



Geoffrey Alphonsus Chewing: A Wonderful Life

Eulogy, Broulee Memorial Gardens, 14/2/2013

We come together today to celebrate the life and legacy of Geoffrey Alphonsus Chewing. In writing these words I recall the movie **It's A Wonderful Life** and A.B. Facey's well know Australian autobiography **A Fortunate Life**.

In the movie an angel comes to earth to remind a simple man of the great good he has done for his family and his community.

A Fortunate Life is an ironical title, for A.B. Facey's autobiography was one of triumph over tough circumstances.

Both these elements: a man with a touch of doing simple goods and triumph over adversity are there in Geoff's life. These attributes now carry on in Geoff's son Rob and daughters Ann and Joan and their partners and children.

The Chewying family and the lines that come through Geoffrey to his family are like a great story of Australian history.

Geoffrey's Aboriginal heritage through his mother Regina his grandmother Jane Duren, his great grandmother Catherine Sutton, his great great grandmother Jane Cissy Nimebor and his great great great grandmother known only as Leitia is a very proud and illustrious one.

We know that grandmother Jane petitioned King George V for better education for Aboriginal people on the South Coast and Moruya in 1926, six years before the now very famous Henry Cooper did so in Victoria. Jane was passionate and strong and a founding member of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association. Geoffrey recalls grandmother Jane and Percy Davis one of his cousins speaking fluently in the Djurga language.

In 1926 Jane was fighting for the rights of her children and grand children to attend public school in Bateman's bay.

I expect one day there may be a statue of Jane to attest to her wonderful spirit and courage. But most importantly today we know that Geoffrey and his family have that spirit.

Perhaps the family recognised it in Geoffrey's famous stubborn-ness and his incredible ability to be quite unrelenting when he knew he was right, especially about Aboriginal rights. But this was not expressed in a showy or public way, Geoffrey would always take things on in a personal determined way that left no-one in doubt of his Aboriginal heritage.

So it is worth reflecting her on Geoffrey's Aboriginal past.

Let us also pause to think of Jane Cissy Niembour, Catherine Sutton and Leilani. Their marriages and lives were equally remarkable as Janes and they spent most of their lives around this Broulee area.

Very close to this spot, (just 4 kilometres away, today you can find this spot, if you drive down George

Bass drive to the mouth of Candalagan creek) in the earliest days of the Australan colony in 1842 a vessel, **The Rover**, was breaking up on the sandbar in heavy seas.

The early English settlers on the shore were completely ignorant of surf and could do nothing. But the Aboriginal people who must have been camped there, came together locked hands in the surf and saved every person on The Rover. Geoffrey's great grandmother Jane Cissy Niembor was 21 when this occurred and it was her relatives and maybe even herself that would have been in the water. This surely created a great bond between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community and I see and feel that quiet spirit, acceptance and endurance in Geoffrey and his family. Is it any wonder that Rob notes his father was so confident and at home in the sea?

Many words could be written about Geoffrey's proud Aboriginal heritage. But this was something he was modest about and quiet to assert.

Then of course we have the other remarkable line in Geoffrey's family namely the Chinese Chu Yings. This story of the marriage of Geoffrey's mother Regina, Jane's daughter with Albert Chewying might have come out of Broome where it's well known that behind what was known as the common gate, love and commerce between Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian and Aboriginal people flourished! But of course this was a story of NSW, Braidwood and the goldfields.

Geoffrey ran The Monterey cafe in Braidwood for many years. It sounds to me very much like a Chinese trade store and Rob tells me the story of how his father employed an Aboriginal woman who served tables with bare feet and created a stir which left his father completely undeterred. Geoffrey's canniness and ability to see new trends in the passing trade and the need for what we now call fast food was legendary.

Rob writes:

"Dad lived in Braidwood with pop and nan at the age of 7 he lost an eye , he use to go rabbiting with his brother they leaded a very simple life dad use to talk about the Brilies and the place they had at Moruya near the airport , he also

spoke about playing cricket and camping there as a child and always felt sorry for how the council moved the Brilies into town. This is where his passion for fishing developed and the connection to the sea developed he helped with nets and the mullet run at Easter so that he could take fish back to the shop to sell.

Dad was conscripted into the national service , in the national service he was assigned as a sniper , he talked about the time he was shooting targets to pass a shooting test , his mate next to him used to struggle in shooting distance and dreaded the thought of the test as he would become black and blue from the recoil of the 303, dad put a quick pattern into his own target quite easily passing , then asked his mate to throw him his magazine , dad was a bit of a larikan he proceeded to load his mates magazine into his own rifle after the Seargent walked passed , once again he fired off a quick succession of rounds into the mates target that quite easily passed him.

As a child I remember my father as a very hard worker 12 hrs a day 7 days a week working in the shop , at one point he had 12 people working in the shop employing kids from the local community we as kids either worked in the shop after school or over the weekend.

Dad and mum were avid church goers , every Sunday we would attend mass and anytime church was mentioned he would start talking about the time the acting priest approached him and said that he could afford to by a pew , I think dad was proud he could do that.

Dad had three major passions, the love affair with his wife of 49 years Mona, fishing and shooting. He would take time off from the shop to practice clay pigeon shooting and

once again taking to it like a duck to water becoming a top marksman in trap shooting , he traveled to competitions with his brother Eric (recently passed away.) Dad in the clay pigeon (trap shooting) scene was a crack shot in wind , no one could get near him, if dad turned up on a windy day

other shooters would go home.

Dad was gung ho or very confident in the sea, he felt at home fishing at sea but also felt comfortable and at home in the bush.

I will remember my father being passionate about family and what is just, I believe that up until the day my father died that he was true to himself."

Anne writes

"Dad lost his eye playing darts with his brother. He was holding the dartboard in front of his face while Eric threw the darts at the board. He thought Eric had finished and lowered the board. Unfortunately he hadn't finished and that dart pierced Dad's eye. Dad spent many weeks in the Sydney Eye Hospital and lost the sight in his eye. Interestingly the other eye compensated and he became a crack rifle shooter. In the National Service he excelled at shooting and was considered a marksman. Once when practicing at Singleton Training Base the soldier next to him was having a terrible time hitting the target. The Sargeant was unforgiving and made the guy continue which bruised his shoulder so bad he could hardly shoot. Dad told him to

wait until the Sargeant was not looking and he would hit the target for him, which of course he did and the guy was extremely grateful. He loved Clay pigeon shooting and we spent many weekends at local and district competitions. As kids he twice made us walk miles back into town. Once was because we filled the petrol tank with stones from the side of the road while he went off into the paddock shooting rabbits. The other time when the truck broke down in the bush near Warri Bridge which was over the Shoalhaven River. He told us to go to the main road and hitch a ride into town and get help, so we did. We thought nothing of it. He expected us to work in the shop from an early age, and if you didn't work you packed the fizzy drink bottles or packed shelves. Whether we were male or female there was no distinction. We chopped and stacked wood, used a rifle,

skinned rabbits, chased foxes, gutted and scaled fish and knew how to use the correct tackle and bait your own line, undo any unbelievably tangled fishing lines and row and drive a boat. We all mowed the lawn and knew how to use all sorts of tools. We spent more time learning outdoor skills than home skills, although he was also a very good chinese cook. We were probably the only kids in Braidwood in the 60's eating home cooked chinese food, vegetables that were foreign to most locals."

Geoff's daughter Joan has of course gone onto great things in nursing. Joan works at Braidwood hospital as nursing unit manager in palliative care, her children Mark and Renee spent many a time in the bush with Geoff hunting . Renee is currently working at Tenant Creek as a teacher with the Indigenous community there, Mark as a diesel mechanic in Canberra carries on his grandfather Albert's heritage. Grandfather Albert was an exceptional mechanic as to is Mark.

In this short time today I can only hint at a life well lived but I think we can say without any fear of contradiction that Geoffrey Chewing lived a very wonderful, fortunate life and that his spirit and qualities carry on his family, his community and in his friends.