

The legacy of Mr. Robert (Bob) Ware

Prepared by Vesna Thon, Public Information Officer, SA Police with permission of Jan, Shelley and Aaron Ware. The Ware family have given permission for images contained in this story to be used by the media.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this story contains names and images of deceased people

In 1968, he was the first Aboriginal officer to graduate as a fully sworn officer with SA Police and indeed all of Australia. He was a devoted father of 2 – Aaron & Shelley Ware, loved and loving husband of Jan Ware and proud and committed community leader and elder. He was Bob Ware. He left a legacy and this story, this NAIDOC Week, honours his journey.

NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As such, it is fitting that a story be written about Bob who was committed and passionate about justice and fairness. A quietly spoken, unassuming, gentle soul, Bob pioneered the inclusion of Aboriginal officers within SA Police, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse police force which SA Police actively strives for to this day.

Bob Ware was born at the Koonibba Lutheran Mission in August 1948 and grew up on Colona Station/ Yalata Land where his Dad, Edmund Ware was Head Stockman. His Mother, Ruby Ware (nee Cox) died when he was a young boy.

He attended primary school at Coorabie Area School and then later as a young man, he attended Adelaide's Concordia College and then took up ranks and embarked on a three year training course at the Police Academy in Fort Largs, along with his other fellow Course 13 peers. His time at the Academy was a remarkable one. He loved the comradery and the teamwork that the course afforded. At the Police Academy he applied himself, working hard and diligently. His excellence and natural sporting talent awarded him the Michigan State Sports Trophy for his course. In 1968 Bob would graduate and embark on the next exciting chapter of his life.

On graduation from the Police Academy as a Probationary Constable, he was transferred to Murray Bridge following by a posting to Whyalla as a Constable. It was here that he would meet the woman who would become his wife, Janet Sullivan at a Red Cross Fundraiser and together they would move to different areas of South Australia for work and family life, including Adelaide and then to Mannum. Their family would soon grow with the birth of their two children - Shelley and Aaron.

Throughout his eight years with SA Police, his style of policing was gentle and kind but he knew how to be assertive when he needed to. As a Constable, Bob would work in the areas of Whyalla, Adelaide and Mannum. Both on and off duty, Bob had a strong awareness of situations around him and sharp perceptions of situations that didn't seem right. In Mannum, he apprehended a repeat offender who was stealing from shacks along the River, much to the delight of the local community. He also sported a broken arm for a time after he had chased an offender down and jumped a fence. He was incredibly proud to be a part of the police family and committed fully to his role. He relished in the team work that the police force offered to him. He was happy and fulfilled and felt the support of his team mates.

The pride he felt was also shared with many of those in Aboriginal communities. In Ceduna, Bob was looked up to as a role model- someone that others could look up to and this was seen in how almost every Aboriginal family in the Ceduna area had a picture of Bob in his Police uniform framed in their living room. Their sense of pride for Bob and his achievements with SA Police was enormous.

After challenges in the work place whilst working in Mannum, Bob chose to leave SA Police in the 70s where he then became the CEO of the newly formed Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, Adelaide. Around 12 months later, Bob and his family relocated to Ceduna where Bob would manage the Aboriginal Progress

Association. This was at a time when Aboriginal people were not instated in senior roles without a non-Aboriginal advisor to accompany them. This would provide the impetus for Bob to complete matriculation to enable him to be an independent administrator. At this time, whilst many children in Ceduna were sent to boarding schools to complete matriculation, this was not a feasible option for many of the local Aboriginal children. Bob enquired with the local Ceduna Area School about how to go about completing his matriculation. He was advised that a matriculation class would only be offered if there were 10 students. Eager to see this to completion, Bob set out and found the required number of students, which resulted in the first matriculation class to be offered at the Ceduna Area School. Bob's matriculation graduation day was an immensely proud one.

Bob then entered the Aboriginal Taskforce at the Adelaide University a national program initiated by Don Dunstan to encourage participation of Aboriginal people in tertiary education to foster their readiness to take on senior management roles. Here Bob put his values and passion into place by studying social work and administration.

After graduating from Adelaide University, Bob would go onto a number of senior roles where he applied the leadership and lessons he learnt at SA Police as well as the discipline he fostered through his tertiary studies. Bob was manager of Aboriginal Housing with SA Housing and then went on to be a manager at statewide Aboriginal Hostels Limited. Later, he would take on a number of other senior roles including with Department of Environment and Planning and later the Aboriginal Liaison and Heritage Advisor and Sacred Sites with Santos. His final position was in Ceduna as the manager of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission up until his death.

While he held these senior roles, Bob also played a significant support role in the clean-up of the Maralinga lands in the west coast of SA. Bob like many other Aboriginal people at the time was alarmed at how the area had been used by the British Army for the testing of atomic bombs which resulted in large scale displacement of families and communities. The area was ravaged and severely damaged by nuclear waste. Dissatisfied with what he saw, Bob along with others accompanied a group of Elders and travelled to England twice to lobby the Government for compensation to clean up the lands. They were successful in this request and supported the work of Maralinga Tjaratja to clean up and restore the land and return it to their traditional owners. Around this same time, Bob also had the greatest honour of being initiated in 1995 as an elder of his Wirangu-Yankunytjatjara people on the west coast.

Later, Bob would be invited to give the annual Australia Day Address in Oxford, England. Bob was also a talented sprinter, where he won over 30 gifts on the pro circuit but was most proud of the Maryborough Gift and the NSW State Championship.

Like all of us, Bob had his own personal battles and challenges, yet his calm, resilient and steady approach along with great support from his beloved family helped him to overcome proudly.

Bob passed away suddenly of cardiac arrest in January 2000 at 51 years of age – a proud man who accomplished more than what many do not achieve in a lifetime and left a great deal of unfinished work for others after him to pick up the baton and finish. At the time of his death, Bob was studying a Master of Business Administration. His pride and outlook on life continues to live on in his family who spoke so highly of him and are honoured to see his story shared.

Bob is survived by his proud family- Jan Ware, his daughter Shelley, her husband Steven and their son Taj, as well as by his son Aaron and his wife Amy with their two children, Atticus and Violet.

This NAIDOC Week 2021, we thank and remember Bob Ware for his service with SA Police and his commitment and achievements working with Aboriginal communities across SA.

Images below.



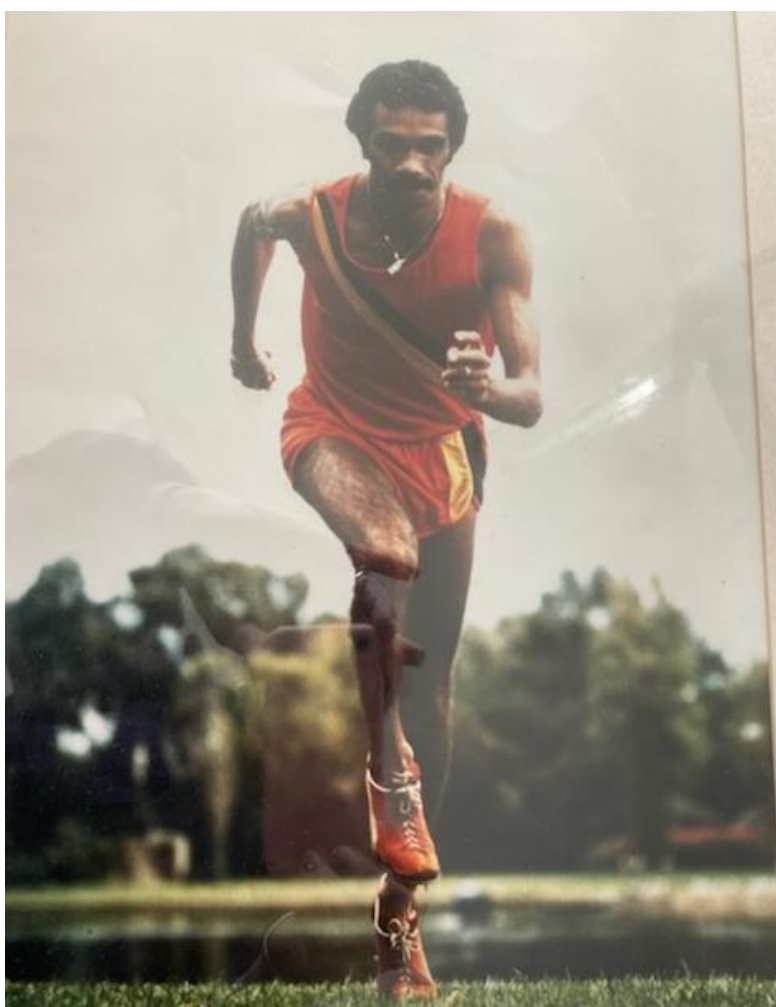
Bob with his Dad, Edmund



Jan Ware



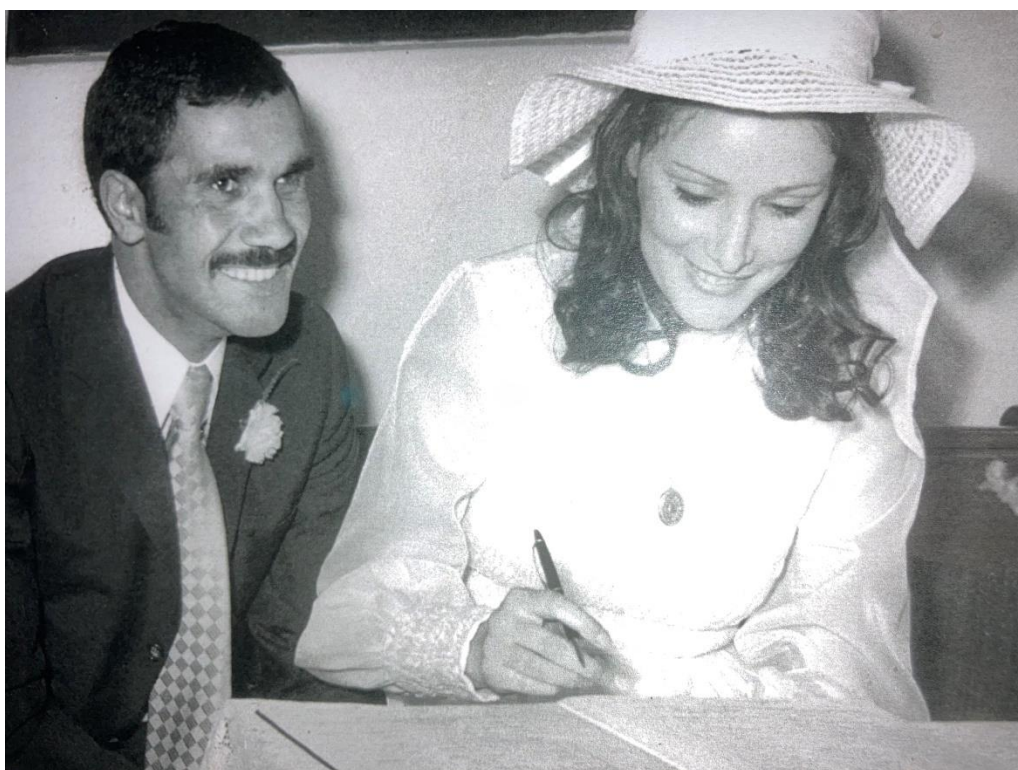
With his sports class at the Academy – Bob is in the front row second from the right



A talented sprinter



Bob, Jan, Shelley and Aaron Ware



Jan & Bob Ware on their wedding day, Sept 1971