

Alan William Ralph

For those who don't me, my name is Phillip Walsh.

Alan has been a close friend of mine since 1965, when together with Alan Miles, Mike Prefol, Bob Pender and other young shipping men we would play up to all hours of the morning.

In the 60's it was fashionable to drink port after meals, and we would not order by the glass but by the bottle, no point 05 in those days.

Having arrived from the UK in January 65, I was still a Learner in Australian ways. After the first time we finished a bottle of port Alan introduced me to the concept of "A cleansing ale". He kept this tradition up until the end.

Alan went to school at the Melbourne Grammar School and he still has many old school friends who he kept in touch with, and are represented here today.

He has always worked, either directly on indirectly through exporters and port authorities.

He began work with Bunge as an office boy. He has said that he spent many happy hours at Lindrums playing pool during his employment as office boy. He moved on to their Shipping Department and then Noels Bennett which became American Shipping & Trading and then changed name to ShipTraco. Margaret has said she has had calls from around Australia saying how Alan was a great friend.

Shiptraco, were the agents for Hamburg Sud or Columbus Lines as they were to be known in Australia. Columbus opened their own offices in Australia and Alan was the Assistant Manager to Brian Meadows and also operations manager with them for many years. You could also say he was their main marketeer, as he had a very strong circle of friends in the importing and exporting field.

In the days prior to the introduction of the container vessel, when agents were known as Ship's Husbands, vessels being female and the agent looked after them, we had great times on the conventional waterfront.

Strikes were common place but Alan always put his company first. An example was when the dockmen were on strike and his vessel supposedly could not sail. Alan in his good old way would not put up

with this and let go the mooring ropes own. For his efforts the Unions banned him from the waterfront for some time.

He was very proud of the Hamburg Sud vessels, being run with true German efficiency. He was not so happy when they sold the Cap Frio to a Greek concern and then later chartered the vessel to fill a gap in the trade of kangaroo meat, heavily disguised as beef to the USA. At that time I was employed by James Patrick and they were the owner's agent for the vessel. So here was a chance for Alan and I to work together. Alan was not too happy about the condition of the vessel, but the Captain, whose name ended in popoulous, we believe meant son of a priest (far from the truth) had great plans for his 10 days in port. Parties were arranged and all good young agents had a telephone book full of names of young females who would love a party on a ship. It was a remarkable party that continued over a few days. The vessel returned some months later for another cargo, but with a very subdued master, he had his wife on board. The vessel later caught fire in the Caribbean, Alan said, "I new something like that would happen".

When Lew Hillier of the WWF, allegedly shot another union official in Victoria Dock, Alan dryly said he didn't know that the toilets at Victoria Dock were so large. I asked him what he meant; he replied that 60 wharfies in their statements to the police all said they saw nothing as they were having a toilet break.

Until the early 70's a favourite drinking hole was opposite the Melbourne Harbour Trust building, known by names such as Hepatitis House or the Blood and Bucket. In later years The Great Western was a favourite place for his cleansing ale. Margaret has said that whenever she saw a pub she asked him if he new it, he always seemed to say yes, and that he may have had a beer or two there.

He was a great lover of red. In the 70's my brother worked at Crittendens, a respected wine seller, and it was decided that we would get a group together to bottle some red and white wine. My brother arranged the purchase of kegs of wine, our own labels were printed and we purchased a very expensive corking machine. The labels were duly printed under the name of The Red Nose Group. A few years ago Alan produced a bottle which we tried, he assured me that he had sipped a bottle and it was good, this bottle was heavy with sediment and to call it vinegar was being polite.

It was during his years at Columbus Lines that he was in contact with Heine Bros, who exported meat, amongst other things, to the USA and he spoke frequently to the receptionist at Heine's. For those who do not know, this was Margaret, who he married in 1976.

Alan and Margaret bought a house in Templestowe Lower in 1977 and have remained there. Alan was a great user of Public Transport. Margaret has told me he has timetables for every train, tram and bus service in Victoria and frequently neighbours would ask him how to get from one place to another. He knew the bus drivers on his route home very well.

There are not many people for whom a bus driver will divert from his route and drop the person off at his house. Alan loved people and they loved him.

Alan was a long time member of the MCG and in the winter lived for his football team. I was lucky to be invited on an annual basis to the St Kilda Melbourne match. To me the first was memorable, as well as a training session for future games. The invitation was to the game and lunch. I was very excited about this as I had never been in the members. I duly turned up at 11:45 and we retired to the long room with four others, after two rounds were nearly completed and my stomach was churning, it was 1:45, Alan said "Time to get the pies". In future years I made sure I had a good solid breakfast.

He caringly looked after his fellow Melbourne supporters, who were in an age group greater than his. At the end of each match giving them instructions on which train or tram to catch to the next away game, and more importantly, which watering hole to meet in before the game.

In the summer it was cricket, if you saw two or three people watching what was the Sheffield Shield on the news, one of them would be Alan.

After many years at Columbus he decided to finish his services with them.

I would like to read out parts of a letter sent to Alan, from Alan Miles who was the Operational Manager at a container Terminal in Buenos Aires at that time.

After Columbus Lines, Alan then worked for a few years with the Melbourne Port Authority, where he was much appreciated.

When he retired from active work he began his second career. I think he must have been knighted for this career move twice, as Margaret has told me he has been called Sir Lunchalot and Sir Outalot.

These activities included Tripe Club, Old & Bold, Master Mariners, the bimonthly Curry Bash, Former AWB Luncheon and the ISO, of which he was the Secretary for many years.

Alan introduced me to The Old & Bold, where I was greeted at my first meeting with “It’s young Walsh”.

He also introduced me to the Bi Monthly Curry Bash, which I highly recommend to any retired shipping fellows. Once again, with the lunch over and the Senior Citizens all off to the public transport system, using their cheap daily fares, Alan would suggest that “Cleansing ale” to all who had time to participate

I couldn’t accept his invitation to the Tripe Club!

He also was involved in his local Neighbour Watch, having been the secretary and later the Area Manager.

A friend of mine said the other day, “Alan was the most respected person in the Shipping industry”. You must bear in mind that this refers to Importers, Exporters, Shipping Companies, Port Authorities, Pilots, Government bodies and Transport Companies.

Alan had a great library of knowledge and history in his head; he never seemed to forget any gem of information he had heard.

We have often chatted over a bottle of red and said it all should be written down. Time sadly has run out.

Alan William Ralph, a true, loyal, honest and trusted friend, who will be deeply missed, but not forgotten, by all those who were privileged to know this unassuming man.

He would not be compromised, even it if meant him resigning from a long held positions. He believed that truth and honesty was the mainstay of all relationships.

Margaret, his sister Christine, cousins and other family members must be proud to have such a respected man as their own.

I am sure we will have a few cleansing ales for Alan.