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## Poems

Briar Wood

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# Poems

## **Abstract**

SEA WALL and KIRIKAU

# Briar Wood

## SEA WALL

We let our fingers meet  
swimming in Palolo Deep  
the rest of us got together later —  
after Margrey Ta's bar  
where the Kiwi women's netball team  
cheered the Samoan men's dance routine  
among the roots of a banyan tree  
with Cindy the dazzling fa'afafine  
shaking her tail feathers.  
Later the bus radio played Odyssey —  
Going Back to My Roots.  
Love, sweet as the Mika Sisters.  
As the massive ships slipped away  
we stood hand in hand at the cool sea wall.

## KIRIKAU

There were screen memories,  
under the now sealed surface  
following the Wanganui River  
by a twisted road, past slips,  
that many times have blocked  
the path, running on empty,  
across a high bridge, and into  
whatever went before. I expected  
dry ice and dramatic driving, not this  
pleasantly tripping river, soft poplars  
and the navigable road. I'd heard  
tall stories of mail drops, the river  
swollen to impassable for weeks,  
long drives to prohibition-style drinking  
parties, my mother (who loved  
Elliot Ness), reluctantly transported  
to hospital, waiting impatiently  
as I became way overdue. Her only  
bunch of flowers brought by Peter  
Singh, arriving late one night after  
an interminable drive from Auckland  
only to be frowned on by a matron.  
'But you've got to let me in!'  
he persuaded 'I'm her best man'.  
The schoolhouse filled with sunlight  
and a variety of mobiles annotated  
with children's tentative hands. Was it  
this or the building at Te Poi that's now  
a hay barn where the everyday miracle  
of children grew? After, we stopped for  
tea at Taumarunui, my birth town  
of which I am inexplicably proud,  
including the café with fine china  
and postcard paintings of mountains  
viewed from close to the Desert Road.  
The thick railway cups have gone  
but the maternity hospital's there.  
At many a country town, I've hitched  
this Calamity Jane complex to a railing  
searching for something like turangawaewae.