

Karina Hilterman – HFNZ Tribute

Karina's interest in complementary medicines started while caring for her father during his cancer journey. After healing herself from Lupus (1991) using herbs, she wanted to find a better way to care for him. Karina already had a keen interest in plants and gardening and was always happiest working among them. She had learned a lot about plants of many kinds from her mother who had a wonderful ability to identify plants from even the tiniest of leaves.

Karina started her studies as a Medical Herbalist with Isla Burgess, doing a 3-year course of study. Her passion was 'Wellness' and Wellness Education. She later completed her Diploma in Medical Herbalism (Dip Med Herb) at the Waikato Centre for Herbal Studies (1996–1998), then built a successful practice in New Zealand. In the 1990's she did ground-breaking research with running a clinical trial looking at using herbs to treat HPV. This was the first independent contract study grant on herbal benefits that was given in New Zealand.

Karina developed a company, Lavender Hill Projects Pty Ltd, focused on developing effective high-quality herbal products that are supported by research. Her first product to market was an excellent cream to rejuvenate aged and damaged skin (ODE Rejuvenating Skin Cream – I can attest to this wonderful cream). She continued developing different products with the goal of creating a commercial range focused on herbal based skin care.

In pursuit of advanced knowledge, she moved to Melbourne in 2003, where she earned a post-graduate degree, Bachelor of Health Science in Natural Medicine, from Victoria University. In 2005 Karina supervised the Melbourne centre of a four-centre clinical trial through RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) looking at a topical treatment for cold sores. Karina managed the entire process of the trial in Melbourne. In 2006, she supervised the second phase of this cold sore trial. While in Melbourne she continued studying and completing educational courses as well as educating others about the power of herbs.

She later completed a Master of Science (Complementary Medicine) at RMIT University in 2020, with a thesis focused on "Actinic Keratoses (a pre-cancerous skin lesion) and Herbal Medicine Interventions."

Upon her return to NZ in 2017, Karina took on the role as President of the Herb Federation of New Zealand (www.herbs.org.nz), successfully guiding the Federation for 8 years. She has been an active member of HFNZ since 1995. She was also a member and later an Executive member, of the NZ Association of Medical Herbalists (NZAMH)

Karina joined the Tauranga Herb Society back in mid-1990's after being invited to talk to them about landscaping with herbs. She was so impressed with the group she immediately signed up, becoming a member just in time to join the committee planning the HFNZ Conference that was hosted by Tauranga HS at the Historic Village. She joined HFNZ at the same time.

Karina was one of the founders of the KatiKati Herb Society along with her friend Lizzie, Heather & Frances Young, and Jenny Ager-Pratt. While at HFNZ Conference in Christchurch in 2002, Karina submitted a remit to start Herb Awareness Week, with the first HAW occurring in 2003. Karina felt it was very important to cultivate grassroots education.

Herbs endure; they are the backbone of original medicine. This is still a strong philosophy that drives Karina's work. As part of her ongoing drive to further the education of herbs, she also wrote and published a small book "A Handful of Herbs" (2003), described as a discovery tour of nature's garden, talking about the stories, science and history of herbs. She had great plans to write an updated book. Karina had plans to publish a second expanded edition focused on general wellness.

Karina also served on the NZAMH (NZ Association of Medical Herbalists) committee for many years in early 2000's, and was recently awarded life membership in that organisation for her services.

As a member of HFNZ and NZAMH, Karina has tirelessly advocated for education, collaboration, and the advancement of herbal medicine nationwide. She has continued to keep up to date with all proposed laws affecting herbal medicine, advocating for greater recognition of western herbal medicine. This included submissions to the government to argue against proposed bans for certain herbs eg *Artemisia annua* (Sweet Annie) and *Marrubium vulgare* (Horehound). She also presented a submission on behalf of HFNZ to the government select committee against the proposed Therapeutics Bill (2023). She has been a strong proponent for improving regulations and support for practitioner-based treatments as well as for herbal medicine in general.

She continued to promote education and share her knowledge within HFNZ including through her regular informative monthly e-newsletter, as well as writing several of the Herb Awareness information sheets.

Karina was recently presented with Life Membership at the 2025 HFNZ Conference and AGM (held in Tauranga Nov 2025) for her contribution to herbal awareness and education, and her services to the Herb Federation and the wider world of medical herbalism in NZ

Thank you Karina for all your hard work and the knowledge you happily share with us all. We hope your spirit continues to flow through all of us in the HFNZ. It is now our duty to honour you by keeping your presence alive in our herbal community, in our work, and in our hearts and memories.