

## **FLASHBACK 1956**

**GLEESON! GLEESON!**

The 9-year-old boy looked up. Startled. Like a mircat. He'd been in the middle of concentrating on his most important decision for that day. And now he was distracted by half a dozen kids running down the schoolyard towards him at a pace and screaming his name. GLEESON! GLEESON!

The human brain is a marvellous thing. One moment it is engrossed in deep concentration. Next moment, in a flash, it is coming to quick and full alert.

His mate, Johnny Famechon, had given him permission to choose one lolly from the small box he had just received in the mail from his father, the Champion Boxer in France. The brown paper wrapping of the box was still covered in French stamps and a big Par Avion was stamped in red ink on the opened package.

These French lollies were too exotic to be true so the boy was having to make a difficult decision. Had they been Australian lollies he could have assessed the familiar collection very quickly and made a choice balancing out size and taste ... lastingness and novelty. But, he recognised none of these lollies sent, as they were, from half way round the world.

So he was searching for a strategy, a method, a way of making the best decision when his mind was snapped to attention by the alarming call of his name ... GLEESON! GLEESON! Now they were closing in fast and his brain was in crisis mode. He took one last look at the lollies, grabbed the biggest one and was on his way.



In 1956 Michael Gleeson was both the youngest and the smallest kid in his class at Rupertswood, a boys boarding-school in rural Victoria run by the Salesians of Don Bosco, a Catholic teaching order of priests and brothers. He was 9 and in 5th grade. Yes. He'd had pneumonia several times a few years earlier and if that had scarred his lungs and stunted his growth it had done nothing to slow him down. He could run like the wind.

With the rush of kids on his tail he was now in full flight down the stairs under the dormitory through the narrow corridor between the theatre and the toilets and out through the back of the building. Think quick. Left to Jackson's Creek or right to the dairy? The creek was out of bounds and that would only compound whatever trouble he was already in so he swerved off sharply to the right and raced down towards the dairy. You could, of course, smell that it was a dairy well before you got there and soon the lowing sounds of calves and their mother-cows were also filling his burning ears.

GLEESON! GLEESON! The kids were hot on his heels although by now he was pulling away. The dairy was a possible haven. He could climb something or find a hiding place and as he rounded the corner it all came to a sudden stop.

Whoa! What's going on. Slow down, Michael, slow down.

And there was Brother Reg. He was a kindly man. Uncomplicated and devout. The dairy was his domain.



• *Bro Reg still at The Dairy in 1989* •

Michael stopped as he was told and now the kids had reached him and gathered around pulling at his shirt and all yelling at once. He wasn't at all scared but he was by now on the defence and his instincts knew that he must have done something wrong otherwise why all the fuss. What could it be? How could he minimise the inevitable punishment that would follow?

Gleeson. Gleeson Guess what? You've got the highest IQ in the school. You've got the highest IQ in the school.

No I haven't.

Denial was always the first line of defence. Every kid knew that. It also gave you time to think up something more plausible as you gained more information about the predicament you were in.

Yes you have. Yes you have. You've got the highest IQ in the school. The kids began a chant.

NO I HAVE NOT.

Add volume to denial. That sometimes works, at least temporarily. Survival is all about buying time. By this time, his mate Johnny and some other curious kids had joined the fray and it was time for Brother Reg to take charge.

OK. OK. Quieten down. All of you. Now what's this all about?

In the aftermath it was explained by the breathless kids that some recent tests that all the boys in the school had been given by Fr Fedrigotti, the Provincial, were something called "IQ tests". And although none of them had any idea what IQ was the results had just been posted on the noticeboard and Gleeson had more of it than any of the other kids. He was on top of the IQ list. It's true. You can check it on the noticeboard.

I see, said Bro Reg, turning to marvel at the young boy now staring down his accusers. The boy stood his ground. Time to switch from defence to offence.

Don't say that! It's not true! I HAVE NOT GOT IQ!!

Young Gleeson was emphatic on the subject and could not be moved.