

PROUD DAD... DAVID BEING
CONGRATULATED BY HIS FATHER
ON GRADUATING FROM UNIVERSITY

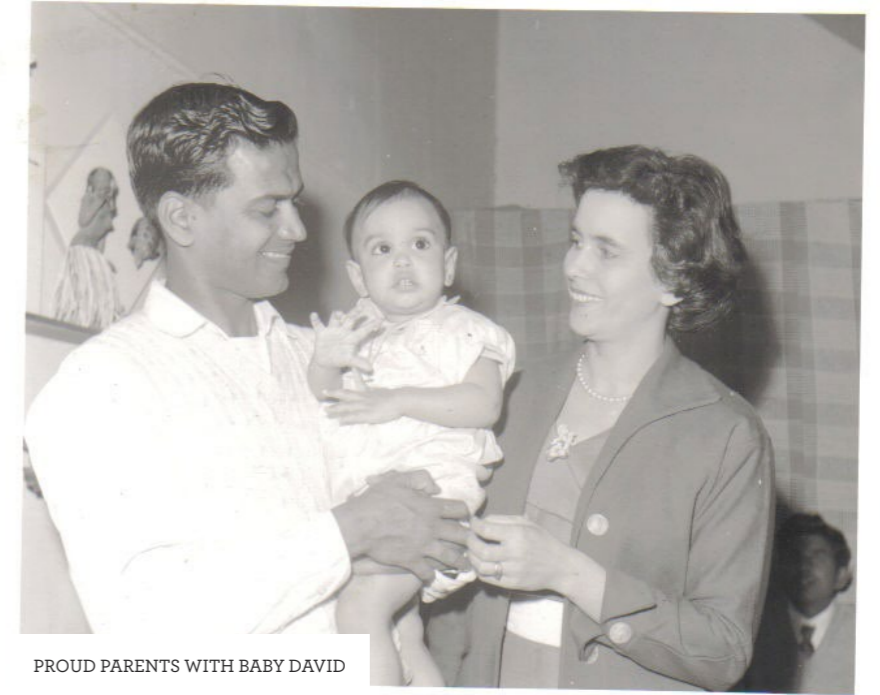


THE PRODIGAL SON

WORDS: NIGEL ADLAM.



YOUNG DAVID
CELEBRATING HIS BIRTHDAY



PROUD PARENTS WITH BABY DAVID

David De Silva was living in a tent with his long-time girlfriend Wendy when he decided, on a whim, to sit in on the Lindy Chamberlain trial at the Supreme Court in Darwin.

It was a decision that would revolutionise his life.

David was riveted by the courtroom drama - Lindy tight-lipped, the prosecution and defence lawyers arguing with strength and great attention to detail, Justice Muirhead in his wig making sure all was proper and fair, the press excitedly taking shorthand notes.

"I was captivated," he says.

It was 1982 and the trial of the century: a fundamentalist Christian mother who claimed a dingo killed her baby daughter Azaria at a campground in the shadow of Uluru was charged with murdering the child.

David, who had so disappointed his parents when he decided to take off around Australia in a beaten-up old car rather than finish year 12, decided then and there, as he sat in the public gallery in his best t-shirt nearly 35 years ago, to become a lawyer and practice law in Darwin.

And he did.

He went to college to complete his school studies, excelled and got into Adelaide University to study law.

David is now the principal of Darwin-based De Silva Hebron, one of northern Australia's most successful law firms.

He and Wendy have been together for 37 years and have three children, Jenna, Khia and Xavier, and a much-loved grandson, Talan.

"My family is the single most important thing in my life."

The couple sometimes look back and wonder what would have been if they hadn't decided to take a day off from doing nothing in the campground and go to the Supreme Court.

"I love the legal profession," says David. "There's not a day when I'm not happy to be going to work. I have to be very, very crook to take a day off."

His parents are still alive - his Portuguese-Indian dad Anthony is 85 and his Irish-Burmese mum Doreen is 78 - and are proud of their boy.

David was born in Bahrain where his father had an engineering contract with a British company.

It was a closeted life - a traditional British education amid an expatriate community.

The family migrated to Australia when David was 11 - just after the White Australia policy ended - and settled in Adelaide.

"I had an Aussie mate in Bahrain and from talking to him I expected horses and roos in the streets. When we got to Adelaide I was surprised to find a pleasant city without the animals bouncing around.

"We were the only 'coloured' people around when I was growing up in Adelaide," he says. "We were extremely conscious of this, but I never felt discriminated against. We lived in an immigrant community, mainly Greeks and Italians."

Migrating to Australia was a brave decision because the family's money was tied up in India and couldn't be taken out of country, but the De Silvas believed Australia wasn't nicknamed the Lucky Country for nothing and their seven children would enjoy a good life.

They were right; all the kids have done well.

Inevitably, there were disappointments in the new country; for instance, David's dad went to the most prestigious engineering college in India but his qualifications weren't recognised in Australia.



THE DE SILVA CLAN... THRIVED IN AUSTRALIA

His parents invested nearly all their earnings in buying a house and sending their children to private school.

“We never went without but there weren’t any luxuries either. We never went on family holidays but we had a lot of love, support and fun, and didn’t miss out on anything.

“My mum is a clever woman and was determined from the start that we should adapt to our new home and become Aussies as quickly as possible – love Aussie sport, eat Aussie food, talk like Aussies.

“We were curry kids and she made us eat Aussie food – meat pies. We hated it. How things have changed!”

David soon found his feet in his new country.

“I made many great mates at school. I had a very happy and interesting childhood.”

David is now as True Blue as you can get – he loves Aussie Rules and as a former board member of the NTFL and AFLNT, was actively involved in the establishment of the AFL in the NT.

He avidly follows St Mary’s where he is a life member, Territory Thunder and St Kilda, enjoys a round of golf (“I’m crap at it”) as a member of the RAAF Darwin Golf Club and works ferociously hard but still finds time for the occasional long Friday lunch, now mainly confined to Carbine Club and Admiralty Club lunches because of work commitments.

David went on a driving trip with mates from Adelaide to Mildura when he was 16. It wasn’t much of a journey – only 400 kilometres, the distance from Darwin to Mataranka – but it was enough to distract him from school studies and catch the travel bug.

His next major trip was up the east coast with Wendy working at odd jobs in Queensland.

“We thought we were living the life. Happy days.”

The couple eventually ended up in Darwin. They liked the feel of the Northern Territory’s pretty little capital city and went back a few years later ... to that fateful bit of voyeurism at the Chamberlain trial.

“MY FAMILY IS EVERYTHING TO ME... I ALWAYS TRY TO FIND TIME FOR THEM.”



ST MARYS FAN DAVID WITH THE AFLNT TROPHY AND (LEFT) JON HUBBARD AND FORMER CLUB PRESIDENT VIC LUDWIG

David’s parents were delighted when the prodigal son returned home to take up his studies again.

After graduating with a law degree, David completed an associateship with South Australia Supreme Court judge Justice Robin Millhouse.

The judge urged him to join a South Australian legal firm, but he and Wendy decided to go north again.

“The plan was to stay a couple of years and return to Adelaide, but Darwin had got under our skins and we couldn’t leave the place – we loved it.”

In 1989, David got a chance to complete his articles at Poveys in Darwin and then went to work as a litigation lawyer with Cridlands.

In 1993, he took over management of the Darwin office of Brisbane partnership Grieves Creswick but the following year set up De Silva Hebron. He has been the sole owner since 2008.

David must be one of the busiest blokes in the NT.

He is chairman of the Power Generation Corporation, Darwin Performing Arts Centre and Crimestoppers. He is also a board member of Darwin Waterfront Corporation, Tennis NT and Territory Equities.

Here’s a taste of his schedule: David recently stopped off in Tennant Creek to inspect power stations under development on his way to Alice Springs to chair a board meeting of the Power Generation Corporation, which trades as Territory Generation.

As a result of the Territory Generation meeting, he had to apologise for not being at the 20th anniversary celebration of Crimestoppers NT.

At the same, he was overseeing a significant dispute being litigated in the Supreme Court at Darwin.

And on the flight back to Darwin from Alice Springs he was reviewing the first draft of the contract between the Northern Territory Government and Tennis NT.

David helped win a \$16 million grant from the Territory Government to set up the 16-court NT Tennis Centre, which will allow the Territory to attract international tournaments.

It doesn’t end there. As president of the Carbine Club, David was at the same time heavily involved in organising important lunches for the V8 Supercars and the Darwin Cup.

All the while he was running his busy legal practice and involved in the operations of the Darwin Waterfront Corporation.

And as board chair of the Darwin Entertainment Centre, David was preparing for the Garmalang Festival and coordinating the Territory Day celebrations at Mindil Beach and Palmerston, which the Entertainment Centre is facilitating for the Major Events Corporation.

Nobody could accuse the man of shying away from a tough job.

David finds all the work enormously rewarding.

The Darwin Entertainment Centre had been in deficit for five years but has been in the black since he joined the board three years ago .

David praises the support of the NT Government and City of Darwin, and salutes centre manager Alan James.

“He’s very efficient and entrepreneurial. We’re looking to bring in even bigger international shows.”

David also took over Crimestoppers at a tough time – there were widespread governance issues and the board was in disarray – and he has the job of restoring the organisation’s credibility.

How does he find time for it all?

“Firstly, and most importantly, great support is needed. Every entity I am involved in has strong leaders and able people who pull together to offer support. Without that I could not do what I do.

“I’ve got good time-management skills and this is very important. I start work first thing in the morning when I decide what calls I can fit in on my hands-free car phone while driving to work.”

De Silva Hebron has up to 10 lawyers and covers a wide range of legal matters, but is best known for its commercial work.

Wendy works in administration support and daughter Jenna is the office manager.

“It’s great working with family,” he says. “My family is everything to me. It doesn’t matter how busy I get, I always try to find time for them.”

David is a prosperous and well-respected business owner nowadays. But he never loses sight of his harder, younger days.

He drove taxis for four years at night while at university – and hated every kilometre of it.

“It’s a tough job and I never forget that,” he says. “Cabbies always get a tip out of me.” **TQ**



DAVID IS THE PROUD OWNER OF DE SILVA HEBRON



DAVID AND HIS PARENTS OUTSIDE THE DE SILVA HEBRON OFFICE