

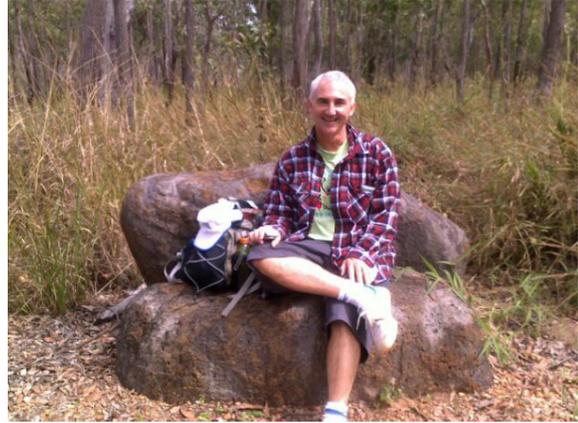


# Members in Profile

August 2012

## Martin Plüss

My story is one of places and communities, merging my interest in Geography in all I do. My eyes were opened attending a primary school which is now the site of Westfield's, Liverpool – only a Geographer would pick up on that. During secondary schooling in Strathfield I observed the suburb was like an oasis in Sydney's west and this became my Honours thesis topic a decade later.



Upon entering university I intended to be a teacher, studying Economics, Psychology, History and Geography. Initially, my attention was drawn to History and Geography though I could not make up my mind and started Honours for both. The History Faculty was not interested in my thoughts on geographical history. In the Geography department Dr Dennis Jeans' spoke to me about historical geography and my Education Faculty lecturer Dr Kevin Laws' thesis research was on historical geography. The deal was sealed because geography was fun - Geographers were very social in the era of Professor Maurice Daly.

Geography followed me into my teacher training and postgraduate study in education. I did third year Geography twice - not because I failed. I had to choose between human and physical geography and opted for human geography first and decided to squeeze physical geography during the following Diploma of Education year. The topic for my Masters of Education was on Non-formal Education in South East Asia and the Pacific. I did not want to let go of my other possible Honours thesis topic on third world countries, inspired by Professor John Connell.

On completion of my Honours thesis on the historical Geography of Strathfield I attended, probably the first, Honours Conference, which the Geographical Society now hosts. At the end of the day Dr Ian Burnley and Dr James Forest asked if I would contribute a chapter for their book *Living in Cities*. Although I am not an academic this opportunity started me on a yearly cycle of researching, planning and writing at least one article a year since the 1980s on Geography teaching. This is my substitute for never submitting the couple of PhD proposals I had prepared.

Since 1984 I have been privileged to be a geography teacher in four independent schools: Oxley College (Bowral), Northholm Grammar (Arcadia), Tara School and now Loreto Normanhurst. Once I was a geography teacher I moved to Bowral. Typically early, on the day of my interview, I decided to perch myself on the highest point of Bowral to the west observing the land uses. Thinking about the geography calmed my nerves. After a successful interview I undertook follow up research by re-visiting Professor Langford-Smith's work on landforms and read Bradstow to get a feel for the social geography of the community.

Teaching the basics to Year 7 is practical and fun. The freedom of electives in Year 9, inspire me to try different things and really engages the students. Year 12 Geography, though extremely rewarding, is a balancing act of encouraging students to think more deeply about geography while learning tips and tricks to perform well in an external examination.

Once back in Sydney in 1990 I nominated to be on the Council of the Geography Teachers of NSW and the Geographical Society of NSW. I have continued this association to date with a few "sabbaticals" with the birth of our two children Nick and Ali and to allow me some time to settle into new schools. My involvement has been a wonderful experience for different reasons. The GTANSW has enabled me to meet wonderful teachers who share ideas and practices in Geography consultations, publications, workshops and lectures. I am a bit of an "academic groupie" when it comes to my involvement with Geog Soc. I love going to the meetings and hearing about what the latest developments in academic geography.

Over the years I have re invented myself as a Geography teacher who supports teachers and students integrating learning technologies to enhance learning. Geography lends itself to embracing learning technologies like social media more formally and I am encouraged to see some schools and university geographers experimenting in this newly evolving area of influence.



My journey as a Geographer continues with my life beyond the school gate. As a runner I explore the natural environment of the trails and the built environment surrounding the roads I pound; observing patterns and wondering why. My Kindle and iPad are loaded with the original manuscripts of the early Australian explorers and geographers. When I need an intellectual fix I reach for a copy of an Australian Geographer – a near perfect collection. Does anyone have a copy of the first edition for me?

Martin Plüss

Geography Teacher and Dean of Learning Technologies at Loreto Normanhurst



Follow @plu on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/plu>