

Vale Richard Keam



I am sad to report that one of my oldest walking mates, Rick Keam, died in the early hours of Wednesday 11th November 2020, after a long battle with cancer.

Rick and I first crossed paths in the 1975 Australian University Games in Sydney, as competitors in the 3000m track walk. Rick, representing the University of New England in Armidale, northern NSW, had taken second place in the Varsity walk for the previous couple of years and felt that 1975 would be his year. It turned into a great battle between us, with me eventually getting up to win with 13:43.3, just pipping Rick who finished second with 13:46.2.

That year, Rick finished his Masters in Sociology and 1976 saw him relocate to Melbourne to work in the field of Social Research. It was at times a precarious lifestyle, with his next job always dependant on research grants and University funding.

Once in Melbourne, he joined Ringwood Athletics Club and the Victorian Amateur Walkers Club and availed himself of the greater athletic opportunities in Melbourne, the walking capital of Australia. He had been a keen runner and walker at New England but now he concentrated on his walking.



Rick (on the right) walking with Stuart Cooper and Mark Wall in the 1977 Victorian 50km at Albert Park

His first year saw immediate success, with the following finishes in Victorian Championships

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|--------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| 1976 Victorian 15km Walk | 4 th | 1:14:34 |
| 1976 Victorian 20km Walk | 6 th | 1:44:59 |
| 1976 Victorian 30km Walk | 3 rd | 2:41:12 |

He contested his first Victorian Track Championship in February 1977, finishing 5th in the 3000m walk in a huge PB of 13:18.8. The first 5 places make for interesting reading in that I finished 4th, 0.2 secs ahead of Rick, but Graham Dent of Box Hill, who had finished 4th in the 1975 Varsity Walk, beat us both and finished second with 12:49.4.

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|----|--------------|-------------------|---------|
| 1. | Willi Sawall | Ballarat Harriers | 12.22.6 |
| 2. | Graham Dent | Box Hill | 12.49.4 |
| 3. | David Smith | Footscray | 13.15.0 |
| 4. | Tim Erickson | Ivanhoe | 13.18.6 |
| 5. | Rick Keam | Ringwood | 13.18.8 |

That year, he also attempted the Victorian 50km but failed to finish. The shorter distances were his forte.

His stay in racewalking was a brief one, as he retired after the 1977 season to pursue his professional career and to enjoy the other great loves of his life - fly fishing and music.

His fly fishing world had many prongs. His extensive knowledge base had been built up by some 35 years of tramping the high country of mainland Australia and Tasmania, testing his skills in what has always been a challenging arena. He was also a renowned fly tyer, producing trout flies that were in demand around the world. Such was the quality of his flies that he never made any money from his endeavours. The time taken to source the materials and produce the flies far outweighed whatever small recompense he received. It was a labour of love, never done for the money. Finally, he was a well known flyfishing writer and book editor.¹

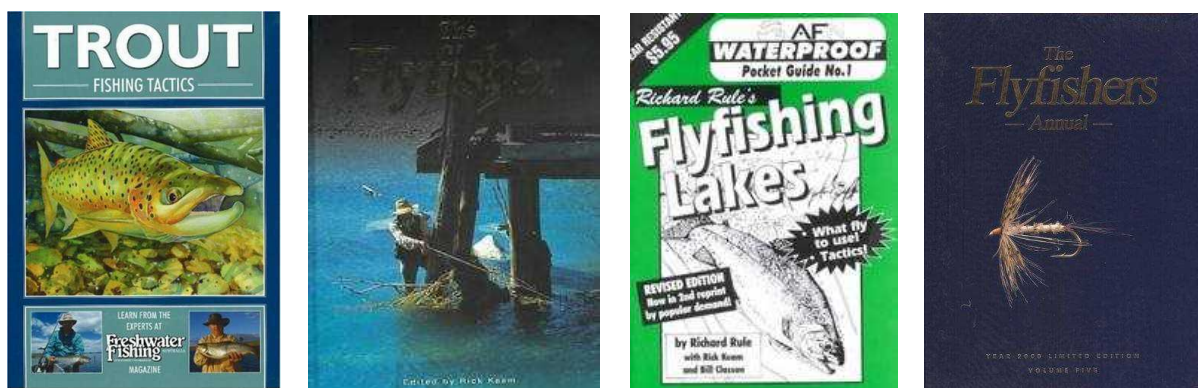
His 2004 book *The Flyfisher* was a stunning full-color reference book featuring the best flyfishing writers and photographers from around the world and containing topics as varied as advanced fly tying, saltwater fly fishing and fly fishing for trout around the world. There was something for every fly angler.

He was also the editor of the annual *Australian and New Zealand Fly Fishers Annual*. This was a huge endeavour that he undertook each year. His volumes are collectors items nowadays.

The 2016 book *Australia's Best Trout Flies (Revisited)*, which he edited, won critical acclaim as a wonderful followup to the original *Australia's Best Trout Flies*, published 20 years earlier.

Another of his books was *Richard Rule's Flyfishing Lakes* which he co produced with long term fly fishing friends Richard Rule and Bill Classon.

He was also a regular writer for *FlyLife* and a columnist for *Freshwater Fishing*.



Some of the many flyfishing books that Rick authored or edited

Rick was a keen historian and musician, and the two worlds merged in 1985 with the release of his album *On The One String - Songs From The Verse Of Shaw Neilson*.² He had felt for many years that the poetry of Shaw Neilson³ had been sadly forgotten by Australians, so he took a number of his poems and put them to music, bringing the poet to a new audience. I was lucky enough to hear Rick in concert that year, singing songs from the album.

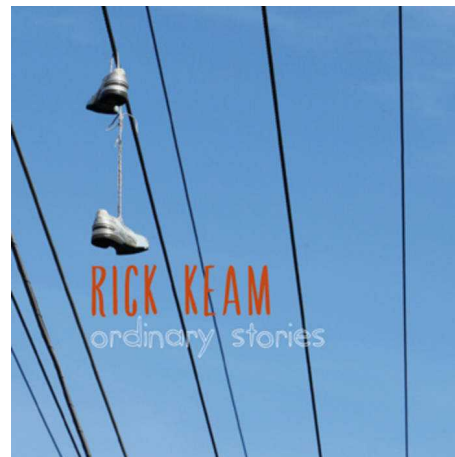
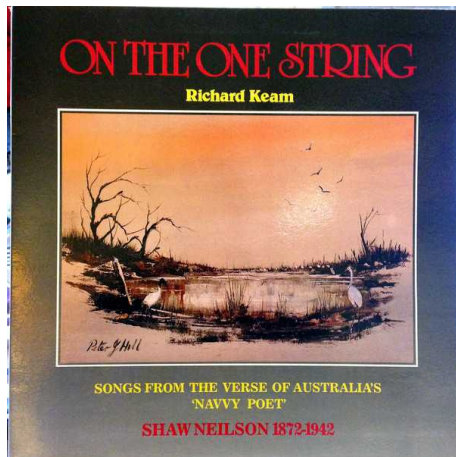
¹ See some of Rick's books at https://www.isbns.tw/author/Rick_Keam

² <https://www.discogs.com/Richard-Keam-On-The-One-String-Songs-From-The-Verse-Of-Shaw-Neilson/release/10936367>

³ <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/neilson-john-shaw>

In 2014, now conscious of the ticking of the clock, he decided to produce an album of his own work. He had been writing songs for many years but they had not been shared with the wider public. His album *Ordinary Stories* included some wonderful songs, my favourites being *Hell out of Hackston* and *Sloebery Wine*. He uploaded the song *Home From The War* to Youtube, along with a very moving collection of photos, showing the starkness of war and its aftermath - see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DulKq8Oq_6Y. His plea: pay the powerful photos the respect they deserve by viewing them in the Full Screen option.

Rick had been an early winner of Port Fairy Folk Festival's Lawson-Paterson Award for Australian songwriting, so this album, which drew deeply on alt country, folk and country influences, was long overdue. Co-produced with multi-instrumentalist Hugh McDonald (Redgum), the album featured Dave Folley (Killjoys, Tex Perkins & The Band Of Gold) on drums, Dave Blight (Cold Chisel) on harmonica, acclaimed pedal steel guitarist Garrett Costigan, and James Clark on tuba, with supporting vocals from Heidi McDermott. He had gathered an all star cast to put down the tracks and it showed with the polished final product.



In the early nineties, Rick was diagnosed with Meniere's Disease ⁴, a debilitating inner ear disorder which results in a series of health issues. After some 5 years of treatment, he was still having two or three 12–13 hour vertigo attacks a year and it was obvious that something different was needed. It was at that stage that he discovered the Salt Skip program and how low salt living could effectively relieve Meniere's issues. In the subsequent 14 years, without diuretics or any other medication and relying solely on dietary control, he had only four attacks. For all practical purposes, he was cured, but would remain so only for as long as he maintained control over what he eat. He became a strong advocate for the reduction of salt (sodium in particular) from processed foods and from bread, and was a regular contributor to the *Salt Skip News* newsletter. ⁵

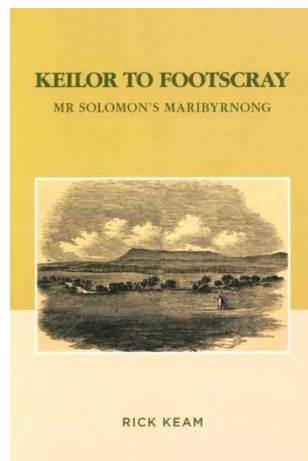
Meniere's was not Rick's only health challenge. Around 20 years ago, he was diagnosed with kidney cancer, undergoing the inevitable operation and subsequent chemotherapy regime. Since then, he had a number of battles with secondary cancers, the most recent one being the most serious and the one that would eventually end his life.

He had to wind back his fly fishing and adopt a more "sensible" lifestyle, one which was based around his home in West Footscray and his trips to hospital. But he was not one to go quietly and he embarked in a regime of walking, mainly along the paths adjacent to the Maribyrnong River. He was able to view the river from the perspective of a fly fisher, noting the deep pools, the flow of water season by season, the fords and the other distinctive features. This led him into exploring the history of this waterway and earlier this year he published his final book *Keilor to Footscray; Mr Solomon's Maribyrnong*. ⁶ It corrected a number of historical inaccuracies and was noted, on release, as an important new work.

4 Read more at <https://www.dizziness-and-balance.com/disorders/menieres/menieres.html>. Star Australian Rules footballer Brent Crosswell has battled the disease since the early 1990's and has been effectively house bound for many years.

5 See for instance http://www.salt-matters.org/newsletters/N_L_149.pdf

6 See <https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/product/keilor-to-footscray-mr-solomons-maribyrnong-by-rick-keam/>



Rick always maintained his interest in racewalking and would often send me historical snippets or photos that he had found while researching other unrelated historical matters on the Trove website. He would also come down and watch the occasional major race at venues such as Fawkner Park. The following pic was snapped at the 2006 Commonwealth Games walks at Docklands in Melbourne.



March 2006 – 4 old stagers at the Commonwealth Games – Rick, Tim Erickson, Ian Jack and Terry O'Neill

I shall miss our catchups, which were always filled with talk of world politics, history, sport and whatever else took our fancy.

To Rick's wife Lesley, we sent our deepest sympathies.

Gone but not forgotten.

Tim Erickson
12th November 2020