

Vale Jim and Margaret Dowell.

By Ann Orel, Secretary Greater Western U3A.

Within the last two years we have lost two much loved and valued members of our U3A region: Jim and Margaret Dowell.

Greater Western U3A owes a great deal to Jim and Margaret who both worked tirelessly for the region. Jim is responsible for our region's name change. Initially known as the Parramatta Region he suggested the name *Greater Western*; the name by which we have been known ever since. Jim became a committee member in 1999 and was for many years our Membership Secretary and later on Web Editor and then President.

Margaret was Course Coordinator for 5 years; Secretary for 3 and also President.

Greater Western U3A was the first region to run computer classes for seniors and both Jim and Margaret taught these classes for ten years. In 2002 Jim won the Education and Commerce Award for his voluntary U3A teaching of computers. The same year Margaret received a Certificate of Appreciation for her voluntary work for The Friends of the Riverside Theatre.

In 1998 Jim and Margaret were heavily involved in the publication of Sydney U3A's first book *Old enough to know better* which was published to commemorate *International Year of Older People*. It was particularly exciting when the first printing sold out and a second run of 500 copies was needed. Jim and Margaret hosted a lavish barbeque for all involved to celebrate the publication.

They were also members of the editorial committee of the next Sydney U3A production, *Many a Good Tune*. Margaret did her proof-reading by reading the pieces backwards. She found it easier to spot errors that way! Jim had a great way of putting words together. Some of his work is included in *Many a Good Tune* and *Old enough to know better*.

For a while Jim was a member of Pam Evan's *My Word* writing group. We received great pleasure from his pieces of writing which invariably concluded with a twist or the unexpected. In one of them he recalled his first meeting with his cousin Margaret when they were primary school age. He didn't like her! He later married Margaret. Funny how attitudes can change! As a member of Pam's group Jim performed with gusto at the Mid Year Madness entertainment in *Toad of Toad Hall* and *The Good Ship Galactica*.

Both of them were always supportive of members, course leaders and most willing to advise or make suggestions to assist in-coming committee members adjust to their new roles.

In June Keith's words, "When I became Course Coordinator Margaret was my mentor, always willing to pass on her knowledge, help and suggestions."

And in Lorna Clayton's words,

"Jim and Margaret were great people to work with. They could make hard work seem like fun. If I had something on my mind I could (and did) knock on their door and over a cup of tea a down-to-earth discussion would follow. Mind you, their down-to-earth discussions could be punctuated with sly chuckles. They were a joy to be with.

As a group leader, I soon discovered that any group with Jim as a member went well. He was a good listener. He was frank. He was thoughtful. He was funny. He was able to make a correction sound almost like a compliment.

With his north east English accent and his slow quiet delivery, he would have us hanging on every word. I once heard him describe himself to a group as 'a slim man in a fat man's body'. He did have a substantial build which he carried with aplomb. In my mind's eye I can still see him dressed as an imposing Reverend Samuel Marsden for one of Greater Western's celebrations.

Margaret had a ready, eye-watering laugh. Jim had more of a chuckle. They managed to mix nonsense with common sense in productive proportions.

We raised many a glass together and I raise my glass to them now."

We missed them when they left Sydney to settle on the Central Coast but they continued to attend Greater Western's special functions while they were able to do so.

Many of us regret that neither of them received Honorary Life Membership of U3A because they certainly deserved it. Perhaps a posthumous award should be considered.

Special thanks go to Lorna Clayton, June Lynn and June Keith for sharing their recollections of Jim and Margaret which have been included in this eulogy.