

Allayne Kiddle



MARCELLE Allayne Kiddle (“Allayne”) was a remarkable woman who packed into her 84 years a breadth of experience that few of us manage to achieve. She signed the Roll of Counsel in 1959. She transferred to the non-practising list in 1966. She died on 29 December last year.

In 2002 she published privately a book of reminiscences, which she entitled *A Most Peculiar Child*. If a biography of Allayne Kiddle were to be published it would properly be entitled “A Most Remarkable Life”.

A Most Peculiar Child captures in vignettes pictures of a time which is now long gone. Speaking of her early childhood spent in Sydney she says:

When I was very young, hansom cabs competed with taxis, trams and buses for passengers. Even then they were an obsolete method of transport, nevertheless, I was fascinated by the top hatted coachmen, sitting in a high seat on the top of the cab, controlling their snorting horses with a long whip. As a special treat I was occasionally allowed to ride in one of these amazing conveyances.

In about 1930 she became a boarder a Fensham Girls’ School in the southern highlands of New South Wales. She describes her life at Fensham in about 1930 as follows:

The Head Mistress believed not only in

nurturing our spiritual needs and artistic talents, but also in upholding the *mens sana in corpore sano* dictum. In furtherance of this we slept on open verandahs with only canvass blinds to shelter us from the blast of winter winds and rain. We rose at 6.00 a.m. and after stripping our beds and throwing the bed clothes onto the verandah railing, we hurried to the bathroom where we showered in icy cold water. Three nights a week we indulged in a hot bath.

Subsequently, when her parents moved to Melbourne, she enrolled at St Catherines and, on matriculation in 1939, she enrolled as a medical student at Melbourne University.

She had studied dancing and had become a most accomplished tap dancer. Apparently, she danced at the Tivoli while she was studying as a medical student.

In late 1940 she abandoned her medical course and her dancing at the Tivoli to marry Geoffrey Kiddle. His family owned a sheep station near Tumburumba and another near Deniliquin. In 1940 those places were much more remote than they are today and she spent much time at the station near Tumburumba and endeavouring to keep up with her husband and his father on horseback.

During the war her husband served in the army and she acted as a ARP warden in Melbourne suburbia.

In London in the early 1950s she was pursuing a dancing career, and had a contract as a solo dancer with BBC Television. On medical advice she gave up dancing. It was then that she decided to enrol for a law degree at the London School of Economics. She graduated with Honours from LSE and joined the Middle Temple in 1956. She returned to Melbourne and signed the Roll of Counsel in 1959.

It was at this stage that I first met her. The name “Marcelle” was never used and “Allayne” seldom. In the English tradition — and in the old tradition of the Victorian Bar — she expected to be called “Kiddle”.

I came to know her well when in about mid-1960 an overflow of young barristers from Selbourne Chambers found themselves housed in Condon’s Building. In a warren of tiny rooms in a narrow-fronted building, half of which was taken up with a printer’s business, were Garth Buckner, Peter Furness, Garrick Gray, Hartog

Berkeley, Allayne Kiddle and I.

Her style appeared at first sight to be arrogant. She was very positive and unafraid to say: “That’s not the way it was done in the Temple”, or at the Law Courts. Most of us originally thought she was English. In many ways she had become such. It was clear that she enjoyed her time at the Temple and at first found it hard to adjust to the more pragmatic environment of the Victorian Bar. When one came to know her one realised that the apparent arrogance was not arrogance but merely a directness that stemmed from a complete lack of self-consciousness. She was never afraid to ask a question, never afraid to reveal her own ignorance, never afraid to take a contrary view if she believed in it, all of this without any real consciousness of self. She seemed to have no concern as to whether she was making a good impression or a bad impression. She was just not concerned with impressing in any way at all.

As has been noted previously in *Bar News* she was the third woman (it seems) to sign the Roll of Counsel and to practise at the Victorian Bar.

As a woman at the Bar she did not expect to be treated in any special way. But she did expect to be treated as an equal. In her book of reminiscences she says:

There has been much talk in recent years of prejudice against the women. I can only say that I did not find either the Benchers or the members of the Bar prejudiced. In fact I found them the very reverse. If the solicitors were prejudiced, I do not know. I did not find them so. But then I do not look for prejudice and I do not find it. If they had been, I would not have blamed them, because, by and large, they had no women when I went to the Bar, except Joan Rosanove, and she had a very specialised practice. It is quite clear that she herself did not suffer from prejudice insofar as matrimonial matters were concerned. Having had nothing but men to brief, in all other matters, for years and years, I would say they were just slow to change over to the fact that they now had a choice.

When the Bar Dinner for 1960 came around she said to Hartog Berkeley and me that she wanted to attend the Bar Dinner and asked could she go with us. We agreed. Prior to that time no woman

had attended a Bar Dinner. Subsequently, Allayne spoke to Joan Rosanove and they came to the Bar Dinner together. Berkeley and I were unnecessary. Joan Rosanove did not attend any subsequent Bar Dinners. Allayne Kiddle continued to attend.

She was not only a pioneer woman in the law and a superb dancer. She was also an excellent photographer. Photography was something to which her father introduced her when she was a young child. In the 1970s she was made a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society of London.

She retired from the practising list in 1966. But that was not the end of her intellectual activity. In 1994 at the age of 75 she completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree, and in 1997 she obtained a graduate Diploma in Writing from Swinburne University. Whether her writing owes anything to that Diploma is hard to tell. It is, however, undoubted that she writes with perception and touch. Speaking of the “ice man” of her childhood she says:

Nothing, however, in our small lives compared with the chase on a hot day down the street to catch him with his cart, as he travelled from house to house delivering blocks of ice.

His van contained very large blocks of ice that required chipping into smaller blocks before they could be carried indoors. To do so he placed a sugar bag on his shoulder and a block of ice on the bag. If a spell of very hot weather was anticipated he would be asked to place an extra block or two in the copper.

What pleasure it gave us to see him breaking the ice with his ice pick. Then, when the slivers of ice came sailing in our direction, to try to catch them. How we licked and sucked those pieces ... An icy pole (developed much later) licked sedately within the confines of one’s own garden was very different from those chips of ice which we garnered from the ice man.

She was also a wise woman, not necessarily in her personal relations but in her understanding of the world about her.

Although we speak of recollecting the past, all we really remember is our perception of former happenings at the time of their recall. Once we censor those moments by deleting them from our memory, or transforming them in such a way that they no longer bear any relationship to past events we embark, whether we realise it or not, on the writing of fiction. Memory, unlike fiction, has no story or plot. It consists of no more than a series of incidents recalled haphazardly.

It was a remarkable life, a pioneering life; the world is poorer for her passing. As Warren CJ wrote after reading *A Most Remarkable Child*:

It was fascinating to read about such a full and richly life. Even more so, as a woman in the law Mrs Kiddle achieved an enormous amount. Along with Joan Rosanove QC and Molly Kingston she blazed the path that paved a way, much easier for women like me.

G.N.

Leslie George Crisp

GEORGE Crisp was born at Charters Towers in North Queensland on 25 October 1919. He was the eldest of five children, and his father was a railway fettle; his extended family were graziers and miners around Charters Towers and Ravenswood.

George’s family were “battlers”, but at least his father had work. His brothers and sister recalled nothing but a happy and productive childhood. His father’s work took him to Cloncurry, so George spent his early school years with paternal grandparents at Charters Towers. He remembered them fondly, and later joined his family at Cardwell and Hinchinbrook Island on their return from “out West”, where he continued his schooling at Cardwell State School from 1929. Part of the attraction of Hinchinbrook at the time was its orchards.

Cardwell/Hinchinbrook seems to have provided a positive, nurturing environment. George recalled it as a stimulating, liberating place and time, where people travelled by goat and rail cart, where prowess in sports and athletics was valued over possessions, and where school was actually a positive influence, so much so that after leaving Cardwell he remained friends with his old headmaster. An old studio photograph of George shows him as a young boy in his Sunday best, without shoes. No money for shoes, but no need, and yet the money for a photograph was found. That milieu produced five charming and dignified people who went on to lead balanced and contented lives. They never needed, nor could justify, laments about the bad old days, or a rough trot.

George and family moved to Townsville for his final schooling,

where he continued to form positive relationships and furthered his sporting interests in tennis, cricket, rugby and rowing. Via school and the fellowship of the West End Methodist Church, as well as the aptly named and nearby Magnetic Island, George met and wooed the love of his life, Alice (Lally) Kennedy. They later honeymooned on Magnetic Island.

George had to leave Townsville High School after Intermediate, to help his family. He left behind an impression best summed up in the comments (kept by his mother) by his French teacher on an essay: “Mon Cher Georges. Je vous felicite”. He rejected the offer of an apprenticeship in fitting and turning with the railways (won over hundreds of applicants), toyed with the idea of teaching, but opted for the Townsville office of the Public Trustee.

War intervened and George enlisted in