

Eulogy for Yvonne Alicia Margherita Smith

26th August 1923 – 27th March 2022

I first became aware of Yvonne around 1967 when I joined a law firm of which Yvonne and her husband were clients. She would be often sat in the waiting room to see my partner, Keith Souness. I eventually took over their affairs in 1978 following the sudden demise of my partner.

Apart from my own experiences, I am reliant upon Yvonne's own story and upon those of her friends. Janet Ben, Anita Fergus and Rhoda Montgomery.

Janet and Anita are daughters of Ene and Gilbert Mudge. Ene and Yvonne were great friends and through that friendship Janet and Anita became lifelong friends of Yvonne and Yvonne's husband Andy. They felt as close as *aunties* as one could get.

Yvonne had a brother. When her mother and father divorced, Yvonne went to live with her mother and her brother with his father. Yvonne also had a stepfather who managed to persuade her mother that Yvonne should go and live with the YWCA where she resided for 4 or 5 years. Yvonne left school at the age of 14 but attended night classes to pay her board. After her stepfather died Yvonne returned to live with her mother. Together they knitted, crocheted and sewed for what they called "their war effort".

At the beginning of WW2 Yvonne had been engaged to a British pilot who sadly was killed in the war. She met Andy during the war who after the war was introduced by Yvonne to the Mudge family from whence solid friendships began with Janet and Anita.

Andy and Yvonne bought a section together in the Waitakere's and had plans drawn up for building a house. Unfortunately, things did not work out. Just when they were at a low ebb, they won the Lottery to the tune of 12,000 pounds sterling and they bought house in Orakei overlooking Hobson Bay. That was in 1962. They also owned and operated two businesses together, one a stationery shop in Glen Innes and the other a small leather goods factory in Parnell.

From all accounts and what I recall of these operations Yvonne was the driving force and everything was done to perfection. The war had a profound affect on

Andrew and sadly Yvonne and Andy were not able to have a family. Andy died suddenly in December 1986.

Yvonne had two overseas experiences, one in 1953 and another after Andy died, to Israel and Jordan.

On her return from overseas she bought a boarding house in the city which became the home for young girls who had nowhere to live. She worked tirelessly to get and keep the building up to scratch. The building was ultimately taken under the Public Works Act. She then acquired a small AA garage in Park Road Newmarket. This had been a former service station and when the pumps were removed the building was turned into a small workshop. She ultimately sold it to the tenant for government valuation stating that that the tenant had been a good one and she wanted to see him get ahead. Not long after I noticed that the building had been demolished and the area now forms part of the Newmarket Railway Station. I never told Yvonne of the likely windfall, but she would have been happy for the tenant.

I had come to know Yvonne very well by the late 1990's. Everyone who new her told me of her generosity. She was a strong member of the St James Church in Orakei where seemingly she would help anyone who asked for help or who she thought were in need. In addition, she was a strong supporter of the RSPCA, Presbyterian Support and the Auckland City Mission. I recall having to take from her for disposal letters soliciting donations to various causes, after I perceived that she was being constantly taken advantage of. The flipside was that she never seemed to be purchasing anything for herself. The Auckland Savings Bank had at some time, or another given her a plastic wallet, presumably to carry her traveller's cheques in. On her demise I came across this wallet in her one and only handbag that had been cello taped repeatedly to cope with her various uses of it

In addition, or despite her generosity she was fiercely independent. As I have said she was a stickler for perfection when it came to applying quality control to her business accounts and her tax returns all of which she prepared herself and forwarded to the IRD.

On a visit to her home in the late 1990's, she confessed to me that she felt somewhat of a spent force and seemed to be looking for a reason to carry on. The view across Hobson Bay and her beloved cat were not quite what fulfilled her anymore. I was also conscious that she was in danger of being taken

advantage of as her result of her persistent generosity. I was deeply aware that Yvonne was an extremely intelligent woman who had not been blessed with formal education other than that she derived from her own industry. Clearly the inability to have a family of her own was a bitter disappointment.

In my practise as a lawyer, I had derived some satisfaction in assisting certain retired headmistresses find another pathway in their lives through the formation of charitable trusts with chosen educational objectives by the client settlor and at the same time reigniting the fire which had first interested them in education. I asked Yvonne, if she had a wish to make possible something she really cared about, what would that be? There was little doubt in Yvonne's mind that if she could do anything to assist women extend their education by having the opportunity to do master's or Doctoral study, that she would find to be most fulfilling. And so was born the Yvonne A M Smith Charitable Trust out of which was created the Yvonne A M Smith annual scholarship. Tertiary institutions throughout New Zealand were invited to advertise the offering of such a scholarship. Yvonne was herself a trustee for as long as she was able. She did not want to sit on any interview panel but took delight in examining the shortened list of candidates for interview- prepared her own spreadsheet which she handed to the panel prior to the interviews taking place. The interviewers were only made aware of Yvonne's picks after the interviews had occurred and before selection of a winner. Rarely were we in total agreement, which only goes to evidence the value of the personal interview.

Notwithstanding, for some of the early years in the history of the scholarship Yvonne would gladly meet with the winner and a myself over lunch. Over the years scholarship winners have filed reports with the Trust from universities all over the world addressed with thanks to Yvonne and gratitude to the Trust. To date the Trust has donated in the form of scholarships and grants over a twenty-two-year period nearly \$1.5million. Each scholarship is currently worth NZ\$60,000.

Only three days before Yvonne's passing The Trust selected as this year's scholarship winner an undergraduate engineer from Invercargill working at the Tiwai point aluminium smelter. The scholarship will assist in enabling the recipient to go to Rotterdam to complete an Executive MBA. The competition gets tougher every year as more and more women seek to obtain their goal of extended education which will hopefully eventually place them in positions of leadership in New Zealand.

Yvonne grew up the hard way. Under circumstances outside her control, worked in an office and earned just enough to pay her board while attending night school and using every spare minute to upskill herself in any way possible. The legacy of her industry and perhaps the one stroke of good fortune in the Lotto win have left our community with her magnificent legacy for which past and future awardees, and even her country, will be forever grateful.

Bill Duncan

Lawyer, Trustee Company Director and Friend

1.4.2022