Part 5 - Working for Peace (although her whole life is devoted to this cause)

Muriel was always absolutely concerned that there would not be another war, and indeed used to speak out quite readily about such things at Student Christian Movement rallies. She sees her University education as having been highly important in so far as providing her with certain necessary skills, such as the ability to read things and pick out what really matters. From a very young age she was greatly concerned with social problems, and wanted to do as much as she could to help.

Muriel's first major involvement in the peace movement was at the age of seventeen, when she was the secretary for the League of Nations Union branch in Christchurch.(1) They had needed someone to do the job and she had offered. From here she joined 'The No More War Movement' which was made up of a lot of people from the Socialist Sunday School.(2) Members of the movement decided that it should be run by young people because they were seen to be *"foreward looking"*, so she became the Secretary and John Morrison became the Chairman. *"He was a very anxious man, unsure, insecure and all those things. I told him what to say, so I sort of steered him through"*. This was not the first time that Muriel had been in contact with John because she had first met him when she was on office duty at the hotel and he, being an apprentice to the Municipal Electrical Department, had come with a senior inspector to inspect the place.

Out of 'The No More War Movement', she and John and three to four other students formed another peace group. They met in a little room on Chancery Lane which was owned by Norman Bell. Usually it was used to hold meetings for the "Free Religious Movement" which she sometimes went along to on a Sunday before going to Church. *"It was not like a real church. Norman Bell said before every hymn 'You place your own interpretations on the words you sing'"*. They sang a mixture of both Christian hymns and Socialist ones.

This small peace group which they had originated, held many anti-war activities. The main thing which they did was to hold street meetings where they talked about peace. (3)

> *"We put up a soap box and stood on it, and the person who was speaking would speak and the others would stand around in front"*

They talked about general peace issues and how wrong war was. *"What I talked about I can't imagine but I did talk"*. Each group member would talk for about ten minutes and then someone else would talk. Some passers by would stop and listen, many of whom were absolutely furious and thought they were mad. Muriel remembers one particular street meeting which they set up outside the show grounds on Show Day. There were four of them standing there and they were well supplied with posters informing people about what was going on. They would link their messages with whatever was happening at the time. On another occasion when she was up visiting Wellington she spoke out on a soap box. This was a friday night, and she was with A.C.Barrington, who was also speaking. Muriel remembers many people being put in prison for doing just this. She feels that it was absurd that people were not allowed to speak out in public, and indeed some were arrested even before they had had a chance to say more than a couple of words. *"I didn't get put in prison. I don't know why I didn't get picked up but I didn't"*.

At one stage they ran a peace shop in Armagh Street, where they sold posters and books and were also available to talk to people. They also set up a stall with things from the shop, at an important educational conference in Christchurch, at which there were lecturers from around New Zealand. *"They were very radical and lovely people"*. The group reached it's peak in the years of 1936-37 when things were beginning to get really tense on the International front. During this time they were all still major players in The No More War Movement.

Muriel cannot remember many peace rallies being held in Christchurch. *"The Christchurch pacifists were a small group, almost nondescript"*. She feels that they were not as strong as the Wellington Peace Movement which had a very strong Methodist influence. There was however a nation-wide peace group in New Zealand at this time called 'The Christian Pacifist Society' which Muriel joined in 1936. (4) In order to be able to join she had to belong to a church which is why she became a member of The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers as they are more commonly called.

In 1939, Muriel got a job as a resident teacher at Friends School in Wanganui.

> *"I hadn't had any training, but I got a job there to teach piano to about 30 little kids, and it was indescribably awful, because they didn't really want to learn the piano"*.

She would be in the classroom ready to take the next pupil, and she would see them playing *'with gusto'* on the other side of the school grounds. Not only was the job not ideal, but Muriel was also very homesick to begin with. *" I went away to boarding school, I was a teacher but I might have been a child. I was terribly terribly homesick".*

There was a small group of Christian Pacifists in Wanganui. They held many discussion meetings and she became quite involved in these. She was in Wanganui when World War Two broke out.

At the end of 1939, and the beginning of 1940, Muriel became ill with peritonitis, which put a stop to her peace protesting for quite some time. She was in Wanganui hospital for many months and at one point nearly died because after the operation she was unable to keep food down and the medical staff did not know what was happening with her. Family members came up in stages because they thought she was going to die. When she was just on the verge of death, she remembers having a wonderful experience. *"Just lying there feeling that there was no life in me, and I felt very safe, not frightened of anything, just being there".* She knows that there were many people who cared about how she was and among her visiters was a senior member of The Student Christian Movement, who she remembers as being a *"lovely person"*. Later on another friend told her that he had known she was sick and had rung another friend, telling him about her and together they had prayed for her. *"And I got better".*

Muriel remembers the doctors and nurses as being lovely people.

> *"There was a Sister Nicola who was a real tartar but was a good nurse. I think she saved my life because after the operation there were still complications and she suggested trying champagne to help me keep the food down".*

The champagne did fix her stomach, and Muriel says this was due to Sister Nicola's *"expert nursing"*, because the doctors had done all they could.

Her parents came up to Wanganui when she was ill and rented a house near the hospital. When Muriel got out of hospital she too went to stay here for a while. Once she got well enough to travel they took her back home to Christchurch. It was during this period back in Christchurch that she got engaged to John Morrison. Back in Christchurch she was living a relatively normal life but did not quite feel up to returning to the boarding school. She told John that they could not get married straight away because she

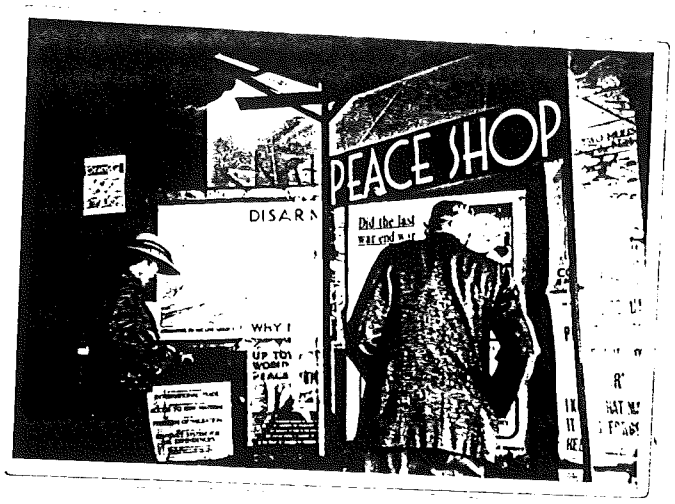
felt obliged to go back to Wanganui and give the school some time, because they had been very good to her while she was away sick. Muriel returned to the Friends School in the new year of 1941, and gave them two terms of work.

FOOTNOTES

1. The League of Nations Union was founded in Christchurch in 1922. It existed primarily to educate the public on what The League of Nations was doing, in the hope that this in turn would put pressure on the Government to support the League (Taylor, 1986:174). The Union never really gained much public support and was labelled 'pacifist' in the public eye (Grant, 1986:21). It was however a precursor of the United Nations Associations and did fulfill a useful role as an organisation advocating a global approach to problem solving.

2. The No More War Movement began in Christchurch in 1928, deriving from the British No Conscription Fellowship. It's goal was for complete pacifism (Locke, 1992:75).
At this time there was some antiwar sentiment emerging from the general public, this being reinforced by literature such as Ernest Hemingway's novels serving to enlighten people about the less glorified sides of war. Despite this the No More War Movement remained small in numbers and in 1934 it's nationwide membership was 270 (Taylor, 1986:174). The extreme stance that the movement was taking, refusing war at all times appeared to be too much for most people to accept.

3. Throughout New Zealand, from 1938 into World War Two, many pacifists began to spread their beliefs to the public through street meetings where they spoke out to people from soapboxes (Locke, 1992:95).
This obvious challenge to the Government's war administration and the attempt to generate public thinking on the ethics of war, caused a certain amount of alarm on the part of the authorities. They dealt with this by trying to forbid such meetings and then by arresting those who continued to speak out for 'obstruction' under the Police Offenses Act of 1927 (Taylor, 1986:181).
In 1939, the independent city councils assessed whether they would categorically ban such meetings. and all did, with Christchurch being the last city to ban them in January 1940.



The Peace Shop in Armagh Street, 1937.

From February 1940, people who spoke out publicly were immediately arrested under the newly passed Public Safety Emergency Regulations Act (ibid:191).

4. The New Zealand Christian Pacifist Society emerged in 1936, as one of two antiwar groups surviving into World War Two. The other one was the Peace Pledge Union (Taylor, 1986:179). Both groups worked towards absolute pacifism, frequently combining their efforts.
The Christian Pacifist Society drew it's beliefs from the idea that war was contrary to Christ's will and the members all had to belong to orthodox churches. This excluded many people and as a consequence it remained relatively small. By the outbreak of World War Two they had 428 members nationwide(Grant, 1989:36).
Because their stance against war was based on religious beliefs, it meant that they adhered to them much more than those who had simple political or humanitarian objections, and although they remained relatively small in numbers it was a strong organisation because the members believed that they were staying true to their faith. From 1938 onwards they began to make their beliefs public by holding sandwich board parades or by speaking out to passers by from soap boxes (Locke, 1992:95).

Part 6 -Marriage (13 th of September 1941)

Muriel and John got married, on the13th of September 1941 in the Christchurch Friend's Meeting House. At this time the Quaker Meetings were being held in The Federation of University Women Rooms on campus. *"There was a hole in the floor in the passage, and you had to make sure you didn't fall in, and the roof leaked in a few places"*. They did not invite many people to their wedding, however everyone who went to Meeting knew about it. They had decided that they were not going to create a fuss. The wedding service consisted of a very simple meeting for worship. Muriel was wearing a brown suit, a white blouse and a brown felt hat, which on recollection she feels looked awful. They had no wedding cake, instead having cups of tea and sandwiches afterwards. *"It was quite simple"*. (1)

Her youngest sister, Margery was not at the wedding, because at this time she was teaching at a school near Invercargill, and it was seen to be too big a journey to come to Christchurch for her own sister's wedding. *"It was just thought of as an extreme journey"*.

After the wedding, her father took Muriel and John back to their own little house which they had brought on Cuffs Road. The house, which was a relatively simple one had three and a half acres of land, most of which consisted of sand. John, with the help of Muriel's parents and his own parents had been working on it while she had been back in Wanganui, so that it was nice for when they were married. It was quite simply furnished and they brought a piano to put in it .

For their honeymoon they decided to do a cycling holiday around the West Coast for a couple of weeks. They put their bicycles on the train, to get over there, and then biked down to Franz Joseph, and then along to Fox Glacier, across two mountain ranges, staying in huts and motor camps.

Back in Christchurch, Muriel and John began to settle down to married life., which was not all easy. (2) *"Marriage was good and difficult, we were absolutely unprepared and unaware"*. However they did work through it. Muriel was no longer working. *"Of course I didn't teach anymore after getting married, it wouldn't have been contemplated"*. (3) Because of this Muriel had *"nothing to do,"* except getting involved in things. She became very busy with things of her own making. At this time she became very concerned about the starving children in Belgium, because of the blockade and she felt that something should be done about it She

gathered together a group of people, many of whom were relatively prominant figures such as the belgian Consol and called them to a metting at the Friends Meeting House. They agreed that something had to be done. *"But anyhow I started something up, and a Press report later described this as the beginnings of the idea of Corso"*.

Both she and John were called up for military service in 1942.(4) John was called up first. At this time he was working for the Municipal Electrical Dept and managed to get his appeal allowed because of the fact that he was a Quaker. (5) His manager also wrote a letter of support because everyone at work knew that he genuinely believed in peace. All the men senior to him were called up and had to go away. John realised however that if he kept his job, that a particular man who was married and had a baby would have to leave, so both he and Muriel decided that he should be the one to stop working there. John then began working as a private electrician. They did not have a car, so he had to get everywhere on his bike, carrying all his things. They got a system going where he would get his ladder and wires ready on the bike and then Muriel would give him a push to start. She does not know and indeed cannot imagine how he ever got going at other times when she was not around.

During this time Muriel re-activated the kindergarten and she did this every weekday morning. When she was called up by the military, she was ordered to go and work as a ward maid in a hospital. Her way of getting out of this was that she argued that she was already fully occupied by doing her part in the war effort, which was making peace and that she was not willing to be directed anywhere else. *"I was quite clear about it. I said 'it doesn't matter what you say, I'm not going' "*. She was let off also.

Muriel does not remember being stigmatised too much due to being a conscientious objector, however she does remember one particular occasion, when John was treated differently.(6) He was a very loyal member of the St John's Ambulance, and one night at their meeting one of the men stood up and said *"We can't have this chap Morrison here, he is a conscientious objector and we can't have him in our membership"*. So John stood up, took his badge off and left. As he was leaving everyone stood up in respect. However the whole episode was very hurtful to him because he had placed a lot of energy into the organisation even feeling that he should attend one of the meetings the day Muriel

returned to Christchurch fromWanganui. Despite this Quakers and other friends were all very sympathetic on the whole.

FOOTNOTES

1. The simplicity of the wedding would have been due to the Quaker philosophy of living simply. This ideal has been in place since the emergence of Quakerism in the 17th century and originated as a form of social protest against the ruling Establishment because they perceived all people to be equal (Sykes, 1958:57) .
   Even if Muriel and John had wanted to have an elaborate wedding they would have found it relatively hard to get all they needed due to the war-time rationing, when shortages of all types of things were prevalent (Edmond, 1986:150).

2. The transition from single life to married life has been commonly identified as a highly difficult stage for couples to go through. Indeed the first year of living together is thought to be the most hazardous year of marriage (Folkman & Clatworthy, 1970:144). This is when couples must modify old habits as well as learn new ones to fit in with each other's lifestyles and routines (Peterson, 1989:443).
   In addition to the more functional modifications, both the husband and wife must also work out new self-definitions as being one of a couple.

3. It was generally understood in the first half of the 20th century that when women got married they would give up any form of paid employment (Pahl, 1984:73). This was based on the ideal that women should provide full-time housekeeping, and of course if children came along, child-rearing would need to be done.
   Of course there were the exceptions to this, and in particular during World War Two, it was necessary for many women to work. However in most cases, women accepted their economic dependency in marriage, and paid work existed for the majority of women as an interlude between educational institutions and marriage (Bunkle & Hughes, 1980:165).

4. Compulsory military service was introduced in New Zealand in October 1940 (Ebbett, 1984:18) due to the small number of people who had volunteered (May, 1992:33). This covered all men between the ages of 18-59 and all women between the ages of 18-40 (Ridge, 1988:25). The Government's decision to re-introduce compulsory military service represented a betrayal of the Labour Party's original objection to war and many of its leaders such as Peter Fraser had even conscientiously objected to the First World War.

5. People who objected to military service were able to put a case foreward to the Appeal Board in order to gain exemption from conscription (Ebbett, 1984:130). Each case was decided on individual merits as the Board sought to distinguish those who were genuinely opposed to war from those who they felt were merely escaping obligations. The process was made as unpleasant as possible in the hope to deter others from objecting. Throughout World War Two there were 5117 appeals lodged (which was 1.7% of those called up), however only 79% of these people were excempt (Taylor, 1986:265).
Those whose appeals failed, and who still refused to do military service, were charged and sentenced to a detention camp for the duration of the war.

6. Although Muriel does not remember much hostility being directed towards herself or John due to being conscientious objectors, the public opinion towards conscientious objectors was generally negative (Locke, 1992:119).
This was most evident for the men who refused to fight because not only were they seen as taking the easy option out and denying their obligations, but their masculinity was also challenged. As Jock Phillips says, *"The New Zealand male at war continued to be seen as physically superior"* (1987:199). Perhaps the reason why the Muriel and John did not feel greatly stigmatised was because most of their friends affirmed their position and they were able to maintain considerable social solidarity in the face of public opposition.

Part 7 - The Brian Knight Hostel(1942-45)

" Somehow our lives seem to have been ordered so that the right thing came along when we were both ready for it".

By 1942, Muriel and John began to feel that it was not quite right that they had managed to stay together and were safe, while people were dying, and decided that they wanted to do something for others. Just at this time a Quaker woman told them about her friend, Brian Knight in Auckland, who was running a school for maladjusted children, suggesting that they would be perfect for working in such a place. They both thought about this and decided that it was something that they could do together. So they wrote away about it, and almost by return mail were told that they had the job. *"It sounded so exciting".* Brian Knight told them to come straight away. They sold their house to some friends, and moved to The Brian Knight Hostel in Auckland. (1)

There were about twenty children living at this place, both a mixture of girls and boys, with ages ranging from around five years old to twenty five years old. Their families paid for them to be there, and they would go home on holidays. Muriel and John were paid ten pounds a month between them, with accomodation and food included in this because they lived in the Hostel. It was a big two-storeyed house on the top of a hill. The downstairs was for the classrooms and the kitchen, and the other floor was for the more general living and sleeping quarters. It was a very poor institution.

There were school teachers who came in each day to work with the children, and there were also helpers for the cooking and cleaning. They had responsibility for the children after the teachers had finished with their lessons. There was a large box of blocks in the schoolroom which the children frequently played with, and another thing which they liked was when Muriel played the piano to them and they would skip around loving this.

Muriel feels that she and John were very ignorant in regards to looking after children and adolescents, and indeed she thinks that Brian Knight purposefully chose people in such a state.

"He usually had people, and I would class us among them who were in a half baked state, really not knowing where they were, not mature in their social relationships at all".

Brian Knight gave them some general direction of how to cope with the whole situation, but basically they both realised how little they really knew about getting on with children. *"We sweated our soul cases out"*.

They found the job very hard and stressful, and to make matters even harder they were not getting any time to focus on their relationship with each other or getting to know each other more closely. They would work for six days a week, and then would get the seventh day off. This free day was a real luxury and usually they would borrow bikes and go out towards the suburbs, frequently to visit people, or sometimes just for the outing. Their first stop was always at a bakery where they would buy a large custard tart, breaking it into two, and then sit down on the footpath and eat it. *"That was a very interesting symbolic act, what we needed was sweetness and softness and indulgence"*.

At one stage when they got quite stressed Brian sent them to a psychiatrist for one session every week. *"This was a great help"*. They did not have any friends of their own in Auckland, however they did get to know some Quakers through going to Meeting, and they also had several relatives living nearby. Every so often they would both get a whole weekend off, and stay on a batch in Waiheke Island, which they found to be very helpful.

During the time in Auckland, Muriel had to return once to Christchurch for an operation. At the same time a gynaecologist whom she greatly respected examined her and reassured her that she would be able to have children. This however was not the case and they never again consulted medical advice on the issue. The problem could have been hers, but then again it could have been John's. This doctor did say however that it was a good idea for some people not to have children, which stuck in her mind, even though she never consciously decided not to have children.

The Auckland stage was one where they both felt they *"grew and learned a great deal"*. They were there for two years, and were there when peace was declared in 1945. Eventually they decided to give the job up, because they felt that they needed some more training to deal more effectively with that type of work. They also felt that if they were not going to have children of their own that they should be helping to look after somebody else's, and particularly wanted to do something in the way of healing.

John wanted to do social work training, and Muriel wanted to train in speech and language therapy. There were no social work

schools in New Zealand at this stage so they decided to go to Sydney where there was one. Before leaving they returned to Christchurch for a while because they were unable to leave the country due to having been Conscientious Objectors. Despite this Muriel's brother in law was quite high up in the Labour party and he happened to know the Minister of Manpower at this time, and arranged for Muriel and John to see him. When he asked Muriel what she would do if John was not allowed to go, she replied " *'I would just go on without him', even though we were horrified by the idea*". John was then given the permit, because the MP appeared to be impressed by their sincerity, and they then moved to Australia.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Brian Knight Hostel was set up in 1940 for children who had learning, behavioural or emotional difficulties. It was also known as The Institute for Individual and Special Education, and was the first such institution in Auckland.
Many of the children paid to be there, however money was always a problem and a trust fund was set up so that the project could be properly financed.
The children lived in and lessons were held on the site.
In 1950 when the staff-child ratio became stretched to it's limits, the boarding facility was closed and Brian Knight decided to run a clinic from the building instead (Katherine Knight, 28 June 1994).
Many Quakers got involved in things like The Brian Knight Hostel because it represented an opportunity for them to ensure that children from disturbed backgrounds could be given support in a warm and caring environment. It was seen as a positive contribution to peacemaking on the individual level.

Part 8 - Australia (1945-47)

John got into the University in Sydney, and after having moved they found that the Speech Therapy school was only operating in Melbourn. Muriel then got a job teaching in *"the most snobby Church of England Girls Grammer school"*. She taught English and history here for a year. During this time she was a resident, at the school and had one weekend off in three in which she could go and stay with John, in a room they had rented. There was an Irish landlady at this house. *"It was a terrible place.....sometimes we'd go home and we knew that she'd let other people sleep in our bed"*.

At the end of this year they both got a job at the University Settlement. Here they were given a room in an area where *"hard up people lived in terraced houses"*. John was still completing his degree at University, and Muriel spent her time running 'The Children's Club' each afternoon for pre-schoolers living in the area. She held this in a room in the bottom floor of their house. The settlement ran many different clubs for the neighbourhood, such as 'The Young Person's Club' and 'The Mother's club'. They ate their meals with the other workers there. This lasted for a couple of years, and after one year the warden went away on a travelling scholarship and left them in charge for a while.

It was during this time in Sydney that she had been thinking that she might get pregnant, but this did not happen. *"After that I was about thirty-two or thirty-three and I began to feel that I was a bit past it"*. (1) At the time they did not grieve about this, however about ten years later back in Christchurch they did. John had been to a seminar in the North Island, and when he came back he was telling Muriel how they had done some psychodrama in which they were acting out a family but they did not have a mother. John had been the father and there was nobody left for the mother. The group decided that they would just have to be a motherless family and cope.

> *"At this stage in the story I said, 'I was that mother. They were my children' and I burst into tears and John burst into tears and we both wept like anything. We let out all this grief that had never been acknowledged"*.

It was in this way that they dealt with not having children, and managed to come to terms with it emotionally.(2) Although she still feels quite sad at times, especially looking at families.

When the warden came back to the settlement in Sydney, they decided to go to England, where they had been offered positions at a residential school.

FOOTNOTES

1. Muriel would have felt too old for having children when she was thirty-three years of age, because at this time the majority of women in New Zealand (similarly in Australia) had their first child before the age of thirty. Indeed 64% of women did so (New Zealand Official Yearbook, 1945:341).
Women are now choosing to have children at a later age, and thirty-three years old would not seem too late to try (Penhale, 1984:14).

2. Many psychologists have acknowledged the grief that couples face when they realise they are never going to have children. It is due to the social expectation that everyone at some stage in life will have children, and that those who are unable to do so, feel as if something has been taken away from them. They then grieve for the child they never had (Cameron, 1990:46). The feelings Muriel and John were facing would have perhaps been heightened by the fact that after World War Two, there was a high emphasis placed on motherhood and family life (May, 1992:43) and indeed their peers would have been breeding at a high rate due to the post war baby boom (King, 1988:11).

Part 9 - England (1948)

They had been offered positions at a Quaker residential school for malajusted children near Leeds called, The A.F.E.T, or 'The Arthur Fitch Educational Trust'. The children used to call it Arthur Fitch Enjoys Trouble. The other teachers were a bit apprehensive about what was going to come from New Zealand. *"They were quite surprised to find that we were perfectly normal"*. The school was in an old Manor House, and it was here that Muriel and John lived.

The school catered for about fifty to sixty children, and Muriel taught a group of Standard two pupils. *"It was quite exhausting"*. They would also do things with the children out of class time, taking them out for walks, or playing games with them. John frequently played cricked with them. The staff all ate together. She remembers that there was a lovely bathroom at the school, *"with a great old bath in and the water was hot"*. It was here that Muriel and John would go once the children were asleep, and it was their peaceful place. *" You'd go into the bathroom and shut the door, and have a big bath and dream away"*.

They stayed here for a year and in the holidays went away exploring England on bicycles, staying the nights at Youth Hostels. She does not remember feling many after effects of the war in Europe at this time.

Because John was not actually teaching at this school he was able to go and visit a Rudolf Steiner School, called 'Camp Hill' in Scotland, which he stayed at, and Muriel then followed him to at the end of the year.

They both worked at Camp Hill, receiving no salary, but getting free room and board and were responsible for the twenty-four hour supervision of a dormitary of five eleven year old boys. All the children at the school were in need of special care. Muriel was given a job as kindergarten teacher of a little group of children.

She remembers this time as one when they learnt lots of lovely things. Once the children were in bed the adults would attend meetings, and were lectured by a consultative specialist from London.

Muriel was impressed with many of the ideas and ways of doing things and indeed children would come from all around the world to attend this school It was policy for all the staff to

children, and at the beginning of each meal they would all begin with a period of silence and then say *'blessings on this meal'*. Many Christian beliefs were used in various ways. *"Everything was done beautifully"*. Once a week the grownups would have a special meal together and there would only be bread, water and salt on the table. To begin with they would talk about ordinary things to do with ordinary people and then they went on to study a passage from the New Testament.

They were both here for about three months in total, John having been there for three months longer.

After leaving the school, they explored around England for a while before returning to New Zealand. Looking back Muriel is appalled that they did not even venture over to the continent.

> *"Our absolute unadventuresness.....we did not go to the continent. We were kind of hinged around with the thought that we haven't got much money to spend"*.

From both parental sides they had this ingrained belief that they had to be careful with money.

Part 10 - Back in New Zealand (1949)

Their first stop back in New Zealand was in Auckland, and waiting on the wharf for them was Brian Knight, wondering whether they would return to work at his hostel. They did not even consider doing this.

Back in Christchurch, they moved in with Muriel's parents until they were able to find a place to live, and decide what they wanted to do with themselves. Temporarily Muriel worked for a family by providing domestic help, and John at this stage became involved in helping to build the Quaker Meeting House in Manchester Street.

During this time, Muriel was giving some talks about the Steiner philosophy and the schools they had visited, having so recently had such first hand experience of them. At the end of one of her talks in 1950, she was approached by a man who asked her whether both she and John would like a job. He was the Secretary of the Church of England Committee which was responsible for the Children's Homes. They were undergoing a great transformation at this stage because they were planning to join the girls home from Christchurch with the boys home from Timaru. Muriel and John decided to take on this job, where there were about forty children from the ages of five to High School, who were under their care. it was called 'St Saviours Orphanage'.

Muriel remembers it being really an institution run very faithfully like a hospital, where there was meant to be a Matron, and all the staff were called nurse.

> *"It had very beautifully kept dormitories with the beds lined up and lovely white quilts and lovely polished floors. The beds were pulled out from the wall so the children could get behind the beds to get to their lockers without making a mess of the floor. There were lots of nice soft toys on each bed, but they weren't to be played with".*

As Muriel puts it *"Then the Morrisons came"*, and many changes were made. They began by ridding themselves of the previously used titles for their positions, and Muriel said that she was not going to be called Matron , that she would prefer to be called Morrie, and John said that he would be called John. They sought to remove the formality inherent in the institution. They removed

the white quilts from the beds, and unscrewed the brass plaques from above the children's beds on the wall. These brass plaques all read *'This bed is given in memory of...'*. They stopped the formal prayers in the chapel each morning, instead putting aside a time every evening when everyone had to be quiet. The children could fill this time in as they wanted by reading or doing some other such quiet activity. One night a week a vicar came in and read aloud to those that wanted to listen. Muriel and John did not want the children to be labelled as orphans, or indeed to have the place called an orphanage, so they managed to have the name changed to 'St Saviours Children's Home'. They were also able to get a proper address for it so that when the children were asked at school where they lived they did not have to say that they were from the orphanage. Of course everyone knew that they were from the home anyway, and indeed in the neighbourhood they were called *"the home kids"*.

John introduced ideas about children to the Anglican Council, which they had never thought about before, and in turn they regarded what he said as if he was a man of authority. However there was a Ladies Comittee that wanted to have the place looking good. *"We upset that properly because the children started walking across the floors, playing with the toys and the place got in a mess."* They also made sure that the staff ate at the same time as the children and ate the same food as well. Some staff members left because of all the changes they were making. In total there were about five other staff members.

Many of the children were put in this care because they had only one parent. Muriel explained that if the mother had died, it was seen as very natural to put the children in a home, and for the father to visit them on Saturdays, or the mother could be ill or in a mental hospital for a long time, or the father could have died and the mother could not manage alone, along with many other reasons. (1) The children were living there permanently. They were not cut off from whatever family they still had, however they merely did not have a family life. Few of the children were actual orphans. They were clothed either from garments that family members gave them, or they would be given them from The Mother's Union, whose members looked after a particular child and would make them clothes and give them birthday presents.

During the day they all went to school just as other children would. The routine began with everyone geting up and having

breakfast together. For a long time they had weat-bix softened with hot water so that they did not use up as much milk.

One thing that Muriel and John were quite strict about, was that everyone had to go to church on a Sunday, and this included themselves. *"I didn't think it was right to send children off to church if you weren't going with them. I remember sitting with the children, and although I wasn't an Anglican I got to love the services"*. She merely did not say the things which she did not believe in.

To begin with some of children went through quite a rebelious stage, and Muriel and John refused to whack, strap or cane any of them, which was what the children had been used to receiving. On one occasion one of the boys decided to smash several windows, and while John was helping him sweep up the glass this child said *"I wish I was back in Timaru, because I would have got six of the best and that would have been the end of it'*. They merely said that when the children had damaged anything they just had to pay for it. This could be through doing extra work, or by giving up their pocket money. This was a very difficult time because they were bringing a new, less formal attitude in almost everything into the already established institution.

Some children were far more demanding than others due to their backgrounds. One boy once said to Muriel that he would knock all the chests of drawers over in the dormitary. She replied that he could do that but would have to pick them all up again afterwards. While she was saying this so calmly she was churning up inside in case he did decide to do it. The children always needed boundaries. They had to know how far they could go. John and Muriel made it quite clear to all the children where the boundaries were, but also made them realise that there was still a great deal of room within these boundaries for movement. They had trouble devising punishments.

> *" A common punishment for the children was to say that they had to do forty silver, this meant that when the staff were washing the dishes the child would have to go and wash forty items of cutlery".*

One child who was quite naughty had great respect for Muriel because she could spell every word he could think of. *" He couldn't catch me out".* However they had to be quite careful because they were not the child's parent.

The children were frequently involved in things outside of the home such as Scouts, Guides, and Bible class, and after school they played the usual sorts of games that other children did.

During the holidays, Muriel and John tried to have all the children placed on farms with other families. In some cases this was a real success and children would relate well to the families and may have gone back on several other occasions. Muriel was responsible for getting the children ready for these holidays, and she remembers being overly concerned about what they should bring with them. *"I was always worried about their clothes, and I sent them with far too many clothes. This was my general agitation."* It was very important for everyone to have some time apart, and before the children left Muriel would suddenly feel the need for them all to be placed somewhere. She and John would then go away together either on a camping holiday of their own, or sometimes to conferences. *"It was an extremelly difficult and demanding job"*. They were here from1950 until 1954.

FOOTNOTES

1. At this time it was assumed that children whose families did not consist of a mother and a father were better off being cared for somewhere else (Murains, 1950:3). This can be seen in the asumption that women are naturally good mothers, causing solo fathers to be regarded as inappropriate primary caregivers for their children, hence having them looked after elsewhere. Children's homes and orphanages met part of the need. In addition to this ideological reason for children to be cared for in institutions, there were frequently practical reasons as well. Although a limited programme giving child allowances to families became available universally in 1946 as the Family Benefit (Thomson, 1991:59), the majority of solo mothers would have faced financial difficulties if they cared for their children at home. Hence the reason again to place the children in other forms of care. It was not until 1973 with the establishment of the Domestic Purposes Benefit, that any provision was put in place to help out single parents.

Part 11 - The Cottage Home (1954-58)

At the end of their time working at St Saviours Children's Home, they moved, along with some of the children to a Cottage Home.(1) Some Council members had felt that the children should be living in smaller groups more like a family. They felt that each home should have a mother and father and about ten children. John was very keen on the idea and both he and Muriel put a lot of energy into the transformations. Hours were spent visiting houses to try and find places which were suitable for the cottage homes. Several houses were found, usually with about four bedrooms in, and these were scattered all around Christchurch. The whole moving process occured over a period of time, with the different homes being set up seperately.

They were allocated a house on Champion St. The hard part in the whole process of shifting was in working out which children would go where. Some children were able to go back to relatives at this point but most moved into the varying homes. *"We had considerable difficulty deciding which children should go with which people. John and I decided that we should have the particularly awkward ones".* In the end they had about twelve children, ranging in age from around six years old until High School age.

Muriel and John were primarily responsible for the children twenty four hours a day, however they did have a 'lovely helper' who lived there with them, otherwise they probably could not have managed. Because of this help they were able to have one day off each week. Their role was like that of normal parents. The children all went to school, and Muriel spent this time doing things around the house. She would usually have a rest in the early afternoon, but knew that this could not go on longer than 2 pm because she had to make the pudding. She cooked all the meals and the puddings were the treat for the children.

On the whole the children stayed here semi-permanently, however some did leave and some new ones arrived. There were marked differences that Muriel and John noticed in the children, merely from the fact of living in a smaller family grouping in a private house. She can remember one occasion concerning the gooseberry bushes at the Cottage Home. At the big house there had also been gooseberry bushes, however these gooseberries had always been pulled off or thrown about before they were ripe. At

Champion Street, they only had one gooseberry bush, and one night after dinner everyone discussed what they would do with *'our gooseberries'*. In the end they decided that they would have a gooseberry pie, and nobody pulled any off or threw them at anybody else.

In 1958 Muriel began to get very tired. She had pains in her back and the doctor told her she was working too hard and would ultimately have to stop that job. Lots of people came and looked at the cottage home but nobody volunteered to take it on. It just happened that at this point a few of the children were able to return to their families, and in the end there were only five children left in their care, and these were the older ones anyway. John and Muriel told these remaining children that they were going to leave and buy their own house and that there would be enough room for all of them to come also if they wanted. *"And they all came"*. They found a house of their own in Opawa, which was large enough for all of them.

The remaining 'children' stayed with Muriel and John until they went away for higher education or for training of some other kind. However once they all left, they did still maintain a relatively high degree of contact with each other. They would return for holidays, some even still doing so to the present day. These remaining 'children' were in a sense like their own family, and Muriel remembers at one point when she was in Wellington and she stopped by the work of one of the 'boys', he said to his superior, *"Me Mum's just turned up, can I go?"*. For this same 'boy' Muriel and John were there for his wedding in the role of his parents, and then when he died they were expected at his tangi. *" That's the part of being a parent in a sense"*.

FOOTNOTES

1. The movement to Cottage Homes reflects the breaking down of the larger institution into several smaller ones which were meant to be more like "real homes". These not only appeared to be better for the children developmentally but they also served as models for what was seen to be the ideal family. This consisted of the mother, the father and the children (Koopman-Boyden, 1978:11) in hope to perpetuate this traditional nuclear family.

Part 12 - Epilogue

Although the children had all left, Muriel and John were never really alone. John got a job in The Department of Psychological Medicine at Princess Margaret Hospital, and when his mother died his father came and lived with them for ten years, before going to live at Manning House.

During this time, the 'Kaihanga' hostel for Maori apprentices, was short on staff, so Muriel offered to lead one night a week. The apprentices were Maori men, from all over the country taking courses at the Christchurch polytechnic. Muriel then became the matron of the hostel, and they both moved in, while someone else was living in their house looking after John's father. *"It was more than a handful"*. After a year here they got to a point where they desperately needed to leave. It was difficult for them both because John was just hanging around the place and even got quite depressed. Another couple then took their place working there.

Back at their own home, Muriel began to think in greater depth about their relationship, and began to wonder where they were going. John was nearing retirement however he was still very caught up and busy with his counselling work. He was a very good counseller, and his social work world was full of lovely people however this was not a world in which Muriel was part of. *"He was so alive"*. Her own interests were mainly in her religious life and her concerns with peace issues. She began to get more involved in The Society of Friends. *"Since I then didn't have children to distract me"*. She became Clerk of The Monthly Meeting, then Clerk of The New Zealand Meeting, which she held for about four years. This kept her incredibly busy and John joked that he was a widower during this time. She then went to Pendle Hill in America in 1978 for several months of religious study and reflection. She did this alone during which time John stayed in Christchurch working.

This experience at Pendle Hill caused Muriel for the first time to see herself as a person in her own right. Here she had been quite alone, although she was constantly surrounded by other people, and she did miss John enourmously waiting for and writing letters all the time. However she began to realise that she could survive alone, and make her own *'dear friends'* and basically feel worthy as a person. She became more aware that she had gifts of her own. In addition to this experience at Pendle Hill, The Women's Movement of the 1970's played a large influence on her life

Although she did not have much to do with The Feminist Movement itself, and indeed was put off by the aggression that many of them had towards men, she was primarily influenced in so far as seeing her role in life as important, and of her life as being worthwhile.

Muriel became concerned that she and John were beginning to take different paths, and realised that something had to be done or else they would have continued on their seperate paths forever. She being involved in her committees and religious life and John being involved in his work with all the *'lovely people'*. She realised that they had to get out of Christchurch for a while.

The idea of living in a community had always been on their minds, and a group of Christchurch people began to have regular meetings to talk about community generated by an American visitor. *"We saw it as a way as an answer to the world's hideous problems"*. They never fulfilled their dreams of starting a community.

Muriel was desperate to get away, and at this time John met David and Sally Lewis, who had just brought a farm in Le Bons Bay, and were into all the conservation ideas that John and Muriel were into. After visiting here one day, Sally said to Muriel *"Wouldn't it be lovely if you could be living here, and we could start a community, and you know you can have rose coloured dreams"*. For over a year they often went to visit the Lewis family, and in 1982, John retired from his part-time job at the polytechnic and they moved out to Le Bons Bay. This was a big upheaval, especially in regards to selling the house and getting themselves out. They originally stayed in a caravan they had brought, and later discovered an old shed on the property, down below the house. John re-built this place, and it had beautiful views - *" A dream house"*.

John did not really want to move over there, but he did agree to go. He realised that all their life they had been moving in directions that his career had taken them and that this was something that Muriel really wanted to do. He even said that he would never hold it against her if the move did not work out because he had also agreed to do it.

Muriel worked very hard at the garden there, which she wanted to enjoy, and John did a bit of counselling, going over to Akaroa to do so. He was not really happy, and he missed his colleagues and friends back in Christchurch. They did make some friends,

however they were both living a far more quiet life. They stayed for over two years. Over this time, Muriel began to take more initiative in their relationship, and they managed to work out a tremendous amount in regards to their relationship with each other. On reflection they were both glad that they had made the move and had that time in Le Bons away from Christchurch.

Shortly after returning to Christchurch, Glen Busche asked if he could write about their life in his book, "You Are My Darling Zita". She wonders whether they had managed to fully convey in this the ways in which their relationship had changed over the years *"from being an ordinary, conventional relationship in which we went the way that John thought we should go to something more"*. They grew a lot together.

John got ill in 1985, and died in December of 1988, which was an incredibly sad time of their life.

Muriel currently lives in Sumner, and is still actively involved in many social issues. In particular she puts a great deal of time and energy into her involvement with The Religious Society of Friends and the Peace Movement.

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