



Winnie's horsey holidays

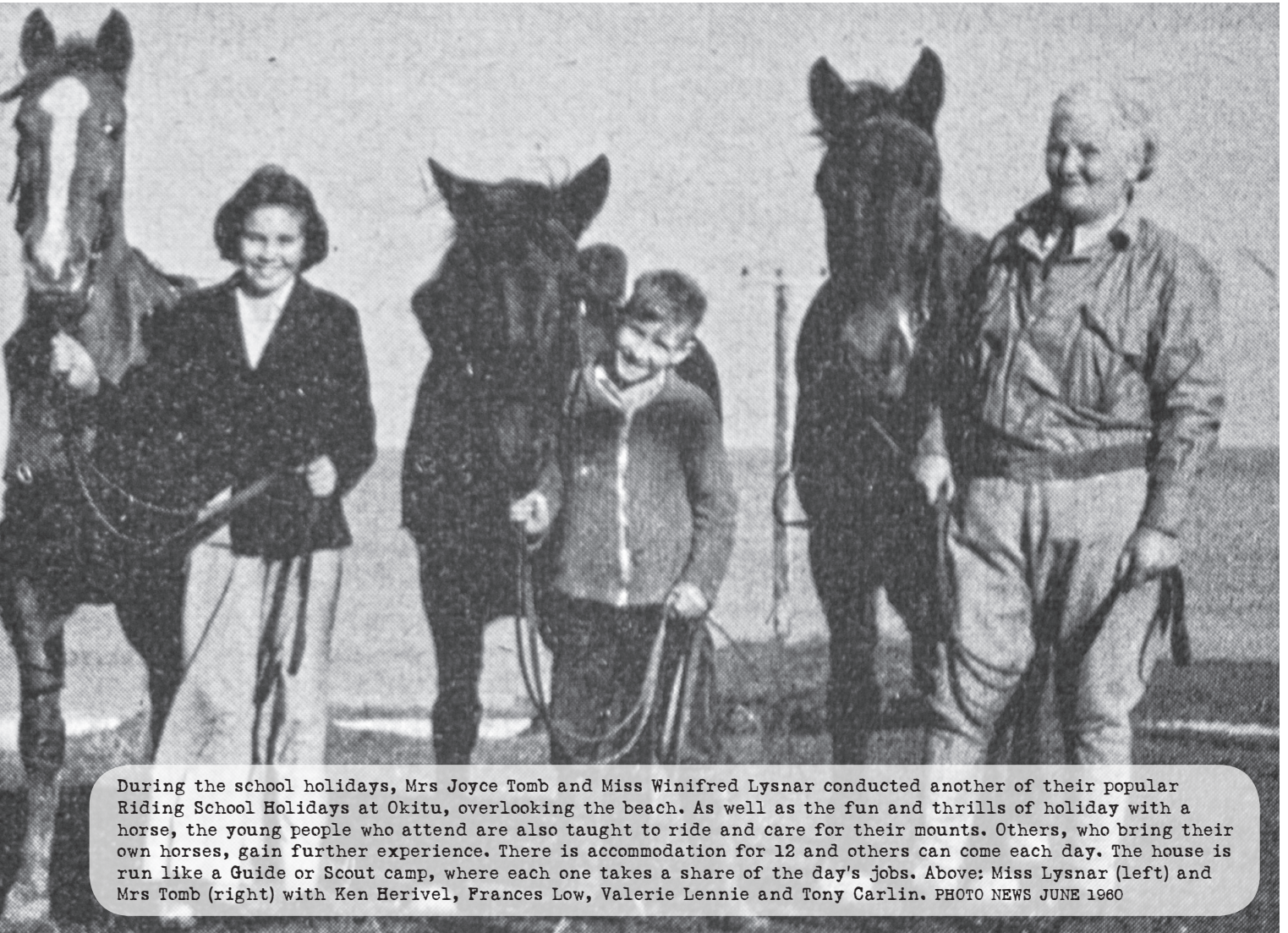
By Jo Ferris

THERE HAS ALWAYS been the idea of writing a story about Winifred Lysnar – particularly her later years when she ran the famed Okitu Riding Holidays on her farm at the northern end of Wainui Beach. Initial research revealed little detail about “Winnie” from this era, apart from information contained in cursory Gisborne Herald articles on her retirement and later her death in 1974. So this feature, written by JO FERRIS – freelance journalist, Wainui expatriate and a former “helper” at Winnie’s in the 1960s – is a major writing effort and in itself an historic achievement. It is a lengthy saga – but it celebrates the life of one of our most famous, yet most enigmatic Wainui personalities. It paints a colourful picture of the life of a woman born in 1901, who grew up amidst wealth and privilege and in later years gave away most of what she owned to live a spartan, spinster life at Wainui Beach, dedicated to good deeds and the well-being of children.

As the years pass I am reminded just how much childhood experiences influence adult lives. I have kept a store of trivial memorabilia from just about every phase of my life. Treasured photos, tucked away in boxes – along with archived high school reports and job references – which, until researching for this article, had not seen the light of day for several decades. My substantial library of photographs contains less than 20 images from an era I now consider were the most important years of my young life – my years at Winifred Lysnar’s Okitu Riding Holidays.

I have no photographs of Winifred Lysnar herself, other than a tattered page from an ancient Gisborne Photo News, and my recall of those days in the distant 1960s is not clear and complete. I could excuse my memory deficit to the time I was knocked senseless by a flying stirrup iron after a horse called “Socks” bolted down a small hill on Miss Lysnar’s property following a prankster’s hearty slap on the rump. There are some experiences and people lodged vividly in my memory – others I have little recollection of.

After being asked by BeachLife to write this article I scoured The Gisborne Herald archives, where I learned that more than 6000 young people passed through the gates at the end of Moana Road during the Okitu Riding Holidays’ 19-year existence from 1955 to 1974. In an



During the school holidays, Mrs Joyce Tomb and Miss Winifred Lysnar conducted another of their popular Riding School Holidays at Okitu, overlooking the beach. As well as the fun and thrills of holiday with a horse, the young people who attend are also taught to ride and care for their mounts. Others, who bring their own horses, gain further experience. There is accommodation for 12 and others can come each day. The house is run like a Guide or Scout camp, where each one takes a share of the day's jobs. Above: Miss Lysnar (left) and Mrs Tomb (right) with Ken Herivel, Frances Low, Valerie Lennie and Tony Carlin. PHOTO NEWS JUNE 1960

interview on its closure, Miss Lysnar stated that in the final years there were 425 bookings a year – some children attending for several weeks. Participants came from all over New Zealand and even from overseas.

I am unable to describe the early and the final years of the riding holiday – I can only give my impressions of the 1960s. How it was in the '50s or how it became in the '70s, I can only speculate. This just happens to be my version – with information gleaned from the few archives that do exist and recent nostalgic discussions with a handful of others involved who still live in the Gisborne district.

Primarily these journalistic allies were former senior helper Erle Tucker, Miss Lysnar's former trustee Michael Chrisp and one of Miss Lysnar's few remaining relatives, her niece Jillian Charteris (nee Lysnar).

Despite the odd occasion since my time at Miss Lysnar's, I didn't continue riding, though horses remain in my life. The same is probably true for the majority of young people who attended Miss Lysnar's holidays – work, marriage and parenthood overtaking horse riding as a life priority.

My few after-Winnie riding experiences were treks. The kind where somewhat lazy hacks follow nose-to-tail in tedious fashion with minds of their own. Okitu Riding Holiday was not a "horse trek", it wasn't a pony club and it wasn't a riding school. Everyone was equal and it was totally casual. In the 1960s we didn't wear hard hats. Jodhpurs were for naffs and gumboots ruled. The emphasis was on the word "holiday".

This was an era when horse riding was only readily available to farmers' children or those with parents who moved in "horse circles". That was the true beauty of what Miss Lysnar accomplished – she brought horse riding to ordinary children from all walks of life, and allowed them have fun while doing it.

Riding in the Winnie Lysnar environment was all about gaining self-

confidence, learning values and collecting life-skills. Horses were simply the medium. And while we didn't realise it at the time, what she offered was a very rare opportunity. Cost wise, it must have been an enormous challenge. I can only surmise her family heritage and position in life gave her the freedom to do so. BeachLife's earlier extensive historical feature on the settlement of Wainui Beach outlined the significant land holdings of Winifred's father, William Douglas Lysnar.

While there is much documented about the life of W.D. Lysnar – Member of Parliament (1919-1931) and Mayor of Gisborne (1908-1911) – it's odd that there is so little written about his only child and sole heir to his substantial estate.

In the course of his own research on W.D. Lysnar, Gisborne lawyer Michael Chrisp read three of Miss Lysnar's diaries, now held in storage at the Tairāwhiti Museum. He says he found little to provide an insight into Miss Lysnar's personal feelings or opinions. Acting as her trustee, Michael knew Miss Lysnar well but acknowledges she was a very private

The writer Jo Ferris started her writing career in the 1960s at Radio 2ZG as an advertising copywriter. Her father, the late Ted Dumbleton, was editor of the Gisborne Herald who in his later years lived at Mākāorori. She married Wainui boy Dein Ferris in 1970. They lived at Wainui and built homes in Murphy and then Lloyd George roads. Children Tanya and Vaun are both Wainui born and bred and both currently live at Wainui. Jo later worked at The Gisborne Herald and then moved to Tauranga in the early 1990s to a take on a job as sole reporter with an INL community newspaper. Following redundancy she has since worked as a freelance writer based in Papamoa. She spends most of her time commuting between Auckland and Wainui to visit her children and six-year-old granddaughter Yula.



PORTRAITS OF MISS WINIFRED LYSNAR: Aged two in 1903, nine in 1910, a young woman in her 20s and then in her 50s around the time she started the riding school venture. Below: As Girl Guides camp nurse in 1955.

person – one who chose a spartan life and was “incapable of holding a negative thought about anyone”.

“She saw all people as angels”, says Michael, who was often concerned by the way she would gather strangers from the beach and take them into her house. He remembers her being extraordinarily generous, in her own frugal sort of way.

Considering what is known about Miss Lysnar’s upbringing and her father’s substantial holdings, I can only assume that, as an only child and single all her life, Miss Lysnar was reasonably wealthy – not to mention a fair “catch” in her youth. She displayed nothing of any apparent wealth in later life. Her dress, demeanour and lifestyle were the antithesis of affluence. She lived frugally and dedicated her life to young people. How and why she ended up a somewhat eccentric spinster living alone in a ramshackle farmhouse at the end of Wainui Beach is the mystery of the woman and the enigma that she remains.

Born in 1901, the young Winifred Lysnar must have been a young lady of some standing in Gisborne and even the wider New Zealand community. She would have enjoyed the finer things of life and more than likely was presented as a debutante in the highest social circles. It is known she was presented to the Queen, possibly more than once. She often travelled abroad with her father, their departures and arrivals mentioned in the nation’s press.

Like her father, Miss Lysnar learned to ride at a young age. While abroad she achieved considerable ability as a horsewoman, honing her skills in France and England and qualifying as an instructor there. She must have retained riding contacts in England, as I can recall her sending several star pupils there to further their careers.

Miss Lysnar’s ability to break in horses would have been a major achievement for a woman of her day. She learned methods used by the late James Andrews, the Whangara farmer who bought part of Makorori Station from her father. In a 1974 Gisborne Herald interview Miss Lysnar recalled how in the 1940s reliable horses were needed by older men who were asked to return to work on farms to release the younger workers as they went off to war.

In later days Miss Lysnar ventured into breeding. Probably due to her time in France as a young woman, she gained a penchant for the

Percheron, a breed which dates back 12 centuries to the small district of La Perche in north-western France. The Percheron was a cross between Arabian horses, abandoned by the defeated Moors at the Battle of Tours in 732AD, and massive Flemish stock native to the rich, fertile province of Flanders. Miss Lysnar’s stud Percheron colt, “Kadlunga Templar”, was bought at auction from a closing Sydney Percheron stud in 1939. She crossed the breed with lighter mares in this country to create a true utility horse – sound station hacks which were also good jumpers. They were mostly greys.



I rode some of those horses. One on which I competed in some obscure gymkhana at the Gisborne showgrounds with others of “Winnie’s Mob”. It was my sole attempt at competition. I remember our being looked upon as total ruffians, not at all the right stuff for Pony Club. Despite the solid foundation of the Percheron breed, my understanding is that Miss Lysnar’s breeding programme wasn’t regarded highly by Gisborne’s equestrian elite. This was confirmed by Erle Tucker, who had a lot to do with breaking in many of her horses. She was deemed somewhat eccentric by then – a square peg out of a round hole. But while Miss Lysnar certainly had some splendid eccentricities, those who remember her have nothing but warm memories of this extraordinary woman.

If it hadn’t been for Miss Lysnar and her horses I would never have had the opportunity to ride, let alone compete. That’s what Miss Lysnar instilled in us – a sense of achievement. Even when those wily old horses would swerve the logs

dotting the house paddock rather than jumping them, Miss Lysnar would call out: “wonderful” or “you’re doing splendidly”. Life with Miss Lysnar was, indeed, splendid!

Youngsters were introduced into Miss Lysnar’s riding holiday experience from around 10 years old – the starting age of what would become a regular school holiday ritual with children spending weeks at a time at Okitu.

Locals would be collected in Miss Lysnar’s grey Morris Minor van – she actually picked children up, rather than expecting their parents to drop them off. Sometimes she was helped by volunteer drivers. Other kids who came from around the country, or even from overseas, stayed in Miss Lysnar’s house. It was the ultimate school holiday camp.

Each camp ran Monday to Saturday with a parent-day finale on the Saturday, the culmination of a week at Winnie's.

Children were divided into groups according to ability. They were allocated a horse befitting that ability on which to participate in a variety of activities each morning and afternoon. Children were taught not only the basic skills of riding but also the responsibility of looking after a horse, grooming and saddling their own mounts each day.

Miss Lysnar had several adult helpers. Most memorable was Mrs Joyce Tomb, her "right-hand woman" and the leader of our expedition rides. I don't know whether or not Miss Lysnar was still riding herself when she began her venture in 1955 though photos suggest she might have. I never saw her on a horse in my time from 1962 to 1967. Mrs Tomb joined Miss Lysnar about a year after the venture began and was there until the very end.

I know nothing of Mrs Tomb and Miss Lysnar's friendship or their business arrangement in terms of the riding holiday. Only four years of age between them, they were very different yet totally compatible.

Miss Lysnar was genteel – a soft but firm smiling face with white hair always tucked up in two buns under a hair net. Her uniform of choice being a neck scarf, shirt and a calf-length skirt (invariably fastened with a safety pin) worn above crumpled stockings and sandals. She was also known for wearing a beret, possibly a penchant she picked up from her time in France.

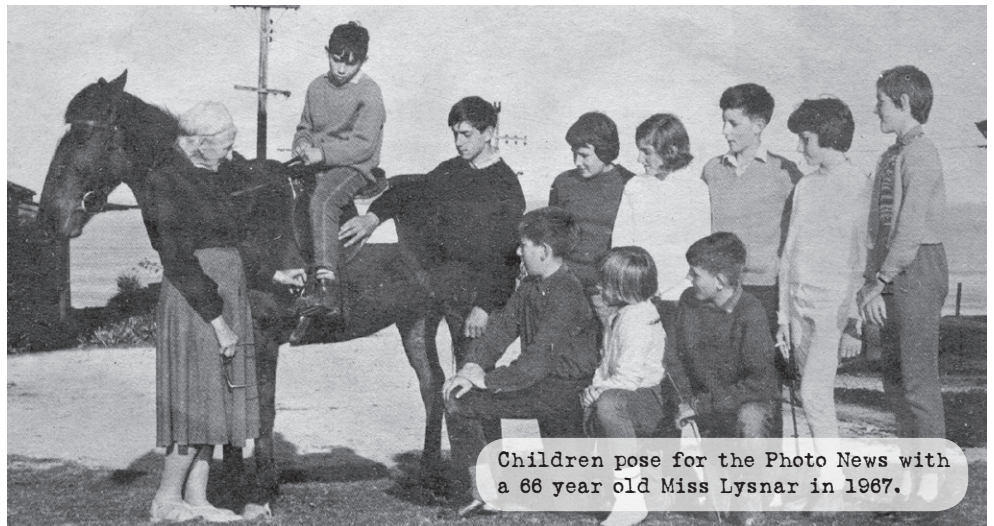
Mrs Tomb was down-to-earth with snow white hair and, like Miss Lysnar, it was also worn under a net. As the riding leader she was an experienced horsewoman, having spent her life around horses. She had broken them in, shown hacks and jumpers at the A & P Show and was the first commissioner of the district's pony club. She was always dressed in pants, an Aertex shirt and a Swandri jacket with a packet of tobacco and papers ready in her pocket. Her deep, throaty laugh crackled and everyone wanted to ride alongside her. She lived an unassuming life with her husband, Dr John Tomb, in their beachfront home along Pare Street.

The other adult helper was Les Woodward – huntsman, pony club instructor and show judge – who was there for a short period during my time. A sergeant who served in both world wars with the mounted rifles, Mr Woodward was an experienced rider with a soft demeanour, a huge heart and a big laugh. On busy weeks he would come to help with the treks. Other times he could be found be down in the yards working with young horses.

Other helpers during my time included the "A-team" – the late Bob Whiteman, Erle Tucker and occasionally Neville Rogers. By the 1970s a Mr and Mrs Bruce Holt were helping, in what way I do not know, because I cannot trace them. Miss Margaret Kemp also helped in a non-riding capacity. She passed away two years ago, aged 60. Younger brother, Stephen Kemp, while not a helper, was a regular rider as were so many other local children. A Mrs Russell arrived in the mid '60s, a dressage specialist, who instilled a higher level of riding discipline into those who aspired to greater horsemanship.

The dressage ring was sited on a picturesque spot later donated by Miss Lysnar for public ownership as the Okitu Bush Reserve. The flat arena was beyond a legendary ride that was known as "Tucker's Trail". This dirt track was devised by Erle Tucker for the parents' day finale, a gully trail that followed the corner sweep from Okitu as the road leaves Moana Road towards Makorori. Erle's experience at Miss Lysnar's started earlier than mine. The grandson of Bob and Alice Craill of Douglas Street, and growing up with them, he suspects he was sent off to Miss Lysnar's each holidays to give them a break.

Like others over the years who spent a lot of time at Miss Lysnar's, Erle was eventually hand-picked when at high school to become a "helper", a role of responsibility and youth development that required teenagers to



Children pose for the Photo News with a 66 year old Miss Lysnar in 1967.

assist in all areas of the riding holiday routine. Erle later became heavily involved assisting Miss Lysnar breaking-in and working with young horses she bred on the former W.D. Lysnar-owned Arowhana Station.

Tucker's Trail was a perfect amphitheater. Parents lined up on the ridge overlooking the gully to watch the eager-beavers as they paraded in military fashion, beaming with pride. It was the encore to a Saturday show as that week's class put their mounts through their stuff – trotting and cantering in circles, jumping over logs and hurdles.

Chests were puffed and parents were impressed by their kids' staggering accomplishments. Splendid stuff. Everyone wanted more – and they got it. They came again and again each new school holiday, eager to renew friendships; the boys keen for more rough and tumble; the girls desperate to rekindle crushes on the likes of Bob, Erle or Neville. Adoring kids secretly hoped one of their idols would arrive from the yards following a call-up from Miss Lysnar to tickle up their sluggish horse with a quick whirl of a whip and a hearty kick in the guts.

Erle can't recall quite when he mapped out the trail named after him. It became a centre feature of activity and known by some as an after-hour escape for the pursuit of teenage romance. Considering he mapped it out, one can only assume Erle knew all the best spots!

Bob Whiteman was a few years older than Erle and was another local lad from Wairere Road who became passionate about horses and injected further personality to the place. Either working with horses in the yards at Okitu or around on Waimoana Station, Bob and Erle were idols to the younger riders.

The fundamental pattern of a week at Winnie's revolved around riding lessons in the house paddocks with Miss Lysnar before being let loose on the beach or hills with Mrs Tomb and the helpers to experience the thrill of trotting and cantering in an open space.

Popular was the circuit along Wainui Beach, then up and over Waimoana Station. The first stage was either along the beach at low tide or through the sandhills, jumping the ditches and trotting well-worn paths through the dunes to the Pines and up Lysnar Road and onto Waimoana Station. The trail through the hills would wind along the upper ridges before returning down through horse paddocks that backed on to Miss Lysnar's house.

Makorori was a longer and spectacular trek, either up through the hills and down to the beach, or via the road to enjoy the full stretch of Makorori's flat sand at low tide. Nothing could match the wind in your face and the exhilaration of a full-throttle canter along Makorori Beach. Riding over the dunes was normal through the 1960s but I doubt it is allowed today. Horse riding on the beach, however, is still part and parcel of recreation at Wainui – and long may it reign.

I'm not sure when Miss Lysnar's house was built but it was probably the mid-1950s. A derelict building stood in the paddock adjoining her home, which added to the rustic charm of the place – apparently this was the original homestead of Makorori Station, a sizable acreage bought by W.D. Lysnar in 1897.

A photograph taken in 1908 of a colonial style cottage is presumably



"Winnie's Mob" compete in a pony club gymkhana at the Gisborne showgrounds. From left: Kerry Edwards, Sally Bethune, Jo Ferris, Prue McLeod, Lyn Green and if you can identify the two on the right let us know.

the same derelict building of my memory, where a young Winifred would have spent time when the Gisborne-based family travelled out to the farm. Both the original cottage and Miss Lysnar's newer home are both long gone. The property since subdivided and named Sirrah Street. Little evidence remains of Miss Lysnar's presence.

The location was perfect for the venture – a mix of flat land with gullies and hills. Stock yards and sheds were down by the road where there are now houses overlooking the beach. A separate gate led into this corner of the property. The original entrance was a gated drive further north and up what is now the rise of Sirrah Street.

W.D. Lysnar had bought land from Maori owners which, at the time, extended from the top of Tatapouri Hill to the Hamantua Stream. He sold the northern part of the station in 1919 to Whangara farmer James Andrews, the remaining farm behind Okitu known then, and still is, as Waimoana Station.

Though Miss Lysnar went on to sell the land to Ian and Sue Fraser in 1969, access for treks remained throughout the riding holiday's history, just as she retained access to Makorori.

Okitu's beachside sand hills also belonged to W.D. Lysnar. As part of a quest to develop a seaside village at Okitu in the 1920s, he donated 22 acres of this beachfront land to the Gisborne Borough Council to provide permanent public beach access. Miss Lysnar gave the remainder of the dunes to the Crown in 1957, creating the W.D. Lysnar Domain and ensuring public access to the beach for all time. Michael Chrisp remembers Miss Lysnar's first act of charity in 1954; donating to Gisborne the riverside Kelvin Park. Wyllie Cottage was sold to the council the same year and marked Miss Lysnar's permanent move to Okitu.

Miss Lysnar's house at Okitu had two wings joined by a type of garage that served as a meeting place. Those who had come from around the country, sometimes for weeks at a time, would be housed in bedrooms in one wing. Miss Lysnar's wing (her bedroom aside) housed lounge and kitchen areas which the children has free use of. Floors were bare boards, furniture simple, as was the food.

Menu items that return to mind include weak orange cordial served in plastic mugs, sliced white bread, luncheon meat, saveloys and tomato sauce. There was also Mrs Tomb's famous scones and vegetable soup. Both were as synonymous with Mrs Tomb as her green, flat-deck truck with its rickety side-rails penning in the hoards of kids who jostled to hop on board.

The doors were always open to Miss Lysnar's house and children were welcome to treat it as their own – except for her bedroom. That room was the realm of myth and fantasy. I can't remember the blinds ever being raised. Nor did I ever grab even the sneakiest of peaks as Miss Lysnar came or went from this inner sanctum. It was an utter mystery.

Active imaginations conjuring a fervent belief that wads of notes were stashed there among cobwebs. The room was as much an enigma as Miss Lysnar herself.

Holidays and Saturdays with Miss Lysnar became part of my life until I left high school. In essence, it was such a short period in my life, yet it had such an impact. I can't remember how many riding holidays my late parents paid for while I learned the ropes. I can't even remember the moment I was actually invited to be a "helper", which is odd, given it was so important to me. Everything focused on riding at Miss Lysnar's and being one of an elite group. Being a helper was a huge honour, far surpassing any kudos earned as a school prefect.

In hindsight, Miss Lysnar's helpers were pivotal to the entire operation. With up to 50 children attending each week and tutors in their 60s – a fit, tight-knit group of youths was needed to do the heavy work and help out during riding sessions.

There were horses to round up each morning, tack to look after and horses to bridle. There was hay to put out in paddocks, troughs to fill, and manure to dispose of. Newcomers needed to be watched as they groomed and saddled their mounts – and to rein in at times and mentor, just as I had been.

The routine was generally the same, but the adventure was never boring. It wouldn't happen today of course. OSH would have a hernia. Just getting started for the day, the horse round-ups were straight out of the Wild West.

This was the job of the "A-team" which I joined only a few times. Riding bare-back, bare-headed with a stock whip in one hand, charging up the hills at Okitu to round up the herd and drive them downhill into the yards. I now struggle to believe we did this.

Erle Tucker looks back with head-shaking incredulity as well. The daily muster he and Bob used to undertake was something akin to a cowboy movie; the sight of horses charging down those hills was pure theatre. People used to stop their cars on the highway to watch.

Once the horses were in and, following the obligatory mug of cordial at morning tea at Miss Lysnar's house, there was a human stampede to the yards and a competitive scramble for a spot on Mrs Tomb's old truck. Being driven to the yards was a bonus adventure.

Preparing the horses was probably the biggest part of the day. Helpers in the tack shed, handed out bridles. They'd rush to the yard rails, scramble to the top and hang bridles over the side, a chorus of names repeated as helpers caught the horses for kids to hitch up at designated spots.

Each horse had their own hitching position – the likes of old "Leon", "Rajah" and albino "Foam" inside the shed, the parade of others tethered along the yard rails. Some, like a grumpy old ruffian named "Sam", needed space, ears flattened before kicking any horse that dared verge within hind reach. Every horse was an individual with its idiosyncrasies. "Socks" was a bolter. So was "Tarquin", the chestnut with a tail the same colour as my hair back then. Dare to raise a hand suddenly in front of him and he'd bolt as he did one wet day along the entire length of the sand hills with me on board after sneaking out with a friend to the Okitu Store for supplies.

Miss Lysnar owned the horses, buying the more dodgy ones from lord knows where, or from riders who outgrew the fad. She also borrowed horses – usually flighty ones that had been bought by unknowledgeable parents, only to discover the horse was more capable than their child. Mounts would end up at Miss Lysnar's for steady work or remaking by helpers as we honed our own skills under Miss Lysnar's ever-watchful eye. Part of that early scrutiny included a disciplined seat position – thumbs atop the reins and regimented stirrup iron with ball of the foot; heels down and weight on the big toe. Miss Lysnar would come at you

with amazing fortitude as she tested that foot strength. Young riders dared not have their legs flayed backwards for fear of being ousted from the saddle.

Apart from the Lysnar family of Lysnar Road themselves, many other Wainui families had a strong association with Miss Lysnar's. Whiteman, Tucker, Craill, Ferris, Searancke, Rogers and Low to name a few – numerous children at some stage spending time at Miss Lysnar's. The riding holiday was an integral part of the community, as much as Miss Lysnar herself.

Her niece, Jillian Charteris, remembers her "Aunt Winifred" in much the same light as I. And she has further memories – of stout shoes and a brush; prerequisite items everyone was asked to take for a week's riding. Being family, Jillian also had insight about that mysterious bedroom. Quite barren, apparently, apart from an old wire-wove bed. She also remembers cheques stashed in a chest of drawers, much to her father's concern. Accountant Wathan Lysnar helped with the bookwork, apparently not an easy task with Miss Lysnar.

She might have had a gentle outward demeanour, but she also had an iron will, an attribute no doubt inherited from her father. Jillian remembers dinner party invitations at her aunt's where guests were given a number at the door and designated to a certain task.

On one occasion, Jillian recalls turning up for a social gathering, only to meet Miss Lysnar driving down the hill, all thoughts of dinner banished from mind. There were also the odd incidents when Miss Lysnar apparently forgot about young charges in the back of her van after a routine pick-up for Bible class.

Commitment was part of Miss Lysnar's ethos. A devout Christian she attended church regularly and ran the children's Bible class. She was also largely involved with Girl Guides and St. John Ambulance Cadets.

Miss Lysnar put huge trust in the many who enjoyed holidays at Okitu, allowing horses to be borrowed during school terms by those who had grazing available in town.

Helpers either had one of Miss Lysnar's horses designated as their own or they owned them outright and grazed them on her paddocks. The list of people touched by Miss Lysnar and those around her is long. The yarns are endless. Nothing before or since has ever come close to Okitu Riding Holidays. Horses were synonymous with their riders – as individual as the people themselves: Margaret Graham and "Ginger", Lyn Green and "Fashionette", Diane Quinn and "Cabana", Libby Jones and "Mr Ed", Erle Tucker and "Flek", Jill Bradley and "Rumba", Stuart Hanlen and "Gypsy".

The 1960s' roll call is a lengthy one – Roddy Walker, Alison Findlay, Prue McLeod, Kerry Edwards and Sally Bethune to name a few. I wonder if Clive Alcock's formula for picking a race winner still works. I wonder where Lyn Turnbull, Lyn Laracy or Hugh Graham are. I stayed in touch with Toni Izzard long after she left town. Friendships crossed into other phases of life as people connected, either through work, romantic flings or marriage.

Chris Milton, by sheer fluke, is now my neighbour in Papamoa. Diana Dobson's ongoing association with horses led to a management position with New Zealand's equestrian team. Stuart Hanlen's passion led him to breed quarter horses as well as running Gisborne's RDA for a while. Still breeding, he now lives in Clevedon, a photo of Miss Lysnar sitting in his tack room. The string of local family names associated with Miss Lysnar's is almost endless.

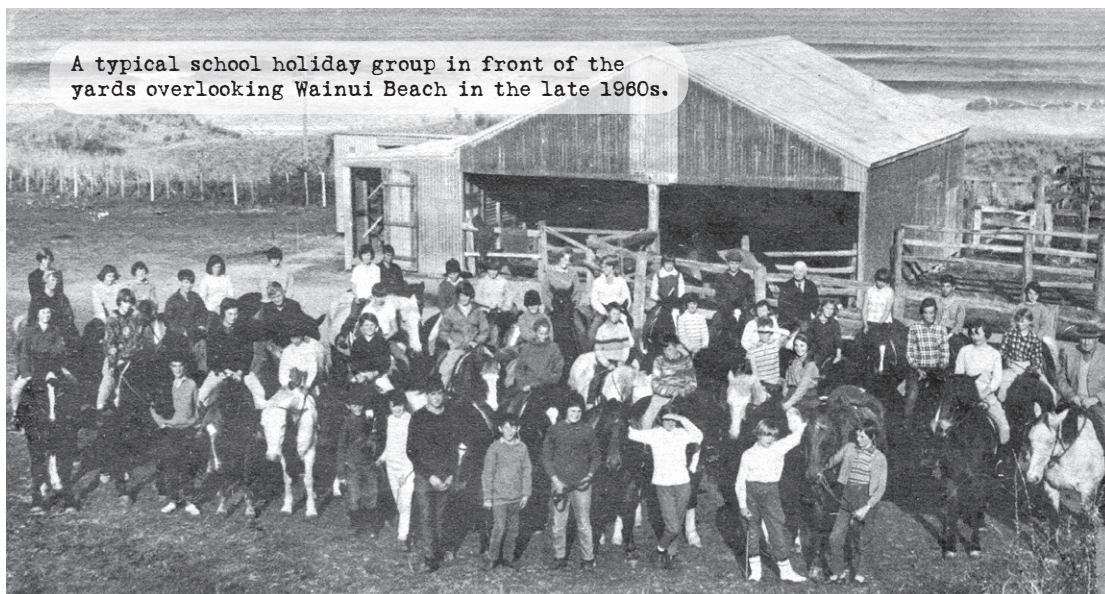
Sadly, I am sure there are many, like Bob Whiteman whose Humber Super Snipe was as much an icon on the place as he was, have passed on before their time. A fearless rider, it's ironic that Bob's untimely death at 47 in 1995 was due to an accident with heavy farm machinery.

Considering the level of freedom in the place, injuries were surprisingly low. There were the tragic ones. When breaking in a stunning looking but brute of a horse named "Robbity Bob", Les Woodward was kicked in the head. Miss Lysnar had the horse put down and Mr Woodward was never the same again. He fell to his death from a cliff just before Easter 1973 while walking around the Makorori headland.

Luckily, most mishaps were self-inflicted, often the result of a careless fall, or an over-boisterous fun fight. And how we never burned down the hayshed, while sneaking a puff out of sight from Mrs Tomb, I'll never know.

Catering at times for children with disabilities at the riding holiday, it was logical for Miss Lysnar to also help start Gisborne's Riding for the Disabled Club. She donated horses and equipment from the outset and when she shut up shop, Miss Lysnar donated more horses, bridles and saddles.

When Miss Lysnar wound the venture up and sold that part of her



property to Mr and Mrs J.H. (John) McGuinness in 1974 it became known for a short time as Turanga Farm. The McGuinnesses held Inter Schools Christian Fellowship camps, three of which were held each year on Miss Lysnar's property. They kept some horses, I believe, aiming to cater for the occasional rides. But by this stage I was long gone. And when they sold to John Harris in 1980 the property was developed into the subdivision of today.

All that remains of the Okitu Riding Holidays has disappeared into the questionable memories of those of us fortunate enough to spend time there.

Miss Lysnar died, aged 74, in December of 1974. A simple tombstone at Taruheru marks her burial and names her as the loved daughter of William Douglas and Ida Eleanor Lysnar. Joyce Tomb died at the age of 83 in 1988, 18 years after her husband.

Though active to the end, in the year of her death Miss Lysnar donated the remaining belt of Okitu dunes to the council for a reserve, along with the bush and headland at the end of Moana Road. She sold her Okitu property just months before she died.

Jillian cannot recall where Miss Lysnar moved to after the sale of the farm but she does remember visiting her when she was ill in Chelsea Hospital. Jillian believes Miss Lysnar almost willed herself to die and it doesn't surprise me. I believe Winifred Lysnar had the capacity to achieve anything she set her mind to. It is sad yet poignant to me that such a remarkable woman had the perception to accept with dignity the end of such a splendid era. 🐾