

Ko Mōtītī Blue ahau. I am a survivor.

As I tell my story of survival I can feel the thick black oil leeching into my feathers and my tiny heart races just thinking about the day that the Rena ran ashore, striking the Astrolabe Reef.

I was diving, twirling, speeding down into the waves not far from my home and nest on Mōtītī Island. The sky above was angry but I was enjoying a game, skimming and swerving the rain that shot down like bullets. Growing tired, I caught a silverfish between my beak and crooned to my neighbours to let them know that I was headed home. That's when I tasted it. The bitterness and poison of the black monster coated the inside of my beak and throat. It slid down into my puku and I knew that something terrible had happened.

I scrambled to the top of the island to where I could see out over the ocean to the shore of Pāpāmoa, braying and barking as I went. Desperately, I tried to warn my whānau to keep out of the water. I stood frozen in time sniffing the poison in the sea spray and squawking as my heart felt like it was breaking in my chest.

I could see the ship; split in half with its containers plummeting into the sea below. A river of thick black liquid ran behind the Rena, covering and drowning everything in its path. Eventually washing onto the shore, the black oil covered the sand and anything else that dared to get in its way.

Days and weeks passed and the white suits moved in with their trucks, shovels, spades, soap and hoses. They sifted through the debris that was strewn across the sand. They worked and cried and worked some more. Desperately, they tried to save us but the devastation of the disaster was just too great.

Thousands of lives were lost that day and many more in the years that have passed. The Rena still lays wrecked on the ocean floor, perhaps one day I will be brave enough to stare into the eyes of the monster.