

Farewell: Robert Costa

Dad died at 3 in the morning.

The frantic phone call from the nursing home at 3:10 a.m. confirmed the worst. They mumbled something about being sorry, but *“could you have him picked up as soon as possible?”* The summer heat in Sydney, even at 3 a.m., isn’t something to ignore. Another quick call to the funeral directors fixed that, but they apologised. They were running late. There are too many other pickups.

Another call from the nursing home. Another call to the funeral directors, and it was all sorted.

I’ve never really thought about death. I’m not sure it bothers me as much as it does other people.

There were times I thought this was the end after the stroke. My attending doctor thought so as well. Still, it didn’t worry me. Here one day and gone the next as they say.

The funeral was a basic affair—a few words spoken by a priest who had attended the nursing home where Dad spent his last days. The words were generic and spoken in the usual sad way with enough emotion to sound like he cared. Maybe he did. There was a vacancy to the voice.

It was a sunny day. Isn’t it supposed to rain at funerals so everyone can feel as miserable as possible? I was sitting at his internment, staring at the coffin, no more than 2 meters away.

Luckily for them, Mom and Dad had the foresight to buy above-ground crypts years ago. They’re pretty miserable affairs, though, high above the ground but horrible brick and concrete construction. I remember they said they didn’t want to be buried. I can’t imagine why it would have mattered. Luckily for them, they didn’t leave it to me to decide.

So there I was, staring at the coffin sitting on temporary trellis legs that looked like they bought them from Ikea. It was a nasty timber veneered construction of dubious quality and not at a bargain price. At least it was shiny. I felt sorry for the pallbearers. It was heavy, zinc-lined, and fabricated so Dad wouldn’t leak out. I felt sorry for Dad. His relationship with Mom at her end wasn’t the most pleasant. We didn’t know till her very end that she had a terminal illness,

exaggerating her moods and making her decidedly unpleasant. There was no helping her then.

Dad was happy for a while after she passed. He no longer had to deal with her life or his and was glad to spend his days playing cards with friends. But in the end, when he died, I did feel sorry for him; he now would have to spend eternity with her inside the same crypt.