

Dame Jocelyn Fish biographical information – 29 Sept 1931- 20 Sept 2021

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The Dame Jocelyn Fish Award awards \$1000 annually to women students enrolled in a non-traditional qualification for women offered at Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, the University of Waikato, and the Waikato Institute of Technology. It continues as long as the student is successfully completing her studies.

Dame Jocelyn Fish was a Waikato woman notable for promoting the rights of women and for community service.

Jocelyn Barbara Green was born in Whangārei and the youngest of three children. Her parents Edna (née Garton) and Jack Green both came from farming families in the Far North. In 1946, Jocelyn's family moved to Hamilton, where she attended Hamilton Girls' High School, becoming Head Girl in 1948.

Jocelyn was the first member of her family to enjoy a tertiary education. She studied at Auckland University College, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1952 and then completed post-graduate teacher training at Auckland Teachers' College.



Jocelyn taught history, geography and English, firstly at Hastings High School in 1953 before leaving three years later for the United Kingdom. She taught at the Arts Educational School in London and subsequently at Heathfield School, Ascot. Whilst in Europe she travelled around much of the UK and the continent. Upon returning to New Zealand in 1957, she worked at Hamilton Girls' High School briefly and then at Fairfield College.

She gave up teaching when she married farmer John Fish in 1959 and helped run their dairy farm in Morrinsville. Jocelyn used to joke "she never worked again" - a bitter-sweet witticism and commentary on the invisibility of women in society, particularly the unpaid or voluntary work. To counter the unwanted stigma attached to the labels of "housewife", or "farmer's wife", Jocelyn adopted the phrase "Company Secretary" to describe her partnership with John in the farm.

Jocelyn took part in the social and spiritual life of her community, joining the local Association of Anglican Women and the Morrinsville Lyceum Club. It was at the former that her interest in women's issues found focus. History papers in her degree taught her that all levels of government require active participation by the whole community to function well. This learning was hugely influential in her involvement in the women's movement in New Zealand in the 1970s. She saw the exclusion of women from government as a travesty and a waste of the talents of half the population.

After raising a family, and very much practising what she preached, Jocelyn was elected as Piako County Council's first woman councillor in 1980 then re-elected for a further two terms. Her election caused shock among some of the farmers of the district – not to mention her fellow councillors. She was the only female councillor on the Council in that decade.

Local activism soon gave way to national bodies, and particularly The National Council of Women (NCW), through which she participated in campaigns for including women in major decision making and issues such as equal pay for equal work.

Dame Jocelyn held many positions including: member of the Film Censorship Board of Review (1981-1984); National President of the National Council of Women (1986 – 1990); New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO (1989-1994); an active member of the Waikato branch of NZ Federation of University (later

Graduate) Women including National President of the Federation in 1994-1997 (the first triennium the national committee had been held outside the four university 'cities'); deputy chief commissioner of the Transport Accident Investigation Commission (1990-1995); member of the Broadcasting Standards Authority (1989-1991); board member, including inaugural chairperson, of the Hamilton District Community Law Centre Trust (1994-2000); and a Justice of the Peace. Jocelyn was a member of the New Zealand Government delegation to the United Nations Conference on Status of Women in Nairobi in 1985 and led the NCW's delegation to the International Council of Women's Centennial Conference in Washington D.C. in 1988. She was a member of the group who lobbied for 1993 to be recognised as Women's Suffrage Centennial Year.

The capacity to grasp the essentials of any issue quickly and to articulate her position with clarity and conciseness were among her skills as a politician but she also had a quick and keen wit, which stopped well short of being derogatory but could often diffuse tension.

Dame Jocelyn was awarded a Suffrage Medal in 1993, a CBE in 1993 and an honorary degree from the Waikato Institute of Technology in 2003. In 2001, Jocelyn was awarded a DCNZM for services to women and the community, which was converted to a DCNZM in 2009. Mindful of the contributions of others, Dame Jocelyn accepted the honour on behalf of all women, saying ". . . it was the collective voice which was instrumental in changing the policies and attitudes to women which had held the country back for so long."

Dame Jocelyn was awarded a University of Waikato Medal in 2012, in recognition of her service to both the community and being a long-standing member of the University's Honours Committee. She also chaired a large social science survey on *New Zealand Women: Family, Employment and Education*, an important study in establishing the University's Population Studies Centre.



Dame Jocelyn Fish (seated) with the first recipients of the Dame Jocelyn Fish Award in 2016. From L to R: Jessica Xiao, Alina Rajan, Tara Fernandez-Ritchie, Ilonka Petrick, Lynley St George.