

## Carla Paul; Life at Royal Derwent Hospital

I went to Royal Derwent quite young, from Mount St Canice, which was a girl's home. I was placed into the security ward up there, which was then Ward 7, and it was quite horrific. There was people tied to heaters when I first walked in, screaming their lungs out and in strait jackets which was very scary for a young girl in school uniform to walk into. I spent 7 and a half years in that environment, not just in that ward. We escaped from Ward 7, us women are great when we put our mind to something we can do it. We escaped from there, so then they built a big security ward, which was Ward A which was on the other side of the river, but we still got out of there too, when we wanted to.

And my life in there is a bit mixture. Most of it was bad. I'd be locked up in a room for say six months at a time, but that suited me fine because I hated people at that stage, until, one certain sister came onto the ward, her name was Sister Whiteway. She was told not to go near me, but she had a feeling that she'd be able to get through to me, because I had become like a wild animal in the finish, and people said even my eyes showed like a wild animal. And she attempted a few times to come in and I'd charge her, but she'd keep trying. And I must of, in the finish, realized that she really was interested in what was going to happen to me. I don't know, that's probably what it was. And we became that we had a strong bond, I was allowed out of the room. We played games together at the table, and I learnt how to spell and do adding up through playing games. Now I am a great scrabble player, a champion really. Really people come to see whether they can beat me.

Without her there, I'd be like many that are out there now, just stuck into a home or boarding house, and left to fend for myself which is very sad. I quite often sit back and think 'Yeah, it was good that they shut they shut the Royal Derwent down' but when I see how some of the ex-patients -or clients you call them now - are living, I think we still need something for those people, to have that proper support, to make sure that they have bedding, to make sure that they can have a bath, you know, one of my clients when I worked in the maids program, she couldn't even go and have a bath because she was terrified someone was going to be waiting there to kill her. Now there was no one else there from the mental health department to go in and do that for her, she was just stuck in this boarding house where she had a little room, and she had, she had the ashtray was all overflowing. And another thing to point out was there was no fire extinguisher in this boarding house 'cos I checked it. I put a report in about it but nothing was done. They're living dangerously. And I'll leave that there. And if you've got any questions you want to throw at me I'll try and answer them for you.

*Q. Do you think it was the fact that Sister Whiteway wasn't afraid of you, that was the thing that just began the bond?*

Could have been, could have been. She didn't show fear. She was able to come in on her own, where if they wanted me to go and have a bath, they'd bring down the big security men to take me round. Maybe that could have been a thing about her, she was going to come into the room on her own, not with the big, burly, muscly men. Yeah, could have been.

*Q. Carla some of the students have had an opportunity to read your story, and some haven't, so I am just wondering if you could tell us the circumstances that led to you going to the Royal Derwent?*

Well, at three I was adopted out to a family called the Crossses. They'd lost their little girl and they wanted to replace their little girl with another little girl about the same age. But it didn't work out because I was different to their little girl. So, my adopted mother could not handle that and I

couldn't handle being in there. Then they transported me down to Mount St Canice at Sandy Bay, said they were going on a holiday and they'd be back. But they never, ever, ever came back. And every Sunday other people'd have their visitors and I'd stand at the window waiting for this green van. I can still remember the license number it's implanted, and it was WOG269, was the license number and I would sit there or I would stand there and look out, waiting for that to come which never happened. So then I started striking out at people and became quite violent towards people. I hated 'em, I hated all people not just certain ones. And through my behavior at the time, they had no other option but to find me another place which happened to be Royal Derwent. So that's how I came.

*Q. What age were you when you went to Royal Derwent?*

4. Well, I don't know exactly. When they abandoned me, at 9.

*Q. Have they ever tried to contact you since? Or have you had contact any with them at all?*

I do have contact not with, my mother and father are both dead. I had time with my father before he died, not with my mother. My mother had already died when he got back in contact. I'd been over to Queensland, quite often, when he was nearly dying, I was transported to Queensland by the youngest brother, of the two. I sat by his bedside, when he was dying, so that was nice. And I had to learn to forgive all things, but through my Christian beliefs, what you learn to forgive, those things have no longer got a hold on you or on the other person. So, I did spend a lot of good quality time with my father before he died. And my youngest of the two brothers that I had in that family, is still in contact. Yes, now, come from Queensland to East Davenport to live. I have my grandchild full time, in care. He has just been licensed to take her for holidays. He quite often feels that he has to do a lot of things for me because of what happened, but I've told him he doesn't have to do that.

*Q. Was he around when you?*

Yes, he was for a little while and he said he could see things happening but couldn't understand why, 'cos he was only a couple years older than me. Where my other brother was quite older, he was off to the Navy, he didn't see much and he can't believe some of the things that happened in the family. So, we haven't got a very close bond because he doesn't want to know about, he can't handle that stuff that happened in that family. Anybody else?

*Q. After leaving Royal Derwent and then trying to learn to live into society, just exactly what did you have to learn?*

My very first night I came out of Royal Derwent, we went round, oh my first day we went around looking for flat or unit, we couldn't find anything suitable so I was put into a boarding house for that night, and I thought I'll go for a walk. Went off for a walk and came across traffic lights for the first time, and as I got half way across the street it said 'stop', so I stopped. I done what I was told for once. But the other people didn't like that, they kept beeping horns and abusin' me. So by the time I got over the street and down the road, then I seen a telephone box, so I rang and said 'Help! Can't cope, can't cope with this'. So they came the next day and told me to go back to the boarding house and I went back and I was absolutely terrified first night, with no one around that I knew. They came back the next day and had a good talk to me and they didn't realize that it was going to be that difficult. They just took it for granted that everybody knew these things. So then I had to go into another institution to be taught about the outside world, which was Elim, at the time the Salvation Army Home at West Hobart and so I spent a fair amount of time there too. To get retrained into the-

*Q. And that was a long process?*

It was a long process, yes, even I didn't know how to handle money and things like that. Never had any.

*Q. Some of us have seen Willow Court and Royal Derwent empty and some of us will go and have a look at it now. It's obviously very different now to how it was then. Can you just tell us a bit about, paint a bit of a picture for us about what it was like when you were there?*

What the actual Royal Derwent itself?

*Q. The ward if you like, or the facility you were in...*

Well the first facility was yuck. That was the one that I very first walked in and the big – I don't know whether you've seen the big panel heaters that were there, some of you would have done – on there, people were tied with the bits from a strait jacket, tied to those heaters so they couldn't move, and they used to rock backwards and forwards.

The ward itself, it didn't get much fresh air because the windows only open to there that was it, they had a big bar on them so they wouldn't open any further. You were locked in the day room during the day, you weren't allowed up the passage ways. Occasionally, you was allowed outside. Your cigarettes were put into a little suitcase, if you smoked, and you waited till that sister wanted to give you a smoke. If you'd looked sideways or you looked anxious that you wanted a cigarette, she'd make you wait longer, and you all got it at the same time, and you were placed outside with it – that's when you got outside, out into the actual backyard, courtyard, whatever you like to call it.

It was, you had to work, all us able-bodied clients had to do the cleaning of the ward with mop buckets and brooms and things like that. Even though they had cleaners, we still had to do that. And we had to go out into other wards to do work there too. Go and help with other patients, like Ward M was for the babies, Ward L was for the school aged children, we went into some of the older peoples parts to help out, yeah, and then after a few years there, they decided if we went out to work they'd give us some money and so they opened accounts for us. We didn't have it in our hands, so when I left there it was given to me, it was a good amount. That was in this account, because of going out on other wards but sometimes I couldn't handle being out on those other wards because of how some of these dear little children were treated by some staff members. And of course, me being me had to mouth off and tell them they shouldn't be doing that, then I'd be in trouble, because ECT was used as a punishment if you voiced your opinion too far, so you had to be careful what you said.

*Q. Did you have ECT treatment yourself?*

I did. Many times. Some said to be –

*Q. What's your memory of that?*

My memory of that is being lined up in a big passage way, if you'd been up there you'd know the big passage ways I'm talking about, see the ones before you getting their electro-therapy treatment. And they didn't use any knock out needle like the do, it's more humane today, you just was given a bit to bite on, and they put these wet things on your head and that's all you remember till you came round. But it was very scary.

*Q. The other people that you were in your, like in the ward with, were they, you classed yourself as being loud and out there, were the other patients the same or what was there – like what was your diagnosis and was theirs similar to yours?*

Mainly, there was a lot of young ones placed there but more so in Ward A, there were a lot of young girls, in Ward C there were a lot of young men which was, they were close together. They were expected to do duties, yes. I also walked for a doctor there, I went round and cleaned his house and looked after his kids. So, the psychopath was ok to look after his kids. He was the main doctor there too, at the time but I wasn't good enough to go out into the outside world, but I could stay and look after his children. That was quite funny, now when I think about it. I didn't quite make the connection before, but yeah that was quite weird.

*Q. You said that you were locked in a day area sometimes, in the day area all day, what were you meant to do though?*

Well, nothing. Just waiting for your cigarette, you'd watch the other patients that sit, you know the ones that were tied doing this all day, that's what they'd be doing and screaming because they were bored too, what else could they do? Some staff members would get bored too, and they'd stir up the patients to make a bit of excitement for the day, to give them something to do. Yeah, it was not a very happy life. These days I know, that they do occupational therapy and all those type of things there was a stage there where we had to go to the peg factory, they called it, and we had to put pegs on cardboard, all day, not paid, to be sold, so that was part of our job there. But that, I suppose looking back that would have been occupational therapy. That's what they call it today, but then it was just you earn your keep.

*Q. How old were you when you got out?*

When I got out I was twenty-three.

*Q. Did you have to do anything to qualify to be let out?*

We had a new doctor came on, I can't give names out because I am not allowed to do that when I wrote the book. He came on the scene and I knew that my - they used to have expiry dates, lets call them of when your order was up and I knew that was coming up again, and they could renew it to whatever they liked. So, this doctor was sitting in the office this day and I was going past and I thought I've got to say something. So I went in and I said 'I want to talk to you' and he said 'Yes, what can I do for you?', and I said 'I want out of here'. He said 'you can leave Monday'. Whoa! I couldn't believe it, that was that simple because every other time I had asked to leave when everyone else was going out and coming back and going out and coming back and I was still stuck there, never went out to come back. For him to say that I was just absolutely terrified that night, I knew that it was going to be difficult, because I had been stuck, not only in the Royal Derwent, but in an institution before that, as well. I didn't know anything, but I was also excited to actually get out those doors, freedom, you know?

*Q. Are you in contact with people that were in there?*

Yes, I do have some contact with some of the people, yes. Some of them are life time friends. A lot of them are dead now. They had things like cancer, and things like that in their body. And I got a very close one that I keep in contact with, her name's Diane, and she's coping with the outside world too now, but they all went through similar things.

*Q. You've told us about your experience with the traffic lights. I'd be interested to hear more about your rehabilitation after being institutionalized for such a long period of time.*

Well as I said I was placed into the Salvation Army home and the other young girls there – there was two sections to the Salvation Army homes, there were the pregnant young mums, or young mums

one, and the other part for people like myself - mental problems, coming out into the community they needed somewhere to be placed. They used to take me to town and show me the ropes, yeah. And also not just them but Marion Clenski, who was the social worker at the time, for mental health patients. She'd quite often come and give me new experiences to handle because it was a big thing. A very big thing.

*Q. At any time going through that, even though the Royal Derwent was so bad because of learning outside, did you ever just want to go back?*

Yes, many a time. Many a time I did go back, yeah, but after the initial first going out it was easier to go out again, and I think they realized why I was back there too, because I wasn't handling the pressure of the outside world.

*Q. With the going back and then out again, did it get easier each time you went out?*

Yes, it took a long time to be able to get out of that pattern of running back there when I couldn't handle things.

*Q. How long did it take for you to be secure in society?*

Many, many, many years darling. It wasn't until I'd found faith and the people in the church were fantastic, and instead of taking me back to the, well it was the Royal then, they no longer took you back there, in the last stages of running, they'd take me down to the beach and sit there and we'd talk and a nice serenity type thing, and that bought me out of relying on that place because I had other people to rely on and my faith to rely on, and learning to forgive people and stuff like that.

*Q. Carla, you seem to have a mischievous streak, and I was a child of one of those doctors in the ward for many years, and I remember going round the wards and there was no laughter. How did you deal with that bubbling up of mischief in you while you were still in the-?*

Well, I didn't have teenage years, I'm doing that now. I'm just ah, I suppose you call it retarded in my growing up. I am in a different place than what you'd been in, because I am going to enjoy life, now I've got it. I've got a life which is good, and I was lucky to have it because many a time I tried to kill myself. I took rat poison, a whole lot on my Weet-bix. I got marks on my throat where I slit my throat, cutting myself many a time and they just got me in time. I slashed my wrists deep and they'd stitch it and I'd pull the stitches out. I did really want to die because it was no life. But now I wouldn't want to die but now I won't get no say in it when I'm getting older, will I? Any other questions?

*Q. You mentioned that you had a grandchild now, so were you able to marry and have children?*

I had three children, three girls. They're all grown up. My eldest has got three children. She works, she got a great partner. My middle one, well she's wild when, yes, I go there, she's the mother of the grandchild I've got. I did have both her children but I couldn't cope with two. The boy was a handful and still is. The youngest one is the one that dropped me off this morning she has one child, and now she is doing Tabor College to become a counsellor and I reckon she'd make a good one because she had to put up with a mother like me.

*Q. When you first left, when the doctor first said you could go, what year was that? The 1960's?*

Yes, it would have been the 60's.

*Q. Early 60's or late 60's?*

The late 60's. It'd be 70 actually, just the early '70's. Yeah, '71 I'd say.

*Q. Apart from the treatment that the staff dished out, and the punishment, were there any other abuses that you saw that really made you angry?*

Yes, there was, there was yeah. One that always sticks in my head, one that my very close friend from there still has never been able to handle. When the young girls got pregnant up there they were made to have abortions. They had no say in it. And I know my friend, she still thinks 'what would it have been? What sex would it have been?' You know, things like that, and that is abuse, that is just plain out the worst abuse you could do to anybody but some of those children did belong to staff members, let's put it that way as well.

*Q. A lot of bad things went on, but was there any good therapy that went on? There must have been people that were out there trying to help, or –*

Well, people weren't interested in the Royal Derwent people, they didn't want to know in them days, it's not like today.

*Q. So there was nothing good there that went on?*

Except for Sister Whiteway in my life anyway, and maybe others had one, not many of them though, going back the ones I've had contact with haven't had that, and haven't really wanted to either.

*Q. So there was only one nice staff to you, but the rest of the staff were horrible?*

No, you've got your good and your bad as you do anywhere else, but the outstanding one to me, because we had a close bond, shared stuff into her house, when she wasn't supposed to, to be with her family. Well, that's how close a bond we have, and I called her Ma.

*Q. Is she still around today?*

No, she's gone now.

*Q. Where do you think you might have ended up, Carla, if that person hadn't started, that staff member, that sister hadn't of come in, and kept persisting to come in?*

I'd say I'd still be where I was. So I've got a lot to be thankful for, for what she's done, and also Marion Clenski the social worker's done. They've gone out of their way, and I still have contact with Marion. We go out to different things together, and yeah, I hate to think I would be still in that situation. I'd be one of the ones in the boarding house, left to fend for yourself or probably in jail. Because I probably would have finished up killing someone.

*Q. Can I just ask, you were adopted out at three, what about those three years were you in an orphanage or...?*

Well, my real mother I have met now, but I don't want a bar of her anyway but we tried but it didn't work out. She had three children, all were put into the orphanage because she didn't look after us. So, that's what they done, they didn't put them into foster homes, they went to the orphanage. I was the youngest of those three. My adopted parents, as I've said wanted to replace a child. My sister that's older than me. Her parents wanted not to split us up, they wanted the both of us, but it went to court and my lot won. I don't have any memories of anything in those three years. My elder sister does, that we was in big white cots, she can remember, and left in there just to look through the window at one another, because we weren't in the same room. I was a different age group, she's only a year and a half older than me. The other one I've met and she was bought up by a member of my real mother's family, cos she's the baby.

*Q. So how are they now, are they in institutions, or?*

Yes, my elder sister Judy did, she ended up in Mount St Canice but through her adopted parent's grandmother she got out, because she took her on. But she's now got three children, all grown up and has got grandchildren as well. She's got the same bone problems as I've got but she copes with life well and she's got a husband.

*Q. You seem to be an exceptionally caring person, and I was wondering when you said you got the position of looking after the doctors children, was that because he saw that in you or was that some sort of problem that come up?*

I don't know why he done it. Maybe he did? Because I only had time for children, as I said we had to go out into the ward now, and went into the school-age children's ward and we used dress them up all pretty, iron their clothes when they didn't and do their hair and stuff. It was just like having little dolls you know, but no one else done that for them, no one else showed 'em that love, and it's not the child's fault that they were in that situation, and I do love children.

*Q. You made a varied contribution in your life to a young life...*

Tried to.

*Q. Did you have any educational training after you came out?*

Yes, I had to go to TAFE. I know I done, something learning, it was called, to go and learn how to write and that into, I went to a grade 6 level. Adult Education Board, I went to.

*Q. You went around when you went to courses?*

I'm about to put myself into a computer course because all I know how to do is play games. And I've got one for my granddaughter that lives with me and I will get on there with the games and I thought, I'd love to be able to do what she does. So I've booked in for a computer course, yes.

Yeah, but other than, I used to work with Mates program, and that was just go and befriending people who have mental health problems and taking them out and that one that I had in the boarding house, she had a bath while I was there, she actually cleaned her teeth, she never cleaned her teeth before. We'd go out to coffee, she was terrified to leave the room before. So, we got to do a lot but once I got my grandchildren on the scene I didn't have time to go and do it.

*Q. Do you think your experience of having that one nurse who helped you so much, do you think that's what made you be involved in the Mates program?*

Yes, just to be there to listen and to be supportive and not to judge. A lot of people judge, and I still know today if people know I have been in Royal Derwent, they really give you heaps.

*Q. So, you still suffer from the stigma attached?*

You do have the stigma, but I found out how to do that one, they say 'Well, you're a nut', you say 'At least I've got a certificate to say I'm sane where's yours?'

*Q. You've talked about Marion and you wrote the book with her and every student here is coming to be a support worker in one role or another. What are the qualities she has that you admire, what makes her an effective worker?*

The effective work of hers is that it didn't matter what hour that I need it, she'd come. She didn't only work from 9 to 5, she was there for me any hour that I needed her, and still is, 'cos there are

times when I still need support. Not through mental illness, I haven't got that anymore, I've had no medication for years, but just things that life throws at you, at anybody, and sometimes you think 'Ooh, I'm handling this bad. I need to have someone to talk to, to work out how I should handle it.'

*Q. Do you live with, do you have a fairly high degree of self-worth, to know that you've been able to handle transfer from the institution to the wider community, do you have a high value of self-worth to know that you have been able to do it?*

That I am able to do it?

*Q. Have been able to transfer successfully from the institution?*

Well to me I think every individual has a hard time, and we've all got to pull ourselves out of it, so I haven't done anything all that extraordinary that nobody else has done, really, when you think about it, everybody has had a toughie somewhere

*Q. You might have had it a bit tougher than I've had it, I think..*

So what? It's how we handle it isn't it. You gotta leave it back there, you can't change it. So get on with life. It's the future that's important, not the past.