

Are newspapers now the least trusted source of truth?

This month's *TCFNews* explores some of the issues raised by the much proclaimed banning of SRE materials by the Department and the role the media played. For some time the community has been getting more anxious about the credibility of the media, newspapers in particular, to provide even an approximation of the truth as they continue to seek the sensational and catchy headline over any reasoned argument or even handed reporting. This is particular the case with religion in schools and the article *Banning books and other witchcraft* takes up this point and refers to arguments put by TCFNSW to the Department about an attempt to ban SRE materials.

Other features include a report on the 2015 *Getaway*, an article and request for sharing about past student contacts, another *Something funny happened on the way to the office*, in which I write a letter to myself and reply and a recognition of Vale Minnie Wells, a long standing member who recently passed away.

John Gore

Banning books and other witchcraft

Many TCF members would have been alarmed when they read in the Sydney Morning Herald last May a report alerting readers to Special Religious Education materials purported to present a distorted view of sex that was against Department policies. Even more disturbing was the memorandum from a senior Department officer requesting all principals to check if these materials were being used and if they were to instruct those SRE providers that they could not be used, effectively issuing a ban.

It turned out that one of the books had never been part of any program and that the others, by respected author John Dickson, were part of the Anglican church's program for secondary schools. The Anglicans met with the Department and these matters were resolved but I am sure one senior officer must have been given a huge boot in the backside for his overreaction to the newspaper story.

This incident involves a number of issues and TCFNSW wrote to the Department about some of them.

1. Media support for secular groups opposed to religion in schools.

In recent years the SMH has been an ignorant supporter of sections of the community who want to ban religion, SRE in particular, in state schools. It provided strong support for those who proposed ethics classes in SRE time and has continued its support through opposition to the SRE enrolment form corrections and the promotion of news releases from groups that oppose religion in schools. It is not impartial and there have been no retractions of its misreporting or any attempt to provide space for counter arguments. The Fairfax media is not neutral when it comes to religion in schools and continues to support these groups and inadvertently the agenda of the NSW Greens and their spokesperson John Kaye.

2. Lack of understanding of the provisions of the Act for SRE

The attempt to ban SRE resources shows the lack of understanding by some officers within the Department of the provisions for SRE. The content and pedagogy of SRE lessons have nothing to do with the Department. These are

matters entirely for the providers as indicated in the Department's own guidelines. *The religious education to be given is in every case to be the religious education authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.* That a senior Department officer would seek to ban SRE materials is outrageous.

3. Clarification of the activities of the review of SRE and SEE currently underway.

The current review has within its terms of reference *7. Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Year K to 6 in a variety of demographics.* The review can make its recommendations but again it is not for the Department to take up any comments or opinions from the review on this matter. TCFNSW reminded the Department that these matters were not its concern and if taken up would not go uncontested by the providers of SRE.

4. Need for continued action

All those with a continuing interest in SRE will need to hold the Government to account on its review intentions. It will be all too easy to inadvertently question or pose questions about the future of SRE despite this not being the focus of the review. Those who are anti religion in state schools will want to make the most out of the review findings and this will mean more media releases of a negative nature and newspapers like the SMH who have shown their lack of partiality will be quick to take a catchy headline.

All TCF members need to keep informed about these developments and ready to oppose the stream of prejudice that finds its way into the media.

John Gore

TCF Getaway 2015

Held again this year at the delightful setting of Kihilla, in brilliant sunshine, 11 of us studied, ate, talked, sang, ate, walked, ate, prayed and played the weekend away.



Karen enjoying Bridal Veil Falls.

We missed a few of the old (aren't we all?) regulars, but we were enough to have a hilarious time playing Trivial Pursuit, over-ruling it, where necessary. The studies, from Romans 5, Ephesians 2 and Titus 2, were, on the one hand, the basic gospel, yet, on the other hand, very deep, and humbling. With not enough time

to answer all the questions, we were able to take the studies home with us to do further work. Brenda had made up booklets of words to songs new and well known, and accompanied us on her keyboard.



Relaxing after Term 2.

We still managed to have porridge, thanks to Pam's determination to get it on the menu! Lyn, John and Margaret showed photos and videos of their times in India and Bangladesh.



Taking in the view along Charles Darwin Walk, Wentworth Falls.

What a great way to start the holidays!

Margaret Barlow

A Wonderful Reunion

I wonder how many TCFers have had the great experience that was mine in meeting ex-students?

In 1957 at the age of 29 years I was appointed Principal of Wynberg-Allen, a large Anglo-Indian school in India with more than 300 boarders apart from day scholars. The medium of instruction was English and students sat for the Cambridge School Certificate.

Just over a year ago we received a phone call from Surjit Bains from the USA. Surjit was school captain in 1959 and still holds the 400 metres record for Wynberg-Allen. As a result of further telephone chats, a reunion of ex-students of the school, now living in USA and Canada, was arranged at Las Vegas and they insisted Helen and I join them. Twenty or so were at the reunion over four days, the students now being in their 60s or 70s. We asked them to call us Peter and Helen, but they all insisted on calling us Mr Kidd (or sir!) and Mrs Kidd.

When I joined the school there were two menus, one for the rich and one for the poor. I immediately changed this to one menu for all. We became the first school in India to have co-education in high school. Those who knew me best won't believe that they all said that because of these, and other changes, I was the best Principal they ever had!

In our school assemblies we used to sing hymns from *Golden Bells* hymn book, with me conducting. Although back then roughly half were Christians and half Hindus, they enjoyed singing the hymns so much that they insisted that one night of the reunion be taken up with singing their favourite hymns from *Golden Bells*.

Helen and I both felt that the ten days we spent with Surj, his wife Judy (our hosts) and other ex-students were the most wonderful since our honeymoon. The Lord really blessed our short time there and they have decided that their next reunion will be in the Blue Mountains in 2017.

Peter Kidd

(We would like to hear from other TCF members about their experiences meeting up with ex-students.)

Something funny happened on the way to the office

(The fifth in a series of stories that owe their fame to bureaucratic practices.)

5. Writing a letter to me

As most are aware, senior officers of the Department rarely write their own letters. When a letter comes to the department it is allocated to the officer responsible for that area and the senior officer signs the reply when they are satisfied with it.

A British organisation wished to invite a director to visit England to observe a number of technology projects. Governments are always careful about requests for overseas travel because they are accounted for through the parliamentary estimates committees which can interrogate ministers and department heads. The work of this organisation related to my section and I would have to work it through. Getting this director permission would be tricky.

I met with the organisation head here in Australia and arranged to draft a letter from them to the Minister with an impressive itinerary indicating the

educational benefits to NSW schools. They accepted the draft and sent it to the Minister.

Several days later the letter had come through channels to my desk for a reply. I prepared an enthusiastic briefing and letter of reply including identifying a source of funds which was always a sticking point. Senior officers accepted the response and the Minister signed it and the director had a very pleasant educational visit to England. It's always nice to be able to write the letter and the reply. It's just that much easier.

John Gore

Vale Minnie Wells: 4th January 1921 - 23rd June 2015

(Min joined TCF in 1947. Her long-standing and good friend Gwenda Waddington contributes this article.)

Min was a dedicated teacher who knew that the Lord's calling was for her to the classroom, to the children who constituted her class each year. Her calling, further, was to children in their beginning years of schooling. Her ability to develop early reading and number skills in her small pupils was highly and finely developed.

Her devotion to early childhood learning was, however, not a single devotion. Min was also a children's evangelist in the wider fields of life. Only the Lord and perhaps in some cases Min know how many grown up children and young people love and serve their Lord and Saviour today because of the Holy Spirit's working through Min at a Holiday Bible Club (DVBS then), through a Christian book given, because of words spoken at a children's or young people's Scripture Union Camp (then VASC, or ISCF), or in a children's talk, or indeed a sermon (Min being a qualified Local Preacher in the Methodist and then Uniting Church).

Because Min loved her Saviour, she also loved and knew her Bible, and taught it, using often the artistic skills the Lord had given her as well as speech.

Min was also a devoted supporter of Missions and of missionaries' children, in both practice and in prayer. Her great desire was to glorify her Lord. If she could know about this account of herself, she would highly disapprove of it. She would echo the words of Carey of India as he was dying, "Don't speak of Dr Carey. Speak of Dr Carey's Saviour."

So it is. "Don't speak of Minnie Wells. Speak of Minnie's Saviour." May we all be busy at that.

Gwenda Waddington.

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