

'The Kuia and the rock'

At the entrance to Tauranga Harbour, at the foot of Maunganui, there is a rock in the water called Te Kuia, the old lady. When the fishing boats go out in the open sea, the men on board throw over a piece of food, or a small coin, an offering to the Kuia as they pass by this rock. This is also an offering to Tangaroa, god of the ocean to ensure the success of their fishing trip. It is also a way of showing respect for the sea, for the power of the waves and the food resources to be found there -but who was this old lady, this Kuia? Some say she was Wahinerua, who was thrown overboard by Hoturoa from the Tainui canoe which went aground at the entrance. However, in the following story, the Kuia lived on Maunganui.

A long time ago, when the hill of Mount Maunganui was called Mauao, there was a big settlement on the lower slopes. The many shell middens and terraces can still be seen. It was an ideal place to live. It could be defended from attack, there was water in a spring on the south side, and there was plenty of kaimoana to be caught in the sea and among the rock and sandy shores around. The heights of Mauao provided a view all around the district and it was possible to see from afar any approaching visitors or war parties.

One day an old lady, Kuia, climbed up to the lookout place high on Mauao. She sat down in a sheltered corner of the rocks, and gazed out to sea, across Matakana and towards Moehau. The sun warmed her old bones, she thought about the doings of her youth and of past generations in this district. She drifted off into her dreams. Her little dog which always followed wherever she went, lay down nearby and dozed too. It was not until a cool breeze of late afternoon chilled her body that she woke, she realised it was getting late. The sun was low in the western sky. She must get down before sunset, back to her whare before darkness overtook Mauao.

Kuia took one last look around the glistening ocean, and the islands and mountain ranges toward Moehau, and out to sea toward Tuhua. She looked again out to sea, where something caught her eye. There appeared something far out where she knew there were no island or rocky reefs. She saw some black shapes and suddenly realised what they were a group of canoes. Perhaps they were enemy canoes waiting just below the horizon until darkness fell, when they would swiftly come ashore and attack the Pa. She looked again and was certain they were canoes. She felt just as certain they were a war party.

Kuia moved to the edge of the cliff and shouted down to the houses in the pa below. "He taua! He taua! "A war party," She called as loudly as she could but, but no one heard. She cupped her hands to her mouth and shouted again. "He taua, he Taua!" Still no one heard. She started to run down the steep, rough track. She was old and her legs would not move fast enough. Her little dog followed. She tripped and stumbled on the rocks on the track. She felt herself stumbling out of control. Her body rolled down the track and rolled over the edge of a steep rock face into the sea. The little dog bounded after her and jumped into the sea. It pulled on her clothing and tried to drag the unconscious old lady to the shore. The effort was too much and they both drowned. Their bodies lay there, and the water lapped around them and they became the rocks that still lie there. Tangaroa recognised them thus and allowed those rocks to become their memorial stones. Therefore, the Kuia rock is the place where fishermen make their offerings to Tangaroa and ask for protection and a successful voyage.