



O'Sullivan Centre

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2017

www.theosullivancentre.org.au



International YCW Gathering in Asia

Special Edition:

Remembering Fr. Hugh O'Sullivan

May 18th 2017 marked 20 years since the passing of Hugh O'Sullivan, our dear friend and colleague. To honour Hugh's life and to commemorate his anniversary, the O'Sullivan Centre invited people who knew and worked with Hugh to put pen to paper and write down their memories and stories of Hugh.

This special edition of the O'Sullivan Centre Newsletter contains a collection of these stories. If you would like to contribute your own reflections or if you have any photos of Hugh, please email them to info@theosullivancentre.org.au

Also included in this edition is information about Hugh O'Sullivan Memorial Dinners held in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney and a recent visit to South Australia by two young Timorese women, that was funded by the O'Sullivan Centre and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide Charitable Trust.

AT THE TIME OF HIS PASSING



YCW National Council 1979

The one thing I would like to share is Hugh's passing.

I had lunch with him on the 17th of May with the intention of coming back on the 18th. When I rang on the 18th I was told that he had been taken to hospital and his family were with him. The next thing was I got the news of his passing.

On that 17th we had come together for lunch, Hugh's sister Denny had cooked up a kangaroo soup. We sat and ate quietly. Hugh's hands struggling to hold the thick handled spoon. Both holding it and eating were painful. We paused often. We would look at each other. He could see in my eyes my sadness and grief. I still see his beautiful open and compassionate eyes.

I pass under O'Sullivan Beach Road bridge every time I go to and from the city. Each time I talk to Hugh or just remember him.

Finally he could eat no more. I had finished mine and Denny took our plates and left us. We sat there for some time talking little and mainly sitting in silence. Finally Hugh, looking deeply into my eyes said: "it just takes time". We knew he was talking about his passing. I looked at him. Open eyed, carrying the pain without a word of complaint or regret, facing death with that same confidence and readiness as he would any other challenge or opportunity for creative action. 'It just takes time'.

He knew Jesus, he sat there at that table that morning and celebrated mass, offering himself in the bread and wine, consenting to love and serve as he had done so generously, humbly and faithfully all his life. We knew a 'communion' there that day after lunch. I had a sense that he knew we wouldn't catch up tomorrow, we held each other gently and I said goodbye. He knew how close the time was. I could sense him saying to Jesus, right what's next?

Hugh showed me how to live and how to die, ever open to the call of Love. I thank God for the "Word" he is in my life.

Tom Gleeson, former Adelaide YCW Chaplain

AS YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 70's



YCW National Gathering 1976

I met Hugh when I visited Adelaide with a group of young workers from Melbourne in the early 70s. We arrived feeling anxious not knowing what to expect, or what others would expect of us!!

Hugh was the first to meet us, casually introducing himself and promptly doing some card tricks. He fancied himself as an amateur magician. He immediately put us at ease, and from there we relaxed and talked openly about life.

Over the years, I got to know Hugh through meetings of Melbourne and Adelaide young workers. He never preached at you and was always approachable, listening to the stories of young people. He often finished with a story of a young worker to make a point. He was close to his mate Frank Hornby (Melbourne YCW Chaplain) who with Hugh had a strong commitment to the principles of social justice.

Hugh talked about his travels throughout Asia and his contact with Aboriginal people in Adelaide. What particularly interested me was how he made contact with Aboriginal people regularly frequenting a local pub in Adelaide where they drank. His motives were not to "convert them" or sign them up to an organisation, but to get to know them and try break down the barriers of racism which still exists today (eg Adelaide v Port Adelaide recent footy match). He wanted to learn himself from talking to them about the discrimination they suffered.

We now call this Assertive Outreach Work! It was Social Justice in Action!!

He opened my mind to what we could do by challenging ourselves to seek justice for all. Years later I worked with Aboriginal people myself in Fitzroy finding homes, and trying to keep people out of jail.

Proudly I got to talk to him a couple of times about this work and his influence on me. He would listen, smile and always shook my hand promising to meet up again. Today I am back working with people who don't have a home because of poor Government policy and greedy corporations who won't pay their tax. I would be great to sit down with him now and talk about these issues. I am sure he would agree with me.

Thanks to Hugh and his good mate Frank Hornby my life changed for the better with work and family.

Paul O'Sullivan, former Melbourne YCW Fulltimer

AS YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 70's

It is testament to the character and impact of Hugh's life that 20 years after his passing many ex-YCW people continue to celebrate his life and work. Hughie was an important person to so many of us in YCW and he touched each of us in a way that changed our lives forever. Today, in 2017, we continue to celebrate Hugh's life and in doing so we celebrate and remember our journey of change and formation because Hugh played such an important role in that.

The YCW has been so important to so many YCW members and workers in shaping our lives, our values, our beliefs and goals in life. Hugh was the embodiment of what the YCW was about. I think of the YCW and I think of Hugh O'Sullivan. The YCW is about the absolute belief in the dignity of each human being, it is about the potential of each person for change, it is about the rights of young workers, it is about striving for social justice and equality. In saying what the YCW was about for me, that sums up who Hugh was.

As ex-YCW people who worked alongside Hugh we all have own stories about him and in telling those stories we recount what Hugh meant for us and for the YCW. I would like to highlight 3 things about Hugh that stand out for me and some stories that go with each of those.

I admired Hughie's ability to engage and listen to people's stories and his ability to engage young people. He had a unique style that was compassionate, comforting and empowering. That ability came home to me when I was living at the YCW house in Fitzroy in 1975. At the time I had just started working fulltime for the YCW and I was doing some work with some local lads in the Fitzroy area. We had a local youth group and I used to meet a number of the young people at a local pin ball shop. Hugh was in Melbourne for a visit and I was telling him about this contact with local young people. Let's go and meet them said Hugh. So off we went to Fitzroy.

The second thing that stood out for me about Hugh was his compassion and support for Aboriginal people. On that same night that we met the Fitzroy young people Hugh asked me about the Aboriginal people in Fitzroy. I told him about the Champion Hotel where many Aboriginal people would gather. Let's go he said and meet them. So we went in and stayed for some time. Again Hugh's ability to engage people was astounding. It seemed to me at that time that as white men in this setting there could be distrust about us and our motives but Hugh exuded compassion which the people responded to.

I learnt more about Hugh's compassion for Aboriginal people when I went to Adelaide to live, and to work with the national YCW. I knew that Hugh would often go and sit with Aboriginal people in King William square at night. He would listen to their stories of struggle and hope.

I work a lot these days with Aboriginal people and agencies and Hugh's lesson of listening and hearing the stories of Aboriginal people taught me a great deal about working with the Aboriginal community. I have done today what he did then i.e. listening and getting to know Aboriginal people and understanding their stories, their struggles and their achievements.

Hugh loved to bring joy to people lives. And nothing more exemplified this than his ability as a magician. He loved to perform his magic tricks at YCW leaders' weekends and national key leaders schools. You could see the joy it brought him in making us wonder and laugh at his tricks.

For me, his 'pièce de resistance' of magic tricks was at a national key leaders school in 1978 at the YCW Lowanna House in Melbourne. At Lowanna there was a big meeting room that had a sliding wall in the middle that went up into the ceiling and could be brought down to divide the main area into two rooms. Hugh was performing his magic tricks one evening and the sliding wall was up and locked in with a bolt at either end. He said he could make the wall go up and down. He undid the bolts the wall just stayed there.

And then he commanded the wall to come down slowly (which it did) and then commanded to go up, which it did. We were all amazed. We then pestered about how he did it. No, he wouldn't tell but the two blokes that he had up in the roof to lift the wall up and down at his command couldn't help themselves laughing and spilled the beans. He would make us laugh with his tricks and he loved to make us laugh and wonder.

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's



Hugh had a strong influence on me in my years as a member of the YCW, and when I was a full-timer between October 1986 and January 1992.

I became a member in 1983 and remember how Hugh would try to build friendship and show a genuine interest in what I was doing in my life. I would respond to this through being rude and try to stir him up for a reaction. Most times Hugh would laugh it off and continue as if I had reflected that I want to continue a conversation. In the first few years when others would refer to him as the National Chaplain, I would refer to him as the "Priest from the National office coming to check out the local branch of Brisbane".

One time when Hugh was visiting Brisbane, he was hit by a car as he was crossing the road. Afterward, I told him "You better watch where you're going in my town Hugh, you know how I feel about you and that may not have been an accident...it may have been a warning". When others who were in the room heard me say this, they were critical of my insensitive comment. Hugh came up to me a few minutes later and said softly "You may think that you have it worked out in Brisbane... but you better watch out if you come to Sydney or Adelaide." Hugh was able to take it and give it back.

I remember an afternoon when I was a fulltimer and Hugh spent time talking with me about what I was doing in my role and what I would do after being a full timer. Hugh mentioned a proposed "Workers Centre" which other leaders and myself could attend for training on how to work with adults instead of youth or to be an adult JOCist leader. This was an example of how Hugh was visionary and did not want to see what appeared me drift away from Lay movement (YCS and YCW) after being involved for a number of years.

Living in Brisbane during the Joh years meant that I had been attracted to bands like Midnight Oil and Redgum. Since Redgum was from Adelaide, it was one of the few things I did not give Hugh shit about.

When I attended the Asia Pacific Regional Conference in Hong Kong in 1989, it was great to see Hugh voted as Regional Chaplain. After the years of being in contact and working with Hugh it was easy to see how others at this conference saw that he was genuine in his interest and commitment to young workers and their struggles.

I miss Hugh and his attitude and his influence has assisted me in my work as a social worker since 1996.

Joe Heffernan, former Brisbane YCW Fulltimer.

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's

I was fortunate to have time with Hugh, as we often shared accommodation when he was visiting Melbourne. He would often surprise me with his enthusiasm and energy.

I was living in a community house in St Kilda with a number of parish workers and the parish priest. Hugh stayed with us for a number of weeks and became quite interested in each of us as you would expect.

It was at a time when Midnight Oil the rock band was at the height of popularity. One of the TV channels was advertising a live simulcast of one of their concerts and Hugh was particularly keen to keep the evening free to see the show. He was especially keen to experience this new simulcast 'stereo sound'. As I recall he purchased some speakers and spent a good deal of time enhancing the sound quality of the TV. This took a bit of experimentation and he was very insistent on getting it right. I think he may have used a number of rugs and cushions to soundproof the room from the street noise. He was very excited and looked forward to the concert with great anticipation.

The parish priest and the other residents showed a passing interest and they may have had other commitments, but in the end I think it was only Hugh and myself who experienced the great sound he created, enhanced of course with a glass or two of red wine.

Hugh was also a great fan of Redgum, a folk band of the time who often sang songs of solidarity and support for the workers. Their signature song was the anti war song "I was only 19". I remember being with Hugh one time at their concert and he made a point of seeking out their lead singer afterwards to congratulate him on their songs in support of the working class.

Another time we were living at different church house. Each night about 10pm as were slowing down for the day, Hugh would be off on his walk. The presbytery was situated on a busy arterial road in Brunswick which is a very cosmopolitan suburb of Melbourne. Hugh would walk the length of the road with all its shops and clubs and bars. The next day he would often have a story or an opinion on what was really going on behind the scenes of this night life. It was all news to the parish priest we were living with, then again we were never sure if some of the stories were Hugh having us on!

Another time I remember waking to find Hugh had gone for a morning walk and it was quite a while before he reappeared. It was another parish again and Hugh had an enthusiasm for getting 'the lie of the land.' He was in Melbourne on his way to Hong Kong where he was about to take up the position of regional chaplain to the Asia Pacific YCW. He was torn about whether it was the right thing for him to do. He spoke about his uncertainty but in the end he thought it was right because the YCW has asked him and it was important for him to make a contribution if he could.

Another memory is of Hugh musing about what title to give the book he had written introducing and explaining the YCW for young workers of the 1990's. I remember being surprised when he told me that he had decided on 'The Clatter of Wooden Clogs'. It of course takes us back to the young Cardijn who first heard the clatter of young workers going to work in the factories of Belgium in the late 1890's. Cardijn never forgot those young workers and Hugh was a priest who never forgot them either.

Denis Sheehan, former Melbourne and National YCW Chaplain

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's

I first met Hugh during the 1980s after I went to work in South Australia in 1981. I met Hugh's sister, Dorothy, that year and often stayed with her family in the years when I was working around the Lock district on the Eyre Peninsula. I also met Hugh's mother and two of his sisters during those years. It was probably around the mid eighties when I actually met Hugh with Jenny Lauritsen and Bernie McEvoy who were working with national YCW in Sydney.

He always struck me as one who had such a penetrating mind, going to the depths of things. He was really able to listen and talk with each person and with such encouragement.

He had a profound sense of justice and worked solidly, often in quiet ways, to help create a world which honoured people with respect and dignity.

A little anecdote: I remember being at the Granville house one night. Hugh visited and began to relate his experience of being at a Suzi Quatro concert the night before. He was quite animated about it, and really appreciated the edgy quality of Suzi's performance, Suzi being someone who broke the barriers on women's participation in rock music. This appealed to Hugh!

A great man and great to see that the O'Sullivan Centre has continued on his good work over the years.

Stancea Vichie, Missionary Sisters of Service.

Driving on country visits with Hugh, an activity initiated by Hugh, was memorising the number plates of cars that passed in front of us. After a few cars we needed to repeat to each other the number plates, of course Hugh always appeared to remember them all but I would never be quite sure as I had forgotten some

Extension work in North Queensland at the end of our days visiting various young workers and church leaders we would go to a bar, have a beer and peanuts and reflect on the conversations had and what future plans could be made to grow the YCW in that town.

Training weekends at Daw Park house in Adelaide with Hugh speaking to us of Laissez Faire capitalism and how this related to our lives as young workers, evening time Hugh lying on the floor sharing jokes/stories with a glass of port.

Thanks for beginning this remembrance John it was an enjoyable time of reconnecting with former YCW people, some I've not had contact with for many years.



Glenda Gleeson, Fulltime Worker in the South East of South Australia and National Team Member

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's

Hugh O'Sullivan went with me to the Golden Breed Factory in Adelaide to help me get my first job. I know I was one of many young people he helped in this way. When I worked for the Australian YCW, Hugh was the National Chaplain. That is where I got to work closely with him and got to know him well. We travelled a lot together and organised different meetings and events. I learnt so much from working with him.

He was great at focusing on the big picture, looking at how to build unity and work together. He always wanted to get on with the work of building the YCW and as he used to say to us "to stop arguing about the oranges at half time".

He visited my home when my sisters and I were in the YCW. He would lie on the floor in the lounge room and talk with us.

He was a very kind and encouraging man. He made the work we did sound and look good. He always looked for goodness in us. He helped me to do my job as National President a lot better than I could ever have done it without him. He became my friend for life and over many years I was lucky to be able to talk to him regularly.

I went to university after I finished working for the YCW. When I was struggling with an essay in Philosophy he agreed to write it for me so I could pass. He was a friend. Twenty years on I still miss him. I miss his warmth.

Bernie McEvoy, Former Adelaide YCW Fulltimer and National President

When Jenny Lauritsen and I moved to Sydney to work with the newly starting YCW in early 1983, our first office was in Polding House, the Archdiocesan Centre, where we had a small space - "the cupboard" as Jenny used to call it.

It was offered to us by the Paulian Association, who greatly assisted us, particularly Mary Gilchrist and Paul Lentern (who is now a YCW collaborator and whose daughter Sarah also became a YCW fulltimer!).

We soon saw that the YCW needed to be based in Sydney's demographic and geographic centre - which was in the Parramatta region. We found a place at 42 Rosehill St, Parramatta, which we rented from Ron Hodgson Motors through an agent.

The house was large but in appalling condition with carpets that were soaked with dog urine and other organic material! The stench was unbelievable!

But the location was ideal - 5 min walk from Parramatta station and just off Parramatta Road.

So when we agreed to take the house, we asked the agent for a guarantee that we could stay for longer than the 6 month term of the lease. The real estate agent also kindly gave us a few cans of paint to improve its appearance.

Anyway, overcoming our sense of disgust and with much hard work, we moved in.

The front rooms of the house were turned into offices for Sydney YCW and National YCW. The rear of the house was turned into bedrooms for myself, Greg Lonergan (Sefton YCW, later Sydney YCW president) and Damian Hogan (Arncliffe YCW).

I well remember that the first few nights we slept with the back doors wide open against the smell, which was still overpowering despite all the work we had done. (One night I even woke up to find a guy walking by through the backyard, which was also a little disconcerting!)

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's



Hugh and Stef with International YCW Team members, 1991

Hugh also often used to stay at Rosehill St, usually in the shed out the back. It was a bit rough but I guess the smell was better!

The house was great and we had some memorable YCW parties there and even a hangi, a Fijian method of cooking on hot stones, with Freddie Fesaitu from the Fiji YCW.

By the time the 6 months of the lease were up, we had succeeded in making the place somewhat presentable. The inevitable happened - Ron Hodgson, who was a former Bathurst 500 driver and car racing team owner, now wanted the house back again!

So despite our vociferous complaints to the agent, we were obliged to move - but we had nowhere to go. Plus we were reluctant to rent another house as our office on a 6 month lease to face the same risk of having to move again.

It was Hugh who came up with the idea of buying a property. In fact, we at first offered to buy Rosehill St from Ron Hodgson - we offered \$49,000! - possibly he wanted \$50,000!

So we started looking around the Parramatta - Granville area where better houses than Ron Hodgson's were going for around \$55-60,000.

But how were we going to find the money? We approached the NAB Granville where the manager agreed that we could borrow the money provided we got guarantors - and at an interest rate of 14 or 14.5%, which was the going rate at the time for a commercial loan (home loans were around 12-13%).

We balked at the 14% and approached the Knights of the Southern Cross and others - one of their members did offer us a loan but at around 12%. He thought he was doing us a favour and was quite put out when I told him we wouldn't pay 12%!

While we wondered how to find the money, Hugh had located another house that he thought was pretty close to ideal.

It was 25 Union St, Granville and was being sold by Neil Jenman Real Estate. The vendor wanted around \$60,000. We offered \$58,000 and Neil convinced the vendor to accept \$58,500.

The house was divided then into 2 flats front and back. Hugh considered it to be an overcapitalised house as the owner had done the place up nicely so that it was a very good place considering the price.

AS NATIONAL YCW CHAPLAIN IN THE 80's

Anyway, the house was perfect for our needs with the possibility to turn the front part of it into accommodation with the back part suitable for offices for National and Sydney YCWs.

But where to get the money?

Around that time, Jenny and I had gone to visit Cardinal Edward Clancy to tell him of our plans, including buying a house in the Parramatta area.

About a week later we were stunned to receive an unsolicited cheque in the mail from his personal account for \$7000 being a donation for the purchase of the house!

The National YCW also had some money available. I am not sure how much - but it was not a lot, maybe around \$3-4,000. We still needed another \$50,000 or so.

We asked for an interest free loan of \$1,000 or more for one year at a time on a loan to be managed by our solicitor, Bill English, also from the Knights of the Southern Cross, as trustee for the mortgagees, i.e. the people lending the money.

Between us we organised a number of loans from current and former YCWs and some of our friends and family but Hugh raised most of the money.

We also approached YCW Holdings in Melbourne who granted somewhere around \$15,000.

Thanks largely to Hugh, we managed to raise enough in loans - and all of it interest free. With interest rates at 14% or more, this was a saving of \$6-7,000 over a year.

To pay back the capital of the loan, we did as we had done at Rosehill St, i.e. Sydney YCW and National YCW paid "rent" into the YCW House account and three of us rented a couple of rooms where we lived. These combined sources raised total of around \$10,000, which enabled us to pay off the house in 5-6 years, paying back a number of lenders each year.

That's how we got the house. And that purchase also became a model for the purchase of a house for other YCW movements. The experience also inspired a group of us to go ahead and set up our own housing venture but that's another story.

Buying the house and setting it up was a great experience - it really helped to consolidate the presence of the YCW in Sydney.

So perhaps the best way to finish this story of Union St is with an anecdote about Hugh that I have never told anyone before but which gives an insight into who he was.

One night I had just gone to bed when I remembered something I needed to do. So I got up and went around to the National Office where the light was on but the door closed. I opened the door to find Hugh sitting on the floor leaning on the far wall saying mass alone. His eyes and face were shining and although he was looking straight at me he seemed not to see me. It was as if he was in a trance.

I was stunned to see him like that and I quickly closed the door. I was surprised not because he was saying mass alone - he did that virtually every day when he did not have another mass to celebrate - but it was clear he was experiencing or seeing something or someone special.

I don't know what he was experiencing in that moment but to me it just confirmed what I already believed, i.e. that he was literally a saint of the YCW.

It's another reason why for me Union St will always be Hughie's house.

Stefan Gigacz Former International Treasurer, member of the Asia Pacific Team and National Secretary of the AYCW.

MEMORIAL DINNERS



Former YCW members and friends of Hugh gathered in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney to celebrate him and remember his life.

In Melbourne (pictured), John Bonnice spoke about celebrating Hugh's life and in doing so remembering the important role that he had on our journey of change and formation.

There were two gatherings in Adelaide where Glenda Gleeson remembered the fun of travelling with Hugh in many parts of Australia. She said the dinner "was an enjoyable time of reconnecting with former YCW people".

REMINDER: Please send any photos or stories about what Hugh meant to you, what you admired or learnt from him, to: info@theosullivancentre.org.au

Two Young Women from Timor-Leste Visit South Australia



Discussion with young mothers at SA Health's western suburbs school completion program

In May 2017, two young women from Timor-Leste, Leonisia Guterres Belo (Monik) and Safira Esperanca da Cruz Carvalho were selected by the O'Sullivan Centre to participate in a two-week visit to South Australia where they talked about the lives of young people in Timor-Leste to students in the History, Geography, Society and Culture and Religion Classes at St. Aloysius College.

Monik and Safira also met people involved in projects related to the current priorities of Juventude ba Dezenvolvimentu Nasional (JDN), including young mothers who are completing their secondary education.

They saw where university students live and study and discussed what they are hoping to achieve through JDN's projects.

The O'Sullivan Centre received funding by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide Charitable Trust in order to offer this opportunity.

In 2018, two young women and two men from Timor-Leste will be selected by the O'Sullivan Centre to visit South Australia to follow a similar program.

AND FINALLY

Subscription Invitation

I wish to contribute by becoming/renewing as a Member of the O'Sullivan Center:

- Member \$100/year
- Life Member \$2000
- Monthly/month. Donations of \$20 or more
contributor per month include membership

I would like to make a donation of \$..... to the general work of the O'Sullivan Center

I would like to make a donation of \$..... specifically for the work of the O'Sullivan Center in Timor-Leste

Donations can be made by:

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- Mail to: O'Sullivan Centre, P.O. Box 3046, Ivanhoe North, Victoria 3079



*O'Sullivan Centre for
Action, Analysis and
Training*

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this special edition of the O'Sullivan Centre Newsletter.

Thanks also to all those who are supporting the O'Sullivan Centre's projects and activities.

John Bonnice, Chairperson

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