The heartache of saying goodbye

[box] This column is normally reserved for comment on local issues, but occasionally it will also be used for short thoughts about every day life. This is one of those occasions.[/box]

John Sycopoulis, one of Glenn's extraordinary carers, with Glenn and I, in January 2013.

SHORT THOUGHTS – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] I [/dropcap]t has been a very tough week at *Bluestone* because we have lost two very important parts of our lives, and while these moments are normally kept private and hidden from readers, I want to share them with you, because you have been part of the journey.

You may remember that in October last year,

Bluestone recognised the generosity of the **Western Victoria Holden Car Club** by naming them as our Quiet Heroes. We did this because the car club kindly organised to have several cars turn up for the 50th birthday of my older brother, **Glenn**, who had Down's Syndrome.

Because of his condition, Glenn was expected to have a shorter life span than what most of us take for granted and so his 50th birthday celebration was an even more important milestone than usual. Even then, his body was not as strong and capable as it used to be – he needed to be lifted into the car – but that day was one of the happiest in his life.

Last Monday, April 7, Glenn passed away peacefully, with myself and three of his extraordinary carers by his bedside. Warrnambool has some of the most kind, capable and wonderful carers: people who do the things that I know I would be unable to do.

And they do it with love and laughter and a generosity of spirit that is increasingly hard to find in the world. Each one of them is a Quiet Hero.

Glenn with members of the Western District Holden Car Club who helped him celebrate his 50th birthday.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] J [/dropcap]ust two days after losing Glenn, we said goodbye to one of our *Bluestone Magazine* cocker spaniels, Peggy, who has been a part of our family for 13 years.

And just like Glenn, Peggy's body was no longer strong and capable – each day that passed, she was getting smaller and smaller in the world.

It may seem odd to write about the loss of a beloved brother and the loss of a beloved pet in the same piece, but both Glenn and Peggy taught me so much and gave me so much, despite having so little to give – in terms of how we normally measure such things.

They reminded me of the value of time. Of non-judgmental love. Of caring for someone because of who they are, not for how they earn a living, or what they own.

Of appreciating the precious gift of good health and a body that moves freely, without pain.

Of not getting lost in the small troubles of life such as whether you have more ‘likes’ on Facebook this week, or what is ‘trending’ on Twitter.

To hug often.

These are the gifts they have given me and what I now cling to as we say goodbye.

I hope that I never forget these things, just as I will never forget them.

Peggy – one of the Bluestone Magazine cocker spaniels.