

## Eulogy for Roy Staddon

by his daughter, Dee Murdoch  
at Aberdeen on 7th February 2015

*Stand up straight, put your shoulders back and your chest out, close your mouth it is not a fly trap, breathe through your nose, put your spoon down it won't run away* – words of advice that Grumps instilled in us and which have resounded in my head since his death on the 21<sup>st</sup> December.

Roy Glynn (with a y not an i) Staddon, Dad, Grumpy, the Old Fart was born 27<sup>th</sup> July 1921 at Mansten Grove, Mansten in the sub district of Ramsgate in the County of Kent, England to father Leonard and mother Eva Maude. He was the younger brother to sisters Mary and Peggy. Dad's childhood coincided with the Great Depression and the successful development of the family's five acre farm as a market garden. Dad's father had a history as a military man, having first hand involvement as a pilot in England's earliest flying boats.

With the death of Dad's sister Mary from food poisoning in the early 1930's, the family became fragmented. Grumps finished school in 1936, at the age of 15 and remained working with his father on the farm where he spent his summers and winters shooting, trapping moles and rabbits, housekeeping and generally working bloody hard. It was during this time that he started, under his father's tuition, to discover his love of woodworking, carpentry and cabinet making.

In 1938, with Dad's juvenile innocence, the threat of war provided an opportunity to don an eye catching uniform and rifle. Deciding on the army, as the service of choice, the next decision was which Branch. Cavalry, signals, engineers, artillery, tanks .... As he was not from a line of aristocrats the cavalry was out and so his father made his choice easy with the simple advice "Ride don't walk". So the artillery was the logical option.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1939 Dad enlisted in the Royal Artillery and his military service saw him explore England, Wales, Algeria, Tunisia, Italy, Holland, Germany, France, Norway, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and Cyprus. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1944 he was one of the English paratroopers who were shot and captured at Arnhem, the Netherlands, in the doomed military operation Market Garden. He was a prisoner of war for approximately six months until the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1945, at which time he, like many others, were liberated by the Americans. Following his repatriation to the UK, he was posted to Norway and the Middle East, ending his military career in March 1948 with the rank of Lieutenant.

Dad had joined the army as an 18 year old healthy young man and left nine years later deaf, with a crook ankle where he was hit by shrapnel, dysentery, partially paralysed right arm and hand where he had been

shot, hair falling out, dermatitis, a drinking problem and no trade. However, right up until his last ANZAC March in April 2014 he would wear his Airborne beret and insignia of Bellerophon upon the winged horse Pegasus with enormous pride and was a staunch supporter of the RSL. As a result of his military service and the commitment of most of the English people to its leader, Dad had an enormous respect for Churchill. Anyone who visited Dad would testify that his recurring reading material was Churchill's History of the English Speaking People, a four volume series which is now dog eared and well worn.

In 1943, whilst in Fareham on leave and carrying a box of quality cakes he sought directions from a local young lady named Joyce Mary Sims. They subsequently married on a freezing cold day on 21 Dec 1946 at St. Peters and St. Pauls, Fareham, and had a one night honeymoon at the Spread Eagle hotel. The following day Dad was sacked from his job as a house cleaner, but luckily Mum still worked at the dental surgery and in Dads words "was able to keep the wolf from the door and gin in the cupboard". After a number of short term employment opportunities and with an avid hatred of the cold Dad applied for work as a tea planter in Ceylon, a rubber plantation assistant manager in Malaya, planting peanuts in Kenya, helping farm wheat in Canada or immigrating to Australia. The last option came to fruition.

As a result of a five week trip at sea on the Ranchi the three passengers, Mum, Dad and little Nan (Mums mum), thrived, never missing a meal, including ice cream and cakes and enjoying the freedom of the open sea.

On reaching Fremantle in September 1949 Dad rekindled his friendship with Bill and Laurie Nocton. Bill and Dad had served in the 1st Air Landing Light Regiment and after their move to NSW the friendship flourished, with many holidays spent together with lashings of ham and eggs being served at breakfast and both men enjoying the simple pleasures that a pipe full of tobacco offers. Initially, Mum and Dad moved in with Mum's sister Ruth and her husband Mick at Harris Park where, in Dad's words, he was comfortably warm in shirtsleeves.

Dad commenced work in earnest with C.C Wakefield & Co (Castrol) as Credit Manager on the grand salary of 500 pounds a year. The majority of his working life in Australia was aligned in some way to the petroleum industry, whether it be with Castrol, Ampol, BP or Valvoline and the fun filled times with Peter Gray at the end of his working career.

Whilst he would recall numerous stores about the industries he visited across Sydney, or the capacity of a tanker whizzing past us on the New England highway or his exploits and much enjoyment with Peter Gray at the service stations across the Hunter region, Dad had a total distrust for the petrol multinationals that underpin the industry. This was evidenced by the fact that he never used detergents or soap being 100% convinced that they all contained chemicals that were harmful and best designed

for a vehicle motor and not a human's skin. Dad always shaved in cold water and never had a beard or moustache preferring on occasions to rub methylated spirits into his head. It may be the reason for his lack of hair, or the fact that he had suffered with alopecia whilst a POW and again in 1952 and in 1981.

Dad's, at times, prickly personality and employment opportunities resulted in numerous moves initially from Northmead to Lismore, then Coffs Harbour, North Avalon, Avalon, with the encouragement of dear friends Betty and Jack Gubbins who had also moved from Avalon to Cooranbong, then to New Lambton, Forster, Girvan, Upper Rouchel, with John and I, and for the past nine years at Willowgrove Village, Aberdeen.

Dad's relationship with Mum was chequered, to say the least, though since their separation on their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and Mum's final move to Newcastle, they spoke to each other every day, with Dad spending precious moments with Mum over her last few days in October 2012. I know that they loved each other in their own special way and were lucky enough to have time to tell one another so.

Although Dad didn't learn to swim until he was 62, as children, he encouraged us to appreciate the love of the outdoors and the water and he took Liz, as a teenager, to swimming meets and competitions all over Sydney, and for Bob and I he purchased a timber row boat which was more akin to a small Viking ship than a dinghy suitable for two young children. He would take us to Bilgola beach on the northern beaches of Sydney at the height of the summer storm season and when we questioned whether it was safe to enter the ocean baths with the waves crashing over the walls he replied "I have brought you to the beach to enjoy yourself, now put your swimmers on and get in the water".

Dad was renowned for a range of traits. These include: his ability to fart in public, frequently and often with some volume; his edict for formal table manners; his sense of humour and his desire to promote and enhance the community in which he lived. As a result of his involvement in the Progress Association and a tree planting and public park enhancement program whilst living at Northmead, Dad has been actively involved in community focused groups wherever he has lived.

On numerous occasions his manner created tension, heated words and factions but the end results of his numerous endeavours have been amazing and numerous. These include: President of the P&C at Liz's High School, Pittwater High; the development of sporting and community facilities at Greenpoint, Forster; the Stroud Garden Club and more recently the tree planting around Aberdeen with John Scrivan and efforts with many other locals to secure a doctor for Aberdeen and of course his involvement in the Men's Shed movement.

Dad also loved the Golden Oldies film and lunch outings that are held regularly here where we are gathering and where dad's role was to flog

as many raffles tickets as possible and to try and ensure that everyone had a name badge to help in networking – hence the presence of both of these today as a we know dad would very much approve.

For most of his adult life Dad was a smoker, initially cigarettes, then a pipe, and finally large and very smelly cigars all which he gave up approximately 30 years ago around the time of the birth of Ben – his youngest grandson. However, the love of tobacco continued with him saying as recently as the week prior to his death that he would still like a cigar after dinner. Likewise Dad loved a drink – often a bottle, not a glass and I know that we children were all delighted when he decided to give up this vice.

For Liz, Bob and I, Dad was a constant source of support and advice – not that we always listened or heeded it. His proudest moments included Liz graduating from nursing and in May last year when she was awarded the inaugural Australian Primary Health Care Nurses President's Award for her outstanding contribution to nursing.

When Bob joined the Navy, Dad couldn't have been more proud, that was until he saw Bob swim in the pool at Royal North Shore Hospital three months after he broke his neck and became an incomplete quadriplegic. Twelve months later when Bob represented Australia at the disabled Olympics and subsequently carried the Olympic torch for the 2000 Sydney Olympics Dad's pride continued to increase. These successes in the water have continued and Dad often told me how amazed he was that Bob had conquered the oceans and all that they held, with Bob having recently completing 900 open water scuba dives. For me Dad was always there to encourage me, he convinced me that I could do anything, be anything I wanted and I never doubted this for a second, whether it be at education, my land rehab work or at a more hands-on-level with the house inspections and renovations for my range of properties. To this day I assess the worth of a piece of real estate based on Dads edict on where the water flows, the access to the roof and subflooring areas and, if a timber property, just how far the penknife that Dad always had with him would pierce the lower boards in his assessment for termites.

Dad had a handshake that would crush lesser mortals, he was stubborn, intolerant of fools and laziness, quick witted and possessed an amazing general knowledge. He was in many ways a frustrated academic, completing TAFE based trade courses in Working in Museum collections, computing, upholstery, organic farming and welding and just to add spice to his life he studied Chinese.

However, one of things that I think we will remember him most for and for which he had no formal training was his love of timber work. For most of his life Dad would delight in designing, then crafting pieces of furniture, repairing the cursed dining room chairs and generally making reams of timber shavings that Liz and I, as children, delighted in wearing

in our hair. Power tools were not his favoured method of manufacture, but he preferred the use and pleasure of a quality chisel or a plane, that could shave the hairs on the back of his arm as a test of its sharpness. Dad loved food, not of course anything with gluten as he was convinced that it made him poo more and fart more often – if that was humanly possible. His favourite meal being a Rockyview leg of lamb baked dinner, followed by a huge bowl of vanilla ice-cream or a homemade rice pudding.

Grumpy watched his four very special grandsons, Mike, Chris, Peter and Ben grow from boys to amazing young men, all with their own special and individual talents. More recently he watched his family grow with his role as a great grandfather to Jake and Isabella.

Mike has inherited Dad's love of the outdoors and working with timber and it is with great pride that many of Dad's wood working tools will reside with Mike and Karine.

Dad's tolerance and total lack of discrimination for minority groups has been evident for the past two decades with his openness, acceptance and unrequited love for Peter.

For Chris, he instilled the need for perseverance and the attention to detail and Ben's intelligence matched Grumpy's and their ongoing discussions about gravity or the mysteries of energy and electricity were still occurring right through until the day before Dad died.

Over the last 12 months, his stubbornness and determination has been evident through his ability to fight illness, aging and the process of dying. This was clearly reflected on July 27 last year, his 93 birthday, when against his morbid fear of flying, something to do with his time in gliders during World War two, he was transported by the Westpac helicopter from Scone to John Hunter Hospital.

During the past few months, at which time Dad's body was surely failing, his stubbornness and determination was never more evident as he willed himself to live awaiting my return from 13 months volunteering in Kenya. For that I will always be truly grateful.

Dad hated the cold and it is only fitting that he died in the heat of the Australian summer with his body being transferred to New England Uni, Armidale. In so doing, he has avoided another cold winter with his heater set on 25 degrees and being rugged up in layers of singlets, jumpers and woolly coats and fighting off any draughts with blankets around his knees and ankles.

In his own way Dad was very much a gentleman, opening a car door for a lady, standing up when someone entered the room, sitting up at the table for every meal and always using a bread and butter plate, linen serviette and silver serviette ring.

It is these attributes that he admired when he witnessed them in others – he believed that

being non-discriminatory, having good manners and good bananas, timber dowels, araldite, first quality brass screws, and laughter could fix pretty much anything.

He instilled in those who knew him a love of life, a thirst for knowledge and a respect for yourself and those you hold dear. Grumps would ask that you consider how you could incorporate these qualities into your life, especially the idea of laughing at least once a day and to hold dear these memories and love that he felt, as we to share today in the company of this wonderful group of Grumpy's family and friends.

Thankyou