

EULOGY

delivered at St Andrew's Chapel, Robina, Queensland on All Soul's Day

My tribute to my beautiful Mother who passed away peacefully on the afternoon of Tuesday 25 October 2016.

All Soul's Day is fitting as our Mother was a bright soul who inspired all the souls with whom she came into contact.

Mummy – I have always called my Mum, “Mummy” – I have always and will always love you with every ounce of my being and words are inadequate to express how much I am going to miss you.

You have always been my rock and the wind beneath my wings and I know you will be our guardian angel into the future and that Dad and Hugh and your beloved Mum, Dad and Sister were there to welcome you into heaven.

When we see an eagle soar, the sunlight on the wings of a dragon fly or hear a Butcher bird sing or feel some extraordinary force around us that we are unable to explain we will feel your continuing presence in our lives.

Mummy, I am deeply grateful for my life and for the lives of the wonderful people who form our immediate family. Without you, Tammy, Michael, Robert, Samantha, Matthew, Summer, I and all those yet to come would simply not exist.

Thank you for laying the foundation stones of our lives. For caring for us. For teaching us. For handing us a moral compass and, for instilling in me a great passion for the arts. On the occasion of my 21st birthday you wrote a special note telling me:
“No matter how hard it gets in life, never give in.”

I thank you for those words of wisdom, they have stood me in good stead. They gave me strength at times when I did not think I could find any strength.

How fortunate we have been to have had the privilege and the honour to call you Mother, Grandmother, Great-grandmother. Your generosity of spirit accepted what all Mothers and Grandmothers come to accept; their babies must fly from the nest to follow their dreams and do you proud in the process. This frequently and often means long and painful absences when letters, notes, telephone calls, even thoughts come to fill the void on both sides. That is the way of the world. You understood that well as you found yourself living so many thousands of miles away from your beloved Mother, Father, Sister Niece and Nephews and Great Nieces and Great Nephews.

But your love and your light was carried in our hearts and minds and that love and light love has sustained us and will continue to sustain us into the future.

Our Mother/Grandmother/Great-grandmother is an “unsung” hero whose song deserves to be sung and whose song will be sung by us and through us and whose light will forever burn within us.

Wife, Mother, Grandmother, Great-grandmother, best friend, nurse, teacher, director, artist, entertainer, entrepreneur, public speaker, philosopher, calligraphist, ghost writer, prizewinning short story writer, philanthropist, President of the Women’s Writers Association, President and lifetime member of Probus Narrabeen, competent driver for 50 years – for those who do not know, Mummy drove thousands of miles through Africa in the 1950s, on one occasion 11,000 miles in 28 days. Best ever plum pudding, mince pie, Madras curry and chicken Szechuan chef, preserver of History.

War robbed Mummy of her dream to become an actress.

She served her nation – Britain – with dignity and distinction, being dispatched by the Foreign Office in London to hut number 4 at Bletchley Park where the British ultimately broke the Nazi enigma encoding system and where she would remain until the end of the war years, being finally recognised for her efforts by Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010, and later serving her adopted nation – Australia – as a stunning ambassadress at the side of an Australian sporting legend and almost single-handedly raising a family during her husband’s long absences on tour.

After our father’s death in 1974, Mummy found love and happiness with Major Hugh Gillan of the 2/13 Rats of Tobruk. Hugh made our Mother very happy and ensured her security.

We owe our Mother, Grandmother, Great-grandmother a huge debt of gratitude for the legacy she leaves us and for the rich world of memory we hold in our hearts of those special moments that she shared with us as individuals and as a family.

At times like these, when the worst pain washes over and through you,, it is often a good thing to reflect on happy memories.

The memory of Mummy’s neighbour, Beris Chapman waiting until Hugh had polished his camper van to the hilt in readiness for the honeymoon up north before writing “She’s too young” and “Old Boys make good lovers” all over it in flour and water then taking a vacuum cleaner and blowing confetti through the interior.

Then there was the “naughty smoking incident”. Hugh, determined to break our Mother of the smoking habit, found her sitting under the table at a function at the Macquarie Inn hidden by the folds of a starched white linen tablecloth having a cigarette. Thankfully, Hugh won the day.

The lullaby “Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ral” which Mummy sang to us and I sang to my children.

Lessons in how to cook a turkey.

The beautiful woman in hair rollers stitching eisteddfod costumes.

Driving across the Sydney Harbour bridge in a little blue Fiat, roof wide open, yelling: "We won, we won."

Working together in partnership in the Lindrum School of Theatre.

Performing "We're a Couple of Swells". Well, Mummy, you were certainly a Swell.

My anorexia nervosa wreaked havoc and caused indescribable pain to my Mother but she was always there. She loved and supported me as she loved and supported us all through our various ups and downs.

How much joy she derived when Tammy graduated as a nurse and what a thrill it gave her to buy her daughters their first fur coats.

Then there was the day in Naples when Mummy banged on the window of a shop front demanding that the shopkeeper forgo his siesta as the ship was about to sail and the evening at the Ensemble theatre in Milson's Point.

The curtains opened to two art dealers discussing the merits of a blank canvass. One said to the other, "Well, I am afraid I do not like it." To which Mummy declared in true theatrical voice, "Thank God, 'cause I don't like it either", which, of course, brought the house down.

Thank you to the army of people who have given of themselves to bring happiness, comfort, care and compassion to our Mother's life and/or who have provided their services to ensure her security.

Tammy who visited Mummy to the end, Dr Rebecca O'Connor for her care and compassion, the staff in the Acute Medical Ward at Robina Hospital, Keith McDonnell for caring for our Mother's beloved Rusky the Husky for four years when our Mother went into full-time care, and taking Mummy out for lunches, our Mother's neighbours Helen and Marty De Jong and Megan and Glen Fitzgerald who were kind to our Mother and provided me with emotional support at a very difficult time and Marty who worked with me on Mummy's garden. Susan Morris the diversional therapist at the Tallai Glades who did much to help Mummy make the transition from home to full-time care, the staff at Hillview – nurses Alan, Ray, Terry and others – our nation's true heroes, heroes at the front line – the administration staff, Patricia at Lifestyle services, the dining room and kitchen staff, the staff who man the coffee shop, the housekeepers who have maintained Mummy's room meticulously, Julie for looking after Mummy's hair, Yumi for looking after Mummy's nails, John for baking special birthday cakes, part-time nursing staff from Caring for You, the staff at the Golden Door at the Spit who looked after Mummy's nails for three years, Don and Gina at Woodchoppers (the former proprietors of a favourite restaurant destination at Mudgeeraba), Phil Dean who, until recently, worked on our Mother's lawns and gardens, our Mother's accountant Grahame Raftery, Rod at Trojan Pools, Harcourts at Robina and Judy of Home Instead for bringing such joy into our Mother's life as a much loved companion from 2011.

Judy has penned the following note:

“My thoughts and love are with you at this sad time. What a wonderful life’s journey I have been so fortunate to share with your beautiful Mum over these years. From the early days when she used to talk about her gorgeous daughters, grandchildren, her work at Bletchley Park and Rusky the husky, to more recent days where no words were needed, just a cuddle or the touch of my hand would produce that magic smile that would melt my heart. Thank you for the privilege and pleasure of spending so many happy hours with Joy. What precious memories I have to keep. Joy will always have a special place in my heart. She was a very special lady.”

Finally, the press and cameramen across the world who recorded our Mother’s 24 year journey with our father, the people of Mudgeeraba who took Mummy into their hearts, Terry, Robbie, Kim, Dian and all at A Gentle Touch for their sensitive, kind and caring approach and immaculate organisation, sons-in-law Jim Shortall, John Wickham, Mike Gillan and Robert Yandell, each of whom, in their own special and unique ways, brought joy into our Mother’s life and to you, Rod, for conducting this celebration and expression of gratitude for our Mother’s life.
THANK YOU.

You all enjoy a special place in our hearts.

Beautiful, elegant, graceful, dignified, intelligent, Mummy’s rich and remarkable life was unquestionably, “A magic carpet ride”.

She brought life into the world, she nurtured life, she supported life, she embraced life, she loved life and she loved and was intensely proud of her family.

Today, Mummy’s message to us is best rendered in the words of a song by the great Johnny Cash.

Lures of this old world have ceased to make me want to stay and my one regret is leaving you behind.

When it comes time to travel don’t feel lost for I will be the first one that you’ll see.

And I’ll be waiting on the far side banks of Jordan.

I’ll be waiting drawing pictures in the sand.

And when I see you coming I will rise up with a shout!

And come running through the shallow waters reaching for your hand.