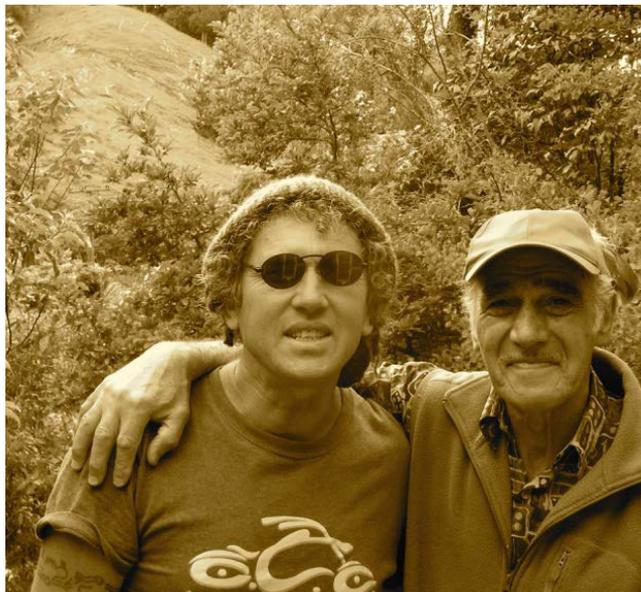


## THE RAW MAN: Rowley Habib (1935-2016)

### Extracts from letters and an interview, with commentary by Brian Potiki

*The letters came handwritten on lined sheets (the earlier ones headed Minute Sheet and Cubitt Wells) and they came typed on thin white sheets of A4: letters from a Manners Street Post Office Box in Wellington; from Birkdale in Auckland; from Pataka Road; and, lastly, Williams Street in Taupo. The earliest that survives is from 1978, when Rowley was in his forties; by 1990 they'd become a regular – sometimes fortnightly - exchange, continuing up to a letter received three weeks before his death on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2016 of a heart attack (hoping we could meet up in Rotorua at the Tutanekai Street Night Market).*

*On 19th and 20th December 2011 I interviewed Rowley. We walked around the Taupo lakefront then drove out to his writing room at Wairakei and on to his birthplace at Oruanui, me holding a small voice-recorder as he talked. He had a strong sense of literary history, as the letters and interview show; that and his self-belief in his own importance in what he later refers to as “the First Wave” of Maori writing made this excursion seem quite natural.*



## Ardmore Teachers' College (1954)

*In his letters Rowley often discussed books he was reading or had read, and, in the last few months of his life, it was a great sadness to him to have lost the ability to retain what he was reading. In our last conversation he expressed a wish for "just two more years" so that he could see all of his stories published.*

### *Interview*

I'd been told by my English teacher at Te Aute College *you have the seeing eye of the writer* - that, from what he'd read in my essays, I had a gift for story-telling. He suggested I submit stories to newspapers and magazines when I left college to supplement my income (no teacher ever encouraged full-time writing as a career in those days). At the time what he said went right out of my head, or so I thought. Then at Ardmore Teachers Training College a couple of years later, where literature was taught very differently to high school (no compulsory exams for one thing), I was exposed to writers and their work and lives who were to figure prominently in my life – D.H.Lawrence, Hemingway, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Zola, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Whitman and others I've forgotten. I began to see that writing as a career could be a *real* possibility. They, after all, came across as being no more or less human than I was. The upshot was that sometime in October I woke from a dream that was so vivid in my mind that I reached for my exercise book and pen on the desk beside my bunk and wrote it down. What I wrote impressed me sufficiently that I woke my room-mate Eddy Ormsby in the bunk above and began reading aloud what I'd written. About half way through Eddy leaned over to see what I was reading from and expressed his surprise saying *did you write it? I thought you were reading it from a book!* His saying this quite surprised me as well as I thought he knew it was something I'd written. Not long after I wrote a second story and showed it to Eddy. Late afternoon, returning from rugby training (I played for the first fifteen), I saw students crowding around the door to our room. Thinking something must have happened to Eddy I arrived feeling very concerned. What the hell? Eddy was sitting on my bunk reading them my stories! The buzz had gone through the dormitory about these stories I'd written. If I wasn't sure about my talent at this stage I had no doubt later. The people running *Farrago*, the college magazine, were running a literary competition. I'm still not sure who submitted my stories for it certainly wasn't me. The outcome was that my stories won first and second prize. I received my first payment for my writing. I left a teaching career to pursue a career as a writer believing I had a destiny. I'd go it alone. Carve out my own path. (Path! Hell! There wasn't even a track at the time, just a barren wilderness of scrub!) I'd been given a gift – the ability to write. This would be my *raison d'être*. Of course I didn't realise I was pioneering the way for contemporary Maori writers and writing. I know there are those who will consider this claim preposterous but I know that when the research is done it will be acknowledged that I laid the foundation. This I did as the most prolific and consistent – persistent – contributor of stories, sketches, poems, articles for publication throughout the 1950's, '60's and early '70's. Especially in *Te Ao Hou* magazine which was the most influential Maori publication at the time. Not that I'm suggesting for one minute that I was the first person of Maori descent to write, rather I'm staking my claim as

being the most prolific of the First Wave that started up around the time I started writing and publishing.

The first novel that made a lasting impact was *How Green Was My Valley*. Set in a Welsh mining community, I was able to recognise in its characters and their behaviour the people I know best, Maori. And the same for Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, set in a North of England coal mining town recognisably like my Oruanui timber-mill settlement; more so, as I had just set my mind on a writing career, it gave me hope that a writer *could* come from a working-class background – a humble, isolated settlement. Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice And Men* and Zola's *Germinial* had the same effect – a recognition of the characters with nga Māori katoa. There was a rawness (there's that word again) about them that I understood. Dozens, scores, hundreds of authors and their books impressed me because of their subject matter, style, setting, characters. A recognition of what you do or feel; of people you know or others you've observed. Off the top of my head are Marquez's *A Hundred Years Of Solitude*, Joyce Carey's *The Horse's Mouth* and Patrick White's *Voss*. Then there are the short stories; everything of Hemingway and Tolstoy and our own dear Katherine Mansfield.

I felt an immediate rapport with Walt Whitman who liberated us from the restrictions of the formal poetry of England in particular. The major hiccup was that he wrote about a vast country – America – whereas I lived in a couple of islands, which his vast sweep didn't suit. I nonetheless took some lessons from him and restricted the poems I wrote to the much smaller landmass and population way down at the bottom of the South Pacific.

Could Thomas Wolfe be the godfather of these rambling odysseys where the author is the protagonist of what professes to be real life, passed off as novels? As far as I know all of his books are accounts of various stages of his own life running to millions and millions of words. He pounded them out and dropped the pages into a wooden box without even editing them. For this he was widely accepted as a genius. But as one critic asked *is pouring out your life in great detail on paper genius?* Perhaps it was, for to disclaim this is to ignore his facility as a writer – a way with words, word structure, an ability to hold the readers' interest plus his enormous energy. It was like he wrote in a fever. And is to overlook the selectiveness of his accounts, some of which – like with Henry Miller as has been discovered – may have been bullshit!

I read some of V.S.Naipaul's early stories in the early sixties (I can even remember the boarding house in Dunedin I was staying in at the time). I found them erudite and refined but wasn't excited by him. Perhaps he seemed too academic?

### *Interview*

Two documentaries on TV recently. Maurice Shadbolt – what an awful end to a great man, a real tragedy. It upset Birgitte and me. Birgitte knew him – he stayed with her and Anton Vogt in Menton for a while. Then Allen Curnow. What a grand old trooper, still prolific at ninety, intellectual faculties intact, in great physical shape pretty well up to the day he died. Birgitte commented that he lived a charmed life however I doubt it all could have been. How could there not have been some unpleasant moments? This aside, his poetry (and approach to it) is an ideal example of the thing I've been talking about with regards to Charles Bukowski and

his ilk. I'd argue that it's the poet's job to *mine the gems* – do the hard graft of digging and picking and chipping away the superfluous rubble to find the gem, rather than Bukowski does, dumping the rubble at your feet and letting you do the mining. I believe that poetry is a craft – it starts with the heart then has to be processed through the intellect and onto the sheet of paper. They think it's poetry simply because it is *passionate*. But it's more than a passionate cry from the heart; it's also a craft that's evolved over centuries. This much Curnow was aware of – he was a master craftsman who'd taken the trouble to study and learn the forms and master them. I do take issue with rhyming where the rhyming is so subtle it isn't noticeable, even when read aloud. Surely the whole idea of rhyming was to instill a kind of music into the spoken word. I can't see the point of rhyming if it doesn't have this effect. But I'm aware that poetry has moved a long way from what was considered necessary back in the 1950s or '60s (even compulsory) for one to dare call oneself a poet – moved to more emphasis on original use of imagery and to hell with archaic forms of metre. But I still think that a poet should have a knowledge of these forms. Picasso after all had mastered the conventional forms of drawing before he went off on a tangent. And it's the fact that he could draw a human body that looked like a human body that gives validity to his later, unconventional work. Likewise Colin McCahon. I've loaned my nephew Dino Bukowski's *Love Is A Dog From Hell* and he's rapt! Thinks the poems are great – has his mates around to read them as well and as they all tend to be of a similar disposition they're rapt also. D H Lawrence was a much better writer than Charles Bukowski, much more elegant and sophisticated. But their idea was the same, to write 'white hot' from their initial impulse and leave it. Certainly this is what Bukowski did. Lawrence's 'poetry of the immediate present' only applied to his later poetry such as *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

A strange thing is happening – more and more I find that on certain days writing comes easily. Almost like...magic! Whereas for a week or two it's a struggle – a battlefield – and I struggle to find the right form, no nearer resolving it than when I began, further away from the original idea, more tangled in knots. Then one morning I'll wake up, have my usual breakfast, come up here to my cottage and voilà! Why did it all seem so hard before? I've had this tendency for most of my writing life. It's only as I get older it's become more pronounced. It is different if the work is being written on commission – then there's an unhindered flow. A couple of thousand words a day? A matter of rolling up your sleeves and knuckling down, getting on with it, pounding out the words. You don't wait for inspiration; if it's there at all it comes during the process of writing. In my case these moments have been all too rare – I've never had the consistency of encouragement. I don't know why. Perhaps my writing is not commercial. There's been times when I felt I deserved – had earned – better treatment than I got. It's just the way things panned out.

### Writing for theatre and television (1978)

*Rowley's dramatic writing at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s was part of the beginning of modern Māori dramatic writing, along with Harry Dansey whose play Te Raukura, written for the 1973 Auckland Arts Festival, was the first by a Māori. After I directed a production of this play in Wellington in 1975 (which Rowley attended), he shared his plan for a Wellington-based Maori theatre with Jim Moriarty and I. Both Jim and I took*

*part in the numerous productions of his first play, 'Death of The Land,' along with many other actors. In excerpts from three letters Rowley discusses his involvement in theatre.*

25 September 1978

It has been my aim from the outset of establishing Te Ika A Maui Players that one day we be a professional theatre with half-a-dozen Players on the payroll fulltime – fully committed to TIAMP and then be able to pay full rates to any other cast who may be involved in a production but are not 'hard-core' members. Of course here is the rub – where and how does one get the money to achieve in that time. I have invested an amount of money – nowhere enough but at least it's a start. My long term hope is for a small business that generates income towards this. I'd given myself three years to achieve this goal (one year down already) but I can't see it happening towards keeping the theatre financially buoyant rather than relying on hand-outs from some Arts Council or other. An impossible dream perhaps but I'd like to give it a try. In the meantime I rely on the goodwill of part-timers. We are *moving*. All these performances and travelling away I feel are helping to build up the confidence and morale of the group. And of course we are gradually building a reputation as a 'living and kicking' theatre that people will be able to take seriously.

At the moment we are flat stick negotiating, planning, scripting and casting a proposed series of six plays for TV One, done by TIAMP. We are insisting that the director be of our choosing. I will be undertaking over-all production. I've already drafted the format and several of us have been assigned the task of producing the scripts.

7 August 1981

I'm finding it very difficult to reorient my self to Auckland. It is such a vast place. Wellington seems like a small town whenever I return. Which is quite often. I'm returning there again next week – that horror of a place, Avalon, has commissioned me to write another play. I submitted the first draft a couple of weeks ago and they like it and have bought it. Whatever you think of television you can't deny they pay the best money in the business and they pay on time what's more. The play's set in a Bastion Point type of situation and is mainly about "protestors". Māori protestors.

*The Protestors was broadcast in 1982 as part of the Loose Endz series of one-off dramas and featured Jim Moriarty, Merata Mita, Joanna Paul and Billy T James among others in a large and stellar cast. In 1983 Rowley Habib won a Feltex Award for the play.*

14 June 1988

We called in on the Nga Puna Waihanganga Conference at Rotoiti but only for the Sunday night 'all in concert.' Except for a couple, not many of the 'old faces' around. However the thing is still going as strongly as it ever was. Lots of 'new blood' which is good and proper.

I often think about the 'old crowd,' Te Ika A Maui Players, *Death of the Land* etc. with a measure of nostalgia. For it seems to me now (and I even knew it then) that they were very vital times. A time that I haven't been quite able to recapture again, despite sporadic sorties into the world of theatre, TV and live performances. The difference being that these others

have only been brief, quick sharp stabs at it. In, get the job done, and out again. There hasn't been an almost total commitment as it was in those days. Altho' to be honest I think it's because I want it this way. Don't think I want my life to be so totally taken over like that again. However there are times when I do feel I'm 'out of touch.' And it doesn't help matters being here in Taupo and so far from the 'pulse of things.' Yet with Birgitte in my life this seems the right and proper place for me – for us – to be.

### Menton (1984) and Samoa (2005)

*I've prefaced the following letter extracts with Baxter's poem referring to Rowley's time in Dunedin. He'd meet up with Jim and Jacquie Baxter later in Wellington - outside a Courtney Place record store he recalled them talking excitedly about the Bob Dylan record they'd just bought. Meanwhile he was thinking "who the heck is that?"*

*Midwinter Moon (for Rowley Habib)*

*Rowley, when we met in Princes Street,  
You were sick of the Public Works Department,  
I was sick of the whole town of ghosts –  
It did me good to see  
Your beat-up gloomy stubbled Maori face...  
I drove the Public Service Garage Holden  
Howling up the motorway,  
Ten bottles of freezing coke on the seat beside me,  
You and your girlfriend in the back...*

*James K Baxter: Collected Poems (OUP, 1979) p.364.*

13 January 2010

I was staying in the Gretna Hotel in Taihape in 1963. How do I remember that? Because I came down from my room on the second floor for breakfast and heard on the radio the news of John Kennedy's assassination. At the time I was working as House-master at Flock House on the coast road down from Bulls, a hostel run by the Department of Agriculture, for boys being trained to farm. I was on my way to Taupo and normally would have stayed in the Taihape motor camp but I had a duodenal ulcer as a result of several years on the Government Service treadmill, and that night it was very bad – so much so that I thought that if it killed me that night I wanted to be in a comfortable bed, a comfortable room. I gave up the Government Service rat-race in 1965 and took up manual work which better suited my nature.

From 1965 to 1974 – I was in my thirties, married with a young family, struggling to keep our heads above water – I worked as a truck driver, postie, groundsman, builders' labourer, relief work planting willows along the banks of flood prone rivers. I did all this in Palmerston North, Taupo, Seaview, Petone while trying to keep the flame of my creativity burning. Most

times I didn't finish writing until three in the morning, then up again to start work at 7.30 or 8.00. It was the lowest and toughest period of my life. I went around half dead most of the time. And apart from three months spent in the Fiji islands I'd not been anywhere apart from New Zealand.

In 1984 I went to Menton as Katherine Mansfield Fellowship recipient. I took over about sixty-odd short stories; some finished, some in various stages of being finished. I took these as Katherine Mansfield was a short story writer of renown and as the award is in memory of her I felt these are the writings I wanted to work on.

I visited Samoa, late in 2005. At Oruanui Native school we native kids were read a chapter of *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson as a treat by our headmaster. I think it was every Thursday and in the afternoon, same time. Possibly the last session before schools out at 3pm to keep our attention on our lessons throughout the day; waiting with baited breath for we were all enthralled by the unfolding story. Such marvellous, memorable characters. Right up a Māori kid's alley. And hinting that education could be entertaining, exciting – not just a grind. On sunny days Jock Richardson would take the senior classes outdoors where we'd sit on the grass embankment while he sat on a chair in front of us reading and telling us a little of Stevenson's life – how he died at a young age of consumption in his house (Vailima) in Samoa. This was portrayed to us as a barely imaginable place thousands and thousands of miles away rather than just up a way, north, in the same ocean we inhabited! It's no wonder my generation grew up confused as to who we were, although possibly we were vaguely aware they were, like us, Polynesians.

Ironic isn't it that a white man who only lived in the place for four years should be one of the major attractions for someone like myself (of Polynesian descent) when visiting Samoa. The house (a two-storied mansion that included expensive teak wood in its building) stands on a manicured lawn on the side of Mount Vaea – beautifully contoured, bush-clad, dominating Apia like Tauhara dominates Taupo. I was enchanted by it: a veritable landmark if ever there was one. Old-time sea voyagers returning I imagine, would spot it and say *there's Apia*. It cost 15 tala (about 10 NZ dollars) to enter the house where a young Samoan man acted as guide to me and a middle-aged couple from NZ who, to my horror and embarrassment, displayed pig-ignorance regarding anything to do with RLS. Nevertheless our very cool and intelligent guide had a precise answer for their questions. Talk about being in the presence of a legend! Like walking down the hill in the dark with R.A.K Mason from Charles Brasch's place on the Dunedin peninsular. Entering this place was exactly like that – stepping into a legend, where the great man lived and worked. Well, when he was well enough to. His presence in the house was made more tangible because of all the photographs with Robert sitting here, standing there in still recognisable places. On one occasion I stood exactly where he stood in one of the photos, leaning against the banisters of the great wooden stairs leading to the top floor. But of course I looked nowhere as elegant as he did. For one thing he was tall and lean (bordering on anorexic but that was probably the ravages of consumption) and dressed elegantly – kind of like a “swashbuckler” whereas I am short and...well, never mind!

The house has been restored, almost to the point of being sanitised. Shoes off at the door, no smoking, no food. But I was permitted to wander round on my own when our guide finished his spiel.

I picked the wrong time of the day (mid-afternoon) for climbing the hill to his grave, for although you're sheltered by canopy from the sun, the heat is stifling, suffocating, humid. The sweat was fairly pissing off me! And it's a long way up. But finally there was the great man's tomb, about two or three metres high, with his self-written epitaph *under the wide and starry sky*...which seems fitting – he's surely under the wide and starry sky up there. It crossed my mind as I struggled up the steep hill that there must've been a few hot and sweating Samoan men carrying the coffin that day, though he didn't look like he weighed much – probably the coffin weighed more than him. Not to mention lugging up all that cement and sand and water to construct the tomb. No helicopter in those days.

After the visit, waiting for the bus to take me back to town I got to talking to a local and told him where I'd just been. Without prompting he told me that fourteen of the hardest prisoners on the island – *murderers, rapists with life sentences* – were seconded for the job. It took them a day and night and part of the next day to get the coffin up there. By the time they got to the top his corpse was smelling pretty high (Samoans don't flinch over such graphic detail in the telling). When this was completed – and I presume this includes digging the grave and constructing the tomb - they were all granted a free pardon. I guess this was the only way the powers-that-be could effect Stevenson's last wish – to be buried on top of Mt Vaea.

Another thing worthy of note is that in some way RLS supported the Samoan rebellion against their German colonisers, during which several chiefs were imprisoned. As a token of their gratitude they set about building a road to RLS's house which they called *Road As A Token Of Our Loving Gratitude*. A plaque at the head of this road with this dedication was officially unveiled by Walter Nash (there are a number of signs of NZ's association with Samoa).

## Retirement and Childhood: Taupo and Oruanui

*Rowley was working-class, down to earth, plain-spoken. He stayed close to his roots in his friendships and lifestyle. His poems are honest expressions of this kinship, as he highlights in his poem 'In the Dining Room of a A Woollen Mill (The Raw Men: Selected Poems 1954-2004, O-A-Tia Publishers, 2006, p.142):*

*For a moment I felt it, here amongst the raw people,  
How near to the truth of life I felt then.  
There was no questioning, no fear, no restraint:  
There was just the live and let live.*

*Here amongst the laughter and the talk,*

....

*Down to earth men and women. Raw and alive.  
Laughing and talking.*

*Lonely, miserable at times, Rowley loved company and was considered a very good dancer. These lower depths were sometimes leavened by the praise and support of other writers. In Wellington for instance, he told me he was 'adopted' (for example, singled out for praise at local writers' gatherings) by local PEN members such as Joan and Russell Reed after his arrival in the city as a fresh, young writer in their midst.*

*The 'Woollen Mill' poem is dated 1959 in the Selected Poems. Rowley would pick up this theme of 'rawness' again in his memorable 1962 poem 'The Raw Men (for the Maori Battalion)' (Selected Poems, pp.88-91) from which the extracts below have been drawn:*

*Yes, this is where they came from, the raw men  
From the crude-hewn, back-blocks, saw-screaming  
Sweat-sapping timber mills, they came,  
Trudging to work in the early mornings, their breaths  
Rising in mists with the cold.*

*From the bush covered hill slopes, they came;  
Plodding down the 'snigging track' with axe drooped  
Over shoulder at 'knock off' time.  
Only the step is a little quicker now*

*. . . .*

*From singing in a bar, led by a rich baritone voice;  
"Hoki mai e tama ma, ki roto, ki roto . . ."  
All around they are singing. Everywhere there are mouths opening and closing:  
Feet planted firmly apart, heads thrown back, eyes opening and shutting in trance-like  
ecstasy*

*. . . .*

*Always there is the guitar and the songs.  
Above it all, beneath it all, right through it all,  
There is the singing and the dancing and the laughing.*

*'The Raw Men' is a tribute to the men of a generation before Rowley's, the generation who had formed the core of the Māori Battalion, who had come home to continue a battle, this time as the core of the working class in post-war Aotearoa. In his poem 'Flesh and Blood' (p.84), Rowley encounters this same 'rawness' in the contemporary Aotearoa of 1965. The first part of the poem tells how he is tired of listening to academic talk about 'the Māori,' and then he leaves Wellington and . . .*

*...one night on my way north, travelling late,  
tired, I stopped-off at a small town to rest.  
Hearing sounds of revelry while passing a pub, I entered.  
Everywhere were Maoris. Singing, laughing, arguing,  
drinking. The Maori in the raw.  
A warm current ran through me.  
I moved amongst them absorbing their warmth.*

*The poem 'Maori in Suburbia – I' (p.79) offers a kindly but satirical glimpse of Māori transplanted to the Pākehā paradise of the suburbs, a world where all 'rawness' has been eliminated. But the poem concludes with a vision where the man mowing his lawn on Saturday morning recalls the past:*

*Visions of childhood flash through his mind.  
He is a child again in the village where he was raised.  
He hears again the laughter of the men. Coarse robust laughter.  
They are bending forward drawing-off the sacks from the hangi  
At the hui held once up at the pa.*

5 September 2001

To get back to this business of being read stories and poems...of the memories I have from my school days these are the most vivid. During my brief and unhappy time at Taupo Primary in the mid-forties the headmaster read to us seniors the Charles Kingsley novel *Westward Ho!*, also in weekly installments, with the same effect of anticipation radio serials held over us. Or serials such as Captain Marvel or Zorro at the movies that came on in the first half during the shorts (newsreels, cartoons) before half-time when you went out into the foyer for an ice-cream - or outside to relieve yourself against the wall or settle an old score! – coming back in for the main feature. These serials transported us to another world, another time and place (which I needed as my life was miserable at the time) out there on the high seas.

A stand-in teacher - young, handsome, blonde-haired and invalided from the war – also read to us that gem of a poem by Hillaire Belloc, 'Miranda' which described young muleteers *who didn't have a penny and weren't spending any / the tedding and the spreading of the straw for a bedding / the hip-hop lap and the clap of the hands / of the girls come dancing, prancing, backwards and advancing* evoking a rawness and spontaneous passion that was closer to me than anything I'd read before. Was this in 1944? Before my life was blighted? I don't know why this teacher stayed for only a short time. I guess there must have been a shortage of teachers during the war? Whatever, we kids were broken-hearted when he left. In our own ways we'd fallen in love with him. Me certainly because he never raised his voice, never used violence, never strapped us – a common practice among teachers then. Never screamed at us as others did. I've often wondered what became of him. Did he marry? Have children? He must've only been in his early or mid twenties. Of course knowing he'd been invalided from the war gave him a tragic aura. We never did know what it was but suspected shell-shock.

### *Interview*

In 1989, our family house was carted up the hill in three pieces by Garth McVicar (and his crew) who heads the Sensible Sentencing Trust. Down below is the cemetery – both my parents are buried there and that's where I'll be buried, the last journey I'll ever make, up this road.

11 February 2008

I've had a most surreal experience over the last few weeks – my long-serving manually operated portable typewriter finally gave up the ghost on me. It served me for the last thirty years! Think I could acquire another one!? Shops don't stock them anymore, don't even sell the ribbons for them. (Only twenty years ago – yesterday to me – you could purchase a manual typewriter from any stationery outlet). So I put the word out for one and although I got several responses they were all electric models, which I never learned to operate. In the end I was reduced to going up to our rubbish dump where they've recently started recycling, and although they did get the odd portable, no they didn't have any at the moment. At this stage panic began to set in! Eventually people began digging out long abandoned portables from storage and now I have three.

Stayed in Tapu, in a caravan in the camping ground. Loved it there, cosy and private in my caravan. Long walks along roads up into valleys, into hills and bush and along the coast road. It was there that I discovered I had a hobby. I'd walked about six kilometres heading towards Thames and seeing a man sitting on a rock fishing, climbed up to join him. When I told him I'd walked there from Tapu after he'd asked me where I'd come from, he said, *walking's your hobby then*. It wasn't a question so much as a statement. Till then I'd not regarded walking as a hobby. How can it possibly be when all I do is put one foot in front of the other and keep going & going & going!? Enjoying the sensation of motion. Enjoying the senses. Out in the open - wide open spaces. Space (freedom) all around me. Drinking in the sounds, sights, smells. My thoughts stimulated to a higher pitch.

## O-A-Tia Publishers

*Rowley did consider offers from publishers to produce a collection of his stories, poems and plays. But he was never comfortable with editors' suggestions to change his words. So, in retirement, he decided to self-publish. He named his publishing house O-A-Tia after the highest point at Oruanui: "for the sole purpose of publishing the accumulated writings of Rowley Habib (Rore Hapipi)," as he said.*

### *Interview*

The self-portrait on the cover of *Pikipiko Blues* and *The Raw Men: Selected Poems* I drew either when I was at Ardmore Teachers College or not long after I left in 1954, the year I began writing. Until I'd been bitten by the writing bug, my creative gift had manifested itself in drawing, painting etc. I was the Head of the Ardmore Art Department's prodigy that year. He had high hopes for me as an artist, inviting me to work with him in the evenings when he was working on his own paintings. (His name was Phil Barclay, he was an exhibited painter). For about three years after I tried to keep my writing and art going together but finally decided I was stretching my talent toooo thin. It was around the time ball-point pens were invented and made writing much easier – whereas art required paints, easel, chisel, all I needed to write was an exercise book and a pen.