

1st Place (Schools Y7&8, 2022): Keira Piper, Aropohue School, My Marae

In that one moment, everything changed forever. I changed forever.

I had to go to my marae for the first time. My koro had passed away, and he had always wanted a proper Māori burial. I have never really felt Māori, *really* Māori, just like most other New Zealanders.

Ōrākei Marae is the marae of my hapu. First, I went to my nan's house, where Koro was in his casket in the living room. The funeral home had done a really nice job. He was lying with his korowai wrapped around him and his taōnga on top. Visitors came. They laughed, they cried, they told stories, they sang waiata on Nan's guitar. They kissed my cheeks and embraced me.

"Nice to see you, bub," they said, or:

"Aroha mai," or

"See you at the tangi, whaea."

On the day of Koro's burial, Nan murmured sadly, "Me haere tātou, my mokopuna."

Time to go to my marae, Ōrākei, the home of my ancestors. As the kaikaranga calls us onto the marae, I fall in love with the ornate carvings on the walls and roof of the wharenuī. The words of the karanga draw me in and welcome me home. This is the place that connects us – past, present, and future. This is the wharenuī my ancestors built with their own hands, the place that I have never come to before now. My people fought and died for this land. This is my culture, my *dying* culture. And I will fight to save it.

In that one moment, everything changed forever. I changed forever.

I found myself.

