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For me, it's my grandmother's kitchen, in Constanța, filled with wet Black Sea air mixed with the scent of hyacinths. It's constant chatter and being surrounded by balls of knitting yarn. That's the home I left behind when my family emigrated from Romania in the 1990s.

It was difficult to fit this memory into my pēpeha years later, when I first encountered te reo Māori. But one thing I could always relate to was the emotion gripping speakers as they delivered their pēpeha. Talking about one's roots tends to have that effect, regardless of the details.

When we first arrived here, it seemed obvious that I maintain my language, even though I could not articulate why back then. Not easy, given the small number of Romanian speakers in Aotearoa. I made room for it in small ways, creating opportunities to invite it into my new home. This is how I began to listen to Romanian internet radio and to Romanian pop music.

Non-English radio featured in New Zealand as early as 1921, with broadcasts



The Pātea Māori Club performing its chart-topping song Poi E at the Eltham Country Fair in 1984.

Sounds of home

Language Matters

from the first Māori radio station. However, historical records indicate that it wasn't until 1927 that te reo Māori was heard regularly on air.

According to the archives gathered by Māori broadcaster and writer Piripi Walker, the first Māori Anglican Bishop of NZ, Frederick Bennett (of Ngāti Whakaue and Irish descent), delivered his radio address in te reo Māori in June 1929.

Māori-language broadcasting continued over the years and flourished, championed by distinguished

broadcasters, like Ted Nēpia, Wiremu (Bill) Parker and Wiremu (Bill) Kerekere.

In 1984, the song Poi E was released, containing Māori lyrics and a catchy tune. Not only did it reach No 1 in Kiwi charts, but it also sold well overseas, achieving "single of the week" in the British magazine New Musical Express. The airwaves were booming with Māori language lyrics, bringing te reo into everyday Kiwi homes.

The 1980s brought other significant changes to the shores of Aotearoa. The Māori Language Act was passed in 1987. That same year, Te Reo Irirangi o Te Upoko o Te Ika, the first permanent Māori

language radio station, was set up.

Over the years, my home kept filling with more Romanian songs transmitted over the internet. In 2004, the Romanian language song Dragostea din tei topped European charts for nearly three months. The band O-Zone, whose third album featured the song, was propelled to instant stardom, the album selling 12 million copies. That song is still a staple on our home playlist, as is Purea Nei, sung by Anna Coddington, and Pēpeha, by SIX60.

By 2020, Aotearoa had 21 iwi stations, broadcast around the country, in the language of the indigenous people whose mother tongue had been displaced, disrupted and so nearly destroyed. The tide was finally beginning to shift again.

But is radio enough to maintain a language? In a world obsessed with proficiency, it is worth remembering that speaking fluently, but also about small acts. Songs. Pēpeha. Whakataukī.

Nurturing a link with a language can simply mean making space for it in your home. It is heart-warming to hear my daughter bopping and singing along to Romanian tunes, intermingled with the waiata that she brings home from school.

Do my children speak Romanian? Not by academic standards. But as long as Romanian lyrics can be heard blasting out of my house, the language lives here still.

As we have celebrated Māori Language Week this month, I am reminded of the importance of home and the small acts that can help bring back its enduring feeling.

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THE IRISH TIMES

Covid's end in sight but threats remain

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

Global weekly deaths from Covid-19 are at the lowest level since March 2020. "We are not there yet, but the end is in sight," said the director-general of the World Health Organisation (WHO). The shift in tone from the WHO is encouraging. It is also a tribute to the scientists who designed safe and effective Covid vaccines in record time. Some 12 billion doses have been administered around the world, and the WHO estimates that, as a result, 19.8 million deaths were averted last year alone.

But the WHO's message is carefully calibrated: the world can see how Covid can be defeated, but there is a lot of work to be done to make that a

Viewpoint

reality. If a pattern has taken hold, it appears to be two to three waves of infection a year, each caused by new variants or sub-variants. The hope is that each of those waves is going to be smaller. The worst-case scenario is the emergence of a new, more dangerous variant that evades immunity.

Either way, the challenge for governments is the same. First, it is to ensure that health systems are equipped to deal with a sudden spike in serious illness. Second, it is to ensure that vaccine booster programmes continue apace, protecting the vulnerable in particular. New vaccines that target all circulating Covid variants could be a game-changer, but only if people actually receive them.