

John Pannell

Memories of Mount Lawley Teachers College

I joined Mt Lawley Teachers College in its second year of operation as Media Production Officer. That meant that I was to be responsible for the production of learning and teaching material for and with the various teaching departments.

Professional Experience - Pre-Mount Lawley

I had been a Primary School teacher, then a producer of Schools Programmes, radio and television, for the ABC in Perth.

After some time in that role I realised that, my having come straight from teaching into media production, there was a lot that I didn't know that I should have. When I was invited to join a local cine cameraman as his partner, responsible for sound recording, film editing and scripting, I jumped at the chance.

Our main work came from the ABC. The cameramen and sound recordists at the ABC were worked flat out and needed support. *Today Tonight* was produced in WA. We got a lot of work through them. Other Perth ABC departments - Talks, Rural and Education also gave us work. Eastern States produced programmes like *Rural* (Big Country) and *Four Corners* used us too.

Other things we did were a series of little commercials for a local shoe chain, various other Commercials, a Documentary film for WA tourism and occasional odds and sods for other TV Channels

After four years of this work things changed. Work became scarce because the production of ABC Current Affairs Programmes started shifting East. Luckily for me a vacancy occurred in ABC Education and I was invited to fill it. My decision to get more experience outside proved to be fully justified. I was welcomed back by all and sundry and felt very satisfied with my work.

Media Production at Mount Lawley.

About this time Mt Lawley Teachers College was getting underway. Part of the plan was to establish a media production unit able to produce

teaching and learning materials for the College and elsewhere. I applied for the job of Media Production Officer and was appointed.

John Twycross, who has since died, was the man in charge of the installation of the video, audio studio, recording and replay facilities.

My first activity on Campus was to set up the Public Address equipment for the daily Morning Assembly in the carpark. Meanwhile I was ordering equipment for the various foreseen activities like film making including editing, field sound recording and ordering equipment for lending to staff and students. Many a night saw me still working at midnight.

Soon Roger Penny, another former ABC Education Officer, joined us a head of department. Our staff consisted of Roger, me (Educational Media Producer in video, film and audio - studio and outside), John Twycross and Miriam London in charge of replays. There was a technician to look after the maintenance and repair of equipment and a Storeman to lend out equipment to staff and students. We pretty soon added a Graphics Artist/Designer, followed by a Photographer and then a second Graphic Artist. And yes, we were busy.

I needed a secretarial person (Called a Script Assistant) to type scripts make bookings and keep records. A former ABC Scripto joined us.

We bought a high quality 16mm camera with a Nagra sound recorder along with the necessary 16mm sound and editing facilities. This was before digital TV. It enabled us to make high quality documentaries. A documentary about teaching in the outback North West of the State was one result. Many others followed.

So we were up and running and very busy. We added a Lighting Director, fresh from the BBC and a general studio operator (production assistant). Little did we know that we were employing someone who was to become a world leader in his field.

Colin George was his name. His father was Professor of Physics at the University of New South Wales. Colin had grown up in a University College. This turned him into a Hippy. He worked with us for a year or so before deciding that he would join a Hippy Commune in Tasmania. Much to our regret he took off with his lady in their highly decorated V.W. Kombi. It felt like a month or so later he was back (actually about two years) asking for his job back. We were delighted.

Colin and I had many deep and meaningful discussions. One thing that we agreed on was that what mattered in the world of communication was not what you wanted to DO but what you wanted to ACHIEVE. How you tried to achieve that was what you DID.

Colin went on to join Yorkshire TV as their Outside Broadcast Sound Manager. From there he went freelance, working on live sports events, and was part of the Commentary Management team for large events like World Championships and Olympic Games. He worked on the Sydney Olympics and, since then, has trained and supervised Commentary Staff at every Olympic Games, Summer and Winter. He told me that he stresses that it's what you want to achieve that comes first in your planning.

Meanwhile, by and large, things went swimmingly but there were a couple of academic staff who seemed to think that they could just walk into the studio and, at the press of a button, start recording. It took a long time to convince them otherwise - many years in one case - but once convinced that one became a great fan. (Onya Dick!).

After some years Roger Penny went back to the ABC. He became Head of ABC Education in Tasmania. He died several years ago. He was replaced by Mike Grant, fresh from the UK. Mike and I hit it off from the start.

Years went by. I like to think that I, and the team with whom I worked, made a significant contribution to the College and the Teacher Education that it offered.

I worked at Mt Lawley for (about) 14 years before being shifted to Churchlands. When the College became a University there was no longer any place for us.

I retired to live in Falcon, south of Mandurah. With the support of the local TAFE I ran, with great success, a series of Summer School activities in Mandurah and surrounding towns - Pinjarrah, Waroona and Dwellingup. Next, my new wife and I noticed that local artists all worked alone, We started and ran "Peel Community Campus" which, among other things, got local artists together to work on projects such as "The Masks Mandurah"

My proudest moment was when I had tutored Year 6 kids at the local school in writing poetry for a competition run by the local Lions Club. Two of my girls came first and second while another gained an honourable mention. The first two gained entry into the State-wide Bush Poetry

competition in Today where they came first and second in the Under 17 section.

Now 92, I have slowed down a lot. I still write, mainly short pieces about church Feast Days, explaining them for children.

Life is good if you don't weaken.

John Pannell June 2003