

## My Mum and Dad

### Dad

My dad, Henry William Baker was born 12.2.1892 in North Hampshire in Tasmania.

He was orphaned at the age of 2 years and spent the next 10 years in an orphanage in Glenorchy Tasmania. He was put to work at once, with 3-4-year old's teaching him with I guess an older child in charge.

Glenorchy was a Catholic self-contained farming Orphanage, managed by Brothers of farming abilities, including chooks (for eggs and meat for all), sheep, milking cows and wheat. With the wheat they would have cracked grain for porridge, flour and grain for the chooks and pigs.

All the work was done by boys of various ages and the Brothers. At some time, the boys were schooled. But I don't think there was too much of this as my father could not read or write very well (my mother taught him after they were married).

One thing my dad loved was when one of the Brothers would read from the newspaper, especially articles about the Boer War in South Africa. The War correspondent was Andrew Barton (Banjo) Patterson for the Gazzet Newspaper. The Sydney Morning Herald also published Banjo Paterson's poems; this is why he became so well known.

When dad was 12 years old, he was taken out of this place by an uncle of the same name; because dad was considered old enough to do a man's job. This uncle was very cruel and dad was often belted with the Cat of nine tails. Eventually another Aunt and Uncle took dad for a holiday to Melbourne in the Mainland (he was still 12 years old). The boat trip took several days. Right from the time the boat left Tasmania, dad had made up his mind that he was not going back. The last night of their trip was the night dad was going to disappear. But before he left, he heard his Aunt and Uncle talking. He heard the words "it's time to tell him, he has a right to know, he is old enough". But dad didn't wait, so he did not get to know what this great thing was - "he has the right to know". However, a few years back from now, a member of our family was studying Genealogy and she was delving into my father's life. She discovered that dad's Grandfather on his mothers' side had been deported from England as a Convict. His name was Murphy. Dad's mother's name was Agnes Murphy. So perhaps this is what the Uncle and Aunt wanted to tell him. This is something my father was not aware of and I'm thankful that he never knew, as I think he would have taken it badly as he was always a very hard-working man and as honest as they come.

Dad was only 12, but very wise for his age. When he left his Aunt and Uncle, he went to the Police Court House kitchen and obviously appealed to the women staff, who fed and hid him in the potato shed (he slept on the bags of potatoes, probably covered with the potato sack). He worked in the kitchen with the ladies doing the washing up for them for a small fee so that they could get off early to go out with their boyfriends. Dad was there for some

2

time and eventually got a job at the IXL Jam Factory. He worked there till he was about 19 years old, then went to South Australia to the Barossa Valley wine making place.

He continued working till he was in his early 20's. He was staying with a family of Mormons and in this family were daughters. The father of these girls had my dad in mind for a future son-in-law, but my dad was not coming to the party- so he did a moonlight flit!

Dad made his way to West Wyalong. Being brought up in farming, he wished he had enough money to buy some land here as he loved the soil. This is an excellent wheat growing area, however he kept on moving and eventually settled with the Melvil family a little South West of Peak Hill NSW., later closer to Peak Hill with the Newbigging family. It was here with a couple of the Melvil boys that they enlisted for the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. They were amongst the first 1200 to enlist. My dad's Number in the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse was 1226 (he had not yet met my mother).

They sailed out of Albany WA, for Europe and towards the battlefields. During the war dad had a horse called 'Chunda', a Waler (breeding origin in New South **Wales**) These horses were collected from the North West corner of NSW bordering on South West corner of Queensland and South Australia. This is dry sandy land with little water and not a great deal of feed. They were a tough breed with larger hooves, which allowed them to move faster in the sand, making them more suitable in the sands of Egypt and Turkey. They could work all day without water which proved good in battle. It was Banjo Paterson who persuaded the army to use these horses (Dad remembered the Newspaper readings by Banjo Paterson as a small boy). I don't know where dad got the name 'Chunder' from, but dad said his horse was shot from under him towards the end of the war.

Dad came home uninjured, but always suffered from Shell-shock. Any sudden sharp noise would affect him greatly. To my knowledge dad reached the title of Lance Corporal. He had been offered higher rank but he refused to take it. He said he would not send a soldier into battle, but he would lead them and he kept to his word.

He had promised himself- if he got through this war he was going to 'live it up' in Sydney for 12 months before he settled down, which is what he did. He heard that blocks of 620 acres of land in the Peak Hill district was being thrown open for farmers who had returned from the war. The land thrown open was from a very large Land Loan Lease from the government to early settlers on a 99-year lease, so this land called 'Ganagi' was taken out in 1819 or 20.

Dad was lucky enough to draw a very good property which he called 'Glenorchy' (from the orphanage- the only home he knew). It took only a few years to find out the 620 acres was not enough to make living on. Too many farmers went broke, many of these just walked off the land. So, the Government doubled the size of the land and all of them had 1240 acres. Dad was lucky in that a large dam was already on his block. All the farmers had some stock to water. Dad gave everyone the right to water their stock for 12 months. All bar one farmer sunk a dam, but dad stuck to his word. That farmer had to beg water from other

3  
farmers. Dads block was very heavily timbered and had to be cleared before he could plant a crop. He already had sheep and a few cows and horses, there were no tractors at this point, only horse teams. Dad employed a man to help clear the timber but he only lasted 3 days. "Harry worked like a steam engine" this man said "I can't keep up with you, you work like an elephant". Then walked off and left dad to it! When the timber had been felled and burnt, the paddock then had to be ploughed with a disc plough- this had one sharp pointed blade, drawn by one or two horses. Usually one, as the machine needs to be held with both hands. The horse's reins were put around the farmers neck being placed over the head with the reins coming from the horse to both hands. The purpose being to now bring all the tree roots from under the ground to the surface, it was then left to the off sider (later my mother) to stack up the roots and burn them. This had to be done before the land could be ploughed and a crop sown. The farmers terminology for picking up the roots was called 'Emu -Bobbing'. You needed a good strong back, but it had to be done.

It stands to reason that one of the first things dad had to do was build something to live in, so with all the timber that was felled, he sawed enough timber to build a two roomed hut. One bedroom and the other a living room. One end of the living room was bricked in- a fireplace for winter. This was big enough to hold a 3foot length log, which he had plenty of, and a fuel-wood stove for cooking. These two rooms were 12foot square. All the walls were sawn timber lengths nailed side by side. As the timber dried out and shrunk it left ¼ inch cracks which let in plenty of fresh air, especially in the winter. The hut was not lined or sealed until dad was married, only then the bedroom was done! This was the home dad took his wife to. (As the family grew, so did the house to five rooms and 3 verandas, until dad bought a big house in Peak Hill to be closer to the doctor. This would have been in 1948-49). After dad had got settled on his farm and could now make a living, he met my mother.

## Mum

Ethel May Foulkes 1895-1970. Daughter of William Pelsworth Foulkes of Peak Hill and Supervisor of the Open Cut Gold Mine. Peak Hill bears the title of being the town with the largest 'Man-made Open Cut Mine' in the Southern Hemisphere, but today is being mined with machinery. Mum started work when she was about 17 in Millers Hotel and later at the Roach Stock & Station Agency. She was well liked and treated as one of the family.

My parents were married in 1922 ( Mum had a wedding photo above her bed and one day Jan 2 ½ recognised the photo and burst into tears and exclaimed broken heartedly "Oh Nana, why didn't you have me for your flower girl?" that took a bit of explaining and an early lesson on the birds 'and bees!)

My brother Ken was born in January 1924. Mum had just finished feeding her baby and laid him on a chair with the latest newspaper on it while she got out of her chair. As she picked the baby up the paper rattled and out wriggled a snake! This house was still surrounded by bushes and wild life was plentiful. Later Mum reared turkeys for pocket money (snakes and

X  
turkeys do not get on, so there were fewer snakes) Back in those days there were no such things as washing machines, so everything was washed by hand. To add to their problems water was scarce as hens' teeth. Washing when possible was done weekly or fortnightly (or many times once a month). Life was tough at that time but tougher still on the early settlers.

Mum was a diabetic, but not known until 1942 and would often collapse. One day dad came home from work and found her on the ground under the clothesline with ants all over her. He brushed off as many ants as he could and picked her up and carried her inside and cleaned her up and covered the bite marks with their famous 'Cut-a-care' ointment. Not on the market today, personally I think it really runs rings around this type of ointment today. After this episode dad asked mum not to go outside till he was home, but he always took her for a 1 ½ mile walk every evening – but not alone. In tow were 3 kids, 2 or 3 dogs, 4 or 5 pet lambs a poddy calf and a pig (love to see that on TV!). The pig was rescued by mum when she was out rounding up sheep with dad. Obviously taken by a hawk, and dropped into the sheep feeding. The sheep would have surrounded the little pig out of curiosity preventing the hawk from retrieving his prize and of course when Mum saw it, it was added to our collection of pets. A calf was given to mum every Christmas by an old school friend who now owned a dairy that supplied Peak Hill with milk.

Dad worked hard all his life and the doctors found out that he had a large heart and asked if he was an athlete. He wasn't of course but did heavy work even as a kid and his favourite sport was tennis, which he was very good at, and this he played when work would slow. There were tennis courts on Uncle Dave's property which was central to the district and laid out and fenced, by a collection of farmers. Sunday was tennis day. There would be a collection of about 20 families. The ladies would provide the lunches in the long shed the men had made. The front of the shed was open and facing the courts, the spectators would sit and watch until it was time for lunch and they would lay out a feast. Among this feast were Harry Bakers sandwiches. Dad made these instead of mum as mum said she could not cut the bread ¼ inch thick like dad. Her sandwiches she called 'door stops' filled with meat, pickles and salad. All the work men gave her the credit of making the best man-size sandwiches in the district. Mum believed in giving working men a good feed. Dad's sandwiches were very thin bread. Mustard (lots of) ham only, or with tomato and ham or tomato, ham and cheese as well as just tomato or cheese. The mustard sandwiches were always on a special plate and as the men came off the court, they would ask where are Harry's sandwiches. Obviously, there were some men that that liked mustard as he certainly put a lot on. The bread back then must have stayed fresher than today's bread because we got our bread with the Friday mail and it was still fresh on Sunday. One Friday I rode my young pony to get the mail 1 ½ mile away and there were 11 loaves of bread to bring home in a chaff bag. My pony was flighty and objected to that bag hanging on the side of her. So, I no sooner got on her and she hit off in a gallop. I tried to reign her in, but no go. She had taken between her teeth and no matter how hard I pulled back, it had no effect so she galloped the 1 ½ miles home- even flew over a 6 foot creek about 30 inches

deep ( we should have landed at the bottom of this- with a couple of broken necks!). However when we eventually got to the horse yard, this pony was white all over with sweat and dad was in the yard at this time and one look at the pony and he screamed out "What have you done to that pony?" dad loved his horses and would not harm them in any way. I wasn't happy either, I dismounted, dropped the bread without speaking. Dad walked the pony for about ½ hour, then watered her. Bought her back to the tack shed and combed and groomed her and fed her, picked up the bread and came home. He had calmed down somewhat and asked me in a more gentle tone "What went wrong?" I told him she did not like the bag on her side, she took her bit between her teeth and I could not hold her. "What about the creek?" "She just flew over it". Dad shook his head. "You should both be at the bottom of it". You could see that dad was thankful for small mercies. He looked at the precious bread, it was perfect! So, his mustard sandwiches went to tennis after all. And my pony was fine thanks to dad.

My dad loved and appreciated his horses and worked an 8- horse team right after the World War Two. When my brother Ken came home from the air force, he decided to buy a tractor. He sold his team but made sure they went to a good home. We were left with a couple of ponies. my mother was a sick lady all her life Her mother had died when she was 6 years old. She died in a coma; it was not till 1942 that we found out that Mum was a diabetic. My dad was the best husband (& dad) in the world. He bought a nice big home in Peak Hill for her to be close to the doctor. Dad now took up bowls and turned out to be good at it, winning many prizes. He still worked on the farm till he was 92 years old.

He lost mum in 1970, then he came to live with me in Balranald for 3 years. He was supposed to be hard of hearing but on the last occasion that I took him to the doctor, he overheard the doctor ask me if I was still living a social life of my own, and said "You need to." Unfortunately, dad heard this. The next day he came to me and said "I'm going to put myself in a Nursing Home". This was a great shock as dad and I got on very well, so my answer was "I can't do this Dad." Dad abruptly answered, "then I will get Ken to make inquiries at the Parkes Salvation Army Home". Dad really admired the Salvos, he always spoke about how they were right up in the front line in the First World War. Dad was there till he was 97 years old. I hated losing him from my home, but I know now that he did the right thing for himself. As he eventually needed much more nursing care which he got there, and was very happy too, as one of his old friends was in there too. When he first went there, they both used to sneak out and go down town to buy a whisky. They were great mates and a pair of villains. Dad died on 28.3.1989 and was laid to rest beside mum and their headstones are both the same.

Dear Chris, I hope you get some pleasure out of this, though I'm sure I have missed out on a lot too,

All the best and love to you all

From Grandma

