Vale Barry Mckeown

On behalf of the family, I'd firstly like to thank Don for organising everything we see here today. Dad would have been absolutely thrilled to see so many people here — while at the same time wondering what all the fuss was about!

What a life my Dad had. A life well and truly lived.

Looking around today, it's no surprise to see so many of you here. Dad did a lot, gave a lot, and left a lasting impression on so many people in so many places.

During my lifetime, he went from Castle Hill in NSW, to two and a half years in Lee-on-the-Solent in the UK, back to Castle Hill, then Baulkham Hills, Paddington in Queensland, Chambers Flat, Bethania, Mount Cotton, Tweed Heads, Toowoomba, and finally Hope Island on the Gold Coast.

Dad was a man with a very kind heart. He believed strongly in giving back to the community, showing respect to others and, generally speaking, following the rules.

Although, if Dad had a shortcoming, it would probably have been his patience — or more accurately, his complete lack of it when confronted with fools!

I remember when Mum and Dad came to visit Kim and I in Melbourne. We all boarded the train and a group of teenagers sat opposite us who were loud, obnoxious and clearly testing Dad's patience.

I looked across at Dad and could see the pressure building. Mum knew Dad all too well and said to him numerous times along the way, "Just let it go, Barry." Luckily for them, they got off the train before we did — but they left a huge mess behind. When Dad saw that, it was the last straw. As their feet hit the station platform, Dad jumped up, grabbed one of their empty soft drink cans and threw it at them,

yelling, “Take your rubbish with you!” Thankfully, the train doors closed and we moved on.

That was Dad. He had a very strong sense of right and wrong — and he wasn’t afraid to let you know which side of the line you were standing on!

Never one to take a backward step, there was also the night out in Sydney when Dad was a young sailor. He was jumped by two blokes looking for a fight. He was outnumbered, but that didn’t seem to bother him. Quick-thinking Barry pulled off his belt and proceeded to whip them with the large buckle end before chasing the two of them away until they fled with their tails between their legs. I think it’s fair to say that particular story probably explains why he was so well suited to a career in the Navy!

It also comes as no surprise to my brother and I that dispensing discipline is one of the many roles of a coxswain in the Navy. Let’s just say we have a lot of sympathy for the sailors who came before Dad and had to receive one of his famous “talkings to” after doing the wrong thing.

I was fortunate to have Scott as my older brother and was able to learn from his mistakes — which probably saved me from a few “talkings to” of my own. Thanks Scott!! One of Scott’s mistakes I remember particularly well was the time he snuck into the Castle Hill RSL while underage and came home with a belly full. I’ll spare you all the details, but let’s just say that the next morning Dad had a very hungover Scott outside mowing the lawn in the morning heat. I quietly made a mental note to myself that day — some lessons are best learned by watching someone else!

As a young boy, I remember thinking that the only person who could yell louder than Dad was his great mate and our neighbour, John Taylor.

John may have been small in stature but had a voice as loud as a fog horn. Dad and John shared many common interests, particularly boating and fishing.

I have many fond memories of our families holidaying together in Port Stephens. Scott, being five years older, was probably more interested in surfing and chasing girls, while I was usually pestering Dad and John while they tinkered with boats and fishing tackle.

One particular memory stands out.

John came rushing over to our house after flipping his son's trail bike. He had caught his hand on the tyre knob, leaving a nasty gash in the palm of his hand. Dad took one look at it and decided it needed a couple of stitches. So he sat John down in our loungeroom, grabbed his Navy suture kit and a bottle of his favourite Navy Pusser's Rum.

Four shots for John and one for Dad later, he started stitching. Almost immediately, John requested another couple of shots. The needle would go in just fine, but Dad was having trouble getting it back out the other side. The problem was John's tough-as-leather truck-driver hands — combined with the awkward position of the cut.

After many attempts, and with John feeling more like a pin cushion than a patient, Dad eventually wrapped the hand up. They then decided the safest thing to do was simply finish the rum!

I have no doubt that Dad and John are looking down on us today, having a good laugh and reliving that story together.

Dad had many jobs throughout his life — driving trucks, painting, chicken farming, boat sales, garbage truck driver and QUT security guard — but it was the Navy that he was destined for.

So strong was his desire to join the Navy that he falsified his birth certificate and sat the Navy entrance exam when he was only 16. He failed the first exam and had to wait another three months before sitting it again. Shockingly, he failed the second time too. He was bitterly disappointed and couldn't understand how he had failed again. But despite that, he still hadn't given up on his dream.

Now legitimately 17, Dad took the long train trip into Brisbane to sit the test for a third time. As he walked into the recruitment office, the staff member recognised him straight away and, with a sly grin, said, "You'll do OK today, Barry."

Little did Dad know that the staff member had known his true age all along — and the real reason he had failed the previous two times was because he was simply too young!

Finally, Dad got his chance. And the rest, as they say, is history.

I thought it was pretty great having a Dad in the Navy. I loved going into his workplace at HMAS Platypus on Sydney Harbour and being allowed to walk through the submarine and look through the periscope.

The weekend fishing trips to the HMAS Penguin pier, with Dad's exclusive access, were pretty special too. Who would have thought that six-year-old boy would return to that same pier 12 years later as a young soldier, completing his Army underwater divers course alongside Navy clearance divers?

My course mates couldn't quite understand the significance of it. For me, though, it was a place filled with memories of fishing with Dad and Scott all those years earlier. "Look, another leather jacket, Dad!" I would say.

I’m not sure Mum’s memories of the Navy were always quite as fond as mine. She spent months looking after two boys on her own while Dad was away at sea. It’s definitely tough being a Navy wife, and Mum did an amazing job looking after our family. She never failed to have a nice home-cooked meal on the table each night for Dad to come home to — topped off with a cuppa and his much-loved Arnott’s Choc Mint bicky. From the freezer, of course. Just how Dad liked them!

Another funny memory I have of Dad was from the late 1970s when we were living in England. Dad was completing his submarine escape instructor’s course. During the final practice escape, unbeknownst to Dad, the Poms had sewn an inflatable kangaroo tail into his escape suit. So, when Dad reached the surface and climbed out of the water, the surprise was revealed — and the cameras started flashing. There are apparently photos floating around somewhere. I’m sure Dad would have preferred that story to remain classified!

There are so many memories. So many stories. And that’s what makes a life well lived.

I’ll really miss our chats about world events, new military hardware and tactics, how the grandsons were going in footy and how his only granddaughter was going with her dancing. I’ll miss helping you in the garden, our morning and afternoon walks around the Halcyon Waters complex, and all the ordinary conversations that now mean so much.

Dad, you gave us a lifetime of stories. You taught us the importance of hard work, standing up for what you believe in, helping others, respecting people and, occasionally, making sure people took their rubbish with them!

You were a loving husband, a great Dad, a proud grandfather, a loyal mate and a man who lived life on his own terms.

I know you wouldn’t want all the fuss and fanfare of a big farewell.

So, on behalf of the whole family, I think there’s really only one way to sum it up:

You did good, Dad.

You did very, very good.

We love you, and we’ll miss you.

Raymond Mckeown