

# Karin Herms and the Camphill Biodynamic Seminar

By Paul Martin

Karen Herms crossed the threshold, 13th March 2013.

**Karin was born in 14th May 1924, just two months before Rudolf Steiner gave the Agricultural Course in Silesia. I am not sure where Karin was born but I do remember a rumour that as a young woman she escaped through the "Iron Curtain," if this rumour was correct then Karin was close, not only in time but also in space, to the Agricultural Course. Karin was a person with an incredibly strong will, she told me herself that as a teenager she had a love of the classic Russian writers but she was not satisfied reading them in German translation so she taught herself Russian! Now through my eyes that is proof of a very strong will, but also of a tremendous passion.**

Karin's will and passionate nature combined in whatever she did, and this combination manifested as a tremendous enthusiasm. David Adams once told me how he witnessed Karin stroking a cow with will and passion, but the cow was not really enjoying all the passionate attention!

Karin came to the Camphill Schools in Aberdeen in 1948, as a young woman of 24 years, she was already a nurse and had survived the physical, emotional and spiritual destruction of the 2nd World War; in fact I believe the horrific destruction gave Karin an inner strength and a spiritual vision which she held onto throughout her life. Karin's will and passionate nature immediately found a niche in Camphill, and she centred her enthusiasm on the care, nursing and education of disabled children. It is hard for us today to imagine that time, with all its social ramifications, only 3 years after the end of the war. This was also the time of the early formative years of Camphill, we can now only imagine, with her will and passion and enthusiasm, what she must have also contributed to the establishment of Camphill. I do know that she did have many conversations with Dr. König. I hope Karin will not mind if I refer to one of those conversations: Dr. König evidently had said that there was only one man with a will strong enough to be Karin's husband, but that he was already married (meaning himself)! Karin remained single all her life, but this meant she could dedicate herself to nursing, to disabled children, to Biodynamics, to the Camphill Community and to Anthroposophy.

In the late fifties or early sixties Karin moved to South Africa to help with the establishment of the fledgling Camphill Communities there. Karin always spoke so highly of Tilla König, they must have formed a very strong connection at this time, it was also this time that Karin turned her attention to Biodynamics. We know that Tilla had an inspiring relationship with nature and the world of the nature kingdoms. Maybe it was Tilla that inspired Karin into Biodynamics? I remember Karin telling me once that she felt that the land was so ill and she felt she had to nurse

it as she had nursed the disabled children. Whatever it was that inspired her to take up Biodynamics she took it up, "hook, line and sinker!" But again one has to admire Karin's strength of will, to take up Biodynamics in the Southern Hemisphere at that time would have been very challenging, but typically of Karin she took it up with passion and enthusiasm. Even in those years without the availability of mentors and teachers Karin developed an understanding of the inner aspects of Biodynamics; this knowledge benefited so many of us, many years later during the time of the Camphill Biodynamic Seminar. One could tell, by the way that Karin told her stories, that she loved South Africa, its land, its people, its culture.

At some point in the seventies Karin returned to Britain, and was instrumental in the founding of the Beannachar Camphill Community where young people disabled and not so disabled could work the land productively and Biodynamically, to provide good quality food to the Camphill Schools over the river and the wider community, and at the same time bring healing to those youths working the land.

The Camphill Biodynamic Seminar started in mid-eighties, initially it was the inspirational thinking of Alan Potter who had the vision to establish a nurturing but still educational course for experienced Biodynamic practitioners based more on an esoteric level than a practical 'down-to-earth' level. The initial impulse was based on the Eight Fold Path and the Seven Fold Image of Man working in combination with each other, but over the years this initial foundation was slowly modified, developed and transformed.

Alan invited a small group of Biodynamic practitioners to join him in how to make his lofty idea practical. In that Initial Group was Michael Schmundt, Dorette Schwabe, Karin Herms, Alan Potter, John Brett and myself, Paul Martin. By this time Karin was gardening at Delrow. As a small group we worked intensely together for a year bringing this inspirational idea down to earth.

We felt we were ready to launch the Camphill Biodynamic Seminar, invitations were sent out, enrolments received, and we started. Alan never joined us as one of the facilitating guardians, but selflessly handed his impulse into the safe keeping of the rest of us. I will never forget that first weekend, it was in Oaklands Park, it was cold and damp outside but inside there was wild fire burning out of control amongst the farmers and gardeners participating. We were discussing the difference between the substance earth, the element earth and the life ether; the conversation/argument became so heated that a very brave gardener from Scotland stood up grabbed the burning candle from the centre and demanded that only the person holding the candle should speak and the rest of us would have to learn to listen, it worked a very well, a fruitful and inspiring conversation followed. The Seminar had come down to earth!

Karin's knowledge, her wisdom, her love of Biodynamics and Anthroposophy, her will, her care, her enthusiasm was instrumental in holding us all together. Each Seminar lasted 2 years, made up of 4 long weekends per year. The Seminar continued for about 20 years; David Adams joined the Guardians after the first cycle, and I left after the fourth cycle but Karin steadfastly stood by this very important initiative from the very beginning to the very end. And it was not always so serious; there were times when we roared with laughter, even Karin!

Each seminar had an Eurythmist who committed themselves to be a part of the 8 weekend retreat. One very humorous memory was when Judy Hesse was our Eurythmist and Bernt Ehland, of the Camphill Schools was a participant. (Bernt has also since crossed the threshold.) Each eurythmy session became a very joyous occasion as Bernt never managed to follow Judy's instructions and inevitably there was a huge pile-up, and no matter how hard we tried to be serious we all eventually lost it and collapsed into peals of laughter, even Karin who took every aspect of Anthroposophy so seriously!

Another memory I have is of Karin's wisdom. We were discussing the ethers; Karin demonstrated the presence of the 4 ethers by showing us works of art by Vincent Van Gogh, August Mache, Paul Klee and Charles Filiger.

Karin often had tears in her eyes when discussing Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy meant so much to her. Occasionally she would get quite upset by some of the flippancy of us farmers, but John Brett would come to her rescue, he would put his large arms around Karin, give her a little hug, Karin would smile and all was well again.

During these years of the Seminar Karin moved to the Grange and concentrated on seed breeding, she also contributed much wisdom, knowledge and experience to this then developing impulse.

The Seminar moved throughout Britain, we even ventured abroad to the Netherlands and Norway. We were often invited to specific centres; having a group of experienced Biodynamic farmers and gardeners concentrating on esoteric studies was seen as potentially beneficial for a centre. Although each seminar weekend had a retreat like nature we also tried to engage with the services, cultural events and the land workers of the respective centres, as much as possible.

It was during the Biodynamic Seminars that Karin took on one of the most important tasks for the future of Biodynamics on Earth. Karin had previously taken up communications with Adalbert Count Keyerserlingk, Count Carl von Keyerserlingk's son, as an elderly man. As a result of this relationship Karin used her will and her passion to get the 2 books, "Developing Biodynamic Agriculture, Reflections on Early Research" and "The Birth of a New Agriculture," translated into English and made available for sale. The Camphill Biodynamic Seminar was able to contribute financially to these translations and publications.

One day another esoteric seminar for farmers and gardeners will establish itself and I am sure Karin will watch over that seminar as she so ably watched over ours; in the meantime Karin's love and dedication to Biodynamics will be appreciated by many for years to come. ■

*Paul Martin lives in Queensland, Australia.*

## From the Biodynamic Association Chairman

*Continued from page 4...* Until now it is only because the people of Britain and Europe have made it clear that they do not want to eat GMOs, and that therefore there is not a market here, that GMOs have been prevented from being grown here, despite the propaganda and money of the big companies involved. I therefore think it is only in having an interested and informed society that there is hope of changing things. This is a difficult task to bring about when a lack of honesty is not condemned by society and where evidence based science is not used with transparency.

Interestingly, a recent Farmers Weekly survey showed that many farmers would be prepared to grow GMOs but few are prepared to eat them! A bit like the members of parliament, who promote them but do not allow them to be served in the parliament restaurants!

We have to support and encourage our biodynamic producers to keep going, against all the odds, so that we have examples of what can be done for the future. The seed production and breeding work requires to be intensified and developed further, as does our work with the bees, and if we hear what the bees are telling us, then most importantly, we must develop and encourage the right consciousness with which we work with nature. ■



### ADVERTISE IN THE STAR AND FURROW!

**Star and Furrow reaches not only the membership of over 1000 people. It is also read by a wider audience in the organic movement and in educational institutions around the country and abroad.**

The advertising rates are as follows:

The charge for small advertisement is 12p per word for members of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association and 25p per word for non-members. The charges for display advertisements are:

- Outside back cover £300
- 1/4 page £50
- Inside back cover £200
- 1/8 page £25
- Full page £200
- INSERTS £65 (per 1,000)
- 1/2 page £100 (all prices inclusive of VAT)

Discounts are available on request. Cheques and money orders should be made out to the Biodynamic Agricultural Association or BDAA. Foreign advertisers are requested to pay by international money order. The closing dates are: 1st April for the summer issue and 1st October for the winter issue. Advertisements not received and paid for by these dates may not be accepted. Please send advertisements to the Editor's address (see inside front cover).

Chairman of the Council for three years.

We will carry a full appreciation in the next issue of Star and Furrow.