A is for Arthur

Catchment Champion

Faith Butt, Jack Celli, Kane Horne, Nicholas Lambrecht and Dylan May

Mathoura Public School

Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Murray Catchment Management Authority and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to natural resource management issues. **www.murray.cma.nsw.gov.au/creative-catchment-kids.html**

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. **www.wirraminna.org**

Murray Darling Association

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. **www.mda.asn.au**

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. **www.envirostories.com.au**

A is for Arthur

Authors: Faith Butt, Jack Celli, Kane Horne, Nicholas Lambrecht and Dylan May

Teacher: Julie Szwec

School Learning and Support Officer: Julie Carlin

School: Mathoura Public School
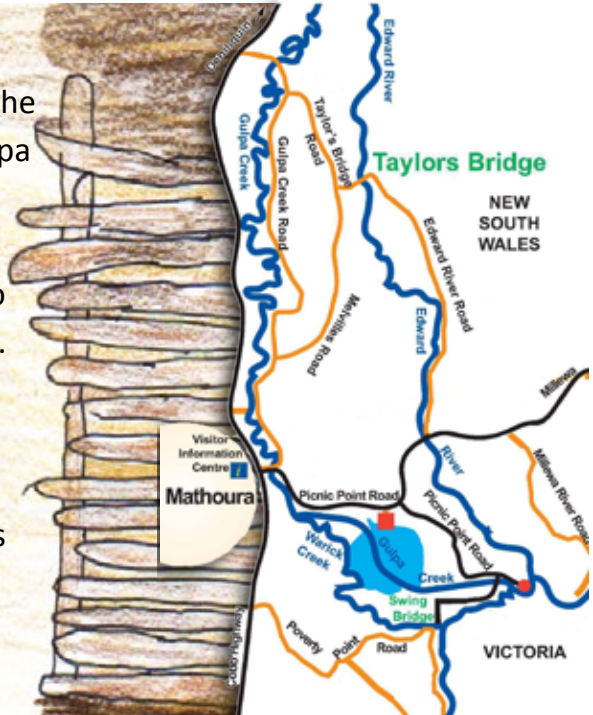
Catchment Champions

Young Joe with his mother and an aunt. The fish are huge!

A is for Arthur

It was a family tradition that the first born son of the Murphy family be christened "Arthur". By the time our Arthur was born in 1936, it was very confusing … so Arthur became known as "Joe".

B is for Bridge

Taylor's Bridge crosses the Edward River in the Gulpa Forest. In the 1980s it had to be rebuilt. The bridge was important to fire fighters and loggers. Joe supervised the new construction. Locals worked in summer heat and the bridge was finished in two months. It was made of timber grown at the site.

C is for Change

In the 1950s, Joe saw a change to the forestry's harvesting policy. Every tree had to be marked before cutting.

D is for Deputy Mayor

Joe was on Murray Shire Council for thirteen years. He was Deputy Mayor from 2005 – 2008. Joe met with state premiers and the Prime Minister of the time, John Howard. Joe worked hard for the locals, irrigators and the forest environment.

E is for Elaine

Joe and his wife Elaine have been married for 58 years. Joe calls Elaine "The Boss". Joe says without Elaine's support, he wouldn't have been able to do the many things he has done. They have two children; Brendon who is a detective and Belinda who is a police officer. Both work for the Victorian Police Services.

F is for Forest

The Barmah-Millewa Forest is the world's largest river red-gum forest. Low-lying river beds, creeks and wetlands and the red gum make up the forest. Joe knows it like the back of his hand.
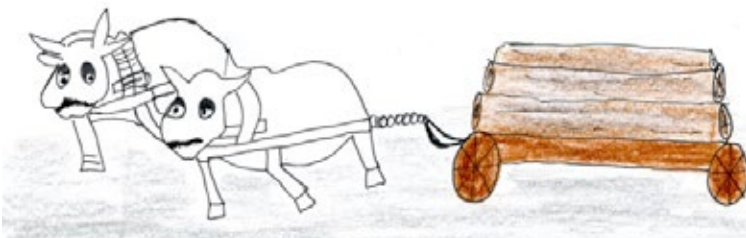
G is for Gulpa Creek

Joe was president of the Gulpa Creek Management Committee from 2003 to 2007. Water supply was the main business, but Joe and his team were also concerned about such things as carp and the damage to river banks they cause.

H is for History

Three generations of the Murphy family made their living from the forest. They were timber cutters, sleeper cutters and charcoal burners. The family owned a sawmill at Picnic Point, where young Joe and his brother Ray worked. Their mill was just one of five mills in the Mathoura area.

Joe remembers many stories told to him by his father about river barges and bullock teams transporting giant logs from the forest.
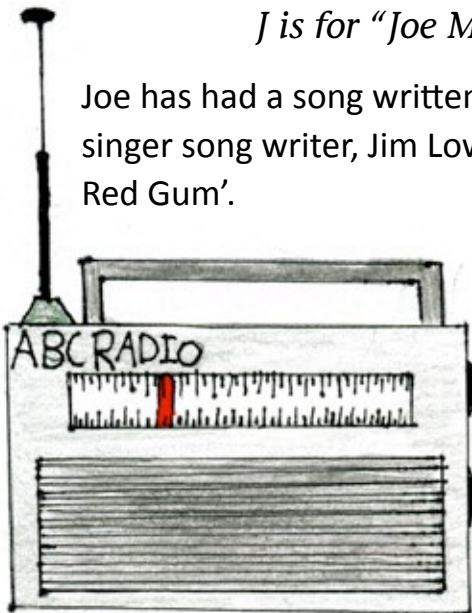
I is for Irrigation

Irrigation schemes affected the normal flow of the river. Wetlands and the growth rates of the red gums suffered. In the 1970s and 80s, Joe, with some locals, unofficially diverted much needed water to the forest. He was once called "the biggest water thief in NSW."

J is for "Joe Murphy Knows"

Joe has had a song written about him by country singer song writer, Jim Low. It is called, 'Murray River Red Gum'.

Chorus:

*But while there's life
There's always hope
Or so the saying goes
And through the years
It's this Joe Murphy knows*

K is for Koala, Kangaroo and Kingfisher

Joe has seen many interesting animals when working in the bush, but these three animals are his favourites and are among the most plentiful.

L is for Legislative Assembly

Former NSW MP, Jim Small, described Joe in the NSW Parliament as, "a well-acknowledged man of the forest and its waterways. He is not just pages or chapters but a complete book of knowledge."

'For recognition and appreciation of outstanding achievements for forest communities in Australia'.

M is for Mathoura

Joe has lived in Mathoura all his life. Joe attended Mathoura Public School and Echuca Technical School. Joe remembers a very large yellow box tree growing right in the middle of Mathoura School's oval. "We just played football and cricket around it," smiles Joe.

N is for Nature

Joe has loved nature since he was a boy. He especially loves the wetlands. Every year over 20,000 ibises fly to the Gulpa Reed Bed Swamp to breed. Part of Joe's job was to monitor the birds and water levels.

O is for OUCH!

Joe once cut his finger while sharpening
his chainsaw. He needed seven stitches.
Joe was an accident investigator
and chainsaw instructor for the
Forestry Commission. In ten
years, Joe taught more than
1000 persons how to be
safe around chainsaws.

P is for Plenty of … SNAKES!

They're protected nowadays.

Joe told the story of this photograph. It's thought to
have been taken near the Moira Lakes. It is of bushmen
and timber workers shooting snakes for sport. This was
their "catch" for just several hours.

Q is for Quail

Joe is keen on birds, and one of special interest is the quail. A quail is a small bird. Quails make their nests on the ground. If they are disturbed, they take off making an unusual sound.

R is for Reporting

Joe has been reported in a number of newspaper articles and books. He's quite famous! ABC radio, Quantum, magazine and newspaper articles have featured Joe and his knowledge of the bush.
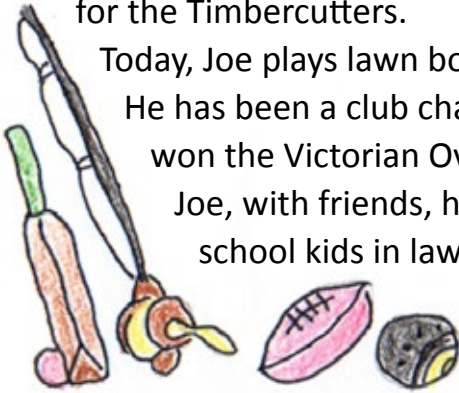
S is for Sport

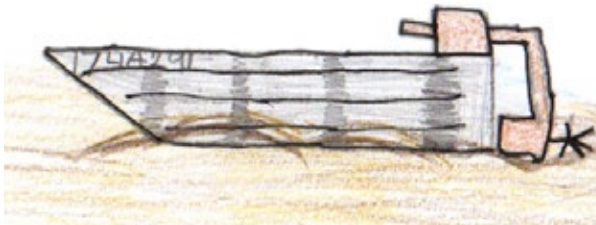Joe played cricket for Mathoura for over 25 years. He also played nearly 150 footy games for the Timbercutters. Today, Joe plays lawn bowls. He has been a club champion many times and once won the Victorian Over 60s Singles championship. Joe, with friends, has also coached the local school kids in lawn bowls. They think Joe's a champion bloke!

T is for Tinny

Joe used a tinny or punt for work in the bush. The flat bottomed boats were very useful in times of flood. Joe would mark flood levels on trees. The three biggest consecutive floods in history were in 1973, 74 and 75. The red gums got a good drink those years!

U is for Unique

Red gums are unique. The gums can take both flood and extreme drought. The red gum relied on the Murray River's cycle of winter and spring floods. In the 1950s irrigation changed that. Our unique man, Joe, later began his own watering system, where all trees received a share of watering. Joe was called Ned Kelly at a national conference. This was because of his "water trials".

V is for Volunteer

A community minded citizen, Joe has volunteered lots.

- Visitors Information Centre Management Committee
- Bush Tour Guide
- Working on local newspapers
- Bowling Club committee member
- Fourteen different Murray Shire Council committees

Some "Mathoura Matters"newspaper volunteers with Joe and Jack

W is for Work

Joe's first job was as a grocer's assistant. He would work three hours every Saturday for six shillings. He worked every Saturday night at the picture theatre, for "two bob". Joe drove a baker's cart in the school holidays. He also helped his dad in the bush, working with a cross cut saw. In 1962, Joe joined the NSW Forestry Commission. He retired in 1997.
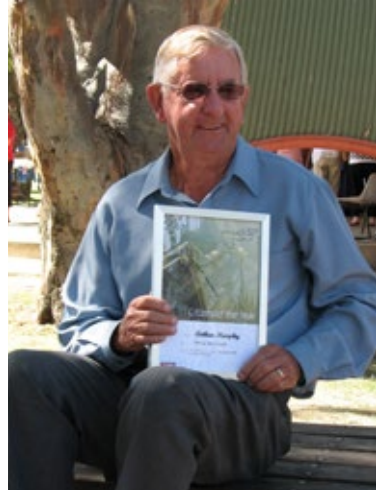

X

Five year old Joe at the Murphy Mill site

Y is for Year

In 2009, Joe was named Murray Shire Citizen of the year. His nomination read: "For more than thirteen years, Mr Murphy provided the Shire of Murray, and the residents of Mathoura in particular, with dedicated and honest representation." This award also recognised Joe as a champion of the environment.
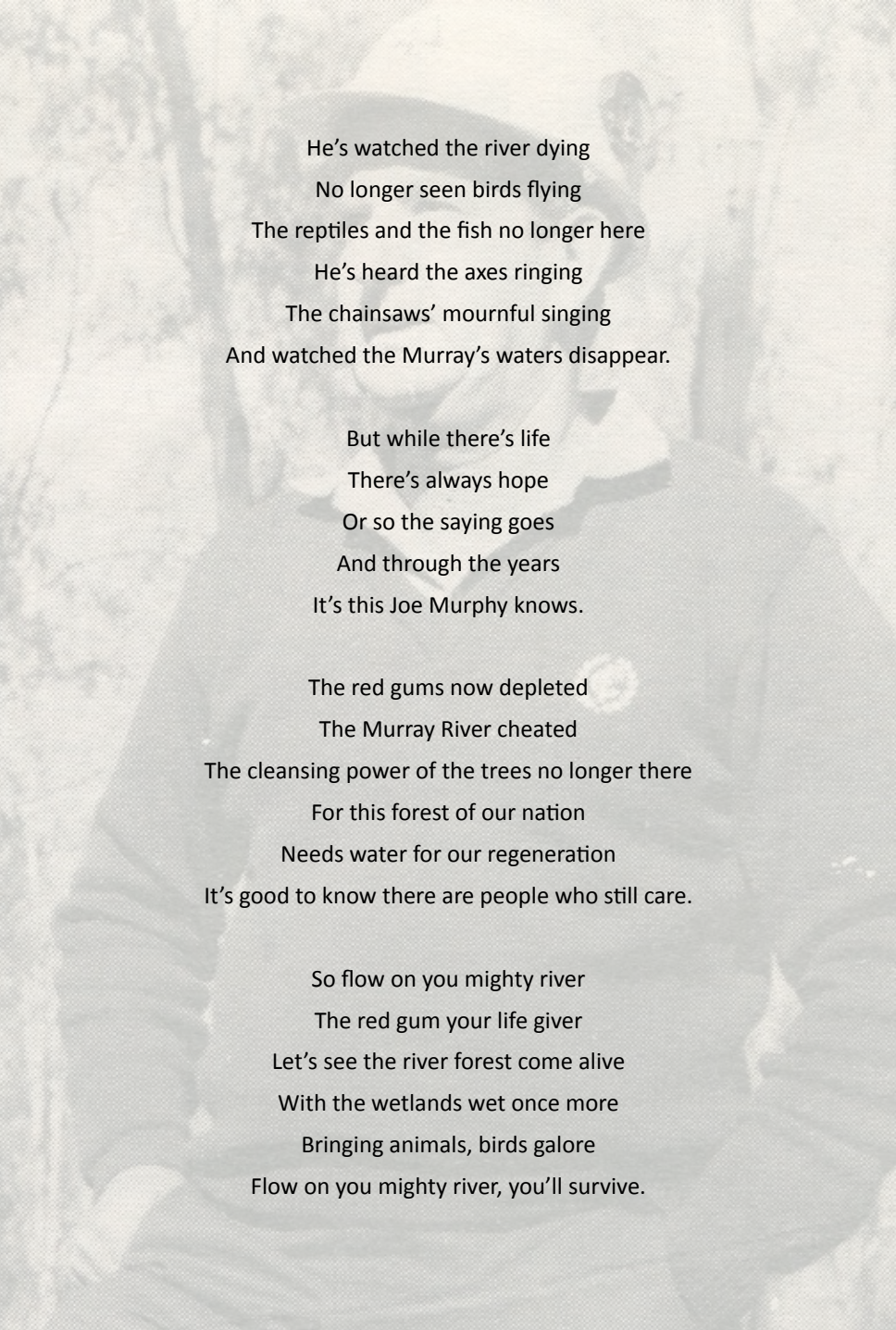

Z is for … The End!

Thanks to Mr Joe Murphy for sharing his A-Z story.

The students wish to thank also Ms Julie Carlin, School Learning Support Officer.

He's watched the river dying
No longer seen birds flying
The reptiles and the fish no longer here
He's heard the axes ringing
The chainsaws' mournful singing
And watched the Murray's waters disappear.

But while there's life
There's always hope
Or so the saying goes
And through the years
It's this Joe Murphy knows.

The red gums now depleted
The Murray River cheated
The cleansing power of the trees no longer there
For this forest of our nation
Needs water for our regeneration
It's good to know there are people who still care.

So flow on you mighty river
The red gum your life giver
Let's see the river forest come alive
With the wetlands wet once more
Bringing animals, birds galore
Flow on you mighty river, you'll survive.

Back Row: Faith Butt and Kane Horne
Front Row: Dylan May, Joe Murphy, Nicholas Lambrecht and Jack Celli

2013 Year 5/6, Mathoura Public School

The 2012 and 2013 Creative Catchment Kids writing program was showcased at the Seventh World Environmental Education Congress, held in Morocco during June 2013.

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