

Brian's Story



Brian Foreman was indeed a character. He was serious—and he was anything but!

He was there right at the start of AAEE, founding Secretary and host of the first national conference in 1980, held at Arbury Park Outdoor School of which he was Principal. He was passionately committed to education as a means of bringing young people and older people alike to love the environment, and help them find their role in caring for it. As part of the school program he ran at Arbury Park, he had the kids banding birds and conducting studies of longevity and migration, sharing with them his skill as a licenced birdbander contributing information to the CSIRO database, and his considerable affection for and appreciation of birdlife—and of all the natural world. He used to say that his motivation for his work was renewed daily when a kid, who had carefully transcribed numbers from a bird's leg band and entered them on the data charts, held out his or hand and released the bird. "The way their faces shone was worth a million dollars", he claimed.

During his 18 years at Arbury Park, Brian was one of the special few who worked hard to make it what it remains, a highly regarded environmental education centre. He took up an international exchange to Boyne River Natural Science School in Canada in the mid 1980s, was Acting Superintendent of Education in the Education Department of South Australia's Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island regions and held within AAEE held the office of state delegate, conference organiser, secretary and president.

If you had the good fortune to be in a group with him, drinking too many bottles of magnificent red wine and listening to his yarns, it's a fair bet that you'd have tears in your eyes for much of the time. Few joke tellers or raconteurs could hold a candle to him. Add to this a prodigious memory and unexpected turn of phrase, and his company was always keenly sought. He had an immense appetite for pleasure, around a dinner table, a campfire or afterwards. For all his being an enthusiastic creature of the wee small hours, he'd be there at the first session in the front row at the conference plenary, grilling the keynote speaker on some point not clearly made.

He was about to embark on the next stage of his career and move to manage education at Melbourne's zoos when he was diagnosed with cancer. In the year until his untimely death in 1994, he took on a project to develop AAEE's first strategic plan, visiting with each state's committee for their input; he travelled around the world with his partner Kathy Beer, purchased a homette by the sea and he bought an MGB. And that was Brian in full measure—professional, with his commitment for environmental education; personal, with his boundless regard for other people and fun, always in generous measure. The MGB (painted British Racing Green by his friends whilst he traipsed around the world) was a sheer indulgence, and he reckoned that that was his due. Even in his last days he continued to be the spinner of yarns and teller of jokes. He'd accepted that he was going to meet the reaper, but he didn't accept that the reaper had to be grim.

When AAEE renamed the travelling scholarship in Brian's honour, the criteria under which it is to be awarded include contribution to EE of course, but equally they include some measure of the enjoyment the recipient is planning for themselves and others. Brian said of the AAEE network he was so instrumental in establishing, 'When you join the environmental education community, you never leave it', and that you know that anywhere you go in Australia, there will be kindred spirits to meet you to share experiences, environmental passions—and a yarn, a joke and a drink or three.

That is Brian's legacy, and our Association is the better for it!