

EULOGY for DR. ROGER L. D. CRIBB

It's great to get that perspective on Roger's life from Gulcin. Many of us are probably unaware of how much Roger achieved in his earlier life.

It's a privilege to share some of my thoughts on Roger's life. I met Roger in 1994, when I first came to Cairns and I was attending the Uniting Church at Westcourt.

Roger was probably a bit high at the time and still experiencing intense grief over the loss of Alice, his second wife.

I wondered what I'd struck initially. A good example of Roger's combination of humour and sense of justice was his willingness to take money out of the collection plate at church to support a good cause!

I drifted away from that church, but Roger kept turning up in my life – in various places. I came to realise that God was putting him in my path.

We've heard about Roger's earlier career and achievements. His later career in Australia was very much focussed on assisting our indigenous people and that was an intense passion.

Roger moved to Cairns from the Northern Territory and worked for the Cape York Land Council. It was a time of intense activity in archaeological circles with the introduction of Native Title in the early 1990s. Much of Roger's interest focussed on the West Cape York area, particularly around Aurukun and Weipa. He was particularly interested in the Shell Mounds in these areas and their significance to the people, especially as mining activities began encroaching on these. He also did work collecting stories of the Rainforest people around Cairns, the Jabukai, the Irikadyi and Yarrabah people. During this time Roger formed many close relationships with Indigenous people and was accepted into their groups. He was very interested in the strong kinship ties that bind indigenous folk. He was formally adopted as a brother and father by Nola and Lavinia from Aurukun, who are unable to be with us today. Lavinia was able to visit Roger a few weeks ago, and it was a great joy for Roger to see how well this young lady was doing, now running the community Radio Station in Aurukun.

In the later years of his life, Roger's ability to work was hampered by physical and mental illness. He maintained very close ties with his indigenous friends and would help in any way he could.

Roger was dealt a difficult hand in life. He developed Bi Polar disorder which became increasingly severe. He often talked about the episodes of mania, which gave him great energy and a sense of purpose and creativity, but were a nightmare for those of us who cared for him. These led to the breaking of many professional bridges and impaired his ability to work. Within a period of a few days he could swing down to severe depression

and deep despair – none of this he had any control over. Roger suffered incredible grief with the death from cancer of his second wife, Alice. Alice and Roger had 4 years of happy marriage. Roger nursed Alice through her last months and put everything else in his life on hold. These were days however, that he said he was incredibly close to God.

Roger developed cancer himself about 10 years ago. This recurred about 18 months ago and again 6 months ago.

Despite all these setbacks, Roger never gave up. He continued to look for work and to help people when he could. He never lost his sense of humour, or his “Ratbag” sense of fun.

Some years ago he formed the Ratbag University, of which he was the Vice Chancellor and sole distributor of degrees. These were given to both friend and foe, to acknowledge both highly meritorious and also inglorious acts, I was never too sure which category mine fell into.

Roger was happiest sitting around a table with a friend or two, having a glass of wine and talking about life, regaling stories and talking about politics and theology. We had great conversations and particularly loved debating our understanding of the creation story.

I was privileged to journey with Roger on his spiritual quest. Roger regularly attended church here and was accepted by the community. He had quite an ecumenical approach. He was actually baptised a Catholic a few years ago and had a great relationship with the Fathers Flynn at Our Lady Help of Christians church at Earlville.

I recently asked Roger about how his faith developed. He explained that Alice was following Jesus and he was following Alice. When Alice passed away, he continued to follow Jesus. Roger faced death without fear. He constantly reminded us that he was not scared of death, although the prospect of dying alone or in pain troubled him.

Thankfully, neither of those things happened. We shared a memorable time last weekend around his bedside as Roger slipped away. Roger’s faith deepened in the last few months of his life, and it was wonderful to see his prayer life grow. He also sought to mend any broken bridges in relationships.

When I first met Roger, I guess I took him on mainly as someone who needed help. I now know for sure that I was the one who needed the most help. Having Roger as a friend has enriched my life. I came to love him and learnt much from his struggles. I am very grateful that God brought him across my path.

We will never forget him and look forward to seeing him again.