

Michael Joseph O'Brien

16 June 1943 to 12 Dec 2021

REST IN ETERNAL PEACE

Mike O'Brien, Coodardie Station, Mataranka NT 0852

Husband to Clair, Father to Patrick, Dinah, Felix, Moira. Father-in-law to Mark Ostwald, Sisi Nilsen, Colin Lanzarin. Poppy to Josephine & Phillip (PJ); Madison & Imogen (DY); Savanna & baby bump (FS); Caleb & Anton (MC)

Dad passed away peacefully Sunday afternoon, only hours after family members had arrived from interstate and gathered round. When further treatment was no longer was an option for Dad, he wished only to be brought home. He has been with us here at Coodardie, surrounded by the things he loved most – his family, his Coodardie Brahmans, his faithful Dog, and on his Country.

We thank everyone for their strong embrace of love and support from near and far. It is a source of great strength for us and a tribute to the man he was. We could not have asked for better or higher quality care and support than what we received from the Mataranka Sunrise Clinic and the NT & Qld public healthcare system.

Dad wasn't perfect, but he was 100% right for us. We would not change a thing and are so very, very grateful for all that he did for us and what he made possible. We are what we are today, because of his influence and he lives on in all of us.

Dad lived a very full life with no regrets. He used to say, "There is no point worrying about what has happened. We can't change it. Make the most of now."

Michael. Mike. Black-Jack. Mick. Dad. Poppy. Pop.

Cattlemen. Husband. Father. Grandfather. Pro-active. Tough. Stubborn. Single mindedness. Caring. Intuitive. Mischievous. Creative. Resourceful. Adaptive. Tenacious. Quiet. Hardworking. Pioneering. Visionary. Community. Flying Doctor. Generous. Fencing. Family. Coodardie Brahmans. Flat bones, tender meat. Country. Fresh milk. Low-stress stock handling. Landcare. Timber work. Chainsaws. Holistic Management. Did I say fencing?

Born in Brisbane, the youngest of 4 children to Stephen and Mabel, in 1943. Stephanie, Rory, Daniel were his siblings, and all were very close, both in years and friendship. For 1 week each year Dan and Dad were twins – being born only 11 mths apart. He is now reunited, with his parents and brother Dan. His parents were essential farmworkers operating a dairy farm and fresh milk run in the middle of Brisbane (the farm was 3km from the GPO). The boys would help milk the cows by hand and deliver it, prior to school each day. Their old farm is now Purtel Park, Wests Football field (Ithica Creek).

His 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. Dad regularly jokes he paid the penalty from the Catholic

Priests for the earlier misbehavior or reputation of Rory and Dan; and that he only really learnt through fear of the strap. “Where there’s a will there’s a way, and this Will! (Meaning the Priest’s strap)” The strong friendships he made at boarding school have endured the test of time. Reacquainted at their 50-year reunion, he has greatly appreciated this renewed time with the “old boys”, his college mates. Thank you to those able to join us online today.

Unfortunately, none of us standing here, had the privilege to meet his mother. She passed suddenly at the age of 48, when Dad was only 18. Grandpa, heartbroken and lost, later sold the dairy herd but kept the farm for a little longer.

Believe it or not, one of Dad’s early jobs were as a “bank Johnny” or clerk – Dinah and I even use to wear one of his lovely white silk “bank” shirts that he had kept, complete with a cigarette burn hole in it! Another job was on the production line at XXXX Brewery. At morning tea and lunch, they were given a beer. Thanks to the introduction by a neighbour, a young Mike applied to head north to the adventures of the Kimberly and cattle work of Argyle Station. He celebrated his 21st birthday there and did a season or two, in the Argyle stock camp. The country and large-scale beef operations mesmerized him – he had found his calling, his true north.

Eager for his own land and own herd, he applied for undeveloped land via the Queensland Ballot system. In his application, some important information was missed. Being so far away, and in the essence of time, Grandpa (his Dad) re-submitted the application on his behalf. They were successful and in 1964, 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 amazing springs started the Burdekin River flowing full time. This was the start of their beef cattle empire. Dad and Grandpa rallied the family, over many years, but it was brother Rory who returned immediately, from teaching in Papua New Guinea; and later again brother Dan, from the Navy and national duties involving submarines. From this humble base, living in humpies which they built from local trees they had sawn, a cattle empire grew, setting up each sibling with their own property 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 at 12% and escalating to 28% during the “recession we had to have”), multiple properties were purchased and developed, the herd grown. Interestingly, Dad maintained that the Live Export Ban of 2010 made many of these others, seem like a walk in the park.

Essex Downs. Sugar Bag, The Brook, Glendhu, Reid River in north Queensland. Carmor Plains. Numul Numul. Coodardie in the NT. All have been his home, or he has assisted family with.

Even though Dad was the youngest in the family, he was an unassuming and natural leader, simply getting in and getting things done, prepared to make the hard calls/decisions when no-one else would or could.

Dad had a knack of being surrounded by a strong team and great people. This is evident by the people here today, in person, on-line and in spirit. None more so, than the love of his life, Clair. Young Clair Baulch from Aloomba, was the governess on the neighbouring property, Marionvale station. Romance blossomed during that year tutoring the young Lucey children but Mum felt it wise to leave after 2 years (when they were engaged) – to test if this young gentleman was actually serious or if their relationship was simply convenient - But she also knew she was coming back to live as a good friendly neighbour.

51 years on, through thick and thin, good, and better, their marriage most definitely stood the test of time. Dad had plans of his own football team and they were well on their way – 4 children in the first 5

years. Patrick, Dinah, Felix. But I inadvertently, stopped the line. After my eventful arrival, for medical reasons Mum was told there had to be no more.

Older brother Rory, never married, and he and Dad worked really hard and well together. Blood made them brothers but hearts, the best of friends. Their business partnership first started as young boys growing, picking and selling green beans from the dairy. As mature men, they formed the long-lasting partnership of MJ & RS O'Brien with the creation of Coodardie Brahman Stud in 1976. From the humble initial purchase of 11 cows to a high point of over 1200 hundred registered stud cows. Learning, working and sourcing from and with fellow great Brahman breeders - the late Ron Bauer of Tyagarah, the late Lionel Delandelles of Cherokee, Zedric Zsiche of Balara BOS cattle and Mick Delroy of Wandarri. These genetic bloodlines have travelled with us from property to property and continue strong today, rigorously finetuned for the North.

Our O'Briens arrived directly into Brisbane on the first boat of free settlers, Queen of the Colonies, in 1869. They were Catholics in Northern Ireland and the family fled from persecution and famine. Three brothers went to America and three came to Australia. The Australian contingent were early pioneers and took on virgin farming country on the Brisbane River. This pioneering spirit, passed on to Dad. Always, further out. The next challenge. The next development. The next management improvement.

When asked why we sold Craigs Pocket and left Queensland for the Territory, he replied, "the only thing left to do was build Clair a house." That was in 1993. He managed to put that building off for another 10 years, until Coodardie in 2003/4. After never allowing themselves the luxury of any personal comfort and living in tin sheds or rudimentary abodes, with all funds being spent on property development (not to forget, that through the droughts of the late 80's, early 90's they bore the cost of 4 children through boarding school after 7 years of home schooling/School of the Air/Distance education), I am sure you will agree, a lovely homestead was well overdue and deserved – and where he passed in comfort.

Most properties we have been on either had no or minimal fixed improvements, (and bare of stock) at our arrival. Coodardie Station, Mum and Dad's retirement project was a blank canvas back in 2001.

We often laugh, "if O'Brien's are selling assets – now is the time to buy. Prices are about to skyrocket!" This was particularly so with Carmor Plains and the main herd at Numul but there are no regrets from any of us. Of all the properties on which we have had the privilege to be custodians of, Coodardie has the least natural attractions. But it does have bitumen highway, mains electricity, mobile phone, school and medical facilities – all things that had done without for 40 odd years. Priorities change.

Dad was proactive in all things, succession planning included. First with his father and siblings and then with his own children. We were fortunate to be included and involved, as and where, we wished. Business and family were and are, one.

Dad lived by a code – his own code of what he considered right. Family, Country, Cattle, Community. Doing right by others and looking out for each other. He thought clearly for himself and never saw a need to follow the crowd/fashion/or do what was considered the norm or the accepted thing to do.

Best friend, business partner, mentor. On the forming of Coodardie Pty Ltd, Dad was the MD – Managing Director to most but to me, MY DAD.

I have only scraped the surface. And Dad would say that I have already talked too long. Please, help keep his memory alive, and continue to share the stories.

On behalf of all the family. Thank you.