

# Melanie Beckman (1995 - 1999)

My name is Melanie Beckman, I was a CHSHS student from 1995 - 1999 and was School Captain in my senior year.

I am a secondary teacher of English and History, and have a Masters in Arts with a focus on Shakespeare and youth engagement.

I enjoyed my time at Centenary as a student and even had the opportunity to work there on some short contracts as a teacher as well.

While the school is now very different to when I was a student, Centenary has always maintained high expectations and has a good reputation.

Below are some memories of the teachers who influenced me during my time at Centenary, with special mention of Anne Rudder, Jeff MacGregor, Ken Murdoch, Brian Jentz and the late Clive Yeabsley.

## **I had many quality teachers during my time at Centenary.**

### **Part 1**

*Sandy and Peter Caldwell and Janelle Duane* were dedicated to the arts and the school musicals. *Sandy Feldman* was our illustrious Interact mentor. *Brian Forbes and Henry Thompson and their wives* accompanied us on the China Study Tour in 1998. The time that these people gave of their own accord to the extra-curricular life of the school was admirable, and certainly now as an educator myself, I appreciate the sacrifice of their own lives that they gave up to help make the high school experience enjoyable for hormonal teenagers.

I may have had a little crush on *Will Curthoys* when he arrived to teach PE with *Ken Jackson*. *Mike Hetherington* still makes us laugh. *Janelle Insley* was my year 8 History teacher and cemented my love of the ancient world. While I still hate Maths, my year 10 class with *Brian Walter* remains as one of the highlights of my high school experience. *Jeff Usher* reminded us of Magnum PI.

*Phillipa MacGregor, Margaret Haberman, Robyn Parslow* and the indomitable *Barbara Pearson* instilled both fear and respect in us, and while they appeared scary to unsuspecting high school students, they were actually strong women who showed us that it was okay to be a force to be reckoned with. And Mrs Pearson's battle against the short sock has gone down in history...

*Anne Watson, Merle Thomas and Deb Beaumont* were lovely women who really cared about their students.

*Tim Ryan* was a great advocate for humanities and was always a bit of a mystery to those of us who weren't involved in the vocational subjects. *Dianne Hillyard* was a well-travelled and knowledgeable History teacher, who was somewhat terrifying, but who nowadays I count as a friend as we share our travel adventure stories!

Each of these people moulded my high school experience in some way, and for that I will always be grateful.

## Part 2

**Most significantly, there are five people who I will forever be indebted to, and they need to know how much I appreciate them.**

*Anne Rudder* (Frau Rudder to us) was my year 8 German teacher and was integral to my love of school and of learning. She was always positive and encouraging and I wanted to do my best to make her proud of me. I still have my year 8 German research project that I made, and it is because of Frau Rudder's excellent tutelage and encouragement that I got my first permanent teaching job, as a year 8 German teacher, despite only having high school German behind me!

I blame *Jeff MacGregor and Ken Murdoch* for making me choose teaching at uni. They were passionate about their subject areas, they spoke to us like we were people, not just kids, and they challenged us to think for ourselves. Murdoch and MacGregor were clever, witty, sarcastic and funny, and showed us that teachers weren't just robots, but people who you could bond with. It was that relationship that made me want to become a teacher, and for that I will both bless and curse them until the day that I die! (I also like to remind them regularly that they are very old because I am now very old, to which Ken pointed out in his acerbic way, that I shouldn't throw stones because when they taught me they were the age that I am now...)

At Centenary Heights it was an honour to be taught by the exceptional *Mr Clive Yeabsley*, the best English teacher I have ever seen, bar none. I can only dream of being even one tiny speck of the quality educator this man was. There was, and will be, no one like this great man, who from his shack in the abandoned foothills of D block, showed me that English was wonderful and full of humour. He is the man who fostered my love of Shakespeare and of English as an art form. He showed us that English wasn't just words on a page, it was performance and poetry and the lifeblood of humanity. It is one of my biggest regrets that I was not able to attend Mr Yeabsley's funeral to pay my respects in a public forum. I like many of my peers, was devastated to hear of his passing. Clive Yeabsley was, and will forever be, the benchmark of a great English teacher, and my life is certainly richer for having known him.

Finally, there is *Mr Brian Jentz*. It is hard to put into words my admiration for this man. As a student, I found him to be fair, generous and kind, and worthy of respect. As a teacher, I wish that more school leaders exhibited the qualities that Mr Jentz modelled during his time as principal at Centenary: humility, humanity and integrity. I believe that he was the last of his kind, a leader who made decisions based on what was best for his school, his staff and his students, rather than a yes man for departmental politics. I believe that Centenary Heights was a great school because Brian Jentz was a great leader, and that his high expectations pushed the rest of us to act accordingly to keep that standard.