

Eulogy for Bruce McCormack – 11 November 1936 – 3 January 2024

By Catherine Radisich

Let me take you back to 1936, the year that:

- King George V died and his son and heir the Prince of Wales succeeds to the throne of the United Kingdom as King Edward VIII. Later that year, he abdicated his title to marry Wallis Simpson.
- Joseph Lyons was the Prime Minister
- Jessie Owens won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics
- The Hindenburg, a German commercial passenger-carrying airship had its first public flight.
- Gone with the Wind was first published
- The first Phantom comic was published
- The first publication recognising that stress is a biological condition was issued.
- The great footballer, Ron Barrassi was born, and
- Unfortunately, Collingwood beat South Melbourne in the Grand Final by 11 points.

and Bruce Anthony McCormack was born.

Bruce was the youngest of three brothers, Greg and Ray born to Jim and Sadie McCormack. They all grew up at 90 Ruskin Street Elwood.

Bruce grew up in the throws of the Great Depression where Melbourne's unemployment rate rose to over 30 percent causing thousands of families to struggle for survival. The McCormack's were luckier than most and Bruce often shared stories of a happy childhood. Playing with his brothers, Greg and Ray, the other kids in the street and his mum, Sadie always putting delicious food on the table and his dad Jim, providing for them all.

Bruce started school at St. Columba in Glen Huntly Road. He made friends quickly as was the case throughout his life. One of these school friends, Ken Corbett wrote of St Columba during the war years. The US military had seconded the school buildings, and the students were relocated to a nearby tennis pavilion with three students to a desk. He also wrote of practising air raid drills as the threat of invasion by the Japanese was real.

Bruce didn't like school much. He was left-handed and was wrapped over the knuckles and worse may times because of his unacceptable handwriting and disobedience. One day he came home from school crying because of an altercation with his teacher. His mum Sadie was hopping mad at the state of him and raced down to the school to tear strips off the nun. Back in those days, it was unheard of to chip a teacher, let alone a nun. After Sadie had finished with her, Bruce never received another beating. You see, Macs always have each other's backs.

When he moved to De La Salle College in Malvern, his natural talent at sports got him through. Playing football, cricket and winning at athletic meets in hurdles. One of his greatest rivals in the running events was Barry Tobin of the Tobin Brothers where we meet today. He always said that sport was the only reason he kept going to school. I reckon he

would have played anything rather than do his schoolwork. I wish I had known that when he used to rag on us about doing our schoolwork (haha).

Growing up in Elwood during the war years was sometimes confronting with blackened windows, air raid alerts and ominous radio broadcasts. Sadie took the boys to Cockatoo for a time to escape the danger. His dad enlisted and was in Darwin for the infamous Japanese attack. V Despite this, Bruce told stories of his youth with a twinkle in his eye. A new adventure was always close by.

I recall one story where he and some mates 'borrowed' a skiff from the local yacht club and took it out on Port Phillip Bay. It sprang a leak so they quickly jumped out and pulled it to shore. Not wanting to get into trouble, they pooled what money they had and bought out the entire supply of chewy from the beachfront kiosk. Haha – I can see them unwrapping and madly chewing the gum so they could plug the hole.

Ahh – that sounds just like Bruce. What a character! They did fess up to the owner – another of Bruce's qualities – uncompromising honesty. The owner would later let them take the vessel to sail on the bay because he believed they were honest and trustworthy by confessing all.

Football was a big part of his life as a young man. He played in the amateur league for Elwood where his brothers played. Greg had torn a cruciate ligament a few years earlier so couldn't play. Back then there was no medical interventions available so nothing could be done. Greg became the team's goal umpire to stay connected.

Ray was a ruckman in the seniors, and it was Bruce's dream to one day play with his brother. In Ray's last season, Bruce got the chance to play with him in the seniors even though he was only 16. Playing with grown men had its challenges for a teen body and one game Bruce was knocked out. His dad and brother Greg both stormed the field to wreak vengeance. Bruce told them to get off the field or the team would be penalised. It took some time for them both to calm down. You see, the Macs always had each other's backs.

In 1956, Bruce started training with Ormond Football Club who were A Grade Amateurs. There was only one team at the club during this time so the odds of getting a game every week were slim. Bruce decided to stop training with Ormond and went back to Elwood where he was guaranteed a game every week. The Ormond coach, Joe Kelly, came knocking on the Ruskin Street door to try to coax Bruce back to training. Honest Bruce told Joe he wanted to play footy every week and couldn't see that happening with so many players on the roster. The coach looked him squarely in the eye and said, 'If you come back to training, I'll guarantee you the first six games. The rest will be up to you.'

Bruce debuted (with 4 others) in a win in Round 1 against Old Paradians on 21 April 1956 and kicked 2 goals from a total of 17. The Amateur Footballer said of his debut that the forward work of Bruce McCormack (jersey No 17) was a feature of the new brigade.

He went on to play 53 games for Ormond and won the most improved player (or the third best and fairest) in 1958. He was also coached by Geoff Harris, a legend at Ormond during his playing career. They remained close friends throughout their lives. Even after footy.

In his time at Ormond, Bruce had the privilege to play with some of the greats in VFL history including Melbourne Premiership players Peter Brenchley, Neil Crompton and Dick Fenton-Smith. Also, with Swans players Jeff Kiteley and Otto Sonnleitner. And with Ormond luminaries like Ian Anders, Norm Bird, Geoff Bridges, Max Brook, John Byrne, Ken Davidson, Bob Hancock, Bob Hannon, Jack Kingston, Max Lyon, Doug MacMillan, Keith McConnell, Colin McDonald, Barry Mau, Tony O'Connell, Norm Pert, Graham Schober and Jack Stock.

I would like to give a big thank you to Malcom Roach, Secretary of the Ormond Football Club for providing Bruce's stats and some club history from the time. I can provide an answer to your questions Malcom about why Bruce was a registered player but never played in the last few years of his registration.

Bruce had left school and started work with the State Bank of Victoria. When they found out about his football prowess, they offered him a spot on the bank's team who played in the same competition as Ormond.

After Bruce declined their offer, he was seconded to the relieving staff at the bank which meant country trips across Victoria. As banks were opened on Saturday mornings, Bruce couldn't get to any of the games. So, just like that, Bruce's football days were over. However, prone to put a positive spin on things, he threw himself into his new career.

The club was planning to visit at Villa Maria where Bruce was a resident, to present him with a jumper later in the year. A big thank you to the Janine and the VM staff and the club for their efforts to organise this. He would have been tickled pink.

When I think of Bruce, the man he was, there are certain themes that stand out. Elements of his character. I think his connection to people was the key to everything. Family was everything to him. His connection to his brothers who he never had a crossed word with were his best mates. He was a loyal and fierce friend. Once he decided you were friends it was a lifetime commitment.

The women in his formative years showed him what family means which informed his life. There was his mum Sadie, a woman living with chronic illness who never let that stop her from living the life she did - loving her children, caring for invalid parents contributing to her community and protecting her family in difficult times. There was also his Ma, Mary Ann Bennett who married James McCormack, his grandpa and took over the Cricketers Arms Hotel in Cruikshank Street built and originally managed by Thomas McCormack, Bruce's great grandfather. The side street behind the Cricketers Arms is called McCormack Street named after our family. If we were ever to have a reunion, the Cricketers Arms is where it should be.

I remember, it never really mattered where we went, whether on holidays to Lorne or Echuca, Kiama or trips to Sydney to watch the Swans, Bruce would invariably run into 'a mate'. He even met Sharky from Lorne in Broadbeach Queensland for goodness sake.

By his own admission, Bruce led a charmed life. He knew every step of the way he was surrounded with love. He made it so. When he met Doz, also a strong independent woman and the greatest of love stories, he found his lane. Doz was his arms and legs. What a lucky

guy he was. At their first meeting, Doz thought he stood out from the other blokes there because he was the only one drinking milk. Well, we all know how he loved a pot or two. Suffice to say her first impression may have been a little skewed but her sense of him was spot on. They made a family together and a dynasty of sorts and lived their lives together for more than 60 years. He has left behind six children, 19 grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

I think we are all proud of Bruce and how he tried to overcome the biggest challenge in his life – the passing of Doz, his arms and legs. For the first time in his life, he had to learn how to live alone and look after himself. On top of that, he was living with chronic pain while trying to process his grief through COVID. Our thanks go to Dr Stephen Wales who was a mountain of support for Bruce through those difficult times. Bruce was so grateful to his family and all the people that supported him through this difficult time.

He moved on to Villa Maria a little while ago, albeit reluctantly. Within the short time he was there (about 6 Months I think), he did what he has done throughout his life and started making friends. He went from a reluctant resident to a valued friend and was even the poster boy for international elderly persons day. His message was 'Behave yourself, love one another and make the most of it.' I do remember he used to say, 'When you wake up in the morning, everything is a bonus!' Which was quite annoying to hear when I was a grumpy teen and a stressed out mum. But now it is a mantra I try to include everyday.

Bruce had an interesting turn of phase. When it was time to walk away, he would 'give it the lemonade and sars'. When the Swans kicked a goal it was, 'You little ripper!' He would absent himself to 'the reading room' to 'do a chocolate frog'. And an early beer was always ok when 'the sun was over the yard arm'.

The passing of Bruce is indeed the end of an era. Now all the Macs are at peace. But as I look around the room, I see the Mac brand is alive and kicking. The three brothers have left behind an evolving McCormack brand. There are professionals, tradies, artists, carers, academics, dancers, entrepreneurs, and so much more all looking after each other and their families and living their best lives. I reckon the Mac boys will be smiling down to see us all. So in the words of the man himself, 'Thank you linesmen. Thank you ball boys. That's finitabusta!'

By Catherine Radisich

Bruce McCormack - by John Jeffries

11th January 2024.

It is with a deeply saddened heart that I am not able to be present on this day, to send Bruce off on a journey, to join his beloved wife Dorrie, who patiently waits for him in the next life, as she so often did during their wonderful life together.

I thank the family, Anthony, Catherine, Elizabeth, Mary, Rebecca and Claire, for allowing me to express my feelings today of Bruce, Dorrie and the beautiful children, grandchildren and great grandchildren they have produced.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of so many State Bankers in passing our condolences and who had the pleasure of knowing and working with Bruce throughout his illustrious career in the Bank.

My first meeting with Bruce, was as a young 12-year-old, presenting my filled to the brim SSB money box to him as teller at Rangeview branch of the SSB, some 60 odd years ago.

Little did I know that this same man, who stood tall as a respected Bank Accountant at the time, was to play such a huge part in my personal life and that of my family in the years to follow.

It was not until I joined the SSB in 1968 that I really got to know Bruce. It was soon after that I met his adored wife Dorrie and then quickly following came a chain of six beautiful children, in true catholic fashion.

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A few years passed and it was when the tribe of McCormacks, having grown up to that stage, would often call around to our place for a swim in the pool and share a good yarn that Bruce was so good at.

It was then that he and his family got well and truly entrenched into my family scene through living close by and being in the State Bank, where Bruce and my paths crossed many a time.

Conversations never passed without mention of both family's mutual love and following of South Melbourne, later becoming Sydney Swans.

Bruce was an avid Swans supporter and was often taking the kids to the footy to watch their beloved Swannies.

I don't think any of those kids had a choice in who to follow in the AFL.

Living close by, Bruce would often call in with kids in tow, while Dot would often be working night shift at Mitcham hospital.

He shared holidays with us and stayed with my parents, Aussie and Dot at Airey's Inlet when relieving in the vicinity with the bank.

It is with deep sincerity that Bruce can lay claim to being in the class of legend and a genuine champion bloke, as is evident in the numerous comments by colleagues upon hearing of his passing.

Bruce was a true legend, especially in the eyes of his adored family and that of his peers in the State Bank family.

He was an extremely popular bloke with everyone right up till the final years.

Whenever Bruce wasn't at a function people would ask "where's Bruce?"

His devotion to his wife, family, friends and colleagues was never questioned or challenged.

He was a dedicated family man who lived life to the fullest and never flinched when confronted with adversity.

Bruce was also an absolute champion bloke with his infectious 'goofy' laugh and his witty sense of humour. People always spoke so highly and respectfully of Bruce and what a wonderful bloke he was.

Ironically or jokingly he probably helped plan today's arrangements at 11am on the 11/1 when he was born on 11/11

His greatest achievement as a champion bloke (along with his beautiful wife Dorrie) would have to be, bringing his wonderful family of 6 kids into the world.

He adored his family and the offspring of 19 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren that followed progressively in true McCormack fashion.

I'm certain that every one of those offspring here today will sadly miss their pa, pop, poppy or grandpa and hopefully they will have passed on to each of them, as to what a true champion bloke he was, so that his legacy will not be forgotten.

I, along with the many in the State Bank family, will always remember Bruce, hopefully as much as his family for the memories he left us with.

Thanks Bruce.

You are indeed a True Champion bloke.

We are indebted to you for the wonderful life memories you provided us with.

Your friend, mate and colleague of the many State Bankers who you made laugh so much.

JJ.