

Memorial ceremony for John Paul Quinn: Australian Embassy Rabat

Your Excellency Ambassador Cutts,

Your Eminence Cardinal Cristobel Lopez Romero,

Secretary-General Dr Abbadi,

Your Excellency Ambassador Ibrahim of the Arab Republic of Egypt,

Other excellencies and representatives of Embassies, including Monsieur Maurel of the French Embassy

Ms El Hnot of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Monsieur Fouquet of Air France

Other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen - both in Morocco and in Australia.

It is an honour and a privilege to say a few words on behalf of my family, particularly my sisters Joanna and Alison, about our father, Ambassador John Paul Quinn. His life and those of 76 others from a range of countries, represented here today, was cruelly cut short by a tragic air crash not far from here sixty years ago yesterday.

I would first like to thank most warmly Ambassador Cutts and his team at the Australian Embassy, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra, for arranging and hosting this event.

The engagement and support of the Moroccan MFA and many others in Morocco, especially those Ambassadors, other dignitaries, and everyone else here today, are also deeply appreciated.

Let me also thank all those in Australia who are joining us “virtually” today. Among them are a number of illustrious names in Australian diplomacy, including a few colleagues of my father.

This event has strong personal, historical and symbolic resonances. Notably, it highlights the esteem in which John Quinn was held during his short 42 years of life. He was a proud Australian, a dedicated and professional public servant - in the best senses of the word, and a committed internationalist.

Today's mood is, of course, one of melancholy, especially for those directly affected by this disaster, including my own family. However, I have no doubt that my father would have wanted us to be inspired at this ceremony by a positive spirit, both of remembrance of those who passed on that fateful foggy evening in September 1961, and of human solidarity with the families, friends and colleagues they left behind.

Under the current clouds of Covid, environmental disasters, heightened strategic and economic tensions and other global challenges, our event today is a symbolic microcosm of the global village in which we all live and where our fates are inextricably tied.

My wife and I had the great privilege and pleasure to visit Morocco, including Rabat, in 2017. My older sister Joanna made two earlier similar visits in 1995 and 2014. These trips were something of a pilgrimage for us to honour our father's memory.

At the same time, they were inspirational in another sense - given the extraordinary experiences we and other visitors enjoy in places like Marrakech, Fes, Casablanca, and of course Rabat. You will thus not be surprised that our family and others in Australia are very disappointed we cannot be with you here in person today in this peaceful, beautiful place.

Sadly, my father never got to see Rabat or Morocco, but I am confident that he would have felt very much at home here, especially in this wonderful royal capital city, so steeped in history and culture.

Morocco's role as a global leader in promoting constructive dialogue between civilisations would also have resonated strongly with him – a voracious reader, a sharp intellect, and a proficient linguist fluent in several languages, especially French, and still learning others, including Arabic.

Sadly also, he was not of course able to discharge his official mission of developing Australia's relations with Morocco. Others have, however, delivered on this important task. It is thus fitting today that we also celebrate the recent commencement of operations at the new Australian Embassy chancery in Rabat, another milestone in this evolving story.

I have only vague recollections of my father, being only seven years old when he died. Nevertheless, I have always had a strong sense of living in his shadow. His friends and colleagues published a small booklet in his memory, specifically for my sisters and myself. We are delighted that this has been circulated in electronic form to participants at today's event.

This very personal tribute cites some of the highlights of his career, but also paints a vivid picture of a remarkable man. Key aspects of his personality resonate consistently through its pages: a powerful, inquiring and informed mind; an unerring commitment to the highest standards; integrity and moral courage; strong leadership, and mentoring which was inspirational to all, especially younger colleagues; the gift of friendship; and a gentle and sometimes whimsical sense of humour.

My father was a highly professional and gifted Australian diplomat who conquered many formidable challenges. I followed in his footsteps in more modest fashion, retiring after almost 40 years in the Australian Foreign Service in 2018. This experience has given me an even better appreciation of his contribution to Australia, and to many people around the world.

By all accounts, my father was a modest, self-effacing man. He would have been humbled by our ceremony today, and the many tributes paid to him after his demise, including by Australia's Prime Minister at the time, the Rt Hon RG Menzies, cited by Ambassador Cutts. It is poignant to recall that my father had travelled from Cairo to Geneva in February 1961 to participate in a meeting of Heads of Australia's diplomatic missions, chaired by Prime Minister Menzies.

Accomplishment in adversity was the hallmark of my father's stellar but ill-starred diplomatic career. It is remarkable that, during his personal and professional life, he was either an actor in, or witness to many of the major events which shaped Australia and the world in this period.

John Paul Quinn was born in Sydney in February 1919 in the shadow of two catastrophic global events. The Influenza Pandemic was still raging at the time, including in Australia. World War I had also only recently drawn to a close, having exacted a terrible toll on the Australians who had volunteered to join this fight, their families and friends, and the country as a whole.

My father's formative years coincided with a third global upheaval - the Great Depression. In Sydney in the 1930s he would have seen unemployment, poverty and hunger. His parents, of Irish and English origins and of modest means, were strongly committed to education, social justice and international peace and development, a legacy passed on to my father and his sister Patricia who became a prominent archivist in Sydney.

Dad grew up in Randwick, an eastern Sydney suburb, not far from the celebrated Bondi Beach. Rabat reminded me of this part of Sydney when my wife and I watched from the Medina as the surfers rode the Atlantic waves into the shore, and we felt the gentle breeze blowing off this great ocean.

A brilliant student at school and university with a special gift for languages, Dad won a French Government scholarship to pursue a Ph D at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1938. At this time, he bore direct witness in France and when visiting neighbouring countries, including Germany, to the gathering clouds of war. He sent regular letters back to his family on these developments, which were devoured in particular by his father who had a keen interest in international affairs.

Dad's studies were cut short by outbreak of World War Two which forced his return to Australia. After a brief period broadcasting in French for Radio Australia's Pacific service, he joined the fledgling Department of External Affairs in Canberra in 1941. This was a time when Australia was forging its own distinctive diplomacy in response to changing global circumstances. One of its key planks was establishing Australian posts overseas in places such as Washington, Tokyo, Chungking, and the British colony of Singapore.

It is hard to imagine a more challenging start for a diplomat. Posted as Political Secretary to the three person Australian Mission in Singapore in 1941, he was captured by Japanese forces after Singapore fell in February 1942. After his Head of Mission was tragically executed by his Japanese captors on Bangka Island, my father and his young trade officer colleague disappeared. My father resurfaced in Darwin in late 1945, sickly and emaciated, after more than three years in a Japanese internment camp in Sumatra. This experience left his health permanently and significantly damaged.

To assist his recovery and to be with his family, Dad was sent to run External Affairs's Sydney office. He then served as Private Secretary to the brilliant but mercurial Dr HV Evatt, Australia's External Affairs Minister, during a pivotal period in world history that required new approaches to Australian foreign policy. My father assisted Dr Evatt in foundational work relating to the United Nations, including attending the UN General Assembly in Paris in 1948 which adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He also accompanied Dr Evatt on several official visits overseas, including to Japan.

In Sydney during this time, he met my mother Josephine (known as Jo), a close friend of his sister Patricia and a qualified social worker. They married in Edinburgh in 1949 when he was serving in the Hague. After his death, my mother never remarried, devoted to his memory until her passing in 2015. She did a remarkable job bringing up three children in the wake of the sudden, traumatic loss of her beloved husband.

In the late 1940s and into the 1950s, Australia adopted a positive approach to decolonisation, notably coming out in support of Indonesian independence from the Netherlands. As this drama was playing out, my father was posted to the Hague as Charge d'Affaires in 1948. Needless to say, Australia was not very popular with the Dutch at the time, making for a demanding diplomatic assignment.

After heading the Australian External Affairs Office in London, my father was cross-posted to Pretoria as Acting High Commissioner from 1951 to 1952

A broad Australian priority in the 1950s was developing relations with the emerging nations of Southeast Asia, including by establishing diplomatic missions, and through initiatives such as the Colombo Plan which sponsored students from this region to study in Australia. Southeast Asia was then generally a turbulent and impoverished region, grappling with post-war reconstruction and development, intensifying Cold War competition, and rising nationalism.

It was in this context that in 1952 my father was posted to Saigon as Australia's first Minister to the Associated States of Indo-China, thus covering Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, then still under French colonial rule. Again, his diplomatic skills

and personal resilience were tested during this period when political and armed conflict were simmering.

After this succession of overseas assignments, my father finally returned to Canberra in 1954, and bought a house in Deakin - then on the outer edge of Canberra. My own children, Andrew and Fiona, grew up in this house between my overseas postings, and it is where my wife and I still reside.

Our mother said Dad loved tranquil, small town, park-like Canberra where he could enjoy family life, and some of his hobbies - on weekends - notably photography. He also enjoyed tinkering with his aging beige Austin A40 motor car in which we spent countless happy hours on weekend Canberra-Sydney return trips. These were no doubt prompted by our mother's desire to escape Canberra as often as possible!

As a small boy, I remember Dad working long hours in those busy days at External Affairs, a boutique-sized department, with a huge agenda. Between 1954 and 1960 he looked after South and Southeast Asia on two occasions, interrupted by two years heading the Branch which liaised with the Defence Department, still located in Melbourne at that time.

In these roles he and his colleagues were in the thick of priority foreign policy and national security issues for Australia such as the communist insurgency in Malaya, and developing regional security arrangements. They were also addressing how best to position Australia in a rapidly evolving global environment, marked by serious Cold War tensions, the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement, the emergence of many former colonies as proud independent nations, such as Morocco in 1955, and many other transformations.

In 1957, my father was awarded an Order of the British Empire for his services to Australian diplomacy.

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in 1956, Australia's relations with Egypt were, not surprisingly, severely strained, resulting in the closure of Australia's Embassy in Cairo. When the tasks of reopening this important mission and rebuilding ties with the United Arab Republic arose, my father was selected for this difficult job. By all accounts, he seems to have broadly achieved these objectives in his short

time in Cairo, and was much admired by his Egyptian hosts and the Cairo diplomatic corps.

Part of my father's remit in Cairo was to reach out to other countries in North Africa - hence his mission to Rabat which, tragically, was never realized.

While recognizing that the pain of such a tragedy never leaves those touched by it - especially the grieving families left behind, today's ceremony will hopefully bring further closure, including for me and my family.

In this regard, I am reminded of the visit my wife and I made late one afternoon to the celebrated Merenid caliphs' Necropolis in Chellah, not far from here. There we looked out across to Salé over a marshy valley which would have been near the flight path of that doomed Air France Caravelle. In that spiritual and peaceful place, I remembered my father fondly, inspired by the magnificent architecture, beautiful gardens and eerie clacking sound of its contemporary occupants – the storks, symbols of new life, nesting in the ruined minarets.

In conclusion, let me quote from Scottish poet Thomas Campbell:

“To live in hearts we leave behind, Is not to die.”

Many thanks for your kind attention.