

RĀ WHAKATĀ

YOUR

WEEKEND

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Good

things

take

time

Five New Zealanders show the power of long-term thinking in a fast-paced world

PLUS MATU NGAROPO'S SHAKESPEARE SPIN // WHY WE EAT OUR FEELINGS // AUTUMN ACCESSORIES GUIDE

Worth the wait

In a world designed for instant gratification, it's easy to forget that some of the most meaningful achievements still take years to unfold. Laura Hampson speaks to five New Zealanders whose time-worn arcs show the power of patience and long-term thinking.

Autumn is a season that reminds us of life's slower rhythms. Gardeners are thinking about what to plant now for the growth that will come next spring, while vineyards are harvesting grapes that will become wine years down the track. It's a season that asks us to think not just about what we're gathering now, but about what we're planting for the future.

That same patience echoes through many parts of life. Whether it's building a business, restoring land, learning a language later in life or discovering a passion that was almost made for you, the most lasting change rarely happens overnight. Across Aotearoa, people are quietly doing that long-term work. Here are some of their stories.



Tuhi-Ao Bailey, climate activist

For Tuhi-Ao Bailey, change has never been quick. In fact, much of the work she has spent the last two decades doing – from restoring land to shifting public attitudes about climate and food – is built on the understanding that meaningful progress takes time.

Bailey (Ngāti Mutunga, Te Ātiawa, Taranaki) grew up in Wellington but traced her roots back to Taranaki, where she now lives and works. Her path into environmental advocacy began at university, where she studied ecology and geography before moving into community campaigns around issues like Wellington's inner city bypass, the Happy Valley coal mine and genetic engineering.

"In around 2004 I travelled overseas looking at a whole lot of environmental projects, the good and the bad, and community projects that were working well," she says. After returning home, the now 48-year-old eventually settled in Taranaki, working on habitat restoration, regenerative farming and climate justice issues around Parihaka.

In 2009, after a friend showed her newly issued oil and gas permits – many of them centred around Taranaki – she helped form what would become

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JAMES MACDONALD



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TUHI-AO BAILEY

Climate Justice Taranaki.

“It was just like, ‘oh my gosh, we need to do something’,” she recalls. The group set out to raise awareness about fossil fuels and the need to transition to renewable energy. Over a decade and a half later, the work continues – still largely voluntary, though they have recently received some funding for workshops. But this long game is the reality of environmental work.

“On the legal side ... it takes years to shift politicians and to shift legislation on the council level and the government level,” Bailey, who is also an iwi representative for her local council, says. “You constantly have to [be] educating the broader community to shift society.”

The same is true on the land. Restoration projects that might look simple from the outside often involve years of planning, consultation and preparation before a single tree is planted.

“You cannot just go plant a tree and do the thing,” she says. “You have to get the funding, get the plan, get the permission ... grow the trees sometimes yourself, do the fencing,” she adds.

Even then, patience is required. “To get a tree up ... where you don’t have to keep coming back to it, takes about three years.”

Despite the slow pace, Bailey finds motivation in the work itself and the people around her. “It has to be done,” she says. “We surround ourselves with whānau and friends ... and support each other.”

What gives her hope is the gradual shift she sees happening beneath the surface.

“Things are shifting in the right direction, slowly, and society is changing,” she says. “People and communities are moving slowly in the right way.”

James Macdonald, second generation winemaker

James Macdonald was just 4-years-old when he decided he wanted to become a winemaker.

His family had recently moved from Australia to Marlborough to help his aunt, Jane Hunter, run Hunter’s Wines after the sudden death of her husband, Ernie Hunter. Even at a young age, Macdonald was certain of his path.

“I was fascinated by the growing of the grapes, the making of the wine. But I was particularly taken with the international travel that Jane and my dad would do,” he says from across the table in the garden of Hunter’s cellar door. “In the 90s, growing up in Blenheim, things were different. We weren’t very connected to the world. So I thought that’s what I want to do.”

Before he was old enough to work properly in the vineyard, Macdonald had already convinced himself he was indispensable. By age 7, he was mowing lawns; as a teenager he drove tractors and absorbed the rhythms of vineyard life. He says the most valuable wine industry knowledge he has gained is from family conversations around the dinner table.

Studying winemaking at Lincoln University was the logical next step. But upon graduation, he was “kicked out” of the family business.

“They said to me, ‘If you want to be in this industry, you better go and see how it is in the rest of the world’.”



Macdonald spent the next decade working in vineyards across South Australia, France, Italy and Spain. The experience showed him the demands and rewards of the craft.

“It’s not all good times,” he says. “It’s a long game and you can never put out a bad wine.”

That philosophy echoes the approach of his uncle Ernie decades earlier. When Ernie first planted vines in Marlborough in 1979, the region was largely farmland with cherries and apricots. Unsure which grapes would thrive, he planted a range of varieties and waited to see what succeeded. Over time, it became clear that sauvignon blanc flourished in the dry, stony soils – a decision that would help define Marlborough’s global reputation.

Returning to Hunter’s in 2015, Macdonald joined his brother Edward in the still-ongoing changing of the guard. “There’s never really a moment in a family business where someone hands over the keys. Every year the previous generation does a little bit less, and we do a little bit more.”

Now the business exports to more than 35 markets. While growth has been steady, quality remains the priority, a principle set by Jane Hunter decades ago.

For Macdonald, working in wine has reinforced the value of patience. Vines take years to establish, harvests come only once a year and the results of each vintage may not be clear until long after the grapes are picked.

“Winemaking is about learning and being reflective and looking at your wines and deciding what worked and what didn’t,” he says. “[It’s about] being honest with yourself and then making changes in the next season to try and make them better. [We only have] one time per year where we get to have another go.”

Today, Macdonald is also focused on the vineyard’s long-term sustainability. Hunter’s has transitioned its 100 hectares to regenerative farming, building soil health, reducing chemical inputs and maintaining natural ecosystems – laying the foundation for decades to come.

“We’re trying to set the business up for the next 40 years.” →



Kelly Ihaka-Pitama, champion weightlifter

Just four years ago, 51-year-old Kelly Ihaka-Pitama (Te Aupōuri) started weightlifting for the first time. Today she has represented New Zealand as a masters athlete, holds national records and has qualified for this year's World Masters Weightlifting Championships in Greece.

For Ihaka-Pitama, the key to this success is simple. "Weightlifting isn't defined by age," she says over the phone from Tāmaki Makaurau. "It's defined by mind."

Sport has long been part of her life. As a teenager she competed in athletics for more than a decade and later studied sport science at the University of Waikato. But adulthood brought other priorities – building a career in freight forwarding, getting married, raising children and buying a home.

Sport remained there in the background, something she always returned to in different ways. But a serious health scare eventually pushed her to refocus on her wellbeing.

"I had a tumour in my thyroid," she says. Although non-cancerous, the illness drained her energy to the point that even driving home from work could be difficult.

"I'd have to pull over on the side of the road and just have a little sleep to get home," she says. "It was quite a crazy time."

After surgery, she promised herself that she would commit to living differently. "I think it was more of a promise I made to God that if I'm OK ... I'm going to dedicate myself to being more healthy."

Once she was cleared to exercise again, she joined a gym called FITmumz where she rediscovered her passion of moving her body. That passion soon expanded beyond one sport. She began entering CrossFit competitions, tried

bodybuilding, ran marathons and explored different ways to challenge herself physically. But the strength side of training kept drawing her back.

After watching a friend compete at a weightlifting meet, she decided to give it a try herself. She joined Papatoetoe Olympic Weightlifting Club and quickly realised she had found something special.

Alongside competing, Ihaka-Pitama also stepped into leadership roles within the sport. She has worked as a high performance development manager for Weightlifting New Zealand, was last week appointed the South Auckland development manager for Athletics New Zealand ("a full-circle moment"), and coaches athletes who call her Mama Kelz, sharing the knowledge she has gained along the way.

"I want them to learn as much as they can from me," she says. "It's not mine to keep. I want to give my information away."

She is also back at university, studying a bachelor of health science, something she approaches with the same steady mindset. "It's going to take me years, but I don't care," she says. "I'm huge on education."

Much of her motivation comes from wanting to give back to the communities and people who shaped her. "I always maintain that it would be about giving back to community ... to my iwi, to my people," she adds.

Between competing, coaching, studying and mentoring younger athletes, Ihaka-Pitama's schedule is busy. But she sees it all as part of a wider journey that is still unfolding.

"There is this full circle of giving back as well as still having a journey [yourself], it doesn't end," she says. "You wake up each day and you choose, 'Yep, I'm going to do that'. I think if you asked my friends, they'd be like, 'If she says she's going to do something, [she's] going to do it'."

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KELLY IHAKA-PITAMA

Regan Tucker, aka Triggarr Happy, singer

At 50, Regan Tucker, better known by his stage name Triggarr Happy, is finally living the dream he first imagined as a child. It's been a long road to get there.

"I was dreaming of being a singer-songwriter from the age of about 4," he says. One of his earliest memories is of his father bringing home an old radio with a microphone attached. "I heard him singing songs on it and I thought that would be cool."

Music was always around. His father, a dairy farmer, would sing with friends over beers while country classics played on the stereo – Elvis Presley, Kenny Rogers and the records that filled rural Kiwi homes in the 80s. As a young boy, Tucker absorbed it all.

Later, like many teenagers, he rebelled against the music he grew up with. In the 90s he swapped country for hip-hop. But the pull of country never disappeared. At 21, while milking cows in the Waikato, he heard Garth Brooks on the radio.

"I was milking 120 cows ... and I fell in love with country rock right there," he says over the phone from Ōtorohanga.

For years music remained something he did on the side. Life moved forward, he spent a decade living in Tasmania, and the dream sat quietly in the background. When droughts hit and finances collapsed, everything began to unravel.

"Triggarr Happy is the epitome of finding a way when there is no other way. There's always a way."

REGAN TUCKER





Tracy Manu, life coach

For Tracy Manu, personal growth has never been something that happens overnight. The life coach and author of *Hononga* has spent decades exploring the slow process of reconnecting with herself – work that eventually became the foundation of how she approaches sessions with others.

Manu (Te Roroa, Ngāpuhi) didn't begin her career in coaching until her late 20s. Before that, she was navigating a difficult period in her own life.

"I had had quite a tumultuous relationship and decided to get some support myself," she explains from her home in Snells Beach. Part of that support involved working with a life coach herself, an experience that changed her path.

"I was blown away by just how powerful it was to sit with someone and have them listen and ask questions that I wouldn't ask myself and learn about myself," she explains.

Manu launched her own practice in 2009. In the decade and a half since, she has noticed certain patterns appearing again and again in the people she works with.

"There is definitely a disconnection," she says. "I noticed that with nearly all my clients over the years, there's a disconnection to themselves, what they believe about themselves, what they believe about life."

Often, those beliefs quietly shape the way people move through the world. "They believe certain things about themselves and then they go about their life operating from that sort of perspective," she explains.

Helping people recognise and challenge those limiting beliefs is a core part of Manu's work. That reconnection, she says, often begins with vulnerability. "A simple thing is being upset and leaning out rather than leaning in and being vulnerable and saying, 'This is how I'm feeling, this is what I need'."

Her own journey of reconnection has unfolded slowly over many years. It began in her early 20s when a friend handed her a copy of *You Can Heal*

Your Life by Louise Hay – a book that introduced her to the idea that the way we think about ourselves shapes our lives.

"That was the first awakening of, 'Oh wow, I'm creating my life by what I think, what I do and how I see the world'," she says.

From there came workshops, study and new practices – from kinesiology and life coaching to Kundalini yoga. More recently, that journey has also included reconnecting with her whakapapa and learning te reo Māori. Starting te reo later in life was both exciting and confronting.

"There was definitely a lot of that," the 51-year-old says of the nerves that came with stepping outside her comfort zone. "Perfectionism, making mistakes, looking like a fool. There's so many things that can come up when we're outside our comfort zones."

But the motivation ran deeper than personal challenge. She was also thinking about the generations coming after her. "I was also thinking about my children and my grandchildren, my mokopuna and wanting them to see someone in their whānau speaking te reo Māori."

Learning the language has also taught her something else: patience. "You've got to be patient with yourself. That you don't learn things instantly."

That patience – with growth, with learning, with life itself – sits at the heart of the philosophy she now shares with others.

"I don't think there's any end," she says of the process of self-discovery. "I think I'll always be learning."

In a world that often celebrates speed and constant productivity, Manu believes there is value in slowing down and reconnecting with what really matters.

"Goals are fantastic," she says. "But feeling like you've always got to be striving ... listen to your rhythms. We aren't energetic all the time. We have cycles. Tuning into them, I think, makes life more satisfying." **YW**

"I was losing my farm, [my] marriage was going down and everyone was sort of blaming me," he explains.

Desperate to keep the farm afloat, he started singing at the local pub.

"I was so nervous ... I started singing all my favourite songs, just covers," he says. The crowd loved it, and soon he was playing regular gigs. What followed was years of work. Tucker estimates he played around 450 gigs while performing under his own name and releasing four independent albums. The turning point came after he returned to New Zealand with little left. At one point, he says, he was sleeping in his car.

"I turned to music and music saved me," he says.

It was around then that the name Trigg Happy came to him in a vivid dream. The shift marked a new level of determination. He invested everything into recording music professionally, working with some of the best producers in the country. When his album *Talk Is Cheap* hit number one last year, the moment felt surreal.

"I stopped on the side of the highway and cried," he says. "Who would have thought that you could dream for that long?"

Success didn't come easily. Tucker personally sold physical copies of his albums at the same bars where he once played. "Everyone says, 'how'd you do that?' And I just said, 'Through one poster at a time'."

Now, with new music, upcoming shows and even a cowboy cookbook being published later this year, Tucker's journey is proof that some dreams take decades to arrive.

"Trigg Happy is the epitome of finding a way when there is no other way," he adds. "There's always a way."

"Listen to your rhythms. We aren't energetic all the time. We have cycles. Tuning into them, I think, makes life more satisfying."

TRACY MANU

