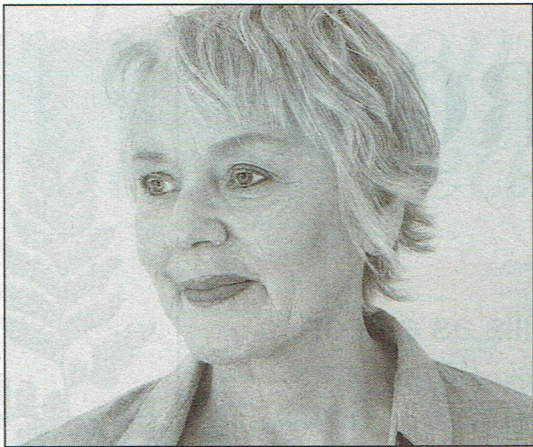


The season of unreason

David Herkt talks to Kerry Harrison about the tour that divided a nation in July and August 1981



It was a period of fierce division in New Zealand, where one part of the population was brought into sometimes violent confrontation with another. The country's political and racial attitudes, social trust, and generational cohesion had never been so nakedly exposed.

The Springbok Tour of 1981 was a groundbreaking moment and it continues to shape contemporary New Zealand. On its 40th anniversary, Kerry Harrison's new novel, *Hold the Line*, explores this fracture and its consequences, using all the ability of fiction to recreate and revive the period.

"It was a very intense time in New Zealand history," Harrison says, "and I remember that very viscerally in myself. It has always stayed with me how powerful it was."

Harrison was 23. She had spent a year in the United Kingdom but had returned to New Zealand with a young child. Her time overseas had given her a different perspective on the ferment and turmoil she found herself entering. Harrison also came from a family who took political issues very seriously. One of her brothers had been to South Africa and seen the inequities of that racially divided nation.

"I was a young woman. I had a baby and I went out with members of my family and friends and protested a number of times. I protested in Auckland and I was batoned in the stomach. My brother Rhys, who is a lawyer, represented Marx Jones, who flew the plane with flour-bombs over Eden Park. My brother Laurie, who was with Hart (Halt All Racist Tours), was a protest leader in Gisborne, where there was the first game." She is also married to the head of the E tū Union, Bill Newson.

Harrison's novel tells this story through the eyes of two main characters. Beth, 25, has returned from London after a relationship break-up. Back living with her parents, it is a time of re-assessment as she deals with her personal wounds. Beth's father is a veteran of World War II, still living with the costs, especially psychologically, but is also the classic Kiwi rugby fanatic. Her brother, Rob, is deeply involved with the anti-tour protest movement.

Viktor is Harrison's other lead character. He is Croatian, coming from an immigrant Yugoslavian family, with his own early childhood memories of

that fractured country. His parents now run a fish and chip shop, but they too have their own wartime history. Viktor has joined the police and finds himself a member of the Red Squad, training to deal with the tour protesters.

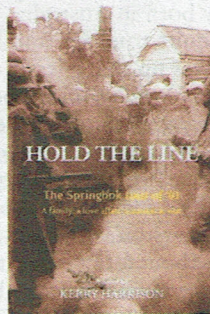
"Surprisingly, the tour is not a subject that has been well-used in fiction," Harrison comments. "It has only been covered in fiction once. It has been done in a non-fiction way — so I am not revisiting anything — but in terms of plays and novels I think there is a lack of artistic work around the tour."

Harrison's book has a real feeling of location. Her evocation of Auckland in 1981 feels pitch-perfect. Ponsonby is not the multimillion-dollar suburb it would become. Dominion Rd has yet to be immortalised by Don McGlashan's song. Everything is a little bit tatty in the wake of the era's repeated economic recessions. Harrison's wider research has also been extensive.

"There are some wonderful photographs of the tour. All our famous photographers were out there doing amazing photography and there were also a number of books which referenced the tour, which I listed at the back."

But *Hold the Line* also deals with another aspect of human history: the ongoing consequences of warfare.

"It's that generation of the children of World War II, the inheritance of that from our parents, all that trauma. Through their fathers, they are working something out — something that is true," she adds. "They are carrying their fathers, in a way."





Harrison's novel is an in-depth exploration of a central moment in the making of contemporary New Zealanders. It is engaging and evocative, breathing life into history but also usefully pointing to the origins and resonances of the events themselves, as well as all their inherent drama.

● *Hold the Line*, by Kerry Harrison (Cloud Ink Press, \$30), is out now.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. A car race.
2. BMI, or body mass index.
3. Loki.
4. The summoning charm (from the world of *Harry Potter*).
5. Northland (between Opua and Okiaio).
6. Tea.
7. Yogi Bear.
8. The modern pentathlon.
9. *The Casketeers*.
10. In Antarctica (they're large ripples on the surface of snow).

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WALKING THE TALK

"Any long-term environmental change has to include the whole community and the best place to start is with the rangitahi (next generation)," says Aka Aka dairy farmer, Stu Muir. A fifth generation farmer, Stu and his wife Kim have restored over 40 hectares of wetlands in the Waikato Delta. "Right from day dot, local iwi and students have helped out with planting and building our boardwalk. You should see these kids — they take to it like ducks to water!"

See the Muirs' story — and see what you can do — at thevisionisclear.co.nz

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