

Ngāti Kuri Proud

by Tim Tipene



Nana was collecting seaweed for her garden. Her three mokopuna – Heta, Temere, and Wiremu – had come to help, but they were too busy enjoying the beach.

Heta ran about waving a piece of driftwood. “Arhh!” he cried, flashing a pūkana. “Let’s build a whale.”

“A whale?” Temere frowned.

“That’s how Ngāti Kuri got its name,” Heta said.

“Isn’t that right, Nana?”

“You tell me,” Nana said with a smile.

“A long time ago, the warriors of Ngāti Kuri were attacking an enemy pā,” Heta explained. “But the pā had very strong defences. The warriors couldn’t break through. So one night, they made a huge whale out of sand on the beach. They covered the sand whale with dog skins and fish. Then they hid in the sand dunes and nearby bushes. Some even hid underneath the dog skins.”



“When the sun came up, the people in the pā looked out and saw seagulls flying around a beached whale. They had been stuck in their pā for a long time, defending themselves against Ngāti Kuri, and they were very hungry. All they could think about was the blubber and tasty meat from the whale. There was no sign of the Ngāti Kuri warriors. Thinking they were safe, the people came out of the pā.

“When they got close to the whale – WHAM! The Ngāti Kuri warriors jumped out. The people from the pā were taken completely by surprise and defeated.”

Temere tutted and rolled her eyes. “It was the other way around,” she said. “It was the battle at Maungapiko, and Ngāti Kuri were the ones who were *in* the pā. They were being attacked. Our ancestors were the ones who got tricked by the pretend whale.”

“No!” Heta growled.

“Yes,” Temere continued. “But that wasn’t how we got the name Ngāti Kuri. I’ve heard a different story.”

Nana bent over, picked up a long piece of seaweed, and stuffed it in her sack. She looked at Temere. “So how do *you* think we got the name?” she asked.



“Aunty told me that our name used to be Ngāti Kaha,” Temere explained. “Long ago, our ancestors came here on the waka *Kurahaupō*. The voyage to Aotearoa wasn’t easy. Our tūpuna had to be tough and strong to make it.

“Pōhurihanga was the captain of the waka. On the journey, *Kurahaupō* was damaged in a storm and started sinking, so Pōhurihanga and his people landed on the shore of some islands called Rangitahua. Pōhurihanga had a big fishing net for catching kurīmoana – seals. He used his net and some seal skins to tie the waka together so that they could continue their journey to Aotearoa. Because of the seals, we became known as Ngāti Kurī.”

“Is that right?” Nana smiled.

“Āe,” Temere answered, raising her head.



Nana stood still and looked out to sea. “What about you, Wiremu?” she asked. “What stories have you heard?”

“I was told that we got our name from a sacrifice,” Wiremu said.

“Eh?” said Temere.

“One of our chiefs, Ihutara, was killed in a battle at Houhora,” Wiremu explained. “His son, Taihaupapa, carried his father’s body to an island in the Pārengarenga Harbour. In those days, chiefs used to have kurī. Dogs were special. Their skins were used for cloaks. Taihaupapa killed three kurī and offered them as food to the atua. He did it because of his father’s great mana.”

“When you offer food to the atua like that, it’s called whāngai-hau,” Nana said.

“The island was called Motu Whāngaikurī after that,” Wiremu continued. “Dog Island. That’s how we got our name.”



Nana closed her eyes to the breeze and took a deep breath.

“So, what do you think, Nana?” Temere asked. “Which story is right?”

“I’ve heard them all before, my moko,” Nana said. “Each one is a part of who we are, so each one is right.”

Nana turned, studying the beach and the land. “Ngāti Kurī is a name of mana,” she said. “We are Ngāti Kaha, we are Ngāti Kurī, and we are Muriwhenua. We are connected to the kurī and the kurīmoana. I am proud to be Ngāti Kurī.”

Temere, Heta, and Wiremu stood taller. “So are we, Nana,” Temere said. “Ngāti Kurī proud.”

illustrations by Munro Te Whata



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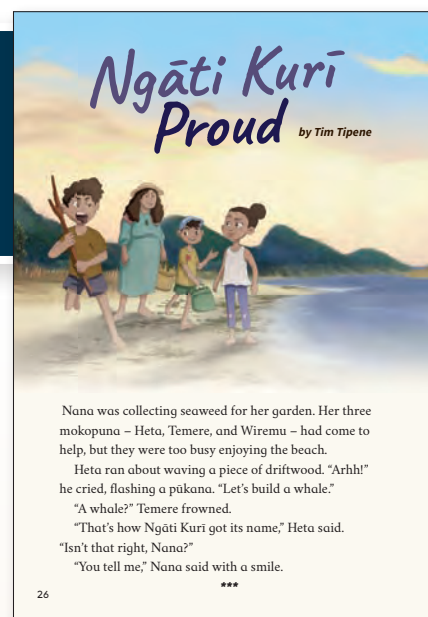
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