

John's Story

John Stewart Deeble was the only child of Arthur Vivian Deeble, 50, of Ballarat and Jean Deeble (Forster) 39, of Wellington, New Zealand. Arthur had been Headmaster of Essendon High School Victoria, one of the commanding officers of the 8th light Brigade at the battle of the Nek at Gallipoli and finally a grazier of a 5000 acre sheep and wheat farm called Banyenong near Donald, Victoria before he met Jean. At 46, he started taking his annual holiday at Erskine House, Lorne, Victoria where Jean was the manager. They corresponded by letter during the year and on the fourth summer, he proposed and they were married in Sydney on 7th August 1930; it was a bit of a shock for socialite Jean moving to the middle of nowhere and becoming a grazier's wife. On July 9th 1931, John Stewart was born very prematurely, weighing in at just over 2 pounds. The story goes that he was wrapped in cotton wool and put in a shoe box in the oven to keep warm. His parents immediately bought a pianola which began his lifelong love of music. He spent the first 4/5 years of his life at Banyenong, where being an only child on such a vast property, he learnt how to be happy in his own company.

The family moved to the town of Woodend, North-West of Melbourne, when John was to start primary school. His intelligence was evident from the outset and he skipped two grades during this time. Their large home, Seven Chimneys, was to remain in the family until Arthur passed away in 1958 aged 79 years; John loved this house and stayed in it many times after it became a guest house. At about the age of 11, John became fascinated with the cathedrals of England and went on to give a public talk about them; nearly 30 years later when he travelled to England, he could tell the family everything that was inside a cathedral before walking in. His love of cathedrals never wavered and he returned many times to revisit his favourite ones.

Transport to and from school in Woodend was by pony. Most people would consider this very exciting but John said that 'catching that darn pony in the adjoining paddock at the end of the school day was a nightmare and could take up to half an hour and so he was pleased when his parents finally let him have a bicycle. Arthur had an Arts degree from Melbourne University and was extremely well read and expected no less of his son. John had great admiration and respect for his father and commented that his father spoke to him as if he could and would accomplish anything he set his mind to. In those early years, John developed a really solid, secure sense of self that was to remain intact throughout his life. Despite being a sociable person, he always built houses with views of open spaces and moved further out when he felt encroached by suburbia. For the last 23 years of his life, he lived at Gundaroo on 100 acres, named Banyenong after his first home.

It was after one year of John attending Kyneton High School in country Victoria that Arthur and Jean realized that this was not the right choice for John's secondary education. For one thing, they were elderly parents compared with most, 61 and 48 respectfully, and they thought they were too old for a teenager and that John needed to be influenced by younger adults. Secondly, he needed to be stretched intellectually as well as physically as he was turning out to be quite a sportsman. So he was sent to board at Trinity Grammar school in

Melbourne; John loved the school but hated boarding and being away from his parents. He excelled at everything, playing Aussie Rules football, cricket and tennis and amongst other awards, claimed the Under 15 Athletics sports champion in 1945.

With the end of the war, Arthur talked of the mass return of men and advised John to leave school and secure a job despite him being only half way through his matriculation year in 1946; remember he was only 15 years old (nearly 16) because of the skipped classes. He left school and got a job in a bank. Later, his parents encouraged him to sit the navy entrance exam which he passed with flying colours, becoming an officer straight away; although he developed a love for sailing, he did not for the navy's rules. He left and then had a variety of jobs whilst studying for the first of his three degrees that would all be completed part time whilst working full time.

It was whilst studying at Melbourne University that John met Eunice whom he would marry in 1955 (both sets of teetotaling parents agreed, after much persuasion by the couple, to allow guests 'one' sherry at the wedding!) In 1957, John became the Assistant Manager of the Peter MacCallum cancer clinic in Melbourne. As the person responsible for finances in a very high tech hospital, he felt the need to return to university via the Master's qualifying exam, a part time tutorship and assistant lectureship to study hospital costs; he didn't want to see any more people refuse cancer treatment because they couldn't afford it. In 1969, the whole family went to England by ship (6 weeks there and then back) as part of John's PHD study. Then a meeting with Gough Whitlam, Dick Scotton and a couple of sympathetic doctors started the ball rolling for Medibank, and ten years later, Medicare.

It was at the start of 1975 when the huge hours of service understandably took its toll on his marriage and John and Eunice parted ways but remained on good terms until the end; Eunice visited him only a few weeks ago. John wanted his four children aged 10-18 to live with him, despite his long hours, his inability to know how to turn on a washing machine or cook a meal. Although he was extremely busy, he kept the ship going at home, well afloat anyway. They had an afternoon lady, Margaret, who came in most afternoons to do the domestics and between them, they managed. Sunday nights with the Appels meant the world to them and John, as did the holidays they shared. Those years were fun as the family ran itself like a group house and they became exceeding close. John loved all their friends being round and correspondingly, they bonded instantly with him.

He was a very humble man and the family only discovered by mishap that there was a 'Deeble Institute' named after him, years after its inception. Although John was obviously pleased when he was awarded the Order of Australia, he felt his best accolade was being given the title of 'Professor', something he had aspired to all his life! 16 years ago, John found happiness in his personal life again when he married Mary, the love of his life, his true soul mate. We thank Mary for making John so happy.