

## TRIBUTES TO BILL KENNEDY

*The following comments were made by former NSW Secondary Principals' Council colleagues of Bill Kennedy shortly after his death on 22 September 2021. Bill was held in very high regard by all those who worked with him as secondary principals, SPC reference group leaders and members, SPC State Assembly delegates, SPC employed officers and SPC executive, including our Deputy Presidents and Presidents. These comments reflect the great diversity of those who admired, respected and appreciated Bill.*



### **BRIAN RALPH**

It is my very sad duty to report to you the passing of Bill Kennedy yesterday morning at the age of 83. Bill had a previous medical history of Hodgkin's lymphoma going back many, many years and after three previous very brave and successful attempts to keep this dreadful illness at bay he finally succumbed yesterday.

Bill first became a Principal in the Campbelltown area in the early 80s and then moved to Bulli High School in 1986, where he gave outstanding service to his students and community until his retirement at the end of 1996. In the late 80s and early 90s Bill was Treasurer of the NSWSPC, and then became one of its two Deputy Presidents from 1992-1994. Bill was also heavily involved in the development of the Australian Secondary Principals' Council (ASPA) and was Deputy President of ASPA for several years prior to his retirement.

Bill was awarded Life Membership of the Council in 1998.

Post retirement, Bill took over from Ken Newton as NSWSPC Executive Officer in June 1998, a role that he performed with great distinction until his 'second

retirement' in June 2008. To recognise his outstanding contribution to the Council during this period, the Executive led by President Jim McAlpine established the Bill Kennedy Medal in his honour, which was awarded for the first time in 2009.

Perhaps it is appropriate for me to quote the first part of the citation for the Bill Kennedy Medal that I wrote in 2008, in preparation for its inaugural award in 2009:

### **The Bill Kennedy Medal**

“The Bill Kennedy Medal was initiated at the 2008 Annual Conference of the NSWSPC to recognise the outstanding work of Bill Kennedy on his retirement from the position of NSWSPC Executive Officer. Bill was a long-standing member of the Council, including at one stage NSWSPC Deputy President and Deputy President of ASPA, prior to his retirement as Principal of Bulli High School.

After Bill retired he took up the role of Executive Officer of the Council. Bill performed this role for ten years, giving further distinguished and sustained service to the Council. Major hallmarks of Bill's service included a passion for supporting the work of both the Council and principals for the good of NSW Public Education, provision of expert advice and wise counsel, and the tireless undertaking of his work in a positive, helpful and selfless way.”

Bill was a fine man who displayed great dedication to NSW Public Education and who gave outstanding service to the NSWSPC. His passing is a huge loss for all of us.

On behalf of many people who knew and highly respected Bill, I would like to extend our very sincere sympathies to Bill's wife Kath, his daughter Jennifer and her family, and his sons Stephen and David and their families. Unfortunately both Stephen and David live overseas at the present time and were not able to be by his bedside this week.

Kath has informed me that Bill's funeral will be held on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September. As it is a COVID-safe event his funeral will be live-streamed for those who wish to participate. More details will be provided as they come to hand, most probably in next Saturday's *Illawarra Mercury*.

Best wishes for now. Please stay safe and well.

Brian

### **CRAIG PETERSEN, Current SPC President**

I have just learned that SPC Life Member and stalwart, Bill Kennedy, passed away yesterday morning.

Many of you will know Bill's name, but some of you may not be aware of the significant contribution that he made to the association.

The Bill Kennedy Medal was initiated at the 2008 Annual Conference of the NSWSPC to recognise the outstanding work of Bill Kennedy on his retirement from the position of NSWSPC Executive Officer. Bill was a long-standing member of the

Council, including at one stage NSWSPC Deputy President and Deputy President of ASPA, prior to his retirement as Principal of Bulli High School. He was awarded SPC Life Membership in 1998.

After Bill retired, he took up the role of Executive Officer of the Council. Bill performed this role for ten years, giving further distinguished and sustained service to the Council. Major hallmarks of Bill's service included a passion for supporting the work of both the Council and principals for the good of NSW Public Education, provision of expert advice and wise counsel, and the tireless undertaking of his work in a positive, helpful and selfless way.

You can hear an audio recording of Bill, Brian Ralph and Chris Bonnor discussing the history of the SPC at State Assembly, 5/3/2010 at this link: <https://www.nswspc.org.au/members-area/council-operation/history/history-of-nswspc/>

In late August he once again showed signs of Hodgkin's Lymphoma back in his system and by mid-September a visit to the specialist confirmed that things were definitely not good. He was admitted to hospital on Friday following significant deterioration in his health. I know that Kath (his wife) and Jennifer (his daughter, who also works at Wollongong Hospital where he was admitted and spent several days by his bedside) were there by his side when he died. There will be a funeral for Bill on 30/9/21 which will be live-streamed (details to follow). Bill was 83. In the last few years Bill also struggled with dementia.

This is, indeed, sad news.

I will make sure that the condolences of SPC are passed on to his family.

**Craig**

### **JIM HARKIN, SPC Past President**

What sad news!

Bill was a titan of both SPC and ASPA. It's rare to have the degree of selflessness that Bill had. He was always in it for others. I doubt any Principal ever put more into his professional life than Bill. Always modest, always hard working, always supporting his colleagues. What a great man.

I was lucky enough to room share with Bill in many places. I can remember one meeting, I think in the Hunter Valley, when we were 'disturbed' by the Roulettes flying over the venue. Not Bill. He was as proud as punch as his son was one of them!

He was a great mentor to me and a role model to many more. My sympathies and best wishes to Kath and the family.

A life well led and a huge contribution to Public Education.

**Jim**

### **LARISSA TRESKIN, SPC Past President**

Vale Bill! Such a wonderful, selfless colleague. Without Bill, SPC would have been a far less strong voice for principals! So many stories about Bill – and rightly so. Bill was a legend. Yet he didn't look like one. He wasn't a big man physically. Short and sprightly, slim and energetic, when Bill was executive officer of SPC he held the wisdom – knew everyone, knew SPC history, understood the best way forward. He had a huge intellect and a bigger heart.

I loved working with Bill. Nothing was too much trouble, with organisation, paperwork, advice – all delivered with tact and humour.

When I learned of his passing, it jolted me. Bill was the sort of person you expect to always be there.

Vale Bill – a life well lived.

My deepest sympathy to his family.

***Larissa***

### **CHRIS BONNOR, SPC Past President**

What a wonderful outpouring of memories about Bill Kennedy. Surely a treasure trove to share with his family. Amazingly moving tributes. He certainly touched the lives of so many people, in ways that went way beyond his role as NSWSPC executive officer.

So many memories and impressions. His support for me was unqualified, but neatly balanced with sound advice that I would ignore at my peril. I had to learn this the hard way. Holding office and being somewhat brash at times I would initially listen to Bill's advice and warnings ... and then go away and do what I intended anyway.

Then when it went pear-shaped he wouldn't have to say much, he would just smile in a way that conveyed the clear message that I should have bloody-well listened ... but that he wouldn't give up on me.

So many of us were recipients of Bill's knowing, supporting, but telling, smile. It has to be up there with the best strategies of the great influencers.

***Chris***

### **CHRISTINE CAWSEY, SPC Past President**

I remember when we decided to establish the Bill Kennedy Award, it was to recognise his personal and professional commitment to principals, the work of principals and his deep love of the NSWSPC. Those who subsequently received the award shared those qualities.

***Christine***

### **LILA MULARCZYK, SPC Past President**

Bill was the epitome of a gentleman, expert in educational leadership, advocate of and for principals, extraordinary friend and executive officer through his work within and for SPC.

There seems to be a theme with our dear Bill though. Bruce (Stavert) mentioned the whiskey, Jim (McAlpine) and I also enjoyed a Jameson or several with Bill after SPC events. Jim and I shared a Jameson virtually last night in honour of our dear friend.

Bill was an informed, generous, kind, intelligent and powerful voice for and of SPC. He was a guide and mentor in his SPC role and a very dear friend. Bill was one of the generous colleagues who helped me so much during my time as an SPC Executive. Many of us continued to enjoy lunches and coffee catch ups with Bill post SPC. We shared laughs, work and family stories and deep discussions to remedy our system.

I am so saddened by the news.

*Lila*

### **CHRIS PRESLAND, SPC Past President**

Very sad news. We have lost a champion. Bill's contribution to so many was amazing and the many tributes from people over the last day are testament to that.

When I was SPC President I well recall Bill taking the time to take me aside one day at a Retired Principal lunch to say some very nice things about the work we were doing, the directions the SPC was heading in, and the impetus we had given the retired Principals group via the lunch presentations and the delivery of the website. He didn't need to do that, but it was typical of the man that he would take time out to say such things.

He was so generous of spirit, and even in his later years when his health was declining, so determined to stay abreast of what was happening. We all owe him a great deal.

Vale Bill Kennedy.

*Chris*

### **JUDY KING**

Such sad news, I learned so much from Bill when I first joined SPC in 1992. He was widely admired and I was one of his many admirers.

I was so pleased to receive the Bill Kennedy award from SPC in 2012 after my retirement. He was wise, totally honest and always ready to be involved in solutions to difficult issues. He was a true public education warrior and a fine colleague.

He exemplified the ethical leadership qualities sadly lacking in so many of our political “leaders” today. I loved going to meetings in Bridge Street or to the Federation with him, secure in the knowledge that I had wisdom and experience with me, but then Bonnor was often with us so I was doubled vaxxed (so to speak).

VALE Bill

*Judy*

### **COL COOKSEY**

Bill was Principal in the Campbelltown area before a long and credible role as Principal at Bulli. He was a leader in the South Coast Principals Council, treasurer of the SPC for a number of years and on retirement became the second Executive Officer of the Council, following Ken Newton.

Bill was a strong advocate for teachers during the industrial campaign for paid relief during teacher absences, led by the Illawarra Region and staff at Warilla High School.

His contribution to discussions at SPC Management meetings and as a delegate to ASPA was recognised at the time.

*Col*

### **OWEN KENNY**

Thanks Brian, this news is so sad. I know that you will be just as distressed as I am. I do want to be a part of the livestream, it is devastating that COVID reduces us all to this. Please stay in touch, and you cannot know how grateful we are for the role you play. I am sure that you would rather the news had a different focus.

*Owen*

### **LYN WENDTMAN**

Such a loss for his family and his friends, especially principals. He will be greatly missed by many. Bill made a massive contribution to and for principals in NSW and across Australia over the length of both his careers.

He was a colleague and a friend to the end and it is sad to think that Covid robbed us all of the chance to meet up with him at Tatts over the last couple of years.

Vale Bill

*Lyn*

## **PHIL HIRST**

The passing of Bill Kennedy is the saddest news I have heard in a very long time. He was a gentle man in the true sense of the word. By his kindness, honesty and integrity he will be most remembered. The SPC and education generally has lost a giant.

*Phil*

## **ANDREW NEWMAN**

Bill Kennedy was a very special person and a great educator. I worked with Bill when he was at Bulli HS, where he was held in especially high regard. His ability to support and guide other Principals and teachers was exceptional. His work on the SPC Executive and as Executive Officer set the direction for the SPC organisation.

An enormous talent, a great friend and a wonderful educator who will be missed enormously. Condolences to Kath and the family.

*Andrew*

## **BERNIE ROEBUCK**

Very very sad news in every sense.

In the simplest terms Bill had immense credibility with his peers because he had experience, wisdom, knowledge, know how, and as Peter M so aptly said, he cut through clap trap and bullshit and could smell insincerity from miles away. He knew so much about the SPC membership urban and rural and had a deep understanding of the context of so many situations.

When I think of Bill I think intelligent, articulate, honest, authentic, caring, and this immensely strong persona. His grasp of issues, people and how to move things forward was second to none. I was often in awe of his depth of knowledge and will be forever grateful for the support and guidance he afforded me.

How the DET could use people of his ilk, quality, and personal integrity right now.

*Bernie*

## **PAM WELLHAM**

I was saddened to hear about Bill Kennedy's passing. What a great gentleman! What a lovely family man!

Bill and I worked very closely when I took on the role as the Executive Officer of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council after his retirement. Notice that I said "took on the role" – I did not say that I had replaced Bill as I know that no one could replace Bill. Bill was my friend but also my mentor and my support through those years.

I used to be able to call to see Bill and Kath at Woonona when I made a trip south. A friendly lunch at a local restaurant, usually close to a beach, was always something to look forward to. I treasured these catch ups and have missed them over the last two years when Covid has restricted our movements. My times chatting with Bill are fond memories - sometimes they were at breakfast at a NSWSPC meeting day, sometimes they were after the evening meal with members of the NSWSPC at a conference or PL day. These memories and others come to me as I write this email.

Bill had battled Hodgkin's lymphoma bravely and he worked through many of these very stressful periods, maintaining a high standard of work supporting secondary principals across the state.

My thoughts go out to Kath, Jennifer, Stephen, David and their families at this time. These are difficult days for them and also for Bill's close friends and colleagues.

Condolences to all who knew Bill!

***Pam***

### **WARWICK CHIPMAN**

So sad that such a wonderful friend and colleague has left us. We all remember how great it was to be in his company, whatever the situation.

How fitting that his name and contributions to public education and Council will never be forgotten, through the presentation of the Bill Kennedy Medal!

***Warwick***

### **TOM COLL**

Thanks Brian. Lots of nice memories of Bill and his impressive skills at State Assembly.

***Tom***

### **BRUCE STAVERT**

Thanks for letting us know Brian. Such sad news. I spent many hours in Bill's wonderful company at SPC executive meetings and conferences and later at post retirement lunches in town. Jim and I always enjoyed a whisky/whiskey or two with him of an evening at conferences and many hours of conversation. Such a warm, knowledgeable man and so devoted to public education and the SPC. A very sad loss.

***Bruce***

## **DR SHARON PARKES**

Afternoon colleagues, whilst I responded individually to Brian R in relation to the passing of our colleague Bill Kennedy, I feel a need to also say (to the retired team) that having Bill as a colleague on the SPC Executive and as a strong advocate for principal well-being (as outlined by Beverley Theobald), he was an inspiration to me in my leadership.

At this time when our current principals need our strength, wisdom and support it is timely to remember those who inspired and supported us. I am sure Bill's family will feel the love and appreciation we are all sending.

Keep well and safe dear colleagues, these are tough times for all of us.

***Sharon***

## **RAE MITCHELL**

Bill was a great supporter of the Principals' Council and of public education. His influence was widely felt in the Illawarra and at state level and he was a wonderful mentor for others in the role of Principal. I personally benefitted from his support and knowledge, enjoyed his wry sense of humour and appreciated his sage advice. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

***Rae***

## **MAURICE BRUNNING**

A really special person, Bill's passing just too sad. A great loss of educational and management wisdom that I, and I'm sure many others, have been benefited from. I fondly recall the trip to China with 10 principals and Minister Virginia Chadwick. On that journey I really got to know him and listened intently to his advice as in 1992 I was a very inexperienced young country Principal. I tried hard not to notice as he nervously explained that those black lines all over the wings of the ancient, rattling Air China 707 were probably just excess hydraulic fluid! There were many late nights, often past midnight, rewriting documents, preparing briefs for other members of Council Executive, organising programs, etc – a myriad of disparate tasks and he was good at all of it yet he took little credit.

His patience, supportive nature and capacity to extrapolate a complex present into a better future for schools and the principalship I believe, helped to underpin the steady rise through the 90s and 2000s of respect for principals and for the principalship as a whole. Sure, he was one of many on that journey, but he led with both quiet determination and a style that upheld all those around him.

You'll be missed Bill. Thanks for it all.

***Maurice***

## **CHRIS MASON**

I too must comment on Bill's passing. He was so kind and able to steer newer and older principals in such a clever yet humble way. He impacted greatly on me. Best wishes to his family and all of you too.

*Chris*

## **JOHN FREW**

Such sad news to wake up to this morning. I worked with Bill when he was a HT and then DP at Woonona High and as a young teacher, he was always an inspirational mentor and later a friend. His service to the children of NSW and to the teaching staff is immeasurable. A great loss to us all.

*John*

## **LOUISE AND PETER MANWARING**

Sad to hear of Bill's death. He was a great mentor to me in my first principalship at Illawarra Sports HS and a trusted friend to both Peter and me. There are few of his stature in every generation.

*Peter and Louise*

## **BOB STOCKTON**

What an icon. When I was a relatively young Principal in 1993 Bill rang me and said there was a vacancy on the Finance Reference Group. It seemed a hell of a long way from Bombala but it started me on a journey with SPC which continues to this current day. I really appreciated someone in his position reaching out to me and that is how he lived his professional life for as long as I have known him.

*Bob*

## **BEV THEOBALD**

I was particularly saddened to hear of Bill's death. I worked with him in various capacities on SPC reference groups and valued his contributions, especially in terms of Principals' welfare.

I think Bill touched many of our lives in our profession and as a colleague. In addition, he was a genuine and lovely man.

My condolences to his family.

*Bev*

## **JOE ALLAN**

Bill was an inspiring colleague. The glue that held the SPC together for a long time. Always enjoyed a yarn with him at conferences, meetings etc.

RIP Bill.

*Joe*

## **PAMELA HUNT**

Bill was extremely supportive of me in my various Principal roles and as a member of the SPC Executive. I can remember sharing many walks and drinks with him with fondness. He obviously loved what he did and the SPC owes him.

*Pamela*

## **MURRAY PATERSON**

I have only just turned on the computer to this sad news. As Bruce and Larissa have so well stated Bill was the rock behind the scenes that held the SPC together with his great historical knowledge and ability to provide sensible advice to complex problems often while sharing a whisky or a wine. Sadly I miss the aftermath of Executive or Council meetings with the opportunity to chat with Bill.

*Murray*

## **LINDY TAYLOR**

Bill was a gentleman among the predominantly male principals of the time – I never saw him as anything but calm, warm and supportive – any time of the day or night. I'll miss the reassurance of his presence at retired principals' gatherings. Bill gave so much to public education.

*Lindy*

## **BETTY HARPER**

Such sad news. I never worked with Bill but I knew him as part of SPC. He always had a warm smile and the time to listen and share his wisdom. I have always had a spot in my heart for him for his generosity without knowing he'd done anything at all for me.

Thanks Bill.

*Betty*

## **GUS PLATER**

I have tried, but I'm sorry, I can't come up with any words to equal those of Phil Hirst.

*Gus*

## **PETER MORGAN**

Very sad. I remember Bill as a highly principled, forthright and supportive colleague. Working with the SPC exec, he had the capacity to cut through the dross with his sharp insights and at times blunt assessments. He kept us grounded and real.

*Peter*

## **GLYN LEYSHON**

This is sad news. Bill was one of the best and did so much for new and aspiring principals.

On several occasions he came out to the Riverina to our meetings and imparted his wisdom regarding where education was heading. His support was invaluable for a relatively young group of leaders who were learning the ropes and he could always be counted on for the right advice on how to manage our schools.

That he took the time to come to a rural SPC group was greatly appreciated and he was always well received. He will be greatly missed.

*Glyn*

## **STEVE ESLER**

My favourite memory of Bill was his incredibly patient minute-taking at State Assemblies. During my time at Bridge Street the process became hi-tech with Bill's minutes being projected onto two large screens. I was amazed at Bill's ability to translate an enormous amount of 'verbal stuff' into a concise and reasoned report. At times I thought he was very kind to the speakers. I was also the recipient of Bill's guidance and support when on the executive. He was a true gentleman and friend who will be missed.

*Steve*

## **TRACY PROVEST**

Sad to hear Bill finally succumbed. His legacy will live on. He was always welcoming and friendly. He has helped a lot of principals. He has done much to keep us informed over soooo long. And all with such humility. Bill will be missed.

*Tracy*

## **DAVID SILCOCK**

So sad to hear of Bill's passing. He was a wonderful person – full of energy, compassion and good humour. He will be missed.

*David*

## **PETER SHEARGOLD**

Bill was a great man and a tireless worker for public education. He was always there when I needed some advice or a word about my tardiness in replying!

*Peter*

## **JOHN HARDGROVE**

Thank you Brian. Very sad news. A lovely guy. Regards

*John*

## **JOHN AYRES**

I still remember Larissa addressing us when her phone rang. She handed Bill her bag so he could retrieve her bag. After about a minute, Bill gave up and handed the bag back to Larissa.

*John*

## **JIM McALPINE**

I have loved reading all those tributes to Bill over the last few hours. He would have quietly denied them if they had been said out loud in his presence. I can add my own brief comments as I also got to know Bill from the moment I started coming to Sydney for SPC meetings even prior to being elected to the executive of the SPC.

He seemed to encourage all principals in his own quiet way, but he certainly encouraged me to keep being involved even if I wasn't based in Sydney. We shared many a whiskey (with an 'e') over a couple of decades after meetings and chewed the fat over all world-changing matters.

When he first got lymphoma, the then SPC executive weren't going to let him go and we gave him leave until he recovered, with Pam Wellham filling in for that time. I bought a bottle of Jameson whiskey and told him that it wouldn't be opened until he could share it with me. I think this incentive helped because about 12 months later he was able to resume SPC meetings and on the first night afterwards he came back to the small flat I was renting in the city and between us we managed to make two thirds of the bottle disappear.

Bill and I remained in contact long after he retired, with Bill and I having our birthdays one day and a decade apart. I last spoke to him on the 21st of April this year and he apologised for having difficulties selecting the right words to use but I inserted the best fit words for him and that worked pretty well.

Some of us also had lunch with Bill on a number of occasions in the Wollongong region in recent years and we recycled war stories from our shared experiences. Bill came for lunch two years ago in the Southern Highlands and quite a few of us were able to join him. Fortunately, Terry O'Brien and Lila Mularczyk took photos and were able to find them last night after I broke the news to them. Covid of course intervened in our social gatherings and we weren't able to catch up in person this year.

His daughter Jennifer phoned me late yesterday while Kath phoned Brian Ralph. It was a happy sad conversation as we spoke about her dad and my mate, and she knew all about the many friends Bill had within the SPC. She was glad that Bill only spent a few days in hospital at the end and she was relieved that his suffering was over. All of us have lots of memories of some top times together as well as some great SPC work done with Bill and by Bill. I suppose the Bill Kennedy Medal now becomes a permanent memorial to a man who did so much for the rest of us and expected nothing in return, except for the occasional dram.

Thanks Brian for getting the email string going. I will if it is acceptable to all paste the comments into a document and email it to Kath and Jennifer to add to their memories of a husband, father and grandfather.

Stay well you lot.

***Jim***





**12 April 2019, Bendooley's at Berrima**

**Top photo:** Lila Mularczyk, Jim McAlpine, Brian Ralph, Bruce Stavert, Terry O'Brien, Owen Kenny (top), Chris Bonnor (below), Warwick Chipman, Murray Paterson, Bill Kennedy

**Trio photo:** Chris Bonnor, Bill and Warwick Chipman

**Final photo:** Bill