

TONY MUSGRAVE – EULOGY

On family occasions, Tony’s conversation would often have loving reference to “my dear wife, Ruth, my seven children and ten beautiful grandchildren” – always a dedication.

Today, our words and thoughts are dedicated not only to Tony but also to his extended family.

One of the legacies that Tony leaves for us is an online memoir. His expressed wish is that this document stand in place of the stories he would dearly have loved to tell his grandchildren had he lived longer. The website link to that is in your booklet for this service.

As recently as March of this year, Tony entrusted the password to this ‘treasure trove’ of information to Uncle Michael. In true Tony fashion, this contains fulsome files with many attachments which outline many aspects of Tony’s long and interesting life. Perhaps some of the events will be news to some of you.

Tony was born in Sydney in 1935 to medical student father Les Musgrave and Connie Rily, who ran a solicitor’s office in the City. They lived in a small apartment in Bondi, just around the corner from Pop and Nanna Rae Musgrave on Old South Head Road. While Les was studying, Connie was working to ‘bring home the bacon’. Aunty Monica Musgrave and some of Tony’s uncles were constantly on call. They would take it in turns to come baby-sit or walk this little boy, who was the first-born of what was to become a family of five siblings, Tony, Michael, Anne, Mark and Cathie – the first Brisbane Musgraves.

Les and Connie, and the young boy Tony moved to Redcliffe Queensland in 1938. As the Second World War became more threatening, Les and Connie took Tony up to the Marist Brothers Junior College on Tamborine Mountain as a boarder. He was now safe, but from his recollections, very cold, and homesick.

In later years, back at Marist Brothers Ashgrove, Tony learned the piano, advancing rapidly, performing flawlessly in two Lord Mayor’s Concerts in the Brisbane City Hall. How many times did his siblings have to listen to him practising difficult bars of ‘The Rustle of Spring’. Was this an early sign of the ‘perfectionist’ in Tony that became so evident in so many pursuits during his life?

Tony’s first career dream was to be a doctor (like his father). In strong competition though was a powerful desire to ‘fly aeroplanes’, presumably like all those that whizzed around Redcliffe and Moreton Bay during the War.

But he also entertained thoughts of being an artist (and flying aeroplanes) . . .or being a concert pianist (and flying aeroplanes) . . . or being a journalist (that was his father’s idea). In his teen years, he would beaver away for hours making model replicas out of balsa wood and Tarzan’s Grip glue . . . you guessed it . . . of aeroplanes.

Les was against Tony becoming a doctor – he felt it was too hard a life. Nevertheless, Tony enrolled in Medicine and off he went to Queensland Uni. A couple of months into his Medicine course, the Grafton Examiner rang offering him a job as a cadet reporter, which he took.

Off he went to Grafton . . . but from the very first night, he realised he'd made a mistake. Loneliness and homesickness, and the boredom of mundane news assignments, became too great for Tony.

About the only fond memory he can recall of his time in Grafton was when a family friend came and picked him up from his bare cold room in his 19th century boarding house, and took him home for a cuppa and a plate of tomato and chives sandwiches. Tony reminded his family of that last Friday, when he commissioned them to bring him “tomato and chives sandwiches, with plenty of salt and pepper.” Which, of course, they did.

Anyway, after a few months, Tony returned to Brisbane and re-joined the Medicine course. And despite the months away, he passed First Year.

But studying to become a doctor was not the only thing that occupied Tony's mind. As Tony notes in his memoir: “At the Mater Hospital I met a beautiful woman. She was a nurse. Her name was Ruth. There was a bit of competition but it's true to say that we pursued each other. After a couple of courting years Ruth became my wife, and mother of our seven children.”

That was fifty-six years ago last week!

In the mid-1950s all young Australian men were required to sign-up for a period of National Service in the Defence Forces. This led Tony into the Air Force, where he stayed for 14 years as a part-time citizen soldier, ending-up with the rank of Squadron Leader.

After a medico locum assignment to Malaya at RAAF Butterworth, Tony scuttled his own plans to become a Surgeon, and decided to pursue Public Health and Tropical Medicine as a career. He and Ruth trundled off to Sydney while he pursued these specialist studies, and somehow, in between keeping his nose in his books, first-born, Bill came along. Grandfather Les could never subscribe to the formality of the name William, and later when Victoria was named, in true Musgrave larrikin-humour, he re-named them both as ‘George and Aggie’.

Tony's expertise in the field of Public Health and Tropical allowed Tony the most important achievements of his professional life.

He was particularly proud of the changes he brought about in the fields of Aboriginal Health, the Ambulance Service, and the Home and Community Care Program in the 20 years from 1971 to 1991:

Designing and implementing his Aboriginal Health Program for the Queensland Government assumed ground-breaking proportions. Needless to say, Tony had to spend so much time living and working with indigenous communities in the

outback of Queensland and on Thursday Island, while his devoted wife Ruth stayed at the helm looking after their ever-growing family.

He was a trailblazer in his introduction of 4WD outback mobile medical clinics in outback Queensland, which were staffed by a trained nurse and an aboriginal helper. This program saw a dramatic improvement in child health and a major reduction of the infant mortality rate in Indigenous communities.

Also, during this period with the Health Department, Tony steered through major reforms in the Queensland Ambulance Services including establishment of a Flying Doctor Service out of Bundaberg.

In the mid-eighties, Tony personally negotiated and introduced the Queensland Home and Community Care Program - HACCP. This involved organising government funding of some 400 community organizations to provide care and support for elderly and frail persons in their own homes. This service continues today – and, fittingly, has been part of the support services that have assisted Tony & Ruth in recent years.

Tony himself said of his time in the Queensland Public Service:
“I have enjoyed my professional career. The opportunity to influence government policy and personally design and direct new services within the bureaucracy is not given to many. However, in the Queensland Health Department I was able to do just that.”

It wasn't all work for Tony. Many of you will know that he was an ardent Francophile. He loved everything French, not the least its food and wine and countryside!

Early in his retirement, Tony joined Alliance Française in Brisbane in order to master – not just learn! – the French language.

Soon he was proficient in French - another talent to add to his many others. He and Ruth purchased a holiday home in St Malo on the coast of Brittany in France, where they spent many happy times together, eating oysters, amongst other things.

It is testament to his ability to converse in this foreign language that he was able to deal with tradesmen, construction suppliers and the French bureaucracy. This was quite an achievement for an English speaker. Oh, to have been on the building site in St Malo, listening to Tony joust with a local plumber!

It would be no exaggeration to say that the past decade or so has been difficult, health-wise, for Tony and Ruth. Tony's story is that of thousands of men with advanced hormone-refractory prostate cancer. While the prognosis for that condition is never good, Tony took on the fight against the disease with his customary determination and doggedness.

Even last Friday, he was saying “I am going to get better and get out and sit in my Lazyboy chair.”

Throughout all this time, Tony has been characteristically thorough and persistent in researching and pursuing his treatment options. He challenged his treating doctors and made his way on to cutting-edge research trials.

He was also vocal in championing the rights to affordable treatment of other prostate cancer sufferers, particularly those he saw as unfairly excluded from receiving new, costly but effective drugs under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) simply on the basis of budget considerations.

Tony's petition in support of wider access to the drug Abiraterone is a case in point. Another aspect to his legacy.

A few weeks ago, during many periods of introspection on life and family, Tony was gradually coming to accept the 'cycle of life'. One of these days he would have to face the reality of dying. He expressed a wish to speak about this with family friend and Jesuit priest, Fr Steve Sinn. Steve was very happy to oblige and to fly to Brisbane, even suggesting that he come and stay with Tony and Ruth at Newnham Road! What a great comfort this was for all.

Steve learned so much more about Tony through reading Tony's blog. Later, he made the comment: "through writing about one's life, an individual becomes reconciled to oneself and others. And Reconciliation is about gratitude."

So, we can gather that in writing his online memoir, Tony was in the process of reconciling himself to his death and expressing gratitude for a wonderful life, and a loving family.

That is where Tony was when he died on Saturday – Reconciled, and in the arms of his loving family.

Finally, a tribute to Tony would be incomplete without acknowledgement of those whom Tony and Ruth often refer to as "those kids" – Bill, Vicki, Jonathan, Martin, Jeremy, Justin and Jacqui.

'Those kids', with their "United Nations" of partners and offspring, Tony and Ruth have extended their family's Irish and Australian heritage to links with the heritage and cultures of Korea, Denmark, the West Indies and Sudan, and India.

That in itself is quite a legacy, Tony.

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Written by Uncle Michael, and edited by Uncle Trevor.