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ARTICLE FOR NURSING COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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Te Tai Tokerau

Raukura Gertrude Robinson (nee Piripi/ Phillips), Registered Nurse. Born: 23 December 1910

Recently former Registered Nurse Raukura Robinson celebrated her one hundredth birthday. Hundreds of whanau and friends packed Paratene Te Manu Marae in Ngunguru in Te Tai Tokerau to celebrate the much loved and respected kuia's century.

Recently I visited with Mrs Robinson, or Auntie Gertie as she is known by many, and she recalled her experiences as a registered nurse in the 1940s and 50s.

As a young woman living with her whanau on their farm at Ngunguru on Northland's East Coast she did not want to leave home to train as a nurse. But, concerned about the future of Maori youth losing their culture, the elders insisted. They saw it as being important for Maoridom that young people were trained in the professions and were able to become good role models for future generations. Auntie recalled how prominent Te Tai Tokerau kaumatua, Sir James Henare himself had chosen her and persuaded her to at least try it for six months.

Trained at Auckland Hospital in the 1940s, Raukura Phillips was registered as a nurse on 22 August 1947. In those days many Maori anglicized their names so she was known as Raukura Phillips. She recalled that at that time, apart from a young Maori intern doctor, she was the only Maori employed by Auckland Hospital. Here weekly pay was six shillings and three-pence. Nursing tutorials were held at the Cargon Hotel. At 28 years of age, auntie was the oldest student in the class. She recalled being challenged by theory and exams as English was her second language after Te Reo.

Aunty Gertie recalled that in this post war period, many of the patients were returned servicemen. Whole wards were designated to caring for them. Many had returned from war with mental health problems and were admitted to Auckland Hospital for acute care. She told of several occasions when she had dashed from the Hospital to near-by Grafton Bridge and physically holding seriously disturbed young soldiers who were attempting to take their lives by jumping off the bridge.

On another occasion, whilst on duty she checked on a patient, a young air-force pilot who was terminally ill but who at the time had a bad case of the hiccoughs. He told her that he couldn't get any sleep because of the hiccoughs. Nurse Phillips went to the kitchen and then returned with a cup of warmed milk and a container of baking soda. She explained to the young man that she would spoon some baking soda into the milk and when it foamed up, he was to drink it immediately, which he did. Apparently the hiccoughing stopped instantly and the patient was soon sleeping peacefully. However Aunty recalled that nurse Phillips was soon in big trouble. She had not read the patients notes before administering the "medicine" and as a result she was brought before a Board of doctors and seriously reprimanded.

After Auckland Hospital, now a "three striper" Nurse Phillips worked at Thames Hospital as a theatre sister following which she had intended to return to work amongst her own people in Te Tai Tokearu. But instead she took up a position in Taumaranui where she worked extensively throughout the Tongoriro National Park region as a District Nurse, working closely with the Bush Ambulance service. She recalled the many babies she delivered at home births or in the bush ambulance on route to Taumaranui Hospital. These included breech births, and she proudly reported she never "lost" a baby or a mother.

Later on Aunty Gertie met and married a returned serviceman, Ray Robinson from Tainui, and they had two children. Sadly Ray died some seven years later of tuberculosis.

Aunty Gertie now lives independently in a small unit attached to her daughter's home in Whangarei. She keeps excellent health and remains active in her church and community.