

Annie Gross: A Tribute to Warmth and Humility

— Ruth Ker



Annie Gross, beloved Early Childhood educator in Canada and former WECAN board member, crossed the threshold on February 5, 2017, after a valiant journey with cancer. Her joy in life and her compassionate social concern for “the other” remains as a legacy and inspiration while the spiritual world rejoices to have her back.

On February 5, 2017, someone very special quietly passed over the threshold from her home on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada, lovingly surrounded by her husband and two children. This is the way that Annie wanted it. Her husband, Desmond, attuned to her needs, devotedly supported her careful preparation of friends, family and professional connections for her leave-taking. It was on October 5, 2016 that Annie realized her striving to reclaim bodily health was becoming a journey to the spiritual worlds instead. She accepted this with faithful resolve and began to prepare for this new

direction. She remained her thoughtful, selfless, determined and loving self until her passing, and it is likely that her developed will accompanies friends and family and the Waldorf movement still.

As a member of the Social Science Section of the School for Spiritual Science, Annie was passionate about the social aspect of Waldorf schools, and her striving to bring warmth and depth of understanding into human interaction accompanied her wherever she went to mentor and help others. Her years of mentorship and WECAN Board membership happened at the end of a long career as an educator

of young children. Colleagues from the Toronto Waldorf School remember her as a light-filled presence in their work, “a strong champion of the Early Childhood faculty, helping the faculty to be recognized as equal partners.”

Annie was born in 1949 in England to Jewish parents who had fled Germany and Austria. Later, as a graduate of the London College of Fashion, Annie enjoyed a successful design career in the United Kingdom, and also enjoyed this work later in South Africa where she was to meet her devoted husband of almost forty years. Annie’s and Desmond’s gifts and passions led them across three continents to pursue their different careers and dreams, often working together.

Her initial encounter with Waldorf education came when she researched educational options for her first child, leading to his enrollment at the Waldorf school in Johannesburg, South Africa. Smitten with the education and with anthroposophy, it was not long before Annie became the Class Parent.

She began her teaching career in England in 1986 at the North London Rudolf Steiner School, with her husband also joining the faculty as a class teacher. Wishing to join family in Canada, in 1990 they both joined the faculty of the Toronto Waldorf School. In addition to her early childhood classroom work, Annie went on to actively support the school by participating in various committees in a variety of capacities. On leaving Toronto to enjoy the quieter life on an island on the west coast of Canada, she

continued to advise, mentor and evaluate early childhood educators.

Annie had a deep love and respect for anthroposophy and for Waldorf education across all grades. She touched the lives of many students, parents and friends with her wisdom and understanding of Waldorf education. One of her phrases was “for the other.” It was her life’s work to learn and share what she knew about anthroposophy with those that inquired.

Annie was always learning and open to new realizations in life. Her unadulterated warmth, generous and sincere regard for ALL other human beings was genuine and non-judgmental. When she and her husband left teaching for other pursuits, she brought her warm interest and positivity towards being a potter and later opened a successful baking company with her family, “Bite Me Cookies.”

As well as being an accomplished Waldorf educator and mentor, Annie was a fabulous cook and baker, an excellent seamstress, and a fervent knitter. She loved poetry and music. She was above all devoted to her family and her greatest regret at leaving was to not be able to be present for her grandchildren’s lives and those of her family.

It’s a privilege to honor someone who has been such a fine example of faithful longing for a healthy social future. Annie has inspired us all to accompany her on her journey and passage and will, no doubt, accompany us from her new “home.” We miss you, Annie. Thank you for your loving example. ♦