

*Home Births to Hospital Births:
Interviews with Maori Women
who Had their Babies in the
1930s*

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Introduction

MY INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROJECT IS A VERY PERSONAL ONE. IN 1994 I began sorting through the papers of my mother, Emere Kaa Mountain, who had been a Maori health nurse and district nurse in the Bay of Islands during the 1930s.¹ Her papers included pages of notes about Maori home births, and it was interest in this aspect of her work that led me to this study.

Over the next six years I interviewed twenty-four Maori women who had given birth to at least one child in the 1930s. They were women known to me, while my parents, an uncle, and the *Kuia* [old ladies] themselves gave me other names. The extracts from the interviews follow. They display a moving candour because of the esteem they held for my mother, my father—Walter Mountain, a beef butcher for fifty-seven years, a taxi driver, a Kawakawa town councillor and the force behind the rebuilding of the Te Rawhiti Marae—and my uncle, Hauraki Heta, a mutton butcher for fifty years and a Mormon elder. I was helped by an aunt, Ngareta Wharerau, and another relative, Rangimarie Hakaraia Higgison, one of whom came with me when I knew that the *Kuia* might speak rapid and idiomatic Maori leaving me floundering. Yet another relative, Marara Tetai Hook, translated parts of some tapes. And for two, I went back to the families for their help.

1. For a summary of her career see E. M. Ellis & H. M. Harte, 'A Maori Health Nurse', in *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of New Zealand Women since they Won the Vote*, S. Coney (ed.), Penguin, Auckland, 1993, pp. 102–03.

Maori childbirth in the 1930s was a disaster area even though Derek Dow's most welcome research found evidence of genuine concern about Maori health at a governmental level from 1840 to 1940.² Maori health had been an issue since the formation of the colony, when missionaries and administrators established small private hospitals for Maori. In 1900 the Health Department came into being. It was then that Maori health became a focus. Native medical officers,³ Maori health nurses, district nurses,⁴ rural doctors (scarce as they were),⁵ the vision of some officials,⁶ and the native schools attempted to attend to the health of Maori at its domestic rural roots.

The Maori population, concentrated in rural areas, had risen to 82,326 by 1936⁷ after being severely reduced by war and disease in the nineteenth century. Maternal and infant health became an issue. In 1936–38, a Commission of Inquiry into Maternity Services travelled around New Zealand talking to each hospital board's doctors, district nurses, and midwives and concluded, among other things, that '... the risks of maternity amongst Maori women ... are twice as great as ... white women, and the incidence of sepsis is particularly high'.⁸ This was due to a number of factors, including poor housing, unhygienic conditions, the high incidence of skin diseases, and the inability of the midwife to cope with abnormalities.⁹

In an attempt to reduce mortality rates there was a move in the late 1920s to hospitalise childbirth,¹⁰ which meant that

2. D. A. Dow, *Maori Health & Government Policy 1840–1940*, Victoria University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1999.

3. *ibid.*, p. 35.

4. A. H. McKegg, *Ministering Angels: The Government Backblock Nursing Service and the Maori Health Nurses, 1900–1939*, MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1991.

5. See D. A. Dow, "'Specially Suitable Men?': Subsidized medical services for Maori, 1840–1940', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1998, pp. 163–88.

6. See, for instance, Dow, *Maori Health & Government Policy*, chapter 3.

7. *ibid.*, p. 173

8. 'Report of the New Zealand Committee of Inquiry into Maternity Services', *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1938, H-31A, p. 109.

9. *AJHR*, 1938, H-31A, pp. 95–7.

10. C. M. Parkes, 'The Impact of the Medicalisation of New Zealand's Maternity Services on Women's Experience of Childbirth, 1904–1937', in *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand*, L. Bryder (ed.), Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991, pp.165–80.

the doctors would predominate in what had been the midwives' field.¹¹ The Commission of Inquiry endorsed the education being given by the district nurses to Maori women in their homes as to the wisdom of their going to hospital.¹² They took note of non-Maori women's reasons for not going to hospital. These had to do with transport, no domestic help and no telephones. Both Maori and non-Maori women were reluctant to go to hospital for their births.¹³

For non-Maori women, the numbers going to hospital were increasing. In 1920, 35 per cent had their babies in hospital, by 1930 the number had risen to 68 per cent, and by 1938, 87 per cent of non-Maori women gave birth in a hospital.¹⁴

In 1937, 16.8 per cent of live Maori births were registered in hospitals, a figure which had risen to 49.5 per cent by 1947.¹⁵ By 1962, 90 per cent of all women were having their babies in hospital.¹⁶ Thus it took twenty-five years, from 1937 to 1962, for most Maori women to go to hospital to have their babies. This is quite a rapid change for such a fundamental cultural tradition but a slow transition when compared with non-Maori women.

The sample

As noted earlier, I interviewed twenty-four women in total.¹⁷ The youngest was seventy-nine and the oldest, in 1994, was ninety-three. This year I interviewed an alert woman aged ninety-two. Their answers provide an invaluable oral history

11. See P. Mein Smith, *Maternity in Dispute in New Zealand, 1920–1939*, Government Printer, Wellington, 1986; and J. Donley, *Save the Midwife*, New Women's Press, Auckland, 1986.

12. *AJHR*, 1938, H–31A, p. 6.

13. *ibid.*, p. 170.

14. Mein Smith, *Maternity in Dispute*, pp. 139, 150.

15. B. Brookes, 'Aspects of Women's Health, 1885–1945', in Bryder (ed.), *A Healthy Country*, p. 158.

16. I. Prior, 'Health', in *The Maori People in the Nineteen-Sixties*, E. Schwimmer (ed.), Longman Paul, Auckland, 1968, p. 279.

17. I wish to acknowledge here a grant from the Sesquicentennial Committee of the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. The original tapes of seventeen of the interviews are lodged in the National Archives, Wellington. For the preliminary findings of this project see H. M. Harte, 'Maori Childbirth in the 1930s', in *New Countries and Old Medicine: Proceedings of an International Conference on the History of Medicine and Health*, L. Bryder & D. A. Dow (eds), Pyramid Press, Auckland, 1995, pp. 361–5.

Table showing Kuia, the number of babies they had, the midwives and the years of birth

Kuia	Babies																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
No.1 year place MW	36 hp —	38 hm u	39 hm gu	40 hp —	42 hm u	43 hm gu	45 hp hp	47 hp hp	49 hp hp								
No.2 year place MW	30 hm gf	31 hm gf	33 hm h	35 hm h	37 hm h	39 hm h	41 hp hp	43 hp hp									
No.3 year place MW	25 hp —	28 hm d	30 hm h,m	32 hm h,s	34 hm h	36 hm d	40 hm s	42 hm hm									
No.4 year place MW	28 hp —	30 hp —	32 hp .	33 hp —	35 hp —	36 hm m	37 hm m	39 hm m	40 hm m	41 hm s	42 hm S	44 hm s	46 hm s	47 hm S	49 hm s	53 hm s	56 hm s
No.5 year place MW	37 hm u,a	38 hm u,a	40 hm h,m	41 hm h	43 hm a	45 hm h	47 hp —	49 hp —	51 hp —	53 hp —	55 hp —						
No.6 year place MW	39 hp —	42 hp —	44 hp —	46 hm h	47 hm h,c	48 hm h	50 hm h	52 hm h	54 hm h	56 hm h	58 car S	59 hm S					
No.7 year place MW	37 hp —	39 hp —	40 hp —	42 hp —	44 hp —	45 hp —											
No.8 year place MW	32 hp gm	34 hm ga	36 hm ga	37 hm ga	38 hm ga	44 hp —	46 hp —	48 hp —	50 hp —								

Kuiia	Babies																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
No.9	year place MW	40 hp -	46 hp -	51 hp -	53 hp -												
No.10	year place MW	35 hm fa	37 hp -	38 hm d	39 hm fa	40 hp -	42 hm d	43 hp -	45 hp -	46 hp -	48 hp -						
No.11	year place MW	30 hm fa	32 hm fa	34 hm fa	36 hm fa	37 hm fa	38 hm fa	39 hm fa	41 hm fa	45 hp -	52 hp -						
No.12	year place MW	34 hm pa	36 hp -	38 hm pa	39 hm pa	41 hm pa	44 hm -	46 hp -									
No.13	year place MW	37 hm ml	38 hm ml	39 hm dn	42 hm ml	44 hm ml	46 hm ml										
No.14	year place MW	38 hm d	39 hm d	40 hm -	42 hp -	44 hp -	46 hp -	48* hp -	50 hp -								
No.15	year place MW	34 hm m,d	34 hm dn	36 hp -	39 hm m,ml	40 hm m,ml	42 hm -	44 hm h	46 hp -	47 hp -	50 hp -	55 hp -	59 hp -				
No.16	year place MW	27 hm m+	29 hm m+	31 hm m+	33 hm m+	35 hm m+	37 hm m+	39 hm m+	40 hp -	42 hp -	44 hp -	48 hp -	50 hp -	52 hp -	54 hp -	56 hp -	
No.17	year place MW	32 hm ml	34 hm h	35 hm h	36 hm h	37 hm h	40* hm h	41* hm h	43 hm h	45 hm h	46 hm h	48 hm h	49 hp -	50 hp -			

Table (cont.)

Kuia	Babies																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
No.18	year place MW	31 hm fa	34 hm a,s	35 hm a,m	36 hm a,m	37 hm a,m	40 hm m	42 hp -	43 hm m	44 hp -	46 hp -	50 hm h	52 hp -	56 hm h			
No.19	year place MW	32 hm m	35 hm m	39 hm m	43 hm m	45 hm m	48 hm m	50 hm m	52* hm m	54* hm m	56 hm m						
No.20	year place MW	19 hm h	21 hm h	23 hm h	25 hm h	27 hm h	30 hm h	31 hm h	33* hm h	35 hm h	37 hm h	41 hm h	43 hm h	45 hm h	47 hm h	49 hm h	
No.21	year place MW	28 hm ml	30 hm ml	32 hm h	33 hm ml	34 hm ml	35 hm ml	37 hm ml	39 hm ml	41 hp -	44 hp -	46 hp -	48 hp -	50 hp -			
No.22	year place MW	38 hm dn	40 hm dn														
No.23	year place MW	30 hm m															
No.24	year place MW	38 hm m	39 hm m	40 hm m	42 hm m	44 hm m	45 hm -	46 hp -	48 hp -	50 hp -	52 hp -						

Key
 * = baby died at birth; a = aunt; c = cousin; d = doctor; dn/n = district nurse; f/fa = father; g = grandmother of i; ga = grandaunt; gf = grandfather; gm = grandmother and mother; h = husband; hm = home birth; hp = hospital birth; m = mother; m+ = mother and other whanau women; ml = mother in law; MW = midwife; pa = parents; S = self; s = sister; u = uncle

as to the effects of governmental policies and of their own cultural beliefs. Each *Kuia* had to sign a privacy form and on the same form give permission for the original interview tape to go into the National Archives. The *whanau* representative had to sign when their mother had passed on or when she was incapacitated. The same process was followed for their permission to use the interview in a book. Some *Kuia* refused one or the other but none refused both. For two *whanau*, there is still disagreement. Each *Kuia* has a typed copy of their interview and, when the publishing is over, they will retain everything on tape and paper.

The table provides a close look at the women or *kui*a and their varying family numbers. The average size of the families for this sample is nine, with the largest number of children in one family recorded as seventeen and the smallest as two. There are a variety of midwives, and men predominate. Two women had all their babies in hospital, and four had all of them at home. From the 1940s most women were having their babies in hospital.

Of the 147 home births, nine had a doctor or district nurse present. The other 138 had their trusted midwives. Five babies died at birth of the total 230 born. Some women may not have told me about baby deaths. Most women knew of someone who had had a baby death.

By the end of the 1940s, eighteen of the twenty-four women were having their babies in hospital. The interviewees offered various reasons for going to hospital. Twelve said that the doctor or district nurse had told them to go, or they believed that it was compulsory to go to hospital. Three said that their midwives had died and there was no one to deliver their babies. Four women had no transport, or lived too far from transport so they had their babies at home. Four said that it was too expensive to go to hospital with fees and layettes. Two said that there was no space at home. Their houses were too small and there were too many children.

The following extracts have been translated from Maori where the interviews were in Maori. The lasting impression of these venerable old ladies is their liveliness and their humour and their love of life. Even for some, as their energies faded and they passed on, their beings are easily restored

when their words are read. Their lives when they were young and looking to a bright and happy future in the 1930s for their children and themselves underlie the cares about their babies. The whole interviews are to be presented in a book.

Extracts from the interviews

Kuia 1

I did have a dry birth. The first one. And the home people always say your first one is the hardest too. My first one, my in-laws said, 'You don't know what's going to happen, you better go to the hospital.' I said, 'No, look at those *fullahs*. When I see some having theirs at home I want to stay home.' And they said, 'No you go to hospital.' [Kawakawa] The second one, oh well they were quite brave to see it through with me. And with my third one, I really refused to go. I said, 'No. I'm staying home because I liked that you're kneeling down.' But after the third one they put me back in hospital. You know, I think the nurses, the midwives helping you to have your baby, I don't think they have a good time either. They must have their doubts too ay? They must. They have their worries. They'll be worrying, I wonder if everything will be all right. I'm just thinking that today. And also, you know when I think of those cot deaths they're talking about. Makes me wonder you know, in our time there were no cot deaths.

They said you're better off in a hospital. I don't know maybe there were a few doubts. They weren't too sure I suppose, that's why they sent me to the hospital. If I had my way I have them all at home. Specially after going to hospital. It's not that something's wrong with me or the baby, no. I was just told you go to the hospital. In my way I refused to go, I won't tell them I'm in pain until it's too late. Naughty ay? I wanted Ngarupa and Wire [great uncle and aunt]. Cause they were good. Yes, I wanted them. They always came for my five I had at home. The last three I had in hospital. The first, the fourth and the last three.

Four I had at home. There are quite a few of us. I wasn't the only one who had babies at home in those times. I don't want to go to the hospital. And more so when I went for the

first one. They lift your feet up in the air. I suppose they still do the same. In hospital you lay on your back and your legs were lifted up. That's why I think it was so painful. And they're prodding here and there to see what's happening with the baby. It's not till afterwards that you think how embarrassing because it's so painful. Just one thing at the time on your mind to hurry the birth along.

The last one they had to take it away. Oh well, probably it won't come but they knew ay. The doctors. It was Doctor Frengley, the doctor.¹⁸ It is a sad thing I did not see my baby. All I knew was that I was giving birth. They didn't tell me anything. Perhaps it was too big. But the doctor said after the birth, I would not have survived if my baby had lived. So, that was all I knew about my baby. But it was a boy.

Kuia 2

I had six at home, one with my Grand Uncle and the ones with my husband. They helped me and massaged my body. Lovely. Never leave you. I had eight children—three boys, five girls. I had my first baby up at this place at Matawaia,¹⁹ the babies. When I got married my grand uncle had to come and bring me back there and he was my doctor. He was an old *fulla*, an old *kaumatua* [old man]. He wanted me to come back and he had to be with me all the time when I started labouring. And my husband wanted him to do it for me. So that's it. I had the baby. When I had it, well, kneeling at his knees. Then they made a *hangi* (sauna) for me to lie on and steam. Ooh it was warm in that tent, all covered up. Three days. Just one time. Never again. We know too much! Just a bath next one.

But when I get to hospital [Kawakawa] they make me lie down on the bed. That's tough. I didn't want to lie down, so I wanted to kneel down. But I didn't have the chance. Six at home and two at hospital, the last two. It's very hard at hospital to have it on a bed. Oh, it was tough. I had to lie down on a bed. They tell you to lie down. I had to lie down. I didn't want to lie down. I wanted to sit up but there were no nurses,

18. Gerald Jacob Frengley (c.1899–1973) MB, ChB NZ was medical superintendent of Kawakawa Hospital, 1926–51.

19. An hour's drive north-west of Kawakawa.

no doctors with me. I thought I better try to get up. No, I just have my baby there. No one there. They came after the baby came on the bed. My last ones. Hospital. No old people then. Had to go to hospital. We moved down here, closer.

Kuia 3

Well, I had my first one at the hospital. Whangarei Hospital. 1925. My mother was worrying more than I was. She didn't like me staying home and having my baby. So we went to, for me not knowing when I'm having my baby. We went to Hikurangi. I came into labour. They took me to hospital at Whangarei. In the hospital, one of the sisters, one of the nurses, she said, she's a sister, when I was going through the pains, and she said to me, 'When I tell you to push, you push'. And I thought 'Oh well, push'. And then she said, 'You push'. I pushed and then I stopped you see. And then she slapped me for not pushing down you see. I said to her, 'You wait till your turn comes and see if you'll be able to push.' I got wild with her you see. I didn't like that about hospital.

And then after that I had the boy. He was born in 1928. Well, I had the doctor to that one. I had him in Whangarei. And the doctor wanted me to go to hospital but I wouldn't go because I didn't like to leave my little girl with anybody, you know. So anyway the second came along, well, I thought, well it's no use me going trying to go to the hospital to have my babies. It's best I have it at home and get it over with and done. I'll be with my children.

My trouble is I couldn't trust anybody to look after my children. That's where my trouble was. And I know myself and that's what it was. My Mum used to say to me, 'I can look after them for you.' I said, 'No Mum, I rather look after them myself', you know. I thought she might go and give them a hiding or something like that, you know, and I thought, no, I'd look after them myself. So the next one came along in 1930. I had that one at home. I didn't go to the hospital. I wasn't going to no hospital and no doctor. I had a breech and it wasn't bad but it was bad enough. And the doctor was Dr Eva Hill.²⁰ She was living in Russell and she wanted me

20. Eva Esther Hill (1898–1981) MB, ChB NZ, 1921. For details on her career see J. Barrett, *Cancer and Cure: A Doctor's Story*, Bachman & Turner, London, 1976.

to go to hospital. I said, 'Well, no, I'm not going to no hospital. I'm staying home.' When I was labouring with him, it was nearly two days, I think, labouring and she was just in time to deliver that one. She said to me, 'Now next time you have a baby, you go to hospital.' 'No', I said, 'I won't. I'll be all right.' So, I had that at home. After that, I had all my children at home. I had eight children and I had them all at home. I had two breech babies. Doctor Eva Hill came and she fixed that one up too.

I'm worrying about my husband milking the cows by himself and all that sort of thing. And as for looking after the farm. So when I'm home here, as soon as I'm strong enough I'm out of bed and go down and help him to milk.

Kuia 4

My eldest boy was born in 1928 and then the others one after another. I had him at hospital. I went to the Whangarei one. It was horrible. I thought I was going to die. I had my second son in the Kawakawa hospital.

They put me on my back and you don't like to lie on your back. You want to get on your side, you see. I did. And I said no, I am not getting on my back. They said you have to do as you are told. And I said, no it is easier this way. I have been doing this all along since I started so I'll stay this way. And there was this sister there and she slapped me on the bum. And I said to her if you dare hit me again I'll get off this bed and I'll give you one and you won't forget it. I was in pain but still. I refused to go to hospital after that. Oh blow it. I wasn't going to listen to nobody. I told my *whanau* that I was going to have a baby. My sister came and said, I know what you're like. You won't wait for nobody. I had the next twelve at home. The sixteenth baby was stillborn. I had a doctor to that one. I had one stitch then. I had a stitch for the hospital births. Not for the home births. The doctor said I should have.

Kuia 5

At the first birth there were others there besides me and my husband. My first son had a cleft palate. We had to wait for the doctor for the cord was twisted and the placenta didn't

come away and the doctor had to come from Hikurangi to Punaruku [an hour's drive]. Dr Armstrong at that time.²¹

Oh well, they said we had to go to Whangarei Hospital. That's when they were pushing for women to go to. 1937. By that time everyone had to go to hospital. Sort of pushing you to go otherwise you could get into trouble when you get into labour. So you got all this and you got worried about this sort of thing. They pushed you. Some of them still didn't go. It's easier to stay at home though than going in. You have to have someone to look after your children and that sort of thing. I suppose that's why they wanted the women to go in. You rested up there but it didn't do much good because when you come home you adjust again. Everything is so different. If you're home everything just goes on. It's all part of it.

When you go to the hospital, you get all those luxuries. You get your food brought to you and everything. The babies are attended to. You don't have to do much but when you're at home well, everything just goes through and you don't notice any change because you don't go away from your children.

Did you rest for a day or so after your babies?

Yes, for the first ones, I had somebody there to do things, which wasn't so bad, but after, well, at Christmas time, you can't lie back in a one-roomed house. You've just got to get up and do things.

I went to the hospital again for five altogether. It was terrible when I first went there. Hospital was all right but in hospital something's being done to you. You can't sort of relax. You have to lie on your back. Twilight sleep or whatever they call it.²² Chloroform. They put it over here [pointing to her nose] and then they take it away. You don't feel anything and you wake up later. I don't know why they give it to you. But still they can do things to you, I suppose, and you wouldn't be able to stop them. Well, I used to think you're

21. Denis Frank Armstrong (c.1903–56) MB, ChB NZ, was the son of a South Island dentist.

22. Twilight Sleep was pain relief administered to mothers for normal labours in the 1920s and 1930s. Doctors used various drugs: chloral hydrate, bromide, morphia, nembatal, gas, chloroform, and ether. Painless births were promoted to draw women into hospitals. See 'The Silent Births of "Twilight Sleep"', in Coney (ed.), *Standing in the Sunshine*, pp. 60–1.

just like cow or something you know. That's what I felt like. It's not like being in your own bedroom and doing what you want to do.

Kuia 6

We were living in tents. My husband was on the roads. We shifted from Waiomio to Moerewa. I said, 'Hey, I'm starting to haemorrhage. I think I'm going to have my baby.' So they packed me in the car and took me to the Kawakawa Annexe. It was too cold in a tent for a baby so I stayed with my Dad and Mum. I had the first three in hospital. Then I had eight at home when my husband got houses for us—a *nikau whare*,²³ then an army hut and then this Maori Affairs house.²⁴ I always went to the doctor after my births so he can see if everything's all right.

Kuia 7

You know I never felt a thing with my first baby. When I woke up I had my baby. I don't know whether they gave me something. But I never, no problem at all.

I went in. Not hard labour, you know, but I knew. My sister said, 'Oh you're in labour. Go to hospital.' And I woke up, not long. They prepared me and that and then I woke up. I don't remember anything. When I woke up, I said, 'What, have I had my baby?' And they said, 'Well, feel your tummy.' I had my baby. But the second one, she was '39. Well, they gave me the mask. That was in Te Puke too. There were four I had down here at Kawakawa. I had to walk out up to the road. We had no road in here then. Out to the road on the other side of the bridge. I went from here in the car with my last two.

Kuia 8

I had my first baby in 1932 at the hospital. Lucky the old people were there. My grandmother and sister. I laboured all

23. *Nikau* (*rhopalostylis sapida*) was a palm tree used for the walls and roof of a one-room hut. The manuka (*leptospermum scoparium*) trunks, or tree fern trunks, were used to support the woven nikau covering. Newspaper and sacks were added inside for extra insulation.

24. The Native Department, as it then was, was renamed the Department of Maori Affairs in 1947.

day and all night and didn't have the baby until late the second day. It was night time before I had it. On the second day they said the baby wasn't coming so they said you have to go to hospital. Yes, it takes a long time the first one. My grandmother wanted me to. She must have made up her mind, too long. The waters broke at home and then they put me on the launch and I had her in hospital. I had to have the last four in the hospital. All in the hospital. Whangarei Hospital. Getting older. They were too far back in the bush, those.

Kuia 9

Yes, I had my first baby at the hospital. When I started labour pains my mother said, 'Oh that's started. Leave.' So I had to go on the train. Caught the train from down here at Motatau. You know, it takes about an hour from here to Kawakawa because every little station and shunting the trucks off and wagons, you know. And then get to Otiria and there's a cup of tea for so long, about half an hour. And then to Moerewa, shunt off all trucks for the Freezing Works and then got to Kawakawa. And then over there, my husband went to see the McEwens, you know they had the taxis. No taxi, all out. So he came back and went to Ralph Cookson's [undertaker] and he said, 'Oh, jingo, my wife's got to go up to the hospital. No taxis.' 'Oh', he said, 'I'll take her up.' Then he arrived on the hearse. He took me up on the hearse, to the hospital. He said, 'It's all right I want you in front here. I don't want you in the back.' I was there for two days before I had the baby. The next three I had at hospital because it was compulsory.²⁵

Kuia 10

And I had my first baby in a *nikau* house. It was my father that attended to me. He always did for us kids. He never got anybody to help. Sometimes he did but very seldom. But he was with me, him and Mum but he attended to me. I was there before I laboured the baby. I stayed there for a week and then I had the baby. But oh, it was hard. Oh well, to me

25. Hospital births were never compulsory but doctors and district nurses told their patients to go to hospital otherwise they wouldn't get help at home, as a way of forcing mothers to go to hospitals.

it was hard. Still I suppose as they say first babies always are but I don't believe that.

I wouldn't have another baby at home. I went to hospital. I was taken. My third baby I couldn't even get to the Kawakawa Hospital. It was so quick, just like going to the toilet. I had the doctor there. I thought, I wonder if it's going to be like that again. I had one at Rawhiti. That was the finish. I wasn't going to stay at home then. I went to hospital for the next one. I had the doctor at home for the sixth baby. Then I went to hospital for the last four. That was very easy.

Kuia 11

Eight children were born at home here at Mokau and two at Whangarei Hospital. It wasn't so easy but my father was a good doctor so everything was OK. Was as good as a doctor. My father is good. I love my father. He had a gift for it. He was taught. My sister and I didn't go to a hospital. He was our doctor. Nearly killed me when he passed away. One of my boys, number nine, I had in the hospital and he was born before time. He was five months and two weeks old. That's the boy here in this photo.

I got the contractions at home. The ambulance came for me so I went in and they put me in bed. They tried to stop it and I said, 'No.' I kick her away. I said, 'Let him come.' Oooh but, that's a little wee thing. They didn't bring him to see me. I was there for a week. I can't feed him, there was no milk. That's the first one of my babies that take the bottle because I had no milk. The first one. A strong baby. The next one, I had him at the hospital. I had a hard time with that one. He was a big baby. 1952.

Kuia 12

I had my first baby at home. Two days I laboured. That was all right. My parents thought it was a girl. It was a boy. Two years another one was going to come again. I had that and that birth was good. I had that in hospital [Kawakawa]. Then afterwards, three more I had at home. My mother came to deliver them. She came to deliver that third one. It was a breech birth. I knelt at a box. That was good. I had seven babies. Three in hospital.

One of my births was premature. My husband was drunk and we arrived home at night. There was no firewood. I went out and chopped some wood and carried the load back to the house. When I got there, I started labouring. I rang the doctor [Frenley] and he said, 'Come straight into hospital.' Someone took me in. I had that baby in hospital. It was three pounds in weight but in two weeks it was fit to come home. All my babies were breast-fed.

Kuia 13

I had my six at home. There were no doctors and hospitals in those days. My parents were still with us then. He helped me with the first one. 1937.

And then my third one. That's when I had your mother. She was district nurse. I knew I had him a little before time. I went back and my mother was really sick. She was dying, you know. And I must have got upset and that's how I had baby sooner. The next day then your mother came down. We sent for the nurse. She was Nurse Kaa then. She came down. She used to ride on a horse. Then she said he was all right. My baby was all right. He was only a few days before time. He had yellow jaundice but she said that it would go away in a few days. All the others I had them all back here at my mother-in-law's place. We never had any doctors, no doctors, only a nurse. I don't remember having doctors, only nurses. Nurse Kaa was the nurse around there at the time.

We didn't go to hospital so I don't know whether any others went to the hospital and had to pay. I don't know. But I know that most of the mothers, they all had babies at home.

Kuia 14

I had four girls and four boys and of course I lost one so that only left me with seven. I had him in Whangarei. In fact, I had the two of them, my girl in Whangarei, but I had a doctor with that one, with the girl. Doctor Buckley²⁶ from Whangarei, that's our family doctor. So when he put me off, I started singing, singing. I was in pain and that. Put me off, I started to sing a hymn and I woke up. Oh, it's all over. Oh,

26. Howard Francis Buckley (c.1896–1957) MB, ChB NZ, 1919.

well, you know when you're just about out he put chloroform on me and it was all over. I never felt my baby. Well, I did for the other one because it was a straight out birth. But this one, they put the mask on you and then finished.

But with him, who did I have? I had my namesake and a nurse then. And I had my baby in Whangarei with my mother. My third one? From then on I had the rest in the hospital. At Kawakawa. Those are the only two I had in Whangarei. You have your way at home and at hospital that was their way, on the side. That's how we had them. I wanted to go.

Kuia 15

It was in 1934 when I had my first children. Things those days were different from today. You didn't see doctors, didn't see nurses or anything. And anyway it so happened that the district nurse²⁷ happened to call in on some of the homes further up the road. And then these people told her that there was a young mother expecting at anytime. So she came down. Well, I was already in labour then. And who I had at home was my mother and my aunty, my father's sister. Well, she stayed there and then she decided that there was nothing that she could do without the doctor. So there was at that time luckily, a farmer living in Waimate here, and his telephone was the only one that could connect up to the hospital's. So the nurse wrote a letter, gave it to my uncle and he went up the road on horse-back to this house with this letter from this nurse to Dr Frengley from Kawakawa Hospital [an hour's drive], saying to him to come and he will find her car. Anyway Dr Frengley did arrive. Before I knew where I was I was out. He gave me ether I think. When I sort of come to my senses everything is all quiet on the western front. No doctor, no nobody, and then I looked around and she was still there and she said, 'Oh you've had a baby boy, but there's another one. But doctor said it will be quite some time yet before the other one will come, but we won't need him, so you can have a good sleep now dear. I'll have a rest too.' And the poor thing ... we had a sofa out in our kitchen, and that's where she went, this district nurse. And she's old, she wasn't young.

27. District Nurse Hall, retired at this time.

Anyway it was quite some time after that then I had the second one.

I had the next one at hospital. The nurse and the doctor said I have to go to hospital. Then I had two at home. Couldn't get to hospital and my mother was there. Then I had seven at hospital. One in 1944 I had at home with my husband. It started to come early. That went all right.

Kuia 16

I have sixteen children. I've got over 146 grandchildren. Most of my family, I had the births at home with my mother. I still remember those days. I had a hard life. Then the next one arrived 'cause pretty well every year I had a baby. When the next one arrived, my mother arrived. This baby she does. Then the next time the same thing happens. How many were there when I went to the hospital [Kawakawa]. The old people had gone so I had to have my last daughters in hospital. My mother said the best thing for me is go to hospital anyway.

It's hard that giving birth at home. It's very hard. It's very painful, the Maori birth in those times. I didn't, I didn't want to go to hospital. I refused to go for the first seven. I carried the things but in the end I went to hospital, specially down there, with this one.

Daughter: From 1940, she went to the hospital. It was compulsory then.

It's easy at the hospital. I had nine there. They give you some drugs before you have birth for your baby. Well, that's what they did for my last baby. They give me some drugs to ease the pain. No, they do something and they put it on your nose and you breathe it in.

Kuia 17

From my understanding, it was for the benefit of the Maori that we had to go [to hospital] but for me it was because we were far away from any place to come to hospital [from] in Motatau right the way up the back. We had a house, a tin shed but it was our own. Just one room and our only stick of furniture was a small stove my husband had carried up and he put this little Orion stove, cast iron with two rings on it. It was rough up there. I don't know how he got it up

there. I had eleven at home and two died at birth. Then I went to hospital for the last two. There was no room in our house at that time and it was easier to go to hospital.

Kuia 18

I had six at home. I had the 1940 one at home. I didn't go to the maternity annexe.²⁸ My mother came to look after me, that's why I didn't go. And it's hard to get to the annexe. We were about five miles away. We never had any vehicles. We were too poor, too poor to go there so that's why I didn't go. That's the downfall of the Maori—can't get to the annexe. That's some of the trouble with the Maoris. And then there . . . the things they did there. They told you to hold on to the baby when you wanted to push. And then they put a pad over there to stop the baby. That's what some of them were frightened about not going to the annexe.

I finished having babies when I was forty-one. I went to work in the Whangarei Hospital. The Maori mothers wanted to go home. They just had the baby the day before and they wanted to go home. And Sister Bolan used to tell them that it's no good going home, they're not well enough to work for the family; to stay in the hospital for another three days. Sister Bolan, she was good. She understood the Maori wanted to get home and work like heck. Well, with me it was the last daughter. I had her in hospital. My mother wasn't able to come out. She was too sick. She had a high blood pressure, heart complaint. She couldn't come out although she would like to, but she couldn't. And my father had to look after her. I went on a truck, on a rattly old truck. And I came back in a taxi. They had a taxi going then. I was on the bed. I said to the nurse, 'I'm going to have my baby soon.' 'Don't have it', she said, 'don't have it.' And she ran away to get the sister. And then I had just had the baby and I was sitting up just like that and just had the baby. 'Oh', she said, 'So long as you didn't have it on the floor.' I had the baby on the bed. They were good. All those sisters are good in the hospital.

28. The maternity annexe at Te Kopuru Hospital, which opened in 1903 and was an hour from Whangarei Hospital.

Kuia 19

I had ten babies at home with my mother. She was a nurse, my mother, and she delivered all our children. She was strict. I had my first in 1932. My babies didn't come quite often out of me. Long time between my children. I had my last one in 1956. Before my last one, two of my babies died.

Kuia 20

When I had my first baby they come. They all come, my grandmas. They talk. I didn't mind. But since then I was hating people you know when I'm expecting. My sixteen births. Just me and Dad [husband]. But at the time the baby comes out, I tell him to go out and I call him when it's out. Poor people. Matou (I say), go to the *hui* house. Poor things. Even my own brother. Most women come to show *aroha*. This lady in Rawhiti [a half hour by sea to Russell, then a half hour from Kawakawa] is like me. She won't have anybody. She just has her mother.

Somebody wanted Dad. They were labouring. I said, 'Somebody wants you to go down.' He said, 'No. I'm staying right here.' He didn't go. I said to myself, well just as well you're home or otherwise I wouldn't know what to do, to go into hospital. I've never in my whole life, I've never been to those places. Yes. I'm not like most people—hard and takes awhile. No. My labours were usually just a couple of hours. If there's no one around. Dad taught me everything I know. One time I was labouring for eight hours. That one died. I never got the baby. Dad ordered the doctor urgent from Russell. And the doctor couldn't believe how I was still alive. He said to Dad it's a miracle that I lived. It's dangerous. He said to me lucky I'm a healthy person.

Kuia 21

My daughter's friend said to explain where babies come from, I don't know where that came from. You cough them up. But my eldest son. I nearly dropped him in a potty that one. But my mother-in-law pushed me on to the bed. And I tell you that's been a blinkin' great learning, teaching thing for me. You see with me, childbirth was easy, I suppose, you know? My husband looks at me when we're going up the road

looking for a doctor and the next thing, he turns round and I'm not going for a doctor, I'm running back into the house. And he's got to double up and run back. And then he finds out, oh when he gets back into the house, the baby's nearly coming through, nearly born! But I used to birth that quick most of my kids were born at home. And that was the beauty part of the birth at home that you can get into a bath. You know, in a blinkin' old-time bath. Really soak in it. You see at the hospital, they just really wash you around and that's all. But oh, it's lovely when you sit in a bath and then you get out and you do yourself up, then tie yourself up. Then I had a break. The next one was born normally, the next one was another breech! And the next one was a normal and the next one was another breech. So I had three breeches. But they [were] all born at home, those breeches.

But one of them, number eight of my kids, I went away to hospital [Whangarei]. And the doctor said to me, 'And what you want to come in here for after having all those children at home?' And I said, 'I don't want kids on my bed on Christmas Day, hopping around and spoiling my dinner.' He started to laugh. And I said, 'I want a decent Christmas dinner'. Well, it is right you know, because you get about three or four kids, you know and this was number eight this one. I had five in hospital. I ended up cutting the cords for all my kids at home.

My first baby was in 1928. The last one was in 1951.

Kuia 22

We were married in 1936. The first baby was in 1938. We couldn't afford to go to hospital in those days. Money was so short. Dr Maclean was the doctor in those days. It was the first babe so we had to have help.

But I wouldn't go to hospital . . . well it was expensive . . . we couldn't afford that. We would have had to pay it off on time payment wouldn't we? In those days we had to go to Kawakawa. This Kaikohe Hospital was in 1958. A lot of women had their babies at home for that reason. Auntie Tim had her babies at home and I had the doctor come to the house. I think I had a few problems, which was why the doctor was there. My in-laws were there . . . my family don't come

from this part but I class it as my home now . . . Well, we've been married for fifty-eight years. I was lying down on a bed for my baby with the doctor there. Your mother was district nurse and she attended my second birth. She was game and I was game. Just two babies.

Kuia 23

I hated being betrothed. I hated my husband. They didn't want me to marry my own boyfriend. It took nine years to have a baby. And I hated that experience too. I had it at home. I married again and had another baby at home. That was better.

Kuia 24

Oh, if I had a baby in hospital then someone must have found a car. I had most of them at home. Too poor and too busy to go. Well, the later ones, the younger ones I had in hospital. Had to find a ride. Well, at home it's just the same eh? Actually, they, there you sit down there, actually on your knees, you know. You don't sit with your knees closed but they prepare the place for the baby first before you do that. Yes, when you're squatting, well some of them say that all you have to do is pull your *puku* [stomach] up and out slips the baby. It happened with me.

Auckland