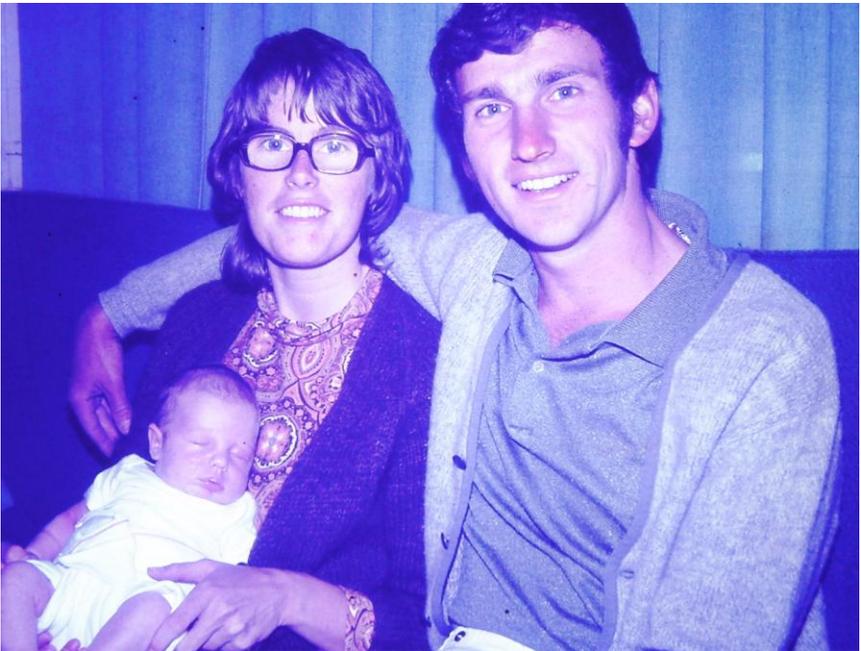


ONE MAN'S JOURNEY



The story of an ordinary Kiwi by
Fred Needham

Childhood

I became a Christian about a month before I turned twenty one. For my twenty first birthday my mother organised a small family and friends celebration (that was all I wanted) at our home in Auckland. At the end of the evening I was helping my aunty with the dishes and she said to me about my new faith, "It's all pie in the sky and you will only get hurt and disappointed." Forty five years later I can only say that the opposite is true. I wish that I could have persuaded my aunty that she was wrong. I want to tell you my story so that you won't be like my aunty. Please read it.

I grew up in Auckland in the 1950s and first half of the 60s and I look back with gratitude on those days. Loving, hardworking parents and a younger brother and sister made up the family that I was born into and ever since I have been old enough to appreciate my upbringing I have never ceased to be thankful for it. I started my schooling at Owairaka Primary School, had two years at Wesley Intermediate and finished with four years at Avondale College. We lived in the same street the whole of that time, surrounded by mostly the same neighbours and I think that the stability of all this and of our parents has had a very positive effect on our lives.

Our parents names were Ron and Mary. Allan is eighteen months younger than me and Margaret four and a half years younger. We were your typical happy family of those less cluttered days. Quite a few families in our small no exit street didn't own a car, we knew almost every card game played (including Poker and Pontoon) and until I was thirteen only two houses in the street had telephones. The first time Dad gave someone our new telephone number he gave them his war number and I still remember the surprise I got when I answered the phone to hear Dad's English accent! He had never sounded like that in normal life.

The firm Dad worked for closed down for three weeks every Christmas and we would head off on our annual big holiday, sometimes picking Dad up as he walked out the factory doors. Our usual destinations were a beach campground or Palmerston North where Mum's parents lived, though twice we crossed Cook Strait to visit Mum's sisters who lived in Dunedin and Southland, exploring awesome places like the West Coast on the way down. I have so many great memories from these family holidays that I still treasure. So many fun filled days with surprises here and there and some mischief thrown in. Grandad didn't own a car but he and Grandma used to cycle into town. They would have been horrified to see how and where Allan and I rode their bikes at times!

Dad suffered a serious leg injury during the Battle of Alamein in 1941 in North Africa. Although he was in the New Zealand army, he was picked up by British medics. Apparently if it had been the New Zealanders who treated him first they would have amputated almost his whole leg but the British didn't want to make that call and so patched him up as best they could. It was a five year recovery process for Dad but he ended up living a relatively normal life after that. He was not able to follow his heart and go farming but even with his stiff leg (a bullet had completely smashed his knee) he could chase us down when we were little and drive a car with the help of a hand clutch.

Dad was a sporty person and when the Mt Albert Rugby League Club (Dad's first name was Albert and we lived in Alamein Tce, Mt Albert; ironies that have always fascinated me) opened a branch nearby he took Allan and me along to join. I was seven so Allan would have been only five and a half! We were determined little players and once we got hold of that ball anything could happen, including tries being scored at the wrong end of the field! So long as we got our oranges at half time we were happy.

About the same time a new Baptist church was started beside Owairaka Primary and when people came round the neighbourhood asking if any children would like to go to Sunday School we weren't asked, just signed up again.

Mum joined me up with Cubs, the junior section of Scouts, and took me there weekly for a few years but then I joined Allan at Life Buoys at the much closer Baptist Church.

The rugby league went well for a few years but I developed a fondness for doughnuts, apple pies and especially chocolate cake and began to put on a bit more weight than I should have. I reached the point where I was too heavy to play in my own age group and had to play with boys older than myself. I wasn't a "tough" boy and after being knocked around a few times by the stronger, faster, older boys I stopped playing league and joined a soccer club.

The only memory I have from a whole winter of playing soccer is when I once played goalie and let 4 goals through in the first half. One of the other boys in the team was so disgusted by my performance that he took over as goalie for the second half and let through 5!

I wasn't any good at soccer – too slow and a bit too solid – and when the next winter came round I didn't play any sport. In the summers we had been going to the newly formed Owairaka Athletics club. I liked it enough but I was not a sprinter and the longest race we ever had was 100 yards. In handicap races, which most of them were, I seldom managed even a third placing, no matter how big a start they gave me. A dominant memory from those evenings is of sitting in rows with the other boys getting constantly growled at for disruptive behaviour (all of us, not just me) while we waited in our skimpy uniforms to be taken over to the shot put or high jump. In the various school cricket teams that would allow me to play I invariably batted about nine or ten,

rejoiced if I made it to double figures and occasionally got a wicket if I had the uncommon job of bowling a few overs.

I did try a summer playing softball when I was about ten or eleven and like the soccer I have only one memory from a whole season. Our team was fielding and I was the third base catcher that Saturday morning. So there I was, standing on third base dreaming about something and not concentrating on the action at all. The ball was pitched up to the batter who hit it square on, a real scorcher. The smack of the bat on ball woke me up from my dreaming for me to see the ball flying straight at me, as I stood there with my glove hand hanging on my hip. Before I could react in any way the ball crashed into my open glove which miraculously closed around it. The batter was out and I was an instant hero, cheered and congratulated by all for taking such a great catch!

There is another interesting sporting memory from those pre-puberty years. Wesley Intermediate was quite a new school and the year that I arrived for Form One a swimming pool was built. To celebrate its opening races were held. I made it through to the Form One Boys final. We all lined up and ferociously flayed our way to the other end. It was all so close that they decided to swim it again but they pulled me out. I was devastated not to be getting another chance until my teacher told me that I had actually won it and they wanted to have another go at finding second and third! Such are the sporting highlights up to this point in my life.

Turning Point

Around this time two major things happened in my life that have affected me to this very day.

The first one occurred about the time I turned eleven. It was a typical Life Buoy evening where we played games and learnt how to tie a particular knot or whatever it was that they used to teach us. Towards the end of the programme one

of the leaders gave a talk about Jesus and how he had come from heaven to die on a cross so that if we asked him he would forgive us for our sins. At the end of his talk the leader asked if any of us boys would like to ask for this forgiveness and for Jesus to come into our lives. I knew about all this because I had been going to Sunday School for several years but had never felt the challenge before to actually do something like saying yes to it. Two other boys and myself went up to the man who had given the talk and said that we wanted to ask God for his forgiveness. For me something happened then that I had no understanding of and didn't for another ten years.

I was only a boy but I was serious about my commitment and I meant it as best I could. It was time for me to learn to pray and each night once tucked into bed I would say my prayers. I would start by asking God to forgive me for my sins of that day then think about what else I could pray for. I never could think of anything else and would soon be asleep! I started attending Bible Class on a Sunday morning but we were a rowdy bunch of boys difficult to control. The only success our teacher had at keeping us quiet was when he read us a chapter of a WW2 naval story each week!

During this time the second major event occurred.

At Wesley Intermediate we used to have one Physical Education class each week during which we did various sporting activities. I remember how useless I was at gymnastics but by now I had lost a bit of weight and grown quite fast to be the tallest in our Form One class. One morning our PE teacher had a new challenge for us. A two lap race around the two rugby fields; a total distance of about half a mile. None of us had ever raced or probably even run this far before but off we all went. After half a lap I found myself somewhere in a running race I was very unused to. In the lead! And I stayed there almost to the end, finishing second. It didn't matter that the two best runners in the class

were away that day. I came second in a race and I had loved running in the lead for as long as I had. The following weekend Mum and Dad took Allan away on a league club trip and I went to stay with Auntie Lucy and Uncle Bob. On the Saturday I ran around their section for twenty minutes or so and on the Sunday ran down the hill, over some horse paddocks and around the league club field. I finished up with sore legs but I had fallen in love with running. I had just turned twelve.

I started running round “the block” after school a few days a week and gradually built up until I wanted to see how many laps I could do. Kevin, the boy next door, was my official lap counter and water provider. I managed 21 laps, with a few drink stops and a hose down, a total of 10 miles. After I had been “training” a while I challenged the second fastest boy in our class to a one mile race and beat him. A few weeks later I challenged the fastest boy to the same and in front of a small group of interested class mates I easily won again. My running career was well under way.

An interesting side effect from the running I was doing was that my school work began to improve. I think because I was learning to apply myself to something and my self esteem was rising. Through the next five years at school I had many running adventures and highlights and my schooling went well also. The four Avondale College years were a great time for me.

One race I have never forgotten took place when I was in the Fourth Form. It was the annual School Cross Country Championships, and there was a shiny new trophy to be won in the Intermediate grade. I was the favourite to win it but there were three other very keen runners who also had their eyes firmly on that impressive prize. With less than three weeks to go to the race I came down with a very bad cold or perhaps the flu and had a week off school and training. I wasn't worried about it because I was all over it with a week

to get my legs back into full running mode. Plenty of time I thought.

So the race duly started after Allan had brought glory to the family by winning the junior section. We hadn't run very far and the four of us were well clear of the rest of the field. One of the boys was setting a cracking pace and I began to struggle to keep up. Horrors! At the halfway mark I felt terrible, I was only just hanging on and began to think I was only going to come fourth. In fact I resigned myself to it. Then one boy dropped off the bunch. I should get third now, I thought. Next thing Richard pulled away and I had no answer. He left Keith and me in his wake. By the time we came back round to the bottom of the school sports fields with a kilometre to go he was nearly 100 metres in front and the sports master told me later how delighted he was to see one of his students giving me a beating.

We then went out of everyone's sight behind a long straight row of trees. I thought of Murray Halberg at the 1960 Olympics 5000m and how he took off with 1200 metres to run and I decided my only hope was to try the same. I managed to drop Keith and slowly pulled Richard in. I closed on Richard and feeling that I might win after all I gave it everything to pass him. I was in the lead with 400 metres to run. We came back into the school grounds with a straight 300m line to the finish. I could hear someone close behind. It was Keith but I held him out by one second. I have always considered it one of my best ever races.

Another effect of my love for running was that Sunday mornings became the big training run of the week with the rest of the boys: Bible Class with its war stories totally dropped off the scene. My 5 second daily prayer died out, and with that all my thinking and interest in God died as well. By the time I was 15 I was well and truly finished with any belief in him. I fled any mention or discussion of him and could not understand why there were still a few boys in

my class who did have a faith. How could intelligent people believe in all that old God stuff anymore?

Into the Work Force

I had no idea what sort of job or work I wanted to do but Dad thought that becoming an accountant would be the way to go for me because I was good at mathematics, a desk job would be ideal in allowing me to put plenty of energy into running and the remuneration seemed quite attractive. So towards the end of my sixth form year I went for a number of interviews at accountant's offices in central Auckland and obtained a junior position to start in the following January. The plan was to work in the office and go to university part time, thus funding myself while doing my degree in Accounting.

At the end of the sixth form year (1965) ten sixth and seventh form boys and two of our teachers made up a group that travelled down to Lake Waikaremoana to cut part of a new track that was being planned to circle the whole lake. This turned out to be another life changing adventure for me, though it didn't show up until about three months later when I was struggling to cope with life in an accountancy office.

My school life finished and we had our last family holiday, a three week trip round the South Island. South Westland made a lasting impact on me with its rugged bush and glassy surfaced Lake Paringa. I have longed to revisit the area ever since, next time taking it much more slowly.

With that great holiday over it was time to start my adult working life, wearing a tie all day in a busy downtown Auckland office. My head was full of the beauty of Lake Waikaremoana and the South Island. I was a true city boy, hardly ever having been on a farm or into the bush, but suddenly, without realizing it yet myself, I had become a different person, in love with the great outdoors. The endless

numbers on invoices and balance sheets gave me no pleasure or inspiration. As well as that I wasn't coping with the much longer working day than school day when it came to running training, which was on the verge of petering out altogether.

Then something quite devastating happened! I started my university studies. Two units for the first year; Maths One and Accounting One. With some excitement I attended the first Maths lecture at which the lecturer in a supersonic 90 minute session covered the whole of my sixth form year. I hadn't done any maths studies for about three months and suddenly I found myself in way over my head. The next lecture was only a few days away and when it came I wasn't ready. I couldn't understand any of it. But that is only half the story. At my first Accounting lecture it was like listening to a man speaking in a foreign language! I had not done Book Keeping at school and therefore had no idea of what accounting was really about. Dad's idea had seemed a good one to us all but now everything was turning to custard very quickly. It was a hot, humid summer in Auckland, running was pretty well gone from my life, my heart was longing to be back at Lake Waikaremoana and I was being tortured in the office and/or at university every day.

There was only one course of action. Become a deer culler!

I had just read Barry Crump's deer hunting story, "A Good Keen Man," some of which was based at the old Te Puni Hut at Lake Waikaremoana, a short walk from the new Te Puni Hut we had been staying in. We had walked over to that derelict hut and had seen Barry Crump's name carved into the table. Now I could enter into all that adventurous life and escape this accounting nightmare. Mum was devastated when I told her I wanted out after two weeks of university, begging and pleading with me to keep trying. I managed a few more lectures for her sake but it only got worse so that I handed in my notice to my employer, who was very

understanding. My unsuitability for an office job had not escaped his notice.

The man responsible for hiring deer cullers listened to me and talked with me about it all and told me that really I was not suited for the job. I was too nice a city boy! Not rough enough to cope with everything involved. So I quickly formed Plan B. I would apply to become a National Park Ranger Trainee and wrote away about that. It was early April and the reply letter informed me that appointments were made in October. Included on the list of qualities and experiences that helped young men to get a trainee position was farming, which I had no experience of and thought it would be helpful if I did so I applied for a few jobs and got one on a dairy farm at Putaruru.

It was 2nd May, 1966 when I arrived on the bus from Auckland to start a whole new life, working with cows and calves, driving a tractor, feeding out hay and silage, chipping thistles, mending fences and so on. I loved it from the first day. Within a few months I had dropped the plan of becoming a park ranger for the idea of aiming to become a sharemilker and then buying my own farm one day. After a year at Putaruru I felt like a change and got a job on a Town Supply farm at Ardmore. It was great being so much closer to my family in Auckland and my new boss encouraged me to train as an Artificial Insemination Technician. I really enjoyed that work, driving round the district of Franklin inseminating cows, meeting lots of farmers and earning quite good money.

In Putaruru I had made a good friend, Harvey, who lived at the beginning of our road on his parents' farm and was working with his brother there. We kept in touch after I left Putaruru and met up from time to time, especially when he got a job in Auckland. We would often have long, deep and meaningful conversations into the early hours of the morning about the important issues of life as we saw them in our late

teenage years, including discussions about God. Harvey had a Baptist background and a belief in God and sometimes tried to explain that belief to me. One such time he challenged me, when I got to bed that night, to ask God out loud to show himself to me if he really existed. Harvey was certain that if I prayed that prayer God would answer it. So I said I would. I felt that I had nothing to lose. I didn't believe he was there but if it so happened that he was it might be a good thing to know. After all he was supposed to love me, want to look after me and give me eternal life, things not to be sniffed at really.

And so that night when I finally made it to bed, out loud I asked God that if he loved me and he really did exist would he please show himself to me so that I could believe in him. In the morning no revelations had occurred. Life went on as normal and I soon forgot all about that late night prayer. I was 19 at the time.

A year later I flew across the ditch to try and get some work as an A I Technician in New South Wales. While there I had a few weeks to wait regarding getting this job and during that time Dad had a heart attack. In her letter Mum said he was alright, don't worry and I didn't need to come home, but I became very homesick. Hanging around in a strange town where I knew nobody, waiting for this job to happen got to me and I decided, "Forget it. I'm going home. I want to see Dad." In less than 48 hours I was back home, unannounced and causing a big surprise but I was so pleased to see my family again.

Change of Tack

I got a job on a dairy farm at Te Awamutu but that turned out to be a rather unusual situation and when the opportunity to work back on the farm at Putaruru came up I willingly took it. Thus I found myself back there after an absence of

two years. The only real difference was that the guy who took my place was still there and I would be working alongside him rather than the farm owner. Graham was my own age and we got along very well. Milking time was discussion time and so every morning (I was actually only milking in the mornings) we nattered our way towards breakfast.

There was one peculiar thing about Graham that totally perplexed me. He went to church twice every Sunday, morning and evening, and also on a Wednesday evening. What a terrible waste of time and energy by a seemingly intelligent young man! I loved Sunday mornings. Often I would walk out to the back of the farm and through the neighbouring sheep farm. It was so beautiful. Or else I ran up to the end of the road and through the pine forest. That was so beautiful also. I loved Sunday mornings! Fancy spending most of your day off at church!

I was intrigued by Graham's faith and beliefs. Amongst the numerous strange things he believed was that God made the universe and us. We are not a product of evolution. Could anyone really believe that in this day and age? I couldn't, that's for sure. Our discussions went on morning by morning on a wide range of topics and although he could see reason in most things when it came to the Bible he remained immovable in his deception. He gave me a little booklet concerning creation and evolution and after reading it I said to him, "Even if I came to believe in God I would still believe in evolution." Our discussions were causing me to think though, and while he didn't have all the answers he was never rattled by my objections and scepticism.

Another thing he coped with very well was my language. In his presence at milking time I often swore excessively, really turning it on when something didn't go my way, such as a cow kicking the cups off. Perhaps I was trying to show him who was the real man around the place!

One night I had a dream. By now my heart was starting to soften a little bit towards this God stuff because Graham kept telling me that God loved me, which is one thing I remembered from Sunday School days. I knew that I was loved by my family but inside myself I was wanting more than that. So my heart was probably creaking open a tiny bit. In my dream I was working on my own out on the farm, forking silage onto the trailer, shifting young stock and mending a broken fence. Unbeknown to me my father was secretly following me around all day, hiding behind trees and watching me. He was carrying a tape recorder and every time I swore, which was frequently and loudly, he recorded my outbursts. Then he went home and carried on with his normal life. Whenever his friends came to visit him they would at some stage say to him, "What a fine young man Fred is. You must be very proud of him." He would reply, "Yes, I am, but just listen to this." Then he would replay the unedited recording of my terrible language. At this point I woke up and for the first time in my life I knew that God was speaking to me, through that dream.

In my own eyes I was truly a fine young man. Hard working, polite to my elders, honest in everything I did, friendly, and I never swore in front of my parents, their friends or anybody who should be respected. Yes, I was a pillar of society, a fine young son to be proud of. Suddenly I saw that I wasn't really that fine young man at all. A fine young man is the same in front of everybody, not just a selected few. I was simply a foul mouthed show off who would have been ashamed if my parents actually knew how I spoke. Inside myself I knew that I had to do something about it but I also saw that it was a much bigger problem than I had realised. Swearing was out of control in my life. I had a level of control when it suited me but after that it was a non stop flow.

I said to God, “If you are there and you want me to stop swearing then you have to help me.” For my part I immediately began to pull myself up when I found myself swearing. I couldn’t stop starting to swear but I could stop part way through. All that day and all the next day when I found myself swearing I would stop. On the third morning I had a fencing repair job to do after breakfast and I went up to the shed to get what I needed. This shed only had an earthen floor. I picked up a small cardboard box of post staples that was on the floor and the other necessary materials and tools and walked down the drive and across the road. Just as I was about to open the paddock gate the damp bottom of the staple box gave way and a couple of hundred staples gleefully scattered to the ground. I stood there, dumbfounded, because not a single word of any sort came out of my mouth. I looked at those staples, spread all over the ground, and I was truly amazed.

Two years later a very minor swear word popped out of my mouth when I discovered I had lost my glasses but that is the only time in more than 45 years.

This sudden stopping swearing experience had quite an effect on me. I started going to church Sunday mornings and reading more stuff that Graham gave me. At the Putaruru Baptist Church they had communion most Sundays but I would not take it because I knew I was not a Christian yet. However, there came one Sunday morning when as the bread and grape juice were being passed round I took it. Then in my heart I asked Jesus to come into me as I ate that bread and drank that tiny cup of grape juice. I felt nothing but I wasn’t expecting to I suppose. I had certainly meant that prayer though.

After church we came home and I went for my regular run up the road and through the forest. The next few days were very normal. Part way through Wednesday morning as I was working out in a paddock it suddenly dawned on me that I

felt different. I just felt different, good. I knew God was there and an inner peace came which has been with me ever since. It was May, 1969, about a month before I turned 21. Soon I became hungry to read my Bible and do little studies. I went to prayer meetings as well as church and I sang hymns and Christian songs with gusto and joy. I became like Graham! A puzzle to my family and friends. A close friend said to another of my friends, “We’ve got to get that religion out of Fred.” But it wasn’t “religion” that I had. My loving heavenly Father had come to me and I was a new person.

How does such a radical change take place in a person’s life? Although I was a party to this change, I know that forces greater than myself were at work and without them there would have been no change. A change from complete disinterest and denial to wholehearted acceptance and a lifelong involvement thereafter. I am still amazed by it!

I can’t give all the answers to life’s questions. I can only say that God came into my life when I didn’t deserve it. I was a God-denying, foul mouthed, arrogant teenager and, as I came to see later, controlled to a large extent by self pity and pride. First he chipped away at my unbelief and brought me to a point of willingness to inquire. Although through my teenage years I was not interested in him at all and would read anything that argued against his reality, I now believe that my reaching out to him as a ten year old boy unknowingly set the course for my whole life. I soon dropped and forgot about that commitment but God never did. He watched over me as I grew into adulthood and brought me to a place where I would reach out to him again.

And when I did very quickly he began to teach me about myself and himself. The things that I learned and am still learning about myself are often too embarrassing to want to write about but the things God has been and still is teaching me about himself and the life he has for me are so wonderful that I want you to learn them too. That is why I am writing

my story. An everyday story about an ordinary Kiwi caught up by his loving creator. One of the most important lessons any of us need to learn is that God wants to live our lives with us and us to live our lives with him, on a daily basis. He is not controlling nor into using standover tactics but rather he patiently teaches us how to surrender ourselves to him and come to realize that he knows best in everything and only wants the best for us.

A new Adventure

I began my new Christian life with no idea that I could have a relationship with God similar to a friendship with another person. I thought that God talked to the “world” and loved the “world.” At first I had no understanding that God loved “me” and would talk to “me” on an individual basis. But as the early months turned into a year and two years I was finding that when I talked to God he knew what I was talking about (the normal issues of life as they related to me specifically such as finding a new job, moving to a new town, working out my finances, finding a wife and so on and even going to the dentist after a long build up of problems) and he worked these things out for me. I began to recognize that he was working these things out and I began to hear him speaking to me. Yes, me! I have never actually heard him speaking to me with my ears but mainly through circumstances, my conscience and from the Bible. But when God speaks to you you know it and it changes you.

Let me give some examples of how God has worked in my life.

The greatest thing to happen to me in this life was to marry Heather Burt. This is how that special event came to pass.

In 1970 I obtained a job in Kawerau in the Bay of Plenty working in the forest that supplied the two paper mills in that

town. There I attended the Baptist Church and was drawn to a girl whose family were part of the congregation. Her name was Christina.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1972, an English couple arrived to live and work in Kawerau, Frank and May Burt. They had emigrated to be nearer their two daughters, one of whom lived in Tauranga. Frank didn't want to come to the other side of the world without the security of having a job lined up but wasn't able to arrange anything in either Tauranga or Mt Maunganui. He was a builder and while still in England the nearest to Tauranga he could find a job in that line of work was Kawerau, so Kawerau it was. I actually met them on their first day in Kawerau and got to know them quite quickly because they began attending the Baptist Church as I was. Their daughter Heather used to come across from Tauranga regularly so I was getting to know her as well.

It was coming up to Easter and Heather arranged for me to join a group from her church who were travelling down to Feilding to attend an annual Easter Convention. I was very keen to go to that convention and I was also very keen not to spend the long holiday weekend on my own in Kawerau, where I lived in a small room in the Single Men's Village. Four days of being on my own in that deserted accommodation and town did not appeal at all. So I was really looking forward to being picked up and taken to Feilding but with only a day to go the whole trip fell through. I was very disappointed and resigned myself to four boring days on my own in Kawerau. It was too late to book a bus ticket to get up home to Auckland as I had done the previous year.

On Good Friday morning I went to the combined service at the Anglican Church. Frank, May and Heather were there and after the service they invited me back to their place for lunch, which I gladly accepted. After lunch it was decided

that we would all go for a drive to Ohope Beach. This really appealed to me because I knew that Christina was there at a church Easter Camp. I would get a chance to see her and have a chat! At Ohope we soon located the camp group, playing a ball game down on the beach. As far as chatting up Christina went it was a total non event. She was so obviously chasing round after a guy there that within a few minutes I realised who was important to her, and it wasn't me! Hopes dashed. And not for the first time I might add.

To finish off Good Friday I stayed with the Burts for dinner. As we talked during the day Heather told me about Faith Bible College and how she was enrolled for the second half of the year to do their Bible and Christian Life study course. My interest in doing the course began to grow. Also that evening as we talked about our jobs etc I offered to take Heather for a walk up Mt Edgecumbe, the 800m symmetrical volcanic cone right on the edge of town.

So the next morning Heather and I, with our lunches, set off to climb Mt Edgecumbe. We didn't make it to the top but we got high enough to have a great view as we ate our lunch. I had dinner with the Burts again that night and we talked about all sorts of things, including Bible College. I was getting more interested in this Bible College.

After church on Sunday morning I went back to the Burts for lunch and for the afternoon we all went for a drive to Lake Okataina. I was having an enjoyable Easter after all, not boring and lonely in the slightest. After yet more questions about Faith Bible College that Sunday evening I decided to apply for the next term starting in August. At least I would know one person there, Heather. I was excited about my decision.

On Monday morning the Burts picked me up from the Single Men's Village and we all went for another big day out, this time over to Rotorua and a walk through The Buried Village. That evening Heather dropped me off at my village

and as I said goodbye to her and walked down to my room I realised something. My heart was fluttering! Strong flutters too. It had been a lovely weekend with her. We had talked about so many things over those four days and found that we had much in common. I would rather be seeing her again the next day than going back to work or going anywhere.

A long two weeks later Heather's mum, dad and I went up to Tauranga. We met Heather and she took us out to Faith Bible College at Welcome Bay where we met the Principal, Des Short, discussed with him things about the half year course they had those days and took a good look around the campus buildings and grounds. It looked like just the place for me. During those two weeks after Easter I couldn't stop thinking about Heather and the Bible College and by the Friday before we went up to Tauranga I was quite churned up about it all. On that Friday evening I was reading my Bible in the book of Exodus when suddenly a verse seemed to jump out at me. It was Ch 33 vs 14, The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest." I felt that God was saying something to me but I didn't really know what, other than I did need some calming down. So I got to see Heather again and the Bible College and I was still feeling excited and perhaps worried all at the same time as we set off to drive back to Kawerau, a journey of nearly an hour and a half. Suddenly, about half way home I realised all the tension and turmoil had gone and been replaced with a contented peace and I remembered God's word to me two days earlier. I thanked God for his hand upon my life.

From then on I got to see Heather every weekend. We started writing letters to each other every week and our friendship blossomed. The rest is history.

Right from the start there was one thing that has stood out to me about that Easter and that is the order that God worked events out. First he got me to be in Kawerau for those four days when I had been determined not to be. Then he

removed Christina from my romantic thinking and began to put Faith Bible College into my reckoning. By Sunday evening I had made the decision to enquire about enrolling at Faith and by Monday evening the stirring in my heart concerning Heather was underway. I was so pleased to be able to say to myself or anybody that in choosing to enrol at FBC it wasn't because I was chasing Heather but because I genuinely wanted to go there. God had worked those four important steps in my life and to think that a few days previously I had no idea of any of them! It is no wonder that I was excited and that you love God as you get to know him.

Moving North

Another amazing event in our lives was being able to buy a farm. Here is how that happened.

After Heather and I got married we went to the Philippines with Youth With A Mission. When Heather became pregnant we decided to return to New Zealand, having been there five months. By this time Heather's parents had moved from Kawerau to Wellington and so we spent some time with them adjusting to life back in NZ and looking round for a job for me. When we told our fellow team members in YWAM that we would be going home they would ask us what we would be doing once back there. My standard reply was, "I don't know, but one thing is certain, I will not be milking cows."

The job hunt wasn't going very well but one day we drove up to Levin to visit Heather's sister Gill, who with her husband David had moved there and were renting a house on a dairy farm. On that visit we discovered that the farmer was looking for a new helper. We had a talk with him and the result was that the job became mine. A week or so later we shifted into a house almost opposite Gill and Dave and there I was, milking cows after all! Right from the start we loved it

there. I had an excellent boss and it was great for Heather to be living only a hundred metres down the road from her sister.

I was on a reasonable wage but when I found out the cost of the latest tractor that my boss had bought I felt that there was little hope of me ever owning one, let alone a whole farm. After two years on that farm we moved to Otorohanga where I got a job as a farm manager, a step up the ladder of responsibility. At Otorohanga our daughter Anya was born to join her big brother Matthew. That job was quite a hard one because of the very hilly nature of the farm but we were only there one year because my parents offered us a loan that enabled us to go 50:50 sharemilking, a big step up the ladder for us.

The new position was on a small 80 acre (less than 35 hectares) Town Supply farm at Ramarama, South Auckland. The \$19,500 needed to get into the job was made up mostly of loans. \$12k from the Rural Bank (their maximum), \$2k from the Dairy Co (their maximum and not often given), \$4k from Mum and Dad (their maximum) and \$1500 of our own, which was all we had. Cash flow wise it was very tight right from the start but we managed from month to month. The first spring went normally but we struck a very dry summer. Amazingly dry. By February the whole farm was brown and by April a very sad grey! I was able to keep the cows going and meet our contracted daily quota by feeding them silage but this became a big worry as the weeks dragged on because I was using up all my winter rations. The cows completely gave up the hopeless task of looking for grass to eat. After milking they would wander out to whatever paddock I gave them, lie down and patiently wait for me to turn up with a load of silage.

Also as the weeks dragged by I began to moan and grizzle to God. Why was this happening to me in my first year of sharemilking? It was tough enough without such a fierce

drought. “You are supposed to be blessing me, God, not making it worse!” I think that I moaned and whinged quite a bit that summer and autumn. Finally, towards the end of April the rain came and we managed to grow enough grass to get through the winter.

That severely dry summer and autumn had a major effect on the price of autumn and winter calving cows in the whole of South Auckland as farmers struggled to maintain their daily quotas. Values immediately rose more than 50% and continued to rise for another twelve months until my cows were worth double what I had paid for them! As well as that I had increased the size of my herd by 25% after two years without having to buy any cows which coincided with the farm owner purchasing 55 acres from the neighbouring farm and quota to go with it. Suddenly we found ourselves in such an improved position that we were able to think about buying a farm of our own. Inspired by our friends from across the road who were able to buy a farm in Northland after 3 years sharemilking so did we. That is how we became Northlanders and we have never regretted it.

To be able to move into farm ownership so quickly became possible for two reasons. Whereas my parents had lent us money to go sharemilking Heather’s parents lent us money to buy the farm. The farm I liked the best had two houses on it and Mum and Dad decided to sell their house in Wellington, help us into the farm and come and live there too. I don’t think that we could have done it without their input. The biggest factor though and the catalyst for moving us on was the drought. The very thing that I had moaned to God about for months, the “Big Disaster”, was what he used to bring about the unimaginable. From that experience I learnt a big lesson in my walk with God. Try not to complain about hardship, disappointment and loss because when you have committed your life to him he does things in unexpected ways.

So much Life

We bought the dairy farm in Ararua, Northland in 1980. By then we had two more little boys, Philip and Richard. Neither of us had ever heard of the district, in fact Heather had never been more than a few kilometres north of Auckland. She was quite concerned about moving to such an unknown place far from anyone or anything she already knew but with her mum and dad coming as well and her trust in God she was able to cope with her misgivings.

It worked out to be a very good move. All our farming neighbours were very welcoming and we soon fitted into the life of the district. Heather quickly found a good friend in another Heather and the local Methodist Church in at Paparoa was filled with lively Christians. We are especially grateful for the little two teacher school at Ararua which was such a great place for our four children to grow up at and a wonderful centre for the wider Ararua community.

We got stuck in to developing the farm and building up the herd. Heather's dad was a builder and he transformed our badly laid out and falling down old house. There were plenty of highs and lows caused by a multitude of factors, the weather being one of the majors. The first three summers were very dry resulting in disappointingly low production but slowly the pastures were responding to the high rates of fertiliser I had increased our borrowings to apply and at last in our fourth season production began to rise. I found milking cows something of a love/hate relationship and after ten years we sold the farm and moved back to town. I wanted to lessen the 7 days a week workload and we thought that it would be good for our children to experience the differences of living in an urban environment.

Many times I have regretted selling the farm when I have been struggling with the differences of being an employee in town compared with being your own boss in the great

outdoors. But then I look at how well our children have done in their lives, at the many new and precious friends we have made since leaving the farm, the wonderful range of activities we have been involved in and I realize that it has been a great journey. A journey lived with so many other people you are grateful to have in your life. A journey that you cannot put a price on. A journey that you would not want to change, and you can't anyway! A journey waiting to be written about another day.

In ending this brief account I want to finish by saying that having the Lord Jesus Christ at the centre of everything doesn't mean that all will be smooth sailing but it does mean that the richness of life is enhanced more than it would have been without him.

Why don't you call out to God? If you do you will be glad you did! I am.

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