

VALE NORM MITCHELL

The death of Norman Mitchell, husband of our past President, Dr Winifred Mitchell, occurred peacefully in the Nimbin Hospital on June 25th, 1998.

Norm struck me as a very gentle, dignified man whose demeanour masked some very strong and forthright opinions which he would often air in well-considered letters to the editors of newspapers. He was briefly my tutor in educational history at the University of Wollongong and, having read some of his many letters, I was surprised at how eager he was to quietly listen to the opinions of others even when it seemed obvious to me that he probably violently disagreed with the person speaking.

As well as being married to our past President, Norm had two daughters and five grandchildren. He died at the age of 86. One of his daughters, Kathy Stavrou, has written a marvellous poem to commemorate the death of her much loved father.

To my dear old Dad.

Norman Charles Mitchell, Nimbin. Born 6 April 1913, died 25 June 1998

My father taught me to play chess so well that ruefully he found,

After a year or so, that I was able to beat him.

My father taught me well.

I was carefully taught George Bernard Shaw,

Socialism, Marxism, kindness, gentleness,

A burning desire to rescue all the creatures of our biosphere

From the ravaging destructive madness of coercive corporate society,
That I recognise as capitalism,
Thanks to his rationality, his methodical splitting of the logs,
Building our house at Austinmer room by room, board by board.
The funnel web spiders, the kookaburras waiting in the trees,
Cocking beady eyes at us, at Patsy our black kelpie
At the brown snakes disturbed by our house building
At the edge of the escarpment forest,
Where the mountain flies like a flag over the sea.
Now I remember him there, teaching me gymnastic tricks of body and
mind, How to chase ideas down their burrows, never letting go.
“Never drop your bundle”, he always said.
He was a dreamer, a dreamer, a dreamer.
He told me, when they moved here 7 years ago, That this was the first
time in his life
He'd ever watched the clouds.
What thoughts there must have been in his dreamer's mind, Dreaming it
all in his beautiful manuscripts,
“Take It As It Comes”, his autobiography;
“How Odd Of God”, his exposition of the Bible,
That even a Salman Rushdie wouldn't have dared;
My father was frightened of nothing, not even Death;
“Why Nimbin is Not a Coaltown”, that starts

Millions of years ago, when this place was still a richly bubbling lava soup.

When I looked at him, just after he died, a beautiful sculpture of a man,

So beautiful I said, he was so beautiful and calm,

His soft white beard still bristling,

As white as the heavy frost that fretworked the roadsides,

The road sides between the Nimbin Hospital and home, 4.30 a.m. on the

first frost of winter,

So cold, so cold, I rubbed his feet and legs, So cold, I couldn't warm

them,

Even a space blanket wouldn't warm him,

He was slowly slipping from this life to that,

Flanked by the kindly nurses of the Nimbin cottage Hospital, That is what

it was like, a little cottage

Where someone we loved just slipped away,

With me and my mother to stroke his gentle hands and say goodbye, Knowing

it had to be, but so shocked (?), it was hard to bear. With kindly Doctor

David, Helen and David the Community nurses, Father Arthur who wasn't

allowed to pray over him of course, He would have jumped up and objected,

But spoke as such a good old friend:

Loretta, Lola, Nancy, the night nurses, Nettie,

His grand daughters Becka, Coeo and Corin

All saying goodbye to this kindly, clever old man,

Lying as still and calm as a dead knight or warrior,
And my dear friend John, the custodian of here,
Who knows about death and grief and loss, said, Kathy,
He's a big, big spirit, he's there, he's watching out for the old woman and you,
For the girls, he's there all right.
And Diana and Kerry brought my mother a wedge tail eagle feather,
That drifted down from the sky over Mountaintop:
So right for the dreamy spirit of the man now gone back into air,
Who soared on his wings of Philosophy
Surveying all with his thoughtful, keen blue eyes.

So I say to you, his many friends,
That he hasn't gone; his letters to the Editor, his thoughts labelled and categorised,
His books, his deeds live on in their results.
I am one result, and my sister, and his grandchildren,
Nurtured so gently by him, while all of us were nurtured by my mother.
And I said at the hospital, most of us can expect, on the statistics,
To have a lovely mother: how many of us are blessed
With the lifetime company of a spirit like my father.

He told me at the hospital that the pain he had in his legs
Was like when he was 12 at a picnic, he ran too close to a car, it ran over his toe.
That must have been 1925.
That was the other pain he remembered, like this. His mother sat up

with him all night.

His last spoken dream, his last memory of long ago, a long life

Of love, positivity, and kindness in word and deed.

So Solidarity Forever. The dream doesn't die, he knew that,

And meticulously and methodically labelled and recorded his memories

and dreams,

Refusing to the end to be coerced, even by Death,

When he said, Blow this for a joke, I'm going, and went.

Kathy Stavrou, Nimbin 28 June 1998.