

# Reflections on the life of Bridget Robinson

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19/06/1958 - 11/02/2022

48 Tasman, Somers,  
February 2022

# A celebration of life

A celebration of Bridget's life was held at her home at 48 Tasman Road, Somers, in the afternoon on Friday 18th February, 2002. In attendance were some 250 of her friends. A transcript of the proceedings follows below.

## Welcoming - Anna Sandiford

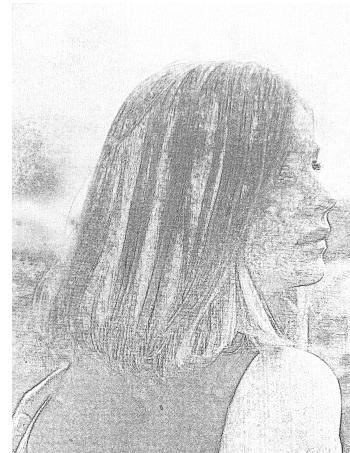
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I'd like to welcome everyone here to Tasman Road, to Bridget's forever home. This is a place she loves.

Mum spent over half her life on the Mornington Peninsula. It is, on this land, that she felt most at home.

In the last week, we experienced an extraordinary phenomenon. Animals and birds came by the garden, ones that we haven't seen in many years. There was a koala, a pair of tawny frogmouths, and some king parrots. To us, this is meaningful. It is a song from the past.

When I relayed this to my dear friend (insert he country name here) Karri, she explained that the land that understood. This is a special reminder that this land has been occupied for over 50,000 years and we pay special acknowledgement to the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation.



I'm going to handover to mike now. Who is going to talk about his Bridget, our Bridget. Who he, for the last 45 years of his life, has described as the most beautiful woman in the world.

## Welcoming - Mike Sandiford

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We are joined here today by the simple fact that our lives have been touched by Bridget, each and every one of us.

We are joined here at Somers, the place Bridget called home.

So fortunate are we - the people and place of her love

In joining to remember and celebrate her life, our families – the Robinsons and the Sandifords, thank you for being part of our dear Bridget's life.

You too were part of the Bridget-verse – a very special place.

Bridget has touched our lives, each in different, unique and treasured ways, whether it be as mother, Bibi, sibling, friend, colleague, or, for me, as life partner.

As a family we are desperately sad to no longer have Bridget's physical presence in our life, with all its calm, measured, assuring purpose.

But at the same time we are grateful for the wonderful seeds she planted in our memory gardens, throughout our lives.

We hold those seeds so dear

We will be celebrating her life here today with personal anecdotes and testimonials. In doing so, we hope each of you too might uncover some long forgotten treasured memories of Bridget, the seeds of which you can take with you into the future.

By clearing away some of the weeds of time, you bring life back to them, so you too can nurture them in your own memory garden.

In the sadness of this past week, I have been greatly comforted by many dear friends who have travelled with Bridget and I over the 45 years of our life together.

The stories we have recalled have uncovered many long lost gems – memory seeds I had long forgotten such as the coconut seed as you can read about in the order of service.

Should I be so brave as to claim that the bag of memory seeds Bridget carried to wherever it is she has gone is as fine a bag as any person could aspire?

Each of us will have our own idea of what might happen at death. Bridget did not much care for such metaphysics, much preferring to concentrate her energies on the more concrete reality of the here and now. Specifically, she was focussed on how her actions could enhance the well-being of all around her.

I think we were all touched by that commitment.

Could there be a common thread to the way Bridget has touched our lives so, and in so doing cultivated such an extraordinary legacy of memories – an essence of Bridget?

To help unravel such questions, we will hear insights and reminiscences concerned the founding platforms of her life, from children, siblings, friends, professional colleagues, and life partner (that would be me). These were the bedrock of her existence. And it is these that gave her the calm, assured, purpose in her life.

In celebrating her life, we will hear stories from the heart from some of those who have been most closely associated with Bridget, all dearly loved by her.

Before we do so I wish to outline a basic chronology of her life – a chronology that combines place with people. It is chronology of constant love and support.

Bridget was born in Malvern Hills in Worcestershire in the town of Great Witley, in the evening of 19 June 1958, second child of Moira and Phil Robinson. Melbourne time, that was about 7am 20th June.

Phil had met Moira at Cambridge reading English, and following university he took up a job at the family carpet firm Bondworth, a job he would say he was singularly unsuited.

After an initial trip to Australia on carpet business in 1960, Moira and Phil emigrated to Mornington in 1964, purchasing for the second time their home at 28 Bath Street, Mornington and established the renowned Robinsons bookshop in Frankston that so many of you will know.

Bridget's schooling was at Toorak College, where she met dear friends that she keeps to this day. She started at University of Melbourne in 1977, where she studied Psychology, and more importantly perhaps, our life together started together (in a house in Michael Street).

A great sadness in our lives occurred in 1980 when her dearly loved brother Andy died in an accident in England.

Bridget and I married in 1983 after living together for almost seven years in student houses in Fitzroy and Carlton.

Dan was born in 1986, and we spent the first year of his life in Cambridge, UK, before moving to Adelaide, where Erin in 1989 and Anna in 1991 were born.

We moved back from Adelaide to the Mornington Peninsula in 2000, for several reasons, one of which was to reconnect more closely with the extended family.

Bridget is immensely proud of her children, and mothering is essential to her being. But friends and work were also extremely important. Except for a short break in what I teasingly called her mid-wife crisis, when she went back to study in the mid 2000's, she worked throughout her adult life, in a huge variety of roles, mainly in her professional capacity as a clinical psych.

As Anna has already alluded, the Mornington Peninsula is where Bridget felt most at home. She spent over half her life here. In the 22 years since we returned, we have benefited from a wonderful sense of community, and we are both deeply thankful for that,

with many friends we love, including some of Bridget's oldest friends dating back to her earliest school days, and many new ones.

People and place are key ingredients in all our lives, setting the foundations for everything else. Both Bridget and I were fortunate to travel widely, and in my work I have seen many extraordinary wonderful places. But our hearts are here in Somers, Bunurong country. If you have not been here before, I urge you take a walk to the beach down the track just across the road. A special track we walked most days. If you have more time, then one day take a walk along the beach eastwards. It is 5 kms to Sandy Point which you can only get to by foot or sail. It's such a magical place full of power and mystery, equal to any of the places I have seen on this planet. We loved our walks and time there.

Bridget died here at home, with all her family, last Friday morning just before 7.00 am. Anna has alluded to the appearance of many animals last week, animals that we used to see quite often, such as koala and little bush birds, that we see much more rarely now. A few minutes after her dying a gentle misty rain briefly settled on Somers. It was as if the sky was crying along with us.

There was a special magic in those moments.

Bridget regarded her life as full of luck. She could not believe her luck in having the parents she had, her children the friends and the work. I loved her to bits, and she knew it. She wrote *I love you, I love that you love me. How lucky am I..*

She lived all of her 23,247 days on this planet, not a day without being loved completely, she would say.

And that number, 23,247, do you note the last three digits, they are so special – I read it as *twenty-four seven*.

Just so Bridget.

What is it that made Bridget the special person she is?

As I have been thinking about this, a distinct image has formed in my mind, a kind of celestial map of Bridget's universe.

You are all part of it.

At the centre of this map is the axis comprising her children, and now their partners and children, about which Bridget's life revolved.

Her siblings and parents are there as other planets, with their moons, providing her orbital stability, though it has to be said that Andy's distant orbit has a notable wobble.

And her sky, it was illuminated by the dazzling array of friendships and colleagues and people who have sought her professional counsel.

You are constellations that bought the sparkle into her life.

## Mothering - Dan Sandiford

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In my last months of high school, they did this whole time capsule thing, reading out answers to questions that had been asked we first started. One of the questions must have been along the lines of what do you like doing most. My answer was "cooking at home with mum". My school chums found this mightily funny. No one else had nominated mummy hangs as the pinnacle of contentment. But she was damn good company.



Many of the activities we pursued growing up had this dual aspect - whether it was the after school bolt to Pt Leo, to catch the sniff of a swell at high tide, or runs up the Monash for netball training with the radio tuned to Richard Mercer's love song dedications. Likewise, she would drive all over the peninsula to pick up Erin from parties she didn't know Erin was at. Our family migrations were mainly dictated by Mike's work. Mike's way is to do things with a great intensity for a while, then draw a line and move on. One year he cooked beans and rice. Another year potato pizza. Every night. Bibi provided Erin, Anna and I with the bedrock - the continuity. She added new recipes to her repertoire, but the classics would always return. She built and sustained her friendships, did the hard work of making community. Wherever we lived, she found lifelong friends. When people latched on to her, they didn't let go. And why would you?

Many people have told us this past week that even though they might have met Mum only a few times, they felt like she got them and instantly felt comfortable with her. They've remarked on her energy, intelligence and radiant positivity, which you could see in her twinkly blue eyes. While others noticed that she had this special way she had of listening, like a clever little bird. Some have reflected that she seemed like an ideal mother, wise, patient, steady.

Erin tells me that what underlies these qualities is it that Bibi had an exceptionally uncomplicated and un-conflicted relationship with mothering. She had a natural way of inhabiting of the role of caregiver, the role of provider, listener, boundary setter. This requires a deep intuition of people's emotional needs. She was someone who was comfortable living most of their life externally, whose focus was the people around her, the physical space she inhabited, her attention to conversation, her presence in a hug.

And 'mothering' is not just being a biological mother, she mothered her friends, her siblings, Mike, Mitra, her clients. Perhaps this kind of community-wide mothering is better-articulated in other cultures. I've been thinking of the fencing analogy; at one level a stock fence is just posts and wires. But the tension is taken up by the end assembly. Now an end assembly is nothing more than post and wires, but it keeps the rest of the fence standing when it's tested. Without those, the whole bloody thing falls over, and soon enough the bank is turfing you out. Erin goes on, Mum's ability to tailor her mothering to suit an individual's need was tuned so perfectly that it was almost imperceptible, and you weren't even necessarily aware you were being mothered/cared for because of it. She held everyone with a different level of grip.

Her parents, Moira and Phil, no doubt have a big hand to play here. Those who knew Phil will remember his spellbinding knack with people, for immediately putting folk at ease. Which is why their home at Mornington became a kind of *Durrell-esque* haven for so many visitors.

With Heath, mum's care-giving energy was channelled in an intense focus and presence, something fundamentally irreplaceable. We would watch Heath become his most relaxed, his most expressive - around Bibi. He would sit with her for hours chatting away about his view of the life, the universe and transport infrastructure.

One of the most remarkable about mum is that even during her illness - which was always going to cut short her life, and frequently laid her up in a variety of symptoms - she remained such a rock for a wide range of people. Mum gave without judgement or expectation; her advice and counsel never harboured the ghosts of her own regrets, ambitions or hangups. Importantly, she had a way of gently dissolving binary simplistic thinking, particularly blame-seeking. She supported us to start a commune, then was ever-available to talk through the realities and tensions of running a commune. Likewise with the ups and downs in relationships, jobs, parenting. She had an ability to communicate using just as many words as is needed – not talk to hear herself talk, not talk to show off.

Of course, Erin, Anna and I, don't mind dominating a conversation. When we were all together one of favourite games was to try to stir mum up a bit. To try to find a flaw in the old girl. Often it would start with Erin doing an impersonation of someone - and if she took the bait, showed a hint of a smile, we would all pile on. "I told you, she has mean streak a mile wide" we would howl. She loved these bits of theatre, being the centre of attention, even in jest. She leaves behind a long trail of nicknames, reflecting our playful adoration: *bid, bibi, Mrs B, bridge, bridge over troubled daughters, ridgy didge, rigdgy didge the travelling fridge, bj, mo fo, mama bear, mumbles, the radioactive woman*. There has been a lot of laughter over the years of her illness. Erin and Anna, mum was so proud of you both - forging ahead, kicking goals in your relationships and careers.

While this is obviously mum's show today, it's not all one way traffic. At mum's 60th birthday I remember she made a pointed mention of her girlfriends and the mutual support that they provided one-another, through conversation, walks and drop-everything backup. I want to thank everyone for the support you have provided her in ways big or small. One of things that was very important to her as cancer-haver, was to have normalcy. If you ever felt uneasy about dumping your emotional baggage on mum - don't. We all did it, and it gave her the role she wanted, not a victim, patient, but empowered friend, therapist, mother.

Watching mum die has been a raw, sad and beautiful experience. She drifted in and out of consciousness, and various dreamworlds. It seemed to me like she was simultaneously inhabiting all phases of life - young, uninhibited, pixielike; old, wise, decrepit; contented and sorrowful. The conscious and unconscious realms mixing freely. And when she got the wobbles, saw strange things in the void that were too strange and too thingy, Mike was there, hand on the tiller, to guide the good ship Bibi. Like a shaman, or Hermes - man as spiritual guide and caregiver. And in these role-reversals, us caring for her, there felt a profound spiritual and ritualistic element to her departure; as if we all understood suddenly that this is how it is meant to happen, this is how we are to behave.

She was able to joke with us about the wonder and absurdity of the experience. She told us how various characters were visiting her - like Daniel from Inverloch, and this other fellow - of no fixed address or purpose. Incidentally Jung saw these archetypal manifestations - the psychopomps, or guides towards the afterlife - as possessing the dual role of traversing the conscious and unconscious parts of our psyche.

Now this motley crew of Angels were no seraphs; seemingly they were as real, as colorful, probably as flawed as we are. No doubt the relationship was reciprocal - as they assisted her to loosen her tethers to the physical word - I'm sure she was working with them, reassuring them about their career choices, relationships and their fundamental worth.

I've been listening to a song a this last week, called, *Someone great*, by LCD soundsystem. It's basically a lovesong to his therapist. It starts - I wish that we could talk about it, but there that's the problem". It ends with this repeated lyric, *when someone great is gone*, something like an mantra or an incantation. It doesn't offer analysis or an attempt closure, just the lament,

*When someone great is gone...*

I think this is apt for Bridget.

## Siblings - Jean and Doug Robinson

In a way, all of us are lucky to have known Bid at all as she might well have stayed in England where she and Andy were born (not like Jean and I, we say patriotically), or Mum and Dad might not have stayed in Australia. But luckily Phil and Moira did decide to commit to living in Australia and went on to form many close friendships in those early years, particularly the Morleys, Johnstons, Hawkins and of course our relatives the Gibsons. In turn, the children of their friends from these early years became our friends and we have all been lucky enough that many of them have continued as life-long friendships.

For Bid, some of her childhood friends, especially Sarah, Nicky and Sue, have remained amongst her closest friends and still holiday together on a regular basis. After more than fifty years, their friendship has well and truly stood the test of time.

For all of us Robinson kids growing up, a mainstay of our lives was being part of this big mob of kids from these various families, spending huge amounts of time at the beach but also on regular holidays at places like Walkerville and Tabberaberra. This love of the bush was a real feature of our family growing up and continued for ever after for all of us.

In truth, though, when we were growing up in our school years, we were the 'littlies' and Bid and Andy were the 'biggies' and so we never hung out that much with Bid at that stage of our life. However, she was the sensible biggie. And Andy was the not-so-sensible, naughty biggie but a lot of fun if you were one of us. So from quite an early age, we had a good sense of how some people take their responsibilities seriously and others do not.

A few of our favourite examples of Bid's early sense of commitment, responsibility and care for others were firstly, her determination to acquiring and training an afghan hound for competing in dog shows. She worked and saved up for months to buy the appalling afghan hound Princess Zaida and put huge effort into training her for dog shows, culminating in Princess Zaida bursting out of the show-wing at Sunbury show-grounds, with the family in hot pursuit. This ended that particular campaign.

Secondly, just after I finished year 12 and Bid and Mike had just become a couple, they generously let me join their 3 week hiking trip through Tasmania, and put up with a whingeing younger brother complaining about leeches, heavy back-packs and Deb as a potato substitute as backdrop for this early romantic adventure. But what a fantastic trip that was, Mike, as we sat with Bid last week recalling those adventures.

Finally, Jean and I were in awe of how studious Bid was and her meticulously labelled study notes and charts she had created for various subjects which I subsequently used to pass various subjects at year 12 and University, still managing to get a response from her

last week when we recalled that thanks to her notes I got 80 in French whereas she only got 79.

By comparison, our memory of Andy's academic approach was that he barely bothered to go to school at all in his final year. What Andy did do so well, however, was to be a magnet for people and Bath St, in our later school years was always full of his group of friends, including a young Mike, along with the intriguing adult friends of our older foster brothers. But soon after we all finished school, and while Jean and I were in our late teens, Andy died in an accident in England, making Bid the oldest sibling. His loss was obviously a huge loss for our whole family but none more so than for Bid, who was now the only big kid for us little ones to follow but also without her closest sibling.

This support role for us is a role she provided magnificently and with ease over the last four decades, especially as we moved into the stages of long-term relationships and child-rearing. Wearing her psychologist's hat, Bid always thought that one of the reasons Moira and Phil created such a wonderful refuge at Bath St was because they were so in tune as a couple that they had energy and love to spare and share.

Bid, with Mike's enduring love, continued that tradition, always providing a calm and supportive refuge where one could shelter from the storms of life. I will so miss that special role of guardian angel and mother hen that she provided to us and to so many others.

### Friending - Sarah Hawkins

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There was something about her that seemed deeply - almost fundamentally - comfortable insiders herself. The way I think a person is when they have been loved by their parents (oh William, Elizabeth Strout) and in Bridget's case by the love of parents, Michael, her children and her many many friends.

I am going to relay the thoughts of a number of these friends and my own experiences of a friendship with Bridget.



From Nicky Sandiford '*So good at friends, had time, inclusive, caring/sharing. Checking in for us. How do we go. Sister, family, everything. Yell to the world - we all loved her. The essence of her - for everybody.'*

From Pam Clark '*Duration and constancy of her friendships over her lifetime. It is no mean feat to mother, work and stay in those relationships well. Women's friendship is restorative for all.'*

From Grace Walsh '*She was a ray of sunshine in my life. I am so grateful I was her friend.'*

From Cheryl Gurney - '*Bridget was good at making friends and keeping them. If you hadn't seen her for awhile she'd phone saying 'hello my dear - just thought I'd like to hear your voice. And of course she was a great listener and provided wise and practical advice if requested. Always positive, you always felt better for having shared a short or long conversation with Bridget. And great at sharing stories, family, news, books, recipes and a cup of tea or glass of wine.'*

From Marg Tilleard- '*Bid made everyone feel they were her friend. Make you feel valued, took an interest in you - talk about anything . Good at connecting with people at all levels. People told her stuff. Valued friendship, wise council.'*

From Jenni Sebire - '*To me Bridget was wise, compassionate, warm and such good fun. She was easy to talk to, one of those people who, you felt, listened to and valued what you had to say. I think she bought out the best in everyone. I think we all recognised her courage and her ever positive attitude, her vitality and love of life.'*

From Sue Morley- '*Bid and I met when we were toddlers. Her parents and ours became close friends soon after they migrated from England. We grew up together and had many common interests - camping, bushwalking, birdwatching, books music, fun, family times. When we caught up it was if we had seen each other yesterday. There is a comfort with a good friend where you don't have to worry about silences in the conversation, where you know each other well enough and you have a long shared history, you don't need to explain the background to a story you are sharing; there is also a lovely quiet connection and comfort with each other. Bid was a great cook and one of the things she did well was creating times with friends over good food and great conversation - good hearty and heartfelt conversations.'*

For me, Brigdet was "a tonic for the soul" to quote Hannah Kent talking about friendship. We are soul mates who shared 60 years, shared kindergarten, school, a share house, holidays, activities, but more profoundly important we shared. We shared the most important of life's paths - knowledge and love for respective partners, achievements, sorrows, disappointments, loss, gains (of the birth of children and then grandchildren) as well as sharing recipes, books etc etc. Bridget guided, cared, counselled , nattered and gave love. Her head and her heart was given in equal measure.

I had the opportunity to tell her what she meant to me - and I am thankful for that privilege. Now I want to thank her for all she gave all of us.

### Working - Carla Lechner

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For those of you who do not know me, my name is Carla. It is my absolute privilege to speak here today. I apologise in advance for speaking longer than intended but so many colleagues wanted to add their voice and to pay their respects to a psychologist and woman who made a difference. My remit is to speak about Bridget's professional life, and I would hope that by the end of my absurdly short summary of her career, you will understand that Bridget touched the lives of not just family and friends but also of many, many colleagues and countless clients who will remember the kind *lady they once saw who helped change their life for the better.*



I knew Bridget just shy of forty years and what a gift it is to share such a long friendship. We met in 1983 when we were both admitted to the Clinical Psychology Masters Degree at Melbourne University.

We were immediately drawn to one another as we were clearly the only sane and psychologically sound people studying there. This became abundantly clear when we studied the Psychopathology unit and began diagnosing our fellow students with great confidence – Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Bi Polar Mood Disorder, Never Say Anything in Class Disorder and some cohorts who were just plain weird.

We laughed a lot, especially when carrying out tasks allocated by our teacher Dr. Ian Campbell. He was a very strict adherent of RET and following the ethos of Albert Ellis, we had to engage in "homework", such as shame- attacking tasks that we would later utilize with our clients,. I recall that we once took a tram ride through Carlton – I was wearing my clothes very visibly inside out and Bridget was calling out the name of the tram stops in a very loud voice – Grattan Street, Tin Alley, Elgin Street etc. People thought we were lunatics escaped from the asylum; little did they know we were aspiring to be the professionals treating them!

We did manage to graduate, and Bridget went on to enjoy an amazingly diverse life as a psychologist. Her special interest was always mothers, babies, child development and attachment. At uni she studied under Dr. Nancy McMurray and her long-term placement was at Queen Victoria Hospital in the child/adolescent ward under the supervision of Dr. Trish Miak.

After graduating, Bridget and Mike moved to the UK (where she didn't work) but upon their return to Adelaide, Bridget was employed at the Hillcrest Hospital and later at the Noarlunga Community Mental Health Centre where she provided 1:1 therapy services, as well as setting up group programs and providing community education. During her time at Hillcrest she worked with Donald Sandford who stated,

*my clearest recollections of Bridget are of her considerable intelligence, her enormous professional competence and her confident grasp of the endless inter professional politics of a hospital working environment ... her intellectual curiosity, incisiveness and ready wit were sorely missed when she left ... she was undoubtedly one of the best psychologists I have had the pleasure of working with.*

Don's early insights of her unique qualities have been shared time and again by subsequent colleagues. Bridget also worked at SIDS; her colleague and friend Sandy Gaunt remembered Bridget as *always getting on with the job with compassion and kindness* in a job characterized by immense grief. She stated that Bridget was immensely sensitive to her client's grief and quietly resigned when she was pregnant with Anna in the knowledge that her pregnancy would be too confronting for her clientele.

Bridget and I kept in touch whilst she lived interstate – she started having babies, moved to part-time work but never lost interest in her craft. She and I would often discuss the difficulties of balancing home and work life, (and I assure you that we NEVER used psychological strategies for child management .... well maybe sometimes, well ... maybe often!!!). We would talk about new psych trends (that mostly seemed to be variations of the old), different therapeutic strategies and interventions, interesting clients, and any dilemmas we had encountered or mistakes we had made. We were acutely aware that we were not perfect clinicians, well not yet anyway! We would also discuss the frustration of more "annoying clients" who baulked at all suggested interventions.

I recall that Bridget once told me about a client with OCD. She stated that he each time came into their meeting/appointment, he wouldn't stop with his obsessions and compulsions – he kept telling her *and then I washed my hands three times, touched the door handle so had to wash them again, clicked the light switch five times, went out the door back in the door as he paced around the room muttering thoughts of dread*, until she shouted, *SHUT UP, just shut up*. Realising that she had momentarily lost her cool, and quick as a whip, she looked at her rather stunned client and explained *now, that's what you have to say to yourself, nice and loud, it's called thought stopping*. I've come to realise it's not such a bad strategy when you get caught in your own over-thinking!

Upon returning to live in Victoria, Bridget worked at Cerberus where she was referred to as *marm* and on occasions saluted. She tells me that she would salute back but inwardly she would get the giggles. She found it hard working in such a male dominated and psychologically immature environment but I'm sure she provided a lot of care and wisdom to some lost souls, helping young recruits who didn't really fit the mould to exit the program with grace. Her friend and colleague at Cerberus, Jackie Watkins, stated "Bridget was happy to be out of her comfort zone", with fond memories of her participating in the *high ropes course* (apparently, she froze at the top and had to be talked down by another psychologist) and *weapons training* (can you imagine Bridget with a gun or bayonet in her hands?) But what Bridget didn't have in defence skills she had abundantly in people

skills – she was described as “asking penetrating questions whilst warmly holding and embracing the relationship” and this would be for new recruits and commanding officers alike – Bridget didn’t care about rank!!!

As we all know Bridget segued for a while and followed her dream of midwifery, studying and working part-time and running a home (no mean feat) until she qualified and worked as a midwife for a brief time. Realising that she actually preferred working with the mind rather than the body, she returned to psych, then found her dream job working with mothers and babies at the O’Connell Family Centre. Bridget always believed that the mother/child or primary caregiver/child relationship was of paramount importance hence her work focussed on strengthening that bond.

Dr. Matt Roberts, consultant peri-natal Psychiatrist at OFC, offered the following insights regarding Bridget’s work (and I’m pretty much quoting him in full such was his insight to her work and general being – especially bearing in mind that she was diagnosed with cancer in her early days at OFC). He stated

*Over the best part of a decade, Bridget was the clinical psychologist on the Mental Health Team at the Mercy Health O’Connell Family Centre, formerly the Grey Sisters, a residential early parenting centre for families with children aged 0-4, in Canterbury. Bridget clearly loved this work and it loved her back. She brought a wonderful energy in the door with her, driving innovative clinical changes such as the mental health screening of all admitted parents, cutting-edge Circle of Security group sessions for parents and babies, regular staff supervision and support sessions, and introducing clinical teaching of psychology students. Bridget’s students clearly loved learning from her, as she loved teaching them.*

*But her first duty was to the families of all walks of life who came to the centre desperate for help. Bridget’s curiosity, compassion and dedication meant that each week, those families struggling the most with the stresses of early family life were listened to carefully and supported through clinical understanding, painstaking discharge plans and handovers to community staff.*

*Bridget was my eyes and ears on the unit, sitting me down upon arrival each week for a rundown of who was in and what was up, including her gentle wry observations about staff wellbeing and interactions on the unit, always conveyed with her characteristic warmth, humour, and sympathy.*

*A proud mum and grandmother who had been grand-maternal to us all at O’Connell well before her first grandchild was born, Bridget was the heart and soul of our Mental Health Team; I among so many others from her OFC years will carry her caring thoughtful voice with me always. Thanks Bridget: to steal from your beloved Circle Of Security, you made OFC bigger, stronger, wiser and kind.*

But that is not the end of her career for Bridget had yet another string to her bow. For many years she also worked at the Melbourne School of Business as a “coach, facilitator and

debriefer” for executives and others in management who undoubtedly had psychological issues blocking their potential. She teamed up again with Jackie Watkins of Cerberus days. Jackie believes that Bridget helped hundreds of clients with her *dry wit, independent thought, serious intelligence and by being a thoroughly decent person who didn't tolerate fools* Bridget remained with MSB until late last year.

Ultimately, as Bridget and I grew older and wiser, we realised that the theoretical framework didn’t matter as much as the therapeutic relationship; it was developing an empathetic connection, really listening to her clients, and cutting to the crux of the matter in a kind and compassionate manner that Bridget excelled at. She reluctantly retired at the end of 2019 (except for the odd MBS gig) so that she could focus on her health and spend time with family and friends (and garden, not sure how much of that happened). Now Mike, sorry, this is where I will wander off the reservation and talk about Bridget more personally! Whenever Bridget and I met up, we would talk about work (a lot), current affairs, books we were reading or had read, holidays we’d been on or wanted to go on, but invariably the discussion would turn to family – who was doing what, the trials and tribulations of their relationships, our own respective relationships, who was happy and who was not. We quickly realised that we were living proof of the edict *you're only as happy as your least happy child*. This meant that we spent many years in the *low to moderate happy range* as we navigated the teenage and early adult years, as invariably, one or other child was in the *not to happy range*. I always appreciated Bridget’s ability to listen, offer sage advice or to make me laugh as our children tumbled from one crisis to another.

But whilst low-moderate range happiness may have dominated those fraught years of teenage-hood, I know that in recent years, Bridget’s happiness gauge was in the high – very high range despite her diagnosis and ongoing fight against her illness. She was happy about Dan, Mitty and their gorgeous family unit, proud of Dan’s academic achievements, the couple’s thoughtful approach to life and she was enthralled by her grandchildren Heath and Rosa. She was thrilled with Erin’s pregnancy and convinced that she and Dave will make lovely and loving parents; she knew how much being a mum means to Erin. She was also over the moon about Anna’s recent marriage to Richie and that Anna was following her dream of life as an “attorney” in NYC. She was proud of her children as young people with positive goals and values, care for one another and decent moral compass. Having a happy family was paramount to Bridget (and of course Mike) and they achieved that goal through love, nurturance and never failing support.

And Mike, well they were each other’s north-south-east and west – a relationship perhaps of *yin and yang* but built on deep mutual respect and immense love for one another. Mike, through your dogged research and discovery of an effective treatment for Bridget, you gave us all another ten years of cherished time with her – we cannot thank you enough for that.

Bridget, I was so, so lucky to have you as my friend and confidante. Even when we last met on the Sunday before you died, we could still laugh at life's twists and turns and were fortunate to share how deeply we cared for each other.

Vale dear lady, I will, we will, miss you enormously. May you rest in peace.

### Loving - Mike Sandiford

Bridget's childhood home Mosgiel at 28 Bath Street, Mornington was a magical place for many people, me included.

Aged 17, and hanging out with Andy after in the summer after we had finished school, I was immediately captivated on my first visit.

It was full of people of all sorts, all welcome, from lost souls to the shining intellects. There were the dogs, sometimes penguins.

What made the place so fascinating was the welcome. Everyone was welcomed without judgement or expectation by all the Robinsons. And I think this is really key to understanding Bridget, who was a Robinson through and through.

Though I knew Bridget earlier, I was immediately captivated by her. That in itself produced challenges.

Amongst the Robinson menagerie was a bitzer dog named Moz, whose two missions in life seemed to be to defend Bridget's virtue, and to excel at chair cricket. Entering Bath Street was always by the back door, never the front, and to unlock the garden gate one had to stick their hand through a small triangular gap in a solid 6-foot-high wooden garden fence gate. Moz had a sixth sense for any would be suitor, so opening the gate always risked attack by his manic jaws.

Still the prize was far too great, not to risk hand amputation. At first I thought that being able to sail very, very fast was enough for a young suitor to win the heart of such a brilliant young lady. How sadly naïve was I. But I persisted, even soliciting the aid of Moira who became my main ally.

Bridget was just 15 at the time, and it was not until she went to Uni, some three years later, when I was living in a share house with Andy in Michael Street, Fitzroy, that I finally succeeded in attracting her affection. She was 18, and I 20. Apart from a brief early period of ambivalence on her part – referenced in the coconut memory seed in the order of service – we have been truly in love ever since.

I was bedazzled by her from the very beginning and remain so today, even if now only in memory.

The Bridget that I remember from those early years was like a morning star, though she would claim she was hobbled by doubt and uncertainty at that stage of life.

It wasn't really until she became mother that she was able to shed those doubts. It is then began to find the purpose that allowed the quiet calm, and assuredness that I think we all recognise now.

Throughout her life, but particularly in those early mothering years in her thirties and forties, she was magic to me. I don't think words can describe it, really. I was blessed and I knew it.

It is impossible to understand Bridget completely without reference to the illness that has stalked her these last 10 years.

In many ways this was her age of wisdom, fusing the love and kindness she inherited from her parents and siblings, with her compassion and with the work she did, both professionally and within her network of friends.

Once the initial awful realisation of the diagnosis had settled, it was clear there was a new purposeful serenity in her life. Her focus was now clarified on the important things of life. It was as if the windscreens of her life were now cleared of all the dust and detritus. There was now just clarity.

Given the circumstance it speaks directly to her essence.

After several years of mysterious nondescript issues that were initially thought to relate to menopause, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in April 2012. Everyone knows that isn't a good one. The initial diagnosis was extremely challenging – the sort of pack your bags type. She was extremely sick and faced with an initial prognosis of just several weeks.

Within a few days it became clear that the cancer was a very rare beast, a PNET and not the much more common adenoma, as initially assumed. PNETs are more like a slow, silent stalker than a pack of wild attack dogs that is adenoma.

Several weeks later she received what was life-saving treatment, from the remarkable Peter Mac Hospital under the direction of Rod Hicks, the remarkable Tim Ackhurst and her oncologist Michael Michael (funny how there were such a lot of Michaels in her life).

The treatment itself almost killed her. There was a touch and go period of about 7 days in ICU.

Three months later she emerged from hospital, a tiny skeleton of her former herself. Some will remember the 100-day party we had at the poodle palace just up the road from here. She was just 43 kg.

It was a time of great compassion, love and support. Nicky my sister knitted a heart each and every one of those first 100-days until Bridget told her she must cease because Bridget had decided she was going to live much longer.

Bridget' stoicism was extra-ordinary. Even in these early days. I can only recall one private occasion of somewhat muted self – pity; the why-me syndrome. I think she decided there and then never to do so again.

Because she had initially thought she was likely to miss cherished events, every big family occasion was very special to her. No more so than those that marked passage for our children.

Graduations, Anna's 21st, two weddings and even now two grandchildren and another in the oven. They were all made especially magic for the rest of us by Bridget, simply by her presence.

As my mother was fond of saying – Bridget was *tickled pink* just to be there.

As her strength grew, and her weight increased, she gradually resumed normal life duties, so much so, that I found it hard to believe she had any disease at all. Even though she continued to receive treatments every 6 months or so, I often forgot about her illness for months at a time. Occasionally, but only very occasionally, Bridget would express frustration at me over this because, for her, the cancer was ever present in her mind.



I know it took an enormous toll on her, because though she was so determined not to be defined by the illness, it would never leave her side. Would any of you known that? I doubt it.

Reflecting on her last decade, it seems she was being stalked by a silent assassin, the ever-present threat finally wearing down her reserves of energy. In December everything seemed to change, as though the disease realised she was weakening, and it pounced.

I can't pretend it was not harrowing, watching helplessly as the life was torn from her failing body. It was. But she remained extra-ordinarily calm and centred throughout. And neither did she lose her sense of humour.

As I mentioned earlier, she often gave talks at conferences and fund-raising events, presenting the perspective of a cancer patient – a grim ask if there was one.

But her presentations were anything but grim, eliciting as many laughs as tears, often simultaneously, in her awe-struck audiences. To quote one...

*One other person who brought some light to a difficult situation although he wouldn't have known it, was a lovely Registrar who was providing cover over the weekend – that dreadful arid wasteland where you know nothing is going to happen for 48 hours. He bounced up to my bed and excitedly announced that I had the second most interesting tumour in the hospital. I remember thinking – sheesh what does a girl have to do to be number one.*

On another occasion early in her long stay in hospital a young psychologist approached to see if she needed any help. They talked for an hour, and by the end they had sorted out his career path quite nicely, Thankyou.

Just so Bridget.

In a presentation some seven years along her cancer journey, she reflected:

*I've done extraordinarily well. In the 7 years since diagnosis, I've lived to see all three of my children complete uni and get jobs, I have a grandchild – something I did not think I would see. I returned to work and lead a busy normal life. I consider myself incredibly lucky.*

Just so Bridget.

Bridget and I had several conversations in the last few days as she hovered in the half-light between life and death. Sweet conversations, funny, sad, full of meaning and mystery, with all emotions collapsed into one – I guess that is what we call love.

Just pure Bridget.

She told me several people had been visiting. One was a man called Daniel, he came from Inverloch, with a kind face and warm hands. She was aware he was going to take her somewhere – an escort of a kind. We talked of his purpose, and she was relaxed about it.

After she fell asleep, I wrote these lines on this special conversation :

*In the night came to me  
A silly man  
With gentle face, warm hands  
said he to me, soft-voicedly  
Please come, no rush.*

*He seemed the gardening type  
and set about planting memory seeds.  
A special task we both agreed,  
Would take some time,  
No rush.*

So when you next pass though Inverloch, please say a silent thankyou to Daniel and let yourself feel the gentle warmth of Bridget's memory, see her quizzical smile with those unmistakable slightly upturned eyes. I am sure it will bring a gentle smile to you.

Then there was a mysterious lady, who whispered the words *twenty-four seven*. Bridget was more worried by this person. Who was she, where dis she come from and why the constant whispering *twenty-four seven*?

It seemed to me, that time was collapsing for Bridget as she approached death, and I wonder if at that singular point between life and death, time merges the past with the future into a dimensionless form.

Surely the *twenty-four seven* was a reference to the love Bridget received and gave so generously. *twenty-four seven* for every one of the 23,247 days she spent on this planet. To me it was also a calming reassurance that her memories will be with her family *twenty-four seven*.

And the mysterious woman. Could it be that she was from the future, a grandchild perhaps, as yet unborn. I have become very fond of that mysterious lady. I call her Audrey.

A dear friend of mine, a colleague from Bhutan, with whom I have worked in the magical remote Bhutanese Himalaya unexpectedly emailed me the day before Bridget died expressing concern *how are you doing, how is Bridget?*. A premonition of a kind,

In return to the sad news that followed, Phuntsho responded, and I quote

*According to Buddhist calendar, whoever dies on this day is considered to be very special. This reflects how special Bridget was. Today we offered butter lamps to guide her through darkness to an eternal peace. They say, memories are stronger than physical forms. Ultimately we too shall pass and only our memories will remain.*

There is some essential truth here, which I agree. While Bridget is no longer with us in her physical form, and we will grieve for that, she is ever present in our loving memory.

When I reflect on Bridget's life, the way she so willingly offer herself without expectation or judgement, her calm presence, her careful phrasing, her moral compass built on a foundation of family love, friendships and community, I sense she was the quintessential gardener of memories, at the job *twenty-four seven*

While I did not understand it at the time, it was very much part of what bedazzled me all those years ago as a captivated 17 year-old, just as I remain bedazzled today.

And I am comforted by the knowing that in her death, Bridget is accompanied with a bag of memory seeds the envy of any person.

After all what more could one want for, at the end of this life.

### Wording - Erin Sandiford

De Facto Epithalamium  
(for Bid and Mike)

The orb that burns by the darkling panes  
Is nigh, and the embers in linen  
Flared with the dawn; I am recalling that  
Syllabic smile of depth  
Between her right thigh and her left,  
Guttural throat of the mariner  
Foundered in visions of his mermaid.

Now is the time when all body is a sail  
Moved by the trade winds of touch and devotion.  
Early cry of the suckling birds  
And the sun is faltering to its birth  
High over the arid and scarf flung hill.  
Speak love by the bowsprit,  
Speak love through the madrigal.

— Andy Robinson, circa 1979 .

## Bridget's cancer story

*Bridget gave numerous public talks concerning her journey with the rare cancer PNET Pancreatic neuro-endocrine tumour. She was first diagnosed on April 20 2012. The talk at the annual raising gala for the Unicorn foundation presentation, in 2019, is cited in full below.*

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Thanks Kate for the kind introduction. I was really delighted to be asked to do this talk, mainly because I'm a great fan of the Unicorn Foundation and the wonderful work it does in advocacy, fund raising, and support. It's amazing to see so many of you here, if a bit scary, - so don't be shy everyone, spend up big, it's for a great cause.

Before I really get going, I need to emphasize that what I am saying tonight is my experience, it won't be yours. Just as people are different, so too are NETS and everyone's experience of NET cancer will be different.

So, a little bit about my experience of cancer. As Kate said, I was diagnosed in 2012. I had been experiencing vague gastric symptoms for several years prior to diagnosis – bloating, abdominal discomfort, occasional bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea. More flatulence! My husband used to say I was like the Queen and would never do anything as common as farting in the presence of others. That, regrettably, is no longer the case. Most days I sort of splutter along.

I saw several GPs, was referred to a gastroenterologist, had a colonoscopy, gastroscopy, and various other investigations. I began to lose weight and developed a not-so-healthy tan. One day I noticed some puffiness around my ankles and saw the GP who said my liver was playing up, tests were ordered and the next day, actually just as I was about to head to the gym, she rang to say I was extremely sick and to go to hospital. This was confronting to say the least. Up until that time I had been to hospital three times in my life to have three babies. I had barely missed a days work due to illness. My own assessment of what was happening was that it was the middle aged woman's triumvirate of mild IBS, stress and menopause and I basically just went on with life. The idea of cancer had never crossed my mind. There was no family history of cancer whatsoever.

So off to the Epworth and a few hours later a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Even I knew that wasn't a good one. By that stage I was severely jaundiced as my bile duct was blocked. Several days later I had a stent put in and by that stage there were the beginnings of a rumour that I might have a PNET and not a pancreatic adenoma. Shortly afterwards I was admitted to Peter Mac and there I stayed for the best part of three and a half months. My tumours were secreting large amounts of something called ACTH which in turn affected lots of other things. My potassium levels were so low that I was on a constant drip for weeks and as fast as they put it in one end, I efficiently peed it out the other. Calcium,

magnesium, phosphorus, all were erratic. There was some talk of my adrenal glands needing to be removed but luckily they found a medication that finally slowed the ACTH secretion. Crazy times indeed. At my peak I was taking 54 tablets a day. It was a full-time job keeping the pill box filled!

Of course during an admission of that length there were some amusing moments. About three weeks into the admission, it was a weekend – you know, that dreadful, arid wasteland where you know nothing is going to happen for 48 hours. A lovely young registrar bounced up to my bed and excitedly said Bridget, you have the second most interesting tumour in the hospital. I remember thinking – sheesh what does a girl have to do to be number one. Some weeks later, about 2 months into my admission I decided I should see a psychologist, I am a psychologist by the way and I thought that that was what you did when you were facing an uncertain future. They sent up a lovely young man and I spent a very happy hour discussing early career progression and the importance of good supervision with him. I don't know if he benefited from the session but I certainly did. For me, a small moment of trying to recapture my old life.

I then began a series of PRRT treatments – (Peptide Receptor Radionuclide Therapy), the first of which, a combination of yttrium and lutate nearly knocked me off. I remember one of the nuclear med doctors just calmly saying, "It's a cytokine storm". Cancer, like all fields has its unique language. I rather like the phrase "cytokine storm", it sounds vaguely intergalactic and it certainly felt as if I was having an out-of-body experience. How could this be happening to me?? To cut to the chase, I've had about 11 PRRT treatments since 2012 and in my case it's been amazingly effective. I'm also on monthly injections of octreotide, a large unpleasant jab in the butt, that many of you will be familiar with. That's the one where the nurses all apologize profusely before giving it to you. I've done very well. In the 7 years since diagnosis, I've lived to see all three of my children complete uni and get jobs, I have a grandchild, something I did not think I would see. I work half-time and lead a busy, normal life. I consider myself incredibly lucky.

So let me talk now about what has helped me during my time living with cancer and again can I say, this is my experience, it may not mirror your's. First, is the love and support of friends and family. Having their support, particularly in those early days helped ground and reassure me – made the seemingly unbearable, bearable. My husband hates sickness, hates hospitals, never gets ill himself, but he sat by my bed every day for most of the day, a comforting presence that helped keep me calm. He took up running at this stage, running off his demons I think. At one point he was running 100km a week – completely stuffed one of his calf muscles and can't run any more. My kids and their partners were wonderful, beaming life, laughter and vitality into the room. Friends came and visited, brought books, news and coffee.

The second thing that has helped and continues to help is the fabulous professional care I have received. In my case, I have received nearly all my care at Peter Mac and I can't

speak highly enough of this hospital. I probably shouldn't name names, like the ABC it might be construed as product endorsement but I have a great medical team around me. My oncologist, a man of few words but whose clinical judgement I trust completely. The nuclear med team, one doctor in particular, a long , lanky fellow spent hours and hours with us in those early weeks explaining what was happening and explaining again as the words fell out of my brain. Right at the start, during that long admission, I had a string of wonderful graduate nurses who cared for me. These bright young things, straight out of training were compassionate, caring and so very professional. I have been treated unfailingly with respect, kindness and care. A smile, some humour to lighten the moment, remembering my name and not just being called the generic "love". It matters at these times to feel as though you are a person, not just a UR number or a case profile.

And the third thing that has helped me without a doubt is the wonderful Unicorn Foundation. Again in those early days of fear and trepidation, the support group was a lifeline. Being able to meet with a group of fellow patients, people who had this same weird diagnosis as me – a cancer probably none of us had heard of prior to being diagnosed. There really is a sense of community in the support group and it helped me, as it has so many others. When I was diagnosed in 2012 the Unicorn Foundation had only been going for three years. Simone ran the Melbourne support group, there wasn't a NET nurse, written information was relatively sparse, I don't think there was a FaceBook group or other online forums. The Unicorn Foundation has come such an extraordinarily long way in a relatively short time thanks mainly to the energy and commitment of Simone and John Leyden. Simone and John, along now of course with others have been powerful spokespeople for the NET cause, keeping it in the public domain, raising awareness, raising funds. The work done in raising funds to support research trials, in lobbying to have medications approved by the PBS, in funding the NET nurse – it's truly astonishing. I am lucky, I live very close to Peter Mac and have relatively easy access to medical professionals but for those who live in rural or regional areas, being able to access accurate information and support using the website and online forums provides a sense of connection and community that helps reduce the isolation experienced when you have a diagnosis so rare, few have heard of it. I must put in a special plug for our fabulous Kate (our NET nurse) – so ready with support and care, such a source of knowledge, so quick to respond to questions and queries. So kind. Thanks Kate.

I just want to talk briefly about one other thing that I think is important. I've said before that I consider myself a lucky person but perhaps one of the main ways that has played out is that I am by nature positive and optimistic. Make no mistake, the diagnosis of NET cancer is a heavy blow. During those early weeks in Peter Mac, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror because my eyes were so frightened that I frightened myself even more. But overall I haven't spent much time bemoaning my diagnosis, worrying what I did wrong to get this illness or thinking it's not fair. I am a psychologist as I said. I spend every day talking with good people to whom horrible things have happened. Life is not fair and

that's how it is. I do think however that looking after people's mental health who have a chronic illness as well as their physical health is a definite area for improvement. There is good help out there and too many people struggle in silence. Health professionals need to be more on to this area, particularly if they know patients are isolated, live in rural or remote areas, or have few supports. I applaud the efforts the Unicorn Foundation are making in this area through their recently released Treatment and Wellness Plan.

So what have I learnt along the way. Well:

I have learnt to be an advocate for my own health. Hospitals are busy places, you have to be prepared to ask questions, seek information, keep at people. Being health literate helps you navigate the system.

I have learnt not to believe everything I read on the internet and not to read scary cancer stories. They don't do you any good.

I have learnt to cultivate a spirit of gratitude for what I have and not to focus on what I may not have in the future. (Actually to be honest, this one is still a work in progress).

And finally, I have learnt that out there in NET land there are people who are brave, courageous, generous in spirit, funny and indomitable. I have been privileged to meet you.

Thank you