

SIR JAMES DARLING, "The Boss", headmaster of Geelong Grammar for 32 years, chairman of the ABC for six years, is the man who educated Sir John Gorton, Sir Rupert Hamer, Sir Roderick Carnegie, Rupert Murdoch, Kerry and Clyde Packer, James and John Fairfax, Ranald Macdonald, Russell Drysdale, Stephen Murray-Smith, Geoffrey Dutton, Daniel Thomas, Keith Dunstan, Sir Robert Southey, Sir John Young, Professor Jamie Mackie, Geoffrey and David Fairbairn, Richard Woolcott, Sir David Hay, Ken Myer, John Landy, Alexander Downer, David Moore, John Manifold, Peter Carey, diplomats, professors, and captains of industry and law by the score; the nation's string-pullers. And Prince Charles at Timbertop. The Darling years are legendary for the extraordinary number of notable people they produced.

Darling's was an adventurous appointment, bitterly opposed by many of the Western District graziers on the school ▶

Rupert was the bookie and Kerry was dyslexic. Ranald read Mickey Spillane at assembly. JANET HAWLEY looks at how Sir James Darling tamed the offspring of the squattocracy.

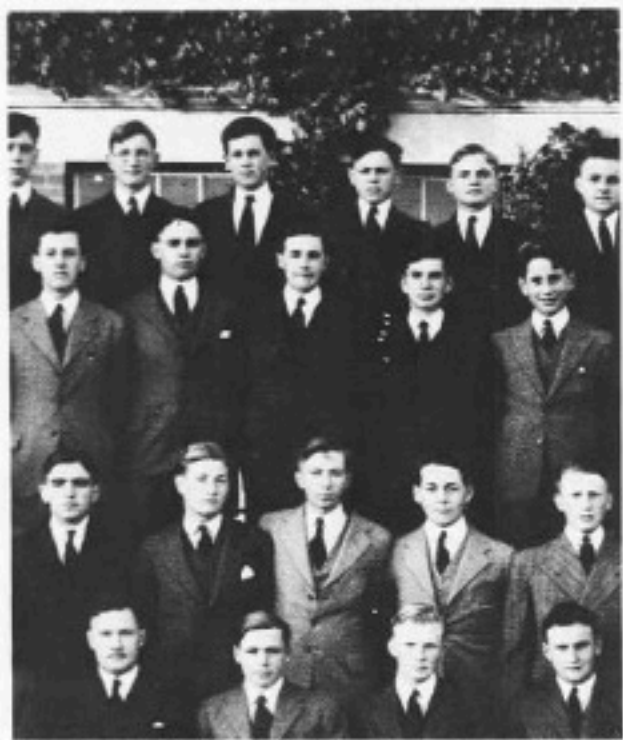
THE MAN WHO TAUGHT THE TYCOONS

Sir James Darling in his Melbourne study: Geelong Old Boys at the top of their fields still make occasional pilgrimages there.

ROSS RHO







Left, drawing by cricket-mad Russell Drysdale, then 13, in 1925 Junior House Gazette; above, 1936, Robert Southey (back, third from left), Geoffrey Dutton (third row, right).

council, but it paid off. Unmarried, not a clergyman, and politically "a bit pink", he revolutionised Geelong Grammar and gave the sons of the wealthy a social conscience.

NOW 89, Darling sits in his Melbourne study in a flowery armchair; booklined walls, mantelpiece crammed with photographs, half-moon glasses sliding down his nose, smoke from his pipe swirling around his face, ash showering on his trousers.

A pre-lunch pink gin is in his hand and he talks in a rich, throaty voice, a voice that belongs with a pipe which he smokes constantly, pausing occasionally to give a mischievous little boy's twinkling grin. "Yes - it's got me out of all sorts of scrapes," he chortles when I mention the grin.

Parades of Geelong Old Boys, at the top of their various fields, make the pilgrimage to this study to see J.R.D., to talk about life, problems, to seek his advice as mentor, philosopher, spiritual guide or friend.

He is one of the great elders of Australian society, a genuine wise old owl, and acknowledged as such by those he hobnobs with in the Melbourne Club and other powerful or modest halls of influence. "He is a most unusual pedagogue, the most complete, well-rounded man I know," said one.

Indeed, Darling's lengthy conversations during my visit revolved from intense thoughts on God, Socrates, Jung and the unconscious, to a joke with

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IF REVIVED

The Press and The Public

By James O. Intefus

"The newspapers! So, they are the most villainous—licentious—abominable—infernal..."

SHERIDAN'S *Sir Fretful Plagiarist*, who applied these somewhat libellous adjectives to the press of the time, was rather apt to judge it not on its merits, but on its treatment of his play. And many people judge the newspapers of the present day on their political views. If someone reads a newspaper comment on some political move, he expects that newspaper to be uninfluenced by either side, but he himself does not hesitate to judge it on his own view. In other words, we do not judge newspapers by the standard of impartiality that we expect of them, but by our own predilections and prejudices.

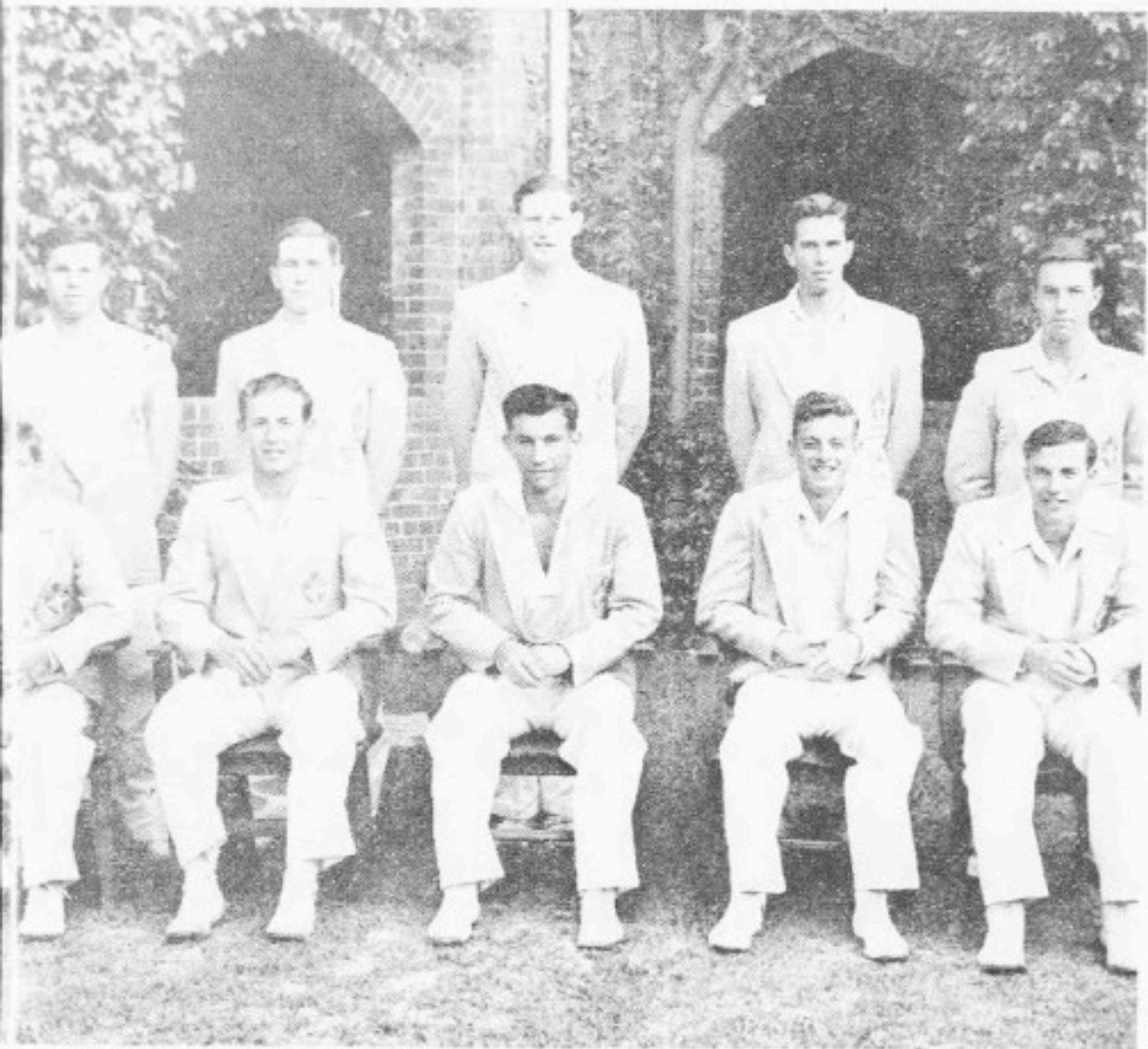
The first aim of any newspaper should be to give a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning. This one of the most responsible people is the reporter. He must be completely accurate, and if possible should always take first-hand information and not hearsay. He must be properly trained in news-gathering, and know which items are most likely to interest the public. It is important, too, that there should be a clear distinction between fact and opinion.

Then there is the handling of foreign news. Of this it may be said: "It is not enough to report the fact truthfully, but it is necessary to report the truth about the fact." The press has a similar obligation in reporting domestic news: a reported statement, which although true, is easily misunderstood, may do a great deal of harm.

There should be exchange of comment and criticism. Opinions on both sides of a question should be printed in full, especially in politics, and the source should be plainly stated. The public is influenced by the general reliability of the facts presented to them, and they must have some means of appraising such statements.

Most criticism tends to be destructive rather than constructive, and personal differences play too great a part. Yet discussion is essential rather than weakens a democracy, although it is to be useful, the...

Article by James Fairfax in 'If Revived', the magazine edited by Rupert Murdoch.



Kerry Packer (back row, centre) in the 1956 First XI: 'My way of surviving through school was sport.'

the copulating adjective rousingly pronounced, to politics and moguls, literature and higher intellectual pursuits, to the hedonistic delights of imbibing good wine and good whisky. For 89, he is amazingly sprightly, up ladders and on his knees to find references in various books as we talk, his brain sharp as a tack. He is a man at one moment well aware of his status and authority, the next overwhelmingly humble. Not all his Old Boys like him, but all respect him.

The Darling Geelong years 1930-62 were the core, when he took over a school with 300 pupils and a modest reputation and turned it into one of the top schools in Australia with 1,250 pupils when he left. As well, he took on a full public life — chairman of the ABC

for six years, and leading roles in the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, Australian College of Education, Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Melbourne University Council, Immigration Advisory Council, Road Safety Council, Universities Commission, Australian Frontier Commission and more. For many years he has written the Saturday *Reflection* column in *The Age* on alternate weeks, signed J.R.D.

THE SON of a schoolmaster, grandson of a clergyman, he was born in England in 1899. Three pivotal influences shaped him — a teacher, a headmaster and World War I. The teacher was the dynamic Victor Gollancz, later the famous publisher.

"He woke us up, introduced us to

liberal politics, socialist politics. We really believed if you educated people you would have a better world, and socialism was the way.

"It was a great blow to discover later in life, socialists are just as selfish as other people."

The headmaster was William Temple, later to become Archbishop of Canterbury and a lifelong friend. "I got everything from Temple, philosophy, religion."

At age 18, barely starting to shave, he left school and went to war, serving in the trenches on the Western Front, and later in the army of occupation in Germany. He returned conscience-stricken he had survived when so many of humankind had fallen.

"I can still remember the exact place ▷

on the road in England where I was walking along, thinking about something I'd done that I was rather ashamed of, and the simple idea came to me — look, all those people have been killed, you haven't, so those left alive must do double time."

He went to Oxford, joined the Labour

Party, started teaching, and was pleasantly surprised when the Geelong Grammar council, searching England for "a married clergyman over 40", after a furious internal dispute, appointed him.

Aged 30, unmarried, Darling was a man deeply blooded in life's lessons when he drove through herds of sheep

and cattle straying over the road to reach Geelong, and the waiting brawny sons of the Western District's squatocracy and Australia's wealthy families.

"I remember the boys as immensely lovable, with an endearing innocence about them ... and totally lacking in social conscience, as were their parents,"

TALES OUT OF BOARDING SCHOOL

A COCKSURE young Rupert Murdoch landed in trouble when he requested permission to leave school to go to the dentist, and was spotted by a housemaster at the races. Known as "Commo Murdoch" for his Leftist leanings, Rupert, against school rules, kept a motorbike at a local store, to zip down to Melbourne. Murdoch ran a book at Geelong, an enterprise he continued at Oxford. ("Scratch a media baron and you'll find a great gambler," says Ronald Macdonald, former managing director of David Syme and Co.)

Several Old Boys, including Sir John Gorton, pinned the Great Smoking Story on Murdoch. A boy was caught smoking, and sent to Dr Darling to be roared at and caned. Dr Darling had to leave his study during the admonishment, and returned to discover the boy puffing a cigarette he'd extracted from the headmaster's desk.

"No — that wasn't Rupert, he wouldn't have had the nerve — it was someone else!" growled Sir James Darling darkly.

Young Murdoch's publishing career began on the Geelong school printing press in 1949, when he edited the school literary magazine, *If Revised*, and wrote a very earnest article on the great German school of architecture and design, the Bauhaus.

James Fairfax was a regular contributor, writing a fervent piece on *The Press and The Public* — "Rupert commissioned it, and as I recall didn't interfere with what I wrote" — and an elegant, somewhat wide-eyed feature on Rasputin. James, a quieter boy with a more cultural bent, nicked off from school, too — he asked for permission to see an eye specialist in Melbourne, so he could see *Brigadoon* and have lunch at Florentino. "I wasn't caught!"

Kerry Packer, dyslexic in an era when dyslexia was not understood, unable to spell, his education interrupted by polio and nine months in an iron lung, felt "a bit of a laughing-stock because I was hopelessly behind everyone else at school", and was sent to Geelong. "I was academically stupid and my way of surviving through school was sport." When he returned to Sydney for the holidays without his new tennis



1930: Prefect and future PM John Gorton stands behind the man who aroused his political conscience.

Ronald Macdonald (third row, centre): caned for reading aloud from a Mickey Spillane book during assembly.



racquet, his father, Sir Frank Packer, made him catch the train back to Geelong to collect it, to teach him a lesson on the value of property.

"All very well, providing you could afford the fare!" hooted Sir James.

Ronald Macdonald, a house prefect, for a bet at assembly read out Mickey Spillane instead of the Bible. "I received several cuts of the cane from Dr Darling, and regard it as a significant part of my education," said Macdonald, still sounding profoundly guilty over his misdeed. "Years later I saw the person in a plane and abused him that I'd received the worst

cane of my life, and he hadn't even paid up on the bet!" The incident so deeply etched in Macdonald's psyche, passed Sir James by. "Oddly enough, I have no memory of it — poor dear Ronald."

The greater irony was to come years later, when Sir James was on the Broadcasting Control Board hearing applications for the first TV licences, and the media barons and their QCs appeared before their old headmaster. The room looked like a Geelong Old Boys' reunion, though the mood was in stark contrast. "I was against newspaper proprietors getting TV licences, because it gave them too much influence over public opinion. However, the original inquiry decided the applicant gaining the licence also had to provide the studios and transmitter, making it almost inevitable the licences would go to these proprietors — they had the money."

Ronald Macdonald, a great admirer

and friend of Sir James Darling, said: "He's often laughed softly over the years that he fears he'll have to answer on the Day of Judgment, for not having more of an influence over the schoolboy media barons."

"Oh, I can't talk about that on the record," muttered Sir James. "I did my best, and failed! The Geelong influence worked on Ronald; he was always thoroughly honourable, if not always thoroughly wise, and the Fairfaxes were always responsible, public spirited, sensible people ..."

So you got about half of them? "Yes, I suppose that's right," he smiled. □

Sir James said smiling. "I was appalled at their complete detachment from the social and political facts of life. The denizens of Toorak must have daily driven to the city past suburbs full of the poor and unemployed, remaining totally oblivious and unconscious.

"The school was academically almost disgraceful. There was a glorification of sport, and lessons didn't seem to matter. Boys were captain of boats or captain of cricket, and by age 18 might have managed to collect two intermediate subjects, before they went on the land or into business.

"I felt the concept of Geelong as an English-type boarding school set in Australia made it exotic and remote from the Australian way of life, and I set out to destroy this image. I was horrified by the cultural cringe of Toorak ladies who genuinely believed nothing good could come out of anything that wasn't English."

Immediately known as "The Boss", and by his detractors as "The Beast", Darling set to work like a tornado. He revolutionised the academic program, made the boys work, introduced art, music, craft, de-glorified the school's sporting toughs and bullies and banned initiation rites. The Depression had badly hit the surrounding Geelong township, and he steered the boys out into the community doing what he called

national service — delivering food parcels, helping rebuild a church and an old people's home, doing civic good deeds, opening their eyes to how the other half lived.

He threw the school open for cultural and education holiday camps, and he took public positions outside the school, "to break down the isolated, snobbish image of Geelong Grammar". He encouraged individuality, and above all, taught boys to think, particularly about the wider community.

The one memory every Darling-era Old Boy mentions first is the philosophy of public service pounded in. The Darling message to the privileged Geelong pupils was relentless — from those to whom much has been given, much will be expected. John Gorton was in his final year, a house captain and prefect, when Darling arrived.

"He was like a breath of fresh air. I liked him," Sir John recalled. "The previous head was 'The Crow', a horrible old autocratic clergyman, who'd tried to sack me when he found an automatic rifle in my locker I'd brought from home!"

Gorton regularly went with groups of boys delivering food parcels. The distress they witnessed was a great shock, and he admits it awoke his political conscience.

Geoffrey Dutton, noted author,

confesses: "He opened vistas most of us had never dreamt of; we all developed a social conscience through Darling, he was very skilful at getting your attention.

"He was an awesome figure striding around the school in his gown and mortarboard, this gaunt, hawk-like appearance. You'd think, my God, here comes The Boss. He was both liked and feared, in a healthy way.

"I remember him mocking the sporting fraternity for their boneheaded attitude to the important things of life, complaining about 'idleness' and boys 'basking their beastly bodies in the sun'. He had a good sense of humour. He asked one boy what he was going to do when he left school, and the boy replied his father was going to put him on the land. 'What as — manure?' Darling retorted.

"He gave us one wonderful tirade in chapel when I was about 13, when a boy was expelled for committing suspicious acts in the cypress plantation.

"Darling lectured us at great length about the sin of lassiviciousness. I had no idea what this beastly lassiviciousness lurking in the shrubbery was, for years afterwards.

"I loved the music and the intellectual stimulation he brought to Geelong, and remember him roaring at the philistines who weren't interested."

Darling took the senior form for▷



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English, and directed ambitious school plays. James Fairfax has "vivid memories of his inspiring English lessons, where he'd act all the parts in every play — *School for Scandal* was his triumph."

Keith Dunstan, dean of Melbourne columnists, hated Geelong, hated the whole notion of boarding school, disliked Dr Darling and couldn't wait to leave school.

"It was such a monastic environment, compulsory cold showers, no women. We had dancing lessons and because I was short I had to be the girl — as a result I can still dance better backwards than forwards. One of my great Geelong Grammar memories was the scandal over the son of a prominent retailing family, who was caught with one of the maids! He didn't wait to be expelled; he caught the train back to Melbourne. After that, maids were banned and boys had to wait on tables.

"Darling's highly moral sermons irritated me — I decided he had a guilt complex and was trying to pass it on to us. National service exasperated me — when Darwin was bombed he had us digging bloody air raid shelters and learning how to identify enemy aircraft, when I felt I should have been studying for my matriculation.

"It was only years later, when I read Darling's marvellous autobiography, *Richly Rewarding*, that I understood how complex a man he is, and started to like him. I realised he was much wiser than I'd thought. He really does have a tortured conscience and worries about questions of morality.

"I realised he did allow a variety of differing opinions in the school, even if he didn't like them. Manning Clark was one — a highly controversial history teacher at Geelong for a few years, and very anti-church at the time. We'd come back from chapel, and Clark would say, 'You've all been at the Jesus racket again, wasting time when you could be learning something important.'"

Sir James Darling feigned surprise at Dunstan's comments, and twinkled: "Lazy fellow, complaining about digging ditches! I'm very fond of Keith Dunstan. He's the type of Old Boy I'm proud to have produced. . . he thinks for himself, stands up for what is in his own mind, and is not afraid to say football is nonsense!"

If there were complaints in the early days Dr Darling was "a bit pink", these evaporated over the years. Sir Robert Southey, prominent businessman and former federal president of the Liberal Party, remembers parents who once called Darling "a ratbag", regarding him as a stirrer and potentially dangerous influence, beginning to admire the man.

There was, however, a vociferous campaign from many parents against Manning Clark, seen as a dangerous

commo who should be dismissed for the ideas he was giving the boys about peace and liberalism when a war was on. Dr Darling rode them out, later admitting "even though he was a brilliant teacher, there were times I wished Manning well away".

But hadn't he always admired individuals who had the courage to march out of step?

"I may admire them," he laughed, "but they are still a damned nuisance."

There were several brilliant left-wingers on the staff over the years, and

several eccentrics; Darling deliberately sought a mix. He rescued Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack from an internment camp to be Geelong's art teacher. Hirschfeld Mack had worked with Gropius at the Bauhaus, and inspired many, including Daniel Thomas, now director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, and, apparently, Rupert Murdoch.

Could Darling always pick the boys who would go on to be outstanding in some field in later life?

"In the majority of cases, yes. We >

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missed some. I don't honestly think I, or any of us, realised what was in Rupert Murdoch. He talked a lot about newspapers and we knew his father had one, but I don't think we foresaw what was in Rupert." (Murdoch's friendship with Richard Searby, his right-hand man in his media empire, and current chairman of the council of Geelong, was forged at Geelong.)

"You missed other outstanding boys because they spent their schooldays trying not to be noticed, they were the observers . . . Peter Carey was one."

Carey, son of a used-car salesman made good, remembers Geelong as a place "where the children of Australia's Best Families all spoke with English accents". He claims he barely read a book at school, but when he left, began to write brilliant novels, and has won the 1988 Booker Prize. His final-year English master, however, remembers him as "a charming boy who I never gave less than A minus for an essay".

Sir James continued: "The boys all had record cards which we consulted to write their final report when they left — but as I put the card away, I used to write on the back in red ink what I really thought of the boy! I suppose those cards are all at Geelong today and would make interesting reading!"

Are they available under the Freedom of Information Act? "I doubt it," he

roared in good humour, "I think they'd be considered privileged information."

Even the official reports were blunt enough, as was brought home to Sir James by an Old Boy who'd become Prime Minister.

"My wife, Margaret, and I," Sir James recalled, "were staying with our good friends the Caseys when he was Governor General, and Casey said, 'James, will you be in at 5 pm because Gorton is coming for drinks.' I replied, 'Don't be silly, if the Governor General and the Prime Minister say will you be in at 5 pm, of course I will.' In came the Gortons, and his wife Betty said, 'James, I have something in my handbag to show you — John's school report.' I gasped, 'My God, what did I say, give it to me quickly.' It read — 'Schoolwork most unsatisfactory, but he has a brain if he would use it. Character inclined to be pig-headed when he thinks he is being strong-minded. He is bound to make a mark of some sort in the world, but what sort of mark will depend greatly on the influences under which he comes in the next few years.'

"I'd put in that last part to persuade his wicked old father to send him to Oxford, which he did. So I said to the Gortons, 'Well, I'll stand by that!'"

We go in to lunch. Sir James's devoted wife, Margaret, who'd arrived at Geelong as a 20-year-old newlywed,

raised their four children there, loved her involvement with the school and found leaving it a great wrench.

As Sir James was opening a bottle of wine, "a present from an Old Boy, they're very kind to me", I asked what stamp he tried to put on Geelong boys.

He began to laugh: "Well, my dear, the only decent aim of a schoolmaster is never to kill boys; you must not kill them. Excellent wine, isn't it? You must never forget that every boy in a school can do something better than you can, and it is the school's job to discover what this is and encourage them to do it.

"You ought never want to put a stamp on a boy, but at the same time you should want to put a stamp on a school. The school has to stand for something. If the school is inward-looking, selfish, over-pleased with itself, over-competitive, self-indulgent or greedy — then what's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh.

"If the school tries to be the servant of the public and the boys, some of that ought to stick. To be honest, I think it has. Not all our Old Boys are admirable, but I've been privileged to see what a lot of them have done, and the school has every reason to be proud."

How important is the school — does he believe the adage "give me the boy and I'll give you the man"?

He sweeps the latter aside as a



nonsense. "It always used to be said, 60 per cent genes, 30 per cent home training and 10 per cent school. I'm inclined to think it is 45-45-10."

Does a child have a better chance with a private school education?

"Clever children will survive anywhere, and will do well in either private or State schools. But if you ask, why are the majority of independent schools better than the majority of State schools, the answer is, a) State schools have to provide on a local basis and cannot be in any way selective of their pupils. But more importantly, b) they lack the continuity which is necessary to build strength. Their headmasters don't stay long enough, they have very little say in the appointment of their staff, and cannot keep staff if they want to. Therefore the school lacks continuity and the building up of an ethos, a tradition. I believe the school is the unit of education, not the class. The school needs to have a soul of its own and that can only be preserved by Old Boy associations, father-to-son associations, and a few Mr Chips and assistant masters who are prepared to make the school their life. There is no earthly reason why the State school system cannot do all that, if it wanted to. Sadly, only the selective high schools had enough clout to do it — Melbourne High, North Sydney High, are just as

good or better than any private school." The only things they lacked were religion, and a Timbertop, Sir James's mountaintop innovation where students spend much of one year developing outdoor skills.

Today boarding schools are less popular "as Australians with money are no longer tied to English standards, the way those with money once were. Boarding schools, however, perform a new function — a shattering number of students at Geelong now come from broken homes."

Many students come from overseas, particularly Thailand. Last year Sir James and Lady Darling attended a Geelong Old Boys' reunion in Bangkok. "There are 52 Old Boys in Thailand and six are heads of government departments. The most famous is Mechai Viravaidya, who is known as Dr Condom, for popularising that item's use." Sir James was delighted at a remark from one VIP at the reunion: "There are 52 Old Boys, and there are none of them crook!"

Do headmasters make good fathers? He smiled thoughtfully:

"Probably not, they tend to leave child raising to their wives, and I'm sure I did. Our three daughters boarded at another school, and my son John went to Geelong." The four, however, remain devoted to their father, the three

daughters all living within walking distance. Daughter Elizabeth is a teacher and her husband Ivan Sutherland is headmaster of Glamorgan, the Geelong prep school in Toorak. Son John Darling following the individualist philosophy, went to live in Bali, to write and make films. His acclaimed *Bali Triptych* has recently been shown on ABC-TV.

Geelong Grammar has changed considerably in the 27 years since Sir James left. It is now co-educational, and girls in pale blue uniforms run with the boys on the flat lush green lawns by Corio Bay, and inhabit the red brick buildings.

Many are sons and daughters or grandsons and grand-daughters of the Darling era, and their families pass on the Darling wisdoms: "How to deal with bullies — Show Fight!", "When something seems a disaster or a great disappointment, remember that later in life, it will very likely prove to be one of the most important things that ever happened to you."

Was it the man or mere coincidence that the Darling years produced such an outstanding crop? "I think you have to say it was the man," answered Sir Robert Southey. "It's impossible to explain it otherwise."

Janet Hanley is a senior feature writer with The Sydney Morning Herald. Her last story for Good Weekend was on Donald Friend.

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