

Terre Nicholson Eulogy for Celebration on 31st October 2022

We all know that Terre was a witch – a powerful and wise woman, so there couldn't be a better day for her memorial than Halloween.

Teresa Ann Goette was born in Tacoma, Washington on 15th June 1955. She grew up with her solo mother in Rapid City, South Dakota. She became Terre Maize when she married at a very young age, and some years later she became Terre Nicholson when she married Mike, a Kiwi bloke. That, of course, was a great stroke of luck for the rest of us as it brought her to Aotearoa.

Terre described herself as coming from a dirt-poor background. Food was always short. She told me of a time when as a little girl she trod on a broken glass getting into the bath and she it looked like she might bleed out entirely. Her mother didn't have enough cash to take her to the doctor and ran around the house looking for enough coins to scrape together the fees. In desperation she borrowed from a neighbour to have enough to get Terre to a doctor.

As we know, Terre was hugely resourceful and steeped in willpower. She supported herself through university to train as a civil and environmental engineer and got a post-grad diploma in Hazardous Materials Management. She was experienced in risk assessment, toxicology and soil decontamination. She loved her job, her boss and her company HDG GEO, and they supported her brilliantly through her medical challenges. They also provided a fantastic insurance policy that covered the costs of unfunded medicines – something every NZ cancer patient would benefit from! Terre was hugely frustrated recently by the severe neuropathy caused by one of her treatments – her hands became incredibly painful and it was impossible to type, making it hard for her to work. Her dedication to her work was clear when she phoned me a couple of weeks before she died to ask me if I knew any Kiwi experts in phytoremediation, the use of plants to decontaminate soils. I did, so I referred her to an expert and in the final days before she was admitted to hospital she consulted him on how to use plants to remove arsenic from an old sheep dip site. She was absolutely committed to her job to the end.

Terre's profile on the HD GEO website says "Communication is one of Terre's strongest attributes along with her willingness to help others learn. We can always rely on Terre to tell a great story with passion and enthusiasm and love having her on the team!"

Well, we *all* loved having her on our team for those very same reasons! We loved her passion, her wicked dark wit, her intelligence, her commitment to noble causes, her empathy and her leadership skills.

We snapped Terre up onto the committee of Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition (BCAC) in 2018, when we saw she had started the Ibrance petition. Her petition demanded that Pharmac get off its tush and fund Ibrance, a breakthrough medicine for the type of breast cancer that Terre had. It would help women have longer healthier lives so was an absolute no-brainer. BCAC and Metavivors, who are stropky Kiwi women with advanced breast cancer, got right in behind her on this worthy cause. Sue Wall-Cade was petitioning for Kadcylla, a medicine for another type of breast cancer, and they did the smart thing and combined their petitions. Metavivors became a force to be reckoned with and many amazing advocates, including Tracy Barr-Smith, Wiki and Malcolm Mulholland, Julie Bunnell, Elisa Wijohn, Mareta Marsters-Grubner, Mary Margaret Schuck and many more told their stories to the media, took the petition to Parliament and then made submissions to the Health Select Committee. Many realised that funding would come too late to help them personally, but they were making the case for those who would be diagnosed in future. The rest is history, as they say, with both Ibrance and Kadcylla being funded – and that’s an amazing achievement when there are around 120 medicines on Pharmac’s own list of medicines that they actually want to fund.

Terre was a courageous and effective warrior in all of this, comfortable fighting on the front line, using her big brain, her huge heart and her very articulate turn of phrase to make an unassailable case. She was an inspiration to many, including the founders of Patient Voice Aotearoa, and I’m sure Malcolm will tell that story.

Terre successfully made the case for an inclusive process in developing the Advanced Breast Cancer treatment Guidelines for New Zealand, and as a result Metavivors, BCAC and Sweet Louise all had input into the latest version. Terre herself represented Metavivors as a reviewer, and we now all have a real sense of ownership and appreciation of the new guidelines. They’re already proving a fantastic resource for patients to understand their treatment options and for advocates to argue for the recommended treatments to be funded. Terre would want to acknowledge her trusted oncologist, Marion Kuper, for the absolutely pivotal role she played in developing the guidelines, and Adèle Gautier of the Breast Cancer Foundation for all her valuable input.

We saw Terre's generous and empathetic side in her willingness and skills in administering the Metavivors NZ Facebook group. It's an amazing space where women share their toughest challenges as well as their good times, providing hugely valuable peer support from the perspective of completely understanding and going through the same shit. Terre was so good at gently taking care of people who felt vulnerable and I have huge admiration for that. The love and support that Terre's Metavivor friends gave to her was absolutely vital for Terre.

She also showed her supportive nature and willingness to take responsibility through her involvement in te Maniapoto Māra Kai Rōpū, the community garden group in Te Kuiti. Despite all her other commitments she agreed to be a Trustee for this worthy cause, that grows and distributes food to people in the community who need it.

Terre adored cats and was a long-term cat rescuer, always draped in one or more cats while she attended our online BCAC meetings. During Covid lockdowns, on my neighbourhood walks I would take copious pictures of the cats of Ponsonby and send them to Terre. She'd respond with pics of her own moggies.

Terre was great at analysing complex problems and finding smart solutions. She was an excellent strategist and we spent long hours on the phone plotting how to support particular patients who were encountering difficulties, how to overthrow Pharmac, outwit the Minister of Health and achieve better longer lives for breast cancer patients. In fact, apart from my wife Louise, Terre was the person I spoke to most often. I truly loved and learned from our unfiltered conversations and I'm going to miss my dear friend terribly.

We were all so lucky to have Terre in our lives. She brought great ideas and knowledge along with warmth and wicked humour to the BCAC committee, to Metavivors and no doubt to HD GEO and to Maniapoto Māra Kai, and certainly to her friendships. I did instruct her that I *really* needed her to live forever, so I'm quite pissed off that she quit the planet. I will think of Terre as a Valkryie, soaring high on powerful wings in a place without time, guiding the souls of her fallen warrior sisters safely home to Valhalla or Folkvangr. Always there, ready to lift us up as she did in life. Her legacy will live on in many ways, not least, in the extra time in good health enjoyed by every NZ woman treated with Ibrance.

E rere ki runga, moe mai ra e te wahine toa arohaina!

Fly high and sleep peacefully, beloved warrior woman.

Libby Burgess MNZM

Chair, Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition

www.breastcancer.org.nz

