



DHSESA NEWSLETTER

Spring 2001

Issue 26

VALE MOLLIE COWEN

Former teacher, Judith Eckstein (whose husband Erich also taught at DHS), delivered the following eulogy at the recent funeral of Mollie (Mary Veronica) Cowen.

Mollie was born in Kalgoorlie, in Western Australia, in 1910, into the large family of Mary and Edmond Malone. Edmond was a guard on the railways. She was second last of eight children. Her exceptional talent for music seems to have been evident from her earliest childhood. Before Mollie started school an older sister would come home from a piano lesson and pass on what she was learning to Mollie, who once remarked that she could not remember a time before she was able to play the piano. She set no great store by her remarkable skill because to her it was all so easy: "To me it was just like breathing. If I had to practice technical studies I would put a book up on the music stand to read while I ran through scales and exercise—the fingers seemed to do them of their own accord while I could get on with the book".

Her sisters were soon to find there was a downside to this musical prowess. On Saturday mornings they all had their allotted jobs to do. Molly, to her disgust always had to scrub the hall floorboards. "Why me?" she complained. But that was a job where she couldn't go wrong, whereas at all the other household tasks — cooking, mending and sewing for example, she was hopeless. The others would have to do them and her parents would say resignedly "Look Molly — you just go and play the piano". Molly studied piano at the convent she attended and in her teens was entered in Perth's most prestigious piano competition.

Playing presented no problems, what she was nervous about was bridging the gap between the wings of the stage and the piano. She had not been coached in how to bow to an audience, and it was this that filled her with terror as acres of empty stage seemed to lie out there in front of her. When once she had reached the safe haven of the piano stool the music flowed and she won the competition with a report so glowing she recently confessed that she wished she had kept it. How typical that she had not!



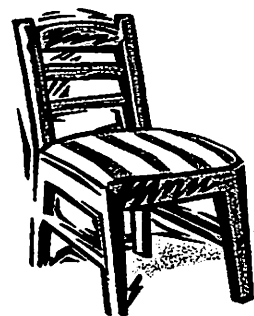
Mollie at the piano, John Menadue to her left and Edna Dawson (Vukmirovic) to her right. The house choir conductors are Lynton Webb, Henri Licht (who is featured on page 6), Roger Barlee and Anton Iseli.

English was her favourite subject at school. In her final year she was devastated to find she and her friend had failed in the public examination in the subject in which they normally received top marks. Devastated, she left school. Not till years later did a nun confess to her that, solicitous for the careers of two of the boys who were poor in English, she had substituted the

numbers of the two girls. She had foreshadowed that the two girls would secure passes at the supplementary exams. The friend did that second year exam and passed ... Molly, however, reasoned that there was no point in further studies when she had failed in her favourite subject. "I thought perhaps God was punishing me for pride in being so good at English, so I just left". For a time she taught piano at the convent, then one day a nun came to the house and said to Mrs Malone that her daughter must go to Melbourne and study at the Conservatorium, there being no conservatorium in Perth at the time. It was arranged that she would stay with the nun's family there. So she went. "We always did what the nuns told us as a matter of course," Molly commented. (cont'd page 4)

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From The Chair No.26

Greta Jungwirth (deVries)
President

In this edition the passing of Mollie Cowen is sadly noted. For a decade this lovely lady was the official accompanist at DHS – a position unique in government schools. The Association has honoured her contribution to the School and the ex-student body by commissioning a perpetual trophy, engraved with her name, to be awarded to the winners of the annual House Choral Competition. Thus her name will live on and be remembered by future generations of DHS students.

On a more positive note, the Committee was very pleased with the Inaugural Faber Quisque Fortunae Lecture, held on 11 August at the Dandenong Club. We were fortunate that Barry Jones agreed to be our speaker and it did not take long for him to captivate his audience with his inimitable style. A full report will appear in the next newsletter.

For some weeks I have been directing my thoughts to the School and ex-student matters but they have been drawn away to the serious events unfolding overseas since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

In order to justly and wisely deal with that situation it is important to understand the motivation of the perpetrators. As more information, analysis and comment emerges it is clear that the narrow and distorted world view of the zealots involved has much to do with the indoctrination practised in their religious schools. They were carefully taught to hate.

This has brought home the importance of an education that does the opposite – that embraces diversity, promotes tolerance, and encourages a broad perspective. A sense of one's common humanity taught at an early age will stay a lifetime and underlie one's actions and attitudes. Schools that give their students this beginning are not just fulfilling their responsibilities in the present, but also ensuring a safer society for the future.

"A sense of one's common humanity taught at an early age will stay a lifetime, and underline one's actions and attitudes."

son Vukmirovic Music Scholarship to entertain us and this has been most rewarding. So, if you have not attended in the past and met your Committee, do so this year and overwhelm us with your numbers.

Greta Jungwirth (de Vries)
President

Another — "Forty Years On"

*"Some Reminiscences Of a Former Pupil – Stuart Kennard."
This heading from the last Newsletter inspired the following article
from Jessica Farrands (nee Ferguson).*

I was delighted to read "Forty years on" 1936—1939 by Stuart Kennard — In the Autumn 2001 Newsletter.

As I attended DHS during that time, many names and 'nick-names' came back to me.

My brother John Ferguson also attended DHS and started in AS— as Stuart did. In his B form year, John became Dux of the school. My sister Meg Ferguson attended DHS three years later. We all travelled to DHS by train from Murrumbena Station. The mention of Dr Plant was of particular interest. When the poliomyelitis outbreak temporarily closed some areas, Dr Plant used to drop in huge history assignments to us, on his way home.

The mention of Francis Mellow also brought back many memories. When later I went to Teachers' College, he was my art lecturer.

My late husband, John Farrands was also a student at DHS at that time. How he came to be there is quite interesting. His father was out of work in the 30's and on leaving Lloyd Street Central School, John Farrand's option also seemed to be to look for work. However, a wonderful teacher from the school visited the family, and suggested that John could 'cope' with high school—the fees would be paid by the teacher if necessary. A very interesting career was to follow for John Farrands.

After completing Form B at DHS, John graduated to Melbourne University with a Science Degree.

He enlisted and served with the AIF Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers setting up radar stations in New Guinea during World War 11.

In 1946 we were married. Then in 1950 John completed his P.H.D. at Imperial College, London. Back in Australia this led him to become Scientific Adviser to the Military Board, 1956—1961 and Chief Defence Scientist from 1971—1977, finally becoming Secretary to the Department of Science and Environment for the Federal Government.

When retired, he had several Chairmanships—two important ones being OTC and the Australian Institute of Marine Science. He was honoured with a CB in 1981—an AO in 1990 and an Honorary Doctorate of Science in 1993 from Melbourne University. It is quite possible that his inspiration for things scientific came from DHS science teacher, Mr Soloman — a very respected teacher, remembered by many students over the years.

Jessica Farrands.

WATCH THIS IS SPACE FOR A REVIEW OF THE INAUGURAL 'FABER QUISQUE FORTUNAE' LECTURE,

LATIN LOVERS!

Thank you—now that I have your attention!

The school featured in the recent public debate when University High School withdrew Latin from the mainstream curriculum. This would leave DHS the last public school in Victoria with Latin on its core curriculum.

THE SCHOOL

How goes it?

The school team of Year 11 and 12 students which created the 100 metre long ARC (Australian Recycled Cardboard) train, was rewarded by being named a national finalist, winning for the school a multi-media pack valued at \$9,000. Around 100 students were involved, plus a great support team of teachers, parents and sponsors.

The new Chaplain, David Ogden, has written of his feeling of 'fitting-in' at DHS after his first 7 months. The City of Greater Dandenong has acknowledged the community benefit of this post by providing a \$3,000 community grant.

Jason Ha, a year 7 student, has competed at the National Taekwondo Championships, after winning the State Title for the 12-13 years old, 34-38 kilograms class.

Year 7 student Timothy de Selve, has broadened the reputation of music at DHS by travelling to Europe with the Australian Youth Choir, singing for His Holiness, the Pope, and the Mayor of Athens, and also performing in Vienna, Salzburg and Florence.



Vale Molly Cowen (continued from page 1)

Student days in Melbourne were a breeze. "I never practised, you know, because I played every night at the Williamstown cinema." Mary Crouch not long ago took Mollie back to Williamstown where she got a great welcome from the local historian who opened up the old theatre for her. There stood the 2 original pianos, and at his request she soon launched into Ramona and Jealousy. How astonished the old walls must have been! Somehow the lack of regular practice was no handicap to Molly—she was the top piano student all the way through, and in 1930 Bernard Heinze announced that she was to receive the travelling scholarship to London awarded to the top graduate. Alas—it was not to be—as she had not passed in matriculation English she could not take out a degree and the scholarship was forfeited. Molly's admirers have always said that the nun's effort to help those boys deprived the musical world of a brilliant accompanist.

Returning to Perth she taught piano, and at concerts used to sit in the audience always hoping that some crisis might have removed the accompanist, and fantasising that there would be an appeal to the audience for someone to deputize. However, in 1943 she met and married Bert Cowen, a South African who dealt in feathers, and they returned to Melbourne. From Molly's account he must have been a most delightful and accomplished man. He was several decades older than Mollie and seemed to take pleasure in amusing and educating this young lady. One hobby they loved to indulge together was collecting antiques for their charming house in Inverness Avenue, Armadale. (Editor's note—Lorraine Metcalfe (nee Vincent) recalls her mature age student piano lessons among those excellent items). There are still people who remember the soirees there, and in fact that Molly was always anxious about catering, as she never did get the hang of domesticity. Bert was a man of many parts. He was a champion swimmer, and it was he who had the idea of the Herald Learn-To-Swim campaign, and, with a friend, brought it to fruition. After Bert's death Molly had young Ric to provide for, and from 1958 was glad of steady employment as accompanist at Dandenong High School where many of us here first met her.

Through some of Melbourne's leading singing teachers, such as Jessie Smith, she had already begun accompanying young singers, and developed the work she loved above all, that of vocal coach. Her ability to not only sight read with ease, but to transpose at sight into any key, no matter how remote, became legendary. She knew so much music by heart that it was not a problem if the singer's music had been forgotten, and if she did not know it, she could extemporise while the singer performed.

While working at De La Salle, she married the late Pat Jacob, who was as much younger as Bert had been older. "At first I thought the age gap too great", she said, "but then I thought that perhaps this was Our Lady's way of looking after me. The 17 years of their married life was spent in Frankston. During the war, Pat's mother had fled Ambon with her children, a

"..... if the singer's music had been forgotten, and if she did not know it, she could extemporise while the singer performed."

matter of hours ahead of the invading Japanese. The government repatriated the Indonesian refugees after the war, but this family, the last, refused to go. Their story became a *cause celebre*, known as "the O'Keefe case", and features in the history of immigration and the White Australia policy.

Right up until her admission to hospital in her ninety-second year, Molly continued to generously share her talents. She would make transcriptions or write out long transpositions *gratis* for other performers, and play without fee wherever she was asked—for the Salvation Army, for the Dandenong Music Festival, for family celebrations for the Frankston choir, for our own Ex-students' Association recording, for the John Hannah residents. She taught and encouraged the children of her friends, taking the accompanying of a beginner in a competition just as seriously as playing for an accomplished performer. Her happy presence enlivened and facilitated so many parties and celebrations. The music ranged from opera and piano classics to community singing or Scott Joplin or the Black and White rag—all were grist to her mill. Music, however was not her only talent. She had a great love of literature, read widely and voraciously, and not only that she remembered everything she read, and had wonderful recall, especially for biography. Two books that impressed her recently were the life of Christian Barnard, the pioneer of heart transplants, and the Surgeon of Crowthorne - that

Vale Molly Cowen (continued from page 4)

extraordinary tale of the making of the Oxford Dictionary. Her memory was quite phenomenal, not only for books, but for all the people she met and their histories. Perhaps it was all this reading that gave her such a precise vocabulary, and made the cryptic cross-words another of her passions. She relished a game of canasta. For picnics or excursions or anything she suggested she was always at the door, ready to be up and away.

Her puckish sense of humour was one of the things about her I found most endearing. She was always ready for a laugh and loved to hear a good story. Of course the re-telling of some of her own stories sometimes drove the listener to distraction, as she herself knew. "Ric said to me," she recounted, - "Mum, you don't just tell all the details, you tell the details of the details". She laughed as she told me this, and added—"There was only one person who talked more than I did and that was Bert." - Imagine!

Molly's family were very dear to her, and her friends often heard news from the West, especially about the achievements of the younger generation, and Carmel's Fullbright Scholarship for the study of theatre music. She often thought of returning to live in WA, but was torn between family in both places.

Entry to a hostel for the aged is usually a matter for some apprehension,

But Molly's stay at John Hannah's was one of her most carefree periods. On one occasion she hesitated to accept help, not wanting to be a trouble..."And the carer said to me 'Molly, you must understand that our job here is to help you, and that nothing is too much trouble.' " And that was so. Not only Molly, but all her circle felt indebted to the staff for the wonderful care of their charges. In my mind I re-named the hostel after the Lehar operetta "The Land of Smiles", for that was how I found the staff and volunteers whenever I was there. I am glad of this opportunity to pay tribute to them.

As in most lives there were some difficult times for Molly, but great strength of character and a wonderful capacity for understanding and

forgiveness seemed to sustain her, engendered no doubt by her simple faith.

In recounting stories such as the one about the examination numbers she bore no resentment to the person who had wronged her. Unfortunate incidents were merely recounted and left in the past. She always looked forward optimistically.

Molly was a wonderful person who enriched many lives and did harm to none.

I would like to conclude with the words of the poet Schober, addressed 'To Music'. I'm sure you know them from Schubert's famous setting.

*Thou heavenly art, in many hours of sadness,
When life's hard toil my spirit hath oppressed,
Hast thou my heart revived with love and gladness,
And born my soul aloft to realms of rest.*

*Oft have thy strains set free of sorrow,
Or soothed my grief with tender thought divine
I hear thy whisper of a brighter morrow,
And thank thee for that heavenly gift of thine.*

I like to think of music bearing Molly's soul aloft to the realms of rest....

And I give thanks for having known her.

Judith Eckstein



Tolstoy Revisited

In March 1988, an organization called the United Teilhard Trust invited me to give a speech at the United Nations on Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). Some time earlier, I had completed a masters on Tolstoy and had become acquainted with some Tolstoy scholars in the U.K., including Sir Isaiah Berlin, John Bayley (Iris Murdoch's husband) and Dr Ronald Sampson. It was the last of these who became my friend and mentor. It was Ronald Sampson who recommended me to the Teilhard Trust. I felt rather privileged to enter the private world of Tolstoy through the backdoor as it were.

To quote from the invitation, 'Visionaries of World Peace embraces a series of Colloquia held at the U.N. in New York City, under the auspices of the U.N. University for Peace. Each year, we honour a prophet of world peace by bringing together people from around the globe who can speak with expertise'. Two earlier prophets of peace had been Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Paine.

I felt rather elated and apprehensive as to how I would conduct myself in the company of internationally renowned scholars. Some of my Russian friends in Melbourne were kind enough to tutor me in Russian pronunciation, which isn't an easy affair.

The significance of the event was twofold. I would meet leading Tolstoy specialists from around the world i.e. Russia, Poland, Canada, Japan, Germany and the U.K. But more meaningfully I would meet members of Tolstoy's family thereby establishing a personal link with the great writer. Tolstoy's youngest daughter Alexandra had only died in 1979 at the age of 95. Alexandra had established a Tolstoy colony and estate based on Tolstoy's own estate, Yasnaya Polyana, (Peaceful Glade) in America.

I was proud and comfortable representing Australia. The deepest satisfaction, however, was interacting with the descendants of Tolstoy, principally Dr. Serge Tolstoy, an eminent Parisian doctor, (Leo's grandson and the son of Mikhail, Leo's tenth child and seventh son) and Count Nikolai Tolstoy (author/historian and a distant relative). Serge and I became quite close at the forum.

Serge's aristocratic bearing and French mannerisms couldn't conceal his underlying Russian sentimentality and spontaneity. By contrast, Count Nikolai was very much the English lord. Unfortunately for him, a few years later, he became embroiled in an expensive litigation case against a certain Lord Aldington whom he alleged had been responsible for turning Cossacks (fiercely anti-communist) over to Stalin at the end of the second world war. Count Nikolai lost the case and was sent bankrupt: very Russian and very Tolstoyan.

My paper, 'Tolstoy's Death Imperative and Civilization' was well received. It was translated simultaneously into French and Russian. A number of American students present wanted a copy of the lecture.

In 1994, largely as a result of this experience, I decided to visit Russia and headed for Yasnaya Polyana, situated near Tula about 150 kms south of Moscow.

The journey turned out to be rather serendipitous. I was told that visiting the estate was a waste of time because it was Tolstoy's birthday and the museum would be closed. I chose to ignore this piece of bureaucratic advice and made my own way down to Tula. It was a stifling hot day. When I arrived, I gingerly showed my letters of introduction to a generous female commisar. This included one penned by Barry Jones who alas wasn't known in this region. But my Russian contacts did the trick. I was given the freedom of the estate and there were no hordes of tourists to be seen. Donning peasant shoes I lingered in each room soaking up the palpable atmosphere and I thought I saw Tolstoy working at his low desk writing "all happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

After some hours, I walked to Tolstoy's burial mound situated amidst birch trees. The fractured sunrays converged on the green mound. Someone had placed red flowers on his grave.

Gazing at this grave-site, I could penetrate see Tolstoy fully, the long turned upwards depicted in an film. The scene cottage in As-Tolstoy had far from peaceful.

Hardened journalists had set up camp outside the shack. Tolstoy's doctor, Makovitsky and Alexandra kept Tolstoy's wife away from the deathbed. Peasants were anxiously asking about the rate of deterioration. Even the tsar wanted to know the condition of his adversary.

As far as I know, Tolstoy was the first celebrity whose burial was captured on camera and beamed around the world. Thousands of peasants followed the coffin to this final resting-place, where I was now standing. I felt I was now part of the Tolstoy world and as it was getting late it was time to close the back door.

Henri Licht.

"Thousands of peasants followed the coffin to this final resting-place..."

most unusual felt as if I the soil and resting peace-straggly beard like the tsars Eisenstein

at the railway topovo, where died had been

MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES

This space in the previous Newsletter carried a mother/daughter story about Gwen and Sue Jarvis.

Now history almost repeats itself.

The Pakenham-Berwick Gazette recently acknowledged the passing of Jean Porter, of Officer, and mother of Rob. Jean (nee Tivendale) was an attendee in the very early days of DHS. She was a founding member of the Officer CWA. The article described Jean as a "proud member of the Officer community and was well known throughout the town".

Her daughter-in-law, Carole (Gilbert), also a proud ex-student, is obviously very much in the same mould, with that paper also reporting that Carole was recently presented with a badge to acknowledge her 10 years service to the admirable 'Make a Wish Foundation'.

In addition, Carole was honoured at a recent Cardinia Shire dinner, by receiving a further citizenship award. Carole's father, Clive Gilbert, also attended DHS.

Premiers picture of a proud Austin Bainbridge, a student from the late 1950's.

The Editor was recently in a bookshop, browsing through a self published autobiography by Arthur Hunt of Noble Park, when he spied a picture of The Noble Park 'B' grade football club of 1963. There was a proud Austin Bainbridge, a student from the late 1950's.

The Journal' carried a story recently of the huge success of Cathy Fitzpatrick, the worlds fastest bowler, who recently toured England as part of the successful Australian Women's Cricket team, bringing home 'The Ashes'. In the first test, Cathy took 5 wickets in the first innings, and three in the second. She improved on this in the second test, taking 9 wickets for the match!. Cathy still works locally. Senior staff are seeking to invite Cathy back to school as a great inspiration for present students.

COMMITTEE MEMBER, DAWN HARRIS (NEE BURHOP), HAS BEEN AWARDED A LIFE MEMBERSHIP, AFTER SERVING THE COUNTRY WOMENS' ASSOCIATION FOR 30 YEARS.

We regret to record the death of Pam Jones (nee Robert), a prefect from the late 1950's, and the former Mayor of Bairnsdale.

Pam grew up in Dandenong, and her older sister Wilma also attended DHS.

Pam won the principal prize for elocution at the South Street competition at Ballarat.

Pam was a teacher at DHS, and a member of the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth.

'The Journal' carried a nice tribute recently to Tom Black, who worked for

The Journal for some 30 years. Tom and Gwen are celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. A Dandenong boy, Tom attended DHS after leaving St. Mary's Primary School. Tom also produced his own paper, the Dandenong Observer.



Mailing
Address

PO BOX 383,
Dandenong
3175

DHS Ex-Students Association

Office Bearers

President:

Greta Jungwirth

Secretary:

Marta Lopez

Treasurer:

Ruby Constable

Historian/Ordinary Member:

Dawn Harris

School Liaison Officer:

Robyn Stevenson

Membership Coordinator:

Samantha Brown

Editor:

Don Metcalfe 9704 7938

Email; don_metcalfe@msn.com.au

Assistant Editor:

Wendy Metcalfe

RECORDS WANTED



notice board

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED;

To help catalogue items in the archives for a few (pleasant) hours per month.
Contact DHSESA Historian, Dawn Harris, on
9787 5136.

Due to an oversight, some members were not sent their receipts for recent memberships, memorabilia and donations, so they have been included with this newsletter.