



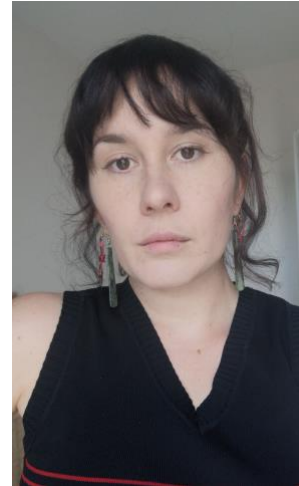
Logging into Ancestral Knowledge

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After my nan died, her house was left to my aunty. There have been heaps of renovations on the house, but the one thing that remains is the tupuna paintings, nailed in a wide arch on the lounge wall. I've looked at the people in these paintings my whole life but I still don't know who they are. I always assumed, one day, I would learn.

Then COVID-19 enters the chat. I think of the influenza outbreak in 1918, when the death rate for Maaori was seven times the death rate for European. It is uncertain, when we look out at the flat waves of our past, whether our voices will be maintained throughout these crises or snuffed out, so how do we make sure we're heard?

There was a push-pull effect within my whanau; a resistance to let go of the older principles of learning kanohi ki te kanohi and an urgency to teach everyone the whakapapa for a worst-case scenario. One side said, let's put it all online, the other side said, but it's not tika. On both sides, we were spooked to think the 'Tomorrow', when we were going to take up the roles of our matua, wasn't as secure as we thought. As a compromise, my uncle made Facebook pages, and filled them with maps, pepeha, links to stuff that was already online, announcing "here is today's learning e te whaanau". Even our big, stoic uncle was worried. If he disappeared from the long body of Papa-tuu-aa-nuku, who will carry on the wisdom?

My only desire for this page is to help
whanau to connect and self discover
through their past

Ko Wai au, (who am I)

Look forward to your thoughts.

Jack Rahurahu 7 Comments • Seen by 7

What is allowed to live in the digital air? What should only exist between people?

I scrolled over the pepeha, the maps, the names by the blue light of my screen. And as we all looked down at the government-issued mass text,



announcing a four week lockdown, I started seeing an offload of information across social media from mātua kēkē from other maunga all over the motu.

Veronica Hetet initiated a free course for beginners, instructing students on how to make kono, a simple basket out of harakeke, in the style that she was taught by her mother before her. Her videos are shot over her shoulder, as if you are seeing through her eyes, and her voice guides her students through the harvest, the preparation of the flax, and the weaving into shape.

A quiet, still day became a gathering day, a kitchen knife became a tool for softening, and a line of harakeke in my local park became a resource.

On her Facebook page, Arihia Yet outlined her practice of collecting plants, their natural medicinal purposes and the tikanga around using these materials, from her 18 years of learning. She turned over the plant matter she had collected in her hands, impressing the importance of karakia; only taking plants when you have the knowledge, then returning any scraps back to the earth. I played her wisdom in the morning, considered how I could take without waste, started setting out a bucket to collect rain water for my houseplants, placed an old kumara in a vase of water to grow water roots, and let the unruly vines grow and crawl across my living room floor.



On Instagram, Hone Bailey, in his quarantine in Japan, shared his knowledge around dyeing cloth, using avocado and onion skins, as well as sulphur to bind the colour to the cloth. He then scoured the muslin cloth in his sink, washing it in the colour baths. He scanned the camera around his



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tiny apartment balcony to show us his line of harakeke plant and tii koouka sprouting from pots. I was inspired and dyed my shirts with turmeric and old dropped leaves from outside my house, then pulled out my old paints from the back of my closet and painted spiders on my jeans with symbols from my whare tupuna.



Scotty and Stacey Morrison released a free programme for Te Reo Maaori learning through Massey University, and shared videos of their thoughts of the 'Kahungunu Wave' (a flick of the chin upward to greet people without touching) and a non-touching alternative to hongis

I followed along with the online scenarios and mouthed the kupu to myself, practised the sign of hongis; a hooked finger pressed against the nose, then pushed outward.

I don't know if this sharing is tika, but all I can say is I'm thankful to have had guidance on the basics of ancestral knowledge. Through it, I was able to imagine a world where I could exercise this education every day, and live an authentic lifestyle that is guided by our ancestors. What if we dyed our own clothes, made baskets from flax, used herbs to ease our pains, and spoke Te Reo Maaori everywhere?



There is so much learning to do, from your whanau, from other whanau, and so much space to imagine our future together. One day my Elders will



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be gone, and what will I have to give to the next generation? I log into Facebook and type out a message under a green light:

ok aunty, what can you tell me about those people up on the wall?

Michelle Rahurahu (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whaoa, Rangitāne) currently resides on Te Ākitai Waiohua whenua, in Takaanini.

In 2019, Michelle joined Rangatahi o te Pene, which self-published Te Rito o te Harakeke, an anthology of Māori voices for Ihumātao. She has published poetry, non-fiction and fiction in several places.