

HENARE KING

Te Korowai

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of each story was very vague and unrelatable to my life at that time, today, I find myself totally absorbed by the historical content and knowledge encapsulated in each chapter.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.

After an important ceremony held at Pawarenga in 1963, everybody returned to the marae, where a feast had been prepared and then entered the meeting-house for discussions and farewells. One of the elders asked the owner of the korowai (feathered cloaks) to bring them from the base of a monument and place them in the centre of the hall for discussion. It is customary to give ceremonial cloaks after such an occasion to the best claimant through lineage or to the one who could most eloquently state his claim. Orators from five northern tribes began an interesting discussion. A distinguished elder stood up declaring that no Te Aupouri descendant should be permitted to lodge a claim. The cloaks he said belonged to an Aupouri and been honoured by being laid on an Aupouri memorial.

Immediately, Sir James Henare stood up and said, “listen to me all of you. These are my cloaks. I am Te Aupouri, I am Ngāti Kahu, I am Ngā Puhi and I am Te Rarawa. Therefore, these cloaks are mine”. All eyes were fixed on the speaker as he placed his hands on the cloaks saying, “now that my hands have touched my cloaks, I am giving you the lot”. With those words, he lay down and went to sleep, for he had been travelling all night and he was very tired. Other claimants tried to take the cloaks until one of the most senior elders stood and made a decision and placed the cloak on top of the body of Sir James Henare as he slept and placed another on the shoulders of a young Te Rarawa chief, to return to his people and be used as a ceremonial korowai (cloak) for tangihanga or funeral services. With the fate of the cloaks decided, the people completed their farewells, bringing to close a happy and unforgettable occasion.

Whakarongo mai koutou katoa
 Ena kākahu nōku
 Ahau ko Te Aupouri
 Ko Ngāti Kahu
 Ko Ngā Puhi
 E Te Rarawa
 Nā reira ēnā kākahu nōku

Inaianei kua pā taku ringa
 Ki āku kākahu
 Ka tukua atu nei e au
 Kia koutou