

Mary Woodward

"If you want peace, work for justice"

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Until recent months those attending Auckland/ Bay of Plenty Meeting may have seen a little white-haired lady come in on her husband's arm, for she is nearly blind now.

And during the early part of the hour, with the children still present, she would have stood and given ministry, always the same message. "If you want peace you must work for justice".

She no longer comes to Meeting for she has advanced Alzheimers disease and becomes restless after a short time.

Mary Woodward is small of stature, but has a huge footprint in the Quaker life of Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly in working for peace.

She was born Mary McMillan in 1924 into a family that had no connection with Quakers. However the stories of her early rejection of Christian dogmas that made no sense to an intelligent and questioning child suggest that she was a Quaker waiting -to -happen.

Her childhood in Kaitaia was shaped by the great Depression of the 1930s and the influence of a strongly socialist father who like his tough Scots forbears placed huge value on education, while her mother provided the background of a proud and genteel cultural heritage.

After a four-year spell in Invercargill where Mary's intellectual ability was sharpened and she came under the tutelage at Southland Girls High School of a well-known Quaker teacher, Winifred McNaughton, the family moved briefly to Napier where Mary, 'the plain but clever one' of two sisters, exceeded even her father's expectations by independently arranging to study and sit three stage - one university papers while still at Napier Girls High School. She passed in two. Her capacity for work was to reveal itself as phenomenal during the following years at university, firstly at Auckland.

By this time Mary's family had settled in Christchurch and Mary, now studying for her MA at Canterbury University College, found her heaven in the independence of thought and expression encouraged at the university, and in the wealth of companionship experienced among those of compatible interests in literature, poetry and music, and of course in tramping. Among the trampers she found her future husband, Jack Woodward, an engineering student.

In the 1940s options for intelligent women were virtually limited to teaching, nursing and secretarial work. Mary chose teaching. She was sociable and loved dancing, and always had plenty of partners, though young men were in short supply due to the demands of World War Two. The year she passed in four papers and wrote a thesis for her MA while also working part-time and breaking off an amorous attachment even Mary conceded was a 'huge year'. Huge also from the fact of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima that year. Mary was greatly affected by an address delivered after Hiroshima by philosopher Karl Popper, a recent Jewish refugee to New Zealand, who concluded that in future wars would be too terrible to contemplate.

Mary was fortunate in finding opportunities to teach in the unusually innovative Rangiora High School in Canterbury where she began to manifest her gifts as a teacher, and later at the exceptionally enlightened Forest Hill Junior High School in Toronto after her marriage to Jack in 1949 and the move to Canada. The hardship Mary saw in Canada, with long unemployment queues and beggars on the streets and no welfare support as in New Zealand, fed her socialist leanings.

As Jack's time in Canada was spent partly working in industry then as a graduate student at the University of Toronto, Mary encountered those unemployment queues at first hand as she sought menial work to help support her student husband while meanwhile studying for her teaching certificate for Ontario. But there were enjoyable interludes such as tramping on the Appalachian Trail and their memorable 'vagabond summer' of 1951, when they traveled widely in Alaska and Canada.

Mary's first taste of Quaker life began when in 1952 she and Jack joined a voluntary work camp run by Quakers in Southern Italy to help in the reconstruction of war torn Europe. Although the brief injunction to 'sit and shut up for half an hour' failed to attract Mary to Quakerism, it opened a door which eventually led to involvement in the life of the Christchurch Meeting, on the couple's return to New Zealand and Jack's appointment as a lecturer at Canterbury College.

Mary found herself particularly influenced by the letters of John Woolman, with mentoring from John Johnson, a stalwart of Christchurch. Her longstanding friendship with Claudia Fox goes back to this period. Mary felt completely at home with the testimonies of equality, simplicity, stewardship, integrity and peace; her way was always first to work towards the understanding of a situation through reading and listening, then to judge the action required, and finally to act, the action always motivated by the spiritual values that were intrinsic to her. And in Quakers she found refreshing the ability of people with differing views to find common ground and work together.

Pregnancy and motherhood were new opportunities for Mary to learn, and to extend her contacts and interests. 1958 saw the start of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament with New Zealand following the year after. Although only the first of her three young sons, Alistair, Matthew and Frank, had started school,

Mary was moved to join with Elsie Locke and others to form the New Zealand Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Mary became its first national secretary. This was the first of her many forays into activism in the peace movement and perhaps that for which she is most remembered.

The ambitious goal of shaping public opinion to the extent that politicians felt they had a national brief to act against nuclear involvement was work that kept this young mother of a growing family hard-pressed over the span of six or seven years as the campaign's hard-working secretary; the reading required, the archiving of press clippings, the interviews and public addresses, the frequent trips to Wellington to lobby politicians and present petitions, (including in 1963 what was to become the largest petition since the 1893 petition concerning votes for women) - all these activities were centred round Mary's life at home, where all the committee meetings were held for her convenience. Jack's help with the children, even in his own busy schedule, was at times essential, when Mary was called away to overnight meetings out of Christchurch. But, ever resourceful, Mary took on a flat-mate to help out during Jack's seven months' study period at Cambridge University. A vignette from that time- Mary is delivering a message from the back of a milk delivery truck in company with the future leader of the Labour Party, Bill Rowling.

When Jack took up an appointment in Adelaide as Professor of Electrical Engineering Mary wasted no time yearning for her beloved mountains in that flat arid land, but as South Australian Convenor of the Australian Peace and Service used her honed skills in writing, speaking and argument, to help fund the only limb-fitting service in North Vietnam (Quang Ngai) for civilian casualties caused in the war, a politically sensitive project. A major source of that income - up to \$60,000 p.a.- came from the sale of second-hand donated articles sold through the Adelaide Quaker Shop which Mary helped to found, and where she worked tirelessly behind the counter and in the background. The Quaker Shop is still thriving!

Still there was time to serve on the Board of Governors and introduce new thinking at the state school where Alistair was studying; a brand-new rowing eight called the 'Mary Woodward' appeared on Lake Torrens in recognition of Mary's fund-raising initiatives for the school's rowing club. Then into this busy household increased to four by the arrival of a daughter Rebecca some years before, came Maurice, an abandoned eight year old from an orphanage. Through those most difficult of all years the whole family united in trying to 'walk cheerfully' in the Quaker way. Eventually, indeed after many years, their hopes for Maurice's happiness and wellbeing were fulfilled when he proved that 'the chain of abuse (of three generations) can be broken'.

A mutual decision to spend Jack's sabbatical year in Papua New Guinea followed requests for support from Australian academics for what was to become the PNG University of Technology at Lae, where they stayed on for a further five years with Jack as Professor and Mary teaching English for Special Purposes and Developmental Studies to foundation-year students, and literacy in the squatter

settlements. What she learned there, combined with her interest in the effects of colonialism, provided some of the material for the prestigious Australian Backhouse lecture she gave in 1972 on *The Developing World on our Doorstep*.

Finally settling in Auckland where Jack took up the position of Professor of Engineering at Auckland University, Mary worked part-time at the Auckland Institute of Technology teaching English for Special Purposes to apprentices, and enjoying the opportunity to introduce them to issues of civics within emerging democracies. At Mt Eden Meeting Mary took on many roles in the life of the meeting; as clerk between 1986-88, as Elder and Overseer, as editor of the newsletter for many years, and as representative on the board of the Foundation for Peace Studies. On the wider front, she served as Vice President of the Foundation for Peace Studies from 1986 to 1989, and as member of the Public Advisory Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control (funded from reparations for the destruction of the Rainbow Warrior) from 1987 to 1990.

Her outspoken Letters to the Editor, which always conveyed her commitment to Quaker values, gained a significant following among the public, while at the local level she served as secretary for the Grafton Residents Association. Always a voracious reader, but how did she ever find time over all these years for her own extensive writing and research, into local history, colonialism, the development of third world nations, a wealth of subjects, but all related to the need to foster understanding, justice and ultimately peace?

Mary had a gift for friendship, and the Woodward home, in whatever location, was always the centre for hospitality, particularly to overseas students. When able to build their first home, in Ilam, Christchurch, about 1959, Jack and Mary had insisted on enough space for two squares for square dancing, even if all the furniture had to go out on the lawn, and, taught by experts among overseas students, they learned to samba, chacha and even tango!

Dance was seen as a way to get people together, break down inhibitions and nourish friendships. As a consequence of their involvement with members of many nations, Mary and Jack have friends of many races, all over the world.

While quite young Mary chose tramping as her ideal sport, and with Jack she has experienced tramping in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, US/ Alaska, PNG, Nepal, and India. Fit and hardy she accepted challenges ranging from a 14-day trip through the Landsborough Wilderness involving river-crossings on a wire, high passes and glacier travel, up to a tramp with Jack from Lewis Pass to St Amaud, while in her seventies. Tramping took her with people she loved into the wild places of the Earth where Nature rules, and 'in tramping there is no competition, everyone helps everyone else'. In the world Mary worked for everyone helps everyone else!

**Bobbie Woodward's 'real' name is Mary Woodward. Despite sharing the same name, Bobbie and Mary are not related.*