

Book Launch

When, half way through 2016, Father Alfredo first approached me and suggested that we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the opening of the church by updating the parish history, my reaction was “why”? The 35th anniversary wasn’t significant in modern terms, so I was curious. He explained that if it wasn’t updated regularly, we would lose contact with people and the stories that they could tell. Well, I couldn’t argue with that, and so I agreed to do the writing of it. After all, I had done it in 2006, so surely I just had to add on a bit. Didn’t I?

And so it was that, in September 2016, Father called a meeting to plan how we might proceed. The group had lots of ideas of how we could develop father’s carefully conceived project. One thought that was nurtured right from the first was that a parish consisted of so much more than the mere buildings and a time line. The people of Glenfield were an increasingly diverse community, and we felt that the story should reflect that. This gave me the first of many issues to deal with. How much did we include in the history itself, and what did we do with the many stories that didn’t fit into the “history” timeline? It was agreed from the onset that we wanted people’s personal stories, because these WERE the history of the parish.

One member of the group, Helen Ellis, used her considerable skills to set up a website, and an email address. She became the driving force of this project, and among other tasks, devised an “I Remember When” sheet, to get as many people in the parish involved as possible. With weekly reminders from the pulpit and newsletter, and a little bit of harassment towards some groups along the way, we started to get the material in. At the same time, a couple of members of that first group went

out and interviewed several older parishioners, some of whom had moved away from Glenfield.

My dining room table soon became covered with pieces of paper and post-it notes of every shape, size and colour, as I sifted through contributions from so many different sources. I picked out the pieces I could write into the history, collated articles, edited stories and reinstated bits I'd edited out. Little did I know that my one notch up from absolutely basic computer skills was going to take quite a hammering! As I read the contributions, it became apparent that there was so much more to our history than previously printed.

As time went on, it became clear that this project might have been one man's dream, but it definitely had two mothers. With Helen amassing photos and articles from all and sundry and me producing draft copy after draft copy, we gradually got it looking more like a booklet. Where we didn't have a photo of a particular item, Helen went out and took one. The Takapuna library was also visited, and from there I found several good photos of Glenfield taken about the era of the church being built. We had widened the scope of the project to include stories of all the parish ministries and ethnic groups, so now Helen and I had to think outside the original idea of a simple history booklet. At this point, the decision was made to keep the more historical facts to the first half and to place our stories and articles in the second half of the book. A task easier said than done! Choosing and placing the photos was in itself, a daunting task.

Before long, it became clear that we needed a midwife or two. Enter Alexia, a professional journalist, who proof read it, not once, but about three or four times, correcting mistakes, suggesting changes and sorting out my ideas on where articles should be. Many were the phone calls asking questions along

the lines of, “to close a sentence with a bracket, quote marks and a full stop, which comes first?” And from her, “mum, did you really mean to say that?”

By the start of 2018, we really started to feel the baby growing. Was it developing as it should be? Was it going to live up to Father’s expectations? Was it going to be ready by its due date? And where could we find those elusive photos of our first two parish priests!

Now we realised that we needed help to polish it up, so out went a call for a midwife who was also a graphic designer. Along came Isabella, a young Brazilian girl who had only been in New Zealand for two weeks. It was Isabella who designed the cover, and made many suggestions about fonts and headings, along with frames for photos while generally tidying the whole project up. Her patience with Helen and I was amazing, as we constantly changed articles, replaced photos and altered the text. OBRIGADO Isabella!

As the deadline loomed, Helen and I realised that there was another essential person needed –someone who could deliver this creation. Specialists were too expensive, but once again, our need was heard. Enter Joe! An engineer who serviced printers, Joe had all the right connections, and soon recommended a friend of his, who could deliver the final product, and at a price that we could afford. It was Joe who sourced the paper for Helen and me to look at, including a suitable weight paper for the cover, and advised on the number of pages the printer could handle to staple. He thought nothing of collecting a USB stick from Hobsonville (Helen’s place) to print a sample. Then it was back to the drawing board for Helen and me, then off to Isabella once again. We did that final version three times! On the night that it was finally completed, I woke up at 2 am, knowing that something was wrong! Then it came to me!

The last sentence I had put in to fill a gap, just the day before, had a word misused and another one misspelt! Back came the USB stick, corrections were made over breakfast by Isabella and I breathed again!

Finally, on Anzac day, 2018, I came away with the final version on a USB stick, to hand over to Joe. Mission complete!

After that, it was settle down and wait time. Then, on the 1st. May about 1 pm. the action started. Joe came and collected me and drove me to Sharp Printers in Albany, where introductions were made, and preparations completed. Then suddenly, with a great deal of noise, the baby emerged from the printer, quickly followed by 174 identical siblings. Its colour looked good, it made a little noise when it hit the tray of the machine and it breathed straight away. Its birth weight was 208 grams. Just a lightweight! Unfortunately, neither of the midwives could be present, but Joe and his printer friend, Sarvi, managed the process very well. Finally, on Saturday morning, Father Alfredo unpacked the first carton and got to see his dream come true. Looking back, it was an amazing experience. I got to know Helen, and liaising with Father, Isabella, Joe and Mary from the parish office, was an added pleasure. Interviewing different members of this parish community was a privilege in itself. But most of all, I learnt so much about this amazing parish of St. Thomas More. I hope you, the readers, will too. And how my computer skills have improved!

And the booklet? Well, I'd like to quote the New Zealand artist Ralph Hotere when he said "There are very few things I can say about this work, that are better than saying nothing at all".

Thank you

Clare Russell