



THE GOLDEN GIRLS
8 July 1998

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Sometimes it is necessary to remind one's self of the essential goodness of human nature. I want to relate today a story that illustrates this so well. In 1996, a small fellowship group was established within the Uniting Church in Port Lincoln which became known as 'The Golden Girls'. This friendship group learnt of the special needs of a small girl called Kelly and her family in Adelaide and were moved to express love and support in small ways which then evolved into the compiling of a cookbook.

The names of 'The Golden Girls' are scattered throughout the book amongst a circle of contributors which grew wider as friends and families wanted to become part of the project. *Kelly's Cookbook* was the final result of their endeavours.

I will relate a little of Kelly's story in the words of her grandmother to illustrate why these 'Golden Girls' have been so moved by compassion as to establish a benefit fund for Kelly. Her grandmother says:

Kelly's parents and their three children have always loved their annual holiday in Port Lincoln, the home of her father's teenage years (and where his parents still reside). In 1991, after a week's happy summer recreation, on the eve of their return drive to Adelaide, four year old Kelly, their bright, blue eyed, blonde, middle child suddenly became ill with a fever and terrible headache. The next day. . . without warning, the nightmare began . . . her first epileptic seizure took them all by storm, as it rolled into another, and another, and then dozens a day, with very few gaps of relief. Hospital sessions and neurologists' attention continued for some months as medication was trialled in a vain attempt to halt the seizure activity. The cause was a mystery—every aspect of her health, her life, and the Port Lincoln holiday was examined, but it is still only speculation that she had been stricken with viral encephalitis.

That was seven years ago. Kelly is now 12, tall, thin and on the edge of puberty. Once an energetic little chatterer, she now sits or paces, imprisoned in her autistic world, protected by a loving family, monitored by her parents 24 hours a day. The insidious brain damage which has robbed her of memory, understanding, language and personality has taken place over many thousands of multi-focal seizures. Kelly's parents have worked through grief, anxiety, expectations and many disappointments as countless therapies have been tried—nearly all the known medications, every alternative they heard of, and even the consideration of brain surgery. The best medicos in Australia cannot name her condition, nor have they offered any hope of improvement. The seizures still continue unpredictably.

Kelly's condition, resulting from seven years of uncontrolled epileptic seizures, has resulted in a gradual loss of receptive and expressive language and understanding. In simple terms, Kelly has lost the ability to understand what people say to her, and also to use or learn words to express herself in return. Kelly's condition is rare, and appropriate, intensive therapy is expensive. A specially tailored intensive therapy trial to be run over the next six months will cost about \$12 000. It is a cost far beyond the means of the family and has only been made possible because of the success of *Kelly's Cookbook* and other fundraisers and donations.

I am constantly amazed and humbled by the ability of my community to provide practical, social and spiritual support to others in times of need. I commend each and every one of 'The Golden Girls' and all who have contributed in any way to the success of this venture. It demonstrates what can be achieved by a community which works together to achieve an outcome. Compassion with no focus is a wasted force. However, when compassion is combined with a

desire to do good it becomes an immutable force and must surely affect the outcome. I sincerely hope that this outpouring of goodwill effects a positive outcome for Kelly, and we can only wish Kelly and her family of supporters well.