

E Te Waati e
Kei hea ra
I to wairua.

Where art thou Te Waati?

In 2002 we visited a "urupa" or cemetery at Kauangaroa, in the Whangaehu Valley, in a search for the grave or headstone of my paternal grandfather, Te Waati Taiaroa.

As I was searching the headstones the grandchildren were asked to stay in the car to avoid disturbing any spirits which were described to them by their grandmother as, something that you can feel but cannot see.

"Like pins and needles in your feet!" remarked Marco.

While I searched in vain, a moth flew into the car. We had read previously that in Maori folklore that the spirit of the dead often appeared as a moth. So we took this as a sign that we had indeed disturbed the spirit of our grandfather and that we were in the right place although there were no physical signs of his presence.

Earlier at a Taiaroa whanau hui held at Hirangi marae at Tokaanu we had been directed along with the rest of the whanau, by Dalvanus, to write a verse about Te Waati for a waiata which he was composing for the hui. Our verse read as follows:

Ngu ra koe
E Te Waati e
Kei hea ra
I to wairua
Tangi ana
Te roimata
Whakarongo ki o
Mo-ko-pu-na.

You are the silent one
Te Waati.
Where is your
spirit?
Listen to the cries
of your grandchildren.

Our own father never told us about our grandfather. Only recently, we discovered why. Our grandfather, Te Waati, had died when Dad was only two years old.

There are only two bits of information we have been able to find about Te Waati. One is a written record—from the Maori magazine Te Tupiri/The Jubilee published in 1900 which recorded Te Waati's presence at a meeting with the Minister of Maori Affairs, Timi Kara, at Turakina in May, 1900. Hoani and Te Kiri Taiaroa were also in attendance.

The other information was hearsay. In 1979 we visited Raetihi Marae and were taken on to the marae with Archie and his family "the most remarkable of whom was Titi Tihu, an energetic 98 year old who remembered meeting our grandfather, Te Waati and his sister Whakairi (aka Nora) at Whangaehu in 1896."

My grandfather has certainly earned his title as 'the silent one'!

Mervyn Taiaroa
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