

# Little lady had an immense presence

**Elsie Locke led a simple life, but made a big impact. An early feminist and ardent socialist, she also campaigned against nuclear weapons, and was an accomplished writer.**

A tiny figure, an old bike, a backpack for togs and towel — daily, for half a century, Elsie Locke headed for a swim at Christchurch's Centennial Pool.

Recently, she gave up the bike, but her stooped walk between the pool and her Avon Loop cottage remained a fixture in many people's mornings.

Some noted how she would bend, oh-so-slowly, to pick up litter from the street, then put it in her pocket to discard properly later.

Elsie Locke lived just long enough to attend the unveiling of a sculpture in her honour, erected outside the pool, last month. She died last Sunday, aged 88.

Swimming and walking were simple pleasures in a simple life. Yet she made an impact. Although diminutive, she had an immense presence. Her wide smile, illuminated by her twinkling eyes, beamed warmth to the world. Listening to others' thoughts, prompting here and there, she shared her intellect and wisdom.

Elsie Locke lived as she swam — free-style. As the youngest of six children, she

was inspired by her mother, Ellen, to overcome difficult financial times in rural South Auckland and complete an arts degree at Auckland University, in 1933.

She challenged establishment views with early espousal of feminism and women's rights to birth control.

In a militaristic milieu, she opposed conscription. Later, she campaigned against nuclear weapons, being a national

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executive member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament from 1957 to 1970.

For a time in the 1950s, she was a member of the New Zealand Communist Party. She remained a socialist.

In more recent times, she was quick to castigate Christchurch town planners for any blemishes to the Garden City.

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She was an accomplished writer. She won the Katherine Mansfield Award for non-fiction in 1958, and had an honorary Doctor of Literature conferred on her by the University of Canterbury in 1987.

Among a score of books and articles, she wrote notable works of historical fiction for children, the best known being *The Runaway Settlers*, in 1965.

Free thinking led Mrs Locke into Left-wing circles in the 1930s, and in 1941 she married Communist Party member John Locke. He was from the South Island, and in 1944 the couple moved to Christchurch, where Mr Locke was an active party member. He died in 1996.

One of their sons, Keith, is a list MP and spokesman on foreign affairs, defence, and disarmament for the Green Party. One of their daughters, Maire Leadbeater, is an Auckland City councillor and campaigner on social justice issues. —Mike Crean

■ Elsie Violet Locke (nee Farrelly), born Hamilton, August 17, 1912, married John Locke, 1941, died Christchurch, April 8, 2001, survived by two sons and two daughters.



Elsie Locke: her wide smile beamed warmth to the world.