

**Memoirs of Deanna Gerding:** inaugural student of Trinity College Beenleigh from 1982 to 1986 (written in 2021)

My years at Trinity College were some of the happiest of my life, looking back.

As a year 7 student at nearby St Joseph's Tobruk Memorial School, as it was known then, I watched keenly as Trinity College developed out of the adjacent Scortechini Park bushland.

Between finishing year 7 in 1981 and starting year 8 in 1982, because we lived very close to the school, my best friends and I spent many a day on our Christmas holidays investigating the new buildings and meeting and talking with Brothers John, Jeff and Paul.

Our first impressions of the Brothers were an instant liking and acceptance. They were very friendly and kind and didn't seem to mind us hanging around at all, roller skating on the new smooth concrete or playing handball or games on the new equipment.

By the time we attended our first day at school, we already felt comfortable in the surroundings and with knowing the Brothers.

The first day of year 8 in 1982 was one I will never forget. I was in awe of how many other students were in attendance. Having come from St Joseph's where we had two classes per grade and all of us knew each other since kindergarten or year 1, our student numbers had virtually doubled! I recall looking around and checking out the other kids, wondering who might be my next best friend. It was certainly exciting getting to know everyone new. It didn't take long to get to know everyone because there were only 108 of us. Before long, we were all friends.

As history will tell, we didn't last long at school that first day; we were all sent home for another week's holidays because there were certain areas of the school that were unfinished due to the recent heavy rain that occurred during the last stages of building. We couldn't believe our luck!

As we were the inaugural year of the school, the only students in attendance on the first day were year 8's which meant we were the leaders of the school from day one, even though we were also the youngest. Our responsibility as leaders remained with us all the way through Trinity College until year 12. Sometimes it was a prestigious tag and other times it was a drag. The responsibility never left us, unlike other established schools where leadership is traditionally left to the seniors in years 11 and 12. The constant reminders of our position and responsibility sometimes tested our adolescent minds but mostly kept us on the straight and narrow. On reflection, it was very character building.

The facilities at Trinity College in those early days, although new, were quite basic until the school grew and stages 2 and 3 were built over the next couple of years. I recall our home economics kitchen was in a small normal sized classroom and had about three upright stoves and one sink. Mrs Kidd was our Home-Ec teacher and because she was so well known to most of us as "Shane Kidd's mum" it was like cooking at home with our own mother!

Similarly with our music class. Mr Philip Lam was our homeroom teacher, maths teacher and music teacher and our music lessons consisted of him playing the guitar and us singing along. A regular song was Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Bad Moon Rising". I particularly loved music class because we didn't actually learn music, we simply sang rock songs!

Between years 8 and 12 we experienced stability with our teachers and the Brothers, with only a few changes. This was definitely a positive experience. Our teachers were firm but kind and some were

just plain fun and interesting. We often would approach the teachers in the playground when they were on playground duty or before or after class when we enjoyed less serious conversations and moments that enlightened us to the fact that our teachers were actually nice, real people. Sure, there were moments when students were told to “Put your hat on” or “Pull your socks up” but generally, we highly respected them and they us. I remember being blown away when Mr Ryan, our science teacher, casually told us he invented the tile that covered the outside of the NASA’s space shuttles. I’ve been to Cape Canaveral in recent years and felt a sense of pride when I saw a space shuttle up close and read about the significance of the tiles to the space program.

I don’t recall ever being harshly spoken to by any of the teachers. The fact was, most of them weren’t much older than we were or we were the same age as their own children.

By the time we were true seniors the school was in full swing with numbers around 800 students. Even though the school had grown to such a size, it still had a welcoming, country feel to it and most people knew everyone. Some of our class mates were from traditional catholic families that had many children such as the Williamsons, the Mulherans, the Tooheys to name a few and as such, their siblings were in the lower grades which allowed students to associate well across year levels.

During those years, we were all very connected and social. As well as the school events of the yearly fun run, school socials, yearly camps and working bees, most of our families were also members of St Patrick’s Catholic Church where we attended many social occasions with families including family camp, church balls and celebrations and my personal favourite, youth group (run by Brothers Jeff and Paul). They certainly were wonderful times.

As the school grew, so did the facilities and it wasn’t long before we had access to state of the art facilities in the science labs, home ec rooms, tech drawing and woodwork shop. We wanted for nothing and we had every opportunity to succeed.

The friendships forged during the five years I spent at Trinity College are so strong. Our particular class has come together on many occasions for reunions such as our first year out of school, our tenth year, our twentieth and thirtieth.

To this day, I am proud to say I made friends for life while at school. My close friends and I catch up regularly and share our history and our current lives. I am truly thankful for having the opportunity to have been an inaugural Trinity College student and treasure the memories.

Deanna Gerding