

The Harris Family

Peter Harris and Doug Harris, now in their seventies, share memories of the establishment of Hohepa by their father Sir Lewis Harris, and of some events since. Both men have given a great deal of time themselves to the project which their father founded in 1957. Though never having lived at Hohepa, their sister Deirdre (Dee) has worked in some of the workshops and lives on the old family farm, Brooklands.

Peter Harris

My sister Deirdre was 19 when Hohepa opened so mother and father had had 19 years of being with a handicapped person.

We were lucky that she had the sort of freedom she had. Father always thought of the parents of other handicapped children who might be inside with them all the time or on an eighth of an acre section in Hastings.

Father was on an International Rugby Board trip to England in 1954 and was chaperoned by a man who also happened to have a handicapped child. They saw a village in the Midlands all with handicapped people and Father wondered how we could have something like that here.

He couldn't remember the name Steiner (as being connected with the village) — just what a brilliant scheme it was.

On his return he met a wonderful woman (Marjorie Allan) who had the experience to dedicate her life to the project. The meeting was at 6.30 one night at the Masonic Hotel in Napier. They chewed it over as to what each one's input (to what would become Hohepa Homes) would be.

Father decided he could turn Hohepa Farms Ltd into a charitable trust to provide income for all time. All the family would sign over perpetual rights to Hohepa Farms Ltd which would become Hohepa Trust Farm.

Father wasn't a mean man, but he was a man with some mean habits. He wouldn't use a new piece of paper. He tore off paper and drew lines on it to write.

"We'll have to get plans," he said. "Barry will have to draw them. I'm not paying him. I want something for tomorrow night when I meet Miss Allan."

So Barry Marshall (the architect) freehand sketched the (original Home School) plans on the spot.



Peter (left), Dee and Doug Harris at the St Martin House Opening

Doug Harris

Doug remembers his father's excitement at meeting Marjorie Allan:

"Dad was frightened Marjorie was going to escape his clutches. He wanted to find a property to set up 'Hohepa', one Marjorie would find suitable. He looked at a number but finally gave some of the family land for the site of the Home School.

The parents of intellectually handicapped children would get excited when they heard about Hohepa and come and see it being built.

Dad wanted the home where it is. He had to fight (the council) not to have to move it further from the boundary. The old man was pretty shrewd.

Mum insisted the boys at the Home School be shifted out at age 12 and wanted the land on the other side of the road from land we had at Clive to set up a place for them. The present Clive office was Bishop Colenso's old house. It got jacked up and rebuilt.

Dad later offered to take part of the Clive farm over. The fledgling community had more land than they could maintain. Dad farmed it and gave Hohepa the profit for a while until the community grew bigger."

Living just over the road from all the children's houses now, Doug is very handy for the children to visit.

"They come for tea and tiny cakes — I look forward to that. It's great to see the kids when they walk in . . . especially on my 70th birthday — they were singing. I've never been so embarrassed in my life . . . they had me baled up."

Letter from Brooklands

Dear Roy — Thank you very much for inviting me to share the opening of St Martin Home. I really enjoyed the tableau and songs and the goodies at afternoon tea. I hope the tree will take root quickly and grow big and strong as the children who play under its branches. It was also good to have my photo taken with Doug and Peter. We all have happy memories of Mummy and Daddy and I am glad they started Hohepa to help so many new friends.

Love from Dee Harris



Where did the name Hohepa come from?

The name 'Hohepa' is that of the man pictured above, Joseph Harris, father of Hohepa Homes' founder and benefactor Sir Lewis Harris. Joseph was known as Hohepa, the Maori pronunciation of his Christian name.

Hohepa Homes is a community-based charitable trust. At Hohepa Hawke's Bay there are over 100 children and adults with special needs who live together with co-workers and their families. We provide a range of residential, vocational and educational opportunities founded on the work of Rudolf Steiner.

Comments and enquiries to Roy Boonen, Hohepa Homes, 21 Fryer Road, Napier RD2, Ph (06) 844-2740; Fax 844-4943

Hohepa Village Life layout by Caduceus, Ph Steve Armon (06) 878-3128; photos by Caduceus and Sarah Horn Ph (06) 876-6781