

Weary, the Tireless Fighter

By Emma Sandford

'I am the man who can never say no.'
(Weary Dunlop, cited in Ebury 2009, p. 371)

They called him 'Weary' by name (Ebury 1995, p. 51), but he could never be called weary by nature. In Sir Edward Dunlop lived a spirit of determination, benevolence and compassion, a spirit which drove him to greatness in times of hopelessness, and to action in times of apathy (Dunlop 1986, p. 364).

Community service is ultimately about sacrifice, the giving up of a part of yourself in order to be a part of something bigger. In the life of Weary Dunlop we see sacrifice personified. Whether in theatres of war, medicine or community organisations, Weary Dunlop gave freely of himself to others, sometimes at great personal cost.

In Japanese prisoner-of-war (POW) camps in Java, Burma and Thailand he protested about the mistreatment of prisoners (Ebury 2009, p. 172), lobbied for adequate food and medicine (Ebury 2009, p. 234, 267), pioneered creative surgical techniques (Ebury 2009, p. 243; Dunlop 1986, p. 240), and stood up for and in front of those who were easy targets (Ebury 2009, p. 160). He suffered through malaria, dysentery, oedema, ulcers and the effects of beatings (Ebury 2009, p. 224), and yet rarely flinched in his personal call to service. On one occasion, having staved off execution with a savage beating instead, he returned to the camp's makeshift operating room, bloodied and bruised but determined to continue (Dunlop 1986, pp. 262–263). What compels a man to live when life becomes a bitter test of endurance? Perhaps in Weary Dunlop's life we see community service become a means to 'rise above self' and suffering to find happiness in service to others (Dunlop, cited in Ebury 2009, p. 379).

There is little doubt that the three 'dragging' years (Dunlop 1986, p. 364) Weary Dunlop spent in POW camps spurred him to make up for lost time when he returned to Australia, drawing him into an ever widening circle of causes, commitments and charities. Before returning to civilian life, he pledged that he would make the care and welfare of his fellow prisoners-of-war 'a life-long mission' (Dunlop 1986, p. 381), continuing to tend to their medical needs — often for free — and fighting for government compensation and support (Ebury 1995, p. 548–554).

There was also the battle for which his weapon was a scalpel. Weary Dunlop returned to the operating theatre with gusto, starting with gastro-oesophageal procedures and progressing to surgical interventions to treat cancer (Ebury 1995, p. 541, 580). Ever the dedicated doctor, he sat by patients' bedsides while they slept (Ebury 2009, p. 354). Yet his medical life extended beyond the scope of surgery to encompass involvement in community organisations like the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria and the Victorian Foundation on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, as well as countless others. Size or significance did not matter; his contribution

was the same (Ebury 1995, p. 616–617). In later years, he reached out to Asia (Ebury 1995, p. 571–576), his community spirit extending across barriers to embrace those in whose midst he had suffered and those who had caused him to suffer.

If the measure of a man be in his contribution, then there is no scale by which to adequately measure Weary Dunlop. He was a man who gave of himself to everyone and everything, a man for whom sacrifice and service were synonymous: magnanimous gifts from a modest man.

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