

EULOGY FOR THOMAS LESLIE WILLIAMS – The Early Days by Billy DeGoldi

Tom was born 20/5/26 in Collingwood. He was educated at St John's East Melbourne, just at the end of the depression. The school was attended by children from Collingwood, Richmond and Abbotsford, mostly from poor families. Bill Davies, who is here today, relates a story of his first day at school as a terrified 9 year old. He was full of fear as he walked through the school yard. There was this group of boys playing football with a paper football, watching his every step, when along comes the smallest kid and asks if he is new to the school, then tells him, "stick with me. I'll look after you and take you to the teacher." That was Tommy, showing leadership qualities that stayed with him all through his life.

I first met Tom when I was 14 and joined the Collingwood youth club. I had just started work but Tom had started 8 months earlier, working at Cornes bakery in Richmond. They owned a shop on Flinders St. station and made all their own pastries. Tom loved his work and would get to work early so that he would get the best spot at the workbench. Tom was very efficient and faster than any machine at making pasties, both hands going at remarkable speed. His knowledge of a yield from a bag of flour, or potatoes, and costing, saw him made foreman over the top of the owner's two sons. It was good working with Tom, plenty of laughter and talk, and quite often you would be hit in the head with an uncooked pastie carefully aimed at you by Tom.

Tom made many friends in Richmond. He was always a target for anyone who wanted to borrow a quid, for Tom could never see anybody stuck for money. I know that Tom never got back anywhere near the money he lent, but still he never had a bad word about anybody.

After Mr Cornes died, the business divided into two and Tom went to work with the younger son at Sth. Melbourne, doing the same type of work until Tom decided to open his own business, making his own famous ham and chicken patties and rissoles until he retired.

Tom loved all sport and would bet on it, especially the horses. He owned some and was involved in a stud farm, which he enjoyed.

Didn't he love it when Fammo, Rose and Fenech won their world titles. Tom was a good boxer himself, trained by an ex boxer Ron Conabere. He had 10 fights for 8 wins and 2 draws; the last draw was with a tall boxer with a long reach. It got a standing ovation from the crowd and the ring of the old stadium was showered with money because of the little bloke's courage. Tom's fists got him into and out of trouble. He had joined the air force and was spending his day tending the garden outside the officer's mess. When Tom told the officer this was not his idea of active service and a small altercation took place and Tom's left and right combination did the talking. So Tom hopped the fence and went down and joined the army – 2/7 commando battalion, serving in New Guinea. Tom a Commando? That figures.

Footy matches with Tom standing on half a dozen cans, back to the pub or social club for a few beers, was a ritual not to be missed. How proud was he when the boys next door played their first games for Hawthorn, and prouder still when Leigh coached the Magpies to the 1990 premiership. Tom was a good footballer. He was captain of Collingwood YCW, a side that boasted 3 future Victorian representatives. He also played for Collingwood juniors, which later became Collingwood thirds. Then the war interrupted things.

Tom returned from war and married my sister and they had four children – Sue, Paul, Julie and Shane, who gave them 12 grandchildren and 1 great grand child – all of whom Tom was immensely proud.

Tom was a born leader and organizer. He was a man's man, a person you wanted to be with. Wonderful times at family reunions, weddings or a club night at Collingwood or just a few quiet beers, his company was enjoyed by all.

Tom was a man who could absorb pain. He must have suffered terrible pain with his gout condition, but the pain and sorrow when he lost his beloved Gene – I doubt if he ever got over his tragic loss. He was a very unique person. There was definitely only one Tommy Williams. He was loved by all.