

# Jubilee Gems



*Bringing you memories of the 50 year journey of celebration of the parish of St Joseph's and St Bernadette's.*

**MAY/JUNE 2014 (Issue 2)**



Coming back to St Joseph's school as a teacher more than two decades after graduating from Grade Six, Veronica Baum soon discovered some things never change. Walking out into the 'forest' to supervise kids at lunchtime she saw them collecting sticks and bark to build a hut, as she did many years before as if no time had passed. The problem now was that playing with sticks was banned, and she was supposed to tell them to stop. The world had changed and the stick had the potential to maim apparently in a way it hadn't 30 years previously.



Like many of her class mates, she knew where the best sticks were, the smell of the 'forest' - and the best places to not be seen by teachers!

Step back further in time to 1964 when, on the Feast of St Joseph, Sister Genevieve Jeffrey and the lay teachers herded her young pupils by train from Ferntree Gully and then up from the station to 212 Boronia Road. What a wonderful environment the new school presented with its forested, rural aspect. The land was originally part of a nursery and the first principal noted the daffodils in the playground. But with few amenities, it was to be a primitive start. Sr Genevieve started with a blackboard and one stick of chalk. She and her lay teachers, Mrs Dux and Mrs Bishop, sat on wooden packing boxes, whilst the kids sat on the floor. They had no telephone or staff room.



Sr Genevieve looking after one of the early classes

But you didn't need whiz-bang things to make an impact and create fantastic spirit and enthusiasm. Solid core values and a belief in youngsters receiving the opportunity to develop their faith with teachers who cared, were the rock-solid drivers. Liz Murray (Janky) was one of the very first preps. Currently, Literacy Leader at St Bernadette's, the school where she's been teaching for thirty years, her most vivid memory is of her teacher, Mrs. Dux. "She was so comforting and loving." For around 2 shillings a week a child could get the best schooling in the district.

Sr Genevieve, who lived in the then Convent at St John's, initially didn't have a licence or a vehicle, so a roster was set by the Men's Club to drive her to school. When a car was purchased, Dan Mason taught her to drive.

The school quickly became the central meeting point of the parish as the parents' involvement grew and long-term friendships formed. "The parents at St Joseph's were magnificent" said Sr Genevieve. "It would not have been possible to have a successful school without them," In turn our first principal, who now continues her life with other Presentation Sisters at Corpus Christi Aged Care, Clayton, was much-loved by kids and parents alike.



First Communicants August 1966

*Thanks for the great response and your feedback to our first edition of Jubilee Gems. Keep your stories coming.*

*The email address to reach us on is [jubileememories@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jubileememories@yahoo.com.au)*

The school increased by a new classroom each year although these were often not ready for the first school-bells. The 60s and the 70s were times punctuated by struggle and resourcefulness as classes were accommodated at a range of back-up locations - the Boronia

Teachers Centre in Dorset Road, the Presbyterian hall across the road and the good old Factory.

The kitchen of the Factory was the first tuckshop. Think about the grey dust on the bench tops that greeted the helpers on arrival. Visualise the colours of the clothes of toddlers after a crawl around the floor while mum made the lunches. Today's health rules wouldn't have stood any of that. At the canteen on one occasion a child, not having any money, presented a stone for payment That's how enterprising our early school kids were!

Of course, the Factory provided its own 'excitement' on many an occasion with flash flooding and slimy mud build-up after heavy downpours. Flooding seemed to be the gift that kept on giving in our parish. Mary Asquith taught one of the Prep classes at St Joseph's from 1980 to 1983. She remembers the prep corridor of the classes (now the new kitchen area) flooded. "We had to hold our classes in the rooms at the back of the church for a few weeks until the carpet was replaced."

One wonders how many irrigation experts and plumbers got their education in the parish. With St Joseph's flooding being a continual challenge and the construction of St Bernadette's punctuated by



St Joseph's school 1967

water intrusions because the land had a spring, H<sub>2</sub>O could have been a big part of the curriculum.

One of the highlights in 1967 was when the Governor of Victoria Sir Rohan Delacombe visited the shire and 50 enthralled pupils from the school attended the greeting. As we fast-forward, at the end of last year, Jasmine Castrechini from St Joe's was honoured as an Aston Shield recipient for demonstrating outstanding school citizenship.

St Bernadette's school commenced in portable classrooms on the grass behind the parish house. Sr Frances Henderson was the first principal and the school officially opened at The Basin on 2nd December 1983.

St Bernadette's original site was vacant water-soaked land, which turned out to be a gushing spring. Perhaps it was divine providence like the symbol of the spring at Lourdes where Mary appeared to St Bernadette.

Bill and Donna Bowker and their four daughters had a bird's eye view of the development of the new school. They rented

a house on the site where the multi-purpose hall currently is till 1992. "We even experienced snow in 1986," says Donna.

During the first years the school had family sleepovers on the oval at St Bernadette's with camp fires and singing. Families went to Badgers Creek for weekends as they got to know each other. Mass was held in the middle space of the school where the children's restaurant is now set up.

The hardships of the early days drew both school communities together.

There were many great characters and stories over the years. Norma Nash was a wonderful towering figure although Yvonne Johnson well recalls being taken to task by the 'traffic cop'.

*In the days before 1998, families taking their children from the Basin area to St Joseph's or vice versa had the challenge of heading through the busy Boronia Road level crossing. (Here, in June 1952, nine people were killed in one of the worst bus-train level crossing accidents in Victoria.) It was always a bottleneck. When Boronia station was lowered into a cutting to remove the Boronia Road crossing, Pauline Ward said there was much rejoicing. "We no longer had to play the timing game."*



1973 teachers including Sr Gabrielle Jackman (seated) and Sr Anne Carey



"Who could forget her imperious figure bearing down on any parent who didn't park correctly," says Yvonne. But you couldn't beat Mrs Nash's knowledge of history, particularly Anzac Day, her devotion to "The Cats", her training of the Debs for the Debutante Balls, and her love of roses. (Incidentally, Yvonne and Phil Johnson's six kids clocked up 22 years continuous association with the School.)



Early images of St Bernadette's in 1983

During Sr Verna's time as principal of St Joseph's, Mrs. Betty Quinn was the very efficient School Secretary. Traditionally, every year the Grade 6 girls played Netball against the staff.

Sr Verna's mischievous streak came to light during the game as she stirred up the girls during the game. Beth Holohan was the umpire and when she and the kids returned to the classroom discussing the game, the children were complaining that Sr Verna had cheated. Beth empathised with them

but pleaded who could you possibly report the principal to! They all looked at her with astonishment and answered as one. "Mrs. Quinn!" As Sr Clare Corcoran (1981-87) remembered: "Who could forget Betty Quinn? As school secretary, she was always ever-obliging."

Jeanie Hunter believes she was blessed in 1996 to be appointed Principal of St Joseph's Primary School - her first and only experience of Principalship.

"I was immediately excited and energized by the spontaneity, diversity and challenge of the beautiful Boronia kids," she says.



St Bernadette's	
1983—1987	Sr. Frances Henderson
1988—1993	Mr Peter Moran
1994—1999	Mr Bert Benne
1999 -	Mr Stephen Cope (Term 4)

Many former students of the schools' hallowed halls went on to become our teachers. As Jeanie observes: "Any teacher worth his or her salt in the East, had at some time in their career been honed and polished by the St Joe's experience." Veronica Baum, Geoff Klep and Anne Baumann, to name just a few, followed this path.



Veronica Baum spent seven years as a child at St Joe's then triple that as teacher. "Returning as a teacher was a privilege and a time of great, perhaps greatest learning for me. The grounds remained familiar but the emphasis on understanding the environment grew and impacted on many areas of learning."

PTO

St Joseph's	
1964 – 1969	Sr Genevieve Jeffrey
1970 - 1972	Sr Anne Halpin
1973 - 1974	Sr Gabrielle Jackman
1975 - 1978	Sr Verna Carroll
1979	Mrs Shirley Mutimer
1980 - 1981	Sr Denise DeLean
1982	Sr Denise DeLean (1 <sup>st</sup> Term) Ms Helen Whiting acting principal 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Terms
1983 -1989	Mr Denis O'Callaghan
1990 -1995	Mr Jim O'Sullivan
1996—2011	Mrs Jeanie Hunter
2012 -	Mr Peter Vanstan

Annette Menting told Sr Genevieve (years later) that she thought they learnt only Sport and Art when she taught them, but when she got to secondary school she realised she had learned considerably more. Veronica Baum doesn't remember much about her learning. "It was a bit of a blur, but the feeling was always good...a familiar, generally happy place to be, perhaps so comfortable that learning just happened and therefore was less memorable." Sounds like a nurturing environment.



Teachers can help in the direction of young people's lives. A young Greg Baum constantly had his head in a book during the lunch and play breaks. One day Sr Halpin suggested he put the book away and get out onto the oval and play footy. Perhaps this urging into the sporting arena and Greg's passion for analysis were the seeds that sprouted a Walkley-award winning journalist and one of the most respected sports writers in the land.



Parent Information meetings were always well attended by parents recalls Jeannie Hunter. After one such meeting a parent sidled up to her: "Do you know what I most love about St Joseph's, Jeanie?" Getting warm inside, Jeannie was thinking she might mention the challenging curriculum, the outstanding teachers, the contented kids... But no - instead she beamed: "You always have great food and plenty of drinks!"



Helen Kitching standing in front of the fabulous winning poster that St Joe's submitted to the Sorbent/Circus Oz Competition

Student creative talents often rose to the top. In 1997 St Joe's entered a competition to make a poster for Sorbent and first prize was a Circus Oz performance at the school. We won and the show, which had to be performed on the oval due to the size of the equipment, was fantastic - if not a little risqué in parts. Therese Kitching remembers: "As we were just standing around in a circle, you were able to see the joy on the faces of the children and parents as they watched - a truly magical fun evening". Veronica Baum recalls another time, at the urging of a parent, the school entered a competition to make a short video clip about what the world would be like without Vegemite. We came second with entries from all over Australia and earned good prize-money. "We had a moment of glory on the Denise Drysdale show and a spot in the Women's Day magazine. Big notoriety for the little school on the hill."

Today, the school community comprises nearly five hundred students from 337 families. And the future is in good hands with the two principals praising the selfless contributions of our parents and staff and the great sense of community.

"St Bernadette's is truly blessed," says Stephen Cope. "What a setting! What wonderful members in our community! I can't wait for the reopening of the 'Kids' Café', an example of parent commitment."

Peter Vanstan is also excited with the future School Review and a Major Building Project. "We look forward to a successful and rewarding future where our community has the opportunity to continue to grow in ... Faith, Love and Knowledge."

As we celebrate our fifty years, the parish has been enhanced by the contribution and endeavours of our schools community. #



[jubileememories@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jubileememories@yahoo.com.au)

Once again, you are invited to submit any anecdotes or impressions of your time here in the Boronia Parish. We can't print everything we get because we are limited by space. However, your input is really appreciated.

Upcoming editions of *Jubilee Gems* will feature:

**July-Aug—The Spiritual Community**

**Sept-Oct—Parish Groups and Associations (including Sport)**

**Nov-Dec—Pitching In—How we've worked together**