

Jo Greenhough

I was born here in Auckland, in Epsom, where I lived until I was married.

I've always really enjoyed working with children. I love little people and I had wanted to do Karitane nursing because I quite liked working with babies. My father was against that. He thought I would no sooner get one baby settled than have to move off and that I would have terrible hours and it wasn't a good idea.

The other incentive was that my aunt, Vere Middleton, was a kindergarten teacher. She was a lovely person of whom I was very fond. She was the Head Teacher at Myers and sometimes for treats I would be allowed to spend a day with her and the children. Sometimes my family would go to her place for an evening meal and she would regale us with wonderful stories about children she had been working with and I liked the sound of that. So I thought kindergarten teaching would be a good thing to do. Sadly, she died at an early age, when I was about 8.

When I was 17, I was interviewed for kindergarten training. Constance Colegrove was on the panel, also Nette Burt. The training was at Myers, upstairs, and I believe it was excellent training. We had 6 weeks in college and then we had 6 weeks out on section. We were sent to experienced teachers and were able to put into practice the theories we were being taught.

My first section was at Lady Cobham and in those days the kindergarten was in the church hall at St Andrews in Epsom. It was a lot of hard work because you had to take the equipment in and out every day so it was quite a physical job. Very nice staff there and a great experience for my first section. I recall Jenny Worley, now Jenny Becroft, was the teacher. Jenny and I became good friends. The Head Teacher was Margaret Beckley from Australia. In those days there were only two teachers and usually 2 or 3 students.

I also went to Constance Colegrove which was a new kindergarten in Remuera. I remember Eleanor Matheson was the teacher. She became godmother to one of my children and I've kept in touch with her over the years. My next kindergarten was St James, which was a kindergarten where children brought their own lunch. Some of them went home at 12 o'clock and some stayed on and had lunch and then a sleep in the afternoon. The Head Teacher was Elizabeth Tunks, but I don't recall who the other teachers were.

I was also sent to Ponsonby. Gwen Gilbert was the head teacher and she was an institution in herself at the kindergarten. She was an amazing woman. Miss Fowley used to come and play the piano and take music. A cooked lunch was provided by specially employed kitchen staff. The children stayed on, and had a rest too. The younger ones in one room while the older children would just have stories and quiet play, then normal kindergarten activities would resume.

Every Friday afternoon of the 6 weeks that we were out on section, we came back to Myers and had a staff meeting with the rest of the students who were in college, so the two groups of students got to know each other.

Most kindergartens had a piano and the trainees had to be able to play a musical instrument. They didn't necessarily have to learn how to play the piano but at that time, about 48 years ago, a lot of people did play the piano - it was part of growing up. Music was always a really big part of kindergarten and part of the programme. I used it in many ways. For example, if they got bit over excited (particularly on a

windy day) I would just go and play the piano and it was like the Pied Piper, they'd hear the music and come in and take part in what was happening. It was a good way to settle the children.

When I finished my training I was 19 and Blockhouse Bay Kindergarten was my first posting. That again was in a hall and you had to take everything out and put everything away. There was a shortage of teachers when I finished training and of course the kindergartens that were in church halls were not at the top of the list for people who were trained and wanted a job. So there was Blockhouse Bay and Meadowbank which was also in a hall. Both good communities and working towards building their own kindergartens. Anne Slaven, who is now Anne Vette, and I were both approached and asked if we would take up the Head Teacher positions although it was not usual to put graduates into Head Teacher positions. I have no doubt there was a lot of discussion as to whether they would take this risk or not, particularly as we both went out to kindergartens that had only untrained teachers with us.

Untrained teachers were usually woman who had older children and most probably had not had the opportunity to train to do anything before they married and wanted an interest and a bit of an income. Gwen Skinner who was a delightful woman was my assistant. She had two teenage boys and lived locally.

I had been there for about a year, I suppose, when I met the man who eventually became my husband. He had a motor scooter and he said that he'd come out and have lunch with me one day and help me (it was a Friday) move all the heavy stuff and put it away at the end of the morning because on Friday we didn't have children in the afternoon. This was a long time ago and he had not long come back from England. He had a very, very red beard. People in those days didn't have beards. It was long before the norm. While I was reading a story at mat time someone came and wanted to do an enrolment. Tony was there so I said to him, "Would you mind finishing the story?" So he sat down and finished reading the story while I attended to the enrolment. On Monday, one of the mothers came to me and said, "Did you have a man at kindergarten on Friday?" I thought "Oh my God, this is it!" I said, "Yes we did. Why?" "Well", she said, "Jenny came home and said 'Jesus came to kindergarten today'". I said to her, "How do you know?" She said, "He had long hair on his chin and he sat down and told a story!" I thought that was lovely.

Most kindergartens had a roll of 40 children but at Blockhouse Bay I think we had a roll of 35 because we were in a hall and because there weren't 2 trained teachers. It was a good community, with wonderful support from the parents. We always had a mother help and didn't require a roster. We had a good committee, good fundraising, and at that time no children with English as a second language.

We had Friday afternoons for cleaning, preparation etc. and once a month we went into Myers for a full staff meeting. Wednesday afternoons were for parent contact and home visiting, which was very much part of kindergarten in those days. We would visit the next lot of children who were due to come to the afternoon session. They would have been notified by mail and a visit arranged in their home, so that when they came to the kindergarten we were not strange faces to them or the mothers either. It was a good exercise really. We would also go and home visit if children hadn't attended for 3 or 4 weeks.

I was at Blockhouse Bay for about 18 months and then I went to Myers as Head Teacher at the beginning of 1958. We had difficulty getting mothers to serve on the Committee there as a number of children came from the Karangahape Road

business area and both parents worked. We were fortunate in having Sybil Myers, the founder's daughter-in-law, with friends Mae Nathan and Pam Savage come on the Committee and support the kindergarten. I was only at Myers actually for a couple of terms and was then seconded to Constance Colegrove as relieving Head Teacher for the first term of 1959.

In August of that year I had my twins, Andrew and Tim, and 15 months later Libby was born. My kindergarten training was put to good use with 3 children under 15 months. When Libby was 3 I did relieving teaching all over the Auckland area for the AKA. I was able to take my children with me to the kindergartens where I was relieving, which worked really well. So they happily played while I taught. The AKA were still terribly short of trained staff, so they agreed to have the children go along, but I never did more than two weeks at a time as it was too hard on the children.

Even then there were kindergartens that were still in halls. One terrible time I went to St Christopher's off Sandringham Road as a relieving teacher and I got there and no other staff came. I had to get one of the committee members to go and get a key to open it up and here I was at the kindergarten with my three small children and all the other children and no help at all. It was a ghastly day, but that sort of thing would never happen now and was most unusual then.

After I had been relieving for a while and when my children started school I decided to open up a private kindergarten with Chris Johnston who was a couple of years behind me at training college and who had also worked at Constance Colegrove Kindergarten. We started St Luke's in Remuera at St Luke's Presbyterian Church and operated 3 mornings a week. We always encouraged the parents when their child's name came up from the waiting list at Constance Colegrove to send them there because they had much better outdoor facilities. Often the boys went but quite often the girls stayed behind. We employed 2 staff so there were 4 of us which was really good because we had children from just under 3 years to nearly 5. Families that moved to Auckland didn't automatically have a place for their children at one of the AKA's kindergartens because there wasn't a transfer system in place then and there were very few private daycare centres operating, so we were able to take them.

We had hoped to make this the beginning of an Establishment Committee for another AKA kindergarten. Constance Colegrove served the Remuera and Parnell areas and had a very long waiting list. Sadly, not enough parents were interested.

While I was there, Dr David Barney, a Doctor of Psychology who lectured at University asked me if I would be prepared to go on to the AKA's Education Committee. He had lectured us on child psychology during my kindergarten training and was on the AKA Council and that Committee. They met once a month.

When I had been on that Committee for about a year, the AKA decided to employ a part time Supervising Head Teacher. Joy Ramsey was the Supervising Head Teacher, paid by the Government. The AKA had expanded over the years and it was physically impossible for her to do the job on her own. I was employed for 18 hours a week and eventually was employed fulltime, funded by the AKA. Of course I had to give up St Luke's when they asked me to be Joy's assistant.

Joy and I worked together for a good 2 ½ years, probably 3, before the government provided a salary for another fulltime Supervising Head Teacher, so I was now fulltime and paid by the government. By then, the workload had increased so much that we needed another part-timer, so Cynthia Girling was approached and accepted the part-time position, funded by the AKA.

There was so much desk work for Joy that she was getting out less and less to the kindergartens, so that when I first started my job was literally going out and visiting kindergartens, spending a session with them, talking with the staff, giving ideas but at the same time assessing what was happening in the kindergartens.

We had a number of new kindergartens opening at this time and the Senior Teachers (no longer called Supervising Head Teachers) had to organise that. A Senior Teacher had to speak at three public meetings where parents could enrol their children for the new kindergarten. It was publicised so people were encouraged to come to these meetings, hear about kindergarten, what we hoped to achieve, and the roles we hoped the parents would play in it. The parents had done the fundraising and it was a 2:1 subsidy from the government in those days. The Senior Teacher also had to organise all the equipment, including all the basic things like the lockers, the tables, the chairs, the puzzles, even the things for the kitchen, with help from the parents.

As time went on, committees and teachers became interested in building outdoor playgrounds and developing covered outdoor playgrounds. Of course there were standard specifications that we had to work to, and that became my responsibility. My husband is an architect, so I've learned to read plans and I can visualise things so I guess that's why I fell into that job. If I had any problem I took it home and he would explain it to me.

There was a phase where everyone wanted to build tree houses or very static constructions so I spent a lot of time trying to talk people out of these things and talk them into having lots of boxes and moveable equipment. Nobody really wanted that because they couldn't see where all the money they had raised was going. I tried the idea of putting up two vertical poles with a pole across the top with hooks for equipment like rope ladders, knotted ropes, and different types of swings that could be taken off and put up so it wasn't static and could be changed each day. The children could actually help to change it too.

The Senior Teachers arranged workshops once a term on a Friday afternoon and we would meet in different areas...North, South, East and West. The teachers in each area would meet, bring their lunch to the host kindergarten and it would be a chance to talk to each other, discuss ideas and problems and then we would have a practical workshop or a speaker. We were feeding in ideas, they were feeding ideas to each other and it gave the staff an opportunity to get out of their fairly closed environment. It's a very isolated job, kindergarten teaching, and these meetings worked well.

From these meetings a good resource system evolved. For example, if teachers at one kindergarten had a whole lot of cardboard given to them, they would ring round the others and say, "We've got stacks of it if you would like to send a mother round to get some".

The Senior Teachers started a resource room downstairs in Jessie Neill's old office. Businesses would contact us and say, "We've got x number of cartons, what kindergarten would like it?" And rather than have people go and offload things that maybe weren't very good, we would go and check it out. Then we would have it brought into the resource room. The teachers would then be told, through newsletters, and if interested they would come and get what they wanted.

It was also about this time that I asked the AKA if I could start up an equipment room because so many teachers were being interrupted during the session with people selling them books, puzzles and various things. With only two teachers it was not an

option to leave one teacher responsible for the whole kindergarten while the other talked with the salesman. We notified all the suppliers that there was now an equipment room at the AKA and we ordered directly from the suppliers so the staff could purchase at no extra cost from the AKA.

When Judy Gilbert came as a Senior Teacher, she took over the resource room and moved it out of Jessie Neill's room and took it into the back locker rooms and toilets downstairs at Myers at the entrance that faces up Queen Street.

We then set up the equipment room in Jessie's room. We put up shelves and had a lot of equipment. Everything was sold at the price that we had got directly from the supplier. It meant that the teachers could come and see all the puzzles from the different suppliers including a good range of books, blocks, arts and crafts and so on. The suppliers soon approached us to ask if we would sell their products. We quickly outgrew Jessie's room and had to move upstairs.

By the early '70's, a lot more kindergartens had been built, and when I resigned in the early 1980's there were 91 in the AKA. By then we had more Senior Teachers so we could spread out the workload. I continued to work with the equipping of the kindergartens, simply because I had made the contacts and it was easier to work that way.

I was involved with kindergarten from the '50's to the early '80's and witnessed many changes, though they weren't as fast as we would have liked. For example, we were desperately trying to get 3 teachers per kindergarten. The only ones that were getting that were those where English was a second language. Often these ones also had difficulty in getting a Parent Committee together. We had to do a lot of the work that committees might otherwise have done. For example, Mangere and Otara Kindergartens had 3 teachers and when those kindergartens first started it took a lot of Senior Teacher time. We used to go and spend weeks working there with the staff. They had terrible vandalism problems. It was hard work for them, but they were all kindergarten teachers who wanted to work in that area and the community really appreciated that. Flatbush at one stage had a dreadful time. We used to dread Monday mornings, as we knew the place would have been trashed. But then some of the Black Power children started going there and we never looked back after that! It was well looked after, the men did anything that needed doing and it was really wonderful.

The main problem in that area was lack of money and hardship, and that reflected on the children. In fact, I was at Yendarra early on and we had some very big problem children there. Only four year olds but they were hard cases! I was having a cup of tea and a biscuit and one of the biggest hard cases came past and said, "Give me a bickie, love". I looked at him and thought, "You most probably are hungry", so I went back and spoke to Joy about it and talked to the AKA, and it was decided that we would provide bread, Vegemite and honey for that kindergarten. The children would start the day with some food. The staff just put out the bread and the pots of Vegemite and honey and let the children help themselves. They had to sit down and eat properly and have good table manners. The children didn't mind that because they were getting good food. And the difference in the behaviour of those children was amazing so we started providing food in all the Otara and other kindergartens where appropriate.

The KTA (Kindergarten Teachers Association) was very active and was always fighting for extra staff and better pay. And certainly the pay wasn't good. When I

finished teaching after 13 years, not all of it full time, I was getting \$18K per year, which wasn't a lot of money.

After 13 years with the AKA I felt it was time to move on. Adele Graham and Judy Gilbert had a company called 'The Puzzling Company' that produced maths and language games that Adele had made and they supplied to schools. She wanted the games taken around schools so I said that I would do that. I went out on the road throughout the North Island. I would ring up, make appointments with the Principals of the various primary schools and I would go down and demonstrate the games to these schools. That was very interesting. I enjoyed visiting the schools but hated the horrible hotels.

After I finished working for 'The Puzzling Company' I sold health insurance for 2 years. Then my husband and I went to the UK for 3 months and when we came home I joined an interior design firm and worked there for 6 years.

Then I started a Bed and Breakfast in our house on the edge of the Orakei Basin. As they say, I met a lot of very interesting people, but it became too successful. In one week we had 26 different people and that is very exhausting and a lot of work. We only had two double rooms. It was a lovely place overlooking the water, very quiet, and people enjoyed those surroundings, and by word of mouth we became very busy. So, to get out of that, we sold!

While we were doing the B&B I worked 2 days a week for Diane McCallum, an ex-kindergarten teacher who started 'Mainly Toys', an educational toy shop in Mt Eden. I did this for 7 years and thoroughly enjoyed catching up with all the kindergarten teachers who came in to purchase equipment for their kindergartens. One of my tasks was to do the window display and, though I'm no longer working in the shop, I still dress the window once a fortnight.

We're now living on the North Shore. I play golf, look after a couple of community art galleries once a month, go to our bach at the Manukau Heads and spend as much time as possible with my grandchildren.

Looking back, I think the kindergarten training we got was great. It was very practical and in some ways very basic. We would make our own puzzles, books, etc. and had a lot of very good lecturers, particularly in child psychology which I think stood me in good stead for quite a lot of things in life. It makes one very resourceful. There is nothing a kindergarten teacher can't do!

At the time when I was asked to take up the position of part time Supervising Head Teacher, my one concern was that I would no longer be personally involved with young children, my very reason for becoming a kindergarten teacher. Sure, there would be contact with them when I visited kindergartens, but I knew that wouldn't be the same.

What I hadn't realised was how much pleasure I would get from getting to work with with such a wonderful group of women, all of whom had the same interest – educating young children. My husband says he can't go anywhere with me where I don't meet someone I know, and 9 times out of 10 it's a kindergarten teacher, and aren't I lucky!