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Notes on the Family of Tamatea Te Waati Taiaroa(Generation 1, 5 iv)*

(*refer Whakapapa Te Waati Taiaroa compiled 2001)

Tamatea Te Waati Taiaroa was born on 25 September, 1907 at Whangaehu. He was also known as Thomas Wattie Taiaroa and to his friends and family as “Tom”, “Tommy” ,“Old Tom” or to his workmates as “Big Chief.”

We don't know a lot about his early life in the Wanganui area except that he was brought up by the Jones family on a farm in the Whangaehu valley. We later met members of the Jones family when they toured south with the Wanganui rugby team; they included Bevan, Graham and Peter, all of whom were Maori All Blacks in their day.

Tom worked as a hairdresser, on a dairy farm(we believe the first farmer he worked for was named Baldwin) a cook for a forestry gang (Some years later he explained that he was a member of the forestry gang who planted the trees in the Central North Island forest and in particular those on the hilltop at Atiamuri on Highway 1.); and he also had a go at running the piecart in Wanganui. In Wanganui we lived near Cook's Gardens.

He was in Timaru before the war where he met our mother on the dance floor at Caroline Bay. Our mother, Helen Margaret McDonald, came from a farming family in Southland with a strong Scottish background. The first of the children(Gordon) was born in Christchurch; the next three(Ray, Nelson and Mervyn) were born in Wanganui . Although Tom wanted to go to the war he was not accepted on the criteria at that time of “essential skills and too many children”. Instead in 1940 Tom was “manpowered”(able-bodied men with young families were compulsorily directed to take jobs where there was a shortage of labour) to Timaru to work in the freezing works. The next three children(Lesley, Lindsay and Beverley) were all born in Timaru.

After a number of years at the Pareora and Smithfield freezing works, he worked at the Timaru Woollen Mills as a “carding machine operator” until following the 1951 wharf strikes he had the opportunity to become a “wharfie” and he remained there for the rest of his working life. In

retirement, he and Mum looked after the catering and grounds of the Timaru Golf Club at the Levels near Timaru.

Although there were a number of Maori at Arowhenua, there were very few in Timaru itself so Tom was often the recipient of gifts of food which people thought a Maori should enjoy---which he did—including crayfish, eel, mutton-birds and wood pigeon. He was also popular for his home brews—primarily beer, but also a range of vegetable wines including beetroot wine which from time to time exploded in the wash-house. Later, he developed a brew, a type of mead, which only he could drink!

He was a handyman out of necessity(so many mouths to feed!): he repaired our shoes, cut our hair, did his own electrical repairs, hand-painted our first car(a Ford Anglia with a 10 hp motor and an urge to pull to the left) with some left over silver paint so it became known as the “Silver Bullet” although it seldom got over 30 mph.. But most of all he was a gardener. At one stage he had the use of two neighbours’ gardens plus our own; borrowed a horse to plough up the section to plant potatoes and still planted cabbages or lettuces in the front garden saying: “You can’t eat bloody flowers!”

Timaru was a great place for a young family to grow up in the 50’s. All of the children had the advantage of an outstanding primary school, Waimataitai, where we not only got a good grounding in the three R’s but were also exposed to good coaching in rugby, cricket, swimming, boxing and running as well as being introduced to brass bands. Both Gordon, Nelson and Lindsay carried on their initial introductions to the cornet to become good musicians.(It was only later we learnt about the brass band traditions associated with the Ratana movement). Gordon went on to tour of Europe and North America on two occasions with the NZ National Band in the 1960’s; and Nelson and Gordon were members of the champion Timaru Brass Band for many years.

Ray, Nelson, Mervyn and Lindsay, at the Boys High School, and Lesley and Beverley, at the Girls High School, then had excellent opportunities to develop both in the classroom and on the sports field. As a result Ray excelled at cricket and went on to play for South Canterbury, Otago and North Otago; Nelson and Mervyn played rugby for South Canterbury; Lindsay and Mervyn played for the University of Canterbury and NZ Universities at rugby; Beverley played netball for South Canterbury and both Lesley and Beverley were keen competitors in the local highland

dancing competitions. Mervyn and Lindsay completed their Arts degrees at Canterbury and Lindsay later completed a Masters degree in Public Policy at Victoria.

Eventually Gordon followed Tom to become a wharfie in Timaru(his son Peter later followed in his footsteps); Ray became the General Manager of the Licensing Trust in Oamaru and continues his interest in the beverages industry; Nelson worked most of his life as a commercial representative for Shell Oil located in Mosgiel; Mervyn started secondary school teaching in Timaru, continued in UK and Canada before taking up a career in personnel management on his return to NZ to live in Auckland;

Lesley(Edgeler)married and raised her family in Timaru while continuing to teach and judge highland dancing; Lindsay started secondary teaching in Invercargill, continued in Canada before returning to NZ and pursuing a career in university administration and is currently Chief Executive of the NZ Universities Vice Chancellors' Committee; Beverley(Betts) has spent much of her adult life offshore in UK, Europe and Singapore with her husband who was employed by the then New Zealand Dairy Board but they have now returned to farm at Pleasant Point on the outskirts of Timaru.

Tom died in 1986 but Mum, or "Nellie" still lives in Timaru.

We meet as a family relatively frequently whenever we can think of an excuse: these include weddings, funerals and important birthdays with the last occasion being the new millenium.

It would take too long to describe all the activities of the 25 grandchildren, 34 great grandchildren and 2 great, great grandchildren, but, at the risk of offending some, I will mention a few themes:

I have already mentioned Tom's long involvement on the wharf at Timaru, Gordon("Little Chief") and then, his son, Peter("Wee Chief") followed in his footsteps and coincidentally Beverley's husband, Alistair is now Chairman of the Harbour Board.

Beverley's daughter, Vicki is married to Eddie who is employed by Fonterra in Dubai; and Nelson's son Rikki is also employed by Fonterra and works in Indonesia.

We have always been international travellers: Mervyn went away in 1955 to Madison, Wisconsin on an AFS scholarship, his daughter Keri went to

Argentina and Chile in 1983, his son Tamati went to USA in 1985 and his other son Travis went to school in Japan the following year. Gordon's daughter Cheryl lives near Syracuse, New York and his son, Michael is a orchardist in Queensland. Ray's son David lives in New Brunswick, Canada. Lesley's son Paul continues the "cornet connection" and is a music teacher in a secondary school in Brunei. Nelson's son, Bevan has followed his mother(Dot) into the nursing profession and practices in Saudi Arabia.

Lesley's family has continued Mum's Scottish traditions with all her daughters competing in highland dancing and her grandsons, Michael and Scott being keen pipe band participants.....

For many years, because we lived in Timaru, we were associated with the Taiaroa of Otago(Taiaroa Heads) and Taumutu(Lake Ellesmere) but we were aware of our links to Wanganui, initially through Raunu (7) and Gordon(19) meeting each other at the national brass band competitions; then Nelson and Mervyn playing rugby for South Canterbury against Wanganui and when Archie() was sent to Christchurch by the Maori Affairs Department in 60's and visited our family in Timaru. Some of our family re-connected with the Wanganui Taiaroa Whanau at the re-union for Kahukura Taiaroa held at Raetihi in 1979 and since then we have met up with numerous others in Wanganui, Ratana and Auckland.

We look forward to meeting up with many more at Turangi later this year.