

Mariri, the Flying Man



a traditional story
from the Cook Islands,
retold by Maria Samuela



Long, long ago, there lived a great explorer whose name was Mariri. He was brave and clever and good at making things. Mariri lived in ‘Avaiki, where his people had lived for many generations.

One day, Mariri said to his wife, “We need to find a new place to live. ‘Avaiki is too crowded now. There is not enough land or food for everyone.”

Mariri gathered his warriors. They agreed that it was time to find somewhere new – a place with more land and more food.

Mariri and his warriors spent months building a vaka – a huge vaka that could sail across the ocean. Finally it was ready.

“I will return,” Mariri promised his wife, “once we have found another home for our people.”

For many months, Mariri and his warriors sailed the ocean and, at last, they came to an island in the middle of the sea. They found no people living on the island.

Instead, it was alive with white-tailed rako birds and potipoti (flying insects).

Mariri named the island Enuamanu, which means “island of birds and creatures”.

Enuamanu was a fine place to live. There was plenty of land, food, and fresh water.

“My wife will be happy here,” thought Mariri, and then he felt sad. He and his men had been away for a long time, and he missed his wife very much. He wondered how he could fetch her. Sailing back to ‘Avaiki by vaka would take many months.



As Mariri stood thinking, he saw a flock of rakoa circling above him. The wings of the rakoa were big, and they flapped slowly and gracefully. Then a swarm of potipoti zoomed past his face. Their wings were tiny, and they flapped very quickly. The wings of the birds and insects gave him an idea.

“I will build wings of my own,” he shouted.
“I will *fly* back to ‘Avaiki!”



Mariri took some branches from the tutu tree and carefully bent them into wing shapes. Then he filled the wing shapes with feathers, plucked from the rakoa. His wings looked magnificent. Proudly, he tied them onto his arms.

But his pride didn't last long. He ran along the beach flapping his new wings and then launched himself into the air. For a moment, he rose up, but then he felt himself dropping back down again. “Au-ē!” he cried as he crashed onto the sand.

The potipoti and rakoa laughed. “Silly man, with your imitation wings!”

Mariri felt shamed, but he didn't give up. He straightened his wings and tried again. He ran and flapped his wings as hard as he could, but he stayed on the ground. Soon he was puffed. His arms were sore, and he felt sorry for himself. He lifted his face to the sky and wept.



But as he looked upwards, he saw a towering hill, now known as Te Kurikuri (The Seabird). The hill reached up into the sky. Mariri picked up his wings and began climbing. When he reached the top, he looked out over the island. “Yes,” he thought again, “my wife will be happy here.” He tied his wings back on.

“Silly man!” squawked the potipoti and rakoa. For a moment, Mariri was worried they were right. He felt panic. “This hill is so high. Auē!” Then he remembered his wife, and he took a deep breath, spread his wings wide, and stepped forward off the side of the hill.

“Aaarrggghhh!” He fell like a stone towards the ground far below. Down, down, down ... but then, a gust of wind collected beneath his wings, lifting Mariri high into the sky. He flapped his rakoa wings and soared through the air. “I’m flying!” he cried. He circled the island once and then turned towards ‘Avaiki.

For part of his flight, the potipoti and rakoa flew along beside him, no longer laughing at his imitation wings.





Mariri's wife was standing on the beach when she saw something far away on the horizon. It looked like a huge bird. As it got closer, she realised that it was a man flying across the ocean towards her. She couldn't believe her eyes. At last, Mariri landed beside her on the beach.

"My husband?" she cried. "Is it really you?" She stared at his wings, and then they embraced. They had never been apart for so long. "You flew?" she asked. "But how can you fly?"

Mariri smiled. "Let me show you," he said. Mariri walked with his wife to the top of a nearby hill and helped her to climb onto his back. "Hold on," he said, and he jumped off the side of the hill. The wind caught his wings and lifted them high into the air. Together, Mariri and his wife flew away through the skies, back towards Enuamanu.

Mariri and his wife lived very happily in Enuamanu. They had a son, and when he grew into a man, the couple returned to 'Avaiki one last time.

Can you guess how they got there?

illustrations by Samuel Sakaria

Cook Islands

Northern group



Southern group

Rarotonga

Atiu

More about Enuamanu

Enuamanu is now part of the Cook Islands. Today, the island is called Atiu (the name of one of the ancestors of the Cook Islands people).

Mariri, the Flying Man

by Maria Samuela

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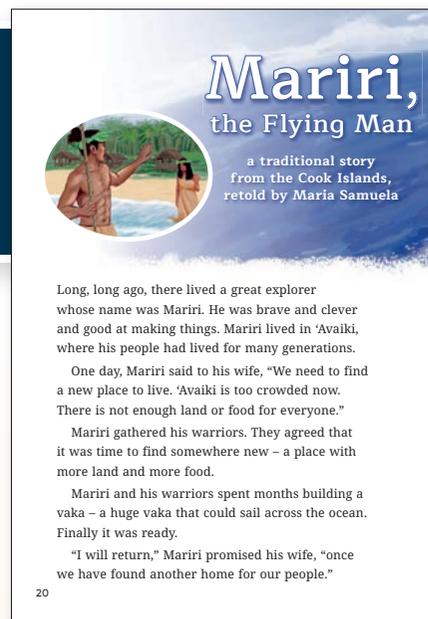
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