

Public School News

By Jane Rowley

When **Owen Kimberley** attended Artarmon Public School in 1918 he used a slate and slate pencil to write his lessons and his eraser was a sizable glob of spit! Owen is one of the oldest living students to contribute his memories of school life to the Centenary history project. In the 21st century the materials have changed but the objective remains the same; to maximise the opportunities for learning and growth for the children of our community.



Owen Kimberley, APS 1925, centre back row

Inspired by the centenary year, this past term, Artarmon Public School has celebrated its academic achievements by holding the inaugural **Artarmon Academy**. Based on the work of world renowned educationalist and author, Sir Ken Robinson, Artarmon Academy was developed over a number of months by the school staff. Sir Ken Robinson believes that education "is about recognising the multiplicity of talent, the individuality of talent and the importance of developing that for the reasons of individual fulfilment and of economic security." APS staff translated this theory into a range of special study subjects which students have been exploring for ten weeks. Judy Learmonth, Deputy Principal says "most of the subjects were interests and skills the staff already had." The subjects include movie making, architecture (the children are creating a scale model of the school), geology, botany, wind design, local history, journalism, ancient Egypt, Greek mythology, ethnic percussion, photography, fishing, and an introduction to German or Italian. "As a teacher when I was reading the finalised list I thought, 'Gee, I'd love to go to all of those, they're so interesting'," says Judy laughing. For a subject to be included on the final list it had to have enough content to fill a two hour lesson over ten weeks and had to come with a fair amount of academic rigour. "The staff had to draw links between that particular topic and the curriculum," explains Ryan Shephard, Deputy Principal. As Sir Ken Robinson says, "we're all born with fantastic creative abilities," and Artarmon Academy has proved a resounding success, communicating the power of creative learning to the children by utilizing the skills and abilities of the talented APS teachers.

One such teacher who contributed her skills to APS over a twenty-five year period was **Susie Mu Sung** who retired recently. Born in Hong Kong, she immigrated to Australia with her parents when she was just five years old. It was 1957 and "we were one of three Chinese families living in Willoughby," recalls Susie. After leaving school Susie studied law but decided she was more interested in being

a teacher despite her mother's warning that it was hard work! In those days new teachers were encouraged to take up country postings. Susie went further bush than most of us can imagine and took a job on Melville Island in the Northern Territory arriving just days after Cyclone Tracey had devastated the area. "There was just nothing there, nothing left," recalls Susie. Each posting provided new experiences and by the time Susie arrived at APS in the mid eighties, shortly after the birth of her second child, she welcomed the fact that it was a small school where "everyone was so supportive and friendly." At the time APS had three Kindergarten classes with thirty-two children in each class. Today APS has five Kindergarten classes with 20 children in each class and according to 2006 Census figures, there are over five thousand ethnic Chinese living in the city of Willoughby. Susie's favourite memories from her days teaching at APS are the big musical productions which were staged each year and involved all the children from Kindergarten to Year 2. And for those of us, like Susie's mother, who wonder why anyone would choose teaching as a career Susie says



Susie Mu Sung

music through their school." It was the sixth year in a row that APS has won that section. APS Senior Concert Band are also to be congratulated for achieving second place in the Premium Primary School Band section and APS Jazz Band One achieved a commendable third in the Primary School Stage Band section. All this success and growth has meant the band is long overdue a permanent headquarters on the school grounds. Fortunately the Federal government's Primary Schools Building Program has provided an opportunity too good to miss.

Members of the band committee and the P&C are rolling up their sleeves and taking on the job of renovating an old demountable to convert two classrooms into one large band rehearsal space, two sound-proofed practice rooms, an office for Band Director, Mr Walmsley and an extensive music library. Meanwhile the Schools Building Program is providing APS with a new library and classroom block. The ground floor library will be twice the size of the current library and there will be three new classrooms on the upper level. Both students and staff are looking forward to having more space in which to work and learn. "It will be great," says Judy Learmonth, Deputy Principal. "For a school this size you need the room to provide the sorts of resources that benefit the children."

Owen Kimberley certainly benefited from his time at Artarmon Public School and at 97 years



APS Concert Band Performing on stage in the final of the McDonald's Sydney Eisteddfod 2010

it's the privilege of working with children. "It's very rewarding watching them grow and develop especially when they come back and you see what they've become," she says. After a lifetime of teaching her advice to students is this; "school is what you put into it, what you make out of it."

That's a piece of advice that members of the school bands are taking to heart. They recently participated in the **McDonald's Sydney Eisteddfod** with fabulous results, winning over 13 other bands in the Intermediate Concert Band section. APS has six bands with around 160 children dedicated to learning and practising everything from the tuba to the piccolo. Over the course of the school year the bands perform at public events, such as the Artarmon Fair, and compete in festivals and eisteddfods. "School bands are particularly important to the Eisteddfod," says the Eisteddfod's Jennie Lees, "because many of Australia's leading musicians are introduced to

of age he's looking forward to attending the school's Centenary Celebration event later this year. Children under the care of Susie Mu Sung benefited from her experience and skill, and the wider Artarmon community is reaping the benefits of a school that nurtures our future. ■

- Learn more about the work of Sir Ken Robinson by reading his latest book, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, available for loan at Willoughby City Library.
- Contribute your memories of your time at APS to the **Centenary history project**. Contact Margot McKay at margot@whichhue.com.au
- Participate in the **Centenary celebrations on Saturday 23 October 2010**. For more information check the school website at www.artarmon-p.school.nsw.edu.au