

Cheryl reflects on Life in an Institution

Thinking back, she slowly unravels the past, her face distorted into that of many, and her thoughts enriched by what would seem good. An exalted look instantaneously replaced that of blankness. Cherishing the past, she often reflected upon it with significance. She was the creation of her past; everything that happened then and that changed her; still remained, and if you were part of it you were with her always. To some her depth was inevitable; to others she was just a mere adolescent typical of many her own age.

Formidable Enemy

Society was her most formidable enemy, and as one knows to fight society is a losing battle. Manipulative powers were only one of many skills which she possessed. But all this was buried well within her now, as depression is one's sole devastator.

She is just one of my many acquaintances whilst in institutions, who suffered from this depression or should I say emotional trauma, experienced when one enters an institution. Some recovered, others however did not.

Meaningless

Life can seem meaningless without parents, as respect for yourself holds no significance when you have no one to respect yourself for.

Many who have lacked affection when younger often turn to sex, and become quite promiscuous, as they feel whilst having sex they have someone (at the time) who is giving them love and affection.

Alcohol and drugs are often used for an escape from reality as reality can often destroy one's-self as much as depression.

Many Problems

To be placed in an institution you immediately gain some kind of independence and are also forced to face many problems in which you are expected to cope with. Responsibilities of a sixteen year old may be placed upon that of a thirteen-fourteen year old. This is why I feel most of these adolescents appear to be more mature in comparison with one who has lived in a normal home life situation.

Many Benefits

There are also many benefits of being in an institution as you are not all at once at the age of eighteen exposed to the clutches of the outside world, which consists of many problems and responsibilities. I feel, a home life situation is too protected in many senses.

Suicide "attempts"

Suicide attempts are often used as a means of attracting attention, one who has not been associated with institutions does not realise that often this occurs. Attention is a necessity and it depends on the individual how much he or she needs; but no one can do without it. Those who need a lot more than others cannot always be given it, therefore suicide and other such drastic methods seem to be the only answer.

Not many of these teenagers form relationships with the staff for it places a lot of responsibility on them, such as behaviour.

Those that do, their relationships are based on hate, for they cannot, as yet, have a normal relationship whether it be because they have never had one before, or previous relationships haven't worked out.

Boyfriends of some of these adolescents are often looked upon as father images — others are just there as attention givers.

Lesbian Relationships

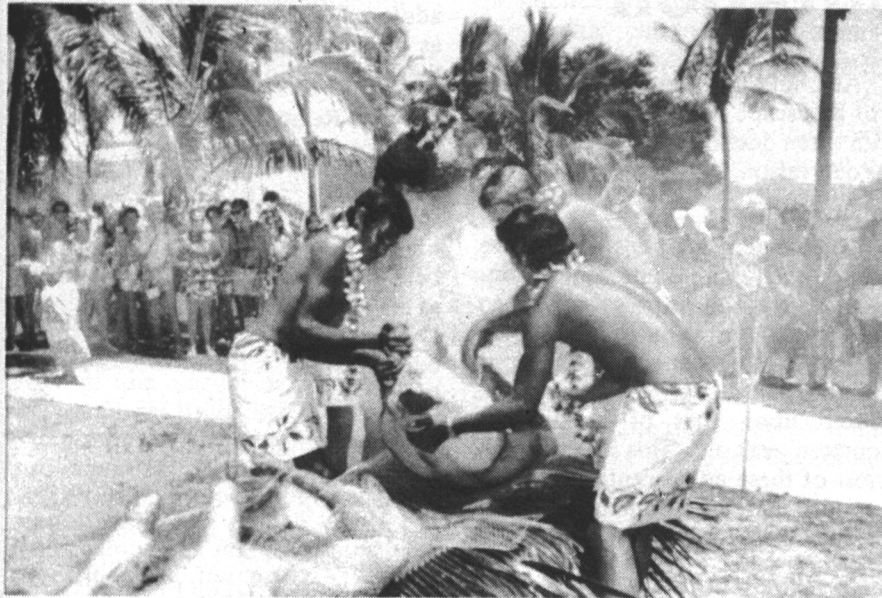
Lesbian relationships are quite usual also — living so close to somebody over a long period of time it is often hard to distinguish between sisterly love and love, such as in a hetero-sexual relationship.

There are various other reasons but I feel this is the most basic and typical. ●

This article was contributed by Cheryl, a 16 year-old girl who lives in Unit 64, a co-educational residential program for adolescents situated at Brighton, a suburb of Melbourne, Vic.

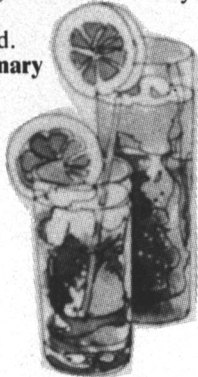


Under the palms a polynesian feast

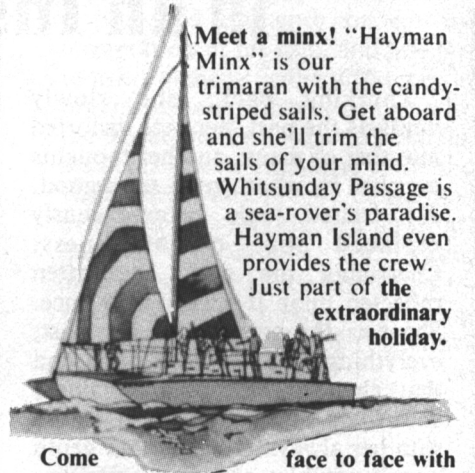


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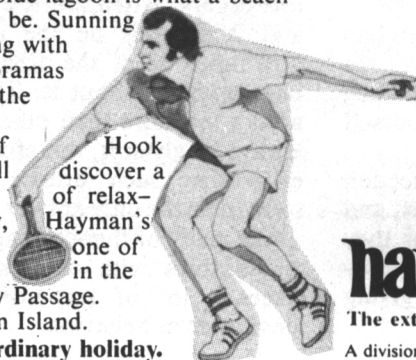
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