

NSWSPC CHICKEN SOUP 8

Angela O'Callaghan

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 ☺

Chuckle Time – Angela O'Callaghan

I thought I'd share a memory of my time as Principal that always makes me chuckle. To understand the humour you need to keep in mind that I was born in the early 1950s when, in my community, there were certain expectations about what constituted 'appropriate language'.

I was interviewing a difficult Year 9 student, often in trouble, whom I will call Mary. She had several substantial scratch marks on her neck, having just been in a physical fight with another girl. Both were at fault to varying degrees. Mary proceeded to use very colourful language to describe her assailant that in days gone by would have been described as capable of making a sailor blush.

When I admonished her for her language she said, "Everyone talks like that." "Not at Happy Valley High School" was my response. Mary then said, in a somewhat sarcastic manner, "You're so old fashioned, you were probably born in 1994!" Rather than panic about Mary's numeracy skills, given that she underestimated my age by 40 years or more, I decided to savour the comment as one of those priceless moments in teaching. Memories of it still bring a smile to my face.

Asked to write a reference – Angela O'Callaghan

I was Principal at a school where our work was often challenging, but I loved the school and the students. One day, a single father whom I will call Fred, arrived exactly a week late for a meeting about his son, whom I will call Harry. Harry's behaviour had been most inappropriate for some time and it was really important that I meet with Fred to discuss this matter. During the meeting, I told Harry what a great father he had and how disappointed he must be in his behaviour. I was trying the guilt-trip trick!

About half an hour later, I was in the supermarket, as it was my turn to provide morning tea for the staff. Fred approached me and asked if I would write a reference for him. When I asked why he needed it, I was told he had been charged with drink driving and since I had said what a great dad he was, he thought I would be able to help him. He was very worried as he claimed the magistrate in the neighbouring town, where he would have to attend court, had become very harsh since his own brother had been killed by a drink driver.

I wrote a very short reference, simply stating his children attended school daily, dressed neatly and were provided with their recess and lunch.

Many weeks later I entered Harry's classroom. As soon as he saw me he called loudly from his seat, "Hey Miss! My dad never had to go to jail no more because of that letter wot you writ." I can still picture the joy on his face.

An invitation – Angela O'Callaghan

I was a Head Teacher in a small country school where a student, whom I will call Chloe, was often in trouble. She came from a very impoverished background. One day her mother, a difficult parent whom I will call Jenny, arrived at school and invited me to her daughter's 16th birthday party, to be held at the local club. She told me, "There will be lots of tucker but you have to bring your own grog."

I went to the party and stayed for an hour or so. About fifteen years later, I saw Jenny in a local chemist shop. She was now a very large lady, wearing a smallish tee shirt with the words 'Hell Was Full So I Came Back' written on the front. She approached me with a raised fist. She obviously didn't recognise me. Perhaps she was under the influence of something? I often wonder where Chloe is today.