

Kaumatua profile

Harata Solomon is so involved with activities at her local marae that it is difficult to make a distinction between the two.

Her close association with Porirua's Takapuahia Marae goes back as long as she can remember and stems from the fact that her mother and her grandmother were born there.

In addition, Harata's husband, Matu, whom she married in 1947, is the seventh or eighth generation of his family to have been born in the Takapuahia community, she says.

And to Harata, life and the marae mean "a deep and close involvement with people, the families in this community. Life on the marae just becomes a role that you fill. Nobody puts you there," she says.

Regardless of how she got involved with marae activities in Porirua, Otaki (Raukawa) and Waikanae (Whakarongotai), Harata has become a mainstay of the small Takapuahia Marae near Mana College and an important local Maori leader.

She is on the marae committee and is the secretary for the Porirua Maori Committee and its representative on the Wellington District Maori Council. With her husband, Matu, she is also a Raukawa trustee.

Harata is a Justice of the Peace, a member of the New Zealand Maori Chorale and the Maori Writers and Artists' Association, a Servas host, a foundation and life member of the Maori Women's Welfare League and an actress in her own modest way.

Harata is also a teacher and a student of marae lore, culture, arts and crafts and is part of a local language study group. She has seven grown-up children.

"People get to know you and before you know it they will rope you into all sorts of things," she says, relaxing in her Nohorua Street home which is so busy with friends and relatives that it could be a nerve centre for the nearby marae.

"If you are busy, people find other things to make you busier and so that's really the story of my life. It's been a deep and close involvement with people, the families of this community."

Although her mother was from Porirua, Harata was born in Otaki and brought up in Waikanae, which she describes as her favourite place. Her father, Natanahira, was a local chief and he had a lot of mana in the community, Harata remembers.

She belongs to the Ngati Toa, Ngati Raukawa and Te Atiawa tribes and was the youngest in a family of 12 children. She remembers only eight.

Because her mother died when she was young, Harata was brought up by her grandmother, Ria Teuira Wineera, the person to whom she says she owes her love of everything to do with Maoritanga.

"I was just a little tot that used to hold on to her skirt and toddle along after her. It all began there," she says of her abiding interest in Maori life, culture and current affairs.

A happy childhood in Waikanae's

Zealand children's holiday programme, Hotchy Potchy, that recently won an award in the United States, the 1983 Ohio State Awards for radio and television programmes.

Harata and other kaumatua of Takapuahia marae were recorded talking with the children of the marae in a magazine-type programme. Piripi Walker and Lyn Chambers produced the programme.

The Solomons are also hosts for the



(Photo: Evening Post)

free and open spaces was followed by boarding school at Napier's Hukarere Maori Girls' School and Wellington Teachers' Training College.

Marriage and motherhood did not stop Harata teaching in Wellington, the Hutt Valley, Porirua and Titahi Bay.

"I had an arrangement with the infant mistress and used to pop the kids in there," she says. "And then when they were about three they just used to come into my classroom and the other kids just used to love it."

The children have all moved away from home now, but the family home seems as busy as ever.

"In most Maori homes, mine included, there's a lot of traffic in and out. My children come and go and their friends come and go, my grandchildren come and go; sometimes you can't even hear yourself think."

Harata was involved in a Radio New

worldwide Servas organisation, which means travellers can call on them at a moment's notice and stay a few days.

Harata says her home is popular: "Out of all the Wellington Servas hosts, Matu and I get the most visits."

The family comes first and the marae a close second, Harata says: "The marae and the people mean everything to me and what motivates me is that the mana of the marae will be upheld."

To this end, she is always prepared to show school children or others around the marae and grounds, to kaaranga (welcome) arrivals, or just to be "seen sitting there," doing what Americans call shooting the breeze.

"If the people manaaki (care for) the marae, the marae will manaaki the people."

Karen Brown