

## ***Such Riches I could not have Dreamt***

**Jean Cotter (2006)**

I dropped out of school in the October of my third year at Woodville District High School. Because my family was living at Peep-O-Day, out the back of Fielding, I boarded with an aunt and uncle whilst at secondary school. I learnt later that my mother had tried valiantly to persuade my aunt and uncle to convince me to return and continue at school, but beyond that there was no conversation with me about what my future might be. After three different jobs, when I was twenty-one, I applied for the one-year teacher-training programme that had just become available in Wellington.

In the meantime I had been very involved in the Presbyterian Bible Class Movement in Fielding, going to local group events, to Easter camps and to the National Conferences. I was one of the organisers for our local district camps. These experiences were a good grounding for what would happen next.

I found Teachers College very difficult because I didn't really know how to study, nor did I have an adequate educational foundation. Still, I graduated and taught in two schools during the next three years. From there I went to the Presbyterian Deaconess College in Dunedin, where I again struggled academically, but I enjoyed what we studied, enjoyed the life of the College and was ordained as a Deaconess in 1962.

For six years I worked for Presbyterian Social Services, Wellington, as a City Deaconess doing social work - until I burnt out. It was then suggested that I go overseas for a year. I had met Diana Goss who told me about her CPE experience at Osawatomie Psychiatric Hospital in Kansas and she suggested that I think about doing a unit of CPE. I applied and went for the summer programme in 1968. I embraced wholeheartedly the method of learning so espoused by Anton Boison (founder of CPE) i.e. learning from 'engaging with the living human documents'. What a great way to learn! At the end of that unit, I went to visit Nora Calvert and talked myself into applying for a full CPE-student-year at St Luke's Episcopal Hospital, Houston, Texas. Prior to going to Houston, I attended William Temple College in Rugby, England, for a term.

CPE in a General Hospital was very different from my experience at Osawatomie. There were twenty-eight trainees with accompanying supervisors under the leadership of Armen Jorjorian. It took me three hard-working years to become accredited as a CPE Supervisor. I was confronted on every side, but survived! As the only woman in my group and also having my English constantly 'corrected' made life difficult. But we had some great parties, and I met some wonderful people. Gordon Hambly was at St Lukes that first year and, along with his wife Joy, we had many a long conversation about what was happening in our lives, as we struggled to make sense of what we were learning about ourselves and about CPE itself.

In 1973, I came back to New Zealand and found work with the Inter-Church Social Services in Hamilton. I was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church that same year. Once established in Hamilton, I ran my one-and-only New Zealand CPE unit in the community.

I am overwhelmingly grateful for the training that I received and the people who helped me along the way. It gave me the education I needed and a new way of looking at the world. CPE changed my life, turned it around, and opened doors into parts of my inner self that I did not know existed: a very personal journey. I was so naive when I began and the journey was very painful. However, my personal growth is something I have continued to pursue as a life-long way of continuing to be open and caring. I have learnt that the better I understand myself, the more I have to offer others. CPE changed my whole attitude to life; that was what my family commented on most when I returned to New Zealand.

Professionally CPE gave me a framework, a body of knowledge, and an understanding of human development on which I have been able to build. Understanding how groups work, and then working with groups has been joy for me, and has enriched all my work with people. So I have put my training to good use. CPE has been the keystone of my professional and personal development. And I still delight in offering supervision to a small number of people - also spiritual direction.

Prior to CPE, I could not have dreamt that my life could have been filled with such richness!