

I interviewed Mary in 1994 for the book, *Teachers Talk Teaching: Early Childhood, School, Teacher's College*, Dunmore Press 1997 (with Sue Middleton).

Interviewee: Mary Purdy b. 1933
Interviewed by: Helen May
Date: 1994

What type of education did your parents have?

My mother was one of nine and, probably, only had secondary school and simply never worked. No, she did work in an office for a few years, but certainly after she married, when she must have been about 28, she never worked another day after that. That is other than good works which is how I came to be in early childhood because she was on the kindergarten committee. My father completed a degree at Canterbury, no it must have been Victoria, but how did he do an engineering degree at Victoria?, but he did. Maybe he did some of it at Christchurch, but he certainly went to Wellington College and then on to Victoria. He was a Civil Engineer which he stayed with all his life in varying ways. He went off to the war of course. But education wasn't, in his mind, a great priority I don't think. This is unusual seeing he had that opportunity and certainly all his family had degrees, but there was never much talk about higher education in our household. I started off at an alternative school. I was born in 1933, so, at age 4 - 1937, I set off to an alternative pre-school, which followed through to a primary and secondary school run by the Theosophists in Auckland. I didn't go there because my parents had any foresight, but because it was around the corner in Epsom. Looking back, I realise how lucky I was. It was the most wonderful school; learning was just a joy. We ran to school; we all loved it so much. The only thing I can remember against it was that we wore a school uniform, but apart from that the whole method of learning was just out of this world. We all learnt at our own level, and we all had a chart that we tried to finish by the end of the term, and you had segments of doing English and segments of doing maths, but we all worked individually. I suppose the ratios were incredibly small. We did wonderful things like have, when there was an election, we too had an election. And the fact I was head prefect - I can remember feeling so guilty because I voted for myself. We did everything like that, and democracy was a very very big thing in the school. I can remember a boy who once stole something, or picked something up when he was somewhere, and we all decided what would happen to him. There were lots of similarities with Summerhill {in England} except not as extravagantly liberal, but certainly decision making was left up to us. Well of course I thought that was what school was about.

I only went to standard five unfortunately, and my father transferred to Hamilton. What happened to me then was terrible.

I don't understand very much about Theosophy. What was the link there between progressive education?

I don't know, I think it was the people. I think it's like so many other schools, Bertha and Daphne Darrow??, who were the two sisters ran the school and lived on the property. I think it was their progressiveness not the Theosophists. We knew very little about their thinking and their philosophy, unfortunately I wish now that I had had known more. We had a sort of chapel on the grounds, and once you got a bit further up the school, every Friday morning, a Minister of religion would come to school from every other denomination. There was never any pushing, but I think it was those personalities, when I look back, that kept the school

together. The school collapsed after the two leading women left. One took the junior school and one took the top half. We did such lovely things, learning was no effort at all, lots of things in the garden and at 11.30 everyday everybody had to stop whatever they were doing and get a book out of the library and go and lie under the trees. That was a half hour before lunch. This happened every day. I moved to Hamilton but didn't do exceptionally well academically, but my brother was put a class ahead when he went to Whitiora, so he must have been more than adequate.

What do you remember of that five/six year old classroom?

It was a very big open lovely room. I go back and look at where it was, (it has been pulled down now) every time I go to Auckland virtually. It just was a lovely time in my life. We did a lot of things like Greek dancing. We used to wear these lovely flowing gowns and we stayed at school afterwards; we never rushed home. This must have been great for mother at home. The whole school was like a big family. When I went there, there were 39 pupils, right through from kindergarten to secondary, and when I left there were about 74, so it had almost doubled. My mother always said it was a school for nice peculiar people, and there certainly were some very unusual families. I remember Sergei was from a Russian family, and Michael Riesenstein. Quite a few of them I've heard of since that have done quite well in their lives.

Now your parents found the school almost by accident, but did you get the sense that they really liked what the schooling?

They loved what we got there. My mother was a vegetarian and of course the people running the school were vegetarian, so that was a close link. Where we lived was close to Diocesan, close to St Cuthberts, and close to Epsom school, and close to the school on Teachers College grounds. They had lots of choice, but I think, the smallness attracted them to begin with. It was called ?? Garden School. It really was a wonderful experience, and I just wish I could have stayed there for the rest of my schooling, but in Hamilton they sent me to Waikato Diocesan and I hated it.

Do you remember how you learnt to read at the school?

Everything was very encouraging. It just seemed to happen. I was also good at maths and so they encouraged me to go on ahead, but if suddenly I got something like long division, that would stop the whole class and we would all learn long division together. People said to me, "wasn't it competitive if you had these charts that you hung of the side of your desk, and you crossed things off as you did them", people said wasn't it competitive? But I don't remember competitive feelings, and I don't remember doing any homework, whether I did or not I don't know, but I don't recall having to go home and sit down and do another lot of work afterwards.

So really it was an education far in advanced of its time.

Absolutely. But I didn't realise that of course.

What about Hamilton?

I was in standard 5 by the time we went to Hamilton. I don't know why my parents chose to send me to Diocesan, but it wasn't bad I suppose. There were lots of fun times there, we did lots of sport after school that I thoroughly enjoyed. I was quite keen on sport, but I didn't respond very well to the religious side. In fact, Sue Cherrington's grandfather threw the bible at me because I wasn't listening! I didn't do very well at school. I was looking through my reports the other day, and it was full of "Mary could try harder." I wasn't inspired obviously about learning at all. I was fairly inspired about sport in the 4th and 5th form, and social

life started to become a very big part of my life in the 5th form. I didn't extend myself at all, in fact I was dash lucky to get school certificate the year I did.

What date would that have been?

1949. Then UE in 1950. Then I left school. We didn't do school cert in 3 years automatically. You had to be chosen and I was chosen to do it. Everybody was a bit surprised. I must have also been a little bit of a goody-good, because I got, what they called, a "red girdle", and I was a day girl prefect so I was fitting into a little bit of the Diocesan pattern. There were only 2 day girl prefects and the other one was a young woman called Piki Mahuta, who is now the Maori Queen. She and I became very close friends, because we were the only two day girl prefects.

Is that Dame Te Atairangi Kahu?

Yes, she was eighteen. Princess Te Puea had said that education was a must. Pita and I had quite a lot of fun together, and we used to ride together to school. She was Captain of our Hockey team, and I was Vice Captain. I was more often Captain because she didn't turn up, but she was quite a highlight in my last couple of years at school. And perhaps a sort of a sane friend, because there was tremendous number of Waikato farming families. Hamilton had no University and no Teachers College, and that brought a little bit of sort of balance to it. My mother said she was never really accepted in Hamilton. It was a very snobbish town when we went in 1945. It wasn't an easy place to move into. I think I wouldn't mind going back now. I have a brother there who I've spent a bit of time with. Hamilton has got a lot more to offer now. It was declared a city, almost 2 or 3 days after we arrived there, so it was still small, because that was only 20,000 people.

How long did you stay at school?

Only 4 years.

Did you leave school with any sense of what you wanted in life, what you wanted to do?

Yes. My mother, as I say, had been on the Whitiara kindergarten committee. That was nothing to do with us being at kindergarten, that was how they did it. She was also on the Plunket committee and all those sorts of things. I got quite interested in kindergarten and I can remember going to see the Head Mistress, with my mother, and the Head Mistress said, "I think Mary would be a good teacher", and my mother said, "she's a bossy enough so and so now without being a teacher" forgetting who she was talking too. It was decided that I would have the opportunity of being an untrained teacher for a year, in Hamilton, to see if I liked it or not.

This was an untrained kindergarten teacher?

Yes. I worked with a wonderful teacher

Why kindergarten teaching rather than primary teaching at that stage?

I think because my mother steered me towards that. I was good with little children. I didn't know, till many years later, till I was 40 in fact, that my parents were bitterly disappointed that I didn't go to university. They never said a thing, but they automatically expected that's what I was going to. When I chose teaching they were apparently very disappointed and when I chose early childhood teaching because they could see no career pattern. They must have had wanted me to have some sort of a career, because they had to bite their words, because it has been very good to me. I have always been at the right place at the right time, and have had lots of opportunities.

Would you, at that age though, have had a sense of kindergarten teaching as a career?

No. I think I just saw that this will fill in the next 2 years. But once I got into the College and got involved it overtook me.

You went into an untrained situation. Can you describe what you saw?

I'll never forget arriving, because the Whitiora Tennis Club rooms - was the kindergarten. The first thing we had to do was sweep out all the beer bottles tops and open up so that you got rid of the smell of beer which was just unbelievable. You then had to set up apple boxes with enamel bowls for the children to wash their hands. It was very primitive when I think about it. Even in the worst playcentre I worked in, was nothing like that at all. It was very very basic. And it was very very cold. I can remember Moira Gallagher [Dept of Education Preschool Officer] coming visiting and saying "you can't possibly work in skirts in this condition. I give you permission to wear corduroy trousers, provided they match and you wear the same corduroy". I can remember ???, who was a most glamorous person and who was the kindergarten Director, and I going off and buying wine corduroy trousers. It was ever so cold and we had permission! The whole thing was sort of so mickey-mouse then. When we were paid the Treasurer got on her bicycle and cycled round each of the kindergartens and gave us our money, every second Friday.

It was still very much run as a voluntary organisation

Very much. We were very reliant upon the committee raising enough money. One person who inspired me in Hamilton was Miss Jamieson, who has this scholarship named after. She was quite a forbidding sort of person, but she had the feeling I was enthusiastic about kindergarten teaching. She was very good to me when I think back.

How many children were in that kindergarten?

I think it was 30 and 2 teachers. Never, ever, a thought of having parents come in and help. It just wasn't done at all. But we were very very close to the committee, they were like personal friends. So they were in and out a little bit.

Was taking on an untrained teacher like yourself and unusual thing?

No, there were quite a number at that stage.

Hamilton was an areas that wasn't linked to a training institution.

That is right, we were very much out on a limb. One of my biggest memories of that kindergarten is having a "mothers club". I was charged with looking after the children while Mavis?? was inside with the parents. Looking after the children consisted of locking them all in the tennis courts, and just hoping things were alright. I can remember mothers coming out and sort of feeding me through the gate - you know, slipping me a cup of tea and piece of cake. Mother's clubs were a very big feature. I suppose that was the only parent contact we really had.

What was done in the club?

We had speakers

On Education?

No, no. They were very much recreational??

Oh, I see, it wasn't about child development or something like that?

No. That took a while to come. I can remember when I was teaching, it suddenly came into being.

How was the programme organised?

It was very formal.

What do you mean by that?

We didn't have a show and tell, but there was a lot of - inside play or outside play but it was very formal, and there was a lot of sitting on the mat. There was a lot of music, we had a piano I think. There was a lot of knowing the children individually. When I look back, I can still think about some of those children quite clearly, and how well we got to know them. There was free play to a certain degree. There were puzzles provided and blocks and all those sorts of things.

What was the range of equipment that you would have had?

There wasn't a great range. A lot of it we made ourselves, like threading cotton reels. There was a sandpit and a slide but nothing creative. We did have water play, paints, so it wasn't too bad.

Clay or plasticine?

Plasticine probably, I can't remember clay, but I can remember some modelling.

Craft activities of any kind?

Yes, there was. Quite often making things to take home. There was quite an emphasis on what you took home, it was quite important.

How much choice was there?

Yes, there was definite choice, but I think the big change came between 1949 and 1951.

I once interviewed Moira Gallagher who told me about the toilet times in the kindergartens of the 1940s

Well one thing we did do, was always send them to the toilet at 10.15. When I think back, you know, whether they wanted to go or not they went in there and then they washed their hands, then they had morning tea. Moira must have made a difference during that time. When I did my training I didn't suddenly think, "oh goodness me this is dreadful, this is all so different", so it must have been fairly common and what happened at that time.

Then of course I went off to my interview for kindergarten training, which I can still remember vividly. "What book did you read last? - "What have you read in the last 6 months?" - "Can you play a musical instrument?" Those seem to be the two vital things.

Where were you trained?

Auckland, at Myers Park, which was a great place. The training had quite a lot to recommend it although there were still lots of things about it that were pretty awful, like learning how to put lids on paint pots, and there was a lot of making of equipment - I made an interlocking train. When you think of the hours it would take when I could have been doing child development, but we did have a good basic training.

What other areas were you trained in?

There was health, child development, music. There was quite an emphasis on health when I think about it. There was woodwork, those sorts of things.

What about the child development?

I can remember very strongly that we were told every child was different and we were told, quite a bit about child development and how important it would be for us to understand it. But we didn't do observations. Mind you I didn't excel and did the minimum while I was training. I was living in a hostel which was a lot of fun. I don't remember a lot about child development.

Any people that you can remember there and who taught you?

Yes, I can remember them all. There was Maggie Burt who may have died now, but I spoke to her probably 10 years ago. There was Mrs Rothbury and Fay Cawkwell the Principal, and she was a very strong person. Looking back, she probably held the place together. They were fairly strict in lots of ways. There is still

somebody working in Wellington that trained the year I did; in fact she was head girl. I should have rung and talked to her about what we did do. There was quite a lot of creative art, and we were allowed to do our sort of thing. Child development didn't have the depth, it just skimmed across the surface really. If you were going to learn anymore you had to do something else afterwards.

Where were kindergartens were at that period of history, Did you see yourselves in the footsteps of the valiant strugglers of the past?

No not really. I think we thought the strugglers were the people that were working voluntarily and raising the money and getting the kindergartens set up. The Auckland Association was quite strong. They had their offices underneath us, and we just expected that everything would fall into place while we were training. We never dreamt that people had to work as hard as they had to get kindergarten where it was. It wasn't until you got out there and started teaching that you suddenly realised - that it's not a bed of roses at all.

What sort of children were coming to kindergarten then?

I did a section at Myers Park, and those children were very from the lower socio-economic group, but other sections I did were in places like Mount Roskill and Point Chev. They were average sort of children, not under privileged.

These were families who were thinking that going to kindergarten was an advantage.

They weren't working mothers at all. They were all very involved in the kindergarten and what was happening. Mothers were just starting to be part of the kindergarten during my training. In those first few years of teaching, parents became much more involved.

So after the training?

Back to Hamilton, to home, and one year there working as a teacher in a kindergarten. I stayed all year, not really enjoying it very much, and was very anxious to get back to Auckland to do something more, I just wanted to do something extra.

To do with what?

It was to do with the kindergarten environment and getting more understanding of what I was doing.

What was happening in Hamilton that you didn't like?

Nothing much at all. Nobody thought about going to courses, and I felt that if I went back to Auckland, I would have more opportunity. That year was very much a standing still year to me. I didn't enjoy it nearly as much as I had enjoyed my training. I just felt that I wasn't going to get anywhere if I stayed in Hamilton, so I went back to Auckland. They were very short of trained teachers, so I became a Head Teacher immediately. I can remember it so vividly. I was at Point Chevalier and it was hard work and I was trying to get the parents involved. I can remember Dot Stolworthy came and did child development lectures at night. I had an 80% attendance of parents, which was incredible, but was all a bit of a battle. I can remember Moira Gallagher coming to visit me, and she must have seen by my face when she walked in, and she said "forget about me being here, I'll be one of your staff members", and "come and have dinner with me at the hotel tonight, and I'll talk about where you are at and what you want to do". She suggested that I go to university. Did I do that then? I just mucked about, I just had a good year, and I didn't pass it then.

That would have been seen as somewhat unusual in those days, recommending kindergarten teachers to go to university?

Yes, so on Moira's recommendation I went and sat next to Max Cryer, he drew dress designs for us. The next year she said to me, "well you really do want to do something don't you". Why don't you go and talk to Lex Grey. He let me attend his playcentre lectures, even though I was an unmarried person with no children. I joined in his playcentre training, and that really inspired me, it was just wonderful. I just loved those evenings though he and I had lots of arguments. I didn't realise at the time, but he was always aiming high, to think further than he really meant perhaps, and he and I had some differences. It was great doing that training. By then I had moved to another kindergarten at Mount Roskill. Then I must have gone back to Hamilton for some reason, for a year.

Let's go back to that kindergarten where you were Head Teacher. What did you try and do?

That was a wonderful time. For instance, I tried to do away with the mat time. That created an incredible upset. At another kindergarten I tried to change the afternoon sessions so that the younger children came in the mornings because they needed afternoon sleep. They came up from the Department and said, "you just can't do that, it's illegal what you're doing". I had to change it back. At Point Chevalier I managed to get by without a mat time at the end of the day, because the parents all came and collected their children. It was dead easy to do that, and the parents always finished off their activities. I had an incredibly free programme - probably far too free when I think back, but it was much freer than anybody else was operating at that time.

Where did those ideas come from? From your training?

Yes, how did I do that? I must have had people that I talked to, and I had quite close contact with Fay Cawkwell, who was the principal. I used to see quite a bit of her. We got very involved together. I think we set up one of the first branches of the KTA in Auckland together. I must have been mixing with those people quite a bit. I was doing far more than my peers were doing at that time, as far as the programme was concerned. I probably was reading more than other people were.

How did you describe a free play programme in those days?

It was just letting the children do what they wanted, literally. We put everything out. We didn't really know how to handle it looking back now. We became a little authoritarian, when we wanted to intervene. I can remember sending children to the office, who weren't fitting into what I thought was the right pattern, so I wasn't really doing what I would call free play now. We didn't really understand children's behaviour enough to know what we should be doing, but during that year and the next year particularly, I learnt a lot more by having these night classes with Lex and Stolorow whom I got in for the parents originally. I learnt a tremendous amount. I had a great belief in knowing the families and I started doing an enormous amount of home visiting. When I think back it was awful, because I used to go visiting at 4 and 5 at night. When I later had three children under 3, I would not have appreciated anybody who came and visited me then, but I got so enthusiastic about knowing the families. And I opened the last kindergarten in Auckland to have a role of 60 /45, so that was 105 parents I was trying to get to know. I felt it was my duty. Well, no, I felt that it was worthwhile for me to know them.

Did your staff follow you, collaborate with you, what was your relationship there?

That varied tremendously. One person I had just thought I was quite crazy, and asked for a transfer, which the Auckland Association were good about. Others did become quite interested, but very often they were only there for a short time, and they moved on. It was very much a short career in kindergarten, at that stage still. You went and trained and then you got engaged and then you got married, and nobody came

back to work after they were married, or very few. There was a moving population, I can only remember one teacher that I really felt came along with my ideas in a big way.

What was the support of the Auckland Association, because you were obviously trialing out some new things?

There weren't any senior teachers. Lecturers came and they were very supportive. Nellie Burt who I thought was ancient, (she was probably about 50) was very supportive, and keen for me to try out different things. They did send students to me, and there weren't many places where they sent students at that time.

Tell me about Moira Gallagher, I hear so many people say that "Moira Gallagher came to visit"

She just had such a tremendous effect on me. That instance where she took me to dinner at the hotel afterwards, she made me believe that I could have a career in early childhood. Moira invited me to her house down in Wellington. In fact, she suggested I come down to Wellington. That was the reason I first originally came to Wellington, to work with her in the Department but then I decided that I would go off overseas. However, I changed my mind and the job had gone. I think Leonie Shaw got that job. I came down to be a kindergarten teacher. Moira was very supportive and had a way of being able to make you feel important and was a great person for building up your self-esteem. She must have had an amazing personality and was inspiring. In fact, I doubt if I would still be in early childhood without her, and there were several people: Gwen Somerset, and Lex Gray were the other people that really changed my thinking about early childhood.

What was it that you disagreed with with Lex?

I saw him about 4 or 5 years ago when he was here for a reunion, and I said you won't remember me, and he said "you are Mary Brooker aren't you?" They were silly little things like allowing children to have their milk on the gate post if they wanted to, they were limit things that we disagreed about. "The children have got to learn by experiencing things" he said. I remember one time where he even talked about children crossing the road on their own, and I couldn't agree, but I think he might have been testing me. I often used to stay behind and talk with him afterwards. He was inspirational in such a quiet way. His lectures changed my thinking quite a lot too. I was lucky and it was Moira Gallagher's suggestion to go to his classes. He was an inspirational sort of person

We'll move on to what happened next.

I went back to Hamilton. My parents went overseas, and I went and stayed with a friend of the family. I was about 24 and I taught at Miropiko which was a dull sort of place. I couldn't raise any enthusiasm. I just couldn't raise the enthusiasm of the parents. I can remember standing on a table at a father's morning trying to get these fathers enthused in their children's education. They thought that they had just come for a working bee, but I was trying to get a bit more interest. Then my father went to golf that afternoon and was being told "Your daughter was trying to get at us, and she thought there was more to kindergarten than just looking after children" etc. I didn't feel commitment to that kindergarten. It was while I was there that Moira Gallagher again, suggested that I come down to Wellington and work with her.

The would be one of her pre-school officers?

I dilly-dallied, and then I met my husband, so I changed my mind. I came down to Wellington to be Head Teacher at East ??? Kindergarten, which I did for about 3 months. This would be right up to 1957/58. I liked some of the things that were happening in Wellington. I felt I had the opportunity to do lots of reading there, and I hadn't been there very long when Joyce Barns rang and said we want a lecturer at the kindergarten college. I was about 25 or 26. There was no such thing as applying for the job. The college

committee came out and watched me work in the kindergarten and interviewed me. In 1958 I went into the Taranaki Street College to lecture, with no real background. I was going in to lecture in what they called 'principles and practices', and visit students out on their teaching experience. It was hard. I was not mature enough to be doing what was expected of me. I worked for Joyce Barns and Marjorie Connell. I can remember one student who walked out of classes for the whole first term. They had been attached to Mary Patrick. It was her job I was taking, and they weren't happy about having me at all. The conditions were appalling when I look back. We were in a very old building, and it was a terrible end of town then. But, I learnt a hell of a lot.

What was the training like? Was it different to how you had been trained?

The emphasis was far more on child development, and people like Marie Bell came into the College, and that was an inspiration. Joyce and Marjorie were just kindergarten teachers that had just moved into positions of responsibility, and they didn't have an academic background, like Marie. Finding Marie was one of the turning points in the training, then Gwen Somerset came in too, so we had some good people. It was quite inspiring. Marie and I still talk about it a lot. There were good things happened in that training.

What kind of things are you talking about?

The depth of the child development. There weren't a lot of students training, probably 25 each year, and we knew them all well. It had disadvantages, but also advantages in that you were able to develop each person. I still had that feeling from my primary school days, and you felt you were developing each person as an individual, more than you could possibly do now. I still think some of the people trained then were very good teachers, although some were pretty awful, but it was only a step in their lives.

Was this to do with the selection process?

I don't think many applied, and certainly no married woman or men applied at that stage. We had the first men in 1975. I think society saw it as a "nice job" for a young woman. That changed over that next 3 or 4 years. The College moved from Taranaki St to Tinakori Road, and I left in 1961 to have my first daughter.

You had got married during this time and carried on working?

Not for long though. Barry had a son of 8 and we wanted to fill the gap pretty quickly, and according to everybody I was getting very old, I mean I was 29! So we had Sarah and then I had Belinda a year later, and then Joe two years later.

I was so lucky, just before I was married, I had a party at the flat the night before, and the phone rang the next day and this voice said, "Miss Brooker we would like you to come and audition for 'kindergarten of the air'". I thought it was the guys from the party the night before, and this voice said, "I'm very serious Miss Brooker". I said there was no point in my coming because I can't sing a note in tune, and they wanted me to sing and write a script. He said to come anyway, so I went to this vast studio, and somebody played the piano and I sang Baa Baa Black Sheep and Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and read my script. Keith Hay said to me as we walked out "you're quite right Miss Brooker you can't sing a note in tune"! But they couldn't get anybody that would do the whole lot so they got Alice Martin to sing and play the piano and offered me the job. Well of course it was wonderful.

Was this a new thing for the radio?

No kindergarten on air had been going for 4 years. L?/ Jones had done it for 4 years, but it was only going one morning a week. We got on to two and then three and then five, which was an enormous undertaking.

And you were in charge of the script?

Yes, but they were overseen by ???/ who was overseen by another man, who used to be in the airforce, and he should have stayed there! It would have been much better, and so they did limit me a bit. I wasn't allowed to use long words. One of the instances was Miss Polly had a dolly on the programme and the Minister of Health rang the Minister of Broadcasting and said "get that off the radio smartly" because it mentioned the pill! It was restrictive, and I was nowhere near suited. I was young but I wanted the money. I had Sarah and Belinda while I did it. It was wonderful for a young family and a good income. I could write the scripts while they were asleep, rehearse them and record them at night, and it was just wonderful.

Did you have any view or have any message that you were trying, or a particular approach to learning on the radio?

We were there to educate. I had Beverley Morris on the advisory committee and of course that helped tremendously. She also encouraged me. The fan mail was a terrible burden, because that came from the sailors on the ship, saying can we have the jumping game once more! All sorts of people wrote to you. It was on the radio at 8.40 in the morning, and people were driving to work, and they would hear it. I went to a conference with my husband once and they asked me to do a session at breakfast in the Wairaki Hotel. Somebody leaned over to Barry and said, "do you know she is almost as good as the person who does it on the radio"! Because I used my maiden name, nobody really knew who it was.

Working and having children would have been seen as somewhat unusual. Did you find an unusual husband or were you an unusually assertive person?

No, I wasn't assertive at all. Barry was extremely supportive, absolutely marvelous. He'd had quite a high-powered job too. Barry was very encouraging, in fact, when I was first at home with the children, he insisted on having somebody in once a fortnight for four hours. Not to do any housework or anything, just to look after the children for me to go out and have a cup of coffee somewhere or go to a museum. We couldn't really afford it so he was very supportive.

So how did that dove-tail with the kindergarten college?

I had four years off. Joe was four before I went back to the college. In the meantime, I finished kindergarten on the air. They said they didn't want me any longer, which was quite a blow to one's ego, and they wouldn't let me say goodbye to the children. I can remember there was a terrible fight about that. Kate Harcourt came after me, who was far more drama school and had a better speaking voice. I was left with nothing to do. Well, I had 3 children under three, but nothing specific and I for a while I did a job with an advertising firm which I just hated every minute. They thought I'd like it because it was to do with a school and it was a jubilee of Queen Margarets - it was just awful. Then the Playcentre rang and said they were desperate, they had a child that needed one-to-one attention, so I slipped back into Playcentre when Jonathan was about 2. Of course once we got involved in Playcentre we became very involved. We lived in Khandallah on the road to the shops and the house was equipped for children and I really did run a playgroup. There were always children there. The day that Joyce Barns rang me to say would I come back to Kindergarten College, I'd had 23 uninvited people through the house, so I said yes - willingly. The playcentre filled that gap at the time, so I never really had more than 6 months when I wasn't involved in early childhood, I was lucky.

Any perception at that time in terms of philosophy between Kindergartens versus Playcentre?

I got very keen about Playcentre and began to frown upon kindergarten, but that was short lived.

What was it that swept you away, was it the parent involvement?

Yes, that kindergarten hadn't really managed to get parents involved to that extent, I thought that was good. I also liked the fact that the parents were all learning. However, I didn't really stick with Playcentre for long and I was back at the Kindergarten College lecturing.

What about the playcentre programme?

They were much more like the programme I had run at Point Chevalier years ago, where everybody just did what they felt like. I can remember being a little bit frustrated because I could never seem to do things that I wanted to like music. There never seemed to be any time for that somehow. I was not in charge at playcentre, and I think I would have done it slightly differently. It was not appropriate to have all the children doing something together for a period of time.

And that still would have been occurring in the kindergartens at time?

I still thought that was quite good to do but I've changed my mind since. At that stage I saw that as getting ready for school, which I wouldn't think of that way now.

I was lucky how it all happened, when Joyce rang and said would I do 8 hours a week, and that soon became 15. Then there was a fulltime job going and Barry said, "why don't you apply for it, you're doing that sort of time." Joe had started school by then, but I had to have very good backup services at home as I didn't have family in Wellington. It was important that there was always somebody having to go home to.

Was there a clash in ideology because kindergartens had mothers who usually stayed at home?

We were starting to move away from that idea. There were a lot of people who frowned on what I was doing and saw Barry as having a reasonably decent job and why did I have to work? It never entered their head that it might be for me that I was working. It was hard, particularly in a suburb like Khandallah. I made friends at that stage with an English Doctor who had come out, who later became Health Officer at Victoria University and has now become a psychiatrist. We are still very close friends, but I remember her saying when she first arrived in New Zealand, she had to explain why she only had one child because everybody had large families. Not long after she had 4 children and had to explain why she had 4 children. She said that she always seemed to run against the general pattern. I found that quite difficult, people's feeling towards me about working. Now of course it is quite different.

Just date that again for me in terms of when you went back to the College.

Sarah was born in 1961, Belinda was born in 1962 and Joe was born in 1964, so I went back about 1967. Things had really moved whilst I had been away. Gwen had had a great influence. Again, she was another person that influenced me strongly. She had had a great deal of influence on our training.

Had that been easy to get changes in the training?

Joyce Barn - she really is a remarkable woman. Very astute about people. She saw that the training needed something new at that stage. She had Jimmy Coe on the staff then, who later went into the Department, Joan Reed. She must be 76 I suppose now, and I'm 60, so there was quite a difference. I thought there was far more difference in our age than that! Nevertheless, there was never enough people with an academic background until Fay Pankhurst joined out staff. Things began to look up but unfortunately, she only stayed a short time left, and rejoined us when we came here to Karori. I then became very much involved and Marie Bell was fulltime on the staff by this stage. That was one of the big pluses. I learned a lot from her. We used to team teach quite a bit, so I was very lucky to have that background.

What was the key things you were trying to get across to the students?

Very much what we learn now but not as much about the community as we are doing now and not as much parent involvement or understanding of parent's needs. We certainly covered the child development as much as was known then. I think we had a good programme on child development. There was a lot of art, music and literature. There was speech training and a lot more emphasis on being nice. There wouldn't have been anything like human relations and conflict resolution - all those things have come in since. It was at that time we did the dramatic thing of bringing men into training. We tried to do it the year before, but the Department said no because we only had one set of toilets and they couldn't see their way around that. Like when my daughter wanted to be a builder, the man said, "she can't, we only have one toilet she would have to share it with the men"! "I said believe it or not she does at home too".

Let's just picture the late 1970's. What were kindergarten like then?

There was much more understanding of the individual child. We began to understand children better and their needs, and we were catering for individual children far more. We had imposed a tremendous amount on children before in the kindergartens, and suddenly we were beginning to realise that these children had individuality.

So it was OK to be different or say I don't feel like doing this?

Yes. Some teachers could cope with that, and some couldn't. We spent a lot of time in the kindergartens because we visited the students on teaching experience. They did half in the college and half in the kindergartens. We were also responsible for the staff; we were the senior teachers as such. The variance from the competent teacher to the less competent teacher was enormous, and some were still just there overseeing children. Others were doing wonderful things and really looking at children's needs and trying to cater for them. And parent's needs, which was an enormous task because they were still only 2 teachers and 40 children.

If you were thinking of the kindergarten at that period versus kindergartens now, what would be some of the differences that you would note?

I see kindergartens now as far more involved in the community. They should have been more involved in the community because there was much more community life in some ways. I also see them involved in a much wider range of children. The children that are now getting to kindergarten seem to be from a much broader spectrum than they were. That is quite a challenge. The other thing I see is the enormous amount of book work, administration they have to do, compared with the old days. I think that's getting to the stage of being almost an impossibility for some of them.

What about the programme?

There is not a great deal of difference.

So what you are saying, is that the substantive changes in the programme really happened through the late 1950s?

Yes, very definitely. There is not a great deal of difference between the ones at the end of our time at the 'Glen' and when we came up here to Karori. When we came up here things changed a little.

Tell me about the shift to the Teacher's College, what was behind it, what happened?

It was just told to us, it was most peculiar. We were running a very good programme and we had very good people with Margaret Rosemergy on our staff and Marie Bell. We had good people involved, and and we were suddenly told we were going to join primary. We got a letter in the mail which said your services are no longer required and from 31 January, but you may apply on the open market.

Had a deal been struck between the associations?

Yes , but we weren't involved in it. It was done without negotiation. Joyce Barns retired at that stage; she was very hurt by it. Marie was involved, because Marie was in the Department by then, so she would have a better background. We had what was called the Regional Council of Management that had the Principal of this College on it. He must have done a bit of manoeuvring. I think it was seen as the right thing to do educationally for training. I still think it was the best thing that happened. But the way in which it happened was terrible. When we came here some of us won jobs here and some didn't. It was absolutely awful.

What were they looking for in the new person they wanted at Teachers College?

I don't think they really knew what they were looking for because I don't think really knew what early childhood training was about. Fay interviewed us all. She had been appointed a senior lecturer here, she knew what she was doing. But some of the people they left out, were not good choices on their part. Val Burns came in at that stage. I had met Val previously because we had both had children together in the home at the same time. Val had been lecturing to Playcentre. It was a very sad end to the College. And of course, we came up here with some trepidation. Somebody said they thought we would never stop holding hands. There were 7 of us arrived. It wasn't easy the first three years.

Val and I, Joan Reed and Kathy Watson, about 7 of us came and started afresh. We had to negotiate nearly all the time, for everything. We had an autocratic Principle at that time, Alan Mackay, who didn't want anything to get out of his control. (I am quite a good friend of his) He even checked letters - to that extent. He wanted to be sure that he knew what was happening. He wouldn't let us go over to the Brown House which would have been the logical place for us to be because he wouldn't be able to keep us under his thumb so much. Once he went, we had John Pankhurst, which was a disastrous two years in many ways, but early childhood was far better recognised and even Margaret Malcolm recognised it more and Graham Oldershaw certainly does recognise it. We were left completely alone as far as our programme was concerned. Graham would never dream of interfering.

Are you saying that you had to renegotiate all your programme?

To a certain degree, but then we went into Departments. I went into Professional Studies and Val went into Social Studies. You had to negotiate within your own Department. Those first years were battles. A lot of the things I think they thought, "oh well that was a group of women who ran it that way, and now in the big wide world they will have to learn to do things properly."

So aspects of the programme must have become more aligned with primary?

Yes, in fact at one stage, we were far too much involved with primary. Funnily enough I was in hospital recently and I had a doctor who said, "you don't remember me, you helped me become a Primary Teacher", and she said "we were part of your programme." We did take in a group of Primary Teachers one year, and she said, "I learned far more from that than I learned as a Primary Teacher". We did integrate quite a bit and I taught a bit in the primary division on various aspects. It was hard to integrate. That's what they hoped originally that it would be more integrated. But then we slipped back when I became Head of Department, and we were definitely much more a stand-alone area.

When did that happen?

When Val went into Department of Education, about 1981. When we became more stand-alone, we had a really good relationship with the primary division and they had a real understanding of what we were doing. I think we have lost that again because of size and the majority of the primary staff now don't

understand what we are doing. They are nice to us but oh! it just makes you so angry sometimes. If they realised that if they understood what we're doing in early childhood, they would have an easier life afterwards in primary division.

For those first few years it was survival, and we just got on with it. Then Pam Cubey joined the staff and that was one of the best things that happened. All along there have been people that have come onto the staff that have really made differences. Pam was a good injection into the programme with a very good academic background and a very deep thinker. She was inspirational. That's when we started to get the students observing properly and doing the things that I now think are so important. That was a great time. When Helen Bernstone came, I said I wanted to leave, and Graham said well what about half time. I said I couldn't do that until I knew who got my job because it could be somebody that would find me threatening. Once I knew it was Helen, I was happy to stay on.

Did you ever envisage you would have a long-term career as a lecturer?

I would never ever have envisaged it. If I am honest, I should have got out 15 years ago and done something else, and I regret now that I didn't. But I still get absolutely fired up about early childhood and I still think it was one of the best things I did. I was very disappointed when neither of my daughters took it up. One has her own portable sawmill, she couldn't have gone any further from early childhood, and then at 24 my son decided to do early childhood training. It was quite exciting that he took it up, and even in this day and age he is absolutely convinced that is what he wants to do.

Did he go through this place?

Yes, the first year Helen was here he did the childcare course. He was very committed to early childhood. He has been in England for 3 years but is pleased to be back.

What about the time when I would have first met you, and when I was working at the University Creche, it seemed to me to be a time where there was starting to be some quite links across the services at the preschool group.

You see it is people, people every time. That group started as a result of a refresher course Marie Bell did at Palmerston Teachers College. I remember Russell Bernstone was there, it was a really inspirational group of people. They decided they would go on meeting, and this is where that started, and that went on for years. OMEP has taken that over. One of the greatest joys to me was to see that link with childcare, playcentre and kindergarten because the separation always seemed so awful. When I went to work in Playcentre people found out I was a Kindergarten Teacher and they said, "what are you doing here"? "Why are you here"? That was sad because each service is unique. We are lucky we have the choice, and they have all got tremendous things to offer. It has been one of the pluses to see that happening.

I really didn't get as involved politically as I wanted too. It's just that time always seems to be a problem. Originally Fay Cawkwell and I got involved with the KTA and set up branches around Auckland with Liz Tonks. That was quite a strong involvement and I saw the Union as a really important part of student's life and the teachers lives. It gave them a feeling of strength somewhere that they didn't every get from anything else. I'm not sure what will happen now we are in NZEI.

What about moving in through the 3 year training, kindergarten has fought for so long for that 3 years, how is your sense of how that happened?

I think it happened well. Graham and I were both on a committee and I remember Margaret Carr. My father died during that time, so I didn't get to quite as many meetings as I would like, but I can remember Graham saying "gosh, she's impressive"! And of course, nobody realised her original background in

geography. Margaret was able to come up with all these things about population, which stunned people. It was lovely. It was one of the first times I felt we were really involved and consulted. You couldn't help but watch the kindergarten people feeling pretty sore that 3-year training was going to be given to 'those childcare people' too. We are all early childhood people. Their behaviour seemed almost childish at times. But they came round; some of them that might have blocked the idea originally but in the end saw it as a very positive thing.

How did you find the integration of kindergarten and childcare at this place here?

Good. Really good. There are still people who think that kindergarten is superior, and they will for the rest of their lives, I don't think you'll ever change them. At AST [Advanced Studies for Teachers] courses you still get the kindergarten people on one side - but on the whole I think they respect each other now more than I thought they would, and I think that's a real positive too.

Is there anything that I have not asked you or anything you want to sum up?

No, I just think that early childhood has so much to offer, and I just think that the people involved now, like yourself, and Margaret, - there is a whole strong body out there that has made it what it is now. It is absolutely wonderful. Long may it last.

I was going to say that the other thing is that our students have become assertive. I like peer assertiveness, but I think that they are going to be great people as well as early childhood educators. I like the way they go out there and turn down jobs that won't pay enough. I feel quite astonished because we just took everything that came our way, we never even asked the salary. But I agree, they are now really making a stand.