offers a time for reflection and appreciation, both of the gifts we have in our lives and for those we may receive. As we offer messages of goodwill and the hope for joy and peace in the lives of those we love, perhaps we may also reflect on the personal peace that exists, or that we seek, in our own lives. Perhaps we may also appreciate the peace that exists in the country in which we live, while those in so many other countries face a

Just as the traditions of friendship, goodwill and generosity at Christmas have their origins in an event that occurred more than 2000 years ago, so too do the wars and hostilities occurring in so many countries around the world today have their origins in events that have long since past.

This is how history is created... the stories we share, and pass on, from generation to generation until they become entrenched into the collective story of our own culture.

Lessons from the Past

It is often said that those who do not learn from the lessons of the past are destined to repeat them. And so, especially at this time in our history, there is an imperative to ask, what are the lessons of the past for us, as people, as a country, and a culture, and, in the context of this newsletter at least, what, are the lessons for us all in relation to the child migration and child care practices of the past?

For those whose lives have been touched by, or were party to such policies and practices, hopefully we have learnt that ALL children need love, a sense of their own special-ness and a continuity with their history if they are to be able to grow into their full human potential as mature, caring and compassionate people... people who are then able to pass on these same gifts to the children they may one day bear. Hopefully we have also learnt that the policies of the past, which supported the uprooting of children from their family and cultural

A Christmas Message from

C-BERS Chairperson,

Maria Harries

connections were not only wrong, but were also a major contributor to longer term personal, family and social problems that live on to this day.

These policies were not developed out of malicious intent. The people who formulated them did not set out to cause the damage that ensued. But they were made possible because, at that time in our history, the beliefs held by policy makers made it possible to discount the basic human needs of children, many of whom were at the time living in child care institutions in their country of origin. For convenience they were grouped together, labeled as socially disadvantaged, and transported to far distant shores where the issue of their needs, care and support would become the responsibility of some other country. Some were sent away from their homes within their own country.

Holding on to Our Humanity

Throughout history, atrocities have been committed against many people and against many groups of people. The common element that

enables the denial of basic human needs is the de-humanisation of those people who are the subject (or more commonly the object) of that policy which provided authorization for such practices to be implemented.

When one group of children, or people, or a race of people is de-humanised, it doesn't take long before others are also caught in the same net.

Over the latter part of 2001 we have witnessed many examples of the de-humanisation of people who are in desperate need.

At times of insecurity and uncertainty, it is common for people to tend to focus inwards, battening down the hatches, as they seek to protect their own, while others are expected to fend similarly for themselves.

However, if the lessons of the past have taught us anything, it is that the de-humanisation of children, individuals, and groups of people is likely to bring greater problems in the longer term, to our very great cost as individuals, families, societies and increasingly as a world community.

I return to my introductory remarks. The tradition of Christmas celebrates joy, peace and goodwill.



The Staff and Management of C-BERS

extend Christmas Greetings

to all our readers and to all former
child migrants and ex-residents.

May this Christmas season

be a time of joy, peace and goodwill to you all





WE'RE OPEN
FOR BUSINESS

between 8.30 a.m.
and 4.30 p.m.
Monday to Friday

ON STAFF

Administration
Manager— Mary Kearns
(Monday to Thursday)

Clinical Psychologist
Patrick Howard
(Tuesday, Wednesday)

Counsellors
Michael Anderson
(Tuesday, Wednesday,
Friday)

Sjoukje Tarbox
(Monday, half day
Wednesday, half day
Thursday)

Administration
Lorraine Hipkins
(Monday, Tuesday)
Sue Fullerton
(Wednesday, Thursday,
Friday)

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Maria Harries
(Chairperson)
Dr Debra Rosser
George Horton

CONTACT

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WE SALUTE...

Western Australian Democrat Senator **Andrew Murray**, former child migrant, committee member and sometimes spokesperson for the 2001 Senate Inquiry into Child Migration.

Former child migrants have asked GBERS to acknowledge, and thank, Senator Murray for his contribution towards increasing public awareness of the issues facing former child migrants and for supporting the development of sensitive policies to address these issues in a constructive way.

We have yet to be informed as to how the major political parties will respond to the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry Report which we reported on in our last newsletter.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CHILD MIGRATION

An International Congress on Child Migration is planned for next Autumn in the USA. We need to know how best we can represent your voice in America at the Conference. Please contact us, or write, in confidence, about the issues you would like us to raise on your behalf..

UK ACKNOWLEDGES NEEDS OF FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

We at C-BERS are delighted that the Catholic Child Welfare Council in the UK has expanded its services to Child Migrants sent to Australia, building on the excellent work carried out over the last 10 years by Michael Lyons.

Joan Kerry has been appointed as Project Manager for the Australian Former Child Migration Project. A social worker with many years' experience working in the

HONOURING the "Old Boys" of 1947

Just over five years and counting...

2007 marks the 60th anniversary of a journey that, for many former child migrants, began in 1947. (*In Australia, the highest number of child migrants arrived in this year.*)

In some "host" countries, preparations are already underway to organise events that will, not only mark this milestone, but also honour those who have travelled towards and past it.

In their *Home Children Canada* newsletter, former Child Migrants to Canada have offered some ideas on how the milestone can be suitably commemorated including the following suggestions:

- ◆ **Recognising the important role of Child Migrants.** Statues or plaques ensure a heightened awareness and appreciation of these "home children" and the part they played in (our) history.
- ◆ **Providing markers for unmarked graves** of Child Migrants.
- ◆ Petitioning for a **commemorative postage stamp issue** on Child Migrants.

C-BERS is happy to work with individuals and groups who wish to plan local commemorative events to mark the 60th anniversary of the child migrants of 1947.

October "GET-TOGETHER"

The C-BERS Management Committee met with a small group of former child migrants and their partners on 19 October to discuss the services we provide and our plans for the future.

Matters discussed at the meeting included

- ◆ A number of suggestions on items that could be included in the newsletter of relevance to, and as a way of connecting with, former child migrants
- ◆ How the contribution of former child migrants to Australian society could best be honoured. Some suggestions included the erection of a Memorial or Plaque with a separate acknowledgement of child migrants who left from Malta



fields of adoption and fostering and more recently with former Child Migrants, Joan will be mainly

working with former child migrants sent through the Sisters of Nazareth. Her work may include locating information in ledgers; tracing family members and making contacts with them. Joan will be in close touch with the counsellors at C-BERS and will visit Perth from time to time to meet with C-BERS clients in person.

Joan Kerry can be contacted through C-BERS, or directly:

0011 44 1675 434 002; or at:
Australian Child Migrant Project
Catholic Child Welfare Council
St Gerards, Coventry Road
Coleshill, Birmingham B46 3EB UK

and...AFTER ALL THAT...

“DANNY’S” STORY

Like many of my fellow child migrants, my earliest memory is of a time when I was already in care in a large institution in the UK. I am trying to tie my shoelaces but as usual can't get it right. Across a playground I can see a group of kids. They have just started school but to me they are the “big boys.” Sister Bernadette helps me with the laces and tells me that when I can do it for myself I'll be ready to join those big boys. How hard I try after that, but when the move comes I feel lost for a while and Sister Bernadette is not there to run to.

Generally I enjoyed my school days in that orphanage. Warm classrooms and the company of children my own age, many of whom I'd known since we were infants. Bath time was always something to look forward to ... the big bathroom with about twelve baths in it and billowing clouds of steam. It was a wonderful experience to have a kind young nun bending over the side of the bath tending to us.

I soon became aware that many – it seemed to me like all - of the other children had visitors every Sunday while I had none. The weekly violin lessons I hated so much at least spared me from seeing all the visitors, but the longing for a family of my own never went away. So I was delighted and excited when I heard that my best friend and I were going to live in a real home with our own mum and dad and brothers and sisters. In no time I had packed my things, collected my few treasures from the hole under a tree where I cached them and was ready to leave the orphanage for the first time.

We had three wonderful years in a foster-home. I became very attached to our “Mum” who treated us well, as did her three teenage daughters. The terrible day that I always dreaded finally came when the Principal arrived and after tearful farewells we were taken back to the orphanage. Soon after that we were on our way to Australia.

I was nine when I arrived at Castledare. The Brothers in their long black dresses seemed very strange at first and I was frightened and crying as

The following account of life as a former child migrant comes from a much longer story written by a CBERS client who has agreed to share his story but wishes to remain anonymous.

were a couple of other boys. But we soon settled in. The Brother in charge was a big man with a kind face, like I imagined a big dad would be. He had a gentle style and always seemed to have time for us. The farm and the riverside environment were a giant playground for us. Huckleberry Finn had nothing on what we had at our disposal. For some time we were to see many boys from our first orphanage arrive at Castledare. We knew many of them and would extract as much information as we could about the Sisters and the home itself. As old hands, we would look after them until they gained their independence.

When holidays came around I was always placed with a host family and without fail was treated with kindness and generosity. I never wanted to leave these homes and the pain of separation was sometimes intense. Contact with families always stirred thoughts of the family I didn't have and I would ask the adults around me if they knew anything about my real mum and dad.

When the time came to leave Castledare, I took it for granted that I would be heading the same way as my best friend who had been my constant companion for as long as I could remember. I had to be dragged kicking and screaming off the bus that would take him to Tardun. I was going to Clontarf.

This was a much harder school than any I had been in before. The regime was tyrannical, the work hard and the punishments extreme, at times sadistic and perverse. One day while working in the garden I was caught talking. One minute I was bent over weeding; then with a terrible pain in my backside I was flying across the garden. The pain was so unbearable that I could not sit down for days. My second year teacher would wander up and down the rows peering over boys' shoulders at their work. If it was not up to the mark or if he caught you copying, he would punch you in the side of the head and send you flying across the boy next to you. Often I saw stars this way.

I never stopped wondering about my parents. While still at Clontarf I obtained the address of the orphanage where I was first placed and wrote to them, but they gave me no information that would help me

find my mother.

One theme that runs through most of my memories of Clontarf is hunger. I seemed to be always hungry and looking for ways of getting a little extra food. We made kylies and hunted for fish in the river. We caught gilgies. We trapped and ate black cockatoos. We collected mussels and cooked them on a sheet of iron over a fire. Assigned to look after the chickens, I would supplement the inadequate institutional diet by boiling up to a dozen eggs in a tin over a fire.

Hunger obviously sharpened my wits. My finest hour came when I landed the plum job of waiting on the chaplain. He would often inform me that he would be out at a particular mealtime. Instead of letting the kitchen know, I would simply take the meal up to his room as usual and eat the lot myself. No one was any the wiser.

One thing I am grateful to Clontarf for is the lesson on work as there was never any end to it. We learnt that if you wanted anything then you must work for it. At the time I hated it as did many boys but I know now that it prepared me well for later years. When the time came I was happy to be leaving Clontarf but a bit sad too. I had many friends and despite the hard times I had felt secure there.

I have no complaint about the life I have had since. I had many adventures, challenging and interesting jobs all over Australia meeting all kinds of people. I had a twenty-year military career and fought in a war. I have been happily married for 32 years and our two children are now young adults and doing well. I found my mother and learned the story of my birth and early life. Our contact has been patchy due to the jealousy of her two husbands but I hope to visit her again soon. I try not to drag too much baggage from the past with me. I believe hatred is self consuming. Instead I get up in the morning and tell myself how bloody lucky I am. And I can honestly say that, if I had to go through it all again to get to where I am now and to live the life we live in Australia, I would.

BINDOON EX-RESIDENTS

Farewell —
RECENT OBITUARIES

WHO PLANTED THE OLIVE TREES?

Due to the popularity of the olive oil and pickled olives being produced at Bindoon, the College would love to hearing or tending of the olive groves at Bindoon. Please contact oil producer Ian Rowe on 9245 2100 or Shendelle Mullane Community Relations Manager on 9576 1040 email: admin@cacbbindoon.wa.edu.au.

WANTING CONTACT

John Lawrence (Clontarf and Castledare) would like to hear from any old boys who were at Clontarf in the 1953-60 era. John can be contacted on (08) 9274 1589.

Does anyone know the current whereabouts of Ronald Steffans Walker (formerly of Murray Dwyer and Westmead Homes NSW)? Sister Tania of Catholic Migrant Centre wishes to get in touch with him. If you have any information that would help, please contact Sr Tania on (08) 9221 1727.

John Merrigan (Tardun and Boys Town Glenorchy) wishes to contact Mark Kinsey, Michael Fitzmaurice, David Daley and George Kellegher particularly in relation to a reunion he's planning to hold in Tasmania (see below for details). Contact C-BERS if you have any information about how John can get in touch with these men.

REUNION

TASMANIAN CHILD MIGRANTS

50th ANNIVERSARY Reunion: 12 October 2002
A reunion of child migrants who came to Australia in 1952 and placed at Boys Town in Glenorchy (Hobart) is to be held in Hobart (Tasmania) is helping to organize the event. John will provide further details in newsletters leading up to the reunion. Contact C-BERS if you want to get in touch with John. See above for old boys who John particularly wants to get in touch with.

PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES

C-BERS has compiled albums featuring collections of photographs from each of the Christian Brothers child care institutions (Tardun, Bindoon, Castedare and Clontarf). We've also recently received a group photo of boys from Malta who came to Australia on the Asturias in 1953. Copies of photos can be ordered at a minimal cost.

ALSO: A brief film clip of an historic 5 minute news item 1943-44 Movietone News: "Miracle at Boystown at Bindoon" (unfortunately minus sound) is available on video for viewing at C-BERS.

OOPS!!

President of the Child Migrant Friendship Society, Margaret Colgan apologises for mistakenly reporting that Margaret Gibson won the lucky corsage prize at the Christmas in July luncheon. In fact, the winner was Margaret Solomon.

We note with sadness, the passing of the following ex-residents and former Child Migrants. We extend our deepest sympathy to their families and friends on the loss of these valuable men.

Michael Curtin died in Sydney in September 2001. His cremation ceremony was held on 14 September. Michael was possessed of a proud and indomitable spirit. He was a champion of truth and justice for his peers at Clontarf, and in adult life, became a fighter for the rights of working people through his trade union. Michael was a great character and truly "one of a kind". His passing is a sad event for his friends, the staff at C-BERS who got to know him well over the years, and for the many good causes for which he had fought.

Michael Cunningham passed away on 26 September in Bunbury. He is survived by his wife Mavis and 8 children. He will be sadly missed by them and by his Child Migrant brother, John.

Rod Bartlett was born in Jersey in 1931 and died in Perth on 6 May 2001. Due to his parent's poor health Rod and his brother Derek were placed in the care of Nazareth Nuns at Hammersmith, London sailing to Australia on the *Stratnaver* in March 1939. Rod was sent to Castledare and Derek to Clontarf. Three years later both were placed at Tardun. While there Rod lost his eye in a serious accident. He left Tardun in 1947 to do various farming and shearing jobs in the country eventually moving to Perth. Sadly for Rod his brother Derek was killed in a traffic accident at Frankland River in 1966. Soon after Rod's own health deteriorated and he retired to Rivervale. To many Rod was an inspiration in his practical concern for his fellow man. To fulfil his last wishes his funeral mass was held at Clontarf and he was buried with his brother Derek at Karrakatta. His sister Faith and many old Tardun and other close friends attended his funeral.

C-BERS seeks to acknowledge and honour ALL ex-residents who have passed away.
We rely on information supplied by our clients and readers to enable us to do so.