

So I was told.....

My father Albert came to New Zealand from Staffordshire with William Ridge about 1911, they arrived at Wellington and were on their way to Gisborne via coastal ship, it called in at Napier and they liked the look of the place and decided to stay. Albert got work what happened to William Ridge I don't know but he finished up in Norsewood and stayed there all his life.

Daisy Walters my mother had emigrated to New Zealand with her parents, Frederick Walters and wife Elizabeth and sister Ivy. One sister Nellie stayed in England and married Harry Drury and lived in Kent. Somehow they came to Hawkes Bay and Fred Walters worked at Amners Lime Works at Paki Paki, he was a bricklayer and was involved in building accommodation which still exists today. At some stage later they must have moved to Whakatu when the freezing works was being constructed. He had a large hand in bricking in the boilers for the works. He also built himself a home which still exists today in Station Road. My Mother Daisy finished up as manageress of the Trocodero dining establishment, she talked of entertaining visiting stage people etc. Some how about this time Albert and Daisy must have got acquainted.

World War One came along and Albert joined the Army and went overseas to Europe with the 9th Reinforcements. After Albert's departure Daisy was pregnant and gave birth to a son (Ivan) in 1915. Years later I was surprised to see that Albert gave as his next of kin his Mother in Staffordshire no mention of Daisy. In those much stiffer times single mothers did not have it easy, she was helped by Rev. Alfred Hodge and his family of St Augustine's Church and that family always remained close friends. Agnes Hodge was a very close friend of Mums. Years later when the family moved to Haumoana Canon Hodge would drive over in his bullet nosed Morris and do some fishing at the beach. Another daughter Harriett was a frequent visitor when I was a youth.

Albert survived the Somme and eventually returned with the rank of CQMS now called Staff Sergeant.

Using his gratuity etc they decided to built a general store right opposite the Whakatu Works, I imagine Fred Walters built it because it was brick. Apparently they built quite a business and my mother was very good at knowing who to let have "tick" etc. The family grew with the arrival of Robert in 1924 and Fred in 1926. Ivan attended Mangateretere Primary where he was dux and later caught the train to Napier Boys' High School. With my arrival my mother developed asthma and it was thought living by the sea would help, so they sold the business to a Mr Dillon and moved to Springfield Rd Haumoana around 1930.

From this point my own memory starts to kick in.

The Haumoana property needs much doing to it but it possessed a concrete tennis court. The next momentous incident was the huge earthquake of 1931. Albert was in the Hastings Public Library, where several were killed (Don McLeod a Simla Ave neighbour's Mother was killed in the Public Library) he suffered a broken jaw, I was with my mother in the main street of Hastings watching building fronts etc collapsing, Ivan was at Napier Boys' High School and Bob was at the Haumoana School. I was only five years old and it was a terrifying experience, in seconds it seems the place is wrecked. Somehow my parents found one another and got back to the car, then was the job of getting from Hastings to Haumoana and somehow they got home. We were lucky as a family with no one missing at the end of the day. Our house was okay but chimney wrecked and water tank gone also the artesian well was heavily affected eventually had to be replaced. The interior of the house was a mess, particularly the kitchen, my mother did not want to sleep in the house, and a makeshift bivouac was made in the corner of the tennis court. Dad and Ivan slept in the house. There were earthquakes for days afterwards. Hawkes Bay was lucky in the respect that the land came up not down as happened in some places in Christchurch. Or perhaps the Napier quake was deeper, the Christchurch ones all seem so shallow. Napier was hard hit with fire moving through much of the business area. A tin shopping area was built at Clive Square in Napier, and a degree of normalness returned.

Ivan gained University Entrance with Medical Prelim. , did not use that and won a job in accountancy with McCulloch Butler and Spence in Hastings. He played tennis and met Jean Burge in club matches, at this stage there was a family quarrel and he left home. Bob spent a couple of years at NBHS, his horticultural interest was not covered and it was organised that he would do a diploma via studies using Victoria University. He had done the first stages when at the age of 18 he went into the Air Force as a trainee aircrew candidate. He went to Levin and Taiere and was then shipped to Canada, on the completion of his course he gained a commission and became a bomb aimer on Lancaster type aircraft. Ivan suffered from asthma and he gave up accountancy and went on the land as a shepherd, working for Pat Barker on a Te Aute trust farm. Eventually Ivan married Jean, he had to change jobs to get a job with accommodation and finished up at Craggy Range station. I used to bike up the Tuki Tuki Road to Craggy Range, sometimes stayed with them, it was wonderful as a horse would be provided and I could accompany Ivan on jobs around the station. It was a big place of several thousand acres, I remember one paddock being named the drome because Piet van Ash would land his plane there.(he was the founder of Aerial Mapping.) Ivan and Jean had a little Austin 7 and their first child (Barbara) had arrived. When they put her pram on the back of the car it was nearly as big as the car. Somewhere in this period Ivan went into the Army, but did not stay long invalided out because he was a severe asthmatic. At this stage Ivan must have decided that knowledge of dairy farming was essential if he was going to progress and he decided to go to Taranaki and get experience of that sort of farming. He got a position on a farm owned by W. Freeth and learnt the key elements of dairying. This was in the 1940s. Albert and Ivan patched up their relationship, and Pa eventually purchased the property in York Road, it was owned by Ernie Wall a leading pig farmer , 43 acres with access to Kaiapo Road. Thirty cows and a Jersey Bull were purchased from Hughie McKeesick Tuki Tuki road near Haumoana, (this is the bull that became very aggressive and I had an episode with) Around this time I must have joined Ivan and my farming career began. The farm had large pig farming facilities, Ivan organised it as a conventional dairy farm, a draught horse was the only other animal on the farm. I guess the locals watch proceeding with great interest, the immediate properties on either side were the Pimley Family, and Wellwood estate at the end of York Road

York Road of course at that stage was a lovely blind road, with yards at the end which were part of the Annie Wellwood property, a property which Ivan would later lease to increase his herd to 70 cows. Being wartime getting gear together was difficult, the first tractor was a Model B Allis Chalmers on steel wheels, it was a great day when we got rubber tyred wheels for it. You started it by cranking, I had six weeks off when the impulse somehow got mixed up and it broke my arm. The Herd Tester came regularly and that way you soon knew which were the better animals. We separated the milk and the cream went to the Heretaunga Dairy Co at Stortford Lodge, the truck came to us fairly early so it had to be at the gate by 7.30 am. We had pigs fed with the skim milk, one large white sow had 16 piglets and we raised them all, a Borthwicks rep (Jim McCormick) used to take all our pork production, and the pigs had a nice grass paddock. I lived with Ivan and Jean and Marie must have been on the scene. Can remember Ivan telling me Jean was pregnant again with John. I had a little James 2 Stroke about 125 cc I think, and used to go to Haumoana on that, came off it just on the Haumoana side of Black Bridge must have followed a truck carrying sawn firewood blocks, it was nearly dark and a piece of wood was on the road caught the exhaust pipe and I veered across the road near a girl waiting for a bus and into the fence.

In October 1944 [Vin Morris Local Postmaster Haumoana called with a telegram) we got the shocking news that Bob had been killed,aged 20.

What a great brother he had been for me and what a waste to die so young . My mother was a different person after that, I don't think she ever really got over it. My father said he would try and block me going into the services until I was 21. I think milking cows was classed as an essential industry and I was 19 when the war finished. Albert spent most of the war in the National Guard, he had the rank of sergeant he was in charge of a small detachment of men guarding the petrol tanks at Ahuriri. Cannot clearly remember when we grew our first paddock of peas for Watties.

Seem to think that one of the heads in Stewart Greer Motors (They had the Allis Chalmers tractor agency) was a director in Watties, if you bought one of their tractors they would get you a contract to grow a paddock of peas for Watties, that of course would help pay for the tractor. At that stage we did not have much gear for agricultural work, I think we acquired a two furrow horse plough and that was our first plough. Ferguson gear was on the horizon and it made Barclay Motors a big firm. I can remember sowing whole paddocks for sugar beet or mangels with two men and planet junior seeders. Neighbours got together when a gang of men was required for a job. Paddocks of maiden ryegrass for seed were quite common and Watkins mill was a common sight powered and drawn by a steam engine. Doug Walker had the first tractor driven pickup haybaler that I remember. Keeping crops clean from weeds etc was still always done by hand labour. The hydraulic age was still just around the corner. One season Watties suddenly increased the acreage they wanted of tomatoes, we grew 30 acres that season. Wet spraying was very slow, so we purchased a Bean Crop Duster, the only problem was that NZ was not geared for that operation and we had to play around a lot with the raw materials in the hopper. Dusting was done at night hopefully when the plants had the dew on them, so Ivan & I did that, very hard not to drowse off with the whine of the machine and then drive into the fence. Ivan borrowed Percy Flowers' orchard sprayer and using only the lower nozzles sprayed a crop of tomatoes, I think that was a district first. Among leased land we used was a block of Reg Martin-Smith' (50 acres) at the bottom of Tennant Road off Tuki Tuki Road, it had been a dairy farm, quite a trek, and we carted the tractors etc on the truck. About this time we purchased the Sisson Orchard in York Road, and I proceeded to sell the Bennett Road property to Michael Crooks a field rep of Watties. Hazel and I moved into the old house, was in pretty bad shape, used our crew of workers to spring clean it. I started Hazel's gardening there by taking 6 standard roses from Bennett Road and planting them in the middle of a rough grassy area in front of the house. I was to be in charge of the orchard. There was an old coolstore on the property and it was surprising who wanted fruit from it in our first year. (All very illegal!!!) Bernie Sisson had planted it in a diagonal manner and we had the largest single block of Winter Coles (400 trees) in the country I was told. In one corner was a very old planting of asparagus, that became a block of HB red delicious which yielded some wonderful crops. Right near the main well there was a row of walnut trees which we removed and we made many changes, among the odd varieties was an apple called Red Brighton which I had never heard of. The only stone fruit was Omega plums surrounded by Victory plums for pollination. The Coles were in a low lying area and after very wet conditions there was a drainage system using a Bamford single cylinder diesel mounted pump which moved water to the York Road drain. We purchased a Cutler grader from Lew Smith in Twyford, set it up in a building which Bernie Sisson and his wife had lived in, added a couple of lean-to's. So I became a fruitgrower, Clarrie Brown of the Dept of Agriculture was a great help in the tree culture side. We progressed, within the family I purchased the orchard, Ivan got the other York Road block, we built a new packing shed and then a new home. We actually had an orchard field day on the property, and enterprising orchard instructor Ian Ivey wanted to show off what we had achieved in the Coles, one American visitor said to me that if he had done to his trees what I did to our Coles they would have died..... Also did trials for Henry H. York and Co, (their rep at that stage was Bruce Rough). One of the most unusual incidents was a phone call from a Govt. Dept about the possibility of bats in trees on the orchard. I let them come and found the whole story intriguing, I guess it must have started in the Sisson era, I never knew if Bernie Sisson was a drinking man or not!!!!!! It was fortuitous that we left the orchard, there were a few more good selling years but then prices overseas were heavily affected by the high dollar, the APB format changed and only big operations took over. My period with the APB is covered in a separate article.

Incidents which fortunately can almost be forgotten but were quite alarming at the time.

The Jersey Bull. It was nearly the finish of evening milking and Ivan and Jean wanted to go somewhere, leaving me to finish and clean up. Ivan said put the bull through the far gate take

Jimmy his dog etc, a thing we probably had done many times...(The bull was the only animal in the paddock and was being put back with the cows after milking)). The paddock was just opposite where the old Wellwood house used to be. I started off with the dog and bull involved with one another, when we reached the middle of the paddock the bull seemed to become increasingly frisky, and the dog ran away. So it was the bull and me, somewhere I knew if I started to run away, very likely the animal would knock me over, also I knew the bull only had a small stub of a horn left and he could not gore me. The bull came right up to me nudging me with his head.

Some how I sidestepped etc working my way to the nearest fence, can't remember how I got through or over the fence!!!!!! The bull was sent to the works.....

Another episode was at frost fighting time in the orchard at York Road. We used to fight frost using pots of diesel, If the pots sat for a long time, they would become increasingly hard to ignite. Just a tiny amount of petrol added to the top made things much easier. So the person igniting the pots would be armed with a flare (a long holder with a flame quietly burning) in one hand and a container with petrol in the other. You would put a tiny amount of petrol in the top of the pot and then quickly ignite it, you had lots of pots to light and it had to be done quickly. On one occasion I must have become sleepy and lit the petrol container instead of the pot. I can only remember drawing my breath in and fortunately blowing the flame out. The young man with me (Mason Willson) carrying spare fuel dived behind a tree.. We changed the setup after this and the man with a flare did not carry any petrol.....