



Good Night, Sweet Prince

The following is the way in which my father will be remembered by most people who knew him:

EULOGY:
FRANK RICHARD GILLESPIE

delivered at Tootgarook Church of Christ, 31 May 1989
by Pastor Mal Geizendanner
written by Jeanette Gillespie

Mr Gillespie was born on 25 October 1919, and spent his early years in Emerald, Moorabbin and Rowville. When he was 12 he won a scholarship to attend Wesley College, and travelled there daily from Clayton. He was an excellent student, and his prowess in mathematics saw him working with figures in one way or another for the rest of his life. He was accepted into the State Savings Bank, and served the bank for 42 years.

War intervened in his career from 1941 to 1946, and his banking experience saw him serving as Warrant Officer in the Pay Corps in Western Australia and New Guinea.

During this time, in July 1942, Frank Gillespie and Betty Triplett were married at Oakleigh Church of Christ. The people of Oakleigh have played a large part in their lives ever since. Their three children were born there, and Frank served as Treasurer and Sunday School teacher, with further involvement in the Explorers' Club and the Men's Society. The family have often returned for the annual Church Anniversary.

Frank's involvement in the Bank led to a number of moves. The family shifted to Syndaal in 1958; from there to Frank's first managerial position in Melton, when the entire area supported only 500 inhabitants. From there he held managerial positions at Bacchus Marsh, then back to East Preston. Frank and Betty's last move before retirement was to Belgrave Heights.

Wherever they were, Frank's commitment to the Church was greatly appreciated, whether as Treasurer, or in the Sunday School or at Worship Services. His caring and gentlemanly ways and strong Christian principles have, I am sure, influenced many people over the years. His great loves besides his family and his Lord were classical music, refreshing walks and holidays in the country and by the sea, and gardening. The earth around him wherever he lived was always transformed into something beautiful.

The Tootgarook Church received Frank and Betty into fellowship with great pleasure when they moved into retirement in the area 10 years ago.

He will be remembered with fondness by Betty and his three children and two grandchildren.

GOOD NIGHT, SWEET PRINCE

A special edition of 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'

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Written and published by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia (phone: [03] 419 4797). Printed by Copy Place, Melbourne. First appearance in the October mailing of the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association. The cover is based on a photograph probably taken by my mother at 4 Valentine Court, Syndal, in 1959, when my father was two years younger than I am now.

This issue could not exist without the help of my sister Jeanette, my Auntie Linda, and my Auntie Betty and Uncle Ian. It is also dedicated to my mother, Sally Yeoland and John Bangsund, and Michelle Hallett and Roelof Goudriaan. Thanks, everybody.

FRANK RICHARD GILLESPIE:

25 October 1919 - 25 May 1989

1989 had been a pretty good year until 1 May, when my mother rang from Rosebud to say that my father had to be operated on for cancer of the lower bowel. Could my father survive so radical an operation? I doubted it. The condition should have been picked up six months earlier using a test that my father was not given until a few weeks ago. Some GPs show a near-criminal inability to diagnose serious illnesses.

My sister Jeanette returned from her year-long round-Australia trip. That she had time to farewell my father and help my mother is the most fortunate part of these events of May 1989.

My father entered Beleura Private Hospital, Mornington, on 16 May, and the operation took place on 18 May. It seemed to be a success, although as a result my father would wear a bowel bag for the rest of his life. My mother and sister were able to visit my father every day. For several days the pain-killing drugs made him totally incoherent. He started to recover on the next Tuesday, but on Wednesday something in his digestive or circulatory system went very wrong.

For various reasons, I had not been able to get down to Mornington until Thursday 25 May. I took the train to Frankston and Jeanette's friend Maury met me at the station. My mother and Jeanette arrived, and we had lunch in Frankston. We drove to the hospital. My mother warned me that I would be shocked by the condition of my father, but nothing prepared me for the sight of someone who had aged 30 years in a week. As soon as I entered the hospital room, I knew that my father would not leave there alive. I did not expect to be there when he died.

We still don't know what went wrong. The coroner's report has not been completed. By the time we arrived, my father seemed to be blind, and he could register only that my mother was there. He did not know that I had visited that afternoon. He was suffering extraordinary pain, not from his belly but from his chest. The nurses had been feeding him liquids that day in an attempt to restart his alimentary canal. They already knew, however, that his stomach, small intestine, and kidneys had stopped working. Suddenly he started to throw up everything he had been given in the previous two days. Nurses rushed in. We were ushered out. A minute or two later the matron came to tell us that he was dead. We went back into my father's hospital room. His face had been cleaned up.

A body lay there. It seemed to have no relationship to my father. What struck me was the

absolute difference between life and death. A few minutes before, the my father had been still struggling for life. Now he had gone, I know not where. To oblivion? To endless rest? To the heaven in which he believed all his life?

My father was only 69 years old. The question I keep asking myself is: if a man should live a great, noble, and healthy life, sticking absolutely to the principles he believed in, why should he end his days in such a painful and ignominious way?

My sharpest childhood memory of my father is an odd one, if you know how much I dislike Australian Rules football. Since our house at Oakleigh had the largest back yard in the street, we attracted kids from all the nearby houses. One Saturday afternoon there were about 15 children hurtling around the lawn, some of them kicking a football. My father came back from the front garden where he had been working, took up the football, and kicked it straight from one end to the other. He only stayed a minute or two, but I felt absolutely proud of him. Only in later years did he confide to me that he had always been as bad at football as I was.

My father was always doing the garden, planing wood, hammering, or house-painting at Oakleigh and Synda. His love of gardening was genuine enough, and he started three gardens from bare soil, at Oakleigh, Melton, and Bacchus Marsh. But although in childhood he had hated woodwork as much as I did, he taught himself enough carpentry to build an entire row of storage cupboards on the back verandah at 50 Houghton Road, Oakleigh. Through determination he fixed our bicycles and anything else that needed working on.

My father was the best man I ever knew. His absolute integrity puts him apart from almost anybody else I ever met. Yet I spent most of my life escaping his influence and doing things he neither liked nor understood. I realized early in life that I was not the son he wanted. Examples of such boys were pointed out to me: Good Christian Boys who helped their fathers, enjoyed gardening, were good at practical things, and liked sport. The fact that my father was impractical and disliked sport when he was a kid had nothing to do with it. Christian parents raised their kids in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, but I don't think either the Lord or my father ever succeeded in getting their message through to me.

Under my breath I've often accused my father of never seeing me for what I was, for always trying to make me into something else. (He never stood a chance, since he would become so impatient at my incompetence and I would look so bored that he failed to teach me anything practical.) It was only recently that I realized that I never accepted my father for what he was. When we were kids, my parents would show us his report books from Wesley College, to which he had won a scholarship after finishing primary school. In Matriculation he achieved near-impossible marks in mathematics, and if I remember correctly, won the State Exhibition in Mathematics B. At the time I learned this, I wanted to grow up to become a great scientist, little realizing that my incompetence at maths would stop me forever. But I always wanted my father to have been a famous scientist or mathematician. There were times when I would have liked a famous father. When questioned, my father would make a sheepish joke out of the matter, saying that he had become too interested in girls to go on with his studies.

In fact, my father was afflicted by the 1930s Depression, like everybody else of his age. When he finished Matriculation, he was offered an all-fees-paid scholarship to go to university, but his parents could not afford the living expenses for his course. He had to work instead, and was employed by the State Savings Bank of Victoria just before World War Two. When he joined the army during the war, he was put in the pay corps. As he would say with glee, he never fought in the battles, but only followed them. Nevertheless he suffered dysentery and malaria while in New Guinea. He probably suffered mild bouts of malaria for the rest of his life, which might account for many of his later problems.

In 1942 my father and mother, Betty Triplett, were married during a weekend's leave. My mother worked from then until 1946, when dad returned home. His pay, which she had saved, was the basis for a deposit on a house that they bought in 1947 in Oakleigh. I was born in early 1947, and we stayed at that house until 17 February (my birthday) 1959, when we moved

to the newish, almost countrified suburb of Syndal. My sister Robin had been born in 1948 and Jeanette in 1951.

From our point of view, my father's life was ruled by the central fact that he earned the bare minimum of salary needed to keep us all. My parents watched every penny; on the other hand I'm good at spending every penny. A broken fan belt on the car (a 1949 Morris Oxford that kept breaking down when least expected) or an unexpected illness were financial catastrophes. Dad's only chance at improving his income was to become a manager within the statewide system. He gained the Melton branch in 1962, and we moved to the country. Melton had 500 people then, and the one-man SSB branch was its first bank. (Melton now has 40,000 people, and the local State Bank branch is the busiest in the state.) My father's troubles began then, although he hid them from us as best he could. He began to suffer debilitating headaches and wake up very early in the morning. If he got to bed late, he would wake up early anyway, and feel tired all day. These conditions became worse as his responsibilities increased. He gained promotion to Bacchus Marsh branch in 1966, and then to East Preston in 1970. At East Preston we were living in premises above and behind the bank, so he never escaped from work. He and mum had already decided to build a house in the hills, where they always wanted to retire. When the house was built at Belgrave Heights, they moved there, and dad applied for branch after branch in the area. After 35 years in the bank, he found that he was pushed to the sidelines. His last years with the State Bank were spent on a nighmarish round of relieving-manager posts. Some days he had to travel 30 and 40 kilometres to work. He became so ill that he took his accumulated sick leave and retired early.

It was only much later that I discovered that his lapses of short-term memory began during those last few years with the bank. I didn't know about them. Jeanette tells me that he became much better after he retired. My parents decided that the Dandenong Ranges were not the paradise they had hoped for, and shifted to Rosebud at the end of 1978. I phoned my parents and asked if I could come to visit over the weekend. 'I'd better warn you', said my mother 'that dad's short-term memory is going. He asks you something and a few minutes later asks you again.' Hearing this was nearly as much a shock as hearing about his final illness ten years later.

I don't know what happened between my parents during those last ten years, as my father's short-term memory became worse. I know that my mother had to take over all those skills, such as responsibility for money, the house, and most practical details of life, that my father had always taken care of. For his part, my father dealt with social situations by keeping silent most of the time. He still had all his long-term memories, and he remained good company with close relatives. In large groups, he knew that if he joined in conversations he might say something that seemed silly to his listeners, so he stopped joining in conversations. It was a graceful way of coping.

My father was two people to me -- until the late 1960s the anxious, money-worried, short-tempered father of three young children (I can still hear the tone of his voice when I shout at the cats) who was driven almost mad by his work; and in the 1970s and 1980s a sweet middle-aged man who was always good company even when he said little. The first Mr Gillespie is the man whose values I have spent my life escaping; the second Mr Gillespie (who became that way after we all left home) was a good friend. With neither man could I discuss why I had little faith while he had absolute faith; why I became passionately fond of pop music at the age of twelve although my parents never played anything but classical music; why I loved books and ideas whereas he distrusted both; why he was a manager, a man who always shouldered his responsibilities, while I am a person who cannot manage his way out of a brown paper bag.

Apart from his family, my father's three main interests were classical music, the Christian religion, and nature in general and gardening in particular. The fact that he treated them with equal reverence might help to explain why I shied away from classical music until I was 21, and have never gained an interest in gardening. Worse, I hated expeditions to the countryside, and would much have preferred staying home reading books. Only since I have been with Elaine have I enjoyed country rides and walks.

My father belonged to that group of people who have a linked skill affinity between classical music and mathematics. (The third item of the trilogy is chess, but I don't think my father ever played it.) I have no mathematical ability, and I approach classical musical in an entirely emotional way. When I was a child, listening to Mozart was a chore; the music had so much emotional weight that it pressed me into the ground. In most other music I could not detect the tune or the rhythm. My father had always understood the tunes and rhythms of Mozart and Beethoven. (He's the only person I've known who had a bust of Mozart in the living room.) I liked many things in Handel's Messiah, but the fact that I was supposed to listen to it reverently almost ruined it for me. When I rediscovered it in the early 1970s, I realized it is the jolliest collection of eighteenth-century pop tunes ever collected. When I gained my own radio in 1959, I discovered the commercial radio stations that we had never been allowed to listen to, with their rock 'n' roll, serials, and quiz shows. Pop music was irresistible: those songs where you could actually hear the rhythm in the drum beat; tunes that I could recognize; music that was fun. I began to note down the hit parade positions as they were read out each week; later I collected the 3DB Hit Parade in The Sun each Friday; and in 1961 began to assemble my own pop chart from all the hit parades I could collect. When I realize how much this must have hurt my father, I'm amazed at how little he objected. Maybe he knew that I would return to the True Music, although he could not show me the way. That was left to John Bangsund and Lee Harding in 1968. In the early 1970s I not only rediscovered real music but began splurging endless dollars on records, and music became the most reliable and enduring link between me and my father. This made up for all the years in which we had little to say to each other.

There was a time in the 1950s when on any night of the week my father or mother would be out at some function of the Church of Christ. Dad was treasurer of the Oakleigh congregation; my mother was involved in the CWF and many other activities. Sunday was entirely taken up with church activities, at least until Sunday School moved from 3 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. When my parents retired to Rosebud, they found that lots of people from Oakleigh and other suburban Churches of Christ had retired to the same area. Therefore when John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland drove Elaine and me to my father's funeral on 31 May (which is one of those kindnesses we can never repay), we were not too amazed to find the Tootgarook Church of Christ entirely full. My father was a favourite of the people there, and most of them turned up to farewell him. Many of our umpteen relatives, Gillespies and Triplets, were there as well. There were people from Glen Waverley congregation, people I hadn't seen for 25 years. Conversation with them didn't seem too difficult. The minister, Mal Geizendanner, had first met us in 1959 when he was training to be a minister by preaching sermons at Glen Waverley. Minus some hair, and thirty years older, he seemed just the right person for the service. When the funeral finished, the side doors of the church opened and we walked into the hall, where an enormous picnic lunch had been prepared by the church. Later some of us went back to my mother's house. It was a strangely jolly occasion; after all, didn't most of us believe that Frank Gillespie had gone to a far better place? And who am I to disagree? It was a fervent farewell.

People keep asking me, 'How's your mother taking it?' I suspect that she was better prepared than many other women are in the same position. My father had been intermittently ill for some time, and he had been losing weight steadily for a year. This should have tipped off the GP that my father might have cancer, but evidently some GPs aren't too bright. Meanwhile, the loss of his short-term memory had made my father both there and not-there. During the last ten years, my mother had to take care of her husband while no medical procedure, test, or advice brought him back to full health. Jeanette's presence has been a great help. Lots of relatives and church friends live near by. But in the end there is no greater loss than one's life's companion. Ah well. Despite the difficulties of getting from Collingwood to Rosebud without a car, I'd just better make the journey more often.

My father lived the best life he knew now, which is more than I can say for myself. In the end I weep for myself; the death of my father is like tearing away the best idea I have of myself. Suddenly the universe is much more dangerous, life seems to run downhill, the good is defeated. Or can the good only be found in people like my father when they are alive?

-- Bruce Gillespie, 5 June 1989

THANK YOU, JEANETTE...

...for your notes and letter, which I have used to round out the piece I wrote only two weeks after my father's death.

In some matters Jeanette disagrees with me entirely. This is hardly surprising, since the above piece is as much about me as about my father. 'Robin and I remember him as a very sweet Dad who we could twist around our little finger, and who only rarely took over from Mum as the disciplinarian.' As the ever-disappointing only son of the family, I remember things very differently: father as disciplinarian, mother as ally.

Jeanette sets me right on some matters. For example: 'He was in no pain before the operation, was quite at peace in himself, and joked with the nurse who was to give him the pre-anaesthetic injection.' Although my father suffered terrible pain in the last two days of his life, he was probably spared months or even years of equally severe pain. The surgeon could not guarantee to have removed all the cancer; in any case, the operation was so severe that my father could only have continued life in extreme discomfort.

Jeanette visited Rosebud more often than I did. 'He and Mum were still quite conversant up until the last. He was only quiet with strangers and those with whom he didn't feel completely comfortable. When Mum wasn't around, he and I would talk a lot.' Maybe I've made too much of my father's short-term memory loss during his last years -- but that's because it's a problem I'm likely to suffer myself. My grandmother lost her memory during her last years, as did my Auntie Dorrie, although my uncles have not suffered from the affliction.

Jeanette points out that, whatever the strains of my father's last few years with the State Bank, he enjoyed his career until then. He 'was proud of his work. He still received the bank staff magazines in his retirement. He was always liked by his staff.' He made a great number of friends during his years with the Bank.

Jeanette had discovered some nice stories about my father by talking to my Auntie Linda. Eighty this year, she was already going with my Uncle Fred (sixteen years older my father) when Dad was a boy. Raised on his parents' flower garden in Rowville, Dad was eight years younger than any of his brothers and sisters 'and played a lot by himself. He was a "Mum's boy" -- loved his mum, who provided lots of entertainment for the children -- great birthday parties, magic lantern shows, etc. He must have fended for himself a lot, as when he was ten or eleven he was growing his own plot of flowers, and giving them to Fred, who sold them at the market and brought back the money. Dad kept a meticulous book with all the amounts written down, and got worried if he was as little as a halfpenny out! He bought a bike with some of the money.' My father was always a banker! So much for my lifelong-held theory that he was really a mathematician who went astray.

Also, he probably learned to be careful with money as he watched his own father give away or mismanage the income from the farm. My grandfather was difficult to get on with, it seems. He kept as many as possible of his children on the farm for as long as possible. Jeanette writes: 'In 1941 Ian was already going with Betty [my Aunt Betty, not my mother, who is also Betty] but was too scared to get married. However, one day Dad rang home and told the family he was going to get married. That was news to Mum! And I guess quite brave of Dad. It gave Ian new heart, and he immediately proposed to Betty!'

My father was a gifted and graceful man who had little notion of the good he conferred on other people. Luckily, he never despaired, like George Bailey in the film It's a Wonderful Life, but equally I don't think he was ever fully aware of his own value. Good night, sweet prince.

WATER FLOWING UNDERGROUND:
The Gillespies

A member of the Gillespie family once told me that we had once 'had money'. If so, it had disappeared before it reached my father's generation.

My aunt and uncle, Betty and Ian Gillespie, have discovered quite a bit of the family history. Some of it they've shown to Jeanette, and she photocopied some of the documents for me. I can't tell you the entire family story, but I can see something of a pattern.

My father had six brothers and sisters. One of them, Bruce, after whom I am named, died in his first year (1913). My Auntie Dorrie was the oldest. Born in 1903, she died in 1974. My Uncle Fred was married to my Auntie Linda, who recently celebrated her eightieth birthday. Fred, born in 1905, died in early 1978. My Auntie Jean, born in 1907, is married to my Uncle Allan (Daff). Auntie Marjorie, born in 1909, is living at the Churches of Christ Guest Home in Oakleigh. And my father, born in 1919, married to Betty Triplett, was by far the youngest of the family.

The Gillespies are a reticent people. Like my father, they've never sought or made much money. They did well in the lives they chose, but all had financial and other difficulties from time to time. They are hobbyists, doing things that interest them rather than things leading to easy success. My Uncle Ian in particular has always been known as a man who can 'fix anything': his larger projects have included one of the first solar water heaters in Melbourne, a windmill in the back yard at Murrumbeena, and many projects for the Oakleigh Church of Christ, relatives and friends. (For example, he built a record-player for my father, then installed a microgroove stylus when LPs arrived in the 1950s.) My Uncle Fred, Auntie Dorrie and my father were all expert gardeners. My Uncle Allan and Auntie Jean have farmed all their lives. They had market gardens at Springvale, Clayton (1950s and 1960s), and the Mornington Peninsula. All my aunts and uncles have stayed closely connected with the Churches of Christ, particularly at Oakleigh. They have led quiet lives of quiet, continuing achievement.

Thomas Scott Gillespie, their father, my grandfather, was somewhat different. I'm relying on rumour here. People remember that he gave away or lost most of the money he made in his farming projects -- particularly flower farms at Emerald and Rowville -- and that he was estranged from the rest of his family because he married a servant, Josephine Crofts (1880-1959). My grandfather was born in 1874, and died in 1951 (when I was four years old). He had one brother and three sisters, and I had never heard of them until I saw the family tree that Jeanette photocopied for me. He also had three half-brothers and two half-sisters, and they've also been lost from sight. I remember little about my grandmother, although we used to visit her regularly when we were small. Nobody says a bad word about her. In the 1970s my parents visited two Crofts sisters at Wandilogong, near Bright. I think they were my grandmother's cousins rather than her sisters. They were, I'm told, totally dominated by their cat. I've often wondered what happened to the cat when they died.

My great-grandfather definitely 'had money'. He married twice. After his first wife, Helen Somerville Ellis, died, he married 'Martha King daughter of Andrew Scott and Celia King'. That was my grandfather's mother. Robert Gillespie arrived in Victoria from Scotland in 1852. He became a manager of National Bank at Buninyong and was 'highly regarded ... for his service in buying gold from the prospectors around Buninyong and Ballarat'. After Robert Gillespie retired from the bank, he 'spent his remaining years in Church and philanthropic work including service on various committees of the Presbyterian Church, and held a seat on the Councils of Ormond College, Scotch College and the Presbyterian Ladies College'. So Great-Grandad was not just 'a banker on the goldfields', as I had always been told, but a member of the Scottish Establishment. His wife came from one of a land-owning family.

Banking, it seems, runs in the family, as do strong church allegiances. So does integrity, and the enjoyment of satisfying but non-profitable hobbies. I rather like the Gillespies as they have become. I wonder how my nephews, Colin and Philip Rout, will turn out?