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Interview with Margaret Edith Atkins OAM [sound recording] Interviewer: June Donovan

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Details

4 hours 36 minutes??Margaret Atkins was awarded an OAM in 1982 for her service to education in special education. Margaret Edith Atkins was born in 1928 at Rose Park and grew up at Kensington Park where she attended kindergarten and small private schools despite the cerebral palsy and received regular physiotherapy and speech pathology. She describes her experiences at school and the difficulties she experienced with writing and mobility. After leaving school she enrolled in a playgroup course at the Kindergarten Training College and commenced voluntary work in kindergartens. She recalls dealing with her frustration from the limitations from the disability and her determination to be as independent as possible. She describes her employment in two kindergarten positions where she was successful in organising extracurricular activities and developing good relationships with the children's parents. She later worked as an equipment maker for the Kindergarten Union and designed and made toys. Margaret later decided to return to study social work at university but was initially refused entry to the course at Adelaide University. She describes the circumstances surrounding her entry into the course and the new difficulties she faced in being allowed to tape lectures and write exams and lecture notes and managing the physical environment although she was able to get finance from the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Centre to complete her studies. Margaret talks further about her university studies and completing a Bachelor of Arts with Honours majoring in psychology. Margaret gained a full-time teaching position with the Education Department as a teacher of intellectually handicapped children and was also supervised by the Department's psychologist to allow her to gain membership of the Australian Psychological Society. Margaret was employed at the Woodville Special School where she developed innovative teaching methods and designed equipment. During her career she held positions as Deputy Head at Strathmont Centre for Intellectually Retarded Children, Head of Barton Terrace and Kings Park special schools, and then in 1975 the Ashford Special School. Margaret recalls other activities and hobbies she was involved in outside of the school such as swimming and horse riding. She goes on to explain the circumstances surrounding her retirement on the grounds of invalidity in 1977 that led her to become a resident at the Julia Farr Centre. In 1982 Margaret was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to special education. While living at the Julia Farr Centre Margaret was funded by the Centre to undertake research into leisure activities for the residents and was able to travel overseas. After her health improved Margaret felt that she needed to return to a more home-like environment and was able to move to an aged care facility. She then became very active in community activities and events, WEA and University of the Third Age. Margaret continues to talk about the difficulties facing people with disabilities and particularly in social situations, discrimination and isolation. She then recalls the circumstances in 1996 that led her to require further operations and necessitated she move to another aged care facility. She talks about the stereotyping and stigma attached to people in aged care facilities and how she has lived with disability. She talks about how her life has been spent overcoming discrimination and how she has maintained a positive attitude through her life.

Author Details
Anne Heywood

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