

MAC IRWIN GUDGEON



GUDGEON Mac Irwin 8046 (1962–67) MR
Gudgeon Pharmacist Wollongong; Jnr Mac,
Mac, Bro, Wad, Sm. HC. Hm. CUO. Drum
Major. Script Writer for TV and Films. [13 25
28.08]

Born	2 March 1949,	Camperdown, NSW
Died	25 May 2023	Melbourne

Mac grew up in Wollongong where his father was a pharmacist. Like many children in the years after WW2 Mac was born in the new King George V Memorial Hospital for Mothers and Babies in Camperdown, opposite the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital which happened to be close to his mother's family. His father Mac Richard, a returned serviceman and Lieutenant during WW2 in the 2/1 Australian General Hospital serving in Palestine and New Guinea, heralded from Gulgong where Mac senior's father was a grazier. Mac's mother Edna May Irwin, the only daughter of two children to furnace worker William Theodore Irwin and his wife Edna, grew up in Newtown. Mac's mother had been a Vaudeville dancer and an acrobat. Mac senior and Edna married in St Paul's Church, Redfern in 1939, Mac's older sister Maxine being born soon afterwards. Mac also had a younger sister – Jenny.

His grandparents' diverse backgrounds would have had both subtle and not so subtle influences on the young Mac as he grew up in the world. In Wollongong he attended Wollongong Primary School before moving to the Illawarra Grammar School for Grade 6 in 1961. Here he met Chris Burn (OB '67 but left in 1965) who recalls they were both in the St Michael's church choir. Mac also played rugby for the school and was an U12 representative in the regional team. His father had been a notable half-back, regional representative and coach in the 1930s when he lived in the Illawarra region of NSW. On arrival at King's in January 1962 Mac and Chris helped each other find their feet in this different environment. Mac, not yet a teenager, entered Junior Macarthur under housemaster Harry Read.

Mac was intelligent and good at sport where he was not only successful, but he excelled at King's. His nuggetty build made him an ideal half-back at rugby where he was in the junior A teams before playing in the 1st and 2nd XV in 1966, then in the 1st XV for all of 1967. While trying to emulate this in rowing Mac's height and lack of bulk meant he started as a cox; whilst his size may have hindered his progress as a rower, he still made the 2nd junior eight in 1966.

His stature and skills were nevertheless very imposing. He was in the Corps Band initially as a bugler and then as their CUO and Drum Major in 1967. He had confidence too. Hugh Poate remembers the band marching past in the 1966 cadet corps centennial parade when, to the amazement and delight of onlookers and those in the parade, Mac thrust his mace upwards and forwards seemingly to the sky, for it to complete a double loop before plunging back to earth and into Mac's outstretched hand, he not missing a step and continuing almost nonchalantly. Mac provided an excellent report on the Band for the '67 50th Reunion Magazine.¹

Mac's broad interests also included drama.

At the time Macarthur House moved to the new school in 1964, Mac was one of about half of his year who had to move to other houses and joined School House Broughton at the Old School, where he was in 'The Annex' next to the swimming pool.

Some of the Annex boys in 1965:

Mac (front), Charles Jennings, John Lord (L to R middle row)
Bob Buntine (partly obscured), Bill McCoy, Basil Simmons (back row)



Rob Pearce remembers Mac from circa 1962 when apartheid was rife in South Africa and Zimbabwe and Ron Moore, their English teacher, thought

it would be a good idea to have a class debate on the subject. "Pearce and (Geoff) Kyle you be the 'for' and Gudgeon and (? it didn't matter) you be the 'against'" was the instruction from Ron. Geoff was first to speak and in his three allotted

minutes managed to cover all the 'for' points that had been discussed beforehand, including those allotted to Rob. Mac followed Geoff with one of the most impassioned anti-apartheid speeches Rob had heard either before or since. As the next 'for' speaker Rob was left a bumbling wreck. He was then, and has remained, in no doubt that Mac was a unique character who clearly stamped his mark for compassionate causes at an early age, at least as early as 12!

After being appointed a House Monitor in Broughton in 1966, in 1967 Mac was appointed Captain of Waddy House, a junior house located at the Old School. He was also a School Monitor in 1967.

For the HSC he sat for English (2nd level), Short Maths (2), Short Science (2), Modern History (1), Ancient History (1) and Geography (2), from which to the surprise of many of the staff he gained a Commonwealth University Scholarship and in 1968 started an Arts/Law course at Sydney University. Mac along with many other King's boys entered St Andrew's College at the University the same year. In his own words, Mac acknowledged that his university degree "... came to a shuddering end during 1968 when he discovered drugs, sex and rock'n'roll."

Australia joined the US in the Vietnam War in 1962, which by 1965 led to the requirement for 20-year-old men to register for national service. This conscription ceased in 1972 when the new Whitlam Government was elected. Mac, with support from his parents and sisters, refused to register when he turned 20 in March 1969, meaning he was automatically called up. By this time his father had started an anti-war group which was gaining a lot of press; his mother joined "Save our Sons" and with three other women chained themselves to the railings inside Parliament House, Canberra in June 1970.

Canberra Times; 12 June 1970, p1

Over the next few years Mac kept a few steps ahead of the Australian Federal Police as he sought to avoid being arrested - he was facing a two-year prison term. Initially in Glebe with Charles Jennings ('67) and other draft-dodgers and activists opposing the Vietnam War, Charles remembers the early-morning knocks at the front door, which took enough time to be answered for the 'dodgers' to escape over the rear fence before the police entered.



Mac's father's pharmacy started to suffer from his anti-war stance but fortunately the wharfies, coal miners, and painters and dockers unions rallied to give him their business. These union connections helped Mac too as he took to the road to avoid capture. He was provided with safe passage and given assumed names as he travelled north to Cairns, where he lived in a cave in the bush for a year, and survived with forays to Magnetic Island, where he climbed palm trees and harvested coconuts for tourists at a dollar a pop. Then to Perth where he got a job with the wharfies, and then to Adelaide. Fortunately 1972 saw an end to all of this subterfuge. Settling down in Melbourne, Mac opened a vegetarian restaurant (Shakahari) in Faraday St, Carlton which became moderately successful and was fondly remembered by many old boys. Natural talent nevertheless breaks through, and after two years working as a videotape editor in the US, Mac became a film, television and stage writer, his first notable project being the 1984 mini-series *Waterfront*, which won the 1985 Logie award for Best Single Miniseries/Telemovie. This drew upon his wharfie connections with the men who had helped him in the early 1970s.

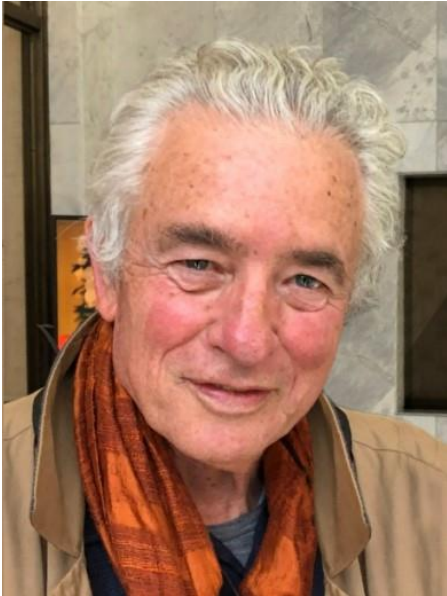
He was kept busy in the remainder of the 1980s by a mini-series *The Petrov Affair* (co-writer), a film *Ground Zero* (co-writer with a walk-on at the start in a germ-free suit) and a screenplay *The Delinquents*. Many other projects followed, his expertise being sought through to 2015; many of the details of his extensive career can be accessed at <https://www.austlii.edu.au/austlii/page/A69585>. Over his 40+ year career in film, television and stage Mac received a number of personal awards from his peers as well as a number of the projects he worked on receiving awards. On hearing of Mac's death there has been a number of inciteful messages posted on the Australian Writers' Guild website <https://awg.com.au/News-Details?newsId=883&title=Vale-Mac-Gudgeon-1949-2023>.

Mac first married in the early 1970s from which came a daughter (Shanti). He and actor Kerry Armstrong were married for two and a half years in the 1990s from which came a son (Sam).

Over the last 32 years Mac and noted artist Deborah Russell shared wonderful times together, during which they married. Despite his strong anti-war beliefs, which some might interpret as being contrary to the upbringing he had at King's, he kept in close contact with many of his friends from '67 and attended a number of the ten-yearly reunions. On one such occasion in 1977 there was a noteworthy exchange between Harry Read and some who opposed the Vietnam War; however, time healed those wounds and in recent years both parties were able sit and chat at the same table.

Fellow '67er Malcolm Lamb recalls the time when, while still at King's, he produced the infamous booklet *Vietnam Past Present and Future* in August 1967, and Mac rocked up to buy a copy. Mac was a CUO and the Drum Major at the time and the next day he said in no uncertain terms but with a wry grin, 'I don't like it ... it's not radical enough!' Malcolm admitted to being a little shocked.

Mac was a key member of the '67 Editorial Committee which produced the 2017 50th Reunion Magazine. He was also the instigator of *The Legacy*, a documentary produced in 2022 by Ned Manning (OB '68) and others to recognise the VIII's success at the Head of The River in 1967.



On hearing of Mac's death, Ned wrote:

"One of the many things that impressed (and surprised) me about Mac was the way he effortlessly straddled two worlds. He was a radical, non-conformist. A fierce advocate for Australian writing and writers. A totally dedicated Union man. A card carrying left winger. And yet he never severed ties with his ultra conservative, monarchist loving, somewhat militaristic school, nor his school mates. He owned his days at The King's School as proudly as he owned his days on the run from conscription. That is the mark of a man completely at ease with himself and his past.

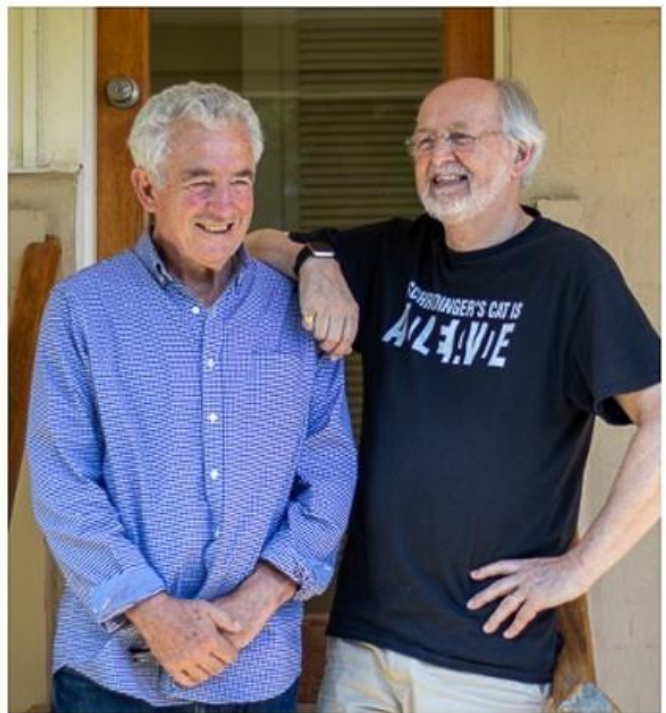
"It was an honour to be asked by Mac to help create a film celebrating his mates' triumph in the 1967 Regatta. In many ways I helped make it as a tribute to Mac and to thank him for the support he gave me as a writer. He was a great man."

Mac in 2020

Source: Gudgeon family

Mac was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 2016, an illness he tackled with the same strength and determination he brought to all of the challenges that confronted him during his life. In recent years he was hospitalised where he enjoyed visits from his many friends including '67ers Warwick Fisher, Charles Jennings and Pete Ashton, however it was here he was diagnosed with Multiple System Atrophy.

He died from a heart attack in hospital on 25 May 2023 with a memorial (his *Last Hurrah*) on 20 June, attended by about 200 family, friends, industry luminaries and old boys. There were Pete Ashton, Warwick Fisher who delivered a very moving eulogy, Chris Burn, Basil Simmons and Cyril Payne, while Charles Jennings provided his memories of Mac via video link from England.



Mac with long-time friend Charles Jennings in 1965 and again in 2020

Contributors: Charles Jennings, John Lord, Hugh Poate, Ned Manning, David Simmons, Malcolm Lamb, Chris Burn, Rob Pearce, David Payne, Rodney Hammett.

Acknowledgements: Deborah Russell; Mac's own obituary read at his *Last Hurrah* on 20 June 2023; Australian Writers' Guild (Vale Mac Gudgeon).

¹ For further details of the 1966 Cadet Centennial Parade, see the Class of '67 website.