

Eulogy: Remembering Len Haynes

Len was a bit of a loner. As a child he wanted a better life than his circumstances offered. He had a strong sense that life did not have to be like this and was determined to create something better. He guarded his independence and drew on his own strengths. Even in his eighties and nineties he would say “ I said to myself, what’s wrong with you, Lennie, get on and do it!”.

In one of his first letters to Sylvia, in 1945, he asks if she minds his ‘frankness’. She replied that she liked and admired it. He approached friendship warily. His often repeated motto was “Familiarity breeds contempt”. In Sylvia he found a bridge to the world of other people. She mediated for him, doing most of the necessary social interaction and relaying stories to him. He was an observer and analyst of what people were doing, discussing family and friends over endless cups of tea with Sylvia – and his children when they would listen. He followed a set of beliefs about how to live – be serious, work hard, owe nothing, buy quality – whether it be in music, art, clothing, jewellery, tools or furniture.

Throughout his life Len loved music. He developed a love of opera and classical music. In the 1950s he bought, at one of the auctions he attended when looking for something like a new bicycle, a record player in a cedar cabinet. It was a beautiful piece of furniture as well as a good player for its time. From then on, Maria Callas could be heard on the shore of Botany Bay if you went for a walk along the beach in the evening – so loud and so long did he play it. He could lose himself in the music. He talked music with his son-in-law Jim, and his granddaughter Katherine, buying them both classical music CDs he thought they would like. Katherine recalls:

He taught me so much about classical music and opera. He used to make tapes for me of music he thought I would like, he told me so much and answered all my questions. He would save music up to share with me when I came to visit. He taped opera and ballet for me to watch with him. He and my grandmother took us to the theatre we sat in the back row of the Opera House (the best for his hearing) and watched the Mikado.

While cooking, working in the house or the shed, he would maintain a constant soft singing, which was as familiar a part of his presence as the smell of hand-rolled tobacco (or later, chewing gum) and a hat.

He loved the books he called “the classics”, and was determined that this love of reading and learning would be carried through his family. He often told his grand-daughters with great pride how Sylvia had taught Jillian and Jim to read before they went to school, and he took great pleasure in his family's academic accomplishments, in particular in attending Jillian, Katherine, and Robyn's graduation ceremonies.

Len viewed his most important role as that of family provider. He not only worked to earn money, but worked at home to build a shelter, a comfortable base for his wife and children – to add value to what he could afford to buy with the work of his hands. He worked to build the better life he had sought as a child – and succeeded. He took a great interest in the activities and health of his

children, their spouses, his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren. While he rarely offered praise directly, he would boast of their accomplishments to others with a huge sense of pride.

Katherine recalls: *Reflecting on Len what stands out is how much of his time he gave me After watching my sister and I play cars in our sand pit, which was under the orange tree he built road signs out of tiny oranges just beginning to grow, nailing them on to bits of wood, he made smooth roads out of a block of wood and then he watched us play. He made toy trucks and trains, a pull along rabbit and dog, and best of all a doll house which he flat packed into his suitcase ...When we went to Sydney he made golf courses out of old margarine containers digging them into the ground.*

He made the best potato fritters. He made them for my sister and I because he knew we loved them.

His sister Jessie – 20 years younger than him - said last week *I keep recalling the one clear image I have of him coming home on leave from the navy {in London, during WWII} when I was a little girl and the big box of chocolates that he had saved for me and him stripping off his money belt packed with five pound notes and giving it to mum. He was a good son and a great brother and I grieve, not for him but for my loss.,*

His niece, Susan recalled Len's return to London in 1965,

His Mum Ada's first words to him at the arrivals lounge in Heathrow when he set foot on British soil for the first time in 22 years were "I should've drowned you at birth". When he and Sylvia arrived later at our house in Northfield Park some 30 minutes, where his sister, my mum, had mounted a huge Union Jack teatowel complete with bulldog above the fireplace just to wind him up, he showed no signs of being wound. . I was so impressed. We hit it off straight away.

His nephew Christopher, also in England, recalled:

I remember him well from visits here, and being introduced to whisky chasers with my beer when I was about 16, and his support for my left wing views and anti vietnam war stance, but also of a very fit and healthy man who lived life to the full.

Len was a staunch unionist throughout his life, with strong beliefs about right and wrong, and an interest in politics. Katherine remembers: *As I grew up he shared so many things with me. His opinion on politics and the state of the world. He listened to my opinions and encouraged me to have them. He used to shout at the TV.*

He served as a Union delegate for a time while working at the Davis Gelatine. Although he remained a Labor man, he left the Party when, in the 1950s, Tom Cahill won preselection over the local nominee, Paddy Williams. Even at 93 he would tell anyone the story and restate his conviction that party bosses ruined the party by nepotism. His interest lasted throughout his life - his last conversation with his granddaughter Alison in April this year involved his opinion about the Prime Ministership of Julia Gillard. Like Christopher, Alison also appreciated Len's support and understanding of her left-wing activities throughout her life, as well as the "get a decent job and stop worrying everyone" advice that usually accompanied it.

Alison recalled: *My first two memories of Grandad are from when I was a pre-schooler. One is of him yelling at me because, after dropping a cork in his beer, I had stuck my fresh-from-the-sandpit fingers*

in to retrieve it for him. The other is of him telling me I was "his sun". To this day, I'm not sure if he meant I was the tomboyish grand-daughter, or that I lit up his world, but at the time I took it as both. In many ways, my relationship with Len followed this pattern - he was often a rude, ornery bugger lacking in social sensitivity to the point of hurtfulness, and yet he always offered me the most incredible unconditional love. I felt great ease in his presence, always confident he would be honest, if not tactful, with me, and I always felt great respect and interest in my opinions, and an intellectual give and take. He was above all, a proud man, and the look of love in those blue eyes he bequeathed me never left me doubting that I, my mother, father, uncle and aunt, sister, nephews and nieces, were one wellspring for that pride. I will miss him so much.

As will we all.

Katherine also adds:

He explained the off side rule in soccer so I could understand it and taped the Italian world cup games and taught me about all their players.

He had Anthony and I around for dinner the first time I introduced them even though he was really nervous and anxious. He cooked.

At my Nana's funeral he touched my shoulder and told me "she loved you" and offered comfort when there was no comfort for him.

He loved me and I loved him.

And so say all of us.

He has bequeathed us his intelligence, his stubbornness, his values – and a family. We are grateful, and will remember, carrying him with us.