



Loving devotion to seeking changes

By: Roger Moroney

It was 1976 and 28-year-old Anna Natusch moved from Hastings to the Manawatu - and a place at Lake Alice Hospital where she had taken on a role working with children who had mental health issues.

She had a strong vision of how to assist the young people, and a true love and determination to do all she could for them.

"But I had no idea what was going on there," she said.

She soon found out.

"It horrified me and I resigned after a year ... I had been helping to hold up a rotten system."

She saw, heard and experienced a lot, but it did not end there because she effectively went on to battle the mental health system to try to change things - to try to introduce a more spiritual, more love-enhanced approach to that field.

Her ideals were far removed from what was an accepted and long-standing psychiatric system, and about 30 years ago a doctor she had been working with said what she had experienced, and her unique approach to dealing with psychiatric patients, should be noted - perhaps in an article, or series of articles.

But she went one better.

Sparked by what she experienced at Lake Alice and a desire to "get away from the clinical thing", the title is appropriate, *Battle Against the Rulers of Darkness - A Kundalini and Psychiatric Experience* - kundalini being an ancient primal and spiritual energy.

She will be officially releasing it today at a special function at St Luke's Church in Havelock North at 2.15pm.

Love, she said, was the most important ingredient when working or associating with people facing a mental health problem. She did not see that at Lake Alice, and her decision to take on the system resulted in a formal board of inquiry and the eventual closing of the child and adolescent facility in 1978.

The complete hospital was closed in 1999 and in the following years more than 150 former patients received ex-gratia payouts for the "inhumane" treatment they were subjected to.

Former High Court judge Sir Rodney Gallen concluded that children at Lake Alice had "lived in a state of terror".

Anna had been teaching at Hastings Intermediate School during the early 1970s and that, coupled with the fact she had a degree in psychology, saw her "headhunted" by Lake Alice management.

"They asked if I would be prepared to go over and have a look."

She did - and initial impressions were that it looked "quite nice", so she took on a position there dealing with children and adolescents.

And the nightmares emerged.

"I became appalled at the regime of terror - they held it together by terrifying them," Anna said.

"They came in relatively all right but they would eventually go down ... and they were only children."

She saw the electric shock treatment which was classed as electroconvulsive therapy.

It would often cause the young patient to pass out - one former patient described it as being like a sledgehammer being driven into the side of his face.

Painful injections of paraldehyde were also a common practice.

Paraldehyde is an anti-epileptic and used to treat certain convulsive disorders and its main use was for sedation.

It was described as painful and would leave the patient unable to walk for several hours.

Through her determination to change things, Anna (described by many colleagues as "courageous") went on a tough journey, describing some of her experiences as "horrendous in the pursuit of social justice".

There was even a time when her pursuit of change saw her labelled a psychiatric case herself.

Her book, which is an autobiography, is something she hopes will educate the public.

She said it was a story of survival and perseverance, and she did not write it to make money.

"I did it to help people."

She said from what she had seen, at Lake Alice and beyond, psychiatry was not really succeeding, and while the hospital and other psychiatric facilities has been closed down, nothing had been brought in as an alternative.

What was needed was a more spiritual approach, she said, and in pursuit of that she formed the New Zealand Hermitage Charitable Trust with Dr Ingo Lambrecht and Helen Gilbertson.

Dr Lambrecht is a registered clinical psychologist with more than 20 years of experience and Ms Gilbertson is a registered nurse.

They share her passion to make changes.

The trust reflects the desire to take a different approach to mental health, and the connections with spiritual problems.

Part of the therapy they embrace involves an alternative to shock and drug therapy, providing the opportunity for spiritual reflection and ultimate psychological renewal.

"It is to get away from the clinical thing," Anna said, and love was a crucial and valuable part of it all.

In terms of the book, she wants to get it out and about to other centres and accordingly was prepared to meet people to talk about her and the trust's ideals.

"Even if it's only a few people, I'm happy to come and speak with them."

INSIDE VIEW: Havelock North author Anna Natusch has written a book about her experiences during her psychiatric career.

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