

Real heroes go unrecognised in Australia Day honours

Ross Taylor



I was at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women last week to visit our daughter Lisa and gorgeous first granddaughter, Ember Katherine.

KEMH is a wonderful old maternity hospital with incredibly dedicated staff and doctors.

The hospital cafe is, so I learnt, operated to raise research money for babies and mums who have been disadvantaged or facing major challenges in their life.

As I waited for Lisa's coffee I couldn't help but notice the lady behind the counter. Her name

was Ellen and her badge also stated, "volunteer".

So I asked her about the shop and what she does.

"Oh, I just work here five days a week as a volunteer trying to help the shop and all the mums in need," she said.

"So how long have you been doing that?" I asked.

"About 10 years now, love," she replied with a smile.

"But some of the ladies out the back making sandwiches and cakes have been here for 15 years. We love doing this."

As I looked at this lady in her 60s, I reflected that two years ago I was humbled to receive an AM — a Member of the Order of Australia — for my services to the community and Indonesia-Australia relations.

It was a high point of my life,

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and such an incredible honour to join so many truly distinguished Australians.

But then I couldn't stop looking at Ellen, as she went about her duties serving yet another customer buying a

sandwich or coffee, probably for a loved one upstairs with a baby.

"But who recognises Ellen?" I asked myself.

The truth is that recognition would not have even entered the mind of this lovely lady and her other friends in this little coffee shop.

And most people don't even know about her contribution to making our country a better place.

I have a relatively high profile in the community. Ellen and her friends don't have — they are the hidden gems in our society who ask for nothing and usually receive nothing. It really doesn't matter to them.

As I walked back to the ward, I couldn't help but reflect on the knighthood conferred on Prince Philip by Tony Abbott on

Australia Day. A time of year that should be a day to acknowledge all the "Ellens" who are found in every suburb and town in Australia — the real unsung heroes.

The award that I have proudly held for two years does indeed seem diminished by our Prime Minister's actions in placing a foreign person above us all, including outstanding Australians such as Angus Houston and Australian of the Year Rosie Batty.

Mr Abbott's knighthood for Prince Philip sent a message to Ellen and her team at the KEMH: "Aussie battlers don't really count."

And that breaks my heart because if this is the Australia Mr Abbott wants, it's not the Australia I want to be part of.