

Message from the AMOU President



Vale ~ Stephen Taylor Groves 21.5.1946 – 27.8.2024

It is with much sadness that I pass on that AMOU Life Member Steve Groves has passed away.

Steve will be well known to many members as a shipwright and later a long term AMOU Official based in the Melbourne Office.

Jan Thompson work closely with Steve over many years and has provided me with the following obituary:

'It is with much sadness that I advise the passing of Steve. Members of the AMOU will remember Steve with much fondness for his dedication to the union movement and the advancement of maritime workers' wages and conditions of employment.

Steve commenced his maritime work as an apprentice shipwright at the Williamstown Dockyards and lived in a very interesting boarding house in Nelson Place. Perhaps a livelier place than the farm he grew up on at Clarence Point overlooking the Tamar River in Northern Tasmania. Although the day Steve's brother shot his own toe off must have been very interesting. He always remembered the farm and his parents with great affection.

While living in Williamstown he was fortunate to find the love of his life, Sandra. With a thirst for adventure, they headed to London, Steve found work with the British Merchant Navy. While living on a boat on the Thames in Teddington, he went to work for Tough Brothers Boat Yard, who infamously rescued 385,000 soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. This may have been the first industrial action the boatyard had experienced, but the brash young Aussie negotiated that the shipwrights should be paid threepence and hour extra for caulking.

Still young and adventurous, instead of leaving London via Heathrow Airport, they headed off in their van and decided to drive home. This could have been where the story ended for the young couple. Unable to drive home via Pakistan and India due to the war that was taking place at the time, they went via Iraq and where detained for a day for accidentally handing a pamphlet to a kid. Flying home became imperative when they learned that one of their American travelling companions was shot dead and his partner was seriously injured. Despite the tragedy, Steve always had fond memories of travelling in that van and in retirement enjoyed wandering around Australia with Sandra in their van and with fellow shipwright and lifelong friend, Neil Hunter in his van.

On returning to Australia, Steve gained work in the Merchant Navy and renewed his membership of the Federated Shipwright's & Ship Constructors' Association of Australia. In 1976, 247 shipwrights joined the Merchant Service Guild instead of the AMWU. Shortly afterwards, Steve was recruited to represent the MSG in Newcastle. After building their own home in Newcastle and well established, Steve was instructed that he was needed in Melbourne as the Southern Area Secretary.

As Southern Area Secretary, Steve was responsible for Tasmania ports, Victorian ports, tugs nationally and dredges. Port workers typically had wage structures based on bands in levels and classifications, it seemed to be a sport to him this type of negotiation as he would convince some poor unsuspecting HR Manager that the wage increase was a modest 2.5% however with the movement within the bands and of insertion of new classifications each port worker ended up with 4 or 5% annual wage increase. And the strangest thing was they would fall into the same trap the following negotiation, due in part to the fact that HR Managers typically did not last that long at port authorities. Steve also had a wonderful way of telling HR Managers that they would not be at the table next time, but the Members would be.

Steve's job also involved helping individual Members. Steve would always speak of such admiration of Members who had come from some war-torn country, who had successfully dealt with the bureaucracy to get their certificate recognized and then they would be working typically in the offshore oil and gas industry or on dredges. However, when you spoke to

the Members, they were in absolute gratitude to Steve for all the assistance and encouragement that he had given them.

Steve never forgot he began as a shipwright and took immense pride in how shipwrights had advanced in the maritime industry, on one day in Port Phillip Bay, 4 shipwrights now captains, commanded vessels ranging from the Spirit of Tasmania to the PMA vessel.

Steve could be very funny and impulsive, like the day he ordered us all out of the car as a van was parked in the laneway preventing us accessing Drummond Street, undeterred he ordered us to all push this van out on the median strip of Drummond Street. I would have loved to see the drivers face when he returned to find his illegally parked van now sitting out in the middle of the road! Dan Pearson recalls the story of him walking out of a meeting in Perth with Wayne Moore and Steve and a fight breaks out between two unknown twenty year old men. Most people would have scattered to the other side of the street, but not these 60 plus year old men they grab one each to break up the fight!

Steve could debate all day and sometimes he would become animated with Members of the AMOU Executive, but as soon as he walked out of the Boardroom, he was back to being easy going and very pleasant especially to the office staff, he fondly referred to the “girls in head office”; always bearing gifts at Christmas.

Leanne and I were not just work colleagues, Steve was our dear friend and after his retirement from the AMOU in 2015 as Offshore Divisional Director, we continued to catch up at our favorite haunt Pappa Gino’s in Lygon Street usually with tuggies Bob Haisman and Graeme Stone. Steve never complained about the cancer treatment, which was brutal and when the cancer returned, he said “I got an extra seven years, stop complaining”.

Steve lived life to the fullest and he was never bored. His motto in life was “make every day count”.

Steve donated his body to medical research and much to my chagrin had requested no funeral. Our sincere condolences to his beloved wife, Sandra and family. Rest in peace my dear friend, forever grateful.’

Matt Jepson
President