

## Andrew Richmond (Tangi) Martin

*MB ChB, Dip Obst (15 July 1921 – 2 February 2012)*

Dr “Tangi” Martin started his medical practice in Taupo in 1954. Both he and Libb (his wife) were Wellington people and decided to start a practice somewhere in New Zealand ‘close to water’.



At that time Taupo’s population was about 2000 and there were two other small practices but those doctors soon retired. Electricity had just arrived in Taupo and Tangi did night surgery by candle light in his temporary rooms and then later they were lit by a cable from a hut next door.

Taupo then was a very different place to what it is now. There were no sealed roads, no supermarkets, shared party lines, a dodgy local telephone exchange and homewares came with travelling salesmen. A doctor’s practice ranged far into the surrounding countryside. In those days Taupo’s community was half Maori and half Pakeha.

The local Maori dubbed Tangi the ‘takuta’, the Maori word for doctor. He wasn’t always paid in money (a consultation cost half a crown); usually it was venison, trout, fruit, eggs and (rarely) whisky.

Tangi’s practice was half home calls and half surgery visits. Many of the more complex family matters he preferred to handle at night surgery when he could spend longer sorting out the family problems. And of course there were many maternity cases—that is until the ‘pill’ arrived in the 1960s. The Maternity Home was his second home and if he wasn’t there during the day he was called out during the night, pyjamas sticking out from under his trousers.

Local doctors were integral to the community. Tangi was the police and St John’s doctor, attended the boxing and racing in the capacity of medical officer and eventually when the original hospital was built, became the first Medical Superintendent. Local doctors did most of the minor surgery there although Tangi said they were severely limited by the availability of drugs and equipment.

Specialists were few and far between—General Practitioners had to deal with a huge range of ailments; people flinging themselves over the Huka Falls, depression and other mental illnesses; a lot of asthma in the Taupo region; car, boat and ski accidents; and often a trek into the surrounding forest to tend to accidents. Then there was a weekly surgery in Turangi including visiting the two local prisons, the convent at Waihi and a local marae.

For many years he was the Chairman of the Waikato/Bay of Plenty Disciplinary Committee of the Medical Council. It was indeed a busy life for a doctor which one would have thought left little time for other interests. But Tangi packed a lot into his life outside of medicine. No golf or bridge for him and anyway with six children, leisure time was spent teaching them to ski.

He became a founding member of both the local water and ski clubs and an early member of the Lions Club, In the 1980s he built an historic village—called Huka Village—on the outskirts of Taupo, assembling a group of charming older buildings such as the local Presbyterian church, an early school house and Maori whares to show how Taupo was in the olden days. This passion of recording the old meant that for all his years in Taupo Tangi took photographs of new developments around the town; these now reside in the local museum.

He inherited his business acumen from his father J T Martin—a well known businessman in Wellington. This led him to be on the board of the Association of Medical Practitioners as well as the Medical Assurance Society which he helped to shake down in the early days and which is now a multi-million dollar company.

Tangi always took a pragmatic approach to life. He put it down in part, to his 2 years as a medical officer in the Korean War. As a doctor there he had to invent, beg or borrow much of his medical equipment, even bargaining gin for medical supplies from the Americans. In Korea he got on with everyone and it was this common touch with people that endeared him to the Taupo community and his friends and family at large.

Libb, who was a huge support to Tangi during his eventful life, died just 6 weeks before he did. He is survived by his six children and numerous grand and great-grandchildren.

Robyn Turner, a daughter, wrote this obituary.