

## **Eileen Bethell (nee Beechey)**

*I was born in Auckland, in Devonport, grew up in Epsom and did four years secondary education at St Cuthbert's College, but the school then turned around and said to my father that I wasn't up to standard to sit School Certificate, which in those days was done in four years. I was not doing particularly well at school and I wanted to do kindergarten teacher training. Not only was it an area that I could go into without academic qualification but I wanted to work with children. I used to teach Sunday school and help with Brownies and that sort of thing. My father said "All right, you can leave school because you're going to be doing another two years' study". So I started kindergarten training in 1951 at the Myers Park Training Centre.*

*The Training Centre was upstairs in the Myers Park building. During my training we did half a term in the Training Centre doing lectures and half a term out in the kindergartens. When the juniors went out in the kindergartens, the second year students came back into the Training Centre. That was quite an interesting scenario in that we had a week in the middle of the term where junior and senior students were in the kindergarten and then the juniors were there by themselves and seniors would go into the Centre for their six weeks of lectures. Which meant that during our two year training, we actually had the experience of six different kindergartens.*

*When I started my training, Fay Cawkwell was acting Principal, then was appointed Principal when Miss Colegrove retired. Miss Cawkwell was a very dedicated person. My understanding was she was the first NZ Kindergarten trained person to be appointed as a principal of a kindergarten training centre. I don't know whether she trained in Auckland or elsewhere.*

*She was a charming person but quite shy and retiring. Looking back, I think she was a very good Principal. She was very fair; she could also be very stern or strict. We only had about three lecturers actually in the Centre. There was Miss Cawkwell, Miss Burt who was the assistant Principal, and for many years Miss Rothbury. They had all been kindergarten teachers and had come into the training centre. We had other lecturers that came in. We had Mrs Rouden who was the music lecturer, Mr. Murray who was the art lecturer, Dr Houghton and one or two others who came in from outside to lecture us on certain subjects. There were only 3 permanent staff in the training centre at that time.*

*I could be corrected on this but I think there were 21 kindergartens when I first started and then during my years in the Association it built up considerably. Not all kindergartens were used for training purposes. It depended on the Head Teacher or Director (as they were then known) as to whether she wished to train the students. During our times in kindergartens the lecturers from the centre would come out and review our work and liase with the staff as to how students were getting on. At the end of our six weeks the Head Teacher would write a report that would go to the Principal. When we came back into the Centre we would have a couple of days where she would interview all students on their six week section in kindergartens. Therefore*

*you were kept aware of the areas in which you had to pay more attention, upgrade your skills. That ongoing assessment was quite useful.*

*Myers was one of the kindergartens in which I did my training. During my training, junior students painted the interior. That was quite a project and was considered to be 'good for us' as young woman...doing our 'community bit' because Myers Kindergarten couldn't afford to paint their own building inside, so we were asked to do it.*

*I've noted down some of the subjects that we followed in our training. There was children's literature which covered children's books, poetry, finger plays and also covered in that category was a collection of pictures in all different areas of activity, transport, nature, animals and we had to have this collection of pictures all mounted and catalogued. These pictures came from magazines, newspapers, travel agents. We would go anywhere where we could get lovely, big colourful pictures. Then we'd take them to our kindergartens and use them in conjunction with the literature side of activities. Child psychology was a big section, health – our own personal health, the health of the community and the health of the children. That subject was taken by Dr Houghton, a GP in Auckland.*

*Then of course we had music, music in general, and children's music in particular. We were all meant to play at least one instrument, preferably the piano because most kindergartens had a piano. There was no such thing as tape decks, recorders or anything like that in the kindergartens.*

*We also spent a lot of time on woodwork and equipment maintenance, learning how to mend equipment, tables that broke, chairs that broke, dollies, corner furniture and the maintenance of all in good condition.*

*And we did at least one day a week doing woodwork in the centre. Working with fretsaws, cutting out pieces for puzzles and painting them. Just an overall knowledge of basic tools and woodwork, particularly pertaining to kindergarten furniture and equipment. And that's a skill that never leaves you.*

*Then of course we had physical education. We used the YMCA next door and we would have that once a week. At one stage some of us played netball in the weekends. We made up a team and entered the Auckland Netball Association competition.*

*I lived at home at the time, but those from out of Auckland either boarded locally or at the YMCA. We had students from Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, and Northland. A lot of them boarded at the YMCA next door, which was quite handy for them because they could just come down through the park. There was no training centre in Hamilton in those days although they did start a course there at some point.*

*Another subject was learning how to keep books, records, rolls etc in the kindergarten. We spend a lot of time on that, waiting lists, parent involvement work, help with the children.*

*We also spent a lot of time learning to do programming in the kindergartens. The week's program was discussed and prepared in advance, especially when it pertained to special times of the year, spring, winter or autumn or something special that we wanted to highlight at that time.*

*We also took children out to different places on a long rope with loops on each side. Each child had to hold the loop. We always had to have a couple of parents to come with us.*

*The ratio of children to teachers was one teacher to 20 children. So our morning session was 40 children with 2 teachers and the afternoon sessions were 40 also. The sessions were from 9-12 and 1-3.30.*

*We took children from three and they left for school when they were five, but if there were specific reasons for keeping them after five we did so until the end of the year in which they turned five. That was a Department of Education ruling. Due to full rolls and waiting lists, very few kindergartens could take children in at three, they were usually 3 ½ .*

*Actually, the overall system of kindergarten teacher training changed during my training between year one and two. My first year of training was under a very formalised type of programme. There had been a meeting in Wellington of Early Childhood people and the syllabus changed and it became a more flexible programme. It was quite hard for some students to make that change initially and probably quite hard for staff, especially staff who had been teaching for years. But of course as it evolved it was a very satisfactory programme. For example, the indoors/outdoor situation changed to the indoor-outdoor freeflow as it is today.*

*Looking back and having been involved in kindergartens during my years in the Association, we worked very hard to get children with special needs with their own teachers. When I was actually teaching we didn't have that system, we just did what we could to get children in, we took referrals from doctors and we did what we could with them. Some teachers could cope and others couldn't. There were no special courses for us to attend when we had special needs children. Not to my knowledge anyway. I always loved having the special needs children. I had a disabled brother, which possibly led to my basic interest in special needs children.*

*When I was teaching in Hawera, being the only kindergarten in a 40 mile radius I had a lot of special needs children and I absolutely adored having them, spent a lot of time with them. So much so that I wanted to actually specialise in working with children with disabilities. This was a few years after I finished my training, but my father wouldn't let me. He said, "No you would get a warped idea of childhood". And of course in those days you did what father said, mostly!!*

*When we were out in the kindergartens, the weekly program was quite interesting, different to what it is today. On Monday we had two sessions of children, Tuesday we would have one morning session and then in the*

*afternoon we would do book work, parent work, parent/child work and home visiting. I don't think they still do home visits.*

*One of the things we always did on a Tuesday afternoon was to visit the children who were due to come from the waiting list into the kindergarten. We would go to their home and visit them. Depending on the welcome from the parents, sometimes you were greeted at the front door other times you were invited in. The purpose was to meet the child in the child's own environment. If necessary we would go back to that home two, three times, four times prior to the child starting kindergarten. If the child was very timid and shy we felt, well let's just delay this enrolment until the next vacancy and see if we can get alongside this child and its mother.*

*So Tuesday afternoon was parent/child work, which included Mothers Clubs' meetings. They often met on the Tuesday afternoon, usually a pot luck lunch, all the mothers would bring lunch and it would be pooled. Children from the morning session would stay on for those mothers that were coming. Mothers Clubs were very strong. We also used to have evening meetings with the Mothers Clubs.*

*I remember when I first went to Hawera they had not had a trained teacher for some time. They were having the first Mothers Club meeting of the year one evening and the chairwoman said, "You will come, won't you". Well of course I'll be there, that was one of our duties. The meeting duly opened and they had the opening session and introduced me and said, "Miss Beechey will be talking to us later". Oh goodness, they didn't tell me this! What do I do, here was me a first year Head Teacher, so I thought the only thing I can talk about is kindergarten teachers' training which they probably didn't know anything about because they weren't in an area where there was a kindergarten teacher training centre. So I bluffed my way through this.*

*So on Tuesdays we did a morning session then parent/child work. Wednesday two sessions of children. Thursdays we had a morning session and the afternoon was spent on cleaning, polishing, all the tables and chairs had to be done with some particular oil every Thursday and we would prepare activities, cutting paper for painting and activities for the following week. Friday afternoon there was program preparation, work on the books, rolls, banking, all this type of thing. Our hours were very strictly 8.30am till 3.30pm and you did not leave your kindergarten till 3.30pm.*

*The other day I was out for lunch with a friend and I got up from my table and walked past a group of young women having lunch and one of them looked up at me and said to me, as I was limping, "Hmmm... bad back from all those years kindergarten teaching". They were staff from two of the kindergartens from the area having their end of term lunch. We would not have dreamt of leaving the kindergarten after session and having lunch out, you wouldn't dare. I had a chat with them. I didn't know any of them but one of them knew me.*

*At that stage, I taught at kindergartens for 6 years. I did my first year as an assistant, as we were called back then, half the year was at Avondale Kindergarten in the old church hall and then half the year at Mt Roskill Kindergarten which of course was a purpose-built building even then. The Head Teacher had trained in England and was just the most wonderful teacher who taught me so much. Then I went for two years as Director in Hawera. Two years in Henderson and one year at Owairaka and then I married and resigned to have a family.*

*We didn't meet those on the AKA Council very often but of course Mrs Cuthbert from Onehunga, she was very much a leading light in the kindergarten organisation and there was Peg Batten who was Vice President. I can't recall who was President but Peg Batten always used to come and speak at the staff meetings. We would have a staff meeting every six weeks and all the staff would come into the Myers centre on a Friday afternoon. Mrs Batten usually came to speak to us about policy matters and changes in procedures. Then the rest of the meeting would be run by Principal Cawkwell or the assistant Principal Nette Burt. Of course there was Des O'Halloran who was the Treasurer of the AKA for years and years, I remember him quite clearly. I don't recall many others from the Council. We didn't really have very much to do with the Council. The administration and professional side were quite separate in some respects. Then later on when I got involved in the voluntary side of kindergarten I learnt more about that side.*

*Later on, the first day that I took my child to kindergarten as a three year old someone said to the Head Teacher of the day, "Who was that woman that came down the pathway with that red headed little girl? She used to be a kindergarten teacher here. Why don't we get her on the committee?" So that was it for 21 years.*

*I was teaching at Owairaka when I got married. The kindergarten was in the old hall and negotiations were going on for the new building. We moved into the new building a month prior to the end of the year. I was in the very early stages of a pregnancy and we were having a Mothers Club meeting that evening. We had no vinyl on the floor and there was paint spilt and I was down scrubbing the floor. Well I never got to the Mothers Club meeting because I had a miscarriage as soon as I got home! But later I became pregnant again. This was when I had my eldest daughter Jane, but I always think I gave one child up for kindergarten.*

*So I joined the Owairaka Kindergarten committee in 1963 and served on the committee until 1969. I was a Committee member, and then Secretary and then Chairwoman. And it was during the later stages of my time at Owairaka that I was elected onto the AKA Council.*

*The voluntary donation scheme was functioning when I joined. It was very much our main source of income. Kindergarten committees were responsible for the costs of running and maintaining their kindergarten. So if someone came up with a bright idea to raise money, we did it.*

*And personally I think that's an extremely healthy thing for a community. I remember at Owairaka one year when I was Chairwoman we had a fair. We worked on it the whole year. And on the day, which was a beautiful sunny Saturday, we had 82 parents and grandparents involved, not just coming, but actually involved. And I thought with a roll of 80 children, that's not bad and that's not bad for a community. Because kindergarten, apart from Plunket, is the first educational situation children and parents go into. And it's giving them the pattern of community service, going on to serve on school committees. I thought that was a very good training ground for parents. Unfortunately today it's a different situation. Of course we had parent helpers in the kindergarten. Some kindergartens were more successful than others with the parent helper roster. But you usually had a parent helper every session, at least one.*

*From the Owairaka committee I was elected to Council, I think in 1968. I can't remember when I became President but I was on the council from 1968 to 1981.*

*We used to have a representative from every kindergarten that made up the Council and from the Council we had an Executive Committee elected at the Association AGM. It was the Executive that did all the work. Because the AKA was growing in numbers of kindergartens the Council numbers were becoming too unwieldy, so we changed the Constitution and brought in the area system so that Auckland was divided up into four areas and we had two representatives from each area who came onto the Council. Also included were the President, two Vice Presidents, also the Treasurer and Secretary who were ex officio, and a number of elected members.*

*We had sub-committees and at Council meetings we would receive the minutes of the sub committee meetings, and work from there so the Council didn't have to sit down and discuss all the small details.*

*The Council met monthly, as did the sub-committees. Usually, the subcommittees had daytime meetings and the Council meetings were in the evenings. Jessie Neill's old office downstairs became vacant and became the Council room. Jessie Neill was an invaluable Secretary for many, many years. Her retirement brought about numerous changes in administration.*

*When Jessie passed away the solicitor phoned me and told me, and said he would be in contact with me later. He rang me later in the afternoon and said, "Do you know where the keys to the garage are?" "Well, yes, they're on the hook in the pantry." "Oh well", he said, "If I send the keys to the house out to you in a taxi would you go and lock up? I can't get the garage locked." "No, it doesn't shut". "Oh", he said, "I don't like the idea of leaving the car there". "Well, do you want me to take the car home?" So I walked down with the keys and went into the house, got the car keys, closed the house all up, made sure it was all safe and drove her car to my place so I could garage it. Then subsequently it was one of our Kindergarten Association Council members who actually bought the car from the estate. That car was around for quite a number of years!*

*The solicitor phoned me again a couple of days later and asked me if I would be prepared to go in and clear out the house of perishables and that sort of thing, strip the bed and so forth. So I did all that and found it all quite hard because I was very fond of her. I was very pleased to be able to do it for her, as I had a feeling deep down that she would be happy for me to do it.*

*Then of course we were informed that the AKA had inherited the house and everything in it as well as her entire estate. We had an auction and sold the furniture and then the house was leased for a period of time until it was able to be sold. It was sold to some people I knew so that was quite nice because they altered it and did all sorts of things to it and I went in two or three times and saw what they had done to it. But it's gone now, it's been moved away and there are two town houses on the site.*

*I also remember Mrs Cuthbert. I didn't know her very well. She was a very elderly lady. One of my sections during training was at Onehunga and I used to see her...she used to come down at least once a week and talk to the Head Teacher and browse around and talk with staff. Of course she attended the kindergarten committee meetings that were held in the daytime in those days and this was in the old kindergarten. I believe the Onehunga kindergarten was called the Cuthbert kindergarten, named after her.*

*She was just a charming elderly lady when I knew her, she was a great one for beads on her rather large bosom! She was a little short lady with a shock of the most beautiful white hair that she wore back in a chignon. She very often wore black and she always had lots of lovely beads hanging.*

*During the late 50's the old Nathan house in Arney Road was bought for teacher training. That was the time when I was not as closely involved. I remember the property had lovely gardens, and then they built the big hall down in the lower part of the garden. I recall two or three occasions when kindergarten teachers used to have reunions held there. It's reverted back to being a private home and I had a visitor recently who had visited the house and particularly wanted to tell me how beautiful it is. Apparently a couple own it. The wife is an artist and uses part of the hall as a studio and an exhibition hall.*

*During my years on Council I was a member of the Education Committee. This was a strong Committee, and had a couple of representatives from the AKA Council on it as well as people from outside the organisation such as Professor Barney from the University, Early Childhood people from the Teachers Training College and Early Childhood advisors from the Department of Education. It was a group of 8-10 people and dealt with the professional side of kindergarten work. This meant that the professional side and the administrative side were separated. The supervising Head Teacher of the Association was on that Committee. Any matters pertaining to the professional side of the workforce were dealt with by that Committee. The Association was the employer, so it was a very wise move to develop the*

*strength of that Committee to deal with professional matters, because it was then not the employers dealing with teachers and their professional work.*

*A kindergarten teacher I recall from those days was Miss Gilbert at Ponsonby. Ponsonby was an interesting unit because there was a full day program, a hot dinner was served and they employed a cook. Some children went home at noon. Parents had a choice.*

*The dinner would be served at 12.15pm and then there was rest time. There was an old Nissan hut (the American army hut) that was put up in the grounds and that was the rest area. Two staff would supervise the children at rest time whilst other staff continued with other duties. Ponsonby had three trained staff and very often three students. It was a difficult playground and building to supervise. Miss Gilbert was quite an institution and was there for many, many years. There was Mrs Legget at Mt Albert, Joyce Ramsey at Owairaka and Miss Tunks at St James and then St Heliers.*

*In my own personal experience, our relationship with the Education Department was great, wonderful. We had early childhood supervisors who visited kindergartens and attended education committees. We had a good rapport with them. They recognised the importance of kindergarten. There was Elizabeth den Ouyden, she was a pre-school advisor and then Head Teacher at Myers until quite recently.*

*I remember Lindsay Rae, formerly a President of the Association, who became a preschool advisor. Also Elizabeth Connolly who passed away during her time there. There are faces I can remember but I can't put names to them all. We had a good rapport here in Auckland. I was just yesterday looking through some correspondence that I had received from the Department of Education people when I retired. I've kept them because they're just nice to have. I must say when I had this experience the other day when I met these kindergarten teachers that were out having a social lunch, I said "I've been out of it so long". "Yes, you have been, but we remember, all the work you did for us teachers, we'll never forget it", and it was so nice after all these years, I felt quite good.*

*To start a new kindergarten, an establishment committee was formed. The wish needed to come from the community in the early years. In the latter years of my involvement we would look at areas and think is there a kindergarten needed there? A local establishment committee would be formed and they would start raising money. The Association would negotiate for a site, if there wasn't a site in the area. During the period of my involvement, a policy came in whereby when a school site was set aside an early childhood site would be included. That meant that in quite a number of newer suburbs there was a site already sitting there for us. The establishment committee would have to raise 1/3 of the costs and the government would pay the 2/3 subsidy on building and equipment. In most cases it took 10-12 years to raise the money so the establishment committee members didn't see their own children in the kindergarten.*

*We did have a scheme for particularly the Otara and Mangere areas where the government would give more money. These were special needs areas. Then of course when a kindergarten opened, because it was a special needs area, language, different nationalities and so on, we would have three teachers. I think a lot of the things happening today have all happened before.*

*In those areas we had mainly Maori and Pacific Island children, and they were difficult areas from the point of view of supporting the committee because there would be the language problem. We set up a system at one stage where a Council member would take a group of special needs kindergartens, maybe two maybe three, and would work with those committees individually. I had just two at Otara and I would go out there to meetings or they could ring me any time. I got alongside some very great people out there in Otara. Four or five kindergartens were established out there under the special needs criteria.*

*I think it was in '74 when the teachers' training moved to Teachers Training College. They had an early childhood committee and I was the first Kindergarten Association representative on it. That committee ceased to function and I was subsequently placed on the College Council as the E.C.E. representative. I served on that for about 3 years and during that time I was on the selection committee panel for E.C.E. recruits to the College. Overall I had a broad experience of AKA work and responsibilities, as well as student training.*

*I was a delegate to national kindergarten conferences over a period of about nine years and at the time of my retirement had been nominated for national executive work.*