

DONALD JOHN HODDER: ST.ALBANS EAST HEADMASTER, INSPIRATIONAL TEACHER

Hodder Eulogy



St. Albans East State School
1959

Donald John Hodder passed away at Berwick on 24 June 2015, leaving behind a wife, Aileen, their children, Michael, Mary and John, and eleven grandchildren.

Welcome all and thank for attending on behalf of my mother, my brothers, my sister and myself, and for your efforts to be here today, to help us mark my father's passing and celebrate his wonderful life. He fought a long and hard battle with cancer and is now at peace.

Each of you here knew dad in your own special way, and have your own memories that describe this man. I hope that, in this small eulogy that I present, you will recognise some part of the man that we all knew, that I called dad. Dad was a great father to us and husband to mum.

As many here knew he started his career as a school teacher, then Principal, then Inspector of schools. He made great friends from the teacher fraternity, many for life. He married his

bride Aileen in 1955 from the Western district after meeting in Mudgegonga (Myrtleford) and settled in St Albans. Aileen and Don Hodder's house was in MacArthur Avenue, St Albans, 1950s. From there they moved to Upper Beaconsfield then finally to a small village called Berwick.

He returned to university later to complete a degree where he picked up his love of the German language and modern European history. You could not fault dad on this knowledge of this subject from the Renaissance period to the Reformation and theology; he was brilliant. He was always striving to expand his knowledge because he had a real thirst. He was constantly researching and always had a book of C K Chesterton at arms length. He was a wealth of knowledge! It astounded me.

His interest in these areas led him on trips overseas where he made lifelong friends, in England, Europe but mainly Austria, especially a place called Gratz, a place he adored. His support and encouragement to us in all we set out to achieve when growing up was faultless. He could not do enough for us, ever!! He saw the importance and secure employment that was available in teaching and encouraged this and as a result three out of four of us children became teachers. I slipped the net!!! I didn't want a life of writing lists and stick-it notes to remind me to do things as dad loved doing. I can still see the note next to the outside flood light switch saying ... "outside flood light". That was typical dad, he always had our concerns first and foremost trying to make our lives as easily as possible.



Aileen and Don Hodder's house in MacArthur Avenue, St Albans, 1950s.

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I have many great memories of dad especially during my childhood growing up at 10 Edwards Street, Berwick, and after speaking with my siblings many memories came back to me that I had forgotten. Dad enjoyed his sport, in fact most things outdoors playing his football as a young man with Bairnsdale and boxing. Dad took great enjoyment throwing the gloves on Tim and I in the top yard and then letting us "go for it". Thumping each other, bloody noses, mum screaming to stop, dad laughing and Mick encouraging it to go on!! Good times!! We would watch as dad would instruct us how to throw a straight left or quickly switch to southpaw to throw off your combatant using Mick as his assistant. It wasn't long before student started to outfox the instructor as things got a bit serious dad would often be the one left with the blood nose.

Summer meant cricket!! And our top block was perfect for that. I hate to think how many games of cricket we had. Long hot evenings, Dad displaying his prowess with the ball or bat. Or kicking the footy, or swinging a racquet of some type. It was this involvement and encouragement from dad I believe that led to all of us leading healthy and active lives, which we are extremely grateful for as are his grand children.



Don Hodder with Grade 4, St Albans East Primary, 1957.

Dad had a regular saying “always look after your heath” In the very early days, as kids dad would finish dinner and occasionally on a Friday evening would go see Dr Johnson to look after his health. Very impressive!! Took a little while to work out Dr Johnston was in fact Mr Barry Johnson, the publican of the Berwick Hotel! Dad’s sense of humour! It was this sense of humour that explained his leaning in politics and why in the ’70s we had a rooster was called Gough and a cow called Germaine. If today if he had a guinea pig or peacock I’m tipping dad would be looking at names such as Julia or Kevin.

Dad very much enjoyed good quality comedy shows: Dave Allen, Faulty Towers, Dad’s Army. He loved the brilliantly funny Ripping Yarns, and It Ain’t Half Hot Mum!! He enjoyed the British being able to have a laugh at themselves. I forgot to mention Benny Hill!!!

Dad also had a no-nonsense, get-it-done approach when required. None so more impressed me when as a child, dad was frustrated by a young inexperienced doctor at a local hospital refusing to seriously treat my very ill sister with chronic asthma and arguing over the refusal to discharge her. Dad was like “watch me” bundled up Mary and drove fast into the Royal Children’s where the staff praised him for his quick actions as any further delay would have been dire for Mary. Or the time when I was very young, at the beach and swimming was not my strong forte, in fact I’m sure I couldn’t swim. I was being a little ansy about getting in the water so dad just picked me up and piffed me in!! Problem solved. (My therapist says I’m making very good progress.)

One thing was apparent growing up with dad, he had two clear and distinctive sides. The responsible, dedicated, educated, hard working “conservative” father and the lad from East Gippsland. The closer dad got to his home town of Nowa Nowa the more “carefree and laid back” he became. The wild wild ... East and I think dad took advantage of this as I will explain. We recalled the many great adventures we all had with dad and the boat which he loved especially to Cape Conran. Tim reminded me of one of our first launches in Port Phillip Bay. Dad had a habit of wearing these brown and white thongs which became extremely slippery even at the sight of water. With us kids looking on excited with anticipation, dad has hastily prepared the boat for launch, jumped into the driver’s seat and commence to reverse, slipping off the brake he has not only launched the boat but the trailer and most of the car!! And the adventure with the boat had begun ...

As a young man in growing up in Nowa Nowa I'm sure, after the chores were done there wasn't much to do except fish and shoot stuff and I have a sneaking suspicion this is where dad inherited a distinct dislike for cormorants (fish stealers), along with his admiration of the gun!!! Which always seemed to appear out of nowhere. My bother Mick was driving the boat on this occasion as dad was at the stern of the boat with his back towards us staring down a flock of evil cormorants, taking aim!!! Mick had put the throttle down, the boat took off and dad's gone arse over with the gun in the air!!! Scared the hell out of dad and us!!!. What was he thinking, boat, water, kids and a gun!! East Gippsland!! No rules!! I'm tipping mum doesn't know anything about this!!

We have great memories as a family staying at Cape Conran which we did year after year and were fortune enough to have the use of the Lynn's house (more like a miner's shack really) two to three time a year, right on the beach, and it was here where we would often encounter the odd snake and travelling along the coast road, dad would loved to perform his famous manoeuvre taking great delight in explaining it to you as he skidded over a snake in the big old XP falcon. He did this with much concentration very similar to approaching a flock of cormorants. Then quick as a flash he would be out, a gun would appear from nowhere and us kids would be frantically looking for cover or concealment.

Dad loved Conran as we all did and much quality family time was spent there, be it spearing for fish or simply by the fire place, cooking toast over the hearth. It was here where dad taught us how to chop wood (using that same axe!!), light fires, tie fishing lines, clean and gut fish, or simply explaining the Southern Aura lights as we stood on the back verandah looking out to the ocean some nights. It was a place of endless education and adventure ... with dad!! Just some of the many memories I look back on now that I and my family will always have as you will have your own memories of Don.

Dad instilled in me (as he did with my siblings) many virtues that I am eternally grateful for and will carry on through my life. He was always a Pillar of strength for all of us. Having a read of some cards and condolences on line recently, one described dad as Scholar, Gentleman, Friend. He certainly was this!! And more!!

I remember reading a quote from an early influential bishop, I think it was, don't ask me why I was reading quotes from a bishop, I have no idea!! Anyway, it went something along the lines of: Life is not about the money you make or the status you achieve, but it's the people who you meet along the way of your journey and the way you have enriched their lives by the things you do. Or something similar!! ... and dad certainly did this!! We will miss you dad.

John Hodder, 2015.



Donald John Hodder, 2006.



Don Hodder with Grade 5A, St Albans East Primary, 1959.



Don Hodder with class re-enactment, 2006.



Don Hodder with former students, 50th anniversary, 2006.



Don Hodder with former students, 50th anniversary, 2006.