

Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa now

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

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Written by Murray Lucas: Life at Linden School (1958–1965) and My Secondary School Years (1966-1970). Edited by Steve Avery 22 2 26 2474 words.

Murray's Linden School years (1958–1965)

I went to Linden School from 1958 to 1965, and when I think back, it really was a special time to be a primary school kid. Back then, there were only three primary schools in the Tawa area: Tawa School, St Francis Xavier, and Linden. Tawa School was the largest primary school in New Zealand, and Linden, which had only opened in 1952, was growing fast.

I have very fond memories of my years at Linden. The teachers were all dedicated, although they varied a bit in experience, and that was often reflected in how well they managed the class. It was the era of fountain pens, inkwells, and blotters, and learning to write neatly was a messy business. Ink blots were common, and the newsprint paper we used to protect the desks was usually worse for wear by the end of the day. Still, I'm grateful for the strong focus on good handwriting, it's a skill that's stayed with me.

The classrooms were still new, and I don't remember any maintenance issues, which says a lot for the caretaker. The only real problem I recall was the field beside the motorway, which seemed to flood on a regular basis. In the 1960s, we didn't have Year 1 to 8, instead it was Primers and Standards. The Primers went from 1 to 4, and the Standards from 1 to 6. Moving through the Primers was a bit random. I once jumped from Primer 2 straight to Primer 4 in a single year because one classroom was being used to store traffic-safety pedal cars used along with other aids to instruct and practice for primary schoolchildren the road code. That meant I started secondary school a year earlier than most of my classmates, and to be honest, I struggled a bit socially because of it.

Reading lessons were based on the Janet and John books, which were dull, simple stories and uninspiring pictures. *Chicken Licken* was probably the most interesting book I read in those early years! When I see the wonderful illustrations and storylines in today's children's books, I'm amazed at how much better they are. We also learned our times tables by heart. Mum had her own special method, she'd wake me

up and start firing multiplication questions at me: “What’s seven times six?” “What’s six times seven?” It must have worked because I’ve never forgotten them.



A Linden school play. Murray front row of actors, wearing dark clothes; fourth from right as we view it.



Folk dancing lessons Murray back of the foreground, arms stretched out leaning forward, centre right as we view it.

In Standard 6, we did a lot of tests. The student next to us used to mark them, and the total numbers were read out and we lined up in order from top to bottom. It was

supposed to motivate us, but I can imagine how discouraging it must have been for those always near the end.

The same kind of pecking order was carried over to playtime sports. When we picked teams for soccer, the captains chose players one by one until no one was left. Looking back, it wasn't the kindest system for shy or less sporty kids. Still, we loved our games. Linden had great facilities and football and padder tennis were the big favourites. Padder tennis used a bat larger than a table tennis paddle but smaller than a tennis racket. It was so popular that everyone raced out at break time to grab a court. We also had athletics days and padder tennis tournaments, though no inter-school competitions were held back then.

Cultural activities were part of school life too. We had singing lessons, but apparently my enthusiasm outweighed my talent, I was told I sang too loudly and off-key, so the teacher sent me outside to play with a cricket bat and ball instead. Luckily, two mates soon joined me. We also did folk dancing, with *Red River Valley* making frequent appearances, and sometimes we put on plays for our families. I remember one play based on Greek mythology where I was cast as the back leg of Pegasus. Unfortunately, I thought I was acting as if I was the leg of a dog, so when we passed a tree, I lifted my leg to the great amusement of the audience, except for my mum!

One of the distinctive things about school life then was the free milk. Every student had a bottle each day. Early on, I discovered milk didn't agree with me. Once I was sick and the classroom had to be evacuated while the mess was cleaned up. After that, I was excused from drinking it, which was probably a blessing. Later, I became a milk monitor, delivering crates around the school. Being a competitive kid, I liked to race my friends with the trolley until one day I took a corner too fast and smashed about twenty bottles. That was the end of my milk-monitoring days.

Discipline was handled very differently in those times. The strap was a common punishment and any teacher could use it. I remember one occasion when the class was chattering away and the teacher told me to "go and get the strap." I misunderstood, went to another classroom, held out my hands, and got three strokes before I realized she'd meant *fetch it*, not *receive it!* I came back in tears and empty-handed. Writing lines was another common punishment. I often had to write, "Yes, not yeah or yep," over and over, apparently, "yeah" was far too casual back then.

We had some truly wonderful teachers and principals, though. My last headmaster, Mr. Nolan, stands out as one of the best. He was kind, encouraging, and genuinely interested in his students. In my final year, he organised an exchange trip with Inglewood Primary School, where he'd previously worked. We travelled both ways by train, stayed with local families for three nights, and visited the Waitara Freezing Works, Mount Taranaki, and a nearby farm. For a boy from the suburbs, it was an amazing experience and a real credit to Mr. Nolan's vision and care for his pupils.

Looking back, my time at Linden School was full of laughter, learning, and a few life lessons — some taught in the classroom, and some learned the hard way in the

playground or milk shed. It was a great place to grow up, and those years gave me a foundation I've been grateful for ever since.

Murray's Tawa College years as a pupil School Years (1966-1970)

I attended Tawa College between 1966 to 1970. It was a period of huge growth for the school as the only neighbouring Colleges at that time in North Wellington and Porirua were Onslow College and Mana College. It was also very accessible by train as there are five railway stations in proximity to the school. Hence, many students attended from areas such as Pukerua Bay, Plimmerton, Paremata and Porirua East. Reflecting this there was a relatively high percentage of Māori and Pasifika students in comparison to other Wellington schools. Eric Flaws was the new Tawa College Principal in 1966. Three other Principals of the College started at Tawa in 1966: Brian Walker 1982 - 1989; Bruce Murray 1989 - 2002 and Murray Lucas 2002 - 2021.

Like most secondary schools in that time, it was streamed according to ability. Form 3 students could take the language route (the L stream), the commercial route (the C stream) or the practical route with subjects such as Woodwork and Clothing (the G stream). Within those three streams we were classified according to ability with the number '1' being seen as the ablest and '4' being seen as the least able. I am unaware of how this was done by the teaching staff as I cannot remember sitting any entrance core tests.

One other issue that emerged was that some subjects were girls only, some were boys only. Examples were that only girls could do Typing and only boys could do Woodwork. This had an impact on me in that I was keen to do Typing but despite lobbying to the school by my mother, I was not allowed to study Typing. I think that decision hindered my educational progress in that early exposure to keyboard skills would have been hugely beneficial.

Discipline at the time involved corporal punishment, rubbish detention and lines. In fact, in the 3rd Form myself and a few of my mates competed for the 'golden bin' award for accumulating the most detentions and it was seen as a prestige trophy. Thankfully, I never experienced the cane and I did wonder about its effectiveness. However, I was not brave and perhaps it acted as a deterrent. Punishments were almost always punitive and there was no restorative element within the formal discipline structure. However, there were a number of teachers that handled disciplinary situations in an effective way by respectfully pointing out ways that you could deal with the situation in a positive way.

College sport was not as competitive as it now is and the competition between schools was more even than it is now. In Soccer (Football) I played for the school for 5 years. I played one practice game for the First Eleven but missed an open goal and sadly never got another chance. At that time there was only one sports exchange with Hillmorton High School, Christchurch, and you travelled both ways by the Union Company Steamer Express overnight boat sleeping in cabins to Lyttelton.



Murray on the bank at a College sports day, not a high quality image of Murray front centre.

Culturally we had a music and debating exchange with Spotswood College in New Plymouth. I represented the school in Debating and enjoyed the opportunity to compete against other Wellington schools as well as Spotswood College. Music education was not as impressive as it is now at Tawa College. However, my trumpet instructor was Harry Radcliffe who was the Caretaker/Grounds man. A highlight of my time at Tawa College was the major productions. I participated in two productions, "Salad Days" and "Journeys End". I loved both the rehearsals and performances even though my part was the deaf mute Troppo in "Salad Days". I would say that school productions continue to be a positive aspect of schooling at Tawa College and provide unforgettable memories for both the cast and the audience.

Each day we had 7 classes of 45 minutes each with three classes in the afternoon. The afternoon periods proved problematic for both the students and teachers. Some of the classes were double periods which suited practical subjects but as a student I felt ninety minutes was too long. Comparing timetables from 1966 to 2025, I feel that five one hour periods is more conducive to effective learning. I would say that classroom behaviour was worse than it is now and in my opinion the timetable structure contributed to this.

With regards to the uniform it was not much different. The boys wore caps and the girls wore a different tartan. The only other uniform issue was that girls were not allowed to wear their skirts short and occasionally teachers measured between the bottom of the skirt and the knees to check that the skirt length was appropriate. Also in my 7th Form year, the students won the right to wear mufti which I believe was a positive step. The students presented this to the Board of Governors and they decided to grant our request which was quite progressive.

In my time as a student at Tawa College we spent much time fundraising for a gymnasium. As a result, the first gymnasium facing B Block was built and this made Physical Education more palatable on wet days. Cross Country races were compulsory and there was a whole day off for the Athletics Sports which were held at the College and the Swimming Sports which were held at the Naenae Swimming Pool as the Tawa Pool was not opened until 1972. It must have been a logistical nightmare to transport the whole school by train from Tawa to Naenae.

Teaching was invariably chalk and talk and worksheets were usually duplicated from the banda machine. It was a spirit duplicator using methylated spirits and a master sheet coated with a layer of wax colourants. The master used a rotating drum wound by hand pressing on a newsprint to produce a mirror image. It gave off a sweet aroma. We used logarithm tables in Mathematics and slide rules in my senior years. Highlights in terms of what I learned were books such as "Lord of the Flies", "To Kill a Mockingbird", "Animal Farm" and I loved studying the War Poets. I was Shakespeared out having studied Julius Caesar, MacBeth, Hamlet and King Lear. In terms of Social Studies two highlights were a Year 12 trip to Fiji which cost us \$120 and this covered transport, food and accommodation for our 10day experience. In 2025 last quarter the cost would be around \$3,888,37 according to the Reserve Bank inflation calculator using wages as the measure. The other highlight was in Year 11 having a plane trip from Rongotai Airport looking at the geographic landforms of the lower North Island and upper South Island.

There were great clubs to be involved in and in my Seventh Form year we started "A Poetry Recitation Club" as well as a "Political Club" and one of the teachers ran a group called the "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Society". It was years later that I reaped the benefits of attending the latter group. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Catholic Jesuit priest who lived 1881 to 1955 scientist, paleontologist, philosopher, mystic, and teacher. Teilhard de Chardin investigated the theory of evolution from a perspective influenced by Henri Bergson and Christian mysticism, writing multiple scientific and religious works on the subject.

Some of the teachers were engaging and inspiring and several inspired me to embark on a teaching career. In fact, one teacher, Miss Barnes, allowed me to teach a Year 9 Maths class for a short time which in hindsight was very helpful.

Finally, it is the people that you are with that can enhance your experience of school. I am profoundly grateful to my friends, classmates and teachers who accepted me, sometimes corrected me and provided a sounding board as I dreamed of my future beyond secondary school.