

Eulogy Karina Sanders

Born in Riga, the capital of Latvia, on 20 January 1940, to Aino and Janis Bergs.
June 1940 Russia invades Latvia.

Karina's father, Janis, is arrested by the Russians and deported to Siberia. Her grandfather, who was a Minister in the Latvian Parliament, was also sent to Siberia and subsequently shot.

By July 1941, the German forces had driven out the Russians, replacing them as oppressors of the Latvian people.

During the war Karina's mother worked in a machine shop to support them both. With the Russians sweeping in from the North in 1944, and certain to recapture their country from the Germans, Karina and her mother boarded a ship, as part of a massive Latvian exodus, and escaped to Denmark. From there they travelled to Czechoslovakia. Only 5, Karina had a graphic memory of them hiding under a bed when the Germans ordered the town's population to witness an execution. From Czechoslovakia they travelled again, with other refugees, into Germany to the west, eventually settling in a camp in Norstemmen, near Hanover.

The Occupying Forces evicted German families to install refugees in their homes. While settled in their Nordstemmen home, Karina's mother worked as a secretary for the British Army.

In 1949, they boarded the SS Oxfordshire for their journey to Australia, arriving on 9 August. Their country of destination options restricted because they were not 'a complete family'.

They landed in Western Australia, where her mother (affectionately remembered by the family as 'Granny') again gained employment as a secretary.

Next they crossed the Nullabor and settled into life as migrants in Greta Camp, in 'Chocolate City'.

Karina travelled from Greta by train to Maitland Girls High for her schooling, where she graduated as Dux in 1956.

She was naturalised on 12 July 1956.

During this time they left Greta Camp to live with her uncle and maternal aunt, in Cardiff.

Eventually, they rented a flat in Laman Street, Cooks Hill, with 'Granny' gaining a job with the Time Life office in Newcastle.

Karina took a position as Chemist with the Northern Drug and Chemical Company, while she completed a Bachelor of Science degree part-time, majoring in Chemistry. This was before the University of Newcastle was opened, with her study being done at Tighes Hill, which was then a College of the University of New South Wales.

After graduation, she became a Chemist in the laboratory at John Lysaghts, near BHP, where Dick was also working as a Shift Tester. On the same shift as Dick was a Latvian, Ivor Udris, who was a friend of Karina and who had previously introduced her to Dick. They began 'going out' together after that and, on 18 April 1964, were married in Christ Church Cathedral.

Dick remembers proposing marriage to Karina one night, in his 1937 black Chevy, half way along Nobbys breakwater. Nervously he asked "Karina will you marry me?" Ever pragmatic, and conceding the inevitability of the event, she replied "I suppose I'll have to."

They lived, after marriage, in the same upstairs flat in Laman Street, Cooks Hill, that Karina had shared with her mother up to that time. Her mother had moved out and boarded in Adamstown, before shifting into the downstairs flat in Laman Street later.

Lara was born in the early hours of 30 December 1967. Dick remembers that a friend of Karina's was visiting the previous night and showing them photos of an overseas trip. Karina had to excuse herself a few times, saying "I'm sorry, but I'm having contractions." Eventually, they had to ask their guest to leave, and they left for Woodlands Hospital.

Karina and her mother had wisely bought a block of land in Charlestown before Karina's marriage.

This was built on and, in early 1969, Dick and Karina moved in.

'Granny' moved in too, into a small flat at the front of the house.

Stene was born on 26 August that year.

Karina had given up work (at Lysaghts) to have the children, and only sought employment again when they were both at school. Unable to get a job as a Chemist, she was employed for a short time with the Department of Social Services, before starting a new career as a Librarian, at the University of Newcastle. She studied for her Librarian qualifications part time, completing them a year early. She loved her work. She was an 'original cataloguer' and enjoyed the challenge of correctly cataloguing difficult works, including often complex theses. Sometimes, if the works were in his field, Dick's help was sought at night. She received a medal after 25 years, and retired in 2005, having served for 29 years.

In retirement, while Dick still continued working for a further five years, Karina enjoyed her Bridge games, and seeing the family, since both Stene and Lara lived close by. Bridge was a particular passion, not just for the game itself, but especially for the many good friends that she made while playing.

After Dick retired also, in 2010, they travelled to Africa to enjoy 'luxury tented safaris' in five camps in Botswana and Zimbabwe, flying between them in a light plane and seeing lions, leopards, elephants, hippos etc at very close quarters. They also flew over Victoria Falls in a helicopter. A most memorable holiday. Unfortunately Karina's poor heart function precluded any further travel.

In previous trips they had firstly gone with the children, in 1979, to Germany, Latvia and Russia. After the family toured around Germany, including having a swim in the Munich pool where Mark Spitz won seven gold medals, Dick went to a conference in the Ukraine, while Karina and the kids went to Moscow. All four then met up in Riga, where they were joined by her father, the first time she had seen him since she was a baby.

In 1990 Dick and Karina went to New Zealand for the Commonwealth Games in Auckland, and again in 1994 to the Games in Victoria, Canada, followed by a tour of the Rocky Mountains.

In 1996 Dick and Karina went again to Latvia, after a stint at the Swimming Coaches Conference in San Diego. From Riga they flew down to Krasnodar, Russia, where they met up again with Karina's father, travelling to his home in Kropotkin for a reunion 'feast'. From there they flew due south to Zambia, doing a safari in the South Lwange Reserve then staying with the parents of Lara's penfriend in Ndola.

In 2005 they travelled to America, visiting Seattle, Memphis and New Orleans (leaving a few days before the catastrophic Hurricane Katrina hit), and San Francisco.

In 2007, with Stene, they travelled to London, Riga and Paris.

Once trips had become out of the question, they enjoyed the 'simple pleasures' in retirement. These included weekly trips to the movies, going 'Gold Class' wherever possible, eating out, and trips to the Hunter Wetlands. They had a tradition of some 13 years standing of meeting a special group of friends on Saturdays, for a long lunch on the wharf. This was broken only by Karina's hospitalisation. They also had a regular Tuesday lunch date at Lena's at Warners Bay, and were fond of lunching at Pippi's after the movies.

When the kids were growing up, the family would holiday at Hawk's Nest, in rented cottages. Good times. After the kids had left home Dick and Karina would still take holidays there, lunching by the river, taking a motor boat up the Myall, and having daily walks, trying to remember the houses they had rented, and when, as they walked past.

Over a long period, they would also enjoy a Sunday BBQ lunch on the headland at Caves Beach with old friends Geoff and Robyn. With these friends, and their children, many glorious days were also spent along the beach at Birubi Point, with fishing BBQs and games. These were special times.

At their home in Charlestown they could enjoy the company of the colony of Eastern Water Dragons that called their yard (and pool) home, and who turned up at the door for banana treats on a daily basis. Possums also liked to use the possum boxes under the house.

So, in spite of the limitations imposed by her weak heart, there were always enjoyable times to be had. Karina was never happier though, than when spending time with her family, especially the four grandchildren who brought her so much joy, watching them grow up and hearing about their schooling, sport and other childhood things. She recently reaffirmed this when she said "I live for my family".

On 12 January Karina was admitted to John Hunter Hospital with bowel issues. The necessary treatment was restricted by her weak heart condition. Over the next eight months she was in John Hunter, through the Emergency Department, four times, in Toronto Private Hospital for rehabilitation twice, and home three times (for one hour, ten days and three days). In spite of her many heart issues,

she survived an operation and a stint in ICU. Throughout the eight months she displayed a stoic acceptance of her parlous condition, in spite of the pain and suffering, and the personal indignities.

She was due to come home last Thursday, where a bed and nursing support had been set up. She was apprehensive of this, having become dependant on the excellent nursing care she was receiving at John Hunter.

On the Monday, Dick had a good visit with her, reading the paper, doing crosswords, and watching TV. During the night she was awake often, chatting with the nurse when she was nearby. At 6:30 on the Tuesday morning her nurse said "I am going to get your pills now." When she returned she saw Karina take her last breath. She was not in pain or distressed.

Karina will be remembered by her family, and all who knew her, as a real lady. She didn't say much, in stark contrast to her husband Dick, but when she did speak it was usually worth listening to.

Vale Karina.