

## Fearful: Lyn Overton

A hot summer's day 1958, Jane walking home from the local pool, barefoot, speedo togs, towel over the shoulder. A friend, Sonia, lived opposite the pool, Jane stopped to talk. They sat on the fence chatting, oblivious of the world around them.

A police car cruised by, they called out, 'get some clothes on, get home or we will have you for being *exposed to moral danger*'. Sonia rushed inside; Jane ran the half mile home, terrified, told her Mum. Mum got very angry, 'who do they think they are?' and then she said quickly, 'you had better wear a top in future, you are not a child anymore. Next thing they will want to put you into Parramatta Girls Home.'

Jane had heard of Parramatta Girls Home, a girl from primary school had gone there it was, Jane thought, for 'bad' girls. Jane knew she was not 'a bad girl', but it scared her all the same.

1966 at Crown Street Women's Hospital as a student midwife Jane was on her first rotation to the Labour Ward. Her job was to admit women, assist the midwife or Dr with the birth, wash, weigh, and label, then dress the newborn and when they were both ready take mother and baby to the ward.

The new patient had arrived, Jane went to admit her. She was distressed, in early labour, wearing Parramatta Girls Home school uniform. Her angst troubled Jane. Only 14, a child, she was a ward of the state, charged with being neglected and *exposed to moral danger*. Jane thought back on her experience several years earlier and felt a cold shudder.

She was not the only one from Parramatta Girls Home to come to Crown Street during that year; it was always very hard to see the girls, children, so wretched, defenceless, like animals in the spotlight. Most were the victims of sexual abuse, usually a 'family friend', or relative. No option for abortion, the going rate for those who could afford to seek it was £500. Only the very wealthy, the well-connected could come into hospital for a hush-hush abortion.

In recent years, the abusive 'in home' treatment of the 'Parra girls' has been laid bare, uncovered, the term 'exposed to moral danger' now had a new meaning. Jane realised with horror that some of the pregnancies may have been a result of abuse within the home.