# Looking for Truthiness

A personal investigation
into bicultural poetry from the Bay of Islands
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# Abstract

The creative component of this thesis mixes poems, prose poems and prose. Boundaries are blurred. English and Te Reo Māori intermingle and sit side by side, as do memoir and writing situated in the present. Time is sometimes curved and loved ones are brought back. Parts of the portfolio touch on environmental issues. The main recurring theme is a search, not only for 'truthiness' which may help the author find a comfortable place to stand, but also for physical, intellectual and emotional nourishment from food, nature, family, community and place. The critical component is an exegesis, which looks at influences on this writing, influences which are both local and international, male and female, Māori and Pākehā. A research question is explored in the exegesis – What are the social, historical and personal constraints and drivers behind the work presented and considered here? Particular attention is given to the consequences of colonisation in Aotearoa-New Zealand, with a focus on writing from the greater Bay of Islands area by Robert Sullivan and Glenn Colquhoun. Although three decades have passed since their first books were published, many of the issues their writing explored remain unresolved. Similar drivers and constraints still exist today, despite the efforts of many writers, artists, activists, educators, politicians and ordinary people. The thesis concludes that there is still work to be done, and hopes that more individuals in our society will eventually accept that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by acknowledging and confronting personal and institutional racism, by embracing biculturalism and by making room for an indigenous Māori perspective in their lives, alongside whatever other cultural legacy they inherit from those whose shoulders they stand on.

# Dedication

To my mokopuna
Olivia, Leon, Quinn and Annika
because the future is yours

# Acknowledgements

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# PART ONE: EXEGESIS

## Introduction / Whakamōhio

Deciding to write a collection of poems is easy enough. Even starting to write is an everyday thing, for a writer. However, at some point it is inevitable that questions start to arise, questions like: What is this actually about? Why am I doing this? Who am I writing it for? Has this already all been said by someone else?

At that point, looking for published collections which have inspired or informed your own work can be a useful thing to do. Similarly, it can be helpful to find theories that elucidate and elaborate on the "why" of any piece of writing – what prompted it, what constrained it, what it appeared to be trying to achieve. All of those questions occurred to me at various points while writing this portfolio. Here are some provisional answers, firstly from the work of two poets with connections to the Bay of Islands near my home in Russell – Glenn Colquhoun at Te Tii and Robert Sullivan at Karetu.

## 1. Influences / Whakaako

### Glenn Colquhoun (Born 1964)

In 2004 I bought Glenn Colquhoun's first book of poetry, *The Art of Walking Upright* (Colquhoun, The Art of Walking Upright). Wikipedia says of this collection. "It has been said the book is a love letter to the people of Te Tii, the Northland town where he was living at that time" (Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Colquhoun). My copy was from its third printing. It was an award-winning book, so must have resonated with many other people as well. But why was it so significant for me?

At the time I was studying English and Psychology. I was also heavily involved in, and being influenced by waka ama, a sport built on Māori and Polynesian ways of doing things. It was, and is, more Māori than Pākehā. The tangata whenua of my home town, Kororāreka, many of whom are whanaunga, wider family, were showing me how to operate within a Māori world, but waka ama was really my equivalent of Colquhoun's Te Tii. There, for the first time, I felt as if I fitted my Māori side comfortably, and other paddlers recognised me as Māori. Personally, and academically, I was exploring my bicultural heritage. Colquhoun's book elucidated some of the things I had been experiencing. So would my poetry collection, like his, become a love letter to the people of Kororāreka, to the waka ama community, or would it be something else altogether?

This first collection of Colquhoun's has also been described in other ways. His own introductory statement says:

> I grew up firmly in a Pakeha world. I looked over the fence at things Polynesian and Maori. I recognised lots of sights and sounds and patterns but not what they meant…These poems then are about belonging. They are about discovering a place to stand within a Maori world. Ultimately for me they are about finding more clearly what it means to be Pakeha and what it means to be human. (Colquhoun, The Art of Walking Upright 7).

Colquhoun published an essay, in 2004, called *Jumping Ship* (Colquhoun, Jumping Ship). It was a title he'd used before, for the second poem in his 1999 book (Colquhoun, The Art of Walking Upright 13). It is essentially a list poem, consisting of twelve double spaced lines beginning with "Because", full of sounds, smells, visual and tactile similes, and movement, and concluding, after an extra line space, with "Because everything sticks like a word on the tip of my tongue. / I have jumped ship."

(13) The essay suggests that not only was he jumping ship away from medical training, but also from his marriage, from city life, from loneliness, and towards a place where he felt a connection with an ancestor, who had lived in the North and learnt to speak Māori, "I ran away and came home at the same time" (10). The reference to "a word" in the penultimate line suggests also that he was moving towards what would eventually be a dual career, as a doctor poet. He also went there out of curiosity, and to conclude something a friend had challenged him with. He was jumping from a ship into a waka:

> He told me that if you are Maori in New Zealand then you have to learn to engage with Pakeha. There is no choice. The houses are Pakeha. The streets are Pakeha. The newspapers, the rubbish bins, the telephone poles, the bus timetables are Pakeha. But if you are Pakeha in New Zealand then you can live your whole life without ever knowing what it is like to engage with Maori. I opened my mouth to reply but I did not know what to say. (9-11)

This was an understanding that I, brought up as a member of mainstream Pākehā society, also came to, slowly and eventually, as an adult. Colquhoun explored his mongrel social and genetic heritage in many of the poems in *The Art of Walking Upright*.

His poem "The Indigenous Pakeha" comes to an interesting end after diverse discussions of clothing, housing, cars, families, etymology, religion, immigration, weather and crockery – "Either I don't belong to anyone, / Or else I'm indigenous everywhere." (41) – in lines reminiscent of Derek Walcott's "I have Dutch, nigger and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation," (Walcott). Walcott was writing about his mixed heritage over a decade before Colquhoun, having lived with it his whole life – those lines were published in 1980.

Colquhoun challenged and deconstructed racist stereotypes and labels in “Bred in South Auckland”, concluding with the line: “I think I am the luckiest mongrel I know.” (37). In “Race Relations” he explored his English, Scots, German and Jewish ancestry – “Sometimes I don’t know how to live with myself. / I am a civil war.” This poem then moved on to more contemporary social comment, “The pakeha think they own the place. / The maori want us all to go home. / I would if I knew where that was. / Sometimes it seems I’ll never win. / Sometimes I never lose” (38). Yes, my ancestors fought each other too. What’s more, several of them crossed vast oceans to do it and never went “home”. The repercussions of those conflicts linger within individuals and in our society today. Having read Colquhoun’s collection and acknowledged that it was an influence on my own work I needed to find an answer to the question - has this already all been said by someone else?

French novelist and Nobel prize winner André Gide (1869-1951) left us an answer to this question long before I ever asked it. “Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens, we have to keep going back and beginning all over again” (Gide). Furthermore, there are always new people being born and asking questions about the society they are growing up in. Some of them may seek answers in poetry, and different people respond differently to different poems. What is meaningful to one reader may make no impression at all on another. And, yes, the content of some of my work covers similar ground to Colquhoun’s, but I say it differently, for many reasons, one of which is that unlike Colquhoun, I have known all my life that not only am I Pākehā, of English, Scots and Irish descent, but I am also Māori.

Although I haven't come across the word anywhere in the commentary about this first book of Colquhoun's, it seems obvious that much of this book is about personal identity. My collection is partly about that too. However, our identities are very different, as is our work. Apart from obvious differences such as age, gender, ancestry, life experiences and personality, my work is very different from Colquhoun's for the simple reason of chronology. It has been written over a period of several years, some of the poems dating back to 2006, but most were written in the years 2018-2019, a quarter of a century after Glenn Colquhoun took time out from his medical training, moved to Te Tii and made himself into a poet. Colquhoun's perspective, when he wrote these poems, appeared to be one of curiosity, of discovery and exploration, of a world which to him was new. Te Tii was certainly new to him then, in a way that it could never be again, because afterwards, he was definitely considered by the people there, to be one of them, a part of Te Tii and its Ngāti Rēhia whanau (Kaiawe). My own home has been in Russell now for over thirty years, and it has been a spiritual home for my whole life.

Getting to know it as Kororāreka has been interesting and challenging, but nevertheless, my approach to this place in my writing is very different from Colquhoun's poems about Te Tii. I have always belonged here but have not always been sure that it is where I want to stay. Part of the point of this collection was to explore those connections. Colquhoun didn't stay in Te Tii, but he has always returned there and felt a connection to the people and place, saying that all of his poetry comes from Ngāti Rēhia and Te Tii (Colquhoun, Oral Poetry and Totems). The 5th to 7th of April 2019 was one of those returning-to-the-north times for him and it was the first time that I was able to watch Glenn Colquhoun performing his poetry.

He gave three readings at the Bay of Islands Upsurge Festival. I attended one in Rawene and one in Kerikeri, which is a short drive from Te Tii. The Rawene event, on the Friday evening, was called “Homecoming”. Colquhoun also has a whare in Rawene that he calls home – that connection being established during a period spent working as a doctor at Rawene Hospital.

He began by reading three well known poems, then several unpublished ones, including some that he wrote to patients. He spoke of the trajectory of his poetry career, which is now largely focussed on oral poetry and work with rangatahi, young people. He stood with arms stretched out high and wide, saying “if this is poetry, then this”, at which point he lowered his arms and held a finger and thumb about a centimetre apart and said, “is written poetry”. His current work, he said, is working with the two oral traditions of our country – Māori and English – and thinks that “oral poetry carries the true imprint of poetry – the call”. Mentioning the forms of traditional Māori poetry, moteatea, waiata tangi and waiata aroha, he went on to observe, “There are a lot of sad-ass poems in Māori, poems about loss” (Colquhoun, Homecoming).

Two days after this performance, on Sunday afternoon in Kerikeri, was “Oral Poetry and Totems” (Bay of Islands Arts Festival Trust). Ngāti Rēhia was well represented in the audience, including one of Ngā Poupou, one of the aunties, Aunty Kare, from the second section of *The Art of Walking Upright* (50-51), still recognisable from her photograph but as to be expected given the passage of two decades, now looking older. At times during the performance, it seemed as if Colquhoun was speaking

directly and only to her – as is appropriate for a younger man of the hapu to a kuia. At the beginning of the reading, he did converse directly with her, fluently, in Te Reo Māori. At the conclusion of the event, a kaumatua from Ngāti Rēhia, Kipa Munro, gave a mihi in both Te Reo and English. Munro said that Ngāti Rēhia was lucky, when Glenn came north, because he was looking for a tin shed, and they had one. The aroha and connection between these three people, was plain even without being able to understand everything that was said. They are family.

I paddled for a Ngāti Rēhia Golden Masters waka ama team – all Māori wahine over the age of sixty – for a couple of years recently. One day after a training session the subject of the 2019 New Year's honours came up. There was general amusement, agreement with, and admiration for Pākehā carver Owen Mapp's comeback to Rangi Kipa's criticism of the award going to a Pākehā, on TV One the night before, "When I started carving in 1968, Rangi was 2 years old. I think some of the younger carvers in New Zealand need to grow up" (Tahana). Their hilarity, contrasted with the gravity of the commentators, reminded me that there are many ways of expressing individual ethnic identity.

TV One had focused on controversy – primarily to do with the race issue, but also with the honours system. Māori TV paid more attention to the award itself, the reasons for it going to that particular carver and touched on Mapp's experience of being a Pākehā working in a Māori world (Tyson) .


This difference is not a new thing – Waitangi Day reporting is always another good example. Sometimes it seems as if Māori TV and TV One cameras are at different events and different places – which in a sense they are. They are reporting from within different world views to a different audience within the same country. Unfortunately, the invisibility (McIntosh) and dominance (Harris) of white privilege prevents many Pākehā from ever realising it, ever bothering to look, or, as Colquhoun was by his friend, ever being challenged to find out what it is like to live on the other side of that figurative fence.

Likewise, in the academic world, it has not been uncommon for Pākehā and/or Māori to strongly criticise what they see as Pākehā writers' intrusion into a Māori workspace, into writing about things Māori. It is not by any means a universal position, but has been articulated often enough for many Pākehā writers to feel nervous about venturing there.

*i. Who gets to write about what, and in which language? / Ko wai ngā kaituhi tika, ā he aha te reo tika?*

French writer André Gide had an opinion on this too:

> What another would have done as well as you, do not do it. What another would have said as well as you, do not say it; what another would have written as well, do not write it. Be faithful to that which exists nowhere but in yourself — and thus make yourself indispensable. (Gide)

However, in postcolonial New Zealand, things have not been quite that simple. Indeed, the term postcolonial, it has been suggested, is inaccurate, implying as it does that the colonists have departed (Smith),which obviously their descendants and structures have not. This issue has been a source of some disquiet for me. Though I can whakapapa back to Rahiri, Puhi Moana Ariki and Nukutawhiti and establish a bloodline even further back from Toi Kai Rakau, who, it is claimed was one of the first Polynesians to travel here from Hawaiki and to explore the country, as far back as AD 850-900 (Fletcher), that hasn't made it comfortable for me to call myself a Māori writer.

Writing this portfolio has been one way for me to try to arrive at a more settled position within this discussion and dilemma. Glenn Colquhoun certainly appears, though identifying as Pākehā, to be as immersed and comfortable working within Te Ao Māori as I am, perhaps even more so. And that's ironic, given my whakapapa. It is not only Pākehā however, who are challenged by biculturalism. How do Māori writers navigate in that space?

In a 2003 Listener article Steve Braunias referred back to a 1991 Listener review which considered the race issue in New Zealand historical writing. Author Michael King had said then:

> I…always wanted to do the right thing…And when it became uncomfortable…when that became reasonably intense, I more or less said, 'Okay, that's fine. I've got other things to do.' But I never accepted the validity of the argument, because to say whether or not someone's equipped to write history, is not to make a judgment about their ethnicity, it's to make a judgment about how well prepared they are. And now, people who are writing Maori history, like Anne Salmond and Judith Binney [Redemption Songs, 1995], are people who know as much about Maori language, and culture, and specifically Maori history, as anybody Maori could. I honestly don't know of anyone Maori now who is saying Pakeha ought not to be doing this. (Braunias)

Braunias then went on to question Ranginui Walker, author and professor emeritus of Maori studies at Auckland University, who said:

> The historiography has got progressively better over the past two, three decades. You take Keith Sinclair's history…when you read it now against current literature, he ends up being an apologist for colonialism. It's very hard not to be like that, because he's a man of his time. But then you get revisionist historians like Jamie Belich coming along, and Anne Salmond, Judith Binney, Michael King. Where would we be without their books?… But…you take Michael. I've got great respect for his work, but it's set in the framework of Pakeha historiography, Pakeha power and domination. (Braunias)

Although agreeing in principle with King, Walker added another level of complexity to the discussion, pointing out that he, as a Māori writer, had a perspective, not well publicised by mainstream media or publishers, that he wanted heard. In 1984 he joined the protest hikoi to Waitangi, saying:

> There was a tremendous conglomerate of people; a lot of Pakeha in there, activists, radicals, church people - and the gangs, the boys with the tats. And you see these boys with the tats saying, 'We was robbed.' But of course, they don't know how they was robbed, do they? Because the history has been hidden. And so I wrote Struggle Without End with them in mind…so they could talk with better knowledge…My pedagogy is one of emancipation…liberating Maori from Pakeha power and domination, through intellectual critique and rigour. (Braunias)

Māori writer Patricia Grace offered an opinion on this too, in 2018, "I don't think I've ever said that Pākehā shouldn't be writing about Māori because it's not what I believe" (Shepherd 184). Grace, talking about her novel *Potiki*, which won a New Zealand Book Award in 1987, defended her use of te reo in the story, without including a glossary – a decision which was criticised at the time. She said, "a glossary is what you have for a foreign language and I didn't want Māori to be treated like a foreign language in its own country. My publishers agreed with me" (178). This standpoint should be even more acceptable now, with Google Translate at our fingertips, but I suspect it is not yet universally agreed with. It is a position that I agree with and have chosen to follow.

As with any complex issue, there are many valid angles. I admire public figures like King, Walker and Grace who appear to be firm and assertive in those roles. What is not clear from these excerpts though is how easy or difficult it was for them to arrive there. However, Patricia Grace did also say, "You can't afford to be affected by reviews…you want to be free to write how you want to write…Reviews are not written for me. My job is done" (178). That resolve is worth trying to emulate. Maintaining it, especially when unsure, or challenged, seems to be something that needs to be practised, especially when, as a writer, you are offering your work to anyone who picks it up.

## 2. Influences / Whakaako

### Robert Sullivan (Born 1967)

I met Bay of Islands and Ngāpuhi poet Robert Sullivan in 2017, the year before starting my thesis. He was the judge for a poetry competition I was thinking of entering, in advance of which he ran a workshop on writing a poetry sequence (Sullivan, Writing a Poetry Sequence). I already had two of his publications on my bookshelf – *Captain Cook in the Underworld* (Sullivan, Captain Cook in the Underworld), and a catalogue, *Shade House* (Lander), from a 2004 exhibition in Whangarei that I had been to, featuring his poem "Ahi Kā – The House of Ngāpuhi". I have since added others to this short list. Sullivan has been teaching poetry for some time and his skill as a teacher was obvious during the workshop. He acknowledged influences on his own writing – Pablo Neruda's sequence "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" and Ezra Pound's essays – and said that poets always talk to poets, both poem-to-poem and face-to-face. He advised us to write about something that inspires us, and to ask of yourself and the work, "Am I fired up writing it? Would I enjoy reading it?".

Other advice of his that I found useful was: It's okay to tell fibs, but there must be emotional honesty in them; find the truthiness[1] in the myth you create; use the well of sensibility from your culture – it will resonate; poetry can bring back your loved ones; be purposeful in your approach; writers are time lords, travellers in a flow of

[1] My interpretation of Sullivan's "truthiness" is influenced by postmodernism's refutation of the possibility of there ever being a single truth about anything. Always contextual and subjective, any definition of truth must forever remain personal. Truthiness, on the other hand, is, for me, different from facts, factoids and Trump's alternative facts, and more akin to a scientific proof – the best consensus that can be found after reviewing all the available, reliable evidence –it's considered proved until new evidence emerges. It's personal too.

time, who can return to now from the future, who are constantly curving time; and, from Pound, “Only emotion endures. Make it new” - to do this you must know what came before (Sullivan, Writing a Poetry Sequence).

After hearing this advice, and assuming that it would have helped shape his own work, I looked at his first book *Jazz Waiata* – a 15-poem sequence titled “Tai Tokerau Poems” (36-52). Sullivan wrote these poems as a young Māori man brought up and living in Auckland in the 1980s – no doubt a very different person from the one I met in the late 2010s. The first points to strike me were Sullivan’s comments that poetry can curve time and bring back your loved ones. The first poem in this sequence 1: “I walked over the hill” is circled back to in the last, 15: “Bella”, in more than one way. “Over the hill” is both a literal reference to walking on elevated ground and a metaphorical cliché about growing old. It is also a walk into the recent and distant past. In the first poem the narrator enjoys being in Bella’s physical presence and receives gentle advice from her – in the last, he travels to her tangi, over the same road, which this time is not old metal, but a ball of sometimes broken string. Both poems evoke shared moments with Bella – bringing her back. Poem 15 has a different emphasis – not so nostalgic perhaps, but evoking the presence of many of his whanau, both in memory during the journey north and, in the present of the poem, at the tangi.

This poem ends with other references to traditional and contemporary Māori practices – the placing of deceased ancestors’ photographs on the end wall of a whare nui and the obligation to sing a waiata after a speech. In the whare nui, korero is

directed both to those present and to the departed. On formal occasions a speaker will be supported by a group of kaiwaiata, singers, but sometimes the speaker will sing alone. The narrator in "Bella" offers a poem in place of a waiata:

> ...I told them what Nanny's aroha meant to me,
> how she's one of the last links with my old people, and that
> I wished I could speak te reo.
> Then I told them, and my ancestors' photos on the marae wall,
> that I write a lot of poetry. 'This is my waiata.' I read out
> the first Tai Tokerau poem (52).

In other poems of this sequence, Sullivan reveals a desire to reconnect with his Ngāti Manu heritage and to be acknowledged as tangata whenua. At the same time, he celebrates it and is obviously anchored and comfortable there. Both numbers 1 and 15 are travelling poems. The first poem, as well as going for a walk on the hill, the site of Sullivan's ancestral pa, refers to "the old metal / that brought you here, took us home so often." There's a double meaning here. The old metal could be the car and/or the road, which turns from tar seal to loose metal somewhere near Karetu. The road to Karetu runs almost parallel to the river from the turn-off at Taumarere - both are sources of movement. Perhaps this also symbolises the narrator's emotional and spiritual movement.

Written into both poems are references to traditional Māori practices and beliefs: washing hands after leaving a tapu or sacred site; "the ritual of bread", which I interpret as the ritual consumption of food to turn tapu to noa after a hui or tangi, but which could equally as plausibly be taken to represent the Christian symbolism attached to bread; the phrase, "It is no man's hill", I take to refer to communal Māori ownership of land together with the traditional collaborative nature of Māori society. The hill belongs to everybody and nobody. It is the place that members of the hapu

come back to and identify with, even if they don't live there permanently, as their spiritual home, their turangawaewae. For Robert Sullivan, Karetu is that place. In an online 2017 conversation he said, " I am most familiar with place and tend to orient my work by referencing my mother's village, Karetu, which has ancestral and historical (derived from civics and the political engagement there) resonances" (Academy of New Zealand Literature). For other Māori it is not always so clear. Urban marae, serving city dwellers from many different hapu and iwi, increasingly provide a place to be Māori for those living far from their ancestral places, as do marae in other countries, such as Australia and England.

Sullivan's "Tai Tokerau Poems" sequence confirms Colquhoun's observation that there are a lot of sad-ass poems written by Māori, not only in the past, but now too. From "2: Opua", amongst old family photographs, "There were even / some of the museum people taking taonga from our pa" (37). There are elegies for Bella, Auntie Kiri and Uncle Tangiwai, and in "6: This much is true", the narrator expresses a feeling of disconnection from where he lives:

> Watching a cockatoo in its cage reminds me of my position,
> I must go back to the Bay of Islands, get out of the city.
>
> I've lived here all my life – almost died, been sent away
> and returned for more. But I don't know how I'll survive this
> (42).

This feeling is developed further in "7: Tai Toko Poem", "I'm living in a Christian / community one street from home, but no Baxter, just struggling" (43), and "10: New Decade", "This city's / hideous: buildings that irresponsible should wear condoms" (46). In "12: Making the umu", he enjoys learning from his Samoan in-laws how to cook in an umu but ends the poem with another regret, "I still can't hāngi!" (49). He

also acknowledges gaps in his knowledge of Māori tikanga. In "1: I walked over the hill" Bella reminds him of the ritual of washing hands after leaving a tapu place (36), and in "14" his Grandad looks after him, "I left my comb by the sink / and Grandad leaves a sprig from a tree in its place / to unknot the tapu / tangling my ignorance" (51). By weaving these references into the poems, readers are being taught too. In this fourteenth poem the narrator seems to come to a more assertive position about his place to stand, his ancestry and his future:

> My throat numbs, all the songs are in Maori, they welcomed me
> as they welcome a *guest* to the home of my ancestors!
> I want te reo
> to karanga in and a whole skull empty of bomb shelters
> or unexcavated spirits
> I want the voice of Kawiti to fight the powers
> like he and Heke did
> a flicking tongue
> tekoteko red
> to spike his cry (translated):
> this is also my standing ground
> OUR TURANGAWAEWAE! (51)

This ending says quite a lot of different things. On one level it is the narrator claiming his right to stand on his ancestral ground. It is also saying that there is work to be done, in the modern world, as important for Māori as Kawiti and Heke's stand was against the British government in 1845, and that Sullivan is preparing to take it on. He also acknowledges that he has work to do, personally, before doing so – learning te reo and exploring and coming to terms with his inherited and spiritual place in the world, part of which is possibly being a poet in both languages. In a 2018 interview with Vaughan Rapatahana, he explained that, "a large focus of my work is the transmission of knowledge through generations, so historical and mythical narratives are often threaded through the poetry" (Rapatahana).

This sequence of poems reminds me that although I may have spent time trying to figure out where to stand in our society, a society founded on the promises made in Te Tiriti, being brought up and looking Pākehā, and so enjoying all the privileges that bestows, has spared me the experience of being discriminated against or suffering under racist structures and behaviours. Neither have I inherited a legacy of loss in any other than a theoretical way – some of my tupuna had to relinquish land that they believed they had a right to live on, during the 1800s, but that has had no long-term impact on me, personally. Robert Sullivan's sense of loss is very different. It is historic, immediate and ongoing. He also brings what is a commonly held Māori sense of collectivity and spirituality to his work. As he explained in discussion with Billy Kahora, "In my poetry I like to think "I" is a collective pronoun since I believe in a family of spirits who accompany me" (Academy of New Zealand Literature). Although I experience a strong sense of connection, gratitude and sometimes, obligation, to some of my ancestors, the only time I feel accompanied by them is in dreams. My scientific and rational perspective explains that as pure mental activity, not spirituality. My conditioning and perspective is quite different from Sullivan's.

At the conclusion of Sullivan's workshop he gave us a writing exercise, first reminding us of some key points: firstly, to disrupt time, and then he quoted Ezra Pound again, saying "Make it new" and "Only emotion endures" (Sullivan, Writing a Poetry Sequence). He gave us a prompt, "peace", and five minutes writing time. From this, after revisions, came my prose poem "Picture Windows". Most of the original lines though, remain exactly as they were written in that first rough draft, in five minutes. It fulfils two of those three pieces of advice, and up to a point, it brought back a loved one. But does it make something new? In theory yes – that arrangement

of words didn't exist before – but really? I'm not convinced – novelty is a bit more of a challenge.

### *ii. Poets talk to poets / Ka korero ngā kaituhi tētahi ki tētahi*

Robert Sullivan, in the workshop mentioned above, commented that poets always talk to other poets, either person to person, or poem to poem, and in order to do this well, they need to be aware of what has come before them. Sullivan mentions James K Baxter more than once in the Tai Tokerau Poems sequence, in "2: Opua" and "7: Tai Toko poem", and acknowledges him as an influence (ReadNZ Te Pou Marama). His work talks to Baxter's work. Ezra Pound's essays, Sullivan said, are a resource that he uses regularly. One of Pound's essays develops the concept further:

> My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once and for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on those feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. (Pound 11)

The title poem in Glenn Colquhoun's *The Art of Walking Upright* is a response to Alan Curnow's 1943 poem "The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch" (O'Sullivan 91). My poem "Still Swaying" is a response to Colquhoun's. Curnow's poem, his biographer Terry Sturm argues, has been "almost invariably" misinterpreted as his "definitive statement about New Zealand identity in the 1940s". The most that could be said about the sonnet, he says, "is that it is offered as one among several possible ways of thinking about the purposes and conditions of being a poet in New Zealand at the time" (T. Sturm 182-3). Sturm's analysis seems applicable to all three poems. In a post-structural, multi-cultural world there can never be one national identity, then, now or anytime in between.

My poem, “Lying in a Hammock, at Home in Russell, Under a *Strelitzia nicolai* ” was triggered by James Wright’s “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota” (Wright 122) more as a tribute than a response. Wright’s poem made a strong impression on me when I first read it, probably at one of those times when I needed a change of job or direction. How others read it is their business. They will come to it with, as Pound said, different nuances and intellectual gradations, from within different structures of feeling.

### *iii. Structure of feeling / Te Āhua o te Wā. 1985 - 2000*

*Jazz Waiata* was Robert Sullivan’s first published book of poems, released in 1990 when he was 23 years of age. Glenn Colquhoun published his first book, *The Art of Walking Upright*, nearly ten years later, in 1999, at the age of 35. Sullivan published *Star Waka* that year too, aged 32. In order to better understand the impetus behind their work, at that time, it will be helpful to consider what was happening in the country then, socially, politically and culturally.

John Newton, in his book *Hard Frost :Structures of Feeling in New Zealand Literature 1908 –1945*, describes the term, structure of feeling, first used by Raymond Williams as “an intuition… that never quite becomes a theory” (24). He explains its usefulness as a concept for understanding literary history, in Newton’s case, New Zealand’s so-called nationalist writing, in the period 1908-1945 by saying, “I am trying to tune my ear to what it felt *necessary* to write, and to what it was *possible* to write” (21). Close reading of texts is essential to application of this “intuition”. I am considering a shorter period and only two writers.

Going back to Newton again – he states that, paradoxically, "*feeling has shape and regularity*…feeling doesn't simply pour out of us: feeling is antecedent, it surrounds and informs us, a structure in the sense of being a framework that we are always negotiating "(22) and that structure is not "a superstructural effect (epiphenomenon of some deeper cause), but as a *historical determinant in its own right*. The way that each generation 'feels its life' is an active ingredient of cultural change." This change, he said, is usually driven by a cohort of writers in their thirties (22-23). Sullivan turned 30 in 1997, Colquhoun in 1994. John Newton explained this, citing earlier work by Williams (132):

> "In trying to outline a structure of feeling we are reading for a pattern of a subjective regime, whose 'characteristic elements of impulse [and] restraint' at once enable, and put limits on, literary expression…while writers are not 'free' agents, they are agents nonetheless. Authors help to write the affective codes they are constrained by; or as Williams puts it, 'the new work will not only make explicit the changes in feeling, but will itself promote and affect them" (25).

What was happening in New Zealand society from about 1985 to 2000, when both Colquhoun and Sullivan were working on their first published collections? What shaped the structure of feeling that, in combination with their individual characters, impelled and directed their work? The answers to those questions depend partly on whether you are looking out from te ao Māori or mainstream society.

In 1985 the Waitangi Tribunal had been operating for ten years, hearing claims about contemporary government actions. In 1985 this scope was extended back to 1840. The first claim that would become part of the massive Northland claim, Te Paparahi o te Raki, was filed in September that year. In 1988 Sir James Henare, perhaps the foremost kaumatua in Te Tai Tokerau (Te Taitokerau Sustainable Development

Group), filed another claim on behalf of several Bay of Islands hapu, including Robert Sullivan's Ngāti Manu. Sullivan dedicated his Tai Tokerau Poems sequence to Sir James, who died in 1989. The report on the total of 420 claims was not released until 2014. A major finding was that Ngāpuhi never relinquished sovereignty by signing Te Tiriti. The Tribunal process occupied Māori hapu, historians, lawyers and researchers all this time – nearly three decades. Many of the original claimants died during the period. It was a time of great stress but also of empowerment through the sharing of vast stores of knowledge - oral histories, written records and stories not often told, were uncovered, heard and discussed by independent experts – lawyers and tribunal members. Although Ngāpuhi settlement negotiations have been slow, the experience of being listened to at last was significant in itself for many witnesses. This was not only happening in Northland. Settlements were being negotiated throughout the country, one of which led to the establishment of Māori broadcasting – TV and radio. In 1987 Te Reo became an official language.

Of course, there would be a backlash. It culminated in National Party and Opposition leader Don Brash's infamous 2004 speech to the Orewa Rotary Club, when he said, "The topic I will focus on today is the dangerous drift towards racial separatism in New Zealand, and the development of the now entrenched Treaty grievance industry" (Wikipedia, Don Brash). Brash would later go on to head a lobby group, Hobson's Pledge, that advocates the abolishment of the Waitangi Tribunal and Māori seats in parliament and eliminates affirmative action. The group also claims, in direct contradiction to Waitangi Tribunal findings, that sovereignty was ceded by Māori in 1840 (Wikipedia, Hobson's Pledge).

This period also included: the 1990 sesquicentennial commemoration, the 1987 stock market crash, a change of government with National's landslide victory in 1990, the 1991 Employment Contracts Act which resulted in lower wages, benefit cuts under Ruth Richardson, the 1993 MMP referendum and instigation in 1996 and the ongoing effects of Rogernomics:

> the leap into a neoliberalist global economy which exposed both businesses and the wider workforce to the unregulated predatory practices of private capital…led to a decade of insignificant (and sometimes negative) growth with the "economic miracle" being experienced by only a relatively small proportion of the population… approximately 76,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1987 and 1992…adding to unemployment…The newly unfettered business environment created by the deregulation of the financial sector… left New Zealanders "easy targets for speculators and their agents", exacerbating the effects of the October 1987 stock market crash…inequality increased in the 1980s and 1990s (Wikipedia, Rogernomics).

Increasing inequality combined with a more assertive Māori presence became commonplace around the time of publication of Colquhoun and Sullivan's poetry collections. Their poetry can be seen as part of what would become known as the Māori Renaissance (Derby, Mark: Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand) . How these two young poets felt and wrote about their lives became "an active ingredient of cultural change" (Newton 23). However, not all members of a generation think the same way, despite being subject to some of the same social conditioning. The Hobson's Pledge response is, I hope, an anachronism, but they may have a significant young membership as well.

Sullivan and Colquhoun's books were published at a similar time to others, in different genres, that dealt with similar issues, for example, Ranginui Walker's

(1987) *Nga tau Tohe Tohe: Years of Anger* and (1990) *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* and James Ritchie's (1992) *Becoming Bicultural*. Three others, published very soon after Brash's speech, ended up on my bookshelf too and helped me clarify and formulate ways of defending my position: David Slack's (2004) *bullshit, backlash and bleeding hearts: A confused person's guide to The Great Race Row*, Patrick Snedden's (2005) *Pakeha and the Treaty: why it's our treaty too* and Robert and Joanna Consedine's (2005) *Healing Our History: The Challenge of the Treaty of Waitangi.* Since then I have lent these books out to people so often that I've had to replace a couple of them after forgetting who I'd given them to. In terms of influence on society, all of these publications, on their own, exert pressure and increase knowledge, and when combined with political protest and lobbying, change becomes more likely. When literary works across different genres coalesce, the effect is magnified.

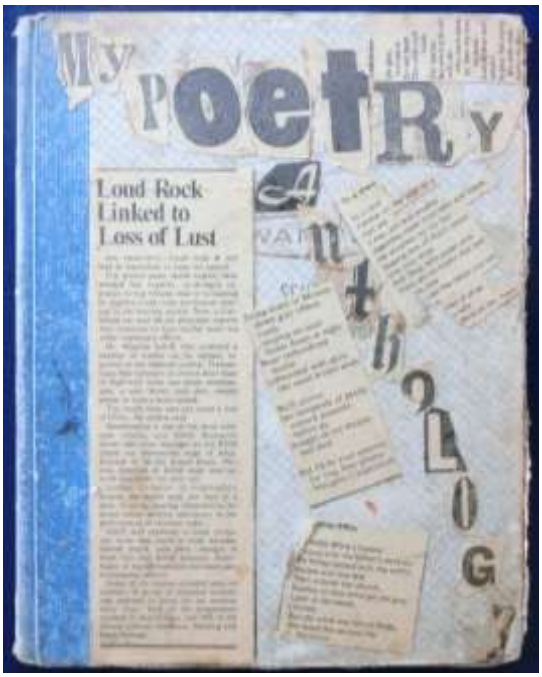
## 3. Influences / Whakaako

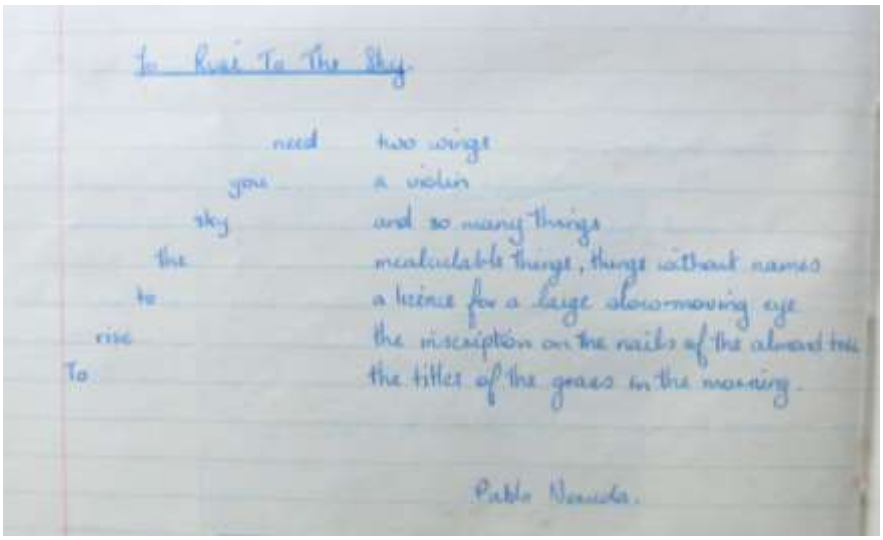
### Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

Glenn Colquhoun and Robert Sullivan were both young in the 1990s to be writing life memoirs – accordingly, both *Jazz Waiata* and *The Art of Walking Upright* are portraits of a particular period in their authors' lives, not a looking back at a whole life, which is what my collection has evolved into. I started working on it seriously in 2018, the year I turned 60, aiming to write it as a thesis. It was a birthday present to myself, one that would last two years.

If I was to find a model for the collection, it was obvious that I would have to look elsewhere. It didn't take long to find one – Pablo Neruda's *Isla Negra* (Neruda, Isla Negra: A Notebook). Neruda is a poet I have been reading for most of my life. While

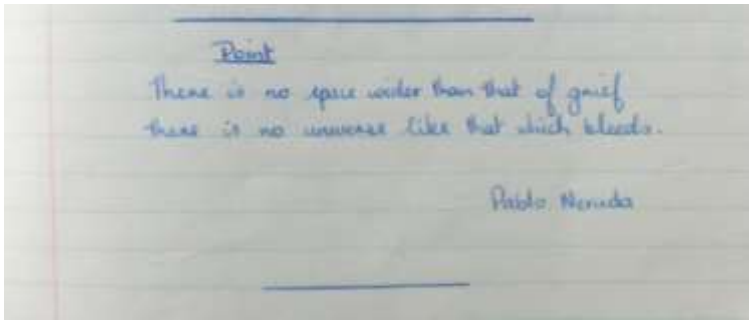
still at school I started collecting poems that I liked, pasting or copying them into an exercise book, which I still have. There are two Neruda poems, “To Rise to the Sky”, and “Point” copied into it, shown here, together with the cover. I have recently rediscovered these poems, together with others Neruda wrote at about the same time, in *Extravagaria* (Neruda, Extravagaria).





To Rise To The Sky

need two wings
you a violin
sky and so many things
the incalculable things, things without names
to a licence for a large slow-moving eye
rise the inscription on the nails of the almond tree
To the titles of the grass in the morning.

Pablo Neruda.




Neruda's inventive and lyrical use of words and images, together with the many layers of connotation and the juxtaposition of the tangible with the abstract, attracted me to his poetry at a young age, and still does. For example, lines like, from, "To Rise to the Sky", "a licence for a large slow-moving eye/ the inscription on the nails of the almond tree/ the titles of the grass in the morning." All three images link things to words in a way that invites a closer viewing of both.

"Those Lives", from *Isla Negra*, (132-5) opens by promising a summing up of the narrator's life, only to tell us that such a thing is impossible. Neruda, and his translator, then present a metaphor that takes your breath away, while also describing his project:

> This is what I am, I'll say, to leave this written
> excuse. This is my life.
> Now it is clear this couldn't be done –
> that in this net it's not just the strings that count
> but also the air that escapes through the meshes.

In an afterword to *Isla Negra*, Enrico Mario Santi says that this poem marks a shift from the "biographical sequence" that had predominated up to that point (Santi). From then on, the remembered chronology was randomly interrupted by "diary"-like musings both on his own life and current events. Neruda acknowledged the subjectivity of memory in a preface to one of the sections when it was published separately, but as Santi says, he never included it in *Isla Negra*, "probably because

Neruda preferred to leave that crucial view implicit in his poems." In Santi's translation, Neruda described it:

> The road's forgotten, we left no footprints in order to return,
> and if the leaves trembled when once we passed them, now they
> no longer do, and the fatal lightning rod that fell to destroy us
> doesn't even whistle. To walk toward memories when these
> have become smoke is to sail in smoke. and my childhood, seen
> from 1962 and in Valparaiso, after having walked so long, is
> only rain and smoke." (411).

My own collection of biographical and diary-like poems jumps about like this a bit, and acknowledges both memory's unreliability – as in "My Vicious Eel" – and, perhaps, its selectivity.

Does sharing a hemisphere confer a commonality between writers that is missing if they occupy opposite halves of the planet? Chileans definitely share a commonality with Māori and Pākehā in being residents of a nation dealing with the flow-on effects of colonisation, one of which is having no practical alternative to writing their work in the language of the coloniser – Spanish for Chileans, English for New Zealanders. What we haven't had to live with here, though, is the daily threat to life that political opponents of some of Chile's political regimes have lived with day to day. Neruda's life and work were many times threatened by his political opponents. Indeed, it is only recently that the probability of his assassination by the Pinochet regime, has been investigated (Bonnefoy). *Canto General* (Neruda, Canto General), first published in 1950 in Mexico City, was completed during Neruda's time of exile from Chile, after he publicly criticised the then president, González Videla, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

Neruda's and South America's histories are interwoven in much of his writing. In the introduction to the 1991 edition, *Canto General* was described as both a "poetics of betrayal" and "a return to origins and a rebirth, a sweeping recollection dragging, along with the memories of Neruda's intimate and poetic self, the natural and collective history of Latin America" by Roberto González Echevarría (1). Neruda finished the book a few months before he turned forty-five. He identified with peasants and with indigenous Chileans, without any of the apparent angst that Pākehā in New Zealand sometimes experience when negotiating with Māori. As Echevarría said, Neruda's "own journey through life is a foundational story woven into the fabric of the poem" (2). The poem was written when both Chile and Neruda were going through a time of upheaval. New Zealand, while sharing a history of colonisation and the ongoing effects on its indigenous population, with Chile, has never, since the end of the New Zealand Wars in the 1870s, been as politically unstable or as dangerous, for political activists. The warrant for Neruda's arrest was revoked in 1952, and he returned to Chile to be honoured publicly. He then wrote and published, in 1956, *Odas Elementales*. These poems, according to one of his translators, Alistair Reid, arose from Neruda's deliberate decision to fulfil, "what he referred to as his 'poet's obligation' – that of being a voice – …in order to make them more accessible to people like the campesinos who had given him shelter when he was in hiding" (5-6).

Neruda's writings reflected his life, his character, and the structure of feeling he was operating within. *Canto General* and *Isla Negra*, while both partly biographical, were written at different stages of his life and from different countries and within different societies. They reflect all those influences, together with their author's

purpose, part of which I suspect was cementing a myth in his readers' minds. Perhaps in his own mind as well. He was a public figure with a political purpose. He was a lover of many women, of nature and of his country and was loved in return by many women and many of his fellow Chileans. Writing one's own autobiography, whether in poetry or prose, is one way of trying to control a legacy. And Neruda was no stranger to criticism and attack. This didn't stop when he died.

The author of so many love poems revealed himself in his memoirs to have once raped a young Tamil woman who came to his house every morning to empty his latrine bucket (Neruda, Memoirs 100). This became public, and widely debated, when the Chilean government proposed renaming what is now Santiago International Airport after him. (McGowan). Responses have ranged from recycling previously-loved poetry books by him (Sanders), to support of his work, by Isobel Allende, in spite of dislike for his behaviour. She said, "Unfortunately, Neruda was a flawed person, as we all are in one way or another, and *Canto General* is still a masterpiece" (McGowan). A Spanish Literature teacher responded to the knowledge by refusing to teach Neruda's poems to women students, saying, "I refuse to let them romanticize the figure of a misogynist as one of the greatest poets to ever write" (Semiramis). While these revelations are certainly disturbing, this kind of behaviour was not unusual for powerful men living in Neruda's times. It is not uncommon now either. Society's willingness to expose and resist such behaviour is long overdue. However, history cannot be undone, and such new information does not alter the fact that Neruda's poetry has been and still is an influence on my own writing. What it does do is add a layer of reality to his myth and adds a level of complexity to a

consideration of how possible it is to separate an artist's life from his or her work (Barthes).

Another commonality that I was aware of in my reading of *Isla Negra*, is the shared proximity that New Zealanders and Chileans have with the Pacific Ocean. The sea, any sea, with its beauty, its mystery, its bounty, force, saltiness and wetness, carries a fascination for many of us. Isla Negra, the place, seemed to encapsulate that for Neruda. Translator Alistair Reid appreciated working on most of the translation of the book on an island, " which proved lucky for me…because I was able to spend time contemplating, say, the kinetics of a wave to the point of realising its physicality, the dimension of experience in which Neruda's poems are so deeply rooted" (xiv). A quick look at the titles of these poems reveals that many of them refer to the sea: The First Sea, Soliloquy In The waves, The Sea, Tides, The Fisherman. So too do many individual lines, such as, from "Truth", "I want to invent this day our daily sea" (401), or in "Monsoons", "Eventually I went to live across the sea. /My house was set up in magic places,/chapter of waves,/of wind and salt, eye and eyelid/of a stubborn underwater star"(127). Neruda's poetry is saturated with the enchantment of the ocean and with all its associated images and natural life. I share this with him. The sea is in my work too. It has been part of what attracted me to his poetry.

*Isla Negra* was published seven years before Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Two years later he was dead. It is a collection written by a mature man, sure of his craft. A big book, it is organised in five separate, named sections. I read, and was inspired by it in subtle ways, over several months. It was

only later that I became aware of some of the subconscious or deliberate borrowings that I took from it.

One was the absence of punctuation in many of the poems, leaving the choice of where to pause and where to place emphasis, up to the reader. As a reader I appreciate such abandonment and handing over of control, that invitation, that acceptance of co-creation. To me, it suggests generosity and a confidence that the reader will value and respect the work, and will bring his or her own character and experience to the reading. It also seems to subtly say, make of the structure of this poem what you will. Bring your own life into it. Interpret it within your own kaupapa. Perhaps that's too big an assumption. Perhaps not. I have found it interesting too, to note that in some of my later poems in this collection, I have felt it necessary to use more punctuation. Where this impulse has come from and why, is, so far, a mystery to me.

One poem from *Isla Negra* that brings many of the factors that I like, together – nature and the sea, intense observation, lack of punctuation, the circling back, surrealism, symbolism and lyricism – is "The Fisherman" (259). The onlooking narrator watches a man, a naked fisherman, with a long spear, going after fish trapped in a rock pool. The scene is quickly imbued with stillness, gravity, expectation and emotion:

> sea air and man are still
> suggesting a rose a gentleness
> spreads from the water's edge and slowly rises
> enclosing the harshness in silence

The enjambment in the first and second of these lines creates an interpretative challenge and disruption to a seamless reading. Double meanings are suggested. Not only has the observing narrator constructed, in verse, a completely motionless and benign, kindly scene, reminiscent of the flower most commonly associated with love, but it is also a slowed down, silent and mute scene, a still life:

> one by one the minutes seem
> to have folded up like a fan
> and the heart of the naked fisherman
> to have stilled its beat in the water

This still life however, is about to be undone, without any warning such as a stanza break, a change of rhythm or pace, in the next few lines. A potentially destructive force of nature, lightning, with its connotations of startling light and electricity, sound, fire, storms, surprise and speed, is unleashed from the fisherman, the silent, still, naked fisherman, who up to that point had seemed unthreatening, perhaps even, to a Western eye unused to nakedness except behind closed doors, vulnerable. Except that he was holding a long spear. His prey is trapped in the rock pool so there is no urgency in the scene. Even nature, the apparently inanimate rock and the ocean waves, had, like the reader, been lulled into a false, but temporary, sense of safety:

> but when the rock wasn't looking
> and the wave had furled its force
> in the midst of that mute world
> lightning struck from the man
> at the still life of stone

The rock is alternately given life then has it taken away again "the spear stuck in the pure stone". This is at once a reality – it is what the onlooker sees – and an impossibility. This surrealism is another aspect of Neruda's work that fascinates me. It brings a sense of wonder to my reading of his work and serves as a model to aspire to. I want to train my mind to see things in such double, or even multiple, ways, to be

able to interpret in complex, compound ways what is contained within the images, sounds, signs, tastes, textures and intellectual information that my mind receives from the world, and then to turn it into words that convey all those possibilities to another mind.

The spear stuck in pure stone, not just ordinary stone, in pure stone. Something sacred, tapu, has been violated. Then the full consequences are revealed. The fish is wounded but not yet dead – its dying will be slow. In reference back to the lightning which killed it – not the man with the spear, "the wounded fish flapped in the light / harsh flag of an uncaring sea / butterfly of bloodstained salt." In English the last line has satisfying alliteration which is absent in Neruda's Spanish, "mariposa de sal ensangrentada." The images though, in both languages, contain movement. First, the fish flapped, then by association, so did the flag and, finally, the butterfly, which seemed to me to be in full flight, fleeing the harsh reality of this scene, and at the same time, leaving the page and the poem. Like Neruda fleeing into exile?

In three lines this poem moved from a still life painting to loaded images. The flag carries connotations of nationhood, which, in Chile, has at times been harsh and uncaring to many of its citizens. No matter how much we humans like to romanticise it, the sea can also be dangerous and life threatening, as can other forces of nature which act on animals like fish and butterflies with exactly the same impartiality as they act on us. Neruda presents all of this in a poem of one stanza and one sentence.

“The Fisherman” appears midway into the section titled “A Hunter After Roots” dedicated to Neruda’s friend, Spanish sculptor Alberto Sánchez. Originally published as a stand-alone book, this section, according to Santí, “expands on the metaphor of exile as rootlessness and projects Neruda’s return to Chile in 1952 as a journey to find his roots and repossess his identity.” (415). It is Neruda’s ability to saturate his work with emotion, as here, that of an exile’s longing for home, that will always bring me back to his work, because for me, that is part of the potency of poetry, his in particular.

Some of his work is complex enough to reveal more on each subsequent reading. Using fewer words than prose, using the effect of lines and line ends and harnessing the power of rhythm, changes of pace, and the multiple connotations that can be embodied in a word, then placing that word in a context and soundscape that enables all those meanings to be perceived and understood, and, often subconsciously, to elicit an emotional bodily response in a reader – that is my ultimate goal. If I don’t feel it myself, I know there is more work to be done. That Neruda achieves it so often, even in translation, is the sign of a masterful poet, one worth trying to emulate.

One down side of using such a polished collection as a model is that it reveals gaps in your own work. Where for instance, have I written of how poetry came into my life in such a way as to lead me to devote two years of who knows how many years of life I have still ahead of me to it? Where are my love poems?

# 4. Influences / Whakaako

## Anne Carson (Born 1950)

Was one of my models, Neruda, a misogynist – a person who dislikes, despises, or is strongly prejudiced against women (OUP) – or was he a lover of women? Perhaps he was both. So, where does that leave me? In the same place of ignorance about women in literature that I was in with regard to biculturalism in Aotearoa before I started to educate myself? No.

This response is made with confidence. Any student of literature in New Zealand or anywhere in the world would have to be very determined to avoid noticing the huge amount of work that has gone into exposing and challenging the patriarchal and Eurocentric bias that has controlled which literature has been published, studied and canonised in the past (Leggott) (Newton). It is not only in literature that this movement been obvious. It has been pervasive throughout the academic world and most of our media and social media driven Western society. This doesn't, however, negate the conditioning that I was subject to during my early life, before feminism became an everyday word and long before equal pay was even thought of as a possibility – I still remember hearing the justification for the difference, that men need to be paid more than women because they have families to support. It was wrong then and is still wrong today.

My exposure to and appreciation of the work of women poets has increased in the last few decades – particularly HD, Elizabeth Bishop, Robin Hyde, Janet Frame, Michele Leggott, Lauris Edmond and Carol Ann Duffy. While writing this thesis though, it was rereading Anne Carson's book *Glass, Irony & God* that got me started.

The two earliest completed pieces in my collection were directly modelled on the fourth long poem in her book – "The Fall of Rome: A Traveller's Guide". Mine are "A Short History of Russell & the Bay of Islands" and "Kororāreka -Russell: A Visitor's Guide". The final versions are also influenced by tourist brochures that I wrote or edited during my time as curator of Russell Museum. Anne Carson's work was definitely a trigger, the form being an obvious similarity, as is the conversational voice and posing of questions I used in the latter piece. I'm aware of definite borrowings: Hers – "Who I am doesn't matter" (74), and mine – "My name is not yours to know"; Hers – "What is the holiness of a stranger?" (81), and mine – "What defines a stranger?". The final result is, of course, quite different from its triggering piece. I'm from the South Pacific, she's Canadian. I'm a beginning writer who has never settled into any particular career, she's a classical scholar, author of many published books and, as described on the back cover of *Glass, Irony and God*, "teaches ancient Greek for a living." Further down on the same cover is an extract from *The New York Review of Books* which says, "Carson has created an individual form and style for narrative verse. Seldom has Pound's injunction 'Make It New' been so spectacularly obeyed." (Carson). I found her innovation exciting and, obviously, inspiring.

## 5. Influences / Whakaako

### Airini Beautrais (Born 1982)

Another New Zealand woman poet whose recently published book I read in its entirety while writing my portfolio is Airini Beautrais. *Flow: Whanganui river Poems* had several obvious similarities with my project – a mix of poems about people and places, some current, some historical, about ancestry, public characters and events. Some of them overlapped – her "Hat on a map" dealt with the same

issues and locality as my "Still Swaying". She also wrote some poems about geological time, pre-settlement, as did Neruda in *Canto General*. I didn't go that far back, beginning instead when Polynesians arrived.

In her dedication, Beautrais said, "Writing about, or, more accurately, around the river, was not a straightforward task…it is impossible to tell 'the story'…there are many stories…and many interpretations of these stories" (13). This is a concept that I tried to explore in my work as well, telling stories from different perspectives, and sometimes using a persona. Developing this idea further, Beautrais went on to say, "And, more importantly, the significance of the relationships between Whanganui iwi and the river cannot be adequately addressed by a Pākehā writer." (13). Accordingly, she adopted a more "fragmented approach", attempting to create "something like a collage or polyphony of stories" (14). My own collection is even more polyphonous and fragmented than that and includes, besides the two brochure-like pieces, life writing, poems and prose poems. Its focus is less clear than that of the Whanganui River Poems. I haven't attempted to write a story of local iwi relationships with Ipipiri – the Bay of Islands. That story is far too big to fit within my mind, let alone my writing. What I have started to explore is the relationship, the history and legacy of my own tupuna with the place that, without them, I would probably never have come to live in.

*Flow: Whanganui River Poems* was interesting for another reason. It is contemporary with my work. Beautrais published *Flow* in 2017 – mine ends only three years later. Much of the other poetry I have been considering is now a couple of

decades old at least, but Beautrais and I were probably working within a similar "structure of feeling" – we are both female, although of different ages. Biculturalism in Aotearoa – New Zealand has moved on from the early 2000s. The Whanganui River now has legal personhood, following the 2014 Whanganui iwi deed of settlement signing and subsequent passing in 2017 of the Te Awa Tupua bill (Beautrais 13).

### *iv. Structure of Feeling / Te Āhua o te Wā 2019-20*

Here in Te Tai Tokerau the Waitangi Tribunal ruled that Ngāpuhi didn't cede sovereignty by signing Te Tiriti. Ngāpuhi treaty settlement negotiations have been protracted, but are underway. NZ history, including balanced teaching of our civil war will soon be a compulsory component of our school curriculum. Tuia 250 commemorations strengthened ties between indigenous Tahitians and Māori, and celebrated both Polynesian and English voyaging traditions, with waka hourua and tall ships sailing together to locations of first encounters between Māori and Europeans, prompting a more open acknowledgement of hurt and loss than has been common in the past. I was fortunate enough to be on the *R. Tucker Thompson* on the leg from Whāngarei to Waitangi, to hear the kōrero first hand and be part of the overwhelming aroha, openness and inclusiveness shown at pōwhiri along the way – not at all like some of the media emphasis on protest and divisiveness.

At the same time, partly funded by Tuia 250, the generally conservative NZ Herald produced and ran an online video series, *Land of the Long White Cloud,* challenging the racism in our society that some Pākehā have been ignoring, or unaware of their whole lives, promoting the message that "Pākehā NZers need to take their colonial

guilt and turn it into action". The series' Pākehā filmmaker Kathleen Winter hoped that Pākehā who viewed the series would "realise the impact they can make by speaking up and speaking out - especially to each other." (Herald). Sometime later Winter was interviewed by an e-tangata writer, Simone Kaho. Winter said, "We've been a little overwhelmed by the racist backlash since the series release." Radio NZ also ran the series in November and, Kaho said, "discussion there has been more balanced, perhaps reflecting the difference in audience". After analysing 188 of the social media responses to the Herald she realised:

> most of the comments, and most of the backlash, was defensiveness. This actually makes sense to me, given not only the gaps we've had in our education system but also the lack of access and exposure that many Pākehā have to teachers or friends or relatives who are Māori, or who understand colonisation…Strangely, perhaps, I wasn't expecting it. *Land of the Long White Cloud* aligned so well with my personal truths, it was hard to imagine it could piss off so many other New Zealanders, so much. The backlash exposed the oceanic gulf between the Pākehā in *Land of the Long White Cloud* and the Pākehā of Hobson's Pledge and talkback New Zealand. How do we begin to have conversations about critical issues when we're so far apart?" (Kaho)

So, what does this mean? It means the job is not done yet. It is important for more filmmakers, journalists, poets and prose writers to keep telling their stories. As Gide said, nobody listens, so it has to be said again and again. In these social media saturated times, when it is so easy to be algorithm-ed into an endless rerun of your own ideas, telling stories in different ways is the only way of getting through to more people. My small contribution may make a difference. It is worth doing.

## Conclusion / Whakamutunga

So now I will come back to earlier questions: What is this actually about? Why was I doing this? Who was I writing it for? Has this already all been said by someone else? Was I fired up writing it? Would I enjoy reading it?

Yes, I was fired up at times, during the writing. Whether I would enjoy reading it is now a non-issue. I know it too well to answer that question, so will have to leave that answer to other readers. It is about people and place, particularly mine. Initially I was intending to write it for family, researching lost histories and recording them in poetry or prose. As the work progressed this impetus became less pressing and it seemed to gather a momentum of its own that I was happy to follow. I'm not suggesting some kind of spiritual possession here, rather a subconscious state of mind that has no rational explanation but which served a useful poetic purpose for me.

Two models for my own work have been the Tai Tokerau writers, Glenn Colquhoun and Robert Sullivan. Why were they significant? Firstly, because they both have ties with the area in which I live. It seems as if I have more to discover about the significance of place in people's lives, whether the place is lived in or remembered. Secondly, because in their work, both on the page and in person, they challenge the hegemony of our nation's mainstream western political and social legacy and work towards strengthening the bicultural promise agreed to, but subsequently marginalised, in our founding treaty document Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Both of these are positions I share.

In addition to this perspective there is another influence which I attempted to interrogate through both the lives and works of these writers – again, while also considering my own similar but slightly different social and cultural positioning. Glenn Colquhoun is Pākehā. He deliberately set out to discover what that meant to him, once he knew more about what it means to be Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Robert Sullivan self-identifies as Māori both by whakapapa and upbringing, while also acknowledging his Irish ancestry. I, on the other hand, was brought up as a Pākehā New Zealander with Māori ancestry, alongside my Scots, Irish and English inheritance. I'm multi-cultural too, and as Colquhoun says, a mongrel. A lucky mongrel. My indigenous whakapapa became more important to me as I tried to understand what it meant both for me and for the society I live in – especially locally, in Kororāreka -Russell. What it signifies to me as a poet is still developing.

Recently I have been considering a different perspective. While such soul-searching seems to be popular and vaguely interesting, how necessary is it really? Could it be media-driven? Part of a constructed simulacrum? (Baudrillard) Perhaps it doesn't need to be a personal quest. Not every poet does it. Walcott did. Neruda had other priorities. I can choose to call myself Māori and/or Pākehā – I'm both. Sometimes one name escapes through the meshes – at other times it gets caught. What seems more important is what stays on the page, not what labels are attached to the author. After all, it is only the words that remain after the death of the author (Barthes), or as Robert Sullivan said, quoting Ezra Pound (Sullivan, Writing a Poetry Sequence), " Only emotion endures". Maybe it's time to let that one lie and move on.

Poetry seems to make its own way through a writer. Something will trigger the beginning of a poem for me – an image, a place, a sound or a memory are common triggers, and for one of these poems it was a conversation. At other times it has been reading other writer's poems – but sometimes the words just arrive as if of their own accord, from nothing. The poem's development then is sometimes fast, but sometimes can take years before it seems finished. Glenn Colquhoun was once asked, "how he knows when a poem is working". He replied:

> It's like there is a conceit or irritation that makes me want to write about something and I keep going till I think the poem says what I want it to, or what it has decided to say instead. I just keep going until it gets up off the page and walks away. (Colquhoun, http://www.dunedinwritersfestival.co.nz/glenn-colquhoun-creative-writing-workshop.html)

Every poet approaches their work from within their own body and mind, which is shaped by their genes, their geography, society, culture and life experiences. Every poet, knowingly or not, is constrained and enabled, by the structure of feeling operating in their society and by their chosen language. Sometimes, as Colquhoun hinted, a poem, and a collection of poems has a life of its own and all the poet can do is follow along in its wake. Writing this portfolio has at times been compelling in that way, and it also seemed significant enough to spend my time on. It seems finished, for now, and I'm looking forward to discovering what might come next.

What I didn't expect, and what has challenged me to, once again, get off the fence and decide where my boundaries lie, are the feminist and sexual violation issues connected with two poets whose work I have enjoyed for decades – Pablo Neruda and James K Baxter. Do I make space on my shelves where their books have been, and read female poets instead as Annabel Wilson (Auckland Writers' Festival), Pip Adam (Duff), Semiramis and Sanders did? Do I decide to separate the work from the

person as Isabel Allende was able to, but read more critically in light of the new knowledge, to show where we've come from, as Hannah August (Duff) advocated? Or do I justify my fence-top position by saying something like "We only know about these crimes (which, in Baxter's case was not legally recognised as a crime until 1985, long after his death) because of their "confessions". Who else would I have to take off my shelves if they too had written memoirs or collectible letters?" After all, Ezra Pound is still there. Were they all just products of their times like our early colonial administrators who decided to fundraise for the under-resourced British Crown by stealing, then speculating on Māori land? Even if this is true, there is still some reckoning to be done. For now, perhaps the best I can do is follow J C Sturm's example, from her poem "A Slow Learner". I'll give her the last word, "Acceptance, they say, / is the name of the game. / True. The trouble is, / I am such a slow learner" (J. Sturm 123). Either way, the issue warrants more research, more learning. Perhaps that will be next.

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PART TWO: CREATIVE COMPONENT

# Essential Notebook: Pukapuka Tino Pūtake

*"Neruda was writing…a set of assembled meditations on the presence of the past in the present, an essential notebook."*

- Alistair Reid

## Introduction / Whakamōhio

E ngā mana, ngā waka, ngā rangatira, ngā karangarangatanga

mihi mai, mihi mai, mihi mai ki a mātou

Ko Māmari tōku waka

Ko Maiki tōku maunga

Ko Ipipiri te moana

Ko Kororāreka te kainga

Ko Te Kapotai te hapu

Ko Ngāpuhi nui tonu te iwi

Ko Shelley Arlidge ahau

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnānō tātou katoa

Ko te kaupapa o taku whakaahua mata, ko tetahi tangata rongonui.
Ko Tiraha tōna ingoa, tōku tupuna whaea.

I tata ki whānau mai a Tiraha, i Utakura, Hokianga, i te tau kotahi mano e waru rau, mā waru. Ko Papaharakeke tōna Papa, ko Kopu tōna Mama. Nō Hokianga a Papaharakeke. Nō Waikare a Kopu. Nō reira, nō Waikare me nō Hokianga a Tiraha, nō te rawhiti, me te hauauru. Kāhore te tungane, te tuakana me teina a Tiraha.

I te tau kotahi mano e waru rau, rua tekau mā rua, i haere a Papaharakeke (te papa a Tiraha), ratou ko Te Pae-o-te–rangi, me ngā tangata toa, ki Rotorua ki whawhai tatou ki Te Arawa. Ko Papaharakeke, i mate, Te Pae-o-te-rangi, i mate. I mate tokomaha te tangata. I hoki kotahi tane, anake, ki tōna kainga. E hia te tau a Tiraha? Tekau mā whā.

I tera tau hoki, i tau mai nei a William Cook, nō Engari ki Te Pewhairangi, mā runga kaipuke whaiwhaiwēra haere ai. E toru tekau mā rua, ona tau. I whiwhi mahi a Wiremu i Kororareka. Ko te mahi ia, he kaihanga waka.

I tūtaki raua. Ka haere te wā. I moenga a Tiraha me Wiremu.

I whānau mai a George, te mataamua a Wiremu raua ko Tiraha, i te tau kotahi mano e waru rau, rua tekau mā rima. Ko ia tōku tupuna hoki. E tekau mā whitu te tau a Tiraha. E toru tekau mā rima te tau a Wiremu. I muri tata mai, i haere rātou ki Rakiura. Ka haere waru tau i mua i hoki rātou ki Waikare.

E tekau mā rua ona tamariki, e tokorima ngā tama, e tokowhitu ngā kotiro. I whānau mai te potiki i te tau kotahi mano e waru rau, mā whā tekau mā waru. E hia o tau a Tiraha? Whā tekau. Tokomaha ngā mokopuna, me ngā uri.

Ehara au i mohio ngā mea maha mō Tiraha. Kotahi te pikitia a ia. Kāhore au e mohio ōna whakaaro, ōna pumanawa ranei. E titiro ana ahau i tōna pikitia. E pānui ana ahau ngā korero mō ia. E hakarongo au ki te kaipūrākau. E whakaaro ana ahau mō tōna ora.

E kite ana ahau ngā kākahu Pākehā. E kite ana ahau tā moko ki runga tōna kauae me ōna ngutu. E pohewa ana ahau he wairua hikaka tōna. E pānui ana au mō te ngawari o tōna ahua. I noho ia ki te ao hurihuri. I tū a Tiraha me kotahi waewae ki Hokianga, kotahi waewae ki Waikare. I tū ia me kotahi waewae ki te ao Māori, kotahi waewae ki te ao Pākehā. He tino tauira ia hai whainga mā au.

E kite ana au he wahine manawanui, he wahine kaha, he wahine maia. E tū ana i mua, toku tupuna, me he toka.

Ka whakamutunga, he whakatauki

Te toka tūmoana
Ka tū, ka tū, ka tū.
Ahakoa i awhatia mai te rangi
Whakapakakatia i te whitinga o te ra
Te toka tūmoana
Ka tū, ka tū, ka tū.

Let me introduce to you my ancestor, Tiraha. She was born in about 1808, in Utakura. Her parents were Papaharakeke from the Hokianga and Kopu from Waikare, so Tiraha was from both the east coast and the west coast of the area of Northland where I now live. Her whakapapa encompasses both coasts of Te Whare Tapu o Ngāpuhi. She had no siblings.

In 1822 her father, Papaharakeke, Te Pae-o-te-rangi and many other warriors went to Rotorua. In a fight with Te Arawa, he and many others died. Only one man returned home. How old was Tiraha? Fourteen.

In the same year, William Cook arrived in the Bay of Islands from England, on a whaling ship. He was 32. He found work in Kororāreka as a boat builder. William and Tiraha met. Time passed. They married, first in the Māori way, and some years later, in the English and Christian manner.

Their first son George was born in 1825 when Tiraha was 17. Wiremu was 35 when he became a father for the first time. This son George, too, is my ancestor. Not long after this they went to Rakiura, Stewart Island. They spent eight years there before they returned to Waikare.

William and Eliza Cook, to use her transliterated name, had twelve children, five boys, seven girls. Tiraha was forty when the youngest was born in 1848. They had many grandchildren and descendants.

There are many things I don't know about Tiraha. There is one photo of her and one photo of William. I don't know her thoughts or her character. I look at her picture. I read the stories, listen to the storytellers. I think about her life.

I see Pākehā clothes. I hear of a moko on her chin and lips. I imagine an adventurous spirit. I read about her flexibility. She lived in a changing world. Tiraha stood with one foot in the Hokianga, one foot in the Waikare. She came from a Māori world but must have followed many of the Pākehā ways of her husband. She is an example of biculturalism for me to try and emulate.

I see a determined woman, a strong woman, a fearless woman. She stands before me and behind me, my ancestor, like a rock.

To finish, a whakatauki.

The rock stands in the sea
Stands, stands, stands.
Although the weather may be stormy
And the rock may be roasted by the sun
The rock stands in the sea
Stands, stands, stands.

# A Short History of Russell & the Bay of Islands

c. 1300
When Polynesians arrived after crossing Moana nui a Kiwa there were no other humans here. Polynesian navigators visualised islands moving. They appeared as guides then disappeared again. Sometimes it is difficult to know who is doing the moving, you, or the island.

Sometime after c.1300
Motuarohia, the island that Cook would later anchor in the lee of, was once the home of a whānau with a rebellious daughter who, early one morning, against the wishes of her father, a rangatira, fled to be with her lover, a commoner. Not for her a political marriage to cement some alliance with another hapu or iwi. She wanted something different, something her father hadn't counted on. Following the advice of a tohunga she climbed before dawn to the island's highest peak. Already her beloved was waiting in his waka, just offshore at Wiwiki and as the tohunga ended his chant the pyramid sized chunk of rock beneath her feet, lifted off, levitated and travelled, carrying its passenger towards her tane, where it splash-landed in the sea. She swam to his waka and the two lovers paddled away leaving a father bereft, gazing across a hole in his own island towards a new rock standing in the sea, far across the bay. There school fish gather, seabirds nest and incoming swells crash, throwing their white spume high.

c. 1500
There is evidence in Northland of a series of tsunami which decimated coastal settlements, not long after the eruption of Rangitoto, just a few kilometres down the coast. Many possible causes are theorised: a mega-tsunami caused by a meteorite impact, subduction zone earthquakes, submarine landslides or ruptures along several underwater faults. Coastal kāinga were abandoned. People probably died immediately and later, by starvation. Gardens, inundated with seawater, would have been ruined. In Russell, marine gravels deposited almost certainly by at least one tsunami, were found 22 metres above the current sea level. Whether there were residents here then is unknown. As far as we know, no one has worked out whether gravel would be lifted 22 metres above Russell's shingle beach in a tsunami generated near Cape Wiwiki or by an earthquake under Motuarohia.

Undated Oral History
On Okahu Island, Redhead, at a headland called Ngākiriparauri, another young woman, pining for her tane, composed a lament, a waiata tangi, before leaping off to her death. The words of the waiata, passed down the generations long after her name was lost, were memorized first by her sister, who accompanied her to the clifftop. On the 29th of May 1953, Henry Clendon, the last recipient to safeguard the kupu in his memory, wrote them down in a letter to his friend, Fred Baker. Henry's mother had sung them to him, in music now gone. The high, rocky cliffs of Ngakiriparauri look north towards Tikitiki and beyond, to Reinga. The kotiro sang of her sadness and her sister kept on singing it. Henry translated her words for his friend and wrote them down. Other losses were to follow those of the two sisters.

1769
When the English explorer James Cook visited Ipipiri he drew a line in the sand of Motuarohia claiming one side as his own. NO TRESPASSERS. Violaters will be shot. Some were. Cook left names. *I have named it the Bay of Islands, on account of the great number which line its shores, and these help to form several safe and Commodious harbours, wherein there is room and Depth of water for any number of Shipping*. Cook stayed eleven days. Some years later, his name was engraved on a plaque stuck to a rock near his anchorage which is called by some, Cook's Cove.

Cook sailed his barque Endeavour in and out between the two legendary and actual points, Tikitiki - The Ninepin and Okahu - Redhead, but went aground on Te Nunuhe - Whale Rock, that only shows in a swell on a low tide. Endeavour floated off and sailed away, no damage done.

That depends on where you're looking from or to and whether it's his story or hers.

1772
Marion du Fresne, a French explorer, visited the harbour that Cook had already named the Bay of Islands. He stayed for several months. Many deaths, including his own, punctuated his visit. Apparently, his men buried a bottle on the island of Moturua, after destroying a pā there. Some years later archaeologists excavated it and other sites on the island. The bottle has, officially, never been found, even though the directions to its location were not secret. Assassination Cove is a name still associated with du Fresne's visit.

1779
On his third visit to New Zealand Cook didn't anchor in the Bay of Islands. He sailed back across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii where, on another beach, the locals killed him.

11th March 1845
Hone Heke and Kawiti with the aid of Te Kapotai invaded Kororāreka in the early morning while it was still dark. By evening most of the inhabitants were gone. Others left their bones behind. Heke and Kawiti paddled away ki ōku kainga on the other side. Nene also returned to a pā in the west, near Te Ahu Ahu. I whawhai rātou they continued to fight each other over this and other issues, present and past. Kororāreka burned. Te Kapotai returned to Waikare. French missionaries and their bishop, Pompallier, remained in their corner facing a red twilight. In the secluded, horseshoe shaped bay, a vacancy waited to be filled.

In the fighting on Maiki hill when the flagpole fell, so too did a young girl. Collateral damage, it's still called. Fanny Wing, daughter of Thomas, ship's captain and Ruatangi, from the Hokianga, was killed along with six soldiers like the others we remember at the going down of the sun. She was buried in an unmarked grave. At the time, interracial marriages were common, between Pākeha men and Māori women. It helped if the wahine 'owned' land. Monogamy was not guaranteed. Sometimes there were wives in England too. In Kororāreka, there has always been a lot of breeding.

May 1845
The Te Kapotai pā at Waikare was attacked by the British, without Nene's help, two months after the sacking of Kororāreka. They were guided by 'a man called Cook' (no relation of James) and helped by local rangatira Rewa, Wi Repa, Mohi Tawhai and Hauraki with about a hundred toa, warriors in waka taua. Hauraki was wounded and taken in by a pākehā who lived on the river. The pā at Waikare was sacked and burned. Hauraki didn't survive and there was a return visit to avenge his death. That time the British troops were not invited.

After 1845
Tapeka Point lies between Motuarohia and Kororāreka. It is the site of an ancient inter-iwi battle where survivors climbed the cliffs to safety in Tara's pa above. This highest point is known locally, though not on any map, as Lovers Leap. It commemorates another jump, this time by lovers hand in hand. Historians believe that story to be a fiction. There are no stories or waiata telling of how or what they leapt to. Tapeka is also a good place to catch kahawai and snapper and to gather mussels and kina.

No-one really thinks that a chunk of rock from Motuarohia actually lifted off like ET's spaceship and crash-landed miles away, do they? Volcanism in the Bay of Islands probably ended long before Polynesians sailed their voyaging waka past Rakaumangamanga for the first time. But land still moves. Continents drift slowly apart. Earthquakes lift or drop shorelines, farmland or city streets in an instant. Tsunamis are an ever-present possibility when you live within a ring of fire. In modern Russell, tsunami sirens are tested twice yearly, when time moves forwards or back for the saving or spending of daylight.

2020
After years of battling, tangata whenua recently established a marae building in Russell. Named Haratu, after the whare of Rewa, one of the last Ngāpuhi rangatira to maintain a kainga in Kororāreka after European colonisation, it sits on a corner of land between The Strand (as in London) and Pitt Street (named for an eighteenth century British Prime Minister) and looks out on Kororāreka Bay (named for a chief who liked sweet penguin soup). Beyond the mooring area, superyachts often anchor where once there were whaling ships, their holds filled with barrels of oil, bound to light the lamps of empire.

Now marketed as a town of two names, Kororāreka-Russell is being tidied up for tourists. Kikuyu grass verges that once spilled over onto roads and were grazed by milking cows, are almost all kerbed, channelled and concreted. Café and restaurant tables perch on esplanade reserves. Some of us drop rubbish. Others are paid to pick it up, off the streets, off the beaches, out of the drains. Some dwellings are getting bigger. Others are motorised and tiny. Some wallets get fatter while others shrink. Children still catch fish from the wharf, still jump and dive off it and swim back to the beach. Parents still watch them carefully. Pompallier's printery has been restored. Flags fly from a flagpole called Whakakotahitanga on the Maiki Hill recreation reserve

several times a year. Russell (named for an English lord) is a town that has always welcomed visitors. It wouldn't be what it is without them.

# Kororāreka-Russell: A Visitor's Guide

1. Russell is a secluded village set in a horseshoe shaped bay. It was once called Kororāreka. Before Europeans arrived Kororāreka was a temporary kainga, a summer fishing village occupied by Māori while potatoes and kumara were growing in gardens elsewhere. If you visit Russell during summer school holidays now, you will find it anything but secluded.

2. Kororāreka Bay faces the sunset; sheltered from north and east it is a favourable anchorage for shipping and beloved of photographers.

3. Waka brought the first visitors. Explorers like Cook and Du Fresne were next, followed by whaleships; missionaries followed the whalers who anchored offshore and rowed in to fill water barrels and other emptinesses.

4. Kia ora, greetings, my name is Sophia. Welcome to Russell. Haere mai ki Kororāreka. Welcome thrice. Nau mai, haere mai, piki mai, tēna koutou katoa. Make yourselves at home. Then go home.

5. I am practising in preparation for a walking tour of Kororāreka-Russell on Saturday. My presentation needs work. I am expecting a group of twenty. A mihi followed by waiata in the absence of pōwhiri is best practice for tour guides, especially if you are hosting international visitors. Pōwhiri is a customary welcome designed to determine the intentions of manuhiri, whether they are friends or enemies, harmless or dangerous.

6. Enemies do not always declare themselves. Trickery is also traditional.

7. My name is not Sophia. My name is not yours to know.

8. It is necessary when living seasonally to capitalise on any resources that exist. A guide is a resource. A visitor is an honoured guest.

9. Let me tell you about Kororāreka. Supposedly Charles Darwin named it the Hellhole of the Pacific. He didn't like it here, preferring the tidy English hedges and enclosures of Waimate North, but he did make a donation to the Anglican church building fund. Over two decades later, his theory of evolution by natural selection made quite a fuss in English church circles.

10. Kororāreka was never the capital of the country, though Russell was. At that time Russell was situated a short sail up the harbour towards Opua. Visitors and guides both, are sometimes confused by the historic mobility of these names, even though the places stayed put.

11. I meet a visitor for lunch on the veranda of the Duke of Marlborough hotel. He is writing a piece for an Air New Zealand inflight magazine. He wants facts and photographs and has an expense account. I need to decide how much to tell him. It is

not an easy decision. This is my home. What I say may haunt me. He orders seafood chowder in a cob loaf. I get the oysters. Of course, there's wine. Kororāreka was, is, built on booze. We decide to walk. We walk on crimson stamens sprinkled on asphalt. The pohutukawa are early this year. He listens and writes in shorthand in his notepad, selecting, choosing, leaving out as we go. Sometimes I suspect I'm talking to the trees. He leaves on the 5pm ferry.

12. The stories I told him are not the same as the ones I will tell my tour group on Saturday.

13. What defines a visitor? Departure.

14. If a visitor doesn't depart, she becomes a resident or sometimes, a swallow, following the flush of summer, like a nomadic goat-herder, moving in endless circles. Some Russell swallows are feathered, others wear t-shirts, suits or skirts. Some build nests on boats or under bridges – others, mansions on ridges. They all keep moving, in and out, out and in.

15. Another migratory species that arrives every spring is pipiwharauroa, the shining cuckoo. They're not nest builders. Females lay their eggs in the nest of a grey warbler, riroriro. When it hatches, the cuckoo chick pushes any baby warblers out of the nest. Warbler parents faithfully feed their giant whāngai chick until it fledges and flies away.

16. Co-evolution has equipped warblers with a defence against cuckoo predation. After the cuckoo chick has flown, they will often lay, sit on and hatch another clutch of eggs - finally able to feed their own family.

17. When migratory birds flock together with others, identification is not always possible. Even taxonomists can have trouble knowing where one species ends and another begins. The test is always in breeding. There has always been a lot of that, in Kororāreka.

18. Sometimes hybrids are fertile, sometimes not.

19. Following on from pōwhiri and hui is the hākari, a feast, a meal, to turn tapu to noa. And because, by then, people are hungry. The traditional method of preparing food is a hāngi where food is cooked under earth and on top of volcanic rocks, heated by fire. It's slow cooking. It takes hours, so these days a hui will typically conclude with a cup of tea, sandwiches, sausage rolls, biscuits and fruit.

20. My tour group will find and fund their own hākari. Options abound, in Russell.

21. A good cook knows a hāngi stone when she sees one - carrying its legacy of subterranean heat, it can be relied on not to explode when a fire is set under or on top of it. Nowadays hāngi stones can be replaced by metal bars, guides can be replaced by smart phone apps, but visitors, visitors are irreplaceable.

22. Visitors are a resource, a moveable, removeable resource, like fish or herds of bison.

23. All visitors should be farewelled with a poroporoakī from the tangata whenua. This usually includes a wish, a hope, a request to whichever atua are around, for good health and safe travels. Haere rā. Ka kite anō. See you again. Or not.

# A Short Family History

## 1848: Ngā Whakaaro o Tiraha

Which words should I talk to this twelfth, maybe the last tamaiti? Te reo o te ao ngaro, or those of the Pākehā world, that keeps turning on its tail, the world I can't see into and have to ask Henry, our tama tuarua, to translate for me? Henry, our second, was born when we were still learning each other's words. Then, when the flour was used up and I pounded fern root again, as if I was home at Utakura, I knew what to do. Now food is easy. Henry buys it with his soldier's coins, Henry the interpreter, Henry who can talk one world into another, who tells me, ka tangi te ruru, and his father, of the morepork calling in bright sunshine as the cannons shot their balls at Ruapekapeka's manuka walls. Now hearing is hard. I don't know. But I will sing to her, ngā waiata aroha, and I can hold her hand when she stumbles.

## 1899: Inheritance

Annie Uncles, nee Hickton, mother of nine living children, was one of my great-great-grandmothers and also a prohibited person, so probably an alcoholic. Her husband John, GG-Grandad, was proprietor, from 1871, of a series of New Plymouth hotels. One autumn day, Annie sent her eleven-year-old son Henry to buy her a shilling's worth of whiskey – for medicinal purposes. He was caught. Annie's husband gave evidence. Their son, he said, would be twelve years of age in November, but looked thirteen, then the legal age for buying liquor. The licensee of the Red House Hotel, who supplied the whiskey, was fined forty shillings. The Taranaki Herald reported, in a Police Court story, that the intent of the prohibited persons law was to protect such people from themselves. The medicinal purposes defence was apparently in common use.

All this I learned from old newspapers, not from family stories. Annie's grand-daughter, my Nana, eldest child of eight, rarely spoke of and had no photos of her mother, father or family. She had moved north from Taranaki as a young woman and married the grandson of another hotelier, one-time manager of both the Pacific Hotel and the Duke of Marlborough in Russell. Nana would not allow alcohol in her house, not even sherry in the Christmas trifle. Our Papa kept bottles of rum in his car shed and boat but Nana, as far as we knew, never suspected. We, their so-wise grandchildren, thought Nana a bit of a spoil-sport. Not one of us ever questioned her silence, or her temperance, so now, we can only surmise.

c. 1925, 2015: Past Meets Present

Do you trust this picture? These two men never met. On our left is my grandfather, standing on the deck of his launch, sometime in the 1920s. In the original photo, he had his arm around a cousin. Here, Mervyn, who died in 1982, lays a virtual arm on his great-grandson, my son, born three years later.

The original photograph would have been taken with a camera, allowing a moment of light to permanently alter the chemistry of part of a perforated strip of film which would later be developed into a relatively rare product for the times, a colour print. Until all the frames on that roll of film were exposed, the image would have sat in the dark, within the camera, vulnerable to instant destruction by any unplanned exposure. Great care would have been taken to protect it, until it was fixed – opening the back of the camera in a darkened room, placing the roll in a sealed, lightproof canister, and sending it to a chemist to be developed, by immersion in a series of vats of liquid, dried, and then posted back to its maker. Nearly a hundred years later I placed that rectangle of shiny paper on a scanner and in another instant, made a copy and merged it with a digital image, creating a lie. However, part of the DNA inside the barefoot man with the smile still exists within the bemused one, gazing out into a scene he was never in.

# Tipi Haere: Excursions 1958 - 2020

## Crossing the Bay

My parents, as young lovers
were separated by miles of seawater
my father, resisting the ease
and expense of a ferry trip
would row a dinghy across the gap
between Russell and Paihia
the tide first running one way
then the other, shifting him sideways
the sea breeze rising to ease him on his way
but resisting every stroke as he rowed home
with his back to the choppy sea
a kahawai lure trolling out behind
face lit by the setting sun
and the two great loves of his life
his future wife and fishing.

# Life Writing: I

*"Who the hell cares about Anne Sexton's grandmother?"*

-W.H. Auden

"*… to escape the narrow confines of memory, to fly over history on the wings of the imagination*."

- Billy Collins

## 1950s – 60s

As a small girl, along with Cinderella, Goldilocks, Snow White, and the froggy Prince, I'd absorbed the tale of the Māori "princess" our family had descended from. For a long time, it was just a story, like all the others. It was even longer before she became real, before she became a person with a name and a past and even a photo. The image of princess-hood never quite squared up with this person. In the one photo we have of her, she looks more like Darth Vader than a princess. Eventually for me however, my tupuna whaea, Tiraha, became an inspiration.

My siblings and I had been raised Pākehā and didn't question our family culture until we'd left home. We were the local school principal's children. Wherever we were, we had, like our parents, a public profile to maintain. We were mostly model children and teenagers. Transgressions were either kept very secret or dealt with swiftly. We were children of the 1960s, living the mainstream dream, in a country with "possibly the best race relations record in the world".

## 1970s -80s

That pressure to be "reputable" was something I gladly left behind when I ventured out into the world on my own, a world where nobody knew who I was. I resisted too what seemed to be the easy option for my future – teachers college followed by a secure government job – like both my parents. That terrified me. University was free then so that's where I went. Marine science would be my future. Three years later I came out of academia with an almost-degree and with a man who also wanted to create a life different from the one he knew. We fled the city to become part-time farm workers – haymaking, feeding out, herding sheep, making and selling sandals to tourists from a truck on the beach in Paihia. That kept us going for two summers but we needed money in the winter too. We moved south to Bulls and learned to make shoes and boots.

Perhaps it was becoming a mother that got me thinking it was time to return to my turangawaewae. But where was it? My birthplace, Whangarei? Where my parents were from? I wasn't sure yet where I wanted to go but I knew it wasn't where I was. We were living in my partner's home turf, in the southern half of the North Island, a region where the wind blew almost constantly from the west. Cold wind. Strong wind. Wind that crept into your bones. The sea was close but it was a dangerous sea. The only swimming we did was in pools. It was a farming district and I'd attached myself to a farming family - spud and onion growers. All around us were wheat fields, dairy farms, cropping farms, farm machinery, farm

talk, farmers' politics and farmers' wives. They had large cars and traditional support systems – Plunket, Country Women's Institute, and Rotary Wives. I didn't fit.

I'd not always lived in Northland, though I was born there and thought it would be where I would ultimately return. My childhood and adolescence were punctuated by movement. My Dad was a primary school principal. Mum had been a teacher too and sometimes taught as a reliever, but mostly she stayed home. Every few years our family would pack up and move on from one country schoolhouse to another, but always we did the same things: school in the week for Dad and the kids; Mum waiting after school with a glass of milk in one hand, for our bones, and something from a cake tin in the other; caramel square, 2-4-6-8 cake, peanut brownies, Afghans or chocolate fudge slice. We were well fed. Come Saturday, it would always be tennis, with the whole family playing, netball or rugby. Soccer was for Poms, in England, in those days. We did the real heartland Kiwi stuff. We'd drive for hours through farmland or bush and one small hick town after another, before facing up to our opponents in Horeke or Paparoa, Ngatea or Rahotu, depending on which end of the country we were in at the time. The other glue that held us together though, and which bound us to our more distant past, was the outing after Saturday sports, or instead of Sunday church. Our Father's agnosticism put the kibosh on Mum's attempts to do the right thing for our spiritual development. My brother and I caught on quickly and whinged so much about the torture of Sunday school and confirmation classes that our younger sisters were spared the ordeal. Released from other obligations, we were usually at the beach or in a boat. Wherever we were, the sea was close. We spent our lives beside it, in it, or on it.

Three months into our older son's second year of life we moved north to Kororāreka, Russell, to my Dad's childhood home in the Bay of Islands. Both his parents had died by then and he was saddened every day, he told me, when he looked out from his house, across the water to Russell, and there was no-one he loved living there anymore. It warmed some inner part of me when we'd settled in, to think of him looking out as he munched his morning weetbix, knowing that his family was back. When we moved into our house, it was my twelfth move in twenty-four years – time to stop.

We set about immersing ourselves in the familiar place and its unfamiliar community. We bought a boat and went fishing. We swam and bodysurfed. We bought fishing rods for small fish and large. We caught sprats, with tiny hooks and sticky dough, off the wharf, then we caught john-dory with the sprats. We tried cast netting. We dragged a piper net for bait. We picked pipi at Te Wahapu, dived for mussels off Motumaire, and for paua at Moturoa. We smashed kina and sucked out the roe, and skinned our knuckles opening oysters with rocks. We picnicked on the islands and listened to Dad's stories from the past.


## 1965: Moving

When we moved houses for the first time, leaving everything known, except a truck full of stuff, a station wagon and each other, our pōtiki was just a baby. Pulling over on the long drive south for her skin dinner, that nursery rhyme fixed the location of a random rest area in family maps, alongside Uncle Arthur's terakihi ground and the marks for Capstan Rock. We revisited it with sandwiches, apples and a thermos of tea, two years later, two years older, following another removal truck, taking us north again.

## Mangatarata

We lived here once, on top of that hill
named for a tree that smells of lemon
a hill with a home beside a small school
with two classrooms, a swimming pool
a netball court and a row of macrocarpa trees
for cowboy and Indian games and, later
for sitting half-hidden, kissing a boy
in a smoothed-off clay hollow.

At the base of the hill was a runaway garden
with creepers insinuating themselves
into window cracks and gaping doorways,
paint peeling off display window frames and signs
from an old shop – some doors mysteriously locked.
Broken glass from windows and tossed bottles
was a sufficient hazard for our parents
to ban us from ever going there again.

Now it's a café, renowned for unusual garden plantings
and generous steak and kidney pies.
On top of the hill is a sad looking house
an empty pool and a closed down school.
Farms surround it, grazed by dairy cows
across the road, a golf course.
The tiny hill, which used to be huge,
and the straggling macrocarpa trees
could be anywhere. Their presence holds less memory
than the smell of honeysuckle wafting in the car windows.
They're as distant as the old photos, on the café wall,
of the store and petrol station, that was here
long before we four, transient children were born.

## Physics Experiment

It wasn't a long walk
and on a warm, sunny afternoon
a pleasure like no other
crossing fields, climbing fences
carrying a billy each
one, white enamel with a navy trim
the other silver-grey aluminium
both with loose-fitting lids
light and easy to carry to the cowshed
so simple to spin
occasionally dropping a lid
spilling air, perfecting technique.

Coming home with billies full
almost to the rim
we carried them carefully
so as not to spill any of the still-warm milk
handles, pressing heavy
on the soft flesh of small fingers
were moved from hand to hand
to relieve the drag of gravity
and then one day, daring
to test the power of the centrifuge
with a full billy, banishing thoughts
of consequences, milk spilled, parents angry
        picture it
two children, not much taller than the fenceposts
standing like ferris wheels
on the side of a grassy, green hill
arms spinning, faces split open by grins.

## Hunters and Gatherers

*for Kathy*

Fortunately for my father, a teacher
the duck shooting season would usually coincide
with his May school holidays
so while we kids sat inside by the fire
with books, jigsaw puzzles, Monopoly and Chinese Checkers
he would be out in a chilly maimai
honking on his duck caller at dawn and dusk
keeping himself warm from a thermos
of Mum's first bacon-bone and split-pea soup of the winter
and in the afternoons, he'd walk the hills with his English setter
hunting pheasants, there'd be strings of dead birds
hanging by their necks in the garden shed, waiting to be plucked
sometimes pukeko or a swan to be skinned, and feathers
fluffy nose-ticklers, tan-and-black-barred tail quills for old fashioned writing
midnight-blue green from the wings of drakes
slanting silver at the turn of small, inquisitive fingers
gizzards sliced in half to tip out tiny swallowed stones
the stink of singeing pin feathers, too small to pull out
bloody guts, webbed feet, necks and heads buried deep in garden dirt
once, a family of quail, peacefully sleeping, feathery heads
with closed eyes on the pillow of my sister's toy pram
almost as dead as our dolls and teddy bears
stray shotgun pellets found under the skin of roasted breast or thigh
would line up around our plates, the rest scattered at the bottom of a lake
the cleaning of the guns with oily cloths, rods and brushes
special oil for the barrels with their hard, metal smell and dark residue
another kind for the warm wood of the stock
reloading the shotgun shells, blue, green, red or gold

with their shiny brass ends and tightly crimped tops
sometimes we'd have target practice with the .22
the ejected shells' lingering odour of gunpowder
their breathy whistle when you angle your lips just right
holes around the bullseye or bleeding into the soft fur of a rabbit
flung into an old sacking pikau, together with
lemons or peaches from an abandoned orchard
or from the bush, kiwifruit or chokos, growing as wild
as the hair of my tender-hearted sister
who first turned vegetarian and then became a Buddhist
liberating spiders from all the corners of her house.

## 2020: Inheritance

When we lived in Labasa, on the Fijian island
of Vanua Levu, for a couple of years
my Dad collected giant clams and a turtle shell
as casually, but with equal effort
to his pursuit of paua and crayfish
back home in the Bay of Islands.

Still on display in his Paihia house
are black coral branches, marlin bills,
and, until we took them down
to put with him to be cremated,
there were three seahorse skeletons
hanging on threads in his bathroom.

Now the turtle shell is in a cupboard.
The clam shells collect rain and leaves on the deck.
A whale vertebra – given to him –
gathers dust in his garage.
Perhaps one of them will come
to me when Mum moves on.
What will I do? Hide it?
Or make visible its times, and his,
alongside the mementoes of mine?

# Life Writing: II

## 1990s - 2000

On Waitangi Day 1990 the waters of the Bay were filled with waka, just as they must have been when the first European explorers arrived. This February day was a commemoration of the passing of hundred and fifty years since the Treaty of Waitangi was signed – the partnership agreement between Aotearoa's ruling rangatira and Victoria, the reigning English monarch, on behalf of her subjects. These modern waka were authentic recreations of the originals; intricately carved, decorated with colour and plumage, and paddled by bare-chested would-be warriors. In advance of the big day the crews practised and explored. One day they paddled over our way. The shingle beach of Kororāreka became a scene of fierce confrontations as waka crews manoeuvred between moored launches and yachts to reach the shore where a welcoming party challenged their right to land, with a haka. Once allowed onto the shore, manuhiri mingled with tangata whenua and stood shoulder to shoulder ready to issue a challenge to the next arrivals. An impromptu tug-of-war symbolised an emerging sense of togetherness and of barriers being broken, when the two-inch rope parted, sending all the combatants sprawling in a sweaty, laughing heap of bodies.

Our boys started waka ama (outrigger canoe) paddling one summer because all their mates were doing it. Paddling was one more activity for them alongside tennis, fishing, fooling around in boats, or travelling all over Northland's countryside to play soccer or rugby. Their childhoods were slotting into the pattern of mine, just without the regular movements of household and school. Then they learnt to surf. As surfing took hold of them, paddling took hold of me. The boys headed for the coast, surfboards under their arms, and I paddled my waka all over the Bay of Islands. It removed me from the home that I loved but which sometimes overwhelmed me. Living in the midst of a busy, male dominated household, often I desperately needed to be alone. Being alone helped calm a restlessness that sometimes bewildered me. But it didn't fix it. I couldn't find a name for the feeling. I thought for a long time that I'd find an answer in the lines of hills encircling the blue waters of the bay. I thought, when I was lining up the Norfolk pine over the sugar loaf island of the Black Rocks to find Uncle Arthur's terakihi ground, that I'd find stillness, here in the landscape of my tupuna, that it was important that I continue the unbroken tenure in the place. But would that be enough? I wasn't sure.

At the same time as I was getting away from everyone, out on the water, I began to immerse myself deeper into the workings of my small community. When "Tomorrow's Schools" was dumped onto primary school educators in the 1990s, parents began to flex their muscles. It so happened that I had as much muscle as any Russell School parent at the time. To my ongoing bewilderment I was elected chairperson of the Board of Trustees. We had big decisions to make, and big responsibilities. Te Tiriti o Waitangi was one - the implications of it for our school community. I grasped it with both hands. I thought I was well supported and it seemed important enough. We did it properly, my fellow trustees and I. We consulted, we organised, we got the kai together and we invited the Race Relations Office to come and educate us. My eyes were opened. I soaked it all up. Some of it I knew

already - the Treaty violations and some of the history, but as a tried and true Pākehā New Zealander I knew little of Te Ao, mana whenua or tikanga. The information was sensitively presented. We were challenged in our thinking and presented with another way of viewing the world. Some of the teachers, and some of the parents were quiet and preoccupied. They left early. The resistance surprised me. The fear, anger and indignation surprised me even more, but worst of all was the ignorance and refusal to listen. It was a surprising day. At the conclusion of the hui I thanked our manuhiri. I spoke from my heart, thanking them for their vision and their generosity, hoping that we could incorporate what we had learned in our daily life. I was inspired, but saddened that others were not. That day I learnt to tread softly and to go forward slowly, but not to yield.

I wised up some more when a resource consent application to build a marae for Kororāreka awoke the townspeople from their slumber. The school hui had alerted me to prejudice in the media. I was about to be alerted to prejudice in the streets, as vitriol gushed unchecked from the red neck section of local society. I was shocked and saddened all over again, but this time, not at all surprised. Public submissions were called for so I put a supportive one together and sent it in, thinking that was the end of it. Huh! My words were noticed. I was asked to speak at the hearing. My head wanted to say no, but I heard my lips say yes. What was happening here? Writing is easy for me, but the thought of standing up in a public place and opening my mouth is enough to wake me in a sweaty nightmare night after night.

The reality was not nearly as bad as the idea of it. I've never before, outside of my immediate family, experienced such nurturing and support. It helped me to speak out strongly, clearly, and proudly in front of hundreds of people: strangers, acquaintances, opponents, friends, lawyers and council officials. This overwhelming feeling of aroha made it all the more upsetting to witness the fear, anger, and hostility coming from those who felt threatened by the idea of something unknown and uncontrollable impinging on their lives. They were desperate to retain their control, their assumed position of power. My education was proceeding. Six months later, dressed a little more formally, I repeated the process in the environment court. This time I was cross-questioned by a big-city lawyer in a designer suit. I survived it and learnt that I was capable of a lot more than I'd ever imagined possible. But there was to be no marae for Kororāreka, not for another twenty years. We were not yet being listened to in our wider community.

In my wider world things were changing. Our sons were older, more independent, and I had spare time again. I became passionate about waka ama paddling and as part of different teams went to regattas within Aotearoa and around the Pacific – Fiji, Tahiti, Australia, Hawaii, New Caledonia and Rarotonga – for short races and long. My team mates, almost all of them Māori, were as dedicated as I was. Inevitably the world of waka ama, va'a, wa'a, vaka changed me even more. And I was starting to write – life writing, travel writing, fiction, essays, poetry. In 2003 I went back to university as an extramural student but it took me another decade before I finally focused in on writing. First, I completed a graduate diploma in psychology. A bicultural psychology paper taken with an inspiring young Māori psychologist reinforced my academic understanding of the reality of being Māori in a racist society. Community psychology taught me about marginalisation and white privilege. I

thought about becoming a psychologist, earning a decent income and saving people one at a time. One abandoned postgrad paper cured me of that illusion. Instead, I've become a volunteer ambulance officer, helping people mostly with bodily rather than mental emergencies and moving from one short term occupation after another to contribute to our family's survival. Next was an advanced certificate in Te Ara Reo Māori from Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, with weekly classes at Russell School, lots of music, a break for shared kai every night and more insight into this community, into the layers of meaning and history embodied in the kupu, and a love for the sounds of the reo me te mita o Te Tai Tokerau. Finally, I found creative writing, poetry and literature in English. I was hungry for knowledge and for greater understanding. These days I'm not quite so driven but I'm not done yet.

## My Vicious Eel

Someone once said that *a good memory is never as good as a bad pencil*
and the same could be said about a mnemonic.
Every mnemonic is a star in the memory stakes, as long as you write it down.
Store it somewhere you know you can find it again.

I made up a mnemonic for the planets in the solar system once.
It started out with *My Vicious Eel* for Mercury, Venus, Earth,
but I've forgotten what that ferocious pet did next, and I get it mixed up
with the one for the classification system of Linnaeus.
The result of that memory lapse is a mish-mash, so that I'd have
*King Phillip Coming Over From Greece Sometimes*.
He'd leave his kingdom, followed in single file by his retinue of
phylum, class, order, family, genus and species
but at other times I had my vicious eel arriving at breakfast time,
leaving his trireme tied up at the jetty
and when he'd eaten his cornflakes, he'd slither off to his flying saucer
and vanish beyond the clouds, leaving me to wash slime off the floor.
He never bit. He wasn't really vicious, just vagrant. A bit like memory.

# Life Writing: III

## Flashback

I'd heard of a stone patu, named after our ancestor, Papaharakeke, which was gifted to Te Arawa as a token of peace. Papaharakeke had died, along with many others, including a nephew of Hongi Hika's, near Rotorua, while on a supposedly peaceful expedition. Supposedly peaceful, according to the stories we have today, but of course Ngāpuhi at the time had a fearsome reputation throughout Aotearoa. The first tribe to possess muskets in any number, they used them unmercifully. War parties rampaged the entire length of the North Island, killing and eating their enemies, then returning home in their waka, to the anguish of the resident Bay of Islands missionaries, with the preserved heads of their vanquished foes as trophies to be traded for more muskets and more power. The advantage couldn't last of course, as other iwi realised the musket was not a magical killing machine and began to acquire their own. The balance shifted, but not before Hongi Hika mounted an assault on Te Arawa, culminating in a massacre on Mokoia Island. The battle was fought both hand to hand with traditional weapons and at a distance with the airborne musket balls exacting a terrible toll. Ngāpuhi power was eventually reigned in and the patu, Papaharakeke, accepted by Te Arawa, sealed the uneasy peace that was negotiated after the battle.

Throughout New Zealand at about this time, the early 1800s, Māori began to change their old ways. The memories remained but were subordinated as attention turned to the new arrivals, the Pākehā – English mostly but also French, Irish, Scottish and American. Old enmities weren't forgotten, they just became less pressing. Where an insult would once have led to a killing, and that killing to several more in a never-to-be-extinguished trail of revenge, now the tangata whenua began to adopt new ways of being. Many succumbed to Christianity, exchanging stone patu and muskets for prayer-books and confessionals. Most grasped the new technology with both hands. Tiraha, daughter of the slain Papaharakeke, welcomed an English seaman with open arms and an open heart in an early Māori- Pākehā union, when he arrived in the same year that her father's life ended at Lake Rotokakahi. Tiraha and William Cook had a long life and twelve children together, trailing around the coastline as William built boats in the Bay of Islands or hunted seals in Stewart Island. They eventually settled in the Waikare inlet, a few kilometres from Kororāreka. Always there were boats. George, the eldest son, married Matilda who had come to New Zealand as maid to a wealthy family. She would often accompany her husband, Captain Cook, on whaling and other voyages. The family lived in Rarotonga for several years, where George was quickly accepted, partly because of his fluency in Te Reo Māori, a language with many similarities to the local dialect. When he was not chasing whales across the Pacific, George was a publican on the waterfront in Kororāreka. Four generations later, George's direct descendant, my father, grew up on the same street. Our small family moved into that little wooden house when we left the Rangitikei and moved north. It was the house I'd visited my paternal grandparents in throughout my childhood. Now they were gone. We lived in their house for a few months before we settled into our own first home in Russell, a few streets away.

## Picking Pipis

*for Dad (1932-2004)*

It was in that valley
you told me, pointing
on another day
picking pipis at Uruti
that Hone Heke
when he invaded Kororāreka
abandoned his waka
in the dark, before dawn.
A myth, a story handed down.

The hightide must have gone up further then
before horses, cars, before the road went in.
I wondered how a rangatira
could write off
all those hours of adzing
leave them sinking in a swamp.

Of course it was never found.
Perhaps it's there, suspended, still.

I bend to scratch at muddy sand
see you, a boy again
searching in the raupo
with your cousins,
with the other kids
listen, for the laughter.
You crawled through culverts
in single file
lit smoky fires for sausages
in that cave
where wetas fell
into hair, caught claws

in thick, handknitted jumpers.
Later you kept one of those
ancient armoured insects
in a box.
First pet, before
the hunting dog.
Then there were
children of your own.

You passed your curiosity on.

At last the pipi kit is full.
I row your dinghy home.

## Picture Windows

My mother sits alone in her lounge, looking at a television on a wall between two windows with views of rainforest, ocean and sky. She has pressed the mute button, so watches without hearing, as Lydia Ko hits a golf ball, with a three wood, down a fairway at Ann Arbor, Michigan. The ball rises, flattens, slows and drops towards a green, bounded by blue. It lands and rolls, but stops short of the pin.  She sips her tea, slips her club back into its bag and walks off downhill towards the horizon where my Dad has just hooked a fat terakihi.

## Summertime, and the living is easy

*-George Gershwin*

The season is either on or off here, in the Winterless North, no messing around with four of them with all their fancy promises. The Season, in Russell, is time to be like a farmer making hay even after the sun's gone down, to envy tourists eating fish and chips out of paper parcels, woodfired pizzas from cardboard boxes or gourmet meals at candle-lit tables under a pohutukawa tree as the stars come out, after they've been picnicking and lazing on the beach all day, swimming, fishing, walking a track or playing frisbee, cricket or hide-and-seek with their children, even doing a spot of shopping, as if all the time in the world belonged to them. Meanwhile, we are kept busy milking the golden goose before she flies north to truly tropical skies. It's time then, to take off our polarised glasses, pull on our down jackets, possum hats and mittens, wave the swallows goodbye and hope that we've laid down sufficient stores to squirrel us through to the next season. There goes summer, swinging on by.

## Cruise Ship Day

The great white ship slows, stops
and turns, imperceptibly at first
pivoting on the point of its anchor
and settles, bow to stream of tide
like a white tern on a wild beach
with head tucked and neck feathers
just ruffling in the breeze.

Soon the tenders swing out and down
their bellies pale under
orange domes, moving to the jetty
like ticks crawling on a horse
gravid and ready to burst
spilling out their offspring
in bright shirts and sunhats
carrying credit cards and cash.

The ship dwarfs the hills.
People in the surrounding towns
supplicate as if to a great god.
Visitors come ashore
for tours, ice-creams, salads
and a floor that doesn't move.
In the afternoon they leave.
The ship shrinks then disappears.
Look! The horizon's back.

## Time & Motion: Paihia, January 5th 2020

The tide is close to high.
Two resident eagle rays
patrol a perimeter of their territory
drifting over oyster-encrusted rocks
the fine, almost translucent edges
of their wings undulate
as if lifting in a passing breeze
like net curtains at an open window.

They move without apparent effort
occupying the attention of tourists
who lean over white iron wharf railings
pause to take a photo or two
then move on, as if still in a queue
not wanting to be left behind
to miss the bus or boat.

The rays swim on, one
two arm lengths long
the other smaller, darker and speckled
as if still sluicing off the sand
it shimmied into earlier, when the tide was low
when the oysters on the rocks were dry
shut up tight against the sun
which turned pink later
shining on oysters, people and ocean
through smoky bushfire cloud
blown east across the Tasman
turning the whole scene sepia
as if already in the past.

# Life Writing: IV

## 2000s

When I thought the boys were old enough to understand, I took them to the Auckland War Memorial Museum to see Exhibit # 19424. Sitting silently there in its glass display case, resting on a little square of wood, the patu Papaharakeke gave no hint of its history. Heavy, no doubt, and deliberately designed to lie comfortably in a hand, capable of splitting a skull, this weapon was never used for revenge, never feared. Now its smoothly shaped basalt surfaces absorbed the light of the museum's fluorescent bulbs during the day, and its darkness by night. My sons glanced briefly at it. "Pretty boring," their faces said, as they dragged me off to see some tarantulas. I returned alone, a few weeks later, and considered it carefully. It was probably the cold air of the empty hallway that raised the hairs and goose bumps on my arms and the back of my neck rather than a passing ghost leaving chilly air in its wake. I do know that seeing that family taonga left a lasting imprint on me, and changed me ever so imperceptibly from the person I was before. Some years later I learned that the patu had been returned to Te Arawa, in Rotorua where it belongs.

Every year there is a waka ama race in Te Arawa territory, around Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua. It was a race I'd never wanted to do. For me the waka belongs in the sea, not freshwater, and my race choices have always taken me seawards before. Something eventually urged me towards this race. Paddling had taken me to Hawaii, to Tahiti, to Fiji, Rarotonga, Hamilton Island and Nouvelle Caledonie. Why shouldn't it also take me over a section of Hongi Hika's journey of revenge, his haerenga utu? The chance came but I had to pursue it energetically. My regular crew from home wasn't keen so I had to venture down there alone. I joined a crew from Tamaki - more ancient enemies - venturing into the area of another traditional foe. It was not an auspicious beginning to my hikoi.

The glassy surface of the lake sparkled with reflected morning sunlight. The still air, warmed by the sun, felt soft on my bare arms. There were paddlers everywhere, meeting up with old mates, rigging waka and fitting spray skirts. Wooden paddles rested on fibreglass canoes, lifejackets were pulled on over brightly coloured lycra and polyprops. As we waded into the lake water the chill hit us. The water was icy. This was mid-May. Hongi attacked Mokoia at a similar time, on a still morning, with mist concealing the approach of his canoes. As our waka neared the island a breeze came up, ruffling the water. Paddling in the lee of the hills, all was peaceful but it wasn't hard to imagine the scene all those years ago. By the end of the day, in 1823, survivors were in the water, desperately swimming for distant shores. Many of them must have succumbed to the cold. The unlucky ones would have already been lying lifeless along the lakeshore or in the mud and weeds under the surface.

As we rounded the northern end of Mokoia we were buffeted by cold wind and choppy, confused water. Within moments we were soaked through and glad of our warm clothing. My fingers chilled, then gradually, sensation ebbed away into the now cold air. I couldn't feel the paddle in my hands, and my feet, ankle deep in the water sloshing around in the bottom of the canoe, were numb. The forty-minute slog to the finish-line would be unrelenting. Without the support of my trusted crewmates I wondered why I was there.

What had driven me to this madness? Would these strangers have the strength and stamina for this test? As one of the more experienced members of this tossed-together team, I'd been given the job of caller, the motivator. As the waves crashed over the bow and our progress slowed, I started to talk to my team-mates, urging them on, urging them to dig deeper into themselves and find their strength. The words came. I began to believe them and everyone else must have too. Our heads came up and our backs straightened. Our timing improved. We paddled faster and remembered why we were there. We remembered that we love to paddle. The activity invigorates us. We are all, strangers or best mates, brought together by a common bond. We work together and we move forward together. We connect with our deepest fears and our deepest joys. We connect with our past and we come fully alive in the present. The moments of difficulty, of hardship, help us to savour the rewards when they come. The rewards on this day were the safe return, the hot pools, a hāngi meal and the newly discovered camaraderie with newly found friends. I don't need to paddle on Lake Rotorua again. Ever. I visited the past, tested it and left it where it belongs. It touched me, made me stronger and gave me another taonga for my journey through this life. I came home to the sea.

## Sharks

Pale skin against pale sand
the mightiest denizens
passed by like wraiths
smooth sandpapery bodies
never so many
and none so hungry
stately stealthy creatures
in their effortless
underwater dance of death

shark callers living
without pretence
in the wild world
*My shark come up*
nothing soft or sentimental
billows of blood drift
the deadly dead jaws
alongside sunburned conquistadors
on the wharf at Russell
never so many
and none so hungry.

A found poem – from original text by Kennedy Warne
'Sun Come Up, My Shark come Up'
pg 132 NZ Geographic 134 July-Aug 2015

## Lying in a Hammock, at Home in Russell, under a *Strelitzia nicolai*

A tui swoops in, chortles and lingers
its beak dips into and out of the blue flowers
white throat tufts shimmer in the green shade
down at the wharf a ferry toots its departure
grinding its way up the incline of Flagstaff Road
a tour bus revs up and changes down
a klaxon on today's cruise ship warns someone
of something  the Salt-Air helicopter thumps past again
below it a black-backed gull glides, then dives
spying food  schooling sprats, pizza crusts or plastic.
Tui, parson bird, Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae
its thirst quenched, flies away.
I close my eyes and wait.

## Karanga nō Kororāreka

Ocean water surges, laps, breaks
on the shores of this narrow peninsula
with sunrises one side
sunsets the other
we visited grandparents
in a little white weatherboard house
with a sunny sheltered garden behind
and in front, a sea view
sounds of waves, gulls
children swimming and fishing
oars dipping and sails slapping

I took my place in line, kindled my fire
in the still-warm ashes of theirs – ahi kā
but now kahore ōku mātua i tēnei wāhi
my mokopuna are not here either.
I'm chopping my own wood and slowly turning
to stone. Maybe it's time to up sticks
tipi haere, become a nomad for a while.

## Peace of Mind

We plan a trip away for two weeks, so as well as deciding what to take, which clothes, which books, which shoes, we have to tidy up the house, clean out the fridge, mow the lawn, turn off the hot water, inform the neighbours and ask them to water the pot plants, collect the junk mail and feed the cat. We clean the car, lock all the windows and doors, cancel the newspapers and the mail, even though there's almost none of that now, just bank statements monthly and the Listener on Mondays. So, it's off to the PostShop to fill out a form and pay for something or nothing not to be delivered but after reading the terms and conditions I realise I'm also paying for peace of mind, which will be a handy thing to have, while travelling. It's a comfort really, to know that NZ Post will hold and safeguard our mail for a defined period, but only if we plan ahead and apply today, can we rest assured/fee information is correct at the time of printing so any posted articles will be kept safe/to the maximum extent permitted by law/it's a small price to pay for peace of mind. In the small print/NZ Post will need three working days to action your request/liability is limited (if any) for any loss or damage, however caused/you will be required to provide proof of identification/if not, rejected, cancelled/rest assured it's so easy/a small price to pay for peace of mind - which can never be guaranteed only fingers crossed for, small lies told for, prepared for, hoped for but above all arranged in advance for, because if you leave it until the last day the mail must go through and then, some small piece of your mind may be very troubled and then, rest assured, rest will never be assured.

This poem remixes lines from NZ Post's *Holding Your Mail* Brochure

## Free Range

I return to my home and garden
packed like tiny fish in a street of houses
after six days on a farm.
I long for chickens
scratching, pecking, clucking, laying eggs
in cosy wooden boxes softened with straw
boxes with hinged tops to let a hand
reach in to steal warm eggs
always leaving one
for the next egg to lie beside.

In exchange I would clip their wings
give shelter, food scraps, wheat, water
and warm mash in winter
and every morning I would open
the gate to their enclosure to let them roam
wherever they chose
and in the evening house them
safe from any terrors of the night.

I would offer them free range
on the lawn and under fruit trees
but fence them out of the vegetable garden
away from the neighbours' dogs
and the vicinity of the house.
I don't want chicken poop on my paths and decks.
We don't have room for chickens.

## Home Improvement

Sometime in the sixties our family shifted into our first school house, cheap accommodation being one of the perks then, of a principal's position. Dad entered into a carpet deal with some cousin. Agreed to grudgingly by my mother on the basis of only a sample square, they sent a cheque for a lounge-sized lot, which we walked, sat, dropped crumbs on and played Monopoly over for the next two years. When we moved next, to the tropics, it was lifted, rolled up and stored (under another cousin's house) never again to be properly fitted or laid. We found it again in Russell, on holiday, Nana by then arthritic in her bed, Papa pushing his new carpet-sweeper room-to-room over its grey background, its green, gold and chocolate-brown leaves. Another recipient of the whanau carpet deal was Uncle Bert, whose house, just a few streets away, Jeremy and I would buy for our own family, several owners later, in the eighties. There it was again, the carpet. Underneath, were heart kauri floorboards which now, in twenty-twenty, are mostly sanded and polyurethaned, but in one bedroom, the carpet remains, not only ugly but outdated, its foliage faded, its pile flattened and yet, still warm under my toes.

## Hungry Customers

The Mangonui fish shop occupies
part of the Doubtless Bay shoreline
rising from the beach below, the tang of salt
mixes with the smell of cooking fat

drawing in hungry travellers and marauding gulls
tour buses park up and disgorge passengers
while at a nearby wharf, fishing boats
unload crates of fish and upload ice and diesel

wiry and sun-browned, the fishermen
chug back out to sea, while sandy
and sun-burnt customers sit and eat.
Red-billed gulls fight for the leavings of both

diving on discarded bait, scavenging
in rubbish bins and haunting
the fast food joint like spectres
of the homeless in other, less scenic towns.

## We Visit North Cape

also called Cape Reinga
and Te Rerenga Wairua
from where departing spirits
leap towards Rarohenga
which sounds more like Rarotonga
than that other underworld
where no-one wants to go
surf throws itself against rocks
at the base of the cliff
disintegrates into sound
rising to join and overwhelm
the snap of i-phone shutters
and tour-group spiel
sound like the outbreaths
of taniwha
caught in the whirlpools
where two oceans collide.

## Going Home from Hamilton, the Morning after Tonga Beats Samoa in a Rugby League World Cup Final

In a Huntly rest area
we park behind
a Tongan supporters' van
small flags and large
lift now and then in the wind
even the baby wears red
a sulky teenager tosses rocks
into the river
wood smoke rises
from a makeshift fire
a ritual we relinquished
a generation ago
about the time
the road speed limit
went up
and our thermette
rusted out.

## Still Swaying

*The art of walking upright here*
*is the art of using both feet.*
*- Glenn Colquhoun*

We'd been at WOMAD, in Taranaki
driving the Surf Highway home
with swell lines stretching to the horizon
still swaying a bit, to a lingering beat
as if not yet back to shore.

We stopped off in the Taringamotu Valley
near Taumarunui, for a night
in our friend's childhood home, still owned
by a family trust but mostly empty now
the land leased, his siblings all in cities.

We're deep in Te Rohe Potae, King Country.
House-paddock sheep, raddled red and yellow
graze amidst Scotch thistledown, underfoot and floating.
In the 1950s farmhouse, books line the hallway
retired timber-mill hands reminisce, in local histories

shelved beside spiral-bound Wai reports
seven hapu of Ngati Maniopoto lament
uri of Ngati Urunumia tell of a river diverted
totara forest felled, eels gone from creeks and urupā
fenced off at the end of a topdressing airstrip.

We climb to the site of old kūmara gardens
north facing, just below the ridge-line
spring water is piped and gravity-fed
to tanks, troughs, garden hoses and kitchen sink.
See them, with digging sticks, planting, weeding

harvesting into kete, then hāngi, for manuhiri
tired, hungry, cold, worn down by fighting
fleeing pursuit – safe behind the aukati line.
Until the main trunk line came through.
Under us, the ground still moves.

## Ode to Adventure

*for Olivia*

You know the movie about a woman, dumped by a boyfriend, lost,
doing one of those long treks across countryside that seemed to go on forever,
then she got properly lost in a snowstorm, the soles of her boots came loose
and she imagined threats from a wild looking farmer
who turned out to be friendly. She kept on walking
like Forrest Gump, running and running
or Jack Kerouac decades before, driving and doing drugs
in an attempt to find himself and America.
She got to the end and decided, next, she'd walk across Spain.

I don't live in America or Spain, I've never walked far, I live on a small island
in a group of three, plonked down in the middle
of the largest ocean on the planet, I live quietly at home with a husband
visiting grandchildren and a garden
so finding myself or America in the pages of a cult novel written
by a twenty-something in an Oldsmobile
or some other V8 with chromed wings on the back
and a shiny kick-ass grille across the front
is doubly, triply, wrong. But to be daring and have adventures,
to be woman alone against the elements
struggling in the dark and the snowdrifts on the slopes
of a mountain range like The Remarkables
or reaching the summit of The Devil's Backbone is, at least, in the right hemisphere.

Those hills may not be as vast as the expanses of Texas or the big sky of Wyoming
but there's always something to be found
whether you're hallucinating in an Oldsmobile
or shivering in a backcountry hut
with snow all around and only damp wood to try and light a fire
when your clothes are wet, your socks damp and smelly and your belly empty,
but what you really want to do
is find a pencil and write before you forget

especially if you want to be immortalised in print
or write your last will and testament because you're feeling fragile
and all you can find to write on is a Wilderness magazine
that someone carried in their backpack all the way in here
because they knew they'd need some inspiration in order to keep walking
because if you don't walk out of here you will probably die here
but you can't decide whether to tear up the Wilderness magazine
and set it alight under the damp wood to dry out your socks
or to do what the hero of that other movie that I can't remember the name of did
when his luck ran out
which was to write his story between someone else's lines.

It was a letter his lover had sent him, imploring him not to sail off
into the wild winds and freezing temperatures
of the Southern Ocean. Silly woman. You can't tie a man like that down
a man with adventure in his soul and love only in the flesh over his bones.
But he kept it, her letter, and when his mast broke and the boat capsized
and he was staring death in the face, when his days were numbered
no, he didn't get down on his knees to start praying
he was not a religious man nor literary, not a reader, not a writer either
but writing is what he did. He took her envelope from the dry-bag
in his survival kit and fitted his love letter around hers.
Love in the abstract was what it was and of course he made it home.
By the time he was saved she'd got used to being alone.

So, I think about these things sometimes while I'm weeding carrots,
washing dishes or walking on the beach
and wonder what, if anything, I should tell my granddaughter
of these things. So far, I haven't said a word.

## Adventure Tourism

*The Great Wall of China resembles the concept of heartache in that neither can peel a banana.*

*- Terry Eagleton*

My neighbour, Nicole, recently ran a half marathon on the Great Wall of China. Stations along the route provided water in bottles, energy drinks, bananas and wet sponges. Race information warned that some of the 5164 steps along the route could be slippery, especially if wet, especially around water stations, with their wet sponges. Goodie bags, to be collected at hotels, would include tickets for a gala dinner with up to 2500 other runners. Breath-taking surroundings and views were promised on the arduous but iconic course through valleys and villages starting and finishing at the Yin and Yang Square in an old fortress. Of the 21.1-kilometre-long race, three are on the Great Wall, which is over twenty thousand kilometres long and visible from space.

Energy gels are generally preferred over bananas by competitors in the Breca Bay of Islands Swimrun. The course follows a classic island-hopping format in an iconic area, famous for its white-sand beaches, pristine islands, lagoons and turquoise waters, rich in wildlife, known for its history. This swimrun is named after a character in the Old English epic poem Beowulf. Breca and Beowulf are friends who have to escape danger by swimming together for seven days and seven nights through an icy, windswept sea. The six to eleven-hour long Bay of Islands swim can be windswept but never icy. In the run legs, there is rock-hopping, island crossing, steps and steep slopes. The race ends at Otehei Bay Resort on the island of Urupukapuka, which was once a sheep farm, but is now home to regenerating native bush, sheltering threatened native birds and invertebrates. Project Island Song staff hope that these changes will entice migratory seabirds to re-establish nests on the island. The presence of running humans is not, apparently, a threat to these plans.

Running resembles swimming in that both involve movement. Water resembles a banana in that both are consumed by athletes. A swim and a run resemble each other in that either can numb heartache. The Great Wall of China resembles the concept of heartache in that neither can swim, peel bananas or run. The Breca Swimrun and Great Wall Marathon resemble each other in that neither live in a nest or can be seen from space.

(This poem re-uses text from the websites *www.greatwallmarathon.com* and *www.brecaswimrun.com*.)

# A Day in the Life of a St John Ambulance Volunteer

starts at 0600 hrs, hoping the pager doesn't go off until after breakfast. You're ready to respond from home. Nothing happens. Two hours later, you drive to the station, meet up with your second officer to do the critical check – defibrillator batteries, oxygen bottles, medicines, bandages, vomit bags, oil and water, lights and sirens. You print missing patient info sheets – hypoglycaemia, concussion, lower back pain, influenza – and two verification of death forms, just in case. You walk to the coffee shop – it's close – talk to each other, talk to the barista, dawdle, go home again, sweep the floor, thin the carrots, do the washing, make a to-do list, read the paper. Nothing happens.

Someone falls, waits, not knowing whether, when, who will come, if this is it.

The pager goes off. Switch. Respond. Adrenaline tingles. Into the uniform, buckle the belt, zip the boots. Drive, with lights, with sirens. Uniforms swarm like bees, green, navy, khaki, hi vis yellow. Onlookers snapchat sights. A helicopter lifts, turns in its own circle, taking urgency, leaving calm. Rescue choppers. Excite small boys, sadden old ones.

You drive slowly back to the station, clean the truck, inside and out. Replace the methoxy, bandages, splints, dressings, saline. Change the linen. Debrief. Take off your uniform and boots, put on jandals and t-shirt, go home. Read the morning to-do list, vacuum, dust, bring in the washing. Lie down, close your eyes.

1800 hrs, you're off duty. Turn the pager off. Watch the news. You're on the news. Call your buddy, debrief some more. Go to the gym, lift weights, sweat, wash it off. Have a beer, have a second beer, a vodka shot, eat dinner, do the dishes. Watch Grand Designs, watch Sidewalk Karaoke. Go to bed, read Tolkien, try to sleep, read Harry Potter.

2400 hrs, awake, wired, writing.

## Overdose

I held her airway open with two fingers
one on either side of her face
where her jawbones kinked.
With my elbows on her pillow, I held her

all the way from her house to the hospital
and it must have hurt, but she didn't move.
Her skin shivered where a needle pierced it
but she didn't wake.
Her eyes stayed closed and I watched her face
and her belly, as it rose and fell

all the way from her house to the hospital
and I watched her eyelids
and listened at her lips
and I pushed my fingers harder
against her jaw when she snored
as if she was only asleep
and I watched her and held her
and listened for the air moving
all the way from her house to the hospital
I held her.

## Small Talk

It's odd sometimes, being an off-duty ambulance officer
in a small town, meeting people socially, randomly
in the street, someone's home or a shop
and later, or earlier, in distress.

Here, buying tomatoes, a rejected girlfriend
recovered from deliberate Panadol poisoning.
Over there, by the biscuits, a home handyman
fallen off a dodgy ladder, and at the PostShop
an amputee, from that car crash ten years ago
the one that the sixteen-year-old daughter
of your friend didn't survive.

But it's weather, real estate and gossip
that predominate, those bodily intimacies
held tight or locked away
like long-ago love affairs.

## Retirees at Play

*Join us for petanque, champagne and strawberries*
was the invitation – not on white, deckle-edged stationery
but text-messaged the day before. *Join us*
*in the heritage gardens of Pompallier Mission* – where
until recently I'd worked, pulling weeds, spreading compost
deadheading (that's removing spent flower heads) and
detailing (taking off unsightly leaves) in order to keep
the borders and beds looking as they would have
for garden parties and tennis afternoons in the 1900s
with gentlemen in whites, ladies in wide-brimmed hats
to shade their fashionably pale complexions – where
in an even earlier time French missionaries in dark robes
pissed into the tanning pits where hides were soaked
to make leather for the covers of prayer books, being printed
stitched and bound upstairs, in the hope of luring the natives
of Kororāreka into the hold of the Roman Catholic god.

The berets were out, it being one of those days
when sudden squalls bring fierce but short-lived
wind and rain, scattering paper napkins and leaves
even, on this particular day, ripping a forty foot
keelboat from its mooring, leaving it cast on the beach.
There were mutterings about big stones on the court
its construction having been an amateur job, constrained
by cost, space, the lack of traditional materials and expertise.
Corks were popped, plastic glasses filled and passed around,
good health and happiness toasted. Once-shiny silvery boules
were tossed, underarm. Competition was robust and applause
polite, with everyone obeying the rules of the game.
Oh, for some dead-heads and a compost heap.

## Winter

The holiday houses are all empty
there's space on the footpaths
no queues at the Four Square
calm in the mornings
cold sou'westers in the afternoons
waka ama training on a moonless night
phosphorescence swirls from my blade
tiny jelly fish, plankton
fire flies swimming
no wakes cross mine
lights on the wharf
bring me home.

## Tripartite Poem Written At, After and On a Conversation at a Writers' Conference in Whangarei

*- with thanks to Olivia Macassey and Kamala Jackson for your contributions*

Mute dumbshow trans-mutating
mutating minstrels saying the not
invertebrates flying sideways
breathless mirrors mist
reckless saying scratches
reckless bubbles scrabble
transmute empty speech
scratch stolen taniwha.

Dumbshow scrabbles
dumbshow bubbles
dumbshow expresses
transmute dumbshow
suppress dumbshow
not saying the not
in mute speech bubbles
ordering the order.

Nevertheless, breathless mirrors mist
invertebrates, taniwha and minstrels
mutate sideways
last speech bubbles empty
flying transmutations pop.

## There Is No River, Neo

*- after Heraclitus*

There is no river
and yet I see one
fat, fluid, flowing
when the mountains
unleash their snowfall
in the spring
and send a torrent
to pick up rocks,
tree trunks, dead cows
and sometimes
unwary whitebaiters
or unwatched infants.

There is no river,
not even a quiet creek
slipping past lizards
on sun-hot rocks,
where crickets chirrup
under dry mud pancakes,
and grassy banks
grow brown and stalky.
The stream
is a spent salmon
carried slow
towards the sea.

There is no river
in the irrigation ditches
of potato paddocks,
in the sipper bottles
of thirsty shoppers,
no river cutting
through the city,
collecting drain pipe debris,
sliding under oil slicks,
merging with the mud
of tree-bare slopes,
escaping into evaporation.

There is no river,
just a stream of light
reflecting off irises
of eyes
that look aside.
Where are the ripples?
Caught in the river
and washing away.
Is there a river?
Crippled
yet washing
a way.

Where is the river?
There is the river.
Where is no river?
There is no river.
Where is there
no river?
There is no river
in the river.
The river has ridden
itself of itself
and left
its self behind.

## Albatross

*He went like one that hath been stunned,*
*And is of a sense forlorn:*
*A sadder and a wiser man*
*He rose the morrow morn.*
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Let me tell you a trashy story. I'm down at the Opua Marina one day, drinking coffee from my carry-cup, dreaming of sailing across pristine oceans, when a man sits beside me. He's been picking up rubbish. He's about fifty, tanned, an outdoorsy sort of guy, starts telling me about a boat delivery trip he's just back from. *We left here mid-June, stopped in Fiji for a week, up to Hawaii, stayed there three weeks, then headed north three to four hundred miles and a little bit east, to get a good run down to California.* Instantly I see turtles, coral sand beaches, clear turquoise water, flying-fish, dolphins phosphorescent under skies lit only by guiding stars, and that green flash as the sun goes over the horizon into someone else's day. *We figure we've gone as far north as we need to when I see something come up on the radar. We're about a mile away when it slows down, this tug, towing a barge, about as long as that berth,* (he points – it's about fifteen boats long) *five or six boats wide and twice as high as that marina office* (he points again – it's two-storeyed.) *Then three or four guys climb onto the barge, which is loaded up with rubbish…*Rubbish? *Rubbish, garbage, trash…compacted.* Compacted*? Compacted…and then the barge opens up. All that shit falls into the sea, into the North Pacific Garbage Patch. We head towards California. We're waiting offshore to go into Marina del Rey and they pass us going into the commercial port. Two identical barges come out, going the other way.* When was this? *About a month ago.* No. *Yep, ocean dumping - 750,000 tonnes a year.* Bastards! *Uhuh. I'm telling everyone I meet. Someone might know what to do. You're number fifty-two.* He picks up his bag of rubbish and wanders off. I finish my coffee and head home.

You're number fifty-three.

## Beachcombing

Washed up or dropped, three finds –
what was once a coin
dull, brown, verdigris patched
a feather from a gull
bright, white, almost as light
as the air inside its quill
and what was once a colony of polyps
*Physalia physalis*, adrift,
poised to stun and paralyse.

The Portuguese man o' war's
brilliant blue pneumatophore
and iridescent purple-spotted sail
still move slowly as if reaching
for the wave run that sometimes
lifts, shifts it sideways, and strands again
once trailing tentacles
reduced to a pile of blue mush
left, like the coin, abraded
by sand and sea, like the feather
dropped as easily as an eyelash
out of place and out of time.

## Face  Ears  Wind

Paddling past Motu Arohia
I change my course
rudderless today
my waka wants to turn
into the wind
there it is now
evenly in both ears
the bow points east
I follow.

This poem started dangerously
an idea  it turned upon itself
frightened  by its own silence
listened for
sirens singing  not wailing
stepped  sideways  skipped
across wavetops  to face
what the wind carried

## Katabasis

Heath grows rampant
on top of the cliff
where Jane takes the air
deep into her lungs
while walking her dogs.

Meanwhile back in the attic
Friday is searching for
the children of Wednesday
and there's a man
alone on a mountain.

Tangaroa takes his new net fishing
while Poseidon ponders
how paralytic shellfish poisoning
will affect the dinner party
they had invited Neptune over for.

Meanwhile back at the terminal
a ferry is about to leave.
The hostess asks each passenger,
*One way or return?*
debits their cards and casts off.

## Life Writing: V

2010s-2020

My ancestry is multihued - English, Scottish, Irish and Māori. Most of the old memories are lost, but perhaps some have passed into my subconscious. Some seem to have stayed. Why do some memories, images and characters resonate and remain while others leave? Maybe I'll find out one day. What I do know is that the heritage of seafarers, with its obligation of kaitiakitanga, and the Māori part of my ancestry have spoken to me louder than any other part. It has directed me in my search for meaning and challenges. It brought me to the place and the people of Kororāreka and to waka ama, all of which in turn has given me fitness, strength, and the confidence to venture into arenas that fear would have once kept me out of. It has taught me about manaakitanga and whakawhanaungatanga. Most important of all, coming to live in Russell as an adult has taught me how to navigate more carefully, with awareness, with respect, with aroha and ongoing wonder, in two worlds – te ao Pākehā me te ao Māori. Unlike my tupuna Tiraha, who must have learned very quickly how to function in her newly bicultural world, my re-education has been a long, slow process. My latest venture has been sailing on a traditional tall ship, in the Tuia 250 flotilla, alongside Tahitian and Māori voyaging waka and an Endeavour replica - two maritime traditions side by side. It's as good a metaphor as I could hope to find, of what to hope for in the rest of my life, and in my grandchildren's futures. Transforming this picture into poetry will, I hope, be an equally invigorating, ongoing adventure.

## To & Fro

A small khaki crab, with flattened claws pressed tight
against her face, her stalked eyes shining,
looked out from the mussel bag as I hung it
emptied, on the line to dry.

She moved carefully in the unaccustomed altitude,
a mass of eggs tucked tight under her tail, holding on
to the loose red threads (it was an onion bag once).
Then she dropped, quick, like a cat, to earth.

I didn't look again.
There were mussels to shell.
If she'd been bigger with fatter claws,
we would have eaten her too.

My family were hungry, waiting for food.
It's important for fritters, that the mussels are raw
when added, with onion, to the batter. Hold
the mussel just so, with the knife tip against

the shell just there, where there is no gap,
and then there is. Push down hard, quick, and slice.
Slice the tough adductor muscle clean in two, that strong band
of pure white tension, holding shells close, ocean in, air out.

See the valves relax apart in a long, expiring breath.
Salty water ebbs. The animal inside is still alive.
Fry them (the fritters) quickly in olive oil.
Serve with lemon.

The empty shells go in the bucket with byssal threads busted
with pea crabs, parasites squirming, limpets
clamped on tight, and anemones, wobbly brown jellies,
their tentacles tucked away, dessicating slowly.

The empty half shells, their ruptured adductors
going grey in the glare, opalescent interiors,
brilliant in darkness, fading with the day. They cluster,
ragged. Just empty shells in an old paint bucket.

We throw them on the drive to be crushed
by parking cars. With one toss,
the skeletal shapes of sea scatter and fall.
Soon they'll be indistinguishable from stones.

But first a red-billed gull will spy them from the sky,
will wheel, bank, and drop its delicate starfish feet.
With fluttering of wings and squawks to fellow foragers,
they will flock and feed.

Surviving pea-crabs, unfitted for a life requiring legs,
will succumb this time, to sharp eyes and probing beaks.
I think of that other crab, maybe still alive.
I did look, followed her as she fell,

saw her scuttle sideways across the crazy paving of the path,
into the shadow of the rock garden,
where succulents seal their moisture,
secure against the sun.

I strolled, nonchalant, swung the bucket to and fro,
past my partner, sons, relaxing after lunch, said, ‘I thought
I’d take a walk, down the hill, along the beach, to the rocks
at the end.’ Didn’t say, ‘To take a crab back home.’

I looked among the rocks, where she had gone,
gone deep where rocky crevices must have seemed familiar,
cool, quiet, sheltering her never-to-be-children from time,
sure to be covered any minute now, by a flooding tide.

Incomprehensible, the infinity of tide-less time.

I walked anyway, without her, down the hill,
along the beach to the rocks at the end,
with the smell of salt flying off
waves incessant on the shore.

Alone along the beach, sun sparkling off the sand,
pausing at the urupa, with flowers fresh among the graves,
to the rocks at the end, washing clean with every swell,
and the seaweed, swaying, nonchalant, to and fro.

Everything was in its place
moving easy with the tide.
My own debt, to that mother of many
will be repaid in its own time.