




Speech By
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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Davis, Mr BJ

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (9.50 am): Something I only recently found out about Brian Davis is his connection with the iconic Australian characters Dad and Dave, created by author Arthur Hoey Davis, better known as Steele Rudd. Arthur was the brother of Edward Davis, Brian's grandfather. From all accounts, Edward Davis was the main source for the fictional character of Dave and Thomas Davis was the inspiration for the character of Dad. Therefore, it seems fitting that Brian 'Digger' Davis, a man who was an icon to many in Queensland, was a direct descendant of the legendary Dad and Dave.

Rex Davis told me that the family were always aware of the link and would often visit the replica of the shingle hut near Greenmount. The family describes those visits as a great way of keeping them all grounded, reminding them that Thomas Davis and Mary Green managed to have a remarkable family life while housing an enormous number of children in that tiny little home. When Brian Davis first ran for Cunningham in 1966, the electorate included Greenmount. Brian shared many a humorous story about not being able to get his relatives to vote for him.

As we know, Brian and Jeannie Davis had two children, Mark and Rex. They were immensely proud of both of them. We warmly welcome Mark, who is here with us today. Rex is in Cincinnati, having only recently moved there with his wife, Sophia, and their children. Otherwise, he would most certainly have been here today to honour his father.

Rex describes his father as always being an inspirational figure from whom he learnt more than anybody else. Brian Davis was charming, fearless, pragmatic and caring. Rex said, 'Most of all, Dad was witty and at his best telling comedic stories in his trademark gravelly voice.' At family celebrations at our place, we had the pleasure of knowing that sense of humour and Brian's enormous love for life. We will always hold those occasions dear in our memories. One such occasion was a birthday celebration for my father-in-law, Brian Mellifont. The two friends would compete to relay stories of the Labor Party from their early days in politics.

The two Brians, as they became known, met at the Queensland Labor college, which was an organisation of the Queensland Labor Party that ran a public speaking and debating team. Recently, at Brian Mellifont's funeral, Brian Davis joked that although at first they were known affectionately as the two Brians, later some came to call them 'the two Bs'. The two Brians became the best of mates. On a social outing, Brian Davis spotted a young woman in the near distance. He told Brian Mellifont that he was going to marry that girl, and so he did. Later, he and Jeannie became parents and a political tour de force.

Together, the two Brians and their wives, Jeannie and Rosemary, became a formidable team of four. The two Brians were part of the formation of the Old Guard, bringing in democratic reformation of the Queensland Labor Party, establishing annual state conferences and monthly administrative committee meetings. They were also the very first president and vice president of Queensland Young Labor, and Jeannie was the first secretary.

Brian Mellifont served as alderman for the Brisbane city ward, Brian Davis was a state member for Brisbane and Manfred Cross was a federal member. For years, branch meetings and functions were held at the Davis's house, with an ever-growing collection of kids amongst the attendees, sleeping under the bench seats. Rosemary, Jeannie and, later, Kay Milliner ran amazing fundraisers by catering for functions for the Trades and Labor Council, election campaigns and the Labor Party, with guests including Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke and Bill Hayden. Back then, the election of candidates was run by a plebiscite whereby you had to lobby for both branch rank-and-file vote and a union member's individual vote. Later they often joked that they may have lost their first plebiscite, but never lost another one after that. Brian Davis had the chance to try to repay some of the amazing support Jeannie had given him by supporting her in her campaign to become lord mayor of Brisbane.

Brian, affectionately known as 'Digger', gave generously to many. He had a deep and abiding friendship with my father-in-law and was always very giving and caring, even when he himself was so very unwell.

Brian Davis will be remembered as a reformer with a keen eye to the future. His address-in-reply speech of 9 September 1969 is an example of what a forward-looking and thoughtful representative of the people he was. He called for the beautification of Brisbane, to turn it into a city that we could be proud of and that tourists would be pleased to arrive at. He called for flood mitigation strategies for the Breakfast Creek and he railed against red tape preventing solutions being put in place. He described it as his duty and that of his fellow representatives to give Breakfast Creek back to nature so that it would be like what it had been years ago. He identified that it was critical that the government take much greater account of inner-city living. He was spot-on when he predicted that that would be a critical part of Brisbane's future.

Brian Davis called for affordable and coordinated public transport so that people would be encouraged to leave their cars at home. He called for planning for transportation for the then predicted population increase to one million people. He said that it was no good to simply say we will get more people; we have to know what we will do about it. He said that we have to say positively, 'This is what we will do.' Brian called for an increase in safety regulations for drivers who transport flammable products, warning against industrial death if action were not taken. He called for government to be alive to the injustices occurring when employers were prepared to take advantage of their employees and then cast them out when their use-by date had been reached.

Brian said that it would be impossible to emulate his predecessor, Johnno Mann, but stated that he wished to possess one of his very fine qualities: his sincerity to his electors. By all accounts, Brian certainly achieved his wish and much more. He was a man of strength, generosity and integrity, which are character traits that his children carry through their own lives. It was a privilege to have known him. Brian, may the road rise up to meet you, may the wind always be at your back, may the sun shine upon your face and may you rest in peace.