

Eulogy for David J. Gowans

26th February 2020

by Carmen Gowans

David James Gowans was born on the 31st of October 1931 to Annie and Henry, in St Leonards. He had a precocious and inquisitive nature as a child, which sadly were qualities with little value in the school system at the time. His obviously keen mind was not encouraged and so his school days were very unhappy for himself AND for his teachers. Not in the least because he did things like set the science teacher's coat on fire, much to David's own amusement.

David had three older siblings. Eldest brother Clyde, his only sister Vera, known as Pat, and John, whom David referred to as the Pole Cat, or the Cat for short - I don't really know why that was, but the name stuck. I rather suspect being the youngest by several years contributed to David's, shall we say, mischievous and competitive disposition as a child and an adult.

As much as school was a misery, David's greatest joy as a boy were his horses and he won hundreds of ribbons at gymkhanas. He was also a keen tennis player, beating most of his opponents. Literally at times when the ball struck them. Tennis proved to be hard on his body, but David refused to give it up until he had absolutely no choice in the matter.

As a young man, his long time tennis partner was Bob Smith. Bob was David's best friend, and they worked together for many years at both the printing factory and at church. Bob fell ill in later years, and watching his dear friend's health decline, while being unable to do anything to help caused David real distress. This was a mark of David's tender heart.

Around the time Bob gave up tennis, it just so happened that Bill Condon and his wife Di Bates, moved to Austral. It wasn't very long before David and Bill were playing tennis together regularly, with Bill even winning a few games. In time though, David was forced to give up the sport he loved so much because of his bad knees, so the pair moved on to golf, and it was much gentler on their bodies.

When there was no option but to stop all sport, Bill continued engaging with David through weekly phone calls. Wendy is most grateful to Bill for that kindness.

David left school as soon as he could, around 14 years old, and went straight to work with his father, Harry, in the printing factory which at the time was located in Sussex Street, Sydney. They drove daily over the Sydney Harbour Bridge to work and back again.

From the time he was a baby, David attended Austral Church of Christ, as his father was the unpaid minister for 25 years. For all of David's childhood and most of his teens, the family made the long drive from their home in St Leonards to Austral faithfully every Sunday. They moved to Austral when David was about 16 years old, where David would ride motor bikes with some of the local lads and of course he still rode his horses. Andrew recalls as children his Dad telling them that he was the Sheriff of Austral. And the story David told about riding down George Street on an Elephant when he was a boy was true!

When he was about 20, Wendy's family, the Willises, moved into the district and attended church. It wasn't long afterwards that David and Wendy started dating. They became engaged on Wendy's 17th birthday and were married on August 13, 1955. They had 64 years of happy marriage.

Not only did Winnie and Herman Willis have a strikingly beautiful daughter, they themselves were fine musicians, who fostered in David a life long love of the violin and violin music. Accompanied by Winnie on piano, Herman, himself an accomplished violinist, gave David his first violin lessons as a young man. Over the years, David accepted every opportunity, to play the violin he inherited from his father-in-law. Always beautifully accompanied by Wendy on piano.

Children quickly followed the marriage. First David in 1956, then Andrew in 1958. Anne arrived in 1960 and in 1962, little Lisa followed. Lisa was the baby for 9 years, until, after some consideration, Chad came along in 1971.

All the while, David worked at the printing factory which had long since moved from Sussex Street to Rosedale Avenue in Greenacre, and was a lot closer to home. The factory was not much more than a tin shed, and in the early 80s, David demolished and rebuilt it in brick. Each in their turn his children came to work in the business with him, which David absolutely loved. He adored his children. The factory in Greenacre is where David spent the remainder of his working life, apart from a couple of years as a truck driver delivering steel for Elders Metal.

Harry encouraged David to drive from an early age. Like twelve. Now, this may or may not have been before age restrictions applied or driver's licences were compulsory. Anyway, it comes as no surprise that David developed a life long interest in automobiles. Owning a business, he was able to update his motor vehicles fairly regularly. Nothing too fancy, and always within budget as finances allowed.

One such vehicle was the Ford Econovan. The van was very handy for delivering parcels, AND with a mattress in the back, was the perfect place to catch up on sleep, on the drive to and from work. Now this may or may not have been before safety restrictions applied and wearing seatbelts was compulsory. By this stage, the children all had drivers licenses, so David, often wearing his dressing gown over his work clothes, took the opportunity to catch some winks before and indeed after a long night of bingeing. On television!

And at this point I will add that as much as David loved T.V., he detested alcohol, plain water and tea in equal measure.

Like the rest of us, David had his quirks. Take his dressing gown. For a time, he would wear it at work, when shopping, anywhere in public. Most of the family didn't care. However one family member, when waiting for a lift home from Liverpool Station one evening, was mortified to be met by David in his dressing gown.

All through his working years and retirement, David was dedicated to this church, helping in many different capacities such as secretary, treasurer, deacon, Sunday School teacher, general handyman and groundskeeper, preaching as called upon from time to time, and of

course, playing his beloved violin during services for many many years. Willing and able, he also served with the Churches of Christ Social Services committee in earlier times.

When the children were young, even though David worked long days during the year, he always took the family on holiday at Christmas time, to Manly, Stanwell Tops and Cairns, just to name a few. He was a doting father, the type who got up early every Easter Sunday to hide eggs in the garden, well into Chad's teenage years. In his eyes, his children could do no wrong and he could never remember them ever being naughty. Never ever. This is more than likely because in his mind, compared to himself, his children were angels.

These angels eventually went on to have families of their own and in due course, David welcomed daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

David knew both great joy and deep sorrow in his life. When he was still only a boy, his eldest brother Clyde was tragically killed on his way home from helping to build this very chapel. He was only 19 years old. Clyde's untimely passing had a profound effect on David. For the rest of his life, he couldn't bear the thought of death or dead bodies, which was ironic really because his brother John owned a funeral home.

Losing his mother, Annie, as a young man, just beginning his own family, was another great sorrow. Her death was a dreadful shock and he missed her dearly.

The sudden death of James, the second of his thirteen grandchildren, who lost his life in a terrible work accident at just 20 years of age was truly heartbreaking. And only recently, an infant great-grandson, Jude, quietly and quickly left this world.

All these losses were wounds to David's heart that never completely healed. Over his 88 years, David mourned the passing of his father and Wendy's parents; his remaining older sister and brother; three of Wendy's siblings, Norma, Rona and Brett; a nephew, Stephen, and a little niece, Caroline.

David was a loving husband and always had great love and concern for his adored wife, telling her after many years of marriage, "When you walk in the room my heart still skips a beat."

But don't let this soft-hearted and tame manner fool you, for David did indeed inherit his mother's fiery, Irish personality. For example, once when he was building the toilet out the back at home, something didn't go to plan and the perfectionist that he was, flung his hammer to the ground along with a few choice words.

Living next door, my own boys experienced this Irish temper from time to time but not very often. On one memorable occasion, David came home from an outing to find Nicholas riding his trail bike up and down the banks of the creek in his precious paddock. He shot out of the car like a bullet and Nic has never seen his Grandpa run so fast or yell so loudly.

To get to and from the paddock, the kids much preferred to scale the 5 foot tall side fence, than make the tiresome trek all the way to the gate... All the grandsons did actually, so would have all heard, 'Oi! Use the gate!' or 'Stop climbing the plurry fence!' Until one day, Alaster politely pulled his Grandpa up by questioning, 'Why? What's wrong with it,

Grandpa?' Now Grandpa was nothing if not a reasonable man and unable to find and give Ali even one rational answer, never tried to stop them climbing the fence again.

My boys all learned to play some kind of loud musical instrument - electric guitar, bass guitar, drums, brass, the usual stuff. While I'm sure Grandpa was pleased that they had talent, I'm also fairly sure he didn't always appreciate the racket they made. Not that he ever complained to me. Timothy recalls receiving advice from his Uncle David, one of the cherished angels, about the best way to position the amplifiers so Grandpa could experience the full effect. I don't think Tim took him up on that advice.

He was very kind, and my boys shared a close bond with their Grandpa, who let them do all sorts of risky and fun things like... driving the ride-on mower round the yard, towing friends in the little trailer behind. All in all they have very fond memories of growing up on the other side of that paddock.

We've touched on David's perfectionism. He had a saying, which was definitely NOT 'Practice makes perfect', but rather 'PERFECT practice makes perfect'. I kind of understood what he meant, but not really. David enjoyed making beautiful things, like fish ponds and gardens, working with timber, and renovating his house. He would make and build and re-make and rebuild the same projects until he'd achieved the best result. BUT. When it came to BBQing, he was the worst ever. The flames shot about six feet in the air and the snags were charcoal.

David laughed easily, finding life's little twists and peculiarities amusing, referring to them as 'Ironic Twists of Fate'. One such moment was when he dropped into the septic tank after the top gave way, much to his disgust but the family's considerable entertainment.

He had a wonderful sense of humour, with a wit as quick, dry and sharp as they come. Only last Sunday Anne gave me one example of his natural aptitude for the droll.... The minister at the time couldn't find his family pet, a dog called Beethoven. Locating the dog sometime later, David, his face no doubt wearing that deadpan expression of his, told the minister, "I say, Bill. I've found Beethoven. He's under the hall, de-composing." Thanks for that one, Anne.

On December 8th 2016 David suffered two major strokes, and spent 13 long weeks in hospital and rehab. Though his mobility and speech never recovered as well as he had hoped, he always understood what was said, and never failed to ask about his grandchildren and great grandchildren, always concerned for their well being. He bore the burden of his disability very patiently, and was lovingly cared for by Wendy at home up until the day before he died - last Friday 21st February, 2020.

Wendy would like to thank her wonderful family for the way they have helped and supported her, and for their love and kindness, especially during all of David's hospital stays.

To conclude, Wendy has chosen this poignant passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Chapter 3 verses 14 to 19. Reading from the Living Bible.

When I think of the wisdom and scope of His plan, I fall down on my knees and pray to the Father of all the great family of God—some of them already in heaven and some down here on earth— that out of his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you the mighty inner strengthening of his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvellous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself.