

Bruce's Eulogy

Family have passed their recollections of Bruce to me to relay to you today. I deliver these thoughts as my humble honour to someone who has touched all our lives with such gentle and lasting love. This will be inadequate and incomplete because the person we have all loved for so long, whether 'Bruce, Dad, Pa or Uncle Bruce', cannot be captured by mere words.

Bruce was born in Melbourne and spent his childhood in rural Victoria with his siblings Douglas, Ruth and Joan. Bruce became a farmer early and he and his father bought a farm in Peebinga in the early 1960s, which was to become his lifetime home. Early farming adventures with his father were memorable, and in January this year I recall Bruce with tears in his eyes laughing about the antics of friends and helpers, of tractors rearing-up and comical mishaps. Bruce was also ahead of his time, planning and leaving large areas of uncleared vegetation – carefully creating bush corridors to link nature reserves.

Bruce met the love of his life, local girl Pam, in Pinnaroo and they were married in 1965. They spent a life on the farm, with Pam his companion in all aspects of his life, with Jason and Natasha dearly welcomed in the 1970s.

Fishing was a huge part of Bruce's life and Bruce and Pam moved to spend much of their time in Goolwa in 2016 where the access to fishing was so much easier, there was closer proximity to Pam's family and they found new neighbours and friends. In Goolwa they enjoyed many wonderful walks on the beach together, and they spent the last happy four years alternating between the farm and Goolwa.

Many people have sent remembrances of Bruce and I will start with Bruce's brother and sisters who capture the early days...

Douglas, Bruce's older brother, writes:

Bruce and I spent the first few years of our lives in Canterbury, a suburb of Melbourne. As Dad was away at the war, Mum had the job of dealing with two young boys. Apparently, we ran her ragged. Bruce's first memory of Dad was when he returned from the war. He remembered seeing the taxi pull up, Dad in uniform, and the driver saying "Yous guys don't pay". Shortly after Dad returned we went to live in Wycheproof where Bruce started school. Here he began his lifetime love of fishing at the local reservoirs. There were times when he arrived home after dark as he was so immersed in the pursuit of the redfin that he lost track of time. We moved to Culgoa when Dad and Mum bought a general store in there. Here Bruce honed his mastery of various bush skills.

I remember my brother so fondly - the boyhood games running all over Mount Wycheproof, sitting waiting for the fish to bite, and the joy of growing up in a happy family with our two younger sisters.

Ruth, Bruce's sister writes....

Bruce taught me to read. He would read me comics and I would badger him for more and more. Maybe he is responsible for my love affair with the Phantom. Anyway, eventually he got tired of reading to me and made me learn how to read the comics myself.

He also taught me how to pray. He would drive me into Pinnaroo from the farm in his mini and slide sideways, blindly, around those sandhill corners at huge speed. It was terrifying and indelibly imprinted on my memory.

He also taught me how to drive. He might regret that because he put me on the tractor with the combine and I just missed the electricity pole in the paddock by inches. He just did not mention the dynamics of towing! However, I was master of the kangaroo hop start so he did manage to teach me amazing skills.

He was a much-loved brother and uncle, interested in all aspects of our lives and we can rest in the sure knowledge that he is now in good hands.

And Joan, Bruce's youngest sister says...

How she has many fond memories of her early years as a child and teenager on the farm when, with Douglas and later Ruth not there, Bruce became her friend, her protector and mentor. Joan remembers him always being there for her, driving her to the pictures or to other events and always ensuring he was on time to safely collect her.

Joan and Ron recall wonderful memories of holidays at the farm when their children were growing up. They remember time spent with Bruce and Pam, concerts put on by Tash and Jennie; Jason and Doug and Anthony escaping on some form of mischief, and Bruce taking everyone spotlighting even though he was undoubtedly tired after a full day of work.

Joan and Ron write 'we remember with gratitude our children getting to know the beautiful person who was their Uncle Bruce. A gentle and loving man with such strength of character. We count ourselves fortunate indeed that he was a part of all our lives.'

Bruce was also a dearly beloved brother-in-law. Pam's two sisters Jan and Rae and their husbands Mal and Bruce Mitchell spent much of their lives in close contact, with holidays and frequent visits.

Jan and Mal enjoyed many fishing trips with Bruce and Pam before the children arrived and Mal recalls..

"I always thought Bruce was part goat. We once went fishing at the toe of the York Peninsula and found a cliff with a fifty degree slope for about sixty metres to a ledge over the sea. Bruce scrambled down easily. Unfortunately, carrying my food, drink and fishing gear halfway down my feet slipped from under me and I ended up flat on my back. With both hands full, every time I tried to move I slipped further down the hill. Fortunately Bruce eventually noticed, came back up and, notably, took the fishing gear from my right hand. That allowed me to turn off my back and scramble down. Unfortunately, we did not catch any fish.

The girls did not usually join us in casting out a rod but on one trip they did. It was short lived. The only fish caught that day was by Jan - a lovely big whiting. However she did not have it long as Bruce swiftly put it on his own rod as bait for catching something bigger."

Ever the keen fisherman!

From Rae and Bruce

Pam's sister Rae, who was ten when Bruce first started going out with Pam, regarded Bruce more as an older brother than a brother in law. She remembers feeling safe when Bruce was around. One of the rare times she did see him annoyed was when she was driving in the paddock and each he tried to get in the vehicle she drove off – in the end she thought she better leave him behind completely, hoping he'd cool off by the time he'd walked home. Bruce Mitchell, Rae's husband, or, the two Bruce's (as they liked to introduce themselves) spend many hours – often in one day! – on the phone as the discussed or dribbled (as Bruce Mitchell said) the worlds issues.

Niece Miranda and her husband Russel said they both put Bruce on a pedestal and how much he meant to them both and their children Isaac, Layla and Keira. Bruce and Russel joined the tradition of long phone calls and they all loved their farm visits.

Joe

For myself I couldn't have asked for more in my father-in-law. His initial warmth and welcome and the subsequent years of good humour, shared interests and family devotion are things I have been privileged to feel. These are not guaranteed and I have been truly blessed in having Bruce in my life and the lives of my children. When times have been hard, I felt so much stronger because I felt Bruce's belief in me, and felt so much safer when his strong shoulders were there to hug.

Bruce had a passion for nature, fishing, cars and motor racing, and cricket. The first day I met him, I sat next to him as he drove us home from Adelaide, through the dark. And from Tailem Bend for a good half hour he steered only with his knees while he ate his chicken and chips! He taught both my sons to drive only shortly after they'd learned to walk.

Bruce's way was to make you feel like the expert in all you did. He would often start off his sentences, with "Joe, you'd know about....." even if the subject was a fishing knot. Indeed, the reverence with which he held my opinion, on more or less any topic, has humbled me since the day I met him.

Tash (and boys)

Tash remembers her Dad's gentle and quietly spoken ways, his patience and belief in her when teaching a skill, and the amount of thought and interest he gave so many matters - a deep, curious thinker, keen to engage on the bigger issues of the day. She recalls his enthusiastic love of reading stories to Jason and her, tirelessly throwing her the netball, and his funny poses when Pam bought him new clothes to try on, pointing and peering into the distance. But she particularly remembers her Dad's love of nature - sitting together watching everything from mallee fowl to ant lions, his careful observation of all animal behaviour and nature's changes through the seasons.

Once Luca and Ollie were born, all of us recall our many walks in the bush with Pa - he spotting so many animals, nests and natural marvels that he could discuss, but always excessively humble in his knowledge, always keen to learn himself.

Pa played endlessly with Luca and Ollie - and this really was endless - literally hours and hours each day on everything from toy planes to the receiving of 'Pa traps' of which he would obliging fall into

with great surprise. On one occasion after Lucas had been to hospital to get a dried pea out of his ear - Pa was subjected to the same treatment - in the Luca 'hospital' with Dr Lucas, complete with fearsome tools and the promise that it would 'only hurt a little bit' – perhaps the first time, we're not sure about the 15th. Luca recovered well - physically and psychologically - we hoped Pa did too.

Ollie too had the joy of countless 'all-day plays' with Pa from trains, planes and cars, to riding motorbikes and driving lawnmowers. In particular Pa was Ollie's playmate for Police games - a playtime that would keep them going for hours and even days, though Tash was never sure who enjoyed this game more.... it seemed to her that Pa contributed an awful lot to the storyline...

Jason

Jason spent an enormous amount of time with Bruce, a benefit of the farming lifestyle they shared. Pam and Bruce spent his last two months on the farm, giving Jason once more a precious time on the farm with his Dad.

Jason remembers Bruce's enormous love of fishing, something they shared and did together. Whether it was catching callup or carp on the Murray River or adventuring out to sea on Jason's boat Bruce's great joy was fishing. His life-long passion was of course the mullock and his favourite spot the Murray mouth. The family holidays at The Mouth are legendary. Sleeping in the back of an old Toyota, Jason remembers Bruce coming in at 'who knows what time' and crawling in next to him, and falling asleep, still in his wet trousers from wading out in the surf.

Jason and Bruce worked together on the farm for decades. You'd have thought there would have been plenty of opportunity for frustration in the farm work alone, but Jason only ever remembers his father swearing twice: a testament to Bruce's infinite patience. Bruce's thoughtful nature and eagerness to help were always evident. Jason recalls "When I was doing jobs on the farm – and particularly when there were difficult jobs, Dad was always finding ways to make it easier for me, to give help and assistance. He'd anticipate what I was doing when working on something, have a tool ready, find a way that could make the job easier. He was also selfless in his actions, crawling under the silo, doing the dirty job, or the difficult job, to make it easier for me".

Jason reminded us too the other day of how much Bruce loved his companions the whippets. He got so much joy from their company, adventures and the love they gave him back.

Pam

I will end with Bruce's love of Pam - loving, caring, always. Bruce had such a deep, devoted love of Pam, they were seldom apart in over 50 years of marriage, she was the centre of his universe.

Bruce Graham LeBas, he is deeply, sorely missed. Rest in peace.