

HOLLY'S STORY

Mater Dei Year 12 Satellite Class student and school captain, Holly Levers, is the recipient of the Mater Dei Peace Prize Award for 2008. 'Peace' is the motto of Mater Dei. The Peace Prize is awarded to the Year 12 student who best exhibits a "commitment to peace", a key value of Benedictine spirituality which underpins all that we do at Mater Dei. This award is like the "icing on the cake" for Holly and her family. Here, Holly's mum, Karen, gives an insight into their lives – so far!



Our lives changed dramatically on Saturday May 21, 1994 when finally, after many years of waiting and filling in forms, we were to be the proud parents of two girls. Shauna was 10 and Holly 4 when they came into our lives.

It was not an easy time for any of us. The girls suddenly had a new Mum and Dad and we had two beautiful girls to look after and love.

The years progressed with Shauna attending primary school and Holly starting pre-school and loving it. We were taking Holly to Parramatta each week for early intervention until we could change over to a service in Campbelltown, closer to home. We started to take Holly to many different therapists. She eventually learnt to talk, thanks to a lot of help from videos of the Wiggles (a children's band), which we would watch over and over again, with Holly singing and dancing her way around the house.

The year Shauna went to high school was also the year that Holly started at "Big School". She was so excited to have a uniform like her big sister. I worked in the Bankstown area so Holly started in an "IO" (special education) class at a local primary school where she stayed for 2 years. It wasn't an ideal setting for our sweet little girl who was picked on and had her lunch stolen by lots of students including fellow members of the "IO" class.

A friend had two nephews who went to Mater Dei and suggested we contact the school. So we rang them and had an interview with Mrs Pamela Templeton (Assistant Principal). We were delighted when our gorgeous blonde haired, timid year 6 girl was offered a place at Mater Dei.

Holly started in an all girl class with Mrs Shannon Stanizzo where she made a new friend, Deanna, who just happened to have a brother in year 7 at Mater Dei. Paul went home and told his Mum about this cute girl who had just started at his school and how he was going to marry her one day! Well they are still close friends and have visions of spending their life together.

On November 11, 1997 we received a phone call from our Burnside case worker to say our adoption application for the girls had been rubber stamped by the magistrate that morning. Wow, the excitement and the emotions were running very high that day. I was able to ring Shauna at her school and explain to the principal what had happened and they put her on the phone to me; she was so excited and cried. We told Holly when she came home from school. She was excited "cause no-one can take me away from Mum and Dad now".

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We could see Holly thriving in the safe and secure environment at Mater Dei, a place where she could be her self and had many friends who accepted her for who she was. She was able to work to the best of her ability and at her pace with extremely supportive teachers and teacher's assistants. We were so thrilled when Holly was elected School Captain for 2008. She thrived on being able to represent her school at various functions. We attended a World Youth Day event at St Scholastica's College at Glebe and who stood up and spoke in front of a

room full of Pilgrims and the Archbishop of South Africa? Our Holly. We were so proud of her. Yes she made a few stumbles, but the Pilgrims encouraged her, cheering and clapping. What an achievement for this young lady who only a few years before wasn't able to speak to any individual that she wasn't familiar with.

This year Holly attended Mater Dei's Satellite Class at John Therry High School for 3 days per week. This has really helped her self-confidence. For her work placement Holly has been working in a pre-school and has just loved being with the children and helping them. This is what Holly does best, helps people. She has great patience. She comes home each Friday and talks about the children and what they have done that day. Recently Holly has started Ten Pin Bowling with Special Olympics on a Saturday afternoon. This has turned out to be a real social occasion, meeting up with current students and past-students from Mater Dei, as they compete in tournaments and have a wonderful time.

Holly graduated from Mater Dei this year and will start at Macarthur Disability Services in February 2009. This will be a big change for all of us. Holly will go from being a schoolgirl into living in the big wide world.

Thank you to all the Mater Dei teachers, teacher's assistants, taxi-drivers, office staff and students for the wonderful encouragement that they have always given to Holly. Mater Dei has given Holly the opportunity to participate in a whole new area of learning and to develop skills that will stay with her for the rest of her life.

Karen Levers