I consider it a great privilege and a blessing to have had Alan Cairns as my father. I know so many people have bad or non-existent relationships with their father; I never took for granted how special our relationship was, or forgot how hard we worked to make it so. I thanked God for my dad every day and mentioned his name in Heaven where is intimately known.

I remember calling Dad from Thailand saying I was stuck in Thailand with no money and nowhere to stay. I remember how he offered to pay for my ticket home and said I could stay with him. I remember how there was nothing in his tone or his actions that said anything accept that he loved me.

There was footy. Dad loved rugby league and in particular, the Bulldogs. They won the premiership in the year he was born, and his love and passion for the Doggies rubbed off on me, and the contagion spread to James and with each generation the madness swelled. Dad would often shake his head as James and I waxed lyrical about the mighty Dogs. He loved them but they drove him mad.

We had sport and we had politics, but the thing which really bound us together was work. I think through most of his life, Dad prioritized work over everything else. I think he defined himself within whatever job he was doing and over sixty odd years, he had quite a few jobs. During our meeting with the funeral director, we were all stumped by the simple question of ‘occupation’. Eventually we agreed on salesman. Dad could sell stuff because he was easy to talk to and he knew how to connect to people’s needs and wants. People liked him. And they trusted him.

Dad and I worked together on all sorts of building jobs from garden sheds to renovations: paid jobs, and love jobs at his place or mine. He loved a challenge. Loved to mull lover a problem and analyze it from all angles until he found a solution. I think his love of work was one of the primary drivers of his life.

I remember when I announced to mum and dad that I wanted to drop out of high school, dad took me, his then 17 year old son to the pub and bought me a beer and we walked it over. After listening to me patiently, he said he would allow me to drop out, but I had to get a job. I have never forgotten his words. Get a job, or get out of my house. That was 31 years ago and I have never been unemployed. I knew this was a great source of pride to dad.

Which leads nicely into the other driver of his life. Family. As the years rolled on Dad became almost obsessed my the need to keep the family together and to keep it strong. Good relationships only required good communication and I’ve got to say that although it took him a while, he eventually achieved mastery in personal relationships.

Many of you will have heard of Dad’s famous/infamous CRAM philosophy. I thought it was stupid and simplistic and I told him so, but that was dad: a simple man with a simple philosophy.

We were all beneficiaries of that. That simplicity and tolerance. His good communication skills. But I suspect the greatest beneficiary was Andrea. I have said this to Dad but I want to say it here to Andrea, especially. I regret not recognizing and appreciating how good your relationship with Dad was earlier than I did. I know how much Dad loved you and how happy you made him. Thank you.

Dad was a proud man: a self made man who did the best he could with what he was given. He was a little vain, and the hairpiece years have become the stuff of legend. I’ll never forget the night he came home with ‘it’ and how Justine and I, too young to know how to respond, simply laughed at him. His pride caused serious problems at various times, and especially for me and him, it meant that we finished our time on earth together in strong disagreement over a particular issue. That said, the disagreement had no impact on ability to talk, to share and to love and encourage one another. Of all the attributes dad possessed, I think the thing I most admired was his resilience. Things never quite worked out for him, despite his planning and hard work which meant that as he stormed into his eighth decade he was still working harder than he should have had to. Dad was physically strong beyond his years, but also mentally tough. That toughness came from his father.

For a man who professed to not believe in God, he had a remarkable capacity for forgiveness. To keep moving forward and not wallow in past mistakes is one of the many valuable things I learned from him. Again, and also surprising was how he saw his role as father. I mean as a father to adult children. He once said this to me, “I sometimes think that God has given me this wisdom to pass on to you.’ I was stunned at the time that he would even speak about God as though he was real, but I could not, nor can I now, argue with the truth of what he said.

I began by saying that I lost my father and my friend. I lost my ‘go to guy’. During the week I went to buy a tie, this tie/Jessie Rose was with me, and after we had selected a nice tie, she reminded me that I don’t know how to tie a tie. When I needed that job done, I went to dad. I neatly lost right there in Myer. Jessie Rose asked the sales guy if he could tie the know for me.

I’ve lost the physical presence of my father and my friend. I can’t call him to speak to him, now, I can’t sit down beside him and talk to him. I can’t shake his hand and give him a hug of thanks or love or whatever. His physical presence is gone, but as I thought about it, I realized that he’s not gone. Every time I watch the Dogs play, he’ll be there. When labour is returned to government, he’ll be there. When I have a beer, he’ll be there. Through the highs and the lows of life, he’ll be with me. He’s in my blood. He’s my father. I’m his son. Always will be.