

Eulogy for Con Stewart – 11 March 1921 – 8 January 2009
Charles Ellis

As I recall a wealth of fond memories of our beloved Con. I find my very favourite, dates back to early 1993, when, as Colonel Pickering in the Porirua Little Theatre production of “My Fair Lady” there playing at my side was the elegant Mrs Higgins.

That was a part that could only have been written for Constance Patricia Stewart, an esteemed lady of refinement, elegance and taste. With a presence both on and off stage that endeared her to us all.

Just recently Lyn and I visited Con in her new apartment and needless to say it was a very delightful session, raking up the theatrical past – a lifetime of unforgettable memories.

Con was already planning yet another soiree. Important guests would be Jim Matheson and Graham Kelly to tinkle the ivories and give her the opportunity she craved, a sing-a-long around the piano.

Over the years, Jack and Con had moved around the country at the whim of the banking industry, stopping here and there for often as little as 3 years. However short the tenure they found time to earn the respect and fond regard of each community and were responsible for influencing the theatrical scene in very special ways. From Wellington to Masterton, then Marton, Dunedin, Patea, Greymouth and finally to Tawa in 1976.

At Patea College as the English and Drama teacher, a reputable source tells me that Con was responsible for the production of “Little Gipsy Gay” – I understand that the sturdy male sixth formers were very dubious about their participation.

In Greymouth the restoration of the Regent Theatre and the establishment of annual Music Hall productions at the Union Hotel were among notable achievements driven by the Stewarts.

These years provided Con with the opportunity of performing her favourite leading roles as Bloody Mary in “South Pacific” and several times as Aunt Eller in “Oklahoma”. Our shining star at her theatrical best.

Settling in Tawa and working with the Tawa- Linden Drama Society, later to become Tawa Community Theatre, Con devised and directed such hit shows as “Cabaret Revue” “Night of Humour” and “Songs You Love to Remember”. Not enough for our Con though, as she became a long time Committee Member and also took her turn as President.

Attracting sufficient male participants to fill the cast list is often a problem for theatre societies. Con had very quickly found an endless supply of men at the Tawa Lions Club. Arriving at a Music Hall rehearsal one evening I can recall being introduced to several gentlemen who admitted they had never been on stage before, only ever sang in the shower and had two left feet. . . They, like many more to come, had been truly “conned”.

Already a Life Member of the Tawa Community Theatre, it was in 1999 that Con received the coveted Merit Award of the Musical Theatre Federation for Outstanding Service to Musical Theatre in New Zealand.

Together Jack and Con staged several Victorian Music Halls in the local community. There will be many of you here today who have shared the stage for these productions and also for the “Welcome Back – Marines” concerts presented by Porirua Little Theatre to acknowledge the return of veterans stationed here during WW2.

From these my personal favourite was the heartfelt duet from Jack & Con “Oh yes, I remember it well”

And, of course, the Fairy, in all its versions and interpretations (including that famous tribute made to you by Jack)

Oh you were so wrong Con with your plaintive plea “Nobody Loves a Fairy when she’s old . . . “ We adored you, and your memory will live on in the annals of musical theatre history, and in the hearts of all of us privileged to have trod the boards with such a wonderful lady.

I ask the family to accept our very sincere condolences.

Con may have left the stage but she will be remembered and respected by the cast and crew forever.