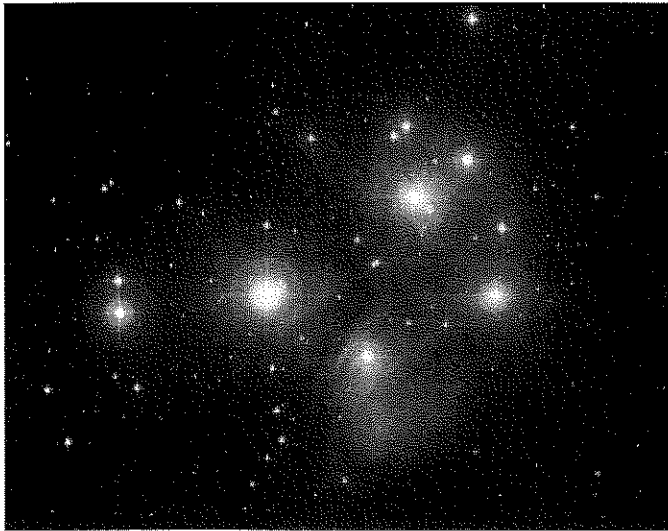


Happyzine *Because Good News Makes a Difference*

A Million Poems for Matariki

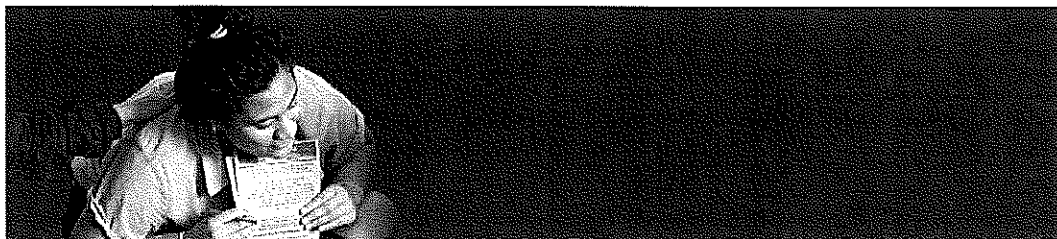
Submitted by [hannahspijksma](#) on August 2, 2010 – 10:40 am [One Comment](#)



“Don’t worry, this light isn’t for surveillance!” said Michele, arms outreached – stretching to find the microphone.

“It’s just so that I know where it is,” she added, her voice booming out to the crowd, strong and convincing. Michele Leggott is at the Auckland City Library to launch a thousand poems for Matariki, in line with national poetry day. Her voice resonates as she punches her arm in the air yelling sweet praises about poetry. You would never guess she is legally blind.

Not that it matters, when she speaks, you don’t need to see – all you need is to listen. In 2009, Michelle helped launch the poetry project, an initiative to get communities around Auckland more involved with creative writing. Last year the project was centred on the North Shore, and celebrated a thousand poems for Matariki, with school groups and locals encouraged to display poster poems around the community.



This year she has “widened the scope” and spread the word to Otahuhu, with five schools from the area being involved in the project, as well as five from the North Shore. Last Friday was the culmination of the project, with readings by poets of all ages, people from all walks of life, celebrating a thousand poems for Matariki, 2010.

As Michelle stood on stage, she spoke passionately about how important poetry is, and you couldn't help but feel moved. Here is this woman who doesn't need to see, who you don't need make eye contact with, to know that what she speaks of is important for communities. The passion of telling stories and empowering children to open up through words is something that is so important in New Zealand.

In a country where talking about feelings is often kept to a minimal, it is refreshing to see a project underway that encourages positive, creative communication. The strength of words is something that also reaches across cultures and ages, and has the power to connect people in a way that is often under-estimated.

As well as Michelle, several other poets spoke throughout the night. Each read of things close to the heart; of a fathers death, the love of a new child, the state of affairs in New Zealand. However, there was one poem in particular that stood out. Selina Tusitala Marsh, the Otahuhu co-ordinator for the poetry project, spoke with such conviction that you couldn't help but feel carried away with her words. She read a poem about a girl called Matariki, who seemed a typical teenager, putting up barriers about sharing her thoughts with a teacher. The poem recorded Selina's experience helping Matariki, about how she slowly managed to coax truth's out of the reluctant teenager. She ended by telling how Matariki came into her name, amid gasps from audience members – "that was the best", I heard people whisper.

All the poems that night were so beautiful. I urge you to go online and have a look at the poetry project <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/poetry-project/projects-matariki-2010.asp> to see just some of the many insightful pieces written by youth in Tamaki Makau Rau.

It is people like Michelle and Selina, and initiatives like the poetry project, that are helping to build positive communities and inspire people.

Writers Bio: Hanna Spijksma

Hanna is a final year journalism student, studying in Auckland. She is interested in intercultural-communication, Maori and environmental issues, travel, hospitality, and breaking stereotypes. In her downtime, Hannah enjoys spending sunny afternoons drinking coffee, reading the paper and listening to Anika Moa and all the other talented musicians New Zealand pulls out of its hat. She is also aiming to/trying to train to run a half marathon, which isn't going so well – but the theory is that exercises gives you endorphines, endorphins make you happy, and happy people are, well, happy. Chocolate also has endorphines, but it doesn't help the half-marathon efforts.

