

This eulogy was given by Bob Calnin's son Dale on the occasion of his funeral service at St Coleman's Catholic Church in Orbost in September 2010

Eulogy - Robert Edward Calnin

30/6/1929 - 11/9/2010

St Coleman's Catholic Church Orbost 17/9/2010)

Welcome

On behalf of the family I would like to welcome everyone and to thank you so much for being here today.

Our journey over the past 3 months has been tough going. It has tested our strength and has left us battered and bruised - to say the least.

We cannot thank you enough for the love and support throughout this very difficult time - one that we will never forget.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the wonderful nursing staff at the Orbost Hospital - they fell in love with Bob and described their time caring for him with as a privilege.

So time to reflect.

Where to begin where to end? How to describe the life of a man we so much loved and respected? How to describe the feelings from the heart, for these are only felt by the heart. Poets and writers try in vain. For words are but words.

Robert Edward Calnin - better known to all of us as Bob, was born in Ballarat on the 30th of June 1929 together with twin brother Jack - they were the eldest children of Nora and Maurice Calnin. Later a sister Margaret was born who survives both Bob and Jack. During his early years Bob could remember playing all sorts of games with Jack and Margaret, cricket and football in the backyard riding his bike around Lake Windouree and listening to most things on the radio.

He started riding horses from an early age, did gymnastics and was good at running - in later years he was asked to train for the Stawell Gift.

Bob went to Ballarat East Christian Brothers School. He would travel 7 miles on a tram to get to school. There wasn't a lot that we learned about Bob's school days - maybe he wasn't there all that much.

He grew up during the depression and as you can imagine - they were tough times.

At the age of 14 Bob tragically lost his Mother. To help make ends meet he got a job at a Dairy doing a "milk run".

At 16 he left school and started making milk deliveries.

He had to get up at 2am each morning and ride his bike for an hour to get to work. He made 30 shillings a week...which I understand was about \$3.00.

In 1950 he joined the Royal Australian Navy where he went to Japan 8 times and also took the crew of Australia's first aircraft carrier, the HMAS Melbourne to England to pick her up. Bob would often say when giving career guidance - "join the Navy and see the world through a port hole".

At 19 Bob joined the Police Mounted Branch where he became a very capable and gifted horseman. Bob would say "there was one way to get on a horse but 99 ways to get off" - and he knew them all.

The Chief horse trainer at the Stud farm that time was a Tom Lloyd. Tom became Bob's mentor and great mate. He was very much like Bob - a practical joker and a lovable larrikin.

There were many stories told of Bob's time spent with Tom. One such story was when 6 capes/raincoats arrived at the depot. The capes condition ranged from brand new to others that were 2nd hand and so flash. Bob had first pick so he took the best one and left Tom the 2nd best. Tom was not impressed - "you inconsiderate bugger" he said. Bob replied "well if you had first pick which one would you have taken". "I would have taken the 2nd best one he said. Well Bob replied "you got the 2 best one so what are you whingeing about"

Keen to get more experience at police work Bob was transferred to Orbost in 1954 where he met his wife Betty.

2 years later they were married in St Francis Church in Melbourne.

1956 Bob broke in and trained horses used in the Melbourne Olympic Games in the Pentathlon event.

In 1959 and 1962 - Bob and Bet had 2 children in Dale and Robyn who we everything to him - he may have never told them so but he didn't have too - they knew.

Bob enjoyed his time at Orbost where he made many lifetime friends often reliving the many good times he had.

In 1964 Bob and the family moved to a one-man station at Buchan. It didn't take long for Bob to make his mark

"Buchan was quite a wild place when I first got there - no one had really been locked up before and then with a wry grin he would add -" I soon put an end to that - I reckon I nearly filled the watch-house book in those first few months".

During Bob's early days at Buchan there was no police car assigned at the station - it was a case of using your own car. One time he picked up a wanted hitchhiker making his way out of Buchan. Bob was dressed in his favourite blue singlet and jeans - which was not usual. Bob quickly got into conversation as he continued up the Gelantipy road. After driving a couple kilometres Bob said **"anyway I am the local policeman"** in which the hitchhiker said **"if you're a Policeman I am Father Christmas"**. Bob replied **"well I have got news for you Santa"** as he swung the car around and headed back to Buchan.

Bob was not only the local Policeman. Like most good country cops he was very involved in the community. He was instrumental in establishing the Orbost and Buchan Pony Clubs and the Buchan Rodeo Club - in which he was a life member.

Bob's list of services to the Buchan and Orbost communities can be found in the **Australian Roll of Honour** (National Honours and Awards 1975-1996)

They include:

- The National Medal in 1986 for this service in the Victorian Police Force
- The Long Service and Good Conduct Police Medal in 1972
- The Orbost Citizen of the year in 1956.

Bob's love for horses remained throughout his life. As a Mounted Policeman he led many parades throughout East Gippsland.

In 2000 Bob (71) came out of retirement to lead a local parade at Buchan. If getting into his old uniform wasn't a big enough challenge (Bob had filled out a bit during his retirement) - getting up onto the back of the horse took quite an effort.

Bob loved being a policeman and he was good at it. He had many wonderful memories of his policing days but admitted that his old style policing methods would struggle under today rules and restrictions.

In 1987 after nearly 39 years Bob retired from the Police Force and threw his heart and soul into his 500 acres on the Timbarra Road - where he would often say "It's a good life this - being your own boss".

Bob had many, many wonderful friends - too many to mention but it was those friendships he truly valued. He was very well known throughout Gippsland and even wider area. It wouldn't matter where we went - Robyn and I would be continually asked "you wouldn't be related to Bob Calnin"?

Amongst his many friends he built a **very close friendship with both Gail and Brett**. He thought the world of both of them - "my best daughter in law and my best son in law he had" he would say.

Bob had no fear - he was "bold as brass". Nothing much would faze him. He was quick to jump on any trouble and there are many stories of Bob running unsavoury types out of town. Bob's approach normally went something like - "We don't want your type here in Buchan - best you be heading home".

Once asked in all seriousness - is it true "that the old copper at Buchan once chased a mob of motorbike riders out of town on his horse with his stock whip" - and so the Legend grows

Bob was hard to forget once you met him.

He had an infectious character - a larger than life nature about him that made people feel comfortable. There may have odd one that did not think highly of Bob and his ways - but that didn't bother him - that their loss. He never lost

any sleep over the unnecessary things in life or worry about the things that might have been. If it meant saving someone's life by locking them up, making them pick up sticks from his backyard, washing off graffiti to teach them a lesson he did. Losing his popularity did not bother him.

Some years into his retirement Bob had a bit of a run in with a certain policeman. Bob wasn't really impressed with his coppers petty approach towards him.

One day Bob asked him "Would you book me if I called you a bastard" "Yes I would" he replied. "What if I thought you were a bastard" "Well I couldn't" the copper said. To which Bob replied "Then I think you are a bastard"

Despite Bob's rugged manner he had a heart of gold and a genuine care for people. He did many" good deeds for people" that were going through hard or difficult times. Some we knew about but others we weren't aware of.

He was cheeky, very cheeky - this and his irresistible charm seemed to win over the ladies.

Bob was a great teacher of life. Amongst the many things he taught us how to laugh at life.

When Bob was laughing so was everybody else - even if his jokes weren't all that funny - you found yourself laughing anyway because Bob was?

As a fine horseman Bob was always keen to teach both Robyn and myself how to ride horses from a very early age. He had better luck with Robyn then he did with me.

Some of Bob's instructions still ring loud and clear

- "Just hang on" he would say - just hang on -meaning if you get good at that I will teach you how to ride.
- "Don't look at the ground" cause that's where you will end up -"look between the horses ears" for me it was - "just get back on".

One of most remembered pieces of advice from Bob was when he told me - "you can be anything in life as long as you are a good parent".

Bob loved nothing more than his grandchildren Ben and Erin - who gave him an extension in life. He enjoyed being part of their lives, spending time listening about their day and was so very proud of them

He also thought the world of Abby, Ben and Grace and enjoyed their many chats and time spent together.

Bob was a man of strong faith and loved St Dymphna's Catholic Church in Buchan He always carried with him a photo of Mary MacKillop and his St Christopher medal with him.

At Mass - Bob was in charge of the collection plate, a job he did for 45 years. He wasn't big on other tasks. Once when asked by the priest would he do a reading - Bob replied "I won't ask you to do my job so don't ask me to do yours"

Bob loved Buchan and he loved the people who lived there. He always spoke highly of the support he was given by the local community. He had the highest respect for the Bush Nurses who attended a number of serious accidents with him during his 24 years as the policeman at Buchan.

Bob always loved children. He loved talking with them, listening to their stories, having a laugh with them and watching them grow. During the past week a number of those kids now grown up with families of their own, contacted me to pass on their condolences and mention the influence Bob had on their life.

Bob had some great sayings - all of which we became very familiar with over the years some included:-

- When trying to get us kids to eat something we didn't like - "Here eat this - It makes policeman look like ants"
- When learning to drive and being concern about other drivers "just make out you don't see um" - and one the kids loved to hear "bore the red stuff into it"
- "May God strike me dead this minute" - which usually meant he wasn't telling us the whole story.

- "Jump your fences when you come to them" - don't get ahead of yourself
- "Flat as a shitcarters hat" - something that was pretty flat
- "Save as in Gods pocket" - he would say when he had the kids then usually drove off without his seat beat on.

Before falling to illness Bob was flying on all cylinders. He was enjoying life to the fullest.

In the past 14 months or so he:

- celebrated his 80th birthday - which seem to give a real lift
- Caught up with old friends
- Fixed broken fences and re-swung gates
- Attended Grandparents day at St Mary's - Erin's school last year
- Visited his sister Margaret and family in Melbourne
- Had a visit from his 4 nieces
- Lived on the phone talking to friends -the bill went up considerably

It was though he knew he was reaching the top of his mountain and he had some final things to do.

The 2 things we didn't know at the time were -"What he was on" and "Where do you get it"?

We thought it may have been the sugar kicking in from all the lollies and chocolate he ate over the years?

Bob is now joined with Betty and I can hear her now saying "Where have you been" - "I bet you have been talking again"?

I am sure by now Bob will have livened things up in heaven and God has probably had to have a quite word in this ear.

So we say farewell

- To a very special person,

- A Buchan Icon,
- The *GREATEST* father you could wish for- and a very dear friend.

"Our heartache no one can heal - our love leaves a memory no one can steal - you will live forever in our hearts"