

A scoop in the jungle

From his observation and association with the three newspaper companies, Neville Togarewa believes investigative journalism is mostly lacking in PNG. However, it is demanding. It involves courage as well as resources.

By NIMO KAMA

NEVILLE TOGAREWA, special writer with the *PNG Post-Courier*, is enjoying life at the peak of his 'natural' career after abandoning law studies during his third year at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1977. There has been no looking back for the man who gained a scoop in the jungle of Irian Jaya and years of front page leads.

'I just felt a natural attraction to writing and was moved to seize the chance when the *Post-Courier* accepted my application,' says the 41-year-old Togarewa, who hails from Rabaraba district in Milne Bay province. He adds that many people do not enjoy their career and their life as a whole because they failed to make the right career choice. 'The pitfall is during deciding about what we want to do and what we end up doing. One can get what he or she wants but will never be satisfied if it doesn't satisfy the natural ego.'

He says he was good at English and normally came top in his class during his high school at Marty's Memorial in Popondetta. He thoroughly enjoyed poetry, story writing and other literature programs from 1973 to 1974 at Sogeri National High School. His good grades in English enabled him to enrol in law at University of Papua New Guinea.

Legal knowledge helpful

'Even though law was a prospective career, I obeyed my natural desire to attain fulfillment in my life,' says Togarewa who studied law from 1975 to 1977. He still finds legal knowledge helpful — especially in reporting court cases and undertaking investigations. 'The legal language and procedures are great assets

in my occupation. They're very handy when reporting requires speed and accuracy. I never had formal studies in journalism. I stepped into the world of journalism by my natural instinct.'

In February 1978, Togarewa joined the *Post-Courier* as a cadet journalist. He completed the four-year cadet program working alongside many prominent journalists such as Sinclair Solomon and Numa Ali. During his cadetship, he was posted to Lae to look after the Lae office. Adventurous Togarewa resigned from the *Post-Courier* in August 1983 and joined the *Times of Papua New Guinea* as a senior reporter. His hard work paid off and he was promoted to chief-of-staff and editor.

'My most enlightening experiences were during my association with *Times*. There are two interesting events that elevated my interest in journalism — the Barnett forestry inquiry and the 1984 conflicts in West Papua which were alleged to have resulted from confrontations.' He adds that many journalists take 'no' for an answer rather than taking it as an encouragement to probe further and do vigorous reporting.

'The most pressing need for Papua New Guinean journalists today is to actively engage in investigative journalism. There are people in the community and leadership who are hesitant to give information or create obstruction. We need to exercise the freedom of press and investigate in spite of these. We shouldn't just count on media statements. We ought to shatter all systems in place which do not allow the free flow of information,' he says in the light of his experience with the timber industry inquiry.

Investigating newspaper threatened

Vigorous reporting by *The Times*, owned by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and United Churches, led to the investigation into the forestry industry. Subsequently, the newspaper was threatened with the withdrawal of Government advertising by the Deputy Prime Minister Ted Diro. Togarewa admits that his team got personal threats as their investigations brought an end to Diro's political career.

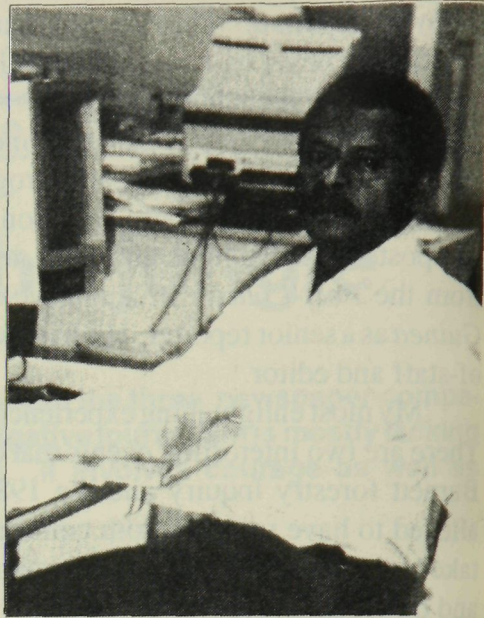
Over the second issue, Togarewa says he wasn't discouraged by the refusal to grant him a visa when he proposed to report in troubled Jayapura in 1984. He went to West Sepik and trekked into the Irian Jaya jungle through Bewani and met the OPM (Free Papua Movement). He interviewed Lawrence Dogu, its leader, recalling: 'I was struck with sympathy for those poor, rugged, hungry, and malnourished people being pursued by the Indonesian Army.'

Togarewa sees himself as a representative of ordinary people. He wishes to unveil the plight of the oppressed, illuminate the actions of the oppressor and reveal corruption. He is conscious of the public who are relying on his reports

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for news. His desire is for every literate person in the country to know the happenings around them.

This led him to join *Niugini Nius* in mid-1989 so he could write for the millions of pidgin speakers in the country. He was editor of this newspaper for a while. However, the company closed in 1990 when the owner, Sir Dennis Buchanan, left the country. He temporarily worked with the Post and Telecommunication Corporation as a public relations officer. Impatiently, he worked in this position for two and half years, awaiting a good newspaper job again. On 13 June 1993 he rejoined the *Post-Courier*, completing the cycle.



Neville Togarewa ... commitment needed

From his observation and association with three newspaper companies, Togarewa believes investigative journalism is lacking in Papua New Guinea. However it is very demanding. It does not only involve courage but also resources. There few resources to allow greater mobility of journalists. PNG news media companies are largely dependent on wire news services from abroad. He suggests there should be interdependence and free flow of information between print and electronic media reporters. Togarewa was one of the pioneering group of five journalists who participated in the new graduate Certificate of Investigative Journalism program at the University of PNG.

In addition to investigative journalism, Togarewa believes that commitment and professionalism are the most urgent need for Papua New Guinean journalists. They should not waste time. He warns that it involves sacrifice of family responsibilities. 'Time management is very important,' says the father of four whose only full day with the family is Saturday. 'I barely find time to read my novels. Currently, I'm enjoying *Ethics of Journalism* as it is grooming me on those aspects of journalism I didn't get to learn at university.'

Togarewa was tremendously influenced by his cadet counsellors Gil Lloyd and Peter Kitchen, and Bega Lebasi, Tarissus Bobola, Franzalbert Joku, Sinclair Solomon and Fr Jim Frank from *The Times*. His wife, Doris, who is also a journalist by profession, has given him support. Togarewa plans to write a book about his experiences. What will the theme be?

□ *Nimo Kama is a third-year politics student at the University of PNG. This article was written for a journalism assignment in May 1995.*