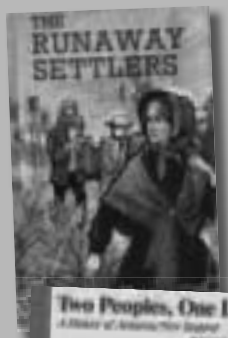
A Big Impression



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More than a Mountaineer

by Bill O'Brien

Sir Edmund Hillary considered himself an ordinary New Zealander. So why is his face on our five-dollar note? His conquering of Mount Everest brought him instant fame, but he was much more than a mountaineer.

On 29 May 1953, the thirty-three-year-old beekeeper from Auckland crawled out of his tent perched on a rocky ledge high on Mount Everest. A ferocious wind had whipped the tent all night. Hillary said it sounded like rifle fire. His Nepali climbing companion, Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, said it sounded like the roar of a thousand tigers. With temperatures at minus 27 degrees Celsius, the men set off on the final leg of their amazing climb. For five hours, they tackled rock and ice faces, some of them vertical, until, at 11.30 a.m., there was nowhere else to climb. They were standing on the top of the world.

Over the next fifty years, Sir Edmund was to have many more adventures and important roles. He led expeditions to the South Pole, travelling on tractors over crevasse-covered glaciers and deep drifts of snow. He jetboated from the mouth of the mighty Ganges River, with its fearsome rapids, to its source in the Himalayas. He was New Zealand's High Commissioner to India. But of all the adventures he had, the one that dominated his life was working among the Sherpas, high in the Himalayan mountains.

One day, while sitting in a group around a smoky fire in Nepal, Sir Edmund asked a Sherpa, "What will happen to you in the future?" The Sherpa thought for a moment then said, "Our children have eyes, but they cannot see. What we need more than anything is a school in Khumjung Village."

From that comment, Hillary's idea of the Himalayan Trust was born. Donations of money and materials, along with volunteer help, soon poured in from around the world. Work began in 1961 on the first Sherpa school.

There are no roads where the Sherpas live, and it's a seventeen-day trek from Kathmandu. Pre-assembled aluminium buildings were carried on the backs of porters to the remote village. At the school's opening, forty pupils were enrolled. This was the first of many projects and a new way of life for Sir Edmund Hillary.

With other projects starting, an airstrip was badly needed. This would make it easier to get materials into the mountains. But with no roads and no heavy machinery, how could they build an airstrip? One hundred Sherpas cut down bush, dug out roots, and levelled the land. The only things they couldn't shift were some huge boulders, but the Sherpas had a great idea. They dug enormous holes beside each boulder. Using poles as levers, they tipped the boulders into the holes and covered them with earth. The ground then had to be compacted, but there was no heavy roller. Linking arms, the Sherpas did a vigorous dance up and down the airstrip. After two days of stamping, the airstrip was ready.

Lady Louise Hillary

Sir Edmund's work with the Himalayan Trust was a great satisfaction to him, but there were also times of great sadness. While building the Paphlu Hospital in 1975, Sir Edmund was waiting for his wife, Lady Louise, and his youngest daughter, sixteen-year-old Belinda, to arrive by plane. They never made it. Their plane crashed, and both were killed. Although Sir Edmund was devastated, he continued with his work for the trust. Within thirty years, the Himalayan Trust had built twenty-seven schools, two hospitals, twelve clinics, an airfield, and several bridges over raging rivers. Its work still continues.

But what happened to Tenzing Norgay? He spent many years directing the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling, passing on his knowledge and skills to young mountaineers. He died in May 1986, aged seventy-three.

The Himalayan Trust has many volunteers, and Sherpas do a lot of the work. The trust's chief administrator is Ang Rita. He gained the highest school marks in all of Nepal and has two university degrees. He was one of the first pupils at the first school that the Himalayan Trust built at Khumjung.

Despite everything he has achieved, Sir Edmund will be best remembered for that great day in 1953 when he and Tenzing Norgay were the first to stand on the summit of the tallest mountain in the world.

Hūria Mātenga
Hero of Whakatū

by Lindy Kelly

On 4 September 1863, Hūria Mātenga (Ngāti Tama, Te Āti Awa, and Ngāti Toa) woke to the sound of wind whistling around the door of her house at Whakapuaka, just out of Nelson. A dog barked nearby. Hūria sat up, listening. Outside were the noises of a great storm. Rain was beating down on the roof, the wind howled, and in the distance, Hūria could hear the pounding of waves on the rocks.

Little did she know it then, but this daughter of chief Wiremu Katene Te Puoho and grandaughter of the famous Ngāti Tama chief Te Puoho-ki-te-rangi was soon to be involved in a daring rescue that would see her name become famous throughout New Zealand.

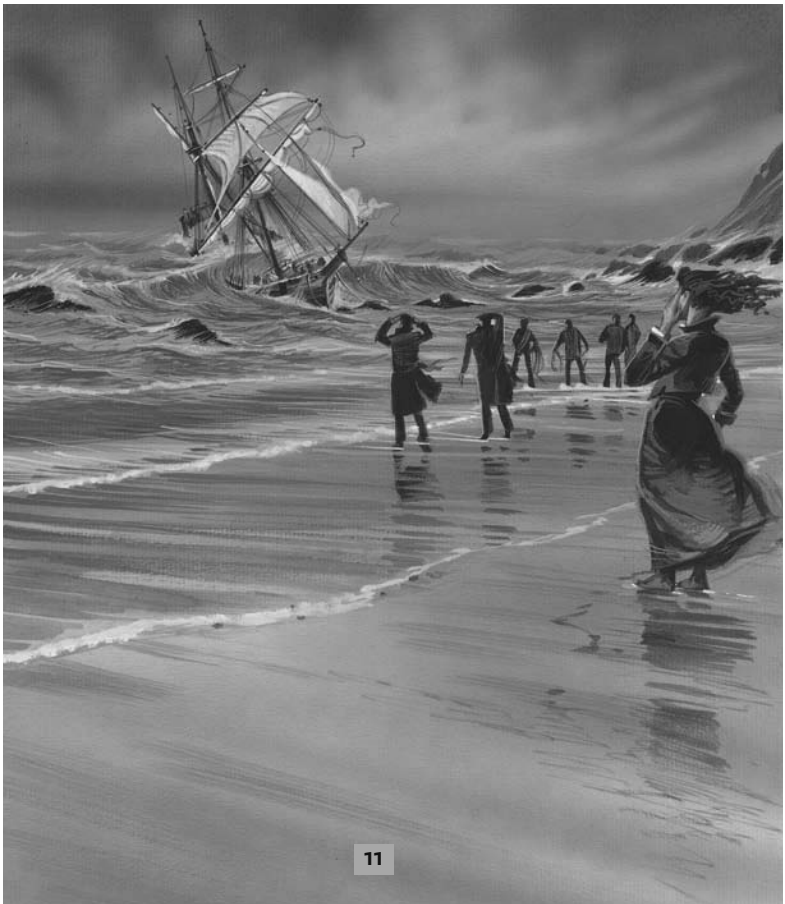
Just off the shore from Whakapuaka, a ship, the *Delaware*, was in trouble. All night long, her sailors had battled the storm to get the ship to safety. Fearing that the vessel would hit rocks, the captain ordered the anchors thrown out. One of them was torn off the ship, and the other dragged. The *Delaware* was pushed by the wind and sea closer and closer to the rocky cliffs nearby. Suddenly, with a terrible crash, the ship struck underwater rocks about 100 metres from the shore.

At the pā, Hūria and her husband, Hēmi, saw the ship hit the rocks and heard the sailors' cries. Quickly, they called their friend Hohapata and started running to the shore.

Back on the ship, the strongest swimmer, a young man called Henry Squirrel, offered to swim to shore with a rope. He tied it around his middle and leaped into the water. At once, a wave picked him up and dashed him against the rocks, knocking him unconscious. The sailors hauled him back on board and laid him in a bunk. No one else wanted to swim for help. It seemed that the ship would soon be dashed to pieces and that they would all drown.

As Hūria and the others arrived on the beach, the sailors began calling to them for help. A passenger called Skeet, who could speak Māori, called to those on shore to catch a rope. The rope was thrown over and over again, but it always fell short of the shore. Finally, Hūria and the others plunged into the wild sea, grabbed the rope, and swam with it back to land.

On the shore, they tied the rope to a large rock. A sailor from the *Delaware* began climbing along the rope, holding on with his hands and feet. Giant waves smashed against the ship, tipping it from side to side. When it tipped towards shore, the rope went under the water, dunking the sailor into the waves and nearly drowning him. When it tipped the other way, the sailor was pulled high in the air, hanging onto the rope with all his might. He was swallowing water and losing strength. Hūria could see that he wasn't going to make it to shore.



Again, she and her companions plunged into the waves, wading and swimming until they could reach the sailor. They grabbed him and dragged him to the beach. One by one, the sailors made the perilous journey from the sinking ship. As each one became exhausted and ready to give up the struggle, Hūria and her friends risked their own lives in the huge seas to support them and help them to safety.

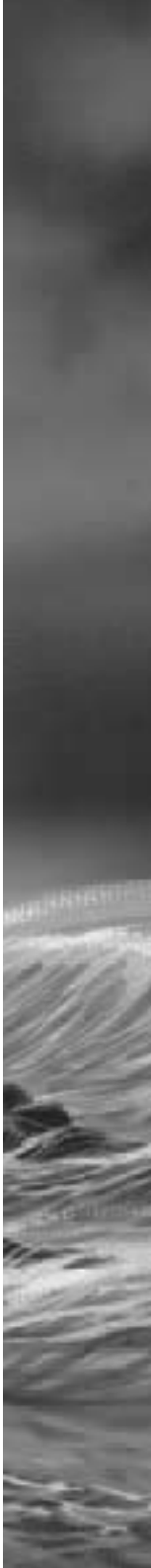
On the beach, more people from the pā had lit a large fire to warm the sailors as they came ashore. They wrapped the men in blankets, gave them food, and dried their clothes.

The last man to leave the ship was the captain. He took one last look at Henry Squirrel and, deciding that he was dead, left him lying on his bunk. Then he set out to climb along the rope to shore. Just as Hūria reached him, the rope broke, and the man would surely have been swept away if it hadn't been for her help.

Later, as they stood on the shore by the fire, the sailors and their rescuers were amazed to see Henry Squirrel standing on the ship calling to them for help. He had recovered after all, but now that the rope was gone, there was no way of reaching him, and he was soon swept overboard and drowned. A short time later, the ship was smashed to pieces on the rocks, and the beach was strewn with its cargo – cases, blankets, candles, saddlery, and clothing.

The settlers of Nelson were very grateful to Hūria and her companions for saving the lives of the captain and crew of the *Delaware*. Each rescuer was given a gold or silver watch to commemorate their brave deeds, and Hūria's portrait was painted and hung in the Nelson Art Gallery. In recent years, a Nelson tugboat was named after Hūria Mātenga, one of New Zealand's early heroes.

illustrations by Spike Wademan



A Small Footprint — A Big Impression

Elsie Locke 1912—2001

by Maureen Birchfield

Elsie Locke made a big impression on New Zealand life, both as an author and as a fighter for many causes. As a writer, her career took off in 1959 after the *School Journal* published "The Secret Rescue". Elsie's last *School Journal* story, "A Present from Pudding", was published over forty years later in 2001. But she didn't just write stories. Elsie was also an activist who put a lot of energy into trying to make New Zealand a better place to live. Over the years, she campaigned for women's rights, social justice, peace, and the environment.

Early years

Elsie was the youngest of Will and Nell Farrelly's six children. She grew up in Waiuku, on the southern shore of the Manukau Harbour, where she set her children's novel *The End of the Harbour*. She always loved nature and used to roam the hills and swim on the wild west coast. Elsie also loved school. One of her teachers dubbed her "Elsie Energy Farrelly" because she was always on the go.

In 1930, Elsie became the first student from Waiuku District High School to go to university in Auckland. Her memoir, *Student at the Gates*, is about her experiences there during the Great Depression, which left thousands of people out of work. The Depression made Elsie aware of social injustice and led her to join the Communist Party, which promised an end to social inequalities. She later became disillusioned with the party and never again belonged to a political party, preferring to think and act independently.

Women's work in Wellington

With a degree in English, Elsie moved to Wellington in 1933. She lived there for eight busy years and helped found the family planning movement. She also edited a newspaper and a magazine, both called *The Working Woman*, and helped set up another magazine called *Woman To-Day*.

Elsie married Fred Freeman in 1935 but left him two years later, before their son, Don, was born. With no government benefits for solo mothers, Elsie struggled to support herself and Don.

A home in Christchurch

Things looked up for Elsie when she married Jack Locke in 1941. They lived together in Christchurch for the rest of their lives.

Three more children – Keith, Maire, and Alison – joined Don, and the Lockes' small cottage was full to bursting. Elsie and Jack, who was a freezing worker, never had much money. But their vegetable garden, and cheap meat from the freezing works, kept their family well fed.

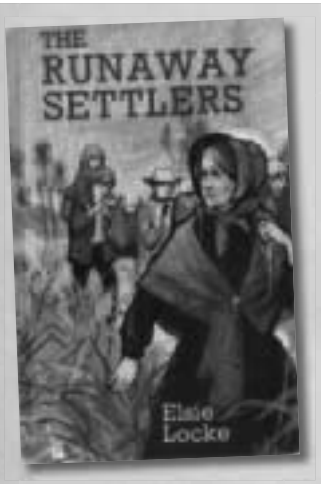
Family life was disrupted in the mid-1940s when Elsie spent two years in hospital with spinal tuberculosis. While she was gone, relatives and friends looked after the children. Typically, Elsie made the most of her time in hospital, writing letters, magazine articles, poems, and radio talks and editing a book. Later, when she needed money to help pay for the children's education, she sent a story to the *School Journal* – and that was the beginning of a long working relationship.

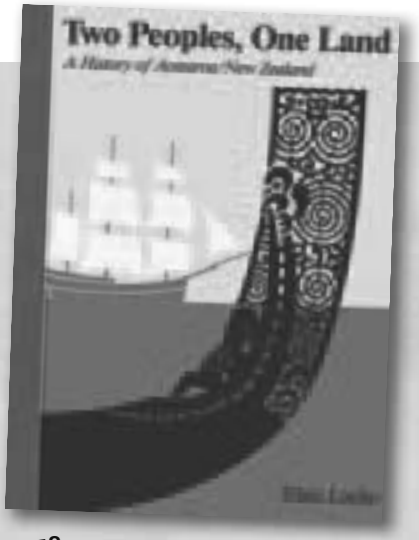
Elsie and Jack Locke in 1945, with their children Don, Maire, and Keith

Novelist and historian

Elsie's most successful book, *The Runaway Settlers*, was her first novel for children. The book was published in 1965 and can still be found in bookshops and libraries today. In 1999, it won the Gaelyn Gordon Award for "Much Loved Book" – one of many awards that Elsie received for her writing.

Much of what Elsie wrote was based on New Zealand's history. She loved learning about what life was like in the past, rummaging in archives and reading old newspapers. She once wrote: "To burrow in the library for me is an adventure." She was eighty when *Two Peoples, One Land* was published. This book was one of the first bicultural histories of New Zealand. Elsie ensured that she got the Māori content right by consulting Māori advisers and studying te reo Māori.





Her pen was her weapon

Elsie often used her pen to fight for causes she believed in. She helped found the New Zealand Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 1950s. Later she wrote *Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand*. She fought against a power scheme that planned to raise Lake Manapouri in the 1960s, and she opposed the felling of native forests on the West Coast in the 1970s.

Elsie also campaigned closer to home, most famously to save her neighbourhood from the expansion of a hotel. She won that battle in the High Court in 1973. She often wrote to her local council, arguing for better town planning and public transport. The Lockes never owned a car, and Elsie walked or cycled everywhere. Even on family holidays, she and her children travelled on foot or on bikes to explore New Zealand.

A small footprint – a big impression

Though small in stature, Elsie left a big impression on people who met her. *School Journal* writer David Hill mused: "I'm 6 feet tall. Elsie is … well, rather less than 6 feet tall. So how come when we meet, I always look up to her?"

And former Green Party co-leader Rod Donald said: "In many respects, she lived a green lifestyle much more than I've ever done, because it was a very simple lifestyle, very close to the earth, with a small footprint."

Elsie was certainly someone to look up to.

Melodie Robinson, Black Fern

by Huw Turner

Melodie Robinson was one of New Zealand's leading rugby players. She was a member of the New Zealand Black Ferns rugby team that won the Women's World Cup tournament in Amsterdam in 1998. In 2002, she played for the team when it won the World Cup in Barcelona. She talks to Huw Turner about her rugby career.

Huw: When did you first start playing rugby?

Melodie: When I was at Otago University. Although I always wanted to play at school, there were no school teams when I started. Things have changed since then. I know of lots of schools that have girls' teams and where girls' rugby is taken very seriously.

Huw: Which club and representative sides have you played for during your career ?

Melodie: In recent years, I've played for the College Rifles club in Auckland. Before that, I played for the Wellington club and the Otago University side. The representative teams I've played for are Otago, Wellington, Auckland Storm, and, of course, the New Zealand Black Ferns. Quite a variety really.

Huw: When did you begin to make a mark in terms of representative rugby?

Melodie: I made my mark in rep rugby for the first time in 1994, when I played one game as an openside flanker in club rugby. The Otago coach watched me. I played out of my skin, and she decided that I would be her Otago openside. It was a radical change from the other loosies they'd had, who'd all been bigger than me and a lot slower. I've played all my rugby as a loose forward.

Huw: When did you first play internationally?

Melodie: I first got into the New Zealand team in 1996, after I was coached by Laurie O'Reilly for the Wellington reps. My first international game was against Australia. We won 28 to 5. In the same year, I played against France, a game that we won easily, 109 to nil.

Huw: How many times have you played for the Black Ferns? Have you got any idea how many points you've scored?

Melodie: I've got seventeen caps, and I've scored twenty points: that's with four tries, I think. During that time, there's only been one defeat, against England at Albany Stadium in 2001. That was the Black Ferns' first defeat in ten years.

Huw: Which match would you describe as your most memorable?

Melodie: The World Cup Final in Barcelona. We worked so very hard for it, and I was so much closer to the other players than I'd been on any other tour. The match was the pinnacle of everything I've set out to achieve in sport.

Huw: Who are the people who have influenced you most in your rugby career?

Melodie: My dad, because, from a young age, he taught me to love the game. The Black Ferns' coach, Darryl Suasua, who kept me motivated and in line for so many years and who taught me a lot. Myself. I wanted to succeed that much that I would have done almost anything to get there.

Huw: What advice would you give to girls who might be thinking about taking up this game?

Melodie: Try it, simple as that. If you love it, stick at it and never let ulterior motives keep you in the game. Rugby is about passion.

Huw: You'll be retiring from rugby soon. What do you plan to do with your time?

Melodie: I'm going to learn more about all sorts of sports and work harder in areas other than rugby – and I'm going to learn te reo Māori.

Melodie Robinson is now a regular sports television host and journalist. She is thought to be the first woman to commentate an international rugby match.

photographs by Jo Caird

Acknowledgments

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