



Mother and Baby homes

Unit 3

Activity 6

“...like a jail”: Extracts from the recollections of Julia Carter

A terrible regime, children got up at 6.30 in the morning in a cold, barracks-like place and [were] given rough food [porridge, milk, tea and bread]...

Drilling in twos in the veranda like a jail. The nuns were very regimental with the children, doing drills and ring-a-ring-a-rosy with them.

Nuns had very little contact with the children, they wouldn't even know their names.

...It was a rotten 'ould place to rear children, marching them around the room to keep them out of trouble.

When the [older] children came home from school they got their dinner and then their hair was fine-combed for nits and fleas. They got tea, bread and butter and cocoa for their supper.

The little ones went to bed summer and winter at 6 pm.

The children would be taken out at night to the toilets but if they were taking them out forever they would still be pissing the beds.

The children's play area had to be scrubbed each day. It was a big long room for toddlers and the smell of urine would come from the wooden floors.

I always noticed that the children were awful small for their age. They never got proper food, they were undersized because they never got the little tit-bits that children in families get.

All they got was ould starchy food, they were all pot-bellied. When [Mother Superior] Martha came she noticed the pot bellies and started giving them soup, but that was no better.

The children had a language all their own. They didn't talk right at all, nobody to teach them, nobody to care!

The Home children were like chickens in a coop, bedlam, screeching, shouting in the toddlers' room. They never learned to speak properly, 'twas like they had a language of their own, babbling sounds.

Whatever they learned at school, they learned nothing up there: eating, to sitting on the pot, to going to bed. I think they spent most of their young lives sitting on them pots!

Some of the children wouldn't use spoons, but used their fists to lift the porridge out of the mugs, and they would get a whack.

They had swings and see-saws, but when I look back they were very unnatural children, shouting, screeching, sometimes laughing, ring-a-ring-a-rosy.

Dr Waldron's wife had a trunk full of books sent up to the home along with the toys.

Some of the local doctors sent books and toys to the home at Christmas, and at that time the children would put on a play. ...We had great plays, there was a stage like down in the Town Hall. ...the doctor's kids would come up to the home to see it.

If a child died under a year, there'd be an inquiry. If the child was over a year, there'd be no inquiry. They'd say it was neglect if the child was under a year. You see the nuns would have to account for the death if the child was under a year, and there would be a lot of investigation. Over a year and it would more likely be natural causes, like measles etc.

Children died of measles, there were no antibiotics. Scores of the children died under a year, and whooping cough was epidemic, they used to die like flies. Sure they had a little graveyard of their own up there, it's still there, it's walled in now.

The babies and toddlers whined and pined after the mother left.

There was no mother substitute.

It was an awful place to be for any child. I'd say it left a mark on them for life.

The poorest downcast family were better off than being in the home: there's love in a family home even though there's poverty.