

DRYNANE

THE HOUSE WITH ELASTIC SIDES

by The Dickson Family Siblings



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DRYNANE:

The House with Elastic Sides



A Memoir of the Dickson Family Siblings residing at
Drynane,
Park Parade,
Waverley New South Wales 2024
Australia



Betty (Bette)

by Betty Burke (nee Dickson)

Drynane is still in my dreams. I often find myself in Mum's bedroom looking out the window. It was a wonderful home to grow up in. The living room was a big double room with an archway between. It was furnished with a Jacobean lounge, armchairs in striped taupe and black and there was a fireplace with a very Victorian mantle piece.

On the right was an ebony black piano where I can remember Auntie Peg playing, with Dad standing in front of the bay windows, hand on heart, singing, "It's a long way to Tipperary," and "The Road to Mandalay". The windows were clad in maroon velvet curtains separated with heavy cream lace and an Axminster rug on the floor which I always thought looked tatty.

Through the arch, the dining room also housed a Jacobean round table and a sideboard where the lovely photo of Mum in an au de nile dress hung above it in a stylish oval frame. Mum's photo was on the occasion of having been presented to the Prince

of Wales in 1920, when she partnered Uncle Bede who was a V.C. winner.

Also on the right of the dining room was a fireplace where an old leather *chaise longue* lived. Many a kiss was had there in my teenage years.

On the mantle piece were books of the History of the Great War with a wonderful sepia photo of Dad and his mates standing around a cannon in France on the wall behind. On the opposite side was Uncle Bede's V.C. medal and photos of him standing alongside Dad's Law Degree of when he entered the Bar.

My best memory of Mum and Dad together was one afternoon cuddling on their bed, a cot in the corner with a child in it - possibly Janet or Malcolm - and I remembered how comfortable it was to have such happy parents.

It's such a shame that Dad only lived until he was forty five as he had achieved so much in such a short time. He had become a Barrister after studying at

University. He was our equivalent of a Mature Age Student after he came back from the First World War. He and Mum were engaged for four years while he qualified.

Mum was twenty eight when they finally married and together they quickly gave the world seven children, Mary Ellen, Mark, Betty, Elaine, Margaret, Janet and Malcolm. My father died on New Year's Eve 1943 in my first year of high school and after only seventeen years of marriage.

After Dad died it was very much a Matriarchal household. Upstairs lived Nanny Kenny and Aunty Nell who were known as Sister Kenny and Matron Sturroch. The house had been a Maternity Hospital which they co-owned till 1936. Every fourth Sunday, Father Piper would come to afternoon tea with two or three Altar boys and we had to be home to serve it. We also had to polish the brass jardinières and the name plate of Drynane until it was spotless, and lest I forget the door knob. I usually helped Nanny Kenny make the pie and the cakes for afternoon tea, all baked in the Early Kooka. Our pantry seemed to be always full of fresh cakes on a Sunday.

Downstairs lived Nanny Dickson and Aunty Peg, Dad's step mother and step sister. Nanny Dickson smoked cigarettes, unheard of in those days. She looked severe with her hair pulled back in a bun and seemed always grumpy, never really talking to anyone. I did not ever see the two Grandmas

have a long conversation. They always called each other Mrs. Dickson and Sister Kenny.

On the other hand Aunty Peg, the daughter was always pretty and bright. Before she came to live with us after Dad died she lived in Moss Vale and every Spring she would bring boxes of violets, pansies, stocks and poppies and any other Spring flower. She had lost her fiancée in the First World War, and remained a single lady by choice she told us.

My memories of Dad are few and far between. I remember going down to Bondi Beach on hot summer days and being taught to catch waves, head down, shoulders down, swim and kick. It still always works for me.

I remember a hot day in Gundagai where we fled from the Japs in WW2 when they fired bombs from a submarine off Bondi. It landed in Wellington Street where we were at school at St. Patricks. On that hot day in Gundagai, Dad was milking a cow and when my turn came I failed to manage a drop and he became quite cross with me because I should have been able to do it as I had Dickson hands.

Another great memory is watching the Anzac Day March from the Supreme Court. We had never been inside before and I remember the wonderful old staircase and the old court rooms with the high wooden benches for the Judge to sit in and Dad's office with

his wig hanging behind the doors. We overlooked Elizabeth Street watching the march proceed to Park Street where it turned into Hyde Park. I think MaryEllen, Mark, Elaine and myself were there. That day started my love for Architecture and old buildings.

I remember Dad standing and gazing out the back door through two Norfolk Pines and dreamily saying, "When my ship comes in." I always gazed through the windows of the upstairs kitchen, (which had to be opened because they were blacked out with white lace curtains stuck on so the Japs could not see if we had any lights on) hoping one day I would see his ship come sailing in but it never did.

In my teenage years, Uncle Bede made friends with my Kevin, my husband to be, because he was a returned soldier too and he felt they had something in common.

I was an Art student doing dress design at the National Art School at Darlinghurst. Each year we had an Art Student's Ball which was fancy dress, and that year my friends and I made Kev the tightest pair of calico pants, which fitted like a glove and he wore one feather in his head and went as a Red Indian.

Uncle Bede did the war paint on the brown muscular body with great care and precision and created one of the hits of the Ball. He was so proud of himself that all the girls staying at our place gave him a big kiss.

What a time I had as a teenager. As a Dress Design student I had to make all the Ball gowns for myself and my sisters and friends. Mum bought me an old Singer treadle sewing machine and set me up in the kitchen upstairs which I called my Studio.

We had Old Girl's Balls for Holy Cross at the Wentworth. There was the Waverley Old Boy's Ball, the Art Students Balls at the Trocodero, Artists' Balls, Fancy Dress Balls and once I went to the Shore Old Boys' Ball with my friend Judy Clegg - and did we dress for them! Moire taffeta, chiffon, velvets, organzas, tulle, taille, beautiful fabrics and all recycled over the years to fit Elaine, Margaret, Janet, friends and bridesmaids.

How did Mum ever afford me?

DRYNANE: THE HOUSE WITH ELASTIC SIDES

A personal account and memoir of the Dickson Family siblings - Mark, MaryEllen, Betty, Elaine, Margaret, Janet and Malcolm - and the home they grew up in. The Dickson family resided at Drynane in the suburb of Waverly, Sydney from 1935-1959.

This memoir tells of each sibling's special connection to the family home, their experiences growing up and eventually moving on to create their own homes, and includes family photographs and a chapter from Mark O'Rourke, a country cousin who spent many happy days at Drynane.

It provides a candid picture of life in Sydney in the 30's - 50's from the perspective of those children growing up in a home that was filled with love and touched by tragedy.

While Drynane is no longer standing (it was demolished, in the name of progress, in the late '60's) the warm memories that it engendered in it's former occupants lives on in this memoir.

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