



Tanja Dixon-Warren's story of

Jane



JANE DIXON-WARREN: def: power tool wielding feminist laced with irrationality, tempered with practicality, sprinkled with theatricality but no sentimentality.

Diana Madeline Jane Bushby (aka Jane) was born in London, UK on JANUARY 25 1935, the 2nd child Stanley and Ruth (aka "B") Bushby.

B was a gentle lady with a political bent, a love of the arts and penchant for Scrabble. Stanley was energetic, physically active – a scientist with an eye for his assistant. Mum admired both. "B" in particular – who was everything Mum erroneously believes she is not. Witty: fearless; open eared; builder of memories; documenter of day to day routine. Photograph albums are kept diligently & family trees researched and drawn with care. She is also like Stanley. Impulsive; opinionated; generous; politically incorrect (while insisting she is not). Oil and Water!

It will peeve Mum if I have some of the fiddly details wrong, however, I trust she understands this is the story I know – picked up, overheard and pieced together.

Mum's childhood was, by all accounts, a happy time. She built lifelong friends, played grass hockey and tinkered with shrunken monkeys' heads and pigs' blood (provided by Stanley for school productions of Macbeth). She stuttered and wrestled with mild dyslexia (B said "this does not matter – as long as you can be understood"). During World War II, she and her brother David were relocated to Somerset and thus began her ache to be by the seaside and near a garden. Her parent's marriage was difficult – which I believe contributed to Mum's steadfast resolve to build relationships iron clad with honesty and steeped in unwavering loyalty.

She met my father, Brian Dixon-Warren, whilst studying physiotherapy and he was in Med school. He loved to dance – and her jolly-good-hockey-stick physicality easily out-jived his delicate, exquisitely feminine girlfriend, Marie. In no time flat – as the legend goes – she usurped Marie and gave my father an ultimatum! On August 9, 1958 they married – he in hat and tails and she in a self-sewn gown. Unchristened, Jane was promptly baptized, and she named my father as her godfather. They honeymooned in a tent and bathed naked in the brooks. From photos of this (or some other adventure) which now hang in their loo, they look the same, just slightly older; my mother full frontal, washing herself in the woods and my father, slightly more modest with his back to us, peeing against a country wall.

My mother had one of 'those' relationships with her mother-in-law. I don't know whose fault it was, or why it was so difficult...but I know it was prevalent. Both were bullheaded – their heels dug deeper than the tomato stakes. A relationship was borne from enormous love of my father yet translated into malice, competition, civil words out loud (with under-the-breath slanders behind closed doors) followed by heart break and many tears. A terrible situation for a man who loved both – stuck in the middle, navigating loyalties – and for children, who loved all, but were unsure of which side to place their bare feet. Mum attempted – often unsuccessfully – to keep these feelings to herself, however – kudos to her – she never told me if she was uncomfortable with me crawling into my Nana A's bed to pour over souvenirs of Nana's travels. Nana A was round, soft and smelt her own particular way. Irresistible – and somewhat taboo...yet, I always atoned for this quickly by crawling into Mum & Dad's bed, to scratch the 'itchy spot' in the middle of Mum's back.

Lessons learned. Mum deliberately chose never to interfere in any of her children's relationships. She bites her tongue and watches from a close distance. She is a mother-in-law who kicks ass!

In 1960 my parents took advantage of an 'assisted passage' program offered to British doctors by the Canadian Government. They traveled via ocean liner, train and dusty bus, to Meadow Lake Sask (for two years ONLY -or so my mother believed). They arrived at a whistle-stop – she in her urban best; gloves, self-sewn suit, with matching umbrella case. No rapturous reception in the quaint hamlet she expected – instead she was met with flat desolation, big sky, dirt roads and a drunken man with enormous sweat patches in the armpits of his lumberjack shirt.

She hurtled herself full throttle into prairie life and shortly thereafter she realized that her belly was full of baby. In a tiny God-abiding community with many churches and countless denominations she was a square peg! Going to church was expected thus she & my father were thought odd because they chose not to follow suit. From the sleepless nights, winter silence, crackling summers and the physio practice she operated from home, she built a social life. She went as an IUD to a costume party (wearing Lippos Loops as ear-rings) and had tea with the ladies at the Empire Hotel (kids were parked on the steps armed with 10 cents to buy toffee and the instruction to 'keep occupied'). She organized a film society – and mistakenly booked a 'blue' movie which set the town back on its heels. In 1968, 2 years had stretched to 8, her hopes of returning home waning and with 5 children; she and my father loaded up the station wagon and traveled west. They bought a rambling house in Maple Ridge where they remained for 25 years. Child number 6 was born. Mum gave up her physio practice, rolled up her sleeves and guided us all through puberty.

She had an enormous garden from which we ate from all year round. A huge variety of fruits, berries, nuts and vegetables (including an epidemic of Jerusalem artichokes which we ate daily for at least 6 years). We never had 'store bought' cookies except on birthdays and a cake was baked each day for us to devour after school. Pop Shop was served on Christmas only and juice was hand-pressed from the wormy Gravensteins that fell from the trees (we were NEVER allowed to pluck directly from the branch). She made apple vinegar with a vile 'mother' gloating on the bottom of an enormous bucket (which was our job to navigate when ordered to refill the cruets). Yogurt was homemade – and rested (with the bread that was rising) under the covers of the master bed. Initially, wine was made from our vine but this was soon abandoned after mum attempted to be time-efficient and press the grapes in the washing machine! We were raised without preservatives...the irony being ...we coveted Tang and Hamburger Helper!

Household jobs were allocated and kept to a rigorous schedule. 8 was the year each child came 'of age' and was permitted to operate the lawn mower and use the iron. Socks and underwear were colour coded. Each night – after jobs were done, Mum would reach up to the very top shelf of the kitchen cupboard and reward us with one cellophane wrapped sweetie from the OverWaitea bulk bin.

The 1970's were spent at hippy fairs, family picnics at Wreck beach and clad in psychedelic bell bottoms. Mum decoupag'ed the rumpus room in clippings of great works of art. TV was verboten, thus we played outdoors from crack of dawn or produced plays on the basement makeshift stage. We went to museums, art galleries, opera, ballet and theatre. When lines were crossed, consequences for bad behavior were swift and non-negotiable. Once, when I was caught sneaking out for a smoke & smooch in the back of a boyfriend's van, not only was I nailed with a 3-week grounding – but, when I stomped to my bedroom and bashed open the door, I was showered with rice, water, porridge and lentils. Her booby-trap!!!

Always thrifty – she pinched pennies and stretched everything. 3 was the magic number. 3 inches in your bath water ; 3 sheets of toilet paper only; 3 minutes in the shower; 3 meat ends in your sandwich. If you cheated and tried to squeeze a fourth – her holler could be heard around the block.

Her memory. Driving the station wagon to go shopping. She stopped at the bottom of the driveway and it suddenly dawned on her – no kids in the car, no infant on the floor in a cardboard box, no husband at her side – just she, and the key in the ignition...the first time on her own – ever – in over 12 years.

I remember her weeping quietly when her father announced he had finally – publicly – left her mother.

Think “career” she said— yet, fretted most when were single.

She still cooks a meal nightly for my father – he likes potatoes; don’t sit at the head, that’s his seat – yet smiles loudly and a little smugly as we wrestle with our partners over whom clears the table. Manners are important; pick up after yourself; thank you notes; keep your elbows off the table, this is not a horse’s stable...and yet she is the first to put a size 9 foot into her mouth with “WHEN are you going to have a baby?” and gobble all the chips in the bowl and accidentally drink from another persons’ glass. She alleges that menstrual cramps, heart break and depression are remedied by ‘you have two pins! Take a walk around the block’ ...but sits on pins and needles for the birth of her 13th grandchild – for “Doris” to be called to arms. “Doris” is our Nanny 911 – she dons starched maid cap and pinny (honestly!) and cooks, cleans, walks dogs & children and keeps out of the way. “Doris” ensures that her breastfeeding daughters get their calcium in enormous pint mugs of cocoa – warmed to exacting temperature.

Independent to the core – she fostered this quality in her 1 son and 5 daughters. A driver’s license, the ability to sew your own clothes and to balance your cheque book are basic requirements. When I was 17, she drove me to Seattle and dispatched me on a standby flight to England. I do not know if she did this with trepidation. I know she hates to fly – cannot bear the sensation of having her feet off the ground – but she says the end result of getting somewhere is always worth it – and therefore should be done. Between the six of us we have lived or traveled on almost every continent.

In the 1980’s – a metamorphosis. She returned to university. Her stutter disappeared; she spoke in public, and was named Citizen of the Year and Grand Marshall of Maple Ridge. She enrolled in a Lesbian studies course. In her naiveté she thought she would learn their social history – to help her understand people she did not comprehend. As the only heterosexual in the group, she experienced what it meant to be “a minority”. Her eyes opened and she was embraced as the unofficial class mascot. Often I would get a call from Josephine’s on the Drive inviting me to tea with her new “lezzie” friends.

In 1993, my parents sold the family home, and responded to the call of the seaside. They built their Utopia on Saturna Island with Mum living in a tent and overseeing the entire project. The two of them live in companionable good natured bickering – the mutual affection tangible as Mum rattles about the house and Brian quietly applauds her achievements (which she poo poos – as though the acceptance of praise is somehow a sign of both egoism and weakness). She became a marriage commissioner and joined the dramatic society. She sits on the Arts council, has regular lunches with her life long friends, speaks out loudly (sans stutter) on any (and all) subjects, recycles and reuses, gardens, swims naked in the ocean, speaks her mind and cooks shortbread for the never-ending stream of friends, children and grandchildren. She rides her bicycle and with her helmet hiding her white hair – she still gets whistles from a passing sports car!!!