

MY MOTHER – ELEANORA LELLO



Eleanora was the eldest child of Harry and Bessie Lello. I think she had a tough childhood because she was followed by a large number of younger siblings, involving her in a burden of housework and child-rearing. Hers was probably also an unhappy childhood. She told me she felt her father never loved her, having been away from home during her earliest years, and she was jealous of her younger sister Edie, who was very much the favourite. These childhood experiences coloured her personality.

Being very intelligent and hardworking she eventually became a teacher, and taught in Tasmania for some years. She then moved to Sydney, where she was on the point of being promoted to the headship of a large school, a prestigious move because she was still young. However, fate intervened in the form of my father Frederick Trevor Daniel, out from England. They married, and I, Ryllis Eleanor, was soon on the way. However, I was born not in Sydney but in England, where they had gone for a short period. The “short period” lasted until my father’s death in 1980, after which my mother returned to Australia for good. “It smelled right,” she told me.

My mother produced four more children: twins Brenda and Deirdre, Gwyneth and Geoffrey. Brenda succumbed alas, in 1978, to cancer, but my other three siblings are with you today, on the occasion of this Lello Family reunion.

I remember my mother as an unremittingly hard-working woman – naturally, with a large family to bring up, plus for a time a much-loved foster child – but I never felt she was happy. I know she missed her family in Australia and Tasmania very badly, especially her mother, Bessie; in those days communications by sea-mail were difficult and long drawn out. Also, I think she fretted at the bonds of housewifery and I am certain she was much afflicted by loneliness. There was not the

possibility, in those restricted days, of her getting to know compatible women for friendship. She was intelligent and longed to be out there in the world, working, where she had been so successful before marriage.

We children gained a great deal, of course. We led a rich life with her, learning a great assortment of practical skills. Not only those, but I remember with joy how we used to sing in harmony while doing the mundane chores of washing the dishes! We were encouraged strongly to take music lessons, to go on foreign travel even when still young, to join the Guide/Scout movement and take full advantage of that, and to take up sporting activities. Our lives were full, and it was our mother who filled them. She taught us to love poetry, the outdoors, music, literature.

But she had the difficult path to tread between conforming to those standards our father had for us, his expectations and his punishments and discipline, and that of attempting to protect us children from his often too strenuous strictness. This imposed upon her a constant strain that she could well have done without.

I remember her telling me now and again of happy times when she was teaching in Tasmania. Of how, in those days, teachers were moved about every couple of years, thus experiencing schools large and small, urban and rural. She loved to be in a one-teacher school, coping with children of all ages; this was a challenge she relished. She would tell me of how these children would arrive at the school on their ponies and would tether them to the school rail. For their lunches, they would bring sweet, luscious fruits from their farms to share with others.

And talking of fruit reminds me: she told me how her first impression of children in Britain was of their rosy "apple" cheeks. Once winter came, she realised why!

Eventually, the house emptied. We all went to university but it was not long before we were bringing grandchildren home to "Nana". These babies brought her great happiness. After my father's retirement, my parents bought an apartment in Spain, right on the beach. Mother learned to speak Spanish, although already elderly, a considerable achievement, and there were aspects of that life which were very happy for her.

I remember her as being an exceptionally gifted and lovely lady. All my friends adored her! One described her as beautiful; another told me she filled her with awe. And as for me, I still miss her badly.

*Eleanor Tims
May 2005*