

## **Butch – Ray Farr**

My mother's brother, my Uncle who despite living in Auckland for the latter part of his life, loved Dunedin, loved Carroll St and its nearby environs and he particularly loved its Lebanese culture and traditions.

There are very few of us here who did not experience Butch's sense of humour and jokes, which he specialized in bringing out in times of sadness, funerals and the like. So, although I could never match his wit or acute sense of humour I just want to pass on some thoughts and anecdotal memories of Butch particularly as they relate to my more formative years and when I was younger.

During his very many trips to Dunedin from Auckland, Butch sometimes stayed with me and Jane and somehow I got to read all of his priceless and treasured letters, to his son Stephen and to Richard Joseph.

They are indeed his memoirs and part of the earlier generation of Lebanese's memoirs and must be preserved at all costs.

But I didn't need to read these letters to know Butch, because he was part of my life, part of my growing up and education and how could I not enjoy his company, as all of you did as well.

Butch was indeed a character. He loved being known as a character, he loved associating with characters especially the older Lebanese characters and to name a few, Ike and Paul Hannah, the late Tom Farry, his Uncle Bert George and others like Eddie Chin, Ray Massetti, Keith Weatherall and many many more Dunedin identities. He had a particularly kind heart, who could easily be and was often mistaken for a rogue.

Butch was very street wise, of superior intellect, a comedian in every sense of the word and very unpredictable. He was also an intense family man who had a particular reverence and love for his 2 Aunties, Jesse Milne and Louisa Coory.

The best way I can convey my memories of Butch is by way of anecdotes under various headings.

### **The Very Early Days**

As young children we lived at 191 Carroll Street, Jiddees large family home. It was always full of people, my parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and indeed many Lebanese visitors speaking their language 'all at the same time' and..... there was Butch.

I was about 5 and slept in the same bedroom as 'Uncle Butch' – the sun room – it had very large windows and faced south. I have 2 or 3 enduring memories of those days.

**Firstly**, I remember that Butch always Slept in a white shirt, black bowtie and black trousers (not pyjamas) – as a 5 year old I couldn't understand this, but I found out that he worked as a barman and always came home late and therefore had to sleep late and never got time to change.

**Secondly**, that's when I learned the foulest swear words you could ever hear – remember I was only 5. There was an old man who lived next door, Mr. Anderson, who used to chop wood in the mornings when Butch was trying to sleep, after working all night. That poor man copped the worst

abuse known as only Butch could deliver and if he got really upset he used to let Mr. Anderson have it with his Webley air pistol.

My **third** memory of these days was Butch's mother Rosie, bringing him his breakfast in bed – always the same. Scrambled eggs on toast with a cup of tea, that's when I learned that you could drink a cup of tea, making the same noise as emptying a bath.

### **Butch's School Days**

Remembering that this is anecdotal, and Shirley his sister, will probably know the truth – but Butch told me that he left school in Form 1 – that's doubtful – but I can tell you that he intensely disliked the brothers who taught him and that was quite mutual.

He often wagged school and one day when he felt he had to explain why, the brother said 'Don't worry, we had a better day without you' and when he finally did leave, to celebrate, the whole school was given a half day holiday.

On the other side of the coin – later in life, he spent a lot of person money improving the Brothers living arrangements in Rattray Street and ended putting on a large dinner for them at Chequers Restaurant.

### **Early Work**

Butch worked at McCallums Wood Yard (now Naylor Loves) until VJ when he just walked out – he then joined the Post Office and learned Radio Transmission in Wellington, which would serve him well in later years, when trying to listen to Race broadcasts from obscure places.

He also told me he worked for a half day delivering bags of coal, but was sacked after using the Lebanese word for coal to customers – which is "Fuchim".

He later worked in the hotel trade and became a very successful equipment salesman in Auckland.

### **Money**

Butch certainly knew how to make a 'quid' and boy did he know how to lose it. He dealt in foreign currency long before the name Ray Richwhite was known – and at home my mother Freda's biscuit tins were always full – yeah, full of American dollars, Hong Kong pounds, English pounds, you name it. I still don't know why he stashed all that cash there, but it was good to know that we were at least superficially and temporarily wealthy. Butch also dealt in transistor radios and of course American cigarettes. All obtained from the operation deep freeze vessels that visited Dunedin.

In those days, the late 1950's and early 1960's, Butch was a barman and kept a keen eye out for the American sailors with 'quartermaster' or 'supply officer' insignia on their shoulders and made a point of befriending them, hence the endless and indeed large quantities of American contraband often stored in our house. Butch was a deal doer and so I guess the yanks got their share.

I remember him saying to me – "when doing a deal, always leave something in it for the next joker!!" And he was pretty generous too – if Butch had a 'quid' everyone had a quid and my Dad always had cartons and cartons of Lucky Strike and Camel cigarettes.

## Fighting or Scrapping

In the early days, Butch didn't mind a fight and I guess he started a few. He was the first to introduce me to an item called the 'Duster' which he carried in his pocket from time to time. And it wasn't something used to clean furniture, but it fitted nicely around his knuckles and was good to use on jaws! His brother, Nuss got it for him during the war, whilst fighting in the Pacific.

## Cars and Driving

I have endless memories of driving with Butch – one of the earliest – driving a 1930's Buick to Gore and tipping it over a bank and catching the bus back to Dunedin – to this day I don't know why he did that.

He once borrowed Shirley's Mini for an hour to go to church but instead changed his mind and drive to Tapanui for the day. Once he borrowed my Hillman Avenger, which he did from time to time, and a friend of mine said 'Shit, I saw you driving down Maitland St at a crazy speed on Wednesday, why were you in such a hurry?' It was Butch, he also had a mint early model Rover, a Volvo and a beautiful grey Humber Hawk in which he and I drove to Christchurch once, on one of Butch's liquor selling trips. Butch could somehow access rare whiskeys and liqueurs and sold them to various publicans when travelling.

Anyway, on this particular trip, he had had no success so he decided that we would check into the White Heron Hotel in Christchurch. That's where I had my first T-bone steak and when I did my first and only runner. 4.30am in the morning Butch woke me up and said "come on we're outta here" – bugger the Bill!! Which brings be on nicely to some of Butch's favourites sayings – please don't take offence at any of these, because Butch wasn't particularly P.C.

1. **Sympathy** – if you want it, it's in the dictionary between shit and syphilis
2. **Sphynx** – a dry balls person with no personality
3. **Relic** – any old person who annoyed him, especially old Mr. Anderson who lived next door.
4. **"All that meat and no potatoes"**

That was Butch's favourite saying that he would call out of an open car window when driving past an overweight lady.

5. Maybe the best – my house is full of **'Period'** Furniture – yes – I bought it on hire purchase – kept it for a 'period' and then it was repossessed.

## Gambling

I have to mention gambling, and in those days the only forms of gambling were cards and horses, unlike today. Butch was not a good card player – by any means – I was watching him once at the club, he was playing a game called solo, a form of Bridge, I think. One of the bids is 'Misere Rivere' where you bet that your hand is so bad that you won't or can't take any of the 13 tricks, well you guessed it, he took all 13!!

But he always won in a Poker game that he was involved with when he was living in Sydney. How?? Well Lionel Johns, an ex-Dunedin Lebanese boy, who ran the game, paid Butch, not to play, just stay away he said.

Like many of us, Butch had a liking for the horses and he had his wins. After one win, he tried Bookmaking. That's not bookbinding for those of you who are academics, it didn't last long, only one afternoon until he came up against 2 real hard head Bookmakers who were operating in Dunedin at the time, Eddie Griffen and Ike Hannah, as I said it ended quickly. I know because I was his runner, up and down to the Prince of Wales Hotel. I was the only winner as I was working for commission.

### **Finally Family**

He loved his family and his family loved him. He was very kind to his mother and father in every way. I once showed him a photograph of his father (my Grandfather) and Butch said "I bought him that cardigan", which he was wearing. He also gave his parents a good deal of money.

As you would expect he loved his wife and kids, but he had his share of tragedy. Losing his Grandson Seba, at a very young age. His twin sister Rona, at a young age, his wife predeceased him as did his son in law. Not to mention nearly all of his siblings.

My mother absolutely adored him, with all of his strengths and weaknesses and called him 'dear boy'. She would do anything for him and vice versa, as was the case with all his sisters. His brother Nuss, I believe favoured him as well and Butch always dressed impeccably, thanks to Nuss who owned a menswear shop.

How can you not miss him – he touched us all in every way. He made us laugh when we needed a laugh. He was a mine of information, knew the ways of the world. He's now with his loved ones and no doubt will be cracking those jokes that will no doubt be making the Saints blush.

Good bye Uncle Butch.