



THE STORY OF

# Jack Reynolds

— memories gathered and treasured —



*Jack with his Generations Connect volunteer, Sofia*

**A GENERATIONS CONNECT KEEPSAKE**

UniMinistry Foundation · 2026

# John “Jack” Reynolds

Born 14 March 1939 in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales

*These stories were shared over ten visits with Sofia,  
a Generations Connect student volunteer,  
with warm thanks to Rosewood Gardens Aged Care.*



For Peter, Susan and Michael,  
the seven grandkids, and the two little great-grandies.

# MY LIFE AT A GLANCE



| YEAR    | MILESTONE                                                |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1939    | Born in Wagga Wagga — third of five, and the loudest     |
| 1954    | Apprentice fitter and turner at the railway workshops    |
| 1961    | Met Elaine at the St Michael’s dance                     |
| 1963    | Married Elaine — best decision I ever made               |
| 1964-70 | Peter, Susan and Michael arrive                          |
| 1985    | The big lap — six months around Australia in the caravan |
| 1996    | Retired after 42 years on the railways                   |
| 2000    | The Sydney Olympics with grandson Ben                    |
| 2024    | Moved to Rosewood Gardens                                |
| 2026    | Met Sofia — the Generations Connect visits begin         |

*Filled in together on our first visit — it became the map for every conversation that followed.*

# BEGINNINGS

## WAGGA WAGGA, 1939.

I was born on the kitchen table of a weatherboard house on Fitzroy Street, the third of five and, my mother always said, the loudest. Dad was a fettler on the railways and Mum took in sewing, and between them they kept seven of us fed through years when there wasn't much to go around. We had chooks out the back, an outdoor dunny, and a mulberry tree that stained every school shirt I ever owned.

My earliest memory is sitting on the front gate waiting for the ice man's cart, hoping for a chip of ice on a hot afternoon. Sundays were church, then a roast if we were lucky, then cricket in the paddock with a bat Dad made from a fence paling.

*"We didn't have much, but we never knew it."*



## SCHOOL DAYS AND GROWING UP

### BILLYCARTS AND BARE FEET.

School was chalk, ink wells and the strap if you earned it — but I had one teacher, Miss Hartley, who read us *The Magic Pudding* on Friday afternoons, and I'd have walked over hot coals for her. I was never much for spelling, but I could fix anything with wheels by the time I was ten.

My best mate Col and I built billycars from packing crates and raced them down Gormly Avenue with no brakes and no fear. My first pocket money came from a paper run on a bike in the same condition. When television finally reached town, half the street stood outside Hogan's electrical shop just to watch the test pattern. We thought the future had arrived — and it had.

*"A billycart, a paper run and a bike with no brakes — that was freedom."*

## WORKING LIFE

### FORTY-TWO YEARS ON THE RAILWAYS.

I left school at fifteen and started as an apprentice fitter and turner at the railway workshops, and I stayed with the railways forty-two years. The seven o'clock whistle, the smell of cutting oil, billy tea at smoko — that was the rhythm of my whole working life, and I loved it.

Big Kev Doherty trained me. “Measure twice, lad,” he’d say, “and turn up on time — the rest looks after itself.” I’m proudest of the years we kept the old steam crane running long after the paperwork said she was finished. Machines are like people: treat them with respect and they’ll surprise you.

*“Forty-two years, and I never once slept in.”*

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# LOVE AND FAMILY

### A DANCE AT ST MICHAEL'S, 1961.

I met Elaine at the St Michael's dance in 1961. I had two left feet and she laughed so hard at my quickstep that she agreed to a second dance out of pity. I married her at that same church two years later, and for fifty-nine years she was the best part of every day.

Peter came along in '64, then Susan, then Michael — three kids, seven grandkids, and now two little great-grandies who visit and demolish my biscuit supply. Family, to me, is everyone squeezed around one table, talking over the top of each other, nobody in a hurry to leave.

*"She laughed at my dancing. I married her anyway."*



## HOME, COMMUNITY AND BELIEF

### TOMATOES, THE BRIGADE AND THE BACK PEW.

Wherever we lived, the first thing I did was dig a veggie patch. My tomatoes won second prize at the show in '78, and I've never fully forgiven the bloke who won first. I gave thirty years to the volunteer fire brigade and sang in the church choir — badly, but with enthusiasm.

Elaine and I raised the kids to do the right thing when nobody's watching. That's the whole of my religion, really, with a few hymns thrown in. These days I'm most at peace with my hands in the dirt — Sofia and I have taken over a corner of the herb garden here at Rosewood.

*"Tomatoes taste better when you've grown them yourself."*



*Jack, his neighbour June and Sofia in the Rosewood herb garden, 2026*

# ADVENTURES AND THE TIMES I LIVED THROUGH

## THE MOON, THE NULLARBOR, THE FLAME.

I heard the moon landing on the workshop wireless in July 1969 — the whole floor went quiet, grown men standing around a radio like kids. Nobody did much work that day, and nobody minded.

In '85 Elaine and I took long-service leave, hitched up the caravan and did the big lap — six months, the Nullarbor straight as a ruler, the Top End in the build-up, and more flat tyres than I care to count. In 2000 I took my grandson Ben to the Olympics in Sydney and cheered until I lost my voice. The biggest change I've seen? We used to queue at the post office to book a trunk call. Now the kids carry the whole world in their pocket — and still don't ring their grandfather enough.

*"We heard the moon landing on the workshop wireless.  
Nobody worked much that day."*

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## WISDOM AND REFLECTIONS

### WHAT IT ALL COMES DOWN TO.

The best advice I ever got was Big Kev's: turn up on time and look after your mates. It's carried me through work, marriage, the brigade and everything since. If I could tell my twenty-year-old self anything, it'd be to dance more and worry less — the things I lost sleep over mostly never happened.

What matters in the end is people. I'm grateful for my Elaine, every day of the fifty-nine years we had, and for kids who still argue about whose turn it is to have me for Christmas. If people remember me as a bloke who kept his word and grew a decent tomato, that'll do me fine.

*"Turn up on time, and look after your mates."*



## QUICK FIRE ROUND

# MY FAVOURITES

A song I love

*"A Pub with No Beer" — Slim Dusty*

A meal I could eat forever

*Elaine's lamb roast, extra gravy*

A film

*The Man from Snowy River*

A book

*The Magic Pudding — thanks, Miss Hartley*

A place

*The veggie patch, any veggie patch*

A saying of mine

*"She'll be right — but check the oil anyway"*

A season

*Autumn — tomato chutney weather*

A team

*The Dragons, through thick and mostly thin*

A flower

*Elaine's roses*

A perfect day

*A cuppa, the crossword, cricket on the radio*

## OUR VISITS

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*Snap! Jack takes the win — again. Tuesday games at Rosewood, 2026*



*Games afternoon with June, Harold and Sofia, 2026*

WITH LOVE

# A MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERATIONS CONNECT FRIEND



Dear Jack,

When I signed up to volunteer, I thought I was coming to help you. It took about one visit to work out it was the other way around. You've taught me how to tell a story properly, how to listen without rushing, and that a cup of tea fixes most things — and I heard the moon landing through your ears like I was standing in that workshop myself.

I'll remember our Tuesdays for the rest of my life: the herb garden, the crossword arguments, and being flogged at Snap by a man who claims his eyes aren't what they used to be. Thank you for letting me gather these stories. Your family is lucky — and so am I.

*With thanks and friendship,*

**Sofia — second-year nursing student, Generations Connect volunteer**



## ABOUT GENERATIONS CONNECT

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Generations Connect is an intergenerational program that pairs trained student volunteers with older Australians for weekly life-story visits — easing loneliness and connecting generations, one friendship at a time.

Every keepsake like this one is gathered with care over many conversations and given as a lasting gift to the resident and their family.

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### ABOUT THIS SAMPLE

Jack's story is illustrative — he and his family are fictional, and the photographs show program-style moments rather than the people described. Every real Generations Connect keepsake is created with the resident over many visits and shared only with their written permission.