**Ainslie School Days: memories of generations of Ainslie School students 1927-2017**

**Oral history interviews conducted by Ainslie School students**

**Transcript of excerpt from interview with John Dunning**

John attended Ainslie School 1951-1956 and was School Captain in 1956.

Location: Ainslie School Library

Date: 7 December 2016 I

nterview facilitator: Mary Hutchison

Sound recordist: Kimmo Vennonen.

Interviewers: Taj Whitney-Nash, Thea Coddington and Nicole Domigan

Taj: What was your idea about like the captain’s awards and why you brought it to Speech Day?

John: Thank you Taj that gives me an opportunity to share some more emotion with you. Because one of your previous principals, Prue Clarke, had a brilliant idea about the 75th anniversary of the school. If I remember correctly, and I might get a few facts wrong, but she explained to me that in 1927 the Prime Minister of the time, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, forgot his appointment. He was having a cabinet meeting so he forgot he was supposed to open Ainslie School. Somebody rang him up. ‘Oh okay’, closed the cabinet meeting and went over to Ainslie School and opened it. And so 75 years later, what did Prue decide to do? She decided, ‘Why don't we get [Prime Minister] John Howard to talk to the children at the assembly!’ And I saw all the kids getting all the top of awards. The best of this and the best of that and the best of something else. And that's good and that's right and that's proper, but I thought well what about the battlers? What about the kids (takes breath) – see it chokes me up. What about the kids who’ve had trouble, who’ve had domestic violence, who’ve had illness, accidents, who’ve come from another place, who don't sort of feel as though they fit in? What about those kids? So I suggested ‘why don't we have a prize for the battlers!’ And that's how it came about’.

Taj: It’s a great idea.

John: I think it was in infant’s school that they had a school dentist, and I think they used to pedal to make it work - the pedal, the old drill. And it was so slow. And I fainted! (laughter) They were drilling a molar down the back here and I felt so crook, aagh, just went out to it like that! And a teacher drove me home to O’Connor. And I’ve been scared of dentists ever since.

Thea: Also, how was the classroom set up?

John: With ink. Now what that means is that we had little desks about that big. And they had little wells in them - little sort of tin wells with a porcelain covering. The teachers’d come around and put some ink in them.

Thea: What did you guys do at lunchtime? Did you play any sports that are different to now?

John: That's a good question. Lunchtime, um - we used to go to our bags which (sniffs) smelt of leather and also smelt of (sniffs) vegemite, (sniffs) peanut butter and (sniffs) bananas (laughter). And so we would eat our lunch and then we’d play.

Nicole: What sort of impact did the school have on your life?

John: It made a huge difference to my life because it gave me a good grounding with education to go on to high school and to live out the dream I had which I think my grandfather - my dad’s dad - got into my head. I think he programmed me to be a healer. And so the basic education I got at Ainslie School and the respect I learned for teachers and for my fellow human beings, and doing the best I can in my learning, did change my life. It gave me the opportunity of going onto high school and then on to university as the first person in our family to get to university. So education is a way forward.