

Veteran points the way to a peaceful world

Kate Shuttleworth

After almost 70 years of positive peacemaking 86-year-old veteran peace activist Will Foote has written a book about his experiences.

Will, positioned in what seems to be his favourite place - his sunroom in his Redwood home, pokes his nose out from behind a book he's reading.

A prolific reader and writer, Will has written 11 books and his most recent piece Saving Trees Stopping Wars draws on his extensive reading of books on "non-violence and positive peacemaking" - a passion he has had since his youth.

The catalyst for the creation of Will's new book was reading Jonathon Schell's The Unconquerable World two years ago. A book was also responsible for his interest in peace work 67 years ago. The Power of Non-Violence by Richard Gregg affirmed for him why objecting to World War II was essential.

His latest book discusses the topic of non-violence using a New Zealand context. It draws on Will's memories and stories of peace activism.

He says the beauty of this book is that it's simply written. It is a book about non-violence for the layperson, rather than an academic exercise. "Readers won't be put off by the difficulty of the



Positive peacemaker and author Will Foote.

language. It's still got meat in it but it's not high-flung language - I never use two syllables if one will do," said Will, who is a retired school teacher.

His wife Anne Foote describes the book as an easy read.

"His forte as a writer is being able to put things clearly and simply."

The book is a bit of a family affair; Will's grandson Jaron Foote designed the cover and took charge of all the layout of text and images. His step-daughter Sue Barnes typed the manuscript.

Will is modest about

the sacrifice and courage involved in his work toward peace.

While his latest book is full of stories about the movement, his own personal stories range from being a conscientious objector during World War II to protesting against Waihopai spybase.

They don't feature as prominently in this book but illustrate the wealth of personal experience he brings to his writing.

His commitment to peace began when he called himself a pacifist at 17 years of age. At 21 he was called to serve in World War II.

His first book on peace, The Decision, illustrates the prevailing attitude of the time.

"In New Zealand mythology, those who join demonstrations, lead strikes, oppose wars, or in any way rock the boat, are not true kiwis." Opting to resist war was not an easy position to take at the onset of World War II. Will talks about the experience casually, but underneath is a sense that it was no light decision. It meant being ousted from his teaching position in Southland, reduced opportunities for work in education, four years in a defaulters' camp and a series of menial jobs after being released.

When he was called for service in 1941 while teaching in Kapuka, Southland, he appealed and quickly became unpopular. "Some parents took their children away from school. The education board went to print saying I was a disgrace to the country. It was fairly unpleasant."

"At the early stages, objectors to war did not know what would be done to them. We knew the story of Archibald Baxter and what happened to him. Though we didn't really think it would also happen to us, but it could have."

Will also served as secretary of the Nelson Peace Group for 16 years as well as representing the Nelson-Marlborough area on the Executive Working Group of the national peace movement co-ordinating organisation, Peace Movement Aotearoa for eight years.



One of many peaceful protests that have helped shape New Zealand's history, at Waihopai.