

## Denise Iversen

I was born in Dargaville and lived for all of my school years in Kaikohe attending Northland College. When I was about 15, there came to live next door to us the new AA man, one Colin Ramsey. Very soon afterwards he married and brought Joy to live. Often he had to go away and I spent many happy evenings with Joy, as she did not like staying on her own. We often giggled the night away.

In 1955 my family left Kaikohe to live in the King Country and I went to Auckland Teachers College. At the end of my training my family had moved to the Waikato (my father was a Postmaster) and I began my teaching career at Fairfield in Hamilton. With a friend I moved to Auckland and I taught at Tamaki Primary for 4-5 years, then moved back to Whangarei and taught at Hikurangi for a year before marrying and coming to live on the North Shore.

I taught at Campbells Bay Primary and during this time, as a new entrant teacher, I visited Milford Kindergarten to discuss pre-school issues. Mary Patrick was the Senior Director (Head Teacher) of the day and she facilitated these meetings. I always felt I could tell the difference between children who went to Kindergarten and those who attended Play Centre – basically the only other option.

In 1968, when it came time for my three children to attend kindergarten, Milford was the obvious choice. I was asked to go on the Committee almost straight away, and very soon became President (Chairperson). Committees were run very much as they are today, but perhaps we had more involvement from the AKA Council than now. Sometimes we had real difficulty in getting parents to serve – nothing has changed there, I imagine.

I remember one difficult time I had as President...the Head Teacher of the day (she had been there forever) was very fond of the huge willow tree that grew in the middle of the sandpit. The roots of this tree grew all over the section. My husband, along with other committee members, was always clearing out the drains of entangled roots. The asphalt playground was slowly being pushed out of shape. Next door to the kindergarten was a house that belonged to the City Council and the building inspector lived there. He was forever asking us to cut the tree down, but the Head Teacher was adamant it was not to be touched because it provided shade and the kids would climb it. One day he approached me to say that the roots were encroaching on the Council section and, as the willow tree was considered a nuisance, it must be cut down. His Council workers would do this and take it away, if we agreed. As President, I had an angry Head Teacher and Committee after the holidays!

I was also slightly embarrassed as President when my eldest daughter would hang over the gate calling out to me to come and get her as she hated

kindergarten! The other two were most indignant that I even went into the kindergarten with them!

Now and then we had Area Meetings with the chairperson, secretary and treasurer of every kindergarten on the North Shore to talk about general problems. I was asked to attend one of these meetings about two minutes after joining the Committee. I knew nothing and did not know anybody. A lady came in, very businesslike, and took over the meeting. "Who's that?" I asked timorously of my neighbour. "Lindsey Rea, the AKA President" I was told with some awe. I got to know Lindsey well in later years, but will never forget that first meeting.

Wine and Cheese evenings became very popular as fund raisers at Milford. There was a very popular music group at that time called The Rumour and I felt I had scored a real coup getting them along to one of our evenings. We made a good profit that night.

In early 1971 Marj Fogarty, who was already on the AKA Council, said to me "What about coming onto the Council?" I said, "I have two young children – what is involved?" "Oh, just a meeting once a month or so" she said airily. I had no sooner agreed to go on the Council when to my utter amazement I found I was going to have another baby. However, I stayed on the Council.

We used to meet in the little narrow room downstairs at Myers, as you go in the side door. Jessie Neill had just retired and it was in her old office and very narrow. We had the Council table in there and by the time the full Council were assembled (and with me being very round) it was a tight squeeze. I tell you when I was having my son I was huge and how I fitted around the table, I don't know.

It was during these years that I met Eileen Bethell and Dorothy Gascoigne who became lifelong friends. The General Secretary at that time was Margaret Dean.

At that time, New Zealand was divided into Wards set up by the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union (NZFKU) for the purpose of helping all kindergarten associations within each Ward. These Wards had the same boundaries as the Education Board Wards for schools. Each association elected one representative for their Ward. The Ward members would meet at regular intervals and also have meetings with the Education Board to bring concerns of individual kindergartens to the Board.

Ward 1 went from Kaitaia down to Franklin and Marj Fogarty was the Ward member for the AKA. Also in that Ward were Franklin Kindergarten Association with 11 or 12 kindergartens, East Coast Bays with 9, Whangarei with 5, Dargaville with 2, and Wellsford and Ruawai each with 1, whereas the AKA had

80 or 90 kindergartens within that Ward. As you can appreciate, Ruawai with one kindergarten had problems very different from Auckland.

In the years when I was involved we had this huge building boom in the 1970's and early 80's. I ended up being elected Ward member after Marj and it was interesting to meet up with members of other areas. Sometimes we'd go to Dargaville, sometimes we'd go to Whangarei and everyone would gather there for the day and talk about issues of common interest.

Marj and I were both on the AKA Council for quite a long time. I think I must have been there for 20 years, probably as the Area Rep for North Shore when I first went on. Once you were on Council you went onto a Sub-Committee, Finance, Education etc. Because of my teaching background I went on the Education Sub-Committee. Eileen Bethell was the chairperson of that Sub-Committee and we used to meet quite frequently. When I went on Council the training was at Arney Road Kindergarten Teachers College and the Council helped fund that College.

Council met every month, Sub-Committees met in between that and they reported to Council. Those early years when I was on Council were boom years for building and we supported the Establishment Committees in their fundraising efforts. We built a huge number of kindergartens in those years. Nationally, each year there was a priority list for building throughout New Zealand that was negotiated at meetings of the NZFKU and then presented to the government. This was across the country. In those days you had to raise so much of the funds yourself and then you got on the priority list for building a kindergarten. The government would come up with the rest.

Whenever the government designated land for a school, they had to provide land for a preschool kindergarten as well. But before that we had to purchase the land. The only kindergarten built in those years on school grounds was Kauri Park Kindergarten. Some that were built in my days, such as Westlake, Waiheke Island, Forrest Hill and Broadlands, were not anywhere near schools.

But when I first began you had to raise the money and probably the best one I can talk about is Greenhithe because the General Secretary of the day, Luton Dawes and I, as AKA President, set up the Establishment Committee for Greenhithe Kindergarten.

We set up Greenhithe with a teacher called Margaret May and she became the driving force behind that Committee. She really pushed that Committee. She was a parent as well as a kindergarten teacher and it was through her hard work that they got the money together. Margaret applied for the Head Teacher position and won it, and has been involved with that kindergarten every since. Every year, during her ten years on the Establishment Committee she organised

an annual fundraiser, I think it was a make-your-own-beer competition and they always raised a lot of money for this.

We were able to purchase land straight across from the school. When the time came to build, my son-in-law was contracted to build the kindergarten. My daughter Claire Smith is a kindergarten teacher and her husband Mike built the kindergarten. They live just up the road from the kindergarten, and she's been a relieving teacher for a number of years. She doesn't really want to work full time, so she continues to relieve on a permanent basis.

Today the Greenhithe Committee make a great deal of money out of their garden tour fundraiser. Greenhithe has become a very popular area to live and some very beautiful homes and gardens are there. So every year they have this garden tour and Claire tells me it raises sometimes \$14,000. That's a lot of money towards their running costs. They also have a regular trikeathon which they run on a Saturday or Sunday morning, with a cake stall, tea and coffee and a sausage sizzle and the local fireman gives rides. That raises nearly \$3,000 or \$4,000. Other than that they don't do a lot of fundraising because those two things bring them in. Sure, it probably takes a year to organise the Garden Show and a lot of work goes into it, but it is very successful.

I always feel that I helped start that kindergarten because I set up the Establishment Committee and now my grandchildren are going there. So we built a lot of kindergartens in those days and, yes, there was difficulty in getting land when it wasn't attached to a school.

Margaret Dean was the General Manager when I first started and then Judy Dent took over for a while...she's a lovely person and now lives in Australia. She really has got a huge amount of information at her fingertips. She worked well with the Department of Education, which was a tremendous advantage to our Association.

When Jessie Neill (the AKA Secretary) retired, somebody had won one of those very large bottles of Grants Whisky. It sat in the office with Jessie for a few years and when she retired she said, "What'll I do with the whisky?". She gave it to Des O'Halloran who was the Treasurer of the day. It sat in his office until he retired. Then he said to Judy, "What am I going to do with this bottle of whisky?" Judy, ever mindful of profit, said, "We'll raffle it at the AGM". That was when we were still in the Myers building with the big hall. We used that for the AGM. Out on the verandah the Girl Guides had an office. The building has been completely refurbished now.

There was much interest in the raffle tickets for the whisky. I found 20 cents in the bottom of my bag for a ticket and Lo and Behold! I won it! People were quite envious (especially when I had a husband that didn't drink). Anyway, I arrived home late from the meeting and I said to Marj Fogarty, who was driving, "Don't

have an accident on the way home Marj, or we'll never be believed." My husband opened the door and said, "I thought you went to a kindergarten meeting". He often tells the story about me going to a kindergarten meeting and coming home with a huge bottle of whisky. I still use the large bottle for a flower arrangement in my foyer.

Judy Dent was General Secretary followed by Mike Beausoleil, a Canadian. He was a bit of a maverick. He did some wonderful good things, and when he left Luton Dawes was appointed. Luton was a very good General Secretary. He was there at the time I was President and I had a good working relationship with him. We progressed our way through many issues. It was just at the end of that time that things started to change because government policies changed. For example, they closed the Arney Road teacher training and it was taken over by the Teachers College. In the days when we ran the teacher training we had to raise money to run the training as well.

I was on the Education Sub-Committee for a long time. I enjoyed that because they brought in people like David Barney from the University and we discussed the educational side of things, appointments and those sorts of issues. If a teacher had problems we dealt with them. I was involved in one difficult situation with a Head Teacher who needed a lot of support to update her skills. Even though you were still bound by rules in a way, it was very hard to prove that people are incompetent. There was no appraisal system and no clear set of guidelines.

Joy Ramsey was a Supervising Head Teacher and her job was to advise and support the kindergarten teachers with their programmes and also to see that they were running the kindergartens properly. We had a few difficult situations, and Joy would work through those issues with the teachers and would advise the Education Committee on various matters.

I remember having a situation with a girl we trained who was, you would almost say, legally blind in that she had some sight, but she had trained as a kindergarten teacher and she wanted a job of course. We had great concerns about the safety of children that she couldn't see. She worked extremely hard to overcome her difficulty in that she would memorise books and read them to the children. But our difficulty was that if she was outside could she see a child at the end of the playground? She couldn't. We actually appointed her to a 3 teacher kindergarten. It was a huge difficulty in those sorts of issues when you train someone who has a disability like that.

We had a few special needs children and there was a little help from Special Needs Services. I don't remember them having teacher aides like they do now. But we didn't have a lot of these children. They would be assessed by Elizabeth Connolly, who was an Early Childhood Officer with the Department of Education.

I didn't get into special needs until my husband started in special needs teaching and then I became totally involved in it.

Teacher salaries used to come straight from the Department of Education. We got an administrative grant but we didn't handle the salary money.

I was elected AKA President in the early '80's. We had a President and Vice President, a General Secretary and Area Representatives (two from each area). We also had a Treasurer. In those days it was Des O'Halloran and then we had Linton Campbell and Bruce Simpson. One of them would always be at the meeting. Council meetings were quite big.

One of the difficulties of some people serving on Council was their inability to see beyond their own kindergarten's needs. We had a little man from Ranui Kindergarten and at the end of the evening all he wanted to say was, "There's something wrong with Ranui". He really wasn't involved in anything else, didn't want to be, that's all he came for...to get something for Ranui Kindergarten by getting onto Council. That happened many times. I found that quite frustrating.

Also, later in my career Marj and I were elected to the NZFKU (the national body for kindergartens) at a National Conference, and, because we came from Auckland, people in Auckland thought we should be there representing Auckland and should only be interested in Auckland issues. My belief is that if you're on a national committee, you're looking at the whole country's issues. When I was President of the AKA Council it was all of the kindergartens and you had to divorce yourself from your local area.

South Auckland...the government built those kindergartens out there like Clydemore and Favona and Mayfield and Sandbrook. They were fully government funded along with extra help from the Association and grants from the NZFKU to run them. They couldn't raise money and the Association administered them. We worked really hard to provide for the children out there because we felt they needed attention. It was at that time too that we tried to encourage some of our more wealthy kindergartens to support a kindergarten in the south of Auckland, because they were struggling just to get the basics such as paper, crayons, paints and those sorts of things.

I remember going to a meeting out at Sandbrook in the days when Donna Awatere Huata was a Departmental psychologist and a very militant lady of the day. She walked into this meeting and said, "The sooner you burn these kindergartens down the better". My hackles went up but I wasn't brave enough to take her on in those days. I think I probably would now. But I think we did provide some good pre-school education for those children.

This is what we were trying to do, to provide for disadvantaged children. Also at St James Kindergarten there were a lot of Pacific Island children. It was really

hard to get them to come. In some ways kindergarten was seen as a white middle class division, almost a rich person's pre-school. It was quite hard to get over that at times. It wasn't started like that, but out there the perception of it was, particularly once Play Centre started. They again needed the same sort of money that we were applying for. They had a different philosophy and so it was sort of seen at that time that the kindergartens were the white middle class and the playcentres took the others.

For anything to change it had to go through a conference of the NZFKU. You would work away with your local associations like we did, preparing remits to go to the national conference. If you won your remit, then it was the responsibility of the NZFKU to take the request to government. I remember at the national level we fought to get more Supervising Head Teachers at the AKA other than the one that was provided by the government because the job became too big for one person. In some of the bigger associations like Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin they only had one and it was too big for one person, they just couldn't cope. For a while we had two Supervising Head Teachers and eventually we had three...Joy Ramsey, Jo Greenhough and Cynthia Girling.

In the early days of my election to the NZFKU, the President of that organisation was Miss Laura Ingram (Didi) who was Mrs Holyoake's sister. She was a very large and imposing lady and used to draw herself up to her full height, close to 5'10". She was a delightful character, but my word she was strong, and whenever she strode down the corridors of power everyone stepped out of her way to let her go. I suspect MPs of the day ran for their cubbyholes at her arrival!

The Kindergarten Teachers Association (KTA) was a teachers' union and had a national KTA body such as the NZEI (NZ Educational Institute for primary teachers) with local branches. The two national organisations would also meet at national level to discuss issues of common interest. We dealt with the KTA quite a lot and they would be represented on our AKA Appointments Sub-committee. We were closer to the teachers then because we knew so many of them. We trained them. The KTA teachers now belong to the NZEI.

In the early days the NZFKU had a priority list for the building of kindergartens, because Auckland wasn't the only place in New Zealand where they were building kindergartens, so we had to fit into a priority list. Everybody had building plans and so you'd go through the Department of Education and you'd get your name on the building list and then the government would announce how many buildings it would fund that year. Not all of them would be built in Auckland. Ian Hay felt we should have been given them all because we were Auckland, but the rest of the country needed their share of them too. The NZFKU would rank the order that we wanted them and it didn't always please Auckland. People felt that, with Marj and myself on the NZFKU, why weren't we in Auckland getting kindergartens? But then we're not there for one association, we were there to represent all kindergartens of NZ.

In the early days the training was all done by the kindergarten associations themselves, nothing to do with the College of Education. The NZFKU diploma was their certificate to teach. It equates now to the Certificate in Early Childhood Education. 1989 was the last year that the NZFKU diploma was the recognised teaching certificate for kindergarten teachers. After that they got their certificate from the Auckland Teachers College. In 1989 I was not on the AKA Council but I was Vice President of the NZFKU and I presented the diplomas that year, including one to my daughter Claire.

The associations themselves used to appoint their teachers. The AKA Appointments Sub-committee usually included the President who was also usually the Chairperson of the Education Sub-Committee. I think we also had a teachers' representative. We were very professional with the appointments process. However, some smaller associations sometimes appointed teachers to positions before the closing date for applications. This caused problems throughout the country. You'd have the job advertised and then you would find that someone had got the job before the closing date. As a result, there was a move at the national level to have an appointments process for the whole country. This was eventually achieved at the national conference.

Many associations found the new system cumbersome. Maybe it was, but for me it was a fair system. It meant that a teacher from anywhere in the country could apply for a job and had an equal chance of getting it. The best person for the job got it. In the old way, whether we liked it or not, if you had 10 applicants for a job in Auckland and 9 of them came from Auckland and 1 from Invercargill and even if we knew that the girl there was an excellent teacher this girl really didn't have a show. But under the national system you had a better equal chance about it. So the Appointments Committee in Auckland appointed from the whole area.

The first Appointments Committee that was set up for the AKA consisted of Joy Ramsey, Robin Houliker, Elizabeth Greaves and me and we made appointments for the whole area. People complained about it in other areas but I could honestly say that the Committee was very professional, we worked really well together as a team, we got all our information beforehand and went through our applications, so by the time we got to our meeting we had a ranked order of applicants and the number of times that our ranking was the same was just absolutely amazing. We just all seemed to fit together and it certainly didn't mean that everybody from Auckland got all the Auckland jobs. It meant the best person for the job got it. I was actually very proud of that Committee because I think that we were very professional in the way we made our appointments. I can't speak for the others, I know some of them had difficulties but certainly ours worked well.

In the early days of my involvement in the kindergarten the Association was represented on the Teachers College Councils and I was the rep for the Kindergarten Association on the North Shore Teachers College Council, so I used to attend the Council meeting there once a month. I remember being on the Council when Merv Wellington, the Minister of Education, announced just like that, "I am closing this College", and that's it. I don't think the Principal of the day ever recovered. It was like a real kick in the stomach. It was a very progressive and very popular college and some very innovative stuff was coming out of there, so it was quite a sad day when Mr Wellington decided to close it. So that was the end of my involvement with the Auckland College of Education Council.

All through my years on the AKA Council I had my children. They all went through kindergarten, and then I went back to teaching. We lived in England for a year when our children were quite young and my husband went to university there. We came back and then I got back into teaching and because he was head of a special school I got called upon to be a reliever. Then I decided that I quite liked working with these children so I applied for a job with the school.

I worked first of all as a 'Seconded Teacher', meaning I was on the staff of Wairau Valley Special School, but worked at the local IHC Developmental Centre. This position had been created for parents whose children (supposedly) did not fit the criteria for attendance at a special school.

In 1989, with the advent of 'Tomorrows Schools', all children, whatever their disability, could attend school, so IHC centers closed and children moved into special schools and units. Mainstreaming has always been government policy and for some children this works really well, but for others it just is not the 'right' choice.

I have chosen to devote the rest of my teaching career to those very special multi-disabled children. It has been an interesting and at times frustrating journey. Special needs has made many gains, but we still have a long way to go before there is total acceptance of kids who are 'differently able' out there in the big world!

My years of involvement with kindergarten have given me great pleasure and lifelong friends. My grandchildren have benefited wonderfully from the kindergarten experiences. My daughter still teaches in the local kindergarten and I continue to follow the affairs of the Association with great interest.