

Walking in two worlds - a journey of nation building

Mihi by Miria Pomare.

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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. The end of year prize giving is always a special occasion as we all come together to celebrate the contributions and achievements of all students over the past year, and to farewell those girls who will be leaving to embark on their own journeys in life. I feel quite nostalgic as I reflect back to the last time I attended prize giving, at the end of my seventh form year (year 13?), over 30 years ago. There has obviously been a lot of water under the bridge since then, and memories have faded with time, but I still remember that day last day at Nga Tawa as if it were only yesterday. I think the mixed emotions of the excitement and anticipation of leaving school, tinged with the sadness of having to say goodbye to close friends and the school that had in many ways become home, left an indelible imprint on me that endures to this day. Looking back, it was a watershed moment in my life, as I'm sure it will also be for this year's school leavers.

But in reflecting on what to talk about today, I realised that my arrival at Nga Tawa was an even more profound watershed moment than my departure. This was because not long after my parents left me at Nga Tawa as a 'new bug' in 1984, I became acutely aware that I was inhabiting a totally different world and cultural landscape from the one in which I had grown up. No doubt many girls starting out at Nga Tawa struggle at first to adapt to their new environment. But for me, it was more profound than this. Nga Tawa was a world away from the small maori community I was from, where everyone shared close kinship relationships, my friends were my cousins, and our world revolved around the marae which was at the heart of every whanau gathering and community event. Even though I had been booked in to Nga Tawa from birth, and had a sense of pride in knowing that I would be following in the footsteps of my aunty and Grandmother who had paved the way for me, nothing could have prepared me for the culture shock I experienced when I finally got here. The biggest shock was realising that Nga Tawa was not a maori school as I had always assumed it was because it had a maori name! So imagine my surprise when I discovered that the only other maori at the school at that time was my first cousin, Phoebe Tamahori.

At first, the cultural divide seemed too wide to straddle but as I settled in to Nga Tawa life and became more familiar with the school's practices and values, I discovered they were very similar to my own maori values or tikanga that had been instilled in me by my tupuna. The emphasis on leadership and respect, worship, community service, and a strong family ethic, aligned with familiar maori values such as rangatiratanga, manaakitanga, wairuatanga, and whanaugatanga. Holding fast to these values enabled me to go on and make the most of the opportunities available to me at Nga Tawa, which I would never have had access to otherwise.

Nga Tawa gave me a top quality education, strong ethics and values that have sustained me in life, and enduring life long friendships. But above all else, Nga Tawa gave me the ability to walk with ease in the pakeha world. This enabled me to go on to university to complete a Masters degree in Political Science and to establish a career path in the environmental field and Treaty claims settlement process which also allowed to continue to fulfil my obligations as a maori. So it is fair to say that my education at Nga Tawa and the values we were imbibed with, has strongly influenced the person I have become and the journey I have taken in life. My journey has relied on my ability to "walk in both the maori and pakeha worlds" because in my experience the advancement of maori

wellbeing and justice in this country cannot be achieved without building trust and understanding between maori and pakeha, so that the potential of all New Zealanders can be fully realised.

This is why I've chosen the theme of walking in two worlds for my talk today. And while I will be referring to my own journey, I don't believe that I am walking alone because my journey reflects where we are going as a country and, as new Zealanders, we are all on this same journey together. This journey is fundamentally about nation building and the responsibility that we all have in advancing the waka, and in particular, the role that Nga Tawa can, and is, playing to produce future leaders who will continue to bridge the cultural divide and generate mutual understanding. The notion of partnership envisaged by the Treaty of Waitangi is fundamental to nation-building but is yet to be realised. However, under the current government, and with changing attitudes and greater awareness of the history, the prospect of achieving this vision is, I believe, closer than ever before.

But at the time I started at Nga Tawa, there was an expectation that if maori were to be successful in life, they needed to be able to walk comfortably in both the maori and pakeha worlds. And in order to achieve this, a quality pakeha education was essential. This was the reason for my parents decision to send me to Nga Tawa. It was really a reflection of their bigger commitment to the vision of nation building involving maori and pakeha working together in partnership to create the circumstances and opportunities for both cultures to flourish and enable the realisation of the full potential of all New Zealanders in this country.

So my journey at Nga Tawa was in this sense a continuation of a bigger kaupapa or national movement towards the fulfilment of nationhood. But to understand the context of my journey, it is necessary for me to trace my whakapapa back to my origins in Aotearoa. And I would say that this is necessary for all NZers, maori and pakeha alike, because knowing how you connect creates the foundation upon which common goals and understandings can be established towards our nationhood. In my case, my whakapapa connection to Aotearoa began with the arrival of the Tainui waka in the 11th century. My tupuna, hoturoa, captain of the Tainui, made landfall at Kawhia and for centuries my ancestors remained domiciled around kawhia harbour until Te Rauparaha became leader of the Ngati Toa tribe and induced them to leave their home and follow him to the Cook Strait where they became the preeminent iwi in southern part of the north island and the northern portion of the south. My great grandmother, Kahe Te Rauoterangi, was amongst those who migrated with Te Rauparaha to Cook Strait where she became famous for her epic swim from Kapiti Island to the mainland with her baby strapped to her shoulders, to warn her relations of an imminent attack on the island in 1824. Not long after she married a Scottish whaler and trader, which created the first injection of pakeha blood into the Pomare family, and my great grandfather, Sir Maui Pomare, was the first born mokopuna from this union. In 1840 Kahe Te Rauoterangi became one of 13 women to sign Te Tiriti o Waitangi, believing that it would affirm and protect maori authority or tino rangatiratanga over our lands and resources, while at the same time providing pakeha the right to settle in Aotearoa and the ability to make laws for their own protection.

This was, of course, the watershed moment in the history of Aotearoa; and it was not lost on Kahe, who upheld her belief in the Treaty throughout her life and ensured that her mokopuna, Maui, was instilled with the same belief and commitment to fulfilling the vision of nationhood. Maui went on to become the first maori doctor in 1899, saving the maori population from the brink of extinction; and later as a member of parliament he introduced major health reforms upon which the foundations of the public health system rest today. His contribution in recruiting maori soldiers for the war effort and in establishing the first commission of inquiry into maori and confiscations in Taranaki also contributed to the building of Aotearoa as we know it today. His achievements for

maori and pakeha in this country through his political career and leadership as a national figure of his time, was due to his ability to walk in two worlds. He was known to have been just as comfortable at a hui on the marae, as he was in a debating chamber of Parliament. It was Sir Maui who established the template for nation building in our whanau and successive generations have tried to emulate his example ever since.

As I've already mentioned, Nga Tawa was the crucial stepping stone for me that enabled me to walk comfortably in the pakeha world. However, while still at school, I discovered that my world was very different to the world my father had known, and his world was different again to that of Sir Maui's time. Gone were the days when the status of the Pomare name engendered such respect that it automatically opened doors and provided access to circles of influence in either the maori or pakeha worlds. So I began to realise that my contribution to nation building would be very limited if it depended solely on my ability to walk in two worlds, and really what was needed was for everyone to do the same. I started to wonder what was the point of my Nga Tawa education and ability to move in pakeha circles if this was not reciprocated by my pakeha friends and families, who were, through no fault of their own, oblivious to my endeavours and totally unaware of what little they knew or understood of my maori world. I began to realise that maori and pakeha needed to be on this journey together, paddling the waka in the same direction, otherwise we would end up directionless going round in circles – which is where I ended up at that point in time - soul-searching and looking for direction in life. I went through a phase of not feeling anchored in either world – when I was at home with my maori cousins I was increasingly considered to be an outsider, a snob with plumming voice or 'tangata moho' or know it all; and back at Nga Tawa I found myself compromising my maoriness by trying to fit in and be like everyone else, ignoring the derogatory maori joke in lunch queue, or mispronunciation of my name, or turning a blind eye when my maori sensibilities were offended by some unintentional transgression eg sitting on a table (which was a common occurrence).

I guess looking back now, I was going through what we would call today an identity crisis brought on by a sense of inadequacy, as I felt neither sufficiently maori or pakeha to do justice to the legacy of my ancestors in continuing their journey of nation building. My father's philosophy was that in order to succeed as maori, we needed to be successful schizophrenic - in other words, success on European terms was not detrimental to being maori. But the world had moved on, and in my experience success in European terms, for all its benefits, was detrimental to my maori identity. So I came to the conclusion that it was no longer feasible for maori to have to carry the responsibility of our dual nationhood alone. Building a strong and unified nation requires both maori and pakeha making commitment to walk in two worlds together.

So what does all of this mean and how is it relevant to Nga Tawa? Well, I believe Nga Tawa is really well positioned to be on the cutting edge of the nation building journey by continuing to promote strong female leaders, including future prime ministers and rangatira maori. It is also well placed to promote cross-cultural respect and understanding given the close alignment of school values with tikanga maori and the strong ethic of community service that is a distinguishing feature of life at Nga Tawa. And, I believe this journey has already begun. Over the last 30 years since I left Nga Tawa, there have been significant strides taken to be more inclusive of maori students and to integrate Te Ao Maori into the Nga Tawa experience. This is reflected in the significant increase in maori numbers from 2, when I started, to almost 25% today and this has been further enriched by a diversity of students from other cultures and countries in the world. There is also a commitment to Te Reo Maori and it is being increasingly used in the classroom and in worship; and relationships

with local iwi, Ngati Apa, are also being developed to enable students gain a localised perspective on the history and environment in which Nga Tawa is located.

None of these things were in place when I was at Nga Tawa. Back then it was a pretty lonely journey for a maori with little opportunity for cultural validation or expression. Today, we have a completely different landscape that embraces diversity and encourages a strong sense of cultural identity, whatever that may be. This no doubt reflects the broader societal shifts in attitude and the wider acceptance of the Treaty as the founding document of Aotearoa but I think it is also testament to the leadership and vision of the Nga Tawa board and Principal.

However, it is also important to note that 180 years on from the Treaty and we still have yet to fulfil its vision of nationhood. But I think we are getting closer and Nga Tawa is, in my view, a good example of how far we have come, at least in the last 30 years since I left the school. Looking to the future, I think Nga Tawa represents a microcosim of New Zealand society which makes it a good barometer of the pulse of this nation and an ideal incubator for growing future leaders.

Clearly, we still have some way to go but there is growing recognition of the fact that, as NZers, we are all on this journey together. In order to keep the momentum moving forward, there are two basic principles, I believe, that we should all adopt, in our respective lives and school communities:

The first principle involves recognising the importance of whakapapa and I don't just mean in a maori sense, because everybody has provenance no matter who they are and what their cultural background might be, so what I'm talking about is the empowerment that comes from knowing who you are and how you personally connect to Aotearoa. Knowing your whakapapa better equips you to anchor yourself in the world so that you always know where you stand on any issue, in any place, at any point in time. This better enables opportunities to identify where there might be common links that can be used to strengthen future relationships in order to achieve common goals. Whakapapa provides us all with our own unique set of credentials which is a powerful tool in generating mutual respect and understanding, both necessary ingredients for the building of a strong and diverse nation.

The second principle is the importance of committing to the survival of Te Reo Maori – and by this, I don't mean that everyone needs to become fluent speakers. But I do think its important for all NZers to respect te reo maori as the indigenous language of this country which distinguishes NZ every other country in the world. In this sense, te reo maori belongs to all New Zealanders, not only maori, and therefore all of us, maori and pakeha alike, have responsibility for ensuring that its special status as an official language of Aotearoa is protected through its ongoing use and survival. Obviously, one way to do this is to make te reo available in schools. But even at a more basic level, we can all make a big difference by simply making the effort to pronounce maori names correctly, especially people's names. This is one of the most important inter-personal modes of communication and can affect a person's response and self-pride. In a school environment, especially, mispronunciation of names can have a detrimental effect on a students ability to learn. Pronouncing a person's name correctly, shows respect for the person and their language, and is something that every one of us can do to show our respect for te reo maori as a necessary building block for nationhood.

By adopting these basic principles in our everyday lives, including here at Nga Tawa, I believe we are all contributing in a positive way to creating a society and building a nation that is founded upon a duality of maori and pakeha cultures, but which embraces diversity, and allows all New Zealanders to flourish and realise their full potential. I believe this was the intent behind Hobson's pledge at the

signing of the Treaty in 1840, when he said “He Iwi Kotahi tatou” meaning “we are now one people” – but not one people in the sense that maori were to become assimilated into pakeha – but rather that maori and pakeha were to be united as one in their commitment to the Treaty as the foundation for our shared nationhood for the benefit of future generations. We are those future generations, and now it is up to us, all of us together, to ensure that our descendants will also benefit from our contribution as they embark on their journey of “walking in two worlds”.

Kia kaha tatou kit e mahi tahi tatou I runga I te whakaaro Kotahi.