

Raphael House

celebrating 25 years

1979 - 2004

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Watching over the Walls

In conversation with Godfrey & Tessa Therkleson

GODFREY: In 1978 we were living at 38 Mātuhi Street, when we got notification from the City Council that somebody (a Rudolf Steiner School Trust, Wellington) was building a mystery something across the road. So in Feb 1979 I went to the hearing with some practical objections. In the process of doing our homework, however, we had found out about Rudolf Steiner Schools. So we enrolled our children and they began at the High Street school, in January 1980.

TESSA: We put a couple of 4x2's planks across our street - under them was the power and the water to build the kindergarten - the people who drove down the street had to slow down to drive over them!

GODFREY: I knew a builder, Alistair McDowell, he was quite happy to come and build on a labour-only contract. Rob Heath, Fiona and I committed to providing the materials.

TESSA: We used to hear Alistair singing while he worked. His voice echoed across the valley; putting heart and soul into it.

GODFREY: Once the kindergarten had been designed, we started on it: even though there wasn't enough money to finish it. So when we got to a closed in state, I organised parents to do painting, plastering, sanding, crib walls, drainage, doors. I had all the names and addresses and every night I would ring a few people and ask them to help.

TESSA: That went on for years, long after the kindy; we used to do barbeques on our lawn; we carried on with all our working bees.

GODFREY: There came a critical point, we needed another classroom



The buildings had to be craned around the corners

TESSA: Because classes were down at Gaylene's and my house! Iain Trousdell used to do clay modelling on the floor of my lounge - I remember mopping up after he'd finished.

GODFREY: In 1981 a single prefab for Paul's composite class (now the office) came in. We had to move the prefab up to where it is before the road was built. Then we took 2m off to level the road. There was a double prefab Feb 1982; then another double prefab Jan 1983. The buildings had to be craned around the corners of the road.

TESSA: Then the parents were responsible to get the classes ready for the children. Painting, mending broken windows, making desks. We never got graffiti on those desks, cause dad and teacher had made them and oiled them - and the children absorbed that!

GODFREY: I was intimately involved in Class 1,2,3 block building when Fiona designed it (now 5,6+storeroom block).

The second building was built in different materials from the Kindergarten. This was partly to differentiate between the two, but also to simplify the design and save costs. I felt it was appropriate to provide a more utilitarian building for the main classrooms. However, I retained various elements in the design:

- Gently sloping roof planes which together follow the shape of the hills behind, and internal circulation which does the same

- Vertical weatherboarding to increase the tension of the site, the pull from earth to sky, and to accentuate the strong verticality of the site

- a special entrance way, here two encircling arms with a painting create the centre of the building. Fiona Christeller, June 1990



Moving the Class 1 and 2 prefab on site

GODFREY: Then the question was: What comes next? The outcome of that review was the eurhythmy building and I took over the financial tracking. This multi-level building took us to a new level of complication! The floor floats on rubber (for minimal sound transference), has ventilation and heating for a large auditorium, and a kitchen. And because we needed sprinkler systems, there had to be a water tank on top of the hill.

The decision to site the eurhythmy room at the top of the zig-zag was to avoid areas of further earthworks and partly to 'end' the flat part of the ridge with a dominant building. This will also define an entrance at the top of the pathway.

Creation of a diverse series of indoor and outdoor spaces gives much more opportunity for their imaginative use. Our site is a wonderful opportunity for that!

Fiona Christeller June 1990

INTERVIEW WITH JILL HEMMING MAY 2004

NEXT WEEK: THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY