

Growing up at the Quaker Settlement

BY AIRINI BEAUTRAIS

I moved to the Quaker Settlement aged 7 in January of 1990 with my parents Margie and Keith Beutraais and my siblings Emily (aged 4) and Josef (aged 2). Emily, Josef and I lived there until we left home (in 2001, 2003 and 2006 respectively) and Margie and Keith lived there until the end of 2008.

We left behind in Auckland extended whanau, friends, school, Playcentre and Quaker Meeting to start a new life as part of a residential Quaker community. While there were some push factors for leaving Auckland, there were also pull factors for living in a smaller centre and in a communal environment. Margie and Keith wanted their children to be able to grow up somewhere safe where we would know our neighbours and could roam freely outside.

We had a very outdoor childhood. With friends of similar ages living in the community, we were seldom alone. When other kids visited for shared meals or Quaker weekends, or visited family members at the Settlement, we would absorb them into our activities: riding bikes on the driveway, building huts, hide and seek, Go home stay home, catching tadpoles in the pond. Some older boys taught us to pile up the mattresses in the sleeping area beneath the mezzanine and jump off the mezzanine onto the pile. That was a favourite pastime for many years afterwards. We looked up to the older kids and looked after the younger ones.

We were lucky to grow up around older Quakers who had lived through World War Two as young adults, and we got first-hand stories about their experiences. At the time it sometimes seemed repetitive. From the vantage point of 2025, I can see how valuable it is to have known those older people and to have heard their stories. Elsie Bennett had a collection of beautiful necklaces which I used to greatly admire, touching the stones if she would let me. Angela Brusse made excellent raspberry cordial and had little chairs in her house for visiting children to sit on. When she visited Central America, she brought back presents for all the Settlement kids. Mine was a little white ornamental hat with 'Honduras' embroidered on it. Frances Henry gave us gifts on her birthday because, as she said, birthdays were for giving presents. Nick Pyle made us waffles with cream and strawberries, and Dutch doughnuts with raisins in them. Lea Wiltshire babysat us, taught us Finnish songs, and taught us to count in German. Kathleen Douglas often made extra jars of jam or chutney. Terry Douglas led us in Scottish country dancing. All the adults humoured us in our many, many concert appearances. One winter solstice we dressed up as snowflakes and danced for our receptive audience.

I learned a lot from growing up in this community. I learned about manaakitanga, and I learned about hard work – Sometimes, after the fun is over, one must wash the big dirty lasagne dishes or clean the toilets. It was normal to have surprise guests knocking on the door, and it was normal to open our homes to travelling Quakers and WWOOFers – so I have never really understood people who have a horror of unexpected visitors. We had the example of decision-making within a non-hierarchical structure, and we also had the very positive example of seeing adults socialize without alcohol or drugs. Things that other people have to learn as adults have been second nature to us due to our childhood. I would not change it.



Circa 1978 Some of the Quaker Acre Community with supporters

Front row: Kathy Bailey, Marilyn and Nikki Payne, Mataius Smith, Olive Smithells, Van Payne, Jos Brusse, Paul and Ann Bailey, Mark Bailey. Seated: Doris White

Top row: Mei Ling Payne, Mandy Payne, Angela Brusse, Frances Henry, Elizabeth Smith/Else Nordhorf, Roger Henry, Hal Smith, Martin Payne.