

## Serie Barford

### Poem Notes

I'm working on short stories and poems about the environment and plants and spirituality. I have been encouraged to explore these themes by people I meet when I'm out walking on the West Coast or in the Waitakere Ranges. I have been told that it is the Age of Cherishing Waters. I am carrying on the work I did in Project Twin Streams (which were facilitated community poetry writing workshops and extracts from these texts were incorporated into bridges and walkways) by using my own texts as springboards to raise community awareness and promote discussion on environmental issues.

### Poet Notes

Serie (Cherie) Barford was born in Aotearoa to a migrant mother (Stunzner/Betham/Leaega families of Lotofaga and the Samoan-born boatbuilder William Jamieson and the families of Ifopo and Fulu from Luatuanuu) and a Kiwi (Celtic-Scandinavian-English) father. She also acknowledges Algonquin Indian (Wampanoag) ancestry through the Jamieson line. Her poetry collection Tapa Talk was published by Huia in 2007. She has another completed manuscript, Disrupted Narratives, that she's thinking of self-publishing after an interesting conversation with Bradford Haami at a Writers On Monday forum. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English (AUP), New New Zealand Poets in Performance (AUP), Niu Voices: Contemporary Pacific Fiction 1 (Huia), Landfall (Otago University Press), Poetry New Zealand (Puriri Press & Brick Row), Dreadlocks and Writing the Pacific (Pacific Writing Forum) and in the electronic anthologies; Trout, Blackmail Press, Snorkel, Best NZ Poems, Home & Away 2010. Jean Anderson translated her short story, Our Stories Are Within Us (from Niu Voices) into French and it appears in the French short story journal Brèves 91 Nouvelles d'Océanie (Atelier du Gué: 2010), one of two volumes dedicated to short story writing in Oceania. Her poetry and short stories will also appear in Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity (Palgrave Macmillan UK) and in Flying Fox Excursions: Albert Wendt's Critical and Creative Legacy In Oceania (The Contemporary Pacific, volume 22, UHP) and in Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English (AUP) Serie was part of the Polynation Poetry Troupe which performed at the Queensland Poetry Festival in 2008.

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## Whales and mining at Muriwai

whale bones are so light and porous  
they carry sound like feathers carry birds

and when travellers on the old trails meet  
their songs are mustered by attentive winds

then scattered with notes to cardinal points  
where dreamers pluck visions like berries

last week a humpback cavorted at Muriwai

his big-wing flippers breeched the surf  
his rorqual throat unfurled with song

his semi-attached ribs and four-chambered heart  
circulated longing through the heavy black sands

and his flukes stirred talk of children's play  
how they'll run away laughing  
turn and run back to you

but if you move before they return  
they'll cry

for direction's a memory of the heart  
(no matter what they teach you at school)  
and a moving anchor cannot be trusted

driving home through the valley I passed placards  
standing staunch in fields parched by drought

they said

***NO MINING!***  
***KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF OUR SANDS!***  
***THESE SANDS ARE NOT FOR SALE!***

while all around insects and tree-birds  
toppled into the drought

**Thou shalt not smell in church!**  
*(London Missionary society edicts 1820s)*

fearing the sensory distraction of native blooms  
LMS edicts forbade the wearing of flowers  
by native converts in church

they covered breasts, heads and old ways  
planted Palm Sunday instead of moso'oi

and I wonder at all the deflowered  
women who've circumflexed in prayer

and how pearls extracted from salty lips  
have bobbed and swayed and amened  
and passed from mother to daughter

when my mother arranges plastic flowers  
gathered at the local cheap-dollar shop  
over photos, mantle shelves and graves

I'm reminded that women wear hats to church  
embroider floral bands between the crown and brim  
wash with commercially scented soap  
arrange Sunday smiles and put their best foot forward