

## Forward from the Founding President – ICPA Qld Inc

### 2011 Qld Inc ICPA STATE CONFERENCE OPENING by Mr BUNNY POWNE MBE

Madam President, Delegates, well matured former Delegates, guests and visitors. I wish to thank you kindly for the honour of addressing Conference on the occasion of ICPA's 40 year Anniversary. However I do not thank you for the many sleepless nights I experienced as thousands of events passed through my mind since being asked. It did not take long before it became abundantly clear that time was my enemy to reminisce my 18 years on the State Executive - so I have decided to deliver a "Dogs Breakfast" with no apparent connection. For those of an academic mind this may be unusual. If you want a Title for my address it fits neatly into that very old phrase "***when the going gets tough the tough get going.***"

Today we are looking back over 40 years of ICPA, so it is appropriate to acknowledge the presence of two families in the Hall who were there at the very beginning. First off I am referring to Geoffrey and Jenny Arthur who used to live near Cunnamulla and now are residing outside Toowoomba. In 1971 they, with their neighbours, were responsible for bringing Bob Ridge to Cunnamulla to address them about the educational problems in Bourke, which resulted in the first ICPA Branch in Queensland being formed at Cunnamulla (28/6/1971). Later Geoff was to address a representative gathering in Dirranbandi which resulted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch of ICPA being formed at Dirranbandi (11/9/1971) and the 4<sup>th</sup> at Bollon (22/10/1971). Kindon 2<sup>nd</sup> (12/8/1971). Later on Geoff and I travelled independently to the Foundation meeting of National ICPA at Bourke, and were elected as Members of the First Executive. About a month later we met on the Nebine and with the 2 Dirranbandi delegates we travelled together in the rain to Charleville where we met Daphne Rich who had come from Blackall. Daphne was to become ICPA's outstanding Secretary/Treasurer for a number of years and she retired from being Secretary in Longreach. She continued on as Treasurer to retire at the first ICPA Conference held in Rockhampton. She loved the Branches and they loved her, so it was appropriate that she became ICPA's first Queensland Life Member at the Longreach Conference. Meanwhile back on the Ranch with her is her husband Fred who with Paul Vail from Blackall and myself were the Trustees for ICPA until ICPA became Incorporated. Mac McClymont, who was President at the time, made us redundant and put us in the "back paddock," relieving us of our responsibilities and letting our Bank Managers breath a sigh of relief. A special welcome to the Rich and Arthur families.

I want to give you a National History Lesson first and take you back to the end of the 1940's which was a drought period in Queensland - then at the beginning of the next decade we saw 2 major events. The first was the overnight jump in the price of wool from sixpence a pound to a pound a pound, which was closely followed by very good seasons for a lengthy period, which also made the cattle market very attractive. This had the destabilising effect of making people on the land feel secure, as for the first time in history they had over a short period become rich and could do all those things they had dreamed about doing, even though the Federal Treasurer, Artie Fadden, spoilt it by the introduction of Provisional Tax.

Now let's fast forward to January 1957 when the last monsoon, for more than 4 decades, occurred which was to spread south across Queensland and into NSW. This event also signalled what was the start of the worst drought on record in Australia as for the first and only time there was a severe drought in **every** State at the **same** time. This was a drought that lasted up to 18 years in some areas of Queensland and saw the **population and stock numbers** in the bush decline severely. At the same time wool fell drastically in price from a pound a pound and cattle were dying everywhere. This meant added responsibilities for ALL members of the family and the Mother became a Multipurpose Employee, which also caused mental as well as physical problems for many families.

1971 saw a group of people in Bourke agitating for assistance, as their Hostel had been condemned and they needed somewhere for their children to board to receive a Secondary Education.

There were two mates at College from different areas and backgrounds who followed different career paths later on. One became a Presenter on the ABC's National "Country Hour" from Sydney

and the other returned to the family property west of Louth. In due course one informed the other of the Hostel situation in Bourke, and then the ABC, carried the banner for the Bourke people, and constantly highlighted their problems.

This publicity spread rapidly through Regional ABC Rural Stations in Australia and also into the daily National "Breakfast Session" and on Sunday's "Always on Sunday." All these programs were under the control of the late Colin Munro. The publicity of the Educational difficulties of the day in Inland Australia, by the ABC's Rural Reporters, is responsible for the formation of a National Organisation which called itself the ICPA - the Isolated Children and Parent's Association, not to be confused with that other ICPA, the Itinerant Crutches' and Piece-picker's Association. There was no television in the Bush during that period and ABC Radio was the only access for instant outside information in Inland Australia. The formation of the Federal ICPA in Bourke on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1971 is history and I repeat was due to this magnificent publicity given in the ABC Rural programmes around Australia.

Our Daughter Susan has directed me to tell you the following story as she believes it is a true picture of ICPA in the early days, as she remembers the period:

The President and the two Deputy Chairmen of Federal ICPA were deputised to travel to Canberra and on behalf of the Association talk with the Federal Education Department and Ministers of the Crown. On our second trip to Canberra in 1972 the other Deputy Chairman couldn't go as he was shearing. I left Bollon by car very early one morning and met up with Federal President Wally Mitchell in Bourke and he drove on down to Canberra. A couple of days later we had one visit left to make in the morning, and then we were free to return home. The Federal Body had no money at all at this time, and all Executive Members were allowed to pay their own expenses, for the privilege of being on Federal Council. A friend of Wally's had arranged frugal accommodation for us in Canberra and after we had breakfast on the last day we paid the bill with cash (*there were no such things as Credit Cards at that time and nobody in Business was silly enough to take a cheque from the Bush*). We then found out that if we pooled our money we SHOULD have enough money to pay for the petrol we needed on the way home, which fortunately did work out; but it meant we had nothing to eat until we arrived at Wally's sisters' home in Bourke at 11.00pm that night. She and her husband had arrived shortly before us and she had a large Pot of Curry simmering on the stove and Wally and I ate the lot, much to the annoyance of Wally's brother-in-law. It is still the most appreciated feed I have ever eaten in my life. After the meal I got in my car and drove the five hours back to Bollon and the sun was rising as I crossed the last grid out of town. I had a shower and breakfast then went out and loaded the truck and spent most of day delivering fuel to my clients.

This was not an isolated case as Executive Members on State and Federal Council for a number of years carried their own cost and wherever possible travelled together. For example six delegates from South Australia travelled in one car, with luggage on the roof rack, to one Bourke Conference during a hot time of the year, and there was no air-conditioning in cars in those days. Some delegates carried their swag and slept anywhere. There were a number of town people in Bourke who kindly made their homes available for Delegates at Federal Conferences. The greatest majority of people who filled positions on the early Committees are the most amazing people I have ever worked with. Independently they may have been in a desperate situation but they pulled out all stops to ensure a better education for ALL "Kids in the Bush." They were fantastic people.

ICPA began and was operating for a number of years during a continuing drought that had isolated rainfalls, with no follow up - yet it was surprising how often a thunderstorm disrupted ICPA gatherings. The day the Queensland Council was formed in Charleville, commenced with light rain that continued all day but was heavier to the north of Charleville and the Blackall Delegates had to cross flash flooding which also flooded the interior of their car; but they still arrived on time - Daphne was the driver, and she had to get there.

The nearest ICPA came to having a major disaster was at the Federal Conference at the end of 1972. The Shire Chairman of Bungil Shire, based in Roma, was an ICPA supporter and he told the

Roma Delegates. "I have to get my flying hours up so I will fly you to Bourke at no charge and I will arrange for the lights to be put on so we can land back in Roma at night" - so away they went. In those days there were no weather reports available for Western Queensland or Western NSW and when they were getting close to Bourke they were flying into unexpected very heavy cloud, and I mean heavy cloud. The Pilot said we are almost there and I want you to keep an eye out for the River, as the Airport is across the other side. Miraculously there was small break in the clouds and a passenger gleefully sang out "there's the River" and they landed safely. John McNamara had also offered to fly the Longreach and Blackall delegates to Bourke as a donation to ICPA and they had arrived safely earlier. But then it started to rain and they and many others were stranded in Bourke that night. This meant that accommodation was at a premium; but one family said "anybody can stay at our house if you have a swag." They had a second home for educational purposes, which was a 2 roomed hut with a verandah, and they ended up with 17 staying the night. The last person to arrive found the bath was the only spare area left so he rolled out his swag and claimed he had good night's sleep although the intermittent sound of running water kept waking him up - apparently something to do with the toilet being in the same room.

I know there are five very important reasons why ICPA was so successful in the early days. The first and most important was that the Foundation Meeting of ICPA in Bourke **formulated 10 educational AIMS** and decreed that any Branch who wished to join must endorse these Aims and not seek additional aims until most of the initial ones were at very least partially satisfied. This had the instant and important outcome that all Branches across Australia were quickly speaking with a unified voice.

Secondly - the Federal and Queensland Executives emphasised to Delegates that they must continually speak out to Authorities about *their* Educational problems, as *they* are affected and **MUST** at all times be factual and **not emblemise** their problems.

Thirdly - Executive Members continually said to Governments and Authorities, "these are our problems, and we are coming to you (i.e. Education Departments) as you are the experts in this region, in the hope that you can offer a solution as well as the means where we can implement the solution."

Fourth - It was an era of **militancy** in Australia and Executives steered clear of **demanding** anything from another Body or Authority.

Fifth - Applied personally to Members - Members must always remember that they are from the Bush and **THEY** are **the Experts** in the problem as it affects them, when speaking to people who have **NEVER** taught their own children.

This address is a bit like a mathematical lesson with its numbered lists as I now want to enumerate what I consider to be the 10 most important events in early ICPA History, that I haven't got time to talk about today; but all have contributed significantly to making education in the Bush better - and they are not in any order of importance or outcome, and there are more as well as these 10.

1. Commencing on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1973 a Senate Standing Committee inquired into the "Education of Isolated children." The final report was handed to the ICPA Federal Chairman at the Federal Conference in Broken Hill in April 1974, by Senator Gordon Davidson, the Chairman of the Committee. This was a very thorough Inquiry and the Committee validated the 10 Aims that had been enumerated initially by Federal ICPA, then continually re-endorsed by the Members throughout Australia.

2. After Gough Whitlam's Labour Party came to Power the Education Minister the Honourable Kim Beazley (senior) introduced the "Assistance for Isolated Children." He was able to pick up the Scheme already costed, from the promise by the Coalition to introduce the Scheme when re-elected, and commencing in the first term 1973. Queensland had a number of other Schemes in operation for all Students in Rural Queensland so that in the first year of implementation if a person had a very bad or negative income, and lived in the right Taxation Zone the total of Federal and

Queensland Allowances was sufficient to cover a full year's Boarding School Fees - certainly not travel, uniforms, or extra School expenses.

3. The first National **educational recognition** accorded ICPA was to have a member on the Committee that organised and ran the 2 day National Pre-School Conference on "Isolated Children" in Brisbane from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1974. Three ICPA members from West Australia, NSW and Queensland were guest speakers, and Conference was attended by numerous ICPA Branch Members.

4. ICPA was represented on the Planning Committee of the Priority Country Area Program Committee that initially commenced in the South West Educational region of Queensland. Amongst the many new initiatives was the re-introduction of Itinerant Teachers for the Correspondence School children which commenced in June 1977 in the Charleville district and was followed in 1979 with a Mobile Manual Arts complex. In 1978 the program was extended to the Central Department of Education Region, in particular with a Mobile classroom commencing at Twin Hills in July 1978. All Members of the committee had visited parent groups in the Towns and districts involved and compiled a list of priorities what the people in the area desired as initiatives.

5. The Isolated Children's Special Education Unit in Queensland was commissioned in October 1976 and commenced operation in 1977. It was established in conjunction with boarding facilities at the School for the Deaf. Parents and children visited Brisbane for Assessment and then returned home with special lessons for the child. In the first year 163 children were assessed and 50 returned home with special lessons in conjunction with the Primary Correspondence School.

6. 15<sup>th</sup> February 1978 a National Task Force commenced inquiring into the "feasibility of a Domestic Satellite for Australia," at which Queensland Members gave evidence in Brisbane. There also were numerous Federal Conferences all of which were attended by Queensland Delegates. When I say the launching of a Satellite in Australia would have been many years later, or maybe not at all, if it hadn't been for ICPA's support and intervention you would probably think I was from another world - but I can assure you that statement is correct and unfortunately would take too long to verify on this occasion. ICPA was asked at a National Conference in Canberra what were ICPA's priorities for the use of a Satellite, as it was apparent Television was not their top priority, and the answer given was:

"ICPA has three priorities - **First:** A Telephone.  
**Second:** A telephone that works, and  
**Third** A telephone that works all the time."

These priorities probably don't make sense to anybody who has not lived on a single wire earth return Party Line, or who has always had access to a telephone in the City.

7. 28/1/1983 to 20/12/1985 Recommendations from the Ministerial committee on "Distance Education" resulted in three new Schools of the Air being built, which now operate without the lengthy and wonderful assistance from the RFDS. ICPA had 2 members on the Planning committee, including to-days ICPA's Patron.

8. The publication of ICPA's quarterly magazine PEDALS is the means of keeping Members informed. The naming of the magazine has already been recorded in an early edition of Pedals. Sufficient to say the name is meant to epitomise the **Pedal Wireless** that was used in early days by School of the Air students, and to immortalise the work of the Australian Inland Mission and the Flying Doctor. Anybody attending Federal Conference in Darwin this year was given a copy of the FIRST issue of PEDALS in their satchel.

9. The first School of the Air was opened a little over 60 years ago in Alice Springs on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1951 as the result of an imaginative woman (Miss Adelaide Miethke) a Vice President of the RFDS Central Council. Congratulations and thanks to all the SOTAs in Australia for their support for our children over that period.

10. The Queensland Minister for Education introduced the Senior Remote Area Scholarship in 1976, following concern by ICPA that economic conditions would prevent many Year 11 and 12 students living away from their home to complete their education. At the same time Boarding School numbers at Senior Level had fallen dramatically in Queensland, with an increasing number of empty beds at the Boarding Schools. The Allowance was paid direct to the Boarding School twice a year.

I know that after 40 years in operation it is dangerous to name people who have contributed greatly to progress in any Organisation, and ICPA has a great number who have, and we all have our favourites. I have purposely shied away from acknowledging them. Never the less I would like to acknowledge the work of some **groups** who have contributed greatly to the advancement of education in the Bush.

1. The first of course are the many people who over 40 years have given their time and served on the Executive of Queensland ICPA, many at their own expense. I can recall an early discussion about the composition of the Executive and it was agreed that "it would be wonderful if ICPA could get more women on the Executive - at least a 40% composition of women" - time has changed the imbalance the other way. There was a period when I was on Council when there were only 2 males of the total of 18. One year the other male didn't attend Regional Meetings and I was all alone. This had an advantage because at the lunch and dinner breaks I could attend to whatever was necessary and be on my second or third beer by the time the last lady in the queue had powdered her nose. Recently I commented on this situation to be informed by a female person who was at that time on the Executive - shock horror - "we use the male one also now." Unofficially I have heard some in-depth discussions do take place also.

Many Members get accolades from time to time; but the Treasurers of the Branches and Council who have pages of material to present every now and then have been largely taken for granted, and to add insult to injury, hardly anybody even glances at their pages of figures - so on this occasion a special recognition to you guys - long may **ALL Executive** Members continue their generous work.

2. Without the Branches there would be no Organisation and the work they do is critical for ICPA to continue. I am aware overall numbers are declining in the Bush and there are fewer people who wish to fulfil voluntary work. I was involved with my local P & C and I was aware that if the Committee wanted to do something for their children the parents were always available to help with time and effort, when children would benefit. This is also apparent in ICPA where any effort the Branch makes may help their child, and certainly other children is supported.

I cannot let the chance pass and not skite about my own Branch, Bollon. The ICPA badge you folk are wearing was designed by Rainee Banks, who used to live at Bollon and now lives in Toowoomba. She provided Federal Council with 12 designs and they choose the one you are wearing today. The Manufacturer of the first badges omitted to include Tasmania, a problem that was later rectified.

It is very satisfying to see so many Branches are still in operation, despite the diminishing population in Rural Areas. Well done by the Branches - you can pat yourselves on the back.

3. The third group are the Boarding Schools, who have been such great attendees at ICPA Conferences, over a number of years. When the DCAP Committee was being formed I was asked to suggest the Head of a Boarding School to join the DCAP Committee, and I recommended the late Bill Dent, the Headmaster of the Toowoomba Grammar School, as TGS had the highest number of students receiving AIC Allowances that year - certainly not because I was an Old Boy of the School.

Bill asked me after one meeting if he could come to the State ICPA Conference and I got even with him by including him as a "Guest Speaker." The following year the Executive asked all Boarding Schools in Queensland to attend and the response was overwhelming, and has continued to be so. A number of Heads have said to me that they found it important to be able to know more about the

areas and conditions that their children came from, and it did help them to visit some parents at the same time and to understand more realistically situations that could involve and affect their children's behaviour at School - for example travel and droughts. Thank you to you all for your continuing attendance.

4. The fourth group is the Education Department of Queensland. During my time in Office I cannot speak highly enough of the assistance and friendship I was afforded. I believe one of the big pluses with the Queensland Education Department was that the Minister of the time had attended a Boarding School and the Director General of the day, Arch Guymmer used to ride his pony to a small Primary School on the Darling Downs. In other words they were aware of what the Association was saying, having experienced some of the situations.

In my time all the Officers in the Department have been very co-operative and listened closely to what ICPA was endeavouring to do. What I really appreciated was that they always told me **why** some of the requests we made could not be implemented. I cannot speak highly enough of the courtesy extended to me. To all you guys many, many thanks.

Dr. Lillian Katz, a noted Education Professor from USA was the Guest Speaker at the National Pre-School Conference in Brisbane, and she concluded her address with the following statement, which also is very appropriate for an ICPA Conference.

**And I Quote:**

"Keep your eyes and your thoughts on the children.....

They have no union:

They cannot strike:

They have no power:

They deserve of our best thinking and our deepest reflections. "

**Brisbane September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1974.**