



THE STORY OF THE WAKA OF THE GODS

THE OLD TIDES ARE THE ANCIENT TIDES, the waters of Creation. And the Gods made a mighty Waka to sail those sacred oceans, the ones we named Tai Rehua and Tai Rehia. And that wonderful vessel was overwhelmed by the Deluge.

Mokopuna, young one, son of my son, let us travel to the wildest waters and voyage with the Waka of the Gods.

In the days of old the ancestors waited each season for the arrival of the greatest of all waka. And as it drew near they told their children what they were about to see...

‘Look for the finely carved stern post reaching for the stars. See the proud prow cutting a great wave coloured by rainbows and know the Gods use their wonderful powers to send the Waka swiftly through the waters.

Do not be afraid when shadows fall over the land, that is only the tall sail shutting out the Sun. Remember it has two huge hulls, one is Aotea Mai Rangi and the other Aotea Roa, and magic ropes bind their timbers to ride the turbulent waters of the Old Tides’.

Our ancestors loved the Waka of the Gods that came by year after year. Then it sailed by no more. Season after season they searched for it but it never returned. So they asked their wisest ones to seek it in the mists of the past. Looking deeply into yesterday they saw Mahuru and his wife Hione, the keepers of the Waka, bid it farewell on distant shores. And they saw angry stars gathering close to the Moon to give birth to the Tides of Chaos, the dreaded Deluge. And a terrible tragedy unfolded before them.

Far beyond the veiled horizon, seas began to climb to terrible heights before rolling out to attack all in their path. Dark storm winds shredded the clouds, swept birds from the sky, sucked fish out of the water and smashed them into the sail. Cold hands struggled to lower it before the Waka capsized. Valiant was their strength but sudden winds bent the tall mast and the hull of Aotea Mai Rangi was forced beneath the waves. It surfaced but wallowed deep within. Then winds gained new strength from the gathered stars to push the Waka relentlessly across the wild waters.

Suddenly, agony pierced the hull of Aotea Mai Rangi. Timbers shattered as jagged teeth of rock broke through to open all to the raging tides. A hidden reef marked its doom. Desperately, the Tohunga cried to the Guardian Taniwha to save the Waka...

‘Hear us, mighty one. We are at the end of our strength and cannot bail fast enough to stem the tide. Send the waters back to the sea. Make the Waka ride high upon the waves. Come soon or we will perish in the tides.’

The karakia was too long. Aotea Mai Rangi began to sink before the Taniwha appeared. Moving swiftly, the Commander slashed the bindings to part the hulls and set Aotea Roa free as brave Aotea Mai Rangi slid beneath the waves.

Aotea Roa was driven south by fierce winds for thirteen nights. Then calm came to the waters and the crew wept for their brothers and sisters who had drowned. And their grief was shared. Io Mata Ngaro, the Supreme One, reached out from the heavens and sent a magic karakia to gently touch the Waka and the crew, and turned everyone and everything to stone.

That is the story of the Waka of the Gods. One hull was saved and the other lost. Old are the ties that bound the two, and even now the mountains carry the names of those who drowned. They are not forgotten.

Te Waka Aotea Roa o Nga Atua, the great Waka of the Gods, was remade with an outrigger to balance it in the waves. Its prow still thrusts into the cold tides from the south. Its mana still rests in the brothers and sisters turned to stone. That is why we walk the land with careful tread and move through the mountains with respect. For there we meet our ancestors who bravely sailed the Waka of the Gods. And it remains our haven until we are taken to the stone to join them.

Mokopuna, when death calls, carry me to the bosom of our ancestress in the mountains, and give my bones into her caring hands. Send my spirit to Te Rerenga Wairua, where Hine Nui Te Po waits to guide me home. And say the last karakia for me.

When his grandson agreed, the old man smiled and looked beyond the fire to the stars.

Finally know that Tangaroa sent us a wondrous Sting Ray to swim behind the Waka of the Gods. Together, they brave the tumult of the Old Tides to be our island home. Honour them, as you honour the ancestors down through the ages, even unto the days of the Dream Makers.

