When I started writing this I found myself telling a story about all the important people in his life because when I started writing I realised there were a lot. And so many of you are either here in person or online. That made the whole thing about 30 mins long and I thought that would get a bit tricky. So instead I’m going to talk about Martin and when I catch up with you all later I’ll tell you my stories then.

But I did want to talk very quickly about Martin’s family in the UK and mine here. He loved you all a lot. I’m grateful that we have his niece Abbie’s poem in the service sheet and I have a few paragraphs from his sisters Jenny and Marianne plus another niece Amelie in my talk which probably highlight what he meant to them. I have some lovely photos of Kiera you’ll see later and also his Dad John and two bothers in law in the UK Jon and John. He loved them all and they made our trips to the UK all the richer.

I’m also grateful to my family for welcoming this stray from the UK into our lives nearly 30 years ago. You made him feel very loved even when he was doing his grumpy old man thing.

Because Martin was actually a bit of a pain in the arse. Partly because he was a grumpy old man. But also because he always made me do things I didn’t want to do and dragged me out of my comfort zone. But that’s not why he was a pain in the arse. It was because he was usually right. And didn’t mind telling me that – sometimes many times over many years.

He had a couple of great passions in life – right up the top I think would have to be wildlife, travel and family. Initially I was trying to work out how to talk them each separately but I realised that of course Martin pretty much always managed to combine at least 2 of the 3 if not all three. Sometimes I didn’t work that out until we got to our destination.

Martin’s big travel experiences started with a bang when he spent 3 months in Kenya as a 16 year old and then a year as an 18 year old. I can tell it was transformative because it was one of the very early things I learned about when I met him over 10 years later. And actually it wasn’t just transformative because he had a great time seeing amazing wildlife with a close friend, Antony. It was also because he got to meet Antony’s family who basically adopted him from that point on I think. I don’t know if you’re watching this Clem but I do know he adored you and Antonia. Whenever you came to Australia to visit her, there was no question in your mind, we’d be on a plane to see you.

But in our time together our early travel revolved around our UK family.

Mostly Tom, Sean and I all went too but if necessary just some of us. I will never forget that one of the most exciting family logistics exercises I’ve ever been involved in was one his sister Jenny describes beautifully:

*There was the surprise trip when you came over for Dad’s 70th birthday. When Big BIrd (you) landed, I picked you and 4 year old Tom up from the airport. I was welcomed by an exhausted looking brother and a bouncy Tom (yes bouncy) who ran up to me, pulled down his trousers and said, ‘Aunty Jenny, look at my Spiderman knickers’. Well that had me, Martin and half of the Heathrow arrivals hall in stitches.*

We lost Martin’s mother Grace – way too young – in 2006. She and Martin were incredibly close. Losing someone so special gave Martin a real focus on enjoying life now and not waiting until he retired to do the things he was passionate about. So our travel exploded and we went everywhere.

He bought bird guides for every single trip and no matter how heavy they were, the guide books and binoculars had to go into our hand luggage in case the suitcases got lost. Because if you lost those, seriously, what was the point of even going?

I think I could safely say that most of our best experiences as a family have been on trips Martin dreamed up, organised and then managed with military precision. There was ALWAYS a plan whether the rest of us liked it or not. What a great call it was to do it. So yes dear, you can say “I told you so” again.

But I think Martin loved travel for lots of reasons beyond family and wildlife – he was just curious about anything and everything. Meeting people from different cultures and places was fascinating for him – for a raging introvert, he was incredibly sociable when travelling.

Marianne wrote to me recently and said this which probably sums it up:

*Martin and has probably seen more of this planet than most. He believed that every journey changes us a little, it makes us see the world through fresh eyes and provides a remedy for isolation, withdrawal and fear, or disdain of others. We never return from a journey the same; we leave a little of ourselves behind and bring a lot back with us. Martin has done that all over the planet and for that the world is a richer place.*

I’ve got to admit I loved and hated the curiosity.

It was easy to love – he definitely made life interesting and we all learned all sorts of things we’d never have come across if he hadn’t been exploring.

But being trapped in a debate with Martin could be exhausting. You could never just have a light conversation about nothing, you always had to be exploring ideas. And he always had such a bloody carefully thought out position. I have to admit I have been known to pretend to have something urgent to do when one of these conversations became sleep inducing.

This is what his niece Amelie said:

*Every time I saw him I would remark at the way his eyebrows turned up at the ends, and how much this reminded me of an owl. How fitting, for a man of such wisdom. As well as a certain affinity for bird watching.*

*As I’m sure you know Martin was an incredibly intelligent man and no matter how much older he got, how much more he experienced, he was always curious, always fascinated. I think we can all take a leaf from this page of Martin’s book and make sure we all retain a level of curiosity for surely this is a pre cursor to knowledge and knowledge allows us to make better decisions, to be more informed, to keep looking forwards. I want to share a very specific thing Martin said to me in the past and this was:*

*“There is only one of you. That makes you wonderfully unique – celebrate it. I do.” I think this illustrates just how unapologetically Martin was Martin; I hope to follow in his footsteps in always remaining true to myself.*

He went to Uni in Nottingham, met some great people, some of whom we’re still in touch with and are watching on in the UK. He studied Zoology and was sure he was heading for a life in science. Many of you have probably heard this story – he had a PhD lined up studying the breeding patterns of wandering albatross on South Georgia in the Falklands but then the Argentinians invaded and so Plan A was off the table. A Plan B was hastily put together and that involved training as an accountant. An interesting switch for someone who is actually the very worst mathematician I have ever met.

Now I’m not really sure how I feel about this switch. While obviously I’m pretty glad he did it – I would never have met him otherwise – I do think that not working in something to do with animals or even science generally was probably one of his few regrets. On the other hand, I wonder if it fuelled his drive to travel and ended up giving him the opportunity to have so many varied and rich experiences that it might have been worth it. We’ll never know but I’m going to tell myself that was the case.

Being an accountant was what gave him the opportunity to come to Australia – his employer transferred him out here. By then he’d married his first wife and by all accounts the two of them and a lot of expat mates had a rip roaring time in Sydney for several years. I don’t know much about those years, I didn’t meet him until later. But I do know that once again he made some lifelong friendships and some of you are here and others are probably watching in the UK.

And I hear that even back then his wardrobe consisted almost entirely of shorts and that used to often get him refused entry at the trendy pubs in Neutral Bay. You were just lucky he hadn’t yet discovered crocs. Even you guys probably would have disowned him then.

His marriage ended and he met me at work. TBH – most of you know me and know that I’m a workaholic so I was never going to meet anyone anywhere else. But in the nearly 30 years we’ve known each other, we’ve only worked apart for 4 years. And for nearly 2 of those years he didn’t even work – he decided to take a year off and study. Although I do seem to remember that a lot of that year didn’t involve sitting at a desk – there was the diving holiday with Jenny, a skiing trip with Marianne and a number of other weeks away in between. In fact I think he might have been busier that year than while he was working. Which sums Martin up perfectly by the way – he holidayed hard. Looking back I can’t believe all the things he managed to fit in.

In 1998 we upped sticks and moved to the Hunter. It was our tree change before sea changes and tree changes were trendy. Funnily enough the Sea Change series was also on TV at the time and I think he always fancied himself rescuing me, his very own Laura Gibson, from her career in the big city.

To get here, we went the long way around and spent about 6 months wandering around Australia living in a landcruiser troop carrier. That was when I really started to understand how passionate he was about wildlife. It was relentless. Basically 6 months of birdwatching. Actually I enjoyed it – there’s always been something about Martin’s enthusiasm that’s infectious. And he’s enthusiastic about so many things. I think this trip was also where I really understood how broad his interests were and how much he knew about all sorts of things. He’s interested in wildlife, geology, botany, history – in fact pretty much everything but pop culture. He was someone you always wanted on your team for Trivial Pursuit and he was probably responsible for a lot of our best scores when Tom, Sean, Martin and I started doing the quizzes in the Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald on Saturdays.

We started our business when we arrived in the Hunter and it’s still here 22 years later. I could never get him to say he was proud of the business. I think it’s because he associated being proud with being prideful and taking credit for others’ achievements. But I do know that he made some great friends through the business lots of whom are here or watching. He also took a lot of pleasure in the fact that our business gave so many people the chance to show the world what they could do with their amazing talent and hard work.

I almost forgot one of Martin’s other great loves – rugby. One of my earliest dates with him was going to see Waringah play on the Northern Beaches in Sydney. I’m not sure if I ever admitted to him that for the first few weekends I didn’t actually realise that we were watching ruby union rather than rugby league. I thought they were the same thing. Apparently I met David Campese at the BBQ afterwards and asked him if he played.

For international games, his allegiances were very confusing. He transferred his support from England to the Wallabies not long after moving here. But apparently the British & Irish Lions transcended all and got his support against pretty much every team but the Wallabies. South Africa was in there too – I don’t really understand how that worked. But there was always one simple rule that was never broken – All Blacks are spawn of the devil. I know there are a few All Blacks supporters here. I suspect he will haunt you.

So, I think he had a pretty good 58 years. I definitely enjoyed the 29 I got to share with him and the nearly 26 we were married. And we were lucky enough to have two beautiful boys that I know brought him enormous pleasure.

Sean, you have Dad’s “let’s get this done” drive in spades. I don’t know of any two people who seem more able to decide what they are going to do and then just move heaven and earth to do it than you and Dad. I don’t know if you can see it, but I can. You also have his warmth, his love of theatre and the arts, his love of music. He admired so many things about you – of course he loved the fact that you’re a talented actor. In fact, I suspect most people here have seen at least one of your audition tapes. But it wasn’t just that. He loved your courage, your kindness, your generosity, your willingness to try anything and everything and just basically throw yourself into it. He loved the fact that wherever we went, you would make friends for us because the 3 introverts in your family weren’t any good at that. I think one of my abiding memories of you both will be driving across the Mara in Kenya with the two of you standing up in the back of the truck belting out rugby songs (was it Ireland’s call?) and the South African National Anthem even though you’re not remotely interested in rugby.

Tom, I obviously see Dad in so many of your interests : wildlife, rugby and then all other sports except rugby league. But I also see him in your curiosity, your openness to new ideas, your determination to come to every discussion with a carefully thought out position and your complete pigheadedness about the evils of rugby league. The two of you seemed to switch effortlessly between whether George Russell could actually replace Bottas or Hamilton at Mercedes, to what we do today that future generations judge us harshly for to who should actually play No. 10 for the Wallabies. I think I only understood about 50% of your conversations but I know he loved them. Your dry humour made him laugh more than anyone else I know. And since he could be a serious bugger, that was a lifesaver for the rest of us as much as him.

I’m so glad he got to see you both at least get this far in life – where he could see the wonderful young men you’ve become and at least guess at what the future might look like.