

Opening comments - am wearing a hat at a funeral, it's unconventional but Des was not always one for conventionality. "Make your own kind of music" as the Mamas and Papas sang. In that spirit, please sign my cookbook at the back. Am writing down the food I am cooking and creating this week and for the wake. For guests to sign on the table with Mum's favourite children's books and teaching resources on display. All welcome to attend at our house 10 Sun St today, or drop in over the weekend if you can't make it after the ceremony.

Writing an eulogy for your mother, especially giving it, is an emotional challenge to say the least. Which three words describe Desley Pudniks? As a technologist, I think of the AI-driven GPS app of that name, "what 3 words", to pinpoint a location, a destination. For Des it was a place of being: compassion, kindness, gratitude. Those concepts are now the everyday parlance of the esoteric movement. If we were on our way to Lake Tinaroo today for one of our frequent windsurfing, catamaraning & camping holidays, stopping in Atherton to have a lunch of ham sandwiches and lemonade, we would now see billboards and shop windows advertising "compassion, kindness & gratitude" as forms of healing, spiritual goals and many types of therapy.

Yet before the personal wellness hype and hyper focus on the individual, my Mum was practising these three virtues in her everyday life. Her attributes of infinite caring for others, their wellbeing, listening to their stories, made her temperament ideal for the vocation of being a primary school teacher. Indeed early years education was her calling, a passion she wanted to pursue even after her retirement in her 60s. Des had frequently upskilled her teaching qualifications since graduating in 1966 from Kedron Park Teachers' College in Brisbane.

Her outstanding pedagogic skillset was what is now called Special Needs Education. She began with supporting "Gifted Children" in the 80s, getting

certificates in Brisbane through the Queensland Teachers Union, then later certified as a specialist tutor for kids with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds in the 1990s. Thanks BTW to the QTU for the stunning floral tribute to Des and their condolences from the FNQ branches.

Mum told me that she was the youngest student to enrol at Kedron that decade - her mother, Lillie May Marsh, nee Thornton, confirmed that her clever daughter had finished high school in Grafton "early because she was one of the top students, as well as one of the youngest to finish Year 12 in NSW." She was also a School Prefect at Grafton High.

Des was born at the Women's hospital in Sydney in 1942. Her forefathers were New South Welshmen and women - and good, old, rural Victorians! Many from Wallsend, a historic mining village that is now part of Newcastle. Des often mentioned her eclectic ancestry of coal miners, wealthy merchants, unionists, a Bendigo Mayor, gold rush businesspeople from Victoria and soldiers/army people of both genders, both sides of the family from NSW & Victoria who served in both World Wars.

It was sadly without much detail given some personal tragedies concerning her father Corporal Sidney Stanley Marsh from Bulli, [Bull - I] on the spectacular NSW coast, and her mother Lillie. Des adored her mother who was a truly gifted gardener and also served in RAAF - in the Women's Auxiliary for the airforce in Sydney as shown in the few black and white photos of her and girlfriends in uniform on an airfield. I used to quiz Grandma about them back in my childhood in Freshwater, our magical houses overlooking cane fields in Freshie and the Kuranda range mountains. Grandma, BTW, is buried just across from us by the pond - her grave is directly in line with our display table and is where we will place Des's ashes in ca 2 weeks' time.

Since ANZAC Day 2024, I have been on a journey of discovery on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) (using AI to discover many connected family trees and ancestors from Oz, Germany and the USA) and the much appreciated responses of Canberra's Virtual War Memorial for Aussie service men and women. Des' had military forebears stretching back ca 5 or 6 generations to when they emigrated from Scotland, Ireland and England to Australia and New Zealand. On the latter - we didn't know we had a Kiwi great great relative so that might explain Des's affinity and love for our neighbouring country.

I've returned 5 times since April 2022, up to 8-10 weeks at a time, to be there for Mum and help Dad and the family with the round the clock care that Alzheimers' demands of its victims and carers. I had spent around 2 months in the "tropical spring" of 2019 before COVID changed everyone's world. I was writing a book on AI for my New York publishers. Even though dementia was already evident, Mum was as always kind, encouraging and immensely interested in what I was doing. She had the same attitude and approach to anyone she knew - or even strangers she might meet in a café in Cairns or on one of her much loved journeys in Asia, Europe or Australia and New Zealand. The short video with music and photos we're showing during the service today illustrates those trips and her great love of travel.

She keenly wanted to know about the topic of Artificial Intelligence - bravely interested as usual - and encouraged me to "give it my all", heart and soul. As she would do, in all her endeavours. Teaching generation after generation how to read and write, be creative, be ambitious, develop your individual potential, live your dreams and life to its fullest. This was Desley's true gift to the world: the loving power of wonder, the capacity to be open to others and receive their

talents and insights with genuine curiosity and compassion, instead of the all too pervasive envy and "self comparison" that exists these days.

Des used to sing and dance with as much gusto as her focus and devoted attention to others, especially the young children in her care, year in, year out. She absolutely adored so many of the kids' songs and nursery rhymes; early years teaching was a joyous occupation for her, evident in the many decorations, projects, brightly coloured and stimulating activities she would teach her charges and engage them in looking after classroom pets - from patiently spoilt mice to communicative goldfish. Derek and I often got to look after these creatures during the school breaks and I'll never forget the goldfish that "came when you called it" and would happily chat in bubbles!

Des's love of music, especially country icons like Roy Orbison, Olivia Newton John, Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton, to pop stars like Elvis, ABBA and Neil Diamond, was part of our upbringing. She loved to sing and dance around the living room, right up until the very last few months of her life. She knew all the words to her favourite songs - a selection of them are in the video. The Australian 60s pop group The Seekers were her all time fave band; she also thoroughly enjoyed the Mamas and the Papas and The Beach Boys.

Simon and Garfunkel was a spiritual experience on another plane for Des. Speaking of that: though she converted to Catholicism, she often called herself a witch with the power to cast spells. This was in jest but I for one thought she could have had supernatural powers as her intuition, her "intuitive advice" was remarkable. We often shared "coincidental experiences" and pondered how "the universe" was driving such surprising synchronicity of events and serendipity in our lives.

Her spiritualism meant she liked to read her stars on a weekly (often from The Women's Weekly) or a monthly basis (New Idea magazine which we jokingly called No Idea!). That's why Mum would often send me my astrological reading for Pisces wherever I was in the world - Berlin, Nuremberg, Zurich, Nice or London. Bizarrely, as she knew what was going on in the lives of all her children, she would excitedly say - "read this month's stars, it is exactly right for what you are doing and going through". And curiously, invariably, it was spot on and apt for whatever I was experiencing, achieving and feeling at that point in time and the near future.

I'll finish with an astrological reading for all of us from May 2024 to May 2025, which through pure serendipity while writing this eulogy, I found in a local magazine "Connect" lying about in a cafe where Kurt and I were brunching across from Rusty's. The astrology forecast for 12 months from May is apt because I fortunately was here to celebrate Mum's last birthday with her on May 22nd at her lovely, last place of rest at Kewarra Aged Care. According to the constellation of star signs, we are in a time of the Gemini (both my parents are Geminis by the way). But in true Des fashion, the words of this particular astrological reading are uncannily apt for this beautiful person who I was privileged to call my mother.

"With the Sun, Venus and Jupiter, our brightest celestial bodies, all dancing in Gemini during May, it is also a **very bright beginning with an emphasis on dance, play and youthful fun - therein is the true wisdom... Love, truth and courage to light the way.**"

Going into the month of June, from Desley's 76th birthday to her peaceful passing on the day before her husband Karl's 82nd birthday, the stars, quote,

"still followed the theme of have fun" but with an "awakening realisation that we're all in this together, unique, yet united. A paradox"...

With that, let's enjoy the cartoons that Des Pudniks celebrated with her wicked sense of humour, Gary Larson and Murray Ball. She gifted their works to her family members as she wrote in the dedications - with laughter comes love and healing, the power to overcome hardship and sadness.

[quote from Rob Hart, astrologer, Kuranda Heritage Markets. p 37 ASTROLOGY Regular Feature. Connect: The Holistic Magazine of FNQ, 20 Year Anniversary Edition 2004-2024]