

Today's farewell to Tom Kruse will really be in four parts.

In the first part the family will be represented by Helen Hamp (Tom's daughter), Jeff Kruse and me. (son in law).

We will concentrate our words on the family aspects of Tom's life.

In part 2, Ian Doyle will present more on Tom's contribution to the outback community and to the Australian folklore.

The third part will commence when the ceremony finishes. ie the stories, the memories and the tales that you will all relate to each other about the man we all knew and loved.

And the last part will go on forever, beyond these walls, because it's a beautiful story.

Esmond Gerald Kruse was born on 28th Aug 1914 at Waterloo - a little town in the mid north. He was the tenth of twelve children born to Ida and Harry Kruse. (Now all deceased)

He was baptised and confirmed in the little Karlsruhe Lutheran church just outside of Waterloo and the graveyard attached to this church will be his last resting place.

He spent his early childhood in Waterloo where his father was the town blacksmith and undertaker.

Like some of his siblings, he used a name other than his more Germanic christened name and he became Tom at an early age. He remained Tom to everyone.

Mr Kruse, he used to say, was his father's name.

Tom's schooling was basic - he was a graduate of the school of hard yacka and ultimately, he graduated from the University of Experience with first class honours.

He worked locally for farmers and for his father in the blacksmith shop and later moved to Yunta where he worked for his brother in a garage.

He related that the hardest thing he did in those years was to run over the fallow chasing the combine at seeding time with two bags of wheat (they are about 40 to 50 kgs each)

He was a strong youth!

Tom was an accomplished tennis player and those abilities seemed to

improve significantly in recent years as related the stories!

Amusement was simple in those days. People simply played sport and went to the country dances. There wasn't much else to do out there.

It was at Yunta where he met Valma Fuller, the daughter of a local pastoralist...and also a good tennis player.

Tom and Valma were married here in Adelaide in 1942 and then moved to Marree to live.

Tom had already been doing some driving in the back country and in 1939 had helped transport supplies for Dr Cecil Madigan - the second European to cross the Simpson desert by camel.

Tom bought the Birdsville mail contract in 1948 and ran it until 1963.

The making of the film *'The Back of Beyond'* and his awarding of the MBE in 1955 of course, changed his life forever. He became public property.

He was, throughout his life, a humble and modest man but he handled the manifold accolades and related friendships with aplomb. In fact, in later life, those friendships became invaluable to Valma and him.

Tom was often asked if he made much money out of exploits in the outback.

He always answered the same way..." I was like the 10 commandments ...always broke!"

The reality is, if we measure friendship as wealth...and I look around this room and beyond...Tom Kruse was a very wealthy man.

He was also a bit of a larrikin in his younger days. Tom and a good friend, Colin O'Donohue, were invited to stay at a station for dinner after a day's travel.

They were given a choice of beef, goat or horse. The boys had had a few beers! Tom ordered horse for two and make it really rare...in fact, just warm it up a bit!

When it arrived it didn't look all that tasty. Col bolted for the door and then held it closed from the other side while Tom was trying to get out..gagging at the same time.

Tom would cry with laughter every time he told us the yarn.

In due course Tom and Valma had a family. Pauline, who I was fortunate to marry recently, in 1966, then Helen, Phillip and Jeffery.

Much of their upbringing was left to Valma as Tom was away most of the time.

The incredible hardship of the heat, the sand and dust storms and the flies were never complained about but just accepted as part of everyday life.

Tom relates that it was 126 deg F in the truck cabin on his first mail run. He also said that when you got a beer in the Birdsville pub they served it with a saucer so you could cool it enough to be able drink it!...there he goes again!

Pauline recalls having school holidays at one of the dam sinking camps. Tom brought her into Clifton Hills station to catch the mail truck to Marree so she could get on the train back to Adelaide for school. She remembers sitting on the bore drain and balling her eyes out. Tom said " alright , you don't have to go" and took her back to the camp for a term of correspondence.

He was as soft as butter!

The larger part of his working life in the outback was with his earthmoving and carrying business.

His camps at the dam sinking sites were a wonder to behold.

The day's work started when the sun came up and ended when it got dark.

Tom never wore a watch..in fact, I don't believe he ever owned one.

Tom was an accomplished cook and the evening meals were substantial.

He had a kitchen caravan with a wood stove and a kero fridge, table and chairs and a heap of junk in it.

His steaks cooked on a shovel and food cooked in the camp oven were superb....even better when Valma was in attendance.

Shifting camp was exciting if not precarious.

The big Leyland Hippo laden with a 25 ton Alice Chalmers tractor led the parade.

It towed a fuel trailer, a trailer with steel and welding equipment, a caravan (which Tom slept in when it got too cold to sleep on the ground in his swag), the kitchen caravan and then a Land Rover. The workmen followed in various other vehicles.

Probably not all legal but they were rarely on the roads....just head off across the gibbers and sand for a couple of hundred kms to the next site.

Tom knew that country and the people in it like the back of his hand.

Once, when we were crossing the Simpson, I ran out of petrol due to some inaccurate calculations.

He said "no worries , there will probably be some Av gas up one of these tracks I built for some seismic crew a few years ago'. Sure enough, he found some and I flew on to Oodnadatta!

When he eventually retired to Adelaide he and Valma loved the races and the footy. When the Crows started, they rarely missed a match.

The home at Cumberland Park is adorned with gifts, mementos, memorabilia, photos etc donated by dozens of well wishers over the years.

Tom's physical strength, his unflustered demeanour, his mechanical knowledge and his humility are all well known.

His greatest strength in my view, was his amazing ability to remember people, their names and their stories. It was as though he had a special computer in him for remembering people. Amazingly, this remained with him right to the end.

Pauline used to love to ask him about this person or that and where they were now and who they married etc.

Tom Kruse's life was long and peaceful.

His contribution to mankind, particularly the people of the outback, is well documented...but to us he was just Tom, Dad and Grandad.

So I say

Do not weep because he's gone

Rather, smile and be happy because he was here, for a long time, and we knew him.

Max Pfitzner
Son-In-Law
7th July 2011