



## **Obituary: Evan Whitton 5 March 1928 - 16 July 2018**

My father Evan Whitton died at the age of 90 last month and this is my first chance to say goodbye to him and honour his memory. *LEAD Action News* was privileged to have had Evan as a Guest Editor and Editorial / Defamation / Legal / Media / Advocacy Advisor for nearly three decades so this publication is a fitting place for one more obituary.

Many of his journalist colleagues have written obituaries (see below) and thanked Evan for mentoring them, and because Evan was a history and English literature teacher before becoming a journalist and author, his ex-students have also published a whole newsletter full of accolades for Evan as a teacher and a good man.

My experience of Evan as my father began when I was 9 years old, 53 years ago without notice, well, none that I can recall. A year before, my mother Noela had taken on the role of both mother and father, but late in 1965, Evan moved in with us (I have three older siblings) and I can recall thinking “my home has become a classroom – this guy is a born teacher but nothing like a father”.

Picture this, early-on in the new living arrangements: four children seated around a map of Vietnam on the wall, being instructed on troop movements and famous battle locations – Evan standing, used a long ruler to point to the map to describe Australia’s involvement in the war - in chronological order, as was his wont. We each had to put up our hand to ask a question!

By the time I was 10, I realized Evan was a walking dictionary so I always asked him for word definitions while reading or listening to the radio or TV current affairs - this was on for approximately three hours a day! He referred me to the actual dictionary over-and-over before I took up the habit and stopped asking him.

Evan worked two or three jobs in order to earn enough to cover the cost of living for his own three children and the four of us so the most memorable times I spent with him in the early years were doing the shopping, at the laundromat, watching rugby matches he reported on and, because I seemed to have inherited my parents’ musical abilities, going to Gilbert and Sullivan musicals together.



As a teenager, when my friends were listening to the Rolling Stones and heavy rock, I was learning the German lyrics of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony choral movement – Beethoven was Evan's favourite composer. It was certainly my favourite piece of music – played at high volume – thousands of times. When I joined the Beethoven Society Choir and sang it in the Sydney Opera House years later, Evan and Noela dutifully attended.



This millennium, I felt privileged to have spent practically every Saturday with Evan and Noela (pictured at left), enjoying Evan's cooking and their recollections of childhood and of having fallen in love as teenagers, married other people, but reunited in their thirties, and then lived a happy life together, with Evan being the full-time carer for my mother, following a stroke three years ago. Evan took a few decades, but he had transformed from a teacher to become my loving father, all the while creating a model of a loving partnership.

On his deathbed, Evan said he had loved my mother for 75 years and I thanked him for being my loving father for 53 years. He told me he was glad to have loved me for 53 years and that my best feature was that I am "interested in everything."

My wish now is that I can carry on with my vision of creating a lead-safe world by 2041 – in loving memory of my father.

Elizabeth O'Brien, Co-Founder, The LEAD Group Inc, and Author of *Didgeridoo – a children's Dictionary of Aboriginal Words in English*, [book web-published at [www.netk.net.au/whittonhome.asp](http://www.netk.net.au/whittonhome.asp) ]



Here's a sample of *Downlands Newsletter #75 Tribute to Evan Whitton*, put together by Evan's former student Jack Duggan (JD):

**If you would like to read some of the many “Obituaries” written in Evan’s honor, *highlight and copy* the ‘https.....’etc shown below from the newspaper listed, then ‘*paste*’ the details into the search bar of your internet. The details should then be easy to locate from there.**

*Sydney Morning Herald: (by Rachel Clun)*

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/walkley-award-winning-journalist-evan-whitton-dies-aged-90-20180717-p4zrvz.html>

*Australian Financial Review: (by Andrew Clark)*

<https://www.afr.com/business/media-and-marketing/publishing/evan-whitton-the-outstanding-reporter-of-his-time-20180718-h12udg>

*The Herald [Newcastle, NSW]: (by Tony Stephens)*

<https://www.theherald.com.au/comment/your-say/5536643/obituary-evan-whitton-1928-2018/>

*The Toowoomba Chronicle : (by Kerry White)*

<https://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/rugby-pioneers-leave-lasting-mark/3484060/>

*The Muswellbrook Chronicle: (by Tony Stephens as above)*

<https://www.muswellbrookchronicle.com.au/story/5545183/obituary-evan-whitton-1928-2018/>

*The Sydney Morning Herald: (by Tony Stephens – above)*

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/journalist-won-five-walkley-awards-for-ground-breaking-journalism-20180717-p4zryn.htm>

*The Courier Mail: (by Kerry White)*

<https://www.pressreader.com/australia/the-courier-mail/20180728/282252371327786>

I couldn't get the link for Kerry's contribution to work. So here is a copy of what he wrote:



**OBITUARY: Evan Whitton 5 March 1928 – 16 July 2018 – A GREAT  
OBSERVER OF LIFE AND POLITICS**

[As it appeared in The Courier Mail on 28/7/18]

IN the early 1960s Evan Whitton was teaching English at a private school in country Queensland; before the end of the decade he had won a national journalism award for a report on living as a pensioner in Melbourne.

The award was a Walkley, representing esteemed recognition in the media profession, and he went on to win four more as well as a being named Journalist of the Year and inducted into the Media Hall of Fame. He died on 16 July 2018, aged 90.

Whitton was born in Muswellbrook, NSW, on 5 March 1928, but raised in Murgon in south-east Queensland before going away to the Catholic boarding school, Downlands College, Toowoomba. He went on to teaching college and later returned to his alma mater to teach English....

He had been writing rugby on a casual basis for the local *The Chronicle* newspaper where he began journalism full-time, soon moving on to a much lauded career writing (and editing at times) for *Truth* in Melbourne, the *Sunday Australian*, *The National Times* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. He later became a Reader in Journalism at University of Queensland and a columnist for an online legal journal, *Justinian*.

Early on he attracted attention, even a rebuke from Ronald Ryan's executioner in 1967. "... in 38 years I have never been told my work has been jerky," he responded to Whitton's first-hand report on the hanging (Ryan was the last person hanged in Australia).

His journalist of the year award was for "courage and innovation" in reporting the NSW Wran Royal Commission. Later he covered the Queensland Fitzgerald inquiry, "the biggest and most important story I ever worked on; the experience of a career."

He has written eight books ranging from *The Hillbilly Dictator: Australia's Police State* (ABC, 1989), which came out of the Fitzgerald Inquiry, to a work as a 'legal historian', *Our Corrupt Legal System: Why Everyone Is a Victim (Except Rich Criminals)* (Bookpal 2010).

His substantial writings are available online at <http://netk.net.au/WhittonHome.asp> including a story about his ANZAC father who it seems left horse-tending duties at Alexandria to stow away to get to Gallipoli. He was wounded and had his legs amputated, but lived for 50 more years.

Evan Whitton is survived by his second wife, Noela, their seven children from previous marriages, seven grandchildren and four great grandchildren.



By Kerry White (a student of Evan Whitton in 1961)

*Pressreader: (by Chilla Johnson)*

<https://www.pressreader.com/australia/the-chronicle8992/20180803/283583811202301>

*Toowoomba Chronicle: (by Kerry White)*

<https://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/rugby-pioneers-leave-lasting-mark/3484060/>

***The Saturday Paper: (by Richard Ackland – The Gadfly)***

In his regular “Diary” section on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018, Richard wrote: “The death of Journalist Evan Whitton has been widely reported along with his investigatory work on justice and injustice. He was a big presence in the field of reporting and an inspiration to many cubs, including Gadfly. One of the aspects of his career less noted in the encomiums was his campaign to replace the entire adversarial system of litigation with the inquisitorial (Napoleonic – Germanic) system of justice. In other words courts would turn into miniroyal commissions of inquiry, pressing for the truth with minimal interference from the rules of evidence. Judges would be specifically schooled and not necessarily drawn from the ranks of long-winded barristers. They would sit on the bench alongside lay jurors. No doubt these ideas started percolating during the long, dry days he sat as areporter in the Toowoomba courthouse. He tirelessly peddled his inquisitorial approach in the law journal *Justinian* and elsewhere. It was so shocking that the rank and file of the legal profession became incandescent with his attack on the perfection of the ‘Rolls Royce’ justice system. He also gave some of the human rights lawyers a swipe when he wrote: “The adversary system is solid for human rights; its firm position is that criminals have a human right not to be convicted, and their victims have a human right to like it or to lump it.” It’s not often that the death of a journalist leaves an empty space in human affairs. Whitton’s death creates such a void.

**EDITORIALS Evan Whitton chased the truth - *The Australian* July 18, 2018**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/editorials>

Evan Whitton represented the essence of newspaper reporting. He wore out his shoe leather going to the scene, knocking on doors, meeting players, asking questions and uncovering facts others wanted concealed. Whitton’s work was honoured with five Walkley awards, the Graham Perkin Journalist of the Year and an inaugural induction into the Media Hall of Fame. His work exposed police, business and political corruption as well as the folly of war. A truth-teller who broke through barriers erected by bureaucrats and the justice system, Whitton dragged facts into the sunlight. This is a style and quality of reporting under threat in our digital age. He died on Monday, aged 90, and is survived by his wife, Noela.



Whitton's life was quite a story.

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**I don't think Sir Robert Menzies or Gough Whitlam had more 'Obituaries' published in as many newspapers as Arg ! 😊 JD**

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Here are some more obituaries I found, published in New Zealand newspapers:

**Journalist exposed Australia's involvement in Vietnam War**

**Manawatu Standard, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018**

<https://www.pressreader.com/similar/281977493409412>

**Waikato Times, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018**

<https://www.pressreader.com/similar/281977493409412>

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