

Carew is my cousin

January 13, 2008, Carew Chiffelle Warren-Chapman was born. Josiah and his older brother Canaan were so excited - they had a new cousin!! Canaan and Josiah thought she would be coming home soon, like other babies they knew, but she didn't. They wanted to visit her, but knew that she was very sick and that she shared a room with other very sick children so we had to wait for her to get better. Sadly, four weeks later on February 10th Carew died.

When I told Josiah and Canaan, at first they were silent. Josiah looked very quickly at Canaan. Because of the expression on his face and in his eyes, I interpreted that look to be one of searching - for a cue of how to respond to this news maybe? Or, for confirmation that the way he felt was an appropriate reaction? Canaan looked sad. Josiah turned from Canaan, then looked at me, lips quivering. He was sad.

Canaan looked down at his hands then asked, "Is she coming back?" I said no and explained that she had gone to heaven but that we would see her again one day. Josiah asked, 'Like your cousin, Mummy?' referring to my cousin Kenana whose tangi we had attended in October 2007. When I said yes, Josiah listed other people he knew of that had died, each of which I confirmed. Satisfied, Josiah jumped off the bed and ran off to have breakfast.



Carew's body lay in state at her whanau home. Uncle Hami and Aunty Ingrid made those few precious days, about children. Children were included, they were free to come and go as they needed, with all that comes with death open to their curiosity and exploration and they were supported in the process. Josiah looked at Carew's body and watched how others interacted with her. He was happy to and desired to participate in the happenings, but wouldn't get close to the coffin himself. He would ask, "She's dead aye, Aunty?" His questions innocent, honest and blunt, but received graciously.

After the funeral service, en route to the crematorium, Canaan and Josiah wanted to know where we were going. I told them that Carew's body was going to be what people called 'cremated' and turned into 'ashes' which Uncle and Aunty would then take to scatter in Turangi and Samoa - the two lands of Carew's ancestors. Josiah grappled with that, his mouth twisted, brow furrowed in thought. He was concerned that she would be by herself. His Dad and I told him that our bodies are like houses for our spirits - the part that's inside us that laughs, cries, and makes us

who we are. When Carew died, her spirit went to heaven so she no longer needed her body. Both Canaan and Josiah returned to the conversation we had when she died, re-confirming the people that they knew of who would be in heaven 'with God'.

'Your cousin, Mummy?'" Josiah queried. "And your Koro, and my granddad? They're in heaven too? With Carew?"

"Yes, Josiah." I confirmed. This satisfied him, so he sat back in his seat and asked me to put some music on.

WHAT LEARNING IS TAKING PLACE?

Josiah knew of the impending arrival of this baby who would be his new cousin and from the day she was born he claimed her as such. Even though she lived for only a short time and despite having never met her, when Carew died his sense of loss was acute.

When Josiah found out that Carew had died, he sought to connect what was unknown and abstract i.e. death, to something known and concrete i.e. people he has known who have died. He then delved deeper and made relational connections, enquiring as to whether she would be in heaven 'with them'. Josiah felt a sense of abandonment for his cousin, indicating a responsibility for her and *needed* to know she wasn't alone, seeking confirmation of this many times since.

Josiah's responses showed that physical presence and interaction were not necessary for him to embrace Carew as part of our whanau. He included her because of much deeper abstract connections that were created through expectations and anticipations; through the links between concepts and relationships; through being included in the tangible and witness to the exchanges and emotional responses between other whanau members and the subsequent stirrings of soul and spirit they evoked. Josiah absorbed all of these things, made his own connections and arrived at his own acceptance that this little baby whom he had never met, belonged, so he knit her into his fabric. Thus when she died, he mourned.

Closure seems to have been very important to Josiah - to know that Carew is not 'gone' as he described it, something which, when he thought it may be true, was devastating to him. The fear of her being 'gone' is something he faces on occasion and he seeks comfort in the affirmation that she is 'with' others. Josiah didn't meet the 'others' either, but has made the same connections with them that he did with Carew. He has processed a lot of complex emotions and issues and has come through the other side healthy and secure. He knows what it is to lose someone special and has seen how whanau and close relationships help to heal the pain death can cause.

OPPORTUNITIES AND POSSIBILITIES

Josiah watched me and our whanau mourn the loss of my cousin Kenana. He then experienced loss himself and mourned the death of his cousin Carew - an incredibly valuable journey for Josiah to have been on, particularly as a young child. Spiritual foundations and emotional foundations have been knitted into his fabric. Another value of whanau has been added to his kete. It gives me hope that when he faces grief and loss in the future that he will stand on that foundation, draw from his kete and maybe even my documented perspective and find the strength to endure through those very difficult times.