

The Greymouth Evening Star.

(GREYMOUTH)

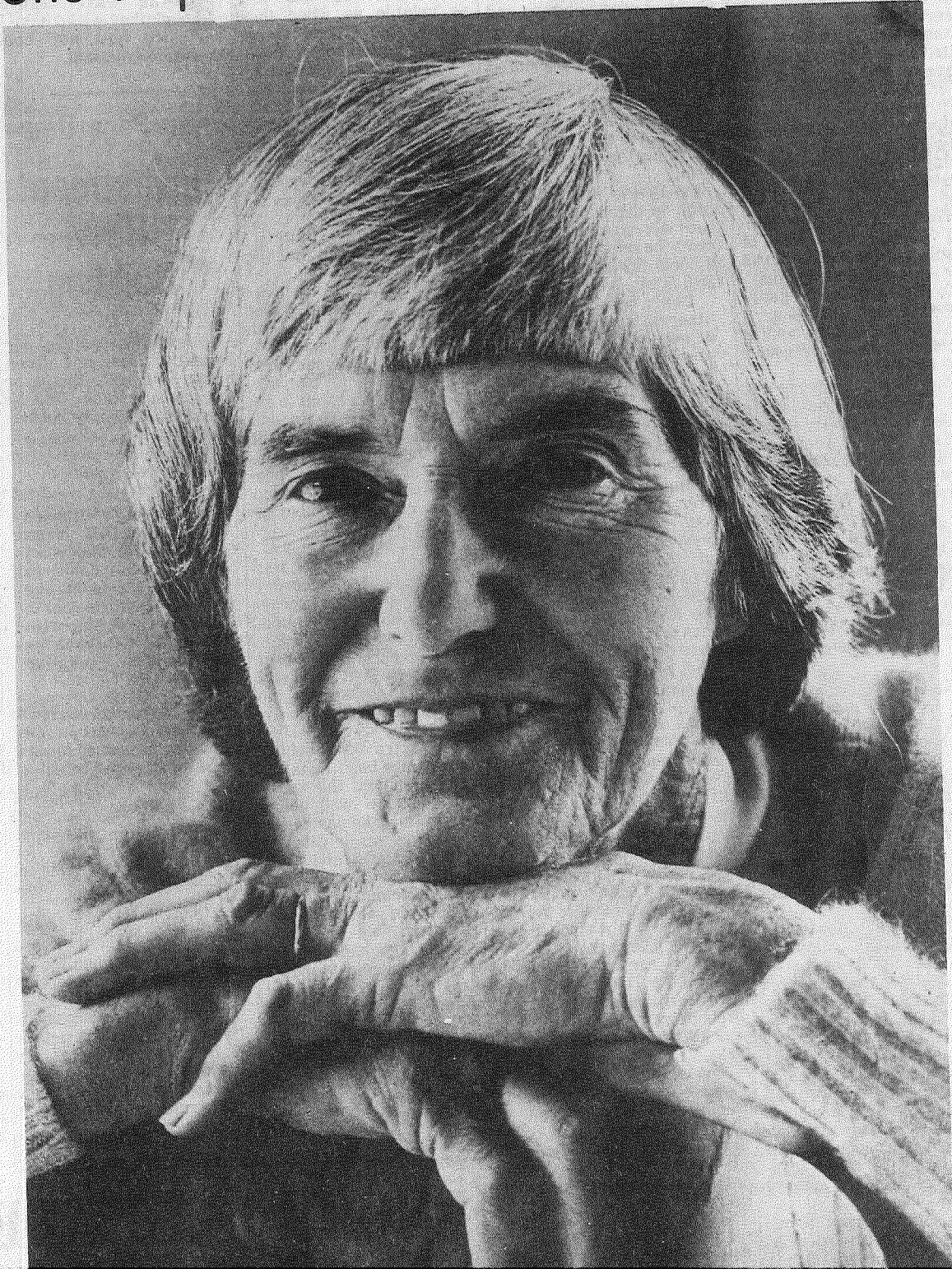
Westland Province
Circulation approx. 23,000

29 JUN 1983

Chongs Press Cutting Bureau
Box 68143, Auckland, N.Z.



She Hopes The World Will Find Peace



The room is unremarkable. An old upright piano, faded carpet, pot plants, orderly rows of books. Neat and homely . . . but still unremarkable.

It is the atmosphere that makes it different. Although heavy traffic grinds up the winding Onehunga road outside, the noise surprisingly does not penetrate.

The feeling of peace inside is reminiscent of a Quaker meeting house. All that can be heard is the call of a white-eye nesting in the back garden, the slow tick of a clock, the quiet voice of the woman . . .

Sitting perfectly still on a straight-backed chair, she speaks in gentle, persuasive tones, her smile sweet.

But the clear, direct gaze becomes stern as she talks about the enemy against which she has battled most of her life.

Katherine Knight, Quaker and peace campaigner, has been fighting war a long time. Now 70, she is as active in the peace movement as she was in her teens.

Stands taken by the young on issues are often dismissed by cynics as the idealism of youth. Katherine Knight's ideals remain as high as the banners she has flown, but no-one can accuse her of being unrealistic.

She has lived through the grim realities of two World Wars, and travelled to speak with those who tell her firsthand of atrocities which decimated families in Germany, Russia, Hiroshima, Vietnam.

MOMENTUM

Yet she retains hope that the world will learn to live as one and sees as a good sign the gathering momentum of peace movements here and abroad.

Her abhorrence of war can possibly first be traced back to early childhood in Mount Albert. The rumblings of World War One had begun. Each night as her mother kissed her she snuffed out the bedside candle, saying, "We must take care the Germans don't bomb us."

Student years at Auckland University (an arts degree, specialising in botany) brought her pacifism through the Student Christian Movement.

In the days of unrest before World War Two, Katherine Knight, in the late 1930s, supported street speakers like Ron Howell, hoping to dissuade others from going overseas.

In Wellington, she visited the anti-war crusader Ormond Burton, an ardent man of peace who was imprisoned for street-speaking against war.

"I admired him so much, he influenced me greatly," Katherine Knight recalls.

She remembers going to his Aro Street house one evening where the laundry was full of drunks, taken there by this humane teetotaler to avoid their possible arrest.

HUSTLED OFF

After dinner, cooked by his wife, Helen Burton, Katherine Knight and others followed the Rev. Burton along Manners Street to listen to him telling the crowd about the evils of war. Soon afterwards, the police hustled him off to prison.

"I was very indignant and, from then on, had a great deal to do with his movement, the Christian Pacifist Society, of which Ormond Burton was the father, Mrs Knight says.

Admitting to pacifism in those war-torn years invited public contempt and ridicule. It was not unusual for Katherine Knight or her husband, Brian, to find white feathers in their letterbox.

She folds her hands in her lap as she talks of the past. "Yes, it was dreadful, although, fortunately, you forget the misery in your life.

"My parents were wonderful. They didn't condemn me, but they didn't quite know where to fit me in either."

But, although some relatives and friends made Katherine Knight and fellow pacifists feel at times "low, miserable specimens," she never doubted her stance. Much of her strength was drawn from Christian beliefs.

During the war years, a plainclothes policeman attended every meeting held in Mount Eden by the Christian Pacifist Society. He was there to report if anything seditious was said.

The society's bulletin was confiscated, its typewriter seized . . . "alarming and demoralising. Some lost their staunch principles and moved on into the Army. But the real core of the brigade stayed, often ending up in detention camps for non-conforming."

Katherine Knight has never ceased in her work to educate the public about peace and can be given credit for helping change attitudes within schools.

She is now national secretary for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which she joined in 1956. About 15 years ago she approached schools, asking to be allowed to speak to pupils about peace.

"I began this as an individual and was later joined by one or two league members. We could only go where we were known — for instance, my three daughters went to Epsom Grammar, so Miss Adams allowed me to talk on nationalism, whether women should fight in the Army and so on. Straight pacifism was forbidden.

She knows she was often called "that woman who goes into schools with her subversive ideas." But all that has changed.

"Now they are clamouring for as much material as possible. At first we could talk only to senior pupils, but now even a horrible film on Hiroshima is not even queried if shown to third-formers."

TOO LATE?

Much material comes from resources stored at the Princes Street headquarters of the New Zealand Foundation for Peace Studies, of which Mrs Knight is a founder member and education convener.

Does she think education for peace may have come too late?

"I doubt it. I still believe in human beings having enough sense and resilience in the end, although I have been disturbed recently by cynicism I heard at both A.T.I. and Glenfield College when I was talking there.

"For the first time in all the years I've been speaking, students did not want to hear. They seem to accept nuclear holocaust as inevitable.

"We have stood by our peace education for years, knowing that it has been unpopular and that many see it as a forlorn hope and a waste of money.

"It is fear that is behind the arms race, fear that is behind us all. We need more education, but it is building up constantly as the response to the women's peace march demonstrated.

"More people must stand up on this issue. We cannot trust the war-peace situation to our leaders. It is for the people to stir themselves, and at last we are seeing it happen. But we must not waste time."

For five months of each year, Katherine Knight crosses a green hill behind her vegetable patch and walks briskly down to the Manukau Harbour for a swim.

Coming back through her kitchen, her head full of thoughts about her life's work, her eyes often rest on a wall poster.

It reads, "Grant me patience, Lord — but hurry."
She says, world peace in mind. "That goes for me, too."