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Haeremai: A Maori Welcome

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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*^{*}

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.*[†]
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

^{*}Welcome, come forward, to you and your ancestors.

[†]I love you, Gibby. Farewell.

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