

In memoriam: Dr Nancy Ann Slater

14 July 1942 – 1 March 2023

Joy Schmidt



Dr Nancy Slater was a dedicated art therapist committed to the advancement of art therapy as a caring modality and profession. As a member of the American Art Therapy Association, she shared her knowledge with art therapists throughout the world over a career spanning five decades.

Nancy began her work as a psychologist around 1975, in the United States, then added to her degree in psychology with a doctorate in art therapy. In 1998, she arrived in Australia to take on the role of the Director of Art Therapy in a newish course at La Trobe University. She brought with her the influence of the US art therapy model and took up residence in the multicultural suburb of North Carlton in inner Melbourne. Nancy was a pioneer, taking a productive role in the development of an Australian art therapy course and its career path at La Trobe. For four years, Nancy helped lay a foundation for the art therapy course. Now, in 2023, the course is shaped and directed by an Australian graduate, who also studied in America. After leaving Australia, Nancy maintained a lifelong connection with the Australian art therapy community, and in 2009 she returned to deliver a keynote speech at the Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association Conference.

In 2002, Nancy ventured on to Israel to advance the art therapy course at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In this environment, she also conducted art therapy groups in the community with Bedouin children and families, and she added to her written papers. Over her career, Nancy authored chapters in art therapy books and wrote a number of articles in professional journals.

Nancy returned to America in 2004, and settled on the open plains of Kansas where she worked with a passion as Director of Art Therapy at Emporia State University. She then moved to Chicago to take up the role of Art Therapy Educator at the Adler School of

Professional Psychology, where she found it easy to follow the Adler mission “to create a more just society”.

In 2011, Nancy returned, after more than a decade away, to her home on Vashon–Maury Island, Washington. She became self-employed and worked as a consultant, trainer and educator. She was always a socially concerned and compassionate person, and involved herself in volunteer work with the Seattle Red Cross, and as a volunteer art therapist for the humanitarian mission The Red Pencil, which saw her travel to work with children and families in Kurdistan who had experienced traumatic life circumstances. She also visited Thailand and Singapore with an interest in multicultural art therapy. The following observations were made by two colleagues:

“Nancy is... an outstanding educator and program Chair... understanding the interaction of art, psychology and the therapeutic process.” Torrey Wilson (2014), Dean of the Graduate School of Professional Psychology, University of Denver.

“Nancy’s work with war-ravaged children in the Middle East is an inspiration for me. It is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. I feel proud to know her. She is my hero.” Lawrence Dean (2016), University of California, Berkeley.

Vashon–Maury Island is idyllic, with its Point Robinson Lighthouse and scenic Mount Rainier across the sound. The ferry trip from this island to the cities of Seattle and Tacoma often treats passengers to sightings of orcas in the ocean. Nancy returned to enjoy the lush island and its environment, which is a haven for birds and birdwatchers. Hummingbirds were frequent visitors to Nancy’s deck, along with squirrels and other forest animals. Here, as an avid reader, she enjoyed her book club and the coffee group that shared a love of intellectual discussion. She also enjoyed walks with her dog, and the company of her long-time island friends and neighbours.

There was a gentleness about Nancy and a caring for others, the environment, and its flora and fauna. She was reserved by nature, but those who got to know our vegetarian Nancy appreciated her compassion, her love of books, keen intelligence and passion for the arts.

Nancy spent her last days on Vashon–Maury Island lovingly cared for by friends, and visited by Vashon and Seattle friends, and with her little poodle, Max, nestled beside her. Nancy touched many lives in her successful and dedicated career as an educator and a caring practitioner in art therapy, and in her friendships with those she met.



Nancy Slater, *Vashon Leaves*, 2016, paper and leaves.

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