

## **Eulogy for Millie Harris (as read by Sarah and Naomi Harris)**

SARAH: Our gorgeous Grandmother Mildred Amelia Harris was born on the 28th of November 1915 in the little town of Grundisburgh in the county of Suffolk, England.

Her mother, Harriet Ethel Hill, was 37 years old when she gave birth to Nana. Her father, Samuel Pipe, was 52. Samuel was a widower with 5 adult children, and Harriet and Samuel together had Ruby, Nana, Barbara and Ronnie.

Nana's family were extremely poor, and she often remarked that she didn't know how her mother managed to keep them as well fed and cared for as she did. The three sisters had to share a bed, two at the top and one at the bottom and there were plenty of arguments until her mum came in with a stick to make them be quiet.

NAOMI: One of Nana's favourite memories was that once a year they had a days outing as a family, usually to the seaside. They would catch a bus and a boat and sit on the beach, which was all pebbles and no sand, while they ate their bread rolls and shrimp. Nana just paddled in the ocean - she never learnt to swim after nearly drowning once as a young girl.

Nana attended the village school from 4 to 13 years old. She got the cane once from Mr Hardy the headmaster- for talking.

SARAH: When Nana was 14 she was granted an exemption to attend school by the Education Committee. She then began Working for the Pastor and his wife, at the Village Manse.

In 1932, when Nana was 16, her beloved mother passed away. As her oldest sister Ruby was working in Oxford for a Lord and Lady, Nana stayed at home to care for her father and her younger siblings.

When Nana was nearly 21yrs old she married the very handsome 24 year old Leslie Thomas Harris, one of the local boys in the village and the brother of one of nana's friends.

Nana and Grandad moved into a house and settled into Village life. Grandad worked in the building trade until he was called up for the second World War, and served in North Africa for almost 6 years.

NAOMI: Sandra was born in 1938 before the war began, Ron (our father) was born in 1942 while Grandad was still serving, so there were obviously some conjugal visits during that time.

Doodlebug rockets were landing around the village as Nana gave birth to Ron, and because of the war, Ron was 2 1/2 years old before he met his father for the first time.

After Grandad came home from the war the family settled back into Village life once again. Nana knitted and sewed all of Sandra's and Ron's clothes, and they lived a life off the land, growing their own vegetables. Grandad and his brother were known as the 'Village Poachers', coming from a long line of poachers. Grandad taught Ron how to shoot and trap to have meat on the table.

Amongst Nana's many talents, she was a long term member of an amateur theatrical company and took part in a number of stage productions. One of her more notable roles was playing the wicked witch, and Ron remembers her practicing the role at home, banging on a metal tray and pretending to frighten Sandra and himself.

She was also a member of the church choir for over 20yrs and was a member of the award winning Women's Institute choir, on one memorable occasion they went to London and sang in the Albert Hall.

SARAH: In 1954, Grandad was working for a local builder and was fed up with the poor wages and miserable English weather. A talk was being held on the Ten Pound Scheme in the neighbouring town of Woodbridge, so Grandad cycled for two and half hours each way with nana on his handlebars to hear the talk. They quickly decided that they should emigrate to Australia as one of the first families on the 'Ten Pound Pom' scheme.

At that time Sandra was 16 and Ron was 11.

In September 1954, the family boarded the ship 'The New Australia' and sailed off for a new life. They were on board for a 5 week adventure, eventually arriving in Sydney.

They were taken to the migrant Hostel in East Hills and lived in Nissan huts recently vacated by the army with communal toilets and showers.

Grandad got a job the day after they landed and was never out of work for the rest of his working life.

NAOMI: Millie had a few minor jobs until she got a job in charge of the staff canteen at the main Woolworths branch in Sydney. After that she was part of the team at the Home Economics Head office in Sydney for Nestle. She loved working there and stayed for 7 1/2 years until she was forced out by the company's age limit.

In 1964 she joined the Bankston View club and remained a proud and active View member in various clubs up until her last days.

She also remained a member of Legacy.

In 1973, Nana was devastated at the loss of her beloved little brother Ronnie at just 52 years old. He had moved to Australia with his family in the 60s and was living near by. As he had been only 6 and Nana 16 when their mother died, Nana had raised him like her own.

Ronnie joined the army at 16 and served for 26 years, a member of the Essex Regiment and Queen's Hussars, he took part in 9 campaigns including the Desert Rats and Ord Wingates Chindits in Burma and was in Africa during the Mau Mau uprising. He was mentioned in dispatches.

SARAH: My personal story with Nana started with my birth in 1976. Nana and Grandad's house was the exciting place that we were always sent to for our holidays to be spoilt and fed creaming soda floats and all of the other delicious things that Grandparents spoil their grandchildren with.

When we were old enough, mum and dad would put us on the plane from Darwin under the care of the airline hostie, and Nana and Grandad would meet us at Sydney airport.

When I was around 7, I was given chewing gum by the man sitting next to me on the plane. When it was time for the meal I didn't want to waste the chewing gum so I stuck it behind my ear, just like Veruca Salt did with her bubble gum in Roald Dhal's book Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. 30 years later, Nana would still tell the story of how she had to cut away about a third of my hair that had become entwined in the chewing gum.

Over the past 15 years I would occasionally receive an envelope in my mailbox from Nana containing a \$50 note mapped in alfoil -which was Nana's hint that it was time for me to come and visit her.

NAOMI: Nana's huge influence on my life started very young. I was born in 1978 and Nana was not only my Grandmother but also my Godmother.

Most of you won't know that my real name is actually Barbara, I am Barbara Naomi Harris.

At my christening, Nana was holding me when the priest asked: what is the name of this child?

To which, Nana, who had obviously decided that Barbara didn't suit me, replied, Naomi Barbara Harris. The priest replied 'um, no?' Nana replied with an emphatic 'yes' and I have been Naomi ever since.

Nana also kept us stylish and well dressed, making us matching outfits and also knitting us all of our favourite toys.

SARAH: In 1990, Nana and Grandad moved from Sydney to Paradise Point to be closer to Sandra.

Nana quickly became involved with her charity clubs especially VIEW and Legacy. She also loved playing Bingo and having a flutter at the pokies, though she had a very strict \$10 maximum limit that she stuck to.

Never one to sit around, she also could be found reading, writing letters, knitting, crocheting and always had a stack of crossword books on hand.

NAOMI: In 1993, our gentle, loved and wonderful Grandad passed away suddenly. They had been married for 57 years. Our memory of Nana and Grandad together was that he constantly told her 'you're a good woman Mildred, a good woman', especially' when she brought him a piece of her amazing fruit cake.

Nana stayed in the big house until 1997 when she moved here to Paradise Lake Resort. She often said that it was the best thing that she could have ever done. She was incredibly happy here, loving all of her friends and the busy social life. We often told her that she had a better social life then either of us.

SARAH: Although she loved living in Australia Nana remained a staunch loyalist. We frequently received Royal Family books and toys for birthdays and Christmas, particularly if it had to do with Princess Diana.

She was also proud of her Pipe heritage, following up links and 1; corresponding with other Pipes. The Pipes were well known as bell ringers, with the earliest records of a Pipe bell ringing in 1817.

The family tree extends back through the family of Oliver Cromwell to the Doomsday Book in 1086, and included a Lord Mayor of London in 1578.

Right up to her passing Nana was a prolific letter writer. She had numerous letters to the editor printed, and many articles in the Grundisburgh Local newsletter about her memories of life in the village. Nana had six trips back to her beloved Grundy during her life in Australia.

She even had a carved wooden sign saying "Suffolk House" which would proudly be hung out the front of every house she lived in.

Still sharp as a whip and with an infectious personality, when asked the secret to her long life and youthful looks, the answer was always the same "two glasses of champagne each day".

NAOMI: The one thing Nana dreaded was a long drawn out ending as she had seen family and friends spending months or years having operations, hooked up to tubes and monitors. In that her wish was granted as she only survived a few hours after being admitted to hospital.

The amazing thing was, in her 99 years she had never, ever had an operation or been admitted to a hospital.

She refused an operation her treating doctor suggested that would only have extended her life for a short time, just opting for painkillers.

Sandra stayed with her during this time and said Nana was still very astute, and never lost her sense of humour, joking with the doctors and nursing staff.

When her treating doctor asked if she became unconscious did she want to be resuscitated and should he use the electric paddles Nana's response was typical, "don't you dare".

Our Nana was an extraordinary woman who lived a truly remarkable life, and we are so grateful and honoured that we could have been a part of it.