

David Grant Lukins

David Lukins, formerly of Edmund Barton Chambers, died on 22 May. The following eulogy was delivered by Philip Doherty.

David Lukins would like to apologise for the inconvenience he's caused you all this afternoon. After what he's been through in the last couple of years, especially the last few months, dying has become life's greatest blessing. It makes you realise that growing old is a privilege.

He did say he felt a bit cheated – another 15 years or so would have been nice. And there's no doubt he had a few things left on the bucket list. But he also told me that when he was born, by urgent caesarean section, he was 'in extremis'. He survived. Maybe the last 55 years have been a bonus. And what a bonus for us!

If the value of life is measured by the length of years, he was short-served. If it's to be measured by quality instead of quantity, David Lukins was an old man.

Before I met him he loved rugby. He'd toured New Zealand twice as Under 18 captain of NSW. He always played half-back. During his HSC year, he again captained the NSW under 18 side to Queensland. Seeing a gap between the scrum base and the centres he darted through – only to be crunched by several nasty Queenslanders.

His right knee was stuffed. Permanently. I'm not saying he would have played for the Wallabies, protected by Steve Finnane. I'm not saying he wouldn't have either.

He spent half of year 12 on crutches.

He wanted to be a doctor, but missed out by two marks. I'm personally very glad he missed out on medicine as our paths may have never crossed. Or, worse still, he could have been standing over me wearing rubber gloves.

But our paths did cross – in the Supreme Court Section of the GIO. It was about 1975. We had long hair and short teeth. Our beards were black.

He'd just married some terrific sort and even though he was a quiet man, he wasn't quiet about that.

They were heady days. Luko had an unstoppable desire to understand the

cases, summarising them in copperplate handwriting. They were days of impossible workloads and fantastic circuits where lifelong friendships were forged with the likes of Flannery, Murray, O'Reilly, Coleman and Wheelahan.

Brian Shirt, unbeknowns to us, had just gone water skiing on Tuggerah Lakes. We laughed loudly when Godders was unanimously overturned by the Court of Appeal then unanimously upheld by the House of Lords.

Luko went to the bar in 1981. Read with Flannery. Lived in the broom closet on the fighting Eighth. Then he was seduced by Wheelahan to join some satellite floor on 43 MLC. At the bar, where egos can swell and tongues can kill, he was admired and respected and I dare say loved especially by the guys and gals of 43.

After 17 years at the bar, he gave himself almost full-time to sailing. What a great decision. Down at the RPA Yacht Club, he didn't just teach kids how to sail, he taught them to love sailing. As a result, more than a few of his charges have been and still are live wire representatives of Australia in the hunt for places in the World Championships and Olympics. At the pre-Olympics in Sydney he was an international umpire.

The Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club recently announced the establishment of a perpetual trophy for class match racing. It will be called the David Lukins Memorial Trophy.

He never ever beat his own drum. His exquisite humility was in being completely unaware of just how good he was. He continually expected perfection of himself.

You should know that there are a couple of bibles written about sailing on the East Coast of Australia. Unsurprisingly, from his own markings and observations, Luko set about correcting the apparently sloppy navigational entries in these tomes.

Then in 2007 he was told he had cancer of the oesophagus. While in the grip of this terrible pernicious disease, he set about

writing the Lukins family history. As you would expect it's not a graphic of a tree with dates of birth written on the leaves, it's the stories of the Lukins lives and times from the earliest days in Australia meticulously researched and recorded over hundreds of pages.

He certainly glowed with sheer enjoyment when Shane, Cara and their princess, Alyssa Molly, arrived to see 'Poppy'. He'll miss the arrival of his first grandson in a few weeks. And he was tickled pink when Kylie and her man, Myles, announced their engagement in early April. He was extremely proud of you two kids. What selfless devotion you have applied in the last few months.

As for Kay, his lifelong mate of three and a half decades, you were married when you were children, what love he had for you. He told me that if it hadn't been for you he would have died long before now. He couldn't believe how he deserved such devotion and kindness from another human being. How poetic that he married a champion. We will never forget him, Kay. And while he's remembered he'll never be gone. High authority has it that love is stronger than death.

As for the rest of you, ring up Kay Lukins from time to time to say 'How ya going? No, not tomorrow. But over the next few months and years.

Spare a thought for Luko's mum and dad, Marge and Warwick. The grief that we all feel is multiplied times over by seeing their son losing his hold on life itself. It breaks all the rules when a child dies first. If you pray, say a prayer for them. If you hug, give them a hug today and tell them you knew their boy.

Luko, you had every gift but length of years. You judged yourself more critically than any person here.

You gentle, beautiful man. Rest now my friend. Your quest for perfection is over.