

Seven decades of service

Karla Akuhata
Staff reporter

THREE Whakatane women have gained New Year honours – a midwife, a squadron leader and a thespian swimmer.

Ruatoki woman Whare-mawhai Timutimu has been awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit; and Gwenda Ruegg and Bronwyn Hanna have both earned Queen's Service Medals.

On Christmas Eve Mrs Timutimu's four daughters gathered in the living room of her Ruatoki house.

They wanted to be there to take part in an interview with the *BEACON* for a story about their mother, known as Mina Timutimu to most, being made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2016 New Year Honours.

Mrs Timutimu has gained the honour for her services to midwifery and Maori.

And it is probably appropriate that they were part of the interview because they have

been there for most of their mother's key moments.

Even when they were children and Mrs Timutimu was working as a full-time midwife, they would wander into the maternity annexe and help take care of new babies while she looked after their mothers.

While Mrs Timutimu prepared cups of tea and a plate of biscuits, the four women recounted their mother's achievements.

A nurse for 70 years and a midwife for more than 50, Mrs Timutimu helped with the births of many of her grandchildren and even some great-grandchildren, in addition to many born at Whakatane Hospital over the past four decades.

Nursing has been her passion for most of her life, and at 85 years she still makes her contribution to her chosen industry as a cultural adviser to the National College of Midwives, a life member of the Maori Women's Welfare League and Te Kaunihera o Nga Nehi Maori, as well as being a kaumatua (elder) to

the Nga Maia Maori Midwifery Roopu.

She was the first Maori representative to the National Committee of the New Zealand College of Midwives and was made an honorary member in 2008 to recognise the contribution she has made to the college, the midwifery profession and to Maori health.

Raised by her grandmother at Waipapa in the 1930s, during the depression years, Mrs Timutimu grew up learning how to take care of herself and others.

"We lived in a humble abode made of iron, with a dirt floor, beside the sea.

"We had gardens and grew everything, even tobacco, [which] my kuia (grandmother) would smoke in her pipe," she said.

Her first language was Maori but her family also understood the importance of education and she was taught by Catholic nuns before becoming a founding pupil of Waitara District High School.

She said her aunty, who had been the sister in charge of the Waitara annexe, encouraged her to become a nurse once she finished school.

"I am the first Maori student to have attended the New Plymouth School of Nursing, graduating with honours in surgical nursing."

Mrs Timutimu met her husband, Mannie Awanui Timutimu, after she graduated and the couple had five children, including their son Hohepa Timutimu, a soldier killed in action in 1993. The family moved to Whakatane in 1976 and eventually settled in Ruatoki, Mr Timutimu's home.

Mrs Timutimu has 18 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.



TIGHT-KNIT: Whare-mawhai Timutimu, known as Mina, with her four daughters - Hineuru Teira, Hinehou Timutimu, Tangi Thrupp and Maria Tutahi.

Photo Louis Klaassen D3078-17

■ Bronwyn Hanna: Page 3