

Next weekend Hilton Morris\* will be remembering Christmas Eve 20 years ago, the night he and his family survived a visit from Cyclone . . .



# TRACY

**I**n our family there is a time-line known as BC/AC. Before cyclone and after cyclone. On the calendar it centres on December 24, 1974.

Being Christmas Eve we had friends around for a party. We shared cake, fruit drinks and pleasant company. Cyclone Tracy was making her presence felt about 9.30 p.m. when our visitors went to their respective homes.

We made final preparation for her visit by placing valuables in what we considered safe places. Our children and house guests were allocated beds in the most secure part of the house. They never used them.

Shortly after midnight a tree was blown through the wall of one bedroom. We were able to use a mattress to block the gaping hole and to hold it in place by stacking furniture around it. Mopping up the water was of little use as it was continually forced through every louvre window and door and crack of this two-storey house.

Strangely enough, the phone rang at about 12.30 a.m. It was Captain Alan Walker, the officer in charge of Darwin Corps (parish) to tell us that the Army's hall had collapsed. A few minutes later when we tried to call him back the phone was dead.

Earlier, before they ceased transmission, the radio and television stations had announced that all emergency vehicles had been called off the roads for safety reasons. All forms of communications were cut as the power station was shut down. Nothing moved except for the tonnes of flying debris that Tracy, with her 200 kph winds, threw about as she rampaged through Darwin and its suburbs.

With our house still largely intact we moved into the kitchen — the most secure room. There was an easing in the wind as the eye of the cyclone passed nearby and we forced ourselves to eat (with difficulty) a vegemite sandwich. Some basic training had taught us that physical sustenance was important in this type of extreme situation.

Suddenly the wind increased in speed and the noise was deafening. It was like a thousand trains approaching together. The front door blew open and the rear door

Saturday,  
December 17, 1994

PRINT POST APPROVED PP334385/00059

## The WAR CRY

OF THE SALVATION ARMY IN AUSTRALIA

Volume 113, Number 51

Price 40 cents



**A tip for the race of life: "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." — Luke 2:11 (NIV).**

was ripped straight off the frame. Our portable 240 volt generator motor (used for bush work) snuffed out. We were completely in the dark, except for a torch.

My wife, Wilga, and I tried to regulate the wind flow by holding the front door shut, but to no avail. "When you hear the roof go, run for the kitchen," she shouted. Our eldest son Brian held the torch showing the way. The front wall tore open, the roof ripped off and we made the five metres to the kitchen with a record leap!

Communication was severed from all other people except the eight family and friends huddling in the dark. Plus the dog! In that room we thought of others. Wilga led prayers for people we knew who were at risk, and we sang choruses. I stood holding a rubber mattress against the glass window in case it shattered and though less than a metre from the others I could not catch their words because of the screaming winds.

We were learning fast about the importance of inner security — a security which comes from having solid spiritual values. Cyclone Tracy was an ordeal that we

would not wish to experience again, but the personal lessons learned changed how our family deals with life and death issues.

After being evacuated to the south our four children were interviewed in a public gathering. They likened the experience to that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as recorded in the Bible (Daniel 3:25). These four men experienced a living person — "the Son of God" — go through a terrifying situation with them. Our children said there were nine people and a dog sheltering in the kitchen that Christmas Eve. The ninth was Jesus.

Today, 20 years AC, the six of us are all involved in active church work. Cyclone Tracy did much to establish, for us, what were the real values in life. Namely, to have a family that loves and supports its members in both spiritual and physical traumas, not only by word but in prayerful practice. And to practise a love which reaches out to the wider community as well.

\*Major Hilton Morris.



Major Morris is currently the Salvation Army's Regional Officer in Darwin. In 1974, when this photo was taken, he was living there with his wife and children, serving as the Army's Flying Padre. The above photo shows the remains of their home after Cyclone Tracy moved through.

**INSIDE**  
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**FRONT LINE FRONT LINE FRONT**

### ASTHMA FINDING

**A**REPORT has been released on a study sponsored by the Asthma Foundation of Australia which suggests that natural-gas appliances may contribute to the incidence of respiratory illness in small children. It claims there is an increased likelihood of up to 25 per cent of illnesses such as asthma, frequent colds and hay fever when natural-gas is used domestically.

The emission of nitrogen oxide is probably the culprit but the fundamental problem is a lack of adequate ventilation. In the energy-conscious 1980s everything was done to make homes energy-efficient and that was often at the cost of household ventilation. It would now seem that if we want to remain healthy while enjoying the convenience of using natural-gas appliances we may have to open a few windows.

The natural-gas industry can respond in one of two ways. It can mount an advertising campaign to convince consumers that its product is safe. That way nothing will change and young children will still be at risk.

A better response would be the application of expertise to the designing of more effective appliances and to the correction of the ventilation deficiencies of existing appliances. This process has already commenced as sales of flueless natural-gas heaters are already restricted.

The Asthma Foundation study suggests that natural-gas stoves are on a par with passive smoking as a health hazard. The latter is now being taken very seriously as an issue and many smokers have been required to discipline their use of cigarettes. Workers having a smoke outside office blocks are testimony to the impact of smoke-free environments.

The radical community changes that have followed the identification of tobacco as a problem substance suggest that we are more than capable of addressing any problem that may exist with the use of natural-gas.

No-one would suggest that natural-gas appliances should be dispensed with but they should be used responsibly. One practical response available to many people could be the greater use of ventilation fans above gas stoves. These mostly get turned on to eliminate cooking smells but perhaps they also have a role in combating the unseen dangers of nitrogen dioxide.

This study has once again reminded us that we live in a world which is finely-tuned to support human existence. Even helpful developments, like the harnessing of natural-gas, have to be managed carefully to ensure that our natural and urban environments are not contaminated.