

## Christopher Martin Egan (1949–2010)

By David Hooke SC



We can all be confident of one thing. Chris is holding court, surrounded by friends both old and new, and grumbling about all the fuss which is being made. At the same time, he is quietly chuffed that we are all here and saying nice things about him.

Chris was many things to many people. He gathered friends in many circles and in many walks of life. Someone said to me last week that he adopted people. I am honoured to be one of them.

When Chris made friends, he made them for life. I feel a bit like a Johnny-come-lately. I've only known Chris for 23 years. He became friends with Michael Delaney in 1963 when he started at St Bernard's College in Katoomba.

Chris's arrival at St Bernard's was the start of a lifetime of keen negotiation for Chris. He and his mother, Zola, were in dispute about matters of discipline. Chris had assumed the role of head of the family at the ripe old age of 11 and took that role very seriously. He remained very protective of both Zola and his younger sister, Karen, until Zola's passing in October 2006 and his own last week. Karen, our hearts go out to you.

Of course, as Chris well knew from that early age, with responsibility came rights (at least I think that's how it went) and he was determined to exercise them. Legend tells of a broken jaw, a shattered ankle, a harpoon through a leg and the use of household bleach to attain the right Bondi tint in his hair. He was given a lift home by the Bondi police more than once and when Zola summoned the family priest to discuss the facts of life with him, Chris had absconded out the window to the beach.

It was at about this time that Zola decided that Chris needed a firmer hand, so she took him on a tour to Boys' Town. Chris decided that Boys' Town wasn't for him and recognised the need to settle. St Bernard's it was.

The following year St Bernard's closed and Chris, Michael Delaney and others moved to Oakhill College where he met the Kelly boys. He ended up doing the Leaving Certificate at South Sydney High in 1966 not having measured up to his own exacting standards the year before.

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We are all well aware that Chris's appearance never changed - except once when he shaved his beard, and the less said of that the better! Bayne Kelly says that at the age of 17 he and the rest of the gang looked 17 but Chris looked 27. This enabled Chris to breach various provisions of the Liquor Act to the benefit of his more youthful looking mates.

After school a group decision was made to play some rugby. Colleagues in Woollahra were the beneficiaries of the arrival about that time of Chris, the Kellys, Michael Delaney, Chris Webb, Mike Fitzgerald and Chris's late English mate, Cal Armstrong.

A gentle run in 5<sup>th</sup> grade was the go, but having recovered from his earlier-mentioned ankle injury Chris decided that he should progress up through the grades. He embarked on a rigorous regime of training and healthy living. He reduced his smoking from 60 to 30 a day, and stopped drinking beer between Monday and training on Thursday night. His efforts and raw talent were noticed and the following season he was plucked from the mighty 5<sup>th</sup>s to play 1<sup>st</sup> grade. It's nice to see Tom and Sam following in his footsteps.

In 1967 Chris embarked on his career in the law. He started work as an articled clerk with Teakle Ormsby and Francis and remained there until about 1973. He told me (perhaps more than once) that during that period he had the biggest High Court practice in the country. He briefed and became

friends with some great counsel. He is apparently responsible for giving Jim Poulos his first common law brief during this period.

In 1968, confronting the Vietnam draft the following year (along with a number of his mates, including Bayne Kelly), Chris hit upon the solution. He rang Bayne and said 'Mate, I have an idea. A mate of mine in the CMF reckons that

if we sign up with them for seven years we don't have to do National Service and so there's no chance of Vietnam.'

Bayne was conscious of the fact that not all ideas were good ones and responded 'Do you really want to go on an Army parade every Monday night for the next seven years and annual camps and so on? Why don't we just take our chances?' Of course, in the result Bayne was called up and Chris missed out. Bayne tells of Zola calling him soon after to express her concern for him and to wonder whether a tour in Vietnam for Chris might be just the firm hand she had been searching for.

In about 1973, Chris went to work for Ivan Judd for a year or so before moving on to McLellands where he established an extraordinary major claims practice and where he remained until completing his law degree at the then fledgling NSW Institute of Technology law faculty.

On 19 August 1978 Chris married Trish, his wife of over 30 years. Trish, our hearts go out to you.

During this time Chris became interested, and then passionate, about sailing, both in the harbour and offshore. He commenced his sailing career on the famous Erica J and became very close friends with Alan Brown, Kenny Davies, Gavin Anderson and many others. His love of sailing and of the water never waned, although Heaven help anyone who had a sheet override or a winch handle disappear overboard! He also became a keen snow skier and his times at Thredbo are legendary.

Immediately he graduated, Chris was called to the bar where he read with Hayden Kelly on 14 Wardell. He stayed

on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor until the floor sadly closed down, and forged many deep and lasting friendships there.

It was when he was on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor that I met Chris. I was a baby clerk sent up to a conference with counsel and client. Margaret Ashford was Chris's clerk then and for most of his years at the bar. As I was leaving at the end of the conference I spoke with Margaret. I said (and you'll forgive some revision of the exact conversation) to Margaret 'That guy's a complete [not very nice person] and I don't want to have anything else to do with him.' Margaret offered some sage advice: 'Next time he behaves like that, and he will, just turn around and tell him to [go away].' Of course, he did and I did and the rest is history. Thank you Margaret.

In the interim the most important thing in Chris's life had begun. He became a father. On 2 March 1983, Tom was born. Sal followed on 2 November 1984 and Sam on 14 April 1988. Guys, you were the love and the light of his life. He loved you more than life itself. Know that, and cherish that knowledge in your hearts forever. Losing a parent is an awful thing and our thoughts are very much with you all.

Chris's sometimes gruff exterior on occasions masked a heart of pure gold; a heart the size of Phar Lap's. His love and loyalty were true and his generosity was boundless. No-one could ask for a better friend than Chris. He was the real deal.

Likewise, he was the consummate professional. His honesty, integrity and independence were beyond reproach. He read every line on every page of every brief. He was a wonderful mentor,

not only to me but to countless others who learnt enormously from being around him and, if fortunate, adopted by him. His generosity of spirit is an inspiration to all of us who were lucky enough to know him.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, wrote:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
Any may there be no sadness or farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

Chris, we love you, we are sad, we miss you, we salute you. We will always remember you.

We have been lucky indeed to be your family and your friends. Rest in peace and thank you for being in our lives.