

At the 1979 Reunion there was one graduate who remembers a great deal about the Wellington Kindergarten scene. Mrs Marjorie Connell of York Bay, Eastbourne, was a 1925 graduate. Here are some of her interesting recollections, spanning more than fifty years of kindergarten work in Wellington...

I had always wanted to teach - my mother was a teacher, and it's been a tradition in the family to teach. My sister went to Teachers' College and I went to Kindergarten - in 1924, when I was 16. We went to Taranaki Street, my mother and I, and sat at a table with the children. Miss Ronayne was the director and Jessie Corkhill the student. Upstairs the Principal, Miss Riley, was lecturing to students; but later we had a chat with her and she accepted me as a student.

On my first day I went to Brooklyn to the Methodist Hall, where Lorna Woolf (Mrs McCaw) was Director. My first assignment was to take a small group of children for a walk and talk to them: I was as tongue-tied as they were ... and that's how I started to learn to teach.

The Brooklyn hall was big, rattly and cold, and we worked very hard because everything had to be lifted out from a trapdoor each day - big heavy tables, chairs, mats, boxes of blocks - the lot. There were three circles painted on the floor, one within the other, in the Froebel manner of doing things always in a circle - emphasising the importance of the family circle. First thing each morning we all sat round on little chairs in the biggest circle and had "morning news". Then we divided up into the "tops", "middles" and "tinies", and went off to do handwork.

We had Froebel blocks - beautiful little boxes with sliding lids. Each child sat on a chair with his box in front of him on the table, and when it was time to start each one turned his box upside-down and slid off its lid, then lifted the box, and there was a little group of blocks, some cubes and some rectangular ones. The children built what they liked, once the blocks were out of the boxes. Then, when it was time to finish, each child saw that his blocks were arranged properly on the lid once more before slipping the box over the top. It was very regimented. And we had little boards for clay: again the children all waited to start together - they all started modelling and potting at the same time ... it sounds ridiculous now.

We had a formal "lunch" with rusks - nothing to drink. Tables were set with embroidered cloths, flowers, and a small mat to put saucer and rusk on. Small "housekeepers" with special aprons handed round the rusks. "Grace" was said before we ate. Then play outside in a little yard at the back. Inside again, we had music and songs. Students all had to play the piano, and the children were all expected to gallop or trot, skip or hop. Usually the "tops" used the outer circle, the "middles" used their circle, and the "tinies" the inside circle. We had many formal games such as "Lavender's Blue", in which all were expected to join.

We worked in the Kindergarten each morning, and four afternoons a week we went to Taranaki Street for lectures - mostly from Miss Riley. Friday afternoon was free. Miss Riley also came to see us at work - no student supervisors in those days. We wore uniforms, a plain colour and rather severe, with a tie as part of the uniform.

We had six months at one kindergarten, then six months at a different one. My second six months was with Ailsa Newton at Newtown, in another terrible old hall. I remember Bell's Pastry Shop provided us with stale loaves, and once a week we cut them into rusks and they baked them for us. Cleaning occupied a lot of our time, as the tables were scrubbed every day. We had no assistants - just the Director and the students then. I don't recall any waiting-lists for children to attend kindergarten. The contribution for each child was threepence per week, but this was voluntary, as it is now. We didn't see much of the mothers - I don't think there were any Mothers' Clubs at that stage - certainly students had no part

One of my pupils at Ngaio was Loma Jones, who later started Kindergarten of the Air in New Zealand. She was backed by Miss Wilson who had had experience of this in Perth, and it was through Miss Wilson's help and pressure that Kindergarten of the Air started here.

There was only morning kindergarten in those days, so I went on with teaching ballet and ballroom dancing in Ngaio, and with money earned from this I was able to go to Australia to observe kindergartens there in the 1930's. I also went to Fiji. I would never have managed those trips on kindergarten pay!

After five years or so I then moved to Brooklyn Kindergarten - back to the old hall where I'd been a student. For the first time I had students to train: Peggy Jennings (Gibbons), Kathleen Farquhar (Jack), and Sylvia Parr. About two years later the Council decided to close the kindergarten because of lack of parental interest and support. I spent the next few months making a survey of the Johnsonville area with the idea of starting a Free Kindergarten there.

Miss Enid Wilson had come from Perth. She had had a sound education and was very well read, a literary person. Her father was an M.P. Her sister was a trained ballet teacher in Perth. Enid broadened the syllabus so that there would be more qualified people on the visiting lecturing staff. Professor Hunter was one tutor, another was Professor Shelley. All the directors were expected to attend WEA lectures on psychology - the new Education Fellowship came to New Zealand and we attended a week of lectures; thus our brains were being stimulated. All these lectures were held in our own time. Jack Shallcrass came a bit later, and John McCready - and the Association for the Study of Pre-school Education started - members were nearly all professors or professors' wives. Mrs Somerset had a lot to do with this group, and of course Play Centres loomed up about this time, too - it was the burgeoning of the pre-schools.

Miss Wilson was keen on eurythmics, and the Dalcroze method was very popular. Someone from overseas conducted classes for staff and students, at Taranaki Street. At this time Isadora Duncan was very much in the news, and her ideas of free movement were an extension of Dalcroze.

Miss Wilson brought in many ideas and innovations. Directors were now expected to write reports and attend Local Committee meetings. I think she might have started the Mothers' Clubs, which were to be social and educational. The Local Committee was responsible for fund-raising, and paying day-to-day expenses, for cleaning, materials for children, repairs etc. The Mothers' Clubs proved very good for mothers who were lonely. Miss Wilson had suggested a United Mothers' Club, and Talent Evenings - during her time as Principal there was an active Mothers' Club in every area.

In the mid-forties, Ted Scott went to America - the first person in the kindergarten world to win a bursary to go overseas - the Carnegie Education Fellowship. Enid Wilson joined her, and together they visited pre-school establishments. That was a tremendous thing - it really opened up the training, as Ted came back with many new ideas and Enid went along with her. As a result the general programme started to change after their return from America - it loosened up, and our formal ways of doing things were gradually swept under the carpet.

There was the influence of Ted Scott's American visit - and there was Moira Gallagher suggesting broadening of the programme, with less rigidity. (Miss Gallagher was appointed in 1948 as the first Government Pre-school Adviser.) Much more definite rules and regulations were brought in - how many kindergartens there should be; how many children on the roll. From then on there was afternoon kindergarten as well as mornings, so really the whole structure changed. Also, there was the influence of Chris Christison from England. Three people were encouraging changes in the programme to a much freer way of conducting kindergartens.

I had one period at Taranaki Street with Ted Scott and Miss Ronayne. The Health Nurse came in twice a week - there was impetigo, and some children's heads were not clean. It wasn't until Plunket ideas became better known that the children at Taranaki Street began to be clean. We would visit homes to find out why children weren't attending - usually they were sick - and we were warned not to go through Haining Street alone - mostly elderly Chinese men were seen, and we knew they smoked opium and played pakapoo.

Ted Scott was very well liked, and loved, by the local people, and the mothers now played a much greater part at Taranaki Street. They had card evenings to raise money, as in that area some of the children could not pay - that didn't matter.

The children did a lot of sitting on mats. Each group would sit on the mat while waiting to go to the toilet ... whether they wanted to or not, that was the time to go! They washed their hands, and had individual towels. If any child was particularly dirty, the student would give him a bath or a wash.

In another part of Taranaki Street there was a separate group of children of primary school age. Miss Morris had a primary class where selected children were taught to read and write. So the students were trained to teach children up to Standard 1. Parents thought it was "something" to go to Miss Morris's class.

I should explain here about the Council. When kindergartens started (this history is recorded in the first Minute Book) it was decided by a group of women - Miss Richmond was one of the leading ones - that a kindergarten should be opened to take the children off the streets. In the poorer areas of Taranaki and Tory Streets they had nowhere else to play. Wives of prominent men in the city were invited to be members of the Council - doctors' wives and so on. They had to raise a lot of money, through card parties, garden parties, and in many different ways. There were no grants of other funds available. This went on for years and years - kindergartens were always short of money. These well educated, philanthropic women, many leaders in society, played a big part in the management of the Council - seeing that the children were well provided for and the students properly trained. The Council really decided who would be employed and who wouldn't. There was a small Education Committee that concentrated on the education side: they were a powerful group, too, and any changes in students' training had to be approved by them. Members of the committee visited kindergartens to see if they were being run properly and students progressing favourably. They were looked upon with awe by everybody, because of their they had a strong position in recommending whether or not a student would pass. Mrs Gibbons was President of the Council: earlier on there was a Mrs Davidson...Mrs Britton-Smith...Mrs Smith whose husband was a judge of the Maori Land Court ... a few names I remember.

When I graduated there were no jobs, so I went to help Constance Huggins at a private kindergarten in Lyall Bay. There was no pay, and as I had little money of my own I started to teach ballet to a few pupils. I was also learning ballet myself, so it was a busy year but a happy one. My father then financed me into a kindergarten in the Anglican Church hall on Box Hill, Khandallah. I used the Sunday School chairs but had my own tables, and gradually collected equipment. I was there for about 2½ years. By this time Miss Riley had left and Miss Wilson had been appointed to be the new Principal of the Kindergarten Association in Wellington. She suggested that I move to the Ngaio Kindergarten that was opening - so I ran that for five years, in the Anglican Church hall. I had several different assistants - Molly Logan, Olga Gilberd (Russell), Marguerite Thompson, Marie Strangemuir (Palmer).

To go back a bit ... in 1939 I was married. This was Wellington Exhibition time, so I manned the model kindergarten there - it was equipped, but there were no children. I answered questions and demonstrated equipment. I was then having a baby, so had a period at home. Later, when I had two children, I was asked by Miss England to teach at Woburn. (Miss England was an English gentlewoman who came out and taught in New Zealand private schools. When older she joined the Education Committee, the select body of people of high educational qualities who advised on the syllabus for students and saw that children were receiving the right kind of teaching. Different well-known educationalists were invited to sit on this Committee.)

A Woburn mother would come to mind my children while I drove to Woburn and ran that kindergarten in order to help them over a difficult period. It was an old house, near the main road and with no fence - no toilets, either (we had potties and buckets, and a father would dig a pit in the garden for disposal!) Conditions like that would never have been allowed later. Sir Walter Nash always took a fatherly interest in the Woburn Kindergarten, and came to the Christmas parties.

Then I had another spell at home, and another baby. For several years I stayed at home, and I had three children and a step-son when I was again approached to return to Woburn. At this stage my neighbour's daughter came to work for me - she lived just through the fence. So back to work I went, taking the 3-year-old with me. Later I ran a private kindergarten in the Horticultural Hall in Lower Hutt; then moved to Petone Kindergarten, first as an assistant for a year under Daphne Wansborough (Mason).

Petone proved to be extremely interesting and challenging - a changing population, different nationalities, lots of hardship, people out of jobs, alcoholism, desertion, and so on - and I had many unusual experiences. There was a good Mothers' Club, a good Local Committee, good voluntary helpers, and some good students - Robin Clere (Gilchrist), Joy Nairn, Sylvia Swan, Mary Patrick (who had her 21st birthday with us). At times we had some extremely deprived children at Petone - problems touched us, and we became very involved. Petone had one of the leading Mothers' Club groups for Talent Evenings; they entertained locally, and even travelled to the Wairarapa to perform.

By this time, Mirium Baucke was the Principal of the College and Joyce Morgan was Music Lecturer: they worked closely together. I had known Mirium since school days - we sat side by side at Technical School, and she had trained in Wellington. She was a visionary who wrote poetry, loved literature, children's stories and so on. When Mirium retired, Joyce Barns (who was running the Nursery School at Taranaki Street) was invited to apply for Principal and I was invited to apply for Assistant Principal, and Mary Patrick was appointed Student Supervisor. All three positions had become vacant at the same time, so at the beginning of 1958 we all started in new jobs. We had a new Secretary, too, as only a short while before Miss Coulter had died suddenly. So it was a difficult time, but we had the log book and records to go by.

My duties consisted of supervising students and lecturing on Principles and Practice, History of Education, Children's Literature, Natural Science also I was responsible for some administrative work. Though it was hard work, I enjoyed working with the students. Feeling I had almost outgrown teaching small children, I was ready to work with older people. Now I had different problems entirely - the students provided a real challenge. They themselves were still growing and learning, and it was interesting to watch them develop, widen their horizons, also to see how they coped in the kindergartens as some had to learn how to communicate with children. We had some outside lecturers: Mr Stroobant lectured in English, Mrs Coe in Art (later she became a staff member), Betty Odell in Education, Nancy Martin in Music. Every Thursday we all went to Training College, which was a valuable experience. For sixpence we could be part of the audience to hear a visiting educationalist, or enjoy a musical or drama experience. Also our students could join the clubs. Walter Scott was Head of the Teachers' College, and also a member of the Kindergarten Education

During this time we moved from Taranaki Street to Tinakori Road. This was a great migration, and rather sad, as so much had happened at Taranaki Street. Free Kindergartens had actually started there, so it was a big step to leave. It took a long time to find a suitable building, but finally we settled into No.112 Tinakori Road. This building was bought by the Education Department, so now it ceased to belong to the Kindergarten Union. It was a nice old home with gracious stairway and big rooms. Some alterations were done to provide a music room, library, art room, lecture room, and common room. Everything was clean and fresh, and also there was a garden which we all enjoyed. There were several different Student Supervisors after Mary left to do the same job in Auckland. One was Mary Brooker (Purdy) - she took over Kindergarten of the Air from Loma Jones when Loma retired. Others were Jocelyn Gardiner (Hill) and Barbara Guilder (Gordon).

After retiring from being full-time Assistant Principal, I continued to lecture in Natural Science. About the same time Marie Bell had started Maturanga School and she asked me to teach Natural Science there, which I did. It was interesting to see that school develop, and I stayed at these two part-time jobs for some years.

In 1969, after I had retired, I went to Canada to my son's wedding and this led to many different pre-school experiences. I visited a pre-school centre in a very interesting complex called Good Neighbourhood - quite a large building, which had a creche, a kindergarten, adventure playground, a room for children to go and do homework, a room for social activities, an area for elderly people, and so on, with a Director in charge. It was financed by people like the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, etc.

In Canada I also saw a Montessori School. This was pretty formal - I was invited to sit down and watch but not talk to the children, which surprised me. Here, as in many other similar places, the children were watched carefully at all times in case of kidnapping.

Through people I met in Canada, I attended the Annual Meeting of OMEP (Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire), and the following year I attended the World Congress of EMEP in Bonn - this was an enormous congress of 1,400, with only 2 New Zealanders present. After Bonn, a week's study course on various subjects was offered: I chose Children's Recreation and Community Work - in Hamburg. Here I observed some Adventure Playgrounds - during the holidays there were all-day occupations in parks for children - there was a pavilion where they could have lunch and a rest. There were "park aunties" - people who came to supervise children so that they were not molested - the mothers could leave them in safety.

In London I visited Lady Allen's Adventure Playground - a great privilege. There was some amazing equipment for handicapped children to use: overhead ropes or rails, with a trolley hanging from the ropes. A handicapped child could push the trolley along, and this would help his walking. Children came here by bus, and the bus drivers helped to supervise. There was a beautiful water complex, bouncing down in various stages to a pond where children played. There was lots of activity, but the children needed plenty of help. There were tree houses, trees to climb - all very well used, and very functional. I was thrilled to be there, and I met Lady Allen - she had persuaded church officials to lend her part of a presbytery garden for the playground.

In Japan I visited a private kindergarten of 400 children, all in uniforms - such crowded conditions. I also visited a Government kindergarten on the island of Lombok, in Indonesia. There were many children, but very little equipment, which had been provided by the International Red Cross. I went to a private kindergarten there also.

Some of the people I met in Germany had read our Playcentre publications, pamphlets and booklets by Mrs Somerset. They were popular throughout the world. Lex Grey helped with these too. Mrs Somerset and her husband started the first community playcentre in Feilding just before the war. 1939/40. And because of their experience in that first centre,

they had the experience to advise in the foundation of the training programme for Playcentre. It was a very advanced educational concept - possibly New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to start playcentres, which have now grown everywhere - not only in New Zealand.

During the war years there were many mothers who had nobody to help them - their husbands were away overseas, or in camp. So they got together in groups and said "Let's form an association so that we can share the responsibility of our children." Children became happily involved in play groups, enabling their mothers to go to the dentist or go shopping, or read a book, or just relax. The idea spread like wildfire, as these mothers were really disadvantaged and many of them were very lonely.

I am very much in favour of Playcentres, as I am in favour of Kindergartens. My sister, Dorothy Ward, was involved in Playcentres from their inception. I found in Playcentre a great deal that was of value to kindergarten teachers and lecturers. Many Playcentre mothers were very well educated, many were graduates, and they were prepared to advise and help and share their knowledge. Playcentre used to run seminars and workshops, inviting important educationalists. It was from one of these that I first learned about group dynamics and role playing, and this proved very useful to me in my work with students. It is used a great deal these days, but it was new then.

I believe that it doesn't really matter whether a child goes to a Play Group, Playcentre or Kindergarten, provided the person in charge is running it properly and the children are happy. Basically they all have the same ideals...community play...children learning to communicate and play with others, within a learning situation. The most important thing is that the supervisor or teacher is skilled enough to provide what the children need at that particular time - I call it "the teachable moment". Without any direction children can become rather aimless - they need a certain amount of help in co-ordinating their ideas. This is something that teachers have to learn ... it's a skill to know who needs help, and when.

I think I should finish by saying I still consider that in our kindergartens there are far too many children for the teacher to do the type of work expected of her. In New Zealand the number of children per trained teacher (a ratio of up to 20 to 1) is far too high. It is almost impossible ... one can't give personal attention on a one-to-one basis, as well as supervise so many other children, all involved in active play. Voluntary helpers and mother helpers are valuable, but the load on the trained teacher is very heavy.

My own involvement with small children continues through having two grandchildren living next-door. I enjoy their company and take a lively interest in their development.

Marjorie Connell

York Bay, Eastbourne.  
November 1979.

# Pillar among teachers

*Marjorie Connell, kindergarten worker: b 1907, m (1939) Jock Connell 3 chn; 1958 asst principal Wgtn Free Kindergarten Training Centre (retd 1962); d Carterton, December 30, 1995.*

The death of Marjorie Connell brought to an end an association with kindergarten work which spanned more than 50 years.

In 1924 when she was 16, Marjorie Seed, as she then was, began to train for kindergarten work.

Since 1910 kindergarten students had been trained in three rented rooms over a shop at the corner of Taranaki and Frederick streets. By the time Marjorie Seed embarked on her life's work, the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association had bought and converted a factory at 196 Taranaki Street. This remained the training centre until 1962.

Students spent their mornings in one of the handful of Wellington free kindergartens, housed according to Marjorie "in terrible old halls". In the afternoons they attended lectures upstairs in the training centre.

A demonstration kindergarten was on the ground floor and the centre also ran a demonstration class for a small number of five-year-olds. The students learned methods of teaching in the infant school, skills which became more valuable when primary schools were closed to five-year-olds in the early 1930s.

Marjorie Connell looked back on her training with pleasure. A 1925 graduation photograph shows her in a group of 13 students all in white dresses. Marjorie looks very small and very eager.

There were no vacant positions in free kindergartens in Wellington when she graduated



**Marjorie Connell - followed the careers of children she taught.**

and she worked without pay in a private kindergarten in Island Bay. In return, she was offered the use of the hall rent free in the afternoons so she could teach ballet. Marjorie was a pupil of the well-known Jo Knowsley School of Dance and continued taking lessons herself, as well as teaching dancing, for a number of years.

The Seed family lived in Khandallah, and in the 1920s the effort of getting to Island Bay and back every day was considerable. Marjorie's father financed her into her own private kindergarten in the Anglican Church schoolroom on Boxhill not far from her home. She ran this for two and a half years and even towards the end of her life remembered the children she had taught, and had followed their careers.

Then a free kindergarten was opened in Ngaio and she was invited to be its director. She took with her all the equipment she had accumulated. Kindergartens operated only in the mornings and she continued to teach both ballet and ballroom dancing.

With her earnings, she went to Australia to observe kindergartens. After five years at Ngaio she went on to be director at Brooklyn where, in addition to the children, she had students to train.

For Marjorie, 1939 was an important year. She married Jock Connell, a widower with a son called Paul. Marjorie was very fond of Paul and was devastated when he died of a heart attack when swimming with his children. At the time of the 1940 Centennial Exhibition at Rongotai Marjorie was in charge of the model kindergarten there.

In the 1940s she had a period at home raising two children. By this time she was living at Korokoro.

At the suggestion of Miss Maud England, a Wellington identity associated with the kindergarten movement, she went to work at Woburn kindergarten. With the arrival of her third child Marjorie stayed home again, but when her youngest was three back she went to work teaching first in a private kindergarten in the Hutt and then at the Petone free kindergarten.

At the beginning of 1958 Marjorie was appointed assistant principal of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Training Centre.

In 1962 this moved from Taranaki Street to a gracious building at 196 Tinakori Road. Free kindergartens had long moved away from their original purpose of rescuing poor children from the inner city and had spread to the more affluent suburbs.

Kindergarten teaching was also changing. The New Zealand Free Kindergarten Teachers' Association began in 1952 as a kind of "club for girls" and in 1958 was recognised as a ser-

vice organisation entitled to negotiate salaries and conditions.

Quite unintentionally, Marjorie contributed to the professionalism of this organisation. In 1961 her employers told her she would be expected to retire in 1962 when she would be 55. Kindergarten teachers in Wellington liked Marjorie and did not wish to see her forced to retire - but more importantly realised that like her they had no job security or formal conditions of service. The controversy which surrounded this greatly strengthened the Kindergarten Teachers' Association.

Marjorie retired as assistant principal at the end of 1962 and continued to work part-time at the college, lecturing in natural science to kindergarten students and to children at Matauranga, a progressive school headed by Marie Bell.

In the 1960s she and Jock had built a house on the side of a cliff in York Bay. Access was by means of a rather terrifying miniature cable car. Marjorie used it with great confidence. Guests often scrambled up through undergrowth to avoid it.

Her husband died in 1969. Her eyesight gradually failed but she devised ways to continue to write her family history. Her daughter and one of her sons lived nearby and she was able to continue looking after herself into her later years.

She was a member of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Graduates Association and when she died at 89 was its oldest graduate. A gentle woman with plenty of resolve, she had no trouble adapting to the many changes in kindergarten teaching. She was liked and respected by children, parents, students and colleagues. - by **Geraldine McDonald**