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Personal background.

I worked in legal offices after leaving school and also owned my own florist shop (where Downtown is now) until my marriage in 1953. We had three children, two sons and a daughter all of whom went to the Takapuna Kindergarten. In 1971 I returned to the workforce and worked for Classic Fashions until 2002. The work was mainly in the administration area as I couldn't sew a stitch. In fact I made jolly sure that everyone knew that, otherwise I would have been roped in to sewing on buttons etc. whenever we had a fashion showing coming up – about twice a year. I really enjoyed my job and I was also involved when computers first came in and had to learn several different programmes. It was a great place to work and of course I had my pick of the latest fashions.

Kindergarten beginnings.

When my eldest son was three I was persuaded to go to the AGM at the Takapuna Kindergarten. The President (Chairperson) was Connie Smith who was on the AKA Executive (Council) and also represented Auckland at the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union (NZFKU) at their annual conferences. Connie was also the founder of the North Shore Womens Club and prominent in the social circles in Takapuna. The Committee was run on pretty formal lines and that Takapuna Committee was like a who's who of North Shore Society. When I joined I was totally green about committee matters and was unaware that Connie had designs on me because she wanted to retire from Kindergarten to concentrate on her other interests.

The Takapuna Kindergarten was built in the aftermath of the War when there were building restrictions which resulted in a very tiny kitchen because they were only allowed to have so many square metres. The Kindergarten itself was in Hurstmere Road in the very centre of the shopping centre. A little way down the road there were a cluster of state houses until you got to the Mon Desir Hotel – very different from today! The ASB building was put up while the Kindergarten was still there, and we were forced to relocate as it became too dangerous for parking etc in an increasingly busy main road. I had been on the Committee a year when Connie dropped her bombshell and told me that not only she, but all the rest of the older people on the Committee were leaving. They felt it was time for the younger generation with children at Kindergarten to take their turn. The Committee had guided the Kindergarten from humble beginnings in a hall at the Takapuna Life Saving building to the Hurstmere Rd site. It was a time when people stayed on the Committee for ages after their children had left, to build up continuity – sometimes not a bad thing.

Anyhow, Connie told me she wanted me to be President (this was almost a royal command!), which was very flattering and totally terrifying. The first thing I had to organize, having been elected for a full two weeks, was a huge retirement luncheon for what was almost the whole retiring committee. The patron of the AKA at that time was Sir John Allum, so he came and also Jessie Neill who was the AKA Secretary. The luncheon was huge because of Connie's standing in the community, which meant half of Takapuna society had to be invited, including the local press who had a field day. My first public speech was at that gathering and I was absolutely petrified. Teachers at the

Kindergarten included Jenny Pope, Mary Smith (who went on to work in pre school Special Ed) and Lynn Anderson who lectures in Early Childhood at the Auckland College of Education. We had some very interesting Committee members too, including the Chief Reporter of the Auckland Star, Charles Wood, whose daughter Susan Wood was at the kindergarten with my daughter. Also the chap who was the Chairman of Pan American Airways.

The building on Hurstmere Road was on Council land and had some really lovely big trees on it. We negotiated with the Council and the Education Dept to move to a site in Tennyson Ave. The Hurstmere Road property then became the North Shore Horticultural Society's headquarters, but now it is just a welcome oasis in a very busy centre. Because the building had been put up by the local kindergarten community with grants from central government we had to do a lot of negotiation. The land swap was achieved amicably with the Council paying us a portion of the relocation costs as the Hurstmere Road property was a lot more valuable than the Tennyson Ave one. Then we had to work hard with the Education Dept. so that the Kindergarten did not have to in effect pay twice for a building.

During some of those years the main fundraising was from the inevitable cake stalls. These were quite easy as we used to set up in the small car park in front of the Kindergarten – right on Hurstmere Rd. It was brilliant and we made heaps of money because we were right in the main shopping centre. My children got used to my baking three cakes and realising only one was for us the others going to the Kindergarten. The other great money spinner was Progressive Dinners, and the Takapuna Kindergarten was well known for the great time everyone had. I recall at one time we had 70 people to dinner! We used to have them with houses close to each other – one had the entrée, another the main course and lastly the dessert. We started at Jan Barlow's place in Aberdeen Road, down to my place in Marywil Cres and lastly over to the Cohen's in Tudhope Glade – and we mostly didn't give a thought to drink-driving. Wine & Cheese evenings were the other popular fund raiser. We had one at the Mon Desir Hotel and next day the Committee were anxiously ringing each other up to see if they had hangovers. As I said, Takapuna was a pretty social place.

My children had all left the Kindergarten by then, but we tended to stay on for continuity. One advantage to the Hurstmere Rd site was that the Council kept our grounds tidy for us because of its position and they were most concerned over its appearance. We had a flower bed right under the office window. We didn't actually want this, but the Council's little Chinese gardener insisted on planting a big row of Iceland poppies right by the front door. I recall a couple of the children (one of whom ended up being a policeman) had a great time popping all the poppy buds.

My daughter Denise grew up with kindergarten in her veins. After I went on to the Executive of the AKA and later the NZFKU I was always being invited to kindergarten openings and from a small child she always tagged along with me – the boys were far too busy with football to bother. The result was that she trained as a kindergarten teacher in the then North Shore Teachers College, and after graduation taught at the Orakei Kindergarten. After raising her own family she returned to teaching and is now the Head Teacher at Wellsford Kindergarten.

Moving On...

The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer always went to the AGM of the AKA. Before one AGM Lindsey Rea (who was being elected to the Presidency) asked me if I would let my name go forward because once again a lot of the old guard were leaving. She was particularly anxious to get younger people that were still involved in kindergarten. This was unusual because most of the Executive were business people with a lot of expertise. Lindsey Rea had an education background, so you had business and education mixing at that level but they also wanted the input further down the line.

Eileen Bethell went on the year before me and I went on about 1966. The Council meetings were held once a month in Myers Kindergarten in Jessie Neill's office. Later we established sub-committees as a better way of getting through the business. Once Lindsey got into her stride she initiated a huge building programme. Being involved in education and passionate about pre-school education she realised that there were huge gaps in developing areas of Auckland and that many children were missing out. Bear in mind that the only other alternative at that time was Play Centre and many parents preferred what they believed was a more structured organisation with fully trained teachers. We were so proud of our teachers and the whole kindergarten movement.

During the time Lindsey was President she had an enormous number of kindergartens built and she also introduced to the Association the retired City Architect Tim Donner. Tim Donner had designed the Savage Memorial at Bastion Point, the Albert & Victoria Sts car parks and the Auckland City Administration building, so it was a huge coup to get someone of his calibre to help us plan kindergartens. Most of his services were donated and we most certainly didn't pay him the fees he would normally have attracted. The kindergartens I recall him designing were Green Bay, Northbridge and Broadlands. I am sure he was involved in others too. Lindsey was also responsible for introducing Ken Hayr to the Association. Ken had retired as Principal of the Ardmore Teachers College and was highly respected in education circles. Ken became a valued President of the AKA.

Buildings

We established several sub-committees – Finance & Policy, Building, Education etc. At one point I chaired both the Building and Finance & Policy Committees.

I worked closely with Broadlands Establishment Committee and it was common then (as I guess it is today) that the entire Committee who worked so hard for funds did not even have one child attend that kindergarten. I know of one outstanding exception. It became a standing joke that Barbara Burkett, their Chairperson, was so determined that at least one of her children would attend the kindergarten she helped build that she managed to become pregnant around the time of the opening of Broadlands. We attended many establishment committee meetings including Chelsea, Northbridge and Kauri Park. We all owe these parents a huge thank you for their generosity of spirit which kept them going knowing that their own children would never benefit.

At that stage we were building approximately 4 kindergartens a year from about 1963 to 1985. When I went on the Council we had 54 kindergartens and when I left we had 92. We have Lindsey Rea to thank for her vision in

pushing this programme forward. Remember we had to go through the government for all these buildings and we also had to go through the NZFKU as the ministry would not deal with individual kindergarten associations. We also did our own lobbying wherever we could and sometimes an MP who was unwise enough to fall into our traps of invitation got thoroughly earbashed over the urgent claims of the Auckland area. They would then go back to the Education Dept on our behalf – sometimes this was successful.

I recall once coming back from an NZFKU conference to find that there had been considerable press interest in the state of kindergarten building, and I was asked to go on television. This was a bit scary – I think the programme was Town and Around or something like that, and I was interviewed outside the Ponsonby Kindergarten. Funny to see yourself on tele. I think what Associations often did not appreciate was that the building was only the start of an ongoing commitment. Equipment had to be bought and there was a set grant provided by the Department, and also the ongoing teachers' salaries. We were at that stage building about 8 kindergartens nationwide and included in that would be relocations such as the Glen Innes Kindergarten which replaced the old Sunbeams Kindergarten. That was a total rebuilding, refurbishment, and it also had to go on to the building programme.

The Government paid teachers through the Association – one lump sum for all staff. Our office would get the returns from the teacher's hours and they were forwarded to Wellington, the money transferred to the AKA and at that point the AKA distributed the salaries to the staff. We did have one drama over this when we were 'between' secretaries. I think it was after Margaret Dean had gone and before Judy Dent arrived. One week the money did not arrive!! The Department had posted the cheque and the Post Office lost it. In those days no convenient wire transfer. There a was major panic. The Association Treasurer (Des O'Halloran) got involved, we had no Secretary and we were desperate for the money to pay the teachers. We contacted the Education Dept in Wellington who said they had sent the money. We contacted the Post Office who said they would put a trace on it. In the meantime Des had to go cap in hand to the ASB to get a grant to cover the staff salaries. The money turned up a week later – it had been 'lost in the post' – very scary.

The Association mostly relied on levies from Kindergartens to cover the Head Office costs – I think we only got a minimal grant to help run the office.

Politics

The Education Ministry would only deal with the NZFKU. Any concerns of any Association had to be channelled through them. We had an annual conference over about three days and everyone sent their delegates. The NZFKU Executive was elected at their AGM and lobbying was intense. There was never any guarantee that the larger associations would have a place on the Executive. As a large association Auckland had 4 votes – the top number. These votes were based on the number of kindergartens you had and 50 kindergartens was the top (no matter we had a lot more than that!). The election of Executive for the NZFKU was done at the AGM and this meeting could be held anywhere in New Zealand. People would offer to host this big event a couple of years before to allow for planning. For example an Association say Dunedin may be having their Jubilee in a couple of years, so they would book their offer. It was quite a big deal to host a conference because you would have well over 100 delegates, plus the Union Executive

(about 10) and Observers. This would involve conference facilities as well as arranging accommodation and usually at least one or more social functions. Auckland hosted one at the Logan Campbell Centre around the time of our 75th Jubilee.

Auckland delegates would be chosen at a Council meeting and the decision made how many observers we could send. There were usually various workshops apart from the formal sessions involving remits. These were valuable experiences for all our kindergarten people. To get someone on the Executive you had to be voted on by the whole conference by all the delegates there. Auckland did have an advantage to a certain extent because they had so many kindergartens, but Wellington, Christchurch and Bay of Plenty also had a lot of votes and if they decided that Auckland was too bossy and big for its boots or they didn't particularly care for the person being nominated they could outvote you. We had to work really hard to convince other associations that we were worthy of a place on the Executive! I also recall that one year the Auckland people decided I hadn't pushed the Auckland building programme hard enough at Executive level (by then I was supposed to be working for the whole country and I really had pushed hard for Auckland) and it became something of a scandal when word leaked out that some of the Auckland delegation would not be voting for me as Vice President. This somewhat backfired as people from all over New Zealand were coming up to tell me not to worry – their association was voting for me – totally embarrassing as I was unaware of the 'plot'.

Wards

At the Timaru conference sometime in the 1960s the Minister of Education dropped the bombshell that in future Education Boards would take over the role of maintenance of kindergartens and we would have a suitable amount deducted from any grants we currently received, replacing them with an allocation to the Board. The method of estimating this allocation was the source of great controversy, and Judy Dent battled continually to try and get some common sense into the system. There was general dismay as the Boards did not have a great track record for school maintenance and the kindergarten movement wanted to jealously guard their own maintenance and of course the grants.

Partly to counter this, the movement decided to split the associations into Ward areas. These were based on the Education Board areas, and the idea was that we would be able to have our own representative work with the Board to ensure our kindergartens were properly maintained – and we would be able to choose the order things were to be done in. The Auckland area was from Kaitia in the North to Franklin in the South. Ward meetings were held on a Saturday three times a year, mostly in either Dargaville or Whangarei – these being the most central places for it. A Ward member was elected each year (I think this was often someone on the NZFKU executive) and associations could send as many members as they wished. Both Dargaville and Whangarei held the meetings in one of their kindergartens and were gracious hosts and provided us with lunch and morning tea. These were great occasions and we got to know everyone really well. These contacts proved invaluable on as the whole Ward would get behind one of us if we were standing for election to the NZFKU. As a very big association it could be quite humbling to learn of problems facing smaller associations.

This system was also great at a slightly later stage when at the Nelson conference (somewhere in the 70's) it was decided to try and reduce the number of small associations through amalgamation. Small associations who had met their counterparts at Ward meetings could then decide who they would amalgamate with. This is how the Wellsford Kindergarten which was originally a single association became part of Auckland. After taking part in Ward meetings they realised that Auckland could offer far greater professional support for their staff, so they made that decision although East Coast Bays (now Northern Auckland) was far closer.

NZFKU

I was elected on to the NZFKU executive around 1980. Meetings were held in Wellington once a term (minimum) over a weekend. We usually travelled on a Friday evening, had a full meeting Saturday and often continued on Sunday morning. We often stayed at Iona Towers which was just off Willis Street and the meetings were in the NZFKU offices in Education House. It was always a good opportunity to get together with the other executive members from around the country and we got to know each other really well. We usually had quite a few informal discussions around a cup of coffee.

Because the Ward system was working so well we always brought any issues the whole Ward may have to the meetings especially if the smaller associations thought they weren't getting a fair deal. I always kept in touch with the Ward and reported any points of interest back to them. About 1982 I was elected as Vice-President and served three terms until work commitments forced me to resign. This was disappointing as I was expected to take up the Presidency the following year – *c'est la vie*. After a several years on the executive I was joined by Denise Iversen – now Auckland had two voices on the Executive and we worked really hard to push Auckland building projects ahead. This was possible as I was Vice President and Denise was elected on to the Executive. After I had retired Sue Crockett joined her at the executive table.

At a later stage the Auckland, Wellington and Bay of Plenty Associations withdrew from the NZFKU – but that is another story entirely.