



*Snow Petrel* iced-up during a blizzard in Boat Harbour, Cape Denison. Inset right: The boys in cockpit of *Snow Petrel* on the day of her departure from Tassie. (L-R) John, Ben, and Matt.



# TURNING A NEW LEAF

Don knows the power and sway of books. But his latest find is right up there with the best-ever reads...

In primary school, one of the first things I learnt was how to correctly turn pages in a book. If you got caught in the library not doing it right, you were in “deep poo”! You use your right hand at the top right corner of the page, lift it slowly with thumb and forefinger, then let your hand slide down the right side and turn it over. (You always do that don't you?). This does not damage the book.

I now cringe when I see people do it any other way and usually tell them so. Books are many things to many people. Their power to influence and inspire is real. Certain books are very special in my life and have

unwittingly helped shape it. I just found another one.

My collection of “keepers” started with the first book I ever read as a teenager, *An Island to Oneself* by Tom Neil. It tells of his years living alone on Suvarov atoll (Cook Islands) in the Pacific. Then there was Chichester, Robyn Knox-Johnston, the Hiscocks, Bernard Moitessier, David Lewis, and more. They are inspirational reads. I was never one for fiction.

These graphic accounts of other peoples' lives made me question mediocrity in life and the real meaning of it. I, like most people, still do not know the answer, but so far I have no regrets.

In this age of blogs and instant

gratification of our senses, there are so many new avenues for stimulation, but nothing in my mind beats the discovery of a “special” book and then finding the time and space to sit back and savour each word.

If you have been following my travels of late on [www.bluetreasure.me](http://www.bluetreasure.me) you may be pleased to know that we made Fiji aboard *ICE*. The joys of fresh fruit and veg after virtually none for nearly five months was intense. But there was an even greater surprise waiting for me when I arrived. A book in the mail — *Snow Petrel*, by Jon Tucker — just found a special place in my library.



## ICE SHIPS

In 1999, I bought a 600-tonne, 36m ice ship in Finland (sponsored by Dick Smith Foods and later named *Sir Hubert Wilkins*). At the time, I took out a full-page ad in *Trade-a-Boat* looking for volunteer crew to sail it back to Australia and then onto the Antarctic. A young 25yo Kiwi by the name of Ben Tucker applied as chief mate. He was living on his 26ft yacht at the time and had a yearning to sail south. He signed on, we became friends, but unfortunately life got in his way and he had to get off, just

before the first voyage to the ice.

In mid-2002, while cruising *Trade-a-Boat*, Ben discovered a simple Roberts 34 that had been sturdily built in steel. It weighed eight tonnes empty, two-tonne more than the design showed, but he had a plan and knew what he wanted. For less than \$40,000, most of that borrowed, Ben was the new owner. He dreamed of Antarctica.

Three years, plenty of frustrations and about \$8000 later, he was nearly ready to go. Ben had meticulously rebuilt the



Top: The power and beauty of Antarctica was everywhere... *Snow Petrel* near l'Astrolabe glacier. Above left: Mawson's Hut on one of the few calm days. Above: The memorial cross is to Mertz and Ninnis (two of Mawson's men).



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boat (while living aboard to repay the loans) to take the worst the Southern Ocean could throw at it. He did it all himself. He had told no one of his voyage plan, but the word was sneaking out.

On a wet, cold Tassie day in November 2005, Margie and I called into the slip at the Kettering marina to say "hi" and see if the "grapevine" was correct. We had not seen Ben for some time and had never seen the boat. Yes, he was off to Antarctica. It was about six weeks from his departure day and we were truly impressed.

The boat and Ben were a real mess, but the making of a grand adventure stood before me. He had a strict budget and no money. The HF radio had cost \$100, the laptop to plug into it for the weather fax, \$200 more — he couldn't afford a second-hand radar. The timber fitout was bare, yet everywhere I looked, I saw totally solid seagoing survivability. Ben knew his stuff. All but two skin fittings were welded over, the rudder was rebuilt and the rig now had heavy galvanised wire. The companionway would make a submariner proud.

He was realistic. The tentative goal was to attempt reaching the Antarctic continent. As crew he recruited his youngest brother Matt, who with a \$2000 total budget for video camera and tapes and a follow-up post-production budget of \$500 for editing and music, went on to produce his first-ever documentary of the adventure. It was awesome! His father Jon was allowed to join the team as "cabin boy", only at the last minute and only on the promise of good behaviour.

### BOOK ABRIDGED

Without giving the story away, I asked Ben to give me the highlights (or lowlights?). Here is part of his email.

- "Leaving... WOW... we are actually sailing off the edge of the world... to the south, weird feeling as you can appreciate and so exciting.
- Me not getting seasick... when the others did... ha ha.
- Matt spilling a tin of oily tuna

Top down: Transiting the pack ice at midnight below the Antarctic Circle; Moored alongside the disused air strip at DDU (Dumont d'Urville), the French Antarctic Station; With limited fuel, Ben sailed as often as possible... listening to the ICE!

on my pillow... I hate FISH, can't eat it... Foul... Vile little brother, and he said it was by mistake.

▪ The Knock-down... sliding sideways at 20kts and three days stew all over the cabin. The small intense blow... running with the drogue for one night... Yuck, wet bunk, I so hate getting into a wet bunk, and I had designed *Snow Petrel* to be dry. Lesson! Never, ever, ever open the companionway without looking... not even for a second, for that rogue wave will leap out and thump you right then. (The wave got us just as I was going below).

▪ The sky, the twilights in the 50s are awesome... longest sunsets as you know

▪ Seeing our first Iceberg. Success.

▪ Scary pack ice. Laughed that you had to go around it as well in your Antarctic sailing adventures... like a maze... it is something we normally don't encounter in life, not knowing a way through... normally we just look at a map or a chart, made me really empathise with old Captain Cook.

▪ Getting into the shore lead where there is no ice and setting the spinnaker for an hour or so, then finally tying up inside Boat Harbour, Cape Denison, Commonwealth Bay... big sense of relief and accomplishment.

▪ The French base. Awesome hospitality. Alien dress-up party on arrival, what a welcome

▪ Seeing my first real snow petrel

▪ Scary trip out through the ice, thinking we may be trapped

▪ Fast trip home... exciting to be heading back, but also sad in some ways. *Snow Petrel* really is in her element in the high latitudes... her stumpy rig pushes her along fine... was a beautiful trip home, no feeling of being in a rush, spent time drifting when there was no wind, a great feeling, just to be stopped mid-ocean, slopping around waiting but in no rush, almost Zen-like experience for me as always. Then the wind would start, a few catspaws... and within the hour she would be leaping for joy, dancing from crest to crest, splashing us with spray, and before long demanding yet another reef, but romping along like a steam train. Day after day... the miles clocking off.

▪ Getting home, seeing the



Above: While *Snow Petrel* was at Cape Denison, Margie and I arrived on the expedition ship *Orion* with 96 passengers for the day. We were able to take Ben and the boys through the hut. They were very happy. Me and Ben at the front door.

green land, and smelling the gum trees. Driving in a car was scary after six weeks away!

▪ Matt's movie... it was cool to see it on the big screen, still brings back a lot of emotions when I see it.

### RIPPING YARN

And now the book *Snow Petrel*, as told by Jon, Ben's father, has just been released.

Jon and wife Barbara have five sons. The only home they have ever owned is their smart, 30-year-old, self-built ferrocement traditional schooner now moored in Tassie. It was the only home the kids ever knew, too. It influenced their lives as did the books they read. They have since scattered to various parts of the world.

The book has elements of a father-and-son story for sure but spare a thought for Barbara, she had to wave goodbye to three of the most important people in her life. They set out on a little red boat to face the unknown. She at least knew they would be warm, if not safe, as she handmade all

their thermals and was part of the team.

Christmas is coming up, so I will try to be unbiased here. I didn't know Jon was writing the book. It was a great surprise. Yes, Margie and I have our photo in it, but I have read it and in a word it's a "keeper". It's up there with the best. Jon's writing style is perfect.

If you have any interest in people chasing dreams, a boy's own adventure, Antarctica, sailing the Southern Ocean, beating the odds, or if you are a father, brother, uncle or son, maybe even if you just have kids — you/they need to read this book.

If I did not already have one, I would kill to get it for Christmas! The hard cover *Snow Petrel* has 167 full-colour pages, with 90 great photos and illustrations. A true delight. Published by 40 Degrees South, the book has a RRP of \$29.95 and is available online from the publisher or from selected book stores.

Just remember, please turn slowly from the top right corner. Enjoy! 🍷