

REFLECTION ON THE CLOSURE OF TARDUN

My Story:

This reflection was the direct consequence of writing my life's story. An exercise instigated by a call from our Cluster Leaders for all of us to write down a little about ourselves; this work has just recently been completed and named:

"A Child Migrant's Memories" – (Touched by the hand of God)

More than half my story deals with the Tardun days and it was a marvellous opportunity to "walk down memory lane". As I wrote, more and more memories surfaced, so I had to bring in to play a filtering system that enabled me to control the amount of material I used. Time and time again I found myself emotionally involved in what I was writing. When my emotions got the better of me I found the document resembled a "hotch-potch" of opinions rather than memories; so once again much discipline was required. I am not sure what will become of the finished work but the second motivating influence was to commemorate the closure of Tardun Farm School.

The Closure:

The Tardun School is now closed and all the students have been relocated. The official closing ceremony at Tardun will occur on the 8th of August 2009 and is being organised by the EREA. I am not sure what is going to happen to the magnificent buildings but the farm will be sold some time in 2010. Much of the equipment and most of the livestock have already been transferred to Bindoon Catholic College and what remains will be sold off very soon. I am learning to cope with this sad news along with many of the Migrant past-students who have called Tardun home for most of their lives. Strangely enough the experience of writing my story has helped me more readily to accept closure on that part of my life. I am convinced now that we should all move on. I acknowledge that for some it is easier said than done.

The big realisation is not that we must learn to forgive the EREA or the OLT who were part of the final decision, but rather to find the true causes of this decision. It appears that the decision had been made so many times in the past that it would be unfair to single out any one person or group to blame for Tardun's demise. Even as far back as 1939 closure was recommended until Brother Conlon stepped in and over ruled the wisdom of his own leadership team. Father Hannan ordered its closure as did the Superior General Brother Loftus in his day. More recently Brother McAppion was sent up to Tardun to arrange the orderly closure of the school. From what I hear from Brothers in the know, it was also a constant topic of discussion by General Councils and quite a few Provincial Councils who were constantly struggling with what to do with Tardun.

Somehow, maybe miraculously, the School survived all these crises and just "sailed on" merrily. How that happened is a very heated debate even today. It is said: a small group of Brothers who had spent most of their lives in these Institutions plus strong local lobby groups did influence the outcome from time and time. It still remains a mystery to me however that the inevitable, Tardun's closure, kept being anything but inevitable. Well finally it has happened after eighty one years of service to the under-privileged and helping students in the remote area of our State, Western Australia. Tardun is - no more! We do need to acknowledge the men and women who spent their lives serving the "Anawim" of this world in places like Tardun.

The Why:

Now to try and sort out the why! The EREA's views are well documented and the general body of Christian Brothers have come to accept that the closure is the right thing to do, though a small remnant still would like to fight on. What I recommend most sincerely is that everyone with a personal investment in this decision should read Professor Plowman's book "The Enduring Struggle" and I particularly plead with the ex-staff members and the past-students of the school to do this if they have not already done so. It is a very professional piece of work and a brilliant book, even if it is at times difficult to "plough through" due to the huge amount of information stored in its pages. A list of thoughts comes to mind after reading Professor Plowman's material:

- The cessation of the Child Migration Scheme set up to assist the migrant's passage to Australia.
- Diminishing Religious Brothers presence
- Ongoing financial problems,
- The frequency of droughts
- Its isolation
- The lack of sustainable pupil numbers
- Inability to employ adequate staff
- The rising cost of maintenance
- The difficulty of providing the right professional support for the type of children attending the school
- The inability of some Parents to pay the reasonable fees set down.

And so it goes on. All these reasons given in Plowman's book may be valid; however the real reason may well be the fact that we no longer have the energy or the will to sustain the work being done at Tardun. Tardun belongs to another era, another set of operating imperatives. It is up to us, the remaining ERN to take up the baton and continue the good work started by our predecessors, who took Edmund Rice's call to the margins seriously. How? By expressing in our lives and in our work that very same spirit that sustained them. Tardun may be closed but Edmund's work will continue on in the men and women left behind and in the memories of us; the Tardun past-pupils.

Our Memories must live on:

Memories are precious things and we are a happier people for being able to remember life's experiences and share them with others. You only have to sit with someone who suffers from loss of memory to realise the importance that memories play in our lives. Tardun, like any school, has a soul/spirit and it does not reside in its buildings; rather it resides in the people who live in them and have lived in them in the past.

A particular school or place may die but its spirit lives on in the hearts and minds of all those who wish to keep the memories concerning these places alive. This is the case for all our establishments that have closed their doors in recent times or have been passed on to other owners. It's the past-students who keep the memories alive by having reunions from time to time. Many years after a Christian Brother's school has closed "Old Boys" continue to meet once a year to celebrate old times and just share yarns.

Abbotsford School in Melbourne, to which I was happily associated, is a good example because it closed its doors twenty years ago and yet its past-pupils have continued to get-together several times a year. This pattern is repeated in dozens of other cities and towns across the country. People like to remember old

times and like to bring back to life the old School's memories. "They were the good times" was heard at our last meeting.

I guess our task then, as past-students of Tardun, is to keep the memory of Tardun alive. There has been a Tardun reunion (*Migrant students and their families mainly*) going on for years and I expect these get-togethers will continue well in to the future. The interesting thing about the Tardun reunion is that it's not only faithfully attended every year but that the children of the past-students are now turning up to. The baton is being passed on to the next generation and I find that amazingly reassuring.

What about bad memories? I hear you say. Of course some memories are not good and it is these that can poison all our good memories. An example of this was the story of one man who shared with me a bad memory while in one of our Institutions. The one bad memory obliterated all the good ones and sad to say he remains bitter even today and who can blame him. I felt the need to suggest a way to healing but I was aware from his response that he was not ready. The question is when will he be ready? I talked about the idea that forgiveness was the only way to a peace of mind and the removal of all bitterness. (*Another reflection for another day maybe*).

Forgiveness and its importance:

The real issue for us all is that we need to find it in our hearts to forgive those who have caused the bad memories. If we don't, not only are we in danger of "dying inside", but our whole life can become a "hell on earth". Revenge, guilt, and hate are not things that lead to personal health and lasting peace of mind. One can only grow and find true happiness through the process of forgiveness. Having a feeling of being forgiven certainly is one way of finding a way through; however the only way out for some of us is to learn to forgive those who have wronged us. Peace and healing can be restored but this giant step has to be taken; there is no other way.

If we have been lucky enough to have experienced someone's forgiveness then we should be counted fortunate because we are handed permission and indeed are given the freedom and the desire to forgive those who have hurt us. I can assure you it is a real feeling of relief; as if a mighty load has been taken away and, finally, a great feeling of lightness pervades our soul.

(I wronged someone and craved forgiveness, it was granted, and in turn I found it impossible not to forgive others)

I came across this piece of writing somewhere and not only do I believe it to be so true; I think it is one of the most inspiring things I have read in a long time. Have you heard the expression "I can forgive but I can't forget"? I was never sure that this was not a contradiction in terms. In my mind I suspect I must forget or the forgiving will never quite hold. Memories have a funny way of controlling you and even paralysing you if you let them. Can we really decide and manufacture the process of destroying bad memories? Probably not! We can, however, make a decision to no longer let it control and dominate our minds and therefore let ourselves be liberated from its power.

Getting back to the closure of Tardun; I feel that Tardun will live on in the memories of the hundreds of past-students but these memories will only survive if they are good memories. Last July 12th 2009 all the Tardun "Old boys", and I am referring to the Migrant boys specifically, journeyed up to be there for the last time. Boys came from every part of the continent to say their final farewell and to share their stories

together and I hope not for the last time. The feeling was it was time for sharing good memories it just did not seem the time or the place for bad ones

From all reports it was a great success and the boys went home feeling that a proper closure, to this part of their lives, had been experienced. *(I was unable to be there because of bereavement in my own family)* I was told about how they spent their last night around the imaginary “camp fire” sharing stories amongst themselves. A sacred moment indeed and I am so disappointed to have missed it. One lad, who was there, summed up the whole experience by saying to me “I will treasure that night for the rest of my life”. Other comments were “It was a great night” and “I am glad I decided to go” or “I would not have missed it for the World”. These remarks suggest to me that it was a great opportunity for these men and maybe at last we all can let Tardun go.

I close this reflection with some Scripture references and hope that all of us can find it in our hearts to translate the lesson I have learnt here into our own lives. I am sure there are memories we all own that need our attention and maybe a reflection such as this just may start us on that road to healing. May Edmund continue to be an inspiration in your life as he has been in mine.

What Scripture says about forgiveness?

“You have heard it said love your friends, hate your enemies. But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

“Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you?”

“Do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you”. *(Matt Ch. 4)*

When you stand and pray, forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done” *(Mark 11:2)*

Jesus “spells out” how it must be and this hard road to be travelled is never going to be easy. I finish with a little paraphrase of my own which has kept me sane and been responsible for much peace.

(Forgive and you will experience forgiveness a hundred fold in return)



***TARDUN
(1928 – 2009)***



***THE AUTHOR
Bro Peter Thrupp past-pupil 1953 - 1963***