

Past Student Spotlight Graham Perrett (1982)



The very first day of St George State High School in January 1978 was my first day in Grade 8. I loved all my time there, especially the sport, debating and musicals. I was very proud to be a School Captain in my final year of 1982.

My upbringing in St George gave me a deep appreciation of community values, team work and the importance of fairness, inclusion and equality.

In 1985 I received a Diploma of Teaching and started teaching high school English, Geography and History when I was only twenty. I taught for eleven years in country schools and Brisbane. I completed further studies at the University of Queensland, where I earned an honours degree in literature.

I began to take a deeper interest in politics and social justice during the nineties. I joined the Australian Labor Party and started studying law. This choice was inspired by Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* – a book I studied at St George State High.

I worked as a solicitor specialising in wills, estates, property, employment and industrial relations. The latter developed my keen understanding of the challenges faced by workers and the need for strong policies to protect their rights.

I ran as the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Moreton in 2004 but was unsuccessful. However, I persisted and was successful in the Kevin07 landslide.

The Moreton community is one of the most diverse federal electorates in Queensland. It has a high proportion of Mandarin speakers and a significant African diaspora. Since my initial election I've advocated for my constituents by working towards improving their lives and addressing their concerns. I've played an active role in a number of campaigns relating to accessible healthcare, quality education, affordable housing and sustainable environmental practices.

I've tried my best to take an inclusive and collaborative approach and have always raised my voice in support of social justice and progressive policies. I firmly believe in the power of diversity and the importance of creating an inclusive society that embraces people from all walks of life. As a member of the Australian Parliament, I've been fortunate enough to serve on a number of parliamentary committees relating to human rights, employment, indigenous affairs, and foreign affairs, among others. I'm very proud that my contributions to these committees have been instrumental in shaping legislation and policies that reflect the best interests of the Australian people.

Wayne Long and I recently published a book together. *The Long Story – A personal journey through inter-racial relations in Australia* is the story of my St George State High School classmate, Wayne Long. Wayne is a proud Murri man, born in St George on the Balonne River. Many will know Wayne and his family. Wayne's grandfather was part of the Chinese diaspora. So Wayne's story is interwoven with the historical, political and social events that have impacted on inter-racial relations in Australia for more than two hundred years, from Lieutenant James Cook's landing in 1770 through to *Mabo*, from the Frontier Wars to the 1987 Goondiwindi riots, from the White Australia Policy to Paul Keatings historic Redfern speech.

Growing up in St George, I never imagined I would be serving in the Australian Parliament or end up writing books. That is life, but I do know that St George State High School prepared me to be ready for whatever is around the corner.

Graham Perrett