



## *Ken's Story*

The story of My Grandfather's life.

By Claire Osborne

## The Life of Kenneth Kiddle

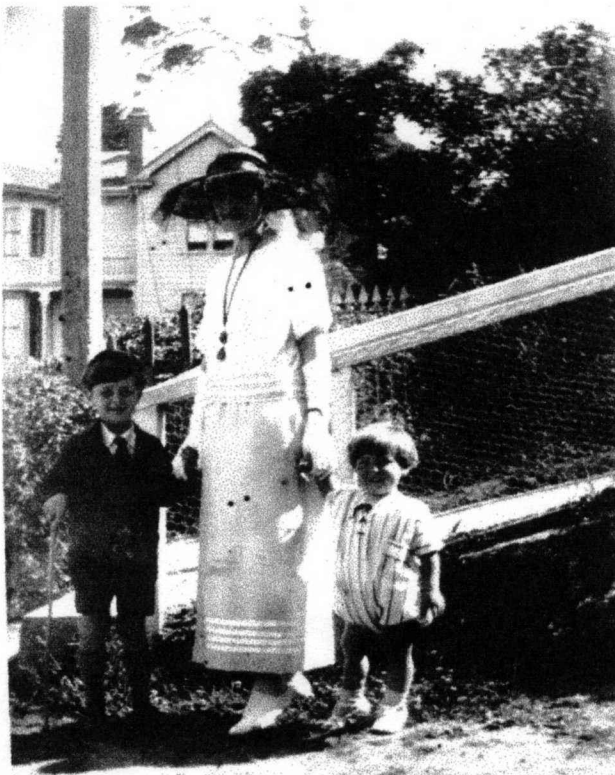
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Mr Kenneth Kiddle (Ken) was born on the 28 April 1926 at his parent's home in Wellington near Victoria University. They then moved to Lower Hutt where his father had built a house in Copeland St. At the time the area wasn't built up and he and his older brother Reg and neighbouring children would go and play in the empty paddocks at the end of their street. This is now where the Hutt valley hospital is situated.



*Ken (centre) and two of his brothers, Reg and Geoff.*

His mother died in 1931 of blood poisoning. Ken did not attend his mother's funeral – the custom at the time was to keep children away from death. After this his father ran the home and brought in a housekeeper Miss Croll. Later a new housekeeper was found, a Mrs Daley.



*Ken with his mother Angie and elder brother Reg*

This was a hard time for Ken's family. His father was left with 4 young boys to raise and he also had to do the cooking. On Saturday morning Ken would set off to the butcher on his bike which was about a 15 kilometre ride from home. On arriving at the butcher he would buy a side of mutton. He would then strap the mutton to the back of his bike and set off home. The whole week's diet except on Wednesday when they had a break and got to have sausages consisted of this mutton. On Saturday night it was roast mutton, on Sunday cold mutton and on Monday night stewed mutton, and so on. For dessert they had rice pudding on Saturday and bread and butter pudding (to use up the stale bread and sour milk) on Sunday consequently Ken now hates these two desserts. Ken and his brothers also became expert darners and sewers, as they had to continually patch up their own clothes.

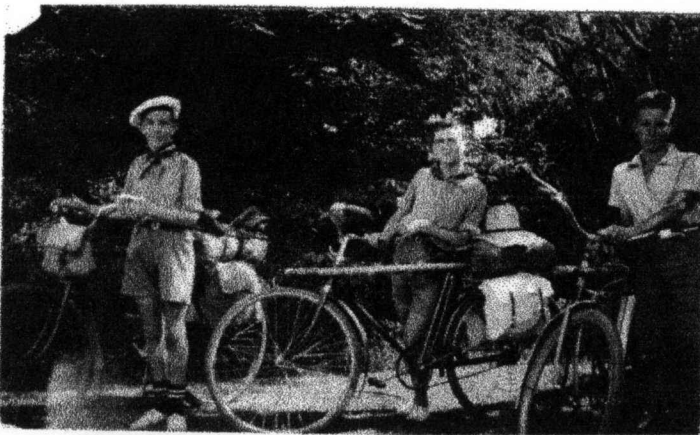
Ken remembers his father as being an "English gentleman", going off to catch the train wearing his bowler hat and carrying an umbrella. His father worked as the manager of Lamson engineering working on the cash and carry systems. This meant that Ken and his brothers had a wealth of left over materials to trade with the other kids for cigarette cards and other such things. One of the most tradable items that Ken and his brothers received were long pieces of elastic left over from the cash and carry systems as these were great for sling shots and catapults and other weapons that little boys like to make.

At the age of five he began to attend Eastern Hutt primary school which he recalls as being an extremely enjoyable time in his life. The headmaster of the school was Mr McBain.

Ken spent all his primary school years at this school. The Marwick children also went there; Hugh Marwick was Ken's good friend and Marion later became his wife. He then went on to Hutt Valley High School which was situated further from his home so he and his brothers had to bike to school. At the school the headmaster Mr Millard was involved in the rugby union,

so rugby was the only sport allowed to be played. All the teachers had nicknames. Ken's own nickname was Tids, as he was an expert at tiddleywinks. His brothers still call him this.

1935 this was the start of the Welfare state. The major thing Ken remembers about this event was his father exclaiming with relief that they wouldn't have to worry about hospital bills.



*Ken (right), Hugh (left) and another friend ready for a biking expedition.*

Ken and his friends went bike riding in the weekends. He biked all over New Zealand with groups of friends. When Ken was in the 5th form he biked from Lower Hutt to Auckland, camping on the side of the road. Another time they did the reverse trip, catching the train to Auckland and biking back, going through Waikaremoana and Hawkes Bay. Ken left his wallet on a ledge at Auckland railway station. Twenty miles later he realised what he had done when he went to buy an ice cream (as part of their plan to sample every ice cream type in New Zealand). They biked back to Auckland, and the wallet was still there, in full view of hundreds of travellers. Their bikes didn't have very good brakes so they would tie branches to the back of their bikes to slow them down on steep hills through the Ureweras.

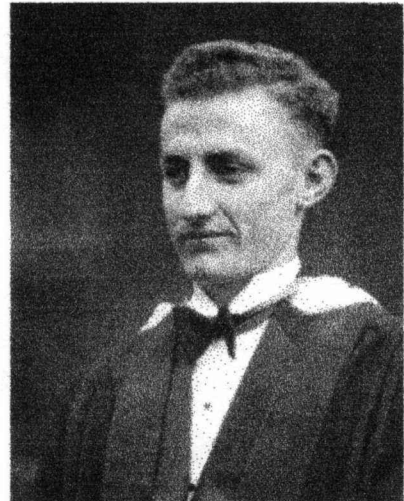
During his time at High school Ken's father remarried, a woman from Australia called Jean. The children called her Gingie.



*Standing: Reg., Gingie, Walter, Ken: Sitting: Jum and Bill*

Ken bought his first car for 25 pounds. It was an Austin convertible. He claims it never went anywhere without breaking down on the way. When he was driving it home after buying it it broke down. He got his brothers to help and they towed it home with their bikes. This caused great hilarity amongst a convoy of US Marines passing by. This was also the car he taught Marion Marwick his high school sweetheart to drive. One day as they were out on one of these lessons they were stopped by a traffic officer who informed Ken that he had best keep both hands on the wheel.

In 1939 he began to study at Victoria University. At University the state paid the fees but Ken had to buy the books and pay for transport to and from University. So he got his first full time job at the Wellington City Milk Corporation where he worked in the laboratory testing milk. He worked weekends so that he had two days a week free to go to the university. He also attended night lectures. Having no car he had to use public transport which meant he often had to run to catch the train after a lecture. The last train ran at 10.30 pm.



*Ken at graduation*



*Ken (front right) and his Victoria University hockey team*

While he was at University he played hockey for the Wellington university first XI and he got to go on sports tournaments to Massey and Canterbury Universities. Marion Marwick was also at Victoria doing a zoology degree.

After three years of working at the Milk Corporation Ken then switched jobs and began to work at the National Carbine company, a battery making factory where he continued to work after graduating with a Masters degree in Chemistry. He was offered a scholarship to go to medical school but decided not to take it as he wanted to get married.

In 1943 Ken was called into the army in the engineers. He remembers a scare when it was said the Japanese were invading. The men were sent over to Foxton, given rifles but were not given any ammunition, which would have really interesting if the Japanese had attacked. He also recalls having to march down near Woodville and when the soldiers walked down to Mangatainoka they had their water bottles filled with Tui beer from the brewery. Consequently Ken now buys Tui beer to this day. During his service he developed goitre and he was taken out and put into an essential job at the battery factory making batteries for the army machinery.

On 13th of October 1945 Ken married the lovely Marion Marwick. The wedding was held at Knox Church. Ken's brother Geoffrey (Jum) was the best man and Marion's sister Thora was the bridesmaid. They had hockey players as their guard of honour with their hockey sticks raised. Marion wore a borrowed lace dress and Ken a pinstripe suit (which years later he gave to his eldest son Edwin when it was deemed cool). Ken then took Marion for a honeymoon down to Queenstown as Marion's Auntie had a house there. Once they got back they began flat hunting and ended up getting a flat at 26 Rodrigo Rd in Kilburnie where they had a landlord who was particularly fond of home brew. The washing machine was unavailable on the first day of every month as he used it to make his beer.



*Ken and Marion's wedding photo*

After about one year Marion and Ken decided to move down to Christchurch and they got a flat on Hereford Street. Marion got a job as a lecturer in zoology at Canterbury University and Ken got a job working for Fletcher Humphrey as a chemist as they were setting up a food division, making cider. Ken had to work with an old Irishman who evidently was not happy at Ken's employment and tried to sabotage his work. He also seemed to sample rather large amounts of cider. Ken then quit the job at Humphrey and got a job at Fletcher Plywood again as the chemist.



*The house Ken and Marion built on Huntsbury Hill*

Ken and Marion then began to build a house on Huntsbury hill. Marion became pregnant and on the 18 January 1951 gave birth to their first child, and named her Helen Vivien Kiddle. She was delivered at Saint Helen's Hospital, and as the policy at the time wouldn't let men near the hospital when their wives gave birth. Ken was ringing the hospital all the time to see if the baby had been born, and he was greatly upset when a family friend knew that he had a little girl before he did.

Ken and Marion continued to build their house. They did it by hand with only a plan done by an architect and the help of their friends. They used plywood specially selected by Ken from work (matai for lining one room, rimu for another, etc.) and chimney stones from the nearby quarry. It took them seven years to build their house. During this period Ken resigned from his job at Fletchers when they fired about 50 employees ( there were no redundancy payments in those days).

He then was employed by Commercial Cleaners. Here he set up training schemes and did a fair amount of chemical work. He also acted as the purchase officer.

Ken and Marion had their second child Edwin (b.04.05.1952) and their third Ian (b.18.07.1954) while they were living in Christchurch.



*The house on Waimarama road – note the cultivated earth.*

It was around this time that Ken and Marion decided that they wanted to work together and “be their own boss”. They chose to try orcharding, and they began to search the country for their orchard. They looked around Christchurch and Nelson, but settled on one they could afford in Hawkes Bay after Ken went there on a trip during show week. They bought a 12 acre orchard on the corner of Waimarama road and River road and called their new business Te Mata orchards. They sold their house on

Huntsbury Hill for about 3000 pounds and moved up to Hawkes Bay. They brought with them all their furniture which Ken had made before they were married, and also a bag of spuds, to the astonishment of the removal firm. A friend of theirs from Christchurch who worked for a stock and station agency had warned them that there was a potato shortage in Hawkes Bay and Ken has always had a great love of his spuds.

Ken and Marion began their life on the orchard, pruning with “secateurs in one hand and an instruction book in the other.” Neighbours were very friendly and gave help and advice. One neighbour, Alf McLeod on introduction said to Ken that if he had anything he wanted know to come and ask him, and that he would tell him what he thought, and wouldn’t be offended if Ken took no notice. This sort of welcome led Ken and Marion to make some great friends in the orcharding community.

In Ken and Marion’s first year on the orchard there was a huge hail storm which destroyed a large amount of their crop leaving only one third to be sent to the apple and pear board. This had a disastrous effect on their income. Ken was forced to seek alternative employment. He first took up a job at a bakehouse where he would go to work at about eleven o’clock at night and finish at about six in the morning. The bakehouse was on the corner of Saint Aubyn St. and Hastings St. He also built a garage for a horse trainer from Hastings, and worked mornings sorting spuds. So the family survived.



*Ken picking Dougherty apples in 1958*



*The Kiddle family in 1963. From left; Vivien, Jackie, Ian, Marion, Leigh, Ken, Edwin..*

During this period Ken and Marion had two more children, Jackie (b. 20.03.1957) then Leigh (b. 30.05.1961).

At the time orchards were not grassed down. Fruit growers did not have the flash equipment that we do nowadays and Ken recalls an incident when he and Marion were out spraying the trees. At the time you sprayed using a hand held boom which you directed the spray with. The boom was attached to the tractor. Marion was driving the tractor while Ken took the boom. The machinery was very noisy so she did not hear when he yelled at her to go slower. Ken, desperate to get Marion's attention, threw a piece of dirt at the tractor but it hit Marion in the back of the neck. She stormed off and that was the end of the spraying for that day.

There was a lot of local spirit in those years and the local children, organised by Ian McLeod who later became a teacher, sang carols around the neighbourhood each Christmas and performed various shows. A highlight of the year was the Fruitgrower's picnic, with lots of prizes for sack races, wheelbarrow races, egg and spoon races, tug-o'-war, etc etc, a big lolly scramble, swimming in the river, in fact every child's delight imaginable.

Ken and Marion went on to extend their orchard, buying 12 acres over the road. They then became partners with Dr Don McKenzie, a good friend and local pomologist (apple research scientist). They bought several acres of bare land to implement a new orcharding scheme using the central leader system he had developed. They called this orchard Huarangi (food of the gods). They later subdivided so that Don and his wife Joy could build a house. In 1977 Ken and Marion also built on this block and this is where they now live.



*Witnessing the arrival of the two millionth carton of apples from New Zealand at a Belgian wharf. (1982) Ken is fourth from the left..*

In about 1961 Ken was elected to the local Fruitgrower's Association and in 1966 he was appointed to the New Zealand Apple and Pear Marketing Board which took him away from home a lot. One year Ken was away from home for one hundred days serving the apple and pear board. Once when he returned from one of these trips, as soon as he walked in the door he had to remove a dead possum that had fallen down the back of the chimney into the old coal range and had been left there until he returned. Maggots had started

crawling out over the coal range. Luckily Ken still had an old gas mask from his time in the army which proved to be very useful.

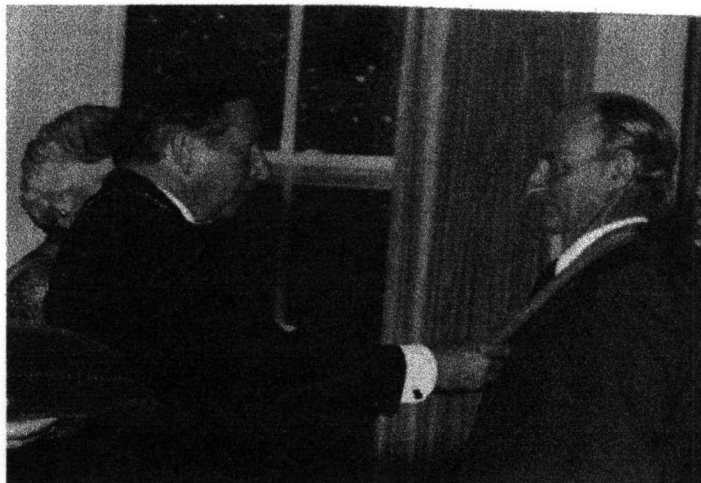
In 1974 Ken took over as chairman of the Apple and Pear Board after Don Sinclair, the previous chairman, was tragically killed in a car accident.

One highlight he remembers was when after being technically insolvent in 1974 and having been helped by the government of the day by way of a loan (arranged by Bill Rowling), the Apple and Pear Board made a record profit in 1977 and was able to pay all its debts off as well as paying out \$2 million to growers.

Ken travelled widely on Board business throughout the world and was also able to take Marion with him on several of these trips. As the wife of the Board chairman Marion launched two ships.

Ken remained chairman of the Apple and Pear Board until 1986.

In 1982 Ken was made a Companion of the order of Saint Michael and Saint George and in 1989. Ken and Marion were awarded the Bledisloe Cup for services to fruitgrowing.



*Ken receiving his C.M.G. medal from the Governor General*

Ken now lives on and still works on his orchard, surrounded by friends and family. He is still involved in fruit politics and took part in the recent protest against deregulation when Jenny Shipley visited Hawkes Bay. It was the first time he had been in a protest march.



*Ken and Marion with their children and grandchildren at their golden wedding (1995).*