

Ma, why did it have to be you

ANGIE HARAWIRA is a 15-year-old pupil at Taupo-nui-a-Tia College. This story, *E Ma*, is her winning entry from 150 competitors in the 1981 Bank of New Zealand Young Writers Award. Angie received a \$150 prize and another \$150 went to her school's library fund. Judge Mrs Judy Siers described *E Ma* as "a beautiful story. The structure is sparse and the message immediate".

AUE — e ma, why you? Why did you have to die? E ma, it hurts so much, knowing you have gone. Why ... why did it have to be you? Aue — e ma, it hurts so much.

I look around me, at our people, our family, all so unhappy, so sad.

I try to swallow the lump in my throat, but it just seems to grow larger and larger. I blink quickly, my body seems to be filled with pain, hurt, sadness.

Again I look around me, the koraias, old wise heads bent towards the earth, the kuia, tear streaked cheeks covered by scarves or hankies, all my many relations and my friends, are with me.

Slowly we make our way to our marae's urupa, our cemetery. I turn suddenly and see my Nanny, my Mother's Mum. The confusion, the unhappiness, the pain and yes, the frustration, I see clearly in her eyes. The hurt is there too. Aue, taku kuia, aue. My poor Nanny.

"It should be me there!" I hear her whisper painfully. "I am so old and she was so young! It should be me there not her ..."

I look away from her, I could take away some of her hurt, comfort her, do anything, but already the burden I carry is heavy, and by helping her I would instantly make it heavier. Aue ... Nanny, I'm sorry but already I have too much to bear.

The wailing, the crying, echoes around me, presses against, fill me.

I blink hard and look at Ranginui our skyfather. He is clothed for mourning, his skies blanketed with heavy grey.

E ma, I hurt so much.

"Tipene, Tipene," a soft voice interrupts my thoughts and I look down. My baby sister is looking up at me, her great big eyes seeming too big for her little face.

"Haramai Pepe," I say, and I know my voice is all choked up and funny. I awhi her tightly, tightly, in case I lose her too.

She is my favourite and I am hers. Maybe it is because we are so different from my three brothers and the other two girls, as our hair is jet black and we

have our mother's light green "pakeha" eyes, whereas the rest have the same brown colouring. Whatever it is, she has come to comfort me and I hug her to me even closer.

I so badly need an outlet for all the hurt rising inside me.

My Nanny's quiet wailing suddenly turns into a high painful scream.

I tense, blink hard and try to swallow even harder.

They are placing Mum gently into Papatuanuku, our Earthmother.

It hurts so much. How I wish I was a little boy, so I could scream and cry out my frustration, my pain, my hurt.

I am still, I can't relax, the pain inside me feels as if it is boiling nearly ready to explode.

"Mamae Tipene, mamae. Mummy's sleeping ne ra?" I hear Pepe's voice, but I can only look at her and nod dumbly. Her big green eyes stare up at me and I know she understands what I am going through.

"Pepe has the eyes of a wise old kuia in a face of a young child," Mum had said once, her lips smiling, her eyes dead serious. "Yes, my baby sister is very wise," I think to myself.

The sound of brown soil meeting polished wood reaches my ears. I will hate that sound for as long as I live.

Aue, it hurts. But, I am a man! I am 15! Men do not cry. Aue, it is so hard to be a man, when you are watching someone you love leaving you, for ever.

E ma, I'll never understand why it was you. Why, why? You were always so helpful, kind, loving, now you've gone. I'll miss you.

I can feel the unmanly tears rising and I know that there is no way to stop them.

"Tipene, look at Daddy," Pepe says softly as she points to our father.

I look over, a man of all men, people call him an example of a "real" male. He is crying. Tears are running down his cheeks, unheeded; but he is still a man of all men, he looks so different.

"Thank you Dad," I whisper softly. I finally have an outlet.

I feel tears on my cheeks, they are not mine, they are Ranginui's, he has blessed me by covering my tears with his.

I have my outlet at last, the pain is still there but it is easing and it is helping so much.

I manage to smile at Pepe. I am still a man, the tears don't prove or disprove the fact. E ma, I am still a man!

Haere ra, e ma ... till we meet again ...

BOOK REVIEW

Women in New Zealand Society. Edited by Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes. George Allen and Unwin, Auckland 1980.

Most books about women in New Zealand treat Maoris as a token, to be mentioned quickly and thereafter ignored. My vision however is coloured by a course I took at Auckland University purporting to be about women in New Zealand. The first book I was to read began ... 'The first women in New Zealand arrived in 1840 aboard ...'. What then am I? My family have lived in the Bay of Plenty for years and trace their genealogy to Tama te Kapua and Tuwharetoa. 1840 meant nothing to my female forbears and surely had less effect on them than the Tarawera eruption.

Books published in the last five years have done little to rectify this situation. I remember being angry with Judith Aitken's *'A Woman's Place A study of the changing roles of women in New Zealand'*. She at least mentioned Maori women, but only in a token gesture. This latest book attempts to treat Maoris equally but unfortunately falls short.

Best book, but

I say unfortunate because this is by far the best book ever put out about New Zealand women. Edited by Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes of the History Department at Victoria, the articles cover a wide scope from the beginnings of the women's movement in New Zealand, fertility, sexuality and social control, politics, professions, education, work and family, artists, women in literature to an article on Pakeha men and male culture.

Recognition is given to a weakness of many books put out on women, and that is a concentration on a problem to the exclusion of the society in which they live. This is enunciated in Christine Gillespie's 'The road ahead for the women's movement — Out of the womb and into the world'. It also fails to fall into the trap of choosing women writers in preference to more competent males. While I recognize the value of exposing female to female, it has often led to many inconsistencies of quality.

Not representative

One of the disappointments of this book is the inclusion of an article previously published, but updated on Maori women. The information previously published is enlightening however the choice of updating is tenuous. While many of the women who capture media attention are quoted little is said