

## A LIFE APART

**A pilot study of residential institutions for the Physically Handicapped and the Young Chronic Sick.**

E.J. Miller and G.V. Gwynne,  
Tavistock Publications, 1972.

The initiative for this study came from residents of Le Court Chesire Home who had been trying to involve a social worker in a research role. Confusions arising out of early correspondence illustrated the problems involved in transactions between the handicapped and the able-bodied. The authors developed an action research role with this institution and studied four others in some depth. In addition 17 similar institutions were visited. The study tries to get at what is really involved in the residential care of the physically handicapped and to discover possible ways of bringing about changes. The action research part of the study enabled staff, inmates and management at Le Court to begin re-defining roles and expectations. The authors are cautious in claiming solutions to problems basically intractable in institutions of this type.

Institutions for 'cripples' are said to be different from others because they contain inmates suffering irreversible conditions, who only leave the institutions when they die. The study seeks to show that clear identification of the primary task of these institutions should lead to the provision of more appropriate models of care.

Part 1 examines the status of the 'crippled' and the social and psychological consequences of the status. The central thesis is that these institutions cater for people who are socially dead, rejected by society. They remain in the institution until social death is replaced by physical death. The authors



*'Developing unfulfilled capacities'*

postulate that because this situation is too painful to admit openly, two models of care have developed — associated with two sets of values used as defence mechanisms — the humanitarian value that it is good to prolong life and the liberal value that handicapped inmates are really normal'. The Warehousing Model of care has the primary task of prolonging life or rather of postponing death. The Horticultural Model has the primary task of developing unfulfilled capacities in the direction of greater independence.

Part 2 analyses the functioning of the five institutions using the open-system theory and the concept of primary task. Using this model the import, conversion, export processes of the institutions are analysed

with the conclusion that institutions must care for dependence, independence and participation. The complexities of roles and relationships point to the need for frequent re-appraisal of the institutional task. By accepting death as the 'end product' the authors cut through our confused thinking about institutions. If they are correct their assertion that 'the institution that learns to manage terminal care and becomes a good place to die in, will become a better place to live in' (p.179), has important consequences for future institutional provision.

This is an important book which contributes much to our understanding of institutional processes as well as being a sensitive account of residential care of the handicapped.

# —SHADOWS OF CHILDHOOD—

To write a book about one's childhood "exposing the raw sensitive wounds" under a pseudonym is one thing; to write that story under your own name takes a special kind of courage. So often there are stories that need to be told but the teller must be prepared to come under the microscopic stare of friends, colleagues, and critics. Ray Willich and family have shown this special kind of courage.

The writing style of "Shadows of Childhood" moves and grows with the writer. The early chapters are full of immense feeling but they lack a flow; they are stilted and gawky — a little like the raw awkward child. The later chapters allow the writer to give life as well as feeling to the

characters. The scene of the dancing instructress is full of warmth and movement even when it is "leading with the hip" and guiding "with the thigh". Terms such as "sphinx face" and "autistic oriental" will mean a lot to those who have suffered the indignity and embarrassment of being taught ballroom dancing.

The writer is able to graphically capture scenes that will remain in your memory long after you have read the book — the poignant scene of a melodramatic mother seeking attention and love at the expense of her child as she gestures to slash her wrists.

The story is not one of condemnation of parents who maltreat their

children but one of understanding of stresses that are placed on many parents. It is a story seen through the eyes of a sensitive child who is rejected and hurt by parents ill-prepared and equipped for the task of raising a family under harsh external pressures. Parents who face a day to day battle to survive cannot be expected to plan objectively for the emotional and educational needs of their children.

It is a great pity that in the latter part of the book further discussion is not given to the problems of children in residential care. This is only touched on briefly by the writer who because of his position as Superintendent of Allambie, is not allowed to develop his argument on the need for dispensation of parental rights of consent to adoption. His statement that the blame for the present situation does not rest with the Social Welfare Department is questionable.

There are many who would further disagree that there has been a significant change in the philosophy of the Department in relation to Child Care; even if we can agree that the Department has had a "philosophy". In the past century our legislation re Child Care has changed very little. Our intentions in the field of Child Care may have changed in the last 100 years from protecting society to protecting the rights of the child, but it is a different proposition to claim that this is borne out in practise, or even legislation.

All parents who read this book will find it will help them understand the damage that can be done to the young impressionable and sensitive minds of their children. At times the story appears to unfold like a Freudian case history but for all of that it is without the tiresome and seemingly endless footnotes annotations.

Shadows of Childhood is a sensitive, readable book which I hope is not the last word from Ray Willich.

VISA

## SHADOWS OF CHILDHOOD reflections of a maltreated child

Ray Willich

