

EULOGY: SUE WYTON

Written by Narelle, Nick and Natalie

John Kevin Ballard was known by most around Muttaborra as JB.

John was born to his beautiful mother Mary Agnes Perriman and her husband Sidney Fitzroy Ballard. They had a whole gang of children – Bernard, June, Sidney James, Bill, John, Patrick, Rita, Marie and Terry. John and his twin brother Patrick were born on 8 October 1936.

Pat always claimed he was older than John and when people asked Pat who came first, Pat declared:

“It should have been me but I poked my head out and heard the Doctor say ‘wipe him’, but I slipped back in and pushed John out first cause I thought he’d said ‘knife him’.

JB told everyone *“I didn’t have to get in trouble myself because of all the scrapes Pat got into and which I covered for him, frequently getting the cane from the nuns.”*

As a kid at St Joseph’s Convent School in Longreach, JB proudly admitted that he *“saw an opportunity and threw the Nun’s cane into the water tank; apparently they never found the culprit”.*

With regards to who was the bigger larrikin - when you look at the two of them as they've gotten older, we can't help thinking they both had a fair bit of mischief in them.

John's work over the course of his life included working in a grocer shop and a bit of dam excavating, but the largest portion of his life was as a truck driver and running a haberdashery shop with his wife, Val.

JB first drove when he was younger than the legal age but, in those days, the local police made sure to let him know when there was a blitz going on. He became expert over the years packing oversize loads and he could still recount the number of bales on a truck and how he loaded/unloaded all the bricks of the catholic church in Longreach by hand. JB said some trucks in the early days would cause them to get blistering on your feet due to the heat and lack of insulation on the cab floor.

John and Val married on 30 May 1959 in Brisbane. He always claimed that his mother-in-law Elsie Beatrice told her daughter to make sure she didn't let John get away. Turns out it was good advice, and they made a perfect choice for their married life together.

His kids wrote John a book a few years back so they could make sure he understood what a huge impact he had on all of them – without doubt to his kids and their mother Valmai, there is no better person.

The book was titled – *JB: It's All Bullshit* - but it wasn't because he thought he saw everything as unimportant. He just didn't see himself as taking too much credit for things. He loved and was ferociously loyal to Val right to the end. Apart from the love of his life, Val, he loved his kids well most of them – (Natalie did toss that rock at dad when she was having a hissy fit that one time). But mostly he loved her too 😊

Dad was a joy, he always looked for our silver lining. He made us laugh. Many of us remember the store they had, full of those lolly jars. The kids loved picking the ones they wanted. It's the same with JB – he was like the one-off item in the store and if he'd been a lolly, he would have been the first prize.

He laughed, had a bucketful of kindness, made life fun, loved good food (so long as it was covered in BBQ sauce), and roses that reminded him of his mother Mary Agnes and his mother-in-law Elsie Beatrice.

Those two women were incredible role models in dad's life and he was unmistakable in his love and admiration for them both. It has to be said that in many ways, the Ballard brothers are from the same cloth – they are hardworking, loyal, and protective of their families.

Around Muttaborra JB was respected and lots of people (kids and adults alike) felt the same about his sense of fun and kindness. Roy and Jerry, who like JB have worked their lives in the trucking industry, were lifelong

mates to JB. JB always loved to visit with them in his last years for a quick catch up.

Jean Lennon has been friends with JB and Val since 1963 and even though Jean now lives in Barcaldine, they'd still run the phone line hot on a regular basis.

Cathy has been a longtime friend of JB and Val over the years. The kids joke that with all the baked goodies she supplied to him, she was obviously his "second wife".

Val and JB's niece Kim has made the trip from Cairns several times in the last few years, to give a hand and to joke and laugh with JB.

Fiona and Mel regularly find ways to 'brown nose', bringing JB and Val little treats and handwritten lovey dovey messages in their hope of being Number 1 in their affections.

The staff at the local clinic and others who have stepped in to help with giving him assistance and ambulance drives, have been fantastic to our dad over the years as they helped the family throughout his Parkinsons. There are lots of others too numerous to mention, but its certain that whether family or friends, JB and Val appreciate what they have done for them.

JB was a smart, cheeky, and thoughtful man. He had a strong sense of justice and he loved animals. He left school early on as was the rule with

his father back then. But not spending a lot of time in formal education made little difference. JB always listened and learned. His favourite shows were Western Movies (the old school ones), documentaries, the ABC radio, and TV. He loved knowledge of the natural world. We can't remember the number of times he'd regale us with interesting behavioral facts about unusual animals – like how the mongoose wasn't affected by cobra snake venom. His "Meerkat Manor" garden sat with his meerkat statues amongst his plants set into an old satellite dish right outside his bedroom window. He loved the garden when he retired and would watch the birds, growing roses, and succulents. Natalie still has lilies JB sent with her back to Sydney on a trip and they still flower for her every year.

JB would say golf was a nutty game - hitting a tiny white ball, trying to hit it in a hole and then walking some more - but Nick and Gary called him out on it when he retired. It turned out he loved the game and played for years until his health prevented him from continuing. Nick and Gary weren't just his golfing partners - their home was right next door. For all their lives, they were his sons and his best mates.

JB had an awesome imagination. When Narelle was at boarding school (now remember JB had left school early and wasn't much for writing letters) however on one occasion, he wrote the entire letter on toilet

paper with a great description about having been inside cleaning out a tank at Fergusons Transport in Aramac. As JB describes, he was attacked by mosquitoes so big their proboscis pierced right through his skin, causing him to bleed so much he needed blood transfusions.

JB would often wake up mornings and tell us about some trip he'd been on during the night - in his dreams he'd have visited a Sufi or had a big old lion sitting watching him or we'd be riding camels on some big trip, usually accompanied by an elephant and her baby.

About four days before JB died, he woke up, and pronounced: *'that skinny old fella' sat there and kept an eye on me all night'*. He was relaxed and at the time we didn't know it wouldn't be long before it was his last days. JB had a unique gift to lighten daily life for others, so it is no surprise he had a mate sitting at his side right near the end.

JB always saw life with the sunny side up. Even though he had Parkinsons and had every right to feel diminished by his illness, he didn't.

Nothing paints a picture about JB's attitude to his life as when you look at so many photos taken of him – relishing food, wearing funny hats, or as was so often the case - with his tongue poking out – as if saying: "It's All Bullshit"!

Sweet dreams JB.