

*Constituency Statement by the Honourable Bill Shorten
Member for Maribyrnong
Federation Chamber, Australian Parliament House
28 March 2023*

Deputy Speaker, I stand to pay tribute to a woman whose passing has been mourned across the Maribyrnong community. Today, her family in four Australian states, seven countries and three continents will hear her story being told in Australia's Parliament.

Theresa Zarb was better known as Tess. She and her late husband, Tony, migrated to Australia from Malta in 1961 with two young sons.

In 1969, they settled in the home they built in Fawkner Crescent, East Keilor. Back then, East Keilor had no sewerage or sealed roads and very little by way of public transport. But it had Tess Zarb.

By 1970, Tess and Tony's family was complete with four boys – Avan, Alex, Martin, and Adam. The sons Tess was so proud of delivered a beautiful tribute to their mum at her funeral at the end of last year. It was held at St Peter's Catholic Church – a parish Tess and Tony had a crucial role in developing.

The Zarb brothers spoke of a woman who – when she saw a need in the community – would spring into action.

Tess founded the St Peter's Social Club, a place for locals – especially senior members of the community – to meet, enjoy some company, and play bingo. Tess was the President of the club from the day it began in 1985 until the day she died, a reign that would be the envy of every Australian Prime Minister. Nobody dared challenge her for the role.

As an early adopter of recycling practices – Tess washed and reused plastic bags, and leftover bits of soap were re-formed as new cakes. As the boys said in their eulogy 'Mum had an innate ability to stretch the life and use of any item.'

She adored her children, their partners, her 11 grandchildren and her four great grandchildren.

She was a prolific knitter. She sewed. She wrote letters.

She knew the birth dates, wedding anniversaries and contact details of everybody in the extended family.

She was a tireless charity worker. A St Bernard's College 'tuckshop-lady-who-lunched' until the end. And Tess and Tony were both deeply committed to Labor values.

Her only flaw appears to be that she was, and I quote Avan 'a terrible cook'. *He* said it, Tess up there in heaven, not me.

As her boys put it, Tess's phone was always engaged, her door always open, and her kettle never cold.

Neighbours would come and go in Fawkner Crescent but their ties with the resident of number 10 were never broken.

Once you made friends with Tess Zarb, she was your friend for life. One of those rare gems in our society who acts as a comforting, steady anchor. Whose love of connection and community drives their passion for bringing people together without expecting any accolades.

The love expressed by Avan, Alex, Martin and Adam – and the people from all walks of life who came to St Peter's to celebrate Tess – tells us all we need to know. Hers was a full life, well lived.

Vale, Tess Zarb.