

SOUTH PACIFIC
VOICE



**Self
Destruct**





Self Destruct

*A story of release from
the tyranny of self*

Kees van den Bosch,
Auckland

He strode through the doorway and filled the room with a mixture of fear and excitement. He was an imposing, dominating man and standing there in his Dutch army uniform he seemed much larger than life. Like a shadow standing over us. We didn't know what to expect.

That was my last childhood memory of my father. It was the beginning of World War Two. The German army was invading Holland and my father was one of many trying vainly to halt the Nazi tide.

We hadn't expected to see him home that day and were even more surprised when he left a little while later, not in his uniform but in civvies.

He looked more like a resistance fighter. He didn't say anything to us.

I didn't see my father again for nine years. There was no contact with him over that time and it wasn't until later that we found out he had been at Moermansk in Russia since the day he left us without a word. My father was an atheist and a devout communist.

As you can imagine, religion had no place in my upbringing. My father didn't believe in God in any way, shape or form and my mother, abandoned with four children, had her work cut out for her just keeping the family alive and intact.

My parents' marriage was a violent affair. There was much shouting and arguing and my father frequently took out his anger on my mother physically. There wasn't much love shown in any direction, not even towards us kids. And the war just made things worse.

Abandoned

With my father gone, my mother headed for the streets to make her way through prostitution. We were abandoned and my two sisters

became wards of the State while my brother and I, (he was seven; I was six) were able to continue living in the house.

Theoretically we were with our mother, but she had no time for us and we had to fend for ourselves as best we could. And of course, in war time the only way to survive was to steal. So we did.

We stole coal from the railway yards and sold that to whoever was buying. One time we sold nearly a whole building plank by plank.

The year was 1944 and one of the bitterest winters Amsterdam had ever experienced. My brother and I knew of an old youth hostel building on the outskirts of the city that had been closed up. We got inside and over a period of a few weeks we systematically demolished the interior bit by bit and sold it on the black market.

We left the shutters on the windows so people wouldn't know what was happening on the inside. By the time we had finished there was just a shell of a building standing, but it looked as if nothing was wrong — until we took the shutters off to start stripping the exterior weather boards.

At that point the locals realised what was going on and swarmed all over the building to get timber for themselves. The weight of all those people was too much for the shell we had left and it collapsed!

We got up to many hair-raising pranks and looking back it was a wonder we weren't caught or killed. It seemed on many an occasion that something or someone was looking out for us.

I used to hang around the bookstalls in Amsterdam because I was an avid reader. They were the only places where I could get something to read without having to pay. I would stand at the magazine

and book racks and read until the stall owner moved me on.

On one such occasion an old man noticed me as I read and approached when I was shooed away. He must have put two and two together because he asked me if I liked reading.

"Very much so," I replied.

"Look, I've got something for you if you can give me a hand," he said.

I eyed the old man suspiciously before agreeing to accept his offer. He seemed harmless enough.

We went off to an old church where it turned out he was the church librarian. In exchange for helping him bind, cover and catalogue the books, he let me read anything I wanted. In three months I'd read all the classics the library contained.

I suppose two boys running free and wild can only escape the attention of the authorities for so long and near the end of the war we were finally picked up and placed in an institution. Later we were fostered out to an aunt and uncle in whose home we lived after the war.

Catching up

I was 11 years old when the war ended and there was a lot of catching up to do as far as schooling went. But I was determined to do well.

Independence was high on my priority list. My upbringing prior to the war and the experiences throughout had taught me one thing — you can't look to anyone else for love and support. You've got yourself and no one else.

Even as a child I'd become hard and self-reliant. My heart was closed to emotion because that way no one could hurt me.

I studied hard, made up for lost time and entered trade school where I learned fitting and turning. I knew that a trade would give me the independence I wanted. On

Finding love cracked my shell and out I came. I underwent a personality change: from introvert to extrovert; from wall-flower to life of the party.

qualifying I landed a job with a big engineering firm and two years later became a leading hand. I then began studying at night school for my Third Marine Certificate.

The war reached back into my memory at 19 when I was called up for compulsory military training. I elected to go into the Navy, even though the prospect of two years in that service seemed pretty daunting. However, it was to be a life-changing experience.

Before that happened, though, another dramatic change had taken place.

I had met a friend's sister and taken rather a fancy to her. Being a withdrawn, lonely sort of guy I never held out much hope for anyone taking a shine to me. An overall sense of insecurity had given me a terrible stammer which made me feel even more isolated from those round about.

Somehow I managed to pluck up enough courage to ask her out. To my amazement she accepted. And not just once, but the second time too, and the third.

Taking a deep breath I asked her to be my girlfriend. I expected her to refuse but I had fallen in love with the

girl and there was no going back now. She said yes.

For the first time in my entire life I had found someone who said they loved me. I was stuck for words for a moment but when they did come, they flowed perfectly! My stammer had disappeared.

Finding love cracked my shell and out I came. I underwent a personality change: from introvert to extrovert; from wall-flower to life of the party.

I thought I had it made but fell head first into the trap of not cherishing the love that had set me free or cultivating it in a way that would make it grow and last.

Twenty-one days

During my stint of compulsory military training I discovered I could get my two years active service wiped out if I emigrated. That was for me. I rushed home on leave and told my girlfriend what I'd planned. In three weeks I was leaving to live in New Zealand (that was the furthest place away from Holland I could find). If she wanted to come with me she had just 21 days to decide; but whatever she chose to do, I was going.

So much for consensus decision-

making!

Well, she came with me and we set sail on an unassisted passage to New Zealand. We could have had an assisted passage but I didn't want to be bonded to any work situation when I arrived, so we paid our own way.

Napier was the city we landed in and I found employment with an engineering company while we lived with my girlfriend's sister.

Three weeks after arriving we were married and I guess even from then I had begun to take for granted the love I'd found in her. I was too concerned with my career and making something of myself to consider anyone else, not even my wife.

We were married in a registry office. I took two whole hours off work for the wedding. Afterwards I returned to the job and resumed as if nothing had happened. Talk about blind.

Sold to the job

Napier was to be our home until 1969 and during our years there our daughter was born and I progressed up the promotional ladder.

After two years I was leading hand and then made foreman. I sold myself to the job, almost literally. I ate, drank and slept the company and could think of nothing else.

I was told by my employer, though, that in spite of my capabilities and dedication to the job, I would never rise further in the industry in New Zealand because I didn't have the necessary qualifications.

That did it. At 32 years of age I began studying by correspondence from the Central Institute of Technology for my New Zealand Certificate in Engineering. I also gained British and Chartered Engineers qualifications and

continued to build my career. All the time, of course, at the expense of spending time with my wife and children.

Our move to Auckland in 1969 was a promotional move with a large firm to a middle management position. I was not liked much by my colleagues but the work I did and the results I achieved were appreciated.

I was known as a bit of a loud mouth and on frequent occasions embarrassed my wife and others around me. She tried to slow me down but I wouldn't listen. We were a far cry now from the romantic days back in Holland. I'd almost completely lost sight of what she meant to me back then.

Another promotional move to Dunedin didn't help the family situation when it came up a few years later. My wife refused point blank to move away from Auckland so I went down by myself.

For 18 months we were apart. I would come home one weekend a month and stay for three days, then head off again. And my wife would return to another man who consoled her in her loneliness.

I was angry when I found out what had been going on. I came back to Auckland but by then it was too late to resurrect anything from the marriage. Divorce seemed the only option open to me, so I took it.

With the stroke of a pen I lost my family. All I had left was a fierce pride that determined not to be beaten by any situation. I set up my own consultancy business and worked hard to establish that.

The next few years came and went and I stuck pretty much to myself and my business, which proved a successful venture. Then some friends — I still had a few! — introduced me to a single lady at a party one night.

We got talking and seemed to

click in all the right ways. It was a close, caring relationship from the start, and it wasn't long before I proposed to her — about six weeks after we'd first met. I got on well with her three teenage children, which helped the relationship tremendously.

Shirley was a Christian, but because we spent all our spare time together if affected her regular church attendance.

About three months later she received a visit from a church elder. This was it, I thought. An ultimatum for her to cut the relationship with me and get back amongst the flock.

But no. To my surprise, all he wanted was for her to return to church. Now that struck me as being a pretty level-headed approach to the situation and so I reckoned I could go to church with her just to give her a bit of support. That was the plan, anyway.

We ended up going regularly for a year after that. It was a strange twist for me, having spared hardly a passing thought in my entire life for God and such like. I wasn't a Christian by any stretch of the imagination. Just a pew warmer, doing my bit for God and family.

These situations have a strange way of turning around and I found myself signed up for a combined church choir that was being put together to provide the music for a series of what they termed outreach meetings.

During the rehearsals I felt a tremendous conflict ripping away inside me.

On one side I felt I had no right to be singing in a church choir about things I didn't even believe in or understand.

On the other I had my pride.

I felt a complete hypocrite, but there seemed to be no way out so I stuck with it, wondering all the time if

there was a God and if he'd strike me down for singing things I didn't believe in.

The battle continued as the outreach series started. I made it through the first two nights doing my singing and listening to the sermon, which surprised me with its honesty and simplicity.

On the third night the preacher read out some parts of the Bible in his sermon and they stuck in my mind like glue.

One was this: "*Before you were born I knew you...*" The words went round and round inside my head.

The next night I sang again but my mind was still gripped by the words I'd heard from the preacher. And then while he was preaching it seemed as if a kaleidoscope of my life's events flashed before my eyes and in an instant I knew that *God knew who I was*. He had been with me, watching out for me from day one. He knew all about my hair raising adventures as a kid in the war; the lack of love in our home; my needs and hurts. In fact, he knew me better than I knew myself!

Calling me

I couldn't stop the tears flowing as I sat there listening. I knew that God was calling me; letting me know that there was far more to life than I had ever experienced.

The preacher gave an invitation for people who wanted to turn their back on the past, get free from their sin and come face to face with the living God to come forward for prayer.

That was for me. I was off. Straight out of the choir rows from behind the preacher and down to the front. I was born again.

Going to church after that took on new meaning. Our marriage went into top gear. I became less and less self-centred, realising that I had to

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give myself to Shirley if our relationship was to blossom and continue to grow.

God became part of our daily lives, teaching us how to support and enjoy each other.

On one occasion I was getting ready to go and play tennis. I loved the game. So much so that I spent far too much time at it at the expense of my relationship with Shirley.

I was heading out the door in my whites, knowing full well that Shirley was upset by me going. But in a typically male response I told myself it was my life and I was entitled to do what I wanted, when I wanted to.

As I stepped outside I instinctively knew I shouldn't be going — not if I valued my marriage. Neglect had already cost me one family.

"Okay, Lord," I reasoned. "If you don't want me to go, make it rain." It was a little overcast, but nothing that would hinder a game of tennis. I thought I was safe enough.

But then it hit. It absolutely bucketed down! I had to laugh as I put my racket back in the cupboard and got changed out of my whites. God has his ways of getting through to us.

Coma

In 1983 tragedy struck. Shirley suffered a massive stroke that put her into a deep coma. The doctors said

she would never come out of it.

I was devastated. My whole life seemed to crash in around me. I did the only thing anyone can do in such situations: I got down on my knees and prayed my heart out to God.

While I was praying I saw a picture in my mind of Shirley up and walking, completely well. Was this for real, I wondered? It seemed that God was telling me she would recover.

That was Wednesday night, the day after the stroke hit. On Thursday I was back at the hospital, where I told the doctors I believed Shirley was going to recover and that one day she would walk out of the ward.

They looked at me sympathetically and tried to explain that Shirley had no chance of lasting even through the weekend. But she did.

Her family were with her around the clock. We took it in turns to be there.

During church on Sunday a friend showed me a passage of scripture from the book of James, chapter 5 and verse 14. "*Is there anyone who is ill? They should send for the church elders, who will pray for them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. This prayer prayed in faith will heal the sick person; the Lord will restore them to health...*"

I thought to myself, "I'll have some of that thank you!"

I went to the minister to ask him about it and with a smile he said he'd

been waiting for me to come. So we gathered up two of the church elders and headed for the hospital. There were 12 people visiting, so I read them the passage from James and explained to them what we were going to do. The elders and the minister laid their hands on Shirley, who was still in a coma, and prayed for her healing.

We waited. One minute. Three minutes. Five. Finally, after ten minutes had passed and I was beginning to think that maybe praying for the sick doesn't really work, Shirley opened her eyes. The coma had been broken.

The doctors tactfully suggested that it may have been better had my wife not regained consciousness, because it was unlikely that she would ever be more than a vegetable. That was pretty hard to take considering the taste I'd just had of God's healing power, so I kept hanging on to the vision the Lord had given me of Shirley's recovery.

Three weeks later Shirley's voice returned and I was able to hold conversations with her. It seemed that her healing was going to be a gradual one, but each step brought joy to both of us and we saw God rebuild our lives together.

Today Shirley is a vibrant, outgoing personality. She is still impaired on the right side of her body but she is walking again with the aid of a frame. We know that in time God will restore her to health and our faith gets stronger as Shirley's body takes each new step forward.

It is a relief to know that God knows all about us. Having encountered him in my life I no longer have an overpowering need to prove myself to anyone. I am who he has made me and he accepts me for that.

Sure, I'm still an extrovert and have to remember to keep Kees down

from time to time so that Jesus shines through. But having found love and acceptance through Christ I know that nothing is so important as letting other people know of the hope that can be found in him.



Kees van den Bosch lives in Auckland with his wife Shirley where he is self-employed in engineering development and marketing. He is a member of the West Auckland chapter of Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.

Facing six years in the slammer was not my idea of success. Yet here I was, at the peak of my career as a solicitor, caught with my fingers in the till and with nothing to look forward to but iron bars and cold, lonely nights.

My working life had started off far differently — the classic Yuppie lifestyle — though in those days the term hadn't been invented.

By the time I was married at 22, I had had a good secondary education, spent several years at Auckland University studying law, and had been employed by a leading divorce lawyer.

I had attended a very severe Methodist Sunday School where I received the impression that heaven was going to be very sparsely populated. I played the organ at the church for a while. It was all a pretty joyless sort of duty.

At 22 I was married to Gillian. I had known her since my early secondary school days. Her father worked for the Telephone Exchange in Mt Roskill where I lived. He knew that I was a bit of a tearaway and used to ride a motor bike around the district when I was still only 15. It took him a long time and 3 grandchildren before he got over the marriage.

My own home life was good. I had loving parents who made many sacrifices for my brother and for me.

At 26, Gillian and I had two children, I had qualified as a lawyer and together with a contemporary had bought the practice of a deceased lawyer. My partner and I both joined the Freemasons because the practice was made up mainly of Masons or their families.

I chose to join a Research Lodge and stayed with Freemasonry for about 10 years.

By the time our third child came along we had a very nice home, a 32-

Inside Story

Les Vercoe
Auckland

foot launch, two new cars and numerous overseas holidays.

On one occasion when my wife was away with her mother, I had a row with the father-in-law and took the three kids off to Sydney (First Class of course) for the weekend.

It was always life in the fast lane with everything that a successful lawyer needed. I was making most of my money out of matrimonial cases, which was a pretty depressing occupation but lucrative. There were the usual stresses and strains on the marriage. I drank pretty heavily. We entertained a lot. But we got by and lived pretty comfortably.

It was March of 1975 when I was



37 years old that the mud hit the fan. I was arrested and charged with theft by misappropriation. The sum involved was almost \$500,000, which was a very large sum of money when you consider that our beautiful home, complete with heated pool, air conditioning and central heating, was only about \$25,000.

My partner was arrested as well and charged in respect of a smaller amount. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two years imprisonment. A couple of months later I also pleaded guilty and was given six years. I do not consider that any grave miscarriage of justice was perpetrated in my case, although at

the time I was bitter about the discrepancy between the sentence given my partner, and mine.

It was a shattering experience to face my first night in custody.

First there was the indignity of a search of all my bodily openings by an officer who was reputed to have homosexual tendencies.

I get very annoyed when I read some of the ill-informed comments made about prisons being like a home away from home where the prisoner lives in the lap of luxury. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I looked for a way to kill myself on that first night but there was none.

The day after I was sentenced I wrote to Gillian and asked her to obtain a separation because I could not see the end of six years.

I was sent to Paremoremo for classification, then back to Mt Eden where I became involved in a dispute with the then Minister of Justice, Dr Martyn Finlay, and then on to Wi-Tako, a minimum security institution in the Hutt Valley.

All through our marriage Gillian had attended the Titirangi Anglican Church. The vicar from there visited me several times in prison at Auckland. When I went South he had a mate who was the vicar at Taita. He came to see me at Wi-Tako. He brought me a book and a block of chocolate. The chocolate was a prohibited gift and I had to smuggle it inside the prison.

For the first year or so I decided to make the Justice Department sorry that they had me. I do not think that I made much impression on the Department, but I certainly gave the superintendent of Wi-Tako plenty of worries.

At Wi-Tako there was a chaplain who was a devout Christian but one who didn't avail himself of the Holy Spirit's power in the daily challenges he faced. He was doing a most difficult job: he was a prison officer who wanted to spread the gospel, but the inmates looked upon him as part of the establishment and refused to trust him. He suffered with heart trouble and it was quite some time before he found that the Holy Spirit could help him in that difficult ministry.

During my first year at Wi-Tako I started to attend the communion service on a Sunday morning. A small group of inmates began to gather together and speculate on spiritual things. One was serving a life sentence for murder, one was serving four years for manslaughter,

another was doing four years for theft as a servant and a former pastor had a four year sentence for indecencies, as well as me. Eventually we started to meet one lunchtime a week with the chaplain for prayer and a discussion.

After I had served a year I was granted church parole and the vicar from Taita started taking me out to his church. I was a reluctant parolee, to say the least. I had applied mainly to get out of the prison confines.

One Sunday a man behind me stood up in the middle of the service and started to talk in the most unusual way. I found out later it was the gift of tongues, but at the time I wondered what I had got into. The outcome of all this was that at the lunchtime sessions with the chaplain it was suggested that a Life in the Spirit seminar be conducted within the institution.

The vicar from Taita agreed to help, as did a number of other church people from the Valley. The seminar was held both in a classroom at the prison and in the prison chapel which was situated outside the walls. About 15 inmates took part and they all completed the course.

After the first couple of nights it became clear to the leader of my group that I had a major problem with bitterness and that this was affecting my ability to respond to the word of God. It all came to the surface at the mention of my former partner.

I started to have a recurring dream in which I was shown the blank cover of a *Life* magazine. My partner's initials formed on the cover.

That was the dream and when I discussed it the next seminar night my friends led me through a prayer of confession, where I renounced the bitterness I felt towards him over getting such a light sentence.

I have not been successful in trying to contact my former partner

to this day, but I believe that one day we shall meet. I have no doubt that I shall be able to put things right with him at that time.

One Sunday parole during the third and fourth week of the seminar, my vicar friend took me to see a man who had a similar background to mine and who had met with the Lord in the same prison I was in. The two of them asked if they might pray for me and did so. They asked the Holy Spirit to come upon me. This had no apparent effect on me but seemed to make my friends happy.

Eventually I was returned to the institution and locked up for the night. As usual, I listened to the National Programme for a while after lock-up and put my light out at about 10 o'clock.

After dark the Lord came to my locked room and ministered to me for several hours. During this time the spirit of hatred and bitterness was exorcised from my body.

I was ministered to for the whole night and the next morning I shared my experience with a couple of close friends. The change in my behaviour and in my person was dramatic. My greatest ambition was now to pray with others to receive the power of the Spirit the way I had done.

Every inmate who took part in the seminar received the Lord into his life and all received an infilling of the Holy Spirit. I am in contact with several of them after 11 years and they still love the Lord.

At that time there was a system which allowed most inmates a 72 hour home leave each two months. On my next home leave, my wife asked me to "relax". She was convinced that my spiritual experience was just a line to impress the parole board.

In fact it did not impress the parole board. I actually served three days more than would normally have been

the case for a sentence like the one I received. But I was dramatically free in a much more important sense.

The last two and a half years of my sentence were much easier to serve than the first one and a half years. There was a closeness and a sense of community with the other Christian inmates. I found it easier to live a Christian life inside than it was after release.

My wife and family had a hard time of it while I was away and I count myself very fortunate that we are still a family. Since I came home I have found the support of Christian friends most helpful and necessary. One lawyer friend helped us with finance to buy a home.

I blew my first job, but with help I now have a business which is able to support the two of us while my wife builds up a small retail shop. All the children have left home and we have recently become grandparents, just before my 50th birthday.

Gillian and I have always been keen on music. While I was at Witako one of my church parole sponsors gave me a guitar and some of the Polynesian inmates taught me to play. I was able to use this skill when taking services in the M3 ward of Oakley Hospital. This was a ward (since closed) where those referred to by society as "criminally insane" were housed. I found much love and hunger for the reality of God in that place.

If I were asked to sum up my testimony in a word, that word would have to be "restoration". I happen to be interested in old cars. When a collector restores an old car it usually ends up better than new. That has certainly been my experience.

Les Vercoe practices as a business and tax consultant in Auckland.

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a tan bucket hat and a brown sweater over a plaid shirt, stands in a garden. He is holding a shotgun. The background shows a house and lush greenery with small white flowers.

A Taste Of Freedom

Steve Lubas
Tasmania

“You’re a trouble maker, Lubas, and you’ll be one to your dying day!”

These words from a fellow worker on a building site after I’d clobbered the foreman over the head with a milk bottle echoed in my ears as I reached for yet another beer.

I was in my twenties and already on the way to becoming an alcoholic. I’d reached the stage where a drink after work was no longer enough and had to be supplemented by a sip from a flask now and then while on the job.

I suppose the pattern for my life had already started to form when in my early teens I began going around with gangs of bikies in North London. We wore studded leather jackets and were known as “Rockers”. Our main enemies consisted of groups of fashionably dressed teenagers known as “Mods”. Unlike us Rockers, who blasted along the roads on snarling motor bikes, the Mods chose the smoother, sleeker scooters as their mounts.

I don’t know why we hated the Mods but most Saturday nights we went looking for them and trouble, which often included a brawl outside a dance hall or pub when bottles and bike chains were the instruments of our hatred.

One night I remember feeling ten feet tall as a small group of us bikies elbowed our way through a larger crowd of Mods and they just melted back to let us through.

One thing about being in a gang, people might either hate you or love you but they sure didn’t ignore you! It gave you a feeling of belonging and power although at times I didn’t always want to go along with what the leaders said.

Some of the fights we got into seemed pointless, but if you didn’t shape up to the gang rules you were out. Anyway, there wasn’t much time for thought once the boots

started to go in. And a gutful of beer or whisky doesn’t exactly make you the most rational human being.

As time went by I switched gangs, finally finishing up with a group who included blacks and Jews on their hate list. I suppose I needed some philosophy upon which to blame the anger I felt, and the gang’s fascist philosophies seemed to fulfil that need.

In my more positive moments I did try to improve my job prospects by signing up for some engineering studies at night school. But this didn’t last long: I was kicked out after repeatedly arriving drunk for class.

With my drinking problem going from bad to worse, it wasn’t long before even riding my motorbike became virtually impossible.

To my drink-fuddled brain the bike seemed to be developing a mind of its own and was turning against me. Twice I was involved in accidents which could have killed me.

How I managed to keep my job I’ll never know and my life became a routine of secret drinks at work during the day and then drinking myself insensible in the pub at night. One morning after a particularly heavy night of boozing I awoke out of my stupor to find myself covered in dried blood! To this day I have no idea what happened.

Although I loved bikes and they had always been a part of my life, I had reached the stage where I was no longer capable of driving without risk of a serious accident.

About this time I began to have a growing feeling that some outside force was influencing my life; something evil seemed to be overshadowing me and affecting everything I did. Even when I was completely drunk I couldn’t escape the feeling that I was being enveloped by a dark cloud.

I figured the best way to sort out what was going on was by attending spiritist meetings. I mean, if anyone knew about mysterious forces they should.

It wasn't long before I was experimenting with ouija boards and the like, but instead of helping me find any answers I became more and more confused.

One night while engaged in my usual pastime — drinking in the pub — I got talking to a couple of New Zealanders who told me of a better life that could be found in their country.

That set me thinking. Wouldn't it be great to start afresh. A new life, leaving all my problems behind. Realising that this could be my only chance I promptly applied for immigration. However, I soon found out that immigration visas are not easily obtained. It turned out that I was unable to qualify for New Zealand Immigration due to my lack of job qualifications, but while I was going through the process I spotted a vacancy for which I could qualify: a contract worker in Australia.

A new start in a new country sounds great, but of course you can never leave your problems behind. They have a nasty habit of going with you.

The new country and new job quickly became routine and old habits continued, with drinking during and after work as part of my normal day.

One day a bloke by the name of Tom, who shared the same boarding house as me, invited me to his room. Since I regarded him as a bit of a "rough diamond" I was more than surprised to see Christian posters and a Bible in his room.

Seeing me looking at the posters, he looked me straight in the eye and asked, "What do ya think of Jesus, then?"

Side-stepping the question, I replied that I thought all church people were a bunch of hypocrites and religion was so much garbage. He didn't pursue his questions and that was that, I thought.

Later in my room I discovered an old Bible left by some previous tenant, so one night when there was nothing that appealed to me on television I decided to dip into it and see what this fellow Jesus was all about. In spite of myself, Tom's question about Jesus had touched a nerve somewhere.

Well, it looked to me to be nothing more than an old-fashioned philosophy book, written in hard-to-understand language as well. So the next time I saw Tom I gave him my considered opinion, "It's a load of old rubbish!"

And that, as far as I was concerned, was that.

A few days later Tom happened to mention that there was a good movie on the tele that night. Strangely, that evening I didn't go to the pub to get sloshed as usual, but settled down in my room with a bottle to watch the film.

It was one of those Hollywood biblical epics made in the fifties with a cast of thousands and much extravagance. A large part of it dealt with the life of Jesus and I found this fascinating. So much so that I forgot my bottle and when the film ended at 11pm I searched around to find the old Bible to see if Jesus really did say those things he had said in the film.

Sure enough, there they were. The New Testament came to life for me that night and by 3.30am I'd also got through Isaiah, which talked about the "great light to come".

In a flash I realised what spiritual darkness was all about and for the first time for years went to sleep sober with my mind still trying to grapple with thoughts of God, Jesus,

good and evil.

As if that wasn't enough, next day as I passed Tom in the hallway he called out, "Hey, Steve, you fancy coming to church today?"

Talk about unexpected! However, I had plenty of excuses which I always kept ready for occasions when I wanted to get out of something. But for every excuse, Tom had an answer. Finally I had to agree, reasoning to myself that I'd go just once, disagree with everything and never go again.

"Anyway," I conceded, "what made you ask me to go to church?"

He gave one of his sly smiles and said, "Everyone needs God and last night I got a message from him to ask you to church."

"From God, eh?" I said sneeringly, "and when did he tell you this?"

"Just after 11pm last night," he replied. That was the very time I'd picked up the Bible. My mouth was suddenly very dry. What was going on here?

I don't remember much about that church service, except that someone was saying that Jesus died for me.

After attending for a few Sundays I had plenty of arguments to put to Tom about sin and judgment and the born again stuff.

I couldn't let it go and every time I saw him I tried to disprove his arguments by logic. Finally he could take it no more. "Look, Steve," he said. "There's only one way you can prove it for yourself and that's to ask Jesus into your life. So how about getting on with it?"

In the end I agreed to put it to the test. The next time I went to church I braced myself and when the minister called for anyone who wanted to accept Jesus Christ as Lord of their life, I went up for prayer.

There were no claps of thunder or flashes of lightning, but something

happened beyond anything I'd previously experienced and I intuitively knew that I'd done something momentous.

During the next few weeks my habits changed. Without doubt the biggest change was that I gradually lost all desire for alcohol. When I think of how I'd depended upon booze to get through each day, well it was amazing.

I still depended heavily upon cigarettes though, and this worried me. So, getting on my knees one day, I asked the Lord to help me. I felt him saying, "If you want to give up smoking, then now's the time."

Straight away I threw my packs of cigarettes into the garbage bin and felt a complete sense of freedom for the first time in my life.

I was hungry for more of God, so one day I prayed that he would show himself to me in some way. That night I was awakened around 4am to see the room filled with light. Suddenly the words "the love of God" filled my head over and over again.

I felt that nothing in creation could be so fantastic as that absolute feeling of joy. I underwent such a release of happiness that I sobbed and cried for several hours. It was the most extraordinary experience of my life and it served to dispel any doubts I may have had that God had a purpose for my life — a life that I had so nearly destroyed.

Since then God has given me the ability to share my faith in the very pubs and hotels that were once my second home. I take every opportunity to explain the love and life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

Steve Lubas lives in Hobart Tasmania. He devotes a large part of his time to helping out at 7HFC Christian radio station.



The Art Of Living

Heiner Meier
Coonabarabran, NSW

Unanswered questions. That was pretty much the story of my life, especially as far as spiritual matters were concerned.

As a child in Switzerland I would be taken to church, where I observed the rituals with great fascination. With a child's imagination I believed that the altar boys' little bells were rung by the angels and the red light at the centre of the altar was a sign of God's presence. I saw old ladies cover their eyes with their hands as they felt God come near; while nearby men were sound asleep.

I envied the ladies and wondered why I could not feel God. I said my prayers daily (sometimes saying them a few days in advance so I could enjoy some time off) and tried to keep the ten commandments. I worked hard at school and scored high marks.

WHY WOULD A BOY LIKE ME NOT FEEL GOD?

I had no answer.

After high school I studied to be a surveyor, graduating at the age of 24. The whole world lay before me, full of opportunity. I felt there was nothing that couldn't be accomplished with hard work. I had a well respected job, good money, security — the recipe for happiness, so I thought.

In 1970 I was married and my wife Martha and I decided to see what Australia had to offer as a potential home. It was pretty exciting and I quickly became consumed by the survey work I was doing in and around Sydney. So much so that the two children born to us became Martha's responsibility. I had no time and little inclination to learn the true role of husband and father.

Naturally enough, this fixation on my work brought tension into our home. Attendance at Sunday church became increasingly difficult for Martha, who felt acutely the

hypocrisy in our lives. I was less worried, figuring that it was better to hang in there and earn my way if not into heaven, then at least into the second best place: purgatory.

We continued going to church but never expected much from it. I was a long way away from my childhood ambition to "feel" God. Perhaps God was only for some people, I argued.

Back to nature

Perhaps a step back to nature would brighten up our lives. It was painful to give up my profession but the land had strong attractions of its own. There was a sense of adventure, of getting out of the rat race and doing your own thing.

We started on a 1000-acre wheat and cattle property near Coonabarabran, NSW, and it wasn't long before the implications of what we'd done quickly became apparent. I had exchanged a stable income, security, confidence, friends, business contacts... for what?

I felt alone in an unfamiliar and hostile environment — and it wasn't just the climate. The locals were sceptical about Johnny-come-latelies who were here today and up and away in six months. That was just the sort of encouragement I needed.

I kept telling myself that things would be different once we had the electricity on and the house finished and somewhere to store the grain and water and once we had cattle yards and proper machinery.

But when we achieved those goals there was still an aching emptiness in my heart. Where was the enjoyment, the sense of adventure that I'd come here to find, the new friends to share our experiences with? Was I missing out on something? Or was I just getting older?

Early in February, 1982, Martha and I attended a renewal weekend

with our local church, hoping to find answers to get a spiritual boost in our lives. Sure, we learned some new songs and enjoyed the talks but by the end of the weekend I was pretty confused. To say nothing of the embarrassment of being totally ignorant about the Bible. I'd never even owned a Bible, let alone read one. So while other people were flicking the pages from one verse to another, I was fumbling with the contents page trying to find my way from Luke to Leviticus.

Some things struck home, though. Like the part where Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I thought that was a pretty direct thing to say, and it rattled me. Perhaps getting my act together with Jesus *was* the way to a better life.

Driving home I remarked to Martha that I would look into this relationship with Jesus business or forget religion completely.

Video review

That night I lay in bed exhausted, but unable to sleep. That stuff about Jesus being the way, the truth and the life kept going round and round in my mind. I was looking for a better way.

I wanted eternal life; well, it was better than eternal death, wasn't it? And I respected people who told the truth, though I often failed to tell the truth myself.

Come to think of it, I had missed the mark in all sorts of areas. I felt ashamed and unclean as my memory went into recall mode and started showing a video review of my life.

Next thing I knew there were tears in my eyes and I was whispering, "Oh, Jesus, have mercy on me, hypocrite that I am. I know who you are, the son of God, and that you died for me. And all these years I've just put on a religious act. I want to live for you now and for the rest of my

life."

Tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy as I knew beyond doubt that Jesus had touched my life and fired it with a new purpose for living. I found it so amazing to think that Jesus had his eye on me, following me over thousands of miles of ocean, waiting and waiting until I was broken enough to cry out to him.

Morning broke and with growing excitement I informed Martha that a new episode in my life had begun. We talked that morning like we'd never done before and Martha also made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

We were like children on holiday, full of the quest for discovery. I purchased the only available Bible in the local newsagent's and read it hungrily: there was a lot of catching up to do. My heart was fresh with praises for my Creator and soon I received the full presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has given my family and me a brand new life. Through my association with Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship I have learned the art of living a balanced life, accepting responsibility for home, work and church activities and keeping them in proper perspective.

The harvest of my life is satisfying to me because I know the Farmer and call him my Friend.

Heiner and Martha Meier live on their property, Yumeina, in Coonabarabran, with their two children Ivan (16) and Nicholai (13).



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