

**ADDRESS TO BE GIVEN AT THE RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL 40 YEARS ON
REUNION DINNER AT THE ALBERT HALL, LAUNCESTON,
ON 12 OCTOBER, 2002**

K J WALKER, PRINCIPAL, 1962 – 69

Present Principal, Past Principals, Teachers Past and Present, Parents and Friends
Association Members, partners, guests and last, but certainly not least,
MEN AND WOMEN OF RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL.

Tonight, the last shall be first.

Over the years I have attended many reunions which were mainly concerned with the leavers of one particular year group who spent the evening catching up on what happened in their lives after school. Very pleasant social occasions they were with a good drop of nostalgia (and other things) flowing throughout the evening.

But this reunion, I am sure we all realise is different. People have come from further away; they are older and they are here not just for the gossip. In Jo-Anne Macpherson's E-mail she said, "I am coming over from West Australia just to attend".

There seems to be something definitive about 40 years: the end of a phase in one's life; the end of an Act; the siren for half-time. At my old high school, Launceston High, the School Song was taken from the old English public school, Harrow:

*Forty years on when afar and asunder,
Parted are those who are singing today,
When you look back and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play;
Then, it may be, there will often come o'er you
Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song –
Visions of boyhood shall float them before you,
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along.*

Before we get on to the glimpses, the visions and the echoes which will form the major part of this address, we should see how tonight's audience fits with the overall picture. Let's see, any students from the nineties; from the eighties; from the seventies; from the sixties; and finally from the first year. As anticipated, the first are the first in numbers.

So let's acknowledge them: the students of '62, the pioneers, the originals, the trail-blazers, and no-one can hide their age; they are all in their early fifties.

Bear with me for a little bit of history to see how Riverside High School came into being, and really why it is that we are here tonight. The first two high schools in Tasmania, at Hobart and Launceston, were started in 1913. When I started high school, 25 years later at Scottsdale, I had to pass an entrance examination. If I had failed, I would have had to remain at the primary school until I was fourteen.

At this time some forward-thinking educationists in Tasmania thought that all children should have the opportunity to attend a secondary school until the age of 16, and immediately after the Second World War this was introduced. So when I returned to Launceston as a teacher at the Technical High School in 1955, there were three secondary schools in the city, and entrance to them was still determined by an examination. The top students went to Launceston High School, those technically inclined to the Technical High School, and the remainder to the Community School at Mowbray.

This selective system, an appalling system that labelled students according to their ability to pass an examination, finished in 1957, when it was decided that all children, whatever their ability, would attend one school located in their district: so the Community School became Brooks High School in the northern suburbs district; the Technical High School transferred to the new Queechy High School to serve the eastern suburbs; Kings Meadows High was opened in 1960 for the southern suburbs; Riverside, 1962; Prospect High, 1965. A ring of five high schools with a senior secondary one at the centre, the Launceston Matriculation College.

And so, in 1961, the Government made the decision to build a high school in the West Tamar area. Some thought it would be at Beaconsfield, but the choice was finally for the fast-growing suburb of Riverside. The contract for the first block was given to Jack Hendriks, a Dutch migrant, who completed the job ready for the opening in 1962. Incidentally, I learned recently that a carpenter he employed on the job was a Welsh migrant, one Roger Smith, who later became known as a developer of tourism facilities.

The Education Department had provided the building and the furniture and equipment. It would also provide the teachers, an office girl, the cleaners and a part-time gardener.

A lot of things obviously also had to be found before the School would be ready for the students in February 1962. And so an Advisory Council was established with parents drawn from all the feeder primary schools in the area. Aub Whittle of Riverside was chairman, and I cannot speak too highly of the job that he and his committee performed in such a limited time-frame.

Rodney Howell spoke at the Assembly yesterday and gave a general picture of the area in which the School was situated: a ribbon development of houses along a single lane highway; no road around Brady's Lookout; no big shopping centre.

Most students would have to travel by bus; the number of pupils travelling and bus routes had to be finalised. There was no school shop next door, so that a tuck-shop would have to be provided in the school itself, and a manageress appointed. Clothing manufacturers had to know details about the school uniform; booksellers informed about the text book and stationery requirements; a prospectus would have to be prepared for all parents of intending students.

I was vice principal of Hobart High School when I was notified of my selection as the Riverside principal about June, 1961. To consult with the Advisory Council and finalise many of the decisions required, I had to make several trips from Hobart at the week-ends with no expenses paid for mileage or accommodation.

I can remember one in particular where the school uniform was on the agenda. As I made the trip from Hobart I thought about the colour. Grey naturally for skirts and trousers; I would settle for navy for the blazers. The blazers would require an emblem for the pocket; a badge with a motto. It promised to be a long meeting.

I was wrong. One of the ladies produced a girl's hat which she had found in a Launceston shop. A bowler hat, a rich burgundy in colour, with blue and gold stripes in the band and very stylish indeed. Another of the ladies, Peg Woodforde, produced a pocket design featuring the Lady Nelson, a ship prominent in the early history of the Tamar. The motto was left to me. The whole affair was finalised in record time and with complete agreement.

Our school was slightly different from the other district high schools in that we would have both first and second year students in our intake. Do you who were in your first year at Launceston High School remember the first time we met? It was in the hall in Wellington Square. E6, 7, 8, and 9 I think you were; very low in the pecking order of the school, non-entities almost and about to be discarded. Above you were the D classes, the C classes, the B classes, the A classes. You may not have realised it at the time but I was the saviour who was to deliver you from the wilderness and lead you to the Promised Land.

For the rest of your school life you would have no class above you. You would be the leaders, the role models for all those below you. A position of considerable responsibility in a new school where we had to establish a different kind of institution, develop standards, and, above all, make a name for ourselves in the Launceston community.

Before the school opened, we were still in the final planning stages. In the week preceding, my assistant and the teacher in a similar position at Kings Meadows, swapped places. As a result, we obtained Jim Brassil and Margaret Record in the reshuffle.

The day of opening finally arrived, 6 February, 1962. The buses had all turned up and so 280 students and 17 teachers were assembled in the laboratory which had been left unequipped and could therefore act as an assembly hall. I remember very little of that first assembly, possibly because two officers from the regional office chose that time to visit us. It was not the time for inspirational addresses but rather one for communicating routines. We had no public address system and, consequently, on that day and those that followed, all instructions had to be given to the whole assembled school first thing in the morning. Do you remember the whistle blowers we had for the top and bottom corridors to signify the end of periods, etc?

Like other schools, we experienced problems in the supply of teachers. For technical subjects, we had only one teacher, so that when a chap on leave from the United Nations arrived looking for a job, we signed him on. He was a prosthetic technician; that is, a person concerned with the fitting of artificial limbs to people in third world countries, and we asked him to teach Technical Drawing. You may remember him, Mr. Mellowship, who would take the boys outside where they produced drawings of the school from every possible angle. Down-river students were also known to have benefited in out of school situations from his knowledge of medicine.

Fortunately, Keith French arrived at the end of term one to take over from Mr. Mellowship who was recalled to his work in the United Nations.

Although our sporting facilities were not great (two basketball courts and one hockey field) we realised that it was important to establish a sports programme as soon as possible. My journal of that time shows that by 17 February, we fielded softball and cricket teams in the Saturday morning roster; on 9 March, we held our Swimming Carnival at Windmill Hill. I recall that one of our parents, Eric Holton, carried away by the excitement, made a portly appearance on the diving board to revive memory of his diving exploits off the Trevallyn Bridge.

On 28 March, we competed in the Inter-High Swimming Carnival and gained third place in the Junior Shield.

On 25 April, we took part in the Anzac Sports and were successful in the under 14 Shield competitions.

By 4 June, we were fielding five boys' teams and six girls' teams in the Winter Sports Roster.

Then, some big news: two boys chosen in the State School under 14 Football Team – Tony Rugari and Denis Walker.

Even bigger news – Tony was made captain of the side.

As well as sport, other activities noted in the Journal were: 29 June – Talent Quest was held in our “assembly hall” during the day. It was so delightful that the parents requested an evening performance, and this became the pattern for future Talent Quests.

29 August – Our choir sang at the Devonport Eisteddfod.

To conclude what had been a fairly eventful and successful year we held our first Speech Night at the National Theatre.

Parental interest in the school, established first in the Advisory Council, continued with the formation of the Parents and Friends Association a fortnight after the School opened with Aub Whittle as President. A tuck-shop, with Mrs. Hopwood as manager, and a roster of willing parents, opened for business on the first day from the very confined quarters of what was called an M.S.D. Staff Room.

Prominent on the Association's Committee and in its activities were members of the Trevallyn Mothers Club. They had already established a considerable reputation in their primary school and were destined to become a formidable force in their high school. Mrs. Young, Mrs. Jessup, Mrs. Goldie, Mrs. McKendrick, Mrs. Peacock, Mrs. Holton and countless others were going to be around for a long time running fairs, raffles, white elephant sales, city balls and country dances.

One hundred and sixty parents turned up for the second meeting of the Association for what was to be a contentious issue, the presence of the ANZ Bank in

what had previously been considered the Launceston Bank for Savings territory of state schools' banking. As there was no bank of any kind in the suburb, I had accepted the offer of the ANZ Bank Manager to provide a weekly service at the School, not only for the students but also for staff and general business. The upshot of all this was that Riverside became the first school in Tasmania, and perhaps Australia, to be serviced by two banks.

There were other ways we differed from the high schools in the city. In the naming of class groups, we replaced the usual E, D, C, and B arrangement with the more sensible 1, 2, 3 and 4. We tried to give a practical application to the concept of student ownership of the school in the establishment of a School Council in which the presence of two staff members on the Council was balanced by two student representatives at part of the Staff Meeting. We also considered we were justified in asking those businesses which profited from the School to help with the costs of our magazine through paid advertising.

The second year was a continuation of the first in that the excitement of doing new things was maintained. Our facilities were increased: the cricket nets were built by the Parents and Friends; a second hockey field was completed; the football oval was started; also the Technical Block. We began what was to become the annual exchange with Rose Bay High; Ken Gillespie started a ballet class; lunch time debates were held between the houses.

The enrolment had grown to 530 and there were more teachers. Jim Brassil left us at the end of first term and he was replaced by Don Best who was transferred from Hobart. Don made no secret of the fact that he was not happy and that he would be returning to Hobart at the end of the year. He stayed on to become probably the longest serving teacher at the School. He gave outstanding service as a tennis and hockey coach, and can take most of the credit for the School's success over many years in the Athletics and Swimming Carnivals through his training of the relay teams.

The United Kingdom was proving to be a valuable source for teachers and two teachers had been recruited to start the year at Riverside. Unfortunately they, with their families, the Butlers and the Simpsons, were delayed by a fire on board their ship in the Mediterranean. Another English teacher, valuable for his major in Physics, was a welcome addition to the staff, but he soon left when we could not satisfy his passion for ballroom dancing competition in Launceston.

I found myself being asked to take on tasks for the whole community of schools which meant certain advantages for our own. As organiser of school concerts for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, I was able to maintain the steady supply of seats for our students. I was made president of the High School Sports Association and with Brian Watson from Launceston High as secretary, was able to develop a thriving competition for the increasing number of high schools in Northern Tasmania.

There was one event in Launceston in our third year that I shall always remember and that was Commonwealth Youth Sunday. All schools had been invited to take part in a march through the city to the Town Hall and, whereas most schools sent the usual token representation, our volunteers would have easily outnumbered all of the rest together. As the "youngest" school, our students were last in line, and as they came

down St. John Street, girls in front in their burgundy blazers and bowler hats, boys in similar numbers behind, they looked magnificent. If the public had not realised it before, they knew now that there was a new school in the town.

And then, as could only be expected, the originals finished their time at Riverside with extremely good results in the external Schools Board Examinations. Three of these students eventually went on to gain university entrance scholarships from the twenty allocated for the state.

Our first intake that had come from Launceston High School had exceeded all of our expectations. Mr. and Mrs. Don Lawson seemed to speak for all of the parents of this group when they proposed an annual prize to acknowledge the special qualities of these students. They named the prize Protostatium Aristo, from the first to the first, and as such it would serve as a remembrance of the outstanding achievement of this first group of students and a reward for those who followed its example in later years.

In the year that followed, when our original first year students became our seniors, David Dunn arrived as our first deputy headmaster. Up until the end of 1969 when David and I both left the School, the student numbers increased to over 800. The physical school, like Topsy, just grew and somewhat haphazardly at that. We didn't in that time enjoy the luxury of an assembly hall, but the lack of it provided us with a further opportunity for the improvisation that had been a characteristic of these early years.

Some of our assemblies I consider were quite memorable. We would choose our site according to the weather, the time we would need, and the nature of the programme. Some would be short stand-up affairs on the basketball courts when we wanted to parade our sporting heroes, drama groups or musicians, fresh from their victories. One of a different kind I remember was sited under the gum trees where we were treated to a display of horsemanship by our team of girls who had performed at the Launceston Show.

For our school socials and talent quests we had progressed first to the Presbyterian Hall in Riverside, next to St. Francis Hall at the site of the Franciscan Friary, and finally to the Max Fry Hall in Trevallyn. The swimming pool built in the local business centre added to the sports facilities available to us.

I have many and various glimpses that stir in my memory from time to time. Our Swamp Poets, for instance, pre-empted the Dead Poets' Society by some years, with a similar secluded meeting place and a desire for the extraordinary.

A lunch-time religious discussion group run by the third year students themselves was the most successful I had ever witnessed, and only broke up when threatened by adult interference.

I remember Walkabout 30 when people young and old contracted to walk to Longford and back in a money-raising effort. One hundred and eleven of our students entered and eighty finished the course. When I drove along the course to see if I could be of some assistance, I could only marvel at the youthful determination not to give in.

These displays of independent spirit gladdened the heart. I personally remember the times I enjoyed with the sportsmen in the school admiring their skill and enjoying their friendship. David Woodforde, a state representative; Rodney Howell, now principal of Exeter Primary School; Stephen, his elder brother, now Sports Editor for The Age newspaper; Clem Smith, now the manager of Motors; Geoff Lyons, prominent in life-saving and sports administration; Stephen Bender, Colin Shadgett, Michael Savage and many others. And Tony Walters, what a talent! The Director General of Education made a special visit to the school and in a very modest ceremony in the classroom presented Tony with his Australian baggy green for his selection as wicket-keeper in the Australian Schoolboys Cricket Eleven.

I remember the statement made by Jane Deeth at the 25 Year Reunion when she told how as an architecture student she attended a seminar in London to discuss provisions for educational facilities of the future. Jane told us that the conclusions reached were similar to what she had already experienced at Riverside.

I noticed also an entry I made in my journal in 1967 of a visit to the School by the Reverend Merlyn Holly from the Collins Street, Melbourne, Uniting Church. He and his wife said, "We had to come and visit the place where our son Baxter said he had spent the best year of his life to date." Like Baxter, there were many teachers from these early years who are remembered for the contribution they made to the spirit and the image of the school. Many went on to higher positions in the teaching profession both within the state and beyond.

And so in those years we experienced both the highs and the lows, and it is one of the latter that I have left till last; one that I have no difficulty in recalling in complete detail because no-one who experienced it could go through life unchanged.

I can remember a parent mentioning to me that we were fortunate that our feeder primary schools had environments that allowed their pupils a freedom of movement and opportunity for exploration denied their contemporaries in the asphalt quadrangles of the city schools. Whether this had something to do with the interest in excursions and adventures away from the school, I'm not sure, but from the very beginning, our overnight trips to the Central Highlands for the first year classes and our organised trips to many places interstate proved to be very popular. Some members of staff introduced smaller groups of students to the pleasures of bushwalking resulting in the formation of RHODS, Riverside High Outdoors Society.

As a result of this interest, in May, 1965, a group of 16 students (15 of ours plus a friend from Sydney) with teachers Rosemary Bayes and John Chick, and a young experienced bushwalker Ewen Scott, set out on a journey of three or four days from the Arm River to Cradle Mountain. On the last day, they encountered weather and conditions on the track from Lake Rodway to Dove Lake that resulted in tragedy.

On that night, the group was split into four: three of the fitter students had been sent ahead to seek help from the ranger at Waldheim; the majority led by Miss Bayes found their way to the boatshed on the Lake where they sheltered for the night; a group of four had taken shelter with Mr. Chick at the top of the mountain; and in between groups two and four, after a valiant attempt at rescue, both Ewen Scott and David Kilvert perished. The first group of Dianne Batten, Peter Williams and Bernard Hay had

lost their way in the dark and spent the night in the open. Mere slips of kids, they were, who finally made it to Waldheim at dawn.

In the sadness of these events, there was much to admire of courage, selflessness and endurance.

By April of the following year, through the money-raising efforts of the Parents and Friends Association and the planning and hard work of the Launceston Walking Club members, together with many volunteers, including staff and parents from the School, this wonderful A frame hut was built on the shores of Lake Rodway.

I don't think I have to tell you of the effect that the tragedy had on the School and the community. But one reaction rather surprised me. Some students came to see me wanting to go in to Cradle to see for themselves where the tragedy occurred. Some of you, I believe, actually did go there with your parents. Later, in third term, we did offer to arrange a Saturday hike up the Gorge into the Trevallyn Reserve. Well over a hundred volunteered so that we divided the walk into two, juniors and seniors, on consecutive Saturdays.

On the seniors' walk I remember that when we reached the Second Basin, one person dived in, clothes and all, and just about everyone followed. I am extremely sorry that tonight we do not have the person here who led that dive; that an unfortunate and recent accident has deprived us of his presence. And what a presence that would have been! I refer of course to Ian Campbell who to many of us epitomised the spirit of Riverside High. No man is an island ... every man's death diminishes us, because we are concerned with mankind. So don't send to ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for all of us who knew him here tonight.

And then another memory from that hike: after we'd climbed the cliff from Duck Reach, and made our way across the Reserve and started the walk down Reeatta Road, everybody suddenly burst out singing. It was the School Song and we sang it again and again.

So much for the memories of the way we were back then. To live in the past, we are told, is wrong, but to ignore the past is to commit just as great a sin against the society in which we live. It is from the past, from the happenings, the activities and the lives of various people, that lessons are learned and ideals planted on which an institution builds its traditions.

The development of the school buildings over the years has provided students and staff with a comfortable and functional place to work, but the piecemeal nature of this development has left us little in the way of architectural gems to revere. However, we have the words of countless headmasters to remind us that a school is more than mere bricks and mortar.

In the Protostatium Aristo prize we have a recognition of one such tradition – from the first to the first – a prize given annually to the student who has shown those qualities of character, of leadership, and of pride in performance that were so evident in the first group of students.

Then, too, we have the words of a mother who lost her son in the mountain tragedy: “You must let your children adventure for themselves. If you over-protect them you spoil their lives.” Those simple words, the event itself, the courage shown by the students, and especially the struggle and sacrifice of Ewen Scott have been to me a constant reminder of the strength of the human spirit and the meaning of “Greater love hath no man”.

This event, too, is remembered in an annual award, the Scott-Kilvert Memorial. Both of these awards, it should be noted, depend not on examination results or gold medals in sport, but rather on character, attitude and example.

One further point, the School and its students could have no more powerful and inspirational icon than the Scott-Kilvert Hut. It’s in a magnificent setting on the shores of Lake Rodway and on a fine day in the shadow of that perfectly structured mountain, it can have an effect that is unforgettable.

The trek to Lake Rodway could become an annual event for the senior students to aspire to. Carefully planned and executed, it could promote genuine interest in our natural environment, the pleasures of safe bush-walking, and a way of keeping the memory alive.

The stated policy of the School in those early days stressed its ownership by the students. It was their school: it was there for their development, their enjoyment and their preparation for life. I found from my own experience, first as a country boy leaving home to go to high school, and then as a teacher and a principal, that what a person responds to first, and remembers longest, is not what he is taught, but how he is treated. If you agree with me on that score and its application was your experience at Riverside High, I hope you will ensure its continuance by supporting the School in the future, and by allowing your children and grandchildren the same opportunity as you had, and at the same time preserving the democratic tradition in Australian society.

When I was leaving Hobart High School to come to Riverside, the Senior Mistress of Languages, Dr. Ann Matz, a wonderful teacher (and, incidentally, a passionate bushwalker too who, when I saw her at a reunion in Hobart last year, was lamenting that she would have to give it up. She is 93 years old). However, when I was leaving the school back in 1961, she asked me if I would consider the Greek phrase, *Panta Rei*, as the motto for my new school. I have to admit that I did not fully appreciate the significance of the phrase at the time. As I have said, we had to find a motto in a hurry, and all mottos were expected to be in Latin, spoken or written, and so I settled for “*Quod verum est meum est*” which loosely translated means “The truth is mine”.

But, with hindsight, I see that *Panta Rei* is so simple and yet so applicable to an institution like a school. “Everything flows”. Wherever we were then in 1962, or here now in 2002, we got there and here from where we were; and wherever we’re going, we’ll get there from where we are.

The Space Administration Centre (NASA) in Houston, Texas has as its motto “The Past is Prologue” taken from Shakespeare’s play, “The Tempest”, “What’s past is prologue”. In the Mt. Stromlo Observatory in the Australian Capital Territory, around the inside of the circular dome, you will find in large letters: WE CAN SEE FURTHER

THAN THE SCHOLARS OF YESTERYEAR BECAUSE WE ARE STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS.

During the School Assembly yesterday, in the atmosphere created, the assurance of the students, and the contributions they made, I felt that that inscription was fitting not only for the present occasion but hopefully for all future celebrations of the school. I could almost see it on one of those massive girders in the Assembly Hall:

We can see further than the scholars of yesteryear because we are standing on the shoulders of giants.

Everything flows. Panta Rei.

I ask you now to raise your glasses and drink a toast to Our School – Riverside High – and then to join with me in singing the School Song.