

## The woman behind Mrs Wilf

The late Diana Unwin is one of New Zealand's least known philanthropists who distributed grants of around \$4m without ever revealing her identity.

Many philanthropists like to keep a low profile, but few are as intensely private as the late Diana Unwin, whose identity as the founder of the Wellington-based G Trust has only been revealed following her death in July this year.

The Trust – which can now be known by its full name, the Grace Memorial Trust – has distributed grants of around \$4 million since Diana first set it up in 1992.

However, very few people were aware of the identity of the woman behind the G Trust, who first began her philanthropic career in the 1980s with anonymous cash donations distributed by “Mrs Wilf” (an acronym of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the many organisations Diana supported).

Among the handful who did know was Jennifer Gill, now CEO of the ASB Community Trust, who has been a trustee of the Grace Memorial Trust since 1995. At that time Jennifer was working for the Roy McKenzie Trust and she was able to use her experience as a grantmaker to help Diana focus her giving, mostly in the areas of peace, social justice and anti-violence.

“As far as I know only one or two people ever guessed that Diana was behind the Trust, and she made it very clear that if her name got out she would stop giving,” says Jennifer. “She realised she couldn’t cope with the demands if it became public.”

However, Diana was deeply engaged with the work of the Trust and often referred deserving grantseekers to it for advice – albeit without revealing how she was associated with it.

“She could then indicate to the trustees that she would like to support the applicant, but the recipient did not need to know where the support came from.”

Diana was born in 1923, and according to *Diana Unwin:*



Diana Unwin, who secretly set up the Grace Memorial Trust in 1992.

*In Search of Peace*, a short biography published by the Trust to mark Diana’s death at the age of 91, she was passionately committed to causes such as international peace, justice and humanitarianism. In 1981 she spent time at the Women’s Peace Camp established to protest at nuclear weapons being sited at Greenham Common in Berkshire, England. She also took part in the Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament in the United States in 1986.

Despite outward appearances – she appeared a somewhat eccentric figure who was often spotted riding around the Wellington suburb of Newtown on an ancient bicycle – Diana was a relatively wealthy but very frugal woman who used a substantial family inheritance to make a difference to the lives of many New Zealanders.

In her later years she became particularly interested in restorative justice, which culminated in her providing generous funding to help set up the inaugural Chair in Restorative Justice at Victoria University – now renamed the Diana Unwin Chair in Restorative Justice.

Jennifer Gill and her fellow trustees will continue to run the Grace Memorial Trust, although Diana made it clear before she died that she did not necessarily expect the Trust to continue forever.

“The remaining trustees will be free to decide its future. In the meantime, we feel privileged to be able to continue the work of a modest but committed philanthropist.”

Copies of *Diana Unwin: In Search of Peace*, by Mark Beehre, can be downloaded from the Victoria University website: <http://bit.ly/1rlyvkc>