

JESSIE Boanas was only four — and the eldest of three — when she instructed her mother to join the protest against the entry of a United States nuclear warship into Lyttelton port. "I'll mind the babies so you can stop the warship," she said.

Now, at nine, Jessie is an active peace campaigner herself. She often writes to Prime Minister David Lange and Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, Fran Wilde — as do her sisters Ann (7) and Lucy (5).

"I want you to stop those weapons and bombs," wrote Lucy to Russell Marshall when he held the disarmament portfolio. She addressed the letter to the Minister of Bombs.

The Boanas household in Christchurch is a mecca for peace workers, academics and researchers from around the world. Mother, Katie, is one of New Zealand's most respected and dynamic peace workers. Last year she was the only woman in the New Zealand delegation at the United Nations special session on disarmament, held in New York. She lectures part-time in peace studies at Canterbury University and instigated the memorable 1983 visit of the internationally-renowned peace campaigner Dr Helen Caldicott.

She has worked with the Department of Education on guidelines for peace education in schools, is on the Government-appointed Public Advisory Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control (Pacdac) and is the South Island representative for the NZ Foundation of Peace Studies.

"I have a real passion for life, a love for the earth and its people," declares this remarkable 36-year-old woman, grabbing time for an interview between organising a birthday party for Ann and flying to Wellington and Auckland on peace business.

"Many women involved in peace issues are deeply motivated by their own children and the children of the world. They care passionately about the whole world environment and the life of all people and species," she says.

Katie's daughters are very much part of her work. "They've grown up with it. They went on marches in utero and when they were pre-schoolers. In a sense they've given me permission for this work. I couldn't be as fully involved without their support."

"There's quite an art in juggling the commitments of family with peace work. It doesn't always



'I'LL MIND THE BABIES SO YOU CAN STOP THE WARSHIP'

Promoting peace is a passion for even the youngest members of the Boanas household in Christchurch, as Glenys Bowman reports.

mean I'm a peaceful mother. I try to make a point of being with the children after school. I teach them the piano," she explains.

"When I was asked to attend the United Nations special disarmament session I had to ask them how they felt about me being away for five weeks. They supported me. They knew I was going to try to make the world a safer place."

Husband John is also supportive — "as I am of him." As a student at St John's Theological College in Auckland he helped found the Peace Squadron, a group which tried to blockade our harbours against nuclear warship visits. He and Katie went on a peace studies course together at Bradford University, in England. He is now the managing director of a stationery firm.

Katie is currently involved in a movement which wants nuclear weapons declared illegal. Initiated by a Christchurch retired

magistrate, Harold Evans, it has gained support from prominent jurists throughout the world.

Pacdac has asked our Government to propose to the United Nations General Assembly this year that an advisory opinion be sought from the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons.

Many jurists believe that the use of nuclear weapons is 'contrary to the principles of international humanitarian law ... a crime against humanity and a violation of the right to life'.

Explains Katie: "An International Court ruling that nuclear weapons are illegal wouldn't be legally enforceable, but it would have enormous moral force. It would make it more difficult for nations to pursue their production, possession, testing and use of nuclear weapons. It would be incredibly significant."

The issue will be discussed at the inaugural conference of the

International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA) in the Hague this September. Harold Evans has been asked to go.

Katie did a lot of the groundwork for the proposal when she was at the United Nations disarmament session.

"I was asked by Pacdac to explore the issue with other delegates. I spoke to Swedes, Canadians, Indians, Danes, Norwegians, Irish, Americans, Brazilians, Indonesians and



No Frigates
Well my mum has
stopped so many of
those Frigates killing
people I'm glad I
help to and it is
so hard my mum
thinks Frigates aren't
the best thing.

Dear Lucy,
Thank you for your letter and the picture. If you and your mummy and a lot of other people, help me, we might just one day stop people from making and using bombs.
I am going to put your picture up on my office wall for some other people to see.

Love

Russell Marshall

FAR TOP LEFT: Katie Boanas and her three daughters, from left Jessie, Ann and Lucy, sort out peace pamphlets. "It's very important to listen to children's fears. It's important for them to feel they can take positive action," says Katie.

LEFT: Katie Boanas: "I have a real passion for life, a love for the earth and its people."

ABOVE: Russell Marshall's encouraging reply to a letter by Lucy when she was just five. The drawing she sent him has pride of place on his office wall.
Main photographs: Des Woods

Japanese. It's quite a radical concept but people reacted very positively, especially those at a non-government level."

Until she was 23, Katie was unaware of peace issues. "John and I both come from fairly conservative families," she explains. In the '70s, while John was protesting out on the harbour, Katie was

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NEW Zealand broadcaster Judy Lessing (blonde woman second from right) was one of several New Zealanders who took part in this nuclear-free demonstration in the United States. Katie Boanas is on the right (in sunglasses).

shying away from any direct political action. It took a piece of music to trigger off a whole new direction for her.

"I was teaching music at Epsom Girls' Grammar in Auckland. One day I played a piece of

music called Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima. The kids didn't understand it all. They thought it sounded terrible. Who were these victims anyway? I was 23 — and I couldn't tell them.

"I felt they should know why

this song of lament had been written and found the information. It totally changed my life. That was the beginning of my voyage of discovery about weapons and the state of the world. I knew I had to do something to stop the madness," she says.

During the time she and John spent at Bradford, Katie attended a women's disarmament conference in Vienna as a New Zealand delegate. When they returned to New Zealand, Katie was pregnant with Jessie. "I felt New Zealand was far enough removed from the nuclear complex to be able to create a vision of a saner world," she recalls.

In Christchurch she met with others sharing her concerns and a peace collective was formed. At the time — 1979 — there were many peace groups throughout the country. In 1981 the national magazine Peacelink was launched and Peace Movement Aotearoa established to be a networking body between the different groups.

The Boanas' home became a peace office, issuing peace letters galore, selling literature, badges and stickers, writing, organising meetings. Their second daughter was born.

Katie and other women kept in contact with women protestors at Greenham Common in England. They showed videos, talked to kindergarten groups with their babies on their hips. The movement spread. Nuclear free streets, neighbourhoods, councils and zones were formed — all the grassroots activity that generated the support leading to our nuclear free legislation.

Helen Caldicott's visit brought a whole new impetus and respectability to the peace movement. Professional groups became involved. There was no turning back now.

Kate will never forget Helen Caldicott's visit — for more than the obvious reason. "Christchurch was her first stop. I was due to pick her up from the airport and bring her back here — but I went into labour instead!"

These days the Peace Movement has a lower profile. Is it fading away? "It certainly hasn't died," replies Katie. "It's true we feel we have achieved a lot — the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, our nuclear-free legislation and our disarmament initiatives at the United Nations — but there's still lots to do.

"We're now looking at Black Birch observatory near Blenheim

to establish whether it's contravening our nuclear free legislation by providing information which could be used to target nuclear weapons. We're also concerned about New Zealand buying frigates and whether these are the most appropriate form of defence. We are a South Pacific nation. We need to challenge the whole nuclear policy of deterrence and question any collaboration with the nuclear system."

She sees the nuclear arms reduction agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union as "just a tiny, tiny first step. There are so many holes in the agreement," she asserts.

She's encouraged by the number of peace studies courses at New Zealand universities, polytechnics, WEA offices and teachers' colleges.

Peace, she believes, is the ultimate environmental issue. "Stopping nuclear testing and the dumping of nuclear waste, stopping the mining of uranium and accidents in nuclear plants has to be on at least a par with the greenhouse effect, or the hole in the ozone layer."

She's adamant that women must strive for their say in decisions affecting world peace. "Women and children are more than half the world's population. We have a right to 50% of the decision making.

"We need to inform ourselves on the issues and ask our partners to take on some of the responsibility for childcare so we are more free for decision-making roles. We must keep reminding men that we have different ways of doing things and different priorities."

Motherhood, she believes, helps, not hinders. "Being a mother of three children under four prepares you for anything. You can take on the world!"

Apart from some expenses, all Katie's work is unpaid. "Women in my position have the luxury of being able to choose to earn or not. It's a privileged position, especially at a time when many people are living at subsistence level.

"I feel I have reaped many benefits from the system — and I want to use those to try and improve the system. My work is a gift — but one I can afford. It's my choice.

"New Zealand has a strong history of both men and women peacemakers. I believe our nuclear free stance has generated hope throughout the world." ●

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