

A TALE OF TWO SISTERS

A Brief Story of

Kathleen and Hannah Daly

by David Robson

A SOUVENIR BOOKLET

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The Heritage of Kate Bush

It is impossible to look inside the mind of a highly creative person, like Kate Bush. But perhaps, if we consider the influences under which she grew and her talent developed, we may gain an inkling of the forces at work within her psyche. From this I think you will also understand why Beck Siàn has developed the way she has.

To understand Kate Bush and her music it is necessary to understand two closely linked families - the Bush and the Robson families - and their joint heritage.

We need to begin a couple of generations before in a little place in Ireland; called *Ballyvoile*. It is near the fishing port of Dungarvan, in County Waterford. Dungarvan is a beautiful town with a large guest hotel overlooking the sea and *the strand* where the river meets the sea.

Kate's grandfather and grandmother, Jack and Ellen Daly, lived in a tiny white-washed cottage near a river where it widened to a small delta and ran over the pebbled beach into the sea - a river with water so clear you could see the fish. My mother said that her father would tickle the salmon as they hovered against the current in the sparkling, shallow waters. This was where Kathleen and Hannah grew up. It was called *the cove*.

The cottage was decorated with sea shells and there was a raised garden wall with concrete animals and a fairy cottage; a miniature white-washed playhouse for the girls.

The family was very poor. Most vegetables were home-grown and produce was traded in Dungarvan. Our Irish grandfather worked as a labourer on farms and on road gangs to earn a meagre wage. There were no cars - only a bicycle or a dunkey and cart (donkey was pronounced *dunkey*). The children walked miles to school. They had no shoes and my mother related times when it was so cold in winter, that they would stand in fresh cow pats to warm their feet. In Ireland, home-made stills brewed a special brand of spirit from potatoes - called poitin (pronounced, potteen). Many an Irishman could well have a headstone which says - 'the drink got him'.

This was the Ireland that had not yet seen modern facilities and technology. It was actually called *Eire* but gaelic was forbidden in the times of occupation. In the early 1900's many of my mother's uncles emigrated to America to find work.

The nineteen-twenties were the times of the *troubles*. The IRA was active and so were the 'black-and-tans'. The black and tans were a military force of occupation recruited from prisons in England to keep the Irish people *under control*. During the First World War, regular troops were needed on the Western Front and so, prisoners were given the option of serving their time as militia in Ireland. They stayed on after the war. Their methods were brutal yet condoned. My mother related seeing two men taken out and shot. The wearing of the green was symbolic of rebellion and therefore prohibited. Dancing was repressed.

Despite this, they were happy times. Basic foods were plentiful and strangers were welcome. An extra place was always set at the table and there was always an extra saucepan of potatoes on the boil for visitors. Everything was edible and nothing was wasted. Pigs were my mothers

favorite. She liked the cheeks, the trotters and the knuckles. They had their own milking cows and made their own butter and cheese. The fires were open and warm. The children huddled around the fire in the evenings and shared the beds to stay warm.

There was no TV, no telephone and no electricity. Entertainment consisted of self-made music and dance. There were also local dances - chaperoned of course. The Daly cottage developed a reputation as a home for music and our grandfather, Jack, played the fiddle (which he made himself and which is still in the family) and sang *Sweet Sixteen* to his daughters as they sat upon his knee. His favorite was Kathleen - whom he called his *Kate*. Kathleen was actually christened Kate, but few people knew and she was mostly called, Kathleen. Jack Daly, provider, labourer, father, builder, carer and music-maker - was also a poet. I wish I had known him before he was terminally ill.

Our mother was one of twelve children - two of whom died in childbirth. (Our generation has 42 cousins in Ireland today!)

There were four daughters: Kathleen (Beck's Nana), Minnie, Nellie and Hannah (Kate's mum). Hannah was christened Hannah Patricia but didn't like the name, Hannah - to us she was always, AuntiePat.

Kathleen enrolled at Cardiff Hospital to study nursing and later Hannah joined her. After graduating they later moved to London and worked together in a hospital. They worked through the war and the London Blitz - times they later would regard as their best.

They lived in the nurses' quarters and there was a strict night-time curfew. Nevertheless, Kathleen and Hannah would complete the day shift and sneak out to a dance. They loved dancing. They were helped over the hospital wall to come home in the early hours of the morning. They sometimes had only enough time to change and then go on duty. The buildings were sand-bagged and the staff wore helmets during the air raids. As a baby, I was housed in a wooden crate under the kitchen table for added protection. The windows were blackened and vehicles' lights were shrouded or taped so that only a slit of light was visible.

It was at the hospital that Hannah met a young doctor named Robert John Bush - Kate's father. My mother was protective and would say that she was the chaperone - which was required by decent Irish families. No courting could take place without a chaperone - my mother fulfilled this role for Hannah and John. She adored both of them.

Kate's father preferred the name, John, but my mother always called him, Jack - a typical Irish (and Australian) idiosyncrasy - but perhaps also because her father was Jack. John Bush also called my mother, Kate - as her father had done.

During the war, my mother became an industrial nurse. She worked in a factory which made breathing apparatus and diver's helmets on massive turret lathes. My mother was on standby for injuries but helped with production work. Kathleen was the only woman trained and allowed to work on the turret lathes.

Here she met a handsome young tradesman, Henry Thomas Robson - Harry - to one and all. Harry was a true Londoner, from Soho in the East End of London. He lived and breathed London, the markets, the stalls, the music halls, Hyde Park and the Serpentine (the lake in Hyde Park), the boats, the river Thames, the *Jew Boys* (Jewish tailors), the characters - yet he was not

at all social but revelled in the bustle of the markets. He was shy, a non-drinker and a non-smoker - very rare in those days.

John and Hannah had their first child, John Carder Bush (Johnny Bush), early in 1944 and I was born six months later. Kathleen and Harry would ride bicycles to the river for picnics and when I arrived, they bought a tandem with a child's seat.



Figure 9-1 Kathleen by the river at Ripley

Harry upgraded to a motorcycle and sidecar. To this day I can recall riding in the sidecar with Johnny Bush.

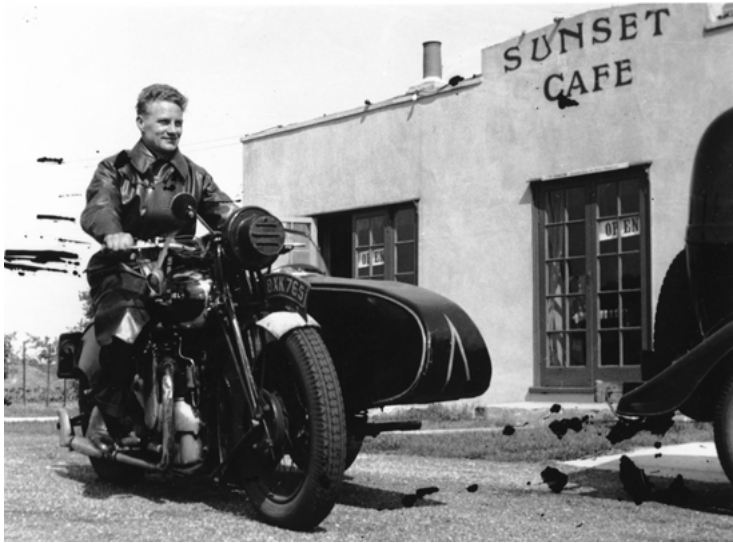


Figure 9-2

Figure 9-3 Harry on his favourite motorcycle (an Ariel). Note the blacked-out headlight.

Both families shared a large flat in Surbiton and went on outings together. I can remember being squeezed between the seats in Uncle John's Austin and waking as we arrived home at the rear entrance of the flat. I can also remember standing in the casement window of the large attic - held by my father, as we watched a tethered barrage balloon against the setting sun.

When the war ended, John Bush's family managed to raise sufficient funds for him to buy a share in a small private medical practice. In the years after the war the economy was slow to grow and the standard of living for workers was not high.

In the early nineteen-fifties John and Hannah bought East Wickham Farm at Welling in Kent - now part of Greater London.



Figure 9-4 Kathleen, Harry and David in the Bush's garden at Bexley. (I also remember climbing the apple tree in the background).

Offers of high wages, sunshine and the possibility of owning their own house attracted Harry and Kathleen to Australia- although Kathleen was a reluctant partner in the venture. My brother Philip was born in 1950 on the same day as Princess Anne and so was named Philip Charles Robson. That year, we emigrated by ship, the *SS New Australia* - to a migrant camp at Bathurst - in the heat of January. I recall my mother breast-feeding Philip on the train as we left Paddington Station for Southampton. She was seasick for days on the way over and suffered terribly from severe migraine headaches. The Irish cure for migraine was, literally, bed, in a darkened room, and a bandage of vinegar and brown paper wrapped around the forehead - remember Humpty Dumpty? Her migraines could last for two days. In Bathurst I became very ill with suspected appendicitis. There were flies, snakes, tin huts and unbearable heat. My parents wondered if they had made the right decision.

We were given a transfer to the Fishermen's Bend migrant hotel in Port Melbourne - where Harry had an offer of work at the aircraft factories. We settled in Port Melbourne and life was fairly happy.

Every Sunday after Mass at St. Josephs, we would walk along Bay Street to the foreshore and share hot chips or jam-filled doughnuts. I could tell that they both longed for the good old days as we watched the ships sailing for England with brass bands playing - and streamers being the last physical link from ship-to-shore with loved ones returning home. A fair percentage of migrants returned home not because Australia was unpopular but because it was so different and they had not been prepared for the change. The advertising was totally false. Racial and social prejudice was rife - garlic chewing Wogs lived in Footscray and we smelly, unwashed, Pommy bastards lived in the migrant hostels of Port Melbourne.

School was not happy. The nuns were severe disciplinarians - boys and girls were segregated and there was little fun. Left-handed children were cursed - we were reminded that the latin word for left, was 'sinister'. We were strapped across the hands with a leather strop if we were caught writing with the left hand. I was counselled by the Parish Priest for my errant ways and they even sat me next to a girl whose handwriting was immaculate. It was no good.

My parents felt the tyranny of distance from home. Cards that were sent from Ireland on St. Patrick's day were opened by the Post Office and the sprig of shamrock was removed - with a note of apology. My mother would be heartbroken that she couldn't have this little piece of Ireland.

Back in England Hannah and John had another boy- Paddy, who would have the musical talent of his grandfather - sadly I had none. My mother would complain, "*Oh David, you haven't a musical bone in your body*". My only attempt was the compulsory participation in the annual school concert - I played a tar in the chorus of HMS Pinafore at the Port Melbourne Town Hall.

I inherited my father's shyness. I didn't dare dance and was terrified of girls. However my mother would insist that I escort her to dances and films shown at the hostel (we all cheered when the film broke - which was often).

My mother loved the social interaction and the gossip of the hostel. She was the epitome of the caring, loving mother - not just her own children but to all. She believed that, if you wrapped children in a blanket of love they would be guided and protected from harm. She worked in the kindergarten on the hostel and was very much loved in return.

My father hated the lack of privacy - the public toilets and showers. I would queue for his meals and carry them to our Nissen hut because he didn't like to go to the canteen. We illegally cooked meals in our hut with a Primus stove - powered by kerosene and metholated spirits. Heating was also by kero and there were fires when cheaper heaters caught alight. There was no air conditioning and the half cylindrical steel huts became cookers. The huts were divided internally by a masonite wall so there was no acoustic barrier. Raised voices and music could be heard and this stressed my father. There were no refrigerators - only an ice box and the ice man came once a week to replace the melted block. There was no TV - not until the 1956 olympic games and we couldn't afford an early model. I faithfully listened to Hop Harrigan and Biggles on the radio and my mother loved Dragnet and the adult radio plays. I loved to play in the surrounding swamps where we collected frogs, tadpoles and spawn. We dug tunnels and built model gliders. I loved the plentiful food and the choice - even if it was all overcooked

and mashed. It was delicious and I often had second helpings. The staff were used to customers complaining - so they were happy to feed a growing lad who enjoyed their food.

There were occasional Sunday bus trips with much singing along. This was our first introduction to the Dandenongs and Puffing Billy. At that time it ran from Upper Gully to Belgrave, as part of the regular transport system.

In 1957, we watched sputnik fly over and the very same night, watched a possum discovered at the top of a telephone pole. These were serious memories for a young boy.

These were the days of the sly-grog shops where a bottle of beer in a brown paper bag could be purchased for an excessive price. One I knew was an old woman who supplemented her pension this way. Port Melbourne was rough and there were frequent street fights outside the many hotels.

Then we received news that my grandfather was dying. There was no chance of a quick airline flight in those days - too expensive so we packed our bags, sold everything and returned to England by sea. In this year Hannah had a daughter, Catherine - I think with a little surprise as she was years after Paddy was born.

While my father looked for work, in England, my mother, brother and I continued on to Ireland. My mother nursed her dying father and I played on the local cliffs and shores. I drove the horse-drawn carts on the beach and read adventure stories in the glow of the open fire. I was engrossed by the novels of Nicholas Monsarrat, Neville Shute and Paul Gallico. I loved to read by the flickering fire-light and I revelled in the dancing flames and the smell of the smoke.

Our grandfather passed away peacefully - he simply went to sleep in his bed with his beloved Kathleen (Kate) nearby. He was in his mid-eighties.

My father found work and we bought a house in Surrey which he could ill afford on his wages. My father always felt uncomfortable outside of his working class environment. We were in a middle-class suburb and we felt out of place.

We spent every Christmas at the Bush home, at East Wickham Farm - often with snow on the windows and a great open fire. Here I was first introduced to classical music - the Peer Gynt suite, the 1812 Overture, Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. We sang Christmas carols as Uncle John played the organ. East Wickham Farm is a massive 15th century farm house. It was truly haunted - by the Grey Lady - the ghost of a governess of the children that grew up there. She was seen by several people but was always friendly. My mother recalled waking to find this apparition tucking her into the bed clothes. She only appeared at one end of the upper floor where the nursery used to be and where we slept whenever we stayed there. There was a very real sense of a presence there. Although the house was rife with priest hides, creepy, creaking staircases and cellars there was always a feeling of genuine warmth and love. My mother bathed in it.



Figure 9-5 The fireplace in the dining room. (Behind and below the display cabinet on the right was a secret hidy-hole for the priest). The lady is Beck's mum - Niki

It was a wonderful home with about a hectare of land in the form of gardens (roses primarily), large trees and shrubs and a vegetable garden - all tended by a gardener. John Bush Jr.(Johnny Bush) attended boarding school but would come home for holidays - usually with friends. The favorite game was to dress as soldiers in genuine ex WW II uniforms and play in the garden jungle. (Army Dreamers?).



Figure 9-6 Paddy Bush and the new 'Army' at the farm - some years later.

Johnny taught me to drive in an old Austin 7 saloon and we even incorporated this vehicle into the Army games.

We stayed in England for three years and then decided the future for our family was in Australia. We returned by sea to Melbourne. My uncle Albert (Harry's brother), gave me a cigarette lighter as a going-away present. Harry was so well regarded as a tradesman he was immediately given his old job back at Kraft foods and I started work at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation as a junior draughtsman.

We settled in Upper Ferntree Gully, on a steeply sloping block where Harry dug out the rock and hand carried buckets of wet concrete to form the steps (39 at the back - the thirty-nine steps). Every step was painted with a white edge - so that it could be seen in the dark. Kathleen unashamedly collected cuttings of geraniums for her garden. She loved the lavender, geraniums and fuschias that thrived there.

These were the days of 6 o'clock closing We travelled by bus to the city and headed for Young and Jackson's for the six o'clock swill. Beer was served from hoses (yes, hoses - hand-held guns on the end of flexible hoses so the glasses could be filled without having to queue). We all bought several pints on closing. The bar was tiled so it could be washed down after closing - like the mens' urinal. The very famous and very beautiful painting of Chloe was in the downstairs bar. I wonder how she survived. On the corner of Swanston and Lonsdale street was the Britannia hotel which had a topless girl posed above the entrance. We fell instantly in lust. (She accepted a drink but declined dinner).

Kate's mother ensured that Kate studied music. She had violin lessons and I remember Auntie Pat saying that she chose violin, so Kate would come home and relax with the grand piano. She felt that formal piano studies might put her off.

A couple of years later, Kate, Paddy and their parents took a round-the-world, sea cruise and stopped for a while in Australia. Dr. Bush took up a temporary locum in a Victorian country town, I think it was Shepparton.

The family stayed with us in Upper Ferntree Gully. They loved the Dandenongs. Kathleen took Kate on Puffing Billy. Hannah loved the sunshine and the fresh fruit and vegetables - and especially the crisp lettuce.



Figure 9-7 Paddy and Kate at Upper Gully

On the way home there was an outbreak of measles on board ship which affected a number of children including Kate. Hannah and John volunteered as nurse and doctor and the saloon lounge was used as a hospital ward. Hannah would never travel by sea again.

East Wickham Farm is a traditional farm house with kitchen and scullery, sitting room, drawing room, formal lounge, dining room, bedrooms and a nursery. This is a walk-in dressing room which Uncle John converted into a nursery for their new baby daughter.



Figure 9-8 Kate at the farm - photo taken by John Bush

Uncle John was very talented - in a very classical sense. He played the church organ with foot pedals and then a vacuum-powered model. He then built one of the early electronic organs from a kit.

There was a grand piano in the sitting room and he played it well. I believe he could have been classical pianist if he had wanted to. He once confessed to me that his real love was mathematics and he would have liked to have been a pure mathematician - but there was no way of earning a comfortable living in this field.



Figure 9-9 Hannah and John Bush - Kate's parents

At this time Catherine Bush who, until this time, we had all called, Cathy (Wuthering Heights?), adopted the name, Kate. Uncle John arranged dance tuition - music alone was no longer sufficient - video clips and performances were required by the fans.

Johnny Bush had given up legal studies (he was totally disillusioned by the profession) and was writing novels and poetry - and was a very competent photographer.



Figure 9-10 Study of young Kate - by Johnny Bush

Paddy was working gigs in several folk bands. The house was full of music: the kitchen was the centre of life. Many musicians visited and played in that kitchen.

Kate was too original, too unique, to be immediately recognised by the recording companies. She didn't fit the mould of a pop star. and it was at the tender age of fifteen, that Kate's songs were shown to Dave Gilmour of Pink Floyd - who arranged a studio recording of, *The Man with the Child in his Eyes* (my favorite).

This resulted in a recording contract with EMI who then gave her a couple of years to develop and mature before recording her first album. The recording company also gave Kate a grand piano with which to compose.

A studio was built in the old coachhouse/barn. The team would turn up at eight, or nine o'clock at night; Auntie Pat would prepare eggs, bacon and baked beans (creative food) and they would often rehearse and record through the night. They would sleep most of the day and repeat the process the next night. This was the routine for much of Kate's early creative years. They could have used a recording studio but Kate was so independent she wanted total control of all aspects (Beck Siàn is the same).



Figure 9-11 The family with the Kate Bush band

I did see Kate occasionally after that. I joined the RAAF and was able to fly back to England for brief visits in 1967 and 1979. On each occasion I stayed at the farm with RAAF colleagues who were always made welcome. During these visits I learnt philosophy from Uncle John (assisted by a good malt whisky) and discovered Tolkien (the Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings) and the incredible illustrator, Arthur Rackham through Johnny and Paddy. It was truly a creative atmosphere. The kitchen was the centre of culture except when Dr. Who was on TV, when adjournment to the drawing room was compulsory.

I attended the Empire Test Pilot's School in 1972 and there I married Beck's mother Nicky. Nicky was of Welsh parentage so Beck is truly celtic from all sides of the family. Hence the name we chose Beck Sian (Welsh for Jane and the name of Nicky's sister). Kate and Uncle John attended the wedding. We then returned to Melbourne where Beck was born a year later - at Werribee hospital.



Figure 9-12 Beck liked Humphrey

We were subsequently posted to Canberra.

At this time, Beck's grandfather, Teddy Evans, was terminally ill and we rushed back to England to see him before he passed away. We actually nursed him as the hospital needed the beds and when he was diagnosed as terminal we were forced to take him home and look after him ourselves. We stayed ten weeks and Beck and I travelled to the Farm to see Kate's family - several times. Kate was following a hectic schedule but did spend time with Beck.



Figure 9-13 Beck with Auntie Pat



Figure 9-14 Kate and Beck

Uncle John allowed Beck to play their grand piano whenever she wanted.



Figure 9-15 The grand piano in the living room

Beck idolised Kate and I think this was the point where a seed was planted in her unconscious mind- to follow the same dream and to develop have the confidence and determination to be unique and to strive for perfection.

As an Air Force family we moved fairly frequently but our true home was the Dandenongs and we visited often.



Figure 9-16 Beck and her Nana (Kathleen) on Puffing Billy

Kate didn't like air travel and so her career may have suffered outside of Europe. However, she did make one special trip to Melbourne and visited Ferntree Gully. She appeared with Molly Meldrum on the *Queen of Pop* awards.



Figure 9-17 Kate at Ferntree Gully - at the foot of the 39 steps.

I was overseas with the RAAF and didn't see her. Since then I have returned to England regularly and always make contact.

Kathleen and Harry went back to England for a month in 1980. I think it was the happiest month of their lives. Harry visited London and explored his old haunts. He also helped Lisa Bradley to send out replies to Kate's fans.

Kathleen bathed in the love of her family. She hated coming away as she knew she may never see them again.

On my last visit I visited Kate's new home and met her partner, Danny and little Bertie. Kate is a devoted mother. Kate's priority is Bertie but I know she is working on a new album which is due to be released in the near future.

So this is what I know of Kate Bush and inevitably, it is also the story of Beck Siàn - although she is only now expressing her unique musical talent. Beck has returned to her soul place - the Dandenong ranges and is finally establishing herself as the next generation of musical talent from that same great Irish heritage. Her first CD is released this week and you have the unique opportunity to be the first to hear it.

Thank you for your interest in two very special sisters, Kathleen and Hannah Daly of Ballyvoile - and their subsequent families. As you can see there is a very special bond with the mystical Dandenongs. I am certain they are both here with us tonight.

Beck Siàn has just finished recording her haunting new album, 'Unfurling'. It is available now.

To order, contact Beck at:

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