

# DAVID DUSTING: STUDENT 1961-66: TEACHER, DEPUTY HEADMASTER



## Introduction

As a secondary teacher myself for over thirty-two years, twenty-nine of which I have spent at Ballarat Grammar School and twenty of these as Deputy Headmaster, my own experience as student and teacher has confirmed what the experts say:

"what makes a 'good' school is the strength and quality of the relationships that exist between students and staff, and between students."

Regardless of the socio-economic background of the students, the level of school resources, the academic programs, the one factor that makes the most difference in the lives of young people is the quality of the relationships that they establish with others in the School. By this definition, between 1961 and 1966, St Albans High was a "good" School.

Particularly in my senior years, it was the support, camaraderie and general youthful silliness that I shared with my "mates" that sustained me through the confusing and uncertain years of adolescence. Classmates such as Graham Snooks, Vova Karol, Henry Goralski, Lindsay Chatterton, Joe Ribarow, Pano Barbopoulos, Joe Attard, and Geoff Landers were often partners in events, adventures and ongoing in-jokes that constituted the hidden curriculum of school life. Teachers such as Mr Rayner, Mr Pavlov, Mr Maddox, Mrs Gliddon, and Father Radford, helped me gain a glimpse that life often holds more than what you immediately see before you.

## Family Origins

On 9 September 1939, my father and mother were married. Within the space of days, my father played in the Springvale Football Club premiers-winning Grand Final team and with the outbreak of war he enlisted in the army. I was born in 1949, and in the ten years in between these milestones my father saw service in the Middle East, Greece and Crete, New Guinea, and spent two years in Japan as a sergeant in the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces.



Prior to my arrival, this much-absent husband managed to come home often enough to father my two older sisters, Margaret and Carol. Needless to say, by 1956 this restless, returned serviceman had not managed to establish a strong basis for a prosperous civilian life and after an unsuccessful attempt to run a grocery business in Caulfield, the family was desperately seeking cheap housing which had easy access to public transport. With the aid of a war service loan, the family moved to a two-bedroom home on the corner of Collins Street and McIvor Road in St Albans. My father gained a job with the public service in Carlton and for the remainder of his working life travelled each weekday by train to the city. My mother did clerical work for William Trains and Co. in West Footscray.

## Schooldays in St Albans

In 1956, I commenced Grade 2 at St Albans State School. Margaret and Carol went on to the High School in its earliest years.

In Grade 6 at the old St Albans Primary School, my classmates in Mr Ick's all boys class were students who I went on to have long associations with through our High School years: Joachim

Simovic, Peter Nowatschenko, Michael Hatjiandreou, Ahmed Ajayoglu, Graeme Kennedy, Pano Barbopoulos, and Franz Jansen were all classmates.

When I now mention names like Reinhardt Junginger, Sloco Muc, and Broderick Smith on valedictory speech nights, I wonder if the students I'm talking to think I attended a school in some strange exotic country, but they were all from the St Albans we know in the industrial western suburbs of Melbourne. These are the names of the sons of migrant families who left Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean following World War Two. In many cases their parents had simply packed their few belongings into a couple of suitcases and left their homeland in the hope of making a better life for their family here in Australia.

I explain to my students that Pano's parents came from Greece, Reinhardt's family came from Austria, while the Muc and Czyz families came from Yugoslavia and Croatia. With tongue in cheek I explain the name Czyz is an example of pragmatic adaptation to the post-war environment, as immediately following the war there was a critical shortage of vowels in the Balkans. Ahmed's mother was a Russian and his father was Egyptian. Even the innocuous-sounding Broderick Smith's parents had come from England, so you can see that we were living in a neighbourhood of immigrants.

Circumstances were difficult for these families as they strove to start their lives over again virtually from scratch. They came with few belongings, earned low wages and worked very hard, often in repetitive and dangerous jobs to create the best possible future for their children.

When I think back however I look at this time with fondness and view it as a happy time. Despite the difficult circumstances of many of the students and the sparse facilities at my school, our school experience was generally a happy one, because of the positive relationships between students and staff, and particularly amongst the students themselves.

While clearly the demographics of St Albans were extremely unusual at this time, as one of the few Australian students I was largely oblivious to the atypical community in which I was growing up. Whilst I was aware of unusual pastries, mysterious cooking smells, and strange "doonas" on beds when I visited friends' homes, I had no real sense that I was experiencing anything extraordinary at this age. With my progress into adolescence and the increasing need to avoid being "different" it was only in teenage years that I began to get an appreciation of how unusual this community of St Albans was. I am sure that others will document the multiple dimensions of this community's differences in what they write and so I will leave this to them.

## **St Albans High School**

The High School was only about four years old when I started there in 1961. It had only very basic facilities. There was little in the way of specialist facilities, no sporting ovals as such, no gymnasium or much in the way of extra curricular programs.

Whilst good facilities and special programs are nice to have, obviously the key to enjoyment of your school years are the relationships and friendships that are built up. Sometimes it is in a challenging environment or in difficult circumstances that the strongest and most worthwhile friendships are formed.

In my first four years at High School my friendships were conventional in that they were often transient and dependent upon personal interests and varying maturity levels. Over these years, I developed individual friendships with Robert Pope, Graeme Kennedy, Gerhard Ruffa, and Graham Snooks.

Life was filled with the formal curriculum of the school program: classes and sport. Outside school, life was filled with more sport e.g. football with the St Albans Football Club and a great deal of boredom filled as best we could with neighbourhood mates. With two working parents and, later, working sisters, entertainment was largely something that had to be provided by

yourself. Adventures on the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully and the end of Biggs Street were usually the major source of stimulation.

## Rebels Without A Clue

In 1965, I entered Form 5, and became included in a strong friendship group of boys based partly on similar academic programs (mainly Mathematics and Science) but also on similar appreciations of off-beat humour and, increasingly, music. In retrospect, had I been a teacher of such boys at this time, I would have classified these boys as “immature but likeable”. We were rebellious but in largely harmless ways. We were primarily “Rebels Without A Clue” rather than the archetypal teenage rebels of the ‘60s.



Vova, Geoff, Michael, Lindsay, Joe A, Peter B, Joe R, Peter N, Graham, Joachim, Henry, Nick, David, 1965.

To illustrate the unusual nature of this group of teenage boys here are some thumbnail sketches:

We didn't smoke, rarely drank alcohol and very few had real “girlfriends” though all of us had “imaginary” ones. We took great delight in adopting the opposite position to anything that was generally popular amongst adults or fellow teenagers e.g. when the Beatles were at their prime, predictably the Rolling Stones were our heroes. When professional (aka “fake”) wrestling was at its prime on television, we adopted the “bad guys” as our heroes. To the amazement of fellow ring-side spectators at the GTV9 studios in Richmond, we barracked for the anti-heroes and waved banners and signs such as “Vote 1, Doctor Tanaka”. Dr Tanaka was the Japanese bad-guy wrestler set up to feed off post-war xenophobia but we weren't buying anything of this. Doctor Tanaka proved himself to be a true professional, because when he noticed our placards he turned in our direction and gave us a solemn bow – or was it that he just got “the joke” too? If there was an opportunity to demonstrate that we were wacky rebels, we'd be in it!

## Escapades

Early in Form 5, various boys became aware that we were all listening to the same radio pop music program well into the early hours of the morning as we attempted to finish off our overdue school work. This awareness led to a suggestion that on the coming evening, if any one of us were still awake at 3am, we should meet at the “Coles Corner” (Main Road and Alfreda Street). Just prior to 3am the following morning, I downed my pen, snuck out of my rear bungalow bedroom and made my way to Coles Corner to find the large majority of the boys gathered. Having surprised ourselves with such a combined act of stupidity, these rebels without a clue simply congratulated each other, turned on their heels and went home. All quite pointless but fun nonetheless.



"Coles Corner" corner of Main Road East and Alfreda Street, 1960s.

To me, the “Coles Corner” gathering, proved to be the seed of many other pointless but often entertaining events and experiences. Directly related to “Coles Corner” was the advent of “Talk Nights”. Over our final years, there were many “nights” where boys snuck out of their bedrooms in the early hours and gathered in the kitchen of Vova Karol in Sylvester Crescent. To what purpose? To smoke, drink, steal cars? No ... just to talk and play cards. Whilst most of our own parents had little idea that their teenage son was out most of the night and morning, Vova’s mother knew we were coming and copious supplies of milk, fresh Vienna bread, and chocolate chip biscuits were provided and consumed. Imminent daylight signalled the time for boys to return home before being ‘roused’ by parents at the start of another school day.

Such experiences gave rise to the “Who can stay awake the longest” competition. A starting day was set and competitors were expected to make note of the first song played after each hourly news break on the radio all through the night to verify that they were awake during the night. Henry Goralski was declared the winner after three days of sleep deprivation, though there was nobody left on the dawning on the fourth day to verify his list of songs from the third night.

Vova was a very central participant in many events and adventure. Vova was a risk taker - his willingness to engage in reckless behaviour made him everyone’s hero. He had no “principles” that inhibited his behaviour - he took everyone at face value and judged nobody. He was totally relaxed in the company of the opposite sex. In short, he was everything that I wasn’t and I loved and admired him because of it. Vova could take a risk and get away with it whilst anytime I tried a gamble, it always seemed to backfire. If you were with Vova however, you gained some of the immunity that the gods had bestowed upon this immortal. I survived three car “crashes” in which Vova was at the wheel of his Falcon 500 (Inverloch, Fish Creek, and Bell Street Preston). Whilst I have the scars to prove this, Vova has none. Vova moved from his love of fast cars to a love of flying light aeroplanes and although Henry and Joe can tell tales of near death experiences with Vova at the controls, I cannot, as I wisely declined the many invitations to fly with this Icarus of the airways.

## Rules and Expectations

The timetable for the October Tests must have finished on a Thursday and Form 6 were informed that they would be expected to be in class on the Friday to resume classes. The rebels without a clue and others felt this was an unreasonable requirement and so decided to boycott classes by wagging on Friday. When classes resumed on Monday, Form 6 was advised that unless the students who had been absent on Friday brought a note from their parents legitimising their

absence, they would be suspended. The following day, most of the absentee students brought notes that parents had provided but some of the rebels (including me) had decided “on principle” not to ask their parents to lie on their behalf. The teachers knew why we were all absent and it would be hypocritical to say otherwise. As a consequence, we boys were suspended by having to spend the following day at school, working by ourselves out in the corridor as others continued with their classes in the classroom. Whilst nothing to the effect was said by staff, I sensed that they had some sympathy and a small degree of respect for those who chose to accept the consequences of their action.



Henry Goralski, Joseph Ribarow, David Dusting, Wally Kosiak, Marin Gunew, Michael Hatjiandreou.

In a similar spirit, there had been an agreement in Form 5 that none of the rebels would accept the position of Prefect were it to be offered to them in Form 6. I have no recollection what actually led to this pact but it was based on an opinion that the Headmaster had taken some action or made a decision that we collectively disagreed with. At the start of Form 6, when Prefect voting was completed, most of the rebels and others were offered positions as Prefects. Graham Snooks, Vova Karol and myself all declined the invitation citing various bogus reasons. In my case I declared that “because I had been awarded a teaching bursary (the princely sum of 50 pounds?) my parents were anxious that I did everything I could to pass my exams, go onto university and not have to pay the money back”. In truth my parents had no real aspirations for me in relation to higher education in these times of near full employment. A day or so after it was known that some students were declining a prefectship, a teacher sidled up to me, smiled, and said: “Come on David, tell me the real reason why you turned down being a Prefect?” I smiled back and responded by giving him the previously stated party line. PS: If anyone can find out why the Form 5 rebels made the pact in the first place, I’d be interested in knowing.

## More Escapades

There could be many thumbnail sketches given but others are probably better placed to provide these. To prompt others to ‘fill the gaps’ I provide the following checklist of nonsense:

One night, a number of boys (not including me) “broke into” the storage cupboard in the Form 6 centre trying to find a copy of the October Test questions for English by using a key made from a wax impression. Such an elaborate plan executed so professionally for so little return on just a practice exam. One of the break-in gang even found it difficult to stay awake during the exam due to his all-night escapade.

Form 6 boys were in the habit of playing cards and other trivial games in the hallway of the Form 6 centre. One such game was a form of “lawn bowls” in which a bunch of keys were substituted for the bowl and thrown/slid along the length of lino in the corridor to topple a small pyramid of old inkwells. On one occasion, a less than coordinated Peter Nowatschenko threw his

keys into the air only to smash the Frisbee-shaped light cover which still managed to stay attached to its fixture.

To support Peter, the remaining half of the light cover was quickly replaced with one from the far end of the corridor and the broken cover was placed at the end and turned towards the entrance so that staff might not notice the damage. For the rest of the day whenever one of the teachers was heading to that end of the corridor there was a student at the front of the class asking some extremely important question that needed the teacher's immediate attention. In the early hours of the following morning a human pyramid of boys (not including me) was formed outside a local furniture store to purloin a similar light fitting from above their front entrance, which then replaced the broken one in the corridor the following day. Has anyone checked whether this light cover is still there?

The rebels without a clue (including me) decided to start a Kazoo band. The one and only gig of the band was a performance at a "French Night" where we played the French national anthem and a few other French classics. None of the rebels actually did French as a subject or had any musical ability, although after the performance Broderick Smith came over and said we should form a proper band - we thought he was joking. What would he know?

## **Cooperation in Self Education**

Due to a lack of confidence in one member of the Science staff, we came to the conclusion that we had better take the initiative and take some measures to supplement our educational experiences. This included a number of late nights making multiple copies of lesson notes obtained from a student at another school. The notes were borrowed and, like medieval monks, boys sat around Henry Goralski's kitchen table in the early hours of the morning making multiple copies of these holy scrolls using carbon paper. The combined completed notes were then distributed to each member of the group.

Due to the inordinate number of absences of that member of the Science staff, we also had to take considerable initiative just to complete the required number of practical experiments. Students paired off as prac partners, and each pair were assigned to carry out one of the missing assignments. The results were written up as multiple copies using numerous sheets of carbon paper, and the copies distributed to the other teams for their individualised reproduction. Some will remember completing an unsupervised experiment to produce Chlorine gas that got out of hand, prompting the experimental equipment having to be carried out onto the oval to avoid poisoning all the occupants of the laboratory. Others may remember, or perhaps understandably not remember, various unauthorised experiments with Chloroform.

I'll read with interest what others can recall of these relatively innocent but significant years at St Albans High.

## **After High School**



L Chatterton, H Goralski, J Attard, V Karol, P Barbopoulos, D Dusting, G Landers, 1966.

After High School we went in different directions. Reinhardt Junginger left school at the end of Year 11 and by the time I was halfway through a university degree, he had made enough money from digging opals in Coober Pedy to retire and spend the rest of his life travelling the world. Sloco Muc became a dentist. Ahmed became an engineer, Pano a metallurgist. Broderick Smith went on to become a rock 'n' roll performer and song writer in the 1970s, and now has a long list of albums to his credit. A number of the others boys studied at university and after graduation actually chose to train further in order to become teachers.



## University of Melbourne

In 1967 I commenced a Bachelor of Science Degree at the University of Melbourne in Mathematics and Chemistry. Having been told to get my hair cut at Teachers College (an unwelcome repetition of a confrontation I'd already had at high school) I decided that the last thing I'd ever want to be was a teacher so I turned in my studentship and by working as a factory storeman in Sunshine and a Bookmakers' Clerk on Saturdays, I paid the money back and supported myself through university. In second year Chemistry, I teamed up with a group of nine Chemists who have remained my friends for the last thirty-seven years. Most of them became Education Department teachers and 54-11s and one is currently Principal of the Catholic Regional College in St

Albans.

In 1970 I did my Honours year in Chemistry, which proved totally irrelevant to entering St. Michael's House Theological College, in South Australia, the following year.

## Marriage and National Service



In 1972 my national service call up was due and I married Janet Matthews from Geelong in January. By November I found myself in the medical corps in Queensland when Gough Whitlam said I had done enough for Queen and country and sent me home.

In 1973, with a pregnant wife and only an Army scholarship as income, I did another about face and did my Diploma of Education at Melbourne

University. To supplement my income during the course, I took a part-time teaching position at Essendon Grammar teaching Mathematics and Remedial English (Remedial English being my native tongue) which led me to gaining a full-time position at Ivanhoe Girls Grammar for the following three years.

With the birth of two sons, we hit the hippy trail to a block of bushland in Smythesdale near Ballarat and set up home. There was no SEC power but plenty of trees and thousands of head of bull-ants on our own cheap bush block.

## **Teaching at Ballarat Grammar**

In 1977 I commenced teaching at Ballarat Grammar. In 1980 we abandoned the hippy dream and moved onto the School campus with our then three sons and remained there for the next twenty years. In the early '80s I undertook the Graduate Diploma in Computing at Deakin University - one of the first online tertiary courses in the Australia. Since then I have been Head of Mathematics, Boarding House Staff member, VCE Coordinator, and at the age of 35 I was appointed Deputy Headmaster and Head of Senior School, positions I currently still hold.

Ballarat Grammar is an amazingly caring community. Over 200 boarding students are in the care of the school 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, and it has been a great privilege to live and work with young people and dedicated staff. Despite the fact that parents pay a large amount of money to have their children at the school, the kids are like any kids and have to cope with all the issues of other adolescents and often some additional ones such as the sometimes unrealistic expectations of their parents. Whilst this work is demanding it is very stimulating and rewarding to share the lives of young people. There are the great lows - the roads deaths, death of parents - but also the great highs as you see young people begin to realise their potential.

In my role as Deputy Head, a large part of my time is spent with those students that don't cope well in this or indeed in any system. Whilst for some students there is no way that they can overcome the baggage that they bring with them, there are many successes to give you the encouragement to keep being positive and optimistic about those who struggle.

In 29 years at this School strong relationships build up with your closest colleagues many of whom are very down to earth and compassionate people and include some fellow WOTYOBs (West of the Yarra Old Boys) e.g. from Spotswood and Yarraville.

## **Family**

In 2000, Jan and I moved off campus to a two-bedroom cottage that I built myself on the edge of bushland in Nerrina. We didn't end up with a big house in suburbia so we have stayed true to our hippy ideals to some extent. We have invested primarily in our sons' education. They aren't lawyers or doctors but have grown into really nice human beings with the good priorities. None of them are married but have good friends both male and female. Matthew and Kym are currently in London and Christopher is based in Brisbane working on various creative pursuits including a hardcore punk band. They are all pursuing their passions rather than working towards fitting some mould or the expectations of others as our generation often did.



David and Janet Dusting with their sons.

I still visit St Albans as my 88-year-old father and one sister still live in the area. I have always been fiercely proud of my working class roots and very appreciative of the excellent teachers who taught me at St Albans High. With no little irony, staff members and groups of our Ballarat students currently make regular trips to the Edmund Rice Centre in St Albans to provide coaching for the children of refugees. Has the wheel somehow come full circle through this service project that I had no part in initiating?

## Valedictory Speeches

Every few years or so at Ballarat Grammar I am invited to give the Valedictory address at the final Year 12 Dinner and whilst I take a few liberties with detail, I always acknowledge my gratitude to St Albans High and point out that luck rather than your own efforts often plays a major part in how our life turns out. Jan and I feel we have been extremely lucky.

My generic Valedictory Speech, for those who haven't tired of this ramble from a middle aged western suburbs old boy, includes the following excerpts:

In my youth, Australia was spoken of as the "Lucky Country". That has certainly been my experience and so too for most of my classmates at school.

Many things have changed in Australia in the last decades. Certainly for young people life has become more complex and more subject to change, but there is no doubt that this is still a Lucky Country.

A simple example of this are the circumstances of your birth. If you were born in Australia I'm sure you'll realise that you have been luckier than many people - certainly luckier than if you were born in the Balkans or Afghanistan. Lucky that you had parents who cared about you and valued education enough to make sacrifices to send you to this school.

Beyond the circumstances of your birth and parentage, in time you'll realise that there were crucial influences in your life that made the difference between where you ended up and being in a less happy circumstances.

It's highly likely that many of these crucial influences will be those that you have been exposed to here at school. Amongst these influences for some may be words spoken by Father John or your fellow students in a Chapel service or very likely it'll be the influence of your house tutor or a particular teacher. It may be as simple as words spoken or a simple act of support in a time of crisis when you were here.

Nearly all adults can give examples of the crucial influence that others have had in their life and many of these happened during their School years. (Amongst my own crucial influences, I recall my Year 12 English teacher who overlooked my appalling spelling and convoluted sentences in my essays and simply said “David, there are some very good ideas here!”)

The scary thing that you will realise in later life is that luck, good fortune - or the hand of God - have played such an important part in you arriving at what will hopefully be an enjoyable future. You will realise that nobody entirely makes their our own future.

My charge to you tonight is that in that time in the future, when you appreciate that you have been fortunate, that you will acknowledge this by being a positive influence in the lives of other people.

Acknowledge it by what you say about your life to others.

More important than your talk is your action. Acknowledge your good fortune by what you do for other people, for not everyone will have had the good fortune that you have had and you have an obligation to help others, for “those to whom much is given, much is expected”.

Make sure that you DO something to make life a better experience for others.

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**David Dusting, 2005.**



David Dusting with sister Magaret (R) at 2018 class reunion.