

# The Brothers Karamazov

## ONE

All Dad's farming life he has had to put up with the two toffee nosed gentleman farmers next door. We have always called them the Brothers Karamazov for several reasons. They would easily fit into the plots and sub plots of any Russian novel, but mainly because they are fond of saying that their forebears took up their farm as virgin country the same year that Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote his most famous novel The Brothers Karamazov in 1888. It's a nice bit of country by the way, rocks and York gums and undulating. Only about 1200 acres but in the good times of wool (unlike now) a good living and a total lifestyle was achieved by a great many landholders on small farms.

They could just as easily have said, for example, that it was the year Spearfelt won the Melbourne Cup or Collingwood won their first Premiership Grand Final, but not these bastards, they have to demonstrate that they are products of St. Peter's College.

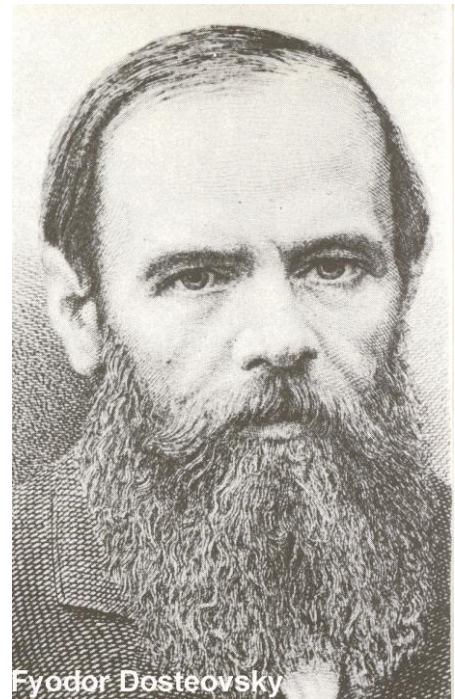
Returning to the bro's, they are pains in the rear end on a good day. They live off their wool clip, don't crop much, spend their ample spare time playing bridge (and poker) here and there, go clay target shooting all over the country and overseas. Both are now single, they married late in life after their devoted mother wasn't around any more to look after these selfish devils. The wife of one, a good sort, died early on and the other flew the coop (wisely so in our opinion).

They dress very well in smooth country clothes and spend their Friday evenings at the Naracoorte Gentleman's Club, mixing with the other district silvertails.

All of what I have set out is their personal good luck and we don't hold their inherited wealth of land stock and money against them, we just don't take to the consistent and fine honed patronising attitudes. In short they really get up our noses.

They are not identical twins, but when you are standing up close and talking to them you realise that their eyes, blue and not particularly open, have a deep mean look in them. I've seen this look only once before and that was in the eyes of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the USA after Jack Kennedy. I once talked to LBJ briefly at Durham University when I was part of the greeting group when he came north to receive his Honorary Doctorate from the University in God knows what. I read later in the late lamented Saturday Evening Post that he had the eyes of a snapping turtle, so there you are.

We also deeply resented their habit of borrowing farming gear from us and never returning it, often quite expensive gear like post hole diggers etc. They are on the governing body of the Clay Target shooters and fly here, there and everywhere for meetings relating to the sport and for large national shoots, never at their own expense. I had sort of forgotten these patronising assholes until Dad had an accident at his perennial occupation of clearing land and more land and broke a leg.



## TWO

At this time I'm a lecturer in Mechanical Engineering at Durham University and I own a gadget that I have been keen to try out on Dad's Land Clearing programme for some time.

Thus Dad's accident is something of a catalyst. I take Sabbatical Leave (I've been at Durham for the past 8 years) and come home to keep the farm ticking. The gadget I pick up is a huge geared block, as in block and tackle, which I pick up in a clear-out sale at Harland and Woolfe's famous ship building yard in Liverpool. There's still some of these things left at Merseyside. There's several in situ. Painted canary yellow they dominate the sky line. They're designed to move huge amounts of steel plate around the yard and are so highly geared they can lift large quantities just by a few men pulling on ropes.

Anyway, I think this block and tackle would work on stump pulling and I'm able to get the block together with spare cable and axles onto a bill of lading and it goes out to Adelaide atop a heap of full shipping containers. Dad advises me in due course of its arrival and we get a truckie to cart it out from Port Adelaide to our farm east of Naracoorte.

## THREE

When I eventually get back to the farm at semester end I weld up a protective screen of steel plate around the driving cage of Dad's Caterpillar tractor. If my idea doesn't work and the cable breaks it may be a life saver.

As part of his large holding Dad has a 1500 acre block running towards the river that he had axe cleared the year the world wide depression struck. He has a deal of other tamed land to work on and has never got back to this block.

I start very tentatively and then with more confidence to winch the old stumps from the chopped trees out of the ground. It's like pulling rotted teeth with the block and tackle. It works like a dream and in no time I have uprooted stumps everywhere. It's easier to maximise this work if you have two tractors and I hire a young chap to drive the wheeled tractor and to put the chains around the stumps. I then just take up the slack with the D.2 and thanks to the geared block, out they come.

I never had to replace any shafts on the block for the entire job. Finally the last blasted stump is out of the ground and I fit the hydraulic operated blade to the wheeled tractor and we push up all the stumps into windfall lines facing into the evening summer breeze. Most of our good burning will take place in fire season when this wind is blowing.

The follow-up job when the stumps are eventually burnt up is also a big one. We have to push the dirt and ash from the burnt stumps into the cavities where the stumps came from.

While it's very dirty, dusty work it's not all that hard to do. Eventually we get it all together, we get some great dry burning conditions and fire the lot and push up stumps and more stumps into the bright flames and by early May we have a huge rough block of 1500 acres to sow to wheat.

During all this activity I batch on my own at the old farm house but scrub up late afternoon on Fridays and dressed in good English country clothes go to the Naracoorte Gentlemen's Club to have a few drinks and then generally someone sends out for a take-away meal and we play cards. The Bros Karamazov are big card players, very canny and they love to win. I set out to fix in their minds that I only punt on very strong hands. I also develop a practice of pulling my right ear lobe when I have a winning type hand. I give in early on lesser hands, thus I contribute to the pot and have the occasional good win. I stick to this policy like glue. There is, I think, no doubt in their minds that I'm a punter of only good hands and I give myself away by seemingly unconsciously pulling my ear lobe. So far, so good.

## FOUR

I now turn to the Clay Target side of things where I am also laying the foundations of a scheme.

I've had a fair bit to do on Clay Target Shooting, but only on the one shooting range in Durham. It comes about this way. On our annual open day at Durham Uni, Lord Elford comes in. He's on the Governing body, is a big local landowner and it seems that while he is shooting fine in the field his trap shooting has gone off. He's blaming his trap gun. I go out and load for him at a grouse shoot at his estate. He shoots naturally and quite fairly, so I next look in at a trap shoot, this is shot in his park and he owns the set up. His gun is a bit tight, so with his sanction I look through the gun racks back at the Manor House. There's something like 120 guns in the rack, collected over a century or two of country shooting. There's not an interchangeable choke gun amongst them and he totally doesn't want to know about such a new fangled idea. I notice that many of his under and over shotguns have two triggers. Talk about conservatism. He tells me his 1897 Encyclopaedia Britannica has a big article on guns and this article has a big down on single trigger shotguns. I check up and sure enough it does.

To cut a long story short, I do a whole programme on patterns and cartridge loading and finish up standardising a formula for cartridge loading and then ream out the barrels on a Japanese shotgun from his rack. It's the only non English gun in the rack. I don't know how it got there.

Anyway, the programme is a huge success and he misses very few with the cartridge and gun combination. I'm so impressed that I pick up a matching gun for myself and give it the same treatment.

There are probably competition regulations that are breached by my approach but as Lord Elford shoots only on his own fully owned range no one is likely to question him.

## FIVE

I now take my gun down to the local range, shoot left shoulder (I'm right handed) and miss many and hit a few and generally establish myself as a mug shooter. At home on the farm I've devised a fast throw auto trap which is so simple I apply for a patent on it. I practise regularly in a back paddock with this, using only the Lord's special formula and miss very, very few, if any.

I'm plotting and planning of course to do the Brothers in the eye, one way or another and I'm prepared to bide my time. The week of the huge Bordertown annual three day competition shoot arrives. It's extra big this year as the top shooters in S.A. have been invited to shoot 75 clays each to put \$1000 each in the pot, winner to take all. Both the brothers shoot this event but they are shrewd and shifty and syndicate their stake, i.e. they have their stock firm donate \$250 towards this, their Bank \$50, their car supplier \$20 and so on down to their groceries supplier, \$20. In short they are putting the wood on people they are buying from. They can hardly say no. They do all this with a glib, easy and totally insincere charm; it seems to work.

I go to Bordertown, shoot rough and left shoulder. They announce the big event and call for starters, they are totally amazed and gob smacked when I throw a thousand in folding ones on the table.

The shooters try to dissuade me. I just tell them I feel a purple patch coming on. The off course bookie who has a man here for the event calls the odds, I'm 170 to 1. They always make a book on this event due to total shooter interest. I give him a bank cheque for \$5000 and advise him very quietly to lay it off as I feel a purple patch coming on.

"You're fucking mad," he says.

"We'll see," I say.

As you might expect with so much cash money on the table there's a lot of very, very good shooters there and all shoot possibles and continue to do so until a strong breeze comes up and shooters start to fall by the wayside. I'm now shooting right shoulder. We shoot on as the wind freshens. I'm totally motivated and miss none. Shooters wander over to study what I'm doing and endeavour to look at my rather ordinary looking shot gun.

I have a habit of running some green insulation tape around the barrel end for the purposes of easy identification of my gun in the rack. Under and overs look alike, also this bit of difference adds to my persona.

This event looks like going on for ever and every so often they stop to shoot another shorter event, all of which I shoot and mostly win. We get back to the main event, it's getting less light and older shooters are fading. We stop shooting for the day, I don't mix, just get in my Tojo and return to the farm.

## SIX

I'm back ready to shoot at the appointed time next morning, which is fine and still, but not glassy still. I think a breeze will get up.

I walk up to the pad carrying my shotgun and a tool box full of shells, ear muffs, shooting glasses etc. Just to add a bit of salt into the wounds I don't even wear a shooting jacket. It's another disdainful shot at the Brothers who wear their Australian Team Jackets.

Nobody's ready to start. They endeavour to call me into the Club House. I flatly refuse. I say I'm on the pad ready and entitled to shoot, I've other things to do, let's get on with it. I hear later that they brought up a top umpire from South Australia Clay Target association and he wants to question me on previous shooting experience and why I've changed shoulders. He wants a quiet word.

I'm quietly brusque and invite him to say what he wants to say there on the pad. I point out that the shoot rules are quite clear: any gun, any load is OK. He retires without saying anything and away we go again. At the end of the first 25 I ask the bookmaker my price, 30 to 1, he says. I take another \$5000. He grins a bit uncertainly.



We shoot until 3 p.m. The guns are running extra hot; no-one of the shoot out squad has missed any. A heavy breeze gets up.

I change to extra strength loads and shoot quicker, you can't let the targets get too far away from you in these conditions. I nail them pronto while they're flying true. The wind gets worse and shooters drop out quickly and we finally get down to the two brothers and myself. I shoot another 25, they 23 and 21, thus the day is over. A sort of funny silence ensues. Then the onlookers start to buzz a bit.

## SEVEN

I get presented with the prize and the bookmakers post-dated cheque. I say by way of acceptance that a shoot returning me what this one has is a nice way to end a long weekend. I congratulated the Brothers for being good sports (I don't mention them bringing up hopefully an adjudicator from Adelaide to try and stuff my shoot up). There is, of course, a huge undercurrent that a mug shooter who is C Grade can clean up the best known event in Oz as well as every other Major Prize and sash. I simply say in reply that I warned them I had felt a purple patch coming on. In respect of changing shoulders I pull down my sweat shirt a bit to show a plaster stuck to my left shoulder.

"Hurt it in the bulldozing," I say, "never shot right shoulder before."

This obfuscates things a bit more, so without allowing things to settle I pick up my trophies and smartly depart the scene.

It is fair to say that only the pent up annoyance at the supercilious Brothers kept me focussed and carried me through. You need a lot of commitment and focus for this sort of thing and the brothers certainly supplied it to my psyche.

I make arrangements to fast clear the Bookies cheque. He took my advice and laid a deal of it off and he thanks me for this. I farm on for the week trundling around in the Caterpillar pushing dirt and charcoal into tree stump holes.

Saturday I go into Naracoorte for the annual Poker championships which the brothers again have dominated for yonks.

I play poker all day in my exact usual style, the pots get bigger and bigger as the evening goes on. The pot is all I'm waiting on, it doesn't matter what quality hand I get dealt.

The pot is now as fat as it's going to be. I draw my first five cards, and show a tad of animation by sitting up straight, I discard one card and push all my chips into the centre and stroke my ear lobe. The Brothers make fluttering I'm out signs with their hands, they talk a bit, everyone tosses their hand in. I scoop the entire pot on a hand that contains only a pair of twos. One of the brothers, curiosity overrunning common sense, reaches out to turn my cards, now lying face down on the green baize card table. I thump his hand near hard enough to break bone and quietly say, 'You know better than that.'

The pot, by the way, was \$4,890, a very nice pick up and a reward for the patient work I've put in to pull this off.

## EIGHT

Back to the farm. I take a day off Sunday to make phone calls and put my next ploy in action. In jotting all this down I realise that it may sound very 'I am-ish'. Nothing could be less true. I'm simply out to paint these supercilious sods' wagon.

The day of the auction rolls along and by auction time we are gathered at the Brothers property, they're too mean to hire comfortable seated accommodation in Naracoorte so we gather in the dust in front of the wool shed. My friends from the Street Theatre Club dribble inconspicuously in and take their places. They have heeded instructions and are dressed in non new country farm world tans and Blundstones, Akubras, well worn, they blend.

Eventually it's show time. The auctioneer finally finishes reading the terms and conditions as he is obliged to do and calls for opening bids. Land at this time is worth \$1,100 per acre. The Street Theatre company ramp up a mad bidding war and the per acre price is soon about three times the expected, the locals are gasping, the Brothers can't believe what they're hearing, they mentally spend the dosh, at this stage a klaxon horn van rushes up, it's got the name of the State Mental Hospital painted on the sides, men in white coats carrying strait jackets jump out, the street theatre bidders start to run, they don't run too fast, they allow themselves to be caught and struggling madly are thrown into the van. The van team head, wearing a doctor head glass for staring into eyes and dangling a stethoscope, tells all and sundry that he's very sorry but this mob had found a set of wire cutters and had cut their way out and so on.

It's totally credible street theatre which I have paid good money for out of my poker winnings and I've had good value for money. Just to see the brothers faces fall so far was worth it.

The auctioneer gamely apologises and re-starts the auction. Bids are dispirited and few. The dry old local solicitor, a good friend of Dad's is the winner among the few bids. The Brothers look at him and yell out 'who's the buyer?' The old advocate ignores them and really draws out the matter, carefully reading the contract of sale several times (I've worded him up closely). He then sorts out the trust a/c cheque and fills in the buyers name, this all gives me enough time to quietly fade from the scene, I'm the new owner of the Brothers Karamazov farm, but I'm not yet finished with these bastards.

They reluctantly ring and congratulate me on the purchase of Rocky Ridge and say that they will come out and have a walk around their old place when they come up from Adelaide once or twice a year. I tell them they're very welcome.

## NINE

Once they are off the property and city bound I bring in a good jobbing builder type and move things around. I have long admired the brother's main entrance and wrought steel gates. We carefully knock down the mellow old stonework, unhinge the gates and re-erect the lot as was at our farm. We Ringlock fence out the entranceway completely. The old house is a fine old timber hardwood from which we pull down the attachments to get to the original main house and jinker the whole lot over several days to a block Dad has long owned at Port Fairy. It's a stumped house and couldn't have been easier to re-locate, it scrubs up well. We landscape and reticulate the grounds, build a hold-all shed out of the left overs and now have a good holiday home which we use a lot in the summer. We demolish the shearing shed and reconstruct this as extra holding space back at our place, we will be running more sheep now so extra space to provide dry sheep at shearing is a must.

Dad comes out from hospital with a volunteer driver and we have a little ceremony. We torch the last of the standing structures, old bush pole walled and straw thatched roofed sheds which have stood on the site since 1881. Straw roofs carry rats and rats carry Brills disease. They burn like nobody's business.

It's all petty sounding and vindictive but we are really cauterising the Brothers Karamazov out of at least the landed part of our district. We use the last of our mad money on a bottle of Kristal Champagne, the driver, Dad and I fill our flutes and drink to the future. Dad is a quiet man but he's nobody's fool. He gestures with his flute towards the raging pyre of the sheds.

"I think," he says, "Old Fyodor Dostoevsky himself would have approved of this, our own private Viking funeral."  
We grin and top up our flutes.