

## **Maud Ruby Basham MBE ('Aunt Daisy')**

1879–1963

Maud Basham, known affectionately by New Zealanders as 'Aunt Daisy', was a radio broadcaster and personality who from 1936 to 1963 broadcast every weekday morning on the ZB network. She would greet listeners with her boisterous catchcall: 'Good morning, everybody', then regale listeners with recipes (mostly supplied by her followers), home hints and sponsors' products. In addition to being a pioneer female celebrity broadcaster, Aunt Daisy was also New Zealand's first celebrity foodie.

She became famous and loved: before sailing to the United States on a goodwill trip in 1938, she was farewelled in Wellington's Town Hall, which overflowed with fans wishing her well. The train stations en route to Auckland's port were crowded by well-wishers singing her programme's theme song 'Daisy, Daisy, Give Me Your Answer Do'.

Maud Basham, always known as Daisy, was born in London in 1879. Her widowed mother immigrated to New Zealand in 1891, settling in Taranaki. Daisy later became a pupil-teacher with a keen interest in acting, singing and debating. After her marriage to civil engineer Frederick Basham, they moved to Wellington in 1922.

Around the same time, she sang for an experimental radio station and began broadcasting seriously in 1928 when – in the lead up to the Great Depression – her husband was put on half-pay. She became known as 'Aunt Daisy' when she presented her first children's programme.

She worked for several radio stations then joined 1ZB in Auckland in 1933 to present a 30-minute programme for women. She built up a huge following, limited only by the restricted transmission range of the station.

The 1936 Broadcasting Act introduced commercial radio and Aunt Daisy, back in Wellington, began her long stint working for 2ZB. Though the station was still State-owned, Aunt Daisy officially began promoting products. As the ZB network (Newstalk ZB's ancestor) expanded throughout New Zealand, she became a national celebrity.

Aunt Daisy would talk, read an uplifting 'thought for the day', share recipes, home hints, advice – and chat about products she'd agreed to promote. Products she promoted were often sold out within hours; her listeners trusted her implicitly because they knew she would only advertise products she had tried herself. Aunt Daisy was a famously fast talker – up to 200 words per minute, all clearly articulated and precisely spoken. (By comparison, the usual conversational speed is 120-150 wpm.)

After her world tour in 1938, she paid wartime and post-war goodwill visits to the United States, where her irrepressible manner and unquenchable optimism earned her the label of 'The Dynamo from Down Under'. In New Zealand she was recognised in the broadcasting industry as one of the country's most potent advertising forces. Her influence was enormous.

Her first cookbook was published in 1934; nine others followed. *The Aunt Daisy Cookbook*, compiled by daughter Barbara, was published in 1968 and has been reprinted 21 times. All proceeds go to a charitable trust that funds medical research in New Zealand.

She was made an MBE in 1956 and continued broadcasting her daily programme with rarely a break until a few days before her death in Wellington on 14 July, 1963.

Daisy Basham hated revealing her age, so it was a shock to many to discover she was nearly 84 when she died. Her vitality, charisma, strength and resilience had made her seem ageless. Having been admonished as a child for talking too much, she built what some might have considered an unfortunate characteristic into a professional, endearing and lucrative career – one unequalled in New Zealand.