

Eulogy (delivered by Andrew Gunn 22nd April 2022)

James Allan Baikie Gunn

Good morning friends and family. Thank you all for coming today to celebrate the memory of our father, Jim Gunn.

Dad passed away this month on the 5th of April, and it is our privilege to be here today to honour and remember his legacy to us. We treasure the memory of his love and trust in us as family and friends.

Dad was hardworking, empathetic and compassionate. He gave his time and energy to others generously and unselfishly.

We could be confident that he would always be there for support, be it emotionally, financially or by any other means he could.

Dad had faith in people. He reserved judgement, sought for connection and listened to people with concern offering gentle advice only when others were ready to accept it. In this way he taught us to be better people and in turn, to nurture and encourage others to follow as an example. Throughout his life he did his best in protecting and supporting his family and friends for which we will always be grateful. And he was a proud member of Clan Gunn, working enthusiastically with Malcolm Gunn in ensuring the Gunn heritage was firmly established.

Almost one hundred years ago, on 5th February 1923, Dad was born into a world that is vastly different now. There was no television or internet of course and Australia was still recovering from the devastation of the First World War. Nevertheless, Dad's early childhood was happily spent at the beach in Largs Bay, making land yachts and canoes, learning conjuring tricks. He was exhibiting signs of his creative nature. Nowadays, in the age of YouTube we would call him a Maker.

Dad was a peace-loving man, but he wasn't a pacifist. When war broke out, he intended to follow in the footsteps of more than one member of the clan and join the navy for the duration. However, the navy didn't like his flat feet and eyesight. He was sent off to the munitions factory at Hendon instead, loathing the work for the inherent violence it represented.

Fortunately, in 1942, a pivotal moment occurred in Dad's life when he was asked to consider teaching as a career. As such he joined with Colin Thiele, Geoffrey Dutton and other members of Adelaide's literary and theatrical scene of the day. Dad had discovered his vocation.

In following his vocation, Dad taught in a series of schools – as a single man at Oodnadatta and Mount Cooper. Then, when married, he taught at Riverton, Largs Bay Primary School and Payneham Demonstration School. He went on as principal at Wirrulla, Mount Compass, Parndana, Seaton North, Ethelton and Black Forest. A talented and natural teacher, Dad left his mark as an innovative educationalist, improving the structure and pedagogical culture of schools and communities everywhere he went.

As Dad's career developed, so did his personal life. Soon after the war, Mum and Dad met through the Presbyterian Fellowship Association and married. First born Kath soon arrived, followed by Andrew Helen and Mandy over the next decade. Mum was the love of Dad's life, as was he for hers. They worked well together as a team, demonstrated by the fact that for nine years of her life as a teacher (some of Senior Infant Mistress status), Mum's boss was Dad – at school.

At one stage of his career, after finishing his term as principal at Parndana Area School Dad was granted a World Education Fellowship Scholarship and went to the United Kingdom and Western Europe to study their methods of teaching reading. On his return he went to Ethelton Primary Schools and was heavily involved in setting up the Reading Centre. The Reading Centre was eventually closed down due to lack of financial support from the government of the day. Dad also spent a year working in head office organising the International World Education Fellowship Conference. He found office politics an unsavoury experience. Somewhat disillusioned, Dad turned down an offer of Inspector of Schools after that.

After retiring early from teaching, Dad's interest in conjuring opened up a second vocation for him. He developed a business in his workshop in the back yard of Butler Avenue which he named as Jim's Magic. Here he applied himself to a renewed interest in performing magic and manufacturing apparatus for conjurers, one of whom was world-renowned magician Raymond Crowe. Dad was an active member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. When he finally laid down his wand he was awarded the Order of Merlin – given for long service to the international community of magicians.

He taught magic to many young people and was delighted when one of his students, Benjamin Ninio, who went on to do his army service in Israel, was able to put it to peaceful purposes. While on active service, if things looked like getting out of hand Benjamin would pull out a pocket trick and calm the stone throwing youngsters by doing it for them. Dad saw that as a proper use of the magician's art.

Still a teacher at heart.

Dad read widely, with little time for television. Whenever the opportunity arose, he would pick up a novel and relax into the world of detective fiction or magazines on woodworking

or gardening. Later in life he developed a keen interest in philosophy and in particular modern interpretations of Christian beliefs.

Dad was a true polymath. He had a keen interest in a wide range of subjects ranging from gardening, electronics, conjuring and carpentry. He was president of the Electronic Organ society and was on the committee of the Wood Group. He was a lay preacher, initiated by invitation when he met the Reverend Lance Shilton while teaching at Wirrulla. He had a keen interest in Victorian and early Edwardian entertainment and would give public lectures on the subject, allowing him to indulge in his passion for music hall and other jokes.

Still the teacher at heart.

Dad had visitors throughout his stay at Japara. Father David was in and out regularly – and they usually discussed wood work. Dad believed that carpentry was a particularly suitable hobby for a priest. Gordon Hervey and Peter Nicholls were regular and much appreciated visitors. Sister Pauline's visits from Cabra delighted him too. His friend and fellow magician Peter Thorpe was also a very welcome regular visitor. There were other visitors as well. Helen and Kath in particular, aware that some residents had no visitors, have been grateful for the support Dad was given. He also kept in touch with extended family and Kath's godfather Leo Barnes, who had been a regular visitor until forced to give up driving.

We will miss him dreadfully but we acknowledge that we are fortunate in that he was with us far longer than many fathers. We are also fortunate that he was alert and retained his sense of humour until the end.

Our memories of Dad are precious gifts. When we think of him, we should be inspired and feel blessed to have known him. His guidance and wisdom to us as family, and his sense of humour and compassion as a friend will always be there to give us strength when we need it.

Ave James Alan Baikie Gunn.

May you rest in peace.