



# Buddy Mikaere Story

By Fiona Sullivan

Buddy Mikaere was born in Coromandel hospital. His mother Ada was working in the bush collecting Kauri gum when the labour pains started, but she arrived at the hospital in time. His father was Kingi, he was a strict, hardworking man.

When Buddy was about four, he would run away to the Kaimai school, near where they lived at the time. His formal education started at Lichfield Primary School, near Putaruru. The family then moved to Mount Maunganui for a little while, and then to Auckland where Kingi worked at the Herald as a cleaner. Buddy went to Curren Street School until they came back to the sawmill at Wiltstown (between Tokoroa and Putaruru). At the sawmill they had a hierarchy system where the longest serving worker received a house, while the others lived in a unit. When it was Kingi's turn for a house, one became vacant, but mill manager gave it to a Pom fresh from England. Ada was so angry that they left and went back to Mount Maunganui, where they purchased a house.

Buddy loved Mount Maunganui College and still keeps in touch with friends from there. When he left school with University Entrance, he applied for the British Fleet Air Arm and, after all the tests, was accepted and all set to go to England to train as a pilot. He'd always wanted to learn to fly. As he was under eighteen his father had to sign a permission form and he refused. Kingi didn't want to lose his son, but Buddy walked out and went to Wellington where he found a job with the Post Office. He trained as a radio operator doing Morse Code and learnt touch typing. They didn't tell him that as part of the training you had to do six months on the Chatham Islands. He had one of two surfboards on the island, the other had been washed up. The locals thought he was crazy surfing alone because of the sharks but the waves were 'amazing' so Buddy stayed an extra six months.

He did the night shift, from midnight to 6am for the Coastal Radio Service, sending and receiving telegrams for ships and locals and looking after the radio telephone link which is how people made phone calls. They also did night weather observations; sending information back to Wellington Met Service for the weather forecast. Buddy read temperatures, wind speeds, wind direction, rain fall, and even the barometric pressure. He had to look up to the sky and even though it was dark, try to work out what kind of clouds were up there and how high they were. The information was translated into five figure codes so instead of saying 'the wind was from the southwest' there was a pattern of numbers.

It was a very busy time. When he finished the night shift, he'd go down to the wharf and onto a cray boat where he'd get into a bunk and have a sleep while they steamed out, for about two hours, to their pots. They'd catch the bait for the day then pick up all the pots, take the crayfish out and put them in a cage and rebait the pots. While heading back to shore a helicopter would come and drop down a hook to pick up the cage and take it straight to the factory. Then the skipper and Buddy would take their time getting back, clean down the boat, have a beer and perhaps another snooze.

After the Chatham's Buddy went back to Wellington and worked in the International Telegraph office which was the central office for all overseas telegrams. He worked there for about three years and learnt how to do things like sending and receiving wire photographs, which is how all the pictures from overseas for TV news and newspapers came. The photograph was sent through as a series of sounds which were recorded and a machine that had a revolving drum with a film inside it produced an image, a negative to develop. Then it could be printed and sent off to the local newspaper or television.

"We also did things like wool sales and press links where you had to be able to type really fast."

About 5am Buddy would go to the National Bank where they were doing foreign exchange trading. He sat with the traders and worked out how much money was needed that day for, say, American dollars or British pounds, then go on the market, via teleprinter, and try and buy them as cheaply as possible. They'd search around the world and do all the deals for the bank for that day which would take up to about 7am, when parliament was sitting. Buddy then went to the press gallery for the Herald and NZPA. Four days a week he worked there from 7.30am to 9pm. Sometimes they would sit for longer to finish the business of the day which was a problem because Buddy was living out in Stokes Valley and the last train left at midnight.

During this time Buddy got married, had two children and bought a house. He moved from the International Telegraph Office into the Post Office Headquarters Personnel Division, Human Resources, which he liked. There was a personal grievance system where if you were dissatisfied with something which happened to you as part of your job you could lodge an appeal against it. You presented your case, and the department would present its case to a tribunal who would make the decision on it. Buddy was the departmental advocate.

"Then my marriage broke up and I moved to Christchurch and started from the bottom again with the Post Office, but quickly got through the promotions because I had all the skills and experience."

But Buddy wanted to move on and explore the commercial world, so he took a job with the Firestone Rubber Company as Personnel Manager for a couple of years, then joined Associated British Cables, an Australian company which was making all kinds of all electrical cables including fibre optic cables. This was the early days of fibre optic and they had a huge contract with China. During this time Buddy was studying at university part-time, he completed his Bachelor of New Zealand History with Honours at Canterbury University. He'd started writing and had a couple of books published.

In 1990 Buddy got the job of Director of the Waitangi Tribunal and was asked to organise it along corporate lines. Buddy flattened the hierarchy, then changed the working hours so people could work when it suited them, an early example of flexi time. He set up training programs and put in place a proper public relations arm with media training. Research teams were established, with Buddy training them on how to collect and record information so that it could be written up by an experienced writer. "It was a great job that I loved, but I was sitting in my office one day thinking about how I could make the budget go further, like should I put motion sensors in so that when people leave the room the lights go out, to save power. Then I thought to myself, if that's the best you can think of it's time to leave."

Consequently, he started working with his cousin Joe Williams, at his law firm in Auckland, Tunicliffe Walters Williams. Buddy was doing a lot of the environmental development work and was involved in projects like building the Americas Cup Village and bringing water to the city from the Waikato River. He also looked after the firm's caseload of treaty claims which was quite extensive. Buddy then went to work for Mitchell Partnerships on the North Shore and again got involved in many large infrastructure projects around the country, including the upgrade of the national power grid, wind farms, hydro and geothermal projects, subdivisions, landfills, quarries and many others.



It wasn't long before he decided to strike out on his own and became the country's leading expert in the field of cultural issues in relation to resource management. He now works mainly in the Bay of Plenty, while still having national clients. Buddy also represents his paternal grandmother's hapu, Ngai Tamarawahu, and his paternal grandfather's tribe, Ngati Pukenga and through that work is heavily engaged with local councils.

Buddy Mikaere retains his resource management clients and still finds time to write. Some of his successful publications are Victory at Gate Pa and Māori life in Aotearoa and Te Maiharoa and the Promised Land which is the biography of a 19th Century prophet. All of these are up for re-publication. He is also the editor of the Illustrated Encyclopedia of Māori Life which he is presently editing to be reprinted later this year.



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