



the "armed offenders squad", not "armed defenders".

As I write this I am wondering if there is a chance that a couple of editors will get together in 50 years to assemble a group to write about an early 21st-century equivalent of Fairburn's friends. Charlotte Dawson/Nicky Watson and Friends? Paul Holmes? Somehow I doubt it.

### Purple Heart

By Ta'afuli Andrew Fiu

(Random House New Zealand, \$27.99)

This is a delightful little memoir by an extraordinary man who has undergone five open-heart operations. It's also a story about migration, courage, racism, traditional values-versus-modern ways and about the love of the extended family.

Andrew Fiu came to Ponsonby, Auckland, from Samoa in the early 1970s, aged three, part of the wave of immigration that turned Auckland's inner suburbs into a cultural melting pot. "I had arrived in New Zealand named Ta'afuli," he writes. "At the insistence of an Irish nun at St Joseph's Convent, my Catholic school in Vermont Street, I became Andrew. Sister Mary's response to the influx of immigrants with exotic names was to change them to make it easier for her to remember everyone."

At 14 he was misdiagnosed as having flu when, in fact, he had rheumatic fever, a disease endemic among Pacific Island communities which causes damage to the heart. At 15 he found himself in Middlemore Hospital in a room with the racist Mr Weston awaiting the first of his five heart operations over 20 years. Anyone who has spent any time in hospital will recognise how well the author writes about the enforced camaraderie of people with nothing in common who have to share wards.

"In the beginning of my journey through the hospitals I experienced racism," he writes ... "yet there were people who showed a fragile,

sick yet curious boy just how beautiful this world is and how powerful compassion, respect and love can be to someone who is sick. I came of age in a hospital...but my story is not one of bravery. There is courage all around you every day in every hospital where people are undergoing lifesaving operations. Babies and toddlers are now regularly having heart operations. My ordeal is no more daunting nor more important than any other. I just had the misfortune to do it over and over again."

If all that seems a bit dire, well it's not. The book appears to have been lightly edited to allow the Polynesian sense of humour to shine through, and it does on nearly every page.

The author pays a touching tribute to his surgeon, Alan Kerr, who was virtually forced out of Green Lane Hospital following the so-called "stolen hearts" controversy a few years back.

Ta'afuli Andrew Fiu is an interesting new voice and I hope he has more than the one book in him.

### First Pass Under Heaven

Nathan Gray (Penguin, \$29.95)

Last year I reviewed *Embracing The Dragon*, a quite good first book by Wellington journalist Polly Greeks. It was the story of her walk along the Great Wall of China in the company of her then-lover Nathan Gray, a lawyer-cum-political speech writer she'd met when she interviewed him in Wellington after he returned to New Zealand to rest, having got part way along the wall. Besotted, she threw in her job and returned with Gray to complete the walk, and her book resulted.

I wonder if Gray knew it was going to be written. In it Greeks was not kind to Gray. She railed against him for refusing, for what seem like mysterious reasons, to make love to her while they were on the wall; she was critical of his obsessiveness and single-mindedness.

Now, with the publication of this book, we can understand why Greeks felt the way she did. The author is quite fanatical about his walk, falling out almost immediately with three other companions with whom he had set out. If he acted the way he writes he would have been a right pain in the bum, for he adopts a semi-mystical tone and writing style that make for awkward reading.

On the book's cover writer Witi Ihimaera calls it "a remarkable celebration about the indomitable spirit of humankind". Witi ought to take his calming pills.

It is never made clear just how much

time was actually spent on the wall, but it's clear that a good deal was spent in dusty villages and hotels and restaurants in grimy cities contiguous to it and where Gray seems surprised to find himself among Chinese. He constantly and very annoyingly refers to "Chinese" peasants and "Chinese" soldiers. Who did he expect to find in China? Eskimos? Pygmies? A decent editor is called for.

I wonder if Gray and Greeks are still talking.

### In A Few Words...

● Te Awamutu-born and raised Andrea Treleaven and Christchurch-bred Ian Treleaven dreamed of buying a yacht, sailing the Mediterranean and then tacking back home to Sydney. In 2003 they did just that. Having shed their successful leisurewear clothing company Line 7, they bought a Beneteau and took to the silky seas. *Letters From The Med* (New Holland \$34.99) is their captivating cruising memoir from their two years aboard *Cadiz*. In the first instance it was a series of newsletters sent home to family and friends, now crafted into a handsome book with ravishing photography, helpful sailing notes and mouth-watering Med-menus. It's enough to make you go out and book a plane ticket immediately.

### Snow falls lightly

On a bleak back country road  
we're confronted by two bulls  
and further on  
a posse of steers giving a cockie a hard time

He wanders over, stands like John Wayne —  
a sarcastic bastard, tonnes of cheek,  
keen-eyed dogs milling around.

"This is one of the worst five jobs in the world,"  
he says, reckons sheep worse than cattle  
— more dogmatic — but women —  
"they'll wear you down to worm tucker —  
reckon no man's perfect 'til he's under their thumb.

"Yeah women — they love the outdoors  
'til winter chucks a few curve balls —  
and they scuttle back to town."

Now the wind's changed, the rain's horizontal —  
time to call it a day.

We turn back,  
he plods on with his dogs.

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Through all the restless night  
snow falls lightly.

Barbara McCartney