

Confined Moments

Patricia Walsh

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia (Tricia) Walsh (Ngāti Porou) is a mother, grandmother, social worker, inspirational speaker, justice activist, campaigner, ex-prisoner and survivor. Patricia first entered prison as a young teenager. By the time she was 40 years old she had been in prison six times. Her insights are informed by both lived experience and a keen analytical mind. Her ability to speak to other survivors of harm and those who have harmed, as well as to policy makers and influencers, demonstrate the breadth of her reach. She signals the importance and power of whakapapa (our genealogies, descent lines) as a decolonizing strategy that can lead to the restoration of mana (prestige, authority, control and spiritual power) for individuals and the collective. Tricia is committed to ending five generations of dispossession and abuse in her whānau (family), and to create safe and flourishing futures for them and for all tamariki (children). Her journey has been recently documented in an auto-biographical documentary entitled *I Am: I am changing the future for our whānau: I am Tricia Walsh* available at <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/i-am/episodes/s3-e3>.

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These short thought clouds capture moments in time and are a koha (gift) to all who understand the struggle and seek to create pathways of positive change. They do not under-estimate the harm and damage done, nor the challenges that change presents, but they recognize the intrinsic value of each of us. Mauri ora.

One Memory of Childhood

I have many memories of my childhood, most of them I wish were someone else's. Sometimes I think, "is it just me or is there some sort of phenomena that provokes us to remember more of the sad events from our past than the ones that may have given joy?" Behind one of the doors in my mind is a memory of always feeling alone. Even in a crowded room I always felt alone and very much aware of my difference. The loneliness I felt when I was left in my room to tend to my battered body after being on the receiving end of my mother's wrath or the shame that burdened my soul as my father

would refuse to acknowledge me, the day after he used me to satisfy his sickness. The loneliness that turned to fear as the sun disappeared beyond the horizon and as the darkness bought with it the prayers of a little girl hoping to be left alone.

One Memory of Prison Life

Prison did not rehabilitate me. I remember my first time in prison. I was all of 16 years of age when I was sentenced to three months of corrective training. I left behind a seven-month-old baby who was left in the care of my alcoholic mother and eleven-year-old sister. I remember arriving at Arohata in a police car and being left in the bus stop (waiting cubicle) for what seemed like hours. I was given a mug of barley soup and a stale sandwich, both of which I scoffed down. As the other prisoners walked past, tapping on the window and some making intimidating remarks, I felt the bravado begin to diminish and a feeling of vulnerability overcome me. I was not so tough sitting in that bus-stop. I heard the jingle of keys and was led to a room to be processed. Prison did not rehabilitate me.

One Memory of Recovery

Legend says that before a pēpi (baby) exits in the birth canal, it is taken on a celestial journey by its tīpuna (ancestor/s). On this journey it is shown its life pathway and intrinsic potential. Recovery to me is discovery. I have discovered that it is okay to be me. I do not have to abuse myself because I am so bad. I am a beautiful Māori woman who has given birth to four beautiful Māori children and who has the privilege of being a nanny to twelve beautiful mokopuna (grandchild/grandchildren). One memory I would choose to share has been the healthy connection I now have with my children, my rocks, my world. My journey of realizing my intrinsic potential did not come easy and my children were taken on a roller coaster ride that they jumped off as soon as they were able. I know my children trust me now and are proud of the woman I am becoming.