

Vale Jim Murrhly

I am most fortunate to have taught with Jim Murrhly at Parkdale Secondary College for many years. Jim was the heart and soul of Parkdale Secondary College, particularly when we all knew it as Parky High. He was an amiable man, always cheerful and encouraging. His students loved him, especially his typing classes in the early days. Those girls are all well into their fifties now, and they will be sad to lose their "Uncle Jimbo."

When I came to Parkdale High School in 1977, Jim was the dominant personality in the staffroom. His laughter and his stories drew us all to him. He had a quick wit and he made people comfortable. Jim made it clear that this was a happy place to work. His mischievous sense of humour always suggested to me, that he may have been a bit of a scallywag in his own schooldays. He seemed to reserve a special empathy for those who strayed, and I never saw him speak angrily to a child. Jim's way was to listen, forgive and ask for greater effort. These days, a Year Level Coordinator must jump all manner of hoops to deal with recalcitrant rascals. As a Year 9 coordinator, Jim liked to visit troubled lads on their own turf. On one famous occasion when Jim visited the home of a regular absconder, hoping to win him over, the boy fled and jumped the back fence. Jimbo jumped over after him. Just for a chat. The boy was at school the next day.

It was natural that I would enjoy Jim's company. He was a died-in-the-wool North Melbourne man, and his eyes would light up and his voice would assume a growling determination when he offered his predictions for the weekend's footy. I am a Tiger fan and more than once we met at the MCG when our teams clashed during the eighties. Jim had the best of those meetings. He was happy, as long as his team played with grit and courage and a dash of magic. Not surprisingly, Schimma, the Krakoeur brothers and King Carey were his favourites. Jim placed determined effort and loyalty at the top of his list of qualities that were non-negotiable. A strong unionist, Jim impressed upon us the importance of standing up for ourselves, and doing everything we could to advance the cause of public education, and the interests of Parky High in particular.

For many years, our school felt like a family. We all knew each other by name. We knew every student. The staff would regularly hold social gatherings at someone's home at the start of the year to share a glass and swap yarns. They were good times and Jim led the festivities. It became a standing joke between us, that Jim's better half must have been an imaginary figure, aphantom, for she was never in attendance.

"Aud's looking after the kids," he would laugh, but when I eventually met Audrey and told her I was glad to see she was a real person, she laughed and confessed that she always gave Jim "room to enjoy himself". Jim was so proud of his own family. How fitting that I have also been able to teach with Martin.

Jim thrived as a mentor and he had genuine admiration for so many students, often expressing his astonishment at their achievements. He coined the phrase, "Parky Champions", a title he bestowed on students like Margit Lindgaard, who was the star of his Girls Cricket Team. He would laugh with delight when returning to school after his girls had won again, and Margit had skittled their opposition with the new ball, and then hammered their bowlers all over the park. When Jim became Deputy Principal, he handed the reins over to me and eagerly sought me out after matches, to learn how his champions had played. Jim's champions included anybody exhibiting good character and striving to contribute to the school's betterment. Students could depend on his interest in them. Jim went out of his way to attend school plays I staged, and he always made sure that I understood the pleasure he had felt, watching the students' performances.

As a Deputy Principal, Jim may well have saved Parky's life. In the dark days of school closures in the 80's, our student numbers dropped alarmingly, and we saw nearby schools at Beaumaris and Bonbeach disappear. There was a strong feeling that we were in a precarious position. It was Jim's job to monitor our numbers and his creative work at census time prompted apocryphal stories that may well have concealed a concern we never fully appreciated. The only time I saw Jim angry was in a staff meeting and he was furious. He considered that the views of some staff members underestimated the severity of the school's position. The school was very important to Jim. He regularly organised weekend working bees after marshalling parental support. I know that there were many other occasions when he was at school in his own time, attending to maintenance or just making sure that all was well.

Jim never changed throughout his career, whatever role he was asked to play. Life is to be enjoyed and we should never take ourselves so seriously that we lose our sense of fun. It is so often the little things that special people leave as their legacy. Jim had his own style, a genuine and genial friend whose

delightful turn of phrase was always accompanied by a mischievous twinkle in his eye. He stuck his head around the door to our little staffroom in the N Corridor, late one Friday afternoon, chiding us for still lingering on the premises.

“Haven't you all got a pub to go to” he quipped, keen to lock the doors behind us. That happy grin. It will be my lasting image of Jimbo.

Jim will be mourned by all who knew him and by the many Parky students fortunate to have studied under his guidance.

He was above all, the most decent of men.

Vale Jimbo.

Andrew Mullett — English Teacher Parkdale

