

# IRON TAMARIKI

by Paora Tibble



“I ... hate ... running ...,” I suck in a few deep, long breaths.

“C’mon, cuzzie! You can do it!”

That’s Dad. He’s always trying to wind me up.

“Dad, my name isn’t cuzzie!”

Dad’s helping me train for IronMāori Tamariki – a 100-metre swim followed by a 1-kilometre run. It’s going to be held in Napier in December.

“OK, Mana. Here’s the deal. If you can complete this IronMāori Tamariki event, I’ll make your favourite dinner every night for the whole year!”

“Cool! But do you really think I’m going to be fit enough?”

“Well, son,” he says, “you know your father wasn’t always this lean, mean machine. I may look twenty and all muscle ...” (he doesn’t) “... but when I was your age ...”

Here he goes again. Dad has this story about how he was once “tubby” like me, but through hard work, he now looks like a Māori version of a superhero! (Once again, he doesn’t.) I tune out and keep running.



“Hey, Dad, how far did we run?” I ask when we get back to his place.

“E toru kiromita,” Dad says. That’s 3 kilometres!

I jump into the shower. Then it’s teatime – bacon and mushroom pasta. Yum! Dad’s partner, Sharon, is a mean cook.

Afterwards, while we’re doing the dishes, Dad tells me about his latest “good read”.

“You know Richie McCaw?”

“Duh! Richie McCaw, All Blacks’ captain!”

“Well, do you know what he was like when he was your age?”

“Yeah, nah. Why?”

“He was like you.”

“What, Māori?”

“No. I’ll show you. Check this out.”

He hands me a book. It’s about Richie McCaw. I look at the photos of Richie McCaw as a kid. He’s like me – kind of chunky!

“Far! Dad, so you think I can do this IronMāori Tamariki?”

“Son, I know you can.”



The next day, Mum picks me up from the swimming pool. (I spend a week with Mum and a week with Dad.) Training for the swim is easy. I’m in the Orca group. I’m not the fastest swimmer, but I can do ten lengths easy. Swimming just feels right. It’s not hard work like running.

Luckily nobody hears when Mum says, “Hey, what happened to my cuddly son? You’ve lost some weight, taku pēpi. Are they feeding you OK over there?”

“It’s all good, Mum.”

“I hope Dad’s not pushing you too much. Are you sure you can do this IronMāori Tamariki?”

I don’t answer. Stuff about Dad makes Mum annoyed. “Mum, are you coming to Napier to watch me?” I ask instead.

She changes the subject.



### *E toru marama i muri iho (Three months later)*

It's race day, and we're in Napier. We're staying at Nanny Mere's house. The race is about to start. I've got butterflies in my stomach. I'm wearing my togs, my rashie, my goggles, and my swimming cap, and I'm covered all over with sunblock. A few kids have wetsuits. Some of us have already dipped our feet into the water. It's cold, but not Wellington cold. Just before we go down to the start line, I look out for my whānau. There they are – Dad, Sharon, and Nanny Mere. They all give me the big thumbs up.

I talk in my head. "Deep breaths, Mana. Relax. You're an orca. Salt water is your home." Someone's talking with a loudspeaker. Then BANG! It's on!



There must be thirty of us kids. Some run as fast as they can, but I don't. I jog into the water. Yes, it's still cold as. The first few strokes, and I'm getting used to the shock of the freezing water. But this is where my extra insulation comes in handy. There are a few kids in front of me. We're all swimming to the orange buoy.

Soon, I get into my rhythm – three strokes, then breathe. I look up every now and then to make sure I'm going in the right direction. I'm cruising. In no time at all, I've swum around the buoy. Yeah! Halfway back to shore, I have a look around. I'm in the lead! That's when I turn it up a gear. My legs and my arms all work together. I'm a machine!







I'm the first kid out of the water. Dad, Sharon, and Nanny Mere are hard out cheering me on ... and so is my mum! I stop and stare. She's standing in the crowd with Dad and Sharon. This is just weird. "Mum! What are you doing here?"

"Don't worry about me, speedy! Kia tere!" The crowd around Mum crack up laughing.

I get to the transition area, where we change for the oma. I put my shoes on. I didn't know Mum was coming. It feels great to know she's watching, too.

Now I'm running out, around the corner, and onto the main road. Some of the other kids have caught up. A few boys run past me. I'm not worried. I've got this rhythm going, like when I swim. I'm just running, and it feels good. I've run heaps of kilometres over the last three months. This isn't hard – I can do it. People I don't even know call out to me, "Kia kaha, boy!"

Crossing the line, I get this big cheer. I've done it, but I'm wiped out. It's a mean buzz getting my medal for completing the event. All my whānau give me a big hug. Mum, Dad, and Sharon are all smiling. It's the first time I've seen Mum in a good mood around Dad, and she's yakking up a storm with Sharon.

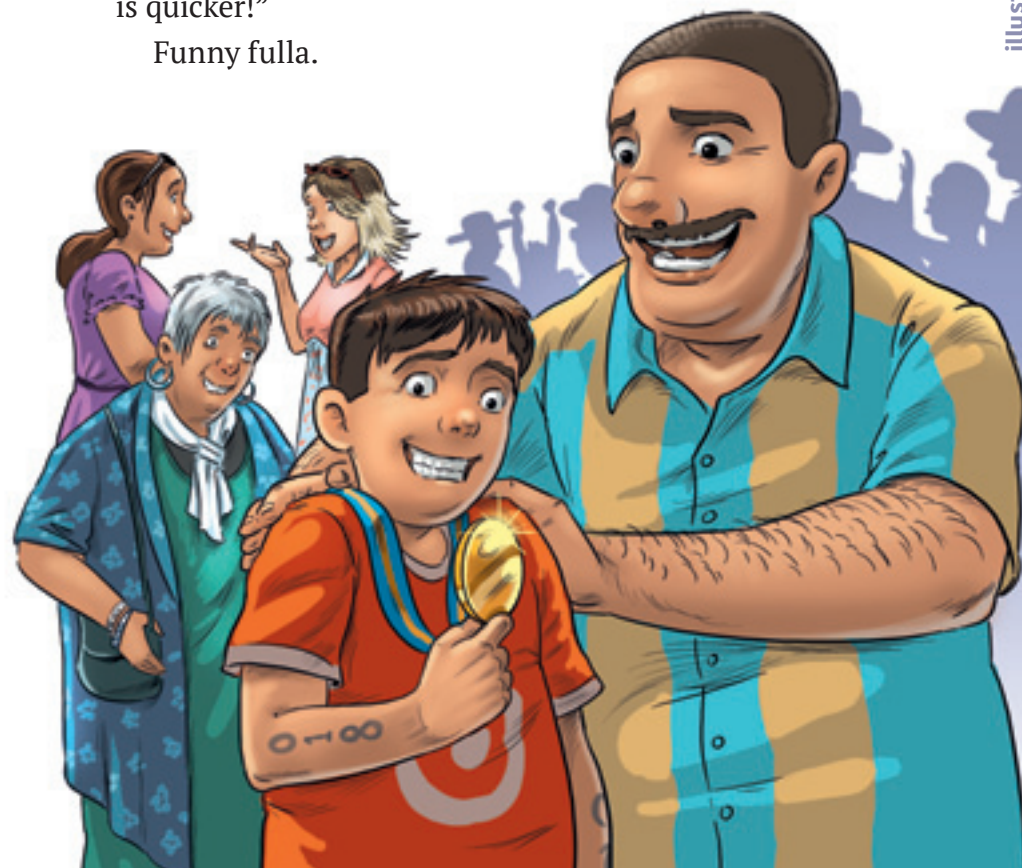
"So, Dad," I say at last. "You have to cook me macaroni cheese every night for a year!"

"I said for *the* year," Dad says with a smile. "It's December, so that's dinner for the next two weeks."

"But, Dad ...," I say.

Dad gives a wink. "You're quick, cuzzie, but your Dad is quicker!"

Funny fulla.



# Iron Tamariki

by Paora Tibble

illustrations by Donovan Bixley

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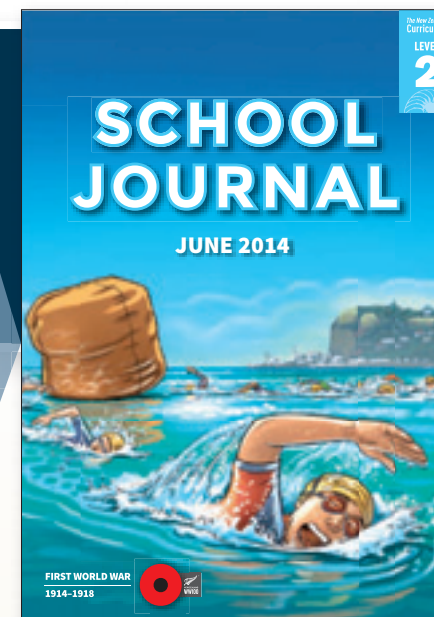
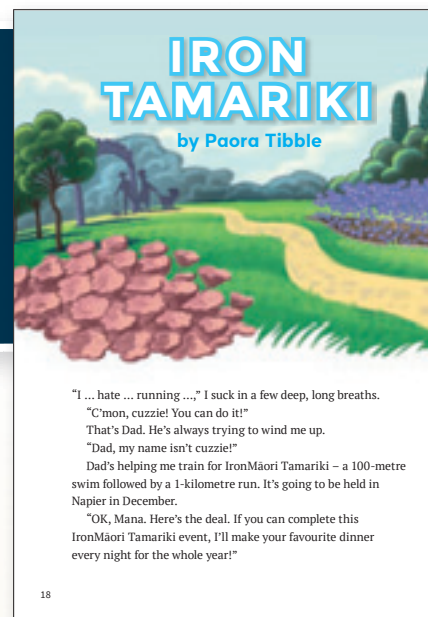
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