

A WORD FROM THE CEO/PRINCIPAL

Dear Friends,

In our last edition of Mater Dei Matters, I spoke of the many wonderful celebrations that we had planned for this our 50th birthday year. As we approach the end of our 50th birthday I can report that we have had a year that we will all remember for many years to come. This year we hosted a very successful 50th birthday Golf Day, our inaugural Mater Dei Race Day, a very special Foundation Dinner and we had the birthday party to end all birthday parties for the students of Mater Dei and our friends from neighbouring and "sister" schools.

This year also saw the launch of "Journey to the Heart", a collection of 50 stories that tells the Mater Dei story throughout our 50-year history as a school for children with intellectual disability. This book brings to life the great happiness, the sadness, the successes and the disappointments that have been a part of our history. It does so through the eyes of the people that have been a very important part of our journey, the students, the Sisters, the teachers and staff, parents and the many friends of Mater Dei. I must confess to being quite a fan of this book as it has provided me with a wonderful insight into the fabric and substance that make up this very special place.

"Journey to the Heart" is a product of the tremendous energy, great faith, commitment and hard work of Sr Jeanie Heininger sgs who inspired, planned, edited and truly gave life to the book. Journey to the Heart is not only a wonderful project, it is also a great read and I have become fascinated by the experiences of the many people who have been part of our history. The stories that most amaze me are those told by the families and, in particular, the children who have been part of Mater Dei. I have included a few passages from two very powerful stories. One story is that of an ex-student titled Memories of an Ex-Student and the second, Phoebe's Story, is a story from a parent. Both stories provide wonderful insights into the personal journeys of two very special people.

Memories of an Ex-Student

"My family and Mater Dei helped me to live my life as positively as possible. So here is my story.

I began my secondary school years in 1982 as a timid little girl from the Central Coast but time, and Mrs Bromley's tender care, soon changed me! I learned to make a bed with hospital corners,

supervised by Mrs Hyeronimus and, since I'd never made a bed before in my life, it was quite a challenge.

Many other experiences followed such as choral festivals, public speaking, integration at John Therry High and a wonderful period at St Patrick's College in Campbelltown. Life was full at Mater Dei, with no time to dream of home.

In my second year I joined the cottage programme and learned many new skills such as shopping, cooking, cleaning and managing my own life – skills I use to this day. I stayed at the cottage programme for the rest of my time at



Frank with Phoebe whose story is featured in the book "Journey to the Heart - Mater Dei 50 Years, 50 Stories".

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Mater Dei and this has been very valuable to me, as I now live in my own home unit in Ryde. I wonder if I could be doing this if it had not been for that early training.

Since leaving Mater Dei I have worked in many workplaces. Some of these were happy experiences and others not so pleasant, but I suppose this is part of life in the real world. As a person with a disability, I have discovered that not everyone is as accepting as the people of Mater Dei. I have completed two TAFE courses and I hold a current Senior First Aid Certificate. I have worked at a preschool for three years, as a clerical assistant at the Open College of TAFE and also as a clerical assistant at a Film Archive Centre, and a customer services officer at a takeaway food shop.

I do not regard myself as a second-class citizen just because I have a disability, but I am determined to make the most of myself and my life. I believe that God wants me to be the best I can be with the talents He has given me."

Cathy

Phoebe's Story

Life with a child who has a disability has changed us. We are no longer the same people we were before Phoebe was born. We have our ups and downs like everybody. At times it's heart wrenching to watch Phoebe trying to grasp something that comes naturally to other children, or to keep up with other kids, but she amazes me with her compassion and love, and delight in her sister's and brother's achievements.

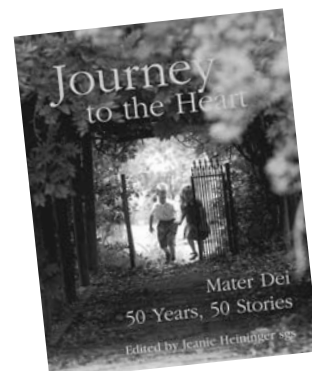
We have learned so much and still have much to learn but we are very grateful that this one little child, this beautiful little girl with her mop of curls and cheesy grin, and oh so tight hugs, has changed us forever. We gain inspiration from Phoebe and knowledge from other parents and those who work with Phoebe. We are determined to fill her life with happiness, love, dreams and memories to treasure. It's only fair we give this to her. It's what she has given to us!

Donna

The same spirit that was so much a part of Mater Dei in 1957 is still present in 2007 as we continue to see children and young people with disabilities do extraordinary things. We are certainly better resourced and we have a wonderful community supporting us, but our work remains that which the Sisters of the Good Samaritan began, to provide love, hope and compassion in our communities. The Sisters provided us with wonderful role models; the challenge for us is to bring the same love, dedication and commitment to our work at Mater Dei. In doing so we continue their work in building inclusive communities and in building a world in which all people are treated with respect and dignity.

I thank you for your on-going interest and support of Mater Dei and I wish you a happy and holy Christmas.

Frank Pitt



"Journey to the Heart"

To order phone (02) 4655 7481 or visit our website.

\$30 a book (plus postage).