

Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of

Katherine Mary Knight

4.01.1913 – 29.06.2001

Kath Knight was born to Howard and Louise Mays (nee Hansen) in Auckland, the third of their four children. They lived in Point Chevalier but she spent holidays with her maternal grandparents on their farm in Whangamarino. It was probably in those early days that she developed her lifelong love of plants and gardens, which led her to reflect later, "how could we be interested in the tiniest wee flower and yet shoot people". Other influences which she spoke of were, the difficult financial situation of her family which encouraged her to develop frugal habits, and the firm religious beliefs of both parents and the Church of Christ Sunday School which she attended. Her upbringing made her humble and unsure of her own ability.

However she was eager to learn and after a secondary school education at Auckland Girls Grammar School she went to Auckland University and gained a B.A. in Botany then attended Teachers Training College. As well as study she found time for sport, became involved in delivering food to poor families, and was active in the Student Christian Movement. It was at SCM Easter camp in her first year at University that she met Brian Knight. They became engaged in 1932 and were married the day after graduation in May 1933.

They worked in small country schools (although Kath was never officially on the staff and had to keep out of sight when the inspector visited), before returning to Auckland.

During this time two ideas on education led Brian to try alternatives to conventional teaching, and he opened a boarding school for disturbed children in King George Avenue, Epsom to put these ideas into practice. As well as caring for her own family, Kath found herself looking after the pupils, the 14 roomed villa, the cooking, the washing and any other problems which cropped up. However in 1944, as a third child (Tessa) was expected, Kath and the children moved to a house in Hillsborough which her parents helped to buy. The school was later closed and Brian went into

private practice as a psychotherapist. Their fourth child, Hilary, was born in 1949.

Kath's association with pacifism dates from the beginning of the second World War. She met Ormond Burton and other well known pacifists, joined the Christian Pacifist Society and eventually in 1952 became the secretary, a position she filled, on and off, for 21 years. In the same year she became a Member of the Religious Society of Friends, having been an attender for some time (Brian already was a Member).

In 1955, the visit of Kathleen Lonsdale, an eminent British crystallographer, Quaker, and peace worker inspired Kath and others to reestablish the Auckland Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Her involvement with WILPF continued for the rest of her life. Following her student days in the SCM Kath retained an interest in ecumenism and during the fifties she represented Friends on the National Council of Churches Womens Committee and the International Affairs Committee.

Her first trip overseas was in 1959 when as secretary of the NZ Committee on Disarmament and International Cooperation, she attended its convention in Australia. Further travel became possible after the death of her parents. In 1964, new horizons opened to her as she attended a WILPF conference at the Hague, a meeting of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, attended Woodbrooke for a term, and visited Friends in the Lebanon, India and Japan.

All these experiences contributed to Kath's increasing feeling of worth and confidence, so that she was able to speak of her concerns for peace and justice and to feel that she had the capacity to make a difference. She later said that the advice she would give to a young person today would be "Whenever you hear or see an injustice, say something. Tell others how you feel. They will start thinking too and it may help you to see what could be done even in a very small way... you might also find out about the power you have".

Kath was one of 12 NZ Friends who attended the fourth World Conference of FWCC in North Carolina in 1967. Here she led a worship sharing group, and was appointed to the FWCC Nominations Committee, an eight year appointment.

The Vietnam War saw Kath involved in protest action against the participation of New Zealand. Another activity she initiated, with her son Paul and other young people was the Work Camp Movement, where people from different backgrounds worked on projects for communities which did not have resources to carry them out on their own. Another committee which claimed Kath's time was the National Council of Women's International Council.

A formative influence for her was attendance at a Group Life Laboratory in the early seventies where she examined her pacifist beliefs more closely. It was not long after, that she and other Friends worked to establish the Aotearoa-NZ Foundation for Peace Studies in 1975. This interest played a very large part in Kath's life thereafter, involving one day a week in the office and countless meetings. She also undertook voluntarily, under the auspices of WILPF, peace education in schools. She saw the need for, and organised the production of, a manual for parents and teachers, 'Learning Peaceful Relationships'. Her pioneering work later developed into the 'Cool Schools' programme now being run by the NZFPS. About this time her marriage of 44 years came to an end.

Friends' activities always took much of Kath's time and energy. She was Librarian, an Elder for 15 years and was still on Extension Committee at the time of her death. She was a member of Friends Peace Committee, the precursor to Quaker Peace and Service Aotearoa/NZ. She faithfully came to Meeting for Worship on Sundays and Wednesdays, and to Business Meetings. She regularly brought flowers from her garden to be taken to the Women's Prison on Sundays. Her lifestyle exemplified Friends' testimony to simple living.

Kath still had time in her busy life for family, and music, to play tennis and swim, and to paint. She continued to study botany her whole life and put her love of plants to good use in tending her prolific garden, sharing the produce with friends and neighbours. She helped and encouraged many other gardeners.

We miss her gentle presence, her sense of humour and her loving concern for us all.