

## VALE MURIEL DAWKINS

29 AUGUST 1914 - 15 AUGUST 2007

On 24 August a very eclectic and large group of family and friends of Muriel Dawkins, reflecting her interests and, indeed, passions, gathered together at the family property of "Melaleuka" to celebrate her life with an Irish wake - a fulfilment of Muriel's request that she wanted no fuss and this was to be the only mark of her passing.

Muriel's eldest son, Roger, began his tribute to Muriel by saying "We are all asking ourselves how a character plagued by guilt and always self-deprecating could have had such a deep and inspirational effect on so many. We don't have all the answers, but they include sympathy for the underdog and a passion for their causes. Defiance mixed with loyalty was another". He later went on to define the guilt as being the impact of colonial rule and part of her passion being Aboriginal causes, such as the medical service, and the environment came to light from another son, Simon.

I became fortunate enough to know Muriel through Connemaras. Muriel began her love of horses as a child at her family's property of Hawthornden, Toodyay. In 1940 she married Alec Dawkins, an orthopaedic surgeon and keen polo player, and five sons, Roger, Jeremy, John, Simon and Patrick, were to result. In 1961 Alec and Muriel drove around Europe, England and Ireland resulting in the eventual importation of the first Connemaras to Western Australia.

These ponies were the foundation mares of the Coomel Stud, Clonkeehan Charm and Little Lark of Abbeyleix, both arriving in WA in foal and dropping the filly foals Coomel Prima Donna and Coomel Brigid in 1972. The Coomel Stud was also later to acquire the imported stallion Inis O'Hara

Through her generosity many of us here in WA had access to the Coomel horses and ponies as Muriel would "lend" them to us to breed from or otherwise use. Coomel Prima Donna, for example, with the Oakes family competed very successfully in open pony club and hacking classes, qualifying for hacking at the Perth Royal Show which was unknown territory then for pure bred Connemaras. She later went "on loan" to Helen Colleran and as a twenty year old mare, still had the quality to go Supreme in the Connemara classes.

One of my fondest memories of Muriel was revived by her family when they stressed that she was always seeking an adventure for the children in her life. I think Muriel was always seeking adventure for everyone. Muriel had "lent" us a thoroughbred mare to breed part-breds and we took her home about 4 years later to "Cooliaberra" in Armadale to which Muriel had moved after Alec's death in 1975. Muriel invited us to "go up the hill" to see the ponies and, thinking this was just up from her cottage, we readily agreed. Not so. Muriel apologetically bundled us into her small station wagon and we headed up and up a nearly vertical washed and gravel track which would have done justice to any modern 4-wheel drive. Half way up we found the ponies, but not content with this, Muriel wanted to show us the old house on the top of the hill. So on upwards we went to what was once a beautiful old stone house, now derelict. The magnitude of our climb up the hill now became clear with views across the coastal plain out to the ocean before us. Then we went down again and Muriel never missed a beat. The house on the top of the hill I am pleased to say is now Simon's home. Talking to others, it appears we were lucky to drive, as a walk up there with Muriel was another experience again!

In 2006 Muriel was made a Life Member of the CPBSA in recognition of her contribution to Connemara ponies in Australia. All Muriel's boys grew up with horses. In many ways they grew up in an immediately post-war time that we cannot ever know, but perhaps can envy despite its lack of modern conveniences. They had physical freedom and a family environment through Muriel and Alec which fostered an independence of thinking mixed with sound social values and a sense of justice. John is now following Muriel with the breeding of Connemaras and is trying to revive the Coomel bloodline, which like the lines of other imported ponies into WA, is threatened with loss.

I would define the Muriel that I knew as fearlessly independent, and a person of great generosity, integrity and dignity. It was the whole mix of her life and times that made Muriel the real lady she was - a label not too many can wear these days. The CPBSA is all the better for Muriel's input and all the poorer for her passing.