

## **OBITUARY – NENA BENTON**

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It is one of those wonderful clear Waikato May days that takes the breath away. The fog has lifted and the afternoon is still. I am sitting, some tears in my eyes once more, looking at a photo of Nena Benton, kneeling on the ground, straw hat on her head, huge smile on her face, and a newly planted kauri in her hand.

That kauri now towers over me and, last week, I visited Nena for the last time. She was lying in state, at the Bentons' Ngaruawhia property, beside the Waikato. Looking out the window towards the mighty river my eyes delighted in a feast of fruit trees. I am certain that Nena knew each one of them, lovingly planted and carefully tended. Very few of those who visited the property last year would have realised how ill Nena was or how much work had gone into preparing for the field day. Nena loved the Tree Crops Association and her passion and enthusiasm right through her painful and debilitating battle with cancer rubbed off onto all of us. And make no mistake, it was a battle. Nena told me last year that she wasn't ready to die and she fought tooth and nail to make her point. She won a small victory in staying to see the fruit of her beloved figs.

Few of us knew that Nena was a brilliant international scholar. We knew her as a gardener and home-maker, and that was how she wanted it. Nena used her scholarly skills to the benefit of others as a tireless worker for justice, the elimination of poverty, and the preservation of language. Nena was a woman of deep faith and great vision. For her the living world was something of great beauty and wonder and her life was a marvellous expression of service to others.

Rest in peace Nena, we will miss you. I can see you now, secateurs over your shoulders, telling us there is work to be done! Those wonderful ideas of Richard's for a Language Garden and James's vision for an international centre for artists at Ngaruawahia need to be fleshed out. The sale of the Bentons' Waiheke property committed Richard and James into Waikato hands. Nena would want us all to help them nurture and bring to fruition their dreams.

Alfred Harris