

## A LIFE STORY

# Life's best prize: Working hard at work worth doing

**John (Frank) Sephton**

**Baldwin:** b Nelson, December 30, 1931; m Erica Strange, 2s, 2d; d Nelson, March 13, 2013, aged 81.

**F**RANK BALDWIN is best remembered in Wellington as chief executive of the Wellington Harbour Board, where he was an agent of waterfront development.

In this post, which he held from 1983-87, he was a catalyst for change, particularly in terms of Lambton Harbour Development. He visited waterfront developments in Baltimore, San Francisco, London and Sydney before setting about making changes in Wellington.

All this travel happened at a time when behind the scenes the then Mayor of Wellington, Ian Lawrence, was talking about the need for port redevelopment.

Mr Baldwin's time at the helm was recorded as being that of a "stiff broom" in one official port history.

He arrived in Wellington with a reputation for being "a very direct, straightforward fellow" after successfully overhauling the Nelson Harbour Board.

He had a clear vision of what was needed in Wellington and during his time the concept arose where everything north of Wellington Railway Station would remain part of the commercial port operation.

Areas south of that, including the Taranaki St roll-on, roll-off ferry berth, would eventually be returned to the city in one form or another.

In 1987, Mr Baldwin was appointed chief executive of the new Airways Corporation, where he oversaw the introduction of a new nationwide air traffic control system – under budget and on time.

Former civil aviation and state-owned enterprises minister Richard Prebble observed in a 1993 article in the *Nelson Evening Mail* that Mr Baldwin saved the New Zealand taxpayer at least \$150 million in one move after taking over at Airways.

"The bureaucrats wanted to spend \$300m upgrading air traffic control systems. It sounded to me like a Think Big project. They were using all the trigger words like leading edge and state of the art.

"But it was hard for me to argue against it. Baldwin came in and saw through it straight away. He got an off-the-shelf system and put out a tender for a turn-key operation.

"That means you don't take possession until it's installed and working. The system was installed for \$57m. It was unique in the world. No-one had ever installed a whole new system in one move before," Mr Prebble was quoted as saying.

In 1991, Mr Baldwin was lured to Canberra to do the same thing as managing director of the Australia Civil Aviation Authority.

In Australia he carried out what one staff member there referred to as the "mother of all purges" before returning to



**Frank Baldwin:** A catalyst for change for Lambton Harbour.

Wellington in 1993.

Back in Wellington he was chief executive of Landcorp New Zealand and then executive chairman of Government Property Services Ltd.

His father Percy was one of the pioneers of the heavy transport industry in Nelson.

At the end of World War 1 Baldwin Sr moved from

Wellington to Nelson and purchased some Albion trucks to haul timber out of the Rai Valley. Frank Baldwin's mother Dorothy lived in the Rai Valley and worked as a nurse in Blenheim.

A few years after Frank's birth his father merged his trucking business with seven other heavy transport operators in the Nelson region and formed Transport Nelson Ltd.

Young Frank, who had a special aptitude for numbers and organisational efficiency, became his father's son during his childhood at the family home at 176 Nile St in Nelson.

From an early age he exhibited a flair for figures. After leaving school he studied accountancy and book-keeping and worked as an administrator at Nelson law firm Knapps.

Mr Baldwin was an accomplished sportsman. He played basketball for New Zealand and represented Nelson in four sports – rugby, cricket, athletics and basketball.

He met his wife Erica Strange, who lived in Miramar, Wellington, through a mutual involvement in basketball in the mid-1950s. They married in the Hataitai Methodist Church.

By 1964, before moving on to the world of real estate and port management, Mr Baldwin had, in his own words, a burning desire to use his energy, drive, initiative, personality and knowledge "in my own business for my family's benefit".

Between 1966 and 1978, he and Barry Brown went into partnership as real estate agents in the Nelson-Tasman region.

Mr Baldwin was a person who applied maximum effort to whatever he did. He was not a yes man and believed that "far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing".

**TIM DONOGHUE**

Sources: Tony Baldwin, Neville Baldwin, Robbie Dyce, Nigel Gould and Karl du Fresne.

A Life Story tells about a New Zealander who helped to shape their community. If you know someone whose story should be told, email [obituaries@dompost.co.nz](mailto:obituaries@dompost.co.nz).