

Eulogy of

Silvio (Joe) Ferdinando Bagnara. 1932-2021

24th February 2021

On behalf of Mum and us all, thankyou for being here today

We are here today to celebrate the full and mighty life of Silvio Ferdinando Bagnara. I'm his eldest daughter, Maree. Dad battled ill health for many years but continued to challenge the health professionals and surprise us all with his positive attitude, his determination to never miss out, and most of all to be sure his outspoken opinions on every aspect of life continued to be heard. However, the last few months were difficult and he succumbed to heart failure at the Cabrini Hospice in Prahran on the 20th Feb 2021 aged 88 years. He was known as Joe (the English version of his father's name), although mum (Marge) his loving and much loved wife, insists the spelling of Joe is EGO! He was a very proud and loving dad to me, David, Elizabeth and Gerard, a much-loved father-in-law to Chris, Ross, Teresa and Robert and an immensely proud Grandbags to Tim, Matt and Teresa, Lachie, Harley, Tiffany, Lauren, Julian and Eloise. He was a loving brother to Mary, and loving uncle to Gayle, Greg and Mark.

Dad was born in Kilcunda, Victoria on 28th October 1932 to our adored Granma, Mary Murnane of Irish descent and our Italian nonno, Giuseppe Bagnara, a butcher who immigrated from Marostica some years before. They had a small dairy farm where his father also operated his butchery. Sadness struck when dad was 2yrs old and Aunt Mary was just a baby, when his beloved father Giuseppe died of renal failure. Granma continued to run the farm single handedly. Life was tough on the farm and there was little money. Dad would never have considered himself a farm boy and would have us in hysterics as he would tell of the early mornings milking cows before going to school, then coming home to ride a horse bareback jumping fences with milk cans in each hand to deliver the milk. His other job was to keep the fire going, a necessary part of life in cold and wintry Kilcunda, while Granma was attending to other farm duties. However, there was many a time the fire would go out, dad too absorbed in this thirst for knowledge and education oblivious to the wrath of his mum on her return.

Dad loved motorbikes! He was a dapper young bikie, part of the Kilcunda/Wonthaggi bike scene. His favourite bike was a Norton Dominator with the unique "Ferdis Flyer" mud flap! Dad was famous for terrorizing the back roads of Kilcunda. Riding the bike while sitting backwards was an envied skill apparently! However, his over confidence

nearly proved fatal with a spectacular crash, flying through the air, resulting in broken bones and some time in hospital. Legend has it that this spurred his interest in Radiography. He was determined to know what the damage looked like and how it would be fixed!

Dad's early school years were at the Kilcunda Primary school and then onto the Wonthaggi Technical College. He completed an Electrical Apprenticeship at the State Coal Mine in 1951 while working weekends part-time at the Wonthaggi Hospital in the Dept of Radiography. Dad achieved his A-Grade Electrical certificate (which he maintained to this day re-wiring my whole house at the age of 70!) and made the move to the medical field with his passion for Radiography and General Pathology.

Dad attended RMIT in the early 1950s completing his Medical Technology Studies while living with his Uncle Jack in Melbourne. By this stage, he had spotted mum at a country dance, and on the weekends he would ride his motorbike to Wonthaggi and do some locum work in the Radiography department, motivated by the hope of catching a glimpse of mum who was nursing at the Wonthaggi Hospital. Mum was not an easy catch. He had his work cut out for him. However love blossomed and Margaret Davey and Silvio Ferdinando Bagnara were married on the 3rd of December 1955. Married life began with living with mum's sister, while dad completed his Medical Technology Studies. Mum and dad then moved to Ararat after dad was head hunted to run the Radiography Department at the Ararat Hospital. After 3 years in Ararat, dad was head hunted again to set up and run the Radiography and Pathology Department in Maryborough. He was one of two in Australia at the time to earn this qualification. This is where the next 16 years were spent enjoying country life.

Life in Maryborough was full. He was an active member of many community groups including the Maryborough Arts Society where he enjoyed the dramatic arts! His on-stage performance of a scene where he was shot was apparently so convincing that mum had to take me backstage before the play was finished to show me that he was still alive! He served many roles in the Rotary Club of Maryborough. This active role in Rotary continued for the rest of his life. He became an active member of the Royal Society of Victoria (formally known as the Sciences Club) making regular trips to Melbourne to spar with like minded scientists and colleagues. Throughout his life he continued to be involved and many of us would join him at the Royal Society for

presentations across all facets of Science and Technology. This legacy continues with me.

Dad was also a keen photographer in the early days. There would be many a photo session as children, lined up / posed like the Van Trapp family from the sound of music! He was not a “happy snap” photographer but more a “techy snap” photographer! His precision and attention to detail must have driven us kids crazy as there were not too many of those posed photos where we are smiling! I’m sure his active science mind was in full swing when we kids, all with an acute case of the mumps were lined up against the wall and told to smile while a portrait shot was taken of each of us! What was he thinking??!

During the time in Maryborough, he was tracked down by his cousin Mario and wife Louise and was able to reconnect with his Italian heritage. Dad and mum enjoyed numerous parties with his new found cousins who had immigrated to Australia in the 1950s - Mario and wife Louise, Elio and wife Angelina, Renato and wife Dawn, Tony and wife Yvonne, Lena and husband Nikko and their families. Evelina, Mariucci, Giuseppe, Lucia, Concetta, Rita and Adriana remained in Italy. Dad and Mario were uncannily similar being the same age and temperament and provided hours of entertainment to all with their clashing egos and enormous sense of fun! I can’t imagine the performances if dad could have spoken Italian!!

Dad’s dedication to his work at the hospital meant he was on call 24 hours and often called away at any time of the day or night. However, his retreat was the garage where he would build an endless array of radios and electrical concoctions. We would know he was home as our ears would be subject to the screeching and whirring of tuning radios and experimental wavelengths, at all times of the day and night. At times the dulcet sounds raised the heckles of neighbours who could swear there were UFOs!

Dad’s passion was flying. He earned his private pilot’s license in July 1968. He was an active member of the Ballarat Flying Club and was a founding member of the Maryborough Aerodrome. Before the Maryborough Aerodrome was built, our usual 3 hour drives to Melbourne in the car were now converted to a drive to Ballarat. We then spent hours waiting in the wartime hangers for the weather to clear, and eventually, we headed off to Essendon, or maybe Tyabb, or even Laverton, wherever the clouds were clear! Fortunately, his instrument rating ended these endurance trips, where he

was one of 12 private pilots in Australia to have a full instrument rating, just shy of a commercial license. During our time in Maryborough Dad invented an aeronautical navigation aid, the NAV-AID rule. His business name is SIFEBA, the first two letters of his name. This is a simple navigation aid for private pilots and proved to be popular with student and experienced pilots alike. Even with modern-day technology, Dad has continued to get orders from all over the world for his simple yet amazing invention.

In 1975 dad was headhunted for the third time to set up the Pathology Department at St John of God Hospital in Ballarat where he was CEO for many years. He was committed to the vision and cause of the charity of St John of God and was much loved and respected by the order of St John's. He played a major part in growing and designing the laboratory from a small 2 room space to a large multi-disciplined laboratory including the expansion of the service across Victoria. Dad continued his service in Rotary being an active member of the Rotary Club of Wendouree .

He was a partner in the ownership of several planes with his flying buddies, Ian Holmes and Max MacClean. They formed "Air Wendouree", mum the book keeper on \$5.00 a week!! Dad's favorite was the twin engine 6 seater Beechcraft Baron. Mum and dad, Ian and Dorothy, Max and Elizabeth and others enjoyed many wonderful flying trips all over Australia including the Birdsville races in the NT and even into New Guinea. Never short of excitement, Dad once needed the emergency services at Essendon airport when alarms blared in the Beechcraft baron that the wheels weren't down as dad prepared to land. Passengers in the plane including Gerard, Liz and mum were frozen with fear, rosary beads rattling as dad prepared to land with the Fire engines racing either side. Fortunately, the wheels were down and it turned out to be a faulty alarm!

Dad always wanted to own a Mercedes Benz. This was realized just before they moved to Southbank proudly displaying SIFEBA personalised number plates. It was his pride and joy, cleaned within an inch of the toothbrush bristles, wow betide if you breathed while a passenger! The local car mechanic was in awe of its mint condition. Mum and dad enjoyed many wonderful trips in that car travelling around Victoria. A year or so back, dad decided to stop driving due to the increasing number of "idiots" on the road. He was delighted when his grandsons Julian and Harley took over the Mercedes legacy - Julian has the car, together with all the cleaning aids including the

toothbrushes and Harley proudly displays the SIFEBBA plates on his car. Harley was attaching the plates to his car when he heard the news of Dad's passing.

Dad was in semi-retirement when they moved to Southbank. He became an infamous star as President of the South Bank Residents association, and found his voice from local papers, to radio and television, rubbing shoulders with the politicians and councillors, demanding explanations for all the wrongs of the world, unable to hear the replies due to his deafness but managing to be heard! Not to be outdone, he mastered the computer and caused havoc on Facebook with his not so diplomatic feedback from politics to the problems of modern life and made friends with the postie with the frequent deliveries of his Ebay specials! I laugh when I recall ABC radio calling dad early one morning for a response to a development issue in Southbank, only to be heard on LIVE radio responding to the well-known compare, Red Simons....."Who is this? (Red Simons here!)....who? What? Speak up will you!! " This little clip was used as a promo for the segment throughout that hilarious day!!

Dad was passionate about the Southbank community and fought the overdevelopment of the area on every level. He was instrumental in preserving a disused public space for the community of Southbank, previously a school, that was threatened to be sold by the government for private development. It is now a community space, known as the Boyd Community Centre of Southbank. Dad was also an active member of the Rotary Club of Sth Melbourne.

We would like to give a very special thanks to Dad and mum's GP, Dr Peter Bennett and his wonderful team at the Southbank Medical Centre. Dad and Peter were great mates. Dad was the unique specimen with all his ailments for Peter and his students, not to mention dad's self-diagnosing and self-medicating. Peter was so very patient with his patient showing deep care and understanding of our larger than life dad. Dad was Peter's first patient and Peter supported Dad right up until the end.

We cannot talk about Dad's wonderful life without including his loving family. Our mum, Marge, was dad's absolute rock and support. Dad could not have enjoyed his achievements without mum. If ever this statement was true, but maybe not politically correct - behind our very successful dad there was a very loving strong devoted woman, our mum!!! Right up until the end mum was by his side and he knew she was there.

He was so very proud of us, and his 8 beautiful grandchildren. He enjoyed many sparring conversations with them as they grew from babies to teenagers and now successful adults. There was never a dull moment when Grandbags was around.

In finishing let me use the words from my brother Gerard.

Dad was a fiercely intelligent, outspoken and self-driven man and succeeded in any academic, vocational, community, political or adventurous area he pursued.

Dad was a farmer, A-grade electrician, radiographer, pathology manager, CEO, president of numerous community groups, an instrument rated pilot, inventor and distributor of aeronautical navigation aids, a member of science societies and political parties and an avid reader.

He was a loving and proud husband, father and Grandbags, and, most importantly .. two times 'World's Greatest Stirrer' award winner. He could pull anything apart, fix it and put it back together again.

Dad always took the lead and got the job done. It was quite a ride and he has left a great legacy with many incredible and fond memories.