

The Journey

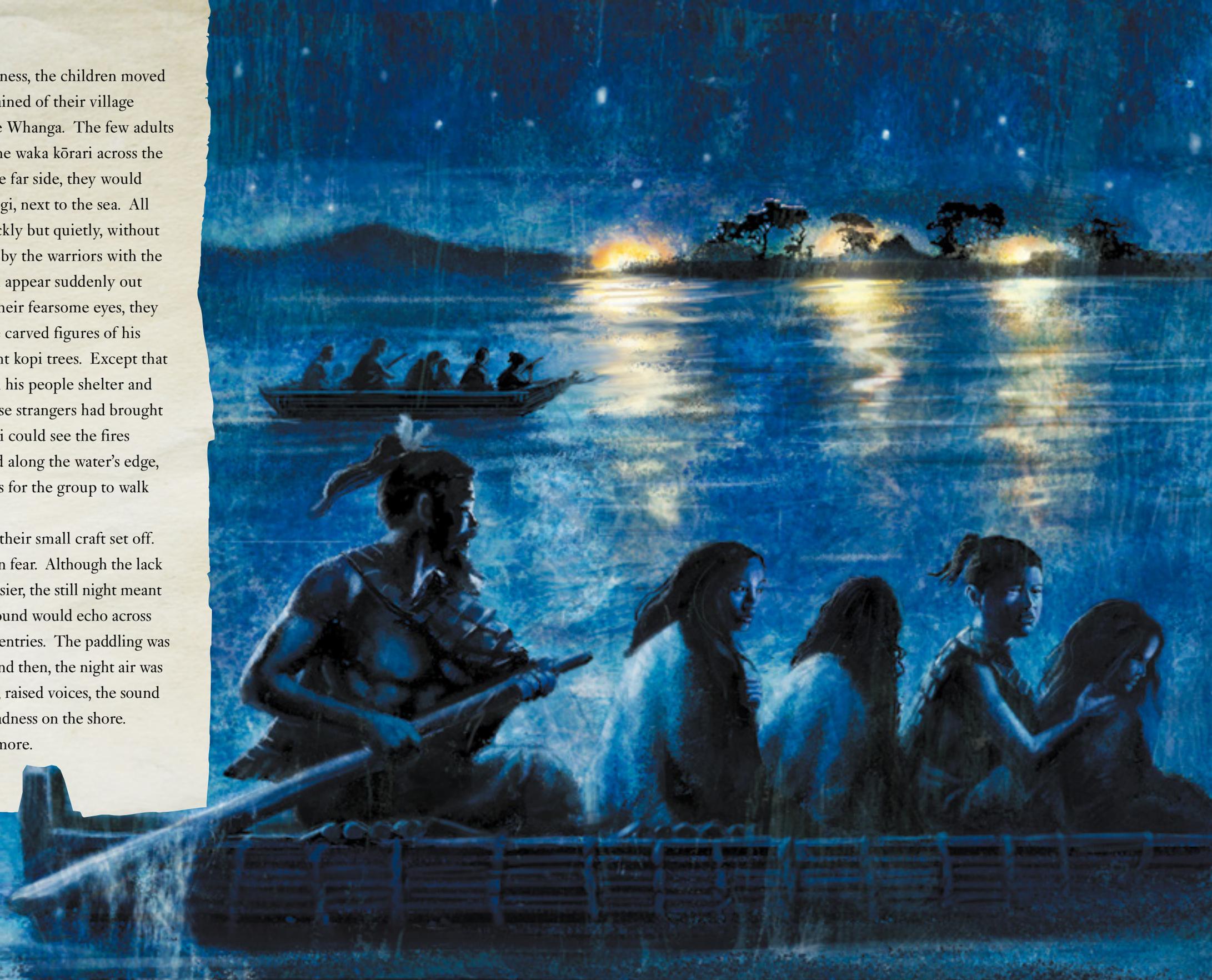
as told to Kiwa Hammond by Tumanako Taurima

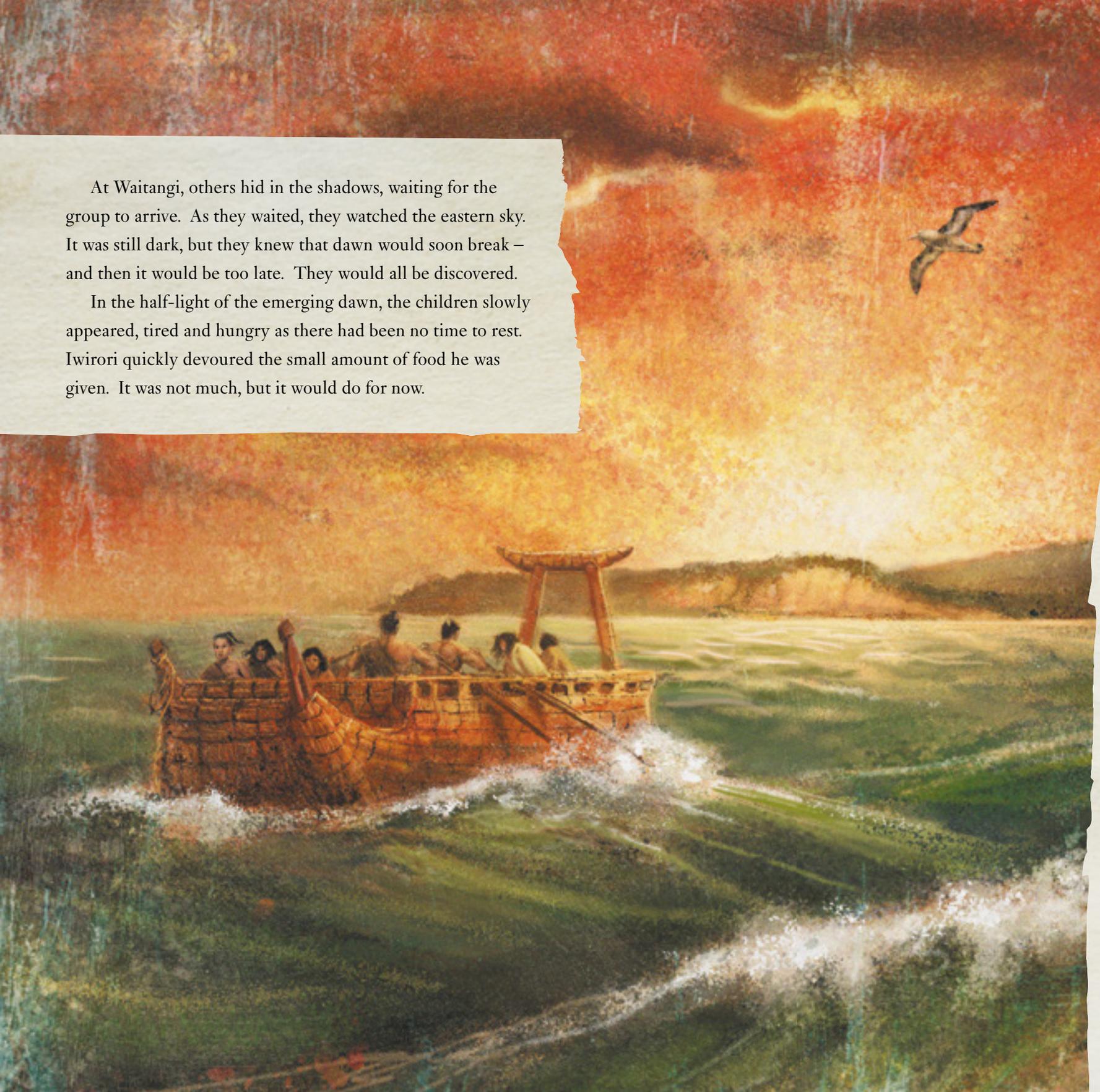
It was time to go. Not a word was said by anyone, not even the little ones. They understood why it was so important to be quiet. Their young eyes had seen many terrible things. They had lost parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, and uncles – but did not understand why. Iwirori was among the small group of survivors. Like them, he had the faint chance of escape to a new life of freedom.

Under cover of darkness, the children moved silently from what remained of their village down to the shore of Te Whanga. The few adults with them would row the waka kōrari across the lagoon. On reaching the far side, they would travel on foot to Waitangi, next to the sea. All this had to be done quickly but quietly, without any of them being seen by the warriors with the carved faces, who could appear suddenly out of the darkness. With their fearsome eyes, they reminded Iwirori of the carved figures of his karapuna* on the ancient kopi trees. Except that the kopi trees had given his people shelter and protection. All that these strangers had brought was destruction. Iwirori could see the fires from their camps dotted along the water's edge, making it too dangerous for the group to walk along the shore.

One after the other, their small craft set off. Iwirori held his breath in fear. Although the lack of wind made rowing easier, the still night meant that even the slightest sound would echo across the water and alert the sentries. The paddling was slow and steady. Now and then, the night air was punctuated by gunshots, raised voices, the sound of someone wailing in sadness on the shore. And then silence once more.

*ancestors





At Waitangi, others hid in the shadows, waiting for the group to arrive. As they waited, they watched the eastern sky. It was still dark, but they knew that dawn would soon break – and then it would be too late. They would all be discovered.

In the half-light of the emerging dawn, the children slowly appeared, tired and hungry as there had been no time to rest. Iwirori quickly devoured the small amount of food he was given. It was not much, but it would do for now.

On the seashore waited the waka pahī, similar to the waka that had brought the group across the lagoon but bigger and built for ocean-going trips. Although the children had been raised beside the ocean, none of them had ever ventured beyond the shore. Only the older ones had been allowed to travel on the waka pahī to the outlying islands when it was time to gather birds such as the hākoako, tāiko, and tītī. Soon this waka would carry Iwirori and the others further than any of them had dreamed ... perhaps to safety. Until then, there was the ocean to contend with.

Dawn broke on the eastern horizon. It was time. The adults who had brought them stood back. They had completed their task and would travel no further. The children sensed this and looked with imploring eyes, but the guides lowered their gaze or turned to look away.

The waka cast off. Slowly, they made their way to the open ocean. By the time the sun's first rays hit the surface of the water, the boat was out to sea.

The journey was not easy. If not for the skill of the men rowing, all those on board would have been lost to the ocean depths forever. At times, they called upon their karapuna as the waka was buffeted by wind and waves. Always the children were wary of ships. Like the hopo* that skimmed over the ocean, such ships had come to the island many times before. The last ones had brought the carved warriors. Iwirori thought of his home and wondered if he would ever see it again.

*albatross

One day, a new land appeared, long and strange on the horizon. Was this the ancient homeland of Hhiawaiki? Or was this the place that some called Te Ika-a-Māui? Iwirori heard one of the paddlers call it Te Māhia.

As they came closer, the land became clearer. The children could see a village and strange-looking waka with long wooden hulls anchored just offshore. One of these waka travelled out to see who was on board the vessel. It came so close, the paddlers were able to call out to each other.

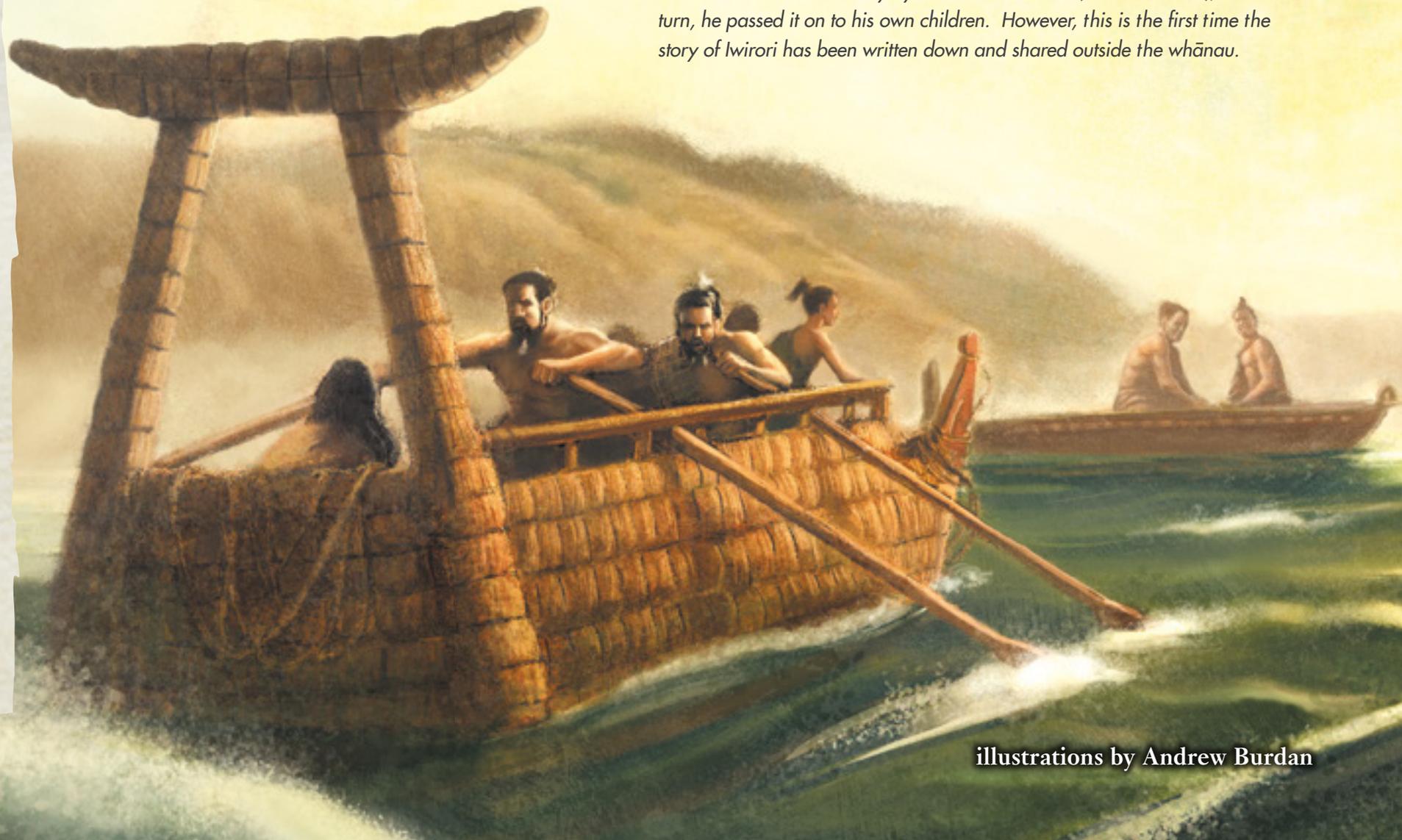
Iwirori was afraid. He could see that the men on the other waka had carved faces. But these ones did not carry weapons – just their paddles and nets for fishing. They spoke in a strange way, too, but it was possible for Iwirori to understand what they said.

One of the men wanted to know where they were from. “Nō hea koutou?” he called out.

“Rēkohu,” came the reply.

The man showed a sign of recognition. He opened his arms wide.

“Haere mai,” he called.



Afterword

According to family tradition, Iwirori left Rēkohu soon after the invasion by Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama. He was adopted by Wiremu Taitai, a rangatira from Kihitū, Wairoa. Karauria Te Iwirori later grew to become an influential chief in the Wairoa district (on New Zealand’s East Coast).

Iwirori never returned to his homeland. He died in 1868. However, many years later, his descendants made the journey to Rēkohu to learn more about their Moriori origins.

Kiwa Hammond is a direct descendant of Karauria Te Iwirori. The story of Iwirori has long been a part of the oral storytelling tradition in his whānau. Kiwa was first told this story by Tumanako Taurima (one of his kuia), and in turn, he passed it on to his own children. However, this is the first time the story of Iwirori has been written down and shared outside the whānau.

illustrations by Andrew Burdan

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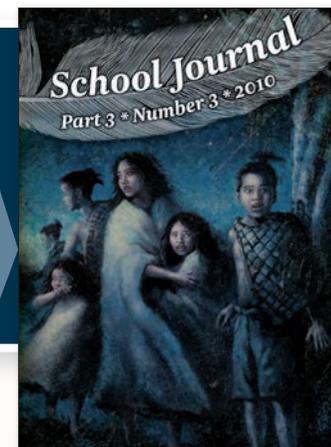
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