

A school's brutal history



Staff photo — Duane A. Laverty

Sherry Matthews, author of a new book about the Waco State Home, stands in front of one of the home's old dorm buildings, now part of the Waco Center for Youth.

Book details abuse, neglect at now-closed Waco State Home

By J.B. Smith

Tribune-Herald staff writer

For nearly six decades, the state of Texas plucked tens of thousands of children out of troubled homes and sent them to a Waco campus that was fenced in by chain link and barbed wire.

From what the Waco public could observe, the Waco State Home provided those youths a break. They had suffered neglect, hunger and sometimes abuse in their families. Now they got three square meals a day, a decent education, and a daily routine of hard work and discipline to prepare them for the future.

The children rarely left the 94-acre campus on the edge of town, but newspaper accounts through the years portrayed it as a haven of wholesome activities: football, camp outs, soapbox derbies, theater productions and an on-campus farm that produced a cornucopia of food.

Only now is a darker side of life at the home coming to light.

In a new book, alumni of the home describe decades of routine beatings, humiliation and sexual abuse that they were powerless to stop.

In "We Were Not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home,"

See SCHOOL, Page 4A



Boys who lived at the Waco State Home work on the on-campus farm.

Photo from "We Were Not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home"

SCHOOL

From Page 1A

Austin author Sherry Matthews presents oral histories of 57 alumni who lived at the home between the 1920s and the 1970s.

In researching the book, she delved into records held by the state and by the home's official archivist, finding evidence that problems at the home were often hushed up.

The home at North 19th Street and Park Lake Drive closed in 1979, and the campus became the Waco Center for Youth, which continues to provide inpatient care for emotionally troubled children.

Good, bad memories

In the book, some Waco State Home residents have fond memories of experiences that helped them become successful adults. But many recall widespread abuse and name the same long-dead staff members as abusers.

They tell of a 250-pound disciplinarian named C.B. Whigham, whose paddle drew blood and who broke a 14-year-old boy's wrist for smarting off to a dorm matron.

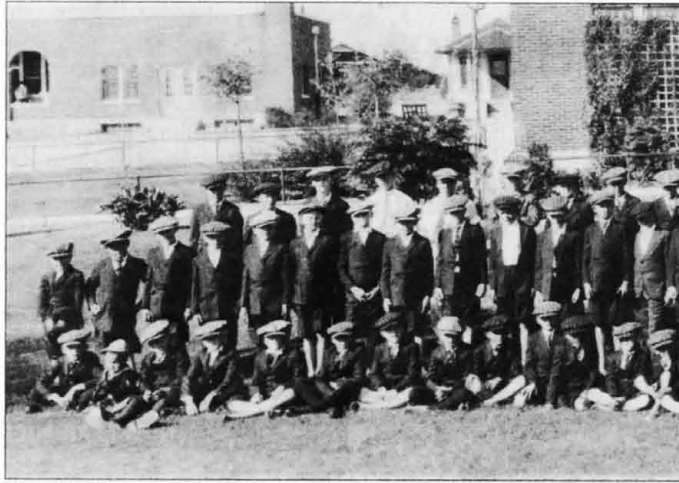
They tell of a staff member who raped and impregnated girls, and another who routinely forced young girls to scrub the showers naked while he watched.

The alumni recall how they were threatened with beatings or removal to the Gatesville juvenile prison if they squealed or tried to leave.

Carolyn Jean Lewallen, a Waco resident who lived at the home from 1949 to 1962, recalls getting daily beatings with a split baseball bat and having a male dorm parent who watched the girls dress.

"We knew not to tell anybody if we were abused," Lewallen told interviewers for the book. "You couldn't trust anyone on staff."

The book, published by University of Texas Press, is harrowing in its descriptions



"We Were Not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home"

Many residents of the Waco State Home were not orphans, but the children of parents who were unable to provide for them. At the home, they got an education and three meals a day.

and Matthews expects it will be controversial among the home's alumni. She said it's not the book she set out to write three years ago.

She intended it to be a self-published coffee-table book for the home's alumni, and she announced the project at a 2008 reunion of the Waco State Home.

She became interested in their stories while attending reunions with her brother Bing, the sole survivor of three brothers who lived at the home in the 1950s.

She found plenty of ex-students willing to talk. She said many of the alumni spoke about the abuse without prompting. And she chose to run those stories that she could corroborate.

"What this book did was to give a voice to alumni, including those who were abused and humiliated," she said.

"There's a lot more abuse I heard about that isn't in the book. What's left in the book are stories that are confirmed by so many people, there's no question. Clearly, I was not trying to do a smear job on the Waco State Home."

Larry Willeford, president of the Waco State Home Ex-Students Association, said he's glad the book is coming out. He said he avoided abuse when he was at the home from 1960 to 1963, but he has heard the stories.

"It's very intense reading because I know so many people in that book," he said.

Matthews said a culture of abuse began at the home in the early 1940s and continued until 1974, when a reforming superintendent took charge.

The home's beginnings

The home opened in 1923 on land that had been part of Camp MacArthur during World War I.

It grew to 379 children by 1935, the height of the Great Depression. During the Depression, a former judge named Robert Patterson was superintendent of the home. Dorothy Diekmann of Fort Worth, who attended from 1928 to 1941, fondly recalls his leadership.

"He was just like a father to us," Diekmann, 87, told the Tribune-Herald. "When Mr. Patterson left, I just cried. I loved that man. He loved children."

In her interview for the book, she describes how a climate of love changed to fear in 1941, when the State Board of Control fired Patterson and hired Arthur Wiebusch as superintendent.

Wiebusch, a Waco traveling machinery salesman, had political connections but appeared to have no experience in working with children.

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Lawrence, a former Gatesville State School for Boys worker. One boy wrote that children were being brutalized for infractions as minor as making a sandwich in the dining room.

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The state board of control held secret hearings at the home in fall 1942, in which employees detailed beatings that left children bruised and bleeding. In the meantime, a McLennan County grand jury found "grave irregularities" in the home's discipline procedures but declined to indict anyone.

Sexual abuse

Lawrence was fired in late 1942, but teachers would testify that he continued to visit girls at the home in the next year and even kept one out overnight, taking her to a bar. Once McLennan County law enforcement began investigating the incident, he fled to Louisiana, according to the book.

In the book, Diekmann said a caseworker at the home began having sex with girls at the home after Patterson left and got at least two girls pregnant. The caseworker she named later became a top official at the home.

In an interview for this story, Diekmann said one of those girls was her own younger sister, now deceased. Diekmann said the girls were sent to a state mental hospital when they became pregnant.

"The doctor at the mental hospital gave them a thorough examination and said, 'There's nothing wrong with these girls. They're pregnant,'" she said.

Diekmann said her sister's child was put up for adoption and the incident was hushed up.

After mounting evidence of abuse, state officials fired Wiebusch in August 1943.

Wiebusch's successor, Ben S. Peek, had experience as principal of South Junior High School, and the Waco Times-Herald gave him a glowing recommendation.

"So far as those poor kids are concerned, God must have been hovering around the state board of control when it looked over Texas and finally said of Ben Peek, 'That's the man for them,'" the newspaper said in an editorial.

Peek acquired new farmland for the home and improved its school system.

But Matthews found evidence that he also denied parental visits and transferred children to other institutions without authorization.

Peek also hired C.B. Whigham, a house parent and disciplinarian whom alumni in Matthew's book consistently portray as a bully.

"We called him 'the Beat-er,'" alumnus Charles Goodson said in the book. "He was a sadist. This guy loved it. . . . He was a big man, weighed about 250 pounds."

Tommy Turner, who lived at the home from 1947 to 1957, tells of how Whigham picked on a junior high school boy whose leg had been disfigured in a car accident. One

night, he dragged the boy out of bed and into a locker room, Turner recalls. The other boys rushed to see what was happening.

"What we saw was a fist-fight, not a disciplining," he states in the book. He said the boys ganged up on Whigham and gave him a "thrashing" until Whigham's wife intervened.

"She saw her husband on his knees on the floor, his white T-shirt covered in blood," he recounts. "She started crying and screaming, 'Don't hit him anymore. Let him alone!'"

Other alumni tell of how a group of older boys finally stood up to Whigham and got him fired. But a few years later, after Peek left, Whigham was rehired and stayed on until 1970.

Change in leadership

The state fired Peek in 1954 for unexplained reasons. In 1955, Herbert Wilson, an assistant director of the Texas Department of Public Welfare, began a 10-year term in which he was widely praised for his professionalism.

But the abuse continued, according to alumni accounts. In addition to Whigham, alumni name several other dorm parents as abusers, including a man named William "Pops" Taylor, who oversaw a girls' dorm with his wife.

Neelee Thames Walker, who lived at the home from 1957 to 1964, remembers Taylor's routine.

"Every Saturday morning, we had to strip naked and get on our hands and knees in the bathroom and scrub the floor," she told an interviewer. "Papa Taylor seemed to think this was the only method of cleaning the floor."

Linda Weeks, who lived at the home from 1950 to 1966, told a similar story.

"He more or less made us fondle him when no one else was around," she told an interviewer.

Buddy Tucker, who lived at the home from 1952 to 1961 and is now a retired mechanic in Waco, said in an interview

for this story that he knew of at least one boy who was sexually abused, but most boys refused to talk about it.

Tucker said he had a staff member deliberately break his right finger by twisting it and Whigham broke his wrist during a paddling session when he was about 14.

Tucker said that at other times he got along with Whigham and years after he graduated, he "reconciled" with the worker.

"He was a pretty good coach," he said. "He had some good points and he had some bad points, too."

School reform

The end of the Waco State Home began when a Baylor student began volunteering there in the 1960s.

Rebecca Canning, now Brumley, would write her master's thesis on the home. And when the job of superintendent came open in 1974, she applied, with the short-term goal of reforming the institution and the long-term goal of closing it.

A landmark 1971 decision by Texas federal judge William Wayne Justice in *Morales v. Turman* had begun major reforms at state institutions.

The judge ruled that arbitrary beatings, solitary confinement and other routine practices were "cruel and unusual," and he shut down the Gatesville juvenile facility.

When Brumley was appointed, she banned corporal punishment and began trying to make the Waco State Home seem more like a home. She shut down the commercial laundry that had relied on child labor and she tore down the high fence.

"I think (the home) was seen as somewhat isolated," she said. "The kids would only come out in long buses, and the huge fence gave the impression that it was an enclosed arena."

She opened up more extracurricular activities and ended chapel services, encouraging local churches to integrate the children into their congregations. And

she started working with the children's families to find permanent homes, often with relatives.

In an interview for this story, Brumley said she saw little future for caring for children in big institutions and even after she left as superintendent, she testified in favor of closing the home.

By that time, she said, the new emphasis on adopting out children or finding foster care for them had caused the population to dwindle. Only a small population needed institutional care for emotional difficulties.

When the Waco State Home closed and was converted to the Waco Center for Youth, many of those residents stayed on.

Brumley, who now lives in Fort Worth, said she never tried to investigate or expose prior administrations at the home, but she is glad that alumni have stepped forward to tell their stories.

"It always serves a purpose to tell the truth," she said.

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States find incentives don't mean new jobs

In Nebraska, Republican Gov. Dave Heineman has proposed a \$16.5 million initiative aimed at attracting jobs while saying he will not raise taxes.



Associated Press — Nati Harnik

Governors across US finding tax rates have little effect on economic growth

By Beth Fouhy
Associated Press

NEW YORK — It's recently become an article of faith for many governors as they try to attract jobs: raising taxes during a recession is a nonstarter, choking off growth and damaging a state's fragile economic recovery.

With the notable exception of Illinois, where Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn last month signed a 66 percent temporary personal

income tax increase and a separate corporate rate hike to help close a \$15 billion budget gap, governors this year are mostly vowing to cut regulations and hold the line on taxes to attract employers and rebuild after a brutal recession.

"We ... hope that every bill you consider passing will be viewed through the lens of its impact on our economic growth," Colorado Democratic Gov. John Hickenlooper told lawmakers in his State of the State address, sounding a theme many governors share.

"This doesn't mean we compromise our standards or put our land, air or water at risk, but it does mean that we'll keep a fierce

and even relentless focus on jobs."

Whether they can hold to that promise will become clearer in the coming months as governors release their new budget proposals.

But there's a catch to the anti-tax, pro-business rhetoric: Businesses consider a range of factors when deciding where to locate, including the quality of schools, roads and programs that rely on a certain level of public spending and regulation.

And evidence suggests there is little correlation between a state's tax rate and its overall economic health.

See TAXES, Page 6A

TURMOIL IN EGYPT

Aides told Mubarak to hold on to power

By Maggie Michael
and Hamza Hendawi
Associated Press

CAIRO — Hosni Mubarak was supposed to announce his resignation on Thursday.

The Egyptian military expected it. The new head of his ruling party pleaded to him face-to-face to do it. But despite more than two weeks of massive demonstrations by protesters unmoved by lesser concessions, the president still didn't get it.

Mubarak's top aides and family — including his son Gamal, widely viewed as his intended successor — told him he could still ride out the turmoil.

So the televised resignation speech the rest of Egypt had expected became a stubborn — and ultimately humiliating — effort to cling to power. It only enraged protesters. On Friday, the military moved decisively.

On Saturday, insiders in Egypt gave the Associated Press an initial picture of what happened in the hours before Egypt's "unoustable" leader of nearly 30 years fell. Some spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the information.

Their account portrayed Mubarak as unable, or unwilling, to grasp that

See EGYPT, Page 5A

BUSINESS, 5B



A new pizza restaurant near Baylor hopes to bring success to a location where other eateries have failed.

INSIDE

Business	5B	Neighbor Plus	8B
Classifieds	9B	Obituaries	2,3B
Farm & Ranch	4B	Opinion	8,9A
Horoscope	12B	Sports	1C
Local & Texas	1B	TV listings	7A
Lottery	4A	Weather	2A



TODAY
High: 71
Low: 38

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"I know they want 1,000 beds and I know that there are a lot of other facilities bidding on it."

Lester Gibson, county commissioner

Area prison goes after federal contract

By Regina Dennis
Tribune-Herald staff writer

The 1-year-old Jack Harwell Detention Center would have to undergo interior renovations and expansion if the jail is awarded a 1,000-inmate housing bid from the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The jail was built in 2010 and has a capacity for 816 beds. But an environ-

mental assessment prepared by the Bureau of Prisons notes the jail would have to remodel part of its interior to expand its capacity in order to accept the federal prisoners.

Issac Gaston, site specialist for the bureau's capacity planning and site selection division, said the agency would not pay for the renovations.

It is unclear how extensive those renovations would be, or whether

Community Education Centers, the New Jersey detention company that operates the jail, or McLennan County would cover the costs, if they received the contract.

The Tribune-Herald was unable to contact CEC Senior Vice President Peter Argeropolous and McLennan County Judge Jim Lewis on Friday

See PRISON, Page 6A