

**KAREN DAY (JOHNSON) 1976 AND VANESSA PICKERING (BAX) 1976**  
(NEW ZEALAND)

IN THE CIRCLE

In the circle. We were there, drawn into the circle by the embracing searching emails that found us all over the world. Van and I read about the preparations for the Reunion, longing to be a part of the hubbub of activity. Finding others, making contact with familiar people, names falling off our tongues as we talked about who said what in which email.

On the weekend of the Reunion we lingered in the circle of memory. Walking around the school just like you did, in our imagination. Remembering our own scoffing of the old ladies who returned every year to remember, catch up, part again. Was the mosaic on the school coat of arms above the Haley Hall still intact? I couldn't remember which pieces I had glued on. Were there still so many weeds on the netball field? Do they still send girls to Silence before breakfast to punish them – the worst part of the punishment to be able to not laugh for half an hour. Does the sun still slant through the windows in the Chapel, halos dance around the candles? And the singing. How does the singing sound today?

We've become women, distant but close, sharing the world in our shared childhood. We carry our girlhood everywhere, challenging the world by our Epworthness. After the weekend we waited for the pictures and pored over them looking for familiar faces. But there weren't any. We looked at one another, searched for what could change so much that we couldn't find anything familiar in the pictures sent to us by Jenny Smith. Who was in red? Where is Sheena? Clare, Robin, Jenny, and wait, there is Denise. or is it her? Oh, how we wished the pictures were videos. We were sure we would recognise people as they moved around us. Clare's posture – that's her, yes. Denise's laughter.

ut they haven't really changed. We suddenly knew we would have recognised almost everyone. Talking, walking together, moving around through the school, seeing huddles of girls, women, laughing in recognition. As we recognised one person after another, we began to feel part of the circle. There but not there. Girls who had grown into women. The women we have become. We were there too. Full of the emotion of lost and forgotten memories, the past shared and split open by a reunion. The circle of belonging enclosing us in mutual memories, our girlhood blending into our future, possibilities spanning out to embrace us even on the other side of the world.

Yes, we are in the circle. We'll all always be in it.