

# Geoff Honey

## School, post school, Kokoda and Rowing

Each year we'd receive the Honey family worldwide and outdoor travel brochure in the form of a Christmas card prepared by Geoff. I was always amazed how much the family was able to squeeze into one year! Geoff and his family lived every minute as if it was the last.

Hello, I am John Treloar, a friend of Geoff's from school days to the present and very honoured to be able to say a few words about a cheeky, funny, loving and humble mate.

I am well supported with the thoughts and comments on Geoff's life sent to me by his friends from school, from one of his many Kokoda Trecks and Newington Masters Rowing; covering roughly 1965 to the present. My inbox is filled with memories, some I cant share, others that brought instant tears or laughter, and all with a common theme describing a man who we all really should emulate.

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### School

Everyone remembers when they first met Geoff.

From meeting in Kindergarten, Ron Simpson expressed that Geoff was like an old Wellington boot - one that you'd expect to see around forever. Ron like many will miss him greatly.

Ralph Bennet recalls that he met Geoff at primary school at Killara . Ralf says) He was universally popular, due to his inherent decency and sense of "fair play " . He was athletic and a swimmer .

(Ralph continues) Our friendship was sealed especially during the summer of '65. It was an intoxicating period ..... the feeling of an endless summer holiday, stretching out into time . A holiday so long , that you feel that time is standing still.

He recall "Many afternoons that summer, were spent in the pool at Geoff's East Lindfield home . It consisted of a relentless routine of in and out of the pool and pool room, combined with general messing around and a constant of fun and laughter. The background music, blasting into the neighbourhood, were those classic 1960's tracks , coming from a large Panasonic Transistor radio.

Ralph's observation was that the loss of his brother , etched a life long magnification of Geoff's already fine qualities of empathy for people and the situations that life can throw at them.

In balance there was also fun loving Geoff . This quality attracted his countless friends and acquaintances. He also believed that life had to be lived and you can't waste a minute .

There is a very funny side of Geoff which people can share at the RFS later today. Ask Ralf about the NRMA man. Ask Peter Bull for more from him about to trip to the Commonwealth Games in NZ in 1974. Also ask Steve Patrick about the sheep rushing and Steve's father.

( Pause )

Like all his friends , Ralf's life has been enriched , for knowing him . An enrichment that goes on forever and in a projected, diluted effect, through the centuries to come .

Thanks Ralph ( Bennett )

David Jeffrey remembers Geoff, "Like so many, I could quickly summon up fond memories of Geoff at Newington, especially his sunny disposition, that distinctive, infectious laugh — which I can hear as I write — and broad smile.

David continues, (At Newington) I was still finding my way, with a tendency to "reserve and observe", I became more outgoing. I recall Geoff, in particular, exhibiting great self-confidence and enthusiasm in his many pursuits at school. This would help me to explore further the many opportunities there on offer: how to join in and, in so doing, make good friends with varying interests. I saw Geoff's energy and zest for adventure and started to "give it a go", something that has stayed with me and for which I am most thankful.

Geoff was also a historian with his own time capsule! You'll recall Lucy mentioned his excellent documentation of holidays and life. His time capsule was not buried, but a humble old shortbread biscuit tin which there were all kinds of treasures including many issues of Caliban, the student paper from 1970 at Newington. There were also school dance tickets, schedules for sports carnivals, a whole collection of 1970 school history. I had a quick look into the special tin last week and was able to send to the 1970 year some photos of selected pages from Geoff's Caliban collection. Geoff himself had written a few pieces and Joe Goldsworthy, now head of Boys at Calrossy in Armidale NSW, commented that what Geoff wrote was still absolutely true today. Joe said that he'd referred to one of Geoff's pieces when speaking to the school yesterday.

In the tin there were also many clippings from the dismissal of Rev Trathen. 1970 was a tumultuous time for all 18 year old males. The Vietnam War was raging and we were up for conscription in a few years. Geoff and I often reflected about these times when we had our 'after rowing coffees'.

These 'after rowing coffees' were often 'after a quick look at the water, slight wind, lets have a coffee, coffee'. This gave us an extra hour or so to talk about everything, covering topics from loving Lucy to how proud he was of Rob, Laura and Georgia, holiday plans, politicians that didn't understand the grain industry,

the great people he worked with, growing strawberries, plans for the future with Lucy and the kids, and lately, honey production.

I digress.

Alan Farrar recalls:

Now for those who know Allan, he wrote a very long email remembering Geoff. I have summarised the story.

Last day of School  
Flour, Water pistols  
SCEGGS Redlands  
SCEGGS Headmaster not amused  
Police called  
Bailed up on school lawn  
Possible trespass charges to be laid  
Distraction from girls  
Police allow the boys to leave  
Relief all round, ignorance of commotion caused, off to next school

And back to Allan's words:

It registered with Geoff that all was not completely right. He quietly and firmly said, "I think that later, we should come back to the school, apologise and offer to do some odd jobs around the place".

Allan said it was many years before he understood that Geoff's suggestion was not a throw away comment. Allen also said that he realised that one was always left in a positive mood after a conversation with Geoff.

Ross Martin spoke on behalf of most if not all Geoff's friends in saying:

That infectious beaming smile and an inherent ability to make everyone he met feel that they were the most important in the world is a trait that I am sure all of us felt and knew.

Mike Bradford recalls:

I have many great memories of Geoff, some of them are from our days at Newington, while others are more recent.

Geoff was a boarder at Newington in 1970, at a time when they occupied an area in the Founders Wing. He had a lovely sunny room on the first floor of that building, the room had a wonderful elevation, an easterly aspect and the view was, as you would expect, quite breath taking.

Geoff and I often had morning tea in that room. I am fairly sure that it was an OK thing to do, as far as the school was concerned, but, in any event, it was a very special treat indeed. Yes, they were great times, the winter sun in that room was simply unforgettable.

You can picture Geoff, a great tea drinker sitting in the bed room in the boarding house looking out over the city enjoying his tea and chatting.

Scott Harvey, tells me that,

“This bloke (Geoff) had a good grip on life ... and well , the right idea.

See it , take it , have fun and be humble.

Frankly , I should have taken more notice of Geoff’s approach to life a long time ago.”

After school I caught up with Geoff on many occasions from time in Florida and Georgia in the US south watching the Space Shuttle land and drinking in bars in the Georgia backwoods to the Tomingley Picnic Races to wonderful times in Goulburn when I was directing a local M&D, La Belle Helene. Geoff wasn't in it, but I did stay with Geoff over a couple of weekends and rehearsal nights. We were both teaching, Geoff at TAFE and myself at a Primary School in Cambelltown. We planned the most brilliant business. Firewood for Sydney. Remember that Lucy mentioned that his favourite tool was the chainsaw. We planned everything, the trucks, the chainsaws, where we would get the wood. We’d tour the back roads of Goulburn Geoff on his beloved BMW and myself on his Honda 500 looking for good places where there was lots of wood. One night drinking and discussing our plans to make this business work, Geoff looked at his fingers and considered our capabilities then with chainsaws and we dropped the idea.

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## **Kokoda**

Geoff loved the Kokoda Track and its many aspects. The physical, emotional and spiritual. In 2000 Geoff, myself Phil Holey and Mark Grey and others completed maybe one of the quickest crossings from Owens Corner to Kokoda. On this trek was Peter Fitzsimmons who was told by other mate of ours, Daniel Petre, that Peter could not write a book about the Kokoda Track with our experiencing it.

Peter remembers:

I thought the measure of the man was this, the thing I will always remember him for, beyond his ever sunny disposition:

Brigade Hill was the hardest part of the Kokoda Track.

Geoff, being Geoff, being fit and strong got to the top first.

Standard practice in such situations was to slump down and use the precious time to wait till the Fatty Boomkas - see John Treloar, Peter Fitzsimmons - got there.

But not Geoff.

That day, I was dinkum faint with exhaustion. But here was Geoff, come two or three kilometres back to help. He had dropped his pack, and come back to get mine!

It was the measure of the man. Emblematic of the Spirit of Kokoda, certainly, but Geoff Honey to the core. He did that throughout the trek. I was the lucky one that day.

Will never forget it.

Peter Fitzsimons

Mark Gray remembers:

Trekking with Geoff

(All) have commented on Geoff's wonderful character, his decency and unwavering friendship over many decades. Mark shares his time with Geoff on Kokoda.

In 2002 at the age of 50, together with Geoff, John Treloar and Phil Holey, we trekked the Kokoda Track together. I know some of you have also trekked the Track and know how tough it is both physically and mentally. Rain, heat, cold, mud, with seemingly endless mountain climbs, forever wet through, are some of the challenges. I know I suffered and was stretched in my ability to continue. But Geoff, ever self reliant, seemed to merge and grow into the challenge and the environment. Always smiling and with subtle encouragement, he kept us forging ahead. Resplendent in skivvy and very short running shorts Geoff was not one for "cool" apparel. In fact his old rucksack was probably the same one he used back in the late 60s. John, Phil and I bought him a new one for his next birthday.

Mark continues: As you have heard, Geoff was so enlivened by Kokoda that he returned a year or so later to compete in a running challenge over the 96Kms. This is extreme endurance athleticism and when I asked Geoff "why" he replied "for the challenge"!

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## **Rowing and recent times**

Rowing with the Masters Rowing Club over Easter was a foodies delight. Geoff would turn up with his famous hot cross buns. Over the year Geoff would bring relish, jam and lately honey to share with his mates at rowing.

Geoff 'fitted in' his rowing when he could. He loved being out in a single scull, would jump into any crew, double quad four or eight. He was up for anything. He could tell the best stories after races in a single scull at Ironcove or SIRC or Ballarat when maybe there was a near or actual capsized or not the straightest course. Geoff went against the temperature convention we have of not rowing in temperatures less than 10 degrees. Off he went on his own to Lake Wendouree

Regatta Centre in Ballarat to freeze. He did row, but could only talk of the cold, walking boats into the water as there were no pontoons and how the rowers tent had a one bar electric heater. But still told the stories with a beaming smile!

Whenever we had a regatta to support or to fill in with coaching, Geoff was the first to put up his hand. Always there ready to place bouys, drive boats, umpire, do anything.

Geoff's last rowing event with the Masters was the schools corporate regatta held at the Olympic Course (SIRC) at Penrith the Sunday before his accident.

Helen Burton whom none of you would know, was one of the school rowers mothers in an all womens crew at this regatta.

Like many other mums and dads on that day it was probably the first time they had met Geoff. Geoff arrived early to help rig the boats for the Newington parents crews. Happy as ever, he got stuck into sectioning the boat, moving oars, all the things he would normally do. He then jumps into the officials boat as driver with John Johnson (or Captain Jack) who was the race official.

Helen said afterward when hearing of Geoff's death,

"Oh John, I am so sad to hear about Geoff. He spread a lot of joy at SIRC that Sunday. I was very taken with Geoff's smiley, enthusiastic face on race day. He was so generous with his praise about our technique!

And as we were waiting to back in to the start for one of the races I watched him ferry a bunch of boat-holding kids back to shore. One girl squealed when they started off and his laugh was infectious. Funny the things you remember.

And funny all the things that many have remembered. Memories that will never fade.

Geoff was a very special friend to many. He was fiercely loyal, inquisitive, witty, positive, funny, entertaining and loved Lucy, Rob, Laura and Georgia dearly.

I will miss him. I will drink a milkshake now and then, will watch more war movies, walk the track one more time - maybe, keep cooking, rowing and fondly and actively remember a really, really nice bloke.

I finish with a slightly changed last verse of our school song: This is the verse that no one knew the words for and so would only mumble in assembly.

The years may go by and we youngsters get old,  
Yet ne'er will the love for our dear friend Geoff grow cold.  
Nay, rather as onward towards life's end we go,  
Our memories of our boyhood mate dearer shall grow.