

The AUNT DAISY story

AUNT DAISY worked happily at the New Zealand Broadcasting Company's Station 2YA for upwards of two years before she was dismissed. She revelled in the work. Radio was life, change, variety; with a mass audience in the background to applaud if one made an especially good broadcast.

"We used to have ripping programmes," she says, "on Sunday and Monday nights. And we made wonderful plans about what we'd do if the Government renewed the company's contract."

Most of this planning took place over coffee and sausage rolls after 2YA's Monday night concert. Daisy, aided by her two regular singers, Mesdames Amy Woodward and Alma Andrews, prepared the food over gas-rings in the basement below Waring Taylor Street studios. This was regarded by the ladies as an act of high courage. The basement in those days was infested with rats.

"When supper was ready," she says, "we'd take it up to the children's studio. Clive Drummond, who did the dance session, would want to join us, and he'd say, 'Just a minute; I'll announce the next four dances straight off—just one great gobful.'"

"Oh! He sounded so dashing and daring! I wasn't very modern in those days, you see. The first time I put

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powder on my face was at 1YA, Auckland. But I rubbed it all off again before the Station Director should see me. I was old-fashioned."

To gather material for her broadcasts, Aunt Daisy went most of the places reporters go, and a few besides. She went out by launch for a first look at Wellington's floating dock as it was towed into harbour on arrival from England. She rode the footplate of a locomotive on the Khandallah suburban railway, delightfully blowing the whistle at level crossings. She described in colourful detail the first opening of Parliament by the newly-arrived Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe.

PARLIAMENT, ungratefully, set about nationalising radio. The staff of 2YA were loyal to the private enterprise. They had hoped its contract to broadcast would be renewed. "We didn't know if the Prime Minister was on our side or not," says Aunt Daisy. "We expected him to speak in the debate. But when the time came, Gordon Coates never opened his mouth." The Bill was passed. At midnight on December 31, 1931, Station 2YA ceased to be private property. Daisy and her fellow-broadcasters began the New Year as public servants.

It was a sad time. Radio was then a more intimate and personal medium. "Clive Drummond was everybody's idol," Aunt Daisy recalls. "He used to end every night with 'Goodnight, everybody—Goooodnight.' Everybody loved it. But when the Government took over they stopped Clive from saying it like that. It was heartbreaking. People used to weep!"

During this time 2YA's staff had once to lock and barricade themselves inside the studio. Unemployed men were staging a march on Parliament. Rumours flew that they would break into 2YA, seize the microphone, and put their case on the air. Nothing came of this scare, but the depression which gave rise to it seemed to grow deeper and deeper.

One day Aunt Daisy was called into the office of John Ball, the Station Director. "I knew it must be something serious," she says, "because he didn't call me Aunt Daisy. He called me Mrs Basham." She was not wrong. Ball told her that he was directed to employ men. He could retain only one woman, and Aunt Molly was the senior. Last to come would have to be first to go. Daisy left the office with the Director's good wishes and one month's notice to quit.

She wasted no time crying over her misfortune. Instead, she walked briskly along to see the opposition. Nimmo's Station 2ZW was a small private concern whose main purpose was to encourage the sale of wireless sets. It had a large following of listeners and was 2YA's main local competitor. The studio manager, Les Strachan, gave her a job for a month.

IT was Daisy's first contact with commercial radio. There were no singing commercials, and it was against the law even to mention the names of products. But Station 2ZW made a tiny income from a dignified form of sponsorship—"This programme of music by Schubert comes to you with the courtesy of Booster and Beaver, Limited."

The daily routine resembled that of a latter-day American disc-jockey. Daisy had often to select her own records, announce them, operate the turntable, monitor the transmission and answer the studio telephone. It was, she says, great fun.

When her time at 2ZW expired, Aunt Daisy returned to Auckland. She applied for work at Lewis Eady's Station 1ZR, Auckland's equivalent of Nimmo's. Tom Garland, otherwise Uncle Tom, told her there was a job, but the pay would be not more than £1 a week. It was barely enough to keep out the cold, but was still not be sneezed at. Daisy accepted.

Soon after, in 1933, the Government bought 1ZR and Daisy shifted, with her fellow staffers, to 1ZB, which had been

purchased by various citizens of Auckland for the Fellowship of the Friendly Road, Inc. She worked hard. She was an earlier riser than her colleagues, Uncle Tom, Uncle Scrim (C. G. Scrimgeour), and Dudley Wrathall. In consequence she drew the job of putting the station on the air each morning. She would let herself into the deserted studio, sit down at the mike, and salute the waking world with a hearty, "Good Morning, everybody." It was the beginning, a quarter-century ago, of the greeting which still rings through numberless New Zealand homes.

This cheerful salutation was the keynote of 1ZB's day. Programmes were conversational and folksy, lively and topical. Daisy often visited unusual places in order to share her experiences with the listeners. Her visit to the rubbish "destructor" at Freeman's Bay almost coincided with the friendly inspection by a wayward elephant from a visiting circus. In the monkey house at the Auckland Zoo she was too slow to take evasive action, and watched with mixed feelings while the monkeys tried on her hat.

BUT the climax of 1ZB's week was Sunday. Uncle Tom conducted a children's service in the morning, with his well-known children's choir. Other services were broadcast later in the morning and in the evening. The latter was followed by a programme of kurb-side philosophy conducted by Uncle Scrim and entitled *The Man in the Street*. The title of Friendly Road derived from the station's attempts to bridge the gap between differing religious sects—"You go to your church and I'll go to mine, but let's walk along together."

In the hard years of the early thirties, this fraternal formula appealed to a wide section of people. Aunt Daisy recalls that groups would foregather to share the station's broadcast services. At the end a collection box would be passed round and the money sent in to help support 1ZB. Income from the only permitted form of advertising was so insufficient as to be almost unnoticeable.

The Friendly Road station was true to its name. It was so friendly the studio frequently looked like a street on late shopping night. There was continuous coming and going, with donors bringing in clothes and layettes and the like, and those in need coming to collect them. And Aunt Daisy compounded the traffic problem by issuing an invitation to her listeners to come up and see her on Fridays, Friendly Fridays, she called them. "We'd be so pleased to see you," she said.

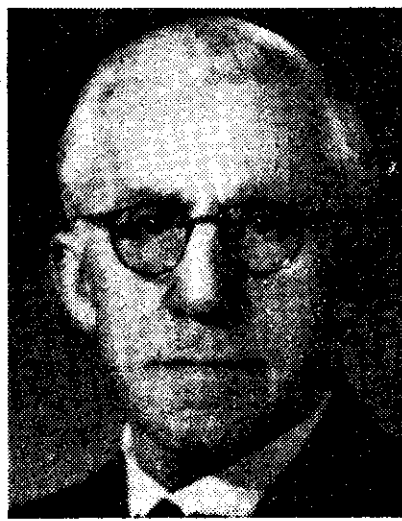
Came Friday, Daisy almost regretted her invitation. She had underestimated the magnetism of radio. "They all came," she declares, "and the lift in the Queen's Arcade building would hardly go. The liftman couldn't stand it. He finally resigned in protest."

THE Friendly Road's unusual brand of religion won it unusual support. Aunt Daisy recalls the following dialogue between Uncle Tom and a visitor

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★ THE EARLY RISER SAID "GOOD MORNING": In the days of the Friendly Road —Aunt Daisy and (from left) Dudley Wrathall, Uncle Scrim and Uncle Tom ★



Spencer Digby photograph