

# Espresso

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Rural Women  
NEW ZEALAND

Ngā Wāhine Taiwhenua o Aotearoa



JANUARY

ADVERSE EVENTS RESPONSE



NEWCOMERS NETWORK KIWI BAKING

FEBRUARY



MARCH

BAKING UP A STORM



APRIL

TRIPLE F CHALLENGE TAUPŌ



MAY

RWNZ ADVERSE EVENTS RELIEF FUND EVENTS



JUNE

RURAL SKILLS DAY



MADE IN STIRLING

JULY



AUGUST

ACTIVATOR



SEPTEMBER

KENEPURU FASHION EVENT



CYNTHIA COLLIER GRANT LAUNCH

OCTOBER



NOVEMBER

NATIONAL CONFERENCE



NORTH ISLAND WEATHER EVENTS RESPONSE

DECEMBER





### *Kia ora and greetings*

It was wonderful to catch up those of you who came to Christchurch. I hope you all enjoyed your time in a city that is so full of rejuvenation and life.

Along with the Board, I would like to sincerely thank each and every one of you for your contribution to Rural Women New Zealand over the last year. We are all integral parts of the whole Rural Women New Zealand team, and together we can, achieve so much as we have this year.

The Christmas and New Year holidays are such a special time of the year. Cherish the special memories created, enjoy some rest and relaxation, and we'll see you all in the New Year, refreshed and excited about the year ahead for Rural Women New Zealand.

My very best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

*Ngā mihi,  
Gill*

## National Office Update

At one of our recent team meetings, we reviewed what we had achieved this year and started to talk about plans for next year. We unanimously agreed that this year had sped by with some months seemingly disappearing completely. Janet can't believe that she has had her first RWNZ birthday this month. Lisa thinks it was only a few months ago that she visited India (actually it was April!) and Gabe seems fairly convinced that someone has messed with her calendar and short changed her.

However, when we thought about what we have done, the list was pretty fulsome. You might recall that RWNZ's Strategic Plan was included in the March issue of the Express and our team has steadily worked on the mission expressed in that Plan. Everything that we do at National Office can be tied back to one of the pillars of the Plan so we always know the why behind every project, action, meeting.

As we close out this year, we have added being Christmas fairies to our list of accomplishments. MPI has funded

RWNZ to produce and deliver 250 Christmas care parcels to families affected by the cyclones earlier this year. We are also working with AWDT, Rural Support and Farmstrong on a range of programmes and events to further support and build resilience in areas that have lost much this year. You can read more about this at [checking-in.co.nz](http://checking-in.co.nz).

The Office will close on Friday, 23 December for a couple of weeks with the first of our team returning on Monday, 8 January 2024.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you in the new year. As always, please come and say hello if you are passing through Wellington. We love having visitors and if you give us advance notice, we can whip up a pretty good morning tea!

Merry Christmas and a happy new year from Gabe, Felicity, Mia, Janet and Lisa



- Sponsorship and Grant Applications
- Opening and Closing Events
- National Project
- Promotions.

## Looking towards 2025

In only a few weeks, we will be able to say that RWNZ's centenary is next year.

Much has been achieved in 2023 to prepare us for 2025. Thank you to everyone who has contributed ideas for inclusion in centennial celebrations, provided feedback on proposals and entered the Book Writing and Rose naming competitions.

As we come to the end of this year, many of the jigsaw pieces have fallen into place and we are pleased to confirm the central components for the year's celebrations. The plan which has been developed by the Board and Centennial Committee is designed so that as many Members as possible will be able to participate throughout the year and also provides opportunities for our supporters, stakeholders, the groups that we work with and sponsors to join us in celebrating 100 years. For this reason, the celebrations around the country will embrace a two-fold approach.

Our Celebrations will commence in the last week of July 2025 which is when the first gathering was held in Wellington to establish the Women's Division of the Farmers Union. We will launch a short video clip that will tell our story and note significant milestones and achievements during our history. It will also highlight our focus as we turn to our second century, be available to be played at all Centennial events and become a valuable addition to our historical records. Our celebrations will continue over the next full year, culminating with a significant national-level function in Wellington in mid-2026.

## Centennial Celebration Plan for the Regions

All regions were asked how they would like to celebrate the Centennial and the Board has determined that there will be an allocation that will come directly from our Legacy fund to enable this. This will empower the members in each Region to celebrate in a meaningful way for them. The allocation will be up to \$15,000 per Region and can be used to assist with covering the costs of running an event such as venue hire, I.T. equipment, speaker fees, engaging an event organiser, etc. More information on this will be available in the new year.

Additionally, the National Board will host an occasion in each Region and invite Members, stakeholders, and supporters in that Region to an event that celebrates our history, acknowledges the present, and turns our focus to the future.

We recognise that these celebrations will need more people power to pull everything together, so we are asking for people to help our Centennial Committee on one (or more) of the following working groups:

## Centennial Book Writing Competition

*The results are in!*

Thank you to everyone who entered the Centennial Book Writing competition. Before turning to the results, here are some of the comments received from the judging panel:

*"What a tough job, some wonderful stories here and special memories."*

*"I appreciate the work and emotion that has gone into these entries by all the writers, and they have together made a sort of literary quilt that overall shows what RWNZ is like."*

*"I found the task of judging very difficult, daunting and challenging! At times, I called in a second reader. There were so many good entries, each worthy."*

There are so many delights in the wonderful stories submitted and plenty of material for inclusion in the Centennial Book. All our judges commented on how difficult it was to select our placegetters and this has resulted in very close outcomes. We have a clear winner in each of the three sections: Past, Present, Future. However, in each of the Present and Future categories, we have a tied result for second place.

So without further ado, the placegetters are:

### Past

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:** *Figment of Fashion* by Joyce Wylie (Region 3)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place:** *When two or three gather* by Barbara Stuart (Region 3)

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place:** *When Town Met Country* by Jan Cook (Region 6 Taranaki)

### Present

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:** *Plonked* by Marion Day, Region 3

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place equal:** *How RWNZ made a difference to my Life* by Laurel Blissett (Region 6 Greater Waikato) and *'I before 'E'* by Frances Allen (Region 6 Greater Waikato)

### Future

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:** *Dear Prospective Member* by Myron Bent (Region 6 Taranaki)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place equal:** *Dear Friend in the Future* by Joyce Wylie (Region 3) and *Dear Great Granddaughter* by Lynne Hill (Region 1)

Congratulations to all our placegetters. We look forward to sharing the winning stories with you in the new year.



## NZI Rural Women NZ Business Awards 2023

The NZI Rural Women NZ Business Awards were held on Friday, 24 November. Our daytime Conference venue was transformed into a beautiful vegetable wonderland for the evening. Instead of floral bouquets, our tables were decorated with fabulous fruit and vegetable arrangements. There was also a gorgeous vegetable wall which provided a verdant backdrop for some lovely photos that captured the celebration.

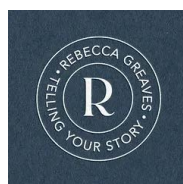
Recognising, promoting and celebrating the accomplishments of the incredible rural women who own and operate businesses in regional and rural Aotearoa is something that RWNZ can be incredibly proud of. The range of enterprises that our Award winners have created reflects the diversification of rural economies. Their businesses support local suppliers and employ local people. They show that living rurally need not be an impediment to starting and running a successful business.

One of the most joyful aspects of the Awards evening is the opportunity to hear from each of the Award winners and see the video they submitted about themselves and their businesses. Although all the businesses were vastly different some common themes came through.

Many of this year's Award winners are mums to young

children and being able to spend precious time with them was an impetus to create a business model which allowed that. Another theme was that several of our winners had made a conscious decision to change their career paths and having mind-mapped what they wanted in a business, converted those plans into reality. Many of the winners spoke about the value they had found in entering these Awards and how the entry and judging process gave them an opportunity to think about their business journey, reflect on what they had accomplished and had kickstarted ideas for the future.

These Awards are very competitive and as winner after winner was introduced to the audience, many of us were wondering how the judges managed to select only one Supreme Award winner from the seven finalists. And, when Amanda Whiting, Chief Executive of IAG New Zealand, stepped forward to announce the winner of the NZI Supreme Award, she expressed this sentiment perfectly by noting that having seen the quality of the incredible finalists that she had been wondering what she had been doing with her life! After offering her congratulations to all the finalists, Amanda announced that Sophie Hurley had won the NZI Supreme Award for 2023.





### EMERGING BUSINESS

Honest Wolf – Sophie Hurley  
(Hunterville, Region 4)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Manatū Wāhine / Ministry for Women](#)

### CREATIVE ARTS

Botanic Press - Emma Hasler  
(Albert Town, Region 1)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Alltech](#)

### BOUNTIFUL TABLE

Hayz at The Anchorage - Haylee-Chanel  
Simeon (Bluff, Region 1)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Havana Coffee Works](#)

### RURAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Kathryn Wright  
(Te Anau, Region 1)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Access Community Health](#)

### LOVE OF THE LAND

Nature and Nosh & The Bush Boardroom  
– Kylie Rae (Waikato, Region 6 Greater  
Waikato)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Manatū Ahu Matua / Ministry for Primary Industries](#)

### INNOVATION

Real Country - Laura Koot  
(Kingston, Region 1)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Marks & Worth](#)

### RURAL CHAMPION

Target PR - Rebecca Greaves  
(Pongaroa, Region 4)



This Category is proudly sponsored by  
[Jarden Financial Partners](#)

### SUPREME AWARD

Honest Wolf – Sophie Hurley



Our Supreme Award Winner is proudly  
sponsored by our Awards Premier Partner, [NZI](#)



# National Conference 2023

At last! Three years in the making, two postponements and one National Conference – we were finally able to come together in Christchurch in November and it was well worth the wait. The National Conference was wrapped around the RWNZ Annual General Meeting and the NZI Rural Women NZ Business Awards over three days at the Rydges Latimer.

The theme of the Conference was Strengthen, Support, Connect and this was reflected in the programme devised by the Canterbury based National Conference Organising Committee. It contained a wonderful balance of guest speakers, live performance, workshops and a highly informative panel discussion.

The Conference Opening Ceremony commenced with a Mihi Whakatau offered by Liz Kereru and Maaka Tau. The National Anthem and reading of the Creed were followed by a message sent from our Patron, Her Excellency, the Rt Hon Dame Cindy Kiro. We were particularly delighted to welcome the Deputy Mayor of Christchurch, Pauline Cotter, who welcomed us to the city.

One aspect that was especially pleasing was the presence of many Canterbury based Members of Parliament for the Opening Ceremony. Some were new faces and some we know already. One of these was Nicola Grigg who provided her thoughts and insights into the role that rural women play in achieving strong, supported and connected rural communities.

Messages of support and Lyn Braico, President of the South Pacific Area for ACWW and a lovely speech on the Conference theme from Jude Vaughan, National President of the Federation of Women's Institutes.

One of the most important parts of this formal session is the presentation of RWNZ National Awards. During this year, two National Service Awards have been presented: the first to Karen Attwood (Region 6GW) and the second to Jo Gravit (Region 5). Following the presentation of the awards for the Lady Blundell Tray for the Most Innovative Project, Best Branch and Best Provincial President's Reports, three special President's Awards were announced. The recipients were Tamzin Coull and Sandra Matthews for their work in supporting their communities in the wake of this year's cyclones and Sharron Davie-Martin for her work in managing

the unprecedented number of applications to the Adverse Events Relief Fund since February this year.

Following afternoon tea, we embarked on the first of the Conference sessions. We heard from two extremely accomplished speakers. Alice Ritchie joined us by video link and her insightful presentation on Tesco's journey to carbon-zero was very relevant to this country's food suppliers. Rosemary Banks, whose last diplomatic posting was as New Zealand's Ambassador to the United States, provided an excellent overview of current geo-political trends and how this impacts New Zealand's search for new markets and trading partners. One of the stand out aspects of Rosemary's presentation was her incredibly interesting anecdotes from her postings, her work at the United Nations and involvement in many international programmes.

After a convivial "Walk and Fork" dinner where we had the opportunity to catch up with old friends and make some new ones, we settled in for a fantastic performance by comedy duo Amelia Dunbar and Emma Newborn (aka 'The Bitches' Box) of their show 'Life's A Bitch'. The show was hilarious and anyone who has ever owned a dog was chuckling away as Amelia and Emma captured all those endearing (and some not so endearing) aspects of the lives of dogs. If you haven't seen 'The Bitches' Box before, go if you can or make sure you see the movie when it comes out next year. Woof!

We got to see Amelia again on Friday afternoon as the Conference Programme resumed after the AGM and Remits session. She was one of three previous Region 2 Business Award Winners featured in the Showcase. It was fantastic to also welcome Beverley Forrester and Tracey Topp. It was wonderful to see how our previous Awards winners had progressed in their business journeys and hear about the role taking part in the Business Awards had played for them.

Also on the afternoon programme was the Speech Competition with winner Jean Hamilton scooping both the Tarrant Bell and Tutaenui Bell for her hilarious take on our competition theme, "Things our mothers taught us; Things we'll teach our children."

Every National Conference embraces the organisation's charitable aims. The Conference Organising Committee had



provided plenty of ways for attendees to give back. Attendees were encouraged to bring good quality but no longer needed bras and underwear for sending to women in other countries where access to these garments is difficult. The suitcases provided for donations were overflowing and were gratefully collected by Shirley Sheppard from Uplift New Zealand. It was great to see Amy from Wild Jewels and to follow the ongoing work of The Michael Cronhelm Foundation Trust which continues to make real differences in the lives of Kenyan children.

On Saturday morning, we had a real treat – a lively and thought provoking panel discussion led by Genevieve Steven with panellists Frances Beeston, Kate Acland and Jessie Chan. The panellists really drew the attendees into their discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing rural New Zealanders and their visions for rural communities in the future. This was evident in the questions and comments from the floor which we beautifully summed up by the last commentator, National Life Member Margaret Chapman, whose thoughts on the role that RWNZ can play in the rural communities of the future were warmly endorsed by the meeting.

The last item on the Conference programme was a laughter workshop with Hannah Airey. This was a truly inspired way to end the event and Hannah encouraged us to set our inhibitions aside and embrace a range laughter exercises.

As our brains and bodies were flooded with oxygen as we laughed, our muscles relaxed, our circulation improved, our immune systems sprung into action and our bodies produced endorphins and serotonin. Many of us were very pleased to hear from Hannah that we were actually take part in cardiovascular exercise as we laughed – certainly one of the most enjoyable workouts ever!

Speaking of workouts, the Walking Group which left the hotel at 7am on Friday and Saturday mornings was very popular... even when the group got caught in heavy rain! The bus tour of Christchurch for the early arrivers was also a fantastic success.

There are lots of people who made this fabulous event possible. First, and foremost, a huge thank you to the Organising Committee. This Conference would not have been possible without their dedication over the last – literally – years to bring such a vibrant and dynamic programme to life. Thank you also to all the Conference sponsors for your support: JJ Ltd, BDO, Fonterra, Dairy NZ, ADM, Rural Co, Farming Families, Farm to Farm Tours and the Canterbury Charitable Trust.

Thank you to the teams at the Rydges Latimer and Multimedia for their patience with us – they have also been on this three year journey in organising this Conference with us.

Most of all though, thank you to all the Members who made your way to Christchurch to be part of this event.

## Thank you to our National Conference sponsors



Farming Families Charitable Trust

farmingfamilies4u@gmail.com  
farmingfamilies4u



# National Awards 2023

This year's National Awards were presented as part of the National Conference Opening Ceremony by Nicola Grigg MP.

Two National Service Awards had been presented during the year and these were recognised by the meeting. The first award had been presented to Region 6 Greater Waikato's Karen Attwood and the second, just recently, to Jo Gravit from Region 5 Rimanui. Both women have made enormous contributions to RWNZ over many years and their efforts embodied 'Service Simply Given'. Both Karen and Jo passed away during this year and they are sorely missed.

President Gill Naylor announced the conferment of three Special President's Awards. Sandra Matthews (Region 5) and Tamzin Coull (Region 4) were recognised for their outstanding contribution to their communities in the wake of the cyclones earlier this year. Sharron Davie-Martin also received a Special Award for her management and oversight of the Adverse Events Relief Fund which has seen an unprecedented call on the Fund this year.

RWNZ's annual awards recognise the work and the recording of it which informs our charitable reporting and historical archives as we approach our centenary. This year's winners were:



**Best Branch President's Report:** Anne Finnie (Korokipo Branch, Region 4)

**Honora O'Neill Gong - Best Provincial President's Report:** Elsa Hydes (Mid Canterbury Provincial, Region 2) .

**Lady Blundell Tray - Best Innovative Project Award:** Regions 6 Greater Waikato, 6 Taranaki, 5 Rimanui and 4 Lower North Island – Triple F Challenge Taupō.

No National Conference would be complete without the craft competitions. Members keenly surveyed the wonderful range of woollen toys submitted in the Wool Competition. These were displayed with the entries in this year's **Cora Wilding Trophy** which had the theme of a Christmas Decoration. Region 1's Heather Smith scooped both competitions with her beautifully crafted items. The gorgeous toys were donated to the Children's Hospital after the Conference.

The **Speech Competition** theme this year was *Things our mothers taught us; things we'll teach our children*, with first time entrant Jean Hamilton (Region 1) winning both the Tarrant and Tutaenui Bells.

The theme for this year's **Writing Competitions** was 'A Journey' and you can enjoy the winning entries, which are printed in this edition, with a cool drink on a warm day over the coming weeks.





# Marlborough Short Story Competition 2023

This competition is open to all amateur writers who are Rural Women New Zealand Members and who have not won this competition in the previous two years or had their writing published - apart from contributions to newspapers or in the RWNZ Express magazine.

The theme for this year's competition was *A Journey* and our winner is *Henrietta Purvis (Region 1)*.

## A Journey

It all began by reading a book. Something a lot of us do on a regular basis. Back in June 2022, little did I realise what a journey reading that book would take me on.

I had learnt about the publication of the book with the unlikely sounding title of *Bwana, There's a Body in the Bath* in the local press. It was a life story written by a resident of my nearest township, Hampden in conjunction with acclaimed novelist, Tony Park. What an amazing life this man, Peter Whitehead, had led! I was enthralled, immersing myself in his adventures, from birth in Shanghai, being schooled in England (with a beating from the headmaster every Thursday, whether he deserved it or not) to putting himself on a boat at the age of 13, as a child migrant and sailing to Australia "for a better life".

The reality was that as a water Joey in the outback of Australia Peter was basically a child slave, with his days starting at 4am and finishing late in the evening. It seemed even the station dogs were treated better than him. Moving on to another job he developed a passion for training horses and blossomed under the tutelage of his new boss. In due course with new skills and a couple of horses he set himself up as a travelling horsebreaker

World War 2 intervened and he joined up with the Australian army and became a horse breaker as literally thousands of horses were required. Once the army decided they had enough mounts, Peter joined the Australian Air Force and trained as a gunner on the B24 Liberator bombers.

After the war Peter headed to Africa and spent the next 6 decades living wherever work and his interests took him. Along the way he encountered man-eating lions, zombie witches, killer hippos, nearly drowned in a crocodile infested river and survived two aircraft crashes. He also married Lorna and they had a daughter, Anne. Horses were still a prominent part of his life, working with them until his retirement in his 80's. Still being a will o' wisp Peter then moved with his daughter and her family to New Zealand.

After reading Peter's adventures I needed to meet this man and get him to sign my book. Husband, Graeme, was sent to the local pub on a Friday night to find out where Peter lived and on the Saturday we made the short trip to

Hampden. Peter was slightly baffled as I was the first person to ask him to do a book signing. Over real coffee in gorgeous bone china cups and homemade ginger biscuits we realised we shared a passion for horses. We were firm friends from the very outset.

On talking to others who had read Peter's book it was clear that I wasn't alone in my admiration. This was a book that needed to be read by more than just friends, family and locals. As the book was published by an independent publisher by a first time author, it didn't have a marketing budget or team of publicists to promote it. We needed to take the bull by the horns and start planning. So began the real journey...

Myself and a small band of locals decided we would have a book launch! Hampden Library was to be the venue, I started a Facebook page, we did a flyer drop to every mailbox in the vicinity and advertised just wherever we could. The big day came and the ladies of Hampden Rural Women put on a lovely afternoon tea and Peter made a special batch of ginger biscuits. The Hampden School kids came out in force with songs and wonderful questions in the Q&A slot. It was the first public event in Hampden post-Covid and the community came out in force. The afternoon was a huge success with a full hall and lots of books sold, and all signed by Peter.

A camera crew from TVNZ Seven Sharp programme came and took some footage and a few weeks later a reporter came to interview Peter (more good coffee and ginger biscuits). The big night came when it was to be aired and we all sat around the TV with a fair bit of trepidation. We needn't have worried and the champagne bottle was cracked open. What a great job Seven Sharp did and Hilary Barry requested the ginger biscuit recipe! We had the book for sale on Trade Me and all of a sudden we were inundated with orders!

This journey has taught me so much about the book industry. What a precarious way to make a living! Unless you are one of the big name authors it is very difficult to make a make money and they are under pressure to have a new book published annually. While Peter is happy with his consistent flow of sales the real win for him has been meeting new people, many of whom have turned into good friends, getting reacquainted with old pals across the globe, and always having something to look forward to.

Peter enjoyed writing his book but never dreamt what adventures it would take him on. Post book launch he has been kept busy with a steady stream of podcasts, markets, radio and magazine interviews, and has been guest speaker for many community groups. The support he has received in North Otago especially has been incredible.

I have been on a wonderful journey this past year with Peter. His mantra throughout his life has always been "just get on with it". Which is exactly what we have done. You never can tell when a new, great friend will come into your life, and age is no barrier. Sometimes it's hard to believe that Peter is 99 and that on Christmas Eve we will celebrate his 100th birthday. Obviously, ginger biscuits will be served.

# Olive Burdekin Prize for Advanced Writers 2023

This competition is for RWNZ Members who are not eligible to enter the Marlborough Short Story Competition as they are either previous first place winners from the past two years, or have had articles or books published. The length of the story must be between 1000 and 1500 words.

The theme for this year's competitions was *A Journey* and the winning story was submitted by *Lorna Crane (Region 3)*.

## His Last Request

Arriving at the airport with only hand luggage, I clutched my precious cargo and headed to Customs. The officer glanced at my declaration card and respectfully indicated for me to pass through the express exit.

The arrival hall was lined with Hire Car booths, all with long queues. Patiently I awaited my turn. The man before me finally reached the counter.

"You're in luck," the agent said, "You have the last car available today."

"Oh no!" I gasped. I could see this was going to be one of those days when nothing falls into place. The lucky traveller looked kind and respectable, so I plucked up the courage to ask, "Are you going into the city?"

"Yes, to the James Cook. Can I give you a lift?"

Immediately the world seemed brighter. I had just booked at the James Cook myself.

"Gary Knight" – he held out his hand to shake mine.

"Sir Galahad indeed! Your chivalry is much appreciated."

Conversation was sporadic as Gary followed the robotic directions from the car's computer. I learned that he was an engineer and was here to make one last Australasian presentation to some prospective investors before returning to London.

"How long are you here?" he asked.

"Like you, just one night. I have one appointment tomorrow, then it's back to Brisbane."

Rush hour traffic then took all his attention so there was no need to elaborate further.

The hotel foyer was bustling with guests. Confidently my driver approached the receptionist.

"Your room is on the sixth floor, sir." But the lady attending to me said "I'm sorry madam there is no booking in the system for you for tonight. I see you have a room booked for tomorrow."

"Well, there must have been some mistake, but can you just change it?"

"Of course, we would but there's an international

convention on and every hotel in Wellington is booked out."

I didn't know what to do so just stood there in a daze while I tried to reorient myself. My new companion had overheard the exchange and was standing by, obviously concerned for my plight. Quietly, almost nervously, he spoke.

"Look, I know this is unusual, but I don't mind if you share my room tonight." I was stunned – but very appreciative. He returned to the desk. "Could you please change the bed formation in room 621 to two singles?"

The receptionist checked the computer. "Sorry, no, the bed is a queen without a split base."

Confused and exhausted, I was in no fit state to make any rational decisions, so I meekly followed Sir Galahad to Room 621.

Instinctively we both chose opposite sides of the room.

"Haha," he said, "at least we don't have to fight over who has which side of the bed."

That lightened the atmosphere, and we went about arranging our gear. I took out a box from my bag and placed it on the side table. Tomorrow I would complete my mission.

"Gary, tonight dinner is on me."

Having lived in Wellington years before, it didn't take me long to find my bearings and we were soon climbing the stairs to my favourite Chinese restaurant. The owner, though much older, was still as bright and welcoming as ever.

The evening passed smoothly. Gary was keen to tell me about his invention. His success tomorrow would be critical, so it was the only topic of conversation. Thankful not to be quizzed on my appointment, I listened attentively.

By ten p.m. we were back at the hotel and Gary was the first to get into bed. I took my time in the bathroom, and he was asleep by the time I carefully slid under the covers.

I couldn't sleep. As I lay there, I glanced at the elegant box beside my pillow and reflected on all the drama in my recent past.

After the funeral I was summoned by the undertaker to pick up my husband's ashes. With a well-practiced expression of sympathy, he handed me a non-descript cardboard box. I grabbed it and departed as fast as I could so he could not see the horror on my face. So ignominious! So utterly disrespectful! My husband deserved something far more worthy for his last remains.

Around the corner was an antique shop and there, in the window, was this beautiful brass container, enamelled with pink, blue and yellow flowers. I didn't hesitate. Whatever the cost, I was going to have it. Now containing Michael's ashes, it was ready for me to fulfil his last request.

The night stretched on, and my mind went back to three years ago when we were given the cancer diagnosis. Our world changed from that moment. Although the decline in Michael's condition was not immediately evident, a year later I became his full-time carer. We shared every thought and fear and tried to remain positive, enjoying simple pleasures together.

Another year passed and we thought we had it beat, but the big C would win in the end. For several weeks I was by his side, night and day, coping with his mood swings and trying to moderate his morphine. I was fiercely trying to keep him comfortable and alive.

The inevitable day arrived and there was a constant stream of visitors, messages, and decisions to be made. In his will Michael had requested that his ashes be scattered over the rocks at Plimmerton. Our first home had been one of the few bordering the ocean and many a time we had fished off the rocks and fossicked for treasures washed in by the waves.

The brass container had sat on the mantelpiece in Brisbane for several months until last week when I made the rash decision to fly to New Zealand. So here I was lying beside a stranger in the James Cook Hotel. His proximity was strangely unsettling. It had been so long since Michael and I had been intimate. I hadn't wanted or needed another man in my life, but now I felt a yearning within. Trying to repress those thoughts I finally fell asleep.

Some time during the night I turned over. He rolled over and, at that moment, we melted together in the most natural way. The embrace became more passionate, our bodies ebbed and flowed with unreserved exhilaration, reaching a climax, gently subsiding until, re-energised we bonded again. Exhausted, we slept on.

When I awoke the sun was already peeking past the edge of the blinds. Gary had already left but a note was on his pillow. Along with his number it read, "Call me this afternoon. I am your dedicated driver."

I smiled as I recalled last night's dream. It was, after all, surely only a dream. My thoughts then returned to the reason for my trip.

Plimmerton was less than half an hour by bus, so I took

the brass container and strolled down to the terminus. The tide chart indicated I should be there before ten. It was old territory for me and, although some of the landmarks had changed, I was soon clambering over the rocks that were being lapped by the incoming tide. I withdrew the precious container from my bag and carefully took the plastic bag from the cardboard within. My darling Michael was at last to return to the universe. Sitting on a rounded boulder, I tore a small nick in the corner of the bag and wistfully let a steady stream fall into the rockpools around me. I must have cut a lonely figure alone on the rocks as I stayed there for almost an hour – but then the skies opened, and I ran to escape the deluge.

Back in Wellington I left a message for Gary to meet me at Te Papa. We enjoyed a pleasant afternoon viewing the exhibits and walking along the waterfront. We were strangers who would probably never meet again. I knew little about him and he didn't even know I had recently lost the love of my life. Why hadn't I told him?

Since Michael died everyone treated me with such sympathy making me feel like such a pathetic individual. Why open the door to more condolences? I was glad I hadn't told him.

Later at the airport we were about to go to our respective gates when I spontaneously reached into my bag for the brass container.

"Sir Galahad, this is for you. You have no idea how much you have helped me. I was dreading this journey, but thanks to you, I have completed my mission."

With a puzzled look Gary accepted the gift. There was an awkward hesitation, so I quickly kissed him on the cheek and turned to go, but Gary drew me back into a warm embrace.

"Farewell my damsel in distress."

With a parting wave to Sir Galahad, I continued to the plane with a spring in my step.



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