

*Through the generations...*

CATHERINE WING

# The Road

DAMASCUS COLLEGE

Spring 2023



# OUR COVER

## SEXTON FAMILY

Cover: Through the generations...

Pictured on the front cover is the Sexton family, Nola, Mary, Paul and Henry who make up four generations that experienced a Damascus College education. Nola and Mary both attended the foundation school Sacred Heart College, Paul attended the foundation school St Paul's Technical College, and of course, Henry is a Damascus College student in Year 10.

Mary, Nola, and then Paul were committed to ensuring their children attended the same school as them so that they could experience the same Mercy and Diocesan charism through the generations.

These four generations are proud of their Damascus education, and their full story can be found at pages 10-12.

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Steven Mifsud at Damascus Day Mass

## PRINCIPAL'S WELCOME

STEVEN MIFSUD

Welcome to the Spring Edition of The Road for 2023. It has been an exciting time for our community here at the College. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge our student leaders and the student leadership team. I want to thank Xavier Byrne and Sophie Busutil for their leadership this year. Both students have been humble leaders willing to serve the Damascus community. Nothing was too much effort or too hard. I can still remember our 6am ANZAC Dawn Service in Ballarat, the many functions that they lead and the countless prayers they provided for our community. Both are gracious leaders who epitomise servant leadership, constantly giving of themselves for others.

At the end of term 3 we celebrated Damascus Day. Damascus Day is an important day in the life of the College. It is the day when we celebrate our identity as a Catholic co-educational secondary college. It is a day when we recognise those who had the foresight and worked hard to provide the opportunities and facilities that exist: the parents, parishioners, priests, religious brothers and sisters who created the buoyant college community that is Damascus College. Notably, 2023 marks the 28 years of our college.

As Damascus, we are a relatively young school with a rich history dating back to 1881, with an energy and vitality that needs to be harnessed and challenged, yet this provides us with a real opportunity to shape our school, to model how we can live and grow as young people from all walks of life, to walk with our God

and with one another. We model to the people of Ballarat what it means to work and study as young people in a co-educational, inclusive community. This opportunity gives us a responsibility to live in respectful relationships – celebrate our differences, and a chance to see many different perspectives.

I reflect on our College theme and school motto, To Live By the Light of Christ. To me, it simply means to listen attentively, laugh, cry, and embrace the one we love and the person who may challenge us. We acknowledge mistakes, we forgive, and we start again to be people who live in the light of Christ. We recognise that we are humble, we are human, we are flawed, yet we need one another! We work for the marginalised, and we put others first. We work for those who need our care and tenderness. Throughout the following pages, you will see how we 'live by the light of Christ.'

Each day, I have the pleasure of coming to work to be part of this amazing community, whereby I see a community living by the light of Christ.

A couple of times a week, I try to visit Teacher Advisor Group (TA). I see Ms Montgomery's group doing their daily maths quiz, Mr Ross singing happy birthday to students, and Mr O'Loughlin or Mrs Hocking wandering the Catherine McAuley building, welcoming and talking to all the Xavier students.



Father's Day Breakfast 2023



Bright Futures Breakfast 2023



Steven Mifsud and Luke Butler, Class of 2012 at the 2023 Visual Art & Technology Exhibition

A highlight in my working week is walking the Murnong Trail with students in my Year 10 RE class, sitting around the sharing circle in the Commemorative Walk and hearing their stories, or just watching the energy and intense friendships they have with one another.

During our college's trip to Indonesia, I witnessed them living by the light of Christ. I enjoyed witnessing students having the courage to step outside their comfort zone, challenging one another and making friendships with Muslim students with limited English. These students had the guts to take risks – to stand out and to be proud to be learning.

Our annual Mother's Day and Father's Day Breakfasts recognise that our families are pivotal in who we are – as we saw in the Addams Family - each family is different. No two families are the same, but we learn to live and love our families, even if not all the time and even when we do not like them. This year's productions saw passionate people loving what they do – getting energy from their tribe and being true to themselves.

At the years 9 and 10 social, our students were able to gather in the Damascus Events Centre (DEC) and enjoy each other's company within the context and joy of music.

At the swimming carnival and the lap of the lake, we witnessed young people living by the light of Christ as they were coached by their teachers, peers and families. They clapped and cheered on each other to achieve their personal best. Sport enables us to find our space, our groove and to get out of one's head and into our body. Well done to all who participated in this year's football, basketball, and netball finals within the local community.

This year, we have encouraged our students to become tour leaders and college ambassadors who proudly show prospective families around the College. On each occasion, we receive emails of thanks from families congratulating our students.

To live by the life of Christ is in our behaviour and responses in the classroom, where we are open to the voices of each other, learn about our world, and grow to be the best we can. To live by the life of Christ is to push ourselves, move out of our comfort zone, and be uncomfortable.

I invite you to think for a few minutes about how you have lived by the light of your Christ. How have you modelled the best version of yourself? Where is there space for change and growth?

I hope you can enjoy our latest edition of The Road and witness how our community continues to live by the light of Christ, each and every day with all members of our community.

With every blessing,

Steven Mifsud, Damascus College Principal





Damascus College Justice Action Group

# SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ACTION

## DAMASCUS COLLEGE

The Justice Action Group (JAG) has provided opportunities to discuss and offer practical ways to raise awareness about a range of social issues facing local and global communities. 'Thank-you!'. With community help and generous donations, JAG has been able to contribute to Projection Compassion, St. Vinnies Winter Appeal and Catholic Mission.

### **Santa Maria, Ainaro**

Prior to COVID-19, Damascus College raised money to contribute to the infrastructure at the Santa Maria Ainaro school in East Timor. Damascus was able to support the school in building a fence. As the project is now complete, Fr. Eugenio from Santa Maria would like to personally thank Damascus College for contributing the financial resources to assist with their fence-building project. He expressed how overjoyed he is at the difference it is making. It has enabled the people to come together and grow produce to benefit the local community.

### **Catholic Mission**

Damascus College has long supported the work of the Catholic Mission. The Mission provides financial and project support for critical initiatives. At present, they are providing emergency relief for refugees fleeing Ukraine, residents of Turkey and Syria who have been left homeless by the Earthquake, and many more global initiatives.

Damascus students initiated a casual clothes day to collect funds to contribute to emergency food, water, and provisions for those displaced and separated from families overseas.

### **Vinnies**

To support those in difficult circumstances or homeless, students and staff donated items for the Personal Care Kit drive. Care packs were put together and have been distributed within the local community.

Students will have the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with students from other regional schools, as Damascus has now registered to become a member of the Vinnies College Conferences. Students will work with and for the most vulnerable within our community. The Conference programs are student-centred programs that empower young people to become social justice advocates within their school and local community by putting their values into action.



# A PROFOUND JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

OUR MERCY HERITAGE

## **Reflecting on the Unforgettable Mercy Leadership Program and Dublin Pilgrimage of 2023**

I was privileged to be one of 28 Australian pilgrims brought together from various Mercy Ministries and affiliated organisations to complete a Mercy Ministry Companions (MMC)-sponsored pilgrimage program in 2023, impeccably hosted by Karon Donnellon RSM and Carmel Ross MMC Trustee Director.

Comprising three distinctive modules spanning 2023, this spiritual journey offered a deep exploration of the historical and social context of the Sisters of Mercy, fostering connections among kindred spirits, and engaging in meaningful ministry-related projects, which action Mercy within our local communities. This transformative journey equipped us all with the necessary tools and insights to embody the spirit of Mercy in our lives and ministries, with a view of creating a lasting impact inspired by Catherine McAuley's legacy.

## **An Immersive Journey into the Legacy of Mercy:**

The Mercy Leadership Program, intricately intertwined with the Dublin Pilgrimage, provided a comprehensive experience of the remarkable work undertaken by Catherine McAuley and the pioneering women of Mercy. Beyond merely highlighting their values and visionary spirit, the participants artfully explored the timeless relevance of their legacy within the modern Mercy community worldwide.

Walking through the iconic red doors of Catherine's House of Mercy on Lower Baggott Street, there was an instant feeling of welcome and a sense of Catherine's warm, affectionate embrace to others and now us. As we spent time here exploring the sacred halls, a palpable sense of reverence and solidarity was evident among us all. Here, we also felt an undeniable connection to the women and children who sought help and sanctuary within these very walls. We developed a profound understanding of the arduous struggles and unwavering devotion to their divine mission through captivating lectures with insightful presenters who imparted both knowledge and inspiration. We enjoyed moments of introspection, the poignant sharing of personal anecdotes and walking the staircase. Their commitment to social justice and the care of the vulnerable, left an indelible mark on us.



### **A Symbolic Gesture of Unity:**

Within the venerable walls of the House of Mercy, the MMC presented a symbolic gift, a message stick, to honour the traditional custodians of the lands from which the Australian partners in Mercy trace their ancestral heritage. Crafted by the skilled hands of Vicki Clark, a proud descendant of the Mutthi Mutthi tribe, the message stick symbolises a means of communication revered by Aboriginal nations and clans. This heartfelt gesture effectively underscored the universal message of Mercy and was graciously received by Sr Patricia O'Donovan RSM, the esteemed CEO of Mercy International Association.

### **A Profound Connection with Mercy's Heritage:**

Our immersive experience into Catherine's life included a showcase of heritage items belonging to Catherine herself. This comprised Catherine's personal ring and Crucifix, her Original Last Will and Testament, a remarkable artwork created by Mary Claire Augustine Moore, and a delicate Emu Egg Clock bought to Ireland by Sr Vincent Whitty in 1871 from Brisbane. These, along with other items, will be proudly displayed in a new heritage museum currently in development.

We embarked on a captivating walking tour of Catherine's Dublin. This enlightening tour allowed us to witness firsthand important landmarks in Catherine's life. It included visiting St. Teresa's on Clarendon St, where the Sisters of Mercy walked to Mass, and thirteen Sisters of Mercy were buried in its crypt. Presentation Convent on Georges Hill was also very special. It was here Catherine began her novitiate in 1830 and was professed according to a unique vow formula approved by the Archbishop. We all enjoyed an impromptu acapella version of Catherine's *Suscipe*, beautifully led by current Mercy sisters and performed by pilgrim members, in honour of Catherine. The Walking tour served as an expressive reminder of the rich history that shaped Catherine McAuley's remarkable journey and the lasting legacy.

A visit to Coolock house where Catherine resided with the Callahan's from 1809 and from which her Mercy vision was able to materialise through its sale. Standing in the very place where she once lived, we gained a deeper appreciation for the humble beginnings of the mercy movement and the profound impact of Catherine's enduring presence.



Catherine's Crucifix



Catherine's Ring





Dan Jans at Baggott Street



### **A Moment of Reflection and Consolidation:**

A highlight of this transformative pilgrimage was the enchanting day trip to Glendalough, a historic monastic settlement renowned for its spiritual feel and a revered destination of learning during early Christian Ireland. Amidst the serene beauty of this sacred enclave of the Wicklow Mountains, we found solace and engaged in moments of deep reflection, consolidating our newfound comprehension. Here, we experienced a Labyrinth, which is walked as a meditative practice. It is symbolic of a journey to the centre and then out again in silence, which we understood to be a true gift to ourselves and a necessary one.

### **Embracing Diversity, Fostering Camaraderie:**

Integral to this Mercy Leadership Program was the fostered feeling of belonging within our group. This enabled us the comfort to enjoy the rich diversity represented in our individual offerings whilst uniting us as a collective. It sparked vibrant discussions and inspired innovative approaches towards upholding the cherished Mercy charism in our modern mercy ministries. This profound sense of community and camaraderie that permeated our journey was truly representative of the transformative power of mercy in fostering meaningful connections and collaborative efforts.

### **A Renewed Commitment to Mercy:**

On return and completion of the Mercy Leadership Program and the Dublin Pilgrimage, I carry with me a renewed sense of purpose, cherished connections, and inspiration in Catherine's faith. It serves as a catalyst for personal growth in our own faith journeys with messages such as "Our hearts can always be in the same place, centred on God." May our collective pilgrimage be a testament to the enduring power of faith, unity, and a formative journey towards Christ in the culture of Mercy.

Dan Jans, St. Martin House Leader



Glendalough Labyrinth



The Roundhouse





Henry, Mary, Paul and Nola Sexton

## A DAMASCUS EDUCATION THROUGH FOUR GENERATIONS

### INTERGENERATIONAL ALUMNI STORY

The Sexton clan have a long and happy history with Damascus College and all three foundation colleges, as four Sexton generations have been proud to have walked the halls of Sacred Heart, St. Paul's, St. Martin's in the Pines, and now Damascus College.

Current Year 10 student Henry Sexton said he is enjoying his time at Damascus, as he has made some wonderful friends, and the teachers have a great passion for the subjects they teach.

"I enjoy going to school every morning because I know that when I get there, I will be greeted by other students who I love talking to and working with, as well as teachers who I love learning from."

"My favourite subjects at Damascus currently are music and mathematics," he said.

Henry's mum Karissa Sexton nee Wotzko, went to St Martin's in the Pines for Year 11 and completed Year 12 at Damascus for the inaugural year of the amalgamation in 1995. Karissa's favourite

subjects were maths methods and physics. She felt strongly that Henry should go to Damascus, so the tradition continued.

"We wanted to send our children to Damascus because we both enjoyed our time there, and both had great friendships that have lasted into adulthood," said Karissa.

"My dad went to St Paul's Technical College and St Martin's in the Pines. My Grandma on my father's side went to St Martin's, and her mother (my great grandmother) went to Sacred Heart for years 8 and 9," said Henry.

Paul Sexton, Class of 1994, said that he enjoyed his time at St. Paul's Technical College and is still close with many of the friends he formed whilst there.

"My favourite teacher was Sharon Wolfe, but there were many great teachers. I know that Andrew Seary still teaches at Damascus. He taught me Graphic Arts and was a fantastic teacher," said Paul.



"My favourite subject was music, and I used to play the saxophone at a pretty basic level. I had some great music teachers: David Santamaria, Gerard Tobin, Vicki Rowe."

Paul recalls that his metal teachers were John Hildebrandt and Les Beecham. "Mr Hildebrandt used to call me Graham by mistake, and the name stuck a bit!"

"My favourite memory from school would have to be kicking the footy and cricket in the nets. We also made up a full-contact basketball game that I used to love. I think they later tried to ban it for obvious reasons."

"My time at the two schools (St. Paul's and St. Martin's) pretty much shaped who I am today – a tradesman who loves a good chin wag."

Henry's grandma Nola Sexton, nee Pearse, Class of 1970, attended Sacred Heart College in 1965 to Year 11 in 1969 before leaving school to work at St. John of God Hospital to be trained as a nurse.

Nola recalls that in Year 7, the students went on an excursion and walked out to Mt. Clear to spend the day at the site for the new school, St Martin's in the Pines. It was a beautiful, sloped piece of land covered in mainly pine trees.

"My favourite part of St. Martin's in the Pines was the feeling of the campus. This school was brand new and so modern. The classrooms were so bright and warm, with huge windows to gaze out of. The atmosphere of St. Martin's was very relaxing," she said.

"Three teachers that had a very positive impact on me were Sr Jane Frances (Veronica Lawson), Sr Andre (Therese Power) and Sr Stanislaus (Anne Forbes). I attended a very small state school at Dean before attending Sacred Heart. I was rather scared of the sisters and did my best to stay out of trouble (unsuccessfully at times). Those three teachers were all very welcoming, excellent teachers who helped me to grow under their relaxed and caring tutelage."

Nola's favourite subject was science and was taught by Sr Andre (Therese Power), where she received a very good grounding in biology. Nola's love for science, fostered by Sr. Andre, led to a 47-year nursing career. Sr. Veronica Lawson's biblical studies led her to study clinical pastoral education, and she spent three years as a Pastoral Associate at St John's.

"I had a very positive and happy experience in my senior years at school and wanted the same for my children. The then Principal of St. Paul's Technical College, Br Frank Hennessy, was such a positive influence on our boys and remains a close friend to this day," she said.



Henry and his paternal great grandmother Mary Pearse nee Reidy



Henry, Mary and Paul at the Catherine McAuley Wing



Paul, Mary, Henry and Nola outside the Mercy Chapel



Paul, Mary, Nola and Henry in the St Martin's Resource Centre

"I found St. Martin's such a refreshing environment to learn and grow up in. I felt cared for, encouraged, and supported, and I see that continue today at Damascus, as it applies to my children and grandchildren. Social justice awareness is encouraged, studied, and acted on in so many ways. I often see Damascus students doing community projects and giving back to the world. We regularly attend the musical showcases and are so grateful that these Damascus students are encouraged to share their talents with us and feel comfortable doing it. Good on them," said Nola.

After hearing the family stories shared through the generations, Henry took some time to reflect and said that having his family go to Damascus for such a long time has not affected his time at Damascus that much. "I am sort of grateful because I would rather lead my legacy than be led by my family" he said.

"What I find special about having my family go to Damascus for this long is the stories I get to hear about how the school has developed over time. These heartfelt stories are usually brought up when they visit the school, at Teacher Advisor interviews or when attending music performances, I am in. It is interesting to hear how different their school experience was compared to mine, whether it was due to the time they attended, what people they talked to, what classes they took, and other variables like that," said Henry.

"Secondary school is a time when people are moulded into who they will be for decades. So, hearing how family members came to be who they are, is not only interesting, but comforting. It reminds me to be grateful for my decisions to get to this point in my life and to be grateful to be at such a great school. Damascus is Ballarat's only catholic co-educational school, with such a unique setting and layout, and has a very interesting history with past foundation schools. I think it is safe to say there are quite a few things you find at Damascus that you will not find at any other school," he said.





# ST PAUL'S TECHNICAL COLLEGE REUNION

## ALUMNI EVENT

On Saturday, 9 September, past students and staff of St. Paul's Technical College (St. Paul's) came together to celebrate an all-year's reunion.

The reunion took place at Damascus College, and it was the first time many of those in attendance had been at the Mt Clear campus. It was important that the reunion took place at Damascus to help build and strengthen the bonds between St. Paul's past students and staff, as part of the Damascus community.

The reunion began with some formal proceedings led by Sarah Boswell, Leader of Marketing and Development at Damascus, who welcomed the guests and spoke of their contributions as a foundation school of Damascus. Br Frank Hennessy, a past teacher and principal, spoke next about the legacy created at St. Paul's, which is continued today at Damascus College. The formalities were concluded by the current Damascus College principal, Steven Mifsud.

Guests at the event were treated to light refreshments in the Damascus Events Centre, where they enjoyed looking at archive displays while mingling and catching up. It was great to welcome back students from the early days of St. Paul's and to hear their

stories and memories from their time at Ludbrook House to their sons reflecting on their time at Victoria Street. The reunion was a wonderful opportunity to remember where they came from, reminisce, re-connect with old friends, and reflect on their life's journey so far.

The event was a celebration and a chance to remember the contributions of St. Paul's as a foundation school for Damascus College. St. Paul's was opened to students in 1948, so this year would have been its 75th Anniversary.

After a group photo, past students and current staff member Paul Briody took the guests on a campus tour. Paul was on hand to show off the facilities, speak about the current curriculum and point out St. Paul's legacies that continue to be a part of the Damascus College foundation.

The campus tour was a huge success and cemented the ties between St. Paul's and Damascus for those in attendance. It was agreed that the next get-together for this cohort would be in late 2024.



2023 Indonesian Study Tour

## DEEPENING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND FRIENDSHIPS

STEVEN MIFSUD

During the Term 2 school holidays, I had the privilege of joining our Indonesian Study Tour with 23 students from Years 9 – 12 and four Damascus graduates. The trip was led by staff members Brendan Bawden and supported by Kristen Phyland, Anna Rowlands and myself. Damascus has been engaged in an Indonesian study tour for nearly twenty years. At Damascus, we can offer two languages to Year 12 students, and we are proud that, as a regional school, our numbers in Indonesian and French are strong.

The trip was designed to enhance our students' language and cultural skills. I was impressed by our students' ability to take risks, meet others, and embrace a totally different culture and language. Our first week was spent at Bloombank, a local homestay that designed a program to embrace our students, challenge their language skills and experience firsthand the life of a young person living in Jakarta. Our hosts at Bloombank were incredibly welcoming, ensuring that the needs of our students and team were well-managed. At every opportunity, the team at Bloombank

created moments of joy, inclusion, and hospitality. I was constantly in awe of the community's ability to find the opportunity to laugh and embrace life with all its challenges. The cultural welcome ceremony was both formal and heartfelt and followed by the obligatory traditional dance and karaoke.

Bloombank staff have worked with our Indonesian students who went on the trip for the past two years, working with them online and providing them with the opportunity to practice their oral language skills. These tutors then ran small group language and cultural activities at Bloombank and the various cultural immersion experiences. We are grateful for the work of the staff at Bloombank and the development of our relationship with the tutors, who were both excited and energised by meeting our students.

The friendships and the deepening of cultural awareness were a highlight for me. I was impressed by our student's ability and openness to engage with local children from the town and their tutors. Our students were able to visit the local towns and see how



families live in Jakarta. They experienced faith experiences by visiting local mosques and churches, schools and one of the largest multimedia universities in Southeast Asia, and the zoo, where we spent an evening. Friendships have been strengthened, and language skills have been enhanced.

A key aspect of the Learner Attribute at Damascus is for our students to develop skills in global citizenship and cultural awareness. The Immersion Study Tour enabled our students to experience the world firsthand, and to witness the lives of young people in Southeast Asia. Our community members have been enriched by the friendships they harnessed with their peers, young people in Indonesia and their local tutors. Learning and experiencing our world, breaks down cultural stereotypes and celebrates diversity.

Our time in Bali demonstrated the challenge of living in a large developing region. The traffic and the energy of the city challenged each one of us. The ability to navigate traffic, people and the tourist trade was an eye-opener for each of us. Again, we had the opportunity to visit music schools and key monuments. Students experienced firsthand the dilemma of tourism and our responsibility as global citizens to remind ourselves of climate change, environmental practices and respecting our planet.

I am grateful for the time I spent with Brendan, Kirsten and Anna, our sensational young people, the Bloombank staff, and the many tour guides. As a college community, we are excited to welcome the staff from Bloombank to Damascus in 2024.

Steven Mifsud  
Principal, Damascus College



Tenenungan Waterfall.



Study Tour outside The Church of Our Lady of Assumption.  
- Jakarta Cathedral

# SHINING LIGHT AWARD

*for inspiring alumni*

The Damascus College Shining Light award celebrates the outstanding achievements of extraordinary alumni in a diverse range of fields and areas of endeavour. It recognises alumni whose service has made a significant contribution from local to the global community.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 AWARD INDUCTEES



**Dr Yvonne Aitken**  
STEAM Achievement Award  
Class of 1929



**Professor Andrew Ooi**  
STEAM Achievement and  
Academia/Career Excellence Award  
Class of 1988



**Nicole Thornton nee Warke**  
STEAM Achievement Award  
Class of 1994



**Dr Samantha Brown**  
Academia/Career excellence Award  
Class of 2006



**Connor Prunty**  
Young Achiever Award  
Service to the Community  
Class of 2016

## 2025 NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN

Categories for nomination include:

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY • STEAM ACHIEVEMENT  
SPORTING ACHIEVEMENT • ACADEMIA or CAREER EXCELLENCE  
FAITH DEVELOPMENT • YOUNG ACHIEVER

Simply complete a short nomination form:

[damascus.vic.edu.au/community/alumni/shining-light-award](https://damascus.vic.edu.au/community/alumni/shining-light-award)

2025 NOMINATIONS CLOSE FRIDAY 2 AUGUST 2024



# MY INDONESIAN IMMERSION

LUKE EDDY

The 2023 Indonesian study tour took place this year, with 23 students and four staff departing on 24 June and arriving back safely on 7 July.

I can confidently say that everyone on the trip had a blast! For many students, including myself, the trip had been a dream from when they began studying the language. It was a chance to get immersed in Indonesian culture, meet new people, and put our years of learning to use.

On the trip, we got to complete a variety of fun activities and visited a diverse range of places and attractions. For the first part of our journey, we stayed in Jakarta for one week. During this time, we met our Indonesian E-teachers, who had been teaching some of us for multiple years. We also got to make friends with the local kids from the kampung, who we keep in contact with today.

During our stay in Bali, we put our bargaining to the test at markets, visited a drive-in safari park, and one of the biggest water parks in Asia, slept in treehouses with slides, and even the teachers went down.

The Indonesian trip was amazing. I will definitely continue studying Indonesian in the future, and I believe many of my friends will too, especially after the wonderful experiences we had on this holiday.

The Indonesian study tour was both educational and adventurous. Along the journey, we made many new Indonesian friends and built relationships with our peers and teachers.

If you are considering learning to speak Bahasa Indonesia, I can confirm that it is fun and rewarding. I also highly recommend going on the study tour if the opportunity arises. While most of the trip was amazing, it was not without its challenges. Students missed their families, and some struggled with Bali belly, but these were all minor problems, and luckily, nothing major occurred. Despite the ups and downs, the memories and friendships made on this trip will last a lifetime.

After such a wonderful experience, with such a great group of students and teachers, I think every one of us will want to travel overseas again. Whether it be to Indonesia or elsewhere, I know I certainly will!

Luke Eddy, Year 10 student



Luke Eddy & James Gorman



Jack Sproull, Luke Eddy, and Kylan Jans



Luke Eddy & Jessica James



Shelby Sherritt and Steven Mifsud at the Bright Futures Breakfast 2023

## BRIGHT FUTURES BREAKFAST

### DAMASCUS COLLEGE EVENT

Damascus College welcomes nearly 1,200 students, aspiring for Catholic education to be accessible to as many people as possible in our community. However, accessibility can be a challenge for some.

In 2018, Damascus launched the Bright Futures Scholarship, which gives one Year 7 student 50% tuition fee relief for their entire six-year journey at Damascus College. This scholarship supports students and families who are experiencing financial or personal disadvantage and who demonstrate a strong commitment to social justice activities, contributing to their local community, but may not otherwise be able to afford a Catholic education.

On Thursday, 10 August, Damascus College held its annual Bright Futures fundraising breakfast for the Scholarship of the same name. The College was thrilled to welcome a large contingent of students,

alumni, staff and community members to the event held at the Damascus Events Centre. Other special guests included several Sisters of Mercy, leaders from the Catholic Education Office Ballarat (CEOB) and the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat offices, Legacy Ballarat and Findex members.

The 2023 College Captains, Sophie Busuttil and Xavier Byrne, welcomed the assembled crowd to the breakfast, opening the festivities with a simple welcome prayer. Sarah Boswell, Leader of Marketing and Development, then shared with attendees the details about the Bright Futures Scholarship, its benefactors and the need to support the scholarship through fundraising, before welcoming to the stage Year 11 student Zoe Newman. Zoe spoke from the heart about what receiving the 2022 Diocese of Ballarat scholarship meant to her and her family, and how it has impacted their lives.



The special guest speaker for this event was past student Shelby Sherritt, Class of 2013.

Shelby spoke about her inspirational and motivational personal journey, from being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer at age 20, to being a full-time artist with an international following. Shelby shared that she has been a creative soul her whole life, but it was not until 2016 that her life was sent in a spin that left her longing for creativity. It was her diagnosis of cancer that led her to explore clay. The medium's therapeutic movement led to her healing and gave her a mindful headspace through her recovery. This made her realise that her true purpose in life was to create ceramic art pieces. The takeaway message that Shelby imparted to the guests was that no matter where she is in life, she tries to make the best of a situation. Shelby does not just survive; she tries and thrives.

The final speaker for the day was Damascus College Principal Steven Mifsud, who thanked the assembled crowd and spoke of the importance that an education can make in a child's life. As a Catholic school, Damascus College is committed to providing excellence in education, and it is a privilege to be able to offer opportunities that benefit students and the wider community. He spoke of the importance of the welfare of young people and hence the emphasis on providing an environment that is secure and safe, happy and productive.

He reminded the attendees that their generosity and commitment could help to make a real impact on the lives of Damascus students.

"Your gift allows us to support an exciting and enriching educational experience for students."

In holding this fundraising event, Damascus College seeks to extend the Bright Futures Scholarship to more than one Year 7 student per year. If you wish to give towards this worthy cause, you can do this by calling the College office (03 5337 2222) or online at [damascus.vic.edu.au/community/giving](https://damascus.vic.edu.au/community/giving)





Class of 1981 - 40 Year Reunion, 2022

## LUCKY TO HAVE GONE TO ST MARTIN'S

### ALUMNI STORY

At the risk of leaning too heavily on the opening line of du Maurier's gothic classic Rebecca, 'Last night I dreamt I was back at St. Martin's.' Despite being just a year out from 60, St Martin's features heavily in my dreamscape: sitting on the classroom heaters, laughing in the dorms, taking care of burning issues on the fire escape. It is funny how two years can have such a big impact on your life.

I first heard about St Martin's in the Pines from my Year 10 art teacher. In hindsight, she was probably only in her early 20s and was not long out of school. She told us tales of boarding school escapades, an amusing mash-up of Mallory Towers (Enid Blyton classic series for those who do not know) and St. Trinian's. I was a staunch fan of both, so it piqued my fancy.

A few months later, I left the Dandenong's and traversed that drive from Geelong Road to the imposing front doors for the first time. Bedded in alpha order, I found myself on the third floor south with others ranging from H to M. While there were challenges, it was also a lot of fun. To say we 'pushed the envelope' is a bit of an understatement – I will not detail our shenanigans here as this is meant to be more career-oriented than a memoir. However, I will say that I made many wonderful friends and am blessed to have many of them still in my life.

The standard of learning was high, and I soon found my straight A's in maths from my previous school, did not transfer well and had to give up my dreams of marine biology (no pathways to anything back then). Instead, I did general maths with Gordon Shaw, and after I finished Year 12 (English with Shahrukh Kan, English Lit with Adib Khan, Geography with Doug Rose, Biology with Flash and

Human Development with Mike O'Brien), I did an arts degree at Monash (Clayton – there was only one back then).

Tip one (for readers still at school): People say arts degrees are a waste of time. Not so – they teach you to research thoroughly, think critically, and study things you like. In themselves, a pathway to so much. If you have no idea of what you want to do in life, do an arts degree and see where it takes you.

From there, I did a Dip Ed and qualified to teach English, literature and geography at the secondary level. While I enjoyed it, I knew it was not my forever role.

Tip two: You have probably been told you will have multiple careers in your life – it is true. Be open to opportunities, and do not get bogged down in something you do not love.

It was then that I got itchy feet and developed a passion for travel, which I still indulge in whenever possible. This time last year, I was in Morocco with Jacinta Cosgriff, also from the class of '81. In 1989, I headed to London via Kathmandu, travelling in a double-decker bus through amazing places over 13 weeks. I then lived in London for three years before returning to Melbourne via Africa. London was fabulous, and if you ever get the opportunity to live and work there – or anywhere in the world – take it.

Travel is the most marvellous and liberating experience. I did a bit of teaching in London at a school where I was paid a 'risk premium' to teach. I described myself as a bouncer. No wonder I did not want to return to it!



Upon returning to Melbourne in 1992, a series of sliding-door moments directed my career trajectory. Having returned to an economic recession, jobs were not plentiful. A good friend (also from the class of 81) got me an administration job at the County Court. From there, I landed a role at the Equal Opportunity Commission doing community relations and communications. I loved it, but it was not permanent. My manager introduced me to JB Were & Son, Melbourne's premier stockbroking company, where his brother held a senior role. It was more to get career advice, but they employed me. I found myself with the title 'Marketing Assistant' in the asset management division. I had no idea about marketing or finance – I was in for a steep learning curve.

Tip three: Do not be afraid to step outside your comfort zone – you might just find yourself where you need to be – or somewhere good for the time being.

I then completed a Graduate Diploma in Applied Finance and, while in study mode, a Master of Business – Marketing at RMIT.

I have worked in financial services, primarily funds management and superannuation, for 30 years. I have held senior roles with global companies, which has meant business class travel to visit overseas offices. I have worked with some senior people who would rate highly on the psychopath test and many more who I am happy to call my friends.

Oh, I am supposed to talk about my family. Among all that, I had two wonderful kids, who are both now studying away from home. My son is studying Business and Finance in London, and my daughter headed up to James Cook University to pick up that Marine Biology course, the one that I could not manage.

A dozen or so years ago I decided to hang out a shingle and set up my own business, providing marketing and communication services to corporates, mainly (but not exclusively) in financial services. It was slow to start, as business can be – but, thanks to great word of mouth and strong networking, I keep very busy, and this enables me to indulge my passion for travel...six weeks in Europe with the kids over Christmas this year, China in May 2024 with my aforementioned travel buddy Jacinta, and a plan to swim with the great whites in Port Lincoln before my 60th birthday.

My final tip, a pearl of wisdom honed over many years: remember what is most important in life. It is not stuff. It is all about the relationships you build and your experiences with the people in your life.

I consider myself very lucky to have had the experience of boarding at St. Martin's in the Pines, to have met some remarkable people and had a varied career. I am particularly fortunate to have now the freedom to pick and choose the work I do, who I do it for and where – being a digital nomad is underrated!

Tracey Franks, nee Krzywokulski, Class of 1981



St Martin's in the Pines, 1981



St Martin's in the Pines, 1981



St Martin's in the Pines, 1981



AW Nicholson Construction, Chris Cogdon Law Architects, Paris Govan, Lucas Wells, Steven Mifsud, and SAC Chair Lucy O'Beirne

# SENIOR BUILDING PROJECT IS FORGING AHEAD

## DAMASCUS COLLEGE

The first sod was turned in October as Damascus College forges ahead in delivering the College master plan with the development of a new Senior Learning Precinct.

The Senior Learning Precinct will be a new contemporary three-storey building designed to support and enhance the learning needs of Damascus senior students.

With vistas to our natural bush site and greater Ballarat and surrounds, the building will provide twenty-three well-appointed classrooms, student services, open independent learning areas and gathering spaces, and modern amenities catering for the broad needs of staff and students. It is designed to reflect an adult learning space with the new building positioning Damascus students to engage in their future pathways.

Damascus has worked closely with Law Architects to develop this new and innovative addition to the campus, which is sympathetic to the unique bush setting of the site and the original works of the Sisters of Mercy.

An open-feature internal staircase produces a light-filled connection between the upper levels of the building, and the accompanying tiered seating provides lecture-style addresses for students in preparing them for further education. Including an operable glass wall on the lower level opening an indoor-outdoor space for students, and creates a natural amphitheatre, increasing outdoor engagement opportunities for the College.

The inclusion of eco-friendly materials in the building and an expansion to the College's array of solar panels help highlight the continued focus of the College on sustainable operating practices, continuing the evolution of the Mount Clear site since the consolidation of campuses.

This new facility will sit alongside the current Sacred Heart Building at the back of campus, nestled between the former St. Martin's site in the Pines boarding house. Adjoining the Genevieve McDonald Science wing and Building 7 via a raised walkway, the design will ensure a continued connection of the building to the rest of the campus.





North perspective\*



Student area\*



East perspective\*



\* Artists Impressions

Entrance foyer\*





SAC Chair Lucy O'Beirne, AW Nicholson Construction, Xavier Byrne, Paris Govan, Lucas Wells, Sophie Busuffil, Steven Mifsud, and Chris Cogdon Law Architects

Damascus College Principal, Mr. Steven Mifsud, said that as part of our commitment to being a 'future-focussed thinking' college, this building provides a modern, innovative, and contemporary learning environment for the senior students at the College.

"In developing the holistic learner, the building is designed to encourage further capacity for independent study, collaborative working spaces, and additional areas for groups to connect our community," he said.

"Being able to provide the best possible support to our students, in leading them towards their chosen future vocations, this new facility looks to bring together the key functions of careers guidance and VCE and VCE-VM coordination into a connected and collaborative student services precinct."

Damascus College is excited to announce that AW Nicholson has been awarded the building contract and will commence works on site in the middle of September this year. AW Nicholson is a local company with a strong reputation for delivering high-quality large-scale projects.

AW Nicholson Director Stephen Allen said that they are delighted to, once again, partner with Damascus College and deliver this modern and contemporary senior learning building for the college, DOBCEL and Law Architects.

"The natural topography of the campus presents unique challenges in both design and construction. Despite this, Law Architects have achieved a design outcome sympathetic to the site. We look forward to successfully delivering this outcome for the students and the broader college community," he said.

College Principal Steven Mifsud said that in terms of timeline, the building will be brought online for use in early 2025.

"Damascus is thrilled to work in partnership with AW Nicholson, a trusted local construction company that is family-owned. We look forward to delivering this amazing building for our growing community to be their best."



Scan the code to take the 3D Tour



# ELLIE RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS MUSIC THEATRE AWARD

## ALUMNI STORY

Congratulations to past student Ellie Carroll, Class of 2018, who has recently received The University of Melbourne Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation Music Theatre Award, valued at \$25,000.

This prestigious award provides significant funding to assist aspiring Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) Music Theatre students to embark on a successful career following graduation.

The Dobell Award is the largest of its kind in Australia and winning takes raw talent and dogged determination. The winner is selected based on both the audition performance and the basis of their exceptional talent, approach to course studies and dedication to aspire to a significant performing career.

The award was judged by an independent panel and included academic excellence from the three-year course she is studying, a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Music Theatre), some assessed performance work including singing, monologues, and choreography.

Ellie is in her third and final year at university and will soon appear in 'Heather's The Musical', with her faculty class. She is also a regular performer with the Australian Shakespeare Company in their Tinkerbell and the Dream Fairies show.

After graduating from university at the end of this year, Ellie plans to study in the Alexander technique at some point in the future and is weighing up where travel and education fit in around auditioning for shows and working.

Well done, Ellie, you are a star!



Margaret and Ron Dobell with Ellie



Ellie Carroll on stage



Benjamin as Uncle Fester

## ME AS UNCLE FESTER

BENJAMIN CASEY

### Why did you want to get involved in the production?

I got involved in the production as I had been involved with Damascus productions before, such as 2022's Clue, 2021's Spelling Bee, and this year's Easter production of Final Hours.

### What was it like to be part of the performing arts group during the lead-up to the show?

It was a really special place that can't be properly described unless you are actually immersed and have experienced the atmosphere and culture that come with being part of a production. The best way I can describe it is as electric, just the room buzzing with energy and nerves.

### What was it like to play Uncle Fester? What preparation did you have to do?

It was really fun, but a lot of hard work and long rehearsals. Preparation mainly included learning and memorising my many songs and lines.

### How did it make you feel to land a lead role in the show?

I was ecstatic. I was in Psychology at the time, and Declan Eden (Gomez) and I were absolutely raving about it to the point that everyone else in the class was probably sick of us.

### What did you find most challenging about the show?

The most challenging thing for me was taking and holding the responsibility of being a main character, as it was my first time in a role of such significance. This was especially true for Fester, as he was responsible for breaking the fourth wall and linking the stage and audience.

### What did you enjoy most about the show?

The best part of the show was easily, collaborating with the cast, crew, and directors. These people really became a second family for me, and many of them I have worked with before, either in Drama or in other productions.

### Why did you shave your head for the role?

As soon as I got the role, I talked with Andrew Seary, and he explained that he would prefer not to use a bald cap and that he would be wrapped if the hair was to go. I obliged. Personally, I wouldn't have had it any other way, as the bald cap honestly looked terrible.

### What is your favourite memory of the show?

The first time we got the puppet in for the song 'The Moon and Me' will always hold a special place in my heart. It was hilarious to have a mini-me strapped to my neck as it was flopping around. I also distinctly remember Andrew almost knocking me off the top of the stairs.

### If you were speaking to a student who wasn't sure if they wanted to audition for the show, what advice would you give them?

Why not? What are you afraid of? If you get rejected, go for it again. Everybody faces rejection and adversity, but as actors and performers, we have to rise about it. That's all rehearsal is, working through challenges until you get everything less bad.

Benjamin Casey, Year 11 student



# WEDNESDAY ADDAMS

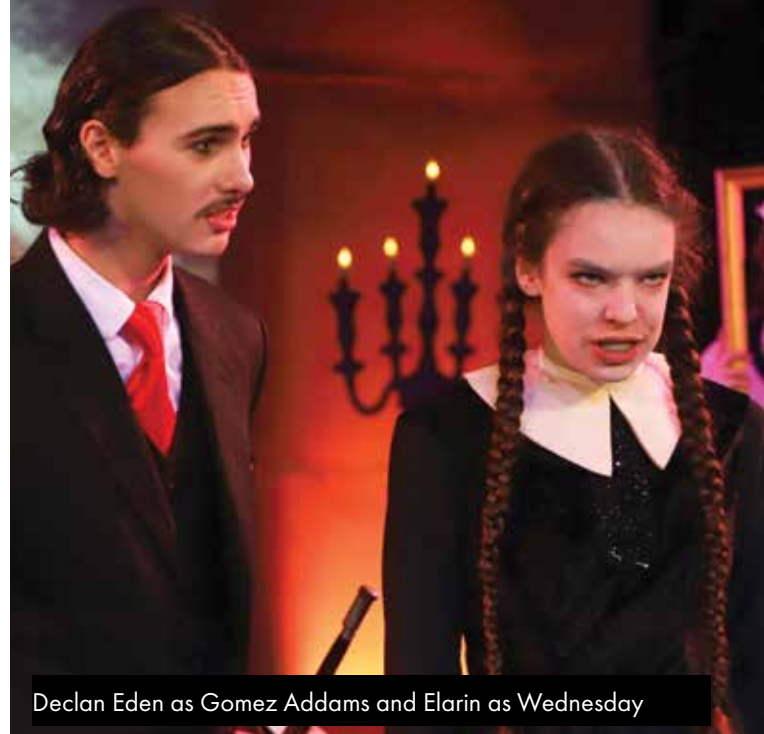
ELARIN JOHNSON

Whenever you're in a production, especially at Damascus, someone will inevitably talk about the cast being like a family. For me, this was especially true for Addams. As a senior student in a lead role, especially having already done *The Final Hours* with many of the cast earlier in the year, together with *Clue* and *Spelling Bee*. Even working backstage at *Newsies (BLOC Jr)* in the last two years, I knew almost the entire cast, and most of the cast knew me! I started hanging out with cast and crew members I didn't usually hang out with before school and at lunches, and even now, weeks after it's finished. But I even grew closer with good friends. We spent at least seven and a half hours extra together every week for over a term, Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, as well as Sunday mornings! It was such a warm and welcoming team. Everyone was always looking out for each other, and not just at rehearsals.

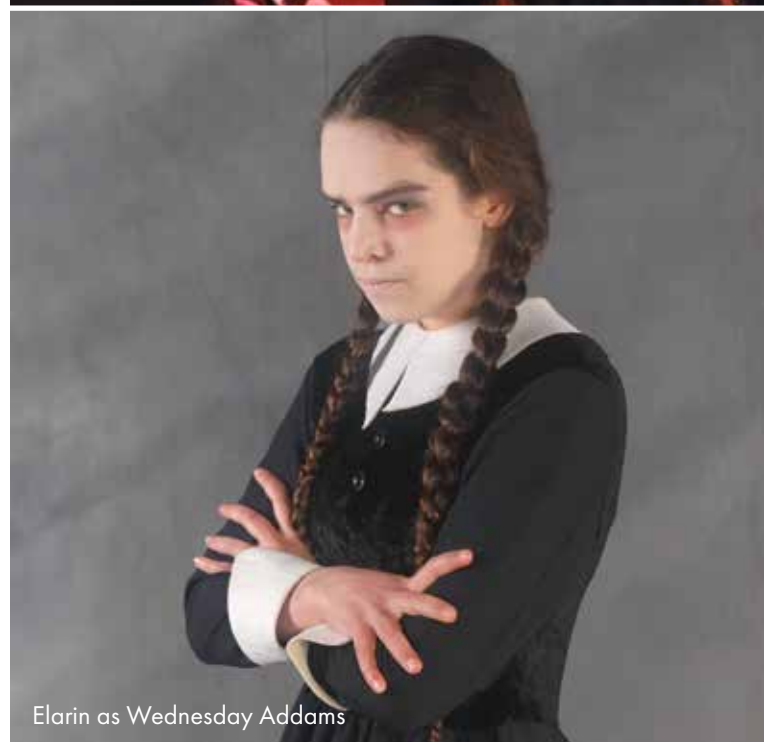
Getting cast as Wednesday was a dream come true. We were sent an email, and then the full cast list was put up in the music building late, one Monday in March. My friend and I had double study when it came out. Not much work got done that afternoon! It was certainly a challenge to juggle Year 12 with Addams, but it was worth it! Sometimes, knowing I had rehearsals that night was all that got me through a day of classes.

But being involved in Damascus performing arts isn't just about productions! I currently do Senior Singers and African Drumming; I did drama club every other year and am currently doing VCE drama. The music building and Audi are like a second home. I cannot thank Maria, Andrew and Nic enough for all they do, and trust me, you don't know this school until you've walked around the bush at close to midnight and stood next to a flaming torch in sandals in front of building 2.

Elarin Johnson, Year 12 student



Declan Eden as Gomez Addams and Elarin as Wednesday



Elarin as Wednesday Addams



Elarin on stage in Addams Family, The Musical



Gabriel Russell as Pugsley Addams

## PLAYING PUGSLEY ADDAMS

GABRIEL RUSSELL

My name is Gabriel Russell, and I played the role of Pugsley Addams in the recent production of *The Addams Family*. I got involved in the production because it looked really fun, and as a Year 7 student, I wanted to have this unique experience.

I found it really tiring when I was preparing to play Pugsley, as I rehearsed every second day after getting home from school, and I had to learn my lines constantly and had to learn how to act, which was quite new to me.

When I heard that I was cast as a lead role in the musical, I was so pumped, as I knew it would open a kooky door to a tonne of possibilities.

On the opening night, I had a large amount of anxiety, but during the second show, it was nonstop fun till the end. That is how powerful the brain is. You can overcome anxiety with just thoughts!

The experience of being a cast member was amazing, and I loved spending time with all the wonderful people who supported me through the process. I am very thankful for their support, and I am now looking forward to auditioning for the next couple of shows in years to come.

Gabriel Russell, Year 7 student



Gabriel Russell on stage



# MY ROLE AS THE ADDAMS FAMILY STAGE MANAGER

## ALUMNI STORY

This year's school production of "The Addams Family" was an incredible show and included students from every year level across the cast and crew.

The Performing Arts program and the auditorium at Damascus hold many special memories for me, and I wasn't ready to leave "the Audi" just yet, so I jumped at the chance to come back!

Stage Managing was a new experience for me, but it was fantastic as I worked alongside Andrew Seeary, Maria Russell and Cooper Guinea, who taught me the ropes. I also got to give my own notes to the students, who were amazing to work with!

In production week, I managed the backstage area, which included jobs ranging from giving 5-minute calls to calling cues in the show – it's a bit more hectic than it sounds!

My favourite memory from the rehearsals was when we first did the scene change for the last scene in Act 1, as it was so loud and chaotic that it had everyone in hysterics! The care and support everyone gave one another throughout the show was incredible, and I feel so privileged to have worked with this group on this awesome production.

Megan O'Beirne, Class of 2022

Stage Manager, The Addams Family Production 2023



Megan during Addams family rehearsals



Stage manager



Pentecost Sunday 1955 Sr M Leo Front left Sr M Carmel 4th row 2nd from right

## SISTERS OF MERCY... 100 YEARS AGO

### DAMASCUS SISTERS OF MERCY

Exactly 100 years ago, on a cold day in September, three remarkable women took their vows and were received into the Ballarat East Convent of Mercy. Here, like so many of the hard-working and dedicated women of mercy who walked the halls of that same convent, they each touched the lives of the students of Sacred Heart College (SHC) in their own individual ways.

Ellen Bridget Tressider's influence on the students at the College was sadly short-lived, yet the impact she made on the lives of those around her was profound.

In December 1924, little more than a year after she was received as Sr Marie Therese, she passed away. Aged only nineteen, her death shocked the SHC community as she appeared to be recovering from the illness that ultimately took her. Tales of her extroverted personality and the saintliness for which she was well known ensured that her spirit lived on in the college community for many years, and she was joyfully remembered through poetry and fond reflections in the SHC annual.

Eleanor Mary Kean was herself educated at SHC. She completed her teacher training in the state school system, working in both regional as well as Melbourne schools.

At the age of 23, Eleanor began making arrangements to join the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Upon calling into the Ballarat Convent of Mercy to farewell the women who had educated her she found her mind was changed, and she instead became Sr Mary Carmel, a Sister of Mercy.

After entering the convent, Sr Carmel continued her study of music, playing and teaching the pianoforte. She actively assisted many regional Mercy schools in gaining their registration and obtained secondary registration as a teacher herself. In 1928, Sr Carmel was a foundation member of the Warracknabeal convent and then once again travelled as a pioneer to the new convent at Mortlake in 1951. She returned to Ballarat East and SHC in 1956, becoming Mother General of the Congregation upon the death of Mother Bonaventure in 1966.



Mother Carmel's love of the piano continued well into her retirement. At her passing in 1988, she was celebrated as a dedicated Sister of Mercy and a passionate teacher whose musical ability delighted many.

Margaret Bartels was also educated at SHC before completing her teacher training.

Aged just 20 when she entered the Ballarat East Convent of Mercy, Margaret took the name Sr Mary Leo and dedicated herself to a life of education. Over the next 20 years, Sr Leo taught in Ballarat and throughout country Victoria. She felt at home in the classroom and had a reputation as a dedicated and compassionate teacher.

It was this compassion that resulted in Sr Leo being asked to leave the profession she loved, to take the important role of Mistress of Novices at the Ballarat East convent, helping the young novices to adjust and settle into their new religious lives. While she missed life in the classroom, Sr Leo accepted this new calling with great commitment and generosity of spirit. Her return to the classroom was cut short by failing health, and Sr Leo passed away in 1965, living on in the memories of those who knew her as a dedicated religious and woman of prayer.



Sacred Heart College front door with Sr Marie Therese, Sr M Carmel, and Sr M Leo 1923



Sacred Heart College front door 2023



Sr Agnes Connellen, Sr Audrey Gleeson, Sr Anne McMillan, Sr Carmel Kean, Sr Mary Ward, Sr Rosemary Kelly 1969





Lucas Wells, Zoe Newman, Eli Spielvoege and William Hollitt

# FRAYNE SPEECH FESTIVAL

DEBATING CLUB

In August, four Year 11 Damascus College debaters embarked on a journey to Mount Lilydale Mercy College for the 2023 Frayne Speech Festival to engage in debates against students from fellow Mercy schools.

The day kicked off with the students taking on the affirmative side of the first debate, arguing that political parties should be required to present candidates from underrepresented groups.

After a short break, it was time for the second debate, where the students found themselves on the negative side of the argument that the rise of AI should be regretted, with Damascus emerging victorious in this debate.

Throughout the day, the students found themselves immersed in the art of debating, receiving invaluable feedback from judges, and then improving their craft. It was a day of growth, learning, and a wonderful experience for the students involved.



Zoe Newman



Opening prayer



# EAMON DE VALERA VISITS SACRED HEART COLLEGE

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Sacred Heart College (SHC) welcomed many a distinguished guest over the years, perhaps none more so than in May 1948 when Eamon de Valera, prominent Irish politician, activist, and later President of Ireland, arrived at the College with fellow Politician Frank Aiken, famed Scottish tenor Father Sydney McEwan, and Australian politician and later Labor Party Leader Arthur Calwell.

De Valera had arrived in Australia to celebrate the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne's 100th anniversary. The visit caused great excitement around the school, as ties between the Sisters of Mercy and Ireland had remained strong, and many students had strong Irish family connections. The only regional stop on de Valera's Australia-wide tour, the visit was no doubt orchestrated by Calwell, who had a daughter, Mary, at SHC and a son, Art, at Villa Maria, at the time the SHC junior school. Sadly, Calwell's son Art was seriously ill at the time of the visit and passed away only a short time after.

The first stop on the way to SHC was the junior school, Villa Maria, where de Valera addressed the waiting crowd, and Father McEwan blessed them with a song. The party then left for SHC, and the 1949 annual reflects the pure excitement de Valera's visit inspired in the students. Three pages were dedicated to the visit, including an account of their frustrated impatience at knowing he was in the library answering questions for a radio broadcast while both his lunch and his admiring fans awaited him in the dining hall.

After the meal, de Valera addressed the admiring students. His speech was then followed by the young Scottish priest regaling the group with the ballads of his homeland. The Ballarat visit ended with a trip to the Eureka Memorial, where the four men cast their eyes over the long list of Irish names included in the dead of the Eureka Stockade.



Eamon de Valera at Sacred Heart College, with Mary E Calwell on the left 1948



On the verandah at Villa Maria 1948



Looking at the Eureka Memorial



Goyoko Lakes, Nepal

# MY LOVE OF ENGINEERING

## ALUMNI STORY

I grew up in Buninyong. Shortly after graduating high school in 2011, I moved to Geelong to undertake a double degree in Engineering (Electrical) / Commerce (Management) at Deakin University. The duration of this course was five and a half years, in which I graduated with Honours.

Once I had completed my studies, I decided to travel and see some other parts of the world. I travelled to Japan with my family and, soon after that, spent five to six weeks traversing across the United States and Canada with a few of my best mates (also from Damascus College).

The first full-time position I obtained post-university was with WorkSafe Victoria (WSV) – the Occupational Health & Safety Regulator for the state of Victoria.

The initial role I applied for with WSV was in a Graduate Program. This was essentially a fixed-term role where I had the opportunity to move into and work with different teams across the organisation. During this time, I worked in Engineering, Change Management and Communications – quite a few different and varying roles. I found I really enjoyed Communications and was fortunate enough

to become a Communications Advisor for WSV after the Graduate Program concluded.

After five years at the organisation, I have now recently moved into a Project Officer role with WSV, supporting them with their efforts to reduce harm from occupational illness and disease (such as silicosis and asbestosis).

WorkSafe is a great place to work due to the profound impact we can have across the Victorian community to improve workplace health and safety and save lives. It is incredibly rewarding work.

Occupational illness and disease are emerging and worrying issues at the moment, even more so after the impacts of COVID-19. I now play a leading role with the organisation as to how we address these issues across Victoria and collaborate with other jurisdictions across the country and world as to how we can best prevent harm from occurring.

My achievements since finishing school were certainly graduating with Honours from Deakin University, and recently purchased my first home just over two years ago in Mount Duneed.



One of my favourite subjects at Damascus College was Systems Engineering. This was in big part thanks to Jeff Simpson. He made that class very fun due to his personality and ability to connect with the students he was teaching. Not only was he very good at teaching the subject, but he was always good for a laugh and chat.

To hear of his recent passing was incredibly sad. He was an amazing teacher. My thoughts are with all of Jeff's family and friends.

I was very fortunate to complete high school with a great cohort of people – many of whom I still call my closest friends today. The time I spent with them during school includes some of my fondest memories.

I've always enjoyed the outdoors. I love going for hikes wherever I can – either locally or abroad. I recently made the trip to Nepal and hiked up to Everest Base Camp, which was incredible.

I'm an avid watcher of most sports, including footy, cricket and the NBA. Where I can, I also love to attend live music.

I'd encourage students to try not to stress if they're about to complete high school and unsure about what they want to do for a career. Your career is not confined to what you choose to do immediately post-school. You may discover new interests along the way, and there will be pathways for pursuing those areas, if you choose to do so.

My advice to Year 7 students would be to get amongst as much as you can while you are there. I think your experience at school is enriched when you participate in the extra-curricular activities available.

Try things outside your comfort zone, too. It is amazing how beneficial it can be for your own personal growth. I initially had reservations about becoming House Captain, but now I think it was one of the best things I did.

It is amazing to see how much the College has changed since I first arrived in 2006 – from moving away from the Junior campus and seeing the growth of the Mt Clear campus. I look forward to seeing how the school will continue to evolve going forward.

Joshua Orr, Class of 2011



Joshua Orr 2011



Swimming Carnival 2011



Submissions are open for the 2025 DAMASCUS COLLEGE

# ALUMNI ART PRIZE

*Your chance to earn*

**\$2000**

*for a piece of your artwork*

The Art Prize is open to Damascus College Alumni, including past students or staff from Damascus College, Sacred Heart College, St Paul's College and St Martin's in the Pines.

Your artwork might be a drawing, sketch, painting, photograph, sculpture, textile, glasswork, lithograph, screen printing, or even an etching but must explore the College motto 'To Live By the Light of Christ'.

Application deadline: 4pm Friday 2 August 2024

Details and application form at [damascus.vic.edu.au](https://damascus.vic.edu.au)





## A WORTHY CAUSE – TWIN HEARTS

### ALUMNI STORY

Kelly-Louise Austin nee Sharp, Class of 1999, worked as a volunteer in Kenya for three months in her early twenties, which started her passion for helping others.

Kelly-Louise is an Apprenticeships Field Officer with MEGT. Most recently, Kelly-Louise was a Jobs Victoria Employment Mentor at AMES Australia, working with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Kelly-Louise has previously worked in Body Corporate Administration Management and Disability Employment Services.

Kelly-Louise has spent time living and working in Kenya and Tanzania in schools, orphanages and Internally Displaced Persons camps. She spent over ten years working for not-for-profit organisations in Kenya, New Zealand and Australia. In 2017, she founded her own Not-For-Profit foundation, Twin Hearts, raising funds and awareness for grassroots causes in Ballarat and partnering with charities in Tanzania. Kelly-Louise is passionate about helping her clients prepare for and then find meaningful, long-lasting employment.

As the President of Twin Hearts, Kelly-Louise and her hard-working committee of volunteers have raised many thousands of dollars for various causes. The pandemic made fundraising difficult, but creative ways were found, and the organisation continued to thrive. Kelly-Louise did all of this whilst battling her own health issues. Twin Hearts has assisted many projects, including Cops N Kids, Food is Free Laneway, Fiona Elsey Cancer Research, One Humanity Shower Bus, and Love Your Sister.

Kelly-Louise has ensured that Twin Hearts runs with minimal overheads, so all funds raised go to the nominated cause. In her working life, Kelly-Louise works with migrants and refugees to assist them in education and/or training.

As well as working full time, raising three young children, and running a charity, in July 2022, Kelly-Louise was sworn in as a Justice of the Peace.



# WEAR IT PURPLE DAY

DAMASCUS COLLEGE EVENT

On 25 August, the Damascus College Pride Committee led the College for "Wear It Purple" Day, which strives to foster supportive, safe, empowering, and inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ allies, friends, family and colleagues.

Students and staff were invited to drop by the Rainbow Stall at lunchtime in the courtyard for information, flyers, and other giveaways. They also had the opportunity to have a chat with staff and/or fellow students present at the stall. Students were given the opportunity to add their own empowering message for the 2023 theme "Write Your Story" to motivate LGBTQIA+ youth.

Wear It Purple Day is an annual awareness day created to help support LGBTQIA+ youth with a day of celebration, activities, and wearing purple so that rainbow youth no longer feel alone.

The message of the day by students and staff was clear and simple: "Everybody has the right to be proud of who they are."





# MY JOURNEY TO AMERICA

## ALUMNI STORY

Hello, my name is Margaret Shelton nee Hines, Class of 1984, and I attended Sacred Heart College, followed by six months at St Martin's in the Pines, before heading off to America, where I completed my final year of school.

While my secondary education gave me an excellent grounding for study and life, I was far from career-focused at the end of high school. It was not until several years after I had finished high school that I decided to become a designer.

In 1993, back when I was in Year 11, I went on an exchange to live with a family in Jackson, Mississippi, America. The American school year starts in the middle of the calendar year, so I was lucky enough to graduate high school six months earlier than my friends at home! My host father was a home designer and would often take me along for site visits to houses that he had designed and were under construction.

After high school, I travelled, worked, and explored other career options. I was a terrible travel agent and receptionist, and hospitality was not for me. After feeling defeated by another job that did not fulfil me, I turned my attention to something more substantial and enrolled in an interior design course at Leeds University.

University was great. Studying design can be hard work, with many late nights drawing, writing, and second-guessing every decision you make. As with any creative field, it is hard to come to terms with the fact that there are no definitive, right answers. Design is subjective - what you see as beautiful and poetic, which others may call boring and contrived.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Design with Honours from Leeds University in 2004. I made great friends at university, including my best friend and life partner, Jo. After university, Jo and I moved to London, and I started working at Owens & Kim Ltd. We bought a small place near Clapham and have been renovating it ever since.

Margaret Shelton, Class of 1984





## WHY IS READING IMPORTANT?

### YEAR 7 STUDENTS

Reading opens the mind, the heart and the soul. As educators, we know this is true; we witness the benefits of reading every day. Yet, we are challenged by the reality that adolescents often disengage from good reading habits as they enter secondary school. Increasing demands on time, a multitude of subjects that require reading, and busy social lives are all changes that impact our readiness to sit and read for pleasure.

Indeed, as adults, we also stray from good reading habits, but for a well-rounded education, literacy is key. The library staff and English faculty have been working towards building the culture of reading at Damascus for years, and we're proud of our successes. But we also want students to drive this important conversation. So, we talked to some Year 7 students who share their thoughts on the importance of reading.

Michael Bennett, Learning Area Leader, English

#### **Reading helps us to be social and understand others:**

Getting recommendations from a friend or family member is a great way to not only read great books, but to connect to

those people through reading and have good conversations. Through conversations about books, we can get an idea of other perspectives and how they read and see the book. It is also a great way to get to know each other and have a connection.

Sienna Baldwin, Year 7 student

#### **Why do we like to read tragedies?**

I believe that tragedies, such as war books and drama, are popular because of the darker aspects of the stories. When reading about someone else's life that has gone terribly wrong, you realise that your life isn't that bad compared to what other people are going through. When we read a book with trauma for the main character, it's like you're inside their head. This can help you truly understand what others are going through. It also gives you a minute to cry and realise how tragic and confronting the event that has happened is. Once you reach what feels like the lowest point you could reach, you can feel lighter, as though you are much happier than you were when you started.

Ella Gordon, Year 7 student



### Good book recommendations can form good friendships:

Receiving good recommendations and following through with reading the book, is a great way to make your friend happy and can lead to some interesting conversations and becoming even closer friends. It can make you think and bounce ideas off each other about past experiences and the world today. It can also make you want to read more about the specific genre and can promote a different thought on things like climate change, LGBTQI+ and others.

Elliot Marson, Year 7 student

### The important role of parents:

All my life, my parents made sure I was surrounded by books. I have many strong memories of being read to when I was young and then, as I grew, reading on my own. I have a lot of strong connections to my favourite books that I remember from being younger, and with those connections comes the love of those books from my childhood. I think that growing up around books and being exposed to all kinds of stories is important to the development of a child, and then an adult, who reads for joy. When your parents read to you or with you, and you enjoy it, it builds connections that reading is good and doesn't have to be forced to happen. My mum would read to my brother and me most nights, and though I was already an avid reader, her doing the voices made the story come alive around me. In conclusion, parents can nurture and foster reading in their children, and that can create a lifelong love of stories.

Isabeau Turner, Year 7 student

### The important role of teachers:

Teachers have the unique opportunity to change a child's life through reading and the magic of literature. By modelling to their students their love of literature, they inspire those students to read and to immerse themselves in the world of books. These days, there are kids like me who adore literature and books and find it comforting to read a good novel. Then there are kids who unfortunately see reading as a chore or an irritating compliance. Teachers can help open students' minds to the joy of reading. When a child is forced into reading a book with nil interest to them and their personal beliefs, they will continue to reject books.

There is a power amongst teachers and influential adults that could change a child's life. By expressing their love of books, teachers are subsequently encouraging children to read more. As previously discussed, books really do give different perspectives and broaden one's mindset. They give insights into the way we think and feel. Having a connection with books, and with a child, teachers are, in a way, passing on that love of books to the student, making reading a pleasure, not a compliance. We need to turn the mindset from, "Ugh, I have to read." to; "Yay, I get to read!". Therefore, by changing the mindset of kids and the way they feel about books, teachers leave a lasting impact that will stay with the students for life.

Freya Bennett, Year 7 student





## BALANCING HEALTH AND SCHOOL

ALYSSA FENSLING

My name is Alyssa Fensling, and I am currently completing Year 12 VCE-VM studies. I live at home with my mum, dad, and younger sister, who is currently in Year 9 at Damascus. I could not do life without my family and my cherished pets. I have two dogs, a cat and a bearded dragon. Outside of school, I enjoy catching up with friends, going for walks, music and anything creative.

I have a genetic condition called Periventricular Nodular Heterotopia (PVNH), which has also caused my Epilepsy. PVNH is a rare neurological disorder that can have a variety of different symptoms among sufferers. Some symptoms associated with PVNH are lung disorders, cognitive and motor issues, cardiovascular problems, and seizures. All these can range from mild to severe. I was finally diagnosed around ten years old after a long and frustrating journey to find answers for my symptoms.

School has been tough for me due to having epilepsy, as well as memory, and auditory processing issues. My ability to learn and interpret information has been a significant challenge for me and often feels like an uphill battle.

Throughout my journey, I have trialled numerous medications before finding the right fit for me. I also use a variety of techniques that assist me in overcoming my learning challenges, such as having information sent to me as a hardcopy rather than verbally. This allows me to refer to the information as many times as is required. Currently, my seizures are very well controlled by the medications my neurologist has prescribed. It can be exhausting, on a day-to-day basis, to manage my cognitive issues, but I get by.

My family have been my biggest supporters and have always advocated for me along the whole journey. My mum has the same condition, and it is comforting to have someone fully understand the symptoms and emotions that come along with PVNH. My neurologist ensures I am medically well-managed. My friends have been amazing and so understanding, and the Learning Support Officers at Damascus have always provided me with so much support in the classroom.



When thinking back over my favourite memories of high school, one memory that will always stick with me was having the opportunity to be a part of the Hands on Learning Program (HoLP) in Year 10. Alan Strange was my greatest mentor, and he really was the backbone of the HoLP program. Prior to the HoLP program, I was weighing up whether to continue my schooling, as I didn't enjoy it. However, thanks to Alan Strange, I found new and unique opportunities that have created a new career interest for me that I didn't think was possible.

The Structured Workplace Learning Program (SWL) has been my favourite part of Year 12. This program has assisted me to gain valuable workplace experience, whilst also learning about which industry I may see myself being a part of in the future. I have enjoyed working in a variety of different settings and working alongside and learning from so many people.

At Damascus, I enjoy how supportive the community is. The environment and the people at Damascus have provided memories and have assisted me in finding meaningful friendships that I will cherish forever.

Currently, I am completing work experience at a set design business, and I would love to continue with this company if the opportunity arises. I would love to be a part of making props and creating stage sets for theatre and film. After high school, I hope to complete further studies in the set and prop design industry.

If any young people are experiencing health issues and trying to balance it with school, my advice would always be to remember to be grateful for your support network. Do not be embarrassed to reach out for help from your teachers. There will always be a solution or modification to overcome your learning difficulties. Do not be so hard on yourself. It is important to take time for yourself. Remember, your health issue is just a part of you. It is not who you are!

Alyssa Fensling, Year 12 student





# DAMASCUS ARCHIVES NEED YOUR HELP

Over the years the Damascus College archives has received many wonderful donations from our alumni, and often the stories behind the items are just as valuable to our history as the items themselves.

Years ago, a beautiful monogrammed table setting was returned to the college by a St Martin's boarder who had secreted it away upon graduating. Used daily in the boarding house for meals and events, this was an exciting acquisition as there was nothing like it in the Damascus archives at that time.

***Damascus College archives invites anyone holding on to cherished items from your school years to consider donating them to the College archives where they will be a celebrated part of our heritage.***

The archives are the repositories of the Colleges rich history, preserving the stories, the accomplishments, and milestones that have shaped the college throughout the years. The College history is of course intertwined with that of the foundation schools Sacred Heart College, St Paul's Technical College, and St Martin's in the Pines, as without them Damascus College would not exist. Be assured your donations would be treasured in a secure archives facility and would help future generations of Damascus College students to learn from this shared heritage.

***To contact the College archivist to discuss your potential donation [archives@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:archives@damascus.vic.edu.au)***



# BLAST FROM THE PAST

## DAMASCUS DAY

A much-anticipated day on the college calendar is, of course, Damascus Day. It is both a day for solemn reflection and joyful celebration as the College community comes together to acknowledge our identity as a Catholic, co-educational secondary school. The day provides an opportunity to recognise all those who had a hand in the creation of the space in which we now exist as a college – from the early days when a senior campus on Mount Clear land was merely a dream, to the beautiful 50-acre site we now occupy.

The day traditionally begins with a whole-school mass in which students from every Teacher Advisor (TA) group are involved. The Damascus Day Mass is arguably the most special of the year and forms the beginning of an afternoon of celebrations. Each year, it is a joy to witness the number of students who willingly involve themselves in the events of the day, whether that be with the preparations in the lead-up to the day or in actively participating in the Mass itself.

After Mass, the College becomes swathed in a sea of colour as students dress up in costumes that reflect the theme chosen for the year. There is a carnival-like atmosphere as activities take place all over the school. Each year is a little different. There might be a giant slide, some live music, a petting zoo, or even a rock-climbing wall. There is always a great selection of food and many smiling faces as students celebrate together throughout the afternoon. It is truly a magical day in the life of the College.







James Mavity 2023

## ANYONE CAN HAVE A GO

### ALUMNI STORY

G'day, for those who may not know me, my name is James Mavity, and I would like to tell you about my Damascus journey. Before we can get to that, we have to go back to the start. I was born in South Australia alongside my twin brother, Daniel. No, I am not the eldest, and we look and act completely different. We moved to Victoria in 2005 to a small farm in a town called Morrissions, located between Geelong and Ballarat. My younger years were spent playing every sport Mum and Dad could get me to, riding motorbikes, and just being outside in the mud. It is safe to say Mum was grateful for the day I started doing my own washing.

Following my primary school years, I embarked on my Damascus journey. Damascus provided me with such a diverse and endless range of opportunities. I gave back to the school in as many ways as I could, including taking part in the peer mentoring program, leading school tours, and dancing (if that is what you could call what I was doing) in the 'dancing with the stars' event held every year at lunchtime. I proudly represented Damascus in school footy,

cross country, swimming, and athletics. I firmly believe that the College's 'anyone can have a go' culture gave me the confidence that shaped me into the person I am today. I also forged many of my closest friendships during this time and look back fondly at the many memories we created while at school.

The teachers at Damascus also played a significant role in shaping the positive memories I hold. Among them, Teacher Advisor (TA) Nicole Burness and Humanities teacher Ashleigh Brown stand out as my favourites. Their knowledge and passion for the subjects they taught, as well as their genuine care for the wellbeing of students, made it an amazing experience. Remember the time that Ash let us watch Brooklyn Nine-Nine in class... (I hope you do not get in trouble!)

The pinnacle of my Damascus time is undoubtedly my involvement in the rowing program. I started as a junior and worked my way through the program until my first year of seniors, where I stroked the Division 1 Senior Boys Crew. We had a remarkable season,



winning the Head of School boys regatta and narrowly being beaten by Grammar in the Head of the Lake. To this day, this is the highest result for the Damascus senior boys rowing crews. We also represented Damascus at nationals in Sydney, reaching the A final - an extraordinary achievement for a school with such a young rowing program. Credit goes out to Grant McKechnie and Sharon Waters for their dedication and hard work that year. I continued rowing for a few years after leaving school, rowing for Ballarat City. I had some amazingly successful seasons, winning a few state titles and a third at nationals. I have since taken up a leadership role, spending my weekday mornings and evenings coaching the next generation of rowers.

Following my Damascus days, I pursued my love for all things mechanical. I got an apprenticeship at a local automotive electrician shop and am now in my fourth year. I love this job as not only do I get to support local Ballarat businesses, but it also allows me to travel to farms all around Victoria, working on both small and large equipment. Additionally, I work as a farmhand at Wells Ag on Saturdays and Sundays. As you can probably tell, I love to work. Working, however, is not my only passion, as I find fulfilment in giving back to the community. I do this by donating plasma fortnightly at the local blood bank and as a member of the Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club, going on beach patrols and going for a surfboat row when I can. Surfboat rowing is basically like rowing on the lake...but completely different!

In the future, I look forward to spending some time travelling around Australia, buying some land somewhere and settling down more. Thank you for taking the time to read my story, and good luck on your Damascus journey.

James Mavity, Class of 2020



Division 1 Senior Boys Crew



Daniel and James Mavity, 2019



Evan Milne with 2023 SRT Members Sebastian Erwin, Ronan Sugars and Lachlan Reus

## BUILDING A BETTER WAY OF LIFE

### DAMASCUS COLLEGE

Evan Milne's life changed considerably when he was diagnosed with an extremely rare disease, Stiff Person Syndrome, in 2019, which is slowly affecting his body and reducing his mobility. Evan has a variant of the same disease that singer Celine Dion has recently made known to be affected by, leading to the cancellation of her singing tours.

As an Occupational Therapist, Evan has helped people with disabilities throughout his career, designing one-off items, from electric wheelchairs to house and car modifications.

Unfortunately for Evan, things have changed, and since contracting this rare disease that affects one or two in a million people, he is now in need of many of the services that he once championed for others.

Back in 2021, the Damascus Sustainable Racing Team (SRT) heard of Evan's illness through SRT coordinator Alan Strange. Prior to employment at Damascus, Alan founded and then operated Astec Services for 21 years, where he met Evan. Together, they collaborated on many projects that gave people with disabilities renewed independence.

Two years ago, a small group of passionate and committed students, led by current Year 9 students Lachlan Reus, Ronan Sugars and Sebastian Erwin, commenced a buggy project fondly known as The Major, by brainstorming a concept of building a four-wheel, independent suspension, electric off-road buggy to support Evan's mobility into the future.

Alan thought this project could provide students with a one-off solution to a practical problem with real-life tangible benefits for Evan. Throughout the project, students benefited greatly from developing their skills, including problem-solving, patience,

resilience, and creativity, not to mention the sheer joy of making a difference and fostering long-lasting relationships through the small-knit and committed team.

Sustainability is at the core of the SRT program, and as part of the project, they re-used multiple redundant parts from old SRT vehicles, such as brakes, throttles, springs, and heavy batteries, ensuring the build was sustainable. There was plenty of creative thinking to re-use parts from many other things, ensuring minimal costs.

COVID-19 and the multiple lockdowns affected the projects progress, but the small and committed team soldiered on, refining, redesigning, and improving the buggy concept.

After two years of persistence and determination in completing this project, the team is excited to have recently finished The Major, so they invited Evan to the Damascus SRT shed, where he was noticeably grateful and humbled by the work the team had put into the buggy. He was able to give the finished buggy a final test-drive.

Evan said that the SRT students and staff are an amazing group of people. He marvelled at the team even working on the buggy during their school holidays, and they spent many late nights tinkering, rethinking, and adjusting throughout the development and build.

"They all have my heartfelt appreciation for being prepared to take on a difficult task and for having the resilience and patience to keep designing, redesigning and making changes along the way, to suit my mobility needs."

"Nothing was too much for them. I told them that it had to fit into my van for transportation, and they adjusted it to suit. The buggy had to handle rough terrain and mud and be stable and capable of reversing, so they again brainstormed, adjusted things, and



introduced safety features, such as a harness, roll cage and a spring-loaded bumper," he said.

Evan loves bushwalking and all the mental health benefits that it offers, but due to his disease and lack of suitable mobility aids to tackle the terrain, he thought his bushwalking days were behind him.

Thankfully, this new Damascus purpose-built buggy allows him to look forward to returning to the bush, back to his passion for exploring many of the trails he has not been able to do for a while.

"I have never observed a school program that is as inclusive of all ages, abilities, skills, and knowledge as the SRT program. It is a real leveller, with no hierarchy. When students are in SRT, everyone is equal, no matter their ability level, as things like that do not matter. What I have witnessed is that student behaviour improves as the students work alongside each other with supportive banter. They teach, celebrate, and respect each other as they tenaciously work towards the same goal: to make The Major work the best it can for me, and continually improve their incredible racing trikes."

"SRT is unique, and much of this comes from Alan Strange's manner and personality in leading and guiding the team. His absolute respect for the students, clear expectations, desire for teamwork and ensuring everyone had their role to play, so that they all contribute and feel part of a team achieving great things. It is a very happy place, with a collective spirit of support and drive to succeed," said Evan.

"I especially want to thank Damascus College for supporting and allowing me to work with the SRT program, allowing me to visit the shed to present a unique problem to the group, and to have the love and respect of the students throughout the two-year project. It has been very special! I truly value the respect the students have shown me, which also reflects the ethos of the college."

"Damascus's strong ethos makes programs like SRT possible, where everyone is treated equally and can experience success, in whatever form that takes. It has been a delight to watch the program grow throughout the years. The involvement and engagement of the parents and past students have been great, as they give of themselves, their time, and their knowledge, creating a great community to want to be a part of."

The SRT program is excited as The Major will soon feature in a documentary called 'A Major Journey' that Evan and Alan are producing. During the filming, the buggy, still in its development stage, enabled Evan to access some otherwise impassable sections of the Major Mitchell trail.

Evan is now looking forward to using The Major and knows that the SRT program and its wonderful students will be on call for any issues. He shared that the students are already considering further enhancements for the buggy – a 3-wheel option rather than 4.

The Damascus Sustainable Racing Team is a wonderful extra-curricular program available for students to participate in, where all students can get involved and contribute, no matter their level of skill, ability, or knowledge. After all, its motto is ADIMOV – Adapt, Improve and Overcome.





## BR WILLIAM SERENUS COOKE

CHRISTIAN BROTHER

Br Cooke was born in Ballarat in 1912 and spent much of his life dedicated to technical education. Although he did not consider himself a scholar, he was a born organiser and was particularly handy with tools. He set up technical departments in several places, including St. Paul's Technical College Ballarat, where he became the inaugural principal in 1948.

The limited financial resources available to him when establishing the College were very carefully allocated as he believed that 'the best was the cheapest in the long run.'

Acting as General Foreman, Br Cooke oversaw much of the building works necessary to get St. Paul's ready for opening, going as far as regularly sleeping at the construction site to guard the machinery and equipment against burglars before doors were installed. For the first seven months of 1948, Br Cooke would travel to Melbourne every Saturday in a borrowed truck to pick up machines, tools and desks that had been purchased for the College.

His life was spent in dedication to his calling.

Br Cooke's dedication to St. Paul's was tested one night in 1958 when he was set upon by three 'larrikins' while working late in the College machine shop. A brawl ensued, during which Br Cooke managed to detain one of the offenders and call the police. While no charges were laid, Br Cooke would later proclaim that the troublemakers 'must have been very sore for some time afterwards.'

Br Cooke continued as Principal of St. Paul's until the end of 1959, when he was appointed Superior of St Augustine's, Geelong.

Brother Cooke's holidays were spent doing construction and repair work in local orphanages, in much the same way he had previously gifted so much of his time to maintaining the St. Paul's building.



In later years, he lived in Western Australia, spending 13 fruitful years at Bindoon Agricultural College, a Boarding School 200km north of Perth with a large farming property attached. This environment gave Br Cooke a wide scope for his skills and interest in passing on his technical knowledge to a new generation.

From 1978-84, he retired to the mission at Bathurst Island, just off Darwin, where his skill and improvisation were invaluable.

Sadly, his retirement was short-lived, and he died there suddenly, still dressed in his working clothes.

Although it had been more than twenty years since Br Cooke led the College, his death sent the St. Paul's community into mourning, with students forming a guard of honour during his funeral procession. Br Cooke's dedication to technical education changed the lives of many young people, his legacy proudly living on in the St Paul's Arts and Technology Wing of Damascus College today.

*With thanks to the Kelty Archives, Parkville*



Br Cooke meeting the Pope in Rome 1979



Br Cooke's funeral procession 1984



St Paul's All School Reunion 2023





Damascus Day Mass opening procession



Fr Marcello Colasante



Lantern's being given out

# DAMASCUS DAY

## DAMASCUS COLLEGE EVENT

Every year, Damascus College celebrates its identity by holding 'Damascus Day.' This year, we celebrated on Wednesday, 13 September, this special day which is one of the major ways we show our identity as a College in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Damascus Day began as a community in the John Shannon Centre with the celebration of the Mass. The College theme for 2023 is 'To Live in the Light of Christ', and in keeping with the theme, the Mass began with a stunning light procession.

In preparation for the Mass, the Year 12 students had taken some time to create lanterns with the intent to hand them over to the year 7 students. The meaning behind this is that the senior students hand over the light to the junior students to become the bearers of light in the College. On the day, the Year 12 students processed into the sacred space with the lanterns bringing their light and illuminating a darkened space. At the end of Mass, the Year 7 students received a lantern as a symbol to highlight that they are now the bearers of light in the Damascus community.

The Year 10 and 11 Youth Ministry students led a new feature in the Mass. Supported by the percussion ensemble, the students sang some South African traditional hymns in three-part harmony. The hymn titles were, We Walk His Way (Ewe Thina) and Amen Praise the Name of the Lord (Amen Siakudumisa).

Thank you to Fr Marcello Colasante for presiding at the Mass and leading us in a beautiful celebration of the Eucharist.

Following the mass, the afternoon was full of fun and engaging activities around campus, organised by the Student Representative Council. Students dressed up in the theme of 'Icons,' where students and staff were invited to dress up in their favourite movie character, sporting hero, musical legend, or historical figure.

It was a wonderful celebration of all things Damascus.









# FATHER'S DAY BREAKFAST

DAMASCUS COLLEGE EVENT

This year, the annual Father's Day Liturgy and Breakfast was held in the Damascus Events Centre (DEC) on Thursday 31 August.

The para liturgy took place in the DEC, followed by 300 guests being treated to a sumptuous buffet breakfast served by our wonderful Damascus students.

A raffle was held during the breakfast that raised funds for the Bright Futures Scholarship.

This annual celebration is always a wonderful celebration of our community and an opportunity to share hospitality amongst each other.







Libby in Sacred Heart College school uniform Circa 1967



Libby with her Mother 1981

## A LEGAL MIND

### ALUMNI STORY

Catherine Elizabeth (Libby) Brophy, Class of 1968, was one of four siblings born into a sheep farming family. She spent her early life in Willaura, about 30 kilometres south of Ararat, where she developed a lifelong affinity with nature and the outdoors.

Having previously worked as a social worker and community advocate, Libby was admitted to practice as a solicitor on 3 May 1982 and signed the Bar Roll on 18 November 1999.

Libby was a well-organised and calm barrister with an outstanding knowledge of elder law and its associated legislation. She was the first to know of and share developments in her specialised field.

Libby also maintained a keen interest in alternative dispute resolution and gained expertise in the regulation of health and medical care. She appeared and advised in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, the Guardianship List at VCAT, Inquests into aged care, health, mental health, medical decision-making for children and adults, and aged care and health legislation. She served as a Member of the Victorian Bar's Dispute Resolution Committee and later the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee. She became a Nationally Accredited Mediator in 2008.

In addition to successfully building and maintaining a busy practice in her chosen field, Libby completed a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Melbourne Law School in the regulation of health services, health practitioners and complementary medicines, the legal obligations of medical practitioners when incorporating integrative medicine and complementary and alternative medicine into conventional practice.

In her academic pursuits, Libby was awarded the Medico-Legal Society of Victoria Academic Prize in 2002 and the Harold Luntz Thesis Prize in 2008. She generated numerous publications in her fields of expertise. She regularly presented at international, national, and state conferences and seminars in elder law, mediation and the law related to integrative medicine and complementary medicine.

Libby was held in the high esteem of those she appeared before, was opposed to, and represented, and will sadly be missed by all after her sudden passing in 2023. She has been described by her colleagues as having an encyclopaedic knowledge in her chosen field. She was genuinely a great exemplar of the best qualities of a member of the Bar. She was a shining example of the benefits of collegiality. Her former clients recount the huge differences she made to their lives and those of their family members.

Libby was immensely proud of and was deeply loved by her family, including her two surviving brothers, their partners, her nieces and nephews, and their children. Those closest to her will remember her always as stoic, fiercely independent, and amazingly optimistic. Her strength of mind was phenomenal, and her outlook on the world enriched all those around her.

*Thanks to the Victorian Bar Association for providing information for this article.*



Shelby applying glaze to the ceramic



Shelby presenting her piece at Damascus College

## 2023 ALUMNI ART PRIZE

### DAMASCUS COLLEGE ALUMNI

The Alumni Art Prize seeks to engage Damascus College alumni in the life and community of Damascus by producing a piece of art that explores our motto, 'To Live By The Light Of Christ'.

Launched in 2014, each year, the College has engaged the services of an alumnus to create a piece of artwork for Damascus.

The Damascus College Alumni Art Prize offers excellent exposure for the artist. The 2023 artist commissioned is Shelby Sherritt, Class of 2013.

Shelby created this unique vase from ceramic pottery. Each artist is asked to develop an artist statement describing the motivation behind the piece.

#### TO LIVE BY THE LIGHT OF CHRIST (2023)

For me, Living By The Light of Christ means following the path that sings to your true heart.

During my time as a student at Damascus College, I discovered my fascination for Australia's amazing native flora and fauna. The serene natural landscape and indigenous bushland of the Mt. Clear campus and my love for the local wildlife nurtured this fascination.

Alongside my love for nature, whilst at Damascus, I was supported to develop my passion for art, in photography and art classes. Throughout my younger years, many told me that art was not a career path, but I followed where my heart sings true, pursued my love of sculpture through pottery, and honed in on my admiration for the Australian native landscape. In my ceramic work, I feature Australian native flora, and the studies of animals and flowers, which pay homage to my passion in my unique and whimsical way.

For this piece, I have created a vase with cascading native plants, both inside and out and have adorned the piece with bees native to Victoria and found in abundance on the Damascus campus.

This piece combines my love for the environment surrounding Damascus and following my path through the guidance of love, light and support to create pottery that inspires others to be true to themselves and follow their passions.

With my artwork, I invite the audience to consider how they "Live By The Light of Christ" within their own lives and encourage them to listen and follow their heart's desire.

Shelby Sherritt, 2023



# 2023 CLASS OF REUNIONS

## ALUMNI EVENT

In 2023, Damascus College was privileged to host five "Class of Reunions."

Damascus welcomed the Class of 1973, 1983, 1993, 2003 and 2013 this year.

The College wishes to thank all past students for attending these reunions, as it was wonderful to celebrate and re-connect, and for each alumnus to feel a sense of pride and belonging to the Damascus College community, even if they attended one of our foundation colleges.

Reunions are a great way to engage with alumni, allowing them to remember where they came from, reminisce, re-connect with old friends, and reflect on their life's journey so far.

Reunion groups are named by their final year, which is the year a student did or would have completed Year 12 or equivalent.

For example, if you left SHC in Year 10 (Form 4) in 1980, your graduating year would have been 1982 - therefore, you are part of the Class of 1982.

While each event was unique and special, they followed a similar format. Reunions commence with a Welcome Reception at Damascus College in the luxurious and well-equipped Damascus Events Centre. Alumni are greeted by staff and enjoy drinks and light refreshments while they mingle and enjoy a chance to catch up. After some quick formalities, there is a group picture before being led on a campus tour. Many reunion groups head off from the campus to enjoy an afterparty or dinner at a local venue. Those reunion groups celebrating their 50-year Class Reunion enjoy a longer event with a catered lunch.

We are looking forward to celebrating the Class of 1974, 1984, 1994, 2004 and 2014 in 2024.

If you are thinking of or planning a reunion or a get-together of your cohort from Sacred Heart, St. Martin's in the Pines, St. Paul's, or Damascus College, please let us know. Damascus College is committed to supporting our alumni, and we can assist you with planning your event, providing support in contacting alumni, and offering campus or commemorative walk tours. Please contact your Alumni Officer, Korina Hegert, at [k.hegert@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:k.hegert@damascus.vic.edu.au).



Class of 1973 Reunion



Class of 1983 Reunion



Class of 1993 Reunion





Class of 1973



Class of 1983





Class of 1993



Class of 2003



Class of 2013



[damascus.vic.edu.au](http://damascus.vic.edu.au)