

DONALD NORMAN FRASER - 3 July 1942 – 7 March 2023

Eulogy by Alys, Janet and Mick but read by Murray:

(When Murray says "I", he means Mick: and when he refers to Muz, he means himself)

Three qualities of Don Fraser remain with me: he was a true gentleman, he made our sister very happy, and he had a phenomenal topographical memory.

I am Michael Hohnen. Don Fraser was my brother-in-law and also my very good friend for almost 40 years.

Don was born in Wolverhampton, in the English Midlands in 1942, with the Second World War raging and the Luftwaffe targeting Britain's industrial heartland. Although it fared better than Coventry and Bristol, Wolverhampton did sustain significant damage.

For reasons lost in the mists of the conflict, Donald (or Reginald, the name given him by his birth mother Emma Hutcheson) was adopted as an infant by Gwen and Donald Fraser. Gwen was a pharmacist and Donald an engineer. Don grew up believing he had survived in his pram under the stairs of a bombed-out building.

After the war, as a small child, Don made his first trip in what was to become a lifetime of travel when he sailed with his parents to Halifax, Canada, where his father's family lived. Don's name appears several times in post-war UK-Canada passenger lists.

As far as we know, his was a typical British childhood: time at school, time with mates climbing mountains in the snow, time in school cadets bivouacking on the Salisbury Plain.

With Don's father's work in engineering and steel making, perhaps it's not surprising that his first vocational training was as a Marine Fitter and Turner.

During his apprenticeship he boarded with another student at the home of Miss Gray, at a port somewhere south of Newcastle on England's east coast.

Don's father's post war work involved extensive travel to help commission new steel plants. Once, Don rode his motorcycle across Europe to visit his Dad in Romania- a six thousand kilometre round trip through many international borders. On another trip he unwittingly crossed from West to East Berlin and had to do some swift talking to get back to the West.

After completing his apprenticeship, Don worked in nearby shipyards and learned to fly in his spare time. At 23, he gained his first pilot's license, the first step of what was to become his second career.

Cars were a passion with Don. He could recite the make and model of every car he'd ever owned, culminating in his pride and joy, the little red Lotus Elan, which lived in his parents' garage at Ebchester, to be driven around Britain when Don, and later Don and Alys, took their holidays there.

After the shipyards, Don's next assignment was as an engineer on P&O passenger liners, plying between UK and Australia. Apart from maintaining the huge marine engines, his duties, as one of the ship's officers clad in white uniform with peaked cap and gold braid, involved making small talk and socializing with the passengers.

Don liked what he saw of Australia during his time with P&O, so he left the company to make a new start in Melbourne. His first home was a beachside caravan, and his first job was in a used car yard on Victoria Parade.

While exploring around Melbourne, Don came upon a small aerodrome at Whittlesea. He joined the flying school there and built up his hours giving joy rides. In 1972, at the age of 30, he gained his commercial pilot's licence and the rest, as they say, is history. A chance remark at a party put Don in telephone contact with Dennis Buchanan, then the owner of Papua New Guinea's Territory Airlines. Don was hired by Dennis, sight unseen.

Dennis had founded Territory Airlines in 1952. The company expanded and became Talair in 1975. Talair flew to more than 100 destinations in PNG and nearby islands, using a range of aircraft, including Beechcraft Baron, Britten-Norman Islander, Cessna 206 and 402, and Twin Otter.

Don became a stalwart of the company, moving with his golf clubs through various Talair bases until he was eventually assigned to Mendi, in the rugged PNG highlands. In a land with few roads, aeroplanes provided essential links both within the highlands and with the outside world, and pilots were highly respected in the community.

I first met Don in 1977, in Soroako, Sulawesi, Indonesia. He had taken 18 months off flying, to work with Skilled Engineering on the construction of nickel mine.

We next met in Mendi, where Janet and I, with our daughters Lucy and Alys, were stationed in 1980, and we were joined there by my sister Alys, an ex-nursing sister from Canberra. Don came to the hospital with a broken wrist after falling out of his Twin Otter. (Otter pilots will understand how).

There in Mendi, at a Clive Steel Club wine and cheese night, Alys and Don met, and so began a love affair that lasted more than 40 years. We well remember their wedding in St John's Church, Canberra, in 1984. I was best man for Don, and the bride, in her mother's wedding gown, was attended by three nieces, Lucy, Alys and Gillian, in Laura Ashley creations. Lucy and Gillian are here with us today. Alys was here last week.

When Don became Chief Pilot for Talair in Mt Hagen, he and Alys were made welcome and became much loved members of the local community. Don was held in such high regard that when the golf course was moved from Hagen Town to Hagen Airport, the local airport boss gave him a chit stating he was approved to cross the runway to the golf club – an exclusive dispensation!

Don was an expert pilot who flew safely for 17 years in Papua New Guinea, a country with unpredictable flying conditions over spectacular but unforgiving terrain. Many of Don's PNG colleagues have sent messages paying tribute to his skill, his dependability, his help in training other pilots, his unflinching gentlemanly manner, and his passion for golf.

Don would explain that he kept aloof from local squabbles and tribal hostilities by declaring, "Me balus driver tassol" ("I'm just the pilot")

In Mt Hagen, Don also joined the Masonic Lodge, eventually becoming a Master Mason. The friendship and support of this esteemed organization both in Mt Hagen and later in Canberra, meant a great deal to him.

In their leisure time, Don and Alys travelled widely in PNG. They particularly enjoyed visits with friends to Bensback Wildlife Lodge in Western Province, the Orchid Lodge and to Harro's rented island off the coast of Madang.

Life changed in 1990. While driving to work, Don was seriously injured in a horrific collision, not his fault. After life-saving surgery by Dr Joseph in Mt Hagen, then emergency evacuation and further scans and surgery in Townsville, he endured a long and difficult recovery and convalescence. During those long months in Townsville, Alys, our parents and our brother Stuart spent time nearby for love and support.

Don's residual injuries meant that he was unable to fly again. He and Alys moved to Canberra for continuing rehab and for the support of family and friends, especially our wonderful parents Ross and Phyllis. Our brothers, Stuart and later Muz, provided ongoing practical back up and helped over the years with a myriad of service coordination, admin and legal matters.

In the mid 1990's, Don and Alys moved to 21 Gilmore Crescent, Garran, which was to be their home for 25 years. Don loved the place, where he was surrounded by reminders of his life, photos of family and places they had visited, paintings and artefacts from PNG.

They were visited by friends from all stages of his life, including (from PNG) Doggie Black, the McArthurs, Ian Leslie, Harro and Norann, & also Barry Johnson his childhood friend from UK.

Despite his physical limitations, Don kept busy. He helped to maintain the gardens at Garran and Forrest. He read voraciously – including the large pile of books delivered from the library each week. He took their various dogs, including at different times Jenny, Audrey, Sparks and Jessie, on long walks through Garran. He loved coming with me on my trips to Bathurst and beyond. He made a point of beating his nephews and nieces at chess and he mastered several computer card games.

With Alys's prolonged hospitalisation in 2016, Don was no longer able to stay at home, so he moved into permanent care at Mirinjani. Whenever we visited, his face would light up and he would talk happily about his life and loves. His room was piled with flying magazines and he enjoyed old movies and of course meal times!

Daily phone calls and weekly visits from Alys sustained them both. Family members, including Tim and Jennifer and Penny, also made their own visits.

The support of the care team and of many friends and family in Canberra, including Susie and Nicole, helped to make this workable.

Don was an important, integral, much-loved member of our family, who cared for Alys and in turn was cared for by her.

We are indebted to the many skilled and considerate people who enabled Don to live at home, and to the staff at Mirinjani for their warm and competent care of Don in his final years.

We gratefully acknowledge the love, support and creative backstopping of loyal friends and family members – you know who you are.

After an eventful life, blessed by the guidance of his parents, his willingness to take opportunities as they arose, giving and receiving loyal friendship, helping others, loving and loved by Alys, and later enduring the strictures of tragic misfortune, may Don now enjoy peace and freedom beyond the clouds.

We will remember him.

Eulogy by Fergus Hohnen:

I am Fergus Hohnen, and I am Don and Duck's nephew.

I'm not sure of the year I first met Don, but as an 8-year-old in the 80s, I travelled (some might argue was shipped off) to PNG from Brisbane to visit my Aunt Janet, Uncle Michael, cousins Lucy and Alys (Ig) in Mendi, and Don and Duck in Mt Hagen. Grandparents followed behind.

That was a brilliant experience for a young kid.

I recall Port Moresby Airport, stinking hot in mid-December, and with drifts of rubbish across the floor in the arrival hall; waiting in a small room with an armed guard, and boarding a mid-sized plane to Mt Hagen, where I was met by Alys and Don. I remember from that night the house, the dogs and their tuna / rice dinners, the big fence, big trees, and an armada of decorative ducks.

Over the next month, I spent time between Mendi and Mt Hagen, looked after by uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. The highlight was time with Don. I was lucky enough to fly with him on multiple occasions, to Tari, Medang and Goroka; usually as excess baggage, sometimes in a front seat. The day would start early with a cup of tea, and later, time in the pilot's office, wallpapered with Larry Pickering cartoons (quite eye opening for an 8 year old), filing flight plans in the control tower, and the flying part.

I learnt from Don the principles of flight and key instruments in a Beechcraft Baron, a little about navigation along the way (which back then was largely compass and stopwatch punctuated by breaks in clouds). In Tari, we sat under the wing of the Baron during an extended tropical downpour for maybe an hour or two. I'm sure there were stories of his adventures, perhaps we talked about the features of the underside of the aircraft. It didn't matter. I was in awe.

He had inestimable patience, from answering endless questions mid-flight about all manner of things, to answering a phone call from family after midnight, settling an argument about whether propeller blades were filed to maintain performance. Always with good humour.

He always had time to listen to, talk to, and play with us kids. All of my generation I have spoken about endless cups of tea, stories about cars, going to sea, and for many, flying. We were all routinely beaten by Don at chess, both before and after his accident. I can add losing to him playing snooker on multiple occasions. When asked why he was so good at it, he told me that he had sacrificed other things to become good at the game. I was never sure what those things were... because he seemed good at all of them. Thank goodness I never played golf!

Preflight done Don, the labrador and golf clubs are on board somewhere. Off you go. Fly well.

More Notes on Don's Early life and his adoption:

Birth mother: Emma Grant Hutchison who lived at:

52 Old Heath Road, Wolverhampton, WV1 2SJ. She was a boot shop assistant.

Don was born **Reginald Grant Hutchison**, his parents were probably NOT killed by a bomb as suggested when he was less than 1 year old. But he grew up believing that that was the case, maybe this was the reason he never tried to make contact. We will never know. <i>

Bombs were dropped by the *Luftwaffe* on Wolverhampton in 1942. Despite Wolverhampton's status as a large town with heavy industry, it suffered relatively little air raid damage with only 8 fatalities in air raids between 1940-1944.

On 31st July 1942, 17 houses in St Giles Crescent, off Willenhall Road were damaged by bombs. A register of bomb damage survives detailing damages to each house. Most of the houses were repaired but numbers 2, 4, 33, 34 and 35 were demolished and rebuilt.

Deans Road War Memorial list those that died.

https://www.wolverhamptonwarmemorials.org.uk/memorial_pages/Town/deans_road.htm?fbclid=IwAR0a-OYuCDSy_-8RoAXsn3DXF-3AMZeeY3Ww_ETfDtIe6yOxpYP-SP-iGZc

Note: Mother's maiden name - what about the father?

Was he a sailor moving through the area?

Was Emma temporarily employed in the shop until the baby was born:

there is no record of Emma's birth anywhere under that name???

Maybe there are other comments on the adoption papers.

Don was placed in a Wolverhampton orphanage and then adopted by a couple from Co. Durham before he was one year old.

The adoptive father (Donald Norman Fraser, known as "Gray") was a Canadian engineer and the adoptive mother (Gwen), a UK pharmacist. They lived in Ontario, Canada for a number of years (13? from May 1945 to 1958) before returning to Co. Durham?

Don worked as an engineer for P&O shipping out of Canada and then Australia prior to becoming a pilot in New Guinea until he was in a car crash on the way to work in 1990 and subsequently relocated to Canberra.

Don's mate from school in Co Durham, Barry Johnson visited about 2013? and his email is: ©

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