

Orphaned in South Australia: Oral histories about growing up at Goodwood Orphanage

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In 1986 the tenth anniversary of the closure of the Goodwood Orphanage in suburban Adelaide was marked by a reunion. From then on the Orphanage was periodically suggested to me, at the State Library of South Australia's J D Somerville Oral History Collection, as the subject for an oral history project. The suggestions came not only from former residents but also from the staff of the Teachers Centre that has occupied the Orphanage since 1990. Frequently they encounter visitors who announce, 'I grew up here' and proceed to talk about their memories.¹



The Goodwood Road façade of the St Vincent de Paul's Orphanage with girls assembled for school in about 1965. The uniforms indicate the range of religious and state primary and secondary schools that Orphanage girls attended in this era. The caption on the back of the original photograph, held by Sister Carmel, reads, 'Going to outside schools helps children mature as citizens of the whole community'. (B 58854, State Library of South Australia)

I agreed that an oral history of the Orphanage, formally known as the St Vincent de Paul's Orphanage, would be most worthwhile. Official records of the institution's management by the Sisters of Mercy, from its establishment in 1888 until its closure in December 1975, are scant.² Documentary evidence of the experiences of residents is very rare indeed. Oral history is an ideal means by which the historic record of such an institution can be enlarged.

In 1991 Rosemary Willis contacted the Somerville Collection to discuss an interviewing program she was undertaking for her tertiary studies. When she mentioned that she had grown up at the Goodwood Orphanage the idea of an oral history of the institution began to take shape.

Media Spotlight

In the meantime children's homes, including the Goodwood Orphanage, had become the focus of growing public interest and avid media attention. This centred on revelations about the thousands of children sent from British orphanages to children's homes in Australia, Canada, Africa and New Zealand from 1945 to 1963, and about the treatment received by children at some institutions.

The Child Migrants Trust, established by British social worker Margaret Humphreys to provide advice and support to former child migrants, was instrumental in much of this publicity, which peaked first in late 1989 with the British television documentary and book *Lost Children of the Empire* and again in mid-1992 with the ABC television drama *The Leaving of Liverpool*.³

The stories of five former child migrants who arrived in Adelaide on the *SS Ormonde* in January 1949, and were placed in the Goodwood Orphanage, featured in this publicity. While some early items gave these women the opportunities to recall positive aspects of their experiences the tenor was generally negative with headlines like, 'They were Sisters of Mercy, but they showed no mercy' setting the tone.⁴

We expected reaction to this publicity to complicate our project and decided not to include former child migrants in the interviewing program. We wanted to assure potential interviewees that our project was not exploitative in intent and we hoped that our interviews could balance the increasingly sensational stories being reported in the media.⁵

The Libraries Board of South Australia provided funding for the Goodwood Orphanage oral histories in 1993 and 1994, and Rosemary was commissioned to conduct 20 hours of recordings with former residents and religious staff, resulting in 16 interviews. The recording program was concluded in May 1994 when I interviewed Rosemary at length about her childhood at the Orphanage as well as her experiences of doing the project. In addition to these interviews, the Somerville Collection holds only four other recordings about the Goodwood Orphanage, three of which had been produced by school children.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>Circumstances</i>	<i>Years at Orphanage</i>	
Molly	1909	mother deserted	1922 – 27	4
Elsie	1915	mother deserted	1922 – 32	9

Frank	1917	foster child	1927 – 31	4
Dan*		unspecified	1932 – 38	6
Maureen**	1930	mother died	1934 – 45	11
Daniel	1929	father died	1936 – 42	6
Monica	1939	unsupported mother	1941 – 52	11
Sr Francis*		religious	1940s – 60s	
Junice	1940	father alcoholic	1946 – 57	11
‘Mara’***	1941	mother widow, migrant	1949 – 52	3
Heather****	1939	British child migrant	1949 – 55	6
Carmel	1952	parents separated	1960 – 65	5
Nita	1952	brought from New Guinea	1960 – 70	10
Bernadette	1955	parents separated	1960 – 70	10
Fr Terry	1927	religious	1961 – 70	
Gwen	1958	unsupported mother	1961 – 73	12
Gae	1950	conflict with stepmother	1963 – 66	3
Sr Carmel		religious	1964 – 74	
Rosemary	1960	mother died	1967 – 75	8
Karen	1959	unsupported mother	1968 – 70	2
<i>Average 7 years</i>				

All interviewed for Goodwood Orphanage Oral History, 1993 & 1994 (State Library of South Australia, OH 201) except:

* St Thomas School’s Oral History Project, 1985 (OH 138).

** Maureen was interviewed by her grand daughter in 1989 (OH 73) for a school project as well as for the Goodwood Orphanage Oral History.

*** Pseudonym.

**** Interview by Leith MacGillivray, 1993 (OH 199).

The twenty interviewees represented in the Somerville Collection range in age from 35 to 85 years, and they lived at the Orphanage between 1922 and 1975. As the table shows, our interviewees came to Goodwood not as orphans but as children of families disrupted by death, desertion, separation, poverty and other hardships. They include women of Aboriginal (Monica), Latvian (‘Mara’), New Guinean (Nita), and Italian (Gae) descent, as well as three men. Both boys and girls lived at the Orphanage until the Second World War.

Only two nuns and one priest are included. We would have liked to interview more religious, but continued media attention, including an extremely provocative segment on ABC-TV’s *Adelaide 7.30 Report* in February 1994, convinced them not to become involved.⁶

And yet, while making no attempt to exonerate the nuns, the Goodwood Orphanage oral histories provide insights that can promote a better understanding of the Sisters’ work and a few of their number’s behaviour. Likewise, interviewees describe experiences that are always more complex – and often more mundane – than those of the stereotypical ‘victims’ presented in historical accounts like the *Lost Children of the Empire* book and most media representations of children’s homes.

For example, the recollection of Molly, our oldest interviewee, of how she and her sisters came to the Orphanage in 1922 provides evidence not only of the traumatic separation of a family but also of the pressures on the Sisters of Mercy as they coped with the unheralded arrival of a family of eight.

Why did you come to the Orphanage?

A broken home. My mother deserted us. Left my father with eight of us. We were up in the country staying where he was working and she ticked off back to Melbourne. That was the last we saw of her for years and years. Our relatives wanted to take one of us or two of us to work for them, but my father said we'd go to South Australia. We came over by the train and he had to find a place to put us straight away. Somebody at the railway station told him about the Orphanage.

Did you go directly from the railway station to the Orphanage?

Yes. There were horse-drawn cabs in those days, and we all fitted in one of those and drove down. The old cabby knew where to go, so we pulled up in front of this big place. I said, 'I'm not staying here', but Dad said, 'Oh you've got to. You've got to look after the young ones.'

We all trooped in. One parlour was too small so we went into the bigger one and sat there. All lined up like sheep going to the slaughter. (laughs) Mother Columba said that she would take the three girls but she wouldn't be able to have the boys. The baby was too young for one thing. Anyhow, we just said goodbye to the boys and off they went. They were sent to work for different people down the South East. Of course, the baby screamed blue murder. He wanted to come back to us. But no. Mother Columba did tell me later that he'd been fostered out.

Dad said he was going back to Victoria. He had to work. I didn't know what to do. Sister Bernadette said, 'You don't want to cry'. I thought, 'Struth!' Anyhow, that's how it happened.⁷

The older boys kept in touch with their sisters, but the family was never reunited.

In fact it was not until the 1960s – and the advent of social workers – that the religious staff at Catholic institutions like the Goodwood Orphanage were relieved of the responsibility of determining whether children brought to them would be accepted. This was a decision that was often based on whether or not beds were available rather than an assessment of the family's circumstances and options.⁸

Child Welfare Provisions

And what were some of the options if the support of extended family was unavailable or, as in the case of Molly's father, unwelcome? Government relief payments were provided on a selective basis to widows and deserted mothers. The state also supervised an extensive boarding-out system that subsidised foster parents as well as paying subsidies to mothers on a selective basis to enable them to keep their children at home. In the mid-1920s one and a half thousand children were in non-institutional care under this kind of state control.⁹

Another 300 children were housed in state institutions; industrial schools and reformatories at suburban Edwardstown, Magill and Enfield, and probationary schools, run by the Salvation Army with state subsidisation, at suburban Fullarton and Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills.¹⁰

Beyond the state realm, the Church of England maintained suburban orphanages at Mitcham and Walkerville, the United Aborigines Missions ran children's homes in a number of remote locations as well as at Quorn in the Mid North, a Board representing various Protestant churches operated the Morialta Children's Home, also in the Adelaide Hills, and the Catholic Church, in addition to the Orphanage at Goodwood, provided the St Joseph's Orphanage at Largs Bay under the Sisters of St Joseph and a reformatory at Brooklyn Park, both in the suburban area.¹¹

I estimate that Molly and her sisters at Goodwood Orphanage were only three of at least another 1,000 children living in children's homes in South Australia at any one time in the 1920s. Goodwood typically housed between 100 and 120 children.

Who were these children? What brought them to these institutions? What were their childhood experiences? Each of our interviews covered a range of topics including; the interviewee's background and reasons for coming to the Orphanage, first impressions, day to day routines, the staff during their era, living quarters, food, clothing, hygiene, discipline and punishment, emotional life, religious life, education, recreation, holidays, contact with family and other 'outsiders', friendships formed within the Orphanage, preparation for life outside and the interviewees' evaluation of the benefits and harm of their time there.

Four of these topics, those that are referred to most often in media treatments of the Orphanage and similar institutions: punishment, physical care, emotional care, and interviewees' evaluations of their upbringing, are discussed in this paper as examples of the detail and complexity of the material recorded in the Goodwood Orphanage oral histories.

Punishment

Dan lived at the Goodwood Orphanage from 1936, when his father died, until 1942 when his mother was able to reunite her family. She placed him and his four sisters at the Orphanage so that they could stay together. However the strict segregation of the sexes meant that he rarely saw his sisters, let alone spoke with them, during his years there.¹²

Dan is explicit about the physical punishment he received but his attitude towards his punishers – the Sisters – is tempered by his personal insights into what we might now call the 'informal power structures' of the institution: the influence of other children.

They never used to give you a hiding there and then. They used to wait till nighttime to get you when you were in your pyjamas, when you were most vulnerable. They'd say, 'You're due for the sock' – the sock was a piece of hames from a horse harness about eighteen inches long and flexible in the middle, and you used to get it across the behind.

I never seen anybody get what they call belted and nobody was ever held down to be hit. The most anybody got was six and I was one of the privileged ones to get the six strokes across the behind. A lot of them used to cry – make out to cry – so they wouldn't be hit any more. But the bigger ones, if you cried or anything when you got the sock, you were a sheila.

The nuns never used to punish you unduly. There was always a reason for them to punish you. But a lot of the times it wasn't your fault, it was what was said by the older boys and that sort of thing. ... You got a hiding because somebody dobbed you in just for their own end and the nuns had to take their word for it.¹³

Not one of our interviewees has recalled the issue of punishment in simplistic terms. The most bitter memories are those of Maureen who was at the Orphanage from 1934 to 1945 – the same era as Dan – yet she differentiates between the Sisters, describing one as 'a truly sadistic person' but also referring to 'dear old Mother Columba' who 'really didn't like' applying the sock but 'she'd be purple in the face when she was laying it on, because she was an Irish lady and [she] used to do her nana.'¹⁴

The interviewees' most painful memories are emotional rather than physical, and relate to their bewilderment about certain punishments or rules. The most heart-rending of these concern the separation of siblings. This occurred not only because of the segregation of boys and girls within the Orphanage or between the different Catholic children's homes, but also because of the physical division of the Orphanage in post-war years into two 'sides' – the St Mary's and St Anthony's wings of the building – which sometimes meant that sisters were not allowed to see or talk to one another on a day to day basis.¹⁵

Nevertheless, most interviewees have been eager to counter the media image of the Orphanage as a place of unrelenting physical abuse. And many, like Dan, assess the punishments they received or witnessed as typical of the eras in which they grew up. 'Mara', who was at the Orphanage from 1949 to 1952 after her family migrated from Latvia, found that 'the teachers out in the primary schools were similar. I mean, you were reprimanded for silly little things as well ... If [the nuns] were cruel at the time, I think people were cruel in general.'¹⁶

The issue of punishment is now complicated by our contemporary understanding of abuse. Significantly, one interviewee – who is a self-proclaimed defender of the Sisters – has, while checking her transcript, replaced words like 'bash' and 'belt', which she used quite unselfconsciously to describe punishment she believes was justified, with the word 'smack'.

Physical Care

A much more common ground for complaint by interviewees is some aspects of the physical care they received at the Orphanage. I will focus here on hygiene – and particularly bathing – because it is a function that renders us so vulnerable and is therefore likely to cause trauma and resentment. At a Catholic orphanage, it was also a function profoundly influenced not only by the regimentation required to organise 100 children *and* the austerity of an under-funded institution, but also by religious codes of conduct.

Maureen recalls bath time, and then hair washing, in the Second World War era:

Hygiene was very, very low on the list of priorities, I can tell you. I mean you wore your underwear and your socks for weeks, so you can imagine the general odour of the place wasn't too good. But you didn't notice it, except you noticed that the big girls smelled funny.

So it didn't improve as you got older?

No, no, except what you could do yourself. You were aware that you'd like to be cleaner and, as I say, you could go upstairs if you were careful and didn't get caught. Or else in the morning you could get up a bit earlier and go and have a wash. But there was no suggestion ever that you would take your clothes off and wash yourself, and even when we had baths we didn't bath naked.

We bathed with those revolting pinny things on – Orphanage pinnies which covered your back and front with loops on the sides. As you got out of the bath you got behind the curtain and chucked your wet pinny back into the bath for the next comer. So of course the first few in the bath got a dry pinny and a clean bath, because only four baths were run.

I never saw another naked human until I was sixteen and in the State Juniors for basketball and had to have a shower with other people and nearly died of embarrassment. To see pubic hairs and naked boobs was just more than I could bear. (laughs) ...

The procedure for washing hair was a great big metal tub filled with warm water and put on a bench down there by the laundry. And the hair washing would proceed – one after another would be washed. It was just soap, yellow bar soap hacked into slabs – that was the only soap we ever had. I don't know why but it was called 'common fat'. Of course if you came late in the procedure, which I would have done any time after I was eleven because I did the milking and that made me late for everything, but then it would be cold and just about six inches of scum and lice (laughs), which didn't really help the cleansing process at all.¹⁷

Frank, our oldest male interviewee, recalls a similar bathroom routine for boys involving bathers, rather than pinnies, in the late 1920s.¹⁸

From the early fifties an interviewee recalls the disturbing experience of finding the meagre amount of bath water allocated to half a dozen girls being murky, and the shared towel soiled, because the girl before her was menstruating. When she complained, 'the nun didn't check the water or anything and just yelled at me and told me I was an ungrateful so-and-so'. At that stage of her stay, she was going home to her mother on weekends and she was told, "For that, you're not going to bath here from now on. You can bath at home." So I didn't bath during the week and madly rushed home Friday nights for a wash'.¹⁹

For many girls the shock of having their long hair cut off was one of their first impressions of the Orphanage. For Heather, a 10-year-old migrant from one of the British orphanages in 1949, it was a terrifying initiation which she presumed was performed because the nuns were concerned about foreign disease.²⁰ Bernadette, at the Orphanage for 10 years in the 1960s, had a more mundane explanation:

We got clean towels once a week and you only had one towel. No one was allowed to have long hair so [that] there was no saying, 'Well I've got long hair

– can I have two towels please?’ because everyone had to be the same, equal. No one was allowed to look different or rich. We all had to look the same.²¹

‘Sister’s pets’ who were sometimes allowed to keep their long hair were figures of jealousy and resentment.²²

Bernadette also recalls that regular haircuts, performed by visiting hairdressers, were another way in which Orphanage girls ended up looking same.

We used to have the Feres Trabilis students come in and do our hair. They’d say, ‘Right, Friday night it’s hairdresser. Bernadette, yes, you can line up, you need a haircut’. We used to think, ‘Now what is the fashion this month?’ And you’d see a kid come out with a Mia Farrow hair cut, and we’d think, ‘Oh, here we go. They’re practicing Mia Farrow haircuts’. So two hundred girls from the Orphanage were walking around with Mia Farrow haircuts. We hated that.²³

And it is Bernadette who perhaps epitomises the frustration involved in the highly regulated institutional life, where modesty was enforced but privacy was impossible: ‘I mean even if you wanted to go to the toilet in the big bathroom, there’d be someone either hanging over the top seeing who’s there or looking underneath.’²⁴

Emotional Lives

Interviewees describe particular nuns as ‘motherly’ and the Orphanage is often referred to as ‘the Home’, or even ‘home’. However it was not until the Orphanage’s final years that the Sisters attempted to create a sense of family life – a trend that was realised in the cottage homes that replaced Adelaide’s orphanages in the 1970s.

Our interviews show very clearly that it was usually the relationships with other children, rather than with Sisters, that provided the emotional support that children had lost – if indeed they had ever known it – when they left their families to come to the Orphanage.

Physical and emotional care are linked in the system of ‘charges’ that is common to the experience of all interviewees. The term ‘charge’ was applied both to daily chores and to the relationship between younger children placed under the care of an older child. The older child made sure that his or her charge got out of bed, was dressed and ready for mass on time, and so on throughout the day’s routines. Most interviewees recall significant relationships with charges.

Almost all interviewees also had contact with relatives outside the Orphanage, and while that contact was also strictly regimented, it was a very important part of their emotional lives. Only one interviewee, in addition to the British child migrant, had no contact with relatives. Frank, who had lived with two elderly women as foster parents until he was ten years old and came to the Orphanage in 1927, expresses both longing for family and the importance of peer group friendships at the Orphanage.

Were you ever lonely there?

Not really. I used to, you know, think that it would have been fantastic to be outside and to belong to somebody. My biggest desire was to have a brother,

which of course I never had. But that was always my big wish, when I'd see other boys with brothers, and I used to think, you know, 'Gee, it'd be great to have a brother'. But anyhow that wasn't to be. Yes, I suppose I was lonely really.

See, occasionally people would come and take a boy and more or less adopt him from there. It never happened very often, but I've got a faint recollection of an odd boy or two going out. One in particular, I think he went to Western Australia. The father was a chemist and him and his wife came over and picked the boy and took him back with them. I used to think, 'Gee, it'd be great for somebody to do that to me,' but it never ever happened of course. But generally speaking I was quite happy there, because I had boys of my own age there and I didn't mind that at all really.²⁵

Rosemary was at the Orphanage from 1967 to 1975 and she describes how another child could become a parental substitute for children hungry for affection:

A lot of children who came through there had emotional problems and the only way the nuns could deal with it was by trying to get an older child to help. 'Can you help so-and-so? They've obviously got a problem'. But sometimes they were just overwhelmed by work. They couldn't attend to everyone.

I can recall one particular boy when I was about eleven. He was new, and when they were new they were always very depressed in the first few days or weeks before they'd settle in.

By this stage I had quite a few charges looking after little kids. This one approached me and said, 'I notice that you mother a lot of the children. I know you're not my mother' – he was only about seven or eight – 'but can I call you Mum?' I was really embarrassed and I didn't know what to do. I thought, 'I'll fob him off by making excuses.' I said, 'Well, I'll have to ask the nuns,' knowing full well the nuns were going to say no. So I went and asked the nuns and they said, 'Oh no, no, no, that's not on at all'.

I went back to him with this legitimate excuse – and he was devastated. His shoulders fell, his head fell. And I couldn't help it, I went over and I grabbed him and I said, 'Look, bugger the nuns' (laughs) – even though it wasn't their fault – 'You can call me Mum, but only do it when the nuns aren't around.' So he started calling me Mum and it snowballed. The other kids wanted to call me Mum too. There was obviously such a strong need to have a mother figure and to be allowed to say Mum, so they all started calling me Mum. Even kids my own age.

So I sat them down – there must have been around twenty-five kids – and I said, 'You obviously need mothering. If there's something I can do, I will do it for you. You just have to tell me what it is.' Some of them opted to have bedtime stories read to them. Some of them wanted to be tucked into bed at night and have a kiss good night, others just wanted someone to talk to. So I used to do the rounds every night, starting with the youngest ones, and it would take me a couple of hours to say good night. (laughs)

So that was something that you could provide that there was a complete absence of in the organisation of the Orphanage?

Well, the nuns tried, especially as children moved out and there was a lot less children there. But when there were those big numbers of a hundred to a hundred and twenty children there and perhaps four nuns looking after all those kids, there was nothing they could do. It was basically they'd see that we were fed and kept out of danger and that sort of thing.²⁶

Rosemary is not alone among former residents in describing the pressure under which the Sisters lived and worked. But one of our religious interviewees, Sister Carmel, who was sent to the Orphanage in 1964 and remained until its closure, also provided insight into their demanding lives.

I came from Elizabeth where I'd been teaching for five years. I hadn't had any previous childcare experience and I was put in charge of forty children as well as teaching school all day.

Do you remember your first day there?

I certainly do, with about forty children coming back from holiday homes with their cases, not knowing where to put anything, where to find anything, didn't know their names. It was a bit of a nightmare actually, knowing that they had to go to school in a couple of days' time.

I had to organise their sleeping accommodation, their clothes and find out where everything was in the cupboards. Take them to this terrible room in a third storey that was full of shoes of all different colours and sizes, and it was a matter of finding a pair of school shoes that suited a particular child.

Did you have any help?

No, not really. I didn't cook for them of course, or do their laundry. But the big laundry baskets would come up twice a week with all their clothes and they had to be all sorted and named.

And I had over sixty Grade Ones to teach over at the local primary school which was about a seven-minute walk – or a two-minute run – in the mornings, after getting forty kids off to school. A full day there and then you came home, perhaps drop in to say hello to the other Sisters and have a cup of tea and then straight up to the dormitories to start again till twelve o'clock or so.

So you were not preparing lessons properly for the children at school. You didn't have time for the children at the Orphanage. You just did not have time to sit down and try to meet their individual needs. You felt that nothing was getting done properly. There were these two enormous tasks that we were trying to accomplish and I'd say not doing either of them as well as we should have been. Certainly we did our best but I don't think it was really good enough.²⁷

One interviewee says of Sister Carmel's load: 'The poor thing. When I think about it now as a mother, having four children of my own, having to be responsible and be the last person to get dressed, I can well imagine her frustration – well, imagine it!'²⁸

Interviewees' Evaluations

So how do the interviewees evaluate their experiences of growing up at the Goodwood Orphanage? While most have grievances about specific aspects, their responses are generally positive. Most, from the oldest to the youngest, express gratitude to the Sisters for providing them with a home and guidance in their youth, and many from all eras describe how they maintained contact with the Orphanage after they left.

However older interviewees in particular comment on how their regimented childhoods affected their personal development. Frank says, 'I suppose if there was any harm done, it was because it made most of us very placid. You wouldn't be able to bring out your own personality. There was so much regimentation there that you did as you were told and that was that.'²⁹ But only two interviewees, including the British child migrant, speak of feelings of worthlessness or a sense of stigma affecting their later lives.³⁰ Younger interviewees, on the other hand, explain how the responsibilities involved in the day-to-day routines made them self-reliant and strong.

Rosemary best expresses this conflict between dependence and independence:

Part of me had this over-reliance on authority because they made the decisions for us and life was so regimented we didn't have to think for ourselves, and yet another part of me was very independent because the nuns encouraged us to look after ourselves. So there was that contradictory situation and its something that I've always lived with since – something I'm very conscious of.³¹

Two common criticisms that span the generations relate to education – both school and sex! Several interviewees recognise that until the final years the educational standards and opportunities for Orphanage residents were very limited. Until the 1950s boys and girls were prepared respectively for farming and domestic work, and they were placed in those positions amongst Catholic families upon leaving.

In the 1950s and 60s the target occupations changed but the expectations remained limited, as Rosemary summarises:

When I first went there I got the impression that when most of the girls left school they went to one of the department stores working as a sales person. And it seemed like the job that you could most aspire to was to work in the ladies' department at David Jones, whereas everyone else just went to John Martins.³²

All interviewees comment critically or with humour about the standard of sex education received from the Sisters and the naiveté with which they confronted the outside world.

Finally, six of the interviewees refer to 'what might have been' if they had remained in the situations they left when they came to the Orphanage and they are grateful that the Orphanage provided an alternative.³³ A seventh, Monica, is a special case in point.

She came to the Orphanage when she was only 18 months old in 1941. Her first experience of family life occurred with horrifying results when she was six years old and her mother tried to reunite her family after marrying a man who was then revealed as an abusive alcoholic. Monica witnessed the bashing of her infant sister, who later died, before returning to the Orphanage which was now even more strongly identified by her not only as home, but as a haven.

I was grateful I went back to Goodwood. I begged my mother to take me back there. I was sick of being molested, I was sick of being beaten by him, I was sick of running down the caves and hiding, I was sick of climbing the highest apple tree to get away from him. I did not want to stay out of that Home because I was protected at Goodwood – I was not treated like that. The nuns looked after me and I felt that the nuns ---. I was never more glad to run up to a nun. I never got treated like that, no way.³⁴

Insider Status of the Interviewer

Monica's interview was recalled on tape by Rosemary Willis when we discussed her status as an 'insider' or 'peer group' interviewer. Rosemary grew up at the Orphanage from the age of six to fifteen years. She found the interviewing program a very emotional and even traumatic experience because of the flood of memories it unleashed. However she feels that coming to terms with those memories has been a very beneficial process for her – and, she believes, 'a reasonably positive experience' for other interviewees as well. However in the early stages of the interviewing program she recognised that her personal reactions affected her interviewing technique.

I was conscious that if anyone touched on anything painful, regardless of whether it was something I knew about or not, I immediately wanted to change the subject because I didn't want to upset them.

Did that happen on a number of occasions?

I think it did. There was one occasion we were interviewing Monica and you were the technician, and I would have changed the subject but I think you must have come in with a question and kept on that particular subject, and I think there were quite a few tears then.

Yes, I think it was time to turn the tape and I said to you, 'Can we explore that a bit further?' and when the new tape came on, as you say, Monica went on with the story rather than cutting it short.³⁵

Rosemary also found her insider status frustrating at times. 'Really I got so frustrated with trying to pull out what I thought was a really obvious memory that they ought to have, that I ended telling the story myself.' On the other hand she also recognised the problem of not asking for explanations or details about some shared memories 'because I knew what they were talking about.'³⁶

Rosemary also discussed the ways in which her status as a university-educated interviewer cast her as an *outsider* as well.

Most of the people I spoke to have not even been to high school. I'd ask a question and I wouldn't get the response I expected because I wasn't using language they were familiar with. So I tried to simplify my language as much as possible, but not talk down to people at the same time. There was a little bit of a power thing there too. I was very conscious when I walked in with this big bag of equipment, how intimidated some people were, and I had to really work at helping them to relax. I was really conscious of that with a couple of old people.³⁷

But her insider status had many benefits as well, not in the least being the confidence it gave to some people to agree to being part of the project:

If I thought someone was hesitating slightly, then I would say that I used to live at the Orphanage, and they were delighted to hear that. Yes, I think that helped to get some interviews.³⁸

Reporting Back to the Participants

In October 1994 I addressed the Historical Society of South Australia about the project. All of the interviewees were invited, and amongst the large audience were Rosemary, Monica, Sister Carmel, 'Mara', Gae, Junice and Frank, as well as four more former residents and Sisters of Mercy, including the current Provincial Leader, who had not been directly involved in our project. It was a thrilling experience, not only to present the results of such a controversial project to the participants in a public forum but also to have them respond directly to questions from the audience afterwards.

Preparing the address was very challenging – I did not know which interviewees, representing diverse points of view, would be present. The address included playing excerpts about punishment, physical and emotional care and interviewees' evaluations presented here – to which some interviewees take vehement exception.

However the interviewees responded very positively. They appreciated the emphasis on the complexity of their responses to their experiences at the Orphanage and the characterisation of their memories as 'bitter' or 'positive' rather than right or wrong. All thoroughly enjoyed the final two excerpts which recalled the camaraderie of the songs children made up about the Orphanage, the first from the 1930s and the second from the late 1960s:

Do you recall a song that you used to sing at the Orphanage?

Yes there was a song that we used to sing, but I can't remember all of it. It was, 'In this place we mustn't talk, all we get is dripping and dork' – dork was bread – 'That's why we're gradually fading away. No sugar in our teas, bread and dork we never see, that's why we're gradually fading away.'

Can you sing me the Orphanage song before we finish up?

(laughs) All right, I'll sing it to you. 'Down by the subway, right on the bus line, there is a home we call our own. A hundred years old yet it's still standing proudly, going by the name of the Goodwood Girls' Home. Kay is the smallest

and Carol is the tallest, and Nina is the quietest of us all. The K-s are the naughtiest, the D-s are the cheekiest, and poor old Sister Margaret has to put up with us all.’³⁹

The rest of the audience were clearly excited by the proceedings as well – to have the subjects of an historical research project seated amongst them and speaking on their own behalf. The process reinforced the vital and exciting role of oral history in allowing voices that might otherwise remain silent to add new information and stimulating complexity to the historic record.

¹ At the time of the online publication of this article in 2011 the Goodwood Orphanage is occupied by Tabor Adelaide, a Christian college.

² The archives of the Catholic Church at the Diocesan Centre, Adelaide, and the Sisters of Mercy, Adelaide, as well as Catholic Family Services, Adelaide, hold material relating to the Orphanage. There is no published history. The monthly *Southern Cross: the official organ of the Catholic Church in South Australia* is a valuable source of information. Sister Marie Therese Foale’s Honours thesis ‘Think of the ravens: The Sisters of St Joseph and social welfare: 1867-1909’, University of Adelaide, 1981, refers to the Orphanage’s early development. *Centenary, the Sisters of Mercy, South Australia, 1880-1980* by Helen Astbury, Adelaide, Sisters of Mercy, 1980 has a few references to the institution’s changing role.

The architectural history of the site has been given more attention: in the mis-named *Corporation of the City of Unley: Former St Joseph’s Orphanage building, 181 Goodwood Road, Millwood*, Heritage Buildings Survey by the South Australian Public Buildings Department, 1982 (mis-named because the Josephites were associated with the orphanage before the Goodwood Road site was developed); and in the information leaflets produced by The Orphanage Teachers Centre which now occupies the building.

³ Philip Bean & Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, Unwin Hyman, London, Sydney, 1989. The television documentary *Lost Children of the Empire* screened on the ABC in November 1989. The two-part ABC television drama *The Leaving of Liverpool* screened in July 1992. Margaret Humphrey’s account of the child migrants has been published as *Empty Cradles*, Doubleday, London, 1994.

⁴ ‘Memories of the Orphanage’ by Lance Campbell in *The Advertiser Magazine*, 3 May 1986, p.7; ‘The orphans who were shipped to Australia’ by Karen Leary in *Woman’s Day*, 31 May 1988, p.18.

⁵ One former child migrant’s story was donated to the Somerville Collection at about the time our project started when Adelaide historian Dr Leith MacGillivray interviewed Heather G–, 28 January 1993 (interview number OH 199).

⁶ The *7.30 Report*’s promotions and commentary implied that children suffered sexual abuse at the Orphanage – an allegation not raised to date – and emphasised the ‘Sisters without mercy’ theme. While acknowledging part way through the segment that ‘most of the women told us that not all of the nuns here treated them badly – indeed, we have spoken to a number of former orphans who have nothing but good memories of this place’, only negative experiences were aired. The Sisters sought legal representation following the broadcast and on 30 March 1995 the *7.30 Report* issued a formal apology.

⁷ Interview with Molly L– by Rosemary Willis for the Goodwood Orphanage Oral History, 18 February, pp.1-3 (OH 201/12). All interviews are by Rosemary Willis for the Goodwood Orphanage Oral History unless otherwise stated and all are held in the JD Somerville Oral History Collection, State Library of South Australia.

⁸ Interview with Father Terry Holland, 14 October 1993, p.10 (OH 201/9).

⁹ Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p.154; Brian Dickey and Penny Baker, ‘Social welfare: the Government sector’ in Wray Vamplew et al, *South Australian Historical Statistics, Australia 1788-1988: A Bicentennial History*, Kensington, NSW, 1984, p.128.

¹⁰ Brian Dickey, *Rations, Residence, Resources: A History of Social Welfare in South Australia since 1836*, Wakefield Press, Netley, S. Aust., 1986, p.174.

¹¹ Dickey, *Rations*, pp.103, 105; Christobel Mattingley, *Survival in Our Own Land: ‘Aboriginal’ Experiences in ‘South Australia’ since 1836*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, S.A., 1988, pp.211-246, 251-253; Peter Scottney-Turbill, *Morialta: Fire in the Mist*, the Author, Stirling, S.A., 1994, p.167; Dickey, *Rations*, pp.106, 160, 174.

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- ¹² Dan coincided with the end of an era of boys living at Goodwood. They were moved to the newly named Boys Town at Brooklyn Park during the Second World War. Boys returned to Goodwood only in its final years as the other Catholic institutions were also closing down and the remaining children being moved into cottage home facilities.
- ¹³ Interview with Daniel C–, 1 March 1994, pp.10, 28 (OH 201/15).
- ¹⁴ Interview with Maureen M–, 26 April and 11 May 1993, p.15 (OH 201/2).
- ¹⁵ See, for example, interview with Bernadette B–, 14 June 1993, p.21 (OH 201/6).
- ¹⁶ Interview with ‘Mara’, 25 February 1994, p.18 (OH 210/14).
- ¹⁷ Interview with Maureen M–, pp.16-17, 14.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Frank G–, 8 March 1994, p.9 (OH 201/16).
- ¹⁹ Interview with ‘Mara’, p.11.
- ²⁰ Interview Heather G–, p.5.
- ²¹ Interview with Bernadette B–, p.12.
- ²² Interview with Carmel C–, 31 May 1993, p.19 (OH 201/5).
- ²³ Interview with Bernadette B–, p.14.
- ²⁴ Interview with Bernadette B–, p.12.
- ²⁵ Interview with Frank G–, pp.6-7.
- ²⁶ Interview with Rosemary Willis by Beth M Robertson for the Goodwood Orphanage Oral History, 11, 12 & 17 May 1994, pp.44-45 (OH 201/17).
- ²⁷ Interview with Sister Carmel, 28 April 1993, pp.1-2 (OH 201/3).
- ²⁸ Interview with Carmel C–, p.20.
- ²⁹ Interview with Frank G–, p.13.
- ³⁰ Interview with Maureen M–, p.31, and interview with Heather G–, p.25.
- ³¹ Interview with Rosemary Willis, pp.55-56.
- ³² Interview with Rosemary Willis, p.33.
- ³³ Interviews with Gae D–, 13 May 1993, p.17 (OH 201/4), Rosemary Willis, p.57, Bernadette B–, pp.21-22, Junice C–, 24 June 1993, p.22 (OH 201/7), Juanita T–, 28 October 1993, pp.50-51 (OH 201/10) and David C–, p.27.
- ³⁴ Interview with Monica W–, 4 April 1993, p.19 (OH 201/1).
- ³⁵ Interview with Rosemary Willis, pp.62-63.
- ³⁶ Interview with Rosemary Willis, p.62.
- ³⁷ Interview with Rosemary Willis, pp.63-64.
- ³⁸ Interview with Rosemary Willis, p.62.
- ³⁹ Interview with Daniel C–, p. 12; interview with Karen F–, 28 October 1993, pp.20-21 (OH 201/11).