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Family, friends, and all who loved Walter Raymond Hughes—our Wally—thank you for gathering to celebrate his life.

I stand here as his grandson,
and as one of many people he quietly, steadily shaped.
He was my Grandad and my mentor,
the man who cheered every milestone
and taught me that good work and good character belong in the same sentence.

Wally was born on 5 January 1937 in Launceston.
Tasmanian roots, strong hands, and a mind that liked to see how things fitted together.

He trained as a fitter and turner—precision, patience, pride in the finished job.
In the 1960s he crossed Bass Strait to Sydney,
took a place with NSW Rail,
and found his way into the great, humming rhythm of a growing city.

Work mattered to him,
but not as a ladder to climb so much as a craft to honour.
He believed that if you said yes, you turned up early,
you set your tools out properly,
and you left your station cleaner than you found it.
Later, when he ran a hardware shop in Parramatta,
he carried those same principles to the counter and the back room:
stock counted, books squared, a spare set of bolts on hand for the customer
who'd misread the packet.
He wasn't flashy.
He was dependable.
And he took real satisfaction in helping others get their projects right.

In time, Wally and Evelyn—married for 63 years—made their home on the Central Coast.

They were a team in the way that leaves no need for big declarations.

Evelyn, your steadiness met his,

your warmth gave his dry humour its soft landing.

Together you raised Michael, Susan, and Linda,

and you watched seven grandchildren—including me—arrive,

each of us measured over the years by the same affectionate, practical gaze:

What are you trying to build? How can I help?

If you visited Wally on a Sunday,

you might find him basting a roast, checking a crossword clue under his breath,
or polishing a bowl before heading out to the greens.

You might catch him in the garden, coaxing roses to behave,

or down by Brisbane Water, reading the weather with that tiny lift of the chin
sailors have.

He loved the quiet arts: a knot tied cleanly, a hedge trimmed true,
a roast carved so everyone got a fair slice.

He appreciated order, but he never confused it with fussiness.

He was meticulous because he respected materials, time, and people.

He had a dry wit that travelled just beneath the surface.

You'd get a sideways comment, low enough that only two or three would hear it,
and then that little glint in his eye when the penny dropped.

No performance, just the pleasure of a well-placed line.

Even in hospital, when the rest of us were trying to keep our tones bright,
he looked at my crooked attempt at folding a blanket and said,

“Not bad—for a first draft.”

It made the room breathe again.

What set Wally apart wasn't only skill; it was how he used it.

He kept an open door for apprentices, for neighbours with half-finished shelves,
for grandchildren with school projects that had outgrown the kitchen table.

He didn't take over.

He taught—by asking questions

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by placing the spanner in your hand and letting you feel the turn,

by standing back and letting you make the small mistake you would remember next time.

He believed frugality and generosity could live together:

use what you have wisely, spend when it matters, share what you know freely.

My favourite memory is simple and, to me, perfect.

We built a billycart in his shed.

Timber squared, axles scavenged, paint from the last job—“no one will mind a bit of green,” he said.

He let me drive the screws, straighten the washer, sign my name under the plank.

Then we took it to the top of the cul-de-sac and, with a ceremonial nod, set off.

He jogged beside me the first run,

hand hovering near the back to steady,

then he let go and I flew.

At the bottom he was already there, somehow—smiling, cheeks creased, hands on hips.

We trudged it back up and did it again. And again.

If you want to know Wally’s legacy, it’s in that sequence:

equip, encourage, trust, repeat.

People will remember the smell of sawdust that lived in his shed,

that faint resin-and-oil perfume that meant a problem was being solved.

We’ll remember his reassuring nods across the table,

a signal that you were on the right track—or almost.

We’ll remember the counsel given over a cuppa,

never hurried,

never dramatic,

just a question or two that turned your worry into a plan.

He valued integrity—the kind you practice when no one’s watching.

He believed in community service, not as a slogan but as a Saturday morning.

He respected others, especially when they were different to him,
and he taught us that thrift and care could sit happily beside generosity of spirit.
He measured his days by who he had helped,
not by who had noticed.

There are chapters in Wally's life that show the arc of a good Australian story:
Launceston to Sydney to the Central Coast,
trains and tools and a small business in Parramatta,
Sundays with family, bowls on a weekday afternoon,
roses, sails, and a kitchen that smelt of roast potatoes.
But if you asked him to list his important milestones,
he would start with names:

Evelyn.

Michael.

Susan.

Linda.

And seven grandkids whose trophies he clapped for,
whose graduations he sat through with unfeigned interest,
whose first jobs and first homes and first scrapes he treated with equal
seriousness.

We gather today with mixed feelings—as is right.
Grief because a voice has gone quiet.
Gratitude because we knew that voice.
Comfort because so much of what he gave us isn't gone at all.
It shows up in how we check our measurements before we cut,
in how we listen first and speak second,
in how we offer help without making a show of it.

If you went to him in worry,
he had a way of turning the kettle on before you'd finished your first sentence.
By the time steam found its tune, he'd have drawn a little sketch on the back of
an envelope:
two options, three steps, one warning, and a smile.

He didn't fix your life; he made it fixable by you. Create your own personalised speech at eulogyai.com.au

That is a rare gift.

To those who cared for Wally near the end—
our family is deeply grateful to the staff at Gosford Hospital.
You treated him with dignity and you gave us clarity.
Thank you for your steadiness and your kindness.

And for anyone wishing to honour Wally in a practical way,
he'd be chuffed to know that donations to the Men's Shed are appreciated.
He believed in places where skills are shared, friendships are built,
and a good day's work can still be seen, touched, and taken home.

What will we miss most?

The nod that told us he believed in us.

The shed, where time slowed and problems made sense.

The way Sunday roasts seemed to gather the week back together.

The crosswords half-finished, pencil resting in the fold of the paper.

The small jokes that released the tension from a room.

And the knowledge that, if we got stuck, there was someone we could ring who
would say,

"Come round. We'll have a look."

Wally did not chase grand statements.

He laid foundations—carefully, quietly, square to the world.

Those foundations are under us now.

They hold when life is bright and when it is hard.

They will hold tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that.

So today we celebrate a life lived with care,

a love carried through 63 years of marriage,

and a family shaped not by speeches but by example.

We honour a tradesman who taught us that the straightest line is the one you
walk every day,

and that a good life is built the same way you build a strong joint:
true cuts, patient hands, and the right amount of give.

Goodbye, Wally.

Thank you for the lessons drawn on envelopes,
for the billycart and the sail and the roses.

We will take your tools—your honesty, your humour, your patience—
and put them to work.

And when we power up the kettle,
when we look twice before we cut once,
when we offer a steady word instead of a quick fix,
we'll know you are there in the grain of our days,
smiling that small, satisfied smile,
and giving us that nod that says,
“On you go.”

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