

# Ken Macpherson: His Life and Writings



**My Life Story by Ken Macpherson**

**Short stories and poems by Ken Macpherson, edited by Judi Rogers (née Macpherson)**

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# My Life Story

Ken Macpherson, 2010

I am writing my life story mainly for my children and grandchildren. Hopefully it may help them with some of the problems and stress that they may strike during their lives.

I was born in Kaitaia on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1928. My father was Alfred Sinclair Macpherson and my mother was May Cecelia Macpherson (née Russell). The first photograph shows Alfred holding me, May and one of the twins at the old house in Mangatoetoe Road, Fairburns. The second is when I was about three with my half brother Buff. The third shows my younger brother Gordon and I when he was five and had just started school.

I am going to start my life story at the age of six as I do not remember much before this time. This is the year which I started school at Fairburn. The number of pupils varied from about 24-30 with only one teacher.

This school consisted of one main room and another room for storage. It was a three mile walk if I went right around the road from our house in Mangatoetoe Road.

Sometimes, if the paddocks were clear of bulls, we could take a short cut over the top and it would be only 2½ miles. This property belonged to Edgar Morey and he used to collect stock from all over the county and hold them until he had approximately 200. Then he and a few helpers would drive them through the gorge to be killed at the freezing works at Moerewa. This usually took about one week so the paddocks were not clear very often.

When I got home from school I had to go to the shed and pump by hand a 44-gallon drum full of water. This was a very tiring job and used to take me over an hour to fill. When I got to eight I had to get the cows in, pump the water and clean the yard. Most weekends I had to help with farm work and gardening.

The first real happy time that I can recall was camping with Uncle Bob and Aunt Eileen at the old woolshed at Aurere on Mr. Geoff



Matthew's property. Neville Atkinson and Gordon were there and I think Olga and Peggy Dunn. It was really great. One thing I do remember was when we were playing cricket and I was fielding. While doing this I was cleaning a butcher knife by stabbing it into the sand to get the rust off the blade. Unfortunately just under the surface was a board my hand slid down the blade cutting four fingers to the bone. Good for waving but not to play cricket. I'm sure that this holiday had a big bearing on my returning there to camp in later life.

I was nine at the time. It was at this age that I started going through a very traumatic period of my life. Over the next twenty two months I was sexually abused by a family member on several occasions which was very embarrassing and painful. This sort of thing was not spoken of in those days so nothing was ever done about it. This affected me very badly at puberty and early teens. It wasn't until much later in life that I worked out a few things, and was horrified to realize that my father must have known what was going on.

We never seemed to have much time to play any sort of games, but one thing we used to like doing was to push an old Indian motor cycle up the hill above the house, hop on, me in front and Gordon on the back and race down the hill between the house and wash house (a gap of about 40 feet apart) and out into a big swamp full of rushes. The photograph to the right was taken a few years earlier showing Buff giving Gordon a ride on his Indian. The one below shows the old house behind Buff doing a head stand.



Our bike only had the frame and a front wheel. I had found a small wooden wagon wheel which was about the same size as the front one. I then found a steel rod which I poked through and bent the ends over and that was the axle. It used to get up quite a speed by the time we hit the bottom and it is a wonder that we never got hurt when we flew off.

One day Gordon wanted to drive. He must have been about six. Off we went, but as we got down the hill the wash house seemed to draw the bike like a magnet and we ended up crashing into the back of the tin chimney, almost went through into the fire. Mum was in the wash house doing some washing and nearly died of fright. As you may guess, that was the end of our bike rides; a good thing possibly.



Gordon always seemed to be getting into trouble somehow. I remember one day he wanted a drink so he went inside and asked Mum for a drink of water. She was always busy so she told him to wait but he must have been very thirsty. He went and got a four inch nail and a hammer and punched a hole in our galvanized tank about four rings from the bottom and had a drink and a shower. He was made to put his finger over the hole until mum got a pointed stick with a rag on it to plug the hole. He got one hell of a hiding for that.

Another day he was locked inside our outside toilet for misbehaving. After a lot of screaming and yelling there was silence and then a mighty crash. He had kicked the back out

of the toilet and escaped. One other time I helped Gordon to escape out of the house and we hid under our house. The front of the old house was very high off the ground. Dad came rushing underneath and stood on a nail in a board. He let out a yell and sat down on another nail at the other end of the board. Well, by this time we were both laughing our heads off. We both got a good hiding.

When I was ten we had a new house built by Mr Bert Brott, his sons Cyril and Sonny, who was a cripple. They camped on the site in tents and worked long days and most weekends. The old photo right shows my Dad and I and the front door. Mr Brott was said to be a grumpy old bugger but I found him very good. He didn't mind me watching him work whenever I could and he explained how and why you had to do things when building a house. This was very handy later in life.



Quite often Dad would go netting on the 90 Mile Beach. I am not sure whether he had a Model T Ford or he had bought a Model A by then. I think it was a Model A Ford. He used to take some of the neighbours but sometimes I was allowed to go which was really great. I remember that we got some big snapper, but it was mainly big sole and flounder. The second photo shows Uncle Bob, Howard Dunn, Olga Dunn, brother Guy and his fiancé Janet, brother John, Eileen Russell and brother Gordon, my father Alfred and me at the 90 Mile Beach just before the war. We were a bit lucky in one respect in that we were the first people on our road to have a car, a Model T Ford and a battery operated radio. We would also go to Kaitaia occasionally and were allowed one ice cream and sometimes some chocolate.



The third photograph was taken about that time just before the war and shows Peter, Alfred, John, Gordon, Buff and me.

Once in town Dad used to spend all his time in the pub and most times go home drunk. This is when he and Mum used to fight about his drinking for hours. Thinking back now I would say that Mum was right as we never had much money for food and clothes. When I was 12 Dad got very ill with stomach ulcers. He actually collapsed and fell backwards into a concrete drain. Luckily I was right there and



was able to grab him before he hit the bottom and pulled him onto the edge. I still don't know how I managed it because he was a very heavy man.

This was a real traumatic turning point in my life as Dad ended up in hospital for a very long time and was lucky to survive. When he did come out Aunt Ines decided that she could look after him better than us so he packed up all his gear and went and lived with her at Honeymoon Valley. Uncle Gordon was away at war.

This was a very hard and stressful time. You could imagine how we all felt, especially Mum and how it affected her life. While Dad was in hospital I carried on doing the milking and looking after the farm. Gordon helped me when he could but he was only eight at the time. I found this very hard going. Getting up at four every morning to milk, usually around 45 cows, then walking or biking three miles to school every day was tough.

During weekends Gordon and I would do farm work like mending fences, shifting stock, cleaning the cow shed, carting hay and stacking it at convenient places to feed out during the week. We had two horses at that time Mike and Buddy, as seen in the old photo to the right.



They were used in harness most of the time. Gordon had a little Shetland pony that he rode to school. He bought it off his grandmother Kataraina for Tuppence, so that was his name. Kataraina is in the second photograph.

To get the collar on to a work horse was quite difficult. The only way we could do it was to put Gordon up on their back then I would push up the collar and then the haines, and he would do up the straps. I also dragged in Puriri logs from the back of the farm to be cut up with an axe for fire wood to keep the range and open fire going.

Probably the most difficult thing to do at this time was to crank up the old diesel engine when the power went off, which was quite often, so that we could get the milking done. Getting the cream to the cream stand at the road was also quite difficult. The cream can was too heavy to carry so I had to carry the cream out to the can in four gallon tins. Some mornings if we were having a problem the truck driver would bring the can to the shed and then carry it back out to his truck.



I think it was about this time that mum employed Graham Latimer, later to become Sir Graham Latimer. How the hell he managed that I wouldn't know. He was very cruel with the cows and if they messed in the bale he would chop them on the top of the tail with the shovel until they bled. He wasn't very energetic either and seemed to sleep most of the day, so after a few months we managed to get rid of him.

My schooling had suffered quite badly over this period as most nights I was too tired to do my home work and occasionally I would be late for school. The teacher, who no one liked, gave me a bit of a hard time. I started off doubling Gordon to school on my bike for several

months and then he started to ride Tuppence. I had been riding him for quite some time as he was unbroken when we got him and he was full of dirty little tricks.

One day coming home from school we decided to swap and I rode Tuppence. The little mongrel didn't like anything to pass him, and when Gordon went to pass he swung his head around and slashed Gordon's head open with its teeth. The wound was just above his eye and about 2 ½ inches long and very deep. I tried all ways to stop it from bleeding but wasn't having very much luck. Fortunately, Joe Dangen came along on his horse and managed to stop it with a heap of cigarette papers, then took him home on the front of his horse. I know we had it stitched up but can't remember how we got him to the hospital.

Neta Macpherson (also known as Gerty, Buff's wife, see right) also came and stayed with us and helped out with the milking for a few months. Lorna McManus (Auntie Cis' daughter) also came for a short period and helped.



When Dad went away he left a Ford 10 Prefect car at home which he had bought on time payment and we had to pay it off.

When I got to fourteen I took it to Kaitaia. Archie McKenzie, who was the traffic cop then, took me for my driver's license. I had to fill in a form and answer a few questions. Then he went outside and said for me to drive up the police station hill, stop half way, then start off again, turn at the top of the hill, come back down and park over there at the curb. I don't know whether he didn't trust my driving but he just stood on the corner and watched me from there. Anyway I got my license. Mind you I had been practicing at home for quite a few months but this was the first time I had driven to Kaitaia. I was allowed to get my license because of our situation and not being able to get to town.

During our schooling period I became very good friends with Neville Atkinson who lived on a farm about half a mile past the school. I would go to his place and play on the occasional Saturday and get up to mischief. Somewhere I had read or heard that if you made pigs swim a lot, they would cut their throats with their sharp front toes. So one day we thought we would put it to the test and chased Mr Atkinson's prime pigs up and down the river for a few hours. Just like Myth Busters. Fortunately it didn't happen. They were just a lot cleaner and a bit lighter.

During the winter months we used to graze our cows at Uncle Gordon and Aunt Ines' farm at Honeymoon Valley (see right). In the mean time I had bought a horse from Auntie Eileen, and I used to take it to Edgar Morey to shoe it for me. This used to cost me ten shillings which was quite a lot of money those days. After watching him for a couple of times I started to do it myself.



If I left at daylight with the cows and had a good run I would get to Honeymoon Valley at around three o'clock.

The cows were put into the back of the farm so I would ride through to the house and Aunt Ines would give me something to eat, but I had to cut her some firewood to pay for it.

By the time I rode the twenty seven kilometres home it was well after dark. Bringing them home again was a lot more difficult as I would have to muster them out of a huge area with a lot of manuka (scrub, titree) and native bush. Some would have calved which wasn't a help. Anyway, if I got them together quick enough, I would set off for home. If not I would put them into a small paddock, stay the night with Aunt Ines and head home the next day. The odd one would go down with tupaki poisoning so would have to leave them and go back a few days later to get them.

The farm was also covered with quite a lot of bracken fern and black berry bushes so during weekends or school holidays I would hook up the horses to the mower and spend all day mowing. I used to have a lot of trouble changing the cutting blade on the mower as it is held in place with a powerful spring. So I made up a steel lever and released it with that.

Sharpening the blade was also a major job. You had to clamp the grinder to the rail then clamp the blade in position and then turn the handle. The grinding stone would spin and at the same time go up and down. When one cutter was sharp you shifted along to the next cutter and so on till 20-30 cutters were done.

We also managed to get an old Maori man, Jimmy Anderson from Victoria Valley, to come and do some fencing for us. I wanted to fence off about six acres of heavy fern at the back of the farm. I hunted around and found some good puriri logs which Jimmy and I cut into lengths with a cross cut saw and he split them into posts. The old photo right shows John and probably Ted Baker using a crosscut saw, watched by myself about 7 and Gordon about three. Jimmy and I also cut down some taraire trees and split them into battens. When the fence was complete I used it to run our pigs there during the winter months.



I also helped him to dig a big drain to drain a swamp below our house. We never had a big enough area on which to cut hay, so when our neighbour Claud Switzer was making his I would go over and take our horses. He would supply a hay sweep, and once the hay was rowed up, I would gather it up with the sweep and bring it to where the stationery hay baler was set up and dump it. This used to be pretty hard going to keep up all day. Sometimes there were two of us and that would make it a lot easier. For helping out, Claud would pay me back with bales of hay which would help us out during the winter months.

The photo to the right shows an eel my brother Peter caught before the war. Once a year I would go and help Claud to dip all his sheep. He had an old swim-through dip. The sheep had to be thrown in at one end, and while they were swimming, we



pushed them under to wet their heads. After we had finished doing the dipping the dip had to be emptied. To do this you pulled a plug out of a pipe that ran from the bottom of the dip down to the creek. There used to be dead eels for about a couple of kilometres down stream. This is frowned upon these days. I used to like helping him with this job. After it was over he would give us some mutton.

Claud's father Rueben also made us a big, heavy, three-wheel cart to take our cream cans out to the cream stand. That was a big help. It was about this time, I think I was just about 14, when I strained my stomach muscles lifting four-gallon tins of milk out of forty-four gallon drums feeding the pigs. This affected me over a long period. Every time I lifted things it didn't help the situation and really slowed me down. Knowing what I know now, I think I had a heart attack. I could not lift my arms above my head for a very long time so could not bowl or swim over arm and the old bugger of a teacher gave me a hard time. The teacher then was Frank Vazey. It was fortunate that we had power put in before Dad took ill otherwise I would not have been able to start the diesel motor.

After Dad had recovered he never returned home but joined the Home Guard (see right). They were stationed in barracks at Peria. Guy, John, Peter, Uncle Bob and Uncle Gordon were all over seas fighting in the War during this period that I am writing about. I think the worst and hardest period during this time was when I got measles rather badly. I spent most of the day in bed then had to get up and milk the cows both night and morning. After a few days of this I got a bad chill and all the spots turned to boils. I can still remember that Mum opened up eleven of them one night.

Schooling wasn't going very well either. Some days the bike would break down; mostly punctures as tyres were very hard to get. This would make us late for school, and when this happened the teacher would keep us in after school to make up the time lost. This was tough going as it made us late with the milking and we were too tired to do home work. The teacher was also very aware of our situation.

At the beginning of my last year of school the teacher was changed. We had Mrs Les Foster. She had only got as high as teaching standard one and two, so it was a pretty hopeless situation. I never really learned a hell of a lot in my final year.

There was one really happy occasion that I remember and that was one evening I was returning to the house after milking and I could see two people standing on the hill by the side of the house waving. I could not make out who they were until I got closer and then I realized it was Uncle Bob (see right) and Aunty Eileen. It was really great to see them again. They stayed with us for a couple of days and he told



us about his experience overseas. After he had heard all of our problems that we had had he said that I had had a far worse time than he had!

To help keep the pigs going over the winter months we bought small scrappy kumaras from the Maori people of Victoria Valley. Jimmy would gather them up and when he had a wagon load he would bring them over. I would store them in forty-four gallon drums out at the area that we had fenced off.

We kept three sows and a boar out there. We also kept any other pigs there that were not large enough to go to the works when the cows were dried off. This worked very well until the last year I was on the farm. I went out there to feed them one day and the only pigs left were the sows and boar. All the rest had been stolen.

Claud Switzer and another neighbour helped me to try and find them. The police were informed but the pigs were not seen again. If I remember correctly I think there were 23 about 50 to 60 pounds weight. The police said they were reasonably sure where they were but as they had no ear marks it would be hard to prove. To lose that many pigs in those days was a big loss.

By this time I had left school, and would be fifteen early the next year. This made things a hell of a lot easier. Mum was talked into attending the Maori Land Court in Kaitaia. I think it was about the same time as I left school. Most of the time we could not buy petrol because of the war; it was rationed as were many other things. Most food items were rationed. I used to take fungus to the Chinese grocer Hop Hing and he would swap it for rice; quite a good deal I thought.

Tyres for the car were almost impossible to buy. Occasionally I would be able to run Mum down to the end of the road to catch the bus and then pick her up in the evening. On other occasions she would have to walk the two and half miles there and back. All it did for us was to cost us money we could hardly afford.

As the war was coming to an end we received a letter to say that Guy would be returning and that we would have to vacate the farm by a certain date. This was a real kick in the guts, just coming out of the blue. I knew that this was going to be a bigger challenge than my earlier years. This had been my home for fifteen years and I knew every stick and stone on the place and now it was all over with a heap of new and different responsibilities.

It was also about then that we received a telegram to say that my half brother John (see right) had been shot down in the English Channel and had not survived. This was just about the last straw, especially for Mum. We got in touch with Dad to see if we could take the car, seeing that we had paid it off over the last four years, but this was also turned down as it was part of the deal and it went with the farm.

Uncle Bob came to our rescue and we shifted in with them for a short period. I got a job working for Arthur Masters at Pukepoto working on a dairy farm. Gordon went to live with Stan and Doris at Orakei, Auckland and finished off his



schooling there. I stayed at Arthurs for a few months until he had recovered his health and then I went and worked for his brother Maurice. He was a real bastard to work for, after being with Arthur.

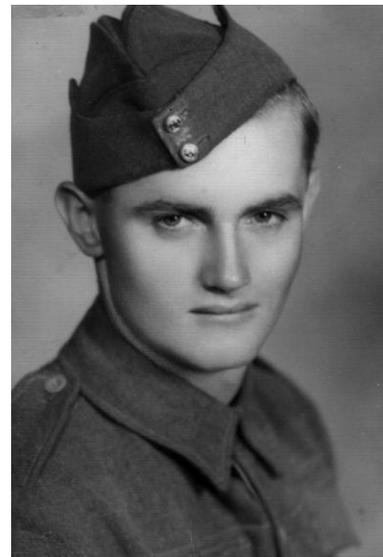
One day he got me to make a heap of pumpkin beds in this four acre paddock surrounded with pampas hedges. It was really hot. Maurice had been to the pub and played pool all day. I think he must have lost because he came home in a hell of a rage and started kicking all the pumpkin beds to pieces, said they were no good and to start again. I don't often get annoyed but I did this day. I told him he could do the so and so things himself. He looked at me for a while. I didn't know whether to run or not. Anyway, he said he was sorry and heaped them back up and was really good to me for the rest of the time I was there.

After that I managed to get a job with Allan Holder who was single at the time. We stayed in his house for a little over a year and Mum did the cooking, washing and house work while I worked on the farm. Mum and Auntie Eileen had never got on very well while we were staying with them, so it worked out quite well. When I look back on it all now, I realize that all the trauma had really affected Mum more than I knew at the time. She didn't want me to have anything more to do with Uncle Bob and Auntie Eileen, which I refused to do. She then went on that I was against her too. Another kick in the guts.

It was really hard going at Allan's place. I got up at 3.30 and helped milk 90-100 cows, after that he and I would cut up big puriri logs into lengths and then I would split them into posts, and then erect new fences, and repair old ones. I also ploughed up several paddocks with a big hand held plough and a team of horses, worked them down to a good seed bed, and planted new grass. I also cut manuka with an axe, really big trees that were growing in native bush. We dragged them with a chain and horse out to the road and then cut them into four feet lengths and stacked them into heaps ready for sale.

I can't remember how Neville Atkinson came to be there but I do remember he gave me a hand for a few days until a branch that had broken off and hung up in another tree suddenly fell and drove into the side of his back. He had to go to hospital for treatment.

It was while we were there that we received another telegram to say that Peter (see right) had been drowned when the prisoner of war boat he was in had been sunk. I am afraid that this was just about the last straw for both of us. Mum was very close to the twins as she had brought them up from babies. Allan had also got married by this time and Mum never got along with his wife Thelma. I also had a bit of a breakdown at this time and nearly ended it all right then. It was just the fact that I still had Mum and Gordon to think about that brought me around.



We went from there just before I was eighteen, and fortunately for us, David Archibald got me to come and manage his farm just down the road from Uncle Bobs which had a house. This farm was approximately 480 acres, mostly hills. I milked between 45 and 50 cows and looked after 400 odd sheep. This was quite a good job and really kept me busy, especially with the lambing and shearing.

It was while I was there that I met Bert Fryer, a really nice neighbour and the best friend I ever had. He was really very good to me and helped me pick myself up again and restored my faith in human beings. This was when we bought some dogs and started pig hunting. We also went duck and pheasant shooting and spent a lot of time fishing together. We also went and camped at the Bluff several times. Camping was permitted on the Bluff back then. We also went away deer stalking at Edgecombe for ten days and that was great.

After a couple of years David sold his farm so we were on the move once again. Uncle Bob suggested that we set up a small mill and cut up some macrocarpa logs and build us a house on his property. It would have to be built on skids so that if we wanted to sell it at a later date there would be no problem. It didn't take long to set the mill up and start cutting timber. Some of the logs were quite large so we built a big ramp and rolled the logs up on top where it was secured. We then cut them into flitches; big pieces of timber that we could put over our saw bench. This was really hard work, especially for the person underneath the log.

This was really a most pleasant and interesting period. Macrocarpa timber looks good, smells good and is really good to work with. It was hard heavy work but I was fairly used to that by now. It didn't take very long to cut enough timber for the house. I think it was about three weeks. Uncle Bob helped me to put up the frame work and then I did the rest. It had three bedrooms, lounge, kitchen and bathroom and wash house. I did the kitchen and one bedroom for a start, so that we could live there while I built the rest.

I had managed to save quite a bit of money since leaving home, Mangatoetoe, and was able to build the house and buy a one ton Reo truck, which was quite a big help. When I was building the house I also worked with Uncle Bob putting up fences cutting down trees, building sheds and bridges. He was very good at this type of work and showed me heaps. He was more of a father to me than my own father.

I then leased the neighbouring property from Pat King, bought 25 cows and started milking. I did the house at night and weekends, if I wasn't hunting with Bert. I got Lofty Hollemby to make all the windows. I made all the doors, lined and clad the building and also did the plumbing. The house cost just over £1,200.

Once the house was completed Gordon came back to live with us again (see right). It was really good to have him back with us once again. Carole and Joan (Doris and Stan's children) used to come and spend most school holidays with us. I had bought a



new A40 Austin truck by now, so I would milk my cows and then drive to Auckland to pick them up and be back to milk in the evening.

Gordon worked for Pat King in his first year back, but when Buff (my half brother) started up a timber mill in Kaitaia, Gordon went into partnership with him. They used to borrow my

new truck to go all over the place to get bits and pieces for their mill which was a dam nuisance at times.

It was while I was living here that I first met Pat Geddes. We started going out together. She was working at Mark Hammond's Chemist shop at the time. Life really took on an upward turn from here on. In my 25<sup>th</sup> year I was offered a job as Farm Manager at Taipa Block working for the Lands and Survey Department.

One relation asked me how I qualified for a manager's job. The only thing that I can say is that I had had quite a lot of experience with different phases of farming. I knew about stock grazing and management. I had learned a bit about sheep farming while I was at Archibalds, how to shear, how to build fences, bridges, stock yards, sheds and houses. The only thing that really fazed me was the heaps of paper work. I very quickly learnt to do most of it every day, keep carbon copies of all your transactions and keep your diary up to date.

I was very proud that only myself and one other farm manager, Don Scaife, were the only two out of over 20 managers who didn't have to go to a course in Whangarei for a week to learn how to do their paper work. So I sold up the house and cows and shifted to Taipa. In the mean time Gordon had met Nancye Mills who was nursing up here and they were married (see right).



It was really good at Taipa. It was 2,500 acres, all in rubbish. It was my job to break it in and fence it up into paddocks. Pat and I managed to get married two and a half years after we shifted there. Her mother would not give her consent for us to be married so we went through the courts and after a hell of a lot of hassle we finally got permission and got married the following day, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1956. Nothing comes easy.

This was a really happy time for me and there has never been a day that I have regretted it. The harder something is to achieve the more it is appreciated. It was a really happy period when we were on the Taipa Block. I was there for just on eight years and during that time four of our children were born; Sari, John, Michael and Wendy. They all went to school at Taipa.

The fishing was also very good. I would just walk over the hill after work and be home for tea with plenty of fish. I also had a horse I could cast off and shoot from. While we were there Mum started work for Uncle Charlie, looking after his children Johnny and Keith Russell. She did this during the week. We would go in on Friday night, have tea with them, then bring her home for the weekend. She did this for a few years and then Charlie shifted out to Ahipara so that made the trip that much longer.

At the end of eight years the block was completely broken in and was cut up into three farms for settlement. While Taipa was closing down I started breaking in a block of land at Cable Bay. By the time we had to shift from Taipa a new house was ready to shift into at Cable Bay. A beautiful spot.

This block was not quite as big as Taipa but steeper and more difficult. I was very lucky as both of these blocks had to be broken in from heavy scrub and gorse. It was very interesting

to plan all the fences, roads and buildings and see it all change into lovely green pastures. I had contractors come in and do all the different operations. All I had to do was to pick out the better contractors and write out a contract.

I forgot to mention that aerial top dressing first started when we were at Taipa. This was really interesting. All areas could be covered. Fertilizer was barged to the Mangonui wharf and then trucked onto the air strip. Trucks with special front end loaders then put the fertilizer straight into the plane.

Waka Rutene came with me from Taipa. He and I were the only permanent workers on the block. He was a very good friend and worker. It took seven happy years to complete this block and it was divided into two large farms. So once again we were on the move, this time we were shifted to a much larger and tougher Sweetwater Block. This block had been going for some time and it was partly broken in. Buck Harrison had been the manager there and was now managing the Puriri Block. Sweetwater was very difficult to break in as it was sand on the 90 Mile Beach side and very deep peat on the lower flats. I managed to get a belt of pines down the coast to stop the sand encroaching onto the grassed area. This was a big help.

Breaking in the peat area was by far the most difficult. It was so soft it was hard to get machinery over it. Luckily, four-wheel drive tractors were coming onto the market at the time so we purchased three of these and that made a big difference. Fires were also a major problem as it took months to put them out. It was while we were there that Judi was born. She was a pleasant surprise as there was an eight year gap. So that gave us two boys and three girls. We are the only Macphersons with a mixed family.

Sweetwater was a great environment in which to bring up a family. Plenty of lakes for shooting and swimming, fishing on 90 Mile Beach also horse riding and hunting. We always had plenty of kids coming and staying. The older children also helped out on the block at holidays and weekends; checking drains, fire fighting and feeding out hay.

We took our holidays camping at Matthew's property at Aurere Beach most years. This was very popular and we always had plenty of friends come and stay. The four eldest children all left home from there to go their separate ways. In 1987 the development of Sweetwater came to a close. Lands and Survey was taken over by Land Corp. I was very lucky to have had all of these opportunities doing development work which I really enjoyed.

When I turned sixty in 1988 I retired. We bought the house at 30 Dominion Road, Kaitaia. It used to be the district nurses' home and clinic and I had to practically rebuild it. I re-clad most walls, put in new and larger windows, also added on another bedroom and a wash house. I also built a double garage, work shop and a large wood shed where I have a lot of swamp kauri timber plus other bits and pieces, which I turn.

After finishing the house I went and worked for Billy Steed doing fencing, spraying and general farm work. This kept me busy for some years. At the time Billy had four farms. In between times I also did building jobs for my family who had now all returned to Kaitaia. It is really good that we are still one big happy family and all get on so well together. Over the years 12 grandchildren have been born: Sari has Trey; John has Genevieve, Hayley and Ben; Michael has Willy, Kate, Sandi and Samantha; Wendy has Riana and Jason; and Judi has Harley and Tayla. We have one great grandchild; Hayley has a son Zayne.

These kids are such a terrific group of young people, the best you could ever wish to have. Pat and I have been so lucky to have been blessed with such a super family. I would like to

sincerely thank Pat and my family for making my life so full and happy. I have had what no money could ever buy.

# Short Stories and Poems by Ken Macpherson

edited by Judi Rogers (née Macpherson)

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# Final Chance

by Ken Macpherson, 2 June 2009

Today is my final opportunity to try and catch a reasonable size pig for my brother Gordon's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday hangi. Bert, my best friend and I have been out three times over the last weeks and have only come up with a sow with suckers which we were able to release.

Bert couldn't make it today so as daylight approaches I am up at the top end of Fryers road with Bert's two dogs. "Laddie" a black and white strong eyed sheep dog (finder) and "Mike" a bull mastiff lab cross (holder). I also have my two dogs, "Patch" and full brother to Mike and "Roy" a bull Mastiff (holder). This spot has been our main hunting area over the last couple of years.

Today I have decided to take a different track to normal as the wind is coming on my back. So I left the grassy formed road, and headed off in a big half circle, through titree, gorse and heavy bracken fern. I am actually trying to come out at the bottom of a large patch of native bush, where on previous occasions, over the last eighteen months we have found the marks and rooting of a very large pig, but had never been able to locate it.

I have just topped the last ridge before I go down across a grassy area that I had left earlier to enter the bush. All of a sudden the dogs' heads went up and after testing the wind for a minute they were off. Down the hill they raced for about a couple of hundred yards, across the deep swamp onto a little spur of real heavy bracken fern. Then all hell broke loose, dogs barking, pig chomping and then he started to squeal.

When I got there I couldn't see any of the four dogs or the pig, but I could tell he was really big. After ripping out and scraping away the dead fern I finally cleared a small area right over the top of his head and I saw a massive set of tusks.

Both Mike and Patch were on each ear which was lucky for me, because as he charged out he just missed me, however as they raced past one of the dogs knocked my legs out from under me. Down I went like a tonne of bricks. I watched as the pig charged off down into the swamp with the dogs still attached. It didn't take me long to get there as a good track had been cleared by pig and dogs. This was where my troubles really began.

The swamp was very deep and I immediately sank up to my waist. Movement at this stage, as you can imagine, was very limited. When I was finally able to grab the pig I couldn't turn it over to stick it. Fortunately the two holders were still anchoring the pig so it couldn't turn on me.

We have never stuck any of our pigs through the rib cage as it usually spoils too much pork and I wasn't starting now. The pig, like myself, had sunk quite deep in the swamp so it didn't

have a great deal of movement. After some careful manoeuvring I managed to slip my right hand up between his front legs and stuck him where he stood. It must have been a fluke shot as he died almost immediately.

Now my work really started. Every time I tried to pull it onto solid ground I just sank further into the swamp, so I decided to cut off its head. I tried again, this time managing to shift it a little. After a long time and a great struggle I got it to solid ground where I gutted it. Headless and gutted it still weighed a tonne and I couldn't manage by myself to get it to my truck.

I wracked my brain. How the hell was I going to get this pig home. Then I remembered, there was an old wrecked fence up by the road. It wasn't long and I was back with a long length of No.8 wire. Then I shifted my truck as close as I safely could to the swamp. With one end of the wire attached to the pig and the other to the truck I hauled the pig up to a spot where I could load it. With the pig, the dogs and me in the truck, all wet and covered from head to toe with mud and blood, we headed for home.

I arrived back at Bert's just after lunch and he couldn't get over how lucky I had been and wished he had been there. I wished he had been too. We then scolded it and cleaned it up. It was a 236 pound black and white barrow in good condition. To top it all off, it tasted lovely.

## Three 303s

by Ken Macpherson

It is just coming up day light. There is a slight smudge of light in the eastern sky. It is really cold, even though the three of us are crowded into the front seat of my old gold crown Reo truck. The only heater is the huge motor in front of us. That should give you a clue to how long ago that this story took place.

Bert my best friend, Gordon my brother and I are heading for Waiotehue, pig hunting. This is a bit of a different type of pig hunting. We have no pig dogs. Over the last five months my uncle and I have been out here fencing. The contract was to cut down totara trees in the native bush nearby and split them all into posts and battens and then erect a new seven wire fence three miles long around a big bush burn area.

There were a lot of wild pigs in the area while we were there (1949). The owner was upset with the damage they were doing to his new grass while also breaking the odd wire on the new fence. Could we possibly do anything about it for him?

It was not possible to get close to the area where we intended to hunt. We had about a 2 ½ mile walk ahead of us, carrying a 303 rifle each plus other bits and pieces. The plan was for us to split up and walk down three long fern covered ridges just out from the native bush. Once in place we would slowly walk down the ridges, prearranged signals had been put in place before we split up. When we were all in place the hunt began.

It wasn't until we were close to the stream at the bottom that Gordon waved us over, moving as quickly as we could we soon joined him. He pointed out something lying in the fern which was black with a big patch of white, like a partly burnt Puriri log. While we were watching a black pig walked around behind it and then we realized it was a huge pig. We looked around quickly for a rifle rest but no luck and we could not lie down on the ground as the fern was too high, so it had to be a standing shot.

On the way in we had come across a saddled horse tied up at the edge of the bush. We had a good idea what he was doing there but that was not our concern.

So we opened fire. The fern erupted. We counted twenty five pigs and I am sure we never saw the lot. It was like another war had started with all the shots ringing around the valleys. We all missed the big pig, but we knocked over a few others.

One quite large boar was running off to the top of a grassy ridge opposite me so I pumped a few shots at it, and I could see it flinch but it kept on going. So I took off after it and I was really puffing when I got to the top. When I got there the boar had stopped, turned around and was waiting for me.

When he saw me he charged. This is going to be easy I thought as I lined him up, but oh hell! Suddenly the tables were turned. There was just a click.

It took about two strides to get into top gear and I was away back down the ridge. As I ran I worked a bullet out of my pocket and slipped it into the rifle. I could hear the boar chomping about a foot behind my backside. Finally the rifle was loaded. I swung around and shot him. After I got my breath back I checked him out. He had been shot five times but none of them very severe.

Meanwhile Gordon and Bert had nearly died laughing as my drama unfolded. After a coffee we gathered up the pigs on the little flat by the stream ready to steam and clean them. We were quite pleased with our morning's work. We had eleven pigs ranging from 90 – 170 pounds.

While we were cleaning them up we spotted a face staring at us from the edge of the scrub. Out stepped a Maori man leading the saddled horse. He gave us a bit of a silly grin as he approached. He said that he had nearly died of fright and thought another war had started, so he had better get out of there. We had actually seen him leave the native bush area at one hell of a speed crouched low over his horse's neck.

When we had cleaned most of them up I walked back to the farmer's house and borrowed his horses and sledge to transport the pigs to the truck. We gave the racing Maori three pigs. He was really pleased as he went off with them tied all over his horse. We also gave a couple to the farmer and headed off home with the rest. It had been a long hard but rewarding day and the beginning of many more pig hunting trips over the next few years.

# A LOVELY JOURNEY

The skies were full, of ominous cloud  
Away in the distance, faintly a thundering sound  
We were hoping it would be warm, with plenty of sun  
'Cause this is the day, for her final run  
She was just very young, when she learnt to ride  
Parents always there, right by her side  
I know it's not been easy, I will atone  
A tear a few bruises, the odd broken bone  
But you're tough and determined, want to achieve  
Ribbons and trophies, like you wouldn't believe  
You started at the bottom, went right to the top  
Trailing behind you, your Grandma and Pop  
We followed you round, to many a place  
To see a clear round, and the smile on your face  
You rode your white horse, as though you were one  
To all of your followers, you gave so much fun  
Cutting the corners, you had guts, you were brave  
By scoring the points, the team you did save  
To do what you did, with your horse forged a bond  
So don't let anyone, call you a blond  
The clouds roll away, the days warm and clear  
We are very sorry, your final day's here  
You've given such pleasure, over the years  
We'll miss the loudspeakers, the crowds and the cheers  
We enjoyed your very last, "Horse of the Year"  
So thank you Samantha, you are very dear

Ken Macpherson 2009

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# **ALWAYS A WORKER**

The night is dark, the night is cold  
I've had some sleep, but there's a tale to be told  
This is the story, of a great little guy  
I hope I do him justice, I'll give it a try  
Eventually walking, follows me around  
Picking up gear, I've dropped on the ground  
He cleans and he tidies, with sweat on his brow  
The cleanest workshop, I have right now  
He helps me, in so many ways  
Cleans up the mess, puts tools away  
He is good with his hands, an inventive mind  
Fixes and repairs, anything he can find  
He's good with a rod, a gun and his knife  
Does swimming and sports, leads a great life  
His eyes light up, has a cute little smile  
A story is coming, I haven't heard for a while  
It runs in the family, his Dad is the same  
Does all the actions, keeps you up with the game  
I know you are wondering, who this could be  
I'm proud to inform you, he's a grandson to me  
So thank you Harley, for all that you've done  
Working with you, is such good fun

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# GRAMMIE'S (PAT'S) MOTHERS DAY

The darkness faded, and rolled away  
Dawning, is a special day  
Celebrated, right across the land  
Drawing families together, it's really grand  
There's hugs and kisses, an occasional tear  
A bottle of wine, and a glass of beer  
Presents, vouchers, and cards galore  
Wrapping paper, all over the floor  
To a lovely lunch, she's whisked away  
Then we all go home, there are games to play  
A lone yellow rose, stands in a vase  
A special flower, just for ma's  
There IS one thing, that made her day  
A text message, from grandson Trey  
Just one little word, that's all it took "yous"  
Bought tears to her eyes, and her shoulders shook  
A lovely fish meal, caught by Kelly and Will  
They got soaking wet, and shivering still  
A lovely video, supplied by Kate  
Kept us up, but not very late  
So thank you all, in every way  
POPS had a glorious, mothers day

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# KELLY

Out of the smog, from far away  
Kelly Whitman, has come to stay  
Heart throb of, our Grandson Will  
She's found a flat, lives on a hill  
Now Kelly is, no ordinary girl  
She'll give most everything, a whirl  
She's found a good job, and works like a slave  
She's small but she's lovely, and oh so brave  
She's taken up shooting, now she shoots with the best  
Her shoulder is blue, but never a rest  
Learnt how to fish, better than a Shag  
At the end of the day, she has the most in her bag  
Lies in the sun, has a very nice tan  
Blends in better, with the rest of our clan  
Cooking is her best, thing of all  
Uses peppers, both large and small  
We all think you're wonderful, we all think you're great  
Just one little criticism, you are sometimes late  
But soon you'll be off, with Grandson Will  
Though only small, what a great gap to fill  
We will all miss you, a hell of a lot  
As the sun goes down, we'll forget you not

# MY LIFE

A waning moon, a rising sun  
Night has gone, a new day's begun  
In the early hour, of predawn  
A new wee baby boy's, been born  
As years go by, and he starts to grow  
It's off to school, he will have to go  
He will strive and learn, to take his place  
Along with the rest, of the mighty race  
Oh' what a glorious, wonderful life  
Unbeknown, the sadness and strife  
Then a paedophile, came to dwell  
Made his life, a living hell  
Then war was declared, the men went away  
Even his father, went astray  
So wipe the tears, you have to strive  
He has a brother and mother, to keep alive  
It wasn't easy, to work night and day  
Once he nearly, gave it away  
But then he met, his wonderful wife  
So once again, what a glorious life  
He had a great family, numbering five  
He thanks them all, for a lovely life  
Please stay together, and stand up tall  
He loved them all as much as he can  
As the sun goes down, he's a happy old man

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# PRIME TIME

The sun has risen, on an exciting busy day  
We are all packed, and ready, all on our way  
The Macpherson migration, has just begun  
To Waitiki Landing, for shooting and fun  
This must be the most, unique place on the map  
The currency accepted here - possum trap  
Finally we all arrive, and get settled in  
Have a few drinks, Grandma has gin  
Maps and charts produced, great plans are made  
Most of us have cards, and a few games were played  
A little bit pissed, but oh very wise  
Early to bed, hopefully early to rise  
Not using a gun, Will traps birds with ease  
Come on Kelly - that's a swans neck, 'tween his knees  
You say you always, get things wrong  
Good god girl, it can't be that long  
The things Jude does, to save a red face  
Takes off her boots, through the mud, she does pace  
Mac gets stuck in, at a furious pace  
Cammo gear, and paint on his face  
He chases pigs, both big and small  
His cammo gear has failed him, is not working at all  
He passes his dogs, and runs out of puff  
Chasing pigs over loose sand, is bloody tough  
Late in the evening, he returns, fully redeemed  
He had the most mussels in camp, it seemed  
And who supplied all the feathers, covered in meat  
No good for salami, spit out on your feet  
Now Glen knew we had, restricted freezer space

He let out his dogs, with smiles on their face  
Sorry Glen I know, you're a really good guy  
Don't want you to cut off, my fire wood supply  
Glad Sari came, though for a short while  
Went back home, with a happier smile  
Karen gets stuck in, fits in well with our lot  
Always out with John, having a shot  
John and Mike Knight, they are not porangi  
They did most of their shooting, at Te Rangi  
Poor Peter he went his separate ways  
His dogs never came back, for a couple of days  
He wanted to know, what was John's whakapapa  
Had to tell him that I, was his f..... papa  
Geba! what a wonderful secret you kept  
You walked through the door, and your grandmother wept  
To the youngest sportsman Harley, who really did achieve  
Got a swan, snapper and kingfish, would you believe  
I hope he will return, year after year  
Join with the families, shoot a few birds, have a beer  
Stan the man came, to participate  
Went back to work, to recuperate  
A few hoons came along, and they booked in  
Headboard against the wall, what a hell of a din  
I don't know whether 'twas the hoons or the coons  
But some of the buggers, stole Joys spoons  
Michael Knight said, with a voice not very loud  
Looking around, you must feel, very proud  
Yes both grandma and I, do feel very proud  
It's great to have so many, family and friends around  
Some people get honours, for what they have done  
Our honour is here, and it was much more fun

We have enough money, just to get by  
But what we have here, no money can buy  
Thank you all, for a wonderful weekend

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# THE HORSE WHISPERER

He was very young, not even three  
Just came up, to big Bill's knee  
Darkness just clearing, daylight is here  
A quiet little voice, whispers in my ear  
"Dad would you catch Bill?, I want to go for a ride"  
This is how it started, many years ago  
We didn't know then, just how far it would go  
He would ride around the lawn, days after days  
Dreaming his dreams, his mind in a haze  
Got himself trapped, under T bar clothesline  
Ended up jammed, over big Bill's behind  
His mother rushed out, to his rescue she came  
Then realised she was naked, shame shame shame  
He broke in wild horses, to make a few bob  
Before he left school, and got himself a job  
Then he up and he left, to the far south he went  
Where several very happy years, he spent  
Then he suddenly realised, if he wanted a life  
Get rid of the horses, and take up a wife  
He met a lovely young woman, he took for his bride  
Went over to Aussie, with her by his side  
Ten years later, with good money in hand  
Returned to Kaitaia, to take up his land  
With four lovely children, they all settled down  
Horses be bought, where ever they could be found  
Mike has talents with horses, you would not believe  
People are amazed as they watch, and perceive  
With a flick of the rope, a nod of the head  
The horse understands, not a word is said

Many rogue horses, have come his way  
All straightened out, by the end of the day  
Excelled at eventing, does trekking far and wide  
His wife and three daughters, ride at his side  
He has ribbons and trophies, to prove his success  
His main satisfaction, ironing out others mess  
People bring problem horses, from miles around  
They know he and his horses, walk the same ground  
Mostly it's not the horse, that's the bane of his life  
It's educating the riders, the odd silly wife  
His knowledge around horses, does revolve  
He also has their medical problems, to solve  
He has a saddlery business, is a farrier as well  
Sometimes I think, he has a horsey smell  
He has helped so many people, always gives them his best  
Riding his horses, is the way he gets rest  
Now that he's older, and he rides down the track  
Was this the dream, that he dreamt on Bill's back?

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# TORNADO

The day started off, sunny and bright  
All of a sudden, it's as dark as night  
The thunder crashed, and the rain poured down  
Then not a breath, not a breeze, not a single sound  
And then all sirens, started to scream and blare  
That's when I knew, there was something wrong out there  
A tornado had come through, at a terrible pace  
Windows and roofs, all over the place  
It came very close, just passing us by  
The odd little injury, but no one did die  
The local hospital, was the end of the run  
But luckily, not much damage was done  
Texts and phone calls, started to arrive  
Family and friends, checking we were all still alive  
The only time, I was blown away  
Was all of the messages, received that day  
Michael and Joy, called in to check  
Were we ok, was our house in a wreck  
They found me alone, so decided to stay  
We had coffee and cake, and some cards we did play  
Next to arrive, was Samantha and Kate  
We had a nice dinner, played cards till late  
Some poor people, had a traumatic and horrible day  
I had another, wonderful family day.

# TRIPPING AROUND

Please come for a drive, let's drive around  
A nice comfortable car, is the best I have found  
I am very cunning, we will drive the east coast  
Not so likely the kids, will spew up their toast  
We will start with Awanui, revamped by sex  
Squashed by the council, what else would you expect  
We're off to Taipa, a lovely resort  
Then over the one way bridge, where many a battle is fought  
Then up over the hill, to Cable Bay  
Oops someone's taken, our over-bridge away  
We creep along, at a snails pace  
Bypass Mangonui, it's a dangerous place  
Drunks stagger and fall, flat on their face  
There are no barriers, it's a bloody disgrace  
All washed out to sea, without any trace  
How bizarre - oops sorry getting carried away  
So it's off to Kaeo, with eyes open wide  
Please drive carefully, through the on rushing tide  
We carry on driving, it's up and it's down  
We come to Waipapa, a new little town  
But the shops are closed, with no one around  
It's a pity and a shame, I do have to say  
Take the smell from Moerewa, it'll go the same way  
Now off to the next town, without any steam  
Where they pull all their trains, by hand it would seem  
Please stop, take a break, wash your face, have a pee  
Kawakawa's very famous, for its lavatory  
Ok let's get cracking, we've wasted enough time  
We'll miss a few places, I can't make them rhyme

We're in Whangarei, with the rain pouring down  
We're heading on through, it's such a wet town  
We'll stop at Wellsford, the town on the hill  
Top up with diesel, and stomachs to fill  
Then we'll weave through Doom Valley, where so many have died  
Heaps of wooden crosses, on either side  
If it's through the tunnel, you intend to go  
Don't blink your eyes, you'll miss it I know  
We'll skirt around Orewa, and Silverdale too  
We'll stick to the motorway, and scream on through  
Now to the great city, we have finally come  
On the edge of the seat, a fat nervous bum  
Then after a tension filled, nerve wracking drive  
We're out of Auckland, and all still alive  
Take a little break, we're going well so far  
No breakdowns, no punctures, no dents in the car  
Don't like Huntly, seems a permanent place  
Bloody big cemetery, where ever you face  
And then to Cambridge, such a lovely little place  
Relax by the river, and watch the boats race  
As night closes in, I will have to stay  
So please join me tomorrow, as I go on my way

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

# WORLD WISE

The stars shone down on the rising sun  
Night has gone a new day has begun  
I rise up and join the flow  
All over the world to work we go  
We all go with increasing pace  
Just to keep up the increasing race  
There's money to make and things to buy  
Just to keep up with the other guy  
And at the end of another day  
We have heaps of toys to stack away  
But that is not the story's end  
Out of the darkness the scum descend  
To rape and pillage and smash what we've done  
It's the only way they know to have fun  
The judge looks down with a mighty frown  
I'm not going to send you down  
I'm sure there's community work to be found  
With rubbish here and rubbish there  
Pollution and sickness everywhere  
So the stars just quietly fade away  
A bleary sun, it's another day

Ken Macpherson 2009 \_\_\_\_\_