

A Legacy of a Lifetime



Des McGrath was a humble man, grounded in deep faith and a lifelong commitment to social justice. Born in January 1954, his life began in heartbreak, his father having passed away in an accident six months before Des was born. Though he never had the chance to know his father, Des was lovingly raised by his mother and grandmother, surrounded by the steadfast support of family and friends. Sadly, Des's own life was cut short by a rare cancer, and he passed away in November 2023.

Growing up in the Brisbane suburb of Camp Hill, Des began his education at just four years old at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic School. He later completed both his primary and secondary schooling at St Laurence's Christian Brothers College in South Brisbane. His Catholic education, together with a strong spiritual upbringing, laid the foundation for the life he would lead. For Des, faith was not just a belief—it was a way of being. It shaped how he saw the world, how he treated others, and how he dedicated himself to making a difference

To his family and friends, Des was a private, softly spoken, and deeply humble man. You would never hear it from him, but he was a renowned plant breeding scientist whose work left a lasting impact on the agricultural industry in Australia and saved the \$55m tomato and \$45 capsicum industry from disease. In 1989 he was awarded an Australia Day Achievement Medal for this work. Yet in his own words, he was simply “a humble public servant.”

But Des's quiet nature belied the depth of his contributions—not only in science but also in service to others. His legacy extends far beyond the laboratory and the field. A devoted supporter of the Carmelites, Des was committed to their mission to support children, families, and young people in Timor-Leste. What began as regular donations in 2002 became something even more generous: a Bequest in his will that will continue to impact lives long into the future. His belief in justice, dignity, and compassion lives on in the legacy of a Lifetime he bequeathed to the work of the Carmelites.

The photo shows Des working as a volunteer in Indonesia helping to improve the health of a bean crop.