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**Bro. GRAHAM CYRIL KENNEDY, AO.
(15 February 1934 - 25 May 2005)**

An Australian radio, film and television performer. He was known in the 1960s as "The King" and to a younger generation as "Gra-Gra". He was a great star on Australian television, later rejecting fame and publicity, spending his remaining years in seclusion.

Graham Kennedy was born in Melbourne and grew up in Balaclava. His parents divorced and he was raised by his grandmother. His first job, after leaving school early was as a news runner for the Australian Broadcasting Commission on their Radio Australia shortwave service.

His next work was at radio station 3UZ, initially in the record library and later as a panel operator for "Nikky", Cliff Nicholls, a popular radio personality, who was a big influence on Kennedy, who would later use "Nikky's" style on his own television shows.

In 1950 "Nikky" put Kennedy, then a teenager, on air with him on 3UZ and following "Nikky's" death in 1956 Kennedy was briefly partnered by Happy Hammond. By May 1957 Kennedy was appearing on television and in 1961-62 he presented a morning radio programme on 3AK with Bert Newton.

In 1970 he was on 3XY and from June to December 1975 he appeared on 3LO before going to 3DB in September to November 1976.

He also recorded a series of eight 30minute radio comedies for the ABC under the title, *Graham Kennedy's RS Playhouse*, written by Gary Reilly and Tony Sattler and broadcast between 11 August and 23 September 1979. The "RS" apparently was taken from the names Reilly and Sattler but also has another connotation in Australian English. Tony Sattler was married to the actress, Noelene Brown, and they were close friends of Kennedy

Graham Kennedy also became involved in Sydney radio station 2DAY FM, owning 10 per cent of the station when it was launched in 1980 and from 1981 presented a three-hour programme of music and comedy on Sunday mornings.

It is certain that Graham Kennedy is best known as a television performer, having been described as a product of the television era.

When the medium first came to Melbourne in 1957, he was chosen to present an evening show, *In Melbourne Tonight*, also called, *IMT*, for GTV9 beginning on 6

television he began a 40 year career on the box. In later years Kennedy claimed that he was terrified for forty years. He was not the first choice for the programme as Frank Packer knew about his reported homosexuality and wanted him sacked for it. This reported homosexuality has never really been proven either way.

On television he was undoubtedly bawdy, irreverent and iconoclastic. Bert Newton, in his own book, claims that,

"The blood would drain from the face of Pelaco shirt-wearing executives in television, advertising and business until they realised that instead of televisual suicide, this skinny little wise guy was commercial gold. And then they liked his brand of humour a lot."

IMT was devised as a copy of the American 'Tonight Show' format with the host presiding over sketches, star turns and reading advertisements live but Kennedy turned the live reads into comedy often deriding the sponsor's products. On one famous occasion a scheduled 20 second advertisement was turned into 33 minutes of improvised comedy. His humour had the touch of English music hall, vaudeville and he was undoubtedly influenced by Brother Roy Rene (Mo), in his smutty, innuendo, double entendre and sometimes camp style.

He often brought his Labrador dog, Rover, on stage with him and in one instance during an advertisement for a certain brand of dog food Rover showed absolutely no interest in that food at all and Graham Kennedy then proceeded to eat the food himself, it seemed directly from the can. On another occasion Rover achieved television immortality by relieving himself-live to air-upon one of the large television cameras in the studio. Kennedy was exasperated for years afterwards by repeatedly being asked, "Whatever happened to Rover."

For thirteen years Graham Kennedy ruled supreme as host of IMT and as Australia's most popular television personality. He had a very talented team of writers and it was a very punishing schedule, on air five nights a week and also during the 1960s for several years he and Bert Newton hosted the morning shift on radio 3AK then owned by GTV9.

On 23rd December 1969, thoroughly exhausted, he quit TV for two years, which he later described as, "Years of misery." He next made a special TV show on 2nd March 1972 and then returned with "The Graham Kennedy Show" on 19th September that year. He sparked controversy when he made the now famous or infamous "Crow noise" which was broadcast in March 1975. The incident was reported to the Broadcasting Control Board and Kennedy was banned from performing live on TV for an indefinite time and was forced to pre-record his programmes. Following the censorship of his 16th April 1975 show he abruptly quit and left GTV9.

There have been several theories advanced about the termination of the show, among them being that Kennedy engineered the whole thing because pre-recording would let him get home earlier, another that his ratings were poor and this that was a way to close the show. Graeme Blundell, Kennedy's biographer, claimed that it was a very political decision. On 17th April Kennedy made a scathing attack on Senator Doug McLelland, then Minister for the Media, for his failure to support local content regulation for TV. While these words were censored and never made it to air they

have been recorded. At this time there was a very active "TV-Make it Australian campaign" in action with personalities such as Gerard Kennedy and Bro. Bud Tingwell involved.. Three of Hector Crawford's police productions were cancelled within months of each other during 1975 and it has been suggested that Kennedy was a victim of Nine's sensitivity.

His next appearance was on Channel 10 in 1977 for a show called "Blankety Blanks." It dominated early evening television for two years between 7th February 1977 and 15th September 1978. Other players included Noeline Brown, Barry Creyton, Noel Ferrier, Bro. Ugly Dave Grey, Carol Raye and Stuart Wagstaff. Kennedy won a Gold Logie Award in 1978 for the Most Popular Personality on Australian Television.

Graham Kennedy returned to Channel 9 on 25th April 1988 in "Graham Kennedy's News Hour" with Kennedy reading the news. This ran until 9th December 1988 before returning on 13th February 1989 as "Coast to Coast" and then continuing until 8th December 1989. Once again he defied convention with remarks which were tasteless yet funny.

His last programme was "Graham Kennedy's Funniest Home Videos" which was broadcast between 29th March and 15th November 1990 on the Nine Network. He presented the introduction segment to the Nine Network special "35 Years of Television" in 1991 and his last appearance on television was being interviewed by Ray Martin in 1994. He complained that he felt "ambushed" by Martin's probing.

In 1998 he was honoured with a Hall of Fame Logie. He did not attend the ceremony and the award was accepted for him by Bert Newton. Graham Kennedy won a total of 14 Logies and 7 Gold Logies, more than any other entertainer in history.

Kennedy appeared in a number of films including, They're a Weird Mob (1996), The Box (1975) playing himself, Don's Party (1976). The Odd Angry Shot (1979), The Club (1980) and Travelling North (1987) among others.

IN 1991 Kennedy retired to a rural property at Canyonleigh, near Bowral, close to Tony Sattler and Noeline Brown, two longstanding friends. He maintained his best friends there were two Clydesdale horses, Dave and Sarah and a golden retriever called Harry.

Graham Kennedy never married and in the 1960s Bob Dyer described as "probably the loneliest young man in Australia."

His health declined during the 1990's. A diabetic, a heavy smoker and drinker he fell down stairs in 2001 suffering a broken leg and skull. The Canyonleigh property was sold and Kennedy moved into a townhouse and then a nursing home. Despite a career of high earnings his financial situation was, while not disastrous, insufficient to fund his ongoing care. Having made millions for the Packer family interests he believed that "The Packers will always look after me." Shortly afterwards the sum of \$150,000 was placed in his bank account, reportedly from Sam Chisholm, former Nine executive.

On 2ND February 2004 the Daily Telegraph said:-

“The King of Australian TV Graham Kennedy will celebrate his 70th birthday next weekend with a few close friends. The low-key affair is expected to be at the Kenilworth Nursing Home at Bowral where Kennedy has lived since taking a nasty tumble a few years ago. Physically he’s not in terrific shape. He can’t walk any more and gets around in a wheelchair as a result of the diabetes and the years of heavy smoking.”

Graham Kennedy died on 25th May 2005 at the nursing home from complications from pneumonia and his funeral was held on 31st May in a small community theatre in Mittagong. Controversy even surrounded him after his death, with Derryn Hinch claiming he had died of AIDS but this was disproved when Graeme Blundell published Kennedy’s medical history including a recent negative HIV test. Tony Sattler offered the Nine Network the right to televise the event. Nine declined despite the millions of Dollars Kennedy had made for the channel. Channel Seven took up the offer free of charge and in a gesture of good will offered Channel 9 a free coverage which was accepted so in fact both channels covered the funeral. In his will he left most of his estate to the Sydney City Mission

In the Australia Day honours of 26th January 2006 Kennedy was posthumously appointed an Officer of the Order Of Australia (AO) for “service to the entertainment industry as an actor, comedian and presenter significantly influencing the development of the radio, television and film industries in Australia and to the community.” The award was made effective from 5th May 2005.

Graham Kennedy was initiated, passed and raised in the three degrees of Craft Freemasonry in St Kilda Lodge No 303, Victorian Constitution, on 5th October 1955. 4th January 1956 and 3rd October 1956 respectively. He resigned on 31st December 1973.

Ref: Wikipedia

Right: In *The Club* with Jeanie Drynan, Ray Barrett and John Hargreaves.
Below: With Bert and Patti Newton. Below far left: Graham’s devoted friend to the end, Noeline Brown.

