



Article written by **Shane Te Ruki**

## “I ahatia e koe taku taonga”

We don't bury our rubbish anymore, but only because we ran out of room, and grazing stock and rubbish pits don't do well together

Te Kopua is typical of a Maniapoto marae, its people are good and well meaning and they acknowledge the earth as “Papatuanuku”, our earth mother. In whaikorero she is acknowledged with poetic verse. Proud orations are made about the landmarks that we treasure, to be cared for as taonga for future generations... lovely. However while waxing poetical and proud about our environmental treasures in speech making, in reality we often don't give them a second thought.

While the state of the environment has deteriorated before our eyes we have continued to talk of the esteem with which we regard our natural surrounds, yet have not acted to protect them from degradation, in fact, have contributed to the dismal state that they are currently in.

In past years, like many other marae, waste disposal at the pa was simple “*bury it, burn it, chuck it, flush it*”. It wasn't seen as a problem, it was just what you did. Out of sight, out of mind. The back of the Pa is going to tell some stories years from now with decade upon decade of buried rubbish. Everything you can think of, and many things you can't imagine, lie buried in a hole. We don't bury our rubbish anymore, but only because we ran out of room, and grazing stock and rubbish pits don't do well together.

Our offal holes are closed now, not because we were worried about leaching rotted wastes into the water table, but because town whanau members filled them with non-biodegradable trash, empty cans and bottles etc.

A 44 gallon drum serves as an incinerator, replacing the old open pits, into which goes all manner of sorted paper waste and a good fire is made more dramatic with some missed plastic! Little or no thought is given to the toxic fumes produced. All that smoke where does it go? Out of sight, out of mind.

A favourite hiding place for many an old and broken down item was “down the back”, that being the “*over the fence as far as you could throw it!*” place. You name it, it was down there on the banks of our beloved Waipa river.

Fortunately it doesn't happen too much now, the only stuff going over the fence is grass and garden clippings. But the river bottom has a store of treasures from days gone by.

That's about where we are now and in some ways we have improved on old practices though not because of any real thoughts to preserve Papatuanuku and neighbouring landmarks of rivers and sky. But rather we ran out of places to hide it all. The challenge ahead of us is to reduce inorganic waste that is generated at the marae. Perhaps marae environmental policies are now due.

Papatuanuku, the land, the rivers, the mountains we all hold them in high esteem.

Te Kopua, like so many of our Maniapoto marae, need to make some special efforts to physically manifest ways that express that high esteem. Let it not be seen in the days of our future generations that we were a past generation of shallow words who trampled heavily on their mothers back. *"I ahatia e koe taku taonga?"* are not words anyone would wish hear. Change for the betterment of our world is possible and if we fail to change our ways for better blame will lie fairly in our hands, and there will be no answer to the question.



Taku aroha ki te roa whenua e takoto nei  
He kura, he taonga tuku iho no nga tupuna  
Te whenua hei oranga mo nga tamariki  
Nga whakatupuranga e

Taku aroha ki te roa whenua e takoto nei  
Hapaitia te maihihi ora mo te whenua  
Te whenua hei oranga mo nga tamariki  
Nga whakatupuranga e