

*A caring and
hard-working mum*



The life of
Clara 'Minnie' Broadie

1899-1980

By Julie Poulter

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Clara Broadie was my paternal great grandmother. She died when I was eight years old and I only have a few memories of her, despite her being in my life at least weekly for all those years. I am in the process of piecing together her life, with the help of family members who knew her better than I. She was known as Nan Hill to me and her death in 1980 was the first death that really affected me. It's when I learnt that people you love do go away forever. A few years later my cousins and I held a séance trying to communicate with her one last time; we weren't successful, but it just shows how important a part of our lives she had been. She was a tiny woman who left a large imprint on our lives.

Clara Broadie was born on the 6th September 1899 in Wattle Flat, near Bathurst, New South Wales. Her parents were George Broadie and Ellen Core. Clara was their first child, born four and a half months after her parents had married. Clara was delivered by her grandmother Mary Ann Core. Family legend is that Clara was born prematurely and was so small she had to be wrapped in cotton wool and kept alive with goat's milk. September in that part of Australia is a crisp affair, with average temperatures at night around two degrees. It is not known how premature Clara was, but she was clearly strong enough to survive her parents care and survival methods. Baby Clara was forever thereafter known as Minnie.

Minnie was born into a close-knit family and her parents were in fact second cousins. George Broadie and Ellen Core were both descended from James and Maria Core, their Irish great-grandparents. George had been born in Sofala, a short distance from Wattle Flat and Ellen, whilst born in Forbes, had moved to the Wattle Flat area as a teenager. George worked as a gold prospector, making just enough to keep his family going. Ellen, according to stories handed down by Minnie, was a wonderful mother.

As a young girl she was a fine horsewoman and competed successfully in shows in the Mudgee area. Legend says that during a big flood, Ellen rode her horse into the water to save a policeman's child. Minnie also told her daughter Irene the story of the time she and her mother were held up by Jimmy Governor, the aboriginal bushranger. Minnie was a young baby and her mother Ellen was travelling by stagecoach with her. Jimmy Governor had murdered a family at Breelong, near Gilgandra and spent several months on the run, killing more people and robbing others for money and food. Confirming this story has not yet been possible, but tracing Jimmy's movements through newspaper reports it is certainly possible it did happen, as he roamed all over the area the Broadies lived and travelled.

After Minnie's birth in 1899, nine more children arrived for George and Ellen; Mary Ann in 1900, Alice May in 1902, George Joseph in 1904, Russell Cecil in 1906, Ada Isobel in 1908, Vera Myrtle in 1909, Emily Elizabeth in 1910, Claude in 1912 and William James in 1913. As the list of children grew, Minnie took on more responsibility to help her mother with caring for them and the household. She left school at age eleven, and despite this, she was good at spelling and maths. In 1912, the day before her 13th birthday, Minnie was to suffer the devastating blow of losing her baby brother Claude. Aged just six months old, Claude had been sick with gastroenteritis for two weeks and convulsions for six days when he was taken to Mudgee hospital, where he could not be saved. The family brought little Claude back to their home in Pyramul, some sixty kilometres south of Mudgee and he was buried the day after Minnie's birthday in the local cemetery.

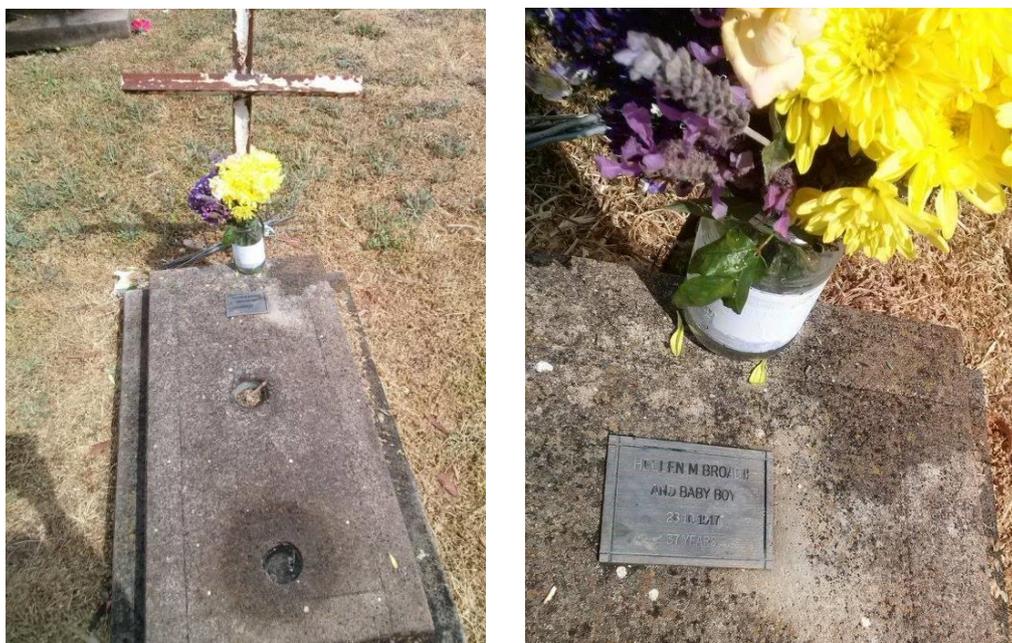
On the 10th October 1916, Minnie married George Reidy, a labourer from Gilgandra. George was 23 years old and Minnie just 17. Their vows were taken in the Church of England church in Coonabarabran, which was 40 kilometres from Minnie's home in Binnaway. Both George and Ellen, Minnie's parents, attended the wedding and George gave his permission for the under-aged Minnie to marry. George and Ellen had moved to Binnaway to live and work on a farm called Sunnyside, on the edge of town. Every Sunday George and Ellen would attend church with their brood of children. Ellen would sing and had a lovely voice, while George played music on the button accordion. If one of the children fell sick, Ellen would ride her horse into the nearest town to fetch the doctor.



Landscape around the Sunnyside, near Binnaway 2015

George and Ellen were, by all accounts, devoted to each other which makes Ellen's early death all the more tragic. In October 1917, just a year after eldest daughter Minnie was married, Ellen went into labour with her 11th child. All of these children had arrived in just 18 years. Ellen's body was exhausted and after 12 hours of labour, she suffered a major haemorrhage and died of heart failure. Her baby boy also died.

A few years ago, I finally had the chance to visit Ellen's grave in Binnaway cemetery and lay flowers, maybe the first to visit for many years, if not decades. It is adorned with a simple cross that now needs updating. It is adorned with a simple cross that now needs updating.



Ellen Brodie's grave in Binnaway cemetery, 2015

The following year, in July 1918, Minnie gave birth to her first child, a daughter registered as Ivy, although she would later come to be known as Dorothy May (Dorrie). The confusion likely came about because she was registered by her father some three days after her birth. Perhaps when he and Minnie returned home, they changed their minds as to her name. Minnie had travelled two hundred kilometres from her home in Purlawaugh, near Coonabarabran to Nurse Guest's Private Hospital in Mudgee to have her first child. It is not known why she travelled so far, although daughter Irene's birth certificate may hold a clue. Stated in the previous issue section is the death of two males. Minnie and George's son Robert was born in March 1920. In a tragic twist, a case of gastroenteritis also befell Robert, this time at eight months old. He suffered for five days and during this time developed pneumonia. Robert died on the 25th November 1920.

Minnie had now lost her own son, some eight years after losing her brother Claude to the same illness. It is entirely possible that the other son died in 1916 or 1917, before Dorrie's birth. No birth or death registration can be found, so he may have been born very prematurely or distance may have prevented the registration.

George and Minnie's second daughter, my grandmother Irene Mary Reidy, was born on the 15th June 1921 in Coonabarabran. Nan told me many stories about growing up with her parents and two sisters. Younger sister Ellen Kathleen, known as Nell, was born in January 1924. Not too long after Irene's birth, the family moved to Baradine. George was a sleeper cutter and travelled wherever the work was to be found. Minnie had been in hospital after contracting pneumonia and was not long out of hospital when, whilst sitting by the open fire, her nightdress caught alight. Minnie had Irene in her lap at the time, so she quickly jumped up and ran outside, with her sister May helping to douse the flames. Minnie was badly burnt from the accident and spent more weeks in hospital. Moves to Coonabarabran and then Pilliga followed.

After Minnie had a breakdown in Pilliga, she was taken by car to Wee Waa. George and the three girls walked and rode a bike all the way, some 60 kilometres, sleeping one night in the Pilliga scrub. Even out of hospital, Minnie continued to have 'funny turns' in the middle of the night, and as Dorrie wouldn't help and Nell was too young, it fell to eight year old Irene to run to the nearest neighbour for help, whilst their father was away working. When Irene was nine, in about 1930, the family moved to Narrabri. The 1933 voter list shows George and Minnie were living in Doyle St, Narrabri, in the heart of the town. Irene remembered Minnie as being a very caring hard-working mother who was a great cook. She made lovely hot curries, Christmas puddings, cakes and homemade bread, scones and dampers. She believed her mother was a much better cook than her.

When Irene and her sisters were young, Minnie would stay up half the night sewing old blankets and corn bags together to put on their beds. Cretonne, a flowered material would then be used to cover them; these warm covers were called wogers. Minnie also made all the girls' clothing.

In 1938, eldest daughter Dorrie married James Lonsdale in Narrabri. A year later Irene married Charles Poulter, also in Narrabri. Irene's first two children, Richard and Ken were born in Narrabri. The family also spent time in Sydney during their early married years, at one point living with Charlie's parents in Clovelly. In 1942, Irene, Charlie and the two boys moved to Wollongong, where two further boys were born, Phillip and Keith.



Minnie (left) and her youngest sister Emily, probably taken in the 1940 or 50s

The 1943 voter list has George, an ironworker and Minnie, a home maker, living at 20 Belmore St, Wollongong. Charlie and Irene were living next door at 22 Belmore St. It was during this time that George and Minnie split up. Minnie supported herself by working in a fish and chip shop.

George moved to Sydney and my uncle Dick remembers visiting his grandfather in his home in Redfern. George would also make regular visits to Dubbo to see his daughters when they moved there in later years. Irene would meet her father in a local pub sometimes to avoid upsetting her mother. George died in 1978.



Nell and Minnie at Irene's wedding in 1939.

Meanwhile, a few kilometres away in Unanderra, the 1943 voter list has Samuel Hobart Hill working as a fruiterer. Minnie met Sam in the 1940s, either in Wollongong or Gunnedah. By 1949, both were living in Gunnedah; Sam on Frogmore Park working as a flour miller and Minnie in Carroll Road. Minnie had moved with her daughter Irene to Gunnedah in about 1947. We knew little about Sam until recently. Sam was married twice before he partnered with Minnie. Born in Tasmania in 1884, Sam was fifteen years older than Minnie.

Sam married his first wife Ethel May Reid in Echuca, Victoria in 1905. This marriage produced eight children; Florence 1906, Ruby 1911, Leonard 1913, Arthur 1914, Bernard 1918, Dorine 1920, Ethel and Eveleane 1921. Sam then left for Queensland where he met Edith May Harris and had a few more children, including George 1923, Ronald 1926, Alice 1927 and Edward 1932.



Minnie and Irene on a Wollongong street in the early 1940s

Dorrie was also living at Frogmore Park by 1949 and Nell and her family moved to Gunnedah too, so all of the cousins grew up together. Sam and Minnie lived in Gunnedah until about 1954 when they made the move to Dubbo. Irene, Charlie and by then, their six children, moved soon after.

By 1958, Sam and Minnie were living at 7 Chelmsford St, Dubbo. When Sam died on the 23rd November 1962, aged 78, Minnie moved into 131 Jubilee Street with Irene, Charlie and the seven children. A tiny three-bedroom housing commission home, it was a tight squeeze to fit everyone in. With the house packed to the rafters, the large backyard became the boy's playground. A unique beer garden, built bit by bit over the years, was the place for literally hundreds of family parties.



Minnie with her great-grandson Gavin, born in 1974.

Minnie developed diabetes in her later years. Her grandson Ray remembers her as being cheeky and childlike when she would sneak cookies from the cookie jar behind her daughter Irene's back. She would giggle like a schoolgirl as she stuffed the cookies up inside her shirt to hide them. Minnie died on the 23rd November 1980, the same date as Sam. She was 81 years old. Minnie left behind 22 grandchildren and her two daughters. Sam lies in the Old Dubbo cemetery. Minnie and her daughter Dorrie lie next to each other in the New Dubbo cemetery. Irene is buried just a few metres away.



My grandmother shared this photo of Minnie and Sam with me and said it was taken in Coonabarabran, although it is not known where, or the significance of the address. Dated 1950s.



Minnie's grave in Dubbo cemetery, 2019.

My memories of Minnie