



food together  
community  
You are not alone

# Ann Hartley

The politics of the ordinary is a theme in Ann's career: the needs of families, the needs of local communities, and of working people. Personal identity is another theme relevant to her story. Her growth as a person has been shaped by race, feminism, faith and the need to make a contribution to society. *I'm very privileged. A lot of people hate politics, but I think there's politics in everything. I am passionate about it and I don't hesitate to get involved.*

Ann grew up in Orewa in the 1940s and 1950s. Her father, Bill Thomson, was of British heritage, his ancestors having settled in New Zealand in 1883. He first worked on his parents' farm at Taupiri and then moved with his parents to a farm at Tawharanui. When the bank foreclosed and the farm was sold, Ann's father then bought a farm in Warkworth where she was born. This was later sold and the family moved to Orewa.

Ann's mother, June Thomson, was of Māori decent, born in Gisborne, but given away as a baby and fostered out to families throughout New Zealand in her early childhood. As adults, Ann and her sister Tricia have tried to relocate their mother's family to learn more of their whakapapa. Ann recalls her mother sharing titbits about her life from the age of 11, when she was put into domestic service during the Depression of the 1930s. *Mum lived till she was 85, which was amazing because her nutrition as a child would have been dreadful. She used to tell us stories about having to gather coals off the railway lines when she was in Onehunga.*

*That's what they were put out to do, they were servants, wasn't very different from Britain. So when people talk about, 'It happened hundreds of years ago', it's rubbish. I'm here, I lived it through Mum.*

Ann is the middle child, with two older brothers and one younger sister. She attended Silverdale School and was then a foundation pupil at Orewa District High School and had ideas of becoming a teacher. Ann's brothers experienced racism when they were at school, but Ann didn't to the same extent. Reflecting on this, she wonders whether it was because she didn't appear to be Māori. Not knowing this side of her heritage has been something Ann has carried her entire life. During her time as an MP, she recalls sharing some of her mother's experiences with Tariana Turia whom she shared a bench with for a term. *I can remember this guy doing his speech about how good New Zealand was, wonderful when growing up and so on and so forth, and I remember Tariana interjecting with, 'Well, it depends what colour your skin was.' He was just mouthing off. Racism was a big deal. Especially in the country.*



*Ann and her husband, Maurice, 1990*

Both Ann's parents were community minded and involved in various activities, from sports to the Presbyterian Church. She remembers discussing the state of the nation at the dinner table: *'Talking about the price of butter fat. That was one of the most important things to New Zealand at the time.'* Her mother was proud to be a Labour voter. When they brought in the family benefit she would say, *'I voted Labour before your father did.'* But at that stage the idea of being involved in politics was not something Ann ever contemplated; it wasn't something to aspire to. *We weren't anyone. We were just feeling that there was a better way of doing things.*

As a result of those dinner table discussions, however, Ann grew up thinking about broad social issues of the day. Inherent in her way of being was to think that there was always a better way of doing things to create a fairer and more just society.

Ann married Maurice in 1966 and five years after was raising her two sons on the North Shore. The couple first rented in Campbells Bay and then built their first house in Birkdale in 1965 when the suburb was a very new housing area. They lived there for the next 33 years.

By 1968 Ann was thinking more and more about global issues and was particularly influenced by the Vietnam War. As a young mother she was affected by the thought of other mothers saying goodbye to their sons who went off to fight in this war. Men who were born after the Second World War, and were now themselves *'becoming fodder for another war.'* All this was beamed into living rooms across the country via television and all of sudden made the world seem a much smaller place. *I can remember feeling sick, because you're looking at people with the same hopes and dreams [as you].* In later years, when Ann entered local government, she found that there was hardly any man already elected who didn't have a war record, most having served in the Second World War. *I just think if you can't think of people as people, not as an economic commodity of sorts, then we're focusing on the wrong path.* It was at this time that Ann joined the Labour Party.

She remembers feeling very fortunate that her children had two sets of grandparents who gave her great support whilst she was raising her boys. She felt fortunate, too, that she and Maurice had sufficient income. But Ann was overcome when she took her son, Paul, along to the local Playcentre in 1972 and learnt of the experiences of other mothers in her community who were not as fortunate as she was: women who were raising their children on their own, or without support from their extended families; women who felt a moral dilemma about whether they could go to work and leave their children during the day in the care of others;

women who wanted to go to work but couldn't because they didn't have anyone to leave their children with and, as a consequence, were struggling financially. Ann's involvement with Playcentre was of a practical nature but, looking back, she can now recognise that it provided an opportunity for many women to become politicised and as a consequence many became involved in other areas of community development. *There was a lot of quite well-known people at Birkenhead Playcentre. There's no doubt Playcentre produced a huge group of leaders. It's been a very important tool in social development in New Zealand.*

It was during this time that Ann heard of the research work that John Raeburn and his team were doing in Birkdale and Beach Haven, and about the establishment of the Birkdale Community House. Ann was attending St Philip's church and was aware of the negotiations that had been taking place to run a crèche during the week at the church, as this was one of the needs identified by the community in John's survey. The survey showed that 75 per cent of people living in Birkdale at the time did not have the support of extended family. *It was spot on, absolutely spot on. Back then, all of your services were male-dominated. You automatically got a rugby field, but not an early childhood centre. What the survey showed was that it wasn't just social welfare we needed but we needed community development, and that was a fairly new idea at the time.*

Ann got behind this initiative and in her own way assisted to maintain a smooth relationship between churchgoers and the community using the crèche. She quietly took on the job of cleaning the seats in the church each day after crèche—it had caused a bit of friction when it came to Sunday and churchgoers sat down on chairs that were covered in play dough. *I could see that community projects took some leadership.* Ann says she didn't know much about the concept of community development at the time, but was actively listening and learning.

## A new generation of women were looking at things in a different way.

In 1975, she was employed as coordinator of the Birkdale Community House, and was responsible for organising courses and services to the community. The house ran many varied courses which were attended mostly by women, from yoga to personal growth classes. *My job was to listen to what the community wanted.* Feminist consciousness raising was at the heart of a lot of the courses that women attended. *A new generation of women were looking at things in a different way. So that's really how it started, especially women looking at their own needs, older, younger, and the crèches and the early childhood centres just kept on growing.* That same year, Ann remembers the Labour government passing the Treaty of Waitangi Act, which she considers a significant piece of legislation that has impacted positively on this country's sense of nationhood.

Ann worked at the community house for five years. During this time, she and others lobbied the Birkenhead City Council to financially support Birkdale Community House. *We had convinced the council that they should cover the cost of running the house. Because you don't just need a cricket wicket to make a community.* At the time reserve contributions levied against new developments were only spent on the creation of new recreational facilities, such as a new cricket wicket, and not put into community development.

Ann then found the confidence to consider running for council. She was already reading the meeting agendas and was aggrieved to see how many councillors were men. *Now I knew how local government worked and how men kept control.* At the same time as being elected to council, Ann worked with John Raeburn to support and develop community houses throughout Auckland. Workshops were held in communities to educate people about grassroots community development practice.

Community development was still something *on the fringes* of local government. Ann recognised that the community



*Mayor of Birkenhead City, 1986*

didn't just need welfare, as in the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in the 1970s, nor did it just need council to pay for recreational facilities; it needed council to get involved in community development. *What became clear to me in those years as coordinator was that community development was a legitimate area that needed support from councils to provide resources for it. It was logical that local government had to get involved. Local government was very conservative in those days, so very few people saw that, but I became convinced.* It also became clear to Ann that Birkenhead as a new housing suburb had received a lot of resources and financial input, whereas Beach Haven and Birkdale *didn't get a look in.*

In 1980, she put herself forward as a candidate in the local body elections for Birkenhead City Council and was elected. Whilst on council, she fought to get funding for a pool at Birkdale College, and \$100,000 was put into building this complex. The pool became a joint venture with the Council and was open for community use out of school hours. Jill Nerheny became a coordinator of this new venture. *It was a hard fight. The opposition was pretty tough.*

Ann then stood in the mayoral elections in 1986 and was elected. One significant community development initiative during her mayoralty was the role her council played in negotiations with other Shore city councils to fund the development of Awataha Marae. *Jean Sampson [mayor of Northcote] and I looked at the marae and listened. That's their community, so why do they not get funded? They very seldom got any funding, so we said, What's fair? You got a tennis club, community house, this and that. We decided that a per-head contribution would be about three dollars and that seemed reasonable, so we did it.*

Ann was mayor of Birkenhead City for one term from 1986 to 1989. The council celebrated its centennial in 1988, and purchased land at Kauri Point, to establish Centennial Park. Then in 1989 Ann formed a 'ticket' for the next local body elections which marked the establishment of a new amalgamated North Shore City Council. Ann's team got in and Ann was mayor of North Shore City until 1992. Ann has always believed in being a team player. *As a mayor you can only have*

*one vote and so if you are going to deliver effective local government it is crucial to have people who share similar values about community. You have to believe in people. In a team everyone has different skills that they bring to the table.*

The new council received some flak from the community for equalising rates across the Shore and starting many new projects in a short period of time. On reflection, Ann can see now that the volume of community development during her mayoralty was probably too fast for some. Highlights for Ann include the planning of the Albany basin and the creation of two lakes, Albany sports stadium, and the new Albany town centre. Brian Putt was involved in this work as a councillor and as an urban planner. *He's a very clever person. It was the early days, but I remember him coming in and showing me the lakes, and they've stayed. There was a lot of fundamental things then that were needed. It was a new breed if you like. Community development was not just like the community house—whatever you do in a community is community development.*

Ann is also proud of the work her council did to secure purchase of land along the Takapuna foreshore, the purchase of Shepherds Park, development of the Bruce Mason Theatre, and the North Shore Events Centre, introduction of five-year contracts for the delivery of community development services, and establishment of the North Shore Sports Foundation. The council was also forward thinking in the development of a Māori standing committee, which was a forerunner to the later Māori statutory board. *That was probably enough to get us thrown out, in and of itself!*

Ann's team lost office at the 1992 elections. The following year she put herself forward for Parliamentary elections. Ann was elected to Parliament as MP for Northcote in 1999 in the Helen Clark led Labour government, until 2005, and was then a list MP until 2008. She was also the first woman deputy speaker of the house from 2002 to 2005. In her maiden speech [February 2000] she spoke of the need for government to support grassroots community development. *Today people do not feel that society is a supportive structure, we need to rebuild*



*Mayor of North Shore City, 1989*

A focus on community development provides a platform for a healthy energetic society, which in turn is the basis for economic development.

*that confidence. I believe the key to rebuilding confidence is to focus on community development philosophy. That means acknowledging all the small energetic initiatives, the grassroots, the interaction, the skills, the wisdom, the things that give people a feeling of well-being, that embraces their personal security, their skill development. A focus on community development provides a platform for a healthy energetic society, which in turn is the basis for economic development. It is also a society that can support people in need.*

Ann is proud of a number of developments on the North Shore during her time as an MP. These included: improved services at North Shore hospital—mental health services and facilities, new obstetric and cardiac wards, and the extension of the orthopaedic ward. The North Shore busway, new motorway on-ramps for Northcote, and a dedicated bus lane were also developed. Ann spent five years on the Local Government and Environment select committee, with Jeanette Fitzsimons as chair. The Local Government Act of 2002 introduced development levies. In Devonport the former Defence land at Fort Cautly was secured as a coastal reserve.

There was also the introduction in 2002 of the Multi Agency Strategic Team (MAST). This community initiative was about reducing youth crime and helping at-risk young people avoid a path of crime. Community coordinator Jill Nerheny and two youth workers, Peter Wolf and Phil Squires, have since worked together with schools, local residents, police and community organisations to achieve a 78 per cent reduction in youth crime in the former North Shore City harbour ward areas of Birkenhead, Birkdale, Beach Haven, Northcote and Glenfield [now known as Kaipatiki].

In her valedictory speech [February 2008], Ann said that she was *constantly reinforced in the view that the most enduring*

*changes occur in society when they are owned and implemented by the community.*

In 2009 Ann decided to get involved again in local government elections. She was elected as one of two councillors on the newly formed Auckland Council, representing the North Shore ward; the other was councillor George Wood. She was re-elected the following term onto the Kaipatiki Local Board which incorporates the inner Waitemata Harbour suburbs of Beach Haven, Birkenhead, Chatswood, Birkdale, Northcote, Glenfield, Hillcrest and Marlborough.

Ann says key issues in supporting community development today are ensuring long-term sustainability, not just financially but also environmentally. Alongside this, local boards need to make sure that funding for facilities and services in the community meets the long-term goals and aspirations of the community they serve.

Consultation is a key part of this process. Ann acknowledges the work of Auckland Council in the area of transport and believes this will be a legacy of Mayor Len Brown.

She still loves living on the North Shore and continues to support various community groups. In her 40 years of political engagement, Ann has been at the forefront of change on the North Shore. She hopes that the younger generation will engage in politics as she did as a young woman and is encouraged to see younger people being elected onto local boards. *But one of the things people don't do today is talk about politics, and it's quite scary that they don't.*

In a team everyone  
has different skills that  
they bring to the table.

I'm very privileged. A lot of people hate politics, but I think there's politics in everything. I am passionate about it and I don't hesitate to get involved.

