

# Uni NEWS

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**MARCH 2021**



## A STITCH IN TIME MAY SAVE YOUR MIND

Student Mei Gillespie's  
inspiring story of getting through  
... with the help of knitting

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**TICKING ALL THE BOXES**  
The 2021 AUSA President Anamika Harirajh says the students' association has shaped up and grown up

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**SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE**  
As well as talking about Covid-19 with the community, Dr Collin Tukuitonga has an education message for Pacific students

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**WHO KNOWS A VOLCANO?**  
Professor Jan Lindsay says we still have much to learn about effective communication of volcanic hazard and risk

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Just a few of the University of Auckland staff and student achievements in the media recently. Email: [uninews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:uninews@auckland.ac.nz)



Dr Geoffrey Handsfield from the Auckland Bioengineering Institute.

## COLLABORATING IN THE REGIONS

Dr Geoffrey Handsfield and a group of Auckland Bioengineering Institute (ABI) researchers are working with Gisborne-based medical-imaging research centre, Mātai, to get a better understanding of cerebral palsy. The ABI's musculoskeletal modelling group is using Mātai's MRI technology to look inside the leg muscles of children with cerebral palsy. Geoffrey told the *Gisborne Herald* the aim is to help in the advancement of new treatments.

Link: [tinyurl.com/ABI-gisborne-herald](https://tinyurl.com/ABI-gisborne-herald)



Dr Joel Rindelaub from Science.

## HAVING FUN WITH SCIENCE

Forensic scientist Dr Joel Rindelaub appeared on TV One's *Breakfast* to talk about whether Covid-19 could spread through air conditioning at the Pullman MIQ. It wasn't just his turn of phrase that caught attention ("If you sneeze or cough, you're going to expel some gross droplets from your face hole, right?"), it was the look. That sparked *The Spinoff* headline 'The mullet, the moustache, the myth: Joel Rindelaub is NZ's newest science celeb'. *UniNews* will talk serious science with Joel in our next issue.

Link: [tinyurl.com/joel-face-hole](https://tinyurl.com/joel-face-hole)

## HOPES FOR PHOTO FINALIST

Elam student Hannah Davey, who graduates in June, appeared in the *Herald* after being named one of ten finalists in the Sony World Photography Awards. Her images were taken during a pre-Covid placement with the Leprosy Mission in Tikabhairab, Nepal, and filled the brief 'Building a Better Future'. Hannah's portfolio, including the image of 19-year-old Saraswati was entitled 'Hope in Nepal' and selected for the Student Competition Shortlist. The winner will be announced on 15 April and if Hannah wins, Elam will receive around \$30,000 worth of equipment.

Link: [tinyurl.com/hannah-davey-herald](https://tinyurl.com/hannah-davey-herald)



Hannah Davey took this photo of Saraswati at the Anandaban Hospital in Nepal.

## CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

A paper co-authored by ecologist Associate Professor Cate Macinnis-Ng was picked up for a story by *Stuff* after being published in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. Cate's research has found climate change heightens the impact of invasive species and habitat loss, particularly in island ecosystems such as New Zealand.

Link: [tinyurl.com/cate-climate-on-stuff](https://tinyurl.com/cate-climate-on-stuff)

## LITERARY STAR IN THE MAKING

Physics and astronomy student Russell Boey won the Under 25 category of the *Sunday Star-Times* short-story competition with his story *Nineteen Seconds*. He told *Stuff* he'd been writing since he was 12 and his natural interest in space and fantasy was infused into his storytelling.

Link: [tinyurl.com/russell-boey-SST](https://tinyurl.com/russell-boey-SST)

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Shadows Bar on Alfred Street is open for food and drink and that includes your morning coffee from 8am. Cheap for students too, with ID.

## INAUGURAL LECTURES

18 March, 6.30pm: Professor Anthony Phillips 'So what is it that you do again?' Anthony talks about his research path studying the science of acute critical illness. Lecture Theatre G36, OGH (102-G36) Register: [anthonyphillips.eventbrite.co.nz](https://anthonyphillips.eventbrite.co.nz)

13 May, 6.15pm: Professor Kim Phillips 'Of mermaids and men: a chapter in the history of women's bodies' Lecture Theatre G36, OGH (102-G36) Register: [inaugural-kim-phillips.eventbrite.com](https://inaugural-kim-phillips.eventbrite.com)

See page 12 for Professor Jan Lindsay.

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**ANAMIKA  
HARIRAJH**

Anamika Harirajh is the AUSA president for 2021.

The 2021 president of AUSA was welfare vice-president in 2020. That experience made her realise she still had work to do for students.

**When did you start with the AUSA?**

I started as the women’s rights officer in 2019. At the end of that year, I knew I still wanted to be involved, so I decided to stand and take the position of the welfare vice-president. Of course, I didn’t know Covid was going to happen! That turned out to be an incredibly busy role.

**What did you have to do?**

All my time as welfare vice-president was taken up with reviewing hardship grants. Trying to balance study and work was difficult. I knew that hardship grant applications were one part of my job but I didn’t realise they’d take up all my time! But students needed help – we had triple the normal number of hardship grant applications. I read every single one – it was sad to hear the students’ stories of losing their jobs and not being able to afford rent or even bus fare to uni. Those are the students who are keeping me on the AUSA.

**How many students voted in the 2020 AUSA elections in which you became president?**

It was massive. In 2019 about 600 students participated. That jumped to over 4,000 in 2020 and we’re proud of that. I guess 2020 was big for elections so they were at front of mind. Students have begun to recognise the AUSA is a serious body: we had a lot of wins last year. The grade bump was a good example of how we successfully advocated for students with the University.

**Given the workload, why did you put your hand up again for the role of president?**

Towards the end of 2020, there were a lot of exciting things happening. One of the main achievements was our input into the new Strategic Plan and I had more to give there. If we didn’t have a general manager I wouldn’t do it, but we’re a lot better organised now that we have one. President is a full-time role and many presidents choose not to study but I’ve just done summer school and I’m doing three papers in Semester One. I’ll be ok.

**What’s changed about the AUSA?**

For the first time in a long time, the AUSA is in a position where we’re growing. We’ve achieved all the efficiencies we can. A couple of years ago the University looked at us and said ‘you’re not efficient; you’re not effective; you’re not representative. What are you going to do about it?’ And here we are: we have a new independent advisory board who are everything from employment lawyers to businesspeople to auditors – and they’re there to help us grow the association and look beyond our one-year terms.

**Your 2020 executive has a lot of fresh faces.**

They’re all new and you can’t look at that list and say it’s not representative of our diverse student community – it is. We have an incredible exec who are excited to be amongst it working for our students this year.

**How does it all work?**

Will Watterson is our new general manager, and we have an advisory board which is working well. We also have a new Student Council made up of the faculty and school presidents from across the University. We have 17 different student representatives on that. Whenever the AUSA wants to do something, or the University needs to consult with students on a big project, we take it to the student council. Student associations across the country have asked our advice in establishing the same model.

**That all sounds quite business-like. Are student unions a bit boring now?**

Student unions will never go back to reflecting a single political party like they used to. We’re political not partisan. It would be detrimental if we did because we represent 44,000 students and they have diverse opinions. But we will take a stance on climate, for example, and Black Lives Matter because these are human rights causes that are relevant to our students. Significant issues on which we might advocate are taken to our student council – not just decided on by the executive.

**Do you have political aspirations?**

No. I am doing my BA in English and History. I

love reading, writing and learning about history. I want to be a high-school teacher so after I finish next I’m going to do a postgraduate diploma in secondary teaching.

**What makes you want to be President then?**

I’ve seen the impact the AUSA has had and how we’re in a position now where we’re not struggling; we’re growing. I’m not just thinking to 31 November when this role ends. I’m thinking about what I’m going to do that’s will set up next year’s executive, the following year’s and five years ahead, to make sure the AUSA is in the best possible position. That’s exciting to me. It’s one of the best decisions I’ve made.

**How much impact is Covid-19 having?**

Students have been doing it tough. Many were casual part-time workers. Finding jobs is difficult and further lockdowns in 2021, as we’ve seen, make things harder. One of our focuses this year is our mental health campaign. Students really struggled last year with mental health and well-being. Lockdowns are isolating. One area we need to grow is the University Health and Counselling Service, and look at everything from a review of that service to a review of our assessment policies. Why are students stressed? Are there too many assignments or are deadlines too close together, or maybe there isn’t a flexible approach to extensions? Covid has just accentuated the issues.

**What are you working on now?**

We’re creating our operations plan. AUSA does three main things: student voice, students’ board and student experience. The plan outlines our goals and shows how they align with the University’s strategic plan. The executive will present it to our student council and to the University.

**What’s your background? You seem to have wisdom beyond your 22 years.**

I was born in South Africa and moved to New Zealand with my parents and older brother when I was four. We arrived with four bags of clothes and the money we had from selling our furniture. My mum was lucky enough to get a job at Auckland Hospital, so we landed on a Saturday and she started work on Monday. Seventeen years later we live in a nice house and Dad has a nice car. I have a roof over my head and food on the table. I know I’m lucky, but I’m not a product of privilege. I’m a product of hard work.

**What do you hope for in 2021?**

In 2020 our first-year students didn’t really get the first-year experience, spending much of it online. I hope we can cater to all the students who come to the University of Auckland not only to study but also to have fun. We want to give students that on-campus experience.





Dr Camilla Highfield helped design the programme.

## TOP-UP TIME FOR NEW TEACHERS

**Newly qualified teachers whose classroom experience was cut short because of last year's lockdowns are receiving mentoring support thanks to a programme devised at the University of Auckland.**

All first-year registered teachers employed in a teaching role in 2021 who weren't able to complete up to 25 percent of their practical requirements in 2020 are eligible for a place on the free Enhanced Induction and Mentoring scheme. The \$4.7 million government programme could support as many as 1,700 new teachers around the country this year and will be delivered nationwide by the University of Auckland, in partnership with six universities and the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Teachers are being assigned a mentor from the university nearest to them, who visits them in their workplace for two half-days followed by two meetings with the teacher and their school-based mentor.

Dr Camilla Highfield, Associate Dean in the University's Faculty of Education and Social Work, designed the programme alongside faculty colleagues.

"Many teachers who graduated in 2020 fell short of the expected time on practicum when schools were closed, so mentors will work with them in a practical classroom context to give feedback and support on a range of aspects such as planning, communication and student engagement," she says.

"School and centre leaders will of course be supporting their new graduates, but this provides 'top up' mentoring for those first few months when they are really new to the job."

■ Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/teacher-support](http://auckland.ac.nz/teacher-support)

## CHEERS TO KAWAKAWA

**Dr Chris Pook from the Liggins Institute is researching the health benefits of a drink made from native kawakawa.**

High-Value Nutrition, from the New Zealand National Science Challenge, has awarded \$1.3 million to explore the potential benefits of kawakawa in a functional beverage – i.e. one with health benefits – for markets in Japan and South East Asia.

Chris will work with researchers from the University's Human Nutrition Unit, the Riddet Institute, the Food Experience and Sensory Testing (FEAST) Laboratory at Massey, Smart Regulatory Solutions and Edible Research. The project will be a collaboration with Wakatū Incorporation and Chia Sisters, and assess the drink's effects on metabolic and immune health.

Wakatū Incorporation is a Māori organisation based in Te Taihū (top of the South Island), representing over 4,000 whānau owners. To develop the functional beverage, Wakatū has partnered with Chia Sisters, Nelson-based innovators in the beverage industry, with a focus on health and environmental sustainability.

Kawakawa is rich in biologically active compounds and has traditional use by Māori. The project may enable the development of a high-value, functional product range unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, based on a combined mātauranga Māori and Western science approach to research.

## UPOMING IHAKA LECTURE SERIES

**The 2021 Ihaka Lecture Series is hosted by the Faculty of Science in Building 423 and the lectures will be livestreamed.**

Many are worried about how much of our personal data businesses are gathering, but are there benefits from allowing our health system to know more about us?

There are three lectures, all at 6.30pm.

**29 July:** 'Data science in the connected era'. Dr Simon Urbanek, Senior Lecturer, Department of Statistics.

**5 August:** 'Implementing a machine-learning tool to support high-stakes decisions in child welfare: case study in human-centred AI'. Professor Rhema Vaithianathan, AUT.

**12 August:** 'Modelling to support the Covid-19 response in Aotearoa New Zealand', Dr Rachelle Binny, Te Pūnaha Matatini  
See [tinyurl.com/ihaka-lectures](http://tinyurl.com/ihaka-lectures)

## HIGH HONOURS FOR STAFF

**This year's New Year honours paid tribute to a number of University of Auckland staff.**

Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond (Māori Studies and Anthropology) received the highest recognition in our honours system, the Order of New Zealand.

Professor in Biological Sciences and the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Juliet Gerrard, was made a Dame Companion (DNZM) for services to science.

Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori, Professor Cindy Kiro, was made a Dame Companion for services to child well-being and education. Dame Cindy took up the role of chief executive of the Royal Society Te Apārangi this month, but remains a professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work.

Professor Emeritus Louise Nicholson was awarded a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for services to neuroscience and

education and distinguished Professor Ian Reid was also recognised in this category for services to medicine.

Professor Shaun Hendy was awarded a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to science.



Distinguished Professor  
Dame Anne Salmond.





**“We have shortages in pharmacy, nursing, audiology and optometry. These are valuable and important professions.”** – Dr Collin Tukuitonga, Associate Dean Pacific, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences

Dr Collin Tukuitonga: “I try to break down all the scientific jargon.”

## MAN ON MANY MISSIONS

Dr Collin Tukuitonga is spreading scientific health messages to Pacific communities.

**Two things happened in March 2020. New Zealand went into a level four lockdown, thanks to Covid-19 and Dr Collin Tukuitonga started a new job at the University of Auckland.**

Talk about timing. Collin, Associate Dean Pacific in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, could not have predicted how his first few months, indeed year, would pan out.

The small matter of a pandemic and a worrying Covid-19 cluster in South Auckland meant he was called on to convey key Covid-19 messages to the Pacific community and the community in general.

“I’ve done a lot of work with the Ministry of Health. The dean has been generous in allowing me to do that. It’s been a full-on time.”

The work continued into late January when Collin headed to the Cook Islands as part of a Ministry delegation ensuring effective testing systems for the one-way quarantine-free travel deal set up with the realm nation. He says it makes sense it’s only one-way for now.

“Two-way is a bit more challenging because the Cook Islands health system is so small and fragile, and they don’t have the expertise that’s needed in the facilities, nor enough ventilators. My trip there was to check they have ongoing good testing systems in place.”

Prior to joining the University, Collin had spent six years as director-general of the Pacific Community (SPC) in New Caledonia. Other roles include past director of public health at the Ministry of Health and working for the World Health Organisation in Switzerland, in the area of non-communicable diseases and child health.

“Now I’m on the Ministry of Health’s Technical Advisory Group for Covid-19 and chair a Pacific expert group for the Associate Minister of Health. I also do one day a week with the Heart Foundation.”

The fact that he’s such a good communicator means the former GP is called on a lot by the media. So how did he get so good at explaining complex health issues?

“When I was at the Ministry of Health there was a former *Dominion Post* journalist working there as a communications adviser. She put me through a training programme – at that time it was all about SARS. As director of public health, I needed to explain that virus. Before that, I was just a clinical person and I didn’t really have a public profile.”

He says conveying important health concepts simply is the key.

“I try to be clear and straightforward and break down all the scientific jargon into language that people can understand.

“Science is a mystery to many people and scientists don’t really help because they often create that mystique. They give an impression that science is this ‘big special concept’ that only certain people have access to.

“Science is a tool and is just one of the tools we have. I have a lot of interest in translating research into policy.

“Sir Peter Gluckman is probably the lead in this area where he tries to communicate science in simple terms, to policymakers or to the media.

“I think all scientists have that responsibility.”

Collin routinely meets with Pacific community groups to give talks, including in his mother tongue, Niuean.

“They want to know, ‘am I going to be safe? Am I going to get this disease? Would my grandma die? And all of that. One of the first things I did when Covid-19 broke out here, was go on Pacific radio. They love radio and I can use the Niue language or English. I’ve been on TV’s *Tagata Pasifika* and RNZ to explain it in English, because if they’re Niuean and under 30 years old, chances are they only speak English.

“I also record short messages on my phone and stick them on Facebook or Twitter. It’s very amateurish, but people like it.”

Collin says the Pacific community is vulnerable to misinformation and conspiracy theories and he has had his work cut out countering these.

“There’s also a tendency to accept that natural things are better than medicines. I guess that’s a human thing. We have a Pasifika Medical Association, where doctors and nurses of Pacific heritage share information – so a Fijian doctor will do a Fijian session and a Samoan doctor a Samoan session. It’s important to do this.”

Collin is keen to promote medical health sciences to the Pacific community, and says many students are deterred from medicine as a career path if they don’t qualify for med school.

“We have enthusiastic young ones who try for med school without having done the sciences. We need to prepare them better.

“I’m impressed with what’s happened with Māori students through a programme called Whakapiki Ake where University of Auckland staff go into schools and the community to talk to families and explain about our health programme.

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The aim is to ensure these young ones do the sciences, starting in year nine.

“Whakapiki Ake has led to a growth in numbers of Māori in medicine but there’s nothing like that for Pacific Island students and that’s one of the things I want to help set up ... where we work with young people, their families, and the people who influence their decision-making, to ensure they’re as prepared as they possibly can be before they come to us.”

He says the other message he’d like to convey is that the medical profession is crying out for Pacific representation in other vocations.

“That’s why it’s important they get the right guidance early on at school.

“Say, for example, a student wants to do medicine but they’re perhaps not strong enough academically. They’re more likely to be told at school, ‘I think you’d better look at something else’ rather than trying to work with that young person to see how far they can get.

“Medicine isn’t going to be for everyone but we have shortages in pharmacy, nursing, audiology, optometry and these are equally valuable and important professions. We don’t have many young Pacific people in pharmacy at all because they’re not being adequately informed and guided, and their parents may want them to try to get into medicine. If they don’t, they just disappear.”

Collin is working with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific, Damon Salesa, and also Rennie Atfield-Douglas from the South Auckland campus Te Tai Tonga, to boost this awareness. “We need to let them know there’s a worthwhile career in so many other areas of healthcare.”

Collin is also concerned about health inequities that are likely to be exacerbated by Covid-19, the impact of climate change on the Pacific Islands, and the stresses of an ageing population. They’re all issues he would like to explore now he’s back in an academic environment. In fact, he’s considering a PhD once there’s time.

But he did enjoy his stint in New Caledonia.

“It was a wonderful place to be. But we have a 13-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son, and so the best time to move was probably now. We’d left Wellington when our son was three and the good part is the children are now fluent in French.

“I was here at Auckland with Colin Mantell about 20 years ago and helped set up the Māori Pacific programme so I’ve always had a soft spot for the Med School. I was aware that perhaps things were not working well for Pacific students so I felt I could make a contribution here.”

■ Denise Montgomery



## GREAT YARN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

***Turns out our grandmothers were onto something. Knitting isn’t just good for your wardrobe, it has benefits for mental health, as student Mei Gillespie has discovered.***

**Not too many people would disagree that 2020 was a stressful year.**

For those with anxiety issues, that stress was exacerbated. Routines that help people deal with stress, such as gym classes and social gatherings, went out the window in lockdowns. We were left with ourselves and those we were locked in with.

Even before the upheavals of 2020, student Mei Gillespie had some mental health struggles. She didn’t complete any NCEA levels, crippled by anxiety and depression, and dropped out of school.

“There’s been a fair share of hardship and uncertainty in my life so I thought it would be impossible to get anywhere or do anything different. My mum never gave up hope though and was pushing me to do differently and to do something beneficial for me.

“Later I realised that if I could do that, I could go on and help other people like me.

“Now I want to overcome my challenges and inspire others like me to achieve.”

Mei enrolled in the Tertiary Foundation Certificate (TFC) for 2020, before lockdown was part of our parlance. It’s a year-long course in which students of diverse backgrounds can gain university entrance qualifications or upskill in sciences.

“It worked out really well. I struggled to adjust in the first two to three weeks because of my lack of NCEA background. In biology, for example, I was quite behind, but I worked really hard in the first semester to catch up.”

She ended up getting two A pluses and two As. Her tutor for the TFC core subject, English, Agnieszka Zabicka, says Mei’s results were extremely impressive.

“Let’s not forget Covid and the lockdown from 26 March. That really threw a spanner in the works for many students. The fact Mei was able to achieve such good grades despite the upheaval was really remarkable.”

Mei admits lockdown was a challenge she had to find a way to deal with.

“I struggled with keeping a schedule and having to learn topics myself and through Zoom. I found myself unable to focus on the more challenging topics and spent a lot of time just ruminating over that and telling myself, ‘I can’t do it, I can’t do it’.

“When you’re in lockdown it’s so confined: your bedroom is your sleeping place, your study place, your lecture-watching space and I didn’t like that. So I’d walk to a nearby mountain, or somewhere near home like that, and set up everything and just start studying there. I can’t study at home.”

Escaping to nature was one tactic but there was another surprising one. Having seen her lecturer and some other students knitting during Zoom lectures, she decided to try it herself.

“The last time I knitted I was probably about nine but I needed something to do because I was really bored. I also heard that knitting was good for your mental state, for reducing anxiety. Because I had a lot of additional anxiety around the whole Covid thing. There was so much uncertainty.”

“We were really pushing knitting as a therapeutic project at TFC,” says Agnieszka. “In



Student Mei Gillespie with her TFC English tutor Dr Agnieszka Zabicka: knitting and chilling.





*Bachelor of Advanced Science student Mei Gillespie started knitting during the stress of 2020 and now says she'll never stop.*

Zoom classes I'd always be knitting, [TFC course co-ordinator] Nina Nola was knitting, Stephanie our co-ordinator was knitting. So we would encourage students to knit as well. I have a little knitting group, a very loose group of students and former students who meet with me ... when it's not lockdown."

Agnieszka, who is Polish, was taught to knit by her grandmother but she says even if you haven't knitted before, so many explanatory videos are available on YouTube. "Personally, also, knitting was very helpful in lockdown. But now we can just sit in my office and drink tea and knit. Sam was a student of ours two years ago. He's another big success for TFC, an A-plus student, and has even written poems about knitting.

"Mei is very special because when most people first start knitting, for the first project they would make a simple scarf or something. Mei made some gloves that were actually my design so I was very excited. Every time she came in with the knitting, it was like a miracle!"

Mei also started a scarf that tells a story of how she's been feeling, with words knitted into the design including 'hope'.

"I started knitting a scarf during lockdown, and I found it was a form of meditation and mindfulness during the panic and uncertainty of Covid. I found with knitting it was like 'just one more I want to see what the next one is', and I'd keep going and going and by the time you know it, four hours have passed."

She's also a talented painter and a small artwork by her sits on Agnieszka's desk.

But in September Mei hit a mental health road bump.

"I went through a really bad bout of depression. I couldn't do the simplest things. I couldn't get out of bed or do uni so I had to take time off. I actually considered leaving TFC.

## ***I found it was like a release of all this pent-up emotion and so I just knitted something I could see and reflect on.***

***– Mei Gillespie, student***

"The only thing that made me enjoy things again – what made me get back into things – was knitting. I got to the point where I was knitting all the time. I desperately needed something to do and I couldn't bring myself to do anything else. Slowly I found it was like a release of all this pent-up emotion so I just knitted something I could actually see and reflect on."

"The TFC is a difficult programme," explains Agnieszka. "You have to pass all of the papers in order to graduate at the end of the year so what Mei has achieved, despite the break, is actually really extraordinary. She's exceptionally hard-working and intelligent and very mature for her age. It's hard to believe she is only 18."

Mei did return to her studies and while her grades in Semester Two didn't quite match her stellar Semester One efforts – they were good enough to give her an extra boost to her study.

"I applied for a scholarship but didn't think I'd actually get it. And then I got an email saying that I'd been awarded a Tier 2 University of Auckland scholarship for academic potential."

It was a real confidence boost.

This month Mei started her Bachelor of Advanced Science, studying psychology, and won't have to worry about the added stress of costs associate with university and study because of the scholarship.

"I'm really excited. I was considering bio-med because I got accepted for both, but in the end the thing that really drove me was the idea of helping people like me who think that they're unable to achieve great things because of their background or difficult life circumstances."

Agnieszka says Mei's choice of study is a good one. "Psychology is almost like arts really and that's a discipline she's shown a lot of aptitude for – analysis of texts will be very useful in psychology."

Mei has advice for students like herself.

"No matter what your background is, it's always possible to achieve. Coming into TFC, I had very little knowledge of the topics covered in each course – including the sciences and some important English skills like punctuation. I found the teaching style in TFC courses to be better than school, and the staff were easy to approach and willing to lend a hand with questions about coursework."

Speaking of hands, Mei thinks hers will stay busy with knitting forever. Aside from being a good reason to pop in for tea, Polish cookies and a chat with Agnieszka, Mei recognises the benefits of the craft for her mental health. That is something Agnieszka can relate to as well.

"I had postnatal depression after my son was born and knitting really got me back on track," says Agnieszka. "Just focusing on something solid and doing repetitive work is good. There have been a number of studies that show knitting is very helpful in dealing with anxiety and depression.

"The other benefit it has, is it comes with being part of a community. It's great to have people to share with ... we have a few students who continue coming in, now we have that knitting connection. They come, sit, knit and drink tea and calm down."

■ Denise Montgomery

## WALLETS OPEN

## WIDE IN 2020

Staff didn't sit on their hands when thinking about how they could help students who'd lost income in 2020. They donated generously to student well-being and research funds.

**The year 2020 was the most successful ever for staff giving at the University, an uplifting highlight from a challenging period.**

The funding helped struggling students, supported research projects and enabled new scholarships and fellowships, with some inaugural recipients already named.

The total number of gifts from staff and former staff was 1,491 for 2020, up from 992 gifts for 2019.

"The generosity shown by our staff has been extraordinary," says Director of Alumni Relations and Development, Mark Bentley.

"Everyone was having to deal with enormous change and challenges, in all aspects of life, yet we had staff and alumni asking, 'What can I do to help?' and especially 'How can I support our students?'"

"Many of our students were having a tough time because of lockdown and the loss of income from part-time work. We were keen to offer as much help as we could to keep them in their studies and support their well-being," says Mark.

Most of the gifts were given to specific funds. Among those that attracted the largest number of staff donations were student support, faculty-specific student support, immune therapy research, postgraduate support, Staff for Students: the Well-being Fund, refugee scholarships and Māori and Pacific scholarships.

One of the new scholarships announced in 2020 was the David M Emanuel Research Scholarship in Accounting and Finance, established to mark David's substantial

contribution to the University and his students over a career that spanned 46 years. Donations to this fund from staff and alumni continued throughout the year and will support grants of up to \$5,000 annually. In September the inaugural recipient was named as Jonathan Manickam, a first-generation immigrant who is being supported through his honours dissertation.

In August 2020, a major donation for research in History was announced, \$500,000 from senior lecturer Dr Felicity Barnes and husband Michael Whitehead, to set up the History Innovation Fund. Two postdoctoral fellows have since been recruited for 2021. Dr Violeta Gilabert will start at the University this month, and Matthew Birchall, who is completing his PhD at the University of Cambridge, is due to start in July.

Another example of extraordinary generosity in 2020 was the \$5 million legacy gift to Law from the late Professor Brian Coote. The Professor Brian Coote Memorial Scholarship has been established to enable postgraduate study in law and is expected to be open to both domestic and international applicants this month.



Tatiana Faaiu says her scholarship, funded by staff and alumni giving, is making all the difference.

## TATIANA'S DREAM A STEP CLOSER

A financial hand gives a big boost to a student hoping to serve her community.

**Being accepted into medical school was once a pipe dream for Tatiana Faaiu, but this semester she takes her first steps towards becoming a doctor.**

Tatiana, of Samoan descent, says her admittance into the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery programme overwhelmed her with a "mixture of emotions". Growing up she thought her financial situation would prevent her from ever embarking on tertiary study.

Tatiana's acceptance into medical school means she is one step closer to making a positive difference in marginalised communities, which currently face disparities in both healthcare and health outcomes.

"Evidence has shown that Pacific people have significantly poorer health outcomes," she says. "By providing healthcare in a

culturally respectful and responsive way, I'm convinced that some of the present discrepancies can be improved on. The more Pacific voices there are in this arena, the better outcomes I believe there will be for my Pacific brothers and sisters."

Tatiana, who went to school at Mt Albert Grammar, is the recipient of a University of Auckland hardship scholarship, which she says gave her the hand up she needed.

Nearly 200 staff and former staff members gave \$37,680 to the Annual Appeal 2020, which goes towards providing hardship scholarships. These scholarships support students who may not have been able to attend university due to financial constraints.

"There aren't enough words to express how appreciative I am and how much this support has affected my life in such a positive way," says Tatiana.

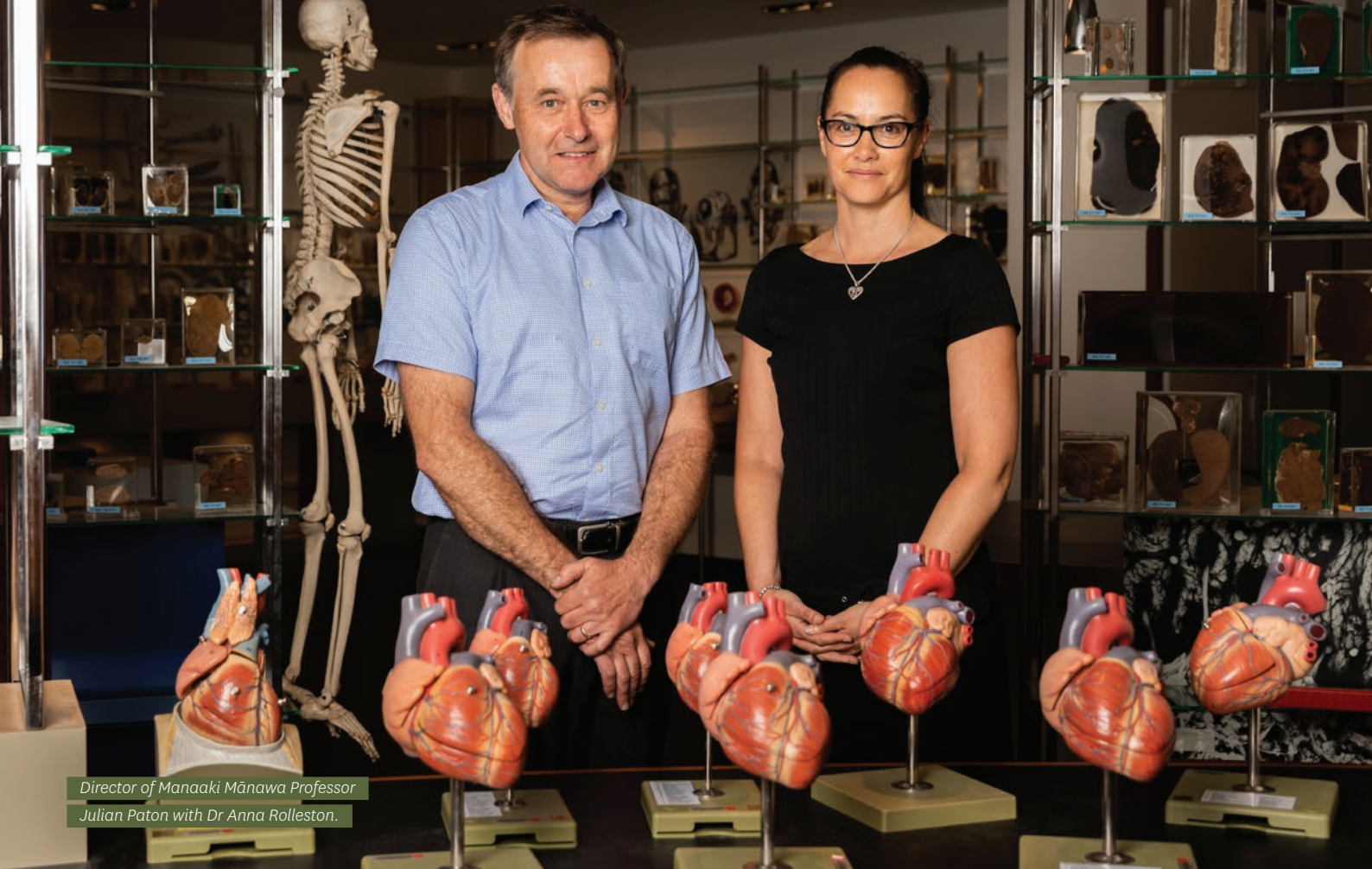
"The money went into resources that directly support my studies and it took a significant financial burden off me and my family. It gave me independence and means I'm free to focus on my studies."

Tatiana says she also feels a big morale lift knowing she's being backed by donors.

"It's a tremendous confidence boost to know that people who don't even know me would invest in my future ... I will do my best to make their investment worthwhile."

■ Briar Hubbard





Director of Manaaki Mānawa Professor Julian Paton with Dr Anna Rolleston.

## HEARTS AND MINDS

Manaaki Mānawa, the Centre for Heart Research, aims to reverse and prevent heart disease.

**Given that cardiovascular disease is New Zealand's biggest killer, it's hard to believe we haven't had a dedicated national research centre focusing on heart disease.**

But now we have – and the University of Auckland is at the heart of it.

The Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences-based Centre for Heart Research is called Manaaki Mānawa, and the name means 'preserving the life force of the heart'.

Manaaki Mānawa is the host of Healthy Hearts for Aotearoa New Zealand (HHANZ), a new Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE) that's an integrated national network of heart researchers, clinicians and community experts from around the country. Base government funding for the network is for seven and a half years, but each heart research centre is expected to raise additional funding for research.

"The government has recognised the chronic issue around cardiovascular disease, particularly the inequity around Māori and Pacific," says Manaaki Mānawa's director, Professor Julian

Paton. "Most families experience or suffer from cardiovascular disease. Unlike pandemics that will go away one day, heart disease has not gone away. We can slow it down but it would be wonderful to think that in the future we could completely reverse it or prevent it."

Julian arrived at the University three years ago, from the University of Bristol, to create Auckland's heart research centre. He says the city has a unique environment, where research is being done right on the doorstep of a main hospital and multiple disciplines can be integrated.

One of the centre's big achievements to date is setting up the Cardiac Inherited Diseases Registry, recording details of patients who have been saved from sudden cardiac death events.

"This has enabled us to alert family members to the possibility that they may have these mutations. It has allowed subsequent genotyping, which has then made them aware of whether or not they are at risk."

Another example of research is the Multi-Ethnic New Zealand Study of Acute Coronary Syndrome (MENZACS). In this study, samples are taken from people who have had a heart attack to find out more about the factors that predisposed them to it. It is the first such local study to look at ethnicity differences.

Julian says a key vision for Manaaki Mānawa is to achieve heart health equity in Aotearoa.

"Maori and Pacific people don't live as long as non-Maori and Pacific, by about seven to eight years, predominantly because of heart disease. New Zealand has a unique and diverse population and we need to move away from a one size fits all strategy to solve the problem of heart failure for the benefit of all people in Aotearoa."

Dr Anna Rolleston co-chairs the Māori

advisory group for Manaaki Mānawa and says researchers will collaborate with Māori and Pacific communities.

"One of our goals is

for the community to feel like they have a voice. I don't think many clinicians and researchers go out to the community to talk to them. But we need to do something different to make a difference.

"We hope Manaaki Mānawa will be like a blueprint for other health research groups that need to collaborate more."

■ Helen Borne

A new fundraising appeal will support Manaaki Mānawa's heart research. Details will be sent to staff, alumni and friends this month. Visit [giving.auckland.ac.nz/heart](https://giving.auckland.ac.nz/heart) for information.



## TOUGH START TO OVERCOME

Derek Challis, son of Robin Hyde, died in January aged 90. Professor Michele Leggott paid tribute.

**He opens a suitcase and there they are, the precious manuscript notebooks written by his poet mother Robin Hyde, born Iris Wilkinson.**

We are in Dunedin for a Hyde conference. “Yes,” says Derek Arden Challis. “I put them in the boot and we drove down from Auckland.” He’s enjoying the gasp of horror around the room full of Hyde aficionados (a suitcase, the boot, the distance between Te Henga and Dunedin, these unique manuscripts on the road with their legal owner and guardian). He wants to make us jump, as his mother, a legend, always wanted to make her listeners jump. It’s a literary tactic and Derek has inherited it in full. The notebooks are of course safe and come to no greater harm than being enthusiastically riffled around the room of admiring scholars. We get over ourselves, but the moment is not forgotten. It’s linked with other moments in Derek Challis’s long history, one of them the trip he took to Ohakune as a 27-year-old biology technician to saw off the head of a circus elephant dead from tutu poisoning, and send it back to Auckland University’s Biology Museum.

Derek Challis was born in Picton on October 29, 1930. His delivery coincided with two significant earthquakes that Hyde liked to think showed promise for her boy. At the age of three weeks, he was smuggled aboard the ferry for Wellington in a dress basket, to keep his existence out of the world’s eye because solo motherhood and staff journalism were not compatible options in respectable New Zealand of the 1930s. The child was boarded in Palmerston North and then Auckland as Hyde endeavoured to work and support him. She wrote a suite of poems (*Derry’s Rhyme Book*) for his fourth Christmas and her memoir, *A Home in This World*, outlines the difficulties of mothering at a distance. The poet mother and the political mother sometimes coalesced, and in 1938 Derek was exhorted to ask other children to gather and donate items for the struggling Chinese in their fight against Japanese aggression: “Do you think you’re too young to ask your schoolmates if they’ll start collecting some of the things I mentioned for the poor people of China – the refugees or the soldiers, whichever seem more easily helped – and maybe that would start other schools off all over New Zealand?”

When Hyde died in London in August 1939, Derek was eight years old and prospects were



L to R: The late Dr Joan Robb, Derek Challis, Professor Mary Sewell, Mandy Harper and Professor Michele Leggott, with the skull of Mollie the elephant in 2008.

grim. The family with whom he had lived were no longer able to accommodate him, and Derek spent several years in an orphanage. He left school to join the navy and, after serving in Korea, left to pursue studies at the University of Auckland, working as a technician in the Zoology Department. He lived in a bach at the Ellerslie home of Rosalie and Gloria Rawlinson, who had been close friends of his mother. The Rawlinsons were in possession of Hyde’s manuscripts and there was an agreement between Gloria and Derek in the 1960s to collaborate on a biography of Hyde, Gloria doing the writing, Derek assisting with research. When Derek took a teaching job at Bay of Islands College in 1970, progress on the biography stalled and Gloria eventually shelved it as a completed draft. When Gloria died in 1995, Derek gained possession of the draft and decided to complete the biography with help from wife Lyn and some support from a Marsden grant.

This is where my direct knowledge of Derek enters the picture, though previously I was one among many who made the trip to the Challis home in the bush on Te Henga Road, to be given access to Hyde manuscripts and fed by the hospitable Challises. It wasn’t always easy. The tangled history of the papers, resting on the event of Hyde’s suicide in London, was always in view. Derek’s investment in them was bound up with the emotional break he suffered when his mother died, something that could never quite leave the room.

“She’s still here, you know,” he would say. “Right here.” We all felt the presence, none more so than Derek.

When Derek and Lyn discovered late in the redrafting of the biography that Gloria had manufactured some of Hyde’s letters from wartime China, the fallout was immense. Derek had regarded Gloria as an older sister, the writer who was closest to his mother, next best thing to family. To find that she had overstepped the bounds of objective reporting was a shock that threatened the foundations of the biography. Derek and Lyn reworked the chapters on China, restoring manuscript probity, and the crisis passed. *The Book of Iris*, published in 2002, was always going to be a work of many voices.

Hyde is quoted at length from her letters and autobiographical writings, Gloria is a first commentator in the script, Derek a second, and it is not always possible to tell where one leaves off and the other begins, but the work does seem to stretch and accommodate itself to the varying narrative registers. *The Book of Iris* is, in the final analysis, a labour of intense love for its subject and needs to be read as part of the family romance Derek Challis inherited and made good.

And the elephant? Her name was Mollie and she was the star turn of the troupe of elephants that toured the country in 1957 with an Australian circus. An untimely snack on fresh tutu foliage in Ohakune left Mollie dead. Derek read an account of the accident in the *New Zealand Herald* and the Zoology Department got permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs to exhume the elephant. With local help, Derek removed the head and prepared the skull for a train trip to Auckland. Recounting this singular adventure, he described buying bulk scent from a chemist to disguise the meaty smell of the flensed skull in its rimu sawdust packing. The skull was still in the Biology Department in 2008 when staff members came across it in a dark cupboard and Derek was called in to tell his part of the story at a symposium for Mollie. Here we learned that Professor McGregor, Derek’s boss, returning from an overseas sabbatical, was not thrilled to find Mollie’s now painstakingly degreased and bleached skull in his museum. Didn’t Derek know that elephants carried anthrax and that the recovery operation in Ohakune might have had serious consequences? More to the point, the technician had unwittingly trumped his professor.

“When McGregor returned to the Department some months later,” Derek recalled, “he was in fact far from pleased to find an elephant’s skull already installed. He had triumphantly brought with him the skull of a largish male elephant given him by one of the institutions he had visited and I think he thought Mollie’s skull somewhat upstaged his own (rather earth-stained) acquisition.”

■ Derek Arden Challis: Oct 29, 1930 – Jan 14, 2021  
 Edited from an article that first appeared on [Newsroom.co.nz](http://Newsroom.co.nz) and is republished with permission.





## UNESCO HONOUR FOR ROBIN HYDE

**Special Collections in Te Tumu Herenga has launched an exhibition showcasing the work of poet, novelist and journalist Robin Hyde.**

The exhibition, *Torrents of Amber: the Extraordinary Work of Robin Hyde*, focuses on Hyde's time in Auckland during the 1930s, a particularly productive period in her writing life, and explores her place in the city's literary scene.

The exhibition coincides with the recent addition of Robin Hyde's papers to UNESCO's New Zealand Memory of the World Register. The Register is part of the New Zealand Memory of the World (MOW) Programme, which showcases significant items of documentary heritage and raises public awareness of their value and the work of the institutions that care for them. Other literary inscriptions on the New Zealand Register include the papers of writers Katherine Mansfield, Charles Brasch and John A. Lee.

Robin Hyde was the pseudonym of Iris Guiver Wilkinson (1906-1939), chosen in memory of her first son, Christopher Robin Hyde, who was

stillborn. Hyde was born in South Africa and came to New Zealand as a small child. She grew up in Wellington and started work as a journalist with *The Dominion* newspaper at just 17. Her life was one of challenge and upheaval. She suffered from bouts of severe depression and experienced ongoing pain from surgery to her knee when she was 18 which left her with a permanent limp. Despite these challenges, she produced an impressive body of work including three published collections of poetry and six books of prose. Hyde died in London in August 1939 of Benzedrine poisoning, aged 33.

Special Collections Team Leader Dr Nigel Bond says an MOW inscription is a major accolade that recognises Hyde's contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand literature, her place as one of New Zealand's great writers and the richness, research value and national significance of her papers.

The title for the exhibition at Special Collections comes from the poem 'Rain in the Night', which Hyde published in her third collection of poems, *Persephone in Winter* (1937). Writing at a time of global upheaval, Hyde's poetry and prose reflects many of the social injustices she saw around her. Her work as a war correspondent, in China in 1938, gave her personal insight into the atrocities of war, some of which are reflected in her work *The Victory Hymn*, on display in the Special Collections Reading Room.

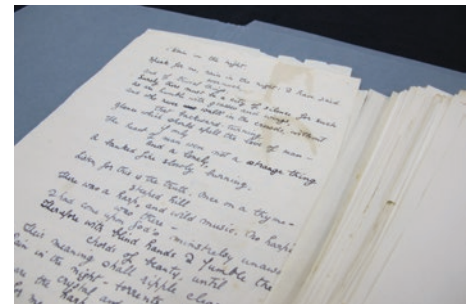
Hyde's literary papers are a valued part of the University's Special Collections and have been used extensively by students and academics including Professor Michele Leggott, whose in-depth analysis of Hyde's poetry resulted in the publication of a previously unpublished long prose poem *The Book of Nadath*, in 1999, and *Young Knowledge: The Poems of Robin Hyde*, in 2003.

■ Nigel Bond and Katherine Pawley, Te Tumu Herenga, Special Collections

Left: Robin Hyde was born Iris Guiver Wilkinson in 1906 and died in 1939. Below: A handwritten copy of 'Rain in the Night', held in Special Collections.

**Visit the display at Special Collections, Level G, University of Auckland General Library until Wednesday 17 March.**

Special Collections' holdings of Robin Hyde's papers: [tinyurl.com/archives-library-robin-hyde](http://tinyurl.com/archives-library-robin-hyde)  
Memory of the World inscription: [tinyurl.com/Unesco-NZMOW](http://tinyurl.com/Unesco-NZMOW)



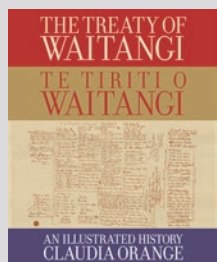
One for  
International  
Women's Day

Alumna Louise Lever has made a feature documentary on contemporary feminism,

featuring the likes of alumnae former PM Helen Clark and Courtney Sina Meredith. *Revolt She Said* premieres on **8 March at 7.30pm** at the Rialto in Auckland (depending on alert levels).

See: [buytickets.at/louiselever/475706](http://buytickets.at/louiselever/475706)

## BOOKS



**The Treaty of Waitangi Te Tiriti O Waitangi: An Illustrated History**

This history book by distinguished alumna Dame Claudia Orange is the latest version

of her award-winning writing on the Treaty, first published in 1987, and the most comprehensive yet.

**WIN:** We have one copy to give away.

Email: [UniNews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:UniNews@auckland.ac.nz) by 10 April.

**Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi: An Illustrated History*, BWB, \$49.99**



**Ngā Kete Mātauranga**

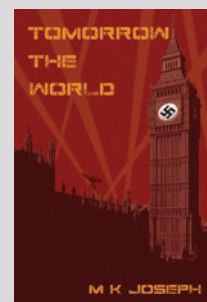
This collection of essays co-edited by Professor of Indigenous Studies, Linda Waimarie Nikora (Tūhoe, Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti), features the personal stories of

24 Māori academics from Aotearoa, including herself, Dr Dan Hikuroa (Māori Studies) and Associate Professor Marama Muru-Lanning.

**WIN:** We have one copy to give away.

Email: [UniNews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:UniNews@auckland.ac.nz) by 10 April.

**Linda Waimarie Nikora and Jacinta Ruru, *Ngā Kete Mātauranga*, OUP, \$60**



**Tomorrow the World**

This novel is by former Auckland professor M.K. Joseph, an esteemed poet and novelist from the 1950s to 1970s.

The novel sat in an archive for decades after his death and is an alternative history

fiction that imagines the world as if the Nazis had won the Second World War, drawing on the writer's first-hand experience fighting the Nazis.

**M.K. Joseph, *Tomorrow the World*, Atanui Press, \$35**





***“We don’t want fear of legal repercussions to quell genuine attempts by volcano scientists to communicate our best understanding of hazard and risk.”***

***– Professor Jan Lindsay***

## SO HARD TO KNOW WHEN IT’LL BLOW

**Which event do you think is more likely to occur, asks Professor Jan Lindsay. An event with a one in five chance of occurring, or one with a 20 percent probability of occurring?**

If you had to pause and think, you’re not alone. Probabilities and likelihoods are hard, even for experts. With more time to reflect, you might assume that people would perceive the likelihood of those two events occurring as being the same. Many people don’t. Some studies have shown that even experts in a field interpret likelihoods more accurately when they are presented as natural frequencies (one in five) rather than probabilities (20 percent). Furthermore, research led by my colleague Dr Mary Anne Clive has shown that when the likelihood of a hazard is presented as a natural frequency, people often perceive the hazard to be greater than when it is presented as a percentage. Who knew!

Whether it be choice of words or design elements of maps and graphs, there is an endless array of communication possibilities that need to be carefully considered for effective communication of data. It will come as no surprise to communication experts, designers and psychologists that the way hazard and risk information is communicated can influence how people perceive and respond to that hazard and risk, but it was a real revelation to me as an early-career volcanologist.

One of the first major projects I worked on was to create a suite of volcanic hazard maps. I picked the base map, hazard content, and colour scheme that I thought would work best, based on my own intuition, experience and judgement.

I proudly handed over my maps to emergency management officials and promptly moved on to my next project. Shortly after, publications started to emerge in the literature based on interviews with people living and working on volcanoes, which stressed the importance of considering the audience before creating volcanic hazard communication products such as maps. The revelation that my maps may have fulfilled my audiences’ needs much better if I had consulted with them has informed the approach of much of my subsequent research.

Communicating hazard and risk effectively is not easy. We have all experienced this during the Covid-19 pandemic, watching the leaders of some of the world’s most powerful nations struggling to get a clear message across. I am sure I am not the only one who has friends and colleagues in the US who are exasperated by some of the conflicting messages around Covid-19, or in the UK who are perplexed by the complexity of their alert level system and who still are not quite sure what actions are tied to which alert level. I am certainly appreciative of the clear and concise communication that our leaders and science communicators in Aotearoa New Zealand have provided around our alert levels and actions. Good communication during a crisis is vital: poor communication can have disastrous effects.

As I write this, 13 parties are facing charges from WorkSafe over alleged health and safety breaches during the time leading up to the December 2019 eruption of Whakaari White Island. The trial, set for March, will undoubtedly include discussions of whether risk was adequately communicated. This is a nervous time for New Zealand volcanologists, given that GNS Science is one of the parties facing charges. I, for one, do not want the fear of litigation or other legal repercussions to quell the genuine attempts by our volcano scientists to

communicate our best understanding of hazard and risk for a particular volcano. However, the trial is also a welcome opportunity to reflect on the importance of effective communication.

I’m reminded of ‘the L’Aquila trial’ in which six Italian scientists and one government official were prosecuted following the magnitude 6.3 earthquake in L’Aquila in 2009, which killed more than 300 people. The experts were prosecuted on manslaughter charges for having allegedly underestimated and poorly communicated the risk in the lead-up to the earthquake, thus falsely reassuring the people of L’Aquila. In the seven-year legal process that ensued, the accused were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to six years prison. Following appeals, they were all eventually acquitted. Much has been written about the L’Aquila trial, particularly in the context of the difficulty in communicating probabilistic hazard and risk, and also in terms of the roles and responsibilities of government and university scientists, such as volcanologists and seismologists.

I suspect these types of discussion will resurface with the Whakaari trial. Indeed we should be having these difficult discussions and we should also continue to support research exploring how to communicate risk effectively, and to modify our practice accordingly, based on insights obtained. Striving for effective communication of hazard and risk is an ever-evolving but critically important endeavour.

■ Professor Jan Lindsay is Associate Dean of Research in the Faculty of Science. Her inaugural lecture ‘Insights into volcanic risk from Auckland to the Antilles, Andes and Arabia’ is on 25 March at 6.30pm in Building 303, Physics Lecture Theatre 1.

*The views in this article reflect personal opinion and are not necessarily those of the University of Auckland.*