

Reminiscences of Mario Montessori: 'The Final Chapter'



**MY GRANDFATHER,
MARIO M. MONTESSORI**

As a child of five I knew my great grandmother, Maria Montessori, as being an ancient, dark shadow in the house. She wore black, sat in a dark room, bent over dark books. Everyone whispered and tiptoed when close to her room so as not to disturb her. Did I know my great-grandmother? No, she was a dark shadow.

In contrast, my grandfather, Mario M. Montessori, has always been, in my memory, a young, vibrant, sportive person with a keen interest in life and everything living. As a child I respected him for his strength, physically as well as mentally, for his patience explaining and answering my continuous, endless questions, for his humour and love of life.

My bond with him grew stronger of the years and evolved into an invaluable friendship based on a variety of mutual interests. He taught me a plethora of different things ranging from self-defence and survival in inhospitable territories to biology, philosophy and the study of our female counterparts. We would sit for hours at an open fire, me listening to him lecturing with a glass of wine in one hand and a cigarette in the other; his hands constantly moving to strengthen or punctuate a point.

As I matured and studied, our discussions moved to a more academic level but they were always laden with humour, his laugh was sometimes robust, sometimes merely a chuckle. His passion, till the end of his life, was an enthusiasm for gathering information and knowledge by any medium and after-

wards passing it on to others through writing or by means of oral presentations. I was lucky enough to be the beneficiary of many of these presentations.

He steadfastly continued and furthered the work of his mother, Maria Montessori. Many people do not realise how important his contribution has been with respect to the continuity and innovative development of the international Montessori movement before and after Dr. Montessori's death, it was immense.

Mario Montessori was a great personality. Personality, as described by Dr. Maria Montessori in 1941, is one and indivisible and all mental attitudes depend on one centre.

To me, Mario Montessori was a grandfather, a loving friend, a caring teacher. I dedicated my Ph.D. thesis to him: *To Dr. Mario M. Montessori, whose scientific work has always been overshadowed by that of his mother.*"

Ch. P. Henny, MD Ph.D.

Dr. Ch. Pieter Henny is the first grandchild of Mario M. Montessori. He was born in the Netherlands, son of Mario's eldest child Marilena Montessori and Jan J. Henny. He is an anaesthesiologist with a speciality in Intensive Care, working in the Academic Medical Centre in Amsterdam.

MARIO—A VERY SPECIAL MAN

When I was twenty years old, I met a man that had a great influence on my life, not by directly changing the path my life would take, his grandson had already done that, but by being such an exciting, knowledgeable

personality. This was Mario M. Montessori.

The son of such a great woman and such a great man, Maria Montessori and Giuseppe Montesano, might have been a boring person, a spoiled person, a pretentious person. He was none of these. He was interesting, patient, sensitive, social and completely loveable.

Everyday life was different with him. A walk in the garden became a botany lesson. A dinner became a culinary lesson on ethnic cooking and even sometimes on the origins of the food! Everything interested him. He was an intellectual man, a scientific mind. He studied how the world and all its parts interacted. It was a great part of his contribution to the Montessori work. He created much of the elementary material that explains the world to the child. He once told us that when struggling with the problem of how to present 'square roots' to children, he woke in the middle of the night having dreamed the material for the presentation. "I sat straight up in bed and I knew exactly what the material should look like".

He was a very practical man. He could cook extremely well (but also enjoyed watching others cook!); he knew how to live in the outdoors. He understood nature and enjoyed studying it and learning how nature affected man and man affected nature. He loved animals, weather patterns, plants, rocks. Once on a trip through France he made us stop the car to collect certain wildflowers; he put them in the car. Later, much to our distress we found they were full of biting ants. This was a typical episode when we travelled with Mario Montessori.

He was a social man. He had the charms of an Italian combined with a knowledge of the world that made him exceptional. He was a 'presence' without being pretentious. He always made everyone feel special. Every family member, Montessorian, friend, helper

or acquaintance that knew him valued him and treasured his input.

He was an international man, in touch with the world and the world wrote to him, asking questions, favours, endorsements. He listened and worked and tried and believed that the world was worth studying and knowing. He believed that Maria Montessori's work was a definite, integral part of the world and he worked patiently to nourish this study and vision of the world.

He was a loveable man. With twinkling eyes and a feeling of fun he encouraged all of us to do our best, in life and for Montessori.

Mario M. Montessori was a very special man and I'm proud to have known him.

Patricia Henny-Wallner

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