

By Al Bonnin

Thank you to Gayle and John's family for the honour for being part of this celebration of the life of John Baker.

I am representing our family - Karen, Sean, Maddie and Marla - and all of those who come to know John through us.

We first met Johnny B the same night he met Gayle. We remember him then as a handsome talented musician, but above all else, we remember the electricity and thunderclap of their fateful meeting, one that brings many of us together on this day.

Since then, John has been family, his warmth and spirit woven into the fabric of our shared lives. As we talk about our memories, a plethora of images and moments pours out. Here are just a few, in no particular order.

John, at our near-weekly Friday night dinners, usually Kaz's roast chicken that he so loved, going in for seconds and then always, miraculously, even in recent months, having room for desert.

John the wordsmith, delighting in wordplay, texting new words and tomfoolery back and forth, turning the sounds and meanings over in his mouth and savouring them like the wine that often went with them.

John the husband, beaming, ecstatic, giving his vows to Gayle at the happiest of weddings. It was a privilege to know them as a couple, true soul mates, and to witness their love for each other, in sickness and in health.

John the handyman, upended and flailing in the tank he was trying to clean out, or puzzling, spanner in hand, at the inscrutable workings of a nut.

John, the water man, bursting to the surface of an azure sea at KI, strong, brown, glistening, like (as we teased him later) some Samoan sea-god gone way off course.

John, and a brother we will not name, trying to row back to the shore at Black Point with storm clouds threatening from the West, pulling with rising anxiety at the oars that seemed useless - until they realised they had forgotten to raise the anchor.

John the soccer aficionado, full of painkillers, wobbling his bike against medical advice through the backstreets of Thebarton with me and Rob Evers to see his beloved Reds, talking so fervently about the game he was lucky to get there at all (they won).

John the teacher, not just patient, kind and encouraging but completely present, celebrating every small moment, every unintended harmony or syncopation with his trademark "Yeah, man".

Johnny the animals' friend. His beautifully crafted eulogy to Delilah, John and Gayle's beloved cat is as fine as evocation of grief for the loss of any creature as has been written. We remember his love for Astor and Pushkin and our family will never forget the uproarious welcome he always received from Kip our chocolate Kelpie, who reacted to John like no-one else, climbing into his lap and delivering the slobber face-wash that he reserved for his most special human.

John the friend. Our daughter Maddie remembers his sweet smile and above all else that when John asked "how are you?" he meant it, meant for her to answer truly and listened intently to every word

she said. He and Gayle loved and supported Maddie as she grew up, and we thank them both for that.

John the conversationalist. John loved conversation, true conversation that took you deep inside a subject. He engaged with people of all ages and capacities, always curious, always respectful. John, deep in conversation with the teenage son of one our friends, surrounded by the noise, wine and music of a rollicking party - this is an enduring and treasured memory.

John the ping pong enthusiast. Although he could only rarely beat Gayle (she would say never) no-one who saw the legendary JB backhand pirouette manoeuvre will ever forget that image.

John as our granddaughter Marla's treasured mate. As a little girl when John and Gayle were coming to dinner, excitement would rise, and when they appeared she, Squid, Joan of Bark, Sardine and subsequently Kip would collide in the contest to be first into his arms.

John the musician. His words and music, and their sublime realisations with Gayle and all the fine musicians they have played with, will stand as an enduring legacy. There have been so many performances, from Womadelaide to the living room, impromptu jams, wonderful hours listening to CDs, Johnny B's music pervading and chronicling all our lives. If we settle on one moment, for mine it was his induction into the South Australian Music Hall of Fame, a deeply felt testimony to the importance and beauty of his work. And at the end, John beaming, out on his feet, but ready for just one more song. Afterwards he said " I just didn't want to stop" and all I can say to that is "yeah man".

Go well Johnny, from all your families. May your capo never slip, and your pitch be always perfect