

MY TREASURE CHEST

by Fonda Dubb

In the old days, most brides to be, when they became engaged, received chests which were imported from China. They were filled with gifts of mainly linens, nighties and gowns. (Of the very best fabrics of course!!). I received one from my late mother-in-law, Ada Dubb. It has the most beautiful carvings made from rich Imbuia wood and is a valuable piece of art. The inside is lined with camphor wood to keep the moths away. Seventy years later, the smell is still there.

Last week, I was "curious" and decided to delve into it. It had been used in latter years for mainly storage of blankets and duvets, (not needed in Eilat) and unwanted or sentimental things which needed to be stored for want of space in my little home.

I had no reason other than boredom perhaps, to open the chest. I wasn't looking for anything special but somehow, feeling curious, I opened it.

I found a variety of things, from bedspreads (one that my son, Nicky, had shlepped back for me as a gift from Guatemala). How precious and thoughtful of him. I had at the time said, 'bring me a postcard'. It was a deep maroon colour with the most beautiful embroidery. I shed a tear at his kindness. He was a youngster travelling with two of his friends to South America, like most Israelis after the Army.

I found a collection of broken ivory pieces from my late mother- in- law which were still waiting to be repaired as well as silver cutlery, almost too good to use?

I removed these from the chest to use for my personal enjoyment. Silly, I thought and pondered why I had hidden them away?

I then found lots of photo albums from my catering days which opened as a business in 1988 with the name *Fonda's Catering* and found precious memories of my time working as a caterer for the South African Embassy for 15 years; doing South African 'Independence Day' functions for different ambassadors and working for two First Secretaries. This has prompted me now to jot down my memories about my catering days.

The chest is very deep and I found a large framed Dancing Certificate of a Prize Winners Concert held in the City Hall in Cape Town for *Frankie and Johnny*. We were a trio from the Freda Fernandez School of dancing in Plein Street (her partner was Gracie Klugman). I know my one dancing partner Merle Meyerowitz has passed away, but still have no idea about Mike Kahn from Cradock.

We had won first prize.

I was meant to dance a solo called *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* the following week, but unfortunately pulled a muscle and had to be replaced.

It really saddened me that I couldn't participate, especially as I knew one of the staff from U.C.T would be there. She and I were always trampling on each other's toes.

But that's another memory!! Better to leave that one in the chest!!

I then come across a large Scrap Book of 38 foolscap pages with the History of the Gelvandale Toynbee Ballet school in Port Elizabeth.

Yes, this is valuable history which I'm currently investigating and am particularly interested in knowing who the new stars are as well as the teachers. I left the School, having taught there for a total of 9 years, from 1969-1977. I've find some glowing reports from the 70s from Dulcie Howes who had inspected the school for a full day Gelvandale Toynbee Ballet School, as well as a similar report from Johaar Mosal who was Inspector for Coloured schools.

These reports at the time didn't have the same impact as they have today. More clarity in the mind now, I wonder? Is this what memories are about? Whatever, I'm enjoying them now at 85!!

My mind regresses back to the Freda Fernandez School of Dance where I performed Cabaret Work- from *Can-Can* to *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* , *Frankie and*



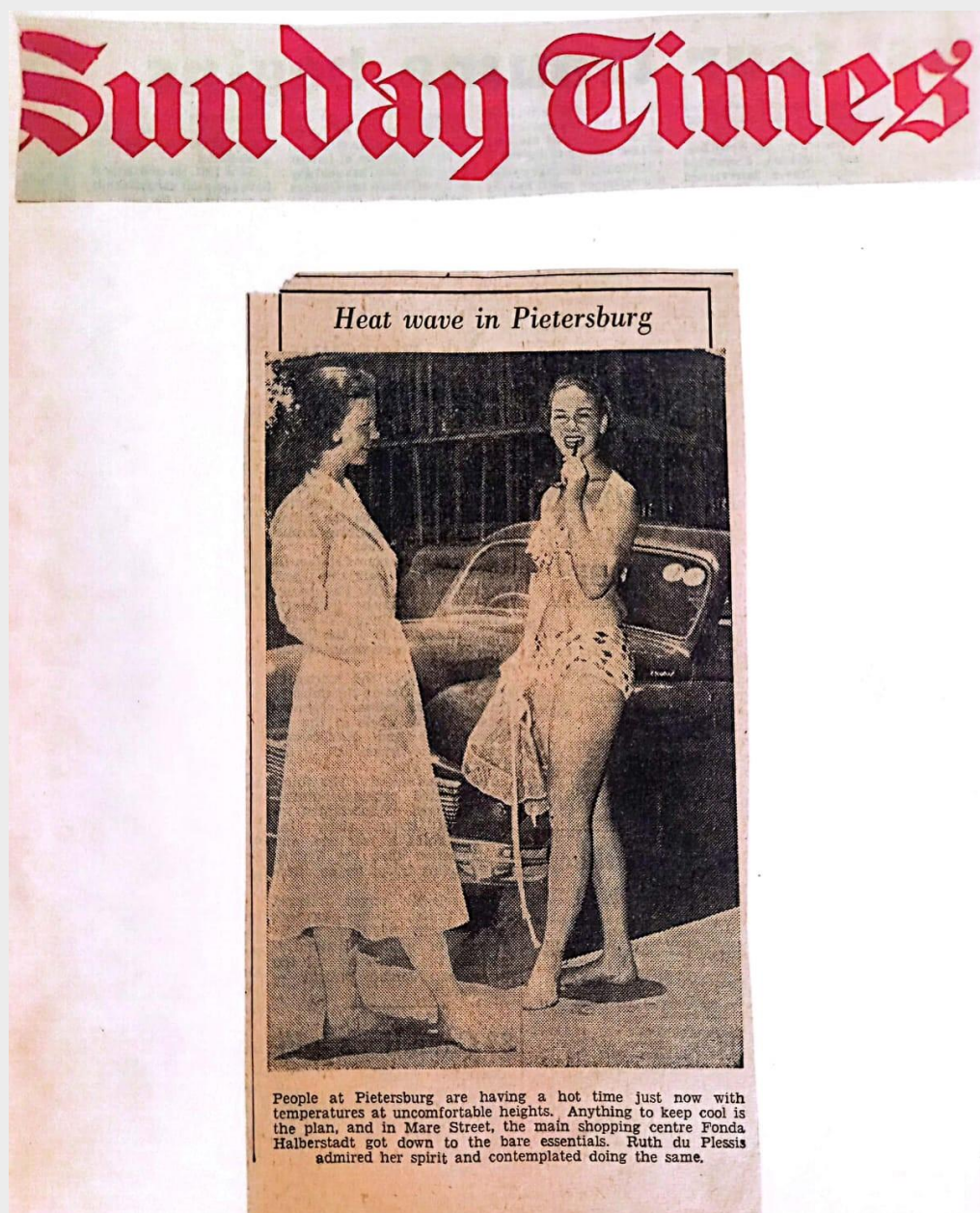
A Gold Diploma from the Cape Town Eisteddfod for the Cabaret Trio 1960

Johnny, performing at many balls and concerts. The highlight was performing for Professor Chris Barnard and his wife Barbara at a ball.

A program slips out from under the papers I'm holding, titled "*Sweet and Sour*." In it, David Bloomberg of the Barn Theatre has written: 'Next time you must be in the Show!!' I had again pulled a muscle and couldn't perform!

The next show was not a musical, but a drama called *5 Finger Exercise* by Peter Shaffer performed by Yvonne Bryceland. This was the beginning of her famous career. This time I was engaged to stage manage and prompt. David Bloomberg, the Mayor of Cape Town, was married to the famous Ballet Dancer Toby Fine.

And now I have found something very different.!!



The front page of the Sunday Times. I as a young 16-year-old girl in a two-piece costume. The caption reads: *Fonda Halberstadt during a heat -wave walks down the main street (Mare Street) in Pietersburg.*

This was all totally untrue!!

I was modelling for a friend who had a clothes shop when one of her friends took a photo of me outside the shop. You cannot imagine the damage this did to my reputation! I was a Convent Girl and they considered expelling me!!

The men from the Klaverjas School which was held every Sunday afternoon at our flat, (I would serve them tea), came to visit my Dad and told him how to "guide me" and to offered him advice. One of them suggested that he find a wife to keep me on a straight and moral path. No one seemed to want to know the truth!! It was a difficult year for me and cost me many tears.

I close the chest.

But alas too heavily. The hinge breaks off, the lid falling onto the floor. I was horrified at what I had done and called my daughter to help lift the lid off the floor which she managed to do, replacing it where it belonged. Unfortunately, it cannot be opened now, and will need to be transported to Tel Aviv for expert carpentry repair.

I pray my kist will return safe and sound and then I shall continue unearthing more treasures waiting to be rediscovered.

Part 2

My chest has been expertly fixed and returned to me and I am able to open it without a problem. I am overjoyed! I delve into it and discover other unexpected surprises.

I spot a red beret which triggers off so many memories from my dancing years. I even remember the detail of the costumes that I wore. They weren't elaborate, on the contrary, very simple. A black leotard with a chiffon type of red material draped around my waist as a skirt and tied with a ribbon and of course the 'Red Beret' to finish it off. I used the same costume for both Frankie and Johnny and Slaughter on Tenth Avenue when I wore black net stockings.

What made me, I wonder keep my Red Beret for the past 50 years?

It was a love of dance that I wanted to preserve. I still remember all these sequences which I sometimes perform, (without an audience), in my small apartment. My well-known cancan kicks don't reach any of the heights they once did, but I still find it fun to try - a little foolhardy at my age!!

Next, I find a post card from my Spanish Teacher at UCT. Marina Keet (now a Dame for her contribution to Spanish Dance in South Africa) inviting me to teach for her Ballet School when she went abroad to examine Spanish Dancers.

I used to take the train to Stellenbosch and sleep over at her home after classes which was filled with photos of her dancing with other famous dancers. And I used to spend my evenings reading many books about her Idols of Spanish Dance.

Her home was filled with beautiful art. We remain friends to this day sometimes communicating on the phone or sending Xmas Cards.

Such a lovely inspiring woman.

Reaching to the bottom of the chest I find a certificate from Audrey Weinrich who taught modelling.

I modelled for many different agencies of clothes, Fairweather, Bertish and Manhattan. The owners of Manhattan were Joe and Ruth Belling or Bellon?. They were so kind and

hospitable. I so wish I'd kept in touch with them to say thank you for all their support and kindness!!

I used to do ramp modelling for Stuttafords and travel with an agent of Manhattan to outlying areas in the Cape to display and model their clothes. I loved modelling. Like dancing it felt like I was putting on a show which triggered off emotions (always with a smile). Wearing beautiful clothes was a boost to my morale.

Today models are trained to be sedate and somber (I wonder why). My husband didn't like the idea of me doing professional modelling, so I stopped. That was because in those days models did not have favorable reputations!!

I discover deep down in my chest some photos of the Devonshire Hotel.

My father had booked me in late for the residence for ballet students and because there was no room, booked me into the Devonshire Hotel in Claremont. How were we to know that there were rumors that a high percentage of guests were prostitutes?!

One day I received a visit from Dulcie Howes, the Director of the UCT Ballet School, who was apparently very concerned about the type of people I would encounter and moved me swiftly to The Manor Hotel in Rondebosch. What a kind soul she was.

I was happy with the move because it had a Hamburger Restaurant (I love hamburgers) in front of it and was in the main street which suited me very well for transportation.

The chest is nearly depleted!!

I come across my wedding veil and my memory goes back to the wedding dress which was designed by Rejanne who specialised in exclusive wedding gowns.

It was beautiful but so impractical with a huge billowing skirt and stiffly wired hem. Because of the bulk and volume of the dress, I fell off my chair at the main table at our wedding reception. It remains one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.

The story of the veil isn't such a nice story either!! It was a very simple net veil with a satin band placed on my head to secure my bun in the center. The design was that my hair be scraped back, giving me a regal, and classical look.

When I arrived from Cape Town to Johannesburg (where the wedding was to be held, I was told by my sister that she'd booked the best hairdresser in Johannesburg for me!! What she didn't know was how obstinate he would be!! He refused to scrape my hair back from my forehead, refused to place the bun in the centre of my head. Instead he gave me kiss curls

(which were very fashionable in those days) on either side of my forehead. You cant imagine how unhappy I was . It wasn't what I wanted and it didn't suit me at all!!

I've never forgiven him!!

In fact, there are no wedding photographs of me displayed on my shelves (may my husband forgive me)!

Tucked under my veil in the chest was my wedding invitation card.

The wedding was held at the Park Hotel. I recall the long speeches made by Rabbi Lapin about my in-laws, Ada and Louis Dubb. The word "pearls" were spoken interminably.

We got married on the 18/06/'61 at the Pine Street Shul and were married by Rabbi Rappaport. We were the first couple to be pronounced " man and wife" in the shul.

After the reception at the Park Hotel we travelled to the Capri Hotel which was quite a distance away, arriving there in the early hours of the morning (we had stopped off at my sister's in Orange Grove) only to find the doors of the hotel locked!! We then made our way all the way back to Berea to the Skyline Hotel where we were thankfully allocated a room. The hotel was a popular stop over for Pietersburgers and there were quite a few guests, including my father, who were very surprised to see us for breakfast the next morning!!

And so, the kist is now empty. It still has the smell of camphor wood.

All its " Memories " are now stored on manuscripts.

Who knows what new ones I will encounter to fill my empty chest?

I do hope they will be pleasurable.

My Treasure Chest by Fonda Dubb

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