

For Nexus

Distinguished Service award

Evan Willis

Thank you very much for this honour in receiving a TASA Distinguished Service to Australian Sociology Award. I am grateful to those colleagues who nominated me and to the TASA executive who saw fit to make this award. It is a special moment for me so thank you to all.

This location (the MCG) has been the scene of another special moment for me and my family. On a warm March evening in 2006 when as part of the Track and Field program for the Commonwealth Games in this magnificent stadium, my nephew Nick Willis took home a gold medal for New Zealand in the men's 1500 metres. I recall I had to quickly write out the words of the New Zealand national anthem for my kids so they could sing along in the medal ceremony!

Johanna and I arrived as migrants to these shores in 1975, securing our first full time academic jobs with honours degrees. First in Armidale, then in Melbourne, we have made our lives here with frequent sojourns and visiting appointments in the UK, back in NZ and in Canada. I was a decade at Monash and then a quarter of a century at La Trobe! TASA and its conferences have been important to us not only as a source of professional identity but also giving the opportunity to visit many parts of the country to attend. From TASA have come the two biggest boosts in my career; winning the Jean Martin Award in 1983 and then the Medical Dominance book (based on that Ph.D.) being placed in the top 10 influential books competition.

Most of my TASA activity has been in the health section where I have worked with wonderful colleagues such as Kevin White, Fran Collyer, Alan Peterson, Stephanie Short and of course Jeanne Daly. Together and with many others as well, we have worked hard to build the strongest section of TASA over many years with journals, conferences, to provide a space both for debates as well as mentoring younger colleagues.

On the teaching front I have just ticked over 40 years at the chalkface. I did not intend to become a specialist first year teacher of large classes but it happened that way; at its peak one year, 1180 students. I have already had the experience of more than one student coming up after a lecture and saying I had taught their mum! Maybe it is time to get out before someone informs me I taught their grandma! On the teaching front I have had the privilege of teaching with some outstanding colleagues including Ann Edwards at Monash; Anne Maree Sawyer, Pauline Savy, Chris Peterson and most recently Sara James at La Trobe.

But it is to my partner Johanna Wyn that I owe the most gratitude since we were students together in Wellington more than 40 years ago. Her support and counsel have been very precious over that time.

So thanks very much again and I'll let you get on with the rest of the evenings activities!