

A life *in focus*

GIL HANLY

Peace activist, protestor, photographer – all three can be used to describe Gil Hanly, who has spent much of her life using her camera to document the events that have shaped New Zealand. Now in her 80s, she talks about her extraordinary life and adventures.

With **JUDY BAILEY**

For more than 40 years, Gil Hanly has been documenting turning points in our nation's history. Her photographs have captured the best and the worst in us. The unity and joy, the frustration and anger, the serene and the ugly.

She was there at the Springbok Tour protests in 1981 to shoot a nation divided; she was asked by Greenpeace to document the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985; she was there on Bastion Point, as Ngati Whatua fought to retain its precious land; and she marched with Maori from Ngaruawahia to Waitangi in the 1984 land hikoi. She shot the Queen Street riots and documented



the outrage over the killing of Teresa Cormack.

It's been said that if you had a protest and Gil wasn't there to photograph it, then it wasn't really a protest.

Of late, it's her pictures of gardens she is most proud of, and it's to her own peaceful tropical oasis in Auckland's Mt Eden that she takes me when we first meet. She's eager to show me her magnificent palms and the flourishing vegetable garden. Crimson poppies are a splash of colour in a border, chooks scratch about in a large run in the shade of a spectacular Brazilian silk tree. Gil's a vigorous 85 – often, according to her grandson Michael, who is staying with her – to be found up a ladder or mowing the lawns.

Gil still lives in the character-filled brick villa she shared with her artist husband of 50 years, Pat Hanly. Pat died 14 years ago. "It's been a long, lonely time," Gil tells me. But she is surrounded by family. Her two children, Ben and Tamsin, live just blocks away and her grandchildren and great-grandchildren are frequent visitors to Gil's welcoming home. It is, of course, filled with art, Pat's and others. In the hallway there's a bronze Greer Twiss bust of Pat with one of Pat's much loved cloth hats tossed casually on his head. It's a touching gesture from the woman who stayed loyal through thick and thin.

Gil is remarkably sanguine about what she calls "Pat and his bloody affairs". Pat strayed numerous times during their marriage but his →

PHOTOGRAPHY by JAE FREW • STYLING by LULU WILCOX
HAIR & MAKE-UP by MELLE VAN SAMBEEK

The Judy Bailey interview

infidelity never broke up their formidable union. It speaks volumes about Gil that Amber, his daughter from one of his liaisons, was wholeheartedly welcomed into the Hanly family. "It wasn't her fault," Gil insists.

Farm to art school

Gil was born in 1934 in Levin, the first of three children; two brothers would follow. Her father, who grew up on a farm, was on his way to the UK when the First World War broke out. He was intending to go to Cambridge to study medicine. Instead, he ended up enlisting in the British Army and was soon headed for the battlefields of Flanders, Gallipoli and North Africa. He survived uninjured but all he wanted to do was return home and go farming.

He broke in a block of land between the sea and the Manawatu town of Bulls. It was a rough acreage of pine forest and sand dunes. The whole family toiled hard on the land, the children expected to do their share. "We didn't play around, we had work to do. We grew and made things," Gil remembers. "Nobody bought things in those days."

Gil was home-schooled until she was 12. "Mum would sometimes get a wife from Ohakea [the airforce base nearby] in as a governess so she could work on the farm."

As a teenager, Gil was sent off to Nga Tawa, the private school up the road in Marton. "I didn't like it much," she tells me wryly, "but I did make a couple of friends who are friends still."

One of them is prominent arts patron, Genevieve Becroft. It was in Genevieve's garden that the popular Women's Refuge Sculpture Exhibition began. At the time we talk, Gil had just visited this year's exhibition with her old friend. "We tottered around

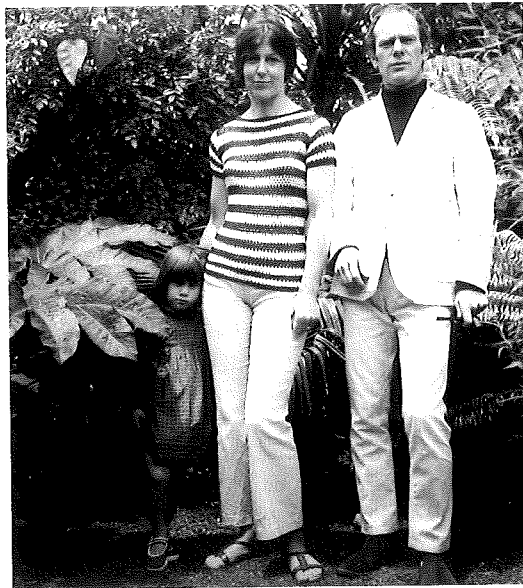
the sculptures but I've lost the bloody photos I took," she grins.

It was expected that Gil would leave school, go back to the farm and marry a local farmer, but she had other ideas. "I thought, no! I'd always enjoyed art. I wanted to go to art school."

There were schools in Auckland and Christchurch. "Back then Dad thought Auckland was a big, evil place, so he sent me to Christchurch where his



LEFT: Gil with her artist husband Pat Hanly and the couple with their daughter Trish. OPPOSITE: Gil in her garden studio, which has shelf-loads of her work.



sister lived so she could keep an eye on me. Aunt Lesley was a lovely, laid-back woman – she never kept an eye on me," Gil grins wickedly.

The Ilam School of Fine Arts was in its heyday. Among her contemporaries were celebrated artists Bill Culbert, John Coley and Quentin MacFarlane. MacFarlane said of the group, "We must have been terrible people to teach... we were born into the Depression,

grew up during the Second World War, often without fathers. By the time we became ready to go to university we were a pretty wild bunch."

Pat and photography

Also at Ilam was the young Pat Hanly. He and Gil didn't pair off until they graduated. At that stage Gil was becoming an accomplished painter. Pat, however, was intensely competitive. In the interests of peace, Gil decided she would concentrate her talent on photography instead, a passion that had begun years earlier at home on the farm, with her box brownie in hand. Pat was keen on her pursuing photography. After all, she says, it would help in his work.

Post-uni, the pair and a group of mates hopped on a boat to London. They would stay for five years, Pat painting by day and working as a theatre electrician by night. "He wasn't very good at it [electrical work]; he'd put the wrong connections together and the lights would go out," she laughs. Gil also found work in theatre as a props buyer for a production company. →

The couple had hit London as The Beatles were about to burst onto the music scene. "There were amazing parties, mad dancing... it was chaotic," she remembers. "We were living hand to mouth." It was a freewheeling time.

Ever the adventurers, they toured Europe on a Lambretta scooter. It nearly cost them their lives though. "We were in Spain; a couple of teenagers on a stolen bike came screaming down the road and collided with us. There were two bikes and four people flying through the air." Fortunately, no one died. Pat and Gil limped on to the next youth hostel and were patched up by its owner.

The decision to marry was a pragmatic one. "We thought it would be a good idea to marry because if we were going to travel we ought to make it official."

Their first child, Ben, was born in the UK. But they soon realised raising a child in London wasn't ideal so decided to return to New Zealand.

"When Ben first saw sheep, he thought they were polar bears! It didn't go down well with my farming parents," Gil laughs.

Their daughter, Tamsin, was born the day they moved into their first home in Mt Eden.

While Pat dedicated himself to his art, Gil spent more than a decade working at the University Bookshop, selling textbooks; her camera, though, a constant companion. She began to pick up work with the feminist magazine *Broadsheet*, and with Auckland University's student mag, *Craccum*. More commissions followed and by the time she turned 50 a new career in photography had blossomed.

Is she a feminist? "I don't think I'm a feminist," she says. Her grandson chips in. "She actively embodies all those things," he says of her. He's proud of her courage and feistiness, telling me about her insistence on taking photographs in the most dangerous neighbourhoods in New York, despite warnings about her safety. Gil and her oldest grandchild are close. Their admiration for each other is clear. Is she the matriarch of



the family? "She is greatly respected, but doesn't play the matriarch, no," Michael says. He remembers fondly, "She always brought home the best presents [from her many travels], never anything generic, always

something special and hand-made."

Gil and Pat both became passionate advocates for a nuclear-free New Zealand and were actively involved in the peace movement. It was this commitment to the cause that saw Gil sail out to welcome the Rainbow Warrior to Auckland in 1985.

She was already documenting Greenpeace's work through her lens. She was on board the Rainbow Warrior for two days before its sinking by the French, spending time with the ship's photographer, Fernando Pereira. She heard about the bombing and Pereira's death while in her darkroom at home, printing shots from her trip.



1990's
Tamsin Family
Tawaneers 90's
Tamsin Family
Tamsin

Openings ONZ 1990's
ONZ Art openings
Art openings 1991/90
Art openings ONZ 1991
ONZ Art openings
Art openings 1990's
Auckland

France, Paris, Monaco 1988
people London
London/Russia
New York
U.S.A. Chicago
San Francisco

Houses
Working Woman
BAD Housing
City/High rise
Buildings

Automobiles
Recycling/Compost etc
Unemployment
Graffiti
SPORT teams
Interiors

Self Defence
Self Defence
People street scenes
Friends
Book collections

Protest 1990's
Protest 80's 90's
Broadsheet
Community House Book

Women Friends
Festivals
Polynesian Festival
1980's 90's

Women politicians
people shops
Friends parties
Women Friends
Older people
Men

Refuge
Immigration
Conference
Emergency
Reed

Gardens/Gardeners
0,91's protests
Polynesian
Family Book '89
Children 80's 90's

Industry
Politicians
TRADE UNION
Politics/Local
Internal Affairs
North Shore Council

Working people
Women
Families
MUSICIANS
Singers
Working men

ANZART. 1975.

Greenpeace asked her to document everything. She spent days on the wharf following the recovery process, and later joined the media scrum at the court as collaborators, Prieur and Mafart, appeared to plead guilty to manslaughter. Her black and white photos are a stark reminder of the crime that shocked a nation.

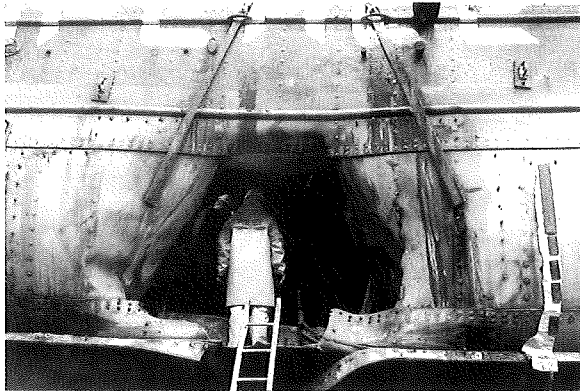
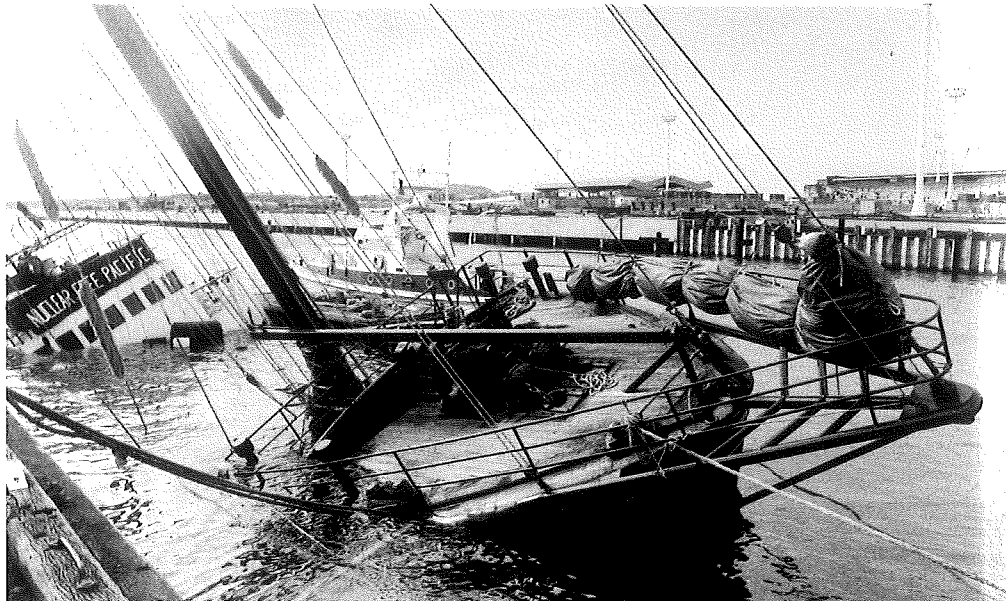
Gil's probably best known for her photos of protest. She was at Bastion Point. She joined the 1984 Hikoio to Waitangi, sharing the road with legendary activists like Eva Rickard, Merata Mita, Joe Hawke and Tim Shadbolt. How was it, being one of very few Pakeha involved? "I knew enough of the people involved to be comfortable [in an essentially Maori setting]," she explains simply.

She counts an incident during the Springbok tour protests as one of her greatest regrets as a photographer. "I was in the middle of the field in Hamilton." When the match was stopped as a plane flour-

bombed the ground, "the police hustled a group of us out under the grandstand. It was then I missed the opportunity of a lifetime; I should have stopped and photographed the players waiting to go back on," she admits ruefully. "I'm still kicking myself."

Gil has shot a lot of sculpture in her 40-odd years behind the lens. She takes me out to her garden studio. It's a work of art itself – bright blue with lime green trim around the windows, a perfect complement to its tropical setting. It's lined with books of gardens she's shot – "I love the way things combine and contrast in a garden, making interesting patterns" – and boxes and boxes of her photographs, all carefully numbered and catalogued. Many are destined for Auckland Museum.

A series of pictures of Chris Booth's



ABOVE AND LEFT: Gil was commissioned by Greenpeace to photograph the Rainbow Warrior after it was bombed in Auckland in 1985.

Despite that, she is still moved to pick up her camera. "I toddled off to get images of Jacinda when she became Prime Minister." A long-time Labour supporter, I ask how she thinks Jacinda's doing. "I'm impressed with what she's doing. It's helpful."

Gil's social conscience is alive and well. Among her back catalogue is a series of photos of Auckland's homeless. Sadly not much has changed in the intervening years. "If there was anything I would get involved with now, that would be it," she tells me.

She is, however, still seduced by a beautiful garden. She rummages in a pile on the kitchen table, keen to show me a flyer. Another adventure looms – a tour of Moorish gardens in Morocco, Spain and Portugal. She may be approaching 86, but Gil Hanly has lost none of her enthusiasm for life, and for observing it through her camera lens. Perhaps that is what keeps her so young. **AWW**

Gil's photos are part of the 'Are We There Yet?' exhibition to celebrate Women's Suffrage, currently at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

"Gateway" catches my eye. I've always loved the sculpture at the entrance to Albert Park and here is Gil's documentation of the entire creative process. She went out to sea with Chris to capture him gathering the rocks for the archway. She's there as he drills the holes to string them together, and for the triumphal raising of the structure. It's a piece of history, and that's what she does, captures these things we often take for granted.

Another adventure

She is still very much interested in photography, although she is seldom commissioned now. "The minute I turned 80 they stopped ringing. They all use Getty Images these days or young kids they don't pay... It's not fair on them." She's not afraid to be frank in her disapproval.