

NSWSPC CHICKEN SOUP 6

Gus Plater

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 😊

Bravura performances – Gus Plater

As one reflects on a career in schools it is possible to recall bravura performances by staff members which, at least for a moment in time, established a reputation – or even awe – among the students of the school. How long this admiration lasts of course is moot, however such events can contribute to a certain positive aura. Two come readily to mind:

Armidale High School

The first was a long time ago, in the early seventies at Armidale High School. Armidale, long established, had an impressive avenue of trees coming up from a lower gate towards the school's asphalt assembly area. It was recess and it quickly became obvious that a largish group of students had gathered, were agitated and needed attention.

What had happened was the arrival and landing of a considerable swarm of angry bees. They had settled in among the lower branches of one of the plane trees.

Assistance was obviously required and it arrived rapidly in the form of John, the Deputy, who as it turned out was an amateur apiarist. He had quickly gone to the boot of his car, donned protective gear including a hat, picked up a hive box he just happened to have in the car and entered the fray. To the amazement of the bemused surrounding students who had been herded to a safe distance, John quickly identified and captured the queen and subsequently had no problem boxing the swarm. He left with the bees in tow to offer them a safe haven, probably among his own hives. The incident certainly did his reputation no harm at all.

Kincumber High School

The second incident was more contemporary and occurred when brand new Kincumber High was in its early stages of growth. The school was of a very up-to-date design and the library, as it should be, was at the centre of the school buildings. The slope of the block, carved out of the sides of the Kincumba Mountain Reserve, was such that if you followed the path to the upper class rooms and science block you could almost look down upon, or even reach, the gutters of the library roof.

I was called to a melee of students who were disturbed by the fact that they had found a considerable diamond python/carpet snake nestling in the library gutter.

Now as a lad from the North Coast who, for pocket money with his brother, used to catch the odd carpet snake and sell it at a shilling a foot to farmers to put in their barns to control rats, I did not see that it really posed a problem. Neither did it present a problem to the Deputy who, for want of a better name, we'll call Lance. He simply obtained a stool from the science room, climbed to the gutter and picked up the snake behind the head, which then (as we knew it would) wrapped itself around Lance's arm. He then calmly walked across the crowded recess quad, through to a waiting car where the snake was relocated to another section of the adjacent National Park.

I can still see the looks on the faces as the 'waters' parted and Lance strode through the quadrangle. I am sure the incident only enhanced his reputation.