

Eulogy: Douglas Guerin Begley (09/09/1932 - 30/06/2023)

I want to thank Kathy and Warren for allowing me the privilege of delivering this Eulogy. On behalf of our family, I want to thank all of you for your presence here today as we gather to give thanks for the life of Douglas Guerin Begley.

Death is the great leveller. It heralds both great sadness and profound gratitude.. perhaps even inner joy...peace. Sadness, because someone we love is no longer present to us, gratitude and joy because it gives us the chance to assess a life in its fullness, a chance to reflect ...and for that we give thanks. We feel gratitude because our lives have been richer for sharing in Doug's life... similar to the feelings we perhaps have when we devour the last page of a great book, a great read. It is in the turning of the final page where we can truly begin the process of reflection and begin to savour our favourite parts of the story. Those parts that offered us deeper insights, expressed wisdom, provided us comfort, that stirred a myriad of emotions within us. And so... it is as we begin to savour the life of my father.

Born in Hastings (Sep 1932) to Daniel and Berta Begley on a rural property along Norton Road, Hastings. Dad and his brother (Selwyn) were brought up in a loving and nurturing environment. His Father, Daniel 'Dan' Begley (a man of obvious exceptional qualities), was immensely influential in forming the values that Dad lived by and the values that he instilled in his children....One word was particularly important to Dad and one that he sought to live his life by. That word is "integrity"... Dad could never talk about his father without betraying emotion in his voice. It could be said that Dan's untimely death probably changed the destiny of our family....originally Dad was slated to follow his father's corporate career path...but in the aftermath of Dan's early and untimely death, Dad saw a side of corporate life where *integrity* was lacking and certain office holders acted dishonestly. He was deeply disappointed and somewhat disillusioned by the experience. That decision to abandon the corporate path was a gift in disguise because Dad devoted his life around his family and through farming we were blessed in having Dad always present to us.

Doug always had an intellectual appetite. His intellectual journey began with his schooling at St Josephs in Hastings and St Patricks College Silverstream (45'-49') where he joined the debating club and took part in the annual speech competitions "Gallagher Cup". Following his secondary schooling he continued to participate in the debating scene through Young Farmers where he teamed up with his brother Selwyn and they enjoyed some regional success.

He was well versed in world affairs; he had subscriptions to Time Magazine; National Geographic and of course the local newspaper. He loved the power of oratory and the great speeches that have shaped our world and for which we continue to gain inspiration. His collection covered speeches by Martin Luther King, Jack Kennedy's Congressional speech where he issued the challenge to send a man to the moon and Robert Kennedy's famous spontaneous speech in Indianapolis upon learning the news of Dr King's assassination.

In the early years of his adulthood, he ferociously devoured sport... especially rugby and athletics. The pinnacle for him was attending the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. His love of sport and the expression of human achievement on the field endured though his early courting days when Mum was driven up and down the North Island attending key sporting events.

Dad's life is bookended by the two great loves of his life Dorothy and Kathy. ...being the special women who have shared and shaped his journey in two quite different ways and periods of his life.

Dorothy

My Mum, Dorothy Margaret Ryan with whom he started his family provided a sort of *Ying Yang* environment. For me Dad was a man of the 'word'. His sharp intellect, his prodigious memory, his love of conversation versus Mum's corporal nature; her compelling empathy, her smile, her inner contentedness. Each had their unique gifts and distinct roles but through their marriage they were stronger and greater than the sum of their individual gifts.

As kids we became immersed in the discussions that ensued between Mum & Dad as they sought to fix the world's problems....sometimes a discussion would be ignited when Mum would suddenly offer an expletive from the kitchen following some item featuring on the TV news. This could develop into full blown discussions ...my mother often shot from the hip while my father preferred positions and opinions that were reasoned, logical and fact based. One indelible memory I have is that of a TV debate at the height of the 1981 ill-fated springbok tour of NZ - between John Minto (spokesman for the protestors) and Bob Walton – Commissioner of Police. Even though Dad had a clear position on the tour he valued the way each of them presented their case. From that example I came to understand that informed debate was more valuable than the holding of entrenched positions.

Dad treasured and savoured all of the discussions he shared with Mum, he often claimed nothing was left unsaid and unshared between them.

New Guinea

Dad's overseas adventures began with his trip to the 56 Olympics but it perhaps flowered with their honeymoon to Fiji in 1959.

There glowing in the warmth of their honeymoon Mum and Dad hatched a yearning to perhaps live in a pacific island setting. This desire took seed when in 1968 they applied for a role in New Guinea through the organisation Catholic Overseas Volunteer Service. It was to manage a Copra & Coco plantation for the diocese of New Ireland... so off we went as a young family for three years.

It's hard to process and understand the bravery and generosity of that decision....to devote 3 years of their lives in their mid-thirties and taking their young family into a totally alien environment. Dad would joke that he got the job because as an orchardist someone obviously felt he might know a thing or two about trees! While the experience was hugely transformative for all of us, I can also imagine it wasn't without a level of anxiety for my parents. Luckily our family escaped any health emergencies or accidents. As kids we were probably given a generous amount of freedom and license to explore our surroundings. Warren spent endless hours fishing out on the reef. Sometimes reflecting on the things you get up to as kids I'm surprised we didn't cause more mayhem...teasing poisonous reef snakes; forwarding swollen rivers, jumping off the copra boat and swimming ashore etc....

Dad & Mum developed deep and binding friendships with the local people. The mat that covers his coffin today is a gift from the people of Meteinge Bay Plantation. Dad in particular had to overcome a range of challenges to deliver tangible outcomes for the mission. He had to quickly learn how to become a *Boss Man*; a substitute doctor; an arbitrator, an engineer. Through his tenure and stewardship he was able to expand production, reclaiming land that the jungle had overtaken, and planting it out in coconut trees. Not really an engineer (by trade or nature) Dad delivered on some amazing projects. He installed a diesel generator and wired the house himself; built a septic tank to allow for an indoor toilet, fixed water tanks without any sophisticated tooling, taught himself how to fix outboard motors and chainsaws.... And for the record ... the house lights worked first time! But perhaps that rascally 5 horse power outboard didn't always run to its potential !! ...some journeys were longer

than others ... but it allowed him to trawl a line behind the boat and come home with a sizable fish for dinner!!

The mission used to augment the workforce on the plantation through the contracting of indentured workers from the central highlands of New Guinea. The mixing of two quite different cultures, those from the central highlands and the local coastal people did lead to some tense moments even a couple of serious brawls ...one of them ignited when a contract worker took a swing at Dad!

All in all, Dad steered the ship with great wisdom and modesty drawing on his interpersonal skills. Funny though how people through a nickname will assess some aspect of your character... Dad's nickname surfaced somewhere along the journey...probably communicated back to him via us kids. His nickname in Pidgin English was "*Face i gorla*" roughly translated as the "the man with the shaking face" ...a beautiful reference to Dad's propensity for his face to twitch and shake when he was really worked up!!!!

Dad – the Traveller /Story Teller

Mum and Dad loved their travel...by last reckoning he got to visit in excess of 80 countries. (I guess he could have given me the exact figure if I had asked Him!!) The countries they visited were mainly in the African continent, South East Asia, the sub-continent and the Middle East.

Their passion was to explore cultures that weren't necessarily European based, but rather diverse cultures where people lived simple uncomplicated lives meeting the challenges of their unique environments much as they had done for centuries. Many of you would have heard his travel tales....He told stories because he was enlivened and passionate about the diversity of peoples...It informed him on many levels about life...exemplified what true heroes were; how people adapt and meet the challenges they are faced with; eg the cruelty of corrupt political practicesbut more positively their travel experiences informed them how life can be lived simply with honour, happiness and contentment.

Dad - the communicator

Men are often accused of not communicating well. Not so Dad, he was a great communicator who over the years wrote scores of letters and diaries covering key periods of his life. Every day of our lives in New Guinea was meticulously recorded. Dad also kept a diary for each of his overseas holidays. When Warren and I were at boarding school, Dad would type a 2-3 page letter every week without fail with all the family news. This habit extended well beyond school when I moved to Auckland as a 16 year old. Each letter was a mix of family news and his reflections on life. Sometimes he would offer wise counsel and each was peppered with memories and reflections on the special moments shared as a family.

One of the great regrets of my life happened at the point I left NZ for Australia, I burnt the collection of letters he had sent to me over the years. I tried to do it with ceremony and honour. I built a small fire outside and sat in a deckchair and reread each of his letters before it was consigned to the flames. While my reasons for doing it seemed honourable at the time, I have come to realise that those letters had a value far greater. They were collectively a shining example of the imparting of wisdom and an expression of love between a father and son.

All of dad's letters from the time in New Guinea right up to the present were signed off with a Pidgin English phrase "*Mi tasol*" translated as "Only me!"

The Father, the Man

Dad perhaps by nature of his intellect was always going to play a deeper role in his children's formation once we reached the age of reason, the age where we could hold a reasonably sophisticated conversation. It goes back to that *Ying Yang* comment earlier. My memories of Dad were not of someone who revelled in coo-cooing to his young babies nor enjoyed the messiness of soiled nappies. Even when it came to toilet training of cats, at the slightest hint of a disaster unfolding under the nearby chair - Dad's handkerchief would come out covering his nose and he would issue urgent orders/instructions from a safe distance for someone else to attend to the errant kitten relieving itself.

Dad's handkerchief had two key uses; one hiding from the messiness of no 2's and secondly containing his uproarious laughter. He liked pomme humour, Ronnie Barker or the irreverence of the likes of Dave Allen... but what would really set him off were those moments where people had unfortunate mishaps!!! The sort of mishaps that Minties made famous in those TV ads called the '*Minties Moments*'. He dined out on the quirky events of life.

As Dad journeyed through life he moved from being a person holding strong black & white views to one where there was a lot more grey ...perhaps more than 50 shades worth!

He had enormous pride in his children and his extended family ...he followed all our careers and experiences with love and fervour. He celebrated our successes and supported us in our disappointments.

A Man of faith

No story of Dad would be complete without acknowledging his love for his God. I'm obviously not privy to all ...suffice to say he had a steadfast love, bond and relationship with his God. He was a man of his generation where the community of faith was the bedrock his faith was built upon.

After he left school Dad spent three years in the Marist seminary at Green Meadows. This was a period of deep influence and some long friendships ensued however Holy Orders was not the path he chose.

We were a relatively typical catholic family, prayers (ie a decade of the rosary was recited each night before bed)...this was a practice that Dad continued privately after we left home. Dad was a generous man and his approach to alms giving and prayer was very much in the spirit of Matthew 6 (praying in private and not letting the left hand know what the right hand was doing). The causes he contributed to were very private....but he supported young men in their seminary studies and many other causes.

Dad was not afraid of death. He actually came perilously close to drowning in New Guinea. We had seen his little speed boat returning from having visited a neighbouring plantation. As he was entering our bay around the outer reef a severe squall descended. We were not aware that he had decided to turn around and backtrack trying to outrun it. He failed in his attempt and the boat capsized in heavy seas some distance off the reef. After the upturned dinghy began floating further out to sea, he and one other occupant on the boat were forced to swim to safety. While I would be horrified to go through such an experience...for Dad it was instructive about the reality of having to face death. After giving up several times and being dragged down and ingesting sea water, he recounted how peaceful he felt in the decision of consigning himself to his fate. It was not his own sense of survival that forced him to struggle back to the surface but rather a commitment towards his young family. He dedicated 10 strokes for each of us in a rotation that eventually landed him on an outer reef close to where his companion was. There he rested *stark naked* until he had enough strength to complete the swim to shore. His companion tore his *lap-lap* in half and the two of them made their way home ...turning up in the rain Dad looking like a drenched undernourished Tarzan.

Thanks & tribute to Kathy

I want to pay a particular tribute to Kathy his companion and wife in the second half of Dad's life. Kathy has been a quiet presence. Just as Mum and Dad had a special *ying & yang*Kathy has brought her special gifts into a relationship that has seen Dad mellow and soften as he has matured into his golden years. Soon after Kathy and Dad married, Dad's Mum (Nana Berta) joined them in their home. Nana was nurtured late into her 90s and celebrated her 100th year with them. She died at 103 her last years spent at *Waiapu* where she received more specialist care. While Kathy attended many of Nana's corporal needs Dad could engage Nana's sharp wit and repartee. A simple groundhog day routine soon developed of listening each day to repeated stories; sayings and jokes...he offering the same responsesall of it delivered as if it was freshly minted. As a couple Dad and Kathy were able to offer Nana a happy, engaging and stimulating environment. Kathy's gift of devoted care and love has enabled Dad to end his days in the surroundings of his home, the loving environment that has given him so much peace and stability.

I wish to also acknowledge the loving care offered by Naomi and Paige in his last weeks, the role of the medical fraternity; the many years that he received treatment and care from the Hutt and Hastings Plastics units who worked on his poor old headand more recently his surgeon Dr Nelson Wang and all the staff at Hastings hospital through to the home showering provided by the Access Health staff (especially Liz) and those from the Cranford Hospice (especially the lovely Jacinda)and indeed the constant support and care of family and friends along with the broader Havelock North faith community. It has been a great blessing for all of the family for which we are all truly thankful and grateful.

Conclusion

Today I have sought to shine a light on the story of Doug Begley....in much the same way as he read his books, we have explored some early chapters and some of the latter chapters and jumped around a little bit in the middle!

I had the privilege of spending a period of time with him recently. He was a man totally at peace with his fate. In a short email he shared his desires and guidance around some of the formalities of his funeral arrangements and today's requiem mass. The readings and music are his choices.

In that email He also set me a small challenge. He invited me (and I extend that invitation to all of you) to give thought to some particular aspect of Doug's life...whether that be bound up in a *word*....a special *memory*...a special *thought*... and in savouring that *thought, word or memory* we continue to give honour to his life while hopefully enriching our own.

Doug's story is of a rich life, a life lived with unerring integrity, great generosity, love and devotion to his family & friends. It's the life of Douglas Guerin Begley...who to each one of us has been either a friend; a Gramps, a father-in-law; uncle; brother-in-law, brother, husband, Father...it's the story of my Dad and friend.

May he Reside in God's Love

©Delivered at Doug's Requiem Mass By **David Begley** (7/7/2023)