

Eulogy for Peter Lee (1/70)

who died aged 56 on 6/12/01 from cancer after being in remission from having a melanoma removed from his leg earlier on.



Thank you everyone for joining us today. There are many who have come from interstate or country New South Wales and we do appreciate your presence. Many of you have never met before which is an indication of Peter's diverse life. Al and the family invite you to join us either after this service or after the burial at Palm Beach, for light refreshments – the address is 15 Iluka Road, Palm Beach (corner of Nabilla and Iluka Roads) and we would like to see as many of you there as possible.

Al, Terry, Helen and I have collaborated in putting together the following snapshot of my twin brother, Peter.

Peter and I had a race to enter this world and we did so minutes apart on the 13th March 1945. Apart from our mother dressing us identically, in the early days, we were totally different.

We had Terry and Helen before us who excelled academically and represented the State and Australia in cricket and hockey. What a hard act to follow. Although Peter was an accomplished and uncompromising hockey player, from an early age he proved to be the most creative and practical one when it came to building anything or making something work. He was extremely talented mechanically. Our billy carts were the best in the street – they were always the fastest, had more crashes and were then recycled into something even more terrifying on wheels. He had a great love of vehicles and was always pulling apart engines and reassembling them. Despite our mother's cries of despair disassembled cars would be scattered all through the garage, the carport and once an old chook pen gave home to some vital parts for months on end. It was the 60s and we three boys

had Mini Minors. They were fun to drive but rather Spartan in their finish. Peter built very smart wooden dashboards and equipped them with tachos and other gauges, full racing harnesses, sump guards etc. We then graduated to Mini Cooper S's, a Lotus Escort and finally Peter purchased the famous yellow 911 Porsche which has had more make overs and facelifts than Elizabeth Taylor and now maintains a gracious aged look all in white.

Peter inherited all our father's drafting and carpentry skills and our grandfather's engineering talents. He gained both building and engineering certificates from Sydney Tech. Coupled with the Old Man's guidance, integrity and commitment to clients, he became the pre-eminent person in Australia in export abattoir and slaughter house design, mechanical processing and construction. He was legendary in coming up with innovative designs and circumnavigating difficulties – not always appreciated by union officials.

We were in the first ballot for military service at the age of 20 and Peter finished his technical training before entering Officer Training at Scheyville and graduated with flying colours as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Engineering Corps. Having run his own business for some time the army hierarchy knew they had a star on their hands. They asked him at his first posting to carry out the most important and demanding task there was – preparing the turf wicket at Puckapunyal for the cricket season which was about to start. From there he went to the Engineering Depot in Brisbane. After reorganising the ancient procedures in record time, the Commanding Officer allowed him to use several bedrooms in the rather empty Officers' Mess to set up an office and drawing room for P J Lee & Associates. He would take a parade of foot soldiers and then disappear into the Officers Mess to design the buffalo abattoir or cattle race. Someone suggested that he probably used the same techniques and blunt coarse language to get man and beast to do exactly what he wanted. He became a crack shot in the Army and won several awards. He was a member of the New South Wales Gun Club throughout most of his life. It was here that his mechanical brilliance shone again. He developed a special machine which travelled over the firing range and picked up and sorted used shot for recycling.

If Al was caught standing still in their flat at Dee Why and the call for designing

and building a new abattoir was not immediate – Peter couldn't resist the DIY compulsion. A new floor might be put in, the kitchen could be updated, a sauna added and always extra miles of shelves for books and CD could be built. Peter's work allowed him to develop his intense love affair with the Australian bush. Nothing would please him more than to "go walkabout" with the Old Man in one of the beloved Land Rovers to the Northern Territory or far North Queensland. In more recent years his dedicated companions were Sam and Max, his dogs. They were inseparable and I gather there was a nickname in the bush applied to this group – "the gypsy and his dogs". He spent a major part of his latter years in southern New South Wales and Victoria and built up a strong network of friends and colleagues which he valued very much. Peter was passionate about his interests and pursued them to a level higher than most of us would achieve. His two great pleasures were music and cooking.

When we were at school with our parents' encouragement, he made a classical guitar which was a piece of fine craftsmanship. Helen offered some basic music technique however he was self taught to an accomplished level before he ever took lessons. He went on to build superb classical and acoustic guitars, assembled a magnificent collection of fine and rare instruments and has probably one of the largest collections of guitar music and CD's in Australia. He derived enormous pleasure from his playing and no doubt it added to the gypsy image.

It was a great joy to Al that Peter loved cooking. Friends were able to share his many varied culinary talents with a bottle of good red wine. Even during the last difficult few months he would love to whip up great pasta dish where the sauce was a complete and complex work of art. He made it look so easy.

Peter was complete in himself. He had a dry wit and a great sense of the ridiculous. Many of us remember well in 1977 when he and Al married, he presented her not with fine jewellery or sentimental gifts but with an "axe" which he thought would be more useful on their camping trips. Always the perfectionist, it was no ordinary axe – it was perfectly balanced for her weight and height and beautifully polished and gift wrapped.

Peter pursued life to the full with his own style and wit. Let's all treasure our special memories of him.