

HARRY NEDERVEEN A.M.

16 October 1924 — 12 February 2008

My father, is Henricus Alphonsus Maria Nederveen and we are here today to honour and farewell him. Funeral speeches are often dry and boring. As Harry was neither, I hope this eulogy reflects that. At my wedding many years ago he stood up, spread his arms thus and said:” if you think I’m going to give a short speech, you don’t know me very well”. I am his daughter, and I will follow suit. Get comfortable.

Dad was a man of contradictions. He drank and smoked voraciously until 3 months ago and lived until 83 – the oldest Nederveen who ever lived, and that goes back to 1204. He was a product of an old and distinguished, sometime aristocratic family, and my recent visit to Holland with his grandchildren proved the strength of those genes in the similarity of humour, appearance, style, eccentricities, and often arrogance of most of the members of the family, male and female. Generous to a fault, but often tight-fisted with money and demanding of gratitude. Suspicious of strangers, but trusting of those who proved their integrity. Forgiving to many, but completely unforgiving to some.. Eating only the finest food, of late eating hardly anything at all, certainly nothing resembling a vegetable.. Counting amongst his friends the CEO of the National Bank, a simple dairy farmer from country Victoria, and the King of Malaysia – all have been to dinner in Kew. He met Queen Elizabeth 3 times, and her children several more, he didn’t like Prince Philip much but he really liked Princess Anne and knew her through Olympic level sport. His favourite famous person for some years was then first lady Tammie Fraser – because she “had good legs and was ladylike” and his enduring favourite singer was that old reprobate Frank Sinatra, adopting Sinatra’s “My Way” as his own theme song. He was seriously fluent in seven languages and was quite a racist in the old style. He shared around so much material wealth but would argue with his grandson over the hourly rate for bookwork and cleaning. In other words, a very human man with faults and

also with excellent qualities, admired, loved, and honoured by people from all walks of life and of all ages. Harry was born and bred conservatively, adopting old-fashioned and traditional values and beliefs, but it didn't stop him from displaying a remarkable even-handedness when it came to nationality and gender, whether in business or in hockey.

His father was a well-known solicitor from Den Bosch and his mother a well-known pianist who performed for Dutch radio stations. He grew up the fourth child of nine in a wealthy family and life was good, until War came to Holland on 10th May 1940, when Dad was 15. The German occupation of Roermond began and Dad spent the next 5 years in a front line occupied town, 50 miles from the German border. Imagine if you can what that must be like for an adolescent boy whose father was one-eighth Jewish and only just escaped persecution. His brothers and he made fun of the situation though, obtaining cigarettes and chocolate off German troops in exchange for money; and when sent to get the money by the troops, hiding around the corner until they moved off and then repeating the exercise with the next battalion. When he finished boarding school with a full classical education from the Trappist brothers, there was no longer an opportunity to go on to university as they were closed, and young men were being rounded up to go and work in German industry. So to avoid becoming a "slave" worker he had to go into hiding for the rest of the war. All his life he has struggled without success to understand what happened in world war II in Europe, and despite extensive self education on the matter, he remained confused as to how a highly civilised country only 60 years ago could commit such unspeakable atrocities upon so many. He taught us that to remember that time in history, is to ensure that it does not happen again on such a scale.

After the war he went to England and Wales to train as an officer and subsequently spent several years on active service including some years in Java as a Captain, well known for the intelligence operations he led. Returning back to his homeland, he studied law but, like so many of his contemporaries, he found it hard to settle down to the steady routines of a post-war society. Holland was too small and lacking in opportunity for a man like Harry, also too damn cold he said. He sought more freedom and more room and found it in Australia.

When, in 1950, he arrived in Australia, Harry made his way to Myer's with an introductory letter from a family friend to the boss. Unfortunately Sidney Myer had died 17 years earlier. Harry was interviewed by Selwyn Porter, who asked him what he knew about curtains. Harry answered that they were the sort of thing to be opened in the morning and closed at night. "Excellent" said Porter. Years later when Sir Selwyn Porter was Victoria's Police Commissioner, he gave an address to a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce chaired by Harry. He greeted him and said: "curtain department".

Harry didn't stay long at Myer. He went into shipping and then into exports, but more importantly he married Joyce in 1955. She was the enduring and greatest love of his life. They soon started their own export business whilst managing a young family – four children under 6. For more than thirty years Harry built a thriving business, exporting all manner of goods to Japan, Europe, the middle east, south America, Asia and the USA. During these years he was the largest Australian exporter of dairy products, the largest of timber products, of crocodile skins, and one time the largest exporter of Australian coal. Held in the highest esteem in the business community, he also made many personal friends of buyers and sellers.

Not only was he a very successful exporter, making many personal friends along the way, but he also made a significant contribution to the *administration* of the industry. He was for instance chairman of ‘ the combined export council’ and of the ‘Australian Chamber of Commerce Exporters Council’. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Shippers’ Council and the Export Finance Corporation, and received the governor-general’s Award for Outstanding Export Achievement”.

Harry grew up in Holland, and there hockey was a prominent and popular sport. One of the first things Harry did in Australia was to co-found the Moorabbin hockey club (which has since developed into the Southern United Hockey Club). He took to the field as an umpire, and rose to umpire a string of internationals, including several between Holland and Australia (he secretly barracked for Australia he once told me). He held, at successive stages, the presidency of the Victorian Hockey Association, both the Vicotiran and Australian Hockey Umpires Associations; and, from 1984 to 1988, he was President of the Australian Hockey Association. It was during this period that Australia won the World Cup Hockey for the first time, though to Harry’s chagrin, Olympic gold continued to elude the team until Athens. Harry was also an international Judge at two Olympics – Seoul and Barcelona

Harry had a great capacity for friendship and was a good judge of how people fitted into the scheme of things. This, his sense of humour, his knowledge of a string of languages and his courage were contributors to the many successes he achieved in business and in sport. In 1986, Harry Nederveen, was awarded an Order of Australia for services to commerce, the Dutch community and hockey. I think this was his proudest day.

Harry Nederveen was a man of his time, damaged by war, successful in migration and business. He considered himself Australian, not Dutch. His politics were conservative, many of his ideas old-fashioned. His business ethics were legendary, and many people loved and respected him. He was incredibly widely travelled and could afford first class and the best of everything.

His legacy for his family and those who befriended him is that of a man to be reckoned with. Those who knew him thought so, and he had the same idea himself. He is a man who will not be forgotten for his qualities as well as for his faults. I know that in the last months, in conversation with me, he took responsibility for these faults, and I regret I did not pay him more credit for his qualities.

The most intelligent man I have ever met, and amongst the most educated in every field except perhaps modern art and music (not serious) or anything but western white history (it didn't really matter); the most financially adept and meticulous man, and with one of the greatest senses of humour and the ridiculous we will ever meet. A man who loved all his grandchildren with gentle good will, a man who openly regretted the lack of closeness with his own children and stepchildren. A man who valued his friends, was incredibly Dutch as well as incredibly Australian, who was well known in many many communities. Till the end he was [involved in](#) the local neighbourhood watch, still enjoying daily coffee visits with the neighbours and a weekly lunch at the RACV club, in touch with many people, arguing with Jonathan and Ellie, offering wisdom and knowledge even if it wasn't wanted.

His views were black and white and he rarely followed advice, rather following instinct. He believed that Australia had no history and was overly influenced by modern ideas including permissiveness and the welfare state, was overly insular and self-important but he loved its originality and vigour and the fair dinkum aussie spirit. In Politics he was a true conservative, believing that most politicians were twits in this over-governed country. He had strong views on right and wrong, avoided doublespeak at all costs; and believed that the old values were tried, tested and true. He appreciated pre-Vatican II Catholicism because he thought it better, stricter, clearer and more beautiful than modern Catholicism. He tolerated other religions as long as they were conservative and ancient. He hated snobbishness or class systems, and would never bow to the queen because she was his equal. Making money was and is the only aim of successful business, and for that one requires . luck, timing, support, creativity, skill and integrity. Harry believed that Family was the most important thing around which everything else revolved; and openly regretted that he had not given his children more time. Harry believed in marriage and that without Joyce he was nothing. He believed that good fortune should never be taken for granted, as it is hard come by but easily lost; and he believed that we should work hard and always stay within our financial limits. Harry could get on with all kinds of people, but two very specific traits irritated him deeply – a lack of intelligence and a lack of a sense of humour – these people he universally named as “clowns”.

Dad lived a long and full life. The space afforded to me here today does not give me sufficient time to do justice to the complexity of his life. Many of you have your own memories and stories – share them with others in his honour.

During 2007 Harry had become more physically frail, but his mind was still very sharp. On a hot night last November he collapsed at home and was taken to hospital, . but the stubborn old bugger actually survived 6 weeks in a coma in intensive care. He had the opportunity to hear the words “I love you” from some of us, and he responded with many kisses. Although unbelievably his liver, lungs, and heart were strong until the end, he lost the final battle of his life on 12th February early in the morning.

Dad, you will be missed for the great lengthy arguments conducted intelligently and humorously. You will be missed for your jokes and the quirky way you always noticed people’s faults and foibles, loudly pointing them out, an arrogance that saved my life when I was four years old. You will not be missed by many for calling them 7 times a day, but you will be missed for your gravelly and slow voice with the accent I couldn’t really hear. You will be missed for kissing us on the cheek twice to say goodbye, then the nederveenesque “finger on the nose” a relic of your childhood. You may not be missed for some of your more peculiar behaviours like embarrassing us in public with sarcasm, or interrogating our various boyfriends and girlfriends, but you will be missed for the self-effacing way in which you called yourself “silly old Pa.” You taught me to appreciate excellent classical music, art, and history. You taught me to care for animals, and how to ride a bike. You were an influential force in the lives of many people and organisations, a man who was impossible to ignore, a generous and intellectual powerhouse with a big heart for those in need.

Tot ziens daddy. We love you