

# RESULTS OF FLAT SURVEY

by Judith O'Neill, co-author with Anne Stevenson and Elaine Martin of 'High Living', a survey on family life in flats.

Like most inexperienced authors, I think we believed that once we handed the flat study manuscript over to the publishers, Melbourne University Press, our work would be done. But we reckoned without such mysteries as galley proofs, page proofs, indexes, upper case, lower case, deletions and corrections. After what seemed an endless time sorting all these out, we were delighted and somewhat surprised when the book was finally released in September last year. No longer would we need to spend time explaining our findings or digging out a reasonably intact manuscript. Now we could say to all the people who wanted information, 'Buy the book'.

It was at this point we learnt another lesson about being authors. Instead of having less to do, we found ourselves in demand to give talks, to work on committees, to help plan all manner of things from lecture courses at the University to playgrounds on flat estates. It seemed that once people had absorbed what was in the book, they were interested in following the line of thought. Certainly we have come to realise that perhaps our most important contribution lies in our ability to actively relate what we discovered to other people and organisations in the community.

In many ways the response of the community to Housing Commission high-rise development was similar to its condemnation of the slums which the flats were replacing. Emotional phrases such as 'goals in the sky', 'prisons for families', 'breeding grounds for delinquents' made headlines in the newspapers and convinced most people that we were once more going to the dogs. In this way, the new flats were condemned without trial by people who never had and probably never would get closer to them than passing by in a car or a tram.

In the face of this community criticism, the decision was taken by the Brotherhood to conduct a systematic 'consumer' survey of tenants on a particular flat estate. Interviewers asked the tenants themselves what they thought about their new housing, and the results as presented in the report are firmly based on their reactions and attitudes at that time.

It was found, for instance, that for most tenants the move to the flats had given a much improved standard of housing. A large number of tenants had previously lived in very poor accommodation, often sharing a house or living in rooms. They told us how pleased they were with their clean, new flats and how comfortable they found them, but at the same time they made it clear that the limitations of the flats created problems.

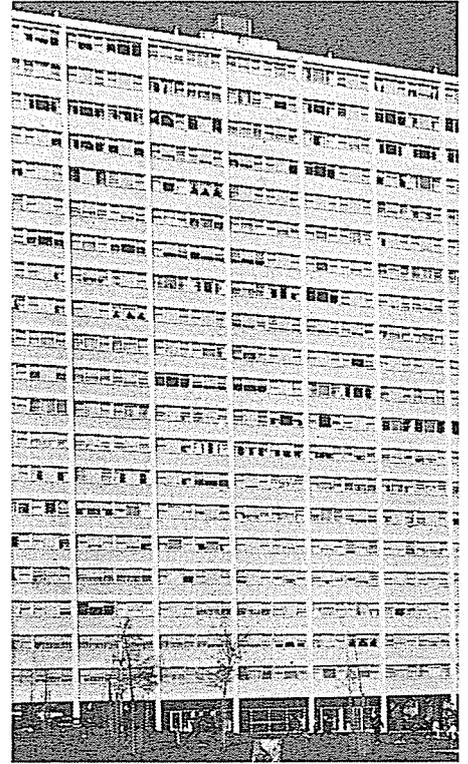
On the estate we studied, the families with young children were housed in four-storey 'walk-up' flats where the only access to the flat was by stair and all shopping,

laundry and even the garbage can had to be lugged up and down. The laundries were at roof level, and a special trip had to be made to do the family wash. On the other hand, in the tall 20-storey blocks the Housing Commission was able to provide better and more convenient services such as laundries on every floor, garbage disposal chutes and, of course, lifts, all of which made life easier for the tenants. In both types of flats, storage space for the paraphernalia of family life was very limited. Children's bikes, prams, cots, high chairs, had to be stacked in bedrooms if the family wished to keep them.

## No Man's Land

Though it was clear to us that inadequate services did make things more difficult for families, they were less worried about such practical things than they were about their children. Parents felt that as soon as their children went out-doors, they were in a no-man's land, free and unsupervised.

They told us that they were worried by their disobedience and cheekiness which they put down to the bad example of the children they played with. Unfortunately, there were no facilities for supervised play, and certainly no staff to organise it on the estate grounds. In fact, no real thought had been given the fact that a flat estate is a new sort of environment and that old techniques of child discipline and rearing were simply no longer valid.



Hotham Estate high rise flats, Melbourne.

This survey was essentially an exploratory study, but we feel it has made people more aware of the problems and needs of tenants and of the Housing Commission itself, and, more important, it has pointed to the necessity of continuing research and evaluation of attempts at social change.

## SCHEME PROVIDES HOMES FOR AGED

It is now 13 years since Father Tucker started what has become known as 'The Better Way' scheme.

Father Tucker felt that the custom of sending flowers to honour the dead and express sympathy for the bereaved could be replaced by something better. He suggested that instead people might like to send a donation to an organisation which was trying to do something to improve the lot of those still on earth, thus contributing towards a more permanent memorial for their friends.

The Brotherhood opened a special fund for donations received in this way and earmarked it for the building and maintenance of cottages for the elderly. A simple dignified card was prepared for sending to the bereaved. On the card is written the name of the departed in whose honour the money has been donated and also the name of the person or persons responsible for the sending of the card.

Since 'The Better Way' started, 11 cottages for the elderly have been built at Carrum Downs and Lara under the scheme and it

will also finance one of the flat units at St Laurence Court, Bendigo, which the Brotherhood is erecting in conjunction with the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo.

Any persons wishing to use 'The Better Way' have only to write to The Secretary, 'The Better Way', Brotherhood of St Laurence, 51 Royal Arcade, Melbourne, or telephone 63 3011 and a card will be sent immediately to the bereaved.

The following information should be supplied:

- The name of the deceased.
- The name and address of the sender and any other names you would like to appear on the card.
- The name and address of the person to whom the card is to be sent.

The 'In Memoriam' card will be sent immediately this information is received.

The donation may be sent or taken to the Brotherhood of St Laurence, 51 Royal Arcade, Melbourne, at your convenience.

The amount of the donation is entirely at the donor's discretion and no mention of the amount appears on the card.