

# Eulogy of Bruno Matuschka

30 August 1928 – 1 February 2024



[Written by Mark Matuschka \(son\):](#)

Bruno Matuschka was born the ninth child of ten at Rainbow in western Victoria, in August 1928. His father Samuel was a crop farmer from a family of 12 children, and his mother Elisabeth Darsow, a teacher and the eldest of six. Elisabeth's father, Pastor Emil Darsow, retired in Toowoomba – which, for our interstate and international audience, is quite near Laidley. During Pastor Darsow's service in Queensland, he helped establish the Queensland District of the Lutheran Church, represented here today by First Assistant Bishop Pastor Ben Hentschke. Pastor Ben is standing in for Bishop Mark Vainikka, who is interstate.

Bruno documented many a childhood adventure on the farm in his book of memoirs, published in 2020. They included playing with the bull, to his parents' horror, and catching his leg in the wheel of the crop sowing equipment, to be saved at the last instant from certain death by his brother, Ern. And the dam, used as a water supply on a farm and dangerous for children, was apparently kept clear of children by the tale of the 'Water Man', who loved to grab children venturing too close.

Bruno's love of music was established by early experiences of family singing around the piano. His parents were both hugely talented – his mother sang in choirs and played the piano, while his father played the violin and had a keen sense of pitch and quality of voice. Many of his sisters played the piano, and Margaret, his only surviving sibling – who is watching online today from Luxembourg – went on to be a professional opera singer. I regard my own musical ear as a priceless inheritance, passed down from my father and his.

After attending local primary schools in Victoria, Bruno's parents sent him to Concordia College in Adelaide, South Australia. His time there was highly formative and he was ever grateful to his parents for their considerable sacrifice, speaking about it often, even recently. Wartime meant he could only travel home to Victoria once a year. Instead, he linked up with South Australian relatives, the Seidels, from Crystal Brook. He took piano lessons only from the age of 16, but quickly became an accomplished pianist, playing from printed music, or by ear, in that wonderful style of the forties. I laughed when he recounted one of his favourite leisure activities – going to hang out with his school mate, James Thiele, at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Adelaide, to play the organ. Music was a skill he would share for the rest of his life, right up to Christmas last year, when he played for his great grandchildren.

During his first year at Concordia, Bruno experienced academic difficulties for the first time, due to the difference between the education levels of the two states. In later life as a teacher, he believed God intended this experience, so he could learn to be appreciative of the learning difficulties of some students, despite their best intentions and efforts. In short, it made him a better teacher.

A teacher he did become, quite suddenly in September 1947 during his post-secondary theological year of training, when Concordia principal Dr Hamann assigned him to Kewell congregation's school in Victoria, following a request for a student teacher. In his book, Bruno writes "so the novice proceeded with the innocent pupils, and I feel learning happened on both sides of the teacher's desk." The next year, 1948, Bruno attended Adelaide Teachers College, earning his Teaching Certificate before being called to Tabor Lutheran School in Victoria, as principal. Well, teaching principal of a one-teacher school.

In the meantime, Bruno had been the leading candidate for a scholarship to Valparaiso University, Indiana USA. While his nomination was supported by leading members of the church Allocation Board, ultimately he did not receive the scholarship because a Call had already been issued. While he and his supporters were disappointed, it would turn out that this decision was pivotal.

Mentored by Garry, Bruno's brother and principal at the nearby Tarrington Lutheran School, Bruno honed his craft over a four year period from 1949. Besides his teaching, he had many activities and commitments, and life was very full. But at the same time he yearned to further himself. So in 1952, he resigned from this position and studied again at Melbourne Teachers College for a year.

1953 graduates of the Victorian state system were allowed to nominate their choices of teaching assignments. Bruno nominated the Gippsland District in eastern Victoria as his first choice, right down to the Western District, as his last choice. He was assigned to Culla in – the Western District! This is not insignificant, as you will see.

Bruno taught at Culla for only one year. The state required that there was to be "no political or religious comment" in his teaching, a rule Bruno believed he had largely obeyed. Nevertheless, school parents thanked him for "the Christian training" he had given their children.

What followed was to be a string of Lutheran primary school Calls and engagements:

- September 1954 – Katyil Victoria as principal
- 1958 – Dimboola Victoria, as founding principal
- 1962 – Hamilton Victoria, as founding principal
- 1971 – Katharine Lehmann School in Wau, Papua New Guinea, as principal
- 1973 – Grace Lutheran Primary School, Redcliffe, Queensland, as inaugural principal

- 1978 – St John’s Lutheran Primary School, Malvern, South Australia, as teacher
- 1981 – Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Para Vista, South Australia, as founding principal
- 1990 – Prince of Peace Lutheran School, Everton Park, Queensland, as teacher He retired from teaching in 1993 at the age of 65.

Bruno's was a distinguished career, with an obvious specialisation in starting new Lutheran schools. He was thrilled with the opportunities this provided to share the Gospel and he actively sought opportunities to do so. Probably the most common thing former students and their parents tell me they remember about him was how he visited their home personally, as principal. This was his practice throughout his career, particularly with parents new to the school. Vilma ably supported this practice, extending it to church contacts and anyone who needed help.

While Bruno enjoyed his career, he loved his family. He met Vilma of Dimboola Victoria, the love of his life, while teaching at Katyl and they were married during the May school holidays of 1955. Jenny was born the next year, then Elizabeth in '59 and Mark in '65. (They say you save the best 'till last.)

Jenny will tell you more about Bruno, the family man and Bruno, the person.

#### [\*\*Written by Jenny Schiller \(daughter\):\*\*](#)

Dad was a details man, and a perfectionist. What a combination. At times I am sure it drove him crazy. He always wanted everything done well, to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree, and it did not matter the personal cost, time, effort, or pressure he put on himself. It also meant late nights and pouring your energy into it – heart, mind and soul.

It would seem it is in the genes. We children are like that, and we can see it in our children, and very uncannily, in our grandchildren too. From a very early age. A blessing and a curse, all at the same time.

But it is also a God-given gift which enables us to help others. To show kindness, empathy, love, care, compassion and faithfulness. It has built us to be the people we are today. And for that we are very grateful.

Dad would always include music and rhythm in whatever he did. He often sang, hummed, whistled, and played the piano - at home, school and church, and mostly by ear. Who needs a music script? He loved directing musicals, choirs, plays and Christmas events, at both school and church. Music was precious to him.

From a young age, he took every child, and every grand and great grandchild on his lap at the piano, and put their fingers under his, to play real songs. They suddenly sounded like accomplished musicians. Their faces beamed. It was magic how he did this!

Very important to Dad was his family. He loved us all as individuals. We often had cuddles, rubbed noses, and read books together. He and Mum prayed with us, and kissed and hugged us goodnight. Our children and grandchildren remember many fun times together when they were played with, chased, went to the park, went to the beach with him at Coffs Harbour and picked strawberries and cucumbers with him. He often pointed out unusual leaves, textures or plants.

Dad loved his car, his radio, his newspaper, his crossword puzzles, his books, and his 'Weeties' for breakfast (which I notice are back on the shelf in Woolies again).

Dad loved every Lutheran school which he dedicated so much time to. We were often at school after hours, on weekends, and in school holidays. We loved being the 'teachers' while the other kids were not here, and it was so special writing on the chalkboard. Usually not allowed. We did up book packs with Mum and Dad over the Christmas holidays. We loved the organisation and attention to detail it entailed.

Dad gardened until it was done. He was so particular with weeds, pruning, fertilizing, and a beautiful green lawn. This was very important to him. Hence the green and white flowers chosen today.

Mum and Dad always had roses, hydrangeas, cucumbers, vegies, strawberries, herbs, orange and lemon trees, melaleucas, and shrubs. We always helped in the garden, maybe in gum boots or thongs, with a wheelbarrow, rake or hands. We loved raking up autumn leaves from the Liquid Amber. No media devices back then. He and Mum worked tirelessly in the garden together to make sure we ate healthily. I just didn't like eating rhubarb much, but we had to eat it.

Mum was in charge of the kitchen. She made the most amazing home-made bread, Tuna Surprise, and potato kuchen with streusel. Dad always called it Pimple Cake.

Dad always loved a meat pie and got his last wish, as Neil took one to him in hospital, just five days before he passed away. He also loved family eating together. So it was not surprising years ago to see Uncle Garry, his cheeky brother, at family dinners, having roast chicken as a treat, joking like Dad, and eating trifle for dessert, made with real sherry. Quite potent. A glass of lemonade was a treat. How things have changed.

Dad didn't cook much earlier on. However, at age 90 he grew too many oranges. So he looked up how to make Orange Marmalade on the internet. It was all going very well until a little bit boiled over, set off the smoke detector, and the fire-brigade turned up. He didn't understand what all the fuss was about.

At 90 he needed some clothes mended. So he got out Mum's sewing machine, read the instruction book, and fixed his own clothes. I said: why didn't you give them to me? He said because he wanted to do it himself. Now where have we heard that before? His determination with any task had no boundaries.

Something Dad loved but I didn't love: getting bogged in the car. He would take the Holden sedan on what I learnt later, were 4WD tracks. I was terrified.

Holidays were always important in our family. As young children Dad and Mum took us to Black Rock, the beach, or the mountains, like the Grampians. We loved it. Walking and fishing were also important, with 'home grown' worms. And of course, it did not matter at all if we caught no fish.

Dad was such a social man. He did this so beautifully with warm greetings on arrival, heartfelt emails, befriending people he didn't know, listening to people, talking to people, and calling them by name, even years later. He was always talking to people he didn't know (embarrassing for us, at times) making others laugh, getting to know people better through spending time with them, eating with them, and sharing God's love. Very simply, very openly. Often he had conversations about Jesus, and his work on earth that God had for him. A very sincere man.

We loved Dad to bits. We will always hold him very specially in our hearts and minds. And we thank God for the long and fulfilling life He gave Dad.

[Written by Mark Matuschka:](#)

For my part, Sunshine Beach always makes me remember the great fun I had fishing with Dad in the '70s. I don't eat fish, but I loved catching them with him. And in more recent years, frustrating at the time but funny in retrospect, Dad was immensely skilled at installing rogue apps on his Android phone, no matter what precautions I took to try and stop him. Right up until two weeks ago. I should have bought him an iPhone. Nathaniel, my son, cherishes memories of adventures in the small rainforest area out the back of Bruno and Vilma's Coffs Harbour home, and having to peel off the leaches afterwards.

Continuing the timeline, Vilma always had a heart for mission, and Bruno's retirement from teaching in '93 finally gave *her* the chance to initiate a move, this time to Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, where together they served a church plant there. Bruno felt highly honoured to be ordained as a Special Ministry Pastor in 1996, allowing him to administer Holy Communion.

Finally, in 2009, Bruno and Vilma finalised things in Coffs Harbour and moved to Forest Lake in Brisbane, very close to where Mark and Kathy live. Vilma's health slowly deteriorated to the point where she needed to move into care at Tabeel Aged Care, Laidley, in 2015. She

passed away peacefully in 2020, with the funeral conducted in this very church, by this very minister.

Bruno continued in his unit at Tabeel until breaking his hip in a fall the next year, after which he needed care. There being no immediate availability in Tabeel, he was pleased to take a room at Zion Aged Care in Nundah, in Brisbane. There he established wonderful relationships with residents and staff alike, quickly becoming an iconic identity characterised by a strong will camouflaged within a humble manner. He constantly looked for ways to share the Gospel with his fellow residents. Even during his four week stay at The Wesley Hospital in January this year, he discussed with Mark how he could bring the Gospel to his rotating roommates.

He missed Vilma terribly, and every now and then spoke of the coming joy of joining her. This became more often as his health deteriorated significantly in December and January. On Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January he had his last earthly conversation, holding hands with Mark, and on 1<sup>st</sup> February, took his last breath with music playing in the background and Neil praying at his side.

We know a new story begins there, one of bliss with Jesus and old friends.

But of the earthly story told here, a master plan is apparent. Firstly, Bruno's education is provided despite poor circumstance. Secondly, significant inflection points keep him from going to USA, ushering him instead to Victoria's Western Districts. That this was God's plan is confirmed by the many opportunities to serve that flowed, one after another. Thirdly, Bruno's natural talents, acquired skills and charming style allowed him to achieve ends and impact lives wherever he went.

From Ephesians chapter 2, verse 10: For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We praise and thank God for the life of Bruno Matuschka.