

Members Life Stories

Members life stories is a collection of the personal stories presented by our own members at our annual general meetings early in each year.

Further stories will be added to the collection as they become available.

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Helen Peate

Aspects of my Life. Talk to the members of U3A Pegasus at the AGM, 20 March 2023

Helen was the eldest of five children. She has three daughters and a son, 15 grandchildren and 3 stepsons. She has had bad luck with her two husbands and after the last one 25 years ago, she reverted to her maiden name of Peate.

Helen graduated from Otago University with an MSc in biochemistry. She lectured for a year and won a research scholarship but preferred teaching. She taught for chemistry for 14 years at Rangiorua school in Christchurch, and her 'hydrogen bomb' made in a golden syrup tin left a permanent mark on the lab ceiling. A great success with her students!

In retirement Helen has pursued many hobbies. She was a freelance journalist, she learnt the piano, plays bridge and has travelled. She joined Toastmasters International to gain speaking skills, and made many friends. Later she started a small business teaching communication skills to others. She became a Nurse Maude home visitor for the elderly and visited one woman every week for 10 years. She read to a 98-year-old who had a scrapbook of poems she had written herself. Helen read them to her which the woman enjoyed very much. When Helen rang to make another appointment, she was told the woman had died the day after her first visit.

Helen was also involved with the Friends of the Christchurch Art Gallery for many years. Her outstanding favourite activity was going to Oxford University Summer Schools in England. She went six times. The University runs courses for 7 weeks, and students live in Christchurch College which is six centuries old and encompasses the cathedral. No academic qualifications are needed and there are only 12 people per class, of all ages and nationalities. The range of topics is extensive and she recommends anyone to go.

Helen summed it all up by saying she'd had a good life, a loving family, and she was looking forward to getting a card from King Charles in a few years' time.

Yvonne Gray

'A World Apart' Talk to the members of U3A Pegasus at the AGM, 20 March 2023

My talk is entitled 'A World Apart' and is based on a piece I wrote as part of U3A Pegasus' writers' group which is led by Vivienne Allan. Participating in the group has given me the opportunity to write about some of my experiences and this short story is one of them. Unexpectedly, my husband landed me with a deeply surprising proposal. He said: 'Hey, I'm going to a meeting to save some goats.' Not really understanding the task being proposed, and in extreme disbelief, I exclaimed; 'What? Where? And anyway, how do you get wild goats from a scrubby hillside on some island somewhere, into a boat bobbing on the sea and then what?' 'All that doesn't matter,' he said. 'Come with me, we can hear what's going on and see what it's all about.' And we did.

The aim of the mission, organized by Michael Willis, owner of the Willowbank Wildlife Reserve, was to save as many goats as possible because they were said to be the last remnants of the Old English milch goats left on Arapawa Island by Captain Cook. He wanted to secure a sustained food source for return voyages.

We agreed to participate and were met at the jetty at East Bay, Arapawa Island in the outer Queen Charlotte Sounds by locals Betty and Walter Rowe and their son Mitch. A full group briefing followed around a camp fire and we were allocated our routes up the hills with details of tasks, maps and instructions. We would set out before first light.

Some of the volunteers were wildlife experts and others like us, were novices – all of us keen to save as many of the animals as possible from being culled by Forest Service personnel. From our muster the goats would be transported to their new home at the Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch.

We gathered at first light next morning after a hearty breakfast. Each volunteer had a tin can or whistle, or a dog, or simply clapped hands and called out. We headed towards the steep scree slope where we turned sharply upwards to 'Easy Ridge', so called because it was open and grazed.

Sweeping upwards and northward, we herded the animals to the top of the hill and along a temporary fenceline and then down Easy Ridge, led by Betty's domestic goats which acted as decoys. The muster was a complete success. There were bucks, nannies and babies, uniquely and truly beautiful. We herded the adult goats onto a waiting barge bound for Picton where they were freighted onto cattle trucks to Willowbank. We took the babies with us in the van, wrapped in a blanket-lined cardboard box. They were reunited with their parents although sadly three died. That trip changed our lives.

(Betty Rowe's book 'Arapawa – Once Upon an Island' is available from Christchurch libraries. It was read on National Radio.)