

IN MEMORIAM  
GEORGE GAVIN BETTS

born: May 31<sup>st</sup> 1932  
died: February 28<sup>th</sup> 2013



**Heraclitus**

THEY told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,  
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.  
I wept as I remember'd how often you and I  
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

William (Johnson) Cory. 1823–1892

## ORDER OF SERVICE

Music : “O Fortuna”

Welcome by Celebrant Leonie Cook

Eulogy from Chris Betts

Tribute from Bob Birrell

Reflection: Images of Gavin’s Life

Reading: “How do I love Thee?”

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Music Tribute: “Adieu mon Coeur”

- (Farewell my Heart): Edith Piaf

Final Farewell

Music: “Les Amants de Paris”

- (The Lovers of Paris): Edith Piaf

## O FORTUNA

O Fortuna,  
velut Luna  
statu variabilis,  
semper crescis  
aut decrescis;  
vita detestabilis  
nunc obdurat  
et tunc curat  
ludo mentis aciem;  
egestatem,  
potestatem,  
dissolvit ut glaciem.

Sors immanis  
et inanis,  
rota tu volubilis,  
status malus,  
vana salus  
semper dissolubilis;  
obumbrata  
et velata  
mihi quoque niteris;  
nunc per ludum  
dorsum nudum  
fero tui sceleris.

Sors salutis  
et virtutis  
mihi nunc contraria;  
est affectus  
et defectus  
semper in angaria.  
hac in hora  
sine mora  
cordae pulsum tangite!  
quod per sortem  
sternit fortem,  
mecum omnes plangite!

O Fortune,  
like the moon  
of ever changing state,  
you are always waxing  
or waning;  
hateful life  
now is brutal,  
now pampers  
our feelings with its game;  
poverty,  
power,  
it melts them like ice.

Fate, savage  
and empty,  
you are a turning wheel,  
your position is uncertain,  
your favour is idle  
and always likely to disappear;  
covered in shadows  
and veiled  
you bear upon me too;  
now my back is naked through the sport of  
your wickedness.

The chance of prosperity  
and of virtue  
is not now mine;  
whether willing  
or not,  
a man is always liable for Fortune's service.  
At this hour  
without delay  
touch the strings!  
Because through luck she  
lays low the brave,  
all join with me in lamentation!

*translation: Gavin Betts  
(<http://tylatin.org>)*

# A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

(Scots College '49 Alumni Yearbook, written 1999)

As my father's job involved him in moving about the NSW countryside, my parents were anxious that I should spend at least some of my secondary schooling in Sydney; country high schools which took students up to the Leaving Certificate were few and, unlike their Sydney counterparts, did not have a very high reputation. Consequently everyone was delighted when at the end of my final year at primary school in 1943 I won a scholarship for Scots. The following January I was duly packed into a train at Cootamundra and dispatched to Sydney amid stern instructions to study hard and behave myself.

Any eleven-year-old child thrust into the regimented turmoil of a city boarding school after a sheltered country background is bound to feel disoriented. In my case it took some time to adapt myself to living in close proximity with so many people whose backgrounds, aspirations, and behaviour were very different from my own. After entering Aspinall House I soon fell out with the matron, a large, elderly lady known as the 'Spirit of Progress'. Whenever she saw me she had a distressing habit of turning one of my ears inside out and pronouncing me 'a dirty little grub' -- this description was probably accurate, but it did little to make me feel I was in a caring environment.

Gradually I became accustomed to a rougher, tougher way of life than I had experienced in my earlier childhood. I was told that boarding school provided an excellent training for one's subsequent life. This certainly proved true. After its many and varied trials I found adulthood agreeable and relatively easy to cope with.

I was a lazy child and probably could have done much better scholastically than I did, but fortunately this did not affect my subsequent career. I was neither interested nor gifted in sport and so did not fit into school life as well as many others. I was, however, just as prone to mischief as most adolescent males, and some of the exploits of which I was guilty still make me shudder.

The masters whom I remember with most affection are dear old Barny Cubis, Rhys Jones, and Mr Stephens (I don't recall his first name; amongst other duties he taught woodwork). Barney, it will be recalled, was a very sympathetic and humane person who never set himself above the children he taught. He had a wisdom that intrigued me at the time and has puzzled me since. One memory I particularly cherish; on one occasion in a history class he was discoursing on the Cold War and the Soviet Union (it must have been in '48 or '49); 'Mark my words boys,' he said, 'The Soviet Union is not going to last forever. I won't be here to see it collapse but this will happen in your life-times.' Whether this was a genuine insight into history or a lucky guess I don't know; I prefer to think it was the former.

Rhys Jones impressed me with his air of omniscience and ready wit. He was once alone on the podium of the assembly hall with the school massed below him. On such occasions absolute silence was the rule, but Rhys noticed Dave Watts, who was the head prefect at the time, whispering something to his neighbour. 'Watts,' he said, 'Have you ever come across the Latin tag *quis costodit custodes?* You could roughly translate it *Who guards the guards?*'

Mr Stephens imbued me with a love of cabinet making which has stood me in good stead ever since, both for practical purposes and as a hobby. The two most useful things I learnt at school were Latin and woodwork. The first provided me with an interesting career, the second with a practical source of relaxation.

In 1950 I began an Arts course at the University with the intention of combining it with Law but I soon decided to drop the latter in favour of an honours degree in Latin. This I completed in '53 and I seemed destined for a career as a school teacher, and I did, in fact, begin as such at Sydney Grammar in '54. However I was fortunate enough to win a travelling scholarship to Cambridge on the basis of my University results and amid much excitement I sailed for England in August.

At Cambridge I spent two years in Trinity College and obtained a further degree in Classics. Academic stuffiness rather put me off the notion of staying in universities at the time and when I returned to Australia in '56 I joined the old Commonwealth Oil Refinery (which was in the process of being taken over by BP) with the high-sounding position of executive trainee.

But the business world was not for me and we parted company rather acrimoniously the next year. This left me rather at a loss but my parents had recently bought an old house in the Sydney suburb of Greenwich, and with the woodworking skill I had learnt so thoroughly from 'Stevo' I began to renovate it.

A few months were enough to bring this to completion but I still had no idea of what career I should, or could, follow. I was young and not over-worried. I still had that unthinking, and often unjustified, confidence of youth, and, sure enough, my luck got me through. One evening I happened to be on a tram going to Kings Cross (I can't remember why) and I noticed that a fellow passenger was one of my old lecturers from Sydney University. On hearing my tale he suggested that I apply for a job teaching Latin and Greek at the newly formed University College at Newcastle. I did this and my application was successful. My real career then started.

Life in Newcastle was congenial. It was a small city where I made many friends and had a job which I enjoyed. My one mistake was to marry one of the faculty secretaries, although the full extent of my error did not become evident until a couple of years later. In '64 we were on sabbatical leave in Germany and she ran off with a Persian (or was it a Greek? There was surfeit of both on the Continent that year). I retired in high dudgeon to London where I soon recovered with the aid of a particularly generous pay rise which the Menzies government handed out to academics in the middle of the year. I was back in Newcastle in '65 but the following year I took up a job at Monash, which had recently been set up as Melbourne's second university.

Several years later I met and married my present wife, Kathy, who has subsequently made a name for herself as a sociologist specialising in immigration issues. We have one child, Christopher, who is now out in the world as a software engineer.

My life at Monash involved the usual petty squabbling that occurs in universities but, despite that, was both agreeable and satisfying. I was second in command in the Department of Classical Studies. I gained promotion to associate professor in the early '70s and stayed at that level until I took early retirement in '94. I wrote a number of books, of which the least boring was a translation of some medieval Greek best sellers; my only commercial success was with a somewhat pedestrian volume *Teach Yourself Latin* which, rather to my surprise, has now sold over 100,000 copies.

In retirement I am trying to catch up on all the books I should have read but never got around to. I am also writing or compiling the odd volume, such as the present Yearbook. As for exercise, our house, which is in a permanent state of semi-collapse, requires much time and effort, as well as all the skills I ever learnt from 'Stevo'.

- Gavin Betts, 1999



*Cambridge 1971*



*Working on the rocking horse, Mt Waverley 2004*

## HORACE'S ODE I.24

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus  
tam cari capitis? praecipe lugubris  
cantus, Melpomene, cui liquidam pater  
vocem cum cithara dedit.  
ergo Gavinium perpetuus sopor  
urget; cui Pudor et Iustitiae soror  
incorrupta Fides nudaque Veritas  
quando ullum inveniet parem?

Why blush to let our tears unmeasured fall  
For one so dear? Begin the mournful stave,  
Melpomene, to whom the Sire of all  
Sweet voice with music gave.  
And sleeps he then the heavy sleep of death,  
Gavinus? Piety, twin sister dear  
Of Justice! naked Truth! unsullied Faith!  
When will ye find his peer?

- Horace (c 24BC), adapted by Dan Franklin  
(by way of John Conington)



*The family wish to thank you most sincerely for your attendance here today. Your expressions of sympathy and support have been a great comfort to us at this time. Following the service you are warmly invited to join us for light refreshments in the old school building.*