

Your say

Feeling at home

I WAS pleased to see a positive article (NS 12/6) about the North Coast Children's Home.

It has been difficult to read all the negative stories in the press and have felt that the voice of so many happy, well-adjusted adults has been blocked.

It seems the good news stories do not appeal to the press.

Thank you for giving us some space to voice our positive experiences.

This was my home between 1960-1969 following the death of our parents, and my life there was full of loving care from the matron, Miss Jean O'Neill, and the staff employed to assist her in caring for many children.

Jean became matron just six months before I was placed there with my younger brother, Phil Writchard, and younger sister.

Our other brother and sisters came to live with us as other children left, so making a place available.

The home could take 36 children, and placing six children in one go was not possible.

It was not a crowded, uncaring, abusive environment.

Each child was treated with respect and had their own personal space, including a bedside table.

Many would not have had

this in a home with their natural parents.

Caring for so many young people in an institutional setting is something many other children's homes throughout NSW struggled to achieve with the positive outcomes anywhere near that of the North Coast Children's Home.

Many of the children who were there with me went on to further education at universities, teachers' colleges, technical colleges, nursing, or settled into other careers of their choosing.

During my working career in Tasmania I have worked with the Department of Child Welfare, as it was then called, and I can assure I am glad it was the North Coast Children's Home in Lismore where I spent my adolescence.

I am concerned for the people involved in the class action against the Anglican Church claiming abuse.

As children, many were placed in the home by the courts for various reasons.

I wonder if the trauma they suffered before entering the home is the latent catalyst for their accusations?

Most of them were protected from this information as children, but it is available to them now under the Freedom of Information Act.

Many will be shocked by

what is contained in their files if they obtain access to them.

Jean O'Neill protected them from this as they were growing up.

I also wonder how many of these returned to the reunions that were arranged by us to celebrate the great life we had at the home.

It was during the last re-

Day surprise for her.

The dinner we held to honour 'our Mum' still holds great memories for me, not only to see Jean for the last time but to see how many children had returned with their husbands, wives and children to meet one of the most important, if not the most important mother figure, they had.

I was distressed to see what my home had become.

No longer was it a bright and cheerful place full of love and laughter, but a dark and depressing place.

Maybe it was this environment that Richard ('Tommy') Campion experienced when he last returned to the home.

I am glad I made this final visit because it highlighted what a great place Jean O'Neill had created for children who were not able to live with their natural parents.

Each of us were individuals with our own dreams and aspirations, and Jean did everything she could to help us achieve these.

I believe the successful person I have become today is due to the support, patience, care, and especially the love, given to me by Jean O'Neill and the North Coast Children's Home.

JENNY WELLS,
executive officer, NEEET Centre,
Tasmania.



MATRON O'NEILL: 'Our Mum'

union that I revisited the home for the final time.

By then Jean had become seriously ill and no longer the matron.

It was a special Mother's

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