

A tale of years of institutional abuse

TERRY COLLINS

UNTIL she was in her 40s, Sharyn Killens, of Kariong, believed she was a bad person.

Now a successful entertainer, mother of two and doting grandmother of seven, Ms Killens was raised in foster care, orphanages and girls' institutions where she was subject to horrendous abuse and maltreatment.

"My mother fell pregnant to a black American serviceman and put me in foster care when I was born," she said.

"I was neglected and abused. "At the age of five, my mother put me into St Martha's orphanage, Leichhardt, where I was physically and emotionally abused by one nun in particular.

"I was beaten with a wooden coat-hanger, had my head pushed down a toilet and was constantly told I was a bad girl."

After a brief period living with her mother as a young teenager, Ms Killens ran away from home, to later be sentenced to a total of 15 months in Parramatta Girls Home and then the notorious Hay correctional facility.

"I can remember we had to



Kevin Rudd.

display our underwear every day to male and female officers so they could decide if we needed a clean pair," she said.

"We would be made to scrub the parade ground in freezing cold weather."

Married young, Ms Killens found herself with a failed marriage and two small sons in her early 20s and was on a path to self-destruction with frequent drug use before turning her life around and finding work in a school for special children and later as a singer who sailed the world entertaining on cruise ships.

She took pride of place at Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to

Story of tragedy and triumph

SHARYN Killens, of Kariong, has chronicled her early life experiences in *The Inconvenient Child*, co-written with Lindsay Lewis.

The book is a harrowing but triumphant account of her life, telling of how she eventually found the family of her American father.

Killens and Lewis will hold an authors' talk and book signing on *The Inconvenient Child* at Erina library at 3pm on Wednesday.

Admission will be free.

the forgotten Australians last week and said it was a chance for the nation to begin a healing process.

"It was a wake-up call to Australia to pay attention to the human rights of all children, past, present and future - a national statement that kids in institutions deserve respect, dignity and love," she said.

"Instead of being punished, I should have been educated, counselled and hugged."



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Sharyn Killens with a copy of her new book *The Inconvenient Child*
Picture: MARK SCOTT