

Hello everyone

My name is Andrew Bruyn and I am proud to say I was a mate of Dick Griffiths – but then, I was a member of a big club in that regard. I'm equally proud the family has asked me to say something about their extraordinary Dad, Grandad, father-in-law and Patron.

The word legend is so overworn, but in Dick's case it fits like a glove.

The definition of a legend is it is more than a simple [story](#); it is a cultural artifact that bridges the past and present, weaving truth with imagination to shape collective memory. You didn't have to imagine with Dick – he lived a life that shaped a living legend and brought so many good things to so many people that – look around – how many are here to pay him tribute.

Yes, it's sad that we've lost Dick, but be glad of his gentle and gentlemanly touch that has brought so many together to say not “farewell”, but “well done”.

I have had many starts at putting this tribute to Dick together and each of them seemed inadequate to the task.

Think of the many words in our language to describe this bloke.

Devoted husband and father;

Loving Grandfather

Patron

Philanthropist

Benefactor

Leader

Sage counsellor

A canny and honest businessman

A community devotee

A mate.

It sums him up and you might sigh in relief and point me to my seat, but of course there's more to Dick's story.

The self-described "skinny little bugger" at 17 left his Newtown home, son of a wharfie and

union man, Paddy, and his wife Lilly and joined the Air Force. He soon moved completely across the country – a huge move in those less travelled times – to Darwin. Working on a wheelbarrow and shovel as a humble Aircraftsman, Dick was proud of his service, which lasted another six years.

Young Richard was a sportsman of note – boxing, league, soccer (his preferred code having played A-grade for Canterbury). Much later horses – some fast and some, not so – also caught his eye and his interest, but by then he could afford to dabble in the sport of kings. He spent much of his youth with his maternal grandmother, Nanna Bartlett – undoubtedly an influence on his impeccable manners.

Now, his dad being a unionist obviously didn't stick with Dick, or his only brother, Terry. Dick committed to his love of the Territory and was eventually made a life-member of the CLP. In fact, Shane Stone – one of Dick's dearest friends – said there wasn't a Chief Minister in the early days of self-government who didn't

take the benefit of Dick's sage advice. Shane couldn't be here today but will be paying tribute to Dick in far-off Queensland as we are here.

Dick's brother eventually rose to be a Minister in the Greiner Liberal government with the police and corrections portfolios. As I said, their dad's union work obviously didn't take with the household's youngsters, but despite his political affiliation, Dick never spurned people on the basis of their party trends – he was a firm mate to people from all sides of the house.

Back to our man in the Air Force.

In 1960, Dick got mugged.

A petite little girl from a prominent Darwin family, Rosemary Chin – better known to Dick's mates as “Miss World” - hit him right between the eyes.

Now the barrier of this young white man courting a Chinese princess in the day was no small thing. Her father most certainly did not approve and as for Uncle Ronnie Chin – better known as “The Flying Chinaman” for his football

prowess – he was definitely not in the know early on.

Dick often had mates pick Rose up from the family home at Stuart Park's Tang Store, among them cousin Ernie Chin. They'd then pursue their romance away from family pressure.

The skullduggery worked and the couple wed in 1961, though Rose's dad Chin Loong Tang, would not attend the wedding. Things thawed in 1962 when their first child, Brad was born. His grandfather demanded they bring him to his home and he was smitten.

That didn't mean Dick was off the hook. He apparently got every bugger of a job at the Tang store or the Chin home that was going, as he tried to win his way into his father-in-law's good books.

Daughters Tanya, Tina and Mandy followed their brother into the fold in the next several years and the daughters won their father's heart the same way as did their mother.

Brad told me he Mandy and Tanya never had a cross word with Dick – their relationships were calm for the most part. Tina – well Tina, apparently was another matter because she and her dad would have robust conversations, to say the least, because their personalities were so similar.

I recall some years ago at the Darwin Cup – a big day out for Dick – he'd always come to the Channel Nine tent for a visit while touring the course because he knew his mate Brian Measey would be with us and that meant there was a good red wine in the offing.

Dick, now comfortably armed with a glass of red, was saying hello to friends and acquaintances in the enclosure and I happened to say to him, "I've just spoken with your daughter, as it happens."

Dick looked around and said, "Which one?"

"Tina," I answered.

"Oh," he said. "Where is she?"

"In the gents toilets, over there," I said grinning.

Her dad laughed and quipped, “That’d be right.”

After leaving the Air Force in 1965 – his period of service was a matter of well-deserved pride in his life’s story -- Dick took several jobs.

He sold insurance for MLC and loved the people side of the business. He was a good distributor with Grifco for Violet Crumble and Pollywaffles and Matchbox cars and in 1973 became a silent partner in Bradlaw Agencies while working for Norris Union in sales.

It was a blessing and curse – Dick loved his work and was good at it, but found financial disaster when told in the wake of Tracy neither his house nor contents were insured.

He was dead broke.

That didn’t stop him for long – his partner in Bradlaw wanted out and was leaving town, so the silent partner was silent no more and the Cyclone left him with opportunity galore if he chose to seize it – after all, now everyone needed new fridges, stoves and TVs and Dick was just the man to supply them.

He turned adversary into a marvellous success.

In 1981 he was doing so well that he had the opportunity to join the Channel Point community. Most of the few allowed to establish there had built dongas of sorts – not Dick – he built a house of bricks and the Griffith family (especially Rose) loved their weekend getaways. After she died, his interest there waned considerably.

His business friendships and his broad experience in the sporting world by now led Dick to be an enthused Thursday lunch-club member. The Noodle House was the most frequented venue, but Dick – like a human comet – would afterward descend to his Cullen Bay home with a trail of debris behind him like a comet's tail – several of his luncheon colleagues corralled for red wine overlooking the water.

In they'd amble, with Dick in the lead, bellowing, "Miss World! Miss World!" and inevitably Rose would have a snack array lined

up to go with the reds Dick brought out for his guests.

One famed afternoon, one of the party, a near-neighbour, Kiwi-born Barry Phillips better known as Yap-Yap or Yapper, for obvious reasons was among those strongly hinted by Rose that lunch time was over because the sun had gone down. “Yeah, Dick,” says Yapper, “It’s time you went home.”

“One problem with that, Barry,” says Dick. “I AM home.”

You can imagine what type of deep and meaningful conversations were in the offing by that time of the day.

His close mates were his great joy ... people like Neville Walker of Henry Walker fame and Bob Kerr AKA Zorba, the publican of the Howard Springs Tavern, and Andrew Wilson of MGM, who couldn’t be here today but has sent his thoughts to Brad and the girls, and Shane Stone, likewise as I said unable to be here, though deeply moved by his mate’s passing.

His family, though, was his greatest joy. In 1989 he bought Shell Palmerston as an investment and travelled with the Shell group to several places overseas with Rose, and loved those trips.

He took enormous pride in joining the Carbine Club and eventually became President. I thought he would burst with pride when recently his grandson Rhys was inducted as a member, bringing three generations of Griffiths men into the organisation – a rare event anywhere and certainly a first for the Territory.

One of Dick's other interests was his deep tie with Waratahs – as a committee member, a sponsor recruit, President and Patron.

In his time he was responsible for building their famous Fannie Bay headquarters and the club donga used as dressing rooms by the oval – now home to Pearl Aged Care Facility.

In 1977, Her Majesty the Queen, the late Elizabeth the Second turned up to watch Waratahs play Saint Marys in the footy grand final.

The queen thrilled the Tahs crowd wearing red and white on the day and Tahs defeated Saints to take the flag. Dick waited for the knighthood, but it never came.

Instead he was most recently honoured by His Majesty King Charles with the Order of Australia Medal, presented to Dick in hospital by the Administrator, the Honourable David Connolly and Chief Minister, the Honourable Lia Finocchiaro. He was thoroughly chuffed.

Dick had served as a Board Member at Power and Water, Patron of Chung Wah – a white man holding that office successfully for more than 16 years – his father-in-law would have been very impressed and proud and Dick was universally known in these parts as “Uncle Dick”.

The biggest blow in Dick’s life came in 2007 when he lost Rose to cancer. He described it as a “black time” and his family and his mates – especially Andrew Wilson – became massively important in bringing him to the next part of his life.

He was a man who never blew his own trumpet – his generosity to so many people went unheralded, but he never forgot his own beginnings and the struggles he faced to become the success he achieved as a man and as a community member.

He'd smile at you, want to head for a meal and a yarn and announce another family milestone that meant more to him than any business venture, but most of all he would revel in the success of those around him and the joy he had of being home, here, where it counted to him so much – the Territory.

There are so many more things I could say about Dick that we'd never get him away from here.

I will – like all of us – miss him so much, but I can only hope that he knew the highest regard with which he was held and the love that was afforded by so many for the enrichment he brought to our lives and our community.

A champion, a gentleman and a dear mate.

Rest well Uncle Dick and don't forget to duck
when you meet your Rose.

Vale Richard Griffiths.