

HENARE KING

Tumatahina

The book “The Tail of the Fish” was published in 1968 and written by a Te Aupouri kuia, Matire Kereama (nee: Hoeft) of the far north of Aotearoa, New Zealand. I grew up with this book as my grandmother would read the stories to me at bedtime. Although my comprehension of each story was very vague and unrelatable to my life at that time, today, I find myself totally absorbed by the historical content and knowledge encapsulated in each chapter.

I completed a Masters of Applied Indigenous Knowledge at Te Wananga o Aotearoa in 2017, entitled; Tales of the singing fish: He tangi wairua. I composed twelve waiata (Maori songs) of which ten of the waiata was information extracted from ten chapters of the book. The other two waiata were composed specifically for my people of the Te Rarawa tribe, namely, Ahipara.

The Te Aupouri tribe were constantly attacked by the Te Rarawa and Ngā Puhi people. Concerned on a narrow strip of land, they were forced to take refuge on an island called Murimotu, just off the mainland. The enemy discovered they were there and decided to wait on the coast for Te Aupouri to surrender but the enemy had to reckon with the leader of Te Aupouri, Tumatahina, a giant of a man both in physique and character. For one thing, he was known to have the biggest feet on any person living at that time. After a few days, Tumatahina instructed a few of his best warriors to go ashore in the dark to fetch strands of flax to make a long rope from the island to the shore line for the Te Aupouri tribe to flee the island in the middle of the night. The enemy were certain Te Aupouri

would dwindle and become weak and surrender, however, they fell asleep and an opportunity arose for Te Aupouri to escape the island in the dark. Tumatahina explained the most important of his plan to his people and said on reaching the beach the older ones carried the children on their back so that their small footprints would be seen in the very large ones left by Tumatahina. As he stepped silently across the sands, Tumatahina looked at his great feet with pride and said to himself, “yes, you are indeed saving our people”.

The enemy slept on and when they awoke and looked over at the island they were amazed that no people seemed to be about, although the sun was well up. Realising that something was wrong, their chief asked one of his men to swim over to the island and investigate. Neither he nor anybody else wanted to go fearing that a trick had been played on them. So it had, and while the enemy stood and argued over what sort of trick it was, Te Aupouri were well on their way to another and more secure refuge.

Rūia Rūia Tahia Tahia
 E noho mai ana ā Te Aupouri
 Ki te motu o Murimtou e huna ana
 Mai i ngā iwi o Te Rarawa mē Ngā Puihi e
 Rūia Rūia Tahia Tahia
 E moe whakatā ana ā Te Aupouri
 I ngā rau mangemange whai atu i te muka
 Harakeke here here i te tauira
 Kia ora tonu ai te iwi nei e
 Rūia Rūia Tahia Tahia
 E kau hoe ana ā Te Aupouri
 I roto i te moana ka mau tonu rā
 I te taura e hikoi ana i te tapuwae o tahi
 Waewae tangata rau o Matahine e (2x)