



BRYAN

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My dad was an alcoholic. My mother died when he kicked her in the stomach when she was pregnant. We were taken on the train to Neerkol Orphanage.

The more I was belted at the Neerkol school the less I seemed to be able to learn. I was called a ‘dunce’ and ‘useless’ by the nuns. They broke my left hand with a cane as I was meant to be writing with my right.

Other children were sometimes forced to hold me across my bed with no clothes on so the nuns could lay into me with a machine strap. If you wet the bed you were forced to stand there with the wet sheets wrapped around you and made fun of in front of the other kids.

When I was 16 I was told I was going to a nice farm to work. But the police met me at Roma Street Station and took me to Westbrook Detention Centre. I was confused about where I was till the other boys told me what they were in there for - break and enters, stealing cars, rape, attempted murder. I couldn't believe it. I'd committed no offence. I'd never seen the inside of a court.

I was regularly sexually abused in the showers at Westbrook, by other inmates as well as the screws. They took kids out of the dormitory at night and sexually abused them. There was not one night when I didn't cry myself to sleep.

I was part of a mass break out and got put in Boggo Road Jail. I felt like a king at Boggo Road compared to Westbrook because they had good food. I even broke the law to get back in when I was released. I got three years and thanked the judge.

I've had two serious relationships. I still have contact with my kids and have never been violent with them. One child I reared myself. He is 26 now, has his own house and is a mechanic. I screamed at him once. He was only in Grade Two and I called him names for not learning well. What sort of father does that? It's always eaten at my stomach.

I've been sick and seen a psychiatrist all my life because of Neerkol. I still get panic attacks, depression and take medication. I can't walk anywhere I don't know and can't take a bus. I still beat myself with a stick really hard. I often don't realise I'm even doing it.

When I first met Jo from Micah I was living in my car down by the river. They got me a unit at an old person's place but it felt like I was in jail again. My youngest son couldn't stay over and I got so sick I would sleep in my car every night rather than inside. I became known as the 'night watchman'. Jo worked with housing to get me a two-bedroom unit where my son could have a room. Over time I've spent more and more time at home but I still need support to stay.

I want to reduce my reliance on tablets and look after my health. With help from Jo I've learnt little exercises that help get the rubbish from childhood out of my head. I'm learning how to not have panic attacks in the toilet - from what the nuns did, rubbing my head in the sewage. Jo got me a cross which I had blessed with holy water at Mary Mackillop's Statue. I focus on the cross in the toilet so I can overcome the anxiety and pain.

The only thing that guides me is God. I know it sounds silly after everything but I believe in God. And my children, all children. I don't want them treated how I was treated.

