

## **ERIC STEVENSON: IN MEMORIAM**

When I returned to Sydney from England at the end of 2010, having retired earlier that year from my ministry at Upper Chapel, Sheffield, Eric was already a member and regular attender at the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship. He was among the people who made my son Andrew and me very welcome.

He was particularly appreciative of the services which Andrew conducted, especially of his occasional musical contributions. It is now about nine years since Andrew moved to Canberra, but almost to the end, whenever I saw Eric he was likely to ask: "How's your boy?"

If Eric was scheduled to lead a service, I knew I could expect something really worthwhile: a well-crafted, thought-provoking sermon, usually exploring a social or theological issue in clear, accessible language; touches of humour; encouragement for the days and weeks ahead. We ministers like being led well in worship, and Eric was good at doing that. I felt a sense of loss when he decided not to take any more services.

My wife Ann commented that generosity was a major factor of Eric's character. He was a keen gardener, and every so often he brought in the results of his labours to share with the congregation. I particularly remember his macadamia nuts - which happen to be one of my favourites.

That generosity led to our having some enjoyable holidays in the house at Katoomba. We have always liked the Blue Mountains (although it's too cold for us to want to make a permanent home there), and the house opposite the hospital provided a convenient, comfortable base for some happy family holidays exploring the area. Ann reminded me that his neighbours there always appreciated everything that Eric did there.

The last years were not easy for him. He suffered the loss of his partner Barbara, and of his wife Ruth. Increasing physical frailty meant he could no longer do the gardening which had given him so much pleasure. And he moved from the house in Ryde to the Willandra Retirement Village.

His deafness frustrated him. If I was conducting the service, he liked to sit directly in front of me so that lip-reading could supplement his hearing.

Covid made things difficult; and then his final decline, in and out of hospital, was a difficult time. Through it all he remained stoic and calm, with no suggestion of complaint or self-pity.

Eric lived long and well. He will be remembered and missed by my family and me, and by friends at the Spirit of Life Fellowship who had the privilege and pleasure of knowing him.

Geoffrey R Usher