

“I was only 9 years old”

by Jabert¹



¹ Jabert chose to use his real name in his story, but other people's names have been changed to pseudonym.

Tuatapere, Southland. I was born there. 28th July 1959. I was two months premature.

I was the last baby in our family to be born. I have three brothers. All my three sisters have died but my three brothers are still alive.

When I was two years old I went to a Cerebral Palsy Unit and I began to walk at four and a half years old. I attended this unit for three years and then I left.

I was only five years old.

I then shifted to Christchurch and I remember going to the cerebral palsy school in a taxi. We were in a house on a farm not far from the pub. We had animals. We'd feed them with hay and they'd always come up to me when they'd see me.

More hay, hay, hay. I loved feeding the animals.

My father was a hard worker and he died in 1967. I came home from school one day and my brother told me he had passed away and he led me into my parent's room where dad was lying.

I was only 8 years old.

In 1968, I went to Templeton for a short-term stay. My mum found it difficult to manage me so I went to stay at Templeton for short stays and then eventually these stays got longer.

I was only 9 years old.

I've been to the Timaru IHC workshop and I have stayed

in some other homes over the holidays. In 1969, I stayed with Mrs Miles for support with my cerebral palsy.

A nurse at Southland Hospital wanted to adopt me to be her son. And Mum said, “no”. My brother said, “no”, Dad said, “no” and I said, “yes”. I wanted to be adopted. She wanted to marry a man and then have her own child and that child was me. All the brothers in my family said, “no you can’t take my brother away”. But my sisters they said to my Mum, “let the nurse have him - have our brother!”

I was only 10 years old.

At Templeton you had to make your bed and then

change the sheets a couple of days later. Then I would go down the hallway to the staffroom. I would get the key off the night staff, unlock the big boys bathroom. The boys bathroom had a bath and showers. My bathroom just had showers.

I was in my 20’s.

I’d look after boys who have seizures and that. Make sure they’re ok.

The boys did bully others but not me. They didn’t bash me. I’d stick up for myself. I had another another friend who stuck up for himself too. The staff would tell ‘em off a couple of days later. Those boys were silly buggars. Just some people got pushed around. And I had to stick up

for some of the people and not get pushed around.

I remember one guy he climbed up the tree. He couldn't get down so my friend climbed up to get him down. And one time a staff member put my friend in the laundry bag and he couldn't get out. So I had to get him out. No worries for me to help him.

He was a good boy ol' T. He knows what is going on. I look after T cos I don't like people hitting him. Staff were hitting sometimes, and I like ol' T. Don't know why they did that must have been mean. Not all staff were mean just some of them. I really liked S at Templeton. She was my main

caregiver, she knitted me a jersey and was kind to me. I bought the wool.

Every Thursday I went to Hornby on the bus. I'd have a look around there – sometimes I went with other residents no staff just us.

Some of my friends at Templeton would go home here and there but I didn't much. I would go and see my brother who was in Rolleston Prison. I used to bike around Templeton. I also used to go to the Chapel every Sunday. I was in the choir group before I started working in the store. Yes, then I moved from the choir back to work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and half day Thursday.

Sometimes at lunchtime, the staff would have a game of basketball. And I said I'd look after the office phone. I took messages, wrote them down. Then L would come back and have a look at the messages and he would ring them all back.

I was in my 30's.

When the nurses went on strike at Templeton I volunteered to help look after other residents. I would go and help in Maple Villa. I was trusted. I had to let the staff know what time I leave and then what time I return. If you play up you go into level one and you go to another villa until the staff came back and get you. In Briar Villa, you couldn't just go out. The staff

had to go down and get all the stuff for you. I would go in the van too and get the food from the villas for the pigs and all that kind of stuff. And I loved to go out by myself. I'd walk down the roads, don't know where I'm going just getting out and about around Templeton.

I used to swim in the pool. One day at swimming, one of the girls - staff didn't see her. She sunk under the water and died. I saw her and I had to take my wallet and my bus pass out of my pocket.

I left my shoes on and jumped into the water.

I carried her over to the steps of the pool and the staff took her from there. She had to go away - back to the villa, Kowhai, and they put her in

the spare room until the police come, and a coffin. Yeah, too late to save her. She was already dead. The staff didn't see her. Later the staff said, thank you.

Mum went into a rest home. I had a photo of her. One day I got a phone call and I was told my mum had died. My friend Tony came to Templeton and got me and took me to Mum's funeral.

We went out with the staff to the races. Staff from a different villa took me to the races. Bring me home. Bring me back to the villa. From Rimu back to Beech.

As I got older I started to run away a few times.

I didn't want to stay at Templeton. I wanted to get out. Happy to leave yes. I said to a staff member, Templeton was my life. They said, they knew it was. S said, I'd been there for a long long time. I moved into Beech villa to learn to get out. And I was happy. I was happy with the staff.

I ran away from Templeton again and this time I ran to the Speedway and a man gave me money to catch the bus. I then went to the pub in the Christchurch square. I just wanted to get out of Templeton. It was time for me to move.

I stayed in Beech Villa a bit longer until we had a big meeting with all the residents. They told us we were all

going to get out of Templeton because it was going to shut down. Yeah. And the parents said, “you can’t do that, that’s their homes!” And the staff said, “let them get more freedom.”

A place was found for me and three others in Halswell. I left Templeton.

I was 40 years.

The trucks brought all our bikes and bags to this place. I can’t ride my bike anymore. I’m too big for it.

I like to be happy and enjoying my life. This is a different life. I’m happy going around and seeing people at their houses. I go around them all. When I got out of Templeton I went to different

houses to see people. And make friends. I’ve made a lot of friends.

Living out of Templeton now, has changed me. I’d go down to the supermarket have coffee with friends. They make me coffee in my cup and I go and sit by the table and drink it. I tell the staff where I am going. I can just say I’ll be back anytime. I like to go to Hornby and to the Warehouse. Drive down the back road on my electric wheelchair or in the van sometimes - our van has a wheelchair ramp.

My flatmate and me. Us two go to work during the week. We work Monday to Friday at Horizons.

Do contract jobs mostly. But no contract jobs when we're on COVID level 2 . So we go around and help others. And I still get paid for that.

I had a good life at Templeton. I made good friends at Templeton. If we didn't go to Templeton we wouldn't have staff to show us how to cook, do the washing, change the sheets, clean our rooms and polish the floors. I learnt lots at Beech Villa. All the residents have all gone out, they're all gone.

But Templeton is not a home, residents can't work and they end up staying there for a long time. People shouldn't be in places like Templeton because they should be given

a chance in a home in their community.

I am 63 years old.