

The Enemy in the Boat



“May I Tell You a Story?”

BY DICK DUERKSEN

Adventist families who lived down by the lagoon in a small Solomon Islands village. As a youth leader for the church in the Solomons, he knew where the supplies were stored, and was a good person to sort everything out before the boat was to leave.

CHOOSE A DIFFERENT ROUTE

“I knew that I needed to go, and go quickly,” Pastor Tana remembers. “So I asked one of the fishermen if I could borrow his boat for the four-hour trip back to our mission headquarters. He told me that that would be OK, but not till after the meeting.”

Pastor Tana led the Bible study meeting, then went with the elders down to the lagoon.

“We prayed for guidance and protection,” Pastor Tana remembers. “Then I jumped into the eight-foot boat, started the 25-horsepower outboard engine, and roared away from the jetty.”

Just before he pulled out, one of the elders warned him that recent storms had changed the channels, and that he should take the longer ocean route rather than the old shortcut through the reefs.

Pastor Tana, we need you to come back to the mission office, sort through all our youth supplies, and make sure the right dishes and pots and pans and microphones and tarps and other things are on the boat that’s going to the other district event. By the way, that boat needs to leave about 4:00 tomorrow morning.”

The message from the mission president reached Pastor Tana late in the afternoon, just before he was to lead a revival Bible study with the seven

“OK,” Pastor Tana shouted above the sound of the engine. Then he waved goodbye and directed the boat toward the harbor entrance, singing happily and enjoying himself.

At the harbor entrance he had to decide whether to take the old shortcut through the reefs or follow the warning and go the safer ocean route.

“I chose the route they told me not to take,” says Pastor Tana. “That way I would save more than two hours. I could quickly sort out all the equipment and have it on the other boat before they needed to leave in the morning. If I hurried, I could make it easier for the others at headquarters. I would be careful.”

Rather than go around on the ocean side, Pastor Tana’s little boat began threading its way through the hidden coral, just as he had been warned not to do.

NOT MOVING

“I was traveling along very well, with no problems, until I came to where a longer reef connects two small islands. Knowing this was a dangerous place, I slowed the engine and steered the boat very carefully through the reef. Several times I dipped an oar into the water to be sure the depth was still safe for my boat.”

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All went well, until it didn't. This time he dipped the oar into the water, and it didn't go down very far. This place was much too shallow and dangerous. He quickly stopped the engine, tilted the motor up, and began slowly paddling with his oar. After about 15 minutes he checked again. The water was still too shallow. And it didn't seem as though he was making any progress!

"At first I didn't notice that my paddling wasn't moving the boat forward, so I kept paddling. Going harder all the time. But when I realized my boat was still in the same spot, I began worrying. The current was moving the same direction I wanted to travel, but my boat was sitting still. Even when I used the paddle to push the boat along over the rocks, I stayed in the very same spot!"

Thinking he must be hung up on some rocks, Pastor Tana jumped over the side to see what was holding up his progress.

"The boat was floating, and there was nothing holding the boat. There was clear water all around it. But it wasn't moving. It was standing still. Staying right there. Not moving!"

Pastor Tana got back into the boat, cold and shivering, and started paddling *really hard*. Then, realizing something very big was going wrong, he stopped paddling and started praying.

"Big Fella Up Top," he prayed in Pidgin English, "I don't know what's happening, but You know what's happening, and I need Your help!"

Then he went to work with the paddle. This time he watched the front of the boat and saw that every time he pushed his paddle through the water, someone in the front of the boat pushed another paddle through the water in exactly the opposite direction.

"When I paddled harder, the person in the other end of the boat also paddled harder. So I figured a way to catch him. I ran from the back to the front of the boat and began paddling furiously!"

It was a good idea, but it didn't help. No matter how hard Pastor Tana paddled, the invisible person paddled with

exactly the same strokes, but always in the opposite direction. The boat was not moving forward.

A PRAYER AND FAITH

Suddenly Pastor Tana realized exactly how to fix what was happening! He fell down in the boat and began to pray—*very loudly!*

"Big Fella Up Top," he shouted in Pidgin English, "I am on Your business, not mine, and I do not want to waste time out here. In the name of Jesus, I call for You to defeat whoever is battling against us."

Then he stood up, walked purposefully to the back of the boat, tilted the outboard's propeller into the water, and pulled the starter cord. The engine roared to life, and he pushed it to full throttle. Then, without worrying about how shallow the reef might be, Pastor Tana pointed the boat toward home.

"The moment I did that"—Pastor Tana goes very quiet as he remembers that dark Solomon Islands night—"a bright light came on under the boat, and I could see all of the dangerous rocks clearly."

That light shone brightly for the next three hours. All the way, as the boat purred through the water to the mission station.

"The bright light replaced the invisible enemy. Chased him right away! That's when I knew the Lord was right there in the boat with me! So I talked with Him and sang with Him, not worrying at all about the rocks. Clear to the mission compound."

"It was like I was traveling with my very best friend." ©

This story is from **Elder Lawrence Tanabose** of the **Solomon Islands**. Pastor Tana served for many years in youth ministry and church leadership. He retired in 2013 from his role as general secretary of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.