

Hi \_\_\_\_\_

*Freestyle Area - Let your parent know why you sent this story & what's happening that's new in your life.*

Kia ora - For most of my childhood I couldn't read, write or talk. When I was 10 years old a couple of major changes occurred in my life & one of the outcomes was that I found the ability to read. Suddenly I could escape from my world which was full of upheaval and abuse into a world of my choosing by simply opening a book.

I didn't do well at school & so when I was in prison, I started to do re-do my school work. I've only recently finished my NCEA Level 2 English. Before doing NCEA I had no idea how to write properly or where to put all the grammar stuff.

Anyway - I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm a long way off being a good writer & so I'm asking for your patience when I don't tell a story 'quite right.' Also, never think I'm judging in my stories especially like when I talk about gang stuff etc.

Finding ourselves & **then** being able to live the life we want to, can be a hard & long road. During my years I've seen so many of my whanau stuck in the 'same old same old' & of course I came across so many gifted & talented youth in prison. For this reason, one theme that does run through a lot of my stories is 'finding yourself.'

The other thing I want to add in here is that when I was a kid & then a young adult, I had no idea how many awesome & exciting things there are to do in this world - I mean how could I? I'd been a foster kid from 8 weeks old & all I knew was a whole lot of pain - but trust me on this. Take the time now, while you're in prison to explore your mind & make some plans & goals. This is definitely a journey you can share over the on-coming years with your kids.

*Arohanui to you from Darcy*

## Here comes a chopper - Part 1-2

Images and feelings come through like an old valve radio trying to tune itself in. All scratchy and staticky, before becoming crystal clear.

I don't speak yet even though I'm almost 10 years old.

**Click.** Here comes a candle to light you to bed and here comes a chopper to chop off your head.

**Click.** I can live a whole life. In a second.

**Click.** I blinked and lived as the woman who'd known a boy named Matty.

John hung himself on the night of his sons 16th birthday. The birthday boy's name was Matty.

He had two sisters. One aged 14 and the other 17. And one half-brother aged 18.

A part of Matty died that night. Soon after he joined a local gang chapter.

Just over two years ago I got to meet him. Matty was quiet and solemn looking. He was proudly wearing his gang colours.

Last Friday about 12.30am my husband's cell phone rang. He ignored it. When it rang again about an hour later he picked it up.

It was Sara his sister.

**"Matty's gone, he's committed suicide."**

My husband and I just held each other close. What was there to say? Both of our eyes were wide open for a long time that night.

My thinking's that the scriptures tell us not to take our life for a reason. And whatever that reason might be, I thought that the repercussions might not be in Matty's favour. I prayed hard out for Matty that night and I always will. I trust that our God is merciful.

Later-on that morning I had to get up as usual. My boss was meeting me in New Plymouth to see some clients. Life goes on. As I talked about terms and credit management I petitioned for Matty's soul;

"Please God in all your wisdom, show mercy on Matty and give him a chance to get into Heaven. He was a broken vessel. Just a sad boy missing his dad."

On Friday night Matty was still in the morgue at Hastings Hospital. Early Saturday morning he was to be driven down by police escort to the coroners for an autopsy in Palmerston North before being driven home to Taranaki.

On the Saturday we had to be at our marae out at Ohawe to welcome Matty home. We got there about 11am and helped set things up. Just after 2pm we were told that Matty would arrive soon and so we all filed inside to take our seats.



*Rangatapu Marae – Ohawe*

We sat and waited. Was Matty truly dead? How could that be? Brains are a strange thing. Mine just couldn't quite grasp the mechanics of young Matty being dead. He was only two years younger than my own son. I knew it to be true, but it was still somewhere beyond my comprehension.

The karanga was called. The coffin carried in. This was real. Matty, the boy with the solemn face was in that box.

When the coffin lid was opened, his mum, Sara cried out loudly;

“Matty”

I heard his Aunty from his dad’s side crying and shouting;

“Matty, I hate to see you like this”

His paternal Grandmother sort of collapsed against the mattresses that’d been set up around the coffin area. Now I knew why the mattresses had been placed like they had.

Matty’s girlfriend had to be carried away and there was the sound of crying and moaning.

I prayed. “God be merciful. He was a broken boy. Please dear God be merciful.”

The appropriate korero took place linking Matty to his marae and the land under the shadow of Pukehou papa (Mt Taranaki).

A bell was rung.

It was time for a cup of tea and something to eat to lift the tapu.

Being raised in mainly pakeha foster homes, I found it weird how quickly some people switched from full-on grief to hurrying off to get the choicest cakes or savories to go with their cuppa’s.

After my coffee I went back in and sat next to Matty in his coffin. There were three girls who were all wearing black skirts and white t-shirts with ‘Matty’ written on the front with a photo of him and his birth and death dates. On the back of the t-shirt was his surname.

I’m at that age where young adults can treat you like you aren’t worthy to talk to and so with some trepidation I asked the girls to tell me about the Matty they knew. I told them I’d only heard of him from my husband and had only got to meet him once.

It was cool.

The girls shared stories about his loyalty, humour and exceptionally smelly feet. We all laughed and cried.

At one point I’d called Matty a ‘beautiful boy’ and the girls tried to politely hide their snorts of laughter.

I'm not that straight that I didn't realise that young Matty would've been anything but a 'beautiful boy' in their eyes. More of a spunky young gangster!

Still to me, he was a beautiful boy. I could hear that song of Yoko Ono's and John Lennon's called 'Beautiful Boy' in my head. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful ...baby boy, oh my beautiful, beautiful, beautiful baby boy...

On Saturday afternoon Matty's skin still looked fresh and his ears were pink.

At the foot of his coffin were two large 60cm x 90cm photos and laid on his body were more photos of him mucking about with his mates. My eyes darted from photo to photo of the living Matty, up to the face of the dead Matty. I was still trying to convince myself that it really was him.

Soon after word came that his Hawkes Bay gang chapter'd arrived and, so we took our seats again.

The karanga was called and his gang mates filed in.

**To find out what happens next read part-two.**

**Just so you know:** this story is a personal taonga (treasure) that I'm sharing with you. When we lost our nephew, the only way I could healthily process it was by writing it into a story. I've also had my brushes with suicide at a personal level and I know what pain a person is in when they are so low that suicide becomes an option. We all have to do our bit to combat this blight and even a smile can save a life. Once when my son was very young, I was going through a period of blackness. Everything around me appeared shaded and black and my heart was just so sore. One day I'd dropped him off at daycare & was heading down get the train into work. I so vividly remember how bleak and empty I felt. Even each step I took was an effort, when in front of me appeared this tiny old pakeha man. He had on one of those old school hats that old men use to wear back in the day, anyway, as my head rose & our eyes meet, his wrinkled old face burst into this big smile. That smile was like a burst of sunlight into my heart and I believe his smile saved me from ending my life that day. Funny thing is that when I turned around to look at the old fella again, he'd disappeared. The thing is. I never got to know my nephew very well at all, but I mourn the loss of him, and I mourn the loss of every person who takes their life – especially the young ones. I just wish I could appear in front of them & let them know that eventually everything will be okay. **Just live.**