

**UNDER THE HEALTH AND DISABILITY
SERVICES ACT 1993**

**IN THE MATTER OF THE MINISTERIAL
INQUIRY INTO THE UNDER-REPORTING OF
CERVICAL CANCER SMEAR
ABNORMALITIES**

EVIDENCE OF ROBIN EHU THOMPSON

1. My name is ROHI EHU-THOMPSON. I was born and grew up in Tawa Tapu. Pākehā call the place Bartletts but Tawa Tapu is the original name for that place. My father was from Ngāpuhi, of the Walters family in Kaitaia. My mother was from here from the Ngarangioie family of the Ngai Tamanuhiri tribe. I speak with you today with the knowledge that I have pertaining to Ngai Tamanuhiri.
2. I went to school at Muriwai. When the new school was built at Tawa Tapu I shifted to that school at Bartletts. There were five Māori children there at that time. Following school I worked at milking cows. I was twelve years old at that time. That was my growing up. Māori was the only language. My parents were not able to speak Pākeha.
3. I was thirty nine years old when I married my husband. I had five children, four are alive at this time. I am eighty years old now.
4. When I was young the elders only spoke about cancer. They went and gathered kowhai, boiled the kowhai and bathed in it. After bathing in the kowhai solution they also drank some kowhai juice.
5. When women took ill with cancer, they did not go to the doctor. And they knew when they had cancer. When the elders heard that one of the women was ill with cancer they would enquire as to how they became ill. And the woman would explain how ill she was and how the illness may have started. It's all open. And so they all knew. And they began to prepare the Māori medicine.

6. What they say about the sacredness of taking off your clothes in public is correct. When you are younger you go off to a secluded corner to take off your clothes. Children knew that it was not a good thing to take off your clothing anywhere. And the act of baring your buttocks is a different matter. That word whakapohane (baring buttocks or backside) was used only on serious matters. But you were conscious of that word when you were taking off your clothes. And as one grew older one became more conscious of where one shed her clothing because of the sacredness of some parts of a woman's body. Much of a woman's body was sacred at those times.
7. As a child grows older they begin to learn what matters are sacred, what things about themselves they need to take special care with, You are aware. And I say that most parts of a woman's body are sacred to the parents. And in those times there were few bad illnesses, but now there are many serious illnesses. And there were few women with those serious illnesses, or you had heard that had those illnesses, unlike today where there are many. At those times also, there was not as much cohabiting as there is today.
8. In these times people travelled widely and much quicker and so cohabitation was more prevalent. In our times this was not so. In our time also we were all mates, as we all lived close to each other. And so when we were together we were more mates than boy/girlfriends. When we grew older we became wiser. We became aware of the boy/girlfriend thing and also what accompanied these affairs. We became part of all the discussion for such illnesses as gonorrhoea and others, which was in a way likened to cancer. But they had medicine. But it didn't happen frequently. Not like today.
9. You know the food, was hot water, no such thing as tea, we drank hot or cold water. That was the food, no puddings and no food like McDonalds and others. Just straight out kumara and pumpkin.
10. When you went to the maternity hospital to have your child, the nurses handled everything. You did not have any say or part on how you were to have your child. I had one of my children born at home but you still went in to the maternity hospital to complete the birth. In those times treatment was speedy. But then later the women began asking for their afterbirth and umbilical cords of their children to be retained. This did not happen in our time and the hospitals just disposed of them.
11. Now there are many women giving birth and requesting the retention of their afterbirth and umbilical cords and these are buried. This ritual has recommenced with the younger generations of women. This is because our Māori people have become more culturally aware and practised. They have gone back to the traditional talk and practice and are continuing to look for and learn the Māori traditional and cultural practices.
12. I am familiar with the Ngai Tamanuhiri proverb:

“Taku hē ki te huatea, no muri ko te huauri”

Tamanuhiri’s first wife was Rongomaiawhia. While he was living with her he became attracted to Hinenui. He had an affair with her in her kumara pit.

Tamanuhiri’s first wife Rongomaiawhia was a person who stayed at home. She did not go out to tend to the garden and work outdoors. She made herself a queen. I am not aware of that situation. And Tamanuhiri saw the beauty of Hinenui as she toiled in her kumara pit. And his wife was a stay at home. So he had that affair with Hinenui in the kumara pit of Hinenui. Whereupon she said “ My failing for not being able to bear children, and now I am able to bear a child “. It appears that the meaning of the first part was that Hinenui and her husband were not able to have children. Some others say the quote referred to the stomach of the paua as a discussion point. But the real meaning lay in the second part of the quote whereby Hinenui says after her affair with Tamanuhiri that she can now have a child. And only now can she have a child. And so the hua was not the stomach of the paua but the ability now to have a child. That is the correct interpretation. And so she did have a child. In those times this sort of event happened quite often.

13. The Māori word for “infertility” is urikore, kore hua, or whare ngaro. This is a situation that can befall a person from their ancestors. That is the word comes down that that person will not have children. This is similar to a curse being cast on a person, a family, a sub tribe that they will not have issue. This is different however to a spell being cast on someone. Another illness which befalls a woman is the taking away of her womb. This is because medically it must be done – hysterectomy. This did not happen when I was younger. And a woman becomes physically different when this happens to her. She suffers many other illnesses that women suffer after this is done.
14. Dr Bottrill’s errors are very bad. Perhaps he has become unwell. And that is why he erred. He should be penalised for that bad work because it has impacted on the lives of many women. These defects in women should have been discovered as early as possible in order that the possibility of medicinal cure can be effected as early as possible. How do people look upon women who are not able to have children?
15. One of the main responsibilities of women in my time was that of having children in order that the names of their families and ancestors would continue. Another of the methods of cure for Māori was that of the spiritual or prayer. We did have a healer who could join broken bones together and this was another form of cure although it has nothing to do with not being able to have children. And we also had people amongst the tribe who were aware of the Māori medicines that could be obtained to deal with gonorrhoea – kowhai juice.

16. One of the causes of this illness in the cervix is by engaging in sex too early in life. Perhaps it is because the person's body is not mature enough to deal with those practices and is not ready for pregnancy. In these times it appears that younger people are engaging in sexual activity at age twelve years and thereabouts. It is also the view of some that cancer is hereditary – from earlier generations. Asthma is a hereditary illness. But it is not known whether cervical cancer is a hereditary illness.

From me

Rohi Ehu-Thompson

Translation completed by Lewis Ruihi Moeau – Certificated Translator on Wed 28 June 2000.