
International Womens Day - 8 March 2019

Government House Auckland by Dr Hiria Hape QSO, PHD, MEd

Kuia Tiria Tuhoro



Ko Mataatua te waka
Ko Maungapohatu te maunga
Ko Hamua me Ngati Mura nga hapu
Ko Tuhoe te iwi
Ko Hiria Hape ahau

I am from the Mataatua canoe,
My mountain is Maungapohatu
Hamua and Ngati Mura are my happé
Tuhoe is my iwi
My name is Hiria Hape

Kia ora huihui tatau katoa

Your Excellency The Governor General Dame Patsy Reddy, Tena Koe.
Esteemed guests, Ladies and Gentlemen
It is an honour and privilege to be here today
to speak about the value of women in our communities including whanau
(family) hapu (subtribe) and iwi (Tribe).

If you went away from today and remembered one part of my speech I
would be very happy.

Each year around the world, on the 8 March, we celebrate International
Womens Day and remember the major contribution women have had in
changing the fabric of society, in economic, political and social achievements.

In 1893 NZ women led the world as the first country where women won the
right to vote and this came about through sheer determination of very strong
and courageous women.

In May 1893 Meri Mangakahia from Te Rarawa, of Te Tai Tokerau, pushed for
Maori women to vote and to stand as candidates for the Maori Parliament. It
was not until 1897 when Maori women had the right to vote for members of
the Maori Parliament and the House of Representatives. Meri's actions was
an indication of Maori womens political awareness and their ability to
arrange and organise themselves.

Through the years of time women have struggled to have their voices heard in a public arena, but research shows that women have an alarmingly higher number seeking education qualifications than the men in NZ. (I apologise for not providing statistical data with this speech). I see this in Te Where Wananga o Awanuiarangi where I work as a Head of School, for the School of Iwi Development, the high numbers of women between the ages of 35 and 60 populating our programmes. These women return to education as second chance learners and because of their passion to learn they all know that education is the way to build up a positive future.

However I want to focus on some of the women in my own family. My great grandmother was Matehaere Te Waara of Maungapohatu a full blooded Maori woman of the Tuhoe tribe. She was raised on the mountain ranges of Te Urewera, in the Bay of Plenty, until she met my grandfather Harry Vercoe from Cornwall England whom was a Government surveyor and was asked by the elders of Ruatahuna, to move and live on a family land block named Paraeroa in Ruatoki.

They raised their family on a farm where electricity, running tap water and warm houses was a foreign part of their lives. Houses were built from kaponga trees, with no floor boards but a ground floor which was kept warm by a fire lit all night. Native wood for firewood is the best, as it is slow burning and throws out the heat. Manuka and fern was layered for a mattress, and a felt like fabric was thrown over the top for extra warmth.

They had several children of which my grandmother was the third child. Her name is Rarotapuhikura Vercoe (a half caste Maori woman) who married Frederick Thrupp from Northampton, England.

They too lived in the family home in Te Urewera forest and raised a big family. The family lands were cleared and our grandfather had sheep, cattle, poultry and hunting dogs. My grandmother raised her children and still went out and milked the cows every morning and every night, and helped my grandfather tend to huge vegetable gardens.

Keeping the home clean and warm, educating the children and teaching Maori protocols and customs, were part of the daily chores of our grandmother who carried it on as she raised us her grandchildren. Passing down knowledge with values of caring for one another, helping other people, and growing vegetables to provide for the many functions held at our marae. To this day I strongly believe women (grandmothers, Kuia, Mothers Whaea, Sisters, Tuahine) are our babies first teachers. The child will quickly adopt the mothers voice, speech and personality.

The concept of money is a foreign thought to these women as they gave tirelessly of themselves for their families and communities. I want to express the physical hardship these women endured on a daily base, whether it be chopping wood for the fire, cooking and preserving foods in preparation for the season that becomes too cold and vegetable plants are scarce. The best parts of those days however was the evenings where our Kuia (grandmother) will talk to us about the stars, the cosmos, the movement of the moon. I remember when I went down to Wellington and asked to go fishing on a boat. It was a beautiful day clear skies, the sea was flat, and petrol in the boat, everything was perfect, except for one glaring full moon looking down on us. I did say it wasn't the right time to go fishing because we got a full moon. Yes, I was shocked and surprised that the boat owner and crew hadn't any idea of the movements of the moon and how the moon affects our lives. They throw their lines out ending in a tangled mess as the line couldn't sink to the ground because the gravity pull of the moon was too strong that creates a strong under current. It is also the worst time to go swimming. I learnt at a very early age in my life of the movements of the moon and how we need to adopt our activities to these phases of the moon. These kuia knew the season for planting, the season for harvesting and the preparation of the lands before the planting begins. These 'KUIA' were such a special part of my life.

The Kohanga Reo movement, the Kura kaupapa Maori, and Whare Wananga all had women who put their shoulders to the wheel to push and advance Maori education that included Maori language and culture, Maori business, Maori development, and Maturanga Maori (encompassing all knowledge from Maori lens or a Maori view point).

Like so many women in our country that lived in those times, during the times of the wars, my grandfather Frederick Thrupp served in the Boar war and first World War, the second World War saw my uncles deployed away from their beloved homelands of Te Urewera, and brothers and cousins sent to Malaya, Vietnam and Korea. The women were left to keep the home fires burning. These women put family responsibilities over and above anything else. Family (whanau), children (tamariki), and grandchildren (mokopuna) was the number one priority.

In 1970 a survey was conducted by an elder of Tuhoe tribe, John Rangihau to find who were the keepers of knowledge in Tuhoe and to his surprise it is the women that held the knowledge in our tribe and who have continued to pass this knowledge on to our men and women alike. They give knowledge freely with the protocols to protect them and the customs practiced on our marae and in our homes. The taking off shoes outside the door before entering a home or marae meeting house, the washing of hands before meals, no sitting on tables, no sitting on pillows, the prayers to greet the day, bless the food, protect our families, travel and end of the day prayers are a normal part of every day ritual and the restrictions around the marae speaking areas for women and in our tribe in the meeting house where women do not have speaking rights during a formal ceremony. Everything a women want to share with the visitors, will be incorporated into the karanga (the form of calling visitors), onto marae or into a meeting house.

In the early 1970's a German speaking artist Harry Sangl came to Te Urewera to find Kuia Tiria Tuhoro in the picture above who is my grandaunt, but on his arrival he found many other women who had chin tattoos (commonly called moko kauae). The family (whanau) and sub tribe (hapu) were all involved to support this man to paint our kuia. The paintings took 5 years to complete the 34 kuia who is exhibited today at 28 Clarence Street, Devonport Auckland. I have several kuia in this exhibition that I am related to with my own grandmother Rarotapuhikura Pare Thrupp is one. This artist paid the hugest respect in paying homage to the lives of these women and their culture of their time and place as embodied in their moko kauae who were crafted by the old methods of tattooing with whale bone sharpened. The artist skilfully captured their confidence, calm and dignity as they sat still for days as if experienced to hold a pose. A book called the Blue Privilege was

also produced of these Moko Kuia by this artist Harry Sangl and our book held by our father has become a family taonga.

These days moko has taken on a huge resurgence amongst our Maori women, many making a statement of identity although many are not fluent speakers of the Maori language believe that their moko will help them drive their personal interest to strengthen themselves in language and culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen I wish to thank these women that helped raise me in the rugged country of Te Urewera in our language, culture and customs and again thank you very much for listening to me.

I had composed a poem that is befitting of our grandmothers (kuia), and all women around the world.

Ka tangi hotuhotu
aku kamo roimata
kua ngaro te tirohanga
mo nga kuia morehu
o tuawhakarere
he whakaahua [o] ratau ahua
Hohonu te aroha
Hohonu te aroha

Continuously weeping
eyes filled with tears
lost from our vision
These elderly Kuia
of long ago past (yesteryear)
photographed before us
captures character and personalities
Deep is the love
Deep is the love

Tena koutou Tena koutou Tena koutou katoa

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