

At times, Mrs. Sherlin wishes there was some way for the teen-agers "to stand in my shoes and look back at my life." She says she's always regretted leaving Bonny Oaks, dropping out of school and marrying at 18. She later earned her GED in night school.) "I talk to them straight about what's the smartest thing for them to do," she says. "Sometimes they just roll their eyes and say, 'Oh Mrs. Sherlin, be real!' But I think they listen."

Martha says that she grew up thinking that all her problems were caused because she'd gotten a bad

deal from life. "But I realized about four years ago that it wasn't life, it was my attitude," she explains. At that time, Martha learned that she had cancer of the colon — the same disease that had killed her other and, more recently, her older brother. All her sisters and other relatives as well had been treated for the same kind of cancer.

"At that point in my life, I became deeply religious," Mrs. Sherlin reveals quietly. "In the hospital, I prayed that the Lord would spare me. Before the operation, the doctors had found malignant cancer in my body. But when the tests came back after the surgery, all the malignancy was gone and there's been no sign of it since. To me it was a mira-

cle, and I know the Lord spared me for a special reason."

Part of that "reason," she believes, is Mollie, Ramona, Annie, Pam, Rhonda, Danette, Tezia, Cathy, Debbie, Sharon, Clara and Cindy. "I came home when I came back to Bonny Oaks," she smiles. "Mr. Adamson told me when I started, 'You've got to want to do a job like

mine,' and that's the way I lived. Every child here has a special spot in life to fill and I tell you, it doesn't take long for these girls to worm their way into your heart.

"I dreamed a year ago that I became the mother of 12 girls, and now I have 12," Martha continues. "The Lord has blessed me with a special portion. I don't plan to ever leave here again."



Mrs. Martha Sherlin and two of her girls, Mollie Quarles, left, and Danette Beach catch up on some magazines in the Bonny Oaks School library.



Mollie Quarles and Danette Beach, seated in swing, visit with their housemother, Martha Sherlin, on the campus at the Bonny Oaks School where Mrs. Sherlin spent seven years as a young girl.

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