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***Exploring grief experiences of rangatahi offenders
through the kōrero of Māori community leaders.***

A thesis

presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a

Master of Arts

In

Psychology

At Massey University, Albany Campus,

New Zealand.

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2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my brother Kane William Fletcher and Nanny Wikitoria Rapata Leatham who have passed on, and also for our rangatahi and future generations to come.

*Rimu rimu tere tere
E tere ra i te moana
E ahu ana ki te ripo
I raro ra e.
Ka kati, ka puare
Mo wairua e -
Te huringa i Murimotu
Te huringa i Te Reinga
Te moana i kauria
Te wairua e -
Ohau i waho ra
Te puke whakamutunga
Haere whakangaro atu te wairua e.*

*Seaweed drifting, drifting
floating out to sea
Flowing with the currents
the whirlpool below.
It opens and closes
for the spirit –
flowing around Murimotu
around Reinga
the seas swim
by the spirit –
Behold Ohau out yonder
the last summit
Farewell o spirit. ¹*

¹ A waiata of the pathway of spirits – te ara wairua – that includes Ohau and the waters of Murimotu near Te Reinga, where spirits of the dead leave the land of Aotearoa. In Kawharu, 2008, p. 122.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whakataka te hau ki te uru
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga
Kia mākinakina ki uta
Kia mātaratara ki tai
E hi ake ana te ātakura, he tio, he huka, he hauhu
Haumi e! Hui e! Tāiki e!²

Ko Māmari me Kurahaupō ngā waka
Ko Ngā Pou e Rua, Maungatūroto me Maungapiko ngā maunga
Ko Ngāpuhi me Ngāti Kurī ngā iwi
Ko Ngāti Rangī me Ngāti Muri Kahara ngā hapū
Ko E Koro ki a Tutuki me Te Hiku o Te Ika ngā marae
Ko Heta Te Haara rāua ko Pohurihanga ngā tāngata
Ko Wattie Watling Te Haara tōku koro
Ko Wikitoria Rapata Leatham tōku kuia
Ko Tui Watling raua ko William Fletcher ōku mātua
Ko Nikki Lee Peapell (Fletcher) ahau.³

Dr Leigh Coombes, thank you so much for providing your time, knowledge and experience throughout this project. Your dedication to people and communities is evident in your excitement for this topic from the start. I have learned so much about narrative and the ways in which we can be creative within the field of psychology.

To Dr Lily George, you have taught me to believe in myself, my dreams, our people, and strive for excellence in this world. Your patience, humour,

² A prayer to bring focus to the project.

³ An acknowledgement of the people and places I belong to.

intelligence and your enthusiasm and dedication to the wellbeing of our people has inspired me to persevere through this challenging yet rewarding voyage. You have provided me with the courage, the strength, and tools to unleash a previously unknown desire to further explore mātauranga Māori⁴ (Māori knowledge), academia and the world at an international level to discover new opportunities and also contribute towards the development of our people.

To the staff of Vaughan Park Anglican Retreat Centre, and Director John Fairbrother in particular - I have been fortunate to be invited to a place of tranquillity and discover new meanings in life; thank you. And to my Massey University friends from across the campuses, thank you all for sharing the experience of this space of whanaungatanga (relationship building) as well as wairua (spirit, psyche).

To Odette Miller and Dason Hita, thank you both for your patience with me and helping me to prioritise my family, work and study. Te Roopu Kimiora crew and Ka Puawai Ngā Hua; I thank you for your immense support.

To Massey University for providing support through Te Rau Puawai and the Purehuroa Awards. I have received amazing supports over the past years and I am thankful for such an amazing opportunity and the networks and life-long friends developed. Thanks also to Poutokomanawa at Northland District Health Board for your scholarship and encouragement since.

Uncle Kahui and Aunty Suzie, I am truly grateful for your belief in me. To all my wider Watling whānau (family), words cannot express my appreciation. To Anaru Martin, Whetu, Gina, Pallas and Gloria, I thank you for your support throughout this journey.

To Poppa Wattie: You always bring us together and I value your humour, your sharpness, your take on life, your wisdom and humility. You have been the

⁴ Māori terms will be explained by an English translation in parentheses on their first usage (with the exception of chapter headings which are self-explanatory). Thereafter, refer to Glossary. Macrons are used to indicate lengthening of vowel sounds for purposes of pronunciation, as per contemporary usage.

backbone of my journey and I treasure your presence in our lives. Mum, you give all your children such love and warmth and have taught us to hold our heads high. Thank you for your endless support with your mokopuna (grandchildren), and also juggling your work to help us. I am forever grateful. Dad, your love and dedication to us children and your mokopuna is immense and I thank you for always being there when we need. I thank Mike and Deb also for being there for us all. My beautiful sister Aroha, you have supported me through ups-and-downs and I thank you deeply. My little brother Tyson, you are so special, with your intuitive mind and caring nature, you mean the world to me.

To Karen and Mapu, I am inspired by the way you both embrace and manaaki (to care for) my family, I truly look up to you both and appreciate your time, energy and support. Our eldest daughter Tatiana, thank you for being so understanding of mum's study commitments. You have been on this journey with me from the start and you motivate me to strive for excellence. I love you with my entire heart darling. Our son Jayme Roberts, you too are our world, your smile lights up any room you walk in to, your soft, caring and protective nature is one of a kind my boy and you keep me grounded. Our baby girl Manaia-Rose, you are the centre of our lives! You bring such colour to our family with your cheekiness and laughter; your beautiful personality is treasured by all. You fulfil our lives honey.

And last but not least Richard. You have come in to our lives and opened your heart to us. Thank you for picking me up when I've been down, thank you for believing in me and sharing this journey with me through thick and thin. You ground me and are truly a great friend and husband.

To the Māori community leaders:

Te Waiohau Te Haara (TWT)	Agnes Daniels (AD)
Pearl Erstich (PE)	Kere Mahanga (KM)
Whare Hauwai (WH)	Martin Kaipo (MK)
Ross Smith (RS)	Ned Peita (NP)

From the bottom of my heart I thank you all deeply for sharing your time, experiences and knowledge and embellishing this project for the purpose of better understanding grief amongst offending and rangatahi (Māori youth). I value the connections with you all, which naturally extends beyond the parameters of this project. My hope is to represent as much of the beauty and richness of the kōrero (discussion, dialogue, conversation) you allowed me to hear to also inspire others with similar aspirations for our people. Thank you kindly for such an opportunity.

ABSTRACT

Māori youth (rangatahi) apprehension and recidivism rates are significantly higher in comparison to non-Māori, which impacts negatively on their health and well-being, as well as their whānau and wider communities. Unresolved grief is a possible factor which contributes to these high rates of offending, especially where troubled rangatahi do not have access to traditional grieving practices such as tangihanga (funeral rituals). This project seeks to establish a foundation for a larger project that gives voice to rangatahi offenders' experiences of grief. Toward this aim, the thesis interviewed Māori community leaders who have worked with youth offenders and their whānau in a variety of ways, who are also actively engaged in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), and work amongst their communities. Their cultural competencies suggest they have had access to traditional grieving practices throughout their lives. A kaupapa Māori (Māori cultural ideologies) approach underpins this research project, using narrative inquiry to explore the kōrero of Māori community leaders. Focus lies with a particular interest in their personal experiences of grief; knowledge of traditional grieving rituals and practices; and their understanding and guidance for rangatahi offenders who may have limited access to traditional healing processes. The in-depth interviews were collected, and systematically analysed to produce texts of grief and hope.

Through interviewing Māori community leaders and acknowledging their role as facilitators of knowledge, a rich foundation was established to enable development of the subsequent project in a space of safe guidance. The leaders move back and forth from Te Ao Māori to Te Ao Hurihuri (the modern world) in a way that provides them with the resources required to be successful in their roles, and able to create positive development amongst our rangatahi and their whānau. By connecting past wisdoms with present circumstances, a forum can be created in which we can reflect on our current roles and relationships with rangatahi offenders. It may then be possible to help create a future where rangatahi offenders are nurtured and empowered to create positive futures for themselves.

PREFACE

Ridling (1994) defines grief as a natural response to loss of any kind, a process that shares universal and unique elements. A young person's emotional, intellectual, behavioural and developmental stage is important to how they process grief, and this is impacted on by their social location. To me, grief is a term which can be stretched, pulled, and twisted in a number of ways to represent the many different means in which a person behaves, feels, perceives, interacts, responds and displays their experiences of having lost somebody or something important to them.

My first loss was at the age of seven, having learned that my Nanny was in hospital and her body was beginning to weaken. My aunties and uncles arrived from overseas and other parts of the country to comfort one another and become one at a time of uncertainty; an inevitable part of life, however unexpected at this particular time. Everyday life slowed down, school and work routines for my family were paused. We all shared our affection with one another and spent all our energies and time at the hospital. I had been to tangihanga before, but this is my earliest memory of grief or for that matter, loss.

I had no control over the situation and just sat behind the adults watching and listening carefully. There were tears, but also laughter. Stories were shared and you could feel the aroha (unconditional love, compassion) in the room. This was my Nanny who took pictures of me on my first day at school, who took me to collect pipi (cockles) out at Shakespeare beach, who would come and pick me up for the weekends and have brand new Strawberry Shortcake colouring-in books and new felt tips, just for me. And here she was lying on the hospital bed unable to make eye contact with me, unable to embrace me. Her body was starting to go numb and she could not feel our touch but knew that we were all there. It was nearly her time to go.

She was talking in te reo Māori (Māori language) which I barely heard her do, so it was foreign to my ear, but comforting to my heart. She was telling her deceased father to wait for her. He was at the end of her bed with his rākau calling for her to go to him. My Nanny was the pōtiki (youngest child) of her whānau but had been whāngai (adopted, adoptee, feed) to an educated Pākehā (of European descent) whānau in Auckland, who also provided her the tools of mainstream education and the western world. Her father and whānau were here to greet her.

My aunty and uncle from Australia had not yet arrived, however, my Nanny was holding on to see them. She then told us they were here at the hospital walking down a hallway. Soon after they entered the room, my Nanny passed over to the spiritual world. We all knew she was with her parents and no longer in any physical pain. However, the pain and the hurt for all those left were evident. Where had my Nanny gone?

Decisions were to be made around where Nanny would be buried and her children pulled together to challenge other whanaunga⁵ (relatives), asserting their voices, their desires and what they felt necessary and right for their mother, my Nanny.

The first night we spent at a local Auckland marae (Māori community facility), which I remember being situated at the top of this strange hill. I felt quite distant from my Nanny as many people from afar came and crowded around her coffin. Seeing my Nanny in a coffin at the end of the wharenuī (meeting house) was unusual. I was frightened. I couldn't quite register at that time that she was no longer physically with us, to move and talk. I remember night falling and a light white veil being placed over her face as if she was asleep in her coffin. I slept on a mattress between my parents and could not allow my eyes to look towards the coffin. However, once I was able to finally fall asleep, I dreamt. I dreamt that my Nanny was trying to get up and talk to me. Although she was half-way across the marae she was extremely close to me. I was scared of all I

⁵ A common practice where branches of the whānau may argue for the deceased to be buried in their area, as a gesture of aroha and respect, and an indication of the mana of the deceased.

didn't know and I did not want her to be dead. She was trying to get my attention. Could nobody else see she was actually trying to wake up and that she was able to talk and move around? How did my Nanny know so many people?

This was my Nanny and we had a strong and unique bond. I am her second eldest mokopuna and the eldest in New Zealand. My mother was the pōtiki, so Nanny was a big part of our lives.

I then remember the long windy road trip back up north near Cape Reinga. A hard turn right, just past the last set of shops. I tried my hardest not to look down the long, steep cliffs, as we swerved around the narrow gravel roads reaching full turbulence. What was this place? There were no houses; there was greenery everywhere, farm animals, mountains and finally the marae, which sits by the ocean. Parengarenga Harbour - beautiful white sand, pearl-blue waters, a lonely marae, horses, gorse and gravel. This is where my Nanny was born and went to school. We were taking her home.

My Nanny is buried on the top of the hill overlooking this astounding harbour. The place is breath-taking. I know in my heart she is at peace and to this day is very much involved in our lives. She is looking after us all. I miss my Nanny every day, but I treasure my connection with her. She is with me all the time and I now feel connected to her, particularly at times of celebration, but also at times of need.

Grief is a lifetime journey and does not need to be an ongoing negative experience. However, this is different for everybody depending on cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, age, gender and other indicators. I believe where there is aroha there will always be some form of grief or sadness. All these emotions can change in intensity, shape and form, depending on the other relationships and experiences in one's life. The experience of expressing and sharing my grief emotions with my whānau was natural and all I know. My whānau give each other strength and when one member is low or struggling to cope with their hurt or grief, the rest of the whānau draws their strength together to help that member at need. This has been my experience of grief throughout my life. Losing my Nanny physically created awareness of my

relationship with her spiritually. This in turn, I believe, has prepared me to manage and work through the other losses which later followed. I thank my younger brother, Kane William Fletcher, for giving me back what I had lost. His loss reaffirmed our whānau traditions and values bringing us closer together, triggering new understandings and aspirations of the world in which we live.

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