

## **DOREEN: WILLIAM FREDERICK AND CAROLINE FRANCES**

**Known as:** Bill and Carol

**Bill born:** 5 January 1929

**Carol born:** 21 January 1932 (maiden name: Eriksen)

**Married:** 17 January 1953, St Augustine's church, Petone

**Bill died:** 15 July 2018

**Carol died:** 1 December 2017

**Buried together at The Avenue cemetery, Levin**

### ***Bill's parents were:***

Frank Doreen (b. 1894, Reading, England)

and

Ida, nee Woodruffe (b. June 1890, Stratford, Taranaki; d. 1967)

They were married in 1917 in Sydney, Australia.

### ***Bill's grandparents were:***

Paternal: Benjamin Ruben Dore and Hilda Hancock (always lived in England)

Maternal: Laurance Ramskill Woodruffe and Janet (Jessie) Harre

### ***Bill had two older brothers:***

Harold (b. 1924)

Henri (b. 1926)

### ***Carol's parents were:***

Francis (Frank) William Eriksen (b. 24 May 1892, Greymouth; d. 13 July 1951)

and

Kathleen, nee Knight (b. 25 October 1903, Lower Hutt; d. 8 April 1954)

Frank and Kathleen were married spring 1929 in the Methodist Church, Otaki.

### ***Carol's grandparents were:***

Paternal: James Kemp and Mary Ann (nee Cain) Eriksen

Maternal: Alexander and Caroline (nee Murray) Knight

***Carol had an older half-brother and two younger sisters:***

Kemp (b. 11 November 1926)

Kathleen (Kathy) (b. 28 February 1933)

Lorraine (b. 5 October 1942)

***Bill and Carol had four children:***

Warwick Francis (20 Dec 1953 -)

Murray William (19 May 1957 -)

Jonathan Michael (8 May 1959 -)

Rosemary Carol (10 Sept 1961 -)



**The family completed, early 1960s (from family archive)**

***There are eleven grandchildren and four great grandchildren***

### **Carol's Early Life**

Carol was brought up in the war years with air raid shelters, night patrols and the home guard, living together with her grandparents in Nelson St,

Petone. Her primary education was at Petone Convent School where she was school librarian. She was also a Guide and Dux of the school in 1944. She relished academia at Sacred Heart College in Lower Hutt where she was also school librarian and Dux in 1948.

Carol joined Gordon and Gotch, the book and magazine distributor, in 1949, learning all aspects of the business. She met Bill at a Saturday night dance at St Francis Hall in Hill St, Wellington, in 1950. As Bill lived in Miramar and Carol was still living in Lower Hutt, they would meet each Friday after work in Wellington. They were engaged in 1952 and married in 1953 in St Augustine's Church, Petone.



**The newly-weds, 1953 (family archive)**

### **Bill's Early Life**

Bill's father, Frank, was an English merchant seaman involved in the evacuation from Gallipoli, rising through the ranks to become a ship's officer and locating to New Zealand where he met and married his wife, Ida. When Frank came ashore in 1928, he worked for the Harbour Board as a crane driver but in the depression years he had to seek work in Australia. Ida's family came originally from Taranaki and from there she went to Wellington to complete her teacher training.

Bill was born in January 1929, the youngest of three boys. As a youngster, he was known as Billy and from his teenage years as Bill.

He was a frail, sickly lad suffering from asthma, bronchitis and eczema. Home was in Houghton's Valley. It was a happy home and between bouts of sickness and time in hospital Bill played with the other kids in the bush.

He went to scouts on Wednesday and the Baptist Sunday School. In those years his father introduced him to gardening; he was given a corner in which he grew vegetables.

Family outings were a special feature of life as Bill grew up and things improved. When they got their car there were family picnics or visits to his mother's family, the Woodruffes, in Feilding where wonderful family gardens advanced Bill's interest in horticulture.

After Houghton Valley Primary, Bill attended Rongotai College for four years. He was not your robust teen but in the war years cadets was a big thing and though he now wore glasses he shot for the school rifle team. He also took up the violin.

### **Bill's Horticulture Career Begins**

In 1948 a newspaper advertisement alerted Bill to a position as an apprentice gardener at the Wellington Botanic Gardens. In his interview with the Superintendent, he asked if he could be considered for a place at Massey Agricultural College to study for the Diploma of Horticulture. After a year at the Wellington Gardens his wish was granted and he attended Massey in 1949-1950 majoring in nursery management. He caught the eye of Dr. John Yeates, head of the Botany Department and a skilled plant breeder. He was invited, in his spare time, to work alongside the man who mentored him, became a friend and introduced him to his passion, lilies. Complete with his diploma, Bill returned to Wellington in 1951 where he completed his apprenticeship.

Such spare time as he had, he played with a student orchestra, joined the Young Nationals and on Saturday night would take in a dance with his good friend Warwick Hoare. As mentioned above, it was at one of these dances, at St Francis Hall, that he met and fell in love with Carol.

### **The Move to Work in Levin**

Bill and Carol set up house in Wilton St, Levin. Bill found work at Avenue Nurseries, the Rose Growers, and Carol joined the Power Board as an accounting machine operator.



**The Doreens' first home, 39 Wilton St., Levin**

They had ambitions to improve their position. Bill moved to be ground supervisor for the new sanatorium to be built in Liverpool Street.

He designed and planted grounds and they lived in a free house with half an acre of ground. He soon had it broken in for a vegetable garden and they sold the surplus to the local grocer.

Bill also renewed his relationship with Dr. Yeates who agreed to sell him some lily bulbs and so their career in lilies was started. After a year, they had some larger bulbs they could sell. With the discovery of a cure for TB the need for a sanatorium evaporated and, with it, Bill's job, although he and Carol were allowed to stay in the house. They became convinced that if they were to achieve some of their goals, they needed to own their own land. They needed capital and Bill needed a job.

They bought a milk run which was profitable and flexible and allowed them to purchase their first ten acres in Fairfield Road in 1954, complete with a 'doer-upper' of a house. It required much work but this was not something Bill or Carol were scared of.



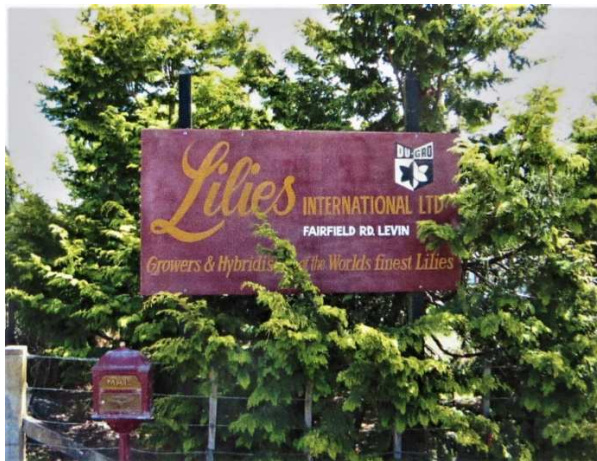
**The Fairfield Road home, before (left) and after (right) extensive renovations**

The property was well suited to the cultivation of lilies and they decided this was what they would do with the land. Bill broke the soil in with his little rotary hoe and over the next ten years with hard work they established themselves with three acres of bulbs grown in rotation. The enterprise was known as Fairfield Bulb Farms. They worked hard growing both enterprises, then sold the milk run in 1968.

In addition to building their business, Bill and Carol were starting their family. Warwick arrived in 1953 and Murray in 1957, born before the shift to Fairfield Road. Jonathon was born in 1959 and Rosemary – ‘Rosie’ - in 1961.

### **The Lily Business Blossoms**

In 1963 Bill was asked to supply lilies for the decoration of Government House during the visit of the Queen. The next year he was on TV in the programme “In your Garden”. His reputation and that of his lilies was growing. By 1968 they were the largest lily growers in New Zealand. Carol was his partner in all aspects of their life together and worked alongside him assuming some key responsibilities in the business and was skilled in packing and dispatch. In 1968 the business took on the name of ‘Lilies International’.



Bill’s reputation in Australasia was based on the exhibition of his lilies at various floriculture events or conventions. Here he was able to introduce some of the hybrids he had developed, most notably the white lily now known as ‘Casa Blanca’ (or Snowdrift in America.) It is possibly the largest selling bloom of any variety of flower in the world.



**Lilium 'Casa Blanca'** (worldoffloweringplants.com)

### **Hybridising**

Equally significant was the development of the upward facing flower which made the lily even more popular with florists and less prone to damage in transport. It was this work as hybridist that Bill loved most. Initially hybridization was by cross pollination but in the 1980's Bill built and equipped his own tissue culture laboratory to further this work, which won universal acknowledgement, especially his developments with the Oriental and Asiatic lilies. It required both skill and patience – a whole year before you would see the result of your work and closer to five years before you could bring it to market.

### **International Recognition**

Bill showed their specimens at various Lily Conventions. Perhaps the most significant of these was the Auckland Lily Society in 1966. Visitors to this convention included noted growers from the US. They visited Fairfield Road and were so impressed with the enterprise that they invited Bill and Carol to visit them in the States. They agreed that Bill (Carol had to stay behind to look after the children!) would travel to the USA in 1968 and would address the US Lily Growers' Convention in Philadelphia. He was very well received and as a mark of their respect the Americans invited him to join several judging panels. Bill spent three months in America studying production methods, spraying and planting techniques, hybridizing, packaging (using colourful photos on the packet to inform and sell the product), dispatching and cool-store management. The standards of cleanliness to mitigate against the spread of disease

particularly impressed. One specific idea he observed was the use of plastic sleeves to protect the stems and flowers. He introduced this technique to New Zealand and it is now universally used. Conservative they may have been in character but they were agents for change in their industry.

Their ability to adapt and adopt what they observed was a cornerstone in the growth of their enterprise. Bill became a leader in the development of overseas markets for their bulbs and later cut flowers. Bulb export began in the 1970s on a small scale but in 1976 they sent 24,000 bulbs (5 tons) to of all places - Holland. Exporting cut flowers by air freight began in 1975. It all required further investment notably to build glasshouses to allow year-round production. And it provided many jobs, as well as a very positive profile for Levin and the Horowhenua.



Carol was the perfect 'other-half' in Bill's ever-broadening ventures. She typed up all his speeches and articles, organised the staff in the packhouse, while also weighing in with the work there, made sure orders were correctly and attractively dispatched, sharpened up the company's marketing image, and cleaned up the sheds for entertaining and feeding guests from around the world.





**Bill entertaining newly-elected Prime Minister Robert Muldoon, 1975**



**Carol in her happy place, among the flowers**

Bill's success and his contribution to the industry – in breeding, production, and marketing – was perhaps more often recognised abroad than closer to home. Having long since stretched their product range to freesias, calla lilies and *Sandersonia*, in 1996 Bill and Carol were in Israel where he delivered a paper on *Sandersonia aurantica* to the seventh Symposium of International Bulb Growers. It was a great moment for them both when Bill was so well received by his peers.

The couple loved to travel and there were many other visits overseas, more than fifty encompassing North America, Europe, and Asia, especially Japan, which was a huge market for their *Sandersonias* in the 1990s.



***Sandersonia aurantiaca*** ([www.vanmeuwen.com](http://www.vanmeuwen.com))

### **Awards and Appointments**

Bill's work as a floriculturalist, both as scientist and entrepreneur in his industry, had few rivals in this country. He was National Horticulturalist of the Year in 1997. Then in 1998 he was awarded an E. H. Wilson Medal, the highest annual award that can be made by the North American Lily Society.

He served also as a director of Market Gardeners Ltd, was National President of the New Zealand Flower Growers' Association and an executive member of the Flower Council of New Zealand.

### **Family and Community Service**

Bill and Carol encouraged their children to achieve and all of them have had an association with the floriculture industry. Warwick was part of the home enterprise. Jonathan worked in plant research and operated a nursery for a time in Fairfield Road. Murray worked closely with his father establishing his parallel business Flowers Corp in the eighties. Rosemary became a qualified florist.

They also believed it was important that they contribute to the community. Carol was active in the guiding movement, becoming a Divisional and a Regional Commissioner. Bill was a member of the Fairfield School committee serving as Treasurer and Chairman. He played a large part in fundraising for the swimming pool and the hall. Later he served for eight years on the Horowhenua College Board of Governors. Other community work was done through the Masonic Lodge and Rotary, holding senior office in both. Rotary remembers the time he opened up 'Lilies International' for a huge fundraising event in 1977. Thousands of people attended and a very significant sum was raised. He was awarded a

Paul Harris Fellowship, Rotary's highest award, in 2016. In later years he was also a senior office holder with Probus.

### **Retirement**

Still active into the 2000s, Bill suffered a bad knee injury in a fall at work. Ultimately, he needed a knee replacement in 2001, demanding a lengthy spell away from the business. It seemed the right time to sell up and retire, which they did in 2004. They moved to a new home in a new street, Corfe Castle Lane, off Bartholomew Road in Levin. They had run their lily business for 55 years, but Bill wasn't quite finished yet. He produced a piece of work of which he was, perhaps, the most proud, his book, "Lily Species throughout the World", published in 2010.



**The family at Carol's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2012**

Carol was the first of them to pass away, in December 2017, aged 85, but it was only seven months before Bill joined her again. He died in July 2018, aged 89, and they are interred together in The Avenue Cemetery, Levin.

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The senses of sight and smell were overwhelmed when entering a glasshouse of Bill and Carol's blooms. It was a joyous experience. It drew lily growers from all over the world. When they packed those flowers for both New Zealand and foreign markets, they were sending off a special piece of the Horowhenua, something of great beauty that would bring joy to those who received them.





**The 'Lilies International' site in its heyday, corner Fairfield and Roslyn Roads, family homestead on Fairfield, centre left**



**The iconically-clad homestead today, adrift within a housing development**

*Researched and written by Bernard Long for Heritage Horowhenua Charitable Trust.*