EULOGY

DELIVERED BY ALAN JONES AO

HONOURING THE LIFE OF

BETTY CUTHBERT AM MBE

AT

THE SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND

MONDAY 21 AUGUST 2017

There is a crushing reminder of our own mortality in being here today to honour and remember the unyieldingly great Betty Cuthbert, AM. MBE.

Four Olympic gold medals, one Commonwealth Games gold medal, two silver medals, 16 world records.

The 1964 Helms World Trophy for Outstanding Athlete of the Year in all amateur sports in Australia.

And it's entirely appropriate that this formal and official farewell, sponsored by the State Government of New South Wales, should be taking place in this sporting theatre, which Betty adorned and indeed astonished in equal measure.

It was here that in preparation for the Cardiff Empire Games in 1958 and the Rome Olympics in 1960, as the Games were being held in the Northern Hemisphere, out of season for Australian athletes, that winter competition was arranged to bring them to their peak.

Races were put on here at the Sydney Cricket Ground at half time during a rugby league game.

And it was in July 1978, as Betty was suffering significantly, but not publicly, from multiple sclerosis, that the government of New South Wales invited Betty Cuthbert to become the first woman member of the Sydney Cricket Ground Trust.

Of course, in the years since that appointment, as Betty herself acknowledged, her road became often rocky and steep.

She once talked about the pitfalls, the craters and the hurdles.

But along the way, she found many revival points.

She once said, just like the marathon runners who grab a drink to keep their energy from being depleted, the nourishment that she found always lay in the knowledge that she gained along the way which she was able to use at later points in her life.

The cups holding that nourishment were many things – the support of caring people, the comfort of animals and the natural world, the inspiration of others running their own gruelling races and what she described as the love of a heavenly father.

I suppose it is only in recent times that the wider public's attention has been drawn to the fact that Betty is a twin, born 20 minutes before Marie arrived on the scene.

20 April, 1938.

She was one and a half pounds smaller than Marie, describing herself as a skinny little thing with long arms and legs.

The nurse who looked after the births of the two girls nicknamed Betty, 'The Spider'.

Of the third and fourth children in the Cuthbert family – John was four years older and Jean was six years older.

Betty always saw herself simply as an ordinary girl from the suburbs, originally of Merrylands, rising to do extraordinary things.

Nothing ostentatious or pretentious about Betty.

When she was young, Dad worked nearby in a factory and at home grew and sold cut flowers and a few vegetables to help with the income.

They were hard times, ahead of the war, and every penny counted.

But when Betty was five, the family shifted to Ermington and Betty's father expanded his little nursery and finally left the factory and became a full time nurseryman.

Betty was a gangling five year old and started at the Ermington Primary School with Marie.

She always called Marie, 'Midge'.

The only running Betty had ever done was at picnic carnivals.

It wasn't until she was eight that she had her first proper race.

It was at the school's sports carnival.

She wore an old-fashioned long tunic and ran in bare feet, like all the other girls, and she won the 50 and 75 yards races.

She had a try at the high jump and she won that as well.

Like all kids then, and even today, that resulted in her going to the district primary schools' athletic meeting and she won the two sprint events and the high jump.

She then went to the New South Wales Combined Primary School Championships and, as she said, in the high jump she was the first one eliminated.

So she took the hint.

But she made up for it later in the afternoon by winning the 50 and 75 yards finals and they were her first two State titles.

She just loved running.

She'd run to school in the morning.

Tear around the playground during the morning and lunch breaks.

Run home after school.

And then run around the neighbourhood until tea.

She played just about every sport there was at school – athletics, vigoro, basketball – but she liked running best of all.

As she once said to me, Mum and Dad had never been good at sport, but John and Jean were school champions but never took any interest in it once they left school.

As she said ruefully, ‘Midge’ was good too, but always had to put up with me coming first.

When Betty won her first trophy for being the champion girl athlete at the school, one of the neighbours said “That’s only the start of the collection.”

But never in Betty’s wildest dreams did she think she’d have the collection of trophies she eventually accumulated.

Her father’s property covered four acres, including the house, and in those early days all the land around Ermington was open paddocks.

Betty loved to get out there and run through the long grass.

She felt as free as a bird.

She hated being indoors.

She was happy when she could fiddle in the garden.

Her father gave her a few shillings a week for doing jobs like weeding and sweeping up.

She would always say that while ‘Midge’, Marie, the twin, finished second to Betty most times in the races, it was ‘Midge’ who was boss.

And ‘Midge’ looked after Betty.

Because then, and even through most of her life, Betty was quiet and often withdrawn.

In those early years, she would close up like a clam whenever anybody spoke to her.

She let ‘Midge’ do the talking.

And Marie fought all her battles.

When Betty left Ermington Primary School, just before she turned 13, she went with her twin, ‘Midge’, to Parramatta Home Science School.

It was there that her life changed.

She first met June Ferguson, the school’s physical education teacher and a former Olympian.

June had competed in the relay and the long jump at the 1948 London Olympics and she was also the women’s coach of the Western Suburbs Athletics Club.

Indeed, it was at her first athletics carnival at the Parramatta Home Science School that Betty won the 75 yards and 100 yards for 13 year olds that June Ferguson noticed her and asked Betty if she would like to join Wests, where June could coach her.

Betty started straight away.

It was only a short time after her joining Wests that that the

Combined Home Science Schools Championships were held here at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

And then the trials, Betty running in bare feet, to choose the New South Wales team to compete at the inaugural Australian School Boys' and School Girls' Athletics Championships in Tasmania.

In the trials, Betty equalled one record, she broke another, and her times were as good as those of the senior girls who were competing, even though some were three and four years older than she was.

The trials were held on the lightening-fast grass track, adjacent to this sporting theatre, then called the Sydney Sports Ground.

Betty's world of track and field was beginning to take shape.

She duly went to Hobart and won the Under 14 100 yards.

June was boss.

And, as Betty would say, her word was law.

It was that same Wests Club that spawned two greats of Australian track and field, the remarkable Marlene Mathews and the hurdler Gloria Cooke.

Gloria, a finalist in the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 in the hurdles, where we had three Australian girls in the final out of six.

Marlene and Betty were to become close friends, but deadly rivals.

Season after season they fought it out and world record followed world record.

June Ferguson pointed out to Betty early that while Betty knew nothing about the art of sprinting, she had one or two good points in her favour and one was the good high knee action and a long raking stride.

And one other little thing – she always ran with her mouth wide open.

This, of course, became a trademark.

Many people, over the years, criticised Betty for this, saying it forced her to take in too much air and increased her wind resistance, but it didn't seem to affect her performance too much.

Betty was often asked if she ever caught flies in her mouth, but she once said that she trapped a few now and then, but a few flies and a handful of critics would not make her change what came naturally.

She was 13 when she first started training seriously and worked out two nights a week for an hour and a half.

It is extraordinary to note that when Betty came home from the Australian School Boys' and School Girls' Championships in

Tasmania in 1951, she went straight into her first season of inter-club athletics and there started competing against Fleur Mellor, who, most sports writers thought, was going, eventually, to succeed Marjorie Jackson, 'The Lithgow Flash', as Australia's champion woman sprinter.

Fleur was two years older than Betty, but they had some terrific battles.

It was the 220 yards which Betty always favoured.

And in that first inter-club season, Betty ran the 220 yards in 25.1 seconds, which was an Australian Junior record and the first time her name went into Australia's record books.

She left school relatively early and she and Marie went to work in a factory making baby clothes.

They hated it.

Marie, 'Midge', took a job as a dentist's receptionist and stayed there until she was married.

But Betty chose to work for her Dad, taking slips from shrubs and trees and sewing them into sand boxes.

She also bred and sold budgerigars and she had a stack of goldfish.

And she spent lots of free time at night making her own clothes.

At that same time, in the senior ranks, Rae James and Marlene Mathews were dominating the scene and Betty soon knew that she'd have to start running against them.

So when she was 17, with another season still to go as a junior, Betty chose to run in the senior events.

While Rae James' performances fell away at that time, it became, then, Marlene and Betty.

Or as Betty once said, Marlene followed by me.

Week after week it went, M. Mathews first, B. Cuthbert second.

These were extraordinary times in Australian track and field and they deserve to be honoured and remembered.

Towards the end of the 1955/56 season, Marlene equalled Marjorie Jackson's world record for the 220 yards of 24 seconds, but Betty was right behind her.

Both of them were given the same time.

It's hard to believe in this, then as now, competitive world of track and field, that when the girls went to Brisbane for the Track and Field Championships of 1956, the line-up was Marlene Mathews, Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland – one of the great sprinters, then, in the world and, of course, the greatest hurdler – Wendy Hayes and the Queenslander, Norma Croker.

Marlene was the athlete of the hour.

Betty was eliminated in the 100 yards in 1956, but coach June Ferguson reminded her that the 220 yards was her pet event.

It was a good psychological trick.

And, at long last, Betty beat Marlene, winning her first senior Australian title when, in fact, she was still a junior.

It was that result that saw her chosen in the squad to train for the 1956 Olympics.

Of course, that's where the myth has grown up – that Betty had bought the tickets to go, not imagining she'd be competing.

But she had, in fact, earned her spot in the squad, though the Olympics are held out of season for Australian athletes, so special competition, as I've said, was arranged on Sundays for members of the Games squad.

It was often cold.

And on Sunday 16 September 1956, and Betty always said she didn't feel like running on that day, she felt a cold coming on, but she won the 100 metres in 11.8 and then lined up for the 200.

There was nothing special, there was no title at stake.

Marlene had some leg troubles and wasn't competing.

Fleur Mellor was in the adjoining lane.

But as Betty said, “I went off like a firecracker”.

She won and they announced the time – 16 September 1956 – 23.2 seconds – a world record.

She had taken 0.7 of a second off her own previous best time and 0.2 of a second off the world record that Marjorie Jackson had set in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics.

The time was flashed around the globe.

It was then that the whole squad went to Melbourne for the final Olympic trials.

Betty won the 100 metres in 11.7, beating Marlene by a couple of feet and Norma Croker was third.

And then Betty won the 200, with Marlene and Norma again taking the minor placings – 23.7.

So here she is in the 100, 200 and 4x100 metres relay at the Melbourne Olympic Games, a little shy thing of 18 years of age, who could have never dreamt what was to follow.

Well, that is common knowledge.

Betty was to win gold in the 100 and 200.

The place-getters, the only time in Olympic history, were the same in both events.

Betty first, Christa Stubnick, a typist with the East German Police Force, was second and the great Marlene Mathews was third in both events.

And then, of course, the controversy over the relay.

The Australian team was Shirley Strickland, Norma Croker, Fleur Mellor and Betty.

Marlene Mathews was omitted.

44.9 seconds – gold and a world record.

Oddly enough, just before the closing ceremony of the Melbourne Olympics, Betty flew home to Sydney to run in a match race between an American team and a composite team from the British Commonwealth countries and the Australian winning team from the Games.

Strickland, Croker, Mellor and Cuthbert lowered the world 4x110 yards record to 45.6.

And then Marlene replaced Shirley Strickland and they ran the 4x220 yards relay to set another world record.

So when the New South Wales members of the team arrived at Kingston Smith Airport after the Olympics – the reception was astonishing.

A few days later, the city of Parramatta gave Betty a reception, perched in a shining Rolls Royce, June Ferguson, the coach, sitting beside her and nearly 50,000 people were cheering.

Not long after the Games, Betty had a camellia named after her and she was depicted on a stamp in a commemorative series issued by, of all places, the Dominican Republic in the West Indies.

One of eight showing winners of major events at the Games.

Betty found all the attention very flattering, but she found it draining – she felt her identity was disappearing.

She was no longer Betty Cuthbert the ordinary girl, but Betty Cuthbert the athlete.

As she once said, many people would probably have wallowed in the limelight, but frankly, she loathed it.

It is not that she did not appreciate what people did for her, she did.

But she wished she could have been just one of the crowd, watching someone else up on that official platform.

Betty was an Olympic champion before being a champion of her own state.

But it was back to the inter-club championships of 1957 and 1958 and at the State titles in 1958, Betty equalled Marjorie Jackson's world record for 100 yards of 10.4.

A week later, she ran the 220 yards in 23.5, to lower her own world record.

She had now broken four world records in the space of four weeks and held every world sprint record in 1958, except the 100 metres.

Yet such was the nature of the talent amongst Australian women that a couple of months later in the Australian Championships in March 1958, Marlene wiped out two of Betty's world records in the space of 48 hours – 10.3 and 23.4 – and Betty was a few feet behind.

The 1958 Empire Games, as they were called, at Cardiff, were a disappointment for Betty.

It was just after that when Herb Elliot, Betty Cuthbert and her coach June Ferguson made a trip through Europe.

Betty ran in Oslo and won the 100 and the 200, but then went to Gutenberg in Germany, where she was persuaded to run in the 400 metres, because it was the only event on the program for women.

It was the first time Betty had ever run the distance – she had not trained for it – and she ran 54.4 seconds, which was the fastest time in the world.

1958.

Rome in 1960 was something of a disaster.

Betty missed a lot of competition with injury and in the quarter finals of the 100 metres, the hamstring played up again and Betty was eliminated.

Doctors wanted her to pull out of the 200 in Rome.

She kept talking until they agreed she could warm up.

But on the morning of the heats, she quickened up on a couple of run-throughs, the pain came back and the Rome Olympics were over for Betty Cuthbert.

Scratched from the 200 metres and the relay.

She wrote at that time, **"I hated being a public figure to be looked at, talked about and pointed out every time I stepped outside my own front door.**

I have been secretly nursing that hatred for four long years, ever since my wins in the Melbourne Games.

Few knew how I felt.

I'd never whispered a word to anybody but my family and closest friends, but it finally became unbearable.

There were few places I could go without people recognising me, wanting to touch me, shake my hand or get my autograph.

It got to the point where I didn't want to go out.

I realised that being a successful athlete went hand-in-hand with being a public figure, but how I wished it hadn't.

I wanted to become just an ordinary girl like 'Midge'."

So Betty conferred with June Ferguson and told her that she was going to retire after Rome.

One afternoon, about 14 months after she retired, Betty was working at her nursery when it suddenly occurred to her that she might need to take up athletics again.

She could not get it out of her mind.

She said there was a voice in her head that kept saying, over and over, run again, run again, run again.

She fought the voice for two months and said **"Eventually I could not sleep at night.**

I realised it was more than just an idea.

Somehow I knew it was God speaking to me.

One night in my bedroom, the voice said 'run again' and this time I surrendered.

'Okay, you win', I said, 'I'll run again.'"

From that point until she retired in Tokyo in 1964, she was never happier in the sport.

The long trek back began in 1962.

And this is an aspect of Betty Cuthbert's achievements that has never been alluded to.

Obviously, she had been out of competition for some time.

Many people believed she could not come back.

The Australian Championships had already been held.

Marlene had retired after Rome, others had drifted out of the sport, there was a whole flock of new girls and Betty was trying to qualify for Perth in 1962 and on a very wet track.

At the Commonwealth Games selection trials, Betty put paid to the notion that they never come back by winning the 100 and coming second in the 220 yards.

And she left for Perth, hoping for her first Commonwealth Games success, following the disappointments of Cardiff.

But she found Perth like an oven.

She talked about winds like blast furnaces, blowing in off the Nullabor Plain.

When the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Games on 22 November 1962, the thermometer was over 32 degrees in the shade, 39.8 at noon two days later.

When Betty ran the heats and semi-finals of the 100, on the floor of the stadium it was 65 degrees.

Betty failed.

In the semi-finals, she beat only one girl home in the 100, running no faster than she had run at school.

She made it to the final of the 220 yards, but came fifth.

All sorts of reasons were volunteered, but what is forgotten in all of this was the women's 4x110 yards relay.

Betty wanted to withdraw from the team, fearing she would let the girls down.

The relay was on the last day of the Games – England was the team to beat.

And by the time the second change was made, England were well clear.

By the time the last English runner, Betty Moore, took the baton, England were five metres in front of Australia and Cuthbert set off.

I remember, clearly, the call of Oliver Drake-Brockman.

After all, Betty Cuthbert had failed in the sprints and it was a foregone conclusion that Betty Moore would run away with the gold medal.

And suddenly Drake-Brockman called "Here comes Cuthbert...".

And with every stride, the old Cuthbert swung into action and she gathered Betty Moore up, metres away from the line, then

shoulder to shoulder, then one last desperate kick by Cuthbert and Australia had won the gold.

I rank it as one of the greatest relay legs ever run by an Australian athlete.

Perth in 1962 and 40,000 at the stadium cheered and clapped for minutes after the race was over.

In spite of the disappointments in the 100 and the 200, she had no intention of retiring.

And then, in 1963, at a holiday resort near Newcastle, Lake Lodge, with June and Jack Ferguson, June, the coach, June bluntly said to Betty, you're going to run the 440 yards when we go back.

At that point, the event wasn't even on the Olympic program.

Betty went back to inter-club, adding the 440 yards to the 100 and 220 yards.

So at the New South Wales Championships in 1963, Betty Cuthbert, won the 440 yards in 54.7 – a respectable time today.

And then she won the 100 and 220 yards and I don't think any woman or man has ever won the 100, 200 and 400 at the state titles.

By that stage, the great Dixie Willis from Western Australia was the opposition and Judy Amoore, later to become Judy Pollock from Victoria.

Betty was invited to run in the Moomba Festival in Melbourne.

The organisers wanted her to run in the 100 yards and the 440 yards.

She wanted as many runs under her belt as she could get.

It is 1963, the year before Tokyo.

Judy and Dixie were in the 400 and all of them had times around about the 54 second mark.

The world record was 53.7.

Dixie was a magnificent 800 metres and 880 yards runner and the holder of both world records.

Betty won the 100 in 10.7.

The 440 yards was an hour later.

The great Cuthbert put paid to both Dixie Willis and Judy Amoore and though her legs felt like jelly at the finish, she heard the announcement that she'd broken two world records – the 400 metres in 53.1 and then the 440 yards, which is a little bit longer, in 53.5.

Two world records.

And that took her off to the Australian Championships in 1963.

And in the 440 yards final, Dixie and Betty hit the line, as the commentators say, locked together.

53.3 seconds – knocking two-tenths of a second off the world record Betty had set 11 days before.

She had set three world records in two successive races.

Of course, Tokyo in 1964 we know, but not the full story.

Betty had an awful foot injury and she could not compete for months.

Everything looked desperate, until she ran into a Bondi chiropodist, John Nolan.

He diagnosed the pain that she'd endured for months and months and which responded to nobody, as a bone out of joint in her foot.

Betty couldn't believe it, but Nolan worked wonders.

And in 1964, on 2 October, she was off to Tokyo.

The first time ever the 400 metres for women had been included in the Olympics – and it was a red-hot field, dominated, so the critics said, by the British runner, Ann Packer and, of course, the Australian, Judy Amoore.

Dixie was only contesting the 800 metres.

Ann Packer ran 52.7 in the semi-finals and the world believed they were watching the inaugural champion.

But as Betty said, when the final came, it was the race in which she ran out of athletics and into history.

Even though Betty had broken the world record 18 months before the Tokyo Olympics, her performances going in to Tokyo had not been startling.

The newspaper critics hardly gave her a mention when discussing prospects for the gold medal.

And Ann Packer, the British 400 and 800 metre runner was a red-hot favourite.

Luckily, Betty had Judy Amoore, her teammate, on the outside.

And in Lane 6, further out, Ann Packer.

There was a wind down the back, which means there was a wind against them in the home straight.

And Betty turned slightly in front of Ann Packer.

She described the wind as “like an invisible hand pushing against me”.

Her legs got heavier as the line edged closer.

She felt Packer right on her heels, but knew she must have been just as tired as Betty was.

And Betty was not going to be the first to give in.

A stride from the tape, Betty knew she'd won.

The fastest time she'd ever run for the distance and only a tenth of a second outside the world record.

52.1 seconds.

Betty said, subsequently "That short space of time sealed my fate in athletics. After 13 years of running, it was all over. I'd made up my mind that if I won, I would never run again."

As she said, athletics had helped turn her from a shy, uncertain school girl into a confident, responsible woman.

And through athletics, she'd learned to accept defeat as easily as victory and to face up to problems and challenges instead of turning from them.

Betty tried many things after track and field, including fostering the belief that coaching young children and encouraging fitness amongst women were important goals.

She started fitness classes for women at the Harbord Diggers Club, near Manly, and drove about 17 miles to attend the classes three times a week.

The challenge of getting people into good health.

Betty tried coaching and, in fact, one of her athletes made the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1970, but I remember Betty telling me how disappointed she felt that the athlete did not share the same commitment as the coach.

Betty said at the time that she couldn’t bring herself to coach anybody as wholeheartedly as she had coached this young girl.

Basically, it was not for her.

But it was in Edinburgh at those Games that she felt, in her words, that “something was not quite right with my health.”

She felt tired, almost exhausted.

She once said that multiple sclerosis is like a dark shadow that crosses your path on a warm sunny day and then moves away again.

At first, you hardly notice it – it doesn’t cause immediate change in your life, but is far more subtle.

It is almost impossible to say at exactly what moment it manifests itself in a person.

She thought her tiredness at the beach was due to the heat – she said nothing.

It was the first unexplained thing that had happened to her.

Earlier, in 1969, she noticed a tingling in her hands – she was 31.

A pins and needles sensation if she walked any distance.

Those sensations occurred in her legs and her feet.

One day, after working in the nursery, she tried to clean her fingernails with a nail file – she got the pins and needles feeling.

There was no explanation for unrelated feelings in her body.

Then, before long, she was feeling tired all the time.

And eventually the list of symptoms became too big to ignore.

She wanted to deny the whole thing and believe it would go away of its own accord, but the warning signs were too insistent.

She made the unpleasant trip to the doctor.

The first doctor told her it was either glandular fever or rubella, German measles.

With her long-standing interest in natural health methods, she thought she might be able to cure the symptoms herself.

But they remained and became even more disturbing.

She couldn’t catch or hold a medicine ball thrown at her during a fitness class.

In one test, she was asked to bring her index fingers together in front of her body – she couldn’t.

Test followed test.

Doctors prescribed Vitamin B12.

She continued to work, was interested in the sporting world and sporting goods and got a job with Adidas.

Indeed, she went to the Munich Olympics in 1972 as part of the company's international promotions team.

By 1973 she felt relatively free from the M.S. symptoms.

And so the dilemma continued.

It was a silent disease – very few spoke the truth to Betty and she told very few about how she really felt.

She actually discovered that her GP, her neuro-physician, whom she saw in 1969 and the eye specialist, because she had trouble with her vision, suspected she had M.S. but no-one told her.

There was a wall of silence from the medical profession.

M.S. is a notoriously hard disease to diagnose and there are no easy answers for a physician when he or she must decide whether or not to tell the patient.

Betty left Adidas and the great Ron Clarke offered her a job with Le Coq Sportif to open a branch office in New South Wales.

The tasks included taking orders for garments and setting up new outlets.

But her back, and then her right leg, started playing up and she knew something serious was wrong, but she wouldn’t let on to anybody that she was ill.

In 1978, the organisers of the annual Walk Against Want asked Betty to participate in their walkathon.

She thought it was a great idea.

But the day was hotter than usual.

After three kilometres, her back started to ache and she felt uncomfortable but kept going.

Then her right leg began to kick out and she had to quit.

Multiple sclerosis is such, and Betty learnt this, that sufferers in remission must always do things in moderation.

Betty had gone past her safety point.

So at this time, May 1978, Betty was 40 and she knew that something seriously was wrong.

She started attending Marrickville Hospital for acupuncture treatment twice a week – it did little to relieve the symptoms.

Then Betty was rung by the Reverend Graham Hardy of St Stephen's Uniting Church in Macquarie Street, asking Betty if she would read the lesson at a lunchtime service.

She was introduced to the congregation.

She wondered whether he suspected her illness.

But she read the bible's words on the race of life from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - **"Do you not know that in a race, all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize. So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath. But we are imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I pummel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."**

Betty found that immensely relevant.

She wasn't running aimlessly, but she didn't quite know when the race would end.

The Reverend Hardy then preached a sermon on disappointment, which, as he told the congregation, could make you either bitter or better.

And arguing that there are always reasons for disappointment in life.

When it happens, he said, God opens the windows and presents solutions from a different viewpoint.

Betty felt the words had been chosen specifically for her.

It was at this time that Betty received an invitation from the New South Wales government to become the first woman member of the Sydney Cricket Ground Trust, where she served from 1978 to 1980.

She was struggling, albeit full of determination.

The years became a continuing story of hope and frustration, of effort and sorrow.

Of people coming into her life to help her and of the uncontrollable emotions that raged within her.

Sometimes, her faith was stretched to the limit.

When it finally became clear that she could no longer remain in the work force, she applied for a government invalid pension.

At 41 years of age, she found it a bitter bill to swallow.

But even more bitter was the discovery that applying for the pension involved an interview process that she considered invasive, humiliating and degrading.

She would say that after trying to be a good ambassador for Australia for so many years, she felt as though she had been tossed on the scrap heap.

The Department of Social Security had investigated her and found that the interest from her bank savings was beyond what was permitted under their rules.

Fortunately, public outrage rectified the situation, but no-one of her standing, or any standing, should have been treated in this way.

Yet happiness and goodness followed.

She found respite and relief when she moved to Lismore.

She loved the animals, she loved the space, she loved the silence and she loved the privacy.

She found being a public person very difficult.

Of Lismore, she said she wasn't devoid of friendship, she had neighbours across the road and down the road and they helped her with washing and ironing.

The world knew she was suffering from multiple sclerosis and while she found public knowledge of that difficult, she was forever optimistic about the future.

She was often asked what it was like to have M.S. and she had three pictures which captured the feeling, one of which was the rose.

She said imagine a bright and healthy rose in your garden in the morning light, sparkling with fine, misty dew.

Pick that rose and carry it inside your house, put it in a vase without water and leave it to wilt.

Sometimes M.S. is like that.

Faith had always been an important part of Betty's life, even though she wasn't religious and even though she wasn't a regular church-goer.

But she said what she went through in those days leading up to Tokyo taught her a lesson that she never forgot.

Each set-back had a specific meaning.

She said it showed her that no matter how awful something is at the moment, good can come of it.

And she determined after Tokyo she would never lose faith again.

Through the dark and desperate days when multiple sclerosis was a sinister but unknown shadow across her life, she held on to God.

It was partly, she said, because of the faith that life is good, however much adverse circumstances seemed to say the opposite.

And if she hadn't had that faith, she used to say, I don't know what I would have slipped in to.

"If I hadn't had anything to believe in, I would have had nothing."

Betty would say that she'd talk to God every day about so many things – He was there to thank and to believe in and to hope for and to ask things of.

She said in one way, it was like having a mother you could always go and talk to.

Of her Mum, she said **"She'd never let me down.**

She'd gone through everything with me emotionally and provided me with the greatest possible support at all times."

Betty said **"There was a deep, invisible bond between us, based on love and trust."**

And God was the same.

Betty once wrote **"Having Him there to listen to me was more important than I could express."**

On one day, Wednesday 1 May 1985, Betty changed direction.

She had been nominated for an award as Single of the Year and she had won it.

Reverend Gordon Moyes came to Lismore to speak at the Town Hall.

Betty thought she would go along.

At the end, he invited people who wanted to become Christians to go out the front and Betty thought I'm already a Christian...so that is not for me.

Reverend Moyes issued a second invitation and added “There are some private practicing Christians here” and the words had a remarkable effect on Betty.

She started to tremble, she said her heart started to thump, she said she knew she had to go forward.

And when she did, the Reverend Moyes prayed for her.

She said she didn’t understand what it meant, but she realised that she had been “born again”.

She had no idea, this was 1985, Betty was 47, and she had no idea what the phrase meant.

She thought it was a cliché in the wider world.

A straight-forward description of something rather wonderful.

But, as she said, the phrase came from the bible, where Jesus says “I tell you the truth, no-one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

She said in all her 47 years, she had never heard such a thing before.

Pieces, for her, started to fall into place.

She said it was better than winning four gold medals – “To be born again is the best medal anyone can ever get. And you don’t have to train for it.”

She often spoke of an old story to prove what she believed was God's joy at saving people.

The story went **"What do you think, if a man has 100 sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the 99 on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray.**

And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the 99 that never went astray.

So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

From Matthew 18, Verses 12-14.

It was during this period in Lismore that, yet again, Betty felt that change was upon her.

She had visited a small Pentecostal church in Lismore.

One of her Sydney friends, Dixie Treharne, the wife of the yachtsman Hugh Treharne, asked Betty if she would accompany Dixie to Perth for the opening of a Pentecostal church over there called Rhema Family Church.

Betty had the same kind of urge to go that she had when she moved from Sydney to Lismore.

She met Margaret Court, one of the greatest tennis players the world has seen, who was involved with the Pentecostal church.

Betty came back home to Sydney and told her Mum and her family this was something she wanted to do, to go to W.A.

The multiple sclerosis now had many manifestations.

She had difficulty writing – the muscles in her right hand and fingers were no longer up to the task and it required an extreme effort to hold a pen and scratch a few barely-legible words onto the paper.

In 1991, Margaret Court announced she was going to establish Margaret Court Ministries for the purpose of fulfilling what she believed was God's call on her life to preach the gospel.

And Margaret began holding meetings in halls, community centres and other public buildings around Perth.

Sometimes, Betty went along and one night she was sitting by the book sales table when a woman about her age came up and introduced herself as Rhonda Gillam.

Betty remembered the name, because a friend had told her some 12 months earlier that this was a person who would like to meet her.

Rhonda and her husband Keith lived in Mandurah.

Betty had bought a little place in Perth.

Rhonda explained that Keith was away at a golf tournament and would Betty like to stay with her for the weekend.

Betty agreed.

And so this remarkable friendship began.

Betty said “When I found Rhonda, I found a special friend. One with all the same interests that I had. And I felt like her family was my family too.”

So Betty moved to Mandurah in 1991, straight into a little unit which she bought with the proceeds from the sale of her place in Como, Perth, a minute and a half around the corner from where Rhonda and Keith lived.

A new phase in her life was beginning on other fronts.

She accepted an invitation to fly to Sydney to name a new three million dollar commuter catamaran “The Betty Cuthbert”, to sail up and down the Parramatta River every day, right past Betty’s old house in Drummoyne.

It was the first time the public had seen Betty in a wheelchair and it was a shock.

Daily life, by now, was absorbing most of her energy.

She was grateful for the strength and dedication that Rhonda put into looking after her.

Then a letter arrived, inviting Betty to Melbourne for the Australian Sports Hall of Fame Champions Dinner.

She asked Rhonda to write back saying she couldn’t.

The invitation followed a dreadful mini-tornado in Mandurah, which smashed the block of units in which Betty was living.

Her little unit was a tangled mess of bricks and wood and smashed furniture and glass, but amazingly, but not to Betty, none of the memorabilia was destroyed.

None of her personal belongings, even though the little garden shed out the back was blown so far away it was never found.

It was the same day that it was announced that Sydney had won the 2000 Olympic Games.

Damage was assessed, insurance claims were made and Betty's unit was redesigned and rebuilt with many improvements to help her with her new living, including passages wide enough for her scooter to go right through to the bedroom.

So she was off to Melbourne.

It was a gala night.

Dawn Fraser was there, along with Judy Patching, Julius Patching, who was the starter for all of Betty's races at the 1956 Olympics, and she discovered that the purpose of the night was to induct Betty as a Living Legend of the Hall of Fame.

Betty had no inkling it was happening.

As they were starting dessert, the MC uttered Betty's name, a spotlight came upon her and 700 people burst into applause.

Someone grabbed the wheelchair and pushed Betty up onto the stage and for the next 30 minutes she sat there in tears as they said beautiful things about her.

I remember in 1996, that remarkably generous man, John Singleton, joined with a few of us to raise money, a virtual testimonial lunch, for Betty and almost $300,000 was raised.

Betty was immensely grateful and after consultation with many whom you should be able to trust, bought a block of land at Mandurah, with gum trees and a dam.

She wanted to share with others what she was able to provide.

Then, a “client” arrived on the scene, interested in looking at property.

He was charming company, said he was a born-again Christian, told his story.

He appeared sincere and enthusiastic and shared Betty’s dream of helping others.

Betty had people check the bloke out, but it was all happening in a whirlwind.

He proposed setting up a trust fund to raise money to finance her plans for the block of land.

A Perth barrister was involved.

The bloke came every day to her home.

Then he said he had come across a clothing business that had collapsed and had bought it for next to nothing, so they should invest in that.

And so the story went on.

And the bills started arriving.

And the bloke disappeared.

And Betty and Rhonda were left in very significant debt.

Betty subsequently found that when this fellow was speaking to influential people on his mobile phone in her presence, he'd actually been speaking to no-one.

Nonetheless, Betty often remembered the verse from Matthew in the bible **"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundred fold and inherit eternal life."**

Betty felt, in spite of multiple sclerosis, that is what happened to her.

Then, Sydney won the Olympic Games and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp invited Betty, Rhonda and Keith to attend the Games as their special guests.

There was much speculation as to whether Betty would light the cauldron.

All sorts of names were volunteered – Murray Rose, Herb Elliot, Marjorie Jackson, Shirley Strickland, Dawn Fraser – but it is part of the Olympic tradition to keep people guessing.

And so it was, on this occasion, in 2000, when the night arrived and the announcer said "Ladies and gentlemen, celebrating 100 years of women's participation in the Olympic Games, the Olympic Flame, carried by Betty Cuthbert and Raelene Boyle" and the crowd erupted.

Raelene started to push Betty around the running track, followed by the next runner, who was Dawn, then to Shirley Strickland, to Shane Gould, to Debbie Flintoff-King and then to the remarkable Catherine Freeman, waiting at the foot of the huge podium.

When Betty returned to Mandurah to her home, fan mail increased.

She lived one day at a time, under the extraordinary care of Rhonda.

And here we are today with a crushing reminder of our own mortality, as we honour the great Betty Cuthbert.

It is hard to believe and yet we are here to celebrate, not to grieve.

The source of the celebration is simple.

Betty would not want us celebrating the gold medals, she would want us to celebrate the journey in which she found, through adversity, a deep faith.

And she would want us to celebrate that in death, as in life, that faith will guide us to the appropriate destination.

Betty would want her example not just to inspire those to be quick runners if they have a natural talent, but rather to inspire those who have a struggle in life to find the courage to keep going with what you have and to never give up hope.

Betty read often the verse by Frances Ridley Havergal – a 19th century poet, who wrote:

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose."

Betty Cuthbert.

Today, we honour you with the same depth of emotion as we have loved you.

And that will be forever.