

## The Cotter family, farmers on Motuihe

Shirley Maddock, in her book "Islands of the Gulf" recounts meeting the Cotter family while visiting Motuihe in 1966.

In spite of a thousand or more people encamped on the beach that day, when we arrived at the far end of Motuihe we might have been on any back-country farm. At night the Cotters can see the lights of the city, they have a direct telephone link to the mainland, but now that the navy has gone there is no regular boat. Once Easter is past the ferries give up their weekend visits and there is only the stores ship that calls once a week.

There is always the amphibian, though, and presently we hear the Widgeon faintly in the distance. That's Fred," said Barbara Cotter, "Or Bruce, one of the boys, anyway. They drop us the morning Herald." The engines grew louder and with a roar that almost took the roof off the house, the aircraft swooped across the island and the pilot shied a rolled up newspaper over the side which bounced down the home paddock. Barbara put down her infant son Nicholas and sprinted across the fence to get it. Over the masthead Captain Ladd had written a poem.

*Greetings shepherds with your sheep  
Here's your friend Fred just roused from sleep.  
The sun is shining and I can't stop,  
But here's the news down your chimney pot.  
Xxx Fred Ladd*

Darryl had a mob of sheep waiting to be dipped and, the dogs bounding and barking at our heels, we walked up to the yards built beside a clump of pohutukawas half way up the hill from the beach, where the scow ties up at low tide. He sent the first dozen sheep up the race. They were being sprayed for lice and it was squirted on like lacquer at the hairdresser's. Barbara and I hung over the rails helping a slow coach along with a bit of a push. She is tall, boyish looking and a champion horsewoman who has ridden in every major show in the Dominion and at the Royal Easter Show at Sydney.

"Darryl and I aren't islanders born," she told me. "He comes from Pahiatua down in the Wairarapa and I'm from Te Puke on the East Coast. Vernon was nearly a Motuihian – he came a bit before time and I nearly had him on the launch going in to town."

On this afternoon Vernon was only two but he was an enthusiastic farmer. His father had cut him a little switch from the hedge and he chivvied the sheep along from behind, laboring between their broad backs, gallantly waving his switch and blinking aside a sheep dog's tail that almost sent him flying. "Get along!" Darryl shouted and urged the stragglers on down the line. The sheep hardly bleated; there was only the drumming of their hooves on the dry leaves, the sharp hissing of their breath and a shuddering cough when they went under the spray. The afternoon sun burned down on the eddies of dust as the last of the mob tumbled into the paddock and Darryl, with Vernon on the crook of his saddle, cantered off to turn them loose.

When he came back, we drove across the fields to almost the end of the island and clambered down the gully supposed to von Luckner's. Its steep banks were ribbed with supplejack and tree roots, a stream oozed through the leaves and dropped into a dank pool at the fence line. Barbara had followed us to the beach on horseback, her handsome black gelding trotting through the loose dry sand.

The ferry would come only for two more days, then the Cotters would begin their winter solitude. The beach was empty now and the Cotters waved goodbye and turned to wander off towards the farm house. Motuihe was once again their own.