

A CONVERSATION WITH KERI

Shortly after Tu Tangata Magazine interviewed Keri Hulme, it was announced that she had won the ICI Writers Bursary of \$6,000.

"Completely knocked out, flabbergasted" was how Keri described her feelings. She says the money will enable all the ghosts in her head and scraps of paper to be finally put down.

First up Keri says she'll polish up a collection of short stories that have been knocking around for a while. She

also intends get to work on a book idea entitled 'Bait'.

The Writers Bursary is funded jointly by the Literary Fund and ICI Ltd and the twenty applications received were judged by Witi Ihimaera, radio personality Elizabeth Alley and Literary Fund member Dr Frank McKay.

The bursary enables an author with potential to be able to work full-time on a creative writing project.

The Silences Between (Moeraki Conversations) is the first collection of poems by a Maori woman writer to be published in New Zealand. *The Bone People* may soon be published by Spiral and the Women's Press in London with the support of Kai Tahu Trust.

I first met Keri when we were visiting New Zealand poets together at the East West Centre in Hawaii. These poems are surely among the most beautiful and profound of our generation.

In 1642 Abel Tasman made his landfall at Okarito and it somehow seems appropriate that Keri should have chosen the isolation of that wild, isolated and symbolic place as a refuge in which to write and live.

Hone Tuwhare, Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera (among others) created between them the revolution which is contemporary Maori writing. Keri Hulme is perhaps the clearest voice speaking for the consequences of that revolution.

— Don Long

Don — In the first issue of Koru Taura Eruera interviewed Hone Tuwhare and he began by asking Hone how he became involved in poetry in the first place. As far as I can tell that is the only interview with a Maori poet to be published to date — so let's open with that same question.

Keri — I've played with words since I can remember — simply because I just like words ...

The first time I can consciously recall making up a poem was biking to Aranui High School in Christchurch and thinking "scudding clouds". I'm not sure to this day whether there's such a word as 'scudding' when it's used in that sense: the sky was full of scudding clouds

But I've been scribbling down things for a very long time. That was the third form. By the time I'd left high school I'd discovered that I could write ...

High School I loathed. I didn't like school at all. I didn't like high school particularly because it interfered with what I really wanted to do and that was read. Fortunately I became a librarian early on. I spent an awful lot of my time in the library. For instance, the p.e. teacher discovered I existed only towards the end of my first year at high school. I just simply wasn't around at physical education. If you are very short sighted and fairly heavy as I've always been (a 'solid child' as one may say politely — 'fat' otherwise) you tend to be out of things like sports. I was very good at basketball. If I hit anyone going for the ball they were flattened. Anyway, by the time I left school I had discovered I could write.



Keri Hulme. Photo by Otago Daily Times