



Vale

Thomas Raymond Lewis

17th August 1929 – 1st March 2020

Tom Lewis was a huge fan of Norfolk Island, making more than forty visits from 1964 onwards. He had also sent hundreds of tourists (and a few residents) to the island, and would talk for hours about the place, if he got the chance. He was an unusual visitor because he always had a project on the go, be it fishing with George Park or Case de Rijk, building another

bridge for Bubby, or completing his house at Roaring Forties. Tom needed to be busy, and (for him) that's what holidays were for. On many occasions he arrived by ship along with horses for Kaye, cows, a donkey, or some timber for the house. Stowed in his cabin (and thus freight free) would be packages of very heavy stuff for friends, and there are gravestones at Kingston which arrived by this method.

Tom grew up in Rotorua and completed a carpentry apprenticeship, learning plumbing and electrics on the side, and at nineteen was drawing plans for shops and houses. Next he built a small launch so that he could go fishing, but for a change signed on to a deep-sea trawler, and fished offshore out of Tauranga for a year or so, gaining his Marine Engineer's ticket. Years later this allowed him to travel to many Pacific Islands on "Ile de Lumiere" and other vessels in place of a sick crew member, applying the oil-can as he sailed along!

Meeting Maree meant settling down in 1957, and this led to building a fish shop at Maketu where they spent eleven years and had two small girls. The next venture led to exporting crayfish to Japan, and Tom was one of the first in NZ to do this. He sold out his shares in this Mt. Maunganui business, and the following day began setting up a canning factory for Reckitt and Colman UK. This processed mainly asparagus and tomatoes, and in the off-season they made steamed puddings with sauce! Tom managed the engineering staff, and maintained all the intricate machinery, and in this role he travelled to USA, Hawaii, and many Australian canneries owned by the company.

(continued overleaf)

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Thomas Raymond Lewis - continued

This was another interesting job, but it eventually cost him his hearing – and deafness plagued him for the rest of his life. The compensation was that he enjoyed the staff, which consisted mainly of hundreds of women! (After his farewell dinner they threw him into the surf in his undies and his best Italian leather shoes).

In between all these activities came the trips to Norfolk. He was constantly planning his next trip, and there were long lists of things to take, of things to buy, of people to contact, long before the ship arrived or the plane ticket was bought. His most exciting trip to the island was the time when Case de Rijk landed the biggest ever catch of hapuku at Kingston, and Tom was with him! Even more exciting was that they repeated the performance the next day! His saddest trip was when Linda Wood died so tragically; she had lived with us for a year in NZ.

Retiring at sixty he decided to return to the building trade, so spent a year or so working with a younger professional to re-learn the trade. Aluminium joinery, power tools, plastic pipes and concrete trucks were all new to him, but having got the hang of it all he bought an old house on a stunning section at the Mount and made it into a dream home. It became an amazing three-storied place complete with a penthouse flat, and it was a real credit to him. It was hard work keeping this seven bedroom place immaculate, and Maree was happy when they sold it and moved back to Te Puke, this time, supposedly, to a “real” retirement. However, knowing nothing about horticulture, Tom’s next move was to buy shares in a kiwifruit orchard where he was able to do the R&M. He was kept busy repairing broken support structures, tightening wires, and maintaining tractors for many years.

Just before his ninetieth birthday last year the family endured the tragedy of Cushla’s awful death. This no doubt contributed to Tom’s diagnosis (on Christmas Eve) of lung cancer. He had never smoked,

and thought he would have a year or so to complete a few little projects, but this was not to be as his illness rapidly progressed. He died peacefully in Hospice care early on Sunday 1 March with Vaughan at his bedside.

Maree gave Tom’s Eulogy at St. John Baptist Church in Te Puke on 7 March, and told how his father was killed when Tom was a baby, and he had no siblings. She thought he had fallen in love with her five younger brothers and sister, and that was probably why he married her! They had eloped to marry, and in spite of many dire forecasts they had sixty one years of happy marriage during which Tom had been richly blessed with good health, three healthy children, and many kind friends. He was carried from the church to the tune of “Vaya con Dios”, and was buried in the Old Te Puke Cemetery beside his Cushy.

R I P dear Tom.



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