
PORIRUA PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE
PERSPECTIVES FROM JANIE EDWARDS, NGĀTI TOA KAUMĀTUA



Janie was born and raised in Porirua as one of nine children. She attended Porirua School which was the first school in the area. When she was younger, Janie was involved in sporting life in Porirua and was a New Zealand referee for basketball. She has been involved in a variety of employment within the city. She worked at Todd motors as a salary officer for 10 years, helped to establish child support in New Zealand and has also had a variety of leadership roles in the community. At 79, Janie is now a kaumātua for Ngāti Toa. She acts as an “advocate for Ngāti Toa people for housing, benefits and jobs.” She is also busy working with various members of the community providing support as well as organising events for kaumātua. Janie provides a personal history of the changes she has seen in Porirua over the last 79 years.

PORIRUA IN THE PAST

As Janie and I sat outside Takapūwāhia Marae on Ngāti Toa Street, Janie explained the ways in which she has seen the city change during her life in Porirua. What is now known as Ngāti Toa Street used to be the main route for buses heading towards Titahi Bay. Her father had built their home opposite Takapūwāhia Marae, and at that time it was right on the water. They had a strong relationship with the water growing up, “that beach down there was our food basket”. The harbour provided a variety of food sources ranging from large Pipi, Pupu (sea snails) as well as flounder which she and her siblings hunted with her father. Where Whitireia is now located, a stingray nesting ground used to be. She was often sent to collect mussels and oysters from the other side of the harbour. The bush also provided sources of food such as the Karaka berry, which was cooked to create a sort of porridge. “So we didn't need supermarkets, we didn't need all those kind of places to feed us. We were well fed.”

“Our men used to go out with their nets and they would set a net for the fish. But that would be for everybody, the men would catch the fish, bring them up to the shore, splay them down and everybody would come down and take what they needed for their family.”

However pollution of the harbour over time has left whatever seafood remains in the harbour inedible. She explains that this pollution first began with the establishment of the Porirua Mental Hospital and its sewerage run off into the harbour, and was further exacerbated by the paint factories located near the streams. “These paint factories, what they were doing was tipping their old paint into the stream... some of our men were working in those factories. They didn't like it (polluting) and they left.”

Janie spoke about the changes to the shoreline and how this was altered drastically as a result of the reclamation of the harbour. The old shoreline is represented today by large metal boulders in front of Ballentynes on Parumoana Street.

The land that Whitireia is currently located on “was part of our sea, our sea beds. That’s where we swam, you know that was our swimming hole. That is where we were baptised into the church. We were all baptised out there until our chapel was built.”

Janie explained that Porirua was one of the first sites that the Mormon Church visited when they arrived from the United States of America. “Consequently we are all, just about all members of the Mormon faith here. Yeah it is a big stronghold, we do have others who are not, but not many.” Janie attended the first school which opened in Porirua and to this day organises reunions for the few alumni still left in Porirua. She explains that the school was opposite from the current site of Ballentynes on Parumoana road and they used to walk to school via a road in Elsdon which has now been converted to hockey fields.

Looking across the road from Takapūwāhia Marae, Janie remembers the hangi pit that was previously located on the nearby land. “People would come down and bring their food, put it in and take it home.” It was also a significant site at the end of the Second World War. There “was a humongous hangi and that was to feed all our returned servicemen that came off the ships in Wellington. They put them on buses and they brought them out here to feed them before they put them on their trains and sent them home, wherever they came from. That was really sad.”

Prosser Hall was another significant site for Janie growing up in Porirua when she did. The hall was built by Joseph Clifford in 1922 “that’s where we used to go to the pictures, dances, balls and everything.” It was also an important site when the Austrians came to Porirua in the 1950s. A large number of Austrians and Germans came to Porirua as a result of an agreement with the New Zealand government at the end of WWII. They were shipped in “because they were great builders, they were skilled people, they came out and they built our state houses here in the early 50’s. Two hundred builders, and a lot of them even married some of our girls from here... They all had motorbikes because they loved to go riding when it was their day off. We used to have dances in here, in our old wharenuī, every Friday night and they would come and pay at the door to help build our chapel. We had a good upbringing; we were born at the right time. They taught us how to dance their dance and when we wanted to have a humorous time, we get up there and do their dance, even now.” The Dutch were also brought over to Porirua where they built houses in Porirua east. “So we had the Austrians, Germans on this side and the Dutch on that side.”

PRESENT DAY PORIRUA

There are many elements of the city that Janie values, particularly the inclusivity of Porirua's community. She spoke about the diversity of the city and the many refugees who have been able to make a home here. *"That's what I like about it...to me it is a friendly place and I can now go anywhere downtown and they say hello."* She sees Porirua as a city which makes an effort to celebrate local and national events such as Creek Fest and Waitangi Day. While Janie spends the majority of her time at the marae, "her favourite space is the chapel first" and foremost followed by the marae which "is a home and a refuge for me, knowing who I am." To her Takapuwhia Marae is "a place of safety for me, could never go and live anywhere else permanently because it's like it's calling me home... this is where I belong."

Janie explained how important it was that Ngāti Toa are consulted regarding changes or things occurring within the city. She also acknowledges some of the challenges that Porirua is currently facing particularly regarding the prevalence of methamphetamine within their communities. "We have problems here with people on P but we have the police coming out twice a month, we all go in there and we're finding ways of how we can get rid of it."

PORIRUA IN THE FUTURE

Land that had been sold to the District Health Board to build the Porirua Hospital has recently been given back to Ngāti Toa. Despite this being the land on the hills, it is providing an opportunity for Ngāti Toa. Janie would love to see a stronger presence of Ngāti Toa in the CBD. She imagines this as a central place where people can come and access information from all around Porirua, "because a lot of our Ngāti Toa people live up the east or Tawa or whatever, they have to come all the way out here to go up here for information."

In terms of the physical city, Janie expressed how the recently designed public toilets in the CBD are against fundamental Māori customs related to the separation of eating and bathroom facilities. She also expressed concern relating to the removal of the I site building; "if they keep on pulling down buildings it's going to be a ghost town. We don't want a ghost town."

Janie mentioned the site of the market in the city and how this had created an event in the city where everyone got together, however with this market now being in Waitangirua, she explained that it is often too far for many people to go. Finally, Janie also envisions more Maori street names in Porirua as this acts to naturally inform those engaging in the city of its history and heritage.