

NATASHA HILL

16.5%

My name is Gabriella Campbell and I am a white Māori. Growing up, this is what I heard from my classmates and teachers. The way I acted, behaved or dressed most likely convinced most of them I was white. I mean seriously, just because my skin is a shade lighter than the 'real' Māori kids, doesn't mean I can't be one of them. In fact, I was probably one of the few Māori kids at my school, which was located right in the middle of other high decile schools around Auckland. St Helinbergs was where it began.

First Year

On my first day here, people looked at me oddly. Compared to them, I probably looked like a washed-up white kid sent here for reform, if I'm going to be honest with you. Many of them brought chauffeurs (I think that is what you call them) and pranced around with them like their Koro is the school's Head of Trustees, or sumthin'. I mean the only dead giveaway that I was not like the rest of the kids at school was because I got here on a scholarship. A scholarship that instantly put me into a group of not-haves, in other words, povos. Not that I was complaining or anything. But when you looked at the social structure of things, a white Māori amongst people with rich parents didn't fit well.

Excelling in my classes and papers, my classmates' parents seemed to only put up with me based on the fact that I'm smart enough to be here. Not that it bothered me, since I wasn't interested in what they thought. But I did

wonder at some point why they didn't like me too much. It was probably because I have a loudmouth and whatnot. Dunno really. It wasn't until I reached senior year that I realised it wasn't me that they didn't like, but how different I was compared to them.

Being different can be seen as a good quality. It means to be unlike others; to choose your own way. You see, this understanding didn't work for me. Being different at Helinbergs meant being an outcast. It was bad enough that I knew I didn't belong here, that I didn't have parents who would spend money on cars and luxury brands, and I knew that they knew. I knew no matter what I did, it wouldn't change the fact that I'm different and I didn't belong there. The problem was I had no idea where I belonged, and it showed. But I made friends who helped me and even though I am one out of 16.5% of the Māori population, I was lucky to have found others too.

Second Year

"Hey Luca, do you hear me," I yelled across the hallway as I saw the back of Luca's head. "Oi, Fat-Nuts! Answer me, you dickhead," I shouted again. Luca looked down on his phone and then turned around to see me barrelling through mobs of students loitering the hallway. "Urgh! What do you want now, aye? I was in the middle of sumthin'," Luca shouted back. I shoved past a group of giggly girls and preppy footballers to see Luca giving me a 'don't mess with me' kinda look, "Oh hey sorry, I know you like your personal space but I heard you are part of t-t-he...um Ma-Ma-Māori student association right?" I managed, trying to not sound like a complete idiot. "Oh, that? Yeah, I am. Why are you asking?" Luca voiced as I pinched my forearm. "Er...nah I was just wondering what it is and stuff. Ya know? I mean, it isn't like I don't know what Māori is because like who doesn't, haha...yea," I nervously said, while Luca gave me a confused look. "Ok, do you mean you want to join or sumthin'?" Luca replied as the bell rang and students scurried off to their classes,

meanwhile I looked off to the side and said, "Yea that's what I was trying to say". "For sure then!" he replied while he dodged a bunch of first years, "You should've said so man, just come along to the evening kai we have on tomorrow night, aye. Keen?" I heard over the loud chatter coming from the students around us. "Oh yeah, yeah I'll be there," I quickly replied as I realised the second bell was about to ring. "Choice! It's gonna be mean as. I gotta go but I'll see you there ok," Luca uttered as he fast walked around the corner. "Okay, Luca I'll see you there," I said quietly as I smiled brightly to myself.

Third Year

I did end up going to the evening kai, and I saw Luca there, too. Soon enough, I was at every event. I found comfort in the fact that most of them were like me. Not accepted as a Pākehā, but still foreign to Māori. I was either too white, or not Māori enough and honestly, it didn't bother me too much until this happened. Luca and I were walking down the science hallway, "Hey Luca, do you think it's weird how we don't have any Te Reo Māori classes? I mean isn't it one of our official languages?" I asked while I looked at a crowd of footballers ahead of us. Luca turned to me and said, "It isn't weird, if I'm going to be honest with you, schools needn't have to offer Te Reo Māori classes. They base it on the fact that the majority of students are white and the rest of us, as the minority are not accounted for, you get me?" I pulled my eyes away from the group of footballers to see Luca glance over to them, "The times are changing, and more students are willing to learn though," Luca continued. That answer reminded me that I am part of the minority. Like it or not, it didn't matter if I was a shade lighter than the rest of the Māori, I was still one of them. "Hey Luca, you reckon I should ask the student representative to put forward a proposal for it?" I asked as we approached the group of footballers. Without realising it, we got closer to them, Luca accidentally bumped shoulders with one of the footballers. "Watch yourself you dirty Māori! You don't

belong here,” one of the footballers retorted. The look of pure disgust was evident on their faces, “Why do you lot always have to make a scene? Coming and going like you own the place, always making a noise,” he said while glaring at us. With shocked faces, all Luca and I could do was stand there in utter disbelief as the group of footballers shoved passed us. “Wh-wh-what the h-h-hell?” I managed to say, “What was that shit? Absolute bullshit!” I snapped, exasperated as I shouted in their direction. I mean who do they think they are? saying ‘that we don’t belong here’, what a load of rubbish! Their brains must be pea-sized for them to be thinking this shit. I turned back to Luca, to find him head down and muttering to himself, “Yo, Luca, are you ok, mate? Hey, what’s the matter?” I questioned. “Oh, nothing’s wrong, I’m just used to their bullshit,” he replied, as he looked over my shoulder. An exhausted sigh escaped me, “Oh really, this isn’t the first time for you then, aye?” I replied, “Nah, a lot of us Māori who have been here for quite a while know what goes around, especially coming from that lot,” Luca continued as we headed to lunch, “Don’t mind them though, they’ve been brought up like that.”

We entered the cafeteria and found a table with the others from the Māori Student Association. “Kia ora e hoa, kei te pēhea koe?” one of my mates asked me as I sat down next to them, “E pai ana, engari te hōhā hoki o ētahi tangata,” I replied. Being in the Māori Student Association definitely improved my reo, not by much though, since most of us learnt from each other. “I aha ki a koe?” the rest of them asked, “Nothing happened guys, just had a run in with some of the footballers, no big deal okay?” Luca assured before they started squaring up on people. I looked around my group of friends and realised the whanaungatanga and manaakitanga these people had developed. It was at this moment, it hit me how lucky I was to have friends who looked out for me.

Fourth Year

It was the first day for new entrants. The whole quad was full of them, each dressed in full uniform with no hair out of place. I stood in perfect attire with the hot blazing sun shining on me, and I instantly wanted to get this over with. Like come on, how long does this have to take? It's not like any of these kids are listening anyway. "Tēnā koutou katoa, greetings to you all," our head of students said to our first years, "on this lovely day, it is a pleasure to welcome our first years..." blah blah blah, I zoned out after that, I closed my eyes for a second there. "Hey Crackhead, wake up," I heard as I was being nudged by someone next to me. "If you don't wake your ass up right now, I'm gonna drag you up to do the mihi," instantly knowing it's Luca. I forced my eyes open to see him glare down at me. With a sheepish smile, I whispered back, "Arohamai, it won't happen again." With one final look in my direction, Luca walked to the front of the stage to welcome the first years. I tilted my head back to look up at him and noticed a few first years looking up at him in respect and admiration as he spoke. "When I was a first year, I felt lost too. I had no idea who I was, where I was going, what was next. But I realised I had to find where I began first, to find these things. Luckily enough, I found friends who were there for me on this journey. A journey all of us will go through and experience. Sure, you will have a few setbacks and obstacles in your way, but that is what builds you up to who you will eventually be. It is you and the people around who will support you. All I want to ask you now is who or what is your tūrangawaewae? Your place of standing or belonging. Is it your home or parents? Think this over and you will eventually find an answer," with an encouraging nod towards the first years Luca said, "Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei, be persistent and don't let obstacles stop you from reaching your goals, thank you." With that being said, many of the teachers and first years clapped and nodded their heads in agreement. He gave a lasting smile and handed it over to

the headmaster. As he walked over and sat down in the chair next to me I whispered, "Who knew you were such a talker," as I leaned closer to him he answered, "Who knew you were such a listener," in an instant my friend Luca came back, "Ouch, you got me there," I laughed.

As the welcome finished, out of the corner of my eye a first year approached us. "Um...Hi my name is Josie and I w-w-was wondering if there is like a place where M-M-Māori...er can hang out or sumthin'," she nervously said to me as she looked down at the ground, "Kia ora, e hoa. Do you want to join the Māori Student Association?" I politely asked, "Can I?" she looked up excitedly as she gestured to a group of first years, "For sure! You are most definitely welcome," I replied back. With a beaming smile, she turned to that group of first years and motioned them to hurry up, "Can they join too?" Josie hurriedly said as they nervously approached us, "Yes, of course they can," I said back while Luca said, "But you have to turn up to our events, okay?" A chorus of yeps and yesses went around, indicating their excitement. "Okay, see you fullas around, look out for a notice for upcoming gatherings, alright?" I said to them. As Luca and I said our goodbyes and headed over to the rest of the prefects, I looked back to see Josie smiling and laughing. Even though she was one out of 16.5% of Māori, she had found others too.