



WRAG 45th Anniversary Lunch – Presidents Speech -
Mulgrave Country Club – Wednesday 10 April 2019

Mayor of The City of Monash – Councillor Shane McCluskey,

Distinguished Guests – In the Form of Waverley Retirement Activity Group - Life Members, WRAG’s Matriarch and Longest Serving Member Dot Schmidt (1983) - (36 years), Elaine Oliver (1988) - (31 years), Bill Lamont (1993) - (26 years), Rona & Helmut Meuris (2005) - (14 years),

WRAG Members and Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be able to welcome His Honour the Mayor of The City of Monash, and such a distinguished group of WRAG members and guests to our 45th anniversary luncheon. We hope you have a great time.

Another of our long serving WRAG members Cliff Imer (1992 – 27 years) was once again invited to give the 45th WRAG Historical Oration, as he previously did with distinction at WRAG’s 25th, 30th, 35th, and 40th anniversary celebrations.

Unfortunately, Cliff is on holidays in Japan and is unable to make it here today, but he has asked me to read the following oration which he has prepared.

The Cliff Imer 45th WRAG Historical Oration

I wish to thank WRAG President, Terry Spicer, for delivering this speech on my behalf, as I am otherwise engaged swanning around Japan.

There are some members here today who have joined in recent years that may not know that at its conception in 1974, it was a completely different animal to what it is today. A two-year-old organisation titled the “Early Planning for Retirement Association” (EPRA) arranged through the Waverley Council of Churches a public meeting on 29 April 1974, from which the 14th EPRA group was enthusiastically formed. Apparently it was an extremely wet night but that did not dampen the enthusiasm of the attendees at the Glen Waverley High School as it was then known.

The essential aim at the time was for retirement planning covering health, finance, housing, social contacts, activities and personal adjustment from the working life. Guest speakers spoke on these aspects at quarterly meetings.

Within a few years most of the members had retired and the need for retirement planning had diminished. Members kept in touch with the introduction of activity groups. Alan Petfield commenced the first of these groups, namely the “Arm Chair Travel” group, which spawned the Caravan group. By 1979, seven groups and in 1984 there were 16 groups. By 1989 it was such a changed social organisation it was retitled Waverley Retirement Activities Group, fondly known as (WRAG). In 1994 and 2004 there were 30 groups. In 2009 32 groups, increasing to 35 groups in 2014.

Now comes the sad part, only 18 groups remain. What have we lost in the last 5 years? Arm Chair Travel, Café at The Glen, Cardmaking, Evening Jonola, cards Solo, Classical Music, Computer group, Golf 9 holes, Lunch Club, Malaysian Mah Jong, Music Lovers, Old Time Movies, Something on Sundays, Beginners Scrabble, the Organ group, which ceased over 5 years ago and this was politely pointed out to me by Lawrie Smith that I omitted it at the 40th anniversary. Lawrie was a co-founder of that group.

This 5 year period does not make good reading. It has seen a marked decline in membership. Going back to Laurie Smith’s presidency in 1997, we boasted some 560 members. In 2014 membership had waned to 417 and currently it stands at 211. Why the decline in activities and memberships? Is it simply ageing, is it a lack of interest to become or maintain Convenorship of an activity group. There is only one group that meets in the evening, so that largely avoids night driving.

We are suffering from a lack of ‘get up and go’ members in their 50’s and 60’s willing to put their talents to work. Over the years at regular intervals the question ‘how can we attract new and younger members?’ I recall Laurie Smith in a Golden Days Radio interview saying ‘word-of-mouth’ is the best recruitment. Since 1996 life membership has been awarded to 16 members; of these some are deceased, namely Geoff and Pat Armstrong, Anetta Ronaldson, Norma Hall, Mollie Weir, Wally Cavill, and Maurie Wahner. Still living the good life are Dot Schmidt 2001, Laurie Smith 2001, Leon Cohen 2003, Margaret Pound 2005, Bill Lamont 2008, yours truly 2012, Elaine Oliver 2016, and Helmut & Rona Meuris 2017.

Our longest serving member is the irrepressible Dot Schmidt who joined WRAG in 1983 and is still active despite some health problems and convenes her monthly dine out. Our current membership fee of \$15 is a very reasonable amount for the benefits we receive. Similar organisations like Life Activities Groups (LAC) are

quite envious. The fee would be quite higher were it not for the support of the City of Monash in the hire of halls, annual cash grant, and newsletter printing.

We are getting older but not yet in the ancient category, if you stop buying green bananas you know you are getting older. Every time you cant find your reading glasses its because they are on top of your head.

We should never underestimate the value of our contribution to community life and the companionship generated. We belong to a caring and compassionate organisation. There are still the saints of WRAG who readily help others with transport, meals and visits to those indisposed, who support each other in times of bereavement and other stresses. I acknowledge the work done by our Welfare Officer, Mary Parker, in that continuing role, which is more important than ever.

I would like to acknowledge the work of President Terry and First Lady Nicole, who work very hard keeping things moving on, also to Roel who has a habit of picking up Secretary roles, also to the multi-skilled and competent Erica in her role as Treasurer and Memberships Records. You recall the saying 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'. In the context of WRAG that single step occurred 45 years ago and we are still travelling on and continuing the journey.

Thank You to the daughter of former Secretary Margaret Murphy, Tegan Murphy, for typing this speech.

When the 50th anniversary celebration occurs in 2024, if I am alive I will be 99 years of age, so I hereby resign from the position of unofficial historian of WRAG and invite the President of the day to invite someone else to say a few words.

Thank you for your attention.

Cliff Imer, (pronounced EEMER, a swiss name) 10 April 2019.

Please give Cliff a round of applause for his wonderful WRAG history. We all hope he has had a wonderful couple of weeks swanning around Japan. (Absolutely remarkable for a 93 year old).

In closing can I just say that Cliff has reminded us that at our peak in 1997 WRAG had 560 members. Which had reduced to 417 members in 35 groups only some 5 years ago in 2014. Today we have just over 200 members in 18 groups.

I have no idea how many members or activity groups we will have by the time we reach our 50th anniversary in five years from now, or even if WRAG will still exist at that time.

All that I can say is that at a recent WRAG Management Committee Meeting the current committee members all committed to continue to support WRAG, its Convenors, and Members, for as long as the City of Monash is prepared to continue to support all of us.

I now invite The Mayor - Councillor Shane McCluskey to speak to us on behalf of The City of Monash.