

Tui Rererangi Walsh O’Sullivan

The ‘flying bird in the sky’

4 July 1940 – 20 May 2023

Abstract: In 1977, Tui O’Sullivan, Te Rarawa became the first woman and the first Māori appointed to a permanent position at what was then the Auckland Technical Institute (it became Auckland University of Technology in 2000). At AUT, she developed the first Women on Campus group. She helped establish the newspaper *Password*, a publication introducing new English speakers to New Zealand society and culture. She taught courses on the Treaty of Waitangi when the treaty was a subversive idea. She contributed to the change in social and political thought that has brought the treaty—that her tupuna signed—to greater public influence. The justice it promises was a major theme in Tui’s working life. She was also a founding member of the Pacific Media Centre advisory board and advocate for *Pacific Journalism Review* from 2007 until she retired in 2018.

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DOMINIC O’SULLIVAN

Charles Sturt University, Canberra

Kia ora koutau katoa. Kia ora mo o koutou haerenga i te ahiahi nei. Kia ora mo o koutou aroha, o koutou karakia mo Tui i te wa o tona harenga ki te rangi.

I whanau mai a Tui, kei Kaitaia, hei uri o Te Rarawa, i te tau kotahi mano, iwa rau, wha tekau.

Tui was born in Kaitaia in 1940—exactly 100 years after her great-great grandfather, Te Riipi, signed the Treaty of Waitangi. She was descended, too, from a Scotsman, John Borrowdale who named his boat *Half Caste*—after his children. Such was the mystery of race, life and family in 19th century Northland.

Tui was the last born child of Jack and Maata Walsh, and sister of John, Pat, Rose and Michael. Maata was Te Rarawa, from Pukepoto. Tui lies alongside her at Rangihoukaha Urupa in Pukepoto. She was named Tui Rererangi, the flying bird in the sky, in honour of her uncle Billy Busby—a World War II fighter pilot.



Figure 1: Tui Rererangi Walsh O'Sullivan: "She taught courses on the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi when the treaty was a subversive idea. She contributed to the change in social and political thought that has brought the treaty—that her tupuna signed—to greater public influence. The justice it promises was a major theme in Tui's working life."

Maata died when Tui was two years old. She and Rose and their brothers were raised by their father, Jack Walsh, his mother Maud and his sister Lil. Maud was born in Townsville. Her father was a lacemaker from Nottingham who emigrated, with his wife, firstly to Australia and then to the far North of New Zealand.

Jack was born in Houhora and died when Tui was 23. Jack's father emigrated from Limerick.

Early in the next century, the writer Frank McCourt described Limerick, just as it had been in Timothy Walsh's time, 'It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood.'

It was a better world these people sought, in and with, Te Rarawa.

Tui's story—almost 83 years—spans a time of rapid social, political and technological development in New Zealand and the world. Her contribution was transformative for the many, many, people she encountered in her professional, social and family lives.



IMAGE: DEL ARBEDE/CARTOON: MALCOLM EVANS

Figure 2: Tui O'Sullivan beside the University of the South Pacific's Dr Shailendra Singh (right), then Auckland University of Technology vice-chancellor Derek McCormack (centre) and with members of the *Pacific Journalism Review* editorial board and supporters on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the research journal.

Tui's schooling began at Ahipara Native School. Transcending the government's official purpose of the Native School, of 'lead[ing] the lad to be a good farmer and the girl to be a good farmer's wife'—Tui left primary school with a Ngarimu VC and 28th Maori Battalion Scholarship to St Mary's College in Ponsonby. Some of her friends from St Mary's were present for the memorial mass, and her granddaughter, named in her honour, started at the school in 2023.

Disrupting social orthodoxy was Tui's life. On leaving school, she enrolled at the University of Auckland, completing a degree in English and anthropology part-time over the next 20 years. During these years she trained as a primary school teacher, working in Auckland, Wellington, Cambridge, Athens and London.

In the past week, we took a phone call from somebody Tui had taught at Kelburn Normal School in the 1960s. Such was Tui's impact.

I was born in Hamilton in 1970. Deirdre in Cambridge in 1973. We moved to Northcote Point in 1975 and, in 1977, Tui became the first woman and the first Māori appointed to a permanent position at what was then the Auckland Technical Institute (it became Auckland University of Technology, or AUT, in 2000). I remember her telling me she was going for a job interview and coming into this Church to pray that she would be successful. Deirdre and I did our primary schooling at St Mary's.

Being a working single parent in the 1970s and 80s was hard work. It did not reflect social norms, but the Auckland University of Technology, as it's become, provided Tui, Deirdre and me with security and a home—a home that has been Tui's since 1978.

At AUT, she developed the first Women on Campus group. She helped establish the newspaper *Password*, a publication introducing new English speakers to New Zealand society and culture. She taught courses on the Treaty of Waitangi when the treaty was a subversive idea. She contributed to the change in social and political thought that has brought the treaty—that her tupuna signed—to greater public influence. The justice it promises was a major theme in Tui's working life.

Tui was interested in justice more broadly, inspired by her Catholic faith, love of people and profound compassion. These values stood out in the memories of Tui that people shared during her tangihanga at Te Uri o Hina Marae.

On Twitter, like them all, a social media that Tui never mastered, a former student, some 40 years later, recalled 'the sage advice' given to a 'young fella from Kawerau'. As Tui remembered, for a Māori kid from the country, moving to town can be moving to a different world. In a media interview on her retirement, she said: 'Coming from a town where you didn't know names, but everyone was Aunty or Uncle, Auckland was by far a change of scenery'.

In Auckland, Tui knew everybody. Always the last to leave a social function, and always the first to help people in need.

Tui helped establish the university's marae in 1997. She would delight in sharing the marae with students and colleagues. Just as she delighted in her family—especially her grandchildren, Lucy, Xavier, Joey, Tui and Delphi.

She remembered Sarah Therese. Her grandchildren tell of their special times with her, and her deep interest in their lives. Last year, Deirdre and Malcolm and their children moved from Wellington to be close by. Joey and I came from Canberra for the year.

We talked and helped as we could. My job was to buy the smokes. I remember saying one day, 'I'm going to the supermarket, what would you like for dinner'—'a packet of cigarettes and a bottle of wine'. That was Tui's diet and she loved it. And it was only in the last few months that she stopped going out.

At the wake for her brother John's wife, Maka, in November, she was still going at three in the morning. I worried that three bottles of wine might not have been the best idea at that stage in life, but she was well enough to do it, and loved the company of her family as we loved being with her.

In December 2022, she took Joey and Tui to mark their birthdays at the revolving restaurant at Auckland's Sky Tower, where she also joined in the celebration of Lucy's 18th birthday a couple of months earlier. Delphi liked to take her out for a pancake. She loved Xavier's fishing and rugby stories.

Over the last year, she was not well enough to watch her grandchildren's

sport as she would have liked, take them to the beach as she used to love, or attend important events in our lives. But she did what she could right until the end.

My last conversation with her, the day before she died, was slow and tired but cogent and interesting. We discussed the politics of the day, as we often did. She asked after Joey and Lucy, and after Cara—always concerned that they were doing well. She didn't speak for long, which was out of character, but gave no reason to think that this would be the last time we spoke.

Her copy of my book, *Indigeneity, Culture and the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, published in April 2023, is still in the post. She did not know that it was dedicated to her and that I had explained, in the acknowledgements, that the reasons needed more words than the book itself.

That was supposed to have been for her to read, and for her to learn, that the dedication was also from her grandchildren. She was the immediate and unanimous choice when I asked them, 'to whom should I dedicate this book'.

No reira, ka nui te mihi ki tena ki tena o koutou. Kia ora mo o koutou ma-naaki me te aroha.

Kia ora huihui tatau katoa!

Reference

O'Sullivan, D. (2023). *Indigeneity, culture and the UN sustainable development goals*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dr Dominic O'Sullivan, Tui's son and professor of political science at Charles Sturt University, delivered this eulogy at her memorial mass at St Mary's Catholic Church, Northcote, on 27 May 2023. It is republished by Pacific Journalism Review with the whānau's permission. Tui O'Sullivan was also a foundation advisory board member of the Pacific Media Centre in 2007 and was a feisty advocate for the centre and its research publication, PJR, until she retired in 2018.