

Memorable Moments

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For this year's journal I originally planned to write an article on Riverstone Public School from 1943 (the year I began school there in June aged almost 6) to 1992 (the year I retired after 30 years of teaching. I taught 27 years at Rivo, from 1958 to 1960 at the Infants and from 1968 to 1992 at the Primary as Teacher Librarian with the last 5 months as Relieving Principal). The article grew too large so I decided to just include some excerpts. The Schooldays Article will make its way into the Museum's collection.

I had retired in late 1960, to become a mum. In 1966 the first of my three boys started school in Kindergarten. I joined the Mothers' Club and, when Infants' Mistress Pat Rohl learned I had been a teacher she began trying to talk me in to coming back to teaching. I returned for 1 term (which became 2). A new class 1A/2D was formed.

One student, son of an army officer, was a disruptive child who rebelled against all authority. The worst day we had with him happened at lunchtime. He clashed with someone in the playground and when called for by the teacher on duty, grabbed a garbage bin and somehow was able to climb, with it, to the top of the weather shed where he held the bin and challenged someone to come and get him. We sent to the Primary Department for some male help, Deputy Principal Bill Roach and another male teacher arrived. They talked him down. I'm not sure how they did it as the rest of the school had been taken inside to classes and I guess without an audience he may have realized he wasn't achieving much. Dad was called and he was away for a few days. He was much subdued when he came back. A bit of army discipline may have helped but then again, it may have been part of his problem.

1983 was the School Centenary Year. As Chairman of the Centenary Committee it was a very busy time for me. In February the school held its Swimming Carnival. As usual the school was closed for the day but there were always a few children who didn't produce the obligatory permission note. I volunteered to stay behind with them if I could use the classroom next door to my office in the Special Learning Unit. Everything was going well. The children were working on activity sheets, coming into the office to have them marked. There was a small group 'chatting'. In that group was a student who was an elective mute in grade 3 of the SLU, She had never spoken a word in three years of schooling, but spoke proficiently at home.

School Counsellor, Jill McGregor, had, earlier in the year, at a Staff Meeting where she discussed the 'new' SLU students, told us how she had even tried ringing the girl's home after school. As was 'the norm', the student had answered the phone, but as soon as she realized who was on the line, she hung up. Nothing worked!

I'm not sure what topic was being discussed when she suddenly spoke! The room was silent till one of the voices said, "she spoke". Indeed she had and she quietly joined in. That afternoon Jill McGregor arrived to work in her office, also in the SLU. Someone noticed Jill walking across the playground and the children begged to be allowed to go and tell her the news. The girl went with them but wouldn't speak much. By the end of the week though she was chatting away with the best of them and, by Year 6, her teacher, Brian Hubbuck, was asking how to "shut her up!" In 2015, in the Christmas card I received from Jill she commented, "I still remember so clearly the day the girl with whom I'd tried everything to get her to talk, talked for you." I don't believe I did anything 'special' I think she was just 'ready'.

One of my students was one of the nicest kids you would ever meet. When he came up to the Primary Department he had a bad speech impediment and his mother was taking him to a specialist in

Richmond for treatment. The library at this time was still in two classrooms. Every afternoon after school he came in to close the library windows for me. I had never asked him to do this, he had simply seen a need and acted on it. His therapy was successful, so much so that he achieved something no SLU student had ever been able to do before, or since. In Year 6 he was voted in, by his peers, as School Vice Captain. Recently I met him and his daughter. Naturally she was a nice kid too.

Following the Centenary a new library was built, on the land where the tennis court had been. It was a haven for the 'misfits' in the school. They felt safe there. Glass walls meant I could work in my office yet see the whole library. Board games were popular, as were school photo albums. One particular SLU boy would stand at my office door and announce, "All you chilluns be quiet. Lewis has a headache". He often would bring me flowers at lunchtime, weeds carefully picked from the school grounds. He always waited till I found a vase for my 'flowers'. The whole school knew when he had done good work. I was now Assistant Principal and in charge of the SLU. Teacher Bev Shearston would send him to show me his work and he would start to call out as soon as he left his room, "Look Lewis, look!" On my retirement I received a gift from him, a notebook and matching address book which I am still using. The card thanked me for making him feel 'special'. He was!

The library was a good place for teachers to send kids whom they felt needed some 'time-out'. I could usually find something to keep them busy. A Year 6 boy, was one of them but he missed a fair bit of school and often was sent to me, with the request that I please find him something to do. One day I sent him on a message to the canteen. The ladies working there had just made scones. He wanted to know if they would teach him. A time was arranged and he got to make his scones and they were pretty good.

Each Christmas, Library Clerical Assistant Margaret Crouch and I would take Year 5 and 6 Library Assistants on a 'Thank You' Outing. This particular year we had gone to *The Roxy* Theatre in Parramatta to see *Storm Boy*. I was sitting next to a Year 6 Librarian when a Year 5 boy turned around and called out, "Look at Brooksie sitting next to Mrs. Lewis". I called back, "It's OK; his mother and I were in the same class at primary school together". The Year 6 boy next to me looked at me in horror, "Gosh. I didn't know my mother was THAT OLD!"

In 1994, retired, I began teaching Scripture to Infants' classes, Kindergarten and Year 1. One 'Scripture' story I love to tell was related to me by the student's mother. She and her mother-in-law were discussing whether God was a man or a woman. The boy was listening. He piped up, "He's a man". "How do you know?" asked his mother. "Cause Mrs. Lewis told us", was the quick reply. "And how does she know?" persisted his mother. "Cause she lives with him" came the same quick reply. "Oh" said his mother, "so how come she teaches you Scripture each week?" "Well, she has got a parachute you know." The young man had the final word. Who could argue with such logic?