

SPIRAL 8

SETTING THE WORK TABLE

SPIRAL 8

Setting the [Work] Table

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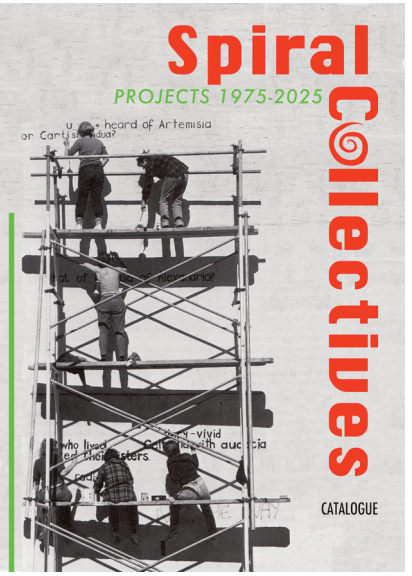
INTRODUCTION

> Look we're setting the table. Right? All those women we know about and the hundreds we don't. Well. They got the ingredients ready and cooked the dinner. And now we've got as far as setting the table. Oh I know it seems as though we'll never sit down to the dinner-party. Well maybe we won't. But we'll get the table ready. Us and all the ones we don't know about.
>
> —'Con' in *Setting the Table*, by Renée.

ABOUT *SPIRAL 8*, OUR 'CATALOGUE' & 'SOME STORIES'

Tēnā koe, Reader, and welcome to *Spiral 8: Setting the [Work] Table*, an issue of the arts journal poet and activist Heather McPherson founded in 1975 in Ōtautahi Christchurch, with the first of the four Christchurch-made issues of the journal. *Spiral 8* is one of three books that mark Spiral's 50th anniversary, complemented by *Spiral Collectives Projects 1975-2025 Catalogue* (*Catalogue*) and *Spiral Collectives Projects 1975-2025 Some Stories* (*Some Stories*). All are extensions of

Spiral's open research project, begun when Heather became ill in 2016.[1]



The *Catalogue* documents projects and participants from all three groups associated with Spiral Collectives — Spiral itself, as publisher, and as creator of archives, events and exhibitions (1974-present); Kidsarus 2 and its children's picture book project (1977-1984); and the Women's Gallery in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington (1980-1984), where Spiral first started to publish books as well as the arts journal.

Some Stories brings together essays and interviews from our online open research project. It also extends *Spiral 8*, with tributes to poet Hilary Baxter; artist and teacher Allie Eagle; and graphic designer, writer and philanthropist Lynne Ciochetto, who were originally part of this book, all born later than those included in *Spiral 8*. When the

1. *Medium* 'Spiral Collectives' https://medium.com/spiral-collectives

file became unwieldy, they went to join others from their generation who are still with us.

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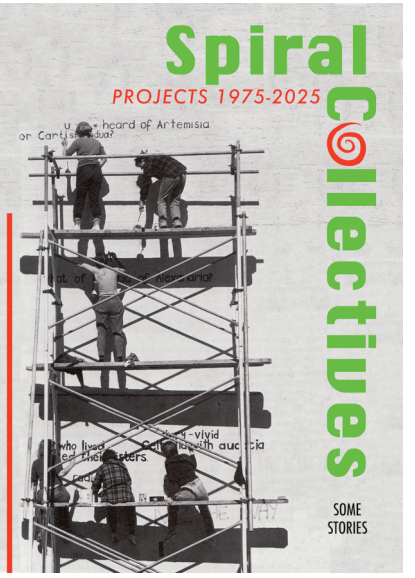


Te Puna o Waiwhetū Christchurch Art Gallery kindly hosts most of our past publications and all these new ones. They are freely available as PDFs, to read and to download; this privilege has truly transformed our work. Without the fundraising work necessary for printing and distribution costs we can focus on producing easily accessible content for anyone who wants it, a kind of social media.[2] In addition, as part of our celebrations, the gallery's dynamic archivist and librarian, Tim Jones, has curated *Spiral Collectives*, an archival exhibition; and a related public event that looks back with artist and early Spiral member Tiffany Thornley, and looks forward as it welcomes a new Spiral generation.

2. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral

One member of this new generation, Joanna Osborne, has worked with the Charlotte Museum to create *Spiral Collectives — Setting the [Work] Table*, an exhibition and events about the artists and writers also featured in *Spiral 8* and *Some Stories*. It's been a special joy to share with her some of the research for our projects, and to learn from her. Others from the inspiring new gen will also be at the events, Becca Barnes and Cathasaigh Ó Fiannachta, who, with Madison Kelly, are preparing to adapt Keri Hulme's *the bone people* as a graphic novel and then an animation.[3]

WHAT'S IN SPIRAL 8?

Spiral 8 remembers, with love and deep respect, sixteen artists and writers who enriched Spiral's work during their lifetimes and have now left us. In birth date order they are Jacquie (J.C.) Sturm, Renée, Arapera Blank, Gladys Gurney (Saj), Frances Cherry, Marilynn Webb, Heather McPherson, Keri Kaa, Rosemary Johnson, Pauline Neale, Miriama Evans, Joanna Margaret Paul, Juanita Ketchel, Irihapeti Ramsden, Keri Hulme, Sharon Alston. Each has a section divided into chapters. As have Hilary, Allie and Lynne, within *Some Stories*.

Each in a different way, these are Spiral's matriarchs. Some of them are very well known, others almost forgotten, but Spiral cherishes them all and celebrates them here and in *Some Stories*, in their own words wherever possible and in the words of others who knew and loved them, and alongside some of their own works. All of them — explicitly or implicitly — helped 'set the work table' for those who came after them, through their own creative and often courageous public lives and work. Some of them would have described their work as asserting mana wāhine; asserting mana Māori motuhake;

3. https://www.spiralcollectives.org/concept; and https://christchurchart-gallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-the-bone-people-a-graphic-novel

asserting self-determination; or asserting their agency. Others wouldn't. But, however they described their intentions, their actions made a difference. A significant thread in the selections, often taken in collaboration with generous whānau, families, friends and Estates, also highlights the loving support most of these artists and writers gave to one another and to other artists and writers in their communities, sometimes for comparatively brief periods, sometimes throughout their working lives.

THE BACK STORY – 'ALL WOMEN'

Heather placed a tiny advertisement in *The Press* on Saturday 22 June 1974.[4]


although the road has been cleared it is considered that chains are essential.

Assert your individuality on some of Canterbury's challenging slopes, this week-end.

Ring Seekers, 30-819, for daily information on snow and road conditions.

4029

WOMEN ARTISTS, WRITERS, PAINTERS, COMPOSERS.

Interested in forming supportive group—

PHONE 884-176.

53930

MOUNT HUTT SKI FIELD IS NOW

months, $35 p.w. Ph.

55868

FLATMATE wanted share flat with 2 girls. Ph. after 5 p.m.

FLATMATE, male or female wanted to share new modern Merivale flat. Ph.

FLATMATE: Young male, own room. Call Flat 1, 24 Devonport Lane. X5874

FLATMATES, 2 girls to share established flat with 2 guys, near town. Ph.

FLAT, s.c., furn., 1 bedrm, sunny and clean, with carport. $20 weekly. Call 14 Coopers Road, Shirley (Flat 1), after 1 p.m. Ph.

FLATMATE wanted. Apply 441 Cashel Street. S7318

FEMALE flat mate over 20 to share with one other, close to town. Own room. Reasonable rent. Phone

S5434

FARMHOUSE, 25 miles from City. Fridge, carpets. Ph. 846 Kirwee. S7520

FEMALE flatmate in 20s to share handy furnished flat, $9 week. Ring 515-533 after 5 a.m.

FLAT mates: 2 rooms available. Phone 486-611. S7508

Heather's ad, in among larger ads for ski fields.

4. https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/press/1974/06/22/39; she placed two ads and we don't know which one this was — see 'Heather & Spiral (1)' below. Many thanks to Philip Matthews for finding this, as well as writing about Keri Hulme and us in *The Press* — 'Keri was ahead of her time: the Bone People past and future' https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/360859542/keri-was-ahead-her-time-bone-peoples-past-and-future.

A very small group responded and attended the first meeting of the Christchurch Women Artists Group, and wrote a Statement of Aims. The first aim read 'We will offer encouragement and stimulus to all women artists'.[5] The group grew, and produced a women's art environment at the Canterbury Society of Arts for the United Women's Convention in 1977. Other big events followed. The environment seems to have been developed on similar lines to *Spiral 1*, initiated by Heather around the same time. All women were welcome and they 'worked with the material they received'; it didn't bother her (or others) too much that the work 'didn't reflect our own reality, it was the idea of women working together for women's voices to be heard, positively, that was the aim, and the amalgam of arts'.[6]

In my experience of Spiral projects, we continue to 'work with the material we receive' (or find) whether or not it reflects our own reality; and to work together for 'our voices to be heard, positively'. Within this process two vibrant strands within Spiral are immediately obvious: wāhine Māori's manaakitanga, āwhina and tautoko; and the usually kind embrace and support of Heather and her peers — often tangata Tiriti Pākehā who self-identified as lesbians or lesbian feminists. Both strands have challenged and nourished me and many others associated with Spiral — sometimes one, sometimes the other, sometimes both at once. Individuals from both are here in *Spiral 8*, alongside those who identify themselves differently.

The 'both at once', and more strands, also generate debate, and, sometimes, unresolvable polarisation. But it's still true, as Sharon Alston stated long ago, that—

5. Christchurch Women Artists Group *Minute Book* Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL): 84-072A-1/03.
6. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* compiled, edited and with afterwords by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Tilly Lloyd — a Women's Gallery/ Spiral group GP Books 1988 (*AWPB*): 40.

> The common driving force we all had was the love of art and the love of women. We knew that at least at that level we'd meet in harmony even if working in the collective was sometimes difficult.[7]

As Sharon identified, the deep love some creative practitioners have for other artists and writers is what's helped Spiral survive. Their deep desire to take collective action to cherish artists and writers and their work inspires what Spiral does and makes it possible. But as a small artist-led organisation Spiral's 'we' has always been fragile. It forever changes, according to who has a particular project they want to realise within the Spiral context and who offers to help. In recent times, when the pay gap between women and men who are creative practitioners is an extraordinary 32%,[8] Spiral's central practices are explicitly awhi and tautoko, embrace and support. These practices make it possible to sustain the ephemeral 'we' of Spiral's collectives as they come and go, often also working with material that 'doesn't reflect our own reality'. A larger 'we' than this is not possible: as Heather wrote, in her *Spiral 7* introduction: "Race, class, able-bodiedness, financial, educational, age and other assorted privileges will always short-circuit the ease of [...] 'we'". This is as true for broader Spiral collaborations as for the lesbian culture Heather was writing about.[9]

One contemporary difference arises around Spiral workers' opinions about what 'woman' means and whether it is necessary to refer

7. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 women artists from Aotearoa New Zealand* (*AWPB*) eds Bridie Lonie, Marian Evans, Tilly Lloyd, a Women's Gallery/Spiral Group, GP Books 1988: 132.
8. Creative New Zealand & New Zealand On Air *A Profile of Creative Professionals* [2022/23]: 15. https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/project/creative-nz/creativenz/publicationsfiles/2023-profile-of-creative-professionals/profile-of-creative-professionals---main-report---pdf.pdf There are of course some beautiful exceptions.
9. *Spiral 7: A Collection Of Lesbian Art And Writing from Aotearoa New Zealand* Daphne Brasell Associates and Spiral 1992: 9-10.

specifically to individuals who identify as 'nonbinary'. Some Spiral stalwarts are uncomfortable with an expansive and fluid understanding of gender.

Nonbinary individuals of various kinds, including me, have always been among us. Sometimes this identification has been temporary. For instance, Heather McPherson wrote, in 1985, in *Wahine Kaituhi,* that BF, Before Feminism—

> For years I considered myself an alien, almost a kind of third sex, with no interest in 'normal' women's concerns and far too serious-minded to relate easily to either sex.[10]

But often the identification is not temporary at all. In 1980 Keri Hulme wrote in the Women's Gallery *Opening Show* catalogue—

> I don't often think of myself as a woman — usually as a sort of neuter observer at the fringe of the fire — because I don't live in a way, do much in a way, that is considered womanly by our society — Maori or Pakeha. It's sweet to be part of woman power again — because there's no way I can ignore my gender — I get a reminder every tide, every moon, every month.[11]

On our website we attempt, imperfectly, to honour all those from the parallel realities who are in regular relationship at Spiral, usually co-existing harmoniously but sometimes in schism. 'Ko Mana Wāhine Te Putake' refers to 'the inherent strength, power, and authority possessed and exercised by wāhine' and 'something

10. 'Heather McPherson' *Wahine Kaituhi* Spiral 1986*:* np. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2023_11/WomenWritersOfAoteroa.pdf
11. *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu*: 228.

uniquely Māori'[12]; it was embedded in the lives and work of the Māori women in this book. Spiral's inexact English equivalent, 'women's strength is our reason for being', refers to the strength of women in general, including those who have whakapapa, and implicitly acknowledges that English has no equivalent of the Māori 'ia' as a personal pronoun that allows for fluidity: it's always necessary to choose from among 'she, he, their' or even 'it'. Keri Hulme made a strong argument for an alternative choice in 'What has Ve Got to Say for Verself' back in 1976 but this hasn't been adopted and probably never will be.[13] In the meantime, within our fragile 'we', Spiral celebrates the presence of nonbinary people at our collective work tables.

Sometimes, because of differences, it's only possible to come together to cherish others, with patience and persistence, for some brief and intense activity. But often Spiral workers' love of artists and writers and of women — through the practice of awhi and tautoko, embrace and support — transcends complexity, conflict and contradiction. It can and does nourish long-term relationships that last decades, a lifetime, as I hope *Spiral 8* and *Some Stories* demonstrate.

THE BACK STORY – THE ARCHIVE

When Spiral began in the 1970s, those involved wanted to connect to and learn from our cultural grandmothers, mothers, aunties and sisters, here and around the globe. Because, as the Women's Gallery 1980 manifesto — written by a group that included founder Heather

12. https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/en/inquiries/kaupapa-inquiries/mana-wahine/te-kete-puputu/briefs-of-evidence-4/new-content-page-4
13. *Broadsheet* 41: 18-19, reprinted in *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu* 2022 https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-our-kuru-pounamu

McPherson — stated, 'We lack a positive tradition to encourage and confirm us in what we see'.[14]

Many of us wanted and needed to learn who our cultural antecedents were, and to make well-informed connections to their lives and work. But these connections were often very very difficult to find. Some of us responded to this loss by committing ourselves to finding and reading only writing by women and looking only at women's art, for a short period or longer. Some Spiral collectives and individuals were also committed to retaining archives and depositing them in a public collection, so that those who followed us would have a little less of the painful gap that we'd experienced. Most of our archive is in the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), the research library within the National Library. It contains art works and photographs; correspondence analogue and digital; websites; ephemera; organisational records; and video and audio material including oral histories.

Establishing this archive has sometimes been problematic, because for some of us our domestic and Spiral lives were at times intertwined. Some of the many letters in the archives — often written when phones were attached to the wall, there was no email, and it was expensive to call someone at a distance — had the capacity to hurt living people or their families. They, and individuals' journals, documented episodes where we'd hurt others or felt hurt and were too tender to expose while those who could be affected were still around. But, as Irihapeti Ramsden used to say regularly, 'conflict is normal', as is its little sibling, irritation, so although some items were destroyed others were deposited with time-based restrictions.

14. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/why-a-womens-gallery-bdf3121a70fe

This book, like the other two, draws on the archive and tests its capacity for providing information that's useful for learning about and celebrating those associated with Spiral who have now gone.

You may want to start reading and looking at the body of this work immediately. If so, go for it, of course. But if you'd like more information before you start here's some basic technical info, followed by more notes which introduce me, as context for why I've selected these artists and writers from among hundreds who've come and gone and sometimes returned during Spiral's half-century; outline *Spiral 8*'s structure, content and limitations; and acknowledge others who've left us, those who are still with us and the generous people and organisations who've supported this book and our 2025 exhibitions.

TECHNICAL INFO

There is stylistic consistency within each chapter wherever possible but no stylistic consistency across all sections or within sections.

With tohutō, writers' own use or non-use of macrons or double vowels has been followed. But if their practice is internally inconsistent, we — the transcribers and I — have standardised the text with tohutō. In one work where each of two writers had different practices, we kept the difference.

feminism/Feminism: capitalisation follows the writer's preference.

Anything in square brackets [ ] is only a reasonably well-informed guess.

I've included an occasional 'research photo', because I think that the beauty of its content transcends its less-than-optimal reproduction.

To avoid writing out Alexander Turnbull Library in full every time, it's often named as ATL.

A commitment to using 'their own words' extends to the biographical info at the beginning of each section, but not always. For instance, I added 'tangata Tiriti' to three sections about people I know well because I'm confident that they would have have wanted that. Others would perhaps have also wanted that.

ABOUT ME & SETTING THE WORK TABLE

At its most immediate, and carrying DNA inherited from all over western Europe, my family background is Welsh and English. I arrived in Aotearoa aged almost three: the immigrant child of teacher parents recovering from World War II and deeply committed to the Anglican Church.

As a non-artist married to a working class artist, I was introduced to the Ōtautahi Christchurch women's art movement that generated Spiral in 1977, when Joanna Margaret Paul invited me to take part in her *A Season's Diaries* project, with Allie Eagle, Anna Keir, Bridie Lonie, Gladys Gurney (Saj) and Heather McPherson, to document some spring months. Around the same time, a neighbour, teacher Julie Grenfell, invited me to join the group which became Kidsarus 2, to produce stories for the children in her multi-cultural school, who didn't have books that reflected their worlds. As that work developed I met Lynne Ciochetto who introduced me to Heather.

In 1980, Anna, Bridie and I started the Women's Gallery in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington and in 1982, Anna and I, later joined by Daphne Brasell and Vicki McDonald, brought Spiral to town, with Heather McPherson's first collection of poems, *A Figurehead: A Face*, followed by *Spiral 5*.

Through the Kidsarus 2 project I met Hirini Melbourne, who introduced me to Keri Hulme. I met Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa who (I think) introduced me to Keri Kaa, who introduced me (I think) to Miriama Evans. I met Irihapeti Ramsden when she visited *Mothers* at the Women's Gallery in the summer of 1980-81. On and on it went from there, problem-solving and celebrating in collaboration with many participants in exhibitions and events, book production and archival work. These were privileged environments where I became better able to understand myself as having stories to tell too, as tangata Tiriti; a single parent; an abuse survivor and beneficiary whose commitment to any formal feminism was almost non-existent, whose gender was unaligned and sexuality fluid.

All the artists and writers I selected for *Spiral 8* extended my understanding of the problematic working conditions for many women artists and writers and for the nonbinary people among them. Too many of us lack the resources to develop our work and opportunities to present it to a public audience. Especially if it depicts 'different' and 'difficult' stories and images and celebrates the courage, power and joy of those who depict their own lived experience: of colonisation processes and racism; of being part of the working class; of lesbianphobia and the fear of nonbinary and trans people; of physical and spiritual violation including incest; of disabilities; of single parenthood; of the physical and mental health systems, various kinds of incarceration, and the justice system; of environmental depredation; and our lived experience in arts communities. Especially when many of us bear the greater share of responsibilities to care for others, in our domestic lives.

But the creative practitioners represented here in *Spiral 8* and in *Some Stories,* as part of their caring for future generations, were always courageous in 'setting the table' for them. They excelled as they told and depicted those 'difficult' and 'different' stories and provided encouragement and support to others doing the same

including, often, to one another. Sometimes they did this as part of Spiral, but their lives and work were much much bigger than Spiral. They were also fun and funny, analytical and articulate, generous and inspiring. I feel truly fortunate to have sometimes helped create and hold space for them in the past and to have loved and learned from them; and now to have an opportunity to create this space to celebrate them and to pay homage to them and their work.

(Someone suggested 'You're making a book about your friends?' And yes, these are certainly people I knew and loved. But few of them were friends who visited, shared a social life, and knew my family. Someone else asked 'Why you? On your own?' and I explained that because all these artists and writers have left us, they're not available to help amplify the lives and works of the others; that of those who remain, none has been available to share the selection and the research; that Joanna Osborne is a fine and challenging collaborator; and others provided a lot of help with specific tasks.)

STRUCTURE & CONTENT

The sixteen sections that follow, in individual birth date order, are not standardised. The book is designed to draw your attention to some artists and writers who've 'set a table'; and to invite you to seat yourself wherever you want to and and to help yourself to anything that might nourish you. It isn't a formal work. It's made on a kitchen table, and is scholarship lite, with just enough information to acknowledge sources and to enable you to track down references if you want to. As with the Charlotte Museum exhibition, this is also a kind of *A Season's Diaries* work,[15] though Joanna's work at the Charlotte Museum is elegant and rigorous.

15. There's more about 'A Season's Diaries' in Some Stories, and below in the Joanna Margaret Paul section.

The introduction to each section provides an individual's names and dates and usually affiliations and something contextual, wherever possible written by the artist or writer whose section it is. Please note any date assigned to something written by the artist or writer: self-written short bios may or may not be consistent over decades.

What follows this introductory material varies. There will be some images of, and often by, the individual; a chapter I've written to describe their connection to Spiral; and chapters with a poem; an interview or a review; some letters; a postcard or an essay, by them or by someone else. There are also examples of what they wrote about one another's work.

Originally, I planned to give each section equal space, but that became impossible. And because I wanted above all to cherish these individual voices and stories and recipes-for-living I didn't intend to write anything new about any of those included. But sometimes it's felt necessary to fill a gap, to provide an explanation. Or to explore something for myself, because material I found down a rabbit hole in the ATL archive raised questions for me.[16]

There are already, or about to be, substantial publications dedicated exclusively to nine of those represented in *Spiral 8* or *Some Stories*. For three of them — Marilynn Webb; Joanna Margaret Paul; and Heather McPherson, these publications were accompanied by major exhibitions. The others are J.C. Sturm (forthcoming); Arapera Blank; Renée and Frances Cherry who published memoirs; Irihapeti

16. If you want more biographical detail than supplied in this book, it's there in the books and other publications referred to in the various sections, wonderful sites like ReadNZ's careful work and Bridget Underhill's Kōmako based on information that Māori writers supply about themselves. Wikipedia is sometimes good. If you're really keen, there are our archives at the wonderful Alexander Turnbull Library and often in other institutional archives, for instance (alphabetically) at Auckland Art Gallery, the Hocken Library at the University of Otago, the McMillan Brown Library at Canterbury University, and Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand.

Ramsden who features in *Tāngata Ngāi Tahu People of Ngāi Tahu, Volume Two* and wrote an extensive autobiographical chapter within her PhD thesis on cultural safety; and Keri Hulme who, like Heather, has already been commemorated by Spiral.[17] Because of this, in these nine sections I've tried to provide material that might otherwise be invisible to a wide audience; it sometimes fits within Spiral's practices of celebrating the apparently ephemeral alongside the in-depth difficult and different. I'm also deeply appreciative of the opportunity to be able to re-publish Judith Galtry's scholarly and engaging long-form essays about Frances Cherry, and about Hilary Baxter.

After their deaths, the other ten individuals in *Spiral 8* and *Some Stories* — Saj (Gladys Gurney); Keri Kaa; Rosemary Johnson; Pauline Neale; Miriama Evans; Juanita Ketchel; Sharon Alston; Hilary Baxter; Allie Eagle; and Lynne Ciochetto — have sometimes been represented in larger works, but none has yet been the subject of a dedicated major work. But they too 'packed a punch', as J.C. Sturm might say.[18] I'm delighted to add to their representation, in gratitude for their powerful presence in the Spiral context; and hope *Spiral 8* and *Some Stories* will inspire new and comprehensive accounts of their complex and fascinating lives, and collections and exhibitions of their work.

---

17. Spiral produced two posthumous collections of Heather's poems — *This Joyous, Chaotic Place; Garden Poems* edited by Janet Charman, and *i do not cede* edited and introduced by Emer Lyons. Thanks to Cushla Kararaina Parekowhai, with Mokopō-paki, Spiral also co-produced an exhibition and accompanying catalogue about Heather and her peers, *This Joyous, Chaotic Place He Waiata Tangi-ā-Tahu*. After Keri died, Spiral published *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu*, of tributes from people who knew her, alongside art and writing by her; and, as an educational resource, *Moeraki Hillside*, a story Keri wrote in secondary school, with themes that foreshadow those of *the bone people*. All these publications are among those on the Te Puna o Waiwhetū site — https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral

18. See 'Jacquie at the Women's Gallery', below.

Finally, three Spiral-significant women left us while this work was in progress and it was too late to include them — if their whānau were happy with that: academic and writer and activist Alison Laurie (1941-2024) who was consistently supportive of Spiral and connected to a number of women in this book;[19] Morrigan Severs (1942-2025) who was closely connected to the early women's art movement in Ōtautahi;[20] and Robyn Kahukiwa (1938-2025), a strong and very generous influence within early Kidsarus 2, Spiral and Women's Gallery projects.



L-R Allie Eagle, Heather McPherson, Morrigan Severs, probably in 1980s. Family photograph.

LIMITATIONS

The results of any Spiral project may look a little different than those developed in other contexts because it's been undertaken,

19. https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/360482065/alison-laurie-lesbian-activist-who-led-life-firsts

20. Not long before she died, Morrigan messaged me about how she saw her involvement— 'Blimmin *artists*! 🤔 Many times I was pleased to be just the 'tea lady'. Although, of course, I didn't resist saying my bit.'

always, with minimal resources other than that deep desire to cherish. The inconsistent copy editing and proof reading of the first edition of *the bone people* is one well-known example and there are many others. Online images could be more consistently well-trimmed. Archives have been deposited in less-than-optimal order.

Everyone has done their best but there will be typos below.

There are also repetitions, intended to underscore the many interconnections among the sections.

There are gaps in the archive and the memories of people who kindly shared information, and looking for what was missing I fell down some rabbit holes, like the one with information about the *Aramoana* exhibitions at Wellington City Gallery and the Hocken Library in 1981. I decided to refer to these because they are such a fine example of artist and writer protest that helped make a difference: there is no aluminum smelter at Aramoana, but who remembers that story?

When I write about each individual's connections to Spiral, there's a bit too much of me, my word view and my sometimes shonky memory, alongside information from various documents and individuals. I've done my best, aware that others will remember those connections very differently.

It was only in the last month or so that I realised that this whole project was infused with and perhaps inspired by my grief at the loss of all those included in this project. I had just heard Hilary Baxter's wonderful voice and laugh in some Spiral recordings from ATL, and was finalising her section. And I started to sob, sobbed all morning, remembering her tenderness towards me when I visited her in hospital one day and her pleasure in the Joanna Margaret Paul watercolour of a rainbow in the Seacliff landscape that I took her;

and remembering her wonderfully direct and compassionate presence in the world. A similar sense of connection to, and grief for, everyone here has probably influenced my choices and my choices of some of the more fragmentary content.

Another choice, to reproduce handwritten texts which may or may not be legible on a phone, is because I love the fluid handwriting, spelling and use of space on paper of those who also used their hands to draw: Allie Eagle; Joanna Margaret Paul; Marilynn Webb.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Beyond the archive, we've had access to rich resources that have helped us make the most of 'what we have' — volunteers who support the core collectives and other generous individuals and institutions. For instance, the recent core collective decision to produce only PDF publications to distribute online, hosted by a supportive institution, makes best use of what we have, although there will continue to be work produced for sale by independent collectives who 'borrow' the Spiral imprint.

As has been true ever since *Spiral 1*, this year's celebratory work has been undertaken by volunteers with minimal additional resources. This time, who and what has kept us going?

Before Heather's final illness, Spiral had been on hiatus for over a decade. But Cushla Parekowhai inspired a revival after she met Heather around then and provided the manaakitanga that made it possible. She, Fran McGowan and Joanna Osborne have been an inherent and valuable part of this project, as current trustees for the Spiral Collectives Trust.

Designer Biz Hayman has this year contributed our cover designs and our website with skill and rigour and generosity and grace. Joan

Caulfield's cover image continues to delight us. Our warmest thanks to them both.

Kā mihi tino nui to whānau and individual family members who, as always, have been wonderful at providing documents and photographs, as have others responsible for Estate permissions. A special mention of Heather McPherson's Estate for funding the expenses associated our celebration publications and exhibitions, significant when we live in different cities and the exhibitions are away from home for most of us; of Keri Hulme's Estate for assistance with travel costs; and of Tom Bond who sponsored framing for the Charlotte Museum. Thanks a million to all of you!

Deep thanks too to those who reflected on their experiences with those included in this project and sent through material for inclusion, in the usual Spiral practice of alphabetical order by first names: Angela Moewaka Barnes; Cathie Dunsford; Cilla McQueen; David Eggleton; Elizabeth McRae; Fran Richardson; Gillian Whitehead; Khady Harvey; Kim Hunt; Lis Ellison-Loschmann; Marg Sharpe; Miriam Saphira; Robin Swanney-McPherson; Sandi Hall. And to the correspondent yesterday who responded to a photo from about thirty years ago that I sent to her with 'Wow... Miss those wahine. So inspirational and supportive'; it was an excellent moment to be reminded, by someone who also has 'set the table', that this has been worthwhile.

Bridget Underhill's *Kōmako* site continues to provide excellent information about individual Māori writers, gathered from them during their lifetimes and I've used it regularly as a reliable reference point.[21]

21. https://www.komako.org.nz/

Thanks also to Speedprint, Ōtepoti Dunedin; they offered a substantial discount on each of the many prints required for the Charlotte Museum exhibition; and to Warehouse Stationery, also in Ōtepoti Dunedin, for some essential editing and reprinting required to finalise many of the works — Joanna (and the rest of us) very much appreciated really excellent support from some of the staff in both South Dunedin and in the city.

There was a lot of transcribing involved in *Spiral 8* and my warmest thanks go to Annie Collins, Caren Wilton, Desiree Gezentsvey, Fe Day, Fran Richardson, Hilary Oxley and Lissa Mitchell, because there was no way I could get it all done on my own.

Special thanks as always to the generous photographers, here and in *Some Stories* — Adrienne Martyn (who's also helped with technical issues); Annie Mein; Bruce Harding; Christine Gregory; Fiona Clark; the late Irihapeti Ramsden; Jane Cherry; Jane Zusters; Joan Caulfield; Kathryn Algie; Mark Tantrum (for Creative New Zealand); Nadine McGrath (for Wellington City Council); Norm Heke (for Creative New Zealand); Pearl Sidwell; Sylvia Kaa (who also lent Wi Kuki Kaa's typewriter for the Charlotte Museum exhibition); various whānau and family members. If I've missed any of you, my apologies. I'm also remembering Barb McDonald (1948-1993) who took many photographs at the Women's Gallery when she was a co-ordinator, and would be in *Spiral 8* if we could find more than one of her art works.



Barb McDonald untitled work in uncertain medium, maybe felt-tip 10 x 7 inches. Unknown date.



Barb at a beach: her happy place. Unknown date and photographer.

Warm appreciation for technical assistance at key moments to Struan Ashby and again to Tom Bond, who helped with photoshop work; exhibition preparation, packaging and freighting preparations.

A special thanks to those who've been connected to Spiral regularly over decades and continue to provide assistance of various kinds. Here are some of them, and some of them with photos, just to give you an idea.

Bridie Lonie has been in my life since before we contributed to *A Season's Diaries* in 1977, and she has intermittently come and gone at the Women's Gallery and Kidsarus 2 and Spiral ever since, especially with Tilly Lloyd, through *A Women's Picture Book (AWPB)*[22] and work

22. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* compiled, edited and with afterwords by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Tilly Lloyd — a Women's Gallery/ Spiral group GP Books 1988 (*AWPB*)

on Spiral's ATL archive; she also kindly supplied Joanna with items for the Charlotte Museum exhibition.



L -R Bridie Lonie & Tilly Lloyd at the Alexander Turnbull Library ?2017. Photograph Marian Evans.

Cathie Dunsford continues her staunch and creative support for Spiral alongside much else, as a generous writer, academic and artist and activist with a global outlook. A lovely photo of her is in Frances Cherry's section.

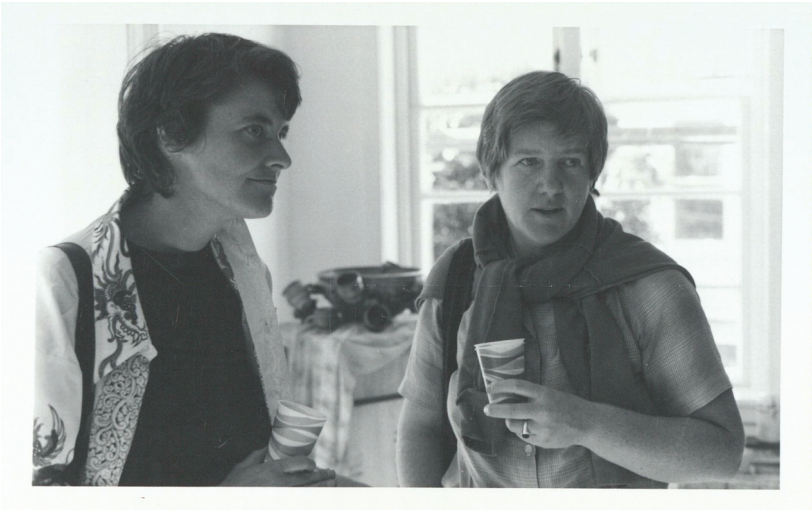
Daphne Brasell and Maureen Marshall, as themselves and as Daphne Brasell Associates, have been constant, too. Daphne was a member of the *Spiral 5* collective and its decision to start to publish books; they both were involved in publishing *AWPB* at GP Books where

Daphne also organised some beautiful sewn binding for the first printing of *the bone people*; and Daphne Brasell Associates published *Spiral 7*. Now, they send through interesting info and publications and have supplied the last few copies of *Spiral 7* for sale at the Charlotte Museum.



L-R Daphne & Maureen 1986 photographed by Adrienne Martyn.

Fiona Lovatt, an artist, writer and teacher who features on the scaffolding portrayed on the covers of *Catalogue* and *Some Stories*, still regularly joins in from afar or when she's in the country; and has contributed her vivid memories of Keri Kaa to this publication.



L-R Kathleen Johnson & Raewyn Park Women's Gallery 323 Willis Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington ?1983 Photograph probably by Barb McDonald.

Kathleen Johnson, first met at the Women's Gallery in her days with the Feminist Librarians group, has supported many many Spiral projects, most recently with rare books to be scanned for the Te Puna o Waiwhetū online resource.

Patricia Grace's contributions to our projects at various times have been so special, as have Fiona Kidman's and Joy Cowley's. Over the decades their support has made a real difference to Spiral's work.

Roma Potiki's energy, analysis, creativity and determination reverberates down the decades for those of us who've been round for a while.

Sandi Hall's work as a feminist fiction writer and journalist was based more at the *Broadsheet* collective than at Spiral until the last few years when we've published her long-ago wonderful interview with Keri Hulme. It's a thrill now to publish her essay on Sharon

Alston and exhibit a painting of Sharon that she owns in the Charlotte Museum exhibition.

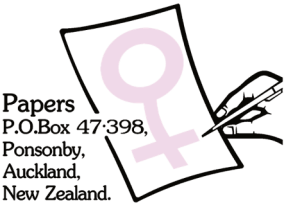
Sue Fitchett and Janet Charman are also beloved feminist writers, poets who have gone from strength to strength as they've moved out from Spiral to the rest of the world, reappearing from time to time with their all-embracing sisterhood.

Teremoana Sparks reappeared recently, talking about the Women's Gallery as 'home', a beautiful reminder of her work there. She also reappeared recently in a Janet Paul sketchbook, in this drawing, which expresses her lovely presence in performance.



'Teremoana [at Taputeranga marae]' Janet Paul (1919-2024)
Sketchbook 1985-1917 *ATL Group-01055 E-686. With permission of the Dame Janet Paul Estate.*

Tiffany Thornley is now the primary living matriarch of the women's art movement in Aotearoa. It will be wonderful to hear her speak at Te Puna o Waiwhetū during the Spiral event, knowing that she's writing about the early Spiral days in Ōtautahi Christchurch, with art writer Gwyn Porter.



And then there's the publishers. The legendary feminist publishing community and those who sustained it: *Broadsheet* (with editor Pat Rosier in particular); *Circle*; Herstory Press; the Herstory Diary series of collectives, including the Dunedin Collective for Women and the Haeata Collective; Miriam Saphira's Papers Ink; Wendy Harrex's New Women's Press; the Women's Bookshop of Te Whanganui-a-Tara. With you in the world, Spiral has had a place to be. Thank you also to *Landfall* (250 issues this year!) and to the *Listener*, for the records you both provide.

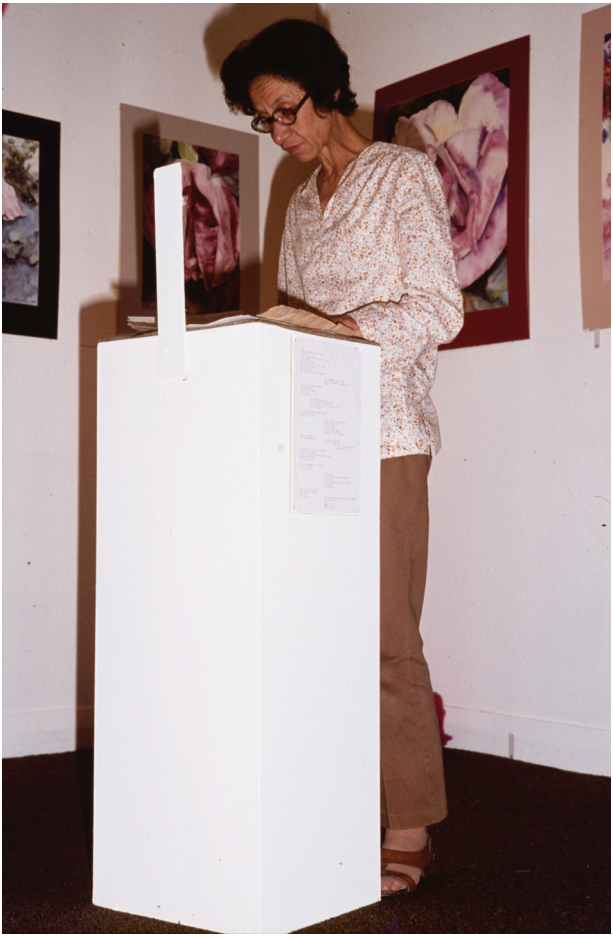
Spiral is very appreciative of the institutional assistance given us — at ATL from Anna Henry; Ashleigh McLarin; Bronwyn Officer; Geraldine Warren; Jared Davidson; Julie Fenwick; Katrina Hatherly; Linda Evans; Louise Garrett; and Sean McMahon, among others who've found and processed material for us; Geneva Davies; Megan Bishop; and Sarah Buxton at the Charlotte Museum; from Tim Jones, archivist and librarian at Te Puna o Waiwhetū Christchurch Art Gallery, with the people who've helped him display Spiral publications and Women's Gallery posters; from Nick Austin at the Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena; and from Ariana Tikao; Catherine Bisley; Erin Kimber; Fiona Tyson; and Jemma Wiki at the Macmillan Brown Library.

— Marian Evans, co-ordinator

Part One

J.C. STURM

1927-2009



Jacquie reads at the Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Te Whanganui–a–Tara Wellington, January 1980. Photo Fiona Clark for Women's Gallery. Behind Jacquie, watercolours by Juliet Batten.

Born Te Kare Papuni. Taranaki & Te Whakatōhea iwi.[1]

1. From Jacquie's 'Brown Optimism' on the exterior wall of Te Matapihi Ki Te Ao Nui Wellington Central Library exterior wall, 2025.

J. C. Sturm, Jacquie, wrote a bio for *Wahine Kaituhi,* Spiral's catalogue for the *Second International Feminist Book Fair* in Oslo in 1986—

> J.C. Sturm, a widow with three children, was born in Taranaki but has spent most of her adult life in Wellington where she now lives and works. Her youngest child is still at home.[2]
>
> She began writing in the 1940s when some of her poems in appeared in various student newspapers and magazines. In the 1950s she reviewed books for *Numbers* and *Te Ao Hou* and it was in these magazines that her stories were first published.
>
> Others have been included in *N.Z. Short Stories*, second series, selected by C.K. Stead; a Swedish anthology of Maori writers compiled by Bengt Dagrin; and *Into the World of Light*; an anthology of Maori writing edited by Witi Ihimaera and D.S. Long. One story, 'For all the saints' has been broadcast twice in West Germany.
>
> She took part in a public reading at the opening of the Women's Gallery in Wellington in 1980, and soon after, this collection of short stories [*The House of the Talking Cat*] was accepted for publication.
>
> These days, most of her time and energy are spent on a full–time job, and her favorite spare-time activities are simply eating, sleeping and being with her family.[3]

---

2. Jacquie's first husband was poet James K. Baxter (1926–1972), and her three children were Hilary (1949–2013), John (1952–) and Stephanie (1968–2009).

3. *Wahine Kaituhi: Women Writers of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, edited by Irihapeti Ramsden, Marian Evans and Miriama Evans, with a cover by Irihapeti Ramsden, inspired by the border of the Banks Cloak (1848.01.0063) in the Etnografica Museet

Tomorrow the Sun: The Collected Works of J.C. Sturm, edited by Ruth Buchanan and Paul Millar, is due in 2026.[4]

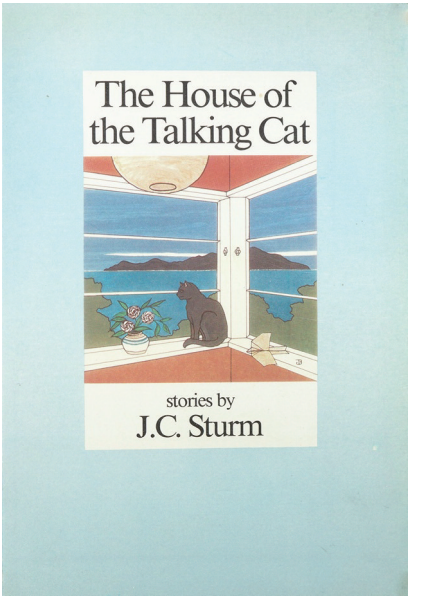
we later visited in Stockholm; and an essay by Miriama Evans. Spiral, 1985: https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/wahine-kaituhi-women-writers-of-aotearoa.

4. Paul Millar also wrote 'Sturm, Jacqueline Cecilia', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* in *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2020. Updated in September, 2020. Translated into te reo Māori by Te Haumihiata Mason. https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/6s1/sturm–jacqueline–cecilia (accessed 21 July 2025).

JACQUIE & SPIRAL

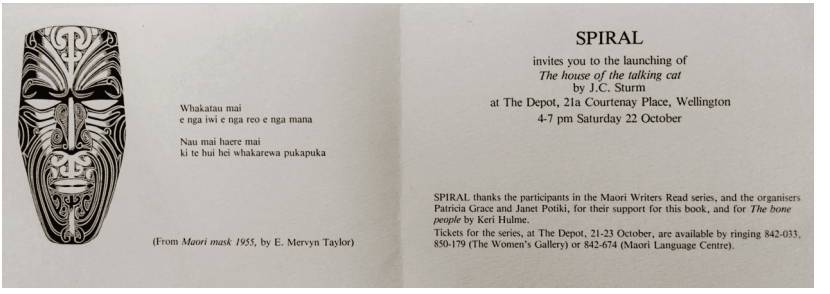
Marian Evans

SPIRAL PUBLISHES 'THE HOUSE OF THE TALKING CAT'



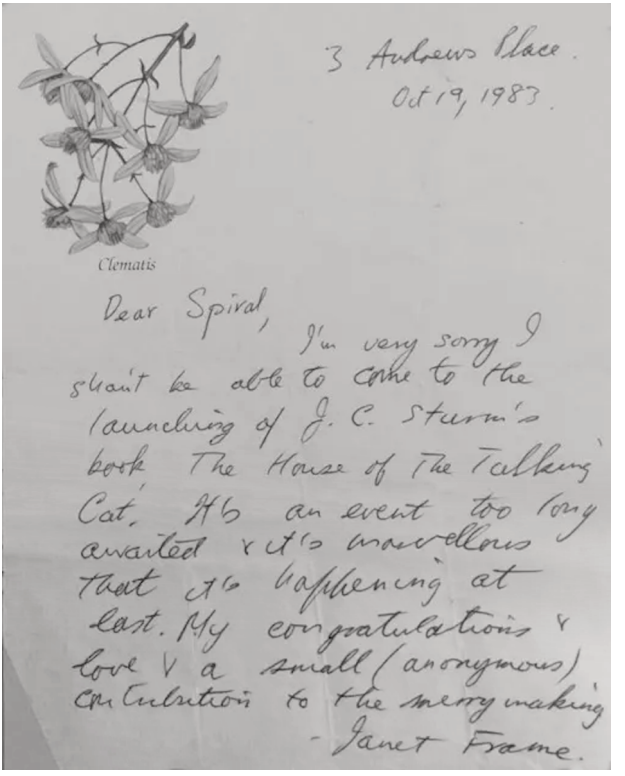
In 1982, Spiral collectives associated with the Women's Gallery became publishers-of-last-resort for Heather McPherson's *A Figurehead: A Face*. A year later, Irihapeti Ramsden, Miriama Evans and I, assisted by Anna Keir, Juliet Krautschun (Raven), Kathleen Johnson, Pauline Neale and Joy Cowley , published Jacquie's collection of short stories: *The House of the Talking Cat*, with a cover image by her painter son John. The work was supported by Patricia Grace's and Roma Potiki's *Māori Writers Read* series and other funding sources, including the New Zealand Literary Fund. Jacquie's dedication reads 'For Jim and Hilary and John'.

We launched *The House of the Talking Cat* upstairs at The Depot, in Courtenay Place, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington.



Invitation designed by Irihapeti Ramsden in consultation with Wiremu Parker.

I don't remember the launch well, but just beforehand we received a letter and generous donation from Jacquie' close friend Janet Frame.

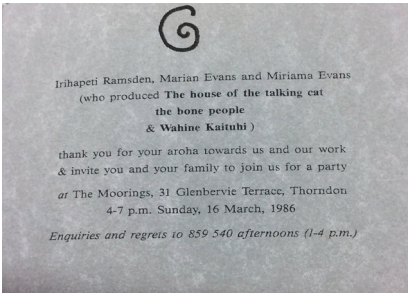


Research photo from Spiral collection in the Alexander Turnbull Library; reproduced by kind permission of the Janet Frame Literary Trust.

In 1985, *The House of the Talking Cat* was one of three finalists in the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction. Hodder & Stoughton reprinted it in 1986 and Steele Roberts in 2003.

SPIRAL'S THANK YOU PARTY

In March 1986 we had a party to thank all those who had supported our recent books.



Irihapeti Ramsden, Marian Evans and Miriama Evans
(who produced **The house of the talking cat**
the bone people
& Wahine Kaituhi)

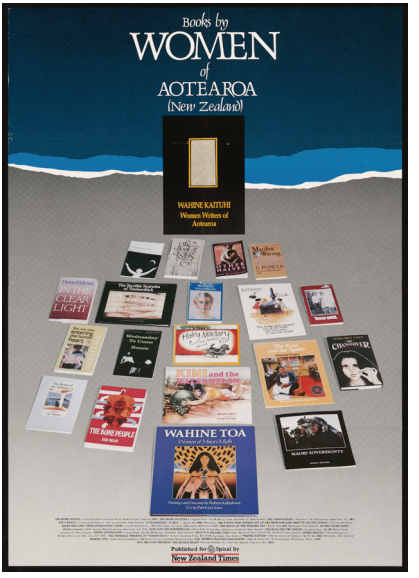
thank you for your aroha towards us and our work
& invite you and your family to join us for a party

at The Moorings, 31 Glenbervie Terrace, Thorndon
4-7 p.m. Sunday, 16 March, 1986

Enquiries and regrets to 859 540 afternoons (1-4 p.m.)

Research snap from Spiral archives in ATL.

JACQUIE & STEPHANIE IN SCANDINAVIA WITH SPIRAL



Poster titled 'Books by Women of Aotearoa (New Zealand)'. [ca 1986]. [Ephemera and posters of A2 and A1 size, relating to publishers and publishing in New Zealand. 1900s]. Ref: Eph-D-PUBLISHING-1900s-1. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

In 1986, accompanied by her daughter Stephanie, Jacquie travelled to Oslo with a Spiral group carrying posters and books from local writers, to attend the 2d International Feminist Book Fair. Her daughter Stephanie accompanied her.



Jacquie reads at International Feminist Book Fair, Oslo 1986. From Irihapeti Ramsden's collection.

The group went on to the Etnografiska Museet in Stockholm, the Ethnographic Museum, to visit a kaitaka, the Banks cloak, and other Māori items in their collection.[1] The museum workers wore white gloves to handle the works, but did not require us to do the same. It also offered us a most wonderful lunch that included smoked salmon with dill, on dark bread.

1. The Banks Cloak is numbered 1848.01.0063 in the collection.



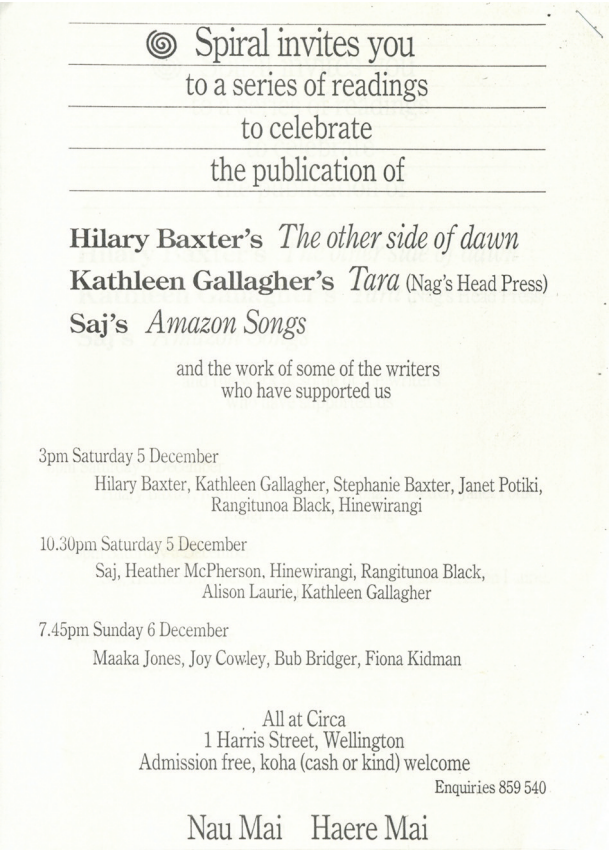
L–R Spiral group at the Etnografiska Museet the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm 1986 L–R Heather McPherson, Carl Erik Larsson, Marian Evans, a Swedish writer, Arapera Blank, Jacquie Sturm, Stephanie Baxter, Patricia Grace. Photo Irihapeti Ramsden.

JACQUIE READS AT THE LAUNCH OF HILARY'S BOOK

Jacquie and Stephanie came and read at our launch of *The Other Side of Dawn*, Hilary's book, in December 1987. The launch, alongside Saj's *Amazon Songs*, and Kathleen Gallagher's *Tara*, took the form of multiple readings at Circa Theatre over two days.

Very recently at ATL, we rediscovered the recordings from the event. Jacquie wasn't mentioned on the poster, but she read with

Stephanie and Hilary, an opportunity that she stated as probably unlikely to happen again. Jacquie introduced and read seven short poems and then something else, which wasn't fully recorded.[2]



Spiral invites you
to a series of readings
to celebrate
the publication of

Hilary Baxter's *The other side of dawn*
Kathleen Gallagher's *Tara* (Nag's Head Press)
Saj's *Amazon Songs*

and the work of some of the writers
who have supported us

3pm Saturday 5 December
Hilary Baxter, Kathleen Gallagher, Stephanie Baxter, Janet Potiki,
Rangitunoa Black, Hinewirangi

10.30pm Saturday 5 December
Saj, Heather McPherson, Hinewirangi, Rangitunoa Black,
Alison Laurie, Kathleen Gallagher

7.45pm Sunday 6 December
Maaka Jones, Joy Cowley, Bub Bridger, Fiona Kidman

All at Circa
1 Harris Street, Wellington
Admission free, koha (cash or kind) welcome
Enquiries 859 540

Nau Mai Haere Mai

2. Alexander Turnbull Library OHC-003764. Thanks to the kind permission of Jacquie's literary executor we plan to add Jacquie's introduction and seven short poems to her other work on the Spiral Collective Youtube site— https://www.youtube.com/@spiralcollectives6077.

JACQUIE AT THE WOMEN'S GALLERY



Jacquie & Kanya prepare to film. Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara January 1980. Screenshot from footage.

Anna Keir and I organised a women writers evening for the Women's Gallery *Opening Show* in January 1980, as part of our co-ordination work, and Patricia Grace suggested that we invite J. C. Sturm to join the readers. We already knew Jacquie as Jacquie Baxter, the formidable librarian in the New Zealand Room at the

Wellington Public Library where we used to do our photocopying, just across Harris Street from the gallery, and were delighted when she accepted our invitation.[1] Appearing alongside Patricia, Keri Hulme and others, she read 'A Thousand and One Nights'. After the reading, Kanya Stewart[2] and Nancy Peterson from the Auckland Women's Community Video filmed her reading the story again;[3] and being interviewed[4].

Jacquie's interview isn't in great condition. It was cobbled together from degraded VHS copies of the original tape and there's an unfortunate repetition midway through that would be nice to remove sometime; and the background sounds came from who-knows-where, not the gallery at the time or our edit: we couldn't get rid of them. If we'd had more time and other resources, we'd have edited out most of the interviewer, too. The interview is very lightly edited, mostly to shorten the questions.

What made you start writing, Jacquie?

I really can't remember. It was so long ago. I think I'd been reading a lot of New Zealand fiction, for some reason or other, and I thought

1. In two online articles, the library highlighted Jacquie as a 'key member of the Wellington City Libraries team for 23 years' and' her 'quiet advocacy for Māori customers, extensive knowledge of NZ published works, and passion for excellence in librarianship'. https://www.wcl.govt.nz/news/jacqueline-jacquie-baxter-jc-sturm/ https://www.wcl.govt.nz/news/spotlight-on-jc-sturm/
2. Kanya was also editor of the ground-breaking *Women*series (1977) and director of *Even Dogs Are Given Bones* (1982) about the women workers' occupation of the Rixen clothing factory in Levin.
3. https://youtu.be/k-etVkLqoBY?si=EjNJ65bJLQoK9KOC
4. https://youtu.be/k-etVkLqoBY?si=RKagjxK8zM-Lo1Un

oh, gosh I'll give it a go, see what happens. I *think* that's what it was.[5]

How long ago was this?

Mmmmm. It's so long ago, I'd [have] to count the years. I was in my early twenties.

And you've gone on writing all this time?

Not really. To be quite honest, I haven't written anything, committed anything to paper that is, you know, for several years. For various reasons.

And is it true, what Pat [Grace] said, that you've got lots and lots of stories?

Yeah, quite a few. Yeah. Because I did write, pretty steadily, for quite a long time. I didn't keep them all. But what I have kept, you know, there are a substantial number of stories. Worth, worth keeping. (Laughter.) I have had some published. This was as I say, it was in the early days. I haven't had many published and I haven't had a volume published and the one that I've just read, no I haven't had that published.

. . .

5. This was probably for her university studies, as described later in the interview. Jacquie held an MA in Philosophy at Victoria University, after writing a dissertation on 'New Zealand National Character as Exemplified in Three New Zealand Novelists', commended as being of exceptional merit and awarded first class honours. *Read NZ Te Pou Muramura* https://www.read-nz.org/writers-files/writer/sturm-j-c-)

Are you thinking of sending it away to be published?

Well I had the bright idea of one day, you know. I had hopes that one day, of having a volume published, and maybe this was a mistake, and I don't know what other people's experience have been, but I thought right, I will write and collect some kind of a volume of short stories that hang together. So I did that, and then when I decided to do that, I stopped sending things to magazines.

Because you wanted to hold on to them to keep them for the volume?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And it seemed a pretty good idea. No-one was very interested in the volume. They all said 'Why don't you send them to magazines?' (Laughter.) And I thought, o blow, you know. I suppose really that there's no harm done, a lot of people do it, they have their work published in magazines, and then they get it all together and have them published as a book. But it is nice to pick up a book and read, to pick up and read a book which you've not read before. When I'm reading something I'd rather do that. If I've got a book out of the library or bought a book, I wouldn't want to get home and find that I had in fact read it, in bits and pieces, you know. But that's just my idea and it didn't turn out to be such a very good one after all.

It might be a good idea to try again?

Yes, perhaps after another gap. Try again. (Laughter.) Try again.

. . .

Are there themes that go right through all your stories?

Yes, I suppose, I suppose you can call it a theme. Probably all writing is about the theme of personal relationships. Some people write about hills and trees and trees and sky and the private life of the eel, or the private life of the rabbit. But it is hard, I think, to write anything without writing about some kind of relationship.

The crux of the matter is what the people are doing, not what's on the other side of the window. It can all add to it. [But] for me, writing is all about people and relationships. But otherwise — you're not writing an article for the *National Geographic*, are you? Nor are you writing some essay for a psychological magazine.

For me, writing consists of two processes, you know. You get an idea. And you develop this, you know, or it grows, like Topsy, or blooms in the spring, you know, or occasionally, you know, just dies prematurely. On that level, that writing, you can do that anywhere. Or nowhere. Because it's internal, you know. You can do it while you're washing the dishes, while you're chopping the wood, while you're serving up the dinner. And this is the core of the method and this is not so much a question of can you do it, but once the process starts, the question is 'Can you stop it?' (Laughter.) And you don't attempt to, you see, so that you go around and you do all kinds of things like putting coffee in the teapot when you really want to make cocoa. People think you're a bit strange, but this is one level of writing, so that that is being done, no matter what you're doing, you see. At home. If you're having to put in so many man-hours at a job, well, that might be quite a different story.

. . .

But the mechanical part of writing, the actual setting down on paper by pen or pencil, typewriter, you know, working out the length of the sentence, and the capital letters, and the commas and the full stops and the hyphens or not, or whatever, that I found I could not do in the middle of any kind of a hurly-burly. I had to retire for that process. I would find it so difficult that I would become so impossible, you know, that it wouldn't be a question of *my* retiring from the scene, everyone would just leave me. (Laughter.) Because I would be so so grumpy, to put it mildly.

Was it ever strange, writing, knowing that Hilary was writing and that James was writing in the same house?

No, not all three of us were. And that was really fun, you know, because 'How far have you got?' 'Nearly there, nearly there.' Or, 'I'm in the middle, I'm stuck in the middle'. Or, 'Let's have a cup of coffee'. You know, this could be one or two o'clock in the morning. 'I've finished.' 'Right. Put the jug on quick. I've got another page to go.'

I can remember one night, in the joy of writing that particular story, because I enjoyed every minute of it, and it was very late at night and Jim had been working and he'd finished early and when I finished I was cold, I was tired, but I was so *happy*. And I was *starving*. And I remember — I've forgotten what it was, bacon and eggs or scrambled eggs on toast, or, you know — in the middle of the night. A celebration.

. . .

And has it made a difference to your own work, being married to someone so well known, and has it been one reason why you haven't published so much?

It was a bit difficult, I remember when I had one or two things coming out in small magazines and people would say, 'Aah'. I don't know whether they were just being so naive or you know, perhaps a bit niggly, bitchy if you like. But you know, oh, 'How much of it was really yours?' Or 'Does he correct it for you?' 'Do you use any help?' 'Now whose idea was it *really*?' It used to irritate me. And sometimes it would hurt me, depending on who the person was. I mean sometimes you don't much care what some people say, do you. Others you care a lot.

(Sigh.)

It was no question of competition. This didn't come into it because I mean I was just writing on one level, and to begin with just because I enjoyed doing it, you know. Later it became a bit more serious but there was still never competition because he was writing on a different level altogether and he had nothing to — I mean you know it would be ridiculous to see him in competition with me and I could never ever see myself as being in competition with him because it was just so different, you know, the two things that we were trying to do. But of course the outside world sees things very differently.

I don't think it's the first time. I don't remember, that I can think of, where one party was writing before the relationship was formed, and, after some time together, the second party started writing, and it did nothing to harm the relationship. Both ended

up, both writing and very — well as far as you can tell — happy about it.

We had our moments, you know. But the thing is, you see now, I don't think I would have started writing verse. This would have been different. This *would* have been different The first writing I did, before I met my husband, had been verse. Pretty mediocre stuff at that. I don't think I've kept more than two or three of them, that sort of accidentally got published and, honestly, it had absolutely nothing to do with my husband. It was this business of reading, for a particular purpose. I had to read a whole lot of New Zealand fiction. I hadn't read much up to that date, in my early twenties. I had read more poetry than fiction. And it was an eye-opener to me, you know, and I was really, goodness me, this is really something. And afterwards I thought, gosh, let's have a crack at that.

It was related to some work I was doing at 'varsity and also I was asked to do a certain amount of book reviews you see, and I remember some of the books that I reviewed — not very long ago I had to look up some of those reviews and I got a shock because I'd forgotten I'd written those reviews and I'd forgotten even that I'd read the books. But some of them still stick with me you know. Yeah, that's how it started.

Did you suddenly realise that there was a tradition of writing in New Zealand?

Oh yes, and it was a way of looking at the country [inaudible]. Gosh, I was in my early twenties. I wasn't a teenager. I don't know how I'd managed to miss it for so long. I think it was actually through that

reading period that I became aware of, of New Zealand, you know. It was like seeing it for the first time. I'm talking now, the sort of authors that I'm talking about, you know, who are now, I wouldn't say the golden oldies, but I met Sargeson for the first time, and Dan Davin, Katherine Mansfield, and, well I was going to say, and that's enough. It was enough to wake me up you know. And John Mulgan, *Report from Experience*.

Did you have a background in Maori oral literature?

No, I didn't. Not at all. Nothing. No Maori language. I had read some earlier things. I'm thinking of Satchell, *The Greenstone Door*, [about] Rewi's last stand. I had read that earlier.

But I don't know what it would be like for anybody now, if they had to, for some reason, to sit down and read all of Sargeson and all of Davin and all of Katherine Mansfield and anything written about those people, and to do nothing else but just simply soak yourself in them. I think it would still... you know you'd come out pretty groggy. It would give you a punch. Because they pack a punch, eh. They pack a punch.

I can remember now and that is *years* ago and I can remember how I felt after I read Sargeson's stor[ies] 'The Way of the Heart', and 'That Summer'. About the people, and how anyone could make it come alive, really come alive, on the printed page, so you could see when he got into the taxi after his mate had died. And he said to the taxi driver 'I want a sheila'. I'll never forget that feeling of 'Of *course*, of *course*'.

. . .

It felt like people that you knew, as well?

Yeah. For me, this is what really good prose does. It doesn't matter if it's prose fiction. Real writing will do this to a person. You're not quite the same after you're read it. It changes you. It changes you. You're having to look at something you've known all your life but you're having to look at it from a different point of view, or you're maybe seeing something that you've never seen before.

REVIEW OF THE HOUSE OF THE TALKING CAT (1)

Renée

THE HOUSE OF THE TALKING CAT, J C STURM, SPIRAL, 1983, $6.50.

"It's no use, Thomas," she said sternly, pushing him away, "everyone wants what you want. You'll just have to wait."

This is the woman in the title story of J.C. Sturm's *House of the Talking Cat*, speaking to the cat. In this story everyone wants something, time, attention, love without strings, but except for the cat who is seldom kept waiting, this household of four, woman, man, girl, boy, are all rattling around like separate satellites who nudge into each other from time to time. There's a kind of desperation in the air, an aridity, which accurately illustrates the emptiness of the repetitive routines of work, and the longings which are never quite met.

In fact most of the women in these stories are waiting. Some for their husbands to come home, for lovers, death, things to change.

They are all victims in one way or another. It's like being in a documentary of This Was Your Life and experiencing that trapped-in-the-freezer feeling so well caught in 'For All the Saints', one of the stories in part two of this collection, which shows the working and effect of racism in this country.

Occasionally the symbolism is overstated as in the last sentence of 'The Bankrupts'—

> Michael caught her close and kissed her as though their life together was only just beginning, and neither of them heeded the moths given themselves gladly to the burning lamp above.

But her ability to capture atmosphere and time more than compensates for this. In 'The Dance' the story moves in an almost formal dance pattern as a group of men and women weave their way from one to other, caught up in a frenzied search for something different, some sort of change.

"What's it all in aid of?" asked John. "What's what in aid of? All this, the rumpus, the dance, or whatever you call it."

But there's no satisfactory answer to this sort of question nor to the feeling that they've all lost something in the search for light and warmth.

All the stories except one are set in New Zealand and that one, 'The Too Good Memsahib', shows the ethnocentricity of one woman as

she fails to come to terms with either her intrusion into another's culture and patterns of behaviour or to see her own racist assumptions. When she say that she's going to use the sweeper's bucket to wash the head of a child who has scabies and lice she takes no notice of—

> "But don't they look on the sweeper as untouchable?"
> "I've no idea," she yawned again, "and anyway if they do it's time they didn't..."

This is the colonialist mentality which refuses to learn by the experiences she's already been through that day.

In 'First Native and Pink Pig' George decides to invite Michael to his birthday party with the idea that Michael's racist behaviour will change once he sees George and his family at home. George has got this idea from a comic. But Michael's conditioning is too strong and the day ends painfully for George, who cannot tell his mother that it was he who was called a "dirty stinking brown Maori cow" and says it was directed at himself. J. C. Sturm shows how George's mother, in a quandary, and angry, knowingly uses the same methods as Michael. What she doesn't know is that it's no comfort to George who ends his birthday weeping in his bedroom.

Spiral approached the writer after hearing her read at the Women's Gallery in Wellington. This collection, which enriches Maori writing in this country, has been waiting a long time to be published. Individual stories have been published in *Te Ao Hou* and have been included in anthologies like *Into the World of Light*. One can only be

glad for Spiral's initiative and speculate on the reasons why other publishers didn't see the value of the collection. I hope we don't have to wait too much longer for more stories from J. C. Sturm.

First published in *Broadsheet 119*, May 1984: 43-44.

REVIEW OF THE HOUSE OF THE TALKING CAT (2)

Keri Hulme

The House of the Talking Cat J. C. Sturm Spiral, Wellington. Price: $6.50 (pb)

What do you do about short stories that sneak up on you?

In this collection, the first by Wellington writer J. C. Sturm, the stories seem ordinary. The writing is gentle, unobtrusive, almost reticent. The situations are casual and domestic. The characters, for the most part, are you and me and Auntie down the road. Normal and dramatic people. Even where the setting is exotic (India, in 'The Too Good Memsahib', for instance) or the characters are extraordinary (Alice, in 'For All The Saints'), life is staidly everyday. A kid's birthday party; a woman taking the afternoon off from home and family; four couples at a social; a day in the life of New Zealand family with cat.

So why are these stories so distinct and memorable?

. . .

Na, I know short stories. I read them a lot. I write them. I dream them. Short stories in all guises – innovative, traditional, borderline – I know them. *The House of the Talking Cat* is full of ordinary stories, and lurking under the skin of each one is tension, is quarrel, traps as intractable as iron.

Try this:

> "Lord, I'm tired. I think I better go to bed. Did I tell you about the washerwoman's little girl?"
>
> Her husband put aside his paper with a sigh. "Not another sad story? Haven't you had enough?"
>
> "No, not me," she smiled. "Well, I've discovered the child's got scabies on her scalp as well as lice, and I reckon her hair should be kept. The father says no, but I think I will all the same."
>
> "Really, my dear," her husband protested, "do you think it's safe to play round with something like that? Isn't it catching?"
>
> "Pooh," she said lightly, "people like us don't catch things like that. And when I've got rid of the hair, I'll be able to give her head a good scrub with carbolic soap".
>
> "What in?" Asked the husband anxiously.

> "Don't worry," she laughed. "I'll use the sweeper's bucket."
>
> "But don't they look on the sweeper as untouchable? And I should think that would go for his bucket too."
>
> "I've no idea," she yawned again, "and anyway if they do, it's time they didn't. So it looks as though I'm going to have another busy morning. Goodnight," she said at the door, "don't wear yourself out over that newspaper." [1]

An atmosphere of menace prevails, very sadly conveyed. A woman and her two young children spend a calm perfectly ordinary day with each other, and the day devolves into a night of normal terror:

> "She thought of having a bath but it seemed a bit risky – a bath wasn't a good place to get caught in — so she made some supper instead and filled her hot water bottle and got ready for bed."[2]

Guerrilla warfare among the nappies and lawns of suburbia ... the quotation is from a story entitled 'A Thousand and One Nights' and the very title comes to drag like a hook in your heart.

. . .

1. J. C. Sturm 'The Too Good Memsahib.' *The House of the Talking Cat* (*THTC*) Spiral 1983: 80.)
2. *THTC*: 14.

Most of the stories are from a woman's point of view — and the woman are fearful, sad, or quarrelling. But quietly. With a kind of coping desperation. The men are prominent: they grin, grab, lech, intimidate. Ultimately, however, they are foils. There are children everywhere, background children, side-entry children, children bawling at the foreground. Some are beautifully realised, like the obnoxious racist Michael — my fingers itched before I was halfway through 'First Native, Pink Pig', wanting to deliver a clout. But the women mostly dominate.

> The old woman nearing her death, laying the beautiful doll back in its box and whispering "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Alice chanting her tuneless song, so proud of herself, so unsure, so proud. Mrs Kelly sitting on her haunches by her self-made fireplace of beach stones, doomed, and background the hand worn gramophone plays 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem', alternating with the Hawaiian war chant.

Some of these stories ask to be read aloud. There are sentences long as chants. There are conversations that have the dull flat accuracy of reportage (and how they highlight by their very dullness.) In general, Sturm's writing is not innovative. There are no wild growths, no pressurised language. She uses words crisply, precisely, inventively: a cat "stalks a piece of string in a jungle of chair legs". A vacuum cleaner "whined and snarled after the woman like some half–tamed beast on a leash". A woman comes back from a party to find "a little fox terrier man thumping a newspaper tail against his thigh and

snapping at my legs, have a drink have a drink, come and have a drink".

Occasionally, the domestic cliche is flat, and Sturm's choice of names can be uninspired (George Harrison and Michael Caine crop up in the same story but not as themselves), but dissatisfaction was an extraordinarily rare feeling when I read *The House of the Talking Cat*. Most often, I would finish one of the eleven stories and think, "Bloody hell. An ordinary beach, ready to turn to quicksand at any second". The anger; the brittle sexual tension; the evocation of childhood ignorance and cruelty and joy, all there under a nice unmarked skin.

> "And who can stand on a street corner and not tremble as the past walks out of a crowd?"[3]

It is noticeable that while all these stories are set in the past — the '50s and '60s mainly, when trams still run still run and man wear brylcreme and woman wear girdles and check to see whether their stocking seams are straight — they are not dated tales.

That time is part of the stories, much as the city of Wellington is a character in many of them. Though I did wonder: this is Sturm's first collection, and she has been writing for a considerable time. (Her work has appeared in many magazines and anthologies both here and overseas.) Is it because there has at last arrived a publishing

3. *THTC*: 96.

concern, Spiral collective/s, that will take on strong but different collections of writing?

And is it possible that more of Sturm's writing will be available soon?

The House of the Talking Cat: toughly, tautly, exactly written stories. Stories full of ominous quiet. Stories that sneak up on you.

And what do you do about that?

You hope for more of the same.

Previously unpublished. Transcribed by Lissa Mitchell.

‘BROWN OPTIMISM’

J. C. Sturm

In September 2025, one of Jacquie’s early poems, recently found by her literary executor Paul Millar, her publisher Roger Steele and her son John Baxter, was unveiled outside the refurbished Te Matapihi Ki Te Ao Nui Wellington Central Library.[1]

1. https://thespinoff.co.nz/books/23-06-2021/today-were-publishing-a-poem-by-jc-sturm-that-has-been-lost-for-70-years



'Brown Optimism' cascades down the side of Te Matapihi Ki Te Ao Nui Wellington Central Library. Photograph by Nadine McGrath, courtesy Wellington City Council.

BROWN OPTIMISM

With dust of labour on a summer's day
They slouched with careless stride of people come
From nowhere, going nowhere, smiling, tired,
And cursing with a laugh the Pākehā
Veneer. For them life is a childish farce
To paint in white the brown which stains their lives.
Their ancient world is gone, and in the pā
The death of past traditions of a once
Proud race is mourned by age with mumbling gums
In soft tones of despised melodious tongue.
You seek your future in the white man's joy;
You sing your songs to ape his foolish tune;
You change your rhythm to the jazz band's beat;
And slave and sweat for coin so easily spent;

You play a losing game with loaded dice
And know no rules to help you win a chance;
While Pākehā stands quietly waiting with
A smile, to move you at his will across
The draughtboard of his policy and faith.
A child went past; neglected, poorly clothed
In imitation of the white man's dress.
Hard feet on hard road running in the heat
To spend the white man's money in the white
Man's store. And what is there for you, oh child
Of Māori pride? Will you be swallowed in
The rising tide, and mingle blood till all
Your heritage is gone?

This shall not be.
For brown must learn from white, the rules to make
Him equal partner in the game they play;
And white must cease to trample underfoot
These dark leaves of the Polynesian tree.
When this is done, and each the other's worth
Has found, from union will spring a new
Race keen, with courage strong to face the world
And find at last its place and aim in life.



John Baxter, in the red scarf, outside the library, seeing the poem up on the wall for the first time. Joy. Photograph by Nadine McGrath, courtesy Wellington City Council.

With thanks to Professor Paul Millar for his support.

Part Two

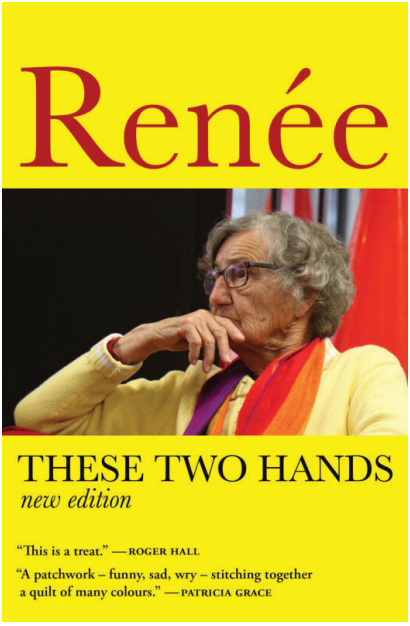
RENÉE

1929-2023



Renée in the Broadsheet office. Photographer Joan Caulfield.

Renée was from Ngāti Kahungunu and the Irish, English and Scots.



Towards the end of her life, Renée's blurb for the first edition of her memoir, *These Two Hands*, is typically stroppy, funny, and flat out.[1]

> Renée was born grumpy (Ngāti Kahungunu/Scot) and nothing has changed. She is an avid and faithful reader, who enjoys cooking and gardening. Everyone, she says, should grow leafy greens.
>
> Renée always thought she would die at forty-two but for some reason this didn't happen. Instead, at fifty she started to write plays and novels and at eighty-eight considers herself very lucky to still have most of her marbles.

1. *These Two Hands*. Mākaro Press, 2017, 2020.

She has written eight novels and over twenty plays, with *Wednesday To Come* perhaps her most loved work.

Renée lives in Ōtaki and teaches her *Your Life, Your Story* and her *Poem a Week* workshops there.

This is her life, her story, told in patches, like a quilt. One for every year of the life she's lived so far.

The second edition of *These Two Hands* had ninety-one patches. The three new ones covered the onset of macular degeneration, the publication of Renée's first work of crime fiction, *The Wild Card*, and living through the Covid-19 pandemic. It also has an index. Both *The Wild Card* and her second crime novel, *Blood Matters*, were short-listed for the Ngaio Marsh Award for Best Crime Novel.

In the bio Renée sent Spiral in 1985 for *Wahine Kaituhi,* there were far fewer publications and no awards like those she received in her later life.[2] But I loved it and still do because it demonstrated her characteristically considered approach and her determination—

Ngati Kahungunu/European

Lesbian Feminist

2. Among her many awards Renée received an ONZM for services to literature and drama, the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement, the Playmarket Award for a significant artistic contribution to theatre, and Ngā Tohu ā Tā Kingi Ihaka for a lifetime contribution to toi Māori.

> The day I turned fifty, I thought — do I want to lie on my deathbed and think of all the things I had wanted to do but didn't because I was too frightened?
>
> I decided I didn't want to do that.
>
> So I'm not going to.

Renée's self-description as a 'lesbian feminist with socialist working-class ideals' is often cited,[3] but I haven't discovered where she first used it; and actor and playwright Lorae Parry's tribute to her is a fine one, I reckon—

> Renée opened the stage door and strode in, announcing her arrival and standing centre stage. She opened the door with a bang, not with a whimper and many of us followed. It was time. Someone needed to do it. Renée had the guts.[4]

I was glad that Renée's son Chris suggested covering her work in the 80s and 90s, because that was when she first came into and out of Spiral's world. With guts. Solidarity. A lot of very hard work. And lots of yellow.

Special thanks for assistance with Renée's section, to Sue Fitchett and Sarah Buxton, to all the writers and to the named transcribers.

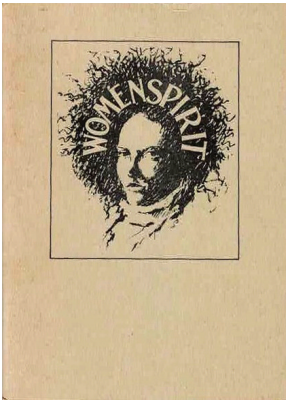
3. For example, https://www.read-nz.org/writers-files/writer/Renée
4. Parry, Lorae (Autumn 2005). "Meat and Potatoes". *Playmarket News* (35): 6.

RENÉE & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

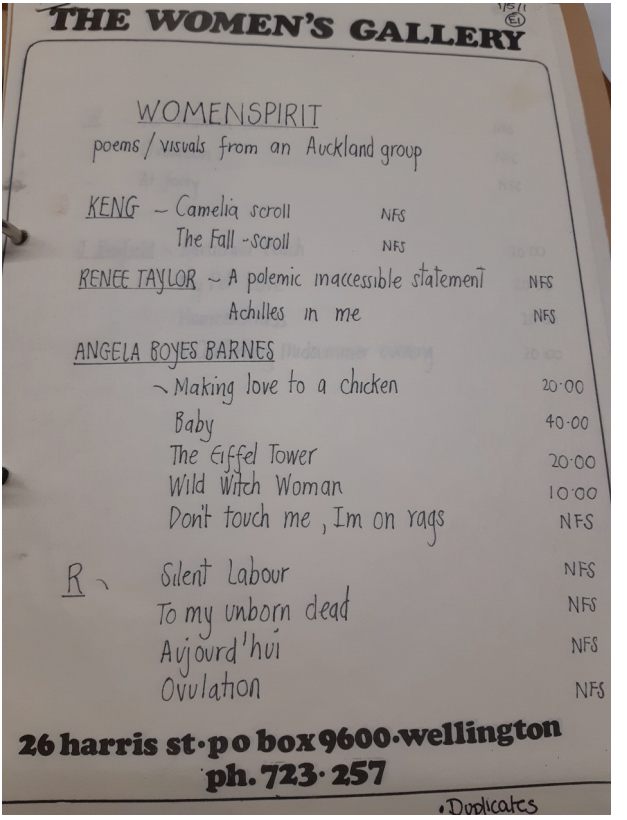
Renée's generous contributions to various iterations of Spiral spread over forty-five years.

1. WOMENSPIRIT



I remember Renée at the Women's Gallery mostly because of Womenspirit, a Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland-based group of poets that evolved from a writers' workshop Renée facilitated at the

United Women's Convention in 1979. We exhibited their first book, *Womenspirit*, with some visual material, over June and July 1980. I think Heather McPherson was working at the gallery then and over time she and Renée were good mates.



THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

WOMENSPIRIT
poems / visuals from an Auckland group

KENG ~ Camelia scroll NFS
The Fall - scroll NFS
RENEE TAYLOR ~ A polemic inaccessible statement NFS
Achilles in me NFS
ANGELA BOYES BARNES
~ Making love to a chicken 20·00
Baby 40·00
The Eiffel Tower 20·00
Wild Witch Woman 10·00
Don't touch me, Im on rags NFS
R ~ Silent Labour NFS
To my unborn dead NFS
Aujourd'hui NFS
Ovulation NFS

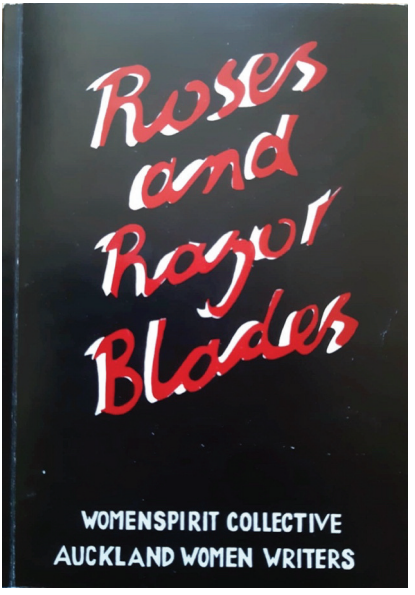
26 harris st·po box 9600·wellington
ph. 723·257

·Duplicates

In their second book, *Roses and Razorblades*, Womenspirit provided some background—

> We arrived as women who felt isolated in our writing, and during the workshop we found in each other's company the kind of stimulating, responsive

atmosphere we all needed... The group as a whole encouraged each woman to develop and extend her own distinctive writing style. We are women whose lifestyles differ — politically, culturally and in our sexuality and have the diversity of opinions which this implies. What we have in common is our experience of speaking and writing as women. We try to criticise each woman's work within the context of her own way of writing and expression. We see this as an important part of having a feminist perspective. We have enjoyed publishing this collection ourselves. It has given us the freedom and power to make our own decisions about content and style — and it's fun.

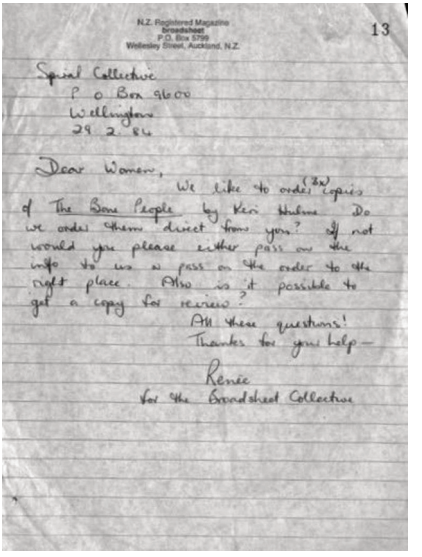


2. BROADSHEET

Joan Caulfield's photograph on the cover of this book was taken in the *Broadsheet* office, with our poster on the wall behind Renée.

. . .

Renée worked at *Broadsheet* for a while, until the end of 1984, and she led *Broadsheet*'s three Roadshows, in 1982, 1983 and 1987. She corresponded with the Women's Gallery during the years she worked at *Broadsheet* and I remember her order for three copies of *the bone people* for their bookshop, and her request for a review copy.



N.Z. Registered Magazine
Broadsheet
P.O. Box 5799
Wellesley Street, Auckland, N.Z.

13

Spiral Collective
P O Box 9600
Wellington
29 2 84

Dear Women,

We like to order (3x) copies of The Bone People by Keri Hulme. Do we order them direct from you? If not would you please either pass on this info to us & pass on the order to the right place. Also is it possible to get a copy for review?

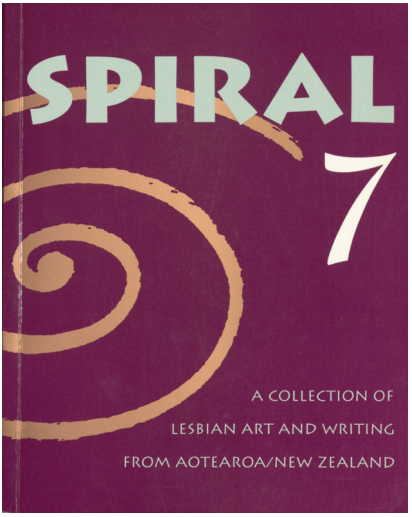
All these questions!
Thanks for your help –

Renée
for the Broadsheet Collective

There's more in the archives.

3. SPIRAL 7

Renée reviewed *Spiral 7*.



Spiral 7: A Collection of Lesbian Art and Writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand, edited by Heather McPherson, Marian Evans, Julie King and Pam Gerrish Nunn (Daphne Brasell, $24.95).

This collection of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, art, craft and design is Spiral's 50th project. Although the collective has changed over the years, one woman, Heather McPherson, has remained constant. She is one of our finest poets, and there's a neat example of her work in the collection. She is now bowing out to concentrate on her own work. If she and her co-editors got as much pleasure out of this issue as I did then the slog was worth it.

In her editorial McPherson has a side-swipe at the concept of post-feminism, and then looks at issues of homophobia, financial privilege, how money controls our cultural survival and the necessity for the collective to guard against being exclusively self-referential.

. . .

Julie King and Pam Gerrish Nunn, the art editors, present their views about working on the publication, and a combined statement ends with a list of issues that they hope the art works raise: the differences in perception between lesbians from varied ethnic backgrounds, the importance of the female body to lesbian art, how lesbians become artists in a homophobic society and how to recognise artistic excellence – and its importance.

It has often been implied or said outright that groups such as lesbians welcome any artistic endeavour, however far it falls short of excellence. I don't doubt there have been times when support and encouragement for the artist have been considered more valuable than rejection based on standards set by the dominant group. But this is not the case with *Spiral 7*. From the stylish cover to the piece by poet Rhona Vickoce on artist Willa Birch, the contents are enlightening, absorbing, serious, funny and moving and – hey I won't mess around with qualifiers: *Spiral 7* is totally engaging.

Marian Evans writes about how being a co-editor doesn't stop because you're nursing a dying mother. She talks about hating editing, hating rejecting even more, mistrusting her partly Aristotle/Revised Standard Version shaped judgement that suppresses alternative views. A member of the collective at the time it published *the bone people,* she recalls the many literary "stick figures" who said it was unreadable.

Although black and white reproductions of the art work reduce the impact, you do get a taste of the originals. And I was lucky: at the opening of *I am: Ko Ahau*, an exhibition of gay and lesbian art at the

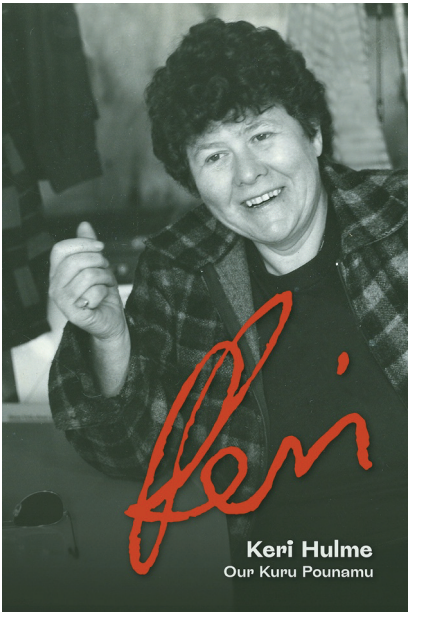
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, I saw Adrienne Martyn's gelatin silver print 'Untitled '91' and Paerau Corneal's 'Te Maru o Hinenui te Po' in all their glory.

Because *Spiral 7* is such an eclectic mixture it is impossible to be fair and give everyone a mention – although all 52 contributors deserve it. So I put all their names into a hat, determined to discuss the first 10 I pulled out. Primitive but fair.

I loved Aorewa McLeod's 'The Closing of the Phoenix', a richly nostalgic and passionate story about loss and comfort; Anne Mein's 'Works and Influences: Nov 1990-Feb 1991', with its attractive images, especially one based on Rodin's 'The Kiss'; the wrenching sadness of Julia Glamuzina's recreation of a long-ago murder, 'Purple Hearts'; Rangitunoa Black's 'Speaking of Ourselves', direct and wise; the irony and witty self–knowledge of Rhona Vickoce's 'The Tirade'; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku's cheeky 'So Easy to Please....'; Ruth Busch's strong and haunting 'Having Said Kaddish'; the knotty reasoning of 'Everything Isn't for Everybody' — some notes on lesbian social science research and post-structuralism from Chris Atmore; the very painful to read (and even more so to write I imagine) 'When You Hit Me', by Deborah Jones; and Christine Reremoana Paul's stunning turnaround of old forms 'Whaiaipo'.

And all the other treasures.

First published in *Listener,* January 23 1993, pagination unidentified. Transcribed by Fe Day.



Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu cover by Madison Kelly.

4. KERI HULME OUR KURU POUNAMU (2022–2024)

Renée sent this for our celebration of Keri.

From my point of view Keri was not that old ... I always liked Keri although we only met on stages or platforms, and I think she liked me too. We had the same sense of humour and the same rather cynical reception of strangers who told us we were wonderful. She said once she never really believed they'd read the book. Thank goodness she obviously knew I had. And more than once ... Keri was often late. Did I tell you about the last time I saw her? Can't remember the date. Dunedin. Me, Rawiri Paratene and Witi Ihimaera were waiting to do a talk and Rawiri was edgy because he had a plane to catch and Keri wasn't there and just as we were thinking we'd better start anyway, Keri strolls in from the front of

the hall, walks casually up the middle aisle, jumps up on stage and said something ridiculous like, 'Hope I'm not late', and I burst out laughing, I think Witi did too. Anyway it was a good session. And Rawiri caught his plane. — Renée

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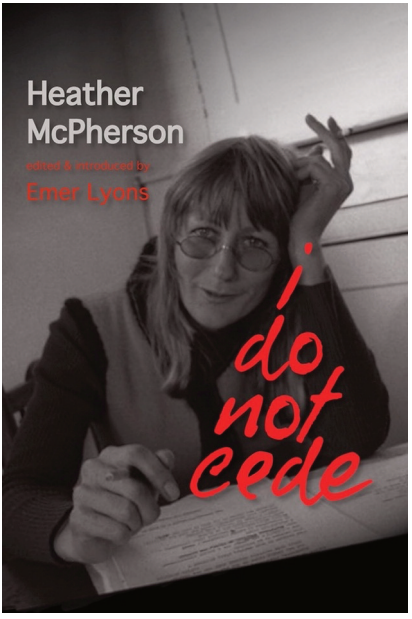
First published in *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu*, 2022.

5. HEATHER'S 'I DO NOT CEDE' LAUNCH



i do not cede cover, by Biz Hayman.

Spiral launched *i do not cede,* edited and introduced by Emer Lyons, in June 2022, and I asked Renée to launch it in an online event.[1] She

1. i do not cede is available here https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/i-do-not-cede-by-heather-mcpherson-2022. Emer reading the work is

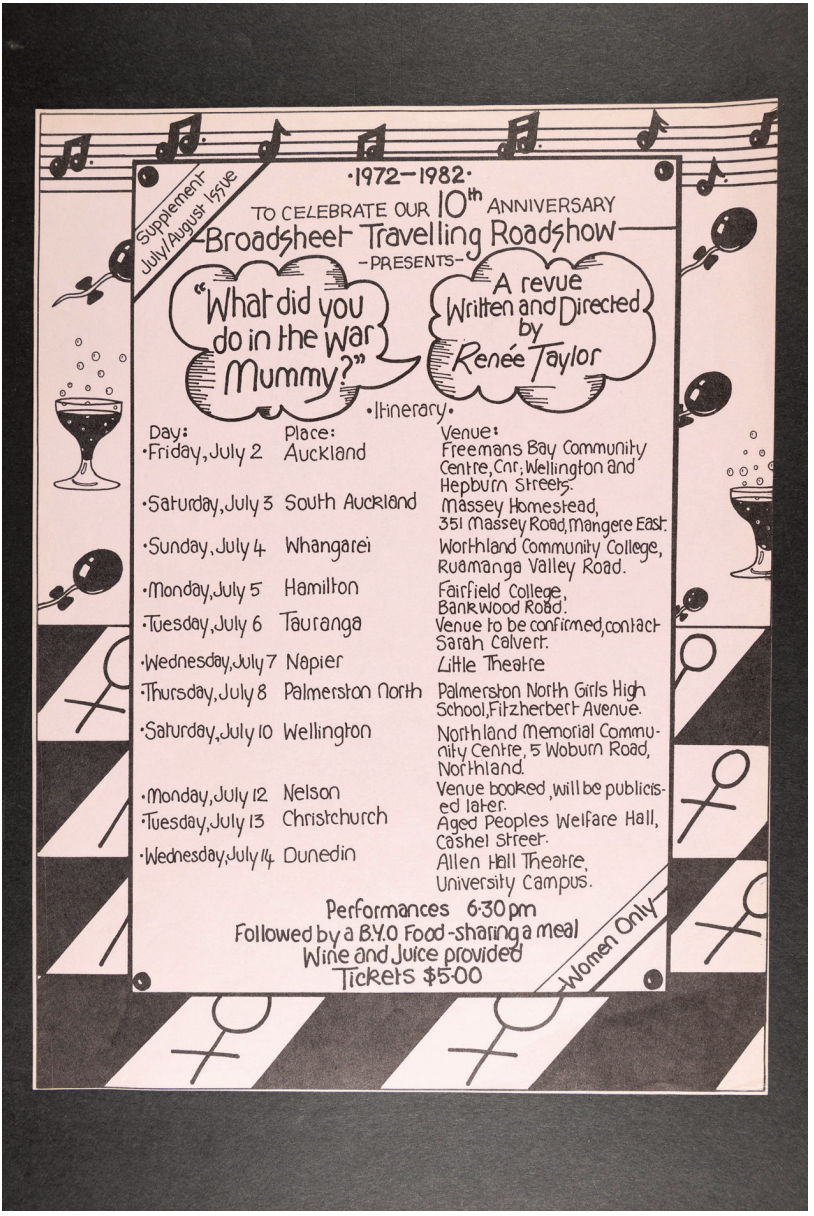
was keen and took a very keen interest in the event's organisation: I've never been so skillfully directed. Tilly Lloyd was a beautiful chair and I am very happy that we have the entire event on our modest Youtube channel.[2] Renée's launch speech introduces Heather's section of this book.

on Youtube here, unlisted because of the comments it immediately attracted https://youtu.be/c7qrP4dmvUA

2. https://youtu.be/L3SjmN2q1eM

BROADSHEET TRAVELLING ROADSHOWS

Renée wrote and directed three Broadsheet travelling road shows: What Did You Do in the War, Mummy? *in 1982;* Asking For It in 1983; *and* Born To Clean *in 1987.*



Poster for 'What Did You Do in the War, Mummy? *1982. Designer unknown.*

THE BROADSHEET ROADSHOW (1983, 2025)

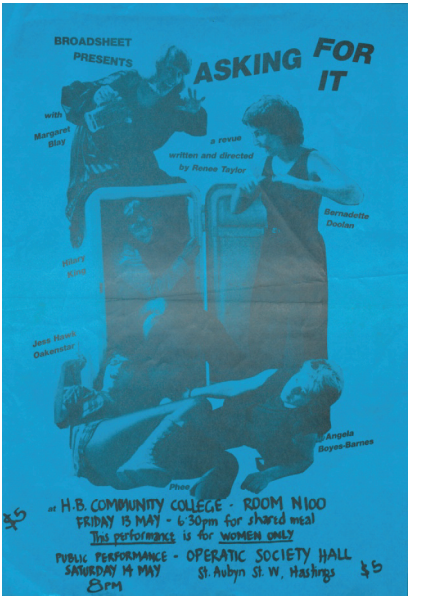
Angela Moewaka Barnes

When I was asked to write something about my experiences as an actor, touring the Broadsheet Roadshow with Renée who was both writer and director, I said "sure". But when I sat down to write I felt a little overwhelmed. There were so many stories, so many experiences, so many emotions. We were a small troupe – all women, of course, with Renée at the helm. I knew Renée prior to this – she was a friend and mentor who encouraged me to write.

During the roadshow we travelled across Aotearoa – it was a grueling itinerary. Renée made sure the plays went to small towns and not only cities, where the venues (of great variety) were full to overflowing (mostly women), where we spent time with our hosts and experienced manaakitanga and great korero. Travelling by van for hours established a closeness and intensity. We told stories about our lives, and this is when I got to know more about Renée, including her childhood, whanau, struggles and of course her many achievements. I appreciated her sharp wit and honesty. Fierce if she thought something was not right. Renée was our leader, our organ-

iser, our sweet support, a straight talker. It was a privilege to know you, Renée.

Moe mai rā e te rangatira.



Poster for Asking For It *1983. Designer unknown.*

Note: There is a wonderful road show rehearsal proof sheet by Gil Hanly (1983) in the Auckland Museum: PH–2015–2–GH344 (Reference Number) 344 (Photographer's number).

ASKING FOR IT (1983)

Cathie Dunsford

At the time of writing, the 1983 *Broadsheet* Travelling Roadshow, written and directed by Renée Taylor (already well known as one of NZ's foremost feminist playwrights), has stunned Auckland and Northland with its gripping political satire. Kaikohe turned up an all women audience of over 60, many of whom had travelled long distances to see the show. And they were not disappointed.

History was the main theme of *Asking For It*. Man writes his version of the story, centring on power, wealth and glory, and neglecting the suffering, ill-health and silencing of all those to whom he had denied power — the two main groups being the 'native' he has colonised and the women he has enslaved. Renee Taylor has cleverly woven together the themes of racial and sexual oppression to highlight the frightening analogies between our shared oppression, yet skilfully reveals the differences also. Rather than simplifying the issues by making a direct analogy between the oppression of any race and of women, Renée Taylor has intelligently analysed the differences, encouraging the audience to see the links, but think through the differences in privilege.

. . .

The focus for shared oppression becomes health — or the lack of a truly woman-centred health care system. While the colonisers hunt the Maori with their dogs and whips (and the grotesque cry of Tally Ho...), the men take over the role of midwife and similarly hunt down with their hatchets and knives that which most threatens them in women. The common purpose of both hunts is to track down the rebellious elements, and cut them out, first physically and then mentally. So the land is take away from the Maori, the clitoris and womb from the Woman. And it is all covered up because "They" write the history, and "if they say it didn't happen, didn't happen, didn't happen, then it didn't...happen!" Renée Taylor has succeeded in recreating dramatically the silenced herstory of NZ women that women like Tillie Olsen and Adrienne Rich have revealed in terms of American culture.

One of the strongest feelings that comes across to the audience (and I had the benefit of taking and gaining feedback from a wide variety of people, ages ranging from 17 to 78, from two Continuing Education classes) is the group's sense of political commitment, collective creativity and sheer theatrical skill. This left many of us in Auckland asking "Why not a feminist theatre?" a question Renée Taylor has herself forwarded on many occasions. I hope this Roadshow will inspire women all over New Zealand to ask the same. The potential of theatre as a political tool has long been explored by travelling groups of feminist artists. Why not create a home base, so that it can become a continual and self-generating force.

The cast of *Asking For It* showed us their skills as serious actors, mimics, musicians and dancers. It must have been a delight for Renée Taylor to have worked with such a talented group. Margaret

Blay and Bernadette Doolan had the onerous task of taking responsibility for HIStory, which they enacted with malicious eptitude, topped off (hats and all) by joining Angela for the biting 'Arrogance' dance. Hilary King, who'd developed her role of Freud in Renee's *MCP Show* at the Health Conference in 1982, played an exceptionally cunning manipulator of minds, leaving Dora, as he intended, speechless. Angela Boyes-Barnes, fresh from her *Zits, Bits and Bows* tour through New Zealand, played a variety of nasty roles, excelling herself as they got nastier and always demanding an uproar from the audience as her father figure "Well, come on, spit it out, girl!" Margaret Blay had the audience, and at times the cast, in fits by her consistent role plays, so that the grotesque snuff-smelling colonialist melted into the evil religious minister. Jess Hawk Oakenstar held the show together with her much-acclaimed musicianship, at one time playing guitar, singing and tapping the tambourine with her foot. Bernadette Doolan nearly stole the show with her accurate, intelligent and side-splitting imitation of Muldoon, now a regular expectation of the *Broadsheet* Roadshow. While Phee prefers to stay in the background, her dramatically effective lighting deserves recognition — and is crucial when touring a show that has no scenery and very few props.

By the time this review appears, all that will be left throughout NZ will be vibrant memories: for me, memories of the final Auckland performance with hundreds of women crammed into the Maidment, and the entire fore-stage area covered by scrambling, adoring children. The chant denying our herstory still plays through my mind. The strength of the ensemble singing 'Maori Women of Aotearoa'. The distortion of truth as Mr Housing Corp calls in the police and army on Bastion Point for a few peaceful protestors. The fear of being 'hunted down' still. Anger at the entire farce of the medical profession — and a wish that I'd known some of the witches. The mixture of horror and hilarity of the 'Speculum Song' Most of all,

the sheer strength and creativity which is celebrated and returned to us by Renee Taylor and her cast: "We are NOT asking for it again".

First published in *Broadsheet* June 1983: 44.

Cath Koa Dunsford, Te Rarawa, African-Hawai'ian, Ngāti Pākehā, is an internationally acclaimed author of 26 books in print/translation in USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Turkey, including the popular Cowrie eco-novel series featuring tangata whenua eco activists from the Pacific region.[1] She taught literature, creative writing and publishing at Auckland University and has edited six ground-breaking anthologies of literary/indigenous Pacific literature.

1. https://www.spinifexpress.com.au/backlist/p/9781875559282?rq=Cowrie

FEMINIST WRITER RENÉE: ALL PLAYS ARE POLITICAL (1984)

Interviewed by Claire-Louise McCurdy, November 1984

What started you writing?

I was one of those kids – there are a lot of us – one of whose best things at school was writing. School was very important to me because it was a place where I got a lot of approval. I was a bright, intelligent, rather timid girl and although I didn't have the same clothes as everybody else, there were other girls in the class who didn't either. But of course if you're bright, teachers like you, and if you're timid, they like you even better. Doing very well at school was good because I didn't do very well at home, and I wrote a lot of things that they get you to do.

I suppose I was always interested, but it wasn't until I was 30 and had three sons that I must have felt I had to have something, because all I can remember of those years is a dreadful, dreadful tiredness. So I started writing – a lot of it wasn't very good, but it was practice. Then I read somewhere (it might even have been the *NZ Women's Weekly*) about the Hawkes Bay branch of the NZ

Women Writers' Association. So I looked the name up in the phone book and rang a woman called Eve Ebbett, whom you probably know through her books – *Victoria's Daughters* is one of them. When she invited me over, I went clutching a little pile of manuscript which delighted her because she expected someone who was just starting out. I arrived with about 10 rather grotty little stories, but at least they were there on paper, and when she'd read them she said she had no doubt that I could become a member. I forget what you had to do in those days – put in three things, I think, if you hadn't had anything published and I had.

The old *Free Lance* published my first article, a humorous one. I did a lot of humorous writing in those days. And so I joined the Women Writers which was really good because at that stage they used to set exercises just to inspire us. Then *The Mirror* bought a story, and although I didn't sell a lot, there was enough just to keep me going. I started doing reviews and some articles for the *Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune* and a few radio book reviews. Then I shifted to Wairoa and began a weekly column, a light humorous thing which makes me cringe a bit now, but people loved it. It was the sort of things where the persona that was 'I' always finished up looking a bit stupid or not being able to ... you know the sort of thing. But that honeymoon came to an end after about 18 months when I asked for a raise. I was getting 15 cents an inch and I wanted 20 cents and they said no so I stopped doing it.

Soon after that I decided to try for an extra-mural degree through Massey University. That meant starting another kind of writing: the academic essay. And I learned to play that game quite well.

. . .

Before that though I was a cook when we worked out on farms after I was married. I used to cook for the men on the station, the regulars, and I also cooked for visitors like topdressing pilots. I was really overworked. After a while I got sick. The doctor had said I was pregnant. My symptoms were a bit like pregnancy although I couldn't really see how I could be as I'd used a diaphragm from the time my third child, Tim, was born because I just didn't want any more children. But things can happen so I went along with that. Then one day I had these fearful pains. I drove myself 40 miles to the doctor. He didn't know whether it was an ectopic pregnancy or whether there was a cyst on one of the tubes so he sent me to a surgeon, who said I had to have an operation immediately. It was Guy Fawkes day. I had to drive back home, because I had the car, and then had to wait in agony while these stupid men caught the cows for milking. I was so angry. After that I was driven to Napier Hospital and could hear the fireworks going off all night until I was operated on in the morning for a ruptured cyst. I got over it very quickly – I was a healthy young woman.

But that made us take decisions we'd been thinking about anyway because Chris, our eldest, was seven, and the little school he went to was a one-teacher place with 16 or 17 pupils ranging from his brother David in primer one to people in standard six. A lot of farmers can afford to send their kids away to school but farmworkers very rarely can, so we decided we would have to come back into town. My operation made up our minds for us because I needed to rest a little after it – not that I got much rest because I didn't make a fuss. I thought that people got over things and you got on with your kids. I came home from hospital and did the washing and hung it out and didn't find out until afterwards that you weren't really supposed to go hanging out heavy sheets and things.

. . .

I loved theatre, and would drive into Hastings to see plays – the matinees so I wouldn't have to drive back at night – and would take the kids too because I wanted them to be interested. When I got better I saw in the paper a little ad for an audition for a play to be directed by May Macdonald, a well-known name in the theatre. I thought I'd go along and give it a go but it was terribly intimidating because everybody read better than me. Anyway May lined up all the women trying for this particular part, and got us to scream. I must have screamed the best because she chose me. Altogether I did four plays with May, as well as some with other directors. That was how I got into theatre.

Then I started talking about wanting to direct, and May told me not to sit around talking about it, but to get out and do it. So I got out and found this little group from the Catholic Women's League who wanted a director. The hall was about two houses down from where I was living so rehearsals were no hassle. One of the women who came had about 10 kids – she was never last – and she just loved it. They all loved it. And I loved it. Of course they didn't know anything – I was the incoming expert. I was free to do what I wanted because there was no one there who was more experienced than me, who could say: 'That's not the right way'. I had to find out for myself.

I started directing for other amateur groups and then I shifted to Wairoa and directed there. I did a major play every year for about 15 years and I also did things with schoolchildren because my children were at school. Now that my sons are adults we have some political differences, but in those days they were thrown in because a lot of kids wouldn't do things. I was asked to do a Christmas pageant for a church and of course no one would be the black king, so Christopher was. He got resigned to taking those sorts of parts and I think

it was very good for him too. Theatre and drama in schools I am really very keen on because I think it gives people who might be a bit inarticulate the chance to be articulate and to feel confident about themselves. When I look back I must have had a terrible lot of energy. At the same time as I was writing that column I was involved in the evenings in amateur theatre which I chose to do because I was mixing with people, whereas writing was on my own and in the house. I had part-time work as well, because I'd always worked outside the home ever since Tim was four years old.

In the end, all those things came together. It took me about 10 years to reach the stage where I needed to do advanced levels for my university degree and I came to Auckland to finish at the university here because you couldn't do stage three subjects extra-murally. My old friend Bernadette was already living here. She had come to Wairoa to work for Social Welfare and heard that I needed someone to play the lead in *Butterflies are Free*, so we worked on that, although she'd never done a straight part before, but a lot of semi-operatic and musical type stuff. We did two or three plays together and then she was transferred up here. I stayed with her when I came up here on a drama course and I really liked Auckland – I liked the blue – the agapanthus and the jacaranda – and I loved the way you didn't have to go very far before you saw some green, and the relatively easy access to beaches. We all came up; my husband and Tim and me. I studied and I worked at Theatre Corporate as a cleaner and I worked on the till at the University Bookshop and then I went to work at Long Bay College teaching English and drama.

I was approaching 50 and started to have severe menopausal symptoms. The first thing was severe flooding and it was just hideous. And I accepted it. I'm an intelligent woman really but those sorts of things are a slow gradual process and you don't realise

until one day you're actually buying 10 packets of Modess. The first day of my period I would have to remember to put some newspaper on the floor because I couldn't get from bed to lavatory without a stream of blood. I was having hot sweats as well. I eventually realised this wasn't normal and went to a doctor who decided I should have a D and C. That took care of the flooding – there were polyps which were benign. I was thinking then about the significance of being 50 and what that meant. For some time I hadn't been happy in my marriage and I'd spent a lot of that time believing that there was the possibility of change. I was wrong. The discovery, the admitting of my lesbian identity was not the reason I left my marriage. The reason I left was because I'd got sick of compromising, because I had got terribly damaged. By the time I did leave, I couldn't use the telephone and I still can't drive. I was very badly injured.

By then I'd known Bernadette for 10 or 11 years and we'd always been extremely good friends and had done a lot of things together like going to the 1975 United Women's Convention. We'd talked non-stop from the time we met, and we still do. We'd thrashed out a lot of political stuff. We'd rowed, we'd debated and we'd worked together on theatrical enterprises. I realised that she meant a great deal to me and was probably the most important person in the world for me. When I left my marriage she asked me if I wanted her to come with me and for a year she did everything.

If someone is going through a very bad emotional patch, I always think that the best thing anyone can do is to believe them when they say they can't do something. Then you should say: 'I'll do it for you'. Bernadette did. That really has meant so much to me because, up until then, you pulled yourself together as I did after the operation and you kept on and you didn't admit to failure and you didn't

admit you couldn't do something as simple as using the telephone. I think that was the first time I recognised that there was such a thing as mental illness, that emotions could make you ill, and that that was something that should be respected, just as much as if your foot were cut off. So that was a real learning experience for me, because I was one of the sniffiest people about people pulling themselves together and getting on with it because I had always done it.

I'd realised before I left that I loved Bernadette and I had also admitted to myself that a lot of the things that had puzzled me about myself were now crystal clear because I had had a chance to talk to lesbian women, and I now had a chance to read things that I'd never read before. So I knew that these great changes were taking place. Along with that went these great changes in my body which, because of the generally chaotic nature of my feelings at the time, meant that my health was quite chaotic too. I had very severe hot sweats and things like that. So it was a year of big changes.

But along with that came a real flowering of my creativity. That was the year I wrote three plays. It was also the year of the Springbok tour. Somehow or other I got over my cowardice and went on the marches and found that I could cope. My only reason for being cowardly was because I was frightened that I would be hurt by the police. I'd been on protest things before and I wore a black armband when the All Blacks went to South Africa without any Māoris, and I'd been involved in Vietnam stuff. But this seemed to me to be different. The Vietnam stuff that I'd been involved in was in a small town and was mainly doing things like debating whether NZ should be there or not, and wasn't the active kind of protest that had happened in the cities. But I was really frightened of the police by this time – frightened of what I knew they could do. Then I got

involved politically with things about domestic racism and stuff like that.

All these things came together and one of the things that came out was this melding of my feelings about women, about the theatre, my politics and the knowledge that when I had come to Auckland, I had expected to see wonderful theatre and it wasn't any better than mine. The directors weren't any better than me and in some cases they were worse. If it was good, then it was the standard I already knew about, and some of the clothes and some of the sets were not as good as I had done. And also there were hardly any plays about women. I started to realise, when I labelled the things I had always known as feminism – which is what they were, but I didn't call it that – I started realising that I was getting very sniffy and very critical about what was going on on stage. And I began to get more and more angry about the fact that there were no really good parts for women, or if there were, they had a lot of males in supporting roles. Whereas men have a lot of good parts, but there's not that may supporting roles for women. They're little parts. So I wanted to do something about that.

I can only say why I started to write – I wanted to write to put women on the stage but I'm not sure why it turned out to be plays really. It was just an amalgam of the three things I was really interested in, I suppose. Of course, I'd always believed that you could make a political point very well and very quickly on stage: you could do something in two to three minutes that would take half an hour to explain. The understanding of what works theatrically had come from all sorts of avenues – I had the idea of shape and gradually developed more skilful use of dialogue. And I became aware that simple things are best – clear, specific statements that go from the specific to the universal – like *Wednesday To Come*, when I took a

family of four generations. Many things that the women are saying appeal to such a wide range of women. From their specific circumstances you have these little ripples going out to the universal experience of a lot of women.

Tell us about your plays in more detail.

Setting the Table. I wanted to write something that showed women as witty and intelligent and hardworking, because all the women I know are like that, and I never saw any of them on stage. And I also had debated furiously with friends the question of the use of violence as a weapon, as a strategy, as an action, and it seemed to me that no one out there in the wider community had any idea of what feminists actually did and I wanted to show something of that too. So that's why I wrote *Setting the Table* and why it was contemporary women. It wasn't autobiographical except in the sense that some of the debate was. I really liked those women and I still do. I saw it done at Victoria University about two months ago by a group of drama students, and I thought the play and the debate still come across well. It's become rather notorious now, but that's really only to people that haven't read the play. The play itself is a good competent piece of work which says some important things, I think.

Secrets. I'm going to write some more one-woman pieces – I think they can be really effective if you hit on the right thing, I guess. But I did this one – I did it out of a clear, blue sky, as it were. I had no idea at the time of writing a one-woman piece, but then I thought of what Miriam (Saphira) was doing on the sexual abuse of children. I talked to her and she loaned me some books. And I wrote about that woman. A lot of the stuff that I put in there was something I made up, but when I showed it to Miriam, she said that it was very

like what some women do experience, particularly this mania about wanting to be clean all the time – the excessive sort of exercise that that woman goes through. I wrote the first half and then I wrote the second half and I was really cocking a snook at Theatre Corporate in a way because when I was working there as a cleaner, only a few people said 'Hello' to me as Renée and the rest just saw me as an extension of the vacuum cleaner and stepped over. (I do remember the ones who were personally very civil to me and so I was really pleased when Elizabeth Hawthorne was going to play Iris in *Wednesday* because she was one of them who always said 'Hello' to me as Renée.) A lot of people like the second half better because it is more cheerful and it had a happy ending in some ways. I've never been sure whether it is as good as I could have made it, but it's been very popular.

Dancing is about four women, three of whom are older women and one of whom is going through what I was going through when I wrote it in terms of menopausal symptoms, so she's there on stage with tissues and stuff like that, and it's lovely. And in between each little scene, they dance the Maxina which is nice. I really just touched on 1951 in that play and I knew when I did that I wanted to write something much bigger. *Dancing* is a play that I think really needs songs. I think it's probably the scenario for some kind of musical that I haven't actually done yet. The play has been done once as lunchtime theatre and it worked reasonably well but I've always thought that it really needs another form. And next year, I'm hoping to look at that because I did write some songs for revues.

There were original songs in the roadshow *Asking for It*. It took me months to recover from exhaustion after touring with it, but when I think about it now, I know from the friends I've made and the

women who've been affected and touched by it, that it was well worth it.

Then I applied to the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council for a grant. I'm not a timid little girl any more and I thought it was about time. I got a grant for $5,000, which was paid out in $2,500 dollops to write two plays, and there was another $1,000 tabbed for a workshop which I could use for either one or both.

So I wrote *Groundwork* which is about the effects of the 1981 Springbok tour on a group of women, and it's set in the cells at the central police station on the last day – the last test. It's a play I'm very fond of because it has a Māori woman in it and a woman whose background is something similar to mine, in that her mother's family were Māori but she has denied any of that culture because her mother suffers from the prevailing racism that makes her think that there is something wrong with that – that there's something bad in it. So I was glad to be able to deal with that in a context where domestic racism in this country was only just being recognised as a problem by the white people. It hasn't been done yet, but I think it is going to be next year. I'll look forward to it.

It's very much more overtly political, making rather grand political statements as we all did at the end of the tour and throughout it – and the more painful kinds of things that happen to women as they actually sought to deal with and face their own racism. It's a record of some things that I observed and felt at that time and that's why it's important to me. We've all come – most of us – quite a long way since then in our thinking and analysis, but we were like that then, and I wanted to record that.



Then I wrote *Wednesday to Come* which is something I'd wanted to do for ages. I'd wanted to write about Mum and women like her and their strength and their survival. I'd tried before but it had never worked out. I tried the short story form and those sorts of things, but it just wasn't right. Then I suddenly thought about my uncle driving my father's body back from Wellington to Hastings because they couldn't afford a hearse. I didn't find that out until about 10 years ago. In fact my uncle told one of my kids and he told me. I also wanted to have some generations on stage because I'd never seen any old women on stage and very few young ones. And 13 is probably about as young as you can get away with, with adult actors. I wanted to show a young boy who was emotionally affected in a way that is not generally shown on stage – a boy who wasn't able to keep a stiff upper lip, who had to jam the mouth organ in his mouth so that he wouldn't be crying all the time.

. . .

And I wanted to show in Iris how I repeated my mother's patterns to some extent and maintained some sort of protective brief over the reality that I chose my kids to see. My Mum did the same, only in a more intense way – she never told me about my father shooting himself until I was 12 or so and she had to get very boozed to be able to do it. So there were a lot of things that I didn't find out.

And I know with my own kids, although I tried to make them face other kinds of realities I don't think I would have done what Iris did, which is allow them to be there, to open the coffin. So Iris is not me. But there are some things about her, I think, that are Mum – that kind of hardness, that wry sense of humour that only Iris can see is humorous and everyone else doesn't. So there are some things about that woman that I felt were like Mum because Mum could be verbally tough, very tough and she was very cynical and had little respect for anything she saw as false. She also had a lot of respect for good manners and things. She didn't see the irony of the two viewpoints. The actual look of things, how you behaved, your politeness and that sort of thing mattered more to her than getting first in class. She was paranoic about good manners so we're all terribly, terribly well-mannered. Being easy at the table and talking at the table were things I had to grow into as an adult because you didn't speak at the table. You had your meal and that was that.

There are all sorts of aspects of her that I will show in other characters because I see that we are all very deeply affected by this woman who mothers us, but there is something of her in Iris and that was very pleasing. And Mary – there are so many women like Mary. I'm a bit like her myself. Women who carry on doing the dishes, getting the meals, doing the washing, doing the ironing in the midst of these fearful crises because somebody had to do it. And Granna – I wanted Granna to have been a marcher, to have been a

protester about something and to have this ability to remind them of things. To not just be your old woman who's a little dotty or who's a bit vague and who sleeps most of the time in front of the fire, but to actually have a function of reminding them of things, to show that old women sometimes choose whether they want to be involved in a conversation or not. They have only so much energy to expend and they will choose how they will expend it and if they want to expend it by going down and giving the people at the Post Office a hard time, that's fair enough, because it's saying 'I am here. This is me, and somebody is going to notice me'. And I really approve of that. Sometimes that sort of behaviour is the most appropriate behaviour in a certain context. Sometimes when a woman sits in the corner and cries, that is the most appropriate behaviour in an intolerable situation. And I'm always really pleased when I see stroppy old women because it means to me that there is something there, and determined to be there. Something of that person is blossoming.

What about your relationship with professional theatre in New Zealand?

Directors haven't fallen over themselves to do *Setting the Table* before this year. I think they found it too political. The fact that it took 84% houses at Mercury when they put it on for 10 days didn't seem to weigh with other theatres and there has to be a political explanation for that, so I made that obvious political analysis for myself. It generally got good reviews by the critics. They couldn't say it wasn't well done because I'm a damn good director and they were wonderfully talented women. So what they had to do if they were stuck for something to report was to say things like 'playing to the converted' or that it was feminist, which meant bad. Some critics gave me very good reviews and practically without exception they were women. The *NZ Times* critic said: 'a witty, abrasive little show', using, as a lot

of men do, the diminutive as a put-down. So my relationship with critics sometimes depends on how they feel about women and feminists. If they don't feel good about them, they use their reviews to say something that shows that bias. In terms of the establishment theatre, there are three theatres that have done *Wednesday to Come*, so that's been great. I was very well treated at Downstage where it was first done and there was no question of any difficulties with my politics. Up here, Theatre Corporate have treated me very well.

I'm not sure how *Groundwork* will go though. I've had approaches, so that I know that it will be done, but I think that some theatres would be very diffident about the politics in it because I have a Māori woman saying some rather harsh things to Pākehā women – nothing that you or I haven't heard before. Certainly we're going to hear it all again – and I hope that we are going to get challenged all the time. But for some people that is something they find very hard to take. I think myself that it will go extremely well and that they will fine that they don't have to be frightened. I mean they don't worry if it's Brecht or people like that. They don't mind political plays, but it's got to be a male who writes them, and it's got to fit into male politics, and then it's quite acceptable. Now I really admire Arnold Wesker. I think of his plays, the one that I love best is *Roots*. That play about a woman learning to be articulate, learning to talk about her own ideas and not the ones she has picked up from her boyfriend and parroted out. She starts to think and analyse and finally to speak her own ideas. I think it's a terrific play.

But I always say that all plays are political anyway. Even rubbish is political. NZ theatre is very healthy at the moment. The directors and administrators of the theatres have discovered that NZ plays pay and now they're including a lot more in their yearly programme. But there is still some reluctance to see women's concerns as main

bill. There's a tendency to put them on at 6pm. I went to a workshop just recently where I was the dramaturge for Stephanie Johnson's play about pornography: *Accidental Fantasies*. It's a most exciting stylish play because not only does it break the mode of what women should do or say on stage but it breaks the mode of style. It doesn't finish with the audience feeling satisfied that there's been a solution. In fact, I think it probably raises more questions than anything else. But it's such an exciting play. I mean, this woman shoots De Sade and Hugh Hefner beside a car crash on stage. A designer would just love it. It's in two distinctly separate styles, and for me they work.

And Rosie Scott's *Say Thank You to the Nice Lady* was workshopped by another group at the same time. Margaret Blay wrote *Clearing Out* and that's a play that should be put on by the establishment theatres because it had a lot to say. Margaret herself says that the end needs reworking but they do that for male playwrights and it would have benefited from working with a director and a cast, with Margaret there as the writer. I'm talking mainly about the Auckland scene, but there are other women writing plays in NZ, other women who deserve to have space and time and expertise at their disposal. I think that's one of the roles the establishment theatres should play. They should also be encouraging Māori theatre and Māori directors. I would go so far as to say that if they won't do it any other way, then they should have a quota forced on them. I feel very strongly about it. They should set aside some part of the year when their staff, their building, their lights and their expertise are there for people to learn. I'm not sure how Māori theatre groups feel about performing in what is really a very Pākehā environment, but there have been some very successful and very moving things done in that situation. I heard Rangimoana Taylor talking on the radio one day and he felt that to have been a student at the Drama School and to have worked with George Webby had been a good experience – that it had given him skills that he could use whichever way he wanted to. I

think the theatres have not faced up to their racism. Until recently when Māoris and Samoans and other Pacific groups formed their own groups, the reply always was 'We can't get them'. Then the thing was: 'We can get male actors' and there are some excellent ones. Now, some of them are telling me that they can't cast a play that has a 30 year old Māori woman in it. I think that shows their racism. There are some very talented women around.

There are problems with the all-male directors in our theatre. There are women directors who have got jobs, but there are not many. I wonder if there should just be a women's theatre, if that's the only way women are going to get expertise. We've got really wonderful actors, singers, musicians and we've got some women who are expert on the technical and production side, but we need a lot more. There are one or two very good designers who are women, but we need young women who are being trained to do that and direct and do the lighting. There are a hell of a lot of things we've got to keep on at the theatres about. They are just the same as any other segment of society really. They have the same biases, the same blindness, the same prejudices and it takes the same amount of time to break them down. But in terms of the actual New Zealand scripts, there is a readiness now to look at them and to see that they are commercially viable. And that is good.

What are you working on now?

I've become a full-time writer and I've been one for about six weeks and it's absolutely terrific, it's just wonderful. I can't tell you how privileged I feel to be able to do this. The reason is that I was asked to do a film treatment of *The Butcher's Shop* and was paid in advance for that so I could leave my paid employment at *Broadsheet*. And I

knew that I was going to get money from the three productions and I knew that with care, that could last a year. So I thought that this was the time to take the gamble, and I have.

I've been working on a pilot scheme for TV writers where a writer who has skills in one field, but not necessarily TV, works alongside an experienced writer as they write a script for *Country GP*, say. I've just finished doing that, and I've got a commission to write a *Country GP* script. I regard that as a good thing. I need to learn the skills and I want to learn them. I've been working with a woman script editor, Philippa Campbell – she's been great. I can see that by the end of next year I'll have a lot more skills in a field that I didn't have at the end of this year. And I'm looking forward to learning that and being good at it. But I don't feel grateful. I think it is my right to see that any potential I have does blossom. That's my right – but I'm so glad it is writing because that is something you can do for years. If one gets arthritis, with word processors and the little taps that you use for machines like that, I can see myself writing until the pen drops from my fingers.

First published in *NZ Women's Studies Journal* April 1985: 61–72. Transcribed by Caren Wilton.

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The first half of *Secrets* has been filmed with Elizabeth McRae and directed by Diana Rowan.[1]

Claire-Louise McCurdy started tutoring in Women's Studies for the Auckland Workers' Educational Association in 1974. She was a founding member of the Auckland Women's Studies Association in 1979 and joined the committee of the NZ Association the same year. She is an extra-mural tutor for the Departments of English and History at Massey University, a member of the *Broadsheet* collective and President of the Auckland WEA. — 1984.

1. I've been unable to locate this.

THEATRE AND POLITICS (1985)

Renée

Most of us have spent some part of our lives in a kitchen. There we have eaten our first solid meals, cried because we hated rhubarb, begged for another piece of cake, done our damnedest to get out of the dishes. Kitchens form part of the happy family myth. You know the kind. In winter the stove has a large pot of soup on it, the room is warm and inviting, there are hot scones, love and comfort. In summer there are salads, cool drinks, even some home made ice cream, and of course, love and comfort.

Now, being a myth, some parts of these things are true at some times. But there are also other elements in a kitchen. There is anger, irritation, unhappiness, tired weeping into cups of tea, rows between kids and kids, adults and adults (or any mixture of the two), a quota of unsuccessful recipes and a bloody tampon or two. Kitchens waver all the time between one lot of drama or another. Your viewpoint about them depends on whether you sit at the table and wait, or whether you stand and serve.

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Maybe you don't know how you feel about kitchens. Perhaps you should find out. Let's say you're going to write a play. You think of some characters. You can have two. They can be two women, two men, or a woman and a man. How will you present them?

Two women? Are they sisters, mother and daughter, friends, lovers, employer and employee? Complete strangers? A policewoman and the owner of the house?

Throw in some conflict. Both want the same thing and only one of them can have it. You could speculate that they have a previous record of competitiveness so that whoever succeeds is going to do a one-up job on the other.

If they're strangers, what has brought them together? Maybe there are class differences. A deprived childhood? No food, clothes or warmth? Too much of everything? Unemployed for some time? In a good secure job? Whatever. The seeking and gaining of something both characters want becomes the frame for your play.

Of course this isn't enough on its own. You need a sub-plot or two. Some threads from the past life of your characters would help. Has one been to war and the other was a conscientious objector? And at the end they understand each other a Lot Better?

Now you're getting somewhere.

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Perhaps there are two races involved. One is a Jew, the other German, or one Māori and the other Pākehā.Their attitudes, emotions, desires, flesh out their struggle to attain their goal and give your play some Telling Insights into the Human Condition.

Alternatively they could be two different age-groups, generational hangups have to be sorted out. Lesbians or homosexuals to illustrate the outsider in society? Ex-prisoners? MPs? Secretaries, Lawyers? Law Clerks? Doctors, Receptionists?

How do they talk? Are they eloquent or inarticulate? Intelligent or dull? Rich or poor? Ugly or beautiful? Murderous or peaceful? A little bit of everything? And how have these attributes affected their personality and behaviour?

Well, after a couple of hours thought you settle all that. I mean we all know it's not very hard to write a play. Not like a *novel* or a *poem*. You've already chosen your theme of course. The Nature of Human Relationships will do. You plot the crises, the lighter moments, maybe a song or two depending on the form you've decided on.

All these decisions! Leading to an even bigger one. How will you treat them, these two characters that I've allowed you so arbitrarily. A lot will depend on your own world view. Mother Courage or Topp Girl?

If you are homophobic you're hardly likely to present a sympathetic portrait of lesbians. I don't mean they can't be failures, or alcoholics, or even just bad tempered, but there will be something in the

way you treat them that shows how you feel about that particular lifestyle. If you have socialistic leanings you're not going to finish up with a piece of work that shows bosses as tender, compassionate and caring employers. If you're racist you're going to find it very difficult to be other than patronising/offensive/arrogant. If you are sexist it will be easy to churn out tired old stereotypes so you will probably go into advertising and not bother about plays.

Of course none of us is going to say publicly that we're racist or sexist, that we hate homosexuals and despise workers. We leave that to the right wing fundamentalists. And a good thing too. That's their job. By the way, they also make lovely characters if a trifle one-dimensional. Always remember that line of Robin Tyler's ' Phyllis Schlafly is to women what the Hindenburg was to flying'.*[1] Just be very careful if you decide to use one. It's hard to make them believable.

You can see by now that writing a play is really quite a complex business. And it gets worse. You can make an impassioned plea for tolerance on behalf of the working class and then, unwittingly, show that your compassion does not extend to race. Or you can be extremely well-intentioned about combatting racism and at the same time show a dislike for old women, or for that matter women in general. Yes I *know.* It's all terribly difficult. Because some old women are trials, but not all. Some mothers-in-law are absolute treasures, but not all.

1. *Jewish lesbian feminist comic: From her record *Always a Bridesmaid Never a Groom*.

However, let's say that you've charted your course, put your shoulder to the wheel, rolled your sleeves up, made your bed and are having a little lie-down on it. And that's alright too. You've worked hard and deserve a rest.

You are thinking about the Universal Challenges and Conflicts that you are going to dot about in your play. But, before you get into first nights, standing ovations and film rights, remember that you haven't settled the really big question. Where are you going to place your characters?

You might think that Universal Challenges and Conflicts are better shown in a war situation where human nature is peeled down to its Raw Essence. Where your characters learn to come to terms or not come to terms with their experience. Or you might decide that these Universals (always supposing there are such things) can be learned, experienced, shared, in a plain ordinary old kitchen.

A kitchen I hear you cry! What the hell has a kitchen got to do with Universals? What happens there? Cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, sometimes even washing people. What's so dramatic about these activities? Sure, you know, that hundreds of women are maimed, beaten, raped and killed in kitchens but somehow you feel that this battleground lacks the dramatic zing so necessary to set a play in.

I suppose it does all boil down to your view of the world. And kitchens are definitely women's world. There great struggles for survival are fought and lost (or sometimes won), there is diminishment, anguish, joy, support, compromise. Who needs Willy Loman? He can't even make a cup of coffee by himself.

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But you're right of course. Kitchens (with some exceptions) are not Main Bill settings. What we need are settings which illuminate man's inhumanity to man. Man's inhumanity to women is all so all-persuasive that it's not really worth commenting on. So hardly anybody does. And everyone knows that the rising statistics that show the same miserable story of violence against women and girls in our society are just figures produced out of the air by a bunch of raving radical feminists and that if they would all just shut up and stay home (in the kitchen) everything would be all right.

It's settled then. Your play will definitely not take place in a kitchen. You have made your decision. Your characters will play out their lives against much more exciting backdrops

They will suffer, endure, laugh, sing, quote poetry, expose their angst. They will reveal truths about themselves and their world and encourage your audiences to do the same about theirs.

You can feel satisfied with yourself too. You will have challenged the status quo but not in too uncomfortable a way. The myths will remain intact. The decision you have made is a political one. It's as much a political decision to stay out of the kitchen as it is to put on an asbestos suit and work among the flames.

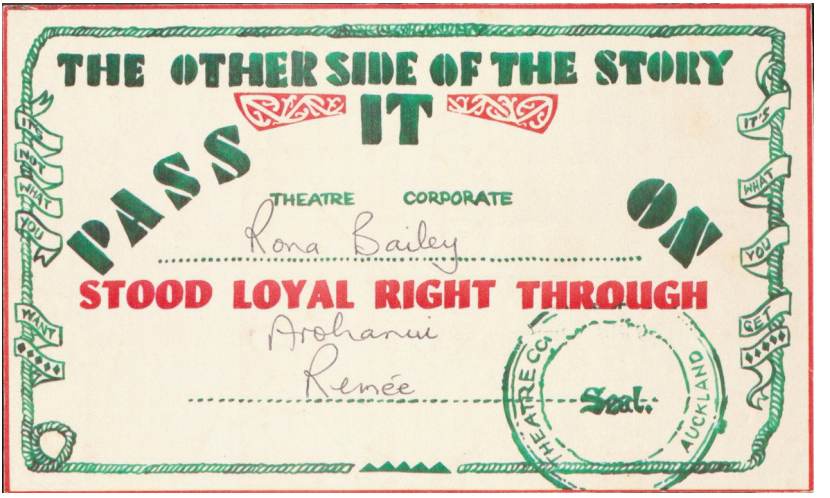
I'll look forward to your play. To your characters. Their conflicts, their humour, their loves and hates. I'll enjoy, dislike or be bored by the choices you allow them and the options from which they make those choices. But the thing that will really interest me is whether

you'll manage to incorporate something of the kitchen in your script. Because kitchens are quite transportable really in any case, as you'll have gathered, I'm not really talking about kitchens at all.

First published in *Landfall* v39(1): 14–17. Transcribed by Fran Richardson.

PASS IT ON BY RENÉE, DIRECTED BY ROGER GILL AT THEATRE CORPORATE (1986)

Andrea Kelland



The card Renée gave Rona Bailey, who shared her experience and knowledge of the strike with Renée. With thanks to Meg Bailey for permission to reproduce this.

Pass It On is a brilliant piece of New Zealand writing which captures a slice of history and brings it alive by showing the effects political action can have on family life. The play is based on the watersiders' lock-out of 1951 which lasted for 151 days.

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In a series of lightning quick scenes which meld inconspicuously one into another we trace the struggles of two of the families and their political involvement. Speeches by the prime minister, union leaders and employers are interspersed to show the chain of events leading to the government bringing in fascist-like emergency regulations.

Jeannie and Cliff, the brother and sister from Renée's earlier play *Wednesday to Come* are now grownup fully fledged members of the Communist Party. Jennie and husband Gus work side-by-side speaking at meetings, printing pamphlets, organising marches and setting up relief posts for families suffering from the lock-out. The parallel between Cliff and Nell's relationship, which is put under enormous strain by the hardship of feeding and clothing two teenage daughters, is finely drawn in heart-rending vignettes depicting real New Zealand pathos and humour.

The setting, by Donal Grant Sutherland, is one of the best uses of the long, thin Corporate space so far. Divided into six acting spaces with no walls or doors and facilitated by smooth lighting changes the action of the play was never suspended for a moment.

Judith Gibson's Jeannie, a trifle tentative in the first half, comes into her own when her husband is forced to tell her she must resign from the Women's Committee because her actions are too 'radical'. Jennifer Ward-Leland plays ten years older than her actual years, her 'merry widow' Nell is a practical real Kiwi Mum whose personal becomes political in the course of the play. Michael Hurst as Gus performs with his usual enthusiasm; his breakdown and fight against

the 'real jokers don't cry' syndrome was a particularly moving moment of the play.

Pass It On has 50 characters and 29 scenes played by 5 women actors and six men. Roger Gill's direction and the commitment of the company bring the play to life. Special mention must be made of Marion Parry, whose maturity and strength added another dimension to the otherwise young cast and Michael Morrissey who payed multifarious policemen with incredible variations.

If you are 30 or over you will be charmed by the authenticity and reminisce over Adams Bruce ice-cream, the first visit of 'ya mate' and 'the red dread'. If you're younger it's a great insight into a piece of our women's history which is glossed over in the curriculum.

First published in *Broadsheet* April 1986: 44–45.



Poster designer unknown.



Poster designer unknown.

RENÉE'S 'BORN TO CLEAN' (1987)

Renée & performers talk with Pat Rosier

Writer and director Renée and performers Hilz King, Jess Hawk Oakenstar, Andrea Kelland and Bernadette Doolan talked with Pat Rosier about this new musical, to be performed at Limbs Studio, Auckland from 12 June.

Renée also wrote and directed the two *Broadsheet* road shows, *What Did You Do in the War, Mummy* and *Asking For It*.

Renée It all started when Sandi Hall rang me one Thursday night and said could I write the opening for a *Broadsheet* seminar. The people who had been going to do something were no longer able to do it. I had a week. I said I'd have to think about it and I did. I quite liked the idea of it so I settled down and worked like mad and got a script done. It was about 20 minutes long. The music wasn't original, but I put new words to it. Then I asked Bernadette and other women to go in it and we did it and it was very successful. Then I joined the *Broadsheet* collective, and it was their tenth anniversary and we toured an expanded version, with more women in it.

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L-R Hilary King, Bernadette Doolan, Renée, Andrea Kelland, Jess Hawk Oakenstar. Photographer unknown.

Jess It was only going to have one musician, but by a strange and wonderful coincidence, Hilz had come up to Auckland for two weeks, and my Dad was very sick at the time so I didn't know whether I would be able to go or not. Both of us started rehearsing, so one of us could go on tour. But we were so wonderful together! and both became so much a part of it that we both went.

Renée That tour was with Judy Wishart, Margaret Blay, Jess, Bernadette and Hilz.

Bernadette *Asking For It* was virtually the same line up but instead of Judy Wishart we had Angela Boyes-Barnes.

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Renée *What Did You Do In the War, Mummy?* was for women-only audiences, and we got taken to the Human Rights Commission for that. There were two complaints. One was that it was a lesbian plot – that we just wanted to get women along there, and then we would hug and kiss them and everyone knows what happens then! It came to nothing of course. There were a few picketers, too, on that first tour. I remember one lone man in Tauranga, who was anti-war – he thought the title suggested we were for war. *Asking For It* was a much longer tour, and very expensive. QEII provided some money. We went to lots of little places.

Bernadette When we came back we were exhausted and never wanted to do anything ever again. It was for six weeks, we were performing at night, maybe two shows, and packing up and travelling to the next place during the day. I think we had about three days in that whole time when we weren't travelling or performing.

Jess We were staying with people which was wonderful but meant we were continuously being sociable and partying and performing – we all had crack-ups along the way.

Bernadette Nonetheless it was a really amazing experience for all of us. It did make it very hard to think about doing another show the next year!

Renée I've never got into a van since.

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Pat Is *Born to Clean* a revue?

Renée No, it's a musical, and it's very coarse and vulgar.

Jess Last year we were talking about doing a lesbian revue and that was a big topic of conversation. I wrote a couple of songs and Hilz started working on a musical piece. It was only as the songs began and your ideas developed, that it turned into *Born to Clean*.

Renée It wasn't that, it was changing the title. We were going to call it *Still Asking For It*. I did a script, but it wasn't very good, although it had some quite nice little pieces in it. A couple of weeks ago I took an executive decision(!) and said I wanted to call it *Born to Clean*. I just kept on saying that was what I wanted to call it. We have a song called that, which strengthened my case.

Bernadette The other thing we're really lucky about this time is that we've got Andrea as a cast member.

Andrea I can't think how I got roped into it. It was way back last year.

Renée You said that you'd love to be in it, that you'd do anything you could to help, but would specially like to be in it. So I thought, great! I'll grab her! I've known and admired Andrea's work for a long time. And Hilz suggested doing the music.

. . .

Pat Does that mean you're writing original music for the songs?

Renée No, they're writing the songs as well. In *Asking For It* I didn't use other people's music. We had had the experience of doing a snippet on TV and having someone writing to us and threatening to sue. Also, I had written once to Irving Berlin asking if I could use the music to 'The Girl That I Marry' in *Setting The Table* and I had to provide the words that I wanted to change it to – it was to be about the boy that I married – and of course they turned that down. For this show Jess and Hilz are writing the lyrics and the music.

Bernadette The title song *Born to Clean* is absolutely wonderful. It's very, very funny. It's a real take-off of the idea that women's place is in the home and the man is at the head of the household. The song takes it to absurd lengths, which makes it really, really funny. The style of the song is quite rollicking, country and western. We've had the script for about a week. It's a working script at the moment, which means that it's fairly well set but, as it has been with all the shows we've done it's all up for grabs if you've got ideas.

Andrea We're going to take the mickey out of some of the worst television ads we can lay our hands on.

Pat What happens if you're in the middle of rehearsal and somebody wants to do some thing different from the script?

Jess We're all agreed that Renée has got the final word on it. If we feel like doing something different we try it out, but if it doesn't

look good, Renée will say. She's the only one that can see it from out front as it were.

Renée I'll always try it. In terms of the actual directing or presentation the cast at times come up with things that are far better than what I had thought of, even to changing the rhythms of a particular piece, which has just made such a difference. That will probably happen this time. It is true that I'm the only one out front and that I am where the audience will be.

Bernadette If it doesn't work we all have to work on it to find something that does. It's not just Renée saying we will do this and we will do it this way. Some of the best moments we've had in both revues have actually happened when there's been a break in rehearsal for some reason and we're fiddling around and all the ideas start to flow. We always try them and quite often they've ended up in the final show.

Pat So there's a certain amount of sparking off each other?

Renée Yes, there's a lot of that. Would you like to talk about the music you two? I ring up and say I want a song called "Dear Gertrude Stein" and Jess says, "Right, okay ... "

Pat So what happens after that?

Jess Hilz comes around and says "I've worked out that we've got to

have something at the beginning and something at the end" and I say "And something in the middle".

Hilz And it just all naturally falls into place after that! Once we've made this momentous decision about how to do it.

Jess We start off by working separately and then we get together. And sometimes I've got the beginnings of something and Hilz can add to it, or whatever.

Hilz Jess is wonderful because she actually just chucks in everything that even vaguely suits. Whereas I sit around and go ponder ponder until I'm absolutely sure about something. So from Jess's large amounts of stuff we just refine, don't we? I get all worked up about it and start throwing in a few bits myself. It's the same process as writing a script, really. It's just a matter of refining ideas. And the more ideas you've got to work with the more varied your songs and music are going to be.

Jess I find it really easy to write because Renée says, "This is what I want it to be about". It's difficult when I get the urge to write a song and I don't know what I want to say. Once the title is there, what the song is going to be about, then the style comes and the words can come.

Pat I suppose only a musical illiterate would ask, but what comes first, the music or the words?

. . .

Jess They sort of both come together generally.

Hilz It depends what you're writing. Sometimes I've written one line, and I sing it away in my head and get a line of music, then a line of words and the music, and the whole thing comes together. But sometimes I can write a whole screed of words and put music to them, or think of a tune and the words come later. Or get a style. I thought at a particular point in *Born To Clean* it would be nice to have a blues sound, a blues guitar, sing a few lines of blues, and have that come into a stronger line with everyone joining in. That is just a style, without any words or melody lines.

Jess I usually sit down holding the guitar and just start strum ming away and see what hap pens. I have to start singing something with it, so ...

Bernadette WelI. I'm certainly dying to get into it.

Jess Yeah. It's four years since we've done a revue and we've done a lot of living in there.

Bernadette It's quite a different way of coming to it, too. It was actually Andrea who arranged our first meeting this year.

Andrea I was dying to get my body on the boards again, so there's some personal interest there.

. . .

Bernadette It gets everybody. We've all got such varied schedules for the year that when we did get together we found we had only a certain period of time to do the show in. So if you hadn't got us together then to sort out the dates the show would never have happened.

Andrea It seems to be a good year for women this year, everybody's really busy. A lot of women I know are getting off their bums and saying 'I'm sick of being poor and I'm sick of waiting for the crumbs to drop. I'm going to get out there and do it for myself".

Pat Talking about being poor, what about money for the show? Have you got any?

Renée QEII have given a $3000 grant, which they do for the first performance of any new script. That will be taken up with the set design, and the set itself and publicity and the rent for the venue. We'll be sharing whatever we get from the takings.

Andrea We're looking for rehearsal space at the moment. It's very desperate to find reasonably priced space.

Renée The reason we're not touring is not just my dislike of vans, it's the fact that it's very expensive. Hopefully people will be able to come and see us at Limbs Studio. Hilz is going away ...

Jess She's jumping a tramp steamer to Korea ...

. . .

Renée ... but when she comes back, we may consider doing it at another venue, but we're not making any definite plans. This is a Working Title Theatre production.

Andrea It's really good to have an umbrella like that to apply for funds.

Renée Well, then they know that it's going to happen, it's got some credibility.

Andrea Your name helps, too, Renée.

Renée They look at everything on its merits. Sure, anything that I write they'd take a look at and be interested. But if they didn't like the idea or felt that it wouldn't work or something they might turn me down.

Pat Well you're obviously not in it for the money, so what are you in it for?

Andrea The fame and the glory!!

Renée I haven't directed anything since '83 so I'm keen to do that.

Jess I haven't played for the last couple of years, so for me it's getting started again.

. . .

Hilz I love acting!

Renée And I love Hilz' acting, too.

Bernadette There's all the things like practising your craft, but most of all there's the buzz you get from performing. It's hard bloody work too, so there are two sides of it. As you get closer to opening night the stress goes up and we'll be saying "Why on earth are we doing this? Why?" The pressure of your nerves and fears – I'm going to forget my words, I'm going to jump five pages and nobody else will know where the hell we are ...

Andrea And often these things come true. And you've got to get yourself out of it.

Hilz It's terrifying for a musician to be acting, because if you forget the words in a song you can go "La da deda, doo bop a dah ...", but on the stage you actually have to come up with something or this person's going to be looking at you *very* oddly. I find that absolutely terrifying.

Pat What's it going to cost to go to *Born To Clean*?

Renée Well I still have to check it out with the others but my suggestion is $12.

. . .

Bernadette With a $10 concession for bookings of ten or more.

Pat How long is the show?

Renée An hour and a quarter.

Jess Will there be a reduction for beneficiaries?

Andrea Unfortunately I have found in the heaps of experience I have had in the box office, that if you have a special rate for beneficiaries nine times out of ten, unless they are incredibly honest, people will pay the lower rate. So beneficiaries suffer for other people's dishonesty.

Renée I just feel that $12 won't provide huge wages, even if we have full houses. The venue's expensive, so is advertising. The cost of the set and the costumes is going to be at least a thousand dollars, so I think that's a reasonable amount.

Pat There must be something extra for you in working as a group of women.

Renée Particularly in a show like this, that's about things that concern us as women and which has a lot of humour in it.

. . .

Jess We're just such jolly good pals, anyway. So it's fun.

First published in *Broadsheet* June/July 1987. Transcribed by Caren Wilton.

REMEMBERING RENÉE; & 'SECRETS' (2025)

Elizabeth McRae

When I was teaching at the Auckland University Drama Diploma course one of my students was Bernadette Doolan. One day she asked if I would like to read a play by her partner, Renée. My reaction when I read it was to say how I would like to play these two women. The one-woman plays that made up *Secrets* were an early example of feminist writing for theatre.

We presented it first at the Women's Convention, directed by Renée. The audience was wonderfully vocal. They called out and clapped when the urinal cleaner won the Golden Kiwi. The production was transferred to Mercury Two for a season. Later my friend Andrea Kelland directed the piece and we toured with it.

I treasure that experience because Renée became a very dear friend. I wish now that I could confer with her about growing old. I would learn, I'm sure, from her positivity and insight.

. . .

The play *Secrets* by Renée is made up of two separate plays. They are both about a single woman and there are no other characters involved.

The first woman has been abused by her father and displays an obsession with washing glasses.

The second play is about a woman whose job is to clean a men's urinal. She gets a letter informing her that she has won the Golden Kiwi Lottery. I have recently moved to Wellington so do not have a copy of the script. This is a shame as I think the women had names.

When I took on these roles I was already an experienced professional actor. Renée was happy to share ideas with the actor. We had a lovely relationship from the beginning.

Secrets, footage of a play performed in two parts by Elizabeth McRae[1] and directed by Carole (Kanya) Stewart, is held at Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision. The footage contains an interview with Renée, before and after the performance. Ngā Taonga F55512, 1985.

1. Elizabeth McRae in Ngā Taonga https://www.nzonscreen.com/profile/elizabeth-mcrae/biography

NO SKELETONS UNDER THE TABLE (1988)

Lisa Sabbage & Renée

LISA

Some remember it as a day in which women finally took control and empowered themselves, others remember it as a blot on the herstory of feminism in Aotearoa, some women don't remember it at all. It was a day that had repercussions for many women and one woman in particular.

In February 1984, six women chained a man they said was a rapist to a tree and spray-painted 'rapist' on his car. The man, Mervyn Thompson, was an Auckland University drama teacher and playwright. In a media statement the women said that Thompson "represents the portion of rapists who are seldom prosecuted through legal channels because of their status as white, middle-class men".

In the media circus that followed, Mervyn Thompson was interviewed by the *Auckland Star*, the *New Zealand Times*, and the *8 O'Clock*. He appeared on the *National Radio Programme*, and *Eyewit-*

ness News, and wrote his own articles in the *Listener* and *Metro*. An earlier article in *Metro* by Carol Wall seemed to conclude that there was a sinister lesbian conspiracy going on in the corridors of Auckland. Following Thompson's cue, many reports focused on the so called similarities between his attack and a play, *Setting the Table*, written by writer and lesbian feminist, Renée. In this play, written three years before the attack, a woman ties a man to a fence and labels him with a rapist sign.

Thompson's 1987 article in *Metro* explicitly linked the attack with the play, dredging out the history of his involvement with it and going so far as to point out that he was attacked in the same 'area' in which the play was set. In the same article he interpreted a statement from Renée as defending his attackers and condoning their actions. The offending statement had been an answer to a question about the play acting as inspiration for the six women. Renée replied: "*They* never said that, the media have drawn that conclusion. Those women are intelligent enough to think for themselves. They don't need me to advise them. A lot of things were said by people who'd never read the play". Thompson went on to write that Renée was using her power of veto to prevent him from entering a theatre group, Working Title Theatre, and said she had the 'most to gain' from his 'theatrical demise'.

RENÉE

In 1981 I wrote a play called *Setting the Table*. I wrote it for various reasons one of which was to explore the feminist debate on women using the male weapon of violence and whether it ever achieved anything. The conclusion I came to in the play (and in real life) was that violence achieves noting either for the attacker(s) or the attacked. Pretty revolutionary eh?

. . .

The play opens with one of the characters, Sheila, attacking a man, tying him to a fence, tying a yellow ribbon round his penis and hanging a card round his neck stating he was a rapist.

In 1984 an incident with some similarities was carried out against Mervyn Thompson, University Lecturer, director, writer, actor (and more sinister things as well if his attackers are to be believed), who had directed the workshop and a rehearsed reading of *STT* in 1981.

The workshop process is set up to help the writer who is free to accept or reject suggested changes, elaborations, expansions, cuts. Usually there is a director, dramaturg, group of actors, and the writer, involved. I have worked as dramaturg on six workshops, four in NZ and two in Canberra. I don't feel the writers owed me anything. Mervyn, however, feels I am under an obligation to him for work he did on *STT* and another script, *Groundwork*.

I don't know why Mervyn was chosen from all other men suspected of rape. I wasn't part of the planning stages of it. Maybe Mervyn wasn't wearing evening dress.

Anyway, the attack took pace and the first thing I knew about it was when Mervyn rang me the next morning to pass on the news and (I suspect) to check whether I knew anything about it. Bernadette and I were just about to go to work at *Broadsheet* and I asked him if we could call round and see him.

We arrived to find Mervyn in a high state of stress and shock. There

was a longtime companion of Mervyn's there. She said, "I would know if he was lying. I'm convinced he didn't rape that woman".

I assured Mervyn I hadn't known anything about the attack until his phone call and then we went to work. I told the other workers at *Broadsheet* and a little later a press release was delivered. Naturally there was a lot of discussion. My position, I soon realised, was a minority one. I understood that. There is a certain exhilaration about women fighting back instead of sitting around listening to men ramble on about law and order. (In recent days women have been taken severely to task by the present Minister of Police. It is all our fault apparently. If we just behaved ourselves and dressed properly we would all be safe as houses.)

All hell was let loose. The phone rang constantly. Nine out of ten enquiries were for me or seeking information about me. All were from some part of the media. After the first few I didn't answer any more so they rang my agent. When she refused to discuss me or my work various highly imaginative reports appeared in papers and on radio.

In a very short space of time media people who had never read the script and probably never have, became experts on feminism, *STT*, radical lesbians, the advantages of the judge and jury system as opposed to vigilante groups, and me.

There were articles, talkbacks, television reports, interviews with Mervyn. He must have mentioned my name to police so I had a visit from them. I told the detective that NZ Drama owed much to Mervyn Thompson but that I knew little about his social life. I also

told him that I didn't know the identity of any of the attackers. I still don't. *Metro* (who else?) published a virulent piece by someone called Carol Wall who felt free to use me, my name, my work to draw her fascist conclusions and (are we surprised?) ever since then *Metro*'s editor, Warwick Roger, has exercised his frenetic and ferretty (sick) malice at my expense.

Throughout all this time I never heard from the women who had instigated the attack. There was no offer of support nor has there ever been. Sisterhood rules OK?

Mervyn gave me cause for alarm. He began delivering letters to my box personally. I knew he was capable of violent rages (see *All My Lives*, pub. 1980, Whitcoulls). There had been harsh bitterness and anger in his published comments about lesbians since the attack and I feared he would seek a confrontation. He didn't. Perhaps he was warned off. I made no secret of my anxiety to other writers in Working Title Theatre. His correspondence ended with a poem which was not only maudlin but inaccurate. I ignored this too. I try never to acknowledge bad poetry.

Everywhere I went I was asked about the attack and treated as though I had secret knowledge. There were exceptions amongst friends and media but they were few. I adopted a kind of cynical humour in dealing with these enquiries.

Many women talked publicly or privately about their experiences with Mervyn either in the theatre or at university. Some approved wholeheartedly of the action, some didn't. There were those who believed he was guilty and the attack on him justified as he would

never have been punished otherwise. There were those who thought he was guilty but attacks like this couldn't be supported and there were those who thought he wasn't guilty and the whole thing was undermining the fabric of our society as we know it.

I made no public statement except for answering a question put to me by Rebecca Simpson in a *Listener* interview. I liked and trusted Rebecca and still do but I felt I couldn't give anything more than a casually dismissive sentence or two.

Looking back I can see that I felt so affronted by it all and so angry with the women for dropping me in the mess that I didn't want to start talking because I wasn't sure I would stop. In any case I am convinced that refutations never work. What readers or listeners remember is the original comment and all the denials in the world will not erase that first impression. So I remained silent. I'm only writing this article now because I realised that there should be something on public record which states categorically that I had nothing to do with the attack.

I understand why the media latched onto me so determinedly. I was the only name they had. I was a playwright starting to make some impact on New Zealand Theatre. There was the irony of him having workshopped *SST*. I had not made a secret of the fact that I was a lesbian feminist. It was a combination of all these factors which made me a desirable target for Mervyn and the media. Basic formula stuff really.

Since 1984, various regurgitations of these events have been dredged up and passed off as either reviews or feature articles. It was

inevitable that *Metro*'s editor should publish (Jan 1987) Mervyn's version of events and that this would feature an attack on me.

It had its funny side. Warwick Roger's minion rang *Broadsheet* for my number and they (tut tut!) gave her Bernadette's then business number. *Metro* wanted a photograph of me. Bernadette (I'll pass the message on) fielded calls for a couple of days then the Big Cheese himself rang, very put out. "Do you expect us to hold up production", he thundered, "while she makes up her mind? Is she, or is she not, going to forward a photo?"

"No," replied Bernadette with not even a tremor in her voice. This, my friends, is an editor who can hand it out but cannot take it. But once he finished drumming his heels on the shagpile he managed to get a photo from somewhere and (happy day!) *Metro* came out (?) on time. From that day *Metro* has referred to Bernadette as my constant companion (true) and business manager (false). Stirring stuff eh!

I have no way of knowing whether Mervyn's version is believed but think in some quarters it probably is and there I am seen as an ungrateful, disloyal, traitorous writer who took advantage of Mervyn's generosity and talent (not to mention his feminism) and was then involved in humiliating him.

There was a lot of talk about censorship when one of Mervyn's plays was stopped from being presented at the Depot in Wellington. Because of the original attack and consequent publicity I was seen as a prime mover against him professionally and therefore a supporter of those who wanted to stop his plays being performed.

. . .

I have always stated very clearly to anyone who asked that I didn't think stopping plays achieved anything. I would prefer audiences to vote with their feet if they dislike a script or the author. I don't think this achieves much either but at least it gives a choice.

The action against Mervyn was a motivating force behind the determination to set up complaints committees at universities and it provoked massive and continuing discussion about sexual harassment on campus. There is plenty of evidence to show that harassment of female students by male lecturers had been a reality for years and years so the publicity was timely.

There has also been a lot of work in many unions to set up committees to deal with complaints of sexual harassment and this has made it easier for women to deal with offending employers or co-workers.

There have been changes in attitudes towards complaints of rape. Not a lot, but some. Always excepting the present Minister of Police of course. Rape still goes on, as the daily papers testify.

I believe that my being subject to a certain amount of distress and vilification is a small price to pay for even a slight improvement in these areas.

I don't have to like it, however and I still feel angry with the women who planned and were involved in the attack. I am highly critical of them for ignoring what would be the results for me. Perhaps they never considered there would be any. Most likely, I never came into

their calculations at all. Perhaps it is as simple as Peter Tapsell's proposition? Maybe I should wear evening dress!

First published in *Broadsheet* October 1988: 14–16.

In addition to the introduction by Lisa, and Renée's report, *Broadsheet* included opinions from two women who had responded in *Broadsheet* to the attack four years earlier, and whose responses continued to reflect the polarised reactions feminists had to the Mervyn Thompson incident.

A BLOODY LEGEND...

Kim Hunt

When I got several messages that Renée had died, I was camped by the ocean. I'd had my phone off for days. It had been a wild old night. The little camper trailer was buffeted by wind gusts and the noise of the sea was almost painful in its intensity.

The news wasn't a surprise, but that didn't reduce the dull stab of anguish and sadness. As I walked the dog along the rocky shoreline, I thought of Renée's spirit making its way to Te Rerenga Wairua, the leaping place of spirits at Cape Reinga. The waves were coming in rough and loud. Alive, so alive. I thought of the way Renée did everything, with such verve and fullness of spirit and energy. So evident even in the way she walked. Near-blindness or no, walking stick or otherwise, she always looked like she was on a mission, and you'd best stand aside.

I didn't meet Renée until about 2013. I didn't know who she was, having lived across the ditch for nearly twenty-five years. I'd left in 1981, that decade of so much political upheaval and social justice

protests in Aotearoa. Renée was in the thick of that stuff. While she was here writing her amazing plays, putting women and working-class folk centre stage, I was fighting slightly different battles in Australia; Land Rights, Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, AIDS treatments that excluded women and resulted in the deaths of several of my women friends, along with the dozens of male friends we lost. Anyway, I think Renée would have approved of my efforts.

I met her when she responded to an ad for a gardener. We bonded over roses and the like and she loved that I was a supposedly 'gun' rose pruner. Many people seem to approach the pruning task with hesitant, fearful snips here and there. A disaster for the vigour of the plants. When people gazed adoringly over Renée's fence, wondering what her secret was she'd tell them, "I treat them like weeds."

For a long time, I never let on to Renée that I was a writer, despite our regular cups of tea when I worked in her garden. That simple act, insisting that I have a cup of tea with her, meant so much to me. I've worked in the building trades much of my life. She treated me like a human and with kindness. Simple but sadly rare qualities. No one exemplified 'walking the talk' like she did. She absolutely lived her politics. In the decade that I knew Renée, she mentored three of my novels. She never charged me a cent, saying that she mentored on a sliding scale and always did one freebie each year. When my latest second-hand computer crashed, she wanted to buy me a replacement. She knew I lived on very little and had no savings, just getting by week-to-week. I was dumbstruck at her offer. I literally couldn't make words for a moment and of course, because she couldn't see, she probably wondered what this eejit was doing. Knowing the background of extreme hardship that she came from, I couldn't accept it, I just couldn't. But she was utterly genuine. I will never forget that. It was one of many, many acts of generosity and

open-handedness from her. (In the event, another caring friend, of much greater means, came to my rescue with a refurbed desktop. Where would creatives be without the consideration of others?)

I called Renée Boss. She was Boss in the garden despite my training in Horticulture and years at Wellington Parks and Reserves. Like so many 'amateur' gardeners, she had a deep knowledge and understanding of growing and I was happy to be deputised. Eventually she trusted me and deferred, mostly. She would sometimes refer to me as Kid, which I loved.

Like Renée, I'm from a working-class background. I will miss her sensibility around such things. Our voices are still a tiny minority in print. She called herself a lesbian or queer and a feminist. I'm a non-binary queer. How lucky I was to share the friendship of such a mentor.

I tried to have a quiet day when I got the news that she'd died. I was reading a book near the ocean, reminded of that fabulous quote from Rose, her mum. "Better get your nose out of that book my girl or you'll end up on Queer Street." How right she was.

Just before Renée went into hospital recently, I took down the proof copy of my latest novel. It was the only copy of the book that I had. It was one of the books she worked on with me. She held it in her hands and that big smile split her face. I'm sure she couldn't see the bloody cover, but it didn't matter. She beamed. Despite being bedridden, she was insisting on a book launch "We'll get a few bottles of wine, I'll do a speech if you like..." The woman was crocked, and getting so near the end, and still she was wanting to

support me. It broke my fucking heart. It's doing my head in as I write this.

How many writers did she help? Numerous that I know of and many, many more I have no doubt.

As my partner Biz said, "Ōtaki just didn't feel right today. It seemed off-kilter". Life goes on, but Renée's great absence has sent a wobble through our universe.

Boss, I love you and I miss you. You're a bloody legend.

First published in Kim's blog, 15 December 2023.[1]

Kim Hunt has published four crime novels under the Spiral umbrella. The first Cal Nyx novel was shortlisted in the Ngaio Awards for Best First Novel and the second long-listed for Best Novel. In 2023 Kim was recognised as an Emerging LGBTQIA+ Crime Fiction Writer, as a runner up in the 2023 Sisters in Crime USA Pride Awards.[2] Her latest novel, *The Corrector,* unlike the three in the Cal Nyx series, is set in Aotearoa.

1. https://www.kimhuntauthor.com/post/a-bloody-legend
2. https://www.kimhuntauthor.com/

Part Three

ARAPERA BLANK

1932-2002

Arapera was from Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Porou.

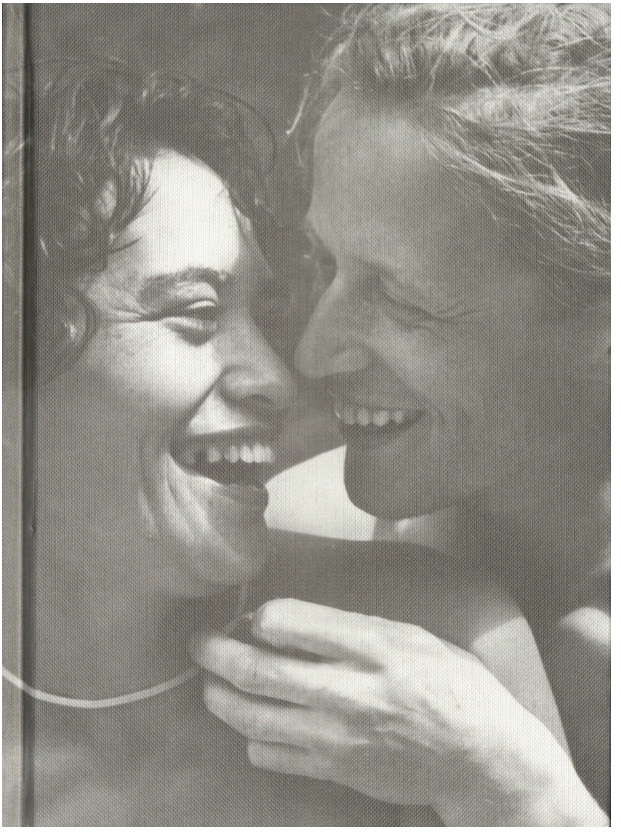
> I enjoy words that sparkle, whether they be in Māori, my mother tongue, or English. What a privilege it is to inherit and to appreciate a language, and to enjoy another equally.[1]

1. In a television interview on *Koha*, cited in *Kōmako* https://www.komako.org.nz/person/78.

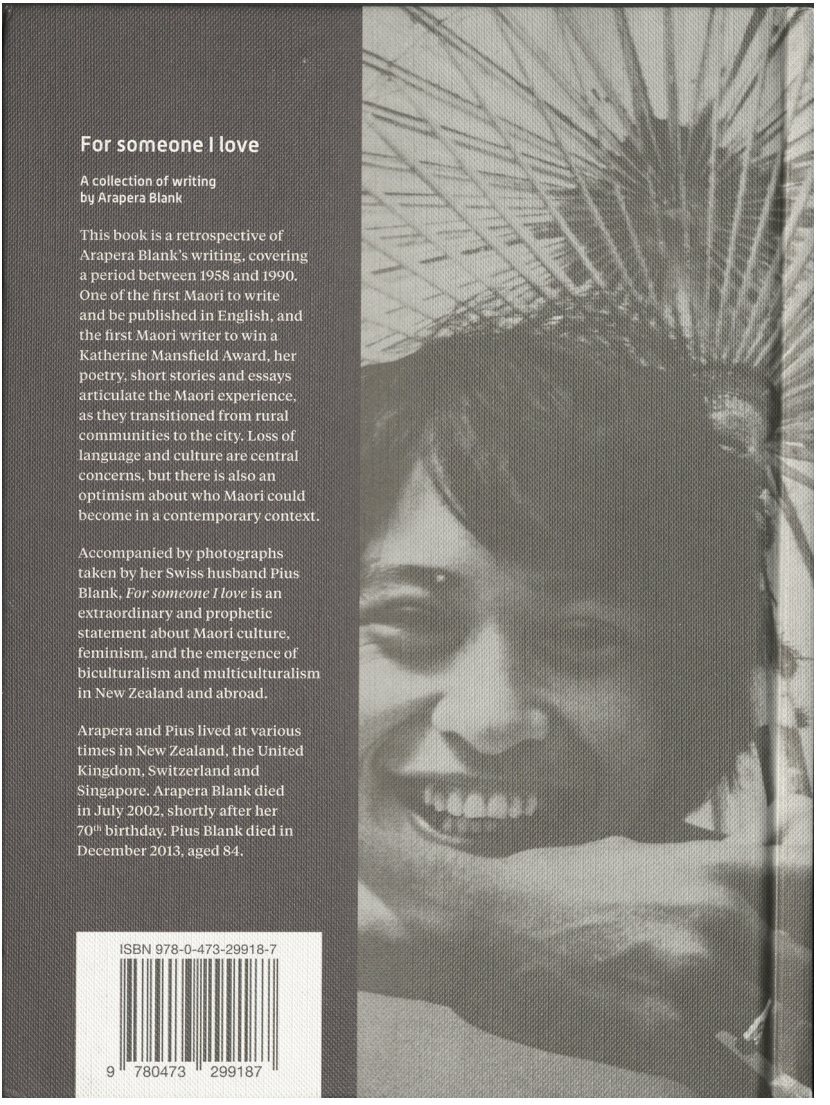


Photograph NZ Herald, *chosen to reference Renée's setting the table theme.*

For Someone I Love — A Collection of Writing by Arapera Blank, 2015, was edited by Arapera's children, Anton and Marino. The collection includes Arapera's fiction, poetry and essays from 1958-1990, with photographs by her husband Pius Blank and the one above, from the *New Zealand Herald*.



For Someone I Love front cover.



For Someone I Love back cover.

ARAPERA & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

At first, many of us at Spiral knew, or knew of, Arapera mostly as a writer and Keri Kaa's tuakana.



L-R Arapera, Keri, sister-in-law Jane. Photograph courtesy Sylvia Kaa.

. . .

Unlike Keri, then a key and much-beloved supporter of and inspiration to us, who was based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Arapera lived in Tāmaki Makaurau. But we got to know her better after she reviewed Keri Hulme's *the bone people* for the *New Zealand Listener*, in 1984. Headlined 'We Are The Bone People' it appeared alongside another significant review, by Joy Cowley. Together, those early reviews made a difference. Arapera also wrote a second review, 'Ebb and Flow of Aroha in Relationships' for the *Sunday Star Times*, and the poem 'Bone Song', for the two Keris.

Keri was one of the founders of Haeata, the Māori women artists collective that created the 1985 *Herstory Diary* and created a series of exhibitions, starting with *Karanga Karanga* at the City Gallery, and Arapera was a founder of the Waiata Koa collective that organised another *Karanga Karanga,* at the Fisher Gallery, now Te Tuhi, in Tāmaki Makaurau. The collective's name, which referred to the dawn chorus, was given by Arapera and Keri's mother, Hohi Pine Whaanga-Kaa.[1]

When Spiral was planning its trip to the Feminist Book Fair in Oslo, in 1986, we invited Keri Kaa to join the group. We knew it would be very special to have her with us. But Keri suggested we invite Arapera instead, so we did, and Heather McPherson later wrote 'Travelling with Arapera', about how very special it was.

1. A third *Karanga Karanga* was shown at the Gisborne Museum and Arts Centre, now Tairāwhiti Museum.

ARAPERA & KERI HULME: THE EBB AND FLOW OF AROHA IN RELATIONSHIPS

Arapera Blank

I felt privileged to be asked to review *The Bone People*, and yet rather fearful that my bones wouldn't respond sympathetically to the call of the bones of Keri Hulme's whanau.

But the introduction was so explicit in its feeling of suspense and tragedy, that the fear was dispelled. And my only anxiety was that the magic and richness of the language which sustained the sad music of humanity that this novel portrays, would reduce me to a tearful mess by the early hours of the morning. It is a tremendous story — sad, humorous, passionate, forgiving of human frailties, though not excusing of them.

The home of *The Bone People* is a harsh environment of South Island beaches, prone to the awesome mood of wind and weather. In my opinion, an environment suited to the struggle for sanity and living despite the bounty of the sea and shore. Each of the central characters has a dilemma — that of fitting into the main-stream of acceptability and accepted norms of behaviour. The style of narration is

like the human mind — multi-fold and multi-purpose and, therefore, changes in rhythm and pace, according to the mood or situation that is unfolded. Thus the central characters — the woman, the boy, the man — are introduced with optimism, yet sadness, and a resolving of conflict.

> ...Creation and change, destruction and change. New marae from the old marae, a beginning from an end.

There is a feeling that something terrible has happened. And it is the shifting of the end to the beginning that makes the style like the human mind. We human beings rationalise fears in order to cushion blows, and we evoke pain and joy in a single thought so that we retain our sanity. The term that encompasses such feeling is aroha. And Keri Hulme has allowed aroha to ebb and flow in this drama of human relations with such compelling musical prose that I read on, having started at 6.30pm, and finished at 1.30am.

The woman, Kerewin Holmes, retreats to a tower-like structure of her own creation, on a lonely beach. But despite the unlimited freedom and space in which to create, she can't paint, so the canvases lie waiting. For solace, she plays her guitar, rises to the call of the sea and wind, goes fishing, goes to the local pub for a beer. Because of her lifestyle the local community think she's odd, difficult to compartmentalise because, despite her Pakeha features she doesn't fit the mould, and despite a certain Maoriness about her, she doesn't belong to the Maori world either!

. . .

Into her carefully constructed sanctuary crashes a boy, Simon P Gillayley. Having damaged his foot, he cannot escape. Kerewin is thus forced out of her isolation by the needs of this child. This self-imposed isolation is the decision of an artist. But the nagging irritations of aroha surface with the advent of Simon P Gillayley, a pakeha, a piece of jetsam with the "mysterious eyes of the sea".

Kerewin, imagining that Simon's father is pakeha, "big and blonde...dumb and boisterous", is stunned when she meets instead, the Maori who boozed and swore monotonously in the local pub. The web of relationships widen further to include his other whanaunga who share in Simon's upbringing, thus catapulting Kerewin back into the wider world.

Joseph P Gillayley is half-Maori, but belongs to the Maori world because of his upbringing. Kerewin is one-eighth and yet shares the joys and sorrows of both worlds — Maori and pakeha.

Both want to escape the obligations of their heritage because both have suffered because of the demands that such a heritage entail. Joseph is bitter about the loss of his wife and son. Kerewin is frustrated that her escape has not brought fulfilment.

Just as Joseph finds Kerewin an unusual woman, so Kerewin senses that there is more than boozing and swearing to the father that is Joseph.

> That's an odd child. And an odd man.

Why the wariness and the drawn-eyed look of the child?

Why the bitterness corrupting the man's face?

Simon, the piece of jetsam, the mute, is as mysterious a character as the ocean from which he was rescued by his foster–father Joseph. Like the mythological culture hero Maui-Tikitiki-O-Taranga, whose ancestor Tama-Nui-Te-Rangi also salvaged him from the dangers of the deep, Simon is mischievous, a thief; and like Maui, he goes to extraordinary lengths to show his gratitude and prove his worth to people who he feels have become part of him. But unlike Maui Simon shows extraordinary loyalty, particularly in his relationship with his foster-parent.

Kerewin is suspicious that Joseph is responsible for the damage done to Simon's body, and puzzled as to why the brutality. For, in her presence, the man is considerate and gentle, showing genuine affection for the boy. A terrible sadness and a sense of guilt overwhelm her when the reality of Joseph's behaviour is revealed — sadness because Kerewin has grown fond of both people, and guilt because she ignored the premonition of her bones.

What makes *The Bone People* unique is that it is a re-creation of a bi-cultural society with all its facets of differences and similarities, narrated with sensitivity, and understanding. In fact, what is so striking is that the people in the story are unselfconscious creations. Keri Hulme allows her characters to find themselves a place in their own time. What is her strength is that with all the divergent views that make up her people, she does not presume to judge the right-

ness or wrongness of a person's way of life. Keri Hulme realises that we, like her, are *The Bone People* who share the pain and joy of aroha.

Tena ano koe whanaunga!
He putiputi to pukapuka.
No reira e hoa ma,
Haramai, katohia!
Hello once again cousin
Your book is a flower.
Therefore, friends,
Come and pluck it.

First published in the *Sunday Star Times* 24 June 1984.

BONE SONG

Arapera Blank

Ki tonu au nei he koiwi ke,
Na, roto i enei, koiwi ke,
Huri noa au nei ki hea, ki hea.

Te-hiku-o-te-ika
Upoko-o-te-ika
Ki-muri-o-te-hiku
Wharekauri-tua-atu

Mahana mai te powhiri a tena
E ara ra! He tangata peka mai!

Te taea te uiui e! Te taea te uiui e!
Tatou ra e noho marara nei
Koia nei ra toku whakapono

Ma Keri me Keri me to whanau
Na Arapera Hineira, kua ngaro
nei tetahi o ona niho tunga.

Runga ngakau koa.

Other bones lie deep in mine,
Within these lie other bones,
It matters not where I turn.

To-the-tail-of-the-fish
to-the-head-of-the-fish
Or curving–behind–to
Wharekauri beyond.

a song of warmth from each one
sings
You must rise, for people come!

Who dare ask, deny who comes
for they who sing
are part of me!

Those of us in pieces drifting
Here is my bone-deep song.

For Keri and Keri and the bone people
From Arapera Hineira who has
lost one of her eye teeth.
With love.



The so-far only known photograph of the two Keris together, in 2005 at Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, at a seminar to celebrate 20 years since the bone people *won the Booker Prize.*

'Bone Song' was first published in *Ngā Kōkako Huataratara: The Notched Plumes of the Kōkako* Waiata Koa Trust, 1986/1995: 30–31; and in Arapera Blank, *For Someone I Love: A Collection of Writing* Anton Blank Ltd 2016: 28.

TRAVELLING WITH ARAPERA

Heather McPherson

Spiral organised New Zealand representation at three international feminist book fairs. In 1984 we helped performer and writer Bub Bridger get to the first one in London, with the biggest suitcase I've ever seen.[1] *In 1988, Irihapeti Ramsden and I travelled to the third fair, in Barcelona. Here, Heather writes about travelling with Arapera in 1986, first to the Commonwealth Literature Conference at Laufen and then to join a larger group at the Second International Feminist Book Fair in Oslo and on to Stockholm.*

Six weeks after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown, Arapera Blank, Marian Evans and I flew to Laufen, in the south of Germany, on the border with Austria, for the Commonwealth Writers' Conference.

1. Bub Bridger (1924–2009) https://www.komako.org.nz/person/83 https://wellywoodwoman.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/bub-bridger.html



Heather on German train 1987 (photo: Arapera Blank or Marian Evans)

Marian, artist, writer, film–maker and one of the Spiral Collective who published *the bone people,* had organised the trip with Irihapeti Ramsden; after Laufen we'd meet with a larger Spiral group — Irihapeti, Jacquie Sturm, Patricia Grace, Jacquie's daughter Stephanie Baxter — at the Feminist Book Fair in Oslo and then travel to Stockholm. Arapera, one of the earliest published Māori woman writers, was also an early Katherine Mansfield Award winner; I was a founding member of the original *Spiral* magazine collective and a Christchurch Arts Festival poetry prize winner, and with Marian represented Spiral's Pākehā and lesbian feminist strand.

Because of Chernobyl and puzzling governmental silences over what to do for nuclear fallout we and the Laufen organisers had doubted if the conference should go ahead. But after a day of flurried transits, here we three were on the deserted platform of a tiny locked-up station in a darkening countryside, no sign of a train, sharing a smattering of the dominant language, and not only *not* in Laufen but on the wrong side of the border.

. . .

Marian, who's wonderful at sustaining a cheery optimism punctuated by outbreaks of chuckles and a blessed capacity for acting capably in tense situations, disappeared to find a telephone. Arapera and I, who had met only at the start of the trip, walked up and down the platform chatting desultorily, I wheeling my smallish handy-sized case. Did Arapera haul her three times larger, heavier suitcase? I don't remember, but on first seeing her luggage I did remember having some twenty years back lugged a similar-sized suitcase to Sydney aboard the *Oriana*; I eyed Arapera's with some alarm.

Marian reported back about trains: none tonight. She went to find us a bed. Darkness thickened, as did a prickle or two of apprehension. A friend and I had once slept on the concrete floor of a station the size of a bus shelter and the worst that happened was being woken by a rude passing express. But that had been in — Gore, Bulls? This platform would be chillier, but Austria was pretty safe... wasn't it? *These days?*

Night noises flared, shook the grasses, scuffled down the tracks. A bird cried. Arapera wandered past absent-mindedly. Always attractive, smartly dressed, at times elegant, with a mischievous, conspiratorial sense of humour, she stopped and gazed into the darkness down the tracks.

This, she said thoughtfully, reminds me of Rangitukia.

I blinked, stared, blinked. I knew Arapera had grown up in Rangitukia, we'd swapped stories and figured connections. I knew some of her whānau as Anglican Church dignitaries; some I'd met at Bible Class camps and marae stays, with one I'd taught Sunday

School. But I was suddenly transported into one of those complex moments in which you learn something unpredictable about another person and yourself.

Here was a compatriot who carried *home*inside her in a way I did not, could not, and indeed, had tried to escape from, let alone trying to find similarities between us. In this locale I'd think of as inescapably Other, my companion, born and raised in a small rural settlement a hemisphere and several languages away, saw this slice of once-powerful European empire as *like home? Home as childhood home, or home town? Or home, our mutual country? Could I claim that?* I couldn't have, wouldn't have so claimed it, even now.

But I had begun to sense another quality in the silence, a different loading, neither strange nor scary, simply rural. *An agricultural silence?* I could smell soil, not fresh-ploughed, fresh-cut, fresh-manured, just — earthy. Life moved here in its cycles, its paddocks — well, they'd say fields — beside the railway, in bushes, trees. Night enlarged, hung with veils of non–threatening silence I was still reluctant to call *friendly* since I wouldn't define *home* as necessarily friendly, and I didn't know how Arapera felt about *home*. But if this place had emanated a possibly risky atmosphere it did so only marginally. I was recalling the travel guide story I'd skimmed on the train: how in a village in this vicinity the hymn *Silent Night* had originated, composed not, as was sometimes claimed, by Mozart, but by the Obendorf village schoolteacher and choirmaster.

Was that what Arapera meant? A comparison, smallness, isolation, between her township and this one: a shared possibly spiritual quality in the villagers' lives? Could that comparison have been made without Arapera's prompt?

The night, this site, didn't seem to emanate an especially holy silence. The stars were just visible, 'calm' maybe, but not exactly 'bright'?

Arapera must have sensed something of my dilemma. She grinned. Quiet, she said.

I grinned then too, feeling easier, though still with some of the deference Pākehā can feel when tangata whenua insights surprise and delight us out of narrow cultural assumptions. (For example, once at a dawn ceremony to celebrate a waka launch, a youngish Māori/Pākehā group stood in front of me. Activity had slowed, darkness was thinning. Suddenly the karanga rang out. All voices stopped. Right on time, murmured one of the Māori man. His Pākehā friend shot his arm up and peered at his watch: What's the time? His Māori friend chuckled, paused, chuckled again and spread his hands towards a just–greying sky: The right time.)

Marian found us a taxi and an inn. Not, alas, dinner; some rule or law had laid down that no food be served after a certain time, of course, hours ago. This was more like *home* and the pretzels I chewed hungrily were just as tasteless and salty as *home* pretzels.

As mentioned we were to meet in Oslo with the larger Spiral group. Marian left to visit relatives and after brief stops in Munich, and later West Berlin, Arapera and I travelled up through central Germany by train.

Castle spires wavered in misty hills, hot grubby yellow layers hung over the valley: fog, smog, or fallout? Silence washed gently between

us. In Munich we had visited Dachau; a melee of flashbacks: war films, histories, books, photos, sixties bomb shelters, Chernobyl, still threshed in my head. I wrote journal poem drafts and teetered over details like the photographs of Dachau camp inmates with their guards, posed like schools or sports teams, except for the prisoners' striped uniforms and the scratched-out faces of the guards. For me and doubtless many of my generation, the immense threat that had been Germany still reverberated, forever the heavily marked site in which nightmares still happened, through which some of our families and loved ones had lived, on the edges of which we'd grown up. By 1986 I'd read quite a lot; I've read more since then. Incidents during the trip would prompt me to wonder: *does — and if it does, how, does a country change its population's historically-sanctioned or vilified political beliefs?*

Because of Chernobyl we censored our food. We saw few vegetables in Laufen and avoided all except the potatoes our innkeepers assured us had been stored under cover, in barns. One dinner time Marian thought the mushrooms tasted strange; I left them, more because I accepted Marian's judgment than because I was convinced of the strange taste; all the food tasted a little strange: I came home with a chronic stomach ache and an eventual diagnosis of spastic colon possibly caused by erratic meals and strong European coffee. Arapera who, as I did, liked her glass of wine, said it would anaesthetise any radiation; a good excuse for a refill, if of doubtful effectiveness. On city street corners the signs claimed: *Oranges from South America.* But even if the street vendors originated there we still avoided the oranges.

A third entity began to infiltrate Arapera's and my travel partnership. When she knelt to contemplate and extract her day's outfit, the open lid of her suitcase seemed to expose a treasure

chest, or glory box, or dress-up chest. But I came to think of that suitcase as that damn chest of drawbacks. After jostling through crowded carriages, finding a seat to match the ticket and metamorphosising back into a civilised being, I'd remember. Uh-oh, *Arapera's suitcase*. She might still be trying to woman-handle it up the steep narrow steps to the carriage; I must bully it aboard while trying not to re-wrench a painful wrist (diagnosed in Laufen as muscle-strain and dosed with painkillers) into a throbbing injury.

In West Berlin we visited different icons: Arapera chose the Brandenburg Gates, I chose the Berlin Wall, its guard towers and artists' murals. Continuing north again, we shared a compartment with a schoolteacher, her young daughter and for part of the journey, two youths who argued loudly, banged the fold-down shelves and generally acted in a loutish manner. I scowled, the schoolteacher, a mild woman with a nannyish air, sat eyes down and mouth twisted as if she were trying to smile over disapproval or trying not to smile, but she did try to distract her daughter's concerned sideways looks by focussing on the child's story book.

Arapera, dozing beside me, peered briefly at the rowdy youths, shut her eyes and presumably shut them out. I sneaked the odd envious look at her, then realised ah, the perfect tactic: *don't dignify unwanted behaviour with attention.*

I began to talk to the child. *May I see your book? Do you like dogs?* The youths stepped up their gabble but the schoolteacher with fluent English and an understated accent kept her focus, and also began to ask questions, making little exclamations of surprised delight over, for example, *New Seeland*. Thwarted, the boys exited to the corridor. Arapera woke and joined the conversation, charming both child and

woman; Arapera found in her handbag a New Zealand-inscribed silver fern token. More smiles. The schoolteacher turned graciously to Arapera.

And where have you come from? she asked.

Arapera's eyelashes flickered, her mouth moved, stilled, she glanced towards the window. I winced. *Should I say something, do an intervention?*

Graciously Arapera replied: I'm an original New Zealander. We say *from Aotearoa*.

It took some uncomprehending moments before the woman, flustered and apologetic, made effusive amends: Oh, oh, I'm sorry, so sorry, I thought you must be — you were from somewhere in Europe. Like...she searched for comparisons... like, Spanish?

Yes, said Arapera. I've been guessed as Spanish before. In Europe.

Then I remembered Arapera and her husband had visited his people in Switzerland; later Arapera confirmed that Europeans would ask if — among other identities — she were Spanish, Italian, Roumanian, gypsy. I did wonder if her fashionable womanly dresses beside my deliberately casual top and trousers might suggest to others that being differently outfitted we didn't have a shared origin. By this date, many Western lesbian feminist women travelling together internationally wore androgynous clothing and were, recognisably,

couples; similarly dressed women in the street searched each other's eyes to check if the outward encoding matched the internal connection. Lack of make-up was another mark of identity but markers could change; eighties 'lipstick lesbians' differentiated themselves from seventies lesbian feminists and heterosexual women by mixing styles.

In Oslo, Arapera was happy to join up with the larger Spiral group. We had had difficulties with our different concepts of time and timetables: I wishing to see and do as much as possible in the time available, Arapera's continuity being much more leisurely-paced, particularly escorting that suitcase.

When we visited Stockholm's Ethnographic Museum to see the *Stockholm cloak* to which Irihapeti introduced us — a significant cloak collected by Joseph Banks on Captain Cook's first expedition to New Zealand — the museum arranged a welcome ceremony. Arapera gave the karanga.

I remember now that ringing powerful call that can set hair prickling and tears rising in tangata whenua and manuhiri all over the globe. The emotion raised and shimmering in that smallish crowded room, left us, as Irihapeti said, with 'not a dry eye in the house'. Young as she was, in that museum context, Arapera was our kuia. Her presence, muffled for me by being seen always in relation to non-indigenous culture, here shone magnificently.



At Stockholm's Ethnographic Museum 1986, with the kaitaka.L–R Jacquie Sturm, Patricia Grace, Irihapeti Ramsden, Arapera Blank. From Irihapeti Ramsden's collection.

Living in two cultures is not without costs in both; Arapera's life, her stories and poems, her karanga in Stockholm, were made by a unique person. That Spiral trip, its brief companionship gave me a glimpse of just how special she was.

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INNOCENCE OF SIN

Arapera Blank

Wawata was waiting for the bus, like everyone else, delaying going home to the smell of cowshit and yelling parents. She leaned against the shop verandah post, carved and worn to a shiny brown by horses, and people rubbing their buttocks against it.

The half-red, half-yellow ancient bus finally clanked to a halt right in front of Wawata. The waiting kids danced and screeched.

Ya ya! Ugly hakari bus! Ugly hakari bus!

He did that on purpose!

What?

That bloody tin-leg bus driver. Nearly ran over my feet!

Wawata shot up from under, grabbing the soles of her feet.

You made me skid, you peg-leg!

If you had two legs like my gammy one you won't feel nothing. Kaitoa!

Sit somewhere else. This is a bus-stop!

The high-school kids piled out. The new girl was first off, followed by at least six heavies. Wawata watched longingly.

Neat figure ne Wawata.

Not bad. Skirt too short. I can see her pants.

Yeah, that's what they're after. Kaore e roa. Won't be long!

No it won't. Know what my brother said? She's only been here two weeks and guess what? She's already started leaving her window open at night.

Wawata sighed.

Yeah, that's bad. Asking for it.

The six heavy hopefuls swaggered behind, down her road. The dancing and screeching started again.

Ya ya ya you going the wrong way.

One big heavy about-turned, clenching his fist.

I'll kick your bloody arses.

The chanting continued, the kids knowing no harm would come to them. The bold ones played follow-the-leader behind the heavies. The rest picked up the mail, and the bread, and scattered home.

Wawata's teacher appeared, just as the bus rattled off, unlocked his bicycle from the fence, and wheeled it round almost onto her feet, just as she stepped onto the gravel with the mail and the bread. He grinned. She looked down, suddenly shy. He made girls feel like that.

Gidday Wawata. Edged his front wheel closer. Gee you're getting big.

As if he didn't know!

Looking good too.

She kicked the front wheel. God, it hurt. Sweat pin-pricked. Hot feelings stirred. She fled home.

Wawata changed into her milking clothes, put on her gumboots, reached the cowshed dreaming of being a new girl.

You're late. Wasting time at the shop again. Her brother went on. Hanging around the shop is kid's stuff. You're getting too old for that. You want to watch out for those high-school boys. They think they're shit-hot!

Wawata cut in on him. You know what. They're all after that new girl. She thinks she's shit-hot too.

Rua responded. They got no show. I know. I hear everything in the pub. They're not the only rams round here!

Her father appeared. The talking stopped. He too nagged about her lateness.

Come straight home. No need for you to collect the mail and the bread. Leave it to the young ones. Last summer it was reading in the cream stand. Now it's dawdling somewhere else. Next year it's boarding school for you, girl. No distractions there!

He always spoilt things. Just when Rua was treating her like a grown-up he had to talk about boarding school. She hosed out the cow-muck. She couldn't wait until the milking finished.

You know what, Rua? You should go somewhere else to work. Dad treats us all the same. He's scared of us growing up.

Nah. I'm all right. He doesn't mind if I go to the pub. Engari koe. Girls are different. They get pregnant. That's where that new girl should be too. In that school you're going to. No chance to muck around there!

Milking over, they plodded home. Wawata musing.

It's a wonder they're not scared of the dog.

What dog?

That Pakeha's. She's Maori all over.

He is her dad! He adopted her.

Oh yeah. That's right. Hmmm! Probably a mean little runt like the owner. Ask your mate if it bites. She should know. She takes them milk every morning.

Course it does. And yaps! It's a fox terrier.

Hmmm. I'll choke the runt if it picks on me. Rua's boot swung out as though kicking a goal.

You like her too, don't you? Wawata asked, suddenly suspicious there was more action than the pub talk.

Not me, but I know one bull who does. And he's bloody well married. That bastard gets away with it!

Wawata pretended she knew. She pounced on a name. But Rua wouldn't say. He enjoyed leading her on.

A voice boomed out. Hey Rua reri nga kai! Hurry up before the food gets cold!

Slurping sounds. Scraping plates. Scrumptious dinner. Wawata drying dishes. Older sister washing up. Her turn to gossip.

You know what? There's a new girl here!

She's not new. She's two weeks old!

Smartie. You know what I mean. She's pinched my boyfriend.

Aw! That's why you're still here. You told Mum you got a job lined up in Wellington. I bet there's plenty neat ones down there.

Don't want to talk about Wellington. Don't want you getting your head full of sex. You're too young. So is she. Only fifteen! I'm eighteen. And I've finished school!

What a waste of time talking to older brother and sister. Never really said too much about you-know-what. Not like her mate. Didn't mind what they talked about.

You know what, Manawanui? Good of that Pakeha to adopt her. Fancy going all over the country with a black kid. What's her name?

Mahiti. She's a darkie all right. Bet they didn't do it for aroha. More like they wanted a servant for nothing. She's from the welfare. Those kids get hell from some of our own. It must be worse with a Pakeha!

Don't think so. Tell you what. She's got lovely dresses. And she's allowed to go to the pictures on her own. Neat eh! Dad won't let me.

It wasn't long before the new year arrived. So did the anticipated misery of boarding school. First month terrible. Rules, regulations, etiquette. Prayer before breakfast and dinner. School not bad. Six shelves of leather-bound volumes of Dickens, Shakespeare, Thackeray, Wordsworth, Tennyson, bequeathed to the school by its literary patrons. Marvellous stuff if you knew how.

Older sister made her way to Wellington. Hoha from playing the dignified whaiaipo, but kept the bush telegraph operating. At long

last she broke the silence of the unrepeatable, though not without a little drama.

Wawata was called into the principal's office.

Sit down, little one. I have a letter here from your sister. I do not approve of its contents, and neither will your parents. I will let you have it because we in this church school believe in making our students feel at home by keeping in touch with their families. But it is my Christian duty to tell you that we do not condone swearing, whether orally or in writing — waving the filthy epistle as though to purify the air — and we do not approve of mentioning the misfortunes of the fallen!

Wawata stared at her shoes. Yes, Miss White. I'm sorry. I'll tell her not to say dirty things — inwardly busting to get her hands on the juicy letter.

She felt a lump in her throat. Swallowed hard to stop from crying.

Well here you are, said Miss White in gentler tones. It's my duty to say these things. Write to her on Sunday and show me your reply.

Wawata stumbled out clutching her letter.

Dear Wawata,

Settling down in the big smoke. I miss Mum's yelling and Dad's preaching. But I don't miss you know who! You might be snotty-nosed but you were quite right. This place is neat. I've joined a basketball team. We play in the mornings on Saturday and watch rugby in the afternoons. We follow a neat rugby team. And I've met this really big, handsome Maori from the South Island. Doesn't talk Maori at all. They don't down there. Tell you what though, he talks real good English. Not like at home, half-Maori, half-Pakeha. We all belong to this neat Maori club and we're raising money for a new marae in the Hutt. Saturdays and Sundays are just great. Sports, then the pub with the boys, then to the club to eat pork bones and puha and takakau. Then the rest of the evening for you-know-what. That's all you get. Ha! Ha! Ha! My big secret.

Guess what's happening up home. You know that girl, Mahiti? Well she doesn't mahiti now. She's too hapu. And I say kaitoa for pinching my boyfriend. But I'll say this much for pokokohua. It wasn't him! It was guess who! That ram of a schoolteacher of yours. I hope that baby is blacker and uglier than he is, the randy bee! You know what, that Pakeha father of hers made him sign a paper that it is his baby. It isn't even born yet! But I still hope it's his. They've sent her away, the poor kid. Up north somewhere. All bullshit if you ask me! Every cow and bull knows anyway. Your aunties and our mother are really going on about it. 'Ka mau te wehi' from one house to the next, the hypocrites. I bet they even carry on gossiping after the ten commandments and all that on Sundays.

Never mind, kiddo. You keep yourself good and clean in your mind. You can't get hapu that way.

Arohanui,

From your one-and-only big, big sister.

P.S. Don't tell Dad I'm going to the pub and don't tell Mum I've got a boyfriend. Don't want her kehuas spying on me!

Dear Manawanui,

Thanks a lot for your letter. I hope you are having a really good time, and looking after yourself.

I really like this school. We have a lovely principal. She is a good, Christian lady with a gentle voice. She's always wearing lovely clothes. I've made lots of lovely friends, mostly from up home. Some of them are really clever. We read a lot of Shakespeare on Saturdays. We're going to start up a drama club. Stops us from getting into mischief.

There's not much news around here, but I have to tell you that my principal says you mustn't write swear words or tell me the home gossip. She says you shouldn't write about the misfortunes of others.

Must sign off now. Please send me some lollies and fruit. We are allowed to have them.

Arohanui,

God bless you,

From your little sister.

P.S. Parekareka ki a au o korero. Ki te koingo atu hoki ki te wa kainga.

The letter passed inspection. A brief, polite reply arrived, two months later. 'Expect a parcel of goodies' cheered Wawata up immensely. She had expected silence. Now she couldn't wait. It arrived on a late spring afternoon. The goodies were unwrapped in front of the principal. There was no note. She and her friends feasted, at midnight, on chocolates wrapped in gold paper. Sheer heaven!

Here, Wawata whispered to her best mate. You have the box for your hankies.

Gee, thanks, Wawata. It's really pretty.

Wawata sat in the classroom, dreaming of Christmas, and her sister in Wellington. Her desk mate nudged her.

You're lucky you got me for a true honest friend. You know what was at the bottom of that box? Here! She shoved ten dollars wrapped in a letter over to Wawata. Lucky beast!

Dear Wawata,

Hope you really enjoy this parcel, kiddo. Best way to collect mates. Just like us back home hanging around those kids with the best lunches. You've got some jail-house there. Fancy reading your letters. You poor kid! But at least you didn't get strapped all because of my big trap. You know what I think? It's all rupahu about Christian duty and all that. They are just all ihu those Christian ladies. And I bet she's never had a man! They're usually maroke types who are in charge of those church schools. No sense of humour. No aroha. Karakia, karakia, karakia, all the time. Just like our father. Mind you, you can't call him maroke with all of us kids running around tutu haere ana!

I'm busting to tell you, they were all wrong up home. The bush telegraph did it this time! Guess-a-thousand-times-who-the-baby's-father-is?

To go back to the beginning. You know where Mahiti had her baby? In

the maternity home near Auckland, where our Aunty Kere is nursing. Well, she helped to deliver Mahiti's baby. Take that! What a small world! And I won't keep you guessing any longer than I have to. The baby is not your black teacher's. IT HAS GOT REAL BLUE EYES!

And guess what else! Your teacher lost his job. And that pokohua Pakeha father of Mahiti has sold his garage and gone up north too!

See you at Christmas time. Sorry I said those awful things about Mahiti. I've really fallen for my big, big man.

Look after yourself,

Arohanui and lots of kisses,

From your one-and-only big, big sister.

Glossary

hakari — orange (the colour of fish roe)

kaitoa — it serves you right!

Engari koe. Unlike you.

hapu — pregnant

Pakeha — a New Zealander of European descent

Reri nga kai. The food is ready.

hoha — bored

whaiaipo — lover

marae — a complex of buildings, and an open area where Maori gather for formal greetings, ceremonies and meetings.

puha — a leafy, bitter vegetable

takakau — unleavened bread

hapu — pregnant

kaitoa — it serves you right

pokokohua — an insult: bastard, arsehole

ka mau te wehi — how terrible!

kehua — ghost

Parekareka ki a au o korero. Ki te koingo atu hoki ki te wa kainga. I love hearing from you. I really miss home.

rupahu — lies
ihu — nosey
maroke — dry, arid
aroha — love
karakia — prayers
tutu haere ana — getting into mischief

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Arapera. Photograph Pius Blank.

WHAT CAN I?

Arapera Blank

What can I
Say to you who bore me,
Fed me on Mother's milk,
washed and caressed my flesh,
Hugged me when I ached
for no reason at all,
when I yelled or screamed?

What can I
say to you who listened for my
heartbeat to make sure that
I live, breathed, and one day
gave you pleasure with
a little smile, a
contented nod of my head?

And do you remember?
Now that I am grown too big
for you to nurse at your breast,
too big for you to scold or

give advice to,
That once you wept for my life,
prayed for me that I grow up
To remember you with love?

For I do,
That I owe you so much
for years of sweating in the kitchen,
on heavy feet too tired to
remember even, that once,
You were young, full of
excitement to be young and alive
to every note of the throated
bird that sang of an endless
Summer.

And I know
That I cannot take unto myself all
your aches and pains
Soothe your tired limbs
For you are too proud
now to want me to
Put your feet on a soft cushion
Hold your head when it aches.

And sometimes I have
This desire to do unto others,
All that you have done for me.
And whenever someone does
something like unto you
To me,
I want to
Give them the whole world
Until my feet feel the aches

That you felt,
My body labour as yours did,
And my heart be forever
Open unto all.

And I hope
That it's not just a dream.

'What can I?' is republished with kind permission from *For Someone I Love — A Collection of Writing by Arapera Blank* 2015: 58-59. Transcribed by Annie Collins.

Part Four

GLADYS GURNEY, SAJ

1934-2024



Saj, probably by Heather McPherson and courtesy Heather McPherson Estate. Unknown date.

Gladys Gurney, Saj — an abbreviation of 'Sagittarius' — was working class pākehā lesbian mother and grandmother, a central participant in the Christchurch women's art movement as well as in many other projects associated with the flowering of feminism in Christchurch in the 1970s.

Of the well-known women's arts and literary projects, Saj worked on the *Spiral* journal, the lesbian feminist *Circle* magazine and, as an administrator and contributor, on the ground-breaking Christchurch women's art environment, first proposed by Joanna Margaret Paul, at the Canterbury Society of Arts gallery in 1977. Later in 1977 she was one of seven contributors to Joanna's *A Season's Diaries*. She also wrote lyrics for an all-women band and poems, some of which Spiral published in her collection, *Amazon Songs*;[1] and contributed to the Miriam Saphira-edited *Lavender Annual*.[2]

1. Saj *Amazon Songs* Spiral 1987 https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/amazon-songs
2. *Lavender Annual* compiled by Miriam Saphira Papers Inc 1989.

SAJ & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

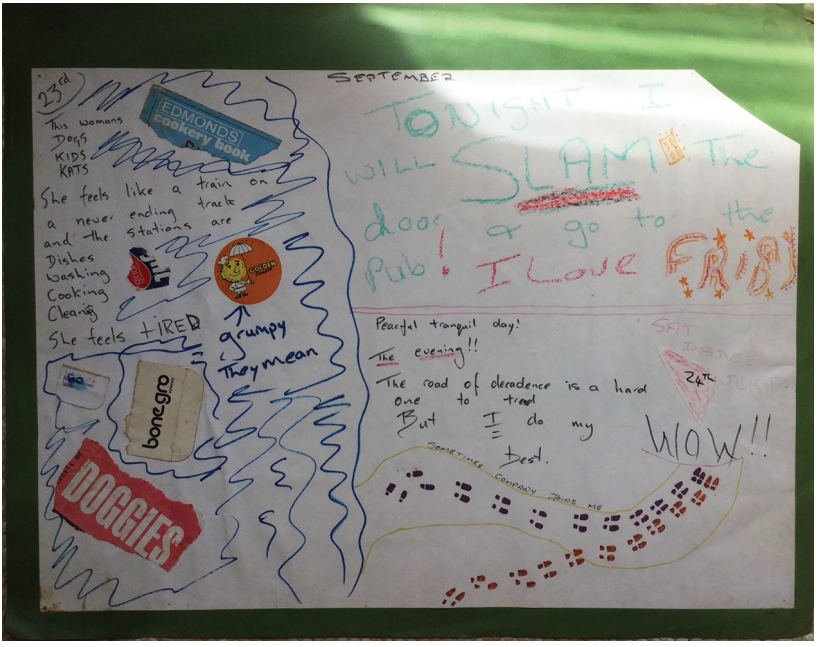
Saj contributed to Joanna Margaret Paul's *A Season's Diaries* 1977-78, the precursor to the Women's Gallery. Her *A Season's Diaries* work, also exhibited at *The Joyous, Chaotic Place: He Waiata Tangi-a-Tahu*, Mokopōpaki's and Spiral's exhibition to celebrate Heather McPherson and her peers, in 2017, is now held in the Alexander Turnbull Library.[1]

Spiral published Saj's *Amazon Songs*, with an introduction by Heather McPherson, in 1987. It was launched at Circa Theatre in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington in December that year. Recordings from the two-day launch are held at the Alexander Turnbull Library.[2]

1. Not yet catalogued in 2025.
2. Saj introduces her work and reads on OHC-003762 and OHC-003789.

‘A SEASON’S DIARIES’ (1977)

Saj



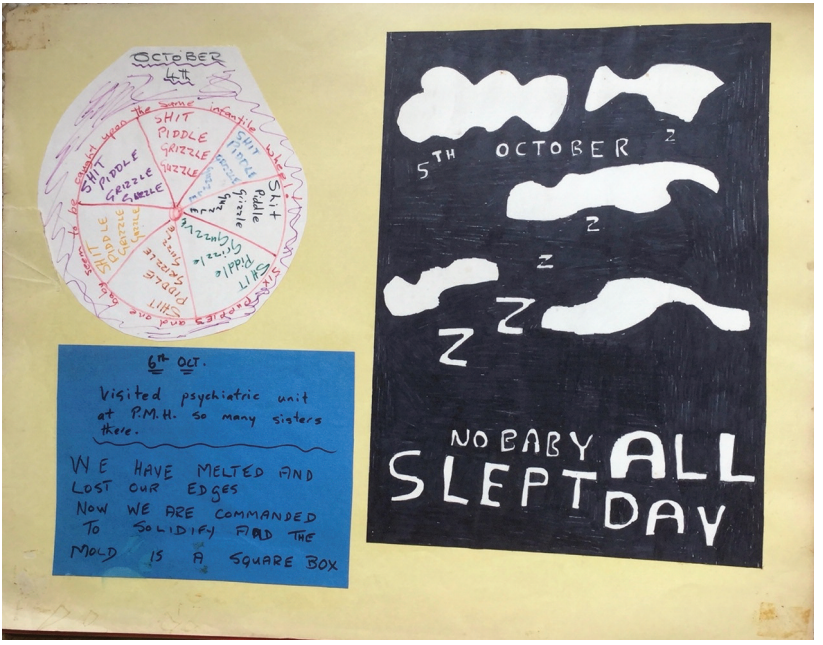
23 September



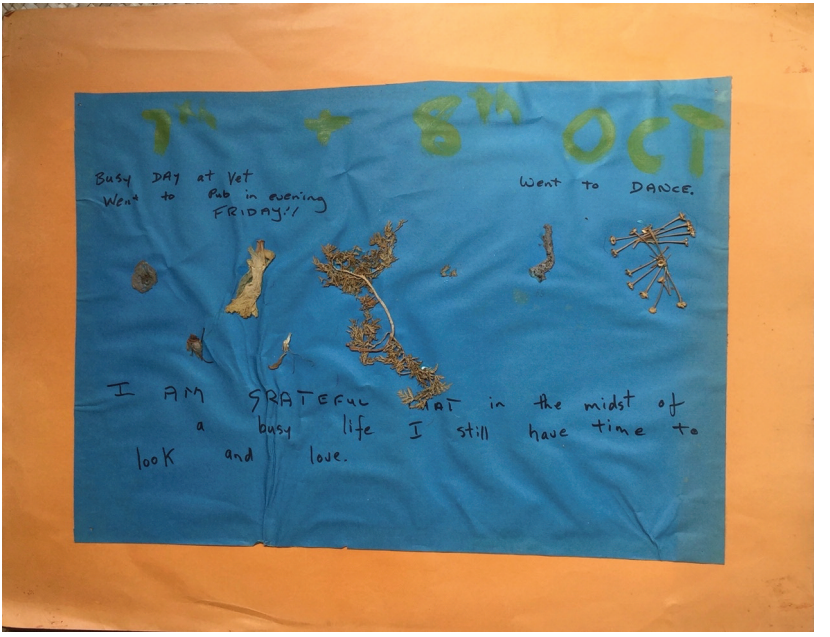
25-27 September



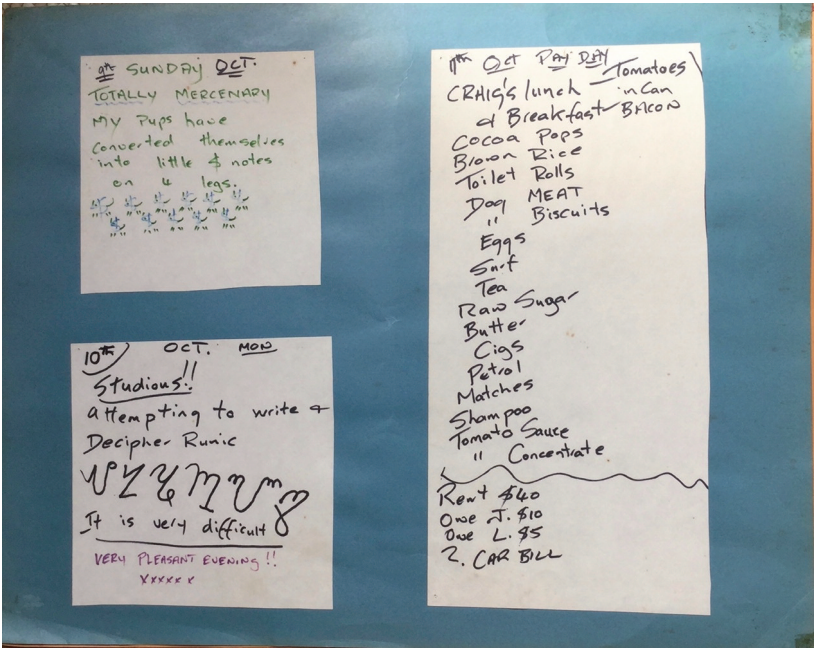
28 September


OCTOBER
4th
SHIT
PIDDLE
GRIZZLE
6TH OCT.
Visited psychiatric unit at P.M.H. so many sisters there.
WE HAVE MELTED AND LOST OUR EDGES
NOW WE ARE COMMANDED TO SOLIDIFY AND THE MOLD IS A SQUARE BOX
5TH OCTOBER
NO BABY ALL SLEPT DAY

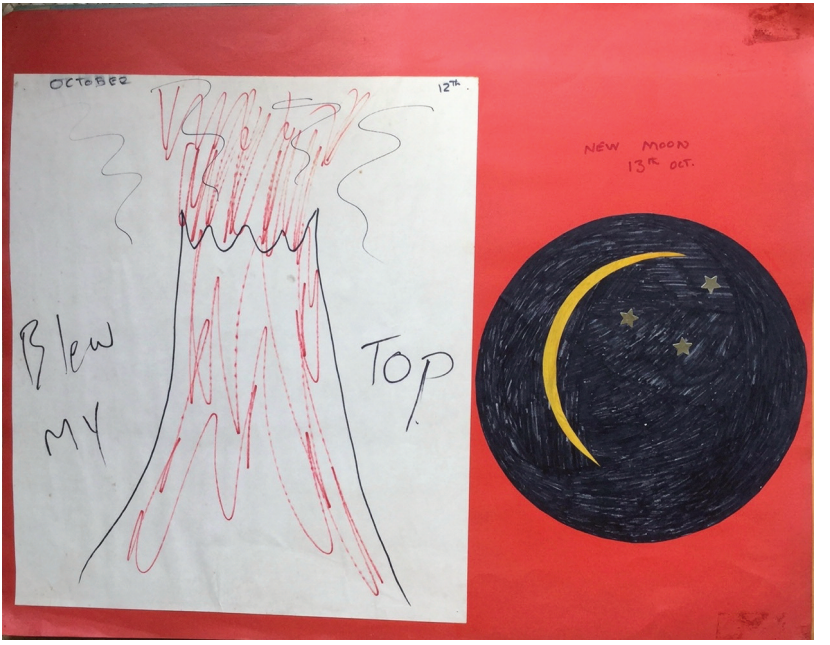
4-6 October


7th + 8th OCT
Busy DAY at Vet
Went to Pub in evening
FRIDAY!!
Went to DANCE.
I AM GRATEFUL THAT in the midst of
a busy life I still have time to
look and love.

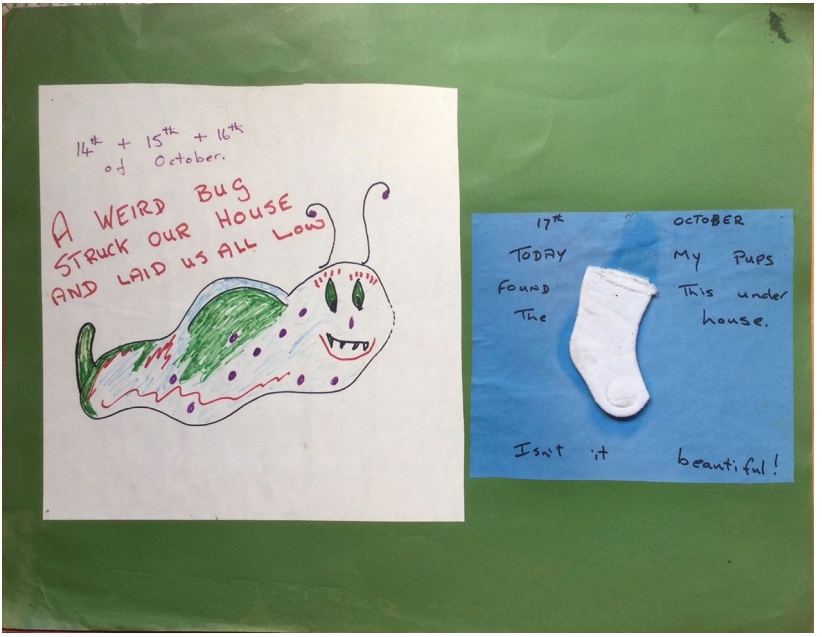
7-8 October


SUNDAY OCT.
TOTALLY MERCENARY
My Pups have converted themselves into little 4 notes on 4 legs.
10th OCT. MON
Studious!!
attempting to write & Decipher Runic
It is very difficult
VERY PLEASANT EVENING!!
XXXXX
11th Oct Pay Day
CRAIG's lunch — Tomatoes in Can
& Breakfast — Bacon
Cocoa Pops
Brown Rice
Toilet Rolls
Dog MEAT
" Biscuits
Eggs
Surf
Tea
Raw Sugar
Butter
Cigs
Petrol
Matches
Shampoo
Tomato Sauce
" Concentrate
Rent $40
Owe J. $10
Owe L. $5
2. CAR BILL

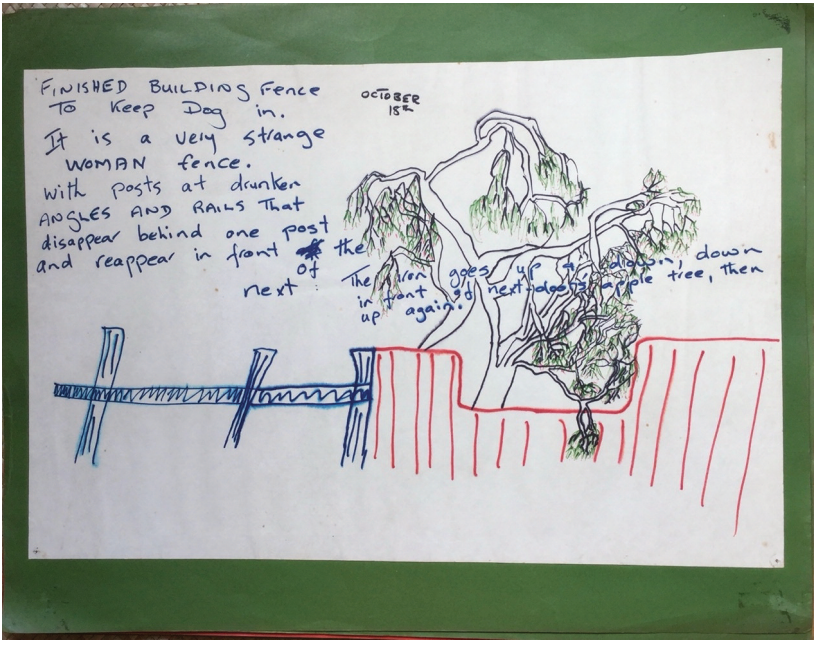
9-11 October



12 October



14-16 October


FINISHED BUILDING Fence
To Keep Dog in.
It is a very strange
WOMAN fence.
With posts at drunken
ANGLES AND RAILS That
disappear behind one post
and reappear in front of
next
OCTOBER
15TH
down
tree, then

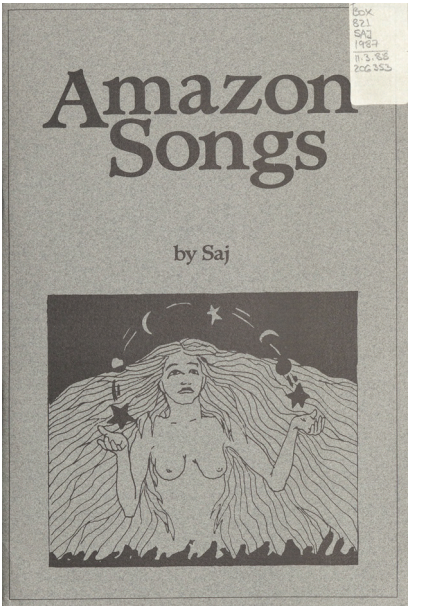
18 October



19-20 October

WUTHERING HEIGHTS, MISREPRESENTATIONS AND PERIMETERS: INTRODUCTION TO 'AMAZON SONGS' (1986)

Heather McPherson



The Alexander Turnbull Library's pristine copy, with callmark. Cover illustration by Deane M. Crawford. Spiral 1987.

Not long ago I was talking to a sensitive intelligent English teacher about *Wuthering Heights*. How amazing, he said, that she just sat down and wrote it. My hair prickled, a rush of words to the head stopped my tongue. Hang on – stop – wait – no – not – oh, hell. Where do I start? The moment passed ...

That night I went to the book I think of as my New Introduction to Logic. Its actual title was *How to Suppress Women's Writing*;[1] it has the same illuminating delight for me as my first introduction to logic, and for women writers is as, if not more, important. Where did that English teachers comment fit ... denial of, pollution of agency? Yeesss ... False categorising? Hmmmmm, partly. But partly "isolation" too, the "myth of the isolated achievement" whereby X appears in the history of literature because of/with one book and is therefore recategorised into something other than writer, as a woman who for this one book was as if divinely inspired but otherwise "wasn't really a writer" – or is it that "she didn't really write it"? Whatever it is, "she's anomalous" ... and all those critical judgments, their logistic distortions, serve the underlying thesis: Women can't write. Or – they shouldn't have, it was the wrong thing, not art, genre, cross-genre, with help, confessional, too personal, to angry, two political, two (unacceptably) sexual ... I exaggerate? Read the book; it should be a required text and every introduction to literature – and philosophy – in every university and teachers' college, and every editorial office and publisher's in-tray.

But — back to Emily Bronte who did not "just sit down and write it". "We who write are survivors" says Tillie Olsen,[2] and Emily

1. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* London, The Women's Press, 1984.
2. Tilly Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Women Who Are Writers in Our Century, in *Working It Out* Eds Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977: 335.

Bronte a was a survivor too, as well as being a genius. Part of genius is being a superb craftswoman; her craft was developed and practised through a childhood sparse on external stimulation but imaginatively, atmospherically and sibling rich, honed in a domestic environment shadowed by her mother's illness and death, her father's tyranny, her brother's drug addiction, a chronic shortage of money and literary social stimulation, responsibility for household and support chores expected of a clergyman's daughters, personal illness, loneliness, depression. How could she have written such obsessive compulsive states had she not observed/known them intimately? How develop the stamina, concentration, self-disciplinary resources to produce such a book — let alone the wonderful poems — unless it had been worked for, through those nursery serials and play-acts; where did the confidence of a sense of audience come from, if not from there? Yet she is presented as a kind of pure vessel through which the bequeathment of genius worked ...

And Emily Bronte had sisters ...

Post World War II, internationally, we have had, says Nicole Brossard, a "fragile twenty years"[3] of feminism in which to address each other. (This is not to deny past feminists from Sappho to Hildegard of Bingen to Mary Wollstonecraft to Vera Brittain to Elsie Locke; this is only to put the renaissance of a widespread feminist movement into post-cataclysm (world war) perspective after the fifties propaganda machine had set women back to home exile, motherhood priorities, displacement from the workforce and exclusion from achievement arenas following wartime and post war inflation of male importance and values; the new elements in the latest

3. Nicole Brossard, *Woman and Writing or Identity and Writing*, from seminar, 2nd International Feminist Book Fair, Oslo, 1986.

renaissance, apart from the numbers of educated women involved, are the hard won visibility of lesbian feminists in the vanguard of theorists and artists, and government backed "affirmative action" programmes and some Western countries; they may also be more economically independent woman in such countries.) In this country we have a Human Rights Commission which recognises women's rights as human; we have women's bookshops, we have women reading to each other, talking work to each other, reading each others work; work – writing that is –understood as such by those who can choose the luxury of commitment to art/craft as part of or apart from economic survival. We are crossing territories formerly marked taboo, by our own commitment, and no sky falls ... Only the reviewers. And someone soon will write a New Zealand version of *How to Suppress* ... perhaps titled *Why Women Writers Don't Pass* ...

As Joanna Russ says "active bigotry is probably fairly rare. **It is also hardly ever necessary**, since the social context is so far from neutral. To act in a way that is both sexist and racist ... it is only necessary to act in the customary, ordinary, usual, even polite manner."[4] Recently I reviewed four books of poetry. Consciously, even carefully, I discussed "the poets". When I received my printed copy it had been titled *Women Poets* ... My praise of a Fleur Adcock poem with a Macbeth witches image, three women waiting for a fourth on trial in a custody case,[5] was cut. Out. Would four *Men Poets* have been so titled? Was the editor "cleaning up" my review by taking out a real life intrusion on literary convention, was it bad taste to talk about divorce, custody? Yes, yes ... there were reasons of "space" — so why that poem? Was it as spatially inconvenient to

4. Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*: 18.
5. Fleur Adcock, 'Witnesses', from *The Incident Book* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986: 52.

include that poem as it has been to talk about — in a literary context — incest, rape; or women being lovers with each other? Those devastating, profound, life changing experiences which so many women deal with in secret and hidings ...

One of C. K. Stead's spoken criticisms of *the bone people*[6] was that it was so violent. And his own *Smith's Dream*?[7] The takeover of a country, the killing of dissidents, the girl given a hiding by her father for sexual (mis)demeanour? Those imaginative re-creations, as *the bone people's* child-beatings and aikido fight, are part of the memorable texture of memorable books, their uncompromising good faith towards the truth of experience. Is only the male allowed to explore violence? Is this part of the syndrome whereby *Wuthering Heights* was "a masterpiece if written by a man, shocking or disgusting if written by a woman"? — and the "double standard of content" applies?

This book of Saj's poems is the work of a woman who has come to publication late, after her nuclear family — if not her community — mothering years, after the liberation movements' expose of the racist, sexist, homophobic ideology of Western culture. Yet where can the tributes: woman, working class, lesbian, be accorded positive recognition or given aesthetic response uncontaminated by social misconceptions?

"Every lesbian has been forced to walk past the distorting mirrors of homophobia before she could get down to the real problems of her work. Every lesbian artist knows that when she attempts to embody lesbian sexuality in her work she runs the risk of having it perceived

6. Keri Hulme, *the bone people* Wellington, Spiral, 1984.
7. C. K. Stead, *Smith's Dream* Auckland, Longman Paul, 1973.

pornographically, if it is not simply denied visibility ... to choose between writing or painting her truths and keeping her child, she is flung back on the most oppressive ground of maternal guilt ..."[8]

Economic survival, silencing, the long habits of over half a lifetime's distractibility, responsiveness to any body/thing ahead of writing, the struggle for continuity and fluency ... are there any advantages for women coming late to writing? Well, sometimes we will be so far out of the social "acceptability" canon and we can discard it. Not attempting (male) establishment approval we can be free of limiting models, content limits; we can refuse self-censorship, the squeezing of perimeters into dominant attitudes thus "falsifying one's own reality, range, vision, truth, voice" which may be a vitiating coercive force on younger or more vulnerable women writers for whom keeping a job or protecting a child/family/public status may be survival essentials.

But our small women's community cannot yet support financially, and even, depending on location, emotionally, our writer survivors whose lives and work would be less constricted if they had/felt the firm commitment of audience, without which, for the writer there is "a kind of death."[9] More education, more contexts, more support for local publisher and bookshop venturers who risk our "not financially viable" material is an obvious answer; as Virginia Woolf wrote,

8. Adrienne Rich, 'Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women', foreword to *Working It Out*: xxi.
9. Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Women Who Are Writers in Our Century, in *Working It Out*: 339.

the greatness of literature lies not only in the great writers but also in that "which explains much, and tells much."[10]

We need all our writers, not just to give voice to the "as innately capable: the born to the wrong circumstances, the diminished, the excluded, the last, the silenced"[11]— but to provide a context for other writers whose "strivings will be amplified, quickened, lucidified, through those of our peers".[12]

"We want to see thousands of women painters, women poets, expressing **our** anger, realising **our** hopes, confirming **our** lives."[13]

Especially we need, and our community, to know that there are writers who are also working class lesbian grandmothers, writing well, from a reality as rich and varied as those of the "isolated", "anomalous" women of the past.

I met Saj in 1974. Friends Morrigan and Allie had set up the meeting;[14] it was in a spare — and bare — room of the Refuge, an old house made available by the city council to the women's liberation group who had initiated this first Women's Refuge and worked

10. Virginia Woolf, preface to *Memoirs of the Working Womens Guild*, quoted by Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Women Who Are Writers in Our Century', in *Working It Out*: 340.
11. Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Women Who Are Writers in Our Century, in *Working It Out*: 335.
12. Rich, 'Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women', in *Working It Out*: xxiii.
13. Miriam Schapiro, 'Notes from a Conversation on Art, Feminism, and Work', in *Working It Out*: 302.
14. Morrigan Severs 1942–2025; Allie Eagle (Alison Mitchell) 1949–2022, see her section below).

hard to make it habitable and welcoming for beaten wives and children with nowhere else to go; it was, too, the only public space for support groups springing up as part of women's liberation philosophy. This particular meeting was for older lesbian mothers.

Saj was very nervous. I was nervous too, if less so; I felt — a new lesbian solo mum with the whole weight of society's conditioning on my back — exceedingly non-threatening. As I got to know Saj and her unique blends of confidence and withdrawals, her life story (an almost completed nursing training, eighteen years marriage and family rearing, an attempt at university English, involvement with alternative schooling for a dyslexic child), I appreciated the courage it had taken for her to come to this meeting. Saj didn't look back.

The difficulties of leaving the marriage, setting up house as a solo mum, building a network of contacts, were dealt with; later, her Blue House, with a shifting woman population became a focus for lesbian women, for regular Friday and Saturday night dances and parties, for meetings, for work gatherings. I remember a dozen or so woman putting together the pages of the first Spiral on the living room floor; I remember the dancing. From my preferred quiet lifestyle I came knowing this a "safe house" with the only requirements being goodwill and enjoyment. So many of us who had once hated dancing learned to dance freely and carefreely, losing the self-conscious and inhibitions of body criticisms, of being exposed to others' eyes.

And Saj was a lifeline to younger lesbians, young women who without family or community support might have been or were sometimes in trouble, whose only (sometimes threatened) sense of community centred on the pub. Some of these women still call Saj mum. Their presence, many from working class backgrounds, kept

our group grounded, the aims of feminism, advancement for all woman, in front of us.

As some of us with arts commitments explored women's art movement philosophies we called on Saj for support — and for her original outlook and creative approach. She joined in poetry readings; the 1978 Diaries show at the C.S.A. included Saj's, and Saj's diary included the doll's finger and sock dug out of her garden; she participated in the Women Artists Group's Women's Environment for the 1977 United Women's Convention and, with friends, contributed to the washing line with its painted sneakers, t-shirts, patched jeans and darned socks — the arts of the community.

Towards the end of the seventies many of our first women's community shifted to other territory; a new group of women undertook organised activities in Christchurch. Our deep friendships continued but joint activities gave way to personal — economic or emotional — survival. Now we are settled through the islands; our sharing is long distance but still vital in our life-support systems.

I've always liked Saj's poetry, her ability to speak the "unspeakable" directly in movingly, her subjects rising to naturally out of her life concerns, the integral music of her language. I am proud to introduce who work to a wider audience.

Transcribed by Lissa Mitchell.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF SAJ (1989)



Saj. Date & photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy Heather McPherson Estate.

Saj, 55 years old (well just about). Mother, grandmother, lesbian. The smell of paint pervades my whole life. I have pails of pale green paint. Pails of dark green paint. Cans of white, and a can of black. Ten years ago, when I was 45, I painted the house. Then I chose brown, red, green and white. This year it was time for a change. For the last 8 weeks this task has dominated my whole life. I have had no time to write, hardly time to think about anything else except what I would do the next day. The roof is finally finished, thanks to the timely intervention of two young dykes. However, when they were up there they discovered that my cold water holding tank was leaking, consequently that part of the roof could not get painted until a new tank was installed. Also after the roof was painted it decided to leak in two places the first time it rained. I am also painting the back porch, stripping and filling in the dining room prior to papering (a winter job) and had to paint around a new window I have had installed in there. I have really painted the house three times as I have put three coats on it. This was because I was trying to cover dark brown with pale green.

SUNDAY: I rose at 8am, fed the cats and the dog. Made a hot drink. Put on the washing. Had a bath and once more pulled on my painting pants and T-shirt. Put third coat on the white in the back porch. Pegged out the washing. Had lunch. Found my tube of gunk with which one repairs leaks and shakily crawled up onto the roof. Filled in around the iron from where I hope the leaks were originating. While I was up there, decided I might as well finish painting the area that had been left because of the leaking tank. Down from the roof, put on casserole for tea. Then decided to put first coat of white around the outside, exterior, new window. By this stage I was totally buggered.

. . .

Reprieve came in the form of a visit from young dyke (one of the roof painters). Luckily had some cold beers in the fridge. Had a few bottles, a bite to eat, then went visiting a few friends, to get away from the house for a while. More beers with them. Home to watch T.V. then crashed out in my bed.

Wielding a paint brush one picks up a sort of rhythm, momentum. Hence 'Dyke Power Rap'.

DYKE POWER RAP

Who can you trust
when you start a new thrust
of female intervention
female intention
feminism moves
feminism grooves
but it's Dyke Power
that's who
who takes all the crap
singing this rap
for Dyke Power.
We're first in the news
first with the blues
when feminism screws
our ideas up
who takes the blame
takes the shame
Dyke Power.
Now I'm telling you loud
I'm telling you clear
so you'd better fear

the revolution's happened
the revolution's here
if you want to scream
if you want to cuss
Dyke Power. That's us.
Now we've fought all your fights
gaining wimmin's rights
who gave you back
the past you lost
who paid the price
who paid the cost
your art and music
wimmin's writing
hear me well
'cause I'm skiting
it was Dyke Power.
When we broke male rule
over wimmin's choices
did you ever
raise your voices
for Dyke Power
and when we'd won
and the work was done
who was it that was
ostracised, criticised,
Dyke Power
it fits
that's the way
it's always been
to do all the work
but never be seen
but if we ever
come out swinging
you'd better duck

don't push your luck
with Dyke Power.
We're telling you loud
singing strong
you knew it was us
all along
we're Dyke Power.
Dyke Power
that's what you need
Dyke Power
that's what we've got
Dyke Power
it's going to cost you a lot.
Now sisters give us credit
where credit's due
we've worked very hard
we did it for you
could you ever
have made it through
without our
Dyke Power
Now we have all got different
points of view
what I've said in this rap
is not really new
there's quite a lot more
that I could say
but I'm getting tired
so I'll hand it away
to DYKE POWER.

First published in *Lavender Annual* ed Miriam Saphira, Papers Ink, 1989.

SKIPPING SONG FOR INCEST VICTIM

Saj

I hate rats
I hate mice
I hate men
who pretend they're nice.
Be kind to your daddy
be nice to his friends
be good to your brothers
it never ends.

I hate spiders
I hate flies
I hate men
who tell me lies.
You lied to me good
you lied to me well
took away my childhood
and gave me hell.

AMAZON SONG

Saj

Sing
sing me
sing me an Amazon song
sing of the lateness
of time
of regrets
of loves
and of those not loved
Of revolution coming
not fast enough
Of my passing
too quickly
Of young ones growing
not fast enough
too slowly
Of my missing
of you and you and you
and the hugging and kissing
of you and you and you
the sleeping, weeping

with you and you and you
Of the picnics, parties
cold days, wet days
hot days, rotten days
Of our power, strength
Of our weakness and oppression
Of our hopes, dreams,
wild crazy schemes
Sing me on and on and on
Of the children we raised
hoping yet fearing
Of the never-ending caring
Sing of our creativity
destroyed or ignored
of the fight for recognition
of our artists, writers, musicians
slowly banding together
gathering their wimmin strength
Sing of our traveling sisters
Meeting, greeting
of visions, missions
Sing on and on
Sing of the ancient ones
who died
Sing a death song
for them
of the knowledge
of the power,
of the fear created
in the hearts of men
Sing of the flames
of bodies destroyed
but not spirits
Sing of our religion

preserved secretly
through it all
Sing louder and louder
Sing that the spirits
who departed
will hear
and return
Sing our Amazon song
shake, break
the patriarchal foundation
then sing with joy
and build again
Sing of renewal and rebirth
Sing
sing me
sing me a song
sing me an Amazon song.



Ceremonial Saj. Date & photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy Heather McPherson Estate.

DEAR SAJ...

Heather McPherson

(i)

How shall I cheer you up

I can't come down and clear the mud
the bobcat churned up knocking
your drunken fence down

after June the 13th's shake...
BUT ANNA and BILL DID...

those blokes could have warned
you that they were on the way
with Lady — save those plants!

Well done for being philosophical —
plants grow again — but O
the damage to your flower

and the hours you spent talking

and weeding and watering
beans and tomatoes and roses

to grow — and bougainvillea —
remembering how I loved your border
tours and the photo of you as

a large shiny cheery turquoise
shrub in your dressing gown picking
blooms for Ursula Bethell's grave —

the green and red meals we ate —
gardens are colours and fruit as
well as flowers. Demolitionists'

secret pleasure might be bashing
down fences and churning yards
into a mess of liquefaction

made by quakes in other suburbs...
thank Goddess dear Saj and Deanie
you're there to rage them

into being a civilized part of nature...

(ii)

You're the best person I know
to cheer yourself and me
And Deanie and everyone else —

good grief, friend, nobody's a robot —
feelings sometimes run amok.
I wonder if you could gestate

your cheer germ from seed to embryo
and we plant it in that space in
the CBD where quakes ate

buildings out and the Recovery
Minister's cronies get paid to oversee
who knows what monstrosities —

what small–minded bureaucrats think —
ex-ministers who've made more mistakes
than's wise to keep people open-eyed

figuring their value...

what's your idea for a centre? Shall we
moot your cheer gene sprouting over
the sad mess some people make

of getting better?

Note: The June 13 2011 earthquake in Ōtautahi Christchurch was a large aftershock in a regional series that started on 4 September 2010. It caused considerable damage, especially to sewerage infrastructure.

Part Five

MARILYNN WEBB

1937-2021



Marilynn 2018. Photograph Norm Heke. Courtesy of Creative New Zealand.

Marilynn, of Ngāpuhi, Te Roroa and Ngāti Kahu iwi and the English, Welsh and Irish, was a printmaker and teacher based in Ōtepoti Dunedin for many years.

Speaking with Bridie Lonie in *A Women's Picture Book*, she said—

> My work contains many mixtures of being a mixture myself. I acknowledge all my forebears and my heritage. I would say that my preoccupation with land power is perhaps stirred by early memory and my Maori. I don't name myself any particular sort of artist, only printmaker.[1]

Of her preoccupation with land power, she also stated—

> [The land] mirrors my place in the space time continuum, where I'm standing on planet earth, my fears and joys, my life and death sequences. All my work is a diary. I use the land as a mirror of my own self.[2]

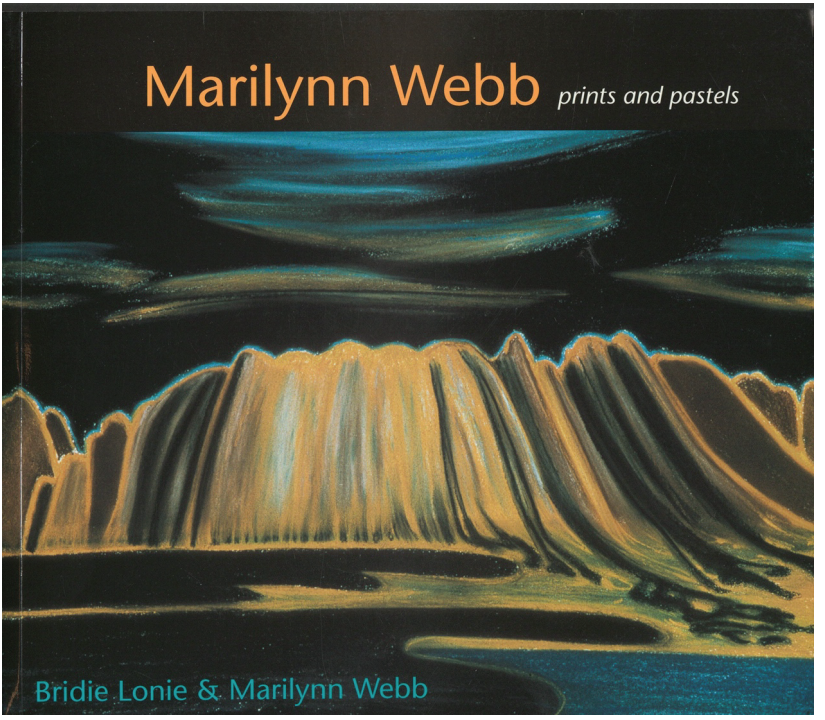
> On the use of hands in her work, she wrote—

> I added the hands to prints as a power image, a statement mainly of power and healing. I don't do self-portraits. They are my first self-portraits I suppose. They also pose threat if they are not my hands so the image works in reverse also.[3]

---

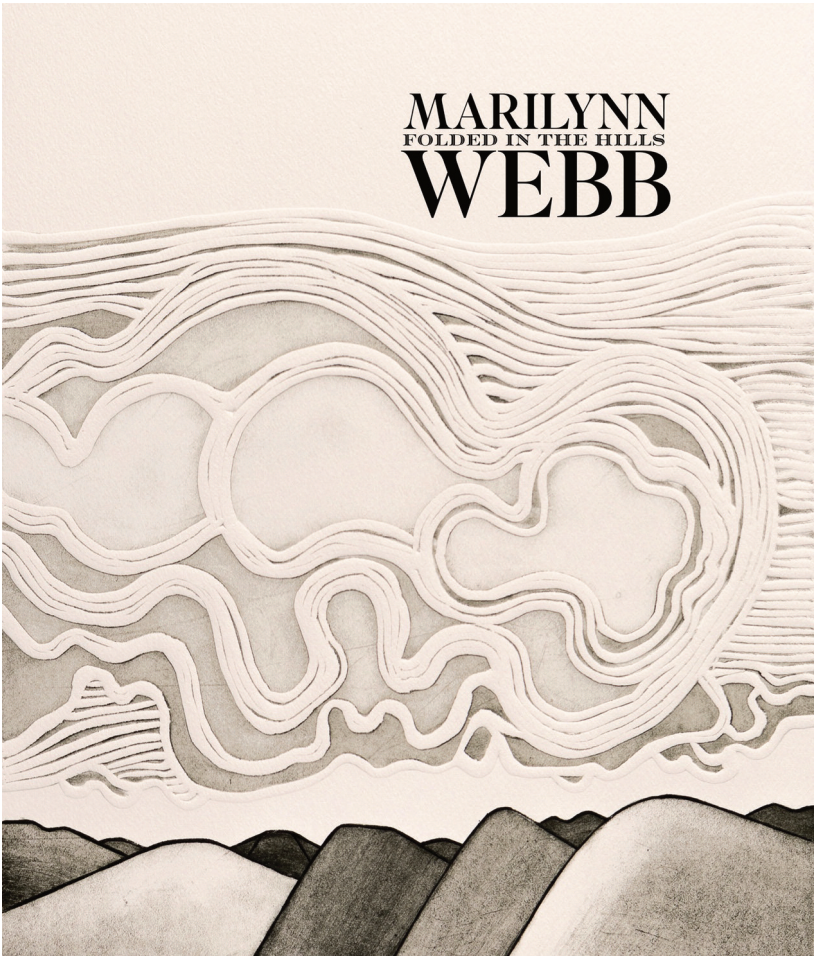
1. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 women artists from Aotearoa New Zealand* eds Bridie Lonie, Marian Evans, Tilly Lloyd, a Women's Gallery/Spiral Group, GP Books 1988: 10.
2. Marilynn Webb Estate collection, Hocken Collections - Uare Taoka a Hākena.
3. *A Women's Picture Book*: 9.

There are two substantial books about Marilynn. *Marilynn Webb: Prints and Pastels* was first, with Bridie Lonie.[4]



The second is *Marilynn Webb: Folded in the Hills*, a bilingual publication to mark her retrospective at Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

4. Bridie Lonie & Marilynn Webb *Marilynn Webb: Prints and Pastels* University of Otago Press 2003.



Photograph courtesy Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Marilynn Webb: Folded in the Hills has essays by curators Lucy Hammonds, Lauren Gutsell, and Bridget Reweti; and poems by Cilla

McQueen, Hone Tuwhare, Essa May Ranapiri and Ruby Solly.[5] It was short-listed for the 2024 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards.

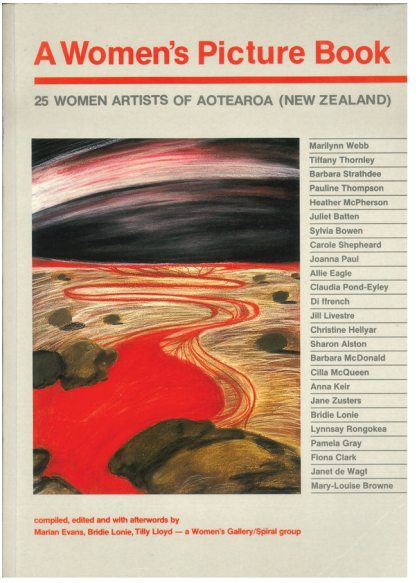
Further significant gallery publications include *Prints & Pastels 1966-1990: Heartland*, a record of an earlier Dunedin Public Art Gallery exhibition;[6] *and* Scott Pothan's *A Multi-media Exploration, Reflective Terrain: Three Women Artists' Response to the Landscape*.[7]

Marilynn exhibited widely, and internationally, with many suites of work. *Taste Before Eating* was one portfolio, highlighted through this section because its recipes resonate with 'setting the table'; and because it connects to examples of her vivid postcards and letters, diaristic like her prints, to two of her dear friends, both activists like her, with Ōtepoti Dunedin and Spiral connections — poet Cilla McQueen and gallerist Galvan Macnamara (1941-2004) who as James Mack, an arts advisor at the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, strongly supported funding for the Women's Gallery.

5. Marilynn Webb, Lauren Gutsell, Lucy Hammonds, Bridget Reweti *Marilynn Webb: Folded in the Hills* Dunedin Public Art Gallery 2023.
6. 1992.
7. 2000.

MARILYNN & SPIRAL

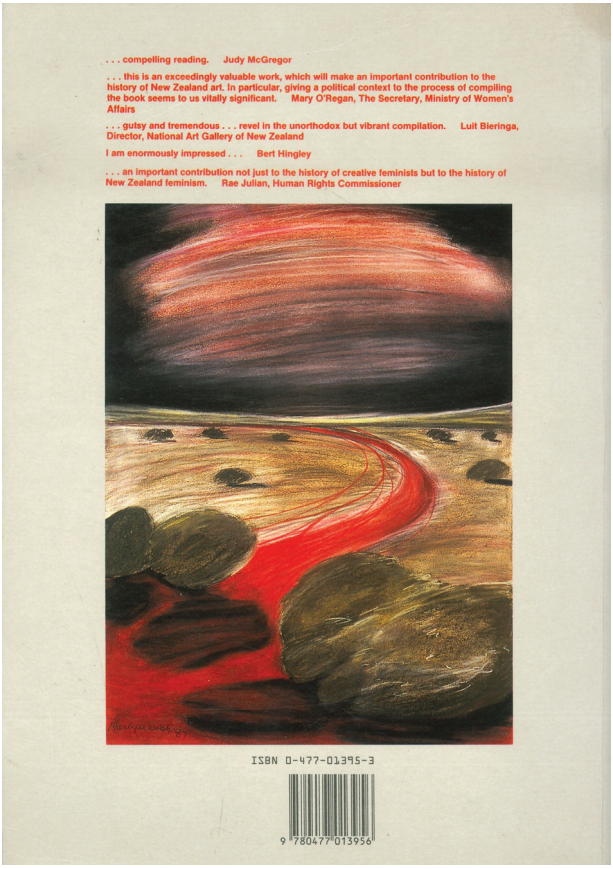
Marian Evans



Cover image: Marilynn Webb *The swimming hole and willows Maniototo 1987 oil pastel, 77 x 57.*

Spiral met Marilynn through Bridie Lonie, who interviewed her for *A Women's Picture Book*, where Marilynn was one of the few artists

included who had never exhibited at the Women's Gallery.[1] As well as an interview with Bridie she contributed the images for the front and back of the book's cover.[2]



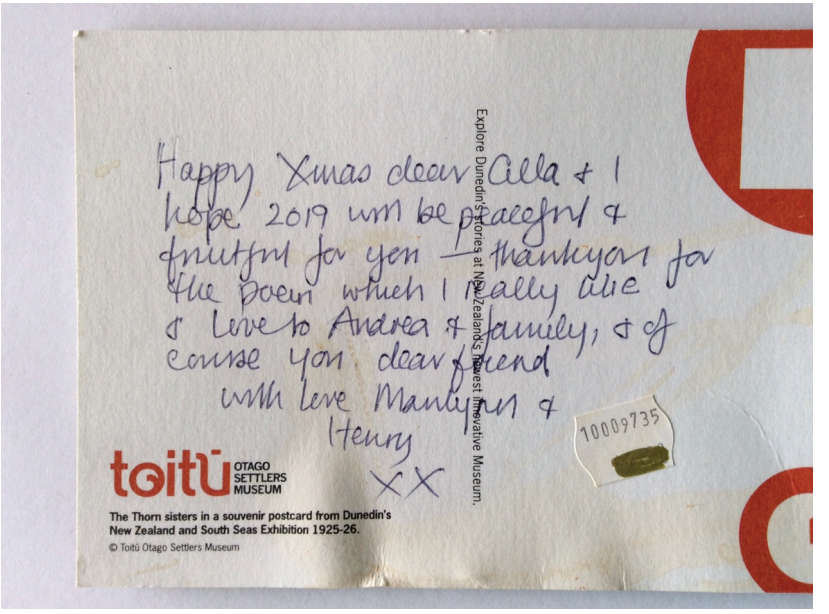
Back cover image: Marilynn Webb *The swimming hole and willows Maniototo 1987 oil pastel, 77 x 57.*

1. Cilla McQueen and Pauline Thompson were others.
2. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand) (AWPB)* compiled, edited and with afterwords by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Tilly Lloyd — a Women's Gallery/ Spiral group GP Books 1988: 1-10.

MARILYNN & CILLA MCQUEEN

Cilla McQueen sent this postcard from Marilynn for inclusion here.





Cilla—

> Marilynn sent me this postcard for Christmas 2018 and said 'That's us'. She was certainly the elder one, in front. A sweet message in her beautiful handwriting.

Cilla and Marilynn both protested about proposals to establish an aluminium smelter at Otago Harbour mouth, from the mid-1970s, and contributed to a powerful exhibition at the Hocken Library in Ōtepoti Dunedin and the City Gallery in Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Wellington. At the Hocken Library, Marilynn showed *Fossil Prints* and Cilla *Screens for Aramoana*.[1]

The exhibitions took place at the City Gallery 5-21 December 1980; Hocken Library 8 January-3 February 1981. Other artists listed on the Hocken's room sheet for the exhibition's presentation are Gary Blackman, Sean Burdon, Anna Caselberg, Chris Cree-Brown, Andrew Drummond, Jackie Fraser, Di French, Ralph Hotere, Chris de Jong, Russell Moses, Peter Nicholls, Joanna Paul and Shona Rapira. Cilla and Joanna, who contributed *In Search of the Indigenous*, collaborated on a poster. Cilla contributed the words, which she also gave to Ralph Hotere to use, and Joanna hand-wrote the exhibition details.[2]

The City Gallery produced a catalogue *Aramoana: Tapu Land*. 'Poetry and polemic from Araiteuru' was added inside the front cover. This exhibition had a slightly different group of artists: Anna Caselberg, John Caselberg, Jacqueline Fraser, Russell Moses, Di Ffrench, Maarire Goodall, Andrew Drummond, Sean Burdon, Cilla McQueen, O. E. Middleton, Gary Blackman, Jill Hamel, Brian Turner, Shona Rapira, Joanna Paul.[3]

Marilynn made 'Aramoana' in the *Taste Before Eating* portfolio a couple of years later.

1. ARAMOANA Hocken Library January 10 - February 14 [February 3] 1981 — Room Sheet, Hocken Library exhibition files, art and photography section. Warm thanks to the Hocken's Nick Austin for kindly tracking down the *Aramoana* details.
2. https://otago.ourheritage.ac.nz/items/show/9898
3. https://tepuna.on.worldcat.org/oclc/154635212



ARAMOANA SOUP

Find a dead albatross, a dead swan, a dead shag, a dead heron, a dead seal, a dead penguin, a dead shark, some dead sandpipers and assorted flat fish. Prepare a stock with them and let it stand for some days. Strain, and discard bones, beaks, feathers, feet and skin. Add the following ingredients to the stock:—

1 sack of blue mussels
1 sack of cockles
1 sack of flouride
1 sack of carbon waste
1 sack of cyanide
1 sack of southern tua tua

Cook for a week at alternating high and low temperatures. Garnish with dry chopped salt marsh vegetation and sea weed. Choose a restaurant with a high noise level and serve the soup at blood heat in aluminium bowls. Finally, add the cost of the electricity incurred in making the soup, to the diner's bill.

Marilynn Webb '*Aramoana*' from Hawk Press edition T*aste Before Eating 1982*.

MARILYNN & MARG



Marilynn 'Mrs Walia' & Marg 'Mrs Budgie'.

Marg— Not a great photo but one I love cause we are holding hands and it was something that we always did and I miss her.

MARILYNN, 'TASTE BEFORE EATING' & GALVAN MACNAMARA

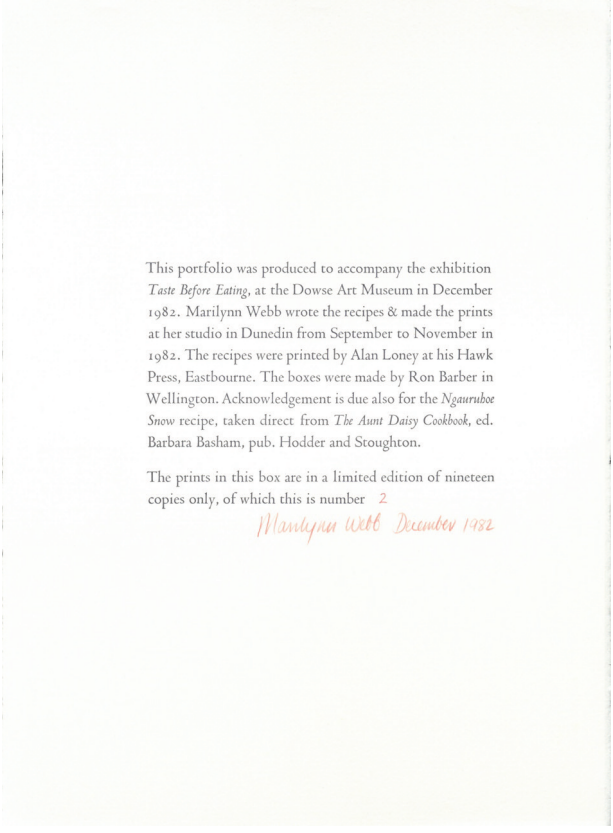
Marilynn produced the portfolio for the *Taste Before Eating* show in December 1982 at the Dowse Art Museum, where Galvan Macnamara, then known as James Mack, was the director.[1]

As she explained to Bridie—

> I made large double elephant hand-coloured monotypes accompanied by recipes printed in text by Alan Loney and blown up and hung as a diptych. I also hand coloured twenty copies of the recipes and the text was printed by Alan Loney at Hawk Press in Eastbourne. [...] I had already made a food print, 'Rangitoto Special', in 1976. I had been asked to contribute a Rangitoto work to an Auckland show and I thought how silly, when I'm here in Dunedin.[2] I extended the

1. (1941-2004). The letters and cards reproduced in this chapter come from Galvan's archive in ATL: MS-Group-1397.
2. Bridie Lonie & Marilynn Webb *Prints and Pastels*: 40.

Rangitoto pudding idea to political food statements, memories for friends etc. I used a culinary prose style snitched from Aunt Daisy (I greatly admire her cookbook) and wrote the recipes and made the big prints.[3]


This portfolio was produced to accompany the exhibition *Taste Before Eating*, at the Dowse Art Museum in December 1982. Marilynn Webb wrote the recipes & made the prints at her studio in Dunedin from September to November in 1982. The recipes were printed by Alan Loney at his Hawk Press, Eastbourne. The boxes were made by Ron Barber in Wellington. Acknowledgement is due also for the *Ngauruhoe Snow* recipe, taken direct from *The Aunt Daisy Cookbook*, ed. Barbara Basham, pub. Hodder and Stoughton.

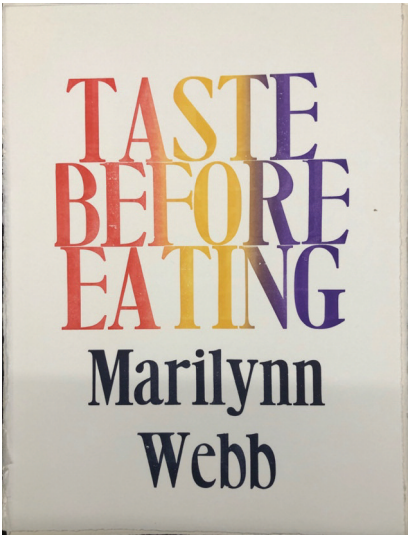
The prints in this box are in a limited edition of nineteen copies only, of which this is number 2

Marilynn Webb December 1982

Marilynn Webb Taste Before Eating *Hawk Press edition 1982. Alexander Turnbull Library: E-286-f.*

3. *AWPB*: 4.

The Alexander Turnbull Library holds the second set of the limited Hawk Press edition, listed in the library's catalogue as 'twenty linocuts, coloured and handcoloured, images chiefly 169 x 224 mm or smaller, on sheets 404 x 302 mm, in black buckram box 440 mm; 1 print black and white 347 x 247 mm'.[4]



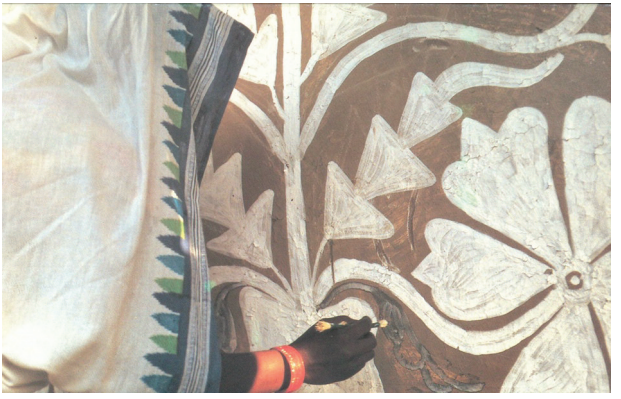
Research photograph of the title page of the Hawk Press edition *1982*. *Alexander Turnbull Library: E-286-f.*

Marilynn and Galvan continued to be close in the years that followed and towards the end of Galvan's life she exhibited at his Marsden Gallery in Featherston, in the Wairarapa, where he lived in a caravan beside the Waiohine river until he died.[5] They both had a

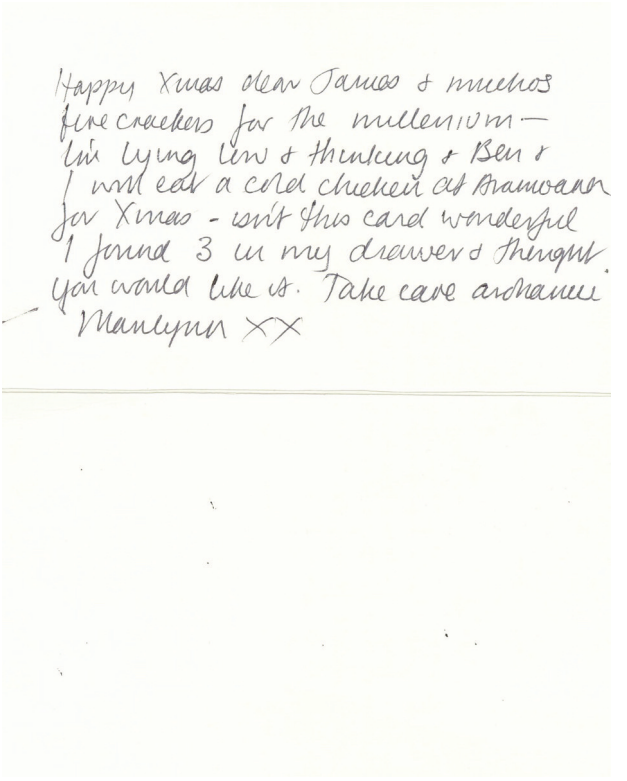
4. Alexander Turnbull Library E-286-f.
5. *Sister Galvan*, a Spiral feature documentary about Galvan, is in Ngā Taonga https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/: F264391.

keen interest in marking solstices, so the *Taste Before Eating* solstice images from the series end this chapter.

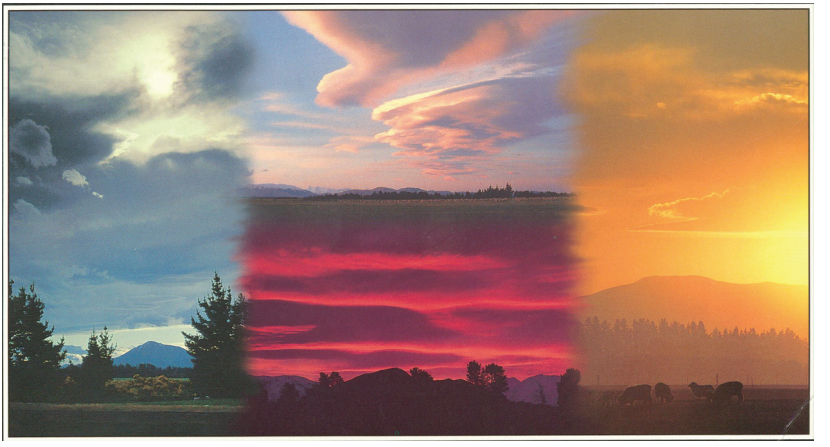
Galvan also organised Marilynn's trip to Te Whanganui-a-Tara for her 'gonging' at Government House, after she was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2000, for services to art and art education.



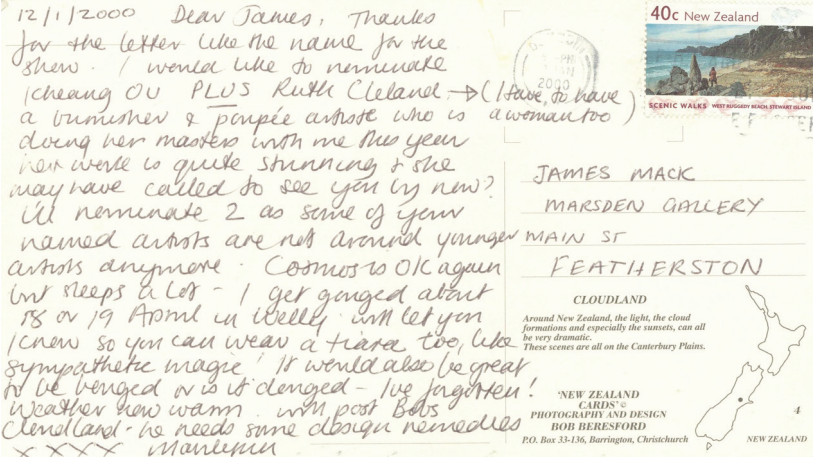
Exterior card from Marilynn to James, at the turn of the century.


Happy Xmas dear James & muchos
fire crackers for the millennium—
Liz lying low & thinking of Ben &
I will eat a cold chicken at Bramwaver
for Xmas - isn't this card wonderful
I found 3 in my drawer & thought
you would like it. Take care andhave
Marilynn XX

Card interior.



Card from Marilynn to James 12 January 2000.



Card from Marilynn to James 12 January 2000: verso.

Postcard text

> 12/1/2000 Dear James, Thanks for the letter like the [unknown] name for the show. I would like to nominate [illegible] PLUS Ruth Cleland (Have to have a

woman too) a [illegible] & poupée artiste who is doing her masters with me this year her work is quite stunning and she may have called to see you by now? I'll nominate two as some of your named artists are not around younger artists anymore. Cosmos is OK again but sleeps a lot. I get gonged around 18 or 19 April in Welly. Will let you know so you can wear a tiara too, like sympathetic magic! It would also be great to be bonged or is it donged — Ive forgotten! Weather now warm. I will post Bob's [illegible] Cloudland — he needs some design remedies x x x x Marilynn



Marilynn with Galvan after her investiture, and two familiar but so-far-unidentified women on the left.

Text of letter from Marilynn to James, from PO Box 1706 Dunedin 22 May

"Dear James, Well I wish I didn't look so fat & old & porky in my pics. But, there you are darling, genes will

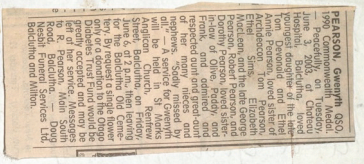
out — I think my jacket looks good though! Trouble is I have the Nga Puhi shape & the Webb colouring. I would rather have it the other way around, next time please Gods, or the universe, or whoever.

Very busy here, 10 weeks without a technician a masters student presenting in Invercargill next weekend, we have a workplace of unease — almost time for me to go — BUT I need the dinero and will hang in until there is a boodle alignment of the dollar planets. [....] Grant Tilly has been in town & we have had a nice old friends catch up Ralphs show looks very good at the DPAG.

[...X] would get the squashed grasshopper award for the worst social personality of the year. Why doesn't someone send [them] to charm school? I wonder. Benedict is going to Spain soon. I will phone about Hawaii — I still haven't got leave from the Head of School — I am also going on a boat trip down around Stewart Island as a guest of the National Park-World Heritage thingee at the end of July — isn't that great!! I still haven't managed to speak to Simon — will you tell him about the print. I HATE HATE answer-phones & usually hang up, which is stupid, I know.

Must post — take care & thank you old friend. X X X kiss kiss for your help in arranging my gonging weekend which was perfect except for Air N.Z.

Arohanui
Marilynn



PEARSON, Gwenyth QSO, 1990 Commonwealth Medal. — Peacefully, on Tuesday, June 3, 2003, at Chateau Hospital, Balclutha, loved youngest daughter of the late Tom Devonald and Ethel Annie Pearson, loved sister of Arcadeccon Tom Pearson, Ethel Simms, Elizabeth Mac Lean, and the late George Pearson, Robert Pearson, and Dorothy Pearson, loved sister-in-law of Ollive, Paddy, and Frank, and admired and respected aunt and great-aunt of her many nieces and nephews. "Sadly missed by all" — A service for Gwenyth will be held in St Marks Anglican Church, Renfrew Street, Balclutha, on Friday, June 6, at 2 p.m., then leaving for the Balclutha Old Cemetery. By request a single flower only or a donation to the Otago Diabetes Trust Fund would be greatly accepted and may be left at her service. Messages to R. Pearson, Main South Road, Balclutha. — Doug Nesbit Funeral Services Ltd, Balclutha and Milton.

P.O. Box 1706
Dunedin
5/6/03

Dear Galvan

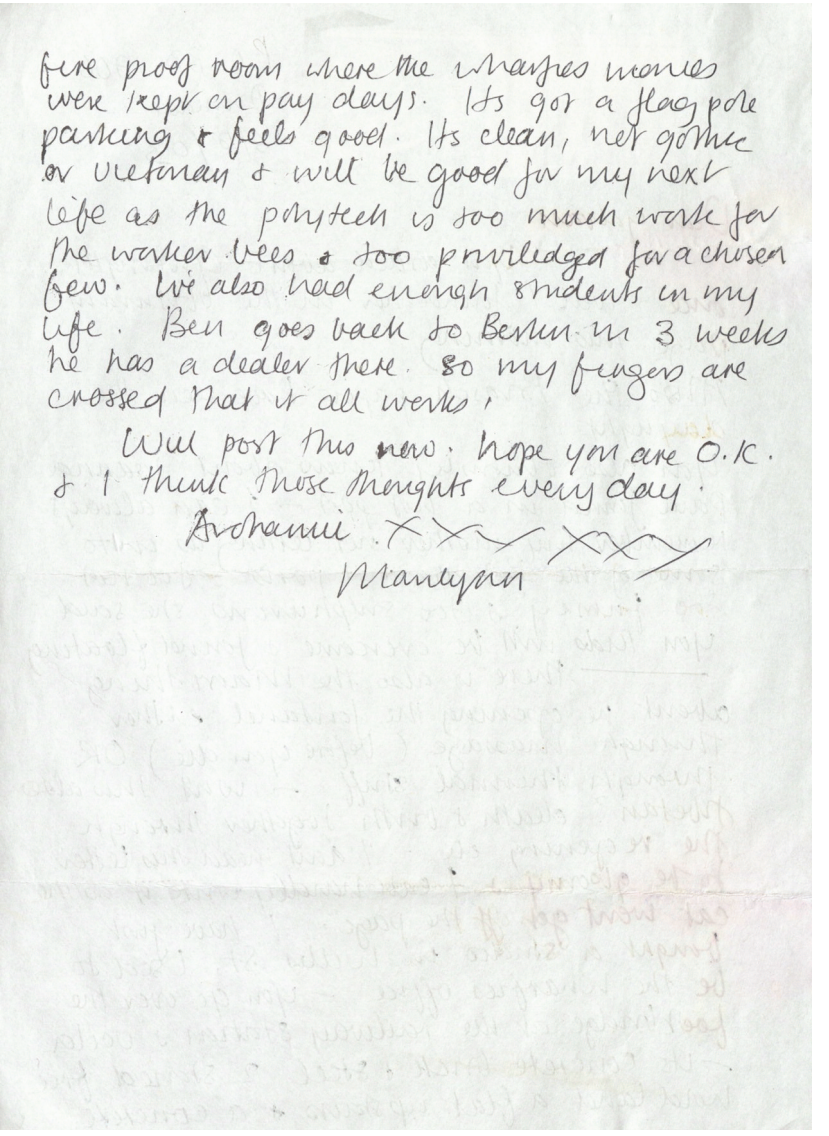
You asked about Gwenyth once - well I found her in the obituary page this morning

Also the Brasch papers have seen the daylight

You also obviously know about Joanna Paul found in a hot pool - I can always remember my mother not letting us into some of the Rotorua hot pools - too hot too fumey & too sulphurous she said you kids will be overcome & found floating

There is also the Maori thing about re-opening the fontanel either through massage (before you die) OR through thermal stuff - isn't this also tibetan? death & birth together through the re opening etc - I don't mean this letter to be gloomy & I can hardly write it as the cat won't get off the page. I have just bought a studio in Willis St. Used to be the Wharfies office - you go over the footbridge at the railway station & voila - its concrete brick & steel 2 stoned free hold land a flat upstairs & a concrete

Marilynn to Galvan 5 June 2003.



fire proof room where the wages monies were kept on pay days. Its got a flag pole parking & feels good. Its clean, not gothic or victorian & will be good for my next life as the polytech is too much work for the worker bees & too privledged for a chosen few. We also had enough students in my life. Ben goes back to Berlin in 3 weeks he has a dealer there. So my fingers are crossed that it all works.

Will post this now. Hope you are O.K. & I think those thoughts every day.

Archanni XXX XXX

Marilynn

Marilynn to Galvan 5 June 2003.

Text of letter from Marilynn to Galvan 5 June 2003

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You also obviously know about Joanna Paul found in a hot pool — I can always remember my mother not letting us into some of the Rotorua hot pools — too hot and too fumey and too sulphurous she said — you kids will be overcome and found floating ———— there is also the Maori thing about re-opening the fontanelle through massage (before you die) OR through thermal stuff — isn't this also tibetan? Death and birth together through the reopening etc —I don't mean this letter to be gloomy & I can hardly write it as the cat wont get off the page. I have just bought a studio in Willis St. Used to be the wharfies office — you go over the footbridge at the railway station & voila — its concrete brick & steel 2 storied freehold land a flat upstairs & a concrete fire proof room where the wharfies monies were kept on pay days. Its got a flag pole parking and it feels good. Its clean, not gothic or Victorian & will be good for my next life as the polytech is too much work for the worker bees and too priviledged for a chosen few. I've also had enough students in my life. Ben goes back to Berlin in 3 weeks he has a dealer there. So my fingers are crossed that it all works.

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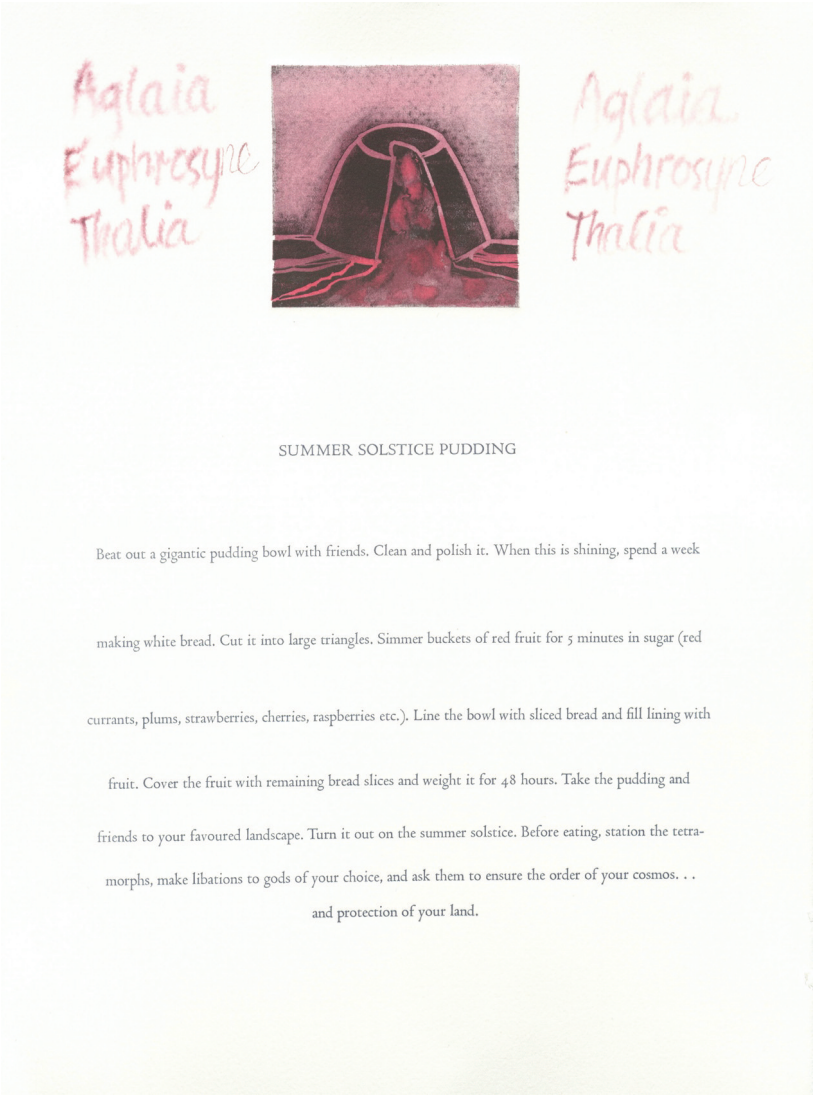
. . .



Marilynn Webb '*Summer Solstice Pudding*' from Hawk Press edition *Taste Before Eating 1982*.



Marilynn Webb '*Winter Solstice Pudding*' from Hawk Press edition *Taste Before Eating 1982*.

MARILYNN & TE WAKA TOI'S SUPREME AWARD

More honours followed Marilynn's ONZM. In 2010, the University of Otago awarded her an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws and described her as 'one of New Zealand's most distinguished and influential artists [and] at the forefront of art education in New Zealand for half a century'. The next year, she was awarded Ngā Tohu a Ta Kingi Ihaka for her lifetime of achievement in art and leadership as a Māori artist at the Te Waka Toi Awards presented by Creative New Zealand.

Then, in 2018, she was awarded Te Tohu Aroha mō Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, the Supreme Award for excellence and achievement in Ngā Toi Māori, at the Te Waka Toi Awards.

I imagine that she (and Galvan) would have been delighted by the photographic record of that event. There she is among the other distinguished honorees, in the middle of the front row, just perfect, from head to green-and-polka-dot-shod toe.



Marilynn centre front at the Waka Toi Awards Te Papa Tongarewa 2018.
Photograph courtesy Mark Tantrum, for Creative New Zealand.

Part Six

FRANCES CHERRY

1937-2022



Frances and her grandson Hamish. Photograph Jane Cherry.

Frances, a Pākehā lesbian, mother and grandmother, was a novelist, short-story writer, and teacher of creative writing.

DANCING WITH STRINGS

Miriam Saphira interviews Frances

Miriam Saphira from Papers Inc (later Papers Ink) wrote and published Aotearoa's first book of poems by an out lesbian, *I Ask of You*,[1] and the first non-fiction lesbian book to be published here, *Amazon Mothers*. She continues to publish under the Papers Ink imprint. In the late 80s she interviewed Frances about her first novel, *Dancing With Strings*,[2] for the *Lavender Annual.*

Miriam: A New Zealand press has finally taken the risk and published a lesbian novel. While the lesbian community may not think it is a *r*isk we have to remember that New Zealand's three million people, in spite of buying more books per head of population that most other nations, does not provide a large lesbian market. The first lesbian novel [to be published by a New Zealander], *The Godmothers* by Sandi Hall, was published by the British Women's Press.[3] Papers Inc. the small lesbian publishing group, can

1. Miriam Jackson *I Ask of You*, 1978.
2. Frances Cherry *Dancing With Strings* New Women's Press, 1989.
3. Sandi Hall *The Godmothers* Women's Press 1982.

only keep producing lesbian books by maintaining a sexual abuse catalogue which is how it keeps its head above water. While Papers Inc. pays contributors and artists it does not pay for the day-to-day distribution, planning, word processing, proof reading, and marketing which is carried out by volunteers. So we take our hat off to New Women's Press for publishing *Dancing With Strings* and hope that with its success we will see more.

Frances: I didn't think about it being a lesbian novel. I just wrote where I was at. I didn't consciously think about an audience. I got carried away with something that was real for me.

There have been plenty of people who could have written a New Zealand lesbian novel. I just think it's the fear. Women are frightened of exposing themselves. As a writer you have to write about what you know, and be prepared to expose yourself. It's no good disguising it. I mean, in the book of short stories, *The Daughter-in-law and Other Stories*, I made a lesbian story into a heterosexual one. Mary Paul came to me and said it was a pity that I didn't have a lesbian story in the collection. When I said that one of the stories had been lesbian story originally she suggested that I change it. I was worried that people would get the wrong impression. I did not want them to think badly about lesbian relationships. I didn't want them to get the wrong idea. Now I think you can't try and make things good if they aren't. It's got to be real. If you contrive a situation people don't like it. Everybody knows that relationships are not always easy and when you write realistically people accept it well. If you write about problems, good or bad, people see that in a lot of ways they are similar to what they have experienced.

. . .

I write for myself. I'm not going to try and please any particular audience. I don't even have a particular market in mind. When it's published I hope everyone will read it.

I start writing and it just flows. I don't think to myself I'd better put this in because this sort of person will read it or that sort of person will read it or I want that sort of person to think this. For all I know lesbians might have been upset by the book but it hasn't turned out that way Everybody, all sorts of people, lesbians included, have really enjoyed it. Most people have said that they couldn't put it down. The amazing thing is that different types of people (even a few men) have liked the book. A gay friend in Sydney — his mother had sent him a copy — rang to say he thought it was wonderful and just had to ring to tell me.

I think having parents who were different made me stronger. My parents were communists so Katherine's childhood is fairly autobiographical. (*Dancing With Strings* begins by describing Katherine's childhood as the daughter of two politically active communists in New Zealand.)

I was so used to being different it wasn't so difficult for me to accept my lesbianism. Then again I haven't always [felt] I was a lesbian. I felt confident. I had a sense of self worth. If you don't have that it's more difficult.

I loved giving my husband's Rotary friends a shock by telling them my parents were communists. So I don't mind my book being acclaimed as a lesbian novel. I want people to think. I wouldn't have written it if it wasn't to do with me. I will take a risk. I think that's

what a writer has to do. I don't think you can be careful. It's scary but you have to take that risk. I want to make people sit up and think about lots of things. I want to throw things at them, not be careful and tread around things, or pretend.

It's funny but I've found people accept things quite well when you are straightforward. I thought some of the people in my class, especially some of the older ones, would be shocked but weren't. One woman said her husband was buying it for her birthday. I don't think he knows what sort of book it is though, she said. The book allows them to talk quite freely. If you don't say anything, they won't say anything because they don't want to upset you. People don't know how to broach the subject. If you talk openly they feel that they can, even if they say something a bit stupid. It gives you the opportunity to say, well, I don't think that's quite right. If it is mentioned naturally it allows for a free discussion. I have some people in classes who react a bit heavily with "I am a lesbian" and almost waiting for a reaction and it puts people on the defensive and ignores the rest of you.

I think it's important for people to know that lesbians are not always the stereotype, that they are just ordinary people who do ordinary things like they do. In a way that's why I still wear makeup and want to wear makeup. It shows that all sorts of people can be lesbians. They don't have to wear big boots, grey clothes or conform to some kind of stereotype. Lesbians don't have to be frightening and heavy, they can/do look 'normal'.

In *Dancing With Strings* you don't know why the woman is on the beach. So the reader is trying to work out what is going on. There is a hint that something has happened to her. Parts are written in the

second person to show the distance. Someone in a bad way is distanced from herself. You talk to yourself when you are needy....

And running along with that is the past. But they are both going forward. They are both leading the reader on and the mystery is still not solved. You still don't know. When she starts to get better the 'you' turns to 'I'.

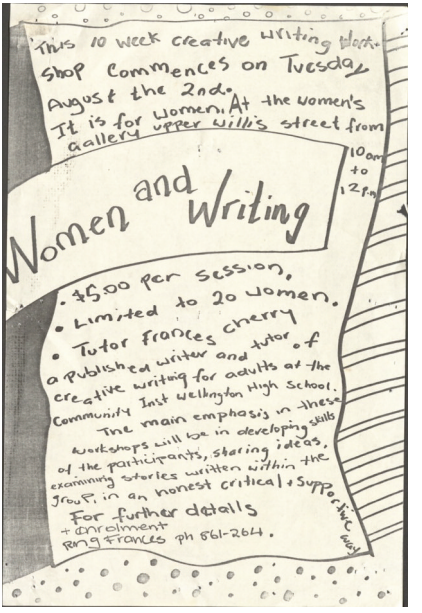
I think that a first novel is always a bit autobiographical. You sort of take your life and say what if... It's not the whole person. You take a small piece, say sadness, and accentuate it. You know what it is like to be miserable about something, so you put a character into a situation where they are miserable but you haven't put all the other things about you into it so it is not really you. I put this woman on the beach by herself. I haven't ever lived alone like that but I'd like to do it, see whether I could stay without a phone all by myself. I think it would be very interesting. That's the good thing about writing — you can create any life you want.

First published in *Lavender Annual*, Papers Ink 1989: 116–118.

FRANCES & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

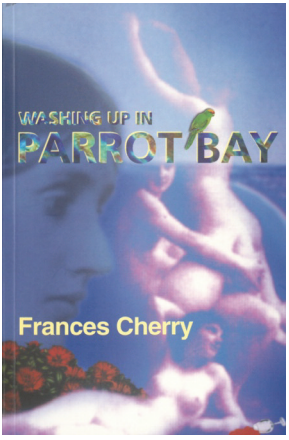
Frances contributed to the Women's Gallery programmes around 1982, when the gallery was based at 323 Willis Street.



. . .

In 1987, at the launch readings associated with the publication of Saj's *Amazon Songs* and Hilary Baxter's *The Other Side of Dawn*, she read her short story 'Waiting for Jim', selected by editor Cathie Dunsford for *New Women's Fiction*, published by New Women's Press.[1] At the readings, Fiona Kidman referred to Frances's commitment to giving classes at Arohata women's prison.[2]

In 1999, her *Washing Up in Parrot Bay* was a Spiral and Roger Steele co-publication.[3]



Cover image by KAL, photo by Frith Williams, map by Phil Simmonds, design by Lynn Peck.

1. See the poster in the J.C. Sturm section. Frances reads 'Waiting for Jim' at ATL OHC-3767.
2. ATL OHC-003762.
3. Available to read and download from Te Puna o Waiwhetū the Christchurch Art Gallery https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/washing-up-in-parrot-bay-by-frances-cherry

FRANCES & CATHIE DUNSFORD

Cathie Dunsford



L-R Cathie Dunsford, Frances.

That was at my place in San Francisco when Frances visited me sometime between 1983 and 6 when I was on a Fulbright Post Doctoral Scholarship at University of California Berkeley.

. . .

I first published Frances' 'Waiting for Jim' in *New Women's Fiction* which I edited for New Women's Press in 1986. Her story was later turned into a film by Chrissie Parker, a director friend who changed the title to *One Man's Meat.*[1]

(Chrissie also filmed Keri Hulme's story 'Hinekaro Goes On a Picnic and Blows Up Another Obelisk', which I commissioned from Keri for *Subversive Acts; New Writing by New Zealand Women*.[2] The film featured Rima Te Wiata and we discussed it lots throughout the process. Keri loved *Hinekaro*, which captured her energy and intention in writing the story and her sense of feminist revenge with subtle wit and humour.)

1. More detail and *One Man's Meat*, Christine Parker 1991, here, including a statement from Cathie that 'when she called for submissions she was deluged with stories of women killing their husbands'. https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/one-mans-meat-1991/quotes

2. *Subversive Acts; New Writing by New Zealand Women* edited by Cathie Dunsford Penguin Books 1991.

FRANCES CHERRY: WASHING UP IN PAEKĀKĀRIKI

Judith Galtry

> Linda stood on the viewing platform and looked down at Parrot Bay. The houses and strips of road were more like a model than a real township. To the west the expanse of sea seemed to go on forever, and the island looked so small. Beyond the houses miles of park and sand–hills curved into a narrow, tree–covered point, stretching out into the sea.[1]

In her innovative, lesbian, spiritualist novel, *Washing up in Parrot Bay* those people who knew Frances Cherry are aware that *Parrot Bay* is a fictitious name for her beloved Paekākāriki (the perch of the green parrot).

1. *Washing up in Parrot Bay* (1999)



Frances on the Paekākāriki beach. Family photograph.

Frances Cherry was a New Zealand writer and author of a raft of books and short stories. Although she was ambivalent, at least in later life, about being labelled as a particular type of writer, much of her work is feminist. It is aimed primarily at women, tackling the often–thorny themes of marriage, motherhood, divorce, lesbianism, and widowhood. Later, Frances' junior fiction series addressed the challenges of parental separation, custody and step-parenting. Unafraid to explore the often dark, emotional undercurrents of diverse relationships and ways of living, her stories have a therapeutic quality.

Paekākāriki was close to Frances' heart, her spiritual home, her tūrangawaewae. It was where she lived as a young married woman, raised five children, and helped run various family enterprises with her husband, Bob Cherry. It was also the home, in their later life, of her parents, and her younger sister. It was to Paekākāriki that Frances returned as an older woman, before making what was to be her last move: back to the Wellington suburb of Kilbirnie where she had grown up. Even in Rita Angus Retirement Village, she still spoke longingly of Paekākāriki, of how she might stage a return, while knowing full well this was no longer a possibility. Yet, she

continued to enjoy tales of village life until Parkinson's disease overtook her at the end.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Born on 25 November 1937 in Wellington to communist parents, Connie and Albert (Birchie) Birchfield, Frances was set for an unusual life. For starters, her mother was almost 40 years old when she had Frances; old, especially in that era, to give birth to a first baby. Not surprisingly, Frances was an especially cherished and coddled child.

Frances' sister, Maureen Birchfield, wrote a fascinating biography of their mother called *She Dared to Speak: Connie Birchfield's Story*. Connie emigrated from Lancashire to New Zealand where she became involved in unions and the Labour Party, joining the Communist Party in the 1930s. In Wellington, she was a well–known identity: a soapbox orator and agitator. But, for her daughters, Connie was a source of immense mortification. Seeing her communist mother standing on a soapbox in Courtenay Place was Frances' "most embarrassing moment", closely seconded by the sight of her father selling the *People's Voice* on Cuba Street.

Like Connie before her, Frances' later political concerns came under a wide umbrella of local and national issues. Frances took these lessons forward into her own life: how to be political, how to have a voice, how to be visible, how to be heard. Along with her mother's milk, Frances imbibed a sense of political agency: the importance of making a difference.

. . .

Frances' activism did not manifest however until she was much older. By her own description, she was a "normal, self–obsessed, and self–conscious adolescent". Later, as a kind of party trick that never failed to make people laugh, Frances would read aloud passages from her teenage diary: a dramatic account of the feelings and activities of an expressive young woman.



Frances dances. Family photograph.

A reluctant student, Frances was more interested in friends, dancing and boyfriends, falling desperately in love with a blond haired, blue–eyed and married American sailor from the icebreaker *Northwind,* that docked in Wellington Harbour in September 1957. Frances even took her Yankee mariner, Don, home to meet her communist

parents, who politely welcomed this representative from the heart of capitalism. Decades later she contacted him only to find, to her disappointment, that he was a rabid Republican and supporter of the United States' president George W. Bush – as far from her own political leanings as was possible. This story, with its suggestion of a rekindled, late-in-life, but unlikely romance, became more tragi-comic with each retelling.

PAEKĀKĀRIKI ROUND ONE: MARRIAGE & CHILDREN

In September 1958, Frances married a Tasmanian man, Robert Hume Cherry. Those Paekākāriki old timers who remember the larger-than-life Bob Cherry are a dying breed. Darkly handsome and impossible to overlook, Bob stood taller than most people around him in stature and presence, as well as in assets and achievements. A small–town property magnate, Bob soon became known, not always flatteringly, as 'Mr Paekākāriki'. Like most big personalities he had a multitude of friends and supporters, as well as his share of detractors.

Bob's swagger may have partly reflected his Australian heritage: a one-man diaspora from that land to the west where most creatures are bigger, brighter and noisier.

Frances and Bob tied the knot at the tender ages of 20 and 23 respectively in St James church in Newtown, Wellington, in a ceremony presided over by a 'left-wing parson'.

After a time living in a bleak, cold Wellington flat, Frances and Bob drifted incrementally northwards: first to Plimmerton, then to Pukerua Bay, before finally alighting on Paekākāriki in 1966. By then

they had four young children in tow: Brent (born in 1959), Craig (1961), Jane (1963) and Robert (1965). Caitlin, the youngest, was born seven years later in 1972.

The Mission House, a large homestead at the top of the hill in Tilley Road (now Mira Grove) built by Paekākāriki's early settler Smith family – and later a sanctuary for Open Brethren Church missionaries on sabbatical – became their nest. Just a short walk down Ocean Road were the glistening sea and Ocean Road steps: a social hub in summer.

In stark contrast to the Cherrys' own grand property were the railway cottages further north on Tilley Road: the once subsidised housing for the often large and hard-up families of men who worked for the railways. Sadly, these whānau have long since gone, as part of New Zealand Rail's privatisation.

Hot on her heels, Frances' parents moved to Paekākāriki in 1968 buying No. 55 Wellington Road, then "a bachy little place with a long section that ran alongside the Sand Track that led from Wellington Road to the beach".

A typical day for Frances was spent doing housework, shooting the breeze with other housewives over coffee, and gas-bagging on the phone, but always conscious there might be flapping ears on the party line. The telephone exchange was in the Post Office building on Beach Road—

> There was a telephone exchange in Paekākāriki and everyone was on a party line. We had a big box on the wall with a handle to turn so many times to get hold of people. Ours was something like two long rings and one short turn of the handle. Sometimes people would listen to other people's calls (you could hear them breathing) and the women (only women of course) at the exchange would often tell us where Mrs So and So was – "She's gone shopping in Paraparaumu".

Tipene O'Regan, then a teacher at Paekākāriki school, and his wife Sandra were close family friends, and the junior O'Regans and Cherrys often played together.

The Cherrys, along with Bob's business partner, owned a large chunk of Paekākāriki: a small TAB, the grocery store, the vegetable shop, the Belvedere motels on the main highway next to the Europa service station and the neighbouring villa – another Smith family settler homestead (later converted to the *1906 Restaurant)* – as well as a septic tank company called *Spick and Span*.

In the early 1970s, Bob and his partner took over the management of the boating pond, putting green, and shop in Paekākāriki's Queen Elizabeth Park, later adding trampolines, a merry-go-round, a chair-o-plane, and a miniature train. Frances and the children helped run the complex.

Reflecting their social aspirations, Bob bought himself a black

Austin Vanden Plas Princess and a crimson pink, two-door Austin Marina for Frances.

As Frances' stories depict, she had mixed feelings about motherhood. She started a group for mothers with young children, before throwing herself into Playcentre, then held in the tennis club rooms, eventually becoming its president. Although her love for her children was never in doubt, Frances chafed at society's restrictions, judgments and expectations. It was the judgment of other mothers that she dreaded the most.

Later, when she left her own marriage for life in the city, she imagined a sense of schadenfreude among those Paekākāriki friends whom she suspected of being trapped in unhappy marriages: a feeling that finally this cocky family who ruled the village from their roost on Mira Road had got 'their just desserts'. Maybe this is why, later, she rejected any form of feminism that subscribed to the simplistic binary of 'good women / bad men'.

But, at the time, Frances loved Paekākāriki as she knew so many people there. At one stage, their home became 'Party Central'. Frances told of how late one night she lay drunk with a neighbour on Tilley Road looking at the stars, without a thought to traffic of which there was little then. And every Guy Fawke's night, along with many other Paekākāriki-ites, the Cherrys went to Perkins' farm where there was a bonfire.

"Paekākāriki was the world and Bob was king of it", wrote Frances. While initially proud of her husband, Frances became increasingly conscious of the envy their lifestyle inspired; how some people

viewed them as a kind of Paekākāriki royalty or mercantile elite because of the size of their house and Bob's many business interests. The children suffered too. Frances' older daughter, Jane, tells of being called a 'rich bitch' and chased home from Paekākāriki school.

As she drove around in her crimson car, Frances experienced self–doubt. Was this marriage a form of rebellion against her upbringing and her mother's avid dislike of what she regarded as greedy capitalists who exploit others: those people who made Connie's 'blood boil'? Although Frances understood Bob's showing off was a reaction to his childhood, her memoir records her growing embarrassment over hearing him telling people what he owned. Her pride in her husband was on the wane.

Bob's friends called him the Tasmanian Devil. According to Frances, "He was a devil of a kid and a devil of an adult." Frances weighed up leaving – there was no Domestic Purposes Benefit payments until 1973 – and secretly hoped that Bob might desert her so she would be left with the house.

Doubts aside, Paekākāriki was a paradise for the kids.

> "They could wander more or less where they liked, climb up the hills, and swim at the beach...Paekākāriki was a real community where everyone knew each other. Many were involved in the school, playcentre, tennis club, bowling club and surf club. Also there was St Peter's Hall, which was hired out for films, concerts

and sometimes plays – and the shops where people caught up with each other.

Much like today, in fact.

The pub was a different story. It was the one Paekākāriki institution that Frances bitterly resented because it stole her husband away from her and the family. Hooked on the masculine company, the big talk, and the booze, Bob would come home only after closing time, which, thankfully, was at 6pm in the early family years.

In *Dancing with Strings*, Frances wrote: "Some people complain that New Zealand is an uncivilised country because the pubs close at six o' clock but all [I] can think of is how much worse it would be if they were open later". However, on 9 October 1967, New Zealand introduced 10 o'clock closing and "All my fears came to fruition. Now Bob went to the pub every night when he finished work and I never knew when he was coming home..."

Much later, lamenting the Paekākāriki Hotel's demolition in 2005, Frances wrote a poem, which was published by the *Dominion* newspaper.

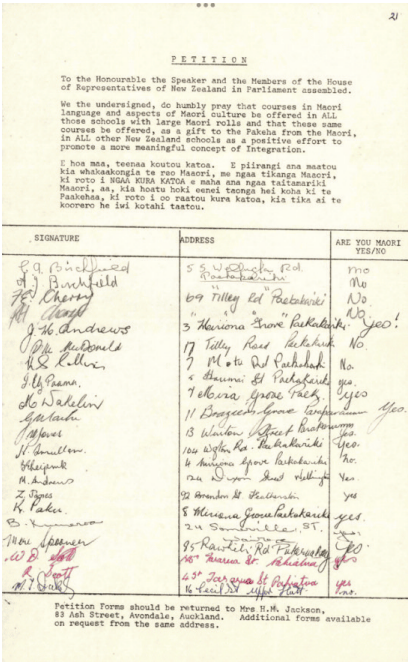
In 1972, following the birth of their last child, Caitlin, Frances had run out of excuses for putting off writing. She went to a WEA writing class run by Fiona Kidman, then to VUW Sunday writing workshops. As became her style, her stories sympathetically

addressed those often silent, but insufferable, situations in which people can find themselves.

In 'About Janice' she writes of the girl who does badly at school, unable to do her homework due to her parents' fighting and forced to clean up after her father and his boozy mates each night; while 'Nothing to Worry About' evokes the alienation and dissociation of a woman she had read about in the news who had killed her children. Here, as so often in her writing, Frances took something deeply shocking and made it relatable: "I wondered what had caused her to do it. I wanted to write a sympathetic story. Even though my life was nowhere as bad as hers, a lot of the feeling of waiting, worrying and hoping was."

Despite the apparent irony of the communist daughter wedded to the wealthy capitalist, Frances had not completely abandoned the values of her childhood. In the mid-1970s, along with Ames Street resident John Cox, she stood as a Labour candidate for Kāpiti Borough, promising to represent the needs of Paekākāriki. She believed it was important that a woman stand but ended up doing so herself when nobody else put themselves forward. Frances' catch–cry was 'Pick a Cherry at Election Time'. Unfortunately, their bid was unsuccessful, but Frances was pleased to get 200 votes.

In 1972 Frances signed a petition to Parliament calling for the promotion of Māori language and culture in schools. Other Paekākāriki signatories included her parents (the Birchfields) and Jean Andrews (Ngāti Haumia, Ngāti Toa).



PETITION

To the Honourable the Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives of New Zealand in Parliament assembled.

We the undersigned, do humbly pray that courses in Maori language and aspects of Maori culture be offered in ALL those schools with large Maori rolls and that these same courses be offered, as a gift to the Pakeha from the Maori, in ALL other New Zealand schools as a positive effort to promote a more meaningful concept of Integration.

E hoa maa, teenaa koutou katoa. E piirangi ana maatou kia whakaakongia te reo Maaori, me ngaa tikanga Maaori, ki roto i NGAA KURA KATOA e maha ana ngaa taitamariki Maaori, aa, kia hoatu hoki eenei taonga hei koha ki te Paakehaa, ki roto i oo maatou kura katoa, kia tika ai te koorero he iwi kotahi taatou.

SIGNATURE	ADDRESS	ARE YOU MAORI YES/NO
P.A. Bucklands	5 S.W. Beach Rd. Raetihi	no
J. Burnfield	"	No
Cherry	69 Tilley Rd "Paekakariki	No
Cherry	" " "	No
J. McAndrews	3 Haviona Grove "Paekakariki	yes!
[illegible] McDonald	17 Tilley Road Paekakariki	No.
H.S. Killin	7 Motu Rd Paekakariki	No.
J.W. Paama	4 Haumia Rd Paekakariki	yes
K. Wakelin	7 Hawira Grove Paek.	yes
[illegible]	11 Braeside Grove Camperdown	yes.
[illegible]	13 Waiton Street Petone	yes
[illegible]	120 Wellington Rd. Paekakariki	yes.
[illegible]	4 Awatapu Grove Paekakariki	yes.
[illegible]	124 Dixon Road Otaki	Yes
Z. Pages	92 Brandon St Wellington	yes
K. Paku	8 Hawera Grove Paekakariki	yes.
B. [illegible]	24 Somerville ST.	yes
[illegible]	95 Raukawa Rd Paekakariki	yes
[illegible]	16a Hawera Gr. Paekakariki	yes
R. Scott	45a Jean [illegible] St Porirua	yes
[illegible]	16 Leigh St Upper Hutt	Yes.

Petition Forms should be returned to Mrs H.M. Jackson, 83 Ash Street, Avondale, Auckland. Additional forms available on request from the same address.

THE MURDER THAT SHOOK THE NATION

In March 1975, Paekākāriki hit the national headlines in an event that struck fear and horror into the hearts of local residents and seared itself into the national consciousness. At a time when murder was uncommon in Aotearoa, Queen Elizabeth Park became the scene of one of the country's most shocking killings.

Newly married Gail McFadyen was staying in a caravan at Paekākāriki camping ground with her husband Graham while they were having a house built elsewhere. On 17 March, Gail saw her husband off to his new teaching job at Kāpiti College. When Graham came home, Gail was nowhere to be found. The police interviewed every person in Paekākāriki separately, including the entire Cherry family. Gail's body was later discovered in a sandy

grave in Queen Elizabeth Park off a track near the surf club. Frances recalled what a "terrible time it was with people imagining all sorts of things; many thought that [an old local] had killed her because he was often seen standing up on the road watching the girls on the beach".

A groundsman at the Park, John Murphy, was eventually convicted of her murder. Mike Bungay was the lawyer for the defence, later including the case in a book about killers he had represented. In a strange twist of fate, Bungay's wife, Ronda, subsequently became one of Frances' close friends.

THE END OF FRANCES' MARRIAGE

Bob turned forty in 1975, but that year fell sick with the heart disease that eventually killed him. Like the Tasmanian Devil, his nickname, Bob was an endangered species. Refusing to heed medical advice to rest, he was quickly back at work and the pub.

The Cherry union had effectively ended by 1978. The commencement of DPB payments in 1973 now offered an economic alternative, although limited, to marriage. If ever there was a time for exiting wedlock, it was now. In her memoir, Frances writes tellingly of her own and her husband's dalliances. Following a local liaison, Bob visited his family in Australia. Here he met his new wife, bringing her and her daughter back to Paekākāriki to a house in Ames Street, only to return before long to Australia. But, in 1981, Frances received news that felt "as if someone had thrown a concrete block into my diaphragm".

. . .

Only 46 years old, Bob had died unexpectedly from myocarditis – some might say from a broken heart from the devastation wreaked upon the family by the ending of the marriage. Later in life, any early bitterness having dissipated, Frances reflected on the good parts of their marriage, wondering if she and Bob should have "stuck things out" for the sake of their children.

At the time, though, Frances had to summon all her courage to turn her back on her wedding vows and on the small town of Paekākāriki where she imagined disapproval at every turn. 'Selfish' is what she supposed they called her, but that was not going to hold her back.

"I didn't want to be in Paekākāriki any more. I wanted a new start where I could go forward without pain. Everybody knew your business in Paekākāriki and if they didn't they made it up. I wanted to be in a place where, if I went to the supermarket, the staff didn't know anything about me. I felt as if all eyes were upon me when I went down to the village. I wanted to be anonymous."

Frances knew she would lose friends along the way, but she still possessed the golden gift of being able to make new ones at the drop of a hat.

This middle stage of Frances' life was life changing. In the 1970s and early 1980s feminism was flourishing in Aotearoa. At Easter 1979, she went to the United Women's Convention in Hamilton where she was exposed to radical feminist ideas and met other women who had left, or were in the process of leaving, marriages.

. . .

One of around 2500 attendees, Frances was deeply influenced by her time at the Convention, with its workshops on everything from abortion to workplace discrimination. She found the conference both liberating and scary: she made new friends but, as the mother of sons, felt conflicted about the exclusion of men.

Around this time, Frances bought a house in Brooklyn, took up with a much younger woman, Wellington lawyer, Barbara Buckett, and threw herself wholeheartedly into the lesbian world. Cross-pollination with Paekākāriki continued – close friends and family still lived there – but the village now felt far too small.

Lesbian politics and homosexual law reform became a big part of her life. Along with various lesbian and gay friends, she celebrated the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Act in 1986.

This period of Frances' life, just over a decade, is best told in her close-to-the-bone novel *Dancing with Strings,* published in 1989, and described as "the first lesbian novel published in New Zealand".

PAEKĀKĀRIKI ROUND TWO: LATE-LIFE ADVENTURES

By the start of the 1990s, finding herself single again after an exciting, tumultuous, and writing–filled decade, Frances was restless. The Paekākāriki magic was once more at work. In 1991, in the grip of intense nostalgia, she visited a friend there, "It was a beautiful day and I thought I just have to live there again".

It took a while to find something, but in May that year she bought 51 The Parade, a small villa one house back from the beach up a long

driveway. “It was a pink and grey house, not very exciting from the outside but easy to maintain.” Having bought the house from an old woman in her nineties, Frances cross-leased it and sold the back part of the long section.

The Widowhood of Jacki Bates – mostly written in Shannon while living in Janet Frame’s cottage – was published in 1991, the year Frances moved back to Paekākāriki. This book explores emotions and behaviour both in and after a relationship ends: themes close to her heart following the death of Bob and the end of her other significant relationship with Barbara Buckett.

By the time of this move back to the wild sea and looming hills of Paekākāriki – the home of her mother, her sister and close friends – Frances was in her mid-fifties.

“I loved the anonymity of Wellington but after a while I missed the very thing I thought I hated about Paekākāriki. It’s nice that people know who you are. It’s a special place, it gets in your blood, no matter how far away you go.”

The sea still sparkled or roared depending on its mood, but Paekākāriki’s social landscape was now different from her early family phase. The village was rich in lesbian life, drama and literature. Alison Laurie, an old Wellington East Girls’ College friend, lived close by on The Parade. Alison had written a history of lesbianism in New Zealand and, along with journalist Julie Glamuzina, co–authored a lesbian take on the notorious Parker–Hulme matricide, the ‘brick in a stocking’ murder of Honorah Rieper by her daughter and her daughter’s friend in Christchurch in the 1950s.

. . .

Then, in 1994, Peter Jackson's film *Heavenly Creatures* based on the 'gymslip murder' was released. Shortly after the film's release, Paekākāriki-based journalist, Lin Ferguson, unmasked the United Kingdom-based crime writer, Anne Perry, as the rich-girl killer, Juliet Hulme. Frances believed the tipoff came from her own conversation with Lin, a near neighbour on the Sand Track. With an eye to the story's Shakespearian dimensions, Frances later expressed mixed feelings about her disclosure, fearing the publicity that such exposure would inevitably attract while simultaneously regretting not being acknowledged as the source.

Various stories exist about the origin of the clue to Juliet Hulme's new identity. Lin Ferguson claims she uncovered Anne Perry's identity by doing "research in the local library and in a who's who of authors and found the gossip to be true". Peter Jackson reportedly begged Lin not to 'out' Anne Perry, but his plea was disregarded in the interest of such a juicy scoop. Perry herself later claimed that this disclosure was "the best thing that could have happened because now I feel free".

In her diary written at the time of the murder, Frances records that the Parker-Hulme killing was particularly shocking, because it was committed by schoolgirls "the same age as me" who "even when they were caught, [they] didn't seem to care". Frances later claimed that the killing of the poor mother, Honora Parker, who ran a Christchurch fish and chip shop, demonstrated Juliet Hulme's "rich-girl sense of entitlement" – it would have been fairer to have done away with *both* mothers!

. . .

Another lesbian friend, Victoria University economist, Prue Hyman, and her partner, Pat Rosier (ex-editor of the feminist mag *Broadsheet*), lived nearby at 66 Ames Street in poet Denis Glover's old house. Later, the subject of Denis Glover became vexatious for Frances, with Denis displaying, even in death, a propensity to provoke shenanigans.

The 1990s proved to be a productive but tough decade for Frances. She now refused to be pigeonholed or defined by any sexual orientation, although she suspected that some lesbian friends saw this as a sellout. She told friends she just wanted to be herself, unapologetically and frankly Frances. She was keeping all options open so she could be free to choose her own destiny.

Short stories were pouring out of her. Various anthologies including *New Women's Fiction* (1986); *In Deadly Earnest* (1989); *Subversive Acts* (1991); *Erotic Writing* (1992); and *100 New Zealand Short Stories* (1997) contain several of her stories from this time.

Frances now dedicated herself to her writing, in addition to her family, friends and animals. Too often romantic relationships, with all their difficulties and drama, had proved disappointing. With a renewed sense of discipline, she adopted a rigid routine which allowed her to spend the best part of the day writing: "At 6.45 every morning I went for a walk with my poodle Dragon Lady. We went along the beach and through Queen Elizabeth Park towards Raumati South".

Frances' energy levels may have dimmed, but she was now free to do as she liked. Her children were grown and self–sufficient and

Paekākāriki friends, both old and new, surrounded her. Annabel Fagan, a friend from her Brooklyn days, with whom she co-authored a book of short stories *Double Act*, now lived in Horomona Road. Always ready to initiate social activities, Frances started a book club around this time.

In May 1994, her mother died in Wellington Hospital following a short illness. The funeral was held at Paekākāriki's St Peter's Hall, on 13 May 1994 and a photograph of the procession accompanying Connie's white coffin down Wellington Road to the hall featured in the following day's *Dominion*.



Connie Burchfield, Frances' mother, with Frances in the garden.

Exacerbating her sense of loss, Frances was at the hospital visiting her dying mother when a car hit and killed Dragon Lady near the Sand Track. Frances kept the dog's body at home for a day so people could visit. Her last poodle – little, black Chloe – later became her loyal companion for many years.

PAEKĀKĀRIKI CONTROVERSIES: A FALLOUT OVER DENIS GLOVER

In the mid-1990s, Paekākāriki's creative community was rocked by controversy over how to best commemorate a past resident: the legendary poet, Denis Glover. Frances found herself in the thick of the action.

In 1996, sixteen years after Glover's death, the Paekākāriki Community Arts Trust, of which Frances was a former member, organised an event at the Paekākāriki Hotel to celebrate the poet's life and works. An impressive line-up of poets, writers, musicians, old friends and neighbours, as well as Denis's biographer, Gordon Ogilvy, came together to read poems both by and about Glover.

In anticipation of this occasion, Frances interviewed Paekākāriki locals who had known Denis for a booklet, *Friends and Neighbour: Denis Glover in Paekākāriki*. There are a mix of tales, some show Glover's kindly aspect – always ready for a chat, dishing out gardening tips, helping lift the heavy lid off the playcentre sandpit – while others emphasise his darker side: a drunken Denis lying unconscious in the gutter in Ames Street.

But, as the event came closer, the committee and others in the community disagreed over the portrayal of the brilliant, but hell-raising, Glover. Not everyone was happy for the stories that Frances

had gathered to be recounted, especially those tales that depicted the inebriated mischief, misdemeanours and misogyny for which Glover was notorious, including towards his deceased and, herself, sometimes incendiary partner, Khura Skelton.

There was concern that a focus on Denis's less savoury side – a side which seemed to intensify in his later years – would detract from his significant achievements.

Feelings ran high over the booklet, but Frances maintained that any attempt to whitewash Denis – who never hesitated to tramp where angels feared to tread – was wrongheaded. For was not Denis and Khura's relationship notoriously fractious and would not Denis – who was only too aware of his own deep flaws and compulsion to shock – approve of, even wish for, a realistic depiction of himself?

In the end, Frances was not allowed to sell her booklet on the evening; nor were any of its anecdotes to be read aloud. A letter (dated 21 October 1996) to a friend highlights her feelings at this time:

> "I hope you enjoy the little booklet. It actually caused quite a controversy in our community...He [Denis] had a passionate relationship with Khura and I feel that many of the things he did after she died were because of grief and denial that she was dead. The booklet was printed to be sold at the evening but at the last minute I wasn't allowed to do that. I also discovered that sanitised excerpts were not to be read out at the evening, as I expected, and only discovered this when I arrived at the pub..." [She concludes] "Paekākāriki is a

> wonderful place in many ways, though with all the trouble I have had over these anecdotes I began to think it was too isolated and thought of leaving. I have got over that now...

Frances was clearly hurt at being misunderstood and sad to lose some close friendships through this process.

A decade later, Caryl Hamer, the publisher of *Friends and Neighbours* wrote in *Paekākāriki Xpressed* (the local rag) that while the decision to print Frances' booklet was controversial, in the end they backed her view that it was important to portray the "warts and all poet".

The Glover hullabaloo shows that Frances was not scared of controversy. But while this time it was the depiction of Glover under fire, Frances did not shy away from writing about her own less-than-noble inclinations. In her memoir, she described her fantasy of murdering her husband by "tying cotton (because it wouldn't be easily seen) across our verandah steps so [he] would trip and fall down to the creek". Not really wishing for this to happen, she instinctively recognised the cathartic value of such an outlandish admission.

Frances' writing tended to be affirming and normalising. Her acknowledgement that being human necessitates the juggling of often contradictory emotions, including or especially towards loved ones, was one of her great strengths. For instance, spelling out the bleakness of postpartum depression is her description of sitting in Wellington's Pigeon Park with her first baby and her mother: "What

now? I'd married the handsome prince and had a baby. The future seemed like no future. Also, the thing that hit me was that I couldn't change my mind. For the first time in my life I couldn't change my mind." It was this honesty, as much as her authorial advice, which drew people – some who never left – to her writing workshops. For many aspiring writers, these workshops doubled as therapy.

On 25 November 1977, Frances turned sixty. Photographed on the back of a friend's motorbike, she set out to show that she did not intend to slow down with age.



FAMILY AND OTHER FRICTIONS: *WASHING UP IN PARROT BAY*

All families have frictions and fissures, and Frances' family was no exception. Her third and last adult novel *Washing Up In Parrot Bay* (1999), became a source of sorrow as it affected, for a time, her relationship with one of her daughters.

. . .

Described as a "provocative and engaging black tragicomedy" featuring "lesbians, witches and man-free conception rituals", *Parrot Bay* is a quintessentially Paekākāriki novel.

The many evocative images of *Parrot Bay* describe Paekākāriki and its multiple moods—

> He was in Parrot Bay before he realised it, turning across the railway line and driving through the village where familiar people wandered. The sea sparkled as he drove over the rise and down on to the esplanade. A few figures were strolling on the beach. Seagulls dived at the water, and surfboard riders floated like black dots, waiting for waves...[He] looked at the island, silent and full of secrets.

And, in an allusion to the legendary Rumbling Tum Hot Bread Shop (of the 1990s) in Holtom's Building next to the railway tracks—

> Adele sat on the high stool in the Gurgling Belly take-away shop, watching trucks and cars pass by over the railway line...It was a blustery grey day with a threat of rain, depressing after all the sunshine they'd had.

But *Washing Up In Parrot Bay* also reflected Frances' ambivalent feelings about Paekākāriki, including its insularity and, sometimes, inward-looking bent.

> “She was normal at one time,” he said. “What went wrong?” “Dunno... It’s probably living here. This place would send anyone crazy.”...“‘I mean the whole place. Parrot Bay. It’s so insular. I couldn’t bear it.” ... “There are some very interesting people living here. Writers, artists, all sorts.” So there, he thought. “Each to their own.”

Also, the sea – still the source of so much pleasure – now seemed more threatening.

> Along the beachfront the wind blew their hair back from their faces. They looked down at the waves crashing and booming on the sea wall. The sea was supposed to be rising with the greenhouse effect. It was all quite worrying...

In 2002, these mixed feelings would drive Frances away from Paekākāriki once again, first to Waikanae, then to Petone for three years, and finally back to Kilbirnie in 2006. “The taxi dropped her in the middle of the city. She stood, dazed, as the lunchtime throng jostled around her. Nothing mattered any more”.

Regrettably, the publication of *Parrot Bay* led to a short-lived rift between Frances and her older daughter. Originally conceived as a co-authored effort with the inventive Jane – who developed the spiritualist, witchcraft and turkey-basting components that lend the novel its contemporary edge – the novel was published under

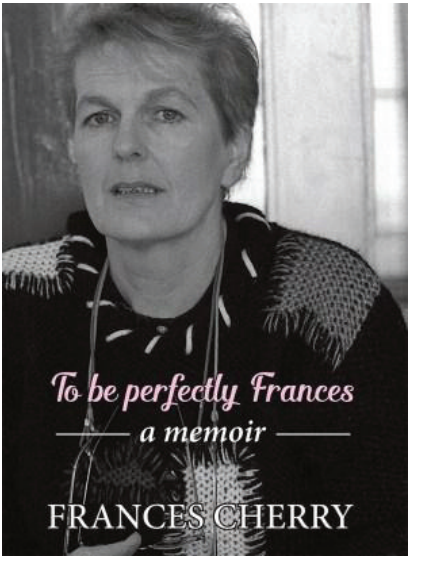
Frances' name alone. Jane's extensive contribution is acknowledged at the front of *Parrot Bay*, but Frances was clearly conflicted.

In her memoir, published almost two decades after *Parrot Bay*, Frances ruminates—

> When [*Parrot Bay*] was ready to go to print, I told Roger [Roger Steele, the publisher] that I wanted Jane's name on the cover as well, but he felt that it would be too hard to market a novel with two authors, and to my great regret I gave in. I do not blame him; I only blame myself and am deeply sorry. I should have insisted.

A review in the *Sunday Star Times* at the time describes *Parrot Bay* as "provocative and engaging", noting "[It] would be a shame for it to be pushed into a pigeon-hole labelled lesbian-only lit. For the broad–minded looking for an energetic and interesting read, there is plenty to enjoy".

Much later, in 2018, Roger and Frances were to collaborate again, this time on the publication of her memoir, *To Be Perfectly Frances: a memoir*.



Although Frances intended this to be a mostly positive summing up of her life and contribution to writing, she experienced huge angst in the publication process, a kind of re-run of the *Parrot Bay* experience. Family members and friends warned her that her portrayal of certain events and people might not be appreciated by the living, but Frances decided to proceed anyway.

Bob was dead so could not be defamed but significant others from Frances' past were alive and kicking. As the memoir came closer to completion, Roger advised her that it would be wise to run certain sections past key potentially recognisable individuals so they could be modified, if necessary. On his advice, she had already made significant changes to render certain characters unidentifiable, even changing an individual's age, hair colour and pet.

. . .

One person nevertheless sought advice from a barrister specialising in media law who claimed that, in order to publish, she would have to expurgate sections of text on the grounds that anyone who knew Frances could identify who she was writing about, regardless of the changes made to their identity. As such, it was defamatory, in the barrister's opinion. Moreover, contended the legal eagle, writer and publisher had committed, even if unwittingly, a 'breach of privacy' by previously passing the manuscript to reviewers who were acknowledged at the front of her memoir. Roger and Frances chose to comply with these requests and no further action was taken.

For Frances, herself a teacher of memoir, this process threw into question the nature of memoir, autobiography and biography, especially whether they can be meaningful once key identifiers have been altered to such an extent that an account becomes, in effect, a work of fiction. The genre of auto-fiction involving the deliberate amalgamation of non-fiction and fiction in a memoir was then in its infancy and also ran counter to Frances' preference for authorial directness and honesty. For Frances, this painful process confirmed that her interpretation of reality could never again be approached as the only legitimate viewpoint.

THE BOSSY OLDER SISTER

Back in Paekākāriki, Frances was living close not only to her parents, but also, later, to her younger sister, Maureen. Both sisters were talented writers – Maureen of non-fiction and Frances of fiction – but were quite different in temperament and appearance. When young, they did everything together, but sibling tension is apparent in Maureen's short story 'Let's talk about Me!'. This tale, which won the Friends of Kāpiti Libraries Festival Creative Writing competition in 2013 and was published in the Kāpiti Observer, appears to be based in fact for the

"bossy older sister" has "Marilyn Monroe blonde hair and generous curves, five children, and several live–in partners of both genders." In this narrative, Maisy, the protagonist, airs her main beef: "I never got much of a chance to talk about me. That's because I had a bossy, older sister who always wanted to talk about herself. She always butted in if I started talking about me".

WRITING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In the late 1990s, Frances morphed into a junior fiction writer. As with her adult novels, Frances' stories for young readers resonate with emotional honesty, addressing big themes such as parental separation and custody, moving to a new place, death of a grandparent, and issues of betrayal and trust.

The first of these *In the Dark*, published in 1999, examines a custody dispute from the child's perspective, with two Paekākāriki girls, Michaela Barr and Hester Callister, featuring on the front cover. The following year *Leon* was published and, in 2001, shortlisted in the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards. Paekākāriki's Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop (run by Michael O'Leary) published *Gate Crasher and Other Stories* (2006). *Flashpoint* appeared that year, followed by *Kyla* (2009) and *Pay Back* (2017).

FRANCES: ANIMAL LOVER, ACTIVIST, TEACHER & FRIEND

Alive to the wonders of the natural world, including the animal kingdom, it did not take long for Frances' conversation to turn to her pets. Each pet was heavily anthropomorphised, especially the last one – Kilbirnie-based Ray: a grey-striped feline with what Frances described as "a devil-may-care attitude". Based on her phone's final voice message, a caller could be forgiven for mistaking Ray for an

errant husband, coming and going as he pleased, rather than a mere cat.

An activist to her core, Frances became involved with local issues wherever she happened to be living. In Paekākāriki, she organised public meetings to protest Telecom upping its charging prices and became involved in a school debate; later, while living in Petone, she formed a local group to oppose a battery recycling plant operated by Exide.

Frances possessed a gift for friendship. Like most talents, it was facilitated by her own actions: her ability to take the social initiative. She sometimes claimed that shyness was a form of selfishness, describing how she grew out of being a shy child into a teenage clown through realising the power of making people laugh.

Frances set an example of how to live life. Although conscious of others' perceptions of her, she knew she had to be true to herself, a lesson burnt in on the ending of her marriage. Often, she said things others might be thinking: an 'emperor has no clothes' response to the world that usually worked for her. Frances may not have been everyone's cup of tea, but her propensity towards expressing her shadowy imaginings gave others the license to express their own less than charitable sides. This facility made Frances funny too, as in her imaginary tale of doing away with her husband — who could resist laughing at such an impossible fantasy expressed aloud?

Frances' fiction has an undeniable immediacy and vibrancy. When considering her legacy, descriptions of Frances' 'undeviating honesty' and 'sense of wonder' recur. Good friends, such as the author

Marilyn Duckworth, and psychotherapist, Ronda Bungay, attribute these qualities with keeping her stories young and fresh; while for Roger Steele, who published two of Frances' books, it was her 'particular gift for making dialogue come alive' that stood out. A prolific author, Frances has over fifteen books and short stories to her name.

Even at eighty, Frances was still attracting newcomers and oldcomers to her writing groups. Dot Dyett, who was 100 years old when I talked with her in September 2023, was one of these workshop lifers. As part of an exercise set by Frances to write about their 'first love', Dot described the time in England during the war when she met a young Jewish man who had escaped Nazi-infested Europe; how they had cycled to a field where they lay together hand-in-hand, only to be savaged by ants having mistakenly spread their rug on an anthill. Dot reports that Frances became impatient with what she saw as her students' "mealy mouthed accounts" and suggested they describe something more attention grabbing such as "****ing in the back of a car." Not everyone could get away with saying these things.

But, in her final year of taking classes, Frances' feedback no longer seemed as acute or insightful as before. Later, Dot wondered if this was due to the Parkinson's disease that, then unknown to Frances, was starting to ravage her system.

But this is about Paekākāriki, a place close to Frances' heart. Even in her last days at Kilbirnie's Rita Angus Retirement Village, she sometimes yearned for her Paekākāriki days. The village exerted a push-pull effect on her, much like the tides of the beach she once walked each morning. When she needed freedom from the village's confines she migrated south to the relative obscurity of the city; but when she felt lonely and lost in the universe, missing Paekākāriki's land-

scape and characters, she came back. This was one of Frances' contradictions, like the two sides of her personality: the hidden-away author fiercely guarding her writing time, and the gregarious, social animal who liked nothing better than time spent with family and friends, chewing the fat on any topic under the sun.

Later in life, Frances ruefully reflected on the changes to Paekākāriki. Recalling its past as a railway town with its own special sense of community, she felt that Paekākāriki had since become more like a satellite suburb of Wellington.

Throughout life, Frances found all sorts of people who met her great need for friendship. I was fortunate to be one of them. Informed by her love of reading and acute observation of life, Frances' curiosity about the world made her a great companion with whom to discuss books and unpick the small events of life, the interactions, and inevitable argy–bargy of human encounter. I was struck by a piece written about friendship which seems to echo her thinking:

> [I]f you like to write and argue and criticize, the only basis for the importance of your general claims – those beyond your particular experience – is the fact that you are human, like everybody else. And humans need friends to act as sounding boards for ideas as much as for gossip. The trick... is simply finding the right person for it.[2]

2. Dean, Michelle. 'The Formidable Friendship of Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt' *New Yorker*, 4 June 2013.

On 24 April 2022, aged 84 years, Frances died peacefully at Rita Angus Retirement Village, surrounded by her family. Her obituary describes Frances best: "A unique, passionate and fiercely loving woman who was ahead of her time".

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Gate Crasher (Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop, 2006)

Out of Her Hair and Other Stories (Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop, 2009)

Double Act: stories from Frances Cherry and Annabel Fagan (Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop, 2010)

Memoir

To be Perfectly Frances (Steele Roberts, 2018)

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In the Dark (Mallinson Rendel, 1999)

Leon (Mallinson Rendel, 2000)

Flashpoint (Scholastic, 2006)

Kyla (Scholastic, 2009)

Pay Back (CreateBooks, 2017)

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First published in *Paekākāriki*, fully illustrated.[3]

All photographs, unless otherwise labelled, are from Jane Cherry's collection.

Dr Judith Galtry is a researcher and writer who has worked for a range of organisations both in Aotearoa and overseas. She has published research in academic journals, and written stories for *Paekākāriki.nz* and *Newsroom*. She is particularly interested in untold stories about women.

3. https://paekakariki.nz/frances-cherry-washing-up-in-paekakariki/ For a fully referenced PDF of this article, please contact Judith on jgaltry@outlook.com

Part Seven

HEATHER MCPHERSON

1942-2017



Heather McPherson Self-portrait 1970s. Spiral collection ATL. watercolour on paper. Text reads Convalescence Elizabeth Bowen Aurora Leigh television washed me through the day

Tangata Tiriti.

FROM CATALOGUE NOTE FOR WOMEN'S GALLERY *OPENING SHOW* 1980.

Personal Note: Woman, poet, mother, friend, lover.

Read write nurture visit talk clean wash weed think nurture meet organise plan think budget cook shop plant listen sketch be nurtured paint mend dry nurture and hold it all together

Communication:

I write slowly, often painfully.
Wisdom ... best, if hardest, learnt by living.
My life, rich diverse distracting.
As the child grows, so productivity.
Sharing is vital.

FROM *WAHINE KAITUHI WOMEN WRITERS OF AOTEAROA (NEW ZEALAND)* 1985.

Most women arrive at the starting point with their joy and confidence as creator — creatrix? — already savaged. No models, an uninterested, anti-intellectual male culture —and physical, sexual and mental abuse without a context in which to be examined or healed.

For years I considered myself an alien, almost a kind of third sex, with no interest in 'normal' women's concerns and far too serious-minded to relate easily to either sex. Visits to helpful male tutors showed me that what I wanted to write was unacceptable — I

consciously censored myself. Those years BF (before feminism) seem lost, often self-destructive. But they did give me a technical apprenticeship in verse form, as well as a bunch of odd, sometimes seamy experiences.

I took a collection of poems to Leo Bensemann, then editor of *Landfall*. And told him I was a feminist. Oh, he said. Rita Cook — Rita Angus — was one and it didn't do her much good. He suggested I send work overseas — I said I wanted to publish locally first. Go and get a grant he said, and then we'll be happy to consider it. I walked out and down to the Avon. A grant? What grant? Where? I thought of Mason. Should I make boats and float the stuff down the river?

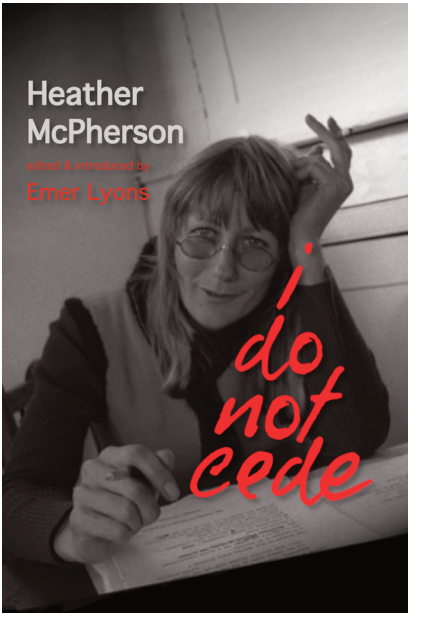
Some twelve years, a son, a *Spiral* magazine and a firm woman feminist lesbian identity later, I'm still concerned with access to support systems and the search for identity. Viva *Spiral*.

Some of the not-floated poems are in my second book [*The Third Myth*] — to come out with the Tauranga Moana Press, November this year.[1]

1. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2023_11/WomenWritersOf-Aoteroa.pdf: np.

RENÉE & HEATHER

Renée



On Sunday 5 June 2022, Renée launched Spiral's eBook i do not cede *by Heather McPherson, edited and introduced by poet Emer Lyons and with a cover by Biz Hayman, a cover image by Jane Zusters and a title typeface*

derived from Heather's own handwriting.[1] *It was almost exactly 40 years since Spiral published Heather's first collection* A Figurehead: A Face (1982).

The online-only afternoon was also a celebration of 80 years since Heather was born. MCed by legend Tilly Lloyd of Unity Books, it began with Hilary King's 'Jilted' *from the classic* Out of the Corners *LP* (1982)*, some archival images and a recording of Heather speaking about her work. It continued with readings and talk from people who knew and loved her: photographer Adrienne Martyn; writer Aorewa McLeod; academic feminist Deborah Jones; writer Fiona Kidman (read by Emer); painter Fran Marno; activist Morrigan Severs, poet and activist Saj Gurney and poet and activist Sue Fitchett. The event ended with conversations between Renée and Biz and Renée and Emer and a karakia from Ren.*

We were delighted and honoured that distinguished writer Renée (bio below), someone Heather loved and admired, agreed to launch the book. And there's more! Renée also coached me on how to structure the afternoon and I learned so much from that; and from Tilly's spirited and professional approach. On behalf of this Spiral Collective, warm thanks to them both, to the contributors and to the audience, for a joyous afternoon that Heather would have loved.— Marian[2]

RENÉE

Kia ora koutou, it is a pleasure and an honour to be here to launch *i do not cede*, a collection of poems by Heather McPherson. Thank you to Marian Evans for her all her help, who made allowances for my

1. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/i-do-not-cede-by-heather-mcpherson-2022
2. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/heather-mcphersons-i-do-not-cede-fab040dc87ae

failing eyesight and trusted me with an ecopy of the collection so I was able to read and reread these poems while writing these words. Thank you Marian and also thanks to Tilly, Emer and Biz. Sometimes, as Blanche says in *Streetcar Named Desire*, we depend on the kindness of strangers but I am luckier than Blanche, I depend on the kindness of whānau and friends.

When I came onto the scene in Auckland in 1980 Heather (in Christchurch) had already (with others) formed the collective, Spiral. I knew what spiral meant — or thought I did — something winding round and round like when I spun one of those pinecones we gathered for the wood and coal range because they burned fiercely and were free for the gathering. Sometimes as a kid I played with one trying to make it spin, mostly failing, but sometimes, once in a hundred tries perhaps, succeeding. A euphoric moment, a sweet success and the image of that little cone spinning round and round, stopping, teetering, falling, then being still, waiting for the next lot of fingers to make it spiral, has remained with me, a useful as well as enchanting object.

Spiral I mused, Spiral...then I thought...Collective?

Before 1972 when *Broadsheet*, the Feminist magazine, began to be published, I'd not come across that word, collective. Before the 70s I'd also not come across the feminist determination to discuss everything before acting. By the 80s when I came to Auckland, it was The Word. The idea that everyone's point of view should be considered before taking action was totally new to me. Up until then I'd used the 'do it because I say so' approach. In a collective though, I discovered, it was essential to discuss every possible move before acting. I understood the principle which said that everyone's point

of view should be discovered, discussed, included — it was the practice I found a bit difficult. I'm not sure I ever got the hang of it.

It seems to me that Heather totally understood the concept and what is even better was happy to put it into practice. The collective support and work on behalf of Keri Hulme's *the bone people* and Jacquie Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat*, among others, as well as the advising and encouragement of women writers makes that clear. She understood that being a writer, an artist, is a solitary business at times, a group enterprise at others — and she knew with great certainty, that you're in it for the long haul. If you write for theatre or group endeavours, writing can also become communal. Other workers, actors, singers, dancers, can comment and make suggestions during rehearsals which you either accept or not. Sometimes you ask for help like I did, when I said to the late great Jess Hawk Oakenstar, I want a song that starts with the words 'Dear Gertrude Stein', and next day there it was.

Poetry, said Heather, is political. She understood the value of words, she understood how important it was for people like me to see that that often despised, scary, wonderful word, lesbian, was also political. She said it, she wrote it and she also wrote about its sexuality, about its combination of frivolity, friendship and about its formidable purpose. We're here and we're not going away.

Sometimes writing goes round and round in a circle and other times you go like a rocket towards the target. There's no such thing as inspiration, there is only working and reworking, working and reworking, and somehow a time comes when you know that piece of work is finished or as finished as its ever going to be.

. . .

While the 1980s was a freeing and fun decade for me and a lot of others, it was also a hard working time. You said you'd do something and although it might be scary standing on a corner yelling about the leniency shown to rapists by the courts, you did it. Other women, friends or mostly strangers, dependent on you, so you squared your shoulders and got on with it. I remember that first march up Queen Street in support of Homosexual Reform and the hatred and shouted slurs of those watching. It seems to me the 80s was a decade made up of a mixture of learning, hard work, being shouted at and going to parties with lots of wine and laughter. Heather did not rely on the male literary establishment for either approval or acceptance. It was unimportant, a noisy little squib quacking to itself out there somewhere. She was a shock and a surprise to their artificial and cosy beliefs. She was a mover and a shaker of old certainties, a friend to many, a lover to some, a loving and loved mother and grandmother, an artist and a writer, a star pointing the way for not only other lesbians but for writers everywhere.

In *i do not cede* (and who but Heather would use that fabulous four letter word, 'cede'? A beautiful word, a powerful word) here is a words woman with a kete full of words, all sizes and shapes, some strong and hard, some fragile, some loving and full of passion, all lengths, all twists and softnesses, sometimes uncompromising and direct. She gathered words, harvested them, arranged and presented them for our future and always delight and illumination. She wrapped them around us as a shield and a haven.

sister, when you pick
Sapphic
fragments
out of my body

from under
your words
& my
words from
under your
body
& after
you shake out
Other assumptions
of sites & times
& ignorances
will you
recOllect
(me)
will you
dOcument
(me)
in y/Our
blOOming
Olivia
tree

Adrienne Rich wrote, 'There must be those amongst whom we can sit down and weep and still be regarded as warriors'. Heather Avis McPherson was that kind of warrior. She knew our weaknesses, she knew our strengths and in *i do not cede*, her words are a shield and an arrow pointing towards the warmth and safety that is in ourselves, signal who we are — who we are.

I am very happy to declare *i do not cede* by Heather McPherson, published by Spiral, editor Emer Lyon, cover designer Biz Hayman, well and truly launched. Kia ora koutou...

. . .



Biz Hayman, Renée and Kim Hunt. Screenshot at launch 5 June 2022.

Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu/Scot) writer, reader and teacher. Renée has written 1 collection of short stories, 8 novels and 18 plays. Her memoir, *These Two Hands* (Makaro Press 2017, 2d edition 2020), her first crime novel,*The Wild Card*, (The Cuba Press, 2017) and her second crime novel, *Blood Matters*, will be published 2022. Renée's Panui for Te Pou Muramura ReadNZ was published November 2021. In 2006 Renée was awarded Officer New Zealand Order of Merit, 2013 Te Kingi Ihaka Award for services to Toi Maori and in 2018 the Prime Minister's Award for Fiction.—Renée (2022)

First published in 'Spiral Collectives' on *Medium*, with links to the recorded launch and Emer Lyons reading *i do not cede*.[3]

3. Video of launch on Spiral Youtube, https://youtu.be/L3SjmN2q1eM and Emer reading https://youtu.be/c7qrP4dmvUA

HEATHER & SPIRAL (1)

Heather McPherson



Heather McPherson in kitchen. Photograph Jane Zusters Giclee print 1975.

My mum trained to be a shorthand typist and secretary, at Seddon Tech (Seddon Memorial Technical College). But it was the Depression; she took work as a shopkeeper. Eventually she became shop

manager. One of her stories was how she'd hoist 25lb cheeses from their top shelf storage 'just like the men' and then, without weighing the rounds, cut off exact pound or half-pound slices. My mother mightn't have called herself a feminist but equal pay for equal work reverberated with her, prompted by her recollection of how, when she was earning 30 shillings a week as manager, non-managerial men were earning 42 shillings a week, because they were married. I grew up with a small internal smoulder that alerted me to gender injustice.

Though initially puzzled by bra-burners, once I mixed with outspoken feminists I gladly discarded the 'foundation garments' that figured so largely in my grandmother's life (less so for my mother). Women, meetings, marches and consciousness-raising groups did the rest. But occasionally the most profound influence on my feminist consciousness was a book. The first was *The First Sex* by Elizabeth Gould Davis; a little later came *How to Suppress Women's Writing* by Joanna Russ. The latter I read and reread alongside mainstream (or 'male') reviews; it's still applicable.

Early seventies: I'd had poems published in *Landfall* and other small magazines. I approached Caxton Press and *Landfall* editor, Leo Bensemann, with a collection. During our conversation I said I'd become a feminist. He said that (painter) Rita Cook — Rita Angus — had been a feminist 'but it didn't do her any good either'. He said yes, my poems were publishable but to go away and get a grant. I didn't know how to do this. The book languished unpublished. At the 1973 Christchurch Arts Festival I was invited to participate with three others in a women poets' reading. This was followed by a Young Poets reading. Twenty or so young men got up on stage; not one woman among them. Their voices seemed indistinguishable; I remember only one as being

outstanding, and as I've said elsewhere, he was a bit mad as well as outstanding.

WHERE WERE THE WOMEN?

Local women's liberation initiatives already existed e.g. The Christchurch Women's Centre which initially doubled as The Christchurch Women's Refuge and began as a community venture jointly by women from Gay Liberation, by Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), the lesbian feminist group in Christchurch, and Radical Feminists (a Christchurch feminist group based at Chippenham urban commune). As Women's Liberationists we saw women's rights as not being just about controlling our own minds and bodies legally and politically, but to be validated in all areas, including as artists/writers/craftspeople, for women's work to be equally valued and visible with men's, for male gatekeepers' power to be challenged. In Christchurch an established and diverse community of talented articulate women sharing Women's Lib goals worked willingly towards them.

Spiral bloomed directly from the Women's Liberation Movement. Women Artists' Movement theory came initially from overseas, particularly the United Kingdom and North America/Canada. Overseas literature and polemics flew into our hands as women travelled overseas making contact with international groups, including those living on women's land, camping grounds with access for travelling women who, like the intrepid Morrigan Severs, brought back magazines, books, posters, broadsheets, reports, photographs, poems. The seventies saw a vital international exchange of arts and theory magazines e.g. *Hecate* from Australia and *Heresies* from the United States.

. . .

With growing confidence, women's and artists' groups modified theory to New Zealand conditions. The vision was of arts and artists communicating, equally valued, democratising the process of art-making, so that it would not be under male dominance. All women are artists, we said. We wanted to publish New Zealand women, to build connections between artists working in different media, to get New Zealand women's art and voices heard, to make overseas connections.

Circle. A collective of Christchurch women took turns with Wellington & Auckland collectives to put together the national lesbian magazine *Circle*. Of course, earlier, also nationally and more visibly, *Broadsheet* feminist magazine in Auckland had begun its run. Some lesbians felt this had a heterosexual slant. A little later Herstory Press started in Wellington, originally by Robin Sivewright and Jill Hannah, continuing with Robin Sivewright and Jill Livestre.

A short time (and a child and a discarded heterosexuality) later, I took part in SHE meetings when members were working on a Homosexual Law Reform submission. It was a large capable group; my input seemed negligible. But the experience spurred me to think what I'd prefer to be doing. With the excitement of Women's and Gay Liberation in the air, with a number of talented artists in the law reform group, with their stories of being turned down for publication by editors or being selected for hanging by art gallery owners because of being too different, or more enragingly, not up to standard, I thought I'd like to be working with/for women artists (in the inclusive sense of visual, written and multi-media arts). In early 1974, I advertised the formation of a Women Artists Group which became a small group that met regularly (see 'In The Beginning

There Was Heather'[1]).

I talked with other feminist women, particularly those involved with *Circle*. Painter Allie Eagle was committed elsewhere especially with her work at the McDougall Art Gallery. I advertised again, got keen replies including at least one member of the South Island Women Writers' Association; we began meetings towards producing a journal.

I was familiar with the story of Walt Whitman's self-publication; also, increasingly, of various small magazines and their founders: notable was Margaret Anderson's *Little Review* which with Anderson as editor and Jane Heap as illustrator and designer first published Joyce's *Ulysses*. (As Alison Bechdel says in *Fun Home* I'd had primary school experience of making/collating a magazine; surely it couldn't be too hard?) I made contact with poets Alan Loney and Don Long who published with small press associations in the United States; both, with Robert Brett, were helpful and supportive. I printed off flyers on one of their elderly printing presses. The physical work was tiring and time-consuming; I realised my priority was not beautiful and/or old-style printing, but getting the printed work out.

In 1975, Joanna Paul, as a member of the Women Artists Group, suggested creating a total environment designed by women.[2] Later, Allie Eagle, who had also learned of Judy Chicago's *Womanshouse,* linked her network of women artists to our Women Artists group, to work on the initiative which ultimately became the successful

1. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/in-the-beginning-there-was-heather-d2ebbf4dd63c

2. See 'In the beginning there was Heather' https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/in-the-beginning-there-was-heather-d2ebbf4dd63c; and 'Joanna, Spiral & Me', below.

1977 United Women's Convention Art exhibit, gathering-place, and performance space, sited in the Christchurch Society of Arts.

A spirit of defiance strode abroad.

Some of our ideas, in the Women Artists Group and *Spiral* were:

> Art is not made in a vacuum but out of our lives.
>
> Women's and men's lives are different because of our different experiences of socialisation, and because of child-birth, child-rearing, work, shibboleths of niceness and cultural expectations.
>
> Thus women and men artists have and express different values as well as content.
>
> Sexism both causes and effects women's marginalisation in the arts by overt and covert censorship of women's experiences as un/acceptable art content.
>
> In the same way, homophobia censors the expression of lesbian and gay experiences in the arts, especially sexuality.
>
> Women artists – some great – have been overlooked, under-rated and/or dismissed by male gatekeepers of the literary and artistic canon.
>
> Publishing and art selection in New Zealand as elsewhere, being male-dominated, gave little support to

women writers and artists and passively or actively discouraged us.

Spiral advertised as a forum for women only (even so, a few men sent work). We advertised and printed only what we received. As I said in *A Woman's Picture Book* (1988) re feminist content and/or work, the intent was more radical than the content. But there was and is a process in definitions, especially defining what is meant by 'feminist' & what is meant by 'feminist artist'; our ideas changed over time. Sixties women artists had seen the 'crazy writer' and the 'suicide syndrome': the brilliant woman artist as depressive and/or self-destructive (e.g. Plath, Arbus). As feminists in the early seventies, we at first wanted positive portraits of strong women, we wanted celebrations of being woman/lesbian/gay, we wanted to erase the images of sex symbol and victim. I once did not publish some good work because it was too 'depressing'; I now regret that decision. (The writer became very successful in mainstream publishing.)

In the first issue of *Spiral* we were rather role-bound, partly because I didn't know how to work with a collective; later we managed more job and responsibility sharing.

Herstory Press was printing Women's Liberation material and posters, pamphlets, political papers, flyers, etc. We negotiated. The Christchurch group sent material, the Wellington group printed and returned the first *Spiral*s. The Christchurch group put together the first issue's pages 'by hand'. Hard work...that putting together. But a glorious shared task done by over a dozen women in the livingroom of Saj Gurney's and friends' The Blue House, loose pages laid out to be stapled together by the collective and house occupants in the one

free space we knew was big enough to cope. In this space, these women hosted weekly lesbian dance parties. Good spirits, good cooperation, fun, laughter, a few howls of frustration, a huge satisfaction.[3]

Later – the magazine typeset and laid-out to printing quality – we used local printers. Distribution was always a problem. The women's/lesbian communities in Christchurch helped; women's bookstores and – in Auckland – *Broadsheet* were helpful. Individual members of each collective did wonderful continuous work to get *Spiral* through the country. The first four *Spiral*s, apart from sales, subscriptions and donations, were mostly funded by the Christchurch women's/lesbian community, particularly women's dances in a community which might or might not share feminist beliefs. I remember, for example, the disagreement over whether or not to use men's music at dances (e.g. the Rolling Stones, the sexist content); this for a while was a feminist-nonfeminist community split.

But lesbian feminist, gay non-feminist and heterosexual feminist women supported *Spiral*; came to shows, readings and exhibitions, bought books, paintings, photos, etc and not least, came to the dances which paid our printers' bills. A cash box disappeared at the Waikato Women's Studies conference, the *Spiral* collective held a special dance to replace the money. Distributing and fundraising were communal; *Spiral* could not have existed without the wonderful emotional and financial support of friends, partners, community.

. . .

3. See https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/the-blue-house-d0a42ed747f4#.7s9xnvat3 and 'stein songs for the blue house' in *A Figurehead, A Face*, Spiral 1980: 9–10 https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/a-figurehead-a-face.

For the first issue we gave the authors a token payment ($2)(!) to 'acknowledge' their work; this was to be augmented but we never made enough money to recover expenses.

Costs included additional life-stresses: I was a solo mum doing a part-time job and paying a babysitter to do that; I rarely had spare cash for luxuries let alone to subsidise a magazine, except in time/labour and small incidental costs. It also meant less quality time for relationships or writing. In 1980 I relinquished involvement with the magazine so that I could move closer to my North Island family and write more and reluctantly took on co-ordinating *Women & Violence* at the Women's Gallery in Wellington, as nobody else volunteered.

Rewards : first, to have been part of a heady exciting venture in a heady exciting time. Shared art shows, shared poetry readings, never in my life had I seen such excitement in swapping newly-published theory and arts books, to be gobbled, swallowed, discussed, disagreed with, tussled over for relevance. Swathes of information sprayed us.

A young feminist last year asked me had I consciously used Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) as a model/framework for my poem 'Have you heard of Artemisia?'[4] Well, not consciously; I had attributed echoes in the poem to two other sources: Elizabeth Gould Davis and Max Jacob. But I'd missed Firestone, perhaps because when I wrote the poem I'd forgotten her, and as a dangerous political theorist she rarely if ever appeared on

4. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/have-you-heard-of-artemisia-7b9f0fe2862a#.r2yyxgvtx

feminist or university reading lists to nudge memory, not with a subtitle like 'The Case for Feminist Revolution'.

Other rewards have included life-long friendships, meeting talented women: artists in all media, concepts, crafts – writers, painters, weavers, sculptors, photographers, printers — to have worked, played, argued with wonderful women, good at their jobs. Hugely rewarding has been to see the inspiration continue, and later women's collectives publish under the name/imprint e.g. *the bone people*...

This is a good opportunity to thank the women who worked on and for early *Spiral*. Always supportive were Paulette Barr and Anna Keir who did lots of child-caring for my son Rick who was two when I moved to Browning Street in Sydenham and got swept into the Women's Movement. Both did heaps of general and specific chores and Paulette generously, stoically answered heaps of letters, Anna designed wonderful covers. On the first *Spiral* Patsy Keene at Chippenham did great typesetting work, Kath Algie with design and layout, Jane Zusters with visuals and photos; in later issues so did Lynne Ciochetto and the women named in the magazine's collectives. Phil McLean did the first cover. Striking. The Women's Centre and Women's Refuge women contributed. Saj Gurney provided hospitable space and fun stages for parties and dances, also helped with child care and the tedious details and organising to make a magazine. All helped fundraise. How did we do it? Enthusiastically, messily, eagerly.

We were changing our worlds.

ŌTAUTAHI CHRISTCHURCH COVERS & COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

Issue 1 (1976)



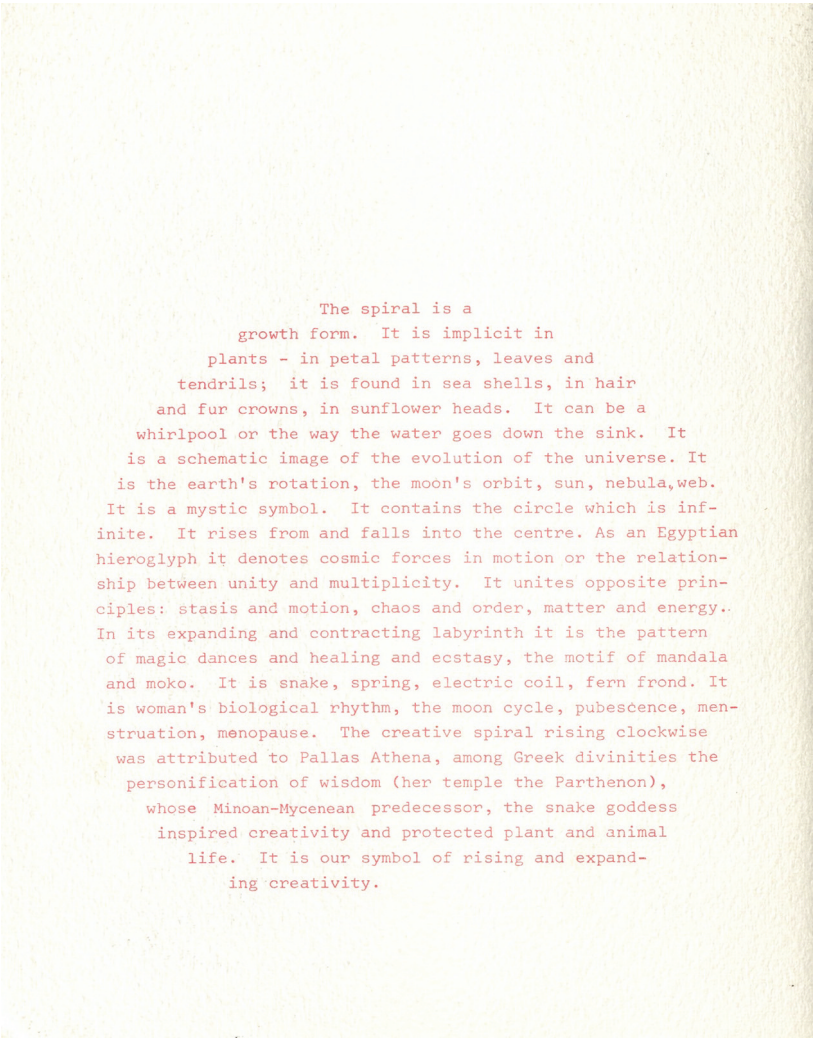
Editor *Heather McPherson*
Design & Layout *Kath Algie*
Typesetting *Patsy Keene*
Cover Design *Phil McLean*
Illustrations *Kath Algie*

Photographs *Zusters*

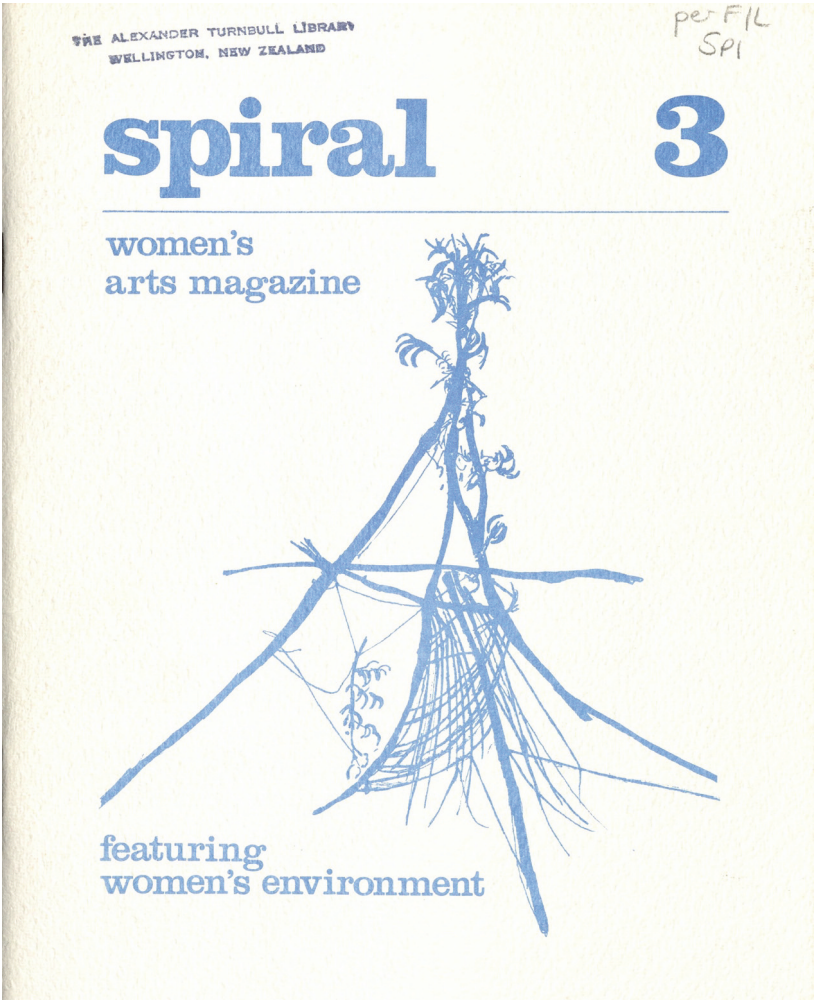


Issue 2 (1977)

Spiral Collective*: Kath Algie, Paulette Barr, Heather McPherson, Alison Mitchell*
Typing *Patsy Keene*
Photos *Zusters*

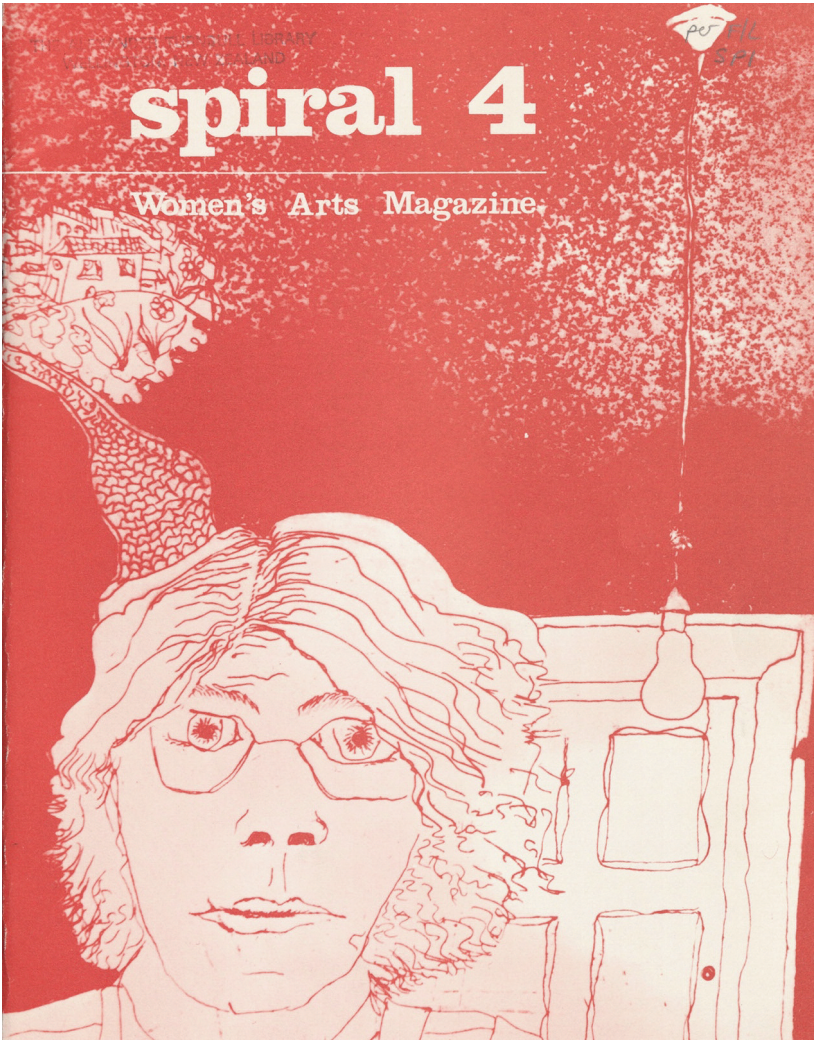


'The Spiral is...' by Heather McPherson.



Issue 3 (1978)

Spiral Collective*: Patsy Keene, Anna Keir, Ruth Lawley, Heather McPherson, Wendy Prestney, Tiffany Thornley*
Layout *Lynne Ciochetto*
Cover *Allie Eagle & Lynne Ciochetto*
Fundraising *Gladys Gurney, Leslie Carr*


spiral 4
Women's Arts Magazine

Issue 4 (1979)

Spiral Collective*: Ruth Lawley, Heather McPherson, Wendy Prestney, Tiffany Thornley, Chris Smith, Gladys Gurney*
Layout*: Lynne Ciochetto*
Typing*: Joan Hazlehurst*
Cover*: Lynne and Tiffany*

Spiral 4 was by now a 'proper' collective – not role-bound – and the last produced in Christchurch. A Wellington collective produced *Spiral 5*, a Coromandel group *Spiral 6*and a cross-New Zealand collective *Spiral 7*.

Written November 2015, mildly re-edited by Heather in March and October 2016. First published in 'Spiral Collectives' on *Medium,* 13 October 2016.

Note: the Spiral covers were reproduced from the Alexander Turnbull Library periodicals collection because they were so beautifully pristine.

HEATHER & KERI HULME



Keri (kneeling & looking off camera) & Heather (foreground in white) with Michael Volkerling & Bridie Lonie in background, Brigid Eyley far left front, partly obscured. Women's Gallery January 1980. Photograph Fiona Clark.

Heather met Keri for the first time at the Women's Gallery in January 1980 and they became friends. In 2005, when Lydia Wevers and Spiral organised a seminar to celebrate 20 years since the bone people *won the Booker Prize, Heather sent this contribution to share.*

For Keri

Months ago, a descendant of naturally disputatious Highland Scots, I wanted to tackle the Listener reviewer of *Stonefish* to tell her she was totally mistaken in her approach to both the intent and the content of the book.

I wanted to say that after tensely gobbling through *Stonefish*'s first twentynine or so pages, about page thirty or thirtyone I suddenly let out an exultant shout — or crow — or maybe if I knew what it was, a guffaw (Kiwis rarely guffaw, in my youthful reading if was an English colonel's reaction). Anyway it was the exultation that mattered — here was our very own great genuinely pioneer bicultural writer out post-modernising all the post-modernists. I hadn't — haven't — enjoyed a book so much since I discovered Italo Calvino. Or maybe for different reasons *the bone people*.

But then I got sick and lost my concentration and instead of a review of one book I've ended up with a tribute to all Keri's work — though who was it said all a writer's works are one work? So here with love is a work in process, a symbol for the greater maker.

E Keri

they're still tearing it apart
the jealous missionary kids

chopping your bright flashing fish
that won't just lie with glazed pop-eyes
cut wings and sickle lips

but heaves and surges basks and dives
lunges and swipes a sword-nose spike
dreaming blows in swollen seas

while you word-fisher
who nurtured it and turned it loose

stalk your beach under green-cloaked cliffs
and listen well and singing know
how pasts and futures live

in simultaneities of time
permeable as the thin white discovered
that bulges out a stretched cloud-skin
off a wicked new moon's grin

where who steps in sees a life-globe split
and a blink expose eternities
and afterwards tormented tranced

clearer and more electric
than their liquid traces facing up
glittery fish-scales on your wet palm
and life-line arc and Mount of Venus

and Plain of Mars

but high in lunar seas your seeing
like Whitman's Melville's White's
hooks a country's new-made vision

shows a person's number infinite
and infinitely compassionate the seer
of the pulsing core of a sacred place

E Keri

though Maui's brothers couldn't wait
and descendant settlers and soldiers' hack
at your great beautiful succulent fish

still your mythical keeper broods
in heart-stone fire
still uncurls

across dark seas
a shimmering whale
flips its tail

sounds the world

Transcribed by Annie Collins.

HEATHER & SPIRAL (2)

Marian Evans



THIS JOYOUS, CHAOTIC PLACE:
HE WAIATA TANGI-Ā-TAHU

Poet & lesbian feminist **HEATHER McPHERSON** (1942-2017)

& some of her writer and artist peers, in association with publication of her new book, *This Joyous Chaotic Place: Garden Poems.*

MOKOPŌPAKI Ground Floor 454 Karangahape Road
1 March-14 April

image:
Painting Heather's 'Have You Heard of Artemisia' on Women's Gallery wall, Wellington 1981.

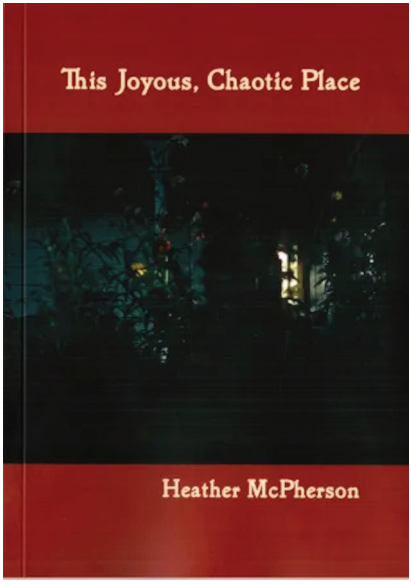
Heather 'left' Spiral after *Spiral 7*. She began her editorial 'that in accordance with a late/nt interest in post-structuralism, suggests'—

> ...that post-feminism be suitably shrunk from its lumpen componency in the corporate whale's-belly to its proper red herring proportions and embalmed; the fisher among us, continuing to change patriarchal structures, consciousness and parameters can then frolic with dolphin, porpoise, and other mammals without accusations of having been swallowed by a chimera.[1]

She ended the editorial with a renewed commitment to her own writing. But she returned to Spiral, in its open research project on *Medium,*[2] when she became ill. After she died, thanks to Cushla Parekowhai, Spiral and Mokopōpaki — a dealer gallery with Māori values — developed a commemorative project, with three distinct elements. First, there was an exhibition about Heather and her peers at Mokopōpaki — *This Joyous, Chaotic Place: He Waiata Tangi-ā-Tahu*.

At the same time, Spiral produced a collection of Heather's late poems: *This Joyous, Chaotic Place: Garden Poems*, selected and edited by Janet Charman, with design and a cover by Lynne Ciochetto, who selected a cover image by Joanna Margaret Paul and further cover images of and by Joanna and Allie Eagle, one of them taken by Kathryn Algie.

1. *Spiral 7: Lesbian Art & Writing from Aotearoa New Zealand* eds HeatherMcPherson, Julie King, Marian Evans, Pamela Gerrish Nunn, Daphne Brasell Associates & Spiral 1992: 9.
2. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives



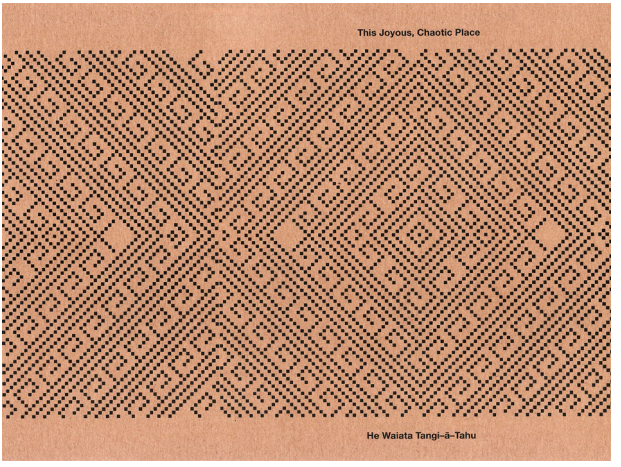
Our sense of having done the best we could for Heather was reinforced when we read Francis McWhannell's comments in *Pantograph Punch*—

'*This Joyous, Chaotic Place* blasts the archive open, countering the silence of the library and the standoffishness of the vitrine. As the title suggests, the exhibition is raucous, celebratory, even as it acknowledges marginalisation, oppression, and violence. It serves to remind us of the roots of contemporary feminist movements like #metoo. We stand on the shoulders of Artemisias — and of Heathers.'[3]

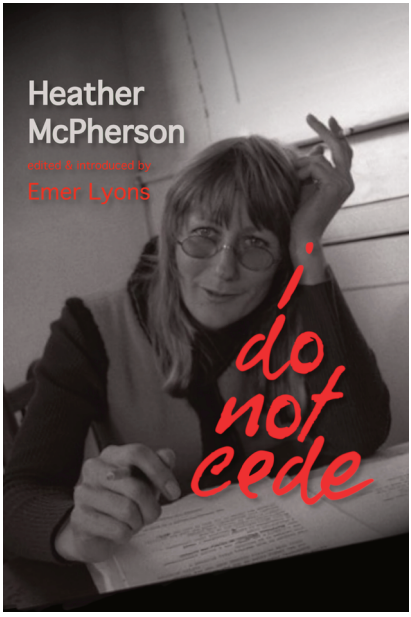
. . .

3. https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/unmissables-march (accessed 2018: link now broken),

Finally, a year later, Mokopōpaki and Spiral published a catalogue of the exhibition itself.



In 2022, poet Emer Lyons selected, edited and introduced a selection of Heather's erotic poems, *i do not cede*, launched, as seen earlier in this section, by Renée.



All these books are available as .pdfs to read and download without cost, on the Te Puna o Waiwhetū Christchurch Art Gallery website, alongside Heather's first collection, *A Figurehead: A Face*, also published by Spiral, in 1982.[4]

4. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral

Part Eight

KERI KAA

1942-2020



Keri Kaa. Photographer Pearl Sidwell. Undated.

Keri Kaa CNZM QSO was from Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Porou. A much-beloved arts matriarch, she won many awards including Te Tohu a Ta Kingi Ihaka (2016), for her lifetime contribution to Ngā Toi Māori and strengthening Māori culture.

A LETTER TO MY MOTHER

Keri Kaa

We've never really talked woman to woman. Our conversations have always been mother/daughter, parent/child, half-way talks. We've never talked or listened with each other. For me you've always been this immense personality on the perimeters of my life, always available to take care of my physical needs, but somehow distant and a bit frightening.

I began by loving you. I depended on you for sustenance and nurturing. Then I went away at the age of twelve to boarding school and slowly the situation changed. I began to view you in a different light. There were so many secret thoughts I wanted to share with you during my teenage years but you were busy or too tired to listen. I also had trouble knowing how to begin to tell you. By the time I plucked up courage to do so, you were needed elsewhere and thus moments were lost. So I coped by keeping my dreams to myself, or else I shared them with other people's mothers who were less threatening. Silly, isn't it, hurtful too. I felt vulnerable and exposed where you were concerned, I still do. Why is it that I who cope

fairly well with all sorts of situations and crises in my working life, am reduced to a frazzle by a negative comment or a funny look from you? I suppose daughters all over the world have asked that question many times. Do you know the answer to that one?

You've always been around when I've been in difficulties and come to my rescue, no matter what your private feelings of the moment, you've rallied round to protect me. Thank you for that. In a sense I have taken your stability and strength for granted and now I realise it is time to take stock and reflect on our relationship before the years race away.

I now realise what sorrow I must have inflicted on you over the years, sometimes wilfully and often unconsciously. Trying to rear Peter has made that clear to me. He wounds me in the ways I wound you. It has been a painful voyage of discovery for me. Parenting is the only profession we are not trained to do. While there has been much sorrow and anger in my relationship with Peter, there have been many moments of delight. Brief but joyful encounters which set my mind wondering.

Sometimes I wonder why you go on loving when I'm shouting at you and insisting on having the last word. I wonder too, why you care, specially when I'm horrid to you and tell you you are a failure as a parent.

Perhaps I'm searching for the perfect parent and you for the ideal daughter. Who knows?

. . .

Laughter I don't recall as part of your mothering. Too many children plus Koro, Kuia and other members of the whanau. Certain childhood sounds I will always associate with you. The old wooden table creaking as you kneaded endless batches of bread, your treadle machine whirring busily so I could have new clothes instead of castoffs, and the squeaking and thumping as you washed all the clothes by hand in that old tin tub. Busy sounds.

I remember some sad sounds too. How you keened and quietly sobbed for months after the baby died in 1948 and how helpless I felt, because I didn't know how to comfort you. Painful but important memories.

Amazing how your spirit has burned fiercely all these years, under the weight of all your burdens. I've never told you how I felt about you before. I truly respect the parent you have tried to be and above all salute the woman that you are. But don't expect me to love or obey you, just because you are my mother.

I remember your courageous stance on family-planning at the hui in Ruatoria in the sixties, and the shocked looks on people's faces because you were the wife of the village pastor. I know our father was upset and felt you had made a public exhibition of yourself. I was secretly proud of you.

I haven't forgotten how you stood firmly with us when we opposed the Springbok Tour, even though the whanau criticised us and you, and especially as your cousin and our beloved uncle George is still a legend in the rugby world. I hope my spirit survives as strongly as

yours when I am nearly eighty, for then I might be able to understand the elusive heart of you.

Arohanui
Keri

First published in *Spiral 5* 1982.

PATRICIA GRACE: ASPECTS OF HER STORIES IN 'WAIARIKI' & 'THE DREAM SLEEPERS' (1982)

Keri Kaa

> And from the two — the land, the woman — these ones have sprung. And by the land and by the woman held and strengthened. Now from knowing this, the old one in turn draws strength as the old light dims, as the time of passing comes.[1]

This paragraph from the ending of 'Transition' sums up for me the essence of Patricia Grace the woman, the Maori, the writer.

Patricia the woman is modest, unassuming and a person of great integrity.

Patricia the Maori is 'sprung' from the land of Raukawa, a descendant of an illustrious line-up of chiefs both male and female.

1. Patricia Grace *Waiariki* Longman Paul 1975: 18.

Patricia the writer is important because she uses her gifts to articulate for many of the silent Maori people, their agonies, hidden feelings, pain, joy and secret dreams. While her stories are rooted in the land of her childhood and her Raukawatanga, they have a universal appeal because they are about ordinary happenings, living, loving, fighting, dying, dreaming.

As I re-read them the words of Carl Sandburg come to mind, when he talks about travelling and seeing—

> “...the wonder of human mind, heart, wit, and instinct. People flung wide and far born into toil, struggle, blood and dreams ... You wonder, you weep, you question and then you say: ‘This will be haunting me in a long time with a loveliness I hope to understand better”.

For me Patricia’s stories have a haunting loveliness. My responses to them vary from shrieks of delight, to solemn agreement, to tears, to acceptance because the style of writing is such that I can feel and dream and get into the heads of her characters.

I respond warmly to Rose in ‘A Way of Talking’ because many Maori women like Rose and me have been sent away from our small villages to be ‘educated’. We eventually go home with our new found city ways, mannerisms, vocabulary and sophistication and we frighten our families because we have a new hard edge to us. We have been educated beyond our village roots and our new ways and our anger causes our families much pain. We struggle to fit into village ways of talking, thinking, dressing and living. Because we are ‘better schooled’ we must make the cultural switch. While there is great pride in our achievements, we carry the burdens for those left

at home, who do not have the opportunities to express their hopes and dreams, to others of the majority culture.

Patricia writes about human events and everyday happenings. Going fishing, planting, sewing, gardening, making bread, eeling, placing bets at the TAB. In the story 'The Dream' the family spend ages trying to interpret correctly Raniera's dream. I have lost count of the number of times I have sat around and listened while my relations have tried to interpret dreams so that they can get their bets right at the TAB. I have myself on occasion phoned dreams through to cousins who have placed bets on the right horses. I was once sent a koha of $12 as my share of a TAB win in exchange for my dream.

It's this instant recognition of oneself in familiar events that gives her stories, for me, an enchanting quality. As the 'ordinariness' of her characters shines through, so does the 'wairua' of her Maoritanga.

Most of the stories in *Waiariki* are told by women, only four are narrated by men.

In 'At the River', the old lady tells the story of the old man's last eeling expedition. She talks about her dream, her 'moemoea' because she has seen the 'waitohu' (omens) indicating the old man's death.

The old lady has had a dream, a dream of death.

> He came to me in the dream, not sadly but smiling with hand on heart and said, 'I go but do not weep. No weeping, it is my time!'
>
> The morepork visits her.
>
> 'Go,' I said to the bird. 'He comes not with you tonight. He is well and strong. His time is not here.'
>
> But it cried, the morepork. Its call went out. Out and out until the tears were on my face.[2]

Our old people are close to death, most of them talk about welcoming death. Patricia explores with great sensitivity a hidden subject, in a clear and direct way. The 'wairua' shines through.

Let me illustrate with two stories from my own family. Our mother knew that our father was dead hours before the hospital phoned. She had dreamt that she was sitting in a tub outside the meeting house at home, washing herself, when our father arrived to have a chat. He was wearing purple robes and when he turned away the back of the robes were undone. Wife-like she pointed this out but he simply smiled and walked East. By the time the hospital phoned through with the news that our father had died they were amazed at her calm acceptance and her answer, 'I know because he came to say goodbye and it's a peaceful going because he is heading East to new life and new hope'.

Our village is Te Urunga O te Ra, the place of the Rising Sun. To head East in death is symbolic, to face East in life is strength-giving.

. . .

2. ibid: 11.

The morepork features strongly in my own family as a good or bad omen. Our mother says when the morepork screams, it's bad news, but when he sings cheerfully everything is fine. Late last year one of my brothers nearly died and was saved by some emergency surgery. He was in hospital for two months recovering. The night he came home the owl sang and sang all night after being silent for two months. One of my guardians, 'kaitiaki', is an owl. We don't find it easy to talk about this hidden part of our lives, we are ever alert to the cynical challenges from our pragmatic thinking friends. We have grown up surrounded by a belief in the supernatural; we have learned to accept the inexplicable, and to bend with the mauri of the world of spirits. I understand perfectly the hidden meaning in the story 'At the River'—

> "The two have come to bring me sad news of him. But before them the bird came and before the bird the dream.[3]

Enough of symbolism, now let us look at relationships between young and old people in the story.

The two grandchildren in the story are so normal. They won't listen to the old man's advice and wisdom. They are disrespectful. Not all Patricia's characters are perfect. Let me illustrate my point with yet another story from my own childhood.

As children we had to help with kumara planting. After a year at boarding school my brother and I decided that the Biology teacher knew more about kumara planting than our parents. So, instead of laying the roots of the plants to the East in the traditional way, we

3. ibid: 14.

planted our 'tipu' every which way. When they grew they all choked each other and died. Our father said sadly to us, 'where is the science now?' The whole point of laying the tubers East is because they thrust in one direction only, the process is highly scientific. The lesson has never been forgotten because the money made from sale of kumara paid for our travel to and from school. That year there was no money for extras. I really felt for those cheeky grandchildren. Growing up is painful, but having a granny who comforts you eases the pain.

> And now we weep together, this old lady and these two young ones by her. No weeping he said. But we will weep a little while for him and for ourselves.[4]

I wept too.

Patricia's style of writing is often described as lyrical. When she writes about the seasons of the year in the 'Valley' section of the *Waiariki* collection she paints a canvas of words. Talking of colour, sharp line, warmth, light, heat shimmering sun-filled skies. One can see, smell, feel and hear the sights and sounds of summer.

In 'Valley' she describes the teacher's first meeting with her class.

> We find a place for everyone at the tables and a locker for each one's belongings, but although they talk in whispers and nudge one another they do not offer me any words. And when I speak to them they nod or shake their heads. Their eyes take the floor.[5]

4. Ibid: 15.
5. ibid: 53-54.

If you've read Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch's book called *Talking Past Each Other* this paragraph will make sense.

Non-verbal communication is a newly discovered area in our schoolrooms. Many of our children have difficulties in their early years in school because this silent language is not understood or recognised by teachers. It's not easy to write about such characteristics without sounding preachy but Patricia skillfully weaves these hidden things into her stories.

'Autumn' is for me another canvas of colour unfolding. My response is to see if I can paint the picture of Autumn which she so vividly describes.

Autumn bends the lights of summer and spreads evening skies with reds and golds. These colours are taken up by falling leaves which jiggle at the fingertips of small-handed winds.

> Trees give off crowds of starlings which shoot the valley with scarcely a wing beat, flocking together to replace warmth stolen by a diminishing sun.
>
> Each day we have been visiting the trees — the silver poplar, the liquid amber, and the plum, peach, and apple. And, on looking up through the branches, each day a greater patch of sky is visible. Yet despite this preoccupation with leaves and colours and change, the greater part of what we see has not changed at all. The gum tree as ever leaves its shed bark, shed twigs, shed

> branches untidily on its floor, and the pohutukawa remains dull and lifeless after its December spree and has nothing new for this season.
>
> About us are the same green paddocks where cows undulate, rosetting the grass with soft pancake plops; and further on in the valley, the variegated greens of the bush begin, the give way to the black-green of distant hills.[6]

'Winter' is a moving little story about the death of a teacher in a country school. It has a starkness and desolation about it. The introduction tells all.

> It rains.
> The skies weep.
> As do we.[7]

Another example of her close attention to detail and the feeling I have that she is not only 'sprung' from the land but has a highly personalised relationship with the landscape—

> "The trees we have visited daily are bare now, clawing grey fingered at cold winds. Birds have left the trees and gone elsewhere to find shelter, and the insects that in other seasons walk the trunks and branches and

6. ibid: 58.
7. ibid: 65.

> hurry about root formations have tucked themselves into split bark and wood holes to winter over.[8]

When writing about deep emotions it is easy to become sentimental but in the story the narrator becomes the bridge between sorrow and laughter. She remembers the laughs shared with the teacher who'd died.

> She had laughed about my washing too that morning. My classroom with the naps strung across it steaming in the fire's heat. I'm coming in for a sauna this afternoon. And a feed. I'm coming in for a feed too.[9]

I remember taking my nephew to school with me because his mother was ill. I remember stringing up nappies across the room during lunch hours and steaming up the classroom. And being too scared to open the doors unless the Principal came in.

The gentle description of the teacher's tangi ends with a message of hope.

> It is right that it should rain today, that earth and sky should meet and touch, mingle. That the soil pouring into the opened ground should be newly blessed by sky, and that our tears should mingle with those of sky and then with earth that receives her.

8. ibid: 66.
9. ibid: 67.

> And it is right too that threading through our final song we should hear the sound of children's voices, laughter, a bright guitar strumming.[10]

In the Maori story of the Creation, Sky-father and Earth-mother are forcibly separated by Tane, God of the Forest. Their grief is terrible and Rangi's tears cause a great flood on the Earth-mother's body. These tears are the rain which falls. Rain for us is symbolic. It's a sign of Rangi's blessing. We have a proverb: 'It only rains when all the chiefs are gathered together'. If it doesn't rain when you have a wedding, hui or tangi, you are indeed a 'nobody'.

> Spring–
> The children know about spring.
> Grass grows.
> Flowers come up.
> Lambs drop out.
> Cows have big bags swinging.
> And fat tits.
> And new calves.
> Trees have blossoms.
> And boy calves go away to the works on the trucks and get their heads chopped off.[11]

Here is the life-cycle as seen through children's eyes. I can remember hiding 'bobby calves' from our father so he wouldn't send

10. ibid: 68.
11. ibid: 69.

them away to the works to get their heads chopped off. Even the promise of a beautiful calf-skin rug didn't help.

One area I haven't touched on is the language Patricia's characters use. She certainly doesn't make the mistake so many other writers make when their Maori characters talk — they write in broken English what I call a 'Hey Boy' style. Patricia's characters speak in Maori English — a valid language all on its own.

Wii the fox.
Us, we don't like the fox.
That's why, the fox is too tough.
Cunning that fox.[12]

When I go home and sit and chat in the kitchen at the Marae I don't use the sort of English I use when I'm in the city because it sets me apart from my cousins. They call it talking posh, being whakahihi, so I use Maori-English so I belong again.

The explanatory notes on the back cover of *The Dream Sleepers* state that these stories are–

> Stories of tension, transition and change; of the contrasts between young and old, city and country, modern and traditional; of what it means to be Maori in a society whose predominant values are alien, above all, elegant, evocative stories displaying the depth and range of Patricia Grace's talent.

12. ibid: 71.

The beginning of *The Dream Sleepers* is delightful.

> The houses sit on their handkerchiefs and early in the morning begin to sneeze. They do not sneeze in unison but one at a time, or sometimes in pairs or threes, sometimes in tens or dozens.[13]

I read this out to a friend who was visiting; she responded by saying they don't just sneeze they hoik up like people coughing to get rid of the phlegm.

I recognise many people in this story.

I have family who are three o'clockers, they clean Government buildings till 6 o'clock, go home, wake up families, get them off to work and school and then go to other jobs during the day. My two Aunts who look after the women's toilets at the Wellington Railway Station are five o'clockers. At seven I'm one of the dream sleepers who staggers off in grim silence to catch a bus to work. I get to my office at eight o'clock and don't really come alive until ten o'clock. My early morning classes suffer until then.

'Between Earth and Sky' is a lovely story about the birth of a baby. I like the paragraph when the mother chats to her new-born babe.

> You are at the end of the table, wet and grey. Blood stains your pulsing head. Your arms flail in these new

13. Patricia Grace *The Dream Sleepers* Longman Paul 1980: [3].

> dimensions and your mouth is a circle that opens and close as you scream for air.[14]

There's a rawness and a strange kind of beauty in this story.

'Mirrors' is about a pair of slippers which get called various names: grinners, gaspers, trippers, flappers. The narrator's feet are called 'limp fillets of cod'.

The story floats about and dives deep into hidden places, then it ends with the slippers being destroyed in the incinerator because they trod in (tutae-kuri) dog-bog. Lovely stuff!

So far I've not talked about humour. There's a lot of laughter in Patricia's stories. Recently I heard her read 'It Used to be Green Once' to a predominantly Maori audience. They roared with appreciation throughout the reading, identifying with great gusto, themselves, their childhood, their poverty and the great warmth and passion of belonging to a whanau.

'Beans' is a gem.

'Letters from Whetu' is full of tension. I recognise the boredom and frustration of Whetu plodding on at school and wondering if all this education is worthwhile. At boarding school we wrote letters to

14. ibid: 14.

each other on our blotters and passed them back and forth. They were often written in a kind of code. Poor Whetu sitting at school waiting to realise her potential and dreaming about flying about like a seagull. She describes her frustration–

> E hoa I want to walk all over the world but how do I develop the skills for it sitting in a plastic bag fastened with a wire-threaded paper twist to keep the contents airtight.[15]

Many of us who have made it in terms of the education system, the so-called 'brown middle class' have experienced the same sensations. It's like being hemmed in by a great square of canvas with no scissors available to snip your way out. And knowing of course that if you break free you wreck not only your future but you let down a generation of elders and close up beginnings for the next generation.

Burdens indeed, but that is what it means to be Maori, especially a Maori in the Eighties. We are 'in the midst of great social upheaval and confusion'. Our women in particular carry the weight of that burden. I believe we hold the key to that change as witnessed by the development of a small but powerful Black Feminist Movement whose methods cause our elders much sorrow and pain. We as women need each others' support. We will survive because traditionally we have always been the bearers of cultural burdens. Some of us know who we are, some of us are still searching for ourselves and some of us wish we had never found ourselves as Maori.

15. ibid: 41.

I would like to end with a look at the story 'Journey', from *The Dream Sleepers*—

> He was an old man going on a journey. But not really so old, only they made him old buttoning up his coat for him and giving him money. Seventy-one that's all. Not a journey, not what you would really call a journey — he had to go in and see those people about his land. Again. But he liked the word Journey even though you didn't quite say it. It wasn't a word for saying only for saving up in your head, and that way you could enjoy it. Even an old man like him, but not what you would call properly old.
>
> The coat was good and warm. It was second-hand from the jumble and it was good and warm. Could have ghosts in it but who cares, warm that's the main thing. If some old pakeha died in it that's too bad because he wasn't scared of pakeha kehuas anyway. The pakeha kehuas they couldn't do anything, it was only like having a sheet over your head and going woo-oo at someone in the lavatory...
>
> He better go to the lavatory because he didn't trust town lavatories, people spewed there and wrote rude words. Last time he got something stuck on his shoe. Funny people those town people.[16]

The old man is 71: he is getting affairs tidied up. He is, to quote my Raukawa father, 'coming down the rainbow' and wants to sort out

16. ibid: 50.

his land. The old man catches the train to town and on the way reflects and philosophises about change and the effects of subdivision on the land he knew as a child—

> And between the tunnels they were slicing the hills away with big machines. Great-looking hills too and not an easy job cutting them away, it took pakeha determination to do that. Funny people these pakehas, had to chop up everything. Couldn't talk to a hill or a tree these people. Couldn't give the trees or the hills a name and make them special and leave them. Couldn't go round, only through. Couldn't give life, only death. But people had to have houses, and ways from getting from one place to another. And anyway who was right up there helping the pakeha to get rid of things — the Maori of course, riding those big machines. Swooping round and back, up and down all over the place. Great tools the Maori man had for his carving these days, tools for his new whakairo, but there you are, a man had to eat. People had to have houses, had to eat, had to get from here to there — anyone knew that. He wished the two kids would stop crackling, their mothers dressed them in rubbish clothes that's why they had colds.
>
> Then the rain'll come and the cuts will bleed for miles and the valleys will drown in blood, but the pakeha will find a way of mopping it all up no trouble. Could find a few bones amongst that lot too. That's what you get when you dig up the ground, bones.[17]

17. ibid: 55.

The old man seeks advice concerning his land and is confronted with words like: subdivision, development areas, surveying, kerbing, channelling, adequate access, right of ways, initial outlays. He goes home depressed, upset and angry. Like many of our old people he is bewildered by change and worried about where his bones will lie.

The story ends with the family anxious to know what happened and the old man exploding.

> When I go you're not to put me in the ground do you hear. Burn me up I tell you, it's not safe in the ground, you'll know all about it if you put me in the ground. When I go, burn me up, no-one's going to mess about with me when I'm gone.[18]

That is where I leave you today because that is where we are as a people. In a dilemma — imposed on us from the majority culture and from within ourselves by our own uncertainty.

The magic of Patricia's writing has helped me as a woman and a Maori to know where I belong in the wider New Zealand landscape. I hope some of the magic rubs off onto you.

Patricia — thank you — kia ora tatou.

18. ibid: 66.

From a lecture in the series *Images of Women* (1982) Women's Studies Department Victoria University of Wellington and first published in *Spiral 5*.[19]

19. *Spiral 5* 1982: 3-6. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2023_06/Spiral_5.pdf

KERI KAA – A TRIBUTE (2020)

Fiona Lovatt

O how the rain falls this day when our mareikura is laid to rest. Her vivacious presence, her expansive heart, this kuia who took the long walks from one century into another was at the forefront of the renaissance of Te Reo Rangatira.

As a student of Keri Kaa we knew she could round up a posse: to go to a choral performance in Latin which she freely translated into the ears of those nearby; or to run a late night session of tapestry, taaniko, and poi production for kapa haka uniforms; or to lay an early morning hangi as a fundraiser; to just get on a bus with a blanket round the legs and off 'to put some warmth' into new wharenui being built around the country; to join a march on the right side of history; to step into Women's Gallery and launch *Te Kuia me Te Pūngāwerewere*.

Her eyes danced. Her hands danced. Her voice danced.

. . .

She was compelling and compassionate. She was a mother to everyone who snuggled under feathers and her tutorial rooms were often a place for sharing kai because she wasn't going to let any student go hungry.

She was gentle as she blew on embers within us, setting us burning as small lights and great roaring flames. She knew the power of broadcasting seeds of hope.

It was an indiscernible, compelling and practical radiation of aroha, manaakitanga and her own mana... so that years later we can still feel the warmth of it, still feel the heat of it, and know that our task is not done yet.

She was a showcase, and no doubt muse, for Maida who had the design skills to make this wahine toa appear to be as light as the ripene pai she sang of.[1] It was her gleeful gift to be majestic, incan-

1. Designer Maida had a shop in Victoria Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington in the late 1970s-1980s. Melinda Hatherly remembers her too: Maida made many items of voluminous jewel coloured clothing for her shop, and clients including Leoné [Melinda's mother] (and later for me).

In my late teens I worked with Maida for about 6 months at her little boutique shop (next door to the then Lido Cafe) and in her home-workshop-studio (on the steps below The Terrace and Willis at .. trying to remember the name ..)

Ted, Maida's beloved black New Foundland dog; was big bountiful and beautiful as Maida was. Maida used to comb and then card Ted's coat and then spin and knit herself balero cardigans from his long soft hair! She also used to enter herself and Ted in a local dog and rowboat trials; Maida would row out into Oriental Bay and then Ted would swim out and 'rescue' her grabbing a rope at front of her rowboat and towing her back to shore!

Although popular, Maida was also a rather private person, and I remember enjoying spending time sorting and cleaning her fabulous fabrics and workroom and working occasionally in the shop, whist we shared stories, and cups of tea and cakes..

Maida was deeply talented, creative, hardworking, witty and beautiful woman.

descent and ephemeral, as light and as strong as the pūngāwerewere's thread.

Light on the balls of her feet to sing the shining cuckoo home, to raise waka and carry them home, to dig down a paddle or scribe the arcs and constellations of the navigator's journeys overhead.

'E hoea ana au, nga waikarekare ki Hawaiiki pamaomao.'

She knew this day was coming. This rain and these tears across the motu speak of the great space left in the landscape of our hearts.

Moe mai ra Whaea Keri i raro i nga parihau o te Atua Kaha Rawa.

Moe mai ra.

First published on Facebook.

KERI KAA & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

Keri contributed strongly and very generously to Spiral. She probably introduced us to Miriama Evans, who became a member of the collective that published *the bone people*. She certainly introduced us to her tuakana, writer Arapera Blank, who later travelled to Europe with a Spiral group.[1]

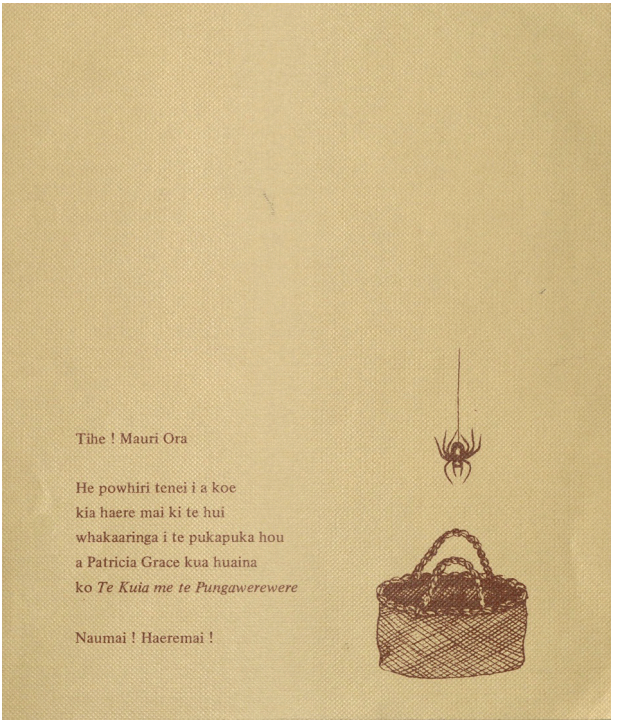
In *Spiral 5* she contributed a letter to her mother Hohipene Kaa, a review of Patricia Grace's *Waiariki* and *The Dream Sleepers*, and some poems.[2] At the Women's Gallery, she contributed to our wellbeing through workshops and presence at events, and to our pūtea.

Keri believed that book launches were 'deadly dull' with boring speeches and too much booze, and introduced Māori kawa with formal powhiri , whaikorero and waiata in two extraordinary launches for Spiral books, for Patricia Grace's *The Kuia & the Spider*

1. See Section 3, Arapera Blank, above.
2. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/spiral-issue-5

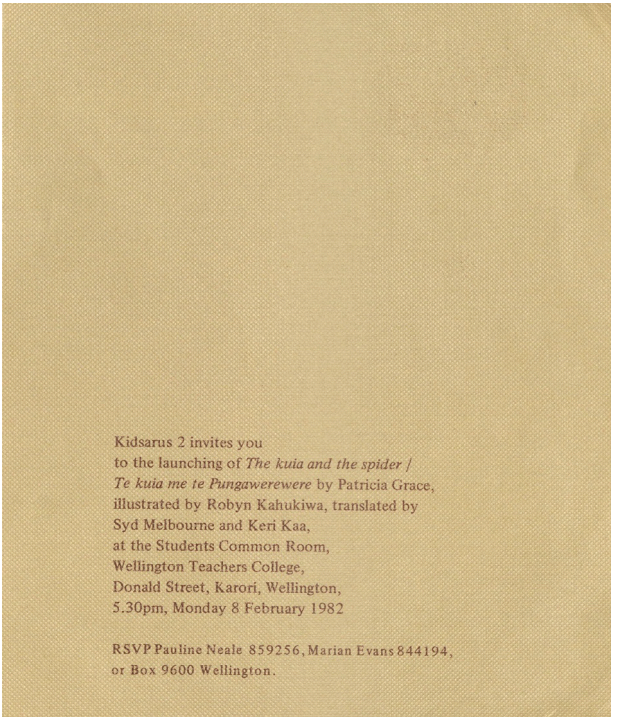
and *Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere* — which she had herself translated with Hirini Melbourne; and for Keri Hulme's *the bone people*.[3]

For the *Kuia & the Spider* launch, she asked Robyn Kahukiwa for a drawing and consulted with Wiremu Parker about the wording. The result was (of course) absolutely beautiful, a folded card, with te reo and Robyn's drawing on the outside and English on the inside.



The Kuia & the Spider *and* Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere
invitation 1982 — exterior. Created by Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa, Wiremu Parker & Kidsarus 2

3. Jane Collins 'Streak of Light', *Listener*, 20 August 1990: 106;. *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu*: 'the bone people': 275ff.



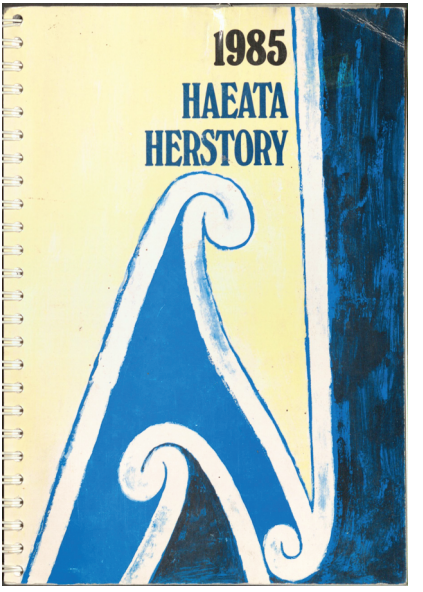
The Kuia & the Spider *and* Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere
invitation 1982 — interior. Created by Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa, Wiremu Parker & Kidsarus 2

Keri made us laugh, evoked joy. Gave us wise counsel, warmly and sometimes sternly. Made us think. Helped us to love. And did all these things in many other contexts, for example as part of Taki Rua, a national Māori theatre company.[4] Anyone who was privileged to know Keri will always remember her.

4. Documented in Whetū Fala's *Taki Rua: Breaking Barriers* 2024 https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/films/taki-rua-theatre-breaking-barriers

KERI, THE HAEATA HERSTORY DIARY (1985) & HAEATA

HAEATA HERSTORY DIARY



Haeata Herstory 1985. New Women's Press 1984.

In the only essay that a member of the Haeata wrote about the group, Keri introduced Haeata as 'a Māori women artists' collective', set up in December 1983 when Wendy Harrex of New Women's Press—

> ...called together a group of Māori women writers based in Wellington and invited them to compile the seventh *Herstory Diary* based on the lives of Māori women. Maaka Jones [(Te Aomuhurangi Temamaka Jones 1927-1997)], kuia, writer, composer and translator, named the group 'Haeata' after the first shaft of light before the night rolls away and the new day dawns.[1]

When Jane Collins interviewed Keri with Irihapeti Ramsden, another core member of Haeata in 1990, Keri explained that Haeata began with about $100 of 'found' money—

> Irihapeti got some money from a big land meeting at Ngai Tahu and I got some from an article I'd written for someone.[2]

The seventh in the *Herstory Diary* series, the diary's theme was 'Takiri ko te Haeata' and Robyn Kahukiwa designed the cover and

1. *Women Together Ngā rōpū wāhine o te motu (Women Together)* 1993 'Haeata 1983-' https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/haeata ('Haeata 1983-').
2. Jane Collins 'Streak of Light', *Listener*, 20 August 1990: 105-106, for which Keri, Irihapeti Ramsden, Robyn Kahukiwa and others were interviewed about the Haeata exhibition *Mana Tiriti*, at the Wellington City Gallery.

the group's logo. The collective was focused on kuia, twenty-eight of them aged 60 and over. As Keri put it—

> Everyone was interviewing all the flash young Maoris with big fat salaries — we thought it was time the old kuia were interviewed.[3]

Maaka, with Harata Solomon (Harata Ria Te Uira Solomon, 1925-1993) and Mihipeka Edwards (Mikipeka-Rukuhia Anne Edwards 1918-2008), became one of three elders who encouraged 'Haeata's development and survival' with 'constant care and guidance'.

The diary's mihi reads—

HE MIHI

'Ano he hua kua tae ki tona puawaitanga.'

E ia, — E, koutou ma, nga purapura i ruia mai i Rangiatea o te tini o Toi. Tena koutou katoa.

He tohu aroha e takohatia ana e Te Whanau apiti whakaaro, ara, Te Whanau Whakaata 'Te Haeata' mo nga tuhituhi, me nga whakakitenga o nga wahine e whai ake nei i roto i tenei pukapuka.

3. 'Streak of Light': 105.

Keri wrote, of the *Herstory Diary* project—

> Many people contributed.... They gave freely of their services: interviewing, typing transcripts, editing, and providing hospitality, transport and moral support. Financial support for the project came from the Māori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC, later Te Waka Toi), Te Rūnanga Whakawhanaunga i Ngā Hāhi o Aotearoa (Māori Council of Churches), Kidsarus 2 Inc., and koha from friends and whānau.[4]

HAEATA CONTINUES

After the diary was published, it was resolved to keep Haeata together. Irihapeti Ramsden told Jane Collins—

> We had a group of very talented multi-skilled Māori women and we wanted to keep that collective identity in order to awhi each other in whatever we did.[5]

Keri explained that Haeata had helped fund about twenty-five Māori women artists, particularly younger ones—

> We'd help them to buy good brushes or a roll of canvas, or petrol money to go to a weaving course, or

4. 'Haeata 1983-' The group included— From the South Island: Toni Allwood, Marian Evans, Miriama Henderson, Rānui Ngārimu, Irihāpeti Ramsden, Myrtle Robinson, Mere Tainui, Karen Wattereus. From the North Island: Ngāpine Allen, Pearl Aranji, Tūngia Baker, Arapera Blank, Ani Crawford, Rosemary Fullerton-Smith, Donna Hall, Sharon Hawke, Maaka Jones, Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa, Jan Kīngi, Georgina Kirby, Mary Louise Ormsby, Judith Ring, Mīria Simpson, Meri Solomon, Therese Stafford, Riwia Whaanga, Sarah Williams.
5. 'Streak of Light': 104.

> pay for people's travel to a hui [...] We are about affirming and encouraging the younger ones to have a go.[6]

Before the publication of the *Herstory Diary*, Keri had mistress-minded the launch of Patricia Grace's *The Kuia & the Spider* and *Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere* and Keri Hulme's *the bone people*, at the Wellington Teachers College, where she was a lecturer. After the diary was published, Haeata organised exhibition openings and more book launchings, and, in 1986, presented its first major exhibition, *Karanga Karanga*, of Māori women's art at the Wellington City Gallery, thanks to the director at the time, Ann Philbin. There were two connected shows in other cities, also called *Karanga Karanga*. One of these, at the Fisher Gallery, now Te Tuhi, in Tāmaki Makaurau, was organised by the just-formed Waiata Koa collective, with Keri Kaa's tuakana, writer Arapera Blank, as one of the organisers; its name, which referred to the dawn chorus, was given by their mother, Hohi Pine Whaanga-Kaa. The other was shown at the Gisborne Museum and Arts Centre, now Tairāwhiti Museum.

Haeata continued to offer artists and writers — young and old — support in various ways and in 1990 also produced the major *Mana Tiriti* exhibition during the 150th anniversary year of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi the Treaty of Waitangi, again with the Wellington City Gallery. In an interview, one of the younger artists, Rea Ropiha, who referred to Keri and Maaka Jones as 'kuia' and 'cultural consultants' statement communicates something of how the Haeata practices affected the younger artists—

6. 'Streak of Light': 104.

> They keep us on the track. You can still make your own input but in the end the inspiration comes from the older ones, from the things that they tell us.[7]

Within the exhibition was *Hineteiwaiwa*, described in the catalogue by Haeata. The description begins—

> Naumai ki te whare kua whakakakahungia e ia te mana Maori motuhake. This whare takes its name from the deity who gave us weaving, Hineteiwaiwa. Uncompromisingly female, the whare is a contemporary expression of a traditional concept. It contains all the elements of a whare tupuna in the poupu, pakitara, heke, tahuhu and poutokomanawa. Like every whare tupuna, it has its own story to tell. *Hineteiwaiwa* is a woman's response to New Zealand's 150-year history of deceit.[8]

And according to Jonathan Mane-Wheoki—

> The most potent expression of gender solidarity in that sesquicentenary year was the Māori 'woman-house', 'Hineteiwaiwa', created by the Haeata Collective in City Gallery Wellington's *Mana Tiriti* exhibition.[9]

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7. 'Streak of Light': 105.
8. Mana Tiriti : the art of protest and partnership Wellington City Art Gallery, Project Waitangi, Haeata, edited by Ramari Young 1991, 'Ko Haeata te Hapu. Ko Hine Teiwaiwa te Whare': 76-78, 76.
9. *Jonathan Mane-Wheoki* Contemporary Māori art – ngā toi hōu https://teara.gov-

Haeata had no formal status or structure. It was open to anyone who wanted to join, had any artistic talent, or wanted to support those who have (including Pākehā and men). New members were usually found through friends or relatives. 'Membership fluctuated as people came and went, but the core group remained Wellington-based', wrote Keri.[10] It seems that it had ceased its activities by 1993, as inevitably, the core group moved on. They had always had very busy lives with paid employment, other voluntary work and whānau commitments, and to me it is always remarkable that for so long that together they also sustained this powerful, highly influential, expression of mana wāhine. With magnificent creativity, generosity, grace, and laughter.

t.nz/en/contemporary-maori-art-nga-toi-hou/page-3 Jonathan Mane-Wheoki (1943-2014) was a distinguished art historian, academic and curator.

10. 'Streak of Light': 104. 'Haeata 1983-' https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/haeata

TAKA KI RO WAI (2012)

interview with Keri Kaa



Keri speaks at the WIFT Awards. On her left, Ella Henry and then Katie Wolfe. Photographer Peata Melbourne.

Keri Kaa's *Te Whaea Whakaata Taonga*, presented at the Women In Film & Television (WIFT) awards in 2010, acknowledged 'an exceptional woman whose meritorious contribution to the arts, culture, and heritage over the last 50 years has had an immeasurable behind the scenes impact on film and television'. Keri's worked tirelessly with funders and policy makers to forge the pathway for Māori filmmakers to tell their stories.



Keri with Dame Patsy Reddy, chair of the New Zealand Film Commission and Governor-General designate, at a WIFT event. Photograph Andi Crown Photography.

But that's just one aspect of her extraordinary life and work. Keri has been a teacher and mentor to, and staunch advocate for, many dancers, writers, filmmakers, visual artists, actors and musicians around Aotearoa New Zealand. She continues this work from afar

while also working in Ngāti Porou tertiary education with Te Ururangi o Te Matauranga. She has also held many positions on boards and committees, including that of a UNESCO Commissioner.

She's been the subject of an episode of *e tu kahikatea*, a series about Maoridom's strongest contributors.[1] She is a Companion of the NZ Order of Merit for her services to Māori and the arts.



Keri at Rangitukia 2010. Photograph courtesy Maramena Roderick and Ngahuia Wade.

Keri lives in Rangitukia on land belonging to the Kaa family, as keeper of the home fires — ahi kaa — and her home reflects a lifetime of creativity in a family raised with poetry, books and challenging and stimulating conversations held in two languages. Her

1. An interview about this here with director Ngāhuia Wade http://wellywoodwoman.blogspot.co.nz/2010/10/keri-kaa-interview-with-ngahuia-wade.html

brothers include the notable actor the late Wi Kuki Kaa and the late Archdeacon Dr Hone Kaa. Keri's sister, Arapera Blank, was an award-winning writer and poet, and an Aotearoa New Zealand representative at the Commonwealth Literature Conference in Laufen, 1986.

When I met Keri, more than thirty years ago, she was a Wellington Teachers College lecturer and a writer, associated with the artists and writers in the Haeata *Herstory* diary, the many other Haeata Collective projects, and the Waiata Koa Collective, all wāhine Māori initiatives where together they asserted their mana motuhake.

As a pākehā, I met Keri as the translator — with Syd Melbourne — of Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa's classic children's picture book *The Kuia & the Spider/ Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere*.

Keri, who had found book launches 'deadly dull'[2] with boring speeches and too much booze, introduced very special Māori kawa book launches with formal powhiri, whaikorero and waiata, starting with one for *The Kuia/Te Kuia* and including one for Keri Hulme's *the bone people*. She often worked in beautiful ways with the late Tungia Baker, at all kinds of events, often as kaikaranga.

I always listen very closely to Keri. And I'd do pretty much anything for her, because I love how she makes things happen, in a way that

2. Jane Collins 'Streak of Light', *Listener*, 20 August 1990: 105-106: 106, for which Keri and Irihapeti Ramsden were interviewed about the Haeata exhibition *Mana Tiriti*, at the Wellington City Gallery.

enhances everyone's experience, with her special tough-and-tender generosity and a lot of laughter.

Keri writes poetry — I loved the poems and prose she contributed to *Spiral 5* — children's stories in both English and Māori, and is working on a book on kapa haka competitions. In 2011, she won a prestigious AMP National Scholarship, to make her children's picture book *Taka Ki Ro Wai* into a speaking book 'so that the language and its sounds are there for all to hear....My ability to speak particularly the Ngāti Porou strand of Te Reo Māori, and to comprehend the many nuances, urges me to pass it on to tamariki.' — Marian Evans, 2012.



Q: Where did the story for Taka Ki Ro Wai *come from?*

Keri: Taka Ki Ro Wai is the story of a foal born during a wild and stormy night and accidentally dropped in the flood waters on the

morning of my birthday. Without giving too much of the story away, a lot of events happened involving a little pig, various family members coming to help with the rescue and the arrival of a flock of black backed sea gulls.

You have so many stories. Why is this story so important?

My brother Wi Kuki rang from Wellington to say happy birthday and asked if anything special had happened. When I told him about the horse, the pig, the sea gulls and the three people he said: 'That's a great story for children. You must write it all up into a book. In Maori'. So I set out to do it but it took longer than I'd planned because I wanted to self-publish which took me up and down paths I had not anticipated.

You set up a publishing house to publish Taka Ki Ro Wai. *What's the story behind this?*

Creating a publishing house allows me to have control of my work, and what happens to it. A lot of our material is used by others for commercial gain without our consent or knowledge. For example the works of composer Tuini Ngawai have been treated with disrespect, in many cases rearranged musically. During the WAI 262 Treaty Claim I was asked by a family member, a lawyer, to join her group of claimants by giving evidence on behalf of Maori art and artists about copyright and intellectual property ownership and their effects on us as a people. It was an exhausting six weeks work on the WAI 262 claim. But it was very worthwhile in terms of making clear to me why I'd spent all those years on boards concerned with arts and theatre, and with film and drama schools,

making known to others our views and attitudes about taonga — music, carving, painting and other images, composition.

You're well known as a translator, and Taka Ki Ro Wai *will have an English edition. What are the joys and challenges of translation for you?*

Taka Ki Ro Wai was intended to be a Maori language edition only. It is written in the manner in which we speak in our valley. It's our dialect. It's idiomatic. My dilemma has been to write the English version of the story or an actual translation of the original dialect. I am much cheered by the talk from friends and family about leaving the story untouched in the English version. When I was first seeking funding, supporters who didn't speak my dialect were puzzled by some of the aspects of the story. Cultural difference can cause puzzlement for people who hold different values especially spiritual beliefs.

The AMP Scholarship will help me make a digital talking book of the story, two versions, in Maori and English.



Keri receives her AMP award from the Governor-General, Sir Jerry Mateparae.

I will be working with local readers and actors because there are people who struggle with pronunciation. It's much more helpful if they can pop a CD into the car and listen as they are on a trip somewhere and practise their language, or use an electronic reader. Our local radio station has offered studio recording facilities and family members will help with musical interludes and appropriate songs.

Part of the story includes a brief introduction to our location and a little bit of the local history. This idea came from the design team and meant adding on two small lots of writing and illustrations. My design team are Marty Page and Tania Short. She's a Ngāti Porou woman who founded *Tairawhiti Arts Page* (2025: no longer online). He's Pākehā and a designer, who has presented me with the idea that there is more than one way to illustrate a book for children. There are photographs of the three whānau members involved in

the story, small drawings and other bits and pieces. In fact the mock up of the book caused great excitement. April, the woman who features in the book, was inspired to suggest that the design team should have an exhibition of the art work at the book launch.

Would you like to have a German edition?

I would be honoured to have a German edition one day.

You're well known for the special launches you organized, for Patricia Grace's classic The Kuia And The Spider/ Te Kuia Me Te Pungwerewere *(which you also translated into Te Reo, with Hirini Melbourne) and for Keri Hulme's* the bone people. *What do you plan for the* Taka Ki Ro Wai *launch?*

The plan is to launch the book in the garden next to the field where the foal was born. There'll be some speeches, readings and lots of singing by family and friends.

When can we get copies of Taka Ki Ro Wai?

We're in a queue for printers in Hong Kong tentatively booked for March. They charge $5000 for the print run. New Zealand printers start at $12,000 so it's no contest really going to Hong Kong. I think New Zealand printers have to pay lots of g.s.t. so it's a hard life for them. Copies will be available here after the launch. The electronic version will follow a little later.

. . .

You — like the late Dame Katerina Mataira — have spent a lifetime supporting writers and artists who want to provide books in Maori, for children especially. Can you say a little bit about publishing in Te Reo?

Publishing in Te Reo has become stronger and more diverse. The challenge today is the level of language spoken by the children coming out of the Maori-language initiatives like Te Kohanga Reo, the pre-school language nests which are family directed. We have stage two called Puna Reo which is teacher directed, and Kura Kaupapa and Whare Kura which are primary and secondary school level of learning. They have done wonders for the revival of the language. But there are pitfalls.

Māori language presented by Broadcasting on Maori Television is a different register of language. It's a whole new level of vocabulary that distances its speakers from those born in rural areas still speaking in their dialects. We are as a people in the midst of a major debate about how to retain and maintain our language. It's a simple idea. Speak Māori in your home all the time if you're fluent. Try not to use another language (English) as a bridge. English is everywhere so you're waging a battle against unseen forces. In my valley our isolation from urban pressures has kept our language intact in my generation of 60 plus. But the generation aged 30 to 50 are the victims of language loss. However, the new Māori language schools and their programmes have encouraged the revival. Once upon a time we were punished at school for speaking the only language some of us knew. Now it's become fashionable, non-speakers sometimes feel left out of conversations. That's why I wanted to write a book for children. What started as a little seed has turned into a flourishing plant. We need more stories in our dialects.

. . .

What have been the high spots for you in writing and performance by and about Māori since the 1970s?

There have been so many advances in Māori contemporary arts. It's been an exciting time in the last four decades. We're braver about breaking out of our traditional roles, views, beliefs and practices. We've given ourselves permission to move on and out of our frameworks. Leading tribal elders like our Uncle Pine Taiapa, a master carver, witnessed the first ventures by a new generation of carvers in the 60s and expressed his dismay. He didn't like their new ideas and told them so. But the revolution has taken hold and the arts are thriving still. There are new directions. We are bolder about exhibiting in mainstream events. We are making important connections and taking our work to other countries. We are learning to cope with different viewpoints. When it comes to learning how to value our artworks and performances, we are discovering where we fit into the arts of a world tapestry.

We are also learning to accept than when visitors come to our country we are not just a corner or a remnant of England. In our arts and performance we are the point of difference and the arts world has discovered us.

I used to hear my beloved friend Tungia Baker, a weaver of traditional baskets and containers, introduce herself to people at forums. She makes an eloquent and powerful point. First and foremost I am a person.The fact that I am Māori is the expression of it.

Have you got more publishing plans?

. . .

I have ten diaries written by my father from 1954 to 1965. They are currently being transcribed by my PA so that they can be edited by my friend Juliet Raven.

The contents of the diaries are the small but important details of family life. My father went to a church boarding school in Parnell, Auckland in 1914. He studied Latin as well as English and the usual core subjects. He told me once that you had to conjugate your verbs before breakfast or there was no breakfast. His diaries are written in a small neat hand which never varies from year to year. He used a fountain pen and good quality ink. What would he think about iPads?

The diaries are a revelation. I had no idea just how busy his life was. He started life as a dairy-farmer, was appointed a Justice of the Peace and was a Licensed Interpreter in the Māori Land Court. In the last decade of his life he was ordained as a Priest and ran a very busy parish. Looking at his life makes me understand why I do the things I'm involved in. If you have skills you should use them to benefit others. Serve the people.

You've always written, and have had to fit writing round your support of others. But on your Tairawhiti Arts *page I read that you are 'known to leave town for some quiet time at an undisclosed location where you take the time out to write'.*[3] *Has your own writing become more of a priority now?*

3. In 2025 the Tairawhiti Arts website which supplied most of the information in the introduction is no longer available.

Yes, I do occasionally leave the country and head to my secret writing destination. Some days I achieve a lot and other days I manage only a start. Have been writing a few poems about oil exploration and fracking and land matters. Yes, writing is more of a priority, especially about political issues. Someone has to be a voice for the voiceless. Writing is therapeutic and non-violent.

Three people told me I could write. My dear sister Arapera Blank who was a writer, Aunt Charlotte Solomon whom I met at the Women's Gallery in Wellington, and Tungia Baker who used to type up my work so others could read it too.

As one of twelve children who were allowed to express their views about the world around us my life has been a long creative spiral of activity. Thus far.

AO ATU RA
The world goes on.

PS Have to hold off the writing for a bit while I take up MA studies for a Master in Matauranga Māori. A thesis in Māori knowledge. Written entirely in Māori. A great way to prevent boredom in old age!

In the beginning was the word!
KA MUTU

Interview first published on Spiral Collective's *Medium* site,[4] in association with Aotearoa New Zealand's status as Country of Honour at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair.[5]

UPDATE

Keri writes–

> I am ankle-deep in the English version of *Taka Ki Ro Wai/ Fall in the Water*. Would you believe that the Pākehā version is making me hōhā! However it's creative & so far there are lots of ideas flying about.[6]

Taka Ki Ro Wai was launched in 2013. It won the inaugural *Māori Language Award* for the *2014 NZ Post Children's Book Awards* and was a finalist for *Te Kura Pounamu: Te Reo Māori*, and for the *Russell Clark Illustration Award* at *LIANZA Children's Book Awards 2014*. It was one of only two New Zealand books selected for the prestigious 2015 White Ravens catalogue, among 200 titles in 36 languages from 55 countries.

4. https://medium.com/spiral-collectives/keri-kaa-taka-ki-ro-wai-ee531cbe6d83 A lovely *Marae* feature on Keri and the book is here https://youtu.be/X_605u4_mi4?si=Z9to_u2v6BLn7G3r
5. https://www.anzliterature.com/feature/selling-new-zealand-frankfurt/ &
6. February 2016.

TE ATA – THE MORNING

Keri Kaa

for Elizabeth[1]

Heard seagulls
this morning
above the roar
of Air New Zealand jets.
Their wailing calls
made me homesick
for Rangitukia
where surf booms and crashes
onto the shore
and you're sure
the sea will come pounding
into your bed.
I lie still listening
to the day's heartbeat
gently thudding.

1. 'Te Ata — The Morning' was written for Irihapeti Ramsden who, like Keri, then lived in Hataitai, Wellington.

Red buses racing by
Puffing snorting dragons
Peter splashes about
in the bathroom
thumps downstairs
late again.
Silence trembles.
Elizabeth phones for a chat.
Somewhere above
seagulls are wailing.

First published in *Spiral 5*, 1982.

Part Nine

ROSEMARY JOHNSON

1942-1982



Rosemary Johnson with her art installation, Falling Fence, *in the quadrangle of the Christchurch Arts Centre. The installation was part of ANZART, an international arts festival at the Arts Centre 1981. Courtesy Christchurch Star.*

BIOGRAPHY FOR WOMEN'S ART ARCHIVE

Born: 1942

Studied: Canterbury University School of Fine Arts 1962 to 1965 graduating with honours.

Travelled to Europe in 1966 and through several countries.

Later studied at the Central School of Art and Design, London. In July 1969 I married and returned to New Zealand, going to live in Dunedin.

Exhibitions etc:

May 1970 I had my first one woman exhibition with the Barry Lett Galleries; subsequent exhibitions in 1972 and 1975.

1970: I sent work for exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney.

1970: I exhibited with 'The Group' for the first time and was invited to become a member. I showed with 'The Group' most years until it was decided by group members to put it out of existence.

1971: One woman exhibition Dawsons Ltd. Gallery, Dunedin in March. We moved to Christchurch and I took part in the New Zealand Young Contemporaries exhibition Auckland City Gallery.

The National Art Gallery, in Wellington, bought one of the 'Beyond' pieces in 1972 and another in 1973.

I took part in the Hansells exhibition years 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974 and was guest exhibitor 1976. Several years I took part in the Christmas exhibition Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 1972, 1973, 1974.

March 1972 my daughter was born.

I lectured at the University of Canterbury Department of Extension Studies 1972 and 1973. Taught at Christchurch Girls High School one term only in 1971.

1973: I exhibited in '8 Young Artists' at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington. (A departure for me I suspended 5 clouds in the centre of the room, near the steps,

underneath, spread sand, and two largish bronzes, engraved 'Distance'.

1974: Commonwealth Games exhibition 'Art N.Z.' Also at the C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch in 1974. A one woman exhibition. 'Clouds', I had an opening and closing, where I made vapour and mist, using dry ice and liquid nitrogen. For the opening a taped soundtrack and the closing a flautist.

1974: The Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt, Wellington bought a 'Distance' piece.

1974: The McDougall Art Gallery bought a 3 piece bronze 'Landscape'. The Labyrinth Gallery opened above my husband's restaurant 1974.

1975: Participated in the Christchurch Arts Festival 'Environmental Structures' 'Cloud Box' in Cathedral Square. (Blue scaffolding box, containing 10 suspended clouds.)

1975: Completed the Sculpture and Fountain, Christchurch International Airport. (Area enclosed by glass on all sides, roof open to the sky, with a staircase passing from the sculpture area to the roof. The sculpture, 3 suspended clouds and 3 stainless steel extended domes, one with water straying from the top.)

1975: Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant towards costs.

1977: I became interested in the Women's Movement and took part in the 'Women's Art Environment' at the C.S.A. Gallery during the United Women's Convention.

June 1977: my son was born.

1977: One woman exhibition at the Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. Subsequently, a 3 piece Perspex sculpture on loan to the Teachers College, Christchurch.

1978: Co-organised and participated in the Christchurch Arts Festival exhibition 'Platforms' in the C.S.A. gallery.

1978: Attended the 10th International Sculpture Conference, Toronto, Canada. Also joined a pre-conference foundry course run by the Ontario College of Art; chief interest here as to learn the ceramic shell process. Visited New York on the way home.

1979: Completed the scale model, for a projected sculpture. Christchurch Teachers College (piece to run through the main body of the college with sight lines linking it with surrounding buildings: stone, sight line, post sight line, post acting as anchor point for the whole sculpture, brick line to brick outlined extended circle and stone, also from anchor post pathway crossing mound to far side of Auditorium area, continuing out of the far side of the mound a batten fence rising to central steel circle, fence continuing out at right angles to the steel and on to end of the pathway, finally a stone.)

First published in *Spiral 5* 1982. Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

Note: The Women's Art Archive is held at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand.[1] Almost all the images in the sections that follow are from Rosemary's archive at Te Puna o Waiwhetū Christchurch Art Gallery (Boxes 7 & 9). Our warm thanks to Tim Jones, the gallery's librarian and archivist.

1. https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/189

ROSEMARY & SPIRAL (1982)

Marian Evans

Spiral has brought together this material about Rosemary Johnson as a tribute to her and her contribution to the women's art movement.

Heather McPherson writes, in the next chapter, about Rosemary's work in Ōtautahi Christchurch, where Rosemary was a key figure in the Art Environment during the 1977 United Women's Convention. In 1980, Rosemary was invited to take part in the *Opening Show* at the Women's Gallery but was too ill to come to Wellington. Instead, she sent us several very supportive letters and an exciting series of slides on sculpture by American women artists – I remember some slides of Jody Pinto's work particularly.

Details about Rosemary's contribution to *Diaries* 1980 follow Heather's chapter and then Bridie Lonie discusses Rosemary's subsequent contributions to gallery shows, the last before she died being her installations and performance for *Women and the Environment*: this includes her statement about her *Women and the Environ-*

ment performance and an extract from an interview with Bridie for Radio Access.

Rosemary's visits to Wellington were always stimulating and joyful occasions for me. She was as scrupulous in her dealings with those of us who worked in the gallery as she was in making her art. Very often, the stress of exhibiting or performing was felt as much by women who as established artists were using the gallery as somewhere to try new things in a supportive environment, as it was by women who did not see themselves primarily as artists. This made for substantial additional demands on gallery co-ordinators while exhibitions or performances were being set up. When Rosemary visited, we could relax about her part. We already had, well before she arrived, all the information we needed about her pieces and about what she needed help with. She was a completely calm and orderly presence, always, in the midst of the chaos of hanging group shows.

And she took other women's work so seriously. Not only did she make being a co-ordinator easier for me, but she also encouraged me to take risks, which on-one else did, possibly because working at the gallery is such a recognised risk in itself. For example, when Rosemary and Claire Fergusson decided to do simultaneous performances during the *Spirituality* exhibition, there was a difficulty with documentation, as they couldn't do it for each other as originally planned. When I said that I could take photos (though I felt uneasy with colour) Rosemary suggested putting her camera on a tripod and swiveling it alternately between her and Claire (on opposite sides of the space), one under strobe lights moving fast, the other (Rosemary) slowly dying and being reborn by candlelight. Her steadfast 'you can do it' and meticulous organization of my equipment

worked; the photographs are beautiful. She gave me a lot of confidence, and I miss her.

2025: In 1982, we were sad that we were unable to print any of Rosemary Johnson's work in colour, as her work used colour very effectively and making black and white reproductions from colour photographs is often unsatisfactory. However, we understood that the Robert MacDougall Gallery was mounting a retrospective of Rosemary's work, and expected a colour catalogue would be a part of this. That didn't happen, so it's a special pleasure to be able to include some colour work throughout this section.

First published in *Spiral 5*, 1982 and slightly edited. Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

ROSEMARY JOHNSON MULLER (1982)

Heather McPherson



Rosemary in conversation in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Unknown date, unknown photographer.

When the Women Artists Group in Christchurch expanded and began working towards a specific objective, the art environment in conjunction with the United Women's Convention (1977), Rosemary,

one of the city's few established and recognized woman artists to express understanding and practical support for its aims, joined the group.

She was very pregnant, her child due about the same week the show opened. But she came to all the meetings and participated fully in plans and discussions.

Since the group felt strongly that art should not be separate from the environment where it is made, since women's art is most often made in spaces between a welter of other activities, we wanted the Canterbury Society of Arts to become not a gallery but a living space, a celebration of the private creativity channeled into home-making and the "decorative arts" as much as the creations visible on the wall.

One of the projects we envisaged was a gigantic mother goddess image to be part of the entrance to the show – a womblike entrance, symbolizing the place and importance of the private environment and emphasizing process as much as product.

Some of us felt daunted by the construction skills needed to undertake such an ambitious project. Rosemary did not. If we could provide the materials, she would organize the design and building. She, Anita Narbey (1944 - 2019) and Allie Eagle worked out the necessary material. To some of us the talk of rods, piping lengths, construction yards, cutting and polythene measurements were baffling. I admired Rosemary's obvious knowledge and familiarity with building materials and tools.

. . .

Someone hesitantly mentioned Rosemary's pregnancy. She waved away the concern, saying only that she would obviously need help with climbing.

We did not get a grant and the idea went unrealised. We concentrated on single projects and the rather chilly gallery to be humanized. Rosemary offered to do the entranceway as her project. With the birth on her mind, and ours, we felt it a happy choice.

As we became more involved with our own contributions we saw less of each other. Rosemary's quiet presence at the top of the stairs, her tape measures, became one of the strands in the necessary confusion of activity. Her support and resources were there when required – I could not have completed my wooden frame successfully without the use of Rosemary's jig-saw.

When the show opened, Rosemary's curtains – birth panels – one of the softest moments of the environment, were successful. Many women remarked on the sense of anticipation and mystery they felt as they came through.



Rosemary Johnson [birth panels] *Women's Environment CSA 1977. Photographer probably Rosemary.*



Rosemary Johnson [birth panels] *Women's Environment CSA 1977. Photographer probably Rosemary.*



Rosemary Johnson [birth panels] *Women's Environment CSA 1977. Photographer probably Rosemary.*

In one of the post-environment meetings, Rosemary talked about her finding of great boulders in a riverbed near Darfield, and how they seemed to her like eggs. She talked about her sculpture for the teachers' college and how she had visualized the boulder-eggs. Later, Gladys Gurney suggested that as it was such an interesting idea I should write about it for *Spiral*.

. . .

Rosemary was pleased and generously co-operative. (She once spoke of her disappointment that so few women sculptors came out of art school and even fewer were interested in learning her skills of casting and working with metals; that she would have liked to teach and/or work with other women in her field.)

I visited with Rosemary a number of times, saw and talked about her plans with her, and one fine blustery winter's day, accompanied by a very small child in a fold-up pushchair, we went out to the site.

Some characteristics of Rosemary's work habits stand out. As with the birth panels, she insisted on absolute accuracy of measurement and faithfulness to her original conception.

Where there were problems of communication, as there were on the teachers' college project, she quietly persisted in meeting with and talking to all parties. She mentioned difficulties with the Ministry of Works, of boulders having to be shifted and trees replanted. But she smiled as she talked of disagreements and gave every indication of confidence in achieving what she had set out to do.

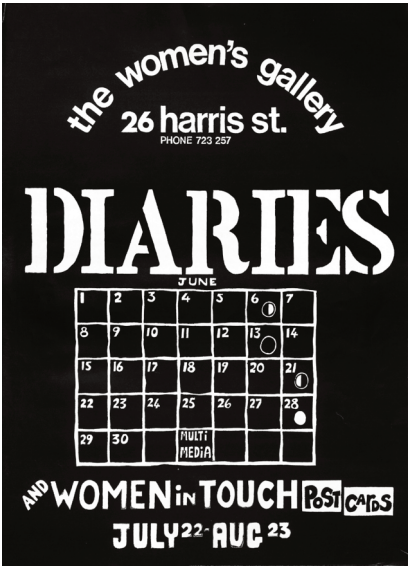
After I had written the interview, Rosemary read and vetted it. She deleted personal references and made the article an accurate statement of her intentions. If I occasionally felt that Rosemary's ideas were more vital than the cool controlled expression of them through her sculpture could indicate, I also felt that her overriding idea was successful – to bring back to human scale the great wind funnel between the concrete buildings where we stood and shivered that day. And I admired the number of factors that Rosemary took account of – from nor'westers which might tip the big central disc

(sun/-moon) over, to harmony of materials – the fence posts adding a warmer touch among the concrete and stone.

During her long illness I remember her sensitive and vulnerable courage in trying to heal herself, in coming to terms with changes in her capabilities and appearance, and in accepting the loss of her family.

First published in *Spiral 5* 1982. Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

ROSEMARY & 'DIARIES' (1980)



'Diaries' poster 1980 designed by Anna Keir & Marian Evans and printed by Anna at the Media Collective, Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

Anna Keir co-ordinated *Diaries*, which was a follow-up to *A Season's Diaries*. Organised by Joanna Margaret Paul in 1977 *A Season's Diaries* was in some ways a precursor to the Women's Gallery.

“ 21 Mersey St Christchurch 1

20-6-80

Dear Anna,

I have been very remiss about answering your invitation of the 7-5-80 to take part in the diaries exhibition. My reason for not replying is as follows. I have been busy working on the preliminary drawings for my Darfield commission and should have them finally ready for presentation this week.

I have found this and a piece I am making for a C.S.A show “Package Deal” next month have kept me busy. “Package Deal”, we, the invited artists are given certain materials to make something, this should prove interesting to see how everyone approaches the problems, both sculptors and painters. I have designed a piece based on a circle using the words “energy, radiating, from central, light”; in the centre 5” squares yellow and blue and outside word circle, 4 sections reaching out, a bit like flower petals, or radiations from the sun.

I would like to take part in the diaries show, but as you can see I have almost run out of time, I wonder will it matter if I make a piece based on one week, rather than a month. I have worked out an idea of format for it and it should not take long to put together. All

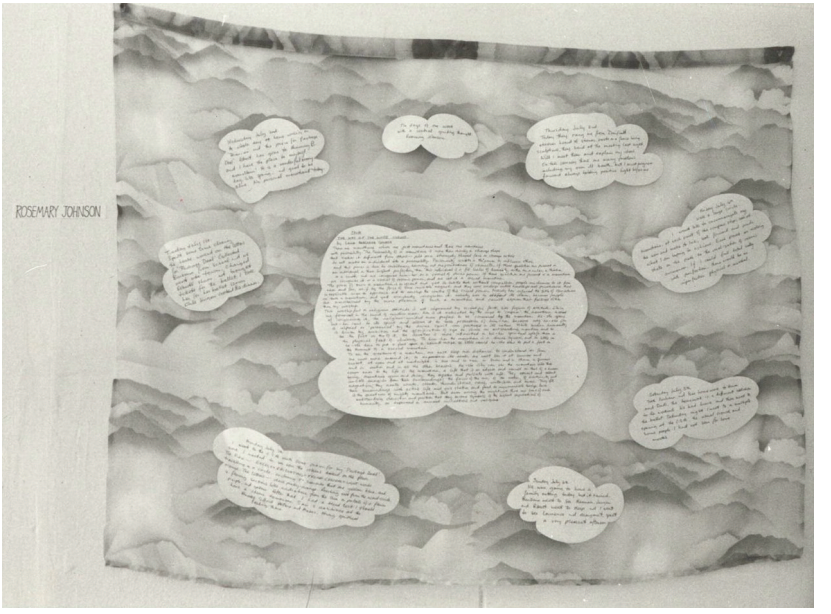
should be well providing I don't get the flu or a cold or something, to meet your deadlne of July 14. When you are having chemotherapy you never know; and so I have been very careful about taking on too much work and I also try to avoid deadlines. If you feel the above is not acceptable, please drop me a note and I won't send the piece for the diaries show.

I wonder how things are going with you I think of you often and Heather, who I managed to miss saying goodbye to. Please ask her if she wants to borrow my jigsaw. She wold be most welcome, it is only a matter of someone going north taking it up to Wellington. I would probably need to take out insurance against loss. I feel sorry I have not been any help to her with the Women and Violence undertaking, if there is any advice or anything that I could give, that might be useful, please write and ask.

I thought the 'Women's Gallery' brochure was very good, well presented and informative, keep up the good work.

Best wishes.

Rosemary Johnson



Fragile batiked pieces of orange cloth with white paper clouds attached, on which Rosemary had written her diary. She had a strong belief in the powers of individual colours, and she believed orange to be the most healing. Unfortunately her words are indecipherable. Black & white photograph by Women's Gallery 1980.

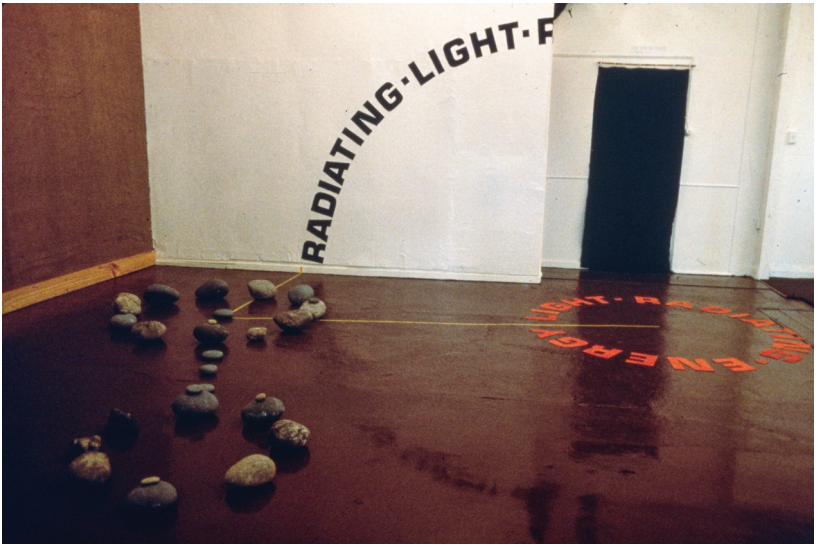
“ Monday

Dear Anna I hope the enclosed will be alright please only hang it if you think its O.K. I did not spend as much time on it as I would have liked to, and in fact it really is difficult to write about ones life on a daily basis, I found. How much to say about the people close to you, when it all becomes very public, so you end up saying less than you would in a real diary, I would never keep one actually because I find writing hard work, and the past of less interest than the present. Thank you for your letter love to Heather. Rosemary

ABOUT ROSEMARY (1980, 1982)

Bridie Lonie

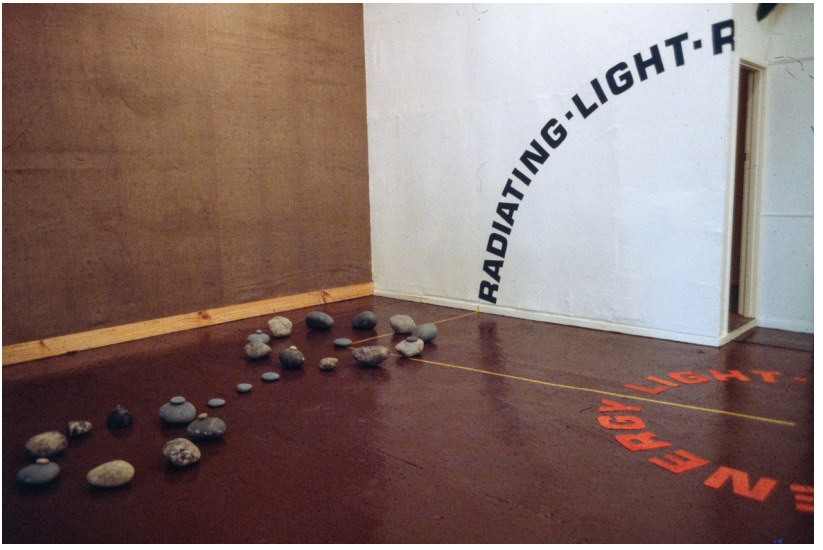
Bridie Lonie co-ordinated *3 Sculptors* in late 1980: Rosemary, Di ffrench and Bridie herself.



Rosemary Johnson Light Radiating Light *'3 sculptors' Women's Gallery 1980.*



Rosemary Johnson Rosemary Johnson Light Radiating Light '*3 sculptors' Women's Gallery 1980.*



Rosemary Johnson Rosemary Johnson Light Radiating Light '*3 sculptors' Women's Gallery 1980.*

. . .

She came to the Gallery three times in the last year, to do a series of pieces concerning cairns and circles, cycles of spiritual renewal and cairns of burial. She used stone circles, tape, candles, wool, and wood, all renewed or recycled materials – the stones were the same stones; the colours were white, brown, yellow: candles, overalls, tape, wood; & grey & brown stones. The performances she gave in and around her pieces were tentative – the first piece had none, the second a private ritual within a stone & candle circle, in the third piece the audience formed the circle, holding candles. She was unsure about the last piece, the wind blew the candles out, the circle was interrupted by people with messages; the ritual aspect didn't overcome the mundane. For the people forming this circle, this didn't mar its beauty.

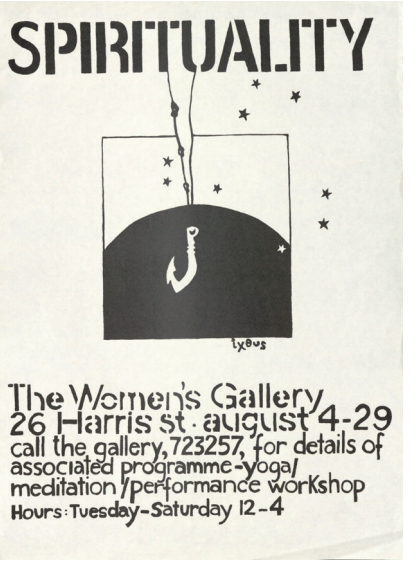
Her piece at Anzart, the *Falling Fence*, in its tension and pain, was a stark contrast to the Gallery work. She was working on all levels, exploring new ideas and media, to examine both despair and belief.

I think of her often, of her clarity and courage, and with what simplicity she would proceed on her journey, with no distinction between art and living.

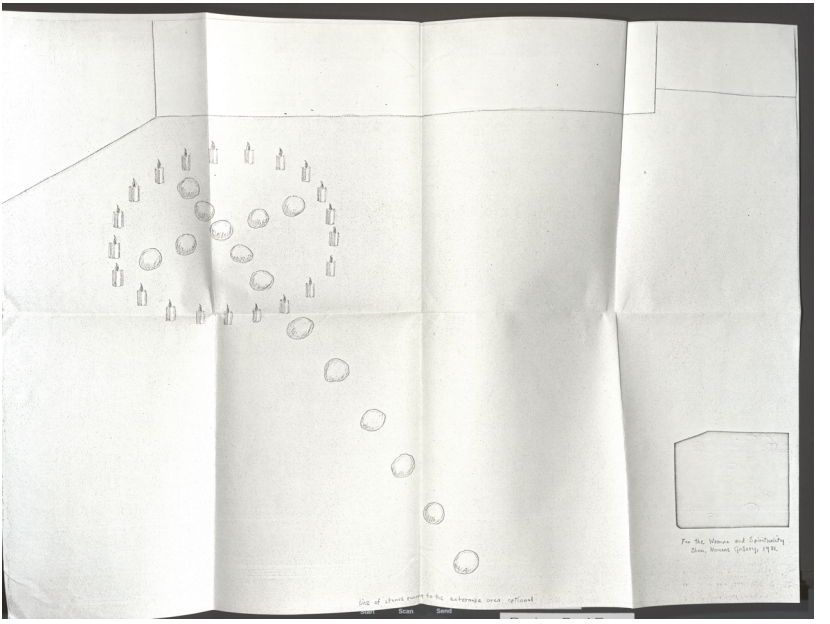
First published in *Spiral 5* 1982. Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

ROSEMARY & 'SPIRITUALITY' (1981)

Rosemary Johnson



Poster design by Marian Evans & Anna Keir. Screen-printed by Anna at the Media Collective Whanganui-a-Tara.



Rosemary Johnson Ring of Light *drawing 1981.*

'RING OF LIGHT' PERFORMANCE

Myself or other person to lie on her back head pointing towards stones 17 and 18, it will be necessary to make inside circle diameter 6'. Lie still for 10 to 20 mis then slowly begin to sit up into foetal position, sideways on to the cross, 5 to 10 mins. Then slowly rise to feet, stand stiffly straight 5 to 10 mins then thrust hands above the head, fingers outstretched. Back should be to stones 17 & 18.

The performer should be wearing yellow overalls provided. Additional candles should be paced around the edge of the stone circle at points marked X in plan.



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *installation 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981. .*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981.*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981.*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981.*

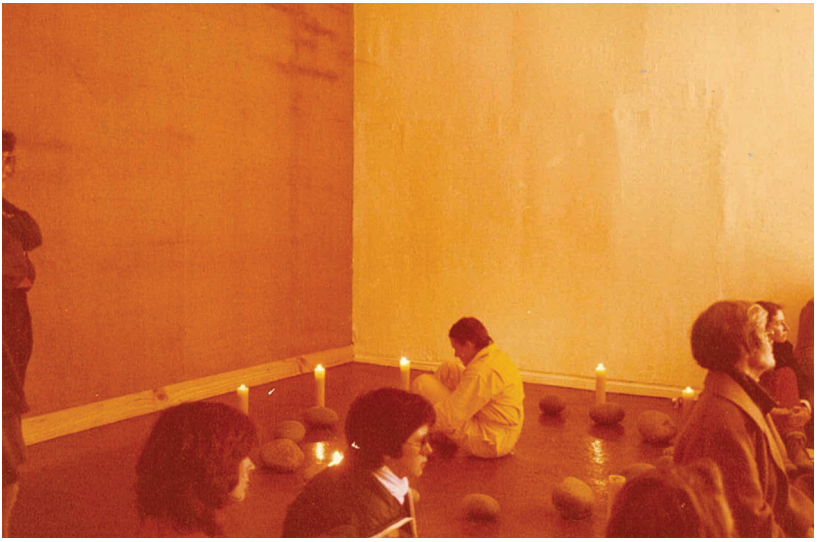


Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981.*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981.*

I'm a bit embarrassed that these are probably the photos I took and was pleased with (see 'Rosemary & Spiral' above). But also delighted because it's her performance with an audience, which at first is turned towards Clare Fergusson and then turns towards her, and watches intently. And, in the audience, I can see familiar faces.



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981. L-R Sharon Alston, unknown, Mary Bailey, Celia Elizabeth.*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981. Foreground L-R Sharon Alston, unknown. Background Bridie Lonie.*



Rosemary Johnson Ring of light *performance 'Spirituality' Women's Gallery 1981. Foreground L-R Sharon Alston, unknown. Background Bridie Lonie.*

ROSEMARY & BRIDIE ON ACCESS RADIO

Rosemary Johnson talks with Bridie Lonie: from an Access Radio programme during the *Women and Environment* exhibition, co-ordinated by Bridie, the Women's Gallery, November 3-December 5, 1981.



Design Sharon Alston. Photography Helen Barlow. Model Mary Bailey.

. . .

Rosemary: I'll start with the piece by the Gallery. The cairns have a basic ground plan which is circular.



Rosemary Johnson *INSIDE OUTSIDE* 'Women & The Environment' Women's Gallery Te Whanaganui-a-Tara
1981 Two cairns, one inside the Women's Gallery, linked visually with one outside across Harris Street, in the rose gardens.

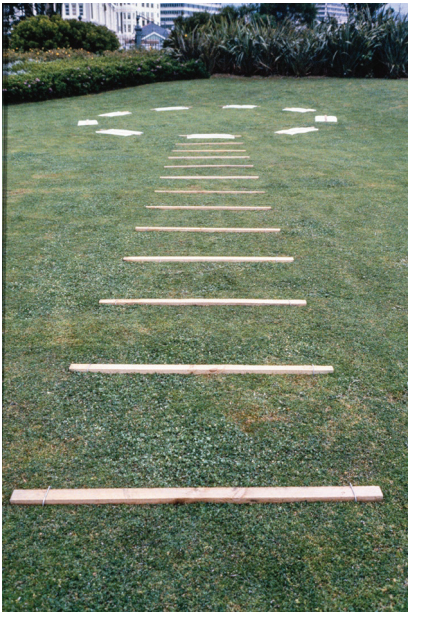


Rosemary Johnson *INSIDE OUTSIDE* 'Women & The Environment' Women's Gallery Te Whanaganui-a-Tara
1981 Two cairns, one inside the Women's Gallery, linked visually with one outside across Harris Street, in the rose gardens.

They are very small and the stones used are oval shaped, the idea being that there's a total containment within the circle and it's a universal symbol which has a continuity without a beginning or end; it is like a lot of things come back to their point of origin. Like the universe everything is going in a circular motion. The cairns also have wool coming out of them. This is symbolic of burial – the wool

is in fact almost like a fibrous decayed animal that's died – the cairn is also a symbol of burial. The burial aspect is related to the fact that I have personally been through certain things which I felt I had buried, put behind me. So that was a personal statement, too.

The piece over in the other park which was used as a basis for a performance with a group of women, uses a circle as a symbol of unity.



Rosemary Johnson *Renewal* 'Women & The Environment'
Women's Gallery Te Whanaganui-a-Tara *1981*.

The *Renewal* performance entailed walking along a line of battens and making a circle within the circle which is laid along the ground

and each person considered various aspects of the environment in a conscious form and held-linked hands.



Rosemary Johnson *Renewal.* 'Women & The Environment' Women's Gallery Te Whanaganui-a-Tara *1981.*

This also had the effect of helping people to feel at one with the environment surrounding them and with nature, with growing things and the wind.

First published in *Spiral 5* 1982. Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

RENEWAL - A PERFORMANCE PIECE

Rosemary Johnson

'Renewal' installation and performance outside the Women's Gallery during *Women and the Environment* exhibition co-ordinated by Bridie Lonie; associated programme co-ordinated by Marg Leniston.



Renewal installation and performance 'Women & the Environment' 1981.

PERFORMANCE FOR A GROUP OF PEOPLE

Each person lights the candle of the person behind – a chain reaction. Then, singly, each person walks up the line of battens – clockwise. They will then sit on the right hand side of the circle, round the inside of the circle, evenly spaced.

The lit candles will be pushed into the ground in front of each person – or held in their hands. Each person considers an aspect of renewal, (which can be shared with the group).

After a time the first person to enter the circle will stand and holding her candle retrace her steps round the outside of the circle anti-clockwise and back down the battens leading into it.

The participants will each walk round the inside of the circle to the right-hand side then anti-clockwise round the outside and back down the battens.

Conclusion – each person puts out the candle of the one next to her.

Some related thoughts

The battens from fallen trees – consider our responsibility to the earth and to nature.

. . .

The candles renewal of body and spirit – realign body energy to result in mental and physical wholeness.

Cloth strips a circle of unity – all life is interrelated, so what you do at any time or place affects other related matter.

Transcribed by Desiree Gezentsvey.

Part Ten

PAULINE REYNOLDS NEALE

1943-2007



Tangata Tiriti, Pākehā, Pommie and feminist, mother of Kate and Ian, married to David Carnegie.

Pauline might ask what's she's doing here, among artists and writers. (She once made a file note that although someone was included in list of artists who had received an arts council grant to travel to the Sydney Biennale she was actually a co-ordinator, not an artist!) My answer to her would be that she's a published writer, because of her

contribution to *Women Together*, where her exemplary short history of Kidsarus 2 remains an essential reference point.[1] Then, if she accepted that, (not guaranteed!) I'd explain why her contribution to the full Te Whanganui-a-Tara Spiral experience — Kidsarus 2, Women's Gallery, Spiral, is, in my opinion, so significant. I've chosen the material for her chapters — ordered chronologically — so you can work that out yourself.

Pauline didn't leave a formal record about her life that I could find. I haven't seen a curriculum vitae, though I know she had several. She didn't write a memoir. I've found no photograph of her in the extensive collective archive at ATL and only one in my own files, which I cropped for the image on the previous page. Enquiries among those who might know more reached a dead end. But without her the Kidsarus project would not have been realised, and her name, sometimes linked to that of David Carnegie, also appears — for instance — in the acknowledgments in other Spiral projects: *the bone people, The House of the Talking Cat* and *A Women's Picture Book*. In ATL her name is also associated with two other feminist projects, the Wellington Women's Boarding House in Mount Victoria; and a Brooklyn Women's Day exhibition she organised.[2]

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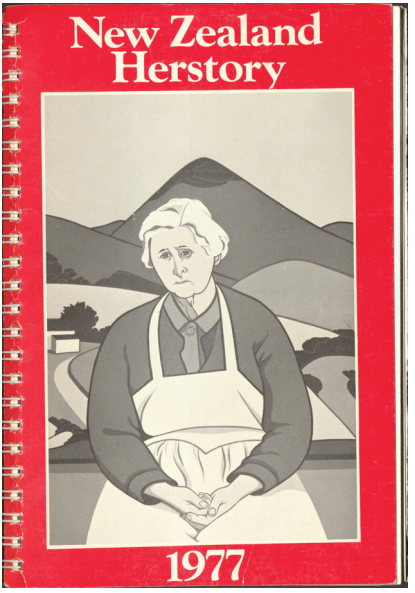
1. *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand Ngā Rōpū o te Motu,* edited by Anne Else, Daphne Brasell Associates Press & Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs 1993. Updated 2018. https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/kidsarus-2

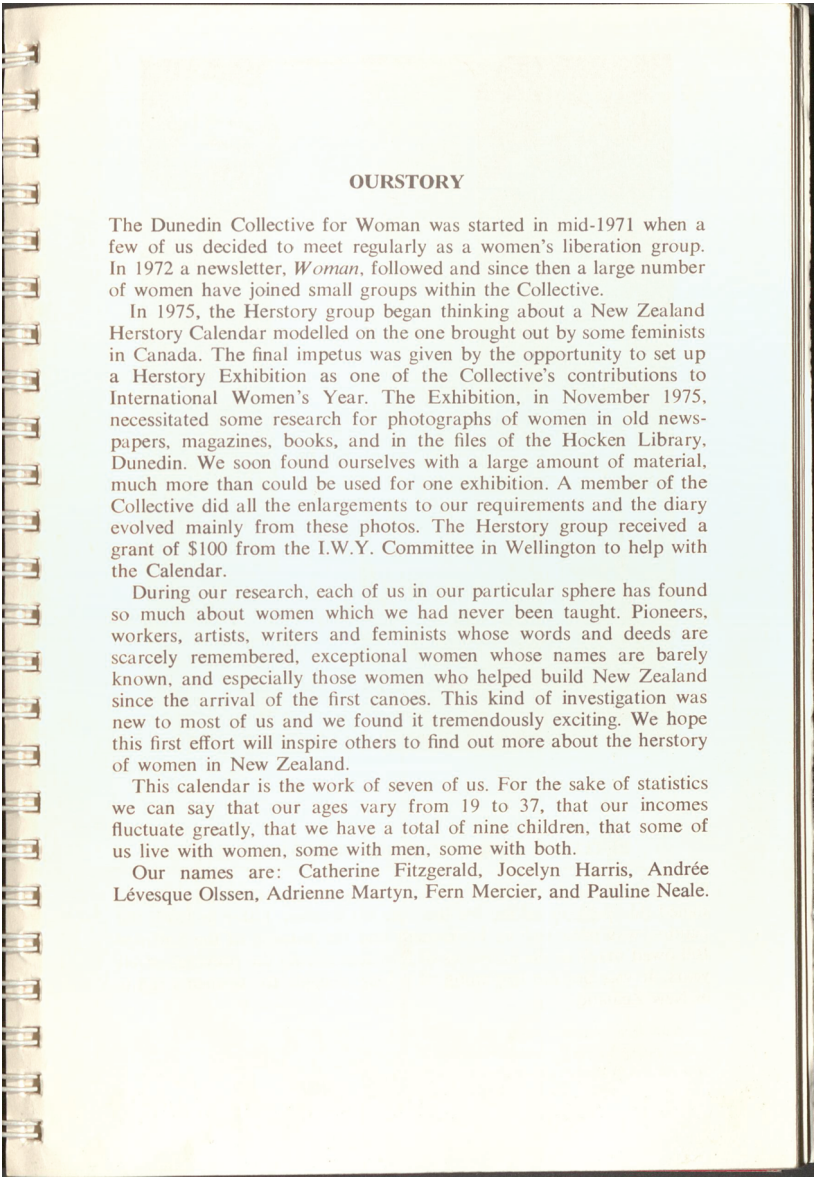
2. Wellington Women's Boarding House Inc : Records Reference Number: 2003-070; [Contributor] - MS-Group-1519. Clifton family : Research papers. 1873-1896, 1995-1997 [Collection];[Contributor] - MS-Papers-7995-131. Inward letters - General. 1983-1993; White, Dorothy Mary Neal, 1915-1995 : Papers (MS-Group-1262). [Item]; [Contributor] - MS-Papers-10782-159. Miscellaneous articles and talks. 1940-1995. Simpson, Adrienne Marie, 1943-2010: Papers and recordings (ATL-Group-00692). [Item];[Contributor] - MS-Papers-7995-133. Inward letters - General. 1983-1993. White, Dorothy Mary Neal, 1915-1995 : Papers (MS-Group-1262). [Item]; [Creator] - MS-Papers-2733. Neale, Pauline, fl 1981 : Papers relating to the Brooklyn Women's Day. 2 May 1981. [Item]; [Creator] - MS-Papers-8509. Neale, Pauline, fl 1981 : Papers relating a seminar on the Bone People. 30 May-5 Nov 2005. [Item];

The most I know is that in the early 1970s Pauline accompanied her husband from Canada or England to Aotearoa, when he was employed to set up a drama department at the University of Otago, in Ōtepoti. There, she was an early member of the legendary Dunedin Collective for Women and part of their collective that established the also-legendary *Herstory Diary* series.



Dunedin Collective for Women New Zealand Herstory 1977. *Cover image Robin White.*

[Donor/lender/vendor] - ATL-Group-00377. Kidsarus 2 : Records. 1978-1992. [Collection]



OURSTORY

The Dunedin Collective for Woman was started in mid-1971 when a few of us decided to meet regularly as a women's liberation group. In 1972 a newsletter, *Woman*, followed and since then a large number of women have joined small groups within the Collective.

In 1975, the Herstory group began thinking about a New Zealand Herstory Calendar modelled on the one brought out by some feminists in Canada. The final impetus was given by the opportunity to set up a Herstory Exhibition as one of the Collective's contributions to International Women's Year. The Exhibition, in November 1975, necessitated some research for photographs of women in old newspapers, magazines, books, and in the files of the Hocken Library, Dunedin. We soon found ourselves with a large amount of material, much more than could be used for one exhibition. A member of the Collective did all the enlargements to our requirements and the diary evolved mainly from these photos. The Herstory group received a grant of $100 from the I.W.Y. Committee in Wellington to help with the Calendar.

During our research, each of us in our particular sphere has found so much about women which we had never been taught. Pioneers, workers, artists, writers and feminists whose words and deeds are scarcely remembered, exceptional women whose names are barely known, and especially those women who helped build New Zealand since the arrival of the first canoes. This kind of investigation was new to most of us and we found it tremendously exciting. We hope this first effort will inspire others to find out more about the herstory of women in New Zealand.

This calendar is the work of seven of us. For the sake of statistics we can say that our ages vary from 19 to 37, that our incomes fluctuate greatly, that we have a total of nine children, that some of us live with women, some with men, some with both.

Our names are: Catherine Fitzgerald, Jocelyn Harris, Andrée Lévesque Olssen, Adrienne Martyn, Fern Mercier, and Pauline Neale.

Dunedin Collective for Women New Zealand Herstory 1977: *'Our Story'*

The family came to Te Whanganui-a-Tara shortly after the diary was published (I think).

PAULINE, KIDSARUS 2 & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

PAULINE & KIDSARUS 2

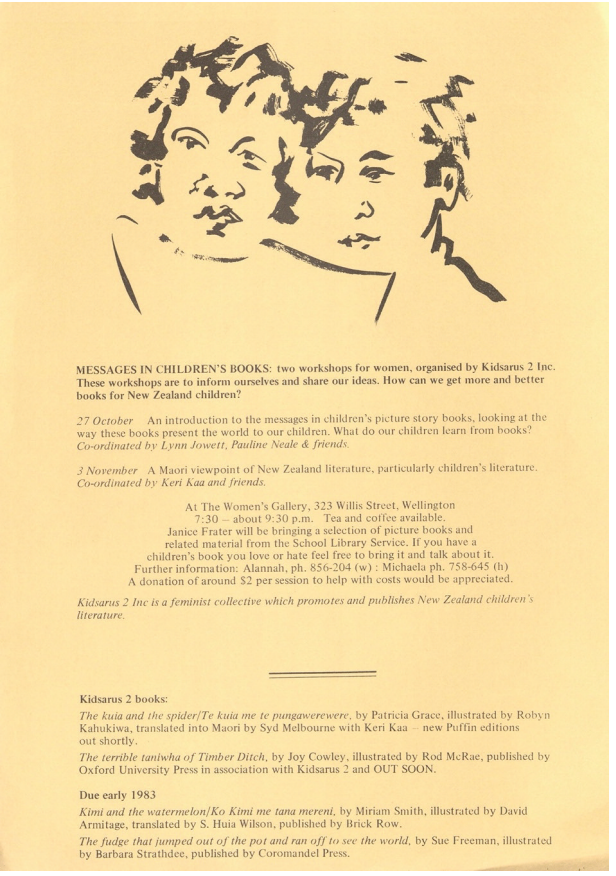
In her essay for *Women Together* Pauline wrote—

> Kidsarus [K2 for short, think 'Kids R Us'], took its name from a Wellington feminist collective which in 1976 had published *The Red Overalls*, a non-sexist children's picture book with black and white drawings, in a cheap, stapled format, sold by mail order. Kidsarus's pioneering work made K2's task much easier. Former collective members passed on their files and remaining stock of *The Red Overalls*, which K2 sold for operating funds; it also used the book's popularity to demonstrate the need for the type of book it planned.[1]

1. *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand Ngā Rōpū o te Motu,* edited by Anne Else, Daphne Brasell Associates Press & Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs 1993. Updated 2018. https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/kidsarus-2

So we got those files and that stock and Pauline built on them in her inimitable, meticulous way, making sure for instance that the books got sold, that everything was immaculately documented and that those who'd created the story and images for *The Red Overalls* were properly compensated.

Without Pauline, no Kidsarus 2 books would have made it to bookshelves. Her immaculate archive for *The Kuia & the Spider* and *Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere.* She made calls, jotting down information in shorthand that she translated into file notes; typed businesslike letters and kept the carbon copies with care; organised the accounts; listened carefully and responded equally carefully; kept confidences; and always always delivered on her promises. For her, these practices were essential for any feminist project to be successful and she was a highly committed feminist who lived what she believed, consistently. An event organised by Pauline ran like clockwork, as with this one, at the Women's Gallery in late 1982, after the success of *The Kuia & the Spider* and *Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere.*



MESSAGES IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS: **two workshops for women, organised by Kidsarus 2 Inc. These workshops are to inform ourselves and share our ideas. How can we get more and better books for New Zealand children?**

27 October An introduction to the messages in children's picture story books, looking at the way these books present the world to our children. What do our children learn from books? *Co-ordinated by Lynn Jowett, Pauline Neale & friends.*

3 November A Maori viewpoint of New Zealand literature, particularly children's literature. *Co-ordinated by Keri Kaa and friends.*

At The Women's Gallery, 323 Willis Street, Wellington
7:30 – about 9:30 p.m. Tea and coffee available.
Janice Frater will be bringing a selection of picture books and related material from the School Library Service. If you have a children's book you love or hate feel free to bring it and talk about it.
Further information: Alannah, ph. 856-204 (w) : Michaela ph. 758-645 (h)
A donation of around $2 per session to help with costs would be appreciated.

Kidsarus 2 Inc is a feminist collective which promotes and publishes New Zealand children's literature.

Kidsarus 2 books:

The kuia and the spider/Te kuia me te pungawerewere, by Patricia Grace, illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa, translated into Maori by Syd Melbourne with Keri Kaa – new Puffin editions out shortly.

The terrible tanlwha of Timber Ditch, by Joy Cowley, illustrated by Rod McRae, published by Oxford University Press in association with Kidsarus 2 and OUT SOON.

Due early 1983

Kimi and the watermelon/Ko Kimi me tana mereni, by Miriam Smith, illustrated by David Armitage, translated by S. Huia Wilson, published by Brick Row.

The fudge that jumped out of the pot and ran off to see the world, by Sue Freeman, illustrated by Barbara Strathdee, published by Coromandel Press.

Kidsarus 2 poster 1982, organised by Pauline Neale. Poster image Bill MacKay.

Pauline worked on all four picture books in the Kidsarus 2 project, each co-produced with a different publisher, with Kidsarus subsidising both the illustrator costs and the full-colour printing.

. . .

When the project was complete, Pauline donated the leftover funds to the Wellington Public Library's children's section and ordered the collective files for deposit at ATL. Inevitably, the files are a joy to consult and for this chapter and those that follow I was delighted to find some representative documentation that I hope shows the kind of thorough, funny, generous and kind person Pauline was.

The Kuia and the Spider

Patricia Grace

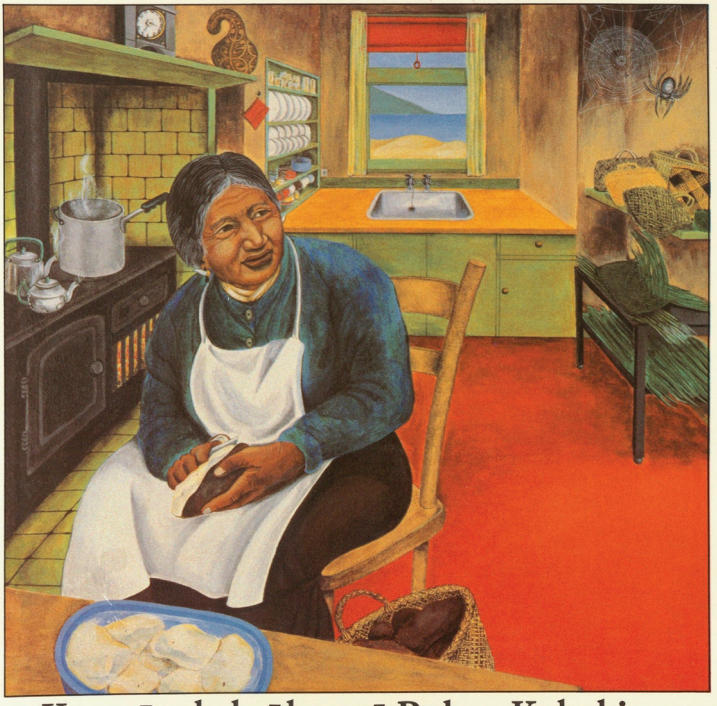


Illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa

Te Kuia me te Pūngāwerewere

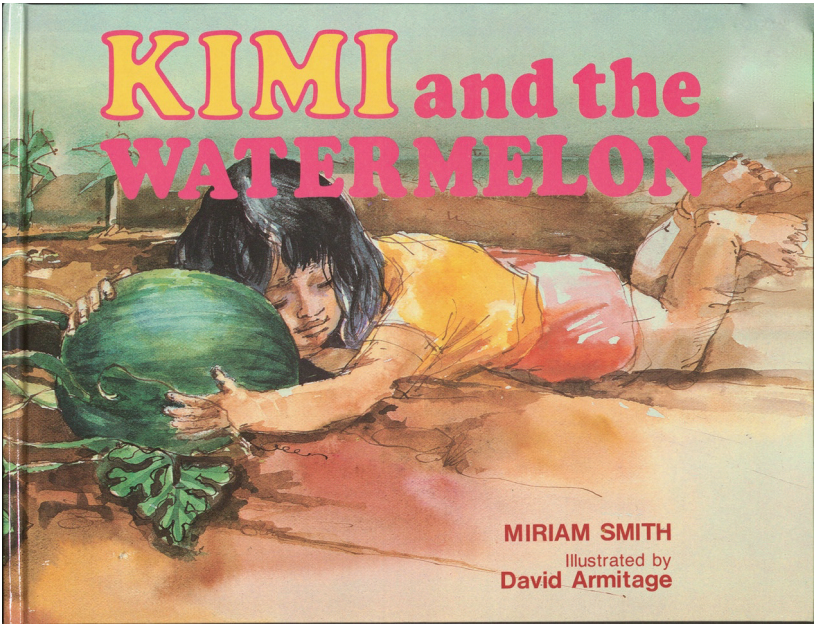
Puffin Books

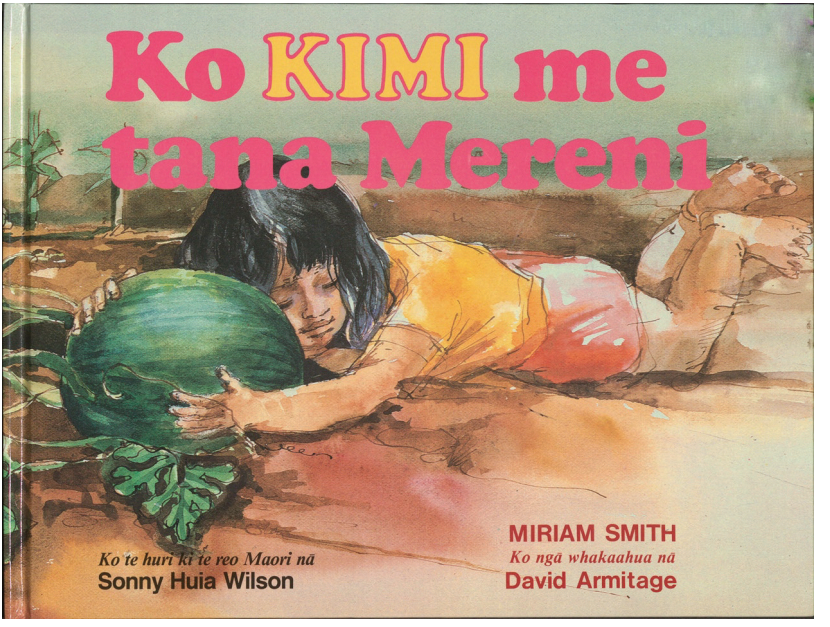
Patricia Grace

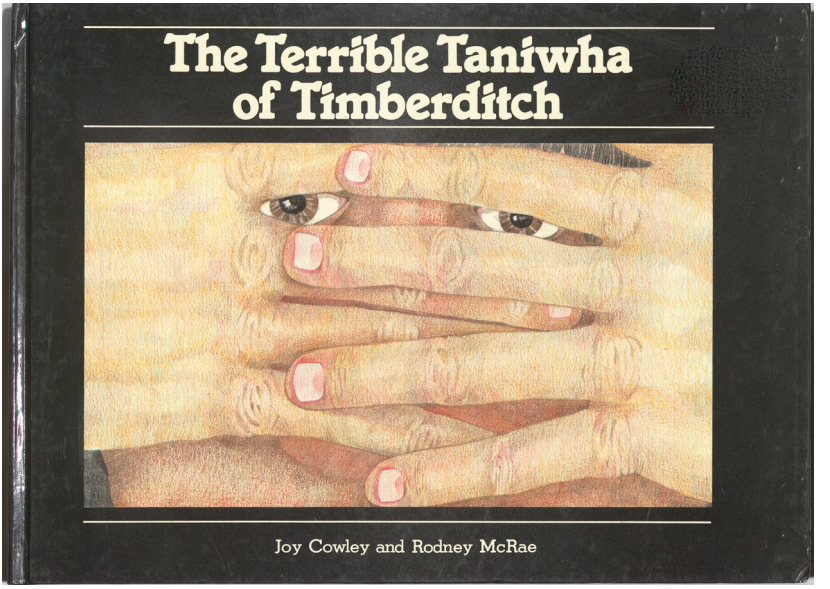


Ko ngā whakaāhua nā Robyn Kahukiwa

Ko te huri ki te reo Māori nā Syd Melbourne rāua ko Keri Kaa


KIMI and the
WATERMELON
MIRIAM SMITH
Illustrated by
David Armitage

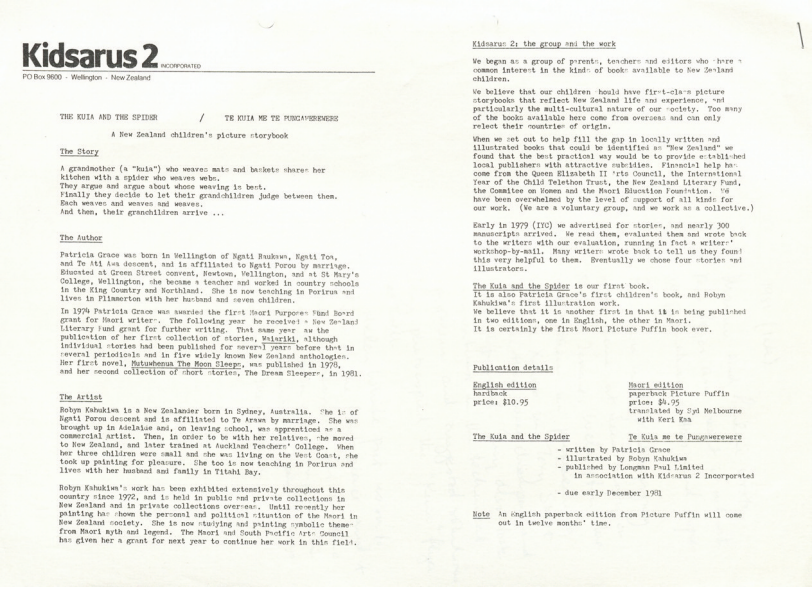

Ko KIMI me
tana Mereni
Ko te huri ki te reo Maori nā
Sonny Huia Wilson
MIRIAM SMITH
Ko ngā whakaahua nā
David Armitage


The Terrible Taniwha of Timberditch
Joy Cowley and Rodney McRae


Sue Freeman
illustrated by Barbara Strathdee
The fudge that jumped out of the bath and ran away to see the world

PREP FOR THE KUIA & THE SPIDER TE KUIA ME TE PŪNGĀWEREWERE PUBLICATION: OUR FLIER; & PAULINE RE HER CARPET & HER EMPLOYMENT

There was a lot of prep, taken very seriously alongside everything else Pauline had going on in her life.



Kidsarus 2 INCORPORATED
PO Box 9600 - Wellington - New Zealand

THE KUIA AND THE SPIDER / TE KUIA ME TE PUNGAWEREWERE

A New Zealand children's picture storybook

The Story

A grandmother (a "kuia") who weaves mats and baskets shares her kitchen with a spider who weaves webs.
They argue and argue about whose weaving is best.
Finally they decide to let their grandchildren judge between them.
Each weaves and weaves and weaves.
And then, their grandchildren arrive ...

The Author

Patricia Grace was born in Wellington of Ngati Ruakawa, Ngati Toa, and Te Ati Awa descent, and is affiliated to Ngati Porou by marriage. Educated at Green Street convent, Newtown, Wellington, and at St Mary's College, Wellington, she became a teacher and worked in country schools in the King Country and Northland. She is now teaching in Porirua and lives in Pilmerton with her husband and seven children.

In 1976 Patricia Grace was awarded the first Maori Purposes Fund Board grant for Maori writers. The following year she received a New Zealand Literary Fund grant for further writing. That same year saw the publication of her first collection of stories, Waiariki, although individual stories had been published for several years before that in several periodicals and in five widely known New Zealand anthologies. Her first novel, Mutuwhenua The Moon Sleeps, was published in 1978, and her second collection of short stories, The Dream Sleepers, in 1981.

The Artist

Robyn Kahukiwa is a New Zealander born in Sydney, Australia. She is of Ngati Porou descent and is affiliated to Te Arawa by marriage. She was brought up in Adelaide and, on leaving school, was apprenticed as a commercial artist. Then, in order to be with her relatives, she moved to New Zealand, and later trained at Auckland Teachers' College. When her three children were small and she was living on the West Coast, she took up painting for pleasure. She too is now teaching in Porirua and lives with her husband and family in Titahi Bay.

Robyn Kahukiwa's work has been exhibited extensively throughout this country since 1972, and is held in public and private collections in New Zealand and in private collections overseas. Until recently her painting has shown the personal and political situation of the Maori in New Zealand society. She is now studying and painting symbolic themes from Maori myth and legend. The Maori and South Pacific Arts Council has given her a grant for next year to continue her work in this field.

Kidsarus 2: the group and the work

We begin as a group of parents, teachers and editors who share a common interest in the kinds of books available to New Zealand children.

We believe that our children should have first-class picture storybooks that reflect New Zealand life and experience, and particularly the multi-cultural nature of our society. Too many of the books available here come from overseas and can only reflect their countries of origin.

When we set out to help fill the gap in locally written and illustrated books that could be identified as "New Zealand" we found that the best practical way would be to provide established local publishers with attractive subsidies. Financial help has come from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, the International Year of the Child Telethon Trust, the New Zealand Literary Fund, the Commitee on Women and the Maori Education Foundation. We have been overwhelmed by the level of support of all kinds for our work. (We are a voluntary group, and we work as a collective.)

Early in 1979 (IYC) we advertised for stories, and nearly 300 manuscripts arrived. We read them, evaluated them and wrote back to the writers with our evaluation, running in fact a writers' workshop-by-mail. Many writers wrote back to tell us they found this very helpful to them. Eventually we chose four stories and illustrators.

The Kuia and the Spider is our first book.
It is also Patricia Grace's first children's book, and Robyn Kahukiwa's first illustration work.
We believe that it is another first in that it is being published in two editions, one in English, the other in Maori.
It is certainly the first Maori Picture Puffin book ever.

Publication details

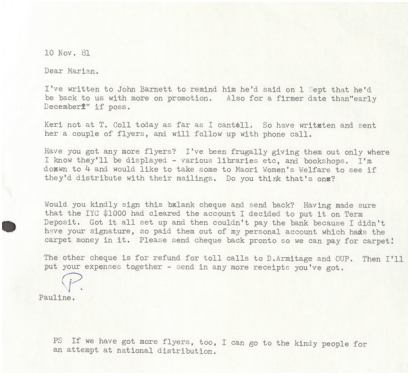
English edition	Maori edition
hardback	paperback Picture Puffin
price: $10.95	price: $4.95
	translated by Syd Melbourne with Keri Kaa

The Kuia and the Spider — Te Kuia me te Pungawerewere

- written by Patricia Grace
- illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa
- published by Longman Paul Limited
  In Association with Kidsarus 2 Incorporated
- due early December 1981

Note An English paperback edition from Picture Puffin will come out in twelve months' time.

The Kidsarus promotional flier, widely distributed.



10 Nov. 81

Dear Marian.

I've written to John Barnett to remind him he'd said on 1 Sept that he'd be back to us with more on promotion. Also for a firmer date than "early December" if poss.

Keri not at T. Coll today as far as I cantell. So have written and sent her a couple of flyers, and will follow up with phone call.

Have you got any more flyers? I've been frugally giving them out only where I know they'll be displayed - various libraries etc, and bookshops. I'm down to 4 and would like to take some to Maori Women's Welfare to see if they'd distribute with their mailings. Do you think that's one?

Would you kindly sign this blank cheque and send back? Having made sure that the IYC $1000 had cleared the account I decided to put it on Term Deposit. Got it all set up and then couldn't pay the bank because I didn't have your signature, so paid them out of my personal account which made the carpet money in it. Please send cheque back pronto so we can pay for carpet!

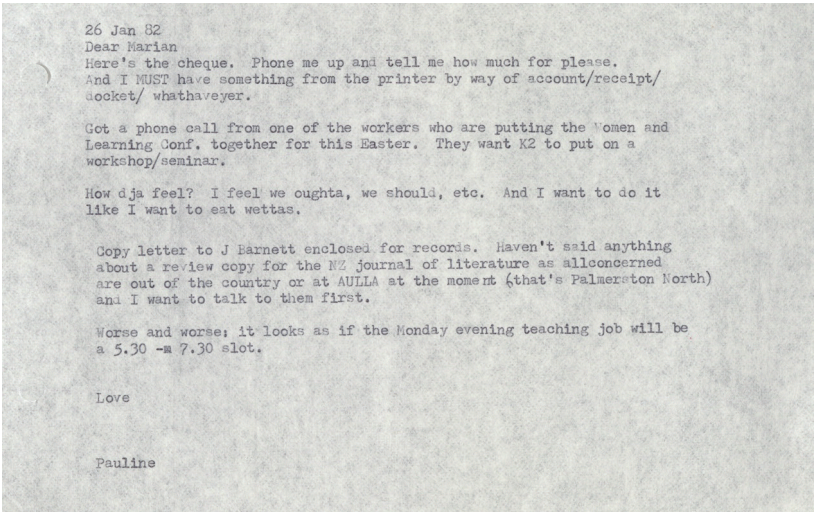
The other cheque is for refund for toll calls to D.Armitage and CUP. Then I'll put your expenses together - send in any more receipts you've got.

Pauline.

PS If we have got more flyers, too, I can go to the kindy people for an attempt at national distribution.

Carpet; & John Barnett, the Longman Paul senior editor.

. . .



26 Jan 82
Dear Marian
Here's the cheque. Phone me up and tell me how much for please.
And I MUST have something from the printer by way of account/receipt/
docket/ whathaveyer.

Got a phone call from one of the workers who are putting the Women and
Learning Conf. together for this Easter. They want K2 to put on a
workshop/seminar.

How dja feel? I feel we oughta, we should, etc. And I want to do it
like I want to eat wettas.

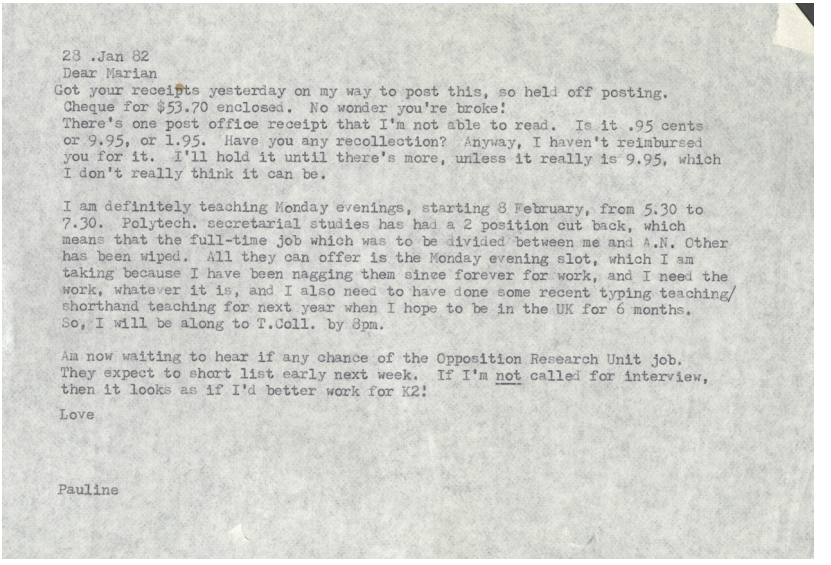
Copy letter to J Barnett enclosed for records. Haven't said anything
about a review copy for the NZ journal of literature as allconcerned
are out of the country or at AULLA at the moment (that's Palmerston North)
and I want to talk to them first.

Worse and worse; it looks as if the Monday evening teaching job will be
a 5.30 -m 7.30 slot.

Love

Pauline

Pauline in full administrative flight-1



28 .Jan 82
Dear Marian
Got your receipts yesterday on my way to post this, so held off posting.
Cheque for $53.70 enclosed. No wonder you're broke!
There's one post office receipt that I'm not able to read. Is it .95 cents or 9.95, or 1.95. Have you any recollection? Anyway, I haven't reimbursed you for it. I'll hold it until there's more, unless it really is 9.95, which I don't really think it can be.

I am definitely teaching Monday evenings, starting 8 February, from 5.30 to 7.30. Polytech. secretarial studies has had a 2 position cut back, which means that the full-time job which was to be divided between me and A.N. Other has been wiped. All they can offer is the Monday evening slot, which I am taking because I have been nagging them since forever for work, and I need the work, whatever it is, and I also need to have done some recent typing teaching/ shorthand teaching for next year when I hope to be in the UK for 6 months. So, I will be along to T.Coll. by 8pm.

Am now waiting to hear if any chance of the Opposition Research Unit job. They expect to short list early next week. If I'm not called for interview, then it looks as if I'd better work for K2!

Love

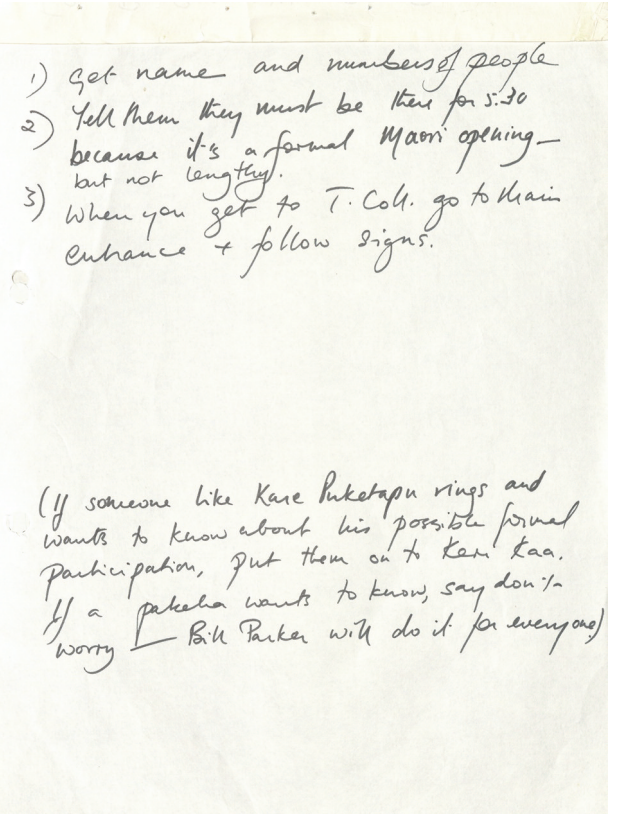
Pauline

Pauline in full administrative flight-2

THE KUIA & THE SPIDER TE KUIA ME TE PŪNGĀWEREWERE LAUNCH

The Kuia & the Spider launch documents in Pauline's files, already referred to in 'Keri Kaa & Spiral'[2] were for me typically entertaining. By the time came for *The Kuia*'s launch Pauline and Keri Kaa had recognised each other, I believe, as people who get things done, with integrity; and some intriguing file notes that precede and follow the launch have both historical value and demonstrate how limited even full archives can be. For instance, this one, probably a translation of shorthand notes taken during a phone call.

2. Section Five.


1) Get name and numbers of people
2) Tell them they must be there for 5.30 because it's a formal Maori opening— but not lengthy.
3) When you get to T. Coll. go to Main entrance + follow signs.

(If someone like Kare Puketapu rings and wants to know about his possible formal participation, put them on to Ken Raa. If a pakeha wants to know, say don't worry — Bill Parker will do it for everyone)

I think that Pauline — who worked on the invitations with Keri and was about to send them out — was recording, as always very carefully, her firm marching orders from Keri, to share with K2. Keri needed to know numbers for the catering, of course. But what prompted that 'not lengthy'? Was it Keri's response to a question from Pauline? Or was it Keri making sure that those K2 communicated with were reassured about the length? Certainly the sentences in the parenthesis at the end were pure Keri—

> (If someone like Kara Puketapu[3] rings and wants to know about his possible formal participation, put them on to Keri Kaa. If a pakeha wants to know, say don't worry — Bill Parker will do it for everyone.)

And then there's Te Komiti Namunamu.

TE KOMITI NAMUNAMU MARCH 1981 & MARCH 1982

Te Komiti Namunamu was based at Teachers College and Keri dedicated her work on *Te Kuia* to it, as recorded in Pauline's correspondence, dated 13 March 1981. The full dedication, one from each of the four creatives involved was—

> [....]
>
> He tohu aroha
> ki a Kaya Moana (Patricia Grace)
> ki a Ruiha Te Whanatu (Robyn Kahukiwa)
> ki ngā whānau e mau tonu nei ki te reo Maori (Hirini Melbourne)
> me
> Te Komiti Namunamu (Keri Kaa)

The archives don't explain the purpose of the sandfly committee, and who was a member, but a year later, in one of Pauline's post-launch letters, it was still going strong. (I'm reminded of Keri's comment to a mutual friend who, sitting next to Keri, was outraged

3. Kara Puketapu (1934-2023) was then Secretary of Māori Affairs and the Māori Trustee.

by someone's contribution to a seminar. "Don't hit a flea with a sledge hammer", was Keri's advice.)

20 March 1982
Dear Keri

"The enclosed is a thank you to your Komiti Namu-namu for all their good work back on February 8. We hope they enjoyed themselves as much as we did.

Have just heard from John Barnett, the Senior Editor at Longman Paul, that all but 200 of each edition is sold out, that they are reprinting both editions as Picture Puffins, and holding the price at $4.95 per copy, AND that they are expecting to be able to send 1000 and 5000 of the same to Australia and the U.K respectively. (With your glossary in every copy.)

Love and best

Pauline Neale Enc. – cheque $25.

A THANK YOU LETTER 16 FEBRUARY 1982

Dear Keri

This is to thank you very much for your magnificent achievement in organsing last week's hui. Since noone made a speech thanking you, here it is, pakeha style (even pommie style). I keep looking back and thinking how much I enjoyed it.

. . .

And the books you got at the launching are definitely yours and definitely complimentary. (We think that LP should have given you more comps., so this goes a little way toward that.)

With kindest regards

Pauline Neale Joint Co-ordinator

PS Will you take it as read that Marian signed this too, but she has been working day and night for the refuge five days non-stop now, and couldn't lift a pen to save her life.

& EXPENSES ARE PAID...

Bridie Lonie came up from Ōtepoti to help with the food prep. I think this was the occasion when we cut up baguettes and filled them with ham, cheese, tomatoes.

dear Pauline

here's receipts – the $5.00 petrol is also meant to cover a taxi I had to use as well, but it seemed reasonable to me. (I didn't use a whole $5.00 of petrol but including the taxi it comes it) Thank you for everything you did – I'm actually too pregnant and zombie like to manage something that big unaided I think now.–

Bridie

(It was a lovely evening, went really well)

12 February 1982

Dear Bridie
Here's your expenses cheque. Get Anna to sign it as well.
Sara Larkin told Keri Kaa that the food last Monday evening was absolutely perfect, and Sara Larkin used to cater for Embassy dinners, so I reckon that's real praise.
My thanks now seem quite feeble!
If you're in contact with Juliet, ask her to send me a note of her expenses, transport basically it was.

Love

Pauline

A BEAUTIFUL MOMENT

KUIA

THE HON. VENN YOUNG
Minister in Charge of the Government Printing Office
requests the pleasure of the company of
Ms P Neale
at a Reception to announce the Winners of the
1982 GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING AWARDS
for the
NEW ZEALAND CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE YEAR
to be held at the
WELLINGTON CITY ART GALLERY
65 Victoria Street
on Tuesday, 30 November 1982 from 5.30 to 7.00 p.m.

PLEASE REPLY TO INTERNAL AFFAIRS 738 699 EXT. 617

The Kuia / Te Kuia won this →
Pat Grace & Robyn Kahukiwa got $1000 each.

N.Z. CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD
Government Publishing

PAULINE & THE COUNCIL ON INTERNATIONAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN, INC. (1978)

Pauline Neale

C/- [obscured] Victoria University of Wellington, Private Bag, Wellington NEW ZEALAND

[obscured...] ber 1978

Council on International Books for Children, Inc. 1841 Broadway New York NY 10023 USA

Dear Sirs

I have just received an advice from you that an account is overdue for payment. This advice was postmarked 27 September, and sent surface mail.

It's possible that someone in your mailing room doesn't know that New Zealand is not just abroad, but a long way away too.

When I ordered the book "Human Values in Children's Books" I asked for it to be airmailed to me (see

my letter of 30 May). The book was however sent surface mail and did not reach me until early September. I sent an overseas postal money order immediately in payment and sent it airmail. Presumably it crossed in the mail with your advice of non-payment, which, as I said above, came surface and has only just arrived. When I ordered the book I even asked you to debit me for the cost of airmailing it to me!

If my airmailed payment really hasn't arrived yet., could you confirm that. And please make sure that your letter, if you need to send one, is sent BY AIR.

Despite your mailing system, thank you very much for the book; its evaluation criteria and judgments are perfect for my requirements.

Yours truly

Pauline Neale

PAULINE TO KATHRYN ALGIE (1979)

Pauline Neale

Kidsarus 2
P O Box 9600
Wellington New Zealand

Ms Kath Algie[1]
357 West 8th
Eugene
Oregon 97401
USA

15 January 1979

Dear Kath Algie

Jane Buxton gave me your address and says that if I write straight away I might catch you; here's hoping.

1. Kathryn Algie was a much-loved member of the very first Spiral Collective and also a photographer: See Allie Eagle section in *Some Stories*.

I'm trying to find out what the position was with your royalties for The Red Overalls, in order to find out if you're owed any money.

(1) Jane says you did the layout for the book and were meant to be paid for that work. She doesn't know if you were paid or not. Could you let me know what the position is from your point of view. How much is owing, etc.

(2) Jane says royalties were 5% of the retail cost of the book, i.e. 5% t each of you, I mean to both of you. I've written and asked he to let me know whether she was paid for the last reprinting (the 3rd reprinting) of 1000 copies, or whether she was paid per copy solely of that reprinting. How do things stand with you? Of that last reprinting there are about 500 copies unsold, but selling still.

I took over a hideous backlog of unanswered correspondence and unfilled orders last September and have been writing placatory and apologetic letters ever since! Have made several sales. Marketing has just been handed over to an umbrella distributor for small presses and publishers which makes our life much easier as we want to bring out more books. Have got more in process in fact.

This letter is necessarily skimpy as it must go in tomorrow's post and it is now quite late at night, and will probably leave you with many questions unanswered. Will write more fully next time, when I've heard from you. Please send current address(es). With best wishes Pauline Neale

PAULINE TO DENNY BOOTHE (1979)

Pauline Neale

To: Denny Boothe[1]
29 Ramsay Street, Lower Dalmore
Dunedin
11 February 1979

Dear Denny

In haste, as this should have been written 8 days ago, but I was getting all ready to take the children to Kate's school camp and be a "camp mother"- why didn't someone warn me? We're back – yesterday, fatter, fitter, browner, and (personally) exhausted.

Anyway, 8 days ago, Ozzie Kraus said would I write to you (and like a nt, I said yes) and find out if Daybreak wanted copies of the Kidsarus books for the UWC at

1. Denny Boothe was also a member of the Dunedin Women's Collective.

Hamilton, and if so could you let him know byFebruary at the latest, because if you weren't going to sell the K books there, he wanted to arrange sale through Paul's Bookshop Hamilton – regardless of whether or not Pauls wold be allowed into the convention. Just guessing, you could certainly sell 50 copies of each book?

So please pass this on to Daybreak quickly and get an order placed if wanted; Ozzie will arrange delivery direct to Daybreak's stall at the convention if you request that.

We MAY be bringing out "Woman of the Wind" in time for the convention. IF we get a subsidy or guarantee from the Committee on Women. IF we get that then our printer can certainly print in time. It looks as if we'll do a paperback version to retail at $2.00 and a hardback to retail at $3.10. But at this stage I'm still saying that I don't think a hardback vesion is worth it. Meaning that it's a neat wee story as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough for anyone to pay $3.10.

We're bothering with it because the old Kidsarus wanted to publish it and never got around to it; we've edited it quite vigorously and got it illustrated. I'm saying that I don't think it's as good as The Red Overalls, but as good and possibly better than Grownups Cry Too.

It was GREAT to have you up in Wellington the other week. Am trying hard to keep my life around March 1 better organised and freer in the hopes that we can get together then.

Delighted to see you are a key person for the convention. All strength; you must be very, very busy. Have just arranged to got to Hamilton with a friend here (the one we went beach-barbecuing wiht when you were here);I'm frantic to get her there before she gets pregnant for the fourth time, in the belief that it will put her off having any more children, and she needs a fourth child like a hole in the head.

It really looks as if we have a home to move into, proabably late March. Same street as that awful dark damp thing you looked at with us, but lower down the street and "in back" and up and up and out in the middle of a windy paddock with about ½ an acre of ground – thinks, might keep a goat, or bees, or chooks, in the hopes that hey'll keep me. And in a much pleasanter house, and not quite big enough for David, he says,so a reasonable size by anyone else's standards.

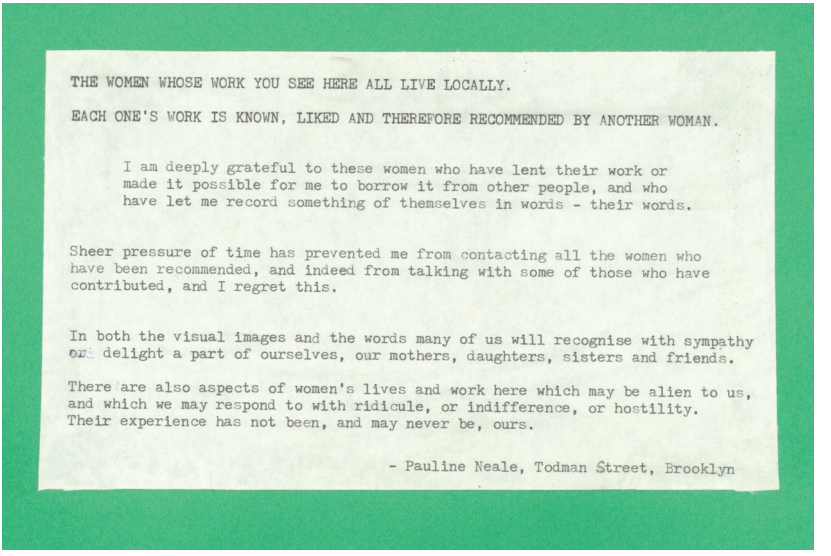
Meanwhile, and thereafter to be on the safe side, use Univ. address or K2 box number.

Much love

Pauline

PAULINE & BROOKLYN WOMEN'S DAY (1981)

For the Brooklyn Women's Day 2 May 1981, Pauline organised an event that celebrated women who lived near her home in Todman Street Brooklyn and deposited the documents generated at ATL.[1]



THE WOMEN WHOSE WORK YOU SEE HERE ALL LIVE LOCALLY.

EACH ONE'S WORK IS KNOWN, LIKED AND THEREFORE RECOMMENDED BY ANOTHER WOMAN.

I am deeply grateful to these women who have lent their work or made it possible for me to borrow it from other people, and who have let me record something of themselves in words - their words.

Sheer pressure of time has prevented me from contacting all the women who have been recommended, and indeed from talking with some of those who have contributed, and I regret this.

In both the visual images and the words many of us will recognise with sympathy or delight a part of ourselves, our mothers, daughters, sisters and friends.

There are also aspects of women's lives and work here which may be alien to us, and which we may respond to with ridicule, or indifference, or hostility. Their experience has not been, and may never be, ours.

- Pauline Neale, Todman Street, Brooklyn

1. ATL MS-Papers-2733.

These included edited transcripts of her interviews with Barbara Strathdee; Kathy Boswell; Birgit Symons; Mary Smith; Carol Holley; Betty Hanlon; Jill Livestre; Chris Poland; Mary-Jane Ansell; Rhonda Edwards; and a sample of one of the labels made by Robyn Sivewright of Herstory Press.

Typically, she sent a detailed letter with the deposit, made via Darea Sherratt, the legendary Acquisitions Officer at the library.

> Dear AT Librarian
>
> On 2 May a Women's Day was held in Brooklyn in the Community centre. The organisers were a group of local Brooklyn women and the impetus for the day came from a local social worker, Shirley Rutherford.
>
> The Day took the form of workshops in the creative arts, including pottery, batik, embroidery, painting; information was also available on other topics of particular interest to women, such as women's health.
>
> As background to the workshops there was an exhibition of women's art work, by women from Brooklyn. Vogeltown, Mornington and Kingston areas. The items on display were pottery, tie-dyed silk and cotton clothes, hand-painted clothes and household linen, watercolours, acrylic and oil paintings, embroidered work, photographs and posters. This exhibition was my particular responsibility; I interviewed the women whom I had asked to contribute and made edited versions of the interviews. These accompanied

each women's work, partly to provide a theme for the exhibition which otherwise wold have been very oddly assorted, but mainly for the interest of the omen who attended the Day.

About 60 women attended, some accompanied by children and husbands.

The edited interviews which formed part of the exhibition are enclosed as we would like them to be kept together; the alternative would be to give each to the woman who originated it. We believe that together they make a contribution to women's social history and would therefore be of interest to the ATL.

Yours faithfully

Pauline Neale

Encs.

P.S. Each group of items in the exhibition had with it the name of the woman whose work it was. These names were typeset by a woman printer, Robyn Sivewright; unfortunately Robyn was one of the woman whom I did not have time to interview, so I enclose "labels by Robyn Sivewright" for the record.

TO SHARON ALSTON: THE KIDSARUS 2 TYPEWRITER

Pauline Neale

Kidsarus 2 INCORPORATED
PO Box 9600 - Wellington - New Zealand

5 October 1981

Sharon Alston
Women's Gallery
P O Box 9600
Wellington

Dear Sharon

You were asking me about the typewriter, and I've now checked with Marian.

First of all, it belongs to Kidsarus, so is an asset, and I have to take it seriously - would you mind putting a little label on its side somewhere to say something like "property of Kidsarus 2 Inc."

And as we have used it a great deal in the past, though not so much this year, Marian and I think it fair that we pay as you suggest half the cost of the recent repairs.

Here's our cheque for $55.65.

Please can you provide me with (1) a receipt for that amount, and (2) a photocopy of the repair bill with details of what has been done. Leave them in the K2 basket in the office. No need to mail them to me.

Thank you for getting the machine fixed. Gallery workers are welcome to go on using it at the Gallery. Please don't let it go off the premises, except for repair. As the Gallery is likely to be the major user of the machine for the foreseeable future, can you assume the onus of its care and maintenance?

Happy typing,

Love

Pauline

Pauline Neale

Enc . - cheque.

Part Eleven

MIRIAMA EVANS

1944-2018



Miriama 1985. Photographer unknown.

Miriama, Ngāti Mutungā and Ngāi Tahu, was born Miriama Phillips. She married Andy Evans and they had three children.

. . .



Miriama and her daughter Lucy, in 1978. Whānau photograph.

Miriama went to university as an adult student and graduated with a B.A. Hons (First Class) in Māori Studies. After she graduated Miriama recommenced her career as a public servant, as the inaugural head of Te Ohu Whakatupu, the Māori secretariat of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.[1]

1. https://www.women.govt.nz/library/mana-wahine-history-te-ohu-whakatupu-2021

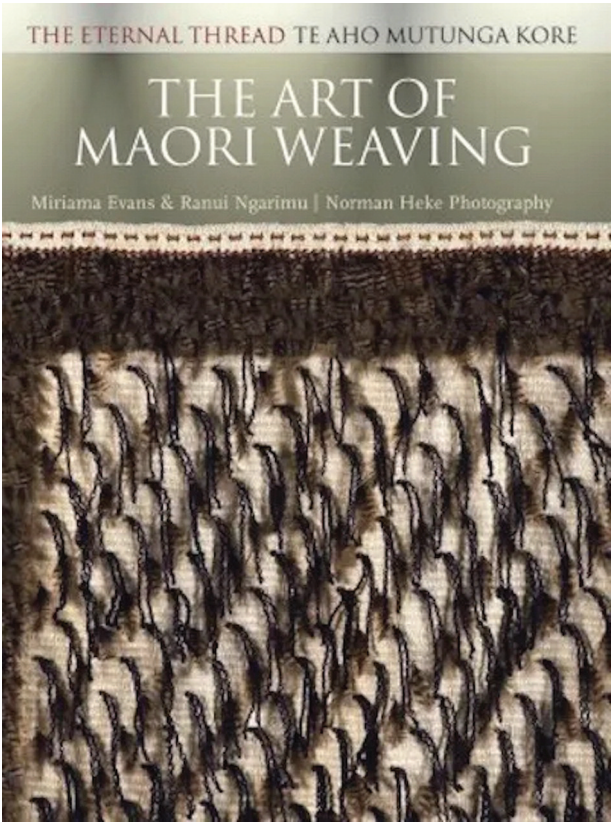


The first Te Ohu Whakatupu team with David Lange, Mary O'Regan and Māori Women's Welfare League leaders. L-R from row Hārata Solomon, Mira Szazy Miriama, Georgina Kirby the then President of the Māori Women's Welfare League, Maaka Jones. Photograph Mana Wāhine: A History of Te Ohu Whakatupu *by Kate Geange. With thanks to Mary O'Regan.*

Later, in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, she was a trusted advisor to four Prime Ministers. She was a member of the Waitangi Tribunal, a member of Te Aka Matua Māori Advisory Committee for Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka, and the national advisor to St John New Zealand on Māori health. She also held governance positions within Ngāti Mutungā.

A composer of waiata, a prose writer and editor and a university lecturer, she wrote *The Art of Māori Weaving; The Eternal Thread Te Aho Mutunga Kore* with her sister Rānui Ngārimu, the book associated with *The Eternal Thread – Te Aho Mutunga Kore*, the first major international touring exhibition of Māori weaving, showcasing some of the finest kākahu, maro, tāniko, tukutuku, piupiu, and kete from

expert weavers throughout the motu.[2] The book was a finalist in the Montana Book Awards.



Miriama wove as well; and hoped to weave more. She also made fabric works.

2. Miriama Evans, Ranui Ngarimu *The Art of Māori Weaving : the eternal thread te aho mutunga kore* photography by Norman Heke, Huia 2005. https://maoriart.org.nz/the-eternal-thread-te-aho-mutunga-kore/



Miriama Evans Taranaki *[2005?]. Fabric, thread. 21 x 32cm.*

She wrote many reports and reviews including *Maori Women in the Economy : a preliminary review of the economic position of Maori women in New Zealand* with Ann Horsfield.[3] As co-editor of *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry Nga Kupu Tītohu o Aotearoa*, with Harvey McQueen and Ian Wedde, she selected and introduced the Māori section.[4]

3. A.K. Horsfield and Miriama Evans *Maori Women in the Economy: a preliminary review of the economic position of Maori women in New Zealand* Ministry of Women's Affairs 1988.

4. *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry Nga Kupu Tītohu o Aotearoa* edited by Miriama Evans, Harvey McQueen and Ian Wedde Penguin 1989.

Miriama was part of the Haeata Collective of Māori women artists and of the Spiral Collective which published *the bone people* and J. C. Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat*.



L-R Miriama Evans and Irihapeti Ramsden: two members of the Spiral Collective 1985. Photographer unknown.

Miriama was awarded a prestigious Hunter Fellowship for her decades of commitment to contribution to Māori development at Victoria as a student, a lecturer on Māori and government at Te Kawa a Māui — the School of Māori Studies — a member of the University Council, and a voluntary external member of the Council's Te Aka Matua Committee. After her death the university established a Miriama Evans Memorial Scholarship to acknowledge her service to Ngāti Mutungā and to the university.

. . .

In 2018, Miriama was posthumously awarded one of five inaugural Public Service Medals, as someone who had earned the title of 'Wahine Toa' for her work in promoting Maori interests. She was also made an Officer of the Order of St John for her valuable voluntary work.[5]

5. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/107201042/wahine-toa-published-the-bone-people; https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/375566/nz-samoan-recognised-for-connecting-public-service-with-pasifika

MIRIAMA & SPIRAL

Marian Evans

I don't remember Miriama's arrival at Spiral, but believe we were sometimes confused for each other, though we were not related; and that Keri Kaa had something to do with introducing us. It was a beautiful thing when she and Irihapeti Ramsden agreed to help publish *the bone people* and *The House of the Talking Cat*.

In London's Guildhall in late 1985, when Irihapeti, Miriama and I walked hand in hand to accept the Booker Prize for *the bone people*, on Keri's behalf, Miriama's voice rang out with a powerful karanga, immediately extended and sustained by Irihapeti's karanga.



L-R Miriama, Marian, Irihapeti. Guidhall London 31 October 1985. Screenshot from Booker Prize ceremony.

It was an extraordinary moment, typical of both these extraordinary women. We'd planned that, if *the bone people* won and we were handed the prize, we'd speak about how the power of love brought the book into the world. But when we reached the podium we were forbidden to speak. In retrospect, probably that didn't matter at all, because those karanga, followed by a live phone interview with Keri, were all that was needed.

The interviews Miriama and Irihapeti gave then and earlier add more. As Miriama told the *Guardian*, 'We're privileged because we've

been educated...So we must turn our hands to all kinds of things',[1] and Spiral was blessed by her extraordinary generosity of spirit when she turned her hands to publishing *the bone people* and J. C. Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat*. Her commitment was formidable, whatever she undertook, and Miriama was committed to *the bone people* as soon as she read the manuscript. 'It was Māori and it was good,' she said. 'I had found something that I would read and my relatives would read — and nobody would publish it'.[2] I haven't found a similar statement about *The House of the Talking Cat*, but I believe that her response was similar.

In May 1986, Miriama, who like Irihapeti had been completing her university studies while working with Spiral, was appointed as head of Te Ohu Whakatupu, the Māori secretariat of the newly formed Ministry of Women's Affairs and continued her career in the public service. In *Mana Wāhine: A History of Te Ohu Whakatupu*, Kate Geange wrote—

> Miriama Evans was the backbone and driving force of Te Ohu Whakatupu in its early years; the sustained existence of Ohu Whakatupu was due to her incredible dedication and hard work. She ensured the unit bore a lasting legacy through its work for wāhine Māori, well after it was eventually dissolved.[3]

1. 2 November 1985.
2. *New Zealand Herald* interview 1984.
3. https://women.govt.nz/sites/public_files/Mana%20W%C4%81hine%20-%20A%20history%20of%20Te%20Ohu%20Whakatupu.pdf (2021)



Miriama with copies of Wahine Kaipākihi Māori Women in Business *from Te Ara Productions with Te Ohu Whakatupu, produced and directed by Hineani Melbourne 1991. Whānau photograph.*

. . .

Miriama had extraordinarily extensive networks and continued to participate in many things, in many and varied ways. For instance, she took part in writer Barry Mitcalfe's tangi in 1986.



Barry Mitcalfe's tangi 1986. L-R at front Unknown, Tipene O'Regan, Tungia Baker, Barbara Mitcalfe, Keri Kaa, (partially obscured behind Barbara), Ani Crawford, Miriama, Huirangi Waikerepuru. Whānau photograph.

After she became the 'backbone and driving force' of Te Ohu Whakatupu, inevitably Miriama had little contact with Spiral and was unable, for instance, to join us at the 2d International Feminist Book Fair in Oslo in 1986. But she was always a writer and artist and editor. She and her sister Rānui Ngārimu had each written a waiata for the launch of *the bone people*, in 1984. In 1984 she was a member of the Haeata Collective that produced the *1985 Herstory Diary and in* 1985 she had written 'Politics and Māori Literature' for *Landfall*. She

also wrote an essay, 'Māori Women's Writing', for Spiral's *Wahine Kaituhi: Women Writers of Aotearoa*.[4]

About thirty years after the Booker ceremony, already ill, Miriama delivered her Spiral archives to my place, for deposit at ATL. As well as sharing the decision-making and proofing a chapter, she had taken responsibility for our essential documents: contracts, accounts, menus and shopping lists for *the bone people* launch; and her archives were of course immaculate, the accounts audited by an appropriate professional.

In the morning of 15 August 2018, a few months after Cushla Parekowhai, representing Miriama, read Heather's 'A Frosty Morning' and Arapera Blank's 'bone song' — both selected by Miriama — at an event celebrating Heather McPerson and her peers, an ATL representative picked up Miriama's Spiral archive boxes. That afternoon, we heard that she had died.

At Miriama's tangi, sharing her whānau's deep grief and her communities' celebration of her life, I learned more about her, beyond what I knew of her literary and artistic legacy. I further appreciated how blessed I'd been to have access to her wisdom. When faced with a knotty problem, I still ask myself 'What would Miriama do?' I have of course no real idea of what that might be and will never ever reach her skill level. But just asking helps me access more grace and clarity.

4. 1986.

And when I really miss her, I watch and listen to her singing her waiata 'Te Puawaitanga' at a seminar in 2005, written for the launch of *the bone people*.[5]



L-R: Keri Hulme, Miriama Evans, Riki Pitama 2005 at the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the bone people winning the Booker Prize, organised by Lydia Wevers for the Stout Centre and Spiral, Victoria University of Wellington. Photographer Bruce Harding.

5. https://youtu.be/S8AIlPRoOlU

POLITICS & MAORI LITERATURE (1985)

Miriama Evans

I enclose an article for Landfall *entitled,* Unuhia ki te ao marama: Draw forward into the world of light! *As you will see the emphasis is rather more on politics and Maori literature and less on feminist perspectives. I hope this is in order. The title is derived from an incantation (but is not a direct quote) by Turi, Captain of my ancestral canoe, Aotea.*

You will notice my persistence in capitalising both 'Maori' and 'Pakeha' whether they appear as nouns or adjectives. In this I follow Maori preference. Similarly, the bone people *is always given in lower case. At one time this was important to Keri, and that is the way it is printed on the cover and the title page of the book. Perhaps you will pick up, too, my resistance to anglicising Maori words. I prefer a plural to retain its Maori form without the 's' and sometimes go to some length in trying to minimize awkward (in an English sense) phrases. Apart from that my blunders occur through ignorance or error.*

Nga mihi nui o te tau hou. Greetings for the New Year.
E noho mai ra,
na Miriama

UNUHIA KI TE AO MARAMA: DRAW FORWARD INTO THE WORLD OF LIGHT!

Since the flurry of the 1970s when the work of Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera, and Pat Heretaunga Baker appeared in print and suggested the emergence of a Maori literature in English, there has been little apparent consolidation through the publishing of prose fiction by other Maori writers. Yet there is evidence that a core of such writers exist. Public demonstration of this is confined to an anthology of Maori writing, *Into the World of Light*, edited by Witi Ihimaera and D.S. Long. Importantly, it is a book that displays a range of literary forms in both English and Maori. However, Maori literature in English remains largely invisible. More recently, J. C. Sturm's collection of short stories, *The House of the Talking Cat*, and Keri Hulme's novel, *the bone people*, have been published by Spiral, a feminist imprint established in the 70s. Spiral comprises a series of women's collectives throughout New Zealand which focuses on women's literary and art publications. A group of two Maori and a Pakeha formed to produce these two works by Maori women writers.

Why is it that so little Maori literature has been published? Is it possible that the endeavours of the 1970s were printed as token gestures of a passing interest in Maori literature in English?

There are more than 250 new literary titles of New Zealand produced texts catalogued each year.[1] The New Zealand book industry is booming, but Maori writers' contribution to this is negli-

1. The 1984 figures given by the Bibliographic Unit of The National Library of N.Z. are: 128 new literary titles for texts over 50 pages, 136 new titles for texts under 50 pages.

gible. Maori literary writing is marginal to a monocultural New Zealand literature.

On the whole, mainstream publishing houses have tended to look for their livelihood from within the boundaries of safe, saleable manuscripts. Publishers and their authors have shown a colonial bias which refers back to an English tradition for comparison of standards. The criteria for acceptance has worked against Maori writers who have sought to incorporate bilingualism and to integrate Maori and English literary traditions. The assumption is that standard English is the appropriate medium for literary expression and that literary form should fall within established genres.

Against this background it is not at all startling that Keri Hulme's novel was rejected by several publishing houses as simply too unorthodox. Literary standards of style and form are not challenged in J. C. Sturm's stories, some of which were published in the 1950s and 60s. As a collection though, it has been tucked out of sight for 20 years, a testimony to the invisibility of Maori writers.

It is not surprising either, that Patricia Grace was challenged for her 'experiments of language' in *Waiariki*.[2] Although several stories adopt an English style, some use English but follow Maori syntax and vocabulary, while others flow between English and Maori. These deviations were considered of 'limited esthetic value' by Norman Simms, who asked, 'If, in reality, the Maori of today thinks and speaks in a mixture of languages, does the writer have the right to produce that reality without modification?'[3] Although Simms states

2. Norman Simms, 1978:224.
3. Ibid.

it to be a ticklish argument, his analysis is, of course, derived from a conventional, white, middle class position. The importance of language in the social bond as a means of communication and identification cannot be denied. In the *Waiariki* collection Patricia Grace has experimented, not in language, but by blending distinctive Maori use of language with an English literary category, the short story. There is no doubt this works for Maori readers. Keri Kaa writes:

> For me Patricia's stories have a haunting loveliness. My responses to them vary from shrieks of delight, to solemn agreement, to tears, to acceptance because the style of writing is such that I can feel and dream and get into the heads of her characters.[4]

Sociological study of literature indicates that there is a patterned connection between society and fiction which provides information about society, its institutions, social structure and technology. In a more subtle way fiction imparts information about values and attitudes. The paucity of published Maori literature is symptomatic of a more general struggle for survival in a world where Maori social structure and institutions have all but given way under the pressure of Pakeha society and where Maori values are constantly under threat. Maori readers have been besieged from early childhood with literature patterned by often unintelligible symbols of another culture. Lack of comprehension leading to disincentive is a major problem which has been largely ignored in a New Zealand community sensitive to less devastating effects of relevance in junior reading texts containing words such as 'pillar box' and 'lorry'. The result of Maori children having been continually bombarded with

4. Keri Kaa, 1982:3.

irrelevant, extraneous, reading material is a population that chooses not to read.

There are overt signs that contradict the popular beliefs that the Maori population won't read, let alone buy books. Spiral's distributor has been astounded by orders of *the bone people* for small Maori settlements way off the beaten book seller's track. Heartening though this is, a more sustained effort in publishing Maori literature is needed to cater for a whetted appetite.

Maori readers want books that reflect our own experience: we consider Maori editors are the appropriate people to be making literary judgements on our behalf. Our vulnerability in the strong tide of monoculturalism is exemplified by Keri Hulme's experience in finding a publisher for *the bone people*. The importance of literary criticism should not be overlooked either. Maori reviewers alert us to the mauri of a book and the mana of its author.[5] For example, reviews in the *Listener* by Joy Cowley and Arapera Blank both extolled *the bone people* but Arapera keyed in Maori readers: 'Keri's novel has the preciousness of a piece of kuru pounamu...'.[6]

It is a matter of political urgency that written Maori literature in both English and Maori should, in accordance with Maori concept, emerge into the world of light. One encouraging sign is the new consciousness which is evident toward Maori literature for young children. Kohanga Reo (Language nests) have stimulated interest for reading material in Maori. Small community publishers such as

5. 'Mauri' is a complex concept often translated simply as 'life principle'. In this case it means the hidden principle which protects the vitality and mana of people and the Maori world. 'Mana' means authority, prestige and power.
6. *Listener* 12 May 1984.

Maori Publications of Kopeopeo, Whakatane are operating to meet this need. In addition, publishers are finding a market for well told, handsomely illustrated Maori stories in English. The field has been led by Kidsarus 2, a small publishing collective. One aim of the group was 'to publicise the need for a body of indigenous literature for children which reflects the multicultural nature of New Zealand society'.[7] Through this project, Kidsarus 2 initiated, prepared for publication, and organised funding for four children's book oaks. Two of these are by Maori writers and have made a major impact on New Zealand children's literature. The first, *Te Kuia me Te Pungawerewere/ The Kuia and the Spider*, won, with its English version, The New Zealand Children's Picture Book of the Year Award for 1982, while both language editions of the second productuon, *Ko Kimi me tana Mereni/ Kimi and the Watermelon*, were finalists for the same award in 1984. Aligned to the new interest in a junior Maori readership are some popular children's stories which now appear in Maori. Included in this category are *Where is Spot?/ Kei hea a Spot?* and the less attractively produced, rather cramped, bilingual text of *The Cat in the Hat*.

The thrust of Maori interest though remains in indigenous writing which increasingly is being fostered in Maori circles. In 1984, the Maori Women's Welfare League ran a competition for children's literature in English and Maori. On a larger scale, a new annual scholarship, The Nicholas Irwin Hunt Scholarship for Maori Writers, valued at $5000, has been established. Administered by the Maori Education Foundation, the scholarship will be awarded for a different literary genre each year. In its inaugural year (1984) the category was picture books for Kohanga Reo, with the ten best manuscripts winning an equal share of the award. The holders of the

7. Kidsarus 2 advertisement in *Spiral 4*.

first scholarship and the category for this year's award are yet to be announced.

As well as the new enthusiasm for young children's literature, The Pegasus Prize for Literature which was available to Maori writers only in 1984, has aroused interest. Sponsored by Mobil Oil New Zealand to coincide with Te Maori Exhibition, part of the prize is publication of the selected work in America. It is not without irony that at a time when so little Maori literature is reaching the New Zealand public that the concept of the Pegasus Prize is to 'introduce American readers to distinguished works for countries whose literature too rarely achieves international recognition'.[8] Of the four finalists, Keri Hulme's winning entry and Patricia Grace's *Waiariki* were published works while Apirana Taylor's *He Rau Aroha* has attracted attention from publishing houses, and an autobiography in Maori by Hemi Potatau, *Ko Nga Maumaharatanga o Te Rev. Hemi Potatau* is being prepared for publication.

Although the impact of the prestigious Pegasus Prize may be judged by the two new titles discovered for publication, it is ironic that while Maori writers have been encouraged and acknowledged with a variety of publishing grants, their work has not been supported by trade publishing houses. For example, Rowley Habib is the current holder of The Katherine Mansfield Memorial Scholarship, Bub Bridger received a Literary Fund grant to attend the First International Feminist Book Fair, Bruce Stewart, as a representative of New Zealand at the 5th triennial A.C.L.A.L.S. Conference in Fiji was given grants by The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Te Aniwa Bosch, who writes in both

8. Conditions and Entry Form for the Pegasus Prize for Maori Literature.

Maori and English was awarded a Literary Fund grant in 1977. These are just a few writers whose works are largely unpublished.

Although the commercial and cultural bias in major publishing houses has failed to bring forth written Maori literature, there is another tension between Maori writers and publishers. Invisibility is a problem that must be addressed by the writers themselves. Most Maori writers have worked within a closed environment. With an increasing demand for written Maori literature for our children and a growing awareness of the meagre number of published titles for adults, the time is ripe for writers to come out of the shadows. This means adopting a vigorous and more aggressive campaign (hard though it seems) in submitting more manuscripts to publishers; while publishers in their turn should consider recruiting editors to create pathways that cut through the old barriers.

In a small way, *the bone people* collective of Spiral has operated on a political and literary level. The venture has been a voluntary one, organised on a non profit basis. A shoe string budget and limited resources posed problems that needed handling with determination and perseverance. but like Kidsarus 2, Spiral has proved a point. Where the primary interests of these two collectives coincided with Maori literature, the books produced have been swooped on by Maori readers but have also given pleasure to others in New Zealand and overseas. It now remains to be seen if established houses are prepared to play a more active role in presenting Maori literature or whether the challenge will be taken up by new, more adventurous, commercial enterprises. Whatever the outcome, Maori aspirations for a modern Maori literature are clear: Unuhia ki te ao marama! Draw forward into the world of light!

. . .

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MAORI WOMEN'S WRITING (1986)

Miriama Evans

E nga iwi o te ao, teenaa koutou.
E kui maa, e hine maa, teeraa te haeata e taakiri ana
ko te waa teenei o te puawaitanga.

People of the world, greetings.
Old women, young women, see the dawn glowing over
the horizon
For this is the time of blossoming.

Contemporary Maori women's writing applies to a sizeable and seemingly amorphous body of work. The appearance of this constellation of writers indicates the contribution being made by Maori women to our literary tradition, and more specifically to women's writing.

It is true that many of the themes, concerns and desires expressed by this group reflect experiences that bind and unite women across

cultural boundaries. However, it is the Maori context — its concepts, imagery and eloquence — as presented by a number of these women writers that gives rise to the recognition of an emerging written, ethnic literary tradition in New Zealand.

There is a profusion of patterns shown by this group as a whole that cluster together according to language, style and cultural concepts. At one end of the spectrum are writings in Maori, while at the other end are those in English. Spanning these two extremes are the bilingual texts which seek to produce the same body of thought in each language. Another distinct writing technique is the combined use (in a number of ways) of Maori and English. These four language streams of contemporary Maori writing may each be sub-divided into non-fiction and fiction, and by extension into prose and poetry.

On another level, writing in Maori may be categorised according to traditional and modern Maori literary genres. Writing in English may sit easily within the mainstream, or else modify the categories by introducing indigenous literary concepts into the broader New Zealand tradition. Another classification relevant here is whether the texts are produced for adults or children.

Maori women as a group have claimed a slither of space in mainstream New Zealand literary tradition only since the 1970s. In the last few years though, some writers, notably Patricia Grace, Katarina Mataira and Keri Hulme have carved out a space of their own. Elsewhere (*Landfall* 153), I argue that this short period of recognition reflects a former lack of interest by large, overseas controlled publishing houses, together with a conviction that indigenous creativity fell outside international and even national standards. However current interest in Maori women's writing has boosted the

number of publications now available, and has publishers and editors to seek out new manuscripts and oral compositions that have so long remained invisible to the majority of New Zealanders.

It is possible to step back from the individual identities and experiences of Maori women writers to consider a collective form in tradition and literary history. Contemporary Maori writing in both English and Maori is underpinned by a rich oral heritage which has its roots in the depths of time. Maori creation, the activities of gods, migrations and tribal histories are all chartered in oral tradition. The cultural belief system, social structures as well as social and political relationships have been upheld and reinforced by a thriving oral literature. The women's sphere of responsibility in oral tradition is well defined. While colonisation has altered the face of Maori society, a number of literary traditions have survived, For example, the women's karanga, the spontaneous, poetic compositions exchanged as calls of welcome, remain an oral form of literature, but waiata, song poetry, with its wide range of subcategories is gaining acceptance as a written as well as oral art form.

Women have a long established tradition as composers of waiata. Ngata (1961:xi) points out that laments, love songs, songs of defiance, and songs to educate children were composed predominantly by women. Contemporary writer Kohine Whakarua Ponika captures the essence of traditional song poetry in her waiata murimuri aroha, song of yearning.

> Ka rite ki te rimu teretere i te moana
> Ka pare i tea akau, te moana i Taupo
> Taakiri ko te ata, mau mai ko ahau e tuohu noa ana e –
> Ka aupaki kau ake, ki te aarai uhi mai

Kei tua ko koutou, e kui maa, e koro maa, e hika maa,
e taa maa e –
Ka huri ka titiro ki te ao whai muri e

I'm classed as a seaweed now that drifts in the ocean
to be stranded by waves on the shores of Lake Taupo
Breaks the dawn, and I am caught, in meditation
a gesture of the hand, to an imaginary curtain that
veils
the old folks, the dear ones, the loved ones gone on
Then, I turn and cast my eyes on the young world,
moving in[1]

The image of this is distinctively Maori. Observation of the natural world provides a wealth of images for Maori writers. Seaweed cast ashore signifies a feeling of helplessness. The 'curtain that veils' refers to a belief in the separation of worlds: that of the living from that of the dead. Only a few contemporary compositions of this type have been published. The emphasis remains on the art of delivery and performance. Other women whose traditional styled waiata have appeared in print include Te Aomuhurangi Te Maaka, Merimeri Penfold and Hera Katene Horvarth.

Women skilled in traditional compositions also contribute to the pool of modern literary forms. New themes have emerged concerning the retention of our cultural heritage. Modern waiata express our hopes, fears, anguish, anger, aspirations, love and sorrow. The most popular form is waiata aa ringa, the action song. Valued as

1. Extract, *Penguin book of New Zealand verse,* 1985.

performances, they rarely find their way into New Zealand anthologies.

A desire to uphold Maori language in the potentially overwhelming current of English communication inspires women to write for the young. Nationwide, Koohanga reo, language nests for preschoolers, are eager for written Maori. *He waiata maa ngaa tamariki nohinohi: songs for young children* gives songs for everyday activities such as teeth brushing and taking care in crossing the road, but also focuses on cultural concepts. *Whakahua Tiipuna: the work of our ancestors* by Moehau Reedy is a contemporary song of instruction for children.

Raranga raranga harakeke ee
Hei kete parareka kumara ee
Rukuruku rukuruku kai moana ee
Hei Manaaki i tu manuhiri ee

Weave, weave the flaxleaf
For a kumara or potato basket
Dive, dive for seafood
To feed the visitors[2]

Katarina Mataira also writes in Maori for young people. Her book, *Te Aatea*, tells of a nuclear holocaust and explores the horrors of the aftermath. The skilfully woven story looks at quest for survival involving a space journey to the far off star, Rehua. In catering for a Maori audience, Katarina follows Maori style in her use of hyperbole, alliteration, allusion and metaphor.

E heke ana te piro

2. Extract *He waiata maa ngaa tamariki nohnohi,* 1984.

ki te koopuu o te whenua
kua moohio te iwi
me haere raatou
me haere kia kama
ki te ao hou
ki te ao moomona
ki te ao tautoku-i-te-ora
kua moohio te iwi
me haere raatou ki Rehua

The poison is seeping
into the core of the earth
the people knew
they should go
they should go quickly
to the new world
to the abundant world
to the life-supporting world
the people knew
they should go to Rehua.[3]

Another story for older children, *Te motopaika*, tells of a girl Wheturangi going for a motorcycle ride with Pitama. An accident prevents the pair from returning home. In both these entertaining stories Katarina displays a talent for drawing attention to appropriate behaviour patterns without moralising. Her most recent books, *Te Reo 1 & Te Reo 2* were written with Ngoi Pewhairangi to support televised language lessons. Katarina has compiled the *Oxford Maori picture dictionary* and has other work in English and

3. Extract, *Te Aatea* (my translation).

Maori. *Whaiora*, a book of photographs by Ans Westra with captions by Katarina is due shortly.

Arapera Blank is also a bilingual writer whose stories and poems have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies. A collection of her poems is currently being prepared for publication. In the poem *What can I*, Arapera writes across cultural boundaries about a mother-daughter relationship.

What can I
say to you who bore me
fed me on mothers milk
washed and caressed my flesh

Hugged me when I ached
for no reason at all
When I yelled or screamed?[4]

Versatile writer Keri Kaa works in both languages too. Known for her ability as a communicator, Keri writes articles, reviews, stories and poetry, and composes waiata. A skillful translator, Keri has combined with writer Patricia Grace and artist/illustrator Robyn Kahukiwa to produce a children's story, *The kuia and the spider* and its Maori equivalent, *Te kuia me te pungawerewere*. These books were supported and funded by Kidsarus 2, a voluntary women's publishing collective for children's literature. The English version won the New Zealand Children's Picture Book of the Year Award in 1982, and both language editions have proved popular with young readers.

4. Extract, *Haeata* 1985.

This year Robyn Kahukiwa has written and illustrated a children's story about *Taniwha*, a monster, and Keri Kaa has provided a Maori translation. Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace have combined their talents in the newly published early readers in Maori written by Patricia. They have also produced *Watercress tuna and the children of Champion Street*, with a Maori translation by Hirini Melbourne. An earlier publication, *Wahine Toa*, by these two focuses on a series of paintings by Robyn about Maori women in mythology, with a text by Patricia. Books created within this resourceful group are eagerly sought by New Zealand readers.

Another children's story writer included in this catalogue is Miriam Smith. Her book, *Kimi and the watermelon* and its Maori translation was a Kidsarus 2 project. Miriam's new book, *Roimata and the forest of tane*, is due to be released this year.

Patricia Grace also has two collections of short stories and one novel in print and her writing appears in several periodicals and anthologies. A new novel, *Potiki* is with her publishers. Patricia writes mainly in English. Her early writing was challenged for "experiments with language".[5] Some stories occasionally flow into Maori as in 'It used to be green once'.

> Mum couldn't stop because of not having any brakes.
>
> "E Kiri," each would call. "Mauria mai he riwai," if they wanted spuds. ...

5. Simms 1978

This is a story about a mother's weekly shopping expedition as told from a child's viewpoint. The poverty of the large family and the mother's strength of character is subtly portrayed with a touch of humour—

> Mum would dig out the rotten bits [from the fruit], and then give them to us for play-lunch. We didn't notice much at first, not until Reweti from down the road yelled out to us one morning, "Hey you fullas. Who shot your pears?"

Indeed, Patricia blends a distinct Maori usage of language with the English literary categories. In another story, 'At the river',[6]the narrator is an old woman telling of her husband's death. The language style is appropriate: the sentence structures tend to follow Maori syntax and the writer employs this device to expose some Maori customs. It seems as if my grandmother is speaking.

> Sad I wait and see them come slow back from the river. The torches move slow. To the tent to rest after they had gone to the river, and while asleep the dream came. A dream of death.

Mutuwhenua, Patricia's novel, is about a young Maori woman's love for her parents and extended family, her love of the land and the traditional Maori ways of living, and her love for a pakeha man. The closing lines of the new novel may be found elsewhere in this catalogue. I agree with Keri Kaa's assessment of Patricia's stories: "the

6. Grace 1975.

style of writing is such that I can feel and dream and get into the heads of her characters".

Keri Hulme is a writer who became a celebrity within weeks of her novel being published. After being rejected by other publishers because it was too different in size and style, the novel made an unconventional entry into the literary world, through Spiral, a voluntary feminist publishing collective. Its popularity has earned it the label 'cult book' from some, but it can not be denied that *the bone people* makes a substantial contribution to New Zealand literature. The theme is the inextricable weaving together of three people's lives, and Keri's technique is to include multicultural threads into the text while emphasising a Maori-Pakeha base. This coveted novel won the Pegasus Prize for New Zealand Maori Literature in 1984, and is now also published by the Louisiana State University Press. It is being published in other countries too.

The silences between: (Moeraki conversations) is a collection of prose and poetry. Published in 1982, it has also proved a popular volume. Keri has two new releases: *Lost possessions* is a story, and *Te Kaihau/The windeater* is a collection of short stories. Her new novel, *Bait*, is a current project; an extract from it has been published in *Spiral 5*.

Of the Maori women writers in this catalogue, J.C. Sturm is clearly a pioneer. Her short stories began appearing in periodicals in the 1950s. Her writing quietly projects a woman's point of view in casual and domestic situations. The significance of the stories has been pointed out by Irihapeti Ramsden: they record "the beginnings of urban cross cultural impact". These stories have recently been collected together in *The house of the talking cat*.

. . .

A young, lonely girl, a dream life confused with reality, two older brothers, an uncaring mother, and a lunatic father: these are the seeds of Bub Bridger's forthcoming novel. Extracts of the novel have been read in New Zealand, England, Ireland and Australia, and although Bub is still working on this project, there is already interest being shown in publishing rights. Bub Bridger's short stories have been published in the *N.Z. Listener*, *Shirley Temple is a wife and mother* and *Into the world of light*. The women created in these stories dominate with their strong, often vibrant personalities.

Donna Awatere's *Maori Sovereignty,* falls into the category of non-fiction. Originally published as a series of articles in *Broadsheet*, this hard hitting book examines race relations in New Zealand and confronts issues such as colonialism, land ownership and failures of institutions to meet Maori needs.

Amy Brown has just given up her career to become a full time writer. Her interest is in writing for theatre and television using Maori-Pakeha themes. She has written a radio play, *The lesson*, a film script, *The murmur*, and several short stories. Her story, *Te kauri* is entered for the current BNZ Writing Awards.

Writer Renée brings s feminist perspective to theatres with her plays *Wednesday to come*, *Setting the table* and *Secrets*. Renée says of her work:

> "What the hell has a kitchen got to do with Universals? What happens there? Cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, sometimes even washing people. What's so dramatic about these activities? Sure, you know that hundreds of women are maimed, beaten, raped and

> killed in kitchens but somehow you feel that this battleground lacks the dramatic zing so necessary to set a play in. I suppose it does boil down to your view of the world. And kitchens are definitely women's world.[7]

This brief survey shows that Maori women writers have added a new dimension to contemporary New Zealand writing. Some are presenting an indigenous perspective which has penetrated a mono-cultural tradition, while others are exploring and modifying that tradition. Maori women's writing straddles two cultures, yet it is clear that there are interests in common across cultural boundaries. As an emerging group, Maori women writers see the dawn glowing over the horizon and know that this is indeed the time of blossoming.

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Transcribed by Hilary Oxley.

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND POETRY, NGĀ KUPU TĪTOHU O AOTEAROA INTRODUCTION (1989)

Miriama Evans

Tērā ko Rerereareahi, ko te Mahu Tonga
Kōrikoriko mai rā te kiko o te rangi
kori ana, ka pū ake te tau o te ate
Rere ana ki ngā hihi whetū i runga
Kia tiaho iho he ikura, te tara pounamu e!

–Merimeri Penfold

E ngā mana e ngā reo e ngā karangatanga maha tēnā koutou. Tangihia rā te āhuatanga kei ngā aituā kei te hunga kua whetūrangitia i te wā iti nei. Kei te huri ngā Mahara ki Te Okanga Huata, ki a Taniwha Waru, ki a Louis Johnson, ki a rātou mā, ētehi pou i rō pukapuka nei: nonanahi i kapohia ai rātou e te ringa kaha o aituā. Haere, ngā mate, ki te poutūtanga nui o Pipiri. Ka tūhonohono rātou te hunga wairua ki a rātou, haere ana rātou i te ara whānui e huna ai te tini te mano ka ngaro ki te pō.

. . .

Kāti, tēnā tātou ngā kanohi ora.

The invitation to join Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen as Māori editor to this anthology at once filled me with excitement and a sense of immense responsibility. I knew that the usual methods of collecting and editing an anthology would produce a limited range of contemporary Māori poetry. Only fragments have been published. Therefore, while Ian and Harvey set about their library search, I began to enquire about poets' work during hui and turned my ear and eye to performances.

Māori literature retains an oral rather than written form, and Māori audiences continue to judge and appreciate contemporary Māori poetry primarily by its performance rather than by its appearance in print. Indeed, an appreciation of the content, language and literary form is inextricably interwoven with a sense of ihi, wehi and wana, that is the power, awe and inspiration of the occasion and the performance itself.

The interrelationships among the poet, the poem, its performance, the performers, the occasion and the audience raised questions about the boundary of the word 'contemporary' in quite a different manner from those which Ian and Harvey addressed in the selection of poetry in English. From a Māori point of view, what is contemporary can be judged from a cultural perception of time and the indivisibility of past, present and future into discrete segments. Thus a holistic recognition of 'contemporary' is not just confined to the 'here and now but is enmeshed with the traditional and futuristic.

. . .

For example, 'Te Tangi a Taku Ihu / The Sound of My Sneezing Nose' by Te Whetū in 1880, which appeared in the previous volume, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, is a poem that still enjoys currency amongst Taranaki people, particularly Te Āti Awa. It is performed regularly by Taranaki groups both as a poi and a waiata. The content remains pertinent to the performers, it continues to inspire them, and it makes a statement to the audience. In this sense Te Whetū's hundred-year-old poem belongs to this period and could be considered contemporary.

While the contemporary nature of such waiata is acknowledged, the Māori poetry for this anthology has been selected predominantly from poets of this decade.

Te Kuru-o-te-marama Waaka's pātere about the Tarawera eruption is an example of a contemporary composition firmly linked into and expressive of a traditional style of the past. Perhaps the most graphic example of the 'contemporary continuum' is Ngapo Wehi's 'I Te Timatanga / In the Beginning', a poem which in content and style belongs as much to a thousand years ago as it does to its time of composition.

In contrast, poets such as Hirini Melbourne, Piki Kereama and Rānui Ngārimu, whose modem compositions belong to te ao hou, the new world, may take up themes from te ao tawhito, the ancient world.

One poem, 'Te Kōtuku – Te Manu Wairua o Te Toka / White Heron – The Spirit Bird of the South' by Aunty Jane Manahi, carries the

Kāi Tahu dialect, which is little heard by the majority of Māori people these days.

While recognising the oral nature of the work, and the complexity of defining a boundary for contemporary poetry, it was also important, as Māori editor, not to make assumptions about the availability of material for publishing in this anthology. Many Māori poets, performers, and audience believe that the vitality and essence cannot be truly appreciated through the written word. Indeed, a number of poets declined to allow their poetry to be published.

Some poets gave 'popular' versions of their work, omitting those sections of particular relevance to specific iwi, hapū or other groups. 'Te Hokinga Mai', a waiata-a-ringa by Pā Max Mariu and Te Taite Cooper, for example, has another verse for Ngāti Kahungunu which is not included in this anthology.

Poets included as Māori contributors had some freedom to select which poems to transcribe for this book. Thus Te Aomuhurangi Temamaka Jones, having declined the inclusion of 'Me he rau', a waiata tangi, in the 1985 volume, requested that it be published here. Other poets, after critical appraisal of their work, set aside suitable and expressive compositions — perhaps because the time was not ripe for their publication.

Inevitably then, the contemporary Māori poetry for this anthology has its own tātai and its own whakapapa, that is, it is layered with its own logic and sense of continuum. This builds on the 1985 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, with its welcome inclusion of Māori poetry and translations together with Margaret Orbell's observation

that contemporary poets were renewing and extending the ancient traditions with songs of protest and celebration.

To some extent, selections were made in recognition of the tremendous variation in style and format, and by limitations imposed through the method of collection. Certainly significant events such as the Te Māori exhibition, the centenary of the Tarawera eruption, and the gifting of Tongariro National Park to the nation by Ngāti Tūwharetoa have produced poems for inclusion. The anthology also reflects current interest in the preservation or restoration of Māori values. In addition, consideration was given to the geographic spread of poets, a desire to achieve parity between the sexes, and a preference to ensure a distribution of contributors across iwi.

Ngā Kupu Tītohu reproduces in microcosm a range of poetry heard in Māori circles. Nevertheless, it is not a comprehensive survey of Māori poetry, but rather a personal selection. It does not, for example, include an oriori, a song of instruction to a child, although Hori Tait's 'He Koha Kī / A Gift of Words From My Grandmother' is reminiscent of this type. 'He Koha Kī' is more universal in theme than traditional oriori, which were whānau or hapū specific. Awe-inspiring poi kāwai, a mnemonic for genealogy, and pao, cryptic poetic comments which punctuate discussion on the marae, were reluctantly set aside.

Contributions for this anthology include haka, ngeri, pōkeka, pātere, waiata poi, waiata tangi, waiata aroha, and waiata-a-ringa.

. . .

At one end of the range are dynamic haka, ngeri and pōkeka. These are vigorous and powerful. At the other end of the spectrum are the longer, formal, almost formulaic-styled waiata which provide commentaries on topical issues.

'Tera Ko Rereahiahi' by Merimeri Penfold is one such poem. The waiata blends contemporary and archaic patterns and themes:

> From the conception the increase
> From the increase the thought
> From the thought the remembrances
> From the remembrance the consciousness
> From the consciousness the desire.
> That canoe was set afloat by Te Hau and Hohepa.

Here the ancient Māori philosophy of creation is expressed in traditional whakapapa style as a rationale for the development and celebration of the new marae at Auckland University — the waiata tells us that Matiu Te Hau and Pat Hohepa conceived the idea of building a marae on campus. Rich in language and content, like others in this anthology, it is an historical source for future generations.

Ruka Broughton's 'He Waiata mō Te Herenga Waka', is also about a university marae. It was composed and first used at the beginning of the building programme to encourage dedication to the project amongst the Māori community at Victoria University. It was initially performed as a waiata with a brisk tempo but has latterly become a waiata tangi, a song of lament in remembrance of the poet.

. . .

And so the texture and layers of the Māori poetry for this anthology are varied. Archaic, traditional, modern, and seeds for future compositions: each layer is woven with a contemporary thread.

I tīmata mai Te Ao
I roto i Te Pōuri
Ko Te Kore ko Te Pū
Te Weu, Te More, me Te Aka
—*Ngapo Wehi*

I would like to record my deepest thanks to taua, Maaka Jones, who sustained me throughout this long endeavour and who provided many of the translations and invaluable advice on the nuances of Māori phrases and words. The poets themselves also provided explanations and perspectives of their poems that have assisted in editorial decisions, and I thank them for sharing their taonga through this anthology. Throughout the country there are many whom I wish to acknowledge with gratitude: the numerous people who were consulted, who offered ideas, and who acted as 'scouts'.

Ian and Harvey quickly proved to be interested in my editorial idiosyncracies and encouraged me to explore the Māori material in my own style. Harvey was unstinting in his support and encouragement during periods of anxiety about my limited leisure time to work on this anthology. I thank you both for your forebearance.

Finally, my most heartfelt thanks to Penguin editor Geoff Walker, who, apart from his support and interest throughout the project, had the awesome task of negotiating the finalisation of my contribution when other demands on my time were at a premium.

Transcribed by Caren Wilton.

TE PUAWAITANGA

na Miriama Evans

Pepuere 1984 (mo te hui whakarewa)[1]

Tera nga tihi tawhiti kei Kaikoura ki te tonga
ka moemoea i taku haerenga ki Te Wai Pounamu
i tenei wa o te puawaitanga, e hine e.

E tutaki ai au ki nga hau o Aorangi
kia marama te titiro ki nga pae o Poutini
ka rere titaha ki Okarito, ki te kohanga o te kotuku
kei reira e noho ai koe e Keri
kati au ka hoki ki Otautahi, ki Tutehuarewa
ki te puna ora o Waimakirikiri
ka rere atu i te ara haerenga onamata
ki Murihiku, ki Rakiura
ka huri ki te akau o Otakau

1. Composed for the launch of *the bone people*, February 1984. In 2005, at a seminar at Victoria University, Te Herenga Waka, Miriama read *Te Puawaitanga* in English and then sang the waiata. You can watch and listen here—https://youtu.be/S8AIlPRoOlU

Tautika te haere ki to whenua tupu, ki te one
whakahira
ko Moeraki.

E Kui ma, e Koro ma, nga mihi ki te iwi e
Titiro atu ki to tamahine
Ano he pua ka tae ki tona puawaitanga
Tihei mauri ora! Ki te whai ao, ki te ao marama.



Miriama graduates in 1983, wearing a kākahu lent to her by Erenora Hetet.

Part Twelve

JOANNA MARGARET PAUL

1946-2003



*Allie Eagle [*Joanna in landscape *2001 watercolour on paper] incomplete image and original missing.*

Allie Eagle: Yes it's easy to revive rich memories. She was such good company on those painting trips. And it was so easy to be a hundred per cent focused on art making w her. Lovely lovely times.[1]

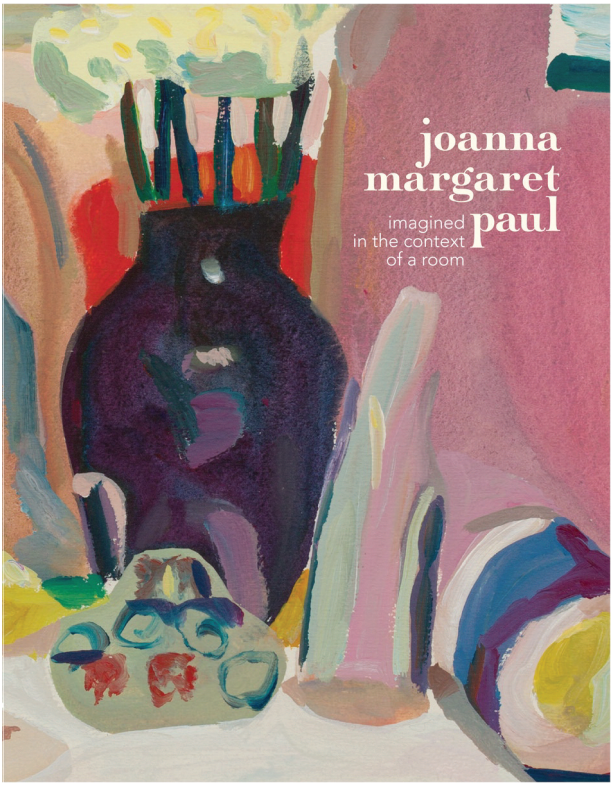
In 1980, Joanna wrote, in the Women's Gallery *Opening Show* exhibition catalogue—

> Biographical: Married with two children, a painter who sometimes writes poems makes small films, photographs, has made books; and in working in various forms is interested continuously in the way language affects/effects the thing said.[2]

These interests never changed, as far as I know. Joanna had four children; and was 'a hundred per cent focused on art making' as often as possible.

Joanna's recent survey and touring exhibition is *Imagined in the Context of a Room* (2021-), accompanied by a substantial book; and there are other books, of her poems that are also available as well as a big archive.

1. Email 4 February 2018.
2. ATL: 84-072-01-2.



Imagined in the Context of a Room. *Photograph courtesy Dunedin Public Art Gallery.*

Because Joanna's legacy is secure, and there will be more to come, the rest of her section is a single chapter I've written about her early contribution to the women's art movement and Spiral; and to me.

JOANNA, SPIRAL & ME 1971-1982

Marian Evans

I struggled with this section until I discovered Allie Eagle's watercolour that became Joanna's portrait on its front page.[1] It's not a great reproduction of a lovely work. But it reflects how I now feel about Joanna, as a small, upright and deeply engaged figure working hard in a BIG landscape, exploring 'the way language affects/effects the thing said'. Distant, with her back to me, and significant to me.

Our friendship began in 1971 and dwindled from 1983, bracketing the period of her involvement in the women's art movement. But my participation in this book, and the other Spiral projects I've contributed to, result from Joanna's 1977 invitation to participate in *A Season's Diaries* and document my life over 'spring months'.[2] So

1. I had forgotten about it and fell over it by chance, attached to a 2017 email from Allie, perhaps from an email Mokopōpaki had sent me. Allie had considered offering it to Mokopōpaki for our exhibition about Heather McPherson: *This Joyous, Chaotic Place: He Waiata Tangi-ā-Tahu*. But decided in the end to offer only works that were for sale.

2. The others Joanna invited were Allie Eagle, Anna Keir, Bridie Lonie, Heather McPherson and Gladys Gurney (Saj).

here's a small tribute-with-a-smile-and-delicate-embrace-to-Joanna, starting where we met in Seacliff and moving through how I understand her comparatively brief engagement with the women's art movement.

SEACLIFF

Late in 1970 my then-husband (and actor and painter) Bill MacKay, and I bought my mother's holiday cottage on the winding Coast Road, near Seacliff, and moved from Auckland to live there, with our eight month-old son. Seacliff is a village high on the cliffs above Blueskin Bay, forty minutes or so by car from Ōtepoti Dunedin in Te Wai Pounamu the South Island of New Zealand, and is best known as the site of a psychiatric hospital where the writer Janet Frame was incarcerated.

Our house had been a railway worker's house and had a large wattle-and-daub hut in the garden; this became Bill's studio. The section was surrounded by a huge macrocarpa hedge and included an orchard of ancient apple trees and a yellow plum. From the verandah and the garden we looked out over Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean; we often watched cargo ships as they moved across the horizon. At the orchard's edge, there was a little gate in a gap in the hedge. It opened onto the road, by the railway crossing. We imagined former occupants had popped out to stop road traffic when trains were coming, before the railway signals were automated. (But what traffic, along that country road?) Usually, visitors used the main drive and gateway on the other side of the house.

We didn't have a car, but there were regular bus and train services north and south, partly because staff from Seacliff Hospital sometimes also worked at Cherry Farm or Orokonui, other psychiatric

hospitals nearby. The next year I travelled on the 7.45am railcar to and the 4.00pm railcar from Dunedin, as I started my law degree, managing my morning sickness as well as I could. I still dream about that journey, of an hour or so, along the coastline. The railcar stopped and started at little stations, ran along the edge of cliffs. The views were never less than beautiful. There was fog. There was rain. Wild sea. There was sunshine. Blue sea and sky all the way to the Americas. In winter, darkness lifting as we circled Blueskin Bay on the way to town, darkness falling on the way home. Children waved. There were kowhai trees. Cows. Mud. Tractors. Farmers waved. Wooden houses. Macrocarpa. Mihiwaka. A spire in Port Chalmers. Factory chimneys at Ravensbourne. Then Dunedin's big old Victorian station. The walk to class, sometimes throwing up on the way.

I don't remember when exactly, but sometime in 1971, I was doing something at the edge of the orchard. I think the apple tree leaves were that soft new green that they have before everything goes darker in November. And a woman's voice called from the little gate in the hedge: 'I'm looking for Bill MacKay'. I couldn't see anyone, so I moved towards the voice. The next memory I have is of a hand holding out something wrapped in a tea towel. And that was Joanna. Joanna Margaret Paul, painter, poet, filmmaker. People often came looking for Bill, a 'golden boy'. But she found me, too. Wrapped in the tea towel, as on many future occasions, was — as I remember — an open metal baking tin, filled with something Joanna had baked.

Joanna lived on the other side of Seacliff with her husband, also a painter. We became friends and she also became our second son's godmother when we decided to baptise him in Seacliff's Catholic church. And then she left. We wrote to each other through her subsequent moves, the birth of her first children Magdalena and

Imogen, and after our move to Wellington in 1975. A painting she made of Seacliff — cliffs, macrocarpa, dwelling, sea — went everywhere with me.

Fifty years later I travelled from Dunedin airport to Moeraki with some of the exciting next generation Spirals: Joanna Osborne, who has prepared the Charlotte Museum exhibition about the artists and writers here in *Spiral 8* and Becca Barnes and Cathasaigh Ó Fiannachta who are working on the graphic novel of *the bone people*.

My companions were indulgent, so we left the motorway at Evansdale to drive along Coast Road and meet the motorway again at the other end. And we stopped at the house by the railway line and I went to ask if we could have a look around. 'I can show you where I met Joanna', I said to young Joanna, who spends a lot of time with old Joanna's work. As we walked up the drive, I pointed in the general direction: behind the hen house, still standing.

The owner was home, the same person who'd bought the place from us when we moved up the road to a former hospital house with a great big studio, tucked into the side of Mount Charlotte. 'May I look around?' I asked. 'I used to live here.' He looked puzzled. 'This place belonged to Bill MacKay before I bought it'. 'I used to be married to Bill. I lived here with him and our two sons.' That made sense to him and we went into the old studio, still standing firm; and with 'new' skylights and a window. It was now an archive; chokka with carefully arranged file boxes. We went in the house too, and I explained we didn't have much time: 'We have to get to Moeraki before dark', I said, 'and I want to see if the big mataī tree Bill used to paint is still up the road'. 'I remember that', he said. 'He never

thought he'd 'got' it.' I took a photo of him standing outside the studio door, and he walked with us down the path, and told me that the apple trees still produce and that he bottles the apples.

Our next stop was just off the Coast Road, up Russell Road past the main entrance to the empty hospital, past Juanita Ketchel's place where she lived with Bryan Harold and her son Jules,[3] and past the site of our second house and studio, eventually burned down by the Waikouaiti Fire Brigade, as an exercise. The tree was still there, looking much the same as it does in the big painting above our mantelpiece and next to Joanna's Seacliff painting.



Mātai, Seacliff 2025.

3. Juanita's section is next.

Back on the Coast Road, I tried to identify the cottage Joanna had lived in, and where Juanita's friend and collaborator Robin Swanney-McPherson still lives.[4] No luck, and it was getting late. Moeraki called. Off we went, with Cathasaigh expertly at the wheel, past Puketeraki, past Karitāne and back onto the main road.

Now I dream that I'm back in Seacliff, am sometimes overwhelmed with longing to be there.

THE LETTERS

In the early 2000s Allie Eagle came to lunch with Juliet Raven,[5] a box of organic dates and a brown paper bag with my name on it. 'I've been meaning to give you this for years', she said. The bag contained letters written to me during the 1970s. Some were from Joanna. I now have no idea why Allie ever had them.[6]

Excerpts from two of these letters provide Joanna's memories of me in Seacliff, a counterpoint to my memories of her. The first remembers '...your rapid occassional visit at Seacliff with an enormous bunch of daffodils or a jam thermometer'[7]

The second, probably written a few years later, in 1979, provides an extended reference to the other elements of my life—

4. See Juanita's section.
5. See also Hilary Baxter and Allie Eagle sections.
6. They're still in their paper bag somewhere in ATL and uncatalogued, as far as I know.
7. February [1976]. Spelling and punctuation from original, here and in all quotations that follow. I always loved the look of Joanna's letters. She viewed punctuation as marks, gestures, as 'things', like words.

> Your note unnerves me, the pain in it. I can feel you jangled tired strained by all you do. Other — that mystery of domestic misery which is always so private. However I have my other vision of you, stepping thru the fence holding daffodils, silver spring sea light everywhere. , & coming from the shower with wet hair and the little leather skirt. How those luxurys told didn't they in that raw place & the struggles with money & babies — the flowers cake camembert & brief meetings[.][8]

Whenever I read these, I want to ring up Joanna, ask, 'What else do you remember?' But, here, I'm going to focus on what I remember or have found out about Joanna and Spiral between 1974 and 1980, because during that period Joanna became a strong influence on me. Why 1974? Because that's when she became involved in Heather McPherson's Christchurch Women Artists Group. Why 1980? Because she then, as she wrote in 'Letters from room to room' in *A Women's Picture Book*—

> ...felt really remote from the concerns of the Women's Gallery refocussing energy on my own work insulated by marriage, distance — heterosexuality! Tho I think what was accomplished there was important — using art as a lever into real areas of discourse. I enjoyed

8. It also refers to Joanna's 'diamond' painting that hangs above our kitchen table, which I bought that year, and the 'Napkins' painting she gave me after Bridie and I had proposed to Galvan Macnamara, then at the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, that we organise a touring show of Allie's and Joanna's work. Allie and Joanna decided they didn't want to do that.

> contributing to 2 more diary exhibitions but did not see them.[9]

And off she went, except for that brief interlude writing 'Letters from room to room' with Allie.

CHRISTCHURCH WOMEN ARTISTS GROUP

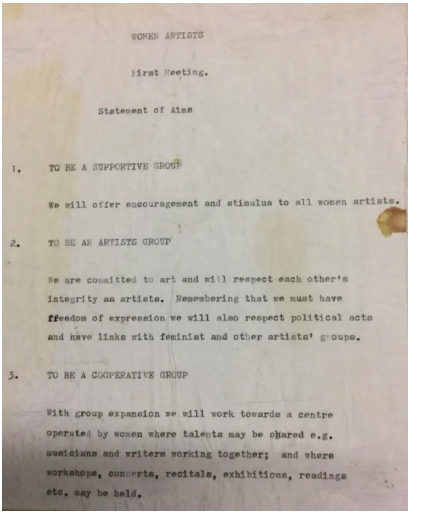
In 1974, when Heather McPherson started a women artists group, the precursor to founding Spiral, Joanna was probably one of the first four members. She was certainly part of the group almost from the beginning.

The Women Artists Group's minute book is in ATL,[10] and the 'Statement of Aims' pasted in front became a basis for all the Spiral projects that followed, right up to 2025.

> "TO BE A SUPPORTIVE GROUP
>
> We will offer encouragement and stimulus to all women artists.
>
> TO BE AN ARTISTS GROUP [...]

9. Joanna Paul and Allie Eagle 'Letters from room to room' *A Women's Picture Book; 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* compiled, edited and with afterwords by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Tilly Lloyd — a Women's Gallery/ Spiral group GP Books 1988 (*AWPB*): 79-98, 82. Joanna also participated in the Women's Gallery touring show, *Mothers* (1980-1982), contributing poems and art works; and of course to *AWPB*.
10. ATL: 84-072A-1/03.

TO BE A COOPERATIVE GROUP [...]



WOMEN ARTISTS

First Meeting.

Statement of Aims

1. TO BE A SUPPORTIVE GROUP

We will offer encouragement and stimulus to all women artists.

2. TO BE AN ARTISTS GROUP

We are committed to art and will respect each other's integrity as artists. Remembering that we must have freedom of expression we will also respect political acts and have links with feminist and other artists' groups.

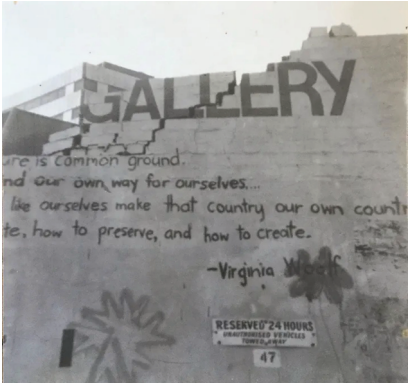
3. TO BE A COOPERATIVE GROUP

With group expansion we will work towards a centre operated by women where talents may be shared e.g. musicians and writers working together; and where workshops, concerts, recitals, exhibitions, readings etc. may be held.

I always imagine Joanna regularly asking 'What if?' in this group, delighting in the kind of 'trespass' that Virginia Woolf describes—

> ...let us bear in mind a piece of advice that an eminent Victorian who was also an eminent pedestrian once gave to walkers: 'Whenever you see a board up with "Trespassers will be prosecuted", trespass at once.
>
> Let us trespass at once. Literature [or any art] is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf — if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our

> own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and to write, how to preserve, and how to create.[11]

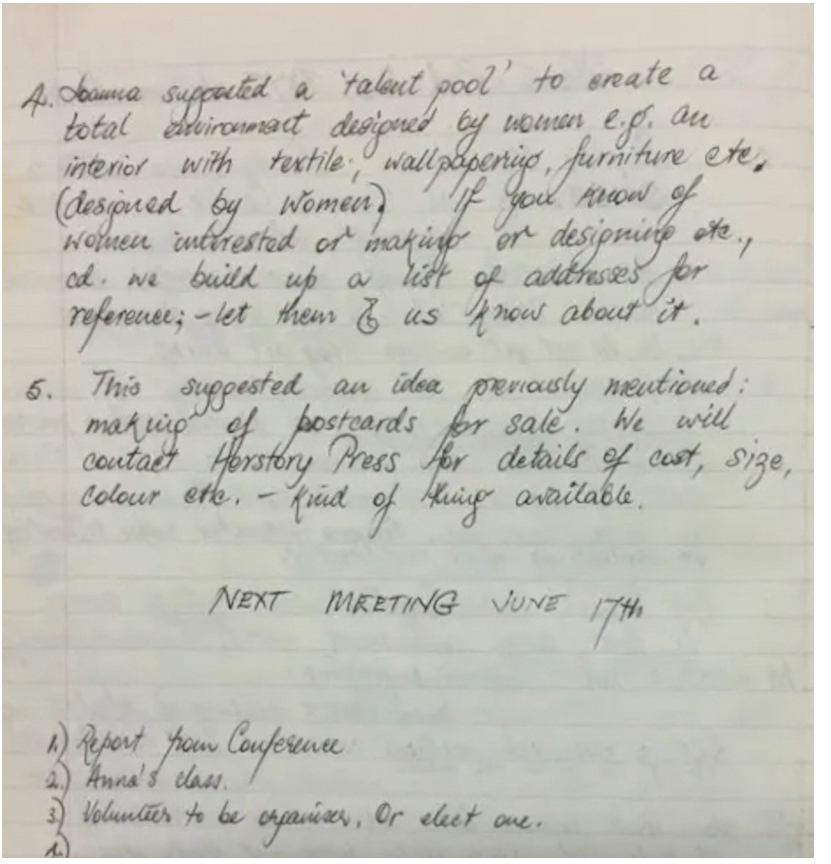


Virginia Woolf's statement on the Women's Gallery exterior wall, at 26 Harris Street Te Whanganui-ā-Tara Wellington, during demolition in early 1983.

Sometimes 'What if?' trespassing is quite a small thing that might make a big difference. For example, at one of the early Christchurch Women Artists group meetings, as recorded in the minute book, Joanna — then using her married surname — must have asked something like: 'What if we ask the Canterbury Film Society to show slides of women's work before screenings?' At that time, it was often much more difficult for women to show their work than it is now and that would have given them welcome exposure in an appropriate context. She offered to approach the film society and the response to her initial inquiry is with the minute book in ATL.

11. Virginia Woolf 'The Leaning Tower' 1940.

We don't know what happened next. A slightly later record in the minute book refers to another Joanna 'What if?', her suggestion for a project very similar to what later became the women's environment at the United Women's Convention in Christchurch in 1977.


4. Joanna suggested a 'talent pool' to create a total environment designed by women e.g. an interior with textile, wallpapering, furniture etc. (designed by women). If you know of women interested or making or designing etc., cd. we build up a list of addresses for reference; - let them & us know about it.

5. This suggested an idea previously mentioned: making of postcards for sale. We will contact Herstory Press for details of cost, size, colour etc. - kind of thing available.

NEXT MEETING JUNE 17th

1) Report from Conference
2) Anna's class.
3) Volunteer to be organiser. Or elect one.
4)

Christchurch Women Artists Group minute book. Heather McPherson's handwriting.

SIX WOMEN ARTISTS

Allie Eagle, already good friends with Joanna, was busy at the Robert McDougall Gallery and came to the women artists group

later, but invited Joanna to contribute to *Six Women Artists*, curated by Allie at the McDougall in 1975.

In 'Letters from room to room' when Joanna refers to *Six Women Artists,* she writes to Allie, 'You wrote a catalogue beautifully designed by Kath Algie which included loose leaf statements from contributors'.[12] One of those statements was Joanna's own, and it was reprinted in *Spiral 1*; and in many other places since—

> For a woman painting is not a job, not even a vocation. It is a part of life, subject to the strains and joys of domestic existence. I cannot paint unless the house is in order; unless I paint I don't function well in my domestic roles. Each thing is important. The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things. To concentrate all meaning and energy into a work of art is to leave life dry and banal. I don't wish to separate the significant and the everyday actions, but to bring them as close together as possible. It is natural for women to do this; their exercise and their training and their artistry is in daily living. Painting for me as a woman is an ordinary act — about the great meaning in ordinary things.
>
> Anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.

12. *AWPB*: 80.

(After I first read this long ago, it became a kind of manifesto for me. Its effects continues today, because, like Joanna, I often found and continue to find it difficult to 'function well in my domestic roles'. And I do love daily living that embraces anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.)

Six Women Artists, Joanna continued to Allie —

> ...was a strong show & precursor of the 1977 CSA Women's Convention exhibition — again your doing? There, suddenly immense energy unleashed — as if women were no longer asking questions but inventing answers — the work was personal witty highly coloured & charged — and distinction between people began to be blurred as between 'artists' & others, art & things'. Was this the first diary show? You asked the women taking part to furnish an intimate space. I had an open suitcase I was en route to Wellington in a 3 months hiatus in my marriage. [...] In the November of the same year ('77) we mounted *A Season's Diaries* in Wellington (Victoria University Library) & out of the reshuffle of your friends and mine the Women's Gallery emerged.[13]

(I think that although Allie was Yes! a central contributor to the United Women's Convention art environment at the CSA, there was a solid group of others at that centre without whom it would not have 'worked': Anna Keir, Heather McPherson, Rosemary Johnson, Saj and others, including Morrigan Severs.)

13. Ibid. Joanna must have forgotten her suggestion to the women artists group.

A SEASON'S DIARIES



A Season's Diaries *poster 1977. Design Joanna Margaret Paul.*

I imagine Joanna's *A Season's Diaries*, in 1977, as yet another of her 'What ifs?' with an element of trespass. What if, she perhaps thought, I invite a group of women to document their lives for a month or two and exhibit the results in the Victoria University of Wellington Library's exhibition space, where 'serious' artists exhibit in a continuing programme? What if a couple of the women (Gladys Gurney/ Saj; Marian Evans) don't even define themselves as artists? Did she see this as an extension of a public event where the "distinction between people began to be blurred as between 'artists' & others, art & things'"? I don't know how Joanna persuaded the library to accept this exhibition, way back then. But Anna and I helped Joanna hang the works one weekend. I think there was some black gaffer tape used to attach information to a concrete pillar that the library wasn't happy with on aesthetic grounds; the exhibition didn't last the full summer, as planned. But it did travel to Waikato University and to Christchurch.[14]

14. More about *A Season's Diaries* in *Spiral Collectives Projects 1975-2025: Some Stories* 2025 https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/spiral-collectives-some-stories-2025

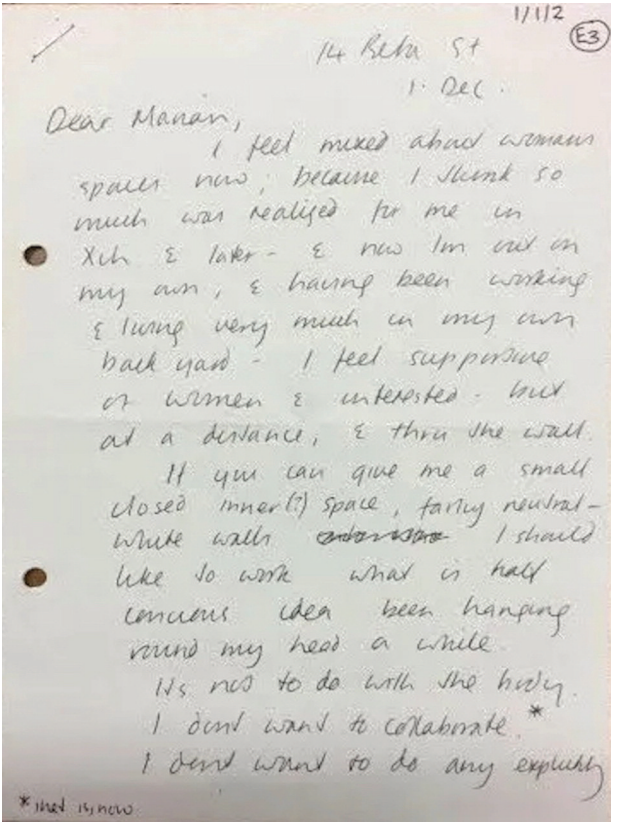
THE WOMEN'S GALLERY, 26 HARRIS STREET, TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA

By the time we invited Joanna to the Women's Gallery for the *Opening Show* it seemed she'd had enough of women-only initiatives. As she said to Allie—

> You [Allie] & I took part without making a directly 'feminist' statement in the the inaugurating show of '80. [...] I placed rectangles of colour round a small white room (transposition teased out by the location of Felix' sleeping waking rhythms). It was an unusually comfortable place to work with a child — there was a cot in the gallery. Heather took Felix for walks — someone took the older children to pictures or planetarium.[15]

In her initial letter responding to the gallery's invitation she's open about her ambivalence.

15. *AWPB*: 82.



1/1/2 (E3)

14 Beta St
1. Dec.

Dear Marian,
I feel mixed about womans spaces now, because I think so much was realised for me in Xch & later - & now Im out on my own, & having been working & living very much in my own back yard - I feel supportive of women & interested - but at a distance, & thru the wall.
If you can give me a small closed inner(?) space, fairly neutral - white walls ~~[illegible]~~ I should like to work what is half conscious idea been hanging round my head a while.
Its not to do with the body.
I dont want to collaborate.*
I dont want to do any explicitly

*that is, now

With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

> I feel mixed about womans spaces now, because so much was realised in Xch and later — & now Im out on my own, and having been working & living very much in my own back yard — I feel supportive of women & interested — but at a distance, & thru the wall.

I should like to work what is half conscious idea been hanging round my head for a while.

Its not to do with the body

I dont want to collaborate*

I dont want to do any explicitly thematic work And most of all

I dont want to repeat myself

*that is, now

She went on to suggest others to take part, Robin Swanney-McPherson ('I think she feels the same Interested. Guarded.') Di ffrench ('Explain. Persuade.'), Jacqueline Fraser 'a highly feminine artist, obviously') and thought 'even Robin White might be worth sounding out'. At the end of the letter she also suggests approaching her sister, Mary.

> One other negative. I dont think it would make honest sense at the moment to put up a work for an exclusively female audience I mean it would be making a claim that would impose a meaning on the work that is simply not there. Open or closed?

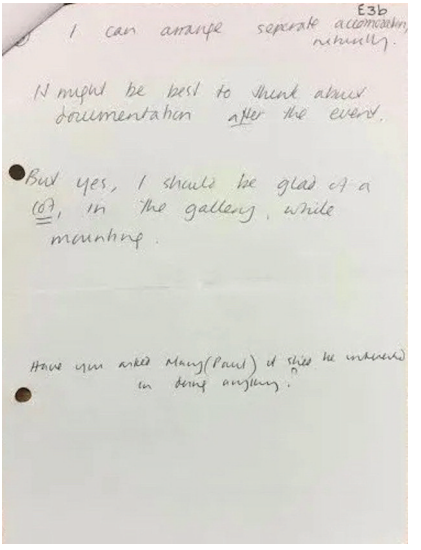
> What am I bringing
>
> A few photographs, possibly, not for display, but possibly useful in the event of a book.
>
> no paintings.
>
> formal
>
> installation to be called POEM
>
> & created in situ

May I bring say 20 copies of my book Unwrapping the Body for sale during the festival or at the gallery afterwards

I can arrange seperate accommodation, naturally.

It might be best to think about documentation after the event.

But yes, I should be glad of a **cot** in the gallery, while mounting.


E3b

I can arrange seperate accommodation, naturally.

It might be best to think about documentation after the event.

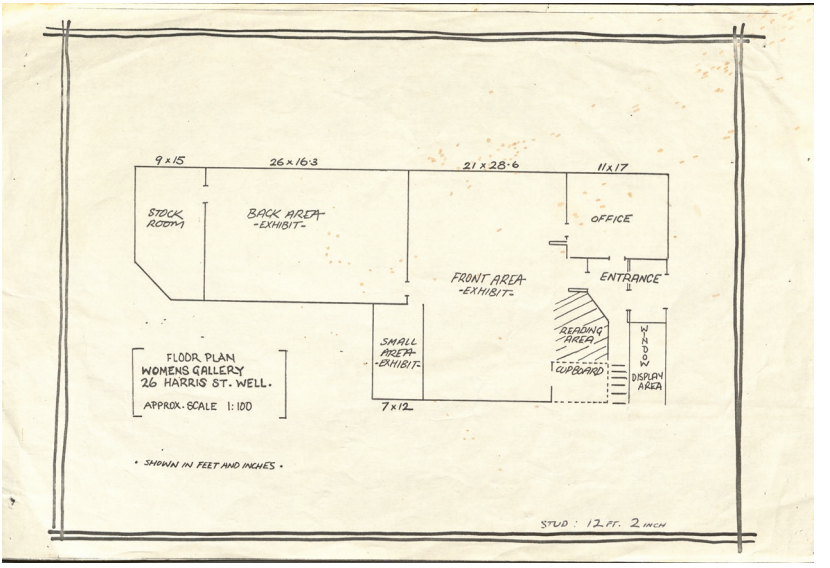
But yes, I should be glad of a cot, in the gallery, while mounting.

Have you asked Mary (Paul) if she is interested in being anything.

With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

Joanna took the entire Women's Gallery tiny back room, 'Stock

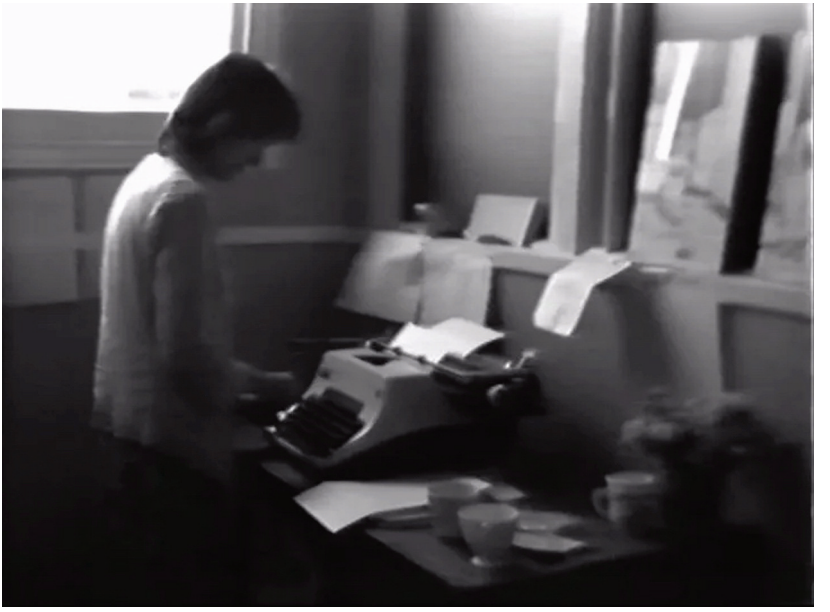
Room' in the plan below, behind the largest discrete exhibition space, 'Back Area', where Allie's work was.



Floor plan Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. Drawn by Sharon Alston.

A screenshot from footage by the Auckland Women's Community Video is from the only visual record of her presence. In the catalogue, she described her work as 'Poem interior and coloured paper'. There are a couple of slides of this work in our collection in ATL.[16]

16. Currently unavailable (mid-late 2025).



Joanna types her Opening Show *catalogue entry at the Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, on the Kidsarus 2 typewriter 1980. Screenshot from wild footage by Auckland Women's Community Video. For further news of the typewriter — also used by Keri Hulme around the same time, to type up He Hōhā — please refer to 'The Women's Gallery & the Kidsarus 2 typewriter' in the Pauline Neale section.*

Today, as always when I work at the kitchen table, Joanna's 'Diamond' Beta Street kitchen painting from 1979 keeps me company.[17]

17. The other one is in ATL

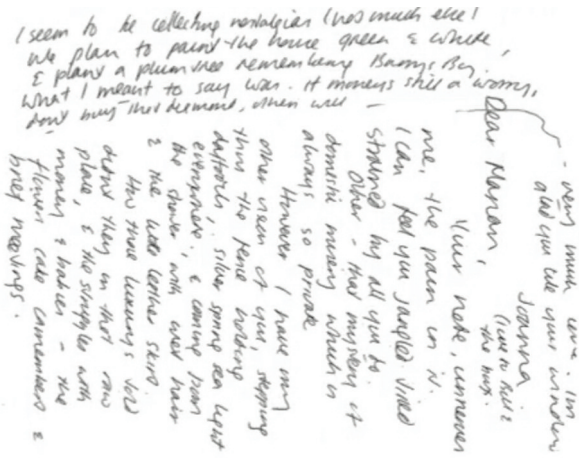


With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.

She wrote:

> I seem to be collecting nostalgias. Not much else. We plan to paint the house green & white, & plant a plum tree remembering Barrys Bay. What I meant to say was. If moneys still a worry, dont buy that diamond, others will — very much love. Im glad you like your window[18] Joanna (love to Bill & the boys.

18. Joanna sent me a 'window' work (ATL: C-009-025) after she and Allie decided



With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate.



Seacliff: With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate, the image shows the exhibition *Joanna Margaret Paul: Imagined in the context of a room* (12 July–9 November 2025) in situ at Te Whare o Rehua Sergeant Gallery Whanganui, courtesy of the gallery.

that they didn't want Bridie and me to organise a touring exhibition for them in 1979 (ATL: 91-023-2/16) — they weren't 'ready'.



Seacliff: With permission of the Joanna Margaret Paul Estate, the image shows the exhibition *Joanna Margaret Paul: Imagined in the context of a room* (12 July–9 November 2025) in situ at Te Whare o Rehua Sergeant Gallery Whanganui, courtesy of the gallery.

Part Thirteen

JUANITA KETCHEL

1946-2012



Juanita in cave, 1980s. Photograph Christine Gregory.

Australia-born tangata Tiriti, Pākehā, feminist, writer, performer, social worker, oral historian.

> Juanita Ketchel was a founding member of the Dunedin Women's Refuge Center, a voluntary roster worker for several years and the first paid co-ordinator/social worker for the centre. She is currently an assistant research fellow in the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dunedin Medical School, University of Otago.[1]

In 1971 Juanita moved, with her baby son Julian, from Auckland to Coast Road Seacliff, Otago. She later settled in Russell Road Seacliff for many years, with Bryan Harold and Jules. An early member of the Dunedin Collective for Women,[2] she eventually moved into central Dunedin and lived in Elder Street until she died.

She worked with artist Robin Swanney-McPherson, among others, and performed at ANZART-in-Auckland in 1985. They toured their performances.

1. Juanita's bio, probably written by her, in *Remembering: Writing Oral History* , edited by Anna Green and Megan Hutching, Auckland University Press 2004.
2. Interviewed by Grace Millar for Dunedin Collective for Women reunion, 2001: ATL OHColl-1285.



Juanita and Robin in Dunedin ?1980s

Robin—

> Juanita was already living [in Seacliff] with Bryan and Jules was about 8 when I moved down in 1978. I stayed in a caravan on their property, went to Australia for three months and returned in 1979 after which Juanita arranged for me to rent this house. Juanita moved into Dunedin in the early 80s but I stayed in Seacliff so we would meet up wherever she was living in town and we'd go over our ideas and have rehearsals etc. in an empty space in an old building on Dowling Street. I had a little red Triumph Herald soft-top in those days and we carried all our props and us in that all the way to New Plymouth on one occasion.[3]

3. By email, October 2025.

Towards the end of her life, Juanita joined a women's writing group and wrote 'Through Kauri Gum', 'Memoir of a Magdalene Girl' and 'The Magician's Assistant'.

We warmly thank David Eggleton and the late Bill Dacker for caring for these and David for also sending them through to us; and Denis Harold for his edit.

JUANITA & SPIRAL & 'GETTING FREE'

Marian Evans



Juanita the researcher. Photographer unknown.

Juanita and I came and went in each other's lives, first in Auckland in 1969, in Seacliff from 1971 after her son Julian was born and she

came south to live with us;[1] and then in Dunedin, often uncomfortably for each of us: we were very different. When Alison Laurie offered me an office in the Gender & Women's Studies' house at 20 Kelburn Parade Te Whanganui-a-Tara in 1997, to work on Spiral projects,[2] Juanita came with me from Ōtepoti Dunedin, but I can't now remember why. I particularly remember her being with Allie Eagle and me when Allie wanted to be filmed at Porirua Hospital; and once having an argument about music choices in my car, when we were driving back to Ōtepoti.

Later, with strong support from Bridie Lonie, Juanita completed the first stage of her 'Getting Free' project, within the Women's Gallery's larger 'Getting Free' project which included documentation like our Porirua visit with Allie Eagle. Ill health prevented her continuing. According to Helen Frizzell and Bill Dacker, a speaker at Juanita's funeral had said that her involvement with the project had changed her profoundly.[3] Helen added that—

> Juanita was an enthusiastic supporter of oral history and carried our her work with great care, sensitivity and meticulous attention to detail. I got to know Juanita during the years she worked on the 'Getting Free' project though I'd known of her for many years as she was a Dunedin identity — pre-Raphaelite in appearance with a great sense of dress, style and fun. It made for an unforgettable character.

1. Bill MacKay, my then-husband, and our child Dylan and me.
2. https://web.archive.org/web/20060824014356/http://www.vuw.ac.nz/staff/marian_evans/getting-free/index.html; https://web.archive.org/web/20060824014015/http://www.vuw.ac.nz/staff/marian_evans/aboutus/aboutus.html At that time, the Women's Gallery Inc, registered as a charity, was Spiral's umbrella organisation.
3. Frizzell, Helen, and Bill Dacker. 'Juanita Ketchel 1946-2012, *NOHANZ* 26: 2, 2012: 3. http://oralhistory.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/july2012.pdf

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (OTAGO-BASED): ORAL HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE, RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

The participants

Sixteen women and men 30 years of age and over who experienced prolonged violence in childhood and/or adolescence with compounding effects; have found ways of resolving their difficulties; and identify as 'resilient'.

The interviews

'Getting Free' explores the long-term effects of violence and the development of resilience in those who experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional violation during childhood. The narratives detail experiences of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood; how individuals perceived and responded to those around them; and the ways in which they have drawn on their experience to enhance rather than diminish the quality of their adult lives.[4]

Funding for Stage I of this project was received from:

- Australian Sesquicentennial Gift Trust for Awards in Oral History
- New Zealand Lottery Grants Board
- Patricia France Charitable Trust
- The Community Trust of Otago
- Dunedin Mayoral Trust Fund
- New Zealand Federation of University Women (Inc) Otago Branch

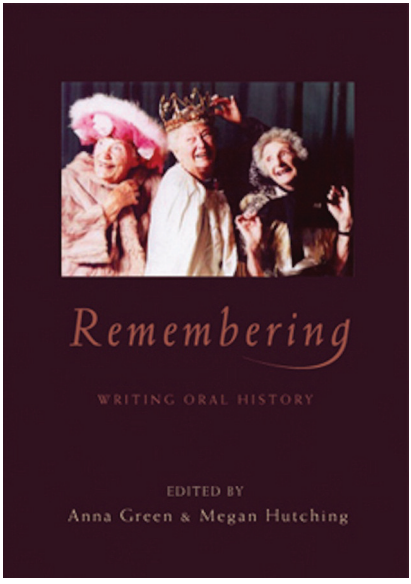
4. ATL: OHColl-0718, as a Women's Gallery project: at that time the Women's Gallery was Spiral's umbrella organisation.

Stage I Project Results:

The project has collected 152 hours of tape-recorded interviews. The collection is held at the Alexander Turnbull Library and is embargoed until December 2007. Copies of eleven interviews are held at Otago Settlers Museum.

'Getting Free' Oral History participants speak of the benefit of having recorded their story and how, sometimes in unexpected ways, it has been of therapeutic value.

Juanita Ketchel 'Oral histories of violence, resilience and recovery' in *Remembering: Writing Oral History ,* edited by Anna Green and Megan Hutching, Auckland University Press 2004.



ANZART-IN-AUCKLAND (1985)

ANZART (Australian and New Zealand Artists) was a series of art events that brought together artists from Australia and New Zealand. In May 1985 the event took place in Auckland and involved performance art, sculpture and film and video works. Juanita and Robin Swanney-McPherson were there.

JUANITA KETCHEL and ROBIN SWANNEY-MACPHERSON

ANZART/AUCKLAND '85 Performance at Investment House, ground floor on Thursday, May 23rd.

Currently living in Dunedin.

Participation in ANZART/AUCKLAND '85 courtesy of NZ Rail and Road Services and Q.E.II Arts Council.

1984 May ART IN DUNEDIN: Performance Joe Steiner.

1985 May HOME & HOSED BENEFIT CONCERT, Dunedin.

ANZART/AUCKLAND '85 *Strike While the Iron's Hot* and *Gingham Goes Wild*.

June GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY, New Plymouth, Performance.

DETAILS OF WORK

STRIKE WHILE THE IRON'S HOT



L-R Juanita Ketchel and Robin Swanney-McPherson in performance: Strike While The Iron's Hot *1985*. Photographer unknown.

Props: 1 x ironing board, 4 x irons, 1 x chilly bin, 1 x sound tape, tulle costumes, tap shoes, 1 x music stand.

The children's rhyme, 'My mother said, I never should, play with the gypsies in the wood' was used, to which new words were set describing a young girl's discovery of independence from the time she leaves home. An ironing board made by one of the performers was used as a focus around which the main action took place.

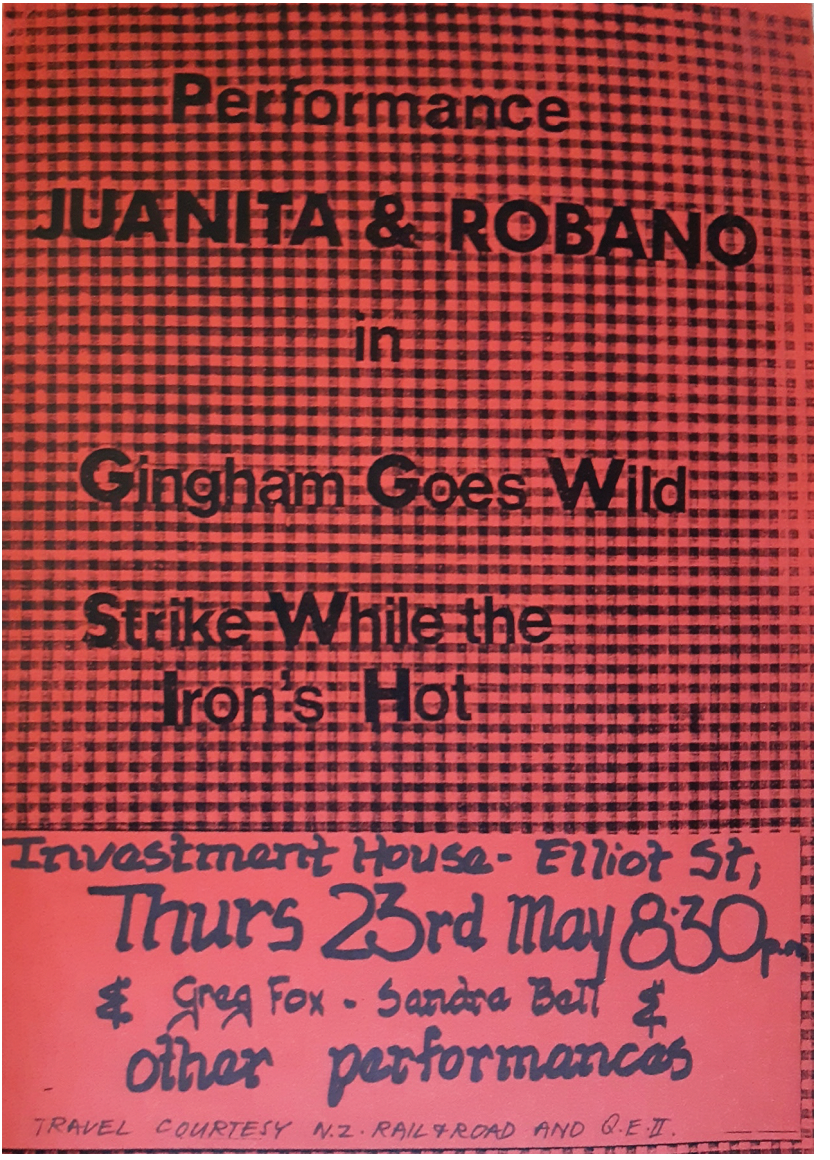
. . .

Exaggeratedly pretty costumes and tap shoe rhythms offset the feminist theme of the rhyme, while a background tape with a cha cha rhythm created a stylized beat. The rhyme was written as a letter to our mothers asking why they'd told us gypsies were bad and girls couldn't be bold, going on to describe how that had an effect on our experiences as women and ending with a confident declaration "I'm bold as brass, no-one to say, naughty little girl to disobey. My gypsy's come, my ironing board's made, my strength is my joy, I'm glad I disobeyed!"

GINGHAM GOES WILD

Props: Male/female costumes, 1 x music stand, 1 x set of bongos, 1 x tea-chest base, 2 x male/female lifesize cardboard cutouts, 1 x cracked record, 1 x record player, taped voices, 1 x strobe light.

One male and one female character enter, bow/curtsey, scream/bellow five times, the woman puts on the cracked record, taped female/male voices are heard while stereotyped male/female posture are played out. The theme of the male/female stereotypes are illustrated in song, to the tune of 'Tararaboomdeay', postures, and tableaus, the first two establishing the stereotypical male/female roles and the last one blurring them leading into the finale where cardboard cutouts of the naked male/female bodies are put on, the couple stand there for a short while in the full light, then sidle off stage.



Juanita Ketchel and Robyn Swanney-McPherson Gingham Goes Wild *poster 1985. Designer unknown.*

ROBIN SWANNEY-MACPHERSON
JUANITA KETCHEL
6 Elder Street, or Seacliff,
Dunedin. R.D.1.
ph 774441. Waikouaiti
Otago. ph. 757-367.

ANZART
P.O.Box 6303
Wellesley Str.,
AUCKLAND.1

To Whom It May Concern,

Please find enclosed a summary of our performance at Investment House on May 23rd during ANZART/AUCKLAND, which we'd like included in the post-ANZART publication. We were shown the proofs of some shots of STRIKE WHILE THE IRON'S HOT that Gil Hanly took and would like you to use those as well if possible.

Richard Von Sturmer said we'd be able to get copies of them. Could you tell us how we go about ordering them, how much a copy costs, size etc?

You can reply to either of the above addresses. Thanks very much.

Ms. Robin Swanney-Macpherson

THROUGH KAURI GUM

Juanita Ketchel

Our house was Victorian-built, with a few modifications typical of the 1950's. The front verandah was enclosed to create an extra bedroom, a finial or two lopped off in the process. Frosted and clear glass panes replaced some of the stained glass windows. Hinges replaced frayed sash cords – thus avoiding a kid being guillotined leaning out the window.

Nana and Grandad lived beside us, in the other half of the house. I think Nana would say soundproofing hadn't been a feature. Their new front door bell was exciting to my brother and me. It chimed every time you pushed it. Nana said, one more time and we'd push her to the limit.

Ernest was Grandad's name though he seldom was – earnest. Nana called him Em, for short. He had blue smiling eyes.

Grandad had been a saddler, but now mostly made rugby balls. His workshop was in the garage at the bottom of the driveway, which ran alongside the house. Sitting on a high wooden stool, with wooden leather clamp clasped between his knees, the smell of honey-wax, wood-oil and leather permeating, he would whistle and sing while he worked. The birds on the clothes-line and nectarine and peach trees, would join in chorus.

'What are you making, Grandad?'

'A wigwam for a goose's bridle,' his fingers rolling resin and linen fibre on the lap of the leather work-apron, making strong stitching thread.

'The world is always sunny when you look through the kauri gum, Grandad,' I say, as I hold it up to my eye and to the daylight through the spider-webbed garage window. The backyard is amber-warm, misshapen and at a tilt, the runner beans and over-grown comfrey plants doing a crazy jig as I try to steady my elbow on the windowsill for better viewing.

There is a round ball of musk-sweet wax to coat the thread; two large stitching needles. The rhythmic squeak of the awl pierces the leather held firm by the clamp, first through one side then the other, followed by the threading and tug as Grandad deftly stitches another horse saddle. Saddles, harnesses, and rugby balls. And Grandad is singing, his voice mellow and warm, 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine ...'

'My Grandad's a gambler.'

'He is not!' My mother is rather indignant – where on earth do I get such notions?

Grandad would bet on Phar Lap any day. The best horse that ever was, and ever will be. Grandad listens to the races every Saturday. Horses can win by a nose, and are measured by hands. The race commentator on the radio gets more and more excited, no matter which horse wins.

For Christmas Grandad bought a horse-racing record for the whole family. Every time you played it a different horse won. On the dining room table, next to the gramophone, and part of the same gift, was a tabletop race-course with wind-up horses. Take your bets, the winner gets a fancy-wrapped chocolate. Someone scratched the record accidently, which meant that two horses were neck and neck, over and over, until Daddy shifted the needle.

Grandad recited poems, too. By heart and from the heart: 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', 'The Wreck of the Titanic'.

'Fifffty thoooousand tons of steeeeeellllah.

Rrrresssting on the oosshhuunn wave-ah,'

His voice roaring like thunder, or sometimes soft and soothing or jaunty and jocular, he took us on journeys where I would tremble in fear of being trampled by six hundred horses stampeding, chilled to the bone by cold seas and icebergs. And he told jokes. I would hiccup with laughter because a man who couldn't walk straight, all doubled up, went to the doctor and the doctor said, Your fly button's done up to your waist-coat jacket.

We would join Nana and Grandad to listen to the radio: *Life with Dexter,* and *It's in the Bag* with Selwyn Toogood. Sometimes other programmes by the makers of Colgate or Pepsodent toothpaste, Persil washing powder, Lux soap and Knight's Castile. Brought to us by our sponsors Samminandspragginlimmited – providing us with an entertaining tongue-twister.

My brother, given half a chance, would shift the dial on the radio, filling the room with a collage of sound. Chimes of Big Ben before the 'beerbeerseer' news; deep monotone voice of an American detective, introducing another spine-chilling thriller; the romance of the lady with soft feathery breathing, 'Oh Cecil my love, oh my darling'. And then there was the weather-man, all alone in the cold, cold wind. He spoke of places mysterious and fascinating; places which are part of our country: Puysegur, Pencarrow, Foveaux, Chalmers and the Chatham Islands. He spoke of lighthouses on Capes and Points, gale-force winds, storm warnings, poor visibility, southwest swell, isolated showers, high sea easing, a ridge of high pressure, outlook variable, precipitation, isobars, anticyclone, and extended forecast.

One night, the man in the radio said in a sudden commanding voice, 'Don't touch that dial!', just as my brother was about to. We were frightened into convulsions of laughter, rolling around on the carpet, kicking our legs as if we were running in the air. We both got hiccoughs, we both got the stitch.

'Be good kids now', Grandad patiently urged us, 'programme's due to start any minute'.

Selwyn Toogood's voice booms into the room from some small-town local hall, and the audience quietens.

'Answer this one and you've got three in a row. Name the New Zealand athlete who won the Olympic gold medal in ...?'

'Yvette Williams!' Nana and Grandad yell at the radio, 'Yvette Williams!'

'Yvette Williams,' my brother and I yell, 'Yvette Williams'.

'What should she take New Zealand? The money or the bag?'

Take the bag, the bag, we chorus. No, the money. No, the bag, the money!

Pikelets and a cup of hot cocoa for supper. The sugar bowl is a cottage with hollyhocks on the side and a thatched roof lid. I scoop congealed milk from the top of my cocoa, and it drapes over my index finger.

'I don't like the skin, Nana.'

'It won't kill you!'

I wipe my finger clean on the side of the couch.

'This is Selwyn Toogood saying good-night New Zealand, and thank you for joining us. Be listening same time next week, when we will be coming to you from ...'

* * *

Nana said the sun couldn't decide what it was going to do. My brother and I went to the beach with Grandad anyway. We were the only people there. We walked happily along the shore towards the rocks. Sing us another song, Grandad.

'Oh! We had a goat with a cast iron throat.

But he died of appen-di-ci-tis ...'

We had climbed halfway round the rocks when Grandad said we should start heading back.

'Do we really have to go, Grandad?'

'It won't be long before the tiger's in', he said.

Far too calmly, I thought. He turned, taking my brother and me by the hand, to walk back along the beach. He is walking too slowly.

'What's the big rush? It won't be in for a little while yet, dear'.

Why is Grandad saying that? I continue walking as fast as I can, tugging at his arm, without actually admitting that I am terrified. Grandad is so brave. I can tell he's not frightened. I wish I was brave.

'Can we run now, Grandad, because I think it will be here soon?'

'Oh, it won't come in as quickly as all that.'

Whichever way it comes will be too quickly for me.

Eventually we reach the steps which lead from the beach to the changing sheds and pathway up to the road. I let go of Grandad's hand.

'I'll race you up the steps, Grandad.'

A sudden downpour of rain. Quickly into the changing sheds, all three of us.

'Aw! This is the girls' shed!' my brother bellows, before a crackle of lightning flashes and thunder shakes the corrugated-iron walls. Grandad hoists himself up onto one of the rafters, then swings across to the next one.

'You're a gymnast, Grandad. Do it again, Grandad.'

He isn't scared of thunder or lightning.

In the hallway of Nana and Grandad's place is a photograph of Grandad taken when he was in Egypt during the First World War. He is in his soldier's uniform, sitting on a camel. The Sphinx and two pyramids are in the background. He said they were built thousands of years ago, and that the Sphinx is bigger than buildings in Auckland.

'Even bigger than the Farmers Trading Company,' I ask him? And he says yes.

'How many soldiers did you kill in the war, Grandad?'

'You never ask an old soldier that, dear.'

I wonder if that means Grandad is ashamed. Because his bullets missed. Or maybe he didn't miss, and now he wishes that he had? Grandad listens to *The Diggers Session* on the wireless in the lounge. 'Tuurramp, tramp, tramp along the hiiiiighway ...' he sings along. 'Maaaori Battalion march to vi-ictory! Maaaori Battalion staunch and true ...'

Grandad sits in the big armchair, clearing his tobacco pipe, tap tap tap into an old container. Taking the lid off his tobacco tin, he folds back the waxed paper, and the room fills with an aroma I associate with Grandad and old soldiers, as old as time itself. He fills his pipe anew. There is a mound of matches in the saucer of the ash-tray with the sand-filled base. You can sit it at an angle and it won't topple over.

Putt putt putt – Grandad's pipe gets underway. His weekly ritual satisfied, he eases back into the comfort of his armchair, abiding the noisy game of marching soldiers my brother and I are playing with rolled-up newspaper for rifles.

By the centre quick march, left right left right, around the living room. Grandad is with his pals, on the wireless. The programme ends as usual with the song, 'Old Soldiers Never Die', and the old man on the radio says, 'Until we meet again ...' as the tune fades away.

* * *

Grandad works at the Naval Base in Devonport, when he's not making saddles and rugby balls. He carries his tools in a Gladstone bag. Daddy got a job there too, so they catch the bus together into town from the top of the road – two sections, thanks, driver – then walk the few yards to the ferry buildings to catch the ferry across the harbour.

One evening Grandad didn't come home on the ferry with

Daddy. He was taken in an ambulance to Auckland Hospital, unconscious. When he came home weeks later we had to keep very quiet. My brother couldn't practice the violin, even softly, so eventually he didn't practice at all. Nana banged on the wall to quit the din I was making.I thought I was being quiet, but it just shows you sometimes get it wrong.

An ambulance with siren screaming sped past Bayfield Primary School when I was in class. I froze. I thought it was coming for Grandad. I had to wait until the school bell rang at three o'clock before I could run through the school gates, along Jervois Road, past the small Methodist Church on the corner, turning into West End Road running, running past the Methodist minister's house, past one, two, three, four wooden houses, past the new block of flats, past the entrance to Bayfield Park and the tennis courts, past the first house past the comer with the big high hedge, to the next house. Then home, with hedge of small, dark-green leaves and red-orange trumpet-shaped flowers holding nectar and ants, drive-way with the garage at the end. And Grandad. Grandad, safe at home.

'It was like being hit on the back of the head with a hammer,' he said when he was well enough to talk and remember. A blood vessel had burst in his brain. He recovered.

He went back to work at the Naval Base, carrying his Gladstone bag, catching the Heme Bay bus, two sections into town. Catching the ferry. Disembarking when the gangway had been lowered. No leaping onto the wharf before the capstan ropes had been secured, as he might have done in earlier years. Along the Esplanade, breathing in the salt air, watching the seagulls circle, swoop, glide and dive. To the Naval Base. To work. All day in the bowels of the ship, asbestos exposed above him, below him, and to the sides of him.

Nana made lots of carrot juice and comfrey juice for Grandad about a year later, when he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Grandad needed lots of rest. His eyes were still blue, but sometimes he didn't smile as much. Mummy said that was because he was in a lot of pain.

We had to keep very quiet. My brother and I thought we were being quiet, but it just shows you sometimes get it wrong. You sometimes think laughter and yelling and singing and old soldiers never die.

Grandad died.

MEMOIR OF A MAGDALENE GIRL

Juanita Ketchel

ONE: ENTERING

My mother came with me in the taxi, which was nice of her, to the place where I was going to be working. I certainly wasn't sorry to be leaving school, though I was inwardly surprised at my parents agreeing to it.

'You can't make me stay at school once I turn fifteen. I'll run away!'

I wasn't allowed to associate with one of my new friends, June. Actually, with most of my friends. My parents said I was a poor judge of character to be choosing these people over the nice friends I used to have; I was not the lovely girl I used to be. I was sneering and answering back. And I was still trying to live down the shameful revelation that when I was thirteen years old. I had lost what I didn't know I had in the first place, my virginity.

If the doctor thought I was bad mannered because I curled my lip into a sneer, he was lucky I didn't kick him – hard. How would he like it if someone had made him strip from the waist down, then pushed a metal thing inside of him? When I complained to my mother afterwards, she commented how much wiser I would have

been to object to a boyfriend touching me *'down there',* so that none of this would have been necessary in the first place. I didn't understand why, in order to get a live-in job, it was necessary at all. The doctor gave my mother a comforting pat on the shoulder as we left his surgery.

The next day, more excited than nervous, I buckled up my small suitcase and with my mother, sat on the porch in the sun, waiting for the taxi to come.

* * *

My mother was Anglican, though she didn't regularly go to church. When filling in forms she wrote 'C of E' next to religion. I don't think Dad answered the question. I know he didn't think much of Roman Catholicism, because one of the rules prevented Catholics from attending the service of any other Christian denomination. 'If it's such a good religion, what have they got to fear?'

I had heard good stories and bad from the twins who lived down the road from us in Herne Bay about the Marist nuns who taught them. I remembered, too, how distraught Marlene had been one Friday when she absent-mindedly ate a meat pie. Eating meat on Fridays was a sin, she said.

The taxi drove through Waikowhai, along Hillsborough Road, and turned into the grounds of the Home of the Good Shepherd Convent, pulling up at the entrance to the building.

'We've been expecting you', said the nun who opened the door. She gave a slight nod, indicated we should follow, then turned and glided from the hallway into a large room. I felt as if my mother and I had entered a foreign land and were being solemnly scrutinised by the inhabitants as two other nuns moved to the centre of the room and stood looking at us. Their faces were framed by taut starched white fabric which hid their ears and neck, and covered their shoul-

ders like a small cape. Hanging from a ribbon, just below the centre of the cape, was a large silver heart locket. Instead of hair, a long black veil covered the head and hung down to the waist over cream-coloured floor length robes. On top of the robes, in the front, was one fall of fabric which hung straight down. One of the nuns held her hands behind the fabric. Another held black and silver beads, rosary beads, muttering as she fiddled and turned them one after the other. All the nuns had cords round their waists with metal things dangling: rosary beads, Jesus on a cross, big keys.

I didn't pay much attention to what was being said. I guessed my mother was saying something polite, and someone would say something polite in return. I just was eager to see what my bedroom looked like, and meet the girls I'd be working with. Most unusually for my mother, she seemed about to cry when I said goodbye to her. I was to follow the nun who insisted on carrying my suitcase.

'Be good for the sisters', my mother said in almost a whisper as I left the room.

* * *

'Sister', I said to the one I was following.

'I'm Mother Damien', she said, unlocking another garden gate 'You'll call us Mother while you're here. And now we're leaving the upper-convent and I will take you to your dormitory.'

We arrived at a building which was much larger than the one we had just left, and Sister — Mother — Damien led me to a stairwell and up two flights of stairs.

'This, dear, is your bed, and this your locker'. She tipped out the contents of my suitcase, left a few items of clothing on the bed, then repacked.

'You can put those things into your locker drawer, and I'll take this. You won't be needing it'. She picked up my suitcase and was gone. Standing in her place was another nun.

'I'm Mother Rosary We're going to get along well if you behave yourself. But, you look like a nice young girl.'

She passed me a long-handled floor mop, and told me to mop the dormitory floor. Then she too was gone. I was disappointed to find I would be sleeping in a dormitory and not having my own bedroom. I counted the beds – eight in the side dormitory where I had been placed, and eighteen in the main dormitory – and then I began to mop the varnished wooden floor boards. The windows were tall, closed and had a kind of wire netting embedded in the glass. At the base of each window one portion opened inwards, securely held in a type of metal box frame. I could hear sounds in the distance of birds chirping and steam hissing through a chimney, but otherwise it was a quiet sunny early afternoon.

'What sort of a job is *that?*' The mop was suddenly snatched from my hands and came belting across my head. I felt stunned.

'Where's the dust, the *dust* ?' It was Mother Rosary. She was screaming at me and stamping her feet like some sort of crazed dancer.

'You won't get away with this, you stupid little girl. Stupid evil little girl.'

I couldn't get free of her because of the length of the wooden stick. It was coming at me from all angles, whacking me, belting me across the head, catching me on my arms and elbows as I tried to protect myself. It hurt, and I didn't know what I'd done wrong.

'You've got five minutes!' she screamed as she spun round and sped away, her thin pinched-in face jutting forward, her habit swishing and billowing behind.

I don't know how much later it was that Mother Rosary returned, but when she did I was mopping the floor in much the same way.

'There you are, see? A much better job. I think we can go down to the laundry now.' Confused, I followed Mother Rosary down the stairs, out into a yard, and across to a single- story building which was hissing steam from windows and chimneys.

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* * *

We walked through a room filled with people standing at pressers, ironing boards and large containers of wet fabric. Some of the people looked peculiar and they stared as I walked past. There was someone with bulging eyes, and a person who made awful grunting noises. One woman stood tall as a giant. She turned in slow motion to look at me, and I felt as if I was shrinking. Next to her stood a girl who was dribbling and grinning, and a girl who made strange whimpering sounds.

'What the fuck are you staring at?' somebody said, and I quickly tried to look straight ahead, pretending to see nothing, but trying not to miss any movement to the left or the right of me. Mother Rosa nudged my shoulder, directing me to the next room. It was the mangle room, with two mangles, two huge steam-driven metal rollers. A couple stood on each side of a mangle and fed in laundered sheets. Another pair peeled the sheets off and folded them when they came through pressed on the far side. Mother Rosary sent one of the folding women to the ironing room, leaving the other to show me what to do. The sheets were exceedingly hot and dry, and as I tried to pull a sheet corner from the turning roller, I felt sharp electric tingles up and down my arms like needles.

'STOP!' yelled the woman teaching me, to those on the far side of the mangle, 'we're piling up over here'. I hadn't managed to grab the sheet-ends properly or to do the folding. Some sheets had slipped around the mangle again, creasing badly, and others were spilling forth wave upon wave.

'Are you the new girl?' The voice sounded behind me, from the direction of the other mangle, like Donald Duck: Qua, qua, the new girl?

I looked over my shoulder but couldn't see anyone. 'Are you the qua qua?' I asked.

There it was again, just like a matinee cartoon, corny and quacking. 'Are you the new girl?'

Again I turned, and looked down to see a dwarf, a woman with wispy strands of hair on her large head and no eyebrows or eyelashes. 'I'm Pauline', she quacked, 'what's your name?' I smiled a nervous reply and hoped she didn't think I was shocked.

To the right of the mangle room was the washer room where a seemingly endless supply of sheets was bleached clean, piled into bins, and wheeled to the mangles for drying and pressing. Once the sheets had been folded they were taken into the packing room to be counted, placed in large wicker baskets and then delivery trucks.

As fast I tried to work, the sheets came faster through the mangle. It was October and the climate in Auckland was hot and humid. Indoors, with the steam from the pressers, irons, washers and mangles the temperature was absolutely stifling. The only windows in the building were small, high up near the ceiling and scarcely opened. I could hardly breathe.

'God, if you exist, please, *please, please* send me cool air through that window,' I silently prayed. 'For even a couple of seconds, God. Please, if you can just send me a whisper of a breeze, I will know you, that will be your way of letting me know you truly exist.' I prayed, pleaded, and begged. Perspiration ran down my face, tickling, stinging.

'How much longer?' I asked Carol, who was folding sheets with me.

'How much longer for what?'

'Til we stop work for the day?' I said. 'Three hours', she said. I felt as if I would faint.

Someone, who seemed to be made of rubber, grabbed my arm and pushed me off balance by her stumbling weight. She tried to say something but the words were battered by rubbery lips and I couldn't make sense of them. When I looked puzzled, she tried

harder. Her voice got louder, but she was spitting more and didn't sound any clearer. It was like she chopped off the beginnings and ends of her words – which doesn't really leave much. She looked at me closely. I could tell that she wanted very much for me to understand and I felt guilty for failing. After some time, guessing at her words, I said 'Your name is Marianne?' She thrashed her arms about excitedly and put a big wet kiss over half my face.

A person from the washer room, wearing white overalls and big white gumboots, sidled up to Marianne and hoisted her upright by pulling Marianne's arm over her shoulder. She introduced herself as Mary and said she had the largest collection of holy pictures in the convent. Who, she asked, was my favourite saint? I couldn't answer that. Mary was about twenty years old, tall, with deep brown eyes and straight dark brown hair parted in the middle. Mary said I could walk outside with her and Marianne, and when I said okay, Marianne grinned and spluttered her approval as the three of us lurched sideways and forwards.

We were outside the laundry. People were moving in various directions and I didn't know where I should be going. I left Mary and Marianne and walked up the stairway. When I saw a girl leaning on the balcony, I said hallo and asked if she knew which dormitory I was in. 'How the fuck should I know,' she said, looking me up and down.

I did not like this job. I didn't like it.

* * *

'Coming to mass?' Somebody pulled the blankets off my bed. 'No thank you.' I yanked them back up over me. 'Don't have a choice. You'd better get a move on!' It felt early in the morning though everyone seemed to be up and dressed. My idea of a Saturday didn't begin with a church service, but I followed the others and got

dressed, too. I had never been to mass before. Fortunately it was all in Latin, so I couldn't understand a word. But it took too long and my stomach was rumbling with hunger by the time it had finished.

The girl who lent me a scarf to wear into chapel seemed friendly, so I hoped after mass there would be a place for me at the same breakfast table with her. I looked around the refectory – a large room with cream walls and a high ceiling, four potted palms on pedestals, one in each corner, and four wooden chairs at each of the fourteen square wooden tables – when one of the nuns took me by the elbow and ushered me to a table in the centre of the room which was occupied by one other person. I was placed opposite and introduced to Betty.

Before eating, as well as sleeping and praying, everyone made the sign of the cross with their right hand touching their forehead, 'in the name of the Father', the middle of their chest, 'the Son', the left shoulder 'and the Holy', and right shoulder, 'Ghost. Amen'. Some people used a shorthand sign of the cross, a squiggle in the air with the right hand. I wasn't sure if that was laziness or confidence. I tried to remember which came first, the left or the right shoulder.

A nun walked into the refectory carrying a book which she opened when she reached the far wall. All the chattering stopped when she entered the room. This was the head nun, Mother Catherine. As the girls and women started eating breakfast, Mother Catherine started reading from the book. Betty hadn't taken her eyes off me since I sat down. I was looking elsewhere to avoid her and with the hope she would get distracted by somebody else, when out of the corner of my eye I saw something fall from her head. I looked across the table. Large white dry flakes of skin were falling from her scalp into the bowl of food which she scooped up with her spoon and ate. I felt ill and didn't finish my breakfast.

* * *

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Saturday slowly dragged through long humid hours into Sunday. Sunday, my first break since arriving at the convent, gave the opportunity to write a letter to my friend, June.

Now that I had a live-in job and could pay my own way in the world, I would make my own decisions. I would spend some time with my parents, but I would choose my own friends. June could expect a telephone call from me within a week. I wrote this down, before quickly drawing a comic strip of sour-faced nuns and sealing the envelope. Mother Rosary was sitting in St. Euphrasia Day-room where I was writing, and I asked her where I might get a stamp for my letter.

'Give your letter to me, and the rest will be taken care of by Mother Catherine', she said, taking the envelope from my hand.

All the signs and signals which I had ignored, believing I was starting a live-in job, registered with a defining thud that Sunday when I was ordered into the office of the Mother Superior. I knocked and opened the door a little nervously as a stem voice told me to enter. It was a command, not an invitation. The early afternoon golden sunlight stopped at the shadow line of the closing door. I stood looking at the austere face of Mother Catherine. My eyes gradually adjusted to the dimness of the room: the dull cream-coloured walls, the wooden ceiling and floor, the large dark-stained cupboards, desk and window frame. Behind Mother Catherine, hanging on the wall and looking as if he was balancing on her head, was Jesus Christ nailed to a wooden cross, naked except for a loin cloth and a ring of thorns cutting into his brow, blood trickling down his face. His eyes were looking heavenward. I lowered mine from the top of Mother Catherine's head and saw that she was glaring at me. With a sweep of her hand and a flick, she suddenly like a magician spread out a fan of white paper on her desk. I saw torn pages covered with my handwriting. I heard her words and she was saying that I would not be telephoning anybody; I would not be meeting anyone except for my family, one hour once a month; I would not be writing to anyone except one letter to a family

member one day a week. The signs and the signals replayed now in my mind like a loop of film in slow motion. Played over and over. And finally, I realised, I was not a young live-in worker. I was a prisoner.

TWO: LONG NIGHT, WILD WINDS

Nobody knew when they would be leaving the convent. Weeks, months, years? However long it turned out to be, when the time came there were no farewells, good wishes or hugs. When somebody was released from the convent you knew it only by their absence. They simply disappeared.

But when one person vanished you could be certain before long there would be another brought in to fill the empty bed in the dormitory and labour in the laundry .

Though most of us dreamed of being elsewhere and wouldn't wish life in the convent on anyone else, we did look forward to the next arrival. The monotony breaker. 'New girl! New girl!'

The word spread throughout the convent with more haste than a speed chant of Hail Marys. What would this person from the outside world bring to the convent? What news? What stories of her own? Would she know anybody on the outside who any of us knew? Would she know any of my friends? Would she be a friend; someone who would recognise and understand whatever it was I seemed not to understand about myself? Would it be someone with similar fears and desires? – each of us privately hoped for such a person to arrive – or would she be hostile, showing no interest in those who came before her? Worse, much worse, would she simply shuffle in and join the rest of us without so much as a murmur?

'New girl! New girl!'

That would have been the call when I arrived at the Home of the Good Shepherd Convent a couple of weeks after my fifteenth birthday.

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* * *

A sad sweet smile would cross Rave-On's face whenever Luvvie dashed past from one side of the convent to the other.

'Hello Luvvie', Luvvie would mutter, nodding rapidly. 'Sad aren't you Luvvie, 'cos Mercier's gone, eh Luvvie? No good, eh Luvvie?'

And Rave-On would answer, attempting to console Luvvie as well as herself, 'Kei te pai, kei te pai'.

Luvvie had hair which hung limp from the crown, grey straight and stringy. Like most of the women in the convent, she didn't seem to have an age, but could have been anywhere between fifty and seventy years old. She was tall and thin. Her body looked to be held together by big sinewy knots at the wrists, elbows, ankles and knees. The end of her nose and her chin almost connected when she smiled or muttered. Luvvie had no enemies – I suppose, in part, because it was better hearing ourselves called Luvvie by her, than Bitch, Bastard or any number of unpleasant names which were applied to most of us, by most of us, from time to time. Luvvie was always in a rush, though she had been in the convent for many years and had no further to go within the convent walls than anyone else. When she had no one to talk to, she talked to herself. Luwie didn't deliver the news of the convent so much as confirm it and keep it in motion.

'New girl, Luvvie, yes, Luvvie, new girl', Luvvie said, weaving her way between small groups of chatting girls coming out of the laundry at the end of the day.

'What's the new girl like — you seen her?' I asked Rave-On.

'Yeah, I suppose she's okay. Doesn't say anything though, eh. You going to play ping pong tonight, e hoa? I'll give you a game'.

'For sure. I'll see you later in the half.'

I liked Rave-On. Her friend, Mercier, had been released a month or so back. Rave-On must have been aching with the loss of her but, however much she hurt, she would not allow her feelings to get in the way of treating those around her well.

My first sighting of the new girl was half an hour later at benediction. She was sitting in the same row as me, and did not at any stage make the sign of the cross, so I figured she was not Roman Catholic, because even angry or rebellious Catholics would do that in the convent, however subtle the gesture. When we walked back down the path from chapel, through the gate, and towards the refectory for dinner, I saw her again and gave her a smile, but she did not respond.

After dinner I went along to the hall to meet up with Rave-On. She had already set up the table tennis trestles, and I helped carry the table top. I was quite agile and played the game reasonably well, but Rave-On was a challenging partner. She was swift and had a backhand so forceful it always took me by surprise. She kept the score in Maori, saying it quickly and softly, followed immediately and more loudly in English. I seldom won a game when I played opposite her, but they were my best games.

'Ka pai, Wannie! You can't win them all, eh', Rave-On grinned, half apologetically.

When we finished our game that night and ambled back past the office and the refectory and stood at the bottom of the stairway, we heard the rumbling of a storm in the distance while a sudden wind gust swirled in the convent yard.

'We might get a storm tonight, by the sounds', Rave-On commented. We climbed the stairs to the first floor which led to her dormitory.

'Thanks for the game, Sis. Sight ya later. Be good, Wannie. And if you don't be good', she added, mischievously, 'be real careful'.

* * *

In the St. Euphrasia Day-room, Helen was kneeling with a notebook and ballpoint pen in her hands and her ear up against the

speaker of the radio, trying to keep up with the words of a pop song.

'Just write chorus', I said when she started to repeat the words, all frantic and puffing. Handing the notebook to Lori who was sitting on the floor near her, thinking she would quickly write down all the words, Lori wrote down 'chorus' only and handed it back to Helen.

'You're a joke', said Helen, dismissively 'Can't you spell? K-a-w-r-u-s'.

Martine came in and asked me if I wanted some wool for the French knitting I had started a few weeks back. She showed me a ball she had left over from a jersey she was knitting for a toddler.

'I love that sort of wool', I said, thanking her. It was red, from rich cerise to pale marshmallow pink, darker in some sections and lighter in others. I collected my knitting from the draw in my bedside locker and went back to the day-room. I attached the new wool with a knot to the end of the wool I had been using, and started again the rhythmic practice of winding the wool round the nail, lifting the stitch with a hairclip up over the head of the nail times four, then tugging the knitted coil as it came through the other end of the wooden cotton reel. I liked the swirling effect of the new colour.

Martine showed me the jersey she had knitted for the child and it looked like a water colour painting with strokes of light and dark shades. She hardly ever had visitors, so I wondered who the child was, and if it would ever know where, and by whom, the jersey had been knitted with such care and devotion.

The wind, which had quietened for a while, started up again, blowing around corners of the building and howling as it collided with itself. Suddenly, from the first floor dorm, Pauline came dashing into our day-room.

'The new sheila's up on the roof! She's going to jump! I'm not bloody joking! I don't know how the hell she got up there.'

She pushed the door open, indicating to everyone in the day-room that we should go out onto the balcony to see for ourselves.

It was dark outside but the roof of the convent was lit by lights strategically placed in the ground and directed upwards. The new girl was on the roof standing right near the edge leaning into the wind. Mother Roch came to the St. Euphrasia Day-room balcony holding her rosary beads, looking anxious like everybody else.

'You'll have to go up, dear'.

I wasn't exactly sure what she meant or who she was addressing.

'You'll have to do it, because you're slender and it will be easier for you to get through the manhole'.

Mother Roch was looking straight at me. 'Mother, no, I can't, I'm really scared of heights', and as I said this I looked up at the roof, which now looked even higher, and at the new girl who was yelling and scarcely able to keep her balance because of the wind. Mother Roch moved directly in front of me, let go of her rosary beads, and grabbed me by the shoulders, shaking them to emphasise each word. 'When God is ready He will call, and only then, otherwise it is a sin. A cardinal sin. Listen to me, child. Would you want her soul to go to Hell for all eternity?'

She turned to leave the balcony, one hand on my shoulder, nudging, when I found myself caught in the midst of a flurry of black flapping veils as I was carried along, back to the day-room, by Mother Roch, and Mother Margaret and Mother John who had just appeared.

A heavy wooden stool was placed on the day-room floor and I was given instructions to stand on it, reach up and push aside the manhole cover. With assistance from Mother John I heaved myself up, so that half of my body was above the ceiling, and my thin legs were dangling down into the day-room where a group of nuns, women and girls were forming a circle, kneeling to say the rosary. I had then to open a trap door above me which was part of the roof. It was difficult at first because of the wind, and the trap door felt heavy banging against me. But when I eventually got it to open

outwards it slammed hard against the roof and seemed stuck in place by the wind.

I pulled myself up so that I was resting on my elbows. My hair blew upwards, held completely vertical by the wind. I turned awkwardly and saw the new girl at the far end of the building. She yelled at me to stay away or she would jump. I could see the distance between the roof and the ground below and I knew that she might not survive the fall. What was I to say to her – Stay there, I'm coming to help you?. I might not make it across the roof anyway, the wind was so strong. She was having difficulty standing and she was bigger and heavier than me. What if she attacked me, we might both go over the edge. I did not want to die. Oh God, I am so scared of heights. We were three floors high. Panic arose in me each time I thought about trying to stand. Should I tell her not to worry, that I won't go near her because I respect her wishes, or do I tell her just being on the roof terrifies me and I won't move in her direction?

Then I had an idea. If she would agree to come down off the roof I would promise to help her escape from the convent. But I couldn't yell that out in case the nuns heard, so I would have to get her to come closer to me. I turned to call to her, but choked and gulped in large mouthfuls of gusting wind. Again and again I tried, but while her words, her cries, were blown in my direction, mihe were lost. Below me, in St Euphrasia Day-room, the Hail Mary was being chanted more quickly than when the group started the rosary, and I could distinguish the tired bored voices from the excited and anxious ones who set the pace.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Over and over.

And overhead no stars not even clouds, but strong winds and a black-ink sky that I had not seen since coming to the convent.

Across the top of the macrocarpas on the edge of the back field of the convent, I saw the distant silver twinkling dancing lights of Auckland city. I gazed, spellbound, unlocked for those hours – or was it minutes – from the agitated chants beneath me and the wailing of the new girl on the far side of the roof. 'Nooooo!! No! Let me out, or I will jump.'

The new girl was rocking on her knees, hammering her fist on the roof, punctuating her words. It was the dive onto her knees that sharply caught my attention. Then I faintly heard a group of voices that seemed to be at ground level, but I could not recognise what they were saying or who it was. Meanwhile, in the St.Euphrasia Day-room, people continued reciting the rosary.

I tried calling to the girl, but again my words were swallowed up by the gale. My ears ached with the cold, even my scalp ached with the wind forcing my hair upwards. From taking the weight of my body for so long, the bones of my elbows felt as though they were piercing through the flesh; my feet, hanging unsupported, felt itchy and half numb.

I felt a stinging whack on my right foot and a hand gripped my ankle. Mother John's voice bellowed up to me, 'You might as well come on down here, now', as I was unceremoniously lowered into the day-room.

'Well, what about the new girl?' I asked.

'What about her?' Mother John replied.

And that was the last we heard of her, though we quietly speculated, to help fill in our days, and because most of us still had some sense of caution and wonder and curiosity about many things.

THREE: OLD STELLA'S FLOUNDERS

We didn't know Old Stella's age. We just knew she was old, which is why we called her Old Stella. She worked in the kitchen, and some-

times in the infirmary. Old Stella had thick straight grey hair which she kept cut just below her ears at the back and sides, with a fringe in the front. She was quiet and worked hard, which pleased the nuns, and everyone liked her. Old Stella said that a certain Mr. Edmonds had stolen her parents' cooking powder recipe. She said he became rich, they remained poor, and many years back she came to live in the convent.

Old Stella's bed was in the side dormitory of St. Euphrasia, and it wasn't difficult to see which one was hers in the dark because her locker stand was crowded with images of Our Lady manufactured in lime green luminous plastic.

One night there was a groaning, crying sound coming from a bed in that part of the dormitory. It sounded like someone in pain, and it was worsening. I got out of bed and went toward the sound which turned out to be beside the green glow.

'What's wrong, Old Stella?' I asked. Old Stella groaned even louder, but didn't answer. She didn't appear to hear or notice that I was standing by her bed, though her eyes were open. 'Save me, God! she cried 'Save me *from the flounder'*.

Other people began to stir, and then there was a rattling of keys and the sound of the dormitory door unlocking. The lights flashed on. Mother Immaculate Heart and big Mother John entered with busy footsteps. Martine and Rose Ann, and then Marie and some of the others, all blurry-eyed, clustered around Old Stella's bed, anxious to know what was wrong. We were told to go back to our beds but we didn't.

'Save *me! Save* me. *Mother*[1]*,* Old Stella was sounding more and more desperate, 'It's the flounder! It's killing me. Oh, God, please save me'.

She was clutching at her stomach. Maybe she was going to die; she seemed to be in so much pain.

Mother John, built like an Olympic wrestler, grabbed Old Stella's arms with one hand, her legs with the other. Old Stella was held, flattened, for all to see. We couldn't imagine how she managed to

bind herself from waist to armpits with heavy duty rubber bands, but when Mother John got the rubber bands off Old Stella, she stopped complaining about the flounder. She was free, her loud cries turned into whimpers that before long turned into soft mutterings and then she was sleeping again.

We didn't get to sleep, though, for a long time. We bombarded Mother John and Mother Immaculate Heart with questions. Mother John said Old Stella once before had almost strangled herself with big rubber bands.

'Good night, and God bless', said Mother John 'Settte down now, and get to sleep'.

'Good night, Mother', we said.

'God Bless', said Mother Immaculate Heart.

'God bless, Mother', we called back, and when they left the dormitory, after casting the light of their torches along the rows of beds, we whispered to each other until the early hours of the morning, leaving little time for sleep before having to get out of bed for morning mass.

FOUR: SWAN LAKE

Mid-afternoon Saturday, we had finished work in the laundry for the week, and a few of us were lounging about in the St. Euphrasia dayroom. I was sitting at one of the three tables, designing a birthday card for my mother. Marie was sitting on the couch knitting a scarf for 'Jack nohi, you!', when anybody asked, pointing at the tip of her nose with a chubby index finger.

'Yeah, don't be bloody nohi!' Rose Ann repeated. She was sitting beside Marie, imitating her movements. Her pink metallic knitting needles made irregular clicking sounds and the tip of her tongue was sticking out of her mouth as she concentrated well but knitted poorly.

The sun beamed dust sprinkled rays through the tall windows. Someone's singing voice filtered through from the balcony, a muffled

song accompanied by the strumming of a ukelele. From the centre of the room Lani swung a weighted paper ball attached to a length of string. Tilting backwards and forwards on her chair, she held the string and repeatedly hurled the ball, following the flight-path of a droning fly.

'Shuddup! Shuddup.' Lani called as it flew past from the top of the window to the rear of the radio and the front of the book-shelves, and down to an empty glass on the table.

'Shuddup.'

It winged its way oyer Rose Ann's head then across to the black and white picture on the wall, St. Mary Euphrasia.

'Shuddup. Shuddup. Gottcha!'

Splat. Crack.

'That shud-it-up, eh?'

Mother Rosarie walked into the day-room and sat down at the table beside me, giving my hand an affectionate squeeze. She nodded hallo to Annabelle who sat opposite, and to Martine, who had come into the day-room once she had finished polishing the brass in the parlours. Mother Rosarie was clutching a small parcel which had come in the post. She placed the package on the table directly in front of her and had a very satisfied look on her face. Looking at the card I was painting, she complimented me on the way it was progressing.

'You're such a bright,talented girl', she said.

Mother Rosarie was never moderate in the way she communicated with me. I was, in her estimation close to perfect, or a 'despicable girl'. On this day, it seemed I was in favour.

Pulling her chair hard up against mine, Mother Rosarie took hold of my arm, gripping my elbow and hand. With her face just inches from my desperately calm face, she said,

'You know, you're a lovely girl, and you love me'.

She picked up the parcel from the table and examined it on all sides.

'Par Avion', she exclaimed 'You know what that means, don't you

dear, it has come all the way from overseas. And look at the beautiful handwriting.'

She beamed at me, then slowly and sternly looked at Annabelle and Martine.

'Who's it from, Mother?' Martine wanted to know.

Mother Rosarie read the name and address of the sender and gasped in delight.

'Oh, I knew she would write to me. She said she would.'

She turned to me, 'She loved me too, you know, dear. A lovely girl, just like you. Oh she loved me'.

Annabelle and Martine tried to persuade Mother Rosarie to open the parcel. Mother Rosarie stalled. She was relishing every moment that came with the pleasure of receiving a parcel: the smell and texture of the wrapping, the foreign postage stamps, with *'Sister Mary of the Rosarie',* Mother Rosarie's formal name, carefully handwritten above the address of the convent. Looking heaven-ward, she made guesses at what the contents of the parcel might be.

I couldn't remember Mother Rosarie ever mentioning the name of the person who had sent the parcel, but from what she was saying on this day, we were very alike and had a lot to be proud of. And while Mother Rosarie stated over and over 'just like you, dear, such a lovely girl', she started picking at the brown knotted string. One knot undone, and another, and one more to go.

Mother Rosarie spread open the parcel wrapping to reveal the underside of what appeared to be a box of chocolates. She could hardly breathe, owing to such excitement.

'Oh, dear girl! We can each have a chocolate, won't that be a treat! I knew she would write. Chocolates, how wonderful. God bless her, God bless her.'

She turned the box over, right side up. She pulled her thin arm back then, like an arrow released, shot it forward, sharp nail at the tip, and stabbed at the chocolate box lid,

'Vulgar, Vulgar!'

Mother Rosarie stood up, stamped her feet, and continued stab-

bing at the box with her gnarled finger. Then she spun round and spat the words out at me,

'Filthy, vulgar, vulgar! How dare she, oh God cover my eyes. How vulgar.'

Annabelle, Martine and I, and everyone else who was in St. Euphrasia's, stared dumbfounded, not because of the way Mother Rosarie was stamping and yelling – we had seen her do that before – but because we failed to see the cause of her fury. That was not until she finally stopped stabbing the chocolate box, when we saw a beautiful swan in a tutu and what little remained of a Prince's white tight-satin covered groin. All that was left of the conical shape in the leotard was minced cardboard and a little jagged piece of chipped fingernail.

FIVE: BATH

Mother Rosarie's outbursts and attacks on me did not lessen over time, but in between bouts she was at least rather kind. Kinder, and more violent, to me than to the other girls and women. Often her kindness and violence were mixed up. Enraged she would fly at me, cursing, yelling, hitting me about the head, and then pausing to get her breath would curse me for the loss of her temper and then she would splutter,

'You love me, dear, just remember that, and stop your delinquent behaviour. You're a lovely, lovely girl'.

One Sunday afternoon I was having a bath. Most of the others were either in parlour with visitors or outside on the lawn and so it was peaceful without the usual din of voices. The bath was deep enough to have a relaxing soak. Rowdy and crowded in the mornings in the bathroom, there was seldom time for anything more than a rushed dip and scrub. Each cubicle had a cast-iron bath with large metal taps, white tiled walls and floor, and heavy doors which closed but could not be locked.

As I lay half floating in the warm bath I suddenly recognised the

sound of Mother Rosarie's footsteps entering the bathroom. Clip, clip, clip on the tiled floor, getting closer to my cubicle. She called out,

'Who's in there? Who is it?'

In reply, I called out my name. Before I had time to grab my towel she started to push the door open. I leapt out of the bath and pushed against the door to stop her from coming in.

'No Mother, no, I'm undressed', I yelled to her. But she kept pushing against the door, and I kept pushing to hold it shut.

'How dare you.' she screamed, her voice shrill and bouncing off the walls. 'Open the door this instant. How dare you, I'm consecrated'.

In the dormitory, when we changed out of our clothes to go to bed at night, the only curtain we had to hide behind so our bodies were not exposed was our brushed-cotton nightie, used as a tent, a portable changing room. Every night, at about nine o'clock, a row of women bagged in winceyette performed a clummsy dance the length of the dormitory. Bending this way and that, elbows, knees, noses and chins protruded while each person fumbled to undo their bra hooks. Spencers, pants and petticoats were struggled out of, revealing nothing more in the process than naked wrists and ankles. Hell broke loose if somebody inadvertently showed bare breasts or buttocks, which occasionally happened if the hem of a nightie got accidently tucked into some part of an under-garment.

I was mindful of this as I used all of my strength to keep the door of the bath cubicle closed. Mother Rosarie's strength, however, finally won out and she flung the door open. When she saw me standing there, shocked and naked, she screamed,

'You evil little girl! You disgusting girl! Mary, Mother of God save us.'

As Mother Rosarie yelled in a frenzy, I pushed past her to get my towel, thrashing my arms about so that she couldn't attack me while I was uncovered. Grabbing my towel, I wrapped it round my torso and ran from the bathroom to the dormitory yelling back at her,

'Blame God for what you see. Blame God. Blame God. Blame God.'

SIX: RUNAWAY

Most of the girls in the convent at some stage made an attempt to escape. Hardly any of the older women tried to, but of the nuns there were certainly a few we hoped would. From inside the convent, escape attempts were rated successful or otherwise by the methods used to get away, and once away, staying away. No return, willingly or unwillingly, and no capture and lock-up elsewhere.

Girls who made their escape by running through the packing room door where laundry trucks arrived to deliver and collect large wooden and wicker laundry baskets, acted entirely alone. They were considered low, undeserving of any respect. Packing room workers earned the right to be there and would not risk abusing the privilege.

The only worthy escape was by climbing over the high fence which surrounded the grounds of the convent or by scaling the spiked metal gate without becoming impaled, or entangled in the barbed wire at the top. Rumours circulated about this girl or that running away and ending up 'down the line' in Arohata Borstal, or being committed to Kingseat or Carrington Mental Hospitals, or 'on the game' — paying for rent and food with sexual favours. The good stories, believed but impossible to verify since we didn't hear from the girls again, were of those befriended by transvestites. Linda, who had been placed in the convent through a court order because of her association with 'undesirables', described to me how, 'A man in a white wig and a long black dress told me I wasn't allowed to hang around with a man in a blonde wig and a short black dress — how naph!'

Linda would talk to me for hours about the drag queens she knew on the outside. She would tell me their names, describe their

clothes, imitate their voices and their mannerisms. After some months Linda seemed to think of herself as a drag queen too. Her every-day way of walking became the same as that of Tinkerbell and Lulu and Peach.

'Okay darling, so I mince', she said, when I pointed it out, 'ooohhh get youuuu, te ta te ta'. Tossing her head to one side and flicking her hair with the back of her hand, she stalked off in mock fury. Ten minutes later she would be back wanting to talk more about her friends on the outside.

Hearing Marmalade and me whispering one day, Linda beckoned me aside and said,

'If you seriously plan to go, I'll give you the names of some queens. All you have to do is go to the Ca d'Oro Coffee Bar in Customs Street, at the bottom of – ha ha ha, Queen Street – and ask for Lulu, or Peach, and say that you know me. They'll look after you. They'll give you clothes and makeup. They're gorgeous, and really understanding. They're not like other men, more like girls, only much better.'

Linda and Pat were the only girls we talked to about our plans. On the actual day Marmalade and I kept to ourselves, to be on the safe side. We didn't tell Marmalade s girlfriend, Lori. Marmalade didn't want her to know, and I was happy with that because I knew Lori didn't like me and wouldn't approve.

On our third day of planning we had a pillowcase each half packed with clothes and, tucked into our bras, names and addresses of people to contact all the way from the Hokianga to Wellington. We were assured of getting help: a place to sleep, food to eat and clothes to wear.

Marmalade and I had always been friendly but not especially close. A simple half-hearted comment one of us made on a humdrum day, about how the gate could be scaled if we chose to escape, led to a serious discussion. We were both thin.

'At least we fit into each others' clothes, so we won't have to take

that much with us', I said, and we laughed as we stretched out our skinny legs.

Marmalade pointed and joked, 'Jesus, you're white, e hoa, did your mother put you in a bucket of bleach the day you were born?'

'She didn't have to,' I retorted 'because you came along all greedy and stole my colour before she had a chance'.

I was very pale, even for a Pakeha, and she was very dark. She came from Murapara, near Rotorua, and though she said she was Maori no one in the convent believed her but thought she looked Indian. Her dark skin colour, the shape of her eyes, facial features and long thin bones, looked more typically Indian. Maori and Pakeha girls made comments for her to hear, though not directly, about her being, 'the most Indian Maori I know, eh?' Marmalade would fume, but say nothing. I wondered whether it would be lonelier to be a disbelieved Maori, or to be the only person in the convent who was Indian.

* * *

I had been fascinated by Linda's description of the drag queens, Lulu, Tinkerbell and Peach, and wanted to make contact with them but Marmalade thought they sounded too weird for her liking.

'Well, why don't we go to them first', I said, 'because Linda says they can be trusted, and we won't get raped. And then, if you really don't like them, we can go to someone else on the list.'

'Why don't we go to the Maori Community Centre?' she wanted to know, 'We can dance and find somebody there'.

Eventually, we agreed to find a place to stay first, and then we would go out dancing.

Three days after our first discussion about leaving the convent we were packed, with a time and signal worked out. We decided to make our run fifteen minutes after the end of lunch when everyone would be back at their work posts. There was less chance of being spotted by anybody getting back a few minutes late, but if we left

much later people would be looking around for something out of the ordinary to break the monotony of their day.

Marmalade worked in the washer room and would have to change out of her white gumboots and into casual shoes without raising suspicion. Her white overalls could be swapped for a dress when we got clear of the convent grounds. I would get permission to leave the mangle room, but instead of going to the kitchen I would go to the porch next door and grab the pillow cases with our belongings that were stuffed between musty old coats and a disused cupboard. I would meet Marmalade by the tall iron gate near the laundry.

That morning at mass, Marmalade slipped me a note. I was worried that she had written to tell me she had changed her mind. After breakfast I hurried from the refectory to the toilets to read it. She was writing to confirm our plans, not cancel them. I then realised I was anxious and would have been relieved had she changed her mind.

I hated being locked up in the convent. I hated having to go to early morning mass every day and I hated working long hours in the laundry. I wanted to get away. I wanted to get away from Mother Rosarie and her violent attacks and insults and I wanted to get away from Mother John and her endless criticism of me. She seemed to dislike everything about me, but whereas she could stay clear of me, there was nowhere for me to get away from her. I had to leave, and the only way that I could was by escaping.

I thought about my mother and father. During their recent monthly visits, I had complained less about the convent and perhaps that made them feel happier. I didn't want to upset them and be angry with me, but they would be. They placed me in the convent, so what should I care, really, about how they felt? I cared and felt angry, all at the same time.

I had been in the convent long enough for them to start feeling secure that I was secure, and that was part of the reason I wanted to take off: because it would be when they least expected it, and

because their decision to put me in the convent would finally be altered by a decision of my own.

'Hurry up, e hoa, I want a mimi'.

There was a loud thumping on the toilet door and a brisk dance of footsteps in and out of other toilet cubicles, followed by donkey ee-aw sounds of toilet-chain pulling. While I had been reading Marmalade's note, thinking about our plans and what consequences there might be, I had become oblivious to all of the sounds around me. I made a dash from the cubicle, apologising to Lanie who was standing cross-legged with her hand between her legs and a grimace on her face, and ran to the dormitory to grab my list of names, addresses and instructions. I made an extra effort to appear calm as I slipped in with the group of girls leaving St. Euphrasia and heading down the stairs to the laundry.

Betty was stationed on the far side of the mangle feeding the sheets through with Pauline and talking endlessly to her. Margaret, who had been working in the ironing room, was shifted to work next to me. We folded the sheets that peeled steaming hot off the rollers. I tried to keep up a casual conversation with Margaret, but kept glancing over to the huge tumble washers. I was hoping for a glimpse of Marmalade, though I feigned indifference when she did come into view. I saw her pushing a fully laden trolley of wet laundry, with a bounce in her step — she was either chirpy, or compensating for fear. Usually a person pushing a full trolley of wet goods would be near horizontal because of the weight — and Marmalade had the slightest build of any worker in the washer room. She gave me a wink as she wheeled the trolley past, and I knew it was all on and felt excited and impatient for the lunch bell to ring.

One hundred and twenty-five sheets through the mangle and folded, one hundred and twenty-six, one hundred and twenty-seven ... one hundred and eighty-nine.

* * *

The fruit in the bowl was fresh and delicious and I ate my share

quickly, but I couldn't swallow the white bread sandwiches. When I took a bite the bread coagulated and stuck in my throat. I felt nauseous. I looked around for Marmalade and saw her on the far side of the refectory, away from her usual table, trading her fruit for sandwiches which she slipped into a paper bag and tucked under her arm. I had never seen her so bright and animated. When Mother Immaculate Heart rang the small hand-held bell, signalling the end of mealtime and the clearing of the refectory, Marmalade skipped up to me and slid her arm through mine.

'You okay, dolt?' she asked, gripping hold of my hand, 'say you're okay, cos you are, aren't you?'

'It's the waiting I can't stand', I said 'but I'm okay. Keep smiling in my direction. Don't give me the nod to get the bags, though, until you're absolutely sure, and then we'll have to really go for it'.

'Yup!' she said 'everything's ka pai. Here ...' Withdrawing her arm from mine, switching the paperbag of sandwiches in the process so that I was left with them tucked under my arm, she raced off ahead to the laundry. What was I supposed to do with them? I couldn't take them to the mangle room, so I decided to take a chance and run over to the kitchen porch. If the way was clear I would put the paperbag into one of the packed pillowcases, and if someone appeared I would simply throw it behind me onto the pile of old coats and hope it went unnoticed. Feeling more nervous than when I first hid the pillowcases, I hurriedly tried to shove the bag of sandwiches with the rest of the things but was interrupted by Luvvie who suddenly opened the kitchen door.

'Oh, hallo Luvvie', she said in a voice louder than usual, 'do you want to come into the kitchen, Luvvie, yes Luvvie, come in, come in.'

I tried to back away but Luvvie pushed the kitchen door further open. Dulcie and Pet, wiping down benches, turned to see who Luvvie was speaking to, and needing some explanation for my being in the porch instead of the laundry, I asked, 'Have you seen Betty?' Of course they hadn't, but I already knew that. I said, 'Thanks

anyway, bye', and dashed over to the laundry, hoping I hadn't disturbed the appearance of the pile of neglected coats – the only corner of the whole convent which was not tidy, clean and polished.

Within minutes I was facing the mangle, standing on the left, Margaret on the right, each grabbing for the nearest corner of an emerging sheet, hot and crackling with static electricity. Margaret appeared to have given up any idea of holding a conversation with me, and was immersed in her own thoughts. Betty and Pauline, on the far side, were talking to and over each other. I felt surprisingly calm as I rather mechanically folded one sheet after another and waited for the signal from Marmalade.

* * *

As we raced to meet at the side of the laundry and heaved and struggled to climb the locked metal gate, regular noises of the convent sounded suddenly distant, as though suctioned up and muffled by cottonwool. Miniature sounds of pots, pans, clatter and chatter in the kitchen, Mother John's yelping little dog, the hissing and wheeze from shafts of steam in the laundry.

I was half crouched and awkwardly balanced between the top of the fence and the gate, with one heel of my foot held by the weave of fence wire, and my left hand trying to hold up barbed wire by means of the two stuffed pillowcases. With my right arm I tried to hold onto Marmalade but she started slipping from my grip.

'Hurry up, for Christ's sake.' she whisper-yelled, and tugged, 'give me a go!'

With the same difficulty I had clambering up, I climbed down and let Marmalade try. She climbed up and cautiously perched at the top between fence and gate and told me to leap as high as I could, grab onto the fence, and she would grab hold of me. I stepped back a number of paces, then ran forward hurling myself as high as I

possibly could with my arms stretched up to reach Marmalade – and as I did, focusing on her eager expression, I noticed a sudden severe look cross her face as her eyes swerved to take in some unexpected movement behind me.

'Fucking little bitch! You fucking shit. I'm gonna fucking smash the shit out of you, you fucking hua bitch fuck.'

The hem of my blue cotton skirt tore clean off in one round fabric loop as I was dragged by several girls from the gate with a thud to the ground. Someone spat globs of warm slimy spittle in my face. Mihi, Lexi, Lani and Pat grabbed hold of Marmalade and pulled her down with the same brutal wrench, and circled the two of us as they waited for instructions from Lori and we lay stunned and gasping. Rubberball needed all her energy to transport her own weight but had just enough in reserve to yell obscenities at us.

I heard Marie's long lugging footsteps and asthmatic breathing coming towards us,

'Lori says you gotta hurry up, youse jokers and you gotta leave Marmalade and you gotta take Juanita to the washer room ... Aw, you're in deep shit, Juanita.'

Someone taller and stronger than me pulled one of my arms and flung me over their shoulder like they would a string bag, and almost with as much ease. I tripped along on the tips of my toes like a broken ballerina trying to keep pace as they dragged me over asphalt and into the laundry washer room. As I was dumped onto the hard wet concrete, at Lori's feet, I thought I saw Mother John turn and disappear out of the washer room. I balanced myself on my knees and the palms of my hands, then raised myself up onto my right foot and, steadying, onto my left – WHAM! Lori's gumbooted foot kicked at some part of my body with such force I collapsed to the ground, sprawled. For a few seconds I struggled to breathe and couldn't feel my limbs. I couldn't feel at all, I was limp.

'Bitch! Fucking bitch,' Lori kicked me again, kicked my shoulder, my arm, my thigh. I started to feel my limbs then. I had to move rapidly, before she could attack again. I managed a swift sideways

movement which separated me by over an arm's length from Lori, but my foot started to slip and I crashed hard against the metal door of a thunderously spinning washer. I saw my face reflected, distorted by dents and angles in the steel – everywhere hard metal, grey concrete, the sharp hot powdery stench of bleach and steam, loads of fabric turbulently tossed in gallons and gallons of water. Lori stood facing me, her hands not quite on her hips, her fists clenched, her knuckles white, her usually beautiful face ugly and goading. I pushed my arms up in front of my face and bulldozed forward. I felt no fear or panic or pain. I was moving through, ahead, away, and I wasn't afraid.

* * *

I could feel the texture of the wet concrete floor under my hand. I slowly opened my eyes and looked towards my arm which, though relaxed, was oddly positioned. Concrete walls, trolleys, driers and washers gradually came into focus and against this gulf of grey, a colourful ribbon wove a semi-circle before me. One by one the colours separated, intensified. When I looked at my hand again I saw that it was wet with blood.

'Get up you bitch. Fuckin' useless bitch, get up and fight!'

Lori kicked, 'What the fuckin' hell's wrong with you?' Lori kicked, again. 'Get up and fuckin' fight! I'm gonna fuckin kill ya, ya bitch.'

The dots and dabs of the colourful semi-circle chorused in support of Lori and inched closer — I could distinguish cotton dresses and the face of Marie and Pat and Mini and Rave-On and Rubberball, Lani, Helen, Annabelle and Lexi. My right ear must have had all sounds kicked out of it because there was a strange but comforting quietness there. No sooner had I become aware of the lack of hearing in that ear, than the weight of Lori's boot landed on that side of my head again, and words roared through the canal.

Lori took a step back, satisfied, or maybe bored by now, and strutted a kind of victory lap around me as the others cheered. Then, above the hurrahs, came the deep booming voice of Mother John,

'Get back to work right now.' All of you.' And casting a quick nod down at me, added, 'You heard me. That means you too'.

Juanita didn't talk about her Magdalene experience to friends and family. There's no record of when or how she left, though it's been suggested that she simply 'aged out'.

Composer Gillian Whitehead wrote 'No stars, not even clouds', commissioned by Chamber Music New Zealand for the Enso Quartet, from a phrase in 'Memoir'—

> I wrote 'No stars, not even clouds' at a time when several friends of mine were seriously ill, and at the forefront of my mind. Juanita Ketchel, who lived in Dunedin, was both diagnosed with cancer and died within the short time-frame in which the piece was written. She had a profound interest in the arts, and was frequently seen at concerts. The title 'No stars, not even clouds' came from a story she wrote some years ago. The piece is written to her memory.[1]

1. https://www.gillianwhitehead.co.nz/no-stars-not-even-clouds/, where there are links to a recording and a recorded performance of the work.

THE MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

Juanita Ketchel

Lottini, the magician; I am his assistant
He wants me to smile at the audience more
He wants me to smile in the way that he smiles
Like an alligator contemplating his next meal

He wants me to smile at the audience more
Lottini ties me up in a sack
Like an alligator contemplating his next meal
Lottini throws away the key, but not his grin

Lottini ties me up in a sack and padlocks it
The drums roll and the audience gasps
Lottini throws away the key, but not his grin
Lottini has disappeared, he has gone

The drums roll and the audience gasps
I have climbed out of the sack
Lottini has disappeared, he has gone
Drums roll, the audience gasps, I smile a big smile

I have climbed out of the sack
He wants me to smile in the way that he smiles
Drums roll, the audience gasps, I smile a big smile
Lottini, the magician, employs me as his assistant.

Part Fourteen

IRIHAPETI MERENIA RAMSDEN

1946-2003



Irihapeti Ramsden 1985. Photographer unknown.

Irihapeti Ramsden OBE was, according to a note accompanying her 'Whakamamae' essay and probably written by her, from—

Kāi Tahupōtiki, Rangitane, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tara, Ngāti Ira, Tainui, Ngāti Kurī, is a founding member of the Haeata Māori Women's Collective and a member of Spiral Collective — the publishers of J. C. Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat* and Keri Hulme's *the bone people*. She has organised and contributed to many art-related projects, including organising three exhibitions, among them the *Karanga, Karanga* Māori women's art exhibition at Wellington City Art Gallery, and *Mana Tiriti*, an exhibition of Māori and Pākehā artists to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

She is a member of the Māori Women's Welfare League and a former vice-president and now member of the National Council of Māori Nurses. She currently serves on the Wellington Polytechnic Council's Māori Advisory Committee, Victoria University's Nursing Advisory Group, Te Puāwai Tapu, the National Heart Foundation of New Zealand, the Asthma Foundation of New Zealand, Manu Kōpere Māori Artists, Capital Discovery Place Māori Caucus, the Health Sponsorship Council and the Health Research Council among others.

Her publications include *Kawa Whakaruruhau: Cultural Safety in Nursing Education in Aotearoa* (1990) and she wrote the overview to *Mana Tiriti: The Art of Protest and Partnership* (1991).[1]

Irihapeti contributed to many books and other publications, sometimes as a writer, co-writer or editor; sometimes in other ways

1. *Te Ao Marama He Whakaatanga o Te Ao — The Reality* (Volume 2): *Regaining Aotearoa — Maori Writers Speak Out*, selected and edited by Witi Ihimaera, contributing editors Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D.S.Long, Reed 1993: 320. (Text very slightly edited.)

— for instance, with Robyn Kahukiwa, Pat Grace and Bruce Stewart she was part of a group which supported Mihipeka Edwards to write and publish her three-volume memoir, 1990-2002.

Tāngata Ngāi Tahu, volume 2 2022 has an extensive entry on Irihapeti.[2]

2. *Tāngata Ngāi Tahu People of Ngāi Tahu volume 2* Helen Brown and Michael J. Stevens (eds) Foreword by Tā Tipene O'Regan Bridget Williams Books and Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu 2022 https://www.bwb.co.nz/books/tangata-ngai-tahu-2.

IRIHAPETI & SPIRAL

Marian Evans



L-R Irihapeti and Miriama in Irihapeti's kitchen 1985. Unknown photographer.

Irihapeti came to Spiral via the Women's Gallery, when she visited our *Mothers* exhibition and engaged enthusiastically with Barbara Strathdee's portrait of her (Barbara's) mother.

. . .

She, Miriama Evans and I formed the Spiral collective that published J.C Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat* and Keri Hulme's *the bone people*. Her 'Comments on *the bone people*', in the next chapter, so affected Professor Terry Sturm, then Chair of the New Zealand Literary Fund Advisory Committee, that he was able to persuade the committee to fund Spiral, so we could pay for the printing. In 1986, Irihapeti was among the Spiral group that attended the 2d International Book Fair.[1]

With a brief hiatus after Irihapeti withdrew as an editor of *A Women's Picture Book* at the beginning of 1987, until Hilary Baxter's, Saj's and Kathleen Gallagher's book launch, in December 1987, Irihapeti's relationship with Spiral continued and she attended the 4th International Feminist Book Fair in 1990.

In the 1990s, Spiral recorded Irihapeti's interviews for her PhD thesis[2] and, after she became ill with breast cancer, filmed her for a proposed documentary, *Something For the Grandchildren to Hold*, as part of the *Getting Free* video project. In 2005 her children, Peter Burger and Pirimia Burger, used some of the footage from the proposed documentary to make a short film for the seminar at Victoria University that celebrated twenty years since *the bone people* won the Booker Prize.[3]

1. See Arapera Blank section, above.
2. Irihapeti Ramsden *Cultural Safety and Nursing Education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu: A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing* Victoria University of Wellington 2002. https://www.croakey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/RAMSDEN-I-Cultural-Safety_Full.pdf
3. https://youtu.be/rElyN7K-4g4



Representing Spiral and women writers from Aotearoa, Irihapeti, third from left, speaks on a panel at the 4th International Feminist Book Fair, Barcelona 1990.

COMMENTS ON KERI HULME'S THE BONE PEOPLE (1982-3)

Irihapeti Ramsden



Irihapeti at work. Photographer Pearl Sidwell.

Please accept this as a purely personal response. I'm no literary

critic. But as a Maori and as a Ngaitahu I am sure of my tuturu responses.[1]

Unlike Keri I have no connection with Moeraki, but I come from Banks Peninsula families where stones have still been known to move. We are all a coastal people, and we are all Pounamu people, and we all come from the bone people.

There is something very personal about this book. A working through, a deep aroha, a striking intensity. A sort of deep swell of frustration, anger for what has come to pass and delicate hope for the future. I keep thinking about looking through a piece of the purest pounamu. It is a very Maori work.

To me the book is a poem, a waiata tangi. There are savage, destructive and furious elements in it, essentially it is a lament. There are symbols of hope that the spiritual integrity of the Maori will return or can be regained, symbols implied in the constancy of the love of the child, the restoration of the health of Kerewin and the reformation of the tricephalous/trilogy. Man and woman, still Maori, and the translucent child without a past but with a whaka-papa at least as ancient as that of his adoptive people. It is a matter of priorities.

It seems to me that Keri is saying that in many ways we deserve to have lost our mauri because we have rearranged our priorities, but that there is a way by which we can regain it. In the restoration of the essential values of the taha Maori, awhinatanga, manaakitanga,

1. 1982-3 note for Spiral, in Spiral's ATL archives.

lies the hope of the rekindling of the Wairua Maori. When that is alight, the identity of the Maori is assured and we will repossess our mauri.

That Keri's book expresses a spirituality which is truly Ngaitahu, for the first time in our literary history, is particularly important. In the past, our tribal cohesion has been threatened by geography and by a history of land loss and warfare, resulting in our dispersal over the whole of Te Wai Pounamu; it has been a matter of survival as individual groups, for example Poutini Ngaitahu (West Coast), the Ngaitahu of Canterbury, Murihiku (Southland, Otago people). We have been in comparative geographical and cultural isolation, fringe people in South Island society, disregarded by all, so that today Maori and Pakeha are surprised to learn that there are indigenous South Island Maori. Furthermore, Maori immigration from the North Island places the taha Ngaitahu again in a threatened situation; cultural groups which come to North Island competitions are often largely made up of North Islanders.

However, the spirit of Ngaitahu has never completely waned and its values are intact although cultural outlines have tended to become blurred under stress. And now, with the whakatipuranga tu tangata, Ngaitahu is constructing a new tribal identity. Keri Hulme's *the bone people* is an integral and important part of this spiritual renaissance.[2]

2. For more about Irihapeti and Spiral, see 'the bone people' in *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu* Spiral 2024: 275ff https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2024_11/Keri-Hulme-Our-Kuru-Pounamu-FINAL_14_11_24.pdf; 'He Aho — Weft, from Matariki Tour to He Kaitaka' in *This Joyous Chaotic Place: He Waiata Tangi-a-Tahu* Mokopōpaki and Spiral 2019: 47-48 https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2023_08/This_Joyous_Chaotic_Place_He_Waiata_Tangi-%C4%81-Tahu_2019.pdf; and an untitled short film by Irihapeti's children Peter Burger and Pirimia Burger 2005 https://youtu.be/rElyN7K-4g4

WHAKAMAMAE

Irihapeti Ramsden

Literally translated, whakamamae means 'to be made to feel pain'. Shona Rapira Davies and Robyn Kahukiwa have decided to give their exhibition this name because they are both deeply concerned about the historical and social processes which have faced Māori people. Shona has further entitled her work 'Ngā Mōrehu', the survivors, literally because these sculptures survived a flood in her studio, and spiritually because they symbolise her tīpuna and their descendants who are struggling to survive in an imposed climate of cultural and economic poverty.

Shona has described the process of making each of her figures as intensely personal on several levels. As their physical creator she made decisions as to their shape, size and posture. When it came to shaping their faces she no longer made decisions, each face shaped itself despite her intentions, so she allowed herself to become the physical medium by which each woman made her appearance. As they appeared under her hands, each woman named herself, names from Shona's whakapapa, some ancient and some quite recent. These names are secret.

. . .

Robyn experienced the same metaphysical process as she painted 'Hinematioro'. Because of the extraordinary mana of this ariki tapairu of Ngāti Porou, Robyn felt unable to portray her until the spiritual climate was favourable. First there had to be a mandate, a commission and permission from the people. This came. Then a series of omens, indications that it was appropriate to proceed with the image of Hinematioro. Robyn remained diffident until Hinematioro began to emerge from her brush. Like Shona, Robyn became a working medium, making guided decisions, incorporating traditional stories about her subject. Both artists have not the least doubt that their work has emerged from the wairua dimensions of their Māoriness. Both feel accountable to their tīpuna and to their living descendants, he iwi Māori.

Because of the tapu nature of this work, its history, its conception and execution, it has followed that it should be shown in an appropriate ambience. This is why the internal architecture of the gallery has been changed. A wharewhakairo has been created. Just as the ancient Māori artists originally displayed their work in the external ornamentation of buildings finally evolving into the carved houses of Te Puāwaitanga (the classic period), these contemporary artists have chosen to continue that tradition by altering the exhibition space to create one that is essentially Māori. In accordance with that, people are required to remove their shoes to protect the delicate whāriki on the floor and symbolise their respect for the mana of the house and the work within it. This work expresses the recent history of the Māori and follows through the work of those ancient artists in wood and stone.

. . .

A major concern of both artists has been the recent, insidious continued colonisation of ngā mea Māori. Independently Robyn and Shona have focused on the karanga as an area of major concern. Each was surprised and in thorough agreement with the other at this identification. A specific ritual of Māori women, the karanga is performed by those who are steeped in language and tradition and have the wairua and whakapapa resources upon which to draw for the content of their call. Traditionally, kaikaranga have achieved their status through seniority by age and kinship. Their function has been twofold, to alert other people to their practical messages and to create a spiritually safe passage along which their group may move. There has never been any formal training in the karanga, rather it has been a matter of lifetime immersion and a final signalling from senior women that it is considered suitable for a woman to become a kaikaranga. This may not happen until a woman is in her seventies. It may never happen at all.

What Robyn and Shona have observed is the dismantling of this traditional structure and its replacement by something bizarre. This whole process has been recent and hasty. Not only has the karanga assumed a new shape which does not fulfill its total function, but it is being undertaken by non-Māori who cannot have the background to do so. Both artists have created emphatic protests about the colonisation of this highly tapu area of ritual for Māori women.

Robyn has continued to explore her Ngāti Poroutanga. Her oil pastel drawings on black paper are a new medium for her. It has been a particularly successful one for depicting the power and the ihi of the karanga. The abstraction of traditional carved figures still fascinates Robyn. As she becomes more confident in her developing understanding of the intentions of the old artists, she is able to include her own ideas about their further development in paint.

There are many examples of the movement away from the restriction of wood in this exhibition.

Both artists aim above all to reach Māori people through their art. They hold themselves accountable to their people although tribally separate. Neither undertake their work without karakia, nor do they eat during its execution. Luis Camnitzer has describes a stream of Third World art which he calls syncretic: 'It involves a combination of the artists' own traditions with those of Western art, a merger in which the artists manage to keep their traditions alive within the formal disguise of Western art.' Camnitzer believes this type of art has a subversive quality because indigenous traditions appear to be incorporated within the mainstream styles when in fact the artists have simply adjusted the media to continue to make statements about their own culture. Neither Robyn nor Shona feels uncomfortable about this, they have the precedent of the painted and carved houses of the 1870s, primary art pieces and vigorous and beautiful examples of adjustment to cultural colonisation.

To say that this exhibition has a subversive quality (a criticism which has been levelled at the writing of Patricia Grace) would not be true. These works are open statements which are frankly intended to describe the current state of a formerly sovereign people. They have their roots in anguish and are the creative response to a deep pain which both artists share equally. There is a challenge to non-Māori who see this work to absorb it and to investigate the true history of Aotearoa. In the light of that knowledge lies the responsibility to come to terms with the past in order to create a future in which the tangata whenua can have an equal share in all the good things which this country has to offer.

First published in *Whakamamae — Nga Morehu Shona Rapira Davies, No Nga Tipuna Robyn Kahukiwa*, Wellington City Art Gallery 1988. https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PWM.pdf; and reprinted in *Te Ao Marama He Whakaatanga o Te Ao — The Reality* (Volume 2): *Regaining Aotearoa — Maori Writers Speak Out*, selected and edited by Witi Ihimaera, contributing editors Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D.S.Long, Reed 1993: 320-322.

Transcribed by Hilary Oxley.

ERENA RAUKURA GILLIES, NÉE TIKAO, TAUA FAN (1984)

Irihapeti Ramsden



L-R Taua Fan (Erena Raukura Gillies), Sweet holding Pirimia, Irihapeti. Whānau photograph.

Born in 1896 at Te Rapaki o Te Rakiwhakaputa on the shores of Whakaraupo (Lyttelton Harbour), Raukura still lives in the family home. Through her father Hone Taare Tikao she is linked by whakapapa to Ngati Porou and Ngati Kahungunu. Through both her parents, she is descended from the earliest Kai Tahu.

'My parents went north on Kotahitanga work. I was brought up at Port Levy, went to school at Wainui, Little River. We used to walk along the road, catching bumble bees off thistles. I could hold five, we'd go all the way, shaking them to make them buzz. Now the bees will sting if I touch them.'

'My parents never spoke English in the house. I spoke Kai Tahu dialect right up until I got married and went up north. My husband's folk used to tease me, I couldn't speak any other way.'

'In 1918, the Prince of Wales came, the government was giving free fares to all the Māoris go to the Rotorua.' Raukura had 'a wonderful wardrobe, all I could want' and a chaperone. Prior to leaving, her father and the Rapaki kaumatua asked her not to go. The influenza epidemic had affected Rapaki and she was needed to help set up a ward in the meeting house and care for the sick in the pa. Raukura stayed. 'The Prince of Wales came to Christchurch, so I saw him there.' There were no deaths at Rapaki.

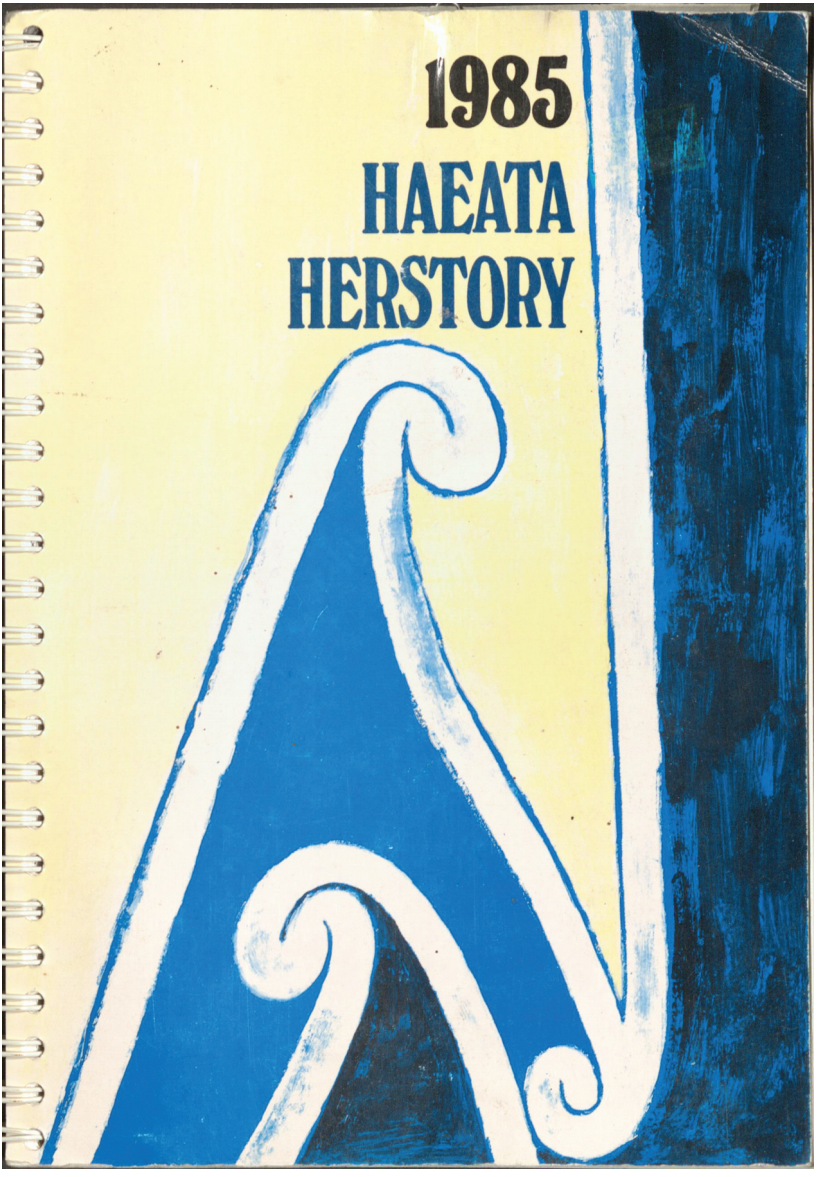
Assistance at the birth of her niece led Raukura into the role of midwife to her sisters and her whanau. 'I wasn't taught anything really, I just learned myself.' She recalled a fishing camp on the Chathams. 'There I was trying to get light from a hurricane lamp and the baby was turned the wrong way.'

. . .

On return from the Chathams, Raukura was again confronted by her kaumatua. A marriage had been arranged for her. A marriage 'hei whakamahana nga toto'. Within a fortnight she was married, at her family home. 'Bob and I would have been married sixty years before he died.'

The last of the old school of weavers in her area, Taua Fan ('I don't know how I got that name') is seeing to the re-establishment of skills among Kai Tahu woman. At 88 she presides over the local branch of the M.W. W. L., and heads her whanau and hapu with aroha and grace.

First published in *Haeata Herstory Diary* 1985: 10. Transcribed by Fran Richardson.


1985
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HERSTORY

IRIHAPETI RAMSDEN – NURSE WHO CAMPAIGNED FOR THE SPECIFIC HEALTHCARE NEEDS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO BE ADDRESSED (2003)

Lis Ellison-Loschmann

Irihapeti Ramsden is perhaps best known in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally for the development of cultural safety – an educational framework for the analysis of power relationships between health professionals and those they serve. She consistently argued for the need to address the ongoing impact of historical, social, and political processes on Maori health disparities. Her ideas were both challenging and threatening to many pakeha (European) New Zealanders who were, and are, often ignorant of the country's history and fearful of difference.

Cultural safety has been part of the New Zealand nursing and midwifery curriculum since 1992. Its introduction was met with a barrage of negative, and sometimes vicious, media coverage, culminating in the threat of an inquiry by the New Zealand government's education and science select committee in 1995. Throughout this period Irihapeti – who trained as a registered general and obstetric nurse at Wellington Hospital in the 1960s –calmly and eloquently responded to misrepresentations and accusations about the aims of cultural safety. She also continued to teach and work towards devel-

oping a comprehensive education approach that would facilitate opportunities for skilled analyses and an informed debate.

Irihapeti, who belonged to the people of Ngai Tahupotiki and Rangitane, New Zealand, worked in comparative intellectual and emotional isolation for many years. Her views were often as unpredictable as they were original. In 1990 during the 150th anniversary commemorations of the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of New Zealand, she was dismissive of the building of waka (war canoes) that were being hailed by Maori and pakeha alike as an exciting rebirth of Maori tradition. "They are nothing more than Maori frigates", she said, "and simply reinforce the stereotype of Maori as warriors."

She held various international positions over the years, including being the New Zealand representative to the International Bioethics Board. The International Council of Nurses, representing nurses and nursing in 118 countries, recommended in 1995 that cultural safety be included in the education programmes of all national nursing associations. Just weeks before her death, Irihapeti was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to nursing and Maori health.

Irihapeti was diagnosed as having cancer eight years ago but continued to work at an astounding pace. Her doctorate, *Cultural Safety and Nursing Education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu*, was completed just months before her death.

Irihapeti Merenia Ramsden, nurse and healthcare campaigner New Zealand (b 1946; PhD), d 5 April 2003.

BMJ 2003; 327 doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.327.7412.453 (Published 21 August 2003) Cite this as: BMJ 2003;327:453.

Lis Ellison-Loschmann belongs to the people of Kāi Tahu, Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Ngāti Raukawa and the islands of Ra'iātea and Huahine. She has three children and currently works as a research consultant in Wellington.

REMEMBERING IRIHAPETI (2025)

Lis Ellison-Loschmann

The following excerpts taken from Irihapeti's thesis recall the initial years of beginning her nursing training, while still in her teens during the 1960s. This period along with her later practice as a graduate nurse in hospital and community settings and exposure to indigenous and non-indigenous theorists during her university study, were all core parts that informed and propelled the development of what was to become Cultural Safety education.

There were few Maori in the hospital as employees. I was the only apparent Maori student nurse.....Other Maori were in the kitchen, laundry, garden or working as orderlies. My attempts to blend with the nursing student world were constantly foiled by Maori people who knew that there was a Maori nurse in the hospital. One notable day I was escorting a patient to theatre in what I fondly imagined was my neutral student nurse identity, the orderly pushing the trolley removed his mask, it was my mother's brother. He winked, I laughed. Because our family was well known in the small Maori community, people sought help from one of the few sources of contact they felt that

they knew and could anticipate some degree of trust from in the local health services.[1]

.....I was called upon by relatives, friends and also people whom I did not know, who were Maori. They wanted me to be at the front door when their ill relative was admitted to hospital, to be waiting for them in the Intensive Care Unit, to mediate between them and the staff.....Anecdotally, people expressed extreme anxiety about entering the hospital system. Hospital was viewed as a place where people went to die and was regarded with consistent misgivings. The experience of many Maori of secondary care as a final option after poor access to pakeha sponsored service had led to generalised suspicion of the institutions.[2]

My roles were to anticipate tension and stress, protect, interpret and mediate. To help to create a border, a safety zone, and place where trust could happen. There were legacies at work which I did not fully understand but whose shapes I recognised very well.....Not only was I suddenly responsible for negotiating the invisible boundaries of history and ideology but the tangible borders of the geography of contemporary hospital realms. This was very difficult indeed for a teenage student nurse socialised into the hospital hierarchy.....[3]

In a social climate which contended that there was no difference between Maori and others, and that people should be nursed regardless of who they

1. Irihapeti Ramsden *Cultural Safety and Nursing Education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu: A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing* Victoria University of Wellington 2002: 32-33. https://www.croakey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/RAMSDEN-I-Cultural-Safety_Full.pdf
2. ibid: 33.
3. ibid: 33.

are, it was also very difficult to validate any role as mediator and to justify the rights of Maori people to have access to service which needed in some ways to be different. I did not have a political vocabulary that could explain the needs let alone the rights of the tangata whenua. I needed the proper words to create a praxis to help me understand what was happening around us all.....Maori political status was something of which I had more experience than most young women of my age but I had no way of analysing or explaining the situations of which we were inevitably a part. It was clear to me that different things worked for different people and there was an obligation on the part of those of us with the power to do so, to instigate change.....As a young Maori woman reared in a gerontocratic society I had little choice but to respond to the clear needs expressed by Maori who were almost all older than I was, and as a student nurse I also had few choices. A large part of my life was occupied with avoiding overt racism, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible and being part of my peer group. Negotiating my way through the morass of situations exercised the diplomatic and people skills that I had observed in the aunts and from all the human diversity of my childhood. This experience stood me in good stead later when negotiating for change became a way of life.[4]

There are many dear whanaunga and friends of Irihapeti, who have also now passed including Miriama Evans (Ngāti Mutunga, Kāi Tahu: 1944-2018); Keri Kaa (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou: 1942-2020); Keri Hulme (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe: 1947-2021); Moana Jackson (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongomaiwahine: 1945-2022), Dame Tariana Turia (Ngāti Apa, Nga Rāuru, Whanganui, Ngāti Tūwharetoa: 1944-2025); and Robyn Kahukiwa (Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti, Ngāti Konohi, Te Whānau-a-Ruataupare: 1938-2025). Collectively, they and many others have, and continue to be part of an ongoing reconstruction and transformation for Māori and indigenous peoples worldwide. As critical thinkers and outstanding

4. ibid: 34.

communicators across their respective genres, all of them understood and held the importance of relationship, trust and negotiating borders, drawn from continuous and connected lines of whakawhanaungatanga past and future. In the big and the small everyday ways, they were paramount role models – making sense of the why, identifying the where, and inspiring us in the how to take action. For Irihapeti:

The birth of my son was the powerful catalyst for the intellectual, emotional and political examination of what it meant to be Irakehu in 1973. Later my daughter's 1977 birth consolidated the commitment to extract a viable legacy for them from the colonial chaos. Now I understood the political action of my grandmother in keeping me linked to the land through the little Croxley letters. It was also time to go home regularly to Koukourarata with the children. Realisation that our reserve land was the most marginal in the area and that the rest of the land was in pakeha ownership, and that those pakeha had benefited generationally, and my people were generationally poor, led me to investigate Land Court records and legal activities according to the pakeha law. Although the daughter of an historian I had little knowledge of the political history or the legislative manipulation of the ownership of Maori land and the social, economic, educational and legislative processes which led to the poverty of Maori people.[5]

Irihapeti believed in nurses and their power to make a difference given the large workforce and the extent of their reach into all areas of the system including not only health but across education, justice, housing and welfare. She was always delighted, and unsurprised, when year after year, nurses were consistently voted as the most trusted profession. However, she was also aware of the level of leadership and influence that would be required to bring Cultural Safety into New Zealand nursing and midwifery education and beyond these professions, and what the challenges of this work could mean, for the wider public and political domains as well.

The story of Cultural Safety is a personal story, but also a very public

5. ibid: 40.

one. It is set in neo-colonial New Zealand, but has implications for indigenous people throughout the world. It is about human sameness and human differences, but it is also a story about all interactions between nurses and patients because all are power laden. Finally, although it is about nursing, it is also relevant to all interactions between health care workers and patients.[6]

Having recognised the potential and necessity for change through developing Cultural Safety, Irihapeti would surely have celebrated its adoption by the Medical Council of New Zealand in 2019, sixteen years after her passing, alongside Cultural Safety's ongoing influence for a range of health professional groups both here and internationally. Her writing remains highly relevant in current social and political contexts and can continue to provide us with direction and focus going forward.

I first met Irihapeti as a midwifery student in 1992, the year that Cultural Safety was introduced into the nursing and midwifery education curriculum. I was then fortunate to work as her research assistant some years later while she completed her PhD thesis. Although Cultural Safety was a huge part of my relationship with her, we also connected across many other areas of our lives including: children; grandchildren; extended family; the special place of the middle child; the autumn garden; Koukourarata; art; Rasputin and the Romanov dynasty; the Drifters; asthma; roses; history and historians; dogs; Ngāti Poneke Young Māori Association; matrilineality; books; land; communicating with and about ghosts; leadership; houndstooth coats; mana wāhine; raw fish; a Waitangi Tribunal case for health; Polynesia; red.

6. ibid: 178.

For the laughter, tears, love, bravery, time, insights, trust, memories, questions, silliness, quiet – Irihapeti, thank you.

.....There is not the time to address all the solutions but I have attempted to identify some of the problems. Solutions require time, process, resources and trust. What is important is that there are more and more people who will be responding as I have done to history and to the current economic and social environment in our country. There will be more and more critical analysis. The issues will be about political interaction, meaningful representation on decision making bodies everywhere and negotiation about resource shift. In essence, tino rangatiratanga. If we want to provide a service in which people feel that they can safely approach health workers, then we who provide the service need to know something about ourselves.[7]

Cultural Safety is simply a mechanism which allows the consumer to say whether or not our service is safe for them to approach and use. Safety is a subjective word deliberately chosen to give power to the consumer. Designed as an educational process by Maori, it is given as a koha to all people who are different from service providers whether by gender, sexual orientation, economic and educational status, age or ethnicity. It is about the analysis of power and not the customs and habits of anybody. In the future it must be the patient who makes the final statement about the quality of care which they receive. Creating ways in which this commentary may happen is the next step in the Cultural Safety journey.[8]

Cultural Safety and Kawa Whakaruruhau have arisen from the agony which Maori suffered through the experience of colonisation. Such loss and grief and pain should not be experienced without learning. What we have

7. ibid: 181.
8. ibid: 181.

learned is that we cannot revisit the subjective experience of being deprived of precious things but rather we should learn from the experiences of the past to correct the understanding of the present and create a future which can be justly shared.[9]

9. ibid: 181-182.

BORDERS AND FRONTIERS (1993)

Irihapeti Ramsden

E kore au ngaro, he kākano i ruia mai Rangiatea.
I am not lost, for the seed was sown in Rangiatea.

It is as well to be very careful about profoundly believing in anything. If, as the *Oxford Dictionary* says, 'Belief is to have trust or confidence in' then I must report that there are very few things that human beings do which can be trusted to remain constant.

What can be believed? History. We all know that history has been a matter of editing, of writing in or writing out selected material. In a matter of time, people come to believe the story. Who knows, in the Pākehā chronology, 1066, at Hastings, the arrow may well have lodged in King Harold's bum — but perhaps it served Pākehā history better to locate it dramatically in his eye. Formal Western history is almost devoid of graceless accident. The written tradition is particularly guilty of freezing information and serving it unpalatably to generations of children who continued to regurgi-

tate it for the rest of their lives in many forms, to their own children.

What about freedom? Personal liberty, independence, self-determination, exemption from defect or disadvantage, fear and want? A very expensive order. People work hard to be free of restrictions, but freedom is comparative. Many who consider themselves to be free do so at the expense of the hopes and dreams of others. Interpretations of freedom rarely incorporate the desires of those who are not free and who often provide the labour which purchases the freedoms of others.

Human beings are usually territorial. Whether by learning or by instinct, we are that kind of creature. Our interactions about territory and resources inevitably encroach on the lives of others. We keep doing it. What is freedom?

It is not easy to believe in truth or justice as they stand at present. Experience teaches the wary observer that ideas of truth, justice, civil and human rights are human in origin. Shaped to suit the times. Questions must be asked. How have we arrived at these truths? Whose interests do they serve? Are these truths for everyone? What is real?

It seems to me that reality can only be encountered through accepting the validity of the experiences of others. This means that the truths of others, the history of others, their justice and what it means to them to be free are real to them and are therefore legitimate in the world. The force which enables people to understand the legitimacy, the reality of others is aroha. Aroha therefore is of

itself a force for freedom. Freedom of the human spirit. Freedom to be without fear.

On these islands of ours, remote within Te Moana a Kiwa, reality has been hard-edged and uncompromising lately. A new reality, imported from well beyond the Pacific and backed up by overwhelming technology and numbers and a deadly package of viruses and bacteria, has altered the ancient story of the indigenous Polynesians of Aotearoa.

As we enter the post-colonial phase of the story of these islands, I must examine the times from the only reality that I can truly speak from, my own. As a descendant of the ancient peoples of this place, a member of the tangata whenua with a genetic infusion only a generation ago from the Northern Hemisphere, I have some observations to make.

Life for all those who come from minority or different cultures is often spent on an emotional and spiritual frontier. Identity is a constant series of borders, of crossings and recrossings. The distances, the no-oneslands, the number of borders which one is able to negotiate dictate the way we cope with our frontier life.

Whether you have brown skin or pink, where you come from and who you are dictates many of the complex frontiers of life well before you were born. For some people the border crossings are few. One world or the other may provide a safe and comfortable refuge. For others there are reluctant and unhappy crossings, often without their consent. Yet other people in this colonised land find themselves dwelling in the worlds of neither one nor the other. Neither

fully comfortable in the tight world of the Pākehā nor in te ao Māori.

The parameters of the frontiers are set by the Pākehā education system, legal system, health system, economic system and by urbanisation. They are maintained by the attitude of many of the descendants of the colonists of this country and are derived from New Zealand's colonial past. Justifications for past treatment of indigenous peoples and current unfair outcomes are woven into the mindset of the colonists. They settle into norms if they are not challenged.

As a child, I was constantly carried across borders and back again. My father, born a Victorian, becoming bohemian in the late 1920s and 30s, was vigorously interested in his own culture and an ethnological trapper in that of my mother's. While the end of the story of the Māori was solemnly predicted by Eric's people, he and Merenia Manawatu contributed children to the new world.

The predicted pillow for the dying Māori race was not required. The development of medical technology, particularly in the 1950s, halted the dreadful progress of tuberculosis and other infectious diseases among the Māori and a new reality began.

I was a baby of the mid 1940s. My mother was part of the wartime movement of Māori to the city. Māori people responded to the move to Wellington by combining in their Māoriness. The focus was the war effort. The place was Ngati Pōneke. Kaumātua accompanied some of their young people to the city and formed the nucleus of a new reality for Māori. A city based and apparently pan-Māori

working identity. The impetus of the war work was strong and people shared a common cause. Although the kaupapa was clear, it was never forgotten by these native speakers from an ancient Polynesian culture that they came from the separate nations of their forebears.

As small children we were taught of the songs of the Whanganui River by people from that area. Ngāti Porou were still thundering the haka 'Poropeihana' in protest against the laws prohibiting or restricting the serving of alcohol to the Māori people, not repealed until 1943. We learned songs and language in a range of dialects.

People from Te Tai Rāwhiti, Te Tai Tokerau, Te Waipounamu and Te Tai Hauauru met and merged and began the redefinition of their Māoriness in town. Some returned home and others remained to shape the first generational experience of the meaning of being Māori in a Pākehā urban environment. A major border crossing, and, with my mother I was carried across.

Ours was a frontier home. Our Manawatu grandfather lived with us much of the time. We rarely lacked Kāi Tahu family members based in Wellington or travelling through while my mother was with us.

Later, curiously through the pro-Māori work of my father, my life and that of my brother were filled with hui and tangihana all over the country. People stayed at our home in a time when Māori were not welcome at city hotels. I recall visits to Sir Apirana Ngata in Wellington and at Waiomatatini and Tikitere, where I rode with him at the front of his saddle over the new Māori land projects.

. . .

Several times I accompanied my father to meet Te Puea Herangi, once sheltering from the cold and wind, huddled in a corner outside Parliament Buildings. That was the last meeting for those old friends. Te Puea looked tiny and ill, her face etched with strain. She died soon after.

Māori members of Parliament, Te Rangihiroa (godfather to my brother), Te Kani Te Ua whom we knew as uncle Kani, Charles Bennett, Hone Heke Rankin, the early officers of Māori Affairs, Fred Katene, Tony Tikao-Barrett, Te Uira Manihera, Arini Grennell, Te Aritaua Pitama and his sister Wai, Inia Te Wiata, John Grace, George Hipango and many more filled that house on the frontier. There was much planning for the future — hopes, dreams, plans, strategies to take to Government — planned over our dinner table while we children slept on.

The precious legacy for me has been a nationwide network with their families and the memories of the vigour of those border crossings to tackle the Pākehā Government.

Stress and the eventual separation of my parents carried my brothers and I back again. Our father attempted to secure us into his reality, standards and values. He was always described by his contemporaries as 'doing his best'. As infants, we struck the frontier. I remember the response of some of his own family to these brown children. The word miscegenation is an early one for me. The Prime Minister, Sydney Holland, said to my father in my young presence, 'I didn't know your children had a touch of the tar brush'. More frontier, another crossing, should we bother to look back? Our elder brother and sister, brought up separately, coped with their own borders.

. . .

Small seeds steadily sown produced a crop of wariness, defensiveness and mechanisms to protect the personality of a growing child. There was nothing in my school experience that said it was a good thing to be Māori. There's no hint of the great deeds of the heroes, the nationalists, the great woman who could have been my role models. Instead, stories of Harold in the Pākehā chronology, 1066, who may or may not have impaled himself upon an arrow.

Working quietly across the border was the midwife who delivered my mother. She was Erena Raukura, the younger sister of my grandmother, Irihapeti Tikao. By 1989, she had lived to almost a 100 years old, quietly welcoming home those of her people who made it back over the border, telling them stories, affirming their version of Māoriness, deepening and shaping it with hers, providing a core. It is to Erena Raukura Gillies that many frontier children owe their identity. Her first cousin, Te Uri o Te Pani Manawatu Te Rā, brother of my grandfather was always there, safely over the border.

Another crossing back into the world of the Pākehā and a cross-hatching of movement in and out of the worlds. A period where I began to believe the conditioning of the dominant ethos of the Pākehā that Māori were naturally good at driving heavy machinery, also, in contradiction, that we were indolent, happy, go lucky and irresponsible. Not to be trusted with property. There was a deeper sexual innuendo, one that I did not understand until very much later. The stereotype was continued by those who were well meaning (until probed). They said that our people made wonderful singers and that we arrived after a great migration in seven canoes. They admired the way we could all play the guitar. What else could we believe?

. . .

I became suspicious of all this because I had heard otherwise. I asked my tāua each time I went home to the South Island. Many of my own generation were caught in the land of nobody, propelled there by the Pākehā education system and maintained there by the premature deaths of the libraries and encyclopaedias of our people, the kaumātua.

For us children brought up in town, the borders worked both ways. The rafts across the border rivers were boxes of kūmera, grapefruit, sacks of rīwai, tins of tītī and inaka sent by our people. Produce of the little land and fishing resource that our people had left. Memories cling of collecting boxes of kai from the Dominion bus ,from the inter -island ferry across Raukawa Moana, from the trains which ruled the transport system then. Kete packed with pawhera tuna tied with harakeke for 'our girland her babies', and later, for the children, even with the Pākehā father.

And our metaphors were intact. As a child the language I heard so much of was Māori. Māui's fish lived and so did the Waka from which it was hooked and landed, Te Waka a Māui, the South Island. Everybody travelled 'up' from Tamaki Makaurau to Te Whanganui a Tara. Everybody knew that the tale of the fish, Te Hiku a Māui, was beyond Auckland and that Wellington was located at the head, therefore, it made common sense to travel down to Auckland and up to Wellington.

The mauri of Te Ikaroa a Maui is threatened today. Māui's great fish which dictated the finding of all directions in this country, has been

sanitised, deodorised and regulated to a story for the children of others.

The loss of metaphors is a serious business for any culture. The orderly world of metaphors is understood implicitly by all members. It makes each culture unique.

The powerful Pākehā war metaphor predominates in New Zealand society. Fiscal and human targets abound. Campaigns, operations and promotions deliver service to human beings. Events are measured from war to war. The moral ladder (topped by Their Royal Highnesses) which ordered the lives of the Victorians has been translated in the late twentieth century into the ladder of success. People scramble up toward success or drop their standards as their lives dictate. And what of the Māori metaphors, our fish, the outrigger waka? Can they give order and shape to Māori society as the borders get closer and the frontier narrows?

What people ask, is a Māori ? The question, of course, is fundamentally wrong. Who is Māori is the question. Māori people have been redefined by the Victorian classifiers of the nineteenth century. Great interest has been evinced in the amount of blood contained within people. There has been an expectation that genetic input somehow affects the blood of people, making them Māori or not Māori, or only a little bit Māori.

Never Pākehā, or not Pākehā, or only a bit Pākehā. It has been terribly hard for the descendants of the classifiers to stop doing that over 150 years later.

. . .

If I daughter of a Pākehā man and a Māori woman were relieved of half my blood, I would be a dead human being. My Māoriness is my choice. My identity is my choice. As I have crossed some borders and being forced across others, I have made a series of decisions about how I shall be to myself and to the world about me. I have chosen Māori, although my obviously Polynesian appearance would have left me little choice. That's life on the frontier.

It seems to me that Māoritanga, like all other realities, is personal. That within the outlines of being Māori there exists a horizon of Māoriness which extends from our ancient kaumātua, secure in their world, through the emerging middle class, to our mokopuna with glue bags sleeping under the bridges in the land of nobody. All these Māori realities are legitimate. All have Māori ancestors, all have been subjected to the experience of colonisation, and each has reacted in their own way to the impact of a new culture.

Our time of Māoritanga is exciting. We are recovering from colonisation. Moving our way forward, pushing back the colonial frontier in some areas and getting temporarily stuck in the mire of others.

A small but significant symptom of the early ideas of Judaeo-Christianity and its impact on the gender roles in Māoridom is the refusal of some Māori men to hongi with Māori women. This restricts the greetings of our ancestors to men only, and often Pākehā men at that. The effect as to denigrate the mana of Māori women and therefore of all Māori. An unfortunate border crossing and a dangerous internal game. Violence toward women and children is another symptom of the powerlessness of some of our men

caught on the frontier, controlled by systems not designed to make them strong and confident.

As well as some border confusion, there is clear and powerful redefinition of Māoriness, according to the times. Being Māori has always meant energy, vigour and dynamism. This has translated in the late twentieth century into a growing population of indigenous Polynesians in the South Pacific determined to sustain the values and some of the ways of doing things which gave the culture and healthy shape for well over 1000 years in this country and in all the millennia before that.

The physical combat of the colonial wars has been replaced by an unremitting impetus of negotiation for change in all areas of New Zealand society. Much of this work has been undertaken by the small yet growing number of middle-class Māori trained in Western journalism, medicine, economics and commerce, nursing, history, law, trade unionism and education who remain committed, deeply committed as Māori.

Prediction and policies of integration and assimilation have not worked. Like any sensible people, Māori have utilised the material culture of the Pākehā and have retained what has been possible under the severe impact of colonisation and built upon it to create the people of today. A testament to the hardiness of this old culture.

It is legitimate, indeed imperative, that in the 1990s we challenge the right to ownership and use of, for example, commercial airways previously unknown to both Māori and Pākehā ancestors. That we resurrect and sustain the agreement made between our ancestors in

1840, which assured us of freedom from fear and want. That we take key part in the shaping of the story of this place. We must remain the guardians of our story and do our share of the editing if there is editing to be done. The Māori people have edited the Treaty of Waitangi back into the story of this country.

There are many of us who live permanently on the frontier and others who choose to dwell over one border or another. For me, frontier life is made easier in some ways. I have skills which I can call upon to make the daily skirmishes, the moment-by-moment stresses less painful. My good command of English has made it easier for me to negotiate the well laid mines of Pākehā education, of the health service, of the criminal justice system, the law and all the other institutions brought from other another reality. The price I have paid for this is the loss of the wonderful language of my mother's people which once belonged to me. Now I and many of my family must stand painfully in line behind the children of the colonists to seek the reo in in their educational institutions. Will the Pākehā speak Māori if we become mute? Will they hongi each other if we stop?

And what of the children of the land of nobody? The refugees who move between the established worlds? Those children, now up to three generations in town, who have been cut away from their midwives, who do not know the names and the heroes? They are Ngā Tamariki a Tāne. Although their stories have been edited out, they remain somewhere in the happenings of this land. These children are cutting the deep moko of their own reality. Our future also lies with them. People below the age of 30 make up the greatest number of Māori today. Many of them take their model from another colonised culture. The proudly Black culture of the Rastafarian movement has great appeal for those whose home models

have been stolen or redefined as rebels or radicals and have been deprived of value and dignity.

For all the difficulties of frontier life, another reality will be forged which will impact profoundly on the future of Aotearoa. Gathering of old and powerful threads and weaving with new will create a Māoriness which gives these unique people a purchase on the twenty-first century and well beyond.

Many of the active and committed Māori of the future will undoubtedly be fair of colouring. Some, like the eight -year- old boy recently met, will not look overtly Māori at all. As he stood in the wharekai of his people, dressed in his Swandri, jeans and socks, he described his way of salting tītī and his way of living on the remote Titī Islands of his tīpuna, out of reach of civilization.

A strong and confident child, skilled in the ancient arts of his iwi, easily talking of a way of life now rare among the people of the earth. In the company of his grandmother, he annually visit the islands to take, prepare and preserve muttonbirds. The school principal, had recently threatened him with expulsion if the visit should last over a week.

Pale though he may be this young man is deeply Māori, his way. He will pass his ancestral legacy to his children, despite the limitations of the colonial education system and the genetic deposits from outside the Pacific.

. . .

Who is to say what Māori really is? And who is to say exactly what Māoritanga should be? Can every Māori pluck a titī?

The future of our people cannot be stereotyped by our current versions of Māoriness. Major cultural markers such as the language of our ancestors, the marae and the tangihanga must be retained at all costs, but, under pressure of changing time, many more adjustments are likely. These choices are for Māori to make, they are a matter of mana.

Aotearoa is a complex and ambiguous society in which each individual is the inheritor of the stories of this place. They belong to all of us, and we belong to them, but we need to understand them all very much better if we want to live within this country with ease, and if we wish to create a healthy place for all our mokopuna.

I believe that Māoritanga is located within every Māori regardless of appearance or the story which has brought them to this part of their life and this expression of Māoriness. Māoritanga is a place of wairua and it is integral to the life of each Māori. Its mauri is the force which guarantees us a life of border crossings and frontier existence. My version has been urban and rural, traditional and contemporary, painful on each side of the border, as well as nourishing and satisfying beyond belief within te ao Māori. My arrival and departure will contribute something to the collective experience and some small Māoriness to our story. As will that of every Māori.

How each of us expresses our Māoritanga is the product of a variety of experiences. None of us is today what our ancestors were, and our descendants will not be like us. With aroha, knowledge, strength,

commitment and politicisation our descendants will be Māori, their way.

In the end, I must say that I do believe profoundly in something, perhaps in just one thing. I acknowledge that as long as people insist on retaining their own way of being human, that there will always be borders, frontiers and negotiations. I do have complete faith in the human will to continue and the determination of human beings to express their realities and their truths through the unique framework of their cultures. This is self-evident all over the earth.

Our work as today's version of Māori is the same as that of our tīpuna: to continue our story, to strengthen it according to our times and to add the next chapter. That will be done.

First published in *Te Ao Marama He Whakaatanga o Te Ao — The Reality* (Volume 2): *Regaining Aotearoa — Maori Writers Speak Out*, selected and edited by Witi Ihimaera, contributing editors Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D.S.Long, Reed 1993: 344-351.

Transcribed by Fran Richardson.

Part Fifteen

KERI HULME

1947-2021



Keri at Moeraki. Undated whānau photograph.

. . .

1984: Keri Hulme is a writer, painter and whitebaiter, living at Okarito on the West Coast of New Zealand. She has published short stories in a wide variety of magazines and anthologies and a book of poetry: *The silences between: Moeraki conversations*, (A.U.P/O.U.P). interested in many things — Maoritaka (Kai Tahu, Orkney Island & English ancestry); cetaceans; fishing; drinking (holds the Okarito record for creative consumption of Wilson's); walking tidelines; building (lives in a strange house she built herself); chance and dreams and change, and above all, People. Particularly that wonderful person Papatuanuku. She plans to write more novels but doesn't intend taking so long over the next one. —Written by Keri for the first edition of *the bone people*, where she described the book as:

> A new kind of novel
> *blending reality with dreams
> *melding Maori & Pakeha
> *weaving strange and hurtful pasts into strangely
> bright futures

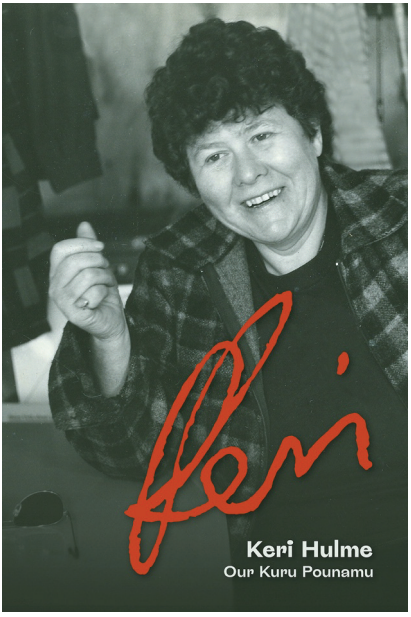
Update 2022: Keri was Ngāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Orkney, Lancashire, a writer, artist and fisher. Her published books are *The Silences Between (Moeraki Conversations)* (poems, Auckland University Press 1982; Janus Press, limited illustrated edition 2016), *the bone people* (novel, Spiral 1984), *Lost Possessions* (fiction, Victoria University Press 1985), *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (short stories, Victoria University Press 1986), *Homeplaces: Three Coasts of the South Island of New Zealand* (autobiography, with photographs by Robin Morrison, Hodder & Stoughton 1989), *Strands* (poems, Auckland University Press 1993), and *Stonefish* (short stories and poems, Huia Publishers

2004). Keri contributed to many other publications. Two of her short stories were filmed: *Hooks & Feelers* (1983) written and directed by Melanie Rodriga;[1] and *Hinekaro Goes On a Picnic and Blows Up Another Obelisk* (1994), written and directed by Christine Parker.[2] — from *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu* 2022.[3]

the bone people won the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction and three major international awards: the Mobil Pegasus Prize, which included US publication and a promotional tour; the 1985 Booker Prize — the first time a book from Aotearoa had won; and the 1987 Italian Chianti Ruffino-Antico Fattore Prize for 'renowned literary works' that best express the values of the environment and nature: the next winner was Nobel Prize-winner Toni Morrison. The book has been translated into many languages, most recently Spanish and Arabic.

Spiral published *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu* after her death to celebrate her life and work.[4] It is a collection of writing and images from those who knew her and includes her in the conversation, with her own art and writing.

1. https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/hooks-and-feelers-1983
2. https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/hinekaro-goes-on-a-picnic-and-blows-up-another-obelisk-1995/credits
3. Spiral Collectives (2022-2024). https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-our-kuru-pounamu PDF, free to read and download.
4. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-our-kuru-pounamu

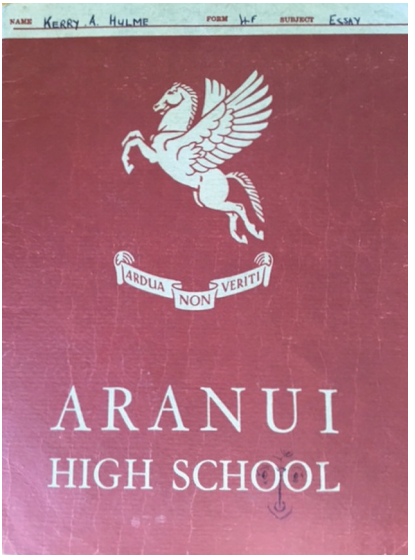


Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu *2022-2024. Cover by Madison Kelly.*

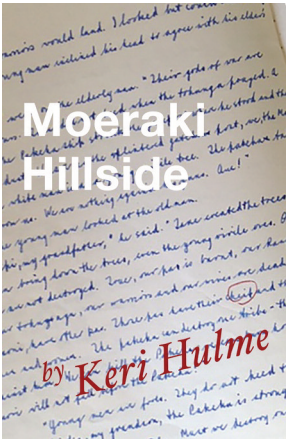
Then *Moeraki Hillside* surfaced, a story Keri wrote at school in her early teens. Its themes foreshadow themes in *the bone people*. We loved publishing *Moeraki Hillside* as a free teaching resource.[5]

And we loved re-publishing it, with *Moeraki Hilltop* — a related story from her last years at school — in a new edition of *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu,* alongside a response to *Moeraki Hillside* from kura kaupapa student Leigh Te Ahuru-Lam Sheung.

5. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/moeraki-hillside-by-keri-hulme



Keri Hulme exercise book. Aranui High School was replaced with Haeata Community Campus.



Keri Hulme Moeraki Hillside *2024. Cover by Biz Hayman.*

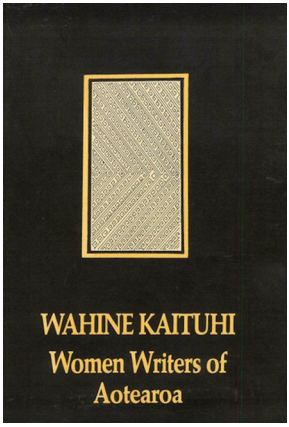
KERI HULME AWARD

In 2022, Keri's whānau, the centre of her world and the kaitiaki of her legacy, sold an original manuscript of *the bone people* at auction and donated the proceeds to the Māori Literature Trust Te Waka Taki Kōrero. The trust established the Keri Hulme Award, presented bi-annually to a mid-career writer who represents the value of perseverance against the odds. Poet essa may ranapiri, Ngāti Raukawa, Highgate, Na Guinnich, was the inaugural recipient,[6] and Becky Manawatu, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoe, Waitaha, received the award in 2025.

6. https://mlt.org.nz/

KERI BY KERI (1985)

Keri sent a beautiful bio to Spiral for inclusion in *Wahine Kaituhi*, in 1985. Spiral published *Wahine Kaituhi* to accompany the group to the 2d International Feminist Book Fair in 1986.[1]



1. See 'Travelling with Arapera' in Section III.



I've never been sure
when I'm smiling
that I'm not also
crying
or wincing:

For the first time in my life
I wear my hair plaited
and it still
curls:

It doesnt matter
if my head is in the clouds
I have stars for feet

and the word for the world
is

Notes Towards A Reconciliation Of

Torso & Head

I dont believe in tomorrow but I write in hope that the story or poem or whatever will be around for a year or two. If I thought it would make any difference, I'd carve the words into the backbone of Te Wahi Pounamu, but I know words are more than sounds, and they survive the decay of larynx & tongue & lips. They survive the decay of paper and stone.

Telling stories, playing with words, is for me, a way of reaching out beyond my narrow life, reaching out beyond my narrow death – it uncrowds my head, pacifies the ghosts, and [in a very small way] makes my life worth my while. So does fishing & drinking & painting & walking beaches & all other forms of dreaming.

Bibliography

The Silences Between [Moeraki Conversations]: published Auckland University Press/ Oxford University Press 1982. A collection of poetry.

"the bone people" : published Spiral, 1984, and Spiral/Hodder & Stoughton, 1985. A novel.

"Lost Possessions" : published Victoria University Press, 1985. A single-volume short story.

The Windeather/Te Kaihau : published Victoria University Press, 1985 A collection of short stories.

It is traditional to finish talking
with a song: this waiata was composed
by Ranui Ngarimu, from Otira, Te Waka O Maui:

Okarito/ te whi tapu o te kotuku
Okarito/ te papa ra o te heu'uru
Taumarumaru i raro mauka Aoraki
Mareparepa te awa a nga inaka
Okarito/Kati Mamoe te hapu e
Okarito/ te tai o Poutini e
Kia ora ra, tena ra koutou katoa

KERI HULME & SPIRAL

THE PAST



Keri, far right, at the Women's Gallery Opening Show *26 Harris Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington 1980.*

Writer, composer and musician Hirini Melbourne (1949-2003 Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu) introduced Keri and Spiral, back in 1979. The next year, Keri contributed to the *Opening Show* at the Women's Gallery — Spiral's umbrella organisation from 1980-2004. After that, Keri corresponded and exhibited with us regularly. Out of that relationship came the collective that published *the bone people* — Irihapeti Ramsden, Marian Evans, Miriama Evans, supported by Spiral stalwarts Anna Keir and Lynne Ciochetto and many others, including writers Joy Cowley, Patricia Grace and Roma Potiki. A fuller history is available in *Keri Hulme Our Kuru Pounamu*.[1]



the bone people launch 1984. L-R back Marian Evans with Penn, Irihapeti Ramsden, Miriama Evans. Front, Keri Hulme. Photograph Stuff.

1. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-our-kuru-pounamu

THE PRESENT



Keri refused over 100 offers to adapt *the bone people* for the screen, because she didn't want a child actor to have to play Simon, the small, abused child at the heart of the book. She waited for technology to catch up, and then offered the animation rights to Spiral.

The project's kaupapa is to safeguard and uphold the mana of this literary taonga in adaptations Keri would love, made by a new generation and for new audiences. Our work has begun with a graphic novel which will become the basis for the animation. Spiral is privileged and honoured to be part of this. As we continue our long conversation with Keri and her work we also deeply appreciate the support of Keri's whānau. Through the whānau, we remain accountable to Keri herself.

. . .

Early development was supported by the Keri Hulme Estate, Manatū Taonga the Ministry for Culture & Heritage, and us at Spiral. We put the whole book into Final Draft, identified possibilities and challenges, commissioned sample character drawings and a detailed report, and confirmed that no single writer or artist can adapt the work alone.

In the next phase of development a group of writers and artists will work together on the book's first chapter, 'Portrait of a Sandal'. This will be both a pilot for the graphic novel and research into safe, ethical and effective processes for completing the work as a collective.[2]

2. https://www.spiralcollectives.org/concept; https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/keri-hulme-the-bone-people-a-graphic-novel

KERI & 'PĀUA SHELL GODS' AT THE WOMEN'S GALLERY 1980

interview with Kanya Stewart of the Auckland Women's Community Video

When Keri came to the Opening Show *at the Women's Gallery she brought with her an installation called 'Pāua Shell Gods'. Kanya Stewart spoke with her while she was setting up the work, and asked her about it. This partial transcript comes from an edit of the interview available online. Images of the poem, as exhibited at the gallery, follow.*

Keri Well, basically it relates to an incident when I was 11. At Moeraki. We were living at Moeraki, we had a mad kind of a summer. This is the first time we had lived down there, and we didn't exactly get on with some of the local children.

We were a bit different being — they were Māori, we were part Māori — ah, and also, you know how it is when a strange tribe of kids comes in. We were the strange tribe. But we found there was also a local strange kid who had some, peculiarly, almost morbid imaginative ideas. And as a result of the collaboration between him and us, we invented what we called 'pāua shell gods'. The whole idea was that you could hit back at adults with these things. You could

envisage terrible things happening to any adult that sort of clocked you one. And you got a nice wee taste of what it was like to be powerful. But it all ended not exactly nicely.

Kanya Tell me about the powerful? How hard was having the power? How did that make you feel?

Well, it was simply a matter that you believed something would work and you invested just a set of ordinary shells with your own rage, your anger. And used that almost as a focusing point, nē. And for a while, it seemed as though you could actually make these things do nasty things to other people. It was quite a strange summer It was the first time that, as a child, I'd become aware of the fact that there's, for instance, a season of nature. You know, there's a season of breeding, a season of making a home, and a season of dying off. And it was all tied up with this somewhat curious adventure into morbidity.

You know it was a small kind of thing to happen, just a bit of childhood. But it stuck round as so many things you do. And I decided to play with it. So I wrote a poem. The small sketches in the pāua shells are adjunct to that poem, explaining all about pāua shell gods.

Kanya Would you like to read some of that?

Keri I'd have to squat down and read it because I haven't memorised it... It actually starts there and wanders round...

. . .

(Camera operator Nancy Peterson suggests Keir might like to read the whole poem.)

Keri I think it would be a very good idea if I didn't actually... (laughter). It'd take about 10 minutes. Alright?...

(Nancy suggests Keri read where it'd be convenient for her (Nancy). Keri moves in that direction.)

Keri Okay right, now if I can cruise round here and not tangle...

(Keri squats down in front of the poem, attached to the side of a plinth, and settles herself.)

Keri Okay, this is the last section of it nē? And it's when we discovered, as it were, our mad Prophet, mad little Prophet had, had vanished. I never actually did find out what happened to him. And it'll sound a little strange coming right towards the end of it I reckon...

Look at what the sea has made
And then
look at the shapes I have given you.
Do not laugh
at the difference.
The lure and shine of this shell is as much my work
as the pāua's.
She also has claim to my bones.

. . .

I don't think we are cut off or separate from anything else, nē, so in that sense I can be part of making a pāua and the pāua can be part of making me. Definitely pāua is part of making me, I eat them a lot.

The roughened scar of pearl
Where the holdfast clenched, grew,
failed.

Shells that battled, ended
battered, broken
beaten in sea wars.
We all lose
the sea war.

We never learned where he went.
The adults merely turned gray
when we asked, and the other gang said
ask your gods.

I have never learned where he went
The ears are silent, unpossessed.

Walking along the wave-line
burning lights to
them out there:
I would ring bells
if they would answer
songs or shore or thunders.

Keri We have what we call a kind of St Elmo's fire — ghost lights — down at Moeraki and when I was a child I always used to think of them as people who lived out there. There's a little line sequence that goes right through it from what island did the seaweed come? Which is actually a Maori proverb meaning 'You're a stranger, declare yourself'.

The blue green sea-glow
has turned to sickly opalescence.
Now I wear a ring whose wink and flicker
Shows me seachange
just the same.
The only survival is to hold on,
or burrow deeper
into the dark.

Now the kelp waves black
and winter-sinister;
now the gulls
huddle one legged against the wind;
Now the trees
bend and moan.

Left dust in the crevice
shrouded with seaweed
they may be
still there.

And that, that is all, dedicated, yeah?

(For Pipi, who never trusted his own shadow
there is one
and
there is one
there is one.)

(Keri gets to her feet.)

It is incomplete nē? It's something I'll continue to work on. For quite a while.

Kanya You'll rework [your poetry] a lot?

Keri Some of it. Some of it comes out so fast and complete that there's, there's no sense in doing anything more to it. Uh you, you know, you'd crunch its shell. Others... Particularly I find things that are connected ah, with the years from when my father died until I'd settled down and become an ersatz parent of my family, which was from when I was about 11 to 14. Anything that happened during that time I find somewhat raw still and needs to be worked through a few times before I find it easy.

Kanya Do find though that that pain is valuable?

Keri Well it must be I guess because... Um, I don't know if 'valuable'. I've never been convinced that pain is necessarily a good thing. I've never been convinced that it helps you learn for instance.

I think you learn as much from, or more, from joy, from calm observation, than you do from grief or upheaval.

But auē... What I'd like to, one of these days, is have is the whole range and cycle of what I've done because... Primarily for myself, nē, it'll make a pattern, make a sense.

There were a whole lot of other things connected with that summer. My mother had an extremely bad time giving birth to my youngest sister. And she had nearly died. And five months later my father had died and this of course had been profoundly disturbing for her and she was still working through her own set of grief.

Kanya Are you the oldest?

Keri Yes, I'm the oldest in my family.

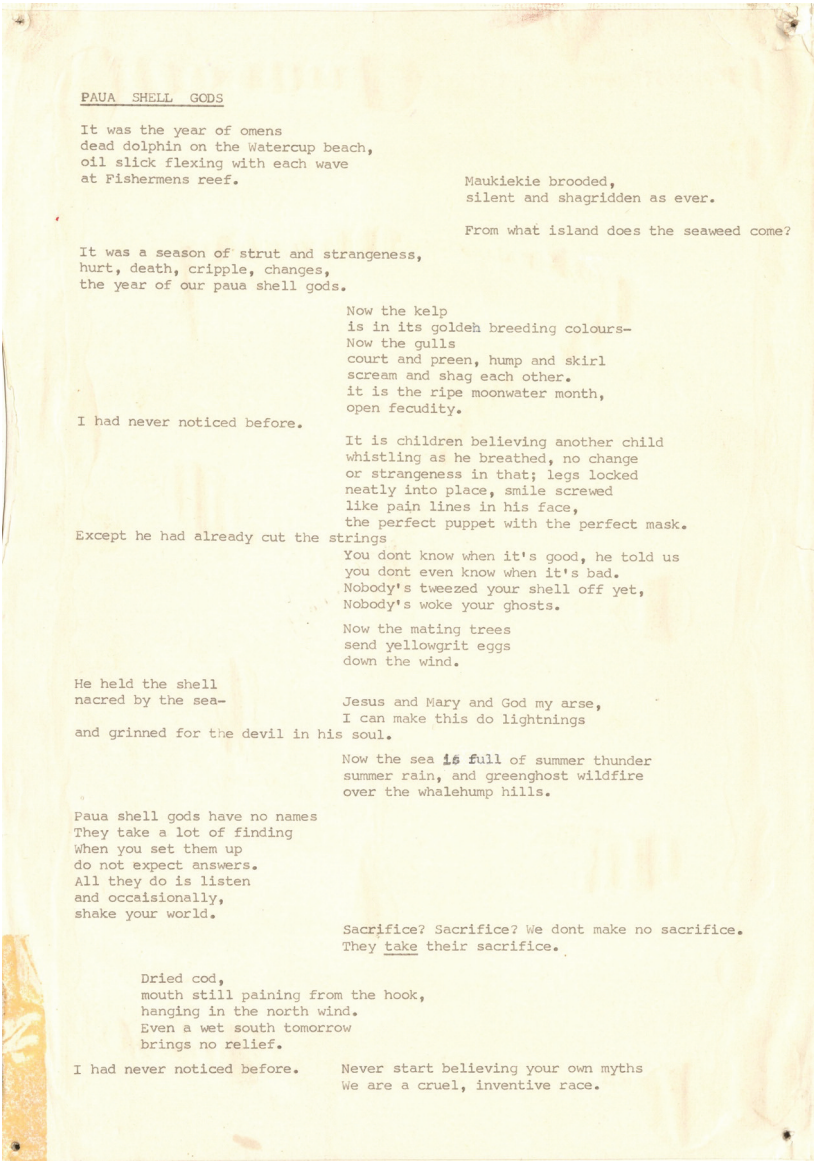
Kanya (inaudible)

Keri It wasn't a burden that you actually realised was there. It was just, you know, okay you're eldest, you've got five brothers and sisters. My mother is close enough in age to be my sister. You know, she's nineteen years older than I am. And ah, we fit together well. We had a lot of support from, particularly, my mother's family. Her brothers and her mother of course, you know (clasps hands together) like that. And I think that without that kind of support I certainly could have turned out a fairly hairy and I don't mean this (hands in hair) kind of a character. You know, I got very anti-social

and aside from going on strange, what essentially were power trips because we could, as well as us children feeding our bad energies through those [pāua shell gods], I was also learning to control people by doing this, you know, by playing on, as it were, people's imagination and their fears.

But you know, there was sufficient, family aroha, sufficient support, to get over it.

Filmed at Opening Show, The Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand January 1980 by Carole/Kanya Stewart & Nancy Peterson,from Auckland Women's Community Video. Edited 2022 by Kathleen Winter and transcribed by Annie Collins.



PAUA SHELL GODS

It was the year of omens
dead dolphin on the Watercup beach,
oil slick flexing with each wave
at Fishermens reef.

Maukiekie brooded,
silent and shagridden as ever.

From what island does the seaweed come?

It was a season of strut and strangeness,
hurt, death, cripple, changes,
the year of our paua shell gods.

Now the kelp
is in its goldeh breeding colours-
Now the gulls
court and preen, hump and skirl
scream and shag each other.
it is the ripe moonwater month,
open fecudity.

I had never noticed before.

It is children believing another child
whistling as he breathed, no change
or strangeness in that; legs locked
neatly into place, smile screwed
like pain lines in his face,
the perfect puppet with the perfect mask.

Except he had already cut the strings

You dont know when it's good, he told us
you dont even know when it's bad.
Nobody's tweezed your shell off yet,
Nobody's woke your ghosts.

Now the mating trees
send yellowgrit eggs
down the wind.

He held the shell
nacred by the sea-

Jesus and Mary and God my arse,
I can make this do lightnings

and grinned for the devil in his soul.

Now the sea ~~is~~ full of summer thunder
summer rain, and greenghost wildfire
over the whalehump hills.

Paua shell gods have no names
They take a lot of finding
When you set them up
do not expect answers.
All they do is listen
and occaisionally,
shake your world.

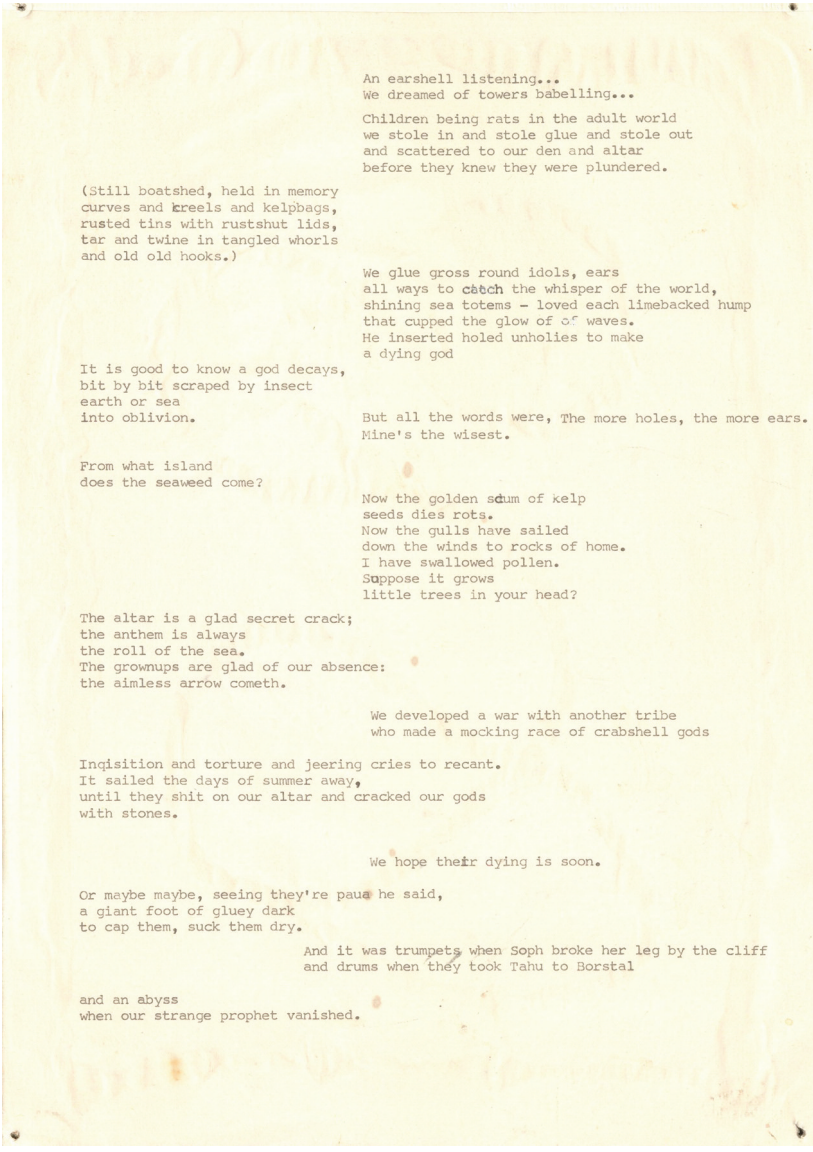
Sacrifice? Sacrifice? We dont make no sacrifice.
They take their sacrifice.

Dried cod,
mouth still paining from the hook,
hanging in the north wind.
Even a wet south tomorrow
brings no relief.

I had never noticed before.

Never start believing your own myths
We are a cruel, inventive race.

p1 from the Women's Gallery Pāua Shell Gods *installation January 1980.*



An earshell listening...
We dreamed of towers babelling...

Children being rats in the adult world
we stole in and stole glue and stole out
and scattered to our den and altar
before they knew they were plundered.

(Still boatshed, held in memory
curves and creels and kelpbags,
rusted tins with rustshut lids,
tar and twine in tangled whorls
and old old hooks.)

We glue gross round idols, ears
all ways to catch the whisper of the world,
shining sea totems - loved each limebacked hump
that cupped the glow of of waves.
He inserted holed unholies to make
a dying god

It is good to know a god decays,
bit by bit scraped by insect
earth or sea
into oblivion.

But all the words were, The more holes, the more ears.
Mine's the wisest.

From what island
does the seaweed come?

Now the golden scum of kelp
seeds dies rots.
Now the gulls have sailed
down the winds to rocks of home.
I have swallowed pollen.
Suppose it grows
little trees in your head?

The altar is a glad secret crack;
the anthem is always
the roll of the sea.
The grownups are glad of our absence:
the aimless arrow cometh.

We developed a war with another tribe
who made a mocking race of crabshell gods

Inqisition and torture and jeering cries to recant.
It sailed the days of summer away,
until they shit on our altar and cracked our gods
with stones.

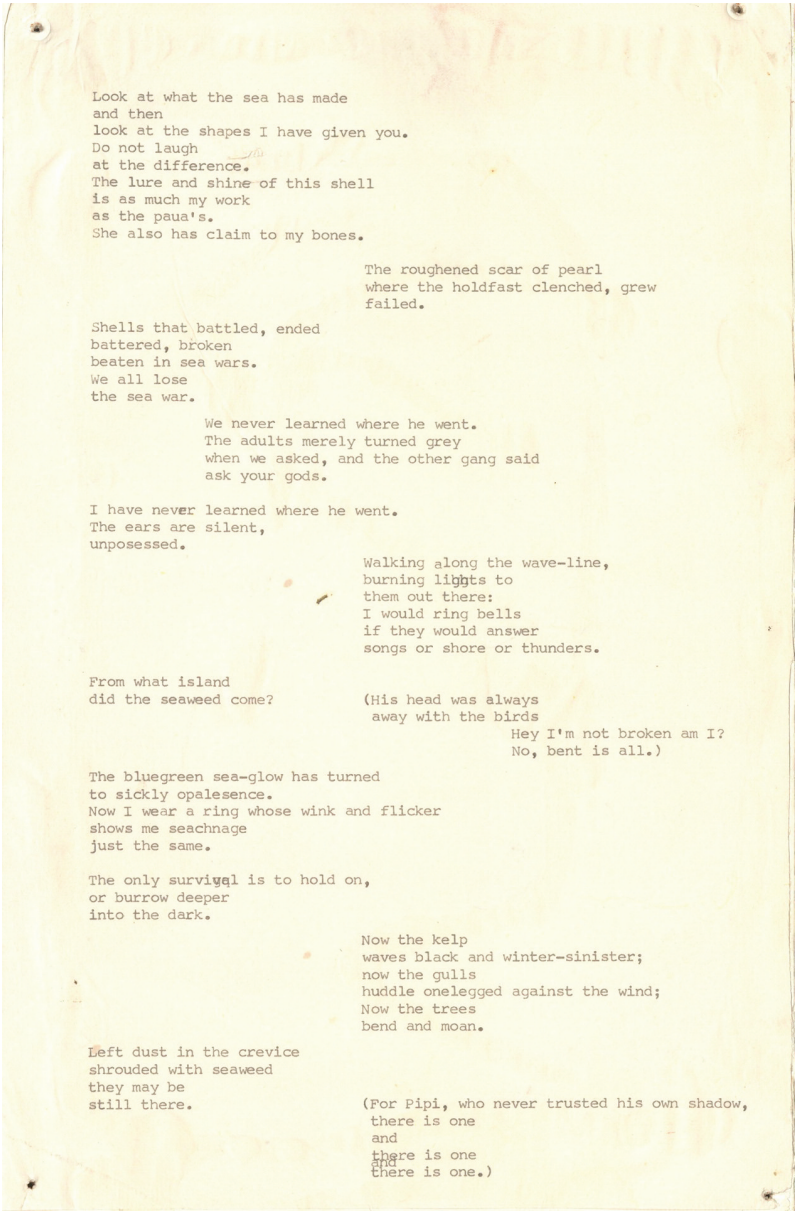
We hope their dying is soon.

Or maybe maybe, seeing they're paua he said,
a giant foot of gluey dark
to cap them, suck them dry.

And it was trumpets when Soph broke her leg by the cliff
and drums when they took Tahu to Borstal

and an abyss
when our strange prophet vanished.

p2 from the Women's Gallery Pāua Shell Gods *installation January 1980.*



Look at what the sea has made
and then
look at the shapes I have given you.
Do not laugh
at the difference.
The lure and shine of this shell
is as much my work
as the paua's.
She also has claim to my bones.

The roughened scar of pearl
where the holdfast clenched, grew
failed.

Shells that battled, ended
battered, broken
beaten in sea wars.
We all lose
the sea war.

We never learned where he went.
The adults merely turned grey
when we asked, and the other gang said
ask your gods.

I have never learned where he went.
The ears are silent,
unposessed.

Walking along the wave-line,
burning lights to
them out there:
I would ring bells
if they would answer
songs or shore or thunders.

From what island
did the seaweed come?

(His head was always
away with the birds
Hey I'm not broken am I?
No, bent is all.)

The bluegreen sea-glow has turned
to sickly opalesence.
Now I wear a ring whose wink and flicker
shows me seachnage
just the same.

The only survival is to hold on,
or burrow deeper
into the dark.

Now the kelp
waves black and winter-sinister;
now the gulls
huddle onelegged against the wind;
Now the trees
bend and moan.

Left dust in the crevice
shrouded with seaweed
they may be
still there.

(For Pipi, who never trusted his own shadow,
there is one
and
there is one
there is one.)

p3 from the Women's Gallery Pāua Shell Gods *installation January 1980.*

THE KUIA & THE SPIDER TE KUIA ME TE PŪNGĀWERWERE

Keri Hulme

Book Review

The kuia and the spider/Te kuia me te pungawerewere, by Patricia Grace, illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa, translated into Maori by Syd Melbourne with Keri Kaa. Longman Paul/Puffin Books, in association with Kidsarus 2, 1982.

When is fantasy, not fantasy?

Well, take one of the main characters in Pat Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa's *The kuia and the spider*—

She's slightly stout, lined face, greying hair. She wears full white aprons and shapeless comfortable black slippers. Everybody's Nana. Well, everybody's Maori Nana because the kuia is indisputably a ... kuia. Her kitchen and house are painted in warm primary colours.

There is a big window overlooking a sunny beach, and there is always a kettle or pots on the glowing range.

What could be more ordinary, less fantastic, than this?

Aha!

"In the corner of her kitchen was a spider, who made webs."

And one day, the spider called out to the kuia— whoops. About this stage, you discover the kuia and the spider have been having a running battle for years. And the fantasy begins, in a gloriously easy fashion, with a challenge by the spider,

"E kui, he pai ake aku mahi i au."

I won't tell any more of the story — Pat Grace has done this in timeless supple prose. (Keri Kaa and Syd Melbourne have made a translation into equally sinewy and beautiful Maori.) I recommend, right now, that you obtain a copy— it's only $10.95 in the hardback English edition. Why not complement that, do yourself a favour, by buying the Maori version too? ($4.95 in paperback).

But I would like to comment on some aspects of this excellent children's story. The first thing that struck was the *Maoriness* of it, not simply the kuia herself, but all the subtle touches in the pictures and the words. The decorated gourd on the mantelpiece by the

clock. The kits and strips of flax and the sleeping mats immediately *there* in the kitchen, not obtrusively, but an obviously intrinsic part of the room. The flax lapping the kuia's porch. The marae over the road from the kuia's house, and the way the old lady and the children go to bed (not in the kitchen I hasten to add).

And the second thing was the character of the spider (in the English version he is male, which makes all my nice comparisons to the old Greek story of Arachne and Athene completely redundant, but in the Maori, thanks to non-sexist pronouns, you can make the spider female or male.)

The spider has fierce pupilless yellow giglamp eyes (one of my smaller cousins thought that would be very frightening at night – "but when you're asleep you've got your eyes closed so you probably wouldn't see that?"). ("You never know, kid.")

Thanks to Kahukiwa's painting, you can feel the velvet of the spider's subtley-banded grey body, magnificently tentacular legs. And the webs are works of art (one of the kids I tried the books out on pointed how like the Southern Cross the collection of feasting spider mokopuna were. Smart-arse brat, *that* one.).

It is a spiderly spider, being as normal and ordinary a spider, even to the transparent spiderlings, as you could wish for. Like the kuia.

But they quarrel. They squabble, they argue. You know reading it aloud or otherwise, that their fighting is meat and drink to them. It is, happily, a bickering, a row that goes on until the end of their lives.

Did you know that words for 'an enemy' in Maori are 'he hoariri' (i.e. an angry friend)?

Anyway, you can hear these two scolding and abusing one another long after the story is finished.

Hoha!
Taureka!
He pai ake aku mea!
Kao! Kao! Kao!

and loving every minute of it.

Children I read it to, or let them read for themselves, had many favourable reactions. One of the smaller ones got fascinated by the kuia's jewellery. "E look! Now it's a shark tooth!" One of the older ones, whom I'd thought too old for it at 11, was delighted with the appearances of the kuia's grandchildren. "They must be a bunch like us, all mixed up." By which she meant the carefully shown fact that some of the mokopuna had Pakeha parents. My niece was a bit young: she just drooled and poked loving fingers at the succulent exciting colours. Well, when you're a year or so older, Mereani ...

I don't think anything like *The kuia and the spider, Te kuia me te pungawerewere*, has been published in New Zealand before. Everybody is to be congratulated, Pat Grace foremost and Robyn Kahukiwa; Keri Kaa and Syd Melbourne; Kidsarus and Longman Paul lastly, for recognising a good thing when it was offered to them.

Some last words— dear people, be two-tongued! Maori isn't a hard language to pronounce (and thanks to the macrons used in *Te kuia me*

te pungawerewere you'll know where to put an elongated vowel sound) and you'll find small children particularly enjoy the sound even when they don't know the meaning, trouble is, they will nag you to translate. And once you've given them

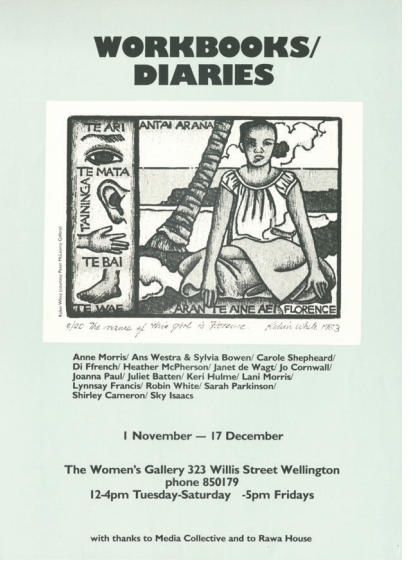
Piki ana ratou i nga pakitara ma runga i nga tukutuku tawewe.
Rere atu ki tena pakitara
rere mai ki tenei pakitara
tarere ana i nga tukutuku tawewe

with that implicit chant, are they, or you, going to be satisfied with "They went climbing all over the kitchen on the climbing webs./They went swinging from wall to wall on the swinging webs."?

This is a book I will give with gladness and gratitude to the younger children in my family group. Kia ora koutou katoa.

First published in *Spiral 5* 1982.

KERI & 'WORKBOOKS/DIARIES' 1983



Workbooks /Diaries Women's Gallery 323 Willis Street Te Whanganui-a-Tara 1983. Poster probably by Sarah Parkinson.

Keri exhibited regularly at the Women's Gallery and contributed an her installation of covers for *the bone people to Workbooks/Diaries*. I

wish now we could read the texts she sent with them; and that we'd worked more closely with her and her images — not possible when she lived at Ōkarito, 600 km away, and before the internet and none of us had time and money for travel.



Keri's installation Women's Gallery 323 Willis Street 1983. Photograph ATL Spiral archives.

A MYSTERY YOU MAY BE ABLE TO HELP WITH

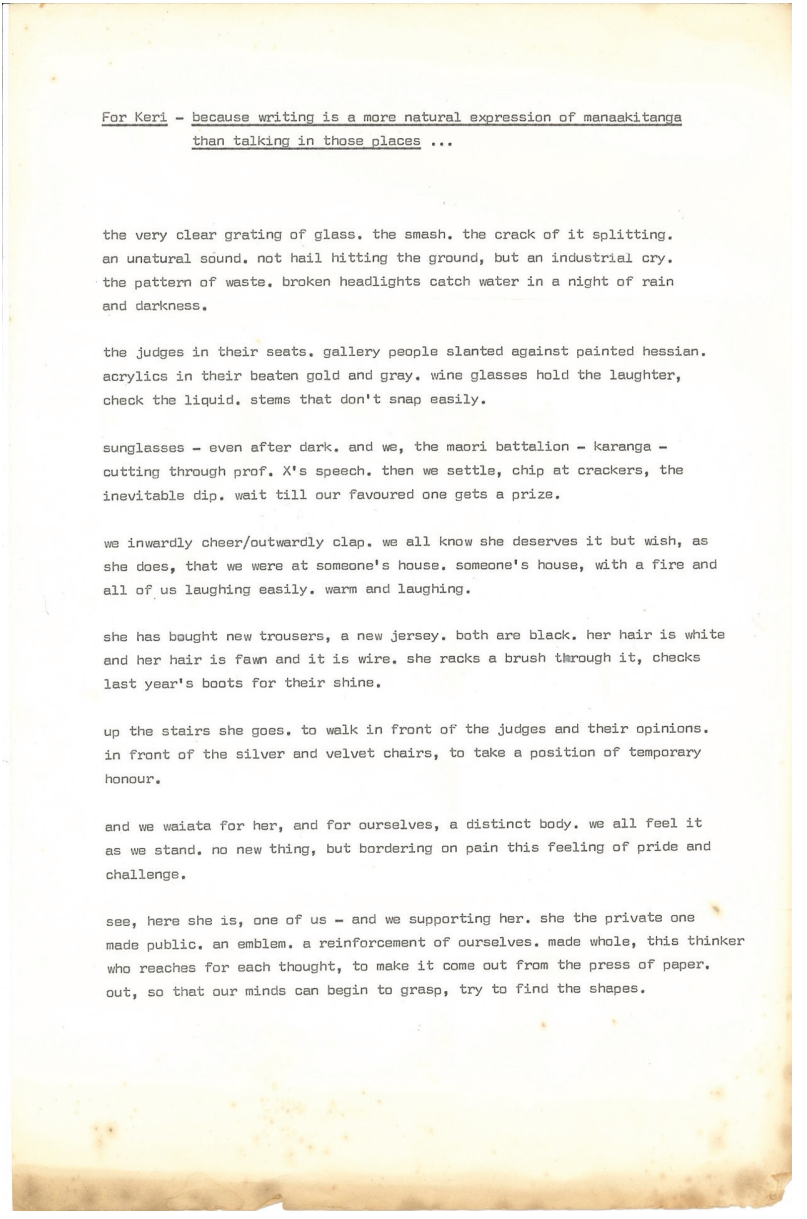
Anonymous



Keri wins the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction 1985. Photograph Stuff. L-R Miriama Evans, Marian Evans, Keri Hulme, Irihapeti Ramsden.

Among Keri's archives is a prose poem — probably about the night Keri won the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction in 1985 — whose

author is unidentified. Some writers have been 'eliminated' for various reasons, for instance because they did not own a car. If you're reading this and you wrote it, or know who did, please get in touch.



For Keri - because writing is a more natural expression of manaakitanga than talking in those places ...

the very clear grating of glass. the smash. the crack of it splitting. an unatural sound. not hail hitting the ground, but an industrial cry. the pattern of waste. broken headlights catch water in a night of rain and darkness.

the judges in their seats. gallery people slanted against painted hessian. acrylics in their beaten gold and gray. wine glasses hold the laughter, check the liquid. stems that don't snap easily.

sunglasses - even after dark. and we, the maori battalion - karanga - cutting through prof. X's speech. then we settle, chip at crackers, the inevitable dip. wait till our favoured one gets a prize.

we inwardly cheer/outwardly clap. we all know she deserves it but wish, as she does, that we were at someone's house. someone's house, with a fire and all of us laughing easily. warm and laughing.

she has bought new trousers, a new jersey. both are black. her hair is white and her hair is fawn and it is wire. she racks a brush through it, checks last year's boots for their shine.

up the stairs she goes. to walk in front of the judges and their opinions. in front of the silver and velvet chairs, to take a position of temporary honour.

and we waiata for her, and for ourselves, a distinct body. we all feel it as we stand. no new thing, but bordering on pain this feeling of pride and challenge.

see, here she is, one of us - and we supporting her. she the private one made public. an emblem. a reinforcement of ourselves. made whole, this thinker who reaches for each thought, to make it come out from the press of paper. out, so that our minds can begin to grasp, try to find the shapes.

Poem for Keri by unknown author [1984] p1.

so many people here. people in the 'industry'. that is what they call it - 'the industry' - of what? of books and words, of production and design, of publishing and marketing. the printers, the heads of companies, the arts council representatives, the internal affairs department, and the maori section - more diverse but just as visible.

there are signs of unexpressed desperation. the things we wanted to say but didn't. the people you want to talk to but can't. the lack of time. so many faces, so much competition , (what was it you really came for?)

certainly not the sliced ham on sticks, not the cleaved tomatoes, not only the alcohol.

introductions become meaningless in the rush.

such a bounty of talent. apparently everything is happening.

the official noises turn off. a slow drain to the cars, some catch up with friends, even an author they admire.

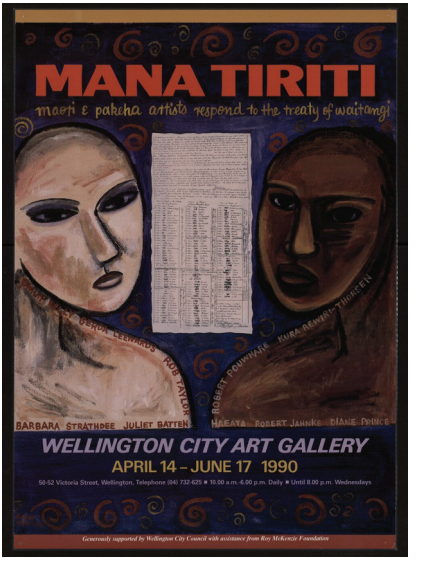
you can look at paintings in the gallery. inspect each detail of the blue blue lawnmower as it shaves the pink pink lawn. see the heroic bust of a maori maiden cast in bronze. capture art.

i do not say goodbye. i cannot speak. i press the arms of three people, nod. i am going. past the mezzanine, out of the heavy doors, out to the wheeled machine, my little trial of terror.

Poem for Keri by unknown author [1984] p2.

‘MANA TIRITI: THE ART OF PROTEST AND PARTNERSHIP’

Keri Hulme



EXHIBITION AND BOOK SHOW THE POWER OF ART

MANA TIRITI: The Art of Protest and Partnership (Daphne Brasell Associates, pb 24.95) Reviewed by Keri Hulme.

. . .

This is a power book. It concerns that power which is inherent and resident in the Treaty of Waitangi. It is a graphic demonstration of the power of Art (the capital isn't used lightly) — to provoke, to show outrage, to provide insight via a witty and womanly statement, to coin startling images that both enlighten and linger.

There are many who would say that the mana of the Treaty has been tramped on so often that the only response left open to Maori artists is anger, and to Pakeha artists, acknowledgment of failings. I am not of that company. And, because I am not of that company (and because, regrettably, I never saw the *Mana Tiriti* exhibition that gave birth to this book) I find this work particularly exciting and challenging.

Protest and Partnership: 26 individual speakers and artists, plus Haeata (the Maori women artists collective) and Project Waitangi contributed to this sesquicentennial exhibition. The variety of their approaches, as documented here, is extraordinary; Taylor's brooding yet iconic canvas; Prince's stalky and defiant Tent Embassy; Pouwhare's stunning neon manatukutuku; and mingled with this richness of pictorial and sculptural and representational art, the oratory of Henry, Duituturaga, Simpson, Durie and Jackson. You may feast your eyes on the art, and then give your mind's ears a treat with the words.

There were a great many occasions of joy and learning during 1990, a lot of them taking place in small communities. *Mana Tiriti*, the exhibition, was one of the more important events that took place, and thankfully it wasn't ephemeral. *Mana Tiriti*, the book, is highly

recommended to you if you are at all interested in the development of Aotearoa, if you find the growing and continuing partnership between Maori and Pakeha of moment.

Incidentally the book is well laid out, colour reproduction is good, and the editorial work is excellent — he mahi tino pai e hoa ma. Kia ora koutou katoa.

First published in the *Evening Post* 28 June 1991.

Part Sixteen

SHARON ALSTON

1948–1995



Sharon Alston 1986. Photography by Adrienne Martyn.

Sharon was, as Aorewa McLeod wrote in an obituary published in Wellington's *Evening Post* and in *Broadsheet*—

> ... a strong, talented artist, yet exhibited only spasmodically as much of her energies went into political activities and the support she gave to other artists. She put her art into causes. She never lived in a house she owned or travelled overseas.

Aorewa quoted from Sharon's farewell letter to her friends—

> Why haven't I achieved very much? I haven't honoured my creativity; I've not carved out a fabulous niche for myself in this world. I've failed. Not a lot of time left to be a famous painter.

Aorewa also referred to Sharon's passion, compassion, humour and style as qualities which she gave to the lesbian community: 'In the lesbian community', McLeod wrote, '[Sharon] carved out a "fabulous niche" for herself'.

Yes. She did.



Nic Moon receives an award in memory of Sharon at Outreach Gallery, Auckland in the 1990s. Behind Nic, from left, Robbie Champtaloup, Lainey Cowan, Jane Zusters and Jo Crawley. Behind Jo, a little group of Women's Gallery-associated posters by Sharon and others, and one with her as a model. Photograph by Allie Eagle.

GRAVITY CAN GET YOU DOWN

Sandi Hall

"Why didn't you clean it up?" I demanded querulously, looking at the arc of iridescent blue, shredded peacock feathers around my feet. They had once been a lovely half-moon fan, gift from a long-time friend, which I had mounted on the outside of my bedroom door.

My flatmate's eyes sparkled with amusement. "I thought you should see it for yourself", replied Sharon Alston. "Hitch did it, of course, but I don't think he's sorry." Her little chuckle was so infectious, I found myself starting to grin. "He had the *best* time! He must have jumped up to them a dozen times before I wondered what the thumps were and came to see."

Well, who can be angry at a cat, especially a grey stripey tabby like Hitch, who Sharon had found cowering under her van on a trip to Christchurch, her family home. Hitch was still a kitten then, probably about five months old and terrified. But feisty and fighting to survive. Sharon, seeing another warrior in the wars of Life, immedi-

ately felt a bond. “You can hitch a ride with me, matey”, she murmured as she scooped him up. She'd been wanting another pet ever since Basil Brush, her tattered elderly dog, had ambled off to the long playing fields of the sky.

Sharrie and I had been friends for a long time before we became flatmates at a spacious house in Grey Lynn's Baildon Road. I first met her in Christchurch, at an after-woman's-concert party in someone's house. Nancy Kiel, rock goddess, had sung, mooned over by Diane Cadwallader, she of the amazingly good ears, able to hear every note's perfect pitch.

As lesbians in the newly-legal days following the passing of the 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Bill (Thank You, Fran Wilde), our lesbian rainbow community became more visible. Here in Auckland, the Alexandra Tavern (aka The Alex) opened under the lesbian ownership of Elaine Timperley and her partner, also a Sharon. It swiftly became *the* place for a-lesbian-about-town to go on a Friday or Saturday night. Regular 'treats' were *Red Beryl,* with Hilz King, Clare Bear, Jess Hawk Oakenstar; *Vibraslaps,* with Mary (Miriam) During, Sarni Darragh, and a great drummer whose name has gone.[1] All of these knew Sharon Alston, probably long before this once-Canadian woman reached Aotearoa's embracing shores.

I came to utterly love Sharrie the more I came to know her. For one, she was deeply attractive in a singular way – her merry eyes, her curly mouth so frequently smiling, her slim body a canvas for her

1. Clare O'Leary - saxophone, bass, drums; Gina Cole - guitar, vibraslap; Dons Savage - vibraslap; Dianne Civil - drums, guitar, bass; Sarni Darragh - keyboards, percussion https://www.audioculture.co.nz/profile/vibraslaps

unique clothing style. She never had much money ("but am not poor, by any means. I've seen real poverty") but her clothes were always interesting, worn with flair, found by her discerning eyes in second-hand shops.

But it was her work which made me come to deeply value my increasing friendship with her. She drew cartoons for *Broadsheet*, where I was on the collective – cartoons vivid and truthful, painful but making one laugh. She developed her art until she felt comfortable with big canvases, like the ones she painted for her then-partner, Robbie Champtaloup, near the end of her horribly short life.

When I admired a painting *Which Way?*, inspired by her then-relationship with Maggie Eyre, she gave it to me. It's on my bedroom wall, a good-size painting perhaps 4 ft by 2 and a half (in old measures!). A rushing, bounding waterfall runs down the right-hand side of the painting. In front of it is half-naked Maggie, hands thrust up into the summer air, smiling as she stands at the brink of water and air. Sharon, as a fish, jumps in the water beside her. The painting still feels fresh and vital, as it did all those years ago when, eyes laughing and a bit shy, Sharrie put it into my hands on my birthday. Her proper 'Art', as this painting shows, makes clear Sharon is a talented leader in lesbian social comment via Aotearoa's art.[2]

There was a humanity about Sharrie that I rarely find, which had to do with the life-wars she endured in her girlhood. The father who persistently tried to fuck her, and the mother who had suicided on

2. I have gifted the painting to the Charlotte Museum in my Will. The Museum is in Howe Street Freemans Bay Tāmaki Makaurau. https://www.charlottemuseum.co.nz/

alcohol and pills, the memory of which Sharrie later turned into an artwork exhibited at the fabulous and too-short lived Women's Gallery in Wellington.



Sharon Alston *Mothers* installation 1981. Detail.

These experiences probably led directly to Lake Alice, where she underwent the iniquitous 'sleep therapy' the State imposed, trying to 'cure' her of her sexual preference. There were her two sisters, one whose heroin-addiction began on a school playground, another trying to find ease in the illegal marijuana crop lives of Golden Bay. And a brother who hated her, probably because she was a pattern-card he could not equal.

Once, sitting in the tussock grass of Long Bay's dunes and watching Basil Brush amble in the waves, I asked her how she kept so happy. Her grey eyes flashed. She gave a wee chuckle, then said “Well,

gravity can get you down, Sandi. Can't enjoy being alive if you're down".



Sharon Alston Which Way? *1980 55 x 43cm acrylic on board. Signed and dated. Photographed by Annie Mein.*

MORE THAN A FOOTNOTE: MAGGIE EYRE

I remember redhaired Maggie as a vibrant, wild-haired woman earning her living by running classes in 'personal communications'. I remember her joie de vivre as she investigated what the newly alive feminist community offered, which included validating relationships with women. Sharon, herself becoming well known for her activism, was drawing many an admiring glance.

As shown in last month's re-screening of the 1985 film *In Joy* by Christchurch filmmaker Stephanie Beth, Maggie created closed workshop events in which women could freely express themselves. At the heart of *In Joy* are scenes filmed in the bush, with women painting their nude faces and bodies and moving, almost trance-like, to the beat of small drums. Maggie later became a professional actor.

Maggie remembers Sharon drawing and painting most days.

> “I was sometimes her model and happy to be her muse. I admired Sharon's courage to be out as a lesbian, and her gay activism made an impact on my life. Sharon opened a door to feminism in the mid-70s-early 80s, and to this day I credit her for encouraging me to fight for justice and challenging the status quo! Sharon not only introduced me to the world of public protesting and demonstrations for women's equality, she also influenced my passion for political theatre. We remained dear friends until her death in 1995.”

Sandi Hall is an award-winning sci-fi and fantasy writer whose books are widely available in libraries and who revels in the choices Aotearoa has offered her via feminism. 'I've just written a new play, *Shooting Stars*, very feminist, in reaction to Roe v Wade. I was pleased to find my feminist anger is still bright and hot!'

SHARON ALSTON & SPIRAL



Women's Gallery Collective 23 Harris Street Wellington 1981. L-R standing: Sharon Alston, Louise Genet, seated: Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Isaac Leniston–Howell, Marg Leniston, Hilary King, Anna Keir. Image courtesy Creative New Zealand, Arts Council of New Zealand.

According to the National Library catalogue, Sharon Alston was—

> ...a political cartoonist, designer, artist and illustrator for the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* from 1973 for almost 20 years [and] a lesbian feminist, involved in gay liberation activities in Auckland during 1970's and 1980's.

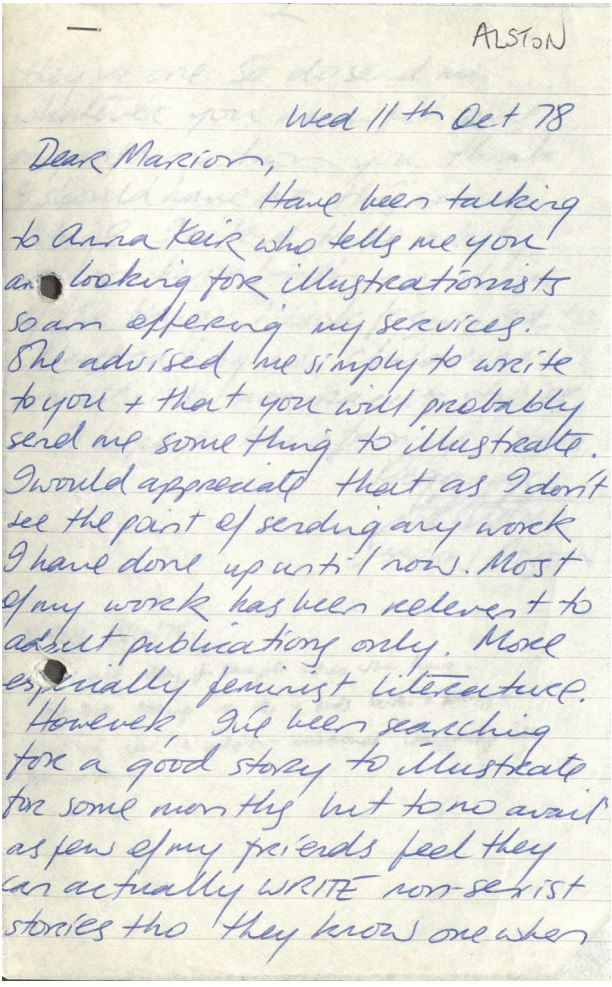
Sharon also toured with, and made the posters for, the Back Street Theatre Group in 1976, when it took a wide-ranging show, emphasising a pro-choice message on abortion, to more than 25 centres from Auckland to Invercargill.[1] Sand Hall, who did their publicity, remembers that after three months of rehearsing the group of nine, mostly lesbians, travelled round the motu in a donated bus, and were billeted and fed by the women in the towns and cities they visited.[2] They didn't charge for admittance and half the event was performance, the other half conversation with the audience.[3]

Sharon died at a relatively early age, of cancer: I've often wondered whether the stress of activism and the strategies used in attempts to silence them contributes to the early deaths of some activists who die of cancer.

1. This was in response to the 'Gill Bill' which sought to entrench the law that limited the provision of abortion services to licensed hospitals https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_in_New_Zealand
2. Those in the group included Deb Filler who did the music, Maggie Eyre, Ruth Pollard, Sand Hall and Sharon. Sand remembers that Renée, then living in Wairoa agreed to organise the event there, including billeting. — Sand Hall personal communication October 2025, when Sandi Hall introduced me to Sand Hall.
3. Sand also remembers that in Ōtautahi Christchurch Allie Eagle attended with bandaids on her face. When asked what that was for she replied 'The battering of patriarchy'. Personal communication October 2025.

SHARON & KIDSARUS 2 & THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

Sharon's first connection to Spiral was via the Kidsarus 2 children's picture books project, in 1978.



ALSTON

Wed 11th Oct 78

Dear Marion,

Have been talking to Anna Keir who tells me you are looking for illustrationists so am offering my services. She advised me simply to write to you + that you will probably send me something to illustrate. I would appreciate that as I don't see the point of sending any work I have done up until now. Most of my work has been relevent to adult publications only. More especially feminist literature. However, I've been searching for a good story to illustrate for some months but to no avail as few of my friends feel they can actually WRITE non-sexist stories tho they know one when

Nothing came of this, though Sharon sent a portfolio and I did meet with her at the United Women's Convention in Hamilton in 1979. Eighteen months later Anna Keir invited Sharon to join the Women's Gallery as a co-ordinator.

According to the National Library catalogue, Sharon was artist in residence at the Women's Gallery 1980-1983, which is both true and not true. Yes, like her fellow co-ordinator Anna, Sharon was an artist, and like Anna and the other co-ordinators she more or less lived at the gallery, but she was a co-ordinator in the Spiral tradition, a very effective one, meticulous in her care of artists and artworks.

We often disagreed, usually over trivial issues like the wine we provided at openings — Sharon's partner at the time was a professional woman who was used to good wine. But as Sharon said to Tilly Lloyd in their conversation for *A Women's Picture Book*—

> The common driving force we all had was the love of art and the love of women. We knew that at least at that level we'd meet in harmony even if working in the collective was sometimes difficult.[4]

And we vigorously defended one another when it mattered. Sharon added that she 'learned a lot from all the women who worked there. It was a valuable experience both personally and politically'. My most enduring memory is that we both loved a challenge. For

4. *A Women's Picture Book; 25 women artists from Aotearoa New Zealand* (*AWPB*) eds Bridie Lonie, Marian Evans, Tilly Lloyd, a Women's Gallery/Spiral Group, GP Books 1988: 132.

instance, when we were asked at short notice to organise *Art by Maori Women* in late 1980, to coincide with an event at Pipitea marae, we went for it, with delight.

EVENTS & PARTIES

Sharon was especially good at organising parties and other events outside the gallery. She was a warm and wonderful host.

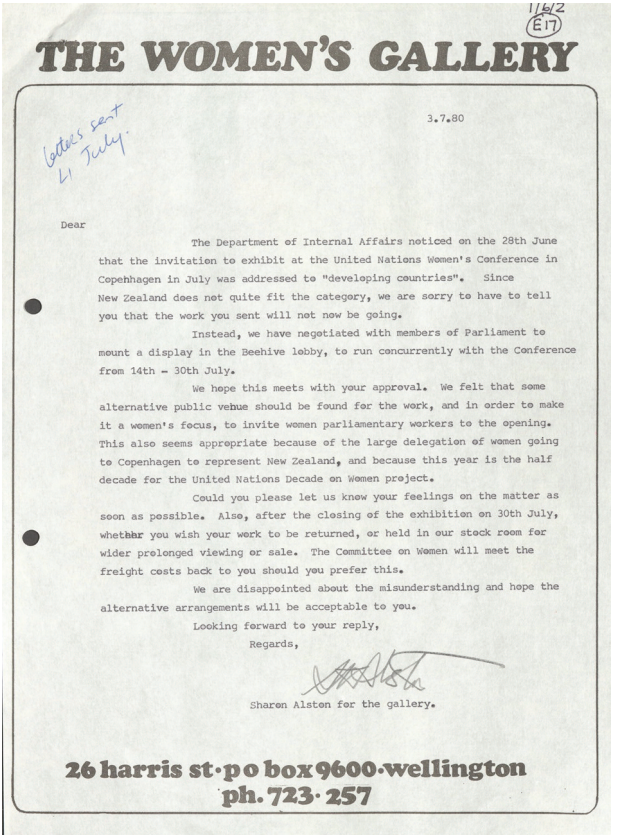


Sharon's poster for Queen's Birthday party 1980.



Sharon with writer Jean Watson Women's Gallery 323 Willis Street [1982?]. Photographer probably Barb McDonald.

From the gallery, Sharon organised an exhibition for the United Nations Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. When it turned out that the invitation to this exhibition was to 'developing countries only', she organised for the work to be shown at Parliament, with, I think, MP Marilyn Waring in support.



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THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

letters sent 11 July.

3.7.80

Dear

The Department of Internal Affairs noticed on the 28th June that the invitation to exhibit at the United Nations Women's Conference in Copenhagen in July was addressed to "developing countries". Since New Zealand does not quite fit the category, we are sorry to have to tell you that the work you sent will not now be going.

Instead, we have negotiated with members of Parliament to mount a display in the Beehive lobby, to run concurrently with the Conference from 14th - 30th July.

We hope this meets with your approval. We felt that some alternative public venue should be found for the work, and in order to make it a women's focus, to invite women parliamentary workers to the opening. This also seems appropriate because of the large delegation of women going to Copenhagen to represent New Zealand, and because this year is the half decade for the United Nations Decade on Women project.

Could you please let us know your feelings on the matter as soon as possible. Also, after the closing of the exhibition on 30th July, whether you wish your work to be returned, or held in our stock room for wider prolonged viewing or sale. The Committee on Women will meet the freight costs back to you should you prefer this.

We are disappointed about the misunderstanding and hope the alternative arrangements will be acceptable to you.

Looking forward to your reply,

Regards,

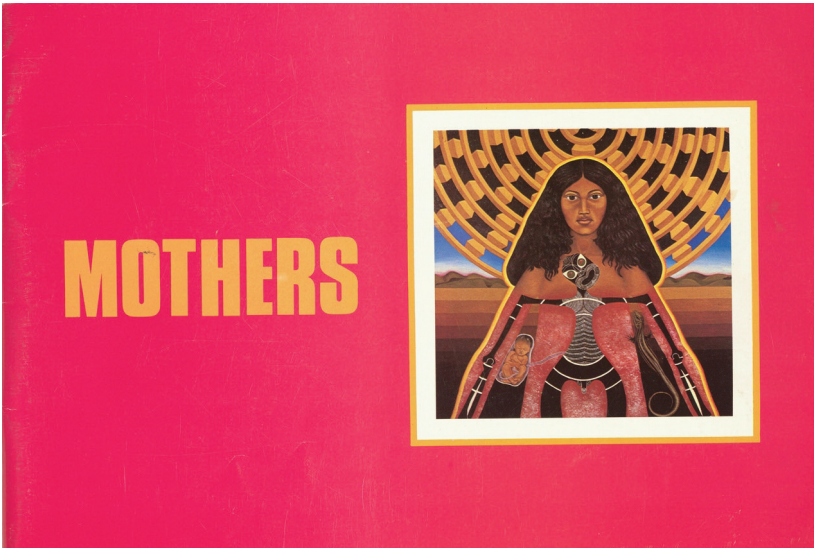
Sharon Alston for the gallery.

26 harris st·p o box 9600·wellington
ph. 723·257

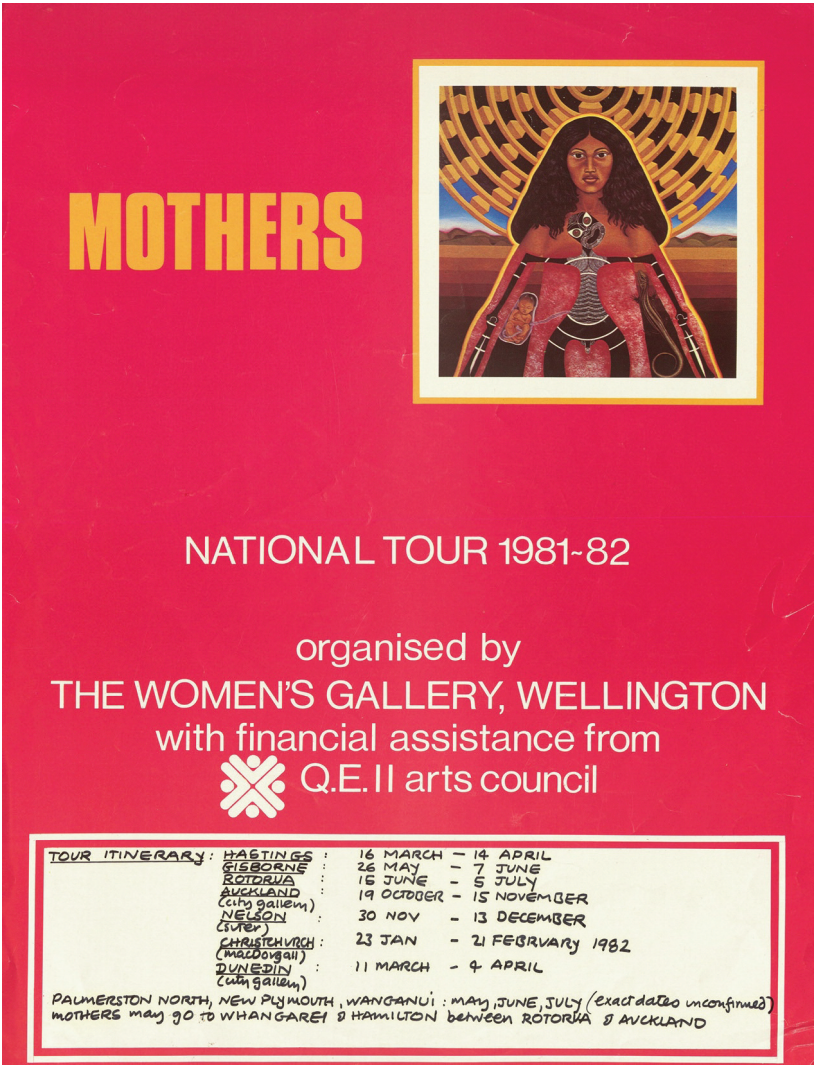
SHARON'S POSTERS & DESIGN FOR THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

Sharon made many posters for us, some of them screenprinted at Wellington's Media Collective; and contributed general design work. One poster was for the first showing of *Mothers* in Wellington.

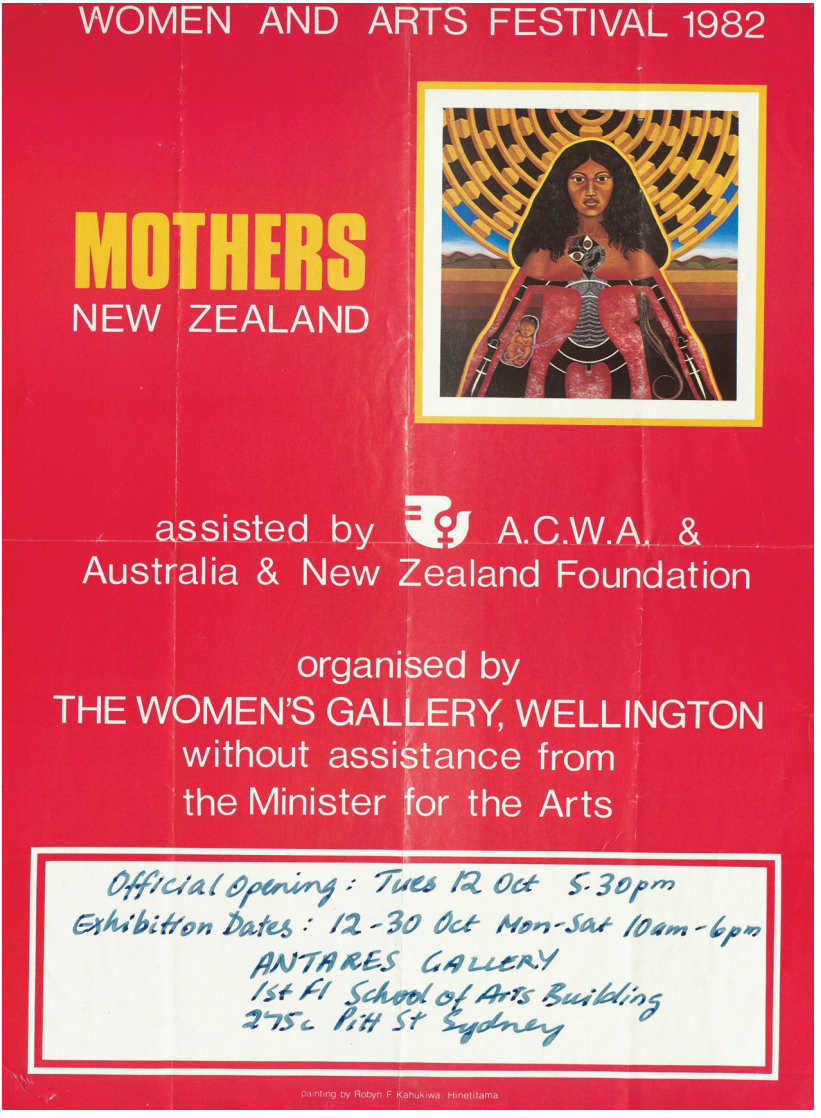
Sharon had designed the catalogue and associated poster, which was eventually repurposed for Sydney.



Mothers catalogue 1980. Image Robyn Kahukiwa *Hinetitama* 1980. Design Sharon Alston.

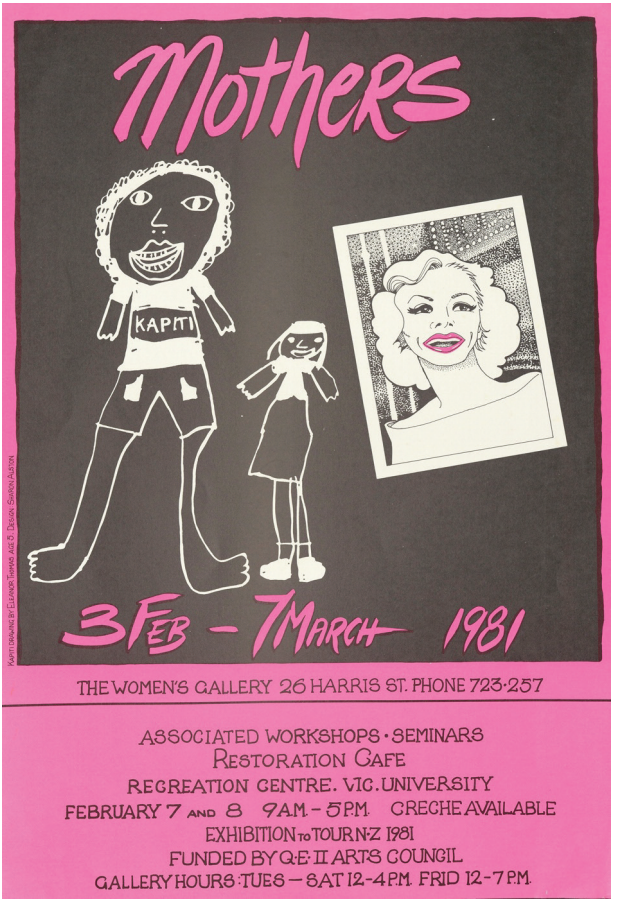


Mothers poster 1980. Image Robyn Kahukiwa *Hinetitama* 1980. Design Sharon Alston. Handwriting Anna Keir.



Original *Mothers* poster 1980, adapted for use 1982. Image Robyn Kahukiwa *Hinetitama* 1980. Design Sharon Alston.

But first we needed a poster that included Wellington-based associated events: this one.



Mothers Wellington 1981. Design Sharon Alston. Probably screen printed at the Media Collective.

Sharon also made installations for our exhibitions.

SHARON'S INSTALLATIONS AT THE GALLERY: SELF IMAGE

Sharon didn't have much time for her own art work when she worked at the Women's Gallery. But she did contribute to some exhibitions, including *Self Image*. She told Tilly Lloyd, in an interview in *A Women's Picture Book*—

> [I used] a mirror, a box shape like the safe house, the free place, the tree house[...I]nside the globe of the world, the trinkets, the shells, glitter, with eggs as the reference point for fertility, birth and death [...] It was made to be destroyed, removed. I wanted a kitsch element there because it makes me laugh and it was me not being serious about me. I had charged at the iron with the spray paint [...]with a gaudy lime and a bright pink. I loved the rawness of the iron and the patterns that the rips and the rust made. It was like my skin with scars and wrinkles, and patterns of aging taking place...a few laugh lines too.[5]

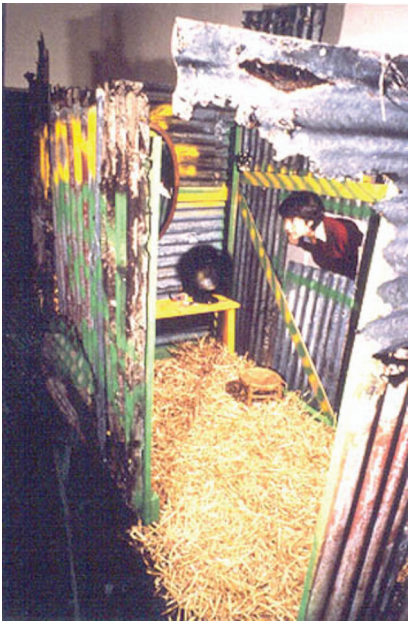


Sharon Alston *Self Image* 1981. Photographer unknown.

5. *AWPB*: 132-3.



Sharon Alston *Self Image* 1981. Photographer unknown.



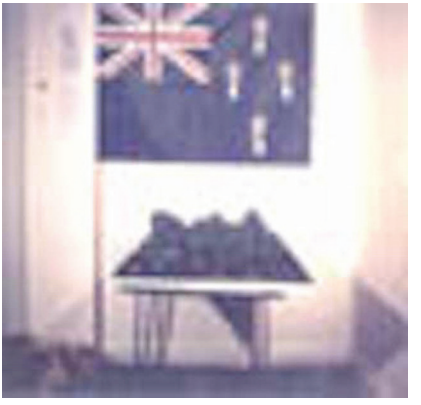
Sharon Alston *Self Image with the artist* 1981. Photographer unknown.

FROLICKING IN THE VALLEYS OF DEATH

Sharon's installation for *Women & The Environment* was 'Frolicking in the Valleys of Death'.

. . .

The only documentation of this work that I could find, other than the blurry photograph below, is a page listing the days on which flags were flown from government buildings in New Zealand in 1981: saints days; royal occasions, Anzac Day, Labour Day, United Nations Day and so on. It includes as an entry, on 3 November, 'Unprecedented Slaughter of 32 million Lambs 1980–81 Season (Victory over N. Z. Lambs)'.



Sharon Alston *Frolicking in the Valleys of Death* 1981
photographer unknown.

(Sharon loved animals and her dog Basil was an important part of her life in 1981. As she wrote in a letter dated 20 August 1981—

> Basil has been patched up at the vets again. We are not having much luck with his skin problems but keep trying. He is on a Chicken and Rice diet, living like a King on my dole money...It's all very complicated so I'll spare the details[...] Maddening rigmarole we have to go through. With dubious results. But results nevertheless...trying to avoid him having too many more steroid injections with their nasty side effects. He has lost weight but will no doubt gain it again as he HAD to have an injection yesterday. Poor darling. He is so

> healthy apart from the one complaint. It is so debilitating for him and the steroids are the worst part of it all. I[t]'s a vicious circle he is in. And expensive. Each time I take him to the vet it costs me between $12 and $20. Plus his special Chikky food. One day he will be so bad he will have to be put down if we cannot crack the cycle. But that is a long way off yet.

And later in the same letter—

> ...[Her partner at the time] is very well, very busy, very lovely. As a matter of fact she is lending me the money to buy an old car. I hope to make the purchase tonight. It is $450 a Morris 1100 1964. But not totally useless. Will need to get a new gear box or clutch at a later date but what can I expect for that sort of money? I am getting my practical licence soon as I can come up with my birth certificate (which I have lost) have got the written and oral so am quite excited at the thought of being independent transport wise. Goddess knows how Basil — who has taken to slobbering like a maniac in cars again — will cope. I may have to get a plastic seat in the back.[6])

Towards the end of Tilly Lloyd's interview of Sharon, interviewer and interviewee refer to the relationship of Sharon's art to her political activity and why she exhibited only spasmodically—

> S: It demands a certain faith in your intuition to work towards a far away ideal whilst presently undermining what is in the here and now. If I didn't think this way I couldn't create an image. There has to be a politically

6. ATL Women's Gallery/ Spiral collections.

delicious reason why that image has to happen. It's grist to the mill for me.

T: Do you think working full time doing design for Broadsheet has taken the grist out of your other mills?

S: It's brought them to a temporary halt, but that's partly in myself as well.

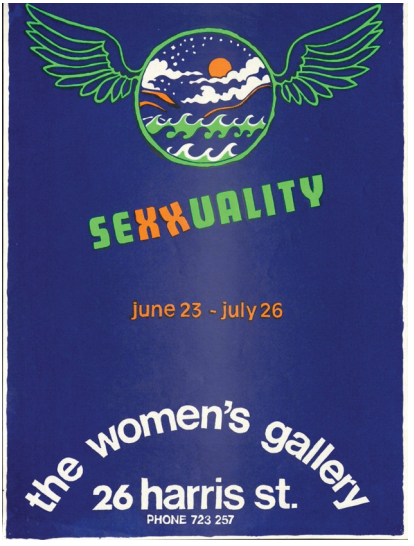
T: Because you're trying to outdo Nathalie Barney?

S: Did she die young?

T: No.

S: Good.[7]

SEXXUALITY

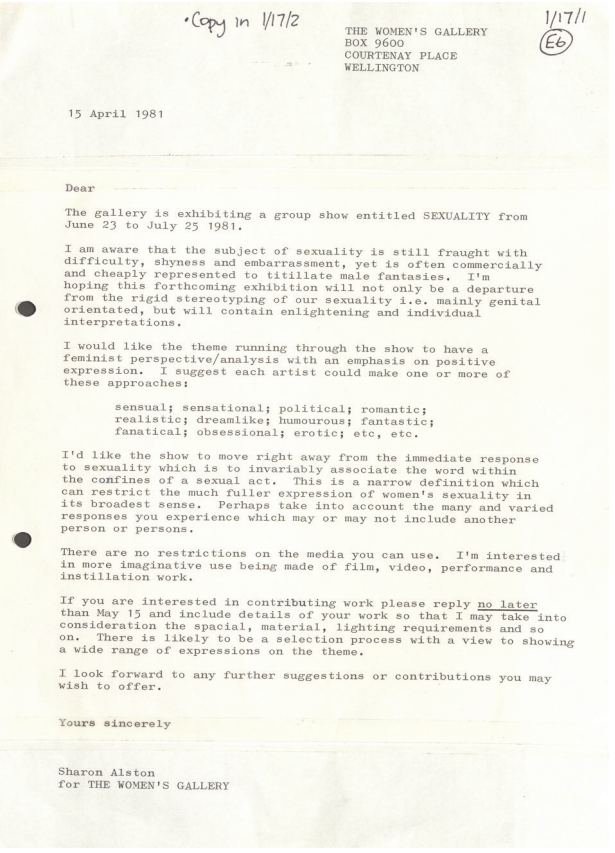


Sharon's *Sexxuality* poster Women's Gallery 26 Harris Street Wellington 1981.

Not surprisingly, for someone whose personality brings to mind Nathalie Barney and who made work for 'politically delicious'

7. *AWPB*: 137.

reasons, Sharon was interested in images about sexual identity and in their public exhibition. She co-ordinated the *Sexxuality* exhibition and invited everyone to contribute.



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THE WOMEN'S GALLERY
BOX 9600
COURTENAY PLACE
WELLINGTON

15 April 1981

Dear

The gallery is exhibiting a group show entitled SEXUALITY from June 23 to July 25 1981.

I am aware that the subject of sexuality is still fraught with difficulty, shyness and embarrassment, yet is often commercially and cheaply represented to titillate male fantasies. I'm hoping this forthcoming exhibition will not only be a departure from the rigid stereotyping of our sexuality i.e. mainly genital orientated, but will contain enlightening and individual interpretations.

I would like the theme running through the show to have a feminist perspective/analysis with an emphasis on positive expression. I suggest each artist could make one or more of these approaches:

sensual; sensational; political; romantic;
realistic; dreamlike; humourous; fantastic;
fanatical; obsessional; erotic; etc, etc.

I'd like the show to move right away from the immediate response to sexuality which is to invariably associate the word within the confines of a sexual act. This is a narrow definition which can restrict the much fuller expression of women's sexuality in its broadest sense. Perhaps take into account the many and varied responses you experience which may or may not include another person or persons.

There are no restrictions on the media you can use. I'm interested in more imaginative use being made of film, video, performance and instillation work.

If you are interested in contributing work please reply no later than May 15 and include details of your work so that I may take into consideration the spacial, material, lighting requirements and so on. There is likely to be a selection process with a view to showing a wide range of expressions on the theme.

I look forward to any further suggestions or contributions you may wish to offer.

Yours sincerely

Sharon Alston
for THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

Later, Sharon wanted 'to begin a series of images containing emotional, sexual, and sensual elements of my own lesbian lifestyle' which may be where her *Which Way?* painting owned by Sandi Hall

fits.[8] And maybe where her controversial *My Bloody Hand* image for *A Women's Picture Book* fitted too.[9] But she died young.

SHARON AT ARTSTATION

When Sharon became ill, her friends organised a fund–raising concert so she could have an overseas trip. I was living in France and for a little while it seemed possible that she'd visit. But she was too ill. Then, after she died, the artist Jane Zusters and poet Sue Fitchett organised an exhibition of her work, with Sharon's partner Robbie Champtaloup, at Auckland's Artstation. According to Jane–

> The exhibition came complete with misattribution as one work was claimed at the opening as Adriana Tuscia's, not Sharon's. Apart from the great artwork from *Broadsheet* and the posters we could not track a lot of art and I recreated a piece we had a photo of that she exhibited at the Women's Gallery [Sharon's *Mothers*[10] sculpture].[11]

The exhibition had no reference to the *Self Image* and *Frolicking in the Valleys of Death* installations, because at that time the slides that

8. See previous chapter.
9. *AWPB*: 133-4. In one letter from Sharon she acknowledges that she learned a lot from her *A Women's Picture Book* experience, where there was nothing she could do that would change the decision of the Māori women who withdrew from the project. She did like to learn.
10. *Mothers* was a Women's Gallery exhibition which toured public spaces around Aotearoa and to Sydney, 1980-1982.
11. I can't find a reference for this, but think it was a personal communication.

recorded them were missing; they are now missing again.[12] But ATL has newly digitised slides of Sharon's *Mothers* installation. One is reproduced in the previous chapter. Here's another.



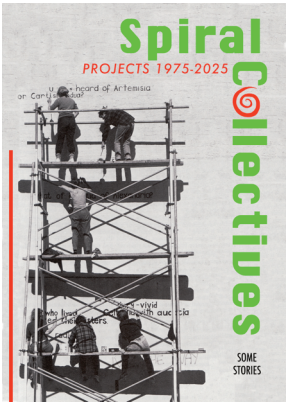
Mothers *in Sydney 1982. Barb McDonald, 3d from left, was the Women's Gallery co-oordinator who organised the exhibition's travel. Sandi Hall: 'I remember that artwork of Sharrie's very well -- it documents her mother's suicide from pills and whiskey ...with her Spirit rising, free from her crucifix....'*

A while back, when I realised that there is video footage of Sharon, I seriously considered making a film about her. She never gave birth to a child, but she was an inspiring artist activist mother and now an artist activist grandmother: a matriarch. A movie would be good. An exhibition of her graphics and surviving paintings would be good. And I hope that all her work will be attributed, wherever it's shown.

12. When by chance I found them in an alien office a couple of decades ago, I deposited them in the Alexander Turnbull Library, where I saw them again in 2022, but in 2025 they can no longer be found.

EPILOGUE

The file became too big, unmanageable. Please find Hilary Baxter, Allie Eagle and Lynne Ciochetto among more of their peers, in *Spiral Collectives Projects 1975-2025 Some Stories.*[1]



1. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral/spiral-collectives-some-stories-2025

SPIRAL COLLECTIVES

Poet Heather McPherson founded Spiral Collectives in 1975. Spiral is a small artist-led registered charity (CC62215).[1]

Perhaps best-known for publishing Keri Hulme's Booker Prize-winning *the bone people*, we cherish and educate about the storytelling practices and legacies of women and nonbinary people. We awhi and tautoko and embrace and support them, with publications, exhibitions, events, moving image, websites and archives. And patience. We all work as volunteers.

Almost all of our out-of-print publications are available to read and download at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, without cost.[2]

We welcome and deeply appreciate donations to our running costs, in our 38-9026-0058551-00 SPIRAL COLLECTIVES TRUST account; and to *the bone people* graphic novel project 38-9026-0058551-04 SPIRAL COLLECTIVES TRUST. If you donate and then send your name and email to kiaoraspiral@gmail.com, we will send you a receipt you can use to claim a charitable donation tax benefit.

1. https://www.spiralcollectives.org/
2. https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/about/library/spiral