

## *Leichhardt of Yester-Years*

30 OCTOBER 2003

### Grateful Memories

*This letter was received by a parishioner who remembers Leichhardt of the 1950's*

I am Australian born and bred and have no Italian blood in me whatsoever but I fondly remember the Capuchins at St. Fiacre's Leichhardt.

My dear late Mum made me join the Catholic Youth Organisation (CYO) there in 1959. I fought tooth and nail not to be a part of any religious group but she prevailed of course. It was the best thing I ever did. Here, I came under the guidance of Father Aurelius (Fr. Andrew Hrdina) and made friendships that last until this day. Fathers Albert, Silvio, Adelbert, Vincent Ryan were also great guiders. Who could forget Fr. Silvio's Sunday Night Movies show in the school playground or his Bocce Club in Style Street. His shooting of Pigeons in the grounds for a meal (which we sometimes enjoyed with him short of a beer) on a Sunday? No problem. Fr. Silvio could fix you up. Father Adelbert's love of good food? A trip into town with him to Valentines Gymnasium followed by a hearty meal in the restaurant next door (Gratis) could not be missed.

I was married out of the Church and Father Albert tried his best to make me change my mind but, to no avail. My wife's parents were very staunch (and good) C of E's so I chose their Church. Father Albert explained that I would be excommunicated and I had to accept that. Upon our return from the honeymoon Bev, my wife, and I spent the next four Friday nights in the Presbytery with the "Great White Buffalo" (Father Albert). Here Bev and he discussed their own religions with plenty of questions asked on both sides. He never at any stage tried to make Bev change but just explained his thoughts and she hers and the result of my marriage outside the Catholic Church. Arrangements were soon made for a Catholic Marriage ceremony in the Convent down the road with the wonderful Nuns as our "Guests". I was back in the fold. A short trip to the APIA club for our "wedding breakfast" completed the night. A wonderful bloke was Father Albert Coletta.

Father Aurelius. What a great human being. He will be in my thoughts until the day I pass on. Us blokes in the CYO were no angles but he controlled us with an iron fist. He truly loved his "Children". He could have been the greatest *Con Man* ever to have live but he certainly wasn't. He just had the personality to make you follow him. The dances in the school hall he arranged most Sunday nights. Our trips away every long weekend in October (fully chaperoned of course by two wonderful people, Jim Wilson and his dear wife Betty). The Netball, Rugby League and Basketball that we played all year round. Great competitions. Who could forget the dastardly Father Roberts from Darlinghurst who intimidated the umpires in the Basketball, ensuring his beloved team won a lot more games than they should have. Our great games of League against our neighbours and enemy, Lewisham. It is a wonder any of us survived. The CYO was the greatest "*Man Maker*" you would ever encounter. I could go on forever but I end now with gratitude.