

# *Haeremai: A Maori Welcome*

It took days to get there:  
two to make reservations,  
then 27 hours from Anchorage to New Zealand.  
And they were waiting.

When we arrived at the *morae* the ritual began:  
three women waved green leafy branches,  
crying *Haeremai Haeremai Haeremai*<sup>\*</sup>

We slipped off our shoes  
and everyone in that carved building stood  
as we walked  
up to the front  
where our daughter and her family waited.  
I mouthed her name: Mandy . . .  
Gave her a smile.  
She nodded, brown eyes lost in shadows.

I knelt by our grandson.  
Did the expected:  
traced the chilled forehead,  
the Swiss Maori nose,  
whispered *Arohanui, Gibby. Haere ra.*<sup>†</sup>  
Saw him again, catching his balance on a rickety ladder,  
then reaching with an improvised broom  
of *ti* tree branches  
to sweep away a host of spiders.

—Norma S. Bowkett

<sup>\*</sup>Welcome, come forward, to you and your ancestors.

<sup>†</sup>I love you, Gibby. Farewell.

This poem won an honorable mention in the 1998 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.