



Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators Inc

If you wish to attend the next IRSEA luncheon,
please print this first page,
complete the Booking slip,
include a cheque for your payment and
post to John Allsopp.

I hope that you find this Newsletter of interest.

Peter Robinson,
Newsletter Editor.

Booking slip 2nd December 2016 Meeting

Complete and return with your cheque by **15th November** to:
John Allsopp, 23 Lyndon Way, BEECROFT, 2119 (phone 9980 2114)

Here is my payment of \$_____ (at \$45.00 per head)

for _____ and me to attend the IRSEA luncheon
at 11.30am for 12.00pm at '**99 on York**', 99 York Street, Sydney on Friday 2nd December.

Please provide _____ vegetarian meal(s).

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone No. _____

Please print your surname here. _____
Make your cheque payable to the *Association of Retired Inspectors of Schools* and cross it
'Not negotiable'.

Money cannot be refunded for cancellations made after **22nd November**



Newsletter

November 2016

Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators Inc

From the President



Alan Laughlin President IRSEA 2016-17

Hard to believe that another year is coming to an end. We have our Xmas function as our next big event on 2 December. This is always a great occasion, a chance to catch up with old friends and enjoy a nice lunch and maybe a glass of wine. Please make a big effort to come along. The luncheon “response form” is part of this Newsletter. If you have a chance, can you encourage others you know who may be a bit reluctant to come? IRSEA will only be as good as the commitment of its members.

In the last few months our Committee has focused on rationalising membership processes and accounts and developing meeting formats. We have been keen to build on the success of our guest speaker program. Ken Boston spoke recently, providing the “inside” story of

the Gonski funding model. This has proven extremely relevant to the funding debate now in the media almost every day. A report on Ken's talk has been prepared by our Secretary, Geoff Walton, for this Newsletter to inform those who were not able to attend.

At the subsequent lunch meeting we had Dorothy Hoddinott as our guest speaker. Dorothy described the challenges of meeting the needs of predominately refugee children as the principal of Holroyd High School and the relevance of NAPLAN in this challenging environment. In the next newsletter we will include a fuller report on her talk.

For those interested, I suggest you have a look at the website of the school. (<http://www.holroyd-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/>).

Also of interest, Dorothy has an extensive scholarship program to help these very needy children who arrive in this country, often out of refugee camps and with little formal education or money, but with a burning desire to get to University or TAFE.

This can be supported through the Public Education Foundation (Friends of Zainab). Dorothy has recently been interviewed on the ABC Lateline program over the relevance of NAPLAN. We have certainly tapped into two very contemporary issues with our recent guest speakers.

The Committee would certainly appreciate feedback from members about the guest speaker concept. We are well aware that many members cannot get to these occasions and so we will ensure that a report is provided for your information in the Newsletter. Your views, as letters to the editor, about these topics, or others you feel strongly about in the public education arena, are welcome and we could certainly publish these.

Given the current and high profile debate on public education issues I would like to address two matters. The first of these is Gonski funding. It would seem apparent that the Federal government believes it will not be able to fund the full Gonski model as it has evolved in the past four years. Our State Minister, Adrian Piccoli, has made his views well known, and is a strong supporter of the model and in particular the appropriate funding of public schools.

The Federal Minister, Simon Birmingham, has made it known in a recent Q and A session on the ABC that he is considering reducing the funding to some highly "over resourced" private schools and redistributing this funding elsewhere.

The media was subsequently full of reports of such "over funding" and no doubt behind the scenes these schools have let the government know how difficult it will be to change their funding allocations. Fairfax has reported; "150 private schools were receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer funding above their entitlement, while many schools in the public and private sectors remained significantly underfunded" (SMH, p.2, Oct 8/9).

This is a truly critical issue for Australia with our comparative achievement, measured through PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) falling steadily. Public education is critical to address this decline. This is a major issue for all of us in IRSEA who have given so much to public education. This debate will build in intensity and your views are most welcome.

The second matter I would like to comment on is the appalling impact on our public system of vocational education and training (TAFE) of the privatisation movement. This appears to have produced unconscionable behaviour on the part of a number of 'private' providers. The VET-FEE HELP scheme has been set up in a way that allowed dubious behaviour at great cost to the public purse and to individual needy students.

For example, it is reported that one private provider, the Australian Institute of Professional Education (AIPE) took in \$110m in public funding in 2014, enrolling 8,000 students that year while graduating only 117. They have now gone into voluntary insolvency. At last the Federal Government has moved to tighten accountability measures on these groups, but it has taken years and great damage has been done. I find it hard to understand the determination to "privatise" such a valuable enterprise as quality public vocational education and training. Again your comments would be welcome.

In conclusion, do try to come to our Xmas function, do provide commentary on our guest speaker program and on any contemporary and critical public education issue that concerns you and do consider the short segment later in this Newsletter on Stewart House.

Secretary says

REFLECTING ON DR KEN BOSTON'S GONSKI PRESENTATION - May 6 2016

Geoff Walton

In reflecting on Dr Ken Boston's presentation at our meeting on May 6, 2016, I have drawn on the notes that I made during the presentation and subsequently sought help from 'Google' and 'YouTube' to access addresses by both Ken Boston and David Gonski to help fill in some of the blanks. In particular, I found Ken's recent **Paul Brock Memorial Medal** address delivered on August 31 and **Inside Story What Gonski Really Meant and How it Has been Forgotten Nearly Everywhere**, September 6, informative and have brought the story up to date.

August Lunch



Dr Ken Boston

Secretary says

REFLECTING ON DR KEN BOSTON'S GONSKI PRESENTATION - May 6 2016

Geoff Walton

The Gonski panel submitted its report in December 2011. The panel had been asked to develop a funding system that was fair, transparent and financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent outcomes for all Australian students. The panel saw and promoted education as a strategic investment rather than a cost. Essentially, Gonski *is a fundamental reimagining of Australian education. It is a rethinking of priorities and approaches and objectives*. As proposed, Gonski model would turn the existing model of school funding on its head, it is sector-blind and needs-based rather than the top-down politically settled sector-based and needs-blind processes.

As its first objective the Gonski panel saw *education*, as a genuine *public good* that has benefits for us all (other examples of *public goods* are roads and health services). All children have precisely the same entitlement to education as a *public good*. The panel's second objective, concerned with equal opportunity, related to reinforcing educational achievement as a *positional good* earned on the basis of talent and hard work alone rather than something purchased by those in a position of wealth and privilege.

As a *public good* the real quality of education varies from school to school. Using a health care analogy, a school at the lower end of both the scale of social disadvantage and the

scale of educational performance, is the “hospital emergency ward”. Children entering this school require “immediate diagnosis of need and immediate intensive intervention by qualified personnel (e.g. interpreters, speech therapists and counsellors)”. “If children don’t get the support they need we fail as a nation to realise the potential of our stock of human capital.”

The inquiry found that particularly over the last two decades while public funding for school education steadily increased, our achievement outcomes have continue to deteriorate. There was a clear relationship between aggregated social disadvantage and educational outcomes.

The existing funding arrangements, essentially a political settlement, sector-based and needs-blind, had exacerbated rather than helped to overcome the situation. The Panel recommended that the existing loading of funding for non-government schools as a proportion of the average government school recurrent costs should cease and proposed that:

- there be a minimum level of public funding for all schools regardless of sector.
- all government schools and a small number of non-governments in areas where there was no government provision receive full public funding.
- any additional public funding for other non-government schools should be on a scale relating to parental capacity to pay.
- each school should have a *school resourcing standard* at which it has been shown – in schools with minimal levels of educational disadvantage - that high performance is achievable over time. The resourcing standard was promoted as the “price” for bringing all schools to standard not a basis for allocating funds.

Gonski was about funding what happens in classrooms in each individual school. It was about providing the kind and amount of support needed so that individual students could achieve a minimum standard of proficiency, most importantly in English language.

Ken then provided a brief commentary on the Political responses and the Federal and State Government decisions since 2012. While both major Political Parties had promised to “implement Gonski” neither was prepared to commit to a National School Resourcing body owned jointly by the States and Commonwealth (as was the old *Schools Commission*). In his terms this “effectively killed off” the Gonski vision for establishing an educationally driven, sector blind, needs-based (evidence-based) school resourcing standard for all schools.

He acknowledged that the response in NSW is different from the rest of the country. All of the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) additional Commonwealth funding has “gone through the school gate” with loadings for disadvantage, applied through the Resource Allocation Model (RAM,) meaning that funding for government schools has been distributed on a measured needs basis. Indicators are showing early signs of improvements in student outcomes.

THE FRIENDS OF STEWART HOUSE

WHAT IS 'FOSH'?

Friends of Stewart House (FOSH) is a group of people with like-minded concern for making a difference in a child's life. Formed over 75 years ago, FOSH's primary purpose is to support the work of Stewart House through fundraising and volunteer ventures.

Membership has now expanded from former Department of Education employees and their relatives to encompass all those who wish to support such an iconic organisation. Members are invited to attend planned social activities for further fundraising and to volunteer their services in a variety of ways.

You can join online for as little as \$15 per year. This forms part of the contribution made available to Stewart House annually.

For more information and to join today go to Stewart House's website www.stewarthouse.org.au and follow the links from the drop-down menu [Get Involved](#).

On our website social events will be listed and we encourage all members and friends to join us throughout the year. A calendar of events for the coming year will be published in the IRSEA Newsletter early in 2017.

**BE PART OF A GREAT SOCIAL GROUP SUPPORTING
SUCH A WORTHY CAUSE**

August Lunch



Dorothy Hoddinott AO, Guest Speaker for August

August Lunch



Brian Gillett

Members say

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN WALGETT IN THE 1970s

Laurie Craddock

This is the final part of the four part report from Laurie Craddock.

Editor

The Library

Peg Craddock was a very skilled librarian (subsequently president of ASLA and winner of the John Hirst award) who developed a library completely appropriate for the school it served. Visitors were always struck by the number of Aboriginal children active in the library during school breaks. She extended the library to meet the needs of the correspondence children after a correspondence centre was established.

Apart from the 'school days' for these children they were often found in the library during town visits. The library and its teacher greatly aided the literacy thrust. I would have to say that the programs devised by the librarian to gain the interest of Aboriginal children were extremely effective. The Services Directorate reproduced some of them.

The Walgett Factor

I don't know if the above successes could have been achieved as comprehensively in any other North Western town. A couple of witnesses in an inquiry I conducted in Bourke in 1982 posed the question "Why is Walgett different?" Different it was in a number of subtle ways.

There was certainly greater tolerance in the non-Aboriginal community than neighbouring towns with significant Aboriginal populations. Never once did P&C members object to all the projects being mounted specifically for the Aboriginal children. The P&C played the normal supportive role.

Due to the efforts of teachers, supported by some clergy, the hotels and clubs were desegregated. Teachers were prepared to use their economic clout in the case of the Sporting Club, but Walgett R.S.L. saw sense and became the first club to desegregate in the northwest.

The Walgett Shire Council embraced the national moves for Aboriginal advancement post the 1967 referendum, and it consistently supported the Walgett Aboriginal Education Conferences staged in the Shire's premises.

Of course, apart from the senior educational leaders who attended, we had prominent academics and interstate participants that gave the conference significant status, as well as putting Walgett the town on the national education map.

On the Aboriginal front a branch of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was established in Walgett. I was the honorary secretary. This gave me an 'in' to the Aboriginal community that could not have been achieved in any other way.

We had a new building and a paid staff that enabled us to run a comprehensive social support operation. In due course a branch of the Aboriginal Legal Service and Housing Co-operative got going. We had a network to which we could turn for support in solving problems.

Government and Departmental Support

From 1974 when Schools Commission funds began to flow (Disadvantaged School Program and later the Country Area Program) the scene changed dramatically. Now there were funds to support the programs we already had running, or ready to launch. The numerous creative thinkers on both staffs (some American) couldn't believe their luck. It certainly made a *huge* difference.

In those days we were very conscious of Head Office, and, in particular, Regional support. Being aware of this support was a huge boost to the morale of the frontline officers.

David Maher, Assistant Regional Director, made Herculean efforts in attempts to get suitable staff for the school, and to see that those who served their time were rewarded with appointments as near as possible to the ones they sought. It was amazing just how often he obtained the actual first choice. He set up an operation with Armidale C.A.E. that made the staffing exercise in placing suitable probationers a surprising success.

David with firstly Tom Allport, then Tony Negline, made DSP and CAP responsive to the needs of the schools and communities that they served. In Walgett's case he involved himself in the school and was the originator of some ideas that became successful programs.

The special deaf unit mentioned above was one of his ideas. The research officer and additional DM were also his initiatives. Under his guidance we had the WAEC committee operating very effectively, and he always was able to arrange the publication of papers presented. Similarly we got great support from the late Bill Rose who had statewide responsibility for Aboriginal education.

Tom Allport urged me to write the lesson notes for a new teacher's first three weeks. I could see what he was driving at, and during the next Christmas vacation I took on the task. One thing led to another and it developed into a comprehensive manual in a spring-back folder to which further material could be added. It proved a great success with even returning teachers using even the lesson notes.

The above gave me the idea for my last major contribution before leaving Walgett. The Cluster Curriculum development incorporated ten schools centred on Walgett. A team of eight consultants funded through the Country Area Program developed an extensive lesson material collection, relevant to the students of the cluster, fundamentally to assist the young teachers with what was a difficult challenge. It covered all grades and each curriculum area, and was some 4cms thick.

There is a real place for such projects in the most difficult areas. One can think of several reasons why not to do this, but they'll never add up to the reasons for doing so.

The Teacher Housing Authority eventually greatly improved accommodation for teachers' in a town where there was little by way of housing, or flats for hire.

I mention these latter things because an infrastructure of targeted support is of enormous significance. There are limits to the number of battles in-school people can fight.

Discussion

What does all of the above add up to? The events described happened over a quarter of a century ago. I'm prepared to have a go, for the last time, to tease out the fundamental lessons that *will still apply*. That is, of course, if the intention is to resurrect Walgett, and places like it.

1. Cleaning up a mess, or simply providing for general educational progress that is acceptable in a predominantly Aboriginal setting requires:

- a.** a leader who is dedicated to tackling the task at hand, and who is equipped to do so*;
- b.** a staff who will give the leader dedicated support;
- c.** an infrastructure of support from the agencies of DET that will support a. and b. ; and,
- d.** provision of genuine incentives for the frontline personnel to do the work.

* The leader must be able to plan and execute a staff development policy that will skill staff in areas where their training, and prior experience, will not be sufficient for the new challenge. Lest the reader be tempted to believe that I had been extraordinarily lucky with my team I should point out that amongst the group I started with, three had been deferred. Later on I did get three exceptional teachers, but the rest while eventually high achievers didn't start that way!

Let us be realistic. What are the chances in this day and age of getting the right staff into places like Bourke and Walgett without genuine incentives? Put very simply the NSW Government cannot solve the Walgett type problems on the cheap.

I would point out, however, that these schools are a very small percentage of the schools in NSW, and the incentives needed to do similar things in, say Alexandria, are very much cheaper. In the final analysis we are only talking about 2% of the school population.

What would be the profile of the leader we are talking about? Obviously he or she would have demonstrated leadership qualities and professional commitment to provide the best education possible. Evidence of preparedness to be in for the long haul, five to seven years, will be necessary.

I was in Walgett for 12 years. She or he won't achieve much in three years. Evidence of willingness to move beyond the conventional boundaries will also be a plus. Preparedness to look at alternative learning modes will also be a requirement.

The teachers will have achieved a degree of professional maturity. Lack of extensive experience isn't an insurmountable problem provided that their training has acculturated them to, as a professional person, find the best answers for the needs of their students and not reject more effective methodologies because they don't conform with their training, or because of the security of the familiar. They'll need to stay three plus years, and accept scheduling of transfers so that the disaster that struck Walgett in 1977 will be avoided.

2. What infrastructure of support will be needed?

- a.** In-service support, specific to the circumstances that teachers are facing;
- b.** guidance for the principal in setting the school to be a place welcoming Aboriginal students and a place where they will want to be;
- c.** departmental action encouraging and disseminating findings of action research;
- d.** departmental sponsorship of academic research in key areas where it is needed; and,
- e.** on the spot guidance for the handling of the most difficult problems.

I think that **2a.** speaks for itself. (A day long in-service course for teachers teaching Aboriginal students for the first time is extremely valuable particularly if it has a section on history.)

In relation to **b.** it was an incidental finding to the research I did in the old Met. North Region that principals were overwhelmingly, and genuinely keen to make their schools welcoming places for Aboriginal students. They all confessed they didn't know how, though many were making a pretty good fist of it. What they wanted was a handbook that could guide them.

Realising that many of the successful operators like Ed Gaskell were still around, and that we were well set up to conduct the very necessary community research, we put together a proposal to collate all of the relevant material into a handbook.

Funds were promised from the former DSE, the Catholic Education Commission, the University of Sydney, and the Board of Studies undertook to develop an interactive CD ROM. The latter would

enable a teacher, or a school executive, to sit down and get specific advice about how to handle a difficult problem.

We submitted the proposal to the Commonwealth as a 'project of national significance', but it was rejected for the most absurd reason. It was a case of an officer with no educational background meddling in an area where he didn't know what he was talking about. I understand the need still exists for such a project.

Much of the research conducted at Walgett was action research, with very valuable outcomes. We set up the WAEC to disseminate our findings through demonstration, and the publication of the conference papers. David Maher did the same through the Disadvantaged Schools Conferences. It had some successes, but it wasn't enough. This whole issue needs to be addressed.

During my time at Sydney University I had two research assistants working on collating the research in Aboriginal education and was shocked to discover the paucity of it, particularly as it referred to NSW. This is a national question that needs addressing.

However, research that will determine whether Aboriginal children still come to school with strong visual learning skills, and poor verbal skills, needs to proceed as a priority because so much depends upon it. Work I was doing on the North Coast (2000-2002) would strongly suggest that it does. Schools can't be left to flounder.

Some sundries rate a special mention. The ultimate goal of teaching Aboriginal children, as seen by their parents (unless parents' attitudes have changed) is to see Aboriginals competing fully with non-Aboriginals by the end of their schooling process. To achieve this some modification of the curriculum offering at key stages of development seems necessary.

I discerned a need for a course in 'thinking', a need that probably still exists. The whole curriculum needs to be reviewed to determine whether or not it is contributing to the parents' ultimate goal. I doubt that it was only Walgett that needed a fully structured affective curriculum.

There is one such area of major concern that I have. Pre-schoolers come into schools with two significant deficiencies when compared with non-Aboriginal pre-schoolers. (Often there are non-Aboriginals that have the same problem.) They have fewer noun concepts encoded, and their grasp of the structure of language is inferior.

As we found in our pre-school trial at Coraki, the noun problem can be easily overcome. Fortunately this problem, and the structural one can be overcome, but the method runs contrary to a dominant philosophy amongst many pre-school teachers.

Back in Walgett days we overcame the structural problem by using a program called Distar(?) using a skilled AEA to do the work with small groups. When Jim Colbourne did some evaluative work for the old Studies Directorate (I think – could have been Services) we found that the positive effects were still clearly in evidence in Yr.4, the stage reached by the first to have the program.

There is a successor to Distar, but it really needs modification for use with Aboriginal students, and teachers need to be trained in its use. One thing that is not acceptable is ill-informed criticism by

those opposed to direct teaching methods. Until they can come up with a satisfactory and proven alternative, they have no place in the discussion.

b. Late in my career in the department I was shocked to hear a discussion of this new discovery of hearing problems amongst Aboriginal students. Twenty odd years after our groundbreaking work in Walgett it was still a new discovery. (The problem isn't only caused by otitis media, there is also the medical condition known as glue-ear.)

The health of Aboriginal children in some areas is still of major concern in spite of breakfast programs and the like. Co-ordination between education and health personnel is vital if effective learning is to occur in cases where, for whatever reason, the kid's health has been neglected.

c. Schools undertaking the sorts of challenges under discussion have to be properly resourced: libraries, computers, all the trappings of a modern school with funds to support an extensive excursion program, etc.

d. I think there is probably a place for lighthouse schools, at least in some areas. If a good one begins to emerge in say the Bourke S.E.D., putting extra resources into developing it could pay-off particularly if there is some firm pressure used to get the others to adopt successful innovations.

It has taken a long time to pull this together. It is an accurate summary set out in sequence of the events of what was a great endeavour. Fortunately there are still many professional educators around who can attest that the story is as I have described it. It has one message that comes through loud and clear.

Aboriginal children will learn as well as their white counterparts so long as the relationship between teachers and students is empathic, the pedagogy is right, and the curriculum relevant.

Have a good think about all of the foregoing! I was wildly astray when I made a bold prediction on 'Four Corners' in 1971 that the problem would be far behind us by now.. I now wonder whether I'll live long enough to see achieved what should be a straight forward challenge for a 21st century education system. For the sake of all the Aboriginal students in NSW, and their parents, let's get it right this time. We did get it right once, but a long time ago!

**L J Craddock
10th May, 2004**

My thanks go to Laurie's widow, Peg, for her gracious permission and assistance in printing Laurie's unpublished report. When I was first considering this lengthy item for the Newsletter, problems at Walgett had reached a state that the Secretary (DG) was required to make a personal visit to the area.

Laurie's final sentence kept echoing in my mind.

Peter Robinson, Editor

August Lunch



President Alan Laughlin and Secretary Geoff Walton

August Lunch



Bill Muir

Members say
LIFE - TOO PRECIOUS TO WASTE!

Graham Sims

Having not long ago been to the funeral of an old tennis mate, John, whom we fondly remembered for his gentleness and yet speed around the court, only for him to face the humiliating descent into Parkinson's Disease, and the collapse of virtually all those skills and insights which had characterised him, I've found myself, once again, pondering the mystery and inexplicability of 'life' and 'death', the great unknowns.

At least, this man LIVED for 81 years, the majority of which were productive, satisfying, healthy and loving. Gentle soul that he was, he would have had few regrets, and indeed had written that he had found his life, faith, family and career to be 'blessings', for which he was very grateful.

More recently still, I joined with some of my weekly tennis colleagues in a gathering to commemorate the life of one of our mates, who, having nursed and supported his wife through her long battle with cancer, suddenly discovered he himself had terminal cancer, and died quite quickly. His widow was among his mourners.

And now I've learned of the sudden death of the sister of one of my friends. Having just had knee replacement, at the age of 80+, this strong-willed and forthright lady suddenly succumbed to a blood clot, and died only a few days after her sister had visited her, as she seemed to be recovering from the knee replacement itself.

Somehow, these sad events caused my thoughts to turn to two other people whom I knew, one only for only a few hours, and the other for some years. Both of them died, many, many years too soon, and by their own hand.

The first was a young lad, still a schoolboy, of only 15 or 16 years of age. He briefly and tragically came into and out of my life within the course of only a few hours, the trauma of which caused him to bring his young life to a ghastly and unnecessary end.

I was driving home from my office in Parramatta late one afternoon, along a winding road in Beecroft, when an out of control car came careering around a sharp bend, on the wrong side of the road, directly in front of my car. I had to take urgent, evasive action, and the other car crashed into a large tree, at high speed. The front passenger was catapulted through the windscreen and ran off into the surrounding bush.

The driver, also only a lad, hit his head on the shattering windscreen and suffered severe gashes to his head. Another motorist and I extracted him, bleeding badly and in great distress, from the wrecked car. Apart from his severe physical injuries, he was in extreme agitation, raving that "dad will kill me for taking his car". He would not calm down and, despite our attempts to restrain him, so that he could receive medical attention, he broke away from us and ran off into the bush.

Police and an ambulance were called, and we learnt that, just up the road, his car, (actually his father's) had previously crashed head-on into a vehicle containing a mother and young daughter, both of whom were injured and in some shock. We had called 000 on a mobile, and, as stated, had tried to assist the young driver, by getting him to sit down so we might staunch the flow of blood from his head wounds.

A short time later, a car pulled up nearby, driven by the mother of the young passenger who'd initially run off into the bush. It appeared that, in panic, he'd run home to fetch his mother. By this time, the police had arrived and took detailed statements from me, as the prime witness to the crash, and the circumstances involving the young, injured driver, who'd disappeared into the bush.

The young passenger identified the driver and a police officer told me they knew where he lived and expected to be able to apprehend him soon, sensitive to my expressed concern about his state of mind and his quite serious injuries. Later that evening, I received a phone call from this officer, telling me that they had, in fact, located the young driver, who had hanged himself from his family's back fence.

My shock and despair at this dreadful news was not really mitigated by the well-meaning young officer saying, "You mustn't blame yourself, Mr Sims. The young fellow was known to us and we knew this was going to happen sooner or later."

I subsequently learnt something of the young lad's life and family, to the extent that he was a bright and successful student at a local high school, and from a respected local family. I contemplated writing to his parents, but the police advised against doing so. Nevertheless, years later, the knowledge that I was almost undoubtedly the last person to speak to their son, and that I recall exactly what I said to him, still haunts me.

"Listen, mate. Your dad WON'T kill you. There are worse things in life than wrecking a car. Let's get you fixed up and then we'll face your dad." We never did.

The second wasted life was that of the beautiful, bright, bubbly and highly successful wife of the owner of TRAKKA Campervans, whose products I've patronised for over 40 years, and whose entire family I've come to know well.

In fact, only a day or so earlier, I'd been visiting TRAKKA at Mt Ku-ring-gai, where we'd been discussing my writing of some articles for their client magazine. A few days later, I was in my TRAKKA van, at my local mechanic's at Thornleigh, when a courier walked over to me and asked, "You're not planning to take your van up to TRAKKA today, are you, sir?"

"No", I replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Haven't you heard?" he replied, somewhat, embarrassed. "Sally (the wife) committed suicide on Mothers' Day, and her funeral is today, in an hour's time."

Those who know me would attest that I'm rarely stuck for a word, but this news dumbfounded me. Eventually, I stammered something like, "But I was talking to her only a day or so ago. It CAN'T be true!"

He assured me that it was, indeed, true, and, bewildered and saddened, I raced home, changed into more appropriate clothes and, in a very confused state of mind, made my way to Macquarie Park, just in time for the funeral.

I found myself amidst a throng of people, family, friends and business associates, all of whom looked and sounded as disbelieving as I did...but the awful fact was, indeed, tragically true.

I subsequently learned that, beneath Sal's effervescent, dynamic exterior had lain, for some years, the dreaded black dog of depression, rearing its morbid head in ways which were known to the family, but hidden, at least on the surface, from the world at large.

Grief-stricken though they were, her family and close friends had suspected and feared that, sooner or later, the awful day would come, as it indeed had. Whatever fundamental meaning life and death may, or may not have, according to a particular faith, if one has one, or, in purely existentialist terms, if one is without faith, the inevitability and mystery remain.

John, my tennis mate, lived 81 fruitful and joy-filled years before his death, and he saw his own life as 'a blessing'.

Ian, my other tennis companion, also lived a full and productive life, as did the sister of my friend.

The young driver who feared his father's wrath so much that, rather than face him, he took his own life, died without ever seeing his life as 'a blessing', or, indeed, without letting his life extend beyond 15 short years.

Sal, from Trakka, was productive, successful and fulfilled in the eyes of everyone but herself.

How do we reconcile the forces, tensions and influences which can cause one man to be imbued with the joy of life, live it to the fullest and not fear death, while a young lad and a still vibrant young woman feel that they and their lives are so worthless that it is somehow 'better' to end them, and that their presence will barely be missed by those they leave behind?

Whether life is underpinned by some Great Plan, or is merely the result of some random, physical 'fluke', it IS life...and it is ours to live, as fully and positively as we can, for as long as we can.

August Lunch



Co-Treasurer Ray Gillies

Editor says

Two errors were included in the July 2006 Newsletter.

In *The Golden Years of the Wireless Quiz* the acknowledgement of Syd Smith as the contributor was incorrect, the article was submitted by Graham Sims.

The entry in the Queen's Birthday Honours of an OAM for Brian Gillett was correct but it wasn't our Brian Gillett. Our Brian already has been honoured with the higher award of an AM.

I have severely castigated the entire Newsletter editorial staff and offer my sincere apologies for any embarrassment that they may have caused.

The Editor

New members

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edspecs1@bigpond.com Partner: Robyn Furness

Address changes
(Changes shown in Bold)

CORISH Brent
sylvia.corish@det.nsw.edu.au

DOBINSON Barbara and Tom
P.O. Box 619 TWEED HEADS 2485
dobinson611@gmail.com.au

PROWSE Ron
ronprowse32@optusnet.com.au

Deaths

11/8/2016 **MULHOLLAND L S (Rus)**
246/1 Dalmar Place
CARLINGFORD 2118

Vale Rus Mulholland



REMEMBER WHEN...

Graham Sims

I remember when the increasingly fashionable and upmarket area now known as 'Bicentennial Park' and the 'Olympics Site' was known to us Concord kids of the 1950's as 'The Mangroves', 'Homebush Tip' and 'The Brickpits'.

This huge and then largely undeveloped area also included 'Flemington Saleyards', 'The Abattoirs' and the 'Barnes Bacon' slaughterhouse. All of it was our playground.

With, (or mostly without) our parents' knowledge or approval, we played amidst no doubt carcinogenic garbage, (which glowed in the dark), rode and slid on 'sugar-bags' over the edge of the brickpits at the old State Brickworks, paddled in home-made tin canoes in and around the vast mangrove swamps, roamed those swamps in pursuit of 'wild' pigs which had escaped their fate and bred among the mangroves and, most dangerously of all, hunted with axes, air-rifles and the occasional .22 rifle, the evil, black bull sharks which frequented Homebush Bay, and often became stuck in the mangroves, at low tide, as they sought the sheep and cattle carcasses which were disposed of by the dreaded Abattoirs.

A local lad, who'd shot and butchered a pig, once jumped into Homebush Bay to wash off the blood 'n' guts...and had his leg taken off, just below the knee, by an opportunistic shark. We blithely rode our (unregistered) motorbikes along Underwood Road, dicing with death against the heavily laden Brickworks trucks which drove up and down all day, delivering their loads.

Unless we had an accident of some sort or another, which happened with a certain inevitability every now and then, our parents remained in blissful ignorance of our escapades. Once alerted, they naturally banned us from such acts of derring-do, and, after a brief period of token obedience, we, equally naturally, resumed our wicked ways.

With my geriatric cycling group, I frequently ride through the 'modern version' of my former playground. It now seems very civilised and tame.

**Have you contributed any material for the
Newsletter during the last 2 or 3 years?
If not, this is a very good time to do so.**

HELP IS NEEDED

Material is urgently needed
for the **February & April 2017 Newsletters**

Accompanying photos are most welcome,
preferably as JPG email attachments.

Copy deadline: 15th January 2017

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