

**A Tribute to Beth Burns**  
**On behalf of the Long Bay-Okura Great Park Society**

On the occasion of her funeral  
At St Mary's by the Sea, Torbay  
21 July 2009

I feel particularly honoured to have been given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Long Bay-Okura Great Park Society at this farewell to Beth and celebration of her life's work.

Beth and I have been the longest serving members of the present Executive Committee of the Society, having joined at about the same time in 1997 shortly after its inception, and have participated continuously ever since. Consequently we have shared in a significant history of momentous events and much toil.

I am sure we are all profoundly shocked and saddened by Beth's sudden and untimely passing. Just a couple of weeks or so ago, she seemed hale and hearty, going about her busy life with her customary vim and vigour. Then into hospital for what was indicated as fairly routine corrective surgery but was, in fact, found to be much more serious. Nevertheless, I understand she was confident almost to her last breath she would surmount her affliction. But then a few days later she was gone from us.

As I took my dog, Kate, for her regular walk on a superb Long Bay beach in glorious early spring sunshine this morning, as indeed Beth did with her hound, Pinot, early on many a morning, I could not but reflect on the sad train of events which have brought us together here today. The thought came to mind that in death, as in life, how typically 'Beth' was the manner of her passing! She was what my dear mother characterized as 'a doer – not just a talker'. (My mother had a very low regard for people that talked a lot but did very little.)

In our committee deliberations, Beth was never short of ideas which she would advocate strongly. But once a decision was made and the time came for action, Beth would be among the first to volunteer, especially with unpopular tasks. 'I'll do it', she would say, and she did – she delivered.

Without trivializing her death in any way, it did seem to me despite her protestations of survival, perhaps she knew deep down her time had come and in true Beth style, she got on with it with the minimum of fuss and bother.

And so we of the Great Park Society remember and honour the memory of our stalwart friend and colleague who toiled mightily for the cause. She served in numerous official capacities over the years – membership secretary, treasurer, general secretary, minute taker, newsletter editor and distribution co-ordinator, film and gala

concert ticket seller, fundraiser for the Environment Court case, often undertaking several roles when the ranks were thin.

Particularly noteworthy I think was her effort with the petition we took up in 2002 urging the North Shore City Council and the Auckland Regional Council to buy the green hills forming the backdrop to the Regional Park back up to Long Bay College which we considered so vital to the preservation of its rural ambience. For months at weekends, Beth canvassed the Regional Park, badgering the picnickers to sign the petition to 'Save the Park' as she simply put it, often securing new memberships in the process. We ended up with 58,000 signatures – the largest petition ever presented to the North Shore City Council, to which Beth made a significant contribution.

I recall also her submission to the initial Commissioners' hearing of the North Shore City Council Structure Plan for the urbanization of Long Bay at the North Harbour Stadium in November 2005. Beth spoke of the deep impression the sight of the white cliffs and green fields of the Long Bay-Okura peninsula made on her as she sailed up the Rangitoto channel on arrival in New Zealand. She talked and wrote letters to the papers describing it as the 'green lung' of Auckland counteracting the brown traffic haze shrouding the City. It was this first impression which inspired and drove the passion she had for Long Bay and the work of the Society.

The newsletter folding sessions Beth organized with her loyal band of helpers have become, I am told, the stuff of legend. She also participated in the Awaruku Stream testing and Long Bay beach shellfish census taking programmes – I could go on but time is finite.

Finally, I think there is one work which encapsulates the 'essential Beth', and that is '**staunch**'; perhaps not a particularly pretty sounding word without frills or furbelows, but like Beth herself, good solid middle English. The meaning of the work in the context of a person given in the Oxford Dictionary is 'standing firm to one's principles or purpose, not to be turned aside, determined'. That I think typified Beth, but tempered with humour and compassion, an outgoing friendly nature and enormous energy, vitality and commitment.

And so, dear Beth, on behalf of the Great Park Society, its 1,100 odd members and particularly the Executive, past and present, with whom you laboured there for many years, we say fare-thee-well – may you have attained the heaven you so richly deserve. We are the sadder and poorer for your passing, but the richer for your dedicated service to the Society and the wider community, for the warmth of your friendship and concern for the wellbeing of others. In brief, a sterling role model of womanhood and true pillar of society.

Bernard Stanley  
Deputy Convenor