

Our 2018 National Hui and Beyond

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We had been looking forward to our National REANZ hui since the idea was first suggested for us to meet in June at Mana Tamariki in Palmerston North. Brenda Soutar has been giving us guidance for many years with all things Māori. She is our Kaiārahi and provides guidance in regards to tikanga and kaupapa Māori.

and we always appreciate the wisdom that she shares with us. Brenda's mana is admired by us all and we hold her in high esteem.

When you wake up each morning, you don't know what will be revealed. the new day can bring joy, challenges and surprises. Like a book turning another page, you never know what is going to be revealed. Our day together in chilly Palmerston North were all of these.

The REANZ Trustees present were Wendy (Chairperson), Julianne (Treasurer), Helen (Secretary), Lorraine (International Representative), Prue, Lis, Chris, Glenys, Bridgette and apologies from Lesley and Diti. The Regional REANZ Networks were ably represented. We had Cheryl Kingi from Te Tai Tokerau, Sarah Jones from Auckland, Suz Clare from Manawatu, Adrienne Wilkins from Taranaki, Sharon Sciascia and Steff Kidd from Hawkes Bay, Rachel Denee from Wellington, Lia de Vocht from Christchurch and Pam Wilson from Southland. We were also pleased to have our Patron Anne Meade join us for the weekend.

The day was opened with karakia and mihi whakatau before our Chairperson Wendy Larmer made a very significant presentation to our newly appointed REANZ Patron, Dr Anne Meade. How honoured are we to have a woman of such standing in New Zealand's early childhood community, accept this role with us!

Each regional network circulated reports prior to the meeting and this provided information that outlined the work that has been undertaken over the last year throughout Aotearoa, New Zealand. Such impressive mahi given with generosity.

It was a packed day and topics that were covered included discussions around a Code of Ethics to guide us in our work and an update of the January International Meeting from Lorraine Manuela our International Representative.

We were privileged to have Brenda and her partner Milton, share stories from Mana Tamariki. They began by giving an overview of the history of Mana Tamariki, which is a Pan-tribal school for tamariki who can be enrolled from birth to Year 13, before talking with us about what they learnt about language recovery. One significant thing was that no other setting outside the home can recover a language – educational settings can support but only the home can recover the language. An entry criterion at Mana Tamariki was established that someone in the home had to commit to speak only te reo Māori in the home. They did not judge or assess the quality of the language being spoken. With this understanding, children would be raised where the adult had a deep love and respect for the language.

Milton and Brenda took us down to Te Marae o Hine, the town square in Palmerston North. Milton gave a korero about the history of Te Marae o Hine and some of the monuments and

carvings within this space. The name Te Marae o Hine means the courtyard of the daughter of Peace – and Milton talked about the role of his whanau as the peacemakers in this area.

After lunch, Brenda linked her presentation 'A pedagogy of peace', to our visit to Te Marae o Hine. We hope to be able to share this with you sometime in the future.

We were all so appreciative of Brenda and Milton's time and the thought they had put into the kōrero they shared with us.

Just as the page is turned, and the words and images on the new page are revealed, we are never the same again. The gift we were given, will never be forgotten and has left a deep impression on each and everyone of us who were privileged to hear their words and appreciate the mana of their wisdom.

I was left with many lasting impressions. One was something Brenda said, "Everyone should leave a hui, feeling better than when they began". How can we make that part of our everyday practice?

Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria

My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul

A page turns...

And then another dawn breaks and a page turns in the book of life. What will this day bring to us? Joy, challenge, sadness?

At first the words in the subject line of an email 'Sad news', suggested that this was not an email you wanted to open. To hear that Milton had passed away was too difficult to digest. Seven days. Just seven days ago. Was it possible that was the new reality for Brenda, her whanau and all the people that Milton had touched with his mana and a message of peace and reconciliation?

We were later to learn that Milton had died peacefully in his sleep. This was too sad to contemplate but also offered solace to learn that he had not suffered.

REANZ Trustees wanted to be with Brenda and Milton's whanau as they farewelled him at his home marae Te Pouto. The following is a story about the journey that some REANZ Trustees were able to experience as they farewelled Milton just a week later.

Loving, living and paying tribute.

7 June 2018

It was a positive start to our journey to farewell Milton and to be with Brenda. An uneventful flight before we arrived at Palmerston North airport to the warm welcome from Suz and Karen to start our journey to Shannon. Cloudy skies and cold, cold, cold – 2deg. Warm, thick coats. Scarfs wound round, gloves on.

The journey to the marae offered a space between the hustle and bustle of Auckland and its motorway, to the gentle roads of outer Palmerston North.

We arrived at Poutu marae off a quiet road in Shannon. One of Aotearoa's small rural towns. Maori wardens were out in the cold morning directing the hundreds of cars that were arriving to pay tribute to Milton. These people were but some of those who were in the background that made our tribute to Milton possible.

As we parked the cars, we saw hundreds coming from all directions spilling onto the mown paddocks with cow pats, car ruts and long grass. The smell of the country hit us. Old people, middle people (like us spring chickens) and the young – lots of black around us. Surrounding us. The vans parking and spilling out the school kids from within, with their names proudly plastered onto the vans. How had Milton touched these people's hearts, I wondered to myself.

We made our way forward and our dear friend Karen suggested we detour around the side so that we would enter from the front of the marae. We were grateful to Karen for giving us guidance as we moved forward.

As we hovered at the front of Te Poutu we could see our dear friend Brenda sitting with Milton, and her whānau keeping her warm and covered with aroha. She was pale and drawn and we could see the strain that the last 5 days had taken on her. Our hearts reached out and added to the warmth of the hundreds of people who had come before and were here today.

As we took our place in the comfort of the seats to the side, we were joined by Wendy Lee, Margaret Carr and Lorraine Sands from ELP. We were curious as to the men they were sitting next to. We recognised them and some thought they were the architects for Mana Tamariki. They stood when Mana Tamariki gave their last farewell to Milton. We were to come to know that yes, the suggestions made, were indeed correct. I was in awe thinking that after so many years, these men were still an important part of the people and life force of Mana Tamariki. Relationships are at the heart.

Much kōrero followed. A special part was in English; the genealogy of Milton and Brenda's lineage. A long history known and shared. Humbling.

Milton's work at the wānanga was honoured followed by Mana Tamariki. The waiata resonated the aroha felt for Milton and Brenda. As the whānau gathered around close to Milton, it was time to take Milton to his final resting place to the urupa. As he was lifted up and carried forth, the first gentle rain began to fall. On the walk along past the buildings of the marae, past the workers tending the hangi, down the long road towards the urupa the rain got heavier. As we stood around at Milton's final resting place, the rain fell steadily. The umbrellas shielded us from the rain, but not from the sadness of saying 'Ma te Wa' to Milton. As I stood near the grave, I looked up to see Brenda smiling at me with warmth in her eyes and a lifted hand. A moment of deep appreciation not to be forgotten.

We slowly took our leave, walking back together in comradeship. A special moment shared in time.

It was time to leave Milton and Brenda at this special place. A place of tranquillity and peace. Peace. Will we ever think about that word and what it stands for, in the same way?

We ventured back to our 'Breakfast café' in town. A place where we recalled our two breakfasts together with our REANZ friends just 12 days before at the Network hui. How could life change so radically in such a short time?

When it was time to leave for the airport, we gave our final hugs to Suz before Karen generously took us to the airport. More hugs and much gratitude and we headed inside the airport.

A highlight was when Prue looked up to see a young woman and she said 'that's got to be a Brenda relation'. Brenda's brother and sister in law followed and it wasn't too long until we were having a kōrero with them. This was a special time for us to have this connection.

We took so much love to Brenda and Milton with us from you all. A special time. A special place. Special people who have touched our hearts and will continue to touch us overtime.

Milton and Brenda. Thank you. We will never be the same again.

*Kia hora te marino, kia whakapapa pounamu te moana.
Kia tere karohirohi i mua i tou huarahi*

*May the calm be spread around you,
May the sea glisten like greenstone and the shimmer of summer dance across your path.*

The REANZ Trustees