

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 Daryl

Starfish - Part 4-4

Instead, for the first time in my life, Kingi stopped and looked at me directly in the face.

“So, you’ve made your choice son?”

Looking my dad back in the eye. I shook my head in an affirmative.

‘I have. I am Tito Waru.’

His piercing eyes fixed on mine while in return I studied his face without fear for once.

One of his eyes was hooded half-shut. Story was that he’d had a nerve slashed by a knife-thrust in some fight. When mum was pissed, she’d stumble proudly through the story of how it all happened over and over. The way she talked made it sound like a good thing.

My dad’s weathered and beaten skin was so covered in prison ink that he looked more green than decent Maori brown.

Tilting his head back on an angle so’s better to study me, my dad took me all in. With a grunt he lunged forward to envelop me in an unexpected bear-hug. As if that wasn’t shocking enough, his hand grabbed the back of my head forcing me into an uncomfortable nose to nose hongi. I had no choice but to share air with him.

Physically frozen and unable to move, a hundred things came to mind that I wanted to say or ask but nothing came up out of my mouth. I just stood there with my arms held stiffly at my sides assaulted by the unfamiliar smell of my dad.

An ending of something had just happened. Weirdly, I felt a spasm of grief for the loss of something that I’d never known that I’d had.

Abruptly my dad let me go, but even before he’d fully turned from me, he’d raised his arms high in victory and had started yelling gang obscenities and chants.

The bros who up until then had been massed silent by the car sprang to life to echo him like foul-mouthed marionettes.

Standing resolute in my decision, I held my face firm and legs planted wide ready to take on anyone on who reckoned otherwise. I knew what was going on.

My dad was just trying to save face by making it appear as if he’d re-staked his claim over me.

Who knew which way this was about to go? Kingi and the bros would’ve used any reason to let lose their internal bitterness on me.

With a shiver, my ghost ancestor appeared, warning me with a glance not to react to their calculated taunts. If I showed any weakness, I’d be dead.

The thing was that I wanted to kick out, hurt and be hurt. My need for pain consumed me like a deep itch. The desire to cauterize any remnant of the life my dad had wanted for me dimmed my sight with bloodlust.

The recognition of my own violent response shocked me.

At this point, my ghost ancestor became visible and started shape-shifting towards Kingi and the bros making them stumble pathetically as they fought amongst each other in their haste to escape.

The surreal hilarity in witnessing Kingi and the bros scrambling like cowards as they raced to the car served to neutralize any remaining bad vibes they'd left behind.

With an apologetic shrug, I returned the grin that my chuckling ancestor gave me as the realization of what I'd achieved hit me.

The decision I'd made tonight opened a whole new world to me. I wasn't a gang boy called Starfish anymore. I'd become the man - Tito Waru.

I reckon it's just like what Bob Marley meant when he sang us his Redemption Song:

***Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our minds.***

The air shivered once again as my ancestor moved to stand before me. He held up his hand, his fingers spread wide like a starfish, and I raised my hand to mirror his. I felt the pressure of his hand momentarily against mine and then the air split with a silent crack. My grinning ancestor had stepped forward to disappear inside me.

I wasn't weirded out because I'd an instant understanding that my ancestor had gone back to where he'd come from.

Me.



The End