

## A Year in the Life

Time is perceived very differently from different vantage points. A year in the life of a primary-school student, for instance, is a very long time—somewhere between  $1/5$  and  $1/12$  of a primary-school child's life. When you throw in the massive amount a child learns in any one year, compared with the diminishing returns that conspire against us later in life, a child's year is more like a decade in adult years. But for a primary-school teacher, a school year is just another ten or so months spent trying to remember names, delivering lessons, writing report cards, and endeavoring to shepherd students through the educational system. And, of course, the classroom is just one part of a teacher's life. Teachers are juggling other serious and time-consuming matters such as relationships, mortgages, further study, family and so forth. The best teachers, however, don't let on about these asymmetries between the child's world and their own; they conceal the differences in temporal perception and they give no clue that each student is just a small part of their life. Such sleight of hand can't be easy, yet all my primary school teachers pulled it off to perfection. One, however, deserves special mention: Mr. Williams.

In 1969 I turned 11 and was in 6th class at the Armidale Demonstration School in Northern NSW, with Mr Williams as my teacher. It was the last time I had one teacher, one group of classmates, and one classroom for the whole year. Apart from the occasional student teachers from the college up the hill, sent to observe and have a crack at teaching, Mr. Williams was all ours and we were all his. It was a fabulous time of rainy days working on science projects, sunny afternoons playing sport, and idiosyncratic excursions to the New England National Park, Arding orchard, the town brickworks, and the local army installation. Above all, it was a time to appreciate the thrill of learning. It was here that I began my love affair with mathematics and logic, as revealed by an insightful comment from Mr. Williams on my 1969 report card: '...a particular aptitude in subjects requiring analysis and formal reasoning—Maths and formal language.' These prophetic words reach out across the years to the logician and philosopher of mathematics I've become.

There were big moments, such as watching the black and white television in the school auditorium with Mr. Williams and the rest of the school as Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. But mostly it was the delightful minutiae of day-to-day life, all to a memorable soundtrack of The Archies, The Beatles, Johnny Cash, and Zager and Evans. In 1969, in Mr. Williams' class, we were on an adventure. It was an adventure that lasted a very long time—a whole primary-school year—and the impact of that adventure still reverberates through at least one person's life.

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