

Memories of my life at Kindergarten
by Isabel Paterson (nee Campbell).

I should say, first of all, that my mother was Mrs Archie Campbell, who was a well-known figure in Auckland for many years involved in community and charitable organizations. While I was young and my father was still alive she stayed happily at home and occupied herself with music, art work etc. She was fun to live with. After my father died in 1933, she enlarged her horizons into the world of music (the Auckland Dorian Singers and the Auckland Junior Symphony Orchestra), also Plunket work, and what became known later as the Auckland Festival Society. In 1953 she was awarded an MBE for "Services to Women and Children".

I was quiet and shy and she could never understand that standing up and making speeches was not my cup of tea. In spite of that we had a wonderful life together and she came with me to the UK when I married my husband in 1970 – she was then about 88. Her last few years were spent in Caughey Preston rest home.

All her varied charitable works did not include kindergarten and she did not influence my decision to train for kindergarten work. She was active in the establishment of the Wilson Home for Crippled Children at Takapuna. The Winstone family were also involved and Beryl Winstone (later Carr) talked with me about kindergarten training so I applied and was accepted in January 1939 (just after the War had started).

The Training School was at Myers Park, Queen Street, Auckland. I think there were only six girls included in that group. The only name I can recall well was Valerie Guppy, whose family was English and lived in Remuera. I was also friendly with another girl from Wellsford (her father was Stock and Station Agent). She boarded at the Girls Friendly Assn. at the bottom of Wellesley Street. I know she married a farmer and lived up North, but I am sorry I don't remember her name.

The head of the organization was Miss Colegrove who was our main teacher and adviser. We went out on 'section' each morning – each term to a different kindergarten.

My first was to Campbell Kindergarten in Freemans Bay (right by the motorway over Victoria Park). Miss Pat Laidlaw was in charge. Other terms I was at Ponsonby, Onehunga, Otahuhu, New North Road (under Miss Rothbury) and so on, all of them a distance for me to travel as I then lived at Northcote Point (before the Bridge) and went to and fro on ferry and tram or a bus to Otahuhu on the 'back road'. It was a pleasure to be at a kindy-built school as opposed to church halls where equipment was basic and had to be stacked away each day.

Each afternoon we returned to Myers Park for our lectures from Miss Colegrove or a visiting expert in Art, Music, Painting etc. It was impressed upon us that we were fortunate not to have to pay a tuition fee – ours was the first year to be free. There was a very friendly Pet Shop owner at the top of Queen Street who allowed us to borrow his small animals and return them the following day.

At the end of my two years of training as a junior and then senior student (1939-1940) Valerie Guppy and I were sent out to the kindergarten at Pt. Chevalier, to the

Haliburton Johnston Bowling Club rooms as joint Directors (Head Teachers). We both survived and the pupils too without any difficulty – coping with Milk in Schools was the most difficult.

After that, in 1942, I went to “Haeata” at Eden Park – rooms in the Members’ Stand - as assistant to Nancy Lane. The fumes of beer and the huge problems with the surrounding flooding were very bad. The only pupil I can remember lived in a house at the Cricket Avenue gates of Eden Park. He later became a well-known caterer (his parents being caterers for the Members’ Stand). I received excellent service ever after.

In 1944 I was made Director of the then new kindergarten at Takapuna. It was held in the Presbyterian Church (St. Andrews) very close to the Halls Corner shops. To get to Takapuna I went to town and back by Bayswater Ferry as the road between Northcote and the back of Lake at Takapuna was not complete. My assistant was Anne Blomfield who came from Otorahonga. She married a Mr Hurst years later but was unfortunately killed on Main Highway down the Waikato. The President of the Ladies Committee was very kind to me. At the request of some of the mothers who wanted extra time to get to the city and back again on the ferry, I had a longer session until about 2pm once a week on a Wednesday. On that day the children brought lunch and they all had little stretchers for a rest, which gave them a proper sleep.

Towards the end of 1944 I resigned from Takapuna as I joined the N.Z.Army for Overseas Service as a V.A.D. I filled in those few weeks with Nancy Lane at Eden Park.

My salary at Pt Chevalier was 60 pounds (we split the Director’s fee in half). I think I received about 100 pounds at Eden Park and 120 pounds at Takapuna. I received far more money as a Private in the Army Medical Section than I ever did at kindergarten.

The 100 years’ Celebration was a wonderful time. I joined, hoping to see some old friends, but I turned out to be the oldest trained girl they could find. There were 8 kindergartens in my day, but now there are 100!

Written 2009