

The Touchstone

Chapter Two – The new kid at school

The next few days were really busy. We had heaps of whanau living in the area and I had to put up with all the usual comments from all the aunty's and uncles commenting on how tall I'd grown and how much I looked like my dad. Like were they serious? Why would I care if I 'looked' like my dad? I can't see myself! Worse was dealing with all my cousins. I could feel their eyes all over me and their broken conversations were irritating. I just wanted to be back in Auckland with my mates who treated me normally!

"Mum! Why do I have to bother going to school? There's only a few weeks to go before the summer holidays! Can't I just stay at home and get used to this place before I have to go?"

"No! Your sisters are looking forward to starting and so you can go to." My mum first comes across as all fluffy and nice, but when she's made up her mind about something, there's no way you can move her!

Honestly, I was feeling sick with worry about starting at a new school. In Auckland I'd gone to the local primary, intermediate and college in our suburb and so I pretty much knew everyone and they knew me.

At least I wouldn't have a teacher aide walking around with me like I did up until year seven. Being blind makes learning harder as heaps of the stuff taught at school is 'visual'. Teachers are always writing things on the white-board, or saying 'look at this!' Because of this, I have to work harder just to keep up. Mum and dad have always felt the need to pay for an afterschool tutor to help me. When I was younger I thought that this all sucked but now I realise that being blind is hard enough. But I would've felt even more self-conscious if I struggled with my school-work too!

All the same, I was feeling down about having to front up at a new school. I shut the door to my bedroom and put my earphones on and lay back on my bed and listened to some music. As I lay there, I moved my hands over my body feeling my arms and legs. I flexed my muscles so that I could try and feel what other people could see.

'Is my body okay? What would girls think of me?' I ran my hands over my face, feeling every detail; my nose felt huge and I could feel a few small patches of whiskers sprouting around my chin. I had no idea if I looked good or not.

I suddenly felt so angry! And I punched my mattress in frustration! I hate my life! I hate being blind! And like a baby I threw myself onto my stomach and buried my face in my pillow to hide my hot tears. I guess I must've fallen asleep because when I woke up it felt late. Someone must have come in during the night and covered me with my duvet.

Strangely, it was the total silence that'd woken me.

Getting out of bed I made my way to stand in front of the window facing the reserve. I was so close that my nose was touching the cold window pane.

"Turuturu" I questioned - "Turuturu Mokai! What is your name?"

BANG!

Something big had smashed against the outside of my window! Jumping backwards with a fright I landed flat on my ass!

The silence resumed and all I could hear was my blood pumping in my ears and my fast breathing.

“Turuturu Mokai, what are you?”

“Everyone! Silence! This is Bartimaeus Kapo-Matakite and he has joined us all the way from Auckland!”

“**Fartimass** Miss? Is his name **FARTI-MASS?**”

All I could hear was laughing! “Tama Henare! That is enough!”

Typical, the class clown was my cousin! Could this day get any worse? Sadly, the answer was yes! Silence descended on the chaotic room when they saw Miss guide me to my desk.

“What’s up? Huh? Is he...like...blind?” I felt a light touch on my arm.

“Hey, my name’s Maddy. Starting a new school sucks aye?”

Maddy was cool. She had a nice group of friends who were pretty friendly and so the day became a bit more tolerable. My dumb-ass cousins Jack and Tama Henare came over laughing and clowning about.

“Hey cuzzy Farti-Mass! What’re you doing sitting with those kids? Why don’t you come and hang out with us?”

My cousin’s comments bugged me because I knew what he was getting at. Being blind, I really didn’t get all the racism stuff you hear people talking about. How I respond to people just depends on whether they’re nice or not. I couldn’t give a heck what colour someone’s skin is! When I hear someone speak their voice usually gives me a clue about their culture. My family is Maori. But like a lot of New Zealanders we also have a lot of Irish in us too and I’m cool with that.

My new friends were all interested to find out what it was like being blind. I was okay with their questions as they were genuine and anyway the talk soon turned to more normal things. When they found out that we lived in one of the new houses bordering the Turuturu Mokai reserve they became really curious.

“What’s it like living there? Do you get scared at night?”

“Why should I be scared?” I asked.

“Because it’s haunted!” they all laughingly said together in one voice!

“Well I haven’t *seen* anything!”

“Who’s the funny guy?” Maddy laughed.

Free-style area - mum/dad or other whanau: write or draw something for your kids or moko's.