

CLAUDE CRAFT

Claude Horace Craft, my dad, b. September 3 1905, at Cobbora was fourth son of Charles and Margaret Craft. His father owned the general store to which was attached their residence. Claude's older brothers, twins William and Charles b.1901 and Albert b.1904 would have commenced their education at Goolma school, perhaps also Claude. Fifth son, Fredrick James, was born in 1908.

Although Margaret had a housekeeper she had a busy life caring for five sons and running the Cobbora Store, as Charles was daily cycling to Dunedoo establishing their new home and business.

Fredrick, now aged two, died in March 1910 and is buried at Cobbora.

Having built their new home, "Strathroy" and Craft's General Store, Charles moved his family to Dunedoo in 1911 when Claude was aged 6. Their sixth son, Leslie, was born September 26, 1911 in Dunedoo.

They settled down to a very comfortable life and Claude and his three older brothers attended Dunedoo school. The twins went to boarding school at St Stanislaus, Bathurst in 1915.

It was later that year, on November 14, 1915 that their mum died during childbirth. She is buried at Cobbora. I assume that family members and a housekeeper assisted Charles in caring for his five motherless boys.

Josephine O'Keefe became their stepmother in 1917.

Claude and Albert boarded at St Stanislaus in 1918 and 1919 and Claude a further year in 1920. St Stanislaus, an imposing structure, was then run by the Vinscentian Priests. He spoke little of his boarding school days but he did tell me that one of the priests had them working hard, happily, after school to establish a football oval.

Charles sold the store in 1920 and moved to 13 Hill Street, Coogee with wife, Les and seventh son Gregory who was born January 19, 1918 in Dunedoo. A daughter Mary was born in June 1921.

I don't know whether the twins stayed in Dunedoo or moved to Sydney with their dad. They left for New Zealand in 1921. However, Claude and Albert were left to work the farm. Amazing as Claude was only 15 and Albert 16 or 17 years old.

William (Billy) and wife Sarah returned from N.Z. in 1922 and operated a fruit and vegetable store in Dunedoo. I think their son Alec was born while there. The store was a short-lived venture and they returned to New Zealand.

Claude and Albert worked the farm right through the 1920's. Later in this decade Charles and 3 youngest children returned to Dunedoo and Charles built a home in Cobbora Street.

It wasn't all work and no play for Claude as he played Rugby League for Dunedoo in the district competition from 1926 to 1930. He captained Dunedoo and earned the reputation as a great League player. Recently I spoke with several people who knew Claude as a young man and they all spoke highly of his football skills.

Many, many years ago I asked mum about Claude's involvement with football as we had "sort of" heard about him playing in Sydney. Her dismissive response was "Huh! Away every weekend, broken teeth, too much drinking." I took the hint and dropped the subject and never ever asked him about his sporting days.

Last year Eric and I visited Horace Craft, son of Jack who took over the store at Cobbbora in 1912. Horace's wife, Kath was a great help with family history while Horace, every five minutes or so would lean forward, form a circle with his arms and mutter, "Great tackler, Claude was a great tackler". He would then sit with a quiet smile on his face as if reminiscing. Kath, who was one of mum's school friends passed away some months ago. When cousin, Gwen Gillis, visited Horace at a Dubbo hostel recently he was surrounded by a bevy of 90-year-old beauties. A true Craft.

Claude fell in love with Jean Hughes, a 17-year-old telephonist, who lived in Dunedoo with her grandmother, Francis Hughes, her Uncle Denny, brother Keith, sister Kathleen and cousin Mary Gillis. The Hughes family moved from Goolma, 30 km west of Gulgong, to Dunedoo November 19, 1919 when mum was 10 years old.

The Hughes family had their share of tragedies as most families did in those days. Mum's mother, Catherine, died from meningitis in 1912 just eight weeks after Kathleen's birth. Mum was two and Keith four years old. Their grandfather, Thomas, died in 1914, the same year that their father, John Joseph (Brick), became Private Hughes who served in France during W.W.1. After being discharged he worked on the steam trains out of Wellington so he was not always there for them. Uncle Denny carried on being their father figure.

Mum often told this story of how she met Claude. Returning home from a function she was nervous about walking home alone. She noticed a group of young men in the White Rose café. Implying this was their first encounter, she singled Claude out, beckoned and asked him to accompany her home. The White Rose was the meeting place for the footballers after training and matches. They also held all meetings there. I strongly suspect mum was well aware of this fact. Dunedoo is a small town and her home was just a couple of blocks away!!!! The romance blossomed and they were married in 1928.

Margaret Kathleen was born September 26, 1928. They were living on the farm at this stage as mum recalls Uncle Denny and Claude riding their horses to Craboon Hotel to wet the baby's head.

The following year, 1929, Claude's stepmother, Josephine, died and is buried at Cobbbora.

The same year Claude and Jean's second child, John Frances, was born, December 25, 1929. They were most likely still at the farm when Bernard Charles was born May 20, 1931 as Margaret has memories of playing in the hayloft. About this time Claude and family moved into town. They occupied one of the Craft Chamber flats and mum said they also lived in a couple of other places in Dunedoo.

Mum recalled that Claude, after leaving the farm, trapped rabbits. She said they were his most difficult years, being during the Depression, but they were golden years. It was most likely a happy, settled time of their marriage.

Mum told me the story of the rainbow cake. Claude and a Bill Lawson were rabbit trapping. Claude came in to town to replenish their provisions and Mum also packed a rainbow cake but didn't tell him it was there. It was a surprise. Days later he discovered a mass of ants and a cake underneath. While the tale would not win first prize in the New Idea for the funniest story it is interesting that it was necessary to camp out in the bush.

Charles married Therese Schofield (Aunty Terry) in 1931. Les was now 20 but Greg was only 13 and Mary 10 years old. Charles at 59 years, I guess, needed a step-mother for Greg and Mary. I have no idea when Albert left the farm and moved to Sydney but I presume Claude was still working the farm while living in Dunedoo or maybe just rabbit trapping or both. Robert, son of Les, said his father worked the farm after Claude and Albert moved on.

I am not sure when Claude and family moved to Coolah but their fourth child, Ronald Joseph, was born there July 7, 1934. I presume it was 1932 or 1933 as Bernard was quite ill when he was aged 2 years and they were then living at Coolah.

Bernard, needed an appendectomy urgently so Claude phoned his father for help. Mum said, "Grandfather Craft sent Trevor Treeves, who worked for him, with the car. He arrived at Coolah at midnight and we put Bernard on a cot mattress on the back seat. We arrived at Rhineberger's Private Hospital, Mudgee at 4am. after a nightmare four hour journey. The hospital was run by two Miss Rhinebergers. After a half-hour rest Dr Cameron operated. Bernard developed peritonitis and the doctor gave me little hope for his survival. He pulled through and I spent the next two weeks in Mudgee staying with Birdie Grayston's mother." A traumatic time for mum.

Birdie, George and daughter Betty rented a small home situated at the back of Nanny's home in Dunedoo. The Graystons I recall as lovely people.

It was at this point in time that Claude started a vegetable garden at Lawson's Springs near Hannah's Bridge which is between Dunedoo and Coolah. The reason for this was --- Group 14, N.S.W. Rugby League introduced a rule whereby players play with the nearest club. To quote Patty Sheridan ("Vernie and His Men from Hannah's Bridge"),

"To comply with these rules, Claude Craft later camped at Lawson's Springs and started a vegetable garden. Such was his wish to play with the Hannah's Bridge team."

Again conjecture, but I think by this stage Claude had moved to Coolah and had started his market garden near the Coolaburragundy Creek. There was great enmity between the Coolah and Hannah's Bridge teams and Claude had already played for Hannah's Bridge against Balmain in 1929, hence his desire to play with them again. As a result of this new rule the H. Bridge team folded. So too Claude's football days.

Claude's market garden was successful and he delivered his fruit and vegetables in a horse drawn cart and also sold from our home. Mum often told the story of a little girl who was regularly sent on a message for "frippy wurf of carry"(threepence worth of carrots) and "frippy wurf of pinny" (spinach).

Charles sold his Cobbora Street home in Dunedoo in 1935 or 1936 and moved to Birrel Street, Bronte with Auntie Terry, Greg and Mary. Greg attended St Joseph's Hunters Hill but I am not sure where Mary finished her schooling. Les was now in his twenties. He may have stayed on at the farm but he eventually went to Sydney and fought in W.W.2. He married Olive Pausey April 10, 1943.

Our home in Coolah was on the corner of Glencoe and King Streets. By today's standards life was harsh and for Claude, a far cry from the fine standard he experienced as he was growing up. Our Coolah home was a very small home housing six children and two adults, often three, as mum's sister Kathleen was a regular visitor.

Clothes were boiled in a copper in the back yard, meals were cooked on a fuel stove, summer and winter, cold water only, from a tank in the back yard. Clothes were ironed with a flat iron. One usually had two irons. While ironing with one, the other was on the fuel stove being heated so of course, one was continually changing irons. I actually have memory of this ironing procedure. Many cotton items were starched so when dry they were dampened, rolled up then ironed.

The highlight of the week was Mass on a Sunday morning. We all had one good outfit which mum either made or ordered from Marcus Clarke's catalogue. Preparation for this event commenced on a Saturday evening when the whole family had a weekly bath. Water was heated on the fuel stove and the tub was placed in front of the kitchen fire. One tub of water did the whole family starting with the youngest. So pleased I was second youngest. I wonder if Claude was any cleaner when he finished since he was last in line. A far cry from today's hygiene standards but it was the norm for a country town in the early 1900's. The only water supply for the home was the back yard tank. Water was carried in to the home for bathing, cooking, washing-up, filling the kettle for a cuppa etc. Water was more precious than gold.

In spite of hardships it appeared to be a happy and settled time in their married life. They enjoyed being part of the community, playing tennis, participating in social functions. Mum was the church organist and also played the piano in the local band at dances. Mum was well known for her sponge cakes. She was a good basic cook. Margaret, John, Bernard, Ronald and I attended the Sacred Heart convent school. Their seventh child, Neville Vincent, was born July 19, 1941.

Not long after Neville's birth Claude and his family's life took a dramatic change. Claude's market garden was completely destroyed by flood. He sold our home and went to Sydney to find employment and accommodation for his family. Neville said to me recently, "What a great undertaking to move a large family to the Big Smoke over 60 years ago.!" With most of our man-power in the forces Claude found employment with Nestles then the Graving Dock at Garden Island. He also had a job delivering bread using a horse drawn cart, at I think Granville, in our early Sydney days.

Jean, left behind with seven children, Neville only three months old, had to pack what was needed and dispose of the unwanted, settle their affairs and arrange transport to Sydney. Apparently, memorabilia including paintings done by Jean's grandfather,

Thomas Hughes, were packed in teachests, put into a neighbour's care and were to be sent for later. We never received them.

Uncle Denny and Aunty Ted took Margaret, John and Bernard to Dunedoo until the family was settled in Sydney. Jean and the four youngest children travelled to Sydney by train. The first weeks were spent with Jean's Aunty Rosie at Merrylands. It was very generous on Rosie's part as she too had a large family. From Merrylands they went to board with Police Sergeant Thompson and his wife Nancy who had a large home in Blaxcell Street, Granville. The Thompsons were pleasant people who remained friends for several years. I do recall their beds were infested with bed bugs and mum frantically cleaning all our bedding when we moved to 60 Prospect Street, Rosehill. Our stay at Blaxcell Street must have been brief as we were settled at Prospect Street when the school year commenced in 1942.

Margaret, now aged 13, went to Holy Trinity, Granville, John and Bernard, aged 12 and 10 went to Patrician Brothers, Granville. Ronald, aged 7 and Judith 6 attended Blessed Oliver Plunkett School, Harris Park.

Claude obtained a position as meat carter with Riverstone Meat Company at the Kogarah depot. This meant rising very early, a long walk to Granville Station and a very long train journey to Kogarah for most likely a 7a.m. start. Later he was fortunate to get a transfer to the Granville depot. Claude was home by mid afternoon and had time to establish his backyard vegetable garden.

We lived at No 60 for the next eight years. It was a good simple family life in the 1940's. There were regular sing-a-long evenings with mum playing the piano, card evenings with neighbours, outings to Bronte Beach in the summer. Sunday lunch was always a roast followed by a pudding. Most Sundays Uncle Albert, Trix and son Peter also Kathleen, Harry and John shared our Sunday meal.

Money was not a-plenty. I recall Claude half soling and heeling our shoes. He would buy pieces of leather about 40cm square and soak it in water for several hours. With softened leather, a sharp knife, a cast iron boot last, a box of tacks and a hammer he repaired our shoes. However, we were adequately clothed and very well fed.

Mind you, it was a weekly event for Jean and Claude to spend Saturday afternoon at Randwick or Rosehill Races and quite often on to the Trots at Harold Park.

60 Prospect Street was a lovely old two-story home. We occupied the ground floor. It had a long wide hallway with bedrooms to the right and a huge lounge-dining room to the left, a closed in verandah at the end of the hall and bathroom, kitchen and laundry to the right of the verandah. The lounge/dining had a lovely wooden archway separating them. A curtain was hung between the two rooms and the dining room became bedroom for Margaret, Winnie and myself.

The kitchen had a very large table which seated all of us. Evening meals were a wonderful time of communication when everybody related the events of the day.

Not long after we moved to Rosehill, Winnie Bowles came to live with us, seeking work in Sydney. Winnie and Margaret were school friends in Coolah. Winnie lived with us until she married Larry Heffernan.. We also had mum's father, John Joseph (Brick) live with us for a great deal of the time in the 1940's when he was not in hospital. He had suffered a stroke when visiting our cousin, Mary Gillis, in Orange. The stroke left him in a wheelchair and the poor man suffered dreadfully with

arthritis. Not only did mum have a large family to look after, her dad's inability to walk must have been quite a burden.

Claude was very patient and very kind to Brick. He washed him, shaved him, took him to the toilet etc. So too was John good to Brick. When the races were held at Rosehill John would wheel him to the course with Neville, aged 6 or 7, assisting. Neville was telling me how, when pushing the wheel chair, he would often jump on the back ledge and have a little ride. One day as they were returning from the races he did just that but the problem was, this time they were going down hill. The wheel chair gathered speed so he abandoned ship and took off for his life as Brick and wheelchair went for a six, Brick screaming for Johnnie to help him and hurling abuse at Neville.

Brick was hospitalised at Concord Repat on several occasions. I recall the time he was transferred to Lidcombe Old Men's Hospital. It was a most disgusting place. I have distinct memories of the odour as one approached the wards. Urine, faeces, mucous, tobacco, unwashed bodies. I suspect most patients were returned servicemen from World War 1. Jean fought the authorities tooth and nail to get him out of the place and took him home to Prospect Street. He died in Concord Hospital, November 1951.

Jean went to Tech. And learned to type. We were all very proud of her achievements. Coming home from her first day of work her knee gave out on her as she got off the train at Harris Park. Her knees troubled her badly from that day until the day she died, in spite of knee replacements.

By this stage, Margaret was working for Meagher & Co as a stenographer, having completed her education at St Patricks Commercial College. John, I think was working for Kilners Removalists and Bernard was with O'Brien's Paper Bag Co. Bernard's employer recognised his potential and wanted him to study Accountancy which he, unfortunately declined. Bob and Neville were at Marist Bros Parramatta, Judith at St Patrick's Girls High School. Ronald, completing his education at Marist, Parramatta was indentured to Cordony Bros as a Ladies Hairdresser.

John married Audrey Bellis from Granville in 1949 and Margaret married John Kenneth (Dixie) Lee from Warwick, Queensland, in 1951.

Our home was sold in, I think, 1951, and we moved to 71 Undercliffe Street, Neutral Bay. Bob and Neville transferred to Marist Bros. Mosman. Uncle Denny and Claude went into a business partnership. Denny sent cattle to Homebush Abbatoir and Claude sold the meat to Sydney butchers.. An East Hills butcher paid Claude with rubber cheques then pleaded with Claude to cover him for a short period. Claude made the wrong decision and they went bankrupt.

By 1953 Jean was working for Logan & Co., Importers in the city, Judith was off to Teachers College, Bob worked for a Melbourne newspaper in the Sydney office and Neville, having completed his schooling studied Woolclassing at Tech.

Bernard married Margaret Medland from Neutral Bay in 1953.

Judith married Eric Young from Bathurst in 1957.

Claude and depleted family moved to 107 Edith Street Leichhardt in 1959. By now, Neville was working as a shearer/woolclasser. Claude's new job was driver for an Irish bricklayer who had lost his license.. Claude saw an opportunity so he kept his eyes open and later started his own business building brick fences.

In 1962 Claude and Jean bought a home at 14 Supply Street, Dundas. Claude continued with his business, Ajax Fences, with Bob as his assistant. Bob married Betty Scott from Dundas not long after moving to the district.

Jean worked in the office at Lewisham Hospital then in the office of a BP Service Station at West Ryde.

Ronald married Daphne Miller from Gosford and Neville married Patricia Hanlon from Leichhardt in the mid 1960's.

Claude's health was not good from the late 1960's onwards. In his latter years he smoked heavily and beer consumption increased. He drank copious amounts of milk to settle his stomach which in turn caused gall stones. Thinking he had cancer and believing the myth that was common at that time that if one were opened the cancer went rampant, he refused to seek medical help. He literally smoked and drank himself to death. He was eventually scheduled for a gall operation, June 18, 1975 but was admitted several days prior the operation. He worked right up to the day before he was admitted. That day, he met me in Eastwood so as I could deposit his last work cheque into my bank account (because of his bankruptcy I handled all cheques). I stood at the bank corner and watched him walk back up to his truck and thought, "What a tall, erect, fine figure of a man you are!" The night before his operation we took mum to see him. Bernard and Margaret were also there. We all left but as mum and Eric walked on I turned back to him and we waved to each other. I can still see him sitting up in bed, his hair so white, with no grease. Watching him walk away from the bank, waving to him in his hospital bed, I knew my beloved daddy would not come home.

He developed a nasty infection as a result of the operation and his heart and lungs were unable to cope. The day after the operation mum phoned the school to say he was in big trouble. Eric, with his sixth sense, came home from work early afternoon. We took mum to the hospital and she and Eric spent time with him. I couldn't face it. He passed away that evening, June 19, 1975 at Ryde Hospital, aged 69 years.

Claude Horace was a great person. A man of integrity. He was an intelligent, caring man with wonderful social graces. He loved his family and I so admired him for the love he displayed for all his grandchildren. No favourites. He had a deep love of his faith particularly the Mass and this was a very personal domain. He was a wise, well informed man of the world who loved people and was indeed loved in return. Mind you, he did not treat fools lightly. In doing my research over the years, I have had so many oldies who knew him well, speak so highly of him. Loved him dearly.