

Tragic loss bonds a circle of friends

LEANNE EDMISTONE

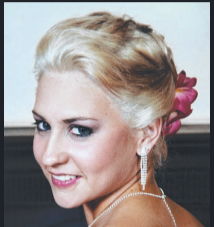
THEIRS is a mateship heavily tested.

A bond formed in classrooms and on footy fields now unbreakable through sudden loss, howling grief and the emptiness of knowing one is forever gone.

Where once there were seven, now there are six. Six young men who have finished apprenticeships, secured jobs or started their own business; who have celebrated 21st birthdays; who have moved out of home, out of town or the country; who have met nice girls and maybe thought about families of their own.

Six young men thrust into adulthood, shocked into confronting their own mortality and the stunning realisation of how precious and fragile life is.

Today marks five years since the deaths of Max Thorley, 18, Nick Nolan, 20, Brett McKenzie, 20, and his girlfriend Abby Ezzy, 17, in a horrific road



LIVES CUT SHORT: (From left) Max Thorley, Nick Nolan, Abby Ezzy and Brett McKenzie, who were killed in a tragic road crash (below) near Warwick five years ago.

accident which devastated the small community of Warwick. Most knew at least one of the young people killed when their car collided with a truck on the notorious Eight Mile intersection of the Cunningham Highway, which has since been upgraded.

Thorley's best mates Ben Sullivan, Tom Brassington, Shaun Fisher, Jesse McIvor, and brothers Hayden and Tyson McNicol were his pall bearers. They should

have been his workmates, flatmates and travel buddies. Together they shared tears, grief and dreams forever lost with thousands of soon-to-be drivers through the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service documentary *Sudden Impact*.

The film aimed to help make sense of Thorley's death, to warn of the risks.

"It makes you live every day to the fullest, it makes you realise just how easy it is that a life can be taken, it just makes you want to

be a better person," says Mr Sullivan, 22.

Older now, they are moving on with their lives. Mr Sullivan is working in airconditioning installation and playing footy in Brisbane. Mr Brassington, 23, is a construction foreman in Calgary, Canada, subtly trying to convince his girlfriend Alex to return to Australia with him.

Mr Fisher, 22, and his girlfriend Larissa moved to the Sunshine Coast, where he is a carpentry sub-contractor, while Mr McIvor, 22, is a driller for a mineral exploration outfit

in Cloncurry. The McNicol brothers have stayed in Warwick - Hayden, 23, has his own carpentry business and lives with his girlfriend Rebecca, while Tyson, 21, is a qualified boilermaker looking for a job in the mines.

Some gathered with family at the local pub to mark Max's birthday on December 8. Today the six will pay tribute to their mate, together if possible.

None can comprehend it has been five years since the accident.

"It's never going to be easy but you just learn how to cope," Mr Fisher says. "It doesn't matter if you're at work or you're at the pub or where you are, something little just triggers it and your mind goes off on a tangent."

For Mr Sullivan and Mr McIvor, it's a Matchbox Twenty or Oasis song on the radio, a moment at a party Thorley should have been the centre of. The McNicol brothers see him in the stars, Tyson often pausing to look up, have a chat and say "goodnight, miss you".



Victim's mates slam shock tactics' axing

A PROGRAM designed to protect young drivers by confronting them with the harsh reality of road deaths has been cut to save money.

The move has been condemned by friends of road victim Max Thorley, who bared their grief in a moving film in a bid to save others.

Sudden Impact was made for the QFRS Road Awareness and Accident Prevention program in July 2009, 18 months after the deaths of Mr Thorley and three others in a horrific crash outside Warwick.

The RAAP program has been delivered by local firefighters to almost 31,000 high school students annually for the past six years.

The Newman Government scrapped the program in December, saving \$150,000.

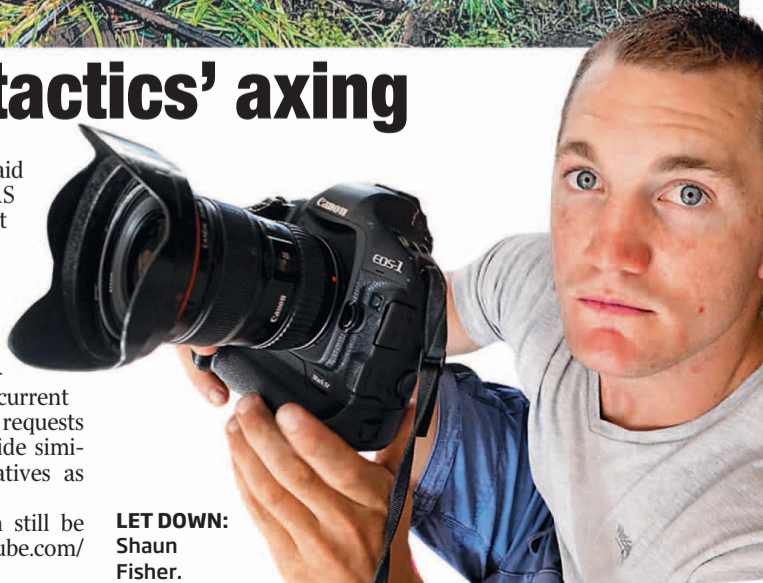
Shaun Fisher, 23, said he and his five friends were proud of the film. "It's not right the way they can cut that sort of program out to save money," he said. "If it can save one life ... it's worth it."

In a statement, a Department of Community Safety

spokeswoman said feedback to the QFRS suggested "significant changes" were needed to improve the way the program was delivered.

"While the QFRS is not reinstating RAAP in its current form, it will facilitate requests from schools to provide similar road safety initiatives as required," she said.

Sudden Impact can still be seen online at youtube.com/flickchicks



LET DOWN: Shaun Fisher.

Holidays take toll on drivers

KRIS CRANE

FIVE people died on Queensland roads over the Christmas holidays and police charged more than 30,000 with serious traffic offences.

Police rolled out the second phase of their Christmas Road Safety Campaign focusing on the Fatal Five between December 23 and January 3.

The 2012/2013 holiday fatality total was half that of the previous year.

The national holiday road toll finished at 56 deaths.

NSW topped the list with 15.

While fatalities were down, the number of serious offences committed alarmed police.

Over the 12-day period, officers issued 29,291 speeding offences, charged 978 drink-drivers, 40 drug-drivers, 626 drivers and passengers without a seatbelt and 568 drivers using their mobile phone.

State Traffic Support Branch Acting Superintendent Paul Fogg said he was very concerned by the number of people ignoring the road rules.

"It is certainly alarming to see so many road users speeding and drink-driving," he said. "The majority of traffic crashes are avoidable."

Queensland's 2013 road toll stood at two yesterday.



Call to rev up checks

SARAH VOGLER

THE state's peak motoring body is calling for more random vehicle inspections on Queensland roads after the Newman Government ruled out compulsory annual checks for private vehicles.

Transport Minister Scott Emerson has revealed about 70,000 random inspections were carried out each year on the state's roads and evidence showed compulsory checks were not necessary.

The RACQ agrees but said it would like to see the number of random inspections increase threefold.

RACQ spokesman Steve Spalding said random checks were the most effective way to detect dangerous vehicles but the inspection program needed to be better resourced to ensure about 10 per cent of vehicles were examined each year.

"That then creates an 'any time, any place' perception, much the same as random breath testing," he said.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than 2.4 million passenger vehicles are registered in Queensland, meaning about 240,000 random inspections would have to be carried out.

The 70,000 currently undertaken represents just under 3 per cent of cars.