

THE ROEPER SCHOOL

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ANNEMARIE BONDY ROEPER

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Annemarie Roeper, educator, author and co-founder of The Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham, Michigan, was born in Vienna on August 27, 1918, and died in Oakland, California, on May 11, 2012. She was educated at Schule Marienau, a progressive school in Germany founded by her mother, a medical doctor and psychoanalyst trained by Sigmund Freud, and her father, a leader in the idealistic, pre-war German Youth Movement. At the school, still operating outside Hamburg, Annemarie absorbed an approach to education that nurtures its students' emotional development and social commitment as well as their intellect.

Annemarie met her future husband as a very young girl when George, who was eight years older, arrived as a student at the school in 1924. In 1937, the Nazis forced her parents, Max and Gertrud Bondy, 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. The Bondys' prominence in educational circles led to assistance in obtaining visas from notable educational figures in the United States, especially reformer Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who brought Montessori education to the United States, and Dorothy Thompson, a pioneering female foreign correspondent. The family's admission to the U.S. was also facilitated by the passports George, a Protestant and Annemarie's fiance, managed to obtain for the Bondys that hid the fact they were Jewish.

Once in the United States, the young couple helped the Bondys establish the Windsor Mountain School, which operated in Lenox, Mass., until 1975. Annemarie and George came to Detroit in 1941 upon the invitation of two local psychoanalysts, Richard and Editha Sterba, to direct a psychoanalytically oriented nursery school and establish a grade school. Only five years after arriving in Detroit, the Roepers' school was so popular they were able to purchase a large estate outside the city, where they renamed the school the City and Country School of Bloomfield Hills. In 1992, the school changed its name to The Roeper School.

Despite the school's country setting, the couple was committed to an educational model of social justice. For years, the school ran buses to bring students from Detroit to the school. Early civil rights advocates, the Roepers integrated the school in 1955 and recruited Dr. Alfred Thomas, a parent and prominent African-

American physician and hospital owner in Detroit, to serve on the first Board of Advisors in 1956.

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 Dr. A. Harry Passow at Teachers College, Columbia University and other scholars in gifted education, they converted the school in 1956 to one that was exclusively devoted to gifted education, only the second such school in the country. Today the school is the oldest independent school in the United States serving gifted students.

Over the years, the school grew and the Roepers became pioneers in the emerging gifted education community, leading a movement that emphasized children's emotional needs. In 1965, Annemarie consulted with Joan Ganz Cooney on the development of *Sesame Street*. 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 after high school. In 1937, while a medical student at the University of Vienna, 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, and the Freuds fled soon after. In 1978, Eastern Michigan University awarded an honorary doctorate to Annemarie, as well as to George.

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, she 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 dying 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 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." She has been listed in *Who's Who*, *Women of the World* and *Who's Who of American Women*.

Former teachers at Annemarie's school and students have gone on to teach or found their own schools using her principles, including the late Eleanor Siegl, founder of The Little School in Bellevue, Washington, and Anne Beneventi, co-founder of the New Helios School in Palo Alto, California.

Annemarie had a passion throughout her life for children and their right to grow according to their unique needs: "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." (*Educating Children for Life*) In the current climate of standardized education, Annemarie has been a longtime and consistent voice for the individual soul of each child.

Founded in 1941, The Roeper School is a uniquely personalized, coeducational school for gifted and talented children in preschool through grade 12 from over 60 communities in southeast Michigan. With campuses in Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham, Michigan, Roeper was conceived on founding principles that recognize the power of education, choice and self-expression, and the transformative impact these principles have on young minds. For more information, please visit www.roeper.org.