

This man who lies before us, Charles Howard, has long been a legend in our family and we are proud to claim him as our own. Despite our faith that he now enjoys eternal life with his God, we are very sad to be saying farewell to him.

My name is Clare Howard and Charles is my uncle.

On behalf of his brothers, Jim & John, my siblings & their families, it is a privilege to share a little of Charles' early history & some reflections on him as a family member, our Uncle Charlie, a person we love & admire.

Born in Melbourne in 1924, Charles McKean Howard was the first of three boys born to Mollie & Charlie. His middle name McKean is his mother's maiden name.

Charles often spoke of his parents, readily acknowledging the role models they were for him. Their involvement in parish, school, St Vincent de Paul, their friendships and loyalty to people embedded values in him which lasted throughout his life.

Charles was educated by the Good Samaritan Sisters in Thornbury, Melbourne. We still have an original Grade 5 school report from 1934 where he earned 100% for every subject with the comment 'excellent student' written across it from Sr Wenceslaus, perhaps a prelude to his later academic capacity and achievements.

There was only 18 months difference between Charles and Jim so they were a formidable pair in the things that kids get up to. They would share a bike, Jim sitting on the cross bar, Charles on the seat and each with a peddle. The other kids couldn't keep up with them! Jim recalls an instance where it was Charles who was in trouble and he was threatened with "You wait till your father gets home". Subsequently, Charles was nowhere to be found, though Jim remembers an unusual object appearing in the middle of the backyard... Charles hiding in a hessian bag.

Mollie or Nanna as we called her was an avid Fitzroy supporter and so Charles and Jim attended many matches at the local football ground with her. When older, they sold lollies

at footy matches but apparently were easily distracted by game highlights which allowed other kids to pinch some of their stock. Consequently they never made a profit!

The family moved to Sydney in 1937 when John was just a baby. Charles was due to begin high school and his father, or Poppy as we called him, was advised that CBC Waverley was the place to go. He became aware however, that Marist College Randwick was closer so Poppy made enquiries on a Saturday morning during a working bee. He was introduced to the principal, Br Ignatius who was in overalls and pushing a wheelbarrow. Poppy, being a handyman, had a respect for manual labour so was impressed. Charles and Jim were enrolled at Marist Brothers Randwick and as they say, "the rest is history...."

I'm sure you'd be surprised to know that Charles engaged in a spot of boxing for a time. Both he and Jim were in the school's boxing squad with Charles showing enough talent to win through to the finals.

Charles was aged 14 when he went to the Marist Brothers Juniorate at Mittagong. In recent years he reflected on how hard that must have been for his parents, particularly his mother, and questioned the wisdom of boys leaving their families at such a young age.

His early life as a Marist meant that our family knew him intermittently & only glimpsed snippets of his life. The schools he taught in and positions of responsibility are well documented. But it was the person he was that impacted us:

Charles was a master at keeping in touch and communicating a unique message to whomever he wrote. For our family, postcards or small mementos sent to the nephews & neices, then to their children, of travel tales, birthday wishes or just 'thinking of you' were regularly received. My brother Phil recalls acquiring a significant key ring collection, and the next generation, Chris and Jo's son Ryan began his piggy bank saving, with a million dollar note from Peru.

My sister, Maureen noted how the style of his cards to her always reflected the things she liked, and how he was able to communicate something unique to the person in all of his correspondence. Postcards and letters were received by many people, so many of you here

today as well as people all around the world. His Christmas letters are famous, his correspondence would have measured in the thousands.

As a result of his positions of responsibility, he spent so much time away from Australia. Keeping connected was important to Charles. He valued friendship, perhaps because he lived so far from home and travelled so much. His family & friends in Australia were important to him. When home he was keen to connect whether it be sharing a meal, a walk, or a movie. Since his return to Australia, Charles appreciated that he and John were finally living in the same city, and able to spend regular time together, both of them having lived overseas for long periods.

It was wonderful to see him relax on Christmas days & family gatherings of the Geaney and Stackpool families. He laughed & enjoyed company around the table & watching the grandchildren of Maggie, Meg & Frank, and most recently, John's friends from Sierra Leone with little N'Nadie.

He's the only person I know who didn't like Maggie's caesar salad!

I know that at the Stackpool family gatherings he loved a big pile of dirty dishes, because of the communication opportunity it provided.

He was an interesting and stimulating person to have a conversation with. Politics, the state of the Church, experiences in Africa, the missions of the Brothers in various places around the world; films he'd seen, books he'd read. He made our world broad.

His global experiences brought a great contribution to our family's awareness of social justice issues, particularly in the 1970's & 1980's when 'middle class conservative Catholics' were unaware of such issues and their relevancy to faith:

- Brothers murdered in various parts of Africa: Algeria, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo as a result of being Christian, or in solidarity with the people of the area;
- The Brothers in China who had been unable to be in contact with the Institute since the Cultural revolution, and had publicly lived without their Marist identity for many years,
- These stories made us aware of what it means to lose or risk one's life for faith.

His stories brought to life issues of apartheid, structural inequality & oppression and political tyranny. And yet he could just as easily hone in to the ordinariness of life, or the challenges faced in daily living – relationships, finances, children, work. We all noted Charles capacity to ask, listen and really get to the heart of what was important to us.

Charles friendship with Br Kieran Geaney, or Col as we know him, is one which exemplifies all he values. Charles accompanied Col home from Rome after his stroke 27 years ago. Then when Charles returned to live in Australia, he regularly visited Col, taking him out for drives, and meals and in the last couple of years buying him a chocolate or ice cream knowing he had a sweet tooth. Seeing them together, it was obvious they had a special bond borne through the suffering Col has endured.

He was well read & intelligent: An avid reader of The Tablet, and many religious and spiritual journals, as well as local and international newspapers. So many of us received photocopies of articles of interest, with a brief note from him. Similarly, his generosity with books & articles encouraged people to think about the God aspect of our life.

He always had a word of affirmation recognizing unique qualities of the person whether it be the role of mother, teacher, father, businessman, student. He saw & reminded us of our potential - The gift of being affirmed & noticed: a rare experience in today's world. My sister Denise recalls the lasting impact his notes to her as 'special one' has had on her.

His theology was strongly incarnational...and he gently extolled to many the God presence in their lives...identifying aspects of ourselves that perhaps we didn't recognize or dare to link to the grace and blessing of God. He often quoted Zephaniah in my cards, "God delights in you, as I do" he would write;

He spoke simple & honestly even when having to say hard or difficult things. He had a unique capacity though to see beyond the weaknesses & failings of an individual or an institution. What he saw – and he could see through you at times to your core – or should I

say my core - never overrode his loyalty and affection to the person or the institution. What an extraordinary gift that is to receive!

Charles had a particular appreciation for the role of women especially mothers: as a Marist, he was obviously influenced by the model of Mary, but he spoke often of his love & admiration of his own mother Mollie, as well as his exposure to the experiences of women in developing countries. Our sister Trish recalls he so often used the word 'lady'. His involvement in the organisation WATAC - Women and the Australian Church - on his return from Rome attests to his appreciation of the role of women in the church.

Charles' final year of ill health was a cruel & debilitating time for a person of great intellect. We are appreciative of the loving care provided to him at St Greg's, the Brothers in the community, the medical, nursing and personal care staff.

On the occasion of Charles' death, the world is diminished without his presence yet it is a better place because of his life.

He was a remarkable man:

- Strong yet gentle
- Gracious & sensitive
- A Man of principle

How privileged the Howard, Geaney and Stackpool families & so many others are, to have known such an extraordinary person, a global citizen, a man of enormous integrity, knowledge, wisdom. And most importantly, a man of God. We have lost a person of significant goodness & but we are richer in having known Charles & experienced his friendship, affection, affirmation, intellect, and faith.

The experience of knowing and loving Charles and being loved by him has changed me, stimulated me to be more than I could be without him in my life, as I'm sure it has for you and so many others around the world who mourn Charles' death.

Trish reminded me of this Celtic blessing for death from John O'Donohue's book *Anam Cara, Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*,

"I pray that you will have the blessing of being consoled and sure about your own death.

May you know in your soul that there is no need to be afraid.

When you come to die may it be after a long life.

May your going be sheltered, and your welcome assured.

May your soul smile in the embrace of your anam cara (your soul friend)."

When I read it I could hear Charles saying it and blessing those of us who are still here. We believe Charles has already received these blessings.

Thank you Charles for the many blessings your life has brought to us and our world. You will always remain in our hearts.