

Otaramarae

1949.

"Caro, where are you? It's your turn today." Those words were like magic to me cos it meant that it was my turn to go to Otaramarae Post Office for the mail and wait for the Van Man for the bread and milk.

Perhaps I should tell you a little about Rotoiti first – In 1936, and I know that was the year because it was just before I was born, my parents brought this beautiful bay called Kahuera on the edge of Lake Rotoiti. Ever since I can remember all our school holidays were spent at this paradise. Behind the house there was an orchard with apple, plum and peach trees and raspberries grew beside the little stream. There was lots of bush for building huts and things and places to play the thinking game like Anne of the Green Gables in the Haunted Woods.

In the summer holidays it never rained and the lake was always calm, or so it seemed to me, and if two boats crossed the bay at once you would think it was a boat jam. I loved to watch the wake of a boat grow bigger and bigger as it got closer to the shore. In the May holidays the northly wind blew for days, it always rained and we kids had to spend every morning gathering pine cones or stacking wood that Dad cut up with the saw.

August was always the time for pruning the giant blue hydrangeas. Sir Alexander ^{Hedman} ~~Shepherd~~ who Dad brought the property from planted thousands of them and I'll bet he didn't have to prune them cos it took ages! In the afternoons there was plenty of time for cards and games, snakes and ladders for the little kids and Monopoly for the big kids. Somehow it always ended with a lot of shouting and yelling over Park Lane and

Mayfair, and then when it got too loud Mum would put the game away and tell us to go and read a book or something else that was just as boring.

There were three ways to go to Otaramarae, I could walk through Te Moana's farm, always remembering to leave the gates as I found them, or paddle my canoe to Mitchell's Jetty and walk the rest of the way. But the way I really liked was to paddle my canoe all the way as there were lots of things to see and do on the way. My canoe was very special, dad brought it for me when I was 9, after I had fallen in love with a canoe called "The Silver Streak" that I read about in the girls Crystal Magazine, Daphne's Feud with the Phantom Four. I called my canoe the Silver Streak too, but unfortunately I left the R out of Streak and had to wait a year before I could repaint it due to lack of paint.

When I didn't stop at Mitchell's Jetty I had to paddle really fast in case the Mitchell boy and his friends came out in a dingy to try and capsize me. Then I was safe paddling past Duff's and Marty's houses. Marty always gave me a wave and if his friend Stan Thomas who lived in Thames was there, he always gave me two apricots. They were very nice. Going round the little island was tricky because Martin from Duff's house used to hide on the island sometimes and bombard me with moss balls. They didn't hurt, they were just messy. But actually Martin was my friend later as he had an Idle Along and we had a Zedee and we had races. It was great fun. Round the island there was a coastline of bush and here you could see the dab chick nests and watch the little chicks grow, that is if the black backs didn't get the chicks first.

Then the long arm of the marae and it took ages but a friend of mine, Mrs Carpenter who lives on the peninsular always had a lemon drink and an Anzac biscuit for me. She was so nice and called me her weekly cheer germ. Mrs Ball who lived next door would often join us for our morning tea and she would know all the news in the marae and this was exciting because our house seemed miles away.

It wasn't far to the Post Office from Mrs Carpenter's house just around the point and there it was behind all the boat sheds. When the Post Office opened Mrs Rangi was the Post Mistress and I will always remember her for her lovely smile, the packet of Park Drive and papers on the table beside her and she never took sides, as some mothers do, when we kids had a fight. After she left Missie Turihau took over, and then we really had fun cos between sorting the mail and any phone calls to Rotorua, if she was in a good mood we would spend hours with her Regal Zonophone gramophone playing records. Missie had some really good records like Harriet with the Lariat, the Big Rock Candy Mountain, and lots of cowboy records, much better than the ones we had at home. Missie was my very dear friend right till the day she died and when I think of her I always remember that gramophone.

Most mornings Mrs Kahu, Mrs Taylor, she was a Maori too and Mrs Hiro would come and sit on the Post Office step sometimes making flax kits or embroidery or most times just talking. They did teach me how to speak some sentences in Maori but mostly how to behave in front of the elders. Topsy who lived on the hill behind the Post Office and her sister Beatrice would come down to play hopscotch or kick the tin but when the boys came, Buster, Tommy and Charlie the competition got very hard because they could jump further than us girls.

Topsy taught me how to make a poi ^{out} ~~and~~ of flax and moss but I was not as good as swinging it as she was. We all used to have turns paddling my canoe but I had to put the mail into a cake tin in case it got wet and Mum and Dad got really angry if the mail got wet.

Te Moana and Mr Turihau often rode by on their horses and if we were doing anything silly like pushing each other into the water, Te Moana would give us a real ticking off and told us to behave properly. He was fierce, but Mrs Kahu told me he was the rangetira which means chief, so I s'pose he had a lot to worry about without us kids being silly.

The Van Man didn't arrive at any particular time but I didn't care cos I was having such fun with my friends. But when he did arrive people came from nowhere and as I was small I was always the last to be served but he must have seen me cos he always saved our bread and milk, and somehow he seemed to know that I had not had any lunch so he shared his with me, usually Sally Lunn Loaf, but it was better than a cheese sandwich at home. When the Van Man drove back up the hill Mr Reeve always seemed to appear and tell me to "paddle back home now" and when I was 13 Mum told me she had asked him to do that – spoil sport.

Missie was supposed to close the Post Office at 1pm but sometimes that got a bit late cos people who came to the Van would often want to telephone Rotorua but if it was on time sometimes Missie would meet me on the point and we would go koura diving. The water at this point was very deep but it was very clear and there were lots of big koura

there. Missie taught me how to latch koura one on to another so you could bring 6-8 up at a time. Missie usually caught a lot more than me as she could go into deeper water. We put them into the canoe, the mail and bread were safe in the tin and when we had enough for Missie's family we would swim pushing the canoe over to the other side where Mr Harvey always had a bucket to put them in. Mr Harvey looked after lots of boats for people in the marae.

By then it really was time to paddle home and if the westerly had got up I had to paddle across the bay first. One time Mr Gatenby came out in his launch and towed me to Marty's Bay cos the wind was so strong. I thanked him very much and he said "well you'd either end up at Hinehopu or drown and I don't want that on my conscience" I s'pose he would know cos one time a man fell off his launch and drowned.

I like to wave to people, my grandmother told me that if people are sad and you wave and smile sometimes that can make them happy too. So I waved very hard at the house called Avalon cos Mrs Ball told me they had a little girl who was very sick, so I hope I made them happy.

I don't like going home after such fun cos I knew all mum will say is "Oh Caroline where have you been?" or "why has it taken you so long?" How could I answer that, old people would never understand.