

“I still have a fear of the dark...”¹



¹ This storyteller chose not to use his name or to name other people in his story.

I was born in Wellington, North Island in 1951. And last July, I was 70.

Me Pa and Mother were old, old before they died sort of thing. We lived in by the beach [down] by Greymouth. We moved there [when] I was four or something years old. We went to [our local] primary school. From Primer 1 to Standard 4. And two years in the Greymouth High School, on High Street.

I had a lot of brothers and sisters – 5 boys and 5 girls, a big family. Ten kids and Pa and Mother. I was in the middle sort of. One of my sisters' [went to] Seaview psych ward when she was 15. Another sister died years ago. I've got two older sisters.

Oh! And I have got a younger sister too that I just remembered. [One brother] is about 80 something, [two] brothers are younger than me. [And another brother] he died too, a while ago.

We lived [close to] Cousins, Uncles, Aunties there was heaps of us in [our] family.

Pa worked in a coal mine, just past Greymouth. Yeah he was a real muscle man sort of thing, with a big Banjo shovel. He had those callouses on his hands. I still remember it all, it's still there. He was good to me and I was his best son sort of thing. Yeah, he was good to me.

Mum - she was a bit, ah, retarded when she was born

and [one of me older sister's was] born retarded just like my mother was. She was born like it. And a younger sister, she was born deaf and dumb, couldn't talk. She drowned when we were young. We all missed her. I had a couple of my sisters that were retarded, born retarded sort of thing.

[Primary] school was hard for me I couldn't figure maths, numbers and that. But my best subject was that thing I did before [when I was filling out your forms]. Painting and writing. That was my best subject. My spelling sometimes goes wonky on me. It took me longer to learn things. I was a bit sort of slow. As I said the mathematics and that was too confusing.

Some teachers were mean and some teachers were kind. Two of my sisters didn't go to school, but my other brothers and sisters were alright.

It was hard for me mother. My dad had to, ah, teach [my mum] how to cook. I can't remember how they met, as I say, my memory's not as good as it was.

When I was at high school, I wouldn't speak to anyone or anything or any people's. I was what do you call it, I was sort of wouldn't even speak to people's or anything aye. I don't really know why but I was a bit worried people would tease me. I wasn't close to my younger brothers because they would pick on

me. Yeah tease and that and they would tease poor [sister] too. My older brothers and sisters were alright I suppose. Even though [my sister] was older than me I felt like I had to look after her a bit, sort of my other sister before she drowned too. Drowned as I said, I was 10 I think and she was 5 when she died.

During the week I worked with horses, father would wake me up early and he would fix brekkie for me and I used to work with horses, what do you call it? A stable hand or stable boy. I was only 14 or something years old then. Twice a day it was. At the racecourse in Greymouth. I biked over on a push bike over to Greymouth. I can't

think now how come I did that thing [the stable hand job].

I went there in the early hours [of the] morning about 6 or 7 o'clock or whatever it was to um, train the horses. They were trotting horses - you know the horses in the sulky thing. I remember I crashed the bloody thing and boomed me head aye. And I had that concussion thing. Twice I fell off the horse and hit the tarseal road and out to it. I fed the horses, the old bran, molasses, hay and chaff and all that. It was good. A sulky, yeah. Bridle and the hobbles on the legs. My boss was - yeah, he was alright as a boss. [I worked for him] right up until I was 15 or 16 years old. And the money I would get paid from the job I would

give to me mum and dad to pay for all the food for the kids and that. Sometimes I got to buy some trousers or jeans, sometimes.

Um, [then] I worked with the carpenter people. Ah yeah, just a what do you call them? A carpenter's labourer. Yeah, I liked that job. I was slow, slow, slow as hell you know and they sacked me because I was too slow and all that. Ah, [I was] 18 I think. Oh, I sort of got all emotional about all the different jobs I had. From one job to the other and I couldn't stay long on one job, [I had] a nervous breakdown.

I remember the last job I had, making concrete pipes and products that's right and that

was too hard for me, hard work with the bloody concrete. A big round spinney thing, and shovel concrete and gravel.

[I found it hard to learn quickly and I lost jobs because of it]. Yeah, and for one part of it there I was on the unemployment benefit for years and years. I knew people from the pubs. I would go to the pub as a 15-year old and I overdid it a bit, the booze, the alcohol. I got really crook off it aye, and not long after I had a nervous breakdown thing. I over did the alcohol and, in the morning, I would get the normal hangover. I overdid it too much.

When I was on the unemployment benefit [for a] couple of years we used to go down the Greymouth river white baiting [with a] scoop net. My father had a motorcar then. And then not long after I went up Seaview. I was only 18 when I went to Seaview psych villa, [an] 18-year old! I hit the booze too much, the alcohol. I got all unwell. I must've been really bad aye? I was in there permanently sort of. I remember my Pa taking me to Seaview. My sister was already there.

I'd get paid staff pay working up at the gardens at Seaview and all that. I first went there, they had me doing the occupational therapy thing and I made leather belts and all them things. I was really

good at that too, leather work you know. I [also] worked on the laundry truck. Where they had them big laundry bags full of washing. I was even in the painting gang too for one part of it. The billiards and that, I was in a painting gang thing they called it.

Yeah and on Friday after pay day. Friday, was a pay day thing on the staff pay. Me and another patient from [my villa] would walk down to town. They would let us go there by ourselves, to the hotel and in them days there were no pills so I used to drink alcohol then and I didn't get caught with it.

My father got me to bring my sister home for the weekend sometimes, and in them days [there was] a railway road

services bus thing. I would take me and my sister home for the weekend sort of thing. And then on Mondays I'd come back with her.

See over there? That's the villa where they had the ladies. The men were in [another one]. There must have been about 20 or something people there. In the ladies one [there was] a great big full-sized snooker table. We had one of them in each villa, a pool table and the nurse fella's taught me how to play. All the other villas they had pool tables in them. In the other villa's they had small pool tables like the one they got just in that room over there.

Those two [villas] - they were both alright. They had a kitchen, big main kitchen and they would bring the meals around in it and they had beautiful meals too, [everyone sat together for meals]. At night time, at sunset, in the skies, the sun



would go into the sea and at nights there used to be a beautiful sunset from the window.

I had my own single room thing. I would get up out of bed when I liked, I didn't have much. Just a bed and a bedside table and a locker thing for some of my clothes yeah. I brought [my clothes] from my house from where my father and me mother [used to] live.

Sometimes the old lady that lived next door or below me – the old pension ladies would fiddle round with my washing that I put on the line. Yeah, I did [my own washing]. Yes, all them years I was up there, even though the washing machines them days were oh

old, old things. Ringer things. If you put jeans in there then, boom the thing would plop out of the side and nearly get you.

Then I got moved to [villa name], they were mean to poor old [me] in them days. They were mean to me then. [The] nurses in [villa name]. I'd hear it in the lock, big steel key, they'd lock me in there. The male staff, seven of them would grab me and chuck me in there and ever since them days I have had the pain around me back.

If you broke windows or fight any other patients, [you would get put] in the lock-up, no bloody bullshit them days aye, they were really mean to me then. When peoples or

someone upset poor [me], yeah I used to go crazy. There always used to be this young fella in [my villa], [he must have been] 18 and I was 21 or something. He used to punch, you know fighting me, he was too strong for me I couldn't handle him aye, yeah no. [I would be] angry if someone upset me or something upset me, I would boom – punch windows. I was getting that good at it, I didn't even cut my hands. [I hit the] veranda window and I didn't even cut my knuckle.

As I said, that lock up room, oh god I would go crazy in there aye. In the dark room. When I was locked in here it had a brown mattress – not the one it has now. I would be bashing on the walls

screaming let me out of here you know.



I still have a fear of the dark. I would be bashing on the walls and me hands bleeding and then, all of a sudden, I would hear the key in the lock, the big steel one, like that young fella had before. Men would rush in there, hold me on the floor, give me a needle in the backside thing to calm me down a bit and then they would lock it all again, big steel key. I would lie on the floor in there, the

lock up room in [villa name]. I don't know how many hours they would leave me in there and, ever since then, I have had a fear of the dark at night you know [I still] I have a bedside lamp going beside me bed while I'm in bed.

And that place [over there] with the fence around. That was so we wouldn't escape or whatever yeah, that was that place where they built an ICU intensive care unit and the lock up rooms had the grey leathery beds in there yeah.

Most of the people in there were brain damaged. You know, epilepsy peoples and one patient there a thin, thin man, a boy I mean and he, he lost the will to live and he wouldn't eat or anything aye

and the nurses there would shove food in his mouth trying to force him to eat because he wouldn't. Cause he was what do you call it? Lost the will to live or what else. [Person's name] he would have those epileptic seizures and bash into the pool table his old head and the glass door window things he would crash through them and he had all stitches on his face and everywhere.

[Today] was the first time I've had a look around Seaview [since I moved to the community] and shows people's you know. Some of the villas are gone. That big steel key made me remember things. I'm not upset – I'm ok with that, cause the psych hospitals, the national

government closed them all down didn't they? I think half of Hokitika peoples worked at the psych villa[s].

I lived with [a friend] after we first left Seaview psych hospital. When she got old and crook, her legs packed up on her, her knees [I looked after her]. I felt more relaxed and that, sort of, once I settled into [that] place with her. That was the first house that me and [friend] went to after this place closed cause, me and [friend] were the best people to go out in the community thing. I've been to heaps of different houses before here. Yeah, me and my friend. Yeah and she died, oh it would be coming up one

or two years now. And when I come here [to the cemetery], I used to cry remembering about [my friend], and my sister, dead both of them, and sometimes I have a cry you know. I should have brought some flowers up.

[But] I'm getting on alright with those other four people at the [new] house. And I've got a little key in me locker door thing, a little key to lock all me money and wallet in there, things like that.

I do a lot of walking.

Yesterday morning I went for a walk down to the river because you got to keep them knees going.

