

Graeme Lewis

When advised of today's requiem I wrote in my calendar – funeral Graeme Lewis. I later crossed that out and wrote Celebration Graeme Lewis. My friends, despite our profound sadness and grief today we are here to celebrate a life well lived, a remarkable man who touched many of us over the decades. To know Graeme Lewis was to know the Territory – who we are, our hopes and aspirations and what's worth fighting for.

In the Christian tradition we believe that we are on a longer journey and today is part of that. Graeme was a believer. We often talked about such matters notwithstanding we belonged to different churches.

My friends I am not here to talk about the CLP Stalwart so described on the front page of the NT News, the man who helped define the Party since its foundation - others will do that. But I want to get this firmly on the public record. Graeme gave unstinting service and devotion to his political tribe. He at times suffered rejection and criticism from within yet he never gave up on us. In my view he was on occasion unappreciated and let down by others, yet it never dented his enthusiasm and

commitment - I suspect, much to Nora's annoyance. I reckon if you asked him how he wanted to go out he would have said with that wicked grin, on my feet serving it up to them at Central Council.

Graeme was my friend, colleague, at times advisor and mentor. We spent a good deal of time sitting around talking and drinking. We spent even more time drinking and talking. We had fun. A weekend at Channel Point was not about the fishing and crabbing but rather fixing the Territory's and Australia's problems. Like Statler and Waldorf of the Muppets we shared cantankerous opinions and a penchant for heckling. Whether it was at a CLP meeting, at the local coffee shop, my balcony at Myilly or sitting on the boat in the Daly River we had plenty to talk about. We didn't always agree but what was clear was that Graeme had a great and enduring passion for the Territory and everything that makes up this unique place we Territorians call home. His passion for the Territory was matched by his concern and regard for individuals that mattered to him. On the Friday before that fateful weekend Central Council meeting he rang me while driving to Howard Springs for the evening function. He

was grilling me on how my health was travelling. At the end of February, I had acquired a pacemaker and Graeme had appointed himself my personal trainer, counsellor and consultant physician. Aided by Dr Google he was full bottle on everything I should be doing. These were regular consultations. We spoke for 15 minutes and what struck me yet again was that he was more concerned about me than I was. This was the Graeme Lewis I knew.

His reach in the Territory was extraordinary. It would be easier to write down who he didn't know rather than who he knew from east to west north to south. During the week I fielded many phone calls, text messages and emails from people who wanted to share with me their Graeme Lewis connection. I thought I knew everything about him but not quite. Look around today's congregation, the number of you who have travelled from the far reaches of Australia to be here in support of Nora and the family. However, how many of you knew he played the violin? I did only because I came home one afternoon with Graeme to find my daughter Madeleine remonstrating with Josie as to why she hated the violin and her teacher

whereupon Graeme picked up the instrument and started to play it. It was enough to persuade a head strong 6-year-old to give it another go. Thereafter if I ever saw him walking around with a violin case I was completely relaxed although I did suggest on occasions he should bring it to CLP meetings and leave it on his desk unopened. He subscribed to the same view as me – better to be feared than loved. One of the great lessons of politics that Graeme and I stood by is that it's not a popularity contest, it's a competency contest. There is a great story that will live in the annals of CLP history of Graeme heading to the fifth floor armed with some contemporary polling that contained worrying trends. In his attempt to deliver the message he was set upon. The contemptuous challenge thrown at him was "if they won't vote for me who will they vote for". Graeme's razor-sharp response in reply "Anyone but you". And that's exactly what happened.

He was a passionate man – I appreciated that most when we were fishing for either barra and reef fish and cat fish were running interference. He would beat the cat fish senseless with a wooden baton I kept on board. When he

was finished I would ask – “who did you have in mind Graeme”. His broad grin would be accompanied by a name and great mirth. It was time for another beer.

We are all challenged by our own mortality no matter how brave we might be. Death and taxes await us all, but it is how we are remembered that matters. As I said at the beginning we can be profoundly sad, but we should also be happy that we knew Graeme, that he touched our lives and that will give us plenty to talk about in the time ahead. Over time the legend will grow encouraged by a nostalgic view through the prism of what was good and positive about our friend. Thursday lunches will never be the same. We are a depleting group. My health care is now in the lap of the Gods and I have lost a close mate. Already in CLP circles they are asking the question “What would Lewis do?” We will miss him, we will defend his legacy, he will be remembered.