

Housing Crisis.

By Peter Dale

In 1955 Dad got a new job with better pay. The only trouble was it meant we had to leave our rented house in Browns Bay to find a place to rent that was closer to Davie Motors in Otahuhu where Dad would work. It took weeks and weeks to find a place during which Dad would catch a bus outside our house to Devonport, catch the ferry to Auckland and then the South Auckland Bus to Otahuhu—a 2 ½ hour journey each way. For some of the time he stayed with my uncle Bob who had been so lucky to get a state house in Court Crescent, Tamaki.

Dad finally found us a place to rent in Browns Road, Manurewa. It was big old farmhouse with a large section which Mum promptly turned into a massive vegie garden. Mum and Dad rented the house from the Education Board which was going to build a new college on the site, but in two to three years. That would give time for us to move up the waiting list with the State Advances to get a state house.

I used to walk to Homai School which was on the edge of farmland between Manurewa and Papatoetoe. Manurewa was a nice country town at the time with lots of farmland around it and plenty of parks to play in.

The bad news came after six months that the construction of Manurewa High School had been brought forward and our house was at its front gate. For a while we stuck it out at the house and the Education Board tried hard to find ways of leaving us in there for as long as possible.

Camp Bunn and Sylvia Park were old US Army bases that had become State Advances transit camps for the temporarily homeless families waiting to get into state houses. But there was even a waiting list to get into those! At the time they were building houses by the hundreds but all the babies born after the war just swamped the system. Mum and Dad were getting increasingly frantic about our situation as there was simply nowhere we could rent and we certainly didn't have enough to buy a house. Dad was on wages and mum had four kids to look after. We didn't have a car or any heavy furniture other than beds and a table.

The day came when we had to leave. Mum took Rose and Jeff to stay with her cousin in Newmarket. Chris went with Dad to stay with Uncle Bob in Tamaki and I was put into the Manurewa Children's Home, an orphanage and home for children of estranged families. I was eight.

We lived in dormitories with new things like 'lights out' and a whack if you were caught reading under the sheets or giggling. I giggled and cried a lot because I was scared and homesick so I got quite a few whacks. However it wasn't all that bad. If you behaved the matrons were really nice and you got stories after tea, mostly bible stuff, but stories all the same. We had to make our beds just so, and we had a box at the base of the bed for our clothes and that had to be tidy and your clothes folded in a special order. The matrons gave you a darned good scrubbing in the baths once a week, including behind your ears to search for spuds growing there. It was called carbolic soap and had the smell that you will always remember. There were paddocks out the back and a small farm I spent a lot of time in. The food was pretty much what we had at home—lots of vegies and corned beef and dumplings and steamed puddings. Lunch was home-made dark brown wholemeal bread wedges with lettuce and tomato in them which I used to swap for marmite sandwiches on white bread at

playtime. Before leaving for Homai School we had to line up and get a tablespoon of castor oil or cod liver oil to keep us regular. I hated it but the matron was a gun at making sure it all went down.

Although I was lonely I was well cared for and I got to know the other kids—from memory about thirty of them who went to school, and about the same number who were little ones. I felt sorry for lots of them because they had no mother or no father or sometimes both.

Either mum or dad would come to see me after Sunday School and we would walk around the grounds and then I would get permission to walk mum or dad back to the Homai Station so I could wave good bye and cry all the way back to the Home. I would spend the rest of Sunday feeding cows and sheep and talking to them about getting a state house so we could all be together. I stayed for Term Two and Term Three there.

When it came to the summer holidays, Dad put me on the bus to Thames at Walker's Travel Centre in Otahuhu and I caught Alley White's Service Car to Whitianga and stayed with my Grandpa and Grandma Dale for the whole time. Our phone number was Number Four and Mum called on her birthday, January 13th to tell us that Dame Hilda Ross had personally organised us a state house to move into as it was not good enough for mum and dad who had served their country right through the war not to have a house.

Dad borrowed a car and came down to pick me up and we moved into our brand new state house in 68 Leybourne Circle, Glen Innes in February 1957. It was enormous. It had three bedrooms and a lounge and a kitchen/dining room and a wash-house and toilet inside the house and a shed outside. And a massive back yard. Mum found a lucky sixpence stuck to the back of a Capstan packet in the medicine cupboard way up high. It said : " To the lucky people who move into this house. Welcome and good luck." It was signed "Charles Dempsey." A knock on the door that evening was Celia and Duncan from next door with a box of fresh vegies for us. Mum just cried and cried. I hadn't seen my brothers and sister, or mum and dad together, for nearly nine months so I cried too.

Dad set about building a three bunk system for the boys and a room to herself for Rose. We had a home.

Looking back, I think this is the first time I can remember being totally happy. I can flick back to it any time. What followed was the most settled time for our family ever. Dad said we would have our own house in five years, and we did.

Peter Dale

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