



MERCY COLLEGE ALUMNI

Milestone Years – Class of 1969 - 2019

- 'We set the tone'

Foundation Students 1965 to 1969 (Year 11)



*Top from left : Pat Guatta, Dianne Eimermacher, Rhonda Luscombe, Rhonda Fay
Bottom from left : Maree Salm, Diana Heim, Maree Hunter*

Dear Diana and Maree, thankyou for sharing your insights of life as a student of Mercy College!

How did you all manage to keep up the focus of study with all the movement of having to attend classes at St Paul's in Coburg, St Ambrose's in Brunswick and St Mark's in Fawkner from 1965 Year 7 to end of term 2 1966 in Year 8?

The year 1965 marks the beginning of Mercy College Coburg. The first students were placed in classrooms at St Ambroses' in Brunswick and St Pauls' in Coburg while the construction of the new building was yet to be started. The students at St Ambroses's were fortunate to have Sister Francis (Sr. Winifred McManus) as their form teacher. She taught us every subject bar Italian and PE. In this sense this year was really an extension of primary school except we wore a different uniform to the primary school students.

Father Paul Garland and Father John McCarthy from St Ambroses' Parish taught us Italian and it was so much fun. Father Garland in particular would play practical jokes on us e.g. surreptitiously dropping plastic vomit on the floor and asking some hapless student to get a bucket and mop to clean it up. Maree and I were door monitors (we opened the door when someone knocked) and Fr Garland would be wearing fangs and a plastic claw when we opened the door. Needless to say, Italian lessons were most memorable.



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In 1966 Sister Thecla arrived as the newly appointed principal of the college. The school building was now under construction and a lot of Sister's time was taken up with meetings with architects and builders. As a result, our education suffered and on top of that we were allocated rooms in the old building next to the church. There was no running water or heating and it was bitterly cold in winter. We were encouraged to bring slippers and blankets to keep warm. There were no science rooms, no library, no art and craft rooms and no specialist teachers. Our PE teacher visited fortnightly to take us for a lesson. Swimming classes were held at the Brunswick Baths. Italian was replaced with Latin which was taught by Sr Thecla. In 1967 (year 9) Latin replaced German.

At this time there was no contact with the girls at St Pauls and vice versa. Friendships had been formed and were strengthened in those first 18 months so by the time we moved into the College very little interaction occurred between the 2 groups. This did change in later years as classes were mixed and subject choices were offered but for a while it was very much a "us" and "them" mentality.

When you finally were able to study at the new College building, what were the setbacks from a student's perspective? Was it easy to form friendships with students who were studying at primary schools?

In discussions with other Foundation students, we have found that most have kept in contact with at least one if not more friends from Mercy. Maree and I have been friends since that first day in 1965. Mariannina, another from our circle of friends, now lives in Canada but we are still in contact.

It has been many years since you left the College gates to make your way in the world. What was your involvement with the College in the years after you left?

1984

Maree and I made contact with the principal of Mercy, Mrs Pamela Davis, seeking her approval and support in organizing a reunion for the 15th Anniversary of leaving Mercy College.

1985

20th Anniversary of the foundation of the college, open to all years.

1990

25th Anniversary

1995

30th Anniversary

2005

40th Anniversary (23/10/2005)

Book Launch and Committee members were Maree Salm, Anne Wasley, Dianne Eimermacher.

2014

Maree, Anne Williams, Ivana Caraffa and Dianne Eimermacher and I met with Michelle Cotter (the Principal) to discuss plans for the Jubilee celebrations.

2015

A number of Foundation students attended the Jubilee Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral and were presented with a commemorative key ring by the principal. In October, Michelle Cotter launched her book to mark 50 years of Mercy College and again Foundation students were in attendance.

In September, Maree and I made a presentation to the Coburg Historical Society along with Margaret Kelleher, one of the College's first teachers together with some past students.



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Significant events?

1967

Nuns changed their habits (uniform). It was less restrictive.

1968

Assassination of Martin Luther King. Sr Bonaventure (Sr Mary McAllen) told us about this at the after lunch assembly.

1969

Man on the Moon.

The whole school crowded into the hall to watch this momentous occasion on a tiny black and white television.

Trip to Tasmania.

Saw Sr Bonaventure and Sr Leonie in a different light- they showed us they had a sense of Humour!

Teachers

We had a significant number of teachers, both nuns and lay teachers, covering all subjects that left a lasting impression on us. For commercial students, Maree feels that Sr Joan Agnes (Sr Inigo) should be acknowledged as she taught all commercial subjects shorthand/typing, Commercial Principles and Legal Studies in Forms 4 and 5. Lynette Long (English teacher) who successfully campaigned to have the commercial students permitted to study for the Leaving Certificate in 1969.

For me Sr Bonaventure was both a teacher and friend. She was a strong advocate for girls' education and was very much a woman ahead of her time.

The Guidance Booklet

We did not take the booklet too seriously because even in the 1960s, we felt that it was very outdated. It was a book of guidance on how to behave at school, home and in public. Today's girls would find it very amusing and it would generate a lot of laughter from them. As a History teacher, I can see its value as an insight into the era and what social norms were followed then.



Even after all this time, when we re-unite, we learn something new about each other; of our experiences at College and of the years between then and now.



We are foundation students; forever proud Mercy women!