

Community unites



Another book down: Authors Marina Sciascia and Hilary Pedersen.

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The threads of Marina Sciascia and Hilary Pedersen's lives began to intertwine long before they were born.

When their mothers were schoolchildren they rode to Porangahau School via pony and gig.

"I always thought that was a nice connection between us," Mrs Pedersen says.

"Our fathers probably played rugby and did stuff like that together too."

The two women, whose friendship blossomed later in their lives (both are widows), are long-time residents of Porangahau, and have just completed their third book together.

Matatoa, Fathers and Sons, is the final in a trilogy of stories gathered and written by people from the Porangahau District.

The first one was *Hakui, Mothers of Porangahau* and the second, *Tuahine, Sisters of Porangahau*.

The books contain a treasure trove of family histories and in this sense, is a slice of the history of the area.

"In all these books people have spoken with their own voices with very little tidying up from us, so in that way, it's totally authentic," Mrs Pedersen says.

"Once we'd done *Sisters*, we knew we'd eventually want to do the men.

"We just had to psych ourselves up to it.

"We started to approach families two years ago and it was the same process; often the men were from families who were in the other books, but their stories stand in their own right.

"There's a diversity of stories and some really solid history in

there – good Maori history as well as the early Pakeha settlers."

Mrs Pedersen says she asked the families to go back as far as they could to establish "a sense of place – where they came from before they came to New Zealand".

"There's a wonderful story by Bill Mouat about his family who came into the district after World War II, and over the years developed a big enterprise," she says.

"His father, Don, played a significant role in the formation of the community that included starting the Porangahau Country Club and saving the old Mangaorapa school, later made into a resource room.

"I'd like to think that what we have here could be a blueprint for others."

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for end of Fathers and Sons trilogy

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"We are really excited about the book because there's more depth in this one," Mrs Pedersen says.

"I believe we have to acknowledge the early settlers who came with their differing expectations of land use and ownership.

"These were the huge challenges that colonial settlement presented and had to be accommodated.

"I thought, if this book can address some of those things, that's great.

"However, other people may not see it that way – I'm open to being challenged on that.

"We are different people and see the world through different eyes; it's about mutual respect.

"I'm strong on that. "I think in New Zealand we should respect this diversity and not try to put ourselves in the same basket.

"We don't have to all be the same and it's naive to think we can be.

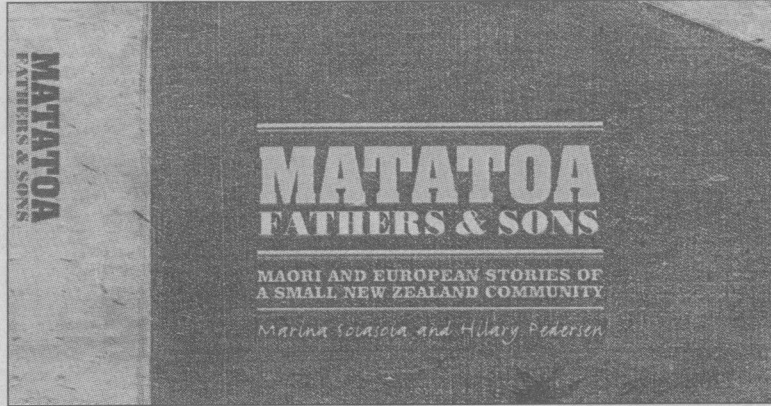
"Standing alongside one another is important."

Marina Sciascia is a hard woman to get hold of.

When we finally talk on a Sunday afternoon, she sounds excited about her involvement in a centennial for the local whareniui, to be held in November.

She is feeling elated and apprehensive about the launch of *Matatooa* in August.

Elated at having designed the layouts and seen the first proofs and apprehensive, because "Hilly and I went into these books with



Matatooa, Fathers and Sons: The completion of a Porangahau trilogy.

no money", she laughs.

But she says it's not an "alone thing".

"There's many other people who feel equally passionate about this, because they've captured their own history.

"Hilary and I both bring unique perspectives to this book.

"We move in different circles, but we are both women living on our own in a village and we often depend on one another.

"What spurred me into doing Te Hakui was that both my grandmothers and so many other wonderful people I knew, had died, yet nothing had been recorded of their lives.

"This was a way to ensure they'd never be forgotten.

"I was lucky that I grew up in a family of story-tellers who would enjoy yarning around the kitchen table. When visitors came, meals could take hours.

Mrs Sciascia says she had always been surrounded by people

who had a love of talking.

"I feel we've only just scratched the surface with these books – anyone could come along now and enlarge on any part of what we've started."

She doesn't feel that being well-known in the community has made it easier for people to open up and tell their stories.

"It's harder for Maori families in some ways, it's our culture; you don't talk about yourself.

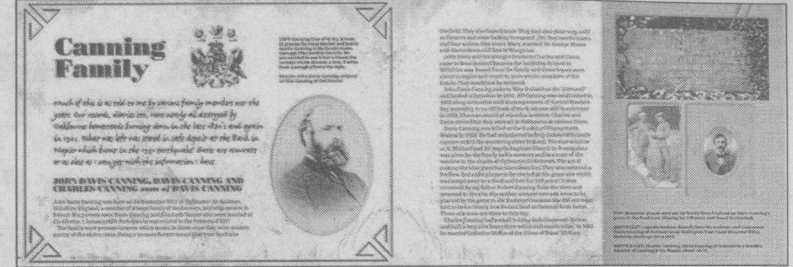
"My generation is still linked to that time when whakapapa [genealogy] was tapu.

"Only tohunga or leaders who had that inner quality, had the right to repeat these things.

"Its about mana; you can diminish people's mana by talking about them and if you put this stuff into a book, what are you doing to them?"

"Not everyone is comfortable with it.

"My sense of achievement is that there will be three books



about Porangahau to put on the shelves. I feel proud but always remember, that without everyone's contributions they wouldn't exist."

Rather than approaching the men to write their stories, though, Mrs Sciascia says the men came to them.

"They came and said, 'What about us?'," she says.

"Then they wanted a committee to oversee us. I wasn't having that!"

How did the men's stories compare to the women's?

"The men's stories have a different depth.

"The women's are more like a social history: how they cooked, the lives of their families; but the men's are rich with history of a different sort.

"When I'm reading the stories

they are so alive and vibrant.

"When I saw the Tipene story I burst into tears – here were all these beautiful people that I love."

Wellington photographer, Sal Criscillo, has collaborated on *Matatooa*.

"Stories live on," Mrs Sciascia says in *Matatooa's* foreword.

"Many of these families no longer live in this community but their stories are still here.

"These are the building blocks of a small New Zealand place.

"The stories may be lost, or altered with the telling.

"They may be passed down through time but in the end we need to have them recorded.

"Writing them down is important."

The *Matatooa, Fathers and Sons* book launch is on Saturday August 20.

