



TAF TUMAS!

different
journeys,
one people



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DIFFERENT JOURNEYS,
ONE PEOPLE



"The boy on a divine mission..."

ALLEN NAFUKI

Church and Independence leader

ERROMANGO | BORN 1950

Once a boy named Nafuki grew up in Erromango's rugged interior before being sent down the mountain to the mission primary school, where 'Allen' became his English name.

Allen grew up under the shadow of his home being nicknamed 'Martyr Island' – because three missionaries had been murdered there. He decided to become a missionary himself and right any past wrongs.

In high school, Allen was offered the chance to study forestry in Fiji. He slept badly, tossing and turning with indecision. "I heard God call me three times with a message, 'If you go to Fiji, what about the blood of the missionaries killed on Erromango?'" Allen decided to continue on his path to become a pastor, and went to Papua New Guinea to start his training.

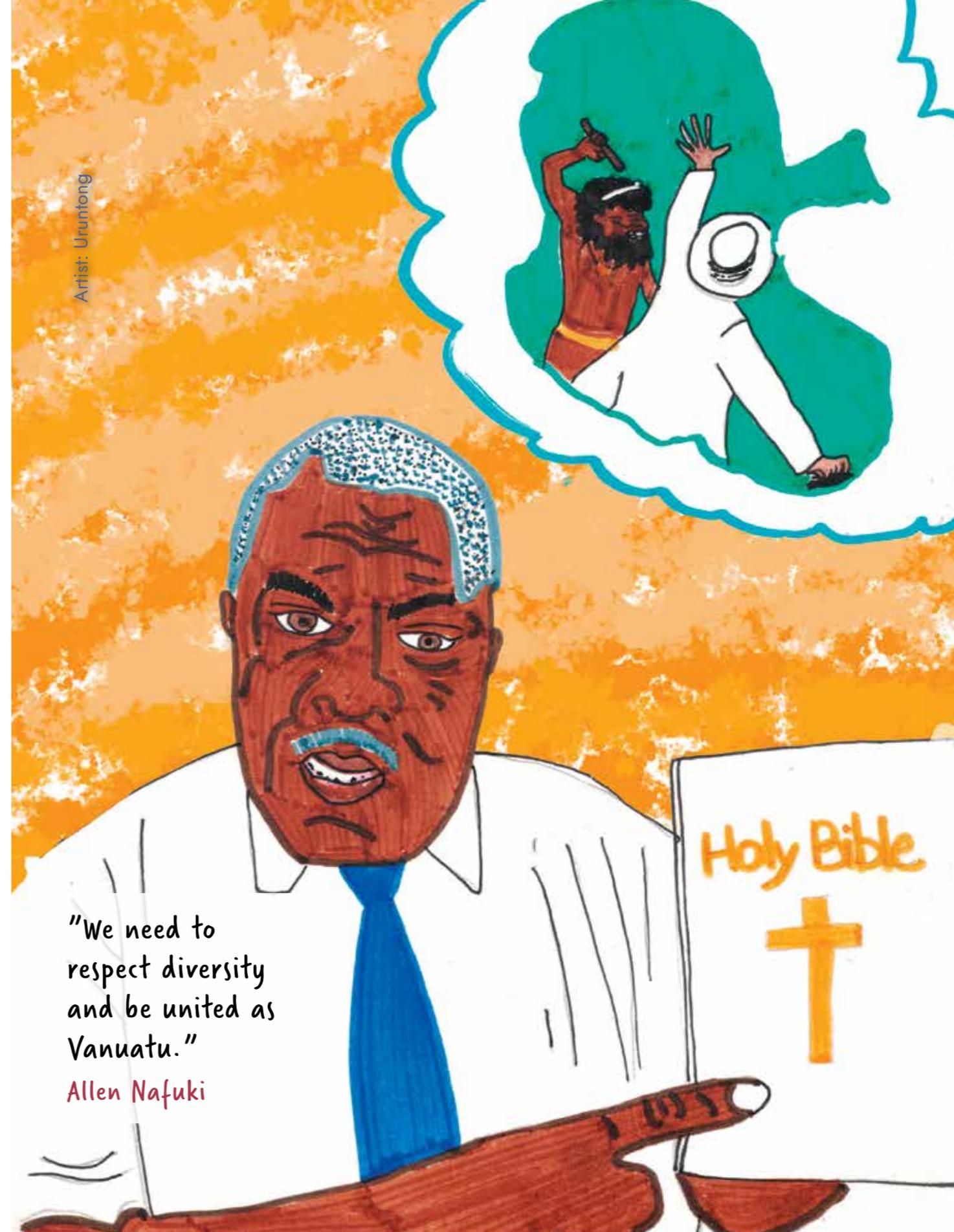
Returning to pre-independent Vanuatu, Allen recalls, "I now knew that God had called me not only to be His missionary but also to help bring about political independence for our people."

Through the church, Allen helped unite people across the islands in the lead-up to Independence. He was a part of all Independence milestones, helping to draft the national constitution and choose a new name for the country, along with a national anthem and motto. He also coordinated churches to join the nuclear-free Pacific movement, and became a tireless advocate for human rights in West Papua.

In 2009, Allen organised a historic reconciliation between the descendants of slain missionary Reverend John Williams and the descendants of the families who killed him. "Erromango is now free from the curse that has clouded our development, *aremaivi wocon* (this is good)!" he says.



Writer: Anna Naupa



"We need to respect diversity and be united as Vanuatu."

Allen Nafuki

"The musician who became a political activist ..."

ANDY AYAMISEBA

West Papuan sovereignty advocate

WEST PAPUA/VANUATU | 1947-2020

Andy grew up in the beautiful land of West Papua, only to witness much conflict and sadness. "It broke my heart to see my fellow West Papuans being displaced from their land and being victims of Indonesian brutality," Andy said.

He became determined for justice, thinking, "Nobody should ever have to put up with abuse, discrimination and hatred; not a single human." Andy realised that his school curriculum avoided topics about human rights and cultural diversity. Inequalities were ignored by the dominant colonial culture and political system.

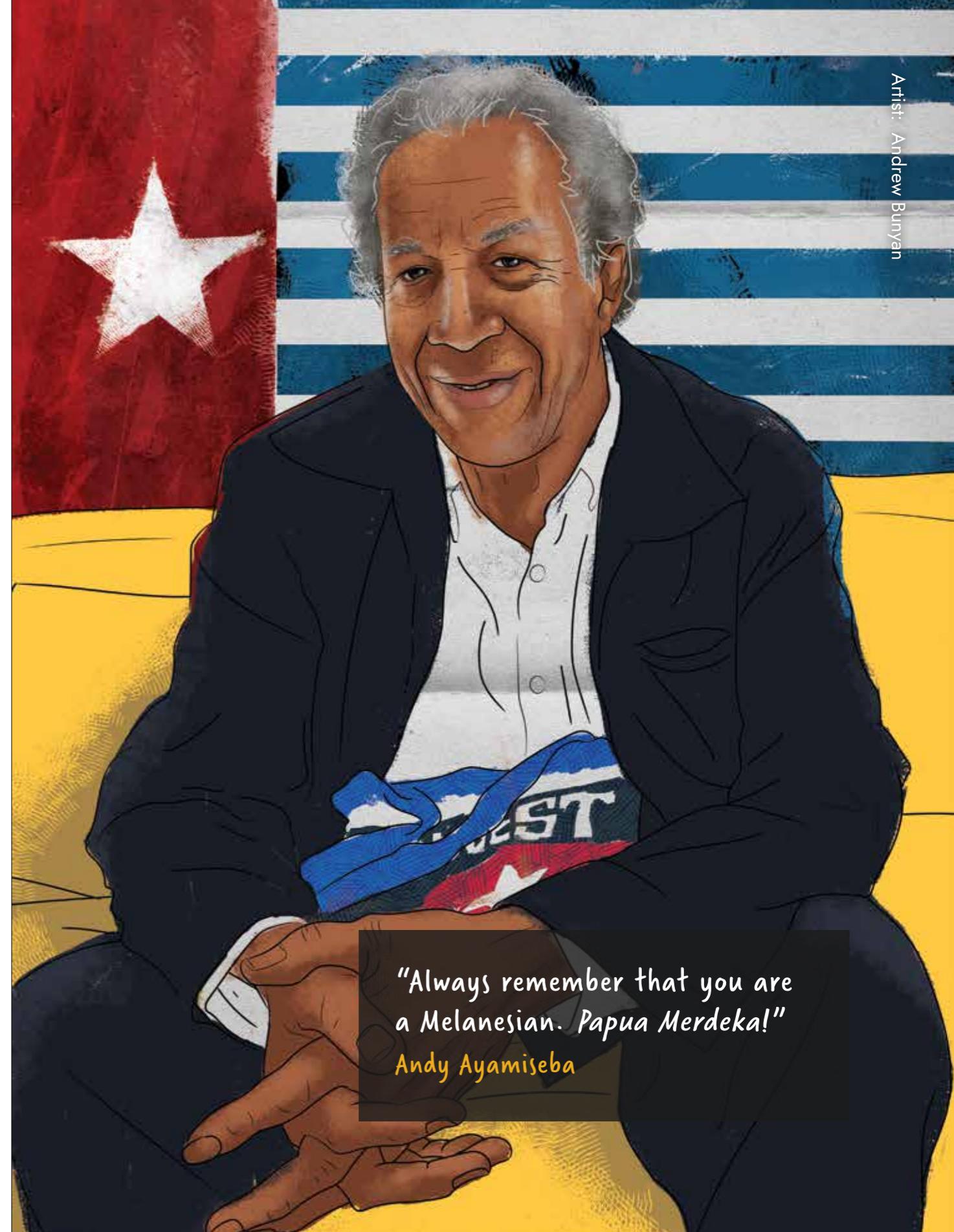
Andy turned his vision for justice into music. His band, *The Black Brothers*, sang popular songs about the Melanesian experiences in West Papua. "We sang about indigenous rights and the injustices in the West Papuan region," he said. "We sang to tell Indonesia we will not let them control our land." *Papua Merdeka* (Free the people, free the land!) soon became the rallying call for West Papuan sovereignty. The penalty for uttering these words was a gun to the head.

Despite topping Indonesia's musical charts, *The Black Brothers* became an enemy of the Indonesian Government. Hunted by security forces, the band was forced into exile. Vanuatu became Andy's home, while other members found refuge in the Netherlands, Papua New Guinea and Australia. "We couldn't go home. We would be arrested for speaking the truth," Andy said.

Andy continued to advocate globally for a free West Papua, including taking the case to the United Nations, until he passed away in 2020. "Always be yourself!" he said. "Vanuatu's children have their identity, cultures and traditions. Grow up to become a Melanesian warrior for culture, peace, love and freedom."



Writer: Georgilla Worwor



Artist: Andrew Bunyan

"Always remember that you are a Melanesian. *Papua Merdeka!*"
Andy Ayamiseba

"The reader who helped grow a nation ..."

ANNE NAUPA

Literacy pioneer

ENGLAND/VANUATU | BORN 1940

Born in wartime England, Anne learned to read at night while hiding from enemy bomber planes. When she started school, she helped teach other children to read. One day, Anne saw the sea for the first time and it awakened her strong spirit of adventure. She wanted to travel to places she had read about, but her family was very poor. Anne studied hard and won a scholarship to become a teacher. Now she could help others like her teachers had helped her.

When Anne was asked to teach English in the South Pacific for two years she thought, "Why not?" Finally, her dream of travelling and teaching would be realised! She arrived in the New Hebrides in 1964 to teach English to Melanesians, some of whom later became leaders of independent Vanuatu. Anne immediately fell in love with the islands (and a handsome islander named John, whom she married!) and decided to stay forever.

Anne helped start a new senior primary school at Lakatoro, Malekula, where she taught basic literacy. "Instilling a love of reading to children at a young age can take them far," she says.

Anne has taught more than 3000 students, young and old, from all over the islands. Many have gone on to hold important positions in the Government, private sector and local communities.

Anne also helped re-establish the National Library and National Archives, helping and training others to safeguard Vanuatu's historical records. "Reading is power," she says. "It reminds us where we come from and enables us to open up our own world to endless possibilities."



Writer: Anna Naupa



Artist: Ava Howlett

"Reading opens up new worlds."

Anne Naupa

"The active life of ..."

ANOLYN LULU

Table tennis champion

MAEWO/MERA LAVA | BORN 1979

Once there was a girl who had an active childhood and grew up loving sport. Young Anolyn would follow her parents and two siblings everywhere to watch them play sport, even to neighbouring villages to cheer them on from the sidelines.

When she turned 15, her sister introduced her to table tennis. Four years later, Anolyn was ready for her first international competition. She could hardly believe she would be travelling for sports. It was a dream come true! "I always wanted to travel the world, and now table tennis was helping me do just that," she says.

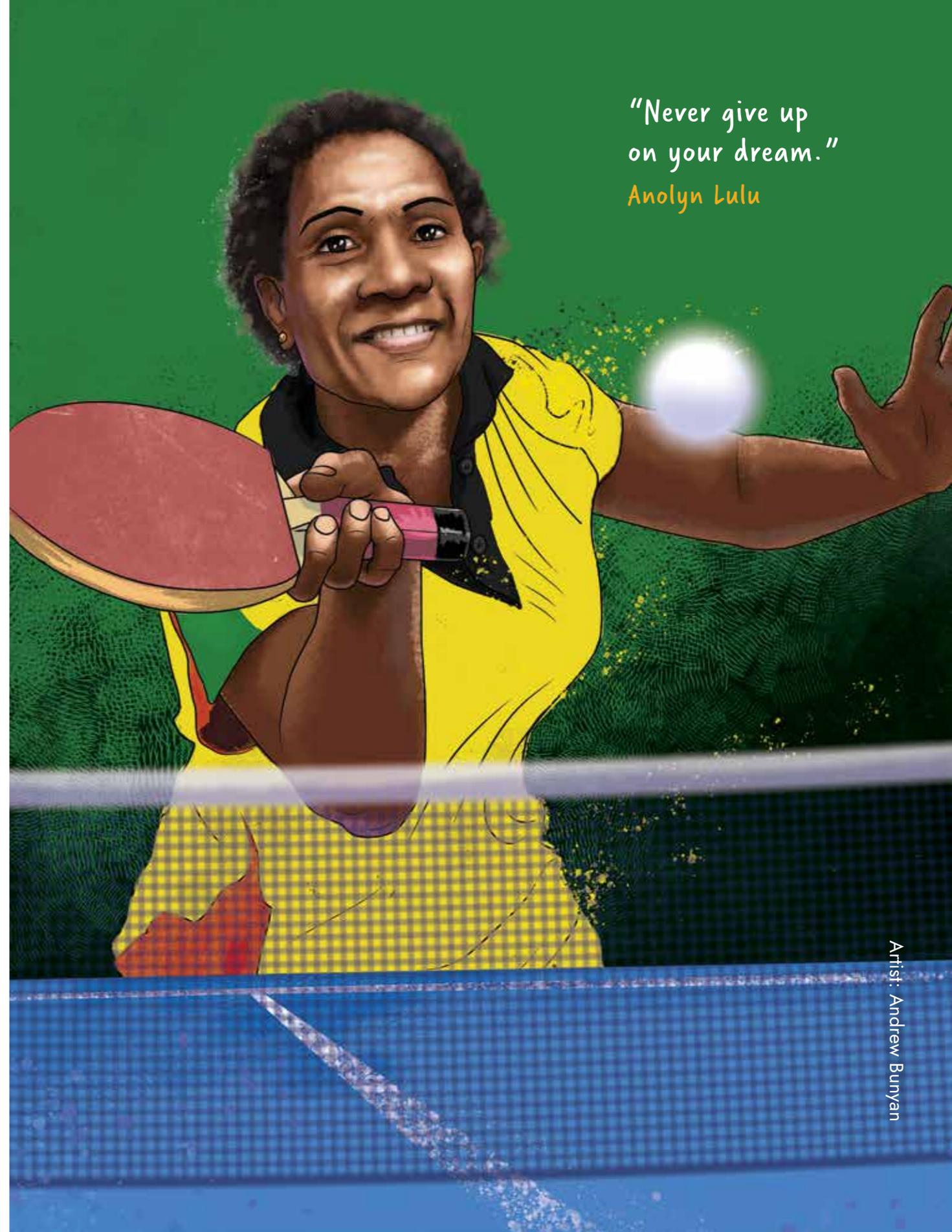
Anolyn has represented Vanuatu many times in the Pacific Games and in competitions around the world, and has won many medals. Her first gold was in the 2003 Pacific Games in Fiji, where she beat the New Caledonian title-holder. In 2019, she was named Vanuatu's first-ever Sports Woman of the Year. Anolyn's parents have become the ones cheering her on from the sidelines!

Anolyn never gave up on her dream, saying, "Make use of every opportunity that comes your way." She also believes her faith makes everything possible.

As well as being an international table tennis champion, Anolyn shares her passion for sport and fitness by teaching Zumba dance exercise classes and inspiring people to get fit. "I'm especially pleased to see so many mamas and young girls exercising and taking care of their health," she says.



Writer: Gruffina Toa



"Never give up on your dream."

Anolyn Lulu

"The well-worn wheels of ..."

ARTHUR SIMRAI

Disability advocate

MALEKULA | BORN 1953

Once there was a boy named Arthur who suffered from polio when he turned three. The disease paralysed him from the waist down. A Catholic priest persuaded Arthur's parents to allow Arthur to attend the Walarano Primary School, even though he could not walk. Every day his mother and father took turns carrying him to and from school. Others, such as the Year 6 students, also helped in pairs to carry Arthur.

The school found Arthur a wheelchair so he could move independently. "Being a village boy in a wheelchair gave me the desire to do more," Arthur says. He travelled to Luganville to continue his education and then was selected to attend senior secondary school in Vila. Sadly, his education stopped at the school steps. In his wheelchair, Arthur could not ascend the steps to the second-floor classrooms.

Arthur did not give up. He returned to Malekula and worked for the Norsup Post Office, while also keeping busy playing music for village weddings and ceremonies. When Arthur went for special training in Auckland, New Zealand, his eyes opened more. "I could see how much more we could do in Vanuatu for people living with disabilities, like myself," he says.

Back in Vanuatu, Arthur joined the Nakato Society and continued his disability advocacy. Arthur is a key driver in ensuring that schools and workplaces become more wheelchair accessible. He is a passionate advocate at the Vanuatu Society for Persons with Disabilities, helping to improve the lives of children and adults across Vanuatu who live with a disability.



Writer: Liku Jimmy

"Look at my ability,
not my disability."

Arthur Simrai



"The big-hearted nurse ..."

BLANDINE BOULEKONE

Community health advocate

FRANCE/VANUATU | BORN 1946

Growing up in New Caledonia, young Blandine decided she would become a nurse to help care for the mix of French and Pacific communities around her.

When Blandine studied nursing in France, she felt homesick for the islands. So as soon as she finished her studies, she returned to Noumea to work at the main hospital and teach at the first nursing school there.

Blandine fell in love with a young law student from Pentecost, Vincent Boulekone. They married and had three children, moving to Vincent's home in the New Hebrides. While Vincent began a 20-year political career in Vanuatu's Parliament, Blandine continued nursing to support the family and serve the wider community, becoming Head Nurse at the Georges Pompidou hospital in Port Vila.

After Independence in 1980, Blandine used her nursing skills to work for the new Government to build Vanuatu's health education services. "There are so many people who need healthcare," she says, "especially families."

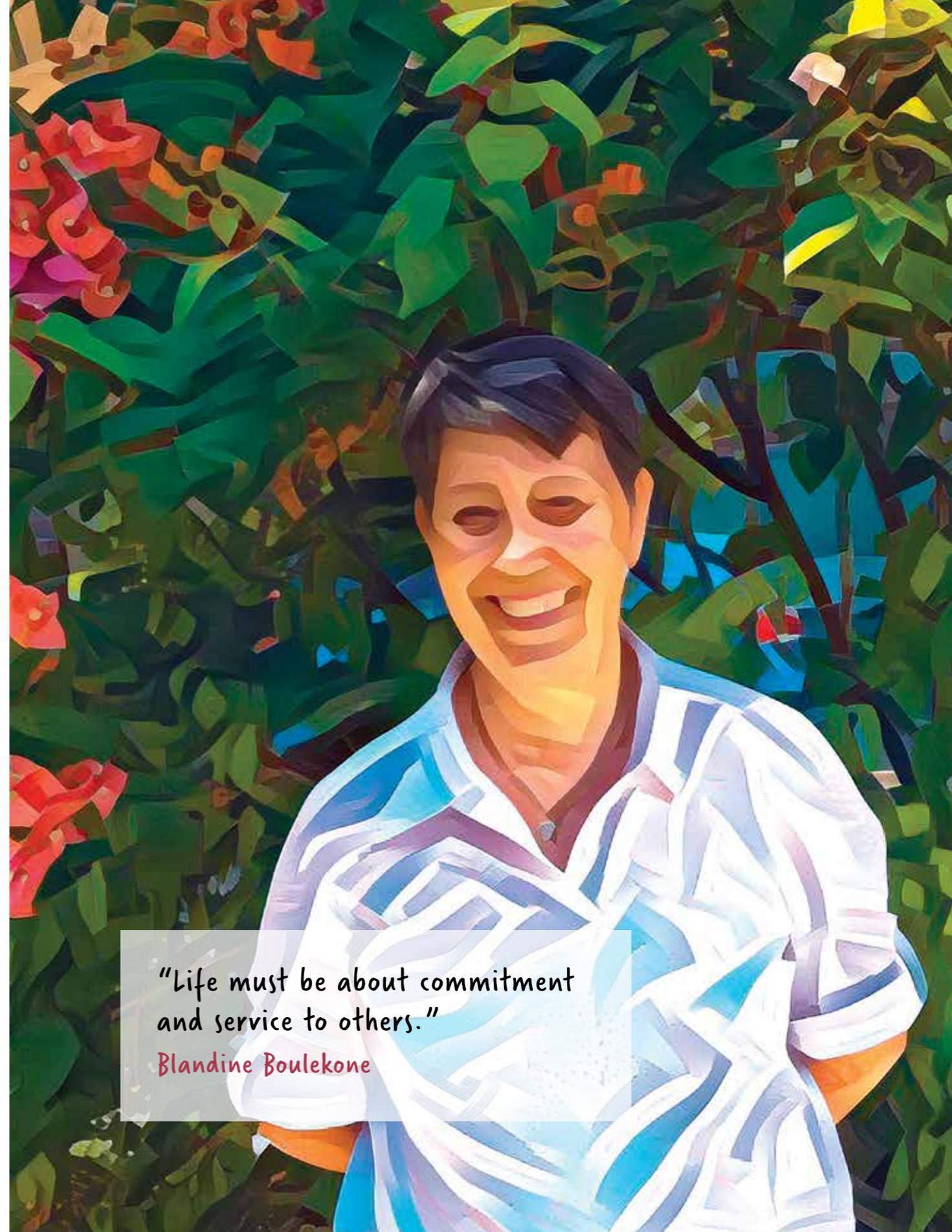
Blandine's passion for health education led her to set up the Vanuatu Family Health Association to promote family planning and reproductive health across the country. "Women's health has many needs," she says.

Blandine also became a founding member of the National Council of Women and has volunteered with the Vanuatu Disabled People's Association for many years, as well as with numerous other community health and human rights organisations. Her community service has been recognised many times through awards by the Vanuatu and French Governments.

Who would have thought that a girl's passion for caring for others would help grow a newly independent country?



Writer: Georges Cumbo



"Life must be about commitment and service to others."

Blandine Boulekone

"Uniting people through soccer and culture ..."



CHARLES VATU

Soccer star, chief, church leader

PENTECOST | BORN 1966

Charles was born into a large family in Abwantuntora village in North Pentecost. He was raised by his older sisters, first in the Lolowai Hospital orphanage on Ambae and then back on Pentecost once he reached school age.

Charles was studying in Santo during the lead-up to Vanuatu's Independence and witnessed the demonstrations and tensions with the Santo Rebellion. "I was drawn by the spirit of Independence and the empowerment that comes with it," he says. "I especially liked the ideas of unity of the islands."

Soccer became a passion too. "My first soccer ball on the island was made out of the heart of the black palm tree," he recalls. "When I first kicked a real size 5 football at the age of 10, I fell in love." Charles' talent led him to be selected for the Vanuatu national team, where he scored Vanuatu's first-ever World Cup qualifying-match goal. "Sport has the power to unite people," he says. "I use my passion to help others benefit from the beauty of soccer."

Charles is also a chief in his *kastom* and credits his character to the traditional values of respect for others. This respect and passion for unity led him to found the biennial *Sia Raga Festival* in 1996, using culture, music and sports to bring people together. "Culture and sports have the power to unite us all despite our different backgrounds," he says.

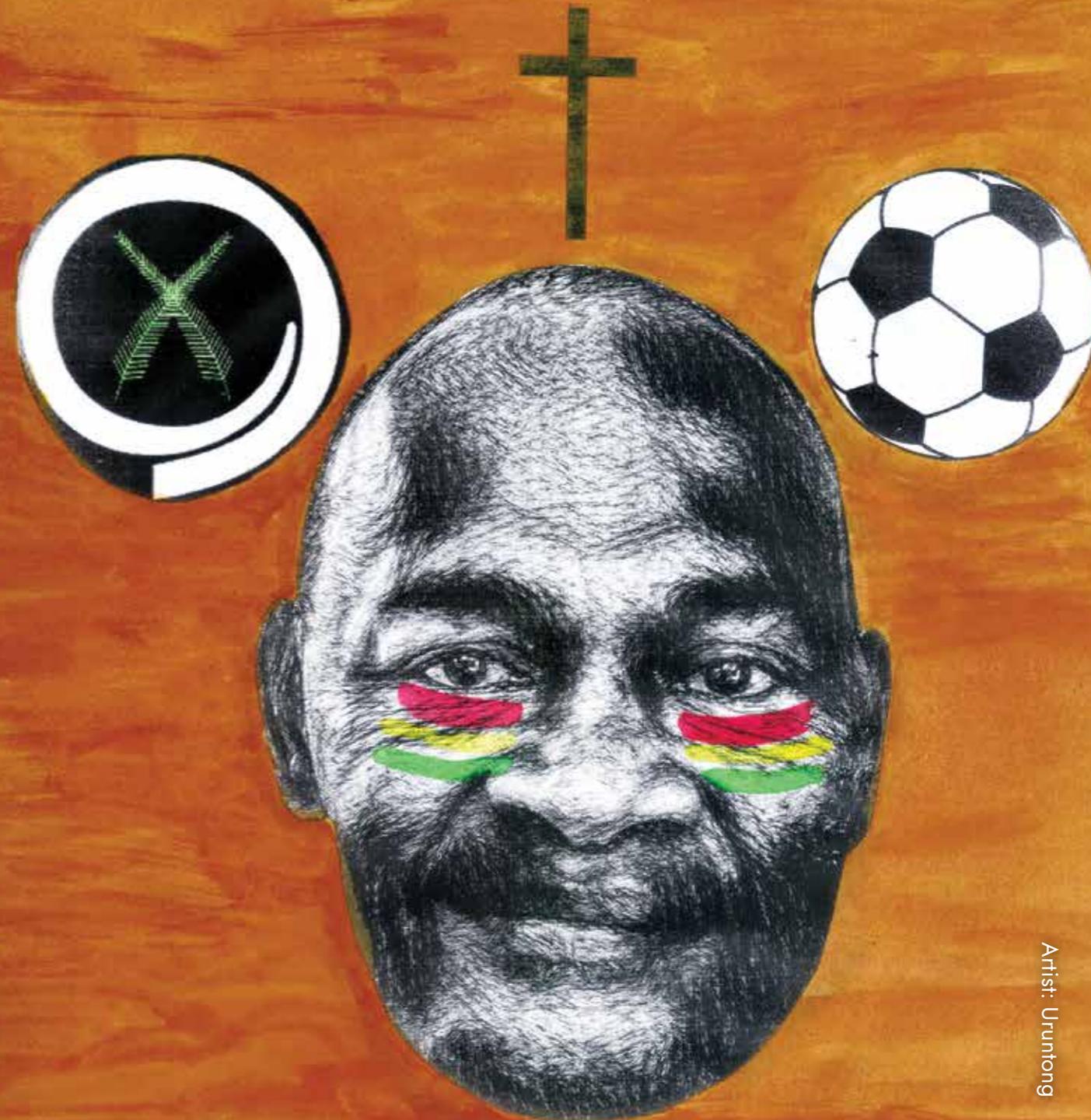
In 2009, Charles was ordained a reverend in the Anglican Church. He says, "I owe my success and achievement to God."



Writer: Anna Naupa

"Culture and sports have the power to unite us all despite our different backgrounds."

Charles Vatu



"A secret agent for change ..."

DONALD KALPOKAS

Independence leader

LELEPA | 1943-2019

Kalpokas was born when Vanuatu was under the colonial rule of Britain and France. He spent his childhood roaming his island until the mission church said he had to go to school.

At school, Kalpokas was given the English first name 'Donald'. He had been reluctant to go to school but he was a natural student, and went on to study in Solomon Islands, New Zealand and Fiji. This opened his eyes to indigenous rights – the rights of the original people of the land.

Returning home, Donald could see that New Hebrideans were not free. They were not even allowed to have their own national identity! So, Donald and his cousin Peter Taurakoto hatched a plan to set their country free.

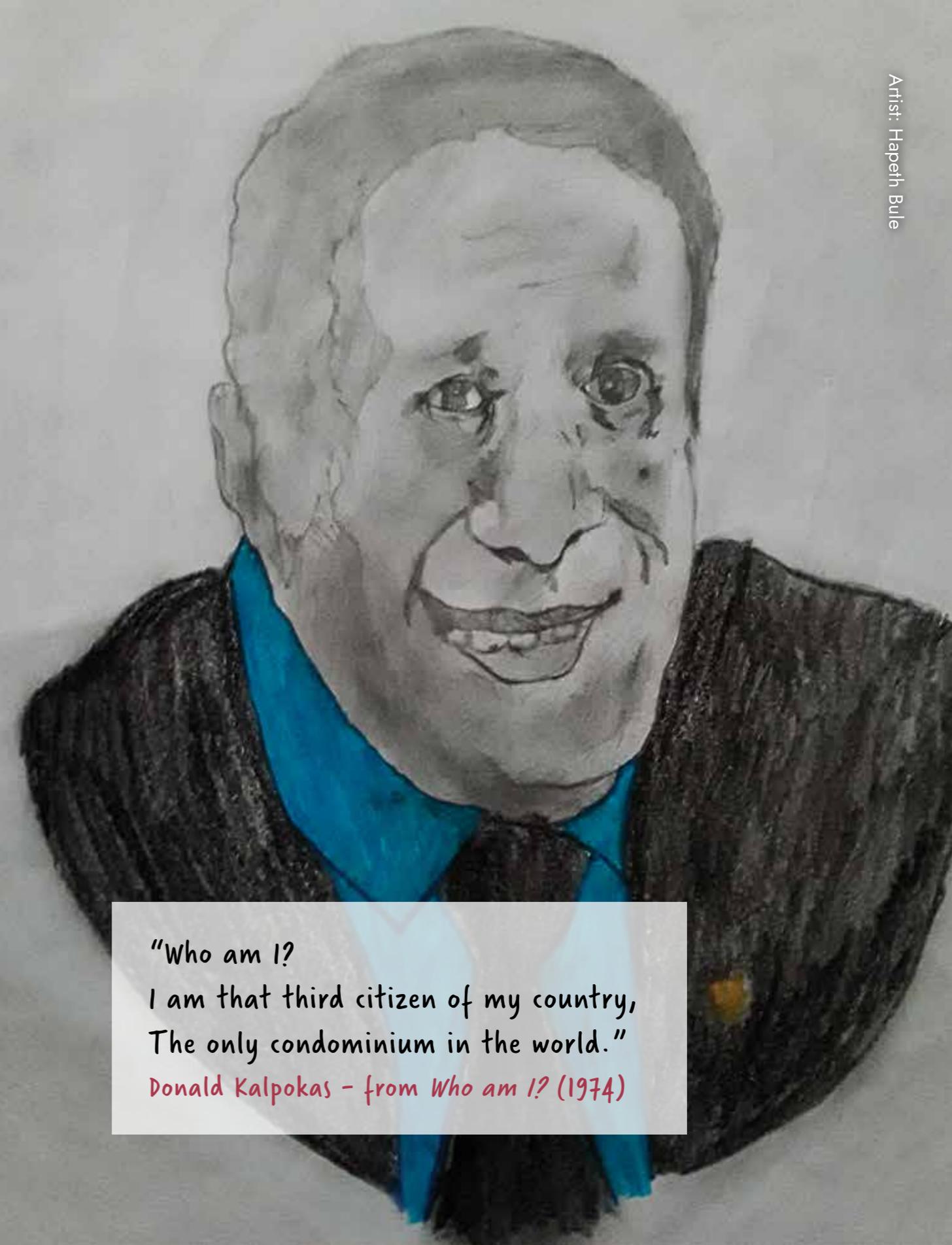
They set up the New Hebrides Cultural Association and shared their ideas with other political activists, including Walter Lini who became Vanuatu's first Prime Minister. This grew into the Independence movement, engaging secret agents all over the islands to deliver coded messages to prepare for change. Many were women and chiefs. Donald worked in the colonial administration, influencing from the inside. "Change must come from within!" he said to friends.

The cousins installed a secret radio station on the highest point of Lelepa. At night, brave Donald would climb the mountain to broadcast news about the movement over a secret frequency for Independence supporters across the country.

As the Independence movement grew, it became riskier for supporters. Meetings had to be secret, with decoys being planted to trick the authorities about their location. But they succeeded, helping Vanuatu gain Independence in 1980. Donald was Prime Minister of Vanuatu two times. Sadly, he passed away in 2019.



Writer: Jennifer Kalpokas Doan



Artist: Hapeith Bule

"Who am I?
I am that third citizen of my country,
The only condominium in the world."
Donald Kalpokas - from *Who am I?* (1974)

"The curious girl who connects culture and technology ..."



DOREEN LEONA

Woman chief and ICT advocate

PENTECOST | BORN 1974

Back when telephones were rare in Vanuatu, young Doreen learned about them in her village school. She thought to herself, "It's amazing, this can connect people over great distances!"

Curious, Doreen read many books to learn about the world beyond her horizon as there was no internet then. Her thirst for knowledge took her overseas to university. Doreen juggled caring for her two baby daughters and completing her degree, determined to succeed. She became the first in her family to graduate from university. The name *Mwei Amua* (first girl/woman) was bestowed on her when she returned to her village. Doreen performed the traditional pig-killing ceremony and was made a chief.

Soon after, mobile phones arrived in Vanuatu. Doreen's job was to map underground copper and fibre networks to find the best sites for extending telecommunication signals. "Being able to use a mobile phone anywhere in the rural parts of Vanuatu was ground-breaking," Doreen says. "It really changed people's lives!"

But there were still very few women working in information and communications technology (ICT). "Being connected helps your access to information," Doreen says. "With information, women and girls can be more empowered to make decisions." Doreen decided to help young women pursue ICT careers. She helped set up the *Smart Sistas* association for girls interested in ICT and engineering. In 2019, *Smart Sistas* represented Vanuatu in the first Global Robotics Challenge in Dubai.

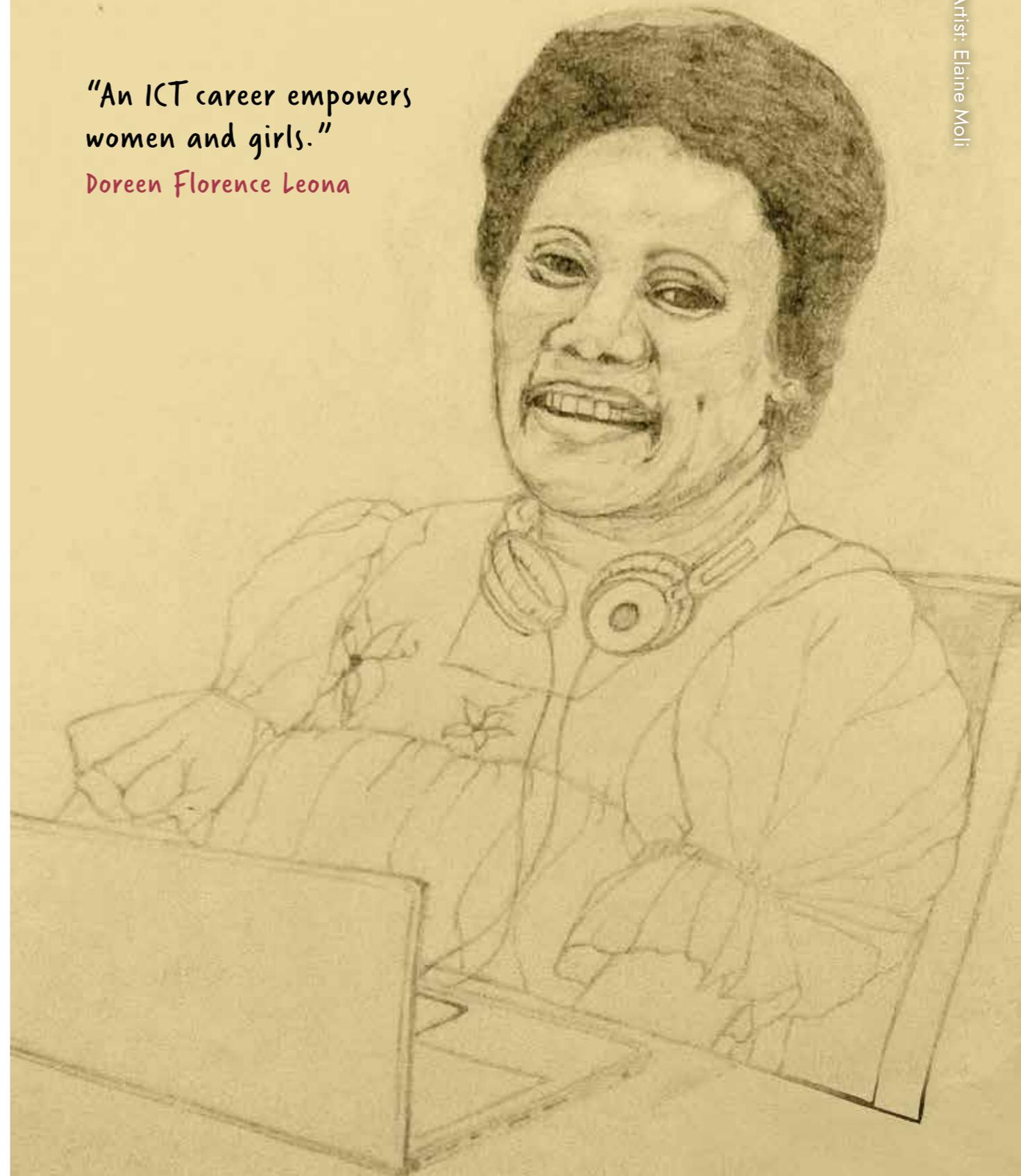
As a chief, mother and ICT advocate, Doreen values the positive role that ICT can play in everyone's lives.



Writer: Georgilla Worwor

"An ICT career empowers women and girls."

Doreen Florence Leona



Artist: Elaine Moli

"The awesome art of ..."

EMMANUEL WATT

Sculptor and environmentalist

AMBAE/EFATE | BORN 1947

Once there was a boy named Emmanuel who saw art in nature. Emmanuel spent a happy childhood snorkelling in the crystal-clear sea and playing outdoors, marvelling at the fertile island environment around him. At the age of 20, a thirst for adventure took him to France to learn how to make stone sculptures. From France, Emmanuel visited other European countries and saw the way environments had been damaged by humans. These experiences changed him forever.

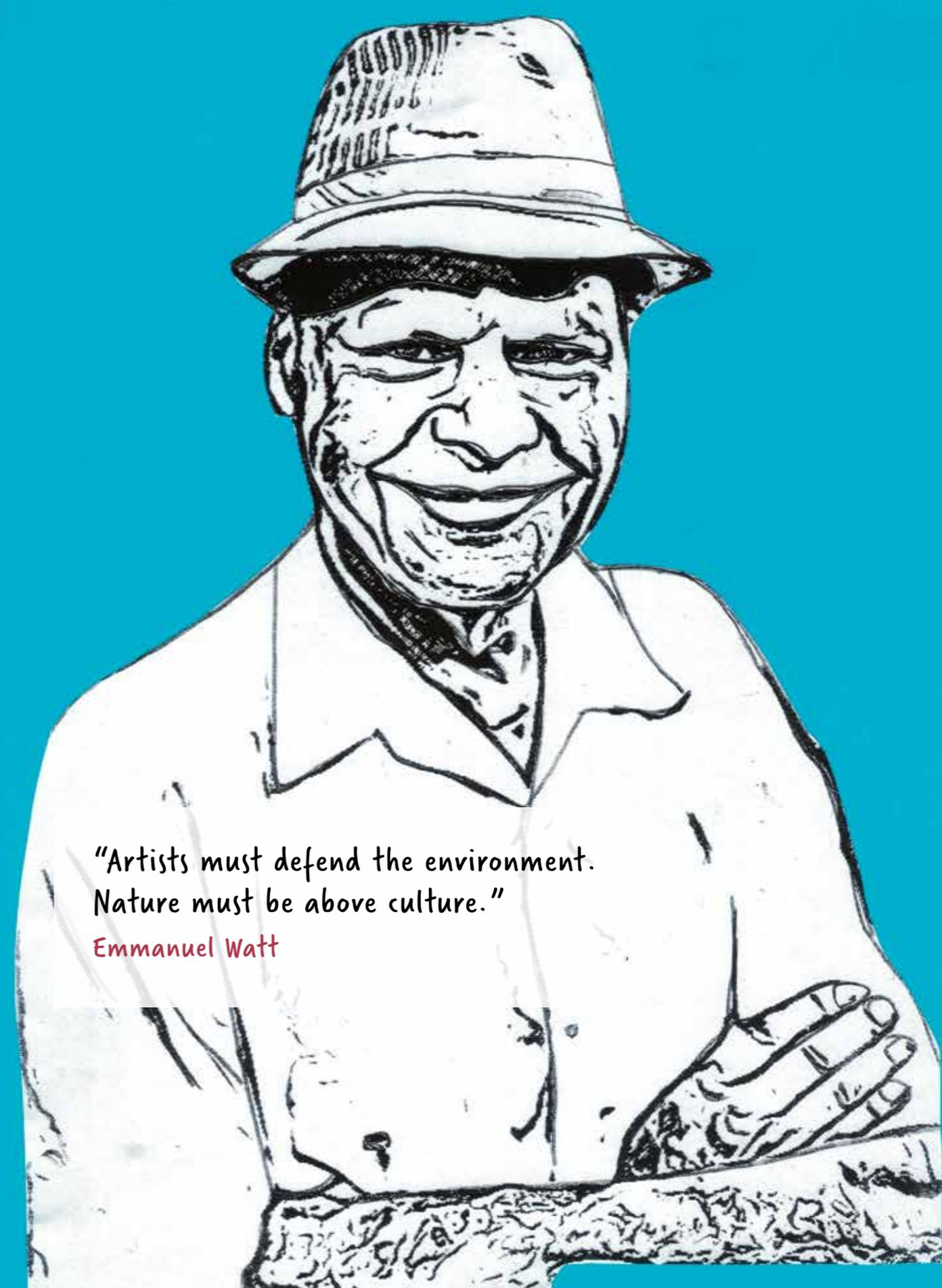
Returning to Port Vila, Emmanuel wanted to celebrate Melanesian artistic cultures, particularly the traditional connection to nature. He sculpted wood and black coral, with a modern twist. He didn't want to be limited by the rules of the traditional *kastom* art. Emmanuel also wanted to be an environmentally responsible artist, so he decided to use only driftwood from the beach or trees that had fallen naturally. He was determined not to cut trees for his art.

Emmanuel is Vanuatu's first contemporary sculptor and artist. He created an art gallery in Bukura, Mele, and in the 1980s, he and a friend – ni-Vanuatu painter Sero Kuaotonga – established the first association of contemporary artists in Vanuatu. One of Emmanuel's most famous sculptures is called *Vanuella*, which he made in 1980 as a tribute to his first daughter and also to women in general.

Emmanuel exhibits his work in Vanuatu and internationally, including New Caledonia, France, New Zealand, Australia and China. "Artists must defend the environment," he says, as he continues to use his art to advocate for a healthy island environment like the one he grew up in.



Writer: Georges Cumbo



"Artists must defend the environment.
Nature must be above culture."

Emmanuel Watt

“The marvellous medical works of ...”

DR. ERROLLYN TUNGU

Women’s health champion

AMBAE | BORN 1981

Once there was a girl who was curious about everything. When the chance came in Year 6 to participate in an exchange programme to Japan, Errollyn put up her hand even though she did not speak Japanese and would be far away from home for two weeks. Errollyn loved challenges.

In secondary school, Errollyn was more interested in playing basketball than studying. When she tried science subjects in Year 11, she failed at first. But Errollyn told herself, “I can do sciences!” In Year 12, she topped all her subjects and earned a scholarship for Year 13 in New Zealand.

Errollyn was then offered two scholarship choices: to study electrical engineering in New Zealand for four years or medicine in Fiji for six years. She decided to try medicine because it seemed like the harder challenge. She soon realised there were very few ni-Vanuatu women doctors and was determined to succeed.

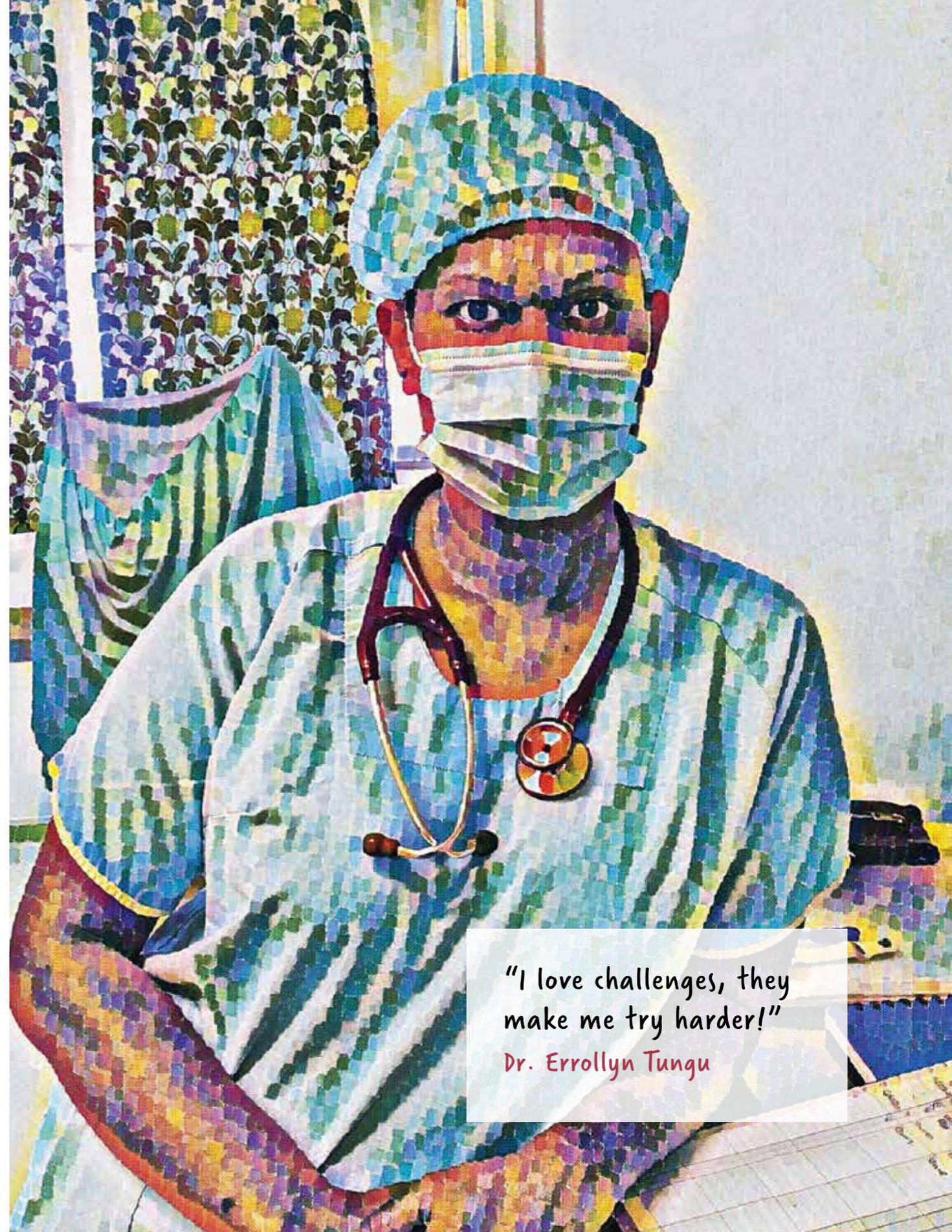
Errollyn became Vanuatu’s first obstetrician-gynaecologist. She has delivered more than 1000 babies and saved many lives, travelling across the islands providing critical care for mothers and also pre-cancer patients. She is a champion for women’s health and a Pacific leader in the fight against cervical cancer.

“In Vanuatu, speaking about women’s health is sensitive,” Errollyn says. “Being a female doctor helps female patients open up about their health.”

“People often think I am a nurse, assuming that only men can be doctors. I remind people that I am a doctor and women can do anything if they are up to a challenge!”



Writer: Anna Naupa



“I love challenges, they make me try harder!”

Dr. Errollyn Tungu

"The uniting lyrics of ..."

FRANÇOIS AÏSSAV

Radio journalist

MALEKULA | BORN 1955

Originally from Lamap village, young François loved listening to the radio. He would listen to as many different programmes as possible, whether plays, songs or simply the news. Radio brought the world to François' life.

Throughout his school years in Port Vila and Luganville, François composed his own songs. One of his songs won the 1976 *Pacificana* song contest in New Caledonia and another won the 1977 contest in Tahiti.

Around this time, Vanuatu was preparing for Independence. In 1979, a competition was launched for the creation of the future national anthem. François, who was working as a supervisor at the *Lycée de l'État Mixte* at the time, decided to enter and worked hard to compose an inspiring national anthem. "It needs to be a song that reaches the hearts of everyone across the islands," he thought.

In May 1979, a jury of officials from the Government of National Unity selected François' composition, *Yumi, yumi, yumi i glad blong talem se, yumi, yumi, yumi ol man blong Vanuatu!*

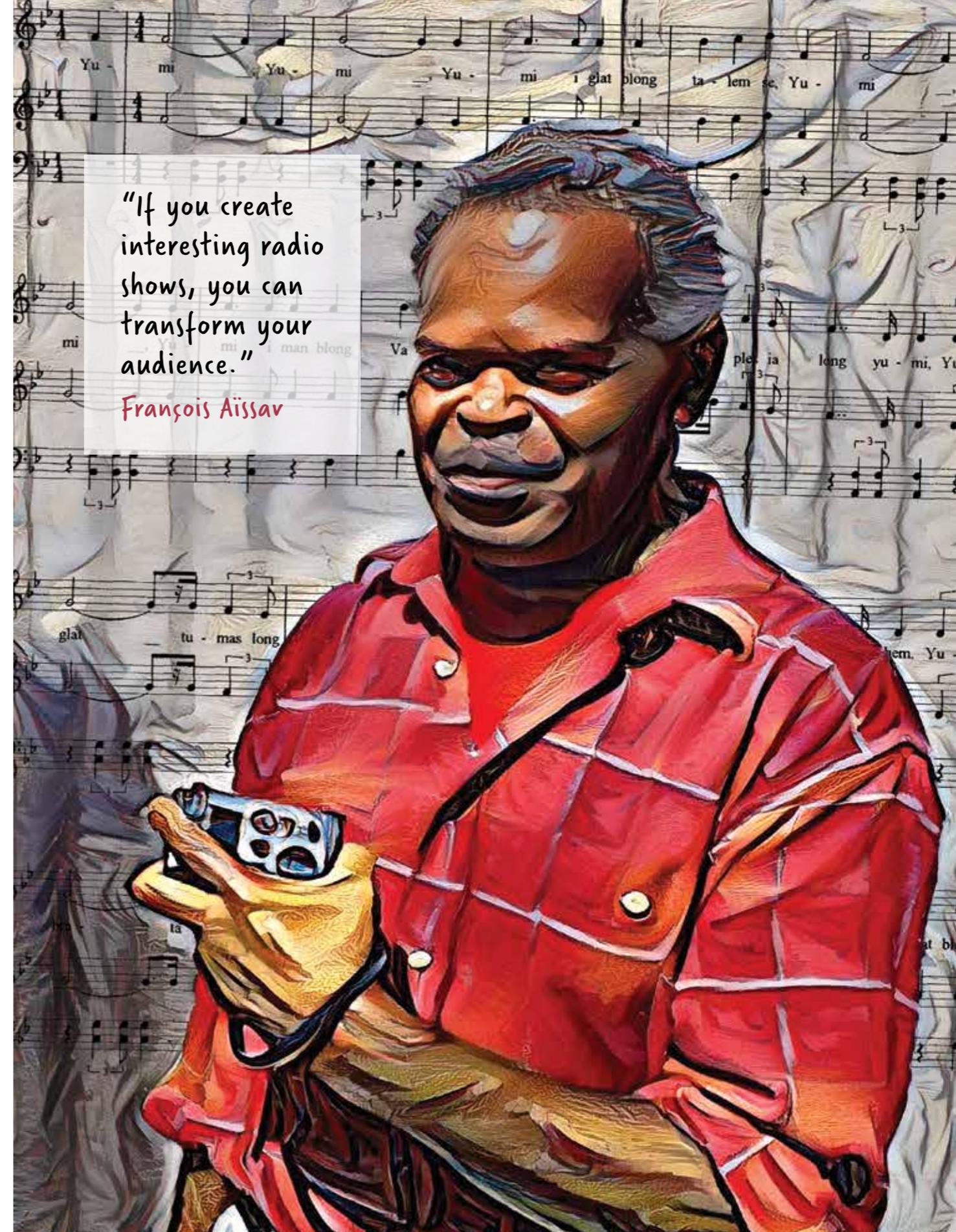
As Vanuatu's flag rose for the first time on 30 July 1980, the air filled with voices proudly singing the new national anthem. The anthem also reached global audiences through world radio!

François' talent and passion for reaching people through words and music led him to a life-long career at *Radio Vanuatu*. Starting in 1980 until he retired, he was the director and host of French-language radio programmes, bringing diverse and fascinating stories to audiences across Vanuatu.

The people of Vanuatu continue to sing François' lyrics at every national event.



Writer: Georges Cumbo



"If you create interesting radio shows, you can transform your audience."

François Aïssav

"The girl who wanted to build her own house ..."

GAIL TAMAKAM

Carpentry trainer

AMBAE/MALO | BORN 1981

Once there was a young, energetic girl named Gail who found it hard to sit still in class. Gazing out of the window one day, her eyes rested on a sight she had not seen before – a girl building a house!

Gail thought to herself, "I want to be just like her someday!" With determination, Gail set out to become 'that girl'.

During the Year 10 career talks, Gail's teacher handed out application forms for girls who were interested in training in the male-dominated trade courses at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology. Gail was the first to submit her application and jumped for joy when she was successfully selected for the carpentry course.

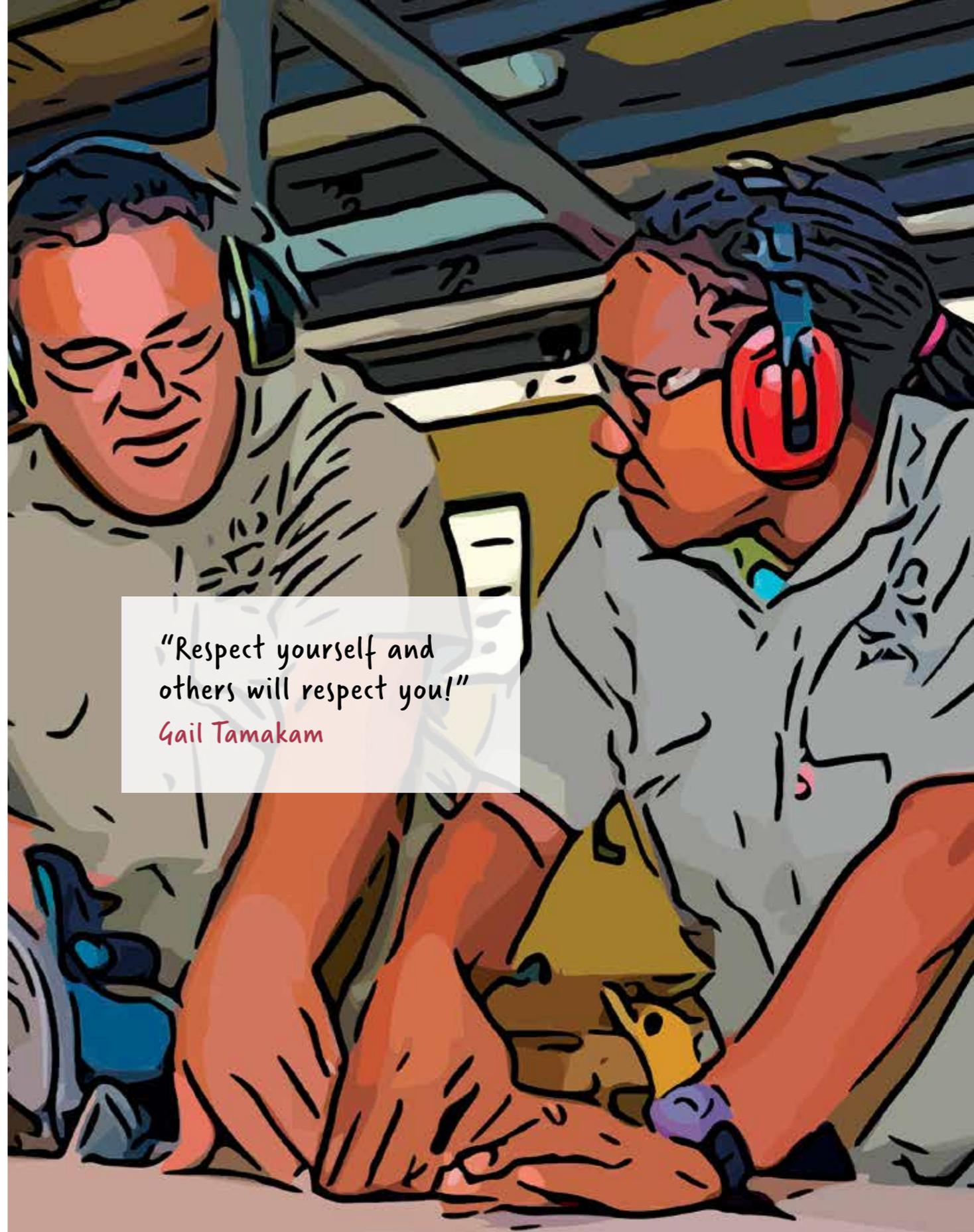
Her passion for carpentry kept growing. As she started her training, she realised that there were very few ni-Vanuatu women in the field and was more determined than ever before to succeed. Gail qualified as a carpenter, worked on many building sites – often as the only woman builder.

Gail decided to become a carpentry trainer to share her skills and inspire men and women about girls in the field. "Vanuatu is still quite traditional about what women can and cannot do," she says. "Being a woman in this trade encourages other women and girls to challenge gender stereotypes and show that girls can do anything!"

Gail is Vanuatu's first female carpentry trainer and can even train construction workers in wall and floor tiling. She encourages everyone to support women in trades.



Writer: Gina Dehinavanua



"Respect yourself and others will respect you!"

Gail Tamakam

"The brave voice of ..."

 **GIGI BAXTER** 
Activist and human rights defender

LUGANVILLE | BORN 1987

Young Gigi grew up in a large, loving extended family that respected culture. "The strong women in my family have had a big influence in my life, some are even chiefs," she says.

Gigi loved school. But school was not always a friendly or safe place. When Gigi started high school, she was very badly bullied with mean words and physical attacks. "I had nowhere to go for help. I didn't feel safe at school anymore," she says.

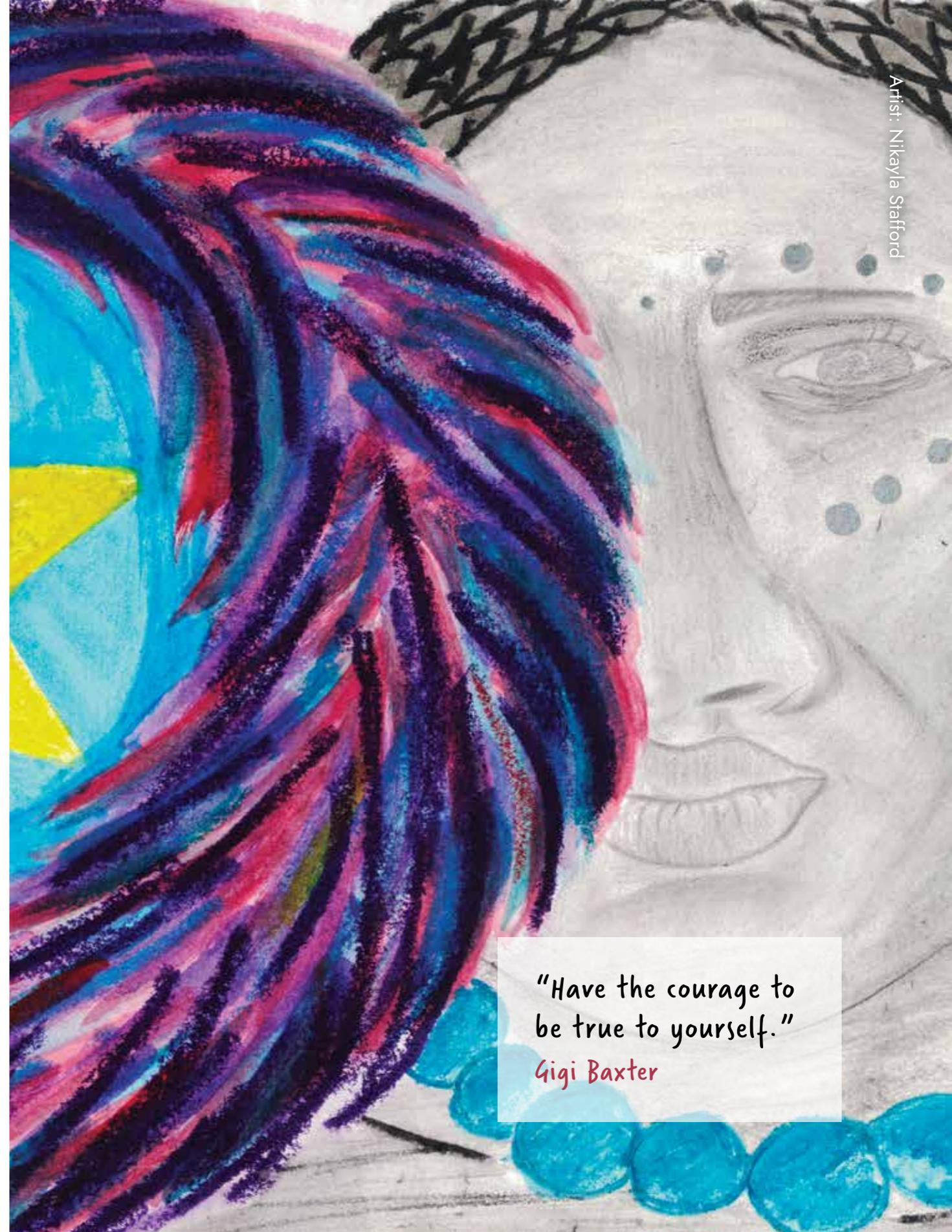
Gigi ended up dropping out of school and says this experience set her down the path to help others. "I don't want any child to go through what I did," she says. "We are on this earth to love and help each other, not hurt each other."

Gigi's determination to help others to stand up to bullies led her to try community theatre as a way to get the message across. Through Gigi's breakthrough role as Andy, a flamboyant character in Wan Smolbag's popular TV series *Love Patrol*, she began to transform her childhood pain into power. "Using humour, I was delighted that my character created visibility and dialogue about the different types of discrimination and bullying people suffer," Gigi says.

Gigi turned from acting to activism, starting an organisation in 2013 to support people who are bullied for being different. "Our organisation, *VPride*, promotes the rights of all kinds of people and encourages people to be proud of being different, not ashamed." She travels all over the world with her work and encourages young people to stand up to bullies.



Writer: Yasmine Bjornum



Artist: Nikayla Stafford

"Have the courage to be true to yourself."
Gigi Baxter

"The fearless words of ..."

GRACE MERA MOLISA

Political poet and activist

AMBAE | BORN 1946

Once a girl named Grace Mera was born. She was her parents' only child. Her father, an Anglican priest, died six months after her birth. His family and her mother's family took it upon themselves to prepare Grace for leadership.

There were only schools for boys on Ambae at the time, so Grace went there. She gained respect and was an outstanding student, becoming a teacher herself. She became the first New Hebridean woman to head a senior primary boarding school for girls and boys, on Ambae, and later became the first New Hebridean woman to gain a university degree.

After graduating, Grace returned to a country preparing for independence from Britain and France. She wanted to help too, and became a key political adviser to the New Hebridean Chief Minister and then to the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu.

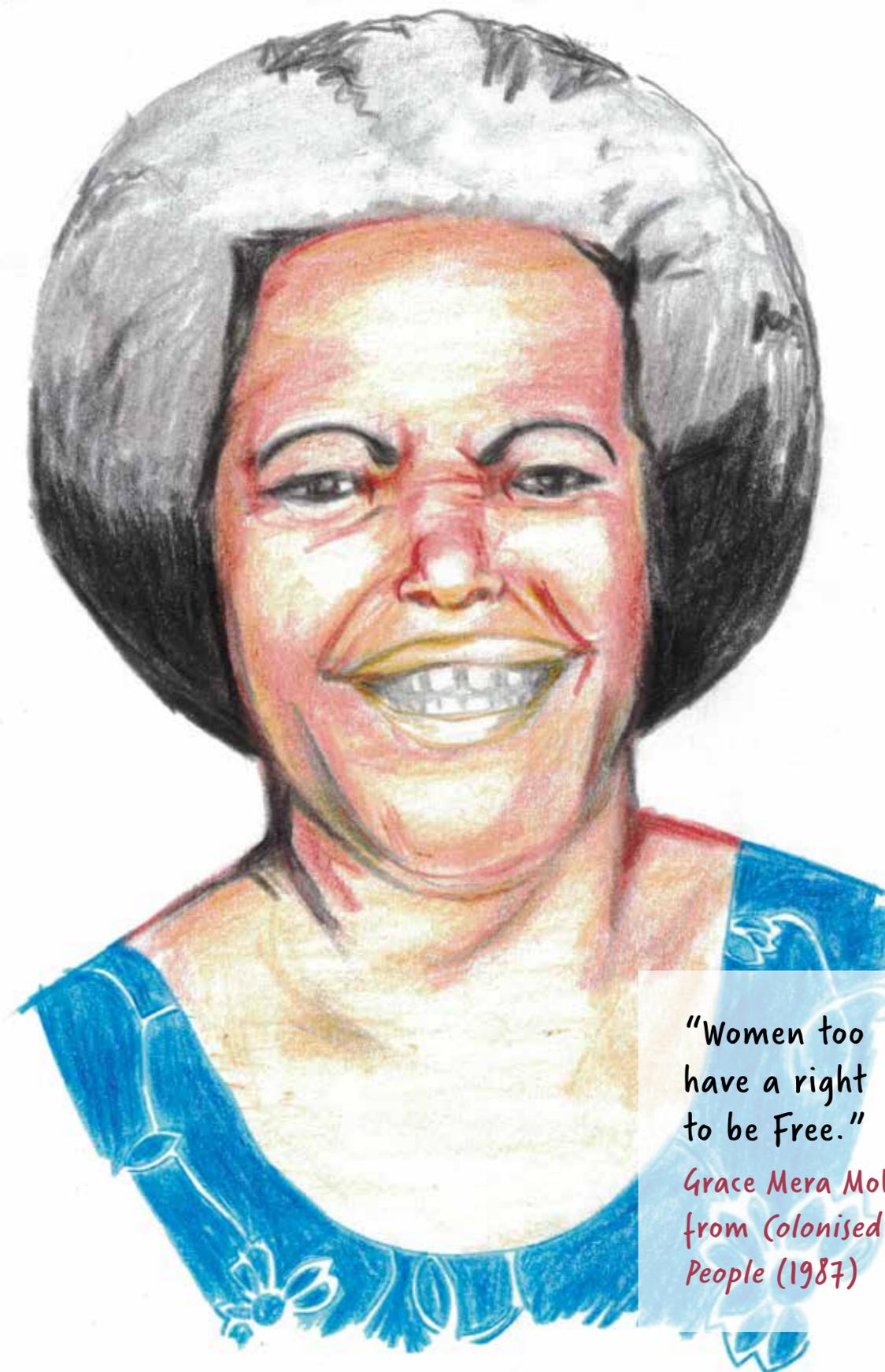
Grace is particularly famous for her poems and essays about changes in an emerging Vanuatu. She used her poetry to talk about feminism and political independence. *Blackstone* is the name of her first published collection of poems. Her poem *As Need Dictates* describes her urge to write creatively: "My verses / not intended / as jokes / provoking / merriment / raise issues / stimulating / second thoughts."

The mother of three children also used her commanding yet gentle voice to speak powerfully around the world and at home about issues important to Vanuatu.

Grace was busy educating people and communities until she sadly passed away in 2002. She is often remembered as 'Amazing Grace', and Vanuatu celebrates her wisdom and her legacy of truly indigenous and respected leadership.



Writer: Ketty Napwatt



"Women too
have a right
to be Free."

Grace Mera Molisa
from *Colonised
People* (1987)

"The flying fish boy ..."

HOLEN WOLUL

Swimmer

SANTO/BANKS | BORN 1999

Once there was a boy called Holen who loved the ocean. One day, watching an eagle swoop and soar over the water, he thought, "Yes, I'm like an eagle! I want to fly and if I fall down, I will always get up."

When he was a teenager, Holen joined the *Flying Fish* swimming team at Mele Bay near Vila. He became a talented swimmer and was selected for training in Australia. He also started teaching children to swim, first at Blacksands, Mele, Eton, Epau and Ekipe, and also in Vila schools. Everyone loved his beautiful smile and positive attitude!

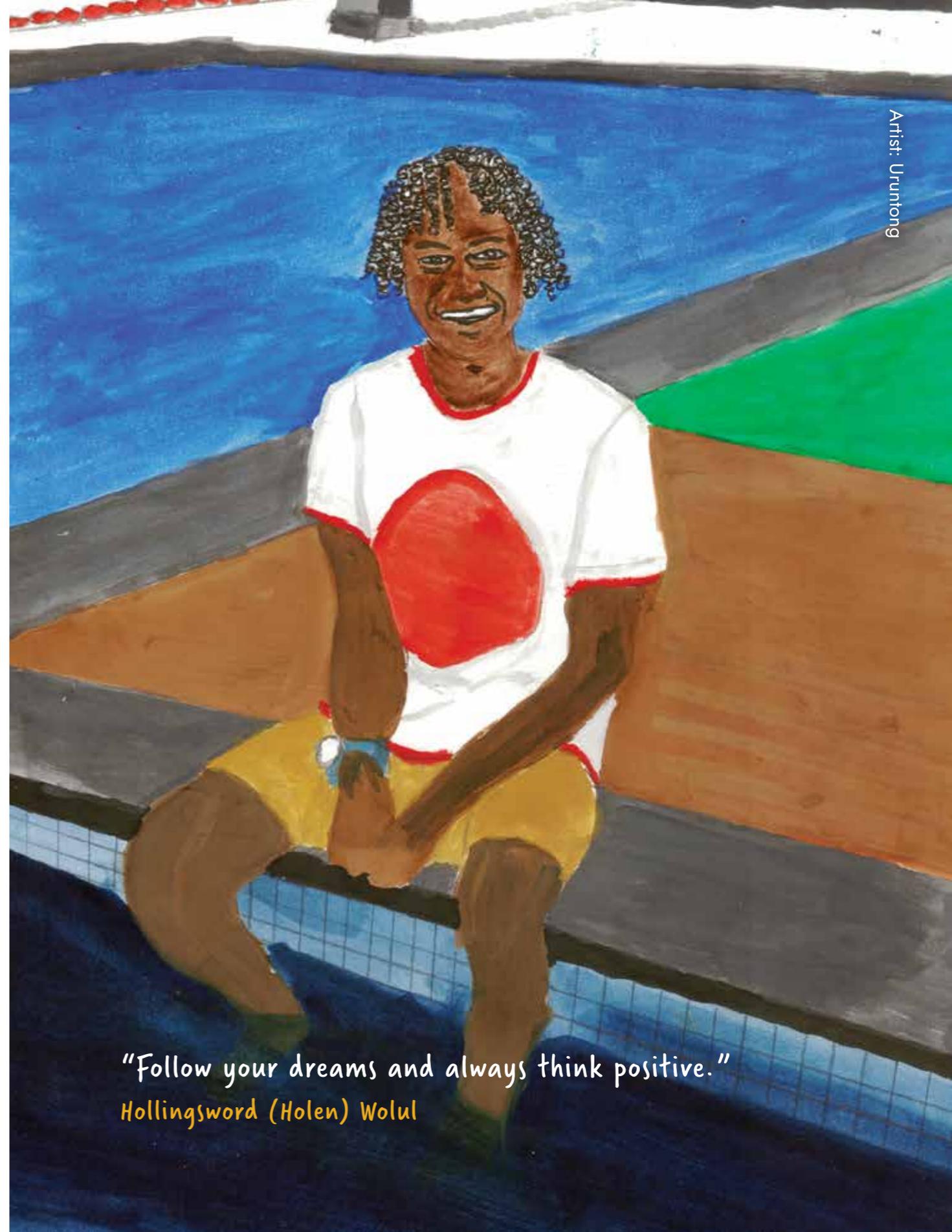
Holen represented Vanuatu in international swimming competitions in Fiji, China, Samoa and, in 2019, at the World Aquatics Championships in South Korea. But he had not been feeling fit and energetic for a while and when he arrived in Korea, he was exhausted and weak. His performance was not his best. Every bone, muscle and joint ached. Medical tests found Holen had leukaemia, a blood cancer, and it was amazing he could swim at all when so seriously sick.

With help from family and generous friends and doctors, Holen went to Australia for medical treatment. He was fighting for his life. Olympic swimmers visited Holen in hospital bringing messages of hope. Thankfully he was young and fit, and after treatment and what seemed like a miracle, his prognosis good.

In spite of many challenges, Holen continues to stay positive. He needs to take medicine every day for two years and have regular blood tests, but is re-building his fitness. His dream to swim for Vanuatu in the Olympics spurs him on.



Writer: Busi Vasconcellas



Artist: Uruntong

"Follow your dreams and always think positive."

Hollingsword (Holen) Wolul

"The girl who found ways to achieve her dream ..."

IBAE MARYLINE

Adult literacy advocate

TANNA | BORN 1966

Once upon a time, a girl named Ibae wanted to learn how to read. Ibae begged her parents to let her go to school but they said "No" because they lived far from any schools. Eventually, her mum let her go without her dad's permission.

Ibae attended school for a short while but left early, still not able to read or write much. Discouraged and ashamed, she decided to get married instead. Sadly, her marriage didn't last. Left with seven children to raise alone, Ibae put her dreams on hold and dedicated herself to her young family. She grew crops to sell at the market and used what little money she made to support her family.

One day, she heard about a programme to teach adult women how to read. She decided to enrol and finally achieve her childhood dream of reading.

On graduation day, Ibae stood in front of her community and read her speech with pride. "Before I could read, my world was quite small," Ibae says. "But now that I can read, I realise that there is a whole world out there I never knew about!"

Ibae became an advocate for adult literacy in her community, helping to spread the reading and writing programme in four different villages on Tanna.

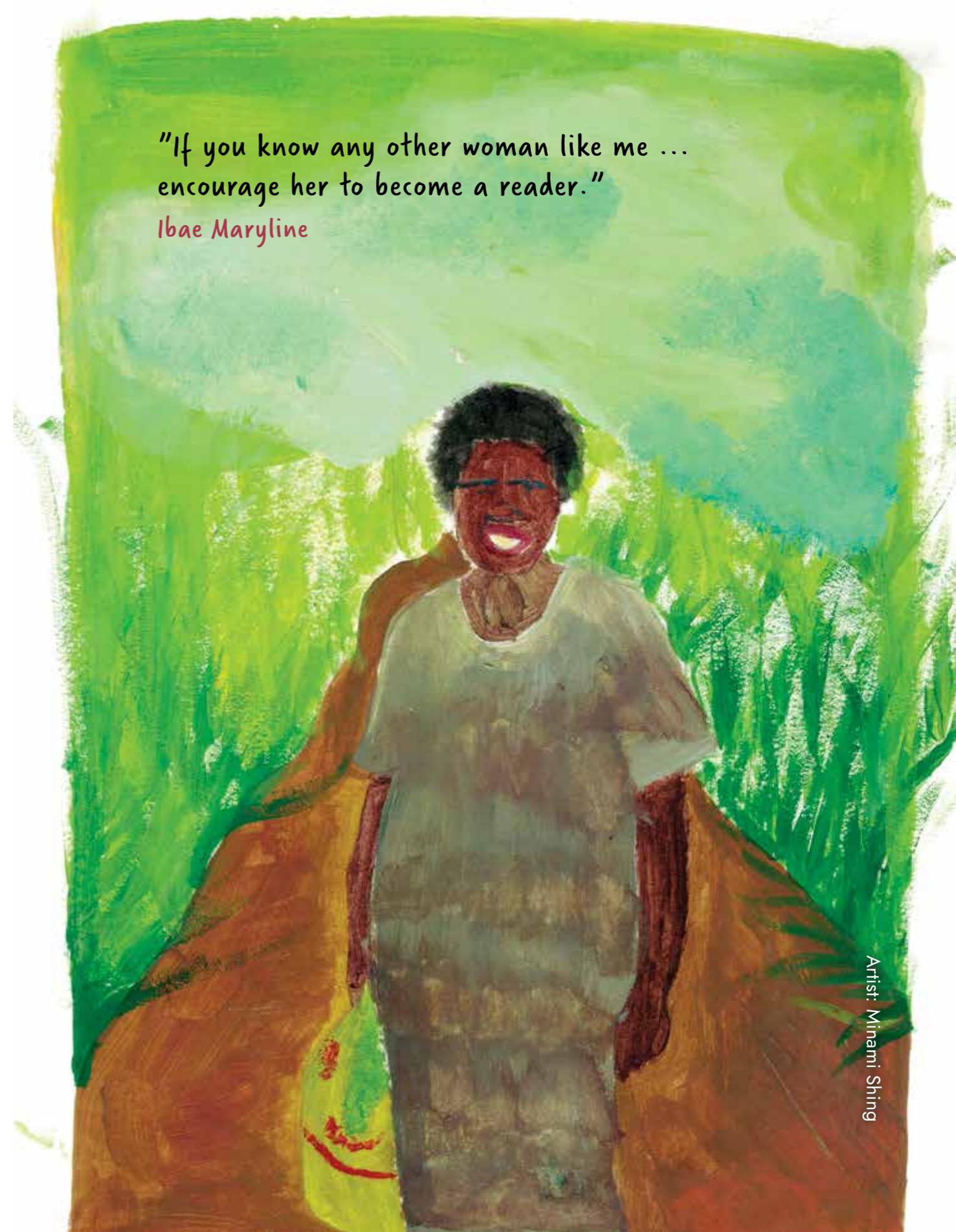
"If you know any other woman like me, will you please help her, encourage her to become a reader, and one day she may become a leader," she says.

"If you know any other woman like me ...
encourage her to become a reader."

Ibae Maryline



Writer: Mere Sovick



Artist: Minami Shing

"The rallying cries of ..."



FUTUNA | BORN 1989

Once there was a boy named Isso who grew up on a small island in the Pacific Ocean. Across 300 kilometres of sea from Port Vila, Isso's island needed to be self-sufficient to deal with long periods of no contact with the outside world.

But the world came to Isso's shores in the form of sea-level rise. Isso wanted to understand why the coastline was changing, why there was less rain and why cyclones were more intense than before. "Why is our drinking water becoming salty?" he wondered. In school, he learned about global warming and climate change. Village elders taught him traditional food preservation techniques to prepare for disasters.

When Isso went to study in Vila, he befriended people experiencing similar environmental problems. "Come stand with us," they said. "Together with other Pacific climate warriors we must tell the big countries to stop contributing to climate change."

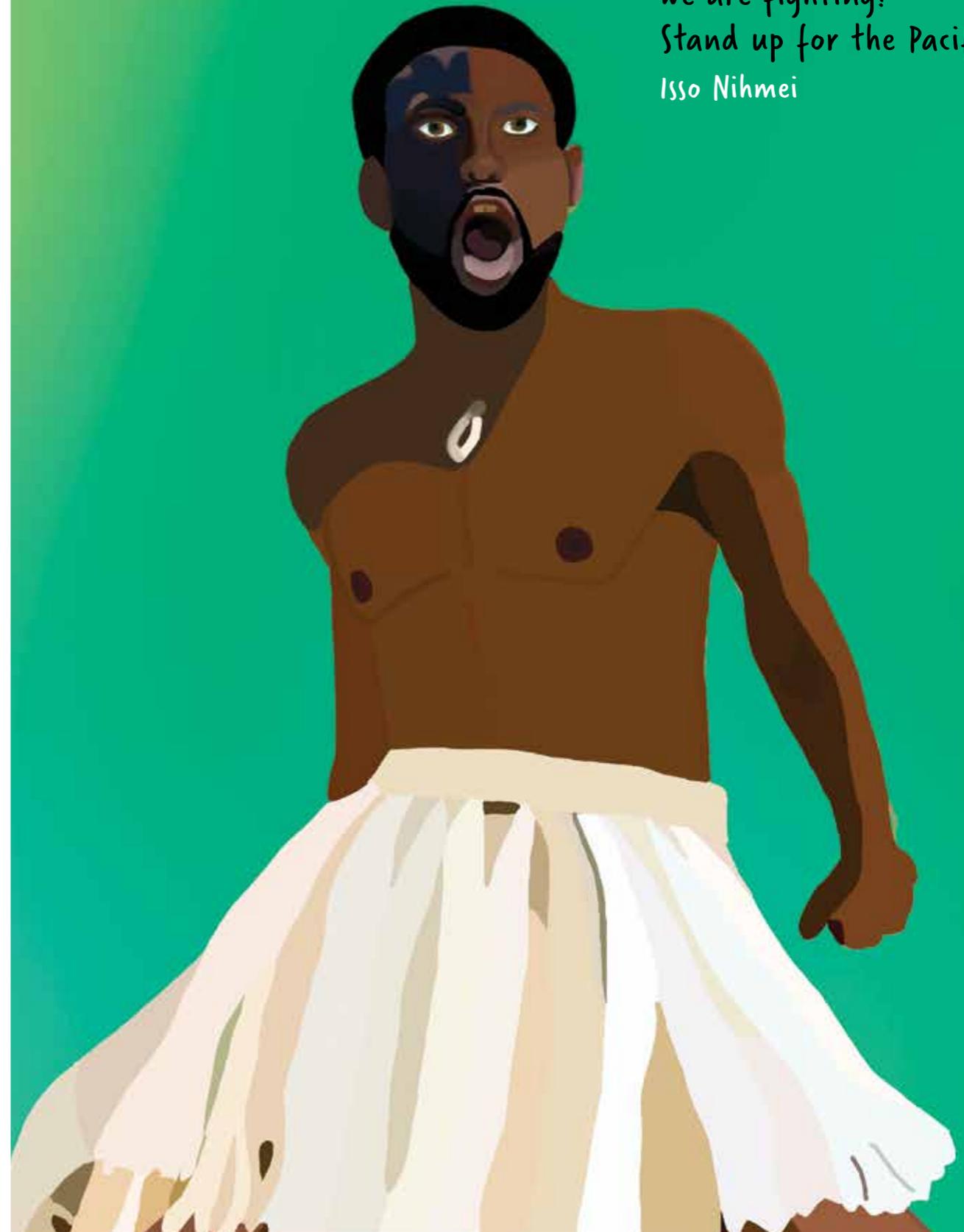
Isso became Vanuatu's leader for an international organisation called 350.org, which brings ordinary people together to fight against climate change. This took him to protest against the fossil fuel industry in Australia in 2014. "Enough is enough!" cried Isso. "We bring *Ta Reo*, the voice of Vanuatu, to urge Australia to stop coal mining!" The Vanuatu canoe joined a flotilla of Pacific canoes protesting in Australian harbours.

"As Pacific islanders, we will fight peacefully to protect our cultures, our homelands and our oceans," Isso says, as he continues to encourage communities, particularly young people, to join the fight against climate change.



Writer: Anna Naupa

"We are not drowning,
we are fighting!
Stand up for the Pacific!"
Isso Nihmei



"The courageous writing of ..."

JANE JOSHUA

Journalist

MALEKULA | BORN 1986

There was once a Malekula girl named Jane who loved to read. Although she was the youngest of five children and only six years old, Jane had to leave school suddenly to take care of her very ill older sister. Her uncle, a teacher, knew that Jane loved to read so every time he came to visit, he would bring her books. Reading became her life-long hobby.

Jane returned to school years later when her sister was better but she could not complete her studies, partly influenced by badly behaved friends and partly because her parents could not afford the fees. In her search for jobs in Vila, Jane applied to the *Vanuatu Daily Post* and was accepted for a junior position, then worked her way up to become a journalist.

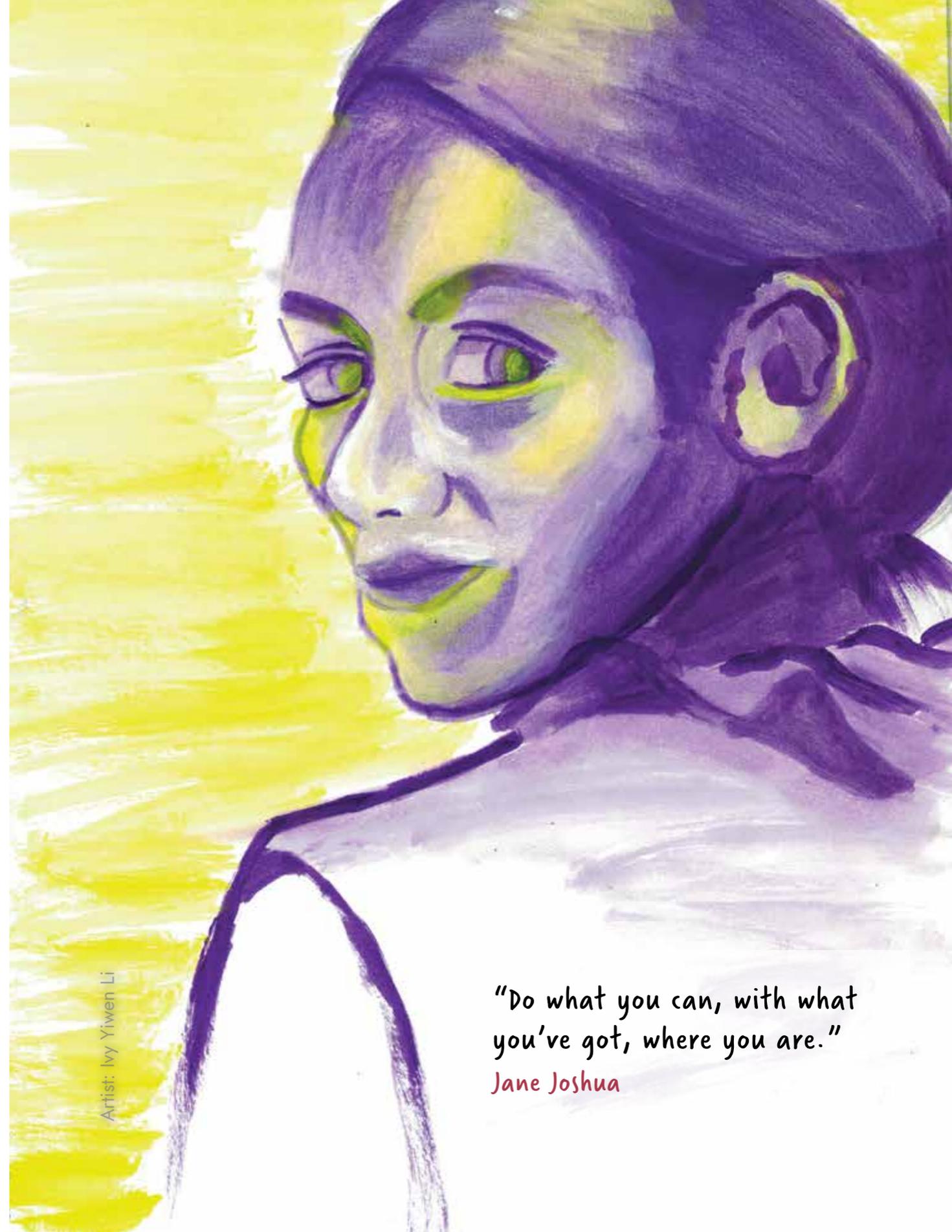
In 2018, Jane became the *Daily Post's* first female chief editor – and also won the Hanson Mataskelekele Award for her contribution to the community in leadership and excellence. "There are many challenges, but as long as you are passionate about what you do and have a committed team, you can do anything," she says.

Jane has written more than 300 front-page stories for the *Daily Post*, and is well known for her stories about social justice and human rights. She firmly believes that ni-Vanuatu have a right to know the truth and that it is important to do what you can, with what you have, to make a difference.

"I had rough teenage years and made some bad choices but I am determined to do better and be better," she says.



Writer: Telstar Jimmy



Artist: Ivy Yiwen Li

"Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are."

Jane Joshua

"The community theatre of ..."



JO DORRAS & PETER WALKER



Drama activists

ENGLAND/VANUATU | BORN 1955 AND 1959

Once there was an English playwright named Jo and a theatre director named Peter who dreamed of travelling the world changing lives through drama. In 1989, they were sent to work in a young country called Vanuatu.

The young couple were fascinated by Vanuatu's rich oral traditions. They wrote a play dramatising custom stories and set up Vanuatu's first professional acting troupe. This was named *Wan Smolbag* because everything they needed was in one small bag. The troupe travelled around Vanuatu performing to enraptured audiences. Communities asked them, "Can you perform more plays about modern life?"

And so began the troupe's 'drama activism', spreading important messages through community theatre. No issue was too tough for the theatre, whether it was about nutrition, adolescent health, gender equality, land rights, corruption or the environment.

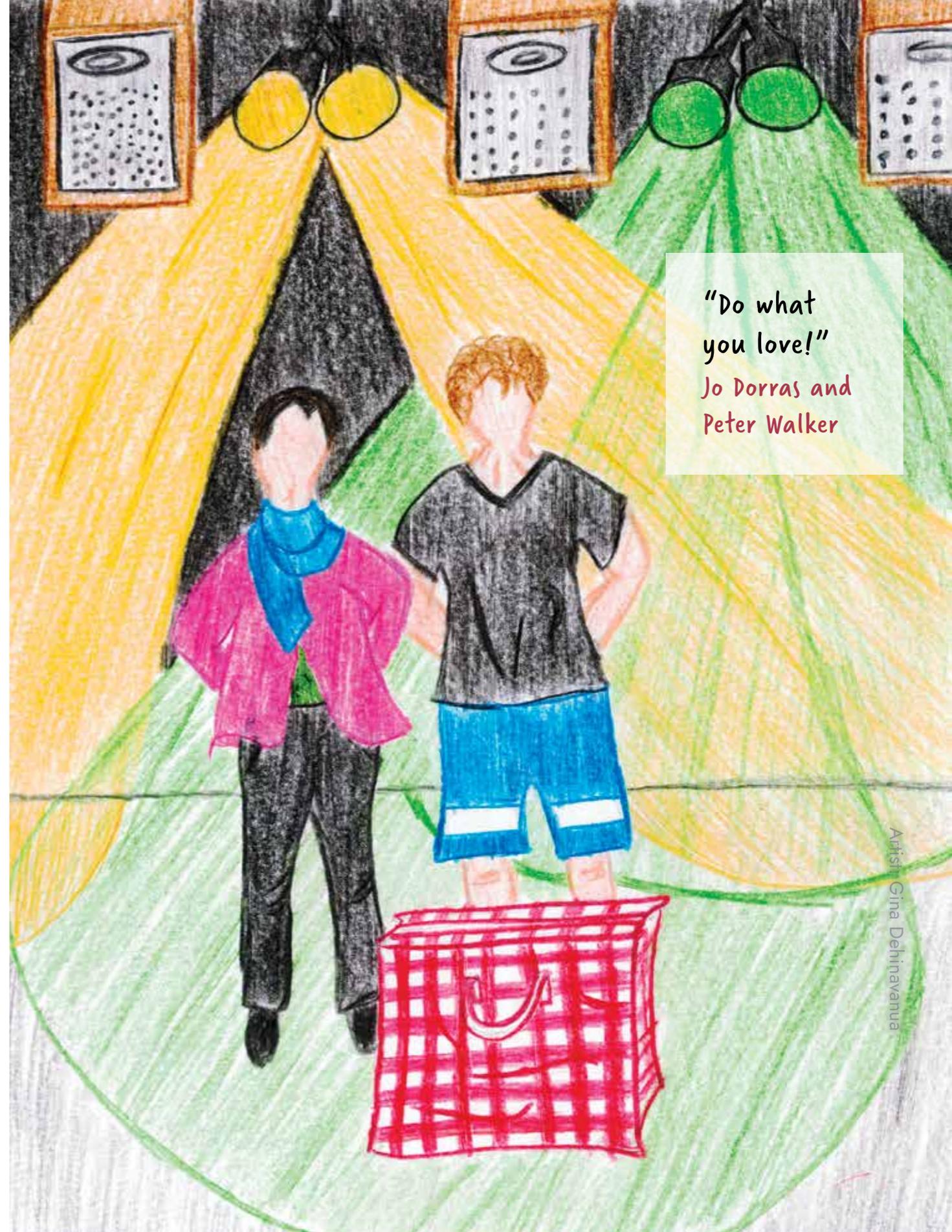
Wan Smolbag has grown to include health clinics, a youth centre, nutrition centre, sports facilities, environmental programmes and much more. It has produced movies and the famous *Love Patrol* television series about love, life, gender empowerment and community in Vanuatu.

The acting troupe remains an essential part of *Wan Smolbag*. Together, the members develop ideas for dramas to share with community audiences. Jo and Peter say, "None of us can do what we do best without the other. It's about all the people you work with, not just one of us. We are one big family."

By 2020, *Wan Smolbag* programmes had reached more than 30,000 youth in Vanuatu and become famous around the Pacific – all because of Jo and Peter following their dream and doing what they love.



Writer: Anna Naupa



"Do what you love!"
Jo Dorras and Peter Walker

"The girl who proved she could work ..."

LEITANGI SOLOMONS

An extraordinary receptionist

NGUNA | BORN 1962

Once there was a girl named Leitangi born in hospital on Iririki Island in Port Vila harbour. She was born with no feet and no hands, but this did not stop her from enjoying life and pursuing her dreams.

When Leitangi completed Year 6, her mother crossed paths with two international volunteers from the Red Cross who helped organise for Leitangi to go to a special school for disabled children in Suva, Fiji. One day, she was asked what she would like to do when she grew up. "I want to become a receptionist," she replied.

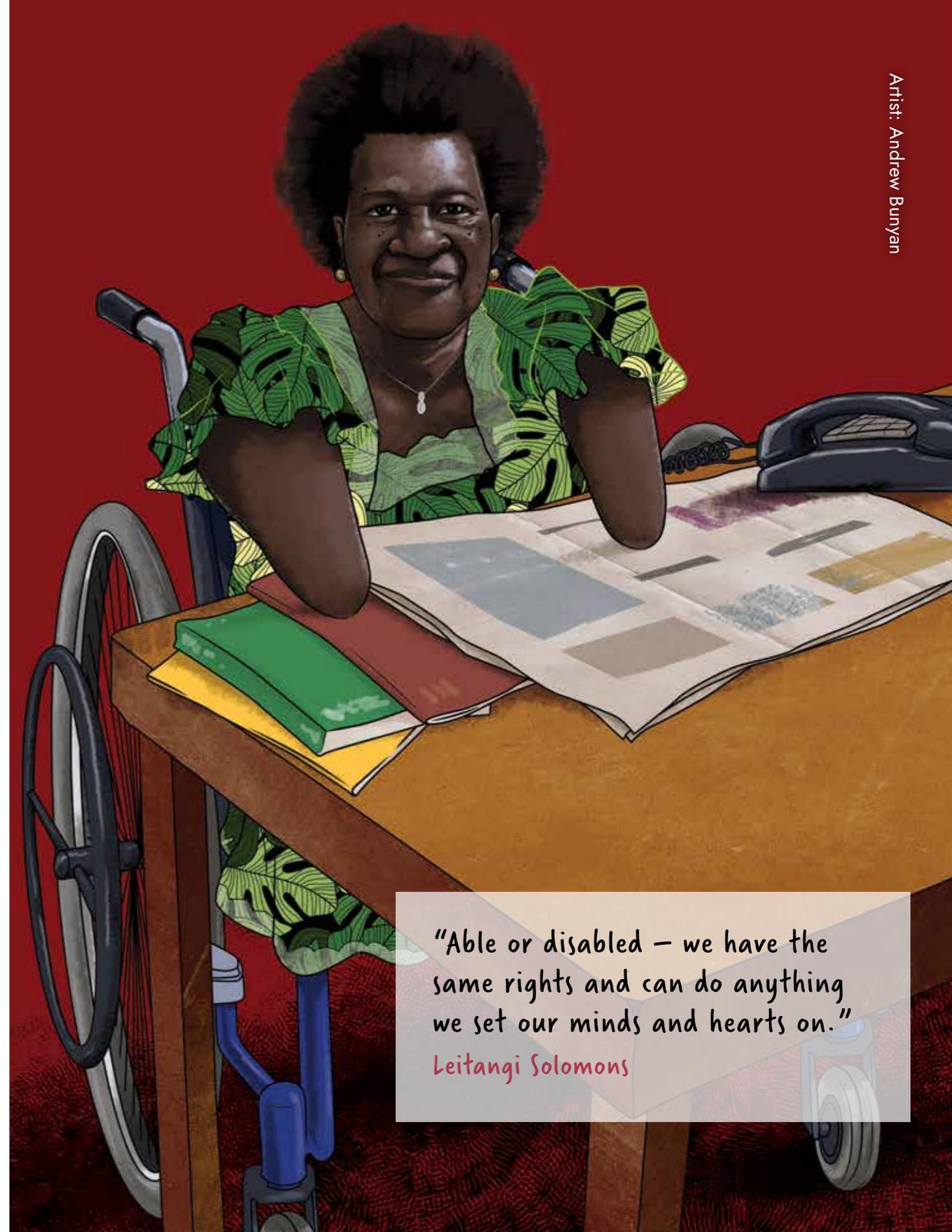
Leitangi's teachers were very supportive, and arranged a time each term for her to do work placements at the Suva Hospital. Her passion for the job grew even more. Coming home to Vanuatu after 10 years in Fiji and with no job was difficult, but she eventually got a job in Port Vila.

Leitangi was employed as a telephonist/receptionist with the Ministry of Health for 35 years and retired in 2017. Her duties included front desk supervision, shipments, ambulance call-outs for emergencies and much more. Leitangi used a typical office phone to fulfil her duties successfully.

She became well known for her warm voice as well as her efficiency and dedication to work. "Able or disabled – we have the same rights and can do anything we set our minds and hearts on," she says.



Writer: Gina Dehinavanua



Artist: Andrew Bunyan

"Able or disabled – we have the same rights and can do anything we set our minds and hearts on."

Leitangi Solomons

"The friends who became Pacific food champions ..."

LEONID VUSILAI & KNOX TALEO

Champion chefs and food warriors

EFATE AND AMBAE | BORN 1990s

Once there were two best friends who loved to cook. Leonid grew up on Ambae savouring his mother's tasty island dishes. Knox grew up in Port Vila and Australia, tasting food from all over the world. The pair met at cooking school, where they showed a talent for flavour.

"Dad always said that life's achievements come from sweat and hard work," says Leonid, who won the Student Chef of the Year Award in 2013. Shortly after, Leonid bumped into famous international chef Robert Oliver, who encouraged him to compete in a team in the reality TV show *Pacific Island Food Revolution*.

Leonid immediately asked Knox to be his teammate. The Vanuatu cooking challenges tested their knowledge of traditional food culture. They eyed up the competition and thought they would lose to the more experienced female cooks. "We were so surprised when our creative local dishes were judged the best!" they say.

Chefs Leonid and Knox became finalists, representing Vanuatu against teams from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga all vying for the Pacific grand champion title. They cooked up a storm, making sure each dish used local ingredients and was fresh, tasty and healthy. When the judges announced the Vanuatu team as winners, the friends could not believe it!

These island boys were standing centre-stage in front of worldwide television and had just been pronounced the best chefs in the Pacific for 2019. Their biggest dream had come true!

"No matter where you come from or your background, you have the power to make a difference in your community and nation," they say.



Writer: Georgilla Worwor



"Never be afraid to dream big!"
Leonid Vusilai and Knox Taleo

"The worldly words of ..."

MARCEL MELTHERORONG

Musician, writer and composer

NEW CALEDONIA/MALEKULA | BORN 1975

There are many immigrant ni-Vanuatu families living in New Caledonia. One had a boy called Marcel who sometimes got into trouble because he struggled to understand his identity. When Marcel grew up, he decided to change his life completely and leave behind all he had grown up with in New Caledonia to move to Vanuatu.

However, landing on Vanuatu's shores, Marcel still felt like an outsider. He did not speak Bislama, nor the language of his Vao ancestors on Malekula. But he knew he had made the right choice. "I learned my *kastom* and my mother tongue as well as Bislama," he says. Marcel embraced every cultural experience to reconnect with the home of his ancestors.

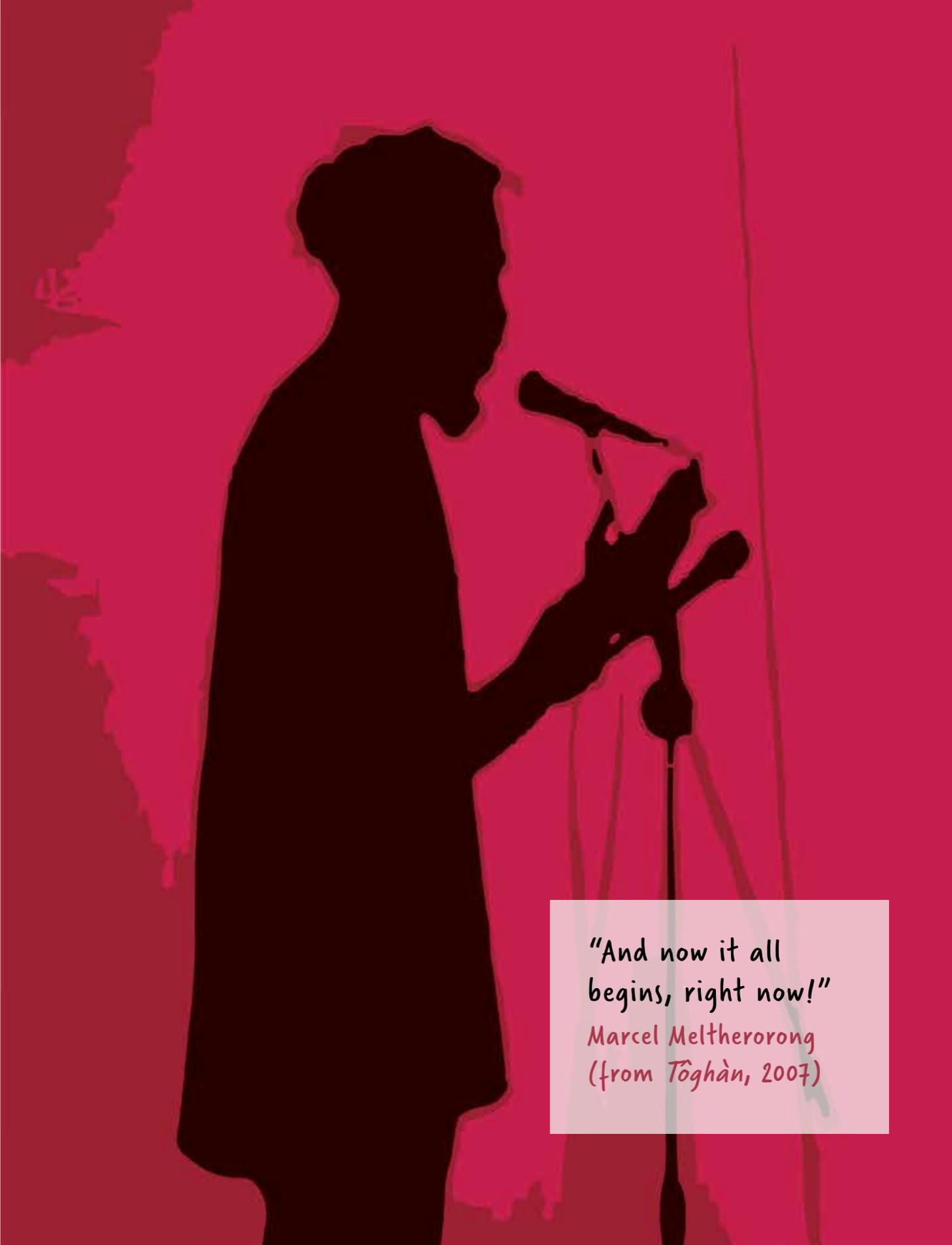
His personal journey is his source of artistic inspiration. Marcel played music at the annual *Fête de la Musique* and *Fest'Napuan* events in Vila, releasing several albums with his groups *XX Squad* and *Kalja Riddim Klan*, and introducing Vanuatu to a new kind of music: folk-reggae. He went on tour to many Pacific countries as well as countries in Asia, Africa and Europe.

Multi-talented Marcel also co-founded a music school and the Association of Storytellers of Vanuatu, and is the first ni-Vanuatu published novelist. His first novel, *Tôghàn*, was published in 2007, and touches on the challenges for Pacific Island youth who live between Melanesian and Western values. His writing is so admired that the Nobel Laureate in Literature, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, described Marcel as enriching francophone literature with "a new, original voice"!

Marcel turned his search for identity and meaning into a lifelong passion for story-telling through music and literature.



Writer: Georges Cumbo



"And now it all begins, right now!"

Marcel Meltherorong
(from *Tôghàn*, 2007)

"The sick boy who became a doctor..."

DR. MARK TURNBULL

Flying doctor

ZIMBABWE/VANUATU | BORN 1966

Mark was a sickly child whose life was saved by quick-acting doctors where he lived in Africa. He decided to become a doctor and help sick people when he grew up.

Mark went to medical school in Australia and then to South Africa to train as a missionary doctor, tending to patients across vast distances. To reach his patients, Mark learned to fly a plane.

In 2005, Mark came to live in Torba Province in Vanuatu. He built a clinic on Gaua, travelling by boat to visit the sick across different islands.

One day, Mark's friend visited and filmed a TV documentary about his work. Mark said, "I love helping sick people but it's hard to get to them. It would be easier if I had a plane and could fly to each island." The documentary aired internationally, and a generous viewer decided to give Mark his own bush airplane for free!

The orange plane was well designed for short bush airstrips. Mark sent word across the northern islands that if people could clear land for airstrips, he would be able to fly to visit the sick people. The communities agreed and prepared five airstrips on different islands.

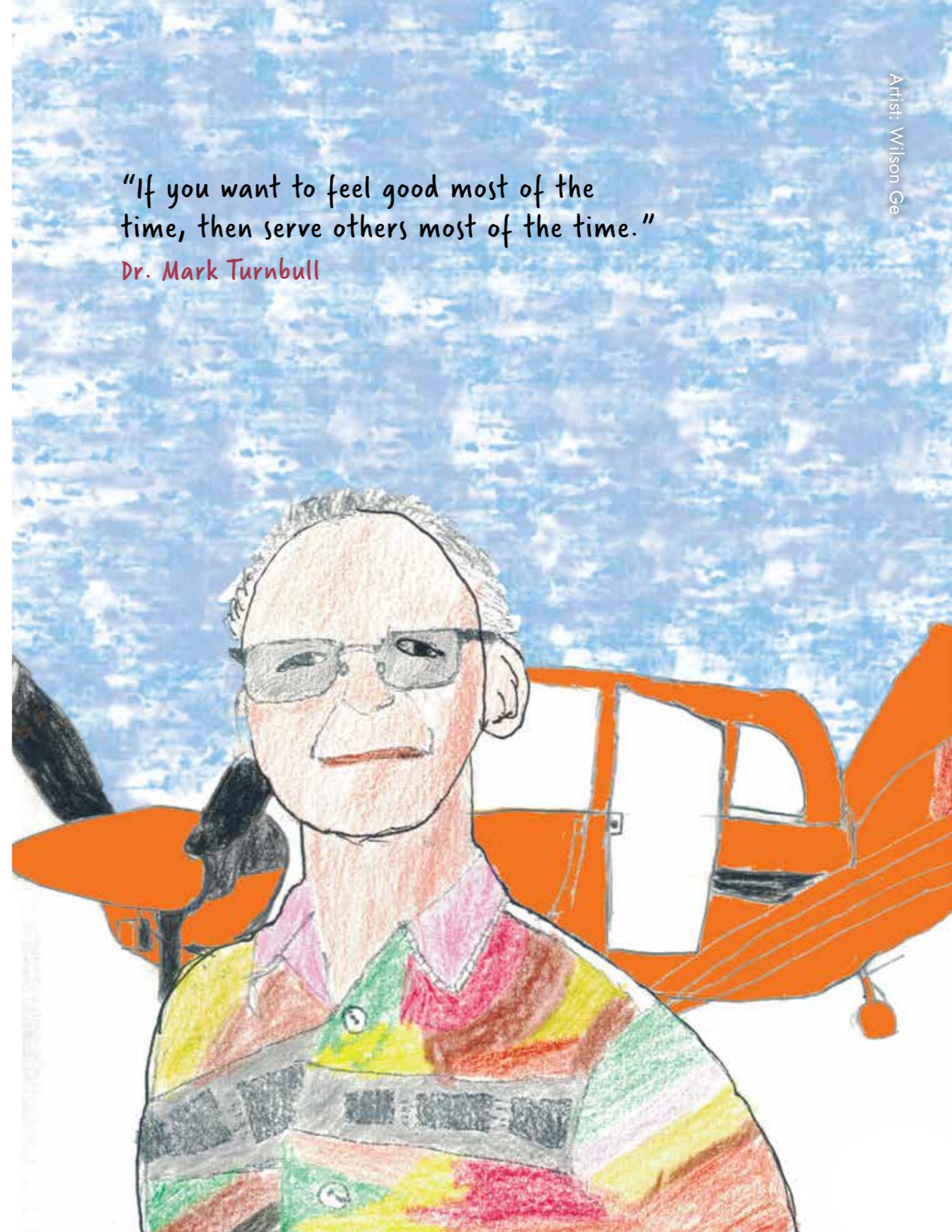
For more than 10 years, Mark has been travelling around the islands for the 'flying doctor service'. His orange plane has been nicknamed *Pijin blong ol man Bankis* (the bird of the Banks Islands). Sometimes people want to give him money for medical treatment, but Mark says "It's not about money, it's about helping people", so they give him food instead.



Writer: Telstar Jimmy

"If you want to feel good most of the time, then serve others most of the time."

Dr. Mark Turnbull



"Golden Mama blong Vanuatu ..."

MARY ESTELLE KAPALU MAHUK

Runner

TANNA | BORN 1966

Once upon a time, there was a girl from Louaneai village on Tanna who loved to run. Her name was Mary Estelle, and she led the way for ni-Vanuatu women to be recognised as top-level achievers in sport.

All the village kids wanted Mary Estelle to be on their team because she was such a fast runner. At home, she helped her mum around the house and would offer to run errands for her parents or anyone in the village who needed help. "I would race everywhere and back and my parents and villagers loved sending me," she says.

Mary Estelle's primary school was five kilometres away, a long and tiring daily trek but it gave her strong legs. She began representing her school in annual race events, which continued into high school at the British Secondary School in Vila (now Malapoa College). Seeing Mary Estelle's talent, her PE teacher coached her for track.

One day, Mary Estelle was selected to represent Vanuatu for the South Pacific Mini Games in 1981. This was one of Vanuatu's first times participating in an international sporting event as an independent nation. After her experience in racing at the regional level, Mary Estelle was ready to aim high. The 400-metre dash was her specialty. She won her first medal, a bronze, in this event in 1983 during the Pacific Games in Samoa. Her second win was a silver medal in the 1985 South Pacific Mini Games.

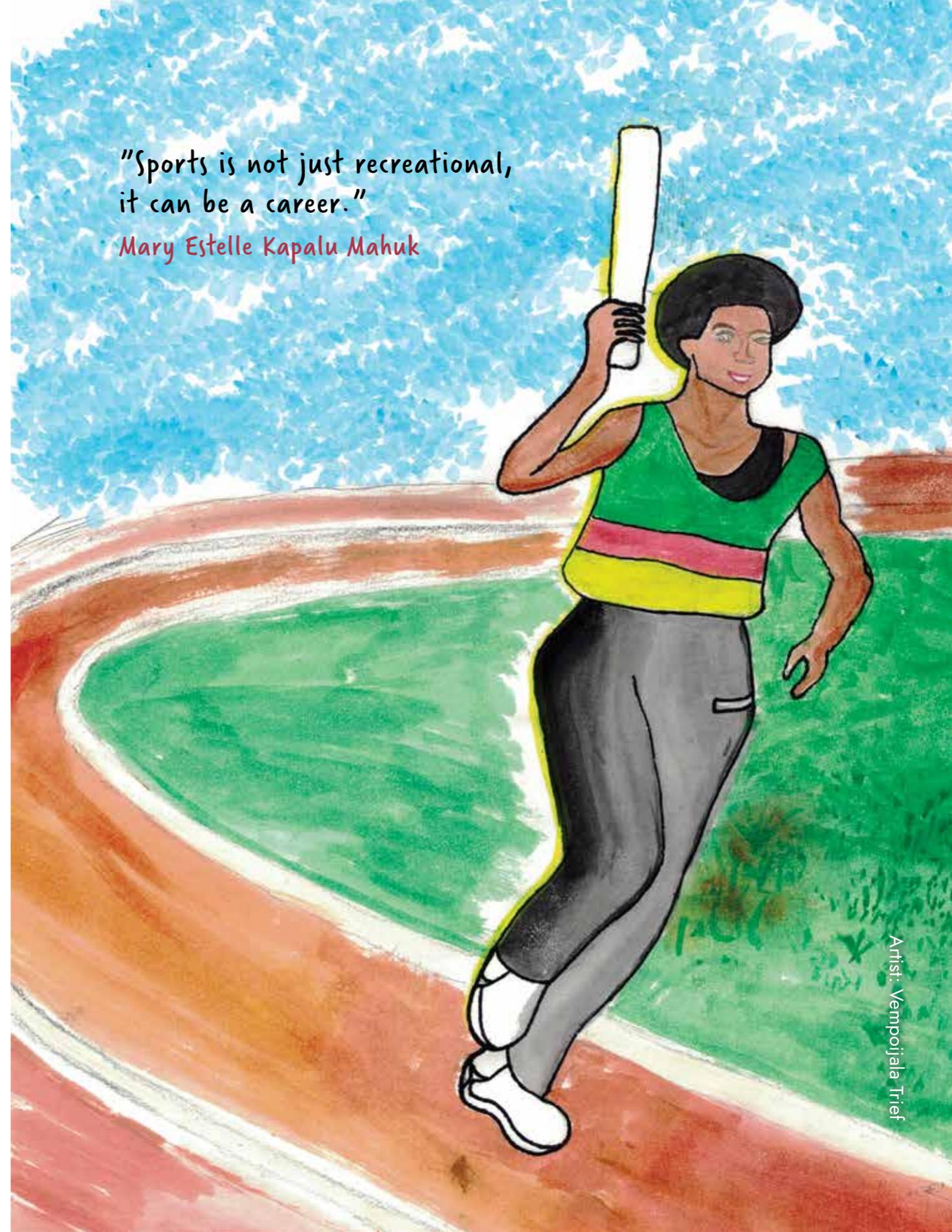
Mary Estelle, Vanuatu's 'Golden Mama' of sport, went on to win all gold medals until she retired in 2001. Mary paved the way for more ni-Vanuatu women from across the country to compete in regional and international sport.



Writer: Mere Sovick

*"Sports is not just recreational,
it can be a career."*

Mary Estelle Kapalu Mahuk



"Fighting violence against women and children ..."

MERILYN TAHI

Women's rights advocate

AMBAE | BORN 1950

Growing up, Marilyn was always a firm believer that everyone should have the right to determine their own life. "Women and girls have the power to create their own destiny, it is only society and culture that stand in their way," she says.

Merilyn is never afraid to say what needs to be said. When Vanuatu was named the happiest country on the planet in 2006, she said, "There is a high percentage of violence against women and girls every day in this country, so we cannot be smiling to say that we are the happiest country in the world."

When it took chiefs, church leaders and politicians 13 years to give their support to laws protecting women and children across the islands from violence and abuse, Merilyn said, "Men don't want to pass law that will put themselves in jail."

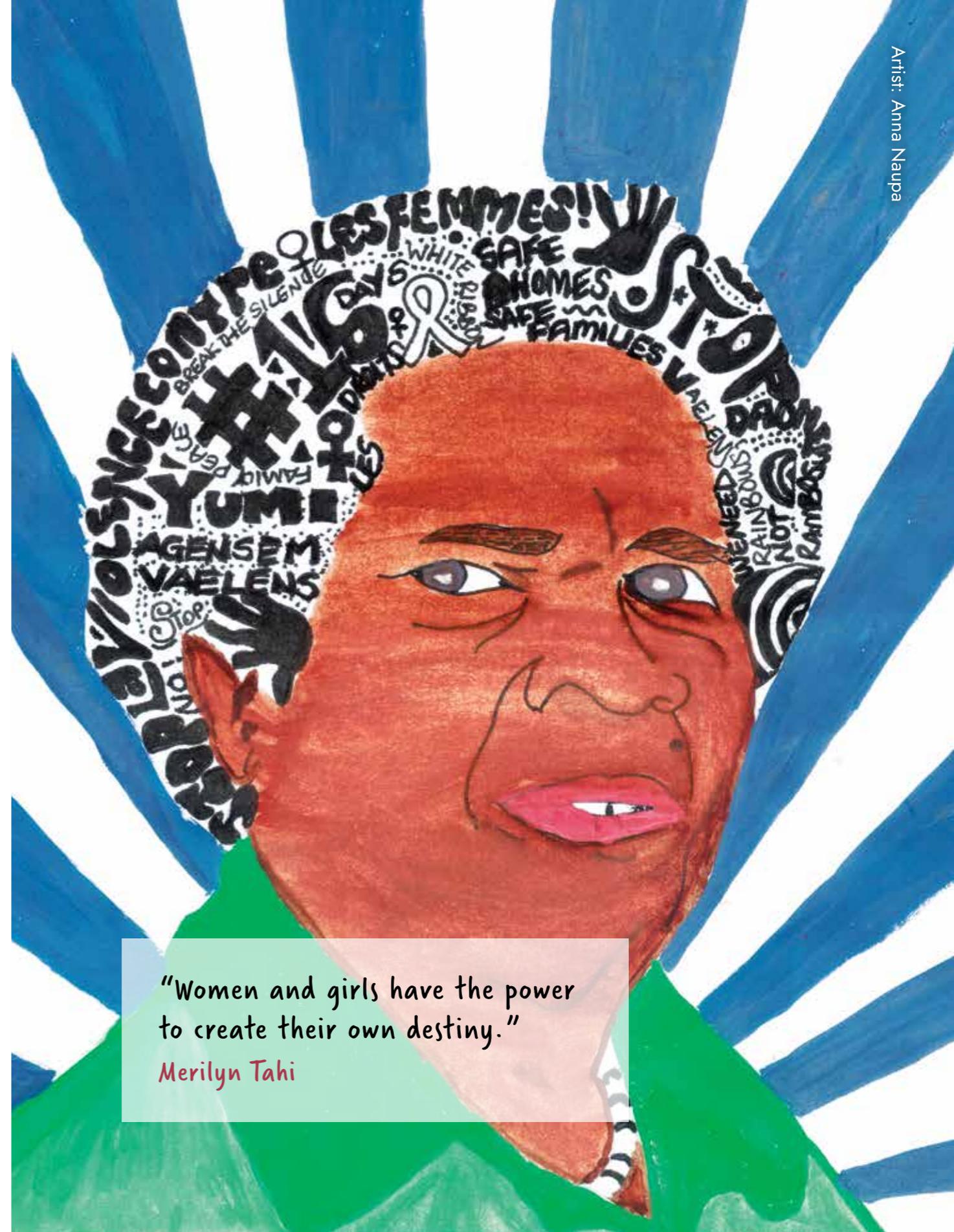
In 1992, Merilyn started the Vanuatu Women's Centre to provide support to the many ni-Vanuatu women and children who are victims of domestic violence. "At first, people thought we were promoting divorce," she says. "But through working closely with the chiefs and churches, and our male advocates, people now realise that ending violence is about protecting families."

Merilyn believes that all women and girls, men and boys can live peacefully together in society if there is respect and if violence is eliminated. "We have to look at our cultural and traditional practice to address violence against women," she says.

With brave advocates like Merilyn, more women in Vanuatu have the chance to determine their own futures.



Writer: Anna Naupa



Artist: Anna Naupa

"Women and girls have the power to create their own destiny."

Merilyn Tahī

"Queen of the court ..."

 **MILLER PATA** 
Beach volleyball champion

MOTALAVA | BORN 1988

Once there was a girl who dreamed of travelling the world. She did not know how she would do this from her small Motalava island village, with a population of fewer than 100 people, but she did know her favourite game was volleyball.

At 16, Miller started setting records that brought her national attention. Her team won gold in the Torba Games and silver in the Vanuatu National Games.

Her father said, "Keep playing. One day you will travel." And he was right. In 2007, 19-year-old Miller went on her first overseas trip. She played beach volleyball in Samoa, where she and her partner won gold. The media called her "Vanuatu's queen of the court"!

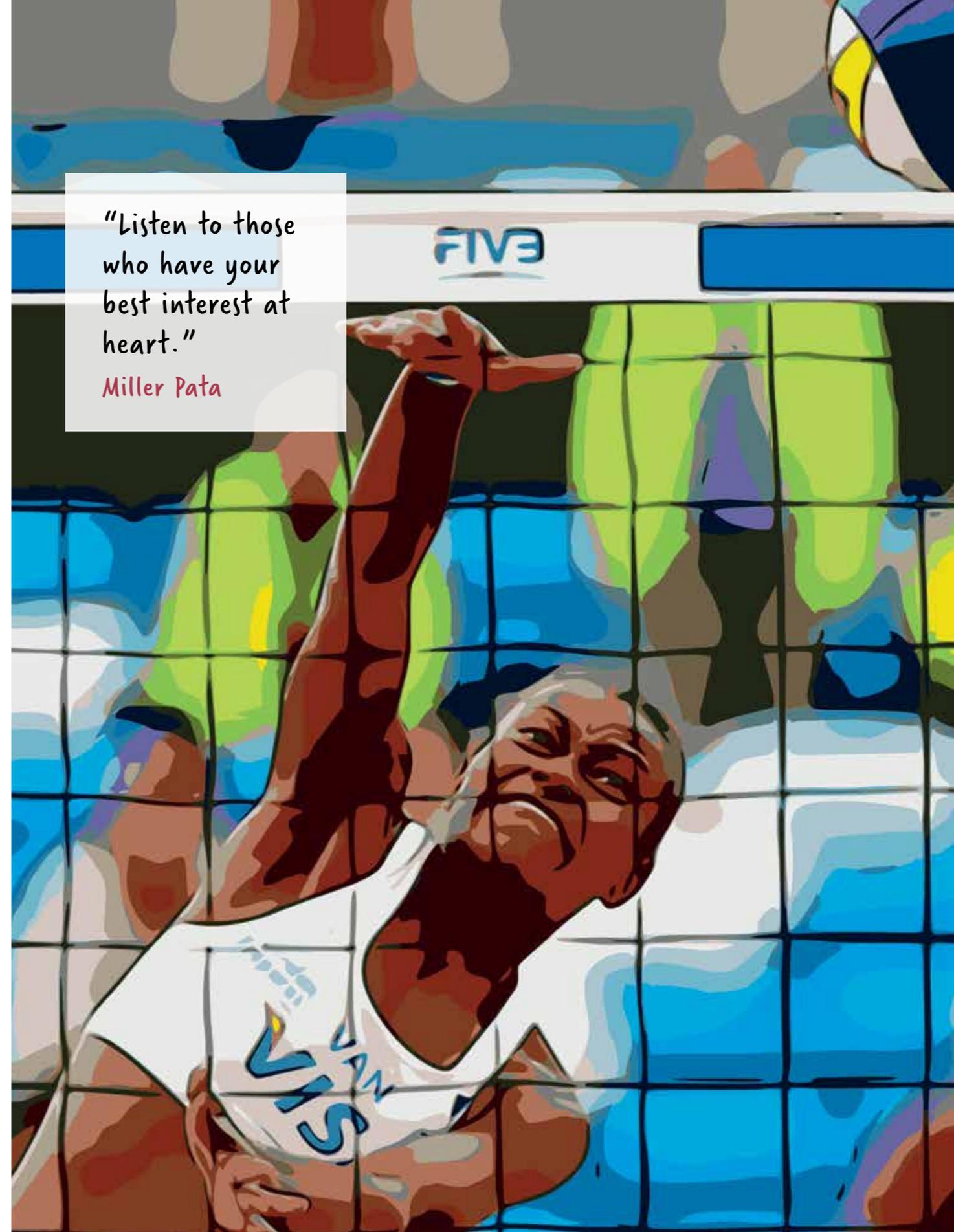
Miller has travelled to more than 30 countries in the Pacific, Asia and Europe. Her favourite place to visit is Switzerland – a country of snow-capped mountains, beautiful flowers and ice-cold rivers.

Representing Vanuatu around the world also means Miller and her volleyball partners are like ambassadors. Lots of people want to meet the world-class athletes and ask about where they come from. This gives them a chance to talk about Vanuatu.

Miller's children are very proud of their mum. She is also an inspiration to ni-Vanuatu athletes and others around the world. Winning silver or bronze is just a reason to try harder, she says. "No matter how hard the training is, you have to keep at it to reach the level you aim for."



Writer: Rebecca Olul



"Listen to those who have your best interest at heart."

Miller Pata

"The amazing cook who banned plastic ..."

MYRIAM MALAO

Cook and environmental activist

VAO | BORN 1970

Once a girl named Myriam moved with her family from a little island off the coast of Malekula to Port Vila. She grew up watching her mother cook local food for the French missionaries at Montmartre, learning the recipes by heart.

Myriam decided to become a cook and later opened her own restaurant, called Chez Myriam, in the main Vila market house close to the freshest produce. "Aelan kakaē is the best, most healthy food," she says.

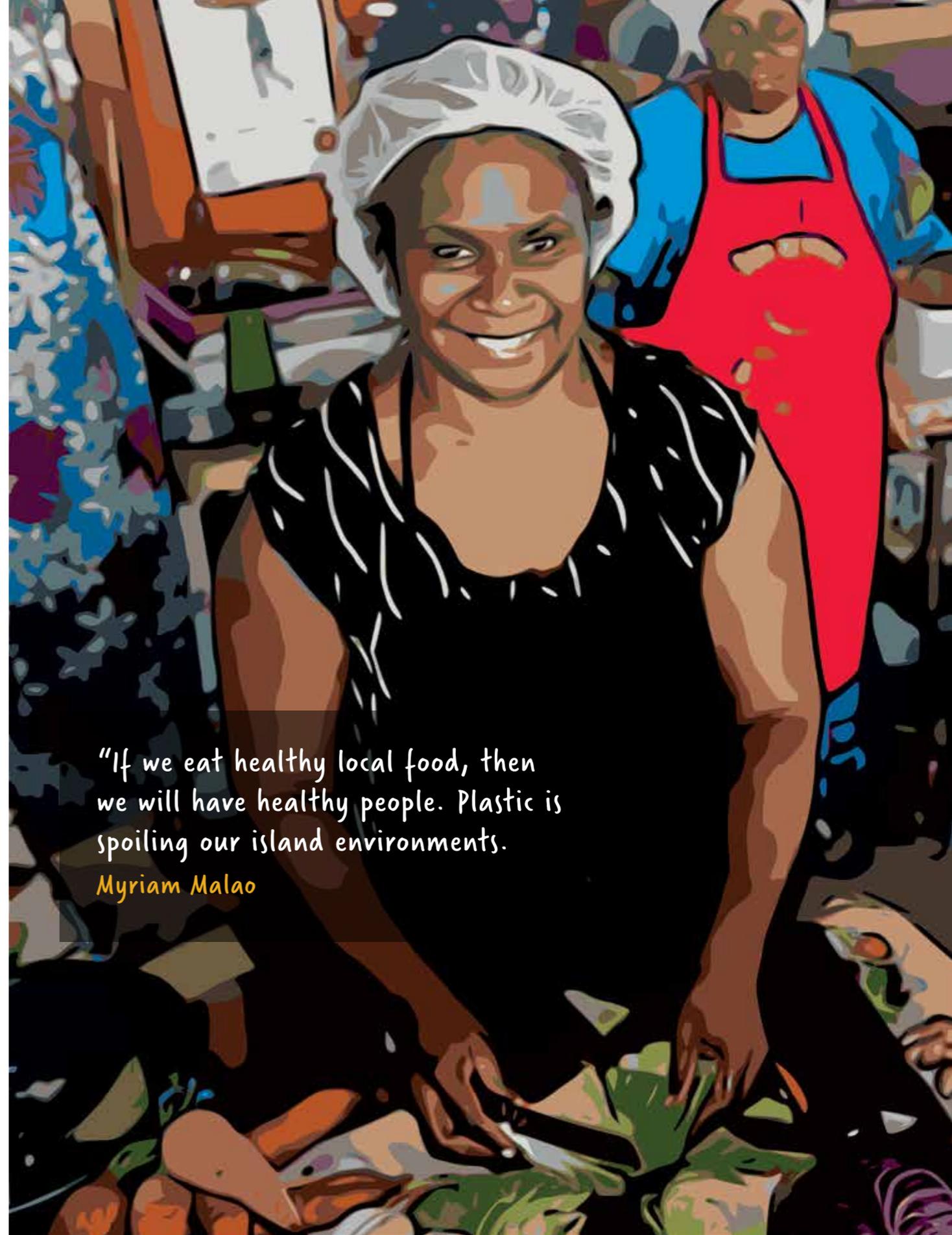
Myriam's restaurant was so popular that other food vendors in the market asked her to help them become successful too. She created an association to support local cooks so that they could expand their skills and get food safety certification. Seeing how much this training helped the cooks in the market house, Myriam took the training to help the '20 vatu mamas' in the roadside markets also receive food safety certification. "We are what we eat," she says. "If we eat healthy local food, then we will have healthy people."

At her home near a river, Myriam worried about the water choking with plastic bags and rubbish. "Plastic is spoiling our island environments," she thought. "We must use local, woven bags instead to promote a healthier environment."

Myriam's passion helped build a national 'No Plastik Bag' campaign to make Vanuatu a greener, safer environment for all. Through her community organisation, Green Wave Vanuatu, Myriam organises many environmental clean-up campaigns, including along her local river. She also raises awareness about the dangers of using pesticides in agriculture. "I want a clean Vanuatu for our future generations to enjoy," she says.



Writer: Christelle Thieffry



"If we eat healthy local food, then we will have healthy people. Plastic is spoiling our island environments."

Myriam Malao

"The baby whisperer ..."

NELLIE OLUL

Midwife

TANNA | BORN 1958

Once there was a girl named Nellie who loved to watch the nurses caring for people on her island of Tanna. Her favourite was Nurse Leiwani, who walked around in her fancy slippers and helped mothers bring babies into the world. As an only child for much of her childhood, Nellie loved playing with babies!

When she turned 16, her parents had twins and Nellie was a loving big sister to the small babies. Her dream to become a nurse grew even stronger. When she was old enough, Nellie was accepted into nursing school on Efate.

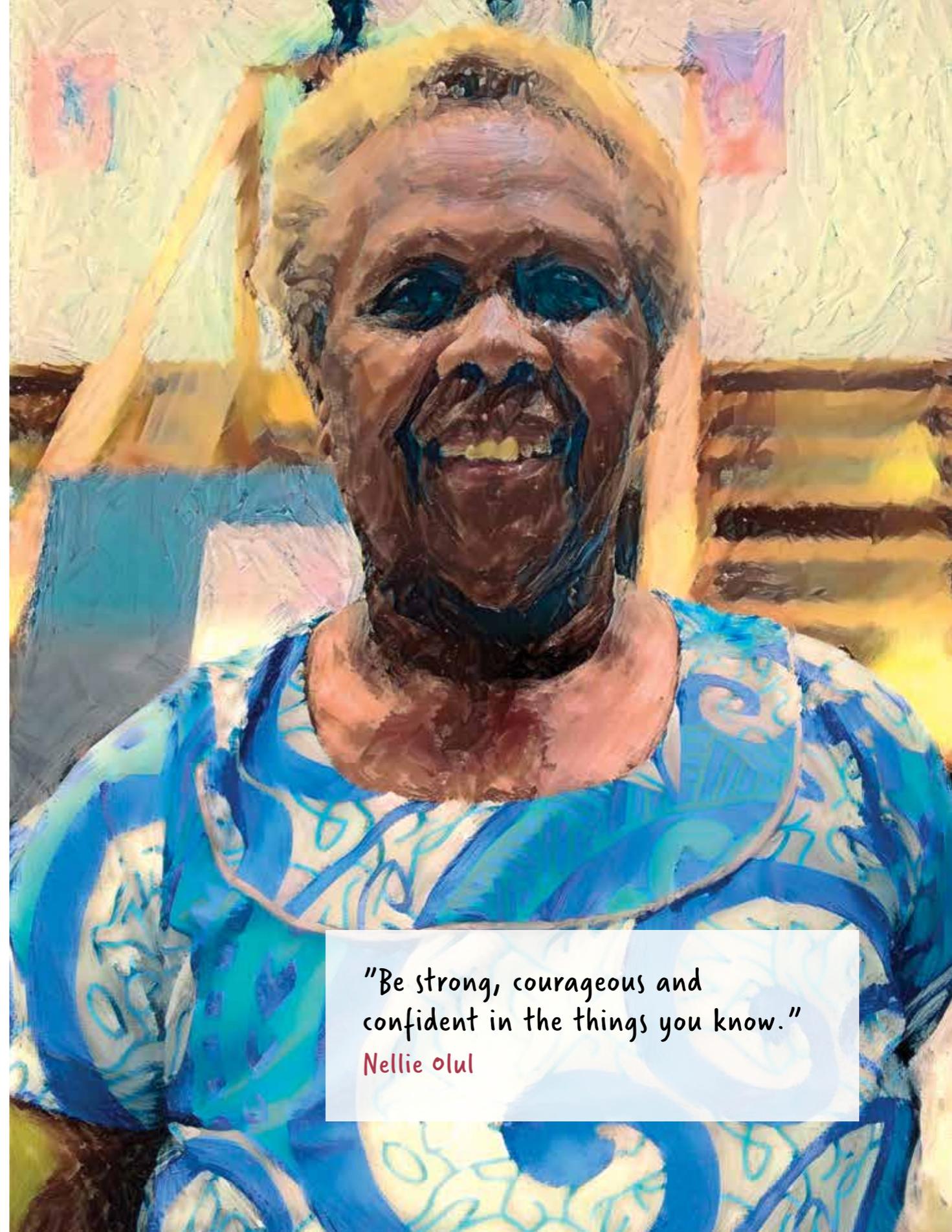
Nellie went on to specialise in midwifery, which is a special nursing skill to help deliver babies. She was one of the first four midwives trained after Vanuatu's Independence and has delivered babies in all kinds of situations. "Each day we are challenged to keep an open mind and learn new things," she says.

One day, Nellie was sent on a 17-hour return boat trip over rough seas between Santo and Gaua islands to be a medical chaperone for a very sick woman and her baby. On the trip, an eight-month-pregnant passenger went into early labour. Nellie helped deliver the baby on the boat.

Nellie retired after being a midwife for more than 40 years. She has helped more than 2000 mothers bring babies safely into the world. Grateful parents and communities often gifted Nellie with mats, food and chickens. "Each healthy baby is a blessing," she says. "And a healthy mother is too."



Writer: Rebecca Olul



"Be strong, courageous and confident in the things you know."

Nellie Olul

"The creative whizz of ..."

NICKY KUAUTONGA

Photographer, film maker and entrepreneur

FUTUNA/EFATE | BORN 1987

Young Nicky was home schooled and was curious about the world around him. His uncle, a contemporary artist, encouraged Nicky to start painting. Uncle Sero later introduced him to digital media. "I loved it – photography and filming are art in a different creative form," Nicky says.

However, Nicky found it difficult to pursue his passion. He could not afford his own cameras and computer, and everyone told him he should work for an employer. "Nobody talks about being your own boss," he says. "I tried to work for myself, but people would put me down and say 'What are you doing?'"

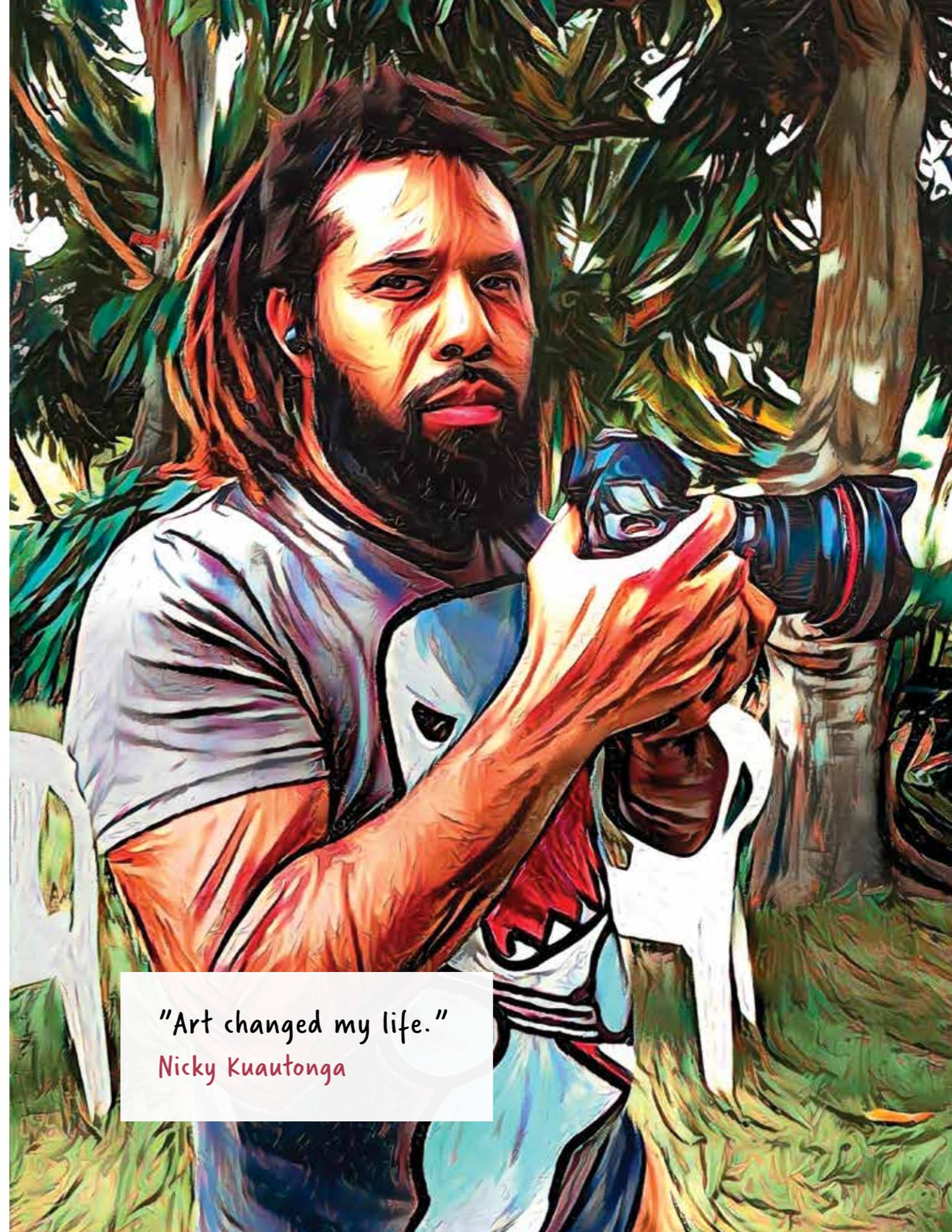
Nicky tried working for other people, but it never felt right – and he never had time for his art. One day, Uncle Sero encouraged Nicky to enrol in a short film-making course and enter the Namatan Short Film Festival in 2014.

Borrowing equipment to make his first film, Nicky was elated when he won second prize and the People's Choice Award. The prize was his very own computer and camera.

From there, Nicky's star rose and he became his own boss. With his good eye for making amazing images, he has produced films and photos for more than 100 clients as well as being a finalist several times in the Namatan Short Film Festival. "When I see my photos up on billboards, I want young people to know that if I can do it, they can do it too, no matter their background," Nicky says. "You just have to believe in yourself and never give up."



Writer: Yasmine Bjornum



"Art changed my life."

Nicky Kuautonga

"The visionary leadership of"

RALPH REGENVANU

Artist, anthropologist and politician

MALEKULA/AUSTRALIA | BORN 1970

Nine-year-old Ralph watched over people's heads as Vanuatu was born in 1980. A cheer rang out around him when the flag was raised. Before this, he remembers being bundled up and hidden away in the night for fear of anti-Independence movement attacks. But he says, "We weren't scared – it was all an adventure."

Born to pastors Sethy from Uripiv, Malekula, and Dorothy from Brisbane, Australia, Ralph was 10 when his father entered the Government. The biggest change for Ralph seemed to be the move from a wooden house to a concrete one with a bidet in the bathroom!

Ralph loved Melanesian art. In Year 12, he painted the famous *Las Kakae* (Final Feast), illustrating the links between the Church, *kastom* and the state. He decided to study anthropology at university because of his passion for Vanuatu and for learning about people, their cultures and development.

Ralph became the head of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and led its role in preserving custom and culture. He often had to think a lot about traditional and modern ways. For example, Ralph said, "We must have a realistic balance between tradition and modernity" when the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs debated the tradition of bride price.

Ralph wanted to include young people in thinking about our culture and spearheaded a popular music festival in Vila in 1996 called *Fest'Napuan*. The festival is now held every year and thousands of people get together to celebrate Pacific music.

In 2006, Ralph decided to become a politician to fight for social justice. "We have to do what is right for Vanuatu, even if the path is not easy," he says.



Writer: Rebecca Olul

"Your purpose is to serve people. Help others achieve their dreams and you've served well."

Ralph Regenvanu



"The dedicated service of ..."



Corporal

MALEKULA | BORN 1969

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Remy who grew up on Malekula in the pre-Independence years. Remy witnessed the burning of houses and killing of pigs and chickens in his village when the adults disagreed about what Independence would be like for Vanuatu. "I wish I could protect my family and village," thought young Remy.

Remy would help his parents cut copra to pay for his school fees. As soon as he was old enough, he joined the Vanuatu Mobile Force to fulfil his childhood dream of protecting people.

Being on the Force means rigorous training and testing personal weaknesses to be the best serviceperson possible. "My service also means that I work with a team to support community projects like building schools, health centres and children's playgrounds," Remy says. "I love my job!"

Remy is part of the Force's engineering and carpentry team, and often in the first group responding to disasters and emergencies. When Vanuatu came to a standstill after the Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, Remy was one of the first responders on the ground, delivering food supplies to devastated communities across the islands.

Remy's service was recognised when he was promoted to VIP security personnel to Vanuatu's Prime Minister. It is an honour bestowed to only a handful of soldiers because of the important responsibilities, and Remy has travelled the world in this job.

Remy started his dream as a child and pursued it always. "Having a dream is something you have to work for," he says. "It takes courage, discipline and self-respect."



Writer: Anna Wilson



"Respect yourself and have courage in life."

Remy Wilson

"The girl who makes waves ..."

RESMAH KALOTITI

Surfing champion

EFATE | BORN 1997

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Resmah who loved waves. Resmah started surfing when she was seven years old. Her village at Pango is known for having the best waves in Vanuatu.

Resmah had to sneak out to surf as the household rules were no play after school and it was all chores. But she loved surfing!

Out on the waves, Resmah was one of only a few girl surfers and would get harassed by the village boys. "Why are you here? You should be at home doing the cleaning and cooking!" the boys would taunt the girls.

"No, that's not right," thought Resmah. "If they can do it, I can do it too!" She never let anyone rubbish her efforts to keep surfing, and believes that everyone has the right to surf.

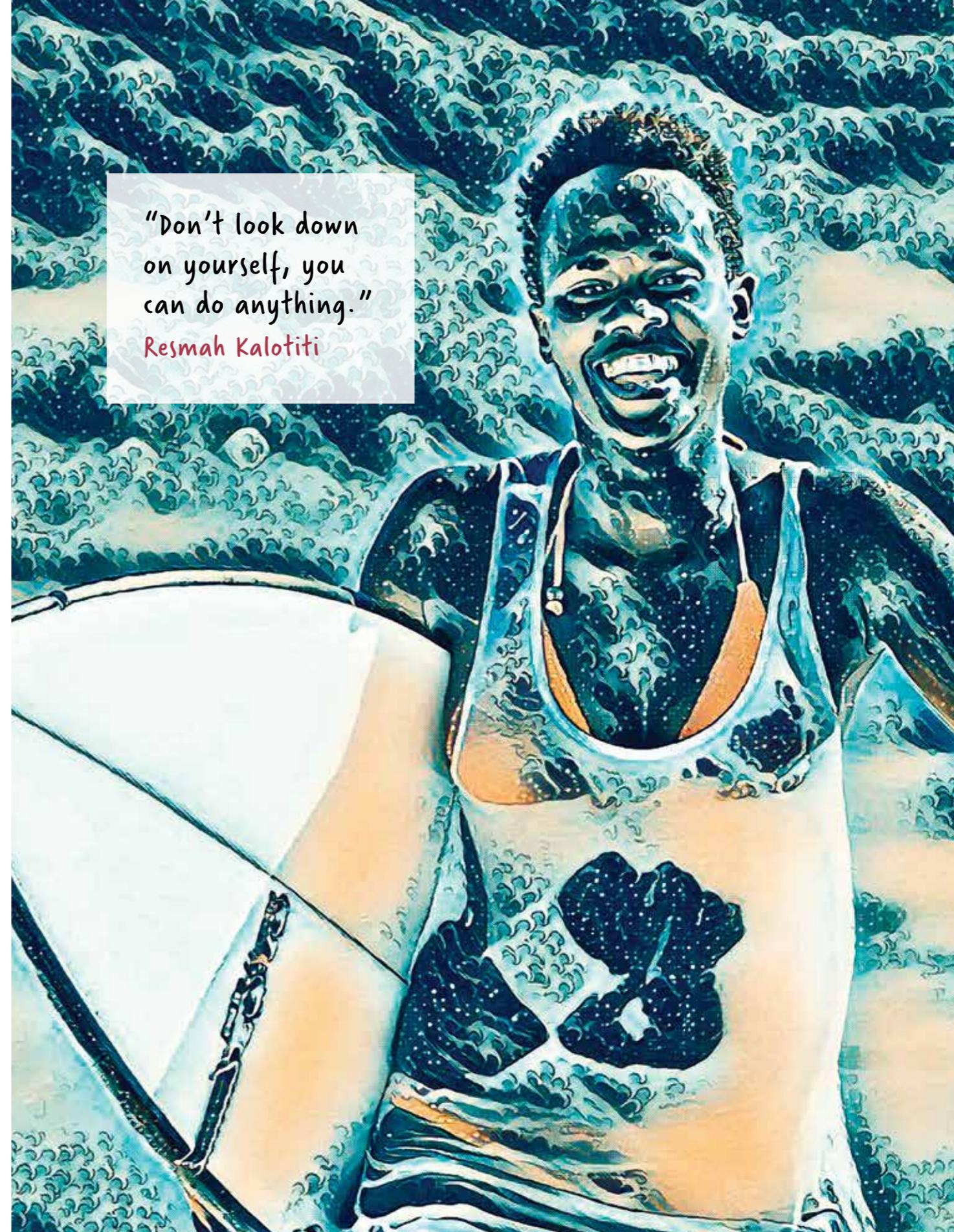
Resmah became Vanuatu's number one female surfer and in 2014 was the Melanesian Longboard Champion. She loved surfing so much, she decided to build a career out of shaping surfboards. Resmah went to Australia to learn these specialist skills and is proud of her finished boards. "Practice makes perfect," Resmah says. And she keeps improving her skill.

Resmah often shares her experiences and stories with the girls in the village to inspire them to get out and have fun in the water. "It's first come, first served," Resmah says about sharing her boards with the many young female surfers from Pango village.

"You don't have to look down on yourself, you can do anything. If you are committed, you make a difference," Resmah tells the village girls.



Writer: Mere Sovick



"Don't look down on yourself, you can do anything."

Resmah Kalotiti

"The community cycling champion ..."

REUBEN AWELL

Cyclist

EFATE | BORN 1974

An excited buzz hummed in the air as 38 Mele Maat village girls and boys prepared to ride 130km around Efate. It was 2010, and the mastermind behind the first 'Bicycle Fun Around the Island' event was Reuben Awell.

Reuben's passion for bicycles began as a young apprentice mechanic. His parents did not have enough money to send him to secondary school, despite his good exam results. "It's okay," Reuben told his parents, "I want to be a mechanic and might as well start learning now."

Aged 13, Reuben started working in a Vila garage. He saved money to buy his first bicycle and rode to work every day. "When I ride bicycles I feel independent and free," he says. Reuben also became so good at fixing bicycles that he soon owned five, which village boys would borrow.

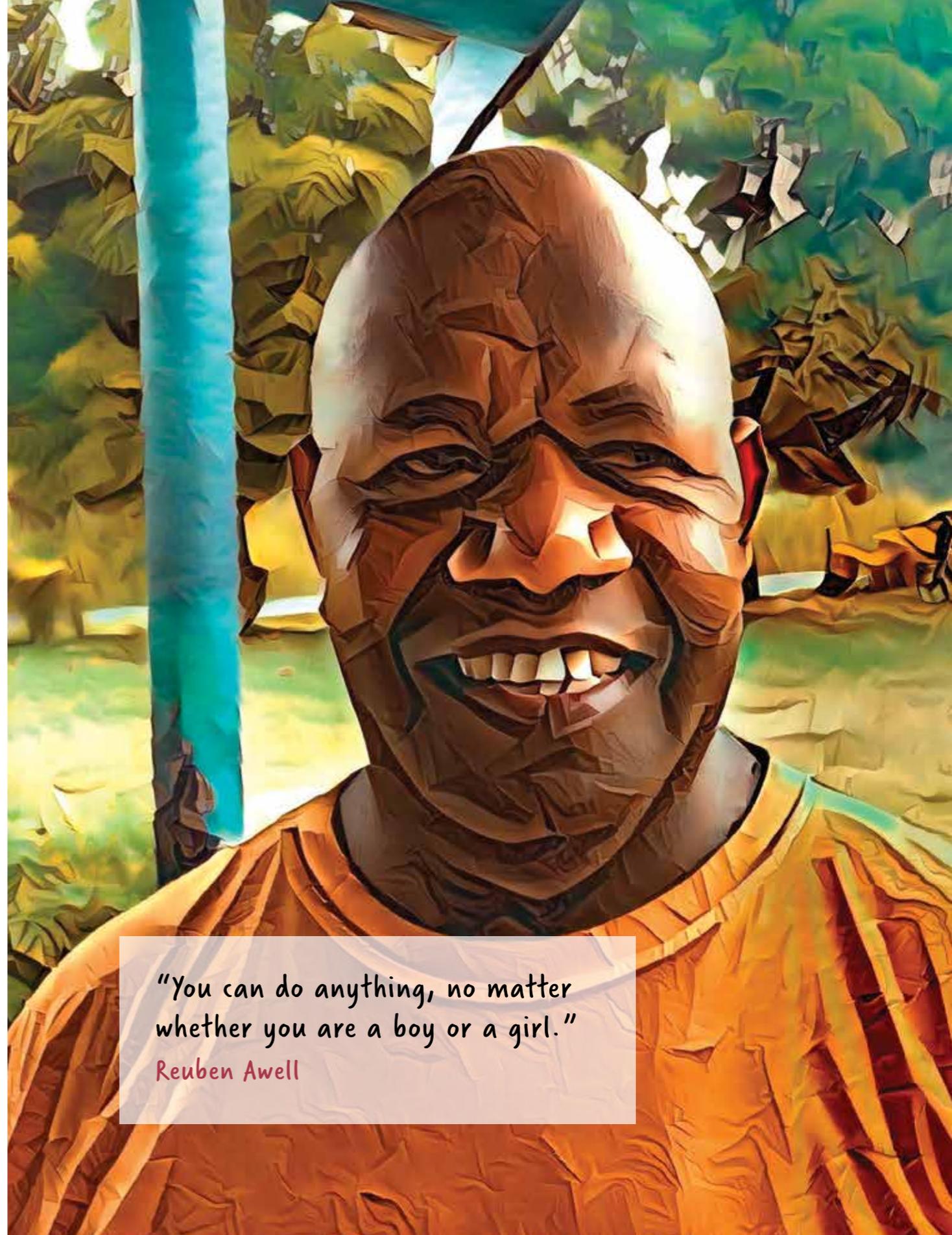
Later, Reuben taught his children to ride bicycles as soon as they could walk. He noticed that many of the village children were bored and not in school, so decided to start a bicycle group. "Cycling helps teach children about responsibility and good health," he says.

Reuben's cycling event is something that village children eagerly prepare for each year. "The children become changed after the annual round-island ride," he says. "They realise that they can do something harder and bigger than they ever imagined. They can achieve what they put their minds and hearts to."

In 2018, more than 100 cyclists participated in the event, including from neighbouring villages. "Everyone can achieve something in their life," Reuben says. "You can start now, you don't have to wait until you're older."



Writer: Anna Naupa



"You can do anything, no matter whether you are a boy or a girl."

Reuben Awell

"The determined discipline of ..."

RILLIO (RIO) RII

Rower

SANTO | BORN 1994

Once there was a boy named Rio who was born into a military family. Growing up in the Vanuatu Mobile Force barracks, Rio learned how attitudes such as respect, discipline and honour were an important way of life in the camp. This attention to discipline from a young age helped Rio go far when he entered into sports.

Rio's passion for rowing developed as soon he laid his hands on an oar (paddle). "You could never get him off the boat!" said his coach. Inspired by ni-Vanuatu 2016 rowing Olympian Luigi Teileimb, Rio was determined to build his natural talent to compete internationally.

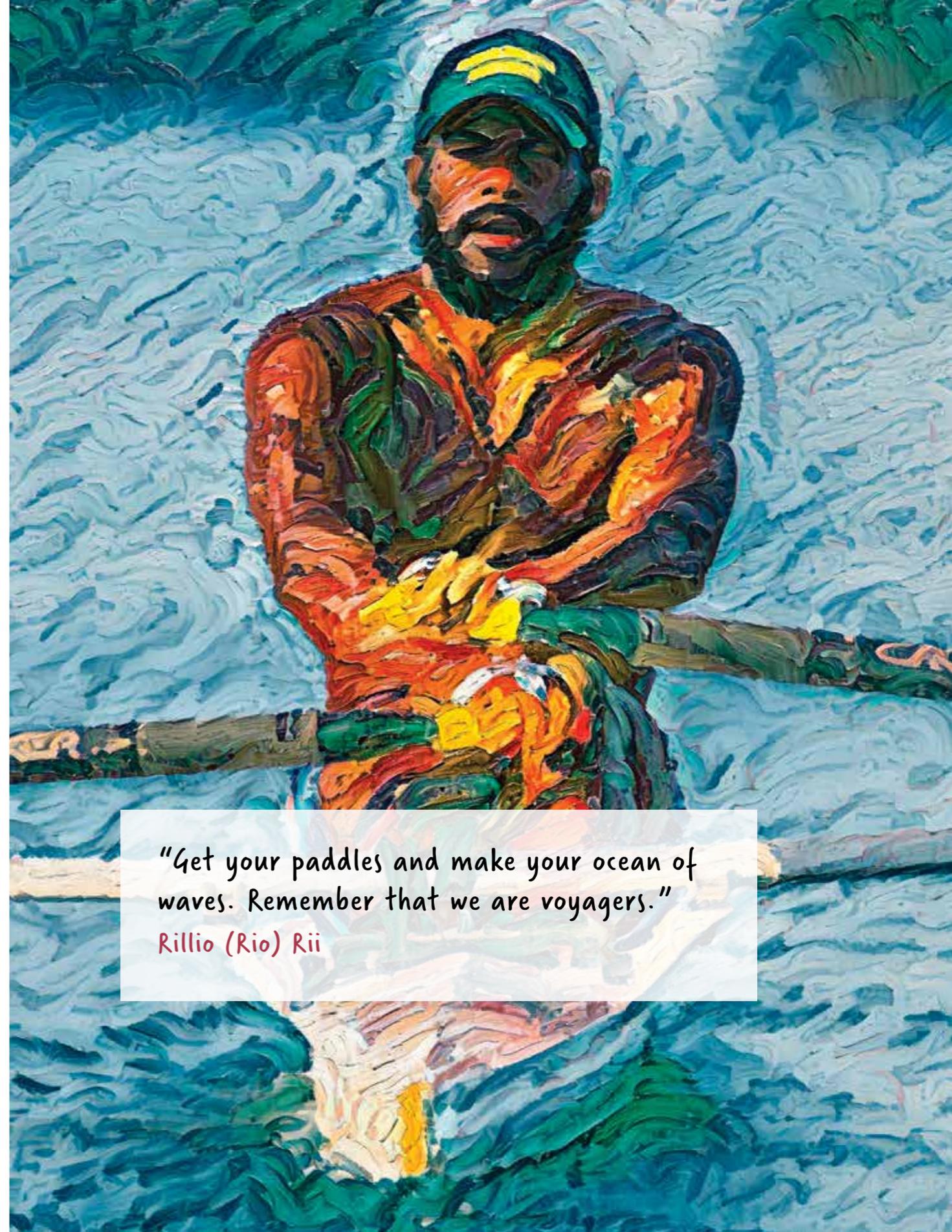
Rio knew that big dreams came with self-discipline and big sacrifices. At his first World Rowing Championships, Rio climbed the charts with his personal bests and was remembered for future competitions. "I am shorter than most competitive international rowers but I know I have other strengths," he says.

Rio biked and walked everywhere he had to go to help get fit, and went through tough daily training sessions to get stronger. His hard work paid off on 20 August 2018, when he won Vanuatu's first-ever Commonwealth gold medal at the inaugural Commonwealth beach rowing sprint race on the Gold Coast in Australia. And in 2019, he competed in the World Coastal Rowing Championship in Hong Kong.

"It's not about how big the challenge, it's about how you plan your game and how big your fight will be," Rio says. "To anyone and everyone who aspires to do something great, never give up!"



Writer: Georgilla Worwor



"Get your paddles and make your ocean of waves. Remember that we are voyagers."

Rillio (Rio) Rii

"The father whose daughters changed his life ..."

ROBERT WOBUR

Gender equality advocate

GAUA | BORN 1945

Once there was a boy named Robert who grew up on Gaua in northern Vanuatu. Robert wanted to be an Anglican priest when he grew up, like his father, and help people less fortunate than himself.

Sadly, Robert's father passed away and Robert had to stop going to school so he could help his mother with the younger siblings. "You will still have a chance to do what's in your heart one day," his mother assured him.

Robert became a *tasiu* (monk) with the Society of the Melanesian Brotherhood in Solomon Islands, serving communities across many islands. One day, he decided to return to Gaua and start his own family.

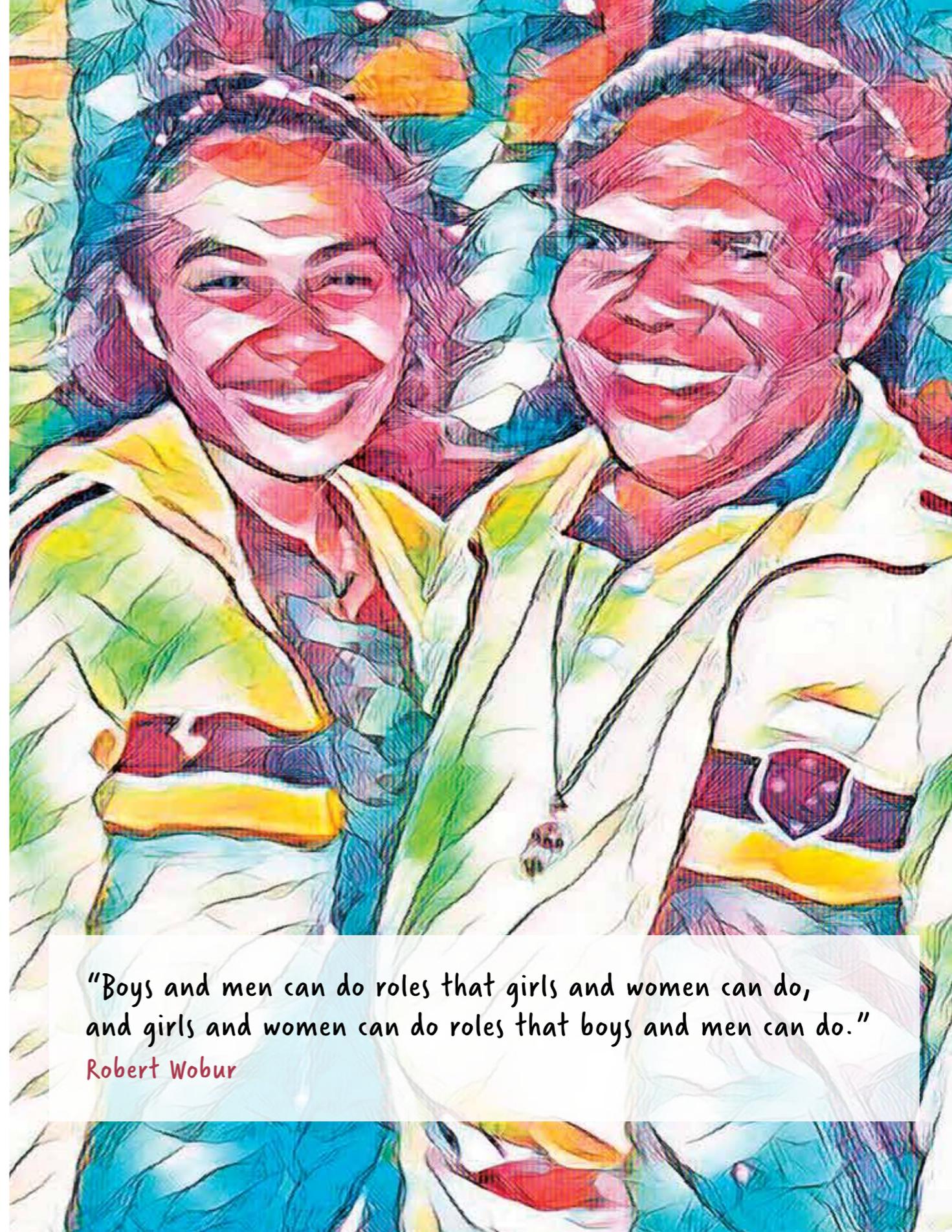
Tragedy visited Robert again when his wife passed away. Suddenly, he was both a father and mother to four young daughters. Robert had to do all the cooking, cleaning, washing and rearing of his young girls. "I realised that I am raising up four dreams, four voices, four souls and it is a blessing," he says.

"I have a renewed purpose in life to advocate for women. Even if society thinks it has decided what my daughters can or cannot do, I am determined to make sure my girls know that girls can do anything boys can do, and boys can do anything girls can do."

Robert is an example of this not only for his daughters but also in his community, working with the Church of Melanesia on Gaua and Ambae islands to encourage men to support women and girls and treat them with respect.



Writer: Mere Sovick



"Boys and men can do roles that girls and women can do, and girls and women can do roles that boys and men can do."

Robert Wobur

"The stirring vocals of ..."

STAN ANTAS

Musician, writer and composer

MALO | BORN 1988

When Stan was 11 years old, his father bought him his first guitar. Stan had a natural talent and practised hard. "I wanted to play the guitar, not sing," Stan says. But while studying at university in Fiji, his band needed a singer so he stepped in.

"I wasn't a great singer, but in Vanuatu everyone grows up with songs all around us, whether at church or through custom stories, so I could at least hold a tune," he says.

Stan loved playing music so much he decided to drop out of his studies and put all his energy into his talent. He recruited some new band members and eight months later *Stan and the Earthforce* band performed at Vanuatu's prestigious annual music festival *Fest'Napuan* in 2011. That first year, only 30 people stayed to listen to the band. The second year, plenty of people had learned his songs and were moving to it!

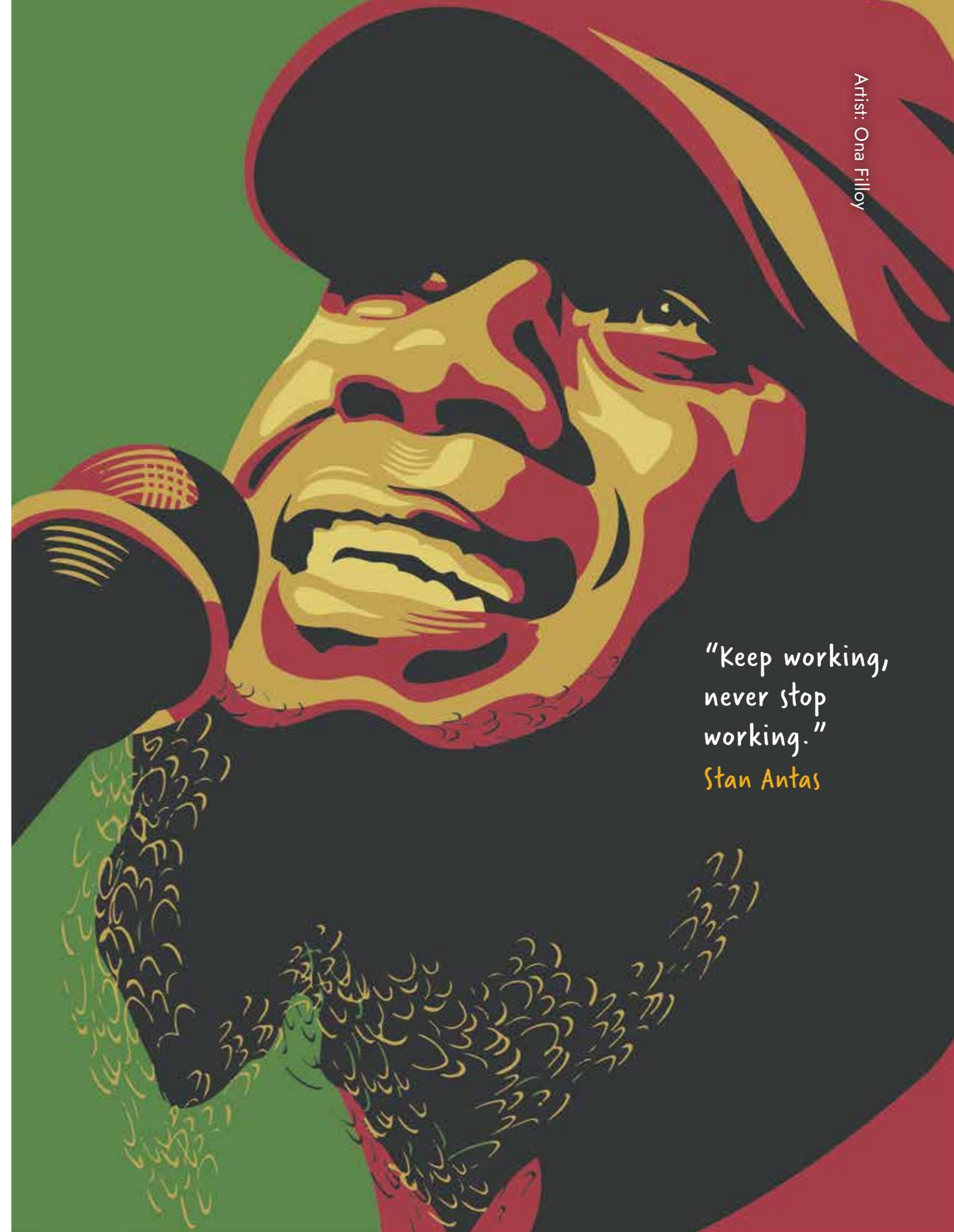
Stan has now released four albums, won two Pacific Reggae awards and has achieved international recognition as an up-and-coming roots reggae artist. "The road is not always easy, there are many struggles," Stan says. "But you just have to keep working; never stop working."

Stan's music always has a purpose and a clear message, and his distinct, gruff voice reaches many hearts. For example, his song *Respecting One Another* speaks out against bullying and violence in schools, and *West Papua Rise Up* supports Melanesian *wantoks*.

"Making music is part of our culture. It is a powerful way to reach people and tell a story," Stan says.



Writer: Anna Naupa



Artist: Ona Filloy

"Keep working,
never stop
working."
Stan Antas

"The musical magic of ..."

 **VANESSA QUAI** 
Singer

AMBAE | BORN 1988

Once upon a time, a girl named Vanessa was born into a musical family. She liked to sing and dreamed of becoming a star, singing in front of thousands of people.

When she was just nine years old, she recorded her first music album. By 11, Vanessa was also composing and writing her own music. Her youthful talent attracted a wide audience and many fans.

One day, Vanessa's dream of becoming a singing star came true. She was invited to compete in the South Pacific International Song Contest, held on the Gold Coast in Australia. She was the only child competitor out of 300 artists and won third prize in the Gospel Inspirational Category. Vanessa then competed at the Nile International Children Song Contest in Cairo, Egypt, where she won first prize.

Her music has made her very popular, not only in the Pacific but also around the world. Vanessa's career as a singer allows her to travel to many different countries and also be a musical ambassador for Vanuatu. She choreographs her own performances as well as writing and producing her own music.

Vanessa also gives private singing lessons to children as young as seven years old, and uses her music career to support charities and the Kids Home Care School in Vila, which she helped her family set up.

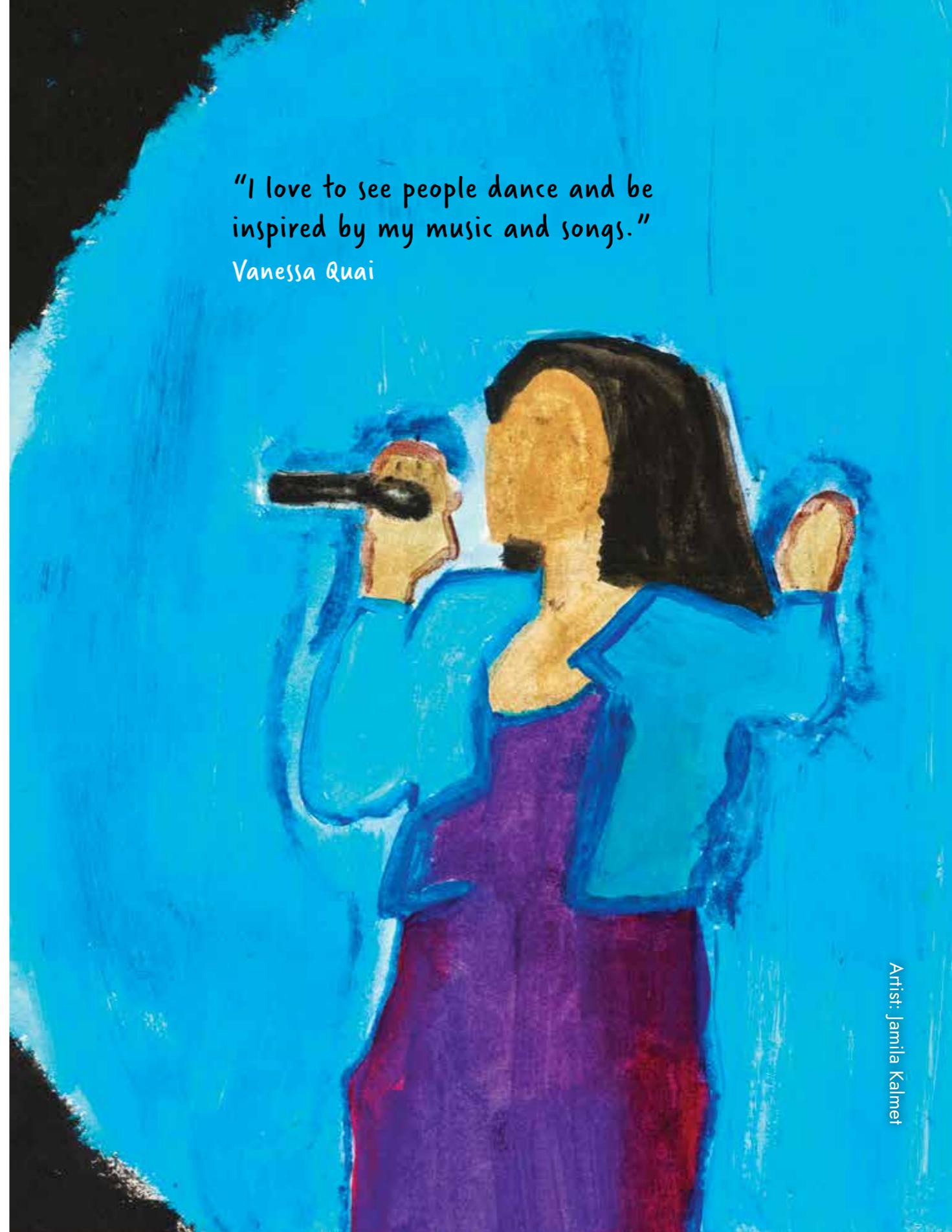
"Look, it happened to me! I have succeeded in making my dreams come true and hope to inspire other ni-Vanuatu girls and help them in their dreams," Vanessa says.



Writer: Mere Sovick

"I love to see people dance and be inspired by my music and songs."

Vanessa Quai



"The village boy who led a nation to Independence ..."

FATHER WALTER LINI

Vanuatu's first Prime Minister

PENTECOST | 1942-1999

Growing up, young Walter wanted to make a positive difference for his people. He thought hard about what he could do. Should he follow the common paths for educated Melanesians and do law, medicine or teaching? Walter decided to study for priesthood in the Anglican Church in New Zealand. Little did he know that he would become the first Prime Minister of a new country.

As a young priest, Walter observed many injustices against his fellow islanders under the joint colonial rule of Britain and France. His main concern was the sale of indigenous land to foreigners. "The land was being taken away from under our noses!" he said. Walter was not going to sit back and do nothing. "Political power must be gained first and [then we must] protect ni-Vanuatu from becoming servants in our own land," he said.

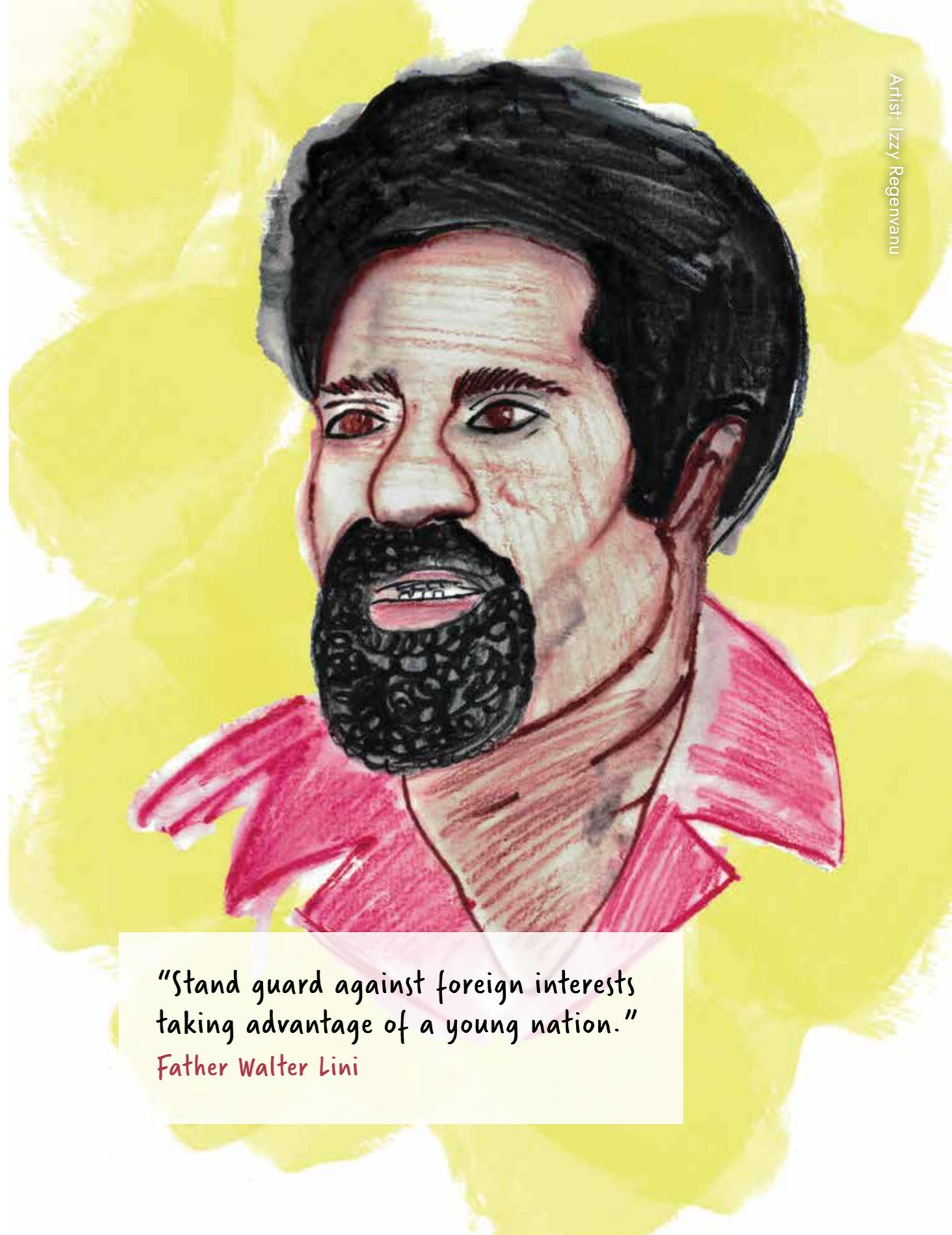
Together with other islanders, Walter formed the New Hebrides Culture Association as a way to bring political change and chase away the colonial powers. He started the *New Hebrides Viewpoints* newspaper, using his literary skills to build understanding across the islands about the value of Independence.

This soon became a political movement that led to the formation of the New Hebrides National Party (later the *Vanua'aku Pati*). Using this political platform, Walter made many powerful speeches to build popular support for Independence, linked to land rights.

Walter was chosen to lead the party and became the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu on 30 July 1980. The name 'Vanuatu' was chosen because it means 'our land forever'. Walter said in blessing of the new nation, "Small is beautiful and powerful".



Writer: Mere Sovick



Artist: Izzy Regenvanu

"Stand guard against foreign interests taking advantage of a young nation."
Father Walter Lini

"The girl who became a voice for young women ..."

YASMINE BJORNUM

Feminist activist

PORT VILA | BORN 1989

Once there was a girl called Yasmine who grew up in a Swedish-Filipino immigrant family in Port Vila with her two brothers and a sister.

Despite being a Vanuatu citizen, young Yasmine felt disconnected from many Melanesian ni-Vanuatu, who have different *kastom* and culture. But as an adult, Yasmine's different ni-Vanuatu identity is now a positive force for women's equality.

After high school, Yasmine moved to Australia to further her studies and she became a citizen of that country. An unplanned pregnancy meant she finished her studies early. "Becoming a single mother to my little girl opened my eyes to the hardships many young women face in Vanuatu," Yasmine says. "I suddenly realised the privilege I had in the support provided by my adopted country of Australia. In Vanuatu, a woman in the same boat would face much more hardship and discrimination."

In 2016, Yasmine started *Sista*, an organisation that uses arts, media and communication to help women and girls understand their rights, and to raise awareness and advocate on issues that affect them.

Yasmine uses her cultural difference together with her Vanuatu identity to advocate for women and girls in Vanuatu and across the Pacific.

"Arts, media and communication are powerful tools for self-expression and to spread positive messages, whether talking about women's health rights, gender violence or women in politics," she says. "Women's voices need to be heard right now. We need to press forward!"



Writer: Anna Naupa

"Women's voices need to be heard."

Yasmine Bjornum

