# Angels in Wanstead

## Jane Elspeth Miller

In the 30th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Jane Elspeth Miller

**Although we had met to talk about her and her book, Jane Miller was effusive in her praise for other Wanstead Angels: "I love the lady who does the gardening in Wanstead. And the one who sells the poppies. They're my angels." This says so much about her that I decided to tell *Wanstead Village Directory* readers about it, too.**

Jane was first turned on to music when her mother bought her a little 45 single of Oistrach playing the *Bach Double* and (on the B-side) Menuin playing *Air On The G String*. She used to mime with it and pretend that she was playing the violin, so it's no surprise that she became a musician and has worked with music since. Jane has always been a local. Now Wanstead-based, she was born in Ilford, went to Woodford County High and on to Trent Park College (now Middlesex), and now teaches music at the very same primary school she attended as a girl. "Redbridge Primary School is lovely. It hasn't changed a bit, although it seems smaller. I can tell the students how it started and it's still a wonderful, beautifully maintained school." She went there direct from teacher training, having been offered the job by the then Redbridge music advisor. She met her friend and collaborator Nadia there and they've been great friends ever since.

She and Nadia ran the mini-strings (stringed instruments) together; Jane conducted the junior strings and still coaches the First violins. They went on courses together at Easter and always worked on arty projects, particularly string festivals for the smaller students. In 1989 Jane lost her father to prostate cancer and then her brother-in-law to Alzheimer's. The big surprise was the loss of her mother, who succumbed to bowel cancer less than six months after diagnosis.

The book they are launching at Christ Church hall this month – entitled *Mrs McNab's Fantastical Hat* – has a long genesis. In the time between Nadia's heart attack in March 2014 and her triple bypass, she decided to finish the pictures and the two decided to look for an agent. Then Jane was diagnosed with cancer in October 2014. She explains: "Suddenly, it was glaringly obvious that part of this book should raise funds for the hospitals we stayed in. We wanted Stephen Jones (milliner to the Queen) to write the foreword, but were told he was very busy in New York. So we were thrilled when, on 14 February 2014, we got a message from him saying he would."

The book contains a wonderfully illustrated, lively poem about the adventures of a fantastic hat, suitable for young children. Jane (the book's poet) explains: "The story comes from what you're always told you should never do – use something you used yourself. I have a bit of a passion for hats and if I didn't have a book, I would make up a story about a lady's hat and its adventures. The heroine's first name came from my husband's lovely, Scottish Aunt Effie and Nadia came up with McNab and the story grew from there."

This is by no means the only thing Jane has done for others. Jane is hoping to take the school fiddle group to play at Liverpool Street Station to raise money in aid of Barts radiotherapy department, and after chatting with a lovely lady while doing radiotherapy herself, she dropped off a couple of music CDs for her on Christmas Day. They later bumped into each other in Boots and she's getting on well. Other examples bubble up in conversation and are lost because I don't write them down.

Jane and Nadia's book launch will take place at Christ Church hall, Wanstead Place on 30 October from 3pm to 5.30pm. If you are unable to attend and would like a copy of *Mrs McNab's Fantastical Hat*, leave a message for Jane at The Larder.

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