



***Kia Kanuta***

Kia ora. Ko Kia tōku ingoa and I'm a voice of hope. Growing up was pretty tough in some spots, you know, but it's- it's actually quite reflective of a lot of other people and my environment.

Grew up pretty poor, which has kind of paid off a lot for me now because I've got that inherent gratitude for things that I just don't think a lot of people have, especially with food, especially with kai. I guess coming from that background and then entering the kitchen, it's been healing in and of itself.

My biggest challenges came around the age of 14 when my parents died. My father died first, and it was quite suddenly for us kids, he was terminally ill. And then eight months later, my mum passed away. Her heart stopped in her sleep, so she literally died of a broken heart.

We got sent to live with our grandparents. And, while my grandparents were solid and provided structure within the household, they were struggling with the death of their daughter.

So, I just became stereotypical. Like- like everyone else, we just drank in the park, we went and caused trouble, we threw rocks at stuff, you know. My best mate, you know, he had my back and I had his and we knew that. I think he helped me through a lot of my challenges, because there were so many. There was coming to grips with being a brown māori in Aotearoa, in a time where being māori wasn't as cool as it is now.

Being māori, there's a lot of- there's that intergenerational trauma that I don't think a lot of our parents or grandparents were even aware of. And, you know, that- that term, 'intergenerational trauma,' is only - is relatively new, but the trauma is old. The mental health aspect and how it was discussed, I don't think it was, at least from a male perspective, at least from my father's side, it was a lot of, kind of, 'harden up' mentality.

There was being an orphan. There was dropping out of school and being uneducated in that- in that societal sense. I dropped out of school as soon as I could and got a job washing dishes at the Avondale RSA. There was two solid head chefs in the kitchen. They were the first chefs that I ever worked with, and they were lovely, welcoming, and warm, and accepting.

They both kinda knew what my situation was, and they nurtured me in keeping consistent in coming to work. So, they nurtured that consistency that I needed in my life.

***Behind the Smile Transcribed Audio***



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The kitchen's a bit of a gift that keeps on giving, to be honest. The kitchen saved my life in so many different ways. Feeding people is a love language for me, and a sense of belonging is what kept me there.

If you don't feel like the outside world accepts you, at the very least the kitchen will. Being able to give people food that I love, and put it out there, that's meaningful. That's- that's so meaningful to me.