



Members in Profile

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Stephen Codrington



I have been interested in Geography for as long as I can remember. As a boy I collected stamps, which was far more mainstream in the 1950s than it is today. Those little coloured pieces of paper fascinated me, opening my eyes to the diversity of the world with its new languages, different currencies, colonial histories, ethnic differences and exotic landscapes. I had the urge to do more than just describe the world – I had to be able to explain it.

I almost missed the opportunity to study Geography at high school. All the top stream students were supposed to study Latin, while the lower stream students had to study Geography. I argued my case for being allowed to study Geography instead of Latin. I was apparently both persistent and persuasive, and I never regretted that decision.

I benefitted from teaching by some outstanding teachers at Drummoyne Boys' High School, and topped the New South Wales Higher School certificate in Level 1 Geography in 1971.

Believing that education is the most important investment that our society makes in its future, my aspiration was to become a teacher. I continued my studies at Macquarie University, combining my Diploma of Education with a major in Geography. I received a First Class Honours degree in 1975, the same year my first academic article was published – in *Geography Bulletin* on 'Natural Resources Management and Development in China'.

Gaining a First Class Honours degree entitled me to progress directly to doctoral studies. Meanwhile, I had married and started teaching – Geography of course. Therefore, I began my doctoral research on a part-time basis in the field of economic geography, working on it at night, on weekends and during school holidays. My Ph.D., completed in 1983, focussed on developing a new model of financial viability, which I applied to evaluate the impact of government intervention in the dairy industry of the Bega Valley.

In 1979 I was appointed Head of Geography at Saint Ignatius College, Riverview, I became a member of the NSW Board of Studies Geography Syllabus Committee, and I was elected to serve on the Council of the Geography Teachers' Association (GTA). The following year, I began editing Geography Bulletin, the quarterly journal of the GTA, a task I performed until late 1986 when I commenced a year's exchange teaching at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire (UK).

I loved serving on the GTA Council because it enabled me to bridge my twin passions of Geography and Education. I was Vice-President for eight years (1981-1985, 1987-1988 and 1991-1994), and President twice (1985-1986 and 1988-1991). In 1982 I was elected as a member of the Council of the GTA's then-sister organisation, the Geographical Society of New South Wales. Although simultaneously President of the GTA, I served as President of the Geographical Society from 1988 to 1990, and then Vice-President from 1990 to 1995, and again from 1995 to 1997. While President, I established joint administrative offices for GTA and the Geographical Society, an initiative that saved money and improved the support for members.

I also served the Geographical Society in other capacities at various times – Chair of the Education Committee, member of the Macdonald Holmes Selection Committee, member of the Travellers' Club organising committee, and a leader of several study tours to China, Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya, Russia, Estonia, Uzbekistan and Burma. It was an honour to be elected as a Fellow of both the GTA (in 1991) and the Geographical Society (in 1998).

I was appointed to my first school headship in 1989. This began an exciting quarter of a century during which I was the Head of five schools in four countries – Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the United States. Contrary to the practice of most Heads of Schools, I continued to teach throughout my time as a school principal, to the delight of my students and their parents, if not always my school boards. I didn't enter the education profession because of a love of administration, and teaching Geography to young people was my sanity saver.

In 1990, I first became involved with the International Baccalaureate (IB), and by 1992 I was setting Geography examinations for IB students around the world. I continued setting and marking IB examinations until 2005, and from 1996 to 2001 I served as Deputy Chief Examiner for IB Geography. My work with IB Geography also gave me the opportunity to lead teachers' workshops in such diverse locations as Melbourne, Guangzhou, Singapore, Brisbane, Auckland, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Adelaide and Mumbai, and to meet and get to know Geography teachers from around the world.

As a Head of School there was always a danger that I might become estranged from Geography. To overcome that danger, I spent much of my spare time writing books, mainly textbooks, for Geography. I have now written or edited 30 books. Perhaps the most successful of these books is Planet Geography. Now in its 7th edition, this 752-page book contains over 1400 of my own colour photographs, and is the main book used by IB Geography students and teachers around the world; it is currently used in 92 countries.

One of the great aspects of working in international schools has been the opportunity for travel. I have now been to 128 countries, several of which have rarely been seen by any other Australians. In 2005, I led the first group of foreign students ever to visit North Korea. I have now made seven visits to North Korea, and I hope there will be more to come. While working for seven years as Head of the United World College in Hong Kong, I led many groups of students on voluntary community service projects in fascinating places, such as building toilets for leprosy sufferers in south-west China, renovating AIDS orphanages in Cambodia, helping to build medical clinics in Guizhou (China), and teaching English to Tibetan orphans. Leading

geographical expeditions, such as trekking through Tiger Leaping Gorge in China, were magnificent bonuses.

In 2013, I retired from my fifth headship (in Houston, Texas) and returned to Sydney. I have been fortunate in being able to take up sharing my passion for Geography once again through teaching at Australian Catholic University (ACU) at Strathfield, and by returning to the Council of the Geographical Society, where I was recently elected treasurer. I am also continuing to present lectures for the Geographical Society's Traveller's Club; this year's talk on Russia's Far East will be the 15th such talk I have presented.

I feel enormously privileged that I have been able to translate my boyhood hobby of looking longingly at the pictures on postage stamps into a lifetime career in Geography, a career that has taken me to so many exotic places in the course of sharing my passion for Geography with thousands of bright-eyed, curious, engaged, articulate students.

Stephen maintains a personal website with travel diaries and photographs at www.stephencodrington.com.