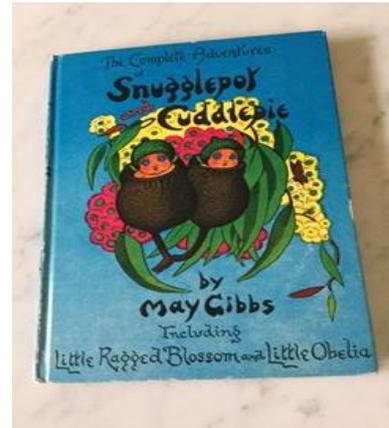




MAY GIBBS and COVID-19
Ruth Caple
ADFAS Yarra, (Spring Newsletter 2020)



I am sure you are all familiar with the books of May Gibbs (1877-1969). Her 1918 children's book *The Complete Adventures of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* held me and quite a few war babies and baby boomers spellbound in the 40s and 50s. Milly Molly Mandy had a definite charm but the frisson of terror felt at the malevolence of the big bad banksia men was a winner and so were her drawings of the two adorable gumnut babies.

On a visit to Sydney in January last year Graeme and I took the ferry to Old Cremorne and walked up the steep steps and over the ridge passing some of Sydney's most desirable leafy gardens and homes. We eventually reached Nutcote, built in 1925 for May Gibbs and her husband. May left the property to UNICEF on her death in 1969 and it is now a delightful museum with a café, gift shop and a growing collection of memorabilia. The morning we visited happened to be May's birthday. This is observed each year with a party for anyone owning a Scottie dog. About a dozen of these little dogs were romping on the grass below the terrace where we enjoyed our coffee and sandwiches which were enthusiastically provided by the Nutcote volunteers. (They all looked as if they were ADFAS members).

A conducted tour of the house began on the next level down towards the water. From the charming 20s vintage front rooms with open casement windows, we looked down the steep slope through a screen of pale trunked eucalypts planted by May. Beyond lay Neutral Bay gleaming in the sunshine; the whole thing looked like an Arthur Streeton painting. Through to the rear of the house and the service areas was a very small rather unfunctional kitchen. Thankfully the talented and productive artist was not interested in cooking, preferring to draw, write or garden. We looked in the display cabinets containing May's publications and a range of fan club souvenirs which have been produced over the decades since her first book was published. I was reminded of my Snugglepot and Cuddlepie celluloid keepsakes which were given to me as the youngest grandchild in 1952 when my 96-year-old grandmother died.



But where were they? I hadn't seen them for years but hoped I had not thrown them out when we downsized 23 years ago. Since the pandemic and forced isolation at home most of us have indulged in sifting through drawers and cupboards. In one of my Covid cleanouts I was thrilled to come across a little box behind the slides and photograph albums. Inside the box lay Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, faded and fragile reminders of my childhood. One naked pink celluloid back is still faintly marked in pencil with the purchase price of 1/-



Nutcote doesn't know it yet, but the next time we visit Sydney, the box will be delivered to Wallaringa Avenue Kurraba Point NSW.