

IAN PETTIGREW - The eulogy of a wonderful man

Today is the day we say goodbye.

I have 10 minutes to re tell the life story of Ian Pettigrew. Pretty impossible you say but I'll do my best. I have made a point not to mention people's names, with the exception of his family throughout the re-telling of Ian's life story because how could I possibly mention everyone who meant something to Ian and keep to my allotted 10 minutes.

Ian was born 19/08/1959 to Sylma and Allan Pettigrew. His sister Ruth was 4 years older and Grant was 7 years younger. Ian grew up in Wallsend attending the local infants, primary and high schools. He always remembered his childhood fondly remembering playing in the new subdivision or riding his bike that his pop compiled from random parts.

His teenager years were spent living at the funeral chapel as his parents, along with his uncles, Neil and David laid the foundations of the family business. His work ethic, business sense and community awareness was fostered at this time as he observed how his father and uncles conducted themselves. His mum, a successful business woman in her own right also added greatly to Ian's understanding of business. He sadly lost his mum in 2013. He was always grateful and proud of his heritage.

For some here today you came to know Ian at school. Friends for decades. When the athletics and cross country carnivals rolled around everyone at Wallsend High knew his name. He was the daggy guy with the mop of curls who became very cool because he always crossed the finish line first. And if that wasn't enough, he could play any sport he put his mind to....and he especially loved soccer...and our school was known for having a great soccer team. But more than that he was the kinda guy who was nice to everyone.

“Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.”

In 1977 he completed year 12. He had a great mind for numbers and was going to be an accountant but due to his social life taking precedence over his school efforts he had a change in direction. His part time school job at Wallace's news agency led to full time and he happily went to work each day charming the locals as they purchased their papers and lotto tickets.

When he was 23 we were married and he started working in the family business. Ian loved the funeral industry and he immersed himself in learning every aspect of the business. In 2000 he took over the day to day running of the business from his dad and he grew the business to the success it is today. In May of last year we purchased the business from his family and he looked forward to looking after the families who entrusted us with the care of their loved ones. To our valued staff I want to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for your loyalty to us and for graciously allowing us to walk away from our beloved business so we could spend the past months together - thank you! Pettigrew Family Funerals brought rewards in so many forms - yes it was a successful business but that was not what drove Ian - helping others in their time of need gave Ian immense satisfaction, that coupled with knowing he was providing jobs for our 34 staff gave him pride. The friendships we formed in the industry were the cream on top (and we all know how much he enjoyed his cream!)

Ian loved life and quietly set about packing as much living as he could into each day. He had an incredible work ethic - up by 6 am and he didn't stop until his head hit the pillow 17 hours later. He loved to get out in the garden and 'enjoyed' re-painting the walls every time I decided we needed a change. Even sitting on the loo he would take in something to read or work on otherwise he'd be wasting time. Early on in our marriage I gave up trying to keep up with him! He loved keeping fit - running each day allowed him the chance to unwind from the pressures of the business. He also loved to play soccer as well each Sunday morning he would head off with his Lycra mates for a brisk 50 km ride.

Ian had a strong sense of community responsibility. He believed in giving back to the community and this was highlighted by being involved in many and varied community organisations.

His love of soccer led him to play for over 35 years with the Christian Churches Soccer Association giving back to this association by being a long standing committee member, past president and life member of the association. Ian was a passionate Jets supporter even when they lingered on the bottom of the ladder he would still don his Jets shirt, scarf and hat and urge them to do their best.

His passion for running led Ian to the Wallsend Athletic club where he was member since he was a kid. His organisational skills eventually led him to be given the microphone running the program in between competing in his beloved 400 and 800 meters. One day we were out shopping and a little girl tentatively came up to Ian and said "you're the man on the microphone" and she gave him a hug. He looked to me with wet eyes and I knew what he was thinking....yep that's why I give up Monday nights! He also became involved with the Federal Park committee where he was president for many years. Ian was also a member of the Newcastle Cross Country club but lately this was replaced by Newy Park Run each Saturday morning. Ian would run the 5 kilometres, chat for a while with his running buddies at the finish line and then run back to encourage me over the last kilometre or so - he loved it when we "ran" together! He never got to run a marathon but he did run a couple of half marathons but his running highlight was when he ran 100 km raising money for Oxfam. Yes I said 100 km! Actually that wasn't the highlight....Ian loved the camaraderie between the running community and often would be late back from running at his beloved Jesmond bush cause he had run into one of his running buddies and stopped for a chat.

With the combination of Ian's sporting background and business skills he was pleased when he was invited onto the Board of Directors of the Glendale Sports Centre.

And to top it off his community involvement, in his spare time Ian joined the Hunter Business Chamber where he was honoured to be elected to the Board of Directors holding the position of Vice President. We loved the photo book given to Ian by his friends at the Chamber, with photos taken over the past couple of years, photos of Ian laughing, shaking hands with business acquaintances, smiling as he stood with a drink in hand making those who he was chatting with feel welcomed and included. Ian was a natural with a microphone in his hand, he would make those he was addressing feel at ease. He loved his time in The Chamber!

After his brush with prostate cancer in 2008 Ian became involved with the Cancer Council, Relay for Life raising awareness and money for ongoing research. He was honoured when his friends on the committee showed their love for him when they had the words "walking for Ian" emblazoned on their committee shirts. This is the only point in this eulogy that I am going to mention the shit of a disease that invaded his beautiful mind....I want to say thank you the doctors and other medical people who did their best to give Ian the most time possible. Thank you for not just your expertise but for the love and care shown to Ian through this part of Ian's journey. Ian was so happy to come home from the Hospice and I want to sincerely thank the Hospice staff for providing everything we needed to enable him to spend this special time at home where he belonged! To Amy and especially to Sophi thank you for lovingly helping me care for him...I couldn't have done it without you! If you feel lead to do so donations in Ian's memory can be made after the service to the Cancer Council "Relay for Life".

Yes....Ian lived his life to the fullest! But as much as Ian enjoyed doing all of that his true love was for his friends and his family.

Ian and I met when we were teenagers. We were both lucky to be "made" to go to church and that meant being a part of the youth group. I was 13 and he was 15 and for the next 6 years I plotted and planned on how I could get him to love me! Our youth group was so much fun! Yes we did the usual church stuff but we had great leaders who took us on picnics, to the beach, up to the bay, and camping. It was all good, clean (well mostly clean) fun and we became great friends! I just knew that one day we would be together....he just needed to realise that too!

It's funny where life can lead you.....I started work in a city bookshop and was asked to oversee the magazine department. I didn't particularly like my job and one Sunday mentioned to him that I was looking for a change and he said he could get me a job. We started working together at Wallace's Newsagency...now he stood no chance!

I remember our first date. Well it wasn't really a date. It was my cousins 21st and I was allowed to bring a "friend". "Yeah sure" he said "he would love to come". I wish I could say that I was the reason he said yes but I think it had more to do with his mate going to the party with my sister. So after 6 years my plotting and planning finally was paying dividends. I wish I could tell you we had a first kiss that night but I wouldn't be telling the truth....our first kiss was when I was 15 and we were playing "spin the bottle" at youth group (I did say mostly clean fun remember - lol) and that was when I knew I loved him! But we did have our second kiss that night....and as they say...the rest is history!

He loved telling the story of his very romantic proposal. In June 1982 he took me to Sydney for the weekend and on the Saturday night we went to the Bennalong Restaurant at the Opera House. I remember I wore a cream chiffon dress. After dinner we strolled around the Opera House and gazing over towards the iconic bridge he asked me did I want to sit down.....but I said no as I didn't want to dirty my beautiful cream chiffon dress. He always laughed when he told this part of the story because he then asked me to marry him and my reply was "I have to sit down". Finally my dress didn't matter, the view didn't matter....the only thing that mattered was that he really loved me and he wanted to share the rest of his life with me! He has loved me and inspired me to be the best me, his encouragement, his acceptance, his unconditional love has completed me. His love has given me the courage to face tomorrow, I am the woman I am because he was the man he was.

"It is not the length of life, but the depth of life."

But as much as he loved me his greatest love was for his 3 children. To say he was proud seems so ridiculously understated. I know his only regret in this world was knowing that his dying would cause pain to you children. He so wanted the privilege of watching you fulfil your destinies. You are three different personalities and dad loved that.

Joel and Tori, when you decided to bring the wedding forward and planned everything in six weeks just so all our family could share in your precious day, it was humbling to dad and he cherished the memories of that day. God answered our prayers and gave us the miracle of Ian, not only attending the wedding, but giving his wonderful speech.

Joel, dad loved that you were never lost for words, and you excel at whatever you put your mind to. You are kind, generous and loveable and you have a real sense of what is right. He was so proud of the way you stepped up, taking care of the business - he knew his legacy was in good hands - no great hands! He loved you more than "Finger Buns"!

Ryan, dad loved your caring and relaxed personality, he especially loved your softer side and your passion. He loved that you wanted to snowboard your way through life...he just wanted you to be happy even if that meant you living in an never ending winter, he wanted you to go out and see the world. He was proud that you are a good man. He loved you more than "Sticky Date Pudding"

And Amy, his little girl was the apple of his eye - just the way it should be. He loved how you called him "daddy". He loved that you never got too old to give him hugs or hold his hand. I think he may have been secretly pleased you were single so he never had to share your love. He was so proud of all of your achievements and he was especially proud of the beautiful, smart, independent woman you were. I always found it funny that he couldn't talk about you without wet eyes! He loved you more than "Banoffee Tart"!

Amy, Ryan and Joel.....you are worthy of his pride and love! The best thing is that you all knew he loved you and even better....he knew how much you loved him! To him you three were the finger bun, the banoffee tart and the sticky date pudding that he loved so much....and I was the cream on top ! He was a happy man.

Ian was blessed with many great friends although he never really understood how much people liked him until he was diagnosed last year. The out pouring of love was overwhelming to him! The worst part of his diagnosis was knowing the pain he had caused to his family and friends. Thank you for the meals, the offers of help, the doing of odd jobs, the visits, the phone calls, the prayers, the flowers, the Facebook messages... the hugs, the tears - the love! It may have been a shit of a year but it's also been a great year! There were so

many good times that helps us through the bad. Yes, there were tears but there was so much laughter too!

The past 32 years and 304 days have flown by. We've had a fairy tale life that has seen us blessed with 3 wonderful children. We had a great relationship and we've been privileged to work together for many years in our business. I enjoyed his company and I know he enjoyed mine. We loved afternoons naps. We were lucky to have some wonderful holidays enjoying the beauty of Europe and England and we loved New Zealand but mostly we loved our holidays seeing our wonderful country especially when we got to share our time away in Tasmania with family and friends. We have many wonderful friends - those who we saw often and others from interstate that even though we didn't see as often we cherished their friendships and the past 18 months has demonstrated to Ian and I the true depth of our friendships. We were also blessed with a wonderful family...both his (the Pettigrew's) and mine (the Parish's) - and Ian was a much loved member of both clans. He was a man who brought honour to his family and was honoured in our families. When Ian was diagnosed our family and close friends formed a circle of protection around us which brought Ian great comfort in the knowing that we will be lovingly looked after when he was no longer here to do so.

Our last moments with Ian were precious... As Amy, Ryan, Joel, Tori and I huddled around his bed and we realised that this was our last chance to tell him - tell him how much we loved him.....tell him how proud we were of the man he was....and tell him how our lives were blessed because of the way he chose to live his life.

So, to his school friends, his church friends, his running mates, his soccer buddies, his tradie friends, his business associates, his Lycra mates, to our funeral industry colleagues, our wonderful staff, our dear friends, to my family, to his family, to his dad, and to our children....thank you for loving Ian and thank you for enriching his life. He was blessed beyond measure!

“ I a n w a s t r u l y a g e n e r o u s , c a r i n g a n d l o v i n g m a n . ”
