

When Rusty's family gave me the honour of doing the eulogy for my unique and wonderful friend. I thought, where do I start. I cannot believe that Rusty achieved so much in the community when she only lived in Canberra for such a short time and had a chronic illness as well

I met Rusty at one of George and Gwyneth's, Monday Coffee and Craft mornings at the Lanyon Youth Club. I walked in one Monday and saw a new lady sitting with an oxygen bottle. I introduced myself to her, she said I'm Rusty, I just moved to Canberra and I need to find something to do to keep my mind active. I was amazed, here this lady was sitting there struggling to breathe and she wanted to get out and do something. I said that I would pick her up at 10am tomorrow and take her to meet Catherine at Cota as I was a Peer Educator with Cota and that this may be something she might like to do. It was the beginning of a great friendship

She was very impressed with Cota and everything they stood for. She trained as a Peer Educator and did so much more with Cota. Peer Educators usually did sessions on their own, Rusty and I used to phone each other after our sessions to debrief, because sometimes people in the audience would tell us what a struggle it was just to survive. After one debriefing Rusty said we should be telling someone all this, so that things may change. I said there wasn't any point as politicians are not interested in stories, someone needs to give them facts and figures. She said why can't that someone be us, I replied why not.

We went to Paul Flint at Cota with our idea about a survey of Seniors in Canberra to find out just how they were coping. Cota financed our survey and the results were used for Cota's submission to the Harmer Review into pensions.

It was months later that we received a phone call to say we will be picked up the next day and driven to Parliament House to meet the Minister for Health and Aging. TV cameras etc were all there. The minister told us that she would be making an announcement in Parliament the next day about the increase to pensioners and pensions would be indexed for the first time, plus a few other changes. She said I wanted to meet you both to let you know that your survey and Cota's submission made all this happen, and you have made a difference to 3 and a half million Australian lives. It didn't really sink in until we received a copy of Hansard and our names were in it. Rusty did a Maxwell Smart by saying we were mentioned in Hansard for good and not for evil

We were asked to do Peer Education Sessions in Bombala, Delegate, Nimmitabell and Cooma staying over night. My husband Colin was supposed to join us and do a Beyond Blue Session. He had to stay in Canberra at very short notice. We were supposed to do individual sessions, but without Colin, I had a bigger load as I was also trained in Beyond Blue. Rusty suggested we do all sessions together to share the load.

We had a driver from Cooma Council so had no idea in what order we were doing our sessions. We arrived in Bombala, walked into the room for our session and about 30 people were there to hear us talk. There was just one minor problem, they were all from the Dementia Unit and

everyone was sound asleep. I said what are we going to do, Rusty said we will do the full session to see how well we work together.

Then we were driven to Delegate, the local hall was open but not a soul in sight, we starting calling out etc, finally a little old lady wandered in with a mop and bucket. Wanted to know why we were there, she replied, nothing on here today. She told us to go across the road and get Mavis. Mavis had forgotten she booked us and hadn't told anyone about the session. We gave our talk to Mavis and the lady with the bucket because they really wanted to hear us or so they said

Then back to Bombala to the same place we were at in the morning. The group looked different, still all asleep except for one man sitting right in front. This session was about Beyond Blue and our gentleman in the front kept saying rubbish, nonsense they should just get over it etc etc, After 15 minutes of this Rusty said to him why don't you go to sleep like everyone else. With that he got up and walked out.

Next morning it was Nimmitabell's turn to greet us. Went to this tiny little cottage in the main street, where the local craft group met. About 10 ladies were in this small crowded room, all awake and very pleased to see us. WE tried to start our session but they said leave all that to later we are so pleased to have visitors to our group we want to have morning tea first. I think they must have been baking for a week, all these beautiful cakes and biscuits appeared on the table. We never did do our session, but left a lot of brochures for them and they promised to read them.

Our last two sessions were in Cooma and I voiced my concerns about working together because our first 4 sessions were so unsuccessful.

Both sessions were for the same group with an hours break between them. Everyone was awake and paying attention. Rusty always sat down for her sessions because of her health, therefore was unable to turn the pages on the flip chart. So I stood and turned the pages and we shared the session between us. She introduced herself then introduced me as her barrel girl. I went WOW! I've always wanted to be a barrel girl. Rusty said, now isn't that just the sort of remark you would expect from a blonde. The lady in charge went out the back and came back with a silver top hat and put it on my head. We bantered all the way through the session, and everyone loved it. The second session went off with the same wonderful result. From that day on we did all our sessions together and had a lot of wonderful fun days. Rusty started introducing us as Laurel and Hardy.

We haven't done any sessions for a while because Rusty wasn't well enough. We had one session booked in for 2 days ago and one in May because she wanted to get back into doing sessions again.

Rusty enjoyed doing things for Cota so much I thought she may enjoy coming along to a Tuggeranong Community Council meeting with me and within a month she was on the Transport and Community Sub Committee with Alison and I, which lasted for 3 years, we met at my house in the evening and Alison always turned up with a bottle of red, it would be midnight before

Colin would say when are you going home. We all just loved doing what we were doing and really enjoyed each others company.

Rusty then took on the mammoth task of getting the 55+club up and running, this became a full time job for her, she was so passionate about the task in hand.

When Rusty's work load eased up with the 55+ club, she joined Conder-Lanyon Probus club. Just to sit back and enjoy the company, the guest speakers and the lunches following the meetings.

Maisie, Ellen, Robyn, Rusty and I started meeting each month for lunch just to sit and chat, we had great discussions on these days about so many different things, it won't be the same without Rusty, but we will continue with our lunches.

Colin and Rusty got along very well together, they both had the same weird sense of humour. This enhanced my friendship with Rusty.

Rusty talked about all her family every time we were together, she loved them very much, was so proud of all of them, and bragged about them all the time. So much so I expected to see you all here today in your super hero suits.

Rusty was only in Canberra for the last 7 years, she was so active in the community and had a great impact on so many people. This was a continuation of the community work she did in the Nowra region. In spite of her failing health Rusty worked tirelessly for the people of her community.

How much better would the world be if we had more people like Rusty

Rusty's passing will leave a void in my life and I will miss my dear friend very much.