



Picture Anna Brooks 2002

Kenneth Douglas McConnell: 1951-2006

Dr Kenneth Douglas McConnell (better known as Ken) was a specialist psychiatrist. Ken was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1951. He was educated at Dundee High School, where he was a Sergeant in the School Cadet Force and also a leader in the local Scout Troop. During this period he climbed many of the Scottish peaks and developed his lifelong passion for mountaineering.

Ken emigrated to Australia in 1974, travelling overland via Europe, the Middle East and Asia. He found work with a building contractor in Hobart, and pursued rock-climbing with great enthusiasm.

He joined members of the Tasmanian University Mountain Club to climb on the Mt Wellington Organ Pipes and other cliffs. Ken loved Tasmania, which he described as being like Scotland but with better weather.

After working in Hobart for several years, Ken attended the Australian National University in Canberra to study Chinese language and Asian Studies. In 1980 he commenced medicine at Newcastle University, graduating in 1987. The next stage in his career was to work at Canberra and Goulburn Hospitals. Ken continued rock-climbing and mountaineering, and made several climbing trips to New Zealand in the 1980s. In 1989 he climbed Aconcagua, the highest peak in South America.

Ken returned to Tasmania in 1991. He began psychiatry training, initially working in the north-west at Wynyard, and later in Hobart. Ken continued his passion for mountaineering, and made many trips to the Himalayas and Karakorum. He became an experienced high altitude mountaineer and climbed on some of the highest mountains in the world. He participated in two international expeditions up the north side of Everest in 1993 and 1999, and reached over 8000 metres. In 1994 Ken was awarded a prestigious Shipton-Tilman Award. Like the famous mountaineers, Shipton and Tilman, Ken loved exploring little-known and remote areas, and preferred to travel in small, lightly-equipped expeditions. He organised many trips to Tibet and Nepal, and on some of these he took friends and colleagues. Ken was a devoted 'fan' of mountaineering and revelled in all its facets. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of mountaineering, its personalities, and its legendary stories. Ken also became an expert in that rare field of high altitude and expedition medicine, and acted as expedition doctor on some trips.

In 1998, Ken moved to Adelaide to complete his psychiatry training, and did his final year in 2002. Thereafter he worked as a consultant psychiatrist in the Community Mental Health Service in Hobart, and also did some work at Burnie, and at the Royal Hobart Hospital.

Ken derived great joy from the natural world. He delighted, not only in the world's highest peaks, but also in identifying plant species on Mt Wellington, roaming around Mt Roland in Tasmania's north, or watching cockatoos on Bruny Island. Ken had little interest in accumulating material possessions. Instead he created a life rich in the experiences he valued.

Ken had considerable sympathy for those less fortunate than himself. He was keenly aware of the difficult lives of many of the Nepalese and Tibetan people who assisted his expeditions, and he gave generously to them in various ways. He made firm friends with some of the Nepalese people, and took an interest in their culture and customs. He had a personal interest in Tibetan Buddhism. He regularly practised yoga to develop flexibility and strength for his climbing, but also because he found it psychologically calming.

Ken died on January 21, 2006 in a rock-climbing accident on the Organ Pipes of Mt Wellington, near Hobart. Ken is survived by his two sons, Ian and Allan.

Ken McConnell was a remarkable and complex person. Though somewhat shy, he was gifted with magnetic charm, natural wit and an exceptional memory. Ken was loved and admired by his family and friends. His patients and colleagues appreciated his professional knowledge, coupled with his compassionate manner. He greatly enriched the lives of many who knew him and inspired them towards their own valued goals and experiences.

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This bursary was endowed by Ken's father, Kennedy McConnell, whose objective is to honour Ken's life and achievements by means of an annual award to a medical student at the University of Tasmania. Recipients will be selected, not only for their academic performance, but also for their love of nature and outdoor pursuits.

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