



Memories of Kostka Hall (Maritima) 1955-1960

Rod Snee

I attended St Kevin's Ormond until grade two but being timid and shy and scared of almost everything including bullies and crossing train lines, Father O'Brien managed to get me a place at Kostka Hall despite my father's limited income from selling chemicals and running an S.P. Book on the horse races. (Whatever that might be)

I started at Kostka in Grade Three with Miss Taylor in the old Elizabethan Gothic building. Father Schneider was the Headmaster. The class was about 45 in number. (I was later to teach classes of 35-38) which nowadays is considered poor learning. We received, however an excellent, rounded and rigorous education both religious and civic. I was terrified of the smelly toilets and occasionally paid the price of my fear. We had a tuck shop and pies were 10 pence or 11 pence with sauce.

Grade four was with a kindly and maternal Miss O'Kelly and I gained confidence, skill and new friendships. We played under the Cyprus trees. Games included tag, marbles and cherry bobs. Our class geni were David Chamberlain and Simon Mulcahy who never went to the Senior School.

Mr Slattery taught a formal and strict grade five and homework became a regular torture. Every night we had to produce twenty spelling, ten arithmetic problems and impeccable handwriting. We used pens with nibs and bottled ink which in the classroom was put in ceramic wells. Mr Slattery always wore a grey dust coat and his strap was ever present. I received it regularly for untidy or shoddy work. I've never been a neat or legible hand writer. Apparently in early years at St Kevin's I had been left-handed and that was frowned upon. Left was sinister and a product of the devil. So I became dexterous.

Play times saw us playing kick to kick or packy with a football. Barry Souter and Brian Naughton were outstanding both at marking and the drop kick. We also played,

“brandy”, or tennis ball tag. As I progressed we moved upstairs and being terrified of heights to this day was extremely anxious about the rickety stairs.

By grade six we gained three new Jesuit scholastics or trainees. They were Mr Olsen, Mr Cassily and a bit later Mr Ramsay. I was terrified of Mr Olsen as he instituted a physical education program based on circuit training which exhausted and pushed me to the limit. He also taught Ancient History. One day I was the only class member to answer a question on Babylon and Assurbanipal. Mister Olsen told me to go to his office after school. I was terrified but quickly relieved when he gave me a planisphere or star chart. That was the beginning of a new interest which I still pursue today and marked the end of my fear and a new respect for my teacher.

My grade six teacher was Mr Sam Tully a great teacher and very knowledgeable but his dust coat smelt of tobacco and his fingers were stained nicotine yellow. He also piled on the homework and didn't spare the punishment. (Usually deserved for disruption of his class) He was very proud of his son Jack who was an accomplished cricketer and footballer. I taught at Cheltenham North Primary with his mother from 1972-1975.

Our new Headmaster was Father Matt Kearney who took a great interest in sports and coached cricket. He taught me spin bowling and developed my love for a game which I played until nearly fifty.

He also made me do extra handwriting practice from a copy book and I received the strap regularly for blotted or untidy work. On one occasion he was so angry he took his strap out of his drawer and after threatening me with a hiding threw it in disgust out the window which had been closed at the time with a shattering result. He instructed me to go and fetch it and I walked out Scott Free and very relieved.

When we moved into the new two-story block I remember father Kearney throwing a bottle of ink onto the concrete after an example of handwriting which he considered not up to standard. He taught us R.K. or religious knowledge which I never quite took to but on a couple of boiling hot days he took us over to Maritima Homestead instead.

He loved music and played us classics as well as the theme song from the newly release film of Rolf Boldrewood's, "Robbery Under Arms". They were among my favourite Kostka Days.

Along with my friends Michael Burleigh and Keith Smyth I was among the boys chosen to move the furniture into the new buildings.

The old Green Study Hall, however was still used for the occasional assembly, 16mm movies, slide shows(Mainly Crosbie Morrison nature slides) and the newly instituted Music Program under the guidance of Victorian Boy's Choir", master, Vince Kelly. The choir was a respected and honoured event and we learnt to sing Brahms's Lullaby in German, Finlandia, French Folk Songs, The Blue Danube and many other multi-cultural melodies, A highlight was when we cut a record with four tunes which was sold at the Annual Fair. It included the Fijian Song, Isa Lei and a Spanish Nativity song, "A La Nanita Nana". We made this record at the Freemason's Coppin Hall in Prahran; quite a breakthrough in that sectarian era. The pianist was Tony Fenelon who became quite notable in his art.

All this occurred while my father paid only what he could in regard to fees but he provided cleaning materials and occasionally we sanded and polished the floors and he met most commitments especially when he had a "good day with the books".

I have heard criticism of the attitude and treatment issued by some of my teachers from those days but I am indebted to all of them for some knowledge or skill with which they infused me. In my own career I discovered similar attitudes, punishments, humiliation and discipline in the State system.

Jack Ramsay was my teacher in year seven and he was the first teacher who really extended empathy, caring and an enthusiasm for my learning. Mr Ramsay also inaugurated the Kostka Chronicle newspaper which we avidly devoured and under Andrew Quinn's editorship welcomed. Jack also had us use a tape recorder to commentate on football matches and "Boy! Did we love that!"



Through his cleaning connections dad became friendly with both Mr Ramsay and Mr Cassily and as dad was a great mate of the Great E.J. Whitten as well as a number of V.F.L. players who he either worked with or knew as clients, both scholastics came with us to a Hawthorn/Footscray match.. I was naturally, unusually quiet with my barracking. It didn't stop Mr Cassily from giving me six of the best occasionally.

Kostka Hall taught me about the joy of knowledge and the power of friendship.

Father Craig taught Latin and declined verbs and nouns on the fingers with his strap when they weren't learnt efficiently He also loved British and Allied military history and often quoted Montgomery and his strategies in relation to Roman tactics. His strap was always highly visible

In years 7 & 8, Peter Tilley was my maths teacher. Peter was a younger teacher despite wearing the ubiquitous dust coat. He had a mop of curly, somewhat receding black hair and drove an older vehicle. I think it was an Austin A 40. When you sat in the car you faced slightly left and the body seemed out of alignment with the chassis. "How do I know?" . "Well! I struggled with maths and dad hired Peter as my tutor. He came to my house once a week and his tuition certainly helped as my marks went from 20-30/100 to top 90%. He was approachable, witty and caring.

One of my past classmates was charged with and manslaughter after the gang death of a teenager in Ludstone Street, Hampton in the 60's. I remember him as a quiet and friendly student.

Quite a few students came and went during my years at Kostka and I only ever caught up with a couple in later years. Geoffrey Highgate who left about year six umpired a couple of YC.W football matches in which I played.

Barry Souter left to attend a Bentleigh High School. His father was a prominent Union leader.

Harrieville Camp



Harrietville camp in Year 7 or 8 was a new and wonderful experience. We stayed in a somewhat dilapidated chalet style, "Bon Accord Hospice". I don't remember which teachers were in charge but I do remember that the Conquest Brothers, (Simon and Tony) from the Senior Years came along as supervisors.

The mornings were freezing and a thick blanket of frost covered the ground. Despite this we rose early to attend mass. The cabins were dull, dusty and cold except for the main chalet which had a big log fire. The days were glorious and I chose to hang around camp rather than attempt the arduous climb to the top of Mt Feathertop. We spent the afternoon in the Ovens River and playing on a cable bridge which spanned the banks. I don't recall any supervision but I guess there was at least one master in charge. In the afternoons we were allowed to go to the general store and stock up with goodies and an icy pole.

One afternoon one of the priests whose name I can't recall took a few of us to visit an elderly lady called Mrs Wraith who lived in the town. Her son had attended Xavier and had been captain of the boats. He had a room dedicated to his achievements which sported a racing shell, trophies and photographs. It was an inspirational experience. I have since found out she was the grandmother of my brother's Kostka friend, Michael Rubino and that her husband had been President of Collingwood Football Club. Interestingly in my own teaching career I attended and supervised almost a hundred camps and tours. They were my favourite activity and it was great to be involved with kids in an informal and fun-filled atmosphere. The rules and regulations have been tightened a lot since those days and I doubt that we could play the pranks and take the risks which we did regularly. Child abuse, political correctness and above all threats of litigation have severely curtailed many of the Shennigans which we got up to.

Another Kostka Activity in those years was the participation in Empire Day Celebrations and marches for which we spent a deal of time practising. I seem to recall it was celebrated on May 24th or thereabouts. In any case like The Queen's Birthday and Guy Fawkes Day (November 5) , it was a great chance to buy and explode a few fireworks.

In the upper years we had Miss Sheila Mercovitch give us speech lessons and diction. It was never my favourite subject even with the poems of Hillaire Belloc. Her nephew was also in the class.

Last but not least-My father worked for Gibson Kelite Chemicals and later Bell Chemicals and supplied Kostka with cleaners, disinfectants and polishes. One of his products was a stain remover called, "Blitzit" and every class had a "Blitzit Monitor", to tackle ink stains. We did our best to keep the monitors busy.

