

## **Pulumautau Aupaau**

### **By Lili Maginness**



My parents, Pulu 85 & Makelita 83 arrived in Portland, Vic, Australia in 2019 to live with my sister and her three girls aged then btwn 15 & 12. They moved here because my brother and his wife in NZ could no longer look after them. I live in Melbourne so does another brother and we have a sister in Toowoomba, QLD.

On Feb 2020 on the day when my Dad was getting ready for a group outing with his carer, his carer noticed he'd lost the use of his legs and he couldn't get up. My sister called the ambulance and rushed to the hospital.

I was just about to start a new job and I was called by my sister with the news. So were all my family here and in NZ... brother in Auckland, sister in Picton, brother in Christchurch and a brother who was away at sea.

One by one each sibling arrived to see my Dad. He already had dementia, Parkinson's, prostate cancer and top of this he'd got pneumonia and an infection in the lung and now no longer able to swallow.

We were virtually there to say Goodbye. We were making decisions whether to resuscitate or not... the important decisions of whether or not to prolong his life.

He was in one ward and we all took turns to stay with him overnite and finally put in the Palliative Ward... I stayed with my Dad for 10 days straight. In that time I saw him thrive. The Drs were amazed at his progress. He continued breathing after removing the oxygen mask. My Dad even managed to take steps at walking with the help of the Physio therapists. His Geriatition was surprised with his progress but told my sister and I to be encouraged but don't expect a lot. The day after I left the hospital allowed one visit per person for an hr. My Mum cldnt go in bcoz she needed assistance with her wheelchair and she has dementia. So my sister visited. A few days after that the hospital went into lockdown.

Before we knew it there was a place for him at an Aged Care Facility... My Dad was transferred from the hospital but my sister cldnt go and see him, prepare him for the transfer. My sister waited at the other end.

My Dad arrived at the Aged Care Facility with only half hr visits only per day. My sister had half an hr to try and prepare and get his room all nice for him. But she didn't have time bcoz time spent with our Dad was more important, more precious.

The next day, she brought a few more things to put in his room. But concentrated on him, feeding him and talking to him. My poor Mum couldn't go and see him.

Before you knew it, the Aged Care Facility went into lockdown.

This was the worst thing imaginable to our family. Every day for almost 2 months he had someone [sleep in](#) his hospital room beside him. The staff bent over backwards to accommodate our family. During this time as my brothers and sister and grandchildren left to go back to NZ, they'd all kissed our Dad goodbye with the promise that they would be back. They were going to come back to relieve my sister and I with the task of taking care of him.

However, NZ were the first to place a lockdown on travel to Australia. Before you knew it, Australia had locked their borders.

No-one could come over at all. All plans were quashed.

So my sister and I and my brother all took it in turns to stay with my Dad. My brother in the weekends to relieve me so I could go back to Melbourne. My sister had her 3 kids and our Mum to look after. My sister making dinner to bring to my brother and myself.

My sister brought my Mum to the hospital each day before my Mum became too tired to do that. When the nurses came in the morning to change my Dad and get him ready, I took some time for me to go and walk, have a coffee and reflect.

The nurses were amazing and so kind. They checked on him through the night, day and night...

Sleeping in a hospital bed beside my Dad I was able to hear him. I was able to comfort him. I was able to call on the nurses...

So of course when the hospital and Aged Care Facility simultaneously went into lockdown my heart sank, my sister's heart sank... my family overseas were in utter despair, helpless...

Eight days later my Dad died on his own... On 2 April 2020, someone from the Aged Care rang and said that.. we regret... all I could hear was... your Dad passed away... He was with a nurse holding his hand. He passed away suddenly.

My sister and my Mum were allowed to go and see him. They had to have temperatures checked, masks worn, hands sanitised. I was preparing to leave Melbourne the next day with my brother.

My sister and my Mum were there for 4 hours before my Dad was taken away. My Dad died at 9.49am that morning. They went in around lunch time. They were offered a cup of tea and had to ask for a sandwich for my 83 year old Mum. My sister asked for something for both of them. A sandwich came, roughly cut for them to share. Considering the situation, the lockdown.. you would have thought there would have

been some sort of etiquette or normal hospitality shown to a bereaved family... to any family losing someone, during a pandemic or not...

My brother and I were on our way to Portland, a 5hr drive. We arrived... our Dad's body was on its way to the Coroner's Office in Melbourne.

We arrived and it was our task to organise our Dad's funeral with the rest of the siblings and in conjunction with the funeral director.

It was my Dad's wishes to be buried back in NZ and culturally we don't usually cremate. We are a Samoan family, my parents having met in 1961 in Christchurch, NZ and had 8 children and brought us up and spent majority of their lives there apart from the last 5 or so years..Auckland then finally in Portland.

When all my siblings were in Portland in the Reflection & Prayer room of the hospital, we mulled over this. We decided should anything happen, our Dad should be buried in NZ. There were a lot of discussions bcoz of costs etc.. however in the end we decided we'd do the right thing and get him back to NZ.

However, we hadn't counted on Covid19 lockdowns btwn NZ & Australia and vice versa. And then we found out we couldn't even fly him over. There were overall complications.

Against everything we'd believed in, our Dad's wishes and our culture, we made the decision to cremate him.

My sister and I chose the urn. It was emotional but weird at the same time.

My sister, brother and myself chose the coffin which wasn't as weird. We chose the best one. Tasmanian blackwood. We thought we couldn't give him his last wishes so we would give him the best.

We had a church funeral bcoz he was brought up in the church. It was the Scots Presbyterian Church bcoz we used to go to the Presbyterian Church in Christchurch. It was a tiny church not what we were used to but the stained glass windows were familiar to us.

Before the funeral we had a viewing of our Dad. By this time my sister and her husband had arrived from Toowoomba, my two sons and a niece had arrived from Melbourne. There were 11 of us in the immediate family that were there. Me, my 2 sons, my sister and 3 daughters, sister from Toowoomba and brother and daughter.

There was angst as ... to [who] was going to miss out. We decided one of us would walk out half way thru the service and one would walk in. That was allowed.

We couldn't give our Dad a traditional Samoan funeral so we did the best we could. Normally my Dad would have been afforded fine mats but we couldn't even offer him one. I had a tapa cloth, a traditional cloth made of bark that I'd been given as a gift on my travels some 30yrs ago.. I was privileged to place it on his casket.

He was well loved and the tiny church wouldn't have been able to hold the many friends and family he had

But 10 (11) of us were there on behalf of our family and friends. We sat in our family groups all sitting apart. I sat near my Mum (then my sister did after I left halfway thru)... after all she lost her best friend and soul mate.

Where we wld normally be sitting closely, comforting each other, we sat 2 metres apart in our own sorrow listening to the message from the pulpit.

We had the funeral live streamed with our Dad's best friend, a Reverend being live streamed from NZ to be part of the service with a Portland Pastor. He communicated in my Dad's mother tongue which made it special.

The live stream glitched because the world was in lockdown and the world internet was in overload.

Everyone missed the beginning and end if the service. My family in NZ were disappointed, some even angry. There was no closure. There was a recording and they wld have to wait... The recording was beautiful .. the service was the best we could do and as beautiful as we thought it did get.

It wasn't good enough. No one watched it for days. Everyone is grieving over in NZ. I've only heard from one brother about it. Everyone us grieving in different ways bcoz each of us are in different situations.

We are here they are there. We at least got to touch our Dad, kiss him and say Goodbye. We saw him in the casket.

We also went to each of our motel rooms and had individual wakes. We had all my Dad's favourite foods catered and delivered. I was exhausted that nite. We sadly ate. I sadly drank a glass of wine and I just had to say good nite to my sons and hop into bed. I went to sleep while they continued on their own.

My siblings and their families had their own wakes individually too. NZ was in stage 4 lockdown.

We're still apart... our Dad passing away during these unprecedented times has divided our family in more ways than one.



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