



The Significance of the life of Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop in respect of community service- by Jane Brewer

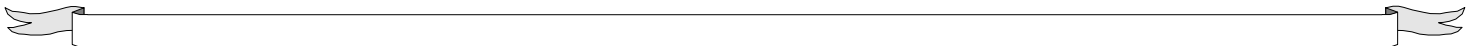
“There was little that was for the welfare of Australian in which he was not active”.


Sir Ninian Stephen, former Governor General and fellow member of the Melbourne Scots, from a tribute given at Sir Edward’s State funeral (Geddes, 1996:434).

From the day he was born Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop was destined to make a significant contribution to citizens of Australia and around the world. His family of origin led by example through their country hospitality, Christian attitude of sacrificial giving and actions of always looking after other people. As a young person, Weary demonstrated exceptional personal qualities of courage, strength, endurance and steadfast determination. These qualities were to sustain him throughout his pharmacy and medical college years, lead him to command and save his fellow diggers from their Japanese captors and meet post-war challenges through continued humanitarian service to others at home and world-wide.

Weary spent his life in service to others. Renowned as ‘Christ of the Burma Railway’ he served for four years as medical officer, leader, motivator and death defying advocate for fellow diggers during the Second World War. Weary’s return to Melbourne did not deter him from his quest to serve. In addition to his large, busy surgical practice and dedication to healing, Weary became a powerful force for good. Finding it difficult to ignore requests for help he was involved in 43 different organisations at one stage. Weary served and used his influence in multiple ways as patron, chairperson, member and donor. Organisations included the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria where he passionately sought to help veterans through medical research into causes of cancer such as post-traumatic stress and smoking; the Victorian Foundation of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence; the Prisoners of War Trust and Association; the Ex-Prisoners of War and relatives’ Association; the Melbourne Council for Overseas students; Friends of Vellore; the Colombo Plan, which helped developing nations; and the Australian Asian Association.

This force for good was never more evident than in Weary’s capacity to forgive his Japanese captors and promote the exchange of knowledge, skills and culture through forging social and cultural links between Australian and Asian students. His philosophy regarding reconciliation following the war was. “You are better to offer friendship and understanding” (Geddes: 284) and it has provided a positive legacy to our Australian community promoting acceptance and assistance to all people irrespective of race, class or creed. His service to others continues to live on in a number





of charitable activities and scholarships, These include the Sir Edward Dunlop Research Foundation set up to investigate veterans' health problems, the Weary Dunlop-Boonpong Exchange Fellowship, which provides opportunities for young Thai Surgeons to get specialist training in Australia and various others.

Weary was portrayed by those who knew and loved him as a gifted and exceptional man, but by no means perfect. Weary was described as individualistic, exuding confidence in his own ability, a great leader but poor follower, blessed with exceptional physical and inner strength, untiring and totally focused on whatever he did to the point of ignoring his own and others' discomfort. Margaret Geddes' (1996) book, fellow surgeons, friends, patients, veterans, students and dignitaries alike, not only testified to his remarkable endurance, thoughtful letter writing, attentive post-surgical care, generosity, humility, quiet dry wit, gentleness and determination to help others but also to his total disregard for other people's time, his occasional temper outbursts and road rage, his priority to help others over spending time with family and his depression and loneliness experienced in latter years.

Thus 'Weary the Hero' was also 'Weary the man', and as such even today serves as an inspiration and realistic model for us all. Serving his community was not limited to organisational involvement but also to constantly opening his Toorak Road home for others to stay, come for meals and use for functions. His deep interest in people of all ages in particular the younger generation ranged widely from medical, to musical, to cultural groups. The extent of one man's impact on the lives of those he touched was never more evident than at his state funeral attended by around 10,000 people.

With only a little of Weary's immense capacity, sense of duty and willingness to serve others, we too can accomplish much. With our own abilities and life experience we too can choose to serve others and create better relationships and quality of life for all. Weary's inspiring example of what an ordinary person at any age can achieve, shows us that as ordinary people, doing ordinary things, we too can make an extra ordinary difference in our community.

Reference:

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

