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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO TUATAPERE:
ARE WE DOING VERY NICELY THANK YOU?

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Social Work

Massey University Palmerston North
New Zealand

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The focus of this study is on a rural South Island community and how it managed the
dramatic social changes over the past fifty years. Government policies, changes in
international trade and markets, environmental policies, globalisation, change in the
structure of local and regional government and legislative changes impacted on all New
Zealanders during this period but the rural hinterland of New Zealand was affected in
particular ways.

The township which is the focus of this study is Tuatapere on the south west corner of
southern New Zealand. The researcher grew up in the district and witnessed the changes
from a flourishing timber and farming service centre to a quaint tourist town. The
residents and how these changes impacted on their lives are explored in this thesis through
the eyes of eight long term residents. This is a qualitative study in which four men and
four women were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire exploring their views
on social change, the way the community has responded to changes in service provision,
how they have managed the move from being a vibrant rural service community to a
tourist town.

This thesis celebrates their successes, tells of their hardships, explores their attitudes to
change, records their life work choices and decision making. Five themes were identified
from the literature and provide a framework for this study: historical influences and
cultural expectations, impact of Government decisions on their lives, sense of community,
sense of self and access to services.

The population in rural communities has been slowly decreasing over the years as
urbanisation has been a reality in New Zealand. Services within the area have diminished
and younger families have moved away to seek employment elsewhere. The remaining
residents are an ageing population. This brings with it a range of interesting issues for the
community. The elderly have to travel for their health and other service needs and the
unavailability of regular daily transport services makes it difficult for them to meet
appointments. They have to rely on family and friends for transport and many no longer
have the family available to support them locally.
This older population also provides the pool of volunteers for recreational and social functions. The elderly feel burdened with this responsibility. The geographical isolation provides a sense of wellbeing and attraction for the residents but it also has its disadvantages. The remoteness is a deterrent for access for tourists that would bring financial advantages to the community. The isolation is also a deterrent for new inhabitants who would provide the much needed contribution to the social functioning of the community. In spite of the aforementioned difficulties with living in a remote rural corner of New Zealand the participants expressed a determination and stoicism that can only be admired. Their life stories are presented in this research.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents

Hector and Iris Carr
    Merrivale

and my grandparents

Charles and Elizabeth Carr
    Pukemaori

True pioneers of the Tuatapere district.
Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Helen, Margaret, Ngarita, June, Donald, Robin, Bill and Hugh. I feel honoured that you allowed me into your homes and your lives and you shared your stories in such a trusting way. These treasured gifts are so precious and I have endeavoured to treat them with the respect each one deserves. Without your participation this research would not have been possible.

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During the two year period of preparing this research I lost in close succession two uncles, an aunt and a sister-in-law who was also my close friend. I want to acknowledge Wal, Selwyn, Bev and Doreen, as they each resided in the Tuatapere area for some part of their lives.

I acknowledge my sisters and brothers who shared a life with me in the Merrivale valley.

Finally I want to thank my family who has supported me all the way through my academic journey culminating in this final research project. To my husband Jim I thank you for all your support and encouragement.

“Lang may yer lum reek.”
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