

Colin Morwood OAM

Electrical engineer, 91,
Kenmore Hills

Interview LEANNE EDMISTONE

PICTURE: MARK CRANITCH



I suspect I really am the only genuine one-eyed judge in Olympic history. I lost my eye in a motor accident just weeks before I went to the 1960 Rome Olympics to judge gymnastics. I healed very quickly, had a good artificial eye installed and duly turned up to judge. Having started gymnastics as a boarder at Toowoomba Grammar School, aged 13, the pinnacle of my competitive career was being named Queensland Horizontal Bar Champion 1953. When I moved into administration and judging my involvement really took off. I've judged at many an Australian Championship, two Olympic Games – Melbourne 1956 as well as Rome – and been inducted into the Australian Gymnastics Judging Hall of Fame.

Growing up in Brisbane with my brothers Ken, Alan (late) and his twin sister Audrey, our father James “Eric” Morwood was the chief engineer and manager of Brisbane City Council’s electricity department and my mother Myrtle was a secondary school English/French teacher. Dad used to take me with him on power station breakdown visits and I never wanted to do anything but

engineering. I became the first City Electric Light engineering cadet in 1948, which involved a year’s apprenticeship before going to University of Queensland to complete my Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical). My first job was with the City Electric Light Company in 1953.

Five years later, I was sailing to England on the Dominion Monarch, having won a two-year industry scholarship to work overseas, when I met my late wife Helen, a New Zealand journalist, while playing deck quoits. We didn’t get together straight away – I had my scholarship to complete and she had to accompany her parents home. After about a year, I got a postcard from Helen to say she was working in London. I was based in Manchester and Newcastle, and burnt many miles commuting to see her. On our way home from a motoring tour of Wales with friends, I took Helen walking on the moors in the Peak District and asked her to marry me. She didn’t give me

an answer straight away because a naval lieutenant had asked her to go to Malta. She’d never been and was quite keen to go!

About a week later, I was driving to visit Essex’s Bradwell Nuclear Power Station when I collided with a fully laden sand

truck. I ended up in hospital with a lost eye, broken nose, broken jaw, and 40 stitches in my face, but was most worried about not being able to make it to Helen’s that night, where I’d planned to put on a slide show

of my photos from the Gymnastics World Cup in Moscow. I had a message sent to her apologising.

Next thing, there was Helen at the hospital, saying, yes, she’d marry me. We were married 57 years and have four children

– Sue, 59, an architect, John, a town planner, who died aged 55 six months after Helen, 85, in 2018, Bruce, 54, an arborist, and Alastair, 50, an airline pilot – and eight grandchildren, aged 15 to 23 years.

My career took us from Brisbane to Townsville, Gatton to Port Moresby, PNG,

for four years, and then back to Brisbane. I also spent 40 years volunteering with the Institution of Electrical Engineers. Rotary has also been a huge part of my life since 1973. My Order of Australia nomination came from the Rotary Club of Brisbane Mid-City and it was awarded for service to gymnastics and the community.

My recipe for longevity is very simple – eat well, don’t stint on the red wine and keep busy. I drink my green smoothie every morning; have a high-protein, low-carb diet – organic where possible; and always have wine with my main meal.

I’m still very busy. I was president of the Blue Care Iona Village (where I live) Independent Residents’ Association (Kenmore Hills) for seven years, as well as a continuing member of the IET (successor to the IEE) committee.

I’ve prepared all the photos for my funeral and Sue asked me to write my eulogy, so I’m halfway through that. I’m about to start compiling a world timeline, starting with my birth year 1930 and recording, year by year, what happened to me, in Queensland, in Australia and the world. I’m hoping to get that finished by my 100th birthday.

My recipe for longevity is very simple – eat well, don’t stint on the red wine and keep busy