

ACCCI MEDIA RELEASES

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Subject: The Walkers were all courageous and honorable people

Vale Frank Walker

The Walkers were all courageous and honorable people

I would like to correct some of the stories recently written about the late Frank Walker and his sons Michael and Sean.

I first met Frank with Paul Keating, Laurie Brereton, Graham Richardson and Bob Carr and others during the mid 1960s at the NSW ALP Youth Council - under 28 years from memory. He was the true intellectual whereas Paul did not care for it, and it wasn't Brereton and Richardson's "bag". Bob Carr always aspired and his current ThoughtLines was and is a continuation of that aspiration - it is a matter of opinion as to whether or not he has succeeded.

But Walker was the real deal and in some ways during the 1970s was Wran's conscience. Indeed Walker's election to the NSW State Parliament in September 1970 was an 'electric' achievement for the progressive side of politics during the 22 years of Federal Liberal Party domination and Askin's State rule - well before Wran's ascendancy. Similarly his single handed touring of Australia for law reform as the 'Boy' Attorney General between 1976-83 contributed to much of the foundation thinking for legislation by the Hawke Federal Labor Government post 1983. Moreover as the first NSW State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs 1981-83 much of his work came to fruition a decade later - Walker has never been given the credit due him for the Federal Mabo legislation in the years 1993-96 - it could be argued he was the man that made Paul Keating historically Great. On a lesser note it was many in Walker's staff that provided the backbone for Bob Carr during his record ten years as NSW Premier 1995-2005.

As for his children. I knew Michael very well - many hours of discussions on life and pain. He participated in an ACCCI Trade Mission to China in mid 1995 visiting Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai. One memorable cameo was his public debate with the Governor of Shaanxi Province over the merits of coffee and tea. He was of great assistance in the logistics of the mission re airports, transport and accommodation for delegates. I was very distraught at his mother's Paddington home after his suicide in November 1997 - what a waste of such a brave and articulate young man.

Similarly with Sean who was a top class skier in Europe and a very capable sailor on the Pittwater and Hawkesbury. I drank with him in many pubs, my son spent a short period living with him and spoke as I did at his funeral in December 2003. He was the dynamic and practical member of the family as witnessed by his renovations of his father's house in Umina and subsequently his mother's homestead in Katoomba.

I have been very upset by the inaccuracies written about these two deceased young men who can not speak for themselves and genuinely believe that in part they are the work of some journalists pushing political barrows by lesser politicians and human beings, past and present, then Frank Walker.

About 18 months ago I had the pleasure to sit with Frank at the funeral of a mutual friend. You do not have to like someone to respect them and their achievements.

However, there is always a "however" with leaders like Frank Walker, the person who deserves the gold medal and accolades is the mother, Marilyn Loraine Walker, who fought like a tigress for nine years to give her son Michael a life from 1988 to 1997, tragically losing her marriage partner of 31 years in the process. Again from about 1995 and Sean's marriage to Fran she struggled to support her younger son in a downward spiral of self harm and betrayal by a basically ignorant society. Congratulations to Frank Walker who in the last decade of his life campaigned to overcome that ignorance about mental illness with recently acknowledged success.

Michael C H Jones
President - ACCCI
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