



# KENTIAN SOCIETY

SUPPORTING KENT STREET SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

# Newsletter

November 2024

## Story of Country

*[Editor: As part of its commitment to advancing education, heritage and culture, the Kentian Society seeks to identify and interpret the historical significance to the original owners of the land on which the School is located for the wider understanding of the community. The following is reproduced here with the kind permission of its author Jordanna Eades (formerly Rebbeck). Please be aware this story includes images and names of people that may cause sadness or distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.]*

Prior to colonisation, the cultural landscape of what is now the Town of Victoria Park and its surrounds were maintained through a complex system of community and Lore that aligned with the six seasons. For at least the last 38,000 years, Whadjuk people cultivated cultural landscapes in alignment with local climate and weather patterns. The swales of this area [*a swale is a low, wet depression*] held a mosaic of seasonal creek lines and swamps that crisscrossed between the Swan and Canning Rivers.

The banks of the rivers had muddy soils with open jarrah forest and native grasses growing thickly in the floodplains, maintained through cultural burning to discourage overgrowth and enabled easy travel, open sites for camping, and plenty of herbage and open areas for hunting and gathering by Whadjuk people. Further inland, a dense banksia woodland grew on the dune and swale system of the ancient Bassendean Sands.

These two endemic cultural landscapes have changed dramatically as a result of colonisation.

At the point of colonial contact, these cultural landscapes were managed by and in the custodianship of the kin of well-known Whadjuk woman Fanny Balbuk [*in 2022, her memorial statue was erected in front of WA's Government House*], as well as several other Whadjuk leaders including Balbuk's uncles Beenan, Yoorgan, and Kareen; Dygan (Kareen's daughter); Windan and Ngalgoonga.

Their land extends from the Canning River on the western edges of present-day South Perth through to the Town of Victoria Park, north-eastward towards Heirisson Island and the Burswood Peninsula, southward towards the Canning River, and extending southeast towards Welshpool.

**WELCOME** to your **Kentian Society e-Newsletter**, offering two-way communication with all interested members, families and friends.

We hope you find it both interesting and informative.

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These Whadjuk families identified as a mixture of Ballarok and Nagarnook skin groups, which tied into the complex kinship moieties that empowered family members as custodians across their cultural landscapes.

Travelling southeast from Perth, when crossing the Swan River and heading towards Mindeera Springs [*located on the corner of where Oswald and Hordern Streets are now situated in Victoria Park*], one would have come across the mud flats of present-day Heirisson Island. Before the dredging and reclamation of the Swan River, a group of several islands in the middle of the river could be reached by walking in knee-deep mud at *Matta Gerup* [*a shallow crossing point where the Causeway is now located*].



Fanny Balbuk Yooreel (1840 to 1907)

**Source:** State Library of Western Australia 253420PD

The islands of these mud flats are sacred sites, with their oyster shell beds left behind as part of the Waugyl's creation journey from the hills through to the mudflats, where he was caught and shook off scales, now seen as oyster shells. These islands, Yoonderup, Kakaroomup, and Goonagar, were encircled by reeds. Kakaroomup island was the birthing site of Fanny Balbuk's mother.

Located just south of the Heirisson Island crossing point in the Swan River, the freshwater Mindeera Springs connected Whadjuk trails north and south of the river to camping sites, birthing sites, and burial sites. This crossroads was a meeting place and neutral ground providing safe passage for families travelling through.

Northeast from Mindeera Springs, the present-day Burswood Peninsula was a popular area for camping sites and a Whadjuk well with fresh spring water. It was also the Country of Windan, a prominent female leader of the Mooro people, and the mother of the leader Yellagonga. Windan's burial, as well as other Whadjuk people's burials, are still within this peninsula today.

Further south and inland towards East Victoria Park and away from the Swan and Canning Rivers, the cultural landscape transitioned towards a dense Banksia woodland atop the yellow grey Bassendean Sands.

This Banksia woodlands included balga, paperbark, and coarse native grasses with occasional jarrah and marri trees.

As wetter Noongar seasons encroached, the Ballarok and Nagarnook Whadjuk people would begin moving away from the riverbanks to avoid being flooded, and travel further inland. Whadjuk people camped on top of sandy hills, nearby the winter swamps that ran through present-day Welshpool, Cannington, Victoria Park, and South Perth.

These swamps had plenty of food for gathering, fishing, and hunting and were popular camping sites. In the drier seasons, they would travel back towards the rivers and camp along the floodplain, as the inland banksia woodlands were relatively dry.

The cultural landscape at the point of contact in the Perth area looked like an English parkland to the colonists, and they set about applying the values, methods, and constructs from home.



An example of endemic herbage (*Centella asiatica*) that historically would have been found near winter swamps in the Town of Victoria Park

**Photo:** Wiki Commons

The new settlers ringbarked and killed old jarrah and marri trees, cleared thick banksia woodlands, and introduced livestock which wiped out endemic grasses and herbage. The colonists took the most fertile areas along the Swan and Canning Rivers for themselves, locking Whadjuk people out of their own Country.

Given the obligations to care for and share resources from Country, it should come as little surprise to the reader that resource hoarding goes against Whadjuk Lore.

As pastoralists took over ever increasing amounts of land, creating orchards, running their livestock onto kangaroo paddocks, and continuously drawing up new lots and boundaries, an unequal friction was created with Whadjuk people whose ecological and cultural values were being violated.

“These swamps had plenty of food for gathering, fishing, and hunting and were popular camping sites.”

Whadjuk people made repeated attempts to help colonists understand and appreciate their Lore and culture and there are several reported instances where corrections and reparations were sought.

When viewed through the lens of unmet basic human needs due to colonists not following their Lore, Whadjuk “attacks” on colonists, such as spearing livestock and taking their potatoes, were adaptive ways of surviving in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Unfortunately, from the colonial perspective, these attempts were viewed as attacks on the colonists and colony, leading to retaliations and a continuing cycle of violence.

Within fifty years, much of the banksia woodland in Victoria Park and Welshpool had been cleared to sell subdivided lots to new settlers. By 1899, many of the residents south of East Victoria Park, along the Canning River, were involved in market gardening, illustrating the fertility of the area.

“Whadjuk people  
had no immunity  
to European  
diseases.”

Whadjuk family groups along the Canning River would have struggled to access their usual pathways and foods.

Moreover, the effects that the European diseases of smallpox, influenza, measles, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases had on Whadjuk people, who had no immunity to these diseases, were devastating.

Smallpox, Australia’s first pandemic, deeply affected Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as survivors were often left without community leaders or family.

A persistent theme of this research is the sustained cultural resilience and agency of Whadjuk people in the face of dispossession of land, water, and sovereign rights. Colonial violence, starvation, epidemics, and increased restrictions were constants from the 1830s. Each of these had serious implications for sacred and profane practices, including camping, birthing, hunting, gathering, fishing, ceremony, trade, and burials.

Despite the devastating impacts of colonisation in and since the nineteenth century, Whadjuk people still follow their Lore, with Elders and leaders advocating for the protection of sacred sites, the value of fresh water, and the rehabilitation of endemic cultural landscapes over many decades.

**[Editor:** *The story above comprises extracts from a Short Report for Wadjuk People and the Town of Victoria Park by Jordanna Eades (formerly Rebbeck), with editorial assistance from Dirima Cuthbert and Joe Dortch. The report helped inform the current Reconciliation Action Plan launched by the Town earlier this year.*

*A copy of the full report (which is supported by extensive detailed historical references) has been donated to the Society by Ms Eades and is available to read in our Archives.*

*Members wishing to see it should first contact the Archives, to arrange a suitable time to do so, by sending an email to [archives@kentians.org.au](mailto:archives@kentians.org.au)*

## A Life Of Ups And Downs

*Kent Street SHS. February, 1960. A sports teacher calls her class to order.*

“Right, girls. Let’s have you all sitting down over here, please.”

Hearing the no-nonsense tone in the voice of this track-suited woman, who looks at least as old as most of their mothers, the young girls quickly comply. Of course, students often struggle to estimate accurately the ages of adults. Their teacher is in fact only 36 years old, although this is her first day of teaching at Kent Street.

She’s been appointed as a temporary teacher (or “Mistress on Supply”) to help the school cope with its rapidly growing enrolments as the first students of the baby-boomer generation, born after the end of World War II, reaches adolescence.

The last time she was working in a Perth metropolitan school was almost 20 years earlier, in 1942, when she was still a teenager called Mollie Perkins and boarding away from her home town of Kalgoorlie for the first time. She’d just been appointed as a Monitor on Probation at Perth Central Girls school on top of the hill near the WACA in East Perth.



Old Perth Central Girls School 1930s

Early that year, when the threat of the Japanese invasion hung over Western Australia, trenches were hastily cut in the lawns and hockey fields, and innumerable sand bags were stacked in front of the imposing school undercroft.

However, as the situation grew worse, the authorities decided that, owing to the vulnerable position of the school, it would be wiser to disperse the classes throughout the metropolitan area. Consequently, walls were cleared of pictures, desks were removed, books and expensive apparatus were packed, and preparations were made for a widespread migration of the students to nine different schools.

At first it was decided to use the school as a military hospital, but owing to certain structural disabilities, the plan was abandoned. Happily the period of exile lasted only until the end of 1942. However, Mollie then had to leave to start at Claremont Teachers' College the following year.

After completing her teacher training, Mollie taught at a couple of rural secondary schools, first at Mount Barker for a year and then three more years at Katanning. She was later described as being a "very valued and excellent sports mistress and physical training instructress" as well as being "of great assistance in the scholastic sphere."

Being young and energetic, Mollie played in the town sports competitions and also became very active in the productions of the local dramatic society, while also studying at night to finish her university degree. She may have tried to do too much at this time as she later applied for unpaid study leave for all of the last school term of 1947 in order to prepare for her final university exams (which she completed successfully).

However, rather than returning to Katanning the following year, Mollie travelled instead to Kalgoorlie to spend her holidays at home with her parents.

She then left on the Trans Australian train for the Eastern States to take up a teaching position at the New England Girls School, an independent Anglican boarding college in Armidale, New South Wales.



The boarding house in Scottsdale Tasmania where Mollie lived in 1951.

**Photo:** <https://www.anabelsofscottsdale.com.au/>

She later moved again to work for the Tasmanian Education Department and, in 1951, was appointed to the high school at Scottsdale, the largest town between Launceston and the State's north-east coast.

While working there, she noticed a young man called Leon who kept visiting the rather magnificent house (built in 1895) where she was boarding. He was the son of her landlady and was working as a fisherman at a nearby coastal town called Bridport. By the beginning of the following year Mollie and Leon Dinham were engaged, married six months later, and welcomed their first child just over a year after that.

They settled in Bridport in a substantial “holiday home” owned by Leon’s parents. It was called *Shalimar* (after the Shalimar Gardens in India of the same Mughal emperor who built the Taj Mahal).

Over the next several years, Mollie continued to work part-time as a teacher, particularly with the Adult Education scheme where she promoted the development of community drama groups in her local area. Meanwhile, following the unexpected death of his father in 1953, Leon increasingly took on the task of managing the many Dinham family shops in Scottsdale, including a produce store, a grocery and drapery store, and a hardware store.

Later in the decade, the couple decided to move to Western Australia where Leon hoped to pursue work as a business manager. Initially, they lived for a time in Albany but soon moved to Perth where they built a house at Mount Pleasant near Applecross. This was to be Mollie’s home for many years to come.

And she soon found herself working as a sports teacher at Kent Street SHS.

When **Mollie Dinham, teacher 1960-66** started at Kent Street, she found it had a reputation as the ‘Netball School’, as the girls did little else in their sports classes. With her knowledge and experience from working in schools in the Eastern States, she set out to create a broad Physical Education program for the 600 female students.

Starting off with little equipment initially, over the next seven years Mollie expanded the girls’ Physical Education program into both Sports (hockey, softball, cricket and basketball) as well as Gymnastics and Dance. In her first year at the school, for instance, she persuaded the Head of Sports (Marsh Walker) and a young teacher (Ken Armstrong) to build her a Swedish Beam for Gymnastics.

She also choreographed dance and rhythmic displays. The Scout Hall across the road from the school was used for dance practice and on several occasions the dance classes performed at His Majesty’s Theatre for Rotary Club functions, while at the school they put on performances with Miss Irmgard Schroder’s choir.

“The Scout Hall  
was used for  
dance practice.”

By the end of Mollie’s first spell at Kent Street in 1966, the school was fielding teams for 21 competitions for girls, had introduced Saturday morning hockey for the lower school, had presented over 100 girls per year for the Royal Surf Live Saving Society awards up to Silver Medallion, and had also become the school to beat in hockey, softball and netball, athletics and swimming.

Upper school girls were expected to umpire and referee at both contributory primary schools and lower school competitions, and some girls went on to take umpire’s exams.

The school also produced State Schoolgirl champions in hurdling and field events, and a total of seven girls were selected for the inaugural State Schoolgirls hockey team.

During the course of this huge expansion of the Physical Education curriculum, Mollie Dinham also had twelve periods of classroom teaching per week in English, Health Education and Physiology & Hygiene.

In addition she became a member of both the Physical Education and Health Education Curriculum Committees for the State and was also often called upon to give demonstration lessons in Gymnastics and Dance for the Secondary Teachers' College.

However, while all of this was happening on the work front, things were not so rosy in Mollie's personal life. Leon's relationship with her broke down during this period, and they eventually decided to separate.

He moved out of the family home, but continued to reside (at least initially) in the general area of South Perth and Como.

Meanwhile, Mollie took further steps to advance her career in education.

**[Editor:** *This is the first section of a two-part extended story about Mollie Dinham researched and prepared by Archives volunteer **Paul de Laeter, student 1960-62.***

*The next section, dealing with Mollie's return to Kent Street as a school administrator, will be published in the next edition of our Newsletter.]*

## Your Say

*Readers appreciate the news brought to us by members, and often are important for inclusion in Archives records and displays, allowing us to honour the history and share the heritage of Kent Street Senior High School.*

*Your contributions should be sent directly to [society@kentians.org.au](mailto:society@kentians.org.au)*

**From: Jan Pope**

**Subject: Photos of Diane Howard, student 1963-65**

I am enquiring to see if anyone might remember a former student Diane Howard who lived in Birdwood Avenue, Como in the 1950s-60s.

She was killed in a motor vehicle crash in 1974, a life so sadly cut short.

Diane had an older brother Robert who recently passed away and I am their cousin.

As Robert never married, there was no other family to pass things on to and I have a box of photo albums of Diane's which include photos of Diane and her friends in their late teen and early twenties years.

If anyone from the 'catchment area' for Kent Street High School remembers Diane, I would be so pleased to hear from you - there may be some photos that could be special to you and I would happily forward them on. Thank you.

**[Editor:** *Anyone wishing to contact Jan regarding her photos of Diane Howard can email us at [society@kentians.org.au](mailto:society@kentians.org.au) and we'll forward your messages to her]*



**From: "Paul" (a former student who wishes to remain anonymous)**

**Subject: The People I Remember**

***Editor:** The following is reprinted from a post made on the Kent Street SHS Alumni Facebook page several years ago. It generated many memories for readers at the time, and is being reprinted here with the permission of 'Paul' in order to reach a wider audience*

I decided to make a list of the names of students and teachers I can remember, and included some personal impressions of persons. Some of the people I've named didn't belong to my year or class. I'm sure I've made errors, so please allow me some latitude.

### Students

(I put one question mark after a name when I was a little unsure of its correctness, and two when I was even more uncertain).

Wendy Ahern?	Bob Allen (noticed girls)
Barry Bamford (serious and reliable - cadets - played guitar)	Henri Besancon
Gavin Bromley (a bit of a clown)	Barry Cain
Diann Chatfield (very sensible - from a country area I think)	Graeme Dalton (the younger brother - cheerful)
Rodney Dalton (the older brother - more serious and thoughtful - explained to me why 2+2 does not always equal 4)	Norman Davis (reliable, steadfast)
Marjorie Draper??	Eric Facey? (heart condition? - restricted to swimming for sport?)
David Geddes?	Gary Gooch (liked cricket?)
Graham Harler (a very social person)	Bill Harris (a nuisance sometimes)
Kerry Hawley (thorough and careful in all he did)	Ian Hunt (new to the school in 1956 - won the mile race by a large margin that year)
Stan Kailis? (one could not help but notice him)	Eva Kampe (very decided and selective - always had good companions)
Garth Kelso (slightly rough, but a remarkably kind person)	Fred Kersley (nicknamed opium - had the best bicycle)
Don Lyall (father something to do with the zoo?)	Marius Mulder (died in 1955 - a very sad occasion - Miss Mitchell cried)
Peter Pavlovic (an eye for the girls - too many genes in his jeans?)	Graham Ricketts (liked things electrical)
Garry Slater (quiet)	Barbara Spargo
Dennis Spargo	David Spitteler (very honest)

Pearu Terts (liked things electrical)	John Vigus (quiet and thoughtful) (I think his younger sister also attended the school?)
Beverley Watson?? (attractive - nice hair - followed me around the school one lunchtime - I should have let her catch up with me?)	Kevin White? (small but very observant)
Russell....?? (small, serious, likely to go into banking?)	Stephanie...?? (tallish, slim, dark haired, no-nonsense)

There was also a boy who came about 1955 I think, who was keen on all things related to newspapers. He probably became a reporter or editor. I cannot remember his name at all.

There were many others I can picture, but full names won't come to mind.

### Teachers Names I Remember

Mr Bremner (cadets)	Miss Browne (taught English - liked Shakespeare)
Miss Clarke	Mr Colgan (nasty - used words as a weapon to demean students)
Mr DeGaris	Mr Gannon (never looked well)
Mr Gough?? (a kind man)	Mr Heinrichs (abrasive and unsettling)
Mr Lang (widower) (Science) (pleasant)	Mr Lawn (Science) (likable)
Miss McCaul	Mr McClure (far too self-centred - had a Morris-Minor car - taught us about the 'sausage-machine')
Mr McGrath (Headmaster - focussed but narrow minded)	Miss Mitchell (An amazing teacher! I am indebted to her for her guidance)
Mr Rutherford (Science - daring with experiments)	Mr Samuels (Maths)
Mr Sawle (new teacher - brilliant - liked cricket)	Miss Tamblyn
Mr Veitch	There were also two teachers who were sisters? They taught girls classes only I think. I can't remember their names.

There was a teacher (a lady) who taught Biology. Her name won't come to mind either.

One of the Maths teachers showed us how to prove (algebraically) that  $2 = 1$ . I remember how it was done, but I'm not sure which teacher taught it to us.

Mr Suggett was the 'Caretaker/Groundsman'. He lived in a house on the school grounds near the Kent Street boundary. We (unkindly) referred to him as 'Old Suggett and See'. He made a bit of a din with his ride-on mower sometimes.

Occasionally, he disturbed students at lunch on the school lawns. I often wonder now if he 'pushed boundaries' to get attention? Or perhaps to feel closer to, and more involved with, school life? He might have had unfulfilled dreams lurking in his past?

There were two school shops: one in Berwick Street and one in Kent Street. The first had the better 'butterfly cakes', pies, and pasties (until they changed supplier), whereas the Kent Street shop had the better vanilla slices, cinnamon buns, and 'ice-blocks'.

Coca Cola was sold to students at lunchtime just inside the northern entrance to the (original) main building (the boys locker room was close to that entrance). It was sold on behalf of the school, which used the profit for 'amenities'? Two 'volunteers' manned the 'mobile refrigerated unit' they had, which was supplied by the Coca Cola Company.

Girls attended 'Domestic Science' in the northern part of the long north-south building just east of the main building. Woodworking and Technical Drawing took place in the southern part of the same building.

The verandahs along the inside of the main school building had spiders and cobwebs in the rafters. Verandah floors were wooden, with seats against the wall.

The Library was in the south-eastern corner of the main building. The Biology lab was in the north-eastern corner? There was a water-fountain for drinking, centrally located in the 'quadrangle' enclosed by the main building.

Sports areas were south of the school buildings. Games were sometimes played at Fraser Park, south of the school. There were a lot of pine trees along the school boundaries.

I see the 'temporary' classrooms, built down on the 'lower level' of the school grounds, being referred to as 'demountables'. In my day, we called them 'prefabs', and I have seen only one reference to that name in the [Facebook] posts. Classrooms at Cargill Street School were used for some of the (first year?) students.

We used mostly 'Quink' or 'Swan' ink in our 'fountain' pens.

Books we used were Hall and Stevens for Geometry. Visualised Chemistry and also Physics? (by Lemkin) for science classes. Geography had a big 'squarish' book, hardcover, about an inch thick, green.

There were books for other subjects too, but my memory is a bit vague on those. Except that in 'English' classes we studied Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, and John Buchan's Greenmantle. Well, at least the other kids probably studied them. This is one area where Miss Browne and I clashed quietly.

*[Editor: "Paul" readily admits his school memories (going back almost 70 years!) may be faulty at times - if you can correct anything he has written here, or simply wish to add memories of your own, please email us at [society@kentians.org.au](mailto:society@kentians.org.au) and we'll publish your responses in our next newsletter]*

**From: Cheryl (McAllister) Spiers, student 1959-63**  
**Subject: The Palm Trees Are A Lot Taller Now!**

This photo is from my last day at school at Kent Street.



Cheryl McAllister, Robert Tarasenko, and Brenda Powell  
**Photo:** Cheryl (McAllister) Spiers

**From: Chris Smith OAM JP, student 1962-64**  
**Subject: Looking To Reconnect With Former Classmates**

I attended KSSHS 62-64 or thereabouts. My first year was at Victoria Park Primary School at an annexe there for KSSHS. I lived in Hovea Terrace, South Perth.

The only thing I did of note was to go with the KSSHS soccer team to Albany to play soccer. Unfortunately we didn't fare well. That's my claim to fame.

**Editor:** *Chris is a former senior constable in the WA Police Force. He was retired from the force in the mid-1980s, aged 35, after receiving head injuries when bashed in Mt Lawley. If you'd like to reconnect with Chris, please email us at [society@kentians.org.au](mailto:society@kentians.org.au) and we'll forward your messages to him.*

## Address To Graduates

*[Editor: This year, the keynote address at the Kent Street SHS Year 12 Presentation Evening was delivered by Kentian **Steve Dobson, student 1994-98**. The following is an edited summary of his speech.]*

In 1998, I was like you, eagerly awaiting the graduation ceremony to end, so I could attend the after-party, so I'll do my best to keep the speech concise.

I remember the excitement of receiving a phone call from Kevin Bennett with confirmation that I'd been accepted into the Kent Street Aviation course. Travelling from the outer metro area (like so many from this school have done and continue to do) was a daunting prospect. Twelve-years-old and catching multiple buses from Jandakot to Victoria Park.

I have many memories from catching the morning bus. One day a two-metre tall absolute giant got on the bus, sat next to me and started to speak in broken English. We hit it off and have been mates ever since.

A migrant from Slovakia escaping civil unrest, he studied and worked hard, attended the WA School of Mines and is now an engineering supervisor with Rio Tinto. I love his story, as it is what makes Kent Street awesome: the multicultural school that has continued to produce leaders.

With the pool open for most lunch breaks in summer, an oval for every sport and an air-conditioned theatre in the Aviation building, Kent Street always had great facilities for a state school that was punching out of its weight class.

The school also had a police officer based in the upper quad. School policing was common in the '90's and had a lasting impact on me in terms of how policing in the community can be positive and help change perceptions.

High school had its ups and downs, as it does for most teens, but one of the constant ups during those years at Kent Street was support from teachers. A few of the teachers that left an exceptional memory included Mr. Martin from the sports area, a South Freo supporter that only ever wore shorts and enjoyed wagering with me on East Freo Derbies.

Mr. Pascoe got me hooked on Economics, Mrs. Brophy's genuine care for the year group, and Mr. Lawson the Head of HASS who probably didn't realise it at the time but left a lasting mark with parting comments and advice, not just on the subjects, but on how to conduct yourself as a student and post-school.

After I struggled on an Economics test, Mr. Lawson gave me some solid advice that I use to this day. He said be the best at whatever you attempt. You don't want to take your car to a mechanic who doesn't know what they're doing, any more than being operated on by an ignorant brain surgeon. If you enjoy a task or subject, take it on and give your best, the results will show, your peers will respect you and you'll earn a good living.

Not listening to Mr. Lawson's advice about applying myself, I got 50.7% in TEE (now ATAR) Maths, which was a required subject for entry into Economics at UWA. The realisation of Mr. Lawson's advice then caught up with me. The transition to tertiary study is a tough one. I liked the distraction of a uni tavern and meeting new mates.

However, I was struggling and didn't enjoy studying. Remember: look after yourself, it is OK to fail. Your story will not stop there.

After school I'd made the decision to join the Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade. At the second meeting I attended, the captain asked if I could use a computer and send emails. I confirmed yes, and then he advised me I was the new Secretary. No vote, just "welcome to the role champ". This was a sliding door moment. So many positive impacts from that event helped me understand the value of community organisations and started my commitment to volunteering.

After eighteen months of uni, I realised that study was a battle. I was keen to work and harboured a desire to become a police officer. After a failed first try, the second time I was accepted into the WA Police Force, a career that had a lasting positive impact in many elements of my life. At the time, truth be told, I was excited there was a job that would pay me to drive V8s. How far from reality that was.

**"I was excited  
there was a  
job that would  
pay me to  
drive V8s."**

Once I was in recruit training, I quickly realised that the role of a police officer was diverse, almost every day was exciting, and the camaraderie of the force was outstanding. One of my instructors at the Academy was previously based at Kent Street as the school police officer. He didn't give me any free kicks and enjoyed a bit of payback on the 10km runs.

A few months after graduating, I transferred to Kalgoorlie, a tough mining town with a reputation that matched. After three years in the town, it was time to transfer, so I was nominated for the Covert Operations Unit. As I still looked like a skinny teenager instead of a seasoned unfit cop, I was recruited and tasked as a Surveillance Operative. In that role, I followed murderers, drug dealers, bank robbers, terror suspects, and all sorts of undesirables.

Late one afternoon, I walked into a deli for a sugar stop and, on a totally unrelated errand, helped spot a drug squad target that was in hiding and definitely not meant to be visiting a corner deli. As a result of my sweet tooth, he and his crew were identified, and then arrested with the largest meth haul in WA history at the time. Receiving a commendation for buying a bag of lollies remains a career highlight.

While working at this same unit, my first son was born and I realised then I was in a high-risk area of policing, and I wanted to have my weekends and nights back.

Whilst working in the bush, I'd had a burning desire to complete the uni study that I hadn't finished. So, I transferred credit from my earlier study to complete a Bachelor of Business from RMIT in Victoria over distance education.

In August 2008, I left policing and moved into financial planning. A few months later, the Global Financial Crisis hit, and I went from being abused by criminals, to being abused by investors. A tough landing, but it was valuable.

My communication skills developed in policing helped me through that career transition. On the birth of my second son, I enrolled in an MBA with Murdoch Uni.

With maturity and life experience, the return to study was a breeze in comparison with my first year out of school.

I mentioned earlier the impact that taking on a leadership role in a bush fire brigade had. The butterfly effect of that brought many positive opportunities, including moving into corporate governance roles on boards and committees (often at an age much younger than those who would normally be considered).

For instance, I'm now a life member of the Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade, WA Police Football Club and Bullcreek Leeming Junior Football Club. I was appointed by the Small Business Minister as a 31-year-old Board Member of the Small Business Development Corporation, and six years later was appointed Chairman (at the time the youngest WA Government board chair).

In 2020, I joined the Gaming and Wagering Commission, a role that was intense and included a witness appearance at the Perth Casino Royal Commission. In 2022, I was appointed by the Assistant Treasurer of Australia to the Tax Practitioners Board, the body that regulates the conduct of tax agents such as Accountants. This also included my involvement in the PwC tax scandal cases that have seen seismic changes in the way the Government engages consultants. In December this year, I start a term with the Senate of Murdoch University.

I am extremely proud of my time at Kent Street High School. I didn't realise it at the time when I was seated where you are, but maturity and time are great at creating perspective. Take the opportunities when they present. Engage with the community and volunteer your time to causes that you believe in. It may not feel like much at the time, but it can lead to great learnings. Had I not stepped up to volunteer with the fire brigade, I doubt the same opportunities, successes and even failures, would have presented themselves.

Be prepared to receive hostile feedback, you don't have to like what you are being told but take it on board. You will make mistakes, that is certain. Some will be harder to recover from, resilience is an easy throw-away line. Resilience is bred through adversity and planning your way back from the bottom.

Life is not a straight-line journey. You will face continual challenges, setbacks, disappointments and heartbreaks. Your ability to pivot, and take learnings from the tough times, will make you appreciate the good times so much more.

Post-school, remember to check in on your mates. Ask the tough questions, make them uncomfortable, as awkward questions are important. In doing so, you might just change one of your mates' worst days.

Be proud of your achievements at getting through secondary school. Whatever your next steps are, be it study, work, or travel, know that the alumni of Kent Street are an amazing group, and I have no doubt that the class of 2024 will continue to keep that tradition. Hopefully my speech has resonated with you in some way. If one sentence from this address stays with you, that is enough. Enjoy the ride, it moves fast. Thank you.

*[Editor: There are many ways you can volunteer, from supporting the planning of a class reunion, sharing your story and talents at alumni events, mentoring a student or becoming an alumni leader. Further information can be found on our website [www.kentians.org.au](http://www.kentians.org.au)]*

## Society Membership

*New Society Members and renewals since 1 February 2024:*

Bev Adam (Smith), student 1953-56  
Beverley Booth, teacher-librarian 1992-2018  
Lloyd Blake, student 1957-60  
Steve Dobson, student 1994-98  
Stephen Cohen, student 1971-75  
Alun Dufty, student 1954-59  
Marg Fox (Jarvis), student 1956-57  
Warren Grellier, teacher 1973-76  
Jim Langford, student 1957-61  
Hailey McArthur, student 2021-23  
Jude Quinn, student 2020-23

Have **YOU** completed your **MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / UPDATE?**

**Forms** are available on our website [www.kentians.org.au](http://www.kentians.org.au)

Your membership contributions help us to keep you connected, build new connections, promote reunions, and preserve your memories in our archives.

**Don't risk YOUR membership falling into arrears.** A review of our membership register is currently underway, so if you want to remain a financial Society Member please make sure to update your details (including your email address) on our new Update Form and pay your membership contribution into the bank account specified on the form.

**Don't delay - do it today.**