

it's **Better** to **Laugh**

TALES OF AN EASTERN CAPE FAMILY

THE
HARDSHIP
AND THE
HUMOUR



BY
JAMES
Mc NAUGHTON

It's better to laugh

Tales of an Eastern Cape Family

James McNaughton



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My aunt Mary and my brothers Henri, Andrew and Paul have all contributed and given me encouragement and I am indebted to them as well as to my four daughters who have been very supportive.

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The book is not intended as an historical record of my family nor as a biography. Rather, it is intended as a light-hearted collection of family tales and stories stemming from my ancestors, relatives, friends and my own experiences. The central theme is hardship and humour and many of the stories were handed down by word of mouth or remembered from long ago and are not necessarily accurate. As the saying goes, "Why spoil a good story with boring facts?"

You should read this with a sense of humour and perhaps a dram of Scotch.

James McNaughton

Sedgefield

April 2009

FOREWORD

Standing on the ledge above the cottage at Vaalkrantz, on the farm Aloe Ridge, with Tandjiesberg behind and above, and the lone sentinel of Loskop towards one's left ear, one looks out over the 'vêr verlaate vlakte'. Before you is the ocean bed of a prehistoric sea. To your right, across the plains lies Graaff Reinet and the Camdeboo National Park and mountain range; and 180 degrees to your left, across a vast flat, almost to the Indian Ocean, grey in the distance, are the mountains of the Addo Elephant Park.

The dream of James McNaughton and others is to connect the Addo Elephant Park with the Sneeuweg Mountains, so once more the springbok can migrate in their thousands to the sea. A dream that gives back the land to the wild animals of Africa.

Let's hope that, if that dream comes to pass, a way is found to accommodate those wonderful farmers who fence the land, conserve it, run angora goats and merino sheep which feed on the pungent Karoo bush. These are the folk who work hard, talk straight and always pay their round. These are the folk who populate, in the main, James McNaughton's stories.

James McNaughton is a great storyteller. Unfortunately, you can't sit around the potjie with him, under a sparkling blanket of Karoo stars, and listen. Listen and laugh; sometimes laugh until you are doubled up in pain.

But the next best is you can read his stories, understand the gentle observations of a man who values his fellow human beings, enjoys their foibles and strange ways. James' stories are kind, with the kindness of a pragmatist who understands this is the life we have been dealt, so the best is to enjoy it.

"So take this medley of ways and people of the Karoo as the gift of a friend and fellow lover of the fairest country under the stars"

Dave Wylde

Former Headmaster of St Andrew's College, Grahamstown
May 2009

Come, for the beer is brewed
And the night is chill;
Close the door to the ghosts
To the spirits of the night.
Let the Leopard cough among the rocks
He is alone and hungry –
But we are warm and the company is good
And there is a story to be told.

Anonymous

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TALES OF AN EASTERN CAPE FAMILY

Good humour provides some spice in our lives? **It's Better to Laugh** is James McNaughton's collection of stories from the Eastern Cape. He grew up in the Karoo near Graaff-Reinet, went to school at St Andrew's College in Grahamstown and now he and his wife Gill live at the coast in Sedgefield.



James McNaughton tells the stories of his and his family's school days and other historic events in his life and that of his family. Farmers in the Eastern Cape are renowned for their story telling and James is one of the best. He must be thanked for taking the time to write it all down and to entertain us.

The stories are a good laugh, but they are also an historic record of life at the time. Times were often tough; drought, floods and then wool and mohair booms came and went. Thank God for a sense of humour.

In these times strong relationships were built with family and friends. Family loyalty was important and there was time, quality time, to spend with all.

Anyone who has connections with the Eastern Cape and many of us do, will enjoy this book – places and characters are familiar. This book is more than a laugh.



"I laughed out loud, wiped my eyes and enjoyed the warmth and camaraderie of Karoo life under the Tandjiesberg. Hard life, tough as ironstone – but with such a sense of community and laughter."

Marguerite Poland

 **Wright
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