

John's Eulogy

Written by John, Fleur's son

Good afternoon, and welcome.

Standing here today and delivering a eulogy for a loved one is not a task that anyone would ever look forward to. I especially want to thank all who have travelled to be with us today, and also to Fleur's granddaughter Lauren who joins us from London via the wonders of modern technology.

There are just so many emotions and memories wrapped up inside. All of them wanting to be voiced in some logical process. But the more I tried to make everything flow and want to say everything that needs to be said about someone who has had such an impact on your life, is truly difficult.

So, if there is no sense of flow to what I'm saying today – I apologise – but just buckle-up and go for the ride with me!

Mum was one of three children born to Tom & Coral Giles and was born at Naracoorte, on the southern tip of South Australia in those uncertain days of the Great Depression and WW2. I think that growing up in that era, where life was pretty tough helped mould her and her family in many ways during the coming years. Tom was a Stock & Station agent and made a living buying & selling sheep & cattle properties, which eventually included properties in western Queensland. During Mum's later years, I would often strike up a conversation about her life back then, and her face would always light up as she remembered stories of sheep & cattle mustering, sheep shearing, riding boundary fences, among a host of other jobs needed to keep a farm running.

Despite protests from her father Tom who I'm told did not believe that women needed to get an education, she went on to attend boarding school at St. Faiths in Yeppoon. After graduating, she later became a telephonist before commencing her nurses training in Bundaberg. And this is where she met Dad. Back at Mum & Dad's 50th wedding anniversary, I asked Dad why he chose Mum, to which he responded that Mum was the only girl he dated that had high moral standards. I think that has been well maintained throughout her entire life.

Mum & Dad dated for around three years as Mum firmly believed that a woman should be able to

support herself regardless of marriage. As a result, she was determined to complete her nurses training before getting married.

And it must have been a very long three years indeed, as while Mum moved to Brisbane (to work at the Princess Alexandra Hospital). They sometimes only met up twice a year. Their dates included trips to Binna Burra and O'Reilly's guest houses at Lamington National Park (separate rooms of course), one trip to the Sunshine Coast, another trip to visit Fleur's brother (Dick) at Brunswick Heads, and outings to the movies.

I think that for Mum & Dad having learnt to do without in the early years, & being of the generation that wasn't so distant from the memories of the Great Depression & shortages of world war 2, that they learnt to live on the basics.

So, I really wanted to start by sharing an amusing story from Mum's past, but nothing really came to mind. That's not to say that Mum was not always a positive, happy person who insisted on seeing the positives in all people, but on reflection I think it's that Mum was never the life and soul of a party, rather she was always the one who quietly, and from the sidelines – perhaps without even realising it – was watching out for that person who was not having a good time and reaching out to them to make them feel welcomed, and important. As a result, her life was exemplified by putting the needs of others before her own, and always being considerate of the needs of others. And in this way, she was a marvellous role model to her family, children & grandchildren.

Time and again, we can see in her life where she was involved in the service of others. Only last week, we were talking with an old friend who reminded us of how Mum went and sat with his teenage brother in hospital after a serious motor



vehicle accident – when his own mother needed a break – just so that he wasn't alone.

She also had several ageing friends about town who were too old to get out and about. Mum's concern for their welfare meant scheduling regular trips to their homes – often with us kids in tow to demonstrate that they were important, and to try to relieve their loneliness in some small way.

Likewise, in my own years while batching on the farm, Mum would make a weekly appearance doing a cook-up, washing & ironing and trying to help out in any way she could.

Likewise, when her 4 grandchildren Lauren, Josh, Felix & Myles came along, Mum's greatest delight was to try & be a part of their lives. I often recall Mum running after the kids around the house playing hide & seek, with the kids in fits of laughter.

And in all my years of knowing her, I cannot recall Mum ever saying anything bad about another person. In fact, it was only in more recent times when I pushed her to make sense of a story that had been re-told to us for years, that she opened up & told us of some injustices she had experienced against her over the years – but even then with complete forgiveness & no malice at all.

In more recent times, Mum has had to have increasing frequency of visits to hospital for various reasons. On account of her name, several people made the connection to myself and often came up to me to recall their encounter with Mum and tell me what a wonderful person she was. I must admit to dismissing this for a while as people just being nice, except it just kept happening from random people, which gave me insight into the way Mum made other people feel.

And now for a few memories growing up:

Firstly – Mum's home cooking. As a kid, the house at Sunnydale had a wood stove at the centre, and Mum became somewhat of a wiz with home baking, particularly ANZAC, choc chip biscuits, and plum pudding being her signature dishes. As a result, I got to be a pretty popular kid at school holding bragging rights for the best little lunch. I couldn't necessarily say the same for school lunches which was often tongue or sheep brain sandwiches. Although not what we would call a delicacy, they were considered a staple of Mum's youth growing up on a sheep station, were a bit unconventional, but to be honest weren't too bad!

Liver & bacon was another combo on the table while growing up. Except for the liver, it wasn't too bad!

Ahh – you can't buy memories like that!

Mum was also a gun at making guava jam. As kids we were tasked with raiding the guava trees which grew all along the banks of the river and was particularly good with cream on sandwiches which we devoured in large portions during cane planting season. Unfortunately, a lot of the fruit was stung by fruit fly, necessitating the pulp having to be strained through old stockings to exclude the livestock. No matter – it's a bit of extra protein Dad reckoned. Despite this, her tradition of jam making remains one of my happiest memories of her. Mum was always in the thick of thrashing can & helping load & plant it but had the added job of feeding us all at the same time. And did a great job.

Homemade sausage rolls was another hit, and were brought out whenever visitors, and especially grandkids were expected. This recipe has since been bequeathed to granddaughter Lauren, so we hope this delicacy will live on.

I remember as a kid, that I used to set a scrap of net in the river on a Saturday night to catch a couple of fish for the table & catfish for the crab pots. Yes – it was as illegal then as it is now, but I don't think anyone cared too much back then. Anyhow one morning the net was loaded with mullet – much more than I was able to haul up, so I sheepishly snuck into Mum & Dad's room – covered head to toe in Kolan River mud & asked Mum to come and give me a hand. Sure enough, Mum hoisted up her skirts & struggled through the knee-deep mud to help me



drag the fish up the bank, then sat with me for a few hours scaling & cleaning the catch while the rest of the family was in bed.

I remember also in my early teens where Mum was concerned about my shyness around girls. Knowing how I used to enjoy shooting, she made me a deal with me to buy a box of .22 ammo for me for every girl I asked to dance at the school social. I of course reckoned this was a pretty good deal. Anyway, next day I proudly announced to Mum that she owed me an entire brick of ammunition. I think there was a brief pause and a bit of an awkward silence, however sure enough, a deal is a deal and next shopping day I was presented with enough ammo to keep me going for the year. How on earth Mum managed to get that past Dad I'll never know!

Mum also really liked her chooks. I think she really enjoyed raising chickens & providing eggs to friends and neighbours. She seemed to enjoy the gentle nature of these animals and treated them all as pets. Sometimes she would disappear, but we knew where she was – down at the chook house looking after them. In fact Lizzy made clay model of Mum holding one chicken under her arm, and Dad holding a chip hoe. I'm sure they are still somewhere. On occasion, a carpet snake would get into the coop and devour a couple – until Dad summarily despatched them with the 12 gauge (I'm pretty sure it was illegal then as it is now!) which made Mum upset to lose her pets.

Of course, Mum being a traditionalist liked to bake a Sunday roast. Despite being pets, this did not exclude them from their destiny. We kids were often called in on a Saturday afternoon to crash tackle a hand picked chicken – of the right age according to Mum's records – to be dispatched and prepared for lunch the following day. Such is life on a farm.

Mum.....liked to keep a conversation going.....at any cost! There were certainly no awkward silences around the table with Mum who often regaled us with stories from her past and in particular about her encounters during her nursing career. Sometimes we would have to start winding up our conversations a good 20 minutes prior to expected departure time as part of our exit strategy.

What we would give to be able to sit down and have a good chat now!

Mum always had a fairly pragmatic view of life. I know we talked over the years about death & dying

and I remember her saying that when someone passes away – at the right age – then it should really be a celebration of life, and an opportunity to rejoice in a life well lived & loved by many, and I hope that is what we will take away from today. That although we are deeply saddened by Mum's passing, that grief will eventually pass - although not to soon I hope. It is my hope as I know it was Mum's, that we would be glad for all that she has done for us, and all that she has meant to us, and treasure these memories with happiness as her lasting legacy.

Earlier this week, Cliff visited to help prepare for today's service, and Dad mentioned that they had just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Cliff said to Dad that 'you must have many great memories of Fleur", to which Dad's response was – and I quote was "we have had an absolutely marvellous life together".

I can't think of any better way of summarising Mum's life & what she meant to her family.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to not reflect on her strong Christian faith.

Several decades ago, the family attended the funeral of Mums mother, Coral. At that funeral, Uncle Chris – who is with us today read the eulogy, and I clearly remember him saying that for Christians, dying is no big deal. Yes we have pain to endure and of course there will be grief, however we believe that her spirit lives on and we look forward to that day when we can all be united once more.



So, to conclude I wanted to say on behalf of Dad, Elizabeth & Peter, Bernadette & myself, Lauren, Josh, Felix & Myles: Farewell Mum. Thank you for all you have done for us and the examples you have set for us. Thank you for the many happy memories and for life itself.

Until we meet again.

