



Speech by

**JO-ANN MILLER**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA**

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Hansard 31 July 2002

### **BOX FLAT MINE DISASTER**

**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (11.28 p.m.): This day 30 years ago 17 underground coalminers lost their lives in the Box Flat mine disaster. Another miner died some time later from injuries sustained in the explosion. A 30th anniversary Box Flat memorial service was held at 11 a.m. today at the memorial site at Box Flat, Swanbank. Members of the families of the miners, retired coalminers, retired members of the mines rescue squads and emergency services personnel attended the service. Students from Bremer State High School also attended and laid a floral wreath in memory of the miners. CFMEU officials and all Ipswich city councillors were present. Approximately 250 people attended the memorial service.

They say that time heals, but even after 30 years it is clear that our families were robbed of their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers and that the tears today that welled in their eyes were the same as they were 30 years ago. When I wrote the speech for the service I, too, was in tears, for only mining families understand what it is like to say goodbye day after day not knowing whether our men will come home. This was especially so if they worked the dog watch. It was the most difficult speech I have ever made, because as I looked around the memorial I could see the old miners wiping tears from their eyes. I could see women, young and old, clutching handkerchiefs and tissues, and the pain that they felt I felt, too. It is pain from the heart. It is pain from the soul. It is pain as real today as it was 30 years ago.

My father, George Pringle, was an underground miner at Southern Cross No. 10 colliery. He was with me today. My uncles, George Kitching and Allan Verrall, were also underground miners. My uncles were in the mines rescue squads on the surface at Box Flat ready to go down the mine on the next shift. My uncle Allan should have been one of the miners in the tunnel, but one of his mates took his place on that shift. That is what saved his life.

The mateship in the tradition of underground miners was evident today at the service. The retired miners came from near and far to catch up, to draw tunnels in the air, to talk about the contract days, to reminisce about their mates who have passed on and to pay their respects to the Box Flat men who lost their lives, for they knew that the Box Flat miners were the same as they were all those years ago. They also left their homes and families in health and strength with no thought that death was near.

Today's service was organised in large part by Councillor Andrew Antonelli and the CFMEU mining division, with numerous sponsors. On behalf of the mining families of Ipswich, I thank them for their commitment. Let it be the collective aim of this parliament that there is never again a need for more memorials and that our coalminers remain healthy and safe in Queensland.

Motion agreed to.