

## **Jeremy Guy Ashcroft Davis AM FRSN**

**4 December 1942 – 13 June 2023**

Born in Sydney in 1942, Jeremy Davis also had local roots in Liverpool where his maternal grandfather had been twice Lord Mayor and was Managing Director of Ashcroft's Wholesale Meats. His parents were Joan and Guy Davis. Although Guy, an accountant and company director who saw active service in both World Wars, wanted his only son to become a lawyer, Jeremy chose to study accounting at Sydney University, winning 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours and the University Medal in 1964.

Davis threw himself into campus life, being active in student drama as well as President of the University Union and Vice-President of the Students' Representative Council. He was also International Vice-President of the National Union of Australian University Students, where he first met Jessica Milner whom he later married. Keen to pursue business studies overseas, Davis won Sydney University's J. B. Watt Travelling Scholarship in 1964. Rather than head to the UK as many did, he went to Stanford University, taking his MBA in 1966, and an MEd in 1968. He taught economics at Stanford and began but did not pursue a doctorate.

Instead, Davis joined the newly established Boston Consulting Group (BCG). In 1970, he and Jessica married and then moved to Paris to help establish BCG's French office. In 1974, Davis was appointed to open BCG's second North American office in San Francisco. Under his leadership as BCG Vice-President and Managing Partner, the young international team developed new consulting areas including the social impact of banking in South Africa, and established enduring friendships.

In 1978, Davis returned as Managing Partner to Paris, where his daughter Rachel was born. Two years later, he was invited to return to Australia and build the new Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM), a national school based at the University of NSW. This was an attractive challenge for Davis: a cross-over between academia and business, with its own Board of Management and a pioneering, interdisciplinary research-based structure.

Under Davis' leadership, AGSM introduced innovations that challenged the then heavily regulated climate of tertiary education. They included salary supplementation and housing loans designed to attract talented young academics, fee-paying short courses including an Executive MBA and public student

teaching ratings. AGSM promoted business partnerships, commercialisation of research and management education across Australia.

Twice elected President of UNSW's Academic Board, Davis also served on the University Council. He advocated for academic input into university decision-making. In 1989, borrowing tactics from his student days, he played a crucial role in campus opposition to Dawkins-era proposals creating a "unified national system" via compulsory tertiary amalgamations.

A strong sense of ethics and social justice marked Davis' personal and business life. He was a mentor to many and women students and colleagues found him especially supportive. As Chair of the Australian Industries Development Corporation, he was summoned to Canberra in 1997 to be sacked when his advice on the proper way to wind up the body while respecting the rights of its minority shareholders was ignored: a sacking he was proud of.

Davis was a leader in business strategy, applying economics, sociology and psychology to develop competitive organisational strategies. His students recall teaching inspired by insights drawn from his personal board and consulting experiences. Under him, the AGSM became a top-ranking school. He was proud when briefly it became a joint school of Sydney University and UNSW.

Retiring from UNSW in 2006, Davis continued his company directorships. He was Chair of Capral Aluminium and a Director of the ASX, Transurban, Singapore Power, SP AusNet, and CHAMP Ventures Ltd. He was a board member for many innovative high-tech ventures like Nucleus (later Cochlear) and chaired several Federal Government advisory committees and enquiries. In 2008, he was made Member in the Order of Australia and in 2012 received Sydney University's Alumni Award for Professional Achievement; in 2018 he became a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

Via his family's Sisyphus Foundation, Davis supported Indigenous, environmental and artistic charities. He was a Life Patron of Pinchgut Opera, a supporter of Bangarra, TaikOz/Percussion Australia and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, the Environmental Defender's Office, the Indigenous Literacy Foundation and the National Library of Australia among others. He was a proud custodian of a historic Griffin house in Castlecrag. A man of many tastes, he enjoyed the music of Janis Joplin, Joan Baez and The Grateful Dead, as well as the shakuhachi and the Baroque.

Still actively consulting at 80, Davis died unexpectedly, leaving his wife of 52 years, Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN, his daughter, Rachel Davis, and son-in-law, Dr James Cockayne, his sisters, Tonia Godhard AM and Pattina Turnbull,

and many nieces and nephews. A Memorial Celebration of Jeremy's life will be held at the University of Sydney on 22 September 2023. Please email [jgadavismemorial@gmail.com](mailto:jgadavismemorial@gmail.com) for further information.

Jessica Milner Davis

23 July 2023