

## **Anne B. Smith 1940-2016**

Emeritus Professor of Education and Childhood Studies, University of Otago

Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand

Companion of the Order of New Zealand

### **The passing of a great friend**

#### **A great scholar and a great advocate for the rights of women and children**

Anne arrived back in NZ in late 1974, with her husband John and two preschool aged children, appointed to the University of Otago as a lecturer in education in the field of human development. She had been awarded an Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Fellowship to study at the University of Alberta where she had obtained her doctorate, as did John. Thus began a whirlwind career and an adventurous journey over more than four decades, using the resources of academia, through research, writing, presentation, conferencing, film making and travel, to present the research and policy arguments for quality child care, and more broadly for quality early childhood. This was a journey played out on many fronts. Firstly within the university where career advancement for women and particularly women with children was a rocky road. Anne was part of small group of feminist women academics that challenged the pervasive patriarchy of university employment practices. Secondly, on the local front Anne was part of the Dunedin Women's Collective that got funding through the 1975 International Women's Year fund to establish a childcare centre that demonstrated in its practice, how quality for children and support for women could be realised. These were heady days that spilled onto national political fronts linking early childhood education and women's rights. Anne has been a figure of national renown ever since: advising, chairing, and working with multiple government agencies on various taskforces, think tanks, committees and working groups. Back in the mid 1970s Anne was the first academic in New Zealand to actively support the idea that quality childcare could be a good thing for children and families. She became involved in the advocacy work of the NZ Association of Child Care Centres (now named Te Rito Maioho Early Childhood NZ) undertaking leading work around qualifications for staff

working in childcare and, through her research, challenging older myths of maternal deprivation to promote new understandings of the components of quality childcare. This is where Anne and I first met. Our recollections don't quite tally, although the occasion does. Anne was presenting an address at the NZACCC annual conference in 1980. I recall nervously going down the steps of the auditorium to meet this amazing academic whose address resonating so much with my fledgling ideas and feeling rather tongue-tied. Anne recalls a tall woman with long red hair flowing, charging down the steps to the podium to tell her about the Early Childhood Workers Union that in the process of being established! Anne's advocacy work for early childhood was always grounded in research, a field in which she gained both national and international recognition. Her book *Understanding Children* went through many editions and has been a standard text for so many New Zealand students of education and teaching. In 1995 Anne was appointed the foundation Professor and Director of the Children's Issues Centre. This opened another front as a leading advocate for children's rights; posing new research questions and confronting key issues for children including New Zealand's 'anti smacking' legislation. Anne's stage was truly international, and with colleagues from the Children's Issues Centre and other like centres of scholarship, the new discipline of Childhood Studies was founded.

Late last year Anne received the unexpected news that she had an aggressive form of cancer. She actually felt in fine health at the time. Having reached the age of 75 years she had been delighted to have gained a free ski pass for the Central Otago ski fields where the Smith family liked to gather with their grandchildren. While the prognosis was not good there were treatments possible. In the meantime Anne hastened work on a number of writing projects, most important was completing her book *Children's Rights Towards Social Justice*. This was launched amidst a great gathering of friends and colleagues in Dunedin in April and then in May at an even bigger gathering in Wellington, including more friends, MPs and leaders of organisations and government agencies associated with early education and children's health, wellbeing and children's rights. Anne was also writing other chapters, papers and articles during these past few months; the last being sent off a couple of days before she entered hospital. This was an unexpected and massive set back. Only earlier in the week Anne was cheerfully planning other tasks and we had

hoped to meet up over the weekend for tea/coffee and pikelets. Instead last Saturday at Dunedin Hospital we said goodbye amidst some still lively talk about ECE politics, the latest books we were reading, computer technology and family news.

Earlier in the year Carmen Dalli and Anne Meade, with Anne's permission, began work on a book to be published later this year by NZCER Press with chapters written by a few of Anne's colleagues: ***Research, Policy and Advocacy in the Early Years A book inspired by the achievements of Professor Anne B Smith, a pioneer of evidence-based policy and practice in New Zealand.*** My own chapter entitled the 'Early Adventures of Anne' tells the story of Anne's first year at Otago University in 1975 - and its aftermath. It is based mainly on an earlier interview with Anne where she describes the politics and prejudices around childcare at the time and the campaigns that followed. In our last conversation together I was clarifying some of the interview content. Anne's comment was 'Well I did say it!' And so she did. I am attaching this draft chapter for anyone who wants to read the first instalment in the 'Adventures of Anne'. There will surely be more to follow.