

In Memoriam

Marjorie Thatcher

May 15, 1940 - September 17, 2023

Marjorie Thatcher, a passionate advocate for young children and their parents, stands with the first teachers to consolidate Waldorf Early Childhood work in North America. A long-time teacher in Vancouver, British Columbia, Marjorie played a key role in the founding of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (now WECAN), and of the West Coast Institute for teacher training. Marjorie also began one of the first Parent-Child programs in North America, and was a pioneer in the Birth to Three movement and the development of day care for young children.



Marjorie was born in New Zealand. She and her older twin were the oldest of four siblings. Her youngest brother had Down Syndrome, and his formative presence in her life influenced many of her future choices.

Marjorie spent her childhood in a wholesome rural environment, with orchards and horse-drawn cart rides, sandy hills, windy cliffs, rough-wavy-ocean swims, picnics at the beach and boating. Raised in a happy home where music had a significant place, Marjorie was and remained an avid reader. Even as a child, she had an impulse toward caring for her siblings, and particularly her youngest brother.

It was because of her aunt that Marjorie first met anthroposophy. Her aunt had studied extensively in Dornach, and then, inspired by the needs of her nephew, founded the first anthroposophical therapeutic home for children with special needs in New Zealand. In this therapeutic place, Dr. Maria Glas, a medical doctor who had known Rudolf Steiner,

inspired Marjorie further on this path.

Consequently, Marjorie studied nursing and later became a midwife. After completing her training, she came to British Columbia, Canada where she met her future husband, Philip Thatcher. A year after they were married, the young couple set off to see the world together with stops in New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Iran, Jordanian Jerusalem, Israel, and England; they also visited the Goetheanum in Switzerland. They returned to Canada for the birth of their children, and lived in Prince George, British Columbia for five years before moving to Vancouver.

Marjorie had a well-developed strength of will. Joan Almon said in the early years of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association (now WECAN), an organization Marjorie helped found, "We talk about the importance of doing certain things and Marjorie just does it!"

Marjorie cultivated strong rhythms around family life. Her home in North Vancouver had a big space set

up where many neighborhood children would come to play; she also held a Sunday School program in Philip's parish.

In 1976, Marjorie was invited by Dorothy Olsen to join her as a member of the early childhood faculty at the Vancouver Waldorf School (VWS). A year later the Thatcher family moved to England so that both parents could take part in anthroposophical studies at Emerson College. Marjorie took the education course, did practicum work at Michael Hall School, and also learned from Margret Meyerkort. Then she and Philip returned to Canada, taking an active role in the Vancouver Waldorf School's early years. Marjorie played a significant role first as one of the early kindergarten teachers, and later the preschool teacher.

Marjorie was dedicated to providing opportunities for children to experience real human activity and the arts, as appropriate for the early years. To this she brought her love of gardening, cooking and baking—honey-salt bread—grinding grain by hand, sewing, storytelling, and simple songs sung in her lovely soprano voice, sometimes accompanied with a kinderharp.

In addition to her many years of service at the Vancouver Waldorf School and on the first board of directors of the Waldorf Kindergarten Association, Marjorie was also the co-founder with Dorothy Olsen of the West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy (WCI) in 1996.

Marjorie spearheaded many early childhood conferences in the Pacific Northwest to inspire teachers, many of whom lacked a formal training, in their work with children. She inspired and supported many students and was always available for conversations—often deep ones—about anthroposophy, education, and questions regarding an individual child's needs. Marjorie's nursing background came to the forefront on many occasions when students arrived at the training feeling ill. Family was very important to Marjorie, and she kept in touch with her own family in New Zealand through letters and visits.

Marjorie also supported her husband, Philip, as he became a Waldorf high school teacher, a pioneer of the Vancouver Waldorf High School program, and



for seven years the general secretary for the Canadian Anthroposophical Society.

In her last years at VWS, she spearheaded one other big project: the construction of an early childhood building designed by Bert Chase, an anthroposophical architect. It is a beautiful, purpose-built place, surrounded by gardens. All the classrooms have windows to bring in natural light and it is ensouled with the prevailing feeling that “this is a good place for young children.” Upstairs, there is a room that is called the Marjorie Thatcher Meeting Room.

Marjorie was a woman of initiative, and her contributions will live on for a long time. ♦

—Compiled by Ruth Ker and Kim Hunter