

OBITUARY



Karina Raewyn Roimata Williams
1962 - 2005

Haere atu ra e te rangatira, e Karina
Puritia te aka tupuna
O tapuwae ki te ara wairua o ratou ma
Waiho matou ki muri
Me o matou hupe roimata
Nga whatinga pouri katoa i wehea nei e koe

Engari,
Kahore koe ki te ngaro i te tirohanga kanohi
Ko te aroha me te mahara e mau tonu ana
A te wa
Ka tutakitaki ano tatou

A Tribute to My Friend and Colleague Karina Williams

On 2 September 2005, Judge Karina Williams passed away after a short illness. It is impossible to express what a tragic loss her early passing has been – not only for her whanau – but also for those involved in the law, where Karina made such an outstanding contribution and had proved to be an exceptional role model.

Judge Williams, whose tribal affiliations were Tuhoe, Te Whakatohea, Tainui, Te Aupouri and Ngaitai iwi, was from Ruatoki. She was educated at St Cuthbert's College in Auckland. Proud of her Maoritanga, it was here that her advocacy for Maori began. One of her achievements at school included being Head Girl.

Judge Williams was the daughter of Tawhirimatea and Kaa Williams, who are both well known for their own outstanding contributions, notably in the field of education. Within her family environment, Karina not only committed herself to study but also to sport and music, excelling at all levels.

Later a representative netball player for Auckland, she went on to coach South Auckland teams for many years. She also taught and composed for kapa haka groups.

At Law School she met the other Maori who would be her friends and colleagues for the next two decades. Later on, many of them also ended up working in South Auckland with her.

Judge Williams practised as a barrister in South Auckland Chambers and later Friendship Chambers, working with other lawyers who shared her concern about social justice issues. Known for being both staunch and hugely competent, she became a trailblazer and role model for other Maori, and other women. She never forgot her roots – even after long working weeks she frequently travelled to hui at weekends during the Whakatohea Treaty settlement negotiations.

Her appointment to the bench in 2003 was met with widespread approval. There was a strong sense that she would prove to be outstanding in the work she was to take on. Her appointment was to the Manukau District Court – in the heartland of South Auckland where she had worked for so many years as a criminal lawyer, youth advocate, District Inspector for Mental Health and Tenancy Tribunal Adjudicator. Despite her success, she was always reminded, both by her work and by

her own life, of the disadvantage suffered by Maori and Pacific peoples. She always strove to make a difference.

Even in the relatively short time that she was to serve as a Judge, Judge Williams showed judicial leadership. Her running of the Family Violence Court proved legendary: her ability to communicate with parties produced truly meaningful results. It is of interest that the success of this specialist court (currently one of only two in the country) has meant that it is soon to be rolled out into courts in other parts of New Zealand.

Judge Williams also maintained strong links with the community after her appointment to the bench, continuing to involve herself in various advisory and trustee roles.

Despite everything she achieved, Judge Williams said that her proudest achievement was motherhood. Those who know her teenage daughter, Kataraina, can easily see that she has her mother's special combination of intelligence, courage and ability.

Invited to give a speech a few months before her passing, Judge Williams spoke in detail of her family background, and modestly described herself as "an extremely ordinary person who has been fortunate to have had extraordinary opportunity and support".

Judge Karina Williams passed away just days short of her 43rd birthday. Her loss is immeasurable. The Manukau and Waitakere District Courts were all-but-closed for her tangihanga, attended by over 1000 mourners. The wide range of people present – from all walks of life – spoke of the impact she had had in so many different parts of the community.

Judge Williams is survived by her parents, Tawhirimatea and Kaa Williams, three siblings, her partner Richard Te Hunia and daughter Kataraina. She rests next to her great grandfather, Rev. Mutu Kapa, in Mangere.

Judge Lisa Tremewan