

H. Michael Graefe – an Update for Friends, Former Students & Acquaintances, Oct. 2019

Michael was born mid June 1937 at Oranienburg, Brandenburg Region north of Berlin, in the original core of Prussia, into a family of male industrial research and development chemists. After being totally bombed-out in a semi-rural northern suburb of Berlin during mid - April 1945, he hastily fled with his parents in one of the very last trains just before this once great city was completely encircled by a vengeful Red Army. This did take them to Lake Constance in southwestern Germany near the Swiss Border only with hand luggage.

An only child, he arrived with his parents by ocean liner on the last day of 1951 as self-funded migrants who could freely choose where they wanted to live and the kind of work they would accept.

At the superb Dandenong High School, Michael achieved surprisingly good Matriculation results in January 1957 that opened the exciting world of tertiary education to him. Exempted from the first year of the Dookie Diploma of Agriculture Course, he commenced his studies at Dookie as a residential student, to graduate in early 1959 with his cherished DDA. He still regards his time at DAC as the best comprehensive education.

In March 1959, he was appointed a Science Teacher at Victorian government schools. The following year, he enrolled at The University of Melbourne (UoM) for evening studies towards a BA degree for eight years. Concurrently, he also gained his teaching qualifications at the Melbourne Secondary Teachers College at the same location.

In January 1969, he married Janet Mary Barnes, a warm-hearted and very capable nurse, midwife and highly skilled operating theatre sister. During February 1971 he moved with his young family, that included their five month old daughter Julie, into Residence Three, located at the corner opposite to the LAC Assembly Hall. At LAC he took up his position as the very first-ever Lecturer in Humanities at an Australian agricultural college. His duties included the teaching of Extension Theory and Practice, Land Utilisation combined with Soil Conservation, Media Relations Tasks and some delicate Public Relations with prospective students.

Until the late 1970's, working and living at LAC was idyllic, especially for families and their children. At that time, Head Office at the Victorian Department of Agriculture, was run by wise Chiefs of Division like Pym Cook or Tom Kneen, with long leadership experience. This was greatly valued by the happy and mutually supportive College Community. Unfortunately, most of this became derailed once the agricultural colleges had been split away into a separate VCAH. To me, this equated to the Colleges losing their soul, with staff becoming increasingly unsettled and even desperately unhappy with this new situation. My friend and colleague, Nick Duckworth, commented harshly about this: "We have to get out of here quickly, to hold on to our health, sanity and self-respect!" He left LAC, as did the excellent Vice Principal Ken Lyons, plus six other lecturers who included me. I seamlessly rejoined the Education Department at Horsham High School, whose Principal, Ian Maroske, had hoped to attract me for some years to teach its senior classes.

After promotion to Kyneton Technical High School for 1988, I was offered an attractive "Retirement Package" at the ripe old age of 54 years and 10 months, to make room for the much younger and lower cost teachers. I accepted, left the Education Department at the end of 1991 and started up my own Pty Ltd that facilitated business migration for German speakers from Europe to Australia. Next, I expanded into emergency teaching at nearby schools, whilst continuing with professional translations of English and German as a Nationally Accredited Translator specialising in translations for importers of complicated silage pasture harvesting and feedstuffs processing machinery from Germany.

In 2012, at age 75, I wound up my firm with all obligations honourably met, to concentrate my energies on the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science & Technology that I had originally joined in June 1972. Luckily, it trades under the abbreviated name Ag Institute Australia (AIA). On April 2nd 2013, not on April Fool's Day, I was unanimously elected President of its Victorian Division and re-elected since then to the same position. In 2015 the AIA made me a Fellow for outstanding service.

During the last three years, my closest AIA colleagues and I have made ceaseless efforts to convince the UoM allowing its Ag. Sci. students to spend all four seasonal cycles at Dookie College as an essential and practical dirt-under-the-fingernails component of their degree course. During my latest visit to the Dookie Open Day on 22nd September this year, it was joyful to hear students bursting out spontaneously: "At last, we are now learning about REAL AGRICULTURE at Dookie!"

The main purpose of my wife and I visiting Longerenong College for its 130 years of existence celebrations is to gain deeper insights into how this venerable institution has so successfully managed to re-invent itself into a remarkable success story. This has occurred under the leadership of Principal John Goldsmith and his Board, composed of no-nonsense successful business leaders in the surrounding Wimmera Region.

This success reminds me of what Dr. David Wishart, a former Director General of the Victorian Department of Agriculture during the 1970's used to preach at every opportunity where ag types were gathered: "The real place and future for our agricultural colleges is with MIDDLE LEVEL COURSES that our agricultural and related industries need and want quite urgently!":

My family and I have a great soft spot in our hearts and an outright love for Longerenong Agricultural College as it provided us with the most rewarding and joyous years of our lives that also represented the apex of my career until VCAH put an end to this. We owe you lots, are deeply grateful for what it did for its wonderful students, to agriculture, the friendly cohesive College Community and to our fond memories of great times.

mgraefe@bigpond.com

0417 54 72 52