



## Honour Statement

*Jean Ferguson*  
1914 - 1998

Jean Ferguson was born on 27 June 1914. She grew up and lived most of her life in the family home in Nundah, Brisbane where she reports being a young tomboy who had to work hard to be accepted into the bushland activities of her brother's friendship group.

Born into a family of committed Christians, Jean also became an active member of her local church. She attended the Nundah State Primary School, then the Brisbane Girls Grammar School from which she matriculated prior to commencing studies at the Brisbane Kindergarten Training College (BKTC). She was one of few matriculated students at BKTC and one of six who graduated in 1933 with a Diploma of Kindergarten Teaching.

Beginning work in the midst of the great depression, Jean was a governess to children on a rural Queensland property, then a member of staff at inner city creches and kindergartens operated by the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland (C&K). These were years of gruelling, heart-breaking work with children and parents, very few of whom had paid employment.

Emotionally drained from these experiences, Jean returned to full-time study at BKTC in 1940 to complete the Diploma of Nursery School Teaching. In 1941 she joined the staff of the recently opened Lady Gowrie Child Care remaining there through World War II though the Centre was closed for nearly two years by the threat of air-raids) and becoming Director in 1946.

A C&K Scholarship in 1958 made it possible for her to complete a diploma course in Psychology of Childhood at the University of Birmingham. She was Principal of BKTC from 1960-1964, a time of turmoil and intense debate about College directions. In 1965 she moved to Canberra to take up an appointment as Assistant Federal Officer of the Australian Preschool Association.

Jean was the first graduate of BKTC to be appointed as College Principal and the first Queenslander to be appointed to key leadership positions in the Australian field of early childhood education. Jean resigned from the national position to return to Brisbane to be with her mother who was then in her eighties. She was welcomed back to the BKTC and appointed as Senior Lecturer, a position she held until retirement from full-time paid employment, in 1979.



But Jean did not ever 'retire' from the field of early childhood education in Queensland. She pursued issues of great importance to her, bringing the voice of the early childhood educator into the numerous governing bodies on which she served. She became a visiting lecturer on campuses establishing early childhood teacher education courses, bringing to these staff a much needed voice from an experienced and reflective practitioner. She pursued her concern for the education of

toddlers, co-authoring the *book A Toddler in the Family* (1984 University of Queensland Press) and continued her work in the toddler program she initiated.

Above all, she brought to her colleagues in the field the voice of the constructively-critical practitioner, challenging what they took for granted, using humour and a quietly adamant manner to ensure they took up the challenges and made them their own. Jean was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 1989. It is a mark of her contribution to her professional colleagues that, following her death in 1998, a Jean Ferguson Memorial Fund was established.

The inaugural Jean Ferguson Memorial Lecture was offered in 2002 and focussed on issues such as toddler education that will honour and pursue the work of this gracious and tenacious early childhood educator.

Author Gail Halliwell

Published in:

*With Passion, Perseverance and Practicality: 100 women who influenced Australian Children's Services 1841-2001*. Editor Joan Waters.

An OMEP Australia publication 2002

Pages 74-75