

Poroporoaki/Obituary:

A tribute by the Director-General of Education, Bill Renwick for Alan Smith, Director Maori and Islands Education and Sonny Wilson, Senior Advisor, Maori and Islands Education.

"Those of us who knew Sonny and Alan are greatly privileged. They were in many ways very different and in others very similar men. Their work brought them together as colleagues. They became fast friends. Their illnesses further strengthened that friendship and added new dimensions of care, concern and courage.

Sonny was born at Ihumatao, where he lived during his childhood and youth. He attended Mangere Central Primary School, Otahuhu College and then, after three years as an apprentice shoemaker, trained at Auckland Teachers College. He taught in various schools in metropolitan Auckland and in the Waikato, and then spent four years in Rarotonga as an organising teacher. He joined the Education Department in Auckland in 1973 as one of the first specialist advisers in Maori. When two years later, a position was established in head office to provide national leadership for the growing number of advisers in Maori, Sonny was the obvious choice, and he lived his last eight years in Wellington.

Sonny was one of the most gifted Maori orators of his age group. He was a Waikato, and he followed the Waikato tradition of keeping warm his links with other tribes. He travelled widely in Maori New Zealand. He developed an unrivalled knowledge of genealogy, tradition and tribal stories. He was renowned for his ability, when speaking on a marae, to relate himself to the traditions of the local tribe and marae. This showed in his extensive knowledge of tauparapara and waiata and in his ability to match exactly the right one to the right occasion.

Sonny was also an inspired teacher. He had an enviable gift for communicating with people of very different ages and very diverse backgrounds. He was always warm and encouraging, and was endlessly inventive in helping his students or his listeners to grasp what he wanted them to understand about Maori or Maoritanga. He combined this warmth and gentleness with an underlying firmness.

He was a great storehouse of knowledge of Maori language and culture. He found himself in a position where he was able to transmit that knowledge, as a gift, to an increasing number of New Zealanders, pakeha as well as Maori. And he dedicated himself to the task because he believed that the building of greater understanding between Maori and pakeha is one of the most important educational issues we now face in this country.

Sonny Huia Wilson



KINGSHIP

Kotahi te kohao o te ngira e
kuhana ai te miro ma, te miro
pango, te miro where. I muri,
kia mau ki te aroha, ki te
ture, me te whakaponu.

There is but one eye of the
needle through which the white,
black, and red threads must
pass. After I am gone, hold
fast to love, to the law, and
to the religion of Christ.

The famous words spoken by Potatau Te Wherowhero, the first Maori King, at his coronation. He had been given the following charge by Te Heu-Heu: "Potatau, this day I create you King of the Maori people. You and Queen Victoria shall be bound together to be one. The religion of Christ shall be the mantle of your protection; the law shall be the whariki mat for your feet, for ever and ever onward."

Alan spent his childhood and youth near Timaru. He went on to Dunedin, where he studied at the Teachers College and Otago University. He was a fine quarter miler, was selected for a third year of training in physical education, and taught that subject in his early years as a teacher. He taught at Stratford, where he met and married Miriam, Rongotai College, when he completed his honours studies in history, and then at Taihape and Edgecumbe.

It was while he was at Edgecumbe College, first as deputy principal and, from 1966 to 1970, as principal, that his career began to change course. Quite a number of the boys and girls who in one way or another were problems to the school were Maori. Alan decided that, if he was to communicate with these

students and their parents, he would have to learn Maori.

That was in the mid 60's, and it is only necessary for the date to be mentioned to be reminded of how few teachers or administrators at that time had Alan's insight. He was to become an accomplished Maori speaker, but some of us can be reassured by the fact that this first efforts were far from fluent. Even Alan went through a period when his speeches in Maori on marae were greeted with tolerant forbearance by the tangata whenua.

In 1970 he joined the Department of Education as director, Maori and Islands Education. It was coming to be accepted among those who thought about the education of Maori boys and girls that language is at the heart of