

A.B. : This is Anne Britt interviewing Dave Robertson who was a teacher at Rathmines P.S. from 1978 to 1982.

D.R. : Um. Well, first of all I ,um, that was my first appointment at Rathmines and I hit the place age 30 ,uh, having done 10 years in... in the Commonwealth Bank and ,um, had a ball at college. And I was the only guy in the entire system ,I think, to get Newcastle. Everybody else was sent all over the place.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : And I was a bit of a mover at college at the time because I was so much older than everybody. And I finally got out here 'cause I lived at Wangi and ,uh, I ,uh, so I arrived sort of with radical ideas ,um, a lot older ,um, hadn't been through the system. Or the Department was doing a very stratified ,you know had to do things in a certain way. And I arrived and I was a bit radical ,um, and I remember the first day I sort of pulled up there. Because before the... I arrived it was a all-female staff. A few things I can't put on tape , but I gleaned afterwards what had happened. But the girls apparently had a bit of ... weren't getting on. There was a lot of fur flying around the place , you know, and they were anxious for a guy to get in there to sort of put a bit of oil on the waters. And they just wouldn't have another woman to talk to. Oh, I don't think you sort of understand what I'm saying but ,uh, sometimes all girl staffs are pretty terrible.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : (Indistinguishable) What was I saying? They were hanging out for a male. Uh, anyway they all said, "A male, a male!" I pull up in the bottom driveway with my little V-dub. Out I climb and apparently with one voice they all said, " Well, back to the drawing board!" (laughs)

A.B. : They were disappointed.

D.R. : They were severely disappointed! But they happened to get me. That's what they told me afterwards anyway.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : But, uh, they were good. They, uh...

A.B. : Who was there when you started?

D.R. : Uh, Ruth Brandt, um, Val, um, there was Anne Humphries too, hanging around and, um, Colleen Jones.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : I got a lot of support from Colleen. Um, and John Leishma started the same week as I did. That was was when he took over from George Gelagin.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : Uh, so I sort of the girls sort of took me into their heart and looked after me and that, and, um, it was, I really I enjoyed it ... um, I better tell you some funny things that happened, uh... um. Val for instance. Val was, um, pretty straight. She had, she had infants, um, girls and boys would be lined up in the same line because that was natural. That was the way it was always done.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : And I'd get them in I'd get them, 'cause I had year 2 there at one stage too. I'd sort of shake them out, and said, "Let's get them all mixed up". She got ... not upset, but she said, "No. This is, this is not right" and uh...

None of the girls wanted to do year 2.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : For some reason or other. They said, uh, "We don't want to be infants", and one of them wanting to do Primary. And so there was a bit of a ... it was a ... real problem. And I was doing year 3 and I couldn't see much difference between the two things anyway. So I said yeah, I'll ... 'cause you do infants meth. at college. Mm. And so I had a couple of years on year 2 and I really loved it.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : It was great . I had a class of about 36 or 37 there towards the end.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : But they were all little darlings . We had a , you know, could hardly fit them in the room. In a demountable there and that was good. Um. What else happened ? Oh, I sort of . I was sort of the cartoonist cum joker in the place. And if there was an opportunity for drawing a quick cartoon.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : I'd put it on the notice board or I'd put it somewhere else. And there was one I drew when they were bringing a demountable to the school . And it was going to be opened by ... or I think it was going to be ... some sort of ceremony was going to happen with the Minister.

A. B. : Mm

D. R. : But the demountable wasn't there . Apart from that the road was a mess.

A. B. : Oh , right.

D. R. : And so. It almost happened the way I drew it. I mean , I drew it over the top. But I drew a grader coming up the road , levelling the road. Behind them it was a bitumen-laying machine which was made the ... put the surface down. Behind then was the crane bringing ... well 4 cranes bringing the demounta

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : And behind them was the governmental limousine with the bloke that , that was about to ... and that's almost the way it happened.

A. B. : You didn't keep the cartoon ?

D. R. : No , I threw it out. It was , um, uh, I put flypaper ... We didn't have flyscreens at one stage. So, the Department somehow gave us flypaper. These horrible sticky long threads and stuff. Or somebody went and bought it.

A.B. : Yeah

D.R. : So, where are we going to put them? We hung them from the fans. And so... let's turn the fans on. We turned the fan on full blast.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : They wrapped themselves around the fans. That was good. If you look at the fans in some little room up there, you can probably see this horrible, yellow, sticky stuff. Still there.

Um, what else did we do? Uh, I dunno. Did a lot of artwork with the kids when I was there. With a lot of... when I first started exploring the fact that you didn't have to um, restrict the use of speech marks and that to Primary kids and upper Primary. And that was one of the rules I sort of come across. And you had... use all these things. It was very structured in those days.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : I dunno. Some people are still that way. But I successfully introduced bubbles - speech bubbles and cartoons and the old sixty-six and ninety-nines to year twos.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : And the bright ones just picked it up. The other ones still didn't know what all the squiggly marks meant, but they didn't catch on. But the ones that did, they really flew. And we just produced books like crazy. That was in the days before we started um, getting on the computer, conferences and making a lot of books. But we produced a lot of artwork. Um.

A.B. : We've got photographs of, I think, your class, um, in Pam Bunn's time.

D.R. : Yeah, Pam was next door to me.

A.B. : Yeah, nature trail.

D.R. : Oh, yeah.

A.B. : Stories out on the nature trail.

D.R. : That nature trail still a desert? We... it was bush, it was bush

when we, when I had it. And we just made a path through it. And just like Hansel and Gretel the kids started to drop little rocks, little white rocks. And from that we broadened it & ,uh, we spent a bit of dough buying native plants. And we put about 50 plants in. Had working bees, um, an art... an outdoor classroom constructed out of logs. We started to get birdlife around the place. The plants were growing. We had it all identified. We had, uh, this guy at Awabakal, um, forget his name. He came out, identified all the trees. And then one day, the slasher came. And put the slasher through the whole lot. And I cried, I really did.

A. B. : That was for the transpiration area?

D. R. : It was... no, it was beyond the transpiration area. The transpiration area was there to sort of water the whole thing. But it was, it was working.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : And, um...

A. B. : What was the reason?

D. R. : Oh, just that it wasn't controlled, or something. They used to... just went too far. We had to apologise like crazy. But it broke my heart.

A. B. : Pam was very upset.

D. R. : I was she was. Yeah, because we both were sort of, did an awful lot of work. We were both always down there. We made a book with the ... in fact there's a book in the library. Probably still there with, uh, we used, used photography to make the book. It was an adventure story on Tarzan strikes back or something like that.

A. B. : That was what I was talking about.

D. R. : Oh, yeah. Right. We lost a shirt that day and we lost a few kids. We spent all day doing it. But an enormous stimulus for language and all that. And the bush was great. The kids loved being down there.

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : And it wasn't out of bounds or anything. You could walk down there. Um. Had a bushfire once too. That's why you've got a couple of Riga fire pumps there which probably not even used since & never be used again.

A. B. : Yeah. Right.

D. R. : Uh, I got a little certificate ... being a good bush fire fighter. And, uh, they all thought I was a big hero ... but I was...

A. B. : Where was the fire ?

D. R. : Ah, just , just sprang from... Rosemary Row , and came east towards the school , and the school was pretty well surrounded I mean , it was , there was nothing in the school to burn but, um, it did cause a bit of excitement and it did burn all the way along the bottom fence up to , um , oh, we stopped it before it got to the little carpark down the bottom.

A. B. : You actually fought the fire, did you ?

D. R. : Yeah , it was two of us went out there and sort of , bucket brigade job.

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : And we had kids in a line filling half buckets and bringing them to us. And we were beating it out.

A. B. : What year was that ?

D. R. : Oh, it would have been about '81, '82 , something like that.

A. B. : Mrs Miles, oh, so that's the same one Mrs Miles has told me about.

D. R. : Yep. Yeah.

A. B. : Who was the other person who helped you ?

D. R. : Oh I forget. It might have been Dallas or someone like that ... or, uh , there was also , um, what's his name ? Norfolk Island guy Lazarevic.

A. B. : Oh, Roy.

D. R. : Yeah. It's funny when Roy came too. You, see, I was the only male there, except for John , and I was , I was sort of getting

sick of all the female talk about, you know, babies and knick knows what. Along came Roy. Roy was the ultimate male. He'd come in, grunt. Sit down. Open up at the sporting page (laughs)

A. B. : Yeah, sounds like Roy.

D. R. : You know, and I was, you know... he was at the other end of the spectrum. He was terrible too. After the fire incident, um, Beth came a... a system of warnings. Right.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : And she had, um, I forget what it was two, two short blasts or 3 short blasts, there is a fire and everyone had to adopt fire drill. Take the kids down to the oval. And then there was, say something like 4 long blasts or something like that, meant there was some kind of, there was a bomb threat or something like that.

A. B. : Mm.

D. R. : You had to stay in the classroom, or something like that.

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : Did you speak to Pam at all?

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : Did she tell you about the time she couldn't get out of her classroom? There was a guy called Trevor Atkins. He was a little... he was a discipline problem.

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : And one day she sent him outside.

A. B. : Yeah.

D. R. : Trevor decided.... that he had a mate outside too.... just outside the demountable door. They got all the school cases and they just, just stacked them up brick-like, like building a sand-bag wall. She couldn't get out. (laughs)

A. B. : So what did you do?

D. R. : We left here there for awhile. (laughs)

We never had any sporting houses. Oh I, I think we, I was there

when they introduced them anyway and sort of ... I looked ahead and said, "Well..." They were going to have two and I said, "This place is growing, let's have four." And I think his idea was to, his favourite idea was to name them after the Commanders on the base, and I couldn't see kids jumping up and down and cheering for Wilberforce or Thistlewhite, whatever they happened to be (laughs) So we happened to pick these attractive names out of the planes. And we based it on that

A.B.: And who's idea was it, just general?

D.R.: Yeah. I think just general. Just one of the suggestions. I don't I can't claim credit for thinking of that but I did do a couple of the banners which I believe are missing now.

A.B.: Yeah?

D.R.: Because we used to have, we made some beautiful banners up. Two were, one of the parents, father designed them.

A.B.: Mm.

D.R.: Two of them. I designed the other two, I think. The ladies went away and made them out of, it was almost like tapestry.

A.B.: Mm.

D.R.: Something like you'd hang in a church, you know. They were really nice. That's about it ... 5 years all forgotten.

A.B.: Mm. Were you there, um, when the Dobell Arts and Crafts Festival started?

D.R.: Yeah. Yep. I won it one year. When I came here. But I won it.

A.B.: Oh, right.

D.R.: For a painting of some gum trees I did. I've sort of got a kinky thing about gum trees. Reckon they're, especially spotted gums in the wet. They're beautiful.

A.B.: Mm.

D.R.: Yeah. We decided that, I think Joan, Colleen was one of the moving forces in that and, um, oh yeah, we did it down the hall and, uh...

A.B. : Is this the rec. hall?

D.R. : This is the, uh, the dance, the, no, before that was built ... use to use the air force base ... the old...

A.B. : Yeah. Yeah.

D.R. : The big one down the bottom.

A.B. : Yeah. The rec. hall down in the Air Base. Is that the one you mean?

D.R. : Yeah, that's it. Yeah. Yeah.

A.B. : Yeah. Right.

D.R. : Yeah. I don't know if it was that, if it was that or, we ran, a sort of a dinner one night too.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : We ran out of glasses. We ran out of seats and everything. I can remember going round to all of the different clubs and trying to shake jugs out of them, and glasses and seat and heaven knows what.

A.B. : Yeah

D.R. : It was...

A.B. : When was this? What year, do you know?

D.R. : Uh. I couldn't put a number to it.

A.B. : And when did the, uh, Dobell Arts Crafts Festival actually start? Did it grow out of that or was that the beginning of it?

D.R. : I don't think it grew out of that, I don't think it started out of that. It was either the Lions Club here I think was a bit of a moving force with that.

A.B. : Yeah. Right. We've heard that it started through the P & C at Rathmines and we're trying to track it down.

D.R. : Mm. No. Nup. We did a lot of work for it. Yeah. Although a lot of people sort of misinterpreted me too, because I had a lot of.. I'm in the army. I was a Warrant Officer when I was, sort of, over there. I mean, I'm a Captain now.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : But they sort of think, "Oh yeah, army guy. He's going to be very tough on discipline and stuff". And there was a few times there where, um, I'd sort of expect kids, cause I had.... this was when I had infants. I had forgot they were little year ones. I'd just sort of say, "Right! (Clicks fingers) Two lines!" They'd sort of stand there. Look at you like this. And I'm saying, (clicks fingers) "Two lines. Ch. Ch. Let's go!" Eventually they got the message. But that was funny resolving playing the part of being a Warrant Officer in the army, and then being an infants teacher.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : Because there's these roles expected of you and in the end I sort of gave up, did myself. But they wanted you to be in the army so you couldn't turn your back on anybody

A.B. : Mm

D.R. : You don't say please, especially Warrant Officers and stuff like this. You give them these orders and commands all the time.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : And other end of the spectrum is an infants teacher. But it's all, you know, uh, warm fuzzies (laughs)

A.B. : Yeah

D.R. : And, uh, sometimes I sort of had to go (smacks face twice), you know, switch off that role, switch on the other one.

A.B. : Yeah. When you were in the army, you mean the Reserve, the Army Reserve?

D.R. : Yeah. Yeah. Army Reserve.

A.B. : Right. Mm.

D.R. : That was, that was funny. I used to get these letters from, I always had kids writing to me in camp.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : And, uh, little kids used to think... in the army, right. They've seen pictures of what happens in the army. And you know I've still got these letters at home. "Mr Robinson, Hope you do not get run over by a tank." Or "Please stay safe, I want you to come back alive

A.B. : Oh right.

D.R. : (laughs) Little boys would draw pictures of you, you know...

A.B. : Yeah

D.R. : Bullets are flying and there's anti-tank guns and here's Mr Robinson being run over by a tank somewhere (laughs) They were beautiful. Plus I used to be very proud of it too, 'cause I used to read out those letters to the other guys in the, um.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : In fact, it became a bit of a feature there to go away to camp and they used to say, "Righto, Sgt Robinson" or you know Mr Robbo's got his letter from his kids. I used to pass it round the entire platoon and the company. And they were amazed a lot of times because I, I, um, do wear, um, my, sort of, my heart on my sleeve a bit when it comes to standards. And I hear all this stuff about teachers don't teach spelling anymore, or language, or maths, and everything's gone downhill, 'cause they read the Murdoch press and they hear all this garbage about how...

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : And I used to say, "Rubbish! Read this!" And they used to be quite amazed at the stuff we used to turn out. Um, fully, I was sort of justifying the rest of the Education Department on the stuff my little kids could do. But, uh, I was quite proud of them.

A.B. : Mm. How long did you teach infants? The whole time you were there?

D.R. : No. Only 2 years. Three for three and two for two.

A.B. : Right, and then you went back to primary?

D.R. : Then I came here because I had to, uh, they wanted a male to sort this horrific mob of year 6 out. I came really unstuck 'cause I was so used to the warm fuzzy stuff. And I got down here.... I've always sort of gravitated round there. I've always taught year 3 and year 2, 13, 14 years I've been teaching.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : I just sort of fit in now, I think.

A.B. : Yeah.

D.R. : In infants . They should have more blokes teaching infants. Just for the fact they , uh, lot of girls have come to me first up the first weeks or so and they're actually terrified.

A.B. : Mm.

D.R. : Of just sort of seeing a male and sort of , seeing me bark at a few people sometimes. But I think after about the first week they've sussed it out that I'm a real pussy-cat and they

A.B. : Yeah. We've always had a male on infants at Rathmines since I've been there. Which is good.

D.R. : Good idea.

A.B. : Oh , is there anything else you want to add , or ... ?

D.R. : Nuh.