

Tales to Share about Graeme Yates

Marilyn Yates

The request for me to write a short article about Graeme that includes some tales about some of his achievements that are not widely known, has given me the opportunity to sincerely thank the Australian Acoustical Society for inviting me to accept the Fellowship awarded to Graeme. Unfortunately our four daughters were all overseas at the time but Graeme's sisters, Pam and Jill were pleased to have the opportunity to gain an insight into Graeme's professional life and share in the recognition of his contribution to the Acoustical Society. The thoughtful way we were included made it a memorable evening. Thank you.

As you know, Graeme had a long association with the Acoustical Society, so those of you who knew him well will have your own memories of him. I suspect that some of the following are qualities you would also attribute to Graeme. In my eyes he was a man dedicated to science but one with very broad interests that extended way beyond science. He had an inquiring mind and because of his many experiences was a creative problem solver, a person with an incredible number of skills from which many others benefited. Also he strongly believed in social justice, and could put the needs of others, particularly those of his family, before his own. He passionately believed in the value of professional associations and of the need for rolling up your sleeves to get the job done.

Graeme was the second of five children and was fortunate to gain an academic scholarship to Perth Modern School, a fact that contributed to him completing his secondary education. At seventeen Graeme went to work at Plaimar's in West Perth and began studying a night school course in Industrial Chemistry.



Marilyn Yates receiving the certificate for Fellowship awarded posthumously to her husband Graham Yates from Terry McMinn at the WA Division Christmas Dinner, 2001

He had been with them for about eight months and I might add we had just become 'girlfriend and boyfriend' when he was whisked away to work on the development of food flavours in their Sydney laboratory. History demonstrates that the flavour he was assigned to develop for a client didn't knock Coke and Pepsi out of the market. He was twenty-one when he commenced a physics degree at UWA, just after we married.

When it came to Graeme valuing 'doing it yourself' his father was a wonderful role model. He was always designing and building a vast range of products made from wood and metal, repairing radios, televisions and motor cars and remodeling the family home. Graeme developed an attitude that all these things happened in or around the back shed. Our courtship involved me helping him strip and spray paint his motor scooter and help him de-coke my Ford Anglia and backyard mechanics drove him to build his own cathode-ray oscilloscope. My memory of the following undertaking when we were about twenty years old, was that armed with the CRO on my knee I was instructed in the mysteries of obtaining information to determine the effect of the addition of twin carburettors to the performance to his brand new Vauxhall Viva. Using a quiet road in Waneroo for our test track, Graeme became convinced that there was a design fault with the engine head causing a problem with the circulation of gases. He informed Vauxhall Australia that there was a problem and when he received a reply to his letter telling him that it was nonsense he wrote to the parent company. His car was recalled for modifications and from memory the reason given was that their tests had demonstrated a problem the internal moulding of what was then an 'innovative' aluminium head.

There was never a dull moment being with Graeme and there are many stories I could relay but another which stands out was when our backyard bore ceased working properly Graeme decided he needed to know what was happening sixty plus feet below ground surface. With me protesting that if he pulled apart a relatively inexpensive camera belonging to one of our daughter's he would never put it back together again, he designed a remote control firing mechanism and lowered the modified 'camera' and was able to determine the level of the water and what was happening to the clap valve. Did he put the camera back together again? Of course not, he had new challenges far more exciting than assembling a camera.

Whether it was building his own colour analyser for developing colour photographs, laying the last brick in the garage he designed and built just hours before stepping on the plane to take up a research post in England, developing a computer controlled system long before any commercial products were available for our budding violinist daughters to learn pitch and timing when practising, Graeme was creating a new challenge. He has provided our family with endless stories to pass on to future generations about a man who could combine a theoretical grasp of knowledge with incredible technical skills to always come up with imaginative and enterprising solutions to everyday problems. The recognition paid by the international scientific community since he died will also be added to our stories of a much loved and respected man.