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OPEN FOUNDATION

JAN McLEOD

TUESDAY 1pm.

RESEARCH PAPER:

However, many women were forced by the economic conditions of the time to remain in the workforce and there was a corresponding decline in the birth rate during the 1930s. For those who already had children, it was often necessary to depend on charities and welfare organisations to support their families.

SAINT ELIZABETH'S AND OTHER CHILDREN'S HOMES IN THE HUNTER AREA DURING THE 1940s.

As the 1940s approached it was clear that there was an ever increasing demand for some type of accommodation for the children of families in dire straits. Few such establishments existed in the Newcastle area: The Catholic Church looked after orphans at the Murray Dwyer Orphanage and they also ran a School for the Deaf. The Methodists had opened a Men's Hostel in 1931, but provided no such service for women and children. The Salvation Army helped feed the community with Soup Kitchens as well as providing support in the home situation. The Anglicans (Church of England) were the largest religious group in the district yet appeared to be more concerned with persuading people to join their Church, rather than attempting to use more practical ways to help their community.<sup>3</sup>

1. Shellah Grey, Newcastle in the Great Depression. Newcastle 1984 p31

2. Ibid p33

3. Ibid p66

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4. letter from Doris Barton (ex Sister Watson - St Elizabeth's 1939, 1944-51

5. Newcastle Evening Herald 26<sup>th</sup> Novem. 1942 p2.

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4. letter from Doris Barton (ex Sister Watson - St Elizabeth's 1939, 1946-51)

5. Newcastle Morning Herald 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1942 p2

The latter years of the 1930s and most of the 1940s saw the Anglican Church become more involved in practical welfare assistance. Through their division known as the "Church Army", they established and staffed Children's Homes in the Newcastle area.

The Church Army had been established in Australia on the 4th of August, 1934. The Parent Society was in London and they were true to their motto of "Service for All." Because of confusion about their loyalties, the words "Church of England" were printed around the edge of their badges.

This organization believed in helping where it was needed and children were a particular concern; thus St Christopher's Home for Little Children at Lochinvar (birth-six years), St Alban's Boys Home at Morpeth, which housed boys from five to eighteen years of age, and St Elizabeth's Girls Home at Mayfield for girls aged between five and eighteen years were established.

The Homes were owned by the Diocese of Newcastle and were staffed by the Church Army workers as well as people employed to do the cooking. All Homes were under the supervision of the Child Welfare Department whose representatives regularly inspected the Homes. Health Department representatives also checked on the quality of the meals received by the children.<sup>4</sup>

World War Two was in progress and the threat of enemy attack was real. Because of their proximity to possible targets such as the Steelworks, it was decided to move the boys to Murrurundi and the girls to Singleton. Permission had been granted by the Parochial Council on the 26th of February, 1942 to build temporary quarters on the grounds in front of the rectory at Singleton to "house the inmates of Saint Elizabeth's."<sup>5</sup> The girls, with  
4. letter from Doris Barton (ex Sister Watson - St Elizabeth's 1939, 1946-51  
5. Newcastle Morning Herald 26<sup>th</sup> February 1942 p2

Sister Lykke in charge, moved during November of that year.

In December 1942, Sister Calvert, who was the first Australian Sister of the Church Army, was put in charge of the twenty two girls at the Singleton Home.<sup>6</sup> The children at Saint Elizabeth's were not generally delinquent children though, because of unsatisfactory conditions at home, some were sent there by the courts. Some girls were there only a short time because of parental illness or unemployment but most stayed for several years. Occasionally orphaned girls were sent to the Home, but in most cases a parent left to cope alone found it impossible to care for their children. These girls were kept at the Home until they reached working age.

Though discipline was strict at Saint Elizabeth's, the atmosphere was generally one of caring. Mrs Kennedy, who attended the Home from 1944 until 1947, recalls that if she didn't finish her meal at the first sitting, it was served up to her again and again until it had been eaten. Nevertheless, she describes the Sisters as kind and feels the girls were well cared for. She has pleasant memories of holidays at Stockton, attending the local Show and being accepted by the Singleton community.

"There were a few families who had little children at Lochinvar and older ones at St Elizabeth's. In the school holidays they would take turns of visiting one another in the Homes"<sup>7</sup>

Dorothy Edwards and Doris Barton were Sisters at Saint Elizabeth's during the 1940s and recall the generosity of the Singleton community: money, groceries, clothing, Christmas trees, fruit and vegetables were all donated to the Home to help ease the financial strain. "...I remember apricots one year...we made

6. "The Pioneer" 21st Issue December 1942

7. Letter from Dorothy Edwards (ex Sister Parry st Elizabeths 1944)



that much jam , we just dreaded another box of fruit..."<sup>8</sup>

Religion played an important part in the girls' lives and they attended Church on Sundays as well as having Bible readings, stories and prayers each day. There were chores to be done and school to attend. Life was made as pleasant as possible and friendships were formed amongst these girls from similarly unhappy backgrounds.

The relevant authorities were gradually responding to the need for Homes for children. "Woodlands", the first home for Protestant children in the Newcastle area opened at Wallsend on the 18th of December, 1944.<sup>9</sup> However there were calls for more Homes for Protestant destitute children and in 1945 Mr T. Agst ( the State Managing Secretary for the United Protestants Association) stated that "the need was never greater."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, a Girls' Home was opened in December of that year in Victoria Street, East Maitland. This provided accommodation for up to thirty five girls aged between seven and fifteen years.

In 1948 it was suggested that the Boys Home at Murrurundi be moved to Mayfield as there was difficulty obtaining staff; also the boys would have the benefit of a greater choice of subjects at the city schools. The move took place in June 1949.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Saint Christopher's Home at Lochinvar was experiencing difficulties. The Sewerage System was failing, the water supply, which relied on rainwater, was inadequate and the Church was urged to "face the problem."<sup>12</sup>

8. Ibid

9. Newcastle Morning Herald 18th December, 1944 p

10. Ibid 24th November, 1945 p

11. Ibid 18th June, 1949

12. Ibid 5th October, 1949

Saint Elizabeth's continued to function as a Girls' Home until 1976 with Matron Lloyd in charge. Most of the remaining ten girls were adopted by the Singleton community. The Home re-opened in March 1978 as a Home for the Intellectually Handicapped and was under the supervision of the Samaritans. The dormitories which had seen many girls pass through their doors were converted to individual rooms and there are presently sixteen people residing at Saint Elizabeth's.

However, the Government has informed Gwen Allgood who has been house mother for the past eleven years, that the present occupants are to be moved into group houses in the community. The Government will supply half of the costs involved; the other half is to come from the sale of the Home which will then, in all probability, be demolished.

→ Gwen has observed many women hesitating at the front gates of Saint Elizabeth's over the years. They have usually been former "inmates" of the Home. She has invited them in to look around and found their memories to vary; some remember good times and friendship, others have more painful memories. One woman recalled being separated from her younger sister and running to catch a glimpse of her as they filed into the dining room. Another woman broke down and cried and could not go inside.

Though the buildings of Saint Elizabeth's may soon become non-existent, the memory of life there will be imprinted on many women's minds forever.

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OPEN FOUNDATION Kennedy (who prefers to be called JAN McLEOD - ibes

TUESDAY 1pm. since which led to her being sent, with her sisters, to Saint Elizabeth's Girls Home at Singleton. In 1944, at the age of eleven, Beat was put on a train to Singleton. Her mother had told the girls that they were going to a lovely place where they would learn to play the piano. Beat's brother informed their father on his return from work that... "Mom took the girls away."

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH MRS MARLENE KENNEDY of the arrangement and the last he heard of his wife and children for quite a while.

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TOPIC: SAINT ELIZABETH'S GIRLS HOME, SINGLETON. I had her chores to do before school each morning; these ranged from scrubbing concrete steps to serving the food. Approximately forty girls attended Saint Elizabeth's and most were there as a result of marriage breakups or financial difficulties.

The teachers and other students at the schools in Singleton treated the girls well. Many of the businesses in the town donated produce to the Home and Beat cannot remember any discrimination against the Saint Elizabeth's girls.

Accommodation at Saint Elizabeth's was in dormitories and the bathrooms were also shared, so privacy was virtually impossible. The Home was immaculately clean and the girls also tended their own gardens. Sister Calvert was the Sister in charge during Beat's time at the Home, which was of three years duration.

During this time Beat participated in Sports Days, went on a holiday to Stockton and counted the days between visits from her dad. She remembers almost falling over the front fence trying to catch sight of him walking down the road. Any parcels

Mrs Marlene Kennedy (who prefers to be called Beat) describes the circumstances which led to her being sent, with her sisters, to Saint Elizabeth's Girls Home at Singleton. In 1944, at the age of eleven, Beat was put on a train to Singleton. Her mother had told the girls that they were going to a lovely place where they would learn to play the piano. Beat's brother informed their father on his return from work that...."Mum took the girls away." This was the first Stan (Beat's father) knew of the arrangement and the last he heard of his wife and children for quite a while.

Beat remembers being well cared for at the Home: the Church Army Sisters were strict but fair. Religion was an important part of life at the Home, as was work. Each girl had her chores to do before school each morning; these ranged from scrubbing concrete steps to serving the food. Approximately forty girls attended Saint Elizabeth's and most were there as a result of marriage breakups or financial difficulties. The teachers and other students at the schools in Singleton treated the girls well. Many of the businesses in the town donated produce to the Home and Beat cannot remember any discrimination against the Saint Elizabeth's girls. Accommodation at Saint Elizabeth's was in dormitories and the bathrooms were also shared, so privacy was virtually impossible. The Home was immaculately clean and the girls also tended their own gardens. Sister Calvert was the Sister in charge during Beat's time at the Home, which was of three years duration.

During this time Beat participated in Sports Days, went on a holiday to Stockton and counted the days between visits from her dad. She remembers almost falling over the front fence trying to catch sight of him walking down the road. Any parcels

he may have brought with him for his daughters were divided between all the girls except for gifts of a personal nature such as soaps or clothing.

Beat remembers her mother visiting only once and neither Beat nor her sisters received any communication from her while they were at Saint Elizabeth's. On finally returning home in 1947, Delma and Patty (Beats sisters) went to Sydney to live with their mother while Beat stayed in Islington with her father and brother.

She found it a little difficult to adjust after being out of the community for so long. She never completed her education due to her family's financial problems. Beat kept house for her father as well as working in a shoe store; she met and later married a mate of her brother and they lived with Stan until after the birth of their first child.

Beat and her dad remained "good mates" until his death in 1982. She rarely saw her mother who died in 1958 and did not keep in touch with her sisters.

After she left Saint Elizabeth's, Beat vowed that if and when she married and had children, she would keep her family together. Thirty four years of marriage and three appreciative children later, Beat feels she has achieved her aim.

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I, MARLENE KENNEDY ..... give my  
permission to JAN McLEOD .....

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Signed M. B. Kennedy .....

Date 28-7-89 .....

Interviewer J. McLeod .....

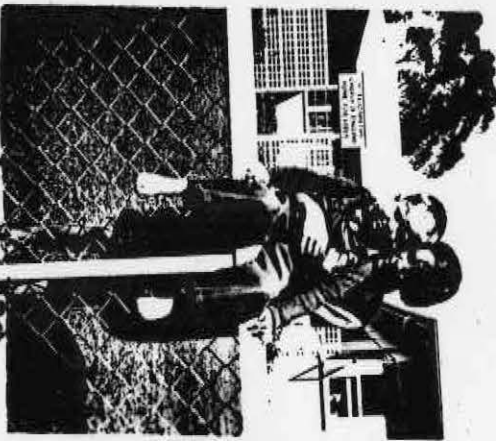
Sisters Calvert & Jones tending  
Woodheap 1946.



Sisters Calvert (seated) & Stanley  
1944



Donald from Lodi, near  
St Elizabeths 1945



Patty, Beat, & Delma Dines 1944



Some of the Girls at St Elizabeths 1945



OPEN FOUNDATION

TUESDAY 1pm.

Jan McLeod, Interviewee, Marlene Kennedy (Known  
Recorded for Regional History Project for the Open  
Foundation Course, Newcastle University. Recorded 28th July, 1989

at interviewee's home.

Jan: Could you tell me your full name please?

Mar: Marlene Beatrice Kennedy.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MRS MARLENE KENNEDY.

Jan: What was your birth date?

Mar: 1933.

TOPIC: SAINT ELIZABETH'S GIRLS HOME, SINGLETON

Jan: When and where were you born?

Mar: 25th of the 10th, 1933 in Newcastle.

RECORDED 28th JULY, 1989

Jan: Could you tell me a little bit about your family. Brothers, sisters?

Mar: I've got one older brother, and an older sister and a younger sister.

Jan: What was your father's occupation at the time?

Mar: He worked on the wharf and mainly for the public works.

Jan: So what time period are we talking about? What were the years you were sent to Saint Elizabeth's?

Mar: We went to Saint Elizabeth's about 1944 to about 1947.

Jan: What were the circumstances which led you to being sent there?

Mar: My mother and father (slight pause) separated so had a broken home and my father couldn't look after us so my mother decided to take the three girls up to Singleton.

Jan: Did she tell you where you were going?

Mar: She said we were going to a nice place where you learnt the piano and done all these sorts of things, but the trouble was my father didn't know at the time that we were to go.

Jan: So how did he find out?

Mar: He found out because he was in the office and he saw the girls.

Jan: Interviewer, Jan McLeod. Interviewee, Marlene Kennedy (known as Beat). Recorded for Regional History Project for the Open Foundation Course, Newcastle University. Recorded 28th July, 1989 at interviewee's home.

Jan: Could you tell me your full name please?

Beat: Marlene Beatrice Kennedy.

Jan: What was your maiden name?

Beat: Dines.

Jan: When and where were you born?

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Jan: So how did he find out?

Beat: No there wasn't such privacy in the bathroom. Like, you

Beat: He came home from work one afternoon and asked my brother where the girls are and he said my mother had took the three of us away to Singleton.

Jan: And do you know why she didn't send the brother to anywhere/why she left him at home with your father?

Beat: No, I don't really know why he stayed home...I think she thought probably my brother would be able to make it alright just being with my father. There was no way my dad could have looked after three girls and a boy.

Jan: So do you remember how you felt going...How did you go, bus? train?

Beat: No we went by train from Broadmeadow Station and we were very scared (nervous laugh) especially when the Sister came to pick us up and being only eleven years of age, we were a bit surprised an Aboriginal Sister came to take us on the train.

Jan: So how old were your sisters at the time?

Beat: (thinking) my sisters were eight, I was eleven and my elder sister was about twelve, twelve and a half.

Jan: And whereabouts was the home located? Do you remember the street, the parks and things?

Beat: It was in High Street, I think, Singleton, opposite All Saints' Church.

Jan: Do you remember what the accommodation was like?

Beat: We slept in dormitories up there...on one side was the younger girls and on the other me and my older sister were on one side and my younger sister on the other. We were all, like together but um, (hesitates) we were well looked after up there.

Jan: What about bathrooms? Did you have any privacy...bathrooms, toiletries things like that?

Beat: No there wasn't much privacy in the bathroom. Like, you

never sort of went in the bathroom on your own, there was always five, six, seven others waiting to get in as you got out of the bath and it wasn't very private. (slight laugh)

Jan: And what about food? did you help prepare the food...was the food dished up to you?

Beat: We all had different times in the kitchen. I remember I used to love to get in the kitchen and pinch a few things, Like one thing I always remember was they used to hand out toast crusts and you'd sort of go from ages. If you've finished having a toast crust one day, you wasn't allowed to come the next day and get one, you had to sort of wait till your turn come round again for a toast crust.

Jan: So did you eat in dormitory sort of environment as well or...?

Beat: Yes, the dormitories were all well kept.. nice and clean, but I remember rushing home from school for a hot lunch and you used to stand in front of the big servery and you'd try and pick out the biggest sweets and the biggest meal. (laughs)

Jan: How many girls were living there at the time?

Beat: Um, I can't really recall exactly but I'd say round oh, maybe thirty five, forty. That's including all the junior and the older ones.

Jan: And were there any girls you particularly remember?

Beat: Oh yeah, I remember lots of girls from up there. I've seen one or two since I've been home. I was talking to one in Mayfield once one day. She was demonstrating sewing machines in one of the shops but I haven't really seen too many of them.

Jan: Did you know anything of the other girls' backgrounds while you were there?

Beat: No, not really, I...from when you're only eleven or twelve... I think most of us were just from broken homes. didn't really

Jan: And so who ran the Home? to do them or we got into trouble.

Beat: The Church Army ran the Home. to do...their own special

Jan: Do you remember any of the Sisters' names? remember you.

Beat: Yes, the one in charge when I was there was Sister Calvert, um, Sister Parsons, Sister Jones and, I think Sister Parry. and

Jan: What were they like? to mark getting a good bucket and kneel

Beat: They were all very nice, um, rather strict with certain rules but we were well looked after. (she) kneel on the cement

Jan: Was there much emphasis placed on religion? trouble.

Beat: Yes we had Sunday Schools and then we had to learn verses of the Bible. I remember I had the book of Mathew and every morning round the prayer circle I had to say a verse from Mathew and then of a Sunday we had Church. Sometimes I might have gone twice, sometimes three times. of march in file to primary school and

Jan: And ah, you say the sisters weren't terribly strict. Did they punish you in any way for any..? late or couldn't go to school

Beat: We weren't punished severely, we were only made to stand in the toilet for a few hours, like I used to spend a bit of time in there. (laughter). We used to short sheet the beds and do things we shouldn't have done... nothing real severe. But I remember once I was made to clean the polished floors with a bobby pin to get the fluff out of the cracks. That was a very hard old school job when you're only young. the Singleton community react? Did

Jan: And did you have any particular chores you had to do?

Beat: Yes we had our usual jobs to do before school. I had to scrub out the outside bathroom plus the big slab of concrete out the back yard plus the steps all around the home... which



in the winter time was very cold and we never had any shoes on our feet and we had heavy frosts up there so we didn't really like doing that but we all had to do them or we got into trouble.

Jan: So all the girls had their jobs to do...their own special chores.

Beat: Oh yes everybody had their own jobs. I remember they used to keep the buckets and the kneel pads down behind the shed and if you wasn't quick off the mark getting a good bucket and kneel pad, you just got left the old scrubbing brushes and the old pads which weren't very good to (laughs) kneel on the cement so, yes we all had to do our jobs or we were in trouble.

Jan: So you had to do these before you went to school. Were you educated at school, out of the town... at the Home?

Beat: No we used to go out to school We used to go down this laneway and then, I think it was across Burdekin Park , and we used to have to sort of march in file to primary school and then we had to come home the same way but once I went to High School it wasn't as bad but if you were late or couldn't go to school or anything you had to um, always have a note.

Jan: was there any stigma attached to being a St Elizabeth's girl?

Beat: No I don't ever remember any stigma.

Jan: And did you form many friendships with the girls?

Beat: Yeah we had lots of good friends outside the Home, at school.

Jan: How did the community, the Singleton community react?/Did they treat you any differently?

Beat: Ah, they were all pretty good. They used to send, um, donations of fruit and vegetables to the Home. I remember the people that lived in the laneway just across from us, were called

Sylvesters and they used to own a lot of stuff up at Singleton and they used to donate fruit and vegetables.

Jan: And, ah, how did you... did you have any entertainment up there? Did you play sport or...?

Beat: Yes we used to have sport at the school. I remember one year I was barred from entering the sport but I went in them and as it turned out I was Junior Champion that year and ah, I got into a little bit of trouble (laughs) when I was presented with the trophy-being Junior champion of 1947.

Jan: Did they have any entertainment at the Home? Did they have any singalongs, things like that?

Beat: Um, no we only, oh we used to have a few singalongs but mostly just prayer meetings and stories and things. If we behaved through the week sometimes you might have got called up on a Sunday night with Sister Calvert and used to listen to stories and that. We used to think that was wonderful to be one of the chosen to go up to her room.

Jan: Do you have any particular memories of holidays or Christmases?

Beat: Um, Christmases were only spent at the Home but we used to go for holidays. I remember going down to Stockton for a holiday for, I think it was a couple of weeks, it was just near the beach so we used to have a good time there. I think it was in a training hall over Stockton.

Jan: And how often did you have visitors at St Elizabeth's?

Beat: Oh, we didn't have many visitors. Oh, my father used to get up as regular as he could. Like we used to just crane our necks over the front fence watching him walk up the street- we couldn't wait, but I think my mother only came up once or twice to see us. I always said I wouldn't let them come from a broken home like I did.

Jan: Did she keep in contact with you... writing letters?

Beat: No I don't ever remember writing any letters or getting many letters. We used to get a few presents, like parcels sent from Dad and that now and again but we had to share them with everybody. It wasn't just for you personally.

Jan: And how did you feel when you finally came home?

Beat: Um, it was a bit hard to adjust I was only fourteen at the time and I had a bit of trouble getting a job. I worked as a waitress ah, I finally ended up , before I was married I worked in a shoe store in Newcastle.

Jan: How did your father find it-having the children back home again?

Beat: Well, I came home with my dad and stayed home and house kept for him. My two sisters went to Sydney and they lived with my mother.

Jan: So you and your brother stayed home with your father, is that right?

Beat: Yes my brother stayed there with me until he got older and then he went to Sydney and to Queensland. He used to play football and he left home but I stayed with my father right up until I got married and had my first son. I lived with my dad.

Jan: And did you have any trouble with relationships as a result of St Elizabeth's...boyfriends and having so much time away from the community?

Beat: No. I think I was always oh, rather quiet person but I met my husband when I was...he was a mate of my brothers and I was only about seventeen so I've been married now for thirty four years and I've always tried to (searchs for words) keep my three children together and I always said I wouldn't let them come from a broken home like I did.

Jan: And did you keep in touch with your sisters after you left the Home?

Beat: No I never saw much of my sisters, they went their way and I just, (pause) went mine and I still don't see too much of them now.

Jan: Do you have any desire to find any of the other girls from the Home?

Beat: Yes I wouldn't mind finding out what happened to some of them like how their lives ended up and how their marriages all went and what happened to them.

Jan: And when you came back from St Elizabeth's did you have any education to finish? Did you have to go back to school at all to finish?

Beat: Um, well when I come home I was only fourteen at the time and I was supposed to do another twelve months at school but my father couldn't afford to get me clothes and books and things so I just stayed home and was housekeeper for my dad.

Jan: Have you visited St. Elizabeth's since then?

Beat: Yes I've been up there a couple of times ah, I think the last time was about three or four years ago. Its changed a lot since I was there. We always had beautiful gardens and everything was in tip top order but I think its, um, I don't think its kept as well as when I was there.

Jan: And do you know what type of institution? Is it still a Girls' Home?

Beat: No I don't think so.. I think there were young girls there when we went up last time but I believe it's now a Handicapped...

Jan: Do you know if the Church Army's still involved in the running?

Beat: No I don't think the Church Army has anything to do with it now. They... when I was up there the Church Army were in Tyrell

House but I think they're in Sydney now.

Jan: O.K. Thanks very much for the interview Beat.

Beat: Thank you.

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