

Tiny, tireless crusader farewelled

by Christine Rush

Almost an hour into Elsie Locke's eulogy, her son Don noted the irony of such a lengthy tribute to his matter-of-fact mother.

Mrs Locke would have liked to be remembered with emotion, but without sentimentality, he told a packed hall at the Christchurch Convention Centre on Thursday.

"Mum cut through the nonsense — she didn't mess around with fancy words and irrelevancies."

Time and again, friends, family, and colleagues referred to a tiny woman who was never afraid to tackle the big issues.

One daughter, Auckland city councillor Maire Leadbeater, said the "watershed experience" of Mrs Locke's youth was watching 10,000 unemployed men march down Queen Street in 1932.

From then on, her mother's mission was "to be one with all who struggled and all who were oppressed".

Don Locke described the two years during the 1940s when his mother was bedridden with tuberculosis.

"It was a very difficult time for Mum, but she didn't waste it. She said it was an excellent time for reading and thinking about political and social issues."

This social consciousness shaped her life, drawing her to movements as diverse as nuclear disarmament, feminism (before it was known as such), and the Avon Loop Protection Association.

Speakers described Mrs Locke as being driven by a consuming passion for people and the land.

Peace campaigner Katie Dewes remembered Mrs Locke's tussles with her daughter over who was going to hold the banner during marches.

New Zealand's nuclear-free status was due in part to the "enormous energy and audacity of people like Elsie", Ms Dewes said.

Margaret Mahy spoke of Mrs Locke's contribution to children's literature, especially through such books as *The*



PHOTO: DAVID ALEXANDER

Elsie Locke's ever-present bicycle rests beside her casket at the service in the Convention Centre held to celebrate her life.

Runaway Settlers, set in Governors Bay.

Historian Len Richardson said of her pioneering research into working-class people such as shepherds and maids: "Elsie's voice was a persistent and gently insistent one ... She pointed pathways which we could all follow."

Above all other interests, however, came her family.

Jessie Moss described her formidable

nana as a "scary grandparent", who would jealously guard the grapevine at her Oxford Terrace home from marauding children.

Another grandchild described how Mrs Locke detested small talk, even to the end. Asked by a chirpy supermarket assistant recently, "How are you today?" she tartly replied, "And why do YOU want to know?"

A godson from Waiuku, Roimata Minhinnick, noted that Mrs Locke's research into the Waikato hamlet's history had been

vital for the local Treaty of Waitangi claim.

Her youngest child, Alison Locke, echoed many speakers as she described the shock of losing her mother so suddenly on April 7: "... Taking us all by surprise because we thought she might live for ever. She would've been cross if she knew, because she hadn't finished everything."

Elsie Violet Locke is survived by two sons and two daughters, 11 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.