

6th March 2019, Naming ceremony for the Gentle Café at Glenaeon - by Glennis Mowday

Firstly, I would just like to say that it is impossible to do justice to all the time, effort and expertise that Stuart & Rosemary Gentle have given to Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School & Steiner Education in Australia. They both loved Glenaeon and Kamaroi and promoting Steiner pedagogy.

What a team!- a dynamic or should I say biodynamic and rich partnership. Stuart and Roe were devoted to each other & supported each other in their service for Steiner Education.

Stuart and Roe began their association with Glenaeon as parents in 1970. Belinda their eldest child was enrolled in Kindergarten at Dalcross, Pymble (the initial location of the first Steiner School in Australia- the start of Glenaeon). Two years later, Fiona began and by this time the Eric Nicholls classroom had been built at Middle cove and the students were being moved across. The Gentles knew the school when it was a dirt road through more dense bush than it is now; with just the early three buildings.

Roe was active on the Mother's Group (the days when there were more stay at home Mums) for the first five years, and began learning craft and about Steiner Education. She heard at the school gates, where the parents gather & chat at the end of the day, that a History teacher had left the school & felt compelled to offer her services. She literally felt a push in the back to call. She was interviewed by Miss Brose and the rest is History! She taught Modern History in the High School. A one term position turned into 26 years! Roe loved teaching History and her students loved her. David Green, Jonathan Teplitski and Elizabeth Ellean were some of her first students. She also was a Class Teacher for a number of years-class 3 to year 8.

Stuart had time-consuming responsible management positions with companies during his time, but when Miss Brose asked him to be the President of the Parents Association; he took on this responsibility as well. He managed to turn around the parent body with many activities he initiated to contribute to the positive ethos of the school. Graeme Harvey was Chairman of the Council at this time and they all worked well together.

The PA's annual BBQ continued successfully under Stuart's leadership. Rosemary's Class in Year 8 which included Anthony Lawes & Rosie McCathie built brick by brick the theatre area for the classes to perform and parents to sit and enjoy items. This was no mean feat for young children and it is still being used for entertainment today!

Rosie McCathie, one of Roe's students in the Class teacher period remembers that when the Gentles were moving house their daughters placed their clothes in plastic garbage bags and gave the wrong bags to the op shop! Also whenever they started a new Main Lesson the Gentles would go in to the classroom on the weekend and prepare the classroom. Rosie was always impressed with Stuart's fantastic blackboard drawings.

Stuart introduced a dinner for the parent body and the senior students that were graduating. This was a gala event that the teachers looked forward to. This lasted until 1982 as I remember attending one of the last ones. A new activity to bring everyone together was Stuart's introduction of musicals. The first production was "Pirates of Penzance" in 1978, then in 1980 "The King & I", and in 1982 "Oliver". I've only seen photos and heard anecdotes about the first two performances, but loved being part of "Oliver". It was a huge production at Bailey Hall (Willoughby Town Hall- where the Concourse stands now) and everyone did come together resulting in a high quality performance. David Hatton as Fagin, Anthony Downs as Bill Sykes, Annie Semler as Nancy, Eric Thorvaldson as Oliver –all did an incredible performance. One night the dry ice special effect drowned the orchestra and one could only see the top of bows coming out of the cloud! Bill

Motzing the conductor was ready to run! It was an amazing experience to be part of the show and watch John Bonney and Start running everything, with after school and weekend rehearsals.

1979-21st birthday celebrations of the school arranged by the PA and College. Visit by Francis Edmunds from England, Steiner Emerson College, who was Miss Brose's mentor. Celebrations organised by the PA led by Stuart.

There were also an amazing number of musical evenings organised by the PA under Stuart's time as President. Eg: Miha Pogacnik, Perry Hart, My fair lady cast –Bunty Turner. These all brought new people to the school. He worked with talented parents such as David Lawes, Chris de Jong, Dawn Woodhouse, Millie Rodgers, Di Nicholas & John Shaw to name a few.

Stuart introduced a Xmas Fair that is the forerunner of our incredible Family fair.

After a gap "Carmina Burana" was performed, followed in 1990 by "Fiddler on the Roof", 1996-"Peer Gynt" and in 1998, "A tale of two cities". I asked Scott Henderson what it was like working on plays with Stuart. He said the priority was making sure all the cast and crew were fed and Pizza was his chosen food. "Has the pizza been ordered yet?" There is definitely a culinary connection to the café, Stuart would have loved Sharon's Pizza and coffee! The pizza is great! Many students from Glenaeon have gone on to have careers in theatre, including Fiona Gentle. Rosemary is a fragrant herb/ garnish that is also culinary connection.

As a committee member for the PA, Stuart initiated the Craft Expo. It was a huge weekend with fine artists from all over Australia exhibiting their work. The whole school worked together to prepare the school grounds and help the artists. The fairy lights decked the trees and the hall really looked magical. The guest speaker for the opening was always wonderful, including Hazel Hawk & Kerry O'Brian. The expo ran "in conjunction with Craft Arts magazine and occurred from 1986-2000. It raised in excess of \$450,000 for the school" and raised the profile of the school. "It acquired a following amongst the wider community and was recognised by the crafts Council of Australia as the finest exhibition of contemporary craft in the country". Stuart drove it with stalwart support from David Tulloh. Anne Kersch recalls the vision of Stuart and PA committee members counting money up in the hall mezzanine after the expo weekends.

In 1989 Stuart became the founding Chairman of Kamaroi Rudolf Steiner School at Belrose. He held this position until 1998. The school was created to become a feeder school for Glenaeon high school, which enabled a second stream to start in Class 7. He also was a member of Glenaeon School Council from 1982. Roe is currently Chair of the Kamaroi Board, but was not on the board at the same time as Stuart.

When Miss Brose stepped down as head of College and became Life Governor of Glenaeon. Rosemary really stepped into Miss Brose's place and along with Graeme Harvey and Neville Harrison took on executive roles within the school. She worked with the College of teachers to run the school. Roe always had clarity of thought, integrity, warmth, humour, a strong presence, a natural leader (but a good listener) and had very high standards. She oversaw a number of inspections from the Board of Studies, where all the programs had to be integrated with departmental requirements and Steiner pedagogy. This took hours of work and brought Glenaeon accolades from the inspectors.

Many people such as Evelyn Mason, Sue Moody, Alisan Smotlak and myself remember Roe being at or conducting the interview for a position at the school. She would often look over the top of her glasses with either a stern look if the behaviour was unacceptable or with humour- which was directed at us young teachers or students alike- we certainly behaved!

Roe mentored and helped so many teachers. For example helping Keiko Takahashi obtain a visa to stay in Australia. She was very much involved in the training program for Steiner teachers at Glenaeon and giving many lectures at conferences. Also gaining accreditation for courses.

Roe was the RSSA delegate for Glenaeon for many years. When she gave up full time teaching Roe had more time to work as a consultant to assist many other Steiner schools. Roe was employed by the RSSA from 2000 to 2008. Roe became the head of the RSSA. She thought of the acronym SEA which became the new name for Steiner Education in Australia.

In reading over the transcripts of interviews conducted in 2002 it became clear to me that Roe and Stuart were influenced greatly and loved dearly by Miss Sylvia Brose. They were both on the same page - working out of Anthroposophy -they had faith that the benevolent spiritual forces were working through them. Clearly they were...

Lindsay Sherrott (who spends a lot of time stopping neighbours plants taking over our native habitat) remembers Stuart as being a life-breath to the school. He said there are three treasures. One –the breath of life, two the time we have on earth and three, what we do with our time here. Both Roe and Stuart have had the commitment to each other, their children and Steiner education.

Roe has a great sense of humour and Stuart provided a great deal of fun & laughter. She loved being surrounded by the banter of David Hatton, Cedric Leathbridge, Evelyn Mason, John Rowan, Anthony Downs & Geoff Craig to name a few culprits.

I am currently teaching the Australian Literature Main Lesson and am following in Roe's footsteps -big shoes to fill!

The Australian memoir "My brilliant Career" by Miles Franklin also has a VHS video to illuminate the story. I remember Roe calling the video shop (back in the day) and asking: do you have "My Brilliant Career?" I think they said "No" , "but we'd like to hear about it".

As it turns out, Roe receiving an Order of Australia in 2008, for her services to Steiner Education, does point to a brilliant career!

Although, they weren't perfect- both had writing that is hard to decipher...

I think permanent framed pictures need to go up on the wall in the café to inform the students that it is not ONLY a place of kind, tender, kind-hearted acts..., but named after two incredible human beings who had all of these qualities.

Although I would like to put in a bid that it become a vegetarian café –very gentle on animals!