



33rd Mayor of Wellington Capital of New Zealand

## **Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa now**

This record is a contribution to a THS project for gathering recollections from Tawa people.

### **Dame Kerry Prendergast, nine years Wellington Mayor, long-time resident of Tawa.**

Written by Dame Kerry and Rex Nicholls, edited by Steve Avery .Words 4394, 21 26.

My name is Kerry Leigh Prendergast. I am the eldest child of Beverley (1927-2019) and Denis Ferrier (1929-2005). Our family lived in Tawa between 1961 and 1976, then I returned to bring up my family in Tawa from 1977 to 1996, but more about that later. Firstly, a little bit about my family:

My father's mother, Dora Jean, nee Smart (1908-1992), had two boys, Denis and Bruce. She was divorced from Bernard Anderson Ferrier (1905-1960), having been married in 1929. He was a 'motor engineer' who had come from Scotland to Stratford Taranaki where he met Jean. During the war he served in the Pacific maintaining aircraft.

Beverley's mother, Gladys Mary (1896-1983), was married to, and had 7 daughters with, Mostyn Pryce-Jones (1889-1943). Mostyn was shot at Gallipoli in 1915, invalided to Alexandria, and returned to Christchurch where he set up and operated a bicycle repair/sales shop; he spent the early part of WWII in the Home Guard before succumbing to TB, exacerbated by his damaged lung. Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that most often affects the lungs. It spreads through the air when people with TB cough, sneeze or spit. It was endemic in New Zealand, and many countries, until modern antibiotics after 1945.

Beverley was the fifth of the sisters. Denis and Beverley met when Denis lived at Gladys's house; she took boarders after Mostyn had died to supplement her war widow's pension. He was then studying Civil Engineering at Canterbury College then part of the University of New Zealand, on a Ministry of Works bursary. He had begun as a Ministry Of Works draftsman, a frequently used entrance to engineering in those days. The MOW, formerly the Department of Public Works and often referred to as the Public Works Department or PWD, was founded in 1871 and disestablished and sold off in 1988. Historically, the state has played an important part in developing the New Zealand economy. On completing his education, he returned to Wellington after I was born in Christchurch on 28 March 1953. My brothers Michael (1954) was born in Wellington, Wayne (1956) in Taihape, and sister Angela, (1958) in Waiouru where my father was a MOW engineer in civil construction.

Denis won a scholarship to study at the London University, gaining a Diploma in Public Health engineering, so Beverley and Denis went there for nearly two years, the course taking one year and travelling as well (of course getting there and back by ship took 3 months). They just took their two sons. Angela and I spent that year with my Pryce-Jones grandmother and aunt in Christchurch. On their return from the UK Denis rose to Chief Public Health engineer at MOW. We lived in a Railway house beside the tracks at Porirua while they built their house on the section they bought at 38 Redwood Ave.

Except for the brickwork and roof, Denis and Beverley built their whole house from concrete slab to painting and decorating. Denis developed the section and even constructed our kitset furniture. The work was done on weekends and holidays, with us playing on the section and behind, on what is Lane Crescent, and in Redwood bush and the hills beyond. During winter we would sometimes be dropped at Khandallah Pool or movies at Ngaio Hall. Ours was the first house started on Redwood Ave, though not first completed. We shopped at the butchery and grocers on Main Road, later using the supermarket built opposite Mexted Motors, one of Tawa's oldest businesses, established in 1925. In 2026 it is now part of Mexted Motors, before that it was the Salvation Army shop.



**Redwood Ave rumpus room being added**

Denis had strong Presbyterian principles and was a strict father. He became involved in Tawa's community, chairing and being heavily involved in building TOP, Tawa's Own Pool. From this platform he became a Tawa Borough Councillor. Beverley worked for A C Hatricks in Tawa on the Main Road, where now there are retirement homes opposite the squash courts, as receptionist/accounts clerk. They sold their Tawa house and moved to Christchurch in 1976 for dad to become Chief Scientist at the National Hydrology Centre. Much later Denis had a stint as Kapiti Borough Engineer, and on retiring to Paraparaumu, he rose to Deputy Mayor of Kapiti District Council.

Our family had a dog and a cat and Wayne had an aviary with budgies, a variety of finches, and quail. Denis added a double garage with a rumpus room above, that included a table tennis table and later a pool table. The family attended church on Sundays, and I attended bible class, mainly for the social evenings. Beverley played 500 and attended a gym. The two boys played soccer, cricket, and table tennis and Angela softball. Denis coached both cricket, soccer, and managed the table tennis club, while Beverley watched the boys' games. Though I played netball whilst at College, I spent Saturdays at home cleaning, changing sheets, washing, and baking from about the age of 10.

The family started with a Morris Oxford car, moving to a Holden station-wagon. Dad had inherited his father's ability to repair things and always serviced his own cars. He even replaced the engine in my Austin Allegro after I'd blown it up. A black and white TV was purchased in time for Princess Anne's wedding in 1973; before that time radio played a large part in our entertainment. The family had weekly visits from our grandmother, Jean Ferrier, and aunty Marjorie Collier. I was a Brownie, then a Girl Guide, ending up as a Brown Owl at the time I was married, in Hataitai. We met at the Guide Hall at Coronation Park in Oxford St. We bought a beach cottage at Paraparaumu Beach and used this extensively on weekends and holidays, particularly over the Christmas holidays.

Denis commuted into the city for work by train. We all had bikes, using these extensively around the suburb and to and from school. It was considered totally safe for young children to be anywhere around Tawa. Redwood Ave had many young

families, so baby-sitting jobs were plentiful. After school I worked in Hendon's haberdashery shop and later at Nan's Dairy, a shop belonging to the Nancarrows, the parents of my friend, Janine.

My mother was no cook, so my father and I did most of the cooking. The food was typical for families of that time and regular as clockwork. Saturday night was roast lamb with peas, carrots, roast potatoes and pumpkin - which I now hate; Sunday was a light meal. The week saw us eating left-overs from the roast; cold lamb, minced lamb, in fact, more likely mutton, and shepherd's pie. Friday was always fish and chips night, bought from the fish shop next to the Salvation Army Hall. Desserts were a fixture, canned peaches and ice cream or baked rice pudding with sultanas and milk. Our breakfasts consisted of Weetbix with boiling water and a little milk, or porridge in winter.

I went to Tawa Primary School and then Tawa College from 1966 through 1969. At Tawa Primary I had Mr Coates in Standard 5, Form I, and Mr McDonald in Standard 6. At College Mr Flaws was the principal and Mrs Ogden, my 3L3 third and fifth form teacher, taught French. Mr Murray taught me geography and coached me in cricket. Bruce Murray later went on to be headmaster and became a personal friend in later life.



**Bronwyn Taylor, Kerry Ferrier, Peta Tait at Tawa College**

My reflections of my early life in Tawa were that it was a brand-new commuter suburb. The houses were mainly three-bedroom, one-bathroom, houses of around 1000 square feet, 90 square meters. New Zealand had completed the change to the metric system in 1976. Those living in Tawa could be generalised as mid-level bank, government, or insurance officers and their young families. There were seven churches and a general sense of strong Christian values. There were no pubs as Tawa was the last suburb to vote out its 'dry' status in 1999. From 1918 until 1967 there were very restrictive liquor laws, for instance no alcohol was sold after six o'clock and no barmaids were permitted, but by 1999 alcohol could be sold in most localities. We

seldom went into Wellington, all our social and school activities taking place in and around Tawa.

Social life centred on sport and there were no 'arts' as such. We lived a healthy outdoor life in a safe environment, close to hills and several parks, all of which we used extensively for recreation.

After having University entrance accredited in 1969 I left school. UE was then the sixth form qualification and the right to study at university and if not accredited you had the chance to pass by external examination. I moved into the Wellington Nurses Home in mid 1970 to begin my general nurse training. That training led me to become a Registered General Nurse and an Obstetric Nurse. Our first three months entailed just learning, making beds, bed bathing, turning, while learning anatomy etc, before doing six monthly spells in the various wards. I was very naïve, having never seen a naked male before! I spent the first two years living in the Nurse's Home and needed my parents' permission to then move out to get married in 1972. I always did well in my classes and, in the final year, took the top award for each of Medical, Surgical, and Obstetric nursing; having a photographic memory, as my father had, helped hugely. I then gained a diploma in Intensive Care General Nursing, for which I again got first place. My three years of training showed me that, not only did I love the work and was good at it, but I was good at training others to do the same work. I was logical, pragmatic, and could teach. Our uniforms were stiff and starched, a white shift over the top of a pink, later purple, dress. There was a cuff stud on the neck, and we wore starched white caps, striped for seniority. The system was very hierarchical; for instance we stood up for more senior nurses and all doctors.



**Kerry Ferrier as young nurse**

There was little spare cash, and our social life entailed the odd party and meal in Wellington. I met my husband, Paul, at a friend's brother's party at Mt Carmell church hall in Hataitai. After our marriage in 1972 we rented a Ministry of Works house on Paterson Street by the Mount Victoria tunnel and later bought a house in Strathmore, which we rented out. We decided to do our 'OE', overseas experience, common for young Kiwis so moved to London where we both got jobs and stayed just over two years.

On our return home, while I was pregnant, we lived, briefly, with Paul's parents. I did a year-long Midwifery diploma, again receiving top marks. When my parents moved to Christchurch, we lived in their Redwood Ave house until it sold. Melissa Leigh was born there in 1977. We then lived in our Strathmore house but, after living in it for a period, we decided to sell that small, two-bedroom, house and buy in Tawa to bring up a family there. At the time Paul was MOW site engineer at the Police College and several of his extended family lived in Tawa with similar aged children so we could support and socialise with each other. We house-hunted and purchased a house in St John's Terrace.

Over the next nearly 20 years we moved, first to Fitzwilliam Tce, then Peterhouse St as our family grew. We had a son, Paul, who died soon after birth, then Andrew Bernard in 1981, and Jessica Marie in 1984. The values I had experienced in Tawa growing up I found to still exist as did the same butcher, greengrocer, supermarket and seven churches! In fact my daughter's top memory of their early life was the free saveloys the butcher gave children. They morphed into luncheon sausage slices once people became concerned about food colouring. The butcher was also a volunteer fireman and every time we heard the siren we thought of him rushing off to do his duty.



**Melissa, Jessica (baby), Kerry, Andrew**

At each of our houses the children could access the Redwood bush, lots of parks, and Andrew would walk up and over the hills to Ohariu Valley past the old airfield and gold digging tunnels. I had explored and picked mushrooms around those paddocks, in my youth, as well.

Our children attended kindergarten, then Redwood School. The southern end of the suburb had become a little wealthier and many houses had been built, so Redwood School had been built in 1966. The principal was Con Coffey and his wife, Dorrie, was head of junior classes. They lived next door to us in St John's Terrace and later became my brother, Wayne's, in-laws. Andrew attended Tawa Intermediate and then Tawa College. This was his choice while the two girls attended Queen Margaret's College, Melissa from Form I, Jessica from Form III.

The children all played sports, tennis, netball, cricket, football and all were very competent swimmers, having learnt in Tawa Pool. They went to Scouts and Guides,

still located in Coronation Park in the Guide and Scout Hall. The girls commuted by train to QMC and Paul used the train to his job with MOW. I continued working part time as a midwife while also starting a law degree at Victoria University.

Tawa was a safe, well lit, well maintained suburb, with little concern for safety; an ideal place in which to bring up a young family. I helped set up Redwood School's first after-school care program. I got very involved in Plunket and spent a lot of time at committee meetings plus cooking and catering for fund-raising functions raising funds for a local Plunket nurse's rooms, car, and consumables. It was here that I realised I had a future in governance and that I had my father's leadership qualities. I found I did not have time for both a law degree and my many other activities, so chose the latter.

In 1986 I decided to stand for Tawa Borough Council, standing on two issues: Mandatory fences around swimming pools, and safety matting under play equipment, there was a proliferation of children's drownings and children hurt in playground falls in New Zealand. My desire to stand was driven, as well as by these issues, by the fact that my father had been a Tawa Councillor from 1971-76 before he moved to Christchurch for his job. We had three children at home, I was working as an independent midwife, and much of my spare time I spent 'giving back', as my father had, to the community.

I was elected and was the only female councillor that term, and found it a shock to find meetings arranged for 5:30pm to suit working men "calling in on the way home to attend meetings". When I pointed out how difficult this was for a woman with a young family I was told I "shouldn't have stood then". In 1989, after our fight to remain an independent borough which was part of the Labour Government transformation of local government, which Tawa lost, we amalgamated into Wellington. So I stood, successfully, as one of the two Tawa Ward councillors for Wellington City. The other ward councillor elected was Tawa's Mayor, David Watt, and he became Deputy Mayor under Mayor Jim Belich (later Sir James). Thus began a huge learning curve for me.

My first term was mainly about learning the way the council was run and how to get some wins for the projects I supported. Tawa Borough had been just about the 3 Rs, 'roads, rats, and rates'. The second term on the Wellington City Council, 1992-1995, was under Mayor Fran Wilde, now a Dame and in 2025 elected Mayor of South Wairarapa. She was, and still is, a dominating influence. She pulled the whole council together and we carried out a lot of good things for the city, including starting work on the sewage treatment plant and selling down Capital Power, first one half, then the other 51%, to TransAlta, to pay for this. Wellington was getting a name for events like the Nissan-Mobil 500 car race but was still perceived as a grey bureaucrat town. It was the period we brought in the new District Plan which entailed many hearings. Deals were done to keep both the Royal NZ Ballet and the NZSO in Wellington.

In my third term, 1995-1998, Mark Blumsky, who owned three shoe shops and was a marketer through and through, stood and won. I became his deputy for both of his terms, until 2001. During this time Wellington became dynamic and began growing its name as an events and tourism capital. Zealandia was set up in 1999, a great biodiversity statement for the city.

A small group of us visited Melbourne and we borrowed their marketing ideas to set up Tourism Wellington to promote the city. The stadium was built, allowing Wellington to host the Rugby Sevens. Over the period from 1989 I helped preserve the old BNZ as chair of City Development, and we arranged the Midland Park development. I was on the boards of Lambton Harbour Management and Wellington Airport for some of the time and even the Wellington Milk Company, located on the upper east side of Tory Street, when it still existed.

During this whole period we had some very good councils. People with business experience, people who had taken risks, people who asked good questions and who made good solid decisions based on recommendations from our experienced staff. We had Ian Hutchings, Chris Parkin, Rex Nicholls, Robert Armstrong, Alan Johnstone, Stephen Rainbow. The city achieved a lot.

My marriage ended in 1996 so I left Tawa in 1997, moving to Talavera Terrace, in Kelburn, to be with Rex Nicholls. We had met on council so, for conflict reasons, he retired in 1998.

I left the suburb of Tawa that had grown in population hugely, but which retained its same middle-class suburban values. No pubs, no arts, lots of parks, outdoor experiences, and a very good pool and library. I still firmly believe it was an excellent place to raise a young family. It catered for all needs, most interests, and provided ample space for personal growth.

I had begun an MBA at the start of 2001, after I'd announced I would not stand again, and because I was being treated as 'just a midwife' and I wanted more credibility with the businesspeople I was now mixing and working with. Then in April 2001 Mark Blumsky told me he was not going to stand again, and that he would support me doing so if that was what I wanted. It took a couple of months making up my mind and then we started a strong campaign. We had the manager of Saatchi's, now a good friend, Kim Wicksteed, David Gascoigne (now Sir), David Bale, who was running Lotto, Chris Parkin, and Rex. We even used illegal, vertical ads on power poles saying 'Kerry4mayor'. It was before social media intervened. I won and went on to win two more times.

My nine years as Mayor of Wellington were some of the best years of my career. I worked very closely with the council Chief Executive Officer, in earlier times this person was titled the Town Clerk. We had a policy of 'no surprises'; that is, we kept each other informed of any potential problems even remotely likely to arise. However, there was a very strict separation of roles. The CEO carried out the council's instructions, having given us advice which was generally well measured and sensible. I led the council and we instructed the CEO what to do, based on officer advice.



**Kerry Prendergast, WCC Mayoral Inauguration**

During my mayoralty I had two good deputies. Alick Shaw for two terms, and Ian McKinnon for one. Alick was an astute left-wing politician but worked with me in getting the numbers to carry out what was best for the city. Ian was more of my political persuasion, not so astute at 'getting the numbers', but a loyal supporter.

Our staff included some very experienced officers, many of them engineers, an expertise WCC now seems to have dispensed with. There was a high respect amongst councillors for our staff. At no stage did I have a majority of similar-thinking councillors, so I met with each councillor to understand their wishes and values, and did deals so that they got some of their wishes fulfilled, while I got most of mine too. Committee chairmanships were doled out, with their corresponding incomes, to appropriately qualified and competent councillors, helping to gain loyalty. There was a high degree of trust and very few 'Code of Conduct' discussions.



**Kerry in robes on graduation MBA**

I continued my MBA and did a marketing option. This made me realise that Wellington's future should be based around creativity. Then, early in my Mayoralty, Chris Parkin, Rex, and I, sat with Nick Dalton, and we peeled my opinions back, like an onion, until my beliefs were distilled to the Statement: "Creative Wellington - Innovation Capital". From then on everything I said touched on these words and everything WCC did focussed on the same beliefs. Council accepted the statement as theirs; then the whole city began to accept it as the city's vision. Later Lonely Planet termed Wellington "The World's Coolest Little Capital".

The idea was that we would do the basics, roads, underground services, etc well and as efficiently as possible; then we could spend our savings promoting the city and providing the best possible city to live in, to work in, to visit. I went on a trip to the USA to investigate the work of Professor Richard Florida and came back with good ideas about how best to implement my plans and began to instigate them.

We placed twenty sculptures around the city, we planted Pohutukawa trees from the stadium to Waitangi Park, we made seven pocket parks around the CBD, we developed Waitangi Park, we re-sanded Oriental Bay beach and built Freyberg Beach. I made a deal with Prime Minister, Helen Clark, to upgrade our social housing with a grant of \$120,000,000.

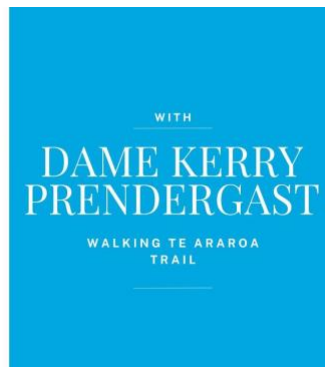
WOW, World Of Wearable Arts, needing to move from its home in too-small Nelson, first approached Christchurch: "No, we are known as the garden city". Then Auckland: "No, not without the light rail we are about to build". Then they approached me: "Yes, how can we make it happen" and it still attracts 60,000 people to our city, many from out of town, and inputs \$30,000,000 into our economy. We helped the mountain bike community build tracks through the hills. The School of Dance and Drama was set up and I spent 24 years on the board of NZ Festival of the Arts, during which time we got the Edinburgh Tattoo in 2000 and 2014. We helped fund and promote many community events. These included: The New Zealand Rugby Sevens 2002–2010; British and Irish Lions 2005; LOTR-Return of the King Premiere 2003; Wellington On a Plate began 2009; Wellington Phoenix established 2008; Rolling Stones 2006; LA Galaxy 2007 (and I hongied David Beckham!); The Police 2008; Rock to Wellington 2008; and the FIFA Play off vs Bahrain 2009; Cuba Dupa, the Newtown Festival, and similar local festivals gave the public free events.

But Wellington lost the Nissan-Mobil 500 car race which I took as a big loss. Another sad loss was the 'Hook of Maui', a huge sculpture proposed to sit across the motorway at Ngauranga. The vertical laser light, representing the line from Maui's hook fishing up the North Island, was rejected by the airline pilots, very unfortunately, in a close referendum. At a time when we were overseas on holiday in 2004, STV, Single Transferable Vote, was approved as the means to vote in Wellington. Instead of putting a tick beside the candidates you want to vote for, you rank them with numbers. In an STV election, candidates must reach a certain number of votes to get elected. This system works well for selecting two or three councillors from about ten candidates. It does not work well choosing one mayor from about 10 candidates. It becomes a way to vote against an initially winning candidate. So it was for me in 2010. From being 3249 votes ahead on the first iteration I dropped progressively to 176 behind on the fifth. I had decided not to stand but, because there was no reasonable

successor, I was talked into standing again. Losing was devastating. We went on a long road trip to get away as I was too hurt and embarrassed to show my face anywhere. In my Mayoral portrait I chose to be depicted in front of items representing heritage, environment, and infrastructure, the three core issues which I believe were the focus of my Mayoralty.

Now I have moved on. I am on ten boards, six of which I chair. I received a Damehood in 2018. I try not to comment on the city I love, but Wellington City is not in good shape, and I have watched it deteriorate since 2010. We have had mayors and councils who have extended the depreciation life on assets, roads, pipes, etc, so that they had more money to carry out the 'nice things' such as cycle lanes, roading changes, green initiatives. The pipe conditions became critical without adequate spending, so the city has been inundated with leaky water pipes, poor roads, and dirty, graffitied, streets.

For years since being Mayor Kerry has walked many log trails in Europe and other places. Over two summers she walked with Tim and Sue Pankhurst supported by Rex Nicholls walked the Te Araroa Track.





At the end of the Te Araroa Track.