

Personal reminiscences of Whekenui School

(collected by Loreen Brehaut, 2006-7)

*You went from this school – say from Waikawa, you went from there, and you might have done that work up here. And you went down there and you're sort of doing virtually the same as what you had before, and sometimes it would be the other way around. Some of the work we were doing here, then we'd go back down there and you'd already done that.*¹

*Having to try and slot back in where you left off. We probably found that a little bit difficult. You're with strange people for a while. You just get to know them, then you're back home again. But we coped. And that was an education on its own, really, going from one environment to another.*²

*I used to hate going over to the school, to Whekenui, because we had to go through that bull paddock, and I was terrified of those big black poll bulls. It was quite a way for us to walk over the top of the hill, and it was terrible if it was raining and in the wintertime – and if we could see the bulls we'd have to walk further up the hill to get away from them, or further down the hill, wherever they were. But if it was low tide we could go around the rocks, and we used to love doing that. We quite often used to go when we shouldn't have, when the tide was sort of in too far, and get wet! Sit in wet clothes all day*³

*I never was a great scholar, right through to the end of my days. The only thing I could think about was getting out of school. No, I think the thing that sticks in your mind is sort of getting to school and coming back, you know, and how we used to play little games and stop at the gun turrets. Yeah, it wasn't a bad sort of a view, walking round the road, either, looking out. I think we just had a heap of fun. I'm sure we didn't learn a hell of a lot as far as normal schooling went!*⁴

*During the winter, if the weather was quite foul, which it quite often was, Joe Perano would come around in his boat, in his whale chaser, before he went to work, and picked us all up at the Station there. All lining up and go down and you'd jump on the boat. The boat's going up and down. But we got there – it was better than walking around the hill in the rain.*⁵

*I do remember that on very bad days we were taken to school on the whale chaser. A whale chaser would come over and we'd all be thrown like – you know, we were only little kids, of course – we were all picked up off the breastwork and heaved up to a guy on the boat and shoved down the hatch into the chaser. And the same thing happened when you got to the other end, down at Whekenui. And then you'd get drenched going from the wharf up to the school at Whekenui, because it's quite a way to walk!*⁶

*I can remember when we first went down there even eating raw pauas. I don't know whether you'd get anybody to do it today, but they didn't worry about it, the kids down there. They used to go round the rocks, pull one off, munch into it raw. Also kinas and that sort of thing. A lot of seafood was freely available: kinas and a lot of crayfish and fish. I didn't eat the blind eels, though!*⁷

As a child, because I grew up down there, and people got very brown in the summertime, we didn't actually think of them as being Maori people. Until I came up to Picton I didn't know really what a Maori was, although these families were all Maori. They were very fine Maori people but their colour was the same as our colour. I just didn't think of them as being Maori. And you know, as children in that era you had to be respectful to all adults, so it didn't matter who or what.⁸

If there was a chase on in the Channel itself – if a whale came in the Channel – the teacher always took us up to the top of the hill to watch it and see how it was progressing and things like that. We did get to do that. It would be a new experience for the teacher, being there. And we would be taken up to the point to watch. We were taken up there on a very bad day if it was very rough, to watch the Tamahine come in, you know.⁹

I didn't have any skills, I could barely read or write, and I couldn't spell, so you can imagine the education that those kids got! But I had fun with the kids. It was easy to have fun with the teaching. We could go down the beach, we could do nature study, we could go out and play sport – physical education – and occasionally we'd read and write.¹⁰

The kids always had terrible sores on their legs from the whaling station. I think it was because the beach they played on with all the whale and all that was very unhygienic. And those kids always had terrible boils and things on their legs, knees and things. I can't remember having anywhere to wash your hands. Imagine all these kids at school touching everything. Everybody seemed to get them. And the flu and the colds – everybody had runny noses and colds and things like that. No wonder we were always sick!¹¹

1. Arthur Huntley, interview, 19 April 2007, Picton Museum archive.
2. Ken Gardiner, interview, 22 February 2007, Picton Museum archive.
3. Jocelyn Davis, interview, 13 June 2007, Picton Museum archive.
4. Jeffrey Pascoe, interview, 11 December 2006, Picton Museum archive.
5. Arthur Huntley, interview, 19 April 2007, Picton Museum archive.
6. Rita Hall, interview, 18 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.
7. Ken Gardiner, interview, 22 February 2007, Picton Museum archive.
8. Toni Halliday, interview, 30 December 2006, Picton Museum archive.
9. Rita Hall, interview, 18 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.
10. Ian Kidman, interview, 9 October 2006, Picton Museum archive.
11. Jocelyn Davis, interview, 13 June 2007, Picton Museum archive.