

# JOHN ERIC YOUD: TEACHER, ARTIST, 1960s

## Background



John Eric Youd started his adult life as an horticulturalist in Red Hills but in the 1960s he was an arts teacher at St Albans High School where he was known as Eric Youd. He was born in 1931 and was the son of European immigrants. He grew up around Mildura before coming to Melbourne to further his education, which he completed through Caulfield College Arts School in the late fifties; it was a good place to go for an educational certificate at the time. Eric was born during the depression, on a small soldier settlement farm, so life must have been tough. Mildura may have been an outback rural environment at the time, but Eric's parentage was a more cosmopolitan than one would expect. It has the elements of a potential Aussie drama in melding English and Swedish ancestry into an Australian identity that died too young.

Eric's father was John "Jack" Youd who was born at Willeston, Cheshire, England, in early 1879, the son of Anne Penk (1856-1911) and Thomas Youd (1836-1902) whose ancestry can be traced to 1724 in Frodsham, Cheshire, England. John Youd was a printer before immigrating to Australia between 1911 and 1914 where he worked as a labourer and horticulturalist. He enlisted with the AIF on 16 June 1915 at the age of 35; he was still single at that stage and his listed next of kin was his mother, Annie Youd of Cheshire, England. He was an experienced army man, having been sixteen years with the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment of the British Army and serving for three years in both Ireland and India. He joined the 23rd Australian Infantry Battalion in 1915 and served in Egypt, Gallipoli and the Western Front - he was an ANZAC who earned his medals of 1914-1915 Star, British War Medal, and Victory Medal. He returned to Australia and disembarked in Melbourne in May 1919 and was discharged in July. He later applied for and was allocated Block 260 on the soldier settlement estate at Red Cliffs.

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The Red Cliffs soldier settlement on the banks of the Murray has been called a monument to the courage and determination of more than 1,000 former soldiers who converted a Mallee scrub wilderness into a prosperous irrigation settlement. Red Cliffs was selected because of the promise of prosperity with Mildura and the area was considered ideal for producing dried fruit. 33,000 acres were subdivided into 16-acre farmlets and became the largest irrigated Soldiers' Settlement in Australia. The land was cleared with Big Lizzie. The water supply was guaranteed in 1923 by building the largest pumping plant in the southern hemisphere.



Marta Engstrom, Kristian Engstrom, Christian Engstrom, Sarah Engstrom, Lill Pedlar, Ollie Pearson, Ruby Smith, Horace Knipe.

Kristian Efram Isidor Engstrom was a near neighbour of Jack Youd at the soldier settlement estate and has a colourful history of settling in Australia. Engstrom was born in Sweden in 1887



and was a sailor who arrived in Renmark, South Australia, in 1909 and had an adventurous life. He had served on the "RMS Mauratania" in 1909 when it won the "Blue Riband" for the fastest Atlantic crossing. He jumped ship when he arrived in Australia and worked on the paddle boats and on the locks along the Murray River in Victoria. He became a naturalised British subject in 1912 and enlisted in the AIF in 1916. He joined the 38th Battalion and was wounded in action (shell shocked) in France. His bravery was proven when he rescued Pte H.J. Hart who was bleeding in "No Mans' Land" when Engstrom put him on his shoulders and carried him to safety. Engstrom's decorations include the British War Medal and Victory Medal. He was allocated Block 262 in the Soldiers' Settlement in Red Cliffs near Jack Youd's allotment, where he grew grapes and citrus fruits. As one can tell from these brief profiles, Swedish Kristian and English Jack had much in common. In

1937 Engstrom moved to Drayton, Queensland, where he bought and ran The Downs Hotel. During World War Two he worked as a civilian rigger for the American Army in Manila. Kristian Engstrom was Eric Youd's uncle.



Eric's mother was Märta Ebba Emerentia Engstrom, who was the sister of Kristian Engstrom. She was born in 1890 in Uppsala, Sweden, to Eric Engstrom and Hannah Gustafson and was living in Stockholm in 1923, but left sometime after this and journeyed to Australia to join her brother on his farm at Red Cliffs, Victoria. Martha (as she became known locally) married Jack Youd in 1928. They had only one son, Eric John Youd, who was born in 1931 and became an artist and school teacher. Jack Youd died in 1953, aged 74, and was buried at Red Cliffs, Victoria. Martha took over the farm and Eric would have stayed on and worked the block as there would have been a lot of helping hands in view of the family and friends that were living in the area. Martha sold the block in 1959 and moved to Barkly Street, Brighton, Melbourne.

She was nearly seventy at this stage and had moved to Melbourne with her son who had enrolled in an Art School and Teachers College.



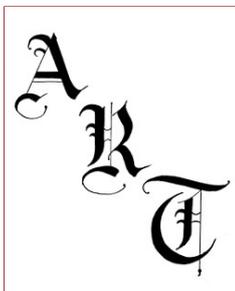
Eric Youd's 21st birthday with parents Jack and Marta Youd, 1952.

One can imagine that it must have been a tough life for Eric growing up on a cockie's farm at Mildura during the Depression. It must have been even tougher on the family when Jack Youd died in 1953, because Eric was only 22 years old and had barely settled into adult life. (People reached their "majority" or "coming of age" at age 21 in those days.) His mother was aged 63 so presumably it was Eric and his Engstrom relatives who continued with the physical work on the farm. However, over the next few years there were enough opportunities for him to continue with further educations travel overseas. In 1956 while still a student he sailed to England where he undoubtedly visited his late father's family and intended to see more of the "old country" as he

intended to stay one to two years. He then moved to Melbourne to study at Caulfield College where he was one of the "senior arts boys" in 1958. His teaching qualifications included Secondary Teachers College (Arts and Crafts) and a Diploma in Commercial Arts.



Eric Youd at Caulfield College Art School (middle row, second from right), 1958.



Youd started teaching Arts at St Albans High School in 1960 at the age of 29 years. He was not there in late 1960s so he probably finished at the end of 1967 or 1968. His material for Form 4 (Year 10) students started with contemporary design and the Bauhaus story (1913-1933) with its principle of good design in everyday things. The introduction to Impressionism compared the style of Lancret's 18th century work "In the Golden Days of Old" with Sisley's 19th century "Hills Behind S. Nicaise" but also introduced Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas and Lautrec. After that it was back to exploring historical styles from Egyptian to the

Medieval and Gothic, exploring art and architecture. His Australia Art lectures covered Colonial art (1800-1880), Impressionist art and the Heidelberg School (1880-1930), and the Modern Movement (1930+). He made life easier for students by distributing his roneod notes about particular artists and styles so that information was readily on hand to look at paintings in an informed frame of mind. Youd was a skilled portrait painter and encouraged this in his classes, where some students talked about the intensity of having to minutely scrutinise a colleague's face in order to capture their image on paper.

His 1961 form had high accolades for him indeed: "The highest praise however, must go to our form teacher, Mr. Youd, who had to put up with us all year through. I would say that we are the noisiest form in the school, and it is certainly not an easy job keeping us in line. The cool, calm and collected Mr. Youd very seldom shouts or threatens. I would say that this and many more factors make him so likeable."

Mrs Wright, school secretary and burser during the sixties, said that he was a delightful person and a good artist: "Every time you walked past the art room you'd see this wonderful drawing on the board that he'd do to encourage his students. Next week it would be something else."



Front: Mr. G. Reid, Miss V. Fenelon, Mr. J. Everson, Miss E. S. Taylor (Senior Mistress), Mr. M. H. Wilkinson (Head Master), Mr. G. H. Strauss (Senior Master), Miss G. M. Bowles, Mr. L. E. Burchell, Miss R. Meyer (Physc.).  
 Second row: Mrs. J. Cox (Sec.), Miss H. Eadie, Mrs. E. Stureslaps, Mrs. L. Pavlova, Miss G. E. Coultts, Mrs. J. Felder, Mrs. L. Cameron, Mrs. Krikselunas, Mrs. M. Burden, Mrs. S. Hudson (Sec.), Miss R. Bechler (Psych.).  
 Third row: Mr. E. Youd, Mr. J. Morison, Mr. D. Hill, Mr. F. Schiller, Mr. P. Pavlov, Mr. L. King, Mr. G. Sacharonok, Mr. I. M. Smith, Mr. T. Walsh, Mr. G. G. Gibson.  
 Back: Mr. J. D. Conroy, Mr. N. Bolvari, Mr. J. Mott, Mr. J. Hunt, Mr. T. G. Scarff, Mr. R. Robertson, Mr. K. Chilton, Mr. K. Robertson, Mr. E. Ford. Absent: Miss M. T. O'Connor.

Phillip Spivey was a sixties' student and even more articulate about his art teacher's influence: "Mr Youd also introduced us to thinking about design when he was teaching us about the Bauhaus movement. These introductions influenced my thinking and even now my approach to photography and garden design is shaped by those early ideas. Mr Youd encouraged me in art. He thought I had some creative potential that could be developed further but unfortunately he also said he did not have the time to give me individual tuition. He liked a painting I did in the Impressionist style of a couple of Dutch windmills I had seen on a calendar. Many years later when I visited Amsterdam I saw the very same windmills in their original setting, which was a wonderful experience. I think Youd's belief and encouragement of my creative abilities finally came through in my photography."

Likewise, Leo Suszko remembers Youd's encouragement: "Youd was terrific. We held these fundraising events on the weekend and I'd sell some of my paintings at the art show and I'd cook up rice with pork or prawns and sell it in little punnets. It all went to the building fund. I was an arts buff and Youd was the first teacher who said I was doing well for the school. He said "If you feel like painting, forget what the rules are, forget what the colours are supposed to be, you do what you want to do inside you." I looked around but I never found a rich artist. I looked where the art shows were and the people who were making the money were the ones selling the pictures and not the ones painting. The middle man was making the money and not the artist. So I understood that you have to be a middle man to be successful. And basically that's what I've been doing all my life."



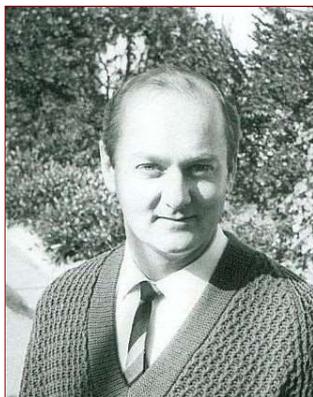
Leo Suszko (back left) with Eric Youd (back centre) and Sandra Crofts (front centre) at football club ball, 1967.

Jerry Osadczuk gave most teachers a bit of a tough time while he was at school but he liked art: "I was really interested in art, especially drawing and painting. I had a teacher called Mr Youd and he was marvelous because he knew how to treat kids and never screamed at them. He had this calm temperament – he would tell kids off but it was never in a screaming fashion. ... I've always liked art since my high school days. I never "took it up" as such, I just never stopped doing it since high school."



Eric Youd with Joan Butler (left) and others teachers enjoying a picnic, 1964.

Youd's enthusiasm must have inspired other people at the school, even to the extent that Laurie Schwab wrote a whole two pages in the irregular POE (Prisoners of Education) Gazette about the art of Robert Grieve - apparently some of the senior students had been delightfully surprised to find that the painting hanging outside the headmaster's office was an original by that well-respected Melbourne artist. They were even more delighted when they were invited to visit him at his Kew home to view his studio and discuss his art personally. That's what can happen when you have good teachers.



John Eric Youd transferred to Elwood High School probably in the late sixties and was there in the early seventies teaching a new school of students about the appreciation and practice of Art. He died of bowel cancer in 1974 (aged 42) at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane. His remains were cremated at Mount Thompson Crematorium and his ashes taken back to Victoria and interred with his late father at the Red Cliffs cemetery. Condolences were published in The Age from Elwood High School, including the Principal and staff, Advisory Council, and the Parents' Association, so he was clearly well respected by his colleagues.

Eric's mother, Martha Youd nee Engstrom, died a couple of years later in 1976 at the age of 86 and she was also buried in the family plot at the Red Cliffs Pioneer Cemetery.



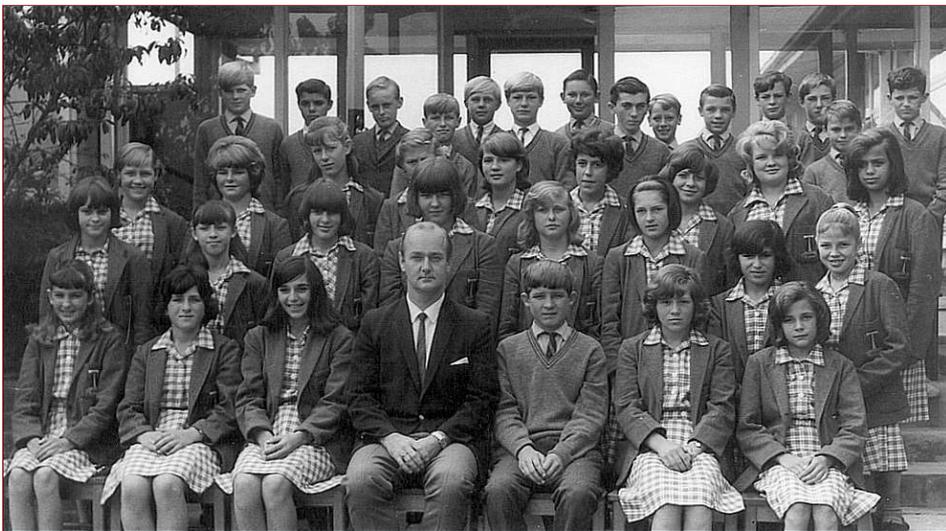
Youd family headstone, Red Cliffs Pioneer Cemetery.



Adelheid Simovic, John Simovic, Eric Youd, Martha Youd, late 1960s.

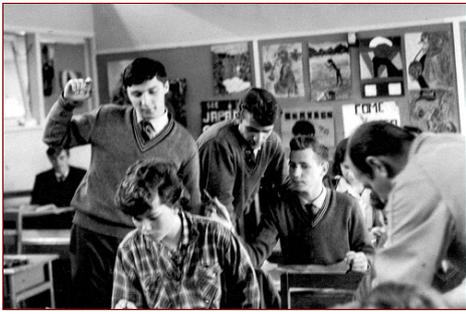


Eric Youd with Form 2F, 1962. Form Captains Lynette Cox and Joe Ribarow.



Eric Youd with class, circa 1967.





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Many thanks to Robert Engstrom for family photographs and information.  
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Classroom photos from John Simovic's collection.