

## Tributes to Mary Purdy, August 2022 from past Wellington ECE colleagues

In addition to the tributes below, messages of sadness and loss from: Lisa Terrreni, Carmen Dalli, Sarah Te One, Sophie Alcock, Liz Everiss, Maryann Corrigan

Maggie Haggerty

I first got to know Mary in 1987 when I joined the early childhood teaching team at Wellington Teachers College...at that time a team of two separate programmes — the kindergarten programme and the childcare programme — the kindergarten team: Mary, Pam Cubey, Marie Bassett and Ann Fisk, headed by Mary; the childcare team: Betty Armstrong, Helen Willberg, and I, headed by Betty. Thinking back to that particular year I am pretty sure Mary was the overall head, but it was hard to tell because Mary seemed to lead from the middle.

Getting to join that team was beyond lucky. I simply could **not** have had a better team of mentors, or as the very whanau-like team dynamics made me feel... a better bunch of tuakana ....older, wiser, more experienced sisters.

There was an amazing ethos in that team and much of it was down to Mary. The advice I got early on from Pam Cubey, advice also strongly endorsed by Betty Armstrong, was that if you wanted to know anything at all about what was going on at Teachers College, ask Mary. She was the knower of all things. There was a good reason for that. Mary was the ultimate people person. She *always* made time for people... had *enormous* empathy, took such *close* interest in you (and your family) and was *so* positive. And then there was that wonderful humour and the laugh that could often lift/ lighten/ provide relief from a tricky, 'unfun' situation. I could go on... Mary's, wairua, energy warmth, care; she was quite simply, a beautiful soul. Bob (Drummond), my husband, who was a student of hers, says she was "the heart of the college".

Many of us have come to know and hold dear the words from the whakataukī "He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata". What is the most important thing in the world. It is people, it is people, it is people. I think Mary was that whakataukī.

I've been remembering the huge impact that Mary has had on my career as a kindergarten teacher and teacher educator. I trained in 1979-80 when the ECE team included Mary, Val Burns (who was the Director for the kindergarten programme before her departure to the Department of Education in 1980), Pam Cubey (who started as a lecturer in 1979), Jo Kelly (art), Margaret Beard (maths and science) and Joan Reid (language and literature). Mary took over as Director after Val's departure in 1980.

A big part of the new student orientation at the College of Education was a camp (from memory of 2-3 days) a few weeks after our programme began. While I can't remember where the camp was held, I do remember it being enormous fun with lots of outdoors activities and freedom as we got to know each other and our lecturers. It was at that camp that Mary told me she had been at school with my aunt in Hamilton and regaled me with

stories of my grandfather, who I never met and who had been the Anglican bishop of Hamilton and responsible for the religious education of the girls at Hamilton Diocese School for Girls.

Sue Cherrington

Mary was a wonderful lecturer, taking our “learning through play” courses and organising all our teaching placements, a task requiring an enormous amount of organisation with very little administrative support and built upon the strong networks that she had and the mana with which she was held by the kindergarten sector. We were required to do five placements across the two years with the option of doing a sixth placement rather than selected studies at the end of the programme Mary was my visiting lecturer for that placement and was incredibly supportive, helping me to work through what was important for me in terms of my philosophy and my faith in the profession through the process.

After I graduated, I would often see Mary when she came to visit students in the kindergarten and, once I became an associate teacher, she would ring me to ask if I would take particular students who needed extra support on their placements. I was the Kindergarten Association’s senior teacher representative on the College of Education’s early childhood advisory committee and would see Mary at those meetings and during selection interviews. She wove together her commitment to early childhood teaching and her support for her students in a really powerful way, and was a tireless advocate for ECE during times when we were most definitely the poor relations in the education sector.

In 1992, I joined the ECE team at the Wellington College of Education – the year that we began teaching the third year of the new 3-year Diploma of Teaching (ECE) with a whole new set of courses to develop and teach. My memories of Mary during the time that we worked together at the College are of an amazing colleague who was always there to support others, who brought wisdom and humility to her work, and who actively encouraged others – both colleagues and students – to strive to achieve their aspirations. During these years, Mary had stepped away from the positional leadership roles but she continued to be a leader, standing with and leading from behind.

I can’t remember which year Mary retired from the College but she certainly didn’t retire from ECE – she would regularly relieve in ECE centres in the Wellington region and was very sought after, often by teachers that she had trained. She would frequently relieve at First Five in Porirua and I would see her there when dropping off or collecting my son, Michael, during the late 1990’s. She had a very calm and grounding manner with the children (and the teachers) and children loved her willingness to read story after story after story.

Mary truly was an inspirational ECE colleague and leader who has had an enormous influence on my career in ECE.

Tricia Thompson

Mary was a strong and caring role model for me. She strongly supported me when I applied for my first job at Te Whanau o Akopai ki te Upoko o te Ika. Her tautoko continued when I applied for HoD of Tuhonohono Tangata, Social and Cultural Education.

Mary's leadership in Early Childhood Education was forthright and staunch. I learnt so much from her about the significance of early learning education programmes. She participated passionately in our trade union discussions and negotiations to achieve fair working conditions for all staff.

Helen Bernstone

I just cannot envisage Mary as 99 years old.

I only know her as always being young.

I hadn't realised that she was 20 years older than me.

I always thought us a similar age.

I know Mary as sprightly, energetic, so very helpful when I first encountered tertiary education.

I was always in awe of Mary as Mary was a radio personality, this to me being something special and looking back she was spreading the 'rights of children' through her expression of positive interactions parents could have with their children.

Along with Betty Armstrong they supported my passion for ECE that has given me a forever lifetime advocacy focus.

Mary is a strong image of a woman with a passion for ECE, and this I carry and have carried with me over the last 40 years.

Lynne Bruce

#### My memories of Mary.

I got to know Mary when I moved to Wellington in early-mid 70's having just been elected on to the national executive of NZFKTA – an organisation that Mary was very supportive of.

I was teaching at Lyall Bay Kindergarten and applied to become as Associate Teacher. Mary (like with Sue) visited often and sent me students that she wanted to have a "second opinion on" or ones that needed extra support.

She was such a strong support of the kindergarten training moving into Teachers College and then later becoming a 3 year course and then a degree. Mary knew and understood that if kindergarten teachers (and all ECE teachers) were to be recognised as professionals alongside their colleagues in other sectors, then those developments needed to happen.

Later I was lucky enough to work with Mary; firstly in the one-year ECE course that moved into Teachers College, then the 3 year teacher education course. Mary was a strong supporter of "learning through play" underpinned by clear and relevant research and theory. She was very supportive of all her colleagues and I remember her advocacy for students who needed that extra

support to achieve their potential (and she was also right about them). Her contributions were thoughtful, clear and you could see her past (and worthy) experiences that contributed to them.

She was active in many groups and organisations outside College like the Wellington Preschool group who met at weekend. Mary saw these networks as essential to advocate for ECE and future policies. I remember Trevor Mallard talking about the impact that Mary (along with Faye Pankhurst) had on his thinking (and later support) of ECE.

Mary really cared about her work and those around her and we had many 'social' events that kept the team(s) working effectively together. She was always cheerful and had a warm sense of humour. Mary will be sadly missed and I am sorry not to be able to be with you all from ECE and her family on Tuesday. Please pass on my deepest sympathy and my thoughts will be with you all.