

Elaine Bracey

1933 – 25 Sept 2007

Elaine is the reason that I write biographies about New Zealand Variety artists. Her passing made me realise that it's no good seeking out old magazine and newspaper articles on entertainers after they have died. You need to interview them now! Since her passing I have written over 300 profiles, a number of which have become obituaries. I remember visiting John Maybury at North Shore Hospital to correct an article to be told by his son that John only had days to live. Life is fleeting!



Elaine was born in the Hokianga in 1933 and moved to Auckland as a teenager, where she attended *Otahuhu College* and discovered a love of entertainment. She married at age 22, had a son Chris Munnik and settled in Papatoetoe. Elaine was related to television host Keith Bracey, some say he was a brother, others reckon he was a cousin. Keith is 17 years her elder.

Her first job in 1950 was as sole charge of the office at *Stebbing Recording Studios* when it was in the *Pacific Buildings* on Queen Street. She was often called upon to sing backing for local artists and do voice-overs and ads. She was also the *Rendells* radio reporter. When *Stebbings* relocated to Ponsonby travel became difficult and sadly, after 3 years at the studio, Elaine had to move on.

Elaine was not one to self-promote. I'm sure there are any number of variety artists who knew her well, but many of her generation have passed on and the rest have trouble remembering their own names, let alone Elaine's story. She had breast cancer twice and when it returned for the third time she began organising her own funeral service. I was invited to give a eulogy to represent the Clown fraternity and sung Charlie Chaplin's *Smile*.

*Smile, though your heart is achin'.
Smile, even though it's breakin'.
When there are clouds in the sky you'll get by, if you ...
Smile through your fear and sorrow.
Smile and maybe tomorrow,
You'll see the sun come shinin' through, for you.*

Magicians have the ritual of the *Broken Wand*. I suggested that Clowns should have a *Broken Balloon Dog* ceremony but in the end we all agreed that the pink poodle should rest on her coffin in one piece, in peace!

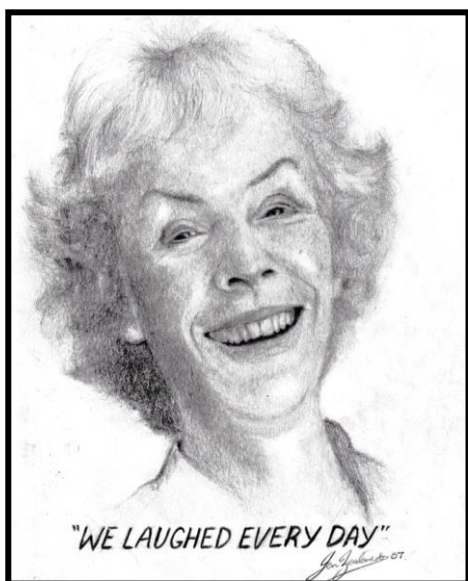
Elaine was *Boo Boo the Clown* and a magician, initially working as Jon Zealand's assistant. To be honest, it took a while for her to cotton on to what clowning actually was, but when the penny dropped she was very funny and extremely lovable. She developed a skill with modeling balloons; kids loved her.

Twenty five years of leading roles in numerous musicals, pantos and plays for MERCURY THEATRE, Music Theatre Productions, Auckland and North Shore Operatic Societies, Dolphin and Howick Little Theatres, (life Member) and Cameo roles in TV production. Elaine has been engaged for over 15 years in Music Hall companies including three year runs at the Turquoise Room and Fisherman's Wharf restaurants. First woman president of NZ Variety Artists Club in 23 years, and recipient of the Rielly Comedy Award in 1992.



Jon Zealand and Elaine toured the country from 1988 to 1994; she organised the bookings, set the itinerary and worked the shows. When there were gaps in the schedule she would put on make up and make balloons on busy provincial main-streets at \$1 a pop! At one time she had a contract to do school holiday walkabout at *Auckland International Airport* and a number of shopping malls.

Between 1989 and 2001 she performed close-up magic and balloon twisting at Avondale's *Cob & Co* and between 1990 and 1991 she did nationwide tours with visiting American illusionist Vince Carmen, plus a two week tour of Samoa with *Jon Zealand's Magic Circus*. She spent several years working for *Auckland Parks and Recreation* entertaining in playgrounds, and during the 1999 *America's Cup* spent 6 months at the *Viaduct Basin*.



From 1960 Elaine took roles in a number of amateur musicals, pantomimes and plays, plus worked at professional theatres such as *His Majesty's*, *Pumphouse*, *The Auckland* and *North Shore Operatic Societies*, *Dolphin Theatre*, *Howick Little Theatre* and *Mercury Theatre*. The list of productions includes *Merry Widow*, *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, *The Sound of Music*, *The King and I*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Oliver*, *Annie*, and *Footrot Flats*. On top of that add numerous variety shows, concerts and music halls, with long runs at the *Turquoise Room* in Otahuhu and *Fisherman's Wharf*. Cameo television roles included *Gloss*, *For The Love Of Mike*, *Plainclothes*, *Hercules* and *Shortland Street*.

For seven years she partnered up with Pat Aldersley to perform at retirement villages and did cabaret shows with Marcus Craig, aka *Diamond Lil*, including North Island tours and a stint in Fiji. Pat reckoned her friend was sincere, extremely dedicated, considerate and fun.

Elaine was a strong supporter of the *VAC*, joining in the early 1980s, sitting on committee from 1986, Vice-President between 1988 and 1991, then President from 1991 to 1993. From 2005 to 2007 she worked as our Friendship Officer. You have to ask yourself, 'What did she do in her spare time?' She was also a member of the *Radio and Television Broadcasters Club*.



In 2005 she met the love of her life Colin King. He recalls going to the *Pt Chev RSA* to watch a rugby game on the big screen and stayed on to enjoy the dancing where he met Elaine. 'We both loved dancing. I was living with her a few months later. We were soul mates. She was such a bubbly person.'

Honours were heaped on her; the *1992 Rielly Comedy Award* and a *Scroll of Honour* in 1993. For her work as the clubs only female President she was awarded the *Benny Award* in 2005. She was a Life Member of the *Howick Little Theatre*.

Elaine's son Chris died in July 2007, two months before she passed away. Her ashes can be found at *Waikumete Cemetery*, Eucalyptus Glade, Row Sc - Ash, Plot 0.

Here's some information I was able to gleam from past issues of *Inside Entertainment*.

May 1987: While performing at a Wellington theatre restaurant with Doug Aston, Johnny Bond and Guy Cater, a gas heater caught fire. The team gaily continued their song and dance routine unaware that there was a serious fire.

MARCUS CRAIG

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SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 3rd — FATHERS' DAY

Starring
Doug Aston, Noel Agnew, Patricia Aldersley, Elaine Bracey, Lynn Cantion, Murray Chenery, Craig Donnell, Debbie Dorday and Burgundy Dancers, Diamond Lil, Carl Doy, Christian Evans, Quentin Gannaway, Bruce King, Suzanne Lee, Don Linden, Keith Leggett, Louise Malloy, Derek Metzger, Chic Littlewood, Daryl Lee, Chris Powley, Felicity Rogers, Valerio Rose, Tania Rowles, Jodi Vaughan, Paul Waring and many surprise guests.

Guest appearances by
Jenny Anderson, Beaver, Lisa Chappell, Donna Clark, Phil Gifford, Miranda Harcourt, Ilona Rogers, Hilary Timmins, Ray Woolf, Stu Wilson.

Special guest star
Maggie Kirkpatrick (Prisoner, Richmond Hill)

1989: A *Gala Variety Concert* in September in aid of *Camp Quality*, held at the *Mandalay* with a cast of hundreds. Patricia Aldersley, Elaine, Quentin Gannaway, Keith Leggett and Chic Littlewood were appearing Sunday nights at *Fisherman's Wharf* from May to July.

1990: Elaine and Jon Zealando were fundraising in Samoa in June for two weeks for the *Cyclone Ofa Appeal*. They raised over \$8000. They also regularly appeared at the *Expo Centre* and performed at *Blue Light Discos* in Kaitia and Whanganui. They finished the year with a 12 day national tour with American magician Vince Carmen and *La Belle Folies*.

1993: *The Auckland Easter Show Magic Marquee* featured Peter and Margo, Christian Evans, Felicity Rogers, Jon Zealando, and Elaine as *Boo Boo*.

1993: Elaine did walkabout at the *Radio Lollipop* fund raising day for *Starship Hospital* with *Crackles the Clown* while *The Aunties* entertained on the band rotunda.

1994: Elaine and Jon Zealando performed in the *Make a Wish Foundation Benefit* evening concerts at *Logan Campbell Centre*

along with Sir Howard Morrison and his son Howard Jr, and they also joined in Chic Littlewood's childrens concerts, with *Crackles the Clown*.

1999: Elaine took time off for a holiday to Europe, staying with William Forbes-Hamilton at Torquay in the UK. Elaine worked in Auckland in his music halls at the *Star Hotel*, *Mon Desire*, and the *International Hotel*.

2002: Working at the *International Airport* she experienced extreme pain, which turned out to be a hernia and twisted colon. Like the pro she was she continued to perform until an operation was done to remedy it.

2003: saw her doing walkabout as Boo Boo at the *International Airport*, performing at retirement villages with Pat Aldersly and performing with Chris Powley at Sky City Casino. Add to that her real job, teaching English to overseas students. Here's some of her examples of 'Anguished English' seen in some international hotels:

- Please leave your values at the front desk. (Paris)
- Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar. (Norway)
- The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the duties of the chambermaid. (Yugoslavia)
- Our wines leave you nothing to hope for. (Switzerland)
- The lift being fixed for next day. During that time we regret you are unbearable. (Bucharest)

2005: Elaine set off for a month in China which included climbing the *Great Wall*, visiting the *Terracotta Warriors*, the *Panda Breeding Sanctuary*, and taking a 3 day voyage down the Yangste River. Some people have all the luck!

2006: *Veterans of Variety* at *Howick Little Theatre* with Keith Leggett, Chic Littlewood, and Pat Aldersly.

2007: Elaine and Jim Joll performed a free concert for the aged of Mt Eden and Mt Roskill sponsored by the *Lions Club*.