

ED 800-Unit 7

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I always wanted to visit New Zealand and learn more about Maori people and finally, here is the opportunity I have been waiting for. I called my old friend and high school classmate Niki Caro who is a good expert in Maori culture, to arrange for me a stay in a village where Maori people live. Next day I hopped on an air-plane in LA and two days later arrived at Auckland, New Zealand. Niki waited for me at the airport and after long talk she took me to the Whangara village.

Imagine my surprise when she told me that I would be staying at the chief Koro Apirana house. He lives with his wife and granddaughter Paikea who is the only living child in the line of the chiefs. However, Paikea is a girl and technically, cannot inherit the leadership. The second day I observed Koro and his granddaughter working on the boat engine. Paikea wanted to know more about their ancestors and where they came from. He showed her the rope and explained that each of the threads the rope is made of, represents one of their ancestors and weaved together they make a strong rope. When he tried to start the engine using the same rope, it broke in two pieces. Paikea tied them together, and started the engine up. The two pieces held together. Paikea was happy, grandfather upset, and I was confused. Did I see any significance in this? Not at first, and as her grandfather said it is just a useless bloody rope, or is it something more? That night, lying in my bed I tried to see the rope through Koro's and Paikea's eyes and that is when I realized the significance of that afternoon. The rope represents Maori culture, old and new ways, tradition that goes back thousands of years and modern days. How important is for someone to know about his past and ancestors? When old customs and traditions have lost their meaning in everyday life, why keep them going? Do the two pieces represent past and present, and can they be tied together like Paikea did, or will they be lost and disconnected from each other forever? Why did Koro get so upset? Was he really worried that Paikea might get hurt or was this more of a collision between stubborn tradition that he represents and new changes (girl power) that Paikea brings. How about Paikea who is convinced that she is indeed the "chosen one"? Is she the missing thread that will make the rope and Maori culture strong for years to come? What are her odds as a female to become the next chief? Does she have the willpower to change the tradition of choosing the male leaders, the tradition that's been going on for generations and generations?

I stayed with them another week and the experience of living and being the part of Maori culture will stay with me forever. A few months later, I received a message from my friend Niki telling me that Paikea has proved to her grandfather that she is ready to be the new leader of Maori tribe.