



## MAUI'S SEARCH FOR FIRE

When Maui was young, before he gained his moko (tattoo) and was full of questions...he thought about fire. It was night and Maui was with his brothers, they were going to sleep, that is all except Maui who was watching the fire on the floor as it slowly burnt down. "Where does fire come from?" he asked. His brothers weren't happy with Maui and his silly questions all the time for they thought that he was nothing but a nuisance so they didn't answer. It was time for him to be quiet and go to sleep! When no answer came he asked again, "What happens when it goes out?" "We make sure that it never goes out!" came the reply. "But what if it does?" he asked again. His brothers were angry, "Our Mother knows where to get it from. Now will you go to sleep!" was the only other answer he got. He was curious.

When everyone was asleep he took an 'ipu' (*narrow necked calabash*) filled with water and slowly tipped it on all the fires, the embers sizzled, went black and the fires died. During the night it got so cold that the people began to wake up. "What's happened to our fires? They've gone out! We'll all die!" the people cried out. Maui's brothers knew that he'd done it and told their mother so. When he was asked he told her that he had put the fires out and it was all his fault, so he would go to get more. "So you should!" she said. "I'll tell you how to get to where your Grandmother lives," said his mother, "For she looks after the fire. Be polite and don't play any tricks on her!"

Maui took the path that his mother had told him of...it was in the underworld. Through the darkness he walked, unable to see and then at last he saw a house with the windows lit up and heat coming off it. "Who stares at the house of Mahuika?" came a woman's voice. She asked if he came from the east, west, south or from where the wind blew. "Yes," said Maui, he was from where the wind blew, "It is Maui, grandmother's grandmother."

Maui explained that he needed to take fire back to his mother because all the fires in the village had gone out. So Mahuika pulled out one of her fingernails and it burst into flames. She told Maui to carry it with care and to light his fires with it. So he carried it very carefully, when she was watching, and when he was away from her sight he decided to stamp on it and put it out so he could go back to her and get another one. This he did.



Many times he returned because he put out each of the nails his grandmother had given him...if he didn't stamp on them, he dropped them in a nearby river. Mahuika grew very, very angry. She had given him all her nails but one! When Maui asked for her very last nail of fire, she flew into a rage and she threw it at the ground. The ground caught alight and Maui ran for his life. The fire chased him, the faster he ran, the faster the fire burned after him. He jumped into a lake and turned into a fish but the water soon became too hot. He rose to the surface and turned into a karearea (falcon) and flew up to the skies but the fire followed him and scorched his feathers, he thought that he was about to die.

He called out to Tawhirimatea, the god of winds, to send down heavy rain and quench the fire. Tawhirimatea spoke with his children and together they drowned the raging flames. In the deluge of waters Mahuika lost all her power and the last of the fire was thrown into the trees...but only the kaikomako, mahoe, patete and a few other trees accepted and cherished it (*totara, pukatea, makomako*).

When Maui returned to the village, he didn't have any fire but instead showed the people how they could now get fire for themselves at any time and all they had to do was rub a stick from a 'fire tree' into a groove of another piece of wood and the fire would always be theirs to command...and so it remains to this day.