

JOHN LEAH: a tribute by Don Metcalfe

John Leah, who passed away just before Christmas, became a friend at DHS, which meant we attended during the 1950's. We shared time together in the month before his death.

He came to Dandenong, the son of post-World War 2 English migrants, via Tasmania's west coast. In 'The Gate' of 1957, (Form 4), he wrote a most erudite piece, titled 'Tasmania's Limestone Caves'. Even as a boy, John had acted as a guide to tourists and as a budding writer: "A crawl through a winding muddy tunnel may be rewarded with sights of rare and wondrous beauty".

That he was called 'Prof', should come as no surprise, as in his penultimate year he commenced a frivolous piece for 'The Gate' with the words, "To one of a scientific bent ..."

He matriculated in 1959 and he had been a Prefect, Co-Editor of 'The Gate' under the Editorship of Greg O'Loughlin, and represented the school in soccer in his last two seasons.

After school, his tertiary studies started in Melbourne, he married a fellow ex-student, Angela Szidat, but lost the marriage.

His lifelong friend, David Caddies, speaking at a celebration of John's life, took up the story in 1966, when they were both at a teacher training establishment in Sydney. He thought John was wise.

They met up again as teachers in Papua New Guinea. He hugely admired John's "great driving passion to create, publish or broad-

cast literary, sound and film pieces, at first educational, but widening in scope. He produced educational broadcasts for the ABC in Papua New Guinea". "...it was as if there was a creative effervescence about him which bubbled up constantly and infectiously—he was driven by it". "Science, literature, history were his themes, and words and images his methods".

His passion for argument is admired. He would often play devil's advocate just to prolong a debate,"...but the rascal never admitted to it. His quick and hearty laugh was never far away, as was his keen sense of the absurd".

As David concluded his speech, reading a poem by Dylan Thomas, I was reminded of our introduction to the work of that charismatic poet, by John's school-time Editor, the late Greg O'Loughlin.

I thank David for allowing me to use parts of his text.

Whilst in Port Moresby, John met Robyn Clark, who became the absolute love and mainstay of his life.

Upon his return to Australia, John and Robyn raised a family, and John continued his television passion, creating the pilot for a children's TV series, attracting the inimitable Spike Milligan for the lead role.

Subsequently he continued his publishing work, including as Editor of STAMP NEWS, and in 2007 from their home in Ferntree Gully, he and Robyn launched Australian **STAMPS PROFESSIONAL**.

JOHN LEAH—continued

The last years of John's life were extremely challenging, and he fought so bravely. As I finished writing this story, I felt so strongly about the Dylan Thomas poem, I thought we might all share it; and it is titled:

"Do not go gentle into that good night..."

