

**Saturday, May 29, 2004**

**I am writing this letter today as I feel that as the days pass the sharp edges will fade and my record of the events will not reflect the gratitude I feel for the support given me by family and friends.**



Dear Family and Friends,

The past week has been the most horrible and strangely, one of the most joyous weeks of my life.

When I saw Sue tumble down the stairs, I could not believe it. She couldn't be hurt. She was unbreakable. It did not take long to realize, but not accept, the situation was serious.

The next 22 hours were ones of waiting for what we soon all knew was the inevitable decision. It was a relief to meet Mark coming into the hospital as I arrived in the ambulance. I was at that point that I began to realize that together we had achieved something that could only come from her determination to build a caring, loving family. A family invincible in the face of tragedy. Andrew arrived soon after. When the surgeon briefed us the options were simple, operate, with little prospect of her returning to her vibrant self, or make her comfortable and await developments. There was no discussion. We all knew what Sue would want.

As time passed, the family gathered, occasionally sobbing, as thoughts of her, perhaps more often thoughts of what her passing would mean to us, flashed through our minds. Yet my recollection is that we often laughed together.

By mid afternoon we were all by her bedside, Kay was on her way from Sydney and about half an hour away. The Intensive Care Consultant spoke to us all. He told us what we already knew and we were unanimous in our response. Wait until Kay arrived, then take Sue off the breathing machine and see what happened. She died peacefully without taking another breath.

We said our farewells. Josh and Lachlan were very brave and I was glad they were there.

We left quietly and firmly of the view that Suzanne Margaret Russell's life and her passing would be celebrated as joyfully as possible.

Suzanne Margaret Russell was something different to each of you. She lived a life most would envy. She achieved many things. She did not seek recognition. Her satisfaction was in a job well done, a task completed and a new challenge tomorrow. She left us still going flat out with plans for new things, new adventures in the years ahead. She has and will continue to be an inspiration to us all.

Our many travels together took us to many places in Asia, India, Europe, North America, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. We often stood where famous men and women of history had stood and marvelled at their achievement and the legacy they left us. She is with them now.

For 41 years Suzanne was my lover, my wife, my partner, my friend, brilliant mother of our children, beloved Nanny Sue to our grandchildren and caring daughter of George and Margaret. Foster mother to Que and Marina during their stay in Australia. She loved us all.

We often travelled separately and in the early hours of the morning I often rejoiced in the knowledge that we would be together again shortly. Occasionally I wondered what I would do if Sue didn't come home, or didn't wake up. I didn't have an answer.

On Sunday morning I knew. I woke and realised that she was not there and not coming back.

I cried.

Saturday had been a day of caring for her. Sunday there was emptiness. That emptiness is passing and as the days go by the pain recedes a little.

The family rallied around, all determined that she would be remembered joyfully. Our children, their partners, my sister and her sisters created a formidable team that seemed to know instinctively what had to be done.

Close as the family was, this experience has drawn us closer together.

Whilst the family was preparing the wonderful farewell, which took place on Thursday, friends close by and far away were offering help and comfort.

The emails from friends far and wide were a great comfort during the first few days. Answering them as they arrived was great help to me and to the family as I placed them and my reply in a folder for them to read.

The phone calls helped, I know my sister, Mary, tried to shield me from them, but talking helps. Many callers I know only by their telephone voice and all listened to me rattle on.

The flowers brightened the house.

The food parcels kept us alive.

The cards and letters brought back fond memories of past activities and friendships.

On behalf of our family, Suzanne's mother and father, my sisters, her brother and sisters and their families I thank you for the wonderful tributes to a remarkable lady.

Whatever we believe about a life hereafter, we know that Suzanne will be in our hearts forever and that our future lives will be guided by her example.

Suzanne, we thank you for what you have given to us all.

Jim

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