

Tribute to Mary

From André Roberfroid

When I joined the Montessori movement as president, I chose to follow Mary Hayes. I could not have had a better guide. With her legendary sense of humour, supported by her extraordinary knowledge and experience, Mary Hayes helped me to absorb some of the Montessori substance, and more importantly to appreciate the exceptional quality of all of you, the people who are making the Montessori movement.

We have lost a friend, a colleague, indeed a sister. For some time we shall be like an orphan, seeking advice that is no longer available. Our Association is mourning. Mary's genuine warmth, friendliness and cheerfulness brightened rooms and hearts.

Mary never looked to the limelight but always to what she could do to make a difference in children's lives. In so doing, Mary made a difference to our lives. Her legacy is expertise, unselfishness, love and humour.

We will all miss Mary Hayes, but her memory will remain forever as we continue to follow her example.

Farewell Mary...and thank you.

André Roberfroid, President of AMI



Mary Hayes (1944 - 2007)

This tribute to Mary Hayes includes contributions from friends and colleagues that highlight various aspects of Mary's life "in Montessori". Spanning almost forty years, her experiences ranged from being a Montessori student, a classroom teacher, a trainer, a director of training responsible for the AMI training college in Dublin, a member of the AMI Sponsoring & Pedagogical Committees, AMI Board member—to her final responsibility as General Secretary of AMI.

Mary was highly committed to the Montessori cause; it was an inevitable path she travelled, as she herself once wrote, somewhat flippantly, 'My introduction to the work of Dr Montessori came in two diverse ways: while visiting my parents before going to South Africa (sent there by the Dominican Sisters), I became ill and while recovering my father gave me E.M. Standing's book Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work. He thought it most suitable reading for a young, convalescent nun. I thought it dreadful stuff. Then, before travelling to South Africa, the Dominican Sisters sent me off to follow a short Montessori course. When I did leave the religious life, it was no surprise then that I wanted to follow the work of Dr. Montessori!'

We can only be grateful for this path. Many people's lives she touched, as testified by the messages received by Mary's family, AMI and the College in Dublin. Everyone has their own memories: recollections of Mary's hospitality, wit and wisdom are shared by all. We had to make a selection from all the messages received—we easily could have filled dozens of pages. We realize that we cannot cover all of Mary; we do hope, and expect, however, that you will recognize and relate to the memories in this tribute.

AMI Secretariat

Hilla Patell, honorary member of AMI, spoke these words at Mary's funeral mass



Mary with Hilla Patell

Mary our friend and colleague, how shall we remember her? Warm hearted, open, highly capable with a clear vision, she was bold and decisive when it came to making difficult decisions— all tempered with a wonderful sense of humour.

Mary took on her responsibility as General Secretary of AMI in September 2000. Her knowledge of Montessori and her considerable experience with children had prepared her uniquely for this responsible position.

Mary's work within AMI started in 1978 when she joined the staff of the Montessori Section of Sion Hill College, where she was highly regarded by her colleagues. In 1986 and 1987 Mary was asked by the AMI to conduct Elementary Training Courses at the Toronto Montessori Institute in Canada, a challenge which she willingly accepted and accomplished.

In 1990 she became Director of Training of the Elementary Course in Dublin and at the same time took on the responsibility as acting Director of Training of the Primary Course at AMI's request (to the best of my knowledge this exceptional situation has not been the case at any other Centre in the world.)

A well respected trainer Mary lectured at Congresses, Conferences and was invited as a guest lecturer at various Training Centres around the world. She was appointed to the Board of AMI in 1998 and served on the Pedagogical and Sponsoring Committees for many years. Here, her sound judgement, clarity of thought and an understanding and appreciation of the needs and concerns of Montessorians in different countries were greatly valued by her peers.

As General Secretary Mary was a pivotal force in smoothly implementing the major changes taking place within the Movement as it moves into the 21st century.

The news of Mary's totally unexpected and sudden passing has left the Montessori Community stunned and deeply saddened. A highly respected pedagogue, Mary also had exceptional organizational skills and a true vision of the universal nature of the Montessori Message. The warmth, the care and consideration and the hospitality extended to all who visited AMI headquarters during the various meetings and throughout the year will not be easily forgotten.

You may have left us Mary, but your legacy has set a benchmark which will continue to inspire and guide us and which we shall continue to honour.



On an outing with the students to the source of the river Liffey

About the Liffey

Irish: An Liff river in Counties Wicklow, Kildare, and Dublin, Ireland, rising in the Wicklow Mountains, about 20 mi (32 km) southwest of Dublin. Following a tortuous course laid out in preglacial times, it flows in a generally northwesterly direction from its source to the Lackan Reservoir, the site of a gorge cut through the Slievethoul ridge. The river then runs westward in the Kildare...

(source Britannica.com)

From Jackie Eibert Close friend and fellow Montessorian

Everyone of us is feeling the loss of Mary, each in their own way.

But we are left with many cherished memories of the time we spent with her. Mary believed in AMI completely and has left her own legacy behind as a result of all her work on behalf of AMI.

Mary was open and accepting of all Montessorians throughout the world. Hers was a policy of inclusiveness to all, kindness and consideration.

Her knowledge of overall Montessori was the best there was, and she was always willing to explain and share that extensive knowledge.

Her organizational skills were incomparable. She was articulate, quick of thought and had the most remarkable memory.

Let us all try to carry on in the positive manner Mary would have.



To Mary from Renilde Montessori

One of the many, many people who love you wrote “But I should not be speaking of her in the past tense. Her faith would forbid that!”

For sure your faith would forbid that. Furthermore, on an earthly plane, the quality of admiration, respect and delight you inspire in those who know you stays with us as an ineradicable source of comfort, making it quite impossible to relegate you to a past wherein you gently fade away. You are too strongly rooted in our hearts and in our memories.

You may have deprived us of your presence (and some of us are very cross with you for leaving) but your essence remains—vivid, quizzical, amusing, intelligent, kind, competent, quietly companionable—a treasure you quite unconsciously, most generously bestowed upon those who have the great good fortune to know you.

Thank you, dear Mary.

This memory by Renilde Montessori was read out by Ann Dunne during the funeral mass on May 16.

From David Kahn

She was the balance wheel for the AMI reform, open to new possibilities, anchoring the proposals for change so that they would move sensibly.

From Fred Kelpin

We worked together in the Material Committee on finalising the new digitized blueprints. Mary was a friend and a Montessorian of a high level, a team builder with a great sense of humour.

From Ita Williams

To quote Tagore ‘death is not extinguishing the light, but merely putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.’

From Alexander Henny

I am deeply sad and shocked by the passing of dear Mary Hayes. Being in Holland I have worked with Mary very closely and with great joy and respect. She was very dear to me and I admired her knowledge and dedication to Montessori and AMI as well as all the close contacts she had all over the world and particularly with all the AMI members. We all will miss her and grieve for her.

From Allyn Travis, chair AMI/USA

She was always there for us in a time of crisis, or at a time of celebration. We always learned something new from Mary, whether it was a different twist on a presentation or a deeper understanding of a piece of material. She was a leader—she was our leader. Her heart was in training and we will all feel her loss for a long time to come.

Letter to Mary from Patricia M. Coulter D.Min. friend of 36 years

Mary, the invitation has come to write about early student days on the Montessori path— in Sion Hill and the US course of Sofia Cavalletti’s— adventures that led you to Bergamo and me to Rome. How to word the living legacy you give? It cannot be said in the third person—putting you in past tense. So I continue the letter begun this way on May 7th, your dies natalis, the day of your eternal birth:

Pilgrim! From an early age, fired by the ideal of utter self-gift, we first met after your South African journey. You came from one life’s call into another within it— all the vision that is contained in the word “Montessori” and so much more. Carrying a flame lit in you at birth and before, a message of hope you believed in to your core.

Now it’s the time of your “month’s mind”, an Irish mourning rite I first learned of in your home. And both sorrow, at your sudden passing over, and gratitude, for your 36-year friendship, stir those long-ago memories yet only in these half-formed phrases.

Yes, then there was that spark of genius, for content and method, with your generous self-giving of it, and the way it was grounded in the whole of your life. “World-lover”— a reality you always lived with breadth: like explorations of prehistoric sites or Dublin markets, or your storytelling of ancient myths (an art of yours that my now-grown nephews still recall from their childhood days).

Yes, there was that quality of humour then too; a description of it as a “transcendent virtue” is true of you
for it held, as did your gentle strength, hidden depths forged in fire.
And while your hearthside chats delighted family and friends,
and you cherished what you called the “bliss of domesticity”,
hardship was no stranger to you. But you would ever “sit lightly to it”.

Mary, today the tape of your narration of “God Without Hands” plays at the point ... when all forms of creation “fulfil their task and whisper as with one voice: ‘Lord, Thy will be done... we obey’.”

And I wonder, looking back at the threshold you crossed over then: did that Dominican decade also serve as indirect preparation of your gifts of scholarship and speaking, so needed in your growing vocation?

Told in your “lovely, lovely voice” is one of your own soul’s refrains: “I hear my Lord and I obey”.

In it I hear the story of your courageous life—your sacred history—speaking still.

A memory of Mary Hayes

by Benedetto Scoppola, mathematician and editor of *Psicogeometria*

I always thought that to meet a woman in order to clarify the legal details of an agreement is not the optimal way to appreciate her warmth and her sense of humour. But Mary Hayes was different.

Even on the occasion of our meeting in Amsterdam about publishing Dr Montessori’s *Psicogeometria*, when I met her first, her hospitality and her sense of humour were so tied to her deep and rich personality that it was impossible not to perceive them.

Beside this, it was immediately clear to me that she believed in what she was doing, in the possibility to work for a better school. She did her work seriously, but without unnecessary emphasis. And she did it very well. I am convinced that many persons in the Montessori movement will miss her. And even if though I met her just a few times, I’ll be among them.



From fellow Bergamo student Phoebe Allen

The loss of Mary Hayes is especially great for AMI-EAA because as an elementary trainer, she was a strong liaison between EAA and AMI. We were fortunate to have Mary as an excellent presenter on the topic of mathematics at our 1999 Refresher Course in Atlanta. She and I chatted in San Francisco at the Centenary Gala last February, and again in



Mary with Camillo Grazzini, her own elementary trainer, and a big Montessori influence in her life.

Amsterdam this past April, about our classmates and our year in Bergamo in 1973-74. Mary had trained in Dublin and worked as a teacher in South Africa before joining us in the astoundingly beautiful, medieval city of Bergamo, which all graduates recall with immense pleasure. In this walled city of towers in the foothills of the Alps, Mary lived with Mary and Sean O'Dwyer and their son, who was only three weeks old when we began the course. She often sang lovely Irish songs to the infant, and taught us students Irish jigs. We were in a large class, studying under Camillo Grazzini, Eleonora Honegger, Antonia Trezzi, and Sofia Cavalletti, with sentence-by-sentence translation into English by Marina, a young woman from Mexico. The Center was at the time in the quadrangular heart of this magical town, built in the 14th Century by the Duke of Milan. Mary reminded me of the lack of heating fuel that cold winter and classes held by candlelight due to a loss of electricity. She was a quiet, diligent student who had emerged from her convent only a few years before. She was sharp, smart and informed, and had a great sense of dry wit. Little did we imagine that one day this reserved young woman who sat at the back of the room would be leading AMI with her dedication and commitment to the rights of the child in what was truly her life's work.

From Ann Dunne

Current Director of Training of the Dublin Elementary Course

Mary came to Sion Hill as a lecturer in 1978 where she later became Director of Training of the Elementary Course and Acting Director of Training of the primary course. She left Dublin to go to Amsterdam in 2001, after twenty-three productive years at the College.

I have had the great good fortune to have been trained by Mary on two levels, as a trainee teacher and as a trainee trainer. In 1978, as trainee teachers, her depth of knowledge of Montessori pedagogy frankly intimidated us, because we were well aware of our own level of understanding, minuscule to say the least.

Teaching, training, imparting and sharing knowledge, encouraging others to be open to new ideas, to enjoy learning and challenge oneself to develop as a better human being, came as naturally to Mary as breathing. The best kept secret was that she had the softest heart in the place!

All of this allied to a generous spirit, unique, sometimes uncomfortably accurate, sense of humour, a warm hospitable nature meant that wherever and whenever Mary met the people she trained, she remembered them, the

year they trained, the group they trained with and the personal detail of their lives, much to their astonishment and ours.

Working with her over the years was such an adventure, always challenging, sometimes impossible to keep up with, as her agile brain came up with ideas and solutions we had not even begun to process. Mary led by example, no task in the work to be considered menial, she gave us, as trainee trainers, every opportunity to develop to the best of our potential, it was up to ourselves to make the most of it. A stickler in relation to AMI standards, as I now reflect on those years, I am grateful and indebted to Mary for her generosity, friendship, support and trust.

It was Mary's vision, leadership, persistence and ability to inspire which held us all together in the late 1980's during the transition from the Dominican Sisters who had sponsored AMI courses since the early 1930's. We will all sorely miss her.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam.

From Mary's former students...

'Mary Hayes was our external examiner in Bergamo. I remember in my math examination that she asked a question to which I gave a wrong answer (thinking I was totally right). I saw a glimmer pass through her eyes. She then re-asked the question, with a "Do you think there might be a chance we'd find the answer in your album?" That gave a moment to control the rising panic and come up with something more (or less) respectable.'

Chris Trostel

'I corresponded with Mary Hayes as a part of the Montessori Institute of Atlanta's rededication. When I told her that we were striving to renew our training centre and that our goal was to offer AMI training here on all three levels, she wrote back with encouraging words. Her willingness to see and promote our vision was key. I'm sure I was not the only one who derived great satisfaction and enjoyment from the fact that Mary Hayes was here in San Francisco for the Joint AMI-EAA Refresher Course and Centenary Celebration. Her insightful comments and unassuming manner were inspiring. Perhaps she walks with us still.'

Gail Pruitt Hall

'At our graduation, Mary Hayes spoke some memorable words. She gave us encouragement and support to go into the classrooms, and reminded us that when things are not working in the classroom, we only need to look at ourselves. What can we as teachers do to change the environment? What lessons can we offer? This isn't to blame ourselves, but instead to show us the power our presence and attitude can have on the classroom. I still hear those words from her when I am discouraged about something.'

Jamie Rue

'I remember that Mary Hayes was a guest trainer in San Diego in 2002. She was very kind and lots of fun. Our 2002 class has many fond memories of Miss Hayes.'

Beth Sale

'Blessings to Mary Hayes and Appreciation for all her years of giving and service to the Montessori work.'

Ross Mingeldorf

'I was so sad to hear of Mary's sudden death. I was very fond of her and am so glad I got to spend some precious moments with her in Rome in January talking about Nancy Jordan and good memories of people from the old days in Dublin. She was very kind to me and helped me a lot to get through my elementary training. She was a wonderful trainer, I admired her greatly for the quality of the training she gave us. But mostly I remember with such fondness the many times I sat with my mother and my wife Kathy and Mary and her mother in the little front room on Stella Avenue drinking tea and chatting about everything. Precious hospitality always. She was a good gabster and gifted with wit. She came from a family of talkers; I enjoyed the fact that Mary's mother and my grandmother were from the same locality in County Meath and were likewise gifted with gab. Mary Hayes gave tireless service to Montessori work and to AMI both in Ireland and internationally. She has left many indebted to her for her guidance and wisdom. As the old people from County Meath would say: 'The light of heaven to her.'

Gerry Leonard

Mary with students and staff, Dublin



From Australia

Mary held a special place in the hearts of the Australian Montessori community. Mary's constant and much valued support for the Australian Montessori Teacher Education Foundation will be sorely missed, as will her Irish good cheer and good sense which resonated so completely with us.

Mary's wisdom has influenced many of us, including her students who have taught in Montessori schools in Australia.

She truly did help all her students to begin the process of discovering for themselves the profound truths underlying the Montessori approach to education. Mary's articulation of these profound truths was real, straightforward and lilytingly fearless and remains a beacon for all who knew her.

From Japan

Mary has made an outstanding contribution to the Montessori movement. As a leader, she championed the emancipation of the child, expressing a profound message of compassion, kindness and love.

Fumio and Sumiko Takane

From Mary's fellow trainers

Eduardo Cuevas

Her sincere concern for AMI, and those working on its behalf—and her ever present good humour will be sorely missed.

Silvia C. Dubovoy

She was an extraordinary person that will live in our hearts forever.

Liz Hall

Her openness to new ideas, her grace and diplomacy and her sense of humour will be fondly remembered by us all. Her positive energy supported our organization during this important time of celebration of our past and transition into our future.

Shannon Helfrich

May we each remember her in our own ways and celebrate the knowledge and skill she so ably shared with each of us.



2000, with Barbo Stenlund and Silvia Dubovoy

From New Zealand

Mary was for us a quiet but strong connector. Initially this was through the wonderful teachers who came to our shores and established a high standard of Montessori practice with our children... More recently, it was through her work as general secretary of AMI. She worked in a country that was not her home, in the service of all in the Montessori community.

She admitted that she found it a lonely task at times but she had accepted a position that called for strong yet diplomatic leadership as AMI sought to express its vision in outreach to a wider world.

We pay tribute to a woman who crossed borders to quietly encourage and maintain links with those who were not in the traditional AMI fold. We are grateful for her support and contribution and will miss her dearly.

Dave Stott and Nicola Chisnall

Nikki Huhges

As we all move out from the reeling shock of Mary Hayes' death, it may be helpful to remember these words which were so beautifully exemplified in her life.

*Whatever is true,
Whatever is honourable,
Whatever is just,
Whatever is pure,
Whatever is lovely,
Whatever is gracious,
If there is any excellence,
If there is anything worthy of praise
Think on these things*

As we move back into our work in service.

Monte and Vera Kenison

She was an incredible beacon in our Montessori lighthouse.

Lynne Lawrence

Mary was dedicated to AMI, to the movement, to the children and determined to make a difference and we shall all miss her.

Greg MacDonald

Her dedication to AMI and to the child was complete.

Zarin Malva

She was very kind and understanding, guiding us sensibly.

Nicole Marchak

Her legacy of goodwill, friendship and dedication to the mission of AMI will carry on within our community for a long time to come.

Janet McDonell

I always considered her in the top three of people I would choose to live with on a desert island. The stories, the stories!

Jean Miller

This is a terrible loss to the Montessori world.

Molly O’Shaughnessy

She was a delightful, clever and warm person.

Judi Orion

We will acutely miss her guidance, her incredible sense of detail as to our history, her ability to ‘cut to the chase’.

Maria Roth

We thank her for all the help over the years.

Ginni Sackett

We all will miss her. May she have peaceful rest.

Patricia Spinelli

We will forever remember her hospitality, her work and sense of humour.

Barbro Stenlund

She was brilliant and full of humour.

Marja-Leena Tyrväinen

Her work was enormous. I miss her.

Pilar Ulibarri

I am sure she will have a very good ‘new life’.

Sister Stanislaus Vas

We too feel her loss very deeply. We appreciated her concern, understanding and readiness to help us at all times.



1996, with Baiba Kruminis Grazzini

Nimal Vaz

We will remember her for her kindness, compassion and her labour on our behalf.

Patty Wallner

Her intelligence, her knowledge, her humour, her quirkiness —the way she could put a problem or person in perspective. We will miss it all.

Ulla Wikefeldt

Her outstanding knowledge and refreshing Irish humour will be missed. She had a special place in my heart.

Rita Zener

I feel deeply the loss of a friend and supporter.



Mary with Marianne Moore

With (most of) the AMI trainers in Rome, 2007



From Annette Haines

fellow trainer, committee member and AMI Board member

I had the privilege of getting to know Mary Hayes not only as the General Secretary of the AMI but also as the Chairperson of the Pedagogical Committee and a Sponsoring Committee member. Although generally quiet as a Sponsoring Committee member, she would come forward full-force when her particular expertise was needed, as in cases involving elementary trainers in training or regarding the assignment of a candidate to a particular course or Director of Training. So it was only when I was appointed to the Pedagogical Committee that I came to appreciate Mary's amazing memory. She held the AMI global network in her head and was able to access not only the whole but all the details of a complex situation at will. So encyclopaedic was her knowledge of the workings of the AMI—down to the level of individuals and members—that it became easy and comforting for us to say, 'Let's ask Mary.' Mary's mind seemed an easily accessible database of the AMI world and when someone asked a question, they always got a complete and well considered answer.

She was also an inveterate storyteller. At dinner or over tea we were entertained with stories of her childhood, stories of Ireland, and of the many friends and visitors who came to the house. As she wove her tales, the characters and scenes would come alive as the story-line evolved. A generous and warm hostess, this plain little Irish lady who lived in the apartment above enchanted the many visitors who came to the AMI during this period and, with her wit and wry sense of humour, seemed to many to be AMI incarnate.

She managed to juggle social engagements as adroitly as she managed her more intellectual duties. When the AMI Committees met in November and April and the usually quiet house came alive with visitors, everyone's living accommodations and social schedules would also come to reside in Mary's mind so that, at any given time, she knew

completely where everyone was staying and who was dining with whom. This took on import beyond mere social scheduling as much of the important work of consensus building was done after hours.

Mary Hayes epitomized the idea *The Servant Leader*. When AMI needed her, she left Dublin, her house and family, even the Training Institute that had become her life, and came to Amsterdam to give herself to the work, to an idea larger than herself. If we ever get tired or think we may have done enough, Mary's memory will be there to chide us, in its typical Irish way, reminding us that there is always more of ourselves that we can give.



The historical Montessori brooch, showing the Child on the Sea of Life, just like the brooch Mary had.

Memorial Contributions

In honour of Mary Hayes a special Fund has been created. Contributions will benefit the training college in Dublin—where Mary spent over twenty years, and where her heritage is still felt. AMI training was very dear to her heart, and by making a donation, however small, you can share her hope and vision. The “technical details” of how you can make your donation can be found in the attachment “Memorial Contributions”.

