

Anne Vette

My name is Anne Tracey Vette (nee Slavin) and this story covers what I remember of the early days of Kindergarten teaching in Auckland. In essence the story should be quite similar to that of most other Kindergarten Teachers but, of course, is made individual to me by my own particular experiences

It begins after I left Epsom Girls Grammar School in December 1954. I had always enjoyed working with children and had worked with the Sunday School at St. Aidan's Church in Ascot Avenue where two women, Miss Brownhill and Miss Boyd, had asked me to help. I had also helped with young children of family friends and neighbours.

To be selected for an interview applicants had to provide two character references and produce school reports. I obtained one reference from Rev. Austin Charles, the Vicar of St. Aidans and the other, along with school reports, from Epsom Grammar. I attended the interview after school one day in my school uniform and, accompanied by my mother, went by tram from Epsom to Queen St. Fortunately I was accepted and began training in 1954.

There were two groups in training – 1st Year Juniors and 2nd Year Seniors. Seniors would have been out on section – practical training in a Kindergarten.

My first (section) practical was at Constance Colgrove Kindergarten in Remuera with Eleanor Mathieson as the Teacher and Miss Jessie Roberts as the Director (Head Teachers were called Directors in those days). We had 6 weeks at Myers Training Centre and 6 weeks on Section.

I had always ridden my bicycle to Grammar along Remuera Rd. so while on Section I rode to as many Kindergartens as possible. In fact this was how I traveled to and from "Constance Colegrove". I can remember Miss Colgrove and her sister visiting the Kindergarten on several occasions and I believe the Kindergarten was officially opened while I was there in 1954.

After 6 weeks at this Remuera Kindergarten I went back into Training Centre with the other students of my year for a further 6 weeks of lectures. We started lectures at 8:30 am with a morning tea break at 10:30am then on till 12:30 with lunch break until 1:30. Lunch was usually made at home (in my case by my Mother!) and consisted of a sandwich of salad with meat or a spread, some homemade cake or biscuit and some fruit. I remember my Mother had bought (maybe at the Grocer in Newmarket called "Hutchinsons") some very dark brown Rye bread, thin sliced, but of a dense consistency. It was very different to what we had previously seen in NZ and caused a lot of interest at lunch time. NZ was seeing different types of food now as European families had been migrating to this country and bringing these new food delights with them. I think this was a little before the Klisser family had brought the Reizenstein Bread recipe to be made in NZ. I had the pleasure of teaching the Klisser children at Howick Kindergarten about 1965.

At our lunch break we would sometimes go with friends from the Training Centre by tram (or walk if time allowed) to the shops in Queen St. to look at books in "Whitcombe and Tombs" (now "Whitcoulls") or to look at the new fashions in "Milne and Choyce" (no longer in business), or buy stockings or gloves at "Strevens" on the corner of Vulcan Lane. Pantyhose had not yet been seen in NZ. Gloves were still worn as a fashion item and a colleague told me she could remember wearing summer gloves to her interview to become a Kindergarten Teacher. I do remember wearing gloves when in the City - sometimes a hat as well - although not while a student, and I certainly wore gloves in the Winter as some Kindergartens, especially in halls like Selwyn, were very cold. I remember us having only two 2-bar heaters there and suffering from chilblains. The children often wore their coats while inside. Coffee bars were not yet to be seen in Queen St.. You could have lunch in the Tea-room at Milnes or at "The Farmers" in Hobson St, but I don't ever remember venturing up there while in training, There were some Milk Bars in the City and milkshakes were very popular. I remember "Wicks" milk bar and "Curries". (Guys on motorbikes congregating there were called "Curry Cowboys")

If we were lucky we might see a Fashion Parade at Milnes or catch the new seasons bathing suits on display. I loved swimming and had competed a lot at Grammar, so sometimes after work would swim at the "Tepid Pools" downtown or at the Panell Pools in Summer.

I travelled to training on the tram along Remuera Rd to Newmarket where I changed to a tram which travelled up Khyber Pass along Symonds St into Karangahape Rd and into Queen St where we alighted at Myers Park. I seem to remember it took about 30 minutes total in the tram, much the same as a bus trip today!

During our training course we were paid £12 per month, from memory, and a boarding allowance in addition if you came from the country. The course included Child Psychology and Educational Methods, History of pre-school Education, Hygiene and Nutrition, Nature Study, Handwork, Woodwork, Puzzle and Toy Making, and a study of Art, Music, Drama and Speech. We worked each day until 4pm.

Most days I think we would go home to wherever home was. Some students boarded or stayed at YWCA or a similar place, called 'The Girls Friendly Society', which may have been a Lodge. A very good friend of mine from Hamilton stayed there and told me how they often would laugh when patrons from a nearby Hotel would call through a low window at the lounge and ask "any friendly girls in there?" This would have been at the time of 6 o'clock closing of Hotels so the patrons would be feeling somewhat merry!

Over the following two years my training included a section at Selwyn Kindergarten in St Andrews Church Hall, St Andrews Rd, Epsom and is now on a new site, renamed Lady Cobham Kindergarten. I also went to Ponsonby Kindergarten where the children stayed for lunch and a cook was employed to

attend to meals. (I remember well helping to butter great piles of bread before lunch).

Then in 1955 I went to Campbell Kindergarten in Victoria Park. Later, a new building was built in Tahuna St and known as Logan Campbell - it is now Freemans Bay Kindergarten.

Next I went to Mt Roskill Kindergarten at the Mt Roskill Shopping Centre and lastly Haeata Kindergarten (now called Sandringham Kindergarten). While out on section we had assignments to complete, plus Music groups where we were expected to play an instrument (I played Piano but others played Guitar or Recorder). We also had to teach songs and dance, or circle games such as "Pigeon House", "The Farmer in the Dell", "Ring-a-Rosie", "Pidgeon House" "There was a Princess Long ago", "Who stole the Honey from the Jar" and the well known, "I wrote a letter to my love and on the way I lost it. One of you has picked it up and put it in your Pocket".

Story-telling (as distinct from Story Reading) was required to be taken in small groups during the day while being observed by your Head Teacher. Comments were written up for your report which would go back to your lecturers at Training Centre. The children's Art work was collected and compiled - pictures were collected, backed onto coloured cardboard and put into Categories, e.g. Travel, Animals (Wild, Zoo, Pets), Other Countries, Other Nations Cultures and People, Science, Weather, Construction Machinery, Buildings etc. These were used for Picture Talks, a great way of learning, and then could be extended into play and were also a way of encouraging children's language by engaging them in conversation about the picture we were talking about.

At the time of my training there were always two committees that seemed to be responsible for the running of the Kindergarten, financially and socially. The Parents Committee was for the financial side where the Director or Head Teacher was required to write a report on the events of the month and her needs for the children, then present it to the meeting. Then there was a Mothers Club which covered the social side, (Remember, mothers didn't work outside the home much in those times). They always brought a plate of food to share at afternoon teatime - sandwiches, or home baked cakes, biscuits or slices, and sometimes, perhaps a bacon and egg pie. These were great times for parents to meet one another and some made firm friendships. It was a time to encourage new members onto committees too.

I remember clearly at Logan Campbell Kindergarten, (it is now known as Freemans Bay Kindergarten in Tahuna St. and was a very new building when I subsequently went there as a young teacher), there was a purpose-built Committee Room where monthly meetings were held. Some well-dressed women, wives of successful business men from the City, would arrive in popular cars of the day to hold meetings to support the financial side of "Logan Campbell" (which was then in a very poor part of Auckland).

My very close friend Mrs Rose Hanak, who had settled here from Czechoslovakia much earlier, was Head Teacher there and I remember her helping with families. She would buy pyjamas for 4 to 5 year olds but buy them to fit 10 year olds because one pair would do for two children - the bottoms would come up to the boys' armpits and the tops come down to the girls' ankles. Rose Hanak worked tirelessly for "her" children and was awarded a Q.S.M in the New Year Honours List (about 1970) for her many years of dedication. At the time of writing this Rose, who is now in her 90s and has been living for many years in her home in Glanville Tce, Parnell, has very recently moved into a Retirement Home with 24 hour care.

At the end of our training at Myers, 26 student teachers graduated and went out to our new positions. As I remember there was a shortage of trained staff then and 3 of us were asked to go as Head Teachers! Since we had only had 2 years training I remember the Centre saying they would support us in this role, and I am sure they did. I went to Meadowbank Hall in Meadowbank Rd. where some children came by taxi across from Glenn Innes and Glendowie (6 to a car and no seatbelts)! They were very different times - once a week we pinned donation envelopes onto their clothes at the back and next week a donation of between 5 to 10 shillings would come back and be posted into a donation box. On a Friday afternoon the staff would open and record the child's donation in a Donation Book. Then the money would be checked and banked by the committee Treasurer later on the Friday.

The year we graduated, "St Ann's" in Arney Rd., formerly the home of Mr and Mrs Charles Nathan, had been purchased to be transformed into the new Auckland Kindergarten Training Centre. It was one of the loveliest homes and gardens in NZ.

The rooms were gracious and lofty and, apart from some necessary alterations, were left in their original and beautiful state. I remember going there one Friday afternoon at the end of my training with Mrs Geoffrey Myers one of the executive members who did such marvelous voluntary work. I remember I went to help her move something (books perhaps) across there. I remember feeling very excited to be going with Mrs Myers as she was such a charming friendly woman and we were to drive in her new two tone cream Humber Car. What a thrill that was!

I left Meadowbank and moved to be Head Teacher in the old Oranga Community Hall. It was an exciting time as I became involved in the planning of the new building in Waitangi Ave in 1958 and was there for the opening (I can't remember by whom).

I left teaching in 1959 and began training as an in-flight Air Stewardess with T,E.A.L, later to become Air NZ. When I married in Dec. 1963 I was required to resign, as married women were not allowed to be employed as Cabin Crew! Once married I returned to Howick Kindergarten as Head Teacher and stayed for 3 years until my husband and I began our own family.

I have worked for the Auckland Kindergarten Association over many years in both permanent and relieving positions. Recently while working at Uplands Kindergarten in Sommerville Church building, Remuera Rd. my good friend and colleague Gloria Asplin said to me when tidying up after a session one day, "Do you realize, Anne, that we have been in this sand pit for 50 years?" I have very many happy memories of this time and have made many wonderful friends over the 50 plus years.

Written in 2009