

Obituaries

Yvonne (Vonnie) Joyce Cave AHRIH, MNZM 3 February 1928 – 2 June 2021

We were all saddened to learn of Vonnie Cave's (née Anderson's) passing, after a short illness, on 2nd June 2021, aged 93.

Vonnie loved camellias (Fig. 1) and was very involved in the camellia world both nationally and internationally, for many years. She grew up among flowers, and after leaving school worked in the family farm flower-growing business. Vonnie remembered well the camellias in her parent's garden near Brunswick, a rural community in the Whanganui District. Husband Henry (Harry) Cave joined the then recently formed Wanganui Branch of the NZ Camellia Society (NZCS) in 1962, after the National Camellia Show was held there the previous year, and Vonnie joined in 1965.



Fig. 1 Vonnie Cave photographs a camellia, one of her favourite flowers.

Together, on their property 'Seafield', they created a large garden on stable sand dunes near the Whanganui coast. This garden was filled with a wide range of plants including succulents and hundreds of the new camellia hybrids that were being created in both New Zealand and around the world. They became heavily involved, both locally and nationally, in the NZCS, which in the late 1980s peaked at 2,500 members. They gave willingly and generously of their time, advice, hospitality,

and friendship to camellia lovers from around New Zealand and the world. Vonnie and Harry were the driving force in planting the excellent camellia collection at Bason Botanical Reserve in 1984, in memory of Wanganui Branch members Owen and Jocelyn Moore. Both Vonnie and Harry were judges, and their skill at growing and showing quality blooms was legendary, winning them Champion Bloom at National Show level (from among about 2,000 blooms) in 1976, 1979, 1986, 1988, and 1994. Harry was Registrar and Vice President at his untimely death in 1989.

Vonnie was made an Honorary Life Member of NZCS in 1984, yet the bulk of her involvement was still to come. She was NZ Director of the International Camellia Society (ICS) from 1990 to 2011. She was Registrar of new New Zealand cultivars from 1989 to 1997, National President from 1993 to 1996, and Bulletin Editor for 14 years between 1996 and 2010. Her passion for plant photography was made freely available for camellia society publications, and she also allowed the overseas authors of several camellia books to include her photos. Vonnie's archive of camellia photographs would be one of the best in the world.

Together, Harry and Vonnie grew, bred, and registered camellias. They registered the spectacular reticulata seedling 'Raspberry Glow' (Fig. 2) in 1989, and in 1989 Vonnie named a compact deep red semi-double japonica with flaring golden stamens 'Harry Cave' (Fig. 3). Her son Peter, also a well-known and accomplished plants-person, named 'Vonnie Cave' (Fig. 4), a miniature cream flushed pink pitardii seedling, after her in 2003.



Fig. 2 *Camellia reticulata* 'Raspberry Glow'. This is a second-generation chance seedling of *C. reticulata* 'Crimson Robe', first blooming in 1983 and named and registered in 1989 by Harry and Vonnie Cave. With crimson raspberry red flowers, the cultivar is aptly named, and there is an unusual lightness towards the base of the petals, as though they are back-lit. Cream filaments enhance the effect. Difficult to propagate, so has never been common or freely available. Photo: Tony Barnes.

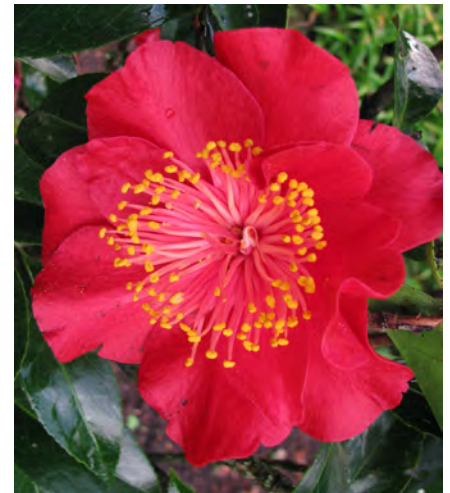


Fig. 3 *Camellia japonica* 'Harry Cave'. Registered by Vonnie Cave in 1989, this is a chance seedling of *C. japonica* 'Bob Hope', sown by Harry Cave in 1982 and first flowering in 1987. Semi-double, bright scarlet blooms with widely spread filaments of red and cream, topped with bright yellow pollen. A striking and noteworthy garden subject, but rare in cultivation. Photo: Tony Barnes.



Fig. 4 *Camellia* 'Vonnie Cave'. Registered by Peter Cave in 2003, this is a chance seedling of *C. pitardii* var. *pitardii* that first flowered in 1992. Amazingly floriferous, with clusters of pale creamy white flowers in all the leaf axils, and a very extended season. Vonnie Cave was an incredibly productive and generous person with her many, varied interests, so a plant that blooms so abundantly and exuberantly is surely a fitting tribute to her. Photo: Tony Barnes.

In her more recent years of exhibiting flowers, Vonnie excelled in the group classes of 6 or 12 blooms, and other members were always amazed at how, time and time again, she could display and win at a single show (e.g., Matamata in 1996) the classes for 6 Hybrid Blooms, 12 Blooms Different, 12 Blooms Japonica, 12 Blooms Reticulata and 12 Blooms Miniature/ Small. In 1997, to encourage interest in the small/miniature sized blooms which she loved, Vonnie donated a trophy, the H and V Cave Trophy for 12 Miniature Blooms. She almost always won it!

In addition to her numerous awards from the NZCS, she attained wider recognition. In the early days Vonnie had sporting successes with small bore rifle shooting. She was the only woman in the New Zealand team during those years and collected the national title once.

Shooting targets moved on to shooting with a camera in the 1960s. Alongside camellias, photography was the other great passion of Vonnie's life. Her first camera was given to her by her mother, to take photos of her and Harry's fast-growing sons. That was the beginning of a lifetime love of the art and challenges of photography

and enjoyment of the friendships made through it. Vonnie and her mother joined the Wanganui Camera Club in 1962. Vonnie remained a member for nearly 60 years holding all major positions, including Judge, President and Patron, and with her name on most of the Club trophies, several times. Her images covered many genres, landscapes, portraits, tabletops, photojournalism, creative and more. She moved from black and white, to slide transparencies and audiovisuals to digital and DVDs with typical determination and success. In 1976, she was awarded an Honorary Fellowship (Hon FPSNZ) in recognition of her contribution to the Photographic Society of New Zealand (PSNZ) and to photography, the highest honour of the Society and limited to seven living members at any one time.

In May 1995 she was made an Associate of Honour of the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture, recognising her lifelong involvement with horticulture in New Zealand.

In the 2009 Queen's Birthday Honours List, she was awarded the honour of Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for "services to photography and horticulture."

Vonnie authored several books that combined her photographic, horticultural, and writing skills. She wrote and took the photos for *Private gardens of New Zealand: Wanganui Rangitikei Manawatu* (Moa Beckett Publishers, Auckland, 1993), *The succulent garden* (1996), and with Valda Paddison co-authored *The gardener's encyclopaedia of New Zealand native plants* (1999).

Vonnie appeared to have boundless energy and seemed indestructible. She was always there, with a wealth of ability, knowledge, and experience. Always a perfectionist, she was meticulous in detail, living by and epitomising the old adage "if something is worth doing it is worth doing well". I remember when I put a picture of her on the cover of the NZCS bulletin for her 90th birthday, a couple of details in the writing weren't correct. I very promptly received an email putting me right! She was matter-of-fact, and didn't suffer fools,

yet despite her quiet, unassuming, and modest personality, was always willing and happy to share her many talents and achievements.

Vonnie gave unstintingly to the causes and things she loved, and over many years has enriched the lives of hundreds of fellow camellia lovers worldwide. I, along with many others, have enjoyable memories of travelling overseas with Vonnie, attending shows and sharing an informative wander around the amazing garden she loved so much. The NZ Camellia Society is fortunate indeed to have known and loved her and been on the receiving end of her devoted passion and dedication to the genus *Camellia*. She will certainly be missed.

References

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