

Alan Frank Smith



Hutia te rito
o te harakeke.
Kei hea to komako e ko
Ki mai ki ahau
He aha te mea nui
o te ao
Maku e ki atu
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

Pluck out the centre
shoot of the flax.
Where shall the bell bird rest.
If you should ask me
What is the greatest gift
on earth
I will tell you
It is man
It is man
It is man.

culture — that if Maori New Zealanders were to have greater understanding of their culture, and if pakeha New Zealanders were to have more respect and understanding of it, there must be a much greater commitment in the education system to the teaching of the Maori language and of Maoritanga. Alan was exactly the right person for that task. During his last 13 years he was the spearhead of all our efforts to build greater understanding and respect for all things Maori.

For 10 of those years he and Sonny worked in the closest association. They were in no sense a two-man band. They were both first and always team men. They both had the happy knack of attracting others to their cause. Everyone who knew them warmed to

their company, enjoyed being with them, respected them, and developed strong bonds of loyalty to them. Of all the words used during the last fortnight when, first for Sonny, then for Alan, people have tried to sum up what it is they remember them by, the one word that has been heard above all others is aroha. To have aroha is to have a warm regard for others, the kind of regard that has pleasure in giving rather than receiving. Aroha is a combination of love, compassion, and respect. Alan and Sonny had great aroha.

They have left us more than memories. They have left much work in progress. One project, the last one Sonny completed just before he died, now has a very special meaning for us, the text of the booklet Sonny wrote for use by

teachers preparing to take primary school children on a first visit to a marae. It describes in detail the physical features of a marae and discusses, in ways appropriate for a beginner, some of the Maori values and attitudes that are at the heart of the cultural meaning of a marae. It does exactly what a good introductory booklet should do. Teachers and parents will, I am sure, find it a valuable source of knowledge and, to the extent they do, Sonny's influence as a teacher will live on.

In their last years in particular they showed us all what friendship and what aroha can mean. They looked out for each other, cared for each other, and shielded each other. And we, their friends, were drawn closer to them in love and admiration. And when Sonny died, Alan, without hesitation or concern for himself, and his wife Miriam stood by him, and did everything that could be done to ensure that his departure from Wellington was handled properly, with dignity, and with respect.

You spoke for all his friends, Miriam, in your poem to Sonny:

Without any fuss —
you put on your dressing gown
curled up in bed
and, like a little boy,
you went to sleep.
We found you later,
cold, lonely, yet untroubled.
You had simply moved away
and left us —
without any fuss.
What can I do for you —
but put away your shoes,
fold your clothes, and cry.
Tomorrow, I shall buy you flowers.
Dear friend, I cannot let you go
without any fuss.

Alan honoured Sonny with his tokotoko — his walking stick.

Alan's stick was once a young tanekaha growing in the bush at Whangaruru in Northland. Whangaruru has changed little in 100 years, and Alan loved it for its beauty and remoteness, and for the happy summers he spent there with Miriam and their family. He cut the tanekaha because it grew too close to others, and he carved it into that stick.

On the head we have Maui, and his long flax fishing line goes down past all the sea creatures until it reaches the biggest fish of all — our country. The carved notches further down signify many generations of ancestors. Alan set the eyes with paua shell, and because Sonny loved the stick, it hung on the wall of his office behind his desk. When Sonny died, Alan wanted to honour his friend by making a fine speech at his tangi, and by using the stick Sonny loved for the first time on a marae. He made his speech for Sonny, and died with the stick in his hand.