

Joe Oliver

Kia ora, Welcome. Thanks very much for coming. Today should **not** be about grief and sadness. Today, as they say, should be about celebrating dad's life.

He was in God's departure lounge for a long time and he missed quite a few scheduled flights. Dad wasn't ready to go then as we all needed the extra time to say our goodbyes as he did with us. He fought that disgusting disease with every ounce of his being and we appreciate that

Dad's body has given up the ghost, but we know the Soul hasn't died and he's as much a part of today as I am.

It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. So let's celebrate his life

A Synopsis of his life

Dad was the eighth child in a family of 13. Some of those 13 obviously are here today and a lot of their mokopuna.

Dad was born in Auckland (we can tell you that now since he's gone) and at 6mths old he went to live in Arohena. It's a community approx 40km south of Te Awamutu.

In the earlier days he had the clichéd, no shoes walking to school experience - through the bush and on metal roads. In fact the arrival of his family in the area provided the number's necessary to start the school. 60% of the roll were Maori mostly provided by the Aotearoa Pa. An enriching cross section

Their house was pit sawn and wasn't fully lined. Water from the spring 200 metres away.

All children had their set jobs; make the beds, light the fire for the copper for clothes washing, getting wood for the stove and large open fire.

They had a model T but it couldn't take all the family so the rest of them became long distance runners - Running along behind it. Dad went to Te Awamutu when he was 5 and half years old and he thought he had arrived in New York City. They have got a Subway now

At 10 yrs old he was allow to shoot dinner for the family - rabbits, quail, pheasants, Kereru (native pigeons). Wild pigs and deer provided a welcome break at dinner time.

Form one Dad was sent to Christchurch to go to school there and stayed with his uncle and aunt. His Mum bought his first pair of shoes but put steel protectors on the bottom. Dad kept skinning his knees as he constantly slipped over on the concrete footpaths in Chch. In the end his uncle Bill removed the hob nails with dad protesting but he told dad he would buy him another pair if they wore out.

Dad entered a school running race. Ran out of Chch up to the top of the Cashmere hills and down to the Rakaia river and back to the college. He got 20th beating most of the boys who were a lot older than him, right up to 5th formers and was well congratulated. He couldn't work out what all the fuss was about because he thought he had just gone for a fun run. The model T was a good trainer.

Then back to school in TA.

Time to leave school and Dad's Mum and Dad wouldn't sign the papers for him to enter the Merchant Navy, so older brother Earle obliged and this started the next phase of his life. Deck scrubbing, Morse code, electrical storms dancing across the rigging in the night, massive waves dwarfing the boat, sea snakes, a mutiny, the whole salty gambit. Too many stories to share here today

The last boat had a bad Captain and for Dad to get back to NZ, he had to jump ship in Aussie and ended up at timber mill in the outback near Perth with no papers. When it was time to return to NZ Dad fronted up to immigration to come clean about his status and the guy processing him said, "you're the spitting image of your dad". In WW1 your dad ran out under heavy fire and dragged my wounded body back to the trenches – saved my life. I'll arrange your documents if you thank your dad for me. All Dad's father said was; silly Aussie, tried to take on the whole German army on his own.

Back to NZ and many other jobs ensued. Building power pylons, breaking in the land with a dozer, driving for Oliver brother's transport, he started his own business with Oliver's Panel Works, married Mary Kathleen McHugh from Te Puia Springs, 6 children ensued.

Then the community activities, charter member of the TA Lions club, President and eventually an honorary life member, town and district councillor for 27 yrs. School boy rugby coach. There was dare devil flying with Trevor Jepson, hunting, fishing. Played competitive golf for TA and long distance running in Marathon clinic.

Every Sunday when I was young dad religiously took the family out to a river for a BBQ and swimming in Summer (after church of course). On occasions he would take the car out of the driveway and would say point which way you wanted to go – it was great family fun.

And then there was the Bach at Kennedy's Bay which provided 33 years of pleasant memories.

Dad had a saying that he quite liked: **"too much is enough"**. A sort of ethos that he lived a part of his life by.

Dad started his second spell of running in his late 50s and completed several marathons in his 60s. People use to stop me in the street and say that they saw Dad out the back of Mt Kakapuku and he didn't look in good shape but wouldn't take a ride from us – he wasn't going to give up. I remember when we run the Cambridge - Hamilton 24km and dad was followed in by the ambulance. They had been trying to encourage him to hop in the back but he wanted to finish on his feet. He cut it fine though as he was secreting blood through his nipples because he had badly dehydrated his internal organs. As I topped him up with water again he sweated solidly for 3 hrs after the race. Too much is enough

Then he decided he needed more vitamin D and started the sunbathing phase. None of this before 10:00 and after 3:00 for him. Midday sun covered in oil to enhance the burning power of the rays wearing his skimpy togs. Ignored burn times as he was out there for too many hours.

Dad decided Manuka honey was good for him because it cured his leg ulcer. So he started to buy it by the bucket and they didn't last all that long. He had it in his drinks and most other things as well. One day he made me a ham sandwich for lunch and I was shocked to find that he coated the ham with the honey.

Dad has always thought salt was the best thing to counter that family goitre problem we never had. The rolled oats in the porridge tasted like they had been soaked in the Dead Sea for several days. After debating with dad the virtues of more salt on his dinner plate, Brother Vaughan caught dad surreptitiously salting his food when he wasn't looking the other way. Dad had gouged the holes in all the salt shakers so they better resembled sugar dispensers and this caught the unwary visitor to our house on many an occasion.

Dad's friends used to have a saying – "would you like to have a JOG" = Joe Oliver Gin. The reason was, if he poured you one it was so strong that it would snap your head back and give you heart palpitations. Too much was enough Dad always called it "nectar of the Gods". But it was just a saying as he knew there was only "one true God".

As dad got less well and was getting less mobile I thought I would take him to Arohena and the Mangere Gorge one last time. His protestations were far feeble than his physical form, so resigned he said, "I'll get the cold beers and the gin. I said, I'd gathered the kindling for the fire and the Porterhouse steak.

When we drove up the Mangere gorge up as far as the quarry, Dad started to reminisce about the day he fell down the quarry face and landed on the ledge, and how he dug his fingers in to stop himself slipping more and waited. As he clung on one of his brothers (Doug I think) cut steps in the face of the cliff using a tomahawk and work his way down to him, to secure him for rescue.

And there were more stories about when they were children and use to throw Maori stone **mere** at each other as part of a game. The colloquial term for a mere is a donger.

We positioned ourselves under a Kaihikatea tree and lit a fire, using our manuka to give the Porterhouse steak the ubiquitous taste of my childhood BBQs.

As we drunk the beers and the gin there were more stories about breaking the land in on the hill above us using a bulldozer. He talked about the time he fell in the tomo and the dozer flipped on the way down throwing dad clear and miraculously didn't crush him. And there was the time he took the top off a wasp nest with the dozer and had to run for his life. After 2 hrs of the dozer revving still covered in the wasps, Dad had to run back to it and got his prerequisite stings as he loosened the diesel tap on the bottom of the tank, using his finger to spray it around, and lit it to incinerate them.

I was enjoying the stories almost as much as the sand flies were enjoying feasting on my legs, but strangely they weren't touching the storyteller. Dad was serious when he told me that it was the Gin that kept the sand flies away. They didn't like the gin in their blood, he said. Dad's blood never seem to mind. Just being in the area where he was brought up, brought him to life again, so to speak. Dad told me 3 times over the next 2 days what a great day he'd had

Dad fought 4 localised cancers over the 8 years and he and the medical fraternity colluded to keep it at bay for most of that time and that also included the blood poisoning he received from one of the ops that almost killed him. The hospital system needs a little nudge from time to time but you cannot doubt the dedication of the individual people within it. Getting dad back up on his feet each time was testimony to their skills and effort and of course his tenacity. One can not forget the importance that mum played in dad's recoveries. She resolutely

supported him to the bitter end. Her strength of character shone through as she faced up to this unrelenting ordeal without complaint.

This community that Dad loved so much has demonstrated to us why they were deserving of his admiration by supplying our family with a never ending stream of delicious food and best wishes since his death. It is greatly appreciated. Alistair Kerr could have done with some hob nails on his shoes as he constantly delivered food that Veronica and I suspect he had tastefully created. There are many others like Daphne Hall, but we thank you all

Dad always put other people before himself

Samuel Johnson said:

"The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good." Whether the person could do Dad or his family any good or not, never came into dad's thinking, he just like helping people out.

He always tried to put the nurses, docs and everyone around him at ease.

For brother Shane's last birthday in February, I asked Dad if he would reconsider going to his BBQ - he said to tell Shane he would love to be there and celebrate his birthday but in doing so would just focus the party goes on the "sick guy" and the party is not about that. Go and enjoy yourselves

Like many others when I would leave Dad's place to head home he would come out on the balcony to say goodbye - he'd straighten up his crooked frame and give you a nice big sweeping wave and smile - the effort, the pain, the chance of failure not visible for that short moment. As you drive off you know that he would have suffered for those few seconds of apparently normality. That's was his "gift" to you for coming to see him

Dad had a **sense of humour** which became more accentuated in the last 8 years - probably part of his trying to make us feel better about things

I was watching the Getaway Travel program on TV and it was about Tasmania and there was a Tasmanian Devil bearing his teeth as he was trying to protect his road kill from fellow Devils. Dad staggered past the TV in a lot of pain, He twisted his bent frame so he could see the Tasmanian Devil as he was struggling to hold his head up and said; if Helen Clark conceived; she have one of those

Dad loved this country, he loved the bush, he loved the native trees, the birds, the people. He also loved music and poetry, especially the pieces that articulated this love of his.

Here's one of his favourite verses:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
"This is my own, my native land!"
Whose heart hath never within him burned
As home his footsteps he hath turned

On dad's many journey's he has been compelled to return to the land and the people who he loves. On one occasion whilst working in the saw mill out from Perth, Dad was so homesick that he went further outback and sat on a ridge and played his mouth organ and sung Maori songs to himself to mitigate the feelings. This story he shared with Granddaughter Claudine as she was saying her final

farewells because she was off to London and seeing him for the last time. As he told the story to her, her tears dried up immediately and were replaced with a smile as she said; goodbye, I'm off to buy a mouth organ. Dad wouldn't want anyone to be too upset at his farewell

So to finish, another favourite stanza of Dad's:

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away

We are going to miss your wisdom, your compassion, your generosity, your mana, we are going to miss you

*Say not in grief "he is no more",
but live in thankfulness that he was.*