

# **The Significance of the life of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop in respect of community service.**

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'he could overcome and rise above the petty prejudice of individuals. He was operating on a higher plane, I think that's really what it was all about'

Dino de Marchi, Vietnam veteran, solicitor and campaigner for veteran's right (Ebury: 547)

Reading about the life of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop I have been inspired, moved, amazed and humbled. I have laughed and especially I have cried. Such is the impact of Weary. Today as we enter the new millennium his life has the power to motivate and uplift. Even now people continue to give time, money and effort in his memory (Geddes: 301-302)

Weary's commitment to people and community was profound, extensive, unwavering and his life long mission. After his heroic, and much documented work, as doctor, healer and leader to his fellow prisoners of war, he returned to Australia and for 46 years fought for the rights of war veterans (Ebury: 551). Even while maintaining his busy surgical practice, he managed to be involved with as many as forty diverse organisations at one time, and never as a mere figurehead. He actively supported them all, often over many years (Ebury: 617) as for the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria where he was chairman from 1974 to 1980 (Geddes: 291).

More impressive than the monumental services Weary performed, is the nature of the person that Weary was. As a relentless humanitarian he always put people, their feelings and concerns before all else. In medicine his personal involvement with patients was part of the treatment (Ebury: 566-567). But his role as healer extended far beyond hospitals, consulting rooms and physical bodies. Weary paid attention to hearts and souls. He listened to the problems of individuals and had the vision to seek solutions on personal, professional, social and political levels in Australia and overseas.

Weary's many fine qualities have been widely praised, but it is significant that he too had both good and bad points. For it is through his weaknesses and faults that he remains approachable, vulnerable and inspiring rather than a distant and unattainable model of human perfection. Even Weary himself said he had experienced suicidal depression all his life (Geddes: 308).

I think his realness, humanity, honesty and ability to inspire and motivate are part of his immense appeal. Rajah Kannan, past president of the Overseas Students' Organisation was astounded by Weary because 'somehow for a man of his stature, he admired people...He actually appreciated the fact that here these students were, in a foreign country, fighting for their fellow men. That gave us a lot of courage' (Geddes: 303-304).

IN 1991, when one of Weary's former captors returned to Australia to publicly apologise to former prisoners of war, Weary was deeply humbled by the man's capacity for forgiveness (Ebury: 637).

In 1986, when Weary's diaries were published the first 10,000 copies sold out in one week, indicating both an enormous thirst for, and Weary's great appeal as, a public icon. I think it is highly significant that young people found Weary and his stories immensely appealing (Ebury: 629). I feel this is because he embodies the values, personal qualities, direction and courage that people admire and long for in their own lives.

For men in particular, Weary is a superb model of strength mixed with compassion, warmth and vulnerability. Weary's willingness to weep uncontrollably in public for the suffering of the men he had known in the prison camps, is a critical reminder of the importance of public expression and acceptance of emotion. Weary never thought tears were unmanly (Ebury: 630-631). This is especially significant in a country with an alarming and growing suicide rate for young men.

By his death in 1993, Weary had come to inspire a nation and 10,000 people gathered outside St. Paul's Cathedral in his memory. At his funeral the Melbourne Buddhist community 'sung him up to heaven' for to them he was an enlightened soul (Ebury: 641). His life remains a testimony to the value of the human spirit, to people everywhere and the communities they live in.

#### References:

Ebury, Sue. (1994). *Weary: the life of Sir Edward Dunlop*. Australia: Penguin Books

Geddes, Margaret. (1996) *Remembering Weary, Sir Edward Dunlop as recalled by those whose lives he touched*. Australia: Penguin Books.