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On leaving school I had to decide whether to train as a hairdresser or a teacher. A number of friends were off to teachers college, and as my Mother had convinced me that hairdressing was an unhealthy option, I agreed to apply for a place in the next kindergarten intake. There were few pre-qualifications, and as I could play the piano, presented well and had parents who could afford to assist financially, I was accepted and began training in 1954 at the training centre in Myers Park

As my family lived in Helensville, it was necessary for me to board in Auckland; students did not receive any remuneration.

During training, we spent time “on section’ at a variety of kindergartens, resulting in long travel times by bus. I remember Logan Campbell, Ponsonby, Grey Lynn, Point Chev, all sessions conducted in an uniform manner, resulting in an orderly and well disciplined environment

From the beginning I fought against the rigid rules and, unknown to the authorities, I attended night classes and graduated as a hairdresser. I completed this course with my closest friend who was at the time at teachers college in Epsom. We were of course funded by our respective parents.

Some not so good memories:-

As students, having to stage a nativity play for an audience, not something that so-called adults would be asked of today!

Nail polish was not allowed and I have vivid memories of painting my nails each evening and removing it each morning, and hoping I would not be reprimanded.

The uniforms were pale in colour, starched, and were a wrap around design, opening at the back, no drip dry in those days!

A compulsory test, to be able to recite a children’s story, word perfect, hence I, to this day cannot read/tell the story of Peter Rabbit.

The requirement to not only serve small bottles of milk each day, but we were required to carry the crates of milk on the assumption that we were all “fit and healthy”. This warm drink was followed by the obligatory piece of apple

In spite of all the above, the kindergarten training and teaching gave me the skills and, together with the strong discipline, enhanced my ability to succeed in a number of roles both in and out of the corporate world.

I worked with Elizabeth Tunks in Grey Lynn. She had very definite ideas and was somewhat uncompromising. I was one of the few who enjoyed working with her and we remained close friends until she died. I recall that every child was visited in their home. This took a considerable amount of time, with appointments made, and it was certainly a privilege to be able to attend such a prestigious place of learning. It was the most multi cultural of all the kindergartens I worked at, but as waiting lists were large, only those who valued education at an early age applied.

At an early age I was the head teacher at Cuthbert Kindergarten in Onehunga, and as I did not always agree with the expectations of the students I refused to have students on section. Fay Cawkwell and I had often disagreed on the rigid rules during training. Some of the activities that I thought were right for the children were too modern for her, so we at least were able to agree to disagree. I always had a strong influence with the parent teacher group, and took pride in motivating the activities and funds to maintain the extras we required.

After a few years out for travel I was appointed the first head teacher at the new kindergarten in Howick, which was a wonderful opportunity as I had just married and lived in Pakuranga, a mere bus ride away.

After time out with my own children I expressed a desire to return to teaching, and put a case to the powers that be, to work with another teacher on a split hours plan. Each would work the same shift, hence there would be continuity of staff/children. This was too radical at the time, so an opportunity to employ 2 good teachers was lost. This was at a time when there was a shortage of staff. To utilise teachers who were parents would only have enhanced the quality of service and only required thinking outside the square.

I moved on and had a number of career moves, but always state when asked, I am/was a kindergarten teacher.

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