

( From Anthroposophy in New Zealand, News Letter 69, August 1997 )

## **SYLVIA WALTERS**

*Pioneer of Weleda in New Zealand*

Sylvia Walters passed over the threshold eighteen days after the celebration of her 81st birthday. Many members will have had contact with her during her life in New Zealand, and particularly through Weleda.

She had joined the Anthroposophical Society at 28 years, after meeting Norah Cooper when both were working at the Stoke-Mandeville hospital in England.

At 42 years of age, in 1958, she came to New Zealand to work at Colin Mahon's pharmacy in Auckland. She moved to Havelock North to begin the Weleda Pharmacy at the invitation of Miss Nelson at Taruna.

When Brian Butler began to read the class lessons in New Zealand, they were held in Sylvia's house.

She joined the Council of the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand in 1977, and was a member for several years until the 1980's.

As has been communicated, one can gain very much from a study of the life of a particular person in order to understand the process of reincarnation and destiny. Her destiny, linked so intimately with the development of Weleda in New Zealand, serves like a shining light to tell us so much about the biography of Anthroposophy in New Zealand.

In 1994, Janet Molloy interviewed Sylvia as part of an assignment for a university history paper. Because it so clearly traces Sylvia's pathway to New Zealand and Weleda, I have kept it to one side, to be included in this year's journal "Anthroposophy at Work". We are grateful also to the following memories of Kathleen Bell which describe a picture of Sylvia's childhood as it was shared between them as neighbours at Havelock North over the past ten years and read at Sylvia's funeral service.

(Editor)

"I've been asked and am privileged to tell you today a little about Sylvia before her Pharmacy Training. The reason I can attempt to do this is because I have been one of her Bewdley neighbours for the last ten years. Being retired, I have had time - as she had too - for many hours of conversation.

At first we paused only in our gardening times to chat about this and that. One day I asked Sylvia to come in and have a cup of tea She knew that I'd been a House-mistress at Wycombe Abbey School for a number of years. "I was at Rhodean myself" she said in a rather challenging way. We laughed heartily - the schools were, and still are, famous rivals, each one known to say "We are the Eton of the girls' public schools". This made a common bond of more importance than many people could imagine. From then on, I knew, speaking generally, in what ways she

represented a special type of English woman - reserved, principled, strong in conviction, single-minded, and so on.

After two years had passed she invited me into her house. We'd been to Carl's (Carl Hoffmann) Monday evenings and on Sunday evenings we'd been reading in my house.

The cups of tea continued and conversation diversified. We began to exchange life stories. We never stopped and we seemed as time went on to forgive each other for a good deal of repetition.

Not everyone will know that she was the only child of a runaway couple. Her parents were Londoners, both working in the city - father in a well-known accountancy firm and mother with career prospects in a similar occupation. Sylvia's arrival put a happy end to those prospects. She was a greatly loved and protected child, possibly troubled by concentrated attention of the kind only children sometimes suffer.

There was music in the household. Father was a good pianist and a keen collector of gramophone records. Classical music was the constant diet. Sylvia learnt to play the piano and later the clarinet and was soon to join choirs, which she continued to do until only a year or two ago.

As she grew out of babyhood, Sylvia disappointed her mother by turning into an incorrigible tomboy - no frilly dresses, no dolls, nothing pink. Instead, she led small boys of from the neighbourhood in more adventurous, dress-destroying games. Her mother was an exacting person. 'Nothing but the best' seems to have been her motto. It was hard for her even to conceive that the best possible had been achieved. All the same she provided a safe and comfortable home life for them all, managing the household with great efficiency. Sylvia was not allowed to play any part and was excluded from the kitchen regions where she might have made learner's mistakes. "The alternative was learning about tools and their possibilities in her father's home workshop. He had had polio in his youth, and with one of his legs rather shortened, his leisure activities were slightly restricted. With his training, and later in her schools', Sylvia made the perfectly proportioned little oak table that sits to the left of her armchair at Bewdley.

There was a somewhat unhappy period at a day prep school - it was hard for the only child to adjust in an uncongenial atmosphere.

That over, and entrance examinations passed, Sylvia went off to boarding school - Rhodean, set in a bracing climate on the edge of the South Coast near Brighton. It was entirely to her taste. Her father was the school's auditor and his visits gave his very small daughter a pleasant feeling of importance, especially when she was promoted to a higher table to sit next to him at meals.

At Rhodean, Sylvia first experienced church services. She eagerly absorbed all that went on. She became a choir member and a regular reader of Lessons in the services. She never lost her quiet resonance of voice.

She enjoyed lessons in a class of really clever girls. She enjoyed sport, especially cricket, which she continued to follow on summer-time television in New Zealand. She enjoyed school House life of the grander kind, and all the advantages of security, tradition, fun and friendship in an excellent setting. Every girl, in Sylvia's recollection, was respectful, well-behaved, ready to learn and to play, totally uncomplaining. I've never actually known a school like that myself. Loyalty is an admirable quality.

School life came to an end - the top form, a prefect. Choice of career was carefully advised, and Sylvia set off for Pharmacy College at London University.

I am endlessly grateful to Sylvia for her friendship, her understanding and her positive listening, her reverence for plant life, for her example of endurance, her sense of humour, her orderliness and her certainty of truth.

She is remembered well by many people in Havelock North and elsewhere. The lady with the bicycle, the one who walked half over the village in the afternoons, the nearby Te Mata Peak Road climbers, workers for St Johns, the post office staff of Weleda days, the RSPCA, the librarians, nurses and others in hospitals and lately by a band of home helpers.

I have heard them all describe her, as I do too, "A very special person"

Kathleen Bell

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SYLVIA WALTERS

(21 June 1916 - 9 July 1997)

Pioneer of Weleda in New Zealand

Sylvia Walters died peacefully on Wednesday 9 July 1997 at her home, Bewdley in Havelock North. She was born in England, the only child of a professional couple and attended an exclusive girls' boarding school, Rodean. Upon leaving school Sylvia attended an English university, graduating in 1940 at the age of 24 with a Bachelor of Pharmacy - one of only three women in a class of 20 men. After graduation, Sylvia worked in the Stoke-Mandeville Hospital until the end of the war. She had encountered anthroposophy through Norah Cooper, a member of the hospital's medical staff, and decided that she wanted to work with anthroposophical medicine, not from dissatisfaction with her work, but after the thrill of finding anthroposophy and discovering that there was a medical side she wanted to be a part of. However she was prevented from changing jobs by the Control of Employment Order, an Act set up to protect service and industry during the war years.

Sylvia began work at the Worcestershire Weleda Pharmacy in 1945, as soon as the war ended, and after two years came into sole charge of the pharmacy for ten years. During that time she travelled round the Worcestershire countryside by bicycle seeking herbs and plants which supplemented the gardens at Weleda in providing some of the raw material she needed for the preparations.

Sylvia left Weleda because she was utterly exhausted from the workload and went to live in the Lake District of England to begin what she thought was a new career in plant nursery. However, the growing and caring for plants did not satisfy either the altruistic or personal aspirations of this woman who was wanting to put her growing spiritual and personal knowledge to good use. she expressed her frustration to a friend who suggested that she visit some pharmacy graduate friends who were working in Kenya. But she replied that she did not want to go to Africa, she

would rather go to New Zealand. It was what Sylvia called "a destiny decision". Since New Zealand did not have a pharmacy degree course until the University of Otago began one in 1963, she was eagerly accepted. Her only connection with New Zealand had been through meeting an Auckland pharmacist and his wife during one of their visits to England.

In 1958 Sylvia travelled the three days by air to her new destiny in New Zealand where she began working at the pharmaceutical practice of Colin Mahon in Symonds Street, Auckland, preparing medicines from the wholly imported ingredients. Colin Mahon, and Ken Friedlander, the only New Zealand doctor practicing anthroposophical medicine, were pioneering the work in Auckland. However Auckland's concrete jungle did not suit this "woman of the woods", and the invitation from Ruth Nelson at Taruna, Havelock North, to begin a pharmacy there was an opportunity she eagerly grasped.

Determined, resolute, clear-sighted, Sylvia embarked on her new life in Hawke's Bay. She lived at Taruna initially then at Bewdley with Gwen and Henry Malden who made her very welcome and became very supportive and firm friends. The new pre-built construction, financed by Gwen, served as a manufacturing as well as a dispensing pharmacy. Gwen was a creative and talented gardener who set herself the task of planting something new every day and soon had developed a beautiful and aromatic garden into which Sylvia poured much love and care alongside her friend, continuing to do so after Gwen's death.

Sylvia and Gwen moved into a new house next to Weleda gardens in 1968 after Henry Malden's death. She lived in that house until her retirement in 1987.

Sylvia's arrival and involvement in this new initiative was received with gratitude and enthusiasm by the now Hawke's Bay residing Dr Friedlander from Auckland and also by the anthroposophical community which was blossoming around the growing Rudolf Steiner School and Hohepa Curative Home.

Weleda is now a thriving and prosperous business providing New Zealand with a much sought after service and employing two full-time pharmacists amongst many other people. It is thanks in large part to the courage, perseverance and hard work of a no-nonsense intelligent, innovative and dedicated English woman who was prepared to adopt New Zealand as her new county and to work for her ideals. What started out as a two-year visit became thirty years later, a time of pioneering development in a field which is still growing and which continues to attract medical practitioners, nurses, patients, pharmaceutical workers and gardeners who are seeking to live out their ideals and aspirations for a healing of the earth and humanity which is in harmony with nature.

Although I have had contact of various sorts with Sylvia since the 1970's, I cannot pretend to have intimately known her. But for the purpose of a university history paper assignment she permitted me in 1994 the delightful task (with some reserved delight on her part I might add) several in-depth interviews from which much of the above material was gleaned.

Sylvia lived a full, disciplined and worthwhile life which will be long remembered by many with love and gratitude.

Janet Molloy