

Grandmothers Tongue: Were You Born in a Tent?

Abstract

Remember when our Nana asked us questions; like, “were you born in a tent?” and without even responding; you knew that you had left the door open and thought to yourself, “I had better close it before Nana says or does something else”. Or, the time, you all got told as siblings to go and have a bath; and in our whānau/family, our grandmother would get us all in a line from eldest sibling to youngest; and check us after our bath; when she reached our youngest brother; she would always say to him “what do you call this a lick and promise” these words resonate in my memory and in my own teachings to my own mokopuna. It is the words of my grandmother that kept me strong as a young person; as a teenage mother; and now as a grandmother of six mokopuna.

If our focus is Indigenous knowledge and Elders in relation to keeping Youth strong, we must engage our young people; we must “listen” and “learn” but, we must also “teach” and “lead by example”. My grandson is 12 years old and he and I had a conversation recently about drinking; I asked him, “you’ve never seen Nana drunk, have you?” to which he replied “No, never!” and I replied, “and you never will!” to which he said, “I didn’t think so”. This answer intrigued me, so I asked him, “why do you say that” to which he wisely replied, “Nana, I’m 12yrs old now, if you haven’t done it now, you’re not likely to do it ever!” I made a choice when my grandson was born that I would honour my own grandmother’s teachings; and endeavour to teach him what I was blessed to learn; and hopefully; this will enable him to pass the knowledge to his children and grandchildren. He knows who he is and where he comes from; and he is willing to share that knowledge with others. This is how we focus our knowledge to our rangatahi/young people; we start with our whānau/family; our tamariki/children; our mokopuna/grandchildren; and we learn from one another. This abstract will look at the language of our grandmothers to our grandchildren.