

Nancy Emmitt

I was born in Takapuna, in 1915, just 50 yards from where I live now in Clifton Road. I went to Belmont School and then Takapuna Grammar. After that, kindergarten.

I've no idea how I decided to become a kindergarten teacher. I often think back, and I remember I went back after the 6th form, I went back to school for a period till Easter and then I thought, "O, I'm not going to cope with this 7th form program", and so I said to the headmaster that I was needed at home and I was going to leave. I was a prefect for that short time, and I think I helped mother at home for a while, but I have no recollection of my future being discussed. I think it was one of the things that some of the girls who didn't go to business college or university were taking up, but I really have no idea.

We started straight away in the kindergartens in the morning, and then went to Myers in the afternoon for lectures. I had to catch the tram, the bus, yes, at about 20 to 8 at the top of Clifton Road and then the ferry to Bayswater. This was in the early '30's. I remember Agnes Cole (later Campbell), one of the senior students, and Jean Chandler who was friendly with Agnes. I think Marie Bomford was also in that year. I remember Jocelyn Archie (whose father, Dr. Archie, was Director of Auckland Museum for many years), also Betty Innes, Val Pope and Myrtle Stewart.

I was sent to the old Logan Campbell Kindergarten. That was with Olive Garland. She was the head teacher. The classrooms had an observation window in the door, and a curtain on the corridor side, and I had no idea how to control children, they were all over the place. And every now and then I'd catch out the corner of my eye the curtain flick, and think, oh somebody's been watching me. But the kiddies down there were a mixture, if I remember. A mixture of Chinese and Maori. They used to come from all round that Union Street area, and we used to have to go visiting if they were not attending. And there were really some quite weird characters around in the streets in those days, looking back.

We were also sent to the other kindergartens...Ponsonby and Kingsland, Otahuhu and Onehunga, also Myers. There would be 2 students, a senior one and a junior one at each kindergarten. I would be the junior one, you see.

Constance Colegrove was there then, and she took the lectures. We had Madge Slingsby Newman who took art and music. She lived somewhere near St Cuthberts, and we used to go out there occasionally to her place, an elderly lady.

We all had to be able to play the piano before we went in. That was one of the criteria. We did singing, and we put on a play at the end of the year.

I started at Logan Campbell, and then I went to, I'm not quite sure if this is the right chronological order, but I went to Sunbeams, which was down Virginia Avenue, Kingsland. Quite a walk down there, right down the back of the Zoo. And I remember down there the kiddies being quite deprived.

There was a lady there, Clara, commenting on how upset one of the little girls got because somebody had taken her lollies. And I must have been a little bit critical, and she said, "To these children that is very important". And some of them would have come without any breakfast or whatever.

I remember down at Logan Campbell, we had two little twin girls, Amelia was one of them, and I can't remember the other one, they were Chinese Maori, quite tall, slim children, and very, very musical. And they used to dance around, and that has stuck in my mind, those two little ones.

And I went to Ponsonby, to St James, where the senior student was having problems with the control of the class. They were very unruly, so they changed the colour of the furniture in that room from Chinese red which was very stimulating, to a green to see if that would encourage the children to be more passive. I can't remember what the result was, it wasn't my class. We used to take the children across the main road to a park in Jervois Road.

I went to Onehunga, which was a day's march. Half an hour in the tram from town. The one thing that sticks in my mind about Onehunga was that we, I don't know if we were escorting our children home or just taking them for a walk up the main street, but we didn't have kiddies in close with a rope or anything. I think they introduced that a bit later. They were just holding hands, about 5 or 6 children on each side of the teacher, who was holding hands, of course. And one of my little ones, out here, on the edge of the footpath, suddenly dropped hands and dashed out into the road. I shook people off, grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, put him back onto the footpath again. And I went to Otahuhu, that was another long trip, in a bus that time.

I remember Ruth Sutherland at Onehunga, a tall lady, handsome. And Olive Garland, Tom Garland's sister. He was the City Missioner at that time. I was a bit scared of her, of course being my first experience and not having had a lot to do with children.

And then I went to Myers. I must have been at Myers in the wintertime, I think, because I seem to remember chopping up masses of veges to make vege soup for the children.

I remember making cocoa for the children, possibly at Sunbeams where the children were very poor. At that time we had free milk and we found the children liked the taste of the cocoa more than the plain milk.

I think the kindergartens started at 9, but they used to come as soon as we opened the door. They'd be watching out. At Myers we had, I remember, two diminutive Chinese boys, immaculate. Some Chinese businessman used to drop them off, and you know what little Chinese children are like, they're very engaging. And I remember them coming in and always being very well behaved and very beautifully dressed.

And then I could have caught the earlier boat home. I could have caught the 20 past 4, or half past 4 boat, but I was courting at the time. And my friend used to be on the 10 to 5 boat so I'd wait for that boat. I would walk down and do a bit of window shopping on the way home. So I guess this is partly why, and I also had my Brownie responsibilities, partly why I don't remember quite so much, because my mind would be on other things as well.

I remember when I was a senior student, we had to take the 5 year olds, because they were cutting down the space at schools, so we would teach them to read, and the Child Education magazine that we could get had all sorts of aids for that, where you cut out the picture and stuck it on a piece of paper, and with the word on another, on a little piece of cardboard, and they matched the words to the pictures, and things like that.

After I finished my training I had a kindergarten at home. It was a big house, and I was the only one left at home. I had about 8 children and it was easy. There was a big verandah that came round the lower floor into a sunporch room, which also came into what used to be the breakfast room. So that was my kindergarten, with its own entrance and exit from round the big wide verandah. They could go out in the garden as well. I've got photos of them out underneath the tree on the front lawn.

We had an inside sort of cloakroom that my sister used to use for developing and printing photos, she was a great photographer, and that was our bathroom part, and then you had to go further out to the toilet which was down the back verandah and outside. So I had that until just before I got married, 3 or 4 years I suppose, with the kiddies from Hauraki Road and around there.

The ages were 3 to 5, until they went to school. They came from 9 till 12. And I had one or two older children at one stage, who were a bit backward, and there was one boy who came, I think they must have lived in a very small, possibly a garage or somewhere, because he smelt strongly of smoke. His schoolbag smelled of smoke, wood smoke.

After I got married in 1938 I put my time into Guides and Brownies, and then became District Commissioner for Guides. My name had been put forward in the year before we were married, because I'd had a long history of Guiding, had been in the movement since I was 12. But it was early days for Guiding, then. I went straight into Guides, I didn't have Brownie experience, but we had very good training classes. I was with Betty Coleson who was Mrs W.R. Wilson's daughter. Mrs Wilson brought Guiding back from England, and Betty was Brown Owl, and I was her Tawny, which is 2nd in command. And then I gradually took over the pack when she got married, and so I'd had quite a lot of experience so the committee put forward my name for District Commissioner, but they said it would be better if you wait until you are married.

I was very busy. My district went from Devonport to Browns Bay, and each little bay had its own Brownie pack and Guide company, so it was a very enjoyable time in my life. And I was Commissioner until 1960 when we moved into our own house and I very reluctantly had to leave. Guiding was changing too, and I didn't approve of a lot of things, didn't go along with a lot of the new ideas, so from that point of view it was quite good I did leave, otherwise I might have been a bit disruptive.

Then I turned my attention more to older people. It was at the time when there were a lot of older people living by themselves and causing concern with their councils and whatever. They were talking about forming little groups of cottages and having a person as an overseer of this little group, the beginning of the rest home and retirement villages idea.

That was about 30 years ago, around about '72 I think. I became interested in finding entertainment for these people. I wasn't actually involved in any of the management or the practical care of them, but I used to provide entertainment every Wednesday for elderly people that met first in Devonport, and then at St Joseph's Catholic Church.

Choirs, good individual entertainers, soloists and things, mainly choirs. And for a little while, when they opened the Braille Club in those days, they've changed it now to the Prescott Club, they opened a branch at Orewa, and I also for quite a long time provided entertainment. When I say provided, I mean rang up and arranged for

people to go, and sometimes went myself if I couldn't get anybody, and sometimes took my own group. So I did that for about 20 years I think.

My group, when I took it over, there were about 18. By the numbers of copies of music, there must have been 40 to 50 previously. They had been the Townswomen's Choir, the Townswomen's Guild, from all over Auckland. And I understand that they used to do quite high-faluting things at big festivals at the Town Hall and round about. They had a very good reputation I understand. I don't know how it came to be just the smaller group.

But anyway we were called the Linden Singers, not the ones that you hear on the radio, they're a very famous choir in Wellington. We were called the Linden Singers because when they became their own small group they were learning the Linden Tree song. And Miss Annie Knight was taking them when I first joined, and then when she retired I took over. I said well, I'll keep you together, but I'm not a professional, but if you're happy I'll do it. And I did that for 20 years.

We used to do about 25 concerts a year, always for senior citizens. Nothing very professional. But having so many people, we were able to do some quite interesting 3-part women's singing, some lovely songs, and we used to go as far as Papakura and Avondale, and up to Te Atatu North, over the Shore. Now I feel sad that the group has come to pieces. They've had to leave for various reasons, or have died, and we're now down to 4, and 2 of those won't be doing anything else. So I haven't closed the group altogether, because I'm hoping that I might be able to find something else in that line, I'd love to.

I do have what I call my old folks group, and it's now known at the church as Nancy's Group. I've always had to have drivers, find people. It's mostly people that I know in the community who are my helpers. Yes, I'd organize the drivers, the afternoon tea and the entertainment. Things over the last 2 years have become a little easier because some of the rest homes have got their own little vans now, little buses. Most of them have, but they're not always available, but it has been easier recently. I've had about 3 places that have their own transport, which is good, but it's a big job.

I'm 88 now and still working, so to speak. But, I still want to. I've had one cataract done, and I'm going to have another one done quite soon, and I still want to work.