

## RCH Alumni AGM and Gala Dinner

15th November 2022

The occasion was the first time in three years that the Alumni could again come together and enjoy the AGM and Gala dinner at the Kew Golf Club. The evening started off with drinks and canapes and 28 members joined the AGM of the Alumni Association, which commenced at 6.15 pm, where they were welcomed by the President Jim Wilkinson, the Vice President Garry Warne, Hon Secretary Caroline Clarkson and Treasurer George Werther.



The President reported the deaths of three Alumni during the year being Ruth Bishop AC, who had identified “Rotavirus”, Dr Helene Wood, who had been instrumental in setting up the intensive care unit in the sixties, and Justin Kelly OAM, who had initiated “The Kelly Operation” for bladder extrophy.

There have been four members who have resigned membership and ten new members leaving a total of 218 members (compared with 215 a year ago).



Reports were then received from The President and Treasurer and were accepted. There was no further business except the election of officers for 2023. Nominations had been received for re-election of all the current officers (as listed above). These were each

accepted unanimously. The meeting closed at 6.45 pm and was followed soon after 7.00 pm with the Gala Dinner.

After service of entrees and drinks the President offered apologies from the CEO Bernadette McDonald and the chief medical officer Matt Sabin and his wife, reported on meetings held during the previous year and welcoming Arnold Zable, the speaker for the dinner who would deliver his "Alum-oration" entitled "The Power of Story – a Writer's journey", who was to be formally introduced by George Werther. Also welcomed were Dr Mark Oliver, Chairman of the Medical Staff Association and his wife Emma and Rob Grant, the hospital's senior videographer and wife Janine.

The president noted that he had recently been able to view a video made by Rob Grant of Justin Kelly interviewing Douglas Stephens in about 2006, not long before Douglas had died at age 98. He (the president) recalled having been welcomed to Melbourne in 1988 by Douglas Stephens, who by coincidence was a friend of his (Jim Wilkinson's) elder brother, whose widow was still living at nearly 101.

The President then welcomed Durham Smith who was present for the dinner having himself celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday a few months earlier. Durham had been the author of an excellent "Profile" of Douglas Stephens which had been published on the Alumni Website.

Reporting on activities during the year he noted that the Gala Dinner Speaker, Arnold Zable, would be delivering what had been renamed an "Alum-oration", which would be introduced shortly by our treasurer George Werther. This new title fits neatly alongside the titles of our regular meetings every three months or so – now entitled "Alum-inars" and our two or three newsletters which are now referred to as "Alum-inations" -- which have been very successful and extremely "Alum-inating". This year we have had three Aluminars and two issues of "Alum-inations", with another expected before the year's end.

The Aluminars have varied a little in format as well as content. The first was delivered by the president on May 12<sup>th</sup> via Zoom and was entitled "On matters of the heart", being a historical review of the emergence and development of the specialty of cardiology over the last 200 years.

The second Aluminar was a face-to-face meeting in the RCH Foundation, the first such "real" face to face meeting for two years. This was given by Prof Sidney Bloch talking to the title "Psychiatry - Is the glass half full or half empty?". The president admitted to being a little surprised that the audience voted in favour of "half full" after the talk – perhaps a tribute to Sid Bloch's excellent talk?

The third meeting took place on September 16<sup>th</sup>, via Zoom, when we had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by A/Prof Jim Tibballs entitled "Lemons, Limes and bitter outcomes for the French Navy". This was based on his recent PhD thesis, in French, on the subject, which explored the differing rates of acceptance of a new anti-scurvy remedy in England and in France.

The Vernon Collins Oration took place on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and was delivered by Prof Jonathan Carapetis AM to the title “From Paternalism to partnership the opportunity for indigenous health research” and outlined the problems and the successes of working with Australia’s “First People” and conducting a range of health orientated research projects often in communities where the deeply embedded culture limits access and language problems add to the difficulties. Within such communities there are many intelligent and well-meaning participants in such research efforts but the barriers to achieving good communication and trust are hard to work around. Nonetheless there is room for optimism that with help from the Aboriginal liaison staff in these communities’ progress is being made.



The treasurer, George Werther, then introduced the speaker, Arnold Zable to deliver his “Alum-oration” “The Power of Story – a Writer’s journey”.

Arnold took us on his journey from 387 Canning St in North Carlton (that became his haven) where he first arrived in Australia with his parents as refugees, to Café Scheherazade in Acland St St Kilda where many like-minded multi-cultural immigrants gathered to share stories, and onto his travels in Ithaca (his wife’s ancestral home) Russia, Asia, China and most recently Poland.

His writing all began in Canning St where he found it to be a source of expression. He would go into his bedroom feeling rage and then the pen would take over and he would feel light afterwards. By ‘writing it out’ he could ‘work it out’. ‘Expression’ was the beginning of writing as a craft and the first of three elements to make a good storyteller. ‘Impression’ was the second and this involved listening to other people’s tales and bearing witness then working out how to craft it for other people. The third, the artist’s story, is ‘the Art of the Specific’ – a mirror reflection that can be seen in other places, for example refugees in Ukraine, Arabia, Iran etc. Arnold read several passages from his books, and they were so powerful, so beautifully written by a true wordsmith. He said it was the detail that counts and that if you take note the magic is always there.

What followed was a night of catching up with fellow alumni in a very convivial environment. Arnold Zable was able to display many of his books at a table in the dining room where many of the Alumni went to look at and / or purchase them.



