

The NZLIA Conference

Jenny Cram was there, and has written this personal account of her experiences

A small contingent of Australians joined with our Kiwi colleagues at their annual conference held this year in Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty. The theme of the conference was Bridging the Gap (*Whakakotahitanga*), bridging the gap between the haves and have-nots of the information age, between New Zealand's two predominant cultures, between the now and the future, between education reality and educational need, between the worlds of literature and life, with books and libraries standing as the information bridges between extremes, the now and the then.

The Conference began with a formal ceremony on the Whare-roa Marae (a *marae* is a special meeting place, an enclosed space in front of a Maori meeting house), in which the *Tangata Whenua* (the people of the land) welcomed the *Manuhiri* (visitors). *Kawa* (Maori protocol) differs from *marae* to *marae*. It differs between tribal groups, though basic principles are common to all—people are welcomed and cared for throughout the *hui* (meeting). We gathered outside the gateway, the *Wero* (challenge) was delivered, and Peter Ellyard, Director of Preferred Futures in Melbourne, accepted the *rakau* on behalf of all the visitors.

The women then called us onto the *marae*, women first, followed by the men. However, when we were seated, it was men in the front, women behind, and only men spoke. This seems strange to Australian women, but in the past, even on the *marae*, visitors were not necessarily safe and the speeches were a way of "feeling out" the opposition. In fact, women hold high status in Maori society, speak as equals within the *Wharepuni* (the meeting house), and are generally treated with great respect.

Biculturalism was not only a strong thread throughout the conference program, it was the basis on which the conference was organised. Two highly respected elders were present for the whole week, and both participated fully in the conference. *Karakia* (prayer) started every day, grace was said before formal meals, and publications were blessed as well as launched.

The line-up of speakers was impressive, and challenging, and a great deal of care had been taken to ensure that there was a very full social calendar, so that even if you knew nobody at the conference you would never have to eat alone on any evening.

Te Roopu Whakahau, the Maori Library Workers Network, had sponsored two young Aboriginal librarians, Melissa Jackson from the State Library of New South Wales, and Alana Garwood from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. They were superb representatives of the profession and wonderful ambassadors for Australia.



Alana Garwood (left) and Melissa Jackson, two young Australian Aboriginal librarians, receiving a presentation from the bicultural SIG and Te Roopu Whakahau, the Maori Library Workers Network

One of the many pleasures of the week was being able to meet with the President of the Fiji Library Association, Jayshree Mamtara, who has contributed the Frontline for this issue of *inCite*. I was cosseted and looked after by our hosts in the most delightful fashion and came home laden with gifts and a wonderful sense of being surrounded by *aroha*—the concept of love in its widest sense which can mean respect, concern, hospitality, and the process of giving.

The NZLIA held its Council meeting on the Friday immediately following the conference. They invited Virginia and me to attend, and we found that the agenda included some very familiar items.

The joint conference in 1994 will be an opportunity for the two associations to further strengthen their relationship, to share problems and solutions and to work in partnership. Maori protocol will be a feature, entirely appropriate in view of the enlightened approach to the Treaty of Waitangi. The four principles of the Treaty are principles which should permeate dealings between all people, whatever their ethnic or social background.

It is not difficult to learn the correct forms of greeting and other suitable Maori expressions and to use them appropriately. I had practised for weeks to learn an appropriate greeting and introduction for my paper, but by the end of the Conference I had also picked up enough Maori to be able to speak off the cuff at the *Poroporoaki* (Farewell). At the conclusion of my remarks, our New Zealand colleagues rose *en masse* to sing a *waiata* in support. It was a wonderful expression of professional solidarity.

Making people feel comfortable is the Maori way, and we should reciprocate. We are usually polite when we are visitors, and although the Wellington conference is a joint one, Australian participants will also be guests in New Zealand. Use your library skills—read, learn, understand, and then come to Wellington and enjoy. ■