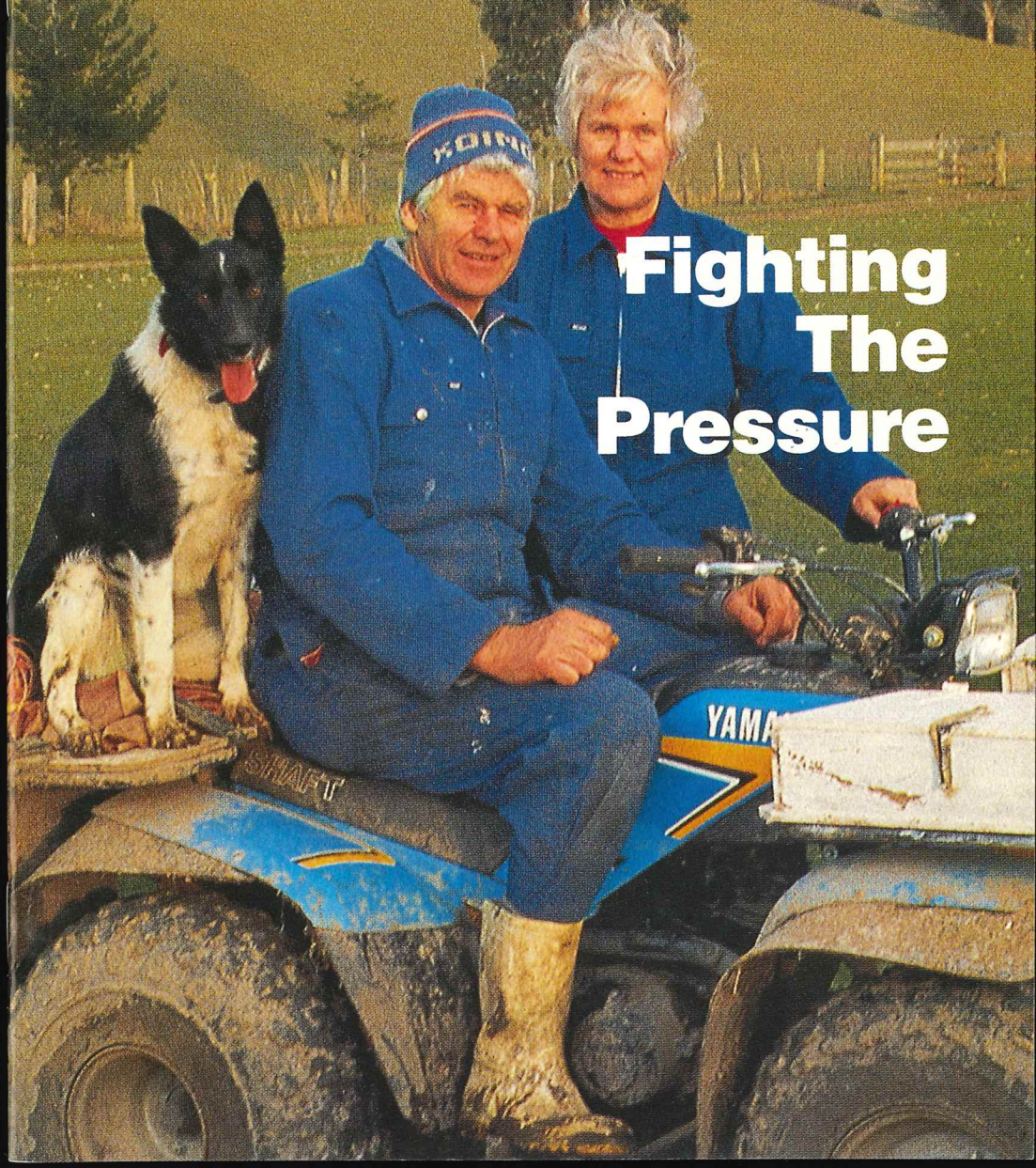
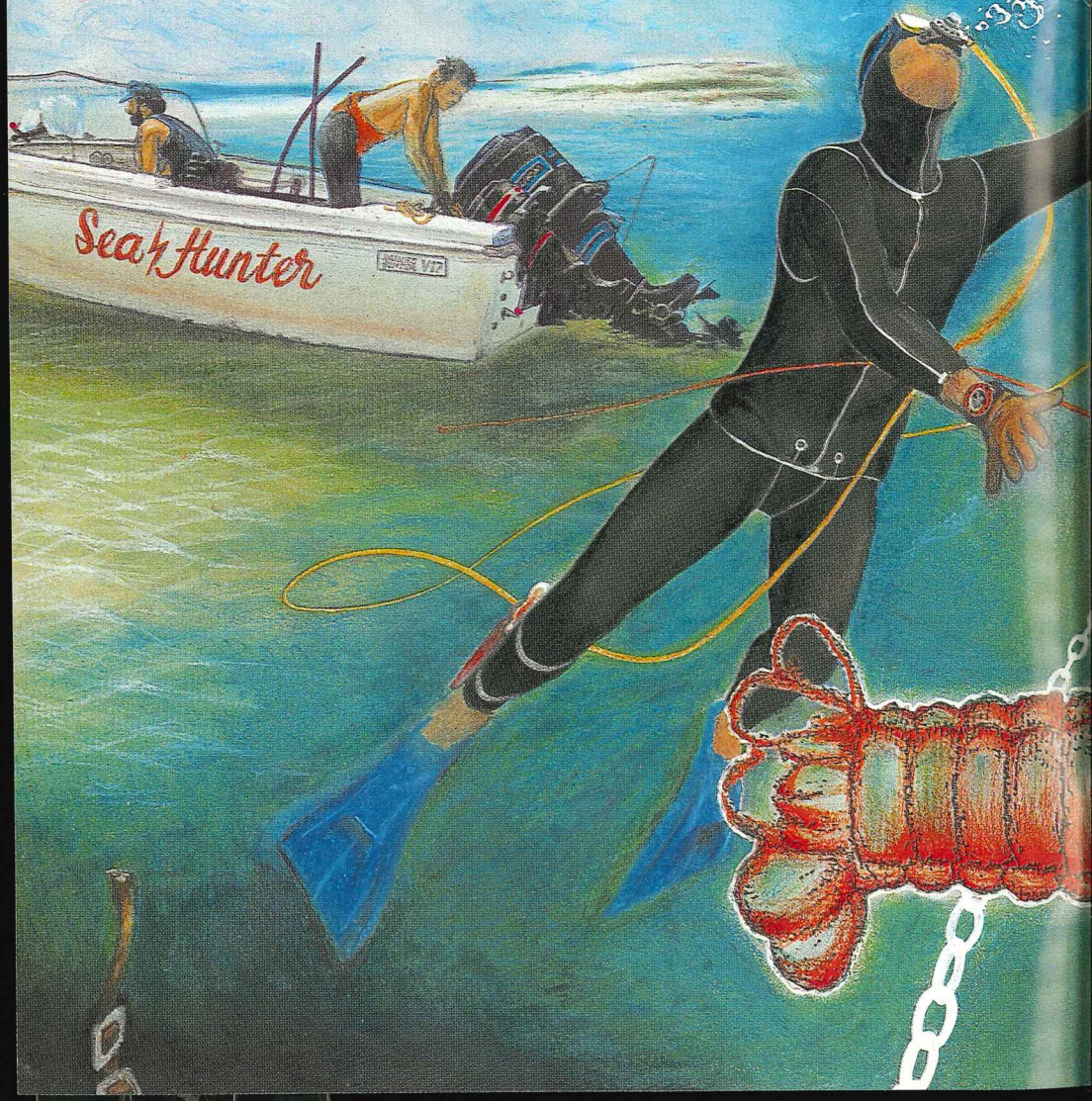


SOUTH PACIFIC
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**Fighting
The
Pressure**



Danger Down



Under

David Dennison,
Moonah, Tasmania

Some Australians call our leisure-loving homeland "the land of the long weekend." The name self-critically echoes the more romantic Maori description of New Zealand as "the land of the long white cloud." There must be some subconscious need to identify with our cousins across the Tasman because we Tasmanians jokingly refer to our southernmost state as "South Island Australia."

But whatever might be behind all that, one thing's for sure. You can't be an abalone diver off Tasmania's southern coast and be a subscriber to Australia's leisure philosophy at the same time. The two don't mix. In fact, to go after abalone is to virtually become a "workaholic."

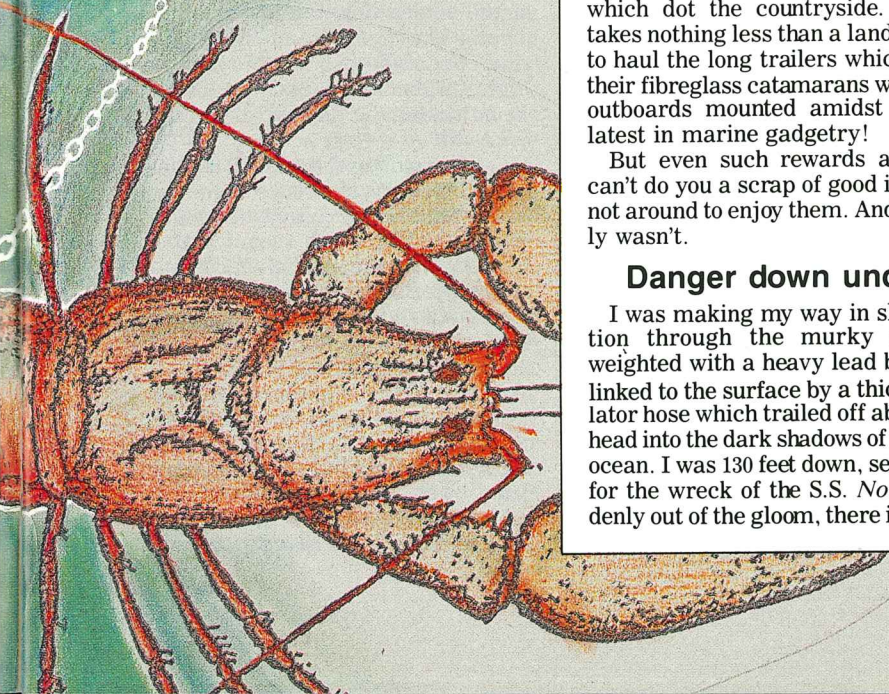
That has its rewards too. Financial ones. As a consequence of the very high prices Japanese gourmets are prepared to pay for the shellfish, abalone divers are now beginning to constitute the new rich of our fair state.

You can tell the abalone divers' homes. They stand out as show homes in the many small coastal towns which dot the countryside. And it takes nothing less than a landcruiser to haul the long trailers which sport their fibreglass catamarans with twin outboards mounted amidst all the latest in marine gadgetry!

But even such rewards as these can't do you a scrap of good if you're not around to enjoy them. And I nearly wasn't.

Danger down under

I was making my way in slow motion through the murky depths, weighted with a heavy lead belt and linked to the surface by a thick regulator hose which trailed off above my head into the dark shadows of the cold ocean. I was 130 feet down, searching for the wreck of the S.S. *Nord*. Suddenly out of the gloom, there it was —



lying prone on the sand bottom.

Without warning I began to feel dizzy. From my reading I knew I was experiencing hypoxia — oxygen starvation of the brain caused by diving at the limit of my compressor's range. I knew that I had to get back to the surface or I was done for.

The thought of blacking out on the ocean floor filled me with horror and with my last ounce of strength and consciousness I fumbled to release the lead belt around my middle. Succeeding at that, I jettisoned the rest of my gear and allowed myself to rise towards the surface.

As I shot upwards I knew I was in real danger from another source — the bends. In desperation I sought for something to break my rise. But there was nothing. I cried out, "Please Lord, save me!" There was nothing else I could do.

Then, as I continued upwards, unable to slow myself down, out of the corner of my eye I caught the sun reflecting off some object just a few feet away. I grabbed for it and my hand clasped round the anchor chain of my boat. Prior to this expedition I had had the chain freshly galvanised so that it was now silver. That irrational and expensive piece of re-equipping was responsible for saving my life. Or was it God? Did he cause the sun to reflect off the chain just at that minute in response to my cry?

I hung on, ever so thankful for that chain. I was 80 feet below the surface and was able to stay there for some minutes. Long enough to avoid the danger of the bends. After that break I continued on up to the surface where I was met by another diver who had an aqualung ready for me.

"Only God saved me," I blurted out. The other diver looked at me in surprise; He hadn't heard that sort of language from me before. It was quite out of character. But you don't brush death that close and not acknowledge that something or someone must have

been watching over you. You begin to think that maybe your Sunday school teacher was right.

Diving party

That fateful expedition came about as a result of a diving party wanting to charter my boat and my services. My normal work boat was a Haines Hunter runabout but I also owned a conventional fishing boat which had been moored in Fisherman's Dock on the Hobart waterfront for two years.

I didn't use it much, since most of my time was taken up in diving for abalone. But since you can't take a diving party out in a 17 footer I had to bring the fishing boat up to scratch so I could use it. Before I could legally take the party out I had to pass a marine survey. That's when I got the two and a half tons of anchor chain galvanised, much to the electroplater's disgust. He thought that such "gilding of the lily" was a complete waste of money.

Newly surveyed, I headed out with the charter party towards Tasman Island. There was a stiff force five southwesterly wind blowing. Only five of the 16 sea-sick passengers were divers. The rest were along for the ride. We made our way to Munro Bight off the Tasman peninsula. We were looking for the wreck of the *S.S. Nord*.

Using a sounder I thought I had located the *Nord* in about 130 feet of water. The sea was calm with a slight southeast roll, which meant that I could have used just a light nylon anchor rope. But I didn't. I unnecessarily ran out the main anchor with its heavy chain.

I donned my diving gear which, unlike the scuba equipment of my amateur passengers, was not self-contained. I was linked through a regulator by hose to a compressor on deck.

Air compressed above the surface loses its volume as it is pumped down



A happy Back Track tour group returns after a successful diving expedition. David's son Tod (right) holds up a fine specimen.

to depth. 100 pounds pressure at the surface becomes about 60 pounds 100 feet under the water. So you have to be careful not to go down so far that you exceed the capacity of the compressor to supply you with air.

It's a whole new world under the surface of the sea and even now it never fails to fill me with a sense of awe every time I go down. As I moved along the bottom in the clear water with the fish and other marine life idling by, I was excited by the expectation of discovering the wreck again. It's exciting to discover something in a world where man infrequently intrudes.

But this time I was disappointed. The sounder had not located the wreck, but rather a 30 foot high rock to which a jungle of bull kelp was attached. I explored some more, thinking maybe that the wreck was close by. But it was a fruitless search and after 15 minutes or so a tug on my air hose told me that it was time to return to the top. Any longer down and I would have to go through a decompression period before I could emerge.

I also noticed that because of the depth I was at there was a shortage of air which was making it a little difficult to breathe.

Back on deck it took the aero starter-motor of the boat ten minutes with flattening batteries to haul in the clattering anchor chain, but that completed our search for the wreck using both sounders.

Half an hour later we got lucky. Not 120 yards away from our first anchorage the sounders located the wreck. My party, still recovering from sea sickness, wanted confirmation that it was the *Nord* so I had to dive again by myself to confirm that we had located the wreck.

Despite the bother involved, and after some hesitation, I decided to have the main anchor dropped again. While it was clanking away over the side I increased the air pressure in order to overcome the difficulty I experienced on the first dive.

Once in the water I descended to the bottom and made my way in the direction of the wreck through the now murky water. And that's when I had

my unexpected brush with hypoxia. And it was no joke. It jolted me out of my indifference as far as God was concerned. He had used my newly-galvanised anchor chain as a life line to bring me to my senses, and for that I was grateful.

I explored the old Sunday school stories and the Bible a little more and soon discovered that Jesus Christ was God himself and that he wanted control of my life. I never knew before that anyone could know the Lord like this, but as I handed my life over to him and determined in my heart that I was going to be a follower of Jesus Christ, I began to experience a new dimension to living. I stopped taking things so much for granted and began to appreciate the creation in which I lived and earned my livelihood each day: the beauty of Mt. Wellington, the trees and clouds and colours of animals and plants.

In 1981, after I had been away from diving for a couple of years, running a hotel and selling insurance, I met a friend who told me about a group of Christian men who called themselves the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. It sounded interesting to me and I went off to one of their meetings with my friend to check it out. I was rapt. I became a member and was involved regularly with the chapter.

Heart attacks

A couple of years later I suffered a series of major heart attacks and had to be flown to Melbourne to undergo a bypass operation. I was so grateful for the support and prayers of the men from my local chapter as well as those of my wife, mother and church. They helped to eradicate all fear and I was able to simply place my future in God's hands. His peace stayed with me throughout the ordeal.

When I was finally discharged, the doctors could find no apparent sign of heart damage. I was home in seven days, a near record for the Alfred

Hospital, and within three months I was back diving. I made it in time for the beginning of the scallop season in the re-opened D'Entrecasteaux Channel beds. The progress I had made astounded the doctors and they even recorded their surprise in writing, just confirming that indeed I had made a miraculous recovery.

I have a lot to thank God for. He saved my life and opened up for me a whole new dimension of existence. God is there. And he is relevant to our day to day living.

*I began to
pull in the crays
hand over fist.*

I was diving not too long ago off the south east coast of Tasmania, looking for the large crays which normally abound under these rough seas. I wasn't having much luck and began to idly scratch in the sandstone of the sea floor the words, "I love Jesus." I guess it was a variation on the theme of John 21:6 where Jesus comes to his disciples while they are fishing and says, "Have you caught anything, guys?"

"No!" they reply.

"Then throw your net out on the other side," he tells them. They do and catch a huge load of fish.

Anyway, as soon as I had finished carving those words my fortunes changed and I began to pull the crays in hand over fist. It only happened the once but it sure showed me that God is concerned with the little things in life, as well as the big things.

David Dennison is a member of the Hobart Chapter of FGBMFI. He and his wife Fay have two children: Ingrid and Tod. David is presently fishing professionally for crayfish and scallops out of Strahan on the west coast of Tasmania. He owns a 65-foot vessel, the Lady Nora. He also runs trout fishing tours to the central highlands.



David Dennison with the bell he retrieved off the Australia, dated 1884.



Some of the best business deals I ever made were worked out during church on Sunday morning.

Maybe it was the rarified atmosphere or the light streaming in the stained glass window. Whatever the reason, it was one place I could relax and think.

I hadn't always been so oblivious to the ministrations of the Spirit. For seven years I was an altar boy and during that time developed a closeness to God and sensitivity to spiritual things. But when I stopped actually participating in the service and was sitting in the pew instead of singing in the choir I lost interest. Gradually I

became detached from what was happening around me in the service.

I got into the habit of procrastinating about God. When trouble struck I'd take God down from the shelf, pray real hard that he'd get me out of the bind I was in, and then when things came right back he'd go on the shelf again until needed. I'd take the credit for solving the problem and God would hardly warrant a passing mention. A pretty inane way to live, when you think about it, but lots of people do it.

Target practice

My life certainly had its share of



'Don't Procrastinate!'

R. (Vic) De Meio,
Mossman, QLD

This photograph was taken during the pre-harvest burning of the sugar cane. During the burn the flames reached 50m high and created a wind turbulence strong enough to pick up Vic's (right) protective helmet and carry it 20m away!

trouble and drama. When I was about 16 I went shooting with a friend one day. We couldn't find much in the way of wildlife to hunt so we had some target practice at an old stone jar. My companion decided to give me a bit of a fright. He stood behind me with his rifle above my head, figuring that the noise when he fired would scare the living daylight out of me.

It probably would have, except that I stood up at the crucial moment. My head hit the barrel of his gun just as it went off and I ended up with a furrow down my skull.

Another time I was spearfishing with a mate in a river when we got

caught in a vicious rip and were both nearly drowned. When we finally made it back to the river bank we were so exhausted it was half an hour before we could move.

I tended to shrug these experiences off as part and parcel of the risks of life without really thinking about how fragile the thread of life was and how easily I could be ushered into eternity. And what then? I just put off thinking about that question.

My wife Emi and I had our moments too, mainly in the raising of a family. Our first child died in the womb four weeks before it was due. This was a terrible blow to us and we



The De Meio family: Emi, Karen, Lesley, Cristine and Vic.

were really cut up about it. To make matters worse we had to sit and wait for nature to take its course. All we could do was pray that everything would go okay with the delivery. It could have been a disastrous situation for Emi but things did go smoothly and later on we were able to have three daughters. Though we prayed like crazy I don't ever recall thanking God for the outcome. But that was me: always putting off coming to terms with God.

One area where I never procrastinated was business. I prided myself on being pretty sharp when it came to spotting a good deal. Of course, as a sugar cane farmer I had to face the various dilemmas that primary producers always have to cope with. Like the time when there was a slump in the sugar industry and I was left holding the bag. Then there was the perennial problem of having a good crop and a bad price or a bad crop and a good price and "never the twain shall meet." When you're on the land there are a lot of things that happen and which you can't do a thing about.

Five years ago a friend invited me to a Full Gospel Business Men's convention. I don't remember exactly what was said there but I know it hit

a nerve. Here were a bunch of men who spoke about God as if they really knew him. And that was more than I could say. But, as usual, I put off doing anything about it.

Runaway mower

The straw that really broke the camel's back happened not long afterwards. I was mowing the back section one day, using a powerful rider-mower. As I tried to turn on a slope the mower took off on the wet grass and went out of control. I was thrown off and rolled down the hill. The next thing I remember seeing was the base plate of the mower coming down on top of me, and believe me, those mowers can slice you up like a kitchen whizz. At that point I rolled into a slight depression in the ground as the mower hit me, then ended up on its side against a paw-paw tree. When I got to it it had cut three-quarters of the way through the tree and the blade was still spinning.

I was bleeding profusely and put my hand up to my head, expecting a piece of skull to be missing. But I ended up only getting six stitches and didn't even have a headache!

I must have had a thick skull, but finally the message sank in that I had

better stop procrastinating about God. That's when I finally received the baptism of the Holy Spirit — something I had been skirting around for ages.

All I can say is I never touched ground for a week! It felt like all the cobwebs had been blown out of my life. All the doors were open to God and he was certainly making his presence felt.

It won't surprise anyone to know that my continual message to other businessmen is "don't procrastinate!" When I think of the colossal waste of time I spent shying away from full commitment to God it makes me wonder how come he is so patient with us. We certainly can't gamble on his grace, though. He holds the cards, not us.

It's a delight for me to pray and seek God's direction in my life now. Not as a selfish thing if I'm in a jam, but simply as the only intelligent way to live my life.

I've had to come to grips with the sin of greed in my life, a vice that a lot of businessmen need to face. What I've found is that even in the midst of an economic downturn God can and does provide for me, but that if I try to make a fast buck through some form of speculation and my motive is pure greed, I find it doesn't work out — God just isn't part of it.

It's far better to be humble and happy than a proud shark shark who mortgages his own soul into the bargain.

Vic is Regional Director for FGBMFI in Far North Queensland.

Vic de Meio is a sugar cane farmer in Mossman, Queensland. Of Italian parentage, he was a draper and mercer in the town of Ingham before turning his hand to farming. He and Emi have three children: Cristine (19), Karen (17) and Lesley (10).

Vic jokingly says he has forgotten what he knew as a draper, and that his friends don't think he's much of a farmer — "so where does that leave me? I'll tell you where: a happy man who's going to heaven. Beat that!"

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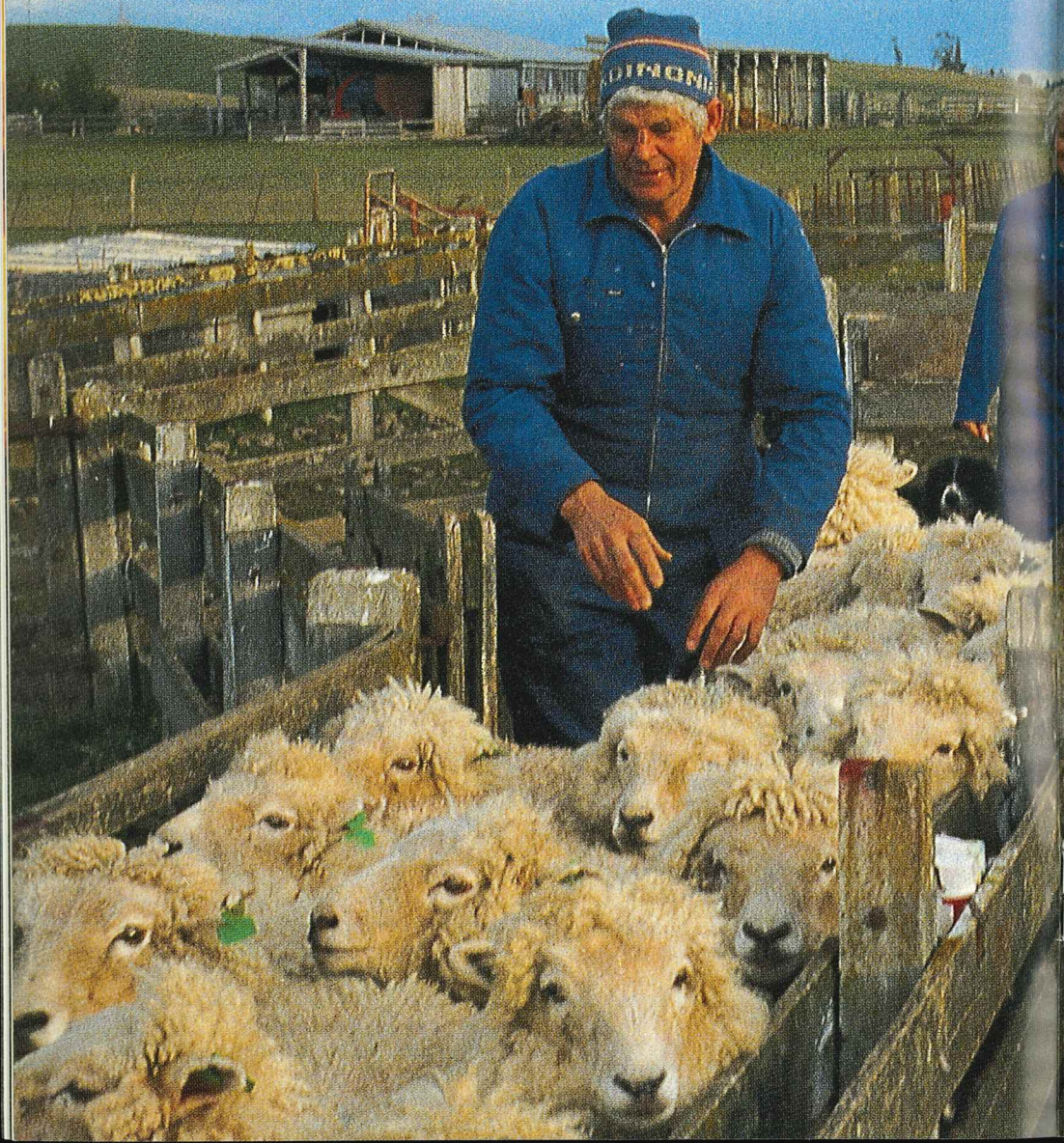
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Fighting the

John Baird,
Dipton, N.Z.



PRESSURE

A woman with short, curly grey hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, stands in a field. In the background, a large flock of sheep is grazing in a green field. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is a rural, outdoor setting.

Two small boys can create a lot of havoc, and my brother Bill and I were masters of that art. From booting a visiting neighbour in the shins to letting people's hens out, smoking and lighting fires – these were all part of our repertoire. Even, on one occasion, falling into a drum of formalin. Our elderly aunts and uncles still remember our escapades with disapproval.

When Bill was four and I was two something happened that was to leave a scar on my life for many years. We had been playing together and got into a battle over the possession of a little cane chair which belonged to Bill, but which I coveted deeply.

In the scuffle I pushed him and he landed on the hearth, his jersey catching the spout of a heavy iron kettle boiling on the hob. Scalding hot water spilled all over his body, giving him extensive burns. After considerable time in hospital he recovered and things seemed to be back to normal – we were still the best of buddies.

However, after plastic surgery in his

teenage years Bill developed cancer and died at the age of 21. My mother was very close to Bill and nursed him right through his final illness, and although there was never any recrimination or rejection of me, from that time I carried a sense of guilt for my part in his untimely death.

We had always been a churchgoing family, although my father's involvement was cut short after an unpleasant episode with some church elders.

As a farmer he struggled through the Depression and managed to bring us out of it in one piece. I was sent to boarding school to follow an academic career. It was an institution where Christianity was preached but rarely practised, and the compulsory Bible class attendance cut little ice with me.

Fresh out of school I landed a job with the Forest Service as a technical trainee and it was in this environment that I got my first taste of freedom – and my first taste of the amber liquid. It was a great working life in the bush with a bunch of rough diamonds as

mates and the pub never too far away.

After my brother's death I reluctantly agreed to give up my job with the Forest Service to help my father run the farm. Dad was active in the community and in local government affairs and was often away from the farm, so it fell to me to keep up with the demands of the work.

Dad had a strong sense of civic duty and was a transparently honest man. When others in high places were using their privileged positions to make financial gains, he refused to do so, believing that a good name is to be valued above riches.

Matched

When I was 21 an auntie who lived next door to us arranged for me to partner a local girl to a debutante ball. I soon took up with the young lady and when we married three years later my aunt claimed it was her most successful attempt at match-making. (I suspect it was her only successful attempt!)

Tricia and I bought a small property of 11 acres in Dipton, where we spent three happy years. Since farm wages in those days were meagre I supplemented my income with shearing, fencing, contract hay baling and bridge building.

After a further period of time as a farm manager in Dipton I got a job managing a Lands and Surveys block in Te Anau. It was a rugged piece of land, situated on the appropriately-named Wilderness Road. There was no power, no phone and no neighbours when we first shifted there. The stark, treeless landscape with the endless, heavily-battened North Island-style fences took some getting used to. Again we had many happy times there, working long hours for a basic wage, but learning how to farm in the process (at the government's expense).

Our only contact with the church during this time was when a tem-

porary Presbyterian minister in Mossburn found out we were Pressies and asked if he could hold a house meeting in our home. When you live in the back of beyond you don't tend to turn people away, so we agreed to have what turned out to be a series of meetings. They were interesting and we had some good discussions but it was pretty much a head thing, with little heart desire for getting close to God.

Ballot

It was some time after that meeting that we were given an opportunity to enter a ballot for a farm back in our home district. For the first time in a long while I prayed to God that we would get this farm. I suppose everyone uses God as a last resort, a final hope. Unbeknown to me, Tricia was doing the same thing and when we discovered that we'd both prayed for the block, a surge of hope went through us. It was almost as if we knew that the farm was already ours.

So in one sense we were not surprised when we were notified that we had won the ballot and were able to purchase our own farm. It seemed as if God was moving closer to us and I had a growing sense that we couldn't deny our upbringing for too much longer. We were truly thankful to God for the farm. We did believe that it was he who had allowed us to get it. He had heard our prayers and, just to thank him a little, we started going to church on the odd occasion.

Some ministers don't need too much encouragement to come calling, and seeing us gracing the pews of the church it wasn't too long before the relieving parson came knocking at our door. I didn't mind, as we had some excellent discussions over a period of time, where I was able to discover what Christianity was all about. Under the care and guidance of the minister I decided I wanted to know God personally. I wanted to ex-

perience the sense of peace that I'd always felt was possible. And sure enough, as I prayed and asked Jesus Christ to forgive me of my sin and to be the Lord of my life, I felt a change taking place inside of me. It was clear and distinct and I knew for the first time in my life that God was real and vitally interested in me as a person.

Changes

The changes in my life were evident. I felt a lifting of the pressure that had been a constant shadow over me for most of my life and I started to learn how to relate to people and to love them without expecting anything in return. It didn't all happen at once, and even now changes are still going on in my life.

Tricia had also recommitted her life to God at that time and we both became involved with the local church. I eventually became an elder and I had a great desire to work for God. I mixed with a strong evangelistic element in the church and I grew quite a bit in my faith. I got baptised in water because I wanted everything that God had for me. I wanted to be close to him; I wanted him to be so real in my life.

Eventually a new minister arrived to pastor the parish and this man talked about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He had received it and seemed to have an edge, a vitality to his Christianity that was still lacking in my own life. I started reading books about this experience and soon discovered, through reading and through talking to the minister, that the Holy Spirit was more than an experience; it was the power of God imparted into the lives of believers to assist them in living for him. I knew I needed that.

A little time later some people from Gore were speaking at our church and talked about this baptism in the Holy Spirit. I was dead keen and as they prayed for me I began to speak in a strange language — a prayer lan-

guage that God gave. It was not a very emotional happening for me but I noted from that time on the changes which had started with my conversion received a fresh momentum. Pretty soon prejudices which I had developed towards other denominations were wiped out. I had even begun to look down on people who were down and out, so taken up was I with my new lease on life. But the Lord soon pulled me up on that score and began to develop in me a love and a compassion for others.

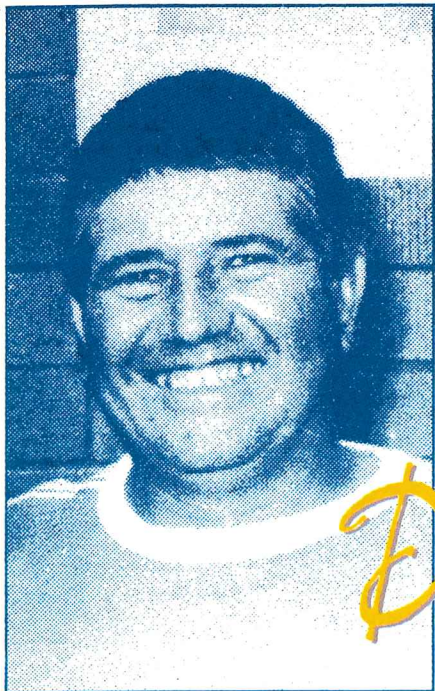
Back pain

As a result of an old football injury I had experienced back trouble for many years. Not long after receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit I was at a camp playing a friendly game of softball. As I went high for the ball I put my back out and wound up on the ground in excruciating pain. Back home the doctor prescribed tranquilisers but they were ineffective. I tried sauna baths and massage but couldn't get any relief. A chiropractor X-rayed my back and declared it would be too risky to treat me because of collapsed discs. One of my legs was starting to shrink and I was getting desperate.

Then I remembered a little sign I had seen in the chiropractor's waiting room: "Have faith in your Healer". I realized it was time I stopped mucking around and put my faith on the line. I prayed, believing God wanted me well and he healed me. It was a classic example of trying everything else first and leaving the most important thing until last.

Since that time I've been putting prayer in its rightful place — at the top of the list.

John Baird lives and farms in the Dip-ton district of Southland. He is happily married to Tricia and their four adult children have nearly all flown the nest. John is the president of the FGBMFI Chapter in Winton.



Kenneth Grey
Wee Waa, NSW

*Drifter
no more*

Kenneth Lee Grey, I find you guilty on each of the four charges and fine you \$100 for each charge."

"Phew!" I thought to myself. "That's lucky, and I still come out ahead." I had been caught stealing cartons of biscuits from the factory where I had been working and this was the outcome. Still, it wasn't too bad - I had made at least double what I had been fined selling the biscuits and by putting on a sob story the judge had been lenient.

It was just typical of my whole 30 years of life. Take what you can whenever you can. Every man for himself.

I was adopted three days before my sixth birthday and became the black sheep of the family. At 14 I ran away from home, thinking I had been hard

done by. Even when I returned home at 18 I still had trouble with my parents. Marriage did little to settle me down either.

I was a drifter, going from town to town, job to job, dragging my wife and four children with me. Not that I never had the opportunity to put down roots, just that I wouldn't accept the chance when it came along. If someone was nice to me I wanted to know why. The way I saw it was that no one offered you anything unless there was something in it for them.

After the court hearing we moved around doing seasonal work and wound up in a town called Wee Waa in north-west NSW where I worked in the cotton industry.

My son started attending a youth club run by the local Presbyterian church. One afternoon there was a

knock on the door and there was the youth director. He said that Nigel wanted to attend Sunday School classes and would we give permission. Well, that rocked me a bit. What was a son of mine doing getting interested in God? What a load of rubbish. I mean to say, where did he get crazy ideas like that from? Certainly not from his mother or me. We didn't believe in any of that stuff. As far as we were concerned when you died, you died. Nothing else. Finish. Goodbye Charlie. Religion was only for people who were scared to die and had to have something else to hang on to. I believed in God but I knew he wouldn't be interested in me and I wasn't losing any sleep over him.

Anyway, the upshot was that I told this youth leader that if Nigel wanted to go then it was fair enough with us. Then he said to me, "What about you and your wife — are you Christians?" That was enough to get me going and I gave him the benefit of my knowledge of the subject. You see, when I was 16 I used to work on a dairy farm owned by Jehovah's Witnesses and I got to know about the Bible and what was what and so I told him. I really told him, and to top it off I added some curly questions of my own.

"When you can answer those I might be interested," I remarked as I shut the door.

A few days later he was back with the answers to my questions! That really threw me. And shortly after that my son came up to me and said, "Dad, I want to go to church next Sunday. Will you take me?" That threw me again. I didn't know what to say but he kept pestering me until in the end I agreed to take him for a few weeks. After all, I thought it was a fairly heavy thing for a 12-year-old to go on his own.

The next thing that happened was that I was offered a job on a cotton farm and . . . YEP! . . . you guessed

it: the foreman was a Christian. I hadn't been there three days before he started talking to me about Jesus. I needed the job so I just shut up and listened. The casual job turned into a permanent job and I found out that the manager and the owner were Christians, as well as half the workers. When people are constantly talking about something sooner or later you have to start listening or go mad, so I started listening and asking questions and found to my surprise that I couldn't argue with the answers.

I started attending church fairly regularly because I realised that I couldn't deny that God was for real. Then I managed to get Veda, my wife, along a few times and thought that was great — until she told me that she only went along because it was easier to say yes and go than to say no and have an argument.

We moved into a house on the property, but were forced to move out suddenly when the place flooded three months later. We moved in with the foreman and his family for five days until the flood receded. With four adults and eight kids under the one roof you can imagine it was quite a crush.

Two days after the peak of the flood Veda and I were able to get a boat ride across the floodway by a neighbour, expecting to be able to start mopping out and cleaning up our home.

Our neighbour dropped us off as close as he could (about 50 yards from the house) and took off again as we were expecting to stay five or six hours.

However, when we walked inside we found that there was still two inches of water sloshing around, so could do nothing at all.

We drove a tractor down to the floodway and attracted someone's attention, thinking that they would be able to drive a four wheel-drive tractor over to get us.

Peter Kessell (who is the foreman)



came up and said no to the tractor as the level was too high. He asked if we could swim across and although both Veda and I are poor swimmers, we said that if that's the only way across, okay.

However, Peter told us to wait and he tried to contact our neighbour with the boat; when he couldn't he got hold of some life-jackets and brought his eldest son, James, back with him.

I asked him how he was going to get the life-jackets over to us and he replied that James would as he was a good, strong swimmer.

I looked at the swollen floodway and across to James (aged 16) and said "No, we'll swim across by ourselves without the jackets in case James doesn't make it."

Peter told me not to be stupid as we weren't strong swimmers and might need the jackets.

James went about 50 yards up-

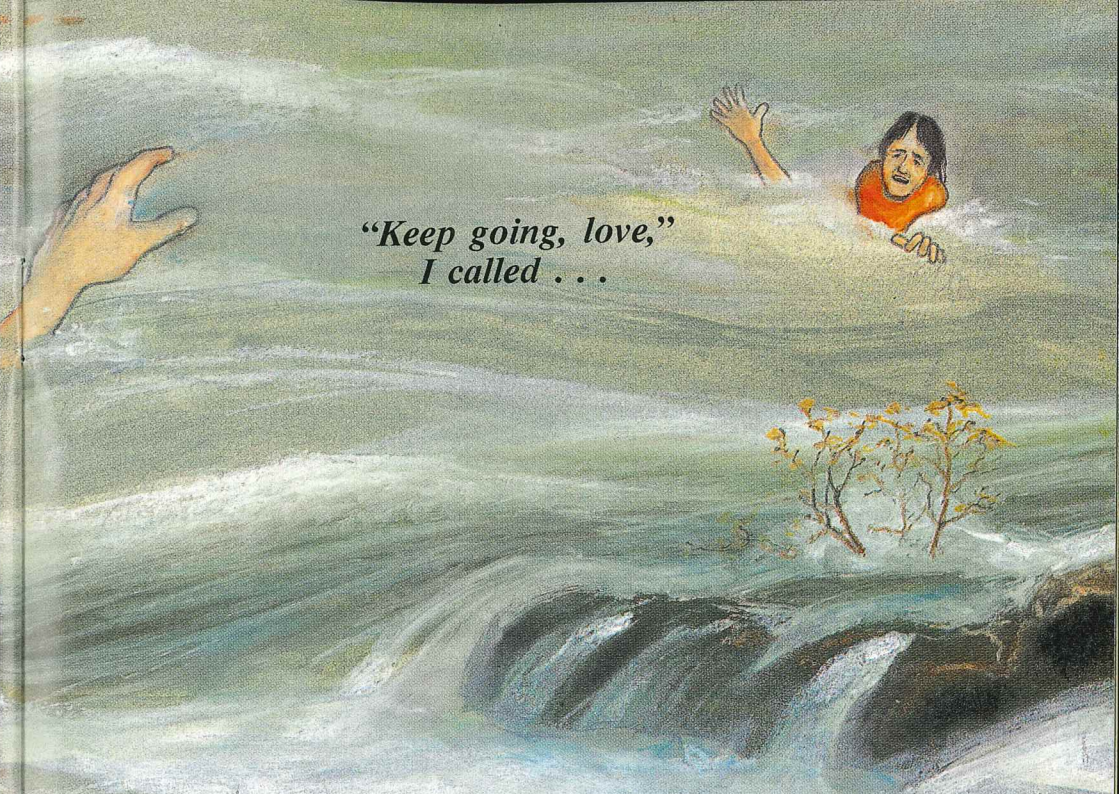
stream and got ready to swim across. Again I called across to Peter that I didn't like the idea of James trying to cross the floodway for us. I was truly scared in case something happened to him.

Peter called back not to worry as if he didn't think James could do it he wouldn't let him try.

Veda and I waded into the water up to our waists and could feel the current trying to drag us down stream. As James jumped in I prayed for him and for Veda and I. James had judged the current well and he helped us put on the life-jackets.

It was amazing how much comfort we felt knowing that at least now we could float and not sink if the worst came to the worst.

My wife and I started swimming and immediately felt the current trying to drag us downstream. James stayed beside us.



*“Keep going, love,”
I called . . .*

I can remember Peter calling out from the other side (boy it seemed a long way away) “Don’t rush it! You’re trying too hard!” I can also remember thinking, “If I slow down at all, the current will carry me away.”

I looked ahead – I was about two-thirds of the way across but I was tiring quickly. I looked around for Veda and she was behind me and going slower than me.

I called out, “Keep going, love.”

I swam some more but my arms were starting to feel like lead and my chest was on fire. I was getting nowhere and the current was starting to drag me further away.

Then, to put it quite simply, I just stopped. I had had enough – I could not swim another stroke.

I looked for Veda and at first I couldn’t see her. Panic! Then I saw her safely on the bank. “Thank you, Lord,” I thought.

The current was really starting to pull me along.

On the bank, Peter had realised what was happening. He stripped down to his jockettes and dived in and swam over to me. “Turn on your back,” he called and grabbed hold of me and swam to shore.

Once on shore I found out that Veda had stopped just before me and James had pulled her to shore too.

Neither of us could possibly have made it across on our own and there is no doubt at all that had we tried to swim across the floodway without the life-jackets, we would have drowned.

We had to stay at their place another three days before we could move back to our own home. During that time the foreman’s wife fed us, washed our clothes and in general looked after us as if we were part of her own family.

She would hardly let Veda do any-

thing at all to help. And yet, not once did she get into a flap.

The day after we moved back to our own house, we called back to see them to thank them and work out how much we owed them for all the food we ate. But they wouldn't accept a darn thing for anything!

All they said was, "We enjoyed your company."

They took us in, fed us, lifted our morale, saved Veda's and my life and all they could say was, "We enjoyed your company."

This attitude really impressed me. If this was what it meant to be a Christian then I was certainly a starter.

The other thing that happened round this time was that I broke a cartilage in my knee and had to have it removed, which put me off work for six weeks. While I was recuperating someone asked me if I wanted to go to the FGBMFI National Convention on the Gold Coast. At first I turned it down as I thought I had enough problems without getting involved in some organisation I didn't know much about anyway. Besides which I was broke.

"That's all right," I was told. "It won't cost you anything."

"What!" I thought. Why would anyone want to do that for me? Instantly the old suspicions rose up: what was in it for them?

"You've been asking a lot of questions," he continued, "and we thought that this would be a good time for you to find out for yourself."

"That's fine," I replied, "but what if I don't like the answers?"

"That's fair enough; you're not under any obligation to us," they said, "but we think you'd like the answers."

Veda said straight out NO WAY! There was no way she was going to sit down for four days listening to that stuff.

"I go to church with you. Isn't that enough for you? Besides, what's the use of going there with no money?"

I thought about it for a couple of

weeks and decided that I would go to find out once and for all whether all this spiritual stuff was real or not.

I insisted that Veda come too, but she made it clear that the only reason she was going was to have peace in the family.

We decided that we wanted to take our own car up rather than go in someone else's. That way if we decided to pack up and come home we wouldn't be dependent on what anyone else wanted to do. Trouble was, we couldn't afford the petrol — until a friend asked whether he could come with us as his car had broken down. He offered to pay for the petrol.

The foreman offered to look after our four children. The night before we left someone else knocked on our door and handed us an envelope with \$200 in it and said that was our spending money, he also was going to pay for our accommodation while we were up there. Some accommodation — 32 floors up right on Surfer's Paradise — magnificent!

At the convention I found out that I wasn't a Christian, just religious. So I gave my heart to Jesus and was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Veda was extremely sceptical for the first day. The second day she walked out of a lecture saying "Enough is enough, I just can't accept that." That night and next she couldn't sleep properly — tossing and turning all night. The last night they had a banquet and at the end the speaker said, "I wasn't going to, but the Lord has told me that there are people here that want to declare Jesus as their saviour." Hands went up. He said, "I know there is another person. Please put your hand in the air." My wife put her hand up. I was so happy, I just couldn't have described my feelings if I'd tried.

Ken and Veda thank God that their entire family is following Jesus. They still live in Wee Waa and Ken is a member of the Narrabri chapter of FGBMFI.



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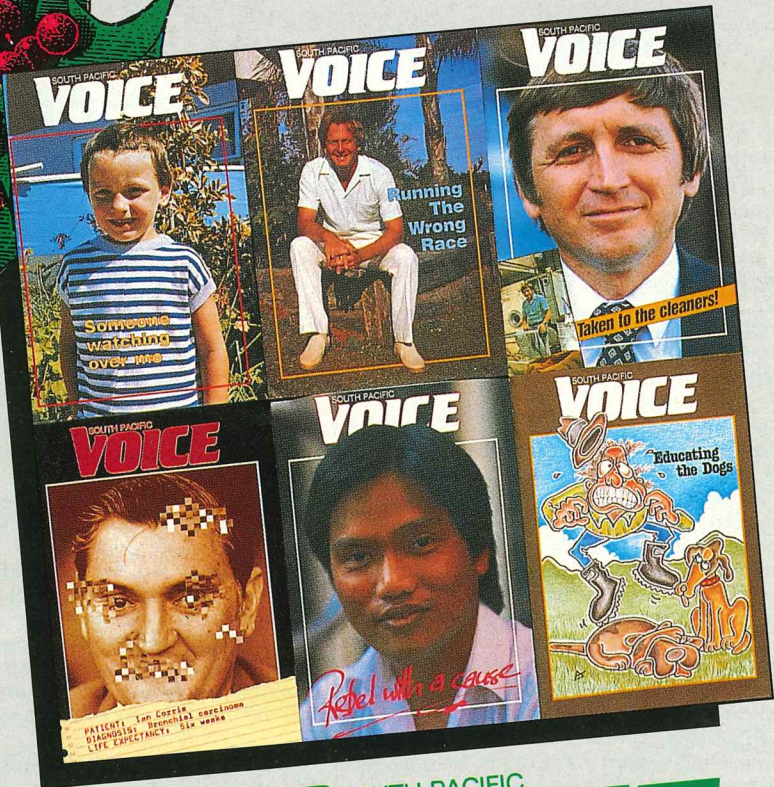
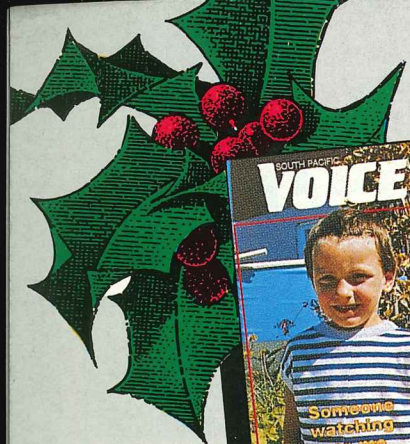
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