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Wai 814 #D7
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TE ROOPU WHAKAMANA I TE TIRITI O WAITANGI
IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

WAI 856

IN THE MATTER OF

The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975
(as amended)

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

a claim by **PUKA MOEAU** for and
on behalf of **NGA URI O TE
KOOTI RIKIRANGI**

**BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF MAEWA THORNTON
ON BEHALF OF NGA URI O TE KOOTI RIKIRANGI: WAI 856**

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Whakapapa

1. **FROM** Te Kooti came a son named Wetini. Wetini had a daughter Putiputi Raukawa or Nanny Mitts who had a daughter named Erina Pohatu (nee Smith). Erina had a daughter Ramari May Jones (nee Pohatu). She then had me Maewa Thornton (nee Jones).

Teachings from Kuia

2. **MY** grandmother Nanny Lena was really the one who brought to light what I know of Te Kooti. She taught me that he was a great man and that he was a leader of our people. She always taught me that we were to be proud of our connections to Te Kooti. She was very emotional about this. Although my grandmother was adamant about taking pride in being a descendant of Te Kooti,

there was always a “but”. Our family knew of the so-called truths that history teachers and other people advocated. To them he was a murderer and a rebel and because of that, my Nanny would say, “*Be careful not to expose yourself as being a descendant of Te Kooti to the wrong people*”. We were encouraged to display our pride quietly so that we would be protected from the dangers of the outside world.

3. **ON** particular nights when it was just me, one of my cousins and Nanny at home, she would tell us stories about our tipuna. The side of Te Kooti that nobody else knew, the version that I was going to accept very young in life. One night I remember asking her why it was us that she was telling these stories to, and she said because the rest of them (her grandchildren) aren’t ready to listen, they’re too busy being teenagers, having boyfriends and girlfriends and having fun. My grandmother wanted to be sure that she could teach at least one of her grandchildren in her time, at least one of us needed to have the knowledge that she possessed, so that the positive aspects of Te Kooti could be handed down to future generations. These memories are something that nobody can take away from me and I have retained them.

4. **WE** were always told, that there was a lot of malice towards Te Kooti, that people despised and hated him, and that because we were his descendants, we would be looked upon in the same way. My grandmother did this so that there would be an element of protection for us, when she said these words, it was like she was wrapping a korowai of white light around her mokopuna to protect us. She would put quality time into sharing her positive memories about Te Kooti with us, but it would always end up with a negative. It would take time for me to learn why she did it this way.

Education

Racist teachers

5. **DURING** my Primary School years, there were occasions when a teacher would rip our tipuna to bits. There were times during our lessons, when we were asked, “*Are any of you kids related to “Tee Kootee”*”. I certainly wasn’t going to stick my hand up in a hurry, particularly when we were told that Te Kooti was nothing but a rebel and a murderer, and so the story went. I am a descendant of Te Kooti, however, I would sit there not saying a word. On an emotional and psychological level, I was made to feel ashamed for being a descendant of Te Kooti. As a child, I felt that I did not have a voice. I could not speak up for myself or my tipuna. My Nanny said to have pride in who I am but be careful who you tell. The pride that I should have felt, turned into shame, degradation and humiliation. I felt that I could not tell anyone because of this. I had been silenced by the very people who's role it was to educate us within a system that failed to educate me and the rest of this country with the truth. The history books had the facts and what we had was a fairy tale. That is the message I felt I was being sent by the system.

Publicly embarrassed

6. **MY** Nanny was very pleased when our school, Manutuke School, went to the Urewera National Park for a week long camp. She said that it was perceived by people to be a very scary place, but to her it was a magical place for our tipuna, for it was where the Tuhoe people looked after him. She told me to enjoy the time I had there and before I left she said a karakia. This karakia was one that was given by Te Kooti for his descendants for protection. Nanny would say this karakia over us especially when any of us were sick. I can remember that even though she was pleased I was going on this trip, she was still very worried about my safety.

7. **ONE** of the days when we were on camp, we were taken to a particular area that overlooked the lake, and there was a stone formed seat that they called “Te Kooti’s chair”, it was quite a tourist attraction. A young Park Ranger had taken us to this spot and whilst he was explaining the significance of the seat, my Aunty Lena Brown who was our camp mother, told the Park Ranger that myself and my cousin Jack Wharehinga were direct descendants of Te Kooti. The Park Ranger was very impressed and made us have a seat on the chair. The Park Ranger remarked how Te Kooti used to sit on the chair and overlook the lake as he prophesied. While we were sitting there, tourists were pulling up in campervans and caravans to take photographs, and when they realised that these two kids sitting on the chair were the descendants of Te Kooti, it was quite a photo opportunity for them. Later when I returned home my grandmother told me that the seat was a whole load of cods wallop and it was just designed to bring tourists into the area. My cousin and myself were however glorified and made to feel important, but that would not remain the same throughout the trip.
8. **AT** the Urewera National Park headquarters, there was a large mural that was supposed to have represented Te Kooti. It was here that we had a different Park Ranger, and he stood there talking about this mural and its connection to Te Kooti. There were a lot of people there at the time, including overseas tourists and New Zealand visitors. Once again Aunty Lena Brown told the Ranger that myself and my cousin were descendants of Te Kooti, to which he responded, “*Oh are they? Well would you two like to come and stand up here next to me?*” So my cousin and I stood by the mural with our chests out, as proud as punch, we were on display. As we were standing there and smiling the Park Ranger turned around and said that Te Kooti was a murderer, a masochist, a rebel and a drunk. Then he said, and these two kids up here are the direct descendants of this man. I was to experience again the humiliation, the embarrassment, the degradation and the shame, only this time it would be on a grand scale that I would never forget. I was a twelve year old child and I had just been publicly humiliated. I wished that

I could have been swallowed up by the mural and just completely disappeared. The tourists in the place took many photographs. I remember that there was another school there with their teacher and all of these kids were pointing and laughing at us. I am 36 years old now, but this is still imprinted on my memory like it happened just the other day. I've carried this horrible experience with me for all these years and unfortunately I do not know that I could ever erase this memory.

Whakapapa a "Secret"

9. NANNY had constantly told me of her fears when we exposed our connection to Te Kooti. When I returned home and told my grandmother what had happened. She just sat there, sitting in her chair, in her sitting room for a long time and didn't say anything, and I just watched her, waiting for a reply. Her reply was a tear that ran down her face, the one thing that she had feared more than anything had happened to her mokopuna. She went on to say, "*Never mind, your Aunty Lena Brown, she said what she did it in good faith you know. She understands*". She then went on to say that it is what she had been trying to tell us all along, not to let yourself be known and to be very careful of these ignorant people. She quoted something from the bible along the lines of, "*Don't strike them down because of their ignorance, they only know what they've been taught*". This experience had a great impact on me, and having to tell my grandmother what happened, meant I had to experience the hurt twice over. This is where I learnt one of my biggest lessons that my Nanny had been trying to teach me all along.

10. WE were always told to be humble Maori. I know it had a lot to do with the element of fear that my grandmother had that we would be challenged and ostracised because of our tipuna.

Mixed messages from kaumatua

11. **WHEN** we were growing up, we got a lot of mixed messages from our kaumatua. Some would say that he was a powerful man, a leader who had insight and wisdom, and then you would then get another kaumatua who would say that he was a rebel and a murderer as our teachers had said at school. I remember going home and telling my Nanny what we were being taught at school and what other kaumatua were also saying, but Nanny had always taught us not to expose ourselves in these sorts of situations. I know it hurt my Nanny to tell us that we had to bow down and couldn't stick up for ourselves, but she did it in our best interests.

12. **NOW** I realise that we cannot put a price on our whakapapa and that it is important that we are outspoken about being descendants of Te Kooti. We are the lucky ones now that we have started a process of exposing who we are and who our tipuna was. Myself and indeed my Nanny were brought up in different circumstances and had to use different measures, but we too were very proud of who we were and who Te Kooti was.

Teaching our future generations

13. **MY** son Leo had to do an assignment on a famous Maori in history and he chose Te Kooti. When he began his research in the library, he was directed by one of the librarians to a certain section of photographs of Te Kooti, of which he took copies and brought them home. This is a picture of Te Kooti, he told me. I told him it was not Te Kooti. I said to him that the koro in that photo has had his identity taken from him as well and that this koro's descendents have probably paid a price because of it. My son questioned me and was not sure that I was correct because the librarian at school told him that this was a photo of "Tee

Kootee". All of what my son had researched in the school library that day is exactly the same as what I had been taught at Manutuke School 25 years ago.

14. **TO** me, my son questioned what I had said because I had a totally different story from what was in history books and that is what is taught in schools. I had to relay to him how there are still many resources on New Zealand history referring to Te Kooti that are incorrect and are ill informed.
15. I sat my son down and told him everything and more about what I was taught by my Nanny. I am quite proud to say that my son accepted my version over the history books version of his tipuna. He handed in a wonderful, well written and presented assignment on his tipuna. However he was rewarded with a "D" for his efforts. When I saw my son's disappointment in his grade I phoned the school and spoke with the teacher. I was told that the reason for Leo's low grade was because, although he had made an excellent effort, he had not researched his information correctly. No amount of trying to discuss the subject with her would change her mind or Leo's grade.
16. I tried to explain to Leo that it was not his fault nor was it mine that the education system is stuck in a time warp of historic denial. He gave his absolute best and just as important, he gave the truth, no matter whose deaf ears it falls upon and that in the end, is what really counts. PONO!

Overseas education

17. **IN** Gisborne during the Millenium celebrations, close friends had travelled, like thousands of others to Gisborne to see the first rays of light into the New Year. One of these friends was from Australia. Scotty grew up in England and then his parents emigrated to Australia. In a discussion we were having at one of the whanau's house, the subject of my whakapapa to Te Kooti came up. Scotty asked

if I was referring to "Te Kooti the Murderer". He told me that they learnt about Te Kooti in England at school when they were studying English history surrounding colonists and missionaries. When he moved to Australia it was also being taught there about this murderer. I was quick to jump to the defence of my tipuna and offered Scotty our pono (truth) of what happened. When I had finished, Scotty asked why this country has not seen it fit to alter the history books on such a controversial and yet important historical issue. My reply to him was that in my opinion it is because it is just that! Too controversial and too important to alter the history books on an historical issue.

Hope for our future generations

18. I look at the future generations, Te Kooti's direct descendants, and I personally see that a change can only occur if New Zealand history is rewritten. This history needs to contain the truth - pono about Te Kooti. Everybody else has written about him, and we the uri of Te Kooti hold the truth and we need to have control over the reintroduction of Te Kooti's korero into New Zealand history. Our tamariki and our mokopuna should not have to experience the humiliation and public ridicule that I encountered during my schooling and at the Urewera National Park. Justice will always prevail and our tipuna is standing waiting for this to happen, and when this does happen and New Zealand history is rewritten, the positive effects for our future generations will be assured.