

PORTRAIT OF A DOCTOR

An outline

At the end of 2016 interest arose in the Nichterlein family of Adelaide.

- The focus soon became Dr Otto Erhardt Nichterlein.
- A multitalented individual who appears to have been forgotten.
- He was a specialist in TB.
- But next to nothing is to be found in the records on this aspect of his life.

‘Tuberculosis Control in South Australia’ – An address delivered at the thirteenth Foundation Day Ceremony held at RAH on 17 July, 1991.

By Roger Clare Angove (1915-1998), Emeritus Physician, Royal Adelaide Hospital



- Concludes with particular reference to Darcy Cowan (1885-1958) and, tantalisingly:
- “Time does not permit me to include more about such personalities or Dr Frank Hone, Dr Charles Savage, Dr John Hayward and Dr Nichterlein. But they must be left to another time in order to do justice to the role of the Adelaide Hospital staff in the fight against tuberculosis in Australia.”
- Why no first name for Nichterlein?

[1991 – Tuberculosis Control in South Australia | Health Museum of ...](http://www.healthmuseumsa.org.au/menu/1991-tuberculosis-control-in-south-australia/)

www.healthmuseumsa.org.au/menu/1991-tuberculosis-control-in-south-australia/

- *Two Million South Australians* by Philip Woodruff (1913-1992) includes two chapters on TB, several photographs and many pages on Bedford Park and Kalyra Sanatoria where Otto Nichterlein was superintendant.
- But nothing about Nichterlein!

[Two million South Australians / Philip Woodruff | National Library of ...](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2862193)

<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2862193> [1984]

Available in the National Library of Australia collection. Author: Woodruff, Philip;
Format: Book; 183 p. : ill., ports. ; 24 cm.

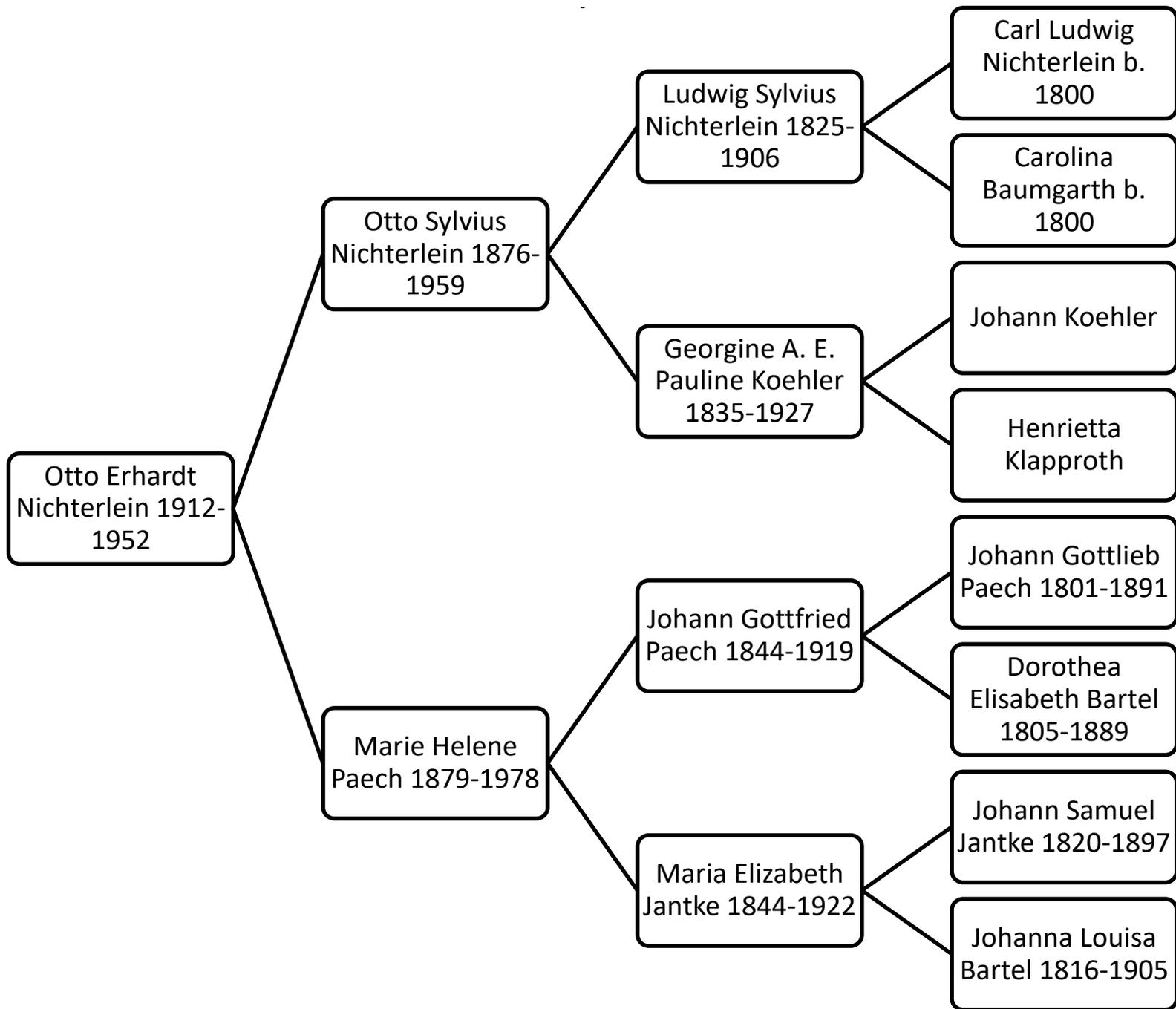
This initial lack of information presented a challenge, but input from other sources led to these findings:

- South Australian, Otto Erhardt Nichterlein (1912-1952) was an athlete, a linguist and a musician.
- He became a lecturer in English literature and was destined for the Clergy.
- But turned to Medicine and became a specialist physician, adopting a 'holistic' approach to his patients. (Is not good Medicine always 'holistic'?)
- He was also a horticulturalist, an environmentalist and a skilled worker in wood.

- Otto Nichterlein died at the age of forty and is all but forgotten.
- Even the Otto Nichterlein nurses home exists no more.
- But he is commemorated in an evocative portrait by Sir Ivor Hele (1912-1993).

Otto's 'pedigree' (as genealogists refer to this form of family tree)

- South Australia's German heritage
- In S.A. 'German' seems to equate to 'Lutheran'.
- The full tree is very extensive – Otto Nichterlein having over sixty first cousins; however, much of the work had already been done by Janet Muller of Mt Gambier.
- He had no children.



Dr Otto's immediate family is worthy of at least a brief mention and will be shown first.

The original Australian Nichterleins in 1891. Gilles Plains to Mt Gambier, to Natimuk. Otto Snr., father of Dr Otto, recumbent.



Otto Nichterlein Snr. 1876-1959 married Marie Paech
1879-1978 in 1903.

- S.A., Victoria, Queensland, Victoria, S.A.
- But now no Nichterleins in South Australia.
- Below: Toowoomba in 1902



The Nichterleins in 1917; Otto Snr. holding Otto Jr.



Golden wedding; Otto Snr. and Marie in 1953 (with Female Relative Badge)

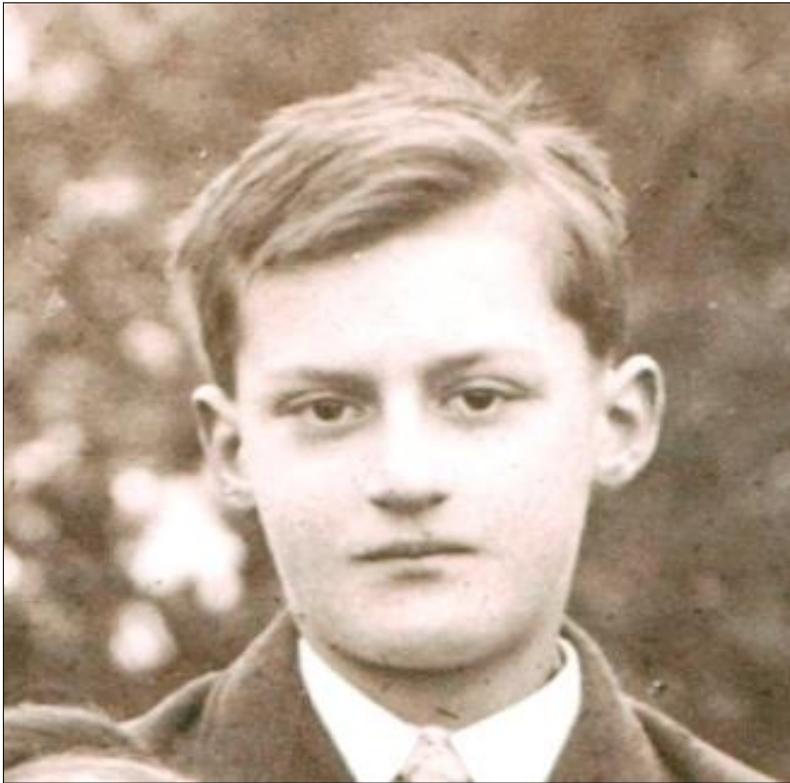


The seven siblings of Otto Junior and then Otto

Four of them in 1936 (note the Mt Osmond Country Club):
Frieda, Dora, (Roy Schumacher), Concordia, Otto, Willie.
Louis was living in Melbourne, Edwin in New Guinea.

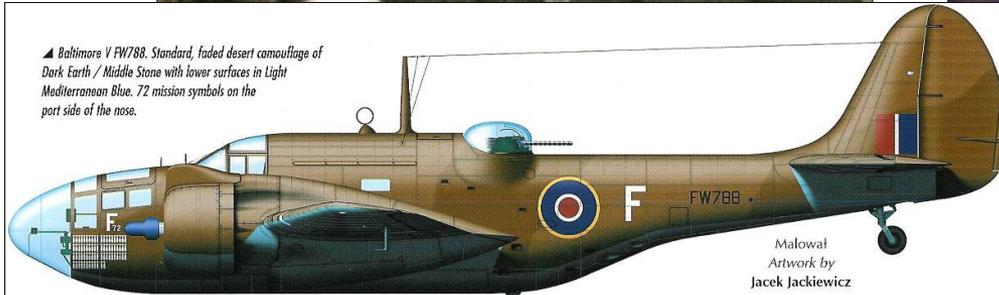
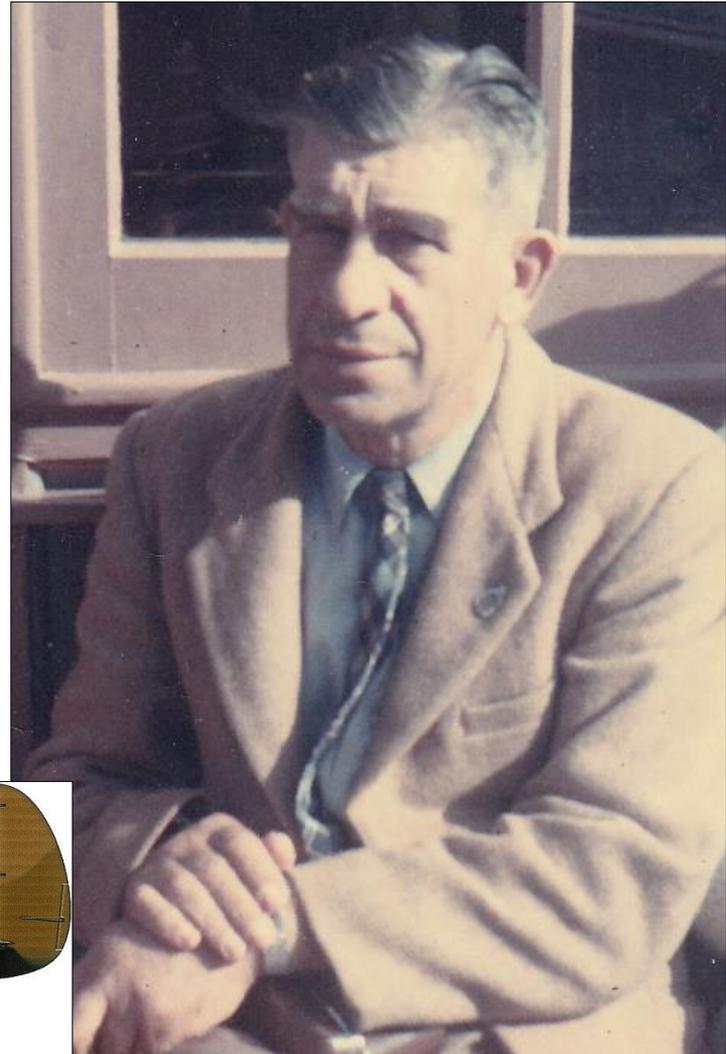


Ludwig/Louis 'Lou' 1904-1947
Champion athlete and lawyer



Edwin 'Ted' 1907-1972

PNG mining engineer and RAAF navigator



Concordia 'Connie' 1909-1992

Country pastor's wife and cherished mother of five



Frieda 'Freddie' 1910-2008
Teacher and educationalist



Elsa 'Elsie' 1915-1917
Much loved youngest daughter



Dora 'Nikkie' 1918-1985

RAANS officer and Director of Nursing RDNS (Scholarship)



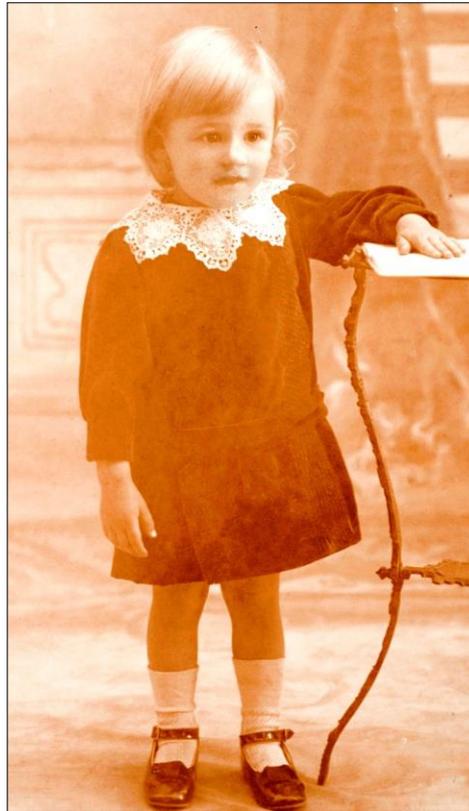
Willie 'Bill' 1920-1943

Born St Valentine's Day, beloved youngest son and
flying officer RAAF



Finally we come to Otto Erhardt 'Nick' Nichterlein (Otto Jnr.) 1912-1952

Otto at the age of two, and (with his father) at the age of five. It was not unusual in those days for infant boys to wear dresses.



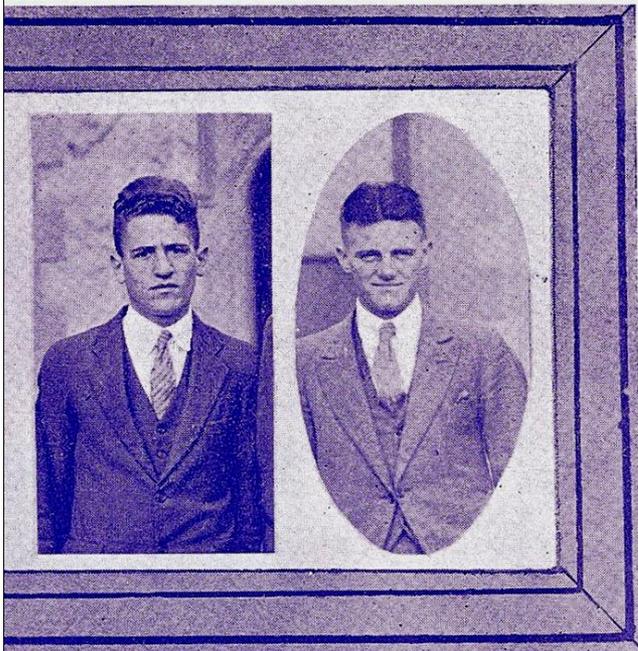
His first home - Tabor, Victoria 1912 to 1924



Home at 313 Unley Rd, Malvern, 1924 to 1927. Now
Adelaide Cardiology



Nichterlein, O. E.—An Adelaideite, “Nick” is one of the genial, yet positive sort. Up at all hours of the morning, he, with Heinie, goes through the mysterious rites of the cold shower. Otto is a hard trier at sports but, though now well past his prime, has not yet succeeded very much at anything. In cricket he specialises in staying at the wicket for the maximum of time and the minimum of runs. Rumour hath it that he once hit a “four.” As one of the C.C.’s official cinema operators he has shown Concordians how not to show pictures. Among his accomplishments he numbers playing accompaniments.



O. E. Nichterlein, S.A. C. E. Zweck, N.S.W.

Budding vocalists are greatly indebted to him for his help. In the orchestra he “saws” the double bass, and has a bent for working up instrumental items.

At Concordia College 1925-1930

- A humorous clipping from the Concordia College magazine ‘Brown and Gold’ of August 1930. This was Otto’s last year at school.
- Fellow student, Clarence E. Zweck from N.S.W. is on the right. Perhaps not coincidentally, his son married into the Nichterlein family in 1976.

Otto's home at 40 Pridmore Road, Glen Osmond 1927 to 1941



Athletics

University of Adelaide Athletics team 1932

Top row: N.M. Fricker, J.O. Were, W.D. Verco, D.M. Reid, C.M. Swan.

Front row: D.C. Cowell, A.H. Young (Capt), **O.E. Nichterlein.**

Many
newspaper
articles re
athletics



Debating and Music

- ... Roma Mitchell, Joan Hawker and Nancy Newland argued against **Otto *Nichterlein***, Eric Janzow and Bill Irwin. Page 51 **July 1933**.

[Roma the First: A Biography of Dame Roma Mitchell](#)

<https://books.google.com.au/books?isbn=1862547807>

[Susan Magarey, Kerrie Round](#)

- Several other references to debating in newspapers
- Two references to playing piano at concerts

Lecturer in English Literature

- *The Advertiser* Tuesday 19 February 1935 p 18 Article
... Glenelg Class English literature, **Mr. O. Nichterlein**
... C. M. Eardley, Messrs. C. C. Crump, N. F. Goss, and
O. Nichterlein, ...

[W.E.A. CLASSES Tutors And Lecturers For 1935](#)

- Several similar references

Master of Arts

- *The Advertiser* Thursday 28 November 1935 p 15
Article... MASTER OF ARTS BY THESIS:—***Nichterlein, Otto Erhardt***...

[THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE Examination Results, November, 1935 FACULTY OF ARTS](#)

- ‘Development of Realism in Elizabethan Prose Literature, through the Jest-books and Rogue Pamphlets to the Picaresque Novel.’

Seminarian

- Otto was to start at Concordia Seminary, St Louis, Missouri, USA in September 1935.
- Having already the knowledge of “the subjects taught in junior college plus German, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew” – John H. C. Fritz (1874-1953), a highly regarded and influential theologian and Dean of Students in a 1934 letter addressed to Otto’s father, Otto Snr.
- How do present-day entrance standards in our tertiary institutions compare?

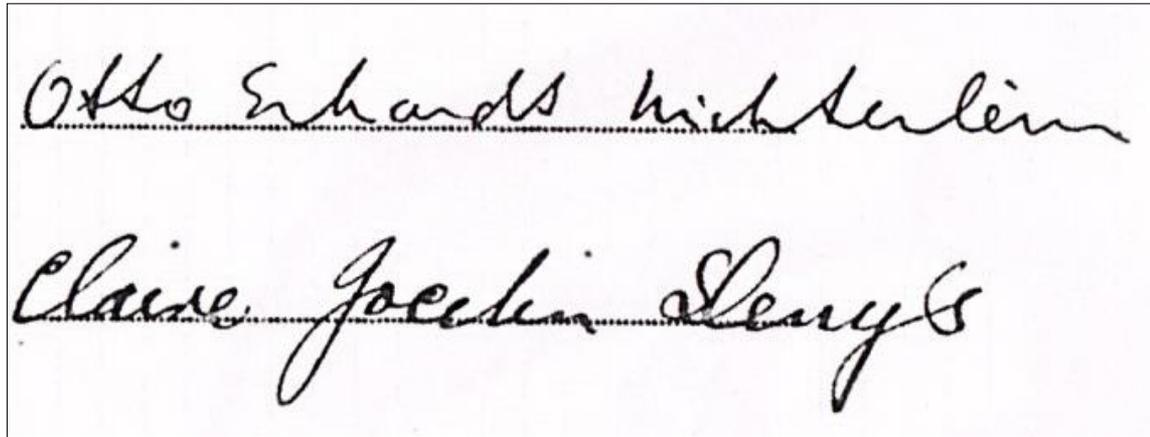
That year he was diagnosed with tuberculosis

Doctor of Medicine

- Otto's career path changed, he obtained his MB BS in 1940 (doing first year Medicine and last year of his MA degree simultaneously) and MD in 1943.
- 'Study of the Optic Tracts and the Primary Optic Centres in the Sheep, with Reference to Other Mammals.'

In 1941 Otto married Claire Denys (1918-1988, graduate in nursing from RAH) at Christ Church, North Adelaide (Anglican).

The signatures of Otto and Claire ('Denny') taken from their marriage certificate.

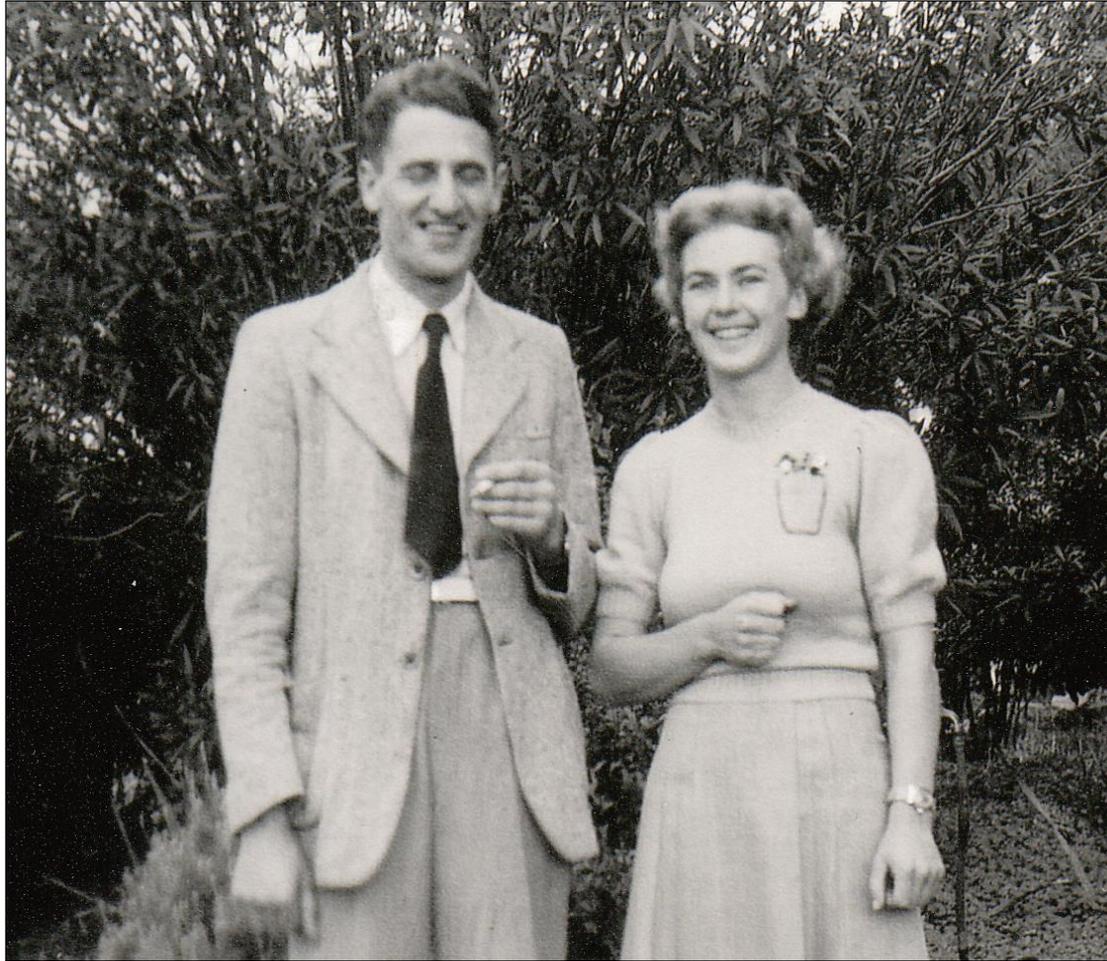


Handwritten signatures of Otto Erhardt Richterlin and Claire Jocelin Denys on a marriage certificate. The signatures are written in cursive on a white background with a horizontal dotted line.

It was Denny's 23rd birthday.

Otto and Denny lived at Finnissbrook, Beaumont Road Burnside (now 20 Garden Avenue) from 1941 to 1944 and he was employed as an Anatomy Demonstrator, examined Army recruits and worked at the Red Cross whilst researching his MD thesis. A semi-bohemian lifestyle?





Otto and Claire at Finnissbrook c. 1941. It is startling to see Otto, as a doctor and suffering from lung disease, smoking but so did Claire; is she holding a cigarette lighter?



The shot appears to have been taken by a street photographer in Rundle Street, Adelaide c. 1950. Otto's eyes are downcast again, but the elegant, petite Claire (and Otto was no more than average height) exhibits energy and confidence as she matches her husband stride for stride.

Their home at Eden Hills from 1944: number 72 Wilpena Street (now number 70).





Dr Otto at the Bedford Park Sanatorium in 1943.

The year after, he became Medical Superintendant of the Kalyra Sanatorium at Belair.

He remained there until his death in 1952.

- Otto Nichterlein was highly respected and exhibited a wide range of clinical skills, but was little known in the medical world.
- Perhaps partly, as a brief obituary stated: *‘Owing to the malady from which he suffered the late brother led a secluded life avoiding all assemblies of people lest he might impart his disease to others.’*
- However (Sir) Ivor Hele, then at the peak of his career, found Dr Otto sufficiently fascinating to have produced at least three portraits of him.

He executed his works of Dr Otto in 1952 with the aid of two photographs.



The last to be taken of Dr Otto.





Photo of an
unfinished
portrait.

Very likely
destroyed by
the artist.



This drawing is signed *Hele 52*. Otto is represented as gaunt, tired and reflective; which was undoubtedly factually true (and evident in the photographs) but the final painting demonstrates what Ivor Hele saw within him: strength, vigour, humour, and robustness.



- It hangs in the office of Sara Blunt, CEO at the Kalyra Belair aged care facility.
- It is larger than life (100 x 117 cm).
- The plaque affixed to it states: *Otto Erhardt Nichterlein M.A. M.D. Medical Superintendent Kalyra Sanatorium 1944-52, presented by Mrs O. E. Nichterlein & Mr Ivor Hele.*
- The image is that of a fit, confident, relaxed man of greater than average stature contented with his past, the present and looking forward to the future.
- All this was undoubtedly true of Otto Erhardt's spirit; Erhardt in Old German meaning 'respectful strength'.



Ivor Hele painted several eminent doctors in his long career including Sir Henry Newland, but Otto Nichterlein was by far the youngest.

(AMA Max Meldrum; Rieger, William Dargie)

In the case of Henry Newland (RACS Melb.) the robes of honour make the man, and the face is already fading into the past; Otto's garments are very much of secondary importance and he gazes confidently into the future.





Would we but do likewise.

