Sleeps Standing Moetū

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Vincent McClintock
Community Member

Book Title: Sleeps Standing Moetū Author: Witi Ihimaera Translator: Hēmi Kelly Year of Publication: 2017 Publisher: Vintage Number of Pages: 220 ISBN: 978-0-14377-111-1

Moetū by Witi Ihimaera with Hēmi Kelly is written to honour Ngaati Maniapoto and the other iwi (tribes) who fought beside them at the battle of Ooraakau in 1864. This book reminds all of us who descend from these iwi, the determined strength of the people we originate from. It comes with a balanced perspective which on the one hand, acknowledges that the iwi who fought made mistakes and were poorly resourced, which meant many people died. This book also shows that the battle of Ooraakau was a triumph of determination and survival.

You learn from Moetū that our tuupuna (ancestors) were heavily outnumbered, were in an underresourced Paa (fortified village), had women through choice fighting alongside the men, were reduced to using fruit pips and sticks as bullets, and had their children running supplies in the trenches. Yet, our tuupuna fought on with determination, while running out of ammunition, food and water. And in the end, even though our tuupuna faced all these challenges, the British colonial forces were still unable to destroy them at Ooraakau in 1864. It was said that our tuupuna had haka (chants) and karakia (prayers) on their lips as they chose death on the battlefield rather than submission or surrender.

This book also discusses how the actions of our tuupuna were held up globally as an ultimate example of valour. The deeds have been revisited and reintroduced again and again throughout the past, often by outsiders to Te Ao Maaori (Maaori world), and through the lens of outsiders.

Moetū in a lot of ways highlights how the achievements of our tuupuna were hijacked, forgotten, or interpreted in the past, by a non-Maaori lens. It does this simply, with an undeniable fact. The battle of Ooraakau in 1864 retained the mana (authority) of the land not for our ancestors own personal gain, but for those of us who were yet to come. All of us who whakapapa (are related) to the incredible people in this book can stand tall because of their mana and strength. If we hold on to their example, they will live on in us, and we can all journey forward as one. All iwi and indeed Indigenous people throughout the globe will have similar inspirational stories of their tuupuna and the importance of their lands, to be shared with their descendants.

Ka whawhai tonu maatou, ake! Ake! Ake!
We will fight on for ever and ever!

Vincent McClintock (Ngaati Maniapoto, Ngāti Paretekawa, Ngati Urunumia, Ngaati Wairora) is a currently studying Te Reo Māori through Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and has passion for learning about his whakapapa. Vincent holds a BA (Religious Studies) and is currently a full time pāpā to Ihaka.