



### **Words of remembrance - Geoff George**

Gerard, I am honoured and grateful that you asked me to reflect on your life. You have had such a huge positive impact on so many people's lives. You have lived every moment to the full and have taken all of us that know you along for the ride. You have touched my life and that of so many others with your extraordinary passion and commitment to make the world a better place. You truly believe that "the glory of God is man (and woman) fully alive" (St Irenaeus).

At a very reflective time you once wrote to me about your students and pondered, "Who will shape them to be the best young men they can be?". Gerard, you have devoted much of your life in answer to this question.

You and I were so lucky to share one very memorable year as the members of the foundation staff at the Berne Education Centre in 1998. We both remember the very negative and destructive beliefs that many of the students held about themselves and other people, especially teachers. But Berne was a different experience for them. In you, Gerard, they encountered an immovable, but benevolent force. The students' behaviour was often very challenging and in your face. They tested the patience, resilience and understanding of all of us. You would not buy into their negativity, always holding up to them a new possibility and a path to a better way of being.

You did not give up on your students. You found ways to engage them in sport, in friendly banter and in learning, while always challenging them to be the best they could be. More times than not you won them over. You were so proud to see them take more control over their lives.

You were quite opinionated, Gerard, in a good way. You thought yourself pretty good, which you were, especially on the sports field. I remember one day you described yourself as a "legend", to which our good friend and colleague Jenny replied, "you mean leg end". Didn't you two get some mileage out of that! We really enjoyed your great sense of humour. You have always been good fun to be around.

Your time at Berne changed the direction of your career. You grew more passionate in your commitment to students most at risk, and, to being a strong advocate for them. You did more training in effective behaviour management and went on to mentor teachers in your diocese, before taking up other the positions of responsibility.

Love and loyalty to family and friends have been a hallmark of your life, Gerard – most especially for your mother, who you lost too early, your father, Frank, for whom you have cared so lovingly, and your brothers, Mark, Chris and Paul about whom you have often spoken to me. It was in this family that you grew into our respected and cherished friend, teacher, uncle, husband and father.

You have always wanted the best for everyone in your life, and you have done your best to make that happen right to the end. Your illness has not daunted your enthusiastic interest and involvement in all that Suzie, Ella and Lucy have had on. You were so proud of Ella being a ball girl at the Australian Open and of Lucy graduating to high school. You so cherish and appreciate Suzie's love and care, especially as you have journeyed together in these last tough days.

You wrote to me recently of "embracing the moment" as you described what it was like saying goodbye to one of your brothers. You have always embraced the moment Gerard, even when it is difficult.

I remember with great fondness that first camp you and I went on at Colo Heights with your class at Berne. For me it marked the beginning of our friendship and the first of many deep and meaningful conversations. I was so humbled to receive a reflection you had written some time ago titled "My Key Beliefs About Being Human". In it you say that I taught you to be patient and "make every post a winner" particularly in dark moments when you thought all was lost. Well, I can only say that it is you that has taught me this lesson, especially as you have lived with the illness that has befallen you. You have continued to be positive, remain as fit as you could be, worked till it was just too difficult, and all the while you continued to be the wonderful husband and father that you are.

I remember Gerard, the young man in search of his "Suzie". In some ways I believe Sydney was alien territory for you – we played the wrong sort of football! You longed to meet someone with whom you would share your life and have a family. You wondered if it would ever happen. Anyway, your patience paid off, and a few years later your search ended in Albury. How wonderful it was to receive that news. You and Suzie were made for each other and your love has given the world two beautiful daughters, Ella & Lucy, who you love and adore. Throughout your life, Gerard, you have been a shining star for so many young people who have felt alone, misunderstood and abandoned. I am sure you will continue to be a shining star for your girls, especially in difficult times. They just need to remember to look up to the stars when they need to. It is certainly one way I will remember you.

Gerard, you have run the "good race" with every fibre of your being. You have left leaving nothing in the tank. You leave us with memories of your love, strength, compassion and commitment to justice. We will miss you dearly. Now Gerard, may you rest comfortably in the arms of your God, knowing that you live on in the love of your family and friends.

Thank you friend and colleague.

You have enriched my life and I am a better person for knowing you.