

In Memory of Helmut von Kügelgen

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Our dear Helmut von Kügelgen crossed the threshold of death on February 25, 1998 in Stuttgart at age 81. Although his health had declined in recent years, he was able to attend meetings and write letters until shortly before his death. He was known throughout the Waldorf kindergarten movement as the wonderfully wise man who took four classes through as a class teacher and then in retirement devoted himself to the young child, serving as head of the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association. He was also an active teacher in the Kindergarten Seminar in Stuttgart and was a leading force in the circle of religion teachers in Waldorf schools.

He played an instrumental role in the development of our kindergarten work in North America. When we wanted to found the Kindergarten Association here I had several very rich conversations with him. He voiced a concern that although it was good to have a separate kindergarten association to meet the needs of the teachers, it was also important to work closely with the whole school movement. He was a bridge builder who saw the importance of everyone working together. He also wanted to see the kindergarten teachers playing a full role in the whole school movement, which in the 1970s and 80's was not the case here. On a trip to North America in 1984 school colleagues asked him, "Can you imagine that a kindergarten teacher could be a Faculty Chair or College Chair of a full school?" He was shocked that such a question would be asked and said there should be no problem at all. Since that time many kindergarten teachers have served their schools in these positions, and it is no longer a question. When I see how many kindergarten teachers now serve as AWSNA delegates for their schools I often think of Dr. von Kügelgen and his great wish that we all work together.

He was much loved as a man of great spiritual insight. His lectures were stirring and the way he helped Waldorf's roots go more deeply into anthroposophy was especially inspiring. Last Whitsun at the international kindergarten conference, he spoke with immense power about the spiritual world. I can still his words ringing out: "You must realize that the spiritual world is not somewhere far away. It is right here!" These were the words of one who was near the threshold of death and sensed the spiritual all around him, but they were also the words of one who intimately knew that the spiritual world is in each one of us.

It happened that on the day he died I was flying to Stuttgart for meetings about forming an alliance for the protection of childhood, a project he felt very strongly about. It was a great gift to be present for the three day vigil during which his body lay in the kindergarten seminar building, to be able to sit with him and read to him, to attend the Christian Community service where his spirit was released to the spiritual world, to attend the funeral service which preceded his cremation and then to attend a memorial for him at the Waldorf School where he taught for so many years. It was also wonderful to be with his five daughters, among them Michaela Glöckler, who has offered so much to our movement. He led a rich life and leaves a great legacy for us all - a love for the young child, a great wish to protect childhood, and a longing to see kindergarten teachers working together with all Waldorf teachers to deepen the spiritual basis of our work.

As a special tribute to Dr. von Kügelgen, we will now be publishing in English the full series of booklets which he created on the festivals and related spiritual themes.