

tion, the development of a rural peasant way of life based on cash-cropping of copra and other commodities, and the economic boom and ensuing affluence and inequality brought about by France's massive funding of its nuclear-testing program in those islands. This saga of colonialization is a familiar one, in the Pacific and elsewhere throughout the world. In this particular case the story includes both the economic uncertainty and the ominous medical and ecological risk of "living off the bomb."

Massey University and the author are to be commended for bringing out these lectures in an inexpensive and well-produced publication (though marred by dozens of typographical errors). These informative, lucid, and engaging essays will be of interest to a broad audience of both Pacific scholars and more general readers.

DONALD H. RUBINSTEIN  
University of Guam

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*Island Boy: An Autobiography*, by Tom Davis, Pa Tuterangi Ariki. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific; Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland, 1992. ISBN 982-02-0071-7, 349 pp, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$25, NZ\$45, F\$18; paper, US\$18, NZ\$35, F\$15.

Sir Tom Davis, doctor, space scientist, academic, sailor, sportsman, author, artist, is best known in the Pacific for

the years he was a prominent Cook Islands politician, six of them as opposition leader, nine as prime minister. *Island Boy* is his second volume of memoirs and brings up to date his life since 1952, when he sailed his forty-five-foot schooner from New Zealand to the east coast of the United States with his New Zealand wife and their two young children to study at the Harvard School of Public Health. The account of his boyhood in the islands, his 1940 marriage to Lydia in Dunedin, where he was at medical school, and their life in the Cooks from 1945, when the young Davis was the government medical officer, was told in *Doctor to the Islands*, in print for many years after its publication in 1955.

*Island Boy* lacks the stylish writing and evocative appeal that made *Doctor to the Islands* a bestseller. This presumably is because Lydia, who Davis acknowledges did the donkey work on the first book in association with a professional writer, had no part in this one, their marriage having broken up in the United States in 1967. In comparison, *Island Boy* reads more often like a detailed inventory of the author's career.

The text is divided into three equal parts. The first, "Home Ground," revisits his boyhood and early years described in *Doctor to the Islands*, but includes useful new chapters on Polynesians and Polynesian navigation and sailing canoes, compounded from the literature and his own experiences and opinions. The account of how, as the only qualified doctor in the Cooks, he faced the challenges of ignorance, superstition, and colonial bureaucrats who held a low opinion of his fellow

Islanders, is still germane as a reminder of island life not so very long ago.

“American Interlude” covers the twenty years to 1972 when, after Harvard, he undertook medical research programs for the US armed forces while remaining a civilian, and consultancies in pharmaceutical and food research. He was involved in the early days of US space research, both before NASA, when the armed forces ran their own programs, each struggling for space superiority, and after. His special interest was in the effects of heat and cold on human subjects. All these years must have been productive and interesting for him, but their pertinence is too often lost to the reader under the weight of detail, particularly the minutiae of some of his medical research. A firmer editorial hand would have selected the more significant events and rejected the author’s determined attempts to write almost everything into the record.

“Home Brew Politics,” the last third of the book, begins with his election to parliament in 1972 as a reluctant and untutored politician who found unacceptable the chief electioneering weapon of Cook Islands candidates—the denigration of one’s opponents, known in the vernacular as *akakino*. It was, he writes, “all comedy entertainment, and what better comedy entertainment than someone else’s discomfiture?” It ends with his disillusionment with politics after his party ousted him as prime minister in a no-confidence motion in 1987 (“they said I had become too authoritarian”).

In this part of his book, Davis—he became Sir Tom Davis in 1980—is more to the point, except for a ram-

bling lecture headed “Economic Solutions,” in which he ranges from Adam Smith to J. K. Galbraith in a bid to explain his economic policies, which he admits he was never able to do to the voters mainly because, he surmised, it was over their heads. This reviewer has to be counted among the unenlightened.

His introduction to politics aligned him against Albert Henry, socialist, master orator, and premier (the title was later changed to prime minister) since self-government in 1965. When Henry and his government were dismissed from office in 1978 for electoral corruption, Davis, as opposition leader, took office. The relationship between the two men was never bitter. Davis writes: “Despite our openness with each other and our liking for each other, I was probably his prime subject for persecution over the years. His political training would not allow him to do otherwise. Our openness with each other included discussions on the most intimate matters of a political nature affecting us and at no time did either of us breach these confidences” (245).

Davis’s administration helped break down the bitter divisiveness in the community from the Henry years of nepotism and discrimination, but Davis’s own leadership problems with the party are documented here (“It never entered their heads that not all of them could be prime ministers and their troubles might just be starting once they got me out of the way” [246]), and much else besides. Useful for the record are his details on “Doctor” Milan Brych, the “cancer cure” charlatan with a criminal record who had the

Cooks in uproar in 1976–1977. The author also casts his net wider in a chapter on “The Pacific Neighbourhood,” which discusses regional politics, including the Fiji coups.

The book confirms Sir Tom as a person of wide-ranging interests and achievements, yet strangely, it does not offer many clues to what makes him run. One is little the wiser about the man himself, or, strangely, his own impact on the times in which he has lived. What his peers may have thought of him during his long and varied

career, we are unable to judge. The occasional unexpected and rewarding passages that might provide us with insights, the isolated, disarming confidences that encourage us to believe that he is at last revealing himself, lead nowhere.

A rounded picture may come one day through an independent biographer, but meanwhile this measure of contemporary Pacific history from one of the players is welcome.

STUART INDER  
*Sydney*