

Glenn Noel Whitehead (1953–2010)

By Lou Lungo

The last time I was asked to speak at a gathering where Glenn was the centre of attention was as the best man at his wedding to Sue. He returned the favour not long after. I was looking forward to that speech but this is one I never wanted to have to give. Well not so soon anyway.

Glenn was raised by his grandparents in Mowbray Road, Chatswood from an early age. His grandmother died when Glenn was 21 and the signet ring he wore was in memory of her. His grandfather 'Pop' lived on at the old house and Glenn would visit regularly. Dragging me along on occasions proudly displaying his latest motor bike!

Glenn attended Mowbray Public School just down the road from home. Years later, Piet Baird, one of his many instructing solicitors, recalled Glenn from the school and more particularly on the footie field. Piet was playing half back and in third class and recalls his first game passing the ball to the older Glenn who was in sixth class and playing five-eighth. Piet was to pass Glenn many briefs years later.

Glenn then went to North Sydney Technical High School which is now the site of the Greenwood Hotel.

Now some of you may not know this but Glenn fancied a man in uniform – himself that is. That's probably why he joined the Navy; then the Police then came to the bar – another uniform.

Glenn joined the Royal Australian Navy after he left school and served at HMAS *Lewin* in Western Australia and also in Nowra. However, after his service period was completed and probably because he didn't reckon white suited him he left to join the New South Wales Police Force.

Glenn joined the Police Force on 3 May 1976 and came third out of approximately 120 recruits in his initial training class with a mark of 93.72 per cent. Probationary Constable Glenn Noel Whitehead, registered number 17285, was first stationed at the Central Police Station. However, hoofing the beat and locking up drunks wasn't his destiny and he soon found himself at the Police Prosecuting Branch where I first met Glenn in 1978.

This was where Glenn's legal career started. He completed the Police Prosecutors Course. He also matriculated so he could commence his law degree. It was around this time that he met his first wife Susan. Together they had a daughter Caitlin who was one of Glenn's great joys in his life, together with Holly and Sue.

I recall on one of my recent visits to Glenn at Greenwich Hospital, Caitlin and Glenn's other daughter, Holly comforting each other and thinking how wonderful it was that they had each other at that difficult time.

Glenn, Lee Downey and I spent many a night at the Century Hotel where we would meet up before lectures for a refreshment. I'm sure some nights we didn't even make lectures however we would have been discussing law as the dean of the law school, Dean Bartholomew, was often with us.

Glenn certainly cut a fine figure as Sergeant Whitehead, police prosecutor. He sported a grand moustache and many people thought he resembled George Negus.

He had a habit back then of wearing three-piece suits or was it safari suits? Anyway, Glenn would always have his hands in his pockets leading to the nickname – 'pockets'. Can I dispel the

rumour that the nickname had anything to do with objects (other than hands) going into his pockets – totally untrue!

Glenn was admitted to the bar in 1984 and commenced practice at First Floor University Chambers where Peter Dent QC was the floor leader and Mark Dalley the clerk.

Peter Dent could not be here today but has asked me to convey the following words on his behalf:

Julia and I are on the medical treadmill and ask to be excused this day. We both knew and loved Glenn. He as nature's gentleman and so much fun to be with. He was always a truly professional barrister-at-law, who never, like so many, sold his soul for filthy lucre but remained an idealist from go to woe. He protected the defenceless all his career, and we happen to be people who see that as right and proper barrister conduct.

He is a superlative barrister and we have no doubt he is already back in practice in another place, where the good and generous hearted are ushered at the end of their mortal service. *Au revoir* Glenn Whitehead – Mate.

I joined Glenn there in 1989. This is where Glenn met his wife Sue. Glenn not only became a husband to Sue but a father to her two boys Tim and Nathan and was there for them during the usually difficult teenage years.

They were fun times. We worked hard and we played hard. Occasionally we lunched in the NSW Leagues Club which was next door to chambers. Many a Friday evening was spent in the chambers common room. Glenn was in his element surrounded by his friends and colleagues.

Glenn then moved onto the Trust Chambers where I again joined him in

1995 with Greg Woods QC as the floor leader.

In 1997 Glenn, Bill Brewer and I defected from Trust to Samuel Griffith Chambers. You could say we were climbing up in the criminal bar but that was only because we went from level 15 to level 18 in the same building.

It was at 'Sammy G's' that Glenn and I started to customise the room we shared. This was continued on by Phil Hogan who replaced me in chambers when I took the 'Crown shilling' in 1998. Our room was anything but staid. There were no paintings of old English courtroom scenes or Chesterfields. Blues music would play and the colour scheme was 'wild blue' – hence the room name: 'the blue room'. This was where members of chambers; solicitors and friends would drop in for a chat and a drink. Glenn liked to do both very much.

Many of you know that Glenn stopped drinking a long time ago. For his health it was probably for the best. However, on or off the drink Glenn was the same person – sociable; funny; loving and caring.

Glenn became somewhat of an expert in running long criminal trials. He would set himself up at his spot at the bar table behind folder boxes with a good book (later to be the Good Book) and while away the hours forever vigilant for anything remotely relevant to his client. When he was called into action he would act swiftly and with deadly precision.

From the first day I met Glenn he was into fitness. That did fade off when the good life was in full swing but he later got back into it. It was mainly running but he also cycled and completed the Sydney to the 'Gong bike ride.

When we worked together at the Glebe Coroner's Court we would often go for a run at lunchtime. Glenn did become somewhat obsessive with running and not only ran the City to Surf but also a number of marathons.

When I saw Glenn recently at Westmead Hospital he said as soon as his hip got better he would be pulling on the running shoes. He never gave up.

You may wonder why I refer to Glenn's clients (or some of them) well because some of them did become his friends. It may not have been the done thing but it was more a case of them befriending him because of the sort of man he was. I can recall when sharing chambers with Glenn hearing him lecturing his clients (only the guilty ones of course) about how stupid they had been; how they were ruining their lives. They respected Glenn for his honesty and advice and many heeded his words and became his friend.

In his last days when at Greenwich Hospital one of those clients came to visit him and brought a gift for Glenn and cried at his bedside. That was the effect Glenn had on people.

Many years ago now Glenn and I embarked on what Cat Stevens referred to as 'A Road To Find Out'. We explored Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies. I detoured off onto the yogic path and Glenn even came along for a while completing a six week yoga course. But he was searching for something else and when he found it, Christianity, he never looked back, never looked any further and he maintained his faith until the end.

It was this faith, along with the support of his family and friends that helped him deal with the cancer that took his life.

The last case Glenn appeared in was a District Court trial at the Sydney District Court. It was a short trial lasting only two days however Glenn was gravely ill at the time and using a wheelchair to get around.

The trial started on Monday, 1 February this year. I recall seeing Glenn with his client and Greg Meakin his instructing solicitor in the coffee shop at the Downing Centre that Monday. Glenn was his usual upbeat and confident self. I didn't know how he would be able to run a trial.

I've spoken to the crown prosecutor in that trial, Paul Lynch, since. Paul said that Glenn, who was obviously in a great deal of pain, stood up and cross examined and he thought it was an incredible display of courage. 'Glenn was fighting for his client right up to the end' were Paul's words. He said Glenn did a superb job and kept his client out of gaol – what more could be asked of him? I'm sure I speak on behalf of Glenn's family and friends when I say:

Thank you for your friendship.

Thank you for the good times – and there were many.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey in this life.

We love you.

We miss you.

We'll never forget you.

God bless.