

THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY MEDAL (N.Z.B.M.)

Kali Peaua FUNGAVAKA

Date of action: 22 August 2005

Date of award: 14 October 2006

Citation

On 22 August 2005, sometime after 1.00 p.m. a young woman was working alone at the Shell Service Station in Atkinson Avenue, Otahuhu. A man who had recently formed a relationship with her arrived at the station and placed an LPG cylinder outside the front door. He then bought petrol for another person who had taken him to the service station. He walked away from the shop, returning shortly afterwards, collected the gas cylinder and walked inside. He placed the cylinder on the floor at the end of the counter where the woman was working and an argument then ensued between them, which developed into a struggle. The woman tried to run outside but the man, while holding a packet of matches in his hand, blocked her path. He then closed the front doors. A member of the public arrived, and saw the doors closed, and witnessed the young woman screaming as she struggled with the offender. She was dragged to the location of the LPG cylinder and, after trying to get away several times was finally overpowered and pulled back by the hair, at which time she fell backwards into the ice cream refrigerator. She was then forced back to the place where the LPG cylinder was located. At that point she was engulfed in a ball of flame to the top half of her body, head and face, while the offender received some burns to his face and left hand, before he leapt over the counter to make his escape. The young woman then crawled out of the shop and collapsed on the forecourt outside, with the flames still burning fiercely.

Some passers-by, including Kali Peaua Fungavaka, saw what had occurred. Mr Fungavaka wet his jumper under a tap and tried to extinguish the flames that were burning the young woman. When this was unsuccessful he entered the shop and got a fire extinguisher, which was beside the gas cylinder. This was burning and flames were coming from its nozzle. Using the extinguisher, he was able to extinguish the flames burning the young woman after which he re-entered the shop and extinguished the fire inside, despite the fact that the shop was filling with smoke. The young woman subsequently died of multiple burns.

Mr Fungavaka displayed bravery in retrieving the fire extinguisher from the shop in order to attempt to save the life of the young woman. He also extinguished a fire which posed a danger to himself and to five other members of the public who were present by that time.