**Producer of *Saultalk* in the Grand Opera House, Wellington, 1974**

# Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa now

This record is a contribution to a THS project for gathering recollections from Tawa people.

## Ken Edgecombe Teacher, Tawa Resident 1971 - 2001.

## *Tawa: Some Random Personal Glimpses.*

Written by Ken Edgecombe, added to and edited by Steve Avery. 15 9 26, 2026 words.

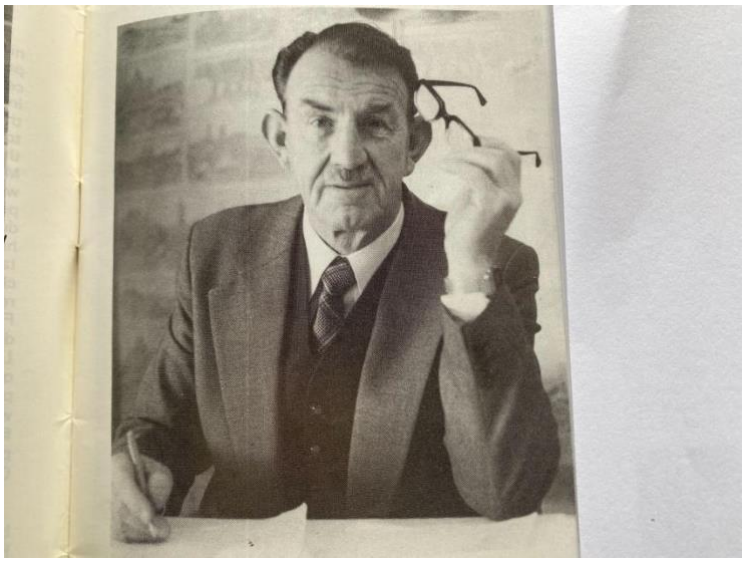
My first conscious awareness that there was a place in the world called Tawa came in the mid 1960s when I arrived at Lyndhurst Park one Saturday as part of a lower grade University rugby team. I have two memories of that day. One was the little garden sign saying “Tawa” that still greets visitors coming off the motorway at the southern end of town; the other was that we won the game, narrowly, by scoring three unconverted tries. For some long-forgotten reason, I was that afternoon the team’s goalkicker.

When I finished university, I went off to Teachers’ College in Christchurch. In October of 1968 I applied by telegram, following the custom of the time, for three teaching jobs in Wellington. I wanted a co-ed school, looked at a map showing Wellington suburbs,

asked a friend, “Has this Tawa got a high school?” and subsequently applied to it, along with Heretaunga College and Onslow College. Tawa College replied first, saying “Pleased to offer you a job in 1969;” I went back to Gore Post Office and said, “Yes please,” and then went back there half an hour later to say “Thanks anyway” to Heretaunga and Onslow. I fronted up on Duncan Street in Term 1 of 1969.

It was to become my school. I taught there until the end of 1982; my wife Felicia had done a teaching section there the year before I applied for the job; my four sons attended there between 1988 and 2000; two of them subsequently also taught there; my only grandson began there in Year 9 in 2025; the first of my granddaughters is likely to go there in 2027.

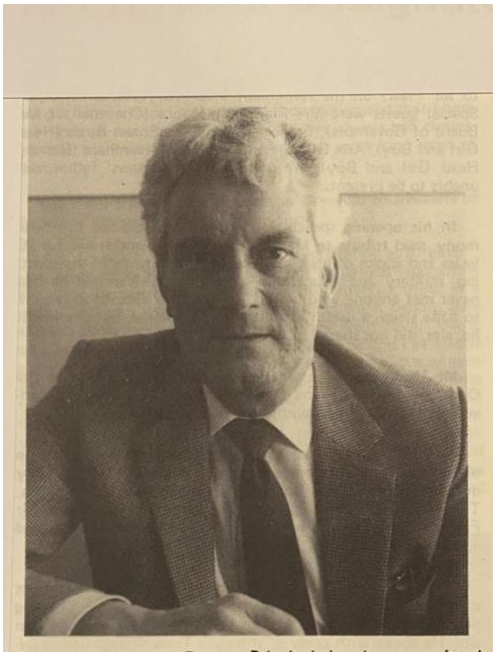
For me, it was a good place to learn the teaching trade. Eric Flaws, Brian Walker and Betty Henderson formed a senior leadership team that covered a lot of bases, and from among my colleagues of those 14 years there emerged I think 13 principals of secondary schools. By comparison, the remaining 30 years of my career in various other schools threw up something like another half dozen.



**E.M.P. Flaws second Principal Tawa College and his prominent desk ornament.**

There is a good community spirit about Tawa. It’s not always appreciated by those outside. I once followed up the street a girl from another Wellington secondary school who was having a mufti day. The girl ahead of me was wearing a tee shirt with a slogan on the back of it that read “We’re from Tawa. Get used to it.” Its subtleties may well have had something to do with the fictitious Lyn of Tawa, who was a sort of compendium of suburban myopia. But fairly presented or not, myopic or otherwise, Tawa is and has long been a place with a felt community. It’s partly geographical: the enclosed valley creates definitions and boundaries and you know where you are. Its one college allows a communal experience for many of its young people. Its many churches have undoubtedly contributed to a general level of decency in the area. It’s often called a “good place to bring up children”: accurate or not, I was glad to bring up mine there, and I’m happy to see two of my sons doing the same thing. And those two sons, as well as their two brothers, still count among their good friends a lot of people they went to school with. The annual Christmas Day service at Tawa College is a visible place of reunion for many of the college’s former students.

**E. Henderson. Foundation teacher. and Deputy Principal Tawa College.**



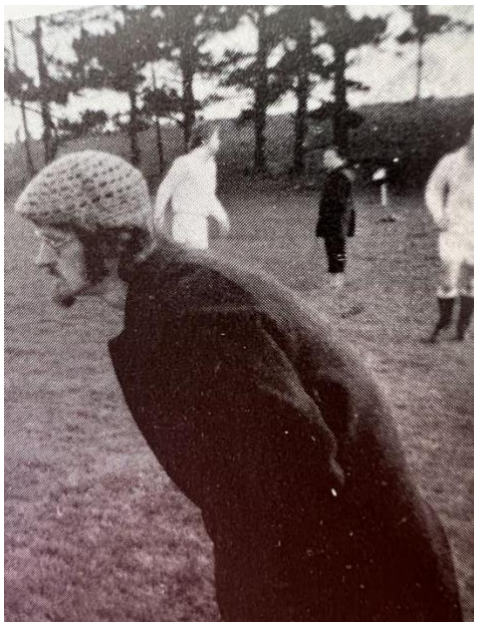
**B. C. Walker. Third Principal Tawa College**

I went to Tawa College as a teaching neophyte in 1969 and left as a Deputy Principal of Porirua College in 1982. In between, this teacher learned a lot. Some of it was by teaching English and Geography, some of it was from coaching rugby teams, some of it was from producing the annual major production.

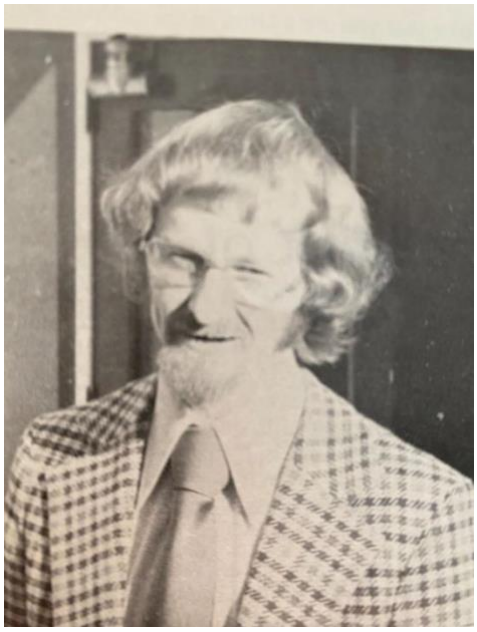
**Tawa College 1st XV 1980, as chorus members of the major production, *Pip.***

One of the proudest moments of my career was the day that the entire 1st XV, minus three who feared their skills weren't up to it, signed on to sing in the chorus of *Pip*, the major production of 1980. I was chatting to the team captain that year on his last day

at school and I asked him what some of his year's highlights had been. "Getting UE accredited," he said. "And singing in that show." Great. What about our win over the Wellington College 1st XV, a rare event in Tawa College history? "Yeah, that too," he said.



**Ken watching rugby, probably the 1 B team he coached, 1976**



**Portrait for Tawa College magazine 1976**

As with anywhere else, Tawa had its share of notable citizens. Apart from the national cricketer and later College principal Bruce Murray, with whom I taught and who became one of my closest friends, I taught sixth form English to Murray Mexted, the first man of two to achieve the distinction of serving all his college days at Tawa College and becoming an All Black. He was a long serving number 8 from 1979 to 1985 playing 34 consecutive Tests and 38 non Tests. Kyle Preston is the second to spend all his secondary years at Tawa. The novelist Elizabeth Knox was in my English classes around the same time. So was Philip Field, New Zealand's first Pacific Island MP.

Outside the college and sport, Bing Lucas of Tawa served New Zealand and the world well in the field of conservation and national parks. I knew him better as an amateur devotee of musicals, and in 1974 he was responsible for the emergence of *Saultalk*, a "sweet rock" musical based on the life of the Apostle Paul. I had a lot to do with *Saultalk*, because Bing's son Murray, later principal of Tawa College — I told you the place was central to the suburb — and his mates talked me into becoming its producer. I never did know quite what "sweet rock" meant, and talked very fast once when asked about it during a radio interview. The show dominated my life for over three years as the cast performed more than 30 times in a dozen different centres and gave occasion for a popular long-playing record. It was something of a phenomenon of its kind, and it was firmly rooted in Tawa College and Tawa-Linden Baptist Church, although certainly limited to neither.

**Bing Lucas, Sir Edmund Hillary, Mishra in Nepal in 1974: Bing talking *Saultalk*.**

**Form Class 1972:**
Back row: Chris Elder, Colin Kelly, Malcolm Fort, Laurie Griffin, Richard Adams
Centre: Ken Edgecombe, David Bonallack, Chris Hewitt, Graeme Proffitt, Mark Greene, David Allson
Front: Brent Douglas, Margaret Fordyce, Karen Mills, Deborah Fawcett, Judith Walker, John Lawrie

**1981 *"Where are the songs of Spring?"* Ask Mrs Hansen,**
**Mr Edgecombe, Mr Greenlees, Mrs Aburn, Mr Osborne or Mr Lucas.**

I live in Paremata these days. That was Tawa College catchment area when I was at the school. I'm still in Tawa numerous times during the week, mostly for family-related reasons. It's been just on 60 years since I first discovered the suburb at Lyndhurst Park. Has it changed in all that time?

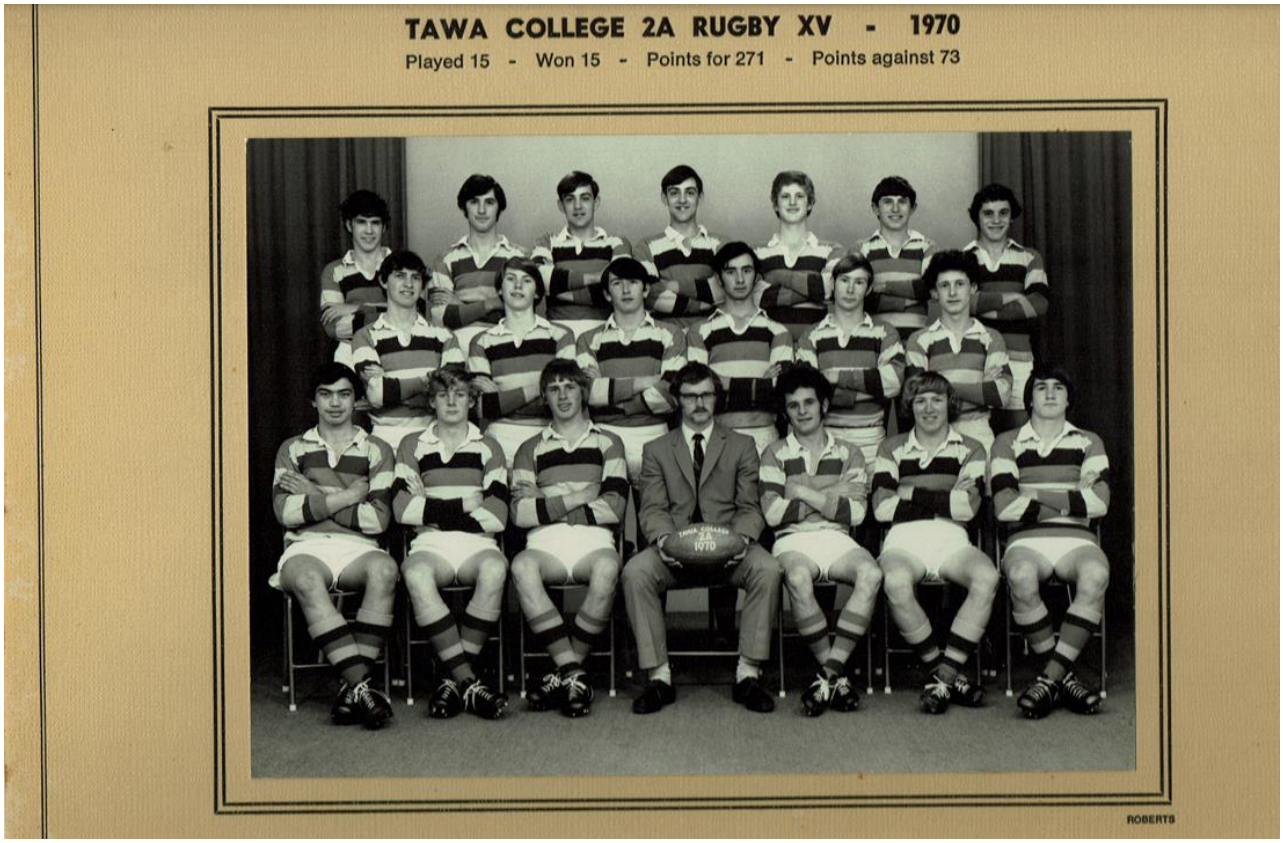
Of course it must have. But I'm not an historian, and I am not sociologically informed. Nor am I detached enough to describe how its changes look. But I am glad to say that Tawa, changed or not, still seems to me to be a place of genuine community, with church and college important in its corporate character, and when I visit the college hall to see a performance from the Tracey Odell School of Modern Dance that takes a whole evening and includes four of my granddaughters, I am inclined to the view that there are a lot of worse places where they, and I, might spend our time.

The following has been added by the Editor. In 1976, when I had been a colleague for four years, Ken, who was in his eighth year of teaching, was interviewed by a member of the Tawa College magazine editorial team. Asked why he became a teacher he said the path to Tawa College was begun in Hawera during his schooling when English was the only field of study in which he showed any sort of ability. He later linked up with history and geography which were simply reading specialised books and making specialised comments. He was an English student and always had been. His plan, such as it was, was to continue this education until he failed, and after School Certificate he never did and then he finished university. He kept passing and going back. He then looked at his M.A. (Hons.) and thought "Where can I use this thing?" Teaching seemed the obvious way so he went into teaching thinking, "Well, if the thing is a fiasco, and I think teaching is one job where you can tell whether it's a fiasco pretty early in the piece, then I'll give it a year and get out. The fact that I'm still here after eight years may simply say I read a fiasco in different terms from how you do." Aside from a break from teaching for some years in the 90s when he served as National Director of Scripture Union in New Zealand, Ken did not retire until his mid-70s when he ended 21 years at Queen Margaret College where he was the teacher of Religious Education — more specialised reading and commentary — and the school Chaplain.

He reminisced on those years in *From Sir, With Love: Glimpses Through a Classroom Window*, the book he wrote after retiring. He included insights into the curriculum for Year 7 through to Year 13 and on the discussion that unfolded in the classroom.

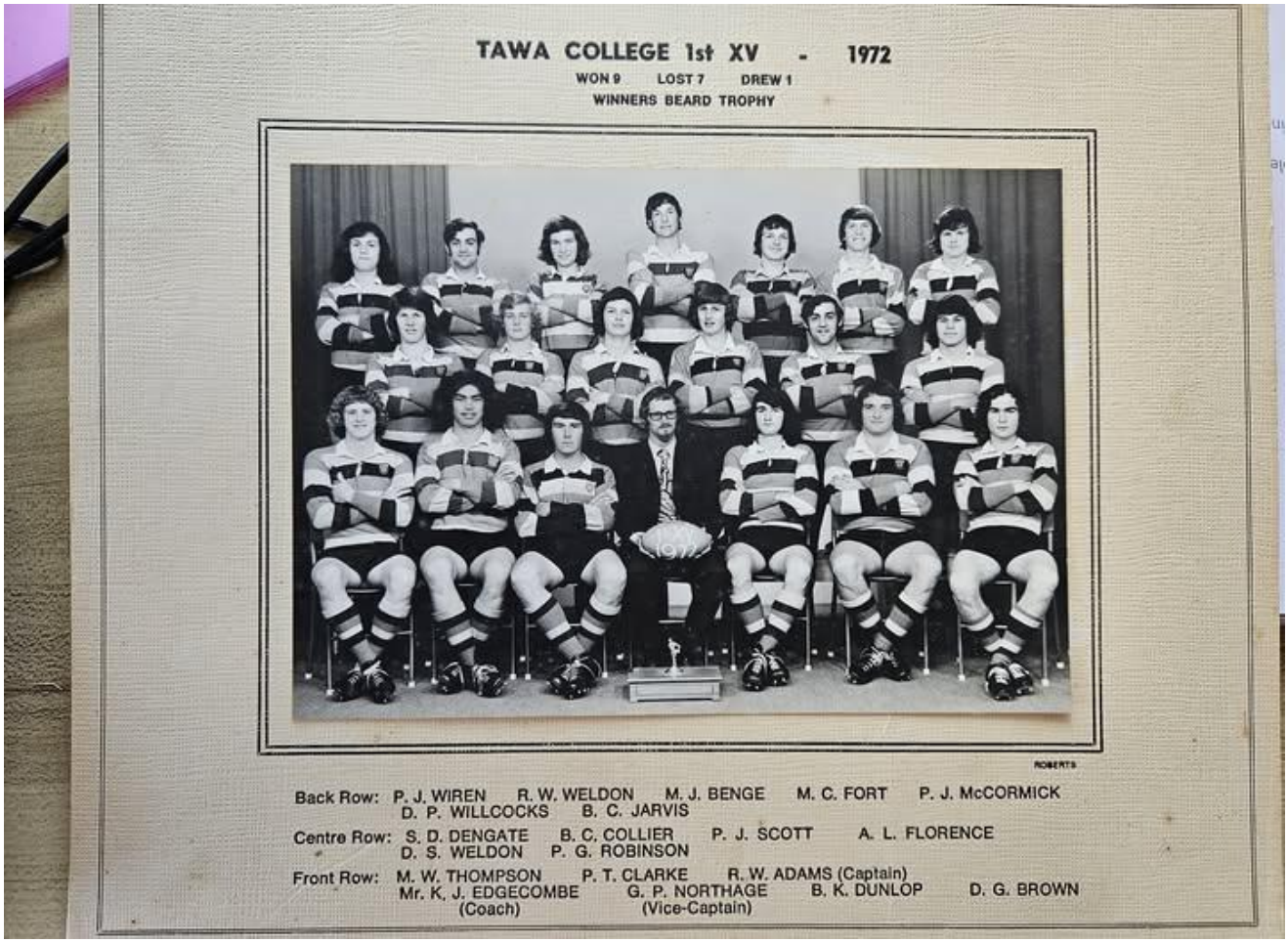
In answer to the question whether, if he had a second life, he would pursue a different career Ken said, “I don't know, I guess not.” Asked if looking back he had any regrets in life, he said “People always have regrets. I don't have any serious ones. As a matter of fact, my life has been rich and fulfilling in faith, marriage and profession. And it really only dawned on me very late just what a privilege I have enjoyed in being allowed to be involved in the lives of other people’s kids.”

When Ken left Tawa College, Brian Walke, Principal 1982 - 1989 and a man of the highest integrity, wrote in the year book a farewell that succinctly showed what a fine and varied contribution he had made over fourteen years. “His Taranaki tones have enlivened the staffroom and classrooms as well as resounded across assorted playing fields. Always energetic in his inimitable laconic way, he was deeply involved in many aspects of school life such as coaching Rugby, representing the staff on the College Board of Governors, acting as PPTA branch chairman, working as a dean for many years and scriptwriting for major productions such as *Pip, Pilgrim,* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* to name a few of his wide interests.”




**Tawa College 2A rugby team in 1970, the first unbeaten team in the College's history**

Back row (left to right): Mark Richards, Alan Collins, Ronald Weldon, Donald Weldon, Mark Thompson, Donald McKenzie, Clive Couch
Middle Row: Craig Roberts, Frank Lawton, Lance Anderson, Murray Adams, Broddy Barr, Graham Chamberlain.
Front row: Paul Clarke, Brian Collier, Steve Hanlon (captain), me, Peter Gunn (vice-captain), Chris Parker, Graham Northage.




**1st XV 1972**

**Tawa late 1960s, Tawa College slightly south of centre around Ken starting at Tawa**