

Eulogy for Ray Farr by Michael Nidd.

Raymond Joseph Farr, my mother's youngest brother who those who knew him and loved him called Butch.

He was a unique character and whilst everyone is unique, not everyone is a character, and he certainly was. We should not be sad because he has gone but we should be grateful that we knew him. We all know he was a diamond in the rough. That is by its very definition a gem with goodness and positive qualities hidden by a rough exterior. You could never have a conversation with him without having a laugh. He was the epitome of an entertaining man. The saddest part is we are the last generation to have known him.

He was born in 1930 in Dunedin to his wonderful parents Fred and Rosie. Rosie was one of the famous George family and was the first Lebanese woman born in New Zealand. Fred had come from Becharre in Lebanon in 1904 at the age of 19. He met Rosie at an early age and they had nine children, of which only Shirley, his younger sister now survives. He went to St Joseph's primary school and then on to Christian Brothers, but was not in any way an academic despite being a highly intelligent man as we all know. He left school at 14 (the only reason he didn't leave at 13 when he could was because Rosie was the most superstitious person you could ever meet.) His first job was a Mc Allum's Timber Yard in Dunedin where he became very proficient in stacking timber. He told me that is how he learnt to stack cards later in life. He then went on to learn all aspects of the hospitality trade and worked for the Elms family at the City Hotel in Princes Street for many years and then at Wains Hotel when Tommy Farry's family acquired it. That hotel still stands today. He became renowned as an excellent salesman and would do exceptional deals buying and selling unusual and rare loads of liquor that he would scout out from various sources. In those days people believed that old wine was of no value but Butch knew better. As did his connoisseur customers. I had the pleasure of living in the same house at 191 Carroll St with our whole extended family. This was a huge house with what seemed like endless rooms, nooks and crannies, stairwells, huge cupboards and amazing places for kids to explore. My endearing memory was the open arms of all my wonderful Uncles and Aunts who would embrace us with unconditional love whenever they could. I had the fortune of being the eldest grandson and spent the first eight years of my life in that house and enjoyed the company of Butch and all the family, and I can promise you I will never forget those years. My brother John and I were spoilt rotten by Butch, Victor, Bert, Rhona, and Shirley, all of whom lived there with

Fred and Rosie as well as our family. Esme and Therese had by this stage married the Sheehan cousins and gone off to live in Taranaki. As kids we were able to observe the dynamics of this amazing family. The rows were legendary, the humour was endless but the warmth and love was unconditional and can never be erased from my memory banks. In 1958 our family purchased a house five doors down the road at 181 Carroll Street and we all stayed close contact, and I mean incredible close. As far as Butch was concerned he was always regarded (somewhat unfairly) as the black sheep of the family but in truth he was so good to his parents as well as being incredibly generous to us kids. Often we would see him come and go, usually in the middle of one of his incredible deals of trading. He was, without question a legendary trader and I personally observed him making wads of money on various deals. On some occasions with hard consequences for us kids. One classic example was an occasion in about 1957 when he had set up the most extraordinary electric train set in the front lounge of 191. John and I had never seen anything like this. He had acquired it from one of the American ice breaker ships that came to Dunedin quite regularly in those days. The train set took up the whole lounge, and even the furniture had to be moved to fit it into the room. It had stations, bridges and models that puffed smoke. We were in raptures with this amazing toy. Our heartbreak came three days later when we came to the lounge to play with the train set which alas had been sold at a significant profit with promises that it would be replaced with a better one one day.

Shortly after this time Butch met and fell madly in love with Moira who he married shortly after. Their first house was in Maitland Street and the legend goes that he won the deposit in a poker game with the American Sailors off the ice breakers. They came looking for him the next time they came to town but they were no match for Butch and his Lebanese cousins who let them know that Butch was not a sharp poker player but just lucky in that game. I can confirm that he was not a good poker player despite his belief to the contrary.

As I got older I began to appreciate his exceptional humour and intelligence and had learnt to survive on his quick wit. I loved going to their house and being entertained in a way nobody else could do, and he never ceased that quality. I always remember how sharp he was when on one occasion in about 1964 he had bought Moira quite a beautiful Cartier watch. I asked him how he could possibly afford to buy such a watch knowing that he was on a Batman's income at the time. He leaned over and whispered to me that he got it second hand. Moira, who overheard part of the discussion said "what did you just say

Ray?" Quick as a wink he turned to her and said "look, it even has a second hand.

What I want to say about Butch is that his qualities truly outshone his failings because to me one of the greatest gifts a person has is to share a sense of humour and to make others feel better when you are engaging with them. One of the truths that I have come to believe as I have got older is that it is not what you say or do in life that matters, but how you make people feel. I can honestly say that I never had a conversation with him in which I did not come away laughing and smiling.

I am pleased to say that Joanne and Stephen have picked up Butch's sense of humour and shared his grasp on what surely counts in life. As you all know he was devoted to his kids and grandkids. Sadly like all of us he faced a lot of tragedy in life starting with his twin sister Rona who died at age 52 and his grandson and Moira, and his other brothers and sisters who died before him. Each one of these was a serious blow and took their toll but he invariably would bounce back with his optimism and humour.

He was known and admired by a huge range of people from the top to the bottom of society but whilst he had huge admiration for many he did not tolerate snobs and social climbers easily. He told me the story in one of the several hundred letters he wrote to me about a social gathering at which some 'society people' were attending about a particularly snobby woman who asked him "and what do you do?". He answered "I am in iron and steel." "Really", she asked inquisitively. "Yes," he said. "My wife uses the iron and I used to steal." He said she laughed hysterically and after that they got on famously. As I have said and as you all know his sense of humour was legendary and no-one could ever do justice to repeating his jokes and stories. Some of us have been fortunate enough to have received his infamous letters which I will treasure, as will my family. Most of the jokes were at the expense of the Lebanese community and the characters and their somewhat crazy sense of humour. A few examples.

Jock George had 12 children and asked the priest for advice on birth control. The priest advised Jock to seriously consider using the 'rhythm method' but when Ngaire, Jock's wife got pregnant for the 13<sup>th</sup> time Butch asked Jock why did he not take the priest's advice and use the rhythm method Jock's response was "where in the hell do you find an orchestra at three o'clock in the morning."

In truth he was incredibly proud of his Lebanese background and would send me endless clippings of anything that involved a Lebanese achievement. Only a year or so back he sent me a clipping about a Lebanese Cardinal Simmon who had been appointed the keeper of the Vatican library. Butch added that he was a brilliant man and originally applied to be the head of the Vatican bank but they were never going to let that happen. He was a man who believed on direct engagement with people, especially when they were annoying him. He was never afraid to let them know. I was once driving him home and a car drove in front of us. As we caught up with them he wound down the window and with a raised voice called out to the driver "have you got a bloody mortgage on the road?" On another occasion we stopped at the lights beside another driver who was picking his nose. Butch wound down the window and said to the guy "when you get to the bridge will you give us a wave?"

No matter what anyone might think to the contrary Butch was in fact an extremely generous man when he had anything to give. A few years back now a friend of mine who is a priest was telling me a story about how he and three other priests were dining in a local restaurant in Dunedin and when they got up to pay they found that Butch had paid for their entire meal and wine with no fanfare. To my knowledge he gave lots of people all he had in his pockets on many occasions.

In recent times his health suffered and as you know he was severely incapacitated but he never let his afflictions get the better of him. Our regular telephone conversations would always result in me being cheered and and having a serious laugh. I will never forget an occasion when he was in hospital and I was visiting and one of the catholic nurses who knew Ray to be somewhat conservative in some of his views asked him what he thought of gay marriage. Quick as a wink he responded he was all in favour of it and said "why should we be the only ones who are miserable?"

To sum up. He was an incredibly loyal man to his family, his community and his church. You could never shake that quality from him no matter the failings of any of those. Although he did object on one occasion when he went to church in Melbourne and there were three collections and when he asked the priest "how come you have three collections?" His answer was "one for the gallops, one for the trots, and one for the dogs."

We are all going to miss him immensely, no-one more than me, but our family can be assured that he left an imprint and legacy of humour, wit and generosity.

