

BYRON RANGIWAI

Tangihanga

This piece is about the tangihanga of my grandmother who was born in 1940 and passed away in December 2017. My grandmother practically raised me. Her influence over my life is undeniable. She sacrificed much for me and encouraged and believed in me always. My grandmother came from a different world to others in her generation. She was raised in Waiōhau, the home-base of the Patuheuheu hapū. She was a native speaker of the Tūhoe dialect and she came from a world where the spiritual and physical were seen as one. This piece speaks of the tangihanga process and emphasises the intensity of the grief we experience as Māori when someone close to us dies, but also the healing that comes from being surrounded by whānau.

You lie in state
In the wharemate
At Patuheuheu marae
Adorned with a taonga
That I gave to you
A pounamu Hei Tiki
Kahurangi grade – fine, light
And without blemish

Your passing cuts deep
Into my fragile, broken heart
The tears sting my cheeks
The hūpē dries on my black t-shirt
Like the trails of a dozen snails
Glistening in the summer sun

The grief drains me, vampirically
Like a squirming black, leach
Pulsating and feasting
On the arteries of my aroha
Its sharp mouthpiece gnawing
Intensely and purposefully

Images of you unwell and
Dying, haunt my thoughts
I recall your suffering
Each time I close my eyes
Hospital scenes and last moments
Projected on my eyelids
In High Definition realness

When you made your descent
Beneath Papatūānuku's skin
I watched from afar and wept
Hinenuitepō's embrace
Nor Jesus' promise of heaven
Did little to comfort me
Your chrome nameplate
And myriad plastic flowers
Now mark your resting place

My whānau are my healers
The rongoā for my pain
Their presence and love
This begins the healing
As does the incessant crying
Behind closed doors
When I am alone