

ORAL HISTORY FILE 032 – DENNIS PIERCY

*Dennis Piercy came to Fairbridge as an 8 year old with his 5 year old brother
Barnie, arriving in Sydney in May 1955. Dennis stayed at Fairbridge for 9
years.*

*This interview was recorded at Gloucester House, Fairbridge Farm School, on
March 3, 2006.*



HILL: Dennis, let's start – what can you recall of what you know about your early childhood, starting with when you were born and where, your family, and the circumstances that led you to come to Australia; and how did you end up coming to Fairbridge?

PIERCY: Well, I was born in Birkenhead, which is across the river from Liverpool, the Mersey River, that is. And we lived in a condemned house in Birkenhead and my Father left when I was very young . . .

HILL: How many of you were there?

PIERCY: Then, there was, at that stage when I was born, there was only myself and my older brother, Ray. But he didn't come out here.

HILL: When were you born?

PIERCY: I was born in 1947.

HILL: And your younger brother, Barney?

PIERCY: He was born three years later in 1950. So, yeah, I was born in Birkenhead – was it St Catherine's Hospital? It's still there. When I went over there in 2001, and it's still there. And the circumstances were I was kept home from school a lot and had to run errands . . .

HILL: Tell us more about your childhood.

PIERCY: I didn't have much in the way of clothes and I had to go to the Docks and pick up what we knew then as coke, not Coke . . .

HILL: Roughly, what age were you when all this was happening? Do you recall some of this?

PIERCY: Yeah, oh yes. I was eight when I actually came out here, but this would have happened between say, the age of six and eight.

HILL: So, you're still living at home?

PIERCY: Still living at home.

HILL: But fairly poor?

PIERCY: Yeah, we were poor; we lived in a condemned house, like I said. And not much in the way of clothes, so I didn't get much schooling and so it was a pretty hard sort of life, but I think I handled it all right at the time. And the Welfare would come and, in the end, it was decided – they coerced my Mother - into thinking it was better to send us to Australia.

HILL: So, the decision was your Mother's, but you feel she was coerced?

PIERCY: Yes, by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, yes. So we were sent to Knock Holt to spend . . .

HILL: This is you and your younger brother, Barney?

PIERCY: Yes.

HILL: So you're eight and he's five?

PIERCY: He's five, yeah. So, my Mother – we were going to Knockholt, and she knew that – and she said, "Don't tell your brother."

HILL: Your older brother?

PIERCY: My younger brother, Barney. Because my older brother, Ray, had left home and he'd married. He left home. He was about seventeen. And so we spent four weeks at Knock Holt.

HILL: What year was this?

PIERCY: It was 1955.

HILL: Did you come out with other kids in Knockholt?

PIERCY: Yeah, we actually we went with two Knockholt kids – and I think the four Henderson children – and we came out in the same party, with the Henderson children, in May – we got here in May, we left in April and got here in May 1955.

HILL: Did you have any idea of what Australia was all about?

PIERCY: No, we were just told at Knockholt they ride horses to school, and the usual tripe that kids were fed that came out to Australia.

HILL: Yeah, we were all fed that.

PIERCY: Yeah, that's right. So, it seemed all right. We enjoyed the Knockholt – I can't remember being ill-treat there – so it must have been all right.

The trip out was okay on the ship – I got sea sick, but you know, that was all right.

HILL: Did you remember anything of the trip out?

PIERCY: Not a great deal. I was eight. I can remember I apparently got my finger caught in a deck chair. I found out that out from the Records Office. I can vaguely recollect something about it, but it healed all right. And I can remember docking in Aden and the piccaninnies diving for coins. Just a vague recollection of stopping at Fremantle and then Sydney. I don't remember much of anything else of the trip.

HILL: Do you remember arriving in Sydney?

PIERCY: I can't remember much of that even. I can only remember the first morning.

HILL: So you do remember your first morning in Fairbridge – tell us about that?

PIERCY: Well, the first morning I arrived, it was one child's duty to keep the donkey – which was the method of heating the hot water – one child had the duty of keeping that fed with timber until nine o'clock . . .

HILL: At night?

PIERCY: At night, until . . .

HILL: This would guarantee you some warm water the next morning?

PIERCY: So it would guarantee us some warm water next morning, yeah. But, somebody hadn't done their duty the night before, and they tried to make me get under a freezing cold shower and I refused . . .

HILL: This is six o'clock in the morning? Six thirty?

PIERCY: Six o'clock probably. And it was the middle of May and so the boss was sent for . . .

HILL: Why? Wouldn't you get under?

PIERCY: It was freezing. Freezing cold water.

HILL: So you're eight, and you said you're not getting under? Who was the Cottage Mother?

PIERCY: Mrs Mill was the Cottage Mother.

HILL: So she sent for the Principal?

PIERCY: Sent for the boss. The boss came down and he had this large pair of wooden tongs with which they used to get clothes out of the hot copper when they boiled in the laundry, and he threatened me with that. I was under four stone and under four feet, and he threatened me with the large wooden tongs, so naturally I got under the freezing cold shower.

HILL: How did you feel, your start at Fairbridge went?

PIERCY: I think like most kids, I was pretty fearful. And I actually had more fear at the time because the Cottage Mother wasn't too bad, she was a pretty good cook, she fed us fairly well . . .

HILL: Did you miss your Mum?

PIERCY: Oh, always. And the letters were very infrequent from my Mother and for years I never heard from her.

HILL: Did you come here thinking you would go back?

PIERCY: No. I don't think so. That thought disappeared. But years later I know . . .

HILL: You said you were fearful or frightened – any other emotions you can recall about that time? Were you lonely?

PIERCY: Oh yeah, always lonely. There were a lot of older, bigger kids in Mort Cottage and I was threatened a lot with verbal abuse and name-calling and cuts and other threats . . .

HILL: Being that age, I mean, your brother was only five, you would have been bullied a lot – the runts.

PIERCY: Yeah, that's right. And nearly every other child in Mort Cottage was bigger than me and most of them older, so I did get bullied a bit.

HILL: Did you feel you had anyone to turn to?

PIERCY: Well, I was a bit lucky because one of the older boys, he was the biggest older boy, and he'd sometimes stop the others threatening me. But then at times he told me he loathed me. So, it was a . . .

HILL: He told you what?

PIERCY: He told me he loathed me, which was a bit funny.

HILL: Did that hurt?

PIERCY: Oh that hurt, yeah. So you had very mixed up feelings, mixed up emotions, you know. But most of the time I was fearful of staff and older boys. But, because I did my jobs mostly, I didn't get into much trouble from the staff.

HILL: Did you consciously knuckle down to avoid being hit?

PIERCY: To avoid being punished, yes I did. But then you'd get called a "crawler" and that sort of thing. And you'd get verbal abuse and maybe some retribution. You might have cuts or whatever.

HILL: What other early recollections do you have?

PIERCY: I can remember, most of the better recollections were going to public school.

HILL: This is the school at Fairbridge?

PIERCY: Yes.

HILL: So you went to the Primary School on Fairbridge?

PIERCY: Yes. It was a public school, they called it a Primary School.

HILL: Did you like that?

PIERCY: Yes, I did like parts of it. I've since had my records and I always got places one to six in the class, mostly in the top three and I really tried to do well because I missed so much schooling in England and so I almost relished to learn.

HILL: Was there anybody on Fairbridge encouraging you. I know the school teachers would have been encouraging.

PIERCY: There was nobody else. I did get some encouragement from the school teachers. I can remember getting something like 96%, 98% in arithmetic one year, and the Principal, Mr Piper, stood in front of the class and praised me and I got "crawler" and all this sort of thing from the kids.

HILL: They wouldn't have liked you for that. Did you find that by doing well at school it made it harder for you at Fairbridge?

PIERCY: Yes I think so. I'm almost sure of that. Yeah, I did get a lot of verbal abuse for doing well from my peers and from older kids.

HILL: You took an unusual Secondary School course didn't you? How did that happen?

PIERCY: Well, in my sixth year in Primary School, we all sat for an exam which, if we did sufficiently well, we'd get a placement at Hurlstone Agricultural College in Sydney.

HILL: Had this happened before?

PIERCY: Yes, it had happened before, to several kids, probably two or three I think.

HILL: And then suddenly three from your year?

PIERCY: Yes, three from our year. We don't know how that happened.

HILL: What year was that?

PIERCY: 1959 – the last year in Primary School.

HILL: So, unusually, three of you won scholarships to Hurlstone?

PIERCY: Yes.

HILL: So Hurlstone waived the fees, did they – because I know they used to stay as boarders?

PIERCY: We don't know. We've never been able to find that out. But that same year I won the scholarship, I won a Leverhulme Scholarship. It was a Scholarship given by the Fairbridge Society in London and I don't recall exactly, I think it was monetary, but I don't exactly remember the amount.

HILL: Did you ever see the money?

PIERCY: I don't know.

HILL: Did you ever get your bank book when you were at Fairbridge – with all the pages cut out?

PIERCY: I don't remember even getting a bank book.

HILL: We think Harry took it. Because they cut out all the pages that would show you the deposits and withdrawals. And the balance was close to zero in everybody's case. So I think somebody was withdrawing money, because nobody ended up with any money despite money being put on their behalf into their account.

So you go to Hurlstone – how did that work? You got the train down to Hurlstone with Lennie Magee and . . . ?

PIERCY: Yes, Len Magee, myself and Robert Parker got the scholarships and we got the train down to Hurlstone as far as I remember. I think we had to change at Central and you changed for a steam train on the Liverpool line, Campbelltown line, Glenfield where Hurlstone was situated, was two stops from Liverpool at a place called Glenfield. Hurlstone Agricultural High School. So, we each spent three years there.

HILL: Did you enjoy it?

PIERCY: We did enjoy it and that was the . . .

HILL: Was it better than Fairbridge?

PIERCY: It was different there than Fairbridge. We enjoyed the freedom so much that we didn't pay attention so much to the studies. So Robert Parker, he became a day boy because his parents actually came out and took him from Fairbridge's care and I say in inverted commas, "care". And he lived in Sydney with his parents and came as a day boy and Len Magee and myself were boarders.

We did cop some ribbing from some kids. Some of it was good-natured, but by and large, in the main, most of the kids were pretty good and indeed . . .

HILL: But you felt stigmatised being from Fairbridge and Orange?

PIERCY: Yes we did, because we were down as Fairbridge kids, yeah.

HILL: And you wouldn't have had things they all had would you?

PIERCY: Oh no. We got fifty cents, fifty pence as week pocket money. And with that, we had to buy boot polish, tooth paste, all the little things that you need to live, well, besides your meals, we got the meals, the meals were thrown in as a boarder. But, with that, we managed to pool funds and we used to go to Circular Quay and to Luna Park and Taronga Park. And go to newsreels in the city and all that sort of thing.

HILL: What, at weekends and stuff?

PIERCY: Yes. We actually escaped for three years.

HILL: You've used that word before, you "escaped" from Fairbridge.

PIERCY: Yeah, it was like a prison, Fairbridge, wasn't it? It was child labour. You did, especially trainees, did an adult male's work for ten pence a week. Most of the younger children got a halfpenny or a penny pocket money, maybe up to fivepence or sixpence.

HILL: After you finished at Hurlstone – so you got an Intermediate Certificate?

PIERCY: Yes, I passed my Intermediate Certificate.

HILL: But you didn't go on to Matriculation?

PIERCY: No. I didn't get a terrific pass. I passed, but I didn't get a terrific pass because we spent too much time having a good time. And we had no mentor, nobody behind us to mentor us, and so whereas the other kids had their parents behind them, we didn't.

I did have one unfortunate happening. I was sitting at my desk, I think it was Third Year at Hurlstone at the time, and I was pointing to a big spider web out the window. And suddenly my head slammed into the desk, the teacher crept up behind me and whacked me and it cut me on the head, and I spurted blood and the teacher said, 'That's what you'll get for inattention,' or words to that effect. And so, the other students urged me to report it to the Principal, which I did, and the teacher did get reprimanded. And that was it. But the other students said if it had have happened to one of us, our parents would have become involved and the teacher would have probably got the sack.

But apart from that, there weren't too many unpleasant experiences at Hurlstone. I did meet some good kids that used to take me away to their homes for the weekend. And one

particular boy, I probably spent at least six weekends with him and his parents down on Mount Burraborang Valley, on Atlow (?) River. They had the Post Office and, at that time, down there it was a large coal mining concern down there. I had good weekends down there and I really enjoyed it, but I should have done a lot better at Hurlstone than I did.

HILL: . . . but nobody did any good at school at Fairbridge. The best people did, was get through, except for P O'Brien. He was a unique case. You see, he had a Mum . . .

So you finished Hurlstone, and what happens then?

PIERCY: Lennie Magee and myself got permission from the boss to finish our schooling – after the Intermediate Certificate, which I passed – and I myself, I was at age fifteen at that time. And so I came back as a trainee for two years on the farm.

HILL: Were you happy to be back?

PIERCY: Ah, that's a to and fro that one. Happy in some ways but I was a slightly bigger, older kid then, and so I didn't cop as much trouble as I had in the past.

HILL: Now, did you keep in regular contact with your younger brother?

PIERCY: Yeah, when we arrived at Fairbridge, which I neglected to say earlier on, my brother and I were separated. I to Mort Cottage and he was put into Canary Cottage.

HILL: Do you know why they did that?

PIERCY: To this day, I can't fathom why they did that.

HILL: So, he had even less protection, being younger?

PIERCY: Yeah, that's true. And consequently, suffered probably a bit more. I think every young child had trouble from bigger, older kids, at Fairbridge.

HILL: And from staff!

PIERCY: And from staff, yeah.

HILL: So, you're back as a trainee. What did you enjoy most and what did you enjoy least?

PIERCY: Least – probably some of the duties. I'd say piggery wasn't a real good job. It was very smelly, as you know, you'd have got first-hand experience. But I didn't find dairy too bad, I didn't find farm too bad. I found if I did as I was told, like no back-chat . . .

HILL: Was Begley still there?

PIERCY: Begley was still there then. And I think one day I was on the milk run and I forgot a can so I had to run back down the village without the cart and bring an empty can back.

HILL: So, you left the horse and cart and went to get the empty can?

PIERCY: He made me go and get the empty can on foot. He was actually a bit surprise I got back so quick. But I was fairly slim, there wasn't a lot of me. And so, yeah I didn't sort of mind dairy duties and that so much.

HILL: Did Begley kick you?

PIERCY: I myself, I can't recall having got kicked from Begley, but I know many kids did. Cuts, kicks, punches. But I just did as I was told most of the time and I tried not to make a rod for my own back. But I know a lot of kids rebelled, with good reason, and so suffered because of it.

HILL: Did you enjoy gardening? Did you work in the garden?

PIERCY: I didn't actually, I don't think I ever worked on the main vegetable garden, but I had my own garden at the Cottage and I was a Junior Farmer and a Boy Scout.

HILL: Did you enjoy those?

PIERCY: And I enjoyed that, yes. Junior Farmers and Boy Scouts and anything like that. It got you away from the drudgery of Fairbridge life.

HILL: Good point. And nobody's put it that way before. But that's spot-on.

PIERCY: And also movies, the boss would show movies at the main dining hall once every six weeks, couple of months.

HILL: I remember them being terrible. I remember showing Shakespeare to bloody six year olds.

PIERCY: Oh, I never saw those.

HILL: They're the only ones I can remember . . .

PIERCY: But I saw "Reach for the Sky", "Battle of the River Plate", "Bush Christmas" and some of the "Smiley" series.

And they were over several years. And then, as a trainee, you could go into Molong once every couple of months or something to the movies in Molong.

HILL: Friday nights, if you weren't on the Discipline List.

PIERCY: Yeah. So, I was lucky up until I was fifteen, and before I went to Hurlstone I went to go with the private family out to Wellington.

HILL: Oh yes, tell us about this.

PIERCY: There were families in lots of areas of NSW applied to have children come and stay with them from Fairbridge.

HILL: During the Christmas holidays?

PIERCY: During well, any holidays. And those that were deemed suitable, or eligible, they were allowed to go and stay with private families.

HILL: Did you enjoy that?

PIERCY: Oh, we had terrific holidays.

HILL: Did you ever ask yourself why I'm not part of a family . . . did they have kids?

PIERCY: They did have older kids. They had three older kids and they were, two of them were grown up, one of them was about three or four years probably older than me . . .

HILL: Are you still getting some communication with your Mum at this stage?

PIERCY: No, very little communication with my Mother.

HILL: Did you ask yourself why you weren't part of a family like these kids?

PIERCY: Yeah, well I did. When I was at Hurlstone I was lonely and I'd been onto the boss at Fairbridge and asked him if he could get into contact with my Mother to get her to write to me and I heard nothing. She'd moved. And I even asked like a surrogate Auntie I'd had from when I first came out, asked her if she could do anything, and she wrote back to Fairbridge to ask them to do something, but no, I had very little contact with my Mother and I was all the time I was lonely. But back to the holidays at "Bonnington". The Hosking family treated us very well. And Mrs Hosking had applied to have my brother come with us as well on holidays, but he was deemed unsuitable.

HILL: Why?

PIERCY: There was no reason given. Mrs Hosking was just told that he wasn't allowed to go. There was another fellow from Mort Cottage, Tommy McFadyan, was allowed to come with me on holidays and we spent at least half a dozen holidays at Wellington.

And I'm still in contact with the Hosking family, although Mum and Pop have passed on, I'm still in contact with the other members. One's in Canberra, one's still around Wellington, and one's in Sydney.

HILL: So you worked for two years from fifteen to seventeen on the farm as a trainee. And then Fairbridge sent you out to the wide world and they find you a job?

PIERCY: They found me a job at Condobolin on a property, a wheat and sheep property.

HILL: Doing what?

PIERCY: Doing the usual work, farm labourer. Ploughing, sowing, sheep work, foot rotting.

HILL: What was that like? Do you remember the day you left Fairbridge?

PIERCY: That's a vague recollection. I can remember . . .

HILL: How did you get to Condobolin?

PIERCY: I'm pretty sure the owner of the property came and picked me up, if I remember rightly. Oh no, I can remember Mr Newberry selecting clothes with me – the twenty pound outfit – and a case, and I can't recall whether he actually drove . . .

HILL: What year was this?

PIERCY: 1964, I turned seventeen. So, I went on the property.

HILL: What was that like?

PIERCY: I got on okay. I didn't mind the work. It was farm work, which I was sort of used to.

HILL: And where did you live?

PIERCY: I lived in one of the houses with one of the married sons. The boss, Mr Hilder (?), he lived in Condobolin, and he would just come out each day. He'd commute each day from the house in Condobolin.

HILL: Were you lonely?

PIERCY: Always. Always lonely. And his two sons had two houses on the property. It was about a four and a half thousand acre property if I can remember rightly. And I was there for twelve months doing the usual wheat and sheep work, labouring. And at the end of that time, I got four pound ten a week, was my wage, and I was giving board on top of that, and at the end of twelve months, Mr Hilder said there's a twenty acre wheat crop

bonus, and that came to about two hundred and twenty pounds I think it was. And I couldn't see any future though and, as I had wanted to join the Army since I was about fifteen, I decided I was going to join the Army.

HILL: Now, a lot of Fairbridge kids who ended up in the Army said it was the worst thing they could have done.

PIERCY: No, I didn't mind it. It was more discipline, but I decided it was the best for me. I wanted to learn a trade and when I was fifteen I thought I could join the Army and learn carpentry but at that time, I was told you had to be sixteen to do an apprenticeship in the Army. And Fairbridge wouldn't let me go until I was seventeen, because that was the rules – and they needed me on the farm to do trainee work . . .

HILL: Which means they needed you for farm production.

PIERCY: Yes. And so, after the twelve months I said, no I'd had enough on the property, and I didn't get on well with one of the property wives of one of the sons, and she'd treated me as dirt, just the farm hand . . .

HILL: So, you went into the Army – how long did you sign up for?

PIERCY: I signed up for six years straight away. But I'll just finish up there – the boss had offered me, he said, "Stay another twelve months and I'll give you fifty acres of the wheat crop." But that wasn't enough for me, I decided I really wanted to join the Army and that is what I did.

I signed up for six years and it was pretty tough, basic training and so forth, but you had some comradeship there, you weren't picked on. You had the same rules as everybody else.

HILL: At this stage, Australia's in Vietnam?

PIERCY: Yes, I think the first training team was starting to go over, I think it was February 1965 I joined the Army. So I did my basic and then I applied for Engineers and was designed Engineers as my Corps and then I went to the School of Merchant Engineering in Casula in Sydney, which is only just down the road from Hurlstone where I'd done my High Schooling.

And so I did three months basic engineering at Casula and we did bridge building, a little bit of mine warfare and all that sort of thing to do with engineering. And then I was designated my Unit which was Eighteen Field Squadron and was posted then to Wakehill in Brisbane. And we actually had as our quarters in condemned buildings in Wakehill, Brisbane.

HILL: So, did you go to Vietnam?

PIERCY: Yes, I did a tour in Vietnam in June 1968 to June 1969.

HILL: That would have been an interesting time during Tet.

PIERCY: No, just after the Tet Offensive.

HILL: Even more interesting.

What happened to you after the Army? Did you decide six years was enough?

PIERCY: Yes, actually I did Plant Operating in the Army. I did a course in Plant Operating, heavy earth moving equipment, and it happened to be the best pay at that stage for a junior ranker, which is Group 7, which is the highest pay grouping you could get. I was asked if I would go and do Corporal's . . .

HILL: Didn't you find it lonely? You'd been in an institution all your life and now you join the Army. Did you find it lonely?

PIERCY: I was lonely all the time, all my life I was lonely. But, you had comrades in the Army . . .

HILL: You had comrades too, at Fairbridge, I suppose.

PIERCY: Yeah, but I had better friends in the Army. And one particular bloke, he was in Eighteen Field Squadron with me at Wakehill, then we went to Enoggera, and when a Unit was posted to Townsville, he actually went to Puckapunyal in Victoria, and then I did a training for Commander, just after Townsville, and then my mate Geoff, he ended up at Canundra at the same time. And we were very good mates, best friends. And so we ended up going to Vietnam together, served over there together just about all our time over there, and then after Vietnam, he asked me to come and stay with him and his family for a couple of weeks in South Australia, which I did.

HILL: What did you do when you were on leave and holidays and stuff?

PIERCY: Oh well, actually, Fairbridge was my home, and quite often I came back to Fairbridge.

HILL: Because you had nowhere else to go?

PIERCY: Because I had nowhere else to go. Sometimes, I remember one time I went from Sydney to Melbourne just for a look around. And I did actually meet a bloke I knew from the Army there.

But back in my Unit, prior to getting out, I was trying to make the decision to leave and there were two fellows there, National Servicemen, who were Plant Operators, and they played a large part in me deciding to leave. I took some of their advice and ended up

deciding to leave and applied to get into the PMG. Which was then the old Postmaster-General's Department. Which had Posts and Telegraphs.

And so, I applied to go into the PMG and won a position there in the mechanical aid side of things that was heavy equipment, so it was doing some of the work that I was used to doing in the Army. Also, we did under-road work . . .

HILL: Where was this? Where were you based?

PIERCY: I was based in Brisbane. And I was told I could stay in Brisbane after I got out of the Army.

HILL: So now we're into the early '70s?

PIERCY: Yes, that's right. I actually got out in February '71. I'd previously met my wife.

HILL: Where did you meet her?

PIERCY: I met her at Cloudland Ballroom in Brisbane, dancing.

HILL: Was that a turning point for you?

PIERCY: I guess it was to a certain extent, but I saw other girls previous to that, that I'd met up at Cloudland and other places, and we used to go roller skating and when I'd been out at Enoggera, a mate and I used to go, and a few others. But actually my wife only lived two or three miles down the road from Wakehill where my first posting was in Queensland, funnily enough.

HILL: So how long did you stay with the PMG?

PIERCY: All together, I was with Telstra – and the PMG and before that it was Telecom Australia – for thirty two and a half years. And I held lots of different jobs. I transferred from mechanical aids once I got married in May '72. I transferred from mechanical aids to the line side of Telstra, and I held lots of different positions, including . . .

HILL: Looking back on it, and the role that Fairbridge played in your life, what are the best things you could say about Fairbridge? What are the best memories you have of Fairbridge?

PIERCY: The best memories of Fairbridge was Boy Scouts, Junior Farmers, the movies, but best of all, going away for private family holidays.

HILL: So, the best bits of Fairbridge were getting away from it? You said before that you escaped.

PIERCY: Escaped. Escaped from well, putting it another way, the asylum.

HILL: What would you say were the worst things about Fairbridge?

PIERCY: The worst things about Fairbridge were peer pressure when you did well, and the threat of punishment from staff and peers, and you know, being knocked around by kids. I actually didn't get knocked around too much by staff because I did as I was told. But, I could well understand those that rebelled and . . .

HILL: Of course, you came here very young and very small.

PIERCY: So I was under four stone, under four feet, so I was very small. I was small for my age and my brother was bigger for his age. I'm now about five feet seven and my brother's now about five feet eleven.

HILL: Finally, how would you summarise the whole Fairbridge thing?

PIERCY: Very very hard institution. But, in the end, at the time I hated it – some parts of it were good, but most of it was bad – but now I am very glad that I was sent to Australia to a new life . . .

HILL: That's Australia, that's not Fairbridge.

PIERCY: Australia, not Fairbridge, yeah.

HILL: Would you want your children to go through what you did?

PIERCY: Definitely not, no. If there was a better home that I knew about in a situation – but I don't think I'd ever send my kids to Australia to go through Fairbridge, anyway. But knowing what I know now, I could understand my Mother had to part with us at the time because she was in great poverty and she was also failing in health a bit. She'd apparently been hit by a Stepfather then, my Stepfather, and she was frightened that myself and my brother, Barney, were going to be hit.

HILL: She'd been abused?

PIERCY: She said she'd been abused, yes.

HILL: Did you ever meet your Mother?

PIERCY: Actually, we had her out here, brought her out to Australia in 1985. She stayed with me for three months, and my brother for three months in Sydney. She stayed with me in Brisbane for three months. And then she came back up to Brisbane and she'd had the six months, and so she went back to England because she was getting homesick but I let her know that I didn't hold any grudge or malice towards her because, in the end, I thought that being sent to Australia was the best thing for me.

HILL: Yes, we were the same . . .

The staff at Fairbridge, did you have good Cottage Mothers or bad Cottage Mothers?

PIERCY: We were reasonably lucky in Mort Cottage; because we had a Cottage Mother that I don't think abused us. She was a good cook and as we ate our night time meal at the Cottage, we were fed pretty well at the Cottage. So we weren't abused by her, although I do believe that she used to perv on the children taking their showers. As happened in many of the Cottages, I've heard. But apart from that, apart from the older kids in Mort Cottage, she was all right. But quite a few of the other staff were abusive, but I managed to keep out of their way, and just did as I was told so, consequently, I can't remember getting any beltings.

-End-