A New Face

It was with regret that we received the resignation from the committee of Pam Morris (Dundas) last month. Pam and her husband John have been at the forefront of a Sanctuary Northern Rivers project to sponsor the re-settlement of three families from Congo, to Mullumbimby. It has been and will continue to be a huge commitment, and we can quite understand how Pam’s time priorities have had to be re-arranged. We thank Pam for her contribution to the Association during the first months and its launch at a successful breakfast last year and wish her all the best in her humanitarian project.

The consequent committee vacancy has been filled by Letitia Towers who attended the school from 1987 to 1992. She works for Ray Towers Carpets and Towers Mini Storage in an accounts/admin role. Her husband is Ross Butcher who also attended Mullum High and her two children are Charlotte, six, who goes to the Primary school, and Dylan, three.

Welcome and thank you for stepping in, Letitia.

PROJECT UPDATE

Funds to complete the buying and installation of the new lectern and sound system are in hand, and payments have been made nearing $3000, so congratulations to all members who have been so generous with their support. The lectern which came in many small pieces is being assembled and the school badge has been applied. Now we are awaiting a crucial piece of information from the Principal about the strategy for installing everything.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Things in the education sector seem to be in a state of flux right now, so rather than expend energy on fund raising for things that may be on the general shopping list offered by governments, we will focus our attention on increasing our membership. The Facebook site it one way of adding to the avenues by which ex-students and staff may find us, but it will also come down to individuals prodding friends to take that step of contacting the secretary to add their names to any of the registers. If you know someone, contact the Secretary to follow it up mh.exassn@bigpond.com.

We welcome George Trahane to the Associate register. George’s time at the high school was from 1970, and he is looking for photos. See the next page for details.

Also, we congratulate Dave Morris, whose roots are very deep in Mullum soil, for converting his Associate membership to Voting membership. Congratulations, Dave.

Moving from one member category to another is easy if you have a voting member who can nominate you. There is a membership application to complete, it is referred to the committee and then you pay your sub. Ask the Secretary for the application form mh.exassn@bigpond.com.
REUNIONS

In its short life the Association has had a couple of functions which have served the dual purpose of providing an opportunity to get together, and to raise money for our project to upgrade the sound system of the school auditorium. We know that class groups have dedicated reunions, whose purpose is to catch up with class mates.

Some people are reluctant to go to reunions for any number of reasons. Sometimes it might be distance and expense; there may be health and family matters that make it difficult or impossible to take part. There may be nervousness about what they think other people remember of school days. It could even be that old antagonisms still linger. Or maybe it’s as simple as wondering what there would be to talk about after a long interval.

There was no such problem when the 59 ers got together last year to mark the 50th anniversary of their high school graduation.

One of them, Edwin Wilson (who at school was known as Peter or Pedro), later wrote about his account of the conversation he had with his old mates, and he has kindly agreed to have this edited version repeated here, to show that there is never any shortage of things to talk about. Ed has a long list of novels and volumes of poetry to his credit, along with his own story titled “The Mullumbimby Kid.”

PHOTO SEARCH

New Associate George Trahane is looking for old school photos, so if you have any of these in the shoe box under the bed, please let the Secretary know.

He is looking for High School years 1970-1st year, 1971-2nd year, 1972-3rd Year, 1976-4th year. He is also after photos from the Primary school years: 1966-3rd class, 1967-4th class, 1968-5th class, 1969-6th class.

George says he has some photos from these years should someone be interested.

A Discourse on Velocity

The last time I faced Joe (Thompson) was on the school cricket pitch as he hurled a hard red ball towards me at some murderous pace. Needless to say, I was terrified, as I’d not had much tuition in this particular game, but vaguely understood that sport taught us to ‘face the music’ and the ball (the playing fields of Eton and all that), as metaphor for fronting dragons on the road of life.

Joe bowled agoogly at our 50th reunion dinner, a question about velocity, as previously delivered by our maths master, Bradley, that may or may not have had Joe stumped.

‘If a car drove at 60 km/hr up a 2 km slope how fast would it have to travel down the remaining 2 kms to complete the journey in two minutes?’ Joe used his hand to indicate a straight rising line, with its mirror image coming down from the pointy bit at the top. Bradley would have used miles in his original question all those years ago, updated now for current circumstances.

As one who’d always struggled with the abstractions of pure mathematics, where a point had no area and a line had no width, this ball had unbalanced me. For although I was weak at computation skills (the mental arithmetic component) I’d been quite good at physics, and had a good sense of the complexity of such a problem in the ‘real world’ of cars and roads. So many assumptions would have to be made before this question could be addressed.

The first thing that needed to be established was the car’s initial velocity and acceleration, if any (according to the equation $s = ut + \frac{1}{2} at^2$, where $s$ = distance, $u$ = initial velocity, $a$ = acceleration, and $t$ = time), to not mention aerodynamic considerations, unless the theoretical car were operating in a pure vacuum, where an internal combustion engine would not work. As another bit of distracting fun (having driven low-slung cars), the slope of the incline would have to be an important consideration, for if it were too great any theoretical car would have its theoretical transmission ripped out as it crossed over the pointy bit at the top of the incline. To meet any deadline the second part of the journey would require a considerable acceleration (from the initial velocity of 60 km/hr) to finish the journey in the required time, further complicating the calculation.

Before I had a chance to raise such matters an answer was provided.

‘If the car were travelling at a constant velocity of 60 km/hr it would take two minutes to reach the top of the 2 km incline, leaving no time to complete the journey, with no answer to the question. End of story.’

“What if the car went at the speed of light for the last section?” I had squeaked.

“It can’t go in no time,” was Joe’s reply.

“Why not?”

Rules of the game apparently, when this rule had not previously been stated. There was some discussion as to how long it took light to travel from the sun to the earth, and from the nearest star (after the sun). I had to concede some time
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would be expended for light to travel 2 km, but this would be virtually zero, and outside the capacity of most time measurement.

The week before there’d been a running discussion in Column 8 (Sydney Morning Herald) as to whether 0.999 (repeater) was equal or equivalent to one. In Abstract Algebra (at the University of New South Wales) they’d seriously tried to prove (or disprove?) there was no integer between zero and one, when I’d always taken it for a given (that there wasn’t), and had hardly thought about it since. Of course I understood that 0.999 (repeater) was asymptotic to one, and got closer and closer (like the paradox of the hare and the tortoise) but never quite made it, except perhaps in infinite space/time.

As far as the engineers were concerned 0.999 (repeater) was close enough to one, within the degrees of tolerance of the engine of any car, real or theoretical. Of course it wasn’t equal, in a pure mathematical sense. That was the problem with mathematicians (as contrasted to the engineers, who built the bridges and the roads and cars). Mathematicians were playing their own games (with their own narrow set of axioms or rules) in their own sand pit, closer to metaphysics in a way, when there were no straight lines in the natural world. At that stage I should have shut up, or taken my hat and ball and gone home in a suit, but that’s when my perversity kicked in. When I was a kid there were eight balls in each over of cricket, now changed to six as I understood.

For ‘reality’ is far more fuzzy and complex than the question had assumed. For Newtonian ‘equations’ sadly are approximations of reality, with ‘bugger’ factors used in some Physical Chemistry experiments (quite literally), to bridge the chasm between the theoretical and the real (I kid you not, such things are done, to make the equations work). And to push some of the other variables in Bradley’s question to their logical absurdiities, apart from the massive amounts of energy required to accelerate the car to some massive speed in less than 2 kms, the car would have to have perfect aerodynamics (and most probably have to look like a pure line on a page). For a car in free fall (accelerating under the pull of gravity) does not keep accelerating, but soon reaches a ‘terminal velocity’, and would burn like a meteor in earth’s atmosphere at velocities far less than the speed of light, the same fate that would be encountered by Santa trying to deliver presents to the children of affluent parents across the whole globe in one moving block of night (this last point, gentle reader is a joke, as Santa is not really real).

This last suggestion (of travelling faster than the speed of light) generated its own degree of heat, when I told Joe he was wrong (in the sense that the question was logically inconsistent and seriously flawed). Most of these thoughts, with the exception of the Abstract Algebra and Santa references were sloshing in my head at the time, and yes I know that Santa is not real, more like a postulation. Of course I jest, but for a moment I had regressed to a spotty child in Bradley’s maths class in the girls changing room of the old Home Science block in 1958, the year before I had to leave for the Tweed. How I would have loved to have had this discussion with Bradley (in a light-hearted and jocular sense) from this point in time (as the politicians say), that zero time was an authentic solution to his question, but over dinner would have been too tedious, as it would have taken too long to explain.

Better therefore to retreat. So I apologized to Joe through gritted teeth that he was correct in a ‘pure’ mathematical sense, like Galileo muttering ‘but still it [could] move [in zero time]’ under my breath, that the question was logically flawed. I walked from the crease with lowered head. Bowled out for a duck again, which happened often on the playing field. This letter is my sort-of action replay, increasingly accepted in most sports, so why not maths, and school reunion dinners?

I have a great loyalty to Mullum High, for education provided us all with aspirations and a pathway to the greater world and back, as the case may be. The school motto now, as I recall, was ‘Play the Game’ (a motto shared with Lane Cove Primary where our kids went), and most appropriate in this context. We were a lucky generation in this Game of Life. We grew up in such a beautiful place. We were just ahead of the great post World War II economic boom, and how I wish I’d bought that block of land at Byron Bay.

Edwin (Peter) Wilson

FROM THE PAPERS

North Coast Advocate-Summerland News, Feb. 18, 1981. Antarctica ‘too hot’ for Byron Bay man

Antarctica was mostly ‘too hot’ for research physicist Dr. Ivan Reid, now on holiday with his mother, Mrs. Cicely Reid, of Byron Bay. Dr. Reid spent 10 months on the icy... He was a member of the 31-strong party that wintered-over at the Mawson base, the most westerly of the Australian bases. Dr. Reid...conducted experiments to study the upper atmosphere.

Much of his time before his trip had been spent building some computerised equipment to assist his research.

His task at the base was to set up the equipment and ensure it was working satisfactorily.

Dr. Reid said that already he had some results but these had yet to be analysed. Dr. Reid said that he only had to wear pyjamas when the outside temperature got down to minus 33 degrees and generally the buildings were ‘too hot.’

This especially was so when blizzards raised the temperature to minus five degrees ‘and you couldn’t open the door.’

Dr. Reid is pictured wearing the fur hat given to him by a Russian physicist also on the base during the 10 month term.