

Book exposes Waco facility's secrets

Author delves into stories, will speak today

BY WAKEELAH CRUTISON
AND JAMES BYERS
COPY EDITOR AND NEWS EDITOR

In the new book "We Were Not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home," author Sherry Matthews delves into the history of the children's home and exposes a fettered past of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Matthews and alumni from the home will speak about her book at 3 p.m. today in Bennett Auditorium in Draper Academic Building. She will sign books after the event at the Texas Collection in Carroll Library and will also hold a book signing at 7:30 p.m. today at the Barnes and Nobles Booksellers located on West Waco Drive.

Matthews attended Baylor and majored in journalism but left the program to marry a Baylor faculty member. She graduated with a B.A. in journalism from Memphis University. Matthews said she's glad to be able to come back to Baylor to share her experiences with students.



Matthews

"It's a rare collection of stories," Matthews said. "As far as I know, no one has collected this many oral stories of abuse in a children's institution. It's rare to have more than 60 stories and for people to

hear first-person accounts."

The book, published by University of Texas Press, contains more than 50 tales of life at the Waco State Home spanning from the time the home opened its door in 1923 to children in need to the day the home closed in 1979.

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NICK BERRYMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

An old dorm building from the Waco State Home, which was closed in 1979, now houses the Waco Center for Youth.

a particular time over an entire history," William Bishel, acquisition editor at the University of Texas Press, said. "They formed a community and it's important for every community to have a voice outlet."

Matthews found her literary voice at a young age when her brother, Donald, introduced her to the world of writing by giving her a typewriter. She declared herself the family's writer while her brother was the artist in the family.

After her family suffered a series of tragedies, she was sent to live with her great-aunt and uncle in East Texas when she was 3 and her brothers went to the Waco State Home.

Her brothers never talked about their experiences living there, but her brother Bing introduced her to alumni of the home at a 2004 reunion. The alumni were more forthcoming, Matthews said.

"As soon as they realized my brothers went there, they were willing to talk to me," Matthews said. "A lot remembered Donald and his paintings and the things he did artistically at the home. They were eager to talk to me about him and their experiences. My brothers never talked about their time at the home, so I never knew what to expect."

Matthews said she was surprised by how many people were interested in sharing

their stories with her when they found out about her venture to write a book on the Waco State Home. She said most of the initial stories were positive.

"The alumni told fabulous stories. They talked about the fun they had and the friendships they made, and the families they built," Matthews said.

It wasn't until later that she discovered the dark underlining of the home intended to be a safe haven for children.

Matthews, realizing the magnitude of the project, enlisted the help of several people to help with research and conducting interviews. One of her interviewers shocked her with the news of a former inhabitant who reported subjection to physical abuse.

"I was horrified and it made me sick," Matthews said. "I realized it was why my brothers never talked about it. I did some research and found there were secret hearings and cover-ups. I knew many people were expecting a happy book with positive stories. But the stories I heard were chilling."

The book features a testimony from Mary "Liz" Westbrook Benton, who attended the Waco State Home from 1966 to 1967.

"I think everyone who was out there was harmed in one way or another," Benton

said in the book. "There is trauma when you have to leave your family and go in a place like that, and then there is more trauma once you are in there, cut off from your family. Then comes the abuse and the aftermath of that abuse for the rest of your life."

It also features an account of the fear some children felt while staying at the institution.

"Our minds were molded to think as the dorm matrons wanted us to think, to remind us that even the simplest of acts could result in a beating," Linda Prather D'Agostino, resident of the home from 1965 to 1974, said in the book.

Matthews said one dorm mother reported a conversation with a dean of the home who ordered her to beat a child every day in front of the other children to keep them in line. The dorm mother refused and was fired. Having recorded the conversation, the woman filed for wrongful termination, and in turn, the dean was fired from his position.

Matthews said the stories show how the state could allow the abuse to happen. She said some officials even referred to the children in the Waco State Home as inmates.

"They hadn't committed any crimes," Matthews said. "These were just children whose families could no longer take care of them. It's an important piece of history and shows how we treat children, the most vulnerable children."

Not all the stories in the book are bad. Some former inhabitants recall fond memories and depict the home as a shelter where they received compassion, food, a sense of family and a haven that kept them off the street.

Fernando "Freddy" Reyes lived at the Waco State Home from 1964 to 1972.

"My view is that everything went well for me at the Home," Reyes said in the book. "We were pretty well sheltered from the troubles outside."

Matthews said the large difference between the children's experiences likely stemmed from the luck of the draw. She said other factors, such as a child's personality, may have also played a role in how much abuse a child was subjected to at the home.

"If they entered very young, they learned the rules at an early age and knew how to

stay out of trouble," Matthews said. "Kids who came from a loving environment, who loved their parents and whose parents loved them, didn't like being separated."

Matthews said older kids with established ideals and behaviors had a harder time adjusting.

"My brother [Donald] hated it," Matthews said. "He ran away, but they didn't beat him because he made money for the home by painting murals and pictures around town. He was beneficial to the image of the home, so they gave him special treatment."

While staffers abused some children, not all of the Waco State Home staff resorted to such tactics.

"Some years were worse than others," Matthews said. "It depended on whoever was in charge."

Matthews said the home was run with compassion and care when superintendent Rebecca Canning, now Rebecca Brumley, took over in 1974.

Brumley's reforms put a stop to the abuse and led to an eventual closing of the Waco State Home in 1979. The building now houses the Waco Center for Youth.

Matthews said she has received mixed reviews of the book from the home's alumni. The reactions to the book were just as varied as the tales inside it.

"There were some people who were not abused who thought if the book came out, people would assume they were treated that way. There were also some who were abused but didn't want to remember what happened to them," Matthews said. "It's very interesting; some confront it and others are very disturbed by it. Then there are many who say the truth should be known."

Matthews said it was an incredible experience to meet the alumni and listen to their stories.

"The experience has given me insight into what my brothers went through," Matthews said. "It was emotionally wrenching, and it made me more determined to always speak up for injustice. Silence is the real problem. There will always be evil in the world and people who do bad things. But the real evil is when there is abuse and people know and don't speak up."

Alumna reformed state home's abusive culture

BY JAMES BYERS
AND WAKEELAH CRUTISON
NEWS EDITOR AND COPY EDITOR

It only takes one courageous person to make a change.

That may be one of the most indelible lessons from Sherry Matthews' new book, "We Were not Orphans: Stories from the Waco State Home," which collects the oral histories of more than 50 Waco State Home alumni.

Throughout the years the home, which opened in the 1920s and closed in the '70s, housed thousands of children from troubled homes, giving them a place to learn and grow.

While many of the book's narratives are warm and

laced with nostalgia, others reveal a dark, previously unpublished history of the state home: one filled with neglect and abuse, often both emotional and physical.

The brutal abuses that occurred all too frequently at the home began to change when Rebecca Canning, now Rebecca Brumley, took over as superintendent.

Brumley comes from a family with a rich Baylor tradition. Her grandfather is Dr. J.M. Dawson, a 1904 Baylor graduate and pastor of Waco's First Baptist Church for 32 years. Her grandmother, Willie Turner Dawson, is the namesake of Dawson Residence Hall, and her father, Matt Dawson, was a professor emeritus at Baylor School of Law.

Brumley graduated from Baylor in 1964 with an English and education major with a speech and history minor.

Though she was involved in a variety of activities on the Baylor campus, Brumley said she desired to be more involved in the



Brumley

community. She decided to volunteer at the Waco State Home, tutoring children in subjects such as literature and English. In the later '60s she taught recreational sports such as archery and fencing during the summers.

Brumley said as a volunteer she witnessed some of the abuses outlined in Matthews' book, but has chosen not to discuss them.

"...I don't think it helps for me to go back and rehash what I saw when I was not involved in the home except as a volunteer," Brumley said. "It's more constructive for me to say I got there and knew that I had a mission and I worked very hard to try to fulfill it."

After writing her master's thesis on the home, Brumley decided to apply for superintendent in 1974, intending to reform the school and reverse the cycle of abuse. She got the job.

"When I got to the state home as superintendent I wanted to deliberately set a course which was diametrically opposite of what had been," Brumley said. "And that was to have a philosophy focusing on each individual child, and the strategy to develop constructive opportunities in both the short term and the long term to live a fulfilling, happy, productive life for each child."

Brumley began the reforms by banning corporal punishment of any kind.

"It was challenging. There were many staff members who absolutely agreed in the necessary reforms and worked diligently and happily in that direction," Brumley said. "But then there were many staff members who had other ideas who were very entrenched in it and devoted to the previous methods of working with kids and who were either dragging their feet or sometimes hostile to change."

Staffers who refused to alter their approach and continued to practice corporal punishment were fired.

Brumley's reforms put a stop to the abuse and led to the eventual closing of the Waco State Home in 1979. The building that once housed the state home has now been converted to the Waco Center for Youth.

Brumley said she had dual goals of reforming the home but also eventually closing it when she arrived as superintendent.

"In my opinion, all children should be in the least-restrictive, most homelike environment possible for them to thrive in," said Brumley, explaining why she thought

placing children in homes with real families was ultimately better for their future than keeping them in a large, institutionalized facility.

William Cooper, professor of philosophy emeritus, met Brumley at Seventh and James Baptist Church in the late '60s. He said he wasn't surprised Brumley was able to institute reform at the state home.

"She's very much concerned about addressing issues that are important," Cooper said.

"She likes to see results. She's not a fearful person at all. She's very capable of dealing with complex issues."

Brumley said she has many fond memories of the children whose lives she changed forever.

One particular memory that stands out is when the home staged the play "Oliver" and more than 77 children participated. The play was so massively popular the children performed it in multiple venues.

"That helped change the tide," Brumley said. "It was a huge experience because it was so very obviously different from anything these kids had experienced before out there, and it was wonderful."

Brumley said she's glad Matthews wrote the book.

"I think it's marvelous to give these kids, these adults now, an opportunity to tell their stories," Brumley said. "I respect them, absolutely, and I'm looking forward to be with as many as can come to these events that we're all heading."

Larry Norwood, Radford visiting professor in journalism, knew both Matthews and Brumley as a student at Baylor. He said he was affected by the power of the book.

"[The book] tells a story that needed to be told," Norwood said. "The stories it tells are in some cases really heart-wrenching."

Norwood said that while some stories are difficult to read, many of the accounts of the home in the book are positive.

"The book is very well-balanced, I think, in talking about good things that happened to kids and the fact that if it hadn't been for the State Home, a lot of these children would have been lost," Norwood said. "They never would have been able to get up to the starting line."

Matthews will speak about her book at 3 p.m. today in Bennett Auditorium in the Draper Academic Building. Alumni from

the home will also be on hand to read excerpts of their stories. Brumley will not attend the event.

Brumley now lives near Fort Worth and is the director of the Red Oak Foundation, a charitable organization she founded with her husband that gives away books to children in families that need them. In 13 years, the foundation has given away more than 330,000 hardback books. The foundation also gives away scholarships to kids who want to be public school teachers.

"It's tremendously fun," Brumley said, adding that she personally chooses which books to donate. "I don't want kids to end up where so many kids in the State Home

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Blame it on the refs

Students involved in intramural sports provide feedback on how to improve the games, beginning with officiating

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Former Bear's big break

A former Baylor student directs "Brotherhood," a film that explores the dark side of a fraternity initiation

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Hot like fire

The Lady Bears softball team looks to expand on its torrid 11-0 start with four games this weekend



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Men's basketball faces a must-win game against Texas A&M on Saturday

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Viewpoints

"An in-depth application would deter students who are not serious about the mission of Christianity and academic integrity that was established in Baylor's charter and would immediately guarantee a higher caliber of students who would fit well in the university's goal for top-tier ranking."

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Bear Briefs

The place to go to know the places to go

Campus Kitchens

Need a break from all those midterms? Come volunteer with Campus Kitchens. Meet in the Family and Consumer Sciences Kitchen at 3:00 on Tuesday or 3:30 on Thursday to do some hands-on hunger relief.

Prestigious guest

Legendary composer Steve Reich will speak at Baylor from 3 to 5 p.m. on Tuesday in room 137 of the Marrs-McLean Science Building. The event is free but reservations must be e-mailed in advance to Todd Meehan.

Musical master

William McGraw, professor of voice at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, will host a master course from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday at Roxy Grove Hall.

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variety of activities on the Baylor campus, Brumley said she desired to be more involved in the community. She decided to volunteer at the Waco State Home, tutoring children in subjects such as literature and English. In the lat-

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Feet don't touch the ground

No. 4 base Crysten Timbes, No. 23 flyer Kristie Serrano and No. 20 back spot Jayme Edwards participate in the compulsory tumbling event during Baylor's first-ever multiple team competitive cheering meet on Thursday at the Ferrell Center.

Gay-friendly group lobbies for charter

By DANIEL C. HOUSTON
REPORTER

A group of more than 50 students met Thursday in the Bill Daniel Student Center Den to discuss students with gay, lesbian and other alternative sexual lifestyles on campus.

The group, named the Sexual Identity Forum, is in the process of applying to be an officially chartered student organization at Baylor, and its founding members expect a final decision on the chartering to be made before the end of the month.

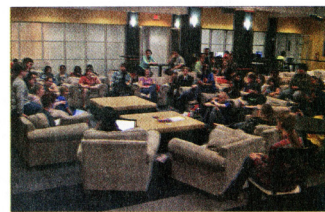
Alvarado senior Samantha Jones, the organization's president who affirmed during the meeting that she is openly gay, said she was motivated to start a discussion group because she believes the administration has not always

been accepting of students with alternative sexual identities.

"I feel as though the student body in and of itself is very welcoming," Jones said. "Everyone I've come out to or approached has been very welcoming and very compassionate and tolerant. I feel as though the high administration ... refuses to recognize that there are gay students on campus, and they refuse to allow a group like this to exist."

Hempstead junior Gabby Garrett is opposed to the idea of a chartered organization like the Sexual Identity Forum.

"Personally, no, I think Baylor should deny them," Garrett said. "I think if you want to have discussions you can make that group on your own. I don't see why it has to have the Baylor-affiliated name to be recognized by Baylor, be-



Students meet to discuss forming a Gay-Straight Alliance Thursday in the Bill Daniel Student Center.

cause Baylor does not recognize homosexuality as an OK lifestyle," Jones said she does not believe that the organization's goals conflict with Baylor's Christian prin-

ciples. "There's obviously been concern that having a group like the

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Defunct artistic fraternity attempts revival

By LIZ HITCHCOCK
REPORTER

For many undergraduates, a sense of community and connection with fellow students is an integral part of collegiate life.

Pending approval by the Department of Student Activities, students in the art department will soon get another avenue to relate to peers through the reinstatement of Kappa Pi, the oldest art fraternity in the United States.

"I've always wanted to be involved in something but I've never really been able to find something that fit me. As an art person there really isn't a whole lot out there," Longview junior Lacey Williams said. "I feel like we need something because I go to school and I leave school and, once I leave, there is no connection with art. I feel like if you want to be successful in the industry you need to have constant exposure to art."

Williams, who will serve as president, and Meredith Davis, a Dallas sophomore who will serve as vice president, are heading up the efforts to bring Kappa Pi back on campus. According to newspaper clippings in the archives at the Texas Collection, the fraternity was around as early as the 1940s, but was disbanded at some point in the '80s. Now the fraternity will keep the same chapter name, Alpha Kappa, though the request for a student organization charter has not gone through student activities.

"The art students don't really have anything to be involved in as far as their major goes," Williams said. "The business school has a fraternity that does a lot of things like bringing in guest speakers. I think we need that, too, since we don't have those kind of resources."

The art department has an archive with information regarding the Alpha Kappa chapter of

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