

A great honour and privilege to be given the opportunity to say a few words about our dear friend Brian Stopford.

Firstly – thank Chris Zilm and the staff at Cairns High for the opportunity to conduct this ceremony in this fantastic hall. Very fitting given that Brian spent so many years at Cairns High. So thank you.

Image 1 ...the family

Brian was born in Cairns on June 13 1954. His parents Danny and Kathleen and his sister Janice lived in Little Street not far from here. Jan and her husband Terry and two of their children Darcy and Suzanne and their children are here today from Brisbane ..and of course, we welcome them and are thrilled that they can be with us.

Image 2 ...BRIAN AS A CHILD

Jan, not surprisingly has painted Brian as an energetic young lad and tells the story of when there had been heavy rain there was a torrent of water passing their house and Brian would take the wooden ironing board out and attempt to surf down the gutter.

In recent years Brian wrote about his early life, and Jan found his writing, and I will quote from what Brian had written.

Image 3 ...Brian as a 17 year old

He wrote ‘ In my early life up to the age of 18 my life took a number of significant twists, but football was always in there somewhere’. His early sporting interests were surprisingly in rugby league, and he remembered playing for the 6 stone FNQ team in the state championship in Dalby.

But soccer, and in his writing Brian does refer to the game as soccer, but I know with great certainty that he preferred to refer to the game

he absolutely loved as football...so from here on in it is football. His father played competitive football when the grounds were at Martyn Street and he writes about how much as a young child he enjoyed watching those games. He attended St Joseph's primary school and then St Augustine's where he had his first game of football for the U12, the second team. He writes about how on a quiet Saturday, a friend of his , Laurie Fisk, came to his house and asked if he would like to play for the U14 North Australian Brewery football team. ..and so began Brian's life in football.

Image 4 Brian in the race

At age 16 he moved from St Augustine's to Cairns High and he writes 'this was the beginning of a turbulent period...girls, buddies and parties were a distraction academically, but my sport was soaring'. In 1991 in his senior year Brian was awarded the Sportsperson of the Year at Cairns High.

Brain attended Teachers College in Brisbane. He lived in a share house at Fig Tree Pocket which was legendary for its wild parties. His housemates all had motor bikes and Brian's love of motor bikes began there and continued throughout his life and he and his old mate Paul Trovalusci , until very recently, were still enjoying riding their bikes around the Tablelands. Some of his early friends from the Party house at Fig Tree Pocket including Dave Hanby and Johnny Pavletich have made the journey to be with us today.

Brian's party life didn't prevent him from graduating as a teacher and he spent 6 months at Toowoomba SHS before being appointed to Mareeba SHS in 1978....and that is where my wife Yvonne and I met Brian...so I will now concentrate on the Brian that we knew...he was a multi dimensional character...he had a collection of random rocks, he collected single malt whiskies and also kept the empty bottles, he loved Eric Clapton music, he loved fishing, he was a bit superstitious, he loved his motor bike, he loved solo trips through Western Queensland, he loved coffee shops ,he loved to have a Guinness or beer with friends, he loved cooking.....we all knew at least one dimension of Brian....but as I said he was a multi-dimensional character... and I am so pleased that the other speakers today will provide insights that I am unable to give....and I feel sure that after this ceremony there will be plenty of sharing Brian Stopford stories.

Yvonne and I travelled overseas for the first half of 1978 and returned to Mareeba High and the F block staffroom and there was Brian. That was 45 years ago...it doesn't seem that long ago but Yvonne was pregnant and our daughter Joanne is now 45 years of age, so there we are. Like many people here today I have known Brian for a long time...4 years at Mareeba High '78 to '81, then 4 years when I was DP here at Cairns High from '86 to '90 and then again here at Cairns High when I was the principal here for 12 years, and we have always kept in contact.

What was Brian like in 1978?

Football was a big part of his life in Mareeba, and he played for Mareeba United in the original State League side that travelled the state, having plenty of fun and getting paid to play the game that he loved.

Image 5 and then 6.

His hair was a bit longer in those days. He was certainly the most eligible bachelor at Mareeba High ...for those who were there those many years ago, I am sure that you would agree that he didn't have a lot of competition, but he was certainly number 1.

In those days at Mareeba High track and field was a big deal. It was as if our sole purpose in life was to beat Atherton at the Tablelands Athletics' carnival. We had 10 relay teams, boys and girls for each age group and nearly every lunch break and after school we were on the oval training. Brian was our sports master and the chief coach.

When the news spread that Brian had passed away an ex Mareeba student , Ingrid Posma, who had been one of those training on the Mareeba High oval in the late 70s contacted me to find out what had happened. She said how much she admired Brian as her coach and added that 'all the girls were in love with Brian...he had great legs you know' ...not sure that I did know ,but I accept that she is correct. She went on to say that she hadn't seen Brian for many years but came across him at a funeral in Mareeba. She said how much she enjoyed talking to Brian and how when he spoke to her, he gave her

his undivided attention and finished by saying ‘ talking to you Ingrid has made my day.’...and of course it made her day.

One of Brian’s great qualities was his ability to build relationships.

Image 7 Brian today ..leave on screen

Let me give one further example.

A few years ago Yvonne and I did a trip to Canada. We went to Lake Moraine in the Rockies...a beautiful place and I climbed a ridge to get a better view. There were two young men there also enjoying the view and we struck up a conversation. One of the lads was from El Arish and I said I was from Cairns and he said ‘do you know Brian Stopford’...it was like, if you are from Cairns you must know Brian Stopford. The lad had been in Brian’s Peninsula Football team and he went on to say how much influence Brian had had on his life...not just his football.....his life ...he said that Brian had been his mentor and had helped him to be a better person. I spent my life teaching maths and I asked myself what was the probability that I would meet someone in the Canadian Rockies who knew Brian, and at first thought I rated the probability as a zillion to one. But when I thought more I realised that Brian had been mentoring young people for nearly 50 years and when you think how many young people he influenced each year and multiply by 50 you get a big number...so maybe finding that young man in the Rockies was not a surprise at all.... I had simply found one of the 1000s of people who regarded Brian as their mentor.

Before I leave Mareeba , I feel compelled to say that during this time Brian married his long-term girlfriend, Marisa. Although their

marriage wasn't for ever and they went their separate ways , Brian often mentioned Marisa and I do think that he would be pleased to hear her name mentioned today.

So - I have spoken about Brian the relationship builder. Let me now talk about **Brian the story teller**. He had a story for every occasion, and he could be very funny. When I was at Cairns High in the 80s I was in a Lions Club and was the tail twister so at every meeting I had to tell a joke. So, before each meeting, I would ring Brian and tell him that I needed a joke...and he would say...short joke or long joke, risqué or clean, sexist or non sexist, Australian, English or Irish.....it was a bit like ordering a pizza...the base was the same but you could have any topping that you liked...so I would say, something like, make it an Irish joke and can you include a dog...and he would say...without any thought...no problem...this guy walked into an Irish pub with his dog ...and away he would go.

But to say that Brian was simply a story teller sells him short. He was a thinker, he read widely, he had opinions and he had a great command of the English language which allowed him to articulate his thoughts and his stories and his jokes.....and ABC radio recognised this and used Brian as the football reporter and in the Friday afternoon radio panel presentation. Yvonne listened every Saturday to Brian ...not because she was particularly interested in football but because she admired his eloquence and his ability to articulate his firm opinions and to use words to paint a picture.

What about Brian as a teacher? The tsunami of comments on Facebook provides great evidence that he was much loved and successful in his career. On a number of occasions, I talked to Brian about the challenges of leading a school and the challenges of leading players as their coach. As a principal I was keen to see a degree of consistency in how teachers taught and worked with students and yet I wanted teacher to allow their own personalities to shine....and I asked Brian how he dealt with the clash between his insistence that his team stick to the game plan and yet allow individuals to fully utilize their innate talents. We agreed that you need both ..consistency and individuality ... whilst there needs to be consistency there must be a place for the individual ..for someone who thinks outside the box....for someone who at times, walks to the beat of their own drum**Brian was that individual...he was a team player but he remained an individual ..he had his own values and beliefs and some very strong opinions.... He was an X factor player that every team needs and every school needs....and Brian was one of those.**

Brian was also legendary, absolutely legendary, for his ability to ignore paperwork and the bureaucracies of the system. Brian's long term friend and his Head of Department Geoff Mayes and I can tell plenty of stories about the challenges of getting Brian to complete forms and write curriculum documents...and his sister Jan would say that Brian has left a few loose ends. That was Brian ...but we all loved him.

Brian was the year 12 coordinator in 1987 , the year of the tragic bus crash. For many reasons Brian was uncomfortable talking about this tragedy and his role in it, so I don't intend talking at length about that terrible event . I simply want to say that his ability to build relationships with students, the community and staff after that event .. in what was an unimaginably difficult situation.... was testimony to his strong character and great interpersonal skills.

On a personal note, Brian has always been a very good friend to Yvonne and I . We regularly meet up for a coffee and talk about what we have been reading, what the papers were saying and share ideas on how to solve the problems of the world. I appreciated his wisdom and his frankness...Brian certainly let me know when he felt that I was on the wrong track. I will very much miss our conversations.

All that is left for me to say ...is thank you Brian. Thank you for being a friend to many...thank you on behalf of the thousands of students who have passed through your classes or your football teams and have been influenced by your wisdom and your mentoring. Thank you for your contribution to football across the country and particularly in Cairns and thank you for your contribution to our great school..the Cairns State High school.

You have lived a full life and we are all the richer for having known you.

May you rest in peace!

