

Te Whitu Matenga Wairua — Seven Symbolic Deaths

Symbolic Death as a Mechanism of Identity Transformation in Te Poutama Ora

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Abstract

This paper serves as a companion to *Religious Trauma as Wairua Assault: Dimensional Autophagy, the Whakapapa Dilemma, and the Path to Covenantal Identity*, extending its theoretical claims through a single whakapapa-verified case sequence. Where the earlier paper established dimensional autophagy as the mechanism by which imposed shame is metabolised while authentic spiritual insight is retained, this paper traces that mechanism through seven dated symbolic deaths occurring across four decades of one life. It argues that these deaths are not a series of unrelated losses but the recurring operation of a single process — described by Taylor Welch as Crisis forcing Consecration — through which what could no longer be carried was repeatedly, and necessarily, set down. The number seven is examined both as a numerological marker of completion and as a personal ariki number determined by birthdate, and the paper argues that this number was not discovered through the deaths but restored to sight through them — a pattern already present in whakapapa, obscured by blindness the individual had herself sustained. The paper further argues that wairua and tuakiri cannot be treated as separable dimensions within this account; each death carries both registers simultaneously, consistent with Tuakiri's position as Poutokomanawa — the hinge upon which the other Pou of Te Poutama Ora turn, rather than a dimension standing apart from them. The convergence argument is extended further by biomedical and clinical-psychological literature on stress-related biological ageing and on acknowledgment as a precondition for change, offered as corroboration arising independently of either the whakapapa or the sociological tradition already in tension.

Keywords: dimensional autophagy, ariki number, Crisis-Consecration, wairua-tuakiri convergence, whakapapa, religious trauma, Te Poutama Ora

1. Introduction

Religious Trauma as Wairua Assault (l'Anson, 2026a) proposed dimensional autophagy as a third pathway between the rejection of spirituality and the retention of harmful religious narrative — a process through which imposed shame could be discarded while authentic spiritual connection was preserved. That paper introduced the Whakapapa Dilemma: the experience, common among Māori Christians, of feeling excluded from a covenant narrative that appears to begin with Abraham and unfold through the history of Israel, when one's own whakapapa traces instead through tīpuna such as Porourangi or Rangatira Momo. The paper resolved this dilemma theologically, through New Covenant theology's extension of belonging beyond genealogical boundary (Galatians 3:28–29, KJV).

What that paper offered in theory, this paper offers in whakapapa. The case illustration in *Wairua Assault* was necessarily composite — constructed to demonstrate how the framework might apply, rather than drawn from a single continuous life. This paper departs from that method. It traces one whakapapa, seven symbolic dated deaths, from 1983 to 2025, each identified by the individual herself as a distinct ending, each verified against lived memory rather than reconstructed for illustrative purpose.

The theoretical scaffolding for reading these seven deaths is drawn from two sources held in deliberate tension. The first is sociological: Taylor Welch's five-stage model of personal transformation — Crisis, Consecration, Confrontation, Multiplication, and Institutionalisation (Welch, 2020–present) — itself consistent with earlier sociological accounts of revitalisation and religious renewal (Wallace, 1956; Weber, 1978; McLoughlin, 1978). Welch's central claim, that crisis forces consecration — that withdrawal from familiar structure is often not chosen but imposed, and that this imposition is what makes room for the next assignment — provides the mechanism examined throughout this paper.

The second source is whakapapa-specific and numerological: the number seven, understood within this account both as the number of completion and as the individual's personal ariki number, determined by birthdate. The convergence of a contemporary

Western sociological model with an Indigenous numerological reading is not incidental to the paper's argument. It is the argument. Two frameworks, arising from entirely different epistemological traditions, describing the same underlying mechanism, offer a stronger claim to that mechanism's validity than either tradition could offer alone — consistent with prior convergence work within the Te Poutama Ora and Whakapapa of Colonisation series (I'Anson, 2026b; I'Anson, 2026c). Section 2.4 extends this convergence argument further, drawing on biomedical and clinical-psychological literature to corroborate the same mechanism from outside either tradition.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Wairua-Tuakiri as Hybrid, Not Separate Dimensions

Within Te Poutama Ora, Taha Tuakiri occupies a distinct structural position as Poutokomanawa — the central hinge upon which the framework's other Pou turn (I'Anson, 2026d). This paper argues that a hinge, by its nature, cannot be examined as though it stood apart from what it joins. If tuakiri is the point at which the other dimensions meet and turn, then wairua — spiritual connection, covenantal belonging, the presence or absence of God's hand — cannot be extracted from tuakiri and examined independently, at least not within an account of identity formed and re-formed under duress.

This claim is tested rather than asserted throughout Section 3. Each of the seven deaths considered here carries both registers at once. A redundancy is, on its surface, a tuakiri event — the loss of professional identity, of a role that had structured four decades of a working life. Beneath that surface, this paper argues, it is simultaneously a wairua event: the collapse of a covenant of security that had, however unconsciously, been placed in an employer rather than in God. A cancer diagnosis is, on its surface, a tinana event — the body's own material failure. Beneath that surface, it becomes wairua and tuakiri at once: a permanent alteration to the self one recognises in the mirror, held alongside gratitude for having been carried through it. The paper's method is therefore not to argue this hybridity in the abstract, but to demonstrate it seven times over.

2.2 Crisis Forces Consecration — Welch's Mechanism

Welch's five stages describe a repeatable pattern rather than a single life event: Crisis disrupts an existing structure; Consecration follows as withdrawal, often involuntary, from that structure; Confrontation requires the individual to face what the crisis has exposed; Multiplication is the emergence of new purpose or fruit from that confrontation; and Institutionalisation is the point at which the new identity becomes settled enough to be built upon (Welch, 2020–present).

This paper does not attempt to map each of the seven symbolic deaths onto its own discrete five-stage cycle. Such a mapping would flatten a lived sequence into false symmetry. Instead, it treats the symbolic deaths as seven recurring turns of a single wheel, some of which cluster within one extended arc rather than resolving cleanly before the next begins. The deaths of 1998 and 2011 — father and mother — are read here as belonging to one long arc of Crisis into Consecration, its full weight not registering until both parents had passed and the individual stood, for the first time, without either. The deaths of 2020 and 2023 — redundancy and the second cancer — are read as a second arc, in which Confrontation with institutional injustice and Confrontation with the body's material limits arrive within three years of one another, compounding rather than resolving in sequence.

Welch himself, in describing the necessity of what he terms the cave, argues that withdrawal from familiar structure is not incidental to transformation but its precondition: what no longer serves the next assignment must be discarded before that assignment can be received. This paper adopts that claim directly. The cave season identified elsewhere in this body of work (2020–2026) is read here not as a single bounded event but as the period in which the cumulative weight of the first four deaths reached a ceiling that could no longer be carried forward, and had to be held, before the individual's sight could be restored.

2.3 The Number Seven and Restored Sight

Seven carries a specific numerological weight within this account: it is understood as the number of God, the number of phases to completion, and — independently of any

theological reading — the individual's personal ariki number as determined by her own birthdate. This is the load-bearing claim of the paper. The seven symbolic deaths were not counted after the fact and found, conveniently, to total seven. The number was already present, already written into whakapapa from birth, before any of the seven deaths had occurred.

Religious Trauma as Wairua Assault established that the individual at the centre of that paper's case illustration had, in her own words, shut her own eyes to what was being shown to her (l'Anson, 2026a). This paper extends that claim: the blindness was not to a single message but to a pattern — a number, an ariki number, already running beneath the whakapapa she carried. God's holding of her within the cave is read here not as punishment, and not as accident, but as the necessary stillness required for sight sufficient to recognise that pattern to be restored. Seven was not discovered. It was returned to view.

This reading finds unexpected support in imagery the individual had already produced, independently of this paper's theoretical framing. Across four visual quadrants mapping Creation, Fall, New and Perfect — themselves a classical hermeneutic structure — a single recurring motif appears in every quadrant: a watching, partially veiled eye. The eye's presence prior to, and independent of, the writing of this paper suggests the theme of sight obscured and later restored was already operating visually before it was articulated theologically — evidence, within the paper's own terms, that the pattern was working itself out ahead of conscious recognition.

2.4 Convergence with Biomedical and Clinical-Psychological Accounts

The convergence argument developed above is strengthened further by two additional bodies of work, neither whakapapa-informed nor explicitly spiritual, which independently describe the same underlying mechanism from within biomedicine and clinical psychology.

The first concerns the physiological cost of what is not metabolised. Sapolsky (2004), drawing on decades of research into the endocrinology of chronic stress, has argued that sustained activation of the body's stress response — adaptive as a short-term reply

to acute threat, corrosive when left running for years — is among the strongest predictors of accelerated biological ageing — a claim substantiated at the cellular level by Epel et al.'s (2004) finding that unresolved life stress was associated with accelerated telomere shortening, and by subsequent work demonstrating that active stress management produces measurable shifts in gene expression through epigenetic mechanisms. Read against the framework developed in Section 2.1, this body of work offers a biomedical account of the same claim this paper makes in whakapapa terms: that what is composted rather than carried is not merely a spiritual metaphor but corresponds to a measurable physiological process, and that the failure to metabolise harm exacts a bodily cost independent of, though not unrelated to, its wairua cost. The redundancy of 2020 and the cancer diagnosis of 2023, read together in Sections 3.5 and 3.6, gain additional explanatory weight when considered against this literature: the individual's own account of physical collapse following the redundancy, and her later description of a decades-long pattern of overriding her own body, are consistent with an unmanaged-stress pathway independently documented within biomedical literature.

The second concerns the precondition of sight established in Section 2.3. Herman (1992), in her clinical account of trauma recovery, positions acknowledgment — naming what occurred, without minimisation or euphemism — as the necessary first stage before integration and recovery can proceed; what has not been named, in Herman's account, cannot yet be metabolised. Herman's claim, arising from a clinical rather than spiritual or whakapapa tradition, adds a third independent line to the convergence argument advanced in Section 1: whakapapa-specific numerology, a contemporary sociological stage model, and clinical psychology's account of acknowledgment as precondition for change, each arising from a distinct epistemological tradition, each converging on the same underlying claim.

3. The Seven Symbolic Deaths — A Chronological Case Sequence

What follows traces one whakapapa across seven dated endings, from 1983 to 2025. Each is presented with its concrete detail, its wairua-tuakiri dual reading, and its position within the recurring Crisis-Consecration arcs described above.

3.1 Death of Innocence — 1983

The first symbolic death emerged during the transition into marriage, entered through religious obligation rather than personal desire. Within this period, a foundational certainty began to unravel: the belief that inherited narratives, authority figures, and accepted social truths could be trusted without question. Raised within a social environment where Pākehā identity functioned as the implicit standard against which legitimacy and belonging were measured, she encountered evidence that challenged this certainty. The discovery that those she had trusted carried limitations, contradictions, and unspoken truths was experienced not as ordinary human fallibility but as profound disillusionment. What fractured was not simply trust in individuals, but confidence that inherited frameworks reliably represented reality.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death was expressed through tuakiri in the outward transition of marriage, while its deeper movement occurred within wairua. The underlying loss was the collapse of certainty in inherited narratives that had previously shaped meaning, identity, and belonging. Yet within this rupture emerged the beginnings of critical reflection and authentic identity formation, creating the conditions for questioning assumptions that had long remained invisible. This was the first significant crack in a colonially inherited frame and the earliest precursor to the Whakapapa Dilemma that would unfold over subsequent decades.

3.2 Death of Whakapapa Anchor — 1998

Her father's death marked the loss of a central whakapapa anchor within the family system. Although his passing occurred in relative solitude, the days that followed revealed dimensions of his life and influence that had not been fully visible during his lifetime. As he lay in state in Gisborne, people travelled from across the country to pay their respects, demonstrating the breadth of his relationships and the standing he held within his wider community. Amidst grief, family fragmentation, and the logistical demands of returning him to his marae, a deeper realisation emerged: much of the family's stability had rested upon a presence that had quietly held relationships, tensions, and responsibilities together.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of security grounded in the continuing presence of a stabilising relational figure. Her father had functioned as a whakapapa anchor whose influence extended beyond what was immediately apparent to those closest to him. In the years following his death, underlying fractures within the wider family system became increasingly visible, revealing the extent to which his presence had absorbed strain and maintained cohesion. Yet within this loss emerged a different understanding of whakapapa: no longer something carried and protected by one person alone, but a responsibility shared across generations. It was from within this period of grief and transition that she and her husband chose to become parents, an act that reflected a commitment to carrying whakapapa forward rather than relying on a single individual to hold it together. This marked a significant shift in how legacy, belonging, and continuity would be understood in the years ahead.

3.3 Death of Physical Certainty — 2010

The first cancer diagnosis arrived unexpectedly while her children were still young. Subsequent DNA testing confirmed that the cancer was not hereditary, yet the diagnosis nevertheless introduced a reality that could no longer be managed through planning, effort, or determination alone. She approached treatment in the same manner that had characterised much of her adult life: continuing to work full-time throughout nine months of chemotherapy, maintaining responsibilities, and focusing on what needed to be done. The physical cost was substantial, including the loss of hair that never fully returned. Only after treatment ended did she begin to recognise the extent to which others, particularly her husband, had been carrying responsibilities and burdens alongside her. Her mother's death followed soon after, closing a season marked by both illness and loss, and she remains grateful that her mother was present to witness her recovery before passing.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of confidence in the permanence and predictability of bodily capability. The diagnosis confronted an assumption that the body could be relied upon to perform according to

expectation if managed well enough. Cancer revealed limits that could not be negotiated away through competence, endurance, or effort. This was the death of the physical certainty, not simply because illness occurred, but because the relationship with her body could never return to what it had been before. Yet within this loss emerged a different orientation: not mastery over the body, but partnership with it. The ongoing realities of physical change became something to be listened to rather than overcome. Tinana carried the reality of permanent alteration, while wairua carried gratitude, faith, and endurance through the experience. Both remained present, inseparable from one another, marking a profound shift in how strength, vulnerability, and survival would be understood.

3.4 Death of Belonging — 2011 (Daughter Identity Severed)

Her mother's death marked the loss of the final parental anchor in her life. In the months and years that followed, she came to understand aspects of her mother's circumstances that had remained largely hidden during her lifetime. Her mother had spent her final years experiencing significant financial hardship while continuing to provide unpaid care for others, carrying burdens that were neither visible nor openly acknowledged. Through conversations with extended whānau, including an aunt and later a brother, she also learned words her mother had never spoken directly to her: that she had been determined not to die before her daughter, and that she had carried deep pride in her. These discoveries arrived alongside another painful reality. For the first time as adults, the wider family had planned to spend Christmas together at her mother's home; she died before the gathering could take place. The family's Christmas card was later found unopened in her letterbox, a quiet symbol of a future that would never be realised.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of identity rooted in the continuing presence of parents and the security that parental belonging can provide, even in adulthood. With both parents now gone, she confronted the reality that there was no longer a generation ahead of her to return to, lean upon, or locate herself through. The daughter identity that had existed in relationship to living parents was severed. Yet within this loss emerged a different understanding of belonging.

Whakapapa remained intact despite the deaths of those who had carried it before her. Belonging could no longer rest in parental presence or familial dependence, but in the continuity of whakapapa, the commitments she carried, and the relationships she continued to nurture. The loss marked a profound transition from being someone's daughter under their protection to becoming a bearer of the lineage herself.

3.5 Death of Institutional Belonging — 2020

The redundancy that ended her corporate career was experienced not simply as job loss, but as the abrupt severing of an identity that had been shaped across more than three decades of professional life. Her removal from a team of 150 was widely experienced as unjust. A role she had spent years developing was transferred to someone who did not fully understand its purpose, while significant contributions, including work that had delivered substantial savings to the organisation, passed without meaningful acknowledgement. The depth of the loss is captured in a statement she has repeated since: "After 35 years, I don't even have a career to show my life's work." What disappeared was not only employment, but a long-held understanding of herself as someone whose value was demonstrated through competence, achievement, and organisational contribution.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of identity derived from occupation and professional accomplishment. For decades, work had provided structure, purpose, recognition, and a sense of security. The redundancy forced a confrontation with the possibility that institutional loyalty would not necessarily be reciprocated, and that vocational worth could not be guaranteed through performance alone. The impact registered not only psychologically but physically; in the months that followed, she became temporarily unable to walk, an experience she now understands as reflecting the profound strain carried through that period. Yet within this collapse emerged a different understanding of vocation. What had always mattered most was not a title, position, or organisational status, but the underlying commitment to serve, support, and contribute to the wellbeing of others. Over time, this realisation became part of the pathway toward establishing her own counselling practice. The work

changed form, but the vocation remained. What her corporate career ultimately produced was not merely professional achievement, but the provision, opportunities, and stability it created for her family. The legacy proved quieter than recognition, yet no less real.

3.6 Death of the Endurance Identity — 2023

The second cancer diagnosis marked a further and more profound confrontation with the limits of endurance. What she has described as a second assault on her body involved a mastectomy, ongoing treatment for nerve and lower back pain, weeks of radiation therapy extending through the Christmas period, and seven months of chemotherapy medication. The diagnosis arrived within an already demanding season of life, requiring a level of physical and emotional adaptation that could no longer be managed through determination alone.

During this period, her younger brother was also navigating significant health challenges requiring hospital treatment. The two arranged to meet around their respective appointments, creating space for conversations that would later contribute to the early formation of Te Poutama Ora. At the same time, what had been anticipated as a year of rest and recovery became another year of pushing forward despite clear signs that restoration was needed. Her body responded with dizziness, falls, and increasing difficulty sustaining the pace she had maintained for much of her adult life. Although 2025 brought further challenges, it was also within this period that Te Poutama Ora first began to take shape in language and purpose.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of an identity organised around productivity, perseverance, and the expectation that commitment is demonstrated through self-sacrifice. For decades, she had responded to illness, employment, and responsibility in much the same way: by continuing, enduring, and placing the needs of work and others ahead of the needs of her own body. The first cancer had been worked through; rest had been deferred; warning signs had been negotiated with rather than heeded. The second diagnosis exposed the limits of that pattern. What died was not a capacity for work, but a longstanding employee identity

shaped by endurance, institutional loyalty, and the belief that personal worth was demonstrated through continued output regardless of cost.

Yet within this loss emerged a different relationship with both work and wellbeing. Rather than viewing her body as something to override, manage, or discipline, she began learning to regard it as a partner deserving of care, attention, and compassion. The experience initiated a shift from living in service to work toward placing work in service of life. In this sense, the second cancer diagnosis became not only a crisis of *tinana*, but also a reordering of priorities within *wairua*—creating space for new forms of purpose, including the emergence of Te Poutama Ora, to grow from a foundation of listening rather than striving.

3.7 Death of the Rescuer Identity — 2025

The final symbolic death in this sequence is the most complex, involving the intersection of *whānau* responsibility, caregiving, health, and personal boundaries. Consistent with the approach taken throughout this paper, the account is presented through her own lived understanding rather than through externally imposed clinical interpretation. In 2025, she and her husband assumed kinship care of a *mokopuna*, a decision made in full awareness of the weight it would place on her own health and capacity, and taken regardless.

The *mokopuna* arrived carrying visible signs of early instability, creating circumstances that required significant care, advocacy, and support. Alongside this, she found herself navigating longstanding intergenerational patterns within the wider *whānau* system — patterns that, in her own understanding, had long blurred the boundaries between responsibility, obligation, and control. What initially presented as a caregiving commitment gradually exposed the extent to which she had continued, across her whole life, to assume responsibility for situations and outcomes beyond her capacity to influence or repair.

Read through the hybrid frame, this symbolic death represents the dissolution of an identity sustained through carrying responsibilities that belonged to others. Throughout much of her life, care had often been expressed through endurance, intervention,

protection, and the willingness to absorb burdens on behalf of family members. The severing she describes was not a severing of love for mokopuna, nor a rejection of whakapapa responsibility. Rather, it was the relinquishment of an expectation that she could continue exposing herself to patterns of chaos, conflict, and instability at the expense of her own wellbeing.

As Te Poutama Ora began to emerge with increasing clarity, a practical shift also occurred. Stepping away from full-time employment reduced her availability for caregiving and created a circumstance she understood as providential rather than self-generated. This change forced a decision that had long been resisted: to acknowledge that her health mattered, that her body's limits were real, and that not every burden within reach was hers to hold. Some relationships within the whānau have needed time and distance to find new footing; others, including with her younger brother, have continued to grow closer through this same period.

What emerged from this death was not disengagement, but a different form of love. The rescuer identity—formed around carrying, fixing, and sustaining what belonged to others—could no longer be maintained. In its place came the early development of a boundary that allowed care without self-sacrifice, commitment without over-responsibility, and love without assuming ownership of another person's journey. Within the hybrid frame, this represents the movement from carrying what belongs to others toward honouring both whakapapa obligations and personal limits simultaneously.

4. Discussion — Convergence

Read together, the seven symbolic deaths traced above resist the tidy symmetry often associated with stage-based developmental models. The sequence unfolds unevenly across four decades: some deaths emerge through a single catalytic event, while others accumulate over years before their significance becomes fully visible. The deaths of father and mother, for example, form an extended process in which the loss of familial anchors gradually transformed her understanding of belonging and whakapapa responsibility. By contrast, the redundancy and second cancer diagnosis produced a compressed dismantling of occupational and employee identities within a relatively short

period. This asymmetry is not a weakness in the pattern. Rather, it suggests that the underlying mechanism operates according to the demands of lived experience rather than the requirements of theoretical elegance.

What remains remarkably consistent across all seven deaths is not the external event itself, but the structure of identity that each event dissolved. The death of innocence undermined certainty in inherited narratives. The death of the whakapapa anchor dissolved security grounded in the continuing presence of a stabilising elder. Cancer challenged confidence in bodily permanence. The death of both parents severed belonging rooted in parental presence. Redundancy dismantled the sense of institutional belonging built across a working life. The second cancer diagnosis disrupted an endurance identity organised around productivity and self-sacrifice. Finally, the boundaries drawn within whānau required relinquishing a rescuer identity sustained through carrying responsibilities that belonged to others. In each case, the symbolic death involved the collapse of a previously stable way of understanding self, followed by the gradual emergence of a different orientation toward life.

This is where the convergence identified in this paper becomes visible. Welch's Crisis–Confrontation–Consecration mechanism explains the process through which these transformations occurred. Crisis interrupted an existing identity structure; confrontation exposed what could no longer be sustained; consecration emerged as a reordering of relationship to self, others, God, and whakapapa. Across all seven deaths, what was consecrated was not the crisis itself, but the identity that emerged after the crisis.

The symbolic deaths do not therefore represent isolated hardships. They function as successive sites of identity reorganisation.

At the same time, the ariki reading of the number seven provides an explanatory frame for why the sequence appears as a coherent whole rather than as a collection of disconnected misfortunes. Seven is read here not as a number discovered after the fact, but as a pattern restored to sight once the full sequence became visible.

Neither explanatory framework is sufficient in isolation. Welch's model accounts for the transformational mechanism but cannot explain why these particular deaths form a

coherent symbolic sequence. The numerical reading identifies the sequence but cannot, on its own, explain the developmental movement occurring within it. The explanatory power emerges through their convergence. Together they describe both the process and the pattern: how identity is dismantled, and why the dismantling appears to follow a recognisable shape.

This convergence also sits within a broader methodological pattern established across the Whakapapa of Colonisation series. Previous papers have examined points of agreement across traditions that developed independently of one another, including karakia, Aramaic prayer traditions, Sanskrit mantra, and Māori healing concepts. Rather than treating difference as a problem to be resolved, the series has treated convergence as evidential. When traditions separated by language, geography, theology, and historical context arrive at similar descriptions of human transformation, the possibility arises that they are observing the same underlying phenomenon through different lenses.

The present paper extends that approach further than previous work. A contemporary Western developmental framework is placed alongside a whakapapa-specific numerological interpretation and then read against the lived chronology of a single life. Added to this are insights drawn from biomedical and psychological understandings of trauma, stress, meaning-making, and recovery. These traditions possess little obvious genealogical relationship to one another. Yet all converge on a common claim: what remains unseen continues to exert influence; what is acknowledged can begin to transform; and the relinquishment of an outdated identity is often the precondition for the emergence of a new one. In that sense, the seven symbolic deaths are not simply a personal narrative. They are a case study in a wider human process whereby loss becomes the mechanism through which a more authentic form of identity is eventually reclaimed.

Finally, the wairua-tuakiri hybridity proposed in Section 2.1 is, this paper argues, demonstrated rather than merely asserted by the case sequence itself. No single death among the seven sits cleanly within one dimension. Each carry spiritual and identity-

level weight simultaneously — proof, within this account, that the hinge at the centre of Te Poutama Ora does not separate what it holds together.

5. Conclusion

The seven symbolic deaths traced in this paper are not, in the end, seven separate stories. They are one whakapapa viewed through seven moments of surrender, each marked by the dissolution of an identity that could no longer sustain the life emerging beneath it. Across four decades, certainty gave way to discernment, dependence to responsibility, endurance to partnership with the body, achievement to vocation, productivity to purpose, and rescue to boundary. What appears at first as a sequence of losses reveals itself, when read as a whole, as a process of re-formation.

The significance of the pattern lies not simply in the fact that seven major disruptions occurred, but in the way each disruption required the relinquishment of a previously stable understanding of self. The deaths traced here are therefore symbolic as much as biographical. They mark the progressive dismantling of inherited narratives, familial dependencies, bodily assumptions, occupational identities, and relational roles that, however necessary at one time, had become insufficient for the life that was unfolding. What emerged after each death was not replacement but reorganisation: a different way of relating to whakapapa, wairua, tinana, work, family, and self.

Within the interpretive frame adopted by this paper, this progression is read through two convergent lenses. The first is Welch's observation that crisis precedes consecration, and that the cave is not an interruption of purpose but preparation for it. The second is the significance of the number seven, understood here not as something imposed upon the life retrospectively, but as a pattern restored to visibility once sufficient sight became available. The cave identified elsewhere in this body of work is therefore reframed not as abandonment, absence, or spiritual failure, but as the space in which sight could gradually be recovered. What appeared for many years as fragmentation is read, in retrospect, as formation.

This paper is offered alongside Religious Trauma as Wairua Assault as its lived companion. Where that paper examined the Whakapapa Dilemma through theological and conceptual analysis, the present work demonstrates its consequences and resolution within a single life. The seven symbolic deaths documented here show that healing was not achieved through the avoidance of loss, but through repeated encounters with it. Each death demanded the setting down of something once relied upon. Each yielded a form of identity that was less dependent on certainty, performance, endurance, or rescue than the one before it.

What remains standing at the end of the sequence is not the identity with which the journey began, but the whakapapa that carried it. Its legacy is found in a marriage that endured beyond its early fractures; in children who carry family stories into another generation; in a body increasingly listened to rather than overridden; in vocation reclaimed beyond the limits of employment; and in the emergence of Te Poutama Ora itself, born not despite the seven deaths but through them. The pattern, viewed in its entirety, suggests that the deepest continuities in a life are not found in what survives unchanged, but in what remains after each necessary surrender has taken place: one whakapapa, seven symbolic deaths, and a future shaped by what those deaths made possible.

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