

# *Christchurch is a Peace City*



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## **- PROLOGUE -**

*Since the beginning of human history the life of man has been shadowed by the fear of war and violence – a fear that has sharpened and heightened since that fateful day nineteen years ago when the power of the atom was unleashed to savage a city ... Nothing has preoccupied humanity more in the last twenty years than efforts to abolish war and achieve universal disarmament. There have been successes and disappointments, sometimes even disheartenment. But never has mankind given up hope for peace, for to do so makes war inevitable and total war now means total destruction...*

- Norman Kirk, Hiroshima Day address in Christchurch, 1964

Cited in Locke (1992: 307)

Over the years, Christchurch has been the site for numerous protests and demonstrations for as many different issues. But a particularly prominent concern for the people of Christchurch has been the threat of war and nuclear weapons. People of all ages, of different ethnicities, with diverse backgrounds and religions, have stood together for a common cause, hoping to bring peace to Christchurch, New Zealand and the world.

One organisation that has played a significant role in these occasions is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Erasing original divisions between pacifists, socialists and liberals, this movement was first formed in Britain in 1958, and later in Christchurch in 1960. This was mainly a reaction to the atrocious nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, but also to later testing of the new A-bomb over islands in the Pacific and Micronesia during the 1950s. A need was felt for a strong movement to act against nuclear testing and nuclear war. This movement first appeared in Auckland, when the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) began to petition against these issues in 1957. They later became the Movement Against Further Testing, Manufacture and use of Nuclear Weapons. This movement eventually joined with

various other groups with the same cause, and became the New Zealand Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (NZCND).

Rose Plumridge was secretary for NZCND in the 1960s and 1970s, when the group was dedicated to having Christchurch and New Zealand declared nuclear-free zones. I originally spoke to Rose because of my own feelings about nuclear weapons. What I found after the interview was that, in my hands, I held a story that was not really about an individual and her experiences. It was more a representation of the people, the groups and the things that went on to help Christchurch become a nuclear-free city.

The interview took place on Thursday, 3 April, 2003, in Rose and her husband's St Martin's home in Christchurch. The day was perfect, with warm blue sky as far as the eye could see, as I waited to approach the house, sitting at the end of her street, with Mt Vernon park before me. I listened to the birds in the trees and all I could hear was peace.

I would like to thank Rose for inviting me into her home and giving me her time which allowed me to complete this project.

- PACIFISM -

Born in Christchurch in 1926, Rose Plumridge has been faced with many of the episodes of violence of the twentieth century, such as World War Two, Hiroshima, and the Vietnam War. And even this year, the war in Iraq has sparked thousands of protests in Christchurch and around the world. I asked Rose if she has always lived in New Zealand, to which she replied, *"Christchurch if you please!"* (laughs). She was born in St Helen's, which was in Sydenham, and was brought up in the city *"...in Chester Street just by Fitzgerald Avenue"*. Rose has always been a pacifist, so being involved in CND was really just a natural progression for her.

*"I grew up in a pacifist family, so for me, you know, being involved in CND or any of those sorts of issues wasn't foreign. I didn't have to suddenly change my mind about something."*

Rose's mother had a founding influence on her stance. She had been brought up a Catholic, but later left the Catholic Church during the First World War when, in mass, the priest was *"encouraging the young men to go off to war"*. Rose's mother was already opposed to war, and had also been vocal in standing up for getting the vote for women. Rose remembers her mother attempting to dissuade anyone that she met from going to war.

*"... and if she met any young man, she'd be saying to them ... you don't have to go to the war, you don't wanna go to the war and kill people. We don't know anything about what's going on there, and all the propaganda, you don't know if it's right. War will not cease 'till young men refuse to go to war."*

There were others who had an influence on Rose's stance from a young age as well. Norman Bell *"was a great pacifist"*. He was on the Labour Representation Committee for a number of years, and represented the Richmond Peace Council and

later the National Peace Council. Bell is a figure that Rose can recall being around when she was young. She can remember attending meetings that he ran in Chancery Lane on Sunday nights called the Free Religious Movement. *"I was, oh perhaps, only ten or eleven? And I think most of it was over my head"*. Rose still looks back on these times with *"great fondness"*, and treasures them as *"nice memories to have"*. Because the stance of pacifists at the time tended to be contrary to that of the general public, Norman Bell often had trouble with police raiding his home and seizing his materials. Rose remembers that she and the other children helped to write out all the information leaflets and then dropped them in letter boxes, which she sees as *"our contribution to him"*.

Lincoln Efford was another peace person that Rose remembers from her youth; he was also associated with Norman Bell. Efford was an initiator of the No More War Movement (NMWM) in New Zealand, which had started in Britain in 1921 with New Zealand not too far behind. Norman Bell was involved in the NMWM along with Rose's eldest brother Colin. The movement's chief concern was the promotion of socialist-pacifist principles, and they were opposed to war and conscription. Colin was later a Conscientious Objector (CO) when World War Two broke out. *"He was only allowed to earn a soldier's wage, if you had a good job you had to pay big taxes. So he just used to work until he achieved that much. He would then go back to doing more peace work"*. Rose's father was not a pacifist though; he had been conscripted into the army in the latter part of the First World War.

Rose recalls that her mother and her sister, who had both given up going to the Catholic Church, decided that Rose should go there. *"They thought, as a bit of a laugh, that they might make a lady out of me, you see"*. Rose remembers considering the hypocrisy of the church when they used to say the rosary every day. During the war *"it was always, 'victory for the allies'. And of course even then I used to think, 'Gee, the Pope's not really on our side'"*. She also remembers being taught to *"hate the Germans and the Japanese. ... They used to say, 'there's only*

*one good Japanese, and that's a dead one.'* ... *This was the sort of propaganda that people were fed*". Rose believes these measures were to "*get people in the right frame of mind*", to be aligned with the government. However this did not sway her own position as a pacifist.

Rose didn't go to high school, as many didn't in those days. She went into the furnishing trade, and was married when she was twenty-one. She soon found herself surrounded by "*quite intellectual type people*", such as Elsie Locke, Mary Woodward, Lincoln Efford and Norman Bell, and she considers herself very fortunate for this.

**- PEOPLE COME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE -**

As the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was growing in New Zealand, people who had originally been divided in the basis of their opposition to war, such as pacifists, socialists and liberals, now came together in agreement that the nuclear issue had to be resolved. In Christchurch, as in the rest of New Zealand, CND had a solid base of Quakers. New Zealand Quakerism has its roots in seventeenth century England; it has Christian origins, but is open to other ideas and forms of religion. Known as the Religious Society of Friends in this country, it is a non-hierarchical organisation with no ministers. There are about 1500 people associated with Quakers in New Zealand, most of whom are pacifists testifying that they reject war and all preparation for it, including weapons, which they will not carry. Mary Woodward was one of the Quakers who helped to start the CND in Christchurch; she was the national secretary until 1965, when she planned to move to Australia. Rose remembers the strong Quaker presence when CND started.

*"They [Quakers] were a very strong body here in Christchurch. ... We used to ... have a lot of our meetings in the Quaker rooms. ... In those days they were in Manchester Street, just by umm, Peterborough Street".*

Rose believes that they are *"a very brave, good people"*. She also recognises the diversity of a movement such as CND, in that people's different beliefs did not pose any problems. Elsie Locke was another key figure in CND and was good friends with both Rose and Mary Woodward. *"But Elsie Locke wasn't [a Quaker] ... they could both strive for the same cause but have quite different religious beliefs"*. She never encountered any issues or controversy between people of different backgrounds. *"I was just as friendly with religious people as non-religious people. Well you're in the one cause you see, aren't you; people come from all walks of life"*.



Rose also talked about the type of person it takes to be involved in something like the CND. You had to be dedicated and prepared to make sacrifices to take part in protests and other activities. Maire Locke (Elsie Lockes' daughter) was in the Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (YCND) with other students at the time. Rose points out how the students in YCND remained *"very liberal minded afterwards. ... It wasn't a flash in the pan for them; it was just something they really believed in"*.

Rose remembers mostly women being active in CND, not because men weren't interested. She emphasizes that there were men, but a predominance of women. This may have been due to the way marches were organized – usually at lunchtime when the men would be at work.

*"Women were free to protest. 'Cause in those days, women weren't working quite so much as they are now. And that's another issue, isn't it. ... Peoples' lives are so different now; ... protesting during the week wouldn't be quite so easy for people"*.

The part that women have played in the peace movement also demonstrates how for many, protesting became a part of domestic life. They may not have been at work during the day, but these women had young families to raise and, as mothers, had all other parts of everyday domestic life to manage.

## **- MEETINGS, PROTESTS, PETITIONS... -**

Rose took over secretarial duties for CND when Mary Woodward resigned in 1965. This involved taking the minutes, and organising and distributing newsletters. There was also literature that would come through about different countries that were planning to have nuclear weapons, and they would concentrate on working on those who already had them – not to continue to manufacture them. Rose is not sure of the effect that they would have had, and is aware that *“a lot of things have got stronger and worse”*. However she does believe that *“if you protest enough, governments don't like too much antagonism”*. Rose feels nervous about the present administration in America and points out that *“Bush himself is complaining about Korea having nuclear weapons. But in a way, it's rather rude isn't it, to expect other people not to have them when you've got them yourself”*.

One of the main activities that Rose remembers, before the CND became more organised, was meeting every Hiroshima day. This was every August sixth and was to commemorate the tragic circumstances of that day, in 1945, when the United States exploded an atomic bomb in the atmosphere above the city of Hiroshima in Japan. Three days later a similar bomb was exploded over Nagasaki. Many people believed that these actions prompted the end of World War Two, but Rose knows that *“it [the bombing] wasn't necessary...”*, and *“...the Japanese wanted to surrender”*. Christchurch's first Hiroshima day march was in 1947 and was organised by the Peace Union which was headed by Lincoln Efford. Rose remembers the marches started at the university (the old campus, where the Arts Centre is now situated), and progressed into the Square in the city where they would have a silent vigil. When Christchurch CND was formed in 1960, they began to run Hiroshima Day commemorations with marches, leaflets, discussion forums – all with an aim to educate the public about the horror that nuclear weapons can cause. Hiroshima Day is something that Rose has been able to participate in along with her husband Ivor. *“He didn't take any part in any committees or anything. It was always me; it is I who did that”*. Ivor was also a CO in the Second World War. The tradition of Hiroshima day continues today in Christchurch, with the floating of symbolic lanterns

down the Avon River. It is one of those issues that have stayed in people's minds. Rose sees that many issues that CND, and the peace movement in Christchurch have experienced, have come and gone, but believes that *"The nuclear thing will never be solved"*. Although New Zealand is now nuclear-free, other countries in the world still have nuclear weapons.

Petitioning was another effective protest method that Rose took part in with the CND. She can recall a time when they were really pushing for a nuclear free New Zealand, and they had *"massive petition[s], house to house, week after week, Saturday after Saturday"*. People were quite argumentative too, putting their opinion forward, whereas Rose doesn't think that that would happen so much today. People are more likely to either agree or disagree, and get on with their business. This was one of the peak times in Rose's involvement with CND. *"They were very busy times and you had to be prepared to give a lot of your own time"*. Rose says she will never forget protesting by the river one time, when a reporter was questioning whether they didn't have anything to be doing at home. This kind of derogatory comment reflects an attitude that has often been held towards protesters.

CND is not so big in Christchurch now, since the city has been declared a nuclear free zone, but Rose says they have still kept involved in a lot of issues, some more local. She says they got very involved in the Vietnam War, the Springbok tour and those types of protests. Now they are protesting the war in Iraq; *"there's always something"*.

Rose's brother Colin was the New Zealand treasurer for the War Resisters International until he died last year, and Rose said that she would continue to do that for him. War Resisters International (WRI) was founded in the Netherlands in 1921, and grew in New Zealand soon after as a non-violent movement to end war. WRI opposes all kinds of war, including humanitarian military action, and perhaps most importantly they provide support for conscientious objectors. Today the movement has its headquarters in London, and has grown to have members and affiliates in over thirty countries. *"But of course the donations are getting fewer and far between, as the older people whose*

*project that was at one time are dying". Rose says it is difficult to get new people interested, mostly "because there's so many demands being made upon people and their money". She also recognises that people only have so much energy. "I haven't got the energy for it [protesting]; I'm too old. ... But I'll do my best". So continuing the job of New Zealand treasurer for WRI is something that Rose continues to do today. "I'll probably finish up in Harewood doing some protesting" (laughs).*

## **- EPILOGUE -**

*Peace - The absence of war*

*The presence of justice*

*The prevalence of love*

- Sir Guy Powles, 1988

Peace issues have really been a major part of Rose's life; she grew up in a pacifist family, and has always had peace people around her. Her mother and brother, Norman Bell and Lincoln Efford, Elsie Locke and Mary Woodward, and many others, who form a part of Christchurch's peace heritage. And now it seems the passion for peace has passed down the female line, with Rose and Ivors' daughter Elizabeth, and her own daughter, also having strong feelings about peace issues.

Christchurch has led the way in peace initiatives in New Zealand. In 1980, Christchurch peace people began to declare their homes and schools nuclear-free zones and, early in 1982, Christchurch became New Zealand's very first nuclear-free city. This would stop United States warships - which would neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons - from docking in the area. Later, in 1984, the fourth Labour government came into parliament on David Lange's robust anti-nuclear platform. This government finally passed nuclear-free legislation on June 4, 1987, putting in place New Zealand's nuclear-free status.

In July, 2002, Christchurch City Council officially declared Christchurch as New Zealand's first 'Peace City', seeing the city become part of UNESCO's cities for peace network. As a part of this, some of the initiatives the Council plans are to establish a peace website, a peace library, a Peace Museum, peace awards, Peace Park and formal friendship links with Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The staunch peace movement that has constantly remained in Christchurch proves that Christchurch has always been a peace city. With the people that came together, and formed the groups and communities striving for peace and for freedom from nuclear weapons, the peace history of

Christchurch adds an entirely new layer to the history of the city and of New Zealand as a nuclear-free nation.

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