
Margret Alice Meyerkort: A Life Devoted to Waldorf Early Childhood Education

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These excerpts are taken from a tribute to Margret in the June 2020 Newsletter of the Anthroposophical Society of Great Britain.

Margret Meyerkort was not only a kindergarten teacher at Wynstones School for twenty-seven years; she established the first kindergarten teacher training in Britain and was acknowledged worldwide as an authority on the theme of early childhood. She travelled internationally to give courses, published Waldorf early childhood classics such as the well-loved seasonal anthologies published by Wynstones Press, and co-authored, together with Rudi Lissau, the classic (now sadly out of print) *The Challenge of the Will – Experiences with Young Children*. Her insightful essay “Working with the Karma of the Young Child” is still available in the collection *Working with the Angels: The Young Child and the Spiritual World*.

Margret’s earnest, stern demeanor did not suggest close association with that most carefree and playful age group, the young child. This contrast highlights the mystery of individuality and destiny. Her “destiny,” in Lynne Oldfield’s words, was to be “a true pioneer, giving firm roots to our teaching and training practice in the UK.” The following words by Margret give an insight into the deep spiritual ideals that guided and inspired her work: “When one tries to understand the intentions of the time spirit, one serves the time spirit. I respond with my whole being. ‘Yes, here I am!’ – Every morning I wake up and ask myself: how I can become more modern? We must be more modern!”

Margret was born in Rangoon, Burma, the first of five children. Her father came from a cosmopolitan merchant family in Northern Germany. She loved her father, a selfless man with a good sense of humor. Throughout her childhood he would speak the Lord’s Prayer with her at bedtime; something that she loved. Her mother was strict and formal: Margret had to kiss her hand at least five times a day until she was sixteen years old. From her she learnt her fastidious attention to detail, the ability to create beautiful spaces and rich festivals and celebrations.



Margret was always a little different, in her dark looks as well as socially. She preferred books to playing with others. In 1945, she began a nurse’s training in Germany, interrupted by a call to help sick children in a makeshift hospital. When the hospital was disbanded, Margret walked 270 kilometers back to complete her training, sleeping rough and begging food. After graduating, she took on private nursing work for a family with a son with special needs. It was during this time while looking at an encyclopedia from the time of National Socialism that she came across the curious word, “Anthroposophy.” Printed in bold words next to the entry was the word, *Verboten!* – “Prohibited!” Margret response was, “Well, if it is prohibited, then it must be something for me.”

And so it most certainly was. From that moment on Margret devoted her whole life to the study of

anthroposophy. She received her teacher training at Hawkwood College Waldorf Teacher Training. Some of her teachers had been personal students of Rudolf Steiner.

In the autumn of 1953 Margret began her dedicated career as the leading kindergarten teacher at the Wynstones School. Apparently, she arrived at Wynstones with twenty-six pairs of shoes: a pair for each dress! But an inner shift took place: it was now the little child that would stand at the center of her life. She began to sort the essential from the non-essential and reduced her possessions to what she felt she absolutely needed. “What right do I have to stand before the children if I don’t develop myself?”

Everything began modestly. The kindergarten was housed in a little wooden hut with a wood heating stove that Margret had to fire up each day. After two years Rudi Lissau, one of the leading teachers at Wynstones, spoke of the importance of integrating the kindergarten into the life of the whole school, and the kindergarten was moved to Wynstones. Margret’s understanding of education came out of her disciplined inner work with anthroposophy. One day she read in one of the karma lectures that the “stars are gateways to the spiritual world.” Out of this study,

she designed her Advent Calendar. Then she read that the straw of the wheat is condensed sunlight, so she made the bowls for two doll’s prams out of thick wheat-straw. When she read about the activity of the Spirit of a language, she studied the English nursery songs and rhymes and used these frequently in the kindergarten. It was due to Margret’s initiative that many festivals were added to the cycle of the kindergarten year, including Michaelmas.

In time she became very involved in early childhood teacher training, especially in the USA, but also in Finland, Canada, Australia, Ecuador, Israel and New Zealand. When giving courses abroad, instead of asking for course fees, she would ask to be taken to a remote place in that country, such as a game reserve in South Africa, the northernmost town in Finland, and a remote hut in the wilds of Canada. Margret stopped working in Wynstones kindergarten in 1980, but continued lecturing and training around the world and running her own training.

Striving to be modern to the last, before her death Margret took all her notes and recycled them, explaining that every generation of teachers needs to be free to develop pedagogy out of an evolving Spiritual Science. ♦

Margret Meyerkort’s Birthday Story

Until the publication of the Wynstones collection of verses, songs, and stories, there were literally no resource books available to North American Waldorf early childhood teachers in English. Then in 1983 came this collection, initiated by Margret. These books were like golden coins dropping from heaven. The volume titled Gateways contains Margret’s birthday story. This may be the story that has sparked the many beautiful variations that are told in our early childhood classrooms today.

Once upon a time there was a Big Angel and a Little Angel. Big Angel led Little Angel from house to house. Little Angel worked in the house of the sun. Then Little Angel worked in the house of the moon and in the houses of the many stars. When the work was finished in each house, Little Angel received a gift from each.

One day Little Angel said, “I want to work on the earth.”

“Yes,” said Big Angel, “It is time for you to go to the earth. I will take care of your wings until you return because now you will become a human child.”

Then Big Angel took the gifts of the sun, moon and stars and changed them into sounds, tones, and music. “When you are on the earth,” said Big Angel, “you will hear the music of these gifts in the sound of your name, and that will give you strength in the tasks you have chosen to do on the earth.”

And with the gifts of sun, moon and stars sounding in and around, the little one went down the rainbow bridge. The child went to the house specially chosen for its work on earth and there found a mother and father waiting. The mother and father were overjoyed that a child had come who wanted their care and they said: “This child’s name is . . .” ♦