



# Graduate Network

In this issue we feature a series of articles about the 'Kindergarten of the Air'.

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## Kindergarten of the Air ... It all began in Western Australia

Early in the Second World War years the kindergartens in Western Australia were closed for some months because of the fear of air raids. (The Japanese did reach Broome). To fill this gap a group of preschool teachers put forward the idea of a radio program for preschoolers and in 1942 the Australian Broadcasting Commission agreed to present a program from Perth for Western Australian children. The ABC already ran a successful women's session there presented by Catherine King who was interested in the establishment of kindergartens in Perth. (She was the daughter of Professor Murdoch after whom that University is named). Mrs King supported

the setting up of the 'Kindergarten of the Air' as the program was called. The first presenter was a Perth Kindergarten Training College (PKTC) graduate, Margaret Graham. This was a world first.

The Perth ABC studio could accommodate a small group of children who sat on tiered seating for the daily live broadcasts. Miss Graham could see the children but eye contact was difficult. They came down to the centre floor for movement. The pianist was Jean McKinley, also a PKTC graduate. Different groups of children came each week. There was a liaison group to assist the presenter and together they wrote the program. I served

on this group in my role as Assistant Principal of the PKTC.

This was hugely successful and in 1943 the ABC decided to centralize the program in Sydney. The presenter was Ruth Fenner. Soon afterwards the 'Kindergarten of the Air' alternated daily with Melbourne presenter, Anne Dreyer.

This widely popular program was also heard by members of the Australian Armed Forces who were posted overseas and were able to imagine themselves at home with their children.

Dr Betty Davis  
(1933 Graduate)

## A few memories of the Kindergarten of the Air

I first met Anne Dreyer who was then presenting *'Kindergarten of the Air'* when I went to teach in the Children's Hospital Spastic Centre in Melbourne in 1946.

When I was returning to Adelaide at the end of 1951, Anne asked me if I would like to apply for the *'Kindergarten of the Air'* relief pianist position for the January holidays. This I did which meant being auditioned in a session with Anne Dreyer at the ABC. I was subsequently appointed.

Prior to the broadcast, I had to receive the Relief Broadcasters program to which I supplied the music. I then had to submit to the ABC a list of any published music I might use.

I was privileged to play on the ABC's comparatively new grand piano that had been acquired fairly soon after the War when things were still in short supply. Perhaps the adjustable

piano stools were in short supply too, as all I had was a chair. This being a little low, I put a second one on top – but after the session, a voice from above (we had only one ABC person in our area) called "Miss Leal would you please not use such seating, as every time you moved, a squeak was clearly broadcast!"

On another rare occasion when I needed to contact the unseen program directors to ask if I could use some printed music – I have forgotten what – the abrupt reply was "Do what you like but don't kill Father Christmas". There had recently been a great outcry when the Sydney *'Kindergarten of the Air'* broadcaster, who alternated daily with Anne Dreyer, had told the children that Father Christmas was make believe.

Most of the music was improvisation (blessings on Heather Gell with whom I had done a course in class teaching at the Conservatorium) and on one occasion I was asked if what I had played for the children when they were to be fish in a fish pond was original. From whom did they think I was stealing it?

The broadcasts were live in those days, so there was no room for mistakes, but I remember a bad moment when the presenter, who had to keep an eye on the clock to finish on the dot, said "Children, let's sing a 'froggie' song again". Having had three frog songs on this session, I played a chord in the key of the last one, and luckily things worked out.

When Anne Dreyer visited Adelaide for the Kindergarten Conference, the ABC allowed her to record her session provided she observed it being received in Adelaide. I arranged for her to see my niece Cynthia – aged 3 or 4 listening. I watched too and I remember Cynthia was completely absorbed and took no notice whatsoever of the visitor. I was proud of her.

*Marion Leal (31/8/2003)*



**"The broadcasts were live in those days, so there was no room for mistakes"**

## Kindergarten of the Air ... I remember

I sat cross-legged in front of the wireless waiting impatiently for the signature music "Girls and Boys Come Out to Play", which told me that Kindergarten of the Air was about to start.

As my mother was an Infant Teacher, she was aware of the value of this program, and encouraged my twin brother and me to listen to it each morning. I remember the songs "Tap tap, shake shake, I play on my tambourine", "Clickety clack, a-lunk-a-lunk, the train is coming a-chunk-a-chunk". We were asked to do the actions and, as appropriate, move around the room.

There was always a story time, and I wish I still had one of the books recommended for parents to buy, which was given to me for my fourth birthday. The book, I remember with nostalgia, was "Digit Dick on the Great Barrier Reef", which was about a thumb sized boy who slept in a match box and had lively encounters with the hermit crab, nautilus shell, and brightly coloured fish.

There was often a short talk for parents on things to do with children, and suggestions for "after the session" activities.

I remember the home-made play dough,

and the rabbits drawn on cardboard from the "Weeties" packet which I cut out and coloured, and to which I added cotton-wool tails, (the recipe for starch paste having been given during the session).

I still have and treasure the songbook bought by my mother over fifty years ago "Little Songs for You and Me", with words by Anne Dreyer and music by Robin Wood.

These are some of my most vivid and happy childhood memories, thanks to "Kindergarten of the Air".

*Pauline Butler*

## Anne Dreyer

Anne Hope Dreyer was born in Perth on February 28, 1905.

Her family moved to Victoria when she was a baby.

In 1923, at the age of 18, Anne started studying at the Melbourne Kindergarten Training College in Kew. After graduating with a Diploma for Nursery School, Kindergarten and Sub Primary Teaching she taught in kindergartens for 15 years.

In the autumn of 1943 Anne's first broadcast went to air. It was an instant success. She endeared herself to children and parents throughout Australia through her tri-weekly broadcasts.

'Kindergarten of the Air' was an Australian program, but listened to by children throughout the British Commonwealth.



Anne anchored the program for 10 years. She spent the next ten years as a lecturer at the Melbourne Kindergarten Training College.

In 1963 Anne returned to the ABC to work on the program and she did so for the next two years. Anne resigned shortly after the program was transferred to television.

Anne died in Melbourne on January 22, 2001, aged 95.

Anne Dreyer was recognized as one of Australia's progressive authorities on preschool education.

*Cris Zollo*

***“‘Kindergarten of the Air’ was an Australian program, but listened to by children throughout the British Commonwealth”***

## Reflections

As a long time admirer of Anne Dreyer and *'Kindergarten of the Air'* I was delighted when the chance to follow in her footsteps came. In 1960 the program was advertised in Adelaide and after some hair-raising auditions I was given a trial – it became a twice a year term as the *'Kindergarten Lady'!*

It was a time of hard work, research, script writing, rehearsals, recording and replying to the many

letters.

I treasure the memories of the reactions to the programs, such as the small boy, an avid listener, who came in as I said “goodbye children”. He dived into the speaker box demolishing it and shouting “come back, come back”! Or another small boy who, after a story about a little Koala who ate gum leaves exclusively, responded to the question, “how would you like to eat

the same food all the time?” with “No, I don't even like gum leaves!”. In my time there were three wonderful pianists and a number of actors and artists who added effects to my singing and story telling.

I made one potentially serious blunder and was called to the managers office .. but that is another story!

“Goodbye Children”

*Sheila Wesley-Smith (Martin)*  
(1935 Graduate).

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## Functions

### Annual Dinner

**Cremorne Hotel, Unley, September 2, 2003.**

There were some new faces among the faithful supporters of our Association when twenty five of us gathered at the Cremorne Hotel. We sat at two long tables parallel to each other which seemed to add to the convivial atmosphere.

Professor Marie Brennan, Dean of Education and Head of the new School of Education, was our special guest and guest speaker for the evening. Professor Brennan a 'people person' moved around and spoke informally to as many of our members and guests as possible. Professor Brennan spoke at length on the need for society as a whole to regard education of children as of vital importance and she suggested we neglect it at our peril.

Our honorary secretary, Pauline Butler, gave a thoughtful vote of thanks noting that we as an Association are facing change and our focus should be on quality early childhood education building on our esteemed past. Pauline presented a posy of freesias to Professor Brennan and this was followed by warm applause.

There was much hilarity as usual when the raffle prizes were drawn. It seems that the prizes were destined to be won by a group at one end of a table. I wish to thank those who brought prizes.

There were many and they looked most attractive grouped on a side table.

Finally, we who make up the committee would like to hear your ideas on just what form you think the annual dinner should take in the future. We would love to hear from you.

### Winter Luncheon

**Dunbar Terrace Kindergarten, Glenelg, June 21, 2003.**

This year Dunbar Terrace Kindergarten is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary and it was appropriate for us to join in the celebrations and hold our Winter Luncheon there.

Emmy Kiriakou, who is a member of our Graduate's Committee and Director of the kindergarten assisted by staff members Denise Francis welcomed us and made us all very much at home.

*Christina Mc Pharlin*

## Member News

### A Trip with a Difference

*This trip to a remote part of Tibet was made by Pat Fairclough and her husband Lance in May 2003. Our older generation of graduates will remember Pat as Pat Heard who graduated in 1951. Pat tells this story in her own words.*

*Christina Mc Pharlin*

We survived (due to the exceptional care of our Sherpas) the 14 day strenuous trek to the remote Tibetan Kingdom of Mustang. Our visits to small walled villages and ancient monasteries revealed that Tibetan Buddhist culture is strong with young monks enthusiastically enjoying monastic and secular studies. Lo Manthang the capital is almost abandoned for the winter (October to April) when people walk to Pokhara and Katmandu to sell their craft and trade. Their animals remain 'housed indoors' under main dwellings.

We met King Palbar Bista who is held in high esteem but Mustang is now part of the Nepalese Government and he has no 'real power'. The Kingdom was opened to tourists in 1992 but permits and restrictions apply. The King is 73 (Lance - 77 is amazed). The few Europeans we saw were young and on horse. We felt much safer even if exhausted on the ground.

*Pat Fairclough*