

Warwick Gibbs:

Here we are at last. The Gibbs Room. At least you haven't had to add the words 'In memoriam' to the plaque.

To be honoured in this way is quite special. The only place named after me is the L-block toilets and that was a joke played on me by Helen Selaries. There is now a more permanent plaque there given to me by one of last year's Year 13 students. When Mr Drumm raised the naming of this room after me, I was blown away. And what a great room! Much better than the L Block toilets.

Perhaps a bit about me: I come from another world, the past. For some of you, the distant past. My father was born the year before Hitler. Born in Studley, England, he went in 1897 to London to see Queen Victoria on her Diamond Jubilee. I was brought up by aging parents and I think that has made me somewhat old-fashioned.

So why stay for 50 years? Many students have asked why I'm not a principal, as if longevity was the main requirement. During my time there have been various pathways: one previous principal came from lecturing at university, that was Mr Hall; another from the inspectorate, that was Mr Taylor; another was headhunted, that was Mr Burden. When lecturing at university I was far too young; when working with the inspectorate, I disliked being stuck in an office in Gillies Ave (my successor became principal of Palmerston North Girls' High). In 2006, there was even a pupil-inspired Facebook petition for me to be principal and Mr Burden noted this in his end-of-year Leavers' Dinner speech. Pupil-power is certainly no pathway. I have never applied for such a job. I enjoy teaching far too much. Which is why I don't have a CV or a Master of Educational Administration, which is the current pathway.

I applied for my job here on a Ministry form E/22/20 with a covering letter. In my 1971 teachers' college group I was the last to get a job

(mid-December). I began as a junior French and English teacher. One of my classes was 3A, another was 3Commercial whose form-teacher was Dave Harrop, Mr. Drumm's uncle. That class contained both future lawyers and some I used to detain after school. Later some of these were also detained by Her Majesty.

I'll mention two things that happened in that first year which help explain why I stayed.

Firstly, quite a few of that 3A class asked whether they could learn German. At the time, German existed only in years 12 and 13. I said it was only possible after school and so I agreed to teach interested students in my HOD's room. To my surprise, 20-30 turned up and not just in 3A. This went on throughout the winter term. On one occasion, at about 4pm, Mr Hall looked in and asked if I was running a class detention. I explained the situation. Two months later, he asked me if I could introduce German to Year 9 in 1973. I jumped at the chance to be in charge of a subject, and I have been identified with German ever since. My HOD thought it was an anti-Latin plot, but nothing could have been further from the truth: if Mr. Hall hadn't walked past when he did, we would have had no junior German.

Secondly, my birthday was at the end of June and 3A and 3AFrench knew about it because the mother of some students had taught me at Grey Lynn Primary when I was five and she had told them the date. On that day, 3A decided on a celebration. I taught them in B8 (now B10), my HOD's room. The class was on a high and Alan Williams had brought a self-baked chocolate cake with Tom Thumb crackers for candles. The call went up to light the cake!! Well, I was young and irresponsible: but I thought I could light just one cracker and throw it on the floor. Which I did. Except, my HOD, who was listening outside the door to the noise inside, chose that moment to enter. Was my career about to end with a bang? There was a sharp intake of breath from the class, which may have starved the cracker

of its necessary oxygen, for it fizzed at his feet. He didn't notice while saying "Settle down, 3A". My HOD felt I was far too friendly.

I owe Mr Hall a profound debt because he gave me the opportunity to teach German in my second year, made me deputy HOD languages in my fifth year and HOD five years after that.

I stayed HOD for 30 years during which time we also introduced Te Reo, Chinese and Japanese. In addition, he appointed me Dean of Year 9 in 1986 and I followed this group through to Year 13 in 1990, (the first to do so).

Mr. Taylor wanted me to stay as the Senior Dean, which I did until 2003 when I told him I didn't really want to keep hunting down truants and miscreants. He came back to me with a new offer: to be Academic Dean and have the task of being someone who was, across the school, acting in the interests of the top-stream students. I owe Greg Taylor a debt in creating what was quite an unusual position in a school at the time. As he said, those with problems get attended to by Deans and Guidance, no-one specifically looks after the top academic kids.

When Dale Burden arrived, he merged that position into the Academic Institute, with Jo Williams being responsible for the girls. Dale and Pat simply left me to do my job and that has continued to the present. Dale made a point of visiting me a couple of weeks ago to congratulate me. He also wrote into my contract that I should take the top stream Year 9 boys' class as form-teacher and that was the case for ten years.

What has changed over the last 50 years? I would say the biggest difference is the size of the school and the introduction of girls. When I first came, the roll was about 1000, everyone could fit in the Hall for assemblies and there was a sense of being part of the whole. Juniors and seniors all together. Staff could all fit in the staffroom and you knew everyone else. Now we are over 3000 and growing, assemblies are separate for each year level, department staffrooms have replaced the main staffroom and I can walk through the

quadrangle, only occasionally seeing someone I know, either student or teacher. “Hi, Mr Gibbs”, I’ll hear from a face I don’t know. “Do I know you?”. “Yes, you’re the piano man.”

When the girls came there was a welcome change in some areas: the orchestra gained more strings and woodwind (in the boys’ school it was more akin to a brass band). Dance, drama, and languages all were introduced or gained in numbers. Overall, it didn’t affect my teaching and, even now, the students generally sit in gender groups anyway.

Once I started teaching German, I was teaching the same students over several years, so I asked them if they wanted to be called by their first or last names. They opted for first names, so I kept with that. At the time, very few teachers did it but it made for a warmer atmosphere. After ten years, it became much more normal in the school, and I put that down to the employment of women as teachers. In my first year there was one female teacher in the hard-to-staff science area.

It is a cliché, but it is true to say that school keeps you young and you have the privilege of seeing the pupils’ lives through their own eyes, if you take the trouble to listen and talk to them. I know a lot more about technology and discord servers thanks to them. I know words like ‘poggers’ and ‘scuffed’.

And now, some advice to the young. As a young teacher it is easy to get upset when things go wrong in the classroom and teachers’ college had impressed upon me that if things did go wrong, it was because your lesson wasn’t interesting enough and it was your fault. But after a while you learn that lessons are ruined by factors like rain, wind, heat, cold, afternoon periods, no Wifi, slow Kamar, other people’s class trips, to name just a few. My heart-rate varies from 47 to 60, not because I’m fit but more because I’m a dinosaur, warming up through the day. I don’t get over-excited if things go wrong.

School nomenclature has changed over 50 years. The gallery is now the mezzanine, the D block is now the MH block, we couldn't use William Caradus' initials, so the new science block is the CS block (Mr Van Dam was a teacher who had problems with his initials too); the rifle-range and swimming pool have disappeared under the E block, now the Greg Taylor block. The old old gym is the C block; the newer old gym is now the upper gym and the new new gym is the lower gym. The school song changed a bit too. We used to sing it straight as a three-verse hymn, then we added an introduction to every verse. Then a progressive music teacher in the 70s rewrote it in 4/4 time because you can't march into an assembly to a waltz. This worked until Anzac Day, when the Old Boys in the gallery found they couldn't stay in time. Mr. Hall immediately came to me to ask if we could change it back again. There was no extant music except that in my head, so I had to write it out by hand. The same music teacher also wrote a new school song which sounded like a rock anthem. This was rejected and he sold it to another school and left.

Does teaching your subject affect others in the future? Some of my pupils have married Germans, others live in German-speaking countries, yet others have studied there. Many keep in contact, have shown me their places of work and their new cars or gone golfing with me. Many years ago, a father of a boy I had met at parents' evening said to his son that I was a loser for being 20 years in the same school. I saw it as being 20 years in the same family.

Because schools are all about relationships. Very like family relationships.

In the time of Covid last year, I really appreciated how many former students and current parents and students all offered to go shopping for me. A boy in my form class brought me eggs from his chicken run every week or so and that continued all through last year as well. It reflects the relationships built up over 50 years. Every week I am

visited by university students who keep me up to date with their courses.

Finally, can I thank the wonderful and collegial staff we have, including those I have taught. They range from (she won't thank me for saying this) Mrs Goddard whom I taught when I was a student teacher in 1971 at Pukekohe HS; Paul McKinney who arrived with a very strong Belfast accent and was top of my senior German class in 1974; Tom Dale who organised a Guy Fawkes celebration with our German class in my backyard in 1986 where they burnt their uniforms in celebration; Reuben Ploeg, who had me as a Dean and German teacher over five years until 1990; John Stradwick, who I believe went on to greater things than year 10 German in 1990; Robin Breen, who, as a native speaker, was a top German scholar; Andrea Reive, who came on the 2009 German trip as a Year 10 student and behaved better than all the rest.

The Languages Department is small but we all get on famously well and support each other in everything. Thank you to Helen, Reina, Ok-Jin, Barbara, Roseanne, Eva and Libby. Finally, thanks to Greg, a life-long friend here at school, with whom I have found so much to laugh about in this place. Waldorf and Stadler we were called and not without reason. He and I share a classical education and would occasionally exchange a few phrases in Latin, only to be thought by the kids that we were speaking Klingon!

I have loved almost every minute of being here. I am certainly enjoying today. Thanks for listening.