

**For women and children:
A tribute to Geraldine MacDonald**



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Edited by Sue Middleton and Helen May



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Chapter 2

Geraldine in her own words

Sue Middleton

Our introduction traced historical, political, and theoretical settings that enabled and constrained Geraldine McDonald's educational and feminist thinking. This chapter narrates her personal trajectory through these in her own words. To produce a comprehensive feminist narrative of Geraldine's researching and activist life, it weaves together extracts from interviews and autobiographical snippets from Geraldine's lectures, letters and contributions to newsletters of organisations.¹ During the 1970s–90s, Geraldine was interviewed for a variety of feminist oral history² and journalistic³ projects. Shaped by the researcher's interests and questions, each interview is oriented around the themes of the research. Similarly, Geraldine's autobiographical writings are slanted towards specific audiences, including a university class, educational and feminist organisations, and readers of feminist publications. In later accounts, Geraldine sometimes repeated stories she had told previously. Accordingly, excerpts have been cut, pasted, and paraphrased to form a "textual collage" without tracing every statement to its source.⁴ Square brackets indicate editorial insertions—dates, biographical facts (from Geraldine's curriculum vitae), and explanations of historic terminology. Occasional grammatical adjustments have been necessary, such as changes of tense or insertion of connecting phrases. Geraldine's life history in her own words identifies legacies her feminist research and related activism have provided for later generations, as exemplified by the authors of the following chapters.

I was born on May 31st 1926 in Wellington, the only child of Gerald and Alma Player (née Fuller). Except for spells overseas, I've lived in Wellington all my life. My father was just 17 when he volunteered for the First World War. He went off, fought in the trenches, and came back. Like many men of that time, he never talked about what the war was like. It was just too horrifying. He worked in the Public Trust Office. My mother was a small-town girl from the Wairarapa. I was brought up in the time of the Depression. It was many years before we owned a radio. We never had a telephone or a car and didn't ever own a house. We always had library books and there were a lot of magazines and comics, which all parents disapproved of, but we read them anyway.



Figure 2.1: Geraldine Player in school uniform, aged 9, 1935.
McDonald family

One of the effects of the Depression was that in 1932 the government, wanting to save money, decided to exclude 5-year-olds from schools. I can remember my father teaching me phonics. I also remember teaching myself to read by the whole-word method by looking at the flashing signs in Wellington streets. I was nearly 7 before I went to school. I was passed rapidly up through the classes. Hataitai Primary School was a good place to go in the 1930s. It didn't matter if you were a boy or a girl. There was lots of craft work. It had a falling roll and we had family-type classes—two or three classes in one room. In wet lunch hours the headmaster, Mr Marriott, would play his fiddle and we'd all sing. He would also read works by the Romantic poets. In the morning, after five minutes drill in mental arithmetic, some of the girls were allowed into the school office to type out parts for a play. Copies were made with carbon paper, and class members would perform the play. In the afternoon, if it was fine, we were supposed to tend the school garden.⁵ Sometimes the girls played the boys at cricket. During the summer weather we'd all be down at Hataitai Beach. You could go for a certificate in swimming. I swam a mile. I've been interested in writing all my life. When I was at primary school, I began my literary career in the children's pages of the *Evening Post*!

In 1939, I started at Wellington East Girls' College. When war was declared in September, I was 13, and from then until 1942 when I left, the war was filtered through the influences of the school. We were informed what we should think about it (right was on our side), how we should feel about it (indignant but proud), and what we should do about it (make the kinds of things that were useful in World War One).⁶ I was manpowered over the Christmas holidays. As a school-girl I went raspberry picking in the Nelson district. I was in the Latin stream where the girls were highly selected, highly committed, and the standards were pretty high. I went on in Sixth Form [Year 12] in Latin, French, History, English, and Science. I tried to keep up with Maths, but I couldn't manage the timetable. I had to do it on my own with a teacher and really that was too much. The school said it would be far better if I did Latin. Sixth Form Certificate was in the fourth year [Sixth Form or Year 12] and after that if you went on it was for Scholarship [Year 13]. I didn't stay for that. The one thing I wanted to do was get to university—to grapple with new ideas, such as thinking

about the cosmos and what made things tick. I lived in Karori and I can remember looking at Weir House,⁷ thinking that *it* was the university and that all sorts of high-minded thoughts must be going on in there. How little I knew! Teaching was a method of getting there and it was a way to get away from home. My father had committed suicide when I was in my Fourth Form year and I never settled down to school work subsequently. My mother and I were living with her sister. My aunt was slowly dying of cancer and so it wasn't a cheerful place to be. At the age of 16 I couldn't get into the usual course at teachers' college but because they were starting up the Homecraft course they wanted to recruit people and, in 1943, they accepted me.

The Thomas Committee was broadening the secondary school curriculum. One of the things that they were going to do was to upgrade the Home Economics.⁸ The Department of Education thought that it had a relationship with the School of Home Science at Otago University, so that if people went to the Dunedin Teachers' College, they would be able to have some collaboration with the Home Science School. A very nice woman, Henrietta Kirkwood, who lectured in the School of Home Science, taught us in the evening—not at the School of Home Science, but at the Technical College.⁹ We followed to a large degree a primary school course—teaching reading and so on. We didn't go out on section [practicum] at any time. I remember my excitement when I first read Susan Isaacs's analysis of children's thinking in a milieu which was largely unconstrained.¹⁰ I think that the course was probably called "human development" and we were required to write an assignment on a topic of our own choice. I'm not sure how I found the reports of Susan Isaacs or her work at the Malting House School in England. I certainly did not know about the free school movement or that Isaacs had visited New Zealand in 1937 as a speaker at the New Education Fellowship [NEF] conference.¹¹ It was my introduction to the idea that one could study human behaviour and analyse it. Secondary school had stressed the certainty of knowledge. Isaacs demonstrated that knowledge could be discovered. It was my first encounter with an account of research, and I wanted to discover things for myself.

We did the year's work in two terms and then we all disappeared off to other institutions which were closer to our homes. I ended up at

the end of the year back in Wellington at the Wellington Technical College. I was there for a year and one term. We were treated as more grown up. Then the third year we still hadn't finished training—we hadn't got our certificates—so we were placed in Manual Training centres:¹² in our case the Hutt Valley Memorial Technical College and manual training at Thorndon and one over in the eastern suburbs. After I'd finished with the Hutt Valley Memorial Technical College, I got a job there and that was the only fulltime job I ever had in a New Zealand school. The fruit of that teaching experience was a book called *You and Your Clothes*, first published in 1959.¹³ It covered the School Certificate syllabus in clothing and textiles.

I was absolutely determined to get to university,¹⁴ but I didn't have any idea what exactly I was going to do. In 1944 I ran into a boy who'd been at school at the same time as I had and lived in Karori. He just said casually, "Oh it's enrolling day at university are you going there?" I said, "Quick, tell me, what is it?". He said he was going to do Education 1¹⁵ so I started off with Education 1. I began university in 1944 at a time when young women just weren't taken seriously. There weren't any of the older women there that you see today. It was unthinkable that you would attend if you were pregnant. Men coming back from the war overseas were being given priority in the courses, in the grades that were given, and in the jobs. On rehabilitation bursaries, they filled the lecture rooms, harangued the lecturers, and generally graduated with reduced course loads. I took the logic stream in philosophy. Women were not generally thought of as scholars. They were just at university to fill in time before marriage and to find someone to marry. I never had the slightest difficulty with mathematics. I had always done well with it at primary and secondary school. I had thought I might do something in maths in my career, but I was always being told the same thing: "Yes, but it's difficult for girls."

I had not been at Victoria very long before I was swept up in the Extravaganza, which was a full-length satirical show making liberal use of four-letter words. Extravaganzas were showcases for men and catered for their exhibitionism. There was usually only one principal part for a female. I danced in the female ballet in the manner of American musicals. We did a lot of rushing round saying "ooh" and "ah" in reaction to some statement from a male character. We were

dressed in costumes that showed quite a bit of flesh. Basically, we were decoration, a kind of support group for the male actors. I appeared for several years alongside Jacky Matthews, Beverley Morris, and others too numerous to mention. I ended up as ballet mistress of the male ballet.¹⁶ There were countless messages at Victoria that men ran the world¹⁷ and constructed the ideas which guided it because they were more intelligent. I saw little sign of this intellectual superiority amongst those I mixed with. I believed then, as I believe now, that the potential of men and women is equal.

At the end of 1948, I finished teaching at Hutt Valley Memorial Tech and had completed my B.A. degree, majoring in philosophy. I married that year and we spent 3 years in London, where I taught in secondary schools.



Figure 2.2: Geraldine dancing in Extravaganza, Victoria University, 1947.
McDonald family



Figure 2.3: Geraldine in her wedding dress, 1948.
McDonald family



Figure 2.4: Portrait by the photographer Brian Brake, c. late 1940s.
McDonald family

Our first child, Caroline, was born in 1952. This is how I got into early childhood education—it's very typical of the women of my generation. I had a child. I lived in Kelburn. In 1955, a friend of mine said, "I'm going to join the playcentre, why don't you come? There's one in Kelburn." It was Gwen Somerset's¹⁸ special centre. Kelburn had a population with some experience of university and there was no problem getting parents involved. It was pretty well free play. We were scared of Gwen. She would come round and see whether we were doing things in the right way. We'd get word that Mrs Somerset was coming—that was enough to make sure that every required bit of equipment had to be out! There were little booklets that Gwen herself wrote and everybody had to read those. Then there'd be discussion groups, little groups of people who had just joined. At that stage they didn't get certificates or anything like that, but they certainly were given training. But Gwen wasn't there all the time, she used to go around to all the Wellington ones when she was advisor. She

often took little discussion groups. She wasn't really an ogre, but people were so used to school inspectors and things that they tended to interpret it that way. After a year some of the other mothers said to me, "Why don't you be president?". From there I went on to be president of the Wellington Playcentre Association and part of the Playcentre Federation through the Standing Committee. [See Chapter 3.] I always believed that the greatest advantage of playcentre was to the mothers. I enjoyed learning how to run committee meetings, getting a grip on what you needed to know, and preparing to do things. That's what playcentre did for me.



Figure 2. 5: Geraldine and her children, Mandy, Caroline and Andrew 1960.
McDonald family

When I finished my undergraduate degree, I was determined to carry on. The university had introduced an honours degree. It was really just a matter of what classes I could get to. My second child, Amanda, was born in 1956 and the third, Andrew, in 1957. I had only two units of education, so to do honours in it I had to do a prerequisite third [level 300] year. I enrolled for Education 3. Arthur Fieldhouse [at Victoria University of Wellington] was very supportive over many years. It took me 2 years to get the prerequisites, then in 1960 I went to Sumatra in Indonesia for 3 years with my former husband. He was employed under the New Zealand Colombo Plan¹⁹ and I tagged along with the children. Under the terms of the appointment, I was not allowed to do paid work. I had servants, so I had a bit of time on my hands. I wrote some plays for playcentre.²⁰ I became interested in local women's groups, edited a magazine and edited a history of the church among the Batak people. This was a very interesting and formative 3 years of my life—a turning point for me. I was plunged into another culture entirely different from my own with a language I didn't understand. I had to reflect very deeply on the rules of New Zealand culture.

When we came back from Indonesia, I was asked to apply for the position of Assistant Principal at the Wellington Free Kindergarten Teachers' College. I taught there for a while. Joyce Barnes was the principal and I became familiar with kindergarten work. I have always been interested in the history of early childhood education and some years ago I wrote *An Early Wellington Kindergarten* based in part on old records which I found in the Wellington Kindergarten Teachers' College and partly on my interviews with a kindergarten teacher Ted (Edna) Scott, who trained before the First World War.²¹ [See Chapter 4.]

I'd always wanted to return to university, so I gave up work at the Kindergarten Teachers' College. Largely through timetable arrangements, I ended up in Education. I had three children and my mother (bless her!) looked after the children and provided meals when necessary. I also read Betty Friedan,²² joined the Federation of University Women,²³ and began to serve on committees to do with women's issues. The professor, Colin Bailey,²⁴ did not have a doctorate.²⁵ It was said that he had lost the manuscript of his thesis in a London cab. He was interested in the history of education and one day he told me that he needed information about education from early newspapers. Would

I be able to help him get this information? I presented myself to the librarian at what was then the General Assembly Library where early newspapers were held. He wanted three copies of specific reports. This was long before photocopiers or computers. I had a pad of unlined paper, a well sharpened pencil, and two sheets of carbon paper.

One of my honours papers was meant to be history of education, but Colin Bailey never turned up after the first three lectures. There was a course called creativity, run by Arthur Fieldhouse. It was so feeble! I said to him, "Would you mind if I did something else? I've come across this book by Francis Galton and how would it be if I made a study?". He said, "Fine". You see, there were only one or two people in the class. I did independent studies of Francis Galton and Jean Piaget. I had my own children, so I gave them Piagetian tests, which they liked. There was one test where you'd get straws, you'd show the children that the straws were all exactly the same length, then you'd hide the bottom of them and have them at different levels then ask them whether they were the same length or not. Of course, this is a Piagetian one that kids get deceived by what they perceive. I was doing this course on it at university and I had these kids that I could practice on. [See Chapter 12.] One day when I was combing the academic courses available, I found that there was a course on educational sociology offered by a newly appointed lecturer called John Forster. He was a New Zealander but had been studying in the United States. Most of the courses I had taken so far had been psychological. Sociology should be rather different. Indeed, it was! It was mostly from German sociologists. At last I was being introduced to a body of work that gave me fresh ideas which could be explored. I got First Class Honours.

I'd got myself to the stage of a master's degree. I'd been interested in research for many years. I went to Professor Bailey and said,

"I'd like to study playcentre".

"Playcentre? Wouldn't you rather study reading?"

"No," I said. "Well I don't know about that— what exactly do you intend to look at?"

"I'd like to look at the relationship between playcentres and their local community."

"Community?—You can't do that, no one has been able to define community."

In the mid-1960s, Victoria University didn't accept that preschools were *education* organisations and worthy of being studied. If I had done a child development study of preschool children that would have been fully acceptable. To get out and look at an organisation of mothers wasn't acceptable as an academic exercise! I'd been a playcentre mother myself and felt I knew something about playcentres. By that time, I had realised that all early childhood institutions are as much for women and for families as they are for children. I was mature by that stage, understood what I was doing, and so just went ahead and did it.

In 1967, I did the fieldwork for my master's thesis out in Wainuiomata, which was very different from Kelburn. While it was mainly a thesis carried out in the tradition of social anthropology, I also studied the old records of the Wellington Playcentre Association. I discovered the value of demographic analysis and used it to study the construction of educational disadvantage for Māori. My basic research question was, "What are the social conditions that existed at the time?" So first I looked at the history of Wainuiomata. It hadn't been going for very long, it was really a post-war settlement. I had all that information before I started doing any fieldwork.

Playcentre wasn't feminist, but because it required the mothers to work for it, it got them out of the home. Some were even in paid employment as supervisors. I had 103 mothers to interview. Playcentre offered courses which were stimulating and useful. I worked out why the mothers went to courses: it was a night out with the girls—to get out of the valley. But it often turned their ideas around completely. It really was revelatory for them—hearing the latest in child development, and what you could do with the children. Playcentre was giving them diplomas and certificates and often they wanted to do more. There was a lot of interest in sociology about different types of organisations and what they did. I wanted to see whether the playcentre in Wainuiomata created community. I had a little notched card with the name of everybody in the playcentre and I'd get the woman to tell me which one was her friend. I got a lot of information about friends from playcentre. Then they'd get together to do this, that, and the next thing. I was able to demonstrate that a voluntary organisation was capable of creating feelings of community because it was a new area—women had moved in, they had new houses, they had mortgages; they didn't have cars, or

if they did have a car the husband probably had to do it to get to work. Basically, it was an interpretative study. I was tackling the problem of what exactly it is that an organisation contributes to the women within it. There was a lot of talk about that: that playcentre did this, that, and the next thing for mothers especially in educating them through parent education. So there were two questions: “Is that all that it did?”, and “Can you attribute all the outcomes for women to the fact they had been members of playcentre?”. I had the problem of trying to work out what happened simply because mothers joined a playcentre and what would have happened anyway with or without playcentre. I looked at the friendship network and I looked at what the community was like. In the course of that study, I met many wonderful women including a lot from Ngāti Porou who had moved down from the East Coast to settle in that area. Understanding cultural differences had been important during my time in Indonesia and it has become a lifetime interest. My interest in things Māori stemmed from my Wainuiomata study. [See Chapter 5.]

That took me 2 years and the MA was awarded [with Distinction] in 1969.²⁶ Then I saw an advertisement in the NZEI journal advertising the 1970 J.R. McKenzie Fellowship. I applied for that. What I proposed was to look at very much the same kind of things that I’d looked at in Wainuiomata. I’d have a look at the Māori things—a bit cheeky but in those days there weren’t the same difficulties in doing this. So I was awarded a J.R. McKenzie Fellowship at NZCER. You had one year on it. I had enough time to get the fieldwork completed. I did it on Māori pre-school groups. During the 1960s there was a move to get Māori families involved in preschool education. For a while it worked, and then it looked as if the Māori families were dropping out. However, there had been the development of independent Māori preschools in the Waikato–Maniapoto. These were community groups started and run by local women and were not part of the established preschool movements. So I sailed off to Matakana Island, into the Waikato, the Urewera, and Taranaki.



Figure 2.6: Geraldine graduates at Victoria University with her MA, 1969.
McDonald family

One of the things that I looked at was what happened when the concentration of Māori got to a certain point. Unfortunately, quite a number of the places I went to, centres which had started off as Māori and European at a certain point fell out and they were running two sessions. There was a feeling of injustice, the feeling that the Pākehā women took over—they would take the leadership roles, tell the Māori what to do. It wasn't like that at Wainuiomata. One of the centres I don't believe actually had any Māori mothers apart from the one who was the supervisor. But the second one was in an area where Māori had

been relocated into group housing, so you have a whole lot of them on the East Coast and they of course all turned up and so did anybody who'd lived there and it was perfectly harmonious and OK. I've been in centres which were entirely Māori run, no problem at all—they didn't fall apart. And where perhaps in a suburb that was mainly Pākehā, there would be some Māori women with a Pākehā husband and that wouldn't cause any problems either. But, in these other places the Māori women were just ready to take over and do the things they wanted to do. This is pre-Kōhanga Reo. They had been through playcentre courses, so they knew what to do. And they resented the unthinking automatic taking over of positions by the Pākehā women. There were places in New Zealand where the feelings about the confiscation of land were still very much alive. At the end of the year I hadn't finished it, but it didn't take me very much longer to do it. It took a good deal longer to knock the manuscript into shape and then it was published in 1973 as *Māori Mothers and Preschool Education*.²⁷

In 1971 I was a lecturer [in Professional Studies] at Wellington Teachers' College. I looked out the window one day and Doug Ball²⁸ and his offsider were marching across the open space between the buildings. I thought, "What on earth is Doug Ball doing there? And why is he looking for me?" The Māori Education Foundation²⁹ wanted some research done and they wanted it done on Māori children's language, so would I do that for them? I was on a reasonable salary at the College and I would have had to leave that. So I said, "Well I'd be quite happy to go on to a reduced salary if I could in some way combine it with a PhD." And that worked out, they made me a Queen Elizabeth II Fellow [QE2 Fellow]. In 1972–3, I took leave from the College to do a PhD, and after a couple of years I was asked whether I'd start an early childhood unit at NZCER.

[For the PhD] I studied children's language. The linguists, psychologists, and educationalists were all keeping their patches and it seemed very off-putting. Iritana Tawhiwhirangi³⁰ gave me a hand setting me up going up to the East Coast. I stayed with Mrs Kiri Boyce of Ruatoria, who was somebody that she was very close to. I went up the coast about 13 times. I used to go up in the rail car on a Sunday and come back at the end of the week. I got a grant from the Victoria Internal Grants Committee. The title was: *The language and thought*

*of 4 year-old Māori children.*³¹ I was concerned about two things. One was the prevailing idea that you teach the children grammar or their language is deprived [promoted by American academics Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engleman].³² There were a lot of ideas around at the time I certainly didn't believe in. And the other one was a more theoretical idea and that was the fact that disciplines divide up knowledge—so you've got language studies in one department; you've got psychological studies in the other. And the psychological ones are talking about concepts and the others might be talking about something like coding and they never get together. I came to the conclusion that it was pointless giving Maori children language drills, which was what was being done with Bereiter and Engleman material. Jane Ritchie was promoting this approach in New Zealand.³³ I thought that just wasn't the answer at all and that you should be looking at how you transmit meaning to children.

I'd never done a [research] methods course. Anyway, it wouldn't have been any use at all, because what I was using was influenced by the idea of the clinical method from Piaget, which wasn't taught in methods courses. I was using a psychological approach from the Piagetian side, but my framework was linguistic. I wasn't going to get that either, so I just had to work it out. I didn't have any difficulty working out what I was going to do. I had a theory, I had a method, I knew what I was going to have a look at—that I was going to end up with some recommendations about what you do in schools with Maori children. And you certainly don't drill them in language grammatical things—that was all clear to me. I made a full list of the spatial adjectives. These words are arranged in polar opposition, each one has a space component, then there's a volume component. I designed about 100 items of equipment. They were all little games and things for children to do. You say, "Show me the big one" and "Show me the little one"—that sort of thing. "Show me the tall one". I tested about 100 children, each three times.

I had the same number of Māori children as Pākehā. In those days you were comparing the two. I picked them up from preschool centres. They just loved the things where there was a story and it had meaning for them. They got very bored with the meaningless stuff like Cuisenaire rods.³⁴ I did cross tabulations and there wasn't an enormous difference



Figure 2.7: Geraldine testing a child., 1973.
Source: *Auckland Star*

between the two of them. The Māori children did not know as many words, but they had just as good understanding as the others. The point was really that the two languages organise the spatial adjectives slightly differently. There was an idea in Bereiter and Engelman and all that stuff that you teach kids concepts. You'd give them a word, "this is a something or other". The other one was that the children learned to speak in full sentences. Absolute rubbish! What I was attempting to have a look at was actually how *do* kids learn these words? If you put them into psychological terms, you'd probably call them concepts. But it's much better to call them words because words have internal structure and words have a different denotative application as well. Words are quite complex. I took ones that did have internal structure and which were related in a semantic field. None of this stuff comes through in education. Have a look and see how little kids work their way through this semantic field and how do they learn it? So that's what the tests were for and at the end of it you could find out which words they found easiest, which ones were acquired first, which aspects of the

words they understood. This is the underlying meaning of the thing. And how they get on when they were faced real life situations.

I had 2 years fulltime on that project and I think that was extremely valuable. I've always been grateful for the opportunity. I didn't have to scramble along with a job on one side while establishing something else on the other. I hadn't finished it by the end of the 2 years, but I'd got all my data and I knew that it was just a matter of writing it up. As soon as I had completed my doctorate, my marriage broke up.



Figure. 2.8: Geraldine in her Victoria University PhD graduation regalia, 1976.
McDonald family

When I was working on my doctorate, I was invited to join an association for women on the staff of Victoria University. There were not many women and they were generally in the lower ranks. Phillida Bunkle was inspirational. I also remember with admiration Prue Hyman and Beryl Hughes.³⁵ This association did a great deal to raise my consciousness. One of its goals was to establish Women's Studies as a legitimate subject and to get the university to provide crèches for staff and students. Anne Smith at Otago University was working on eliminating the prejudice against childcare. John Bowlby's popular *Child Care and the Growth of Love* had been published about 1950 and became part of university courses and really of general belief.³⁶ Delinquency was in Bowlby's view the fault of working mothers, so people thought that mothers shouldn't be leaving their children in childcare. If childcare was used by well-educated women would this break down its image of "service for the desperate"?

In 1974 I was asked whether I would [join the permanent staff] at NZCER, so I resigned from the Teachers' College. Soon after my appointment, I was invited to set up and lead a new Early Childhood Unit. At that stage there were three different organisations. The playcentres and the kindergartens were very suspicious of each other—there was a feeling in each that they were superior to the other. Then there was childcare, which was looked down on. So, the first thing I did was decide that the whole area of early childhood was one—and what really made it similar was not the children, and it wasn't the things that they did, but basically because they were all women's organisations. The unit's projects were to include all kinds of centre without any distinction. That set a tone—these were all just variations on what was basically women and children. [See Chapter 6.]

1975 was International Women's Year [IWY].³⁷ At that time a lot of effort went into making sure that the things women do are valued. I was always concerned if people did not attend to women's ideas and I knew that these ideas were generally thought less important than those held by men. Playcentre had changed the term "mother-helper" to "parent-helper". We kept saying to them, "But actually they're women". The reason I thought of them as a women's group was that just was so obviously the case. Whatever was the role of women—whether they had to go out to work, or whether they had to stay at

home, whether they had any money or whether they had a car or not—all those things were things that happened to women and it affected, of course, their participation in early childhood institutions, whether these were kindergartens or playcentres or childcare. So, I didn't see it so much as a political thing, but as a fact of life. I wrote a paper on that for a conference. I was on the planning committee and it was about early childhood in New Zealand and looking at the future. I said, "Well, if you want to know what the future is going to look like, you need to understand what the future role of women should be and the kindergarten people gasped and said, 'Oh no, we're not going to do anything like that!'" The playcentre "rank and file" were mothers at home and didn't want to get into this *radical* stuff. However, International Women's Year made everything quite civil. I mean, it wasn't like the earliest United Women's Conventions³⁸ and it wasn't like *Broadsheet*³⁹ or any of the more radical things! (*Broadsheet* had begun in 1972. What a marvellous publication!) But IWY was all "perfectly proper" with leaders from the churches and goodness knows what. Because it was an international movement and people in the top positions were invited to come along and talk about women's needs, suddenly it all became OK.

I was invited to join a planning committee associated with the activities of International Women's Year and I was later appointed to the Committee on Women. The task of this committee was to advise the Government of the outcomes of International Women's Year and on matters that concerned women. [See Chapter 7.] I was involved in numerous conferences and activities aimed at equality for women. I attended the United Women's Convention in Wellington organised by Judith Aitken. Marie Bell and I carried out a study of sex-role stereotyping in the illustrations in school reading books and on classroom walls. Activities carried out by the IWY developed into further studies such as the *Teacher Career and Promotion Study* which Judy Whitcombe carried out.⁴⁰

My position in NZCER gave me a platform. In 1975, NZCER promoted me to Senior Research Officer. We collaborated with the Society for Research on Women.⁴¹ I had resources such as a secretary, a photocopier, and access to a library. Women came for help with IWY projects. I was appointed Assistant Director of NZCER in 1977 and

retired in 1992. The indomitable Rae Julian joined the Unit as the 1975 J.R. McKenzie Fellow, and we thought it was time some research was done on childcare. In early childhood education there was no doubt that childcare was the “poor relation”. People like Anne Meade felt that the programmes in childcare weren’t up to the standard of what went on in the other two centres: it was just “looking after” the children, not very enlightened. [See Chapter 8.] That has changed radically. We all thought that as a matter of justice something needed to be done to put child-

care on an equal footing with the other two services. At the wrap up to International Women’s Year, women passed a number of recommendations including one that childcare should go to the Education Department—it was at that stage under Social Welfare. There was firm agreement on that, on the ground that there wasn’t a split between “education” and “care”. The first dopey kind of committee was set up and it didn’t do what it was supposed to do. It was chaired by a man and men on this committee were not terribly sympathetic to the whole thing. Ros Noonan [the NZ organiser of International Women’s Year] made a complaint to Government. Bill Renwick,⁴² who was then Director General [CEO] of [the Department of] Education, was sympathetic to women’s things. He suggested that this issue should become a “Machinery of Government” exercise. So it became a State Services Commission issue, because it handles the arrangement of duties across departments. I chaired the State Services Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education from 1977–80. The man, Athol Mitchell, who was in charge of childcare transferred over from Welfare to Education.



Figure 2.9: Official portrait of Geraldine for NZCER.
McDonald family

In the mid-1980s, I carried out an observational study of the mainstreaming of children with special handicaps into kindergartens and playcentres. There were 39 of these groups. I travelled from Invercargill to Wellsford, observed children and interviewed mothers and teachers. At NZCER we tried to produce books that people would want to read—there are four booklets in the *Joining In* series which report the study, each one dealing with a different topic and they're all illustrated.⁴³



Figure 2.10: Geraldine launching the *Joining In* resources, 1987.
NZCER

I've always joined things. The organisations I have belonged to have reflected the stages in my life and the kind of work I happened to be doing at the time. In 1979 I was invited to help set up the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) and became its first president.⁴⁴ [See Chapter 9.] I was appointed as a board member of the Mental Health Foundation in 1979 after I had helped with a Foundation project and I was made Chairperson in 1986. However, I never lost my interest in matters to do with women. [See Chapter 10.] One of the effects of International Women's Year was to ensure that women did begin to get onto decision making bodies which was fine, except that certain people began to appear on everything. I began to feel as if I was on stage a bit too often.

In 1981–2 I had a Fulbright-Hays award which helped me to go to Teachers' College, Columbia University in New York as a research scholar. I can tell you what my typical daily schedules were like.⁴⁵ On Mondays I would go to Lois Bloom's research laboratory in which I spent about half my time. In the evening I might attend a really good lecture by Lawrence Cremin.⁴⁶ On a Tuesday we would have our meeting of the Bloom research group working on the longitudinal study of infant development (8 months to about 24 months) concentrating on cognition and language. I contributed by surveying transcription methods for preschool vocalisations and then turned my attention to naturalistic ways of testing comprehension in young children. In the afternoons I might practise on the Apple Computer (Applesoft),⁴⁷ read some articles and talk to PhD candidates, faculty, and research assistants who simply "dropped by". In 1984 I was invited onto the Board of the NZ–US [Fulbright] Foundation.⁴⁸

In the 1990s, I researched the first years of primary school and the way children were promoted to the standards. When a child leaves an early childhood centre of any kind can you tell whether that child is top or bottom, average or above average? The point is that you can't because it is not an issue in early childhood education, but it is an issue in school. At what point should judgment of a child take place and what are the consequences? I started studying promotion and its effects.⁴⁹ (This led me to study the "Flynn Effect".⁵⁰) In the 1940s there was widespread fear that the larger families of the lower classes were reducing national intelligence. Therefore, an IQ test given in 1932 to



Figure 2.11: Geraldine in Washington DC, 1981.
McDonald family

11-year-olds in Scottish schools was repeated with a similar sample in 1947. The result was not the anticipated fall. IQ scores had risen. In the 1980s, Flynn collected information of this kind from several countries. Flynn's explanation of "an exponential interplay between environment and genes" was wide off the mark. IQ tests measure average performance at successive class levels. But the scoring system assumes it is measuring age effects. Even if every student at the same class level gets

the same number of questions correct, the IQ scores of older children will be lowered and those of younger children raised. Over the years, children have become younger for their class level mainly because of policies such as social promotion, so IQs have risen solely because of the scoring system. It has nothing to do with the genes.⁵¹

When I retired [in 1992] I asked myself, “What am I going to miss?” and the answer was “a secretary!”. So, I bought the first of many computers. As a retirement present, I asked for a phone+fax machine. At that time, before emails became common, faxes were used to send information. I worked doing summary and analyses of policy and questionnaires. Sometimes I would come home and the faxes (then they were on a continuous sheet of paper) would have come out of the machine and spread all over the floor where I had to kneel down and cut the long strip into separate sheets.



Figure 2.12: Geraldine is presented with her fax machine, 1992. L-R Ian Livingstone (Director of NZCER), Russell Marshall, Keri Kaa, Ros Noonan, Geraldine McDonald. McDonald family.

When I asked my accountant what I would need to set up as a consultant, he pulled out his business card and said, “You need one of these”. I designed my own on my computer and used the phrase “Research and Reviews” as my business heading. I’ve done some part-time lecturing at Wellington Teachers’ College and at Victoria University. I get invited to supervise international (mostly Asian) students’ theses. When the Wellington College of Education wanted to start a Master of Education post-graduate course, they asked me to help them. In 2000, I was called as an “expert witness” for a landmark case in sex-discrimination in Hong Kong. The authorities had regularly lowered the girls’ scores on the entrance examination to high school because the girls performed better and that was thought to disadvantage the boys.⁵²



Figure 2.13: Geraldine in Hong Kong, 2000.
McDonald family

Students and colleagues still ask me to read and comment on their academic writing. I continue to write up research. I've kept going with the current research and new trends—I'm not out of date. I like the exercise of research and writing. It is worth it by itself. I don't have to wonder if it will get an award or a medal—those things no longer count for me. I like being free to do research because I want to. I asked myself, "Do I want to go to bowling? To hit a ball around a green? To go on walking tours?" No! I want to improve my scholarship! I've always kept some issues to the fore. For example, the acceptance of early childhood services, funding for childcare, and respect for women's ideas. I think I've been most concerned about the acceptance of women's work, women's activities and women's ideas.

Postscript

Geraldine's feminist research-related political activism continued well beyond her official retirement. For example, 20 years after chairing the State Services Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education in the late 1970s, Geraldine was still engaged in the high-level politics of early childhood education. In 1995, Linda Mitchell and Clare Wells from NZEI Te Riu Roa⁵³ had initiated the *Future Directions Early Childhood Education Project*, including all community early childhood groups and had invited Geraldine to chair the process. In 1996, she wrote, "In the last seven years early childhood education has had its fair share of change... A feature of early childhood policy development has been the carrying out of 'top down' reviews."⁵⁴ The exercise modelled community consultation. Its final report, *Future Directions*, recommended: universal funding for early childhood services equitable with that of schools; a partnership in policy development between government, providers, parents and practitioners; and a strategic plan for the early childhood sector. Opposition parties incorporated the goals of *Future Directions* in their policies. In 1997, a series of petitions arrived at parliament recommending the adoption of the report. *Future Directions* was kept in front of politicians and officials and has shaped Labour Government policies thereafter. (See Chapter 11).

Towards the end of Geraldine's distinguished career, her contributions to New Zealand education were recognised with high honours. In 1993, Victoria University of Wellington conferred an honorary

D. Litt., in 1994 the NZEI made her an Honorary Fellow, and she was admitted as a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) in 1997. For the rest of her life Geraldine remained passionate about her research and continued to write about the “Flynn Effect”. Her wicked sense of humour, incisively critical mind, passion for social justice and politics, and support of women of all ages continued until her death, at the age of 92, in November 2018.



Figure 2.14: Geraldine receives her Honorary D. Litt at Victoria University of Wellington, 1993.

McDonald family