
Transitions—In Memory of Margret

Margret Meyerkort: A Tribute

~ Janet Kellman

As I ponder meeting Margret Meyerkort, beloved teacher, colleague and friend, the words I heard in my own childhood softly echo within: “For that, you will receive an extra star on your crown.”

Those words were spoken by my mother on unusually rare occasions when she witnessed an extraordinarily kind gesture toward another, when my action was free of any awareness of right or wrong or any need for self-recognition. (In fact, mother never would have offered such words if I was expecting them, because I know she didn’t want to make a little materialist of me; one who was nice just in order to get the “extra star.”) In recalling the feeling evoked by her words, the closest I come to expressing it is “quietly looking up in wonder.” And now, so many, many years later, in a flood of memories, emotions and experiences which fill my heart as I contemplate the 40 years of knowing and working with Margret Meyerkort, it is crystal clear that our meeting and our working together in this lifetime was the gift of an “extra star on my crown.” Without question, I know that there are many other Waldorf colleagues who are also filled with gratitude for a similar experience which has arisen from meeting Margret.

Beginning in 1980 and continuing for more than 20 years, Margret made her annual six-week trek from England to America. Teaching courses each year at Rudolf Steiner College in California, as well as other anthroposophical centers, allowed extra weeks in the States for her to travel to individual schools. This provided an opportunity for many of us to work on a one-to-one basis with her. It was a gift to ponder our immediate situations, as she always considered our individual styles, the children in our care, and the classroom settings we had created. Because I had not received a formal Waldorf teacher training, the initial years of my annual visit with Margret were extremely humbling, scary, and filled with soul-searching anxiety. Yes, I wanted and desperately needed her help, and at the same time was painfully aware of my shortcomings and my limited understanding



of what I was doing. But Margret’s presence, her steady guidance and support, with nary a touch of coddling sentimentality, allowed me to be vulnerable in accepting her down-to-earth honesty and steady example. These years provided the “walking stick” I needed to find my own way forward toward *What* I was doing as a Waldorf teacher and, better yet, *Why*. The *How* also became clearer as I traveled the path toward confidently offering real substance to the children, to their parents, to the broader community, and to myself.

As a teacher, Margret characterized the beloved key points she chose to share as her “hobby-horses.” She would land on subjects such as Rhythm, Education of the Will, Domestic Activities, and the Inner Life of the Teacher; and she would ride and ride! One of her Hobby-horses was Movement: “We are always *moving toward...* and if we ever think we have arrived, we might as well ‘dig our grave.’” With these words and all that lived within them, I could now relax and live more and more into the reality that the dynamic of life

is a process. I could release the anxious feeling that we have to “get” somewhere before everything will be clear. Yes, in Margret’s words, “Life is a journey toward...”

Margret was a real thinker. Her constant inspiration was Rudolf Steiner. Her fount of knowledge, cosmic and earthly, and her ever-present example of active striving, served as a springboard toward deepening our own journey into anthroposophy and Waldorf education, and into life itself! Even with her sometimes austere (and perhaps opinionated) manner, one could feel that beneath it, Margret had a genuinely warm interest in others. Embedded in that interest was the kernel of her life philosophy that “Human relationship is the foundation of existence. Social relations, even more than the cultural life, are the key to understanding our work as Waldorf educators.”

With that thought came her deeply personal and honest question: “What right do I have to stand before the children, their parents and my colleagues, if I am not morally working on myself; if I am not spiritually working on myself?” Yes, the early childhood work became much more than what songs, stories and puppet plays we should bring to the children, even though she had many suggestions regarding these practical matters, too. Margret’s passion became an invitation to take responsibility for developing our own consciousness, so that we could live into the understanding that as teachers we are truly examples of how human beings live on the earth! It was exciting and encouraging for us as teachers to live into this “Toward...” And yes, the hard work was that each of us had to find our own way in that journey, deepening our thinking, warming our feeling, and activating our willing. Margret presented us with lifetimes of work if we chose it. And many of us were filled with gratitude.

A seminal experience between us occurred when we travelled to Yosemite National Park to spend some days hiking and absorbing the majesty of the land. On the hiking trail one day, we came to a closed gate, upon which was posted a warning sign: “No trespassing beyond this point. Danger ahead!” Margret read the sign, pausing for a moment as she gazed up toward a mighty granite mountain rising high above us in the distance. She then proceeded to thrust the gate open as she spoke in her determined manner: “C’mon!” With trust in her hiking experience and curiosity sparked by her gutsy attitude, I followed. The trail led through

a vast open field, gently leading upward. The mighty granite mountain faced us at one end. We came to a forest path, winding gently upward, upon which we walked for a considerable time. At length, we arrived at the edge of the forest where the granite mountain now stood at our side, so tall it seemed to touch the sky. I remember gazing upward and then toward the narrow foot path which snaked along the side of this mountain cliff. Off we went on that path, with, of course, Margret in the lead.

I do not remember how far along this narrow way we walked before I turned my head downward. Taking in the sheer cliff just below, I had my first experience of vertigo! Immediately, I thrust my body against the side of the mountain, yelling, “MARGRET! HELP!” As she turned around, Margret’s eyes suddenly bulged, and in a tempered voice she spoke: “Oh Crumbs! There is a fine line between bravery and fool-hardiness! I’m afraid I went TOO far!” As she moved toward me, her steady gaze was exuding the confidence I needed to feel that “Everything is O.K.” Margret directed me to stand up straight, and then, with an ever-so-measured voice, explicitly and resolutely gave her instructions as to just what I needed to do. “Stand close beside me, your hip touching mine, and place your right elbow firmly within the inner fold of my left arm and then firmly grip my hand. Now, with each slow and deliberate step that we take together, dig your heel, with force, into the ground.” In this manner we slowly made our way step-by-step together, until at last we reached the forest’s edge. We had arrived safely on a wide expanse of solid ground.

In later reflection all I can say is that those heavily-silent-Will-filled-moments of moving together toward the end of that steep trail contained within them the revelation of a panorama of lifetimes in our being together. The reciprocity that lived between us was clearly saying “YES!”

What a gift it has been to have had a teacher in life, leading me to a seemingly far-fetched limit, absolutely supporting me, while at the same time leaving me in total freedom. Years later, in our last conversation before she passed, the only words we repeatedly shared were:

“Thank you, Thank you, yes Thank you; Yes, Yes, I love you, Yes, Yes; Thank you - YES!”

Here follow reflections from other colleagues who shared time with Margret:

- ◆ “Waldorf education is a human-being-centered education” she would say. “So, don’t get so caught up in the busy-ness of songs and stories and fingerplays and so on and lose sight of who the child is in front of you.” “*A priori* is ‘Who is this child? How can I serve him or her?’”
- ◆ Margret was so different from all of the Waldorf early childhood people I had met. She looked different; she talked differently; she was not all wrapped up in silk and linen and expensive everything; she wore real shoes. She was so practical; she wore old clothes, not because they were vintage, but because they were still serviceable and wearable and presentable.
- ◆ One inspiration she brought that stayed with me was “The Pause”: taking a moment, listening to the message, possibly from the spiritual world, or one’s angel, to “hear” before speaking. I wasn’t very good at that skill, but when I do stop and listen before speaking, things always go better. This was invaluable in the work with young children, and in conversations with parents.
- ◆ To see Margret as she listened with deep wonder to the rushing of leaves in the wind, or the flight of a flock of birds, and to live each experience as a willed impulse of the spiritual worlds around us, became a gift to enter into true communion with life. She taught me to see each child as an enduring Being, embarking on a new earthly journey, the path held securely by their guardian angel. A guardian, available through meditation, always ready to help both child and teacher on their journey together.
- ◆ One of the great gifts I received from Margret was how to arrive at school each morning with the feeling of “being truly present.” Before this practice, my head used to be spinning with everything I had to do, leaving very little room for cultivating “being in the moment.” Margret’s words: “When you get out of the car, feel how your foot meets the ground, really feel the first five steps you take, watch your feet. Then look up to the sky; what is there? Clouds, blue...? What is the smell in the air? Is there moisture or is it dry? Feel yourself breathing as you say, ‘It is a new day!’ Live INTO the elements, not as an idea but as a REALITY!”

I came to treasure this morning time of “coming into presence” so much that I started parking further and further away from the classroom.

- ◆ A few years before her death, Margret spoke emphatically: “Things HAVE to change! The new has to be different! The question, of course, is HOW. Every generation has to interpret Rudolf Steiner’s Spiritual Science in a different way, to meet the cultural circumstances of their times. Therefore, I have arranged all of my lecture notes into piles, taped them together (so the cinders would not fly all around) and used them to kindle the wood in the fireplace. And, I must say, I have enjoyed these good warm fires, immensely!” (She later admitted that she did keep the three weeks of notes on her most beloved subject: Rhythm. Margret gave copies of her notes to some of us as close colleagues. Her stern message was “BURN THEM!”) (JK) ◆

