

Memories of Johanna-Veronika Picht (23 September 1922 – 2 October 2017)

Joan Almon

As a Waldorf early childhood educator for over thirty years, beginning in the early 1970s, I had the good fortune to meet and study with many of the great European teachers, among them Johanna-Veronika Picht. She was quieter than some of the others, and less well known internationally, but she brought a still, deep presence with her. She preferred not to give public lectures but excelled in conversation, asking questions, listening well, and helping others to find their own answers.

I first met her in the winter of 1976 when she came to Detroit to teach at the Waldorf Institute (which later became Sunbridge Institute in New York). I was thrilled when the Waldorf Institute began a kindergarten training, and I travelled to Detroit to attend Johanna-Veronika's course. (Regarding her name, she explained to us that her parents had sought advice from Rudolf Steiner who had selected this double name for her. She carried it proudly and was always known by both names.)



One of her great gifts to me was given during that course. The kindergarten teachers I had previously observed arranged their mornings so that all activities like painting, baking, handwork, etc. were done as organized activities with the whole class doing it at the same time. I mentioned to Johanna-Veronika that I did not think I could continue organizing the children so that they did all the work activities at the same time. "But that is not how we do it in Europe," she said, and explained about imitation. One did the activity and the children generally came singly or in small groups of their own free will. That was what I was looking for! Her words changed my teaching in very significant ways.

Years later, in 1984, many of us felt it was time to found what became the Waldorf Kindergarten Association of

North America and is now WECAN. We planned to hold a founding meeting in Toronto following a school association conference there. We were unsure how to proceed. On a trip to Europe I discussed the problem with Helmut von Kuegelgen, leader of the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association, and asked if he could come to Toronto to help us think through this and other issues. He said he was not free to do so but would ask Johanna-Veronika if she would come. She agreed to come and that proved to be an enormous gift.

She spoke with many of us during the days of the conference, and her thoughtful questions about our goals and intentions helped us to clarify our way forward. When we met as a group following the teachers conference, her gentle presence helped us decide to begin as a professional organization for teachers in Waldorf kindergartens. We wanted to support each other in our work, to publish a newsletter and books, and hold conferences and courses. Over several years, trusting relationships were established and a movement developed.

After we founded the Kindergarten Association, I was asked to attend meetings of the International Kindergarten Association in Germany each year, representing the kindergarten movement in North America. Johanna-Veronika was part of those meetings, and I again experienced her quiet presence and the clear values that she brought to each meeting.

After many years helping to train more than 500 Waldorf early childhood educators, publishing two books – “Rhythms and Rhymes” and a book on “Dwarves”, and participating in the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association, she retired and moved to a beautiful anthroposophical retirement home in Stuttgart, where she led a quiet but fulfilling life. She passed away a few days after her 95th birthday, which she had celebrated surrounded by close family, friends and colleagues.

Joan Almon is a co-founder of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN) and the founding director and current director of programs of the Alliance for Childhood in the US. She is a former Waldorf kindergarten teacher, international lecturer and advisor on Waldorf early childhood education, and the author/editor of a number of articles and books, including Crisis in the Kindergarten, Fool's Gold, and Playing It Up—With Loose Parts, Playpods, and Adventure Playgrounds.

