

**Remo Giuffre** My name is Remo Giuffre. I had a retail store on the corner of Crown of Oxford in Darlinghurst that traded there from 1988 to 1996 and Eternity Arthur Stace Martin Sharp's version of Eternity was very much part of our story in those early years, I think. 1989 was probably when we approached Martin with a special idea to celebrate Arthur's Eternity.

**Remo Giuffre** My I personally remember I'm old enough that in the. Sometime in the 60s, I would have come across Eternity on the footpaths, I seem to recall, in the Haymarket area.

**Remo Giuffre** I may have may or may or may not have been with my whole family.

**Remo Giuffre** We may or may not have been going to some kind of Christmas mass or something at one of the churches down there. And I do I do recall seeing Eternity at least at one occasion and potentially I think a few a few other occasions as well.

**Remo Giuffre** Always intrigued me, didn't look into it because I was only a little boy.

**Remo Giuffre** Well, I remember that at the time because it was unusual and.

**Remo Giuffre** And I remember it after all these years for all the things that have happened related to Eternity since this thing.

**Remo Giuffre** But, you know, it was some striking in a sort of charismatic, interesting way. I don't think I ask too many questions about it at the time, but I clocked it, you know.

**Remo Giuffre** I learnt the story. No, I learnt the story when I was when I opened the store. Nineteen ninety eight. No, sorry, I may have been I would have been aware of Martin Sharp's hommages to Eternity, and I would have cross related that to my own experience with Eternity when I was a kid. So I would have known that there was a mysterious human being behind that word and its manifestation. But I didn't know the details of his life, etc..

**Remo Giuffre** It was. I lived in New York City. It was some interesting time to be in New York. There was Andy Warhol and Keith Harrow. I lived downtown. There was all of that. There was lots going on in the media. It was a little a little bit of a downer.

**Remo Giuffre** Actually, when I first came home, everything seemed so less dense, but nothing really compares compared with Manhattan in those days.

**Remo Giuffre** So I had the you know, it's a long story. The short version is that I had all of these tertiary qualifications, a law degree, commerce degree and MBA from an Ivy League university.

**Remo Guiffre** But I just wasn't ever going to be cut out for a corporate life. Tried it for about a split second when I got back from New York, decided that the only way forward for me personally was to try to live a life of passion. And the only easy way to do that was to actually create my own world within which to have that life. So that meant finding a physical location wherein I would be able to surround myself with the things that reminded me of New York or or my other travels or or the cool things that were happening here in pockets within Sydney. And there was a shop on the corner of Crown and Oxford run by a gentleman, Mr Zuglass if I recall. And it was just sort of a Greek five and dime kind of shop that had been there for a long time selling that kind of stuff.

**Remo Guiffre** It was just such a. Even though it was full of stuff, you kind of see the bones of this space. And so that became the object of my obsession to to create this. Passion Palace within this repurposed Greek gift shop.

**Remo Guiffre** I am probably not the best person to ask that (what made the REMO store unique). It's probably better to ask people who felt that. But I didn't have experience as a retailer. I had experience as a communicator. I studied communications management in my MBA. I was very much interested in in in that side of things. And so I approached retailing as a communications media kind of company. And for me, it was more about the story and less about the molecules that you were selling. So for me, that if we could tell a story with authenticity and clarity, then people would kind of want to buy those things as souvenirs of the storytelling bit. So it was like an inversion of the typical cell stuff philosophy. So I think maybe it was the spirit within which it was founded is what made it unique. Also, in those days, Darlinghurst was a very interesting and still is but interesting place. There were there were squats on the Sergeant's Pies. Sergeant Pie Factory here on Burton Street. There were jewellers and photographers and sculptors in there. I think Mark Newson had a studio in there. There was a lot of contemporary energy bubbling just below the surface. And so when my store opened, one of its departments was contemporary design. So it became a platform for the for the local contemporary energy and artisans. And so it was like a physical Etsy, if you like. So it was the Etsy of the of the 80s was the Remo General store.

**Remo Guiffre** So we were developing our own product and we were developing our own product. And very much the philosophy of the product was anti-disposability. More about buying high call it higher quality premium quality once and then owning it forever. So there was this kind of quality focus and anti-Disposability message and anti-decoration message. In parallel to that, we had this very prominent display window in the corner of on the Crown Street side of the corner, five metres long that we used to turn over every two weeks with a different message or graphic. And I had long wanted to involve Martin Sharp in doing something. I had met Martin, you know, some years before, and I thought it would be great to celebrate his skill, creativity with some ideas there. So that was like two two of the planets. And then the third was this knowledge about Arthur's Eternity and and how it would be a nice story to tell in the store and what merchandise could we develop to manifest the telling of that story. And so those three things were

swirling around and they all kind of came crashing together over one afternoon at Wirian at Martin's place where we were talking about what idea you got for the window.

**Remo Guiffre** We've got to do something with about Eternity one day, you know.

**Remo Guiffre** Can you help me propagate the remote general store message of of eternal quality and buying things once and owning them forever. And it also kind of came together. And, you know, Martin grabbed the marker pen from out of my hand and sort of scrawled Arthur's Eternity across this bit of paper template that I used to carry around all that Crown Street window. So really, it was it. It started with an idea for the window and then it turned into like a major promotion in nineteen eighty nine that we sort of just threw everything at it to to develop merchandise, to tell the story, to create an editorial in the catalogue that we sent to people at Christmas time and so on.

**Remo Guiffre** How did I know, Martin? I. I'm trying to remember the first time we met. I would have been an admirer of his from his early work, part of the posters he did for the Nimrod Theatre. All of that stuff. I don't think I would have made contact with him before I went to live in the States, but maybe shortly after I would have found some pretext to go and see him. I think I was designing t shirts at the time and maybe I was showing him some of my designs. And he tolerated, you know, tolerated me. Then when I opened the store, it there was a more natural reason for us to know one another because he was into the popular culture and I was into, you know, manifesting it in the rich, in the retail space.

**Remo Guiffre** All critical (Martin Sharp to Remo's Eternity story) because Arthur's handwriting is not really owned by anybody. It's you know, it's the it's the it's. Creative, common kind of word. But we commissioned Martin to do a particular version.

**Remo Guiffre** I bought the five, made a canvas from wherever it came from and had it delivered to Martin's place. And then we set a deadline. And then I would go there, you know, once a week. La, la, you know, Michelangelo way or the or the Pope waiting for Michelangelo to actually get his shit together and finish this thing. And, you know, each week it, you know. Another layer of paint, another layer of paint. You know, it didn't it wasn't blowing me away until I literally two days before he had this idea to supplement the white, no, supplement the yellow lettering with these white stars with which gave this depth of field around around the word. And then so that got delivered into our window. This big, huge five metre canvas which ended up with the Sharp family, I think afterwards.

**Remo Guiffre** Well, the first question, why would they come to the store? It wasn't so much to buy stuff. It was actually to dwell and gather. And, you know, we had a cafe downstairs. It was a meeting place. It was it was, you know, a cultural celebration of our local culture, but also international stories. And, you know, Keith Haring was like, um, you know, we represented him. So his work was in

the store. Other artists from around the world. It was just kind of the place you would get go and gather if you were local or if you even if you were out of town. We had where people say that it was the first thing that they did when they got off the plane, you know, they would get a taxi almost before they dropped their bags off to come in and sort of hang out, grab some coffee, be with the people. So Martin would have been. Martin would have been a customer of the store. He would have come in. He would have come to our we to have openings every month in our gallery, which would celebrate of one thing or another. We had architects design trolleys. We had we had different furniture designers from Melbourne. We had jewellers from Brisbane. We. It was a time in contemporary design gallery as well as everything else. It was everything at the same time.

**Remo Giuffre** Well, it's you know, we made it (Remo's Eternity by Martin Sharp) the cover of that year's catalogue. It was the hero merchandise for that year. It generated a lot of Vibe-y happy, smiley media heat. And. And it's the message just dovetailed perfectly with the messages we were trying to communicate through the permanency and quality of the stuff that we were promoting for people. So it was really a triple win. You know, there was no there was no downside.

**Remo Giuffre** Yeah, it was pretty significant. Maybe the most significant thing we did on that corner.

**Remo Giuffre** (Remo feels) Pretty good actually. You know, there are times where I haven't felt good about what I felt was like a premature, premature disruption due to due to sort of self-imposed, you know, bad management reasons. But, you know, the store was super influential, super successful at many levels and unsuccessful in an you know, in an operational financial way, it's kind of like you need both. Actually, I learnt that lesson hard in those early days.

**Remo Giuffre** Oh, you know, there was there was a (Eternity-themed) T-shirt, there was a keyring. There was any any. There was a swimming swimming cap. There was a few, you know, fun different things, few fun, different ways that we and I used to periodically take an armload of stuff to Martin. By way of royalty for for his work. And he would give them away to friends.

**Remo Giuffre** I guess it it it was of this place. It was a very kind of Sydney thing to do. It. I'm not sure I've thought about much harder than that. You know, it's like we were selling thousands and thousands and thousands of T-shirts. They were a bit of a kind of a staple in those days.

**Remo Giuffre** It was definitely up there. It's there were more.

**Remo Giuffre** More. I think maybe our best selling design in those days was a quote from Albert Einstein. Imagination is more important than knowledge, which is kind of somewhat gratifying that that was a big seller. So some things came and went. The loved ribbon was another. Another design. But this.

**Remo Guiffre** But the Eternity one has had legs over the decades and we still sell Eternity merchandise online.

**Remo Guiffre** It's in the nature of the word. Right. If anybody is gonna last, it's Eternity merchandise. I'm sorry to crack that joke.

**Remo Guiffre** Partly for that reason, I think they had a connection with the store for like a whole whole complexity of reasons. It was kind of the way the store communicated. With its customers, the way the store created a customer, community and bound customers to one another by virtue of their shared relationship with the store.

**Remo Guiffre** So and swirled into all of that was the Eternity story is one of hundreds of different stories.

**Remo Guiffre** So the Eternity story was one of dozens of stories, all sort of mashed up together into a big soup that that communicated the personality of the brand at the time and communicated the spirit of what it was to be a customer of this brand and in a community of customers who shared values. As manifest by the attributes of the things that were presented in the store.

**Remo Guiffre** After the mural left the window. There wasn't there wasn't a lot of places that we could put it. So it ended up living on the ground floor of the store on the Oxford Street level for four. Well, I'm just trying to think of how many years, five or six years, there was nowhere else to put it.

**Remo Guiffre** So it was there looking at looking over us. For all that time.

**Remo Guiffre** Well, it (Eternity) was that that was the that was the breaking story (in the magazine). That was the the layout. It was a catalogue layouts. And it had the big mural that had Martin's story about how he first came across Eternity. It had a little side panel describing my visit to Martin's studio and how the whole thing came about. It had excerpts from the newspaper when Arthur was sprung and showing that that photograph from the Sunday Telegraph or whatever it was.

**Remo Guiffre** So it was all it was the whole story on a double page spread with the merchandise in the bottom right hand corner, you know, click, click to order here. Well, pre click. Right. Remember this number and put it in the order form.

**Remo Guiffre** I saw it (Eternity on the Sydney Harbour Bridge) on telly, Living in New York. Yeah. And it was terrific.

**Remo Guiffre** It was very uplifting. Did it happen first there at the Olympics?

**Remo Guiffre** I wasn't at the party. I was at home watching with, uh, with Melanie and, uh.

**Remo Guiffre** Five year old. And it was like, oh, great. Perfect. Not surprising, but but perfect. What do you suppose?

**Remo Guiffre** Sorry that the not the being not surprise was more to do with the Olympics because I knew of the Rick Birch connection.

**Remo Guiffre** Yeah, well, I felt proud, a little sad that I was not here for it. Not here to experience it with everyone else. Little bit of a bit of FOMO there, but mostly mostly proud and gratified that that I had made a contribution to the culture, which was kind of what I what had always driven me anyway to make a contribution to the culture and still does.

**Remo Guiffre** You know, I feel proud to have made a contribution to that story and being part of it. And, you know, there was there was the Susan McKinnon movie at the time. That was in 1994. I think it was it felt good. Definitely. Add that to my kind of list of things that I'm most proud of.

**Remo Guiffre** Sydney is an aggregation of many stories and histories and First Nations people and and and I think that is an ingredient that that. That has created the flavour of Sydney, and I think if it was missing, it would be a different flavour. So I think the answer is yes, it would be a poorer, less flavoursome place without that nugget of a story.

**Remo Guiffre** Yes. That (Remo's store being only a stone's throw away from where Stace first chalked Eternity) made it all the more relevant for us to to celebrate the fact that it was just around the corner and it was just across the road from all of these communities of artists who, you know, some of whom ended up, you know, making triangular Eternity key rings for me, which we sold in the in the store. So, so very secular.

**Remo Guiffre** You know, I got to learn a little bits and pieces of the story, as I'm sure you have in making this film, but, you know, the fact that it was written inside that bell was a great, you know, a great little added extra. It's one of those. It's one of those stories that will never go away and will, in waves, become known to each generation. Somehow your contributing to that yourself with this movie.

**Remo Guiffre** Well, it's (the Eternity story) just so poetic. You know, the whole notion of someone doing something for so long in in secret. And the backstory is, you know, the back story is a killer, you know, backstory the the the you know, the down and out guy falling to his knees and writing something, you know, in a script that he'd never been able to replicate or do before. Yeah. So it's got everything. It's got backstory. It's got grit. It's got redemption. It's got permanence and persistence and romance and happy endings and everything.

**Remo Giuffre** The emotion that Eternity evokes in me is familiarity, you know, because it's just been part of my life for, well, 30 more than 30 years. More than half my life.

**Remo Giuffre** I think you've covered it. No, I. Oh, as I say, wait. The Remo General Store still sells online. About a month ago, what did I do? I ran a Facebook ad for the first time, I was I was canoeing or kayaking with some guy up on the Hawkesbury River who's selling sort budget hearing aids. And he was saying I ran this Facebook ad, it did really well. And I sold a whole lot of hearing aids and I went, oh, gee, maybe I should try that again. Had I hadn't done it for years. And I, I ran a little Facebook ad for Stripey Things, which is like a boat about Nick struck top that we sold and it kind of worked to trade. And so a week later, later, I thought, well, what other product could I try out? So I tried out the Eternity T-shirt on Men, on a white background on women, on a black background and ran that ad. And sure enough, we sold Eternity T-shirts. So it was like, OK. So I guess people just don't know that we're out there. So I should probably do a better job of letting them know.

**Remo Giuffre** What would I say to Arthur? Arthur, I love your work. I love what you're doing. It's great. But, have you tried different coloured chalk. No, I wouldn't say that. I got no advice for I've got no advice. I think he's I think he doesn't need it from me. I think he lived he lived a good and meaningful life.

**Remo Giuffre** I'm Remo Giuffre and I'm the founder of the Remo General Store.

**Remo Giuffre** The word Eternity is up there with other words. It's up there with love. It's up there with peace. It's up there with good. Don't ask me to keep giving you words.