

Recollections about John and Ada West and their son, Bernard West.

I guess I have a somewhat different view of our grandparents than does my cousin Shielagh. They died before our parents were married, or at least that is the case for my parents. Either way, neither of us knew them. I once asked my Dad about them and he said that his mother Ada Dobbins was an Irish woman although she was born in Ashton-under-Lyne, near Manchester, England. Her parents are Joseph Dobbins and Bridget McGowan. I have not been able to establish what county they are from in Ireland, but I am thinking the northern counties. Joseph was a confectioner. My Dad also thought that he had some experience as a ship's pursor. He and Bridget had 7 daughters: Mary, Annie, Frances (Fanny), Ada, Josephine, Georgina or Georgeana, and Beatrice. My father whom I will refer to as Bern from now on, thought there were 9 sisters and one brother. Perhaps the others died in infancy.

Bern felt very close to his mother and was very sad at her departing when he was about 21 years old. He often spoke of her and felt her presence before he died. He did meet his aunt Frances who was married to Charles Saunders. If I remember correctly he also met Georgina. As far as he knew, his Mum and Frances were the only ones who married. The 1901 England census shows Frances with a daughter Mary W., but Bern thought that Ada was the only one who had children.

He described Ada as a practicing (though not attending) Catholic who loved being a mum and was concerned that her children got an education. Her main goal in life was the welfare of her family. She loved listening to the radio and visits to the seaside. The things that shadowed her happiness were man's inhumanity to man and a severely impaired heart valve. She was short, and a little heavy set as she got older. I imagine her as having dark auburn hair like my brother's.

Bern described his Dad, John, as an honorable and compassionate person. He worked in the Western Australia gold fields for some 20 years which proved to be a great hardship. He had a primary education, enjoyed telling tall tales, cooking and eating meals with his family and gardening. Bern loved to dance, as did John. John would always go to the local country dances, apparently without Ada. Bern followed in his footsteps (shall I say, dance steps) and loved Old-Tyme dancing. I have very fond memories of attending dances at the Blind Institute with my Dad as a teenager.

Bern says that the thing that made John sad was his sense of injustice. I think that means man's inhumanity to man. Bern lists John as the third child of 12 but that contradicts other records. He lists his grandfather William was a Miner, Hotelier and Farmer. I remember Bern telling me that John recalled a time when William would sit on the back porch with a pile of dirt clods next to him as his daughters worked in the field or garden. If one of them stopped working for any reason, he would throw a dirt clod at her! I don't know whether that was one of John's tall tales or not.

Shielagh mentioned that John coughed himself to death, which may have been the case, but I remember Aunt Pat saying that her Dad went to the hospital because of a prostate problem and as he was leaving the house, he told her that he didn't expect to live much longer. And he died there.

Apparently, Ada was married to a man by the last name of Dowd when she was living in Western Australia. He took off and abandoned her. Some surmise that John Joseph was Dowd's son. She was not able to obtain a divorce, or perhaps being Catholic, she could not marry again. When she met John West, they moved to Brisbane and had a common law marriage. I guess my father didn't realize it was a common law marriage until some lawyers were looking for descendents of Joseph Dobbins—something to do with his estate—but the children of Ada were disqualified because they were born out of wedlock.

Bern said that the reason he did not have a middle name like the rest of his siblings was this: Ada and a friend or relative (I think it was a sister, but I'm not sure whose sister) went into Brisbane from Pinkenbar to register Bern's birth. On the way they stopped at a pub and got a little tipsy, so they did not remember to put down a middle name for Bern. Bern described his dad's occupation as a miner, but I am wondering what kind of mining people do who live in Pinkenbar near the mouth of the Brisbane River. Perhaps he did sand dredging, which is something that Bern also did for a time.

I have such fond memories of my Dad. I guess I was a Daddy's Girl. He would bounce me on his knee and call me his sweetie-pie, honey-bun, etc, etc, etc, etc. When he ran the sand dredging outfit on the Noosa River on the Sunshine Coast, he would help my brother Peter and I walk out on the long pipe to the dredge boat and we would fish. He took us to the beach often. As much as our Mum may have wanted him to be, he wasn't the disciplinarian, at least not toward me. When I was a teenager, I had such a fondness for him that I avoided a lot of pitfalls because I knew certain things would be disappointing to him. I think Peter was closer to our Mum who died of stomach cancer in 1966.

A little about my Mum: Iris was born out of wed-lock in Newport West, Monmouthshire, Wales on June 15, 1921. She told me that her father had died in a motorcycle accident before she was born and that her mother died soon after she was born. She was raised by her maternal grandmother Julia Wilmott whose husband had died in WWI. This was in the village of Ynsnddu, Monmouthshire. As I found out later, her father lived right there in the village and did not acknowledge her as his daughter. When she was about 8, Julia Wilmott died and Iris was passed around the village for a while until she was sent to an orphanage in Tredegar, Wales. Peter and I have decided that this was the happiest time of her childhood. She rarely spoke of her earlier years and of the circumstances that led to her moving to Australia. Her aunt Alice had married an Australian soldier after WWI, moved there, and later sent for my mother. Iris travelled on a big ship from Britain to Australia all by herself when she was about 13 years old. She did not have good memories of living with her aunt Alice. In fact we didn't know her aunt's name. A lady she met on the ship helped her go to Brisbane to train as a nurse. She was a home health care nurse in Melbourne when my parents met at the home of my father's friends the Kenyons.

My parents married in Darwin on December 10 1949, with Dave and Dot West as their attendants. My parents moved a lot. Bern said that Iris wanted security, but he wanted to follow his entrepreneurial dreams, which was very hard on my Mum. She had ulcers and other health problems.

The airstrip for Brisbane was near my father's home. He loved to watch the planes come in and out. At one time he aspired to be a pilot. He showed me a picture of the day that Kingsford Smith arrived there, and he would say, "I'm in that crowd somewhere!" I will have to look up his stint with the air force to

see if I have the facts right. I know he was in the army stationed outside of Darwin at the end of WWII, but saw no action in that conflict. He ran a supply barge from Darwin to northern Western Australia mining outposts. The miner/pro prospector blood was in him. He spent quite a bit of time pursuing minerals on mountains. He also tried to salvage the "Marietta Dell" which sank off the coast of Queensland some time earlier. He at one time sold insurance. In his later years he settled into the occupation of taxi driver. He said his most memorable spiritual experience was 'meeting God in a taxi.' He also noted his occupation as 'failed entrepreneur'.

A few years after Iris died, Dad was able to find a happy place to live in the home of Judith Sultmann, a divorced lady 25 years younger than him who still had two children to raise and needed a man around the house. They became the best of friends. They enjoyed dancing together. In later years, Judith was his care giver until his midnight wanderings as a result of dementia, wore her down and she had to have him live in a residence for people with Alzheimers. She visited him almost every day. He loved to go for walks, and was on his daily walk on May 22, 2007 around the property when he stumbled and fell. He was taken to the hospital and Judith came there. The doctor said he seemed to be fine, but he passed away not too long after. He would have been 91 on June 7th.

Bern had many friends. If you asked him, "How are you today?" he would reply, "Beautiful, just like you!" Peter paid for him to come to my wedding in Hawaii in 1982, and he also visited us in Japan when we lived there in 1993. Both Peter and Bern visited us in Ohio, USA in 1996. My husband, Robert would always say, "Your Dad could offer us so much advice, but he never does until we ask him for it." Since I was in the USA from 1973-1975, in Sydney area during 1978-1979, then back to the USA starting in November 1980, I missed out on a lot of family time with my Dad and with Peter.

I am also sorry that I know so little about my cousins. I did live with Auntie Pat and Uncle Kev, cousins Cathie and Kevin for several months in 1967, after my Mum died. I'm glad to say I have met the Duffy family. We lived in Brisbane, but did not often visit with Frank West's family, though I did stay at their house in St. Lucia once. I'm glad to say that I have met the Frank West family. Shielagh stayed with me at the Duffys for a few weeks at Christmas holidays 1966/1967, and I remember meeting Dave West at one time, but really don't know any other of my cousins. I heard that one of Ron and Sonia's sons, Beau, died young, but I don't think I ever met the Ron West family. Hopefully this Carrucan Descendants project will bring more of the cousins together!