

**Margaret Anne Hornby - nee Stewart
1878-1959**



Margaret (centr) and Pop stepping out

Remembering Grandma

I have written some of these memories I have of Grandma Hornby for members of the family who may be interested. They have been written with love and a great deal of nostalgia. She was very much part of my growing up years and I did seem to spend a lot of time with her. Every day some memory of something she did or said seems to pop into my head. Perhaps your memories are just as precious to you.

Grandma would talk to me a lot and she would often tell me something she remembered of her life. Subjects would crop up in an incidental way and she would recall an experience and tell me about it. I also remember that Granma never let the exact truth get in the way of a good story. I loved her greatly.

She grew up on a small farm outside Melbourne. Her family consisted of at least two brothers and one sister. She herself was very fair with sandy coloured hair (I only remember it as white) but her father and brothers were very dark with black beards. That probably

accounts for the dark colouring of some family members.

Her father, she told me, had Tuberculosis or Consumption as it was known then. They must have been aware of how contagious the condition was, because her father did not live in the main house but in a room separate and meals were taken to him in his isolation. The isolation must have worked, because no-one else in the family apparently contracted the disease.

She had at least one sister, but she didn't mention her much and I had the impression they didn't get on too well. She apparently didn't get on with her mother too well either. On one occasion G'ma had to do the ironing and when she took it to her mother who for some reason was still in bed, she was told it wasn't good enough. G'ma lost her temper and threw the ironing at her mother.

My father told me he remembered visiting the Stewart family as a small child and he hated going there because everything always smelled of kerosene, and they always wore black clothes. I suppose they had kerosene lamps and it was also used for cleaning. Black clothes were always worn in those days by anyone over forty. I don't know why. Perhaps it was to have something ready for the funeral.

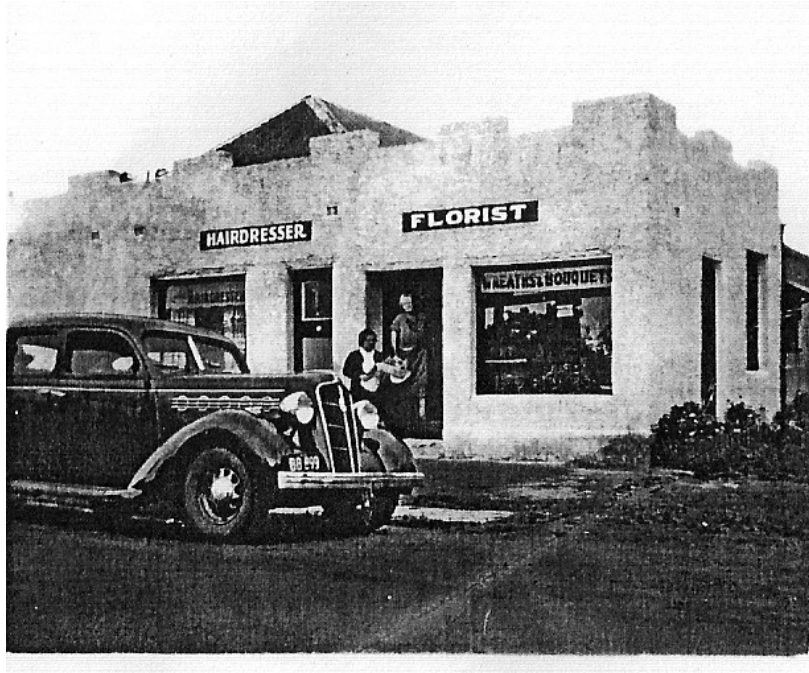
Kerosene was always the main ingredient in G'mas medicine chest. She used to give a few drops on a teaspoon of sugar to people with asthma, I was included, so I remember that well. It's a wonder we survived! When she lived at Flora Street, behind the shop, she had to have part of the kitchen floor repaired. While the boards were pulled up she went through the door quickly, forgetting the hole, and crashed down into it. She hurt her chest badly and out came the kerosene. She rubbed it on with great vigour and waited for the cure. However all that happened was the appearance of enormous blisters.

My mother called the doctor (Dr Miles) against her protests and he was horrified - told her he couldn't attend to her broken ribs until he cured the burns!

On another occasion G'ma had some tar paper that had been used in packing or something and she decided it would be good for lighting the copper. She had a fuel copper for washing and boiling hams and things. Anyhow she lit the copper with the paper and it flared up quickly and blew out of the fire and wrapped around her ankle. She had the most horrible burn and was in agony. For once the kerosene didn't come out, but she left the paper where it was, didn't try to pull it off, and wrapped a bandage firmly around it all. That stayed on for quite some time. When the bandage finally came off the paper came too and she was left without a mark. That was one of G'ma's cures that worked.

Poor G'ma suffered for many years with an ulcer on her ankle, not the one that was burnt, and tried every cure she could find. I don't know if the kerosene cure was ever tried, but I often went with her to

visit various “healers” to get different ointments. She always walked on her toes on that foot and always wore high heeled shoes. I can't remember seeing her in a pair of slippers or sensible shoes. Every day she would dress the ulcer with new dressings and the bandages were washed. Apparently she put a spade through her ankle when she was in her forties, probably at Dorrigo and the wound never healed.



2 Flora St Sutherland - now a caryard

She had extremely fine fair skin. I can still see her lying on her bed with her foot in the air while she attended to her ankle. She hated anyone to see it and would cover it quickly if she was caught unawares. he also suffered for many years with a bad heart. I don't know the correct medical term for her condition but when she had an attack she would put a tablet under her tongue. I've always understood that she had a heart attack when she died. But thankfully she had a short and merciful death and didn't linger or suffer indignities like many others I have known. (She died instantly, I was there David).

Her bad heart gave her a wonderful excuse to carry a small flask of brandy (for medical purposes only! I think she invented the term.) in case of need. Once a light bulb exploded when we were living at No2 Flora Street, and I screamed. That was good enough for G'ma, she gave me a sip for my nerves. I also inherited that trait- I enjoy a calming drink, especially at 5pm.

I have a lot of memories of the florist shop, because not only was I there when G'ma was in charge but also for some years when my mother took over. After that my Aunt Et had the shop for some time. Grandma certainly had an artistic flair. She could take any bunch of flowers and create something beautiful. I remember the excitement

when there was a big funeral. I think the Olsens from the funeral parlour would give the alert and preparations began for sometimes dozens of wreaths. As they were constructed they were put on the cement floor in the cool, until they were needed. G'ma couldn't see the need to construct new straw bases for the wreaths and she and my mother would make raids on the tip at the back of the crematorium and collect re-usable bases. They probably started out as theirs anyway. I occasionally was sent if there was a rush on. Original re-cycling!

She had been known to nip down to the park in Linders St too, if flowers were short, but only after dark. As I grew older I could be sent on errands to collect flowers, frangipani, for bridal bouquets or gardenias and sometimes even bunches of dahlias or Shasta daisies if they were needed in a hurry. Occasionally I delivered flowers to the top of Sydenhain Station where a man met me and gave me the money. I had strict instructions not to leave the platform and to catch the very next train back. I don't remember being frightened but I didn't go off on adventures of my own either.

Sometimes Joan and I would be sent together. One place we went belonged to German migrants. They grew beautiful flowers but not in any great quantity so Joan and I could manage them between us. Their house had a wide side veranda and on that veranda they kept their spare bedding piled high. Joan and I made up stories about them being spies and that the two-way radio was hidden in the mattresses. We never caught them transmitting but not for lack of trying.

G'ma loved doing wedding bouquets and she made really lovely ones. It is a pity that no photographic record was ever kept. She would not have been happy with to-day's custom of choosing the bouquet from a catalogue. Every one she made was individually suited to the bride with a great deal of care.

There were two shops in the building at Flora St. The one beside the florist was used over the years for several different purposes from tearoom to store room. At one stage she rented it to a hairdresser called Pauline. Unknown to G'ma, Pauline had some mental condition and was on medication. While she took it everything was fine but there was a day when she had some sort of turn.

Joan and I were at home at Hornby Ave with G'ma when she had a call to come to the shop. Joan and I of course went too. There was poor Pauline walking around the lawn at the side of the shop with an enamel basin on her head singing God Save the King.

The doctor and an ambulance were called and Joan and I hidden behind the couch, because we weren't supposed to be there at that stage, witnessed it all.

The poor girl thought the doctor had come to take her out.

Instead she went to Callen Park. When she recovered she came to live not far from G'ma and G'ma would go to see her, with me in tow of course. I don't know what happened to Pauline in the end. Perhaps Joan does.

When G'ma left the shop she bought a parcel of land in what is now known as Hornby Ave. The house on the land was pretty decrepit but G'ma used her talents and made it quite comfortable and pleasant. Pop spent his time gardening and grew all sorts of flowers and plants. At one stage they even had a cow. Joan, Judith and Pat lived there for a while so they would know a lot more of those years than me. We were living in Armidale then and I only went there for holidays.

G'ma always had a flair with clothes and design and could make something literally out of nothing. Once I was with her and she was actually getting dressed to go to the Highland Gathering in Sydney. She had made a new outfit but didn't have time to finish it. So she pinned the skirt to the bodice, covered it with one of the many sashes she always had and went off looking as smart as possible. That was when she told me that her mother always said she would be sorry if one day she had an accident and people saw what she wore underneath. So she obviously had always been the same. At the time her mother was remonstrating her, people made their own underwear and a great deal of time was given to embroidery and trimmings.

Some fashion advice given to me by G'ma; wear white gloves to a wedding and black to a funeral, the more you put on the better you look, don't wear everything new at once, don't go out looking like a workman's wife in her best clothes! The second piece of advice I go along with.

When she and Pop had moved to Dorrigo her mother came to visit. She was appalled at the living conditions she saw and said, "Maggie, what have you come to?" and left the very next day. I understood that living conditions at Dorrigo were very primitive and not at all like her home in Melbourne.

When she and Pop were first married they lived quite grandly and entertained a lot. She told me about dinner parties she gave and about setting the table beforehand. They would have sculptured ice pieces for the table centre and a great deal of time was spent deciding the menu. I don't think she had a cook but I understood there was a maid to wait at table. After one such party, my father who was about three, got up early the following morning and drained all the wine and liqueur bottles., unbeknown to G'ma of course. He became quite ill and G'ma had to call the doctor. She was horrified when the doctor told her would be all right in a little while because he was only drunk.

Grandma always impressed on me the importance of having the table set properly, especially if guests were expected. The table

should be set before they arrived even if it was only a simple meal. I always try to do this even to this day. I can feel G'mas presence.

I was staying with G'ma in Oakwood St, it must have been before the war because Uncle Ray still lived at home. For some reason my parents were away and there was only the four of us for tea. Suddenly G'rna realised the time and that Uncle Ray would be home soon. I think he must have had to go out again because there was a great deal of rushing around. But first the table had to be set. The white starched cloth, the flowers, the serviettes in their silver rings and everything just so.

When Uncle Ray came shortly after we were sat down and given fruit salad and cream. Have your sweets first said G'ma, while I think what we'll have next. I was most impressed.

I wonder what she would have thought of today's lifestyle with take-aways and eating in front of the TV. I think she would have approved of the take-aways but not of eating them on our laps.

G'ma was a good cook, although creative and not prone to following recipes. I've inherited that trait. But one Christmas Pop, who loved Christmas, was bemoaning the fact that it wasn't the same without Jugged Hare, a traditional English Christmas dish. So G'rna decided to give him a treat and somehow she found a recipe. I don't know if it really was hare or rabbit as you could buy rabbit easily in those days. Anyhow, the great cooking day arrived, all the ingredients assembled and the hare/rabbit went to the pot. It was probably Christmas Eve and it was very hot. All at once everyone noticed this dreadful smell. "Whatever are you cooking?" asked Pop who by then was probably used to G'ma's individual recipes, "Jugged Hare", replied G'ma.

"That's not Jugged hare!" said Pop. It turned out the first line of the recipe that G'ma used, said, "First hang your hare for 1 week". That would be ok in December in England, but certainly not in Australia. We never ever had Jugged Hare for Christmass.

At Flora St we had Christmas cook-ups I remember is when she had the florist shop in Flora St. It was a very old building with a residence at the back where G'ma and Pop lived and my family also lived for a time. The kitchen facilities like the rest of the house were very antiquated and there was an ancient fuel stove in the kitchen that hadn't been lit for probably 50 years.

Someone gave G'ma a sucking pig for Christmass dinner (she was always being given things from customers and people who happened to be there).

Being wartime it could even have been a Black Market purchase as G'ma could never resist a bargain, but more about that later. Well, as she only had a small electric stove and as there was no way the

sucking pig was going to fit in the oven, she decided to light the fuel stove.

One of the boys was called in to provide the wood and after much huffing and blowing and smoke the fire was lit. With great ceremony the pig was put in the oven, I even think it had an apple in its mouth and G'ma went off to the shop to serve the many people who visited the cemetery on Christmas Day.

Someone decided to check the pig several hours later only to find the fire had gone out and the pig was still raw. Nothing daunted G'ma chopped the poor dthing into smaller pieces an cooked it bit by bit in the small oven. I can't remember what it tasted like because at that stage of my life I was more interested in puddings (with threepences and sixpences of course) and the cakes and lollies that always turned up at Christmas.

G'ma made quite a few Black Market purchases during the war .Because she had a shop there often seemed to be some travelling salesman with a large suitcase hovering around. Sheets and towels and all linen was in short supply and took many coupons even if you could get them. On this occasion both she and my mother bought linen sheets. They were both thrilled with their purchases. So the old copper boiler was lit and the sheets went into the wash.

Imagine their dismay to find that they were only made of muslin that had been drenched in some cheap powder to make them look like linen. All the powder came out in the copper and they were left with yards of muslin. They never saw that salesman again.

Some years ago when Des and I had a house at Emerald Beach, near Coffs Harbour, we decided to go for a trip to Dorrigo. Quite an easy run for a day trip. We went to the Historical Society there and kind hearted woman went to all sorts of trouble for us to find out just where Pop had selected the land.



Farmhouse at Dorrigo. Standard settler's house financed by the Crown

We even met a very old man who remembered G'ma and Pop being at a local wedding when he was a boy. The impression we got was Pop was known as the English Gentleman and not the Pommie Bastard!

However we finally tracked it down and far from being the wild bush country it was then, it is now a very prosperous looking farm with a nice brick house.

It is in a part called Megan and the boys went to school at Leigh near the Little Murray River. Kel Nagle quite a famous Australian golfer also went to the same little bush school and my father, being a keen golfer himself, was always proud of that. In later years when my parents lived at Armidale they always went back to Dorrigo for the golf tournaments.

However it was quite a different place when the Hornbys arrived to take up their selection. Why they ever decided to go there has never been properly explained and I can only suppose that Pop had kept in touch with his old schoolmaster, Mr Dowling, and as the Dowlings were already established at Dorrigo, perhaps they encouraged Pop to join them.

The story goes that Pop went into the Land's Office in Melbourne and selected the land from a map, sight unseen. I don't know what he imagined it to be like but it must have been a shock to arrive after an

arduous boat trip to find completely virgin Australian bush. They must have started a dairy herd because G'ma used to milk the cows and they also had pigs.

This was in 1906 and my father was nearly 4 and Guy had not been born or was a tiny baby as there was about four years between the first two boys. Len and Ray were both born at Dorrigo. Len was named after a Bank Manager who probably helped them get established.

When Ray was born G'ma told me she was very ill and all the work on the farm had to be done by Pop and the boys. G'ma said there was great commotion one day as Pop burst into the sickroom calling "Maggie, Maggie, the pigs are out!" According to G'ma the mid-wife gave him a thick ear.

My father said that the only work Pop did was to grow a lovely green lawn with a white picket fence around it because his boys could not play cricket in a paddock.

They had been there about ten years when Pop sailed off to England to work in a munitions factory during the First World War. G'ma said that the Dorrigo people always said the best man stayed home.

My father had to be sent to school in Armidale as he suffered greatly with Bronchial Asthma and the coastal climate didn't suit him. He used to travel from Dorrigo to Armidale by bullock dray. When going up the mountain it was faster to walk and it took several days, staying overnight along the way.

He stayed at the Boy's Hostel in Armidale and attended Armidale High School. He got his Intermediate Certificate there and by that time the war had ended and he left school as things on the home front were not too good. Pop did not come home to Australia straight away but had a holiday touring around England. That was the last straw for G'ma and soon after they went to Sydney. I think they must have just walked off the farm as their financial situation deteriorated after that.

By 1920 they were living in Sydney and my father, because he was very ill again, was sent to a place called New Angeldool in the far NW corner of NSW to work as a jackaroo. The climate there suited him and by the time he was 21 he ended up managing the property and was engaged to the owner's daughter. For whatever reason the engagement was broken off and Dad returned to Sydney.

Grandma had some sort of dressmaking business but I don't think Pop had returned from England or if he had I don't know what he did. When Pop finally settled back in Australia they bought the house (or built it) in Oakwood Street, Sutherland. They apparently had an ex-Serviceman's loan or grant to enable them to do that.

Mum told me that Pop had some sort of Real Estate business but sold plants on the side. That's probably how his love of gardening and growing things began. I always remember him growing flowers and cutting and bunching them for market, or the Florist Shop, but that came later.

By the time i arrived on the scene they were well established in Oakwood Street and Pop had the most beautiful garden. He had two

magnificent lemon trees and whenever I smell a really fresh lemon I mentally go back to Oakwood Street.

I seem to have stayed with them a great deal in my childhood and I just adored them both. My mother was going to give me a probably well deserved slap one day, when G'ma scooped me up and said "No child will be hit in my house!". No wonder I loved her.

Whenever I was sick she always took loving care of me. She'd wipe my face with eau de cologne and just give me lots of love. My mother was fairly strict and I think G'ma felt sorry for me.

She had a great artistic flair and could always make something out of nothing. She had a way of arranging a room so that it was always pleasant and welcoming. And she loved nothing better than to be surrounded by her boys and their families.

She also had many friends including our doctor, Dr Miles and the ladies of "The Order of the Eastern Star" or the "White Angels" as we called them. They always got dressed up in long white dresses for their meetings. G'ma had a fur stole and a long string of pearls to go with hers. In between meetings Joan and I would have great dress-ups in these glamorous things but G'ma never minded.

Her friendship with Dr Miles went back to the very first days of his practice in Sutherland. It was during the Depression and he had very little money. He set up the front room of his house as a surgery and rigged up an ironing board as an patient's couch. G'ma was one of his first, if not his first, patients and when she climbed aboard the table, it collapsed. Apparently they had a good laugh and remained friends for years.

I was the first baby Dr Miles delivered in Sutherland as I was born at home. Years later when I was teaching at Redfern and I had to see him for some small complaint. "I remember you" he said and was very interested in my doings. I think he finally became a Macquarie Street specialist.

G'ma also had a great friendship with a taxi driver. She loved cars and always referred to them as "motor cars". Although she owned an old blue Ford for flower deliveries, she didn't drive but relied on one of her boys to do it for her.

However she loved going on drives and would go with anyone who suggested it. Quite often this taxi driver would turn up and ask her if she'd like to go somewhere with him for company as it was to be a long drive. Without hesitation she would throw on a coat and scarf (always a scarf) and be away.

When I mentioned to Uncle Ray that this was happening, he was horrified, but I don't think it stopped her excursions.

Another great friend was Mrs Coleman. She seemed to be a widow and I often went to visit her with G'ma. She gave Joan and me each a Minton plate for our Christening present. I still have mine and I think Joan still has hers.

When G'ma acquired the florist shop they moved into the premises at the back and Uncle Len and Aunty Bon moved into Oakwood St.

When I now stayed in Flora St on my frequent holidays the Cemetery became my favourite playground. Joan and I had special graves we would visit and we loved to peer in the grills of the mausoleums and make up stories about their inhabitants.

On one occasion I think we were about six years old, just after Christmas, we had Pop's rifle and the sabre that he had in the Boer War and wearing our new Milanese pyjamas, we held up an early morning funeral going to the cemetery. Fortunately no one found out.

Another time we crawled into the showcase in the shop that had a few artificial wreaths in it and sat there with the wreaths on our heads. G'ma couldn't make out why everyone was laughing.

We had so much freedom and could really do what we liked without ever getting into trouble. On one occasion only, we did get into trouble for using up all of G'ma's carb soda, playing Chemist shops in the backyard.

G'ma loved going on holidays and she would take both Joan and I with her. We went to Katoomba and to Terrigal. When at Terrigal we stayed at a guesthouse (that's what you did in those days) and G'ma had a great time playing ladies and enjoying being able to relax I suppose. Joan and I as usual were given a free run and on one particular day we decided to climb a fairly steep cliff. Joan went first and I followed behind. When we got near the top we came to a lot of loose shale and realised we couldn't go back but had to go on.

Joan went ahead again by pulling herself up by grabbing clumps of grass. Unfortunately when I came along the grass was nearly pulled out and came off in my hand. I was absolutely terrified and when I looked down was overcome with vertigo.

I started screaming and a fisherman down on the rocks called out to Joan to reach down and give me her hand. With what must have been great courage she did so and finally got me to the top. Then we had to fight our way through a lot of blackberry bushes to reach the back fence of someone's house. We crawled into the backyard and were chased very unceremoniously by a Fox Terrier.

When we finally got back to the Guest House G'ma asked us if we had a nice walk. We never told her what had happened and I never told my parents, but I think Joan must have told hers, because she was never allowed to go on a holiday with G'ma again if I went too.

To this day I have a terrible fear of heights and suffer terribly from vertigo.

I don't really remember what G'ma's religious convictions were. I think they were fairly conventional. She didn't attend church, but when I think about it, Sundays were the busiest days in the shop and when she lived in Hornby Ave she had no way of getting there. Despite that she did have occasional visits from the local Anglican minister. Perhaps Joan's influence had a hand in this.

One minister I remember had the most terrible stutter. I don't remember his name, but Joan does. He called on G'ma one Sunday afternoon and received a very warm greeting. "My word", said G'ma, "I did enjoy your sermon this morning."

Those of you who remember the old Anglican church in Sutherland, will remember that it was tiny, and that there could be no way a member of the congregation could be overlooked by the minister. Without hesitation she then introduced Des, who was a teacher of Agriculture, as the Minister of Agriculture. The poor man's stutter was getting worse by the minute.

"He's very young for the job" he managed to get out.

At that time I was very pregnant with my first boy and as it was a hot day, I was wearing one of Pop's old shirts while I did the ironing. It was after Pop had suffered his stroke, and he was sitting on the old lounge chair on the back veranda. He liked to sit there and look out at the trees.

"Would you like a prayer?" asked the poor reverend. No doubt by this time he thought we needed it. So, there we were, me in Pop's shirt, G'ma and Pop. When he started to pray, Pop kept banging his stick on the floor and saying, quite loudly for him:

"Poppycock! I don't believe a word of it!"

Poor G'ma. "Don't take any notice" she said, "he doesn't know what he's saying."

"Oh, yes I do." bellowed Pop. The poor minister made a hurried retreat.

I have so many memories of G'ma, or Margaret Ann as she often signed her name, that I could probably write a book. What a very interesting, if hard life she had. I guess when she first married she expected everything to be rosy, but like all of us, sometimes decisions made for the best, turn out to be the wrong ones.

One blessing was that she never had to suffer the death of any of her boys and she was always surrounded by family. I think it must have been her Scottish heritage, she wanted her clan around her.

There'll never be another like her in my life, but we have all probably inherited some of her traits and we all have memories of her.

She told me once that the only thing she regretted was that she had never seen a Martian.

“I don’t care if it kills me”, she said, “I’d die happy.”

I hope she did.

Dianne