

CHRIS  
KNOX  
NOT GIVEN  
LIGHTLY

CRAIG  
ROBERTSON

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To Peter Broccoli

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# PROLOGUE

‘So, you’re telling me I won’t be the main person on every page of my biography?’ I don’t know Chris Knox well, but looking me directly in the eye he makes clear there is a right (and a wrong) answer to that question. I go with the truth: ‘Yep.’ Knox gives me one of his big smiles and laughs. He likes the idea.

At the time, in 2009, I also liked the idea because I thought the story of Knox’s creative life could also tell a story of how New Zealand changed in the last few decades of the twentieth century. He didn’t cause those changes but his shift from a weirdo on the margins to a cultural institution seemed to offer an interesting way to think about them. However, you will likely be pleased to know that isn’t what I ended up writing. Chris Knox is the main character on almost every page of this book; this is his story.

People, books and times change. Shockingly, Knox had a stroke five months after we spoke. I didn’t start researching his life until 2016 (and am finishing it almost a decade later, given the work has had to play second fiddle to my day job). After I started interviewing people, the book became something different from what I pitched to Knox. Each conversation made clear there was too much to be said about his creative life to put it solely in the service of New Zealand’s cultural history. Writing the book I also realised Knox could be the star of a story that still says something about New Zealand. His life, from the movies he didn’t see in his teenage years in 1960s Invercargill to the acute insights in the reviews and cartoons he wrote and drew as an adult, says a lot about the culture and society he created in and reacted against. A dive into his creative life, the short and long of it, reveals Knox and New Zealand in a different light.

Knox deserves a biography because of the immense impact he’s had in New Zealand and overseas, largely through his music. But he’s also a critic, a cartoonist, a writer, an artist. And he’s an enormously colourful personality — opinionated, provocative, endlessly creative.



TOP Chris Knox in Invercargill, 1950s. Photographer unknown, private collection.

ABOVE Waihopai Primary School class photo, 1959. Chris Knox, first on left, back row, next to Trevor Bayliss. Photographer unknown, private collection.

RIGHT Chris Knox with Bryn in Avenal Street, 1960s. Photographer unknown, private collection.



TOP Rosedale Intermediate Form 2 class photo with Mr Atkinson, 1965. Chris Knox, fourth from left, back row; Arthur Pomeroy and Jeremy Waldron, far left, third row. Photographer unknown, private collection.

ABOVE Chris Knox with movie camera, late 1960s. Photographer unknown, private collection.



Getting ready to leave for the quest for Nothing,  
February 1974. Photographer unknown, private collection.



