Swept around the Sphere: 
Inside and Outside Pacific Islands Studies

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I am grateful for abundance in the universe, and for every circumstance that has brought me to the present moment.

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In the beginning there was nothing. Within that void was room for all possibilities. From vast emptiness came momentous creation—the primeval pair of earth and sky. Earth mother Papatūānuku and sky father Ranginui embraced each other so tightly, even light could not pass between them. Their sons Tāne Mahuta, Tangaroa, Haumiatiketike, Rongo, Tūmatauenga, and Tāwhirimātea lived in darkness between their parents for eons. The brothers discussed separating their mother and father. Tūmatauenga so strongly desired light, he considered killing his parents to create space between them. Only Tāwhirimātea opposed forcing his parents apart.1

In this creation story Tāne Mahuta is usually portrayed as a "hero" god because he was able to create space between his parents, letting in light and generating a world with humans. And Tāwhirimātea is often portrayed as an "angry" god, who lashed out against his brothers because he did not get his way. Instead of staying with his brothers on earth, he chose to be with his father, the sky. Tāwhiri’s winds and storms devastated the forests of Tāne and the waters of Tangaroa. He forced Rongo and Haumiatiketike, the gods of cultivated and wild crops, to hide under the protective surface of their mother. Tūmatauenga, god of war and man, was the only brother to stand up against Tāwhirimātea. Most

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Māori sayings involving wind speak of revenge or war, keeping current the struggles between the god of man and the god of wind.

I do not see Tāwhirimātea as an angry tempest. He is the only son who had any compassion for the love which held his parents so tightly together. Tāwhiri did not want to pry them apart and live only with his mother, for that would estrange his father. He was the only son happy in the darkness. Some believe this indicates that he is blind, but it suggests to me that he could see the darkness as the creative space it is. Being content in the dark requires greater imagination. His brothers created offspring from physical elements of the natural world. Tāwhiri gave rise to progeny out of thin air.

Tāwhirimātea’s descendants are squalls and whirlwinds, hurricanes and storms, clouds and precipitation, burning wind and freezing wind. But they are also the relieving breeze on a hot day, the gusts which fill one’s sails, the carriers of news, the many dervishes who lead us on adventures beyond our own boundaries, and the life which fills one’s lungs. Voyagers who first settled Aotearoa carved Tāwhirimātea into the prow of their vessels so that he might guide them to the land that they had dreamt or heard of, waiting beneath a long white cloud.

I couldn’t carve a deity into the prow of the sort of vessel that first carried me to Aotearoa. But when a northeast trade wind blew me there from Honolulu’s Mānoa valley, Tāwhirimātea received me in Wellington,
New Zealand's windiest city. This was fitting. The word tāwhiri means to "beckon, wave to," or to "bid welcome." 

When his family unit fractured, Tāwhiri set himself apart from his brothers, still tied to their mother's apron strings. I believe that at this time, Tāwhiri joined the fraternity of deities of the wind. Aztec air is ruled by Ehecatl. Anitun Tabu empowers the currents around the Philippines. Njord is the Norse god of winds, sea, and fire, even though Thor is more commonly thought of as reigning over the elements, as his chariot moves across the sky. Susanoo, the trouble-making brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu, stirs up both sky and sea surrounding Japan. Vayu and his son Hanuman control Hindu winds. Together they create the world's atmospheric patterns of motion.

Winds have been pushing, twirling, and leading me all my life. Adagio can sometimes quickly turn into allegro, because in the upper atmosphere there is no friction to slow circulation. Or allegro can come to a sudden stop, because winds need only reach 110 miles per hour to punch lungs empty. Trickster winds have dealt me a few blows, but I've been trained to admit that a good dance partner must at times surrender. When I reached Aotearoa, I turned to face the godly partner who had cut in, and who now planned to lead me through a few numbers on my dance card. I didn't stand against the wind, as Tūmatauenga as god of humans

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would have me do. Instead, I tried to be a partner, and soon found that the steps were already deep in my muscle memory.
I flew before I walked, taking to the air before I could physically ground my feet. I don’t remember anything about the voyage from New York to Tokyo that I took when I was an infant, but I grew up knowing flight was always an option. My parents are immigrants. Even before I was born, my life was about moving.

During my early life my parents made the same few steps taken by many foreigners laying down a path for their American-born children—from apartment to small house to larger house. That last house was the home of my childhood. This sloping wooded acre in a small, lake town in northwest New Jersey was meticulously cultivated. Flowers, shrubs, and trees changed colors through the seasons. One summer, when my maternal grandparents were visiting from Japan, my grandfather trimmed every plant and had my brother move rocks and boulders to create stone features—metamorphic islands in a sea of grass, beaches of gravel surrounded by forests of flowering bushes.

A wooded lot beyond my backyard brought me closer to the wild. The only imprint of humans seemed to be the narrow path weaving through the trees to the street. I meandered through those woods every day on my way to the bus stop, until my brother got his driver’s license, and drove us both to high school.
It looked like my Japanese parents were living their American dream—upward mobility, spacious quarters, a boy, a girl, a dog, a cat. My brother played little league sports, and I went to dance lessons. What started out as an after-school activity became a vocation, as I learned discipline, professionalism, grace, exploration, commitment, the value of being true to oneself, and the blessing of doing what one loves. Rebellious, ready for a change, I left home at fifteen, focused on making a career as a modern dancer. I thought I’d always have my family and that place to go back to. But just after my sixteenth birthday, my father’s company went bankrupt, my brother died, and my parents divorced. This whirlwind buffeted me with the truth of the phrase that “you can never go home.” My home no longer existed.

Since then, I’ve packed my belongings and moved, on average, more than once every year. Some moves were just down the high school or college dormitory hall; others involved thousands of miles. Before every move I try to let go of enough to realize my dream of being able to put everything I possess into one pack at a moment’s notice, and then taking to the road, sky, or sea—whenever my path might call, wherever it might lead. I know I’ll never pare it all down to just one bag. (These days I actually long for a place where I could unpack my kitchen.) But, I keep surrendering to the wind, because I do not settle.
Flights of fancy and invocations have taken me to thirteen countries outside the U.S. (if you count Taiwan as separate from China) and thirty-seven American states. Though I’ve claimed several places as my residence, none of them have held on to me. I’m still working on an answer to the seemingly simple question, “Where are you from?” I am certainly a product of Forest Lakes, New Jersey, but to say I am from a place I’m no longer connected to would be to lie.

By the time I blew into Winston-Salem to begin my stay at North Carolina School of the Arts, I knew that I belonged more to my path rather than a place. I started dancing when I was five, and chose it as a career at twelve. For two years, my mother drove me into New York City every day after school for classes at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. When it became too difficult to balance my life (and my mother’s) between New Jersey and New York, I auditioned for three performing arts high schools.

The locations of possible schools influenced my decision more than what the schools could necessarily offer my career. Had I attended Fiorella LaGuardia High School for Music and Art and Performing Arts in New York City, I would have been perfectly positioned to work in New York, even before graduating. But, my mother and I would have had to move into the city, while my father and brother stayed in New Jersey. Because I didn’t know my parents were about to separate anyway, I didn’t
want to break up the family. (Nor did I want to live in a tiny apartment.) I chose not to attend Interlochen Center for the Arts because they accepted me on my credentials before even seeing me dance. And then when I did visit Michigan to go through the formality of auditioning, the sun was setting beyond the winter campus by late afternoon. Icy walls cast shadows on the sidewalks, shoveled out from under three feet of snow. That dark, cold Michigan campus flew from my mind on the warm spring day I auditioned for North Carolina School of the Arts. Theirs was the most rigorous audition process, and also the most beautiful campus. Winston-Salem was green and welcoming. I didn’t hesitate to accept their offer.

I would have learned about dance at any of the three schools. But in North Carolina, I also started to understand what poets and lyricists saw in the coming of spring. Spring in the northeast is cold and muddy. Passing from snow covered fields and glistening icy trees to stinging rain and blustering winds never seemed a cause for celebration to me. In Winston-Salem, I tried to get caught in Carolina sun showers. Spring was grassy and affectionate. On that liberal campus of high school and college artists, I felt the budding possibilities that came with increased warmth and movement in the air.

But boarding schools and universities have a way of being everything to their inhabitants for a few moments, then becoming
unrecognizable after graduation. At the end of my last spring, I happily
gave my place up to the next wave of students, and my father drove me
and my belongings up the east coast so that I could return to New York
City and the modern dance scene it nourishes.

I will always love New York and claim it as one of my cities. It’s a
place for the best, which set in me a certain snobbishness I feel entitled to
exercise whenever mediocrity comes before me. But I can’t say I’m from
New York. That would insult the true New Yorkers—the ones who resent
the fuckin’ bridge-and-tunnelers. The ones who couldn’t live anywhere
else.

Like every place, New York City has energies of its own. With love
I call this place, so at home with great disparities between so many
extremes, bipolar. Riding the city’s highs gave me the energy to do things
I wouldn’t have otherwise, but when I coasted too close to the city’s lows,
I lost the energy to do anything other than what was necessary to get by.
Keeping company with artists led to a lifestyle of decadence and big ideas.
But day to day, I was in a relationship that was going nowhere healthy.
And most disturbingly, I was no longer inspired by what had been my
vocation for more than fifteen years.

Doing what one loves is a blessing. Energy isn’t spent on whipping
up motivation. I worked, played, and toured with some insightful,
sensitive, and well-known artists. But the world of modern dance started
to look like an unvaried terrain of bodies moving in space to music. Fresh ideas, approaches, and aesthetics were the rare exception rather than the rule, and my dedication began to flutter. I decided that practicing an art that no longer moved me wasn’t worth the long hours, demanding touring, or financial instability. New York no longer uplifted me. When I eventually left New York, I also knew I wouldn’t miss living in the city that never sleeps. Insomniacs are manic, and after eight years, our relationship had run its course. Rather than continuing to fight against the city-grid wind tunnels, I surrendered, and rode one out.

I’m still enough of a New Yorker to feel nostalgic whenever I see my West Third Street apartment building in movies. And I curse the multinational corporate mall Times Square has become. My Times Square was just after the XXX theaters were closed, when Jenny Holzer’s truisms were displayed on their marquees. “At times inactivity is preferable to mindless functioning.” But that was in 1982.

And the gap now in the city skyline, even after it gets filled, will always be a hole in my core.

I moved to Japan with no job, no Japanese language skills, and all but no money. This journey “East” was not about finding my roots. It was partly about running away from mid-twenties angst that I thought I could leave in New York. And partly, it was about seeing where my
parents had come from. But learning about my parents' place was not about looking for mine. I had sprouted in a very different place.

The shock of entering a different culture was less disorienting than the void I had created by ending my career. Though fortunate to be able to choose the end for myself, uncertainty left me floating. New geographies, cultures, languages, and people were welcome distractions, and immediate tasks and short-term goals kept my feet stepping forward. I found jobs teaching English, I learned Japanese, I traveled through the country. Of course, every nation is more than the sum of its mapped symbols, but I found Japan to be a labyrinth of veiled jewels. A lifetime of travel would not be enough to taste every region's specialties.

After living in Japan for almost three years, I had created a comfortable life. I dreamt of traveling from south to north to view the blossoming cherry trees, postponing the impermanence they represent. I had developed an appreciation for a "traditional aesthetic" in excellent cuisine and calligraphy, which are always linked to the season in which they are created. But my wide open (American) sense of space was longing for release from small, crowded corners. And when I left, I was still a guest among my own relatives.

English speakers from all over the world go to Japan to teach. When my closest Australian friend returned home, I then had the opportunity to visit her and a New Zealand friend in countries I had
always thought were too far from the U.S. to visit. I spent two weeks in Australia and four days in New Zealand. Visiting Australia was a wonderful holiday. New Zealand was something altogether different—while at the same time somehow familiar. I knew I would find my way back to Aotearoa.

One of the distractions focusing my life in Japan was a rigorous study of language. Returning to a formal school setting revived my academic self and propelled me back to the United States, and to the undergraduate degree I had sidestepped. I flew to San Francisco, then connected the dots between family and friends as I traveled east. The last stop was the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

It was difficult to be a “non-traditional” (a euphemism for old) student. I found comfort in the autumn foliage, summer fireflies, and top-rate fine arts center in this rural New England town, but I never found my niche. As a twenty-nine-year old freshman, I could not relate to college kids whose only interest seemed to be keg parties. Part of me wanted to tell them they were amateurs. I had outdone them while still in high school. But mostly I just wanted them to be quiet, so I could take my education seriously.

A path of sorts began to emerge in the landscape of academia, but it skirted quagmires of bullshit. Though I was engaged in the learning
process, I rejected the idea that a tower strangled by ivy, rising out of a hierarchical realm of nepotism could become my home. Instead, academia became a way to travel, to explore. Taking advantage of the networks which connect universities, I spent one year at Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan, and one semester at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo. Instead of going back to Massachusetts for graduation, I stayed in Hawai‘i. My diploma came in the mail.

I did not settle on the Big Island because I liked it. I never felt like more of an outsider. As in Japan, I could pass as a local—until I started to speak. But in Japan I was an honored guest. In Hawai‘i, I was an uninvited guest. I often felt warmth as I approached people and exchanged greetings, but just as often the aloha would be pulled back behind a masked vault when the local person realized “You’re not from here,”—almost as if accusing me of saying that I was. My standard American accent had labeled me as an “outsider” before we ever got to that part of the conversation.

The Big Island overwhelmed me with its raw extremes. In winter you can snowboard in the morning, surf in the afternoon, and watch the earth being formed practically under you feet at night. But only, if the mountain lets you live, the ocean lets you live, and the volcano lets you live. Some thrive close to the sublime; I started to unravel.
The Japanese characters for my given name mean “child of a thousand possibilities.” I have been blessed with many opportunities, and with many people who believe that for me anything is possible. But I tend to wallow in uncertainty when presented with choices. Perhaps in an attempt to remain grounded, I stand against the wind that knows where to take me.

When I could no longer handle my indecision, I asked myself what I really wanted to do. Papatūānuku answered. I did not then know Aotearoa’s earth mother by name. But I did decide that a journey would take me there.

I first flew to my mother’s nest in Florida, to end the dramas I had invited into my life in Hawai‘i. I stayed there for a couple of months, and prepared my application to the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. When I returned to the chain of islands, it was to O‘ahu.

Living in Honolulu gave me the distance I needed to appreciate what the Big Island had given me—experiences like swimming with spinner dolphins at Kealakekua Bay, or watching a baby whale explore its aerobatic capabilities. When I had first moved to Hawai‘i I missed the signs of seasonal change, and I don’t know if I will ever enjoy walking across exposed cracked lava fields as much as hiking through peak foliage.
hills. But I had started to tell people in Honolulu that Hilo was my most recent home.

I had been attracted to the Center for Pacific Islands Studies because it could help me go to Aotearoa New Zealand. Even before submitting the application, I had asked about exchange possibilities. My visit to New Zealand a few years earlier had somehow made me feel deeply felt connected to the place. Though I had only spent four days, and all in the greater Auckland area, a space had opened up where I could exhale. I knew I wanted to stay longer than a tourist visa allowed, and to have some structure during my stay. The Pacific Islands Studies program seemed a good fit. So I spent one year in Honolulu, studying the legacies of colonization in the Pacific, before leaving for a year of course work, fieldwork, and thesis writing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I tell people I am working on a creative project based on my interactions with the terrain of Aotearoa New Zealand, drawing on Pacific traditions of voyaging and Pacific understandings of and interactions with land, sea, and sky to shape my analysis. But honestly, I went to Aotearoa because I felt the land call me.

When the descendants of those who first settled Aotearoa introduce themselves, they begin with the things to which they belong—one’s mountain, one’s river, one’s ancestors, the vessel in which the ancestors
arrived, one's tribe and sub-tribe, one's home village, one's extended and immediate family, and finally one's own name.

I feel incompetent introducing myself in Māori. Not just because I lack fluency, but because I have no home, and my familiarity with my genealogy ends with my grandparents, whose given names I do not know. I am a bloom on my family tree that the wind has taken even further from a branch already broken off and carried across an ocean and a continent.

But when I remember that one reason for introducing our genealogies in Māori is to reveal points of interconnection, I feel relieved. Whether or not we know each other’s family histories, I believe that all beings are connected.

So after greeting sky father Ranginui and earth mother Papatūānuku, the best I can do to introduce myself is to acknowledge a superficial line that connects me to Mt. Fuji, then to explain that I was born in New Jersey. I go on to say, “Engari, e haere ana ahau mā runga i ngā hau e whā.” (But, I travel with the four winds.) I often continue by saying I belong to the land under my feet, and I thank the tangata whenua for giving me the opportunity to stand where I happen to be at that moment. I end my introduction, as most do, by saying my given name. My Māori language skills are not nuanced enough to explain that although (or perhaps because) the Japanese characters of my name mean “child of a thousand possibilities” I believe the real work lies in the follow through.
A Māori proverb says the traveler is a dog’s nose. He ihu kūri, he tangata haere. This means that the traveler looks for an open door in the same way a dog follows the smell of food. The saying is a put down of unannounced guests. Once welcomed, though, a guest will always be taken care of. Born in the year of the dog, I’m an adventurer, using my senses to discover which open doors will receive me, then guide me along my path.

When asked where I’m from, what I’d really love to do is borrow my beginning from Pacific cosmology, then add an ending of my own.

*I’m from a dark, creative place out of which came the earth and the sky.*

Now my dance partner, the wind, is leading me on an unfamiliar journey home.
When I arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, I told all who asked, that I came because I felt the land call me. But from July through November I experienced little but the concrete structures of Wellington. At Victoria University I explored a forest of texts in a directed reading, but my feet stayed on cement. So during my summer holiday, I set out to discover which part of Aotearoa had called me and why. New Zealand friends who knew of my desire for landscape and outdoor adventures told me to visit the South Island.

I realized early on that interacting with landscapes doesn't come without interacting with people. Despite the South Island’s scenic beauty, I found I preferred the diversity up north. The rugged wilderness of the west coast makes it difficult to access. Like those in mining towns in the United States, inhabitants of this mountainous area don’t often seem to have encountered different kinds of people.

I was happy to leave Greymouth. I hopped on what is advertised as “one of the world’s great scenic railway journeys,” disembarking in Christchurch, which was kinder. I visited a friend in Methven before going on to Lake Tekapo, Wanaka, and Te Anau. Though at every stop I hiked through undeniably beautiful scenery, the land seldom engaged me in a way I could describe as a call.
Three kilometers east of the small lakeshore town of Manapouri sit self-contained wood cabins—the rental units of Freestone Backpackers. The host and proprietor Jimmy is a gentle soul with calloused hands. When I visited that summer, he had nearly finished clearing the top of his sloping property, and was almost ready to lay the foundation for his house of dreams. Until he finishes, he enjoys the view of Lake Manapouri from a loveseat he made from twigs and vines. When I checked in, Jimmy suggested I watch the sunset from there. Though the day had been overcast, I went before dusk with another guest. Evening brought breathtaking fuchsia clouds, but the dark lake surrounded by lush mountains touched me more. When I saw Fiordland National Park from Manapouri, something inside me became still and calm.

The two things I knew about Fiordland were that fjords are sea inlets bordered by steep cliffs, and that Milford Sound is the most visited tourist destination in New Zealand. So I went to Doubtful Sound instead, but because I thought that Doubtful Sound might still be a popular Fiordland highlight, I booked my accommodation more than a month in advance. Few people know the Deep Cove Hostel even exists. During the school year it hosts groups of students for school programs on conservation. During the summer holiday it is advertised as a hostel. I was the sole booking for the first weekend in January 2006.
A group of sea kayakers also stayed there the first night. The rain which blessed my drive across Wilmot Pass with hundreds of waterfalls had also washed out the kayakers' campsite, and gales kept them off the water. Sam\(^3\), the kayak guide, rounded up games and movies from the hostel manager. He was remarkably good at his unenviable job of keeping up the spirits of eight tourists who had paid for a kayaking/camping trip and instead got a cold, wet sit-around. He was their compassionate leader and their younger brother, and he looked like the youngest of the group, though that may have been because he had a job that he loved which kept him physically fit, while the others had jobs that made them feel they needed to get away and take a kayaking holiday.

I joined the group half way through *The Italian Job* and stayed to complete two jigsaw puzzles of dancing tea cups. I excused myself when a new game came out and people started cooking. The hostel manager had granted me the luxury of staying in the self-contained flat instead of in one of the small, dark dorm rooms. Having my own kitchen, being able to spread out all of my stuff, and sleeping without the disturbances of others were welcome after a month of checking in and out of one backpackers' after another.

But the sounds of rain and wind interrupted my sleep, and continued through to morning. When the gales subsided, the kayakers

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\(^3\) Some names throughout the manuscript are pseudonyms.
got some time on the water. From the verandah outside my flat, where
the resident, cheeky kea was drinking out of a bowl, I could see the
kayakers paddling into different formations. They were bright and tiny
against the nearly black water and towering sea cliffs. I was happy they
could do at least a little of what they had come to experience. It must have
been exhilarating to wake up their muscles by paddling against the wind
in one of the most scenic areas in the world.

They weren’t out long. When they came back to pack up their gear, we said our goodbyes.

- Enjoy your second night here. Alone. This place is a bit like The
  Shining, don’t ya think?

Of the three Germans in that group, the straight sexy one had the sense of humor.

Willy the hostel manager had offered to loan me a pair of gumboots the day before. When I stopped by to take him up on the offer, he invited me in for a cup of coffee. I thought perhaps this was an example of the “Kiwi hospitality” I had read so much about but rarely experienced.

When I first came to New Zealand and someone asked where I was from, I would answer

- I’m from the United States. I’m sorry.
- That’s okay, I’m not an Iraqi.
After a few responses like this, I stopped apologizing.

Willy and I made the usual small talk, which included my interest in tramping around New Zealand. I told him I had never seen trails so wide, gradually graded, and consistently well-maintained, as the New Zealand DOC tracks. Willy claimed that DOC diligently maintains their tracks to save New Zealand taxpayers the cost of heli-rescuing stupid Americans who get into trouble in the bush. This was the variety of Pākehā “Kiwi hospitality” which had become familiar to me. It is easy to hate Americans. It’s exhausting to travel as one.

I found hospitality so rare in the New Zealand service industry that I began to theorize. A Kiwi friend rejected my remarks about Kiwi/Aussie dislike of a “tall poppy.” Supposedly, when one rises above the rest, the others tend to beat the tall poppy down. As someone from a culture where most people want to be the tall poppy, it was an adjustment to be somewhere people liked to beat down the tall poppy. I speculated that this desire for everyone to be at the same level accounted for the service industry’s tendency not to make anyone feel special. My Kiwi friend didn’t see the dislike for the “tall poppy” at work, but she did agree that the New Zealand approach to service came from a place of egalitarianism. Early Pākehā settlers came without servants. Therefore, the idea of career servers who make an art of service is simply not part of traditional Kiwi ideology—whatever that is.
A hostel owner in Wanaka, who served his patrons well, found it strange that Americans hire people to do things they should be capable of doing themselves. When things around his home and property need fixing, he does pretty much everything himself, and I think most Kiwis take pride in being capable of doing things themselves. Perhaps this enters into the service industry. Rather than offering unsolicited service, I was given room to do things for myself. I was asked, "You all right there?" far more often than "May I help you?" Answering "yes" to the first question confirms that I can do things myself. Answering "yes" to the second question admits defeat.

Willy's comments didn't seem to have anything to do with pride in his self-sufficiency, though I know for certain he could do most things he needed. Before living in Fiordland, he had been living at an isolated outpost in a national park on the west coast. Three months once passed without seeing another human being. Willy wasn't inhospitable, but perhaps he had internalized the Department of Conservation's message that "introduced species" are threatening "native species." And like many Pākehā with opinions about New Zealand's current immigration policies, Willy clearly didn't consider himself one of the "introduced species" to Aotearoa.

It didn't occur to me then to present Willy with the theory that either the insurance companies of the people heli-rescued, or the people
themselves, could be billed for the costs incurred. I just thanked him for the coffee and rubber boots, and made my way down to the wharf for the "leisurely cruise on Doubtful Sound" included in my "adventure package."

Most people spot dolphins on these cruises, even in the rain. We did not. In my imagination, the dolphins were staying away because their cousins in Akaroa had told them about my bad attitude. I had snubbed them because I'd refused to pay tourist prices to kayak with hector dolphins. After all, I'd swum with spinner dolphins in Hawaiʻi free of charge, though of course, tourists can't without some local knowledge. The missing dolphins were also perhaps reminding me that I hadn't been in New Zealand long enough to shed my tourist status.

Standing on the slippery deck while being pelted with cold rain was difficult. But even relentless wet wind could not diminish the awe I felt while floating through these fractured arms at the boundary where two plates of the earth's crust collided and hurled up those colossal walls surrounding New Zealand's second largest fjord—second to Dusky Sound, not the more famous Milford.

When the Doubtful Sound cruise boat slowly passed close to a wall of green with intermittent ribbons and sheets of cascading water, a fern growing out of a rock sent a message to me.

- The stories you're looking for are in the bush.
snapshots of home (i)

*Landing, New Jersey 1970s*

One of the aunts sent god over from Japan. Mom put it in the ground near the front door.
My workaholic father who never even boiled water once kneaded sanuki udon under his feet, while I sat on his shoulders. My brother and I fit in the armchair perfectly side by side.

*Forest Lakes, New Jersey 1980s*

forsythia, dogwood, pink almonds, rhododendron
Dad gifted the saplings and Mom nurtured their growth.

*Winston-Salem, North Carolina 1985 - 1988*

Even the intoxicatingly sweet smell of tobacco hanging out to dry didn’t move the massive, gray concrete blocks unimaginatively called “the elephants.” They bore witness to jello wrestling, acid flights, suicide, the art of combat, heartbreak, and true love.
There is no love truer than to one’s art.

*New York City, 1988 - 1996*

Artists and investment bankers have more in common than they’d like to admit. Both are self-indulgent, have an off-kilter sense of reality, and are more driven than seems reasonable.

*Nagoya, Japan 1996 - 1999*

I could eat Toshie-san’s nimono every day.
The annoying dog died. The passive-aggressive aunt got cancer.
Where was my compassion?
A colleague described Nagoya as the armpit of Japan.
Neither of my parents is from the regions surrounding Mt. Fuji. If asked to name a mountain to which they belong, my mother would choose a place she went mushroom picking as a child in Nagano prefecture, and my father would claim the mountain near his hometown, which houses a famous temple on the island of Shikoku. But when composing my Māori greeting, I chose Fuji as my mountain. It’s a symbol of Japan. And after all, the relationship with that “homeland” often assigned to me by others is more symbolic than specific.

I think it was a lonely planet guide that said all Japanese know the following saying about Mt. Fuji: “One is wise to climb Fuji once, but a fool to climb it twice.” Very few of the people I’ve asked have heard this saying, and some would like to climb Mt. Fuji as many times as possible. They taught me a phrase to remember how tall Fuji-san is (3776 meters). In Japanese the first syllable of each number gives you “mi na na ro.” With a slight variation this becomes “Minna narō,” which means “let’s all become (number one like Fuji-san).” Though not as interested as I once was in becoming number one, I did want to climb Mt. Fuji before the end of my time teaching English and learning Japanese.

Thanks to Fuji-san, I had the rare pleasure of saying good morning to my uncle, and the even rarer pleasure of receiving his grumble of a
I wondered if that was how he answered my aunt when she had asked if I could stay with them, a year earlier. It was a smoker's grunt—the sound of air mumbling through a hoarse throat.

Uncle was usually up and out before I surfaced from the land of nod. But I had to be up very early to catch the tour bus that would take me to Mt. Fuji. I am not fond of bus tours, but the most convenient way to climb Mt. Fuji is to buy a package which includes transportation, a guide, and a reserved place to sleep in one of the mountain huts.

Aunt Tatsuko, cousin Yoshihiro, and I took the 7:10 express train from Yatomi. We exited the Nagoya station labyrinth, and looked for my friend and her boyfriend. Erik was there with his pack, ready to go, but Karen had yet to arrive. She had no phone. We waited. Fifteen minutes. Twenty minutes. My aunt and cousin went ahead to meet the bus, three blocks away. After a few more minutes I left Erik too.

I have often stood waiting for someone, decided how long to stay, and planned events afterwards. But I could only imagine the tug of war in Erik's heart. Karen had given him this trip for his birthday—an expensive gift, already paid for. At least one of them should enjoy it. But Erik wouldn't be able to live with himself later if he had been enjoying Fuji while Karen was lying helpless in a ditch.

Erik came on the bus. We waited another five minutes, then left. Our minds were still at the meeting place, while our bodies were stuck in
Obon holiday traffic. The humid air hung stagnant. And what little progress we made through the highway-turned-parking lot was further interrupted. The bus made three rest stops within the first four hours.

At the second highway stop, Erik and I called our employer to get Karen’s neighbor’s telephone number. We got a message instead that Karen had gone to Fuji by shinkansen. We’d meet her at the fifth station, halfway up the mountain.

At the fifth station our bus pulled in next to other busloads of people, all encouraged to buy key chains and pickled vegetables at the many souvenir shops. I bought a stamp to post a message to a loved one from the summit. No Karen. We began our ascent.

The bus ride had foreshadowed our hiking pace—slow, slow, slow, rest, rest, rest. This was a good pace for tired children and sedentary grandparents, facing the challenge of every step, but frustrating for the independent and fit—and there were no children or grandparents. The guide kept the group in practical unison, following his shuffling adagio. My aunt had been concerned about her fitness level, but she had nothing to worry about. With a spring in her step like a world-class triple jumper, she seemed as frustrated as I was, hiking in a herd of forty-four.

The terrain was surprisingly lush for the first couple of hours. Altitude headaches joined us about the time when barren volcanic landscapes took my breath away. A gate like those at entrances to shrines
straddled the dusty trail meandering up the wide open volcano-side. No wall separated the physical space on either side, and it would have been just as easy to walk around the gate, but we passed under it one by one. The journey had started to feel like a pilgrimage, though the biggest change was in the cost of goods. As the distance from the fifth station increased, so did all the prices. The price on cans of oxygen in particular reminded me of the value of breathing deeply.

After a dinner of instant curry and rice at the eighth station hut, we were assigned to close sleeping quarters on raised platforms. From cattle to sardines. Erik and I sat up for a while to see if Karen would come in with the stragglers. We decided she must have turned back before she reached the mountain, so we went to bed. Packing myself between my aunt and a stranger, I lay there for a while, listening to those around me breathe.

Some had gone into deep-sleep breathing right away, exhausted from the trek up. Others had a hard time falling asleep—cramped next to strangers, without the comforts of home. When I finally let go, I did not drift too far, coming back whenever anyone entered the room, to see if Karen had joined us.

We began rustling before our midnight wake up call. I stepped down from the platform, re-engaged my body with a few stretches, then
repacked my bag, put on warm clothes, and ran outside to the hole-in-the-ground toilet.

I admired the hazy half moon cut by clouds. Despite these clouds and the lighted huts dotting the mountainside, the stars shone brighter here than above Nagoya's neon nights.

The sky started to blink—a lightning storm in the distance. No lightning bolts, just a light switching on and off above the clouds. The group's oohs and aahs were like the sounds I'd had heard at many summer firework festivals. I admired the show too, never associating it with impending doom. But that night Mt. Fuji was ruled by Susanoo, god of wind and storms, and he would redirect most of the groups on the mountain.

The wind whipped us with rain as the lightning and thunder came more frequently and closer together. About nine-tenths of the way up, we waited. After twenty minutes the guides turned us back and corralled us in the Fuji-san Hotel.

This was no more a hotel than the shack where we had napped, but a lightning storm left us no time to worry about a name. The longer we sat there, the more my quadriceps cramped from cold and inaction. I tried to rest, but my sore thighs kept me up, and so did the constant echoing calls of waiters. "Tea, coffee, hot cocoa, ramen..." They sounded like my alarm clock, and I wanted a snooze button. Thankfully, my Japanese
was still too poor for insults or negotiations, so my aunt, my cousin, and my friend were spared the embarrassment of me rearing my “ugly American” head.

By 4 AM a charcoal cloud hung above the summit. I had never seen a cloud so black. By 5:30 the patch of sky we saw through the doorway was turning blue, so we went outside to see what we could of the sunrise. A couple of times it looked like she was going to burn through in all her glory, but in the end the sun goddess Amaterasu was feeling as bashful as Fuji-san, and hid behind the clouds, losing that morning’s conflict to her brother. With my back to the wet windy summit, I watched the clouds around the sun dance, glow, transform, and surround us. For a moment I thought I was being revisited by some chemically enhanced experiences. Head in the clouds, feet on the ground, warm pastels somehow swirling before me.

* * * * *

The hike down was faster than up, but the guide kept the pace well within a safe range. Out in front of the guide, my aunt and I led the pack down the slippery sand and pumice. We reached the fifth station in about three hours.

When I boarded the bus, I found that Karen had called the tour company. After the bullet train, she had taken a bus to a different fifth station (there are three). She spent the night on the mountain in hopes of
joining us, but left for home in the morning. So, while we spent the same night on the same mountain, our journeys were so different that the mere mention of Mt. Fuji makes Karen ill. She spent thirty-six hours chasing after us with little food or money. She doesn't speak Japanese, the altitude was exhausting, and a child threw up on her. Karen actually made it to the summit and walked around the caldera. But this, the pinnacle moment of the "Fuji experience" for most, further marked defeat for her.

I never had my exulted summit moment, shared with family and friends. I didn't see the picturesque Fuji sunrise. But I saw clouds dance, the sky blink, and a storm more imposing than a mountain. I went up, I came down, and I can say that "the mountain let me live." With Fuji, though, that seems like a given. After blowing her top and spewing her anger all the way to Tokyo about three hundred years ago, she's been docile, even bashful—hiding behind clouds every chance she gets. The reluctant symbol of Japan is my mountain.
snapshots of home (ii)

Amherst, Massachusetts 1999 - 2003

Between the towns of Amherst and Northampton there are five colleges – Amherst, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Hampshire, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. They’ve been characterized as Fred, Daphne, Velma, Shaggy, and Scooby. UMass is the dog, and the center of the show.

Sapporo, Japan 2000 - 2001

Coffee, cigarettes, sake, mushrooms, thc, and one pastel dream. Projectile vomiting, falling, breaking, and being broken. Pain was a welcome change to numb.

Hilo, Hawai‘i 2003 - 2004

It’s difficult to talk about cockroaches, prejudice, and the overwhelming energy of a moldy “paradise” to New Englanders who are under a blanket of January snow.

Honolulu, Hawai‘i 2004-2005

I thought I entered the program with relatively few demands. But when I found myself bawling in the grad advisor’s office, I realized my expectations had not been met.

Wellington, New Zealand July 2005 – October 2006

On the last leg of my flight to New Zealand, a Wellingtonian with fiery red hair looked through my eyes and told me I would love Wellington. She turned away, looked back at me, and said it again. “You will love Wellington.”
reading in place

I respond to my environment physically, emotionally, and intellectually, with the natural world the source of greatest stimulation. I went to New Zealand to explore, yet for the first five months, the path between my apartment and the university campus was my habitual course. Tall buildings and motorway ramps made up my world. Wellington is a beautiful harbor city, with green spaces like the botanical garden, but it is a city.

I could soon navigate alleyways hosting sculptures, or the maze of stairways connecting the lower part of the city to the institution hosting me. My real exploration came instead through a forest of texts. I had gathered sources from various areas, including anthropology, history, geography, cultural studies, Oceanic studies, feminism, poetry, novels, dance history, travel writing, and Māori language. Before leaving Hawai‘i, I talked with several instructors across the UH Mānoa campus, looking for resources—and possible committee members—that might help me see my project more clearly. I compiled a reading list, and I brought it with me to New Zealand.

These texts became the course materials for a directed reading with Teresia Teaiwa at Victoria University of Wellington. She described her role as “coming along for the ride.” She was not reading with me, nor had she read some of the sources before, but she was present and listening,
and she created an environment where I felt comfortable to discuss even
dead ends. She also asked relevant questions which created space for me
to explore ideas I would not have otherwise considered.

For example, she suggested Minnie Bruce Pratt’s chapter in *Yours in
Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-semitism and Racism* (1984). In
“Identity: Skin  Blood  Heart,” Pratt describes how engaging with places,
buildings, and people has informed her process of expanding her
consciousness. She also notes how her body feels at points during the
process, and how those processes move her toward a different
understanding.

Pratt’s feminist perspective on cross-cultural shared victimization
has given me a more nuanced and positive understanding of feminism.
At least in my reading of this essay, feminism is not necessarily about
moving women from the margin to the center, but about seeing and
collecting the threads that connect people to each other.

As I read many of these texts in my cold studio apartment, with the
Wellington winds whipping by my window, the distinctions between the
authors’ voices became clearer. In the past, reading critically for me had
more to do with how the author’s background colored what s/he had to
say. But while considering this group of texts, the sounds of the authors’
voices struck me as more distinct. As the voices resonated within me, my
path through the literature took shape, moving away from academic,
"objective" voices, and toward narrative. Scenic overlooks offered views into stories of others, and aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand, Oceanic scholarship, even Japan. Valuable finds lay in the many small streams flowing back to my place of intention.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) served as a model for a memoir that blurs lines between dichotomous pairs. I found it in the Wellington City Library's biography section: the stories from Kingston's childhood were published by Knopf as non-fiction. But the book has been difficult to categorize. Western critics seem to have placed on it the responsibility of being the representation of authentic Chinese and Chinese American traditions—or at least until Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* was published. And yet, it is precisely the authenticity of her accounts of traditions which received the most criticism from Chinese American critics. Finally, according to Jago Morrison, biographical scholars "would like to classify her work as (mere) fiction" (2003, 80).

I admire *The Woman Warrior* for its ability to blur and even erase the fine lines between fiction and non-fiction, or authentic and inauthentic. Institutions tend to keep categories distinct and separate; I prefer to blur their boundaries, and at times, sharpen them as well, for then I can find spaces between. Those who dance in the space between and across boundaries inspire me most. In the Māori account of creation, one of the
several eons of void was a space without boundaries (te kore te wiwia). Sometimes, as I drift off to sleep, I imagine Tāwhirimātea leading me back there. To enter this void, perhaps I could learn from the training of Woman Warrior’s Fa Mu Lan. First, learn to be quiet. Then, learn to make the mind large so that there is room for paradoxes.

Because this project draws upon my interactions with the terrain of Aotearoa New Zealand, I felt I had to learn about the first settlers and stewards of the land. I read Peter Buck’s The Coming of the Maori (1949) and Ranginui Walker’s Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou / Struggle without End (2004) toward the beginning of my exploration of sources. While reading The Coming of the Maori I sometimes felt like I was looking at specimens in a jar, which isn’t entirely surprising, since one of Sir Peter Buck’s legacies is a museum of artifacts behind glass. As for Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou / Struggle without End, although the tone is not angry, it clearly speaks with a voice that participates in cultural politics. Both works are important references, and each has also reminded me why I am not interested in taking either an anthropological or a cultural political approach to getting to know the place I felt call me.

Patricia Grace’s novel Potiki (1986) offered a way to understand Aotearoa New Zealand and Māori interactions with it that differs sharply from the manner of Buck and Walker. Grace’s basic storyline maps out a struggle between a Māori community and developers who want their land.
But below the surface are stories of homecoming, of living in the past, present, and future at once, of not letting people fall through the cracks—stories of how everything is interconnected.

Two main characters narrate events in *Potiki*, Roimata and Toko. These two perspectives leave room for ambiguity, for accepting more than one reality. Since Toko, the youngest child or pōtiki with a special gift of knowing, tells stories from before his birth, throughout his life, and even after his death from his carved existence in the poupou (marae support post), our interpretation of time remains fluid and open. Past, present, and future don’t seem distinctly separate. I appreciate *Potiki* for blurring lines between what is real and what is not, and for challenging linear master narratives.

Patricia Grace creates a place where every voice can be heard. The community repeatedly tells the developers that no one person can speak for the group. Everyone is in charge, and has a voice. Also, when Manu didn’t feel school was the place for him, Roimata understood that he had different kinds of stories and different learning needs. Instead of Roimata becoming his teacher at home, the community all became tellers, listeners, writers, and readers of stories. This approach is important to consider in our efforts to decolonize the academic field of Pacific Islands Studies.

I wasn’t surprised to find *Corporealities* (1996), edited by Susan Leigh Foster, to be a dead end. After seeing the person who recommended it
dance, and after reading a chapter of her anthropology dissertation, I knew that she recognized knowledge in her body and processed information very differently than I do. Her interest in academic analyses of dance is apparent in this collection of articles, heavily laden with dance history theory, which look at the body as a site of cultural experience.

I did appreciate Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter’s discussion of how modern dance has been transmitted in “Antique longings: Genevieve Stebbins and American Delsartean performance.” After arguing that modern dance works have been handed down through oral tradition, Ruyter then wonders if a new term, “bodily tradition,” should be coined. This reminded me that kinesthetic learners continue to be left out. In the process of decolonizing Pacific Islands Studies, much has been said about the western tendency to privilege written traditions over oral traditions. But kinesthetic processes are still barely acknowledged as a means of transmitting traditions.

The introduction to Corporealities was most relevant to my project. It mentions the interplay between dance and history for the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, the Pintupi people of Western Australia, and the Apache of North America. Taking account of events in life is thought by the Kaluli to be a kind of dancing. For the Pintupi, history is a traveling dancer who composed beings and landscapes in its wake. For the Apache, dancing brings the dancer to a lucid present moment. Unfortunately,
these statements are not referenced, and none of the articles in *Corporealities* investigates any of these relationships further.

I asked a Pacific historian for a source that discusses the Kanak belief that a person is from the place where their ancestors' bones are buried, and he suggested I read Maurice Leenhardt's articles and lecture notes *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* (1979). I did not find the information I was looking for, and I'm afraid I prejudged the book when I read that Leenhardt was a Protestant missionary who hoped to gain an understanding of the Canaque world in order to convert Canaque people.

Even though Leenhardt lived in Kanaky / New Caledonia for several years and associated closely with Canaque people, his conclusions regarding how Canaques process information seem to be based on peripheral evidence such as linguistics and art, rather than on primary interviews. Part of me wants to dismiss the book while another appreciates it. It is ridiculous to think that anyone can explain what another person thinks and feels and sees without any attempt to let the subject speak for him/herself. Yet, somehow I feel I understand more about Canaque culture for having read Leenhardt.

According to Vincent Crapanzano in the preface, Leenhardt's ethnographic work was a process of self-understanding as well as an

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* Leenhardt prefers to use the French "Canaque" to distinguish his subject from the more general "kanaka" found throughout the Pacific.
understanding of the other (xi). The book may have been considered progressive for its time, but I still found it difficult to read Leenhardt’s “objective” authoritative voice declare what the Canaque feels, what the Canaque is unable to do, what the Canaque means, etc. “The Canaque” is every Canaque. What Leenhardt has written is obviously based on his own experiences, but it is written at a distance from the personal—and at a distance from the Canaque. While Leenhardt’s style of research and writing distanced me from the reading, it allowed my mind to drift to thoughts about how the voices of scholarship have changed over the last several decades, and how, in its efforts to decolonize the field of Oceanic Studies, the Center for Pacific Islands Studies is encouraging continued change by supporting students who choose to tell their own stories.

While reading some texts seemed like an uphill trudge, Basho’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and other Travel Sketches* (1966) offered an easy stroll into a work emphasizing the importance of seasonal nature. Influenced by Zen Buddhism, Basho expressed universal themes through simple natural images. When in Japan, this aspect of many Japanese aesthetic traditions immediately appealed to me. Understanding how a place changes throughout the year is one way I come to know an area. I didn’t really appreciate Hawai‘i’s tropical climate until I knew to look for whales in winter and mangoes in May. And perhaps I was drawn to
Aotearoa more than any other place in the Pacific is because it experiences seasonal change in a way familiar to me.

Bashō, pseudonym of Matsuo Munefusa (1644-94), is known as Japan’s greatest poet. “The Narrow Road to the Deep North” is a simple record of Bashō’s journey. Though travel was anything but ordinary in those days—his first journey began in 1684—the simple and the ordinary are what stand out for me in Bashō’s travel sketch. The structure of his writing reflects the simplicity of his meditative life. The haibun (a combination of haiku and prose) simply records moments of a journey. And as the convener of a writing workshop I took during my first term in Wellington pointed out to me, for Bashō it was the journeying that took him in: “Whether drifting through life on a boat or climbing toward old age leading a horse, each day is a journey and the journeying itself is home.”

Translator Nobuyuki Yuasa describes Bashō as having the ability to enter into “the spirit of place” (37). I sometimes feel the spirit of a place enter into me. This may be because I am not a master of the moment like Bashō, who had the ability to enter rather than be entered. But it may also be because I value listening over imposing. It may just be a matter of semantics, because if human and pine are truly to become one, then I imagine they have entered each other. It was what Bashō described as his “wind-swept spirit,” that devoted his life to writing poetry (71).
I left winter in Wellington for ten days on a boat in the Indian Ocean—one of three non-surfers tagging along on a surf trip. I tried to enter these waters through David Lewis's *We, the Navigators: The Ancient Art of Landfinding in the Pacific* (1994). Lewis's explanations of technical methods of landfinding are out of my depth, yet his writing style is easy enough to understand that between bouts of sea-sickness I attempted to understand (without much success) my location in/on the ocean.

Lewis was a creature of the sea. As a teenager he traveled 430 miles in a canoe. He entered transatlantic races as an adult, and he sailed around the world with his family. He grew up on Rarotonga, listening to sagas of Kupe and other ocean voyagers. He found the sea to be homey and not unfriendly. He saw a gap in the scholarship of indigenous navigation and sought to fill it with information based on actual experience at sea and from indigenous navigators. Lewis found out that voyagers journeyed for adventure, pride, conquest, fishing, trading, and exile. Accidental drifts, and deliberate returns from drifts also set them traveling.

I appreciate Lewis's inclusion of the Indian Ocean, the Arctic, the Philippines, and Indonesia. It's a reminder that the boundaries defining "the Pacific" are artificial. I also appreciate Lewis's reminder that curiosity, a thirst for adventure, and a wandering spirit can exist without a
desire to dominate. The ocean for navigators was a familiar and friendly
place, not an element to conquer (298).

Before I began to travel and to write about the journey, a few
readings heightened my awareness of what I wanted my writing to serve
and not serve. *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle, and Displacement*
edited by Kristi Seigle (2002) and Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel
Writing and Transculturation* (1992) were useful critiques of what I wanted
not to do. (I started to feel as if I could write a proposal about why I
shouldn’t travel and write about it.) But Paul John Eakin’s *How Our Lives
Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999) illuminated the personal importance
the project had for me. Eakin sees autobiography as “a mode of
phenomenological and cognitive self-experience” (100) thus linking
narrative and identity. I believed I would come out of my auto-
ethnographic investigation of my relationship with Aotearoa New
Zealand with a deeper understanding of myself, with the sense of self
Eakin sees as “less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in
process” (x).

At the beginning of my directed reading with Teresia Teaiwa, I saw
no specific path — just a forest of sources from many different areas. But as
I explored these sources, meeting Teresia at trail markers, a path formed
beneath my feet. Each of these better heightened my awareness of my
own location. Since most of my reading took place during my own
transition to a new city, country, and institution, I soon came to consider
myself one of those transitional beings Victor Turner describes in “Betwixt
and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage” (1987). Although
Turner focuses on rites of passage, and more specifically, on transitions
during initiation rites, I think his understanding of processes of transition
can be applied more generally. Processes of transition can still be ritual
passages, even if the rituals are less prescribed, and the states on either
side of the liminal period less defined. Similarly, the transitional being,
whom Turner calls “neophyte,” has experiences that can be noted more
generally. Neophytes are in a condition “of ambiguity and paradox, a
confusion of all the customary categories” (7). They are neither here nor
there, in a space where there is at once nothing and all possibilities.
Separated from a state they know, they are seen as an “other.”

While the liminal period is a time for neophytes to figure things out
for themselves, they are often given instructions which guide their
passage through the transition. During an initiation rite, “neophytes are
alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their
cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them” (14). Often
during transitions, people consider more closely the world around them
and their place in it. In fact, more often than not, the situation forces and
encourages the thinking rather than instructors, though I do believe the
Zen axiom that when the student is ready the teacher will appear.
I appreciate Turner's focus on the liminal period because it complicates binary relationships. It is possible to be neither and both A nor/and B, and during this time interesting and creative processes can occur. The liminal period "is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being" (11).

At the end of my reading path I found myself not so far from where I had begun. What I gained from the directed reading with Teresia was a greater comfort with finding my own way and voice. Walking through a variety of written texts showed me that my ideas of voice resonate more closely with the writings of Kingston and Bashō than with the works of Buck, Walker, or Leenhardt. Like Potiki and The Woman Warrior, this project seeks to blur the lines between what is real and what is not, and even between what is an acceptable academic MA thesis and what is not.5

In finding my way through a forest of texts, I found comfort in knowing that scholars such as David Lewis, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Matsuo Bashō have shown that journeys in unfamiliar places need not be about conquest. They can indeed be about expanding one's own consciousness.

In Teresia's office I found the support necessary to make sense of my approach to my thesis. This comfort in meeting with Teresia came as

5 This project was originally intended to be submitted as a thesis. The proposal was approved, but in the end, one committee member found the genre to be inappropriate for a thesis. Therefore, it has been submitted as a portfolio project.
something of a surprise after writing my proposal in Hawai‘i in a class supervised by her younger sister Katerina. I found Katerina’s classroom persona forceful. Teresia’s softer, more seasoned, approach was a welcome change. It is therefore with some irony and guilt that I mention here that reading Teresia Teaiwa’s *bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans* (2000) helped me understand what I find most limiting about Pacific Islands Studies.

This insightful article focuses on the erasure of Bikini Islander history by not only nuclear testing, which dispossessed people from their land, but by the naming of the two-piece swimwear commodity after the atoll. Teaiwa points out that islanders were subject to radiation during U.S. military nuclear testing. In an endnote she also refers to Robert Stone’s film *Radio Bikini*, a film I had seen a couple of years before reading the article, which discusses the affects that the nuclear testing had on unprepared U.S. military personnel. As I read this article, I came to understand more clearly why it is perfectly natural for Oceanic scholars to privilege Oceanic peoples and cultures and reduce others to an endnote. While I see the rationale in doing this, and especially since Oceania has historically been underrepresented in the academy, I realized that the pursuit of moving Pacific peoples and cultures from the periphery to the center is a task too narrow to move me.
Most in my department agree that insider/outsider binary discourse not particularly useful, since most “Pacific scholars” tend to be both insiders and outsiders at once. But this binary continues to frame the field. While the Center for Pacific Islands Studies may be one of the few places on this institutional campus that could value this MA project, it is still difficult for me to feel at home in an academic field framed by such dichotomous relationships. And yet, while Oceanic studies may not ultimately be my arena, my time and study in Oceania has helped me find my way back to trusting my body, to listening to the land, and to recognizing the boundaries I need to fly over or through to create enough space for my spirit to dance.
Wellington winter

daily descent
different today
Wellington winter
upon me

gray, gusty, wet

ti leaves called "cabbage" flail
belting an aria,
irises cower across the way

the knee
which foretold the rain
punctuates every other step

premature dusk

I remember July
Jersey shore
Vermont poppies
drag fetes in the meat-packing district

now, seasonal knowledge
turned on its head
Bastille Day passed unnoticed

from the tropical climes
of a so called paradise
I imagined this winter
with shivering dread

but now that it's upon me
I welcome the inevitable
seep into my bones
During the sixteen months I spent in New Zealand, I left the country three times. Less than two months into my stay I went to Indonesia to join my then boyfriend on a surf trip. (A relationship that should have stayed in Hawai‘i.) At the six month mark I went to Japan for a friend’s a marriage. It was her dream wedding at Tokyo Disney. When Mickey and Minnie made their black-tie appearances, the experience became surreal. Then, about the time I was supposed to end my stay in Aotearoa, I went to India, and also extended my time in New Zealand by a few months. Since I was looking for significance around every bend while traveling in Aotearoa, these three trips out of the country were a break from prescribed intentions of meaning making.

I never thought of India as a place I’d like to visit. Even after yoga became an important practice in my life, I was not overcome with desire to visit a crowded country struggling to meet the challenges of feeding its people and hygienically disposing of their waste. Only when an Indian friend invited me to travel with her did I start to get excited about the idea. Saraswati’s traveling period coincided with my spring break. I took that as a sign, and contacted my travel agent.

Guidebooks and travel websites describe arriving in India as overwhelming. Saraswati and I exchanged several excited emails. I had
carefully set my arrival within Saraswati's window of availability, but after I purchased my ticket she let me know she wouldn't be meeting me at the airport, or at all on my first day in India. To reduce possible stressors I booked a hotel in advance. Although many visitors to India look like travel-when-the-inspiration-hits bohemian westerners, going to India requires a lot of planning. And even those who "go with the flow" recommend reserving a room for the first night. I went a step further, and arranged for transportation from the airport. Knowing I'd see my name on a placard upon exiting customs gave me peace of mind. I also knew I wouldn't have to defend my luggage from a porter who would lead me to a taxi with a driver I would need to bargain with to go to a location I had never been before.

In slow moving traffic it took nearly two hours to reach Marine Drive. Where the flow of traffic was more fluid, I was surprised that the streets were less chaotic than in Indonesia. They were however unruly enough that a friend's advice remained appropriate: "Being an auto passenger in India is less nerve-racking if you just remember that you're going to die sometime."

The two things that stood out for me from that ride probably epitomize what stays with many western visitors to India—little physical wealth and an abundance of spiritual assets. Outside of my air-conditioned, isolated space were vast areas in the outskirts of Mumbai
covered with small, low-to-the-ground dwellings with plastic tarp roofs. Some were close enough to the road that I could see which homes had cardboard box floors and which had just dirt. I also noticed what looked like a miniature snow globe on the taxi dashboard. A clear plastic dome about twice the size of a thimble protected a figure sitting inside. The driver told me the figure was Ganapathi, which I later found out was another name for Ganesha. Ganesha, “the lord of hosts,” received me into Mumbai.

I made it to the hotel without incident. That afternoon I went through a few cycles of walking around Mumbai; becoming overwhelmed by the traffic, the noise, the heat, the pollution, and looking like I was out of place; then resting in the hotel until I had enough energy to face the city again. In my room I escaped the honking horns and enjoyed the circulation of cool air.

I didn’t take any pictures in Mumbai. I already drew so much attention as a foreign woman traveling alone that I didn’t want even more eyes on me as I framed scenes on my camera’s screen. Many of the sites the guidebook suggested visiting were highlights of colonial architecture. As a student in a program that celebrates survival in spite of colonialism, I wasn’t so interested in seeking out monuments to the staying power of hegemony.
People on the street noticed when I stepped out onto my fourth floor balcony facing the Arabian Sea. I stood in the hot breeze for a few minutes, gazing at the choppy gray water, before I felt the eyes on me. A few couples and many men were sitting on a low wall which ran along the shore. Several men faced the city instead of the sea, so they noticed when I was on my balcony. After several hours, I noticed that some of them were in the same place. I wondered what their stories were. They seemed to be dressed for work, but they spent the day sitting on a wall.

Later that evening I called Saraswati to see how we would meet the next day. Apparently she wasn't planning on coming into Mumbai, and she asked how many nights I had reserved the hotel for.

- Well, since your email said we'd be staying at your grandmother's or your cousin's tomorrow night, I only booked the hotel for one night. If I need to stay another night, I can check if it's available.

- No, I'm sure you're welcome to stay here. Let me just ask . . .

I was beginning to wonder if I had imagined Saraswati's invitation to travel with her.

When we did meet, I gave her a t-shirt as a small souvenir from New Zealand. "The last thing I need is a new t-shirt," she said. Saraswati believes in zero waste, and tries to avoid accumulating unnecessary things, which is ironic, since she was traveling around India with more bags than
she could carry. I still felt cast aside. I didn’t talk with her about the times when I felt unwelcome. Instead I worked on letting go of expectations I had placed on a good friend who had invited me to travel with her. I also decided that bad-host karma was coming around to bite me for the terrible job I did with a cousin I had invited to drive across the United States and part of Canada with me. We could barely stand each other from San Francisco to New York, then I was so inhospitable on the second leg of the trip that my cousin took the car and left me in Ottawa.

Looking back on my trip to India, I’d have to say that Hanuman was my true host. Saraswati was just the instigator, putting lightness beneath my feet. Then Tāwhirimātea blew me in the direction of his brother of the skies, Vayu, Hindu god of the wind. Vayu immediately passed me on to his spiritual son, Hanuman. I thought he was following me, but of course the cheeky monkey was leading all the time.

Hanuman is known for his devotion to Rama, and for reuniting Rama with his wife Sita in the Ramayana War. So deeply did he revere the couple, that he once tore his chest open to reveal that Rama and Sita were literally in his heart. As one would expect of a monkey, Hanuman is mischievous, but he acts out of compassion. Hanuman looked after me.

After a 24-hour train ride from Mumbai, Saraswati and I arrived in Varanasi, a holy city along the Ganges River. We stayed at the Sankat Mochan Temple, which is dedicated to Hanuman, and accordingly houses
many monkeys of all ages. From the ground of the large courtyard beside
the temple, graying monkeys observed the younger ones playing in the
large banyan tree. Mothers carried their young, paying little attention to
the people around them. When I first saw the monkeys running around
the grounds, I heard the voice of the frigid travel doctor whom I consulted
before I left New Zealand. She warned against being scratched or bitten
by any mammals, and particularly temple monkeys. "If you get rabies,
you will die."

Saraswati and I stayed at the guesthouse. The director of the NGO
Saraswati works for in Kansas knew someone on the board that oversees
the temple. This man had a very long name, and Saraswati soon gave up
on reminding me who he was every time she mentioned his name. She
just referred to him as our "benefactor." Since many people received and
supported us, by the end of our trip we had a hierarchy of benefactors.
The director in Kansas was the Super Benefactor. Each location in India
had a Main Benefactor. Then there were Junior Benefactors who hosted
dinners, and even a Mrs. Junior Benefactor, who enjoyed having company
enter her big empty house for a change.

Sankat Mochan is the oldest temple dedicated to Hanuman in
Varanasi. On March 7, 2006 a bomb killed ten people at the temple.
Tightened security today does not allow cameras or cell phones past the
security check point. Since the guest house is within the temple grounds,
Saraswati had to go through quite a lot of explaining about why we wanted to enter with all our luggage. Our benefactor was not there to meet us, but a temple employee came out and we breezed through the metal detectors. We set them off, but didn’t turn back.

Re-entering the temple always meant re-negotiating our entrance. Because Saraswati made several gestures in my direction when she exchanged greetings and stories with one of the female security guards, I assumed the guard would remember me when it came time for me to enter alone. I remembered that her name was Lakshmi and that she usually wore dark jewel-tone saris. But when I greeted her with a familiar smile and tried to enter with my backpack, she manhandled me and pointed toward the lockers outside. One of the military men heard the commotion and rescued me. After that, I always looked for this man with the rifle. He seemed to work around the clock, but just in case, I had Saraswati write in Hindi, "I am staying at the Sankat Mochan guesthouse."

We were very well taken care of at the guesthouse. The peaceful round face of the man who brought us through the security station the first night seemed to radiate compassion. I had no idea what he was saying, but I knew it was about making sure our needs were met. When we asked him to put a few items in the refrigerator he received them as if they were offerings, raising them close to his forehead for a moment. I
wasn't sure if we would see them again. Perhaps he thought they were gifts for the temple. But our handful of sprouted beans and half a cucumber were indeed waiting for us the next day.

I only saw that man once during my week at the temple. Umesh took care of the day-to-day guesthouse needs. He cooked two meals a day, sent out our washing, and took care of us. He even tried to evict a mouse from our room, but in the end, Saras and I shared the room with the mouse. He was there first, and he mostly stayed between a dirty old couch and the wall.

Of the millions of people who visit Varanasi, many come on a pilgrimage to bathe in the Ganges River. Ganga-ji was flowing rapidly and high, and we were advised not to take a boat ride. Although I had hoped to see the ghats (ritual bathing areas) from the river, I didn’t want to capsize into raw sewage. Varanasi is only one of the many cities along the River Ganga that flushes its waste directly into the river. The Mahant (High Priest) of the Sankat Mochan Temple is also a Professor of Hydraulic Engineering at Banaras Hindu University. He is committed to raising awareness in India of the problems facing Ganga-ji. But he also challenges foreign entities like the UN, which has declared bathing an inappropriate use of the river. Although the Mahant has contracted such
water-born diseases as polio and hepatitis, he continues to bathe daily in
the River Ganga for spiritual sustenance.

Though I wasn't planning on bathing in the river, I at least wanted
to touch what is arguably the holiest river in the world. Saraswati and I
approached Ganga-ji at Assi Ghat, at the southern end of the city. A small
bit of land sticks out, so there is a corner of water in front of the ghat that
collects flotsam. We arrived after the evening ceremony, so the debris
included candles, incense sticks, flower petals, bowls made of leaves to
hold offerings, and a few polystyrene containers. Recent rains brought the
river to cover several steps of the ghat, but it was too muddy to see
anything below the surface. As I bent down and greeted Ganga-ji with an
open hand, Saraswati said that I was braver than she was. I touched the
water, sprinkled some over my head, and even touched my hand to my
lips. Then I turned to Saras and said, "She's your mother." She eventually
touched Ganga-ji too.

Saraswati left Varanasi three days before I did to do some work in
Allahabad on behalf of her NGO. During those days on my own, I had the
"tourist" experience. Around the temple and in more remote areas with
Saraswati, it was refreshing to be mistaken for Nepalese or Tibetan. But
on my own, in the more frequented areas of the city, I was pegged for
either a Japanese- or English-speaking tourist. I understand that some
people are in dire financial circumstances, and that taking advantage of
tourists is one way to help their family get by. But I lose my patience when I'm treated like a bag of money. Several people tried to open me up with the approach that they were helping me, but the conversation would invariably end with an invitation to a cousin's silk shop. I just started to ignore everyone.

In beautiful Japanese a neatly dressed local guy warned me that there were a lot of pick-pockets in the area, then he explained that he was a student looking for a Japanese conversation partner. He even had specific grammatical questions, but he never paused for my reactions. Though he never mentioned a cousin's silk shop, it felt like a sales pitch, so when I got tired of having him walk next to me, I turned and lied in English, "I'm not Japanese." He apologized, and allowed me to continue without his company.

The bicycle rickshaw prices also went up to tourist scale. Negotiating before hopping into the carriage didn't work. I told one driver where I wanted to go, and said that I would pay him twenty rupees. He said OK, I got in the carriage, he peddled down the road a few meters, then asked again where I was going. Suddenly the price went up to 100 rupees. I laughed, he continued to peddle, I tapped him on the back and told him to pull over because I didn't want to pay 100 rupees. He motioned with his hand for me to sit down and that everything would be
alright. He stopped somewhere near the place I wanted to go, and asked for 40 rupees. I spoke to him as if he understood English.

- I know this ride should only cost 10 rupees. I offered you 20 before I got into the rickshaw and you agreed. A deal’s a deal, buddy.

He put up four fingers.

- I’m going to think of this as a donation and give you the 40 rupees.

But once I did, he took one of the ten rupee notes and waved it at me asking for one more.

- You must be waving that to give it back to me because I’ve just given you 40 rupees for a 10-rupee ride.

He put one finger up and waved his hand toward himself, as if that would coax the money in his direction.

- You’re a bad man, and now I’m walking away.

He wasn’t actually asking for much in the grand scheme of what I could afford, but I’m angry when I’m taken advantage of.

Of all the bicycle rickshaw rides I took, I encountered only one honest driver. I’m sad that I remember the faces of the ones who took advantage, and I don’t remember any physical features of the hardworking man who didn’t ask any more of me than he would have asked of a local.
But I do remember the face of the gentle soul who never pushed me
to buy anything in his shop. Of course, this is where I bought the most.
Though in Varanasi for less than a week, and I visited the Maa Ganga
store near Assi Ghat five times. I spent hours there drinking chai and
chatting with Sonu, the shop owner. Out of a shop about the size of a
small walk-in closet, I bought a cotton top, a skirt, a pair of pants, two silk
scarves, sugar coated fennel seeds, tea, and saffron. And I made a friend.

Our conversations were like a Tongan talanoa—one topic just
flowed into the next. There was no structure or agenda. As we say in
Hawai‘i, we were just “talking story.” Sonu answered my questions about
Indian culture. He described the beautiful mountainous area of India he
had recently visited. I told him about the people I was buying gifts for in
his shop. He showed me the cards he always carried of the goddess
Gayatri and the Gayatri mantra. When I told him I wanted one too, he
offered to take me to the Gayatri temple he visited daily.

Gayatri was the one mantra I knew. I had learned it from my
favorite yoga instructor in Hawai‘i. After chanting it at the end of class, I
would float home spiritually high yet grounded in clarity. I thought
visiting the Gayatri Temple would be a more authentic experience than
the polite exercises in appreciation I practiced at the larger temples.

As Sonu and I walked toward the temple on a small dirt road, the
sounds of city traffic receded into the distance. What met my ears instead
were voices chanting a familiar mantra toward the end of their morning puja (ritual of reverence). In the main temple chamber, several alcoves were built into the walls, each for a goddess. Sonu introduced me to each one. Gayatri was in the middle, combining past, present, and future; creation, preservation, and destruction. We sat and meditated for a few minutes. Being in a small temple with no metal detector and no hype, calmed me. I felt peaceful, meditating surrounded by several goddesses. I repeated the Gayatri mantra silently a few times before I stood up. “Om bhur bhuva svah tat savitur varenyam bhargo devya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayat om.” There are many translations, interpretations, and scientific analyses of the resonance of the Gayatri mantra. The one I learned first came from the Iyengar Institute: Let us meditate on the highest light so that we can transform our own.

Before we left the temple, I reminded Sonu that I wanted to buy the cards in a plastic protector that he had shown me the day before. The temple had many books and talismans for sale. I bought a CD of the Gayatri mantra and the cards I had come for. Sonu had picked out a keychain with the goddess Gayatri on one side and on the other side the same yantra (interlocking geometric figures) that was on our second card. I asked him if I could buy that for him as a gift. He looked at me sternly and said, “I’m buying this.” I was afraid I had insulted him by offering to pay for his keychain. I backed off.
We took a bicycle rickshaw to Assi Ghat so that I could take a picture of Sonu at his shop. The rickshaw driver charged twice what Sonu usually paid because he had a foreigner with him. Sonu let me buy us one last round of chai. We sat by the River Ganga and talked story. Sonu opened up his shop with his ritual incense burning and prayers. I waited near the entrance and enjoyed the fragrance of sandalwood. We took turns posing in the tiny shop. Then it was time to say good-bye. Sonu walked me outside. He extended his arm with a closed fist and said, "This is for you." I put my hand under his fist. He dropped into it the Gayatri keychain. I nearly cried.

As I walked away from Assi Ghat someone asked me if I needed a bicycle rickshaw.

- I'm going to Sankat Mochan Temple.
- 50 rupees to Sankat Mochan Temple.
- It only cost me ten to get here, and it's only supposed to cost five.
- No, no madam, 20 rupees is the price.
- Fine. Whatever.

Back at the guesthouse, Umesh and I tried desperately and comically to communicate with one another. He wanted to know what time I would be leaving the next day, because my washing wouldn't be back until after 11:00 AM. That was easy enough. But when I tried to find
out how much money Saras and I owed him for the bottled water he brought us on the first night, it was time for charades and getting out the "useful phrase" section of the guidebook. Instead of butchering the language, I pointed to the closest phrases to what I wanted to say, but Umesh couldn't read them because they were Romanized pronunciation guides to the Hindi, not Hindi writing. So I tried to sound things out. Umesh seemed to be following along until I got so excited flipping through the pages that I moved into the Tamil language section of the book. Tamil is spoken in southern India. Even if I had produced the phrases flawlessly, Umesh wouldn't have understood. At the end of our funny communication game, what I heard him say was "Keep your money." There must be a phrase in Hindi that sounds and means the same.

The next morning before leaving for Allahabad to rejoin Saraswati, I wanted to thank Hanuman properly for taking care of me while I was at his temple. I had become familiar with the path around the structure that housed the deity. Devotees touched the wall, placed their foreheads against it, and wrote scriptures in the air with their fingers. I wasn't a devotee. My forehead never made it to the wall. Instead, I touched the wall with my hand then touched my forehead. I stood before the image of Hanuman, put my hands together, and thanked him. The part of the temple for Rama and Sita was closed, but I gave them a greeting as well.
As I headed back to the guesthouse I noticed that someone was trying to get my attention. It was Umesh. He motioned back toward the center of the temple, and asked a question with his deep black eyes. I spoke as if he understood English.

- Yes, I was just saying good-bye to Hanuman.

He pointed to his forehead and silently asked another question. Then he motioned for me to follow him.

We walked around the structure, touching the wall, and stopped at the side. I hadn't noticed before that there was a place to put a tilaka on one's forehead. Umesh was asking if I wanted one. I shrugged my shoulders, but he already had the red coloring on his finger. I moved my face closer to his hand, and he opened up my third eye. Then he brought me right up to the front of the group standing before the deity. He motioned for me to put a cupped hand out. A priest filled it with water. I looked around. The man next to me was drinking his and sprinkling it over his head, so I did the same. Then Umesh talked to the priest for a few seconds and motioned for me to put both my hands out. The priest laid a garland of flowers and leaves into my hands. Umesh was satisfied, and we went back to the guest house.

When I reached Allahabad, Hanuman was on a poster facing my bed. Before I told Saraswati of my time without her, I asked her if he was
following us. The next day, before we started sightseeing with a junior, junior benefactor, we saw three boys putting on costumes and makeup, preparing to perform in the street for donations. One of them was dressed as Hanuman. It wasn’t until much later, after I acknowledged my own insignificance, that I recognized that Hanuman wasn’t following us. He was leading the whole time—from Varanasi to Allahabad, and even south to Bangalore and Mysore. He twirled me around until Tāwhirimātea cut in to waft me back to Aotearoa.

The only time I didn’t feel Hanuman’s breezes was in Sarnath. Every place we went there had no fans and no wind. We had made the trip to participate in a one-day Vipassana course, to sit where Buddha had given his first sermon, and to visit the museum that housed the Ashoka pillar, an artifact I had seen in many books and art history lecture slides.

Saraswati and I both had romantic notions of taking a one-day meditation course so close to the site of Buddha’s first sermon. But the trickster Hanuman took the opportunity to remind me that while away from Aotearoa, I was on a vacation from significance. The Vipassana center’s generator was down, so the ceiling fans in the meditation room hung motionless. The room was a cement box, trapping in heat. Meditating in a sauna for eight hours would have been more comfortable. At least in a sauna there are no bugs.
The woman sitting in front of me must have had sugar in her bag. Lines of ants from virtually every direction were marching toward it. Flies were also getting trapped between the layers of her sari. After a bit of frantic buzzing, they'd find their way out. Saraswati lent me a piece of fabric to keep the flies away from my head. The scarf was made of a fiber that didn't breathe, so I was holding more heat close to my body. At the time, it seemed more desirable than having flies play in the rivers of sweat running down my face.

Hanuman held his winds still, laughing at Saraswati and me as we learned a lesson about expectation.
harbingers

Forsythias
were the first to bloom
in our garden

Nanohana
open before their international guests
at Nabana no Sato

Daffodils
have their own festival
in Meriden

Kōwhai
are the messengers of spring
beneath the long white cloud
in the fernery

under a three-note lilting canopy
light infuses space
textured air pushes flora
generations unfurl
acknowledge

Tuhia ki te rangi
Tuhia ki te whenua
Tuhia ki te ngākau o ngā tāngata
Ko te mea nui
ko te aroha
Tihei mauri ora!

Rangi e tū nei tēnā koe.
Papatūānuku e takoto mai nei tēnā koe.
A, tēnā kōrua, tēnā kōrua.

Ka aro atu au ki te whitinga mai o te rā.
Ki rongo o te tihi o ūji.
Te whenua tipu ōku mātua tipuna.

Moemoe rā, okioki rā,
koutou kua wheturangitia
Piata mai tō aroha noa
heī korowai mō ngā mokopuna nei.

E ngā mana, e ngā reo,
e ngā iwi o te ao,
aku rangatira,
e ngā kaiako, e hoa mā
Nau mai, hara mai, whakatau mai
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

I whānau mai ahau ki Amerika.
Engari, e haere ana ahau mā runga i ngā hau e whā.
No reira, nō te whenua kei raro i ōku waewae au.
E ngā tāngata whenua e, whakawhetai atu nei ki a koutou mō tēnei whai
wāhi ki te tū au i konei.
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.
ritual encounters

Thwack!

"No worries, girl. If the ancient Māoris had golf balls, they’d a wacked ‘em off this mountain, too."

Pops took his shot off the side of Mount Moumoukai and into the valley. My language instructor Pania, her daughter, and two young men from my language class hit their shots off the peak of the mountain toward the distant ranges meeting the sky.

Pops’s iwi belongs to Moumoukai. Since he said it was all right, and since four other Māori followed him to the tee, I let go of feeling like it would be disrespectful, and wacked a golf ball off a sacred mountain, too. A tail wind caught the ball and it soared out of sight. We headed back down to join the group, which had gathered together in a small area more protected from the elements.

Before hitting a golf ball off Mount Moumoukai, I had read in Māori a little about its history. Rākaipākā, a sub-tribe of the area, held its ground at the top of the mountain for so long because the surrounding area was abundant in both forest and sea resources. When others tried to attack the pa, the people of Rākaipākā threw rocks, and even food at them. Pops was probably right. If they had had golf balls, they would have wacked them at intruders as well.
Panía had brought her Māori language class to Tuahuru Marae in Te Māhia for a week-long stay to serve the rural community and to improve fluency among her students. During most marae stays, people are only allowed to speak Māori, but three international guests were invited at the last minute, so English was spoken much of the time.

Some of my classmates were disappointed. I was relieved. The gap between language levels from one semester to the next was further than I could bridge. In the first semester, with a different instructor, we had focused on one grammatical structure or idiomatic phrase at a time. When this class began, we jumped right into historical Māori texts, as the classroom became an environment for acquiring the language through total immersion. I was sinking more often than swimming.

In the beginning, Panía’s energy was a bright beacon that led me back to the surface. As the semester went on, though, one beacon wasn’t enough. She had those of us who were struggling sit next to someone who understood, so they could translate for us. We were all in it together.

I had stayed on a marae the semester before, but it lasted only 24 hours, and was a mandatory part of the course. Though I found the language level of that class manageable, I was nervous about being required to speak only Māori. I was quiet for much of the time, but the two days were well organized. Marae elders talked about the carvings in
the whare nui. We played language games and learned songs. We created group skits based on Māori proverbs. We all pitched in around the marae, but our meals were prepared for us. And we stayed at Te Herenga Waka Marae, at Victoria University—walking distance from my apartment. I never felt the need to leave the marae, but if I couldn’t fight any longer my reticence to make mistakes in Māori, flight would have been possible.

Almost one year later, the stay at Tuahuru Marae lasted a week, and the marae was in rural Te Māhia, a few hours away from my home. No escape from this marae stay. Some of my classmates came a day late, or left a couple of days early with their own transportation. One girl stayed with friends and family in one of the cities we visited in the middle of the week, then joined us again at the end. I thought she had a family commitment, but when she came back, she told me she had just needed to get away. But most of us were there for the duration, without a way out.

It wasn’t just that communal living was difficult, which of course it was. It was also that this was the most disorganized marae stay many of the students had ever participated in. I didn’t have much to compare it to, but apparently my first marae stay, though short, was typical in that everybody knew what they were supposed to be doing, at what time, and for how long. This trip had an itinerary—every day was filled with
several activities—but the timetables were not always communicated to us, except for the frequent “Everyone get over here now!”

A longer marae stay is of course more difficult to organize, and creating a week-long program for more than thirty college-aged students is not a challenge many people would welcome. Some students had chosen not to join the trip at all, because they foresaw the stressors. But when in the midst of plans gone amuck, most of us were more in touch with what was frustrating us than we were with the challenges facing the organizers.

So when the stresses of disorganization and disrespectful tones started to take their toll, we each had our own coping mechanisms. Some people got sick. This allowed more time to rest, and more control over their own schedules. Some people stayed mellow by smoking herb. There were impromptu bitching sessions. A few people rose above it all and just worked harder. I joined the group smoking cigarettes outside the whare kai. At first I bummed cigarettes from people, but when we had an outing to a larger town, I bought a pack of my own.

During a marae stay there is always something to do. We were cooking and cleaning for ourselves as well as studying, practicing songs, and going on excursions. There was no real reason to stand around and do nothing. But smoking and bonding with classmates was a different
matter. It was a chance to burn away frustrations and take a moment to focus on inhaling and exhaling. The carcinogens felt good.

My translation buddy in the immersion classes was also a student of “non-traditional” age. She participated in some of the marae stay activities, but she slept in the next town, where she had friends and family. Coming and going on her own schedule was her way of keeping the chaos at bay. When the activities seemed pointless, she would just leave.

She saw me smoking outside one morning.

“I didn’t know you smoked.”

“I don’t really.”

She laughed knowingly.

“Now you know why you always see the kuia (old women) out smoking near the whare kai.”

Tuahuru marae sits virtually on the ocean, backed by a large hill. I enjoyed being on the breakfast set up crew, because the early morning sun showed the marae in the best light. The whare nui faced east. Morning sun showed off all the colors of the scene—the lawn, the carvings of the whare, the sheep grazing on the hill that met the sky. Rain clouds often moved in before breakfast was over, and the group of more than thirty created a cacophony which overpowered the peaceful sound of waves crashing on the nearby beach.
One day Koro Bill, one of the kaumatua of Te Māhia, and a couple of men from our group came back with their morning catch—various fish, a medium sized shark and a little one, and an octopus. Everyone helped untangle the nets. The five small children from the three families that were part of our group were especially excited when they felt the suction of the octopus tentacles. Later everyone enjoyed the shark and fish, battered and served with chips.

Although Māori is one of the national languages of Aotearoa New Zealand, acquiring the language is not necessary to get by. One of my classmates from the semester before joined us because he was from Te Māhia. His language abilities had greatly improved from what I had remembered. He had visited his aunties who lived nearby. They had always been more comfortable speaking Māori than English, but it wasn’t until this visit that Ewan could allow them that comfort. He was not exactly surprised at how much more expressive they were, but still it staggered him. Fluency for Ewan therefore meant communicating on another level with his relatives. I had experienced something similar when I was studying Japanese. Talking to my relatives was a far more satisfying measure of how much language I’d acquired than any exam grade. It was also a good indicator of how much work was still ahead.
I took on te reo Māori because I thought that learning the language of the first settlers of the land would help me better understand an entity that had communicated with me. Coming to know what others have perceived and received from the land has brought me closer to what breathes beneath the surface, in addition to what has been layered upon it. But as I get closer to understanding the landscapes of Aotearoa, I also see more clearly the distances that remain.

Whenever an opportunity came up to learn something from the land, I thought I would soak it up. But when Koro Bill shared the history, legends, and genealogies of the area, my mind was a sieve. Early in the semester, Pania had encouraged us to consider what we were ready to take and also what we had earned the right to take from the Māori language. Because I was welcomed onto that marae, and invited to listen to Koro Bill’s stories, I had believed the tangata whenua had also extended permission to me to learn what was offered. I guess I wasn’t ready.

Those fully able to understand Koro Bill’s talks had to take on the responsibility of figuring out what that information meant for them, and then of applying that knowledge to gain wisdom, and ultimately, of sharing what they had gained. When I accepted the reality of the situation—the facts and descriptions fell away—my disappointment fell away as well. The wind carrying the words away from me was actually a
gift, since I certainly wasn’t prepared to take on responsibilities which would have accompanied gaining that knowledge.

Koro Bill’s memory houses many accounts of the land to which the iwi of Rongomai Wahine belong. One account I do remember concerns two giant rocks in the shape of snapper, facing each other at the shoreline. They had something to do with irreconcilable differences at war between friends, who were frozen as fish there, so that neither friend had to defeat the other. A land feature which shows Rongomai wahine’s profile and her hair flowing into the ocean is an icon of that area. And what looks like just another grass-covered mound not far from the ocean is a site where one of the first whare wānangas in that area stood. It was once, and still is, a site where knowledge was/is gained and transferred.

Other than our few hours with Koro Bill around the shoreline and climbing up Moumoukai, our outdoor time was spent picking garbage off Māhia Beach. Since it was winter, cold and rainy, there were no holiday beach goers, but there was lots of rubbish. We spent one day filling up garbage bags on our own, then another day teamed up with students from the local elementary school. We put on a morning program of sports and games at the school, had them help us clean up the beach, then we fed them lunch and took them for a warm soak at the Morere Hot Springs.
One of my classmates found a glass cylinder among the trash on the beach. "That's a bong," one of the younger elementary school students said. "Oh? What's that?" my classmate asked as he put it in a garbage bag. The boy, about seven years old, went on to explain how the instrument is used.

One of our outings was a visit to a marae in the next town. As we walked onto the marae, the spokesperson for our group had one of our German guests sit in the front row. Apparently the young man was from the same German town as someone who had played an important part in the history of the people we were visiting, and our group speaker highlighted this connection in his whaikōrero. But he did not explain the reason for having the German student sit in the front row to our group until after a few Māori classmates had been offended that someone not from the culture took such a prominent seat in a traditional ceremony. Nothing was explained to our German guest either. Our speaker had just dictated to him where to sit.

A little later that same day, the German student became offended because he thought the bossy spokesperson was cursing at him while they were getting food. Klaus didn’t find out until later that someone else had made the dismissive comment, and knowing the comment came from elsewhere somehow made the situation a little more bearable. Rather than
feeling like one person was picking on him, now the incidents seemed like random occurrences of cultural misunderstandings.

At a meeting later that night people aired their frustrations and cleared up misunderstandings. Tensions dissipated, but some Māori men were still offended by having the German sit in front. And Klaus said that when the second misunderstanding occurred he was so angry he thought about leaving. Pania said that she wouldn’t have let him leave. She said that as the host, it was her responsibility to take care of him. As part of the Māori concept of manaakitanga, she would have had to stop him from going. “Manaaki” means to show kindness to, or entertain. It also encompasses everything necessary to take care of a guest.

The man who dictated to Klaus where to sit also explained that it is part of Māori culture to jump when an elder snaps his or her fingers. I found this ironic coming from someone not much older than the students, but an example confirmed the explanation when we attended a funeral the next day. When a kuia instructed some boys sitting at the front of the whare to clear the shoes cluttering the entrance, the boys indeed jumped.

Toward the end of the week, another international guest had had enough. He told me he was leaving, and started walking toward the main road, where he figured he could catch a ride back to Wellington. When I told Pania, she already knew. She said that if he wanted to leave, that was up to him. This guest was older than Klaus, more comfortable speaking
English, and had more travel experience. He probably would have been fine hitchhiking. I was still surprised that the specifics of manaakitanga that Pania had explained to Klaus did not apply to Basem. But in the end, a group elder brought Basem back before he got very far.

The marae stay began with a pōwhiri and ended with poroporoaki. This closing ceremony was a chance to acknowledge the generosity that had led us to that moment. Standing in a circle in front of the whare nui in a moment of sunshine after a week of cold rain, we each said a few words. I was truly grateful for the opportunity to experience things I wouldn’t have otherwise had a chance to. My brief mihi acknowledged the sky father and earth mother, and the whare nui Hineterongo for protecting us with shelter. Earlier in the week Pania had said that in the whare nui, in addition to Māori, we could speak “French or German—any indigenous language.” (I think any language other than English would have been acceptable.) So I figured it was OK to switch to Japanese during my mihi to thank the tangata whenua for allowing us to live on their land. Though language is unforgiving, and it leaves if you don’t engage it, my Japanese is still a lot better than my Māori, and especially for expressing thanks. I guess my connection to Japanese culture is more rooted than I had thought, and my connection to Māori culture is more superficial than I would like to admit.
Poroporoakī means farewell. Standing there in a circle of gratitude, I bid farewell to the frustrations of the week. A light off-shore breeze took them out to sea. But new ones took their place when the three vans had to wait over an hour at a gas station for the car with the gas vouchers to arrive and pay. Then, once the gas was paid for, the car set out for its own destination while the vans returned to Wellington.

About halfway to Wellington, all three vans pulled over because the man who had dictated to Klaus where to sit and bossed us all around, had forgotten his suitcase in one of the vans. So the vans pulled over to wait for the car to catch up to us once again. Nearly all the cargo was unloaded to get to the suitcase. I assumed that all three vans had to stop because we weren’t sure exactly which suitcase was his. But one of my classmates pointed out that even though we were in three different vans we were all part of one waka.

We were all in it together. The fact that I needed to be reminded of this made me even more aware of my own position.
turning around

After sixteen months of accumulation, packing up was more difficult than I had anticipated. Torben and I had planned to leave Wellington shortly after our final papers were due, but the only way I would have been ready to leave on Sunday would have been to stay up all night Saturday to finish sorting and packing. Then Torben suggested delaying our departure by a day so that we wouldn't feel incredibly rushed—and so that he wouldn't have a sleeping passenger on the day of the longest drive. The few bookings I had made were easily changed because we were traveling before the peak of the season. And my need to hover for an extra day turned out to be a gift. Most of the driving days were overcast or rainy; most of the days we were active or sightseeing were sunny. Had we left on our originally scheduled day, we would have been cursing the weather for raining on our active days, and then baking us in the car on our driving days. Tāwhirimātea had held me still so that I could gather the energies swirling around me in windy Wellington before heading north.

The idea of this road trip began a few months earlier, when I mentioned in passing that I wanted to tour the North Island before I left Aotearoa. I had crisscrossed the South Island a year earlier, looking for the place that had called me. Fiordland National Park had communicated
with me, but told me to look elsewhere. I never found “it.” This time, while still open to an epiphany, I really just wanted to see as much of the country as I could before I left. Though no one specific place had said to me, “I am your home,” or even “I am the place you need to research,” I felt that Papatūānuku had developed a relationship with me—so much so, that I had extended my stay in Aotearoa to allow her relationship with me to run its course. My notions of the terrain of Aotearoa became more than just internal musings as I shared them with my travel companion. In fact as I tried to make sense of my relationship with Papatūānuku before leaving the motu, my relationship with Torben was also revealing itself as something worth investigating.

Two friends helped me pack the car while Torben talked to a travel agent about his round-the-world ticket home to Denmark. He returned to a completely packed car. We each had two pieces of luggage plus a backpack, but the car also held two large boxes I was sending back to Hawai‘i, and boxes of things that would make our hostel stays more comfortable—a few bottles of wine, spices, oils, condiments, and canned goods, a toiletries box, and produce we bought at the farmers market the day before. Before leaving Wellington we had to stop at the cash converters to sell my printer, which was blocking the view out the back
window. We also stopped at the Salvation Army to make a donation—a box I was holding on my lap until we got there.

It took about six hours to reach Clive, a small town near Napier, with a stop in Dannevirke, a town Danish in name only. Billboards at either end of town depict a huge Viking head, complete with horned helmet, bidding visitors “Velkommen” and “Farvel.”

There is no evidence of Danish settlement today. No Danish candy shops. But I had heard there was a large Viking ship somewhere in Dannevirke. It turned out to be a playground prop. I took a picture of my Danish friend, in a tacky tourist royal blue aloha shirt, posing as a lookout on this poor excuse for a replica of a Viking ship. A perfect start to our vacation.

Hawke’s Bay is one of the bigger wine producing areas of New Zealand. It is also one of the sunnier areas. The two main centers are Napier, known for its art deco buildings, and Hastings known for its outpouring of produce. I was looking forward to a gourmand’s experience along the area’s “food trail.” Though prepared for those unfamiliar with the area, the food trail is not a track of money traps set for tourists, but simply a mapped area with scores of specialty shops. A brochure gives short descriptions so one can self-navigate. During our two days in the area we leisurely fit in five stops along the food trail. I
also mailed the two boxes to Hawai‘i, so there was room for our award-winning gastronomic additions—olive oil, olives, blue cheese, strawberries, chocolate, and bread.

After traveling all around the North Island, Torben said that his favorite place was our first stop—Hawke’s Bay. It wasn’t the sun or the wine that won him over. It was the Bay View Blue cheese from the Te Mata Cheese Company, and the wide river not far from Te Mata Peak. We thought a perfect spot for napping would be easy to find somewhere along the bank, but where the river was flowing and scenic we found unfriendly fences and a dead cow. The other places were rocky and dry. I think Torben just wants to go back to find his place to nap.

We both bought sturdy shoes in Napier, and broke them in at our next destination. Lake Waikaremoana was one of the places I thought I might have a revelation. What I got instead was a gentle reiteration of what I had come to know—in Aotearoa, the native bush is where I feel most comfortable. Rolling green pastures are the iconic New Zealand landscape, but the landscapes calling me are from an earlier time—before the mass clearing of bush and the laying of Banaban phosphates. That fern in Fiordland had tried to send me to the bush, but it was a task I wasn’t able to complete. Though the New Zealand tourism industry promotes the country as green and wild, little bush remains.
Torben was indulging me with this stop. Hiking isn’t his thing, but he was happy to let me include this place on our itinerary, because it was important to me. In the end, though, he enjoyed the hike from Lake Waikaremoana to Lake Waikareiti and then to a waterfall. Later he would say that one reason he was happy I had planned our itinerary was because he would have missed Lake Waikaremoana had he planned it himself.

On our way east we stopped at Morere hot springs. I had been there during the marae stay in Te Mahia, so I knew to go straight up to the small pools at the top. A winding gravel trail frames pieces of light shining through a natural canopy. The path runs along a creek, which passes behind the hot, warm, and cold pools. The sound of the creek is a constant, as snippets of conversation flow in and out.

Perhaps the reason Gisborne gets away with calling itself “the first city to see the sunrise” is that the cities closer to the international date line are on islands many people still have not heard of, and the places east of Gisborne in New Zealand aren’t populated enough to be considered “cities.” Tokomaru for instance is northeast of Gisborne, but far from being a city. Outside of tourist season, it does not have any public internet access on Saturdays, so our excitement was a leisurely walk along the beach. On one side of the coastal road, flat beach extends into the calm
waters of the protected bay. On the other side, the land rises steeply, forming the green wrinkled bumps that are Aotearoa's hills and ranges.

One morning we watched the sunrise from the main lanai overlooking the beach at Brian's Place, our hostel on Tokomaru Bay. Between our two cameras, we have about twenty photographs of a yellow circle rising out of a lined blue expanse, and entering a pink and orange sky. The morning rays highlight parts of a few high clouds; two Norfolk pines and an empty beach stand in the foreground. Apart from those in Tuvalu, Wallis and Futuna, the Chatham Islands, Fiji, and the kingdom of Tonga, we may have been the first people to greet the sun that day.

I found a few pieces of beach glass at Tokomaru Bay. Even though I had put myself on a baggage reduction program, I couldn't abandon my love of gathering beach glass. Someday I would love to go to Rapa Nui, but not just to see the moai. I also think I might find bits of glass and ceramic flotsom to add to my collection. The result would be a mosaic that folds into itself pieces from the three distant tips of the "Polynesian triangle."

I started collecting on the Big Island. My boyfriend would take me surfing, but I tired out before he did, so while I waited on the beach, I looked for glass in the sand. The surfing addiction never bit me; finding buried treasure attracted me more. Large pieces, lapis blue glass, and porcelain with parts of its blue and white pattern still visible were good
finds. To reduce my island baggage, I’ve given most of my beach glass
collection to an artist friend. I know it’s in good hands because she has the
imagination to see the collection as a treasure, rather than garbage spit up
from the ocean. I’ve kept a few choice pieces, though, and someday I’ll
give them life outside the box I store them in. I like to think about their
histories—where they came from, what they’ve witnessed along the way,
what lives they’ve floated through. Even if I eventually leave Pacific
Islands Studies, I’ll continue to carry a bit of Pacific history around my
neck in a simple beach glass pendant.

The drive around the East Cape was beautiful and uneventful. We
reached the Opotiki Beach House late in the afternoon. It boasts of being
on six kilometers of sandy beach, and it was, but it was only an overnight
stop on our way to Rotorua, so I don’t feel like I’ve really met the place.
Torben and I did make time for a walk on the beach before getting back
into the car.

New Zealanders often speak disparagingly of Rotorua because it is
touristy, but it didn’t get that way from marketing alone. Thanks to so
many striking sights in close proximity, visitors can see a lot from just the
one stop. When word gets out that there’s something good, it is natural
for more people to want to see it, but when they do others start seeing it as
something that is spoiled. I’m guilty of this myself. I chose to go to
Doubtful Sound rather than Milford Sound because being in a tourist hotspot seems to provoke more affected performances. I was looking for less layered experiences.

Wai-o-tapu is advertised as “a wonderland of stunning geothermal activity.” The thermal pools range in color from sulfur yellow to pea green to bright orange to charcoal. The most popular attraction in this volcanic park is the Lady Knox Geyser. People gather in a small amphitheatre. The geyser opening is fenced off at center stage, and audience members seat themselves on several tiers of benches. Paying to see something that occurs naturally as if it were a performance felt strange. Even more unsettling was finding out that the geyser is manipulated to make it erupt on cue. The geyser has a 24- to 36-hour cycle, but a park staff member puts powdered soap into the geyser opening to break the surface tension, presenting an explosive show at precisely the same time each day to a waiting, paying audience. The geyser can erupt for up to an hour, but most people left after just a few minutes. They had come, paid, and waited. Then they saw the geyser erupt, checked it off their list of things to see in New Zealand, and left.

Along with one other couple who happened to be from Denmark, Torben and I stayed about thirty minutes. By the time we left, the geyser had lost much of its energy. I regret not staying a little longer. I felt as if I was walking out of an opera before the final curtain call. But I did want to
see the rest of the park, and especially the boiling mud. Musical bubbling mud, randomly releasing air from the ground, makes me giddy.

The Coromandel Peninsula is a popular summer destination for Kiwis and visitors alike. But Torben and I arrived at the hostel in Whitianga in sideways hail. We weren’t sure if On the Beach was our least favorite hostel because of the weather, or because the bed had a foam cushion, not a real mattress, the kitchen had a portable cooking unit, not a real stove, and the staff mistakenly put us in a fine room, then moved us to a unit where three other people had strewn about their belongings before leaving for the day. When we went down to say that we couldn’t stay because the bed couldn’t support Torben’s back, they came up it with a thicker foam cushion. It still wasn’t the best, but we decided to stay. We were grateful for the management’s can-do attitude.

The 309 road to Coromandel Town winds through lush forest, and there’s a short flat walking track that leads to a grove of old-growth kauri trees. Kauri are giants of the forest. Most of them were milled over a hundred years ago, but some of the old-growth kauri still standing today are colossal. The loop trail crosses a small stream. Torben ducked under the small wooden bridge to sit on a large moss-covered rock overlooking the flow of water. That seemed to be his tranquil place—the kind of
setting he might revisit when told to go to his “happy place.” Torben loves streams in forests. When he told me there aren’t any mountains or rivers in Denmark, I reacted with disbelief. They’ve been part of me since before I was born, so it’s difficult to imagine life in a place without them.

My highlight of the Coromandel was the day we spent at Cathedral Cove. The view from the parking lot is spectacular, but I especially enjoyed the hike down to Cathedral Cove, because I shifted from observer to participant. The trail passes over varied terrain—rocky, grassy, exposed, shady, ascending, descending—and encounters a couple of smaller coves before ending at the main attraction. Off the main trail we found an empty sandy beach, crystal waters, and the beginnings of a cave being eroded into the cliff face by the ocean—a tiny preview of what was to come.

The “cathedral” at the cove is a huge cavern cut through a chunk of land that separates two sandy bays. The cavern joins the two beaches. We walked through easily, but it might be harder at high tide. A few islands can be seen from the beach. One close to shore has a bottom so tapered that it’s only a matter of years before it topples.

We took our hiking shoes off, as one does on a beach of fine sand. We put our hiking shoes back on before we left, but with Torben’s back in pain and his belly keeping his hands from reaching his feet, he needed a
bit of help. I couldn’t stop laughing when I thought about what the passers by must be thinking as they watched me brushing the sand off his feet, putting his socks on, and helping him into his shoes. Torben then whispered, “picture bride,” and I nearly fell off the log. Those walking by would never have guessed that the big Viking is the sweet one, and the petite Japanese woman is the grumpy, bossy one.

Although it goes up and down a few times each way, the Cathedral Cove trail is basically a hike from a plateau down to a beach, then back again. The last ascending stretch was a challenge for Torben. He was cursing the people in flip-flops and skipping children who passed us along the way, and the last section pushed him beyond his limits. One of the best days of our trip for me, was for Torben the day that part of him had died on a trail.

We liked Captain Bob’s hostel in Paihia. Vern was the perfect manager, professionally distant, yet friendly. We had the best room in the house, just off the second storey lanai with lots of natural light on two sides and from the sliding glass doors to the lanai. After the poor excuse for a mattress in Whitianga, we checked the bed out before extending our reservation one day. We told Vern that the mattress passed the test, and he told us the room was available for one more night. As we were unloading our stuff, Vern saw Torben with a camper’s backpack on, large
suitcases in each hand, and smaller bags hanging off his arms. "It's not the beds that are killing your back, mate," Vern remarked.

The day we spent sailing around Bay of Islands was overcast, but dry enough to be enjoyable. The wind filled the sails but didn't move the clouds. Underwater visibility was low, but snorkeling was part of the package, so the three male passengers put on wetsuits and went in the water. (The five women stayed on board, enjoying warm beverages.) It was Torben's first snorkeling experience, and he was pleased with his sighting of a murky indication of a fish. I was pleased with my decision to stay warm and dry. During my sixteen months in Aotearoa New Zealand, I submerged myself in the ocean only once. The warm waters around the Hawaiian Islands had spoiled me. I was happy for Torben that he was excited, but I promised a more fulfilling snorkeling experience when he came to visit me in Hawai‘i. When he did, the fish at Hanauma Bay liked him so much that he didn't have to go looking for them. We decided that his extra-large brown and black patterned swim trunks must have looked like a reef.

When we left Paihi, I asked Torben if we could stop in Kerikeri, even though it would add miles to our already long drive, and even though two guys from our hostel who went the day before told us there
was nothing there. Kerikeri is advertised as a vibrant small town rich with arts and crafts and gourmet specialty shops. I bought a wooden pen and some specialty chocolate just outside of Kerikeri, but I agree with the guys more than the advertising. But had we not gone, I would have always wondered if I had missed something.

The main attraction for that day was Cape Reinga. I was looking forward to seeing the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea butting up against each other, off the northern most point of Aotearoa. And I also thought it would be appropriate for me to visit Cape Reinga before my departure to Hawai‘i. In Māori accounts, Cape Reinga is the site where spirits depart Aotearoa and return to Hawaiki. Spirits travel from mountain top to mountain top, or along rivers from all over Aotearoa, to launch from an ancient pohutakawa tree back to the spiritual homeland of Hawaiki.

Ranginui Walker’s section in Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou / Struggle without End (2004) on the canoe migrations to Aotearoa helped me with the idea of “homeland.” I embrace the United States of America as my homeland, but at the same time, all of my journeying has left me feeling a bit homeless. And I still encounter people who insist that my homeland is Japan. Yet according to Walker, when Hawaiki is referring to a physical homeland, it refers only to the last homeland. During the seafaring history of migration across the ocean, then, Hawaiki was the last point of
origin outside of New Zealand, or even the North Island for those who migrated to the South Island (38). These changes in the point of origin would have taken at least a generation or two, but the idea opened up a space for me to consider that my homeland could be the last place I reinvented myself, my last point of departure. This idea also reminded me that indigenous peoples throughout Polynesia claim simultaneously to be born out of the land, and to be voyagers who have arrived from a physical and a metaphysical Hawaiki.

Up until now I had no desire to return to Hawai‘i. Going back was something I had to do to finish something I had started. I had already added four months onto my one-year stay in Aotearoa, putting me into the third year of my two-year program. But I asked the sacred pohutakawa tree at the tip of Cape Reinga to guide my spirit back to Hawai‘i. This act of asking was all I needed to reframe my perspective.

Cape Reinga was the turnaround point. As we headed back south, I started to prepare for the northeast trade winds that had delivered me to Tāwhirimātea sixteen months earlier. When I arrived back in Hawai‘i I was pleasantly surprised to be welcomed. And when I went to greet Pele, a full rainbow arching between Halema‘uma‘u and Kilauea Iki craters appeared after I made my offering. Of course, after a couple of weeks of aloha, the trickster winds welcomed me too, as my housing arrangements fell through, but I recovered.
Before leaving for Aotearoa New Zealand for a year of coursework and fieldwork, I wrote a proposal for my intended project. My thesis committee members found my proposal sound, but the person who graded it for one of the core courses at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies wondered, “How is what you’re doing different from lonely planet?” When I read that comment at the end of my proposal which had laid out background information, methodology, significance to the field, and a working bibliography, I understood that the way we read is as distinctive as the way we write. (I didn’t ask this instructor to be on my committee.)

And yet, the time I spent journeying through Aotearoa did in fact prepare me to guide my Danish travel companion on a tour. Torben let me plan our trip because I was leaving Aotearoa, and with no definite plan to return. He wanted me to experience all the places I wanted to before I left, and he also enjoyed having me set the itinerary while he relaxed and followed—if the person who did all the driving can be said to follow. Torben said a few times that he appreciated the perspectives I brought to our tour. When I first arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, I felt it was my responsibility to learn about Māori culture. As a large white stranger whom nobody would expect to know about Māori culture, Torben was happy to learn enough so that he wouldn’t be offensive. He
expected me to know what was important, and to share cultural references of each place. Even though I hadn't been to many of the places on our route, I expected the same of myself.

I was happy to play the role of host. But on the grounds where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, I couldn’t articulate how conflicted I was about what I believe has been a problematic document. The English and Māori language versions of the Treaty don’t say the same thing. I agree with the Italian proverb that even with the purest of intentions, to translate is often to betray,6 but in this case betrayal may have been part of the plan. Had the Māori translation been more accurate, the chiefs might not have signed over their sovereignty. And, because they came from a culture without a written tradition, it is possible that when the chiefs put Xs on lines to indicate their signatures, they believed the contract would also guarantee the verbal assurances received at the time. So I believe there are many problematic aspects to this document that affected virtually every aspect of Māori life. And yet, because a treaty was signed in 1840, since 1975 many tribes have filed claims regarding breaches of the Treaty, and some tribes are getting lands back.

Most of the people Torben had talked to in New Zealand viewed the Treaty as good thing, so I was offering a radical opinion, spitting into the wind. But my opinion was always welcome. Torben was also interested

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6 “Traduttore, traditore!” “Translator, traitor!”
in my larger project. When I told him that I often pick up on energies unique to locations, I was surprised by his accepting reaction. He explained that there's a Norse concept that amounts to knowing the essence of the land. We also began to consider his role as a character in my narrative. He did the driving because we both preferred it that way, but he was after all named for Thor, the Norse god of the elements, known for his chariot. So through Torben, Thor was working in cahoots with Tāwhirimātea guiding my passing over the land.

One ending for this journey in search of connectedness could have been that a Maori tohunga would take me in and all that was muddled would become clear. But real life doesn't work that way, or at least not mine. What did become more apparent through my cultural approach to the terrain was that my relationship the land and its scapes is stronger than my links to cultures and peoples inhabiting the land. But the land's meanings and the lessons were still vague. Serving as Torben's guide allowed me to figure things out for myself, thanks to an unencumbered sounding board. For this child of a thousand possibilities, opportunities have come in spades, but conclusions have always been more elusive.

A couple of days before Torben and I left Wellington for our North Island tour, we had taken a day trip to Cape Palliser, the southern most point of the North Island. So together we covered from south to north.
We went around the East Cape, and I had been up the center, and through Taranaki before. For all those reasons, Torben felt that I had really come to know Aotearoa. He said there's a Scandinavian saying about relations with the land. The Danish version goes like this: Et sted kan ikke kendes, før det er oplevet. A literal translation would be “A place can not be known/recognized, until it has been experienced/lived,” but according to Torben the saying has a double meaning. First, that you cannot know a place by reading or hearing about it. This aspect of the saying also points out the shortcomings of history. But second, it is not enough simply to be there to know it. You have to participate and experience. By the end of our trip, Torben felt he had come to know the North Island. I felt that much of Aotearoa New Zealand was still unfamiliar to me.

Torben left New Zealand one day before I started my second 10-day sit at the Vipassana Center, not far from Auckland. I felt like he was leaving me behind because he was heading off on a new adventure, while I had to stay one more night in the Auckland hostel we had spent two nights together.

While we waited for the taxi that would take Torben away, we waltzed on the balcony.
In Māori *whenua* means both “land” and “placenta.” Whenua is a source of life. The first human being Hineahuone was sculpted out of earth. Tāne, god of the forest, formed the body, but many gods contributed to the creation. Tangaroa, god of the sea, contributed fluid flowing through the body. Rongo, god of cultivated food, created the stomach. Haumietiketike, god of uncultivated food, shaped the intestines. Ruaumoko, god of earthquakes, supplied the sinews. Tumatauenga, god of war, contributed muscles. Tāwhirimātea, god of the wind, created the lungs. Upon completion of the woman’s form, Tāne sneezed the breath of life into Hineahuone.

When Seamus Fitzgerald shared this account of the creation of the first human being, I felt the pathway into te ao Māori open up to me. Māori language has been difficult for me to grasp, and even though I have a background in dance, Māori dance doesn’t resonate with me. My first entrance into Māori culture was through Māori art, which often embodies aspects of Māori spirituality. Māori culture commonly embraces the living aspect of art, which for me inevitably leads to the art of living. My time in Oceania has been a period of spiritual growth. Learning about the creation of Hineahuone connected knowledge deeply rooted in my body to a higher plane. And recognizing Tāwhirimātea as one of my atua came

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7 17 January 2005, Maori 102, UH Manoa.
while I worked on becoming aware by focusing on my respiration. The smallest movements of air, in and out, joined me to the energies of all wind deities combined.

At Vipassana Meditation centers, gongs sound at 4 AM. The first of eleven hours of meditation begins each day in the dark. Meditating with eyes closed extends the time without light. Within this void, there is room for paradoxes. For instance, sitting in the darkness allows us to meditate on the highest light, so that we can transform our own.

Focusing on sensations in the body, or on respiration, allows clutter to fall away. As I became less muddled, I began to notice patterns of motion, where my thoughts were blocking energy in my body. By the sixth day I started to understand the idea of equanimity. The paralyzing pain deep in my left hip socket was just another sensation. By Day Eight that pain dissolved and another one appeared. Meditation became a series of knots and releases, heat and flow. Some attachments to suffering were more difficult to let go of than others, but whether the sensations were painful or pleasant, they had the same impermanence, as they arose and passed away. The impurities that came out through tears and sweat and blemishes stuck to my face and body. Washing them away polished my spirit.
I had sat my first Vipassana course before traveling around the South Island of New Zealand, with the hope that clearing clutter from my mind would allow my body to pay attention to the world around me. I sat my second course after traveling around the North Island, hoping that clearing clutter from my mind would allow my body to process all it had taken in. Timing the second course to coincide with the end of my stay in Aotearoa made it a possible ritual of departure—an individual poroporoaki. But it didn’t feel like a farewell. It was just another moment along a continuum of practicing awareness—of my connection to place, of my sense of self, of impermanence.

On the bus from Auckland to the Vipassana center before my first sit, I had spoken with a participant who had completed a few courses. He had many stories about people who couldn’t make it through ten days of silent meditation. Perhaps he noticed that his stories started making me nervous, so he veered back to the usual getting-acquainted small talk. Of all the people I had talked to about my studies who did not have a relationship with Oceania, he was one of the only people who thought a degree in Pacific Islands Studies would be useful. He thought that learning about how Oceanic peoples adapted to the changes forced upon them by colonization could shed light on the skills all people may soon need to adapt to the changes global warming will force upon us. He
thought you might be able to learn a lot from Pacific Islands Studies about moving toward liberation from suffering.

Things are easier to perceive when fewer filters and layers are covering them. Because Aotearoa was one of the last places on earth to be inhabited by people, the ground is layered with fewer stories of the beings that have come to inhabit it. Though generations of human inhabitants (particularly since colonization) have severely altered the landscape, for me the sound of earth’s voice is less muted on these islands. Papatūānuku’s stories from the beginning of time are less compressed, with fewer layers to move through. It is easier to feel Tāwhirimātea tugging at my lungs to take my breath away or allow me to exhale. The New Zealand Vipassana Centre Dhamma Medini sits on a plot of land where tree ferns and tui birds touch the sky with abandon. I’m not sure if the bush is old growth or regenerated, but it’s got the feel of an old soul, encouraging its inhabitants to investigate where they are, and where they stand.

Participants take a vow of “noble silence,” avoiding even eye contact. Books and writing materials are surrendered, to prevent dialoging with texts. The volume of one’s thoughts waxes and wanes as do the sounds of rain, plates stacking, birds chirping, spoons spinning, water running, sandals shuffling. The constant throughout the ten days is
the recorded voice of S.N. Goenka instructing, “Start again.” If we have become fixated on the boundaries of our imaginations, space is created simply by starting again with a quiet mind. And we start again, attempting to follow through with patience and persistence.

The first year I sat the course, my thoughts had often taken me away from my physical being. Knots and releases were intense in both my body and my psyche. On Day Ten, after the noble silence was broken, my new acquaintances told me they too had had days when they just cried in their rooms. During the second ten-day course, I spent more time focused on my respiration and the sensations in my body. Though less intense, I still made note of where my thoughts were going—often to the storage unit in Hadley, Massachusetts I continue to pay for which holds whatever I thought was worth holding on to before I started to live/study in Oceania.

There is a chance I will spend more than a few more years away from the continental United States. It would be impractical to continue to pay to store things which are worth less than the cost of storing them. At first I dreaded having to let go of so much all at once. But I suspect I’ve already let go of much of what is in that 5’x5’ storage unit. I am starting to look forward to revisiting my things, then letting them go. When I see what I thought was worth holding on to, I may see how I’ve changed—and stayed the same—over time. My wish to reduce things down to one
bag is still more romantic than realistic. But it's possible. The challenge is
in the follow through.

If I could reduce my baggage to only one bag, it should be easier to
see what I'm carrying with me—pieces of history from my last homelands.
Wherever I go, I'll be an "introduced species," but I'd like to arrive with
some sense of what I'm bringing with me—a genealogy of a different sort.
One purpose for introducing our genealogies is to highlight points of
interconnection. One benefit of sitting in the dark eleven hours a day
watching sensations arise and pass away, is to highlight points of
interconnection.

A Māori proverb reminds people to return to the mountains to be
cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea: Hokia ki ngā maunga, kia purea
koe e ngā hau a Tāwhirimātea. I'm still too close to see how the wind has
swept my spirit this time around. But I do know that the ways it has
moved me, have also trained me to be still.
at the threshold

How many steps
must I take
to cross your beach?

I am not
a beachcomber
an interloper
or an honored guest.

I am
your daughter
your sister
your dance partner.

You are calling me.
Haere mai!
You are calling me.

Why?
To show me
how to bear witness
as you have with grace?
To reveal my path?
To play the trickster?

I shall go
and count the steps
I must take
to cross your beach.
a point of departure

Volcanoes National Park, Hawai‘i, 2005

Perched at the edge of a crater, I’m hoping to make my peace with Pele. Cars driving around the far side of Halema‘uma‘u caldera are matchbox playthings that Pele could flick off her property on a whim. As I look across what was once a molten lake, I realize that trying to stand on equal footing with a vindictive goddess of fire is a lost cause. Since moving to the Big Island of Hawai‘i I’ve been a lost cause—sick, broke, and broken. This rock in the middle of the ocean was too unstable. I unraveled and fled to the mainland for stability.

But Hawai‘i is not a rock bobbing in the ocean. It’s the most massive mountain on earth. To live on Pele’s side of that mountain, you must dance with fire. I don’t know how to begin a dance with a mele, so I begin with a bow—forehead to the parched rocky ground. The ti leaves I brought seem flimsy in the wind, reminding me of the fleeting nature of an offering.

I came, I made an offering, I feel different. But what really changed?

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I moved to Hawai‘i in January 2003. Severe abdominal pain started paralyzing me at the end of February. I went to the emergency room in March and specialists in April. After being scoped, scraped, and scanned, I was offered hospital bills and no relief. All the expensive tests came back normal. Insurance coverage came up short.

By the end of May I was homeless and aimless. June got brighter with prospects of love. Bachelor number one put a price on hurt feelings, and he asked for reimbursement. Bachelor number two was a drama king whose long distance fiancée was insignificant, then significant, then
imaginary. Bachelor number three was damaged from divorce, and forgot that herpes is a sexually transmitted infection.

I never believed in the Japanese “yakudoshi” until I had mine. I thought that my “bad year” might have been brought on by my energy flowing out of sync with that of the Big Island. I thought if I made my peace with Pele, I’d be in a better position to leave for New Zealand. I didn’t realize that to “make peace” with someone you actually have to acknowledge she exists, and communicate with her.

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The last two gas stations heading out of Hilo are out of gin. Your hula daughters must be bringing it all to you, one week before the Merrie Monarch Festival. So, today I’m empty handed. My offerings are my heart and my stillness. Frenetic tourist energy must exhaust you. They run past me in their t-shirts, which display their faraway travels, tucked into crisply ironed khaki shorts. My walk to the observation deck has slowed since my first visit. I take time to smell the sulfur, to notice the cracked black lava fields soaking up springtime sun. To wonder if you are here.

On the deck a girl complains to her sister that she can’t see the bottom of your home. I tell her to move ten feet, because I know that the far end offers the best view. Groups of pale visitors hurry by. I stay and stand and listen, looking for a stable place from which to leap. You see, I’m leaving your chain of islands. I guess I’ve come for your blessing. But you’re a goddess I don’t know how to worship. I’m not even sure if you’re here.

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A lull between groups of tourists. I was standing on the lookout deck next to a local family visiting from a neighbor island. Grandpa was telling granddaughter how Pele traveled from Kaua‘i to the Big Island. I was looking east, wondering if the Halema‘uma‘u trail connected with the Kilauea Iki trail beyond the cinder hill.

A rumbling started that sounded like a convoy of eighteen wheelers trucking along the crater rim drive, but then grew to a volume no trucks could make. When I looked west, wafts of dust settled to reveal tons of rocks that had tumbled from the wall to the floor. A landslide inside Halema‘uma‘u. The earth moved. My monologue became a dialogue.

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lost cause found
before a goddess
my faith leapt
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