

A Student Remembers

Dandenong Primary School 1403

Neil Bradbury

I was born in 1924, and since the back of the photo of Grade 1 is marked 1930, it seems I started school in 1929 at age 5. This was the age most students began school in the Infants Grade, or Babies or Bubs. There were two incidents that I clearly remember in the Bubs. The teacher was Miss Dixon. She asked me to stay behind one lunch time to do a little job and she rewarded me with an almond from her lunch box. The second incident concerned Ernie Cornell. He was sick and I was directed to clean up. Perhaps the cleaning involved no more than sprinkling sawdust around.

In Grades 1 and 2 we had slates and slate pencils to write with. The correct method of cleaning the slate was by means of a piece of rag attached to the slate with string. An elbow was more convenient even though it wore out the sleeves of the jumpers.

Mrs Douglas was the teacher and I remember her conducting the singing. One of the songs was about a happy little aborigine. The porch is also fixed in my memory. A friend and I were walking home from Sunday School through the school grounds. One of us threw a stone and broke a porch window. We ran off expecting to be nabbed at any moment by the cops.

The Principal, or Head Teacher as he was known then, was Mr Besant. We called him Buzzy. One day I happened to be down near the boys toilet when the bell rang after recess. Buzzy was on the warpath when I was making my way back to class - too slowly in his view. He smartened me up with a couple of straps on the hand.

The teacher in Grade 3 was Mrs Douglas again. My only memory of Grade 3 was the boring chanting of tables all the way from 1 times 1 to 12 times 12 after lunch. We knew our tables at the end of that year. The floors in Grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 were tiered. The steps were about 1 metre wide, just wide enough to accommodate a desk. The rise between each tier was about 15 cm. The doors between Grades 3 and 4 were arranged to fold back concertina fashion for special occasions, though I don't recall any special occasions.

We had two teachers during the Grade 4 year. One was Miss Butler who couldn't control the class. The other was Miss Doreen Herrick. We were introduced to periodic tests in Grade 4. The student with the highest marks was rewarded with a blue and white ribbon suitably inscribed to wear for the day. The winner was usually

Monty Rodd with his sister Betty a strong contender. Monty was a rival through secondary school too.

Grades 5 and 6 were much the same. The subjects were mental arithmetic, dictation, precis writing, writing compositions, short courses in civics, grammar, the roots of words and of course maths. In Grade 5 we had what could be called arts and craft. This consisted of modelling in plasticene and gluing coloured pieces of paper or sago on to tumblers and jars.

We had an issue of "The School Paper" about once a month in Grades 5 and 6. The paper contained poems and stories, and probably more that I can't recall. Miss Grace taught us in Grade 5 and Miss Kelly in Grade 6. At the end of Grade 6 students either went to Dandenong High School or to Grades 7 and 8, Grade 8 being the legal leaving age. Mr Bill Hartley was the 7 and 8 teacher.

At recess the boys would play on the Durbridge and New Street sides of the grounds, the girls on the Masters side. The surfaces for the boys were either gravel or bare dirt though there was a patch of tussocks where the boys would wrestle. I seem to remember a sealed area in the girls area.

Cricket and football were the sports played by the boys. The school would sometimes play the Dandenong West School, and occasionally visit or host a school from down the Gippsland line. Another popular game was saddle-me-nag. Two teams would form, one lining up against a fence with each boy putting his head between the legs of the boy in front rugby scrum style. The boys of the second team would then leapfrog on to the backs of the first team until it collapsed. Good fun.

The season for marbles would come and go, as for swap cards, five stones, throwing a weighted card nearest to a wall and cherry bobs. These were the white stones from cherries some coloured red and blue with ink. A game similar to marbles was played with cherry bobs. They would also provide a satisfactory diversion in the class room when placed beneath the seat of a desk. When the occupant sat on the seat a loud crunch would result. Hoppo bumpo was also popular.

The girls used to mark out the walls of houses along Masters fence. I don't know what other games they played. There were no tennis courts at the school, though some of the boys would hit a tennis ball against the blank wall at the rear of Grades 3 and 4

I'm sure there used to be a flag pole, but I can't remember where. We would line up on Monday mornings to salute the flag being raised and to sing "God save the King." The king at that time was George V. Anzac Day, Empire Day and Armistice Day were all celebrated with flag raising, anthem singing and speeches. The obvious place

for a pole would be in the garden, but that would leave no space to line up. Weeding and tidying the garden was an occasional job, its condition reflecting our enthusiasm for gardening.

The Misses Driver had a lolly shop on the far side of Foster Street opposite the end of New Street. A penny would buy four liquorice blocks, a couple of aniseed balls, a packet of fags or any number of sugary delights. I think they sold stationery too. Now and then the school would hold a Bazaar in the Town Hall as a money raising effort. My parents usually gave me six separate pennies to spend on lollies or at the various stalls. I can't recall any concerts or plays staged by the school. We were given religious instruction once a week in most of grades. Someone from the Dandenong churches would read bible stories.

The school motto was "Deeds not words" and the school colours were white on blue. There was no uniform and the colours were limited to blue socks with white bands around the tops. Few parents in those times could afford special socks. Indeed, I recall the Johnson boys who had no socks or shoes. They walked to school from Greens lane about 2 km down Frankston Road. In winter they had chilblains on their feet some of which had erupted into weeping ulcers.

I remember seeing a bumper sticker a year or two ago that said: "If you can read this thank a primary teacher." I certainly thank the primary teachers who taught me the three Rs and gave me a good grounding for a satisfactory lifelong career.

Dandenong Primary School 1403
in the 1930s

Drivers
Lolly shop

Foster

Street

Garden

Street

Master's

New

Durbridge's

W W
W W
W W
W W W
W W

