

# SOUTH PACIFIC VOICE

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INTER

...TOWARD THE SLOW MOVING QUEUE INCHED  
TOWARD THE TWO KUWATI GUARDS WHO  
ATED EACH PASSENGER...

TRUST ME TO TRAVEL DURING THE HOLY  
MONTH OF RAMADAN! THERE MUST BE  
THOUSANDS OF PILGRIMS ON THEIR  
WAY TO MECCA. LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE  
FORCING EVERYONE ENTERING THE  
COUNTRY TO TAKE A TABLET. PROBABLY  
TO DO WITH THE CHOLERA SCARE.

THE OFFICIALS HAD  
ONE CUP. AS EACH PAS  
WATER AND HAND

## Visa into

HE ARMED GUARD HE HELD OUT HIS  
TY PALM.

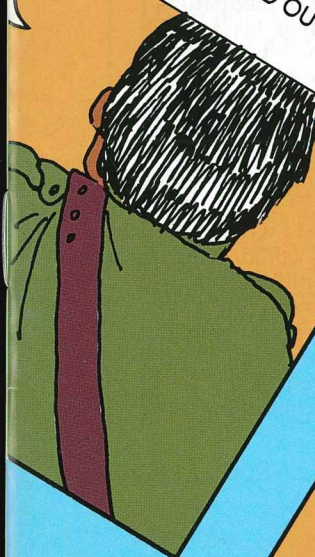
## Paradise

ER- I'VE HAD MY CHOLERA SHOT.

THE MOMENT THE OTHER GUARD HEARD THE SOUTH  
VOICE HE JUMPED UP AND PRESSED HIS SUB-MACHINE

TAKE!!

OF CO





# The Guru's Touch

Alan Carroll, Ipswich, Qsld.



**The engines screamed as the plane sped along the airstrip and lifted from the ground. I could feel myself being pulled up on huge metal wings into the blue above the clouds.**

I closed my eyes and entered into my own spiritual flight that some called paradise and some called oblivion. The air hostess may have stopped to offer me orange juice, but I transcended the banal world.

Below me, the Tasman Sea was buried beneath floating clouds.

Behind me, in New Zealand, I was leaving my former wives and my children. I blotted them out of my memory, surrendering my mind to the Absolute - the Divine Principle - becoming one with the Cosmos.

I was deep in my meditation.

When the plane began the long descent to land I opened my eyes and looked out the window. I was excited, because this was the time I would meet my Guru.

I had been involved in the Divine Light Mission for a few years, and now was my big opportunity. I had been asked to go to Australia and get accommodation and travel arrangements ready for Guru Maharaji.

It was an exciting movement. We would gather every night, listening to the teachings of Maharaji and practising his form of meditation. I was living proof that his religion worked. For years I had been a nomad, travelling from town to town, from country to country, from woman to woman. I had several children, but I never stayed around long enough for them to remember my face.

For fifteen years I had worked hard and long so that I could keep up maintenance. I would find a lonely woman to sleep with for a few months, then hit the road again. But my life had been transformed by the Divine Light Mission. I felt I had something to stay around for.

## Keep on running

Running away had been part of my life. My father had left my mother when we were teenagers, so perhaps it was bred into me. I deserted ship to get married when I was 20. But being used to adventure and travelling from one side of the earth to the other, it was difficult to settle down. So after four years of marriage, and three children, I just packed my bags one day and left.

I still remember the sound of the kids crying as I headed out the door. Years later, I drifted into a second marriage, without even thinking much about it. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but even before our honeymoon was over I knew I'd made a mistake.

It wasn't long before my wife started getting on my nerves, and we'd be fighting, and I'd feel my feet begin to itch. My escape route came in the shape of a young Indian guru!

His name was Guru Maharaji, a Messiah to the West and the leader of the Divine Light Mission. Maybe deep down, the heart of the restless wanderer was looking for something that could be relied upon: a love that would stand the test of time; a peace that would satisfy in my hour of need.

Maharaji was the one to give it to me, and my life changed. I gave up eating meat and drinking, and I stopped womanising. I tried to live a pure life, uncontaminated by illicit sex or alcohol. But it was too late to save my second marriage.

Meditation gave me peace that showed itself in my divorce proceedings. As we visited solicitors and signed papers, there was no hagglng over money, and we were not cruel to one another. It seemed like Maharaji's hand was upon me. I had been in the situation of separation before. I knew what it was like: the arguing over the furniture, the

fight over the debts and who would pay the overdraft. That's why I found it easier just to pack my suitcase and leave. "To hell with the new lounge suite - let her have it!" I would say to myself. It wasn't worth the fight. But this time it was different. I knew why and I told everyone: Maharaji was with me. I felt the Guru's touch.

## Maharaji calling

It was when the arguing was propelling me into a deeper commitment to Maharaji, that I received a phone call asking me if I would be willing to go to Australia to organise accommodation on his visit. I had nothing to lose, so I sold some equipment for my airfare and left.

Meditating in the presence of one's Guru, and experiencing his teaching at first hand was like sitting in the presence of God. I felt spiritually charged. After his visit, when my work for the Maharaji's tour had ended, I stayed on in Australia, living and working with members of the Divine Light Mission.

But when the Guru left, I felt like some part of me had gone away. Meditation lacked something: I was just sitting alone with my eyes closed, not becoming one with the Cosmos anymore. If I could be with Maharaji all the time, I thought, perhaps I would be satisfied. But he had gone away and I needed to recapture my spiritual peace on my own.

For the first time I felt like the meditation didn't work for me anymore, and I began to feel lonely. My father had been in England ever since 1954. I had not seen him in 31 years, and he was now an old man. I decided to write to him, and make contact. I began thinking about my children too. I had not seen any of them either for a long time. I began writing letters inviting my children to come



and visit me. All of them were grown up, and I hoped that seeing them would fill the gap in my life that grew as Maharaji's power seemed to dwindle.

My daughter came over and visited me and I went to England for 18 months to visit my father. But still I was lonely.

My two marriages, numerous girlfriends and lovers had failed to give me the love that I was looking for. The contacts I had re-established with my family were good, but neither did they give me any lasting satisfaction.

When I got back from England I had nothing. No job and only enough possessions to fit into a suitcase. Some devotees of Maharaji offered me a place to stay on the floor at their house. I bought a stretcher and moved into a dim back room.

It was nearly my 49th birthday, and I was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the whole thing. I had been with the Divine Light Mission for seven years - far longer than I had ever stayed with any woman - but my feet were once more getting restless and making me think about moving on.

"Half a century!" I said. "What have I got to show for it? A suitcase and a stretcher!"

I was not the only one for whom the claims of Guru Maharaji were wearing a bit thin. The Divine Light Mission was slowly dying, and as the devotees' enthusiasm dwindled, they had a meeting once a week instead of every night.

I spent the extra time returning to my old habits of drinking.

"Abstinence!" I laughed as the alcohol invaded my blood stream and my thinking. "I've wasted seven years when I could have been having a good time!"

One lady I met during that time was a closet born-again Christian, and

(as strange as it may seem) we moved in together. She was a bundle of ironies: a born-again Christian living with a lapsed Divine Lighter! She talked about Jesus to me, but never went to church and didn't tell her friends about her secret faith. Through her I became interested in Jesus, and I began watching videos of American TV evangelists. I sat on the couch and watched them waving their big black Bibles in the air, hanging on every word they said.

It seemed to me that the claims that Jesus made were similar to the claims of the Divine Light Mission. Purpose.

Hope.

Love.

Peace.

Fulfillment.

Meaning.

Isn't this what we are all looking for? But I'd had enough of self-made Gurus. They came and gave inspiration, but then they went away leaving only video-tapes of their sermons behind. Then they would die like ordinary citizens of the planet, and their devotees would have to carry on without them. What if Jesus' claim that He would "never leave, nor forsake" His disciples were true? What if Jesus still lived on after being put to death two thousand years ago? What if He was more than a great Guru-teacher — but was the very incarnation of God?

My mind was blown away by such ideas as my eyes were glued to the television, watching the evangelists. One day in particular everything the preacher was saying finally clicked into place. Yes, I thought, Jesus is what I have been looking for. He was the one I had to devote my life to. The TV preacher asked those who wanted to accept Jesus as their Lord to repeat a prayer after him.



I knew what it meant to follow a teacher as Lord - I had followed Maharaji for seven years; I wanted Jesus to be my Guru - the one who was my spiritual master and teacher.

"I realise that I am a sinner..." the preacher said, leaving a pause for the TV audience to pray the same words. I bowed my head and repeated the prayer. "...I believe that Jesus died for me to wash away my sin... I receive Him as my Lord and Saviour of my life..."

I looked up from my prayer of commitment, and saw the TV preacher beaming back at me through the tube.

"Congratulations," he said, "You're now born again to a new life with Christ!"

At first, nothing much seemed to happen, and I was disappointed. "Perhaps," I thought, "All religions are just the same — playing on people's emotions for someone's financial gain."

But as the weeks passed, I began to see that Jesus had, in fact, entered my life. I went to church and publicly acknowledged Jesus as my Lord.

A sense of guilt came over me about the fact that I was living with a woman without being married. And even though it was through her that I came to know Jesus, I realised that I had to leave her — not because I was bored and wanted to walk out, but because I wanted to do what was right. I had begun a new life with Christ as my master, and I wanted to live how He wanted me to. I went to the pastor of the church I had joined and asked him if there was any place that I could stay.

He nodded and smiled - and I ended up sleeping in the new church building as a caretaker! I was overcome by the feeling of belonging, and by the love that the people in the church

showed me. They came round to help me move in, and for working bees.

My life had been marred by brief, furtive relationships with women. I had no commitment to any of them and walked out when things got tough or if I got bored. I had remained a wanderer with no reason to stay in one place long enough to get to know the wallpaper.

All that changed when I met Jesus. I married a lady from the church and we began a life together - "till death us do part". My feet are firmly planted in the Lord's garden, and I am enjoying being under His care, never to wander aimlessly again.

Diana and I have been married now for three years, we had our ups and downs in the first year, but in handling our marriage over to the Lord and continual prayer together, God has honoured us by truly blessing our marriage.

All the things that I searched for I have found in Christ. And though the power of the Guru's turned to emptiness, I have never been disappointed by the security I have found in Jesus, my Lord.



**Alan Carroll and his wife Diana live in Ipswich, Queensland, Australia. Alan works for the Brisbane City Council, is President of Ipswich FGBMFI and serves as a deacon in his local church.**



# Looking for the Higher Power

Graham Pritchard, Napier, NZ





**When I began my first business, my partners and I made all our work decisions at the local pub over several jugs of beer.**

I had been a bit of a boozer for a few years (ever since I had gained independence from my parents) and alcohol was the centre of my social and work life. But businesses that begin in a pub with half-cut partners are not off to a good start with solid foundations!

After a couple of years we went our separate ways, and I begun a business on my own. We needed quite a bit of money to do it, so my wife Susan and I joined a Lodge in order to borrow \$10,000.

At the same time as my business venture was getting off the ground, my drinking took a sinister turn too. My intake of alcohol began increasing dramatically, and I frequently stumbled home and fell asleep on the floor. But when I was drunk, I not only lost control of my own actions, I was taken over by another force which worked through me. It first manifested itself one night when I came home drunker than usual. Much to Susan's terror, I began to speak in a strange, Indian-sounding voice.

Other things began to happen when I was drunk too — I could make objects levitate and fly around the room. I also found that I could predict the future, and see auras around people.

I had been drunk many times before, and I knew full well what it was like. But this was something else again, and I began to believe that when I was drunk I became possessed by the spirit of a dead person.

We have all seen the Hollywood versions of possession: rattling windows in dark old houses, scarey music, blood-curdling screams and the like. My experience was nothing as dramatic as what the movies

would portray — but it was **real**. It was not a magic trick or some psychological phenomena. I had somehow tapped into the power of the occult.

I did not really worry too much about it, and I even enjoyed terrifying Susan sometimes with the Indian voice from the dead.

But one day, in the pub, I saw a black aura around a man who I knew. The very next day he was dead. I had seen his death before it happened, and I was terrified.

I nearly went insane, terrified at whatever was inside me, yet unable to break away from the alcohol that triggered the supernatural events through me.

### **Just love him**

Since the very beginning Susan had been petrified of the things that happened through and to me when I was boozed, and she rang up a Presbyterian minister for help.

"My husband is an alcoholic," she told him, "What can I do?"

"Just love him," the minister said, "That's all you can do. Just love him."

To Susan, that was no answer at all. I was completely unloveable, and she could not take his advice. One night, after quite a few months had passed, I came home drunk (as usual) and collapsed on the floor of the lounge. Susan got out of bed and stood over me in disgust as I snored in my drunken sleep.

"Just love him," she heard the voice of the minister say.

She took a blanket and put it over me to keep me warm, and went back to bed. When I woke late the next morning I saw the blanket over me, and realised Susan had covered me with it. I was so moved that I began to cry.

But the hold of alcohol on my life



was stronger than one act of love, and in the months that followed I went from being a heavy drinker to a chronic drinker. I took to the liquor with such an excess that everything began to fall apart. The business I had, started showing signs of severe economic woe, my marriage began to break, and I had a couple of brief adulterous flings. Yet I did not consider my situation terribly bad; I had lots of drinking buddies who were worse off than I was. But I was bad enough to eventually end up in an addiction centre.

I hated it. I was so, so lonely. Not only did I have to admit that I was in bondage to alcohol, I was humiliated because of the damage it would do to my status as a "successful" businessman. I had never thought of myself as a "drug addict", and had never considered booze to be a drug. But both were true.

I remember taking out my aggression on a Methodist minister who visited the drug addiction centre regularly.

He would always smile, or wave, and greet me by name. I would always reply with a barrage of abuse, cursing him and his God, and shouting every obscenity, blasphemy or insult I could invent or muster. Not once did he lose his cool, or retaliate. He steadfastly loved me, and accepted me, despite my gross behaviour.

I was taking out on him deep-rooted aggression towards God and religion that had plagued me ever since I was a small boy.

### **Burning pain**

I had loved Sunday School, and I once arrived half an hour early. To fill in time I wandered across the stock yards next door to the church, and returned back covered in sheep and cow manure!! When I arrived back home my father took me and

thrashed me for going to church in that condition.

As my backside burnt from the pain, I cursed God and told Him that I hated Him, transferring my aggression for my earthly father towards my heavenly one.

I vowed never to go back to church. Many years had passed, and though the pain and humiliation of that childhood beating had long gone, my fear and distrust of churches resided in my memory like dregs at the bottom of a tea cup.

This Methodist minister's calm response to my abuse went a long way to undo my prejudice and bitterness.

Susan had come to terms with the advice from the minister who had told her to love me, and had decided to put it into practise. She had also begun to go to church, and had experienced the life-changing power of God. When I came out of the addiction centre, she wanted me to experience the same thing for myself. She nagged at me to go to church with her.

Eventually, I conceded.

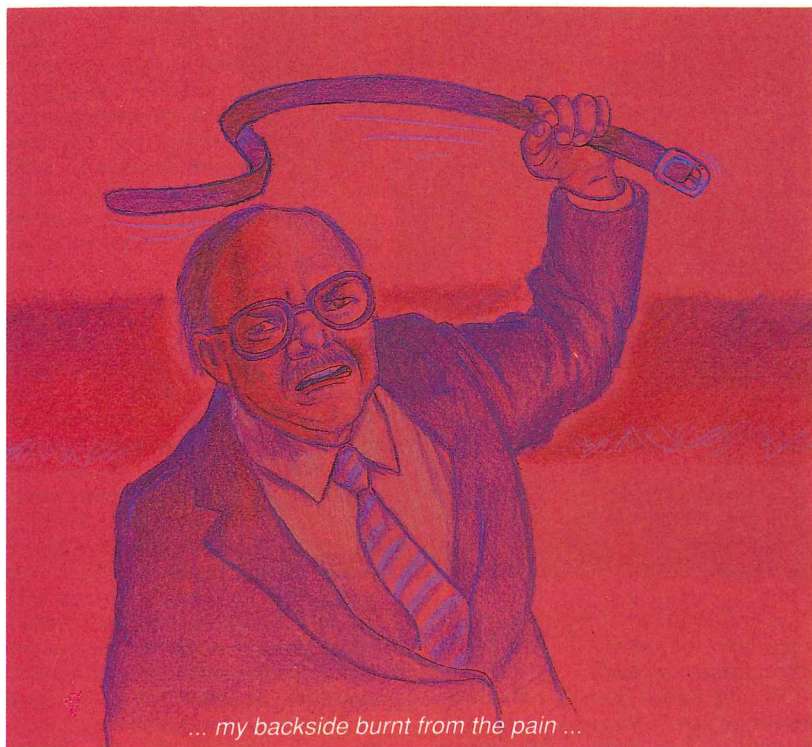
I hated the thought of church and gritted my teeth and expected the worst as I headed down to the service. There would be a tedious sermon, boring organ, excruciatingly dull hymns, and a half-hearted, half-dead congregation, I thought. My wife sat in the car next to me with a stupid smile on her face.

"Why I am doing this?" I asked myself as we parked the car and headed inside the building. "I know what it'll be like."

I was, it is fair to say, almost bowled off my feet by the service. There was no organ to be seen. Instead, young people wearing jeans strummed guitars and sang zippy little songs that were shone up onto a wall with an overhead projector.

The preacher wasn't a mouldy old





bore, he looked happy, almost enthusiastic!

I shook my head, and wondered what had happened to the old, traditional religion I had hated as a school boy. But I still had no doubts at all that the people who went to church were all loopy. The tempo may have been up-beat, but that hadn't changed the fact that religious people were essentially stupid.

### Real power

One week later I attended a healing meeting, and during the service a lady preacher asked people to come forward for prayer.

I watched one lady limp up to the front. She had one crippled leg that was a good six or eight inches

shorter than the other.

"I want everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes," the preacher said. As all the heads obediently bowed around me, I kept my eyes on the woman's crippled leg. "This I have to see," I said to myself skeptically. As the preacher laid her hands on her leg and began to pray, I stared in utter amazement as the leg physically grew six inches to meet the other leg. My mouth dropped open. This was no magic trick, no fabrication. It wasn't millimetres but inches that the smaller leg had grown.

I stared at them incredulously. I knew that the power of the occult was real, but I had never considered that the power of good might be even greater. Here I had proof that I

could not deny, for I had seen it with my own eyes.

Two days later I was invited to a meeting organised by Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship. The man up the front said, "There is someone here who has a serious drinking problem. You need to come forward and accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour."

My first reaction was: "Poor guy — I know what it's like to have a drinking problem." Then, a moment later, I realised that he was talking about me! That was it. I went forward to the front and told the man I wanted to become a Christian.

"Do you want to turn away from your alcohol?" he asked me.

"Yes, I do." I replied.

"Do you want to repent of all the things that you have been doing that are opposed to God?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to accept Jesus into your life?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," I replied.

"O.K." he said. "Then I want you to tell everyone." And, giving me the microphone, made me tell everyone in the hall what I was doing.

Yes, I was embarrassed. But it was one of the best and most important things I have done in my life — perhaps the most important. I know that in later days I would probably have given up God and gone back to the drinking if I hadn't made that public confession.

Two nights later I was back at another meeting. I was hooked on God. Susan didn't have to drag me along, I arrived early!

That night I experienced the power of God, and I was set free from the demonic influences that had chained me up inside. I knew that the strange Indian voice that manifested itself when I was drunk was not good, and the powers that I had to levitate objects and forsee the

future were somehow evil.

At some point in my life I had opened myself up to spiritual forces that took me over when I yielded to alcohol. These things were opposed to what was good and right and true, and I knew when I became a Christian they had to go. After I was prayed for and delivered, I never levitated anything or spoke in an alien voice again!

Becoming a Christian for me was like a massive spring clean. Apart from the Indian voice, there were other things I had to get straightened out: my marriage for a start. We had to get our lives sorted out and put our relationship back on the right track. My work was another department that needed attention.

My business had been floundering along for a long time and had declined to the point where it was impossible for me to trade my way out of it. I had two choices. Firstly I could go into receivership and declare myself bankrupt. This is what everyone recommended I do, as it had the least personal cost.

Secondly, I could shut the factory doors, and write to all the people I owed money to, saying I had become a Christian and that I was going to pay back every cent that I owed. This is what I chose to do. I got a job as a maintenance engineer, and gave everything apart from our basic living expenses back to our creditors.

There was one further complication. My involvement with the Lodge in order to borrow \$10,000 for the business. I believed that I had to break my ties with it, and I told them that as a Christian I could no longer be associated with them. Predictably, they immediately asked for their money back, giving me a date by which the \$10,000 had to be returned.

As a broke businessman, with many



thousands of dollars owed, I was in dire straits. It was impossible to borrow the money, and I had none of my own. The final date neared and no money was in sight. Then, two days before we were due to make payment, we received a letter in the mail with a cheque for \$10,000 enclosed. Friends had given us the money. They were not wealthy people; I knew that they had made a substantial sacrifice to give it to us.

This was the first of many incidents where I saw that God could provide for our financial needs. Time and time again we received money when we needed it, groceries when we had no food, and gifts when we desparate. It took eight years, but every cent that I owed was paid, and we became debt free. During that time God demonstrated that He was powerful and could work through us if we yielded ourselves to Him. There are many spiritual forces in the Universe. **God is the greatest, and the only holy one.** All of these spiritual powers will work through people who yield to them. When my body's natural guards were dropped down by alcohol, a spirit used me to speak and act through me. Now, as a Christian, I have yielded my will to God, and it is He who has the power to speak and act through me. The principle is identical, with one big difference: God is good, and true, whereas any spirit



*The Pritchard family — (l-r) Glynn, Graham, Ruth, Susan and Rhys.*

which tries to take possession of a person is evil and deceitful.

Once, over thirty years ago, I arrived in church covered in cow manure. I was thrashed, and told that I had committed a great sin.

Ten years ago, I went to church again, still covered in manure — not manure from sheep and cows, but the rubbish of a godless life: addiction to alcohol, spiritual possession, and bitterness. Jesus did not tell me off or beat me. He put out His arms and embraced me, taking all of my sin upon Himself, and made me clean and whole and pure again. He washed my sin from me with His pure and holy blood.

**Graham and Susan Pritchard, live in Taradale, New Zealand.**

**Graham is an Engineer, and is President of the Napier Chapter of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship.**



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Te Awamutu	(071269) 855	(082) 5852
Regional Director	(071) 559 626	



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Eyre Peninsula	(086) 26 1174	(086) 8151 37U
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Port Lincoln	(086) 864 224	
Riverland/Loxton	(085) 841 348	(085) 84 6963
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Launceston	(003) 31 8859	(003) 319 608

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East Gippsland	(051) 456 434	(03) 446 212
Echuca	(058) 89 7249	(058) 89 5155
Frankston	(059) 897 431	(03) 787 8354
Goulburn Valley	(058) 52 1136	(058) 54 8288
Heidelberg Chapter	(03) 716 2215	(03) 898 5625
Horsham	(053) 821 004	(053) 824 748
Knox	(03) 725 7394	(03) 729 7911

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Tauranga	(075) 69 538	(075) 87 144
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Whakatane	(076) 61 366	(076) 49 554
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Hastings	(070) 65 046	(070) 69 555
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Sanson	(0652) 49 022	(0652) 49 353
Wanganui	(064) 57 913	(064) 36 134
Martinborough	(553) 69 264	(0553) 69 362
Dannevirke	(0653) 26 638	(0653) 47 399

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#### Chapter President Secretary

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MacKenzie	(0505) 8426	(0505) 8323
North Otago	(0297) 23 896	(0297) 72 104
Timaru	(056) 45 934	(056) 80 167
Waimate	(0519) 8586	(0519) 7637

Regional Director (053) 83 487

#### OTAGO/SOUTHLAND

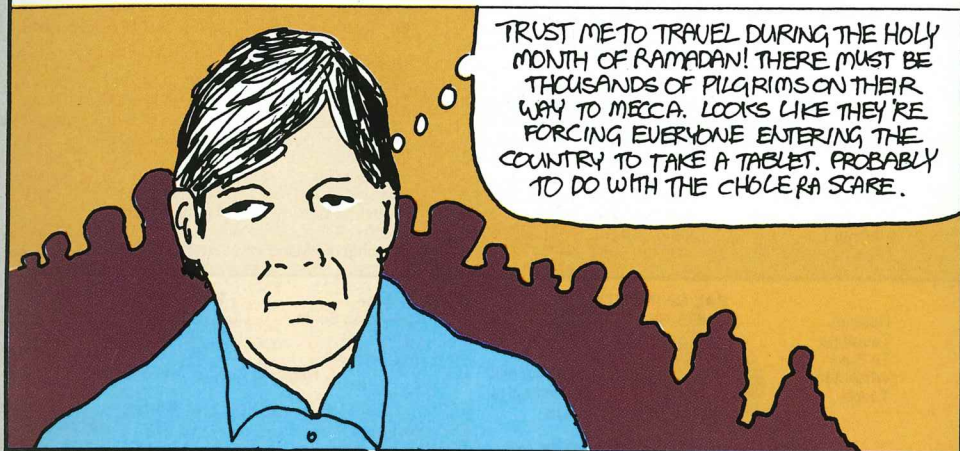
Balclutha	(0299) 83 256	(0299) 57 558
Dunedin	(024) 35 051	(024) 877 504
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Alexandra	(0294) 87 623	(0294) 88 250
Wanaka	(02943) 7861	(02943) 8494

Regional Director (020) 43 373

# Visa into

Don Straw, Mos

THE POUNDING ARAB SUN BAKED US ALL. THE SLOW MOVING QUEUE INCHED ITS WAY FROM THE BOEING 707 TOWARD THE TWO KUWATI GUARDS WHO INTERROGATED EACH PASSENGER...



TRUST ME TO TRAVEL DURING THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN! THERE MUST BE THOUSANDS OF PILGRIMS ON THEIR WAY TO MECCA. LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE FORCING EVERYONE ENTERING THE COUNTRY TO TAKE A TABLET. PROBABLY TO DO WITH THE CHOLERA SCARE.

AS I TRIED TO MOVE PAST THE ARMED GUARD HE HELD OUT HIS SWEATY PALM.



TAKE!

NO, YOU SEE, I'VE HAD MY CHOLERA SHO...



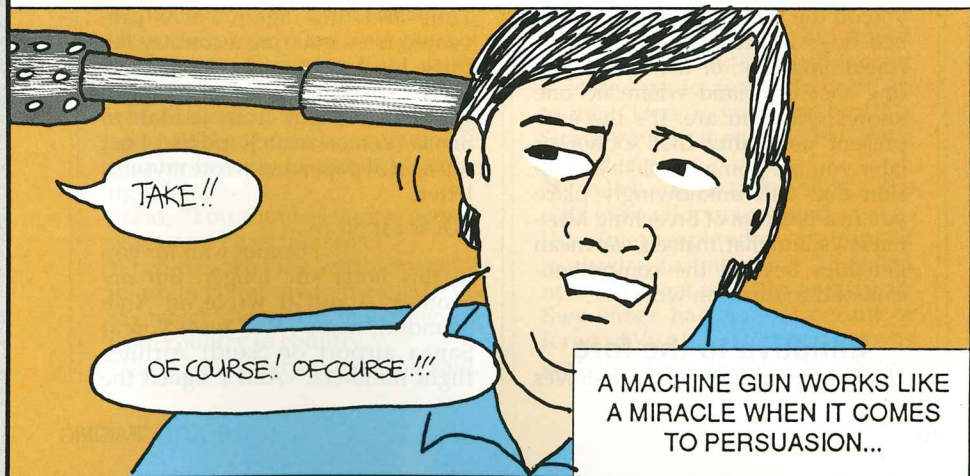
# Paradise

rossman Park, WA

THE OFFICIALS HAD ONE LARGE BUCKET OF GREEN-BROWN WATER, AND ONE CUP. AS EACH PASSENGER FILED PAST THE CUP WAS DIPPED INTO THE WATER AND HANDED TO HIM WITH A LARGE PILL TO SWALLOW.



THE MOMENT THE OTHER GUARD HEARD THE SOUND OF REFUSAL IN MY VOICE HE JUMPED UP AND PRESSED HIS SUB-MACHINE GUN INTO MY FACE.



The Kuwaiti official dipped the cup into the filthy water and pressed it to my lips — the cup that had touched a hundred or so lips before it had come to me.

I drank as little as I needed to swallow the enormous tablet, and I entered the country. But only a few days later, on the aeroplane from Kuwait to Iran, I became violently ill.

When I arrived at Tehran airport I was too sick to realise what was going on about me. Fortunately, a senior official took pity on me and packed me off to a hotel in a taxi.

I was soon to realise that my illness was more than a dose of food poisoning - I had cholera!

I lay on my back in my hotel room, praying that I wouldn't die. "God help me!" I pleaded. "I'll do anything for you if you get me out of here."

In just over a week I lost a stone and a half in weight and almost died, but I was "lucky", I pulled through.

Though I had made grand promises to God about how I'd change my ways and give half my wealth to the poor if He made me well, life carried on as normal after my recovery, as I travelled through the Arab lands.

If you want to visit somewhere exotic, I'd recommend other places. But it's not the disease that'll put you off the Middle East. It's not the bed bugs in the hotels, or the all-consuming heat, or the risk of getting shot in a land where no one knows who you are. It's the ever present possibility that sooner or later you are going to make a decision that will unknowingly place you in a position of breaching Muslim laws, and that, in itself, can mean penalties beyond the comprehension of the Christian world.

### **Initiative to the fore**

I had many run-ins and close shaves

with suspicious and antagonistic bureaucracies as I travelled on business throughout the Arab states. I worked as the General Manager of a Chinese owned Singaporean property development company with a \$200 million asset backing. I was also the Deputy Managing Director and 49% shareholder in the company's prefabricated housing subsidiary which was geared to the needs of the military in Arab countries.

Based in Singapore I spent a good deal of time travelling the world for the company.

I had my introduction to Middle Eastern officialdom on my very first trip into the area. I had just landed at Dubai, and became so frustrated with the immigration officials, that I threw my hands into the air in despair. This was misinterpreted by a guard who thought I was going to pull a weapon, so he dived for his sub-machine gun and aimed it at my head! As we stared at each other eyeball to eyeball, I prayed "God! Don't let him kill me". The look of fear on his face makes me think he prayed too: "Allah! Don't make me kill him!"

Both our prayers were answered, and I am alive to tell the tale, but it was only the beginning of my adventures.

Time and time again I was prevented from entering a country because I lacked the right documents. Out of frustration one day, trying to get onto a flight from Jeddah to Sanaa (Yemen Arab Republic) I got out a bit of paper and wrote myself a letter:

"Dear Mr Straw,

I cannot wait for you in this hotel any longer. But my brother, Abdul (I wrote an Arab sounding name), will meet you at Sanaa airport on Saudi Airlines flight number..." And I signed the



paper with an Arabic scrawl. Knowing that a great deal of acting would be required on my part to convince the immigration officials that this letter was genuine, I crumpled the forgery up and put it into my wallet, then quietly attempted to walk through the check-in chute to board my plane.

The immigration officials began to shout at me, "No Visa! No Visa!" I slowly (with great deliberation) withdrew the crumpled letter — as though I had forgotten that I had it — and handed it to the official, who then took it to his superior. I held my breath, expecting to be exposed and thrown into an Arab dungeon. I prayed to God "Don't let me go to jail, just let me get away this one time and I will never do such a thing again!"

The senior person nodded his assent, the "Visa" was stamped, and I was on my way to Yemen with my promise already forgotten. I told myself that I was not doing anything seriously wrong, only trying to get from point "A" to point "B" with a minimum of fuss and no intent to defraud.

From then on I didn't worry about Visas, but always wrote myself letters on hotel stationery, saying who was going to meet me in the next country, which flight, and what I would be doing in that country.

I was very proud of my little game at out-smarting immigration, especially when I met an Arab in Kuwait whose German construction foreman had been turned away from the country because he didn't have the right Visa.

I said, "You should employ people who use a bit of initiative!"

When he asked me what I meant, I told him about my home-made Visas which succeeded in getting me from country to country.

"Very good! Very good!" he said,

nodding excitedly. If I had known the reason for his excitement I might not have been too keen to meet with him again.

Four days later when I visited him at his office I discovered that he was Commandant of the province — in charge of immigration! He laughed whole-heartedly at the expression on my face when I realised who he was, and my boldness began to fade away.

When I came to leave the country I was not so sure that the airport officials would be so good natured about my scheme, and I was sure that the Commandant had informed them and that my exit from Kuwait would be blocked and I would end up rotting in a stinking cell in the company of murderers and worse. I was praying like crazy that I wouldn't get caught — "God if you get me out of here..." I prayed my familiar prayer. "I'll do this..." and "I'll do that..."

I passed the checkout and was cleared, I headed out over the tarmac toward my plane — and then the dreaded moment came — "Mr Straw, please come back to the terminal building."

I gasped and turned around. This was the end of the road for me. They had surely been informed of my foolish deeds and they were going to put me away for good!

As I returned to the counter, almost physically sick and trying to conceal my blind panic, an official came up to me, "Here is your passport Mr Straw, you left it on the table. Have a good trip."

My relief was immeasurable. Officials were seldom that kind.

I have met people who were trapped in airports for months — they had no Visa to get into the country, or they either had no exit permit or forward Visa to get out, or there was something wrong with their tickets

so they were stranded between the entry and exit immigration gates! I was in a similar position when I couldn't get out of North Yemen one time. However, my company had supplied me with a small number of blank airline tickets, so I simply filled out a ticket myself, writing in the number and details of the flight that I wanted to take.

When I got to the airport (deliberately just 15 minutes before my flight was due to take-off), of course my name wasn't on their records.

"I'm sorry," the official said, "Your name is not on the passenger list."

"There must be a mistake," I said, "Could you ring up to confirm it?" I was very experienced at dealing with airports by now and I knew that it took anything up to an hour to get a line between the airport and the city and then confirm a flight booking — and that the plane was due to leave any moment. There was little they could do but allow me on the plane. Anyway, who would think that this well dressed, quietly spoken gentleman would even attempt to lie his way out of the country!

I had out smarted the officials at one end of the flight - but the people at my destination proved to be less easily fooled. When I arrived in Saudi Arabia and attempted to board the connecting flight my ticket was refused by immigration. I tried to plead ignorance as they babbled away at me in Arabic and broken English. "I don't understand what you're saying," I said, hoping that they would eventually give up trying to communicate with me and allow me to continue my way home to Singapore.

Suddenly I heard a voice say — in polished English — "What seems to be the trouble, sir?" It was then I knew I was in trouble.

Though they suspected that my

ticket was forged, they could not prove it, even when the local manager of Yemen Airlines was called in — he was just as frightened as I was at the situation that was emerging —

I could only hope that they wouldn't check my handwriting against that on the ticket.

They put me under house arrest, which lasted 48 hours, and the interrogation during the first two to three hours was enough for me to begin praying again. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "Please don't let me go to a Saudi jail! I may never get out again!" Once again I made all kinds of promises to God. "If you get me out of here alive I'll never drink again and I'll start going to church." But though God did get me out, my promises were meaningless.

When I got on the plane home I filled myself to the brim with brandy and thanked "my lucky stars" that I had been saved.

## Wiped out

My life of adventure almost came to an abrupt end. With one marriage wrecked by my gallivanting lifestyle, the company decided to close its Middle East operations. I was wiped out; my financial base was destroyed, leaving me about as destitute as one could be.

But always one to rise to a challenge I headed to Abu Dhabi with my new wife and set about establishing myself in various operations.

Our time in Dubai came to an abrupt end when one of Yasar Arafat's splinter groups planted a bomb in our hotel in an attempt to "take out" members of a foreign political party who had booked a whole floor in the hotel section of the Galleria.

The bomb was unknowingly removed from the terrorist's room in his luggage, exploding in a service elevator and destroying it, along with two other elevators sharing the



**“My life of adventure almost came to an abrupt end. With one marriage wrecked by my gallivanting lifestyle, the company decided to close its Middle East operations.”**

same shaft, blowing steel elevator doors across lobbies, through brick walls, and five people into oblivion. It was the last straw. We decided to leave the violent and unpredictable Middle East and moved back to Australia, where life seemed just a little bit saner.

I worked in Brisbane, managed a property development company in Sydney, and then left my wife to return home to Perth to manage another property development business, which I later walked out of to “do my own thing” — which was mostly drinking and womanising. Though things were politically less volatile, and I could forget about crazy immigration officials (the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs became aware of my deeds and I was severely reprimanded), things took a turn for the worse and not for the better. Firstly, almost all of my money was lost in the real estate crash in which it had been invested, causing me to lose my apartment and my yacht, then my health gave out on me.

A Chinese friend who was a doctor was perturbed at my apparent “self destruction” mode, and insisted on giving me a medical check-up.

He discovered that I had an aortic aneurism, and informed me that if I moved suddenly I could die a painful death. The aortic artery had blown up like a balloon.

I was rushed into hospital for an eight and a half hour operation which ran into problems. When I awoke every muscle in my body screamed at me in pain, and my whole insides felt as though sand had been rubbed into every little niche.

“Oh God,” I mumbled, “I want to die.” I remembered all the times I had prayed and He had answered me.

I had been in many scrapes and situations where I was nearly dead (I was run over by a part loaded truck in an open cut coal mine in 1959), but each time God had answered my prayer and I had pulled through.

“Answer me again,” I prayed, “Let me die.”

But for the first time, He did not answer my prayer.

Instead, I recovered — but although my health was restored, my wealth was not. I walked down the streets of Perth and would bump into people who had once worked for me and were now either millionaires, or exceedingly well off. They would ask me how I was doing, and I would have to lie. I was so embarrassed that I had failed in business and lost everything through alcohol, stupidity and wild living — and was twice divorced.

On top of everything else, as I was unable to fend for myself after the operation, my surgeon had arranged for me to board with my ex-wife, adding to my humility. So I worked out a simple plan where I would drive my car out into the country, park it miles from anywhere and fit a hose from the exhaust pipe into the cab, relax and travel to oblivion as my lungs filled

with carbon monoxide — I would never to have to face the humiliating world again. I wouldn't have to watch as past business associates in thousand dollar suits looked disparagingly down at me in my cheap clothes. I had it all so well planned but never got to see it through.

### Honouring my dues

As my doctor had become very close to me and I had made an appointment for a post-op check-up, I decided I would honour my obligation to him before carrying out my simple plan of extinction.

"Tell me Don," he said, "How are things with you?"

"Oh they're — bad," I said, swearing violently, "I have lost everything, my self respect and even my friends treat me like poison!"

"You shouldn't speak like that!" he said.

I realised that he was a "little religious", so I said, "Look, I've read a passage or two out of the Bible, you know."

"Good", he said "Then you wouldn't mind coming to a Full Gospel Businessmen's dinner with me next Friday?"

I was trapped! However, I have always kept my word, no matter what the circumstances, so I agreed to go along and hear Dr Joy Seeveratnam, from Penang speak. I was impressed with what Dr Joy had to say, but when he claimed that God healed people through him, and then people began to fall to the floor as he laid hands on them, I began to wonder how much he was paying these people to drop down all over the place and put on such an impressive show!

My doctor friend talked me into attending a breakfast on Tuesday morning, September 2 1986, where I met Dr Joy in person. Whilst we were talking of the places we had

both visited, Joy suddenly said to me, "Don, I feel that you want to give your heart to the Lord", and he began to explain the message of the gospel in such a way that I could hardly disagree with him. Like someone who finds himself signing an insurance policy he didn't really want, I said the sinner's prayer, acknowledging Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. As I walked out of the building my head was spinning.

"How on earth did he trick me into that?" I thought. I was just as much amused at my gullibility at falling for an old salesman's trick, as angry at his gall. The bottom line was that my word has always been my bond, and I had asked Jesus into my life and promised to try and walk in His footsteps, whereas I knew that it was impossible for me to change; I always said "even the devil doesn't want anything to do with me!" Anyway, I decided to purchase a Bible — more because I was writing a book on real estate, and I needed to find "positive thinking" passages from any book where I might not be sued under copyright laws!

As I had never read the Bible I was surprised that evening in my room when I decided to take a quick glance over the pages, and found all the good parts like "knock and the door shall be opened" and "ask and you shall receive" — this is pretty good, I thought. Then I found that I could make my confession to God in the privacy of my own room — and I did.

Things went along as usual that week, or so I thought. Come Saturday and I began to dread going to church on Sunday. Then I realised that my depression was on the decline — for weeks I had been brooding on my financial downfall, and depressed at my failures — but since I had prayed, I had hardly thought about it at all. I had certainly forgot-



ten about my plans to commit suicide!

"Perhaps there is something in this after all," I said to myself, and headed off to church the next Sunday to see what went on inside those solemn looking buildings. I had only been into a church a couple of times before and that was at weddings and funerals. Whenever I had seen people there, they'd always looked so grave - but when I went into this Pentecostal church that Sunday morning, I received a traumatic shock to my system — equal to about 10 of my Middle Eastern traumas rolled into one!

Instead of a bunch of nice quiet people singing slow monotonous hymns, they were singing at the tops of their voices, clapping their hands to the beat of the music, stomping their feet, waving their arms about their heads, shouting "Praise the Lord!" and dancing in the aisles. Whatever you have seen in the churches of any denomination, it was all happening right there that morning; they even spoke in tongues! And I was slap bang in the middle of this fracas with nowhere to hide!

Here I was, a serious businessman looking for a way to financial security, not an emotional zealot who might be expected to hang from the chandelier at any moment.

When the service was over I nodded politely to the people who came over to greet me and shake my hand, but as soon as I saw a gap in the crowd I bolted to the door muttering all kinds of lame excuses for not staying on. That would be my first and last encounter with any more of those mad religious groups, I thought to myself.

### **Tentative steps**

But as the next week dawdled by, I felt bored and listless - even a little

**"I'll have to forgive some people's skepticism when I say that suddenly, so suddenly that I was still scheming to sneak out and never return, when it happened — WHAM!"**

depressed again. The only thing that I could think of that had changed from one week to the other was my decision not to go back to church. "Perhaps I'd been a bit hasty," I thought. "Maybe one gets used to the antics after a while."

So I went along next Sunday. However, this time I selected a position alongside one of the pillars supporting the roof where I could partially hide, and from where I could easily bolt out the door behind me when the going got too embarrassing for me.

The congregation began to sing — exuberantly — and clap — in fact they behaved like small but very happy children. To hide my embarrassment, I put my head down and began to "pray" (I was really just talking to God) about those nice things I had read in the Bible to date, like "ask and you shall receive", so I did. I said to God, "If you are really there God, then please take away my depression, my pride and my humiliation — and give me the happiness I see in these people in the church."

If someone had tried to tell me that my life could be changed instantaneously from one of depressive

unhappiness and broken pride to one of escalated and joyful bliss, I would have abused them — to say the least, so I guess I'll have to forgive some people's skepticism when I say that suddenly, so suddenly that I was still scheming to sneak out and never return, when it happened — WHAM! The only explanation I could give for some time was that I felt a massive blow over the head — from something that hit me inside, and as it hit me, millions of bright white lights appeared, and I was speared with a wonderful peace and happiness of such intensity I felt my heart would burst — it seemed as though I had been lifted from the ground and flung into a stream of pure love that drowned me, pouring into every cell in my body — and tears came.

I cried and cried, and I didn't care who saw me. I began to sing and clap my hands, and I cried, and when the people came up and hugged me, I cried.

Every hate, everything that Satan had placed in my heart, was washed away. My life was completely transformed in a matter of seconds — it seemed to take at least a half hour, and Jesus made permanent contact with me.

When I crossed borders from one country to another I was constantly harassed by red tape, officials who wouldn't let me into the country or who wanted to poison me with their medicine, and guards who wanted to shoot me. Becoming a Christian was like entering a new country too — entering the Kingdom of God. Sure we still have problems, things still go up and down, life has its usual dose of trials, but Jesus is the King, and He gives His followers His constant support and guidance.

Jesus stands at the gate of the Kingdom of God and offers life, happiness and peace to those who want to

accept it. And when I stood to join in the singing at that glorious, never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning service September 14 1986, I had begun a new life with my citizenship in heaven.

No visa or passport required!

NB: This testimony should not be read as a condemnation of people I came in contact with, many of whom could have put me behind bars had they so wished; the testimony is meant as a tribute to my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.



**Don Straw** lives in Western Australia, he is a former secretary of the Perth Chapter of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International; past editor of the WA Vision newsletter; founder of the Collie Chapter of FGBMI, and currently secretary/treasurer of the St George's Terrace Chapter of FGBMI in Perth. He is also the founding director of the Business Singles Full Gospel Fellowship (Aust) Inc.



## SIX SCRIPTURAL STEPS TO SALVATION

Men still cry, "What must I do to be saved?" The Bible provides a clear answer.

**1. ACKNOWLEDGE:** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23. "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" Luke 18:13.

**2. REPENT:** "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" Luke 13:3. "Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out" Acts 3:19.

**3. CONFESS:** "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" 1John 1:9. "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" Romans 10:9.

**4. FORSAKE:** "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him ... for He will freely pardon" Isaiah 55:7.

**5. BELIEVE:** "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16. "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" Mark 16:16.

**6. RECEIVE:** "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" John 1:12.

### Why not make your eternal decision right now?

"I am convinced by God's Word that I am a lost sinner. I believe that Jesus Christ died for sinners and shed His blood to take away my sins. I now receive Him as Lord and Saviour of my life and will, by His help, announce that fact to others."

**When you have made this greatest of all decisions, please let us know so that we may send you further information. Mail the adjacent coupon now.**

SOUTH PACIFIC  
**VOICE**

### Number 69

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## The Threefold Purpose of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship

1. *To witness to God's presence and power* in the world today through the message of the total Gospel for the total man, and by this to reach men for Jesus Christ, especially those having the same social, cultural or business interests as the person doing the witnessing.

2. *To provide a basis of Christian fellowship* among all men everywhere through an organism not directly associated with any specific church but cooperating with all those of like mind, and to inspire its members to be active in their respective churches.

The Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International does not start churches. Rather, we desire solely to be a service arm to existing ones.

3. *To bring about a greater measure of unity and spirit of harmony* in the body of Christ, where members are united in a common effort for the good of the whole body.

### FULL GOSPEL BUSINESS MEN'S FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL



P.O. BOX 33-424 Takapuna, Auckland.  
P.O. BOX 67, Stones Corner, 4120, Brisbane.

- Please send me information on how to be a Christian.
- Please send me further details on membership.
- Please send me further general information about FGBMFI.

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