

Weeks before Dad passed away, I wrote him a letter. After realising that my siblings had also communicated similar sentiments to Dad, it was suggested by Dad and siblings that this letter might be read today, as a collective reflection on behalf of us. So this is an edited version of my letter.

Dear Dad

After 41 years, I want to say thank you for being my Dad. I'm not sure exactly how to express this gratitude to you, so I have decided to tell you all the things I love and think about you!! To me, there is no one way to describe you, but many. You are like a big, tough police officer crossed with a big, fluffy teddy-bear. In no particular order, here are some random thoughts we have about you that make us smile:

- Soft sheets and towels. How DO you get them so soft??
- The way you mumble, EXACTLY like Pop used to!
- You driving the green Cortina wearing your terry-towelling bucket hat.
- You ironing your undies, and rows of perfectly ironed shirts on coat-hangers.
- How no one is allowed to stack the dishwasher at your house because it has to be done your way.
- When I was playing under 14s for Bulleen and living in Camperdown, remember how you and Mum drove me 3 hours to get to Melbourne every Friday or I would catch the train. One Friday afternoon, you and I pulled up to Camperdown station in the Police car, as the train was already leaving the station. Without saying a word, you started heading towards the Princes Highway. Fortunately for me you didn't turn on the sirens but we still beat the train to Colac.
- Waking up one Christmas morning as a kid and there was a massive swing set with 6 individual swings concreted into the ground in our backyard. I knew the magic of Christmas existed because it appeared out of nowhere! Same with the trampoline another year.
- Going to Mitre 10 with you and my siblings while Mum worked on Saturdays which was so boring, and I thought was a way to torment your children. Olivia tells me, however, that she thoroughly enjoyed those Mitre 10 Saturdays, which is probably why she has her own tool-belt and power drill.

- You would always give us gold coins for treats at basketball stadium canteens across Melbourne. Mum only gave us silver but in fairness she was always handing out money. Olivia says gold meant the difference between getting a Bubble-O-Bill or a plain old Zooper Dooper.
- You're the only person Andrew and I have ever felt 100% safe with in a car. This is a particularly high praise coming from our Andrew for drives racing cars as a hobby. We also never understood why you had to take the back streets to places, saying "Dad can't you just go the normal way?" I put it down to a policeman thing.

One of the qualities we love most about you Dad is your courage. We think these things took a lot of courage:

- To go and find your Dad as a young man
- To overcome a terminal cancer diagnosis in your forties
- To serve as a police officer, soldier and peace-keeper
- To come out, and start a new life
- And to fight cancer again.

Another thing we love about you Dad is how family orientated you are, not only with us kids and grandkids but your relatives, the Sharps and Andersons. Your grandchildren love you 'Poppy-Sharp', and as they grow, they will always have an understanding of who you are and what you did in your life. We love how you take pride in our family's military history, and Pop Anderson and Pop Weatherhead's service. We know how connected you are to your peace keeping pals and how you have cherished and honoured Pop's ANZAC legacy.

You may disguise it with gruffness but we love your big heart and your community mindedness. Apart from law breakers, bad drivers and some categories of the general public, you love people, and go out of your way to help others. The committees, sport, the church, visiting police cancer patients, helping refugees and generally being anywhere you could lend a hand and your expertise. You have an incredible capacity for service to the community. WHY did you do all that? You might say "to make sure it was done properly" which would be true, but I think your love of service to others and making a difference played the bigger part.

One of things I recall saying to you A LOT over the years is “Dad, you just can’t SAY that to people!” to many of the socially, culturally, politically or just-in-general inappropriate comments or rants you are prone to. I have asked you this many times, but once again, what is it EXACTLY that you do at church?!

I am so grateful for the 13 years we spent together in Canberra. And you were my favourite person to have at a Caps game. The Caps were probably just as important to you as they were to me, and you shared highs and lows with us.

One of the greatest things we appreciate about you is how you supported us to pursue our interests in life. You (and Mum) were the ideal sporting parents. I always remember after every game we played as kids, there was never a grilling about how we played, or talking to coaches and all of that rubbish, it was just “good game darling”. No pressure, just free to play and enjoy our sport or whatever else we were doing.

We have always known that you were there for us, as children and as adults. We know that we can tell you anything or talk to you about anything, without judgement. You gave us the skills to grow up and make lives of our own. Whenever we had big decisions to make, you would never tell us what to do, but would listen and be unbiased if you gave advice. Annoying at times because often I wanted you to tell me what to do, but you seemed to know that I had to work it out for myself which helped me become independent.

You are the perfect Dad to us. When we are around you we feel safe, relaxed, like a comfortable peace is just there and we can simply ‘be’. We have a lifetime of memories and love from you that will last us forever. Thank you for being the best Dad we could ever want – reliable, strong, supportive, funny, predictably grumpy, courageous and unconditionally loving.

Thank you for everything. We love you.

Eleanor

On behalf of my siblings and the rest of my family, thank you for coming today to remember and celebrate Dad. He was a proud father to Andrew, David, Olivia and I, father-in-law to Stef, Liz, Jai and Brett, Grandfather to Jayda, Camrin, Khane, Nate, Claudia, Luca and Ethan and great-grandfather to Ryhs, and a new great-grand child on the way.

In the week before Dad passed, there were many precious moments that I will never forget. The love between Dad and his beloved Chris. Seeing Andrew say good-bye, later telling me "He wasn't just my Dad, he was my mate".

And finally, during a moment whilst sitting with Dad in the days before he passed, Olivia penned the following very personal short reflection, which I convinced her to let me share with you:

Sitting here next to you while you sleep, watching your chest go up and down, thinking soon. Soon. Grateful. Proud. Peace. Love. Fulfillment. Courage. I miss you already. Did I tell you everything I needed to? Did I listen to everything I needed to?

I could listen to your stories for hours. The stories you told that painted vivid pictures of time in the army, the police force, as a peace keeper, your youth, my youth. The bravery, the sadness, the hilarity and the history - all of them making me really see and understand you more, and think wow, you have lived some life. This man is MY dad.

But my favourite story of all, is the one about you, sharing your stories with me, over a bottle of wine. Of all the things you ever did, however brave, compassionate, or completely mad, the best thing you did was be our dad.