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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.