Remembered: David John ‘Wewak’ Ross

David John Ross - Wewak - will for ever be remembered by the Katherine community and his family. In 1945, David and his mother were evacuated to Balaklava in South Australia, along with many other Northern Territory residents during World War II. On return to the NT around the age of four, he was placed in the ‘Retta Dixon Home’ in Darwin.

Known as ‘Wewak’, David John Ross, the eldest child of Theresa Hayes’ 11 children, was born in the army hospital based at Birdum, Northern Territory, on September 1, 1942. In 1945, David and his mother were evacuated to Balaklava in South Australia, along with many other Northern Territory residents during World War II. On return to the NT around the age of four, he was placed in the ‘Retta Dixon Home’ in Darwin.

David spent many years at Retta Dixon Home, under the supervision of Christian missionaries, living a religious and strict institutionalised lifestyle along with many other part-aboriginal children.

David lived, learned and grew into a healthy, considerate and athletic person - developing lifelong friends with many whom became ‘family’.

David received an education at the Darwin Primary School, progressing through to Year 9 at the Darwin High School.

In this time, it is said that while waiting for footy training one day after school, David and his teammates saw a barge with the name ‘Wewak’ on it, stranded on a sandbar at Mindil Beach.

With the perception of the barge in the background from where David was situated on the beach, his size 13-shoe was as long as the barge. David was nick-named ‘Wewak’ since that day.

David left school and Retta Dixon Home when he was aged 15, commencing work as a ringer at Mountain Valley Station.

Wewak remained in this field of work until he was 21, becoming a very fit, knowledgeable and ‘take-no-nonsense’ type of character.

When on holidays from Mountain Valley Station, he would visit Retta Dixon Home to see his family.

In 1959 on such a visit, David met Shirley who he was introduced to by his cousin May Stott.

The following year, David returned to work and Shirley relocated to Wyndham with her family when released from Retta Dixon Home.

In late 1961, the two met up again in Katherine when Shirley was working at the Sorrento Cafe and started dating.

The relationship got serious from April 22, 1962, when David and Shirley began living together.

They went to Darwin and stayed with his aunty Betty Beer and uncle Bingo Snape.

When their family began with the arrival of Dorothea in 1964, David and Shirley stayed with aunty Dot at Howard Springs.

With their second child, Elizabeth, due in 1965, they decided to move back to Katherine and stay with his mother, brothers and sisters in Shepherd Street - to settle down and raise their family.


David played Aussie Rules for many years in Darwin originally playing for Works and Housing (later to become the Buffaloes Football Club) in the 50’s, then playing for the Darwin Buffaloes Football Club in 1962 through to 1968.

During these times, David also travelled to Perth, Western Australia, to play football for West Perth in their 1964 season.

David played basketball for Saint Mary’s in the early 60’s.

He has always spoken of his moment of fame (in basketball) when there was about three minutes or so to go and the team was losing by quite a margin, that the coach put him back on the court and he scored seven goals for the team to win.

Prior to being put back on the court, the coach took him off as he seemed to be ‘accidentally’ losing or passing the ball to Chong Woe who was playing for the opposition.

In Katherine in the 80’s, David played in the local darts competition for a team named ‘Green Ants’ and later a team named ‘Eastside Rockers’.

He also participated in NAIDOC’s Sporting Activities, the darts competition and once, for the NLC’s Corporate Softball Team.

Wewak has always been a fan of sports and it was no different when his children and grandchildren started to represent Katherine and the Northern Territory in their chosen fields.

There were many ways he would raise money for them to pay their fees, resignation, travel expenses, and purchase uniforms.

David’s working history is extensive:

- Following his stint at Manton Valley Station, Wewak worked various other places such as:
  - Droving to Winton and back on horseback.
  - Working with the Rudders at the train depot on the wharf in Darwin, unloading trains and boats.
  - Working with the Housing Commission in Wannellie at a brick-making factory getting junior wages.
  - Working at Humes Pipes - David said he was made ‘Leading Hand’ after one day’s work when his team had done the quota of quality cement pipes (and more) long before knock off time.
  - He gained employment with Transport and Works in Katherine as a Truck Driver, transporting supplies and resources to remote communities.
  - He also worked with Lands and Survey for Billy Lee of ‘James, James and Lee Surveying’.

This would be a working holiday, as when he was on his annual leave from Transport and Works, he would go to Darwin to play his football.

- David later worked with the Road Construction Gang with Transport and Works, building and maintaining the Carpentaria and Victoria Highways.

As his family grew, there were many times they travelled to his works camps (at Wave Hill, Top Springs, Timbert Creek and Mistake Creek) to be with him, especially on the school holidays.

- He left Transport and Works and worked at Kalano as a Supervisor when the CDEP started.

- David became one of the directors of Abocon Contractors. When putting in the roads around Tindal RAAF base he got his wife to cook and arrange delivery of hot lunches for his workers.

- The workers would donate funds to keep this arrangement going.

- In 1988, David applied for the Station Cook position at Willeroo Station.

- He was successful, so he and Shirley left Katherine and moved into the ‘Cooks House’ on Willeroo Station.

- Three days later David received notice that he was successful for a position at Northern Land Council’s Katherine Office.

As he preferred this position, David arranged for Shirley to see out the season as the Station Cook and he returned to Katherine to take up his new post.

- David was to work for Northern Land Council from 1988 to 2005.

In this term, David was also based at Ngukurr, Borroloola and Timbert Creek Regional Offices as Senior Project Officer.

- David and Shirley eventually married on 23/4/12 at Low Level after a 50-year engagement.

- Compiled and written by David John Ross’ children Dotty, Libby, David Jnr., Leonie, Dianna, Graham, Brian and Bobby.

KNOWLEDGE AND HISTORY

David and Shirley eventually married on 23/4/12 at Low Level after a 50-year engagement.