



Literacy Aotearoa
Choice Change Freedom

Student Writing

2016

Te Rito - Focusing on What Matters

National Student Writing Event

18-20 Hōngongoi (July) 2016

Waipuna Hotel
& Conference Centre,
Mt Wellington, Auckland

The Students

Tina



Kim



Penny



Linda



Jessica



Ned



Leslie



Stacey



Himaima



J



Blossum



Anton



Foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa,

The theme for 2016 is Te Rito, Focusing on What Matters. Its title is derived from the whakatauki that talks about what is most important in the world.

Hutia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te kōmako e kō?

Kī mai nei kī ahua, he aha te mea nui o te ao?

Māku e ki atu, he tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.

If you were to pluck out the centre of the flax bush, where would the bellbird sing?

If you were to ask me, what is the most important thing in the world?

I would reply, it is people, it is people, it is people.

This year we thought it was time to take another step up in the way that the Student Writing Event was organised. We focussed on what mattered; taking this opportunity to extend our possibilities and abilities.

It started with an idea to take the writings created by 12 students, and make them into a digital book. We worked with a colleague in Dubai, Rhonda Kite, to create this digital application. Her company, Kiwa Digital, turned the work written and recorded on Tuesday day, into this online application overnight, Tuesday day their time 😊. It's been a fabulous learning and collaborative experience for everyone concerned, and I know the students are eager to say thanks to Jodi, Peter, Helen and Stephanie. And in turn we want to especially acknowledge Tina, Penny, Jessica, Leslie, Himaima, Blossum, Kim, Linda, Ned, Stacey, Anton and J as the authors who made this all possible – for your time, brilliance and willingness to dare - isn't this lovely; isn't this wonderful; who could have thought our day could be making resources as groovy as these; isn't this lovely, made with love by you.

Mauri Ora!

nā Bronwyn Yates QSM
TE TUMUAKI



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A FAMILY CONNECTION

Back in the 2000s, my two younger children and I travelled to Wellington to connect with their father's family. We met with their father's sister, his niece and her four children, who all reside in Strathmore, Wellington.

It was so exciting and scary when first embarking on this journey. When I say exciting it's because my children will learn about their family roots. When I say scary it's because of not knowing what they were getting into. Why was this important? When I grew up I didn't know about my family roots and I wanted my children to know about their family.

Unfortunately our lives, being my life and my children's collided. What I had learnt and what my children's father's sister, her daughter and four children had been accustomed to, went BANG! Now a world that seemed justified was not. One world where the worldly things are everything, and another where it is a struggle to get by, not with possessions but being stripped of dignity yet now rebuilding and renewing what we have lost and now gained. My children and I are gladly telling our journey.

Tina

THAILAND THE LAND I COME FROM

I was born in a small village at Khu Tan, Chaing Rai north of Thailand. At the time my country was very poor.

My family is so poor. I have only my Mother, no Father. I have three sisters and two brothers. There are seven, including my Mother. Our people work on the rice farms. We grow vegetables and we breed chickens. We only need to buy beef and pork. We are very lucky to have King Bhumibol because he helps the Thai people to have a better life by giving them jasmine rice, kidney beans, black rice, brown rice seeds to grow on the farms. Before King Bhumibol helped us we were able to grow rice and beans only, once a year. Now we can grow rice and kidney beans three times a year. We can sell the rice and beans around the world. Everyone knows jasmine and brown rice is grown in Thailand. The land I come from, Thailand, has a population of 68 million, 80% Buddhism. The people have very good heart. We call it 'siam muang yim' (the land of smiles). Thailand is a beautiful country. We have beautiful beaches, Phuket and Ko Samui, both south of Thailand. In Phuket they grow Durian-lambutan and young coconuts. We also have seafood farms. In Bangkok we have beautiful temples and beautiful food. I will always remember where I come from. I am very proud to be born in the land of smiles, Thailand.

Penny

MY LIFE

Kia ora, my name is Jessica Aroha Kirwan. I am 28 years old. I am from Gisborne, New Zealand, the first to see the sun. I live with my mum, her name is Tangi Munro Kirwan. I am an only living child in my family.

I have a job that I've done for nearly a year and a half. I do data base administration on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I also do cleaning as well. I love my job as I'm saving my money to go on a cruise next year in March.

This year I have achieved my goal that I've been wanting for ages to get my learner licence. I passed!! After, I've been studying for three months now at Gisborne Adult Literacy Turanga with Rosina and Rene.

My hobby is Tae Kwando. It is to do with self-defence. I do it on a Tuesday and Friday night to keep me fit and healthy.

I play softball in the summer with Turanga Health and I played against different age groups. I've been playing for eight years.

I do cross fit in the winter on a Friday morning. I also hang out with the whānau from Vanessa Loudes crew in Gisborne where I meet other students with their needs.

I also like to travel with my mum in Australia. My other hobby is arts and crafts when I get bored at home.

Jessica

THE ORC WAR-BAND

In amongst the forest, there is a meadow. And in this meadow the wood-elves settled. The wood-elves live in the trees, in small huts.

Two days ago a villager from a distant village saw Orcs hunting bears, alongside a narrow stretch of water.

The villager got scared when he saw the six foot, large green creature and ran into a cave. Unknowingly to the villager, the cave was full of bats which were disturbed by the sound of a broken branch and panicked. The villager was scared so he ran to the nearest wood-elf village called Kingwood.

The Lord and Lady of the wood-elf village sent their daughter Anne, who is a ranger, to find the Orc War-Band camp. On the journey she saw trees swaying, leaves moving side to side before seeing the two day old Orc tracks. Then she went in an easterly direction where she came across another village. A local told her where the Orc War-Band was currently camping. Then she went up a hill to a safe distance to observe them. She saw the Orc War-Band leader eating bear meat around a bonfire.

She went back to her home to tell the others about the size of the Orc War-Band. They decided to ask the other villages to provide extra rangers to come and help with their defence.

The next day, to the relief of everyone, the Orc War-Band decided to move on in a northern direction.

Leslie

“THEY LIKE TO SEE ME HAPPY WITH MY MUSIC AND THEY ALL JOIN IN”

I love dancing!

I trained every Tuesday at the Whakatane RSA and won a dancing championship. We did rock ‘n’ roll.

My granddaughter Isabel who is three years old loves to dance. My daughter Alesha taught me how to sway when I do dishes.

We moved from Whakatane to Dunedin. In Dunedin, when I want to be by myself, I go out for a walk with my earphones on and I listen to my music. I sing and dance, I don’t care what people think.

I like reggae, Bob Marley, jazz, blues, Elvis Presley and rock ‘n’ roll.

When I finish learning to read, I would like to learn how to decorate cakes.

Himaima

MY JOURNEY THROUGH SEXUAL, VERBAL, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ABUSE

At the age of five, I remember my Uncle taking me from my bed to his room, and taking my underpants off, ripping my legs open, getting on top and doing his thing. Thank God he didn't penetrate me, however at that moment I was soooo terrified like a scared animal, heart racing. When he finished as he was always drunk when he would do this, I would get out from underneath him and go hide in the darkest place I could find so he wouldn't find me.

My Uncle sexually abused me till I was 12 years old. My mother who was his sister sent me away to stay with her baby sister. My father and brothers were physically beaten weekly by my Uncle. All I remember is lots of blood everywhere as a child.

When my brother turned 17 years old he beat my Uncle to a pulp and said if you ever touch my Mum, Dad, sisters or brother again, I will kill you. From that day on my Uncle didn't touch us.

Back in Mum's day they never spoke about death or sex. As a teenager, I didn't know what sex was. At the age of 18 I was pregnant and didn't know. I told my older sister that something inside me was moving. I was only eight stone in weight. She made an appointment with our family GP who said I was seven months pregnant. I asked him to get rid of it. The GP said too late you're due in two months. "WHAT!" I didn't know how I became pregnant. My sister then told me about the birds and the bees. Too f---ken late Mum's gonna kill me.

My Mum was told. I was a disgrace to the whānau. My Mum who had total control of all her children, suggested that because the father of my child was the town slut, it would be good for me to give my son to our lesbian cousin who would provide for him and that there was no support out in the community for me and I could go to Australia and live with my brother. Well she lied.

The next year I wanted to get the hell out of this whānau so I got pregnant again and moved away from my home town to another district with the father of my two daughters. Anyway long story short, we lived together for seven years, he physically abused me. I became an alcoholic. One night, a day before Christmas I found him at another woman's house in bed with her. I left him, moved to another district totally depressed for seven months.

In this other district I met an academic man, very clever and strong in nature. He was a marijuana smoker. So to keep him, I learnt how to smoke marijuana and keep up with him. Wow! Bloody idiot I was. After seven years we had a daughter. I had my own home when I met him and through his drug habit, my home was raided every two years by police. He was verbally abusive towards me always saying I was dumb, stupid and I believed all what he said. After being in a relationship with him for 20 years I ended up in the Mental Health ward totally delusional, hearing voices and sleep deprived. I lost touch with reality. Lost, alone, no self-esteem in my world of negative beliefs. After seven days of being warded through what I believed was my sexual, physical and verbal abuses, I was allowed to go home to my children and partner.

I worked in the kiwifruit industry for 14 years prior to being warded (Mental Health). My kiwifruit boss called around to ask if I would like to be one of his contractors on his orchard which I accepted. So keeping myself occupied kept me from creating disasters in my mind. After seven years of kiwifruit contracting to different orchards around the Bay of Plenty I had between 14 to 40 workers. Yeah! I was self-employed. I decided I had enough of kiwifruit and began working in Mental Health. I had a friend who connected me with a friend of hers, who was a counsellor who had a workshop called 'Journey Towards Self Discovery'. This beautiful lady has helped me find myself. She is non-judgemental, has empathy, is compassionate and gave me HOPE to get my level 4 Mental Health Certificate. I have been working with Mental Health clients for 10 years.

I do state that I have forgiven my Uncle and partners for their abuses towards me. From inside out, oh how beautiful this feels. Thank you Jesus and my Inner God.

Blossum

FINDING MY SPIRITUAL PATH WITH A LOT OF OBSTACLES IN MY WAY

I knew I wasn't in a good place. I had a lot of shit to deal with. I was trying to get back to living the right way. But what is the right way, because I was different from most other people, always have been and always will be.

I use to say to people I'm seeing these visions and feeling things I couldn't explain. I wondered if this was just from getting off the drugs and getting clean or what was going on around me.

My life at this time was totally confused. I was trying to get off the drugs, I was still in regular contact with my long time love and trying to understand what was going on with me.

So when I had my daughter 10 years ago my world really tipped upside down. I had just left my daughter's biological father as I didn't really want to be with him when I thought about it. So I left him and went back to the love of my life and started hanging around with him again.

When I had my daughter, I felt really on my own. I had this new born baby that I had to take care of. I was very unsettled, I had nowhere secure to live, I was just all over the place, pretty much on my own.

I spent the first two weeks at the motel with mum and dad, even though mum wasn't there for the first five days, as she was looking after my dying nana in Nelson. So, when it was just me and my dad I had to help dad run the motel and it was really difficult with my new born baby.

Once mum was back and things were a bit more normal, I was slowly finding my way with this new baby. I moved into a house with a friend that I hadn't known for long but she had a spare room. I moved in with my daughter, but it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to. My friend and her friends were always drinking and then sometimes fights would break out, which was not my scene at all. None of it was good for me and especially not for my new born baby.

After a couple of months I had to get me and my daughter out of that unhealthy environment. So we went back to Mum and Dad's at the motel and stayed there for a few months.

My long time love rang me and said that he was moving into a house in Blenheim, so I asked him if I could move in with my daughter. He wasn't keen because he said we are not getting back together so why would I want to live with him. But, after thinking about it, he decided we could move in but only as flatmates.

So, we lived there for three to four months then moved back to Mum and Dad's again until I got my own house in the same town. We stayed there for another three to four months until I decided I wanted to go back to Nelson. So I got my little flat in Nelson and we moved over there.

My long time love had gone back up North to a job he got up there, so it was just me and my daughter in our flat in Nelson for probably two and a half months. Then he came back and came and lived with us in our pokey wee flat for roughly a year. Then we moved again just out of Nelson city to a really nice three bedroom house.

We were only there for nine months then we ended up getting ourselves in trouble again so we left there and I went to my home town to stay with my sister and he went to live somewhere else.

I found my flat after a week, moved in there, got settled and then my long time love came back to live with us. Then I started really working hard on my spiritual world which was still not easy. There was still a lot going on around me but as time went on, I got myself in tune, started doing readings here and there, did a couple of healings and started connecting with likeminded people.

So my world started to make more sense to me. I found out who I really was, I am a healer and clairvoyant. I got a lot of help from my healer mate, in Christchurch. She pretty much saved my life and really helped my daughter as she was having a lot of issues. I also need to mention my long time love for believing in me.

Kim

MY DAD

My Dad is a bird man, a builder and an all-time worker. When I was little my Dad had rainbow lorikeets. Colourful bright birds that he had tamed so we could have them inside with the doors and windows open without them flying away. He has lots of other birds as well, including ring necks, red rumps, doves and lovebirds. We went to bird shows twice a week and every weekend to show off our birds and get them judged. We won prizes and did colouring competitions. After a while I grew out of bird competitions and focused on school and work but not my Dad. He carried on with his competitions until he decided to do other things. Those other things were building decks and new bird aviaries. He built my Uncle's back deck with the help of his other son and me. When my Dad has a plan for a building, he does it. When Dad built our front deck, he had no plan on paper just how it would look in his mind. My Dad turned our back garage into a sleep out so when my cousins come to stay they sleep in the sleep out. My Dad doesn't let anything stop his building because it's what he loves and now he has a new project which is re-doing my and my sister's room.

Linda

GETTING MY LEARNER LICENCE

I am a Māori male. I am 58 years of age. I have had reading and writing difficulties most of my life. I have never given up or been held back. I still try to give everything a good shot. I don't let my literacy hinder me or get in my way. It's been a struggle but I try to never give up.

It would be good to get my driver's licence as it has been 30 years and I have never held a driver's licence. I have two teenage boys who would like me to drive them to their sports. One plays rugby and the other does martial arts. I find it hard as the vehicle is there, but I can't drive it legally. In the past I have been caught driving without my licence and this has to stop. So I have started a learner licence course in order to drive legally.

I am finding the learner licence course challenging but I have the help and support of my tutor at Te Roroa Learning Assistance. I look forward to be able to drive legally.

Ned

ALISSA HELPS THE MERMAID

"Look Mum there is a mermaid!," my daughter screams in excitement as we were walking past the beach.

"Where?," I asked her trying to see where she was looking.

"Over there," pointing towards the water. "Do you see her?"

"No," I replied.

"She needs our help. She is asking for our help."

I asked her, "How do you know?"

"Because I can speak mermaid Mum. We need to help her."

"How do we do that?" I asked. "Come on Mum, let's help her." "Oh, I do see the mermaid right there. This is awesome!"

We saw that the mermaid had been caught with a big fish hook through her tail.

"I really do not know how to get that hook out, Alissa. It's pretty stuck and we haven't any tools to remove it."

Alissa spotted a man with a tackle box and rushed up to him and asked if he could help.

"Sure," he said, "how can I help?"

"This mermaid needs help. Do you have anything to help remove this fish hook from her tail?"

The mermaid spoke up. "My name is Benita. Please help me."

The man ran away leaving his gear behind. Alissa opened the tackle box in search of something to help Benita to remove the hook.

"UH HUH!" said Alissa pulling out some wire cutters. As carefully as she could she cut the hook in half and removed the hook from Benita's tail.

"Thank you so much for helping me Alissa. I am forever grateful. As a token of my appreciation, please have this necklace. It will give you a tail so you can visit me and my family any time you want."

Alissa was beyond speechless as she accepted the gift.

Benita then waved and swam off into the ocean.

"Alissa, I am so very proud of you for helping Benita the mermaid. Let's go and get some ice cream."

"Good idea Mum, I love you more than rainbows," Alissa said.

"I love you more than rainbows too," I replied.

Stacey

Hi my name is J and I'm going to write my story and present it in my own words.

My life begins when I was little. I was raised in Otahuhu and it was cool. I thought I was going to be around other people like my brothers, be around people that would go and look after me, but I was the only child. My Mum went to work and I would stay home by myself and watch TV.

My Mum said to go to school and I didn't take it as something I would do. I actually wanted to stay home. I hated school but I knew I had to be well educated and make something of myself. When I grew up I got into video games and made friends by hanging around on the streets. I took a new approach to school. I joined Dojos to learn how to fight. Fighting came easy to me, pretty easy, and I wanted to break down the styles, like what Bruce Lee did. The styles that I've learnt are Kung Fu, Wing Chug, Kick Boxing, Boxing, Jeet Kwon Do, Tae Kwon Do, Tai Chi, Akido and Brazilian Ju Jitsu. I got in to heaps of fights when growing up.

I hope you like my story.

J

THE THREE AMIGOS

Reaching for the door handle, he was halted by a raucous chorus of laughter, one stood out from the others. It was raw, it was loud, it was infectious. Interesting thought Tom. He proceeded to open the door. "This sounds like my kind of place, it could be fun."

Stepping into the Whanganui Adult Learning Centre for the first time, all thoughts of doubt and procrastination dissolved.

Tom was confronted by the three women who for the immediate future would change his world, one where hope was not a forlorn thing.

"What can we do for you kind sir on this fine day?"

It was the cackler, skinny and indomitable, an air of authority, kindness and genuineness, exuding from her aura.

Wow, Tom thought, she has energy like my mum.

Tom's mum was one of those rare individuals who turned away no one, who saw past the outside to the inside, who believed in people, loved helping people for all the right reasons and not monetary ones.

And, here was another one of those Taonga, her name is Gail, one of the few people Tom had ever met who was to penetrate his defences, and believe me if Tom didn't let you in, you don't get in. He was old school, with old school rules; his was the generation who were told to harden up, where everyone kicked your arse. Parents, teachers, neighbours, priests, police and so on. Ahh, the 60s and 70s where discipline was steeped in the ancient art of violence and practised by all.

Standing on either side of this power house of positive thinking was the delightful and insightful Dr. Deb, a true literacy scholar and a goddamn real McKoy Professor who actually wrote books sometimes on literacy, sometimes on plagiarism, sometimes soft porn. Another very honest, very caring real person.

On her other side was the very leggy, very sexy, very funny Sue. Sexy Sue, she was known as by many of her pupils. Sue put people through the drivers course, Sue's success rate was up there with the best, her beauty combined with her down to earth street manner. Sue was from Manchester, a touch of Coro and a touch of class.

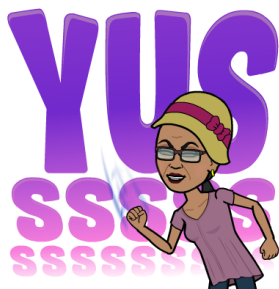
My god, thought Tom, it was just not mum it was the aunties too, The Three Amigos.

After five months of controlling, persuasion, encouragement and sometimes just straight up truth, Tom really appreciated his three Amigos. Friends they became, people who rekindled his belief in himself and others who inspired in him hope, so much so that he is doing courses with the dream of becoming a teacher along the same lines as them. They became Tom's inspiration. Tom's Mantra was if you hurt them in any way I will find you and I willTom is still old school.

Anton

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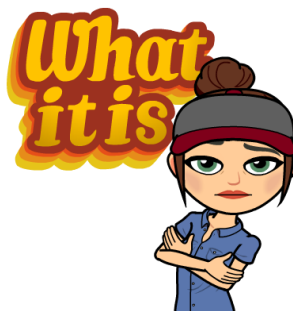
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