

HE TAU IWI (by Anahera Herbert-Graves – Chief Executive Officer, Te Runanga-a-Iwi o Ngāti Kahu)

When my Pākehā grandmother married my grandfather she probably had no idea that sometime during their long and fiery union she would move from being considered a stranger amongst Māori, to becoming he tau iwi. But that is what happened.

There are other Pākehā who, although their starting point was different, became similarly connected. One such was Kris Kjeldsen, aka Kris Hippy.

Kris came to Pawarenga with his wife Diane in the early 1970s. Us rangatahi were riding home after a day of just being, when this old bomb stopped, a Pākehā hopped out, looked up and drawled, "Which one of you kids wants to swap your horse for my car?" Willie Pirini was the quickest to do the deal. So that's how he became the first of us to own a car, while Kris and Diane took tenure of a spavined nag named Freepass. As we watched that delicately blonde and very hapū girl ride away with her husband walking in front, I thought they looked like Pākehā versions of Joseph and Mary. Of course, the horse outlasted the car by many years.

California was Kris' birthplace, but Papatūānuku was his true address and Tangaroa his post-code. He was an ecologist. During his Zuma Beach / Baja surfing days, he'd fought against Chrysler naming its cars after marine creatures like the Barracuda. And, at a time when we Pawarengans were just starting to gain electricity, flush toilets and inside plumbing, he was renouncing them. We thought he was mad, but the energy crises during the mid and late 1970s proved him sane.

Kris' accent enthralled us. We'd talk to him just to hear it. "How are the kūtai?" we asked one day. "Jerst lahk rerber-banz," was the answer. So that became our pat response to any number of questions. Sister Peters to our confirmation class, "What is faith?" Answer: "Just like rerber-banz."

Kris' two oldest children were born in Pawarenga and schooled at Hāta Maria. A third child is buried there. He was a founding Trustee of the Pawarenga Community Trust, and tutored our first community garden courses there. He was also one of the people who revived the sport of waka ama in Aotearoa. In fact its national body was founded in Pawarenga in 1987 at a hui in Taiao marae.

For the last twenty years, Kris had dedicated his life to the growth of that sport. He'd built thousands of waka and many more paddles. However it was during his first twenty years amongst the hapū of Te Uri o Tai in Pawarenga that Kris had moved from being 'that strange hippie' to becoming our beloved brother and friend – he tau iwi.

Kris lived and worked beside Māori whakawhiti i ngā mōtu for just over forty years, and he loved us just as we are. Kris died last Thursday.

He tohu aroha tēnei ki te whānau pani kua noho mokemoke nei mo tātou hoa, he tangata aroha kua moe nei ki te pō roa. Haere ra e Kris. Haere ra e hoa, haere atu ra. Say hello to Bo and Chris from us.