

Good morning His Excellency the governor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

My name is Michelle Matthews and my father was Corporal Bruno Adamczyk.

Bruno was born on the 27th of July 1946 in Germany, he was an only child. When he was 3 years old, he moved to Australia with his mother and father. They originally settled in Mildura and then after in Magill South Australia. Bruno attended Rostrevor College but because he wasn't very academically minded he left at the age of 14 and started work at a Printing Business. This is where he met his future wife, my mum, Cecilia.

The day after Bruno turned 17 he joined the army and he was based at Woodside for training. In 1965 he was posted to Malaya with the 4th Battalion. His eldest daughter Jackie was born on the 26th of January 1966 and in September 66 he returned to Australia and married my mum so she and my sister could return to Malaya with him. I was born on the 14th of November 1967 at Terendak Garrison, Malacca, Malaysia and we all returned to Australia in February of 1968.

On Bruno's return he was posted to the newly formed 9th Battalion at Woodside again and we lived at Smithfield in the army married quarters and on the 9th of November 1968, 5 days before my 1st birthday, Bruno left on the HMAS Sydney for his tour of duty in Vietnam. Bruno came back to Australia for R & R in April of 69 and then returned to Vietnam. On the 12th of July 1969 Bruno was tragically killed in action at the age of 22. His body was returned to Australia where he was buried in full military honours on the 26th of July, one day before his 23rd birthday and two days before his 6 year commitment to the army was over.

His parents were devastated and my grandfather withdrew into himself, he was a broken man after the loss of his only child, Bruno. He turned to alcohol as he struggled to comprehend the enormity of his loss. In pictures before dad's death, my grandfather was smiling but not after, he always looked sad, troubled and angry. I remember as a young child, sitting on his lap trying to comfort him as he cried in pain. He suffered from various mental illnesses later, resulting in hospitalisation and medication. I think in some way, my grandfather suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder brought about from his beloved son being taken in Vietnam.

My grandmother was shattered when dad was killed, whenever she spoke of him she would cry and as a young girl it was hard to see. As I got older, we spoke more about dad and she shared stories with me only a mother would know. My grandmother never really recovered from her boy being killed at such a young age, she felt cheated, like she hadn't been a mother for long enough. My grandmother never went to the Anzac Day March when we were part of the Legacy group, our grandfather always took us. She would stay at home and cry in front of the TV. At the time of dad's death, my grandmother consoled mum as she struggled to comprehend what had happened. She comforted mum through the dark days as they waited for dad's body to come home from Vietnam. The care, compassion and strength shown by my grandmother were admirable especially since her own heart was broken by her only child's death.

They went to the cemetery every Sunday to place flowers at dad's grave and the pain and emptiness they felt from their loss was with both my grandparents till the day they died.

Mum was so young, just 22 when the love of her life went to Vietnam and never came back. I think at the time mum was the hardest hit and really struggled to go on. They had their whole lives ahead of them but it was snatched away in an instant. The reality of burying her soldier husband was more than she could bare and she would have seriously considered ending her pain with pills if not for the love for her children, me and Jackie. The toll of her loss continued to eat away at her and she ended up being admitted into Ward 17 at the repat for 6 weeks in November of 69 for treatment relating to Post-Traumatic stress disorder. Whilst hospitalised mum did a lot of crying and soul searching which helped her deal with her grief. My sister and I were eventually taken into custody by dad's parents as mum struggled to cope with daily life without her beloved husband. Even though the years have passed and mum remarried a wonderful man with whom she has a whole new family, the grief of losing her young husband is still raw and even to this day she has a photo of dad next to her bed that she looks at every night reminding her of her lost love. My mother and I have had a fractured relationship over the years due to the loss of dad and us living with our grandparents but we have managed to finally find peace with each other. We speak about dad a lot now and she makes him real for me as to what sort of man he was when away from the army.

I was aged one and my sister, Jackie, aged 3 when dad was killed in Vietnam and although we didn't comprehend what was going on it was a hard time for all the family.

It's not easy to put into words how I have felt growing up without a father, all the times when I needed my dad and he wasn't there. It completely changed our lives when dad was killed in Vietnam but most people don't understand the impact that that has had on us. I remember taunts that other children would direct at me because I didn't have a dad and how upsetting that was because I didn't really understand the whole situation myself. I remember being at primary school and day dreaming that dad would come to the front office and ask for me and tell me that he hadn't really been killed in Vietnam but had been missing in action. Sadly this could never come true, but it was like we never got to acknowledge dad's death, he was taken from us and we never got to say goodbye. All I knew was that mum lived somewhere else with a new family and Jackie and I were now living with our grandparents. Watching my grandma and grandpa struggle to maintain their own friendships with others, as they now had two young children to consider when their friends didn't, was hard because we felt it was us to blame for their isolation from others.

Even though I barely knew my dad he has had such a huge impact on my life and it is with a longing deep in my heart that I could somehow spend a few moments with him. Just to look in his eyes and see a reflection of me in him, to hear his voice, feel his touch and feel his love for me. This longing will be felt for the rest of my life and the part of my heart that belongs to my dad will forever ache.

I am extremely proud of dad and he is my hero but sometimes wish he hadn't gone to Vietnam, that he had just stayed home and been my dad.

In 2013, with much trepidation, I went to Vietnam. It was a journey 44 years in the making and one that I suppose I needed to do. My sister, Jackie, joined me and we went with a contingent of 25 other 9th battalion members. It was an extremely emotional journey, a pilgrimage of sorts, and I faced a few of my fears whilst over there. I also did a great deal of crying and soul searching which helped with the healing process. As we took off on our flight home I looked down on the lights of Ho Chi Minh City and felt a wave of peace wash over me. I now know that Vietnam isn't the dark, scary place I thought it to be, it's still where my father took his last breath but a beautiful country nevertheless and I have finally made peace with it. Would I go back, probably not, I did what I needed to do but am glad I went on that trip. Going with the Vietnam Veterans was the only way for me to face that journey and I feel they got something out of us being there with them also. We all supported each other and it makes me appreciate my 9th Battalion family even more.

Sadly the follow on from Bruno's loss continues down the generations with my children mourning the fact that they haven't got their poppa and have missed out on the opportunity to meet him. I help them understand and try and fill that void by doing talks at their primary school about The Vietnam War and their poppa's contribution. I also help organise services for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day at their school so that the other students have the personal input of someone touched directly by war.

I stand here today in loving memory of my dad and grandparents, and in support of my family, the 9th Battalion family, All Veterans, Currently serving Defence Personnel and their families.

Thankyou