

Hello everybody,

As most of you know my name is Richard and I am Sam's uncle. Today I am doing one of the hardest things I have ever had to do in my life. Finding the words that may offer some comfort to you all as well as honouring Sam.

Firstly, I want to thank Andrew, Jules and Georgie for granting me the honour of speaking at Sam's memorial today and allowing me to pay tribute to Sam on your behalf, and also on behalf of Sam's grandparents Shaen and Richard, and Dianne and Dad (and although Dad is sadly no longer with us, I am sure he is here today in spirit). I would also like to thank Sam's aunts and uncles including Janelle, David, Rob and Claire, Hamish and Michelle and Sam's numerous cousins Julia, Claire, Matt, Jemima, Airlie, Annika, Jock, Hillary, Henry, and Iggy and each of our extended families and numerous friends gathered here today. It is an honour, and a privilege and I hope I do justice to Sam's life.

The last time I had to speak at a funeral was at this very place when my father died. Whilst hard, speaking at Dad's funeral was so much easier than at this one. Our Pa had lived a full life and it was simply his time to leave us. So, I hope you will forgive me if my voice happens to waver every now and again.

Pa's funeral was also the last time I had a chance to see Sam, as unfortunately this Covid thing locked my family away in WA and we have not visited this side of the country since that time.

Now Pa was an old-fashioned man, not one for texts or emails. His was a voice from a simpler time – where you simply told someone you loved them or, if you couldn't be together, you wrote letters to each other. I treasure the letters I received from Dad, even if most of them are about the weather, the rain (either too much or little) and about his beloved cattle. That spidery handwriting still said so much about our relationship and how he loved us all. And now as part of my inheritance, I also have a box of the letters I wrote to him. I was thinking about those letters the other day, and how they helped us bridge the distance when we lived so far apart. Letters belong to a slower time when we took the time to tell people how we felt, that we missed them and that we loved them. So, with that in mind, I decided to write a letter to Sam on your behalf.

Dear son,
Dear brother,
Dear grandson,
Dear nephew,
Dear cousin,
Dear friend.

Dearest Sam,

Today is a very sad day. You are not here today to hear us say all the things we should have said to you when you were here with us. To hear our words of love, encouragement and support. To hear us talk about what you mean to us.

To hear us remember you as a boy, as a teenager and as a young man. The kid we remember who loved cuddles and who adored his parents, who loved hanging out with his dad on the farm, who as a kid, loved spending time with his Pa on his quad bike, and just “hanging out” with him as a teenager.

To let you know that although, some people measure success on how fast you learn to read, or how well you master the sporting field or the text books, (and I know you were not a gun in these areas when growing up), I would love for the chance to be able to tell you in person that once it is all said and done, these measures are ephemeral, and that success in life is best measured by;

- the connections you make,
- the friendships you collect, and
- the love you share with family and friends over your lifetime.

Sam, when using these measures, you had everything you needed in spades - just look around at us here today and you can see what you meant to us all.

For the last couple of weeks many of us have travelled out to Glenmore to provide our support to your mum and dad and Georgie (Andrew, Jules and Georgie,) and have sat around the veranda table at your home, sharing our memories of you whilst sharing meals and a few drinks together. Sam, you would have enjoyed those stories. We all have our favourite stories about you and it has been mighty hard not having you there, and when I have wandered about your home I have seen the large family photos on the walls there. They are fantastic photographs of a country family, living their best life and your presence is simply everywhere.

Everyone has been remembering you in different ways. My family remembers you always as a bit of a wag. When thinking of you, my daughters reminded me of how, to them, you were their “country cuz” and how you were always looking for ways to trip them up, your “city slicker” cousins. To them, that part of their enjoyment of visiting you and Georgie. It was to engage in friendly competition with you. Whether it was determining who was going to open the next gate when doing a farm tour, to see who could run the fastest, to see who was oldest, who could shoot the straightest, who could ride a motor bike the best. It was all part of the fun of the country / city rivalry between you guys.

A lot of our stories about you these past few weeks have revolved around your love of all things that have wheels and that move. From your Thomas the Tank Engine collection when you were little, to your first motorbike, to your final vehicle, the "Gun Metal Grey" Toyota ute. You seemed to live for the freedom and the independence that having your own wheels gave you. Knowing that, my girls were astonished to arrive one time at Glenmore during your "skater boy" phase. That really was a different set of wheels for a country boy, and seeing you wearing "full on" skater clothes (including the backwards cap) really did my daughters heads in, until they realised that underneath you were still their old Sam. I still smile about the skater boy phase as well, as I know your mum and dad had to regularly drive you to various skate parks in the local area and your family holiday in South Australia nearly turned into a tour of every skate park in that state.

There were heaps of other phases too, as we are all well aware, and I think my personal favourite was your "American Boots" phase. Those ones with the American flag were absolute beauties.

Then there have been the Ute stories, and I've loved hearing about them. But I know your mates probably haven't confessed to the scariest of them. Apparently, the scary vehicle stories started early. I believe that when you were about 7 years of age there was a certain quad bike roll over incident. You and Pa both kept mum for a while, but luckily for us Andrew eventually got you to "fess up" so we know the story. At the time he knew that something must have happened as he caught you both looking like the proverbial cat that had caught the canary, but neither of you would tattle on each other at the time. I reckon, there were lots of those secret pacts between you and Pa that we will never get to hear about now both of you aren't here.

Whilst preparing for today I've been looking through the family photos with your mum, and we came across a number of photos of you with your mates on your big trips to The Cape and to Fraser Island. Looking at some of them I think there might have been some "heart in mouth" experiences had there as well. But the key thing I saw in those photos was a young fellow surrounded by good bunch of friends. The photos of you and your mates show a young man full of life without a hint of the pain that you must have been feeling these recent times. I have been lucky enough to meet a few of them since I flew over, and I would like to say that you chose well Sam. To a man they are good solid people, and when they get a chance, I am sure they will let you know just how much you mean to them.

There is another thing I want to let you know, and this is one “big” brother to another. It is sometimes hard being the eldest. As Julia said some time ago when thinking about the matter, she said: “we eldest are the experimental ones”. I think that is true. They are the one that are sometimes hovered over too much or sometimes too little. I know you know this, but your parents just loved you to pieces mate. They hunted down advice on how to help you and always went that extra mile, especially recently.

As the oldest kid I know you feel protective of your sibling, you take on that responsibility early, and you are no exception. I know you were very protective of Georgie, And although I suspect you know this, she really misses you mate. It’s been very hard for her since you left as you’ve always been a constant presence in her life. One of her treasured memories of you is that, no matter what, you never ever forgot the important dates in her life. She noted that you did not do this for anyone else, and that for as long as she can remember you never forgot her birthday or Christmas and always got her a present. She really appreciates the effort you went to and the care you took when choosing a suitable gift.

Well, it is time for me to draw this letter to a close, but do know this young Sam, we would all give the world to see that Ute of yours being driven up to the house once again with you behind the wheel. To see your smiling face framed by that shaggy hair of yours would be just wonderful.

And I want to let you know that new pup of yours “Sketch” seems mighty confused at the moment. He jumps up at the sound of any vehicle coming up the road but it’s just not the one he is waiting for.... His leader and mate hasn’t been around to take him for a run and feed him, and he just hasn’t been interested in the food anyone else has been giving him. Sam, he just looks a bit skinny mate, but we will look after him whilst you are gone.

All the very best and I hope this letter finds you well and at peace wherever you may be,

Your loving uncle Richard