



ICE (left) in her cyclone hole at Vuda Point Marina, Fiji, keeping company with a Dashew performance trawler. After last season's direct hit from a cyclone, all the holes are now full!

# LIFE EXPECTANCY

Don realises life isn't long enough to cram in his bucket list of adventures

**W**ow, it's that time of the year again. A belated Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

I'm spending mine in the New Zealand sub-Antarctic on the MV Orion before setting off to Antarctica for one last season with 100 passengers.

My little ship ICE is settled into her cyclone hole in Fiji for six months and now, for a short time at least, my imagination is free to dream about anything but weather and treasure. I head back to Tonga in April next year with a new crew (want to come?) chasing more wrecks. It has been another, fun frantic year on and under the water.

The holiday season is a time to recharge your life, have fun in the sun, reflect on the year gone by and contemplate new plans for the future. Maybe even a New Year's resolution? As for me, I am happy to admit that I have never really grown up. Therefore no excuse needed to do something different. But now there is a new sense of urgency! It finally hit me this year when I found my "pirate cannon" that some of the remaining things on my bucket list are going to be impossible to achieve before closing time.

My simple philosophy of carefully and thoroughly planning, preparing and then executing my adventures to achieve success can create lengthy timelines to complete each adventure. Now for the first time I have to seriously factor in a new entity to the equation – old age. In just over one year, a government computer somewhere will figure out that I am 60 years old and spit out an age concession card with my name on it! Wow ... all the things I wanted to do.

I actually have about 15 years or so for more action. Plenty of time really but my problem is wanting to do too many things, something my mother told me 45 years ago. Hmmm? So my New Year's resolution is to consolidate my ambitions...that should be interesting.

If you are in your 20s or 30s and still reading this, thinking what is this old bloke on about, then you may need to meet one of my heroes, Carl Fredricksen from the Pixar movie *Up*. He sits alongside Jacques Cousteau and Robin Knox-Johnston in my eyes. When I first met him in 2009, I thought,

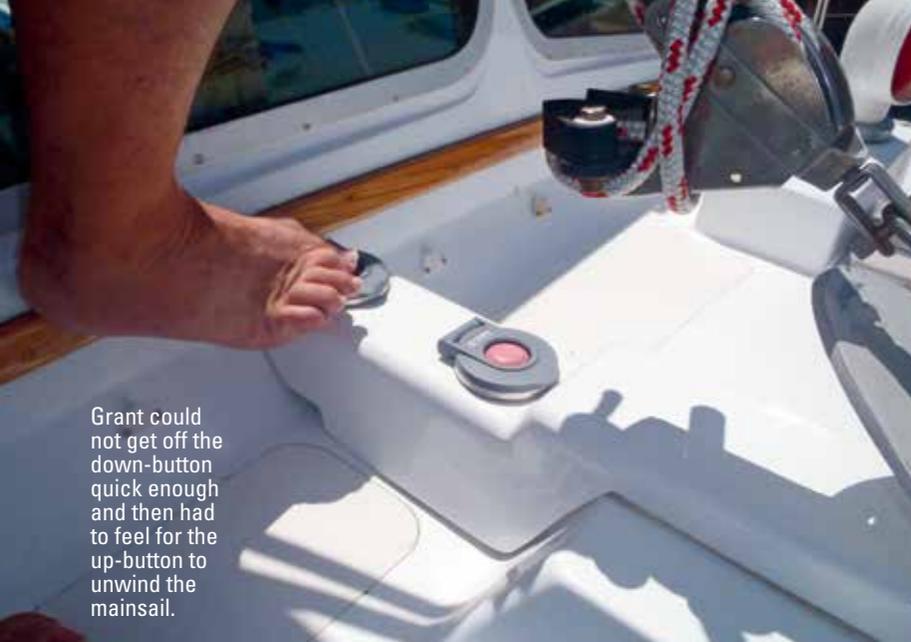


My mate Carl Fredricksen at the helm: a real hero and an inspiration to me, proving it is never too late to go grab a bit of life and follow your dreams while going grey gracefully!

Six months after the event, Grant Meehan still has a deformed arm and shows how it was caught and smashed in the furling boom.



*My Muse* the morning after the mayday. There were three adults, five kids and a dog onboard. All very shaken but happy to have survived and to own one tough boat, built in South Africa 30 years ago.



Grant could not get off the down-button quick enough and then had to feel for the up-button to unwind the mainsail.

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what a guy! So if you are having trouble coming to terms with your own New Year's resolution and it is a rainy day keeping you off the water, go get this super-happy holiday flick and watch it for the first or the second time. In this sometimes challenging world, Carl is certain to brighten your day and get you thinking.

Each year there is never a shortage of moments to remind me how precious life is. I hope you have a safe, prosperous and adventurous 2014.

**OUCH!**

My Kiwi cruising mate Grant has an electric roller furling boom on the mainsail of the Salar 40 *Lochiel*. It is operated by two foot switches, up/down, at the base of the mast. Returning to the marina in Fiji he did as he had done hundreds of times before. With the motor running on autopilot he started furling the main.

It was a bit hot and his arm was sweaty. With the mainsail coming down, the luff of the sail was not running true, so he reached over the boom to guide it but the sail instantly grabbed his sticky arm like Velcro. It then proceeded to wrap it over, in, and then around the boom, snapping bones in his forearm and hand and just about dislocating his shoulder.

It pulled him up on one leg, so he

could not get off the down-button quick enough. Now in agony he had to feel with his foot hoping to find the up-button (and *not* the down-button), which he finally did, to unwind the mess. He then collapsed unconscious on the deck.

On autopilot, the boat carried on for three miles while his two guests continued drinking in the cockpit, unaware of any trouble until Grant regained consciousness. Grant is a very experienced solo sailor but the net result of the incident was many operations and trips back to New Zealand. After six months of repairs he now has another 12 months of physio before he can sail again. His arm will never be the same. All in a split second!

**MAYDAY!**

*ICE* was in Pangai harbour, the main center for the Ha'apai group of islands in Tonga. Late in the day some big thunderstorms came in and the forecast was for 25-30kt winds that night. We were below watching a movie at about 2100hrs when I went on deck; it was blowing 35kts straight into the harbour with blinding rain. The anchor was out and there were two lines astern to a rock wall just 8m behind the boat. The anchor chain was already tight when the wind increased, so I started the engine and put it in gear to take load off



the anchor.

It was now blowing more than 50kts and if not tied to the wall, *ICE* would have been doing 6kts with the engine revs I had set, with one mile of fetch in front of us, the seas were rocking *ICE*.

Then at 2230hrs, I received a "mayday" call on the VHF radio. At 13m and 16 tonnes, the catamaran *My Muse* had gone onto a reef nine miles away with eight people onboard. They had 55kts of wind with crashing seas... it was not good.

I responded to advise we could not move in the blinding rain, wind and restricted anchorage. Our anchor was on the other side of a shallow channel and my anchor winch was broken. In this wind we simply could not get out. If we tried we would end up on the rock walk.

Everything was reported to the police and a radio sched was made every 30 minutes, checking in with the skipper for encouragement. They were not in immediate danger, with all people on the boat now bouncing over the reef. I asked

the skipper if he had set off his EPIRB and he said no. Incredibly, about 45 minutes later, they had crashed 150m right across the reef into deep water on the other side, lost one engine and rudders, had the headsail blown out, but were not taking water.

They were now drifting at about 1.5kts. I plotted their position, course and rate of drift, but now they were heading straight toward another reef to leeward. We still could not move but I had prepared *ICE* and the crew, ready to cut and run to sea. They needed to do something fast and we needed the wind to drop to about 35kts.

If I thought they were in immediate and mortal danger we would have left immediately and taken our chances, but the captain had still not activated his EPIRB. The police could do nothing – which we knew – so we were the only boat available to help. Another two boats responded to my regular mayday relay but they too were struggling in the conditions and could do nothing.



About an hour later *My Muse* reported having one engine operational and some steering and were making for an island about three miles away. I suggested he may like to downgrade his mayday to a pan-pan and he agreed. It was a happy ending! 🍷

Risk mitigation! This is inter-island travel, Fijian style. At least they knew there was risk involved; not long before, a high-profile chief and friends drowned in a boating accident.