

NSWSPC CHICKEN SOUP 5

Allan Jones, Jim Linton, Malcom Stacey

NSWSPC Chicken Soup records some of the many wonderful anecdotes and stories that we all hold from our many years as Principals and teachers. If you have a special little anecdote, short story or even a longer story about times past, please take the time to share it with us. Simply email it to principalfutures@nswspc.org.au 😊

The great piano mystery – Allan Jones

In the early 80s two newly-appointed head teachers arrived on the same day at a school in the Greater West of Sydney. The school had a large (1600+) student population and a large (120) teaching staff to deliver a curriculum that didn't fully engage the students. The challenges facing these new head teachers were daunting, not the least of which was that staff morale was low, with many teachers expressing a strong desire to be somewhere else, preferably further to the east.

One particular initiative to address this issue that comes to mind was an attempt by some of the more progressively-minded members of staff who believed that raising staff morale should begin by raising student morale. And so it was that the two head teachers led a team to run a school disco and tread a path that few had dared to tread. The school hall was booked and a staff member who knew a bit about music was recruited as the DJ and all of the other arrangements were put into place.

And so it was, on a Friday night, with considerable trepidation this brave band of teachers ran what was to be a very successful school disco. I mean there were the odd occasions when a student behaved in a less than socially acceptable manner, but overall when the night was over we all gathered together to have a celebratory drink and congratulate each other. Unfortunately the bonhomie was somewhat spoiled when it was discovered that the hall piano had not fared so well. An enterprising student had managed to detach all of the actuating hammers from its innards and strewn them across the floor without any of us detecting said behaviour. The teachers felt so sorry that what had been a good night for so many had been spoiled by such a brazen act of vandalism that had occurred right under their noses.

The school did have a problem in that some of our students seemed to enjoy school so much that they went to great lengths to break back in on the weekend. That weekend, just as predicted, there was indeed a break-in and - well you can guess the rest. The hall piano had been taken back to the Music Room after the disco and the Music faculty was subsequently delighted with the new piano they received as a replacement. The deputy principal at the time found it confusing, given that the head cleaner had come to see him on the Monday morning bearing what looked like small felt-covered pieces of timber that he had found on the hall floor, puzzled as to how they came to be there. The solution to this mystery is lost in time.

Trusted and valued teachers – Jim Linton

My first appointment was to an inner west boys' high school where the boys predominately came from somewhere other than 'around here'. They were the days when sport was king. I applied for a Rugby coaching position; yes you had to apply. One was given a lower grade in those days in order to prove your worth to the cause. I coached the 14B team. The A team coach chose the best players and I had what was left. We played in the prestigious (at least that's what I was told) NW Metropolitan Zone which included

schools like Normanhurst Boys, Epping Boys, James Ruse HS and Asquith Boys. When we played 'away' we let the boys leave school at recess to travel by train to far-flung places.

One day we were playing James Ruse at one of their home fields. During the game there was a motorbike accident in the street adjacent to the park, the rider was not hurt too badly. An ambulance was called by a nearby resident, and our game proceeded. During the game, one of our players was injured. The ambulance was still there so I approached the paramedic and asked if he had room for another passenger to go to the hospital. He agreed. After the game I drove to the hospital. Of course, I called the parents from the hospital as there was no such thing as a mobile phone back then. On his father's request I stayed with the boy until he was discharged, and I then drove him home. His father offered me a Scotch whisky which I accepted, and we sat and chatted. He told me how trusted and valued teachers were in his country and thanked me for taking good care of his son.

A day in the life of a head teacher – Malcolm Stacey

Back in the days when I was a Head Teacher, I had a woman teacher in my faculty who was a very interesting character. One day one of my other teachers came up to me, saying that he thought there was a riot in her room. So I went upstairs and there was indeed a lot of noise and calling out, and one boy standing outside. I asked him why he was there, and he said I needed to have a look at the teacher. The doors were heavy wide doors that slid, so I pushed the door – which meant everyone in the room looked to see who was opening the door – only to see her at the front of the room wearing a blouse that you could see through! And all the class was calling out "Look at Miss, look at Miss!"

I called her to the door and she came over to me with the class still calling out all manner of things, and me not knowing where to look. Just then the bell went and six classrooms of adolescent kids emptied out into the corridor to see me standing at the door of the classroom with a lady in a see-through blouse. It got worse. More kids came running into the building to have a look. I sent her to the staff room to cover up, which amused and stunned the other staff. Eventually we got to the Principal's office and he was stuttering and didn't want to look. She was sent home to change and we wrote copious reports. It was an event I will never forget!