

# Rory Stephen O'Brien

## **Eulogy - written and delivered by Niece, Moira Lanzarin**

Oldest son to Stephen and Mabel. Little brother to Stephanie. Big brother to Daniel and Michael. Brother-in-law to John Morris, Sheena O'Brien (nee MacEachern) and Clair O'Brien (nee Baulch).

Uncle to 14. Grand Uncle to 33. Great Grand Uncle to 8 and counting.

Gr'uncle to my sons. Friend to many.

Our Dad was Mike, Rory was Dad's older, bachelor brother. They were business partners and best friends. Mum married one and got three. She never knew the traditional modern family unit. Under her tin-shed roof and around her kitchen table, there were always more. Dad's father – Grandpa and his bachelor brother Rory - plus staff, visitors, clients and friends. All were welcomed.

I have never known life without Rory - he has always been a member of our family household and business. He became a very close friend and kindred spirit. He was a great listener and intellectually stimulating conversationalist. Rory never married nor had children but played an active role in the upbringing of me and my siblings and was very proud of all his nieces and nephews and their children.

Rory was born in Brisbane, on the 27th July 1940. This was early wartime. The young city was on the cusp of greatness but also a little nervous. The Story bridge over the Brisbane River opened just weeks before Rory was born and the University of Queensland's St Lucia campus was being built.

His parents were essential farmworkers operating a dairy farm and fresh milk run on the northern foothills of the Brisbane River. His early years were spent at Coodardy, Moggill -part of the original farm land settled by his ancestors - Irish Catholic free settlers in 1868. The boys would help milk the cows by hand and deliver it, prior to school each day. In 1954 they moved to their own farm in Bardon which is now Purtel Park, West's Football field.

Rory's mother insisted that the boys go away to Boarding school for Junior – as much as anything to get away from the endless work of the farm and enjoy boyhood pleasures of football and friends. All three boys went to Downlands in Toowoomba. My understanding is that Rory was the only one of the sons to finish senior.

After initial study in Dentistry in Sydney as per his father's wishes, he transferred to "Cadet Education Officer" training at the Australian School of Pacific Administration - affectionately known as ASOPA. This was an abridged teaching degree to prepare and send individuals into usually 1 teacher schools in remote Papua New Guinea and the Northern Territory. Rory graduated from ASOPA in 1963 and commenced his grand adventure as a young teacher in the island villages of PNG.

The camaraderie of ASOPA was extremely strong and Rory greatly enjoyed reconnecting with alumni at their 40th reunion and more. His first year at ASOPA, would have been made even more difficult by the tragic sudden death of his mother, 3 days after his 22nd birthday.

Grandpa, heartbroken and lost, his children all now young adults forging their own lives across Australia and overseas, sold the dairy herd but kept the farm for a little longer.

Late 1964 saw them all being drawn back together. Little brother Mike, had had a yearning for his own place and cattle herd in the great north and been applying via the Queensland Ballot system for undeveloped land. Grandpa assisted, applied and successfully drew the most amazing virgin block, Craigs Pocket in far north Queensland. So named because it was a basalt pocket, surround by lava wall, whose life-giving springs started the Burdekin River flowing full time. This was to become the start of their beef cattle dream.

On hearing the exciting news, Rory immediately cut short his teaching career in Papua New Guinea to return and be an active part in the business and adventure. My Mum remembers seeing the arrival of pink envelopes in the mail for years to come for the repayment of his training bond because he cut short his time teaching. When brother Dan, could release himself from the Australian Navy and national duties involving submarines, he too returned and was part of the pastoral business, O'Brien and Sons. From this humble base, living in humpies which they built from local timber they had sawn, a cattle empire grew, setting up each sibling with their own property and or herds. Achieved thru sheer hard work, contract fencing and yard building with an occasional bit of luck - despite the cattle slump of the 70's; the interest rate rise (buying in at 12% and escalating to 27% during the "recession we had to have") and the Live Export Ban - multiple properties were purchased and developed, the herd grown. Working with and caring for the land, cattle and community.

Craigs Pocket, Essex Downs, Sugar Bag, The Brook, Glendhu, Reid River all in north Queensland. Then in 1993 to the NT - Carmor Plains. Numul Numul and Coodardie.. All have either been his home, or he has assisted family with.

Rory and Dad founded Coodardie Brahman Stud 50 years ago, trading as MJ & RS O'Brien. Forward thinking with proactive and inclusive management, Rory's generosity and acknowledgement of decades of sweat equity by other members, saw the transition of their business partnership into a family company officially including Mum, my brothers and I in 2002.

Although the elder, Rory was always happy to let Dad take the lead and he had the hugest respect for his little brother's gentle, natural ability with animals and people. Whilst Rory was a capable and hardworking cattle and horseman it wasn't his special talent. He could unsettle milking cows without even trying and in his middle years preferred to remain semi anti-social. Likewise, we all have far too many stories of him simply walking away from damaged, bogged, burned, stuck, or broken vehicles and machines which someone else then had to deal with.

Rory was a notorious social alcoholic. The life of the party, the race meeting or the chance gathering along the road. I believe it would have been the late 1970's when he reformed, never again touching the stuff and became a prolific tea and instant coffee drinker instead.

A bad horsefall at Craigs Pocket saw him with a broken leg required a giant stainless steel pin to be placed to assist healing. ... Another time with a cracked neck. His foam neck brace was a regular fixture for a while and as kids we thought his gadget that held your ankles and tipped you upside down to realign his spine was pretty cool .

As a small girl, I recall waking terrified, thinking that a giant razor back pig was outside our thin tin walls trying to get in - it was Rory snoring. Rory's snoring was always bad but it was exacerbated by his neck injury. He told of a time back in PNG after a night of hard partying he awoke to find no-one else in the village huts. Later he learnt - they had all evacuated - hearing terrible rumbling and thinking it was an earthquake. What they had heard was Rory snoring. He was quite miffed that no-one thought to wake and get him to safety!

At Carmor Plains, walking back one night from the outdoor shower he was bitten by a snake. His brief glance of the creature - he was unsure if it may have been a taipan and so thought he should err on the side of caution. Fully emergency protocol was enacted and we met the ambulance halfway at the Bark Hut inn. The snake bite proved harmless but he spent the next week in hospital as it was discovered that he was highly diabetic and it took some time and effort to stabilise the condition.

His life was far from ordinary. Tough as nails, with quick temper, wit and smile, Rory led a very full and varied life. He was fearless when face to face with dangerous animals but completely unnerved and preferred to avoid the unpredictability and stressors of cattle auctions - both when selling and buying.

In Rory's early 'retirement' days at Numul, he enjoyed his regular trips back to Brisbane to spend time with his nieces and their growing families; reconnecting with extended family and to ASOPA reunions etc.

Rory enjoyed an active and social retirement these last 12 years in Katherine. He was a founding Katherine member of Probus; a keen card player of 500, crib and patience; a regular volunteer at St Vinnie's - he was devastated when his rag cutting duties were declared an OHS safety issue and his task manning it discontinued; and gained great comfort and fellowship by being able to be an active member of his Catholic Church. To the staff at Katherine Hostel, aged care and Katherine medical community - thank you for taking care of him so well.

He is remembered as a true gentleman with a caring soul and fun sense of humour.

It is fitting that we farewell Rory as we also embark on the next chapter of the family's story. At the end of next month, Coodardie Station, Mataranka will transition from the O'Brien family to the Murphy Family and become The Last Paddock. The Coodardie Brahman herd will be settled with new custodians and we will be on our way to new homes back in north Queensland.

Today is a sad day but by no means a bad day. Rory is at peace. He was ready for his time to go and he is now reunited with his parents and brothers. Today is a celebration of all he has achieved and a chance to publicly acknowledge our gratitude and appreciation to him.

THANK YOU. RIP Uncle Rory.

### Other memories not included in the spoken Eulogy

He was a generous and successful bidder at the Royal Flying Doctor charity auctions at Reedy Brook cricket weekends back in North Queensland.. This was very fortunate for me - my birthday being the same weekend as the event - I found myself the recipient of an intricate embroidered bed doll, patchwork cushions and a giant white stuffed monkey thanks to his enthusiastic bidding and support of the cause.

The Bent Arrow brand that proudly adorn's each one of our Coodardie Brahmans was designed by Rory. His initial concept was "moving forward through the hump". In his haste to draw the design and give to Grandpa before he drove the arduous 1600km from remote Craigs Pocket to Brisbane and lodged the design in person at the Brand's department, Rory drew the brand, back to front. Hence it was then known as the bent arrow.

The fascination with PNG and the Northern Territory most likely grew from the adventurous stories of his Uncle's during their WW2 service in both locations.

### Reflections from Heidi O'Shae

I met Rory over 12 years ago at Ormonde House in Katherine (a hostel for men) where he was living and I was employed as a support worker. From the start he was a kind warm hearted gentleman with a brilliant sense of humour. I would run errands to help him with shopping or to go to the bank and he would often come along so he that he could get some fresh air and get out and about. One time I was able to share a memorable day out where I drove to the farm near Mataranka. It meant so much to him to get back there.

I left Ormonde house some years later but I still kept in touch with Rory. I would visit him often when he came to live at the Katherine Hostel. Every week I would visit all of the residents and bring my petting zoo animals in to share with everyone. Rory wouldn't always attend so would make a point of stopping in to see him. We always had a nice conversation and a good laugh.

Rory never married or had children but I know he would have made a loving husband and an incredible father. His big heart and good morals would have been wonderful to have seen passed down. I think sometimes that our friendship filled some of those gaps fro Rory.

I will miss our Monday visits. It won't be the same with you there but I am so lucky to have had such a beautiful friendship with you throughout these years. Rest in peace by dear friend.

Just a few of the 80 plus messages left on Facebook

Denise Maree Lanskey

So sorry to hear about Rory. We certainly had great times at Craigs Pocket and Reedybrook. Rory didn't like to wear jeans and shoes when we were mustering sometimes. Not to mention almost every Sunday at Reedybrook fishing and playing cards very late at night. RIP Rory ❤️

Kaitlyn Cherry

Uncle Rory taught me how to play cribbage, always loved playing cards ❤️

Megan Reid

big love to you all 💙 so many of my childhood holidays spent at Craig's Pocket contain fond memories including a bunch with Grandpa and Rory and their cheeky smiles when they were playing jokes on us kids. Cherished memories 💙🌈💋

John Bauer

My Condolences to your family, have fond memorys of walking amongst the bulls at Cherokee sales at Canomie with Rory.R.I.P

Robyn O'Brien

Seeing this post brings back lots of memories for me (Shane)being jammed between Rory and Mike and the brand-new red Toyota between Glendhu and Craig's Pocket not realising we were going through kinrara (which is now my home)  
Proceeding that was when Rory and I snigging Mike on the tractor back from dog leg probably in the yellow Rover when Rory fell asleep and hit a small tree I was probably four or five and recall Mike getting the bigger friight

I will never forget the time spent with dad Mike and Rory in those early days

Thinking of the brothers that have all passed

Today especially uncle Ror

Shane & Family

Michelle Riggs

So sorry for the sad loss of Uncle Rory. So many beautiful memories - he was such a witty character that would brighten the day. Our thoughts are with you all. 

Christina Young

Sending all our love and prayers to you and your family. We will miss Rory at the Katherine Hostel Church Services and we will continue to sing his favourite hymn- The Old Rugged Cross.

Kevin and Christina Young