

PERRY *house*

“Hello Mr Perry!” they called out. As he walked the corridors of Pentridge Prison, Brian Perry’s name would echo round the building. Many of the intellectually disabled young men he had watched over at Turana had graduated to Pentridge, but they had not forgotten him.

INTELLECTUALLY disabled people are like foreigners in their own land. Forever misunderstood, misinterpreted, disregarded, excluded. When they are locked up in prisons, they are vulnerable. When they are released, they are the least likely to be given support.

Wayne was sent to Pentridge. At first it was not so obvious that he was a bit slow but before long he found himself in the clutches of an older prisoner who offered to 'protect' him – in return for sexual favours. He was paid with a can of Coke. This older prisoner hired him out to other prisoners.

With de-institutionalisation came the promise of support services in the community. Promises were not fulfilled. Many lived unsupported and, with few options for accommodation, homelessness was common. Prisons came to be 'home' for many.

When the intellectually disabled offend, there lies the challenge of negotiating that tricky path between punishment and care. When their offences are serious, the challenge involves protecting both the community

and the offender. In 1991, the Department of Community Services provided the funds for the Brosnan Centre to house David who had committed arson and sex offences and who could not be released from custody without supervision.

Money was provided for renting and staffing a house in Brunswick, where David was safe and cared for and where he did not pose a risk to others. He became the first of many to come there. With the arrival of more residents, a larger house was needed and another property was obtained nearby.

Brian Perry worked at Turana with the 'special needs kids'. It was clear he had a gift for this work. Brian had patience and he understood the challenging behaviour of these young

people. Bernie Geary, the Director of the Brosnan Centre, asked Brian to come and work in this new project. Brian was respected in the justice system. Many new referrals came because those who worked in the youth training centres and prisons knew the work Brian did.

Brian's other love was football umpiring. Controlling the behaviour of testosterone charged footballers was probably a lot easier than the less predictable work he did at the Brosnan Centre. Brian died suddenly of a heart attack while umpiring a game. When a purpose built residence in Reservoir was opened in 1996, it felt right to name it Perry House. Caring for some of the most vulnerable and forgotten people in our community is a gift. Brian used his gift well.

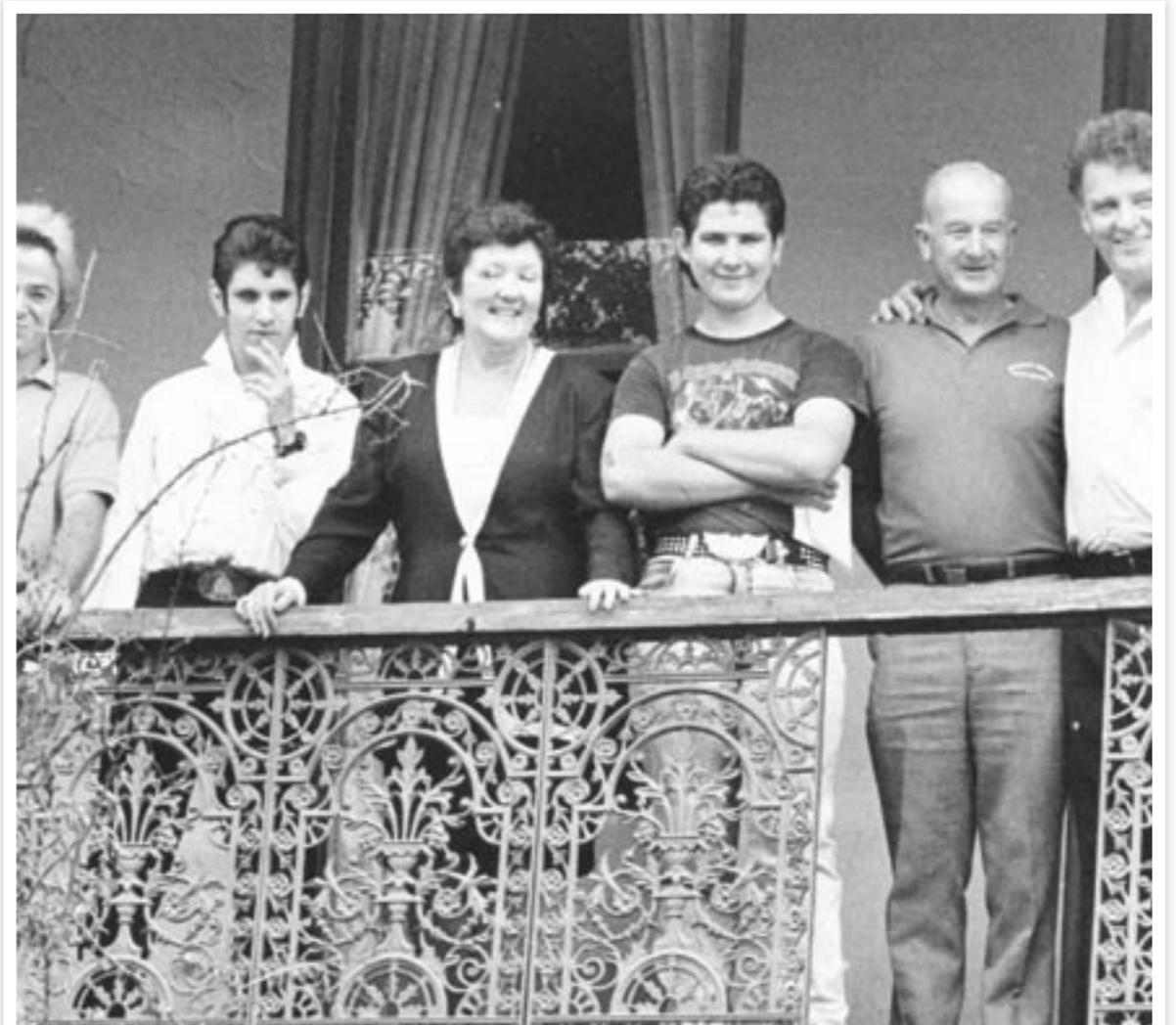
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Rob Ware and Brian Perry



Former Victorian Premier, Joan Kirner, with Brian Perry, Bernie Geary and young people from Perry House