

SKY PILOT NEWS

JUNE
1973

Published monthly by the Sky Pilot Fellowship Ltd., Marella Mission Farm.

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Subscription: 25 cents per annum. Registered at GPO Sydney, for transmission by post as a periodical—Category A



George and his bark hut.

LEFTHAND'S COMPASS (From the Sky Pilot's Log 2CH Broadcast)

There were three of us in the dinghy — George, Lefthand and myself. We were travelling up the Roper River—or, at least, it was our intention to travel up the river when we could find it. The lugger "Iolanthe" was anchored some distance up-river, but we had taken the dinghy down the coast a little way in order to explore the extent of the salt pans, and see if any new ones existed elsewhere. We travelled mostly in shallow water, too shallow

to risk the lugger. Besides, the dinghy was easy to sail, and when there was no wind we could pull it with the oars. We stayed down the coast rather longer than we had intended and just as we needed the wind on our return it dropped and left us becalmed. George sighed and began to get out the oars.

"Well," he said, "it looks as if there's nothin' for it but pull. Lefthand, you take one of the oars and I'll take the other. It's pretty hard

goin'. I reckon unless the wind rises again we won't reach the mouth of the river afore dark. Come on, Lefthand, put your back into it. Pull."

The wind did not rise again and we failed to make the mouth of the river by dark. Unfortunately, there was no moon; and clouds covered the sky, hiding even the light of the stars. George and I thought we knew the coast rather well, but in half an hour we were completely lost.

George voiced his opinion. "I'm hanged if I know where we are," he said. "I can't see a thing. We're not goin' west, or we'd of run aground; but we may be headin' north or south, or even be on our way to New Guinea."

"We're going in the right direction," I told him. "I've my little pocket compass here and I've been watching the course all the time. I can't tell when we're coming to a sandbank or a reef, of course. I'll leave that to Lefthand. But I know we're going in the right direction. Can you read a compass?"

"Read a compass?" George asked. "Of course I can! How else do you think I'd run the boundary of my property? There ain't any surveyors out here now. They left a few trig posts and the stockmen take a compass and run a line to find the boundary. Of course I can read a compass."

"Well, you take the compass," I said, "and keep us on the right course and I'll give you another spell at the oars. I've the tiller lines here—you'll have to feel, it's too dark to see anything."

"Well, how am I goin' to see the compass? I ain't a cat."

"The dial is luminous; you can see it easily in the dark."

"All right, I'll give it a go. I'll leave the oar in the rowlock while we change over; it can't fall out."

"Look out! Can't you walk steady? You'll capsize the boat."

"All right, all right; but how was I to know that Lefthand had his big feet in the way? Now, where's the tiller lines?"

"Right here," I told him. "There's the port, and there's the starboard."

"I've got 'em. Now gimme the compass. Thanks. Ah! that feels better. You fellows sit down and row. You can leave the steering to your Uncle George. Come on, pull, pull—shake it up, Lefthand, you're loafin' on the job."

"What makes you think that?" I asked. "You can't see in the dark."

"No, but my compass can. I can tell by the

compass if we're goin' in the right direction. When you pull harder than Lefthand, the boat goes to port; when Lefthand pulls harder, it goes to starboard. Nothin' 'ard about that. Never you mind the steerin'. I'm captain now and I'll give the orders."

For perhaps an hour we rowed up the coast, making very little headway against the current. George tried to light his pipe, but when he let the lines of the tiller go the dinghy swerved suddenly. I mistimed a stroke in the dark, caught a crab and nearly went over on my back. There was a loud cry from George as the dinghy rocked violently.

"Oh, hang it! Why can't you fellows keep still? Now I've gorn and dropped the compass overboard."

"You're joking!"

"No, I ain't. It's gorn all right. What are we goin' to do now? I can't steer without a compass; I might take you out to sea."

"We'll have to make for the land and camp for the night. I wouldn't risk going on. We might finish up away out to sea somewhere."

"We can't camp here," George protested. "Not on the coast. We never brought our nets. The mosquitoes would eat us alive."

"We'd have to make a smoke screen; light a fire and cover it with green bushes. That'll keep the insects away."

"Maybe. But it wouldn't be easy to find enough wood on the beach; not without a light."

"What about you, Lefthand?" I asked. "Do you think you could find your way in the dark without a compass if we go on?"

"Me find'im way, all right. No more want'im compass."

"Can you see in the dark?" I asked. "How could you find the river?"

"Aborigine no more go by eyesight only. Him go by smell and hearing. Me take you back to lugger, all right."

"I can't see how you'll do it, but you can try, anyhow. George, come back here with me and do some real work with the oars. Lefthand can take the tiller."

"Oh, all right," George said, in his good-natured way. "But I can't see how he can find his way in this darkness without a compass. Looks like an excuse to get out of rowin', if you ask me. Anyhow we've got to do somethin'. Come along, Lefthand."

George changed places with the Aboriginal and we continued the journey. To me, it was a revelation how that native found his way. Neither George nor I had the slightest idea where we were, or in what direction we were

pulling, but Lefthand never made a mistake. George kept silent most of the time; I think he was proud of his boy and he was as pleased as anyone that a boy he had trained could do so well. I was not unkind enough to point out that his training had nothing to do with the boy's native bushcraft—if one can use such a term about the sea. We travelled on, George and I pulling steadily at the oars and Lefthand keeping us posted as to our position.

"We go round here," said Lefthand. "This one big fellow bay where dugong like to feed."

"I remember that bay," I admitted, "but I can't see a thing. How can you tell we are there?"

"Me bin keep'im hand longa water. Plenty piece sea grass that dugong eat floating about. Me bin hear'im dugong come to surface no more long way off."

There was silence for a time, then Lefthand spoke again.

"Now we go by place where mangroves grow down close to the beach. No more long way to river now."

"Do you mind telling me how you know?" I asked.

"Me smell mud. Me know that fellow mud—it is where mangroves grow."

It seemed so simple when he explained it. Had it been any other boy, he would probably not have told us his secret but would leave us guessing. But Lefthand was devoted to George. Now he was speaking again: "We turn round now," he said, "and go in the river. We bin past that one headland."

"I'll take your word for it," I said, "but how you can tell beats me."

"There is long fellow sand bar at mouth of river. All about seagulls sit down there. Me hear'im."

George laughed. "It seems simple enough," he agreed. "As a matter of fact I can hear them seagulls myself; but I didn't think of the sand bar."

"No more plenty water," Lefthand continued. "Tide must be out."

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"Me hear'im noise where little waves break. If water properly deep fellow, no more make'im noise. Shallow water here."

"You're right about that," I agreed. "I just touched bottom with the oar. Can we get over the bar?"

"No more here. We go 'nother side river, where water properly deep fellow. If water had been properly deep here, we could get over

the bar without going round. That's why me come this way, to find out."

"I wouldn't have known that, even in daylight," I admitted.

"Aborigine always remember, then he find his way in the dark. Tide him come in now."

"That's only guessing. It is impossible for you to tell which way the tide is running in the dark."

"Me see jellyfish in water. If tide was going out, they would pass us, quick fellow. They shine in the dark, easy to see 'em. Can you hear'im fish jumping out of the water?"

"Yes; there seem to be a lot of them. Must be a shoal of mullet—or, are they flying fish? I can hear the splashes clearly."

"That one mullet; flying fish go further, and there is long time before they fall back into water. Maybe some are Long Toms."

"But," I asked, "how can you tell by the splashes of the fish which way the tide is going?"

"All about come up river with tide. If tide going out all about go other way. Easy fellow for black man; white man no good at night time; him all a same piccaninny."

"Well, I think it's wonderful the way you are able to remember all these things and find your way in the dark. I suppose we're not far from the lugger now?"

"Him close up now, all right," Lefthand told me with confidence.

Sure enough, a few minutes later Lefthand swung the dinghy round and ordered us to ship oars. Still, I could see nothing in the darkness, but George, who was sitting nearer the bow, made ready to grab the side of the invisible lugger.

"I can't see nothin'," George complained. "Hanged if I can. I hope you're not makin' a monkey out of me. I can't see how . . . hold on there! Here's the lugger, right ahead. Good work, Lefthand, good work!"

And so it was that Lefthand guided us home through the darkness without a compass or any such instrument. George and I depended on the compass, and when we lost it, we ourselves were lost.

Men sometimes go through life depending on something or someone to get them through safely and when they find suddenly that what they were trusting in has let them down, or has disappeared, they are hopeless and lost. The Christian can go calmly on his way, no matter what happens. Wars may come and pass, floods, famine, earthquake—but none of these things can shake his faith in God. The man of the world cannot see how the Christian is able

to steer his course without the way of human reason; sometimes he accuses the Christian of wishful thinking, of chasing the rainbow, of looking for "pie in the sky by and by".

The Christian only smiles. He knows the path he treads. Like Lefthand he has signs and contacts unknown to the worldly man that show him he is on the right path. As God promised: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." The word of God is a lamp to our feet; prayer brings us into direct touch with God; the house of God is the gate of heaven. If we are depending merely on the compass of human reason, the sooner we drop it overboard and turn to God, the better it will be, for He will guide us through the darkest night.

And the final entry in today's Log is taken from the 43rd chapter of Isaiah. "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

FINANCE: Over the years our income has risen steadily and as we look back we have much cause to praise God for His wonderful providence. We do not accentuate the need for finance in our publications nor in our deputation meetings; in fact it is rarely mentioned at deputation meetings. Unfortunately, some people have concluded from this that we are not in any real need. For this reason we feel that we must share with you the real facts of the case. Though our income is rising year by year so are our expenses; and the expenses are rising faster than our income. Our annual balance sheet will be published shortly in this leaflet and this will show that though our income for the past year has risen by about 10pc our expenditure for the same period has risen 17pc. It is quite obvious that something must be done to balance our accounts.

Though we are planning to introduce the Cottage System when God opens the way, so far nothing has been spent on this. But the cost of wages, foodstuff and almost everything we need has risen out of all proportion. We have to feed, clothe, house and educate the children in our care; they have to be provided with heating in winter and need hot and cold

water all the year round. These are only a few of our costs; but every supporter knows this and we do not need to over-emphasise the matter. However, we do ask you all to make this a matter of earnest prayer that God may continue to be glorified in this work for His little dark children.

Some friends who are unable to help greatly with actual cash have made us gifts of good used clothing or articles for our Sale of Work, or made garments for the children. Others have taken our Home Offering Boxes in which odd one or two-cent pieces are placed; when the boxes are opened at the end of the quarter it is surprising how much the contents amount to. In whatever way you can help we will be most grateful; but above all we ask for your continued prayers.

MRS. KEN NASH: Recently Mrs. Ken Nash, the Farm Manager's wife, had to undergo a major operation. We do thank God that she has made a quick recovery and we trust that she will have much better health in the future.

THE DARK CHILDREN: Winter is always a problem where the dark children are concerned. They love the warm sunny days of summer when they can play outside until late in the evening. We are fortunate at Marella in having 10 acres of bush and timber where the children build their wurleys and generally have a very happy time; they are much more fortunate than the children in city Homes who have to play on concrete or asphalt yards. We also have a large artificial lake where in summer the children can swim and paddle (under strict supervision, for the lake is deep).

But in winter we have to try to keep the children warm and dry and much of their time is spent indoors. Both children and staff dread the winter and count the days until spring is due. When the weather is wet and the days are short it is a problem with the children's washing. This has to be done every day and is a major operation for our small staff.

STAFF: We do thank God for the dedicated staff members that we have. It is so important that they should have a real love for the children as well as being efficient in their work. But it is very difficult to obtain the extra workers we need to care for our large family and this always throws an added strain on those who are here.