

## **Eulogy for Luis Donato Gutierrez Fernandez**

*read at his funeral in Brisbane, Australia*

Buenos Dias,

Today we have come to celebrate and farewell the life of Donato Luis Gutierrez Fernandez: Husband, father, Father in Law, Pa and friend to you all.

Some of you might not know of Luis's life before he migrated to Australia, but I believe his early years formed the man we all loved and should be shared with you all.

Donato Luis was born in a small Basque town called "Tolosa" in Northern Spain on the 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1925.

His father, Everisto, a carpenter and his mother Maura a Seamstress, worked very hard to support the family with the little they had. They lived a very simple life. Luis has an older brother Gregorio and a younger sister, Conchita, both still living in Spain.

Donato and his siblings would start their day by eating a breakfast of chocolate milk and bread and then head off to school. When Donato came home he would play soccer in the streets with his friends and wait for the call from his mother "Luis, Luis" as she fondly called him and from then on Luis his middle name, became the name he answered to.

Occasionally they would take a holiday to San Sebastian, a city along the coast to visit family but when Luis was in his last year of Primary School at the age of eleven his life changed forever due to the commencement of the Civil War in 1936.

They had just sat down to dinner when the Nationalist Army commenced bombing the town. As it was getting too close for comfort they were forced to leave their meal on the table with only the clothes on their backs, to catch a train leaving Tolosa for Bilbao.

Passengers on the train used mattresses to put in front of the windows of the carriage to protect themselves from the gunfire. They stayed with relatives until it became too dangerous and a decision was made to send the boys away.

In May 1937, Luis and his brother were taken by their mother to the Quay in Bilbao by train. Maura said goodbye to her boys amidst scenes of great emotion. Conchita, their little sister stayed behind with their mother.

The children were crammed into the ship and slept where they could, even in Life Boats. The journey was extremely rough and most of the children were violently sick.

The ship's name was "Habana", an old Liner which transported the 3840 Children, escorted by Teachers, Helpers, Doctors and Catholic Priests. They landed in Southampton Docks, England on the 22nd of May 1937.

The children were moved into a Boys Scout Camp for a few weeks and then moved on to homes. Luis and Gregorio with 60 other children of varying ages were sent to "Greenbank House" in Upton.

They spent 11 months in England and in 1938 were returned to Spain.

The boys were sent to live in an Orphanage as the authorities could not locate their parents. Gregorio and Luis were going to be sent back to the towns of their birth and separated until fate intervened. They were travelling down a road towards town when they noticed a group of women walking towards them carrying the loads of clothes that they had mended and ironed that day. The boys caught a glimpse of a woman who resembled their mother and ran towards her. It was a happy reunion touched with a little sadness as their mother hoped that they would stay longer in England and have a better life. They were told that their father was in a Prison Camp and made to build bridges and fences for the Army. The war ended in 1939.

Luis and Gregorio moved to Burgos and commenced a Cabinet Making Apprenticeship. Luis was 13 years of age and had to go to work to make money for his family. His Father was released from Prison and started working with his sons and his Mother earned an income weaving rugs and blankets. At the age of 18 young men were called into the Army under the Franco Regime. Luis was not very happy about joining his brother in the Army as they were responsible for destroying his home and separating him from his family.

We would all joke with Dad that this next part of his story could be taken out of a Movie script as we would all listen attentively whenever it was told.

Luis with the help of his friends that were Fishermen made a plan for his escape. One day when he was on leave he stowed away on a fishing boat under the nets. The boat left that night and sailed into a small fishing port on the coast of France under the cloak of darkness. Luis jumped out of the boat and ran down the country roads avoiding the passing trucks and cars by jumping into the ditches. He had been given the address of a nearby village where men from the French Resistance would keep him safe. He was then taken to live

with a family on a farm in the country side where he worked and learnt the language. After several months he then moved on and eventually made his way to Normandy in search of work. He spent his time repairing buildings and homes that were destroyed in World War Two.

Around this time ships were departing to Countries that required skilled immigrants. Luis and a couple of friends decided to go on the next ship and when it became a choice between Canada or Australia the warmer climate of Australia drew him in. The thought of working in the building trade in Canada's winter months was not for him. He paid his 150 pound fare and arrived in Melbourne on the 25th January 1951 on the "Misr" at 26 years of age.

He learnt his first lesson very quickly when he and a friend left the Harbour and took a Taxi to a Hotel. The Driver took them to the Hotel which was 100 meters down the road and charged them a large fare. Learning English became a priority after that.

Luis then moved to Sydney and lived at Maroubra. He obtained work at the Holden Car Factory and started lessons in English by going to school at night. He also obtained his Building License. He eventually moved to Brisbane and worked as a Carpenter at Zillmere, building the Housing Commission Homes. He also worked on the Gold Coast and saved enough money to buy a Motorbike, Car and a block of land in Yeronga.

Luis enjoyed his time going to Dances, spending time at the Beach and riding his Motorbike up and down the coast. He also dabbled in Photography and produced his own slides and photos.

Whilst Luis was living at Boarding House on the Gold Coast with other Carpenters he became friends with the owners, Corey and John, a Dutch couple. Corey worked at the Regent Theatre in Brisbane and Luis would go to a show or Movie and was introduced to Jean Collis.

Jean was one of those glamorous Usherette's and Ticket Box girls. A romance quickly ensued and Luis would then take Jean on his Norton Motorbike off to Coolangatta and Dances at Cloudland. They married on October 1957 at St Stephens Cathedral, Luis at the age of 32 and Jean 25. They rented a Flat at Park Road, Milton and started to build their home at 31 Yvonne St, Yeronga.

Luis and Jean built their home and continued to enjoy their lives when their first child, "Tracy Anne" was born, followed by "Linda Jane" and then finally "Maria Louise".

Luis established his own Building Company L & J Builders and completed several houses and restoration work in Yeronga and surrounding suburbs. The

Flood of 1974 meant the work was plentiful and he did not have to stray too far from home, which was handy as Jean went back to work at Her Majesty's and Suncorp Theatres.

The family moved to 47 Ellesmere St, Yeronga in the early 70s and my sisters and I attended Hyde Road Kindy, St Sebastian's Primary School and then to Lourdes Hill College.

Luis spent his free time on his boat fishing, travelling in his caravan and campervan around Australia.

Mum and Dad decided to retire at Nerang and Luis built a beautiful retirement home. They would travel to Brisbane several times a week for Bowls, Bridge and to see their grandchildren. Ryan, Will, Alexandria, Hamish and Adam. They eventually moved back to Brisbane to be closer to family.

They have spent many happy years living in Tarragindi and when the mood took them they would travel down to Palmers Channel to relax, fish and catch up with Pat, Vince and Stephen.

One of my fondest memories was when we would fish off the bank together he would quote Mr Harold Joynes a fishing mate and neighbor and say "This is quality time, quality time" - meaning that you should just enjoy the simple things in life.

As the years rolled on Dad's health started to deteriorate, leaving him unable to move around with the agility he once had so Mum became his dedicated Carer with lots of assistance from Tracy.

After a fall we were left with no alternative but to place him in Residential Care.

Dad was a very proud and strong man and his final wish would have been to leave this world on his terms. And so, he did.

We will miss you constantly Dad but know that you will always be watching over us. Your life is an inspiration to us all.