



**MONASH**  
University

# MATHESON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

**VOLUME 11**



A woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a black blazer over a white polka-dot blouse and a pearl necklace, stands at a dark wooden podium. The podium features a gold number '5' on a small sign and the Monash University crest. She is speaking into a microphone. The background is a wall of large, textured stone tiles. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads are visible, and a table with white tablecloth, glassware, and plates is partially seen. A blue speech bubble contains a quote.

**“Bequests help us shape a better future by supporting students to reach their full potential, and driving innovative research for the good of communities across Australia and the world.”**

# THANK YOU

## Welcome to this year's edition of the Matheson Society Newsletter.

Each year, this publication offers a moment to pause and reflect on the extraordinary generosity of our bequestors, and the profound impact that Gifts in Wills make possible.

Across our campuses and research centres, we celebrate advances that only exist today because of the foresight and kindness of those who chose to include Monash in their Will – enabling us to push boundaries and drive life-changing breakthroughs.

The stories we share in this edition celebrate the enduring impact made possible by members of our community who have passed, as well as the positive future our current Matheson Society members are helping to shape through their Gifts in Wills.

From trailblazing lupus breakthroughs to advances in women's health, vision research, and legal education, the legacy of our bequestors is already creating a healthier, brighter future for generations to come.

Alongside these stories, we share reflections from members of our community about what inspires their

giving, as well as highlights from recent Matheson Society gatherings – moments that brought our community together to connect, reflect, and celebrate shared purpose.

Together, they reflect a generosity that builds a brighter world – not only through those whose legacy is transforming lives today, but also through those who believe in and are prepared to contribute to a future they will never witness.

We are deeply honoured to have you as valued members of our community. To those who have recently chosen to leave a gift in your Will – welcome. We are grateful for the trust and faith you place in Monash.

Thank you for your vision, your belief in a better future, and the extraordinary legacy you help create. We look forward to continuing this journey together – strengthening our community, celebrating our shared values, and honouring the lasting power of philanthropy.



**Professor Sharon Pickering**  
Vice-Chancellor  
and President

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# FROM HEARTBREAK TO HOPE

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**Her mother was a force of nature – right up until lupus took her life. Now, Gerri Nelligan is determined to continue her legacy.**

A skilled quilter, beloved grandmother, mother of seven, and keen volunteer – Jo Nelligan lived life to the fullest. “She was a tiny little pocket rocket,” says her daughter Gerri. “She was five foot and a half – you have to have the half! She was very fit and healthy.”

But 27 years ago, Jo began experiencing debilitating symptoms – pain, rheumatoid arthritis, and movement issues. She spent months in hospital as doctors treated each symptom separately, unable to find a cause. After five years, a spinal specialist finally pieced them together: Jo was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

This autoimmune disease causes damage across the body and can

look different in everyone. “It’s a bloody awful disease,” says Gerri. “And back then, there was very little by way of diagnosis or treatment. There was no hope.”

Jo died in 2016. After watching her suffer, Gerri and her husband, Oliver Portway, are determined to help unlock the secrets of this disease, which affects one in 2000 Australians. That’s why they’ve each pledged a portion of their estate to Monash University’s lupus research.

## HOPE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Led by world-leading expert Professor Eric Morand, the Monash team recently made a major discovery: by introducing healthy



genetic information into a lupus patient's cells, they can switch off the autoimmune reaction. Revolutionary new treatments could soon follow. This is exactly what gets Gerri excited. "Mum would just be so thrilled to see the breakthroughs they're having," she says.



Jo Nelligan (left) and Oliver Portway (right).

Jo herself was determined to help. Not long before she died, she underwent a risky biopsy. "She was adamant she'd do it," says Gerri. "She knew it wouldn't help her, but said, 'It might help some young person diagnosed in a few years' time.' Mum knew that research was the key."

For Gerri – a journalist – another vital part of this work is raising awareness. "One of the big problems was that nobody knew about lupus," she says. "When Mum was diagnosed, I'd never even heard of it. It's not a disease that gets talked about much."

## A GIFT FOR THOSE STILL FIGHTING

In many ways, Gerri is continuing not only her mum's legacy, but also her approach to life. "Luckily, my husband's like me. We believe our money should go to useful things, so we're leaving everything to what we feel are the most important purposes in our lives. Oliver just loved my mother, and we're both passionate about knowing our estate will be used to do seriously valuable things."

Jo Nelligan didn't have the luxury of hope, she points out – but Gerri and Oliver's gift in Will will help bring it to others. "We knew lupus was going to kill Mum – it was just a matter of when and how unpleasant it was going to be," says Gerri.



Gerri Nelligan.

"The work the Monash team are doing is incredible, but they need money to continue these research projects, which are being carried out with such compassion and passion... the word 'cure' can at least be on the discussion board now."

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# AN ENDURING GIFT TO FUTURE LAWYERS

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**In a lasting act of dedication to legal education, Professor Kumar Amarasekara left a bequest to establish an award in Criminal Law, ensuring future generations of Monash students are recognised for excellence in the field he championed.**

Professor Kumar Amarasekara was a passionate academic, lawyer, and respected contributor to legal scholarship. As a long-serving lecturer at Monash University's Faculty of Law, he was admired for his sharp intellect in Criminal Law and the Law of Evidence, and for his deep care for students and the community.

Kumar's connection to Monash began as a student. In 1973, he received a Monash Graduate Scholarship and completed his PhD in 1977. He began teaching in 1976 and remained a dedicated educator until his passing in 2002. A much-loved lecturer, he was known for his wit, warmth, and ability to connect with students across generations. Many of his former students are now practising lawyers in Australia and internationally, remembering him with great affection and respect.

Even during illness, Kumar's passion for teaching never faded. His experiences in both Australia and Sri Lanka shaped his deep commitment

to legal education. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy could not keep him from the classroom – a significant testament to his dedication.

## ZOE BALASOPOULOS 2025 PRIZE RECIPIENT



Zoe Balasopoulos receiving her award.

“The Kumar Amarasekara Prize broadened my horizons by supporting my academic growth financially, as well as serving as an encouragement to continually strive toward my goals within law and beyond.”

In his bequest, Professor Amarasekara established the Kumar Amarasekara Prize for Criminal Law, recognising outstanding achievement in the field he loved. Since its inception in 2003, the award has been presented to over 20 high-achieving students, celebrating excellence and encouraging future leaders in law.

## VANESSA MARCON

### 2025 PRIZE RECIPIENT

“Receiving the Kumar Amarasekara Prize is an honour. I’m deeply grateful for this encouragement, which has strengthened both my passion for the law and my commitment to serving others through it.”

The award reflects Kumar’s belief that recognition can elevate great students into exceptional ones.

In 2025, two students, Zoe Balasopoulos and Vanessa Marcon, were honoured with the award, continuing Professor Amarasekara’s mission to nurture passionate lawyers-to-be who will help shape a more just future. More than a mark of academic excellence, the prize offers confidence, opportunity, and connection to a proud Monash tradition. Inspired by his values, many recipients go on to contribute to research, teaching, and meaningful legal reform, a true celebration of Kumar’s enduring legacy.



Vanessa Marcon (left) accepts her prize from Associate Professor Becky Batagol (right).

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# LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

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**Jess Naylor and her mother, Dianne Dolman, have turned a personal struggle into a powerful gift – one that will help advance women’s health for years to come.**



Jess Naylor (right) with her mother, Dianne Dolman (left).

Jess Naylor has pledged a gift in her Will to Monash University’s HER Centre Australia, which was founded by Professor Jayashri Kulkarni AM. And her mother, Dianne Dolman, has done the same.

Jess can barely remember a time when she wasn’t dreading the pain of endometriosis. “Over the years, it progressed to premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), and I then went into surgical menopause,” she says. “It was incredibly difficult – a really rough time. But when you’re in a bad place, you go out looking for information to help yourself.”

That’s when she first came across the work of Professor Kulkarni, a psychiatrist and world leader in women’s mental health research. Reading Professor Kulkarni’s work – which connects hormones and trauma with women’s mental health – was a revelation for her. “Rather than looking at single parts of the body, she looks at the whole system,” says Jess. “That approach made such a difference for me, and I want other women to have access to that kind of support.” Now, Jess is determined to give back.

## **WOMEN HELPING WOMEN TO FILL THE GAP**

Established in 2022, HER Centre is dedicated to understanding and treating women’s mental health across their lifespan. It focuses on developing gender-tailored treatments that address the biological, psychological, and social factors shaping women’s experiences of mental illness. Jess wants to ensure future generations of women have answers that weren’t available to her.

“HER Centre is filling a vast knowledge gap,” she says. “In the past, we haven’t studied women. And I think we’re really feeling that now, with chronic fatigue, inflammatory conditions, PMDD, perimenopause, menopause, and postpartum. Until now, nobody’s really studied these things.”

Dianne adds that HER Centre also challenges the invisibility that many women feel later in life. “From my experience, once you hit 60 it’s like women stop mattering. You’re just invisible. Whereas everything that the HER Centre is doing shows that’s not the case. Women of all ages matter.”

Professor Kulkarni has also been an inspiration for Jess professionally. After studying psychology at Monash University, Jess channelled her resilience and lived experience of trauma into her advocacy. She’s built a career in wellbeing and change management, while also giving

corporate talks on menopause and perimenopause.

## A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

For Jess and Dianne, this legacy is as much about their bond as it is about philanthropy. The two are exceptionally close, and Dianne says she has absolute faith in her daughter’s judgement. “It’s an excellent cause. I could not think of a better one.”

“It’s one thing to complain, but it’s another to do something about it,” she says. “In leaving a gift in Will, we’ve tried to do something that will improve life for other people. We all live in communities, whether or not we know it, and the healthier your community is, the better your life is. Poverty, violence, ill health – that all impacts everyone, in one way or another. Being able to do something about it is an incredible privilege.”



HER Centre Clinician with a patient.

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# A LEGACY OF TRUST

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**When Mr Gregory Dean Campbell generously left a gift in his Will to Monash University, he specified that his bequest should be used to study glaucoma and other eye diseases causing gradual loss of eyesight.**

He did not tell us why he chose Monash to carry out this vital research – and we were unaware of his generous gift until after his passing. But he clearly knew Monash. He knew that his legacy would be safe with us. And he trusted Monash researchers to use every cent of it to drive the treatment of eye disease forward, just as he intended.

## EARLY ADOPTION

The eye is a hugely complex organ: and it's an area where much more fundamental research is needed to find new treatments and improve existing ones. Early-career researchers play a crucial role in the research pipeline. For example, immunologist and medical oncologist Associate Professor Vivek Narabhai is using Mr Campbell's bequest to test a better treatment for eye tumours known as uveal melanomas (Australia has the highest rate of melanoma in the world).

"These tumours happen in young people, and they tend to be very aggressive and devastating," says Narabhai. "Often, they result in loss of sight or the need to remove the entire eye. And despite removal, they often spread to the liver and other parts of the body."

Narabhai says that early-career researchers can often find it very hard to test innovative thinking due to the very fact that both the researcher and the ideas are new. Bequests like Mr Campbell's give young innovators like him a jump-start and the team are planning to put their new versions of an existing drug to treat uveal melanomas into animal models shortly.

And the impact of Mr Campbell's bequest could go far beyond its original target, points out Narabhai. "It's probably more likely than not that we'll make progress in the eye space. Then we'll realise that there's another disease that may be more imminently addressable, and we'll pivot to that. Because of the support of donors, we can go where the science and the data take us."

## A FAR-SIGHTED APPROACH

Research Fellow Charles Bayly-Jones is another early-career researcher benefiting from Mr Campbell's bequest. "Gifts like these are so important to someone like me because I'm not an established senior researcher," he says. "I can't point towards a vast track record of grants when I'm seeking funding. So when someone takes a leap of faith, that's incredibly important to me."

Bayly-Jones is investigating the role that a molecule known as tuberous sclerosis complex (TSC) might play in eye disease. If this molecule is mutated, it can lead to eye conditions such as tumours on the retina or diabetic retinopathy. Currently, nobody knows why – and there is no cure for these conditions.

The funding Bayly-Jones' team has received from Mr Campbell's gift has enabled them to use an advanced form of microscopy. "Now, we can actually visualise this


molecule," he says. "That will help us understand how it's able to switch cell growth on and off. And that will give us a foundation from which we can start to design therapies."

Mr Campbell clearly knew that the many young, bright researchers who choose to start their careers at Monash can make an extraordinary contribution if they're given the funds – and that impact is just as important if it comes today, tomorrow, or in 20 years' time. As Bayly-Jones points out, a gift to this kind of research is a gift to the future: indeed, we are now reaping the benefits of research funded by philanthropists 20 years ago.

*"I just can't put into words how important it is for us to be prepared for what might come and get as many people tackling problems in as many ways as possible, with different thinking and perspectives. Bequests such as Mr Campbell's make a huge difference."*





**CHRIS WARDLAW**  **MONASH University**  
**SPORT: ATHLETICS**  
 Bachelor of Economics with Honours 1977, Diploma in Education 1979  
 Olympic Games 1976 (10,000m) and 1980 (5000m)  
 World Cross Country Championships (1976, 1977, 1978, 1980)  
 Australian 10,000m champion (1976)  
 27 year Sydney City Surf in 1978 and San Francisco Bay in October in 1978  
 Best performance  
 10,000m - 28:19.8 (1976) - 1:04.2 (1976)  
 5,000m - 14:48.8 (1976) - 29:55.14\* at Fukuoka, Japan (1976)  
 10000m relay - 0:46.1 (1976)  
 Head Coach, Australian Track and Field Team, 2000 Olympic Games

Chris Wardlaw PSM OLY pictured with his Sport Hall of Fame hanging at Monash Sport, Clayton.

# PASSING THE TORCH

**For Olympian, educator, and Monash alumnus Chris Wardlaw PSM OLY, philanthropy is as much about the future as it is about the present. That vision is reflected in the bequest he and his wife, Carmel Muldoon, have pledged to Monash University – a commitment designed to support ambition and leadership long after their lifetimes.**

Chris's belief in the transformative power of education was shaped during his own years at Monash, where he was the first in his family to attend university. Mentors who recognised his potential made a lasting impact, guiding him through the challenges of combining study with elite sport. Their influence now underpins his desire to ensure future students feel that same sense of possibility.

For Chris, generosity is deeply personal. He gives through encouragement, guidance, and representation – the same kind of support that once shaped his own path. “You need to know someone's got your back,” he says. That sense of care, he believes, must be genuine, not symbolic. It's a belief that has already impacted the lives of students he currently supports through scholarships.

Among those students is Ngarrindjeri woman Marissa Williamson-Pohlman, the first First Nations woman to represent Australia in boxing on the

Olympic stage. Her scholarship not only relieved financial pressure, but also affirmed that she belonged at Monash. For Chris, supporting Marissa feels, in many ways, like passing the torch – one Olympian helping the next realise what's possible.



Chris Wardlaw PSM OLY (left) with Marissa Williamson-Pohlman (right).

Chris sees all of these contributions – today's gifts and tomorrow's legacy – as part of a broader impact for good.

“We have been fortunate enough to make small contributions to young people. A bequest seemed an obvious way to sustain that beyond our lifetime.”

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# WHY I GIVE

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**A respected boardroom strategist and mentor to the next generation of directors, Roger Chao is known for aligning innovation with social purpose. It is this same commitment to building enduring institutions that inspired him to make a lasting contribution through a gift in his Will.**



Alumnus Roger Chao.

## INSPIRATION TO GIVE

“I’ve always believed that education is humanity’s most powerful force for change – not only a path to individual advancement, but also the foundation of a fairer and more enlightened society. Tertiary education should never be reserved for the fortunate few. It is a universal right, as essential to human dignity as freedom itself.

My decision to give rests on a simple principle: equity and inclusion must sit at the heart of education. Every mind capable of learning should have the chance to grow and contribute to the story of human progress.”

## HOPE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

“I hope this bequest will quietly stand beside future students and scholars, offering opportunity and encouragement. For the young person once left on the margins, may it open doors that should never have been closed. For the researcher striving at the edge of discovery, may it unlock potential and enable breakthroughs that benefit us all.

The most meaningful legacies are not carved in stone, but written in the lives lifted and the futures made possible.”

## RACHEL CASSIDY

Rachel Jayne Cassidy is a long-time advocate for social justice and community wellbeing. She is guided by a belief in elevating education and supporting those in need, and was deeply inspired by years of mentoring Monash students.

She hopes her bequest will open new opportunities and support for students, helping them reach their full potential and inspiring others to give so that even more young people can thrive. Through her legacy, she wants to ensure future generations feel the same encouragement and care that have defined her own relationship with Monash.



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# MATHESON SOCIETY LUNCH

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**It was a pleasure to welcome our Matheson Society community to the annual Matheson Society Lunch on April 30.**

Together, we reflected on the impact already achieved through realised bequests, and the profound influence our present-day bequestors will have in supporting future generations of students, research, and innovation. The Vice-Chancellor and President also shared a thoughtful address acknowledging this legacy – past, present, and future – and the transformative difference this collective commitment will make in the years ahead.

We were also delighted to have Professor Steven Chown, Director of

Securing Antarctica’s Environmental Future (SAEF), join us to share insights into the vital work his team is undertaking, along with some of the specialised tools used in their expeditions. His presentation offered a fascinating glimpse into research that is poised to create meaningful global impact.

Thank you to all who attended this special occasion. We remain deeply grateful for your enduring support and the legacy you are creating. We look forward to the opportunity to welcome you again at our next Matheson Society Lunch.



Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Sharon Pickering, speaking with Matheson Society member.



Matheson Society members seated during the SAEF presentation.



Matheson Society members conversing over lunch.



Chancellor, Dr Megan Clark AC, speaking with Matheson Society member.



Matheson Society members reading about SAEF's work.



SAEF expedition tools and instruments on display.



Professor Steven Chown, Director of SAEF, presenting about his work.

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# MUMA GALLERY TOUR

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**On October 21, we were delighted to welcome our community for an exclusive tour at the Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA).**

We were honoured to be hosted by Dr Rebecca Coates, whose passion and deep expertise made the experience truly memorable. The event brought together both long-standing members and new supporters, including those considering leaving a Gift in Will. Dr Coates guided guests through MUMA's remarkable collection, sharing the stories, ideas, and creative voices behind the works on display. Her thoughtful insights fostered rich discussion and highlighted the important role art plays in shaping culture and community.

The tour was both inspiring and uplifting, offering guests a unique opportunity to connect, reflect, and celebrate a shared commitment to supporting the university's future. It was a highly sought-after event and warmly received by all who attended.



Dr Rebecca Coates guiding guests through the MUMA gallery.



Aziziah Diah Aprilya, Under the Tamarind Tree 2025 Awakening Histories, Monash University Museum of Art, Naarm/Melbourne, 2025. Photo: Darren Keane.

# AI FOR GOOD

**Matheson Society  
Annual Lunch**

Thursday, 28 May 2026

This year's keynote will explore the future of artificial intelligence (AI) – debunking myths, clarifying its real capabilities, and highlighting how Monash is using AI for good. Join us for an inspiring conversation and a chance to connect with fellow Matheson Society members.



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## **CONTACT US**

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### **Gifts in Wills**

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