

that's touching



I believe every life should be celebrated

The BEST real-life stories

Craig celebrated his dad's life by turning him into a rainbow of colours

Craig Hull, 55, Sydney, NSW

Holding our breath, my mates and I went silent, all eyes fixed on the TV screen.

"The 2000 Olympic Games will be held in..." the announcer began, "Sydney!"

Jumping up, I gave my friend Roy a hug.

"I want you guys to scatter my ashes at the Olympics," he said.

"Of course mate," we all promised.

Roy only had a few months left to live and I was determined to fulfil his wish.

As stadiums popped up all over the city in preparation, I pushed it to the back of my

mind, supporting Roy, his partner and family through this difficult time.

And when Roy devastatingly lost his battle, we were heartbroken.

But along with the grieving, I remembered his last wish and my promise to him.

I need to give him the resting place he deserves, I thought.

Meanwhile, working at Sydney Aerial Theatre I was chosen to perform at the opening ceremony at the Olympics.

This is it! I beamed.

After months of practice and costume fittings it was finally time.

"Give him the best show of his life," Roy's family said,

giving me their blessings.

So, as I was hoisted into the air and the lights flickered around me, I pulled out Roy's ashes from my pocket.

Then, I sprinkled them onto the field below, saying

goodbye to my best mate as I watched them gracefully float through the air.

I couldn't have thought of anything better for his final act, I thought, wiping away tears.

I finally felt at peace having given Roy the ending I'd promised him.

But after the show, it got me thinking - every life should be celebrated, not mourned.

As I pondered, I noticed the two urns in

my lounge room filled with the ashes of my late dogs.

They were my family, I thought. *I need to give them a spectacular farewell too.*

"Sydney Harbour New Year's Eve fireworks display!" I blurted out.

With my mind made up, I got a job as a pyrotechnic.

And after researching how to build fireworks, I spoke to my boss about my plan.

"Oh that's easy," he said. Working together, he helped me insert the dogs' ashes into the body of the firework.

When December 31, 2010, arrived, we took a boat on the water with the fireworks in hand.

Lighting the fuse, I sent Zeus and Gypprock off into the sky, along with the dazzling New Year display.

Erupting with a bang, a rainbow of colours filled the dark night sky.

It's what they deserve, I smiled, saying my final farewell.

Afterwards, I just couldn't shake the incredible feeling I had when giving my friends a unique goodbye.

I wanted

everyone to go out with a bang!

So I decided to start a business, calling it *Ashes to Ashes*.

"Send me up!" my dad Mervyn, then 77, said, fully supporting my new business venture.

"Not any day soon!" my mum Coral, 72, piped up.

I hoped not either, but seven years later Dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

I had such a special relationship with them both and it broke my heart.

With them living in the Gold Coast, I would usually fly up from Sydney every six months to visit.

But after Dad's diagnosis, I started going there every month.

"Let's give him the best life he has left," Mum whispered one time.

So once she'd gone to bed, Dad and I would stay up late with homemade Black Russians.

Sipping our drinks, we discussed what was next and where Dad would like his ashes scattered.

"I'm thinking over a golf

course," he told me. "Or even the water."

Setting it in stone, he even put it in his will that he wanted us to send his ashes up in one of my fireworks.

"I just don't want to gather dust on a shelf," he reiterated.

As my business slowly took off, I sent lots of people's loved ones off in colourful sparks.

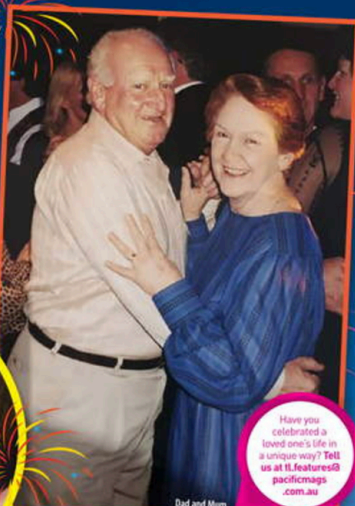
When the sky lit up in a beautiful display, my client's faces were so full of emotion.

Watching their grief turn into joy is something I never wanted to stop doing.

One day, I served Dad eggs benedict.



Everyone should go out with a bang!



Dad and Mum

Have you celebrated a loved one's life in a unique way? Tell us at tl.features@pacificmags.com.au

"Your mother doesn't cook like this," he joked.

But the next day, Dad was rushed to hospital.

Gripping Mum's hand, we were both by his side as he lost his fight aged 84.

"I love you Dad," I whispered.

Over the next few days, Mum and I discussed where to send Dad up.

Pulling out a map, we decided on the Southport Spit on the Gold Coast.

"That's the Coral Sea!" I smiled turning to Mum.

Sharing a namesake, Mum's smile stretched across her face.

A message from Dad, I thought.

Gathering on the shore, tears filled our eyes as I lit the fuse and stood back.

Wrapping my arm around Mum, we watched as Dad

filled the sky with every colour of the rainbow.

Bigger than the opening ceremony, bigger than the New Year's fireworks, I thought watching Dad smile in the sky.

"Bye Dad," I smiled back up at him.

Dad was a brilliant man and deserved a brilliant goodbye.

Sending your loved ones up in a bang truly is a celebration of life.

Dad, thank you for choosing me to be a part of your life.

Until next time mate. ●

As told to Jacqueline Mey

For more information, visit ashestoashes.com.au

'I don't want to gather dust on a shelf'

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that's life! 59



Watching loved ones...



...go off in colourful sparks...



...turns grief into joy