Entry type: Person
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Weekes, Hazel Claire (Claire)

(1903 - 1990)

Born	19030411, Paddington New South Wales
Died	19900602, Warriewood New South Wales
Occupation	Broadcaster, Medical practitioner, Zoologist

Summary

Hazel Claire Weekes (Claire), zoologist and physician, was born on 11 April 1903 at Paddington, Sydney, eldest of four children of Sydney-born parents Ralph Weekes, musician, and his wife Fanny Florence, née Newland. A brilliant student, she was the first woman to receive a doctorate of science from the University of Sydney. She was a Macleay fellow of the Linnean Society of New South Wales in 1927-29 and 1932-34.

Weekes was well known abroad, particularly for her major contributions in the field of psychiatry. Applying kindness, understanding and common sense to the treatment of neuroses, she was always available to her patients. In demand as a public speaker on anxiety, she broadcast on radio and appeared on television while in England. Her methods, which involved accepting symptoms and ‘floating’, were more highly regarded by her patients than by her colleagues, but many of them are now incorporated into the management of anxiety.

Details

Claire Weekes was educated at Sydney Girls High School; and in 1926 graduated with honours from the University of Sydney, receiving the University Medal in Zoology. She became a demonstrator in zoology and began doctoral research on reptile placentation, her study supported by a Macleay Fellowship from the Linnean Society of NSW and later a Rockefeller Fellowship which enabled her to study at University College London in 1929. Weekes was an exceptional young scientist in the field of evolutionary biology, as indicated by the naming of a species of lizard after her, *Lygosoma weekesae*, in 1929.

Before gaining her D. Sc, Weekes had been misdiagnosed with TB and confined to a sanatorium. On discharge, she suffered from panic attacks. During her time in Europe she overcame her panic, assisted by suggestions from her fiancé, Marcel Aurousseau, who had observed the experience of shell-shocked soldiers in World War I.

In London Weekes' research focus changed and she worked on comparative neurology with another Australian, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith.

On her return to Sydney Weekes resumed her work in zoology while hoping to move into medicine. Passionate about music since childhood, Weekes studied singing part-time at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music where she met the piano teacher and gifted accompanist Elizabeth Coleman, who was to become her lifelong partner. They travelled to Europe in 1935 where Weekes said she intended to study the physiology of voice production. She hoped to become a singer but her dreams of a shared musical career with Coleman did not eventuate. Not wishing to return to the laboratory, on their return to Sydney in 1937, Weekes opened a travel agency and contributed a weekly travel column to The Sunday Sun and Guardian newspaper. The outbreak of war doomed this enterprise and in 1941 Weekes enrolled as a mature age medical student at Sydney University, graduating MB with honours in 1945.

Weekes went into general practice at Bondi and began to specialize in anxiety and nervous illness, becoming noted for the effectiveness of her treatment. She also consulted at the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children in Sydney. In 1955 Weekes passed the examination for membership of the Royal Australian College of Physicians and opened rooms in Macquarie Street, Sydney. She was appointed a Fellow of the College in 1973.

In 1962 she published the first of her five books, *Self Help for your Nerves*, which became an international bestseller and remained in print for many years. Weekes travelled extensively in the UK and USA, becoming famous for her methods of treatment of anxiety neuroses, publicising her work in the mass media and selling audio and video recordings outlining her approach.

She was appointed MBE – Member of The Order of the British Empire (Civil) – 30 December 1978 for medicine and in 1989 was nominated for a Nobel Prize.

Weekes died on 2 June 1990, just one week after moving into a retirement village in Warriewood, NSW.

Published resources

Resource Section
The Women's College - History: Famous Past Students: Hazel Weekes,
http://www.thewomenscollege.com.au/history/hazel_weekes.htm

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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