

Tribute to Ray Willis**Principal Extraordinaire**

I would like to thank David and Phil for the opportunity to pay tribute to Ray Willis, who died early in July this year. Ray was present at this Dinner last year. It doesn't seem 12 months ago!

Ray had been Principal of Melbourne High School since January 1992.

I first met Ray when we both attended Caulfield North Central School back in the early 1960s. We were in Years 7 and 8 together. Ray was elected Form captain in year 8 – a position he took very seriously.

Caulfield North was a feeder school for Melbourne High School.

However, back then you still needed to either sit an entrance exam or have very good marks. Both Ray and I together with numerous others were granted the opportunity of attending Melbourne High beginning in 1961.

Ray joined the cadets, like so many of us, and became a sergeant. Colin Green, somewhat older than us, we held in awe as he was a Cadet Under Officer.

I believe that the four years that Ray was at M.H.S. were happy years. He revelled in the work and loved the sport. He joined the Hockey team and was Captain in 1964. Ray and I were both members of 6C in 1964 with Jack Wedd as our Form teacher.

Ray matriculated with firsts in History and Economics.

Ray and I went on to the University of Melbourne – Ray with a Commonwealth Scholarship and myself with the ubiquitous Studentship. We were both part of an extensive group of friends that met up on occasions during the Uni days. During the third year Ray past on his American History texts to me – I still have them!

Ray loved the academic work and successfully completed an Honours year in History. I was doing well to pass my undergraduate degree. It wasn't until three or four years later that I started to come to grips with study doing post graduate work. – I was a late starter.

Ray and I parted ways in 1969. He did Dip Ed at Melbourne – I was 'farmed' out to Monash for my Dip. Ed. I never regretted that move. My memory fails me a little here, because I think it was during this time – 1968-69 that Ray's romance with Ruth blossomed. Ruth had been part of this extended group that I referred to earlier. We all often met for lunch out on the lawns in front of the Union or in the café. I wasn't aware at

that stage that Ray & Ruth were an item - but that doesn't mean much – I probably missed it!

After Uni I was appointed to Horsham High School in 1970 and Ray went off to the other end of the State to Maffra High.

Our paths didn't cross again for another three or four years. By this time I had returned to Melbourne and was teaching at Burwood High School. One day I was contacted by an Editor at the Longman Cheshire Publishing Company – Ray O'Farrell. He wanted to know whether I remembered Ray Willis. 'Yes', I said, - although its been some years. He informed me that he had been in conversation with Ray with a view to preparing a Year 9 History Book. Ray had mentioned my name as a possible collaborator. This was an honour. Why Ray picked me I'm not sure. I jumped at the chance. Ray & Ruth were living in Bayswater with Ray teaching at Altona H.S. So began a time of writing and sharing together that I enjoyed and found very stimulating.

This is our first book – *The Changing Vision*

We rapidly discovered that writing textbooks was hard work and we were hardly likely to retire from the financial rewards in the first year. Maybe Colin has a different perspective on this.

During 1979 or 1980 Ray attended a History Teachers' Conference. Traditionally at these gatherings various publisher's set out their latest books to entice teachers to buy multiple class sets.

Now at this Conference Ray was rather naughty !

During the lunch break he waltzed up to the Longman Cheshire stand and started chatting to the unsuspecting salesman. He indicated that he was looking for a suitable Year 9 textbook. Could the salesman recommend anything. Obliging, he magically produced *The Changing Vision*. Ray enquired whether it was any good.? How was it set out and organised? - he wanted to know. Had anyone else bought it ?

You know - all the usual stuff.

Having thoroughly grilled the sales person, he let slip he was one of the co-authors, and encouraged the sales person to keep up the good work. I would have loved to been a fly on the wall to see the salesman's face at this revelation.

The book must have done Okay because the publisher then approached us to prepare another text – this time for Year 12. This was a different kettle of fish and we co-opted two other authors to assist us. By the time this book was published in 1982, I had shifted to East Loddon P-12 College and Ray was at Daylesford. We continued to keep in touch over

the coming years and monitor our respective journeys. Pam and I became friends also with Ruth and their daughter, Lyndel.

We were all delighted when Ray was appointed Principal to Melbourne High.

This was a fitting culmination to an outstanding career and for Ray a sort of “coming home” – This was where he wanted to be.

It is true to say that from 1992 onwards Ray lived and breathed Melbourne High. He became the longest serving Principal at the school. Not an overly gregarious person he nevertheless had this happy friendly disposition along with a demeanour that stated to everyone that nothing but the best was going to be good enough for M.H.S. His dedication to the cause of students at M.H. S. was 110%. Colin can attest to the many additions and improvements that have been put in place over the past 12 years or so. Ray was in many cases a major advocate. But it was also the ethos that he instilled into the students of the school that was important. He encouraged and expected excellence.

His illness over the past couple of years was a blow to his plans. However his courage and determination kept him at work whenever possible. Maybe he should have resigned early this year – particularly after a special tribute dinner was organised in his honour. But he didn't. Perhaps he thought he could still be doing something for his school – even though his strength was failing and hope for a cure was fading. The prognosis was not good.

Ray passed away on 3 July this year whilst still at the helm.

He was a great guy. Gentle but tenacious. He had foresight, but was also pragmatic. He worked hard and seemed to be “on duty” 24 hours of each day – this seems to be a disease associated with those who work at and for Melbourne High. – isn't that right Sue!

He immersed himself in the educational scene so that he could obtain the best facilities, the best curriculum, the best results for his students. He was also a great supporter of the Old Boys Association – because he was one himself.

This year in November is the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the 1964 year of graduates. Ray is going to be missing at that roll call – but he will be remembered!

For he truly ‘Honoured the Work’.

Geoff.W. Pryor. October, 2004