

Lifelong battler for a more just world left worthy memorial

Dorothy Fay Brown, teacher and peace activist: b Hamilton, August 30, 1929; m Laurence Binet Brown, 3s, 1d; d Auckland, November 28, 2011, aged 82.

DOROTHY BROWN was a lifelong activist for education and peace. She trained as a science teacher in the early 1950s, but spent most of her career teaching English as a foreign language. In her retirement she worked to establish a Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at a New Zealand university, a dream that came true.

Dorothy grew up in Karori, Wellington, where she attended Marsden School. She said she always "slightly disliked" going there because it was a private school and she was upset by the disparity of wealth in society.

She had a good singing voice and sang in the Marsden and St Mary's church choir. She remembered chemistry teacher June Hillary and the headmistress, Miss Mayhew - who taught her botany - as influential in her decision to study science at university.

Dorothy attended Victoria University College between 1947 and 1949, graduating with a BSc in Botany. She was a member of the Student Christian Movement while at university and attended an interdenominational youth camp in Blenheim in 1948, where she met Laurence Binet Brown, her future husband.

In 1950, she went to secondary teachers' training college in Auckland. Dr Murdoch, the senior lecturer in charge of graduates at the training college, wrote of her year's training that "she has a mature outlook, and shows a tendency to be somewhat of a law unto herself . . . She has a strong and original character, knows her own mind, and is not afraid to go her own way . . . If Miss Wood settles down to secondary school teaching she may become a really outstanding teacher."

While she did not spend much of her working life as a secondary teacher - except for a year at Wellington Girls' College and some part-time work at Palmerston North Girls' High School - she did spend her life teaching.

In 1959 the family moved to Adelaide where her husband had been appointed a lecturer in the Psychology Department at the University of Adelaide. There, Dorothy taught English as a second language to psychiatric patients at Parkside Mental Hospital, and to the Greek wife of one of her husband's colleagues.

When the Browns returned to Wellington in 1968 after a brief stint in Palmerston North, Dorothy did the one-year diploma course at the English Language Institute (ELI), learning how to teach English as a second language. She was the only native speaker of English in the class, most of whom had come to study in New Zealand under the Colombo Plan.

The following year she was appointed to the ELI staff and remained there until 1976 when she moved to Sydney with her husband who had been appointed to a chair at the University of New South Wales.

She taught at Guild Teachers College (which later became part of the Sydney College of Advanced Education and then the Sydney University of Technology) until 1990, and helped develop the Diploma in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL).

Dorothy taught English for varying periods in China - at the Tianjin Foreign Languages Institute, Nankai University in Tianjin and to scientists at Taiyuan in Shanxi province. During her time in Tianjin and Beijing, older Chinese people who wanted to practise their English visited her. She kept contact with these people after leaving.

Although Laurie Brown worked at the Alister Hardy Centre in Oxford after he retired, Dorothy decided not to live fulltime in England. She taught teachers of English as a second language in the English Department at the University of Auckland.

At that time she described herself as "in a state of despair" about the violent state of the world. While in Sydney she had spoken to a friend who had told her they were going to Bradford University in the United Kingdom to study for a degree in Peace Studies and she realised she was "quite jealous".

Dorothy considered violence of any kind (direct, indirect, cultural, religious) to be one of the most important problems facing the world. To deal with this problem, she wanted to understand its origins and dynamics but, more importantly, how to ensure the future was nonviolent and peaceful.

In New Zealand after her retirement, she brought together her concern for education and learning with this concern for peace and justice and, together with Margaret Bedggood and Chris Barfoot of the Anglican Pacifists Society and others, worked to establish a trust to work for a peace and conflict resolution centre at a New Zealand university. She believed in the transformative power of education and the central importance of peace education in early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary curricula.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Peace & Conflict Studies Centre Trust was established in 2005, and in 2007 the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Otago University was launched. These two organisations acknowledge peace and justice will not just come about because people advocate for them. Instead the sources of violence and the short, medium and long-term prescriptions for a nonviolent future have to be understood, taught and learned.

Dorothy's networking skills, generosity, intelligence, humour, hospitality and enthusiasm all combined to achieve her goal of establishing the centre. It is a worthy memorial to her.

Erudite, compassionate and rigorous, she was an inspirational teacher, colleague and mentor. She was committed to significant issues such as justice and equity, and was ever mindful of the needs of the disenfranchised. She challenged her students and everyone she knew to contribute to the creation of a more just world.

Dorothy is survived by her three sons and one daughter.

Sources: Megan Hutching, Rachel Brown, Kevin Clements, Sue Gray

DOMINION POST — 31 DEC 2011