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**MADE OF THE WRITE STUFF**

The black and white of the written word is an indelible witness to our lives. Once published and shared it becomes permanent: the public record, immutable and authoritative.

And so the authors of these words matter, and late this year one of the finest ended a distinguished career with this newspaper.

In the world of expressive journalism, Danny Lannen is a prince. He is without peer in any publication in this country.

Covering the inaugural disability awards in Geelong last year, Danny wrote about Ingrid Hindell. Living with a disability, Ingrid needed to speak through her husband when accepting her award. Danny's prose spoke of her strength and humility capturing the essence of his subject:

Thus with succinct measures of gracious thanks, firm embrace and strong statement, Mrs Hindell pointed eloquently to a determined personal charter, perception of the strength in others and 64 years of insight. ... Ingrid Hindell's words glowed with a sense of strength and high purpose."

And so did Danny's .

Later in the piece he described other award winners including Thomas Banks who was "committed to revealing the imperfect world of being a gay person with a disability" . In the use of that single word "imperfect" he described with exquisite understatement the travails of a man who must surely have lived his life in eternal struggle.

I have had the privilege of watching Danny work at close quarters. In the process I have seen him handle the most delicate of subjects with confidence-inspiring care.

Persons bereaved, people damaged, and those who had been horribly wronged would all open up to Danny, knowing that the sacredness of their personal stories would be honoured by this gentle and sensitive scribe.

When a volunteer in my office, Anthony Sheedy, suddenly died leaving a hole in all our lives, there was only one man to turn to in order to have Anthony's story told.

Anthony had grown up in an orphanage and had led a deeply difficult life. Yet in the end he found joy in his family and enchanted those of us who were colleagues. Danny got it ... immediately and beautifully.

“Anthony Sheedy walked into the lives of his nephews and nieces in an old brown suit. He bore a tattered beard and a limp, only a few teeth and often tangled his terms and expressions but he was what he was, and in time he became part of their hearts.

... [he] lived for more than six rough and bitter decades as a Forgotten Australian , shaped by a childhood spent in institutional care. He died ... having spent his closing years enriched by the long-lost embrace of family members.”

By enabling the reader to make an emotional connection with his subject he brought to life his story, such as his description of Chris Pianto’s joy on hearing the news that the Federal Government had initiated a Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Care:

“Chris Pianto’s long-wounded heart poured tears of elation for 30 minutes after confirmation of a royal commission into institutional handling of child abuse. The man who shot himself in the leg 25 years ago to draw attention to his abuse felt measures of disbelief alongside rapturous relief.”

For 12 years, Danny and his writing have been an institution in Geelong . His stories have been different and engaging. His style has been a delight. The gems he left us have sparkled from the page and made the purchase of this paper a treat laced with surprise.

Nothing challenged Danny’s skills more than when he was asked to cover the death of his colleague, Addy photographer Phillip Stubbs. His work did not let his friend down. His description of Phillip’s talent was sublime and in return his epitaph spoke to his own talents:

“The evidence captivated Geelong Advertiser readers for 33 years, demonstrating a fusion of technical mastery, laser-fine timing and composition and symmetry which so importantly compelled the eye to look again.”

How often has a phrase of Danny’s been so perfectly constructed that we have been compelled to read it again and again?

“In the field he saw patterns where others did not and had ability to use natural light and shade to capture expressive nuance where others could not.”

Danny’s insight took us to places that others missed and his expressive nuance made us aware of why that place mattered in a way that others did not.

“As it was for much of his career, he was the only one to do it.”

And so it was with Danny Lannen and almost every piece that he wrote.

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