



**HOW MĀUI  
GOT HIS NAME.**

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When Taranga felt the pain in her swollen belly she knew that it was too early for her fifth child to take its first breath. And when the pain continued and the birth began in earnest she was afraid of what the outcome might be. Comforted by her husband and surrounded by her midwives, Taranga gave birth to a small lifeless boy.

In grief Taranga cut the top knot, the tikitiki, from her hair and wrapped the precious baby in a bundle. Tears streaming down her face and with immense pain in her heart, Taranga carried the small baby to the edge of a cliff and looked down at the calm sea that stretched to the horizon. There she sat and waited for her heart to settle and her mind to ease so that her words of prayer could be carried on the wind. She prayed to the earth, the sky and to the sea. She prayed to the wind, to the trees and to all living things. She rocked the bundle in her arms as she slowly made her way down the cliffs. Taranga walked into the water chanting her prayers and placed the small woven bundle of hair into the sea. As the baby floated away Taranga called out with a karanga of lament for a son she would never know.

Papatūānuku, Ranginui and all their children heard Taranga's grief that day. They heard her prayers, they heard her karanga and they answered her wishes in their own special way. Tangaroa sent sea creatures to bind themselves to the woven top knot of hair. Hinemoana cleared a pathway through the sea, gently guiding the small waka on its seaward journey.

Together Ranginui and Papatūānuku offered magical incantations, prayers of power and safe-keeping. Tāwhirimātea gathered the prayers from his parents and gently blew the sacred words through each of the small boy's nostrils.

"Tihei Mauri ora."

The atua celebrated with joy when the baby's first sneeze of life was heard. Tāne immediately sent birds with offerings of food and water to nourish the small baby boy. The top knot of Taranga, fashioned as a waka, floated towards the setting sun. A small baby boy laughed happily in its midst as sea creatures and birds nursed him on his way.

A tohunga, a shaman with strong spiritual powers, lived a quiet life by the sea. He had been alone for many years and was happy to spend his last days conversing with the animals and creatures of the land and sea. Being a man of the spirit, the tohunga felt stillness in the air and a powerful surge of energy the day that the lifeless baby was set out to sea.

The tohunga thought nothing of his experience until weeks later when he stood at the water's edge offering morning prayers to the atua. He felt the same power and energy as he had previously, but this time he heard the sounds of a baby laughing. Looking around he saw nothing. Confused, he walked back towards his whare but continued to hear the strange sounds of a baby's laughter. It wasn't until he came back to the water's edge that he saw the bundle of hair floating on the sea. The tohunga waded out to the small vessel and to his amazement, amongst the hair, shellfish and fish that bound the small waka together, was a small healthy boy happily smiling up at him. The tohunga was overjoyed with the gift of a baby boy, immediately thanking Tangaroa, Hinemoana and the gods for the special offering.



From that day on, the tohunga regarded the small boy as his son and raised him with all the teachings and knowledge of the ancestors. From a young age the boy displayed powers that the tohunga knew were gifted directly to him from the atua. He could transform himself into all sorts of creatures, birds, fish, insects and lizards, which because of his cheeky nature would often get him into trouble. He could swim, dive and run faster than anyone the tohunga had ever known.



He could learn things instantly, anything the tohunga taught him. Whakapapa, stories and songs never needed repeating before he had grasped them completely. He was a special boy that the tohunga loved dearly and so too did the young boy love the old man.

As the young boy grew older, he began asking questions of his family and where he came from. The tohunga could not hide the fact that he knew nothing of his family. The tohunga would say,

"The atua are your family. The sea creatures, the birds, the insects and the animals; they are your brothers and sisters. You came to me wrapped in a top knot of hair. You were chosen and cared for by the atua. It is a sacred thing that shouldn't be questioned."

But over the years the young boy grew unhappy with this answer. He wanted to know more about his human family, his parents, siblings and wider whānau. One day the young boy asked the tohunga if he would allow him to search for his true parents, his whānau and his true name. The tohunga was sad but knew that this day would come. He could only agree, but asked one thing of the young boy, that he would one day return. The boy promised to return and then set off on a journey to find his family.

After several weeks of travelling over mountains, across rivers and vast stretches of bushclad hills the boy finally saw smoke rising from several fires in a valley leading down to the sea. The boy knew that he had found people and possibly his family. He sneaked into the pā using his acute skills of disguise, amazed at the different people he saw; children, women, boys, girls and strong warrior men. He blended with the shadows, standing silently for a few moments to calm himself. It was the humming of a song that took his eyes across the marae to where a fire burned. There he saw a woman standing in the firelight with her family of boys. The young boy skirted through the shadows until he was close enough to see Taranga humming to herself as she brushed the hair of her four boys in the firelight. The young boy knew instantly that this was his mother.

As Taranga moved from one boy to the next, the young boy moved silently out of the shadows and placed himself at the end of the line. Taranga stopped and stood in front of him.

"Who are you?"

Taranga asked, quickly checking to see that she had counted her children correctly. The young boy replied.

"I came from the sea, wrapped in a top knot of hair, cared for by the atua, the sea creatures and all living things. I have come to find my human family and to know my true name."

Taranga gripped the young boy's shoulders and looked at him carefully. She held his face in her hands and closed her eyes. Then she opened her eyes with a huge smile of happiness.

"You have come back, my youngest child, you have returned as I have prayed. You are my youngest son, the pōtiki. Your name from this day is Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga; Māui of the top knot of Taranga."

Taranga held Māui close, tears of joy running freely down her face. Māui's brothers were not so eager to see a new brother taking the affections of their mother, but Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga was happy. He had found his mother and found his home. At long last he had a name, a name that he knew would one day make his mother proud.

