

**CONFIDENTIAL****NOTES ON** AYC**ST. JOSEPH'S HOME, (NEERKOL), STANWELL, VIA ROCKHAMPTON.**

**ADMITTED 29/12/1953, AGED 2 YEARS, BY THE DEPARTMENT. OUR RECORDS SHOW SHE CAME TO NEERKOL 20/4/1953 WHICH PROBABLY MEANS SHE WAS LEFT AT THE HOME AND THE PAPERWORK TOOK TIME TO PROCESS. SHE WAS DISCHARGED FOR SERVICE ON REDACTED TO A MRS. McKENDRY AND WAS THEN AGED 15.**

24/6/1993

St. Joseph's Home, commonly called Neerkol since it was best approached from the Neerkol railway siding, was run by the Sisters of Mercy (Rockhampton Congregation) from 1885 until a decision was made to phase out institutional care of children in the 1970's. After children ceased to be accommodated at St. Joseph's which is approximately 20 kms West of Rockhampton, there were several years in which some children were still in care in group homes administered by the Sisters (with carers who were usually lay) in Rockhampton.

On the weekend of 12, 13 June, 1993, I was shown the attached article from "The Queensland Times" (Ipswich), Thursday, May 27, in which it is said that AYC **REDACTED**, a former child at Neerkol, "has publicised her book which is presently awaiting publication" about Neerkol. Little else is known except that some of the Sisters have been approached by other former Neerkol children with stories about how AYC wanted to come up to publicise this book. We hear that advertisements had been run asking people to lodge prior orders as a way of financing publication. All comment we have heard has been of dismay. Some claim to have refused to have her stay in their homes. One story is that AYC says in the book that she was pregnant while at Neerkol. Other girls from the same time claim that that was simply untrue.

In the article it is claimed that boys were sent from Neerkol to Prison Farms. This is certainly untrue and could only be a reference to the fact that some boys did go to Boys Town. In the earlier times of the home no age limit applied for boys. However, Neerkol had only female staff (religious) and there were a few instances of big boys who gave serious trouble being referred to the Department. This sometimes resulted in a transfer to Boys Town, but this was usually seen to be to the benefit of all concerned.

In the early 1970's boys over 12 years of age were no longer taken. At the time of implementation of this limit, two boys did end up being transferred to Boys Town and this was not a punishment but an opportunity for them to develop life skills suited to their academic ability. At this time one boy went on to St. Brendan's College at Yeppoon as a boarder and a fourth stayed on at Neerkol for a while and was then transferred to St. George's Home, an Anglican home in Rockhampton.

Even before this 12 years limit was introduced and certainly in years following its implementation, St. Joseph's sent boys capable of continuing their education to be

boarders at St. Brendan's College. The Brothers there were very considerate of these boys. While the boys were Boarders, the home continued to give them substantial financial and pastoral care support. Similarly over many years, girls who were seen to have academic ability even if limited, often were sent to board at the Range College in Rockhampton (Sisters of Mercy) or at St. Ursula's College in Yeppoon (Presentation Sisters). Every effort was made to ensure that children from the home were given the sort of educational opportunity they might have expected were they growing up in more usual families of the time. When I was a boarder at the Range from 1958 to 1960 I was with several Neerkol girls. As Principal of the Range from mid 1978 to 1983, I had students who were Neerkol girls. It might be worth noting that the Department of the time met about 40% of the costs of running St. Joseph's. The rest of the costs were raised through Community Support and the Congregation.

I have heard of only one Sister (Peg Walsh) being contacted by AYC and it was to tell Sister she was coming up to promote the book. She gave Peg to understand that no one would find anything objectionable in it. The Sisters have been asked to let me know if they hear anything else and they have been asked to refrain from making comment, simply referring any enquiry to me. Fr. Reg Durham, still living at Neerkol, has also been asked to refer any enquiry to the Bishop or to me. He knows AYC's Mother and also officiated at AYC's wedding.

AYC has not contacted the Congregation about her allegations. Discipline at Neerkol would at times have been considered harsh by present day standards, however my enquiries (very limited but of people with significant knowledge of Neerkol) have not revealed any hint or suggestion of sexual abuse of children in the period during which AYC was at Neerkol or at any other time. There is word around that the name of Sr. M. Constance is mentioned in the book. This Sister has since left the Congregation but again there were no reservations expressed by our Sisters about her behaviour. It is thought by some that AYC suffered as a child from a protruding bowel problem and that this would have necessitated fairly frequent attention.

Today I phoned Mr. John Taylor of CCI who asked me to record for him these notes of what I had to say. He also suggested I should notify Fr. Jim Spence which has been done. No further action has been taken.

- 25/6 Margaret - fax went to John Taylor CCI Melb.  
 - a note a copy has been sent to Jim Spence, (Bne cathedral) who has your name.  
 - copy also sent to Bishop Kieran
- 2/7 phoned Jim Spence - faxed article from "Morning Bulletin" to him.
- 7/7 Faxed these two pages to Fr Brian Lucas (Sydney) plus copies of newspaper articles 1+2.  
 Press Release rec'd 7/7