



## **BODY, Marguerite (nee Distin Flemmer)**

Madge BODY | 12 August 1900 - 15 August 1988

MARGUERITE 'MADGE' DISTIN<sup>7</sup> FLEMMER (JOHN DISTIN<sup>6</sup>, CHRISTIAN LUDVIG<sup>5</sup>) was born on 12 August 1900 in Grahamstown District, South Africa and died on 15 August 1988 in Howick, Natal, South Africa. She married FREDERICK WILLIAM CHARLES BODY in January 1931 in Tanga, Tanganyika. He was born on 7 January 1900 in England and died on 21 June 1974 at 43 Montgomery Drive, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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As told by her daughter Joan Warren:

Madge was born in the "District of Grahamstown, Albany", Cape on 12 August 1900, the first of 7 children of Maud (nee Croxford) and John Distin Flemmer, who were married in 1899.

She had 3 brothers: John Sweet Distin (Jack Jnr) who was a twin of Ludwig (Lollie) and Neville (Nick); and 3 sisters: Doris, Gwynneth and Barbara (Bobbie).

Madge and her 6 siblings spent many happy days growing up on a farm in the Boksburg district in the Transvaal. Being the eldest, she must have felt responsible for them and she always remained loyal and quick to help any of them who needed a hand. Madge was sent to board at St. John's School for Girls at Frere, Natal, but she was unhappy and longed for home. She trained as a nurse, but despite obtaining high pass marks, she decided to go to "Normal College" to train as a teacher. (I remember that she taught her children to study using "key words", which helped so much.) She was a truly dedicated wife and mother.

During one of her holidays from teaching, she went to stay with relations in Kenya. It was while there that she met my father, Fred Body. Fred was born in the UK in London where his father had a furniture business, but his relations lived in Plymouth, Devon. He visited Plymouth and grew to love the little harbour and thereafter lived always close to the sea. His father died when he was 14 years old, leaving him to work to support his mother and 7 year old sister. He was a choirboy and sang some solos at St. Paul's Cathedral. He distinguished himself by becoming a Troop Leader in the Boy Scouts and eventually won the Medal of Merit – one of scouting's highest honours. The following year, 1915, he joined the Royal Naval Flying Corps, a year underage. He was shot down while in action against a German submarine by the Germans over the North Sea, but was rescued from the freezing water after a homing pigeon took a message back to his Scottish base. When the war ended, he joined a Dutch shipping company, being based in Tanga, a port in Tanganyika Territory.

Fred and Madge married in February 1931. Their 3 children were born in East Africa: Joan and Pam in Tanga and Ron (the middle one) in Arusha – to get away from the heat of Tanga.

I remember the house in Tanga with its huge water reservoir at the back. We children enjoyed throwing cutlery in and watching it sink slowly down to the bottom! There was a large verandah, right across the front of the house where we could sit and watch the Arab dhows coming into the harbour. Very often the brass tray-topped table was piled high with fruit like mangoes, litchis or bananas or with ice-cold drinks. The windows were screened against mosquitoes and we slept under mosquito nets. On the few occasions when it rained, we children excitedly dived into bed to listen to the pitter patter on the iron roof. We enjoyed watching the African Swahili men climb up the coconut trees in the garden, their feet tied together with a thong which caught on the nodes of the tree to lift them up. There was an occasion when 3 monitor lizards arrived in our play area, causing a stir and great shouting and waving of sticks by all of the employees (11 of them).

In 1936, when Joan was 5 years old (the eldest child), they moved to Durban to be near good schools. My father joined an indent agency called "Carst and Walker Pty Ltd.", which imported and exported raw commodities all over the world. He studied Mercantile Law at night and soon became a Director. While we lived in Durban North the 3 children had a care-free time, riding horses and bicycles and swimming. When the 2nd World War began, Fred joined the Coast Guard. We had to black out all windows at night and an air-raid shelter was dug into the bank in the garden. We children dug our own "shelter" too in the garden where we stacked tinned food!

After living in rented houses, Madge and Fred settled in Durban North, right across the grounds of the Junior School in Brookland Crescent. We were able to cross under the fence to go to school.

It was in this house that Granny Maud and Aunt Louie visited us – always a happy time. Grandmother Maud attended the Royal College of Music in London and being a concert pianist, she gave performances for Royalty. She was a big-hearted, happy, loving Granny, who taught me to knit and listened to my shy attempts to play the piano. It was here

that we met her lovely sister-in-law, Anna Louise, "Aunt Louie" to us, who entertained us with her guitar playing.

Madge often stayed up past midnight sewing costumes for her daughter Joan to take part in dancing productions.

In 1945 we spent 6 months in Bryanston while Fred ran the Johannesburg branch of the Company. We moved to a larger house and garden in Kent Gardens, Northlands, which had large trees and a swimming pool and where we kept chickens. Then in 1951/2 we moved to Kenilworth in Cape Town – "Peneaton", Alexandra Rd, while Fred ran the Cape Town branch of the company. I finished my degree at Natal University, Pietermaritzburg and then did a diploma at Barkley House, Claremont, so the move was fortuitous for me and Ron and Pam who attended UCT. Ron and his wife Heather lived with them for a while with their young baby Laura. Joan married in 1958 while they were living there.

When Fred retired as Chairman of the company, they moved to Pietermaritzburg, Natal to be near Joan who lived in Balgowan, Natal. Ron was in the UK with his family by then and Pam came to live with them in a flat while she taught at Girl's Collegiate. They later moved to No: 43 Montgomery Drive, Pietermaritzburg where Dad enjoyed producing lovely vegetables in the garden.

Dad was a man of great integrity, with a sense of humour and a good understanding of human nature. He was a loving and caring husband and father. When my mother became very ill, he did everything he could to get her better including deep and earnest prayer.

Fred retired to Pietermaritzburg with my Mother and died in 1974 at No 43 Montgomery Drive while Pam was in Boston, USA with her family. They immediately left Boston to live in Pietermaritzburg and then Hillcrest. Madge lived with them in Hillcrest until Pam died in 1981.

Madge returned to Pmb and Carolyn, John and Joan's daughter and a friend stayed with her in a flat for about a year while Carolyn attended University. John, Joan's husband, built a home for her right next door to theirs on the Farm "Preston". Madge's brother, Nick came to stay with her for about a year until his death in December 1983.

Madge died of heart failure as she was walking into her sitting room in August 1988. Ron and family were visiting from Canada and were able to return home from a holiday in the Drakensberg to attend to matters.