

Elaine Elizabeth Lucas (Robertson): 14/3/37-14/3/21



Good morning,

I'm pleased to see so many people here today who knew and loved our Mum.

I'm Rory Robertson, one of Elaine Lucas's three children, born between Fiona in 1964 and Alisdair in 1967.

As you know, Mum was born down the road, one of six children of local dairy farmers, Gladys and Ivo Lucas.

Mum used to tell the story that she could rob a bank in Queensland, do 10 years in jail for Armed Robbery, but when she came back to Rochester district everything would be fine, because back here she's Gladys Lucas's little girl.

Elaine is the eldest sister to five siblings, with Gloria, Graeme and Noel here today.

Elaine grew into a brave adventurer, a hardworking professional nurse who worked across much of country Australia, including in various remote Indigenous communities, a determined researcher of family histories, a debater of politics and a keen sportsfan.

More importantly, our Mum Elaine was a loving sister, mother and grandmother. And a loyal friend.

She is the mother of three and the grandmother of six: Natalya, Helaina, Carl, Zander, Lucas and Ivo. And with a seventh grandchild on the way.



Elaine & her two much-loved sisters – Delma & Gloria – chose the nursing profession (Gladys's girls in their 20s)



Mum & Dad (Alexander "Sandy" Robertson), wedding day December 1962, Rochester, Vic.; Elaine & Rory February 2021



Final family photo: Alisdair's 21st Birthday, Baralaba, Queensland, October 1988

Rochester was final tick on “bucket list”

While Gladys Lucas's little girl travelled the world and lived across Australia, Mum never stopped loving and visiting her home-town family and her home-town Rochester. Her final, much-postponed trip to Rochester in the weeks before she died brought her great satisfaction and comfort.

Mum and Fiona visited Rochester and had joyful catch-ups one last time with many of you here for Mum again today.

Like Fiona, I think Elaine probably ticked off that final Rocky trip as the final item on her bucket list.

And then she let nature take its course. There was less than a week between when Mum couldn't negotiate the stairs in her Brisbane home and her dying in her lounge room with her devoted daughter Fiona at her side.

As many of you know, Mum was a country nurse for 40 years. She had overseen hundreds of births and hundreds of deaths. She knew with confidence that when her time came, she didn't want to hang around.

Mum died on her birthday. The afternoon of Mum's 84th birthday on 14 March a month ago in Brisbane was a profound experience for the Queenslanders here today. With Mum dead on the bed in the middle of her lounge room, we spent the afternoon talking about the olden days and the huge part Mum played in our fortunate lives.

For over 50 years until a month ago - Mum for us three kids was a never-ending source of love, support, good sense, lively conversation and humour.

Into the main story

So, Fiona talked about some of Mum's early adventures in Europe.

My task today as one of Elaine's two sons is to recount aspects of our family life back in the day.

For us kids, Mum is the greatest unsung Australian champion.

Based on what I saw in our family homes across Australia during my first quarter century, I've always considered our Mum Elaine to be perhaps the most competent, resilient and courageous person I have ever known.

Today, I'm going to explain just what made your Elaine - our Mum - such a champion

Family life

Our family life started in faraway Northern Territory in the early 1960s. Mum met Dad in 1961 and they married here in Rochester in December 1962.

Elaine became the wife of Alexander – or Sandy - Robertson, our Dad, who passed away six years ago.

Our Dad big Sandy had plenty of faults but THE one thing he did that has dominated our lives in a good way was finding Elaine to be our Mum.

Even in the decades after Mum left Dad, he often said to me: “Your mother is the finest person I have ever known”.

For our Dad, marrying Mum back in 1962 would have been a no-brainer: Mum was a young nursing sister – smart and good looking, kind, well-spoken, hardworking, adventurous and well-travelled. Back in the early 1960s, Mum might have been the liveliest and loveliest person in the entire Northern Territory.

Australia-wide odyssey

After marrying in December 1962, things moved quickly. Mum soon had three kids under four, all born in remote Alice Springs, near the geographic centre of Australia.

From there, Dad dragged Mum and us three young kids across the country, spanning maybe 15 rural properties in a dozen or so years, moving from remote Northern Territory to remote South Australia, to Victoria, to NSW and, finally, to Queensland.

From school age, I remember clearly Stockinbingal near Cootamundra in NSW (c. 1971), followed by a property ("Durella") near Morven in south-west Queensland (1973), then properties at Auburn River (near Chinchilla), Condamine near Miles (1974), followed by a series of places in central Queensland, near Theodore (1976), Moura, Baralaba and Woorabinda (1978).

As a family, we spent more time in and near Baralaba in Central Queensland than anywhere else, because Mum insisted that once us kids hit high school we were not moving away again, to yet another new school.

So we didn't. Mum took control of the family situation. She put her foot down in 1978 and we as a family were based in Baralaba for the final decade of Mum's marriage.

Education

Both Mum and Dad rated education highly, but it was Mum who made it happen.

In the end, I think Mum managed to get us started in about 10 schools across country Australia.

For three years from 1980 to 1982, Mum somehow managed to organise for Fiona and I to spend our final two high-school years 11 and 12 in the two best boarding schools in Rockhampton.

Remote-area scholarships funded by Canberra were a big part of the story but so too was Mum's resourcefulness, determination, and sheer hard work as a full-time public-health professional.

Sports fan

The sportsfan reference earlier may surprise some, but Mum gave me a lifelong love of cricket. It was Mum in the late 1960s listening to the Ashes cricket on ABC radio in remote South Australia that got me interested in cricket. Later on, it was Mum listening to Davis Cup tennis that got me started playing tennis.

In the decade leading up to Alisdair playing a bit of top-grade rugby league in Brisbane, Mum became a devoted rugby league fan.

She also loved the Brisbane Lions in the AFL back in the early 2000s, back when they were winners.

Working life

Like her two sisters Delma and Gloria, and my sister Fiona, Elaine trained to be a professional nurse, to care for those who need help.

As it happened, our Mum Elaine nursed across country Australia, often in Aboriginal communities, from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, from Bendigo to Katherine to Brisbane, via Alice Springs, Balcanoona, Cootamundra, Morven, Auburn River, Chinchilla, Condamine, Miles, Theodore, Woorabinda and Baralaba.

Elaine was widely respected and admired for her efforts. Even today, decades later, us kids sometimes come across people who remember Mum as a nurse caring for them or their family at some important time in their lives.

Now comes the most-important part of my talk

Elaine Lucas - our Mum - was the hero of the Robertson family in “the bad old days”

Mum worked hard to bring up her three kids well, in adverse circumstances.

From the mid-1960s to the late-1980s, Mum sacrificed much of everything for her kids, to get us through our childhoods and ready to face the world as self-reliant adults.

I don't know exactly how she did it. For much of the time we struggled for money and without Mum I don't know what would have happened.

We and she lived in Op-shop second-hand clothes for most of my childhood.

Living on cattle, wheat and sheep properties, we were lucky Dad's weekly pay typically included “house, meat, milk and electricity”, because Dad often spent much of his actual money wage on beer, cigarettes and the TAB.

The truth remains that back in the 1970s and 1980s - when it mattered most for Mum and us kids - Dad drank (and drank) and fought and smoked and gambled, and sometimes was violent when drunk and angry, at home as elsewhere.

There was plenty of ugly stuff that was pretty traumatic for us as kids. And especially for Mum, who bore the brunt of Dad's growing frustration with the world.

I have chosen to be up-front today about the way things were back then out of respect for Mum.

I want anyone who cares to understand, to know that Mum withstood a quarter century of often extreme emotional and physical stress on the way to doing “whatever it took” to grow up her kids until they could survive out in the big wide world.

Elaine somehow managed to keep her family's head above water, no matter how hard Sandy's reckless ways worked in the other direction.

Of course, Mum wasn't the first “long suffering wife” and she won't be the last. But for us kids, Mum is the greatest unsung Australian champion.

Without Elaine Lucas - our Mum - the Robertson family of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s would have been a disaster.

Mum somehow kept the show on the road, despite drama after drunken drama, crisis after crisis.

Mum steered us through all of the tough times in our young lives – and there were plenty - with a virtuous combination of true grit and good humour.

How did you do it?

Decades later an adult, I asked Mum how she found the strength and determination to keep going through all the difficult times during our young lives.

Her answer was not complicated. Elaine said that her mother – my Grandma Gladys Lucas – had a really hard life. Mum said she just kept moving forward like her Mum, Gladys, doing the best she could.

As I said at the outset, from what I saw during my first quarter century, I have always considered Mum to be the most competent, resilient and courageous person I have ever known.

By the 1970s, us kids could see that Mum and Dad were like chalk and cheese.

Mum was a profoundly strong role model. Beyond courage and devotion to her children, for much of her life when I was watching, Mum was super hard-working and didn't drink, smoke or swear.

Later in life, long after the intense pressure of raising children in a dysfunctional household - and the responsibility of always-on-call nursing – had subsided, Mum enjoyed a glass of wine – sometimes even two glasses - to go with her evening conversations.

Three great final decades

Looking back, I reckon what was great for Mum is that the final phase of her life - the three decades from the early 1990s to the early 2020s - was mostly a happy and carefree time.

In 1989, after several difficult decades of marriage, Mum she left Dad: after her three kids had all reached 21, Mum took absolute control of her life again.

For the next three decades she did as she pleased. As far as I could tell, she was content, upbeat and relaxed maybe 95% of the time.

She was happy being able to live in one place. Happy to enjoy her children as adults. Happy to enjoy her grandkids growing towards adulthood.

She was happy to be able see her Rochester family whenever she pleased. Year after year after year, Elaine happily drove the 3000km round trip from Brisbane to Rochester and back.

Elaine also travelled across Australia and overseas as a tourist whenever she wanted, or just stayed home watching the cricket and catching up with her Brisbane nursing or genealogy mates for coffee. Whatever suited.

The fact that Mum got to have those three active and enjoyable final decades in Brisbane after leaving Dad means that there is at least some justice in the world.

Winding up

Alisdair, Fiona and I are so lucky to have had Elaine Elizabeth Lucas as our mum.

We'll be forever grateful that one of Rochester's proudest and most adventurous daughters is our mother.

It's not an accident that my second son's name is Lucas: Lucas Robertson. (He's over there.)

Without Elaine Lucas, our mother, our lives would not have been anywhere near as happy as they have turned out to be.

It's selfless, caring, hardworking everyday people like Elaine Lucas who make the world a better place.

[This is my version of Mum's obituary, delivered at St John's Presbyterian Church, Rochester, on Saturday 17 April 2021](#)