

At home with... Ewa Fenn The woman caring for the city's cultures

Good things come in small packages – and at a petite 4ft-something, Ewa Fenn is clearly one of the good ones.

She's the woman who's played a pivotal role in helping new migrants to the Bay of Plenty for more than 10 years. And this month, Ewa became the 2015 recipient of the annual Recognition for Services to Migrants award.

But who is Ewa Fenn? Where does she come from and what is her culture?

Ewa was born in Poland, a country known for its medieval architecture, Jewish heritage and hearty cuisine. For most of her early life, Ewa studied and worked in Krakow, one of Poland's oldest cities. There, she earned a degree in biology and worked in the department of comparative anatomy at the university.

"The research I was doing later on was based on ecology. Part of that work, I completed an expedition to Antarctica to collect white blooded fish, which was at that stage very new and was just recently discovered."

Today, she's a mother of three, has been married twice and went yachting and

caving in her heyday. "That was all of the time before I left Poland," says Ewa.

She migrated to NZ in 1982 at age 30-something, first to Christchurch before settling in Tauranga later on.

Here, Ewa loves to walk. "My latest achievement was the Tongaririro Alpine Crossing last year," says Ewa.

There's something very special about Ewa and her home. We feel welcome here, beliefs and all. Admittedly, Ewa never wanted the role as president of the Tauranga regional Ethnic Council in 2007 after becoming a member just three years prior. She thought she'd be in way over her head. But, it seems Ewa was the perfect woman for the job.

Multicultural meetings began around her kitchen table, before Creative Tauranga offered a space in their then offices at No. 1 The Strand. Introducing monthly Living in Harmony evenings to showcase and get to know the various cultures of people who live in Tauranga



"I believe we are people of the world"



was next on Ewa's agenda.

When Creative Tauranga moved offices, Ewa was faced with the challenge of finding a new home for the group.

So she went straight to the city's top man, the mayor. A space for

rent at the Historic Village was offered, but Ewa turned up her nose at first.

"I imagined the migrant centre being in town, so newcomers could actually see us when they're out there looking for us."

But, because "everything else was too expensive" they eventually took the room.

"The rest is history," says Ewa. "I've always wanted a migrant centre for the city, a place where people can meet us." **Zoe Hunter**



Photos: Chris Callinan