

Good morning,

My name is Richard Burns.

Wendy has asked that I speak to the personal side of working with Hal.

I first met Hal 11 years ago, when working as a Research Assistant.

But it wasn't until about 6 years ago, when Hal and Wendy relocated to Canberra, that I really came to know Hal more personally.

It was a rewarding experience to work with and to know Hal.

Much of the time we didn't actually discuss our work; well maybe people and university administrative processes, but mostly we talked about our histories, our families, our interests in general issues relating to knowledge, music, theology and sport.

And I am very grateful that in preparing this brief account, a number of people have graciously shared their recollections as well.

Two common themes emerged. First, Hal Kendig was a storyteller. Second, he had a genuine interest in people.

Many of the same stories were conveyed to me, but most unfortunately are not really appropriate to be shared, at least not in this forum. Hal liked very much to tell stories about himself and the people he knew, often people he worked with. Many are funny, others a little salacious.

I think, for Hal, stories were his way of opening up to us. And consequently, by asking about our stories, his opportunity to learn about us.

Hal would share stories about his life. About his father the marine, about marrying his college sweetheart, his university days, the motorbike, the gamble bringing a young family half-way around the world to a 1970s Canberra... It really was "a world away from Southern California", he would say.

He often spoke about his children, his grandchildren and wider family, and his long standing friendships.

He often pestered me about his fishing boat. And the one regret I have is never taking him up on his frequent offers to go fishing. Hal would talk about surfing and fishing with Kim Kiely, a kindred spirit I think. I remember Hal nonchalantly recounting to us about an experience with a shark off the Southern Californian Coast. Kim the ever dedicated surfer, just shrugged his shoulders, that's the norm for surfers I suppose.

And Hal was full of surprises. Tim Windsor and I recall that despite his ancestral heritage, Hal was actually far more interested in rugby union than American Grid Iron. I remember Peter Butterworth, and my wife Dimity and I taking Hal and Wendy to see the Brumbies play against the NSW Waratahs, which Hal very much enjoyed.

But he would surprise me most with his frequent reference to his love of basketball and netball. He insisted he was quite a good basketballer. But he particularly enjoyed the women's league such that he could hold quite detailed discussion with my wife about different strategy and injuries, which in my opinion, from over hearing their stories, are far more chilling than anything we ever did on the rugby field.

Generally I remember good food, wine, music and companionship at the Kendig household. Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" was a favourite of Hal's. He excelled with his gas barbecue. He was proud to show off Coco and especially proud to walk people through his garden, and then there were the chickens. Often Hal and Wendy would host an excellent spread for some international visitor. Dimity and I were always welcome. And we are very grateful for a final meal just before Hal's passing which we shared with his friend and colleague James Nazroo. We recall a wonderful evening discussing music, dogs, gardens, sports and the like.

Hal was often willing to share his experience with colleagues. I know only too well his impact on many senior academics and seen the impact he had on junior academics in supporting and advancing their careers.

I know that there are many leading public health figures at institutions in this country and overseas with whom Hal had strong collaborations and friendship. Hal supported many junior academics with his vast networks and was instrumental in helping some build their own connections. When we felt like

the world's worst networkers, he was our champion, always finding ways to connect us with people purely for our advantage and career.

And Hal was always disappointed when very good people, particularly early career academics, would struggle to secure their own research funding, but heartened when he saw them land on their feet. Not just professionally, but personally. Seeing people develop not just their careers, but seeing them navigate themselves through their lives.

Hal never forgot about people he met. And in the end, Hal could be epitomised by his interest and engagement with people.

As Kerry Sargent so eloquently described, "What stands out in my mind when I think about Hal is his genuine interest in people". Hal would go out of his way to touch base with us all – popping into our offices for catch-ups that inevitably went from family and dog talk to deep philosophical discussions about life, death and the universe.

And all too often Hal displayed his sarcastic wit in offering his support and advice.

Nicolas Cherbuin recalls Hal's propensity to recall Niebuhr's well-known prayer perhaps more commonly known as the sobriety prayer

"grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." He particularly emphasised the last phrase.

Whilst Kim Kiely remembers Hal always quoting a movie when he was mentoring him. Hal could draw on diverse sources of inspiration including Mel Brooks' Blazin' Saddles, but sometimes even Hal's wit went over our heads. And as Kim says "probably the most memorable thing about Hal was trying to decipher his cryptic language".

Hal and I shared an interest in various classical writings; whilst I was a ferocious reader of gnostic writings, Hal's favourite source of inspiration was Marcus Aurelius. We would often recount the opening section to Book II which begins

“When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: the people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous and surly. They are like this because they can't tell good from evil.”

Quite apt for someone working in senior academic leadership I think.

But perhaps one of his most apt comments about leadership, and I paraphrase his thoughts here,

“sometimes one takes on a senior leadership role, not because one wants to do it, or thinks one can do a good job, but sometimes one does the role simply because it would be a disaster if the other person was to do it.”

To draw my brief narrative to a close, I would like to express to Wendy and the Kendig family, to Hal's friends and wider collegial network, just how sadly Hal is missed here at CRAHW.

There was more to Hal Kendig than simply a name, a policy advocate, a competitive grant winner, a study Chief Investigator or academic writer.

Hal was a genuine investor in people.

Even when he moved from one institution to another, or when people moved on from working with him, Hal always worked to support and advance those he thought were deserving of it. Even in his final months his primary concerns at work were of providing continuity of support for his PhD and research team.

In years to come, when all the accolades have been counted and forgotten, Hal's measure will be reflected by his investment, support and genuine interest in developing and nurturing the people around him. Privately, Hal would convey his belief that a “university's primary responsibility should be the generational transfer of knowledge”. He exemplified this belief.

And this is what will long be remembered and will have its greatest impact.

Now I would like to finish with Hal's words. A poem Hal had written when visiting Japan a few years ago and sent to James Nazroo and myself in one of his last emails to me.

“Changing tides of Awareness  
Ebbing Work and Rising Life  
Constancy of Moonlight and Oceans

Thanks to Marcus Aurelius humble Stoic  
Philosopher-King to General always himself  
Steadfast with dignity and compassion for Purposes  
Passing Custodianship to the next Generation

Thanks to Buddha beyond words  
For stillness in Turbulence  
Upwelling Existence beyond the self  
Drifting towards the peace of the Void”

Hal L Kendig, Yokohama July 2014

Richard Burns  
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