

Gumdale State School – 90th Anniversary Speech- Shonel Balsillie

Good morning, Mr Savill, special guests, teachers, parents, and of course, students. It is a true honour to speak with you all on this very special day.

Since we are here to celebrate 90 years of Gumdale State School, I thought I might share *90 facts* about the school...

So, here we go! Number 1...Just kidding! I wouldn't do that to you!

But just to clarify, Mr Savill was not the principal when I was a student here. However, Mr Harris was a teacher at Gumdale when I was here. I'd like to acknowledge Mr Harris, who began teaching here when I was in Year 6, back in 1994. He came in as the Year 7 teacher. He was young, fit, and had muscles like Chris Hemsworth, so you can imagine how popular he was with the mums! Though Brooke and I didn't have him as a teacher, our brother Kurt and many of our friends did. His dedication is just one example of how Gumdale teachers have always been so influential.

Gumdale State School and the wider Gumdale community has been my home for as long as I can remember.

My parents bought and established Kurshonbrooke Lodge in 1986 when I was a little girl. I started Preschool at Gumdale in 1989, in the same classroom where my son Adam completed Prep and today, my nephew Luke is in Prep in that very same room.

This school is more than a place of learning, it's part of my family's story.

Let me take you back for a moment...

When I was in Year 1, the cane was still in use. I remember my parents warning me, "If you misbehave, you'll get the cane!" It worked. I never got the cane.

Assemblies were very different. We stood on painted dots on the bitumen where the SEP building is today in the hot sun while the principal spoke from the B block balcony. We didn't wear hats or wear sunscreen. No one dared to talk, complain, or ask for water.

Speaking of water...no one had water bottles. We drank from the bubblers after at the end of each break before returning to class.

There were fewer than 200 students, and usually just one class per year level. I was often in a composite class because there weren't enough students for two classes.

Classrooms were dusty with blackboards and chalk. One of our favourite jobs was cleaning the chalk dusters banging them against the building walls, covering ourselves in white dust. No one worried about asthma or allergies!

We had two breaks...morning tea and big lunch.

We'd sit on logs in the bushy Environmental Area where the admin building now stands. Lunch was simple: vegemite or peanut butter sandwiches, fruit, and if you were lucky, a packet of chips or a popper if Mum had been grocery shopping at our local supermarkets which were at Capalaba or Carindale.

We climbed on huge tractor tyres, played footy on our one oval with the boys, and drew on trees with sticks. We had monkey bars (which broke a few arms), and an incinerator in amongst our play area where rubbish was burned. No fence...just common sense!

Tuckshop orders were handwritten on brown paper bags and the money went in the bag. Parents baked pikelets and jam drops for the tuckshop to sell. It was simple and delicious.

We even had our very own Uber Eats from the corner shop across the road. Jenny, the owner would deliver Hot Chip to us at the front gate.

Wet play...that didn't exist. You sat outside on the cold concrete and didn't dare return to class wet.

We had only two sports houses—Mars (black, purple and white) and Apollo (yellow and green).

Sports Day began with a march past, house songs, and events for everyone...but a favourite was the ballgames.
It was inclusive and fun.

For cross country, we ran through the bush complete with snakes, spider webs, and muddy paths! The Paul Green Oval was just bush back then.

Friday interschool sport was a highlight. No buses...parents drove us. I don't recall permission notes for transport. The girls played netball in winter and softball in summer. It was a simpler time, and everyone knew and trusted one another.

There were Country Fairs with pony rides and sweet stalls, end-of-year dances at the Capalaba State High Hall, Arts Council performances at the Gumdale Hall and Carols Nights performed on the back of a truck turned into a stage.

And yes, teachers used to smoke. Not on school grounds, of course! They'd walk over to the post office during their lunch break but you could still see and smell the smoke!

The dental van visited each year. It parked where Mrs Bowen parks her car today. Some kids came back to class with swollen cheeks after having teeth pulled and cavities filled.

While so much has changed, many things remain the same:

- The proud red and blue school colours
- The dedicated, passionate, and inspiring teachers
- And the students, still walking through these gates with dreams, energy, and hope for the future.

I've been fortunate to travel the world, work overseas, and teach in many schools. But Gumdale is simply the best.

To every student here today, I leave you with three wishes:

1. Try something new every day.
You never know, you might discover a passion or a talent.

2. Be a giver, not a taker. Help others, volunteer, and give back to your school and community.

3. Never forget where you came from.

Be grateful for your journey, your lessons, and the people who help shape your story.

I hope to return in ten years' time to celebrate 100 years of Gumdale State School.

And who knows...One of you might be standing here, telling your own story about your time at this incredible school.

Happy Birthday, Gumdale!