

Victim of Smokers [NH, 8 August 1988]

Not once since the earliest days of the Colony has any member of my family deviated from its anti-smoking tradition. Many a winter thrashing I got as a child for suspected smoking, when all that was issuing from my mouth and nostrils was condensed breath.

I well remember the laudatory comment of the proprietor of the crematorium at my great-grandfather's funeral: 'There's no doubt about it, those Goffets don't even smoke when they are being cremated'.

When we grew up, we were not allowed to swim at Bondi in case we came under the influence of that heartily-in-favour-of-smoking Dr Whitby.

So I was pleased to read of that \$60,000 out-of-court damages award to the Melbourne bus driver who had been affected by the smoking of his passengers. But now I am concerned about my own case.

For 49 years I was a high-school teacher and, because of my gentle nature, I had no control over the boys' smoking habits in class. Through the haze I could distinguish Capstans, Winfields, Alpines and Marlboros, and in the French classes, Gitanes and Caporales.

Even the inspectors dreaded the thought of entering my smoke-filled room, so that all they saw of my teaching methods was what they could observe by peering through the windows from the corridor outside.

One newly appointed headmaster hastily phoned the fire brigade on his first day at the school.

And now at last the warning signs have begun to appear. Last Tuesday morning I gave an incipient cough. Shortly afterwards, one of my undertaker friends not only gave me an unusually welcoming smile but stopped long enough to run his professional eye up and down my frame.

How do I go about seeking damages for 49 years of suffering from passive smoking? Do I sue the Education Department or the parents of the boys who smoked during my lessons?

The above provoked the following replies;

Passive Smoker Found Out

I was fascinated to read Mr Charlie Goffet's views (Readers' Opinions, 8/8/88) concerning the victims of passive smoking.

Being a student at Newcastle Boys' High School in the 1950's, I believe I qualified for entrance because of a reasonable level of intelligence and observation (which is often questioned by members of my family).

From these levels of observation I believe that Mr Goffet has been 'found out'.

I have many fond memories of my school days at NBHS and on one occasion I

remember Mr Goffet entering the classroom for one of our French periods and putting one of his half-smoked 'roll-your-own' cigarettes on the top edge of the cupboard in the room.

Obviously he believed the cigarette was extinguished but it wasn't, and to everybody's dismay (or was it delight?) the 'bumper' fell into the waste paper bin.

After a few minutes the contents of the bin caught fire. Mr Goffet acted quickly and to the entertainment of the class threw the contents, alight, out the window.

Another one of Mr Goffet's practices was to put a half-smoked cigarette (extinguished) behind his ear for future pleasure.

I still hold memories of Mr Goffet with great affection. I hope he writes more letters to the Newcastle Herald.

Memories of Classroom Antics

Mr David Taylor's views (Readers' Opinions, 3/9/88), regarding Mr Charlie Goffet and his smoking habit reminded me of my days at Newcastle Boys' High School.

As a student there in the mid-60's I was witness to Charlie's penchant for hiding 'bumpers' on the top of the corner cupboard that was part of every room.

Some of the more astute students would snatch the 'bumper' and head for the park if Charlie forgot to retrieve it.

Another teacher at the school, Mr 'Keg' McRae, had an unusual idiosyncrasy that was directly related to Charlie's. Whenever 'Keg' entered a room, the first thing he did was to run his fingers along the top of the cupboard, occasionally encountering a forgotten 'bumper'. This would promptly disappear into his pocket and where it went from there was anybody's guess.

My only regret was that I didn't continue with my French and so missed out on many more encounters with a fine teacher.