

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANNEMARIE ROEPER

Had Annemarie's life developed the way she expected, she'd have been a child psychoanalyst. History altered her path dramatically, so she brought her curiosity and convictions about the interior life of children to the field of education. In her 40 years at The Roeper School and her subsequent research, writing and consulting, Annemarie was an enduring advocate for an education that supports our need to be individuals while insisting on our intimate and inescapable interdependence with all other beings.



Annemarie Martha Bondy was born in Vienna on August 27, 1918. She grew up in the progressive schools started by her parents, Max and Gertrud Bondy, and met her future husband as a very young girl when George Roeper, who was eight years older, arrived as a student at the school in 1924. In

1937, the Nazis forced her parents, who were Jewish by heritage, to sell the school under the Nuremberg Laws that forbade Jews from educating Aryans. The family fled first to Switzerland and then to the United States in 1939. George fled with them, as he was under orders to be shot on sight for having helped the Bondys obtain papers to leave.

Two weeks after arriving in the United States, the young couple married — something they were barred from doing in Germany since George wasn't Jewish. They married at City Hall in New York City on April 20, 1939, wearing a wool tuxedo and silk gown they'd brought from Europe for the occasion. At first, George and Annemarie helped the Bondys establish the Windsor Mountain School, which operated in Lenox, Massachusetts, until 1975. Then, in 1941, Annemarie and George came to Detroit by invitation of two local psychoanalysts, Richard and Editha Sterba, to direct a psychoanalytically oriented nursery school and establish a grade school.

The school grew vigorously. After only five years, it was so popular George and Annemarie were able to purchase a large estate in Bloomfield Hills as a permanent home for the school. At the same time they started their own family:



Tom, born in 1943; Peter, born in 1946 on the day after they closed on the property in Bloomfield Hills; and Karen, born in 1949 while the family still lived on the second floor of Hill House.

In 1956, the Roepers became concerned about the Cold War-driven interest in identifying gifted children. They felt that little was known about the emotional needs of the gifted and that new programs that were springing up might damage the potential of gifted children. After consulting with scholars in gifted education, they converted the school in 1956 to one that was exclusively devoted to gifted education. Today the school is the oldest independent school in the United States serving gifted students.

As a prominent educator, Annemarie was invited to consult with Joan Ganz Cooney on the development of *Sesame Street* in 1965. For many years, Annemarie taught undergraduate and graduate courses in gifted education at Oakland University, in addition to serving as Headmistress at Roeper. In 1978, she and George founded the *Roeper Review*, a peer-reviewed scholarly quarterly of gifted education that is still published by the school.

Annemarie never completed any higher education beyond high school. In 1937 she was the youngest person ever accepted by Sigmund and Anna Freud to study child psychoanalysis with them. The German invasion of Austria in March 1938 prevented her from beginning her studies. She fled on the last train to cross the Austrian frontier before the Germans invaded. In 1978, Eastern Michigan University awarded her and George honorary doctorates.

Annemarie retired from Roeper in 1980 at the age of 61, one year after George retired at the age of 68. The couple moved to California in 1983, where they remained connected to the school and continued to speak, write and consult. George passed away on August 24, 1992, in Oakland, California. Annemarie passed away on May 11, 2012, in Oakland, California.

Over her career, Annemarie published more than 100 articles and book chapters, three scholarly books (*The "I" of the Beholder: A Guided Journey to the Essence of a Child*; *My Life Experiences with Children: Selected Writings and Speeches*; and *Educating Children for Life: The Modern Learning Community*), four children's books, a meditation on aging called *Beyond Old Age*, and a memoir of growing up at her parents' school called *Marienau: A Daughter's Reflections*. She also developed the Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment to provide a more holistic understanding of a child's abilities and personality.

In 1999, Annemarie received the first President's Award from NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) for a lifetime of distinguished service to the field. In 2003, she was given the Humanitarian Award by the International Center for Psycho-Social Trauma for a lifetime in service to victims of trauma, in particular her work establishing the importance of a sense of safety to a child's development. In 2008, Annemarie was the first person to be interviewed for NAGC's "Portraits in Gifted Education: The Legacy Series."

Annemarie had a passion throughout her life for children and their right to grow according to their unique needs. In her words, "Humanity has made two promises to its children. The first is to prepare a world which accepts them and provides them with opportunities to live, grow, and create in safety. The other is to help them develop their whole beings to the fullest in every respect. Education is the vehicle through which we try to keep these promises."

