

Mervyn Chapman



Mervyn and brother Bert Chapman on their island home. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Boyd.

Mervyn Chapman was born in 1918 the year after his mother Maud Wilkes married the Cape Hawke Regatta Rower Albert George Chapman.¹ Mervyn's trip home from Taree Hospital to their home on Chapman Island in the Wallamba River near Tuncurry was a perilous journey on the back of a motor cycle negotiating a gravel road in the arms of his mother.

Maud was anxious as her family of four boys and three girls were growing up about living on an island, worrying they may stray into the river, so in the style of the day Albert tossed Mervyn into the river to start his swimming lesson. By the time Mervyn surfaced Albert had shed all this clothes and boots and was waiting to retrieve him if the need arose. Grateful was Mervyn when his school teacher Mr Songberg taught all the students at Darawank School to swim in the clear water of the Darawank Creek.² The journey to school was epic in itself, the two older boys and two girls rowed the boat across to the end of "Millers Mistake" caught the horse and with only a bridle mounted in line on its back and rode down the river bank to the school house.

Mervyn gained his driving licence aged 15 with one question from the Constable, "Can you drive son?" After an affirmative answer Mervyn proceeded to drive all his siblings to Tuncurry School each

¹ NSW BDM, birth index for Mervyn Chapman No. 38040/1918.

² Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of NSW, 29 August 1925, 4. Mr Songberg was appointed teacher in 1925.

day. By the time Mervyn was 16 he was anxious to get to the city so Albert arranged for him to board with his Aunt Margaret in her boarding house at Fivedock. He completed an apprenticeship in Fitting and Machining.³ Unfortunately, WWII had broken out and Mervyn spent long days at the lathes for Brown and Kidd Pty manufacturing parts for the popular automatic Bren guns.

On one of his few leisure days he met a young lady named Daphne Forwood and they soon married.⁴ After the war he moved back to Tuncurry where he purchased 188 acres at Shalimar from his father and built the family home. He worked the dangerous job of felling trees for firewood to be delivered to Forster for fuel stoves and guest houses. With his wife Daphne and three children he regularly attended the Tuncurry Picture House on a Saturday night, and all along the gravel road ladies and gentlemen stood waiting for a ride on the back of the truck, unperturbed about arriving wind swept.

Along with his brother Bert he was an active member of the Black Head Surf Life Saving Club and every Sunday Mervyn followed the tradition of his father Albert, grandfathers George Chapman and Augustus Wilkes - also a renowned champion sculler from the Manning River, by rowing the boat from Shalimar to the island at the end of Chapman Road to help with the milking. Mervyn's third child would be in the boat in his cane pram.

Mervyn was a keen fisherman, both in the river and surf, he reached the age of 97 and taught his children multiple life skills, in the best school room ever...the area we call Great Lakes.

Author: Marilyn Boyd (daughter of Mervyn Chapman)



Mervyn in the punt on the Wallamba River. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Boyd.

³ Ancestry.com.au, Anglican Parish Registers, 1814-2011, Hurstville St George.

⁴ NSW BDM, marriage index for Mervyn Chapman and Daphne Forwood, No. 13601/1942.



Mervyn and Daphne on their wedding day. Seven more brides wore Daphne's wedding dress at a time when people were on clothes rations and lace-making factories were commissioned to make silk parachutes during WWII. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Boyd.



Mervyn's firewood truck that would carry family and friends to the pictures. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Boyd.