

Reminiscence of Constance Colegrove by Richard Colegrove, 2009

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I am grateful for the invitation to record some of my memories of my late Aunt Constance. These reflect my childhood and early teens, as she died in March 1953 when I was only about sixteen years old. I was not therefore aware in any detail of her life's work in the Auckland Kindergarten Association. My reminiscences are mostly confined to our family life.

Both Constance and her sister May Colegrove, were spinsters and lived with their father in Arney Road, Remuera. My father, Selwyn, was their brother and his immediate family lived close by in St. Stephens Avenue, Parnell. We kept in almost daily contact. Much later I learned with amusement that Constance had carefully observed my brother's and my upbringing (my sister was quite a bit younger) and relayed items of interest on a regular basis to her Kindergarten teachers! For better or worse, I have discovered that some of the teachers of that era remember details of this to this day.

Constance had a great love of gardening, and had a small glasshouse in which she cultivated the most beautiful tuberous begonias. Each summer when they flowered we shared the fruits of her labour and she frequently wore a bloom on her dress as a buttonhole.

She had a great love for children and while not having any of her own she would certainly have had great fulfilment in being closely involved with the hundreds of children who passed through the kindergartens in her time. Constance was a strong character and keenly intelligent. She had a deep Christian faith and worshipped regularly at St. Mark's Church, Remuera. I have no doubt that she saw her kindergarten work with children as a very personal outworking of that faith – indeed, as a calling. Her demeanour was quiet and humble. I have been told by many who knew her well that she exerted a remarkable influence, - and not least when she was raising support for what was an essentially a voluntary organisation! The family was very proud when in 1935 Constance was awarded a Visitor's Grant from the Carnegie Corporation to study at the post-graduate Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York. This enabled her to study kindergarten methods both there and later more extensively, with huge subsequent benefit to the kindergarten work here.

Constance was frequently seen around Auckland driving her little Austin 7

motor-car – a 1935 model, I think - which my brother and I later inherited. At the time I was fascinated because this car had pneumatic seats, which would sometimes need to be inflated with a bicycle pump!

To us in the family she was always loving and concerned – especially with the upbringing of my brother, my sister and myself. Music was a major interest in the family and I shall always be enormously grateful for the wonderful gift that was cultivated in us.

Constance showed enormous strength and courage when she was struck down with incurable cancer. All who visited her in her home in the last agonising weeks and days of her life, came away feeling profoundly moved.

It is a great joy and privilege to contribute these thoughts in memory of a very special and wonderful person.