

wanted it close to a tree. Dogs like trees and Col would appreciate that . . .”.

His closest mate was his brother Ken, known as “Ragged”, who lives in Queanbeyan. Unknowingly, it was appropriate that on that fateful Tuesday evening it was with Ragged that Col spent his last hours before driving home. Annually, they and some close friends trekked for a week’s fishing and relaxing in the far north-west of NSW, camping on the banks of the Darling near Bourke. Col and Ken were that night planning this year’s trip which was being extended to two weeks.

Col was born in Cootamundra and his father shortly afterwards moved to Captains Flat. He left school at 14 and began work in his father’s bakery and later the mine.

Col was one of four sons and a daughter. John was killed in a mining accident at Mt Isa in 1963, Bob died two years ago and now only Ken and Edith survive. Col worked in the mines until they began to run economically low. In 1962 he decided to join the ACT Police. His father had been friendly with the ACT Labor member, Mr Alan Fraser, who had encouraged Col to join.

He undertook his six months basic training with the Victoria Police in Melbourne.

His brother Ken said about this period: “Col’s family was and had always been most important to him. Gwen had only just given birth to their daughter Jenny. It was difficult for them all as it was too expensive for Col to telephone. He always valued his family above anything.

“There were three things in his life; his family, his job and his friends. When he willingly agreed to go to Melbourne recently he made no bones about the fact that his ambition was to come back to Canberra and head policing here. He regarded Canberra as his patch. He was never off-duty.

“He hated the hypocrisy of the modern day criminal who shielded himself in false respectability but lived a rotten life. He had a grudging respect for the old style crim who was frank about his motives.

“He had a deep concern for young people and those who may have been heading for trouble without realising it. He helped many young blokes steer away from that first recorded offence and a downhill cycle of crime once in prison.”



The service in St. Christopher’s Cathedral. (Photo: News Ltd.)

As a colleague said: “Col had a real soft spot for the strugglers. Perhaps it was his bush origins but he felt for those who faced difficulties. There were many at the funeral, perhaps hundreds, who had been helped by Col at the critical time in their lives when they could have gone either way — the teenage kids of a single parent, the wavering kids.

“If a memorial fund is established to him it should be used to help that sort of person. Col would have liked that. While he could be a tough investigator he was a very compassionate man. He had the human touch.

“At the funeral there were many old identities who he had helped along the way, some way back in his Flat days. Col often said the police force was the only social welfare agency that worked 24 hours a day. Now we have some

of those welfare structures formally in place. But Col worked them through with people before there was any of that. He helped people on the verge.”

Col was a total police officer and found it hard to be off duty. Driving about he would see things and say this or that should be checked. He couldn’t help being a policeman.

He saw the tragedy of crime and the victims. He felt for them and often counselled them when no one else seemed to care. He felt for the victims after a bad decision at court or immediately after a crime.

A colleague said: “Even before the formation of the AFP in 1979 he had a great vision of what law enforcement should be doing to counter national crime. He welcomed the development of national strategies. He was always asking questions about crime . . .



The casket leaves the Cathedral. (Photo: News Ltd.)

What's going on? How big is it? What's being done about it?

"Col lived by Christian principles and treated people with dignity. What stood him out in the police was his humanity.

"He had been active in the Australian Federal Police Association and was president of the Commissioned Officers Association at the time of his death.

"He helped to improve police conditions and helped set up the mortality fund of which his family is now a beneficiary.

"He was a leader. In the early days when he was an Inspector in charge of the Emergency Squad (the forerunner of the Special Operations Team) he was a bit older than most of the men, but his dogged pride and determination meant he had to be fitter and endure more than the younger blokes, which he did."

His early career included working as a junior detective on the Keren Rowland murder in 1971. Her partially decomposed body was found in a pine forest near the Air Disaster Memorial which was then one of Canberra's "lovers' lane" areas.

A colleague recalls Col going to the various parked cars in the area asking the passionate couples for information prefixed by a rapid crack on the window with a torch saying, "Don't be frightened. I'm a police officer . . ." and receiving some interesting responses.

Col was remembered for long hours spent in the cold, lonely Barton Unit 5 buildings, the woolsheds, tenaciously working 12-14 hour days with the National Crime Intelligence Branch.

"He had an attitude from his early police days of being very thorough. 'Get the paperwork right and it will be a lot quicker and smoother', he would say. He was a ruthless, tenacious investigator who would leave no stone unturned in the search for truth.

"Col didn't have masks. He saw that same face each day when he awoke. He wasn't two-faced and he spoke bluntly and honestly. He had done his sums and added up life and got the right perspectives. He had his values right."

Col's ambition was to retire in about two years and he had bought a block of land at Nelson's Bay near where an old mining mate, Mr Jack Roberts, had a caravan. He was about to build a retirement house.

His brother Ken said: "Col looked forward to his annual trips to Bourke but he was proud of his achievements and after getting his patch sorted out was looking forward to retirement."

"He would say, 'We're not here long so pack it in tight'. He would walk into a pub with you and ask for two middies and say 'pack 'em in tight'. He realised life was precious and short.

"He loved Gwen. They'd been married for 34 years. He loved his two kids, Jenny and Peter, and thought the sun shone out of his two grandkids.

"Most Friday nights he would visit Andrew (1) and David (3) and on Saturdays would frequently take them and my grandchildren for an outing — to the merry-go-round, Australia Park or some other park.

"He enjoyed the Canberra Raiders and would watch every possible game played at home. He could've had a VIP seat but he wanted to be down in the crowd on the sidelines just near halfway on the sunny-side. That was how he liked it.

"Recently he took up bowling and was made a member of West Canberra Bowling Club and was proud of some of his Club Championship wins.

"He often used to go back to the Flat (Captains Flat) and The Dog would yarn to the boys. They knew him. He'd helped a lot along the way. Many have written since and told us little stories about Col.

"He loved the job and had some close mates in Canberra such as Kevin Harley and Rick Ninness. He went to Melbourne because it was for the good of the AFP. He knew what was right.

"Whoever has killed him has killed a good man and my best mate . . .".

FOOTNOTE: More than 8000 messages of condolence have been received by the family. The Canberra North Rotary Club has agreed to accept any donations for a memorial fund to establish a perpetual memorial trust. These can be sent to P.O. Box 22, DICKSON, A.C.T. 2602.