

" A beautiful collaboration between a young boy and an older man "

GROWING UP
without

LOVE

Growing up at :
St. Thomas and St. Vincent Orphanage

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Preface



For many years I have been ask the question, "what was it like growing up in an orphanage?" This was a difficult question to answer.

The question - in its self - was not so difficult as it was more of the amount of time I could be given to answer such a question .

In most cases it was asked on a fly, meaning, the best I could give would be a short sound bite." It was good, it was bad, it was different, I don't know, what was your childhood like?"

Now don't get me wrong sound bites are very useful, however they are not very informative unless someone already knows the whole story.

I am not a book writer, you may have noticed that already - and this is only the second paragraph. I just have a story I would like to share with you - a story of a child growing up without love, and how he dealt with it and how he did not deal with it.

I am not much for reading thick books, this book should only take you several hours to read. But don't rush through it, it has taken me a lifetime to write.

It's a book that should be read by every parent and every child of every parent.

It is a beautiful collaboration between a young boy and an older man and yes they are the same person, "me."

My short stories in each chapter are only the highlights of a childhood - a life of so many years ago. Of those recollection some would say, "how do you remember all that stuff?"

"the short answer would be "how could I forget."

When you look at me today you will see the face of a older man, but if you look a little deeper into the words, you will see the eyes and heart of a young child , confused and optimistic that everything will be alright.

It's also important to note about most stories, "the facts may not always be accurate, but the stories are true."

The fact is, when I look back on my childhood, I feel very blessed. I have learned of many other children whose lives were not as fortunate. Children who were bounced around from foster home to foster home, wondering "when will I fit in?" With no security or knowing that they would ever fit in. I have read of children put on trains by one of their relatives, with no true destination in mind, just with the hopes someone would take them in.

A little child in a big empty world.

Maybe the orphanage was the place of last resort, but if you were placed there at least you had stability. No child should grow up without love and stability, you may even do ok without one but you will not do ok without both, for there is no room for emptiness in a child's heart.

Most orphanages in the early 1900's were operated by religious organizations.

I grew up in a Catholic orphanage, I'm still a Catholic.

Others grew up in a Lutheran orphanage, and they are most likely still Lutherans.

And some grew up in a Masonic Home , and they are most likely still affiliated with the Mason organization. The way I look at religions is simple; we are all trying to get to the same place - we are just traveling on a different bus.

Many orphans have difficulty talking about their past and so did I for most of my life. Some have been emotionally scarred for life, others have rejoiced in a life that saved them from neglect and abandonment.

You may get the impression that the Nuns (Sisters of Charity) did not love us, especially from the title of this book "GROWING UP WITHOUT LOVE" . The title is based solely on

"parental love" which one could always attach the phrase to - "unconstitutional love" - Personally I do not consider that the Nuns had the capacity to love us like parents. But trust me - they loved us in knowing they were doing God's will in taking care of the least of His children. Me and God love them.

I had what I needed, stability, clean clothes to put on every day, plenty of food to eat and a warm bed to sleep in every night.

Would I have preferred a real family life - yes. If only I had love.

This book should be read by all parents and the children of all parents.... Johnny

History of St. Thomas – St. Vincent Orphanage

To study the history of St. Thomas and St. Vincent Orphanage one must first study the history of St. Thomas Seminary and the plantation of the "Thomas Howard family" of Bardstown, Kentucky.

- In 1794, Thomas Howard son of Everett Howard of Maryland, along with his wife Ann, set up a plantation of over 470 acres for religious purposes in the Bardstown area.
- In 1795, a log house was built on the plantation to house the Saint Thomas Seminary, established by Bishop Flaget, and shortly thereafter St. Thomas Church was built.
- In 1810, upon his death, Thomas Howard willed this land to the Catholic Church, with the stipulation that the plantation would remain the property of the Catholic Church forever - never to be sold.
- In 1850, Bishop Martin J. Spalding established a home for dependent boys, St. Thomas Orphanage. The early orphans to arrive, lived in a part for St. Thomas Seminary. The number of orphan boys rapidly increased so the seminary built a larger building for the boys. They also gave the boys some land so they could grow their own food.
- Two sisters from the nearby convent of the "Sisters of Charity of Nazareth" were assigned to take care of the boys. The Sisters were well suited for this task for they had established a orphanage for girls some years earlier.
- The St. Thomas orphanage remained in operation at the St. Thomas Seminary property until 1889, and closed due to a devastating fire. The orphanage relocated to the city of Bardstown.
- In 1937, the orphanage moved to Anchorage, Kentucky at 100 Ward Avenue in a large brick building. This building was financed by the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky.
- In 1952, an additional wing was built onto the St. Thomas Orphanage building and more than 80 girls moved in creating - St. Thomas and St. Vincent Orphanage.
- In 1954 a very popular and functional gymnasium was built, it can certainly be said this was a "show case" of the Archdiocese of Louisville. The Orphanage sponsored the "St. Thomas Basketball League", were as, teams from the neighborhood churches, from the city of Louisville, traveled to Anchorage to compete in Sunday's basketball games.
- In addition to basketball, the gym served many other functions, including, roller skating, volleyball, a play ground for rainy days and many other day to day events.
- In 1982, the year the children were removed from the orphanage the annual budget for running the facility which could house, on average, 250 children was about \$450,000.00.
- In 1985, the joint orphanages were demolished. The only building directly related to the orphanage, still standing today, is the gymnasium which the residents living in the area can readily use.
- It has been said, that the increased use of social workers and the development of more foster homes has helped reduce the need for orphanages. Moreover, the primary focus of the Catholic Charities of the Archdioceses of Louisville - is to increase programs to help parents keep their children.

- Since the beginning of St. Thomas Orphanage and St. Vincent Orphanage the combined orphanages have reared and educated more than 10,000 boys and girls. This privilege and responsibility has been accepted primarily by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, which was founded in 1812. Their humble beginnings were in close proximity to the St. Thomas Seminary. They two were given a log house on the Thomas Howard plantation. (see photo gallery)
- St. Thomas Seminary, St Thomas Church and St. Thomas Orphanage were named after the patron saint of "Thomas" Howard.
- ST. VINCENT ORPHANAGE and THE SISTERS of CHARITY of NAZARETH
- The Sisters of Charity were founded in 1812, they were given a log house on the Thomas Howard plantation close to the St. Thomas Seminary.
- In 1813, Sister Catherine Spalding was named the first Mother Superior.
- In 1822, the sisters moved to their current location, 31E. in Nazareth, Kentucky.
- In 1832, St Vincent Orphanage for girls was opened in Louisville, Ky. located at 443 So. 5th St.
- In 1836, they relocated to Wenzel Street and Jefferson Street.
- In 1892, they moved to the present day location of the Bellarmine University.
- In 1901, they moved to 2120 Payne St. , Louisville, Ky.
- In 1952, as mentioned earlier, St Vincent merged with St. Thomas to 100 Ward Avenue in Anchorage, Kentucky.
- St. Vincent Orphanage derives its name from the patron saint - St. Vincent de Paul.



1954, Overhead view of St. Thomas and St. Vincent Orphanage, Anchorage, Kentucky

Chapter 1: My Name is John

MY NAME IS JOHN

Some - call me "Johnny"

I was born on May 13th , 1943.

My fathers' name was Paul

My mothers' name was Louise

There were 6 children in our family -

3 boys and 3 girls,

I was the 4th child born into the family.

I knew my fathers' name - but I did not know my father.

I knew my mothers' name - but I did not know my mother.

When I was very young, often I wondered-

What was a family?

I'm sure at a very young age I was influenced by a television family.

With a loving mother-

Who would tuck me in bed at night -

give me a kiss -

tell me that she loved me -

and that she would be back for me in the morning.

A resourceful father -

Who always had coins jingling in his pocket.

A father who would play pitch and catch with me -

and take me fishing and hunting.

A father who would teach me the good things in life -

and how to avoid the bad.

-Brothers and sisters to play with-

brothers and sisters to share my deepest secrets.

But we never had a television family.

For at a very young age, we were all sent to an orphanage, the year was 1948.

My brothers and I were sent to an orphanage in Anchorage, Kentucky, St. Thomas Orphanage, for boys.

My sisters were sent to an orphanage in Louisville, Kentucky, St. Vincent Orphanage, for girls.

We were separated from each other.

Some years later, in 1952, the two Catholic orphanages were combined in Anchorage.

But as a family we were still separated.

Occasionally I would see a brother or a sister passing in the hall or on the play ground.

However being separated at a young age - we didn't have much to say to each other; we had all

but become strangers. I do remember, that I loved my baby sister, Marie, very much and of course I still do. I was always concerned about her, though that's a big word with a big meaning for a small boy. When I would see her passing in the hall I would salute her, she would giggle and say "that's my big brother, Johnny. "

I do not believe it was the intent of the orphanage to keep us separated, it was just the way the orphanage was set up. It was a very large building, with the girls on one wing of the building and the boys on the other wing.

Then there were the dormitories, which were separated into grade groups;

1st and 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 5th and 6th, and 7th and 8th, with about 30 children in each dormitory. Then we had 4 cafeterias. There were events that brought us together, but they were always groups within a larger group. Besides there was always this thing about hanging out with your

"buddies" over family, especially a family you barely knew.

But the days and the years and our time at the orphanage would eventually be behind us. It was not until we started our own families that we reconnected. Now when we gather as a family we all talk at the same time, as if we need to make up for lost time, but we all know what the conversation is about. It's almost always reminiscing our time at the orphanage. Just like any family would talk about their childhood days.

Just so you know -

our family was not sent to the orphanage because our parents were deceased, as may be the common thought, we were neglected and abandoned - precipitated by alcoholism.

I'm assuming, our parents spent more time in bars than they did with us, thus we became wards of the court and sent to an orphanage. I am also sure that taking care of 6 children created its own burdens. My mother and father have long been deceased and I believe I have long forgiven them, though at times the struggle goes on. Maybe it would have been easier to reconcile in the living years.

Prior to going to the orphanage our unofficial guardian was my older sister, Jo-Ann, she was only eleven, - she deserves all the stars in the heavens.



This is the only known photograph of our family as children. We believe it was taken in 1948, shortly before we were sent to an orphanage.

We all gathered into and around a little red wagon.

The photo on the right was taken in September of 2014.

As you can see it was a little more difficult to fit into the little red wagon.

Chapter 2: Last day - First day

It's not likely many people can remember events that happened to them when they were 5 years old and neither can I, except for one day.

Early that morning, my oldest sister, Jo-ann, told me to get up and get dressed, she said today I was going someplace special. She told me not to worry about taking anything with me, she said everything would be provided.

Now I always did what my sister ask me to do. I knew she loved me and would not let anything happen to me.

She said, "hurry they will be here soon", a very short time later, she said, "come-on they're here".

We both walked over to the side window, slightly pulling open the curtain, peaking out to see -

who it was.

There was a big black car pulling up next to the house, I whispered softly, " who are they?" "come-on," she said.

We went outside to meet them. My sister turned to me and said, in a soft but stern voice, "now don't be afraid, everything will be alright, just do whatever they tell you to do."

As she patted me on the head, she said, "and be a good boy."

I started to feel afraid and sad, no one had ever prepared me for these feelings.

Where was I going?

I seemed to be going by myself.....

What did I do?

I knew a couple months ago - I had sold my father's horseshoes for a nickel, but I already got a belt whopping for that.

Suddenly I felt very alone .

I looked up at my sister -

And I asked her, "aren't you going with me."

No, but I will see you again someday, I'm going someplace else."

"is my big brother Frank going with me?" "no he will see you later."

"well, is my sister Mary going with me?" "no she is going with me."

"is my little brother David going with me?" "no he will see you later."

"well - what about my baby sister, Marie - is -". " No !"

" go - on - now - be a big boy and don't cry!!!"

With a slight shove to my shoulder---

I turned toward the big black car,

someone had already opened the back door for me. I climbed into the car and knelt on the back seat looking out the rear window. I started to wave to my sister, for she was waving to me. The more I waved the further away she became. I continued to wave -

even after I could see her no more; thinking that maybe, just maybe she could still see me.

It was a long time - before I saw my sister again.

I started to settle into the back seat, my face pressed against the side window.

The trip was long, very long, but I seemed to enjoy it. I was seeing things I had never seen before.

Many miles later someone from the front seat said, "we are almost there." Later in life I looked back at that statement, not realizing at the time that "there" was a place where I would spend the rest of my childhood - the next 14 years.

We turned off the main road (Ward Avenue) onto a short, tree lined road; it was like driving through a tunnel of trees. Suddenly the view in front of me opened. I could see an enormous brick building off in the distance, it was the orphanage -

St. Thomas Orphanage for Boys.

Off to the side there was a man sitting high on a blue Ford tractor, pulling a wide grass cutting machine. Fine blades of grass were dancing in the air and falling like snowflakes, leaving a fresh scent of cut grass, that lingers in my thoughts even until today. He looked very content, with his frayed straw hat and puffing on a blackened pipe. He drove effortlessly with one hand on the wheel and the other resting on the back of the seat, constantly looking forward and then looking backwards. With a glance our way and a slight tip of the hat he was back to - looking forward and then back. His name was Miles, I would soon learn he was a "farmhand" he deserves to be mentioned.

The big black car was now pulling to a gentle stop, the doors opened, and a voice said, "come - on, we are here."

Now earlier that day my sister told me, not to bring anything with me, however for the entire trip I had two small metal toy cars clutched tightly - one in each hand.

The person in the front seat told me,

"I could not take those with me - that no one had their own toys, there were toys inside but everyone shared them.

The two small toy cars were gently pried from my hands and tossed on the seat beside me.

As I slid out of the car I turned to watch the cars bounce on the seat toward their final resting place. I turned away and continued to slide out of the car --

I remembered my sister telling me, "not to cry"---

as a river of tears -flowed from my eyes.

Post script: Several years ago a good friend of mine, Landon, had an opportunity to hear my story, a story that took place more than 60 years ago.

Several weeks later after hearing my story, at a planned gathering, he handed me a bag, you know, the kind with handles and fancy colored tissue paper sticking out the top. I was surprised - and stunned. I looked around, no one else was receiving a bag like this. I ask him, "why am I the only one receiving a gift,"

he said "don't worry you'll find out." So I started to pull the tissue paper out of the bag; there -in the bottom of the bag were two small metal toy cars. Of course they were not the same cars but for the joy they gave me - they were the same. I clutched them tightly, one in each hand, they felt the same - the same as they did 60 years ago.

Now when I tell my story of the first day at the orphanage I can tell it with a happy ending.

Thanks Landon , you deserve to be mentioned.



Johnny, Marie and Spot....

Chapter 3: Will you adopt me?

The first day I went to the orphanage - I remembered - we drove around a large circular driveway.

In the inner circle - toward the front of the building, there was a white statue of a beautiful woman, with her arms at her side and the palm of her hands facing outward. She appeared to be looking at me with a gentle smile and open hands.

It was only a momentary glance towards her direction but a vision I still have to this day.

I was only 5 years old when I first glanced at Mary, at that time I knew nothing of her - and of course I also knew nothing of Jesus.

I would soon learn it was the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

I was not a very good student, but I did get all A+'s on my report card for religion- but it was a Catholic orphanage, so it's a good bet everyone got all A+'s in religion.

Several years later, through my educational training, I learned about Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the Angels and all the Saints. But as a young child I seemed to have a close connection to Mary.

Of course one could draw the obvious conclusion, a young child without a mother would have much desire to seek out a mother image. However Mary was not an imaginary person. She walked this earth, she was visited by an angel, she gave birth to Jesus, what better person to make friends with.

Mary became my go to person. When I needed help in making decisions, such things as, should I do this or should I do that, I always had her in the back of my mind. I always wanted Mary to be happy with me. Of course I didn't always follow her advice but when I didn't follow her advice, I felt very bad. Some things just never change.

There were many children at the orphanage, so I was never alone but there were many times when I was lonely.

I would lay in bed at night with tears in my eyes, trying to figure out -

Who I was-

Where I was -

And why I was.

It was these lonely and troubled times when I would talk to Mary the most.

I never asked Mary for very many things but I always seemed to ask her for the same thing.

I told her - "if I tried real hard to be a good boy and if somehow, just somehow I made it to heaven would she adopt me". I promised her that I would not be too much trouble. Now I knew she only had one son, Jesus, so I told her if she would adopt me, Jesus would have someone to play with.

I still rely on Mary, especially in troubled times, but I'm sure it's too late to be adopted.



Chapter 4: Celebrate

With over 150 children living at the orphanage, it may be difficult to believe, but there were times when it could be - a very lonely place - especially on days that were not suppose to be lonely - days that were supposed to be celebrated as extra special , -- like birthdays.

Loneliness can be a terrible feeling, more terrible, when coupled with the feeling of being unloved.

The whole concept of birthdays - is that people actually love you - and people that you love are happy you were born, so happy that they want to acknowledge and celebrate the occasion of your birthday with you. The most common means of celebrity and showing your love for someone may be as simple as sending you a birthday card, or by giving you a small gift and maybe even a birthday party. A birthday that no one acknowledges soon becomes a day of no importance.

I always thought , that any day, my mother and my father were going to come and take me and my brother and sister back home.

I could hear them say ,

" we are so sorry, "

" we missed you so much, "

" we love you so much , "

" we came to take you home. "

Other orphan kids came and went. When would it be our turn -- our turn never came.

" where were they,

" what were they doing, "

" don't they miss us at all? "

It's important to know, we were orphans but our parents were not deceased, I guess that is the one thing I could never understand. The fact that they were not deceased is the one reason I held on to hope for so long.

I missed what I remember as our family.

I missed my brothers and sister, I missed our dog, I just missed coming and going in a world I was comfortable being a part of.

They say a mother will fight for her children, even with her last breath.

It troubles me to know this, it really troubles me, even today.

But they never sent a birthday card.

They never came out to see me or my brothers and sisters on our birthdays - and of course there were - no birthday parties.

It's of no value to spend ink on describing celebrations such as, Mother's Day or Father's Day, for they did not exist.

With so many children living at the orphanage, I'm sure it was impossible to throw a birthday party for each child, we would be having a birthday party almost every day --

(not a bad idea - I suppose).

As I can best recall, there was very little celebration of anyone's individual birthday.

I cannot be sure about this, but I think we celebrated birthdays in groups, pertaining to the month of your birthday. All those born in May, for example, would have some small recognition that it was their birthday. Maybe it was a group "happy birthday" song, I am not really sure, as you can see, I am struggling with the whole birthday thing, it was not a very memorable event.

The only birthday I can vaguely remember was my 13th birthday.

I remember a nun asking me ,

"Did you know it was your "golden birthday? "

I said , "no, what does that mean ? "

It is May the 13th and you are 13 years old, that is called your "golden birthday."

I felt - somewhat special - all day.

I was 23 years old when I had my first Birthday party - given to me, by my then, girl friend - Kas. There is no person in my life - who has loved me more, helped me and influenced me more than my wife - Kas.

She has spent most of her life devoted to making me happy.

Chapter 5: A brighter day

Did I ever tell you about the time I ran away.

Does a young child, 7 or 8 years of age, institutionalized, need a reason to run away? To a child, there are many good reasons: loneliness, rejection, isolation, lack of freedom, lack of love, no one cares or I just want to be someplace else.

Actually I ran away two times, the first time was not very successful. It was a decision made totally out of emotion with not a great deal of planning. I just had enough. The orphanage was not a bad place, I just did not want to be there. As I learned later in life, running away was not an idea exclusive to orphans. Children in a family environment who felt emotionally depressed would also see this as an escape from things they had no control over, although this way of thinking was misguided.

I just took off walking, not down the main entrance road, but not far from it. I knew by walking down the main road I would be taking a bigger chance of someone seeing me. Unlike other orphanages or institutions we were not fenced in. Later in life I came to realize that we were not in a prison, we always had a free will, of course that free will was always monitored and under discipline.

As I walked down Ward Ave, the sun was starting to set. Already I was concerned. I started to ask myself. Where was I going to sleep? What was I going to eat? I thought of all my friends back at the orphanage, would they be worried about me?

With the sun setting I knew it was time for them to leave the play ground and start to go inside. I knew shortly someone would start to miss me, or at least I hoped they would. This was starting to look like a bad idea. I started to walk a little slower. Thinking the further I got from the orphanage the harder it would be for someone to find me.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted with a red light flashing at my back, as I turned around a bright light pierced my eyes; my heart raced with fear, I thought, --- I'm going to go to jail.

A very large man got out of the car wearing dark clothes with a very thick belt with many holes. Hanging from the belt were shiny hand cuffs, a long stick and a big gun.

As he came toward me he was carrying a large flashlight, shining the light on my face he asked, "are you from the orphanage?"

" yes " I said.

Where are you going ?

"I'm running away". I said proudly... I am sure the nervous look in my eyes was betraying my boldness.

"Oh ! --- " He said, " --- let's get in the car.", as he motioned toward the police car with a nudge of his head.

As we headed back to the orphanage, he asked me, "why were you running away?"

" I don't like it there, everybody's mean"..., I said.

" Oh ! " ...he adjusted his glasses and rubbed his face.

When we got back to the orphanage the nun in charge ask me just about all the same questions that the policeman had just asked, and I answered them all about the same way. She

asked me if I was hungry and I said yes, then she made me a peanut butter and banana sandwich, "still my favorite snack."

Of course I had to wash and dry all the dishes by myself.

Several years later I ran away again; this time I felt that I had more experience. So I talked someone, much bigger than myself, into going with me. We stuffed our pockets with food from the lunch meal. We planned to runaway when the dinner bell rang. Everyone would run toward the building and we would run toward the cornfield. We would make a clean getaway without anyone noticing.

If you're thinking about running away - don't runaway on an empty stomach or just before sunset.

We entered the cornfield, going in about 4 or 5 rolls, just enough to see out but deep enough in that no one could see us. We settled down to get our breath. We looked at each other with a big sigh of relief. I looked at my friend and said, "let's eat." Now in today's world a bottle of water is as common as a pocket on a pair of jeans - but we had no water.

The sun started to set on our backs and a cool breeze settled in the air. For the next few minutes we didn't say a word; we were being quiet and laying low. But this quietness was only in the air not in my mind - for I started to think - what do we do now?

I'm not sure I had any plans after running away, I just wanted to runaway. The excitement was worth the punishment, so I thought.

I started to wonder was this an "official runaway" I was just about to find out.

I could see off in the distances, Sister Delores Marie, the largest nun in the whole orphanage, storming out of the building with her arms swinging at a very fast pace, she did not look very happy. The closer she got to us the more the ground trembled. Now - I could hear her excited high pitch voice demanding us to come out of that cornfield or we would get the spanking of our life. Fear suddenly took over courage. And out we came. She grabbed both of us, by an ear an ear in each hand, ramping about how stupid we were.

" Where did you think you were going? "

" Where did you think you were going to sleep tonight? "

" What did you think you were going to eat? "

What I kept thinking was --- if we don't get back to the building soon my ear is going to come right off in her hand. Then she grabbed us by the shirt, I think my feet only hit the ground every other step.

You know, we never got spanked. We did get a lengthy lecture, which was more painful than a spanking. Besides, discipline with compassion is much more effective. And of course we had to do all the dishes by ourselves.

Soon I realized that I was not very good at runny away, so I decided - not to runaway again. When I did runaway, I always missed my friends and my home even though my home - was a big orphanage.

As I got older I realized just how lucky I was - to have not - been successful in running away.

I learned that kids who took to the streets, either through their own action or through actions of others - of which they had no control over - ended up in terrible shape. Hungry, cold - living in dirty streets, taking refuge any place they could find, forcing to do things that would break the hearts of any decent human being.

If it's true - that we all have a guardian angel - and if I ever get to heaven, than I have a lot of apologizing to do - for all the things I put her through.

I know this chapter is much longer then I wanted any chapter to be, but there are some important issues to be concerned about.

For instance: percentage wise are their more children on the streets today because we have very few orphanages to offer them a safe haven. Do they have a stable environment to go to - when all foster homes have failed them, and when all family members say, "no, I have enough problems of my own."

The answer might never be clear.

Unfortunately, children will most likely always be abandoned and neglected - by those who should love them the most.

Even in some of the best homes things can get edgy.

If I can offer any advice it would be: parents tell your children - children tell your parents - I want you to love me - but what I really need is for you to respect me.

If you are on the streets, you are most likely not reading this, if you are thinking your present situation is so bad that any place else will be better; I wish I could grab you by the hand and give you safe refuge, but we both know that is not possible. Please find a safe house or a local church, any place but the streets. There are people and organizations that want to help you know that I will pray for you every day

and know that you to - have a guardian angel - ask her for HELP.

Children if you need immediate HELP do this:

Go to any Church.....tell them you need help

Go to any police station or fire house.....tell them you need help

Go to any homeless shelter or safe house.....tell them you need help

Go to any hospital, school or library.....tell them you help

Go to any store or gas station.....tell the person behind the counter.....you need help

It takes a tough kid to live on the streets, it takes a tougher kid to get off the streets.....

PLEASE ASK FOR HELP

Chapter 6: "Gotta be Tough"

One thing about growing up in an orphanage, is you " gotta be tough ".

It is not a place for sissies or weaklings, you must always be willing to stand your ground. Someone, for whatever reason will want to pick on you. Or you may be wanting to pick on someone else . So yes there were many fights. One thing about getting into a fight, the winner and the looser always gained new respect, from each other and from the other kids. Fighting meant you were " tough " and other kids knew if you were every challenged again, you would not back down -regardless of the odds.

With that said, one day I hauled-off and hit a kid right in the face, immediately I started to cry.

I felt so bad, I had a very short tempe, this must have been a turning point in my life. I did get into other fights after that but I do not recall ever starting one again. As I grew older I was a little taller than most of the other kids, so I had to fight less. In my eighth grade I was the second tallest player on the basketball team. Yes, I know, I don't think a grew an inch after that.

My last fight I can remember very well. It was the kid standing next to me in our eighth grade basketball team photograph " Bobby ". If you know the photograph you are probably saying ,

"I'll bet that didn't turn out good for you" and you would be right. After that fight we were the best of friends, before that we just tolerated each other. I think we went through the first to the eighth grade together.

I'm sorry, but for the purpose of privacy I have tried to avoid using any ones full name in my writings.

Post Script to this and other stories and events: why did I decide not to start any more fights or runaway anymore? The Sisters of Charity, of whom we affectionately referred to as " the nuns " were a positive influence in our lives, though we were not aware of it at the time. They were constantly teaching us and molding us into becoming responsible and respectable children. I'm still not comfortable using the word love, but I'm sure they were happy doing God's will and taking care of the least of His children.



Chapter 7: "The Rosary"

One day when I was on voluntary kitchen duty a nun showed up carrying a cigar box, I didn't think she was smoking cigars, besides the box was weathered and frayed, I'm sure it had been in her possession for many years. She was carrying the box with care as if it had much value.

So I ask , "what's in the box, Sister?"

"Do you want to see?" she asked.

"Yes" with excitement, "I do".

Even though I was excited, she seemed even more excited to show me.

She opened the lid of the box, I stretched to see what was inside.

"Wow" I said.

I thought to myself, it doesn't look like anything very valuable but there were some pretty cool things inside. A couple pair of needle nose pliers, a roll of wire, two small baby food jars full of black beads and some other stuff.

She said, "this is my rosary box, I have everything in this box I need to make a pair of rosaries."

"Wow, that's cool.", I said.

I knew about rosaries - we all had a pair hanging on our bedpost, but I never knew - someone actually made them.

She ask, "would you like for me to show you how to make rosaries?"

I took one look at a pair she was working on - and thought, oh that looks impossible,

But, I said, "I would be happy if I could do that, but I'm not sure that I can".

"Sure you can, she said, let me show you a few things you need to know".

Right away I started learning how to make chain loops, in groups of three, then I would toss them into one of the little baby jars.

Making chain was actually the hardest part. Now of course, we simply buy a spool of already made chain and all we need to do - is cut the desired links.

I ask Sister, "What do we do with these rosary when we finish making them?"

"Well, we use most of them here at the orphanage and some we sell or give away to people in the city. People who want a pair of rosaries, but cannot afford to buy them for themselves.

My wife and I have been making rosaries for many years. As a matter of fact she tells me the story, when her Grandfather was very ill, he wanted to continue to pray the rosary but the beads were so small he was having difficulty keeping track of where he was. So she made him a pair of rosaries with large beads, beads about the size of marbles. The joy of making those rosaries for him has never left her.

Much later in life, I thought, how cool it must have been to have a pair of rosaries made by "little orphan kids." I still have the rosary I received when I made my "First Holy Communion, in 1950, along with my little book, "Pray Always."

I also have another very special rosary, well I don't actually have them - I gave them to my wife, Kas.

Every summer the orphanage held its annual "4th of July Orphans Picnic."

There were many booths operated by the neighborhood Churches of the Archdiocese of Louisville, It was a huge event attended by thousands of people each summer.

There was a special booth, where the items raffled off, were made by hand either by the Sisters or some by the orphan children. You simply put down your nickel on a number, one of the Sisters would spin the wheel, and you hoped you would win.

However this booth also had a "Grand Prize" in this case you would buy one ticket, write your name on it and place it into a glass mayonnaise jar, and later that day someone would draw out the lucky winner.

In this case the "Grand Prize" was a very special handmade rosary, handmade by one of the Sisters. They were made of large "Chrystal" beads with sterling silver chain, and sterling silver metal of Mary and a fancy sterling silver Crucifix. This rosary was much larger and heavier than the rosary hanging on our bedpost.

Yes this was a very special rosary, but when they called out my name as a winner, I had already forgotten what it was I signed up for. When the Sister handed me the rosary and congratulated me for winning such a fine prize, she asked, "Johnny, what are going to do with this beautiful rosary."

I held them in my hand, thinking yes these are beautiful, much too beautiful for me.

I said, "I'm going to save this rosary and someday I will give it to my wife, I was 12 years old at the time. You can view this beautiful rosary below.

Speaking of the rosaries hanging on our bedpost. I don't remember if we said the rosary every night, but when we did, I never remember finishing the rosary.

We would start out very strong as a group laying in our beds. Some kids never finished the first decade, and very few finished the second, and before long the only one left praying was the Sister in charge. I'm sure that was her plan, what a beautiful way to fall asleep - praying.

A few mementos from the orphanage:

Basketball net from the gym.

Brick, saved by my brother Frank, the day the orphanage was demolished, 1985.

My first Holy Communion book, "Pray Always" with my black rosary, 1950.

The beautiful rosary I won, when I was 12, and later gave to my wife, Kas



If to steal this book
shall any
take their hands upon it
from St. Andrew's I will
bring it back without
delay.

John May
Rt. July 21/80

Chapter 8: "Let's pitch"

Now Father Lammers loved to pitch horseshoes as a matter of fact he took the game very seriously. We also liked the game, but we also knew, it was expected of us to play, it was almost mandatory. For if we didn't play than who was he going to pitch with?

We respected him very much, so this was not a real problem. As a matter of fact getting to a certain age and being good enough to play horseshoes with Father was sort of a "rite of passage".

All of the excitement started when he walked out the side door of the building, with several small children gathered around him. The more he walked the more children followed around him like dancing bees. It is important to note the horseshoe pit was a good 400 yards away.

Why was this day such a special event? First, you have been living, playing, studying and working with the nuns all week, now it was Sunday, a special day, a holiday of sorts and the one day there was a "father figure" in your life.

Father was enjoying all of this attention but at the same time he seemed focused on a game of horseshoes.

What was also special about Sunday's, it was one of the few times during the week that the girls were allowed to come on the boys side.

We were not particularly happy when the St. Vincent girls joined the St. Thomas boys, at the same location in Anchorage, Kentucky, but wisdom was not our strong point in this matter and neither did we have a choice.

If you had a sister it was also a special time to reconnect, though because we were apart so much it became easy to become strangers.

In case you are wondering about the girl \ boy thing it just didn't seem to be an issue, or maybe I was just not aware.

Like I said, father loved horseshoes, he had built a top notch horseshoe pit.

The pit was located under, what I'm going to assume was the largest tree on the entire 300 acre property. The stakes were embedded deep into concrete with the best clay soil in the boxes. There were reinforced concrete slabs poured on each side of the pit so you always had a level clean platform to pitch from. To keep erred shoes from going astray there was a nice sturdy back board, and of course benches to sit on when it wasn't your turn or if the excitement of the competition had not gotten to you yet.

Now if you were pitching from the same end as Father, that meant you were his competition, but that didn't matter, you always fetched his horseshoes first, knocked off the dirt and handed them to him in an organized fashion, then you picked up your shoes.

My good friend, Joe, was one of the best players, very competitive, however; I think there were times when he could have been a little more competitive, if you know what I mean.

Most of us were pitching ringers at least every other pitch, as a matter of fact - if you were not pitching a ringer - every other pitch it is a good chance you lost the match. Many times there were 3 to 4 ringers around the stake in one turn.

Pitching horseshoe at a high competitive level taught me many things. One of the things it taught me was - it was OK to be happy.

Chapter 9: Abuse

There is not much I can write or say about abuse.

For I was never abused, nor was I aware of any abuse at the time.

But for those who were abused -

the sorrow I share for them and with them.....

is greater - than the weight of all the mountains to bear upon the HEART.....

Chapter 10: Volunteering

You have probably heard the phrase " don't volunteer for anything " , and that may be wise advice in most situations, but for me, I volunteered for just about everything.

I was happiest when I was doing something.

Most jobs were pretty cool. Like picking strawberries.

I feel sorry for those who did not volunteer for this one.

We were given these gallon metal pails and the nuns lined us up at the beginning of the strawberry patch, and off we went, the excitement was pretty high, we would eat two strawberries and throw one into the pale, making a loud noise as if we were contributing to the overall good. At the end of the line our pails were full, and so were our bellies.

The orphanage had a pretty good size farm , but we as children, did not work the farm, not much more than volunteering for strawberry picking and similar jobs like gathering eggs. If you were ask to do something on the farm it was normally considered a privilege.

On some Sundays late in the afternoon I was called to bring in the milking cows. This was not something the younger children were ask to do, at this time I was in high school but still living at the orphanage as a counselor. Now as you know cows are pretty big and at first I was a little concerned. I didn't know if cows were friendly or if they would even like me, however I was assured they were harmless. I was only asked to do this job on Sunday evenings since the cows had to be milked twice a day and sometimes the farmhand help was short on Sunday afternoon. I thought bringing in forty or fifty cows would be a daunting task because they were spread all over the place. I was told that all I had to do was to get the lead cow, Betsy with a clanking bell, walking towards the barn and all the other cows would follow. I was amazed as I lead Betsy to the barn I turned my head looking over my shoulder, sure enough all the cows near and far were following me and Betsy to the barn, I was so proud.

I found that volunteering was a great way to escape boredom, it gave me purpose and value. My goal was to do the best job I could at whatever I volunteered for - in hopes - someone would say, "my....Johnny, you are a good hard worker,- yes volunteering made me happy.

I also volunteered for kitchen duty, which most kids stayed away from. But it put me in an atmosphere and an environment where I would normally not be allowed to be in .

The women of the kitchen were awesome, like Mrs. T, Mrs. H, Mrs. L, Mrs. M. they were so happy to have help. Peeling potatoes was a pretty cool job also. We would dump this huge bag of potatoes into this large drum, it looked like a washing machine. We would turn on a switch and the drum would spin, making a loud noise. A few minutes later we would turn off the machine and out came these white potatoes, all we had to do was carve out the eyes.

Sounds like something I could use today.

There were many other jobs I volunteered for, cutting grass (when I was old enough), working on bikes, serving food to the nuns, and whatever else anyone ask of me. But my favorite volunteering job was ring the "Angels bell."

Ringing the Angels bell was a tremendous responsibility. And I was told this before I was allowed to accept the volunteering job, or privilege. But I was now in the eighth grade, I had worked myself up to being a responsible orphan.

Fortunately the nuns gave me a pocket watch right after I assured them I could do this. The pocket watch was very important, because the number one responsibility of the bell ringer was to ring it at very precise time: exactly at 12 noon and exactly at 6 o'clock in the evening.

For quite some time I thought the importance of the ringing of the bell at a very precise time was to call everyone to noon lunch and to evening dinner. I was not fully aware of the true significance of the bell ringing. Soon I found out it was a call to prayer.

It was a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Basically the prayer consisted of three "Hail Mary's."; accompanied by the ringing of the bell. The bell was rung in a series of three rings - a pause, repeated a total of three times - than a series of nine rings. The complete process was done deliberately slow and with much reverence. It would take about 1 minute and 15 seconds about the length of time it takes to say 3 devout "Hail Mary's".

The bell was very high in a tower with a long braided rope with several large knots tied toward the end. Many times I would look up at the bell ringing in the tower thinking, OK Lord, don't let this be the day the bell decides it wants to fall on my head.

My whole world was the orphanage, however I was aware that the bell could be heard for many miles. I could envision farmers in the field deeply engrossed in their daily work hearing the bells as a call to take a much needed break and go have lunch. I could see people pausing in the nearby cities and towns and checking their watches, not to see if I was on time, but to see if their watches were correct. My responsibility was huge not only was I calling everyone to prayer, I was setting the pace for communities, many miles around.



Chapter 11: Christmas

Every year in late November or early December the Sister in charge of our classroom would get us all excited about writing a letter to Santa.

Of course we didn't need much help in getting excited about Christmas, even if we were past the age of reasoning.

Part of writing a letter to Santa was learning how to write a letter. Making sure it was addressed properly because you wanted it to get to Santa and even more important you certainly wanted to make sure your return address was in the proper place and spelled correctly, you didn't want your Christmas gift to go to the wrong address. Much care was taken to use your best penmanship, you did not want to make a mistake.

We always started with: Dear Santa, (don't forget to put a coma after Santa) I hope you and Miss Santa are doing fine, (we never knew what Miss Santa's first name was).

Many younger kids asked for the same thing.....

something like this....."can you tell my mother and father to come and take me home? I miss them very much, that is all I want for Christmas."

Of course that wish was seldom filled - instead you did get some cool toys, but remember no one had their own toys, toys were shared by everyone.

The older you got the less you asked for the impossible so you used this one chance to ask Santa for the possible, like a new baseball glove.

We ended our letter with.....Thank you, Santa.

P.S. If you don't have what I ask for just send anything, Johnny

" Don't forget to put the stamp on the top - right hand corner - and put it on straight ."

Came a stern voice - breaking the silence.

Some kids left the orphanage during major holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc., but they always came back.....

they seemed to be more sad than ever before.

On many Christmas's some volunteer soldiers from Fort Knox came to the orphanage carrying bags of toys, that was really cool. They also made us a huge turkey dinner.

I would like to thank them once again. They deserve to be mentioned.

The Orphanages were in existence for many years, I am sure each child had their own different and unique experiences. Please share them under "COMMENTS."



Chapter 12: You wanna play marbles ?

Most institutions have some form of bartering system, when money is not available. For us at the orphanage it was marbles. You normally increased or decreased your wealth in marbles by playing marble games. Some games like "ringers" were traditional and universally played all over the world. Games played with marbles have been around for centuries and there are still national tournaments, however many kids today use their fingers and thumbs to operate their smart phones for gaming and texting. There is a good bet they do not know the true meaning of the phrase "knuckle down. "

Playing marbles brings back great memories. It also helped to develop sportsmanship, fairness, getting along with others and developing a sense of competitiveness. An one could play and depending on the game you could play just about anywhere. We did a lot of standing in line - hurry up and wait. We could talk - but we had to do so quietly. Standing in line was not time wasted - it was time to play marbles "shakes" that is.

I can't tell you if we invented the game but I can tell you we played it a lot.

It was an easy game, played like this: each player, just two, would take 10 marbles in put them in a separate pocket (just for temporary storage). From that storage pocket he could put one to ten marbles in his hands, not in view of his opponent, cupping his hands together and shaking them vigorously trying to disguise the sound of the number of marbles as they rattled in his hands. If he was shaking 6 marbles and his opponent said either 5 or 7 than his opponent would owe him the difference, one marble, if the opponent guessed correctly (6) than the opponent would get all 6. All pay-offs were immediate.

I could not wait until I got grandchildren so I could to teach them how to "shake."

Some kids who got to go home for the weekend would come back with a stash of new marbles and if you were lucky sometimes they would bring "cat eyes". Cat eyes were always a little more valuable in bartering. If someone had something you wanted you could try to buy it with marbles. Many kids walked around with marbles bulging from their pockets, this was always an invitation for " do you wanna play marbles " .

Their were many types of marble games to play in addition to " shakes ", there were games called - shoe box, lagging, liners and others.

Of course there was nothing like kneeling in the dirt, "knuckling down", with your favorite oversized "taw" shooter, knocking your opponents "cat eyes" out of the ring, as the next opponent stepped forward for another competitive round of "ringers."

Chapter 13: Where did all that stuff come from?

Every morning when I got up there were clean clothes at the foot of my bed.

I never asked where the clothes came from, they were just always there.

I knew the nuns had washed them, folded them and placed them there -

but I was never really concerned about where the clothes came from.

And when we went down for breakfast, lunch and dinner there was always plenty of food to eat.

I never ask where all the food came from, it was just always there.

I knew the nuns had prepared the food and I knew we would have to wash all the dishes-

but I was never really concerned about where all the food came from.

And when we went outside to play there were swing sets, sliding boards, baseballs, baseball bats and gloves.

I never ask where all this stuff came from - it was just always there.

And when we went to class and opened up our text books-

I never ask where the books came from-

of course the nuns would help us read and understand the books-

But I was never really concerned about where the books came from.

As I got older and moved away from the orphanage and got married and we had children; I started to wonder "where did all that stuff come from?" Since now I was providing all this stuff for my own family.

And I wonderedand I wondered.....and I found out.

It seems that the Arch-Diocese of Louisville had many neighborhood Churches and Schools, and every third Sunday of the month they would take up a second collection,

a special collection for the orphans, these are the gifts that helped support the children.

Now it's a good bet that those who gave their hard earned money never had an opportunity to see an orphan child. And it's a good bet an orphan child never had an opportunity to see those who gave so generously.

So why did they give - first they loved Jesus very much, and second Jesus ask them, to take care of the least of these my brethren. (Matthew 25:40)

Chapter 14: Building a wall

I was no different than any child growing up,

living in an orphanage or not living in an orphanage.

There are certain things a child craves; attention, respect and love.

Without these a child will react; normally in a negative way - either outwardly or inwardly.

Signs of aggression and hostility towards others can often be an outward expression of turmoil from within. I am sure I experienced these negative tendency in my childhood, perhaps that's why I ran away several times and got into fights.

After much inner turmoil I started to take a different path. I learned to be self sufficient and self reliant, and to stay in my space, avoiding situations outside of my comfort zone. I would build an invisible wall around myself. The wall got so thick it sometimes hindered my ability to make true friends, "best friends" or it affected my relationships or my ability to even talk to girls. So if someone did decide to - like me or even love me, they would have to tear down a pretty thick wall. A wall that I didn't want to be tore down, for the wall was a wall of self protection.

The catalyst of my wall was shyness; you can talk to me but don't expect me to have much to say. This wall was so effective it started to control my personality as I got older. I figured I could camouflage my thoughts by not speaking.

I still lived at the orphanage when I was going to high school, a Catholic, all boys high school,

(Trinity High School, in St. Mathews, Ky.) I was now in an environment which was clearly outside of my comfort zone. Almost all the other boys and some of my friends never knew I lived at "the orphanage," never knew for the entire four years.

I never told them, but why should I.

When the school day was over they went home, they had no idea that I went back to the orphanage. I was too shy and perhaps too embarrassed to share any part of my life.

I did not realize it at the time but one effect from growing up in an institution or growing up without love is you start to feel self pity, this is almost as devastating of an emotional feeling as living without love. If you have this feeling, seek help, talk to someone who truly loves you and someone you can trust. Unfortunately self pity only added to my shyness.

As I mentioned, I didn't have very many close friends in high school, but I did have one, his name was Nick. I think back to that time and I realized one close friend is more valuable than 100 friends. But it was no one's fault but my own, my wall of self protection, my wall of shyness had become my wall of self seclusion.

In a way Nick started to tear down the wall I had built around myself.

We had a big football game coming up, he ask me where did live; he said he would come to my house and pick me up and we would go to the football game together.

I said in a short bold statement, "that would not be possible." He looked at me a little puzzled. I said, "because I live very far away, I live in Anchorage, which is about 20 miles away." "OK", he said, "next Friday after school instead of you going home just come over to my house, we'll go to the game and then you can spend the night at my house; I've already ask my parents, they said it's ok."

I was starting to feel very uncomfortable.

I said, "that would not be possible".

Now, you see, this would have been just a normal conversation between two friends. But not for me

I said, " I have never stayed overnight with someone." "Well, why not?" he said.

BecauseI live in an Orphanage - these were strange words I was hearing, but more important they were strange words I was saying.

We spent the rest of our lunch period talking about the orphanage.

I felt as if a huge mountain had been lifted off my shoulders. Someone took the time and ask the questions that started to change my life and started to change the way I felt about myself.

That night - I went to the Priest who was in charge of the orphanage. I knocked on his door, he invited me in, staying close to the door out of apprehension, I said, "Father, a friend from school invited me to go to the football game this Friday and then spend the night, he's a very good boy and from a very good family, he's Italian, Father - can I go?"

"Johnny", he said, as if he'd heard enough. If you think he is from a good family than that's good enough for me, have fun, be sure to check in with the Sisters in the office when you come home.

That night a few more bricks fell from my wall. Nick deserves to be mentioned.

Of all the good and not so good; like most teenagers, I loved high school, I probably went to one of the best high school in the state of Kentucky, we were state champions in many sports and academically very highly rated. The one downside, was - it was an all boys school, sorry, I loved my school, but this was difficult. Living at the orphanage I never had much opportunity to socialize with girls. This brought about one of the most devastating situation of my high school experience; I did not go to my Senior Prom, only those who did not go to their Senior Prom know this feeling.

Chapter 15: Things I Regret

We all have things we regret in life. I'm talking about things we had control over; decisions that we freely made that produced bad results.

Regretting certain things we did in our past and remembering them helps guide us in things we do - or - don't do in the present.

In many cases we do not recognize, in advance, any bad ever coming from our actions. Like the time I painted a turtle !.....

When I was in high school and still living at the orphanage I had more freedom, I could go about the property as I pleased, I had basically no supervision but I always knew what was expected of me. And yes I did have a lot of duties and responsibilities.

I liked to go on hikes and just be by myself. The farm had a good size pond, it's primary purpose was for the cows. I liked to fish the pond although I don't recall catching any fish, of course my fishing equipment consisted of a long tree branch and a string with a hook, could be the reason I wasn't very successful, actually I don't believe the pond had any fish. But I did catch some turtles. No one who goes fishing to catch fish wants to catch turtles. But the joy of catching something is better than catching nothing.

Walking along the banks of the pond I came across an unusual distinctive turtle, I thought , "I like this turtle, I'm going to make this turtle mine." So I picked it up and carried it all the way back to the maintenance barn. I found some red paint and a small brush, I painted my name "Johnny" on it and the date. I carried it back to the banks of the pond and put it down exactly where I found it, thanking that in the next week or so I would come back and look for -

"my turtle."

That is exactly what I did. But in returning to the pond I was heartbroken, - heartbroken to find "my turtle" - was there in the exact same spot I had set it down.

The only problem was - it was only a shell, - it's body had been eaten out by bugs.

It took some years to realize what had happened to "my turtle".

At the time I was not aware of any such thing as "lead" in paint and its toxic effects.

My sincere apologies to "my turtle." He deserves to be mentioned.

On a different, but somewhat similar occasion my heart was broken again.

This time however I could not fall into the protection of "ignorance."

I had saved my weekly earnings, of \$5 a week to buy a BB gun rifle.

Now \$5 a week does not sound like a lot of money but when everything I needed was provided for by the orphanage, I really didn't have to spend my money on anything other than what I wanted. And I really didn't want very much, except for an occasional Elvis record that cost 99 cents. I liked Elvis and I liked buying his 45rpm records because you could always count on the flip side being as big a hit as the "flip side."

So off to Sears & Roebucks I went. The Daisy BB gun was \$19.99, 4 weeks of earnings, but I was more excited to have the BB gun than I was to have the \$19.99.

At the first opportunity I took off to the woods (on orphanage property) with my new BB gun in tow. For several weeks I shot at tin cans and Coke bottles. That was fun learning all about my BB gun and watching the bottles explode. You see - some of my life was rather normal, even

though I was 15 years old and most kids did this when they were 9 or 10 years old with their fathers.

But one day, I thought, I've had enough of shooting tin cans and bottles. I thought I should put myself to a real challenge and shoot at a target that did not just sit still on a log. There was a beautiful red bird (cardinal) chirping happily in a tree about 20 feet away. So I took aim - shot - and down he fell. The forest suddenly become very quite.

I thought every bird and animal was looking at me, looking at me in shame.

I slowly walked toward the bird laying on the ground, his red color was brighter than it was when he was in the tree, but he was no longer singing, I never shot another bird.

My sincere apologies to all the animals of the forest.

Chapter 16: A special family Chapter 16 (not yet written)

A special family Chapter 16 (not yet written)

Chapter 17: A beautiful event

Thank you for reading and sharing in my life and my experiences and what it was like growing up in an orphanage.

But wait the best is yet to come. It seems that after all these years there is more, I mean more siblings, that's right- a sister and a brother. After finding this out in the year 2015 I started to wonder about a numbers thing. Our family was always 6. Knowing you have a sister and a brother that you have never met before I was thinking ...2 plus 6. Meeting them, accepting them, and falling in love with them the number grew to a beautiful eight. Can you imagine after going around the sun 72 times to find out you have a sister and a brother you have never met before, what a beautiful event.

Based on good information we always thought we had a sister and a brother, but for many, many years we never felt comfortable perusing it. Most of us felt or assumed that their family life was probably one of those early television shows like "Father knows best." And who were we to call them up and say, "hay, did you know you have 6 orphan sisters and brothers."

Soon we no longer referred to them as "them" they were now our sister Carolyn and our brother Tim.

In December of 2015 we all meet for the first time, at our sister, Jo-Ann's house in Simpsonville, Kentucky, it was a beautiful event. We talked, we laughed and we shared our early journey through life.

What we found out deeply troubled my heart. We grew up in an orphanage, which was a safe and stable environment. We learned their mother passed away at a very young age, Carolyn was around 6 years old. It wasn't much time after that, they were bounced around to numerous foster homes. Our common bond in life - is we shared the same father, I can draw no conclusion from that, but maybe you can.

Carolyn stated her mother, Ava, was loving and carrying. She said, she would walk me to school and pick me up every day. One day she took me to school but never came to pick me up, during that day she died of a sudden heart-attack. My heart brakes for her and Tim. Carolyn's youngest daughter name is Ava, what a beautiful child.

In this country many families have shared similar events of being reconnected. Many hearts have been warmed and many hearts have been mended. You can stay on the safe side and never peruse, and like our family, it may take many years to decide to reach out, and some experiences maybe problematic, if they are let them go, but you can never fill a void in your heart unless you know.

Of course this story has no ending, as a matter of fact it's only begun....

