Emmarentia Primary School, Johannesburg

A Short History of a Quality School

Dear Reader

Writing the history of a school poses questions. What does one include? What does one exclude? Where should the focus be?

The editors realise the truth of the line, "You can't please all of the people all of the time." Nevertheless, we do hope that you'll enjoy reading this short history of the school.

We thank the many kind folk who gave us information and photos. A huge thank you goes to those who edited the annual school magazines.

Appreciation also goes to Kayleigh Williams and Jess McCallum (Debbie Gaynor's daughter) who assisted with the formatting.

At the end of this snapshot history is a selection of photos. The photos are a sample of what was put on the editors' desks. Enjoy browsing down Memory Lane.

With kind wishes and much Goodwill.

Cheryl Donald, Deidré François, Debbie Gaynor, (née van Ryneveld), Richard Hayward and Nadia Variawa .

The final editor is Debbie Gaynor.

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In the Beginning

Wikipedia states that the school and the suburb was once on the property of Braamfontein Farm. Louw Geldenhuys was a mining prospector who bought the farm in 1886. He had hoped that he would get mining rights but it was refused.

Louw Geldenhuys then decided to share the farm between his two sons, Frans and Louw. The farmhouse of Frans still exists. It's the clubhouse of Marks Park Sports Club. Many Emmarentia Primary School (EPS) sport events have been held on the beautiful huge grounds.

When Louw Geldenhuys died in 1929, his wife, Emmarentia began to sell parts of the farm. Emmarentia was named after her in 1937. When Emmarentia died the next year, she was buried in the small family cemetery in Hill Road. The well-maintained cemetery is opposite the car park entrance to the school.

On 9 January 1953, there was an inaugural opening of the school. The Opening Ceremony was conducted by the Rev JB Webb. The founding principal was Dr PJ Venter. The motto of the school became "Goodwill". In the same year, an 80 mile an-hour gale tore off the school roof. When Dr Venter saw the approaching storm, he sent the children home early.

A brainchild of the first Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was to start a Mothers' Group. The first chairlady was Mrs Gertie Jacobson. She remarked that "Goodwill" was the way that they worked, "… in complete harmony and with tremendous enthusiasm." The mothers started the library thanks to one of their members being an ex-librarian. Another project of the Mothers' Group was the creation of the original school song, "God bless our way of Goodwill, Emmarentia."

The First Thirty Years

Mrs Hazel Garratt, the school secretary from 1954 to 1981, recorded that the First Annual Sports Day was held in August 1954. It was a typical windy August day in Johannesburg. She wrote:

The grass had not yet covered the oval and clouds of red-brown dust kept sweeping across the field … At the tea interval a great quantity of tea was consumed partly for thirst but mainly to wash away grit on teeth and tongue!

The school hall was built in 1959. Dr Venter left the school at the end of 1962. In the 30th Anniversary Edition of the school magazine, he wrote:

I *began with an empty building without any assistance and set about organising, planning and coordinating efforts to make this new school a success.*

Mr Warren Hudson became the next principal in 1964. Under his leadership the young sapling of a school continued to grow, not only as regards the physical resources, but also the young minds entrusted to its care.

When an education department builds a school, the principal is given the bare bones. If the school wants extra classrooms, a hall, a library, sport fields and more, those capital work projects are handed over to the parents and staff. Fortunately, the Emmarentia Primary School community rose enthusiastically to meet the challenges.

The hall became a reality because of generous parents and the number of fund-raising functions. With the money raised, the oval as well as the tennis courts were completed. On 10 November 1962, the Felix Fels swimming pool was opened.

When Mr Hudson left in 1967 after his fine contributions to the ongoing improvement of the school, Mr M Shear became the third principal the following year. The school continued to thrive under his ten years of dedicated expert leadership. Besides the many academic achievements of the children at EPS, many of them took up leadership roles at high schools.

When Mr Shear bid a fond farewell to Emmarentia Primary in 1979, Mr Martin Schumacher stepped into the principal's office.

At the end of 30 years of school history in 1983, it celebrated the four principals who had led the school. They were Dr Venter who was sequentially followed by Messrs Hudson, Shear and Schumacher. The principals were

supported by three very able vice-principals: Messrs Schijf, Hudson and du Toit. Two people who served as Acting Principals during this period were Mrs Brodie and Mr du Toit.

As the years go by, it's not only the children who move on. So do the staff. In 1984 EPS lost several staff members. One such person was Mrs Violet Weiner.



Mrs Violet Weiner

Mrs Weiner retired after twenty-nine years of dedicated and loving service to the school. Her last six years was in the role of Head of Department: Junior Primary Phase.



Mr Martin Schumacher

Mr Schumacher, after six years as principal, left on a promotion in 1984. Innovative thinking was a cornerstone of his excellent leadership. His impact on the school was indelible.

In a tribute written by Mr Jack Skewis, Head of Department (Guidance), he wrote:

Mr Schumacher was first and last, a pupils' principal. The needs, both educational and extra-mural of the pupils came first. This is borne out by the fact that he seemed to know every pupil in the school by his or her first name from the bulkiest Standard Five (Grade Seven) to the smallest Grade One.

In the same year that Mr Schumacher left, there was an emotional and tearful farewell to Mr Andries Legodi, the senior member of the grounds and maintenance team. He had been on staff since the start of the school in 1953. Mr Legodi retired to his smallholding in Louis Trichardt (today known as Makhado), where he intended to drill for water, grow vegetables and sell them. In his own words, he wisely observed:

As jy onder die boom sit, dan word jy oud. Jy moet werk. (If you sit under a tree, you grow old. You must work.)

Today, much of the beauty of the gardens and grounds of the school can be attributed to his groundwork over thirty-one years.



In the past, the school was under the administration of the Transvaal Education Department (TED).

Of the almost eight hundred TED schools in the early 1980s, Emmarentia Primary was one of the few schools that had a fully equipped, modern computer centre.

The centre became a reality largely because of the initial vision and drive of Mr Schumacher.

Dawn of a Rainbow Nation School

The 1980s were times of seismic change in South Africa. The shackles of apartheid were being broken. There were marches and strikes – some peaceful, some violent – for a democratic society. The school motto of "Goodwill" was a daily reminder of how to treat others. The motto was a north star in a maelstrom of political turmoil.



Dr Richard Hayward

Dr Hayward became the new head in 1985. Shortly after his arrival, he was introduced to a particular strength of the school. That strength was the children's theatrical talents. A home-grown production titled *Goggas* was put on the stage. The show was of such a standard that it was copyrighted and performed far and wide.

A quality school is always in a state of continuous improvement. The school changes as the times change. An electronics club was added to the extramural programme. Another addition to an already brimful extramural programme, was the gymnastic club.

One of the most enthusiastic members of the gym club was Ivor Templer who wrote in the 1988 school magazine:

It's not every day that you see dazzling feats being performed by children, some only in Grade One or Two … It is quite marvellous, after your sequence, to hear the applauding crowds … And so, to Mrs Brummer and our gymnasts, well done. Let's keep the crowds head over heels with excitement.

In 1987 the prefects went on a weekend Leadership course in the Magaliesberg. The weekend helped them work as a team. They became more aware of their different skills and strengths. The prefects returned from the weekend bubbling over with ideas on how to be of better service to all those whom they served.

After nineteen years of dedicated service to the school, Mrs Jane Kumalo bid farewell in 1987 to Emmarentia Primary. She made sure that the administration block was kept neat and clean. Unfortunately, she became ill in the last few months, but her daughter stepped into the breach. Thank you and "Sepela gabotse" (Go well), Mrs Kumalo.

Few staff members have an association with the school that lasts more than twenty years. In January 1965 such a person arrived together with her son, Michael.



Mrs Lucille Cotterell

For Michael, it was his first day in Grade One. For mother, a class of 48 children in Grade Two awaited her. The beloved Mrs Cotterell retired in 1988. Whenever and wherever she could, Mrs Cotterell heaped encouragement and praise on children. In a tribute to her, Mrs Keller observed that she was a "whizz" at comforting and helping children when problems arose. A hug and a few kind words worked miracles.

In 1989 a Children's Council was established. The concept was an idea of Mrs van Ryneveld. The councillors were elected by their classmates through secret ballot. The councillors met monthly, and meetings started with a business lunch of hamburgers and soft drinks.

The children then discussed issues raised by their classroom peers. Those young leaders learnt the correct protocols of conducting meetings – no doubt, worthwhile skills for larger leadership roles in their later lives.

The Council meetings were opportunities to help make the school an even happier place for everyone. A simple example is that of a Standard Three (Grade 5) councillor. It was suggested that test marks be given privately to the teacher and not called out in front of the whole class: we all have the occasional forgettable test result! That recommendation by the councillor soon became standard school policy.

Monday, 30 April 1990 is a date forever engraved in the history of EPS. On that morning as she was preparing to come to do voluntary work in the Media Centre, Mrs Hazel Garratt suddenly collapsed and passed away. Since her retirement as school secretary after twenty-seven years of exceptional loving service, she did not simply walk away. "Treasure", as she was so often called, wanted to keep on giving. In a conversation with Dr Hayward, she offered to continue giving her exceptional organisational skills to the Media Centre. However, she stipulated one condition: there was not to be a single cent of remuneration. Her selfless life was an embodiment of the motto of "Goodwill".



Mrs Hazel Garratt

In the school magazine of that year Richard Hayward wrote:

There were two significant requests made shortly after Mrs Garratt's passing. One was from the children. They asked that the beautiful Media Centre be named in her honour … The second request came from the family. They asked that her ashes be scattered in the Garden of Goodwill. One Sunday morning that was done by the immediate family.

Today, the very heart and earth of Emmarentia Primary is imbued with her spirit. Aunty Haze … or Treasure … or Mrs Hazel Garratt, will always be with us.

The tradition of selfless giving set by Mrs Garratt has lived on. Her daughter, Mrs Lynn Keller was a legendary Grade One teacher from 1971-1999. Lynn attended EPS as a pupil, along with Mrs Ailsa Steyn and Mrs Bev Garnitz (neé Nagle) who then all went on to become teachers at the school. Bev was in the first group of pupils to attend EPS from Grade One to Standard Five (1953-1959).





Mrs Bev Garnitz (neé Nagle)

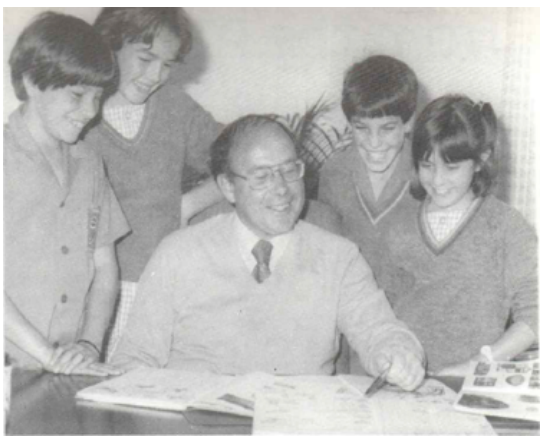


Acknowledgement: James Soullier, *Sunday Times,* Johannesburg.

In the months leading up to the start of the 1991 school year, a unique invitation was extended to all Transvaal Education Department (TED) schools. If a school community was willing, it could open its doors to every child without regard to racial classification. Of the over seven hundred TED schools, Emmarentia Primary and thirty-one other schools grabbed the invitation. Apartheid was being dismantled.

Families previously excluded from the school because of apartheid legislation, were now given the characteristically warm Emmarentia welcome. Traditional school values such as acceptance, kindness, respect and, of course, Goodwill, now had opportunities to blossom further.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu coined the phrase, "The Rainbow Nation" at the dawn of democratic South Africa. In that same spirit, one of the 1992 school activities was a celebration titled, *A world in one school.* It became an opportunity to showcase the wonderful cultural diversity amongst the children and staff. The celebration was a gentle reminder that if South Africa was a "Rainbow Nation", Emmarentia Primary could definitely be a most welcoming "Rainbow School".



In 1993 Dr Hayward was invited by the education department to apply for a promotion post. He was torn as he was truly happy at the school. Dr Hayward bid the fondest of farewells to Emmarentia Primary School.

From Grade Five to the Principal's Desk

Seldom does a pupil eventually become the principal of the same school. That rare event happened in 1993 when Mrs Ailsa Steyn become the principal. When she was ten years old, Mrs Steyn was enrolled as a pupil in Standard Three (Grade Five) at the school. She became a school prefect and after qualifying as a teacher, taught in different schools.



Mrs Ailsa Steyn

When the principalship came up at Emmarentia Primary, she applied. The school community was thrilled when she returned to her roots. She was back where her heart truly belonged. Her mother, Mrs Una Oosthuizen and her daughter, Mrs Deidré François, a teacher with a golden heart and a wacky wit, were also teachers here.

To Mrs Steyn, the children were far more than simply pupils of the school. She was a surrogate mother to them all. Their safety and welfare were forever on her mind. This little anecdote gives an example:

One summer afternoon there was a typical Highveld storm. On that particular afternoon, the thunder and lightning were fearsome. The clouds were black and dark. Mrs Steyn realised that one of the cricket teams was playing a match at a neighbouring school.

She contacted the Emmarentia team coach with this strict instruction, "Get my boys off the cricket field … immediately!"

The fortieth anniversary of the school in 1993 was celebrated in typical exuberant Emmarentia style. Besides the annual exhibition of work, there was a carnival. That event included archery, paddle races across the swimming pool, rock climbing and quad bike rides around the oval.



Miss Maureen Jacobs

Rarely does a teacher dedicate their whole professional career to one school. Such a special person was Miss Maureen Jacobs. She spent her teaching career at Emmarentia Primary School. Miss Jacobs arrived as a first-year teacher in 1969. After 41 years of dedicated loving service to the school, she retired as Head of the Foundation Phase (Grades 1-3) in 2010.

Generations of children enjoyed being taught by a teacher who imbued her lessons with kindness yet – when necessary – firmness too. As a netball and tennis coach, she inspired the children to give only of their very best. Miss Jacobs had a delightful sense of humour which she shared not only in her classroom but in the staffroom too.

In July 2017, Miss Jacobs passed away after an illness bravely and uncomplainingly endured. Her whole life was one of selfless giving to others.



Mrs Amanda van Ryneveld

Mrs van Ryneveld started teaching at EPS in 1957 and officially retired in 1995 - an astonishing 38 years of teaching and witnessing the growth and education of so many pupils. Her daughter, Debbie Gaynor, was a pupil at the school as well as a teacher in later years. Care and love towards children has been, in this instance, generational.

Over the years, Mrs van Ryneveld taught numerous classes across all grades and many different subjects, but her favourite subjects were Maths and Geography, and her pupils excelled under her tuition. Mrs van Ryneveld also headed up the Media Centre for several years, embracing new technology from its inception and inspiring reading in so many pupils over the years.

In addition to her wide portfolio of teaching roles, she was Head of Department (Educational Guidance) and served as Acting Principal in 1990 for two terms.

Many pupils remember Mrs van Ryneveld fondly, and she received several emails decades later from past pupils, expressing their appreciation of not only her excellent teaching, but also her insight and empathy.

She had a reputation for being strict but always firm and fair. Two Grade 7 interviewees once stated, "This is a lady who uses perfect English. So, when you are around her, watch your language."

This wonderful, dedicated teacher, who gave so much of herself to EPS over 38 years, passed away in 2024.

The educational landscape during 1996 was largely dominated by uncertainty and indecision. There were fierce debates raging around issues of school governance, funding, the possible scrapping of governing bodies and educator re-deployment. This included retrenchment packages.

Finally, the new Education Bill established a uniform policy for the organisation, governance and funding of schools nationwide. Mrs Steyn and her management team then had better clarity and could plan accordingly. They were able to successfully navigate EPS through uncharted waters.

The principal's message in the school magazine of that year stated:

I commend my teaching staff for maintaining an optimistic outlook during this period of transition. Their continued commitment to making a difference is borne out by the fact that nobody applied for the voluntary severance package!

In the 2001 issue of the magazine, Mrs Steyn's annual report was headed, "Great people, great service, great results!" The heading encapsulated the key areas that she focused on in her leadership role as principal. She stated:

These are the ingredients which have earned EPS the reputation that it enjoys – that of a fine public school. Our school will continue to excel if this partnership amongst parents, professional staff and learners prevails.

EPS celebrated its Fiftieth Anniversary or Golden Jubilee in 2003. Zulu was introduced as an additional language from Grade One. A multi-faith religious programme was successfully piloted in the junior classes. Finally, the traditional Soccer and Netball Day now included a Festival of Food.

There were Indian dishes, Muslim fare and unique African dishes alongside the traditional boerewors rolls, hamburgers and Coke.

Shireen Cassim, Chair of the Governing Body in that year, aptly summed up how Mrs Steyn guided the school through the post-apartheid transition period:

Mrs Steyn provides able and energetic leadership. Most importantly she is a visionary who has a strong sense of what a school in a changing South Africa should provide for its children – a quality learning environment in which the values of tolerance and respect are always inculcated. EPS is a model of what a school in a democratic society should be.

In March 2005 the school held an tearful final assembly at Mrs Steyn's retirement. Those who knew this much-loved and exceptionally caring leader, were deeply saddened when she passed away in 2021.

Mrs McQueen served as Acting Head Principal until the end of 2005.



Mrs Bev McQueen

The one-liner, "Dynamite comes in small packages" is often heard. It defined Mrs Beverley Mc Queen. She was petite in stature. Yet the quality of her mind and her teaching were huge. Generations of children sat in her English classes and were inspired. Many of the children's written poems and stories were entered in creative and original writing competitions. The entrants often walked away with the highest commendations and top awards. Mrs Mc Queen loved teaching English; the children loved being taught by her. She was able to reach the most reluctant learners through her choice of plays, poetry and prose. The children were imbued with a life-long love of the language. This much-loved, superb teacher passed away in 2022.

A Principal with a Punching Bag

Have you ever met a principal who had a punching bag close at hand? Mrs Cheryl Donald had one in her office. Mrs Donald became principal of EPS in 2006. Yet her association with the school went back much further. She started teaching here in 1981 and became Head of Department (Educational Guidance) in 1993. During her principalship, her punching bag was a source of amusement and interest to countless children, parents, staff and visitors. Was there a reason?



Mrs Cheryl Donald

There was much professional wisdom in this unusual item in her office. Angry and misbehaving children were told by Mrs Donald to vent their frustrations by giving knock-out punches to the punching bag. There were even teachers who, at the end of a tough teaching day, would ask if they could have a session with the punching bag. After a round or two of sharp hooks to the punching bag, the fighters felt much calmer. Mental calm was restored. At a practical level, Mrs Donald was a superb listener. She empathised with the emotions of others to an exceptional level.

A characteristic of her leadership was her perceptiveness. She realised the importance of pre-primary school education. Long before it became provincial and national education department policy, she established Grade R classes.

Children and staff in a quality school need to work in a pleasant environment. Mrs Donald gave attention to beautifying the school gardens and grounds. One area that received her attention was the Garden of Goodwill. (It's the area in the space between the hall and the staffroom entrance). Flower beds, garden tables and chairs were put in place. Today the Garden of Goodwill is a peaceful place in which to quietly gather one's thoughts or have a chat. The venue is also popular for social events.

Her eye for ways to beautifying the school extended to the front lawns. Together with Mrs Charmayne Vonk, landscaping was done. The colourful

and eye-catching entrance to the administration section is a definite excellent first impression for prospective parents.

The EPS tradition of frequent concerts and plays continued during Mrs Donald's term of office. Besides being enjoyed by the children, those theatrical events were seen as an integral part of the children's holistic education. Mrs Vonk was a leading light in staging many of these events. Sadly, this gentle and kind soul who was ever thoughtful towards others, passed away in 2022.

After 37 years of dedicated educational excellence, Mrs Donald retired in February 2018. Her leadership style at EPS reflected a truism about outstanding leadership. She showed that leadership doesn't have to be loud nor in one's face. Leadership can be gentle, empathic and responsive to the emotions of others. Mrs Donald was a powerful knock-out punch of professional excellence!

Watch this Space

Mrs Nadia Variawa has been principal of the school since 2018. She brings with her a deep knowledge, love and understanding of EPS. Mrs Variawa joined the staff as deputy principal in July 2012 and speedily stepped smoothly into the principalship role. Her dynamism and enthusiasm have brought new ideas to an already fine quality school.

A Collage of Photos

Since 1953 thousands of photos have been taken of children, events, parents and staff of the school. The editors realised that it would be impossible to give a fair reflection of all that has happened through the decades. However, we hope that some of the photos will bring flashbacks of happy memories of a school imbued with Goodwill.

















