

**The Mooloolaba**

**ISSUE 5 | JANUARY '20**

# **CONNECTION**

**Special Edition**



## **The Odd Couple**

**And what they managed to pull off for a special mate**

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**This fifth edition of *The Mooloolaba Connection* was inspired by a very special event: *'This is Your Life: Gus Gordon'* held last month to honour the 56 years of service of one of MSLSC's longest-serving and most-loved old boys.**

**More than 200 people, spanning multiple generations, attended what some considered one of the most memorable events ever held at the surf club. But there was also an outpouring of support from many, many more who couldn't make it on the day; hence this special edition to record and share the event.**

***Special thanks to: Tracy Boldery the official photographer on the day whose pictures appear in this edition and on the Cover page***

## Then & Now

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**S** proud grandparents go our mate Gus is right up there. And he's got good reason to be as these shots of his two eldest grandsons show. The top one was taken about 10 years ago, with Carter (left) and Mason (right), while the bottom one shows the impressive young men they have grown into. The boys both show the prodigious sporting talents of father Deon, a champion ski paddler and kayaker, but *their* field of excellence is the rugby field. Carter signed a contract with the Queensland Reds two years before he left school and was one of Wests Bulldogs A-grade stars last year, straight out of school. He is currently in pre-season training for the 2020 Super Rugby season for the Reds and will be heading to Italy later in the year with the Junior Wallabies for the Under 20's World Cup. Meanwhile Mason, soon to start Year 12, is showing every sign of following in his footsteps. He was a stand-out for Queensland Under-16s last year. He has also been attending Rugby Australia high-performance camps preparing for the Australian Under-18 team tour of Europe later in the year. Watch out for both of them in the Green and Gold jersey in the future.



*Above:* A more recent shot showing Gus with his two youngest grandsons, William and Jack.

William was named after Gus's father and was born on what would have been his 100th birthday. Like their older brothers, both boys are already showing their natural sporting talents; kicking a Rugby ball and cracking golf balls around the yard.

# Mission Accomplished

Secrecy, Sparks and Subterfuge  
The story behind the planning  
of *This is Your Life: Gus Gordon*



**They** really are the odd couple, one a laid-back, big-picture guy, the other a tenacious micro-manager who tackles challenges with terrier-like determination. They may grumble and spark off each other from time to time but, when the occasion demands, as it did recently, they can be quite a formidable combination.

We're talking of course about Steve (Stinky) Miller and Graeme (Stumpy) Vierow, the duo behind the tribute event, *This is your Life: Gus Gordon* held in mid-December. The end result was a triumph of organisation and subterfuge, with about 250 people turning up and Gus never getting any inkling before he came through the door about what was going on. And all that with just a few weeks for planning, which begs the question: were their contrasting personalities and very different ideas, actually a secret ingredient in their success? "I don't know about that," said Steve quickly. "I think I could have throttled him at times ... every day, three times a day, I'd get a phone call from Stumpy about his new ideas."

Stumpy on the other hand was determined to leave no stone unturned. "We only had three and a half weeks to organise everything and get the word out, so I knew everything had to be done yesterday rather than tomorrow," he said.

One of their priorities was to pull it all off without Gus knowing, which proved to be easier than they feared. It helped that Gus is not a great social media user, but Graeme also made sure he spread the word about the need for secrecy. "I said to everyone

to please try to keep it quiet. If we have to tell him at the last minute, we will but we really want to keep it a surprise and everyone came to the party. I still can't believe we managed it." There was one slight drama though, which resulted in a real flurry of panicked phone calls, when some well meaning person put a notice about the event in the local paper. "We really didn't need that in case Gus read it, but thank goodness he didn't get any papers in hospital," Graeme said. Both Steve and Graeme are in total agreement on what caused the greatest anxiety in the lead-up to the event – whether Gus would be well enough to attend, given he was in the middle of a course of treatment at the time. The plans all appeared to be on track on the day – Gus believing he was going to the Surf Club for lunch with family and a handful of friends – until a doctor got wind of what was going on and put a stop to the outing, which Steve blames himself for.

"I rode up there that morning and thought I'd have a quiet word with the nurse, a very approachable guy who always shared a bit of a laugh with Gus, to see if he could have a chat to the doctor about giving him a bit of a pick-me-up so when he came out he'd be fresher," Steve said. "I told him we had something special organised because Gus has been in the surf club for 56 years and we had a couple of hundred people coming. Anyway, I got a phone call from Gus at 12.38, and he says, 'Stink, how many people are coming to lunch today?' I said, 'Just family and friends Gus, just a few of us' and he said, 'The doctor's just come in here and said you can't go to a lunch where there's a couple of hundred people.' And I'm sweating going, 'Oh no Gus. I don't know where he got that idea from'. Then Gus said, 'Well they won't let me out Stink and



I've really got to listen to the doctors. I can't go against what they're saying!" So, laid-back Steve was shattered. Micro-manager Graeme on the other hand took the news with greater equanimity. "I always realised something like that was on the cards so it was disappointing, but it didn't flatten me," he said. "I had already prepared a Plan B, which was to get the photographer to do a video so Gus could watch it from hospital through WhatsApp on his phone." In the end Gus's partner, Mary, saved the day by speaking directly to his oncologist who

**Gus believed he was going to the Surf Club for lunch with the family and a handful of friends**



## Waiting for the phone call that never came

stepped in and gave his OK for the outing after an extra hit of antibiotics. So, the biggest problem was sorted, but the Odd Couple's trials and tribulations weren't quite finished. Graeme was so keyed up on the day about everything going smoothly that he managed to lose his phone at a critical juncture; the phone that was crucial to the plans he had laboured over so fastidiously.

“If Stump told me once, he told me 20 times: ‘Now, Mary’s going to ring me when she’s on her way from the hospital. I’ll go down and I’ll ring you when I get him out of the car and put him in the wheelchair so you’ll be able to get the crowd to be quiet for when Gus comes up in the elevator.’”

After a shout-out, the phone was found just in time, so, as Graeme headed down to meet Gus, Steve found a couple of spots where he could watch through the window to follow their progress. “I saw Stumpy put Gus in the wheelchair and I thought, ‘Stumpy will be ringing me shortly’. Then I was looking down

through the glass near the elevator into the foyer and I see Bobby Yarbrough and his wife, who got there a bit late, and Yarbs is going ‘G’day Gus!’ and I’m imagining Graeme having kittens thinking, ‘This is not good’. I was up there watching all this and trying to give hand signals to Bob to come upstairs and Bob sees me and he’s waving back at me going, ‘G’day Stink’. Anyway, the long and short of it is, I see Stumpy bringing Gus in through the foyer and I still haven’t had a phone call. They press the button for the elevator and I still haven’t had a phone call, so I quickly get on the microphone and ask everyone to be quiet because Gus is going to be here in, like, 10 SECONDS. I never did get the phone call.”

They may have contrasting styles and personalities but Steve gives credit to his old mate for what they pulled off together. “He gets his teeth into these things and he makes them happen.”

For his part, Graeme says he was touched by the number of people who

said what a wonderful event it was (including someone who enjoyed it so much he wanted to know when the next one was) but the real highlights for him were clear: “That was Gus being able to turn up and see how much love everyone has for him and also, for me, that I pulled off something that could have easily come unstuck,” he said.

**Graeme and Steve would like to thank the following people who helped to make the event so successful:**

**All staff in the Mooloolaba Lifesaving Club office**

**The Supporters Club and its general manager Bryan Jones**

**Supporters Club staff on the day for their wonderful service**

# The Day in Pictures

## *Honouring a Great Mate*



# *Faces in the Crowd*

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# *Gusso Still Making Them Laugh*

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# *This is Your Life*



## *Gus Gordon*

*A wrap-up  
of the event*

At 2.15 there were just a few dozen people scattered around the function room. By 2.30 that number had swelled to at least 150. And they kept coming. By the time Gus arrived, there were well over 200 people gathered ready to welcome him. It would be hard to think of any other individual who could command not just the respect, but the level of genuine affection and mateship felt in the room that day across so many different eras of the club. Gus was the common link across five decades, which was highlighted during the official proceedings as MC Steve Miller called up successive generations of members in groups. He started with the old boys of the '60s, followed by the small group of stalwarts of the '80s who had held the club together after the clubhouse burnt down. Then came the boaties. Some of them had rowed with Gus as State junior champions, then as seniors and in the Uncle Toby's Series, before coming back for a final spin with him in the Masters. They were followed to the stage by an even younger group Gus had kept his eye on – competitive young guns like his son Deon and mates Steve Meredith, Nathan Day and Jimmy Cleaver, who stayed in a flat at the back of his place in Smith Street every weekend after the club's bunkroom was

**“If the kids I coach and the people I’m involved with can have half as much respect for me as the men and boys who have been involved with Gus do for him, then I’ll be a happy man.”**

removed to make way for the function room. But it was the first person to the microphone who could claim to have known Gus the longest - former Cooloolm president John Ellingsen who first met ‘Denis’ in Grade 5 at St James Christian Brothers College in Spring Hill. Among all the humorous tributes you’d expect at an event honouring one of the funniest men in the surf club, there were also some heartfelt and emotional moments, such as Craig Cleary describing how Gus had been not just a mentor but like a father to him and his crewmates; a constant through all their major life milestones as they grew from boys to men: “I could tell stories all day about Gusso because we’ve had 30 years together, 20 years of actually competing, but I would say, if the kids I coach and the people I’m involved with can have half as much respect for me as the men and boys who have been involved with Gus do for him, then I’ll be a happy man.” And from Matthew Morton who worked alongside Gus during the tough days when a very small group of members tried to keep things going, both on the beach and with the hard slog of fundraising: “We were doing anywhere from 75 to 100 raffles every weekend (with) Gus leading the troops,” he said. “We were doing a patrol in the

morning, raffles at lunchtime and a patrol in the afternoon. For me, being a young bloke, he was the leader that I had to follow. It was a lot of hard work but with a bloke like Gus, you were happy to follow and dig deep with him."

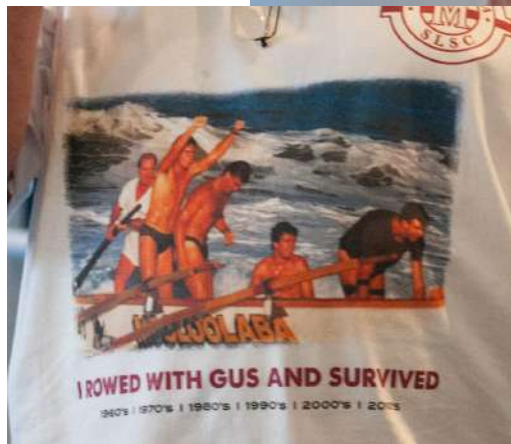
Another of the enduring memories of the day was the humour and the laughs as speakers recounted some of their funniest memories of Gus or dipped into his massive treasury of jokes to pick some for retelling. The stories included the day the regular bingo caller couldn't make it and Charlie (Raines) co-opted Gus, not realising he had spent a good part of the day at the pub. Pandemonium ensued among the very serious bingo players

as Gus got into trouble following the cheat sheet: "On its own ... (pause) number ... (pause) 28". "Clickety Click ... (pause) ...number one", "Two fat ladies ... number 7."

Lester Cichero took the audience back to the days when he and Gus were juniors, short on cash and not allowed at the pub. He told about the night they

snuck up to the turntable to share a bottle of cheapo wine, before joining the seniors in the canvas seats at Jimmy Comino's movie theatre, very much the worse for wear. The next morning Gus, in the top bunk, got the rap for the alcohol Lester had regurgitated from the bottom bunk during the night.

Wayne Vierow recounted the day he and big brother Stumpy talked Gus into playing with their team in the rough and tough commercial Rugby League comp. "It was probably only half an hour into the game and I turned around and Gus was on the ground, out cold. Anyway, he was taken away in an ambulance and he had to have an operation. It turned out he had a fractured cheekbone and concussion. He was in the RBH and Graeme said, 'He's allowed out now, so we'll go and get him and take him down to the Brekky Creek'. Well, I walked into the room and said, 'Shit, that's not Gus is it?' His face is swollen, he's got this thing sticking out of his cheekbone with a cork on the end of it and all the side of his face has dropped.



Anyway, we get him down to the Brekky Creek, get him a pot and he tries to drink it with this cork thing bobbing up and down on the side of his face. but because he's got no feeling, most of the beer comes out of his mouth, down the side of his face and all over himself. I thought to myself, 'We won't be here long. They'll take one look at him and say, 'What's he doing here?' In the end I said to Graeme, 'Let's get him out of here. He's an embarrassment. I've been shouting him beers and he's not even drinking them!' Gary Tanner (Hound) spoke about the many road trips Gus organised, including one where he borrowed a flashy Statesmen de Ville – purple with a cream vinyl roof – from the car yard where he was working at the time, for a trip to Great Kepple Island. But their plans hit an early snag when they were

**"It was probably only half an hour into the game and I turned around and Gus was on the ground, out cold. It turned out he had a fractured cheekbone and concussion."**



**Gus with one of his champion crews from the early '90s**

booked for speeding just outside Gin Gin (107k in a 100k zone) then discovered, when they tried to take off again, that the radiator was dry and the Statesman refused to kick over. The punchline was the very unorthodox but practical advice given by the police officer who'd just booked them. He even very helpfully held his torch up to aid Gus's aim as he tried to fill the radiator.

The audience also got an insight into Gus's competitive instincts as Craig Cleary told about his exploits as an intrepid and gutsy boat sweep, such as the time he took his crew to a Sun 60 event in the lead-up to the State Titles. They were in the lead when all the other boats stopped. "There was a massive set coming but Gus said, 'Nah, we're going', so we charged through the break, went over the first wave, came down and Gus had gone out the back of the boat. We weren't going to

wait to get hit by the second wave so we kept going and left him. Anyway he swam out to back of the break and we picked him up on the way in. He climbed in and he was trying to sweep the boat with a rowing oar, so our re-entry was all over the place, but we ended up getting through to the final and winning the Sun 60 as an A-grade crew."

Then there was Gus's dream of winning the State gold medal with his particularly promising team of juniors. They rowed hard and trained hard, twice a day most days, until three weeks out they looked like genuine contenders. Then the dream fell apart when one of the crew members broke his hand. "Gus had a tear in his eye when he talked to us about it because he genuinely thought we had a shot at it," Craig said. "Anyway he saw a young fellow by the name of Brendan Stagoll. We didn't think Brendan

**"All the other boats had stopped. There was a massive set coming but Gus said, 'Nah, we're going'."**

looked like a rower, but Gus spotted something in him. And he, and we, taught Brendan to row. Gus must have spent hours and hours with him for those three weeks because he didn't want to let us down. Anyway, the fairytale ending was that we went to Marcoola with Brendan and won the State gold medal which happened to be the first (surf boat) State Medal the club had won in 28 years, the one prior being with Joe Western rowing as a junior."

# Unveiled on the day

Another fitting tribute



## President: 'What this Club Should be About'

This is an extract from  
Andrew Cairns' column in the  
club's December newsletter

**On Sunday** I was fortunate and humbled to attend 'This is your Life – Gus Gordon' at the club. Gus, a Life Member, is having a tough time at the moment and through his friends a dedication to Gus took place. Why am I mentioning this? So, what was clearly evident to me and the question that I asked myself at this event was 'why are we clubbies?' 200+ people turned up to support a mate going through a tough time. There was no sense of entitlement, no question of contribution, no factions, no criticism, no egos – it was a group of like-minded people here for a common cause – a great bloke and a living breathing example of what this club should be about.

I think about Gus and the contribution he has made to the club in his 56 years. Little does he know his biggest contribution for me was on that day – it is not the possessions he has but the impression he has left on so many people that will remain in this club for a very long time. It also reinforced that so many of us continue to focus on what we don't have, as opposed to focussing on what we do have – we have a club that is located in arguably the best part of the world, offers more than we can ever give it in return and a place where 500 people should have our back as those 200+ people have Gus Gordon's back. **THANKYOU GUS FOR REMINDING US OF WHY WE ARE HERE!**

Cairnsy

# *The Boy from '64*

*Past Mooloolaba Legends often grew their status by venturing out into the world of Surf Lifesaving beyond our club and beach - into the halls of Queensland State Centre, Australian National Council and even the World Lifesaving scene.*

*Club greats like Arthur Parkyn, Jack Dearlove, Bill Daley, Ron Tallon and Alan Inwood were traditionalists who carved their niche in Australian Lifesaving to legend status by leaving their home club to volunteer their services on the big stage.*

*But the "BOY FROM '64 - Denis Gordon, GUS or GUSSO - stayed behind to walk the shores of Mooloolaba beach and become a shining light of inspiration for the new young lads who wanted to be lifesavers.*

*That shining light became a beacon, a beacon bigger than the Cartwright Lighthouse and shone the path for many a young lad in this club.*

*The pathway was simple - we stayed at home and became Mooloolaba Lifesavers; for a lot of us we joined a boat crew, we swam or paddled, whatever was your thing. We became mates for life; we joined the brotherhood of clubbies who were known far and wide to be inspired by the maroon and white cap.*

*Gus protected us all while we grew in the club, helping to pass down the tradition to the next era or two and was still*

*around to keep the whole thing revolving. He then watched over us to make sure we did the same. So, we then passed down the tradition to the next era or two.*

*He was the catalyst for a strong four decades in the 70s, 80s, 90s and 2000s and watched as those he had mentored brought their own young sons and daughters through the club, with traditions recast and delivered once again. He was always there: at the back of the boat, coaching a crew, at the pub with raffles and laughs, or back at the club, steering patrols and clubhouse duties - and sometimes late night shenanigans. It was as if there was always someone there to watch over the ever-growing group of young lads going through the cycle of becoming men at Mooloolaba.*

*So, this stay-at-home hero, to us, became as big as any of the big-name Mooloolaba legends that had come before him, those who had ventured forth from our bay to the big paddocks and boardroom tables of Australian Surf Lifesaving.*

*The boy from '64, who stayed at home to help grow the crops of weedy young lads, became a part of history and never went away.*

*Denis ... Gus ... Gordon you are a living legend of Mooloolaba Surf Club and we salute you.*

Steven Miller

## **GUS GORDON**

### **56-year Service History**

*Joined the club, 1962*

*Obtained Bronze medallion, May 1963*

*State Title medallist in both R&R and Boat events, 1963/64*

*Instructors certificate, 1964/65*

*Chief Instructor, 1967/68*

*Club Captain, 1980/81, 1981/82*

*Advanced Resuscitation Certificate, 1980/81*

*St Johns First Aid, 1982/83*

*Boat Captain, 1982/83, 83/84, 84/85, 85/86, 1995/96 and 96/97*

*Social Secretary, 1987/88*

*Uncle Toby's Series Boat Challenge through the 1990's*

*Life Membership, 1989*

*Trainer/Sweep of State Gold Medal-winning Junior Boat Crew,  
1990*

*Clubhouse Director, 1989/90*

*Team Manager, 1993/94*

*Sweep of the State Gold-medal-winning Reserve Grade Boat at  
Mackay, 1997*

*Sweep of the first boat crew to win a medal (with the above  
crew) at National Titles, Kurrawa, 1997*

*Boat Crew coach/sweep, 1980's, 90's & 2000, 2010s*

*Supporters Club Committee 1998/99, 1999/00, 2000/01*