

Milton Alcorn's Autobiography of his Maleny Schooldays

Milton Alcorn was born in the Maleny Hospital in 1928. His parents, Norman & Ethel were dairy farmers. He had an older brother Elliot and a younger sister Valmai. Milton & his siblings attended the Maleny State School with his cousins Grace & Betty Alcorn.



Milton completed his secondary education at the Nambour High School and attended the Kelvin Grove Teachers' College. He returned to the Maleny State School as a teacher in 1945, aged 17 when Mr Smith was the Head Teacher. Milton married Helen Roff, a teacher, in 1962 and they had 2 children, David & Katherine (Kate). Milton & Helen retired to Maleny where they were active in the community for many years before Milton

passed away at the Maleny Hospital in 2009 aged 80, Helen shortly after.

Milton's teaching career lasted 46 years. Here are some of his memories starting with a day at the Maleny School in the 1930's.

“The bell would ring at 9.30am. “Stand!”, “Markers Move!”, “Parade fall-in!”. Late comers, some three to a horse, would hurry from the horse paddock and saddle shed, others running through the front garden gate to parade. The flag would be saluted and the national anthem sung. After an address by the Head Teacher, we'd march up the steps to the verandah outside our rooms, take off our hats, unpack our bags from our backs and march in order to our school desk. The two big rooms each held two rows of 4 desks, each desk seating eight or more pupils – I taught 63 pupils in 2 classes in the west room in 1954 – but in the 1930's, it contained up to 4 classes. A third room had the infants' school – Preps 1 to 4 (Maleny was then only a 3 teacher school). Each desk had an inkwell, a slate and a grooved pencil rest with a shelf underneath for our books. The seats were long and fairly narrow. Slate pencils scratched. Pens had a straight steel nib with two sharp points. Teachers adhered strictly to their time tables.

Normally a school day started with notation, mental arithmetic and tables. Homework would be heard (you learnt a new poem once a month and were punished if you could not recite it), any sums were marked and “the cuts” were given (often six of the best) to those who had not done any of the homework. “Learning by rote or doing” was the chief tool of learning. By 7th grade or Scholarship class you knew the Latin and Greek roots of derivation of every word in our school readers. To go to secondary education,

a student had to pass Scholarship, which was an externally set exam. Some took 2 or more years and some just left school!

The roll was marked just before the “little” or 11 o’clock recess. After recess, arithmetic and mensuration, reading and speech training followed and sometimes composition, which was prose and essay-writing and poetry making, and/or grammar. After midday recess, social studies, which included history, geography and civics, were taught. Some days a map would have to be drawn. On other days, in the afternoon, copy books had to be written as perfectly as possible or different types of printing done, plus music, nature science, art and craft (but mainly pastel drawing), girls sewing, boys gardening and religious instruction and bible reading lessons. Often Friday afternoon, for one hour, organized games were held. Children not taking Religious Instruction were allocated to me to look after the very fine gardens – roses, especially fronting Cedar Street.

I started inter-school athletics competition with schools from around Maleny, including Glasshouse Mountains district. Even in the 1930’s we played cricket against Witta, Landsborough and Kenilworth, rugby league and tennis. Girls' basket ball, swings and marbles were also popular. We had a Maleny School Sports day and breaking-up day was fun with games and prizes. Fancy Dress Balls were another popular event especially the Grand March. Another special day was Arbor Day when each of us planted a tree and Calf Club Day, which included cream testing.

During the war years, I helped dig air raid trenches under the big camphor laurel trees (often with seats around). I also dug trenches at Nambour High School and at Kelvin Grove Teachers’ College. Students had to practise air raid drills. In 1945 or 1946, all the teachers marched the pupils down the main street to welcome home Air Force man, Guy Cuthbertson, our first P.O.W., whose children attended our school.

During the Depression, most children went to school barefooted (often passing swagmen camped under the old Walkers Creek bridge) wearing patched trousers. In our bag was a tin match box with our smelly wet rag to clean our slates. But, in those days it was safe for children to walk to school, without parental supervision, once they were old enough to go alone. However, as a child, walking, riding a horse or a push-bike in rain, fog, or against a cold westerly wind or in a cold, fresh, winter morning or a hot, summer thunderstorm to and from school was all part of the school year. We had to get home to help with the milking. My school books all had milk stains on the pages as I turned them over whilst hand-milking. But this changed when dad and mum changed over to milking machines.

Maleny and district has had many excellent pupils over the years – Keith Winning, the youngest ever Captain of an Australian Rugby Union or Wallaby side was in my class at Maleny and Dr. Otto Nothling from Witta, who was an Australian test cricketer who

replaced Don Bradman for the 1928–29 Second Test in Sydney. He was also a top athlete and javelin thrower as well as an Australian Rugby representative. There are others, many.

My aim was to give all students a rounded education, country children the same as city ones, and to allow each student to achieve to the best of his or her ability, considerate of others and to develop a sense of self-discipline from the necessary order a school must have to allow maximum learning and teaching.”

Maleny State School, Cedar St C1950

Photos from Miss Daphne Roberts



1. Front entrance. Principal's Office on left
2. Classroom
3. Classroom
4. Jacaranda at the front of the school
5. Manual Arts Building

These buildings were shifted to the State School in Cedar St in 1958. The Manual Arts Building was not relocated.



Collated by Desley Malone
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