



Memories of Ian Smith or The Adventures of Growing Up in the 1970 S

Ray Williams

This eulogy was delivered at Ian Smith's funeral by his friend Ray Williams. It is a wonderful story of growing up in the Riverstone District in the 1970s. The full transcript of this eulogy by Ray Williams can be found in a booklet entitled "Residents and Memories" in the Reading Room at the Riverstone Museum.

Ian Smith loved the outdoors and, from a young age, spent every waking hour planning and undertaking new adventures. It was my great pleasure to have been able to share in many of those adventures with him. My first recollection of Ian was in 1972 when, at the age of about 12, I met him and another good mate at that time, Tim Woods. We soon learnt that the one thing the three of us had in common was a love of the outdoors and we would plan many adventures that involved camping out in the bush.

It was almost expected that, if you were going to spend time in the bush, you should live off the land and feed yourself and there was no better way of doing that than by catching rabbits. Tim felt there was no better way to catch rabbits than with a FERRET, so, the next Saturday morning, Ian, Tim and I headed off to Mulgrave Saleyards to purchase one FERRET. Tim and his dad had, in anticipation, already built a carrying cage for our new acquisition. Ian, the economic advisor amongst us, cited the best way to purchase the ferrets was to pool our money together. So we brought along our life savings which amounted to about \$8 or \$9 combined.

When we arrived at the saleyards it was like Ferret Heaven. There were ferrets everywhere, about a dozen of them, and we felt quite buoyed that we were in luck. But, by the time the bidding began a few hours later, we had become thirsty and had bought some drinks, and a pie or two, and our bank had diminished somewhat. We had the grand total of just \$6 left between us.

The first ferret sold for \$10, then \$15, one went for \$9. Every ferret that was sold was completely beyond our budget. When almost all the ferrets had been sold, and we had just about given up, we noticed there were two small ferrets together still to be sold. When the bidding started for these last two ferrets there was not one bid. It was as if everyone who had wanted a ferret had bought one and gone home. The auctioneer kept calling for starting bids of \$20 but not a bid could be found! All of a sudden Ian shouted, "What about 6 bucks?". The auctioneer looked amazed and said this was nowhere near enough for these two fine specimens, however, there was not another bid to be found and eventually they were knocked down to us – we had not bought one ferret, but two!

We carried the ferrets home on the train, but, now being broke, we had no money for the train fare. As I soon learnt, all you had to do to evade the fare at Rivo station was to go to the toilet when you hopped off the train and just jump over the fence into the car park which was out of sight of the station master. We all went over the fence and so did the ferrets. So, it was an eventful day out, good fun, we got twice as much as we bargained for with a bit of fare evasion thrown in for good measure.

So, we had our ferrets and there wasn't a rabbit that was safe anywhere this side of the Blue Mountains. We embarked on campouts just about every weekend with our new acquisitions although, while we had heaps of fun, I don't remember catching too many rabbits!

Ian also loved the water and had a passion for everything involved with water including fishing. His parents, Kevin and Heather, gave him a pump-up dinghy for his 13th or 14th birthday. We talked about a rowing expedition and exploring new areas. Finally Ian said we should row up the Hawkesbury-Nepean starting from Penrith and rowing as far as we could toward Warragamba Dam. We set out in the school holidays on a week long expedition. We rowed all day and covered many miles up the river. That night we pitched our tent, camping on the bank of a little stream running off the Nepean, and planned the next day's adventure by the campfire.

By daybreak it had started to rain and it didn't let up! It bucketed down for the next two days and didn't look like stopping. Finally, after only three days, we decided to abandon our trip and turn back. After packing up in pouring rain we commenced the long row back towards Penrith. After an hour's rowing I could still see where we had camped the night before and thought, "this will take us a week to get home" and it was still bucketing down with rain! Our spirits were indeed dampened (no pun intended).

All of a sudden Ian said, "I can hear a boat". Sure enough it was a boat, a boat with a big motor on it. It was Ian's dad in his 50hp cruiser who had come to our rescue, believing we would be doing it a bit tough out in the rain for the past two days. I can't tell you how good it was to see Kevin and get driven back home. Kev said we looked like drowned rats and we certainly did! It didn't turn out to be one of our better adventures but it was indeed memorable.

In between other camping and rabbit catching adventures we planned our next escapade which also involved water. Ian had decided we should enter the raft race on the Hawkesbury River at Windsor representing our school Rivo High. We would build a raft and row it in the raft race. We had to have a minimum of four rowers so our other mates Bill Case and John Lewis were seconded into our team. Many hours were spent building the raft, mostly by Kevin, Ian's Dad, who was always very helpful in our endeavours.

We began the race in fine style but after about an hour things were getting pretty tough. Little did we know that some of the drums on the raft that were keeping us afloat had slowly filled with water and were now weighing us down like an anchor. Suddenly the raft rolled over and we were all "in the drink". We were all capable swimmers and unconcerned by this however John did not immediately appear on the surface. Ian dived underwater only to find John's lifejacket had become entangled. After a bit of persuasion he appeared spitting and spluttering and a little worse for wear. It was a scary moment but Ian's quick thinking had avoided a possible tragedy. I don't know whether John would have drowned that day and I'm sure glad we didn't get to find out and I'm sure John will always be grateful Ian was there to help.

Ian and I also shared a great love of music. Ian's family loved live stage shows, particularly Reg Livermore's. They would buy the sound tracks to these musicals well in advance of the shows' arrivals in Sydney so we would know all the songs off by heart. Reg Livermore's stage productions at that time included "Betty Blockbuster", "Sacred Cow" and the immortal "Rocky Horror Show". When the "Rocky Horror Show" was first in Sydney Ian and his family invited me along. I'm not sure what my Mum would have thought of her 14 year old son going to what was then a very risqué show but I'm sure glad we went – memories to be cherished for many years.

One musician we really loved was Alice Cooper. Alice came to Sydney in 1975 and performed at the Sydney Showground. Tickets were sold out in minutes and were very rare to find. Ian rang me one night to tell me he had just been given a ticket to the concert. I couldn't believe his luck. In typical Ian fashion, he said, "Let's see if we can get another one so you can go too!" Well, we didn't just get one ticket but another two as well. While we were working out whom we would invite Ian's Mum, Heather, invites two of her netball girls and sets us up for the night. Ian had, for years, adored a girl in his Mum's netball team and Heather knew it so she took the liberty of telling the girl that Ian had tickets to the Alice Cooper concert and she should go with him. What girl could resist such a great deal? Heather also set me up with another netball girl so I wouldn't feel left out. At 15 years of age, to travel to Sydney Showground at night and witness one of the greatest live shows ever in this country was another adventure never to be forgotten.

After school, with our lives going in different directions, Ian and I only caught up with each other on an irregular basis. At a young age I was fortunate to have a good friend like Ian. He taught me what was important – stick by your mates, stand up for what you believe in and, importantly, to have fun! Every young bloke growing up should be lucky enough to do so with a mate like Smithy! No one is really gone till the memories fade away.



**Ian Smith on the right with one of his school friends, Silvano Santilli.
Photo: Michelle Nichols.**