



Kia Manahndhwi

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He Mihi

Tēnā koutou,

Kia Manawanui started with an acknowledgement that our rangatahi, while dealing with an ever-changing world, possess a wisdom and maturity about them. Their personal experiences, whakaaro, hopes and dreams all inform the people they wake up as each day. The influences of their whānau, friends, online presence and the world around them impact how rangatahi identify and manage their well-being and their cultural connection.

Kia Manawanui aims to acknowledge the determination of our rangatahi and uplift the learnings they can share.

This project grew from the ground up as a rangatahi-led initiative, created to highlight the voices and experiences of young Māori in Aotearoa and Australia. At its heart, the project aims to showcase authentic, aspirational narratives that reflect the diverse ways rangatahi connect with te ao Māori. We spoke with rangatahi about their lives, their journeys, and the things that matter most to them. By creating a space that felt natural and inclusive, the project empowered them to share their stories in their own way. The things we've learned from them cannot be distilled into one short story. There are many stories within each experience which help to capture a broader idea of who our rangatahi feel they are. From multi-cultural backgrounds and navigating what this means to them, our rangatahi are embracing the best of what they feel empowers them.

Some of the rangatahi felt strong attachments to their cultural identity while others felt a disconnect to their

cultures and their home. The aim of this project is to remind our rangatahi, our kaumātua, our mokopuna of their strength, creativity and give credit to the ways their hauora is being cared for. Our rangatahi know how to care for themselves and each other so let us shed light on their efforts and perseverance.

Hauora te tinana, te wairua, te hinengaro are important in keeping our whānau moving and shaking every day. Our rangatahi reflected on important members of their whānau, the beauty of te taiao, waiata, mahi toi and their connections to friends and loved ones in assisting to maintain their health and wellbeing. They shared experiences relating to their pride in their identity, connection to te ao Māori, those who inspire their personal pride, and some of their hopes and dreams for their whānau. These stories represent those whakaaro and lived experiences.

To all who participated and allowed us to hear from you, thank you. In sharing your laughter, deep thoughts, strong opinions, and some of your most precious memories you have given life to this project and its intentions. This project would not be what it is without you all, and we sincerely hope our efforts will give you another source of pride in yourselves and your identities.

For our whānau, our adopted whānau, friends, loved ones laid to rest – we hope you know the impacts you're making just by being here with us all.

Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou...



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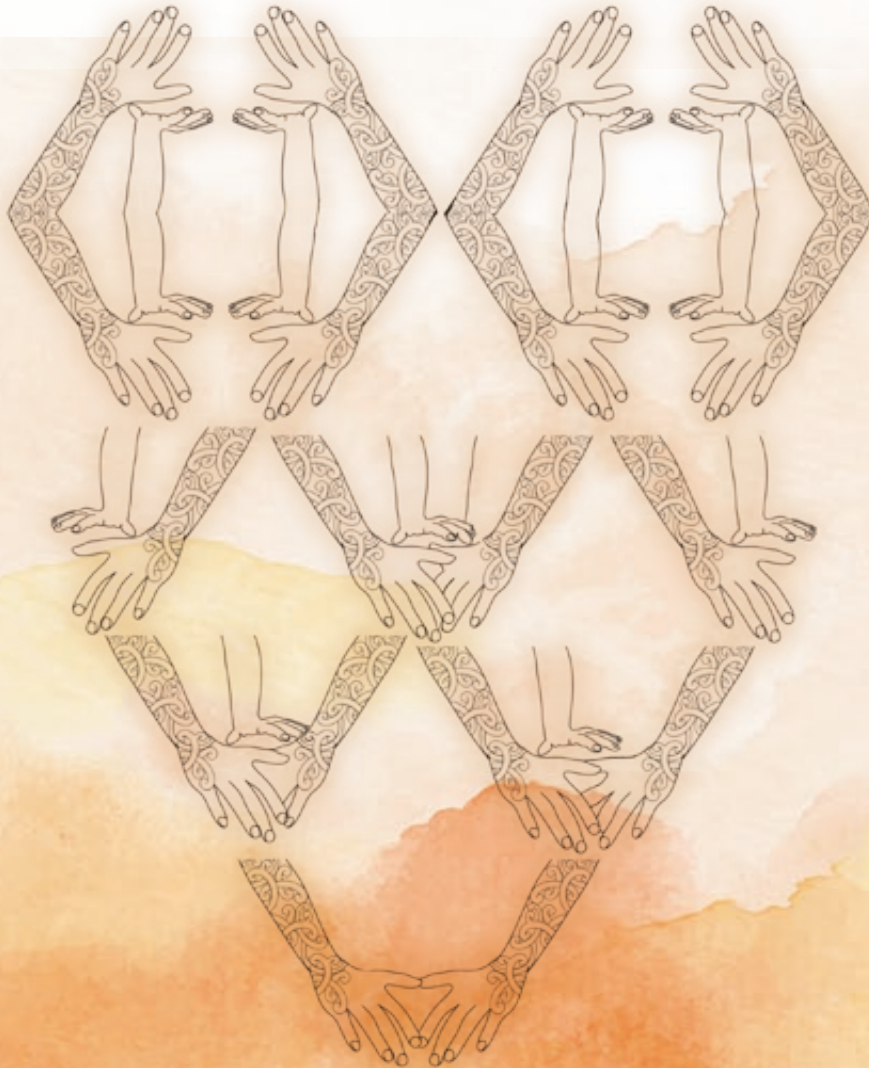
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Introduction to Open Letter

Each of us has been inspired by someone. These people, whoever and wherever they are, hold importance to us and our journeys. Whatever wisdom they've shared has helped us become who we are. They matter. All the participants held someone close who helped them feel confident in who they are, helped them find their way. Open Letter is a way to acknowledge these people for all of us, regardless of who they are or where our own journeys have led us. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.



Open Letter

Tēnā koe,

How are you? I hope you've been well. It may have been some years since we last spoke, maybe our paths haven't crossed in years. Perhaps, you're still an active part in my life. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Anyway, I'm writing to thank you.

At some point we met, you had an impact on me. Your care, kindness, a brutal reality check, whatever you did or said changed something for me. You showed me I'm worth something in a world where I've been told otherwise. You helped shape me into someone I'm proud to be and I'll never be able to thank you enough. I know how to be proud of myself because of you.

The things I'm doing would amaze you. You'd probably say something like, "I never thought any less of the way you would walk into the world."

I can hear you in my head, cheering me on when I struggle, reminding me of what you saw in me and how I want to honour that. I talk about you to anyone who listens. I tell them how you pushed me to be more, see more, do more. We laugh at the growlings you'd give me when I stuffed up or looked like I was about to. You created a safe space for me to thrive, to make mistakes and to learn from them. You helped me grow up.

Whether you're a mentor, teacher, friend, still in my life or not, you taught me the value of being human. Your guidance has reminded me to always stand strong in who I am. Your time with me is something I cherish and can always find comfort in.

Thank you for seeing me, for me.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, Your proud rangatahi



Introduction to Kakahu

Korowai are important to Māori. They can be worn for graduations, gifted at weddings, or used to dress the tūpāpaku of our loved ones for tangi, keeping them safe in their journey through the afterlife. They carry a history and add to our own. This short poem speaks to this importance, something many of the participants acknowledged in their connections to te ao Māori.

Kākahu

Layers of our history

Skin of our taiao

Protection and prayer shadowed in blue
Green and brown, like the eyes of our māmā
And their māmā and their māmā before

Plaited whakapapa placed on our shoulders

Bear our mana as we bear yours

Flakes of skin sinking into fibres

Knitting us closer together

Keep our spines tall

Our shoulders strong, our core tight

Your karakia for us carefully spoken

Whispered through each thread

Wings of our tīpuna, weaved

Twisted into each other

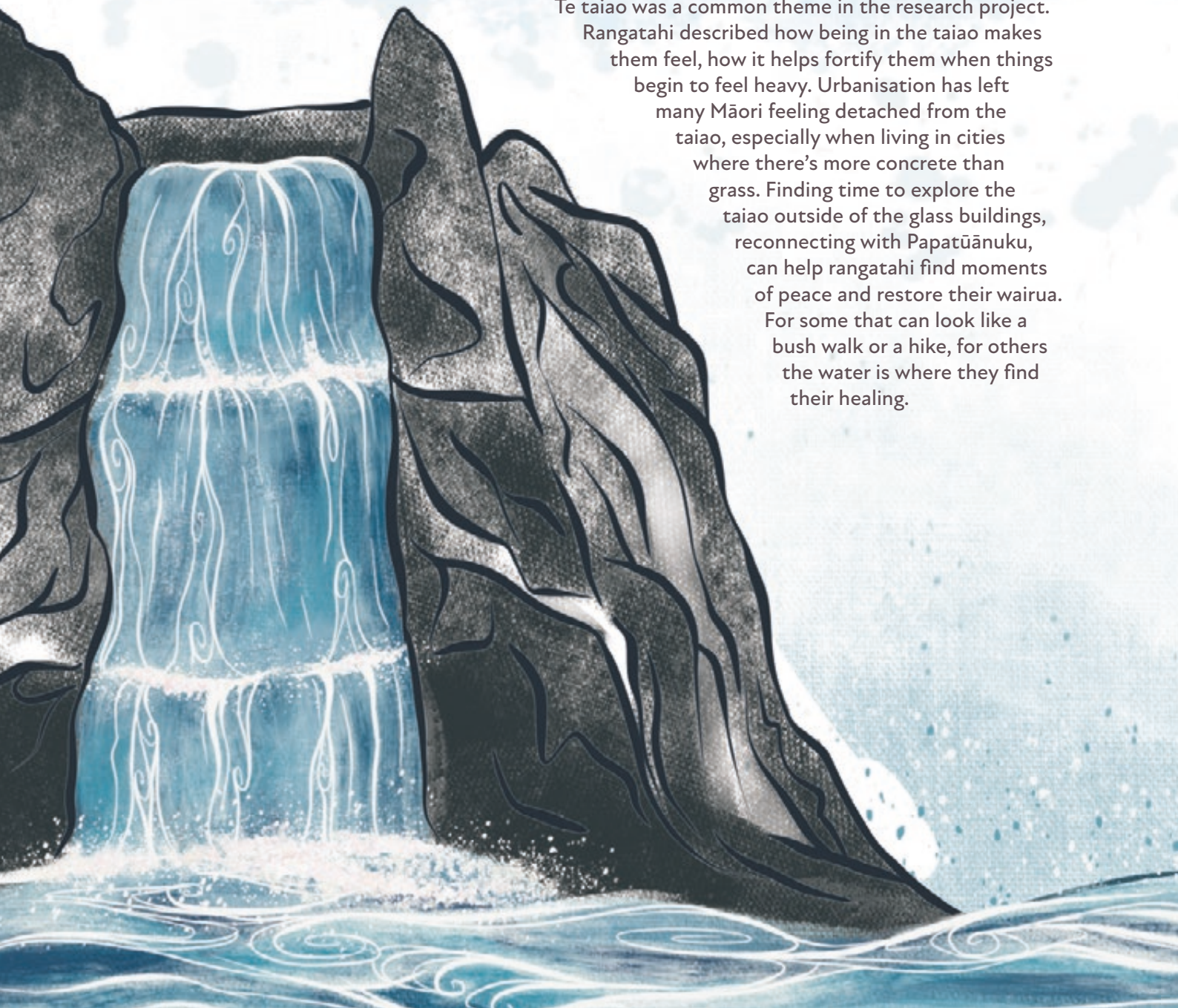
Envelope us in your armour

Uplift us so we soar

Carrying you in our flight

Introduction to Where Water Falls

Te taiao was a common theme in the research project. Rangatahi described how being in the taiao makes them feel, how it helps fortify them when things begin to feel heavy. Urbanisation has left many Māori feeling detached from the taiao, especially when living in cities where there's more concrete than grass. Finding time to explore the taiao outside of the glass buildings, reconnecting with Papatūānuku, can help rangatahi find moments of peace and restore their wairua. For some that can look like a bush walk or a hike, for others the water is where they find their healing.



Where Water Falls

This day held potential. Grey clouds swollen with overdue showers, sun spurting pale yellow rays though unclouded patches of sky. The perfect day for exploration and adventure. Ngaehe stood at her kitchen bench, drinking her first cup of coffee, sipping away as her mind worked. What do I want out of today? What would make me happy right now? She'd begun routinely asking herself these things. It was never long before an answer would form. Some days had been spent painting, others walking through the ngahere. Today would be different again, as Ngaehe downed the last dregs of her second cup of coffee so she could organise herself. Half an hour later she'd begun driving, sensing her wairua beginning to expand with anticipation.

She drove until she reached the carpark at the trail's entrance. The overcast sky had kept constant, clouds humming with electricity, yet the air remained fresh. As she walked, Ngaehe inhaled deeply, watching the grey light of day peek through the treetops overhanging the trail

path. She felt her body buzz with excitement. No one ever thinks to be out here on days like this. *I'll surely have the place to myself*, thinking back to the mostly empty carpark. Taking precaution where mud had glugged away the path's edge, she admired the lack of the city centre's disorienting atmosphere. No clanky construction disrupting the quiet, no angry motors to drown out birdsong or wind. Nature had been allowed to exist peacefully here, the effortless rustling of the tree line, the whisper of the wind around her. Soon she reached the path's end and she caught the glistening of daylight on the surface of the water.

How truly lovely it is to feel the natural realm when you're standing right at its epicentre. She felt a pull in her stomach, the wind tugging at her hair. It wasn't long before she'd pulled off her clothes and navigated carefully over the rocky edge of the pool. She dove in, the shock of the negative temperatures permeating her skin. The cold bit at her, causing her to gasp for breath, but she couldn't have been happier. She waded

across the pool until she could stand beneath the shower of the waterfall. She looked up at the spray of water, noting the mossy stone face carved by the water's flow. She sighed; *this is where I need to be.*

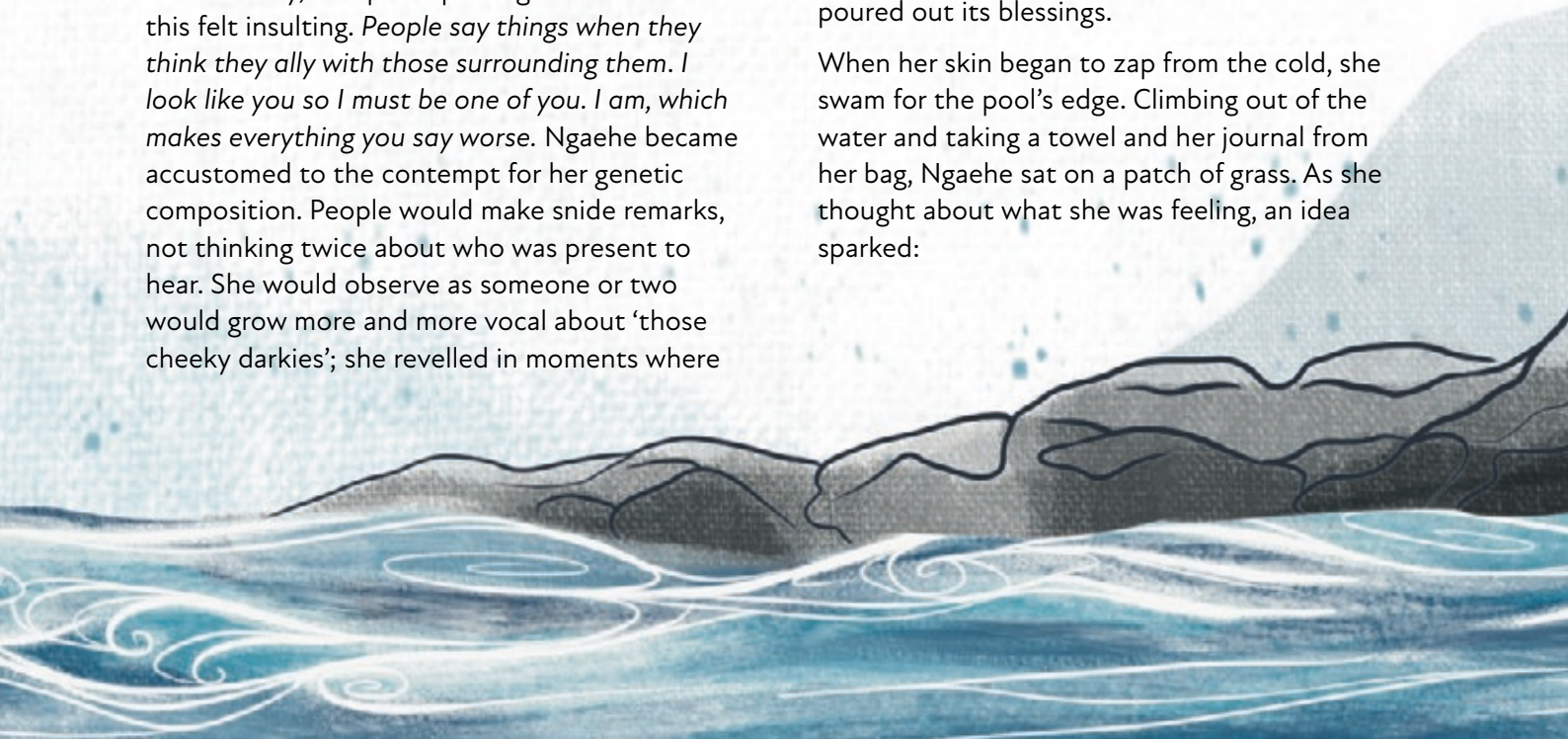
This year had been challenging. As she explored her cultural origins, Ngaehe discovered a war within herself. There were positives to both, of course. Compared to what her tīpuna had faced, even what her parents had experienced growing up, Ngaehe's situation looked easy. The world had evolved to appreciate Māori much more. Language courses, podcasts, social media platforms dedicated to empowering Māori were popping up everywhere. Acceptance was being given more often, which made being Māori feel easier.

What about being Pākehā? This had never seemed easy, except for passing as Pākehā. Even this felt insulting. *People say things when they think they ally with those surrounding them. I look like you so I must be one of you. I am, which makes everything you say worse.* Ngaehe became accustomed to the contempt for her genetic composition. People would make snide remarks, not thinking twice about who was present to hear. She would observe as someone or two would grow more and more vocal about 'those cheeky darkies'; she revelled in moments where

someone would ask her name once these remarks had been established. The constant battle of being in both camps of a fight which seemed on-going was exhausting; the coloniser and the colonised. Being Pākehā and Māori felt like someone forcing together two magnet ends. *How do I figure out who I am?*

She stayed at the base of the waterfall, ignoring the icy water making her body numb. Closing her eyes, she took slow, steady breaths. Hā ki roto, acknowledging Hinemoana for her melody in the space, the cleansing power of her forces. Hā ki waho, acknowledging Tāne-mahuta for the protection he offered, allowing her to reconnect to Te Ao Māori in peace and solitude. Time passed and Ngaehe began to feel the bog of mundane living wash away from her. She could feel the rejuvenation of her wairua as the water poured out its blessings.

When her skin began to zap from the cold, she swam for the pool's edge. Climbing out of the water and taking a towel and her journal from her bag, Ngaehe sat on a patch of grass. As she thought about what she was feeling, an idea sparked:



23 July 2022

**Who am I?
Not a bird, nor plane
Yet I soar through clouds
Am I both?**

**Whistling and whirring
Can I make music?**

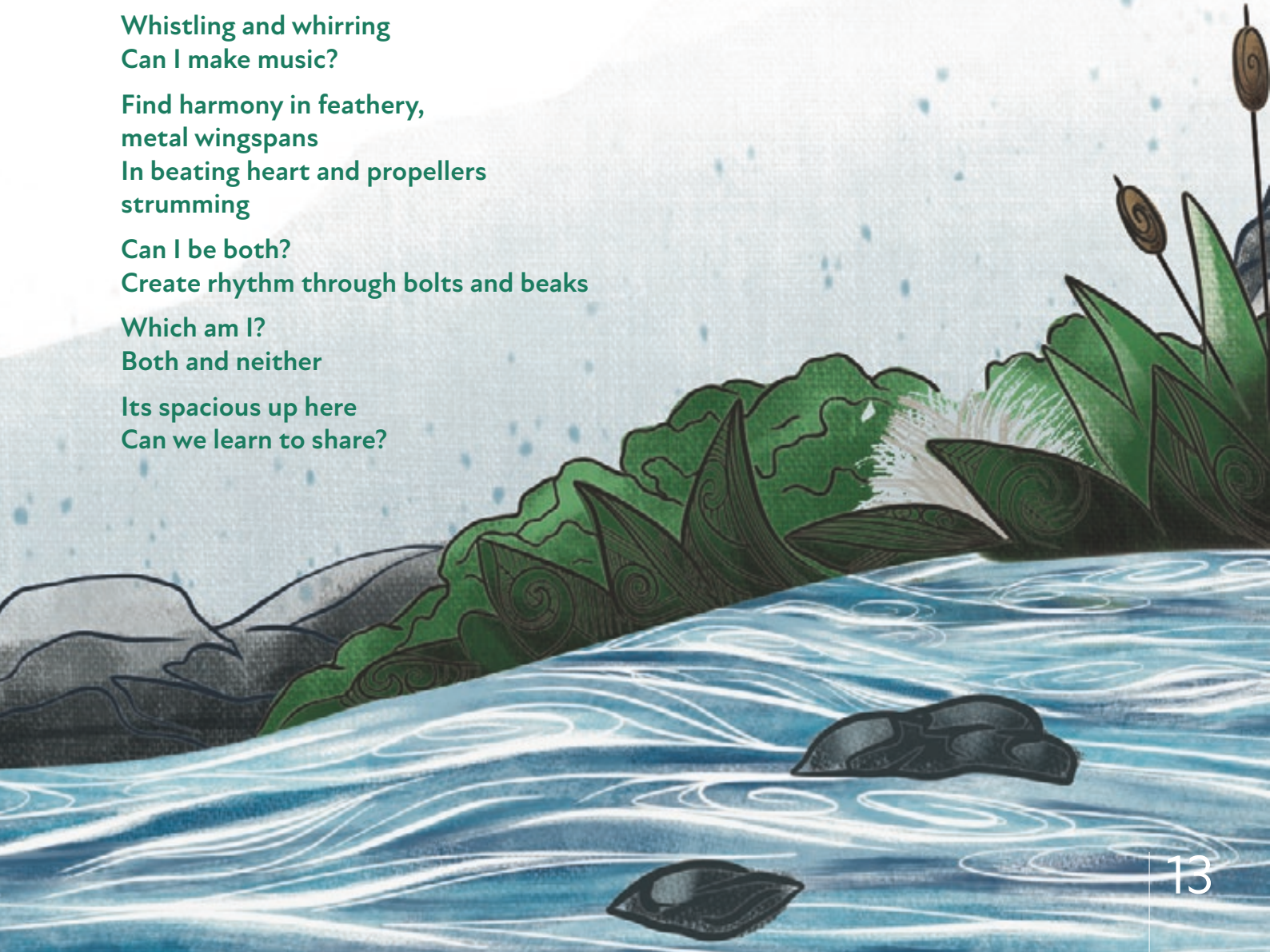
**Find harmony in feathery,
metal wingspans
In beating heart and propellers
strumming**

**Can I be both?
Create rhythm through bolts and beaks**

**Which am I?
Both and neither**

**Its spacious up here
Can we learn to share?**

She reread her last line before closing her journal. Looking up, she noticed the rainbow that had emerged from those swollen clouds.



Introduction to Millionaire Mindset

The word “millionaire” is rarely thrown around when discussions about Māori and our experiences are happening. In terms of wealth, it is predominantly used to describe financial status. What about other kinds of wealth? What about the value of our tīpuna, whānau, the history of our people? These things, shared with us, handed down through our genetics provide wealth to our wairua and who we are. We come from a rich people who are firm in our value, in what we have to gain from what our kaumātua have fought for. Let us acknowledge the millionaire status of our birthright.



Millionaire Mindset

We inherit rich soil
Shores graced by the hiwi of waka
Footsteps of tīpuna
Bodies returned to the whenua with time

We inherit rich soil
Shores graced by the hiwi of waka
Footsteps of tīpuna
Bodies returned to the whenua with time

We are rich in heritage
Pūrākau planted in our taringa
Whispered words of our tīpuna
Our guide in the journey of who we are

Mahi toi
Waiata
Whānau
Marae
Knowledge
Love
Dreams
Language

There is strength in our bones
Passion in our voices
Crafted from the days our waka graced the shores
Coiled in our whakapapa to our own first breath

There is no price to our estates
Forged by the feet of our ancestors
Spoken into being in our first words
We are richer than they will ever understand
Millionaires in more ways than one



Introduction to River Boys

How are our tāne caring for their wellbeing? Often, it feels like our tāne are left out of the conversation, or not thoroughly considered in terms of managing their wellbeing and how they remain connected to te ao Māori.

Where do they turn when they need to awhi their wairua? Who do they count on? What helps them feel strong? River boys explores how our boys uphold themselves and each other.

River Boys

The midday heat created a thin layer of sweat on Gene's forehead. He looked at the pitifully slow-turning fan in the corner of the lounge. Doors open, no one home, and no wind or cool breeze to offset the blaze of the sun. The game he'd loaded into his PlayStation did nothing to distract him from the boredom of being alone and, irritated, he shut it off. His phone buzzed and a text from his mate, Matt, popped up:

Bro, this heat is killaaaaa! Keen for a swim down at the river?

Truthfully, Gene could've been out with his whānau. They'd asked if he'd wanted to come to Tauranga with them but the opportunity for some peace and quiet from his younger siblings and his parents seemed too good to pass up.

"Nah, all good, Mum. You guys go on, I'm just gonna hang around home for the day!"

Fat lot of good that had done him. Usually being alone hadn't felt lonely, until today. He unlocked his phone and pulled up the text thread with Matt:

Yo, I didn't know you were back already! I'm keen bro. Grab your speaker and I'll pick you up.

Grateful to have a way to cool down and some company, Gene changed into some shorts, started up his car and pulled out onto the road. Windows down and sun shining, he felt relieved to be out of the house and on his way to pick up his friend. Matt had been away for most of the summer visiting family overseas. Most of his boys had plans out of town and Gene hadn't seen much of them. His summer had been monopolised by mahi, his own whānau wanting

to spend time with each other. It wasn't like school anymore, when they'd all worked the same dusty jobs and spent all their free time causing mischief. But in moments when one or two could come together, his world made sense again.

Pulling over to the curb outside Matt's Mum's house, Gene honked the horn and waited. Matt and his younger brother, Tai, quickly made their way down the driveway, flung open the car doors and shoved into the seats.

"Took you long enough to get here," Matt cheekily grinned at Gene.

"Shut up, eh! You can walk next time." All three of the boys chuckled. As Gene went to pull back onto the road, Matt reached across and halted the steering wheel.

"Wait, bro, there's one more." He said. Confused, Gene turned to look down the driveway as Matt beeped the horn and yelled for whoever to stop taking their sweet time. Just then, a familiar face appeared as he walked down the driveway. Gene's expression went from surprised, to shocked, to a combination of both. It had been two years since any of them had seen Ritchie and here he was, making his way round to the drivers'

passenger side. He opened the door and slid into the back seat, next to Tai. He reached a hand into Gene's hair and scuffed his head.

"What's good, bro?" Ritchie asked him.

"You're an egg!" Gene shouted, as the boys all burst into laughter at him, "you didn't even tell me you were back. Did you know?" He continued, motioning to Matt.

"Where do you think I was when I went to Aus? Was there to bring him home for a bit." Matt replied, smiling. The four of them spent a few minutes chattering to each other, goofing off like they did before they all grew up and began their own lives. However, hanging out for the cold water of the river, Gene eventually pulled back onto the street and drove towards their old swimming haunt. As they pulled up and Gene parked, Ritchie stepped out of the car and took a deep breath in.

"I've missed this place," he muttered to himself in a melancholy tone.

Gene noticed, but before he could say something, Tai was yelling, "race youse!" and the boys were all heading down to the bank and leaping into the water. Gene followed, keeping his thoughts in the back of his mind, and jumped into the water after them. They splashed around for a bit before Matt climbed back up the bank, with help from the rope on an over-hanging tree, and started up the speaker. Music flowing, the summer's heat above and the cool water below, the four boys spent the next few hours in each other's company. They wrestled each other on the bank and in the water, shoving each other into the water, popping manus and swinging from the rope. Matt and Tai had ended up play-fighting in the water, leaving Ritchie and Gene on the bank's edge. Gene took the opportunity to find out why Ritchie had seemed so dejected earlier.

"You all good, bro? You seemed a bit mopey when we got here."

Ritchie looked at Gene quizzically, with a fleeting expression of suspicion crossing his face, "Nothing, bro. I'm all good, just glad to be home, you know." Gene didn't feel convinced by the words or expressions coming from Ritchie.

"Come on, bro. We aren't kids anymore. You don't have to pretend to be all tough. What's going on?" Gene pushed. Ritchie looked at him and held his gaze for a few moments. Gene worried Ritchie might end up end up shoving him and telling him to wise up. Make a bit of fun of him for wanting to get deep in their feelings. But Ritchie's hard stare softened, and he began to open up.

"I just couldn't hack it over there, bro. I missed home, I missed my mum. Missed you boys and our dumb antics. I missed doing stuff like this, pissing around and stuff," he offloaded. "When Matt told me he was coming over to Brizzy, I told him I'd meet up with him on his way back. Just said I needed to visit home for a bit, you know. But I didn't tell him about my dream."

Gene paused as he took in all of what Ritchie was telling him. He understood what Ritchie was feeling, but wondered why he hadn't told Matt about this dream. What was it about? Was he just shamed out about talking to his mates about his dreams?

"What was your dream about?" He asked. Ritchie seemed to hold his breath briefly before he began to explain. Ritchie had a dream where his father had come to visit him. His dad had died years ago, and Gene knew it was still a sore point for Ritchie. He continued to explain the dream.

He'd been sitting on his patio at his flat in Brisbane. His dad walked through the closed flyscreen behind Ritchie, pulled up a chair and sat down. Ritchie asked

what he was doing here, freaked out by the sight of his father. He said his dad told Ritchie that he knew he was feeling lost. He could feel his son drifting away from himself. He knew no one in Brisbane, hadn't made new friends and was struggling being on his own.

"He let me know he was worried for me, worried I'd lose myself," Ritchie said, "So he told me to come home. Told me I needed to reconnect with my awa, that it would give me strength, help me come back to myself. He told me that's what he'd do any time he felt lost. Just come back to our awa, almost like a cleansing. Like being healed. Bro, I must sound insane!"

"No," Gene reassured, "You don't. I get it. I've been feeling a bit off as well, and being here today with you boys, at our awa, it does feel healing. You're not insane, bro. Our tīpuna are connected to us in whakapapa, in the taiao, in us and our spirit. It's not insane, Nanny always said the wai was cleansing. Your dad just knew where you needed to be."

Overcome by the understanding his friend held for him, Ritchie hugged Gene and began to cry. Wondering what the two on the bank were talking about, Matt and Tai climbed out of the water and asked what was up. Gene nodded to Ritchie as they pulled out of the embrace. So, as Matt and Tai plonked down on the grass beside them, Ritchie retold the story of his dream. Matt and Tai listened to every word and when Ritchie finished, they thanked him for sharing his experience with them. They all began talking about how different life was now as compared to their teenage days.

"There's no way we would've dared to share something like that at sixteen," Matt said.

"But it's not something to feel whakamā about either," Tai added, "I think we've grown up a lot and sharing this stuff now is what we should be doing." The boys all

agreed and for some time the conversation continued. As the sun dipped lower towards the horizon the group decided it was time to head home. They all piled into the car again and Gene drove back to Matt's. As the three boys got out, Matt turned back and stuck his head in through the open-door cavity.

"Should we all go for a boost tomorrow? Find another awa to come clean with?" He said to Gene.

"Yeah bro, I know your crusty toes could do with some cleansing for sure," Gene joked. He waved to the boys before heading back to his own house. Seeing his parents' car in the drive, as he walked in through the side door of the kitchen, he saw his mum washing some dishes. He walked over to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"What was that for, son? Where are you coming from?" She asked, with a surprised but pleasant look on her face.

"Nothing, Mum. Just been down at the river with the boys."



Introduction to Cultural Cocktail

Most participants are Māori AND, meaning their genealogy is mixed. One participant discussed their feelings around being Māori/Fijian Indian. They've grown up in Australia and rarely have the chance to visit Aotearoa or Fiji, which adds some guilt for them around the disconnection they feel from their cultures. For this participant, being able to represent each part of their cultural heritage holds large importance in how they walk through the world. This poem aims to celebrate holding diverse whakapapa.

Cultural Cocktail

There is more to me

Drink me in and taste it all
More than one culture in my cup
Note the flavours

Western influences are blunt

But widen your palate
My lineage is acidic
Sharp tīpuna permeate me

Melanin in my skin

From more than one whenua
Carries the depth of many whakapapa
Feel the heat of my people trickling down

I am intoxicating

I stumble over my own strength
Pack a powerful punch
Hit the back of your throat with fortitude

I laugh with indigeneity

As I overwhelm your taste buds
Confuse your narrowness
Try to dissect me, I dare you

Tino Rangatiratanga

Stories are never only one single format. A story can be told from someone's ideas, thoughts, personality, feelings and not just their words.

Each participant had many whakaaro, feelings, opinions and stories of their own to share.

Each of those details make up the rangatahi who participated in this research project. It felt important to find a way to convey each of the important points they shared, in a playful way, much like the rangatahi themselves.



Tino Rangatiratanga

Love My Mates

Teaching my knowledge of financial literacy to other Whānau

Body Right
Mind Right



Peaceful Protestor



Mokopapa

Empowered by my Māmā & Nanny

Business Self Starter

Te Taiao

Film Maker



Kapaz



Māori as well as (I am more than one)

Good Kai

Waiata



Jamming with the Whānau

Whakapapa

Our Moana

Our History Is Worth Understanding

Family Recipes Passed Down



I Am Not A Stereotype

Mahi Toi

Kaiako

Noho Marae

Loud and that's okay!

Gym

Rugby

My Tā
Learning Māori through TikTok

Feeling the earth under my feet

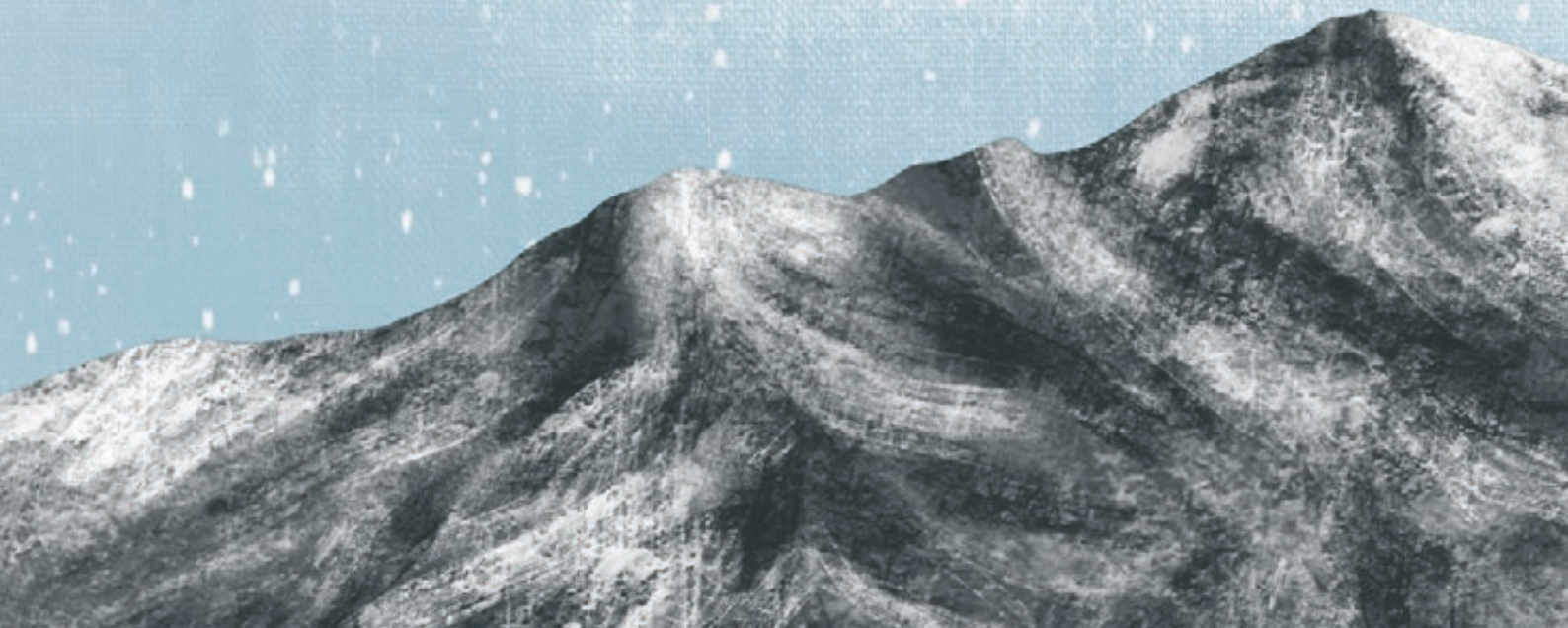
Grandparents

Want more for my kids



Introduction to Whitewash

Many Māori have heard the term “whitewash”. Sometimes it’s used by others to describe us, sometimes we use it to describe ourselves. It implies there is a threshold to be considered a “true” Māori. There isn’t. As Māori we have a right to claim our whakapapa, regardless of how much or how little we know about it. This poem addresses the use of the term “whitewash” directly, in the hope of inspiring pride in our whānau in being who they are, to their own version of their fullest capacity.



Whitewash

incredible teeth whitener
calcium-filled bones they are
making sure our tinana are sustained

strong smelling bleach
keep our white sheets pristine
the people we welcome to our whare feeling
like 5-star hotel guests

maunga showered in their winter coats
marvelled at by wandering eyes
how beautiful our whenua must feel

immaculately cared-for Air Force Ones
crisp Nike ticks have our feet looking fresh
clad in comfy soles

wedding dresses flowing
make our women feel like queens
the special days shared by whānau and friends

our whakapapa though
that can't be bleached
covered over in the haunting layer of a label
meant to keep us from connecting to ourselves

keep that whakaaro away from us
we know who we are
we are not white washable

your efforts while persistent
are not valiant to our tīpuna
who fought tooth and nail to give us our pride
ngā mihi though

Introduction to Waiata

In speaking with one participant, they relayed their love for waiata being fostered by their dad. Singing with him had a big impact on their knowledge of te ao Māori, their confidence and identity as a rangatahi Māori. Māori waiata tell stories of the past, present, and dreams of what the future can look like. They can be cautionary tales, love stories or used to address political issues, among other subjects. They are also a powerful tool for reconnection and learning about who we are and where we come from. They can also help in figuring out where we go from the current point in own lives. This short story explores the depth of how seemingly small things can shape us.



Waiata

Waiata are poetry. They capture emotions and evoke memories sometimes buried deep in my psyche. I remember being little, seeing Dad pick up the guitar and begin strumming.

“Sing, my baby.” He’d say to me.

Our love language for each other. We’d always sing together. Even as a child, I could feel my soul being lifted, humming melodies and singing at the top of my lungs. My most precious memories begin with a few guitar strings plucked by nimble fingers, a radio turned up, a tune hummed. There’s an energy which arises from waiata, learning harmonies and chords from the people most important to you.

We sing to laugh, cry, smile, to comfort our loved ones as we send them off. Dad taught me, unfailingly, the value of a song and the love that emanates from singing with family and friends. I would watch as his wairua became empowered by having me sing with him, to him. He helped me find my voice at an early age, something to covet as a wahine Māori in an ever-changing world. Through waiata, he taught me our histories, stories, deepest feelings are knitted with chords, keys, high notes, low notes. When we sang together, our wairua would flow along with the tune. I watched my dad come alive each time

he picked up his guitar, marvelled at the way he played, yearning to come alive the same way he did. From him, his love of music, I learned the importance of uplifting the people around me. I learned how to uplift myself. Waiata enlighten us to this deeper connection between us and our loved ones, the world around us, the worlds before and beyond us. It became our ritual to sing together while he played, watching his fingers work the strings and hearing the room around us dissolve into songs. My love for waiata came from my love for my dad.

“When we sing, bub, we share the story being told. We become shareholders and knowledge bearers of another person’s message. Some waiata uplift, some make us think. Others remind us of the happiness and joy there is in being who we are.”

As I grew up, his words lived in my mind. I branched out to kapa haka, sharing the love my dad and I have for waiata and stories with other kids who shared our thinking. We’d have practices and muck arounds, seeing how far we could push our voices, how loud we could go, testing our control. We morphed from just a group of kids learning words to songs to a rōpu of fierce determination. We wanted the stories we learned from our waiata, our haka, to be shared with everyone. We became embodied by our tīpuna, their knowledge and strength passing through us as we chorused our sets. The pride in

our whānau, glowing from their tearful faces as we performed, became like nectar for our wairua. As kids, our voices are precious, and those we share it with become precious to us. Our waiata helping to keep us connected.

I began singing with my family on weekends. All of us trying to outdo each other in every way, mocking each other and laughing together. I learned we all shared the same fondness in being uplifted by each other, teasing one another to continue exploring the bounds our voices were capable of reaching. The love and joy felt by all of us is a core memory.

I struggle to recall a time where I wasn't singing. Whether it be with friends or whānau, music is bonded into almost every memory I have. Waiata have become grounded in my soul, they are part of me. Even in moments of grief I can remember songs being sung, melodies and harmonies all around me. Our waiata, our Māori waiata, helping keep us grounded when life becomes overwhelming. The itch for a good cry accompanied by a sorrowful song, allowing us to hold a safe space in our sadness. We can feel what we sing.

It became so important to me to carry on sharing that love I received from my dad, in our one-on-one jam sessions, with everyone around me. Hearing melodies which fit with how we're feeling gives us space to breathe, permission to acknowledge our emotions. I can't imagine a life without waiata right there with me, holding me steady. It has become my love language with all who are important to me. Not all of us can speak each other's language, but music has the charm of moving everyone. My dad's words, his guitar

chords, his encouragement taught me this.

When I've felt unsettled, its waiata that allows me to contemplate. The meanings in their messages have empowered, prepared, informed me about the world I and my whānau have inherited. They give me permission to feel heard while also hearing what is important to others. The stories told with a lyric and a note travel through time, connecting each new era with history, ancestors, events that command to be remembered. I've absorbed so many feelings and experiences from hearing the words of tīpuna in the waiata that have been taught and handed down to me.

Our lives are meant to be enjoyed. Our feelings are meant to be expressed. Waiata allow us to feel, live, dance, sing, laugh and connect. They are the love we extend to friends when we share songs that make us think of them. The songs taught to us by our whānau, that we'll one day teach our tamariki, keep us connected. In a world constantly separated by vowel sounds and pronunciations, waiata is a language we can all speak, no matter the language used to write them. I'm reminded of my dad every time I sing, and I'm reminded of myself. Each lyric strengthens my connection to the man who helped create me. His lessons about love, life, whakapapa, belonging all distils into waiata in my head.

“When you sing, my baby, sing for all of us. Keep us, your tīpuna, your mum and I, your cousins, all our whānau, alive with each word. Every breath, chord, and lyric are our legacy to you.”



Introduction to Online Learning

In a post-Covid society, the online realm holds a lot of our attention. Online language lessons through platforms like TikTok have taken off. People can learn sign language or their native language through other native or learned speakers who share their language journeys. A few participants mentioned the excitement they feel when a TikTok or Instagram Reel pops up on their feed with Māori content. Whether it be a karakia, learning phrases, or simply a Māori content creator sharing their day-to-day life. These things help some of us to feel connected to home whether we live in Aotearoa or not. It empowers a lot of our rangatahi and that should be acknowledged.



Online Learning

Mindless scrolling, my parents would call it. On a 10-minute break, there's not much else to be done. I'm confined to a break room not much bigger than my bedroom, sharing with at least three other people. Headphones and Instagram reels are what my entertainment comes down to. Today, it's mostly cat videos and memes...I've noticed my attention span has become limited to about 12 seconds of mediocre content before I'm scrolling to another video. At least my thumb is getting a workout. I'm thinking about turning on some music for the remaining few minutes of my break when I double-take on the current reel. Did she just say wairua? What's wairua? Sounds Māori, thank God for Google. I type in 'define wairua' and get a noun: the spirit or the soul. It is Māori! I go back to the reel and this lady starts talking about the different ways she likes to uplift her wairua, being that she lives away from New Zealand. I tap on the comments section and find hundreds of people saying they do similar things, or how it feels so good to see home content when they live so far away from home. Some ask whether she has recommendations on how to stay connected to their whenua since they live overseas. I'm feeling a pull coming from my stomach, this inner grip seizing my conscience, and in less than a minute I've posted my own comment to her video:

“I don't know much about where I come from as I've grown up in Aus my whole life. Sometimes I feel like an imposter when I tell people I'm Māori.”

I look up at the clock and my break is over. Before I can rethink my comment, I lock my screen and jam my phone in my back pocket. I can always delete it when I get home. The rest of my shift happens in greyscale. I feel like a drone, tapping away at a computer, making and taking calls, and wading through a never-ending flow of emails. This is mindless scrolling.

By the time I get home, my sleep focus is on and I've kind of forgotten about my comment until I get into bed for a bit more mindless scrolling before sleep. When I open Instagram, my notifications have been flooded with likes and reply comments. I'm a bit embarrassed when I remember what I'd written and move to delete it, but a reply stops me before I can. Another girl has replied saying she feels the same, except she lives in New Zealand and gets embarrassed when she can't understand someone speaking Māori to her. The next reply comes from this random lady, responding to the both of us:

“Whether you’ve grown up at home, or overseas, can’t speak or understand the language, it doesn’t matter. You girls aren’t any less one of us. Your tūpuna (ancestors) know who you are, being Māori isn’t about what you know. It’s who you are. You are Māori enough, as is.”

It makes me smile. Here’s this woman, who doesn’t know me or this other girl, and she’s understood both of us. I like her reply and thank her for her kind words. Another notification comes through and it’s this lady, tagging me in a comment on another reel. I open the notification and it’s a different content creator sharing a karakia, a prayer. They’ve got the Māori words in the top half of the video, and the English translation in the bottom half. This lady’s comment says it was one she learned when she was younger and helps her remember who she is and where she comes from. A Māori prayer! Cool!

I’m sick of praying in English. I decide to take my notebook out of my bedside table and write the karakia down so I can learn it for myself. Maybe I could get Mum to say it with me. When I’ve written it down, I decide to scroll through more of the videos from this creator. They have other videos with more karakia, some videos teaching pronunciations, and others with individual words and their meanings. I give them a follow (I can learn heaps from this), turn on my phone torch and repeat the karakia I’ve written to myself.

Somehow, from this small exchange of knowledge, I feel more connected to myself. My ancestors would freak to know I learned a karakia from a touch screen phone and the internet.



Manawa mai te mauri Nuku
Manawa mai te mauri Rangi
Kia mahara ki te whakaaro
Kia mahara ki te aroha
Kia mātau
Kia pakari
Kia aroha tētahi ki tētahi
Hei oranga wairua
Hei oranga hinengaro
Hei oranga tinana
Hei oranga whānau
Kia mauri tū, kia mauri ora
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e!

Embrace the life force of the earth
Embrace the life force of the sky
Reflect on the primordial energy of thought (take notice)
Reflect on the primordial energy of compassion (give)
To grow in knowledge (keep learning)
To build character (be active)
To have compassion for one another (connect)
For the well-being of the spirit, mind, body and those we hold dearest
For the purpose of good health and well-being
United, connected, and blessed!





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