

Ragged School

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

When I heard I was to come to the Ragged School I was very happy, I never thought I would get to go to school again. Please let me tell you about myself. My name is James and I am 10 years old.

My family came from Forfar in Scotland, Papa was a Mill worker there. Mama was a weaver. Papa thought the colony was a place where he might strike it rich and change our fortunes. So he spent every last penny on the tickets for the ship to get us here. He, Mama, me and my three little sisters travelled to Dundee to board the ship.

Of course Papa could only afford steerage and it was dreadful. The rats would crawl over us at night and the floor was always covered in waste and vomit. A terrible fever spread throughout the ship and both Caitlin and Marta died. Anna and I barely got sick. Mama was so sad I feared she would throw herself overboard with them.

I thought the diggings would be a fresh start, but it is so wild here. Four months and I'm still not used to all the dust, flies and noise. We walked all the way from Melbourne, it was slow going because Mama had lost her spirit.

When we arrived, Papa set up our tent and found some other Scottish men to join with. Mama went to work in the Coffee Tent and spent most of her days there. Anna was left to keep house as best she could.

Two weeks after we arrived I was helping Papa and the other men at the mine. They had got quite deep and we could barely hear them from the bottom. I was helping McKenzie turn the windlass to bring another bucket load up when there was a snap and it went loose. We heard a thud and a scream. The rope and snapped the bucket had landed on Papa's head, killing him instantly.

Since then Anna and I have kept life at our little tent going as best we can, but we are only just surviving. Mama barely comes home, so we try to run errands and do odd jobs in exchange for a bit of flour and meat.

Thank you for the opportunity to come to your school. I will work hard as I hope to be able to learn a good trade so I can help Mama and Anna out of this mess.

Yours Sincerely,

James Donaldson
