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E te whānau, e ngā hoa, tēnā koutou katoa.

We gather to honour and celebrate the life of our beloved kuia, Aroha Rangi Thompson — our Nana Aroha — born in Rotorua on 22 July 1945, and at 79 years, still teaching us how to carry ourselves with dignity and warmth.

I speak as her mokopuna, a grandson who learned patience at her side, pride in our whānau from her example, and how to laugh with my whole heart because she showed me that joy is a duty as much as a delight.

Nana began as a dedicated primary school kaiako, and she never really stopped teaching. Her classrooms held more than reading and maths — they were places where te reo Māori had mana, where waiata stitched a room together, where kapa haka gave shy children a backbone. Later she moved to Tāmaki Makaurau to be closer to her mokopuna, and there she became a bridge between generations — fluent in the language of kids, parents, and kaumātua alike.

For 52 years she walked side by side with Hemi, her much-loved husband. Together they raised three children, welcomed eight mokopuna and, recently, their first great-grandchild. That’s a whakapapa she tended the way she tended her kūmara patch and her lemon tree — carefully, consistently, with an eye to the next season.

She was dignified and generous, quietly determined, with a wonderfully cheeky laugh that arrived half a second before the punchline — warning us and daring us all at once. She wove harakeke into kete and strangers into friends; organised school waiata groups and community language nights because manaakitanga isn’t a word you speak, it’s a thing you do.

My favourite memory is simple. In the marae kitchen, learning to make fry

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bread, my dough stubborn and lumpy. Nana’s hands were sure and patient. While the oil warmed, she told me stories of our tīpuna — where they stood, what they carried, the mistakes they owned, the aroha that kept them together. By the time the bread was golden, I knew two things: how to turn the dough without tearing it, and that I belonged to something bigger than myself.

We will miss her gentle karakia before meals, the hugs that lingered, and the way she made every person in the room feel seen — even the ones hiding by the doorway. We’ll miss the sparkle in her eye as she arranged pāua shell pieces on a windowsill, the rhythm of her voice leading a waiata, the quiet pride when a child found their reo.

Her values were clear: whānau first. Manaakitanga in our welcome, kaitiakitanga in how we care for land and people. Respect for elders and children alike — the ends of the canoe, as she would say, that keep us steady.

Nana asked for brightness today, so thank you for the colour in this room. She wanted a waiata to close, because music can hold what words can’t. And in lieu of flowers, she hoped for support to go to our local kura kaupapa — her work continues when a child hears their first mihi and knows it by heart.

Moe mai rā, Nana Aroha. Your hands taught us, your voice steadied us, your laughter lifted us.

We will carry your reo, your kindness, and your courage forward.

Kua whetūrangitia koe — you are among the stars now — and we will find our way by your light.

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