Stories: Geoff Regan

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Acting Superintendent,
Aboriginal Affairs Division, WAPOL

Acting Superintendent of the Aboriginal Affairs Division of the Western Australian Police Force, Geoff Regan has been policing since 1991.

WARNING: The following article contains words or terms that readers may find offensive.

Western Teacher: Which public schools did you attend?

Geoff Regan: My parents were involved in mining, so I attended a couple of public schools. I mainly remember attending Neerigen Brook Primary School in Armadale, enrolling in Year 5 after returning from travelling around Australia in 1980. I went to Cecil Andrews College in Seville Grove in 1983. In 1985, I attended Mount Magnet District High School, completing Year 10. The next year my family moved to Alice Springs where I finished Year 11 and 12 at Sadadeen High School, later known as Centralian Senior College.

WT: How was your public school experience?

GR: My general school experience was positive, although I did struggle with some academics, but still managed to scrape through. I was generally there to play footy and catch up with friends.

WT: Did you encounter racial issues in your years of schooling?

GR: I experienced racial issues in both my primary and secondary school experience. Being called a nigger and racial slurs, of that nature however, I did not handle those situations in the best way I could have and I did spend some time being suspended.

WT: How did your public school education help to shape the person you are today and help you to achieve your goals or success?

GR: I don't believe it was the education alone that helped to shape the individual I am today, but more about the teachers who came across my path and their commitment to me and every student. Teachers, like police officers, are born to that profession – it is a true calling.

I chose policing as I wanted to be a part of something where I could make a change and a difference in a positive way. My parents were reluctant in me choosing policing given the history between Aboriginal people and the Police, but they were still supportive of my choice.

WT: Did you have a teacher or staff member in your schooling that made on impact on you?

GR: There were two teachers who had a real impact on me as a young person and they were both at Neerigen Brook PS.

Dawn Paxton, who was the deputy principal, got to know me very well as I tended to be sent to the deputy's office more than one should. Dawn had a very caring nature. She took the time to understand you as an individual, what made you tick, and why you may have reacted in a certain way. There was never any judgement.

The other was Geoff "Ted" Penny, I was in his Year 6 class. Ted was an Aboriginal man, so the issues I faced as a young fella, he was able to work through these with me. He did not tolerate the use of fighting back but instilled a sense of pride to

be Aboriginal and to not let the words of others impact on you.

I learnt not to expect anything to be given to you, but through hard work, commitment and ability, a person could achieve anything they wanted to. Ted's outlook was very much in line with the value systems my parents had instilled in me.

WT: What advice would you have for teachers working with Indigenous students?

GR: I would say listen and be prepared to think outside the box to facilitate a full learning experience for Aboriginal students. Be willing to compromise/adapt to cater for the students' circumstances. And be patient. For some Aboriginal students, school is seen as the only safe place for them.

WT: What would you like to see for Indigenous students and education?

GR: I would like to see higher graduation rates for Aboriginal students and for them to be adequately equipped to deal with life.

WT: Is there a message you would like to give young Indigenous people today about their education?

GR: I wasted a lot of opportunity that today I wish I hadn't. Your education is your investment in your future and when opportunities come, grab it with both hands and make the most of it. If you're deadly at sport, remember a sporting career does not last forever, it is just a small window to be successful, so make your schooling count. Some will not always be supportive of your career/job choices but remain focused on your goals and stay true to your values.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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