

The Man Who Cried

I have been mates with Reg Knights since we'd both catch a ride on Finny's Milk Cart for our first day of school when we were 5. I don't mind telling you that was over 70 years ago. Especially because I don't look a day over 60 and the missus reckons I look like Kirk Douglas. We're still neighbours 10kms apart, living on the farm land that our families have had since the first settlers. I have cattle and sheep and he has crops. He gives me hay and I give him fertiliser. Or as he often says, I "give him the shits". We alternate a weekly dinner between our homes.

Now as I mentioned I have movie star looks but my friend Reg unfortunately was hit with an ugly stick. A face as tough as old leather that looked like the hide of the animal it came from. Reg never argued when I'd tell him so but Nancy, his loyal wife, would threaten to poison my scallop potatoes next dinner if I said it again. Good times, good times.

There's only one instance in the whole time I've known Reg that I recall seeing him cry. He's a tough man, he has feelings just like any other man but he just didn't sook. When Fungo kicked him in the manhood in Grade 3 he never cried even though being in murderous pain. He just knocked Fungo unconscious with a mighty uppercut.

He never shed a tear the day his darling daughter was born nor the day he held her hand as she took her last breath cursed down with cancer at 24. He'd say how both were the most precious moments of his life but not a tear fell. Poor Nance couldn't stop them from falling.

I've seen the man curse the heavens for his empty pockets during a five year drought that crushed his spirits just like the dirt where crops should have been crushed under his Size 11 boots. But no tears welled with no water. No tears pooled when the rains eventually came back either, though he did do a little jig in the first downpour in celebration.

When his Nancy died last year I was sure he'd break but he stood up tall and straight not uttering a word through scripture and song, his eyes never left her coffin from church into the ground but they never betrayed him, they remained dry.

The homestead was a lot quieter over there but he insisted the weekly dinners continue. He dishes up a decent stew though he's not as particular as Nance was at setting the table. The missus goes over there and tidies up whilst Reg keeps ploughing away on the fields.

He spent his time when not out working listening to his old transistor radio and patting his old heeler under lamplight.

Now the day he cried...Well it knocked my handsomeness for six. Like I said I've seen him stub his toe a million times, take a few spills outside the pub after we may have had one beer too many. I've seen him get an inch deep saw cut to his hand and seen a feral cow ram into his chest and wind him senseless but none of that made him cry. It was the day he backed his ute over the old heeler. He carried the dog, who was painfully sucking in breath

and giving the occasional violent jerk of his old body into the living room where they'd spend their nights. With one last sorrowing look up to his owner, the old dog departed. Now I understand the important relationship between dog and man and I'm conscious of the fact that the heeler has been old Reg's lone companion in the house for the past year but seeing him cry for the first time still makes me cringe. His big ugly mug contorted into something resembling a monkey's constipated arsehole. I mean not all men can be as handsome as me of course but that scene will traumatise me for life. And thankfully that was the first and last time old Reg Knights cried.