

**MARGARET DUFF — CONDOLENCE**

*Statement*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [5.21 pm]: The Australian Labor Party recently lost one of its true believers with the death of Margaret Duff on 25 August. I want to record an official tribute to Margaret from part of the eulogy given at her funeral by David Templeman, MLA, member for Mandurah.

Margaret Anne Conway was born on 28 October 1944. She was the eldest of four children: two brothers, Brian and Patrick, and a sister, Judith. She lived in the Bicton–East Fremantle area and attended John Curtin High School. She was an excellent student but left school at 15. Margaret was a social person, and a few years later she was with two girlfriends in Fremantle and headed off to the junior sailors' mess at Leeuwin. They would not normally go to the junior mess—they would usually drop by the officers' mess—but fate would have them decide otherwise this night. A young junior sailor, Max Duff, was there that night. He had already had a few too many but still managed to spot Margaret and the girls come into the mess. He thought the little one was very pretty and with a few under his belt he was not shy and started to chat her up. They hit it off well, but for some reason Margaret gave her number to Max's mate and it was not passed on to him. Max could only remember two key items of conversation from that night: Margaret's first name and that she worked at Gemm Footwear in O'Connor. But he could not for the life of him think of her last name. He knew it was a well-known sporting family and so convinced himself it was Porter, Margaret Porter—the Porters being a well-known trotting family. He was, of course, way off with the sport, because the Conways were a footballing family. A few days later he phoned Gemm Footwear and asked to speak to Margaret Porter. Luckily, when the girl on the phone called out, "Is there a Margaret Porter working here?" Margaret heard and knew who it was. They spoke and started going out. So started a love that would continue for nearly 50 years.

Margaret and Max married on one of the coldest days on record, a wet and blustery 24 June 1966. They married in Bicton and enjoyed their honeymoon at the luxurious Rivervale Motel. There was no heating and no bar fridge, but they had each other to keep warm and they were now married. On 26<sup>th</sup> December 1968 their beloved Kate was born. Not long after, on the 28 April 1970, they proudly welcomed their son Allan to the world. The family later moved to Yunderup for a while and it was there that Margaret dedicated her time totally to caring for their very sick daughter Kate. This was a time of great trauma for the family, with Kate so sadly passing away at the tender age of seven. Max talks of how very much he admired and loved Margaret for the way she cared so totally for their little girl Kate and the unconditional love Margaret had for their daughter during this difficult time.

On 17 January 1977, Max and Margaret's second daughter, their beloved Rachael, was born. It was during this period of the 1970s that Margaret's strong beliefs in fairness, equity and a sense of justice were ignited. At the time, Sir Charles Court had decided to close the Tresillian Centre for disabled children in Nedlands. Margaret the activist was born and her campaigning and fight to ensure people with disabilities were treated as human beings, and their rights and wellbeing seen as a priority, was ignited in the campaign to keep Tresillian open. Later, Margaret would tell people that if it had not been for Sir Charles Court making that decision she may not have been involved in the Australian Labor Party. She remained a member of the Labor Party for 40 years.

Margaret's life as an electorate officer started with the election of Beryl Jones to the Legislative Council in 1986. Beryl set up office in George Street, Pinjarra. Essentially, the George Street office was the Labor outpost, an office run by Margaret, and when Beryl was not there, it was just Margaret. She quickly established an outstanding relationship with the local community and became well respected by local Indigenous people, helping Indigenous families with housing, financial and social concerns. Local elders such as the late Theo Kearing, the late Frank Nannup and the late Joe Walley would come to call Margaret a friend and ally.

On her retirement from the Legislative Council, Beryl Jones said —

My electorate officer, Margaret Duff, is more than a secretary, she is my right hand and also my friend. She is of the stuff which make electorate offices successful. She gives more than her best and nothing is too much trouble for her. The rapport which we have built up in the electorate, particularly with the Aboriginal people, is largely due to her efforts. I cannot speak highly enough of Margaret and, indeed, her husband —

Max —

who has been supportive of her and the demands of her job.

John Cowdell replaced Beryl Jones as member for the South West Region and the office moved to 199 Mandurah Terrace, which essentially became the local drop-in centre for every disadvantaged local group or individual. Margaret was the dispenser of emergency relief to people in crisis. It was also just a place where people felt comfortable and welcome to drop in and unload. Almost always Margaret was the one to whom

everyone unloaded, and she was always there to dispense advice, encouragement or simply provide a listening ear. Margaret earned the respect of other electorate staff and was seen by many as a mentor and wise counsel. New electorate staff sought advice from her because of the huge respect for her experience and expertise; she also seemed to know everyone in the Labor Party and the labour movement. When an election campaign was in full swing, Margaret was, as Mandurah's Mayor Paddi Creevey said, "the little general".

Margaret was John Cowdell's electorate officer for 12 years. On his retirement as President of the Legislative Council he said this of Margaret —

I recognise Margaret Duff, my electorate officer. Ours has been a genuine partnership for 12 years in the electorate. She has been a member for a lot of the time, but without the pay and without the prestige. With Margaret I got the whole family, and I am deeply indebted for everything that Max and Rachel have done for me.

Margaret retired, very briefly, from the state scene and worked for Kim Beazley, then member for Brand. On Margaret's death, Kim Beazley wrote, according to my notes —

In grateful memory for the life of Margaret Duff. She was a genuine community servant, caring for her neighbour, broadly defined, with cheerfulness, generosity and great intelligence. There are few of equivalent capacity and sentiment. Her passing is a loss for us all.

In late December 2006, Margaret was drafted into the Peel by-election campaign. She was instrumental in ensuring Paul Papalia's campaign was successful. Margaret offered to assist in setting up Paul's office and stayed with him right until the end. Paul, his staff and his family remain indebted to Margaret and Max for their unswerving loyalty, guidance, support and friendship.

Margaret had, over many years, honed her subtlety. Quite often it was a gentle prod, but on other occasions and when necessary, it was like being slammed with a sledgehammer. When those around her were spouting on about something they knew little about, Margaret had a favourite line. She would, with the tilt of her head and staring straight into their eyes, simply say, "I find it curious you might say that", which was code for, "Mate, you're full of it!" She would then systematically and in the nicest way destroy any flimsy argument they might present. Margaret could hold her own with anyone. She got to her feet on a couple of occasions at the ALP state executive and state conferences.

She was a friend of former Prime Ministers, almost Prime Ministers and hopeless ministers. Margaret and Max particularly enjoyed the occasions when Gough and Margaret Whitlam would visit Perth and they would always dine with them. Margaret was Gough's other Margaret. If you earned Margaret's trust, her friendship and her love, you had her loyalty for life. Margaret also took a passionate interest in making sure that Labor remained true to its core values. She was a firm believer and advocate in making sure we lifted our game, particularly in women's interests and representation. Margaret told friends just before she died that if anyone tries to get rid of affirmative action, she will come back to haunt them. The party awarded Margaret Duff life membership in May this year. She was proud of the acknowledgement. It was a just and appropriate recognition of her decades of service to the party and to her community.

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