



Objection 110

Frances Henke

3 pages

From: Frances Henke
To: [FedRedistribution - VIC](#)
Subject: Submission re proposed seat of Macnamara
Date: Tuesday, 24 April 2018 12:36:11 PM
Attachments: [My submission is in favour of the renaming of Melbourne Ports to Macnamara.docx](#)
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Pls find attached my submission in support of renaming the seat of Melbourne Ports to Macnamara:

My submission is in favour of the renaming of Melbourne Ports to Macnamara

Dear Commissioners,

I was a patient of Dame Jean Macnamara in the 1940s. I believe my parents were granted financial support from a foundation to see her. We lived in Leongatha, in Gippsland. In 1946 aged three, I was an isolated case of polio and kept in quarantine. A year later my sister was born with Cerebral Palsy. Mum had a Hillman Minx so my sister and I were loaded in for the long drive to 41 Spring Street for our appointments.

Dame Jean's office was on the first floor, no lift, so mum had to carry each of us up the stairs from the car. I remember little of these visits except for a verandah waiting room, once a fernery that featured dead ferns – we counted how many had died since the last visit. Maybe mum told me that.

My memory remains blank about childhood, so when the hard-to-diagnose Late Effects of Polio hit, I interviewed mum (Iris Kelly dec 2000) and others for an article for Independent Monthly (March, 1990). I was a journalist but working for a Federal MP at the time. I have since used my communication skills to advocate for polio survivors in Australia and overseas.

Mum remembered Dr Mac well.

"Dame Jean was an extraordinary personality," she told me for the article that went on to be included in a collection of 'Australia's finest journalism'. "She campaigned for the introduction of myxomatosis, the viral disease to control rabbits, also suggested to Robert Menzies that he encourage the Queen and Princess Margaret to wear fox furs in order to reduce the number of foxes in Australia.

"Dame Jean was a very single-minded, determined woman. The Red Cross had founded Welfare House for the children of airmen to stay in while their mothers were ill or in confinement. Dame Jean used you as an example to get Welfare House used for country polios. Later, she organised it to look after spastics too," my mother said.

Her favourite memory was Dame Jean showing off a new hat, the one she wore to Government House to be 'Damed'. "Oh Dame Jean, it's very nice, but still has the price tag dangling down the back", mum told her. Dame Jean had little time for appearances and once reprimanded mum for wearing nail polish. Mum reminded the doctor she had a husband to dress for.

One of my favourite stories was post war when young men who'd had polio looking for jobs, were being turned away on account of their disabilities. "Tell 'em you were shot down in a helicopter", she recommended.

"While Dame Jean was the source of what seemed like torture then, it is she (and mum) I can thank for, among other later ridiculous exploits, being able to climb a (small) mountain in India, I wrote in a memoir for 'Iron Wills – Victorian Polio Survivors' Stories' (2012).

"In those days there were no lightweight materials to use in splints or other body-shaping instruments. Yet Dame Jean's speciality was for splints to immobilise and straighten paralysed and twisted limbs. Mum said the first time she and the Welfare House matron, Lois Ditchburn, had to strap me into the iron frame called Double Thomas, they gave me an aspirin to relax me and closed the door anticipating screams. None came. Next morning they crept in to see how I'd survived the night and found me sitting on the pillow. I looked up triumphantly and said 'Got myself out!' Houdini couldn't have done better.

“Like many others I was transported in a long heavy brown pram, long enough to take me strapped into more of Dame Jean’s torture equipment – calipers. It was not the vehicle you felt like being seen in – attracted too many well-meaning old ducks with ample bosoms chucking you pityingly under the chin. That’s the treatment to breed determination not to be different”.

Dame Jean’s daughter Merran Samuel, told me for ‘Iron Wills’ that her mother predicted the late effects of polio. “They will pay for this later”, Dame Jean said. Well, pay we have and are – struggling with a new breed of doctors and other health professionals too young to know polio, resistant to ‘syndromes’.

But, without Dame Jean many more of us would be in much worse condition or dead. There are an estimated 400,000 Australians living with the late effects of polio, the country’s largest disability group. We owe her our lives, our determination to continue.

Renaming this electorate in her honour is a source of pride for us – validates our journey too. So many of us have been told by medics and family that Post Polio Syndrome is “all in our heads”. If Dame Jean were here, she’d sort them out.

Thank you on behalf of us all.

Frances Henke

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