

## Ross' Keys – “Big” Ears Eulogy

Ross Oswald Charles Keys. He really didn't like acronyms and sort of fussed about them – a lot, but his acronym was ROCK and he was my rock and he was a rock to many others.

He answered to many nick names; Big ears, Colin, PBR, Phoney, Labrador, Tini-arse and there were a few others directed by me especially when he did things like wake me at two or three minutes past midnight to play pinch and a punch at the beginning of each month.

Big ears was his nick name given to him by the Botany Bay Hash House Harriers because he was Noddy's friend, PBR stands for Poor Bloody Ross, given to him by my academic colleagues for having to put up with me; known as Phoney by the RMA (Retired Member Association) which were the former PMG/Telecom/Telstra workers, because he was a member of their group although he never worked as a PMG communications worker; Labrador because he like riding in cars (that is driving Classic Roles Royce's) and lastly Tinnie-arse which my Dad would call him when he won a meat tray from the Padstow Bowling Club on a Friday night and then Ross would ring my Dad and ask him to join us for a baked lunch during that weekend. My Dad loved Ross' cooking and would often comment “he's a bloody good cook”.

I am trying to make this Eulogy as short as possible because it could be pages and pages long, just to do this man justice, because Ross was bigger than life, he was so busy, always in a hurry, impatient, on time, incredibly organised and sometimes he would make me tied just watching him. Sometimes I would see him trying to make his way to bed at night and he would look like the energiser bunny running out of charge and next morning he would say to me “I can't remember going to bed last night”. I apologise to all those listening whom I do not mention today, but his life was so large and so rich and although I know I am going to miss many out I know you will celebrate with me in honouring this man's so larger-than-life's story. He had soooo many mates and friends; some from when he was a child (Tom, Roslyn and John), all his work mates, clubs (athletic and social club mates) which sometimes included partners. Each relationship was important and valued by him and obviously by your good selves as well, otherwise these relationships would not have survived so long. I would also like to thank you all for the enormous love and support that so many of you have directed to me especially in the last months, weeks and days.

He was a very keen athlete and incredibly competitive. He especially loved running, completing many marathons, and I believe being a registered athlete at one stage; he also loved to cycle which he did until just a few years ago. I think he loved golf a lot, because he played a lot, but he often came home very unhappy with his performance, but I think he loved the challenge that it offered and comradery that he shared with his mates - he loved the outdoors. He loved going to the cricket at the Sydney cricket ground where he also socialised with his mates Michelle, Graham, Gary, Warren and many others. He also watched various test matches on the TV but never one day matches – that wasn't real cricket. Our annual TV sporting highlight was watching the “Tour de France” which he introduced me to and we would faithfully watch each night for three weeks each year. One of our holidays included going to the cycling race, the ‘Tour Down Under’ in South Australia.

He had a long and distinguished work history as a public servant for which he received a medal from the former NSW Premier, Bob Carr at Government House. Over the years he worked for various government departments, ending his career working for the Environment Protection Authority. He was a

records manager; he used Trim when it was in its experimental stage, when it was a dirty word when everyone was starting to grapple with it. So over his 43 years working career he made many, many friends, many of which are either here today in person or watching online.

His socialising also included being a volunteer which I think was highlighted in 2000 by the Olympic Games and the Paralympics. He also was a volunteer at Union Aid Abroad for many years, but he would always offer his help wherever he could – and truly there are too many occasions for me to name – but he was a ROCK that was always dependable and was there for his mates. Our neighbours could always depend on him for help,

During Ross' retirement years he seemed to be always going off to meetings and reunions sometimes twice a week, with one meeting being as far away as Morsette and I would often call him "Ross have a lunch".

Ross had a legendary sense of humour which I don't think I need to elaborate upon because everyone who knew him expected and counted on him to tell a joke. He loved a beer, a joke and a yarn with his mates.

One of the things that endeared me to Ross was his love for family, he loved his children which then extended to include mine. I can testify to mutual love and respect there was between my children and him. My children's children were not my grandchildren but our grandchildren, the youngest of which carries Ross' name as his middle name. ....

After 19 years of being engaged Ross and I finally, very privately eloped and married in 2018 – which we had always promised each other that we would do. As time had passed our relationship had continued to strengthen and grow. He would often say to me last thing at night "Have I told you I love you today" and even if he had, I would giggle and say "Oh, I don't think so" and he would say "I love you" and I think that was the core of his life; he loved life, he struggled and hung onto life for as long as he possibly could which was a testimony to how much he loved us all.

His sickness was long, starting with prostate cancer in 2009, followed by tonsil cancer, with lung, lymphatic and bone metastases in 2018. During these last three years Ross undertook several courses of intense radiation, participated in two research trials and started chemotherapy. I would be negligent if I didn't recognise the incredible medical teams who offered him innovative treatments which did buy him extra time. Our appreciation and respect for these individuals and teams was unlimited and grew the more we engaged with them. He fought hard and although he put on a brave face as he became more and more physically debilitated he silently endured the loss of his former quality of life.

Ross used to say to me that he was cranky that God didn't make us so we could fly and that he was going to tick off the 'Big Fella' if he ever got to meet him. However, if ever he had trouble getting off to sleep he close his eyes and imagine going out the back yard, flapping his wings and flying out to the Georges River where he would make his way down to Botany Bay - so he did fly, and I know that he now has no limits, no disabilities, no restrictions, no boundaries, but a big place in our hearts and he is not only flying but soaring. Rest in peace my Darling. Thank you for choosing me to be part of your life, your journey and your inner circle.

Christine Berle-Keys