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At Home With the Everybods

A "Listener" Interview by
MARGARET CLARKE

THIS year brings two anniversaries to Fred and Maggie Everybody, and their creators Therese Desmond and Edward Howell. Fred and Maggie will have been 20 years on the air next October; in May Therese Desmond and Edward Howell celebrate their Silver Wedding. Their daughter, Madeleine Howell, is coming home to Sydney from London for the occasion. She will probably appear in the Fred and Maggie Everybody programme... as she has done in the past. At present she is working with the J. Arthur Rank Organisation.

Mr. Howell believes that Fred and Maggie Everybody is the oldest surviving show in Australian radio. He also thinks it is the only husband and wife session presented by a husband and wife. He writes the script which is built up around incidents in the Howell-Desmond partnership.

"Sometimes I don't know if we are Fred and Maggie or they us," his wife said when I went to call at the Howell-Desmond home in the Sydney suburb of Darling Point. "Certainly just about everything we do gets into the show sooner or later. Take our trip to England: that's been on for some time now and when we come to the end of that we'll be writing about what Fred and Maggie do after they get home."

The Howells have just bought a block of land at Whale Beach, some 25 miles up the coast from Sydney, and are planning to build. So it probably won't be long before Fred and Maggie are also putting up a weekend.

"And they'll have to have a Silver Wedding," Mr. Howell said. "And they must paint their house. We've just done our interior, as you can see. Then there's the cuckoo clock: I gave it to Molly—that's what I call Therese or Maggie, or whoever she is—at Christmas. And what a devil of a job it was to put up! The walls are plaster, you see, and you can't bang in nails. The nails curl up and the plaster comes down. So we had to put it there on the window frame. Well, that's something Fred has ahead of him, poor fellow. He's going to



FRED

"Just about everything we do..."

give Maggie the clock for her birthday. That's in May."

"Sometimes I just dread everything that happens to us," his wife went on, "—because of Fred and Maggie. I'm sure not many of our listeners realise what it is like to have another couple living with you all your lives."

Fred and Maggie Everybody was first broadcast by the ABC in 1932, a sketch in a variety show. In 1936 the sales manager of one of the Commercial stations heard it and forecast: "That show will run for years."

"Even my grocer's bills are addressed to 'Mrs. Maggie'," Therese Desmond said. "So you can see we never get away from it. Sometimes I hate Maggie. This morning I was trying to buy a frock. As soon as the girl realised who I was she started asking questions about the show, just as I had something a size too small stuck half way over my head! I don't know what I bought."

"But it works both ways," Mr. Howell chimed in. "Lots of people will do things for Fred and Maggie they'd never do for us. Things like bricks for Whale Beach."

The Howell-Desmond home in Sydney—original of Fred and Maggie's Dingle Dell—is a comfortable, spacious-seeming two-storey one of a brick pair built about 50 years ago. The room in which we had afternoon tea has an Indian carpet on stained floors, a blue Merry Widow suite, family portraits on the walls painted by Therese Desmond's grandfather, R. A. Burnside, R.A., and Mr. Howell's aunt, who also was a member of the Royal Academy.

French doors open on to a tiled verandah, where Fred and Maggie's canaries hang in two separate cages, and a garden which is the pride of Fred's life though it sometimes amuses the neighbours.

"They tell me I should have nipped the buds off my zinnias!" Fred said and slapped his knee. "Just look at them! They wouldn't cover sixpence!"

Therese Desmond and Edward Howell were both born in London. She came to Australia with her family when she was a girl, and he with a theatrical company. They met when they were cast together in a play, and they still act in straight drama, together and separately. Recently they were the entire cast of a romantic drama telling the story of a husband and wife, *The Fourposter Bed*, which was broadcast by the ABC. They also appeared in Robinson Jeffers's translation of Euripides' *Medea*, another ABC presentation.



MAGGIE

... gets into the show sooner or later"

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 18, 1952.