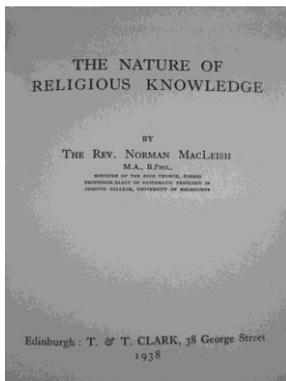


## NORM McLEISH: CHALLENGER, TEACHER, 1960-1970s



Norman Macleish was born in 1931 in Forres, Moray, Scotland. His parents were Rev. Norman Macleish (1898-1949) and Gladys Margaret Burnett (1896-1980). The Macleish heritage goes back to Alexander Macleish in Lochee, Forfarshire, Scotland, in 1841. The Burnett heritage goes back to George Burnet in Strachan, Kincardine, Scotland in 1850. Norman Macleish and Gladys Burnett married in Fife in 1926 and raised at least three sons: Dugald Fairweather (1926), Donald Gordon (1928), and Norman (1928). Reverend Macleish was in charge of the Forres High Church (in Morayshire, Scotland).

In 1939 the family sailed for Australia when Rev. Macleish was appointed Professor of Theology in Ormond College, Melbourne - it was seen as forming a new link between the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Victoria. However, Macleish had a closer link with some Australians, because at the age of seventeen he had enlisted for active service in WW1 and made contact with many Australian soldiers in France.



His induction ceremony was held in Scots Church, Melbourne, and received good coverage in the press:

*"With the detailed ceremonial of the Presbyterian Church the Rev Norman MacLeish formerly of Forres Scotland was inducted into the Chair of Theology and Church History in the Theological Hall Ormond College University of Melbourne in Scots Church last night. The induction was carried out by the Presbytery of Melbourne West under Instructions from the General Assembly and the service was conducted by the Moderator of the Presbytery (the Rev A A Mackenzie).*

*"The service also marked the inaugural session of the Theological Hall for the year and was attended by the Moderator General (the Right Rev. Dr John Mackenzie) the Moderator (the Right Rev Karl Forster) the Master of Ormond College (Mr D K Picken) members of the Senatus of the Theological Hall representatives of other churches and theological students. The sermon was preached by the Minister of Scots Church (the Rev J Golder Burns). The steps leading to Professor MacLeish's Induction were narrated by the Rev. Dr. W. Borland and the address to the newly inducted professor was delivered by Dr Mackenzie Professor MacLeish has been appointed to the chair in succession to the Rev Professor F E Oxe." (Argus 8 March 1939)*

Rev Norman Macleish was included in "Who's Who in Australia" citing his M.A. (1st Class Hons. 1921) and B. Phil. 1922, Hons. Dip. His cited publications included "Ideal Manhood" (1926) and "The Nature of Religious Knowledge" (1938). He supported broad social concerns for the general welfare of the populace:

*"Those principles included that every child should be a member of a family housed with decency and dignity, and should have the opportunity of education until years of maturity, based on faith in God and with a focus in worship. Every citizen should be secure in possession of such income as would enable him to maintain a home and bring up children, and should have a voice in the conduct of the business or industry carried on by means of his labours. Every citizen should be assured of freedom of worship, of speech and of assembly, and should have sufficient daily leisure, sufficient weekly rest and, if an employee, an annual holiday with pay."*

## Norm Macleish

Norman "Torrie" Macleish jnr attended Scotch College from 1941 and 1948 - the College was obviously the preferred choice for the family as a number of boys from the extended family studied there. (Norman's older brother, Dugald Fairweather Macleish, taught there between 1950 and 1978.)

In 1948 Rev. Norman Macleish died suddenly in Melbourne in May 1949 at the young age of 51 years, shortly before he was due to have his D.D. conferred in absentia at the Edinburgh University.

Norman jnr presumably continued his Bachelor of Arts studies at Melbourne University in the 1950s, where he attained his "university subjects" and his later A.C.T.T. qualification from Melbourne Teachers College, which were the basis of his teaching career before he completed his B.A. in the 1970s. Apparently he taught at the Ormond Colleges as well as at St Albans.

Norm Macleish jnr started at St Albans High School in 1962 as an English and Sports teacher and was still there in 1971, so he put at least a decade of leadership and challenge into the school. Jerry Osadcuk recalls: "I liked English literature as taught by Mr Macleish. He was another good guy who loved sports and running; I think he took up marathon running and did that regularly. He was at the school a long time."

Macleish certainly enjoyed the challenge of marathons and took the activity very seriously. He joined the Melbourne Bushwalkers club in the mid 1960s and was a regular walker and marathon runner. A tough cross-country run that he enjoyed was the "Bushies' Broadford to Yea", a distance of twenty-eight miles. He was still running in the 1980s and likely took part in events with the Victorian Marathon Club. He joined the Melbourne Bushwalkers Club in 1982.

Norm's mother, Gladys Margaret Macleish nee Burnett, died at Camberwell in 1980 at age 84 years. It's possible that Norm had been supporting her at this stage as they had been living at the same address in Camberwell.

Norm Macleish married in the early 1980s (details unknown) and had a son, Perry. Unfortunately the mother died when Perry was quite young, which must have been hard for son and father. Norm did not remarry and raised the boy on his own. In the 1990s they were living in Ferntree Gully.

Norman MacLeish died in his sleep at his home in Ferntree Gully in April 2003, at age 72, only seven years after retirement age.

Art Terry of the Melbourne Bushwalkers Club wrote a moving memorial:

*"Norm was a tough, no nonsense individualist, a man's man and the Iron Man of the Melbourne Bushies. He once swam the Murray River (very close to flood level) in June in the mid 70s adjacent to the Hattah/Kulkyne park. The water was freezing cold, the current so strong on the far bank prevented Norm from landing, so it was a non-stop swim. He seemed to be impervious to cold for as soon as he dressed, he said, "Let's go" and ran the five miles back to our camp on the Outlet Chalka, a remarkable feat by a superb athlete. Norm was a thorough gentleman, a scholar with academic qualifications and a brilliant secondary school teacher at St. Albans and Ormond Colleges. He was fond of classical music, Tchaikovsky was his favourite and he was an avid reader. He*

*was a devoted father to his son, Perry, who was only five years old when his mother died. Norm, who did not remarry, reared and cared for Perry who is now a fine young man, aged twenty years."\**

## **Macleish's Sports Editorial**

In a society often apathetic about life's glory, and divided over the ideals which might enhance the realisation of that glory, the sphere of sport is seen, regrettably, by some as an area of escape, and therefore to be treated contemptuously, and by others as merely a harmless way of relaxing. Of course, sport has its fanatical followers, but as our School is not over-blessed in numbers with these, it seems more advisable to consider the attitudes of those who ignore sporting activity, and the remainder, who, while participating somewhat passively, are not dedicated to sport's advancement and some of whom frequently develop negative and destructive attitudes towards sport and its participants.

If sport is pursued with dedication, high degrees of stamina, skill, and often courage and initiative are required. These faculties and attitudes can be and are, it would seem, transferred to life and its problems. On the sporting arena one may meet one's fellows at a level of common enjoyment and in the pursuit of a shared ideal, that of maintaining physical fitness. Liveliness of spirit may be educated and brought out by active participation; fellowship may be enjoyed.

To stimulate good performance, competition is necessary. Of course, competition may elicit the worst in human nature — selfishness, aggression and pride. However, although the word competition suggests rivalry, we should remind ourselves that originally it meant "seeking together." Most people would concur that friendship, fitness and a readiness to live more adventurously were ends in themselves, and quite the reverse of "escape from reality." These we ought to seek together.

Our schools have great opportunities to foster and cherish these ideals on the playing fields. From these sources "may flow the fresh strength and grace, to make the world a better place and life a worthier thing". Sport, PURSUED WITH THE PROPER ATTITUDES, may then be an avenue to reality, rather than an escape. The record of victory and losses is comparatively insignificant.

What is significant is the striving for physical fitness, and the team spirit and maturity of character without which man will remain lost, and society divided.

The success of sport is partly dependent on good organisation, active coaching, and good facilities - far more important is the will to make it succeed - despite deficiencies which may exist in these fields - and the sense of its real importance in our lives. No pupil should even feel apologetic about giving his best to school sport. How many of us are, in fact, giving our best?

**Norm McLeish**  
**Alba 1967**



Norm McLeish with St Albans High School teaching staff, 1962.



Norm McLeish with Form 5, 1960s.

## Remembering Norm McLeish

**Stefan Czyz** - Mr McLeish was a "larger than life character" at St Albans High, teaching there in the '60s and '70s. He taught us English, Phys Ed, and a few other subjects. He was a dramatic individual who many years later admitted that teaching at St Albans High was a great "lesson of life" for him. One of McLeish's main characteristics was that he had a way of relating to the students very, very directly, and one way he did that was to give students various nicknames, which were often joke names. He came up to me one day and said: "Czyz, you are a 'has been'." My brother Richard came along just at that moment and McLeish turned to him: "Richard, you are a 'never wazza'."



I asked what he meant about me being a 'has been' and he replied, "You have great potential, and now you are already choosing laziness and starting to go downhill." He was referring to the fact that in the previous year (1964) I had achieved 8 firsts and a second in athletics due to natural ability but that now I was resting on my laurels and hoping to continue winning without training. He was right!

McLeish was a keen jogger who got into this good habit years ahead of the current aerobic fad. I trained as a marathon runner for over 20 years being inspired to start by McLeish's great example back then and, to tell the truth, his quip about me being a "has been" motivated me to excel in a few areas. For instance my best marathon time was 2 hours and 41 minutes back in the 1980s. I remember McLeish boldly challenging Joe Attard (head prefect and house-captain) to a racing duel over one mile at the time. I think Joe won.

Another McLeish story ... It was 1963 and we were in form 3a. The flavour of the week at one stage was those little wads of paper being shot across the room by elastic bands. I'd already figured that if you didn't want to get whacked in the head by little bits of paper you made sure you got to the back seat. This particular day we came into a McLeish English lesson and I'm in the back seat ready to raise my lid, so I had good cover from the front, there was no one behind me, and from my position I could see the whole class.



Mr McLeish was late for class so we were in full flight with rubber bands and paper missiles. Barbopoulos fired a lot of long distance shots in the hope of getting someone, but his favourite strategy was get within six inches at the back of someone's neck and give them a real pazzunger: "OUCH!!!" Everything suddenly stopped when McLeish arrived, but then he turned his back on the class and started writing on the board. As soon as his back was turned a myriad of papers started flying across the room again. One piece dropped near his foot and he'd look around quizzically, but everything had stopped again. It was like a comic routine, because every time he turned to the blackboard to write something there were papers flying across the room, and when he turned to face the class it stopped. After the third round some students actually aimed at the blackboard and struck. That got McLeish going at his dramatic best.

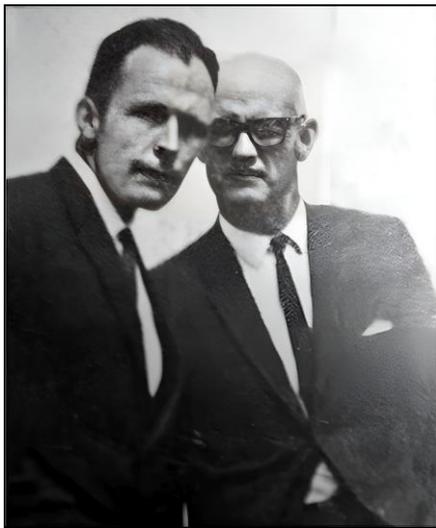
"All right - that's enough of that! What's going on here?"

Well, Form 3A got the classic, full-on psychological treatment: "I didn't expect this of you. You, 3A of all forms, the elite form! How could you?" We hadn't really thought of ourselves as being particularly "elite" but his strategy worked.

McLeish collected all the rubber bands and bits and pieces and we had to swear never to do it

again. Surprisingly he never gave us after school detention for that. After that episode I can't remember any more rubber band and paper missiles being used in our form.

**Leo Dobes** - Other teachers in those first years that one noticed included Norm McLeish and 'Doc' Walsh. I didn't get to know the avuncular Doc as well as some, but he was always there, particularly for those interested in sport. Norm McLeish, bless his biceps, was much the same deep down, but was also a mixture of taciturn Scot and Iron Man. He once shared with me his theory about having to push the body to the point of exhaustion to bring out the best in a scholar. Not being keen on 50 mile runs before breakfast, then or now, I simply admired the learned gentleman (he was always carrying books around) from a distance.



**Paul Ledney** - The St Albans teachers were absolutely sensational as far as I remember. Two particular teachers that stand out for me are Bruce Alcorn and Norm McLeish, both of whom were solid as rocks in my development as a person. McLeish was a hard-working guy and I liked his style of teaching and something clicked for me. I remember in Year 10 he was giving some award for best work in English and the final choice was going to be between Broderick Smith, Ray Haynes and myself. In the end the award was given to Smithie though I couldn't help but think that it was good recognition for me to be there in the top three when at the age of five I couldn't even speak English, whereas the other two were of Anglo background. As well as taking us for English, McLeish was also a keen sports teacher

and was umpiring that match.

**Phillip Spivey** - Mr McLeish thought I was a struggling Italian migrant who couldn't grasp English. However, he liked my poetry about waterfalls and the bush, and that appreciation from a teacher was very encouraging. I still write poems about lots of things, usually in fifteen minutes or so when I get going.

**Barbara Teichman** - We went with Mr McLeish to see "The Hill" which was a black and white film starring Sean Connery and won some awards. This was about 1965. It was based in a British army prison in North Africa during the war and of course Connery plays one of the main roles as a renegade officer challenging mindless brutality.

**Luba Szwed** - I made quite a number of friends and there were very memorable teachers such as Mr McLeish, who was my favourite English teacher. He was always encouraging and optimistic. Others included Mr Alcorn, Mrs Gliddon, Ms Butler, Mr Torpey, Mr Chilton, and Mr Malaniuk, the Russian teacher.

**Albert Achterberg** - Our class had a sweet stall and we managed to get a lot of the sweets donated. Mr McLeish ran a log fight on the day and sure attracted a lot of the fellows who wanted to give him a hiding.



Taking on all challengers, Norm McLeish in fundraising mode, 1964.

**Colin Baulch** - At High School Mr McLeish was an English teacher but was very interested in sport and did a lot of running. We got on very well. He was the coach of the junior football team at the High School and I had him as a coach for a few years probably between 1964 and 1966. I think he came from the United Kingdom as an adult. He's passed away.

**Lindsay Chatterton** - I can remember playing rounders or baseball in our PE classes with Mr McLeish. One day McLeish took me aside and wanted to know why I was not trying out for the football team. I explained to him that I had trouble with my groins if I kicked the ball too much - but he prevailed and I did play in a school game. I'm not sure how long I lasted but the groins went and I didn't play a football match ever again.

**Cheryl Straughen** - I was at the high school from about 1964. I was part of the netball team and the swimming squad and was also in the relay team. Mr Norm McLeish always encouraged and nagged me to compete. I always got on very well with Norm.

**Joe Ribarow** - Norm McLeish was our English teacher for a while, and he was always trying to introduce a bit of novelty into the classes, such as acting out the roles from some ancient Greek or Roman drama rather than just reading it as an exercise. He stirred an interest in poetry by getting us to do parodies on Hilaire Belloc's "Tarantella" or Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and introduced us to the resonance of Mathew Arnold's "Sohrab and Rustum". He must have got bored with reading our essays, because one day he challenged the class to let our imaginations run wild and come up with a hundred alternatives for the verb 'to walk'; it seemed that that was about the only ambulatory word that anyone used in their (not so) imaginative writing. And by golly, several of the class actually did it as they sidled, slithered, sauntered, sneaked, skedaddled, and scurried across the room to hand in their paperwork. It was all in good fun and taken as such.

**Stefan Czyn** - I met Norm McLeish again in 1995 and visited his home in Ferntree Gully.

He was living a sort of bachelor's existence at the time as his wife had already passed away. He had a son, Perry, who was about 15 years old living at home. McLeish died in about 2003.



Staff v. Students hockey match, 1965: (rear) Mike Smith, Ian Smith, John Grieve, Brian Belden, Brian Safe, Arnold Shaw, Norm McLeish, Martin Clancy (front) Joan Butler, Katrina Boas, Judy Sandwell, Robyn Campbell, Seng Min Phua.



Norm McLeish and the Junior Footy Champs, 1964.



Norm McLeish and the Junior Footy Champs, c.1966.

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\* Excerpt from "Vale Norman MacLeish" in The News of the Melbourne Bushwalkers Inc. Edition 627, May 2023.

Article written by Joseph Ribaow.

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