

DR GLEN JOHN “HERB” COOREY

13 September 1932- 17 May 2012

Glen John Coorey, known as Herb, was a highly talented surgeon who without seeking it had a leadership role in Australia's Lebanese community. His profile at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, at St John's College, Sydney University and at the University generally and in countless charities was such that nearly 1100 people filled Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral for his requiem.

Born in Charleville, Queensland where the only other 'exotic' family were the Greeks who ran the milk bar Glen's parents felt they were treated well by Australians because they joined the local parish and because they were hard working and self-reliant.

Education was a priority to his mother, Maureen, who herself was illiterate in English. Glen boarded at *Downlands* in Toowoomba but he was not easily managed. Quickly bored he once locked a priest in his own study and when he and some mates drove an unregistered Model 'A' Ford to town the suggestion came that he might look elsewhere for his matriculation. Then Glen's exam results came in and the school begged him to come back but he was already headed for St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. His stellar exam results at *Joey's* compensated for his many antics. He thrived and set his sights on a Medical career instead of the priesthood which he had considered when younger. Perhaps the childhood loss of two older brothers led him to a career of life saving. He certainly became leader of the family when his father, Raphael, died during Glen's undergraduate period. He maintained this role til his death, always dispensing advice to siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews and many near strangers, Lebanese people who needed guidance through the hospital system.

Glen entered the University and then St John's College staying six years before graduating in 1956. He was a patchy college rugby player and oarsman but a forceful choirmaster and a natural leader of any conversation. This among some seriously bright minds. His wit and mimicry were celebrated and while he was known to be hard on 'freshers' (first year college students) his torments were, he maintained, always mental ones. On more than one occasion his Levantine appearance qualified him to portray King Farouk in University Commemoration ceremonies.

Glen's studies were supported more by his mother than by his father who wanted him to come home and run the business, especially after burying two sons had sapped Raphael's energy for commerce. She supported Glen in some defiance of her husband and upon graduation and he immediately moved all of 100 meters south of St John's College to RPA which he loved and served for decades. (The closest Glen had to a media profile was a surgical procedure filmed for the TV show “RPA”.)

While at RPA he met a greater love in the casualty ward, a red-haired physiotherapy graduate who was setting a plaster cast. Glen found himself walking laps around her. Shortly he was prescribing physiotherapy for ward patients who had no real need for it in order to have Suzanne Hidden closer by. The courtship went well despite the hiccup of Glen presenting Sue with a floral arrangement which still bore the inscription “with deepest sympathies”. Glen defended himself “I didn't think the bloke would miss them”.

Sue's parents, Judge Frank Hidden and Kathleen, the daughter of pioneering NSW Labor minister, John Louis Trefle, loved Glen and he remarked often that Australia could not be

called a racist country. “How could a wog from western Queensland marry the beautiful daughter of a Judge from Bellevue Hill?”

On St Patrick's Day 1959 Glen and Sue were married and directly steamed to Britain for postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Surgeons. A far horizon for a Lebanese boy from Charleville. Sue ran a lean home while Glen worked days and studied nights. Here they began a family: Frank, John and Maureen born within four years.

Many people came to visit and helped them tour the continent. In Pamplona during Fiesta they were approached by a man named Ernest seeking English speaking company. A memorable night ensued while Glen, Sue, their friends Chris Meagher (brother of eminent jurist Roddy) and Louis Pidcock asked Papa Hemingway the ins and outs of bullfighting. Chris stayed on and became a matador no less.

They returned to Sydney in 1964 and bought a home near Sue's parents and proceeded to fill it with children, Peter, Catherine and Andrew followed. They had said they wanted six but seemed mostly untroubled by Matthew's arrival six years later.

Glen worked hard for his patients. His own cardiologist recalled studying under Glen: “Herb I could not tell which were your private or public patients, you treated them all the same” Glen could not see that this was remarkable. His patients always came first and he was never really off duty. He was asked to join the Medical Board at RPA and was for many years head of the Urology Department. He was a senior lecturer in surgery at Sydney University and many students still recall his clarity, his sometimes intimidating honesty and his patient care.

Glen was careful with his resources only wasting them on others. He dressed mostly plainly and cared little for fashion but he commissioned jewellery designs for Sue on all her milestones. His only luxury was travel which he justified by telling himself he was taking Sue away not having a trip for himself. They had decades of annual overseas trips, venturing behind the Berlin Wall well before its fall and to many destinations outside the normal circuit. They were often more traveller than tourist.

Glen had some talent for investment even if he had little time for it. What he accumulated he applied thoughtfully to those who needed help. He teamed up with other successful Lebanese in Australia to send medical relief to the 'old country' during their civil war. He worked with Jose Ramos Horta to assess the medical needs of East Timor and then set about sending them what they needed. He very quietly assisted many members of his extended family, underwriting family celebrations and education expenses, most of these ventures secret until his death.

Education mattered to him and so did his Church. His charity was mostly private but he allowed himself to be photographed by the Catholic Weekly handing a six figure cheque to the University of Notre Dame. He was asked and was pleased to join the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre a 900-year-old group which supports Christians in the Middle East.

He served for many years as Fellow on the Council of St John's College steering their building program but was equally at home buying a keg for a winning college rugby side. Herb took so many house-guests that he and Sue's home became known as St John's College-East. For decades he was a familiar figure at Sydney University rugby and at Randwick Racecourse and he was known to be the slowest swimmer at Tattersall's Club.

Herb was a music lover, having the first record player in St John's College and was probably the only Tex Morton fan to have a son (Matthew) conduct the Sydney Symphony in the Sydney Opera House. He loved watching Australia play cricket or rugby but often grumpily conceded if the Australians had lost that perhaps he was just a patriot and not a sportsman. He loved both the Lebanese commitment to family and the Australian love of friendship.

He died at his home of 48 years after a series of illnesses after being well cared for by the Mater Hospital Dialysis Unit at Crows Nest and by St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst. His family were struck proud by the sheer number of people who attended his funeral, not counting the 14 priests on the altar.