



Vale

Colleen McCullough Robinson

1st June 1937 - 29th January 2015

“She was a very unpretentious person, and she made it known she didn’t want any pomp or ceremony and her funeral service was simple and nice” were some of the words of tribute delivered by Chief Minister Lisle Snell at the funeral of Colleen McCullough Robinson held at the Kingston Cemetery on Wednesday, 4th February 2015.

Like all the funerals that we have reported on over the last 50 years, flags around the island were flown at half mast, the grave, in this year of 2015, had been dug by Sexton Shane Quintal and his band of willing helpers, the floral wreaths made by the ladies at “the usual place” using the flowers that had come from many island gardens, the hearse was driven by “Tardy” Evans and Colleen’s coffin had been made by the tradesmen in the Administration Works Depot.

About 200 residents and visitors braved steady rain to pay their respects to the lady who had a strong support for our island in our constant battle to be recognised for our rights to determine how we were and how we are to be governed.

“She often described Norfolk as a “fragile butterfly”- don’t tamper with it because you will destroy something that is very precious.”

Her close friend Reverend A. Rebecca West led proceedings and commenced with the words “we have come together from across the ocean and across the road and we are all at different stages of our journey through life. Our paths are varied and we look at life in different ways.

“We grieve not for Colleen, but we grieve for ourselves. We grieve because there is a void in our lives and an empty space in our hearts. Yet in the midst of our grief we rejoice for we know that Col lived her life to the fullest. She enjoyed every moment of it and for that we say thanks. We know that the late Mahalia Jackson said “that soon and soon you will be done with the troubles of the world.” Colleen has done with the troubles of this world. We rejoice because we know that she lived life the way she wanted to live life and, like Frank Sinatra sang, ‘I did it my way’ Colleen did it her way and for that we are grateful that she did life to the fullest ‘in her way’ and shared it with us.”

“We pray that you will be with her family and friends and give them the faith, the strength and the courage to move forward day by day knowing and feeling your presence as they have never felt it before.”

Joseph Merlino then delivered the Eulogy and he told us that I am sure we all have a story or two to tell about our Col.

“Ric and I sat for a while, and I have the pleasure of sharing a few thoughts today on Col the person.

I first met Col when a friend asked me to help him install a sound system up in the Hunter Valley at a place named Mourinjari where Col lived for a short time with Jean Easthope before moving to Norfolk Island. She cooked an evening meal, or should I say she prepared the meal comparable to that of a “chef”, and the four of us laughed over stories until the early hours. Col insisted rather than us driving back to Sydney, that we sleep in the lean-to, whereupon she busied herself making up the two beds.

In watching her doing this simple task, I thought she is not the hype of the media, but here was humble hospitality of someone who had had a hard life.

Our friendship was sealed for the next forty years.

But she was no shrinking violet – God help anyone who thought she was. She would bide her time and made sure the culprit got a handle on reality. I am sure we all heard of her theory that she could put a hex on questionable people.

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Colleen McCullough Robinson - continued

Nowhere was this seen better than in Col's strong support for the people of Norfolk Island in their constant battle to be recognised for their right to determine how they were, and are to be governed. Most people on Norfolk recognised that Col and her wisdom was on their side. She often described Norfolk as a "fragile butterfly.....don't tamper with it because you will destroy something very precious and beautiful".

We know that Col ruffled a few feathers when she used the terms Colonial Overlord and Bloodless Genocide in the media. She then made sure that she accompanied Ric when he travelled to the United Nation's Working Group on Indigenous People in Geneva in 1994. To this end she worked with Ric in penning letters and submissions to various Standover committees.

Col's stance on justice and equity is witnessed in her essay "Portrait of a Colonial Overlord" in her book, "Life Without the Boring Bits".

However, before all this, Mourinjari in the Hunter Valley became the place for the most important day in her life, her marriage. I can count on one hand – maybe I would get up to three fingers - the number of times that I saw Col apply make-up. On the morning of the wedding, Jean and I appeared at breakfast and Col was padding around the house in her usual trade-mark, coloured pant suit and scuffs. Then she disappeared. An hour later only to reappear as a transformed regal and elegant Col; subtle, alluring make-up, heels and a dress that said "special".

She was now ready for the first and only love of her life, Ric.

I know that Col's life with Ric was supportive and ran as a two-way street. I once said to her that I rarely came across husband and wife who are truly best friends. At the time she just beamed without saying a word – hard to believe because we all know she was never short of a word.

Her destiny became complete with Ric in her life. As well as Ric, she had a ready-made family in Melinda and Wayde. While she was not trained for motherhood – and I guess who is – Melinda and Wayde were always in her conversation with pride.

She had many friends on Norfolk. I will never forget her fiftieth birthday where I am sure half of Norfolk at the time put in a monumental effort and arrived in fancy dress that would have put Carnivale in Venice to shame.

I will not go on about her global recognition, we can and have all read of her place on the world stage – the novels, movies, musicals and historical research. However, I have to say our great, great grandchildren in the future will know the name Colleen McCullough better than we do in this generation.

But today, Ric will miss her, you and I will miss her and the world will miss her.

Rest Col. A job well done!"

Adrian Robinson then read messages from friends and family and here are a few extracts from the messages

"Today you will be hearing about Col's achievements and they could possibly fill the equivalent of one of

her Roman novels. Col was never a person to shirk hard work and always admired people who displayed the same qualities.

For sometime now, Col's body has cruelly tested her. Wade joked with her that her brain was just getting too big and was trying to push the confines of her skull. The result was debilitating neuralgia, blindness and strokes that took away her joys - intellectual escapism, reading, painting and eventually even life.

But Col was much more than a big booming Amazon. Ineptitude drove her barmy. Bureaucrats were a favourite target. Unfairness and bullying irked her and she fought for the home she chose - Norfolk Island. She could never abide those of privilege or position looking down on others. When the film 'Something about Mary' made people laugh, she wouldn't watch it, hating the fact that the invalid disabled were used as a source of humour. Self mockery however, she was all for that. In her more eccentric times, guests were treated to her singing, at the top of her lungs, at the airport.

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Expression of Interest Casual Teaching 2015

Any community members who are interested in being placed in the pool for casual (day to day) teaching at Norfolk Island Central School during 2015 are invited to submit details of their qualifications and experience to the Deputy Principal, Mr Mark Hall by close of business on Friday 13 February 2014.

Essential Criteria:

- Completion of tertiary qualifications and successful experience working with children, either in teaching or associated activities.
- Ability to manage classroom activities and children effectively.
- Highly developed interpersonal and communication skills.
- Ability to work collaboratively as a team member.
- All applicants will be subject to police and security screening.

There should also be a willingness to work at short notice.

PERSONS WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN APPROVED MUST RE-SUBMIT THEIR APPLICATIONS FOR 2015 APPROVAL.

All enquiries in relation to applications are to be directed to Mr Mark Hall, Deputy Principal on 23000 or via email at Mark.S.Hall@det.nsw.edu.au

Michelle Nicholson
Principal

Norfolk Island Central School

Colleen McCullough Robinson - continued

In recent years the tendency towards perfection made her a challenging patient. For all of those who have worked tirelessly to meet Col's needs - thank you.

Impeccable attention to detail, or nit picking, an obsessive, compulsive personality combined with huge creativity, Col worked incredibly long hours and made the most of her talent to become a success. She gained immense pleasure from encouraging others to do the same. A great observer, Col saw in people, particularly the quieter ones, what they failed to see in themselves. It didn't matter one iota to her whether you were a house painter, mechanically minded, a teacher or an opera singer. What she respected was people who applied themselves diligently. She may not have had the traditional women's maternal instinct, but she did have a power to recognise and nurture the strength of others and was always frustrated when they didn't value themselves entirely.

The greatest gift that you gave to me was a belief with hard work and a dedicated mind I can achieve anything. A strangely maternal gift from a woman who claimed not to have a maternal bone in her body."

Chief Minister Lisle Snell then delivered a tribute and he said that he was honoured to say a few words on behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the people of Norfolk Island to commemorate the life of Colleen McCullough Robinson.

"As has been told here this afternoon, Colleen was a very strong character. She was a strong willed person, a brilliant mind, and a master of words, as proven with many of her literary achievements accomplished as an author and an artist were many a tribute here this afternoon.

"My recollection of Colleen goes back many years. Colleen became very active in Australian and Norfolk Island political issues, particularly when Ric was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Colleen was very strong in her views about the future of Norfolk Island and whether you agreed with her rationale or not, her opinion was never to be ignored.

"Colleen contributed to the welfare and life of this island in many ways. Especially promoting Norfolk Island as one of world's most unique and beautiful places - 'the fragile butterfly'. Her generosity was legendary but I know from personal relationships

Colleen would not wish me to give further details about that at this time.

"She was unpretentious in nature and she only required recognition when it suited her - not anybody else - and now is not that time.

"It is ingrained in our culture that we respect all persons, especially those that come and live amongst us. It is our custom that we acknowledge those that go out of their way to help and assist the community on this small island - Colleen did that.

"Norfolk Island benefited from her being here and we are now equally saddened by her passing. A condolence to her family - may her soul rest in everlasting peace."

Another friend, German soprano Bruni Heinemann, then sang Kyrie, Angelo di Dio and when she hit some of those high notes I am sure that they must have reverberated around the hills of Kingston.

After the placing of the floral tributes and the Committal, Reverend A. Rebecca West said the following prayer "sleep my friend, sleep that eternal peace, you are at rest now, sleep on.

As we leave this place today let us remember life is short. We have not long to lather the hearts of those with whom we journey. Therefore, be swift to love, make haste to be kind and live your lives in light of eternity. We go in peace and we go singing."

The service came to a conclusion with Terence (Tet) Grube leading the singing of the "Pitcairn Anthem."

Thank You

Ric and family of the late Colleen McCullough would like to thank the Norfolk Island community for their love and support in their loss of Col. A special thank you to the Dr's and Hospital staff for their care, the hearse driver, the gravediggers, the Sextant, those special ladies at the usual place, the pallbearers, Andre and Milton for the sound equipment, Jodie for the programme and to those that travelled so far to be here to lay Col to rest.

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