

*For the Love of Children.* By David Buxton Pitt (Pitt Publishing, 1999, purchased direct from the author, 2/82 Westbrook Street, East Kew, Vic. 3102. ISBN 0 646 38502 X.)

David Pitt has had a distinguished career as a paediatrician in Melbourne and this is a characteristically modest yet valuable memoir of a medical life. After an undistinguished academic performance at university (aided to considerable degree by his interest in extra-curricular activities such as writing and the politics of the 1930s, and by a frankly discussed unhappy relationship with his father), he found his vocation in the gloomy building on Pelham Street that housed the Children's Hospital.

War service, marriage and a young family saw him in general practice in Oakleigh before he took the first step into specialist paediatrics when John Colebatch invited him to become his assistant at the Royal Women's Hospital. Here Pitt began a pioneering survey of birth defects and later a study of the effects of maternal rubella on foetal development, resulting finally in a prize-winning Doctorate of Medicine (1962). In 1959 he abandoned his new Collins Street practice to work at the Kew Cottages, an association with mental retardation that was to last seventeen years. Pitt does not shrink from describing the horrors that were hidden from public scrutiny of the back wards of mental and physical disability in the 1950s and 1960s. If he achieved much, and he did, Pitt admits to frequent depression at the immensity of the task and the limitations of funding for these forgotten children.

The account he provides in this memoir of those years—of the medical breakthroughs, the changes in staff training and roles, the gradual unravelling of the causes and nature of neurological disability—is a major contribution to a much-neglected history. Among his contributions was the advancement of the diagnosis of phenylketonuria (PKU) and the successful introduction of the Guthrie test to Victoria (though fatally delayed at the Royal Women's Hospital through the conservatism of the medical superintendent). Ironically, if the story of mental disability management over the past forty years is one of steady demedicalisation, then the 'medicalised' Kew Cottages Pitt entered in the summer of 1959 possessed a nursing staff singularly ignorant of basic nursing care of children in extreme hot weather or even of

those with simple fractures. They had the uniforms, but too little of the knowledge.

But the personal story is also valuable in this memoir. Pitt comes from a literary family, his cousin being the late Kathleen Fitzpatrick whose portrait of their shared early lives as grandchildren at 'Hughenden', *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, has become a classic. He too is a sensitive and perceptive observer of families, including his own, as well as a man with a strong spiritual life. How his family and his faith have given him the strength to be a good doctor to so many for so long is just as important a story to tell.

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