

Graham & Jenny

March 18, 2010

Getting about in the Solomons

I am currently back in Honiara attached to the maternity & gynaecology department. It was my intention to come here by *Pelican* (a ship that sails weekly from Honiara to Gizo via Noro). Cyclone *Ului* has stopped all movement on the sea, which remains very rough here on Guadalcanal.

Most of the locals cannot afford to fly, so they travel by ship: another ship that sails here from Gizo is the *Becoi*. This is a slower ship which calls at more small ports en route and takes 24 hours rather than 11 by *Pelican*. The cost is much lower by *Becoi*, but is often overloaded and there is no overnight accommodation.

In the lagoons of the west province (*Marovo*, *Roviana* and *Vonavona*), most people use dug-out canoes or fibre-glass canoes with out board motors. However, petrol is very expensive. People come to Munda every day except Sunday with their fruit and vegetables, but only if they do not live too far away.

There are 6 moderate side islands with about 1000 smaller islands & islets spread over 2,000Km of ocean. Those that can afford to fly travel on 19 seater *D-H Twin Otter* planes: it takes 5-6 hours to fly from one end of the country to the other. Despite these difficulties, many people do travel quite a lot; some to work, some to visit relatives and others to go to boarding school, which is surprisingly common here.

We often send patients on the *Twin Otter* with drips up for IV fluids; less urgent cases travel by *Pelican* or *Becoi*, but the urgent cases go by R.A.M.S.I. helicopter. A few are sent on to Brisbane from Honiara.

The National Referral Hospital here in Honiara is preparing for a visit from the president of Taiwan next week. Apparently he spends 2 days here every year visiting the hospital and speaking in Parliament. The hospital here was built by the Taiwan government, and currently the Japanese are building a new hospital in Gizo. The Chinese and Koreans are also involved with building projects in Honiara city. The logging is done by companies from Malaysia and other South-East Asian countries; the Chinese run the corner shops!

There is some speculation that an international airport will be built at Munda, possible by the Japanese. They are certainly working hard on the hospital in Gizo; 24 hours of every day of the week using labourers from Sri Lanka.

I am currently living in the student house in the hospital compound. It is known as *Kiwi House* and reminds me of a Scottish bothy. So far it seems to be free of rats and other uninvited guests, but the water is off most of the time. There is gas and electric, with a cold shower which does work when there is water. The only other occupant is a medical student from Switzerland. She went to the island of Savo (not far from here) but was stuck there due to the cyclone.

I am currently in the operating theatre rest-room waiting for the next case – an appendicectomy. All the staff here are very friendly and are used to teaching surgical skills. We also have 2 consultant anaesthetists – the only ones in the country.

March 12, 2010

Roviana lagoon tour

The first tour this year took Jenny to the villages in the Roviana lagoon. As usual it was full of surprises – a delayed start due to heavy rain put us behind schedule but the locals are used to that and still welcomed our arrival. More heavy rain and a very low tide made for a very slow canoe trip to our overnight stop on Tuesday at one of the boarding schools. The beautiful sunset finally gave way to a partially star-lit sky, but a power cut meant that the distant lights we were heading for disappeared, so Soso stood on the front of the canoe with a torch navigating us round the rocks. Manasa is a skilled boat driver and fortunately the sea was calm.

Most of the villages we visited do not have electricity but the school has hydroelectric power. Seeing patients by kerosene lamp light sitting on the veranda of the house we slept in the following evening mixed with the sound of children's voices singing and banging sticks in response to the concho shell in the C.F.C. tradition added to the richness and variety to this tour.

March 9, 2010

Steve Pearce visits from London

Steve is based in the World Church Relationships Office in Marylebone and represents the Methodist Church in South-East Asia and all the Pacific countries including Australia & New Zealand. He arrived from Papua New Guinea on Friday, when Jenny joined him for tea and a welcome from the church here. Graham returned from a surgical tour in Gizo in time for lunch at the hospital on Saturday. We

then took Steve for a tour of the hospital: he was last here in 2004. An evening meal followed by singing from the hospital community was arranged in Davinia Taylor Hall. On Sunday morning Steve went by canoe to Goldie College, returning in time to speak at the evening service in the hospital.

On Sunday evening we said farewell, as he was catching the early flight home & spending the night with the Moderator.

Jenny left for a medical & dental tour of Roviana lagoon after a delayed start on Monday morning (wet & windy).

February 26, 2010

“Paradise island” picnic & farewell to John

Filed under: [Uncategorized](#) — admin @ 9:24 pm

Another week has flown past; 3 new medical students arrived from Edinburgh last week and John our Business volunteer left yesterday. Last Saturday about 40 of us enjoyed a trip to Biribri island by canoe. Everyone contributed to the picnic, some of which we had taken with us; the fish and shell-fish was collected fresh & cooked on open fires. We wove our platters from palm leaves & drank coconut juice from the coconuts. We did some singing, swimming and played beach games. None of us were in a hurry to return & we eventually came back as the sun was setting, with bags full of *ununu* (shell fish). You boil them in salt water to extract them from the shell. We enjoyed them on a pizza base the next day.

[Comments \(1\)](#)

February 19, 2010

Financial problems at H.Goldie

Filed under: [Uncategorized](#) — admin @ 9:23 pm

The financial problems of the hospital continue to dominate our thoughts as the problems have been highlighted by John, the Australian Business Volunteer who has been working with us. With Eddies leaving us, we are struggling to get our heads round the finances and we realise how fortunate we have been to have such a capable and trustworthy person managing them. An obvious successor has not yet been found, but interviews are taking place. The cost of electricity continues to amaze us, especially as we are charged at commercial rates. We are investing alternative energy sources (the cost is 10 times the cost in NZ) but we were appalled to find that we would be taxed on all electricity we produce at 50%, that is we pay in tax half of the normal cost of electricity! We continue to hope and pray that a reasonable solution will be found.

We have enjoyed having John over the last 3 weeks; we had a “wantok” evening with him and two other westerners last weekend. Yesterday evening (Friday) we were entertained by Drs. Dina and Zote and today we are taking John to an island (Biribiri) with a party of 40 hospital staff & family, so it is not all doom & gloom.

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February 12, 2010

Helena Goldie College of Nursing opens

This week Helena Goldie College of Nursing opened to receive its first 16 students. This is quite an important step for us: we have had a nurse aide training school since the 1960's but it closed last year and that training has now become obsolete. The nurse aides have an 18 month training, but carry a huge responsibility – often left in charge of the wards & working alone in the remote rural aide posts. We are delighted that we have been able to find sponsors for 5 of our own nurse aides to upgrade their qualifications. This has left us a bit short of staff, as they continue to receive a small salary to live on. We have taken on 2 excellent volunteer nurse aides who completed their nurse aide training last year. If anyone would be interested in sponsoring some staff posts please communicate via the hospital e-mail account (making the subject *For Jenney & Graham*). *The cost is a fraction of what it would be in the developed world.* We are delighted to have John from the Australian Business Volunteers working with us on our 5 year strategic plan – where do we start?