

HENARE KING

Huirangi

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of each story was very vague and unrelatable to my life at that time, today, I find myself totally absorbed by the historical content and knowledge encapsulated in each chapter.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

This waiata is a dedication to Huirangi Tahana of the Ngāti Māhanga people of Waingaro Marae located 36 kilometers to the west of Ngaruawahia in the Waikato district. Huirangi became a close work colleague and eventually a close friend to my wife and I. She was survived by her husband, commonly known to everyone as “uncle Charlie” or “Chary” was a mentor to me personally on matters of Waikato whakapapa (genealogy) and Kingitanga history.

This chapter acknowledges historical landmarks and boundaries of the sacred pathway of Te one roa a Tohe, the spiritual pathway of the Ninety Mile Beach. The author writes about how the people liked to die at low tide because the tide had to be completely out to enable them to reach Te Rerenga

Wairua, “the leaping place of spirits”. This is a large hole at the bottom of the sea which is exposed at low tide, permitting the spirits to go inside. When the tide is full the hole is under water and covered with masses of seaweed. Other landmarks mentioned are Whare Rūnanga or the assembly place of spirits who are bound for the next world by way of the great hole. If the hole was not well enough exposed for the spirits to be able to jump into it, they would wait on the platform. From there they would look up at the vine-like root of the Pōhutukawa tree, rubbed smooth by the hands of the spirits which had passed this way over many generations.

The spirits would travel north to Spirits Bay and to Te Arai Bluff known as the barrier. The leave tokens brought with them from their homes, usually small branches of a favourite tree or a flower. From the lubb they would climb the high hill called Haumu and take a lingering look at the land they were leaving behind as they ventured onto Waiōraropō the underworld. The spirits eventually arrive at Te Ao pōuriuri o Io, the world of the unknown.

Ka tangi te rangi
 Mā tō tū ki Te Rerenga Wairua
 E tū ana te Pōhutukawa
 He rākau tokanui e
 Te One roa ā Tōhe
 Ki te puke o Hukatere
 Tu atu ki te ārai
 Te puke tapu o Haūmu
 I te puke i Haūmu
 Ka ara mai tō ringa
 Hi Haūmu
 E te ao pōuriuri o Io e
 E Huirangi e
 Moe mai haere rā