



# *Newsletter*

**February 2018**

**Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators Inc**

**From the President**



**Kerrie Ikin, President IRSEA 2017-18**

Welcome back to 2018 and what I hope will be an exciting year for IRSEA. I hope you all had a happy Christmas and New Year with family and friends and are looking forward to more collegiality through IRSEA in the coming year.

I have just returned from a week in Singapore, attending and presenting at ICSEI (International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement).

It was certainly good to hear the latest about educational reform from renowned speakers such as Alma Harris and Andy Hargreaves and also to see some newer faces as keynote speakers, as such as Carol Campbell, Lucy Crehan, and Alicia Grunow.

The theme of the conference was Deepening School Change for Scaling and some messages that resonated with me were that it is the 'teachers who are at the heart of reform', 'professional collaboration should generate new knowledge not recycle old knowledge' (Alma Harris), 'early career teachers have enough to do without being responsible for curriculum design as well (Lucy Crehan), and possibly and most importantly

that we need to place ‘well-being and human development at the core of large-scale educational change’ (Carol Campbell).

At our Christmas luncheon meeting, I indicated that our planned meeting with Murat Dizdar, Deputy Secretary, School Operations and Performance, had had to be postponed.

This meeting has now taken place with Brian Powyer (ISEA) and myself meeting with Murat on 18 January. The outcomes were very positive and will see a greater exchange of information and expertise between IRSEA and the DoE.

First, we have agreed that a flow of information between our two organisations would be of benefit to both. To this end IRSEA has agreed to provide information to the DoE for distribution to senior officers upon retirement.

IRSEA will provide a package that will include information about IRSEA, a membership form, and, for at least 2018 (courtesy of the ISEA) a copy of The Institute. I believe that this is one very positive way in which we can continue to attract members.

Other initiatives discussed included DoE hosting one of our luncheon meetings and tapping into our members’ expertise. I will keep you informed of developments in these and other areas as soon as we can put them into place.

I see a productive year ahead for IRSEA, wish you all good health, and look forward to our ongoing collegiality.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Report from Committee meeting December 1, 2017</b></p>
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This brief meeting was attended by 32 members and guests. It was chaired by President Kerrie Ikin.

Apologies were received from Brian Davies, George Green and Tony Re.

**Reports**

In her report, President, Kerrie Ikin,

- thanked members for their responses to the membership survey and indicated that at its meeting on Monday 19 February, 2018, the Executive will give further consideration to recommendations arising from further analysis of these responses.

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- Indicated that she was still hoping to meet with senior departmental officers before Christmas to explore avenues for the IRSEA to have contact with potential members (retiring Senior Educational Administrators).

Secretary Geoff Walton tabled a schedule of dates for 2018 meetings and Newsletter despatches. During a brief discussion of the viability of continuing to hold a meeting in August 2018 and inviting a speaker to address members during this meeting it was resolved to continue the current practice for 2018.

2018 Meeting dates will be Friday 4 May – lunch and AGM; Friday 3 August 2018 - lunch with invited guest speaker, Friday 7 December - Christmas lunch.

Treasurer, Ray Gillies reported that the CBA accounts in the name of the “Association of Retired Inspectors of

Schools” had been closed and the funds held in the cheque account and the interest bearing deposits had been transferred into the Institute of Retired Senior Educational Administrators account.

The first executive committee meeting for 2018 will be held on Monday 19 February 2018. Please let me know if you have items/issues you would like placed on the agenda for this meeting.

Geoff Walton  
Ph 02 9639 6847  
Mob. 0418 241 406



Geoff George and Geoff Walton



## Geoff presenting the Secretary's Report



### **Friends of Stewart House (FOSH).**

The Friends of Stewart House are gearing up for an active 2018. The AGM will be held on Feb 7th at the Epping Club, 11.00am. Always an enjoyable event followed by a great luncheon with old friends.

The FOSH Committee have been working on a range of activities and fund raisers for 2018. There is likely to be an activity each month, and these will be confirmed in the first FOSH newsletter of 2018 or on the website as part of the Stewart House official website.

FOSH activities will include the regular and successful Doyles Watson's Bay luncheon, High Tea and the Stewart House presentation day and tour.

FOSH is also planning another restaurant outing, an historical trip around Parramatta, a trip to the Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens, a reception and movie night at Stewart House, a Kokoda memorial track walk and of course another race day. All events emphasise friendship and collegiality as well fundraising for Stewart House.

If you are interested in more information, or to join this very active group, go to the website on the Stewart House web address: [www.stewarthouse.org.au](http://www.stewarthouse.org.au)

**Alan Laughlin, Secretary FOSH**

## **FIRST TEACHING APPOINTMENT**

Greg, (a retired teacher) and I were fishing off Pulbah Island on Lake Macquarie one day over the New Year when he told me about his first appointment to the Teaching Service. I thought I'd write it up and send it for the editor's consideration.

It might be of interest, and it might attract others to share similar career tales through future Newsletters.

**Tony Negline**

Greg's first teaching appointment was to Triad in 1970,- a railway siding on the Great Western Line to Broken Hill.

Greg explained that much of the Great Western Line was a single line. At various stages along the line at sidings like Triad, the train stopped and the engine driver walked over to a tin shed alongside the station to phone ahead to establish if the line was clear to continue the journey. If it wasn't, the train pulled onto the siding to wait for the oncoming train to pass; then on it travelled.

Twenty four hours before reaching Triad, Greg had departed Newcastle on a Department of Education second-class rail warrant that entitled him to travel with two bags of luggage but nothing extra; not even the box of food and some everyday ware his mother had packed after her son received notice of his appointment to a one teacher school 50 miles east of Ivanhoe where there was the school, a post office, a three sided railway station with a shed, two houses and no shops.

The second class rail warrant didn't cover the cost of transporting the extra box. That had to be paid for by the traveller and go separately as freight.

Greg revealed that subsequently he and his two luggage bags arrived at Triad together. The freight box, the food and other items his mother had packed, arrived a week and a half later!

After disembarking from the train at Triad, and watching its departure, Greg just stood at the station awestruck by a landscape he'd never seen before – a brown, flat, treeless plain like a big brown billiard table. The only sign of movement was a motor vehicle coming toward the station.

It was the postmaster performing his usual duty of collecting mail left by the train. On this occasion, he also met and collected the new school teacher.

Greg believed that in any case this was an inevitable meeting because the keys to the school were at the post office, the telephone was at the post office, and phone contact beyond Triad was through the post office- including contact with the Department of Education and its district representative.

If anyone wanted to make telephone contact with Greg, they phoned the post office to leave a message for him to return their call. That was how the District Inspector contacted the school as well, by phoning the post office and leaving a message for the teacher to phone him back in Broken Hill. In due course, that was how Greg became aware that the Inspector planned a visit three weeks after school started.

That visit was still a month away. Greg had only just left train, visited the post office, and was now opening the door to the school house. There he found a bed sitter with a kitchenette, and a verandah with a tiny bathroom and laundry at the end. It was clean but there was no electricity, no power, no lights and an empty water tank along-side. There was a gas light with mantle and a gas stove but no gas, and he had no food.

“Bloody Hell” he admitted he exclaimed to himself as he sat on the verandah with his head in his hands thinking, “What am I going to do now?”

Luckily, the upshot of his uncertainty came from a lady who had just called at the Post Office. Having been told of the arrival of the new teacher, she drove over to the school house to meet him. Greg then had a better idea of what he was going to do. The lady invited him to stay at her property until he was settled.

He was loaned a motor bike and someone drove him to Hillston to organise gas for the school house and to buy food. After the gas was delivered, Greg moved into the school house.

School started with ten students from four families— seven from one family. The seven attended on the first day but were never seen again even though they were expected back after six weeks. Greg believed that was the usual start to the school year. The father of the seven children was a fettler who rented one of the two houses nearby. Every year in the first week of February he’d take ‘holidays’. He and the family would go fruit picking in the Riverina.

So when the District Inspector visited as planned, there were only three children attending. Greg supposed the Inspector stayed about an hour and a half doing most of the talking with Greg doing most of the listening. When he’d finished and was leaving, the Inspector observed the need for the wash basin in the school office to be cleaned, and said so.

Greg agreed the wash basin was grimy. He should have explained why but he didn’t. He should have told the Inspector that in the time he’d been there the basin hadn’t been used, and possibly his predecessor hadn’t used it either, because there was no water in the tank connected to it. The tank had been cleansed of impurities by the parents the previous year, and it hadn’t rained since! Children used to bring water from home in bottles for themselves and the teacher for drinking, not for cleaning wash basins.

However, while water was limited at the school, there was plenty of milk! This was the time of the free milk scheme for schools. At Triad the milk came in cans of Ideal Milk that had to be mixed with water, one part to three. Greg still believes that even if there had been water to mix the milk, the kids wouldn't have drunk it in any case.

Consequently, crates of Ideal Milk had piled up. Greg thought the store room was almost full of them, stacked to the ceiling. He wrote requesting that no more be sent, but it kept arriving!

The milk kept arriving until he received a message from the Post Office to call the District Inspector. But the call wasn't about milk.

It was to inform him that having reported the school's low student attendance, and having been advised that the fettler's family wouldn't be returning because the father's job had been transferred from Triad to Euabalong, and his children had enrolled there, a decision had been made to close the school.

Greg was told there were letters to parents about the closure in the mail and that he was to finalise matters at the school, prepare an inventory, lock up, and report to the Inspector's office in Broken Hill the following Monday at 9am.

During his time at Triad Greg had bought a Ute from one of the farmers so on the Sunday, with his belongings in the back of the Ute, he set out for Broken Hill arriving at 2am Monday. Finding the Police Station to be the only place open, he took a nap there in his sleeping bag for the rest of the night.

After a shower in the morning he reported to the Inspector's office in the Wendt's Chambers. The Inspector wasn't there but had left a message to report to Morgan Street Public School in Broken Hill as District Relief Teacher; so he did. On arrival at Morgan Street he was straightaway sent to the high school to teach music.

Greg alleged there was no time off for weekend travel, no time off to find accommodation in Broken Hill, no time off to unpack his Ute, and no time to prepare his preliminary music lessons.

But he did have time to realise that, as DRT Broken Hill, he'd come to the end of his first teaching appointment with the Teaching Service of New South Wales."

#### AFTERWORD

1. Triad Public School never reopened.
2. Greg's second appointment was to Broken Hill where he taught for four years.
3. I didn't catch any fish off Pulbah that day, but I did catch a good yarn.



Vincent Delany and Peter Robinson

### **An ex-student?**

**Frank Fisher**

In 1960, my first full year of teaching, I recall the Headmaster, C W (Cec) Davis, delivering to my Year 5 room an eleven year old Finnish lad, Erkki Pekkinen, who had just arrived with his family in the hostel. Without English, he sat right at the front of the class and rarely spoke, but you could see him absorbing everything going on in the room.

In 2014 Gwen and I spent a month in the Baltic States, Finland and Russia. By accident, I discovered that Erkki had returned to Finland ten years after his arrival in Australia responding to the call of his 'native land'. We had the good fortune to meet up with him in Helsinki.

He and his wife, Kirsti, came down from their home in Naarajarvi, 300kms north, meeting and hosting us for an incredible day, that included visits to the "temppeliaukio" church in the rock, the "Seurasaari" open air pioneer museum, and "Tamminiemi" - the museum villa, formerly the residence of Finnish Presidents, including long serving President Urho Kekkonen. These were all components of the emotional ties that drew Erkki back to Finland and bound him to his roots.

The day ended when we arrived back in Helsinki's main square, with Erkki guiding us to a large statue of Aleksis Kivi, Finland's first and greatest author. At this point, Erkki reached into the satchel he was carrying and presented me with two copies of Kivi's only novel, "Seven Brothers", one in Finnish and the other in English, with the instruction that I was to read these side by side. I have started! To say the least it was a memorable day and a very moving reunion of teacher (77) and student (61).



Whilst in Year 6 in 1961 HM Davis had spoken to Erkki telling him of the good reports he had been receiving of his progress. "You're a lad who will go far", he told Erkki. His inscription to me inside "Seven Brothers" reads "from a student who went far". And with a tear or two welling up in his eyes, he added: "back to Finland". I learned a great deal from the encounter.

On his return to Finland Erkki studied at the University of Helsinki gaining an MSc (Forestry) and a DipEd, and became a forestry teacher. Towards the end of his career he proceeded to Cambridge and gained international qualifications and certification as a native speaker of both English and Finnish, and registration as an Authorised Translator for English/Finnish government, educational, legal and scientific documents, and also for Finnish/Swedish and Finnish/German.

An impressive and tall man, he retains the same modest restraint he displayed in the classroom, and a dry sense of humour. He is justifiably very proud of the personal high commendation he received from his Prime Minister for his translation of international government documents.

Last month Erkki flew out to Australia, specifically to attend the 50th reunion of his HSC Class at Canberra High and to visit his sister, Vappu, who lives at Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills. I was also privileged to teach Vappu, in Year 3 a couple of years later, whom I remember as a very happy, vibrant little girl, always with a twinkle in the eye. She entered the nursing profession.

On his bus journey from Canberra to Adelaide through Melbourne, I caught up with Erkki at Southern Cross coach terminal for a couple of hours.

Once again, he came armed with gifts - a special commemorative folder to mark the Republic of Finland's Centenary this year, to feed my interest in European history, and for Gwen a commemorative limited edition, gold-plated medallion containing a miniature reproduction of a painting by Finnish legendary artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela. The cultural setting of the painting is that part of eastern Finland, Karelia, much of which was ceded to Russia after the Winter War of 1939-40. The painting is drawn from a triptych.

At the end of our visit to Helsinki in 2014, Gwen and I continued our travels by the rapid intercity train, "The Allegro", to St Petersburg, arriving at the 'Finland Station'. It was at this historic location in 1917 that VI Lenin launched the 'October Revolution' that changed the shape of Russia, Europe and the World for at least three-quarters of last century.

This was our second visit to Finland, earlier in 2006 having travelled by coach right up through the heart of Finland, into the Arctic region, and across the border into Norway and on to Nordkapp (North Cape), as part of a larger tour of Scandinavia and Nordic countries with Diploma Travel. It is a truly magnificent country, full of lakes and forests, immaculate cities and good, loyal citizens. It is well worth a visit.

**Mornington Vic**



John Ward and Joan Healy

### **‘Two paragraphs’**

**Tony Re**

This was to be the 'catch' for this article until my middle son, a teacher, told me that "letters to the Herald were only submitted by retired people."

I could have regaled him about my first efforts at letter writing at my high school where I was told, not advised, by the staff to desist from writing any more articles for the school newsletter. No explanation. The prerogative of editors and the powers of the media first came to my attention.

But lessons were learnt through persistence over the many years in education. If writing to the local media about the achievements of your school, never ever mention a single negative. This will completely overshadow all the remarkable achievements of the students and be the headlines in the next edition.

Even as a senior administrator, the pen could be used with the media but restraint and circumspection were the order of the day. Any letter that might shine a positive light on the

government of the day would be lauded but full rein to personal views could not be countenanced.

Back to the SMH and letters submitted over the past two years. Perhaps Editor Peter will allow two paragraphs for at least one story.

For reasons that are beyond my comprehension, the Letters Editors of the SMH have smiled kindly upon my efforts over the past two years especially in 2017.

Yes. There was change in my style in this period. The one or two sentences with some quirkiness reflecting an issue of the day seemed to gain attention and were published.

Even a 'catch' which I thought had to be taken- "Adopted!" relating to the citizenship fiasco was not, but a subsequent letter commencing with: "If not now, but in the past and the future, there will be Federal parliamentarians who do not know who their parents are and would be unaware of any citizenships they hold other than Australian.

There are those who have been adopted, have been born through the donation of sperm anonymously or have had their father's name withheld on their Birth Certificate."

Letters written with some depth about issues such as NAPLAN, selective secondary schools, Reading Recovery and the method of funding of schools were generally overlooked.

But none had anything to do with being retired. For members of IRSEA, retirement from matters educational does not occur. If any member believes a change is required in any aspect of society, write away.

Experiences of many years in education and skills learnt can be used in many organisations and for many purposes.

Prior to 2016, Bankstown Sports Athletics had won five consecutive state Winter Distance/Cross Country Championships, one below the record. The task to break this was quite daunting and yours truly was asked to take a major role in rallying members to meet this challenge. And also competing!

This was done successfully meaning that a win in 2017 would create a new record and more work to be done.

So out came the skills from teaching. Create a slogan to be used repeatedly, "Go for 7 in 17". Place it one on a long banner, another on teardrop banner. Use it in newsletters and on social media. Really little different from a meaningful school motto.

Major events in schools do not just happen. Individual staff members have to be cajoled to give much of their free time.

Students have to be motivated to perform to the best possible standard. Members of the leadership group, like those in a school executive or a senior administrative position, had to lead by example.

The record was broken by a large margin in the way we hope that public education will outperform all others.

### **A Prayer**

Wisdom resides in Lincoln. It is not just the stones of its cathedral or castle that speak. On a recent trip to England, at the top of the stairs, in a quiet, modest corner, I found the following prayer on the wall.

While of personal relevance, I thought it might be of interest to others. Some might already know it; some might already recite it.

**Brian Davies**

#### **A prayer for the mature life**

Lord thou knowest better than I know myself that  
I am growing older and will someday be old.

Keep me from getting talkative and particularly  
From the fatal habit of thinking I must say  
Something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to try to straighten out  
Everybody's affairs.

Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but  
Not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems  
A pity not to use it all – but thou knowest Lord  
That I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details;  
Give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips on my many aches and pains. They are  
Increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is  
Becoming sweeter as the years go by.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others  
Pains, help me to endure them with patience.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is

Possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint –  
Some of them are so hard to live with – but a  
Sour old woman\* is one of the crowning works  
Of the devil.

Help me to extract all possible fun out of life. There  
Are so many funny things around us and I don't  
Want to miss any of them.

AMEN

\* or man

Episcopal Churchwomen, Havana, Cuba (1979)



Part of the group at the December Lunch



## For the Newsletter

**Mort Crawford**

As some members will remember, I turned down the offer of the Presidency and instead we left NSW and went to live in Tasmania. Our eldest son and his wife were living there. They had a young family and needed assistance as they both had full time jobs.

Our son was chief horticulturist for all Tasmania and his wife had a shop. We bought a small farm that we stocked with Aberdeen Angus cattle that we bred for the beef market. This proved quite successful but after seven pleasant and invigorating years, with much community involvement, we moved back to NSW as our family were complaining about how far away we were.

We finally settled on Port Macquarie because of its superior medical facilities. Here I was able to indulge my interest in family history. With Norma's help, I first researched one of her family lines and produced 'The Life and Times of Samuel Sydenham and his family 1600-1988'.

Subsequently I wrote 'The Danish Connection', 'Your Scottish Heritage', 'Diehms and Deanes from Wertheim to Machay' and others. Family history is a fascinating activity which I would recommend to all my colleagues. Cheers and the very best of good wishes to all.



Eula Guthrie and Lawrie Smith

## Greece

**Joan Healy**

Peter, the last time you sent out a call for material for the newsletter, in June, Tony and I were sipping a cold drink sitting on our balcony at a hotel in Santorini and Sydney seemed a long, long way away.

Now however, time has caught up with me and despite an unsuccessful corneal implant in my left eye, I will try to put a few thoughts together.

In 1984, Tony and I took a holiday to Greece that included time on Crete, Santorini, Mykonos, Paros, and Samos as well as extensive coverage of the Greek mainland. As independent travellers we were able to explore many out-of-the-way places at our leisure.

This time, with restricted time available, and advancing years, we opted for a group booking, but one that was only responsible for getting us to and from our destination and arranging hotel bookings. A good compromise, as on each island we were then free to use the local transport to visit the places on our "bucket list". This turned out to be a very successful scheme.

Certainly there had been many changes in the intervening years, the first of which was the new Athens airport and the three lane expressway into Athens.

We felt really at home the next morning, however, as much of the highway between Athens and the port of Piraeus was being dug up for some new transport system. The ferry trips between the islands had not changed a great deal apart from the increased number of travellers.

Our first island was Santorini, and it was really impressive to approach this volcanic island in the late afternoon, and wonder at the buildings of Thira and Oia "tumbling down the steep cliffs" at the sides of the caldera.

The first major change we noted was the ferry docking area - now, a very modern and "Greek-efficient" system to load and unload the hundreds of passengers and vehicles, then move them away over the steep zig-zag road to other parts of the island.

Our first arrival had been in the dark in the very early hours of the morning and the only people in sight were the numerous taxi drivers and others touting for business at the various hotels.

The town of Thera was devoted to catering for the hordes of tourists, including the number of huge floating hotels that brought hundreds of people each day. One of the main features is to sit in an outdoor restaurant overlooking the water, and enjoying a meal and drinks while waiting for the very spectacular sunset. One could never tire of this.

We wanted to visit the town of Oia on the North eastern end of the island as previously there had been only one bus each way each day, and it was far too hot to walk very far.

This visit we were transported in very modern, air-conditioned coaches, leaving every 20 minutes or so.

At the opposite end of the island was the archaeological dig at Akrotiri, now housed in a spectacular building with extensive walkways and illustrated information boards (in English and Greek) to explain the history of the dig.

One very telling sign we saw was “Feel free to put your gelato on the table but your feet on the ground please. Thank You :)."

Our second island was Paros - a much less touristy spot as fewer ferries arrive here and there are fewer backpackers.

Those who are here tend to stay in the resorts that are now scattered long the coast leaving the main town more like you expect a Greek island town to be.

Its cobble stone streets always looked immaculate, despite the number of pets seen in the various houses. We were staying in one of the fancy resorts but we used the local bus to go to and from the town.

Finally, the third island was Mykonos - the most heavily touristy of all, being much closer to the mainland and with many more ferries arriving during the day.

While the main township had not changed there was a new port to cater for all the sea-going vessels including the huge floating hotels, and every small, once secluded bay and beach now housed huge, expensive resorts and enormous yachts. A much more sophisticated atmosphere than where the back packers stay.

Back in Athens we were taken on the usual tourist half day tour before returning to pack for the trip home.

Being caught in the Qtar airline dispute with lots of passenger cancellations, we were rewarded with four seats each from Doha to Sydney.

All in all a good, short trip to celebrate a significant birthday.

## SYLLABUS COMMITTEE MEETINGS

**Graham Sims**

I once spent nearly an hour at an ‘important’ meeting, (was ANY meeting ever promulgated as UNimportant?), before I realized I’d gone to the wrong one. Neither my PRESENCE at the one, nor my ABSENCE from the other, made the slightest bit of difference to either.

As the newly appointed (and first ever) Languages Consultant for the Department of Education, I was responsible for the (then) 28 foreign languages in the official curriculum, and somehow had to attend all their Syllabus Committee meetings.

Logically, so I thought, I began with the most ‘popular’ languages, such as French, German, Latin, Italian etc, and then tried to work my way through the others.

Now, ONE of those ‘others’ was RUSSIAN, and, for some reason, I never quite seemed to manage to attend their meetings. (Actually, folks, it’s so long ago now that I can confess WHY I never got around to them.)

Back in my Dip.Ed. year, I did Russian as one of my courses...and HATED it!...unusual for me, as I love ALL languages.

Our Russian lecturer was a humourless, cranky, ill-tempered old duck who looked as if she’d just stepped out of a Chekov play. She was convinced that Russian was God’s language, and that we were dumb beyond comprehension if it didn’t make instant and complete sense to us...and it DIDN’T!...at least not to me.

I recall spending what felt like HOURS saying the word ‘VOT’ over & over. (‘Vot’ means ‘there is’). Each time I said ‘Vot’, the dragon-lady said ‘Niet’... ‘Is not ‘vot’...is ‘vot’...so I’d say ‘vot’...and she’d say ‘niet’...and it seemed I would spend the rest of my life ‘votting’ and ‘nieting’.

Eventually, at the point of collapse, I said ‘vot’ for the umpteenth time...and she said ‘Da!’ And to this day I don’t know any difference between my final ‘vot’ and all its preceding ‘vots’.

However, as an aside, years later, my wife and I found ourselves in Tashkent, Siberia, in the middle of a Russian winter. As we gazed at the bleak, icy landscape, surrounded by a group of equally bleak, icy Tashkentians who were staring at us, I remembered my Russian from Dip. Ed. and thought I’d give it my best shot...or my best ‘vot’.

Smiling at our icy onlookers, I confidently said ‘Vot dom y most’ (there is a house & a bridge.)

They understood me perfectly. They all looked around them...shook their heads, and walked away.

It was only then that I realized that, no matter where one looked across the vast, snow-covered landscape, there was NEITHER a house nor a bridge to be seen.

It put me off Russian for life, and, perhaps subconsciously was the reason I delayed going to a Russian Syllabus Committee meeting.

When I plucked up the courage to do so, and opened the door of the lecture-room where the meeting was taking place, I realized two things.

- \* The meeting had already started.

- \* There was only one empty seat...right in the middle of a full row.

I had to do that 'I'm terribly sorry...excuse me' thing about a dozen times, causing people to stand up to let me through, before I sat down in the middle, having disturbed the entire meeting.

It was at that point that I realized a THIRD thing about the meeting. I didn't recognize a soul there... nor could I make any sense of what they were talking about...but that didn't really surprise me. They were, after all, Russians.

After some time, the Chairman of the meeting smiled cryptically at me and said, 'We haven't heard anything from you, Mr...Mr...?'

'Ah,' said I perceptively, or so I thought. 'Graham Sims, Mr Chairman. I don't believe I can contribute much at the moment. This is the first Russian meeting I've attended.'

'Russian? Russian?' queried the Chairman. 'This isn't Russian. This is the Mathematics Committee!'

I had to do my 'I'm terribly sorry. Excuse me!' thing all over again, and make a VERY embarrassing departure...and I don't think I ever did find the Russian Committee.

Having spoken of things Russian, let me reminisce about things GERMAN...or, to be correct, a PERSON German.

When I taught at Sydney Boys High in the 1960's, there appeared on the staff an exchange teacher from Georgia, in the USA, officially meant to be a woman, to soften the male dominance of staff at an all-boys school.

A woman he most decidedly WASN'T! His name was John von Strasser. He was GERMAN, not American, and was, at least in appearance and manner, the most pugnacious and daunting person I ever worked with. Not only were the kids terrified of him...we on the staff were, too.



John's English was fluent, but incomprehensible, appearing to consist of an endless series of prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, pronouns and the occasional adverb...but with virtually no nouns or verbs.

He LOVED staff meetings...at which he ALWAYS had something to say. It's just that nobody, either before or after, ever had the faintest idea what it actually WAS.

Of necessity, he was given a Leaving Certificate Maths class, and the Maths Master, Maurie Chalmers, was in despair as to whether John's students could ever understand a word he said...WE certainly couldn't.

One day, John was away, ill, so Maurie went into his class, wrote a maths problem on the board and asked an Aussie kid named John Rumsey to come out and explain the solution, as Dr von Strasser had taught them.

Now, folks, I taught Rumsey French, and he was FAR from being the sharpest tool in the shed.

He came out to the front, took a piece of chalk, approached the blackboard, and, in a perfect Strasserian imitation, said 'Vell, you see...always...but never...as well... and so... above und below...together you put...but not so...like this...' and then went back to his seat and sat down.

'Oh, my Lord', said Maurie. I'm dead!'

It must be said that, somehow, John's Maths class did surprisingly WELL in the Leaving Certificate. Perhaps the examiners were frightened of him, too.

Just before the end of the year, John had to return to the USA, but, before he left, he insisted on holding a special staff meeting, to thank everyone for such a wonderful experience...at least, we THOUGHT that's what he wanted to do. With John, you could never be sure.

He stood up, smiled...at least it MIGHT have been a smile, and, for about 20 long, convoluted, incomprehensible minutes, did his 'Vell, you know...always, but never...as well...und so...' performance, and then suddenly sat down, amid a stunned silence.

No doubt feeling that someone had to respond with something, the Headmaster, Murray Callaghan, as linguistically discombobulated as the rest of us, stood up and said, "Well, gentlemen, I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say that Dr von Strasser's words have given us a lot to think about. I suggest we now think about them"

...and the meeting closed.

## Senior School Studies's Meetings

Graham Sims

I remember one meeting which was, almost literally, the most explosive I ever attended... and very nearly the last.

I was the executive member of the Community Languages Advisory Committee of the Board of Senior School Studies. (Our title was larger than the committee itself...a common phenomenon.)

We used to meet in the office of our Chairman, Professor John Dunston. This was a strange, long, narrow, cheese-wedge shaped little room in the clock tower at the University of Sydney, where John was Professor of Latin.

His room was so long and narrow that we had to sit virtually tandem, on the tatty old chairs with which it was furnished.

On this memorable day, there were already 6 of us in the room, waiting, as ever, for Prof Dunston, who was always late.

Suddenly, into the room burst not the Prof, but Tony Strong, one of our members, who, for some reason, was also late.



Ian and Cate Vacchini

There was only one spare chair in the room,(apart from the Professorial chair itself). It was in the far corner, or APEX of the narrow room, and Tony made a bee-line for it, and sat down.

After a few minutes, with still no Prof Dunston, we all began to notice an overpowering smell of PETROL in the room. Now, we knew there was an ancient gas-ring ,sticking out from the wall ,and that this primitive appliance was invariably used by the good Prof to make us a cup of tea.

The thought of this, combined with the smell of petrol, struck us as a deadly combination... but WHERE was the petrol pong coming from? We all began to search. That is, all except Tony, who just sat there, looking embarrassed, and wearing, I noticed, a very shiny, dark grey suit. I also noticed that Tony himself, or, rather, his shiny suit, appeared to be the source of the petrol pong.

‘All right,’ he suddenly confessed. ‘It’s ME! I tried to use one of those ‘coin-in-the-slot self-serve petrol pumps, and poured the bloomin’ (he didn’t really say ‘bloomin’) stuff all over myself.

Before we could think of anything sensible to say...such as ‘Gawd, you stink’...or ‘Take your clothes off’...or ‘Go away!’...in through the door burst the redoubtable Professor, happily greeting us, waving a box of matches and heading straight for the gas-ring, saying ‘I know what we need. I’ll make us a nice cup of tea!’

That meeting ended without ever beginning, as, like a herd of stampeding elephants, we all galloped past each other (and the Prof), out into what we hoped was the relative safety of the corridor. I never found out whether he ever understood why.

Speaking of ‘explosive’ meetings, I at one stage chaired the Department’s ‘Dangerous Goods and Chemicals in Schools Committee’, whose ‘official’ chair was the Deputy Director-General, whose Professional Assistant was ME.

Now, the DDG, a wonderful lady named Noila Berglund, had actually been a Science teacher, and was eminently qualified to chair such a volatile Committee. I, on the other hand, had a background in languages, and seriously doubted my capacity to chair, and my boss’s wisdom in LETTING me chair, a committee of various experts in chemicals, dangerous substances, occupational health & safety issues ,etc.

As always, however, Noila knew what she was doing, and I learnt that the CHAIR of a committee does not need to be an expert other than in the MANAGEMENT of the people ON that committee, most of whom ARE experts, or BELIEVE they are. I threatened nobody, listened to them all, and, hopefully, guided them to judgments of what was best practice IN SCHOOLS...which I knew better than they did.

One of the laziest and most pompous Head Office colleagues I ever worked with had as his surname a spelling variant of the plural of the big cat known as ‘King of the Beasts’. He was, however, invariably known by his nickname ... ‘Piggy’.

At one stage, he chaired The Competitions in Schools Committee, of which muggings me was Executive Officer. It’s far too long ago for me to seek sympathy, but the fact remains that I did ALL the work for this committee, both prior to and after our meetings.

‘Piggy’ simply galumphed in, pontificated for a while, then galumphed out again...(he was a superb galumpher)...and blithely let me do all the work.

Prior to each meeting, I would prepare an agenda, complete with all the applications received, a summary and costing of each, and a recommendation. From my office on Level 2, I would take or send them up to his office on Level 3...SENDING them up was my preferred option, for no doubt obvious reasons...and then wait for the inevitable phone call.

Before long...NEVER straightaway, as ‘Piggy’ was ALWAYS ‘busy’...my phone would ring, and the following conversation...(or monologue) would ensue:

‘Ah...Graham, It’s ‘Piggy’ here...(actually, he used his real name)...as you may know, I chair The Competitions in Schools Committee, which administers applications for...ah...competitions in schools.’

At this point I’d begin my self-control exercises to prevent myself from screaming...but he’d blithely go on... ‘I’m arranging the date and agenda for the next meeting of this committee, of which, you may know, you function as Executive Officer. I’d like to bring you up to date with what I’ve planned.’

At this point, I’d blurt out a censured version of what I desperately wanted to SCREAM out... ‘I KNOW– I’M EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE !@#\$ COMMITTEE! I DO ALL THE WORK FOR IT. YOU only know about the next meeting, its date and agenda, because I prepared it all and sent it up to you’.

Even then, he’d remain pompously unfazed, continue to tell ME what HE knew only because I’D told HIM, and eventually hang up, convinced he’d shared great words of wisdom with me...his humble servant. His pomposity and ego were such that he was uninsultable.

Suddenly, I find myself recalling another of the masterpieces of this ‘legend in his own imagination’. The Department was sending a group of teachers, selected on merit, to ‘exchange teacher’ positions in other countries. ‘Piggy’ was, for some reason, given oversight of this program, and I was asked to assist, because we worked so well together. (WHO thought this, I never found out!)

Now, folks, this was a pretty impressive and experienced group of teachers, men and women, who would assuredly do the Department proud. The Director-General himself wished to



‘pop in’ to meet them and wish them well, so this was arranged, at a pleasantly informal afternoon tea...well...as ‘informal’ as it could be with ‘Piggy’ in charge.

He decided to explain the DG’S ‘popping in’ as follows: (though I HAVE omitted some of his pomp.)

‘Now, you are very fortunate that the Director-General has seen fit to meet you to tell you how fortunate you are to have been accorded this great honour. He will tell you to be on your best behaviour at all times, and one of you will have the honour of thanking the Director-General for his great generosity.’

At this point, knowing most of this select group, I could see and hear muttered indications that they were not too happy at being spoken to like kindergarten kids...but things reached a new level when the great man went on: ‘I will select one of you to have this great honour, which will require you to be confident, respectful and articulate...so, naturally, this honour will go to one of the MEN.’

Fortunately, a smiling DG waltzed in at this explosive point...otherwise, I really think there would have been either a riot, a mass assault, or both.



Graeme Nicholls, Joan Smith and Geoff George



## ONE MORE TALE FROM THE BOARD

**Graham Sims**

The hard-working Secretary of the Secondary Schools Board, Pat Daley, (who, sadly died of a heart attack, aged only 50 or so) always arrived at the Board meetings laden with a great mass of papers, without which the meeting could not start, and which Pat never entrusted to anyone else to carry.

In those days, the offices of the Boards were in Mitchell St, McMahons Point, but the Board itself met at Head office of the Department of Education in Bridge St, in the city.

Now, as you may know, the little ‘Hegarty’s’ ferries used to operate from McMahons Point and Lavender Bay, across to Circular Quay, a relaxing, scenic trip of only 15 minutes on the beautiful Sydney Harbour.

The Executive Officer, Bill Mason and I always availed ourselves of this delightful little voyage...but, for some reason, we could never persuade Pat Daley to do so.

Instead, he’d lumber himself with his great loads of paper, walk up the quite steep hill to North Sydney Station, and catch the train across to the city, THEN have to walk to Bridge St either from Wynyard or Circular Quay.

All he’d ever say was that he didn’t ‘trust’ the ferry.

One lovely, warm afternoon, Bill and I took our usual little ferry jaunt across the harbour, strolled up to Bridge St and, along with all the other Board members, waited for the Secretary and all his papers to arrive, so the meeting could begin, on schedule, at 1pm.

1 pm came and went, as did 1.30 and 2 pm...with no sign of Pat or the papers. Concerned, I rang our office back at McMahons Point, only to be told that Pat had left ‘hours ago’, and that, surprise...surprise, he’d indicated that, for a change, he was going to catch the ferry. One colleague actually walked down to the ferry wharf, and reported that there was no sign of Pat or the papers. We were all mystified.

Eventually, about 3.30 pm, by which time several Board members had left, and Bob Winder, the Director-General and Chairman, was quietly fuming about the meeting that no longer had a quorum or a printed Agenda, when a dishevelled, red-faced, apoplectic Pat Daley burst into the boardroom, apologizing for the useless !@#\$ ferries, which he’d NEVER catch again!

Later, when we’d calmed Pat down a bit, he explained how he’d seen a ferry waiting at the wharf at Lavender Bay, jumped aboard, just in time, and, to his growing horror, was taken on a meandering, 2 hour harbour cruise, only at the very end coming across to Circular Quay.

For some reason, he BLAMED Bill and me for ‘deliberately’ setting him up. We never convinced him of our complete innocence.



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**(Changes shown in Bold)**

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**Have you contributed  
any material for our  
Newsletter  
in the last 2 or 3 years?**

**If not  
this would be a  
very good time  
to do so, NOW**

**Copy deadline  
15th March**

**email address: peterrobinson7@gmail.com**