



The outlook from Blue Base, watching and waiting... our dinghies lie idle and ICE is ready to go. (See bluetreasure.me for all the details).

TONGAN TRIBUNALS

Don appeases some very unhappy Tongans and dispenses some pearls of wisdom for those of us confronting a personal terror that's actual or mental

I ended last month's column with the following line in reference to our treasure-hunting expedition in Tonga, and I quote: "That will mean that finally, at last, maybe, if all goes well, touch wood, we will get to go diving in a few happy days!" Well, the reality has been quite the reverse.

I have, since then, been threatened with arrest and confiscation of all our gear and boats, been chased by screaming Tongans in boats waving ropes in the air with machetes

hidden in the bilge and been restricted from simply diving in a fisheries zone that the Government says does not exist and if it did, diving is okay anyway! We are yet to dive any wrecks, let alone find any treasure.

Sentiments are running high for a few locals who take some convincing that we are not like the bad guys of the past, plundering wrecks that belong to the people of the Kingdom of Tonga. Slowly but surely, though, we are getting the

message out. Those non-believers, including the Police are starting to come around to our side.

So what do you do in paradise if you have to wait another two weeks for yet another community meeting to give you final approvals to dive their wrecks? You swim with whales, go fishing, catch crayfish, dive some of the best coral in the world in 40m visibility and generally enjoy the island life, when the island is all yours, so it is not all bad.

Today those previously screaming



Tongans are now friendly, so that could mean that finally, at last, maybe, if all goes well, touch wood, we will get to dive in a few happy days. I guess you have heard that all before, hey.

MOMENTS OF TERROR!

In life, moments of terror can be closer than you think. If you are the occasional water-based adventurer, then you are just asking for it. These are the dark periods that you can ponder in stunned disbelief, awaiting the inevitable, or spring to action by instinct not necessarily knowing what to do, yet accepting the fact you need to do something. Such an event can create totally different reactions from each individual.

Maybe that "moment" is when you are washed off your boat, deep in the Southern Ocean, or you order the crew to scuttle your damaged, uninsured \$500,000 boat in the Antarctic and get onto another ship. Maybe your forestay just broke in a storm or your diesel fuel tanks burst into the cabin, just as the steering failed, which then blew your headsail. These and more happened to me in the space of two short years.

At the top end of the scale, many people I have met over the years are no longer around. They departed

Above: Sixty minutes fishing off the beach with a small silver lure and life is looking okay on Blue Base. Crayfish and calamari are on the menu too!

Right: Part of the Blue Base team on a fun dive while we await final approvals from locals to hunt wrecks in their waters. Not a moment of terror... just pure frustration!



this world in a variety of ways. One fell overboard from the bow of his high-sided boat wearing a harness approaching an island in rough conditions. Now hanging and banging there, his inexperienced crew could not get him back onboard. Dangling unconscious and lifeless, the crew went below... an hour later his line finally chaffed through, broke and he was gone.

One solo-sailor friend simply disappeared off his boat which, when recovered, had deep barnacle scrape marks on the hull where he had possibly hit a whale at speed, maybe falling overboard at that time. Another was so far from civilisation, deep in the Southern Ocean, that when his EPIRB was activated no one could get to that spot before the battery went flat. A close friend had a heart attack while up his mast at sea and again a new

crew were challenged to react in time. Even crazier, more than one has succumbed to head injuries from flying booms.

The good news is that none were hit by a bus! That would have been truly sad. But surprise, surprise, even when you think everything is perfect a mutiny could ruin your day, with another in the Pacific just a few weeks ago where the crew simply threw the captain and chief engineer overboard, never to be seen again.

Interestingly not all moments of terror are "capital" events. During the past 20 years of assembling young adventurous crews to accompany me on expeditions large and small, I see many face their own private "moments of terror" at some point during the voyage, not in the midst of a great storm or immediate danger, but simply when the reality

DANGLING UNCONSCIOUS AND LIFELESS, THE CREW WENT BELOW... AN HOUR LATER HIS LINE FINALLY CHAFFED THROUGH, BROKE AND HE WAS GONE



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Above: "Iki" the baby humpback whale, born off Nomuka Iki the day we arrived at our island home. Now a month old, it is getting really inquisitive, coming into shore with mum, right off our beach! You have to love the whales of Tonga. Below: During my solo around-the-world voyage I was to face my moment of terror when I was washed off the boat – I survived to tell the tale! When it all goes wrong, my challenges may well be another person's moment of terror because I have had more than a few. It all makes life that much more interesting... but now I just want to go dive wrecks.

of facing their future hits home. The temptation of challenging the world and engaging everything it offers through travel or adventurous activities is great, as it should be. Many engage this exciting stage of their life straight after Uni, an apprenticeship or the moment they have dollars in the bank. Following dreams, as many of us do, is the luxury of prosperous economies, now helped along by the Internet, which itself opens plenty of doors for those looking. Yes we are all very lucky.

After a few years in the midst of this idyllic lifestyle, that age-old question eventually pops up for all approaching or close to 30: "Can I afford to ignore the economic ladder? What am I doing with my life? When am I going to have kids? Do I want them? Where am I going to get money, a house and what about security for when I get older?" Hmm... it is the biggest single topic of discussion with all my crew, along with the meaning of life? It sure makes for some great conversation while we await the next green flash, an amber sun setting on another perfect day. Those adventurous travelers challenged by these issues are well-equipped to make the next life decisions. Their life experience thus far equips them to better

understand the issues of value judgment and risk assessment. Sadly for some, they do not even make it this far. What drives a guy in his early twenties, earning \$130,000 a year in a regional country town to blow all his money on a weekly basis, when he has never even thought of travelling and engaging the world and then, after a drinking night out and a short message on Facebook, he ends his life in the small hours, at home alone. So sad. The issues are complicated but maybe if we all try to excite the imagination of young people towards real life, instead of virtual reality, (get them out there), their imagination may flourish into dreams they may just shoot for? I, like many people, believe it is important to enjoy the moment and have plans but always accept that those plans can, do and often are meant to change, (like now!), 'cause if you don't you may never reach that next horizon, which surprisingly may be fantastically better than the one you are looking at right now. So if you are facing your personal moment of terror (on the sea or in your mind) no matter if you are 30, 50 or 70... it may look daunting but don't worry, you are not alone. The people of the Pacific islands, the Middle East, Afghanistan, America, Iraq and in fact everyone in the world all face the same "moment". It is part of human nature. I figure I am one of the luckiest guys around and soon, if all goes well, touch wood, we will get to dive in a few happy days!



Returning to ICE after another hard day at the office. Inevitably, the crew start to wonder about their future? It is good out here, but how long can it last?