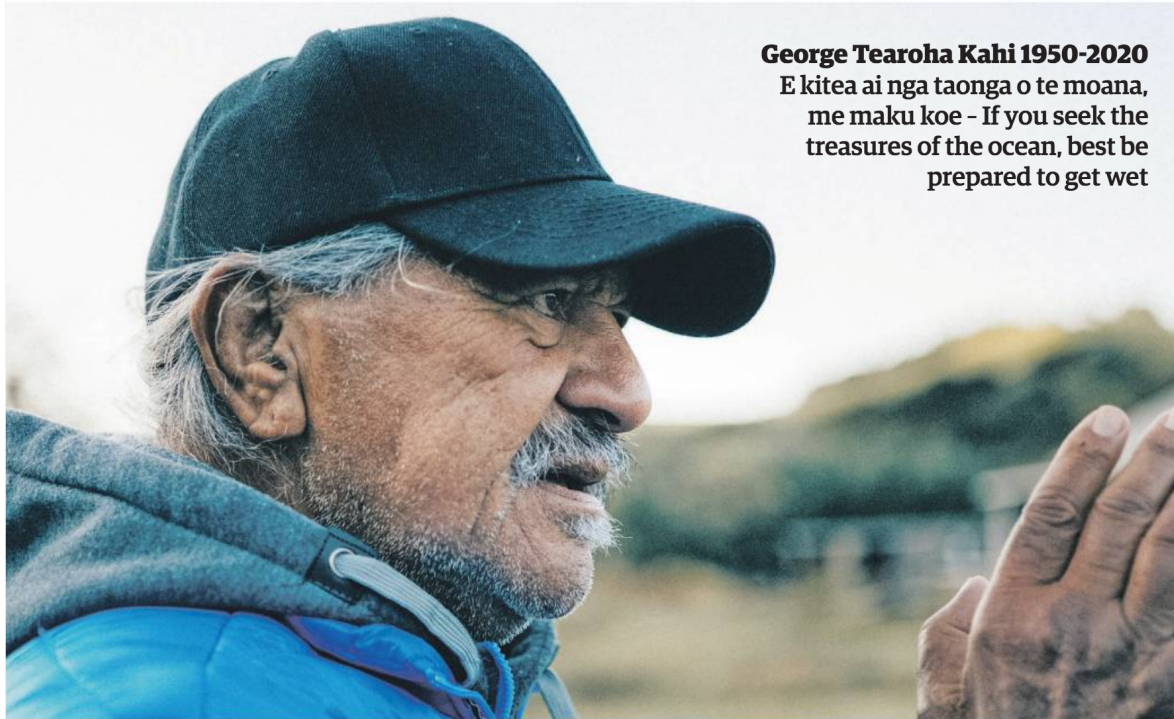


## 'He had a huge amount of things he



### George Tearoha Kahi 1950-2020

E kitea ai nga taonga o te moana,  
me maku koe - If you seek the  
treasures of the ocean, best be  
prepared to get wet

George Kahi's key thought, says Anton Forde, was "that everyone should feel they belong and feel they are part of the island".

Peter Rees Photography

Waiheke is in mourning after the death of one of its foremost cultural champions, Ngāti Pāoa elder George Kahi.

A large delegation travelled off-island to attend his tangihana on Tuesday, at Wharekawa Marae in Kaiaua, with the ra nehu/burial held on Wednesday.

George had spent Christmas Day surrounded by family in Christchurch before he passed.

Hailed as a "statesman" and "diplomat", kaumatua George leaves a rich legacy, having worked tirelessly to promote and celebrate Maori culture and heritage on Waiheke.

Asked to compile a list of projects he was working on just this year, close friend and artist Anton Forde said the number totalled more than 60. It's a mark of the man that the list of committees, organisations, and community groups he was involved with are far too lengthy to recount in one short article.

Anton said he, Lady Jennie Fenwick and Tohunga Whakairo/ Master carver Ted Ngataki travelled to Kaiaua on Monday to pay their respects.

"Te Aroha is his middle name and he was so loved by so many people," Anton

told *Gulf News*. "The island has gone into mourning for George, so many people have been affected by him.

"The idea that everyone should feel they belong and feel they are part of the island was key to him. In that belonging, there was responsibility to honour those gone before, those here now and those that will carry on in the future."

Born in Pukekohe, after spending time while he was young picking potatoes, George made the bold leap into the music business and became an accomplished jazz-fusion drummer. In the 1970s and 80s he toured the world performing in bands including Billy TK's Powerhouse Band and Te Aroha Band.

It was in honour of his mother, who made him promise to locate koiwi/ancestral burial sites on Waiheke, that George came to be so involved in the island. Ngāti Pāoa, their iwi, is Waiheke's manu whenua (people with authority over the land).

As he carried out his mother's legacy project, George became connected with the community and quickly became involved in social, environmental and cultural matters.

He blessed new schools, businesses and ventures, shared tribal history and tradi-

tions, and marked occasions with karakia and waiata.

And he built platforms for Māori art and culture, working to engage the community to take responsibility for the land and each other.

Most recently George connected with others to develop a cultural precinct at Matiatia, working extensively with the Pfaff family at Ahipao [the old Harbourmaster's building] and helping develop cultural tourism on Waiheke.

George has also worked with the local board to ensure historic markers are recognised at culturally significant sites on Waiheke, most notably Rangihoua and Onetangi Sports Park.

Few knew George was undergoing regular medical treatment while juggling his Waiheke workload, arriving weekly from West Auckland where he was living.

"It was only last month when he blessed one of the new homes on the island that he said 'I'm in so much pain,'" said Anton.

"He was a very private person about his illness. After that he went straight to the hospital; but even there he was connecting everyone in the room."

Anton was involved with a number of

## wanted to get done'



One of George Kahi's most recent projects has been working at Waiheke's Matiatia gateway with, from left, master carver Chris Wade, Ahipao's Esme Pfaff and artist Anton Forde. Photo Liza Hamilton

these Waiheke projects with George and regularly accompanied him around the island, meeting with individuals and organisations.

Building friendships and winning people over with his mahi, vision and sense of humour, he came to be widely respected. And it was mutual.

"He just loved the people here," said Anton. "It got bigger and he became more and more involved with the community.

"He wanted to help with things like housing and unemployment. He had a huge amount of things he wanted to get done."

Stretching all the way from Matiatia down to Man O' War at the bottom end, George connected with people all over the island.

"He covered so much ground in so many ways," said Anton. "He always wanted people to connect with the island and the land. He would say 'who else is going to do it?', so that would be what we would do."

Pastor Wiremu Te Taniwha said he and his Living Waters Church community farewelled George with great sadness.

"We will remember George with fond-



The large contingent to travel to the Wharekawa Marae tangihana on Tuesday showed the breadth of community groups George Kahi was involved in. Pictured above left, are, left to right, ward councillor Pippa Coom, Ngāti Pāoa's Dean Ogilvy, Paora Toi-Te-Rangiuai, Tanya Batt and husband Peter Forster; and, right, Grant Crawford, Gavin Oliver, Herearoa Skipper and Nick Pfaff. Photos Cath Handley

ness and gratitude for the many insightful, knowledgeable and sometimes controversial conversations," he said.

"George was a statesman and diplomat who lived life to the fullest, always making a connection between people, whenua and whakapapa."

Local Board chairperson Cath Handley travelled to Wharekawa Marae on Tuesday to pay her respects. She said anyone who knew George will feel a loss.

"We, as a board, will miss him, and so will all the staff. He was a high frequency visitor to our offices," she said.

"He set things up and he inspired people; he had extraordinary influence and good humour.

"He has been an absolute cornerstone to building awareness of Ngāti Pāoa history on the island. He's done that through complete involvement and immersion with a multitude of organisations and individuals. Even when he was extremely ill he was over. He was doing this for his tipuna who are from Waiheke and who are buried here."

• Liza Hamilton



## The place where I stand tall

*It is I*

*Who claims*

*My Tūrangawaewae*

*When standing tall on Te Rangihoua*

*It is I*

*Diving into Tikapa and Waitematā waves*

*It is I*

*Who takes Sealink or Fullers waka to*

*Tāmaki Makaurau return hiko*

*It is I*

*who claims*

*this land and sea with my birth here*

*It is I*

*It is I*

*Giving breath to Papatūānuku,*

*Ranginui and Tāne Matua*

*Again all me*

*It is I*

*My DNA connects me*

*It is me*

*It is all me*

*Waiheke*

*My Legacy*

*Ko te whenua ko au ko au te whenua*

*The land is me I am the land*

## Te waahi e tū

### Rātā ana au

*Ko ahau nei*

*E whaipānga ana*

*Ki tōku tūrangawaewae*

*Ki runga o Te Rangihoua*

*Ko ahau nei*

*E rukuhia ana*

*Ingā ngaru o Tikapa, o Te Waitematā*

*Ko ahau nei*

*E whakaeke ana*

*Ki runga i te waka whakawhiti,*

*Ki runga i te waka tere,*

*Ko ahau nei*

*E whaitake ana*

*Ki te whenua, ki te moana;*

*Ko ahau nei*

*E whakahāngia ana*

*Ki a Papatūānuku, ki a Ranginui, ki a*

*Tāne Mahuta*

*Anō nei, ko ahau*

*Ko tōku whakapapa tēnei*

*E hono atu ana, Ko ahau tēnei*

*Ko au ko Waiheke;*

*Ko Waiheke ko au*

*Tōku whakarereanga iho.*

*Ko te whenua ko au ko au te whenua*

*The land is me I am the land*

**By George Kahi, reproduced from *The Spirit of Waiheke***