

## Roger Stephen Quinn (1954–2010)

By Gillian Quinn



We have gathered here today to celebrate and pay tribute to the life of our brother Roger Stephen Quinn. This is not an occasion for mourning but one of remembrance and celebration of our brother's life. Each of you is here today because his life has touched you in some special way. It is now time to remember those occasions and while Roger has passed on he will live in our hearts forever.

Rather than grieving, I rejoice in having had him in my life. He was always very special to me and from comments that many of you have made, I know those feelings were reciprocal. The love, pride and joy I have in knowing him, I hope you will use that combined with your own knowledge to complete a picture of Roger, the man – the friend, the colleague, to form everlasting memories of him.

Roger was an extraordinarily talented and multi-faceted man: barrister, sailor, musician, composer, poet, author and, surprisingly, an accomplished magician specialising in legerdemain and illusion.

Roger was born in Sydney on 9 August 1954 to parents John and Betty Quinn.

The Quinn family resided in Seaforth for all the childhood and teenage years of

the three siblings Tim, Roger and Jill.

Growing up in Seaforth was a wonderful playground for the three children and it provided an amazing, carefree childhood. There was the harbour pool just below our house where after school all the local kids went to swim. Our Dad who spent the whole of WW II in the navy serving in all theatres of war, used to ring a navy ship's bell at 6:00 pm, which was the signal that dinner was ready. (For Dad, it was always 'At the order or the bugle sounding action...')

There were many wonderful childhood experiences and it was quite idyllic.

In our early teenage years the harbour also became our playground when a group of local kids decided to build canvas kayaks. With the help of our fathers who all completed a boat building course at Manly High School, we were soon paddling around the upper reaches of Middle Harbour and Bantry Bay.

Sailing at Clontarf Sailing Club was a family event where all members of the family participated. Roger in his teenage years bought a Moth sailing boat and raced with the Seaforth Moth Club. Even today he still raced a high tech moth called a Blade Rider out of the Balmoral Sailing Club and I have just bought my own scow moth and was intending to be instructed by, and sail with him.

Roger once told me the greatest gift our mother had given him was the opportunity to learn to play the piano and read music. Our mother cashed in an insurance policy to buy a piano and went back to work to pay for the lessons for both Roger and myself. It was a gift that has endured for 50 years and brought incredible enjoyment to Roger.

Culture was an important part of our upbringing and our mother tried to

show us a different side to life. While Dad was working, Mum organised trips for the three children to museums, art galleries, the ballet and the theatre trying to instil in us an appreciation of the arts. I'm sure seeing *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* ignited the author in Roger. Mum was a staunch monarchist. Whenever Queen Elizabeth visited Sydney there was the mandatory trip to the city so her three children could see the Queen pass by.

Our childhood was without a television and all three children learnt the appreciation of the written word and all became avid readers. Every Friday there was the visit to Seaforth library for more books. Roger quickly graduated to reading Dickens and the classics at an early age.

Roger was very intelligent and excelled academically. He had a love of English and great command of the language as evidenced by his Honours degree from Sydney University. He eventually went on to complete a Bachelor of Laws and started a Doctorate of Juridical Studies, which he converted to a Master of Laws in 1997.

Roger's early working years could only be described as unusual. He had a variety of jobs none of which related to his university degrees.

Roger used to write short stories for various magazines and for the *Daily Telegraph* which led to writing a restaurant guide for the paper. Every night Rog would go to a different allotted restaurant for a meal upon which he would write a critique. Dad, who always worried about Rog during this unusual phase of his life relaxed because he knew Roger was getting a regular meal. However, I think his first published article was about Bondi where he was living at the time.

Rog had a stint as the leader of his own

rock band. Even then, he composed all the words and music. His band was offered a recording contract but being young, he eschewed being controlled by others. I attended a few 'gigs' as they were called then. I am not sure how Roger's hearing survived that period of his life as the band was very loud.

Roger was later to tell me in private that he had wasted the first ten years of his working life. I disagreed with that assessment because it shaped who he ultimately became.

He entered the law because of his innate sense of justice and fairness. He was admitted as a solicitor in 1989. He worked briefly in a small private practice before moving to the Australian Government Solicitors where he specialised in taxation. He stayed there for 10 years before joining the bar in 2002. He undertook many cases for the AGS and the ATO, appearing in the High Court of Australia, the Federal Court of Australia, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of NSW as well as District and Local Courts. He acted almost exclusively for Commonwealth agencies.

Over the next seven years Roger worked tirelessly six to seven days per week applying some extraordinarily long hours. His law practice was very busy over this period, a testament no doubt to his successes and hard work. Roger's clients could always be assured he gave their cases more preparation than was required to ensure a successful outcome.

During this period of Roger's life he had three passions: his music, sailing his high tech moth and an unstinting focus on the law with all its nuances.

In music, he loved boogie woogie, a sub-genre of the blues and he proudly told me recently that he had acquired

every piece of this genre that has ever been written. Roger's Blade Rider provided endless hours of enjoyment every Saturday. The exhilaration he felt when skimming the waves, wind in his face, water spraying over the boat, was tremendous respite from the intensity of his law practice. The last time he went sailing, he said he really enjoyed hanging out with the other sailors at Balmoral and he left home at 7.30 to gain as much enjoyment as he could from the day.

He loved practising the law and he recently said his aim was to acquire a greater command of the law. While he never revealed details, he would explain the complexities of the law and the subterfuge that people employed to get around the law. He took great delight in unravelling their nefarious legal strategies.

In July and August of this past year, when even Rog's legal practice slowed down, he took about five weeks off to spend time repairing the Quinn family home at Seaforth. I don't think I have ever seen or experienced Roger in such a relaxed demeanour.

He had actually switched off or shut down for the first time in ten years and was actually enjoying some of the simple pleasures that Seaforth had to offer, the quietness, the sound of kookaburras in the trees, the casual pottering around the garden, painting a wall. Rog seemed very much at peace with himself.

While Roger loved living in Newtown with its rather bohemian life style and myriad restaurants and cafes, he was clearly re-establishing his roots in Seaforth. I now wish he had taken more time off to re-establish those roots and just take time out, but his practice rapidly picked up with new clients and Rog was back to working those long hours.

His impulse trip to go to Thailand was a last minute decision for which he has paid a terrible price.

All our extended family dearly loved Rog. Words can barely describe the sharp pain we feel from this senseless accident and his absence from our lives. Aged 55 is all too young to pass on and Rog still had so much to live for both professionally and privately.

I am glad I experienced Rog in the middle of last year in such a relaxed state unshackled from the pressures of work and private life. It is how I intend to remember Roger best.

Good bye Rog, you will remain forever in our hearts and memories.

Vale, Roger. *In pace requiescas. Dulce et decorum est cum parentibus requiescere.*

*Et pour moi, Adieu, Roger. Tu me manqueras toujours.*

In accordance with his wishes, Roger is to be buried with his parents. Because he died so far from his loved ones:

*Und deine Seele spannte  
Weit ihre Flügel aus  
Flog durch dem stillen Lande  
Als flog sie nach Haus*

Which translates as:

And your soul spread  
wide its wings and  
flew through the quiet land  
as if it were flying home.