

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

# Donald Kay Forrest



*goodbye... abbisinyā*



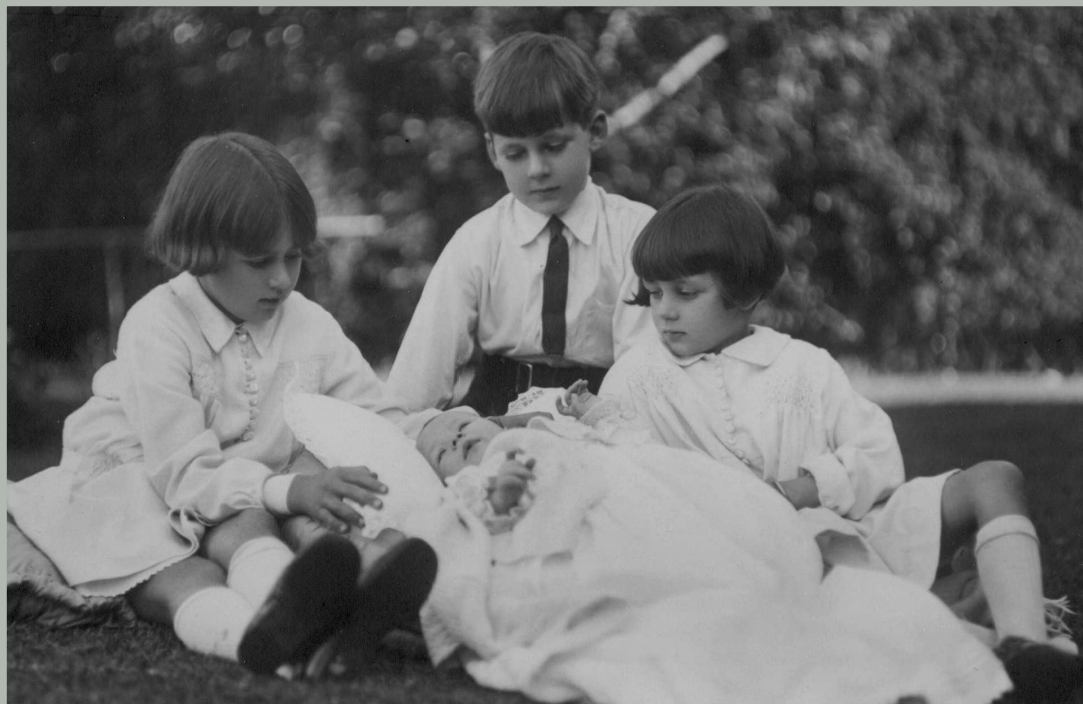
4 May 1928 – 24 September 2023

*"I was a reluctant Jackerroo, but I gave it a go and survived."*

# GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

at Minderoo Chapel

1 October 2023



*Lizabee, David, Shirley, Donald*

*Welcome to the celebration  
of the life of Donald Kay Forrest,  
the youngest child of Mercyn and  
Babs Forrest, passing away peacefully at  
Minderoo Station last week surrounded by  
family on the 24th September 2023.*

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Donald Kay Forrest  
1928 – 2023



# Eulogy

*read by Andrew Forrest*



A huge welcome home, everybody. With all my family, I am so touched that you are here,  
and I know that Dad would be overwhelmed with the joy of this gathering.  
I believe in his way, though we need not understand, he is with us here today.

Dad's 95 years covered the Great Depression, World War Two and a half century  
of managing what would become his love of Minderoo.

On behalf of my sister Janie and my brother David, I am honored to give this eulogy to  
Husband, Uncle, Grandfather, Great Grandfather, Stepdad, and great friend, to all of us.



*Donald Kay Forrest, 1928 - 2023.*



From Dad's birth on May 4th, life was challenging. With a spot on his lung as a little  
boy that was feared to be the onset of tuberculosis, he was sent to boarding school  
at the age of 7, you can see his early life wasn't easy.

The little boy took the bumps in the road with endeavour and with not an  
inconsiderable amount of courage, for which he never credited himself. Even at the age  
of just 7, miserable from the servitude and claustrophobia of the damp confinement of  
boarding school, he ran away no less than 3 times. Each attempt showed a spectacular  
quiet will, which would later serve him well in life, even though each attempt,  
of course, failed barely 1km into his attempted 1400km journey home.

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Donald Kay Forrest  
1928 - 2023

Eventually, at the end of this unhappy era, his parents pulled him out of boarding school, and he was lucky to be tutored at home under the watchful and very caring eye of his beloved older sister, Lizabee. He finished the schooling year with the opposite of boarding school confinement in the wide-open spaces of Minderoo.

There, Dad was surrounded by the love of his mother, Babs and his older sister and tutor teacher, Lizabee; and he was particularly close to the youngest of his older siblings, Shirley and David.

His life was intertwined with hardship, forced acceptance of his destiny, but also the immense joy of life on the land, the community he loved of the North-West and the two great loves of his life – Judy and Marie – with whom he felt immense companionship, joy and love.

Shirley taught the future Manager of Minderoo the intense love of what she called the ‘sweet river’ behind us, of the nearby Ashburton and the ‘sunlit plains extended’ in her own words of ‘beauteous Minderoo’. Dad’s relationship with Shirley remained very close all her life. It was as long and as deep as her love for the winding Ashburton River that enriches Minderoo, in view of our little family cemetery. All are hosted by the ancient red and white gum landscape you see beyond me. It is fitting that Dad’s body will shortly be buried alongside Shirley’s.

Dad also enjoyed a close relationship with his much-adored older brother, David. It was early in Dad’s life, that our Uncle David explained to his little brother Donald, who he referred to as ‘Duck’ (a reference to the waddling character), that when he came back from the war with the Axis powers, particularly Japan, he would go to university. Dad aspired to this as well and Uncle David often mentored little Don aspiring on his return from the war, to be trained as a medical Doctor.

But he never came back.

The loss of Fighter Pilot and Captain, the most adored brother David, when Dad was only 13 wrenched a hole in his, and the entire family’s lives, from which they never fully recovered.

Janie, David and I, in our own younger years, reflected this pain in our childish and fervent hope that Uncle David would one day walk out of the jungle of Papua New Guinea, having survived the crash.

Brother David was only 23 years old when shot down, taken at the hands of Japanese forces off Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea. The loss of our Uncle David, sparked in our generation a long search for his Beaufort Bomber 188 and this search remains on foot today. It is Dad's wish, I am afraid unfulfilled, that he one day would hold Uncle David's dog tags in his hand, solving the mystery of his death and final resting place.

That huge loss cemented in Dad at an early age the knowledge that the future of his life would be that of a Manager of a Sheep Station. Dad would later claim, well into his 90s, that the tears that flowed on learning of his brother's death would be the last he would ever cry. The family was notified on sister Shirley's birthday, and he shared her remorse so severely that they never celebrated Shirley's birthday ever again throughout their long lives.

Dad knew that Shirley continued to write letters to Uncle David even after his passing for most of her life, to keep his memory alive in her heart. Dad helped us store the copious number of these letters in the little archive we have here at Minderoo.

The removal of Dad's right to charter his own future, under the stern eye of a caring and loving, but dictatorially strict father would have major implications for many generations. It is why Nicola and I now, have an expression in our immediate family, that 'hey kids, we can always try to be like you, our children, but you, our children, never have to be like us'.

Our Dad, still a youngster, was moved to another school, called Hale and joined a community which he never left. It was at Hale School where he could settle into who he actually was, and be accepted at last, and - he thrived.

However, his life did not seem to be his own.



While dreaming of a life which included further education,  
he found himself as a square peg in a round hole, and as described by Dad himself,  
a self-proclaimed '*reluctant Jackaroo, who survived*'.

It is in this acceptance of his life and the dearly loved open spaces,  
my dad remarked "*some people are born leaders, and I am not one of them*".  
This is the irony of dad. His own description of his life, always couched within that irony,  
is his self-deprecating humility and humor. He became at many points in his life,  
a leader and highly effective, while never acknowledging it.

Even at the tender age of 17, Dad was thrust into leadership as the temporary  
Manager of Wyloo Station and he reflected at the time, to a very large number  
of surprised Indigenous stockmen, that he was quite astonished to be there.

To be running a 100-mile-long station and managing all these people,  
when he knew a great deal of everything about nothing. He was after all, just a kid.

However, after the death of his brother David in his strict father Mervyn's eyes,  
Dad's life was re-mapped. His hopes and indeed his grades would have allowed  
him to go to university but these were dashed, and instead he returned to a life  
on the land, and a life on the land till the end, which served him very well.

This included a year Jackaroo'ing at Minderoo before exploring the vast  
open plains of the Burrup Peninsular on Karratha Station, not so far from here,  
where now the huge Iron Ore operations stand.

This extensive property would demand Dad to ride a horse for weeks at a time,  
which would roll into continuously isolated months. He would fend for himself  
checking the waterholes and windmills and fixing the fences on this very large  
but lonely sheep station.

With the provisions he was promised, never arriving, he would sustain himself  
by riding down to the coast to collect crayfish, wild off the reef and shoot his own  
kangaroo for meat. He learnt on the job to survive and was taught to catch, prepare  
and cook bungarra, according to the old ways of the local Aboriginal people.

And it was on these large and lonely treks, that he chanced upon major previously unseen Indigenous art, which continued to cement his ongoing respect and love for Indigenous Australians, which we, his whole family, will always share.

Dad was mentored by old Bill Lesley and the vivacious Tish Lesly, on Karratha Station. Our Granddad, Mervyn and Bill Lesley were great outback Engineers making do with whatever they had at the time to get any job done, of any scale. They had to use whatever meagre resources they could find, and ample evidence remains of their considerable ingenuity. Dad inherited this ability to make do with whatever he had, to create the result. You may see but a small part of this in the Minderoo workshop museum you walked past upon entering the Homestead, and which you are welcome on your way to inspect.

It is these Homestead grounds which were founded by Dad's Grandparents, the Pioneers – David and Mary – in partnership with our Great Uncles, Lord John and Alexander Forrest.

The uncomplaining attitude of Dad's was wrought from these very early and tough years when he was taught that our Great Grandfather, David, drove the first large mob of sheep into the Pilbara. Despite being speared, which nearly ended his life, he went on to settle the family home we now all enjoy. Together with the local Indigenous people, the family built a great and enduring love of Minderoo. Many of our original First Australian Minderoo families are sharing the grief of losing old Ju Ju with us today.

Dad knew all the way through his life, that the home on this once dusty sandhill we are on today, was where his Grandparents survived and where his Great Grandmother once wrote with glee 'that a bullock dray had arrived with the first and only window', installed in this first settlers house – one room, one window. It later grew of course to become this gracious old home and its rambling lawns, that Dad so loved.

Dad was sent to South Australia to continue learning the ropes on Nonning Station. Following which, he returned to Minderoo as an Overseer in what he once described himself to be as '*not even a manager's bootlace*'.

Yet a year later, only 23 years old, he inherited the management of Minderoo and the running of the station, which in no small way, due to the leadership and management skill which Dad always denied of himself, was often considered the pearl of the North.

Growing up, as we all did, with knowledge of Elders - that *'you never own the land, the land owns you'* - Dad grew with a deep respect of the harsh wilderness and instinctive teachings of the North-West and its first people, who shaped his life.

And did he ever build a wonderful life at Minderoo and the Pilbara!

On top of managing the station, he served as a member of the Council of the Ashburton Shire for a quarter of a century, and concluded with 5 years as President. Not bad for a person who claimed he could never be a leader.

Despite growing up with a father who during his life, dictated his every move, Dad's rebellious streak led him to eventually muster the courage and determination to stand up to his dad and buy the station from the wide variety of family shareholders.

At the time - 1974 - it was considered a King's ransom, and for a man that was denied a university education, it was an incredible feat. It is in this endeavour, that the true mateship and support of his wife, Judy, and the guiding hand of great friends, that really helped our father.

It was thanks to the generosity of people like Syd Deakin, Sir Garrick Agnew and John Bennison, that he was able to pull this off. It was Syd's uncashed cheque for a possible demanded deposit that remained in Dad's pocket, during that final pivotal shareholders meeting where he was granted 1 month to raise the money.

Syd and Dad were the best of friends, and it was Sydney's father - Cecil (CJ) - who founded their multi-generational, 105 year-long relationship, as great mates and shearing contractors, and we welcome Syd here today.



Equally intertwined in Dad's life was friendship, love and loyalty to his mates.

Dad's endearing, friendly, self-deprecating and humble manner of communicating to all people, whether Prince or Paupers, won him friendship from across our country.

His humour and playfulness crossed age barriers and endeared him to powerful and not, young and old alike. Dad's humility treated everyone the same and made all in his presence feel that they were just that little bit special.

They knew in Dad's friendly manner, there was no judgement, no matter who they were, he was just happy to see them.

And this is a part of our Dad, I know Janie and David agree, we all found so endearing about Donald Kay Forrest. No matter who you were, you always knew where you stood with Dad, and you always knew that in his eyes, you stood equally with him.

Of the great loves in Dad's life, there were really only two.

Generous as always in his praise, he described Judy, our mother, as a great friend, beautiful and curvaceous who shaped his world with her fearlessness, determination and confidence.

And yet after a quarter of a century of marriage, when mum carved out her own life away from Minderoo, this is when he really met the love of his life - Marie Everlyn Vivian.

You were, and are Marie, of your beautiful 34 years with our Dad, engrained and cemented into our Forrest family with all your children and all your grandchildren.

Dad, as you all know, lost Minderoo but on the family regaining it, he was overwhelmed with joy. For his last years he was able to return every winter for most of the year, and in this, his final chapter he deliberately chose to never leave.

When I prayed over Dad, immediately after he died at 3:15am, today a week ago, I prayed for the certainty that his path would be lit and clear for his journey ahead.

The following evening, with Janie and David, my own loved siblings, we welcomed his journey, and celebrated quietly on the banks, the banks of the river Dad and his sister, Shirley so loved, our Ashburton.

And when my own siblings left me that night, to allow me a quiet reflection in the darkness of the Ashburton, surrounded by the ancient softness of the beautiful paperbark trees, I felt the presence of another set of siblings. Through my grief, I felt their great joy, the great joy of reunion, of at last being together again.

The joy of the end of their separation was palpable and so uplifting that only the dark night could hide the tears streaming down my face.

As Dad's much-loved birds slept around me, I prayed, and in the darkness beside Auntie Shirley's 'sweet river', I felt with absolute certainty and deep inner joy, that Dad had at last reunited with his much-loved brother David, his older sisters, Lizabee and Shirley, and his mum and dad, Babs and Mervyn.

The joy of their reunion filled me as though it danced through the gum trees and the starry night sky as I walked home that night.

I leave that mystical experience with you and now share with you Dad's own words with his kids and to all of us.

Dad said these words to me over our very last conversations, and I am honoured to share them with all of you today, through Janie and David. I confirmed them with him, carefully and exactly before he passed.

You will see his attitude of self-responsibility, shed no blame, don't take nor give credit for who you are, to anyone. You will see his faith in the coming generations and his decisiveness to act with a cause or when a reason shows itself. And finally, what Minderoo meant to him in those final days even as he reflects on his own passing away.



## Quotes from Don

*read by Janie & David Forrest*



It is an honor for us to be able to read this because I think you will hear dad,  
I hope, through our voices.



*Dad said in his last weeks:*

“No period lasts forever.

You just have to decide what sort of period you want.

What you do with your period is up to you.

And I’m talking about you and me....And all the family.  
Probably others too.

We all chose to do what we do with our period.

It’s solely up to us.

You can’t blame anyone else.

You shouldn’t credit anyone else.

There will be things you can do about it. You should do it.

It’s up to you.

That’s the way it is. That’s pretty right.

Your friends are what’s important too. And yes, I have great friends in my generation.

Though I like the generation more in front of me, more than even the generation I leave.  
I like the generations ahead of me even more.

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Donald Kay Forrest  
1928 – 2023



There are problems in the world. You shouldn't worry about it.  
But if you can do something about it.

Do it.

Get on with it.

Don't spend your time worrying about it.

I know you love me, and you know it's vice versa. I love you.

But that isn't the point.

The point I'm trying to make isn't that.

It's this.

It's important to pass on not just the love you have for me  
or the love I have for you and my family.

It's more important that you all pass on that love.

To others.

And yes, Minderoo is a staging post. Has been forever.  
People come and stay, yet other people come and pass through.

It's an old staging post, and that is what Minderoo is for me now.

A staging post.

When you go through the gates of Minderoo, you see her foundation dates,  
which is unusual. Reminds me it's a staging post.

*(Then he chuckled while we had a slow, late breakfast together and said...)*

Come and have a bit of lunch with me.

Don't know what I'll give you. Something.

A kick in the arse probably. But it would be great to see you."

—w—

*Farewell, Dad. Let's do as you say!*

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Donald Kay Forrest  
1928 – 2023

*Off for a kip*



*Oooooo*



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Donald Kay Forrest  
1928 - 2023