

COROMIND



Issue 32

From Manaia with Love

Music that heals and
uplifts with May Love

The Engineer Behind the Wheel

Muzza's Alchemy in Coro Town

FEARSOME TIMES

When a Web Designer
Meets a Cliff Hanger

Ahuahu & Andy

A Ranger's Experience
on Great Mercury Island.

Audio 
Version



Beginning...

It's hard to describe. That feeling in your chest as the music reaches within, grasping your core, sending vibrations throughout your entire being. When nothing exists but you and that rhythm as you melt and connect into something primal.

Within the space I immersed myself in I felt the energy, the connection and the diversity. I saw others experiencing that same indescribable feeling – a 'belonging' to something outside of the modern world, the hustle and the hunger for more, as we come back to who we are, creations and creators.

I looked back at how this started and marvel at how a small act of picking up a magazine, one overlooked several times before, can have such a profound impact on me, my own journey and on those in the wider community.

This is more than a small magazine, it's a movement. Coromind has a heart for giving and spreading joy, bringing people back to their true nature to experience life as we were designed, centred in creation.

Coromind holds values and a philosophy I relate to. These emerge from the pages, effecting change within small communities in a variety of ways, not only focusing on one genre of the arts, but connecting them all – as the spectrum of creation is as diverse and colourful as the people who create and appreciate creation. This kaupapa (initiative) was something I needed and could see the community needed in order to reconnect with their identity.

Another evening, another exhibition. The cycle of Coromind ArtWorks' exhibitions rotates and I notice regulars and newcomers. As they peruse the artworks, worlds light up in their eyes as they get excited over details, big pictures, the stories of creations and artists. Artists engaging with the community, the community engaging with artists.

Whose spark is being lit? What future artist has passed through these doors filled with doubt, leaving inspired.

I appreciated art but I was lost in the flow of time, of self-doubt. I learnt from local artists – their processes, each unique, beautiful in their own light. The most important thing I picked up: authenticity is appreciated and nurtured here. That felt like coming home.

My creative spark was reignited. I realised just how surrounded by like minds I was, so I began my journey of rediscovering my own creative gifts, with intent.

Turning the pages of this magazine opened my world up to new possibilities. From issue 23 emerged my beach 'dance walks' after reading Kaitlyn Gooch's 'health essentials' article. Unbeknownst to me, Kaitlyn would become a good friend within the year.

Coromind is a magazine that has evolved to be more. More than words on pages and pretty pictures. More than a commercial magazine focused on profits and meeting their quota. The rarest treasure found was that this magazine is free. They have created an entire and welcoming community. One I now support through subscribing, knowing funds are going to a movement based on my values and beliefs. They create opportunities for a variety of people within the Coromandel community and provide a voice and platform for those who whisper.

The latest extension coming in hot from the Coromind team is an initiative I am on board with, as they bring free workshops to local artists. Workshops with a focus of connection and equipping artists with a variety of tools to assist in their own creative journeys. These events provide support, growth opportunities and guidance where there is otherwise a void.

I'm incredibly grateful to have such an amazing magazine accessible to all and to be involved in the community they represent on their pages.

Words by
Viola Ashford-Martin



COROMIND
On Air



The Local Lens

Every town has stories. Finding the right way to share them, doing justice to their characters, is key.

Coromind On Air started with a simple idea: turn the camera on, hit record, and let the community speak. Whether it's a conversation with an artist, a panel of candidates before the elections, or a local band performing under the stars, Coromind On Air is becoming a space where voices from across Hauraki-Coromandel can meet and be heard.

But this isn't just about making videos, it's about momentum. About building something that might one day look a lot like a local TV channel, a fresh one shaped by the people who live here. Something raw, alive, and real. A video platform where culture, events, stories, and even the small

moments that make this place special are always just a click away.

This isn't about following a trend, it's about reflecting and documenting our times.

And if you've watched an episode, shared a link, or simply told someone, "You should check this out," then you've already helped shape what Coromind On Air could become. This is step one, but it's already opening doors: more events recorded, more people interviewed, more space for the community to see itself on the screen.

It's early days, sure. But the camera's rolling, the light's on, and something good is happening.

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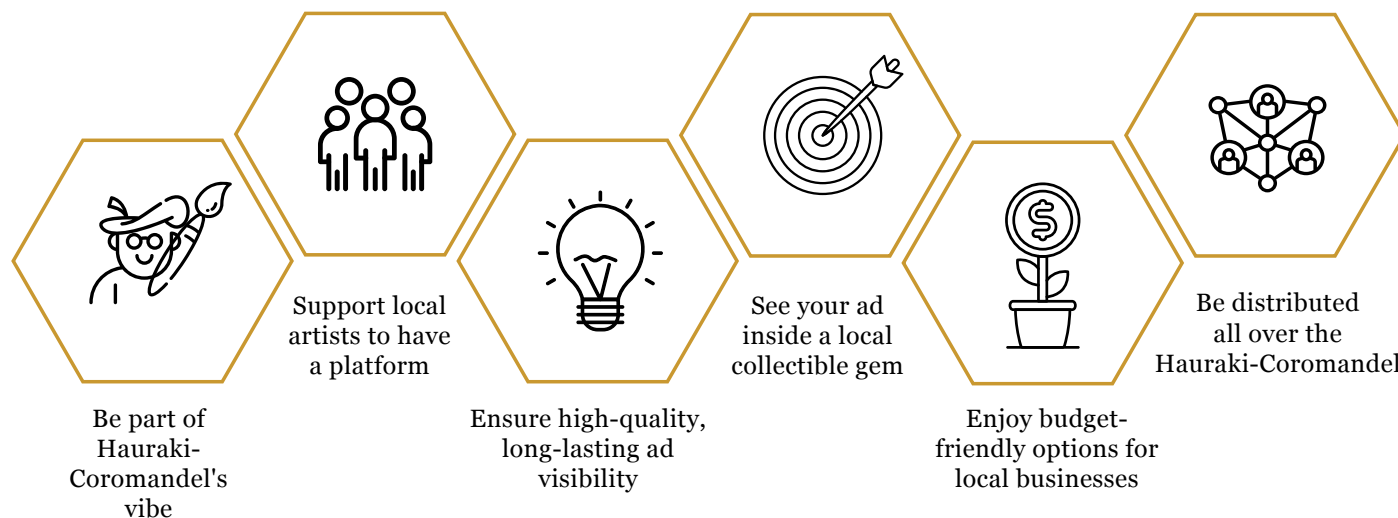
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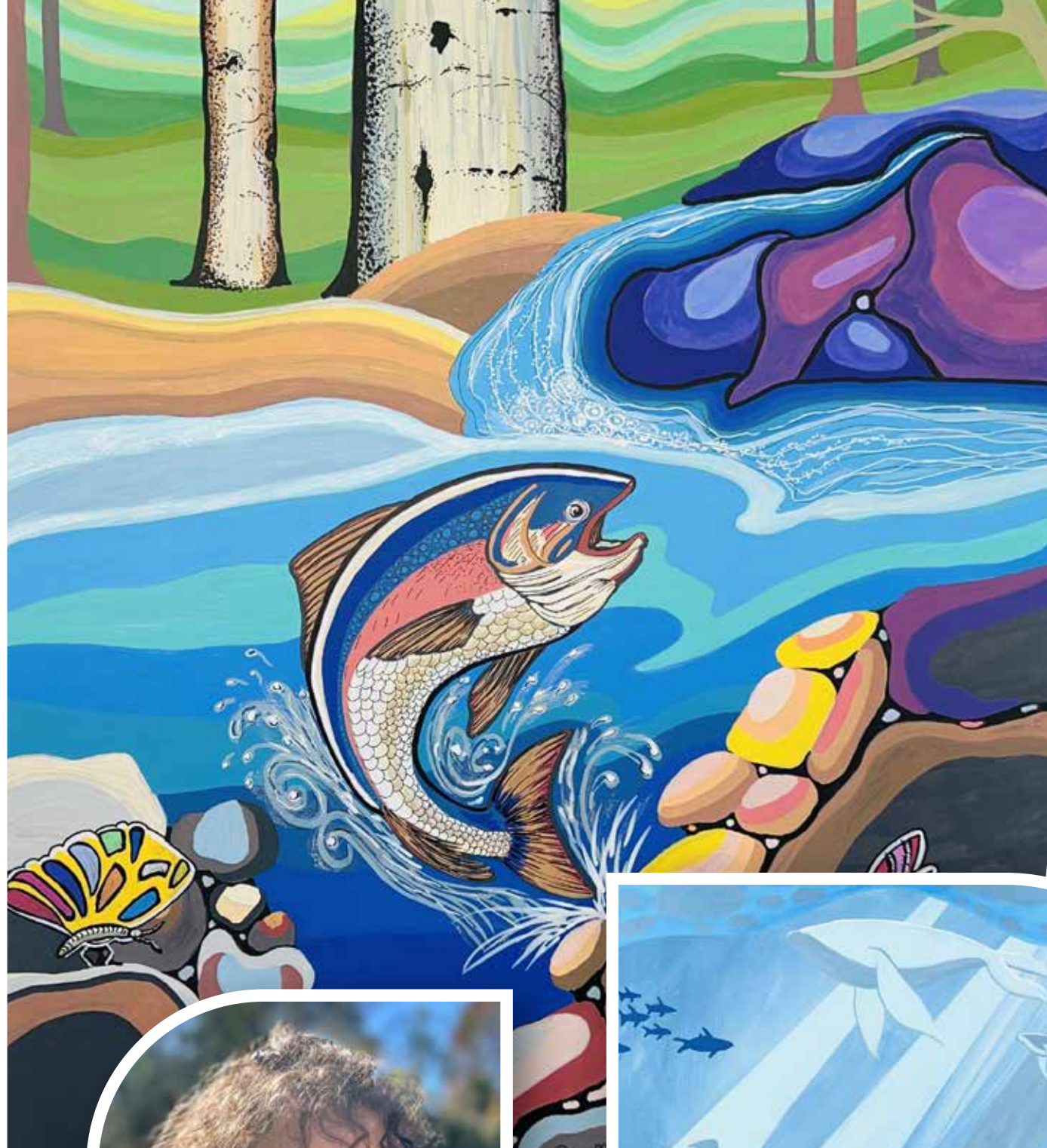
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August 2025 - Coromind magazine is published by Flock Media Group

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Featured Artist PAMELA MAYOS

I am an artist whose creative journey began over 20 years ago, when a close friend encouraged me to explore the world of painting. Starting with oils, I soon discovered the beauty and versatility of other mediums, which has led to a unique and ever-evolving artistic practice.

My artwork moves in creative phases, often sparked by a new material or an idea that refuses to leave me alone. One standout project was a mission to bring bold, unexpected colour to New Zealand's native birds – often more subdued in nature – which resulted in a vibrant series of over a dozen birds, now available in postcard format. We are so lucky to have access to so many wonderful and beautiful bush walks in Thames and I think that is why I have been drawn to our New Zealand native birds.

After moving to Thames in late 2013, a serendipitous meeting with a fellow dog walker led to a new creative venture: illustrating a series of children's books. The third and final book was published in 2022, adding another layer to my portfolio.

One of the constants in my creative journey has been pet portraiture, mostly in pencil. I find the process of capturing a beloved animal's likeness both peaceful and rewarding – adding a personal, heartfelt layer to my artistic practice.

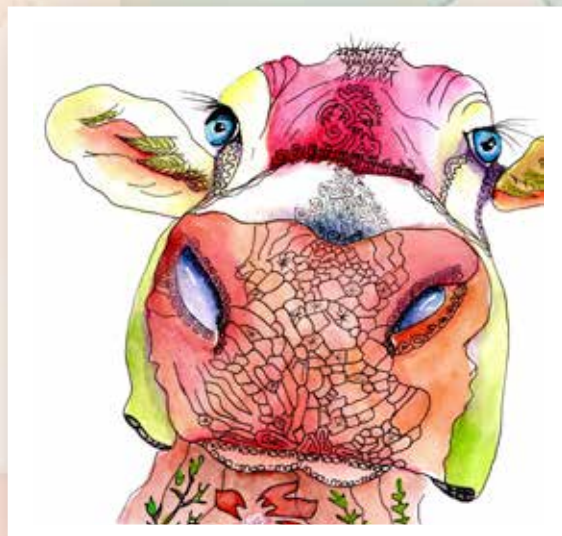
My creative process is as much about discovery as it is about artistic intention. Often, starting with one idea, I sometimes veer off course and end up with something entirely unexpected. The result is a collection of works that feel fresh, dynamic, and full of personal meaning. Whether it's a colourful reinterpretation of a bird, a relaxing pet portrait, or a whimsical mixed-media piece, I hope my creations resonate joy and authenticity. My feeling is that if you enjoy the process – others will enjoy the end result.

You can contact me at: pam_mayos@yahoo.co.uk

View my latest works at the Vessel Co-op, 752 Pollen Street, Thames, or

Follow me on Instagram: [@pammayosart](https://www.instagram.com/pammayosart)

 Words by
Pam Mayos



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IS THERE A RIGHT AGE TO LEARN A LANGUAGE?

ADVANTAGES & CHALLENGES AT EVERY STAGE OF YOUR JOURNEY

If you have ever wondered when the best time in life is to learn a new language, then you're in luck because a ton of study has gone into this.

A lot of older learners can feel like they missed their opportunity, while many parents aren't sure when to get their children started on the learning journey. We adults might look at how fast young kids pick up language, thinking "Damn, I can't compete with that".

While young kids do have an advantage when it comes to learning language, there's a bit more to the story than that.

The Critical Period Hypothesis

The critical period hypothesis (CPH) is just a complicated way of saying that there is, in fact, an age when our brains pick up language better. For someone to reach true native-speaking status in a language, they need to start learning before the age of nine. But, and that's a big but, each age bracket has its own strengths.

Young learners who start before nine years old normally have much better pronunciation in the language. This is because the muscles and brain pathways used for speaking are still forming, and once development finishes they will be set to sound immaculately native in the language.

Young learners are quite inefficient and easily distracted though, so learning grammar is tougher for them. That's where teenagers find their strength, since they know enough about their first language to

understand new grammar. But, and again it's another big but, teenagers often don't know what they want to do or be, making them prone to losing motivation and quitting.

And that is where the older learners find their strengths. Yes, adults who start picking up a new language will never sound native because the muscles in our mouths are set according to what we learned as children. Our brain plasticity might not be the same as a teenager's either. But adult learners have a trump card, and that is called life experience.

Having life experience means we know more about what direction we want to head in. We have higher chances of sticking to and achieving goals and can stay motivated by focusing on the bigger picture. It doesn't matter how much natural talent someone has if they don't have the belligerent tenacity to stick to their goals and soldier on for the long term.

If you are an adult thinking about starting the language learning process, don't expect to sound perfectly fluent, and don't feel ashamed about it either. All adult learners are in the same boat, it's normal. The perfect time to start learning is right now, because the sooner you start, the sooner you make progress, and the sooner you will be able to start actually speaking the language.

For someone to achieve native-level proficiency in a language, they need to start learning it before the age of nine, although this is largely about getting perfect pronunciation. Teenagers and adults will likely miss out on perfect pronunciation, but teenagers pick up grammar much quicker due to their ongoing brain development and knowledge of their first language.

Adult learners might not have the same advantages, but we can outcompete younger learners simply by being more driven, stubborn, and actually having a clear reason for learning a new language.

No matter what your age is, be it seven or 70, the human brain has the amazing ability to keep learning new things. Being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each age bracket just means you know what to expect. Very young learners will struggle with complex grammar, teenage learners will struggle with motivation, and adult learners will struggle with pronunciation.

It's all very normal, so don't worry if any of these challenges seem off-putting. So many other people are in the same boat. What's important is that you chip away at the learning process a little bit every day.

Words by
Matt Bowden



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HUNTING & FISHING WHITIANGA
BACKS WĀHINE ON THE WATER



Photos by CJ Pole

Fishing may still carry a reputation for being a man's game, but in Whitianga, tides are changing.

On Friday, 1st of August, Hunting & Fishing Whitianga hosted a sold-out event that brought together a lively crew of wāhine for an evening of creativity, connection, and casting. With guest speakers Renee Taylor from SALT Aotearoa and Lisa Högbom from OKUMA NZ, the "Sip and Paint" night aimed to build a sense of community around fishing, and break down the idea that you need to know everything before you pick up a rod.

Wāhine arrived from 5:30pm, each receiving a goodie bag packed with \$100 worth of products. Over kai from Basker and plenty of chatter, the group quickly settled in.

Lisa opened the night with her personal story and a reminder that "there are no silly questions" when it comes to learning to fish. Her message was clear: it's all about finding your crew and feeling comfortable to share. Renee followed, speaking about her journey into freediving and the founding of SALT Aotearoa. Her connection to te ao Māori and her whakapapa through the ocean inspired many in the room.

Then came the fun: lures were handed out, paint was poured, and the group of women began decorating their own custom fishing gear, with plenty of laughs along the way. A surprise casting competition added an extra layer of energy to the already buzzing atmosphere.

But this wasn't just about a one-off night. Entrepreneur Ash Taiapa, alongside her partner store owner Alex

Reynolds and the team at Hunting & Fishing Whitianga, created the event with a bigger kaupapa in mind.

"I wanted to create something fresh, positive and exciting for our community," Ash says. "Fishing is often seen as a male-dominated activity, but so many wāhine are curious and keen to get involved. They just might not know where to start, or feel uncomfortable asking questions."

Ash and Alex are determined to shift that. "Ladies don't have to cross the street and grab a coffee while their partners buy fishing gear," Ash laughs. "They can do that together, and then get the coffee!"

To keep the momentum going, all attendees now have 30 days to catch a fish using the lure they painted that night. The three heaviest catches will win vouchers from Hunting & Fishing Whitianga and supporting sponsors.

"The idea was to give them something they created themselves, and then a fun reason to get out there and use it," Alex explains. "We're already planning more wāhine nights and can't wait to see more ladies coming through the store, sharing their stories and getting stuck in."

The team also gave a big shoutout to photographer CJ Pole, who captured the night beautifully, and to the generous sponsors who helped make the event happen.

More events are already in the pipeline. "Stay tuned and follow our socials," says Ash. "There's definitely more coming up!"

To keep up with the action:



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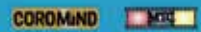


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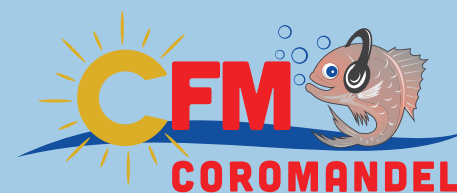
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PROUD TO BE LOCAL *Glen Theobald*

WHAT ARE YOUR FAMILY LINKS WITH THE COROMANDEL?

My parents accepted a job with Toby and Diane Morcom at Cooks Beach, in search of a better lifestyle for all of the family. The move/decision proved beneficial for the whole family, especially us kids – David, Lynda and me.

WHERE ARE YOU LIVING NOW?

West Africa. However, I'm about to return to NZ and retire before age 60.

WHICH SCHOOLS DID YOU ATTEND IN THE COROMANDEL, AND FOR HOW LONG?

MBAS from the start of 4th form to the end of 6th form. Outcome: obtained University Entrance.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE SCHOOL?

Simon Waters (now deceased) randomly knocked on my parents' door one school holiday, asking if I wanted to earn some money working on his fishing boat. This set the seed; when I left school I became a deckhand on a local fishing boat. After a year or so, I became the youngest commercial captain in NZ (at 18yo). I did well and eventually bought my own fishing vessel, which I later steamed to Australia to fish for three years. I sold the boat due to a three-year contract offered by the French New Caledonia government to teach the French how to fish (lol). This involved me travelling to

France, French Guiana, Japan, Guam, South Korea in search of appropriate fishing vessels. I didn't find any, so they decided to build new, which landed me in China for six months overseeing the four new builds. Once these were delivered to New Caledonia, I taught the French some tricks and then roamed most of the Pacific Islands as required.

After the French contract, I transitioned into the oil and gas industry where I captained vessels for an American company with divisions in various countries world-wide. I was located in Dubai/Abu Dhabi for ten years, then in Saudi Arabia for seven years, and now I'm about to finish up five years in West Africa. About ten years ago, I came ashore to become their operations superintendent and relief country manager in any particular country where required. However, before I was led abroad, I met a lady resulting in a relationship that produced three kids and then two grandkids. I look forward to seeing them a lot more from now on.

WHAT ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Being successful in most aspects of my life, enabling early retirement due to investments established along my journey. Not to mention my children are all doing well and I'm very proud of who they have become as adults



HAVE YOU BEEN BACK TO THE COROMANDEL RECENTLY? IMPRESSIONS?

Not for many years – but soon I'll be able to see the dramatic changes that have taken place.

WHAT ARE YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES OF THE COROMANDEL?

The difference in all aspects of quality of life with our parents' decision to relocate to Cooks Beach/Whitianga. Schooling especially was superior and made all the difference to us kids – also farm life, sports including pig hunting and spear fishing.

WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS IN THOSE EARLY YEARS?

Darren Shield, Robin Simpson, Helen Hunt, John Cox, Lisa Abrahamson, Peter Clark, Paul Duffield, Philip Brown and the rest of the class friends we call the 65's. I aim to make the Whitianga Area school main reunion in approximately two years' time.

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— Ahuahu & Andy Series —

MY EXPERIENCES AS A RANGER ON GREAT MERCURY ISLAND

— Stories from the Edge of Restoration —

Great Mercury Island / Ahuahu – 1872 hectares, basically two islands, one rhyolitic and the other andesitic, joined by a tombolo (natural sand isthmus) in the centre on which once stood great native conifer and coastal trees. The southern half of the island as it stands now is fringed with coastal natives; the bulk of the centre is planted in pine trees with a fantastic understorey of native trees, self-seeded and established over the past forty-odd years since the pines were planted. The northern half of the island is farmland and home to the only dwellings on the island. I wasn't expecting to be asked to run the 320 trap stations, used to monitor for rodent incursion, that fringe the island – such pests being most likely to arrive by boat from the mainland. Little did I realise what a privilege and honour the traplines would become.

At the time of my employment in 2016, Great Mercury Island had only just been officially recognised as a pest-free island, after a major pest eradication in 2014 focused primarily on rats, but also feral cats. There were no goats, possums or mustelids on the island in 2014 and surprisingly no mice were found. Ecologically, it was the first time in more than 700 years that the island had been rodent-free, since the arrival in a waka of the kiore (Pacific rat) in Coralie Bay, on the eastern side of Great Mercury Island / Ahuahu.

I am not sure of the true definition of Ahuahu in context to the island; I have read different translations of the word, some referring to heaped mounds/gardens, others to sacred stones and stepping stones.

Great Mercury Island most certainly represents all these definitions – historically being home to huge gardens, the island is most certainly home to sacred stones used as early navigational and seasonal guides, and the island itself is also a stepping stone between gardens around Taputapuātea Pa on Raiātea Island in French Polynesia and the New Zealand mainland. Coralie Bay facing east is a protected bay alongside the great white cliffs of Ahuahu, 180 metres high. From further east out at sea, early in the morning, the sun shines and reflects on the cliff face, sometimes grey, sometimes white, sometimes golden – like a long white cloud shining in the light of dawn, it beacons

to mariners old or new; it is a landmark to see when the mariner makes landfall.

Having sailed offshore professionally myself with many early morning landfall moments, I relate to the feeling if you have been at sea for weeks; it is always a remarkable event to smell land or see a prominent landmark for the first time. The cliff was used as a tohu (navigation point) by early Polynesian explorers but perhaps out of respect this is not my story to tell.

Great Mercury Island / Ahuahu has a breath-taking history which is generally unspoken. From my job's perspective, the moment man arrived on the eastern shoreline of the island, the kiore (Polynesian rat) called it home; from that time, the landscape began to erode into the valleys, harbours and swamps, filling them with silt. As human interaction increased over time, peaking with cattle farming and vehicles, so too did the erosion. This was highlighted to me during an archaeological dig showing soil layers going back to the first Mount Tarawera eruption more than 700 years ago (a datum time for archaeology), which left a layer of ash over the Holocene layer (pan); above this ash, thick charcoal and then a thin layer of taro garden, then thicker kūmara (sweet potato) garden layers and then a deep layer of light grey erosion from the past hundred years or so. This cattle layer represented roughly two thirds of the erosion in only 1/7th of the time.

What was once a crystal-clear stream in a small gully filled with native vegetation is now, as we know it, just a wet grassy area we cannot drive on in winter. For this reason, archaeologists will argue quite rightly with you about the definition of island restoration. Through the eyes of archaeology, the gullies, harbours and sea floor are irreversibly changed forever by the hand of human ambition creating dramatic erosion over the centuries. This damage is irreversible, but things can be done to swing the pendulum back the other way.

Words by
Andy Hopping



**These stories and observations are humbly the author's only, they don't represent anyone else's point of view.*



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From Manaia with Love

Music that Heals and Uplifts with May Love

May Love is the artist moniker of Majella Siezen, a sweet sensitive songwriter with a delicately expressive voice and a penchant for emotional storytelling. She has performed extensively around Europe and released music in various genres, with the aim of inspiring and uplifting listeners.

A Coromandel native, Majella Siezen was raised in the picturesque hills of Manaia, a 20-minute drive south of Coromandel Town. Her parents, who are German and Dutch, are the gardeners for the renowned Mana Retreat Centre. Her older sisters are circus acrobats who perform together as the Twisty Twins. Majella says growing up on the peninsula really shaped her songwriting.

“A lot of what I write and sing about is inspired by the beautiful nature here, so that’s a huge connection I have to the land and the ocean. That’s the main connection I would make. I feel really blessed to have grown up here, and to have the space and the freedom to soak up the energy from nature and infuse it into my lyrics and my songs.”

Majella was drawn to music at an early age, spurred by a deep affinity with it and a desire to differentiate herself from her acrobat sisters.

“As a kid, I liked having something different from what my sisters were doing. People would ask: ‘Oh, do you do acrobatics too?’ And I’m like: ‘No.’ Music is something different, but it’s more ‘my thing’. I’ve always liked to sing as far as I can remember, and I noticed that it helped me. It has a therapeutic effect. Writing, singing and releasing can heal so much.”

Majella’s family didn’t often listen to music, she says, but certain songs filtered through. She recalls a Joan Baez song on a family cassette tape as one of her earliest experiences of being touched by music.

“She was the first singer I remember listening to and being like: ‘Wow. I want to be like that.’ I don’t remember which song it was, but I always wanted to listen to that, even though I don’t remember the lyrics or what was being sung, but I just loved the raw emotion in the vocals. I haven’t listened to her since then.”

Majella wrote her first song at age 11 after she got her first guitar.

“It was something really cheesy,” she laughs. “Like: ‘I love the birds, I love the trees.’ Something about my love for nature. It’s sort of embarrassing now to think about, but we all start somewhere.”

Majella kept writing songs while attending Thames High School. After graduating, she was off to see the world.

“I went on a solo tour to Europe, just with my guitar and backpack. I was travelling

around and making street music, busking to earn my money to be able to travel. I went to Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Spain and The Netherlands.”

Majella remained in Denmark for the year 2016, studying at Musik og Teaterhøjskolen, a folk high school which specialised in performing arts.

“You live at the school, and there are rooms there, and you’re very integrated in the whole school experience. That was a very beautiful experience, and I would do it again.”

Following her study, Majella briefly moved to Germany before embarking on her next musical adventure: a performing residency at a hotel in Cyprus, followed by a similar one in Crete.

“That was a very different thing. It was totally out of my comfort zone, and I was thinking: ‘What am I doing?’ But it ended up being a really cool experience, where I got to learn a lot as well! It was a team of eight people in the hotel. During the day we did activities with the guests, but at night it was like singing and musicals and cabaret.”

She ended this residency in 2020, returning to Germany with plans of a European music tour. These plans were foiled by the advent of Covid.

“Everything which I had just organised got cancelled. It was more like just resigning to the reality of what was going on, because I couldn’t do what I’d planned to do, and also my flight to New Zealand had been cancelled so I was stuck in Germany, but I had to make the most of it.”

She used that time to record new music, experimenting with electropop and hip-hop.

“That was fun, but it was a very different era than what I started with and what I’m doing now again. Experimentation phase, as some people call it.”

Majella returned to her family home in Manaia at the end of 2024. While on the peninsula, she has been prolific with releasing acoustic folk-pop music. Her songwriting goals involve focusing more on uplifting emotions.

“Up until now, a lot of my songs have come from a place of darkness or despair or sadness but then transformed it. I have the feeling I’ve done that enough, and I don’t want to keep just writing sad songs. There’s a lot more than just that, and I don’t wanna make people sad! It’s nice when people are very touched by a song, but I still would prefer people leaving a concert of mine or listening to a song with a deeper feeling of resonance, not just sadness but also feeling uplifted or inspired. Empowering people to be themselves is probably the main thing I want to keep doing with my music.”

Words by
Nur Peach

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Ross' Ramblings – Part 1

A Kiwi educator in the Kingdom

SAUDI ARABIA

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PLACE



When I started working at Coromandel Outdoor Language Centre in 1990, I knew very little about Saudi Arabia, except that it had a lot of oil and a lot of sand. Then, around 2007 we started to have Saudi students enrolling at the centre, thanks to the generous Saudi government handouts to students who wanted to learn the English language. All our students were male and most of them were very friendly young men. Women were not allowed such freedom in those days.

They came to our school for three or four months with a view to mastering English in that short time, entering a NZ university and obtaining a degree before returning to their home country and finding a plush job. For the great majority of them this was a totally unrealistic dream as, although some had a basic level of spoken English, nearly all had very limited written English skills, for various social, cultural, religious and educational reasons. One handicap was that they had little knowledge concerning the use of vowels. A typical sentence might be written by a Saudi student as follows. 'I cme frm Sdi Arbi, I wnt stdy english go unvrsty.' (I come from Saudi Arabia. I want to study English and go to university.) It was going to take a lot longer than a few months to be able to write at university level. There was no ChatGPT in those days.

Anyway, for a few years the Saudis comprised a good percentage of our students. Islam was their religion, and the great majority were members of the Sunni branch of it. However around 15% were from the rival Shia sect and the two groups seemed to hate each other – as I witnessed in one of my classes when two Saudi students started shouting at one another and had to be separated and put in different classes. Don't ask me why there is such animosity. It's probably similar to the Catholic and Protestant clashes of old. I guess this innate divisiveness is one of the reasons I have never had the inclination to join a religion.

Unfortunately, the Saudi education system was, shall we say, not very demanding at that time, and our students often had difficulty with the diligence required to achieve the required results here in New Zealand. However, with around 1800 Saudi English language students in the country, language schools were going all out to market themselves to agents in Saudi Arabia. English language fairs were being held in Riyadh and Jeddah, the kingdom's main cities, and I was lucky enough to be offered the job of marketing our language centre at one of these fairs. So, off I went on Emirates Airline to Dubai and then on to Riyadh on Saudi Air. The trip was really uncomfortable given the fact that I occupied a window seat, with an obese Saudi teenager and an equally obese older woman, probably his mother, who refused to acknowledge me, having the other two seats. Toilet time was an adventure.

On arrival, I was ushered onto a bus with the other 20-odd Kiwi marketing reps, only one of whom was female. It was the first time a woman representative had been permitted to attend a fair in Saudi Arabia. En route to our hotel we were all amazed at the huge size of houses. I remember my students in Whitianga telling the class that they had 10 or 12 siblings, and possibly more if their father had more than one wife. The men are allowed up to four, with each often living in separate houses. I always wondered why a man would ever do that to himself.

Marriages are often arranged by parents with a couple meeting each other a couple of times, chaperoned of course, and then agreeing to the marriage or not. On one of my free days in Riyadh, one of my students, Mohammed, who had returned to his homeland a few months previously, picked me up and took me to a camel market in the desert on the outskirts of the city. He drove with his phone speaker on and received a call from a woman with a beautiful husky voice speaking in Arabic. It was obvious the two were intimately connected and after she hung up I asked Mohammed about her and whether she was his fiancée. He told me with a sigh that they were in love but that he was already promised to one of his cousins so would have to give up on his true love.

The camel market was interesting, except when I was given a cup of fresh warm camel milk which I was assured was excellent for the health. I drank it politely trying to smile and not spit it out. I was told by a camel seller that I could buy a camel for anywhere between a few thousand and a few million dollars depending on its breed and intended use. I declined, stating that in New Zealand a sheep was a lot cheaper and more practical except perhaps when there is a drought. Of course, there was also the difficulty of getting a camel on the plane.

The next day, another student Ahmed took me on a tour of Riyadh. He had to stop the car periodically to attend one of the prayer times, of which there are five daily. One of the stops was at a large square in the centre of the capital. While Ahmed was praying, I sat on one of the benches on the edge of the square. Suddenly I saw a soldier with a gun striding towards me waving his gun at me and gesturing to me to stand up and move away. I obviously looked perplexed and was wondering why I had to move when he pointed at a woman sitting on the same bench 50 metres away. "Oh," I remember thinking. "I see now. I'm not supposed to sit on the same bench as a woman, no matter how far away she is." When my student had finished prayers, I told him about it, and he said the religious police were pretty strict. The same thing happened in a shopping mall. I was standing at the top of a staircase looking down at the lower floor where there were Saudi women all wearing black abayas, veils and expensive looking shoes, shopping in the myriad designer stores, Prada, Louis Vuitton, etc. With another gun pointed at my stomach, I was told by gesture to avert my eyes from the female shoppers. I was not sure whether I looked like an infidel rapist, but this situation seemed to be repeating itself.

Back at the square, Ahmed also told me that it was there that public beheadings took place each month. The area was also known as Chop-chop Square, where about 150 people lose their heads annually. He had been to one execution and didn't recommend it for an innocent Kiwi boy like me. But I was assured that death by sword was a very humane method compared to the hangings, electrocutions, firing squad or lethal injections employed in other countries – America, China, amongst others. I hope I never have to find out the validity of that assurance.

To be continued ...

Words by
Ross Liggins

Photos by
Tim Graham & David Longstreath

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UNDERSTANDING MĀORI WARDS

Te Tiriti Representation, and the Power of your Vote

This year at the local government elections, 9 September to 10 October, Kiwis will have the opportunity to vote for fair representation in our local governments. We will be asked to vote whether to keep our Māori ward representation in local government binding polls. Here is what you need to know.

What is a ward?

A ward is a community in which candidates are elected to serve the needs and interests of that community. The number of seats in a ward depends on the number of people in that community. Wards are often designed to reflect geographical areas or communities of interest. In Thames-Coromandel District there are currently four geographical wards and one Māori ward.

Māori wards are electorates created to ensure Māori representation. The number of seats depends on how many people are on the Māori roll within the district/region. The elected Māori ward candidate will serve the whole district or region but will represent their voters' interests.

This year, at the local government elections, voters will be asked if they want to keep the Māori ward that our local council, TCDC, established in 2024. This is because the current coalition government has removed our local elected representatives' ability to establish Māori wards without asking everyone in the district or region what they think.

Where did this all start?

Back in 2001, the Bay of Plenty Regional Council introduced the first Māori constituencies.

After this, other councils attempted to establish Māori wards and constituencies. But a law passed by politicians who disagreed with Māori representation made it necessary for all local councils to hold a binding poll, also called a referendum, if they wanted to establish a Māori ward within their district or region. Labour abolished the need for a referendum in 2021, then the current government brought it back.

Does democracy work for Māori wards?

In New Zealand, Māori make up 17.8% of the population according to the last census in 2023. Some people say that because there are more Pākehā than Māori in NZ it is undemocratic to provide Māori wards unless the majority agrees to it. History suggests that by passing the choice of Māori representation to the voting public (a large Pākehā majority), Māori wards cannot survive. For example, over

many decades of TCDC, only two councillors of Māori descent have ever been elected, and many have tried.

So, because the Indigenous people in Aotearoa are so outnumbered – in part due to colonisation which introduced disease, land dispossession, enforced poverty and suppressed the Māori language – democracy works against them.

Interesting fact: some councils have Rural wards which are created to represent a minority community – and no binding poll or referendum is required for these.

Will Māori wards cost more money?

No. The existing pool of funds for councillors' wages will be shared with one more councillor. Also, it will potentially save money by eliminating decisions made without full Māori consideration. For example: the Thames Centennial Pool (constructed in the 1970s) is being relocated, largely due to its location on an urupa (burial ground). The Thames-Coromandel District Council and Ngāti Maru have agreed to relocate the pool by 2027, returning the urupa land to Ngāti Maru.

Who gets a say?

Everyone can vote in the 2025 referendum on Māori wards. Only people on the Māori roll can vote for a Māori ward candidate. So, in this 2025 local election, think hard about this referendum.

Māori wards are an issue of fairness, a step towards respecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi and better local decision-making. Learn more at www.votelocal.co.nz/maori-wards-and-constituencies/

There will be some community and household meetings to discuss the Māori wards issue – if you would like a speaker to help inform you and your neighbours, reach out to our local community collective for Māori wards at www.facebook.com/KeepOurTCDCMaoriWard

To secure a Māori voice in local decision-making, which will benefit all of us, tick 'I vote to keep the Māori ward' in the referendum. Voting is by post, opens on September 9 and closes on October 10.

 Words by
Sharyn Morcom

www.votelocal.co.nz/maori-wards-and-constituencies/

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Nurturing in Nature

Growing up, I was a natural creative but connection with nature was not part of my upbringing. I grew up in a small town called Tokoroa. A town built on pine forestry, farming and sustained by a pulp mill. Conservation and nature was not a key part of the local culture. But times have changed. The rest of Aotearoa seems to be catching up with Coromandel's long-standing communities who have fought long and hard to protect te taiao (nature), the taonga (treasure) that sustains this peninsula's healthy waterways and healthy people ... and of course inspires all you talented creatives!

But it takes generations of passionate and active nature-lovers to continue the protection of mother nature. So while some of my peers are deciding not to have children due to the state of the world (or at least the intense awareness of it), my children give me hope. They give me a reason to fight for a better future. To fight for a thriving nature that they can enjoy recreationally, consume sustainably and use to inspire creativity.

Everything I have learned about nature in my adulthood, they are learning in their childhood. It is already becoming part of their everyday experiences. From my toddler helping me harvest green leaves from the garden for dinner to my baby learning to crawl under the magnolia tree in the yard. Being outside and connecting with the environment is one of my favourite things to do with my children. Helping them learn how to respect nature is incredibly rewarding. Ra knows not to touch bees because he might get a mamee (hurt) so he waves at them and says "Hi bee" in the cutest toddler voice. He also says hi to the flowers.

As the children get older, I will teach them more about the complexities of nature. My marine studies diploma will become relevant once again as I take them snorkelling to show them that #NotAllStingrays are harmful (RIP Steve Irwin). They will see that fish are not just kai, but living animals living their best life – as long as they have habitat to thrive in. They will learn that trees are essential for life as they provide shade and shelter for animals, including humans. Oh and they give us oxygen to breathe. That's pretty essential.

You can't care about what you don't know about – exploring and learning about biodiversity has been one of the most important things I've done in my adult life and I'm still always learning. I had to google 'are magnolia leaves or petals poisonous?'

In the process of nurturing my babies in nature, I feel like I am also being nurtured. Watching children play and explore in nature is intrinsically enriching. It is healing. It is natural. Initiatives like Enviroschools give me hope for children who don't have immediate access to connecting with nature. As I've said before: It takes a village. But one could also say that it takes an ecosystem.

Words by
Elvisa Van Der Leden

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The Engineer Behind the Wheel

Muzza's Alchemy in Coro Town

One of the most rewarding aspects of putting together Coromind is getting to know the people behind the art we showcase – not just their work, but their habits, quirks, and the slow-burn stories that shape their creative lives. When I first met Murray Rainey, aka Muzza, what struck me wasn't just his elegant, well-balanced pottery. It was the tidiness of his studio. It was spotless. Not in a clinical way, but in a way that made you feel calm. Safe, even.

It turns out, there's a reason for that. Muzza is not only a potter, he's also an electrical engineer. His technical background plays a strong role in his practice, from his self-built pottery wheel (because the first one didn't go slow enough) to his ability to repair a gas kiln for firing porcelain. In his world, creativity and control aren't opposing forces – they dance.

"My first name is Murray, but over the years, Muzz stuck," he says. "So, Muzza's Pottery it is."

Muzza's ceramic story started not with a grand vision but with a simple invitation. "About 10 years ago, my daughter started talking about pottery courses at Waikato Society of Potters," he recalls. "We did a term, then another on wheel throwing. The courses were okay, but I needed more."

So, he got more. He bought his own wheel and kiln, the kind of heavy machinery that takes commitment, and hasn't looked back since. "Having my own gear meant I could fire regularly and get feedback quickly. I still have the first thing I made: a snowman."

Born in Hamilton and a longtime visitor to Papa Aroha, Muzza eventually built a home and now his permanent studio in Coromandel Town with his wife Janeen. The Coromandel, he says, has changed his pace and deepened his creative rhythm. "Hamilton's busy and loud. It felt like rush mode all the time. Here, it's laid back and quiet. When you're in the right mood, pottery flows. If your mind's distracted, you learn how to recycle."

That insight, being in rhythm with both self and place, permeates his work. His pieces are clean, often minimalist, sometimes showcasing a bold colour that stands out, giving space for the details to breathe. "When you're throwing on the wheel, your hands are in

the work the whole time. You're feeling what needs to happen. There's a bit of you in every piece."

And sometimes, there's literally a piece of you. "They've found fingerprints in pottery works from hundreds of years ago," Muzza says with a grin.

He prefers a smooth, plastic commercial clay that holds shape and fires into a crisp white. "Lazy," he jokes, but it suits his technique. Many of his larger pieces are spray-glazed outdoors, and if a glaze doesn't feel right, he's not afraid to wash it off and try again. "I trim a lot at the leather-hard stage, and I use a small pug mill to help with recycling."

Still, for someone who enjoys order, Muzza isn't afraid of a challenge. His next chapter? Porcelain.

"I've repaired a gas kiln to help me reach the high temps needed for firing porcelain. It's true what they say: porcelain's a sod. But I want to make really thin work that turns translucent. That's the goal."

He laughs, imagining the chaos to come. "Watch this space. Keep your ears open for cries of anguish as my studio turns a classy white from flinging porcelain."

With plans to keep exhibiting in Coromandel's art spaces, Muzza's tidy and methodical studio proves that art can thrive where structure meets spontaneity. His journey, from crafting a simple snowman to creating sleek, sophisticated forms, shows how a steady hand and curious mind can shape far more than just clay.

Check out Muzza's website for more information: www.muzzaspottery.com

On the first two weekends of October (4–5 and 11–12), more than 30 Coromandel artists will open their studios to the public as part of the Coromandel Open Arts Studio tour and Coromind is stoked to be partnering with it! Muzza is one of the participating artists, so make sure to pay him a visit.

More info: www.coromandelartstour.co.nz

 Words by
Leonardo Magri



**Watch our visit
to Muzza's studio**

Scan Here ➔



Or visit: www.coromind.nz/artist-murray-rainey/



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FEARSOME TIMES

*When a Web Designer
meets a Cliff Hanger*

I'm an anti-social web designer working from home in the Coromandel. I had spun my web about 160 metres up, well away from the pigs, possums and goats down below. No one could make it up here. I'd seen a lizard or two at the top, but they hadn't even noticed my web, strung between the spiny alpine shrubs. It had been an idyllic place to have my 50 babies. They'd just left the nest that morning.

That afternoon, I was checking my web when a large, fetid-smelling beast smashed through the spiny shrubs at the top of the cliff. Without warning, it tore straight through my web. It seemed to be attached to some kind of giant blue cord.

This was a spider I had never seen before – only four legs and two eyes. Seriously? Four clumsy limbs and a mere two eyes – how did it even survive up here?

It was crashing through the alpine shrubs, moving down onto the rock below. Something red sat on its head, and shiny things hung from a strap around its middle. With horror, I realised one of my legs had gotten hooked onto its top leg, near its head. Now I was stuck to it, travelling down to a rocky ledge below.

At the ledge, it inserted something into the rock. Then it looked upward and made a loud noise, as if to communicate with another beast. Just then, its two eyes swivelled toward me, and it let out a terrifying, high-pitched sound.

In desperation, I bit it. I just didn't know what else to do.

The creature began breathing faster. It picked up one of the shiny things hanging from the middle strap and suddenly swiped at me with it. I fell onto the ledge below and scampered quickly out of sight. It took me a long time to catch my breath.

My idyllic home was no longer safe. I would be hard-pressed to find another spot so far out of reach to build a web.

~~~~~  
Recently, a giant sheetweb spider bit me out of terror. The poor thing was clearly frightened by my embarrassingly banshee-like screams when I spotted it on my bicep. I'd just rock-climbed 160 metres up a cliff – and I was having a meltdown over a spider.

No one had done this rock climbing route before. It was an achievement to be proud of, but I got completely derailed

by this tiny beast. To be fair, it looked like a spider that had escaped from a science experiment gone wrong – and it was very close to my face. In my defence, I was also extremely tired.

We were in the Coromandel, near Hikuai. The walk just getting to the base of the climb was hard. It was a rugged two-hour walk through dense bush, with a brutally steep final uphill. Now we had finished the climb and were beginning the long abseil descent.

I felt terrible for screaming. My climbing partner still had a touch of the PTSD I'd inflicted on him the previous year. I'd selfishly fallen unconscious – after being struck by a falling rock – when we were 300 metres up a rock face in the Southern Alps. That incident had forced him to activate my emergency locator beacon and figure out how to get me to safer ground for evacuation.

In the Coromandel, when I screamed, we couldn't even see each other. It really wasn't fair on him to react like that over a spider. I quickly started yelling up to him, over and over: "I'm safe! I'm okay!" – giving him the reassurance he needed to come down and the chance to roll his eyes in disbelief.

The spider was gone. I'd knocked it off with a piece of climbing equipment. All that remained was the sound of strange breathing and the shaky presence of someone feeling quietly ashamed.

In the following week I had an allergic reaction to the spider bite, which I took to the medical centre to learn that antihistamines would quickly deal with it. Three weeks later I learned it was a giant sheetweb spider that had bitten me, out of defence. It was not a small spider. I have always felt a slight fear of spiders, but now understood that my fear of heights had strong competition.

Author: Climbing regularly for 33 years. Still fearful. Still hooked.



Words by  
**Rachael Mayne**





# SOAR INTO FLAVOUR

## The Aviator's New Italian Escape in Thames

Some places just get things right. Atmosphere, top service, delicious food, and something to keep everyone entertained. The Aviator in Thames is one of those places.

By day, it's all about adrenaline and aviation. You walk in and instantly feel the buzz. Riveted aluminium tables, cockpit-style details, and a life-sized Spitfire replica set the scene. But it's not just the decor. It's the immersive flight simulators that draw in families, curious passersby, and anyone who's ever dreamed of flying a jet. Owner Craig Saunders will likely be the one greeting you, possibly reminding you not to leave without giving the simulator a go (true story).

Craig's obsession with military aviation started early. He joined the NZ Air Training Cadets as a teen, earned a flying scholarship, and later served in the RNZAF as an avionic technician. When the air force retired its jets, Craig transitioned into IT, but aviation stayed in his heart. He built a home flight simulator that eventually turned into a full-fledged experience at Tauranga Airport. After a COVID-forced closure, Craig brought the dream to Thames, blending his love for flight with a bold new idea: exceptional food.

Now, The Aviator has launched a night-time offering that is quietly becoming

a local favourite. Every Thursday to Saturday from 5 - 9pm (later by request), the venue transforms into an intimate Italian restaurant, and it works. Think rustic pizzas, rich pastas, generous portions, and flavour that lingers like a summer in Sicily. The setting remains aviation-themed, but the mood shifts. Warm lighting, good wine, and the kind of relaxed dining vibe that people keep coming back for.

There's something refreshing about a place that doesn't try too hard. The Aviator keeps it real. Honest food, friendly service, and no skimping on portions. It's Craig's way of doing things. "We wanted to create an experience that feels both special and welcoming," he told us. "You can have a laugh, share a meal, maybe even fly a jet, all in one evening."

Word is getting around. Locals from Whitianga, Paeroa, Coromandel Town, and even Auckland are making the trip. Craig says they've had to turn people away on some nights, so if you're keen to try it, it's best to book ahead to avoid missing out.

So whether you're craving something different or just looking for a night out that hits all the right notes, this is your boarding call. Book ahead, bring your appetite, and let your taste buds take flight.

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[WWW.THEAVIATOR.CO.NZ](http://WWW.THEAVIATOR.CO.NZ)



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