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**YARRA'S  
EDGE**  
magazine

AUGUST 2025 ISSUE

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# THE LEGEND LIVES ON

Dally Messenger III  
reflects on his famous  
grandfather and his own  
life at the forefront of  
social change.



YARRA'S EDGE



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# WELCOME

**IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME THE NUMBER OF FASCINATING CHARACTERS WHO RESIDE IN OUR YARRA'S EDGE COMMUNITY. THOUGH THEIR FACES MAY BE FAMILIAR THEIR STORIES OFTEN REMAIN A MYSTERY KNOWN ONLY TO A HANDFUL OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY.**



Splitting my time between Melbourne and Sydney where rugby league reigns supreme, I did a double take on learning that Dally Messenger lives amongst us.

The 'Master' credited with the birth of rugby league and after whom the Dally M Medal is named, is long dead but his grandson Dally Messenger III has been a resident of Yarra's Edge for more than 20 years.

Dally has just published his third book about his famous grandfather but his own life, in which he was involved in some of the most consequential moments in Australian history, is equally worthy of telling.

Also in this issue of the magazine you can read about Marlee Hawkins, an entrepreneurial mobile travel expert who is able to practise her two great passions here at Yarra's Edge – holiday planning and hula hooping.

When you can bring work life and home life together, that's pretty close to nirvana. It's heartwarming to see two good mates and locals, Jenny and Andrew, team up in a business where they provide a much-valued dog grooming service and do something they truly love. Take a stroll along the boardwalk and the shopfront window with dogs peeking over a white picket fence will put an instant smile on your face.

There is no question that dogs rule at Yarra's Edge and we are delighted to once again support the Walk For PetWellness through our Corporate sponsorship. This annual event to raise funds for Second Chance Animal Rescue is not only for a worthy cause it's a great way of bringing our community together.

And finally, I know you will all join me in extending sympathy to our Office Manager Leanne Teiford whose mother sadly passed. We truly hope that any of our community who experience loss or bereavement has all the support they need to help them through difficult times.

Our doors are open six days a week and you are always welcome to drop in and talk real estate or just shoot the breeze.

**Matthew Matthews**

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# KEEPING THE DALLY M LEGEND ALIVE

**IN THE WORLD OF RUGBY LEAGUE, NO NAME SHINES BRIGHTER THAN DALLY MESSENGER. THE MASTER, AS HE WAS KNOWN, IS CREDITED WITH THE BIRTH OF THE BREAKAWAY RUGBY CODE AFTER DEFECTING FROM UNION, A SPORT IN WHICH HE WAS CONSIDERED A GENIUS, RANKED THE BEST OF ALL TIME.**

Photography by Tim Carrafa

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The courage he displayed in leading the 1907 move to rugby league and subsequent feats on the field, are immortalised in the annual Dally M Awards, the rugby league equivalent of AFL's Brownlows.

And every year, his grandson Dally Messenger III travels from his Yarra's Edge home to attend league's glittering night of nights, proud to bear his forebear's name and maintain the link to a man whose legend he has kept alive through the publication of three books, the latest just released.

Dally wrote his first book, *The Master*, in 1980 and co-authored a second with sports historian Sean Fagan in 2007 to mark the 100th anniversary of Australian rugby league. The 2025 update is a chance to correct the mistakes he acknowledges were made in the original and add extra details that he has been able to uncover through years of archival research.

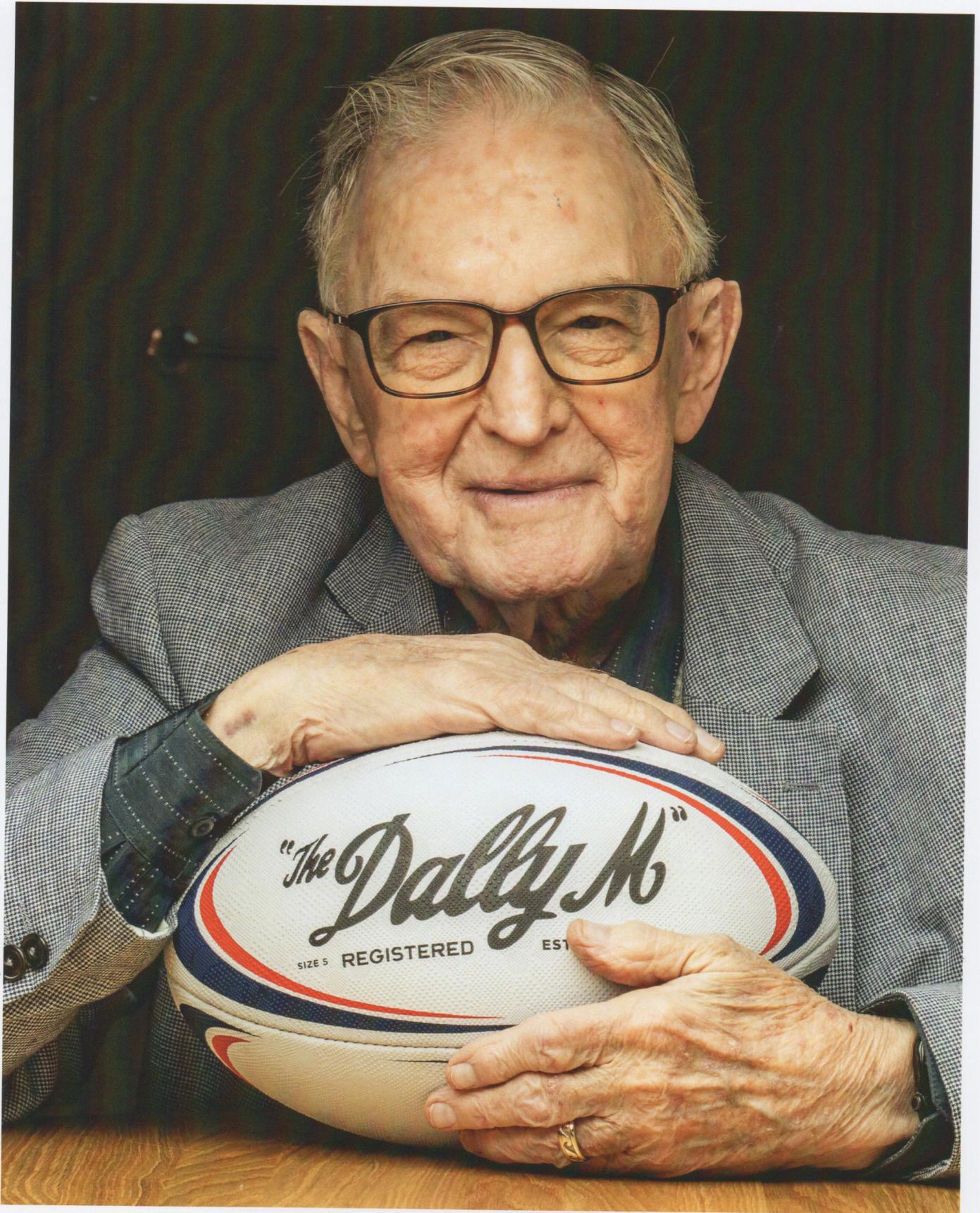
"I was young when I wrote the book the first time and you don't know how to do things when you are young, says Dally, now a spry 87 who shares his home with wife Remi, a former actress and theatre producer whom he met while living in America.

"The world has changed since the original book was published. The main thing is research on the internet, which includes gaining access through

the National Library of Australia to newspapers dating back to the 1830s, as well as the use of AI and ChatGPT

Dally's ease with technology should come as no surprise. Throughout his life he's proven himself as nimble as his grandfather, albeit more quick-witted than quick-footed, and played a pivotal role in the social and cultural changes that swept through Australia in the '60s and '70s.

Hints of his own fascinating history can be seen in the study where he continues to research and write. There's a large framed photograph of Lionel Murphy, the Attorney-General in the Whitlam government who hand-picked Dally to establish the Civil Celebrant Movement, loosening the stranglehold of the church on people's lives.



Dally pursued many career paths after leaving school at 15 but it was his decision to enter and leave the priesthood that made him uniquely qualified to be Lionel Murphy's pick to reform the way weddings and funerals were conducted.

"It was the post Stalin years and Russia started to get heavy with the West, leading to the confrontation between Khrushchev and Kennedy," recalls Dally of the era that led to him becoming a priest. "I went to a lecture by a guy who said America and Russia had enough nuclear warheads to annihilate the world eight times over.

"Motivated by this I thought the only chance of lasting is if people become better people and I saw a mechanism for that through the Catholic Church. I joined up hoping I would do something good.

Disillusioned by the Church's failure to modernise, he left the church and took up a teaching position at Haileybury College, married and had three daughters. He might have remained a teacher had Murphy not tempted him with a second chance to pursue his desire to do good.

"He picked me out of the woodwork because he knew I understood his vision, says Dally. "It was a big move at the time because the churches had dominated for so long.

"Back then if you didn't get married in a church you had to go along to a registry office, open 10 till 4 Monday to Friday and you were not allowed to bring people in. It was dry, offensive and humiliating.

Murphy formed the association of celebrants, appointing Dally as secretary. Over time Dally went on to earn his living as a celebrant performing around 6,000 ceremonies for couples choosing to marry outside the church or the divorcees excluded for seeking love a second time around.

The latter were increasing in number after the Whitlam government passed the Family Law Act allowing no fault divorce, much to the frustration of lawyers but welcomed by Dally.



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**'I have lived a really interesting life and done some wonderful things sometimes without knowing I was doing them.'**

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"The corollary of the family law reforms was that people could get divorced without rancour and get married in a ceremony by a celebrant who was encouraged to create the best ceremony possible.

Dally was among those who took advantage of the law. It was during his second marriage, when his three daughters and wife's two daughters were performing in ballet productions that he decided he needed a nine to five job that didn't rob him of weekends and evenings to watch the children perform.

He created a new job for himself by launching Dance Australia magazine which was an instant success and is still the bible of dance, now published by Yaffa Media.

By this stage Dally had several other books to his name about marriage, celebrancy and a parents' guide to divorce, based on hundreds of interviews in which parents and children shared their experience. There was even a book about the lives and extraordinary radio careers of Nancy Lee and Nicky Whitta, whose children's program, The Chums of Chatterbox Corner, ruled the airwaves from the 1930s to the 1950s.

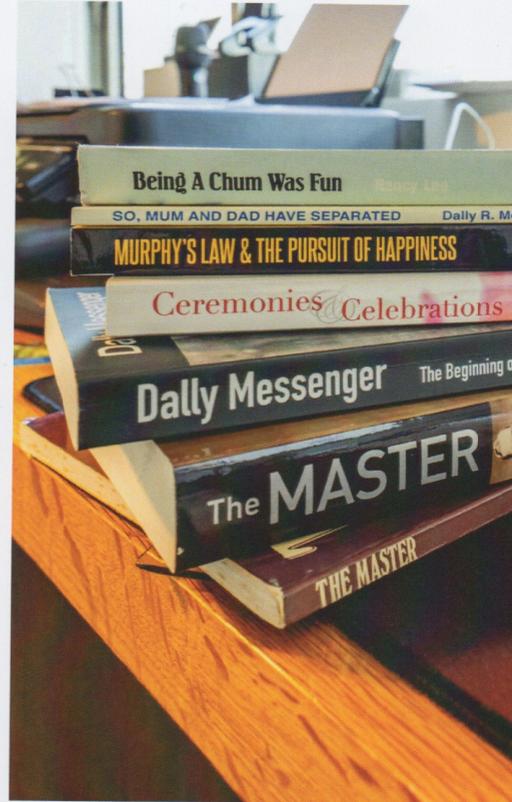
It was Dally's previous partner who led him to Yarra's Edge. Concerned that Dally had little left after his divorce settlement, she encouraged him, for superannuation, to buy off the plan in Tower 4.

"She said Docklands is going to be good, even though it was mostly rubble then, so I bought it. But then she died suddenly of an aneurysm. Some time after, I was sponsored by a wealthy American philanthropist to go to the USA to start a celebrant program there.

It was during this overseas sojourn that he fell in love with his current wife Remi and embarked upon his third marriage.

"I am still idealistic about marriage, he says. "I married a lot of people, 5 or 6,000. The majority start off happy and stay happy but thanks to Lionel Murphy if they find they want to separate they can remarry and find happiness with someone else.

Dally has found that happiness with Remi, and together they lead an active life, making the most of their home on the Yarra. "I have lived a really interesting life and done some wonderful things sometimes without knowing I was doing them. They say the three essentials of a good life are having something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to.



"You have to feel you are still contributing to life. I don't know one person in their 70s and 80s who isn't contributing to life and the better workings of society, whether it's working a day or two a week, volunteering or looking after children.

There is a synchronicity to Dally living his best years overlooking the Yarra River where rowing sculls regularly ply the water. Dally's great grandfather Charles Amos Messenger, descended from a family of royal bargemen to Queen Victoria, claimed the title of champion sculler of Victoria in a highly publicised race on the Yarra in 1878.

Maybe there's another Messenger story to be told although the most riveting of all would be one with Dally Messenger III as its central character. **V**

Order a copy of *Dally Messenger* at <https://books.by/books-from-dally-and-friends>