



STORY BY Rosamund Burton | PHOTOGRAPH BY Eddie Jim

In 2007, Melbourne-based Tilman Ruff, 62, and Dimity Hawkins, 48, helped co-found the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Ten years later, the organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

DIMITY: I met Tilman in 2002 and thought he was very serious and considered. I was consulting for the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW), the Australian affiliate of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). I felt completely unequal to him, and still do. He's a remarkable human being and held in such high esteem around the world.

He trained in infectious diseases, focusing on travel, particularly keeping humanitarian workers' safe, and has been a medical adviser for Australian Red Cross for 20 years. But he sees the 15,000 nuclear weapons in existence as the most serious threat to public health, so nuclear disarmament is his primary focus.

I fell into activism in my 20s. In 2004, when I was offered the job of MAPW executive officer, I didn't even have a degree. My son, Zachlan, was one year old and I was single parenting as my partner, Cath, was on a GP rural placement.

A mutual passion to see a world free of nuclear weapons developed our friendship, but I don't have Til's energy or reach. He works with all the key actors and governments, and attends

all the United Nations' meetings. I haven't been able to fly for several years, because I've been sick with a connective tissue disorder.

Til hasn't been well himself, and I worry about him working too hard, but he has a lot of joy in life. He's happiest riding a horse on his farm, and spending time with his wife, Charlotte, and their family, especially his granddaughter.

In 2005, Ron McCoy, the co-president of IPPNW, proposed starting an international campaign with the goal of a UN treaty to ban nuclear weapons. It was very much [Victorian GP, author and activist] Bill Williams, Til and I who initially picked up the challenge, before being joined by others. We launched the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in Melbourne in 2007, and now there are 468 partners worldwide.

Bill died in 2016. He didn't wake up one morning. It still makes me cry. We were all very close. I rang Til and he was so distressed. Now Til always talks about Bill, and the importance of Bill's work, and every time he gets choked up.

On July 7 last year, the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty [the first legally binding international

agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons] was adopted by 122 countries. I was in a motel room in Wodonga, lying on the bed watching Tilman at the UN on my mobile. I so enjoy his company, but often think, "You are an important person and I should be more reverent." I'm not - I call him Tilpers, or Tilper Bean.

The night it was announced that ICAN had won the Nobel Peace Prize, several of us were celebrating. Tilman rang, and I said, "How's that, Til?" He replied, "It's pretty good."

I hope we'll always work together, because I absolutely adore him. I think he'll do this work until he drops, and I hope I'll do it until I drop.

TILMAN: I knew of Dimity's work with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in New York, and with Friends of the Earth and the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance, before I met her through MAPW. She was a really passionate activist.

I joined MAPW in 1982, the same year my daughter was born. Responsible for nurturing and protecting this new life, I was passionate about working for a safer world without nuclear weapons. It's been my main work for the past 35 years, and I'll do it as long as I can.

We've taken different approaches. I did a medical degree, and seven years of specialist training. Dimity jumped in without worrying about formal qualifications. She's intelligent; she learnt by doing, and has really good sense. We trust and respect one another, and are good friends, but we don't catch up much socially. However, when she's met members of my family she's been just as warm to them as she is to me. It goes with her strong sense of family. She's the third youngest of 11 children.

We share an interest in art and music. In 2009, I took her to the National Museum of the American Indian in New York. She loved it, as I knew she would. Then I gave her one of my favourite CDs, Robbie Robertson's *Music for the Native Americans*. She recently gave me a Luke Howard Trio jazz CD.

We've both had our share of illness. She has a chronic immune disorder. At 34, I had bladder cancer and extensive surgery. I'm okay, but have legacy issues from being replumbed: obstructions and infections. It deepens our relationship having that shared sense of the fragility of life. Because she can no longer fly, I felt that when I went to UN meetings and the Oslo prize-giving that I was going for her as well as myself.

I sometimes wonder why she wanted do an undergraduate degree [graduating in 2013], then do honours in politics, and now a PhD at Swinburne University, because she is so knowledgeable. She's done this work at a very high level, walking the halls of the UN, engaging with diplomats, working with Indigenous communities. There aren't many bad bits to her. If I ever complain it's probably that she's sending too many emails and being bossy.

For us both, being involved in this work means we've lost an opportunity to be earning an income. My paid work is a pretty small part of my time, and doing this volunteer work is a significant financial sacrifice for Dimity. But I can't imagine her not being involved in it while she can, and I'm in awe and gratitude to her for that. She really is a treasure. ■

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