Item 3.1

Vale Brian Sherman

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

In September last year, Brian Sherman AM, the philanthropist, animals advocate, and entrepreneur passed away peacefully after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

I first came to know Brian, his widow Gene and daughter Ondine through the animal protection organisation Voiceless, which Brian and Ondine founded in 2004. I soon discovered that Brian's advocacy for animals, who had no voice was one of his many passions, which I shared.

Brian Michael Sherman was born into a tight-knit Jewish community in Brakman, a small South African mining town. While at university, he met his future wife, Gene. At the time, Brian was the beau of one of Gene's cousins. A relationship was forged that was to continue until Brian's death.

Apartheid was well-established in the South Africa of the 1960s and 1970s. In June 1976, black schoolchildren protested against the teaching of Afrikaans, a language associated with the apartheid regime. Police violently put down the protests, with many children being shot and killed. Encouraged by Gene's cousin, Laurence Freedman, Brian, Gene and their young family moved to Australia the same year, with just $5,000 between them.

Brian soon got a job with the Bank of NSW, now known as Westpac. He worked in the fixed interest department, where his talent for investing was soon recognized.

In 1981, Brian and Laurence founded EquitiLink, a fund management business at Brian's kitchen table with an initial $5,000 investment. The Australian Financial Review later described EquitiLink as "the first funds management company specifically aimed at offering retail investors the kind of sophisticated products sold to institutions".

In 1986, they floated EquitiLink on the American Stock Exchange, raising over a billion Australian dollars. Equitilink was eventually sold to Aberdeen Asset Management in 2000 for $153 million, with $5.5 billion under management, of which 55 per cent was in the United States.

In 1992, Brian was part of a consortium that bought Channel Ten from Westpac for $230 million. According to the Australian Financial Review it increased in value to $650 million within five years. Brian served on its board from 1994 to 2007.

Brian's interests ranged well beyond the world of finance. He served on the board of the Organising Committee for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and chaired its finance committee. He was President of the Australian Museum Trust from 2001 to 2009, ensuring it continued to be world-leading in its collections and scientific research. This was helped by his being founding Chairperson of the Australian Museum Foundation and the President's Circle of donors as key fundraising vehicles. He was a director of the Australia-Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, and chairman of the Rambam Israel Fellowships program.

Brian shared Gene's passion for art and supported her commitment to Sydney's cultural life. He was a director from 1986 to 2007 and subsequently the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation from 2008 to 2017. Gene intended this Foundation to be a 10-year project. In 2018, it transformed into the Sherman Centre for Culture and Ideas to facilitate discussion about fashion and architecture.

Brian and Gene were also avid art collectors owning over 900 artworks. In 2015, they began downsizing their collection, gifting works by 20 of Asia's most important contemporary artists to the Art Gallery of NSW. Other works were later gifted to the National Gallery of Australia, the University of Melbourne, Sydney University's Chau Chak Wing Museum, MoMA in New York and Tate Modern in London.

In 2021, they donated their entire collection of moving image and virtual reality works to the Art Gallery of NSW. They were among the first people to support the construction of the Gallery's Sydney Modern, pledging $1.5 million to its capital campaign. A project gallery in the new building will be named the Sherman Family Gallery. It was not their first contribution to new gallery space. In 2010 they gifted $2 million toward the new gallery for the College of Fine Arts (now UNSW Art and Design) in Paddington.

Brian's philanthropic endeavours were not limited to supporting the arts. When his twin grandchildren were born with the rare Allen Herndon Dudley Syndrome (AHDS), he supported study of the disease by the University of Technology Sydney via the MCT8 International Research Initiative. The Sherman Foundation made significant donations to UTS's global AHDS research and supported workshops for parents of children dealing with the disease.

Inspired by Ondine's passion, Brian supported animal protection through their organization, Voiceless. Since its establishment, Voiceless has helped to significantly fund UTS's animal law courses, advocacy, and the Centre for Compassionate Conservation. Brian helped found the first-of-its-kind with Ondine's husband, the ecologist Dr Dror Ben-Ami. The Centre conducts ground-breaking research across several continents, with the aims of slowing extinction, resolving human-wildlife conflict, eliminating wildlife trade and enhancing coexistence. Voiceless also established the annual Honourable Michael Kirby Voiceless Prize for Animal Law, awarded to the highest achieving student.

In 2010, Brian was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. At first it was a private family matter, but Brian eventually took steps to ensure his experience would benefit others. He worked with the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, taking part in a powerful advertising campaign to raise awareness and shared his experience in two episodes of Australian Story. In March last year, he published Walking Through Honey: My Journey with Parkinson's Disease co-authored with A.M Jonson. The title was taken from a phrase Gene's father had used to explain how he felt when he, too, was fighting the disease. The book proposed "more experimental approaches to treating Parkinson's Disease", advocating turning to the arts, including music, art and movement, for therapy. He previously published his memoir Lives of Brian: Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Animal Activist, in 2018 also co-authored with A.M. Jonson.

In June 2004 Brian became a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of "his service to the community as a philanthropist and benefactor to a range of arts, education, and sporting organisations, and to business and commerce". Brian also received an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year award, an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Technology, Sydney and with Gene, the B'nai B'rith Gold Medal for outstanding humanitarianism.

At his funeral, Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins said that Brian embraced his work to "improve the world with a fullness of heart, mind and body, spurred on by … his fabulous success in business, achieved with his incredible physical and mental stamina, his strategic insight, self-assurance and dogged determination."

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Brian Michael Sherman AM and his significant contribution to animal advocacy, the arts and philanthropy;

(B) Council express its condolences to Brian's widow, Gene, their children Emile and Ondine and their grandchildren; and

(C) the Lord Mayor be requested to convey Council's condolences to Brian Sherman's family.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor