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**PATRIARCHS, PADDOCKS AND THE PERSONAL:
FIVE WOMEN FROM THE WHAREHUIA/TE POPO
DISTRICT TALK ABOUT THEIR LIVES**

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

in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work

Massey University

Lesley Norma Pitt

1998

There is a she
inside of me
deep, deep down
locked away
screaming
screeching
seeking a voice
some words
so she can tell
the world
the stories she knows.

Lesley Pitt

Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore and celebrate the daily lived experiences of rural women. The life stories of four women, from the rural district of Wharehuia/Te Popo in central Taranaki, were gathered in unstructured, in-depth interviews. My life story was written and incorporated as data.

I spent my childhood and adolescence on my family's sheep and beef farm in the Wharehuia/Te Popo district. Later, as a social work practitioner, I worked in rural and semi rural areas. This thesis was inspired by an awareness that life for women (and men) in these communities was unique and worthy of recognition.

The focus of the study is on women. It reflects my gender and identity as a feminist. My feminist values influenced the methodology and theoretical concepts used to add meaning to the narratives. I have included post structural ideas which are of personal interest and relevant to the stories. The five themes used to structure the literature and data are: patriarchy, private and public worlds, women and work, diversity and difference, and power.

The participants discussed the way in which patriarchal ideology had influenced their lives, affecting their intimate relationships as well as their public activities. Much of their lives have focused on the domestic realm of home and family; more so for the older two participants. The younger women were more involved in the public world of paid work. All the women worked hard and had diverse work patterns. Power issues had an impact on all aspects of their lives. The respondents talked about the way they used power to which they had access, positively and productively. There is a tension in their stories between wanting to belong and fit in and a recognition of their own uniqueness. This uniqueness reflected the diversity among rural women.

The study ends with a consideration of its relevance to social work; the use of story telling, the relationship between theory and practice, and the opportunity provided by the women for practitioners to learn from their stories.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to a wonderful rural woman, my mother.

MARGARET ELIZABETH (PEGGY) PITT

(NEE LEES)

Born: 17 February 1933

Died: 21 November 1991

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