

## Geoff's Eulogy

**There was no prelude to her passing, and no preamble to usher in our grief.** She left us in totally unexpected circumstances, her role abruptly deleted from a script that already shone with achievement, respect, excitement, joy and love; on the cusp of another overseas adventure where she and Jim would have reunited with long-term and recent friendships, and forged new ones - so easily did they do it - and the experiences would have been enthusiastically and meticulously archived to join the already impressive array of volumes delineating their travels.

“She was someone who was **unbreakable** to me,” said a letter emailed from the other side of the globe. How true. I think we know why the writer settled on “unbreakable” - it’s because Suzanne combined a high level intelligence with the humane qualities of integrity, kindness, a sharp but generous wit and - to quote another correspondent - the ability to create a wonderful energy around people. People liked her, they honoured her, they sought her company and companionship because she inspired them. It was this rare blend of intelligence and humanity, together with the will, the determination to do positive, life-affirming things, that made her exceptional. In our admiration of exceptional people we may diminish their normal, human vulnerability.

Alas, we are here today to mourn her, to celebrate and give our thanks for a glorious life.

We're an **okay family**. We don't repeat gossip - you listen properly the first time. This week we've taken some counsel and been fortified by John Barleycorn, at the appropriate times. (Bearing in mind that it's always five o'clock in the p.m. somewhere or other.) I think Suzanne would have been satisfied with our efforts over the last few days, qualified perhaps with some gentle and well-deserved suggestions. We've been together a lot, achieved some good things, stuffed up - the lounge room was full of smoke on one occasion and Jim came in waved the poker around and made a short statement that began with, If Suzanne were here. This was the gesture of a man who has known the benefits of building the fire in the back of the grate and keeping it there. We've been frustrated and talked our way down, or through, or around, to a position of calm or compromise, we've delegated - my favourite, that one - we've wheeled out some of Suzanne's more bizarre moments, of which there are a goodly store, and laughed ourselves into tears. Some of us have watched "The Bill" with the phone off the hook, but generally avoided some of her other favourite rubbish . . . er, programmes. Karen and I decided at some stage that we have been reflecting her mother's approach - you deal with a crisis, you get in behind the person, but you do get on with life. To say that Suzanne's influence is all over us is the understatement of the day, up to this point.

We are a family which owes this “woman of wisdom” so much, a family eternally indebted to her, a family whom she loved dearly. We are mighty grateful and relieved that you, friends and colleagues, many who have travelled great distances, have joined us to provide us with your support, as well as to express your sorrow and show your admiration for the life of Suzanne Russell.

To dear **George and Margaret**, intensely yet modestly proud of their daughter, as well they should be, our deepest condolences. Boon companions, fellow-travellers, neighbours, and conspirators in wit and wisdom. Similarly, to Suzanne’s brother Stephen, unable to be here today because of illness, and her sisters Sandra and Kaye.

To **Jim**, her husband of 41 years, friend, straight man, lover, adversary, advocate, confidante, supporter, software and layout consultant, food assessor - admit it, you’re all thinking of one I’ve left out - . . . your piece in the Order of Service gives a splendid insight into your relationship with your wife. Thank you for it.

To Suzanne and Jim’s **children**, Mark, Andrew, Peter and Karen, partners Katrina, Carolyn, Liz and Jason, and their children Patrick and Hannah, Josh, Connor, Julian, Callum, Lachlan, Ben and Nicholas - we offer you our love and unqualified support for your devastating loss.

Suzanne translated her love into very practical support, and I don’t just mean how to get the best bang for your buck in the white goods

market. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but being there can help too. She and Jim **visited** their children wherever they were, in Ireland, Warnambool or Woop-Woop; she made sure they got together for Easter and Christmas festivities, at **monthly meals** with friends and the extended family. Sure, she was aided and abetted by other family members, and Jim occasionally extended and set the table and extracted a cork, but it was her energy that counted.

Suzanne's life story is full of accomplishment, for which she often received public accolades. Her CV is a genuine barbeque stopper, **but what would she regard as her greatest achievement?** Her family, there's no question about it. Her career is a magical, luminous wash across a broad canvas, but the painting is of her family. Her ability to **balance family and professional life** is legendary and the results of her influence in both fields are spectacularly good, so the kids keep telling me. But the view from the bridge may appear more serene than the inside. Answering the telephone, for example. Years ago, a child - whom we'll call Mark to protect the innocent - a child I say, answers the phone and tells the caller that his mother is in Canberra when in fact she is at the local shopping centre. Mark will claim he genuinely believed he was right at the time and was not being mischievous and I for one believe him. There are numerous variations on the theme. Andrew told another caller that his mother was at Safeway and she'd be back shortly when in fact she was somewhere in the northern hemisphere. Well, she would be back shortly, taken in the context of a decade. There was a note on the fridge Andrew which said Paris freezer, green ice-cre cont -

chick/corn soup, also beef cass, 3 mins. Vacuum dog and feed bedrooms.

Notes and duty rosters on the fridge door helped make the Russell children the independent, self-actualised, aspirational people they now say they are.

**Out of Suzanne's wonderful hospitality grew a collection of stories which we share and enjoy.** They are at her expense, and she loved them and against the background of her professional expertise they become more exquisite. A sample:

- She had a propensity to try new dishes, not surprisingly. “Hmm, interesting”, I think I said when confronted with **jelly beetroot**, because when this little monster first saw the light of day I was still too much in awe of my sister-in-law to say what I really thought. It was a prototype and it wobbled, as a mature jelly should. Listening to Peter describe his attempt to eat **cold cucumber soup**, and you're listening to a man in an unequal battle between respect for his mother and gagging. Pete's comment, “Do you think it would be better if it were heated, Mum” still rates as my benchmark for **tact under duress**. And lima beans. Always - often - lima beans. “There'll be lima beans in this meal somewhere,” said Suzanne, as much a threat as an menu plan.

- There was a Christmas when she set fire to **Andrew's guests**, two young chaps from the sub-continent. There was a Christmas pudding, the application of too much brandy, a match, a “woof” of blue flame, a confused tangle of arms, a dreadful tilting of the flaming

flambe, followed by a frantic slapping of the startled guests' hair and clothing. A subsidence into a grateful chair and profuse apologies, and the rest of the meal was taken to the accompaniment of the smell of singed flesh and fabric.

- Another Christmas event was Suzanne announcing her purchase of a **very interesting LP record** which would provide background to the meal. I thought - clever, a diversion. Something's wrong with the food, the turkey's still frozen. But no, the meal progressed as planned to the accompaniment of . . . wait for it . . . a gentleman reproducing the sounds of the Battle of Britain on a Wurlitzer organ. It's a concept the Monty Python team would have rejected as too outrageous. We ate to the sound of dogfighting Spitfires and Messerschmits, and ak-ak fire.

You will have noticed that the tributes to Suzanne have more often than not contained the word "**inspire**". She will continue to inspire us, and it's a deeper kind of inspiration than the one that has me searching for the CD of a guy's instrumental version of Slim Dusty's greatest hits on gum leaves and lagerphone. I know it exists and I believe would be a terrific background for any Christmas dinner. Her model for us goes to the heart of life, of **who we want to be** and **how we go about being it**.

**Suzanne Margaret Russell.** I cannot guarantee that the fire will always be built at the back of the grate, that there will be no wood

smoke in the room, but I do know your irrepressible spirit will continue to guide and ennoble our lives.