**Alan True**

I was in the first group of students, ever to do a music major at Claremont Teachers College. There were about 6 of us. Kent Logie at Curtin University was one of them, so he got an equivalent position to me over there, eventually. From teachers college, I went straight to a teaching position in Collie, at Wilson Park Primary School, which amalgamated with the Collie Primary School, where I went as a child.

The principal decided, that as I was pretty good at music, he had me doing the music for the entire school, from year one through to year seven. I was there for 6 years, so I’ve had a lot of experience taking kids at every age level, for music.

Now, while I was in Collie, my piano teacher was world class. She graduated from the Vienna Conservatoire, before the war. Then, of course, the war destroyed her career and she put me first through the AmusA and then I eventually passed the LMus, which was the highest performance qualification, in music in Australia, at the time. I was pretty well qualified in music.

Then, I was transferred to Perth and I was appointed to Mt Lawley High School, working with Ian Conochie, the fabulous singer. We made a good partnership because we had to take double classes, for instance 8/1 and 8/2 simultaneously and 8/3 and 8/4 simultaneously. The music room was big! I played the piano and sang along and Ian led from the front. We had a choral based program, which was great fun really.

I ran across one of my ex-students from those days, at the Organ Society Annual General Meeting, on Saturday. She said she loved it, and I was so pleased.

The music room at Mt Lawley was on the top floor, at the end of the wing. Alas, the library was underneath and it was anything but a quiet library. From the library, we could see into what was the old pine plantation. There was building activity going on and I wasn’t sure what it was.

After 6 years of Collie and 5 years at Mt Lawley, I really felt as though I needed a change. By the way, I’d started a university degree while at Mt Lawley. I did 2 units in my first year, 2 units in my second year, 2 units in my third year, so I was carving it out reasonably quickly. Then I met a lovely lady. I took time off from university work when we got married in 1969.

In the Gazette, or whatever it was called in those days, there were all those advertisements for a new teachers college, and they needed a music lecturer. It didn’t require me to have a degree, but I did have a Teachers’ Higher Certificate, which was the departmentally based qualification. It was actually the equivalent of a Bachelor of Education, so in effect, I had an Education degree, plus my LMus.

This was very high indeed. There were only 2 other LMus’s in the Education Department, at that time.

We had what we termed the “Stud Book” in those days, the official Education Staff lists for every teacher in the state. I checked them. One of them was a Deputy Principal of a high school in the country somewhere, and I didn’t think he would want to leave that, to come to this lower paying job. Naturally, I applied and I was appointed. One of my closest friends appealed against it, so he had to endure Truck Traylen’s cross-examination. He was brutal! John and I are still very close friends, but he was a high school teacher from beginning to end.

For Mt Lawley, you had to have demonstrated primary teaching experience. That was the clincher. Practical teaching experience got you the job plus written into the qualification was - essential, a performance licentiate in piano.

I thought that’s odd! I’ve got one but that’s the last thing I would require. Anyhow, it turns out that Truck’s wife was on the committee of the Australian Society for Music in Education, where I was secretary. She obviously liked what she saw. I think she heavily advised her husband, who they should get for the job and how to write an advertisement, which would fit them. That happened all the time in the education Department, in those days. Let’s face it. Bob Peter did it; we all did it! So there you go.

It was very interesting, once I got the job to turn up to Bagot Road, totally unprepared to find that the entire staff, shared one room of an old junior primary school. Each one of us had a desk, a bookcase and a chair. Sometimes, we’d steal each other’s stuff, then have to give it back when the owner “complained”. I crossed swords with one of the social science guys, one of the Marshes, because I had trespassed on his area.

it was a hotbed of creativity because we could bounce ideas off each other, because we were all in that confined space together. We didn’t have to agree, but it opened your mind up to what was going to happen. Now in the meantime, I was ringing the Superintendent of Music saying: “what do you expect me to provide for people going out to teach. That was Edgar Nottage. Then I’d talk to other people outside the area and of course from within the Australian Society of Music Education. I was involved there, so I got ideas as well.

The job description said that the recorder was supposed to be a core part of it. I didn’t necessarily agree. I’d taught recorder, but never mind, I did it and I did prove very useful because through playing the recorder you learn to read music. It was my key aim that the basics of music reading, should be there. Of course Kodaly, Suzuki, Orff – they all agreed on this sort of thing. Eventually, fluent reading of music is a must to open the child to further musical expression, otherwise they would be totally limited, in what they could do. So, that’s what we did.

I don’t know how we achieved it because that’s why we had the Order of the Sardonic Sardine, in our special diplomas for foundation staff. We were all jammed in like sardines and quite a few of my classes were actually held outdoors, which was a relief to those who actually loathed the sound of a recorder, being overblown.

Half way through the year, we moved to Mt Lawley. That building, which I’d seen starting to be built, from my music room, up in Mt Lawley High School, the trunk of the main building was there. It had the magnificent purple carpet, combining deliciously, horribly with the red panels outside. It made us all shudder, especially Bryant McDiven, the Head of the Art Department! He couldn’t believe it, but never mind; he wasn’t consulted.

The problem was, where were we to go. My music room was 1.12, at the very end of the corridor, next to where the steps led down to where the lecture theatre rooms were to be built. They weren’t built yet. The room looked south over what would become gardens. The gardens were actually the responsibility of each particular group, under one particular lecturer. My particular group had to plant one of the window boxes, along that wing and we all took part in planting the trees, which has been very carefully planned out by landscape architects from the Public Works Department. They chose the trees. They chose the layout. We put them in place. That’s one reason why the spirit of Mt Lawley was so creative and vital and invigorating because the students and staff all worked together to make it a reality.

The problem was that not a single window opened and they were all tinted a browny colour, so the sun wouldn’t penetrate too much. But heat could: and that’s what we got. Problem – there was no air conditioning, because the air conditioning was a hole in the ground, on the bit of the building that hadn’t been built yet. We had to endure 18 months of no air conditioning. It became a little bit rugged in summer, I’m telling you. That’s why I took a lot of classes outside, as much as possible.

One of the most interesting rooms, built in that section, was the teaching laboratory room, with a carpet of children’s sorts of things. You’d bring a class of small children, and the students of the teachers college behind one-way glass to observe what was going on in that room, with those little kids and their teacher. That was inspirational! I think that was the first in this state, in a tertiary institution. It was purpose built with that in mind. It must still be there.

It was an absolute revelation to go into a system, which Bob Peter had created which was semesterisation. I think we were the first tertiary institution in the country to do that along with our reticulated TVs to every room. Also continuous assessment was an innovation at this level. Now this was a new toy for us. To be quite candid, we over assessed to billy-o. It was ridiculous! Year by year, we chopped it down, chopped it down, chopped it down and the overall result didn’t actually change.

It was good for the ego, that I have done my bit to make sure that my results can be defended, but really the poor students. How the heck did they manage, especially when they had to work part-time jobs. Some couldn’t manage that. We had a 30% attrition rate at one stage – not good. Anyhow, that’s the way it started and we were absolutely ecstatic about this, as it opened our minds to a different form of teaching. Not having to set these classical exams was revelatory. It made us think about our own subjects, much more closely.

As we added staff, the music department gained Jean Farrant after one year, who came from Claremont. Two years later, we got Basil Jayatilaka from Kuala Lumpur, who had a completely different skill set from Jean, who was vocal. I was general. Basil had this glorious composition/dance, you name it background. Two years later we got Cornelius de Munck, who had come straight from the highlands of New Guinea, where he had been on a special teaching project for several years. He had taught with me at Mt Lawley High School, for a while actually. He brought further skills, as he was a consummate guitarist, as well as Australian level singer – bass baritone. He also had extensive face-to-face teaching experience, with a wide range of students from the highlands of  New Guinea down to secondary kids at Mt Lawley High School, down to other schools. That made a nice complementary group.

By this time, I had achieved my Masters degree, and therefore, I was eligible to become a senior lecturer, for which I had to apply and I had to face a selection panel. I had been told that Edgar Nottage the Superintendent for Music, just might apply for the job and I’d have to defend myself against him. That didn’t happen, but the selection panel had representatives from Claremont Teachers College, and Secondary Teachers College. I don’t think Graylands was in existence then.  Anyhow, I got the job.

The following year, Neil Tuckwell went to Canada to do a doctorate. His job was Senior Lecturer Administration, where he was Secretary to the senior staff group, SAGE chaired by Bob Peter, as Director. I was invited to take over that role. I wasn’t quite sure I was the right person for the role but I could be spared from my department. That’s the reason, I think. That was fortuitous because about the second meeting, a letter from the Premier’s Department lobbed on Bob Peter’s desk, revealing that Sir Charles Court’s wish was the establishment of an institution to teach the performing arts, in Western Australia. Not just the conservatorium of music, it had to be broader than that. They were inviting applications from every tertiary institution in the State, to put in a submission.

Bob Peter said oh well, this is a write off, I don’t know if we’ll bother with this. One of the others said: “You can’t have this, we can’t have these people declaiming Shakespeare, under the trees and disturbing our teaching students, who are doing serious education studies”. Max Collins, the new Deputy Director to Bob Peter said: “Oh No! This is a wonderful idea”. Glen Phillips said: “Oh No! This is a wonderful idea”. And I said: “This is a wonderful opportunity”. As Secretary, I breached the rules. ‘This is too good an opportunity to miss! We tick all the boxes.  We were the first institution in Australia to be built with a designated music wing, a dedicated drama wing, a dedicated art wing.”  We were the first. Churchlands copied us. They came later. That’s where it went and it was agreed. We should do this.

My job then was to set up the subcommittees. Jean Farrant was put in charge of the Music Committee. Bryant McDiven, who was on SAGE was in charge of the Art Committee. David Hough, bless his socks, was in charge of the Drama Committee. They then had to report back to me and I had to draw it all together.

Alas I didn’t keep a copy of the submission. I thought one was in the archives. It’s not there!

It came the time. Bob Peter, of course, was going to present it, but who was going to present it with him? Sir Frank Callaway turned up with a bevy of four. Bob said: “I’m only taking one.” Glen wanted to be it. Bryant wanted to be it. But no, it was me. Bob said: “It’s Alan!” I even remember what I wore. Bob was like Ming the inscrutable. We got in there and Dr Dolph Zink was the Chairman of this panel. There was this line of luminaries like Vaughan Hanly, Leader of the WASO, and people like that with him. He was one of our consultants by the way.

We didn’t have time to actually bind our submission into a book, so we just had our 5 booklets, because I said that we’ve got to include jazz. Horror of horrors – jazz! I said: “Look, jazz is a respected discipline in its own right. Of course we have to have jazz. I don’t know of any other institution in Australia, which has it formerly in its program and I want it to be there.” I won that one. There was one on jazz, one on music, drama, art, whatever.

We only had time to do a folder for each one, and put it in an overall folder. We recycled the program folder from the performance of the Beggars Opera, which we’d done a few years earlier, because it was there. We didn’t have to do anything extra. It saved time. We handed these out. I thought I wish I could hide under a rock and die. Then one of the women on the panel said: “This is wonderful! Where did you get this idea from? We can take it apart. We can look at the music. We can look at the drama. We can look at the art. They thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread, so we won.

The way it happened was that Bob would be asked a question and just say: “I will let my assistant here answer that” and it went like that all the darned time. Every time there was something specific to answer, I had to do it. When it came to administration, of course, Bob had to answer it, because that was not my strength. So, we pulled it off. This was 1978. It helped that Jean Farrant was already running a program with the Music Teachers Association, to train suburban music teachers, to a higher level so they could teach better. That was an Associate Diploma, which we’d been running for a couple of years. It was presented as part of the brief. We were informed that was the first course that was to be offered by WAAPA. The name was suggested by Dr Zink himself and we happily agreed.

If anyone says something different, they’re wrong. That’s the right answer. Jean Farrant still remembers that. Her health isn’t that good, but her mind is sharp as a tack.

I then took off for England in September of 1979, and Sybe Jongeling took over as Senior Lecturer Administration. I did my second Masters at London University and came back in September 2000. Bob Peter had retired and was succeeded by Dr Neil Stewart. He called me in and he said: “OK, which job are you going to take? Are you going to take Head of Music in the Academy or are you going to return to your job as Senior Lecturer in charge of Music Education?”

I said: “That is an entirely improper suggestion. Sir Charles Court himself said: “that all jobs for the academy are to be advertised internationally. You cannot go against that and for starters, I don’t see myself in that role. My skill set doesn’t fit that. I opted out of performance. I have an LMus, yes, but for that sort of position, you need more than that. You need a performing profile. You need to have someone who is there doing it day in day out”.

A crucial point in being appointed to any position at Mt Lawley Teachers College, in the initial days, was that you had to be an experienced classroom teacher. That went on for several years. It helped also that we had the Lecturer 2s brought in on secondment, from schools in the Education Department, and I actually used them several times. Every department did and that enriched us, because they came to the college, taught, experienced what was going on and went back out to the schools and enriched the schools. It was beneficial for both sides.

When I retired, in 2001, the Deputy Vice Chancellor was Max Angus and he spoke very nicely about me and then I said: “Thank you very much”. Then it was my turn and I said: “When Mt Lawley started, we were all appointed because we could do what we were meant to do, and that was teach. Jack Bana was appointed because he could teach. I was appointed because I could teach. I went through all these names of people, and they were all in the audience. We could all teach. Alas, that’s no longer the case! We’re getting people appointed because they’ve got academic qualifications.

It absolutely destroyed me, when, at a dear friend’s 70th birthday celebration in Kings Park,  her successor as principal of a northern suburb’s school said that she was having these students on teaching practice and the supervisor came out from the university and came into her office and said: “Look, I don’t really know what I am doing. Could you please give me some idea of what I should be doing?

So this principal said: “What is your position at ECU?” She said: “Oh, I’m doing a Masters. I’ve gone straight from doing my Bachelor of Education and I’m doing my Masters. The only teaching experience I have is ATP and my teaching pracs.”

So, this principal looked up, without blinking an eyelid and said: “OK, the first lesson I want you to look for this, then come back and see me”. So she actually taught her, in a very short time, what to look for and how to assess a student in the classroom.

Now the early staff didn’t need that. Of course we got together with Alan Jones and his marvellous cohort and we blocked out what things were to be looked for. For us it was easy because we’d been there; we’d done it and we had something to hang our hats on. I thought that the Teaching Practice Department at Mt Lawley was an enviable group, because my own experience of teaching practice, when I was at Claremont, was patchy to say the least. It depended on the staff member. Some of the staff members at Claremont were wonderful in the late 50s, but others not so good really. Alan Jones and his crew were younger, vital, energetic and innovative and that’s all I can say about the teaching practice because every single department was expected to take part, because we were all teachers. I was very happy about that.

Every foundation member of the staff was given a diploma. This diploma was really quite magnificent. You had the sub-order of the Sardonic Sardine because we were crammed into the one room in Subiaco, then the sub-order of the Anaerobic Troglodyte, because the new building in Mt Lawley had no airconditioning unit in place yet, and no windows that opened, making for rather a breathless environment. Each of us received a further sub-order and mine was *Subigo Recordum Subitus*, which roughly translates, I believe it is you can shove your recorder, where it does the most good. I’m not good at Latin and I haven’t asked any Latin experts, but anyhow we’ll leave it there.

Our musical achievements at Mt Lawley actually were quite many and varied but I’m most proud of the fact that I managed to get my way on Graduation Ceremonies. I was on the committee for what we were going to do at Graduation Ceremonies. The first two were held on campus, and after that there were then too many graduands to accommodate at one time. They couldn’t possibly fit, so I said: “I want them to be in the Perth Concert Hall. It’s available and it’s much larger.” So, all the teaching students were done on one evening, and all the others were done on the next. I said: “And I’ll play the organ, for free”.

We had to have music in each graduation and this has been established from the very first one, which was held in the courtyard, and the second one, which was held in the refectory, which was newly built. We soon developed a history of having multiple music items interspersed throughout each graduation ceremony. I’m very proud of that, because each of the staff members had a role to play, because they were all good at what they did.

One of the most memorable was done by Jean Farrant, where they got dance students from the Phys Ed Department and the choir from the Music Department doing a series of Negro Spirituals, chosen by Jean and the dancers did free modern dance to each of these. It brought the house down! It was absolutely marvellous! I still remember it vividly, after all this time.

The organ at the Perth Concert Hall was really quite a special instrument, installed in 1974, and I quickly became the organist for all the ceremonies. It eventually eventuated that I would play for several different ceremonies in a given year.

In the late 70's, before amalgamation of all Teachers' Colleges, the Mt Lawley Chancellor was Robert French, the Supreme Court Justice. I was playing the preliminary music before the official procession of Staff, with Cornelius

de Munck as my page turner. I had to time things correctly, and there was a red light on the console to tell me that  "they were ready". As there was time to spare I launched into a perky English Trumpet Tune voluntary - then Cornelius

gasped: "They're coming!" Instead of coming in to a stately processional, the Phys Ed staff who led them in, pranced along to the upbeat tempo of the music. I gritted my teeth, preparing to repeat bits to fill the space, when the last staff member and Mr Justice French slotted into their spaces on stage. I was complimented later for my exquisite timing. Luck was the name of the game.

By the time I was in charge of music, at the Churchlands campus, which is another story, I was playing for 5 ceremonies. I suppose I must have played for 30 or 40 ceremonies between 1975 and the time I retired, in 2001.

My greatest pride was the pivotal role I played in the establishment of WAAPA.  The name Academy of the Performing Arts came from a suggestion of Dr Dolph Zink, the Chair of the Government panel, which allocated this brief to Mt Lawley.

I had quite a few friends, very, very close friends, who worked within the academy but I had absolutely no desire whatsoever to work there. After I retired, I was asked to come in by Pat Crichton, to teach one unit in an emergency. He was Head of Jazz, and was an ex-student of mine. He was still actually a B.Ed student, at Mt Lawley, when he was musician in his own right, before he enrolled.

It was a great problem for me in 1988, I was pigeonholed and told: “We need a Senior Lecturer at Churchlands, because the guy who is filling in for the role isn’t going to get that job permanently because he doesn’t have a Masters Degree. It turned out, he was one of my friends. He immediately took sick leave and retired. He didn’t stay and he went and made a new career elsewhere. So I was precipitously transferred across to Churchlands, where I was out of my element.

All my friendships had been left behind and that was very, very sad for me and I had to sort of build it from scratch. It wasn’t the same experience. It wasn’t the same healthy vive, as you got at Mt Lawley but Dr Doug Jecks, when we amalgamated all those institutions, made it his campaign to destroy what had been created, at Mt Lawley, and boy did he succeed, except WAAPA of course! That blossomed, and blossomed and blossomed.

But in the meantime, I had to build up things in my own image, over at Churchlands, and I suppose in a way I did. My greatest success was in handling the B.Ed conversion people, who’d come in at 4 o’clock, in the afternoon and do specialist music subjects (especially the choral one, for teaching choral music in schools). That was my baby, so that was good.