

# Eulogy for Edward Percy Oldham

Louise Austin (née Oldham)

Read by Spencer Wilson

It is with great sadness that I write this eulogy for Eddie Oldham. My name is Louise Austin (née Oldham). I am Eddie's niece.

Eddie was born in Melbourne on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1932. His parents were Percy & Doris Oldham – married in 1928. He was the first son of his father's second marriage. Another son, Harold Oldham, younger brother to Eddie, was born three years later.

My father, John Oldham, was the son of Percy Oldham's first marriage. He was almost twenty years older than Eddie. Although half-brothers, they kept in touch until my father's death.

In 1932, Eddie was christened Edward Percy Oldham – named after his father, Dr Edward Percy Oldham. While father and son had exactly the same names, Eddie's father was always called Percy and his son was always called Eddie – a move which no doubt avoided many a mistake in mail deliveries.

Eddie's parents and the two boys moved from Melbourne to Lorne in the early 1930s – a faraway isolated community in those days. Construction of the coastal road to Lorne was only completed in the year Eddie was born – 1932.

Eddie's father became the first qualified medical practitioner in Lorne. Before that time, the district was serviced by bush nurses.

When I visited Lorne in 2002, I was fortunate enough to meet an historian in the area. He wrote to me in a letter:

*"I well remember Dr Oldham's two sons in Lorne. Both were younger than I. Both were very fair of complexion – their hair was white-blonde in colour."*

I have in my possession the first lock of Eddie's hair – tenderly kept by his mother Doris Oldham. It was handed to me in an envelope when he moved, at the age of 82, from his home in Hampton to the Aged Care Residence of "Mayflower Brighton".

Back to Eddie's younger days ...

The young, blonde-headed boy completed some of his primary school years at Lorne and then attended Bostock House at Geelong Grammar. At this fine school he completed his primary and secondary school

education. After his final school year, Eddie attended Dookie Agricultural College. With an agricultural diploma, he travelled to the far west of New South Wales for his first job – to gain some experience of life as a jackeroo.

This was after World War 2, and as good fortune would have it, my father's marital family had settled on properties between the outback towns of Cobar and Wilcannia, in the vicinity of Eddie's work near Ivanhoe. My father had accepted his first job as a medical practitioner in nearby Wilcannia – after returning from the war in the Middle East and PNG. Eddie visited his half-brother there on many occasions, driving in his beloved Morris from the isolated property he was then working on. The brothers maintained a very good relationship until John Oldham's death.

Jackerooing work was not for Eddie and soon he was studying accounting subjects through The Hemingway & Robertson Institute – while working at the Commercial Bank of Australia. He worked at this bank and later with its merged parent, Westpac, until his retirement. It was during his time of study that Eddie's brother, Harold, left Australia to travel to London, while his parents Percy and Doris Oldham retired to Woodend, north-west of Melbourne.

Eddie's generosity was well known. He donated substantial amounts to worthy causes, charities and to people in need. The vicar of Saint Peters was most complimentary of the regular attendee in Brighton, describing Eddie as “*a character*” and “*a hero*”. Father Jonathon Chamberlain maintained close and regular contact with Eddie, almost to his final moments. He would undoubtedly have been a source of great strength to Eddie as his health worsened.

The present secretary of the Sandringham Bowls Club, Mr. Alan Watson, directed us to a former secretary of the club: Terry McVey. Mr McVey wrote:

*“Eddie joined Sandringham Bowls Club back in 1976 and has been a member for over 45 years.*

*He won the Clubs' Pairs Championship in 1994 and was a member of the Club Championship Mixed 4's winning teams in both 2005/6 and 2007/8. He was a great supporter of the Club. In 2006 he donated for the installation of Lighting Towers so that we could play Electric Light bowls. More recently, in 2017 he made a significant financial contribution towards the installation of a new synthetic green at the Club which is now known as “The Eddie Oldham Green”.*

*He was awarded Life Membership of the Club in 2012 and as far as we can see he was possibly our longest serving club member.”*

Eddie was also strongly involved with several Freemason Lodges, where he attended meetings and lectures. He made some enduring friendships at these Lodges, and gained much pleasure from his communication with other members.

Eddie's time at the marvelous aged care residence of Mayflower was filled with some frustration for him. He was unused to following a routine that was not his, and sometimes grizzled about the early dinner hour of 5.30 pm. Despite his discontent, the staff were always polite and kind – as far as possible taking his needs into account. They were untiring in their medical attention and maintained excellent contact with me regarding his medical requirements. Several of the staff at Mayflower, Preet and Maria in particular, along with many others, recognised the softness that was truly his.

Eddie had sad memories to cope with. He suffered the sudden, unexpected deaths of his father Percy in 1952, his half-brother John in 1966, and his brother Harold in 1999. He lived with his mother and brother until their deaths, did not marry, and had no children. His mother, Doris, died in 1993. However, he valued the friends that he made through Saint Peter's Church, the Freemason Lodges and The Sandringham Bowls Club. He had a long friendship during his retirement with poet and writer Joy Cripps.

In his later years he was a frequent customer at The White Rabbit restaurant in Middle Brighton. He greatly appreciated the warm and friendly service he received there from the owners and staff. It was a sad day when the long COVID lockdown barred him from these enjoyable excursions.

Beneath Eddie's sometimes gruff exterior, there beat a heart of gold. He was invariably charmed by small children and animals and as people came to know him, Eddie was recognized for the loving character he was.

One of his caring nurses at Mayflower, Gerry, through quick-thinking actions, allowed me to speak with Eddie on the telephone on his final day. I will never forget that act of thoughtfulness. When I asked Eddie if the telephone was working properly, and whether he could hear my voice, he replied, with a rasping but superhuman effort. “Yes – I – can – hear – you”.

Enjoy your travels, Edward Percy Oldham, in the next part of your journey – with no pain and every happiness.

Vale Eddie. We loved you.

Additional paragraph contributed by parishioner Pip Sorel

I would now like to share with you my favourite and enduring memory of Eddie....

In late 2015, several months after Eddie moved into Mayflower, we went to a café in Sandringham for afternoon tea. Whilst heartily enjoying some special cakes, he told me that he hadn't made any new friends at Mayflower even though he knew a few people prior to moving in. When we returned to Mayflower, I escorted him inside and before we said farewell, he was greeted by a female resident who was seated in the foyer area. He duly introduced me and as we exchanged pleasantries, a voice behind us sang out "Hello Eddie", so he span around to see another woman also seated in the foyer, and greeted her, whilst I kept speaking to the first woman. As he moved over to speak to the second resident, from across the way yet another voice sang out "Hello Eddie". Eddie span around again, a bit overwhelmed to be greeted by so many people at once. Seeing that I was still speaking to the first woman, he positioned himself between the second and third women and engaged with ease and confidence in a lively conversation with both of them. I made my excuses as my car was still parked on the forecourt, but before I drove away I looked back and could see that he was still thoroughly enjoying interacting with those women whom he may have just realised were 'new friends'.

What a wonderful moment of lightness.

Concluding paragraph contributed by parishioner Spencer Wilson

In conclusion, I knew Ed for close on 40 years, from nodding acquaintance to confidant and supporter in times of need.

I found Ed to be a very private man, sometimes a little gruff, but always with a compassionate and loving heart.

If Ed considered you a friend, then you knew his trust and unconditional loyalty went with that friendship.

Ed was a loyal and faithful parishioner, loved and respected by all at St Peter's and beyond.

His generosity knew no bounds and his support, service and contribution to the Parish was so appreciated and acknowledged.

Ed may you rest in peace and rise in glory, in the Kingdom of God.