

ALAN'S EULOGY – SATURDAY 9 APRIL at "MUNGALLA" INGHAM

Welcome

Good morning, everyone. We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of Alan Lamont Atkinson

My name is Rob Atkinson, and it is a privilege to have been asked by Kylie, Sherri and Gayle to honour Alan's life. I have been fortunate to have had Alan as an uncle and a Mentor.

Alan was born in Sydney on 29th July 1940.

He was the third child of Robert Lamont (Monty) Atkinson and Ruth Collins Atkinson. His siblings were Yvonne, Rob and Ruthie.

Alan spent the first four years of his life at Glen Ruth, in the Herbert River catchment, before in 1944, Mont and Ruth moved to Mungalla near Ingham, where, fittingly, we are today to celebrate Alan's life. Mont and Ruth had purchased Mungalla a year earlier and put a manager on at Glen Ruth.

Yvonne, Rob and Alan were educated at the Victoria Mill Primary School, riding either a horse or pushbike the 11kms to and from school each day. Once their primary school education was completed, it was off to boarding school in Sydney. Alan attended the Kings School, Parramatta, where he excelled on the sporting fields, in the boxing ring, in Army Cadets his marksmanship was excellent, including a Commonwealth shooting record for a Cadet. Due to his light weight, at one stage he was Cox for the Kings School 1st's Rowing team.

On completing Year 10, Alan returned to work at Mungalla and Glen Ruth.

Mungalla

In the early days, it took years to get Mungalla into full production. Many months clearing lantana and guava scrubs, as well as planting improved pasture and trying to prevent the hordes of coastal wallabies devouring the new growth.

Ruth left Mungalla about 1948 after her marriage with Mont broke down. She and Ruthie went and lived at Kirrama, Ruth's childhood home.

In 1952 Mont married Edna Grant.

When Mont and Edna left Mungalla and retired to Townsville in the early 1967, Ken Wallace and his family were employed as manager of Mungalla Stud. It was a Droughtmaster Stud, Brahman Stud, Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse Stud, so there was plenty going on. The Wallace family were at Mungalla until it was sold in 1999.

In the late 70's, Alan and Rob split the assets out of RL Atkinson and Sons and the company ceased to trade. Mungalla & Valley of Lagoons went to Alan's family, Glen Ruth & Katandra to Rob's family.

Some of the notable bulls bred on Mungalla over the latter years, were Mungalla Double Up and Mungalla 718. These two bulls had a major impact on the Droughtmaster breed.

Notable thoroughbred sires that stood at Mungalla included Nuclear Grey, who Alan had selected in Ireland, the Todman son, Crewman, who had earlier won the VRC Futurity Stakes and the Australian Cup amongst other successes and Fiery Ring, purchased from the USA.

Crewman sired many smart gallopers, none better than Crewshade. Amongst her many wins were the Townsville Cup, Cairns Cup, Townsville International Cup and The Cairns Amateur Cup. She was a little mare with a big heart, often carrying top weight in these staying races, up to 70kg in the Cairns Amateur Cup. Notably, Crewman also sired the winner of Australia's most esteemed campdraft event, the Warwick Gold Cup. The horse was Beau Cadet.

Nuclear Grey was the sire of Singing Bird who was the dam of one of Alan's best fillies, Circle of Song, from Fiery Ring's first crop of foals. Circle of Song was narrowly beaten in the 1982 Golden Nugget, now the Gold Coast Magic Millions 2yo and later in that preparation won the Keith Mackay Handicap in Sydney, a qualifying race for the Golden Slipper. Trained by leading Queensland trainer Bruce McLachlan, Circle of Song held the 1200m track record at Eagle Farm for a period. As a broodmare, she produced Our Horizon, a very good racehorse, who, as a 2YO, was rated 2nd on the Australian Free Handicap.

Some very smart gallopers were bred at Mungalla when the AJC fleetingly allowed Sprint Quarter Horses and crossbreds to be registered and race on registered tracks.

The Quarter Horse stallion, Another Jet was mated with Thoroughbred mares. There was only a couple of crops of foals, but they were very good horses up to 1200 metres.

New Guinea

In 1955, RL Atkinson and Sons were awarded a 50-year lease on 20,000 acres of country in the Markham and Ramu River Valleys of Papua New Guinea. The property was called Gusap. The lease was granted with the idea of starting a beef cattle industry in PNG. The agreement included a guarantee from the government that a small meat processing plant would be built, supplied by cattle bred on Gusap. It was beautiful country, well-watered, red and dark soils in a high rainfall area.

Heifers and bulls were walked from Glen Ruth, loaded on open topped barges in Cairns, and taken, by sea, all the way to Lae, where they were unloaded, swum ashore and walked the 170 kms to Gusap. This trip happened several times. I don't know how they fed and watered the cattle during the 10-day trip, but they got it done.

Was this the first Live Cattle Export from Australia?

Marsden matting, used by the US and Australian Air Force on airfield runways during the war with Japan, was used to erect stockyards. The marsden matting was scattered everywhere, as were 44-gallon empty fuel drums.

Monty, Rob and Alan all spent time at Gusap over a six year period. The breeder herd built to 1200 cows, but eventually in 1962, they sold to a syndicate, mainly because the government had not built the promised meat works.

Valley of Lagoons

In 1962, the property Estate of JS Love was put up for tender. RL Atkinson and Sons, the company that Mont, Rob and Alan traded as, tendered for both the Valley of Lagoons and another property on the Burdekin, Gainsford. They were successful with both tenders, but couldn't afford both, so the decision was made to purchase the Valley of Lagoons. Alan at age 22, became the manager on behalf of RL Atkinson and Sons.

The Valley was larger than it is today, over the years some of the leases were either sold or resumed. Monty's riding instructions to Alan were, 'Get the boundary fully fenced and pay the place off as soon as you can'. Alan followed these instructions, he was careful with his money, some might say that the years after WW2, taught people to be careful.

Alan married Alison Lethbridge in 1967 in Townsville.

The Valley of Lagoons became their home, along with a way of life.

Each Christmas, the Atkinson, Lethbridge, Wallace and Cox families and extended families would gather at one of the properties and it was one big get-together.

Through floods and droughts, happy times and sad times, the couple's greatest achievements were the births of their four girls, Kylie in 1970, Sherri in 1973, Gayle in 1975 and Robyn in 1977.

Many memories come flooding back of the Valley of Lagoons.

Wonderful Aboriginal stockman, such as Harry Goetz, Johnnie Tooth, and Jeffery Kennedy to name a few. The most memorable staff member at the Valley, and most would agree, was AW (Bill) Gillingwater. Bill always boasted that he started working at the Valley before Alan. He supplied many of us teenagers with cigarettes and the odd bit of alcohol. Bill was in his element during the years he was at the Valley, he was a licensed Firearms dealer too. Many of the local properties would call in at the Valley to purchase rifles and pistols from Bill. The Valley always had a big number of feral pigs amongst the lava, in the Burdekin and around the lakes. Bill was in his element.

The Valley of Lagoons was a beautiful place to live. The insects could get a bit testing during the 'wet season', but otherwise it was idyllic. It was a kid's and teenager's paradise. Fishing, skiing, horse riding, chasing pigs, camping, it had it all.

Alan spent some time as a Councilor on the Dalrymple Shire Council.

Alan and Alison separated in 1988 and Alison moved to Central Queensland purchasing Durack near Gogango. Kylie, Sherri and Gayle all went home to the Valley after they finished school.

Robyn lived in Townsville before relocating to Rockhampton when the family moved to Central Queensland.

Droughtmaster

Alan played a very active role in the development, management and success of the Droughtmaster breed.

As a Stud master, he registered the Valley (Valley of Lagoons) and Farnham (Farnham, Taroom) prefixes and, along with brother Rob and the Tableland Veterinary Clinic, in 1984, the Lamont prefix. The involvement of the vets from TVC, was their expertise with artificial breeding, principally Embryo Transplantation.

The cattle bred at the Valley were hardy, tick resistant animals, reared in country that regularly experienced grass 'protein droughts. The selection of these cattle, while Alan was the stud master, was shared with Alison, who is a great judge of livestock. Seedstock from the Valley and Farnham studs were sold to all parts of Qld, NT and Western Australia.

Valley Cairo set a breed record price in 1984 when he was offered at the Annual NQ Droughtmaster Sale in Charters Towers. Cairo was purchased by the Mellor family, Sersema Stud, Gayndah for \$26,500.

Alan served for 24 years on the DSBS Board and President for 3 years, 1985-1988.

One of his visions for the registered Droughtmaster breed was to create a parallel register, where a person who wanted to cross registered Droughtmasters with other registered cattle breeds could do so. Unfortunately, this is one dream that wasn't fulfilled, even though there are many Droughtmaster breeders who cross breed in their commercial operations.

He judged at many shows including the Droughtmasters at the Ekka in 1981.

He was honoured with Life Membership of Droughtmaster Australia in 2012.

Race riding, training and breeding horses

Once Alan's education was completed, he worked at Mungalla and Glen Ruth, while honing his skills as an amateur jockey. He rode all around the North and abroad, including a short stint at Happy Valley in Hong Kong, where he had 15 rides including 3 wins. He rode track work in Ireland and rode in the Corinthian Handicap at Eagle Farm in Brisbane, a race for amateur jockeys, placing several times. Mt Garnet Amateur Races, an annual event, where he rode his first race

at age 16, was his 'special track'. He won the whip for most successful jockey there on 6 occasions, 4 times at the Cairns Amateurs and once at the Townsville Amateurs, Ewan and Chillagoe. Amongst Alan's favorite grass-fed horses were Bogota and Jet Trip. Proud Native and Up Yonder also raced with distinction. Alan retired from race riding in 1976 at age 36.

In all, Alan had 614 race rides, including 165 wins, 147 seconds and 80 thirds.

He became a highly successful trainer after retiring from race riding.

All the while he was also becoming a successful thoroughbred breeder.

Furlong Stud

Greater success on the track came when Alan partnered with his brother Rob and nephew Jim, breeding thoroughbreds at Furlong Stud on the Darling Downs. Alan bred Brief Embrace, a stakes winning filly, who was narrowly beaten in the Blue Riband 2yo race, VRC Blue Diamond Stakes, in 2002. The colt who beat her, Bel Esprit, later sired the champion mare Black Caviar.

In 1999 Alan bought a yearling from Rob and Jim at the Magic Millions Yearling Sale. Her name was Trail of Gold. She won 4 races and retired to become a broodmare. Her first foal, Gold Trail, was a very good horse, winning 7 races including the NZ Group 1, Railway Stakes.

Shift to CQ and Darling Downs

As the Valley of Lagoons (2000) and Mungalla (1999) were sold, properties were purchased in Central Queensland.

Farnham had been purchased earlier, in 1986, as a steer depot, to fatten and be closer to good markets. Farnham became home to the Farnham Droughtmaster Stud when it was recognized that cattle bred and reared in the buffel country had far superior growth than those bred in the North. Bruce and Melba Clothier were the managers there until Kylie and Todd Graham moved to live there in 2001. The Farnham Stud prefix was replaced by the Mungalla Droughtmaster Stud and a Quarter Horse and Stockhorse business began thriving. Now, Kylie, her fiancé Matt Durkin along with Ally and Tom, live and work at their beloved Farnham.

Next purchase was Broadlea (1999), near Moranbah. Sherri, and her husband Hugh Philp managed Broadlea and Alan spent about 5 years there before he moved to Warrabar (2005), a small property near Furlong Stud, between Greenmount and Cambooya, about 30 klms southwest of Toowoomba.

Broadlea was sold around 2005, and the Valley Droughtmaster Stud, the commercial herd and Hugh and Sherri's Wyena stockhorse business was relocated with the purchase of Wyena, northwest of Moranbah.

Alan by this time had become a proud Grandfather, firstly to Harry Philp, then Luke Philp, Ally Graham, Tom Graham, Archie Philp and Isabel Philp.

Cantaur Park (Mt Coolon) was purchased in year 2000. Gayle and husband Mac Shann made it their home along with the Lamont Droughtmaster Stud and their well-known Stockhorse Stud, Cantaur Park.

This is where, on the 9th of August 2002, Gayle suffered her horrific injuries from a machinery accident while she and Mac were erecting a new garden fence for their Cantaur homestead. Gayle and Mac's story is now legendary, it is incredible how they have emerged from that very tough time. It has taught us all to treat our workplace carefully, but most of all the love story that they have shared is inspirational.

MAGS

The Monty Atkinson Genetic Sale held its inaugural sale in 2002 in Charters Towers. The original sale vendors were all descendants of Monty Atkinson and Alan played a lead role in the Sale's development. For almost 20 years, MAGS has been supplying quality Droughtmaster seedstock to cattle men and women all over Australia.

Summary

Alan loved his family, he was his own man, a man of vision, a gifted horse and cattleman, a bloke who enjoyed a good yarn, and, who ran his business enterprises very successfully.

He leaves behind a legacy of exceptional horse and cattle women and men, quality cattle properties and livestock.

To quote my sister Julie Terry this week,

Alan,

'I can't help thinking of Droughtmasters being assessed and Thoroughbred pedigrees being deciphered up there in Heaven. May the grass be forever green, the water clear, the cattle quiet, fat and fertile and those racehorses fast!!'

And another from Stephen Collins on Facebook this last week.

Quote

'I remember as a kid listening to Alan and Dad (Billy Collins) telling yarns. One story of them on their way back from Hong Kong in a typhoon.... Only Alan, Dad, Ray Furber, and the captain of the ship at the bar drinking rum.... Every other passenger crook in their cabins!'

Rest in Peace Alan.