

Betty Szold Krainis

Early Childhood Building Dedication

by Christine Inglis and Michelle Kuzia

On May 17, the entire Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School community gathered to dedicate our newly renovated early childhood building to our beloved founding kindergarten teacher, Betty Szold Krainis, whose life spanned April 16, 1923 to September 19, 2002.

In 1959 Betty and her husband Bernie Krainis purchased a marvelous fifty-acre property in Great Barrington that included a Colonial-era house, cottage, and barn. Ten years later the Krainis family created the Good Food Coop with more than a hundred families, and housed it in their barn. Some of the same people interested in wholesome food were also interested in starting a Waldorf school, so in 1971 the barn in Betty's backyard was transformed into the Pumpkin Hollow School, a kindergarten, with Betty serving as teacher.

Betty was a teacher on many levels. Her colleagues learned much from her through example. She wasn't daunted by hard work, and rolled up her sleeves to do the physical work necessary to create a school, and taught us the hard task of fundraising. Second only to her family, who were dear to her, Betty loved being a kindergarten teacher. She believed deeply in Waldorf principles and saw the happy years of early childhood as optimal for developing confidence in the child. This, she knew, together with cultivating capacities of wonder, reverence, and gratitude, builds inner strength in the child.

The school soon began to outgrow itself, and so Betty, with her generous spirit, donated the land and barn, which was moved a quarter mile down the road to its present location (and now houses our school library). Not only was Betty Krainis a founding kindergarten teacher at our school from 1971 to 1988, her gift of the land and barn enabled the Pumpkin Hollow School — later renamed the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School — to really take root and flourish. For many years, the barn served as the kindergarten classroom, while the grades program grew up around it. Eventually the burgeoning early childhood program sought more space.

The current early childhood building, or North Building as it was once called, was originally built as a Waldorf high school. The building has served many purposes over the years, but for the last twelve years it has been home to our kindergarten, nursery and parent-toddler classes. Over the past two summers, a wonderful renovation took place, making the building truly functional for our young children. We now have five beautiful classrooms, each with its own kitchen and child-sized bathroom decorated with decorative tile work evocative of its name: Robin's Nest, Rose Room, Sun Room, Star Room, and Rainbow Room. Many parents, teachers, and community members were involved in this project and we wish to thank everyone who helped in creating this welcoming and nurturing new space.

Thirty-six years after that first kindergarten got started under Betty's loving guidance, we have a thriving, bustling early childhood program housed in a space that is a model for Waldorf early childhood programs everywhere. We wish to honor our founding kindergarten teacher and benefactor by dedicating this building to Betty Szold Krainis. Just as her warmth and love touched the lives of so many little children — some of whom now bring their own children to our school — we hope that this building will continue to serve as a haven for generations to come.