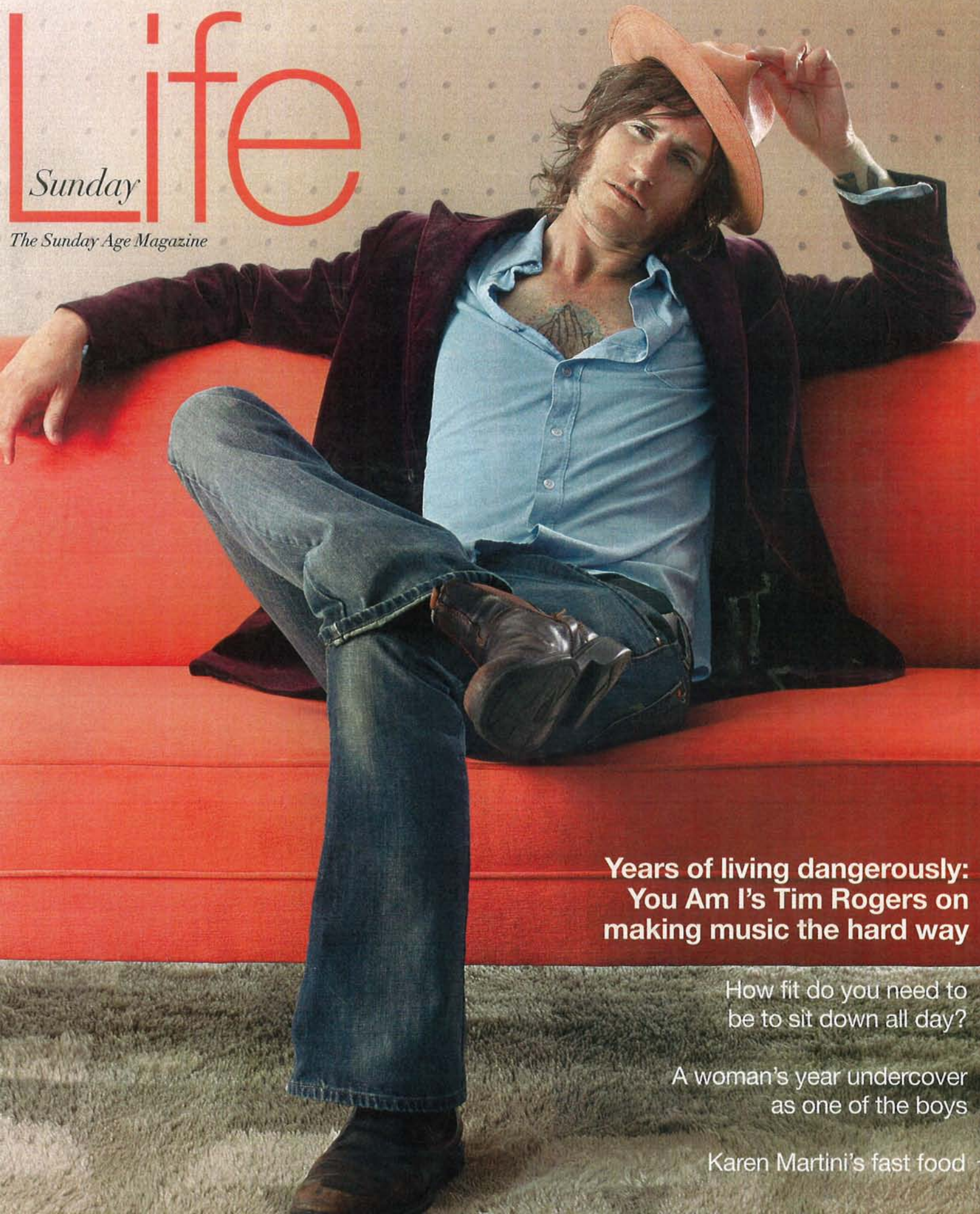


Life

Sunday

The Sunday Age Magazine



**Years of living dangerously:
You Am I's Tim Rogers on
making music the hard way**

How fit do you need to
be to sit down all day?

A woman's year undercover
as one of the boys

Karen Martini's fast food

Rewind

1990

DAVE HUGHES

Interview Louisa Deasey

After a few false starts – including a stint in an abattoir and dreams of playing professional football – Dave Hughes found success as a stand-up comedian.

I was 19 when Mum clipped this from the Warrnambool *Standard*. I was playing half-forward flank for the Old Collegians in the Warrnambool and District Football League, dreaming of being picked for the AFL. I'd started an IT course at Swinburne in Melbourne in 1989 but the big city just freaked me out. I was back home to Warrnambool within six weeks.

I got a job at the meatworks and spent a year leading sheep to their deaths, playing footy and getting drunk. Then I went to Deakin [University] to study accounting and business but I failed every subject in my second year. I was living in share houses, drinking beer and smoking bongos. I had to write a letter on why I should be allowed to stay and I couldn't think of one reason.

My parents weren't happy; I hung around at home for another year, living with them. I was the youngest so my brother and sisters had all moved out. I was really depressed. Dreaming of being picked for the AFL was hopeless. But I've always had big dreams.

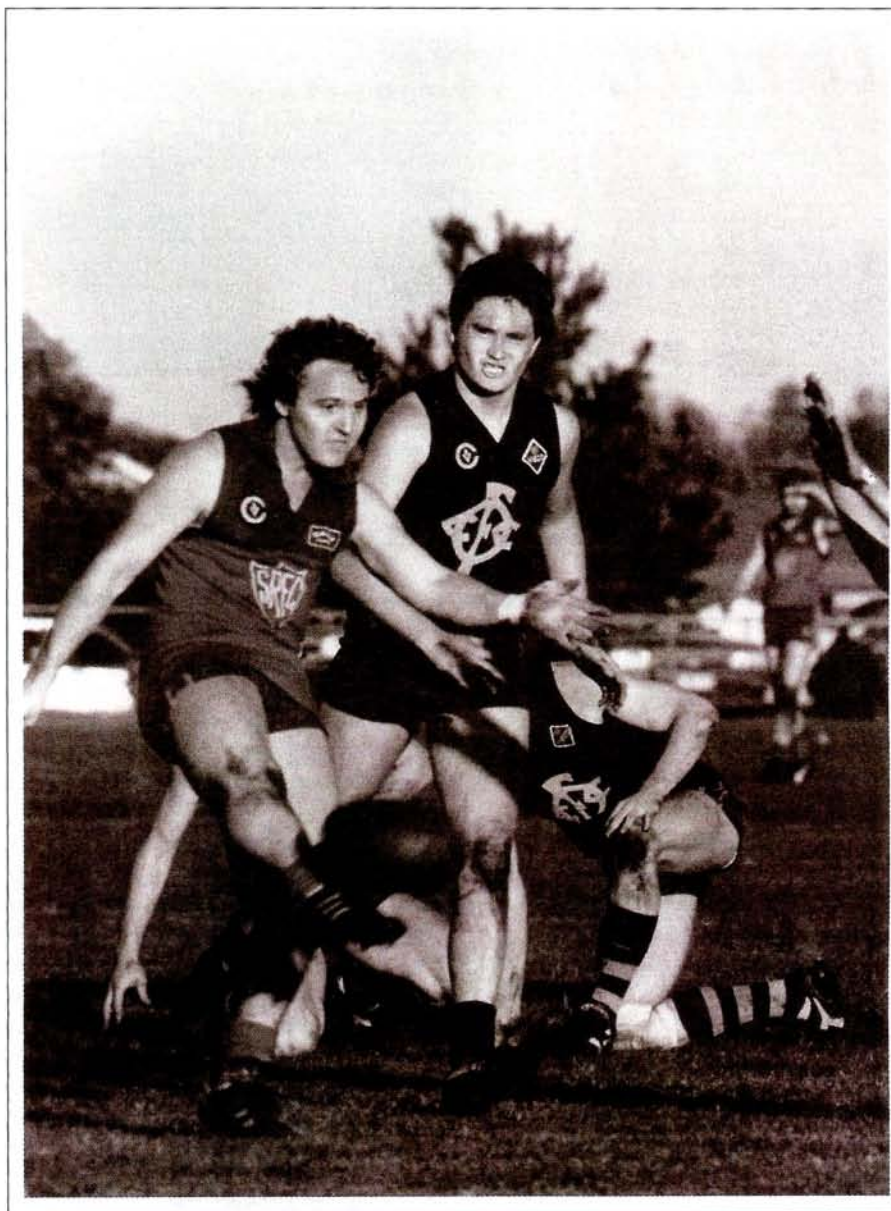
At the end of 1992, I stopped drinking and smoking bongos. I've never been good at drinking – not violent or anything; I just used to wake up on the road or get locked up for being stupid. I thought, since it was depressing me and I was no good at it, I'd better stop.

In early 1993, my mate Rat said he was driving over to Perth. Mum cried a lot the day I left. I needed a change. I thought Perth was a good place to have a crack at comedy because no one I knew could see me fail. Rat lasted two weeks but I stayed. I was only 22 and it was horrendous – I'd get on stage with no idea what I was doing. I had people yelling at me to get off, which is worse than having an ashtray thrown at your head.

On my third time on stage, I had an audience of about 50 laughing. I was hooked. It took me six months to do a headline gig, then in 1995, when I'd reached what I considered the pinnacle of comedy in Perth, I moved to Melbourne.

I found it embarrassing being on the dole and I never wanted to tell anyone but, ironically, it worked well on stage. I did it on my first TV spot in 1998, which was three minutes of stand-up on *Hey Hey It's Saturday*. I did the joke about going into the Centrelink office and saying to my case manager, "Look, I'm happy here but I think I'm worth a bit more." The dole routine is still how people know me.

It wasn't until the Comedy Festival in 1999 that I went from audiences of 20 people to, bang, massive audiences! One day I didn't do my Friday-morning spot on Triple R and hundreds of people called to complain. It makes you realise the power of the media. You could be the funniest guy in the world but if no one knows you, they won't come to your shows.



Fast forward

It's a dream come true to be accepted into the footy world, hanging out with my heroes, which I get to do every Saturday [Hughes is a panellist on Network Ten's *Before The Game*]. Mum and Dad never thought I'd make any money from "the arts" so they're absolutely rapt that I've got this far [Hughes's latest stand-up show, *Hughesy Rides Again*, is on until Friday as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival]. I don't worry about the future as much as I used to. It's worked out well for me but, you know, if you have a passion for something, you can't stop yourself. It's not even up to you. I'd like to tell my younger self, "Just relax, don't be so uptight. It'll all work itself out."