

Remembering Karl Kaltenbach

by Patrick McDonald

All of us 'regenerate' our destiny, our karma, in each lifetime. We encounter people, events, opportunities, disasters . . . and through these experiences create our latest incarnation out of what has arisen from our previous lives on earth. What comes to us, the people in our lives, is predestined; however, what we make of our meetings with others is up to us, and in this we can find freedom in creating something new.

Karl Kaltenbach figured prominently in a great many lives, including mine. This small article is intended not as a biography but as a kind of memoir, a collection of brief and incomplete anecdotes about how Karl's many strivings made such a difference to so many people.

My first wife Kristina and I first met Karl early in 1973, in Sydney, at the old Rudolf Steiner House, upstairs on Castlereagh Street. I had already encountered anthroposophy in the USA some three years earlier, through the lectures and study groups of my university professor, Fritz Koelln (now often remembered as the translator of Steiner's *Riddles of Philosophy*).

But the glowing, unknown adventure of life called to me at age 23, and I set off innocently around the world, ostensibly to visit a university friend who was working in India. Money gradually ran out, however, and Australian friends whom I met in Greece and India pointed me towards well-paid work in Darwin, to a country I never intended to visit.

A few months later, finances restored, I made my way down to Sydney and began searching for a place to buy more of Steiner's books, because I had only been able to bring with me from the United States well-worn copies of *Theosophy* and *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, presents from Professor Koelln.

At that time there were at least three events being held weekly at Rudolf Steiner House, and the public Tuesday sessions were jointly organised by Karl, Lesley Evans and perhaps Mechthild Harkness and several other individuals. I can no longer remember exactly who they were. Thursday nights were for the members, of course, guided by Robert Williams and his colleagues, while John Blackwood ran the 'Young Persons Group' on Friday evenings.

And so it happened that on a Tuesday night I met Karl and Hannelor Kaltenbach, as well as many others, some who became lifelong friends and colleagues, some still in this land of the living, and others now on the other side of the threshold. I remember being very impressed with Karl's talk and it was at this time that I experienced one of my life's most important meetings, a highly significant karmic intervention in my then young life.

Still trying to earn more money to further my newest plan to visit Machu Picchu in Peru and then transit the United States and cross the Atlantic to study at Emerson College in England (where Professor Koelln taught in the northern summers), I was working at the time as a labourer at the Royal Botanic Gardens. On that Tuesday evening long ago, Karl spoke to me about his new work at [Warrah](#), where he and Hannelor had begun building an organisation to provide residential care, schooling and work opportunities for those we then called 'people in need of special soul care.' I had absolutely no idea what this kind of work entailed but was very interested in the thought of practical anthroposophical endeavours.

Eventually, on another memorable Tuesday evening in July or August, Karl mentioned that there might be a position and accommodation available for someone wanting to do labouring work on Warrah Farm, and at the same time to assist Warrah's residents. This completely new idea struck me powerfully and, when I heard as well that Karl and Hannelor and their colleagues were planning a kind of tertiary training course, I began to count the days until Kristina and I could move to Dural and take up the position.

All this set the stage for my life experiences over the coming 45 years, as I learned to know Karl and Hannelor and their family, and especially worked closely with Karl in several different areas of his life's work.

As the years progressed, I heard how Karl and Hannelor grew up in southern Germany during the terrible war years, how Karl was sent to a Swiss Steiner school by his anthroposophical mother, and encountered Rudolf Grosse (later to become Chairman of the Vorstand) as his class teacher.

Amazingly, at one point in his childhood, he crossed the Swiss-German border on foot four times daily, as he made his way to classes in the morning, back home for lunch, then back to school, and finally walking home again at the end of the day. I learned that he pursued two practical trainings in his younger life, first as a 'market gardener' (as he always called it) and somewhat later as an artist, a painter. These interests had somehow called him to England, to the Thornbury Camphill Village, where he worked for a short time. I only discovered after his death that Karl had met Karl Koenig in England and that, on a second trip to England with Hannelor, had exhibited some of his paintings there. (Karl also exhibited his paintings in Germany around this time, together with Gerard Wagner. My wife and I are fortunate to own one of these early 'Carol August' paintings from the 1960s, as well several of his later works.)

Karl sometimes spoke of his feelings of destiny during the 1950s, a feeling that he shared with Hannelor after they met while working together at a kind of boys' correctional institute in Switzerland. At first, they wanted to migrate to Canada or the United States or South Africa. In any case, they were sure that they had to leave Germany in order to pursue their future work. However, the opportunity that presented itself was to take a ship to Australia to join the new initiative in Australia being undertaken by Dr Joachim Pohl and his wife Keira.

The Kaltenbachs began work at Inala in 1962 and Australia proved to be their country of destiny. My understanding is that Keira Pohl took a special interest in Karl's abilities and, after her husband's early death, assisted him and Hannelor in creating a second Steiner 'curative' organisation.

Work on this project began around 1965 and Warrah eventually opened its doors in Dural in 1969, the result of a collaboration of a great many people: Anthroposophists, workers at Inala, local friends, and especially the parents of children who wanted the special kind of care offered by Inala. Land was provided, labour was volunteered, and governments, both state and federal, gave a small but important measure of financial support. Perhaps most importantly, some 19 people of all ages, all with major intellectual disabilities, found their own destinies linked to Warrah. They proved to be the most important people of all.

At this time Karl created the original Warrah logo, an image of a person reaching up to the sky, from which rain was falling. Karl later told me that Warrah was started in a time of great drought, such as the Sydney area has experienced time and again, and that rain was much needed. Rain was, and is, often thought to be a nuisance by most people, interrupting activities and making life unpleasant. But Karl and his early colleagues knew that it was essential, so that plants could grow, and the earth could be regenerated. I came to think of this archetypal Warrah person with difficulties (who of course could be any of us) standing under the cloudy skies and accepting life's downpouring tragedies as blessings, as opportunities to grow and heal and create something new for the earth.

The cycle of rain is therefore a picture of the cycle of life, of karma. For me it was a living picture of how so many people – those in Warrah's care and their families, people who came to work at Warrah, government officials who wanted to find a way to help those born with severe disabilities – took up extremely difficult challenges and tried their best to turn them to a positive result.

The Warrah I joined in 1973 was in its formative stages and I met and worked with Karl in many of his areas of endeavour, not only in caring for people with disabilities but also in biodynamic agriculture,

artistic events and seasonal festivals, and of course anthroposophical study, both at Rudolf Steiner House and within Warrah's own study groups.

Still standing at Warrah is Karl's highly original concrete fountain. It was in its final stage of completion when I first walked down the old dirt driveway to take up accommodation at Waratah Cottage. Very modern and yet archetypal, it was my introduction to Karl's artistic work.

Less well known is Karl's involvement with music, seasonal festivals and plays of all kinds. Nearly everyone at Warrah learned to play the lyre and it was Karl who was called upon to tune the various lyres before important events. He also played the concert flute in those years. All Warrah 'co-workers' worked together with residents to put on regular plays and celebrate festivals and this was a central part of our lives. We also regularly held the so-called Sunday 'pedagogical services' given by Rudolf Steiner. Karl often said that modern people needed to find 'civilisation' – by which he meant that we needed to learn to add to the practical necessities of life a spiritual element, most easily found in the arts.

This said, practical day-to-day work, non-stop, was what Karl and Hannelor directed at Warrah with great dedication. In theory, we had a day and a half 'off' each week, but the reality was that people and animals and crops required care 24 hours a day, and all hands had to be ready to come on deck to deal with emergencies.

We all 'lived in' at Dural in those days, and so formed a working circle around the Kaltenbachs, doing whatever was necessary whenever it was needed. And the Kaltenbachs set an example for us all. My first months at Warrah were spent on the farm, doing labouring work and helping the older Warrah residents. Hans Cooke was the 'Farmer' at the time. I recall Karl telling me that there were certain skills that helped in our incarnations. Milking a cow was one of them, and I learned how to do it. I only wish I could now remember the other important skills! One of Karl's own special jobs was grading the main Warrah driveway with the tractor. He wouldn't allow anyone else to do it, because he was worried that the new water pipes would be torn up.

One day, probably early in 1974, Karl walked up to the farm from Waratah Cottage, and found me digging away with one of Warrah's residents. I can still remember the exact spot. He told me that one of the 'housefathers' (as we called them then) hadn't returned from an extended holiday period. Would I be willing to leave the farm and take on this new job? I remember that I instantly felt the firm hand of destiny on my shoulder and immediately agreed. Somehow, I realised that my life changed at that point. In the evening I wrote a postcard to my parents telling them (in those pre-internet days) that my stay in Australia would be prolonged, and I wouldn't be returning to the United States as soon as I'd thought.

Soon after this event, what later became the 'Association for Rudolf Steiner Curative Education and Social Therapy in Australia' was officially formed by Karl and Hannelor and by Lesley Evans and Susan Haris. Lesley had taken over leadership of Inala after the death of Keira Pohl and Susan Haris had undertaken a new endeavour at Miroma. Their co-working was intended as a base for training a new generation of workers in the field of what we now call disability services. I joined in enthusiastically in the first activities of the association and remember the event held at the newly built Sydney Opera House, marking the 50th anniversary of Steiner's first 'Curative Education' lectures. I believe that Margaret Whitlam, wife of the Prime Minister, was our guest of honour. (Oddly enough, one of my final acts as a labourer at the Royal Botanic Gardens was to help lay a lawn at the Opera House, in preparation for the Queen's visit for the official opening.)

At this same time, the new 'training course' began, and I was enrolled in the first very small group of students. Karl, together with Lesley and Susan, planned the curriculum, which was to last for three years: one year of study of general anthroposophy, one year of general Steiner education, and one year of curative education. All students were required to be working full-time at either Warrah,

Inala or Miroma. Of course, Karl taught many of the courses, especially in the first year. Adding to my earlier anthroposophical study with Professor Koelln, this initial year of study in the new training course – together with introductions to music, painting, drama, eurhythmy and speech work – formed the basis for the rest of my working life. Talks and discussions with Lesley and Susan were also highly significant and I believe that we were also taught by Erwin Berney and Mechthild Harkness.

At the same time, Karl's work with the Anthroposophical Society continued in parallel with his Warrah work. After the death of Robert Williams, Karl became General Secretary of the newly formed Anthroposophical Society in Australia, a position he held from 1982 to 2000, and was also the leader of the School of Spiritual Science in Australia until 2003.

I remained a regular attendee at the Tuesday night lectures in the city and was eventually asked, probably by Karl, to take on responsibility for this work. I would never have dared to give a public lecture but for the warm encouragement given by Karl Kaltenbach. He knew I was interested in 'comparative religions' and Steiner's *The Philosophy of Freedom* and gently but very firmly pushed me to stand in front of audiences and round up others to do the same. In the years that followed, I saw this important quality in Karl's character, his unfailing willingness to encourage others, to support others in their endeavours. His encouragement didn't always lead to the expected results, of course, but Karl showed this positive quality throughout his life and I was certainly a beneficiary, learning to take a leadership role that was quite contrary to my youthful nature.

Likewise, I came to the School of Spiritual Science, joining in 1977. I still greatly value my blue card, signed by Rudolf Grosse himself. Karl championed new directions in the First Class in those years, encouraging the appointment of more Class Holders and the holding of Class Lessons in various locations, apart from Rudolf Steiner House. (Still earlier, the Class had only been held at the home of Robert and Louise Williams.) I still remember how Karl would arrive very early and spend more than an hour creating a picture on the blackboard with coloured chalks. Of course, none of these wonderful compositions survive, but my wife Liz Hamilton copied some of them afterwards, from memory, into her Class Lessons book.

Karl was also very creative, very imaginative in his presentations of the First Class, encouraging free renderings instead of readings. Later, in 1993, it was Karl who sponsored me to become a Class Holder. He then gave me his Class book of Steiner's blackboard drawings, signed in the front by Robert Williams and himself.

As part of the Society's work, and also through Warrah's work with the association, Karl was influential in bringing many wonderful visitors to Australia. These human encounters had a huge influence on many of us younger people. Karl Koenig's close co-workers, Thomas and Anke Weis visited Warrah, and the latter actually sat in my classroom (where, by that time, I was a teacher of high school students). I was terrified, of course, but she proved to be a wonderful and supportive presence, teaching me how best to present one of Wordsworth's poems. Jack Reed from Camphill was a regular visitor and made a lasting impression. Sergei Prokofieff stayed at the Kaltenbach house and gave a First Class lesson in English in the Nordoff Hall. This was unforgettable.

Karl had also witnessed the early therapeutic work of Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins while visiting Denmark and invited the creators of 'Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy' to come to Australia. This led to Clive Robbins and his wife Carol living and teaching at Warrah for several years after Paul's death. Much later I visited the Robbins at New York University, while on one of my annual visits to see my parents, and found their Warrah baby grand piano in a 14th floor apartment in lower Manhattan.

Richard Steele and Richard Neale also visited us in Sydney, as well as other co-workers from Camphill. I can now hardly remember them all. But Karl's efforts (and those of others in the Anthroposophical Society and in the association) brought Manfred Schmidt-Brabant, Virginia Sease, Hagen Biesantz, Hans Dackweiler, Dr Leonardo Fulgosi, Dr Leen Mees, Cornelius Pietzner, Dr Michaela Glockler, Arne Klingborg, Dr Alfred Bauer – and many others – into contact with those of us living in the Sydney area and all around Australia.

Another side of Karl's life that I was privileged to share was his writing. Sometimes he would ask me to edit and proofread his various articles and I gained an insight into his wonderful spiritual imagination. This art form didn't come naturally to Karl, but he worked very hard at it, and especially wanted his work to appear in perfect English. To the best of my knowledge, throughout his life, he always wrote in English and never in German. Karl grew up speaking both German and Schweizerdeutsch (Swiss German), although it was rare to hear him speaking German in Australia unless he was entertaining German visitors who weren't fluent in English. On occasions when he served as a translator, he translated from German into English, often considerably shortening the original German sentences.

In 1992 he published a book together with David Wansbrough and Renate Breipohl, entitled *Festivals, Seasons and the Southern Sun*. He also published many articles in various Anthroposophical journals, some with the assistance and support of Milan Telford and the 'Trust for Anthroposophy.' In 1993 Karl was conferred an *honoris causa* Doctorate from the Vatican's Collegium Sancti Spiritus for his many writings.

Karl was a great traveller, especially during his years as the General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society, and after visiting Dornach, he felt it was his duty to report back in person to the members, and so for many years he criss-crossed the country, giving lectures and reports. He also developed a strong relationship with the Curative Education and Social Therapy work in New Zealand, and for a time made it possible for many of us to travel regularly to NZ for events at the Hohepa organisations. Likewise, he encouraged participation in our Australian conferences by our good friends in New Zealand.

One of Karl's most noteworthy artistic achievements was the design and building of the Warrah School building in 1981, when he worked together with his colleague, architect Reuben Lane. Karl started the plan with his image of what was later called 'Nordoff Hall' (after musician Paul Nordoff), a space designed especially for eurhythmy performances, rising from an octagon to a square. This wonderful space was used for many purposes by the children of Warrah School, for morning assemblies, for plays on the purpose-built stage, and for our various seasonal festivals, especially the 'St George Play' and the 'Wise Men's Well' summer Christmas play. Of course, we also used Nordoff Hall for large meetings and conferences, and later for meetings of the First Class.

I was fortunate to live next door to the Kaltenbachs from 1973 until 2000, the year of Hannelor's retirement. My son probably spent nearly half his life at Karl's house, playing and doing projects with Karl's three sons, one of whom was my godson. Like me, my son learned a great many practical skills from Karl. Twice we had to fight encircling bush fires at Warrah (before the suburb of Cherrybrook was built) before the firefighters could get to us. We also shared Karl's interest in sailing and once even sailed from Berowra Waters all the way down to Sydney Harbour. Only in the most extreme of calms was the motor allowed to be used! My son and his friends were always engaged in practical projects and adventures with the Kaltenbachs, and I well remember the removal of an old car engine and its replacement with a rebuilt engine. And the Kaltenbach house was always teeming with animals, birds and fish. Warrah owned a very tame ram at one time as

well as a cow, several donkeys, many impressive koi fish and uncounted doves. I especially remember the Kaltenbach Labrador named Torso.

Another memorable project started by Karl was the Warrah bakery. It began as a simple outdoor oven, cut into an embankment near the laundry building, finished off with an old iron oven door that Karl and Hannelor had found somewhere during one of their holiday trips out into the country. Special four-grain bread was baked outdoors there for a couple of years, under Hannelor's supervision, before Karl was able to surround the oven with a small brick building. Anyone who ever lived at Warrah will remember the famous Warrah bread!

Karl's endeavours at Warrah were highly regarded in the days before the NSW Disability Services Act of 1993 and improved government funding. In 1982 Karl received the Order of Australia Medal from the Australian Government for his work for people in need of special care. (Hannelor received the same medal for her own years at Warrah.)

Karl's efforts at Warrah were cut short at the end of 1995 because of the first of his illnesses. These health concerns led him to turn his attention to other areas of endeavour, especially to the arts and education and, from 2009 onwards, to the forming in Australia of the Arts Section of the School of Spiritual Science.

Other work he undertook after the Warrah years was the starting of the MichaEL Initiative in 1996 and serving on the Board of Miroma. He was a Founding Member in 1998 of the Asian-Pacific Cultural Development Group for Anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner Education, and a member of the board of the Launceston Steiner School from 2003 to 2005.

Karl and Hannelor moved to Hobart after 2000, where he worked from 2001 to 2004 as 'College Chair' at Tarremah Steiner school, while continuing his many activities within the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science.

In 1995 Karl had designed a remarkable house in Rossi, outside Canberra, and it was built during the next year by his oldest son, a builder. (The admiring locals called it 'The Opera House.')

Here he and Hannelor created another small farm and Karl resumed his painting and writing and of course continued his work with the Anthroposophical Society. Throughout the time I knew him, Karl had always loved Canberra and encouraged others to visit its many architectural and artistic places. Now he was able to visit there more often, while still living in a genuinely rural locale. Between 2006 and 2011 he also assisted with the Orana School in Canberra, as a member of their board of directors.

There are a great many other things I could write about Karl Kaltenbach, with a nearly infinite number of anecdotes, but this little article is only intended as a kind of preliminary memorial to a man whose life was devoted to true 'regeneration' in many of life's activities by means of Rudolf Steiner's indications – disability services, education, the arts, agriculture, the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science – and to the encouragement of others, helping many individuals to find their own paths and make their own contributions in these fields. I should say that throughout this article I could have added Hannelor Kaltenbach's name to many more of the things Karl achieved. The two were lifelong karmic partners and worked together for decades, deeply affecting the lives of many thousands of people, including myself.

Karl himself once wrote:

'Destinies begin earlier than we can imagine. They lead us beyond rational thinking, into the realm where specific destinies begin. However, it is only at the end of life that we can have a bird's eye perspective of our life, that we can achieve an understanding of the past.'

I asked my wife Liz to suggest her own summary of Karl's long life, looking at his many fruitful years from the point of view of the theme of 'Regeneration' . . . and she wrote:

'Karl was a farmer, a creative artist and innovative thinker who regenerated life all around him. Karl's enthusiasm sparked and inspired others by way of his artistic gifts and unique philosophical ideas. Karl was always planting new seeds into the earth. It was like a bright whirling of seeds, lighting up and then raining down, sparkling through him. Karl tilled the soil and planted seeds of life force, in order to bring something new into being on earth.'

Those of us who have known and loved Karl and worked with him in his various fields of endeavour, now thank him for his countless contributions, seen and unseen. Karl touched many people around the world, always seeking Christ in the etheric and, with his ideals, inspiring all who met him.

I hope my few words in this issue will encourage others to write more about Karl Kaltenbach and his life's work. He deserves a book or two, to say the very least, covering all his many achievements.