

JOURNEY FROM MOURNING THROUGH MUSIC – A MOTHER’S STORY

Introduction:

In December 2009 my son Hayden returned from Perth, Western Australia for three weeks, his first Christmas holiday back home after ten years of living away, bringing with him his young wife, their eight month old baby, and his parents-in-law.

Many excited phone calls were exchanged across the Tasman prior to his home-coming. He put in his order for a 'real' Kiwi Christmas tree, and all the foods stamped in his memory signifying happy family occasions.

He planned to spend time with all his old school friends, introducing them to his wife and son.

He wanted to be home in time for his nephew Zaine's sixteenth birthday, and arrived at the party bare chested wearing nothing but a pair of bright fluoro yellow Sponge Bob shorts held up by braces, and a Corona hat, causing huge embarrassment to the birthday boy who was out to impress an entourage of teenage girls!

He wanted to see the 2010 New Year in at Paihia in the Bay of Islands where he had spent some of his growing up years, hoping to convince his wife and parents to make the 'big move' across the ditch and settle in the area, and wanted me to join them for a few family days in Russell.

He wanted to spend as much time as he could showing his wife all the places where he grew up and loved, proudly show his own little family off to the wider whanau, and have a heap of fun!

He did all of this, and at the airport on the day he was heading back to Perth, he put his arm around me, gave me a hug and said 'I won't be home for a long time now Mum'.

I will always wonder did he know what was in store?

18th October 2010, 9.30pm New Zealand time, I'm sitting in bed reading 'Eat, Pray Love' and going through a personal relationship crisis when the phone call came that would alter our lives forever.

My daughter-in-law is on the other end. 'Hello, how are you?', she calmly asks. I'm surprised to hear from her, but I reply "Hi Jo, I'm fine, how are you?". She says 'I've got some bad news. It's Hayden'. I say "What's he done? She says "Hayden's been in an accident". I ask "What's happened? Is he badly hurt?" She says "Hayden's dead!". I went numb. I thought she was playing an awful joke! I remember holding the phone to my ear, rocking back and forth in disbelief! I say "You're joking aren't you Jo? This is a Joke right? This can't be true. Say its not true! Are you OK? I'll call you back".

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Background:

They say 'things happen in three's'. A much used cliché, but how true this turned out to be for me!

At the end of 2011 following a series of life changing experiences, the most significant being the accidental death of my son, I realized I couldn't do what I was doing anymore, and made the brave decision to step away from corporate event management, and the entertainment scene where I had built a reputation throughout Auckland and further afield as a jazz and big band singer.

I embarked on a journey to the other side of the world, distancing myself from everyone and everything that was familiar, allowing myself some real time for coming to terms with my grief, and to do some self-healing following the death of a marriage, a son and a father, all of which overlapped within a fifteen month period.

In January 2012 prior to heading overseas, I returned to Russell in the Bay of Islands, special to me not only because of my Maori connection to the North, but because it was there in January 2010, that I shared what turned out to be my son's last New Zealand holiday.

The immediate sense of belonging and spiritual connection I felt to my tupuna and to those I'd loved and recently lost, the gratitude I felt toward my whanau and friends who were supporting me unconditionally, the new people who were entering and enriching my life combined in a 'light-bulb' flash of inspiration - to explore a pathway in music I had largely kept under wraps throughout my performing career.

In that moment I knew what I had to do, and set a big goal that I would focus on while travelling. I would write and release another CD, but this time it would feature 'my music'. I would write lyrics to whatever popped into my head and merge them with musical ideas that arrived in the same way. A collection of music in a variety of styles based on my own experiences that would appeal and relate to a general audience. I wanted Maori/Pacifika themes to be subtly interwoven in the collection, and I would find the right person to work alongside me to bring my music to life. I would aim to release the CD in January 2013, in Russell, on what would be the third anniversary of Hayden's last New Zealand holiday.

Little did I know when putting the project plan in place, just how cathartic this big goal would turn out to be in pulling me through the darkness of loss into the light of living forward, for when Hayden died I lost the heart to sing.

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The Project:

I always intended this CD project to be a collaboration; a bringing together of family, friends and creative people. A sharing of musical ideas interwoven with Maori/Pasifika themes in a composition and lyrical context.

The CD 'June Hayes – Journey for the return home' has indeed been an incredible journey. Comprising 13 tracks, the first is a stirring Karanga performed by my sister Maria Fitzsimmons-Baker who invites listeners to come on this musical journey, and acknowledges those who have passed. The final track entitled 'Tangaroa' is a powerful orchestral piece featuring 'Ancestral Pathways', a poem written by my cousin, Dr Benjamin Pittman, historian and New Zealand's first Maori Master of Fine

Arts & Design, and narrated by Taipari Munro, a leader within Northland's Maori communities.

The tunes in-between carry powerfully penned stories, drawn from my own experiences.

The place of inspiration (Russell) and the idea of including Maori/Pasifika influences into the project dictated finding an arranger/producer who shared a similar connectedness and affinity in order to inject the right feeling into the CD. Billy Kristian, or Wiremu Karaitiana, recipient of the 2012 Waiata Music Awards, Music Industry Award, was the obvious choice. It was an honour to work alongside someone of his calibre to create and produce this album which was twelve months in the making.

Through total immersion in the creative process of music, I found the means, will and strength to move through my grief in a way that would result in a positive outcome of personal achievement. At times the lyrics and music seemed to just randomly pour out of me! Inspiration flowed from the most unlikely of sources or situations. I was living my dream and healing along the way.

For me the completion and launch of my CD represented the fullstop at the end of a long sentence of grieving, and the capital letter of the opening sentence of a new chapter in my life.

I want my story to encourage and inspire others to be brave and do what ever they need to make it through the grieving process. By embarking on a creative journey I was able to move through grief in a positive way discovering more about myself and gaining a deep respect and understanding of the inner strength of the human spirit.

My son gave me a sound piece of advice just weeks before he died. He said, "Do what you want to do Mum, and be happy!" I've immortalized this in song, and through him, have found the courage and freedom to fly.

June Hayes:

Born June Pitman, June was largely brought up by her Maori Nana Tiria Pitman (daughter of Kawhina Te Moananui and George Brott or Parata) in the small settlement of Tamaterau on the Whangarei Heads coast road.

She is Ngapuhi (Patuharakeke), Ngati Pukenga (Tamaterau/Tauranga Moana), and through her father Gilbert Douglas, Ngati Maniapoto.

June's love of music stems from being brought up surrounded by a large musical family. They could all sing and play an instrument, and loved to get together often at her Nana's house.

At the age of three, June's mother who loved to sing, taught her a few chords on the ukelele, and how to tune it to 'My Dog Has Fleas'. June progressed to guitar in her teenage years, and explored songwriting while attending Whangarei Girl's High School where she had dreams of becoming a singer and going on television.

Life had other things in mind for June and steered her in a completely different direction and away from music, until the early 1990's. June was supporting her young daughter Kersna in country music at the time, when she was asked by her to sing a duet. They then auditioned for a local amateur dramatic show and got accepted into the cast for their singing ability.

From here June went on to become vocalist for a big band and small jazz ensemble.

Before too long she was carving out a reputation as the jazz singer with a 'voice like velvet', performing largely in Auckland, but also around the country at various festivals and events.

Her debut album 'To Whom It May Concern' was released in 2001 and earned her an invitation to perform at the 2003 Brecon International Jazz Festival in Wales.

Her new album 'Journey for the return home', released on 26th January 2013, has taken her down a new path allowing her to explore and re-emerge as a contemporary artist, lyricist, and songwriter/composer. This special collection of music contains heartfelt stories with uncomplicated melodies, and a human connectiveness that resonates on a variety of levels; emotional, creative and cultural.