

## Stephen Maxwell Stewart (1955–2009)

By Andrew Stewart



Dad was born in Katoomba on 14 October 1955. His life changed when a young squash player named Kay Fitzgerald caught his eye. Throughout his life he endeavoured to make Mum feel special. Limousines, butlers and seaplanes were all part of the deal, as was the Bette Midler love song dedication on the radio. For a surprise party on Mum's 40th birthday Dad made guests park in neighbouring streets so she wouldn't recognise the cars. He conned Mum into coming home from the restaurant early with him by spilling a drink down his pants and insisting he had to change.

Dad was an enigma. He practised transcendental meditation and loved Shintaro the Samurai. He loved *Fawlty Towers* and the Far Side. I remember when I was young, I tried to understand what he saw in all this. He told me: 'Just listen'.

There were many eclectic and somewhat illogical things that made sense only to him: working in the garage with Elton John or Pink Floyd blaring at noise pollution levels, or falling asleep in his armchair watching documentaries about the Second World

War. He was also an amazing mimic. He even taught himself to play the piano like his beloved Elton John. He was fascinated by the weird and wonderful. He loved pen collections at the Easter Show, ovens from Danoz Direct, conspiracy magazines and natural remedies. He loved going to Bunnings and Flowerpower on the weekend. He also had some culinary flair, and enjoyed sweating profusely after a bowl of his curry. It cleansed the pores, he would say.

He was a passionate photographer with his Nikon, and was particularly interested in different aspects of natural landscapes. Later in life he rediscovered his love of cars. Deep in his own world, he would sit and take in the noise of the V8 cars and photograph the races till they finished.

Dad was passionate about whatever he did. As a young legal practitioner, he always carried a briefcase to give the impression he had many clients.

He could see the humour in any situation - even the most serious. He enjoyed calling up his first boss's secretary and using names like Terry Bull and Des Gusting. Nothing was sacred with Dad's sense of humour - not even himself.

Although gifted and talented in many areas, Dad always had problems with coordination. While fishing off the jetty he never managed to catch any fish. He was too busy waiting for Lynne to untangle his line while he tangled hers. He was the sort of person who would get lost in a revolving door, or get sidetracked in a crowd and have to go back the way he had come. His navigation skills were such that family drives never went smoothly.

Dad never let us know he was in pain.

If asked how he felt, he would respond: 'I'm fine'. He was always out early and home late, typing up an advice or working on an upcoming case. A colleague said Dad enjoyed that sought-after 'balanced life': highly professional with his work but possessing a solid understanding that work was not the be all and end all.

He went for walks with his younger brother James, just as he would with myself, Matthew and Christopher. Dad was shattered after Christopher's death. As someone who always knew what to say, found solutions and solved complex puzzles, he found it difficult to live without a clear direction. He travelled through his grief, mostly alone but always thinking of others. He did not want his colleagues to see him as someone who had suffered greatly, but as someone who was capable of carrying on with his work. One night late last year he told the family he had decided to apply to become a judge. In seeing the pride in his face I saw not only a man who had fallen, but a man who had stood back up again.

I will always be grateful to Dad for helping me when I was vice captain in year four at Del Monte. I was a fraud. Dad wrote all my speeches for me. He wrote the Father's Day assembly speech with me, and I will always remember doing the last sentence. It was one of those moments that stick with you, I remember how awkward it felt, speaking those words which were not my own, yet were exactly what I wanted to say.

Today, these are still Dad's words, and I feel proud to say them. Thanks Dad, for teaching me how to laugh, and how important that is in life.