# Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa now

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

**Murray Lucas, Reflections on the Tawa College Principal 2002 - 2021.** Written by Murray Lucas, edited by Steve Avery 15 9 26 words 2241.

On reflecting on my time as Principal at Tawa College, I would first like to acknowledge the positive contributions of the first four principals – Allan Mackie, Eric Flaws, Brian Walker and Bruce Murray. A thriving school is based on excellent foundations and each of these Principals expertly contributed to the College. As examples, Allan chose the motto “Do Justly’, Eric Flaws penned the school litany, Brian promoted collegiality and Bruce exemplified the servant leadership model.

The key component of any effective school are the people – the Board of Trustees, the staff, the students and the wider community. The Board of Trustees provided excellent input into financial, property, personnel and legal issues and had a good understanding of governance. Throughout my tenure, Board Meetings were well chaired, and they worked with all the staff to allow students to have the opportunity to grow irrespective of their background. During my time as Principal, the number of

student representatives on the Board increased to two and their input and voice made a valuable contribution to the Board.

I believed in distributed leadership, and I was very fortunate to be supported and where appropriate challenged and extended by a quality senior leadership team. This team assisted me in staff selection and helped in developing a new system of behaviour management, Restorative Practice, alongside Deans and Heads of Departments to allow students the opportunity to realise their potential in all aspects of school life.

One head student summarised well the role of the Tawa College staff. In the 2017 edition of the school magazine, Tawahi, he wrote that the staff had given him the tools to grow and thrive in life. He said the teachers had inspired him to better himself and live a life of success and gratitude. I, too, found the Tawa College staff to be professional, collegial, humane, inspirational and willing where appropriate to be vulnerable.

The central focus of any College is its students, and throughout my time at the school most of the student body demonstrated inclusion, celebrated diversity and achieved at a high level both during their school years and beyond their time at school. These students achieved academically but also culturally and in their sporting endeavours. A major focus was to encourage students to be well-rounded.

One of the annual highlights of my time at Tawa College was the School Ball. For many years it involved formal dancing lessons, and this meant that students participated fully in the programme on the night. It was inspiring to see the efforts students made to include everyone. The student social committee worked with staff to ensure all details such as theme, ticket design, band and programme were expertly dealt with. Up until its closure due to earthquake risk, the college ball used the Wellington Town Hall, and many who worked on that night in security, provision of food and site liaison were effusive in recognising both student behaviour and engagement. The use of breathalysers at the start of the evening ensured that students were not preloaded with alcohol, and I think the College sent a good message that people could thoroughly enjoy themselves without it.

During my tenure, the college introduced an initiative called Restorative Practice which aimed to deal with challenging behaviour. Since its introduction at Tawa College in 2009 it has made a positive difference to the school's climate. Restorative practices involved the teaching staff working proactively with the board, the students and the whānau to work through major and minor infractions in a manner that addresses causes of poor behaviour and listens to the stories of all those involved. Safety of everyone was paramount, but participants had to be vulnerable and to develop solutions together with a trained and well-prepared facilitator. One of the challenges was that the programme was labour intensive and, in the years following Covid, there was often too little time to progress this as I would have liked and momentum was lost.

Another innovation was to replace a lengthy senior prizegiving with three separate prizegiving's. These three prizegiving's were academic, cultural and sports, and they represented the fact that Tawa College students have a wide range of interests and they participate and excel in a broad range of activities. Often the success that

students achieved in cultural and sporting activities gave them the self-confidence to do well academically as well. Another annual prizegiving assembly to celebrate academic achievement took place at the end of Term 1. This celebrated student success in achieving excellence endorsement in National Certificate of Education Achievement (NCEA) Level 1, 2 and 3. Nearly all the guest speakers for this event were former students who had gone on beyond Tawa College to make a positive difference in society. The most spectacular entrance for a prizegiving took place in 2009 when former Deputy Head Girl, Mary Woolston, a fully qualified pilot in the Royal New Zealand Air Force, arrived in a helicopter landing on the Tawa College field close to Cecil Road. She then flew out by helicopter at the conclusion of the ceremony.

When people come into the assembly hall there is a saying carved in wood, “Enter to Learn”. When they exit the hall there is another saying, “Depart to Serve”. This summarises the importance of both learning and serving at Tawa College.

A great initiative relating to service that was introduced in my years as principal was that every Year 10 student, as part of the end-of-year outdoor education programme, gave a minimum of one day’s community service to an individual or a community group within the Tawa region. This could be tidying up a backyard for an elderly or incapacitated person, or it could be painting a mural or tidying up the Willowbank Reserve. The letters of appreciation from the community were very encouraging, and students fed back that this was often a highlight of their outdoor education week. The second initiative was working alongside the other seven schools in the Tawa area to transform an extensive piece of grassland into wetland at the head of Takapū Valley. This programme was called KETE (Kids Enhancing Tawa Ecosystems) and involved planting thousands of native trees and senior Tawa College students showing leadership in things environmental. Continuing the service theme, a student-driven initiative was that in 2009, the Prefects introduced a World Vision fundraising activity called “Survivor Challenge”. The students dreamed up the idea, developed the programme, implemented it and Year 9-11 students competed against each other to be the last person standing. The event is still taking place 18 years later and this student legacy project has been well supported by Tawa College staff member, Eric Clarke.

The other group that contributed to Tawa College were members of the community. Service organisations such as Lions and Rotary provided awards and financial support to assist the school, particularly around achievement and health and wellbeing. A significant number of community members, especially those who had retired, provided an enormous amount of support as reader-writers. Tawa was also well served by our community constables, and they related well to the students and were pro-active in supporting at-risk families. The school also received funding from the community for youth workers, and the workers ran programmes and camps to facilitate vulnerable students to engage more fully with school life.

**Pride in Work Awards Tawa Rotary 2021. Facemasks donated to Tawa College by Tawa Rotary.**

We had some high-ranking visitors at Tawa College during my time as Principal. The visit of the then Prince Charles in November 2015 was a highlight. We never were told definitively how the school was chosen, but I did like the remark of one person who said that “Tawa College was an ordinary school doing extraordinary things”. Prince Charles was mightily impressed with the visceral quality of the College Kapa Haka group which contrasted beautifully with the harmonies presented by the school’s auditioned choir, Blue Notes. He also visited the gym that morning, where he saw some of the College’s top cricket team practising and met a then Year 10 student, Amelia Kerr, who has become one of the top cricketers on the international stage. Other guests hosted by the school included Prime Minister John Key and the then Minister of Education, Hekia Parata. A former Tawa College student, Lee Tamahori, producer of the film ‘*Once were Warriors’* also visited and shared his expertise with our senior Media Studies classes.

One of the most challenging of my times as Principal was the onset and impact of Covid-19. In March 2020, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern closed all schools, and students had to learn from home for approximately three months. Lessons continued as online events. I was in awe of the mothers on our staff who often had to supervise their own children’s learning as well as being a teacher to their classes. Also, the Ministry of Education made a real effort to provide laptops but the large bulk of them arrived at the time when students returned to school. At Tawa College, each family had access to one computer, but there were families whose one computer had to be shared by multiple siblings and a parent who were also learning online. Thus, over this time of online learning, the gap widened in learning experience between the haves and the have nots. When the staff and students returned to school after a lengthy absence, we ensured that all students were taught new material so no-one pupil was having to catch-up. In retrospect, we should have spent more time dealing with Hauora — wellbeing — issues rather than moving into curriculum issues. But there were two highlights of the Covid-19 lockdown. One was the leadership shown by the student prefects: over lockdown they were able to set up the school’s first prefect-run Instagram account, and this helped them to connect with all students through

challenges, videos and stories. The other was the opportunity provided for the prefects to connect with older members of the community. In this way they moved out of their comfort zone, and as a result made new friends and found it to be a heartwarming experience. Also, on Anzac Day in 2020 while the virtual Dawn Service was broadcast on Radio New Zealand, we were encouraged to stand at the front of their houses at our gates in our 'bubbles' to honour the fallen. In the recorded service, the national anthem was sung by the Tawa College auditioned choir, Blue Notes.

During the years of my service, one third of the school's students were Māori or Pasifika and they made an excellent contribution to college life. Kapa Haka groups performed impressively at competitions as well as at formal occasions. There was also an increasing number of Pasifika groups who performed at Polyfests, and the leadership of the senior students as well as the community support was very impressive. Two students, Jess Jenkins and Lucia Bernards, won the Race Unity Competitions in successive years with challenging and inspiring speeches. Jess left school to study at Harvard University and graduated recently and won two prestigious awards. Paki Mckenzie wrote a haka for Tawa College that was taught to all students, and a staff member and former pupil, Isaac Stone, translated the Tawa College litany into Māori, and this was sung at Assemblies.

**Tawa College Kapa Haka**

There were a number of building projects in my years as Principal. The Technology block, Administrative Block, and Science laboratories were redesigned. A new Music Block and a new building housing Transition Education and Guidance were also built. Prior to the Christchurch earthquakes, all the major blocks had been mitigated against earthquakes, and thankfully this was covered by the Government. While I had oversight, the hard work of the various Boards of Trustees, Executive Officers, Property Managers and Senior Staff needs to be acknowledged.

**Tawa College**

**The Administration Block**

As Principal, I enjoyed a positive and collegial relationship with the seven neighbouring school principals in the Tawa Community. This was formalised into a community of learning or Kāhui Ako, and it was good to work together on local curriculum projects. Highlights included a Science evening at Tawa College for Year 1-8 students and their families and an annual Kī o Rahi competition for Primary school students. It was also good to work alongside the local iwi Ngāti-Toa who gave valuable input into all eight schools.

I reflect on my time as Tawa College Principal with a great deal of gratitude towards the Tawa College community who placed learning and serving as a key focus. Respectful relationships were pivotal to allowing students to achieve and sometimes excel in all aspects of life, and I am grateful to God for the privilege accorded me to work among such people.

**The pupils and the Principal**

**Probably 2008. The Family. Murray, Nathaniel, Caleb, Margaret.**

In 2026. Caleb is an Oncologist in Urological and Breast Cancer at Christchurch and Nathaniel a Paediatrician, with Child and Youth Health at Starship Auckland. Margaret completed two Masters the last five years ago. Murray graduated earlier this year with a Diploma of Clinical Supervision. He is now teaching teachers in training, a Professional Practice Lecturer at Canterbury University.

**Murray Lucas Principal of Tawa College 2002 - 2021**