

COROMIND



WHAKATO RĀKAU

Planting for the Future
in Whenuakite

Issue 44

MUSIC CHOSE ME

SaltWood: From different
beginnings to one sound

Plato, Democracy, and Idiots

Why Voters Are Drawn
to the Wrong People

DISCOVERING YOUR ANCESTORS

Genealogy: The Bare Bones
of Family History

On Air



Watch & Listen

Together we Thrive

Hello Coromind readers.

You may remember me from The Seagull magazine! If not, I was the previous owner and editor – and what an expansion has occurred. I left The Seagull magazine back in 2022 for overseas adventures, and I am so impressed by what Leo and the team have done with the publication in the years since.

The Coromandel Peninsula is a step away in time for the most part, and it is our bustling arts community that keeps things thriving. It's been so epic to witness a proper place come together for these stories to be stored, and to continue to learn more about our community every day. In the magazine for sure, but also online – how great and accessible is the audio version? ... and also in the events space, with the mighty pop-up art gallery Coromind ArtWorks, the series of workshops aimed at local artists The Art of Being an Artist and being visibly seen across the peninsula covering festivals like Coro Classic.

Art, along with artists, does not just comprise those who create masterpiece paintings; it's those who write, sing, dance, make music and create the spaces for us to connect with others. Art + artists can be found all over the Peninsula, we are blessed to have so many around. As Roimata mentioned in an earlier intro, "You could still hit an artist with a pāua shell if you threw it pretty

much anywhere on the Coromandel. Throw a kina and you'll likely hit an exhibition or festival – the art scene in the area continues to blossom and grow."

It's the combination of people this place draws in that makes all of this possible. Without our people – those who submit articles to the magazine, those who are artists themselves, those who advertise (and you – the reader), none of this is possible. That's something that has always stuck with me. We are nothing without you – our community.

And as the times out there are getting weirder by the day, I think that this is the greatest thing we can remember right now. Our community is what makes us and what shapes us. Our community is who supports us when our times are tough and who celebrates with us in our joy. Look to your neighbour and connect (maybe over the latest Coromind), and remember that it's our community that makes us who we are. And we get to be active in shaping that.

Here's to many more editions to be published. Great work team!

 Words by
Kaitlyn Gooch



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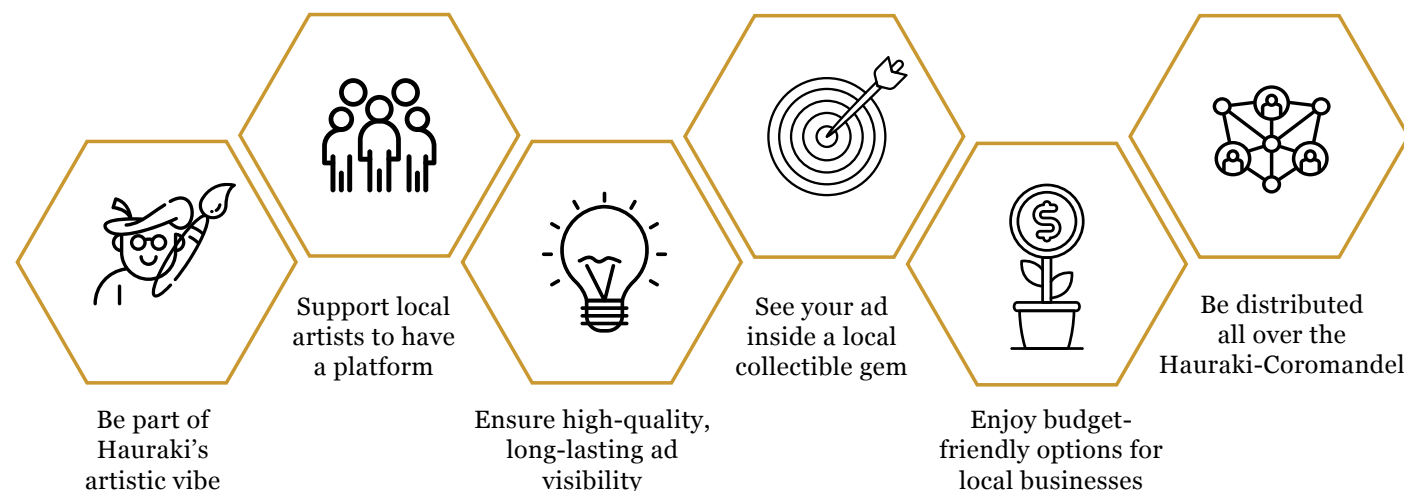
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Travel Sketching

Put the Phone Down, Pick up a Pencil!



For most of my working life, I have been writing software. People tend to think computer programming is about maths and sounds like the exact opposite of art. But what hooked me early on was realising that software code was just another malleable material I could build things with. Because a software program is a digital abstraction of a system or process that exists in the physical world, and creating one is above all a creative challenge.

And that's what links a lot of what I do in both the digital and physical worlds – the joy of building and making. The creative process.

Sketching, painting, or writing code, building things from recycled odds and ends – different materials, but all scratching the same itch.

I have sketched for as long as I can remember. In recent decades, I travelled often for work and always carried along a sketchbook. I flew about two million kms in that time.

This 'Travel Sketching' started as a pastime and a way of recording places I visited, but I eventually realised it was doing something better. It meant I needed to slow down when visiting a new city, and allowed serendipity in. Unlike a camera, a sketchbook forces you to sit somewhere and actually take in what you see. Today, I can look at almost any sketch I made while travelling and tell you where I was, if I was with anyone, and whether I was feeling tired, content, lost, hungry, or all four. I cannot say the same for all but a few of the thousands of photos stored on my iPhone.

One of my favourite Travel Sketches emerged in Paris when I got on the wrong bus, jumped off at a random stop, and found myself standing in front of a church. So I sat down on a bench beside a fountain, looked around, and started sketching.

I've always been drawn to places with character, like old buildings, weathered boats, rustic stone bridges, shearing sheds held together by corrugated iron and optimism.

Character comes from age, wear, craft, and the visible signs of many lives passing through. That is what I'm usually trying to capture: a sense of place, an imagined memory, the story of lives and experiences.

Coromandel has its own pace of life. The state of roading in and out means we're basically an island, and island time explains that pace, and also that people here seem to have the openness and independence of island folk everywhere.

When you first move here, slowly your defences roll away, your senses all open up again. And now you also have time to listen to them.

Most of my painting now revolves around Coromandel landscapes and seascapes and the people who live here: wide, multilayered vistas of coastlines, mountains, harbours, small towns and bush all jumbled together. After years travelling overseas, I realised many people spend a fortune flying to holiday destinations with the kind of views we drive past here every day. I try never to take it for granted.

A couple of years ago, on a whim, I constructed a framed miniature facade of the historic Star and Garter Hotel in Coromandel for an exhibition. I used timber, card, foam, paint and other assorted recycled things I had collected. I'm still not even sure whether or not it's 'Art'.

The response surprised me – it really seemed to resonate with people. Since then I've been exploring local iconic buildings in mixed media like this. My most recent target has been the Colville Store. I've noticed small changes to each of the actual buildings since I captured them, so the work has accidentally also captured a moment in time. I like that. I find that art often sneaks up on its own meaning some time after you have made it.

People sometimes ask whether making art will still matter now that AI can produce any image in seconds. But I suspect we will increasingly value our interactions with real people and things made by human hands, showing human inspiration and human imperfection.

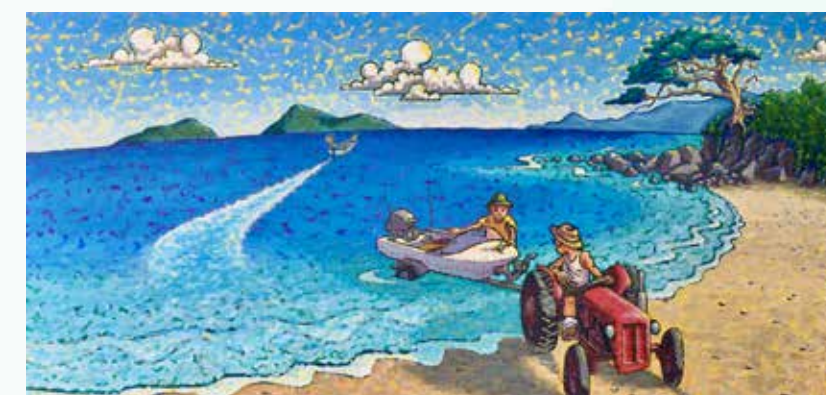
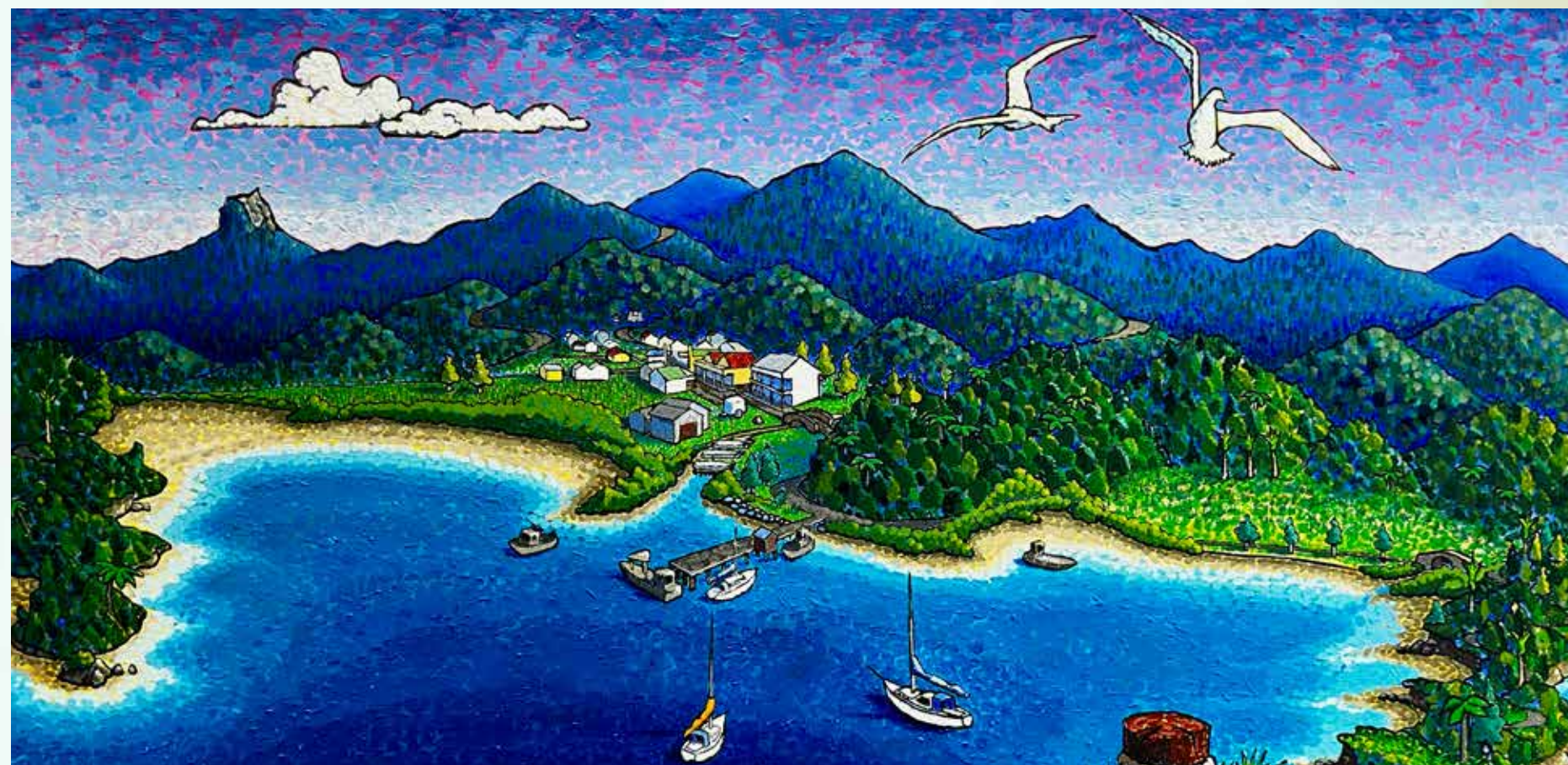
But in any case, I don't sketch or paint for the output. I do it for the pleasure of making it.

If you have come to believe you are not creative, my advice is simple: put your phone in a drawer, allow yourself enough time to just get bored, and keep a pencil and paper nearby.

Kia kaha e hoa mā.

Instagram: @bobvondrummond

 Words by
Bob Drummond



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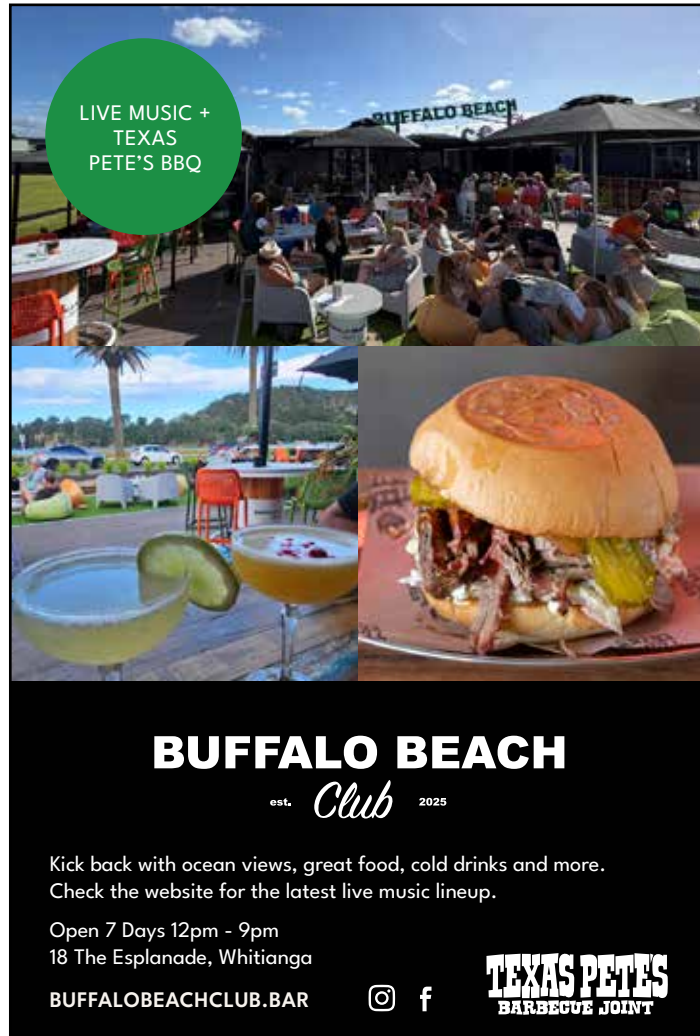


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MILLY MOON AND THE SPACES BETWEEN SERIES



Walking Songs ^{Part 2}

When the world gets you down, keep moving!

Opening night of the second independent tour of Walking Songs is in Te Aro, Wellington. It's a typical evening of misty rain and we're in an underground bookstore, lamp-lit, warm, eclectic, and so packed we had to turn punters down. The gracious host baked and decorated a cake for the night, and our hearts burst at the first of many standing ovations.

As Lucy-Belle and I moved up the motu (island), across the Tasman, then into the magical grasp of Northland before completing the tour on home ground in Bay of Plenty, we were overwhelmed by the hospitality and generosity of venues and audiences alike.

Creating this show had been a labour of love, tears, deep insecurity and unbound joy. After solo hiking Te Araroa trail (3000 km, Cape Reinga to Motupohue/Bluff) full of blind hope and sickening sorrow, I transferred my walking melodies into a story of resilience and reverence, threaded together with unadorned music, and on the first tour was overjoyed to take home Best Music 2023 at Melbourne Fringe Festival.

This iteration of the piece feels deeper still and having my sister at my side is an experience I'll treasure for a lifetime.

Touring independently is chaos. Lucy and I spent each night in Victoria on a different friend's couch, hauling our gear and luggage via bus, train, tram and once on foot – a mad dash from the station to our Melbourne city venue, where we had 90 minutes to set, soundcheck and change to go on stage.

The closest call however was the voyage from Melbourne to Whangārei. We flew to Tāmaki Makaurau, dragged our gear to long-term parking and drove straight up north, arriving at The Octagon Theatre with just half an hour before show start. An attendant popped her head through the door as we were soundchecking and said "Okay, we're letting everyone in now". Lucy and I froze. We were in trackies, unshowered, and had been awake for 18 hours. Coming to our senses, we ran backstage, changed, hugged, swigged from a flask in lieu of vocal warm up and within minutes, Lucy was on stage giving acknowledgement to open the show.

Every night, however, was worth the chaos.

There was an undeniable magic to this 2024 tour. It's always cathartic and connective to share this work but, this time, something theurgical took hold as I dropped in and sang those first lines, "Baby keep on moving, when the world gets you down". The symbiosis of energy from my audiences led the music and stories in a unique and authentic direction each performance.

In Waikino, under a full moon, the community gathered, and the sold-out room radiated with fire's glow and hearts opening. I was told there was a light-woven woman standing at my side throughout the performance.

In Mirboo North, surrounded by explosions of wildflowers picked and arranged in the barn venue by beloved friends, and performing to our most intimate audience, I was told there were 'beings' in the space.

In Hikurangi, our most energetically charged and from my artist's perspective, our most perfected performance, I was graced with the presence of a sacred tokotoko (traditional carved stick) on stage and was held in such love and gratitude, one wahine (woman) exclaiming to me through sobs, clutching my shoulders, "They are with you, spirit, they are all around you!" The drive back to our homestay, we had to pull over for neither Lucy nor I could see for our tears, guttural release in knowing this meant something.

It is a colossal amount of time and work to produce and tour an original show and I'm so glad to feel it was worth every drop of sweat. The community support was overwhelming and while I knew this tour would be the last time I perform Walking Songs, new stories are brewing, and I may just be ready to tackle that admin again.

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Words by
Milly Moon

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PROUD TO BE LOCAL

Kylie Gunn

Kylie Gunn has literally painted the town red. And blue. And green. And every other colour. And not just one town. We asked her how many murals she now has around the Hauraki and Coromandel.

I've completed about 13ish murals around the region so far, with another three planned this year – a large mural in Ngatea, one in Tairua and another large one in Thames. It's exciting to see more walls becoming opportunities to tell local stories.

Do you have a favourite?

Some are special because of the stories they tell, others because of the people I met while painting them. Others because of the personal reflections and growth I go through in the process.

Did you graduate into murals or was that always your field?

I began with oils and sketching as a teen, then moved into murals seven years ago. In the last five years, I've started exploring watercolour and pastel, and I've really enjoyed adding those to my toolkit.

Do you hide any Easter eggs in your works?

Occasionally! There are hidden ladybugs on the Ngatea garden mural. Sometimes friends or family members quietly appear as faces within a mural. Most people never notice, but those who do usually get a good laugh.

What is your thought process when someone commissions a new work?

I always begin by listening. Every community, business or family has a story worth telling. My goal is to create something that belongs to that place and that people will still enjoy decades from now.

How important is it to get the historic murals visually accurate?

Very important. I spend time researching photographs and talking with people who know the local history. I want the artwork to celebrate the past while remaining as authentic as possible.

Did you have a connection with the Coromandel/Hauraki before moving here?

Yes. My mother-in-law spent part of her childhood attending Ngatea Primary School and the local high school, and her mother owned the little shop in Ngatea that sold meat pies many years ago. It was lovely to discover those family connections after making this region home.

How do you spend your time when you're not painting?

Lately there hasn't been much 'not painting'! Between murals and commissioned artworks, I'm kept pretty busy. It was fun recently having to sign an art release for the upcoming Minecraft 2 film, as they were filming on the street where my largest mural is located. I also help curate at our local Thames Art Gallery.

What's important to Kylie Gunn?

Faith, family, community and creating artwork that brings positivity and perspective into people's lives. My faith is at the centre of my life. Knowing God has given me solid answers to some of life's biggest questions and a deep sense of purpose, hope and peace. That shapes not only my artwork, but the way I try to treat people every day – with kindness, humility and encouragement.



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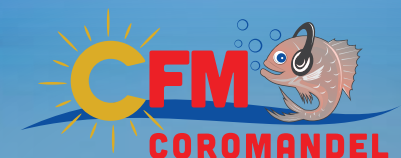
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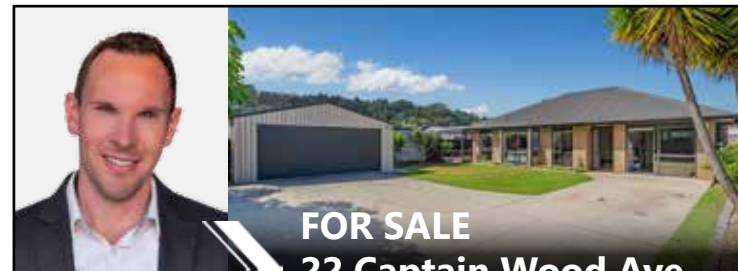
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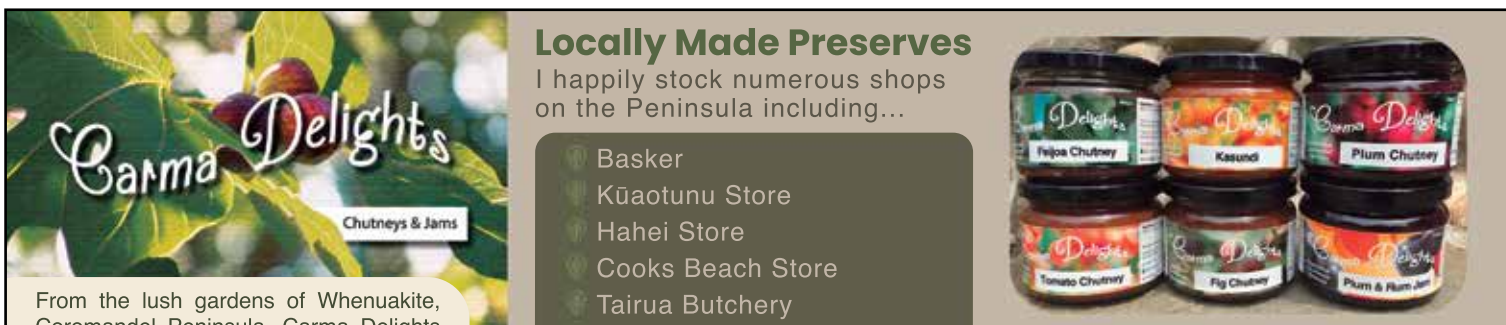
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WHAKATO RĀKAU

Planting for the Future in Whenuakite

On 17 June, Whenuakite School set off on an environmentally focused mission. Working with national native restoration organisation Trees for Survival, the group readied themselves to get dirty. Armed with shovels, gloves and determination, the two senior classes arrived at a local property.

After a safety briefing and general rundown, they got straight to work. "Over the last four years, Whenuakite School has planted more than 3,000 trees. It's amazing to see the plantings grow," says Jayne Nightingale, the local organiser for Trees for Survival. The seeds were eco sourced and grown by Te Whangai Nursery, then the seedlings were sent out to the school in October and potted up by the eager children. And that wasn't the only thing taking root. The Year 7 and 8 students took to the soil, removing the plant sleeves and guiding the young native plants into the freshly augured Earth.

"Planting trees can be a really social job," remarks Year 8 student, Corey. "Getting in there and joining in connects our community and whānau," adds fellow classmate, Beaudyn.

While large-scale planting projects make a significant impact, students were quick to point out that anyone can contribute.

Year 7 student Isla said, "Planting natives doesn't always have to be on a massive scale. Just planting a few around your house can encourage beautiful bees and birds, so it's a win-win!"

However, when you're aiming to plant 850 trees, help is very much appreciated. The students were fortunate to have principal Mr Veysi on standby, as well as senior teachers Paige and Chris and a dedicated group of parents.

In the principal's own words: "Not only does this help our learning, environment and local farmers, it also helps us understand the importance of looking after our own backyards."

Why bother, though? Planting can seem like a lot of work and, besides, do a couple of trees really help? The answer is: Yes.

I asked my peers, Ana and Ava, and what they told me made a real impact: "Planting trees helps with the earth's

oxygen, provides food for native birds, and helps hold up our riverbanks."

While exploring the property, the students also saw startling signs of erosion. In areas where no native trees had been planted, neighbouring land had simply fallen away into the flowing river below.

As the morning progressed, the welcoming landowners, Dion and Carmen, reflected on the long-term impact of the project. "It's incredible to think how much this land will have changed in three years' time," they said. "To know that the Year 7 and 8 students will be able to look back and see the impact their trees have made, and the change they've started, is really powerful."

After enjoying some delicious homemade pork sausages, the ākonga said their thanks and got ready to leave. It had been an exciting and educational day, one the Year 7 and 8 students will always remember.

Whenuakite School extends its thanks to Jayne Nightingale and Trees for Survival, the parent volunteers, teachers and landowners who helped make the day possible. Most importantly, thank you to the students who took part. Their willingness to roll up their sleeves and contribute shows that even a small amount of mahi can create lasting change.

E noho rā, kia kaha ngā rākau.

Stay well, and may the trees grow strong.

Environmental education and restoration programme Trees for Survival supports over 250 schools across Aotearoa to grow and plant native plants. Schools are provided with a growing unit and, each spring, receive native seedlings to nurture and grow ready for planting. This winter, schools are expected to plant 200,000 native plants. Plantings improve water quality, help prevent erosion and increase biodiversity. Supported in their programme nationally by Mastercraft Kitchens.

Words by
Thea Dozell
Whenuakite School Student



IVAN ANDERSON: HANDCRAFTED BEAUTY

*The Fisherman
Who Found
Art in Wood*



Ivan Anderson is a quiet artist and craftsman more comfortable with his chainsaw than promoting his work. As a fisherman with a local charter boat, woodworking was previously a long-time hobby when work permitted. The advent of Covid, of necessity, led to a dramatic change in direction and focus for Ivan. Setting aside bait and hooks, he turned to his woodworking tools, producing extraordinary pieces of art from 'found' chunks of swamp, beach and river timber.

A visit to his storeroom left me in awe of the ten gleaming sculptures on display, coaxed from the rough into magical shapes and curves. Standing between 130 and 170 cm in height, these striking pieces have been formed from both native and exotic timber, including pūriri, tōtara, kauri, English walnut, Tasmanian blackwood and American walnut. The grain and texture of each type of wood has been transformed into fascinating sculptures, which remain intriguing when turned and viewed from every angle. Despite their bulk and weight, each piece can be easily moved using the unique rotating bases that Ivan has created.

Here is a preview of some of his stunning pieces. Each has its story, a riveting history of its provenance and formation.

To arrange a viewing, please contact Ivan:
021 0222 9974
startrek2@xtra.co.nz
or Simona: 021 0850 8656



Words by
Helen Oliver




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— WONDERING IN WAIKINO —

THE WEB OF LIFE

When Cruelty Finds a Worthy Opponent

Johan found pleasure in small cruelties. While other boys played sports, he stalked the corners of the family property – the crumbling shed, the overgrown garden, the dusty basement – looking for spiders. Their intricate webs, although fascinating, were merely targets. A twig was his weapon, tearing apart silk architecture with glee. Captured inhabitants met worse fates; legs plucked one by one with tweezers, bodies drowned in droplets of water magnified by his lens, or crushed without pity beneath a stone. Their silent struggles, their frantic, legless scrambles, were his secret theatre. Power, absolute and terrible, over something smaller and weaker. It filled a hollow place inside him.

One humid afternoon, deep in the neglected shed where rusted machinery and tools lay enwrapped in cobwebs, Johan's eyes spotted a glimmer of movement – a spider! Unlike any other he had ever seen, this spider was larger, twice the size of a thumbnail, and its exoskeleton shimmered with iridescent blues, greens, and deep violets not unlike spilt petrol on water. It seemed defiant, perched on a strand thicker than silk ought to be, watching him with eyes that held an unnerving depth. Johan felt an inner tingle, not of fear, but of challenge.

He lunged, faster than usual, pinching tweezers aimed to seize the shimmering body. But the spider moved with impossible speed, avoiding capture. Instead of trying to escape, it leapt towards his grasping hand. A sharp, electric pain, like a hot needle driven deep between his thumb and forefinger, made him squeal and jerk back. The spider clung for a fraction of a second, its fangs embedded, before dropping silently and quickly vanishing into a pile of rotten wood.

Johan cursed at the tiny puncture. It stung fiercely, more than any bite he'd ever previously received. Then came the itch. An intense, escalating tingling spread from the bite site across his palm and up his fingers. He rubbed them together, trying to soothe it, but the sensation worsened. A strange stickiness coated his skin, like warm tree sap. He tried to

pull his fingers apart, but they resisted. Panic fluttered in his chest. He rubbed harder, frantic now, but the stickiness intensified, becoming tacky, then thick, then viscous. It seemed to be seeping from his pores, binding flesh to flesh.

He stumbled from the shed into the fading light, holding his hand up like a grotesque trophy. All his fingers, slick and sticky, were glued fast together. He clawed at them with his free hand, nails scraping, but the substance hardened rapidly, becoming like flexible, translucent amber tinted with unnatural colours. It set fast, like hard, unyielding latex. He pulled with all his might, a sob escaping his throat, but his fingers remained stubborn, permanently bonded in a stiff, awkward claw.

Doctors were baffled. Tests revealed nothing – no known venom, no allergy, no infection. The hardened secretion was impervious to solvents, needles, or scalpels. Specialists shrugged, offering useless exercises and sympathetic murmurs. The colourful shimmer faded over weeks, leaving his hand looking almost normal, save for the horrifying fusion. Johan became a school spectacle. He couldn't hold a pencil, button his shirt, grip a handlebar, or feel the individual texture of anything. Simple joys – the cool smoothness of a stone, the soft fur of a cat, the grasp of an ice cream cone – were stolen. His world became one of taunts, teases and pitying stares.

Besides the physical torment and limitation, it was the haunting memory. He pictured the shimmering spider whenever he looked at his useless, fused hand. He felt the echo of its bite, the swift, deliberate justice. His power over the small and helpless was gone, replaced by a permanent debilitating deformity. He had trapped and tortured countless tiny lives and paid the price. Now, his hand, the weapon of his cruelty, was his permanent prison – an ugly, incurable reminder of his savagery. He could only stare at his fused fingers, forever bound by the ghostly silk of his hostility and malevolence.





Words by
Amir Yussuf

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MUSIC CHOSE

SaltWood: From different beginnings to one sound

ME

For me, a world without music is unimaginable. Music has always been with me. It is integrated into every part of my day. That's not to say that I always have music playing, or that I'm always playing music, but there is always a heartbeat, a rhythm or a tone or timbre that is musical to my ears. So choosing a career was not such a difficult decision – music chose me.

There is a fine balance between having a career that is your passion and still being able to enjoy your passion outside of work. Likewise, there's an interesting and sometimes challenging balance between working with professional musicians, and extremely talented and passionate amateur musicians, for whom music is a really important part of their life, and who do it because they love it.

Len and I come from very different musical backgrounds. I was given every musical opportunity a small town could offer, with plenty of formal and informal music lessons and music-making situations. When I decided I wanted to play the harp, my mum took me to Auckland for lessons. Later I obtained a degree in music at Auckland University.

Len's musical education was gained from whatever he could glean from guitar playing friends and, later in life, taking the opportunity to play in local bands. As often happens, life got in the way, and Len will tell you that he didn't start playing seriously until he was over fifty years old. Isn't that the beauty of music, and of learning an instrument? It stays with you all your life if the passion is there.

It's interesting to notice the changes in the music scene – from lessons to gigs – over the last few years. There are a number of things that contribute to this. The internet has caused a paradigm shift in the way music is connected between players and listeners. This is a place where you can watch streamed concerts, old concerts, concerts on the other side of the world. It has unlocked hidden treasures. Recordings and performances that many of us, growing up in the 'pre-internet' era, thought were lost forever. Pure gold for fans of music the world over.

The internet has enabled students to access resources that were not available pre-1995. The flip side? You don't get the same feeling as the buzz from being in the audience of that concert – live! You can attend an online lesson in just about anything, but it's not the same as having the teacher in the room, getting real time feedback, and correcting posture or hand position in a hands-on way, and allowing the student to 'try things out' not hindered by the distance created by a screen. The internet, and all it offers, is a compromise, and sometimes a pretty good substitute in certain situations, but LIVE is best without a doubt. And the other changes in the world – the pandemic ... the economy ... the convenience of taking the easy option ... are also major reasons for why we see the live music scene struggling to keep up.

It's interesting too, that in any area of the arts, there are already so many wonderful creations – be it artworks, songs or dances which have already been created to high levels of artistry, and yet, we are still able to keep creating new unique works. With our constantly modernising world around us, you could be led to presume that new works would also be modern, but the variety and breadth of every aspect of the arts allows for anyone's interpretation, in any style, to be accepted. There are still 15th century Italian dance forms or traditional Irish slip jigs being written, some in a very precise and deliberate old form, and others with a fantastic modern twist. The arts are all inclusive.

The inclusion of the arts in our school education is vitally important – the discipline that comes from creating, practising, observing, perfecting, imitating, adapting, completing and all the skills we require to be practitioners of

the arts has a huge (and well researched) application to how we learn from a young age. A well-rounded person does not come from languages, sciences and sports alone – knowledge of, and participation in, the arts has a significant impact on these subjects too. You don't have to create art to enjoy and appreciate it, and our world would be a sad and dangerous place without it.

As well as composing and performing, both Len and I teach private music lessons. We get to engage with the musical journey of a range of musicians. We're both kept on our toes, keeping up with the current music trends – trying to balance the negative impacts of AI in the arts, the dominance of the mega streaming services and the online platforms, as well as the degradation of the income streams that are available to writers, composers and performers.

Around two years ago we formed SaltWood, a duo which blends guitar, bass, harp and voices, creating songs with satisfying harmonies, and folksy/jazzy/bluesy original tunes – combining folk, acoustic and contemporary singer-songwriter influences and creating performances that are warm, humorous and engaging. You can see SaltWood at the Kūāotunu Community Hall on 22nd August 2026 – supporting the Kūāotunu Art Trail, a passion project led by Isabel Gilbert-Palmer. Tickets can be purchased from Kūāotunu Store, or by contacting us on saltwoodmusic@gmail.com to reserve tickets.



Words by
Anna Dunwoodie



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The Old Man

Afternoon has rushed into evening
Showery rain has stolen the light
Too early for wine
Time slows down
I have to think - what is this?
What is this?...slight alarm
That ageing is stealing the sun
Before my eyes, everything has slowed
Bent, bowed, harder to reach
The fruits of each day
Unless we kneel in gratitude
Thing can easily turn grey and dreary
Crumbled relics of relationships
Scattered around us difficult to navigate
We are ghosts in our own landscape
Looking for the life force
That fizzed our younger times
I see the sun in your eyes
Warmth in your hands
Music in your heart
Once broken - hidden away
Melancholy carries like a breeze between us
I have to think - what is this?
Music begins as thought gives way
Words come out, ready to go -
Heading to.....is it still too early for wine?

by Howard Saunders

No Limitations

Flying together,
connected
not bound,
no distance
may count
while flying around.
As birds
with wings,
swinging
in wind,
singing a song
How does it sound?

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Sunday.
you above,
drowned...
under blazing shards.

Deck.
on my knees,
anchored...
within turning tides.

Sky.
laid down,
soaked...
through gritty puddles.

by Mary Fox



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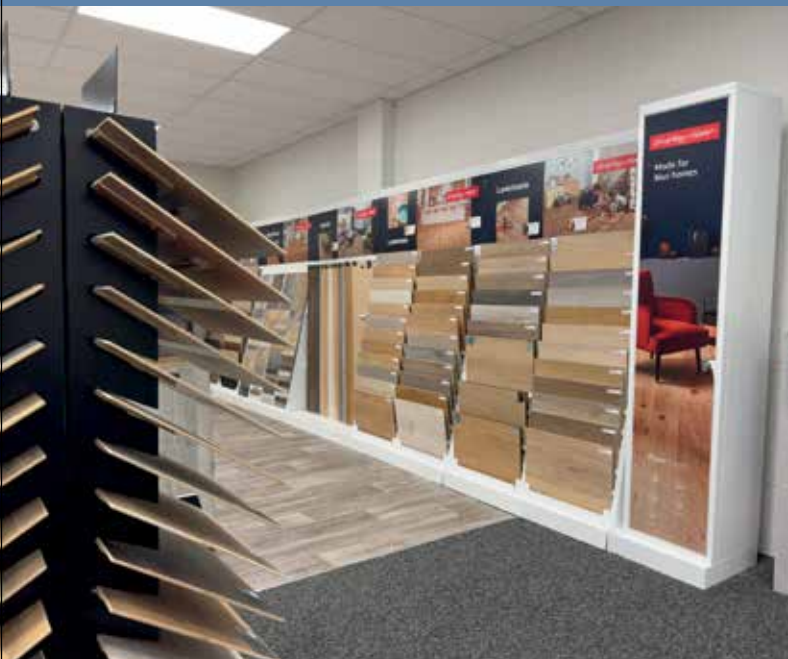
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FROM CAPE COD SHORES TO COROMANDEL SANDS SERIES

Selling Your Love Story to a Complete Stranger

Telling the Government More Than You'd Tell Your Therapist

I had to apply for three separate visas allowing me to live and work in NZ. The Partner of a New Zealander Work Visa application was the most laborious, as I had to compile mountains of information for it, though that groundwork made the next two visas markedly easier.

Half of the application involves filling in required information, and the other half is open-ended, allowing you to upload whatever you think will add weight to your case. Here's a taste of what they required:

Work history: my entire work history, dating back as far as I could remember.

Police certificate: an FBI background check from the United States

Genuine and stable partnership evidence: a landlord letter and joint mail

Evidence of funds: my bank account balance

Evidence of financial dependency: proof of our joint account

As for the open-ended part, I threw in everything I could possibly think of: letters of support from friends; four years of WhatsApp messages (in one massive 4,496 page PDF); a Canva photo album tastefully sprinkled with a bit of clip art; proof of our shared Spotify.

Before applying for my first visa, I did a good deal of research into it. By all accounts, the most important piece of any partnership-based visa application is the 'timeline of your partnership'. Immigration offers little in the way of explaining what they want out of this timeline – they maybe purposely keep it vague so that people who are trying to cheat the system don't just go down and tick off all the boxes – but everything I managed to find online boiled down to the fact that the partnership timeline is essentially where you get to tell the story of your relationship in your own words. There's no recommended length or format for this document, but everything I read said the more you tell them, the better.

At the time I applied, about 85% of our relationship had been long-distance, meaning that we had nearly every one of our 'significant milestones' in writing, which – I hate to say it – was convenient in terms of having to provide evidence. Mining our four years of

beautiful, private conversations for the sole purpose of cherry picking 'the good stuff' felt cheap at first, as though in order to prove the genuine depth of this immense love we have, I had to distill our story down to a bunch of juicy sound bites. But rather than seeing it as an invasion of our privacy, I chose to look at it this way: I love telling a good story, and we had a damned good story to tell. If Immigration wanted a little skit, I'd give 'em an off-Broadway smash.

The first page of our timeline was a simple bulleted list of dates and milestones, in case my application landed on the desk of an ornery, overworked Immigration Officer short on patience and time. As for pages two through seventeen, I wanted it to be the best damned timeline of partnership that person had ever read. I wanted them to be riveted. I wanted them wiping away tears. I wanted them to be laughing out loud in their office (years ago I came across this obscure quote – attributed to a court jester – which I've never forgotten: 'Make them laugh; they'll have a harder time shooting you'). I wanted them to forward it to their colleagues, to tell their spouse about it over dinner that night. I didn't just want them to rubber-stamp my visa; I wanted them rooting for us. I wanted them to love our story as much as we loved it.

Whatever I did worked, since that visa, and the two after that, were approved. In the end, I'll never know if the Immigration Officer assigned to my case was hanging off every word, or just glanced at the first page of bullet points, or if they even opened the time line of partnership at all. Although I do like to imagine them coming across my application at the end of a long day, meaning to just skim it but becoming utterly engrossed in our love story, smiling to themselves, cheering us on. Rooting for us.

Words by
Hilary Emerson Lay



Coromind.nz | 24

Plato, Democracy, and Idiots

Why Voters Are Drawn to the Wrong People

"Tyranny naturally arises from democracy." These are the words of Greek philosopher Plato around 2,400 years ago. It begs the question: Why do we elect idiot leaders? Researchers at Princetown University decided to try and find out. They asked participants to look at the faces of unknown overseas political figures for one second and then guess who won the election. Surprisingly, the participants guessed correctly over 70% of the time based solely on facial features. The same experiment was done with children with similar results.

Another Swiss experiment showed that when choosing between two men to be captain of a boat, one of whom was charismatic and confident that the journey would be successful with calm seas and good weather but had no oceangoing experience, and the other who was a master mariner but was cautious and pointed out all the possible dangers of the voyage, the inexperienced one was chosen presumably due to his confident, positive manner.

Plato was aware of this aspect of human nature 2,400 years ago during the death of democracy in his native Athens. A charismatic general named Alcibiades lost 40,000 of his soldiers after promising easy fast conquests and huge riches, with persuasive speech and empty promises. People chose

charismatic leaders who often used lies, exaggeration and repetition to persuade people to their views. The more lies are repeated, the quicker they are accepted as truths.

It seems that not much has changed in 2026. We see the ill-considered illegal war in Iran, started with the promise of a quick victory after the decapitation of the leadership. It would be a war lasting a few weeks and America and Israel would be finally free from the threat of that 'evil' country. "We will not allow Iran to have nuclear weapons," they shouted, two countries with enough nuclear warheads to destroy the world in an instant. Why, I ask, do we elect idiot leaders, who are good at winning votes but terrible at governance? It seems that looks, charisma, confidence and the public's acceptance of repeated lies win out over research, knowledge, logic, analysis and wisdom.

Part of the empty rhetoric comes in the form of slogans. "Take back control" was the slogan used in the UK by the pro-Brexit lobby during the referendum on whether to leave the European Union. It was short and simple, without explaining the finer detail and the probable consequences. Many responded favourably to this simplistic message but, after Britain exited the EU, complained that they weren't aware of the wider issues at the time of voting.

And of course there's MAGA, 'Make America great again', created by a man who claims to be the world's best at making a deal, but who had no experience in politics when elected. A man who said he would end the Ukraine war on day one of his presidency. Four and a half years later we're still waiting, Donald. Most of us know that his chaotic rhetoric is either lies or bluster. Even his supporters know this, but justify it with inane phrases like "He's just being Donald" or "He's a good businessman" when confronted with evidence of his corruption. "We don't care how much money he has." The question must be asked: Why does confidence, charisma, wealth and power open the way to people accepting illegal and/or immoral behaviour without accountability?

Plato asked another obvious question. "Why do we treat leading a country as the only job requiring no qualifications?" We certainly wouldn't want a 'doctor' with no formal qualifications to operate on our haemorrhoids, or an untrained pilot to fly us across the ditch and land in heavy rain. And yet we allow people often with zero qualifications or experience to be elected to govern our countries, one of whom is even authorised to have his chubby little fingers on the nuclear button. Tell me that's not a scary thought.

The US president is what you might call a sophist, 'someone who uses clever but intellectually dishonest or deceptive arguments to win a debate rather than to seek the truth'.

Sophists are confident, giving simple solutions because they haven't studied deeply enough the complexities of their role nor do they know what they don't know. Many of us like simple solutions, me included, so it is easy for a sophist to take control.

Ross' Ramblings

Plato wanted leaders who had spent years studying the foundations of governing, economics, diplomacy, philosophy, ethics, and mathematics – people who who understood the difference between knowledge and opinion. He abhorred the sophists of his time, who created chaos which eventually led to their demise and the death of democracy in Greece. Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried." If this is true, one wonders which system the US will adopt if the present slide away from democracy prevails.

It is said that people elect the leaders they deserve. I don't know what America did to deserve Donald Trump, who in my opinion would have been better suited to running a business like Epstein's island. Here in Aotearoa we elected the CEO of a large company whose vast business experience may not be enough to run a country without him also possessing the other skills that Plato outlined. No doubt we will find out this November.

The Nobel Prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman maintains our brains run on two systems. System 1 is fast, automatic and runs on emotion and instinct. System 2 is slow, deliberate and runs on logic and analysis. It involves conscious effort and energy to handle complex problem-solving. Plato was undoubtedly aware of this and indeed his mentor Socrates was killed simply because he operated under System 2 and often asked questions that powerful people didn't like. There seems to be a similar but less fatal situation developing in the US with TV hosts being ousted, news outlets being censored or amalgamated into huge pro-government media corporations, legal firms being blacklisted, to name a few. Let's hope similar trends don't develop here.

So, as in Plato's time, democracy today continues to reward idiots. We seem to be becoming less and less enquiring, analytical, and logical. With social media giving us a plethora of brief information bytes to suit our ever-decreasing attention spans, it's easier to skim over real issues or treat them with more emotion than logic.

Perhaps it's time we elected people who have done the hard mahi (work) for us and become masters in the knowledge of governance, people who, like a qualified experienced surgeon, can identify a problem and cut out the bad bits while saving the bits needed for improvement. Of course, experience is only gained by practice, but let's educate our future politicians in the art of governance and Plato's other required subjects before they enter the political fray. Perhaps it's time we adopted Kahneman's System 2 in our education system and encouraged critical thinking and complex problem-solving involving cooperation instead of rote learning. It may help open a way towards creating an even better system than democracy. Plato would be pleased.

Words by
Ross Liggins

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DISCOVERING YOUR ANCESTORS

GENEALOGY: THE BARE BONES OF FAMILY HISTORY

The many generations of ancestors who came before you all contributed to who you are today. Who were they? When did they live? Who were their extended family? Throughout the country, branches of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists (NZSG) can get you started on that journey of discovery back in time.

The Coromandel Peninsula and Hauraki District have NZSG branches in Thames, Waihi and Mercury Bay. Experienced researchers share their knowledge to get you going with various resources. They won't do your research for you: they will teach you how to do it yourself. And they'll be there to help when you hit a brick wall — that name or date or life event that no matter where you look you just can't find. Without breaking the brick wall, your research founders. Sometimes you think you can't go back any further. Perhaps a more experienced researcher can help you.

However, beware! Genealogy and family history are fascinating, captivating, absorbing hobbies. You'll set out to find one small detail and hours later discover you've been distracted by other tantalising, interconnected information. You may never find your way back down that rabbit hole, so while you're there, be sure to take lots of notes and record where you find details that you'll want to use later.

Genealogy is the Foundation of Family History

Genealogy is our lineage: parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on. Our Genealogy research provides us with the basic facts about a person so that we can place them on our family tree: names, date of birth, marriage (if any) and death. These bare facts have to be proven. We need certificates: documents that will also hopefully provide details of parents and spouses. To be truly useful, family trees are created entirely with proven facts: there is no room for assumptions. For some of us, constructing our family tree, going back generation after generation, brings its own challenges and satisfaction and nothing more is required.

However, once we are certain that we have someone in their rightful place on the family tree, we may want to dig deeper and flesh out the bare facts. This is family history. Our research will bring our ancestor to life in a context of how and where they lived, their jobs, what was going on around them. Think about the challenges they faced and their courage and determination to overcome them. Although factual, family history gives us leeway to use information from resources outside our immediate family, such as history books, diaries, newspaper clippings ...

Creating a Family Tree

Start with what you know, and work back. Start with yourself! Beyond your parents are your four grandparents: limit yourself to researching one branch of the tree at a time.

Genealogy Golden Rule: Listen to your parents, grandparents and extended family when they reminisce; ask questions and take notes. Often, when there is no one left to ask, we wish we had paid more attention years ago! For example, knowing your grandmothers' maiden names makes finding their parents' names one step easier.

For historical records of life events in New Zealand, we can refer to historical births, deaths and marriages (BDM) online: <https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/search>. There are some privacy considerations, so I'll give an example from my own family. My mother's parents were James Charles and Edith Lucy Dromgool. Let's look for Edith's maiden name. She turned 80 the year I was 20, so I know when she was born, +/- a year, and I know she was a teenage bride. A marriage search 15-20 years after she was born, using only her name, Edith, and granddad's full name, brings up their marriage in 1911 and her maiden name. Then a birth search for Edith Freeth provides a birth date and her parents' names. With historical BDM results, we can order certificates with full details. Using only Edith's mother's name and father's full name, I can find their marriage. Another birth search reveals all my great-grandparents' children (my grandmother's siblings) and their dates of birth.

For my maternal great-grandparents' births and the next generation back in time, I will have to refer to British records such as census results, parish records, and more.

It's addictive, isn't it? Good luck with your research and contact your nearest NZSG branch to find out details of meetings.

 Words by
Carolyn McKenzie

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THE MAN WHO SHAPED THE MOUNTAIN:

HOW BARRY BRICKELL'S PIONEERING SPIRIT CARVED A LEGACY INTO THE COROMANDEL CLAY



There is a specific kind of madness that belongs solely to the Coromandel Peninsula. It is the quiet, stubborn determination to look at a rugged, clear-felled hillside of raw clay and see a thriving native forest. It is the audacity to believe that if you need a railway to haul clay to your pottery kiln, you should simply spend the next several decades building it yourself, foot by hand-laid foot, against the sheer vertical defiance of the landscape.

THAT WAS THE WORLD OF BARRY BRICKELL.

When Barry first established Driving Creek, the land was scarred from colonial-era kauri logging and gold mining. To most, it was a forgotten plot. To Barry, it was a blank canvas for a lifelong symphony of art, engineering, and deep ecology. He did not wait for permission, and he certainly did not choose the easy path. He pioneered. Every twist, turn, and steep incline of the Driving Creek Railway was designed to preserve the landscape, not conquer it. As the tracks climbed higher, Barry planted.

Thousands of native trees, including the majestic kauri, were returned to the earth, nurtured by the very community that gathered around his pottery wheels.

Today, that pioneering spirit is far more than a chapter in a history book. It is a living, breathing movement that continues across our entire peninsula. Over the next twelve months, we are stepping away from standard advertisements to bring you something different. We are shining a light on the stories that define us. Every few issues, we will introduce you to a fellow local artisan, conservationist, or everyday innovator who is building something against the odds, keeping Barry's fierce independence alive in the modern day.

Driving Creek was built by the community, for the community, and it remains a testament to what happens when human spirit meets New Zealand earth. Whether you haven't been up the mountain in years, or you have guests visiting the coast this winter, we invite you to step aboard, look out over the canopy, and reconnect with the grit that shaped our home.

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