

By Glenn Morrison

I met John Baker after getting caught up in a brawl outside the Mercantile Hotel in Sydney's Rocks, in 1997.

I was loading in for Blind Mary's regular Friday gig, when half the Dubbo Rugby League side decided to have kicking practice on my right arm and shoulder.

Our bass player David Mason-Cox sang and played guitar thru that gig with our violinist, while I went to hospital.

But the injury left me unable to play for several weeks.

So Dave called Johnny. Next week he played guitar while I sang, limp arm in tow.

Initially, the arrangement was temporary.

But we all loved Johnny's phenomenal playing, his smile, just having him around so much that we decided to keep cutting the pay cheque four ways instead of three. And that was that.

A few weeks later we were touring Victoria ... after that John and I played, laughed, toured and partied our way around the country for much of the next four years ... and intermittently beyond that.

Being around John is like being part of a big happy family, and when he's not there you miss him.

After Blind Mary folded at the end of 2000 (because I took a job), we kept contact by arranging gigs, visits, phone calls and in recent years, epic and hilarious texts.

Also, we both loved writing and receiving long hand-written letters, most of which I've kept.

John was always a spiritual man. Moral, but not moralistic, as Phil Hoffman puts it.

But he was also a paradox: Purely in the moment more than anyone I've known, and yet deeply concerned with nature, destiny, the interplay between himself and the cosmos ... how it might all unfold in rhythm and melody.

Our talks ranged widely over literature, music, writing and philosophy.

Our relationship ran deeper, I think, after we discovered we were both suckers for a great quote, but in particular after I had a mild stroke in 2011, which led me to think of my own mortality with more than a passing interest.

That growing understanding ... of our and humanity's shared mortality, proved a rich vein to mine.

At heart John was a storyteller. He told stories of the people around him and the places he travelled.

He was a poet, a brave explorer of the human condition.

Words, melody, laughter ... these were the wind in his sails.

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Time after time we would thank the heavens for our friendship and the beautiful women we had been so lucky to meet ... he Gayle Buckby, me Fiona Gordon.

There was a literary snippet I had meant to show John but hadn't.

I'd like to share it now with John and yourselves ... it's from American writer Annie Dillard:

Ours is a planet sown in beings. Our generations overlap like shingles. We don't fall in rows like hay, but we fall. Once we get here, we spend forever on the globe, most of it tucked under. While we breathe, we open time like a path in the grass. We open time as a boat's stem slits the crest of the present.

My friend, my thanks ... for your life, your songs ... and the brief but wonderful times we had sailing that boat together.

It was a privilege.