

married in 1950.

Margaret's son Warwick was two and daughters Kerry and Robyn nine and eight when she left her husband.

She held several teaching positions before in 1975 completing her Masterate thesis on the plant ecology of the dune system of Kai-torete Spit outside Christchurch.

Then 53, she decided she was becoming a bit impatient with the young, as teaching was very stressful, and retired from formal teaching.

After 25 years of teaching and raising a family on her own - enough to send most people scuttling for an easy-care seaside cottage - Margaret Peace began a new life which would produce new stresses, illness and recovery, victories, defeats, encounters with crazed dogs and grizzly bears, backpacks and, at every turn, battles on behalf of the environment.

She decided to settle in Marlborough because it lay at the centre of Aotearoa and it cost just \$10 to get to Wellington by ferry. It was a place of few people, had a mountains-to-the-sea environment and was a good place to be outdoors.



*The good life: Margaret Peace's smallholding of less than one hectare has provided most of her needs over the last 15 years.*

## Rachel Carson in mind

She arrived at Tuamarina with Rachael Carson packed in her mind. The writer had galvanised Margaret and many others into consciousness about the dangers of pesticides many years before then.

Margaret was teaching science in 1963 when Carson was releasing her grim predictions. The science teacher suggested the dangers of pesticides should enter the curriculum. The suggestion was greeted with gales of laughter from her colleagues. So was Carson.

In 1977, Margaret and May Foley, whose entire family suffered the effects of 2,4,5,-T spraying, established the Agricultural Chemicals Action Group.

For three years the pioneering group campaigned to raise awareness about the dangers of products like 2,4,5,-T. Two national seminars were held and thousands of pamphlets were distributed on the subject.

Hundreds of letters poured in - details of spina bifida babies, dying dogs and aborting cows.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency, locked in battle with Dow Chemical Co Ltd, sent lawyers around the world to collect evidence, including

from Margaret.

Economic factors, Margaret says, have curtailed spraying to some extent, but the group helped raise consciousness about the dangers of the chemicals and their application. However, "mindless" roadside spraying still occurs.

A long serving member and Minister for the Environment's nominee on the Pesticides Board, Margaret points out there are over 900 pesticides on the market in New Zealand today. Phenoxy herbicides are still being sold.

Margaret scoffs at Marlborough's adopted title of "Gourmet Paradise". It is, she says, a paradise where food and wine can be laced with pesticides.

She notes how pesticides have accumulated under cherry and apple orchards for 40 years in places, how orchards can be sprayed 15 times a year and how stock are left to graze in those orchards.

"The whole system of using sprays is unsustainable. It makes the problems worse and worse. We will never get biological control if this continues. There are strains of fungus becoming more and more immune to spraying. DDT-resistant mosquitoes are now responsible for a great resurgence of malaria. There are now hundred of insects resistant to sprays.

"Quick-fix solutions don't work. They are not going to allow the sustainable production of anything. It's in everybody's interest to get back to natural farming.

## Smarter than nature

"The chemical companies are now trying to find bio-tech fixes. Again, they're going the wrong way. They're trying to do something smarter than nature."

Margaret, who lobbied members of the former Labour Government intensively about the dangers of pesticides, says a resource management review of toxic and hazardous



*Tramping in her beloved Marlborough.*

substances made comprehensive proposals after 18 months of paper and meetings.

"It was a good review, but it ended up in the too-hard basket. So for the moment we're stuck with the Pesticides and Toxic Substances Boards. Hopefully we will eventually get a Hazards Control Commission."

The only woman ever to hold a seat on the Pesticides Board, Margaret maintains she is the only member other than the beekeeper's representative to have a concern for the environment.

"All I have done is insisted that things get debated. It's almost impossible to get things done. I moved the formal withdrawal of organo-chlorines, but they can still be used.

There's a 10-year supply out there. I tried to insist they be recalled but the answer was it would be more dangerous to have them stored in any concentration."

Margaret has waged a tireless war against the dumping of chemical residues into Marlborough tips, warning that they would pollute the underground water supplies as they contaminated the aquifer.

One day, armed with a toxic cargo of chemicals left to her by the former property owner, she drove to a local tip and asked where she should unload the cargo for proper disposal.

"Just throw them in the tip, lady," said a somewhat bemused attendant.

She did not follow this injunction but it armed Margaret with the evidence of neglect she needed to tackle the bureaucrats once again about their negligence.

The particular tip has been moved and linings installed to mitigate against the probable consequences of allowing toxic dumping. But, as Margaret has pointed out all too frequently, the only solution is to rid the country of potentially toxic chemicals.

She envisages a pesticide-free Marlborough, a concept so bold it takes the breath out of even her supporters. Still, Margaret has been doing that all her life. She is usually right.

Chairperson of the Marlborough branch of Forest and Bird from 1977/85 and a member of the Forest and Bird executive 1981/84, Margaret has recently returned to co-chair the Marlborough branch again. At 68, she is brimming with vitality.

## One fire too many

Only once since 1975 has that not been the case. That was in 1984, when one fire too many destroyed a magnificent scenic reserve. It was the result of negligence of a local authority unable to control tip fires.

Margaret, somewhat alone after several friends had abandoned Marlborough, decided she had endured enough. She left for Dunedin in the hope it would be too wet there for fires to destroy the land.

A major knee operation destroyed her mobility. Six months later, she returned to Marlborough. It was a shock to see her shaky and frail. But she reaffirmed her commitment to life and the environment and the illness left her body and spirit.

In 1988, Margaret travelled to Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Guatemala with her son Warwick.

She has strong views about the way you travel: "Talk with them, don't gawk at them. Use the environment as a learning experience. Travel should not just be indulgence in food, drink and sunshine..."

Margaret uses the *Lonely Planet Guide* and does a lot of research before she heads off overseas. She travels with backpack and tent, or uses small accommodation places where the profit goes directly to the people.

"Justify your expenditure. It's not just a holiday. I don't distinguish between work and recreation. I think we should be doing something constructive.

"You should use minimum impact travel systems and local accommodation. Let the people profit from you. Learn about their environmental and social problems."