

The Greatest Treasure

Peggy's authorized biographer Nanette Walsh writes this obituary:

On the 15th of November the international Alexander community lost one of its most revered teachers. Dedicated to the Technique for over 50 years, Peggy Williams died at the age of 87 in London. She was beloved by a great many teachers and pupils whose lives she had indelibly touched.

Peggy was born into the Goldstone family on the 14th of September 1916 in Manchester during the first World War. The fifth of six children, at birth she was, in her own words, "small enough to fit in a pint jug of milk ... very much the runt of the family." Delayed schooling and an adverse and troubled relationship with her mother made for a difficult childhood. When she was 19 her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and upon doctors' advice the family moved away from the unhealthy smog of Manchester to be by the sea in Brighton. Peggy remained there to nurse her father until his death in 1938. Within months of his death she left home; she married Louis Nixon and moved to London where she lived for the rest of her life.

Shortly after the end of World War II, her husband, afflicted with a stammer, sought the help of F. Mathias Alexander. Sadly, her marriage was not a happy one. However, when Louie was unable to pursue his own course of study, he sent his wife along instead. This meeting of a fearful young Jewish woman, with little formal education, and the Tasmanian born originator of the Technique that bears his name, proved to be an event of exceptional good fortune. She found in Alexander a method, a genius and a mentor that gave her the means to transform the physical and emotional pain of her past. Peggy would often reflect that FM "brought out the life in me and brought me to life". Louie had given her "the greatest jewel - the greatest treasure that I could ever receive ... So out of great misfortune came great fortune."

In the Autumn of 1947, Peggy entered FM's training course. Her training lasted over seven years. Technically she should have completed her training in 1951 as Alexander's stroke resulted in all students on the course being given an additional year. However Peggy did not feel ready to teach and FM kindly granted her another year; at the end of that year she remained at Ashley Place to lend a hand; she continues to do so for yet three more years. In February of 1955, Walter Carrington and John Skinner persuaded her to take her certificate. After Alexander's death in October of that year, Peggy stayed on to assist Walter with the continuation of Alexander's course. In 1960 she joined the move to 18 Lansdowne Road, where the course continued under the name of *The Constructive Teaching Centre*. Over the next 15 years she continued to help train a great many teachers in the Technique.

Peggy's first marriage ended in 1958. In 1960 she married Rex Williams; sadly Rex died in 1968 after only 8 years of a very happy marriage. In 1972 she moved to North London, where she spent most of the last thirty odd years of her life in private practice. From her light-filled, though somewhat reclusive roost atop the hills of Highgate, she instructed the adept and the novice alike, many of whom had journeyed great distances to see her.

Peggy was particularly known for the remarkable clarity of her hands and thus her ability to masterfully impart the transformational benefits of Alexander's work. In fact, the clarity of her touch was such that it is known to have confounded the London police. Perplexed during

the investigation of a burglary at her apartment they queried her profession: most unusually, her fingerprints left no smudge.

Evan as Peggy was notorious for shunning the spotlight professionally, her exemplary contributions were recognized outside the Alexander world in 1993 when she agreed to be honored as one of the most notable British women of the year in the book *The Best of British Women*. After 84 years of living Peggy had arrived at a time and place in her life where she could at last begin to acknowledge and appreciate the import of her own accomplished journey, and in the spring of 1999 Peggy agreed to the writing of her biographical memoir.

“I was really damaged when I started but I had a deep yearning to change,” she said. “That’s the most important thing; one’s willing and wishing and yearning to change. That is why the technique is evolutionary because it gives you the chance. This must give hope to other people!”

In the summer of 2000 a celebration was held at Landsdowne Road to commemorate Peggy’s 45th year of teaching. Colleagues and students from around the world attended; for many it would be the last opportunity to see her. Peggy was “grateful beyond words.” The day before the party she recalled with great emotion the enormous sense of gratitude that she had in particular for Walter Carrington. “Of course, the real true fact is that I do owe what I am today, apart from my own determination, to Walter and his belief in me and his encouragement ... because without his help and encouragement I’d have given up. That is for sure.”

Walter introduced Peggy at the celebration saying that “No other teacher has really done what Peggy did.” He expanded on his tribute later saying that Peggy was “very much a feeling creature,” and he thought that to be “... a good thing, not a bad thing.” Peggy’s atypically strong emotional life lent her work uncommon value. It was a crucial factor in her ability to work with the care, clarity and insight that has made her perspective on Alexander’s work deeply important.

Peggy once described an Alexander lesson as “blessed”; and it was not unusual for a pupil under her hands to feel exactly that. Esoteric books gifted to her from pupils lined her bookshelves. Yet typically Peggy kindly asserted a disinterest in spiritual endeavors. “Well, people keep giving me those books because I think they think I’m rather holier than whatnot, I try to disabuse it and I sometimes spring on them the fact that I bet on horses!”

At the age of 85 Peggy was still teaching seven days a week, though she kept a modest daily schedule. However, as she became ill over the last couple of years many of her students were simply welcomed for tea; having had a bit of a chat she might then happily offer to “do some work” instead. Either way Peggy Williams’ keen intuition, insight and unusual presence often left one feeling remarkably more alive just for having had the pleasure of her company.

On the 18th of November, a funeral service led by her friend and student Rabbi Jeffrey Newman was held in Golders Green; it was followed by a cremation. She is survived by her brother David Goldstone of Ontario, Canada.