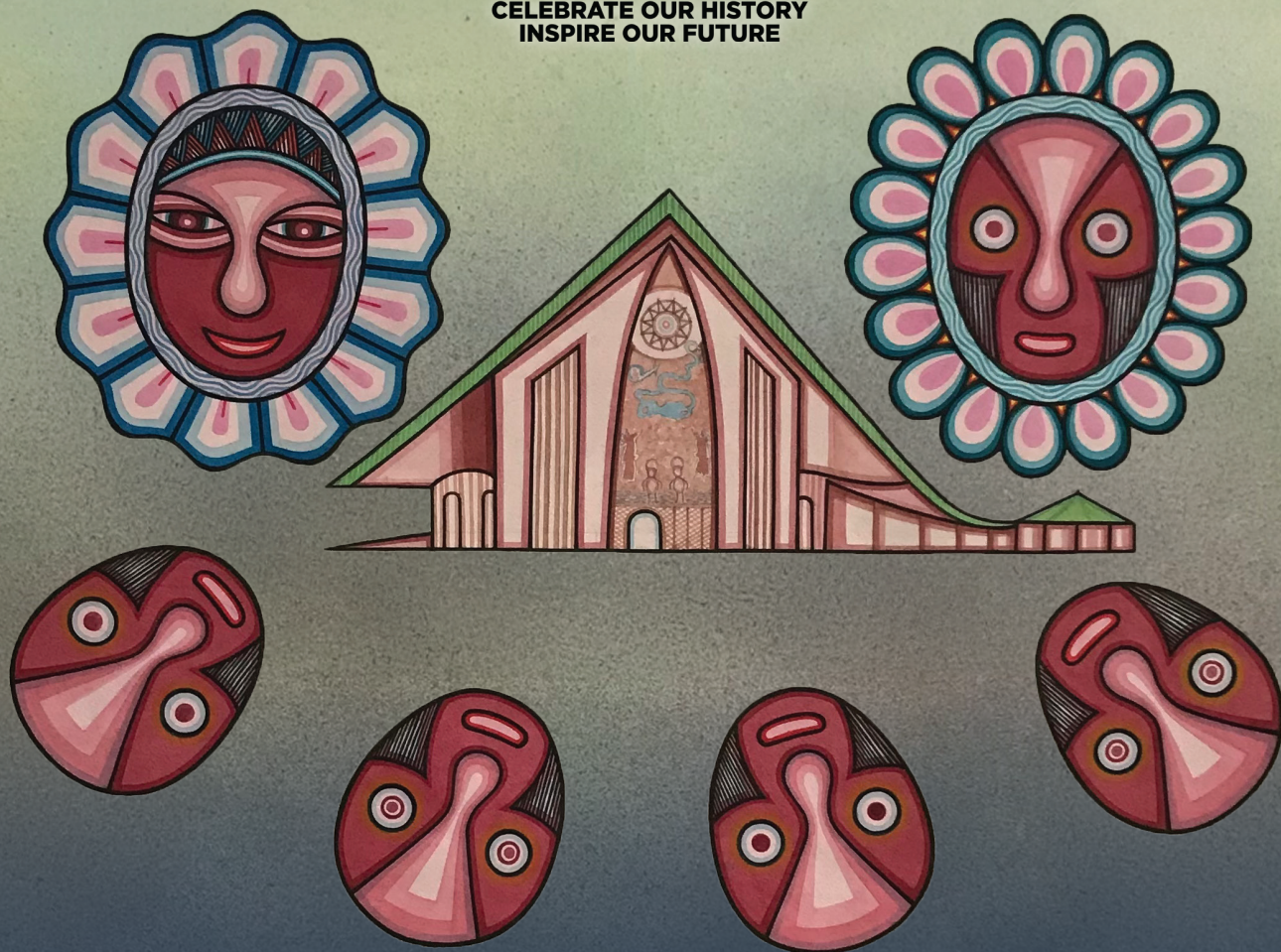


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FIFTY YEARS OF NATION-MAKING:
A PAPUA NEW GUINEA
DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY
VOLUME ONE

Edited by Theresa Meki, Keimelo Gima, and Nicholas Hoare

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September 2025



Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography



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Australia and Papua New Guinea recognise the importance of the history and perspectives contained within this book and acknowledge their value in contributing to a deeper understanding of past events. We acknowledge and celebrate the academic endeavour that has gone into researching, editing and publishing this book, but note that the content does not necessarily reflect the views of either the Australian Government or the Papua New Guinean Government.



Fifty Years of Nation-Making:

A Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography

VOLUME ONE

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Foreword

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Theresa Meki, Keimelo Gima and Nicholas Hoare for their noble endeavour in rejuvenating the *Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography*. This remarkable achievement represents far more than an academic milestone; it stands as a testament to our nation's enduring spirit and collective memory.

This visionary idea first emerged at the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1980s, but it faced numerous obstacles that seemed insurmountable at the time. Perhaps the moment was not yet right for such biographical documentation? Today, however, we witness the fruition of that early vision, transformed into a magnificent repository of our people's stories.

This collection presents a scholarly contribution of immense value to our nation, weaving together the narratives of men and women who have shaped our society through their extraordinary contributions. Most significantly, this work honours our founding fathers, mothers and the generation of Papua New Guineans that followed them — those individuals who, through their separate and collective efforts, guided us to our current position as an independent nation.

I am particularly heartened by the active participation of our young scholars in this monumental undertaking. These emerging academics have travelled throughout our diverse nation, conducting interviews and gathering the rich, varied stories that now form these biographical accounts. Their dedication ensures that these narratives will become integral threads in the fabric of our national identity, preserving not only who we are today but also our aspirations for the future.

Papua New Guinea's society is both complex and culturally rich, characterised by remarkable diversity across our many communities. These biographies illuminate those complexities, providing invaluable insights for current and future generations. I trust that readers will be drawn to this work, finding inspiration in learning about those who came before us, those who live among us now, and understanding their profound impact on our collective journey.

I must acknowledge those visionaries whose ambitions for a *Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography* remained unfulfilled during their lifetimes. I honour the memory and contributions of Elton Brash, Jim Griffin, John Waiko and Sam Kaima, whose early advocacy laid the groundwork for this achievement.

With gratitude and pride, I wholeheartedly recommend these biographies of Papua New Guinea. This collection stands as both a celebration of our past and a beacon for our future, ensuring that the stories of our remarkable people will inspire the generations to come.

Meg Taylor, DBE

August 2025



Introduction:

From Nation-Building to Nation-Making

Throughout the nation Papua New Guineans are celebrating the year of Independence. After the fireworks have done their dash, and the Very Important Persons returned to their countries, the glamour will fade away. In its place will be a way of life which has undergone rapid change over the last 90 years. Many aspects of this lifestyle have survived outside influence — and this fact alone shows the strength of the culture, and the people who live it. This is a new nation, but one with all the ‘luxuries’ required by the man and woman of today. The land is rich and ripe for development, and the people have chosen capable leaders who will enable Papua New Guinea to stand with the community of nations.

(MacGregor 1975:36)

The above words were written 50 years ago by the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Independence Celebrations Organisation Committee at the time of the nation's independence from Australia. It was a time of optimism and celebration of all the hard work that had gone into building the formal structures and institutions of the new nation so that it could stand shoulder to shoulder with the community of nations throughout the region and the world. There was widespread understanding that ‘there may be problems in the future’, but also quiet confidence that there were solutions, and that in facing the challenges that would come the nation's way ‘all people can develop as individuals while contributing to the overall effort’ (MacGregor 1975:37). In the words of PNG's first prime minister, Grand Chief (Sir) Michael Somare, who contributed the foreword to the committee's short book: ‘Independence is not the end of Papua New Guinea's story. It is only the beginning’ (cited in MacGregor 1975:5).

This first volume, *Fifty Years of Nation-Making: A Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography*, is a small contribution to the celebrations 50 years on. Focusing on PNG's story since 1975 and the enormous contributions made by individuals to the overall nation-making effort, we emphasise the ongoing, open-ended and challenging nature of PNG's development and growing understandings of individual and group

identity within the nation over half a century. The core idea of the volume is that, while PNG's 'founding fathers' might have led the creation and establishment of the state in 1975, it is the people — the grassroots and everyday citizens of PNG — that have been making the nation ever since, both consciously and unconsciously. Hence, it is the stories of these people, in all their diversity, that we wish to honour and celebrate through the establishment of a *Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography* — an organised and hopefully ongoing mechanism by which the achievements of the nation-makers may be recorded and remembered over the next 50 years and beyond.

This project showcases the lives and work of important and representative individuals in PNG's evolving national story. It includes men and women who, in their own respective callings, were and are passionate in serving the institutions and people of their nation. Nation-makers are to be found in all fields of endeavour and include politicians, clergy, public servants, community leaders, social workers, teachers, nurses, academics, entrepreneurs, musicians, artists, soldiers, police officers and athletes. It is cause for celebration that, after 91 years of colonial history and 50 years of independence, PNG has so many writers eager to document the stories of their own nation-makers.

In planning the inaugural workshop for this project, our objective was to create something that was genuine and developed by the writers themselves. Our role was limited to facilitating and then editing. It did not take long for a vision of honouring lesser-known individuals to emerge during our first planning workshop held in June 2024 at the Dream Inn's suitably named Michael Somare function room in Port Moresby. Among the 25 enthusiastic writers gathered to discuss the development of the project, everybody wanted to focus on the contributions of unsung heroes who had (and have) dedicated their lives to shaping young minds and educating the future generations of PNG. The reception gave us confidence that there was an eagerness to research and better document PNG's next generation of nation-makers. Moving into our second day of the workshop, more questions arose: Whose stories do we tell? Whose stories do we not tell? What sets one person apart from another? In other words, what makes somebody a nation-maker? Fortunately, the writers — an eclectic group of individuals ranging in age from 20 to 60 and coming from diverse professional backgrounds — offered unique perspectives and insights. By allowing the conversation to flow, we created a process that felt organic. By the

conclusion of the first workshop, the writers had reached a consensus on the type of individuals they wished to document.

The writers established the key criteria, including the importance of aiming for representation of Papua New Guineans from all regions of the country and a desire to strive for gender balance. The latter priority was a response to the lack of historical documentation about PNG women in public life. To date, only a handful of biographies and autobiographies have been written by or about women, such as the autobiographies of Dame Alice Wedega (1981) and Dame Josephine Abaijah (1991). In this volume, we are excited to feature entries on the following women: Dame Kilapelema Amini, Lucy Apoko, Waliyato Clowes, Anne Dickson-Waiko, Tamo Diro, Sister Lorraine Garasu, Winnie Kiap, Muriel Larnier, Annlyn Mota, Cecilia Nembou, Ipul Powaseu, Emily Taule, Meg Taylor, Linda Voyorite and Ume Wainetti. We made a deliberate decision to exclude prime ministers and other notable ‘founding fathers’ in this volume, believing that their contributions to nation-building have already been widely recognised and documented (Ritchie 2015). However, the selection of personalities for this volume does not in any way discount the many other individuals who have also served their nation. The usual limitations inherent to a scholarly volume of this nature mean that there has not been the time and space to include everyone. It is hoped that those who have missed out here will be included in future publications. Indeed, this short volume is envisaged as the first in a series of publications collecting and documenting the stories of PNG’s nation-makers as, after all, nation-making is an ongoing process (Foster 1995).

The telling and writing of historical narratives is itself an integral part of the nation-making process; therefore, in narrating the stories of notable citizens, the writers in this volume are themselves contributing to nation-making. As such, it is no accident that most of the contributors to this volume come from PNG. An important aspect of the project is to provide opportunities for aspiring writers and researchers and provide guidance on the ethical and technical aspects of biographical research. This experience has not been a one-way process. During our workshops, participants actively engaged and asked questions appropriate to their place and positionality and to the writing task ahead. For example, one writer asked: ‘If I am going into a community to interview a resident there, I’ll have to acknowledge the community leaders and seek collective permission prior to conducting that interview — how do I do that?’ Another asked: ‘What if my subject is a big-man in his society and

has three wives — do I include that piece of information in his biography?’ Which audience are we privileging if we remove this type of culturally specific information? With such questions and the ensuing discussions, the writers realised the power and considerable agency they possess in wielding the pen or the keyboard.

PNG has a rich tradition of writing and life writing dating to at least 1932 with the publication of Hosea Linge’s autobiography (*Ligeremaluoga* 1932).¹ If the long list of PNG historians, biographers and creative writers that have come before us are not explicitly acknowledged here, then look out for their names in the reference lists of the individual entries. Our writers came to realise that PNG biography is its own historical genre, requiring unique expertise and requisite local knowledge. While the unfinished *Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography* and well-established *Australian Dictionary of Biography* have both been used as launching pads or sounding boards, we are pleased and excited to see the format and style of PNG biography develop in its own direction in response to the needs and desires of audiences, writers and the subjects themselves.

Life writing, we argue, is an ideal medium to capture PNG’s diverse histories. But we cannot be prescriptive about the way authors go about their business. As Dr John Momis once said about the nation: ‘I don’t believe you need uniformity in order to create unity. I believe that Papua New Guinea is so diverse that you have to allow for differences. I also believe that you don’t need a strong central control to achieve unity.’² While some semblance of central control and unity is going to be needed for this project to thrive into the future, we hope that a similar tolerance for diversity and difference, and organic development, can be observed to enable this to become one of the most vibrant and innovative dictionaries of biography among our community of nations.

Words of gratitude

It is only proper to give credit where it is due. The roots of this project lie at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), where former historians and library staff set the building blocks for a project of this nature in the 1980s (Hoare and Meki 2025). In reviving this UPNG project, we are incredibly thankful for the funding received from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Pacific Research Program: Phase Two, and the Department of Pacific Affairs in The Australian National University’s College of Asia & the Pacific.

The writers of the contributions must also be commended for their time and effort in researching, writing and submitting entries on their respective subjects. In a related vein, we also acknowledge the selected nation-makers and their relatives for agreeing to take part in this project.

Finally, we thank the following individuals, in no particular order, for their invaluable individual contributions to this present publication: Helga Griffin, Sinclair Dinnen, Meg Keen, Angela Terrill, Rani Kerin, Rodney Ng Shiu, Meg Taylor, Jonathan Ritchie, Nayahamui Rooney, Deveni Temu, Eric Johns, Carol Kidu, Ceridwen Spark, Anthony Regan, Malcolm Allbrook, Andrew Connelly, Nicole Haley, Jack Corbett, Tanya Zeriga-Alone, Teisi Kalamo, Hamura Turia, Kainaro Kravia, Lorraine Kluki, Sam Kauga, Vanessa Uiari, Gabriel Kuman, Darrel Yockopua, Jasmine Duadak, Cottingham Geno, Michael Kabuni, Paul Maima, John Kama, Jarrod Hodgson, Stephanie Russo, Lyndsi Davies, Hannah McMahon, Jessie Chella, Eliorah Malifa, Sonia Palmieri, Kerry Baker, David Oakeshott, Thiago Cintra Oppermann, Stewart Firth, Judy Putt, Amanda Watson, Colin Wiltshire, Colin Filer, Stephen Howes, Philip Gibbs, Michael Goddard, Grant Walton, Arianne Kassman, Orovu Sepoe, Fiona Hukula, Geoffrey Dabb, Gideon Kendoni, Jean Zorn, Volker Boege, Dominic Katter, Henry Ivarature, Irene Semos, Katerina Teaiwa, Talei Lusia Mangioni, Melanie Nolan, Soli Middleby, Michelle Staff, Kari James, John Cox, Bill and Jan Gammage, Roger Southern, Shannie Kiram, Frank Griffin, Lote Lisania, Karen Karo, Vicky Puipui and Llane Munau.

Tenkiu badahera, tenkiu tru.

Theresa Meki, Keimelo Gima and Nicholas Hoare

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1 Hosea Linge, also known as Ligeremaluoga, was the father of one of this volume's subjects, David Linge.

2 John Momis 12/1974. Deputy Chairman of the Constitutional Planning Committee, interview by Anthony Haas (Anthony Haas Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington).

Dame Kilapelema Rupa Amini (1943–2021)

YWCA stalwart and women's advocate

By Cheryl Lyn Amini Kalo and Charles Rupa Amini

My name is Charles Rupa Amini and, as her eldest son, I am honoured to write this introduction about our late mother, Dame Kilapelema Rupa Amini on behalf of the family. Our mother spent 58 of her 78 years involved with the 'Y' and working on women's issues. As a young woman, she inspired all her cousin sisters, daughters and nieces to follow in her footsteps. She was a trailblazing pioneer for Hula and Central Province women in what was still a colonial, male-dominated society. Our mother was a simple, pure and fun-loving woman — a great joker in her own right. She could spin a yarn or two. She had strong Christian values and was deeply attached to her family and village roots. We thank her for her contribution to the advancement of women in PNG and the blessings she gave my siblings, Cheryl, Okera, Kilian and I. God bless her soul.



Dame Kilapelema Amini. Courtesy of the Amini family archives.

Kilapelema Rupa Amini was born on 27 July 1943 at Poerupu, Vula'a village, Rigo, in today's Central Province. She was the second daughter of Okera Kilairu Kilapelema and her husband Rupa Alewa Gulo, and was named after her maternal grandfather, Kilapelema Kalawa. Her older brother, Kalawa, passed when he was four years old. Other surviving siblings include her older sister Kilagemona Rupa Tamate, four brothers, Karonama Vagi, Pokanama Vagi, Kilarupa Vagi and Apiiwa Vagi, and a younger sister Taubamona Vagi.

Because Kilapelema's father passed away when she was just two years old, she spent her early childhood at Komukito, Rakoaona, in Vula'a with her mother's brother, Karonama Kilapelema. This uncle was married to a woman called Renagi Kaile, from Irupara, who would often receive visits from an Alewai village uncle, Vagi Pokana. Being a widower himself with a young daughter, Taubamona, Vagi Pokana was pleasantly surprised at the arrival of a widow with two daughters, and it did not take long for the two to fall for one another. While Okera's brother was reluctant to

see her and her daughters leave for Alewai, he eventually gave his blessing for the marriage.

At Alewai, Kilapelema and her sister grew up in a *loke* house on stilts over water where they kept themselves busy fishing, gardening, sailing in dugout canoes, looking for crabs, fetching water, collecting firewood, playing with friends and other siblings, and helping their parents. Later the family moved from the sea to the beachfront and built the family home on the shores of Alewai.

Kilapelema's formal education began at Irupara Mission School before she shifted to the London Missionary Society school at Raukele Mission Station, Vula'a.¹ She excelled from an early age and managed to finish Grades 4–6 within the same year.² In 1958, she moved to Kavari Girls Intermediate School in Hanuabada for Grades 6–8, staying temporarily at Napanapa with an aunt, Aikuluna Timo. She also spent time at the mission station at Metoreia. In 1960, Port Moresby International School (POMIS), unique in its adoption of the New South Wales syllabus, opened at Boroko and Kilapelema was bright enough to gain a scholarship to join the inaugural student cohort.

Kilapelema never felt lonely during her school years away from home. Central students, especially those from Rigo, Hood Lagoon and Hood Point, formed close bonds during their days in Port Moresby and became lifelong friends. Her uncles, Karonama and Numaralai, would also visit in their double-hulled canoes, which they berthed at Koki. It was also while at POMIS that she began what was to become a lifelong association with the 'Y' — the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) — first as a student leader in 1962, running Sunday Schools at Koki and Metoreia, volunteering at Laloki Psychiatric Ward and Bomana Prison, and starting a youth group called Torch Bearers. As a student, Kilapelema worked hard to earn extra money to provide food for her parents, tuition fees for her siblings and to assist her extended family in the village.

In the 1960s, most female graduates either became teachers or nurses; Kilapelema chose the former and, after finishing 18 months of primary school teacher training at Wardstrip Teachers' College as dux, she gained her first teaching position at Kilakila Primary School in 1963. It was at this point that a young man from Alukune village, Brian Kupanarigo Amini, fresh from an Australian scholarship to Toowoomba Grammar School, re-entered her life. With the blessing of their pastor,

the pair began writing to one another romantically and, once they turned 21, they were allowed to marry. The marriage took place at Koki United Church, Port Moresby, on 8 August 1964.

After a brief stay at Taikone, Kilapelema and Brian rented lodgings at a Salvation Army hostel at Koki, before moving to their first house at Minihi, Boroko. This was in 1967, when Cheryl Lyn, their second child was born (Charles Rupa, came along first). They were one of the first PNG couples to live in their own home, as accommodation shortages in Port Moresby meant that most homes were open to relatives and others studying, working or transiting through the capital. The family moved three more times: first to Hohola in 1969 (where their third child, Okera Pama, was born), then to Tokorara in 1973, and finally to Korobosea in 1977, which is the family home today and also where their fourth child, Kilian Karonama, was born. Speaking about these living arrangements in 1974, Kilapelema said:

*‘Our life is adapted to the typical city life with emphasis on modernized
Papuan style. Strong family ties keep us all together and enrich us’*

(cited in Steinbauer 1974:93).

In the late 1960s and 70s, Kilapelema was a vocal advocate for gender equality and women’s rights through her work for the YWCA and other women’s groups. Her association with the YWCA deepened through leadership roles such as program coordinator and then vice-president of the Port Moresby YWCA. She became the first Papua New Guinean to hold the position of national president of the YWCA (Hiari 1977:9). Her oral submission on behalf of the YWCA to the Public Service Tribunal on ‘equal pay for equal work’ in 1969 was legendary.³ In 1971, she was the chairperson of the Port Moresby Womens’ Ecumenical Group and she helped establish the National Council of Women PNG, serving as the first president of the interim committee. Her work with the YWCA took her to the world council meeting in Ghana (also in 1971) and she observed YWCA activity in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as India, Malaysia and Singapore.

Both Kilapelema and Brian were keen athletes. Kilapelema was a talented hockey player who also excelled in softball, netball and cricket. Meanwhile Brian was a reliable middle-order batsman and spin bowler for the famous SP Hoods. He captained the PNG cricket side in the late 1970s before taking up the role of

director of the Office of Information. The pair was also heavily involved in local sports administration, including Koboni Australian Rules Football and netball clubs.

Kilapelema and the family followed Brian once he began his diplomatic career, joining him in Wellington when he became PNG's high commissioner to New Zealand (1981–83). She continued her association with the YWCA in New Zealand, collaborating with Polynesian women, chairing conferences on gender-based violence and promoting PNG to young people. A three-year stint in Jakarta followed once Brian became ambassador to Indonesia (1984–87).

Upon the family's return to PNG, Kilapelema slipped back into her familiar position at the Port Moresby YWCA. In 1989, she was asked to become general secretary, a role that she held until her death. Brian, who received a CBE in 1986, died in 2005, but Kilapelema continued working and travelling for many years. She loved her family and extended family and always made time to visit relatives in the village and Port Moresby. Generous and willing to assist family with school fees and other financial matters, she also supported her husband's family with clan and village obligations. She never forgot her roots and enjoyed going home and spending time with the family and the village community. A humorous lady who enjoyed singing, dancing and telling jokes, Kilapelema supported her younger brothers when they formed Waikei, a string band from Alewai. She sang along with her husband when he composed hymns and prophet songs. She was bright and colourful, which showed in her personal dress and fashion style. While overseas, she advocated for PNG *toana* (national dress).

Ultimately, Kilapelema will be remembered in PNG for her tireless work with the YWCA. Throughout her life she helped support early childhood education, school leavers, working women, women in settlements, villages, suburbs and prisons, and refugees. She empowered those who did not have the opportunity to have an education, the unemployed, and the victims and survivors of domestic and gender-based violence; she fought against injustice and exploitation and advocated for the downtrodden; she became a champion for the voiceless in urban and rural communities; and she helped promote a clean and safe environment, appropriate technology, literacy and numeracy and human rights. And she did all this voluntarily, constantly putting the needs of others before her own.

Recognition came in the form of an MBE (Member of the British Empire), OBE (Order of the British Empire) and CSM (Companion Star of Melanesia) on 26 March 2015, making her the first dame from Central Province. As a young woman she looked to a future where PNG was ‘a self-supporting nation’. She wanted to see Papua New Guineans educated so that they were ‘aware of the problems of other countries as well as those of their own’. And she wanted ‘balanced representation in the Government to overcome the racial and social tensions and frustrations’. For Kilapelema, all Papua New Guineans ‘should believe in unity and nation building, regardless of creed, colour, and tradition’ (cited in Steinbauer 1974:93). Most of her subsequent life was spent in pursuit of these ideals.

Dame Kilapelema died at home in Korobosea after a long battle with diabetes on 17 July 2021. She was laid to rest at her beloved Vula’a and is survived by her four children, 10 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.

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1 In 1957, the school changed its name to Maneamanea Government School and introduced national teachers Toreapo Havora and Buruka Toea.

2 Some of her Grade 5 classmates were Tegana Rupa, Kilaviri Rupa, Teio Ila, John Pat, Kila Pat, William Gima, Herea Amini and Igamailu Amini. She did not know it at the time, but her future husband first encountered Kilapelema during an early graduation ceremony where she received the top prize.

3 Rose Kekedo, then lecturer at Madang Teachers’ Training College, led the successful campaign which gave women public servants (including teachers and nurses) the right to equal pay for the same or like work as men from 1 July 1969. See *Pacific Islands Monthly* (6/1969: 37).



Nirai Lucy Maimoi Apako (Lucy Joseph) (1960–2021)

Bougainville-born educator and mother

By Jacqueline Joseph

My name is Jacqui Joseph. I am known in PNG as the Bougainvillean girl who co-founded Equal Playing Field, a registered charity promoting gender equality and violence prevention through sport. I have found my passion in working with communities in designing solutions and it is through this interest that I discovered a love for writing about community experience and the people I have met and come to know today. I want to write about women leaders such as Lucy Joseph, my late mother, because of our shared passion for teaching and dedication towards education in PNG.

A practice that is prevalent in some PNG homes is the act of giving a tribe or clan name to a newborn, usually alongside a Christian name. This life story is about a girl called Nirai (pronounced Nee-Rai), the name given to my mother from Morohai, her mother's clan, after her birth in 1960. Nirai in the Siwai language is an adjective used to describe something beautiful and, for the first-born child of Henry Maimoi Apako and Catherine Oripa, this was a fitting name for their daughter.

My maternal grandparents, Henry and Catherine, hailed from Siwai, a subdistrict of Buin in South Bougainville. As is tradition, when a woman gets married, she moves to her husband's village and this practice usually means that the children are raised in their father's village. Therefore, Nirai spent most of her early years in Kohkui, her father's village. By the time she started school, however, Henry was working as a clerk for the Siwai Cooperative Society in Konga, 30 miles (48.2 km) up the coast from Buin, on the road to Morotana. It was likely here that my grandfather got the idea to plant cocoa on much of his land back home.¹

My mother's formative years were spent around Henry's trade store indulging in her favourite sweets. It was a comfortable upbringing for her and her four younger siblings: Agnes Rupau, Severina Moses, Henry Maimoi (Jnr) and Josephine Sarei. Agnes recalls how their father would always come home after long trips with special gifts for the children.² The meals he cooked were very tasty. It was once she started school that my mother began using her Christian name, Lucy. (I have seen formal school records that identified her as Lucy Maimoi Apako.)

Lucy progressed steadily and happily through primary school; however, the death of her father changed the course of her life. What had been a stable and well-to-do home became one held up solely by the money Catherine was able to make from selling peanuts, poultry and cocoa beans. The circumstances of Henry's death are unclear, but his lifestyle of frequenting clubs probably did not help. The famous Bougainville copper mine at Panguna brought many things of benefit to the local people, but the establishment of pubs and clubs where alcohol was consumed had a dramatic effect on families and their livelihoods.

This difficult turn of events made Catherine put her faith in her children, especially her eldest, Lucy. She pushed for her daughter to become educated even as many eyes frowned upon her. It was not the norm to invest in a girl's education and Catherine's efforts were not supported. Agnes remembers that no-one pitched in to support Lucy's education aside from Catherine and one lone relative who turned up with a pillow and bedsheet to send Lucy off to high school. The money earned from cocoa and peanuts permitted Lucy to begin Form 1 at Buin High School in 1974.

Peter Nerau, a tablemate of Lucy's from this time, recalls that Lucy and other cafeteria friends shared a special bond: they helped one another with schoolwork and danced to the Sexy Apples, a local Buin band managed by Wally Seeto. The bond with her schoolmates helped and, by November 1978, Lucy had completed Form 4. Faced with the decision of whether to take up further training in nursing or teaching, she chose the latter, influenced by her teacher, Damien Rapese, a renowned PNG educator. Teaching was popular with students at this time. Not only were teachers looked up to as role models but also teaching provided a stable, fortnightly income and accommodation.

In early 1979, Lucy took her first plane trip, leaving Bougainville for Goroka to begin her studies at Goroka Teacher's College. Unbeknown to her, the trip would signal the start of a new era. During her first year at Goroka, Lucy met a young man and fell pregnant with her first daughter Kylie. At the end of the academic year, she followed her daughter's father to his village in Madang and allowed the baby to be looked after by his relatives so that she could return to school.³ In 1980, during her second year of teacher training, she became pregnant with her son, Kenneth Apako, whom she also left with carers while she continued studying.

The effort and sacrifice paid off. In November 1981, Lucy graduated with a diploma in teaching (secondary) and secured a job at Daru High School in Western Province. However, she soon returned to Buin to teach at her former school, Buin High School. Here, she had another child, a second daughter, Marjorie. Domestic challenges with the children's father caused the family to return to Madang in mid-1984. With the relationship breaking down in early 1985, Lucy returned to Bougainville. However, leaving Madang was not easy. Lucy required the help of relatives to flee and she eventually left her eldest daughter, Kylie, behind due to the pleading of the father's family.

Back in Bougainville and once again teaching at Buin High School, Lucy met a local man named Jack Kara Joseph, my father. Jack, who had also just come out of a relationship, had much in common with Lucy. Jack recalls that she invited him for dinner one evening and, as they say, the rest is history. Aside from a year spent teaching at Kambubu Adventist School in East New Britain, Lucy and Jack established themselves in Bougainville, having five children of their own (Stella, myself, Karen, Nigel and Laura) and living onsite at Buin High School.

In 1994 the Bougainville Crisis forced our family to move to Port Moresby. Still a young child, I can remember the actions of my mother when Buin High School was ransacked by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. I was up the guava tree playing with my brother and sisters when we heard very loud gunshots. We knew there was trouble coming. My mother had told us that if we ever heard gunshots to immediately go into the house and lie flat on the floor. So we all ran into the house and waited for her. To our great relief, there she was, running as fast as she could towards the house. The moment she arrived, we opened the door. I was no longer scared; her presence was what I needed to feel safe and protected.

Having fled Bougainville with her family, Lucy was fortunate to find a position at Port Moresby Secondary College (now Port Moresby Grammar School). She taught there for six years until her position was made redundant. She kept busy raising us kids and later undertook a 'Training for Trainers' course (2005). In 2010 she returned to formal employment with the Flexible Open and Distance Education (FODE) centre run by the Department of Education. All her records and qualifications had been lost during the Bougainville crisis, so she had to re-earn her registration as a teacher. She did this in 2018 and then went one step further by completing a bachelor of education in 2020. Lucy's former students especially remember her commerce

classes: she had loved watching her father run their trade store and this inspired her to learn about business and to teach commerce.

Others in the community remember Lucy's generosity. Her hand was always open—from supporting school bus fares for children who had nowhere to turn to, to enrolling them at FODE; if it was within her means, she would go the extra mile to help them. By 2021, underlying health complications had arisen and Lucy experienced respiratory failure, passing away on 18 October 2021 at the age of 61. To her husband she was a wife, to her students she was a teacher, to her children she was a mother, to her community she was a helping hand and to her country she was a nation maker. To live all these roles in a lifetime is to live a full life, which my mother certainly achieved.

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1 According to John Connell (1985), Indigenous cocoa plantations had emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Siwai Cooperative Society drove much of this development.

2 Agnes Rupau, in discussion with the author, 2025.

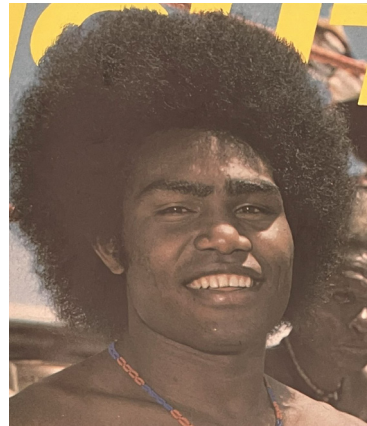
3 Lucy's sister has shared with me that the letter Catherine received telling her about the birth of Kylie and my mother's decision to return to school overwhelmed her with emotion. Sarei Harvey, in discussion with the author, 2025.

Martin Beni (1950–2021)

Sports, nation-making and the boxer who helped unify Papua New Guinea

By Allyn Hicks and Alana Hicks

My name is Allyn Hicks and I am the co-author, alongside my daughter, Alana Hicks, of this article on Martin Beni. I lived and worked in PNG from 1961 to 2004, during which time I was actively involved in the local sporting community, including the early career of Martin Beni. Alana was born in PNG, and we both now reside in Australia. Beni inspired me not only through his exceptional talent as a boxer but also through his sportsmanship and his meaningful role in fostering national unity during PNG's pre-independence years. He was the country's first true sporting hero, and he remains so today. Alana maintains a strong interest in Papua New Guinean stories and in the pivotal figures who helped shape its history. Through her work as a writer and director, she seeks to honour and preserve the country's rich, vibrant and complex culture.



Martin Beni, 1974. Courtesy of Fighter Magazine.

On the afternoon of 26 September 1974, a remarkable and unprecedented event occurred in PNG's House of Assembly. Chief Minister Michael Somare adjourned the parliamentary sitting — not for a political crisis or a national emergency, but so members could watch a boxing match. In a packed venue, thousands across the nation turned their eyes to the ring as Martin Beni, a lean and powerful fighter from the village of Waima, Central Province, stepped up to face Australian lightweight champion Colin Cassidy. When Beni won, PNG — still months away from independence — erupted in celebration. This was more than a sporting victory; it was a symbolic moment for a country searching for unity, pride and identity.

Martin Beni was born in October 1950 in Waima, a coastal village in the Kairuku District of Central Province. His early life, like that of many Papua New Guineans during the colonial era, was shaped by traditional customs and the Christian missionary influence that brought education and sport into village life. Boxing, introduced by police and school programs, became a popular outlet for young men

and Martin took to it with natural skill. His speed, discipline and powerful left hook earned him local recognition and the support of coaches who saw potential in him.

By the late 1960s, Beni was dominating the national boxing scene. He soon caught the attention of Australian trainers and promoters and began competing abroad. His time in Australia honed his technique and exposed him to world-class competition, rare for a Papua New Guinean athlete of the era. In recognition of his success in the ring, he was crowned PNG sportsman of the year in 1968 and 1974. But Martin never fought for himself alone; he saw the ring as a place to represent his people, his village and, increasingly, a nation on the cusp of self-rule.

As PNG approached independence in 1975, Martin Beni became more than just a sportsman; he also became a symbol of national possibility. At a time when over 800 language groups, dozens of tribal affiliations and centuries of cultural division made unity seem an improbable dream, Beni's triumphs were moments when all Papua New Guineans could feel the same pride. His victory over Colin Cassidy in 1974 is remembered not only as a remarkable bout, but also as a moment when national pride crystallised into something tangible. For the first time, people in remote highland villages and coastal towns alike cheered for the same reason. In a society where identity was deeply local, Beni helped to foster something new: a shared national consciousness.

Beni's career also had a political resonance. Just as (Sir) Michael Somare was laying the political groundwork for independence, Martin Beni was helping to forge a cultural identity through sport. Together, figures like these demonstrated that PNG could stand on its own terms — in parliament and in the ring.

After retiring from professional boxing, Beni continued to serve his country, not with fists, but with mentorship and advocacy. He worked with youth programs, often visiting schools and training camps, where he urged young Papua New Guineans to pursue excellence through discipline and education. His message was clear: identity and pride were not given — they were earned through hard work and shared purpose.

Though never formally in politics, Beni had the respect of political leaders, athletes and the general public alike. His quiet influence helped shape the culture of national pride in sports and served as a template for the role athletes could play in society.

Martin Beni's legacy can be seen in every corner of the country, echoed in the triumphs of athletes who followed his path. Boxer Tumat Sogolik of New Ireland Province, for example, captivated the nation at the 1978 Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Canada. Despite controversially losing a gold medal bout many believed he had won, Tumat returned home a hero. Even Queen Elizabeth II reportedly remarked on the injustice, highlighting how sport could transcend medals and reveal character. Meanwhile, in Port Moresby, boxer John Aba nearly captured the world featherweight title in a bout against champion Eusebio Pedroza in 1979 (Stephen 3/7/2023). Aba's valiant performance — cut short by injury — remained a point of pride in a sport often marginalised in national narratives.

Another chapter in this national sporting legacy came in 1990, when Geua Vada Tau, a housewife from Hanuabada in the National Capital District won gold in lawn bowls at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland. Her quiet, determined performance brought joy to a nation and underscored the continued rise of Papua New Guinean athletes on the world stage. The national rugby league team, the PNG Kumuls, later cemented this sporting identity with famous victories, including a landmark 1994 victory over France at the National Football Stadium, Port Moresby. These athletes, like Beni before them, showed that PNG was not just a collection of tribes or provinces, but also a unified people capable of excellence, courage and resilience.

Martin Beni passed away from natural causes on 27 October 2021 at the age of 70. His death marked the end of a remarkable life, but not of his influence. As the country prepared to celebrate its 50th year of independence in 2025, Prime Minister James Marape publicly reflected on the unifying power of sport, invoking Beni's name alongside that of Sir Michael Somare. Both men, he noted, helped steer a diverse and fragmented land towards a shared sense of purpose (*The National* 21/11/2021).

Though challenges remain — tribal conflicts, the political future of Bougainville, and disputes over land and resources — PNG has endured. Its democratic institutions, cultural richness and youthful energy continues to shape its path forward. Martin Beni's story is a testament to how one person, through courage and conviction in sports, can become the heartbeat of a nation. He was not just the first sporting hero of PNG but also a founding symbol of unity, pride and possibility.

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Waliyato Sowati Clowes (1951–2019)

Trailblazing woman in politics

By Eileen Gobu Bobone

My name is Eileen Gobu Bobone. I am a secondary school teacher, wife, mother and PhD candidate with the Department of Pacific Affairs at The Australian National University. My thesis is titled ‘Strength Matters: Voter Behaviours and Attitudes Towards Women Candidates in Papua New Guinea’. I chose to write about the late Waliyato Clowes because, for such a strong woman candidate and politician who has contributed to the making of our nation, there is still too much missing information about her in the public domain. This biography could not have been written without the help of Clowes’s children, as well as aunts and uncles in Widama village.

Waliyato Sowati Clowes was born on 19 January 1951 in Widama, Western Province, the eldest daughter of 12 children to Sowati Yaela and Alamoia Yaela. Widama is one of 33 villages located along the Aramia River in what is now the Delta Fly District, but was then Middle Fly.¹ For the Gogodala people of Western Province, ‘rivers, swamps, lagoons and creeks define the floodplain environment and dugout canoes are a crucial part of life’ (Wilde 2004:34). When the wet season arrives between December and May, the floodplains become one huge ocean.

Waliyato was not required to leave home to receive formal education because educational institutions — a primary school, high school and teachers’ college — had already been established at Awaba Mission Station, a 30-minute canoe ride from her home village. Waliyato attended Awaba Primary School (1960–66), Awaba High School (1967–70) and Awaba Teachers’ College (1971–72). Her first job after graduation was at Awaba Primary School, followed by a subsequent posting to Balimo Primary School, also in the Middle Fly.

While teaching at Balimo, Waliyato met her Australian husband, Paul Clowes, who was operating a trade store and guest house. Paul Clowes had German origins; however, upon migrating to Australia, his father had changed the family name from Klaus to Clowes for fear of discrimination. The pair were married in 1974 in a Catholic Church at Daru and settled in Bonawi, near Widama, after the store Clowes had been managing caught fire. Together they raised three children: Ruth Maria (Waliyato’s child from a previous relationship), William Keith and Brian Ross. After Bonawi, the

young family moved to Port Moresby, where Waliyato took up teaching again. She taught at Hagara Community School and then Tokarara Community School while Clowes found a manager's job at Burns Philp.

In 1977, a Middle Fly Open electorate was created and the Gogodala people living in Port Moresby asked Waliyato to stand for parliament in the first national general election. After seeking and receiving her father's approval, she answered their call and ran for parliament. However, navigating a campaign through the Gogodala wetlands by canoe was difficult. She contracted yellow fever. According to her daughter, Ruth Clowes, things were so bad that:

She lost her hearing, and she lost her eyesight, she started speaking ... you know ... like a baby. I had to stay away from school for two weeks because the doctor said she needed someone close to her to bring her thinking back to reality ... the doctor said she needed a voice that she was familiar with. During her campaign there was not a lot of money. A lot of the people that helped her, mommy had to repay them after she went back to Port Moresby. She will get money from daddy, send it to grandfather and dish it out to the people who helped her. It was a good thing that dad was working and supporting her because that was ... what helped her with her campaign.²

Of the five contenders, Waliyato was the only female candidate. She gained 3,360 votes under the first-past-the-post electoral system — enough to make her one of only three women elected to the first national parliament of a newly independent country. The other two women were Dame Josephine Abaijah for the Central Provincial Regional electorate and Nahau Rooney, representing the Manus Open electorate.³

From 1977 to 1982, Waliyato took an active stance in parliament: debating various matters, questioning government decisions and making proposals. In August 1977, she famously questioned the decision to appoint a man as the minister for youth, recreation, social development and women's affairs (*Post-Courier* 11/8/1977). In the politically tumultuous year of 1980, she became the second woman member of parliament to form a political party (after Abaijah), withdrawing from the Papua Besena party to create the more moderate Papuan National Alliance, formed to fight

for greater development of the Papuan provinces (Solomon 16/4/1980). As party leader, Waliyato hoped to 'work with, not against' the parties in government but she soon clashed with Prime Minister Julius Chan, especially over the purchase of a prime ministerial jet, Kumul One. Her attacks were so effective that Chan threatened legal action against her in September 1980 (*Post-Courier* 8/9/1980). Not afraid to speak her mind, Waliyato challenged him to jail her in response.

Looking back on this period, daughter Ruth Clowes told me:

She didn't like people doing wrong things so when she found out that someone was doing something [questionable], she would go against it [on the floor of parliament]. She did have an encounter with Sir Julius Chan, she did have one with Sir Peter Lus ... he tried to explain something in Tok Pisin, and she said 'Hey, can you speak in English' and he said, 'Wanem, yu ting yu maretim white man na yu no save long Tok Pisin, ah? What, you think you married a white-man, and you do not know Tok Pisin?' When mom said something, he just walked from his end of the table, he was in the Opposition, he came down and lifted ... the table with mommy.⁴

Waliyato's criticism of Chan's leadership continued into his 1982 ousting. She believed it took 'charisma, strength of character and a lot of guts to be a leader' (*Post-Courier* 11/2/1981). Unlike Somare, who she deemed a 'born leader', Chan's leadership skills were 'similar to those of a child who had lost his marbles in a children's game' (*Post-Courier* 11/2/1981).

Waliyato was a trailblazer for women. She was purportedly the first Papua New Guinean woman to ride a motorcycle and one of the first to own a four-wheel drive motor vehicle when they were introduced. She founded the Walima soccer club that competed in the Port Moresby Soccer Association competitions. She was the first Papua New Guinean woman to coach the Walima men's and women's soccer teams. Nevertheless, her time in parliament took a toll on her marriage and, in 1979, she separated from Paul. It was a messy divorce. She took custody of the children on the grounds that she would never take anything else from her husband — this was her decision and her choice. While she never remarried, Paul Clowes moved on and found another wife. As a single mother, she adopted five other children: Clement, Justine, Benjamin, Daniel and Kameda.

Waliyato recontested the Middle Fly Open electorate in 1982 but secured only 495 ballots, leaving her in fifth place and well short of re-election. At this time, former politicians seeking re-employment were not readily accepted into the public and private sectors, so Waliyato found work as a manager at Porky's, a local fast food outlet in Tabari Place, Boroko. She eventually opened her own fast food store at 4-Mile. However, she was forced to close this down in 1986 following violence and looting connected to the gathering of 30,000 supporters at a memorial service for the death of popular highlands' politician Sir Iambakey Okuk. Waliyato then went to work in the Carpenters Supermarket Bakery as an assistant manager, moving to the Steamships Trading Company (STC) as a training officer in 1987. Here, she won an award for the best contribution to training and development from the PNG Training and Development Society. In 1996, she retired from STC and returned to Widama with her six children and two grandchildren and resumed teaching. From 1998 to 2003, she taught in Totowa Primary School and from 2004 to 2009, she returned to Widama Primary School.

On 15 October 2019, at the age of 68, Waliyato Clowes closed her eyes for the final time. She is survived by eight children, 18 grandchildren and a great-grandchild. She left a considerable legacy to education in PNG and women's political representation. Her election to parliament in 1977 is a reminder that, although the patrilineal system that many Papua New Guinean societies subscribe to is a barrier to women's political representation, it can be overcome. Village support is crucial. Of Waliyato's standing at home, Solo Duie, an octogenarian from Widama village told me:

When she was in school, and also teaching, she had a lot of input in the village. She was already a leader here and would take the lead in even small things. She would even take the lead in stealing her grandfather's ducks [people laughing] ... Her parents' house was always open to everybody. She saw it from her father, she saw it from her mother. Her father had an office ... like a men's house and all these men, some of them have died already, they would all stay in that office ... [Her father] was a kind caring man, he had a lot of friends from other villages from around the Gogodala area ... Because of her father's relationships with other community people ... the support came from those angles because [her] father already set the foundation. So that supported her.⁵

Waliyato's story is instructive. Even with the support of her family and village, patriarchal attitudes remain. As feminist scholar Betty Lovai (18/11/2016) has argued:

In the Gogodala Communal Long House ... men and woman were separated from having direct interactions. The central hall, where important decisions were made, was used as a living room by the men, and women were excluded from the space and from decision-making ... The physical structure of the Gogodala Long House has been long dismantled, but the mindset behind its gender arrangement has not changed.

However, female politicians like Waliyato were not afraid to challenge this gendered mindset and could be powerfully articulate when taking on their male counterparts. Dismayed at the status of women workers in the public and private sectors, and disappointed that the Public Services Commission did not contain a single woman representative, Waliyato proclaimed that 'the commission is full of male colonialists who will continue the oppression of women in this country until this situation is rectified' (*Post-Courier* 9/6/1980). She urged PNG men to move on from the colonial days and reminded them of their responsibilities under the PNG constitution. In parliament from 1977 to 1982, Waliyato truly was the voice of women and her people, and in this she was acting in the best interests of the brand new nation.

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1 The Middle Fly District was split in 2022 to create the Delta Fly District.

2 Ruth Clowes 2025. Personal communication.

3 The 1977 election of three women into parliament was a record that stood until it was matched in 2012 with the election of Julie Soso, Loujaya Toni and Delilah Gore. See Dickson-Waiko (2013:193).

4 Ruth Clowes 2025. Personal communication.

5 Solo Duie. Personal communication.

Anne Nealibo Dickson-Waiko (1950–2018) Initiator of Papua New Guinean gender studies

By Cathy Keimelo

My name is Cathy Keimelo and I am a tutor at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). I come from Fisherman's Island, a small community of Hula people originally from Central Province. My academic interests lie in gender studies, with a particular focus on gender-related issues in PNG, especially the roles of women in leadership and education. I chose to write about the late Anne Dickson-Waiko because of the profound influence she had on my passion for gender equality. As a trailblazer and tireless advocate for the rights of Papua New Guinean women and girls, her legacy continues to inspire my work and commitment to advancing gender equity in our society.



Anne Nealibo Dickson-Waiko, a pioneering PNG gender studies expert and renowned historian, was born on 15 May 1950 at the Ela Beach Native Hospital, Port Moresby, but her family originally came from Waga Waga, Milne Bay. She was the fourth of five children born to Osineru and Doreen Dickson. Both her parents had been educated and employed at the famous Kwato Mission.¹ Doreen had been a teacher there and Osineru had managed plantations. The family moved to Port Moresby in 1949 after Osineru was seconded by Kwato missionary Cecil Charles Abel (the eldest son of the mission's founder, Charles William Abel) as an expert advisor on Papuan affairs to the administrator.

At the age of seven, Anne left her family in Port Moresby and embarked for Kwato Island, where she would start her formal education at Kwato Mission Primary School. She initially lived with an aunt, but soon became a boarding student. Despite finding boarding school 'pretty tough', it did not take long for early signs of her intellect to emerge (Ritchie 2018:330). She not only topped her year in Grades 1, 4, 5 and 6, but finished as dux of the school in 1962, her final year. She returned to her family in 1963 and continued her education at Port Moresby National High School

from 1963 to 1966. Anne was one of only a handful of Papuans who were enrolled at the school, which mainly catered to the Australian expatriate community, making her election as a school prefect even more impressive.

Having achieved the School Certificate in 1966, Anne turned her mind to paid employment, initially with the hope of becoming a primary school teacher like her mother. However, after doing well on an aptitude test, she was instead invited to enrol at the newly opened Goroka Secondary Teachers' College in the Eastern Highlands. As historian Jonathan Ritchie (2018:331) notes, 'at 17 years of age, she was among the youngest students, one of only 22 women and 150 or so men'. Despite her age, she was placed in the highest academic stream and excelled in English and social sciences, once again being awarded dux in her graduating year, 1969. Her keen involvement in the college's drama club must have taken people by surprise, given how shy she had once been.

No longer a 'quiet little girl', Anne undertook further part-time study at UPNG and was placed as a teacher at Kila Kila Secondary School in Port Moresby. Her boyfriend at the time, playwright John Kaniku, found work at Badihagwa Secondary School. The pair married in 1971. The birth of her son, in addition to the long commute between Kila Kila and UPNG in Waigani, meant that she withdrew from UPNG and high school teaching for a time and focused on writing course material for the department of education's short-lived community education program.

Returning to UPNG full-time in 1974, Anne initially enrolled in a bachelor of education degree but switched to a bachelor of arts, majoring in history, in which she took classes by leading historians of PNG and the Pacific, Donald Denoon (a Scottish-born South African) and Sione Lātūkefu (a Tongan-born Methodist minister). Despite the birth of her second son and part-time work commitments, she nonetheless graduated in 1977 with first-class honours. Offered a teaching fellowship at UPNG, she instead took up a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to undertake a master's degree in political science at the University of Mississippi with her young family in train. She graduated in 1981, but her time in the United States was difficult, especially after the tragic death of her eldest son. Her marriage to John Kaniku ended while she was expecting another child, her first daughter. She returned to Port Moresby to take up a job in the Department of History and it was during this time that she met her future husband John Waiko, who, in 1983, became the first Papua New Guinean to graduate with a PhD in the social sciences.

Inspired by Waiko and Ron May of The Australian National University (ANU), who encouraged her after seeing her speak on ‘Those Massim Women’ at the PNG Centennial Seminar in 1984,² Anne began her own PhD journey in 1987 in the Department of Political and Social Change at ANU under May’s supervision. Unlike Waiko, who had studied the history of his own people, Anne focused on the women’s movement in the Philippines. After two field trips to the Philippines in 1989 and 1992, she graduated with a PhD in 1994. Other PNG women to have obtained doctorates at this time include Naomi Martin, PNG’s first female PhD holder; and Cecilia Nembou, who gained a doctorate in mathematics from the University of New South Wales in 1992. At the end of her PhD journey, Anne wrote the following, which still resonates with many PNG women as they weigh up the pros and cons of embarking on higher education outside of the country:

Being a mother undertaking a PhD took its toll on my family. I thank John [Waiko] who reluctantly agreed to allow me to go and live in Canberra to undertake this study. He took over the family responsibility while I went on field work and later read parts of the various chapters and offered useful comments and suggestions. My children had their schooling interrupted as I went on field work and tried juggling my private and public roles. Various family members took turns looking after my children, my mother Doreen Dickson, niece Jane Angoro and sister Hannah Basinauro who left her own family in Waga Waga to come to Canberra to mind mine. To all these people and those who chose to remain anonymous I offer my sincere thanks and gratitude.

(Dickson-Waiko 1994:v)

Even if juggling motherhood and work was a challenge that Anne had grown accustomed to managing, it is clear from this excerpt that she could not have completed her PhD without such valuable family support.

Upon returning to PNG, Anne slipped back into what we now call the History, Gender Studies and Philosophy Strand of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) at UPNG, remaining there until her death in 2018. The courses she taught reflected the breadth of her expertise: East Asian History, Southeast Asian History, Colonialism and Nation Building, Introduction to Gender Studies and Gender Issues in PNG. She also taught two honours courses: Feminist Historiography and

Topics in Melanesia. In 2007, she was appointed deputy dean of SHSS, making her one of very few female deputy deans at UPNG.

Anne pushed tirelessly for the advancement of gender studies at UPNG, having previously noticed the lack of opportunities for PNG's growing number of feminist academics and public servants (the majority of whom came out of the social work program at UPNG).³ Commissioned by PNG's National Research Institute, she shaped the national research program on gender, focusing on women in leadership, gender-based violence and women in the informal economy. In the 1990s, she was deeply involved in the review of the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments that established nominated seats for women. This was a remarkable turning point for women in politics in PNG, as it allowed women to participate and be heard at both the provincial- and local-level of government.

In addition to her university and civil society responsibilities, Anne taught and mentored many young undergraduate and postgraduate students within the gender studies and history disciplines. I was one of them. She continued to work at her UPNG office until her health began to decline in August 2017. I remember her as the smiling Dr Anne Dickson-Waiko, always with her glasses on, reading an article or book or marking students' tests and assignments. She would greet everyone with a sweet smile and a simple hello and go about her business. Peter Yearwood, her colleague and head of the History, Gender Studies and Philosophy Strand, described her as a valuable and dedicated lecturer (Keimelo 28/3/2019). She taught gender studies almost single-handedly at UPNG until Regina Kagl joined in 2017.⁴

Even with her heavy teaching load, Anne was one of the most published authors in the school, publishing nine peer-reviewed articles, five non-refereed articles, 13 reports on gender-related subjects and contributing articles to newspapers and magazines (Ritchie 2018). From 1983 to 2017, she delivered more than 50 academic presentations internationally. One of her most influential articles is 'The Missing Rib' (Dickson-Waiko 2003), which persuasively outlines the contribution of women and women's groups, especially grassroots- and Christian-related organisations, to nation-making in PNG.

Like many dedicated professional women, Anne also maintained an active role in the wider community, serving as president of the UPNG Women's Association; PNG's representative at the United Nation's (UN) Commission on the Status of Women in

1995 and 2004; deputy chair of the PNG National Aids Council; PNG's representative at the Special General UN General Assembly Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001; and consultant for the World Bank, World Vision, the UN, the RAND Corporation, the European Union, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF among other roles (Ritchie 2018). Ritchie (2018) also noted her essential contributions to at least two significant oral history projects: 'PNG Speaks' and 'Voices from the War'.⁵ Anne led the Milne Bay portion of the 'Voices from the War' project in March–April 2017, just months before her health took a turn for the worse.

After a short illness she passed away three weeks before her 68th birthday on the evening of 23 April 2018 at Port Moresby General Hospital. Her passing was a tragic loss for UPNG and the nation. Admired by many, she was less of a talker and more of a doer. From my perspective, she not only set a high bar for later generations to reach but also left shoes too big to fill. Her legacy lives on in those who strive to improve the lives of women and girls who continue to face gender disparities in PNG. Anne was an exceptional woman — both humble and intelligent. She persevered in life despite the many challenges thrown her way, achieving academic excellence in her field. She was, and still is, a role model, and her life story is a testament to true determination and dedication.

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1 The Kwato Mission was founded in 1891 by the London Missionary Society. It became an interdenominational mission conducted on New Testament principles and devoted itself to educating and training Papuans in Protestant values. See Wetherell (1996).

2 See Kaniku (1984), later published as Kaniku (1989).

3 About the training opportunities on offer for women in the public service, she noted: 'While civil servants in other departments underwent specialist training, as career diplomats, agricultural officers, teachers, even kiap, women's officers were supposed to know how to institutionalize women and gender policies and processes because they happened to be women' (Dickson-Waiko 2009:294).

4 Regina Kagl headed the discipline after Anne's passing in 2018. Sadly, she too passed away on 16 October 2022.

5 Both available online at <https://www.pngspeaks.com/> and <https://pngvoices.deakin.edu.au/>.



Brigadier General Edward ‘Ted’ Diro (1942–)

The first Papua New Guinean commander of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force

By Alan Donigi

My name is Alan Donigi. I am a Papua New Guinean lawyer with a deep interest in our country’s history, constitutional development and institutions. In this piece, I turn my attention to Grand Chief Brigadier Edward Ramu ‘Ted’ Diro, a pioneering figure in both our military and political history. As the first Papua New Guinean commander of the country’s defence force and a key player in the early years of our independence, his leadership helped to shape the foundations of our national identity. His transition from military service to political life, despite its challenges, reflects the complexity and resilience of our post-independence history. Ted Diro’s legacy continues to influence the generations that follow, and his name remains etched in the institutions and values he helped to build.

Originally from Boku village in the Rigo District of Central Province, Ted Diro was born on 14 December 1943 to Diro Venigo and Navu Kapi, a woman from Egalauna village in the Marshall Lagoon on the Aroma Coast. Diro Venigo was a respected chief, police officer and plantation labourer, revered as one of the ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels’ — the local carriers who supported Australian troops along the Kokoda Trail during World War II. His admiration for the fairness and generosity of Australian soldiers left a lasting impression on young Ted, shaping his early worldview. Following the war, the family managed a small coffee plantation, instilling in their children the values of discipline and hard work.

Ted Diro’s formative years were marked by resilience and ambition. As a young boy, he learned Boku, Sinaugoro, Aroma and Motu, but found no-one to teach him English. In 1953, driven by a desire for education, he stowed away on a boat to Port Moresby. Settling near 3-Mile Hill, he supported himself by taking odd jobs, including working as a golf caddy, while attending school. He was accepted into Kila Kila Area School (later Kila Kila High School) and then into Sogeri Secondary School (later Sogeri High School), a prestigious institution for the Territory’s top students. At Sogeri, he thrived in a multicultural environment where sports and English-language instruction helped bridge cultural divides. He rose to become commander of the Sogeri School Cadets, a paramilitary student organisation established across the

Territory. In 1961, his academic excellence earned him a scholarship to Slade School at Warwick, Queensland.¹

With his sights set on a military career, Diro moved to Portsea, Victoria, in 1963, where he became one of the first two Pacific Islanders to graduate from the Officer Cadet School after 12 months of intensive training.² He held various appointments in the Royal Australian Regiment and Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) over the following years and, by 1965, found himself serving in Vanimo (West Sepik) during the tense border confrontation with Indonesia. Although he never encountered enemy soldiers directly, the experience marked his first active duty in his homeland.

Back at home, Diro rose quickly through the ranks. He read military history and admired Australian army officer Sir William Slim. He became the first Papua New Guinean adjutant in the PIR and was promoted to captain in 1968, major in 1971 and lieutenant colonel in 1974. In 1975, the year of PNG's independence, he was promoted to brigadier general and appointed the first commander of the new Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). As commander, he emphasised professionalism, discipline and national pride. He played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of the newly independent nation's military, ensuring it reflected the values and aspirations of its people.

One of Diro's most noteworthy acts as head of the PNGDF was leading a mission to Vanuatu in August 1980 to put down a rebellion led by Jimmy Stevens and the Nagriamel movement on Espiritu Santo. Stevens was opposed to the independence leader Father Walter Lini. Since neither the French nor the British were willing to help, Prime Minister Julius Chan and Diro stepped into the breach.³ Diro was responsible for training the 95 troops known as the Kumul Force, later describing them an 'efficient and highly motivated' group (Diro, cited in Dorney 1990:190). Despite questions being asked by Opposition leader (Sir) Michael Somare about the constitutionality of sending a contingent overseas, the mission was a success and the Kumul Force returned home two months earlier than expected, having suppressed the rebel movement on behalf of the Vanuatu government.

In 1981, after nearly two decades of military service, and on a high from the morale boosting campaign on Santo, Diro resigned from the PNGDF to enter politics. He ran for election in 1982 and entered parliament as the member for Central Province, quickly becoming a major player on the national stage. He unexpectedly

became leader of Iambakey Okuk's National Party and leader of the Opposition following Okuk's failed election campaign, but found a more comfortable home with the Papuan-based People's Action Party, which he founded to run alongside intellectuals like John Waiko and Vincent Eri at the 1987 election. At this election, Diro succeeded in deepening the Papuan bloc in parliament, defeating the mother of Papuan politics, (Dame) Josephine Abaijah, in the process. As one of several powerful Papuan leaders at this time, he held a number of key ministerial portfolios without ever becoming prime minister, including minister for forests under Prime Minister Paias Wingti, foreign minister and, eventually, deputy prime minister to Rabbie Namaliu in 1991.

As minister for foreign affairs, Diro represented PNG admirably on the international stage. He was known for his diplomatic skill and his ability to navigate complex geopolitical issues, particularly in the Pacific region. His tenure helped strengthen PNG's relationships with neighbouring countries and global partners. As minister for forests, he was a vocal advocate for sustainable development and the protection of PNG's vast natural resources. He pushed for policies that would ensure the country's forestry sector benefited local communities and upheld environmental standards. While his leadership in this sector attracted praise in some quarters, his reputation suffered serious damage following allegations of corruption uncovered by the 1987 Barnett Commission of Inquiry into the timber industry.⁴ Dogged by this issue for several years, Diro triggered a constitutional crisis in 1991 after being found guilty of 81 out of 86 charges of misconduct while in office and was forced to resign along with Governor-General Sir Serei Eri. Diro's fall from grace dealt a serious blow to Papuan hopes of claiming the top office and his party never fully recovered.

Diro was able to rehabilitate and rebuild his reputation through a variety of notable contributions in the years that followed. From 1975 to 1980, he served as chairman of the St Johns Council. At the same time, he became a patron of the PNG Rugby Football League and president of the PNG Golf Association — not bad going for somebody who started out as caddy at Port Moresby Gold Club. Chairman of the University Foundation from 1985, he was also patron of the Koboni Football Club and the Small-Bore Rifle Club.

Even in retirement, Diro has remained active. A mentor to young leaders, a speaker at national events and a symbol of resilience and patriotism, he serves as

an example of what can be achieved through discipline, education and service. His story is told in schools and leadership programs. Reputedly, he once said:

'I don't think I am being a bighead to want to help my people develop' — a simple statement that encapsulates the humility and determination that have defined his life.

Diro's personal life evolved alongside his public career. He married Tamo, a spirited woman from Kerema, in 1965. Together, they raised six children: Eddie, Venigo, Arlette, Margret, Navu and Patrick. After many years of marriage, the couple separated in the early 1980s. In his later years, Diro married Veitu Apana, a respected educator and athlete. Their partnership was marked by mutual respect and shared values, and Veitu became a strong supporter of Diro's continued involvement in national affairs.

In recognition of his service and considerable legacy within the military, the PNGDF named one of its Guardian-class patrol boats HMPNGS *Ted Diro*. Commissioned in 2019, the vessel symbolises national pride and maritime sovereignty, and it continues to serve as a floating tribute to the man who helped shape the country's defence force. Today, Retired Brigadier General Ted Diro is remembered not only as a military pioneer and political leader but also as a father, husband and patriot whose legacy continues to shape PNG's path. Diro's life is a testament to the power of vision, courage and commitment. He broke barriers in both military and political spheres, paving the way for future generations of Papua New Guineans to lead with pride and purpose. His leadership helped to shape the PNGDF, his policies influenced national development and his personal story has inspired countless citizens.

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1 Diro spoke about his upbringing and early role models in a *PNG Speaks* interview. See Ted Diro 12/8/2015. *PNG Speaks*, interview by Ian Kemish and Jonathan Ritchie.

2 His classmate was Patterson Lowa of Galilo in West New Britain. See *Canberra Times* (25/6/1963).

3 Diro was apparently so eager to answer Lini's call that he told Chan he would resign if the prime minister did not agree to deploy troops. See Dorney (1990:190).

4 Diro was found guilty of favouring a logging company of which he held 35 per cent of the shares. See Senge (12/1987).

Kuri Dom (1950–1987)

By Illeana Dom

My name is Illeana Maldowa Dom and I am from PNG. I have a keen interest in understanding global issues, learning foreign languages and travelling and experiencing diverse cultures. I am currently studying international relations in Japan. Kuri Dom is my maternal grandfather. He passed away at the age of 37, long before I was born. The process of researching and writing his biography has therefore been revelatory and emotional. I feel incredibly privileged to have had the opportunity to get to know him through the writing of his biography. I kindly thank Ruth and Grace Dom whose answers to my questions helped inform this piece.



Kuri Dom, Port Moresby, c. 1981.
Courtesy of Grace Dom.

Kuri Dom (1950–1987) was a distinguished scholar and respected colleague to many at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). Kuri was born in June 1950 (precise date unknown) in the village of Ninal, Sinesine District, Simbu Province. He was the third of six sons to parents Oganpewa and Gore, both from Sinesine. His father, Oganpewa, the eldest of the Dom Yale clan of the Bulagau tribe, was a chief and warrior. Kuri spent his early childhood years in Mu Village, Sinesine.

Kuri's educational journey began in 1957 when, at the age of eight, he was enrolled at Mu Primary School. In 1963, he progressed to Asaroka High School, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, where he boarded for the next four years, eventually completing Form 4 (now Year 10) in 1967. Driven by a desire to explore Christian theology, he commenced the following year at the renowned Martin Luther Seminary in Lae, Morobe Province. Kuri excelled in his studies and was an active member of the student body, ultimately being named secretary for the planning committee of the Melanesian Association of Theological Students. This experience sharpened his leadership abilities and fostered connections within and beyond the Lutheran theological sphere. An important aspect of his seminary experience, and

one that perhaps planted the seed for an eventual change in career, was his active participation in the burgeoning theological debates on aspects of liberation theology taking place in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG at that time.

In 1972, as part of his final year of pastoral training, Kuri undertook vicarage work with the Good Shephard Lutheran Church in Koki, Port Moresby. His hands-on experience as a vicar proved invaluable; it gave him practical insights into the various issues and challenges encountered by the church and its congregation members. In 1973, five years of dedicated study culminated in Kuri graduating near the top of his class, with both a diploma and a bachelor of theology degree.

Following graduation, Kuri was expecting to start a job as a pastor. However, a lengthy period awaiting confirmation of his appointment led to a search for other opportunities. He was made aware of an assistant training officer position with the Port Moresby Community Development Group (PMCDG), a voluntary organisation dedicated to community development in urban migrant settlements and villages. His application was accepted so, in 1974, Kuri departed Lae for Port Moresby. He was accompanied by his soon-to-be-wife Ruth Maldowa Ulgan, also from Sinesine, Simbu Province.

From 1974 to 1975, in his role as assistant training officer, Kuri was responsible for conducting research and fieldwork mainly in the 6-Mile settlement area, which at that time was predominantly comprised of people from Simbu Province who had migrated to Port Moresby. He also trained and supervised trainees in the theory and practice of community development. The experience of applying his theological education in practical, real-world situations helped Kuri realise that his true calling was social development work. He was particularly interested in understanding how the wellbeing of urban communities in PNG could be managed for positive social change in the face of post-independence development and urbanisation pressures. He therefore started to think about the next step he needed to take to pursue this interest.

Two significant life events occurred during this time of work and self-reflection: the birth of Kuri and Ruth's first child, Grace, in September 1974; and, in 1975, Kuri and Ruth formalised their marriage at the Mari Mari Lutheran Church in Gordons, Port Moresby. From the beginning, Kuri and Ruth's union proved to be a complementary and dynamic partnership. Ruth, a woman of exceptional quality of character, deep

Christian faith and quiet strength, played a significant role in Kuri's life. Her steadfast support and gentle influence underpinned his professional endeavours, his personal relationships with friends and colleagues, and was the bedrock of their family life.

In 1975, and with Ruth's full support, Kuri left his career in theology behind and enrolled at UPNG to undertake a bachelor of social work, graduating in 1977, before enrolling in an honours year in which he earned upper-second-class honours. These years were crucial in cementing his interest in researching the problems of, and finding the solutions to, social development in urban settings. His excellent academic record provided a stepping stone to postgraduate research and a career in academia. Since 1972 there had been a continuing association between UPNG and the PMCDG, with the latter organisation being a major influence in the development of a community-based approach within the social work program at UPNG. Thus, in 1978, Kuri returned to the PMCDG, assuming the role of training officer.

As training officer, Kuri was instrumental in implementing the organisation's community development objectives. His duties were diverse: he gave lectures and designed and implemented formal training programs to equip trainees with the skills and insight needed to navigate the complex problems faced by migrant communities. Kuri supervised the fieldwork of UPNG social work students as well as community extension students from the Administrative College of Papua New Guinea (now known as the Somare Institute of Leadership and Governance), ensuring they acquired practical experience in real-world environments, thereby effectively linking theoretical knowledge with practical application. His mentorship was crucial in shaping the future of social development work, as he equipped aspiring professionals with the necessary tools and perspectives to engage effectively with their communities. In addition to his primary duties, he took the initiative to arrange resource visits for trainees and fieldworkers to a variety of government agencies, non-governmental organisations and private sector companies.

On the research front, Kuri actively participated in early discussions on how to balance local knowledge and experience, and social work theory and practice. Throughout this period of his life, Kuri remained engaged with the Lutheran Church as a dedicated member of the Morata Lutheran Congregation Church Council, even serving as the congregation's treasurer at one point. In 1979, his pursuit of knowledge took him, his wife Ruth, and two children, Grace and Michael (born November 1977), to the United Kingdom (UK). There, he enrolled in a master's program at the Institute

of Planning Studies at the University of Nottingham. However, due to unexpected challenges, he withdrew after a year and transferred to the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). At LSE, he joined the Department of Social Science and Administration, ultimately achieving a master of science in 1981. After two years in the UK, Kuri and his family returned to PNG and he was appointed a lecturer at UPNG.

In December 1981, Kuri contributed to a course offered by the Commonwealth Youth Programme, teaching a segment at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. The following year he took on several new roles at UPNG. He was given the permanent position of course advisor within the Social Work Programme in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. He also chaired the UPNG Housing Allocation Committee from January to July 1982. Subsequently elected pro-vice chancellor of UPNG, he served in this role from July 1982 to January 1983. He was then made chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology from 1983 to 1984.

In addition to his regular teaching and administrative duties at UPNG, Kuri delivered seminars and wrote research papers (only two of nine were published). In mid-1983, he received a British Council visiting lecturer award from the University of Nottingham. The following year, he was requested to prepare a position paper by the Social Planning Section of the PNG National Planning Office for the Sectoral Committee on Welfare and Policies. While Kuri enjoyed his various roles and responsibilities, his real desire was to complete a doctorate and teach. Throughout his academic journey, his experiences were greatly enriched by the important mentorship he received from senior colleagues, some of whom became close personal friends.

A figure that was particularly influential in Kuri's life was the late Professor Maeve O'Collins, an intrepid Australian academic with Irish Catholic roots, who joined UPNG in 1972 to establish the social work program. 'Prof Maeve', as she was affectionately known, was a colleague and mentor to Kuri and eventually became a close friend to both him and Ruth. When Kuri and his family (now with a third child, Paul, born July 1982) left PNG again in August 1984, this time in pursuit of an MPhil/PhD degree at LSE, the plan among senior academics at UPNG was that Kuri would return to take over from O'Collins as professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. However, in 1987, tragedy struck. On 17 January, just a few months

away from completing his PhD, Kuri suffered a sudden and massive heart attack in his Clapham North home. Despite a quick response by emergency first responders, he was declared dead on arrival at the local hospital. Kuri was only 37 years old.

Through the strength and determination of his wife Ruth, and with the help and support of his friends and colleagues both in the UK and PNG, Kuri's body was transported back to Port Moresby along with his family on 24 January 1987. The family were greeted at the airport by a large crowd in mourning, mainly comprising people from the urban settlement communities he had worked among as a training officer in the 1970s. A similarly large crowd gathered at the memorial ceremony held in his honour at the UPNG Forum, which allowed members of the public to pay their respects. Kuri was then transported back to Mu Village, Sinesine. Ruth and their children, Grace, Michael and Paul, travelled with him, accompanied by O'Collins and a few others. In Mu, traditional mourning and burial rites were observed before Kuri was laid to rest in his village.

Known by UPNG colleagues as a 'soft-spoken, dedicated and hard-working academic' (*The University This Week* 23/1/1987), Kuri Dom contributed significantly to the development of the social work program in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. He also left a lasting legacy through the many lives he touched during his community and theological work. At UPNG, the building that now houses the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, within which Kuri spent most of his academic life, was renamed the 'Kuri Dom Building' to honour his short but influential life.

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Peter Dickson (Diga) Donigi (1950–2014)

Lawyer, public servant, diplomat and academic; Papua New Guinea's permanent representative to the United Nations

By Alan Donigi

My name is Alan Donigi and I am a Papua New Guinean lawyer. I am passionate about history, constitutional law and the commercial aspects of business in PNG. I chose to write about my late uncle, Peter Donigi, to highlight some of his contributions to our great nation. His work during the early days of PNG's independence, particularly in the Diplomatic Corps, was instrumental in shaping our country's legal and diplomatic framework. His dedication and expertise continue to inspire many, and his legacy is carried on by the teams that now build upon the foundation he helped to establish. His involvement in precedent-setting court cases has had a lasting influence on our legal landscape.



Addressing the 56th session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2001. Photo by Eskinder Debebe. Courtesy of UN/DPI.

Originally of the Badiabus clan, Poiam village in Wewak, East Sepik Province, Peter Donigi was born on 19 December 1950 in the district of Maprik to parents Samiel Donigi, MBE, and Amul Angela. Samiel is probably best known as a long-serving East Sepik local government councillor; however, in the years following World War II, he worked as a carpenter. Once Peter was born, Samiel became a labour recruiter, moving the family to Lumi, an outstation in the West Sepik, where workers were being found for postwar plantations in Bougainville, Manus, New Ireland and the New Britain islands. Here, Peter Donigi completed his primary education, finishing Grade 5 in 1961. From 1962 to 1965, he completed Grades 6–9 at Brandi Intermediate High School in Wewak, the school where Michael Somare had taught in 1959–60. In 1966, Donigi enrolled at Bugandi High School in Lae, taking second prize for Form 4 (Grade 10), which earned him entry to the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) the following year. At just 16 years of age, Donigi was the youngest of 83 university entrants for 1967, the first year that degree courses were offered at the newly established university.

Donigi's childhood ambition was to fly aeroplanes; however, since science was not his strong suit, he enrolled in a bachelor of laws after a general foundation year at UPNG. This was a decision initially made from curiosity; little did he know that his choice as a 17-year-old would lead to a long and storied legal career. During his time at university, there were so few Papua New Guinean lawyers within the Department of Law that you could almost count them on one hand. They included Joseph Aoae, Buri Kidu, Bernard Sakora and Charles Maino from the Crown Solicitors Office and Kubulan Los from the Public Solicitors Office. Taking his cue from this trailblazing generation, Donigi jumped at the offer of a public service cadetship while still a student. In this role, he gained real-world experience across the Department of Law's various branches and, after graduating from UPNG in 1972, began work as a Crown prosecutor in May 1973 (*Papua New Guinea Government Gazette* 24/5/1973).

Despite hoping to become the country's first public prosecutor after independence, Donigi was coaxed into joining the newly established Department of Foreign Relations and Trade (situated within the Chief Minister's Office) in 1974. The person in charge of establishing the office was Bill Conroy, head of trade and a close friend of Chief Minister Michael Somare.¹ Working with him was Geoffrey Dabb, assistant secretary for law and expert on the law of the seas,² and the young Anthony Siaguru and Ben Sabumei.³ Donigi worked closely with Dabb on matters of international law. Together, they helped to establish the Legal and Treaties Branch of the Foreign Affairs Department and represented PNG at numerous international conferences and negotiations. For example, Donigi was heavily involved in negotiating the Torres Strait Treaty. His job was to collect evidence about the customary rights of Papua New Guineans to the fishing grounds in Torres Strait waters (*Post-Courier* 30/5/1974). Donigi spoke on this issue while representing PNG at the landmark 1974 United Nations (UN) Conference on the Law of the Sea at Caracas, Venezuela (*Post-Courier* 29/8/1974). This would have been an impressive feat for any 24-year-old law graduate, let alone someone whose early years had been spent in rural Sepik.

In the months leading up to independence in 1975, Donigi finalised and signed PNG's accession agreement to the Lomé Convention, a trade and aid agreement between the then European Economic Community and 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 5/1986). It was a significant deal for newly independent developing nations and symbolised PNG's ascension to full statehood. In 1976, Donigi was sent to Brussels to add the finishing touches to PNG's agreement

to the convention and to open the PNG office to the European Economic Community (*Post-Courier* 13/3/1978; *Pacific Islands Monthly* 8/1978; *Post-Courier* 14/10/1976). Aside from Brussels, Donigi's international postings between 1974 and 1980 included Bonn, London and Rome, the latter as ambassador to the Holy See.

In early 1980, Donigi was promoted to acting secretary for foreign affairs when Siaguru left for Harvard on sabbatical (*Post-Courier* 16/1/1980). Later that year, he started advising Somare. The pair were travelling together, somewhere between New Zealand and Fiji, when (Sir) Iambakey Okuk moved the famous vote of no confidence in parliament that paved the way for Julius Chan's appointment as the independent nation's second prime minister. In the subsequent departmental reshuffle, Donigi was offered the post of high commissioner to Canberra; however, he turned it down out of respect to Somare. He instead went on long leave without pay from the public service (*Post-Courier* 25/7/1980).

Not one to sit idle, Donigi soon became a partner in what would become one of the biggest practices in PNG, Warner Shand Lawyers. He took up high profile cases such as the Supreme Court Reference No. 4, 1980.⁴ Here, opposition leader Somare questioned the constitutionality of the government's decision to commit troops to Vanuatu for peacekeeping purposes and the enactment of the Defence Force (Presence Abroad) Act, 1980, which allowed for Papua New Guinea Defence Force troops to go to Vanuatu in 1980 (the 'Kumul Force'). However, section 19 of the PNG constitution does not allow for the leader of the opposition to file review proceedings against the state. The case set the precedent for the requirement of *locus standi* and certain conditions that are to be met in relation to constitutional references by members of parliament.

During his tenure as president of the PNG Law Society from 1989 to around 1991, Donigi campaigned for the rights of landowners in profit sharing in mineral extraction projects in PNG (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 6/1990). In arguing for the rights of landowners, he filed proceedings against the state seeking to challenge the constitutionality of the Mining Act and the Oil and Gas Act.⁵ This work resulted in his 1994 book *Indigenous or Aboriginal Rights to Property: A Papua New Guinea Perspective*.

The year 1997 was a big one for Donigi. First, together with the likes of the late Sir Barry Holloway and Dame Meg Taylor, he was appointed to assist with the

drafting of the Organic Law on the Establishment of the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC), a project funded by the World Bank. Though the draft legislation for ICAC would sit on the floor of parliament until it was finally discarded in 2003, it paved the way for the ICAC Bill in 2020 and the formal establishment of ICAC in PNG in 2023 (Department of Prime Minister and National Executive Council 12/7/2023). Second, in March 1997, Donigi was engaged as Brigadier Jerry Singirok's counsel during the Sandline crisis. This crisis stemmed from the PNG government's decision to engage the international mercenary group Sandline International to quell local resistance to the operation of the Bougainville Copper Mine operated by the Australian mining giant Rio Tinto in the North Solomons Province of PNG (now the Autonomous Region of Bougainville). Brigadier Singirok was then commander of the PNG Defence Force and led a mutiny against the government, effectively holding the Sandline International operatives captive prior to their eventual deportation. Donigi provided advice and acted as legal counsel for Singirok during the initial stages of the commissions of inquiry after the 1997 uprising was quelled (Dinnen et al. 1997:24–25).

In 1999, Donigi was appointed PNG's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN in New York. At the UN he was chair of the Decolonization Committee, president of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority and president of the Meeting of State Parties to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UN 30/7/2001). He was spokesperson for the Pacific Group of States at the UN Convention on Oceans and Law of the Sea matters as well as chair of the Asian Group of Countries members of the International Seabed Authority.

Donigi retired from public life and left New York in 2002 to spend two years with his father Samiel who was by then wheelchair bound. He used that time to learn about vanilla and co-authored *Vanilla Farming: Making a Living Practical Guide* (Robertson and Donigi 2006). In 2004–07, he lectured in constitutional law at UPNG, before moving to the University of South Pacific in Suva in 2008, lecturing there until 2011. That year he returned to PNG and consulted for Warner Shand Lawyers under Micheal Wilson. Here he was once again outspoken on matters concerning resource law and ownership rights of indigenous peoples, including the controversial Boka Kondra Bill that pushed for Papua New Guineans to have greater ownership of mining, oil and gas resources and fair and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements,

aspects of which were published in his final book *Lifting the Veil That Shrouds Papua New Guinea* (Donigi 2010).

Peter Donigi believed in the rule of law and was known as an activist lawyer. He was counsel for opposition leader Belden Namah's legal team at the time of his passing. Donigi was described as 'a great man who brings out the best in people with his genuine humbleness and achievements as a constitutional lawyer and diplomat' (Nalu 2/2014). He was a CBE recipient for services to law and the community (1989) and a 1991 Commonwealth Fellow. Peter passed in January 2014 at the age of 63 at the Port Moresby General Hospital from a heart attack. He was survived by his wife Diana, an Australian whom he met at UPNG in the mid-1970s and married in 1979.⁶ He had five daughters with Diana — Stephanie, Amanda, Caitlin, Yasmin and Davita — as well as Loretta from an earlier relationship. Donigi's affability was a defining trait that made him a beloved figure among his peers and the communities he served. His warm and approachable nature allowed him to connect deeply with individuals from all walks of life, making him not just a respected leader but also a trusted friend. He had a unique ability to bridge the gap between intellectual discourse and the lived experiences of ordinary Papua New Guineans, demonstrating empathy and understanding in every interaction. This remarkable capacity to relate to everyone he encountered solidified his legacy as a pioneering advocate for social justice and indigenous rights.

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- 1 Conroy himself had recently been transferred from the Department of Agriculture.
 - 2 Dabb (2023) has recently published his memoir, devoting several chapters to his time in PNG.
 - 3 Siaguru became the first secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1975.
 - 4 [SCR No 4 of 1980; Re Petition of Michael Thomas Somare \[1981\] PNGLR 265](#).
 - 5 Donigi v The State [1991] PNGLR 376 (7 November 1991).
 - 6 Diana was an author of PNG children's books, producing the illustrated Pikinini Readers series with Jenny Cairns and illustrator Nina Sanadze in the mid-2000s.

Sister Lorraine Garasu (1961–) Bougainville Peacebuilder

By Mercy Masta

My name is Mercy Masta. I am a research fellow at The Australian National University, and I am from Manus and West Papua. My scholarly interests are in gender, masculinities, peacebuilding and development practice. I chose to write about Sister Lorraine Garasu because she inspires me as a leader and catalyst in promoting sustainable peace in Bougainville, PNG and the wider Pacific region.

Sister Lorraine Garasu, distinguished leader and peace advocate, has been instrumental in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville's post-crisis reconciliation and rehabilitation efforts. Her unwavering dedication to community healing and peacebuilding is deeply rooted in her upbringing and the cultural values instilled in her from an early age. Born into a chiefly family of the Nakaripa clan, to parents Paul Soli and Celesta Manohana Pinil, Sister Lorraine learned the importance of leadership and community sustenance from her family — particularly from her influential paternal and maternal grandmothers. Her childhood experience of growing and providing food for her community laid an important foundation for her commitment to serving others.

Sister Lorraine spent most of her childhood with her wider family between Ieta and Hangan villages in southern Buka, the island where her father grew up.¹ She lived in these villages, and with her cousins rather than her siblings, to have better access to education, but she was never treated like an outsider. Her parents and grandmother were supportive, regularly bringing food to her and the family she stayed with. With their support, she completed primary school in 1973 and graduated from Hahela Vocational School in 1975. Wanting to be a preschool teacher, and despite her Catholic upbringing, she underwent further training at the United Church in Kekesu, as this was the most viable pathway.² She was supported



Sister Lorraine at Kokopau town, near Buka, 1977. Courtesy of Jan Gammage (Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Photo 55-164).

in this by women affiliated with the United Church Mission from New Zealand and the United Kingdom.³ From 1978 to 1979, she worked as a preschool teacher.

Responding to a deep, inner calling to do something different, Sister Lorraine joined the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth in February 1980; she made her first vow as a religious sister on 7 January 1983. During this time she worked with Catholic women, coordinating their activities within the diocese; however, it was not until she attended a counselling training program at the Xavier Institute at Bomana, Port Moresby, in 1986 that her calling for social and pastoral work was realised. Her early career experiences in teaching and in faith-based community development became important in 1988 as Bougainville descended into a brutal civil conflict stemming from tensions over environmental and social damage from the Panguna copper mine. The decade from 1988, now termed the Bougainville Crisis or Bougainville Civil War, not only tested her skills and resilience but also solidified her role as a peacebuilder (Garasu 2002:28–31).

Sister Lorraine's leadership transcended religious and political boundaries. In July 1995, she co-founded the Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum (BICWF), an ecumenical organisation that united women across denominations in the pursuit of peace (Hatutasi 2005). As a facilitator in peace negotiations, she demonstrated courage, moving between hostile factions and risking her own safety to advocate for women's rights and community stability. Her work with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and other factions in the war was instrumental in opening channels for dialogue and addressing urgent community needs, including medical emergencies and security. The impact of this was felt in 1996 when the BICWF organised the Arawa Women's Peace Forum, bringing together 700 women from across Bougainville. This pivotal event emphasised the critical role of women in conflict resolution and rebuilding. Sister Lorraine's approach to peacebuilding drew from her deep respect for traditional and religious values, and blended indigenous knowledge with modern practices to create a culturally relevant framework for healing.

As Bougainville endured the trauma of war, Sister Lorraine's resolve to heal her community grew stronger. When the crisis began winding down in 1998, the Sisters of Nazareth turned their attention to the violence women continued to experience. In 2001, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCfR) was established, based at the Catholic mission in Chabai, North Bougainville, and led by Sister Lorraine. Initially,

the centre focused on providing safe housing and counselling for women affected by domestic violence. However, it soon evolved into one of Bougainville's leading organisations addressing gender-based violence, mental health and peacebuilding. The centre also established a men's counselling service, primarily for perpetrators but also for men struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, helping them to address their issues through counselling and rehabilitation (Masta and Garasu 2025). Education programs focused on raising awareness to prevent family, sexual and domestic violence are at the core of the centre's work, as is vocational training.

As NCfR's executive director, Sister Lorraine has offered sanctuary and support to countless women and children impacted by conflict and abuse. The centre's holistic approach to healing, which includes psychological counselling, trauma recovery and social skills training, has made it a unique and vital resource in the region. Sister Lorraine's work extends beyond providing shelter; she is a catalyst for change, helping the people of Bougainville to develop tools for dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution; and emphasising transformation, healing, and reconciliation to mend differences and foster peace. Over the years, the centre has garnered support from organisations such as the PNG-Aus Partnership, an initiative of the Papua New Guinea and Australian governments, which has committed to advancing Sister Lorraine's work in peacebuilding and human rights.

In 2000 Sister Lorraine received the PNG Silver Jubilee Medal for Community Service. Then, in 2009, she was honoured with the PNG segment of the US State Department's International Women of Courage Award. She was appointed OAM in 2010, the prestigious Australian accolade highlighting her humanitarian assistance to women and children, and underscoring her role as a leader, not only of her local community but also of the wider Pacific region. In 2019, she received the Commonwealth Points of Light Award in recognition of outstanding individual volunteers and change makers.

Sister Lorraine has spearheaded community development programs that provide literacy training, business skills and income-generating opportunities, all aimed at reducing poverty and building resilience. Transforming the NCfR into a community hub, she has implemented agricultural programs and food gardens that contribute to local food security and empower individuals to sustain themselves and their families. Her work embodies her grandmother's teachings about the responsibility of a leader to nourish the community.

Bougainville is a mostly matrilineal society: lineage and land are traditionally passed through the maternal line. This has created a foundation for women's leadership; however, as Sister Lorraine's journey illustrates, achieving respect and authority as a woman requires tenacity and sacrifice. Her approach to leadership reflects the triple role theory in which women balance productive, reproductive and community management roles. Like many Bougainvillean women, she has seamlessly blended these roles, advocating for peace while providing economic support, family stability and a vision for a peaceful future.

Sister Lorraine's story is a testament to the power of faith, resilience and community-centred leadership. Her commitment to the people of Bougainville continues as NCfR expands its programs to support trauma healing, provide youth development opportunities, engage men and boys in rehabilitation, and foster peace education. Her legacy has inspired other women leaders, creating a pathway for the next generation of Bougainvillean women to step into leadership roles. Sister Lorraine and other female leaders recognise the need to mentor and support younger women, particularly those affected by the intergenerational effects of the civil war (sometimes known as the 'crisis generation').

In Bougainville, Sister Lorraine is celebrated not just as a leader but also as a symbol of hope, compassion and unyielding strength. In PNG, through her work with NCfR and the BICWF, she has brought comfort and empowerment to many, setting a powerful example of what it means to be a peacemaker.⁴ Internationally, her work stands as a 'rare success story in contemporary postconflict peacebuilding', offering a framework for other situations in which the blending of indigenous customary and Western approaches are required to resolve conflicts (Boege and Garasu 2011). To me, as someone who has had the pleasure of working with her, Sister Lorraine's mission — to heal, protect and uplift her community — remains a beacon for future generations, inspiring a vision of peace rooted in justice, dialogue and mutual respect.

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1 Her mother was from Lonahan, also on Buka.

2 Sister Lorraine and family members on both her maternal and paternal lines all belong to the Catholic faith.

3 The preschool centre at Kekesu was opened in 1973 and was designed by the United Church to give children aged from five to seven a place to play, learn and grow prior to primary school, and to employ local women who had graduated from vocational schools (*The Open Door* 1973).

4 She was featured as one of six Papua New Guinean ‘Pawa Meris’ in the 2014 film series *Pawa Meri: Role Models to Inspire* (Thomas 2014).



Walla Saulo Peter Gukguk (c. 1922–2004)

Politics and leadership

By Tukul Kaiku

My name is Tukul Walla Kaiku. I am from New Hanover Island, New Ireland. I was born in 1955 to Walla Gukguk and Ngurmot Dokas Pait. I have tertiary degrees from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and a graduate diploma in information management (archives administration) from the University of New South Wales. I have worked as a historian and archivist with the PNG National Archives (1983–96) and as a public servant with the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs (1997–2005). Since 2005, I have lectured in archives and records management, in addition to other information studies courses, at UPNG. I have written articles for newspapers and journals in PNG and abroad, and am the only current contributor who was involved with the original Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography project.

My father, Walla (Vala) Saulo Peter Gukguk, was born in about 1922 at Meteran village on the south coast of New Hanover Island (Lovongai),¹ New Ireland District, in what was then the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. He would become a key leader in a much-misunderstood set of social movements in New Ireland, the Tutukuvul Isukal Association and its predecessor, the so-called ‘Johnson cult’ of Lovongai. At a time when PNG was heading towards independence under the tutelage of the Australian colonial administration, Walla was among a generation of leaders who represented social movements that proffered their own proposals for social and political organisation — a much more decentralised vision, hewing close to local customs. Vilified and jailed for his efforts, he would later serve in parliament and be remembered as a pioneering advocate of decentralisation.

Walla’s birth name was Valus-samil, signifying that he was from the pigeon clan, his matrilineal clan. His mother was Tivirukui of the Valus clan of the Molik inland area of Lovongai Island. His father was Tengai Gukguk of the Siavun clan, a one-time indentured labourer recruited by Germans in the early 1900s to work on German-owned coconut plantations in Sāmoa.

Walla had an older brother, Vatluangan, from his mother’s first marriage. From Gukguk and Tivirukui, his siblings were Makan-valus-sivingmat (older sister), Malusan

(younger brother) and Runi (younger sister). Vala — later changed to Walla — means ‘bald head’ in the Tungak language. His baptism name was Saulo; Meteran village was missionised by Methodists in the 1920s.

Walla began his education in about 1936 or 1937 under a pastor at Meteran Methodist village school (*lukbuk*). The language of instruction at that time was Kuanua, the language of the Tolai people of New Britain. It was there that he received a bible as a prize for reading and good behaviour. He was also chosen to attend Ranmelek Methodist Mission village higher school to continue his education.²

Leaving Ranmelek in about 1939, he sailed to George Brown College at Vunairima in East New Britain. The mode of transport at that time was ship from Kavieng to Rabaul. At George Brown College, school life was not all that different from Ranmelek. The boys slept in single-sex dormitories, while the married students lived in married quarters. Certain days were set aside for classroom learning and other days were for students to make their own gardens for their upkeep.

When the Japanese Imperial Forces bombed and invaded East New Britain in January 1942, Walla and his school friends, villagers and plantation labourers were taken to Pilapila and then shipped by the Japanese to Buna, on the coastal plain of northern Papua, to be carriers for the invading forces, then intent on taking Port Moresby overland via Kokoda. However, somewhere between Buna and Kokoda, Walla, with others who had been brought from the Territory of New Guinea, teamed up and decided to go back to the Oro coastal area of Waria River. They were intercepted by members of the Allied Forces on the Morobe side of Oro. Now with the Allied Forces, they served as labourers and helped build the Nadzab airfield in the Markham Valley, northwest of Japanese-occupied Lae.

Following the liberation of Lae in 1943 through Operation Postern, Walla and the other New Guineans continued working for the Allies. Towards the end of 1944, Walla was selected for scout training at Tabragalba, Queensland, putting him on course to support the Allied Intelligence Bureau Special Unit Forces to recapture Nissan Island, Bougainville. It was later in 1945, while back in Lae, that news about the end of the war reached them and a huge naval ship took everyone back to Kavieng. Over the years, Walla’s Pacific War service medals have been lost, but his cap of honour remains with his daughter and grandson.

For the rest of the 1940s, Walla lived in his village among his people and married his first wife, Ngurmot Dokas. Around 1950, he was appointed to manage the New Ireland Native Society Association cooperative trading store at Metevoe village on the south coast of Lovongai. While there, he married his second wife, Ene Kolin of the Hornbill clan (Vengevenge), and a son, Kelep Roy, was born in 1955. That same year, his first wife, Ngurmot, gave birth to a daughter whom Walla named Makan-valus-svingmat after his sister. Walla had the habit of giving away cooperative store goods to people and was imprisoned between 1959 and 1960 for this, though the charges were later dismissed. This was a time of great flux in the history of the cooperative movement, with two competing colonial rationales of economic development and political control coming to a head (Underhill 2019).

In 1960, Walla was elected to the Lovongai Local Government Council (LGC) as a representative of Meteran and Metemana villages. His political career took a turn in 1964 when, alongside roughly two-thirds of New Hanover Island, he voted for President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson instead of any of the other general election candidates for the first House of Assembly of Papua and New Guinea. This striking protest vote attracted international attention and was quickly labelled a 'cargo cult'; soon reports emerged that money had been collected to facilitate Johnson's travel to the island. However, although there were important religious elements to the movement (Kaiku 2015), an anthropologist who witnessed the events was sceptical of any supernatural motivations and would later describe it as type of political 'theatre' (Billings 2002).

Opposition to the Australian administration was intense, with United Nations representatives being told:

'We do not want the Australians because we have been with them for many years and haven't got changed in our lives. We do ask the Australians not to govern us anymore. We must wait for the USA [to] have its turn'

(Billings 1969:17).

Lovongai voters for Johnson were adamant that America was the better country to administer New Hanover. It was felt that the Germans were only interested in setting up coconut plantations for themselves, while the Australians were not economically savvy or technically innovative; only the Americans could impart the

right knowledge to allow the Lovongai to develop their resources and island. As Walla would later tell the *New York Times*, they ‘wanted the Americans to bring their knowledge, not cargo’ (Trumbull 8/8/1971).

Over the years 1965–67, Walla was again imprisoned, this time for his political support for American rule, alongside other Lovongai men. He and other voters defaulted on their tax and distanced themselves from government instruction. They were labelled anti-administration and punished for their actions. In 1966, a respected Catholic priest, Father Bernard Miller, seeking an end to the stalemate between the Johnson supporters and the administration, called a landmark meeting to establish an Indigenous planters’ collective. Called the Tutukuvul Isukal Association (TIA), meaning ‘stand together and plant’, the collective gained widespread support and encouraged villagers to plant coconuts for copra.³ In 1967, Walla made an important speech to members outlining the importance of unity:

*‘If we did not have TIA we would not have anything or anyone to unite us.
This is the course that will straighten us, that will make us one. TIA showed
us this road, and by and by we will be one’*
(Walla, cited in Billings 2002:14).

In 1971, Walla became president of both the TIA and the Lovongai LGC. He also became a member of the Kavieng District Authority. At first, the district commissioner was ‘greatly impressed’ by the economic activity of the TIA (*Post-Courier* 6/11/1972); however, in 1974, Walla and the TIA majority in the Lovongai LGC took the radical step of abolishing the council head tax and the LGC itself, effectively disintegrating the formal administration and government of New Hanover. Earlier, in response to the Select Committee on Constitutional Development, the TIA had announced that New Ireland, New Britain, Manus and Bougainville should ‘be banded together as one state following independence’ and join the United States (Ryan 2/1971:26).

By 1977, Walla was so popular in his local electorate, Kavieng Open, that he easily won a seat in the national parliament (May 2004:59). Once elected, he called for PNG to adopt a presidential-style system in which voters elected a leader rather than a party. He was unhappy to see so many national leaders taking guidance from external advisors whose advice did not trickle down to the people. His parliamentary

career was cut short in 1981 when he was dismissed for not attending three consecutive meetings during the parliamentary term.

Outside of parliament, Walla continued to pursue TIA's agenda, declaring independence for New Ireland in 1982 and then marching on Kavieng in 1983. From 1989 to 2002, he spent much of his time in his village at Lovongai, teaching locals about Kiukiuvat, a mythical being who was stolen by the Germans (Billings 2002:156–8). A great storyteller, Walla frequently told stories about his grandparents' initial encounters with Europeans in the early 1800s, as well as tales about cannibalism, Indigenous knowledge and the German colonial period (1884–1914). Legends of Lovongai mythical beings and heroes were among his children's favourite stories, as were those about his father's adventures to Sāmoa.

Steeped in the Lovongai way, knowing the traditions and appreciating the need to treat his fellow men and women with respect and honour (*a semsem vap*), Walla built both men's (*rangama*) and women's houses (*hauskuk*). Known for his profound remarks (or *aputukai*), he likened the infighting of Lovongai elites and political rivals to crabs in a bag clawing at each other; on another occasion, he compared them to a local fresh fish known as *kusila*, blindly colliding into each other in a muddy, murky pond.

In 2002, suffering the effects of old age, Walla moved back to his birth village at Meteran. In September 2004, his second wife, Ene Kolin, died. He himself died on 22 November 2004, aged 82. His work has not been forgotten. During an electoral visit to New Hanover and Meteran some years after Wall's death, Sir Julius Chan, former prime minister of PNG, then governor of New Ireland, praised the resoluteness of the Lovongai people. In his speech he paid tribute to the contributions our people had made to the growth of sub-national-level governments and made passing reference to the concept of freedom and autonomy having started in Lovongai in 1964, a decade before self-rule and then independence for PNG.

How can I summarise my father's development aspirations and hopes for New Hanover? He was concerned about Lovongai Island and its people achieving economic and social independence through the acquisition of beneficial knowledge, wherever that might come from. Like other leaders once called 'cultists', such as Paliau Maloat and John Teosin, Walla's insistence on local autonomy would come to

make increasing sense in post-independence PNG. Dorothy Billings, the preeminent scholar of the TIA, summed up his contribution well:

*'he has been a true hero ... he has not become corrupt or a "big head" ...
he has been a servant, not a boss, of his people'*
(Billings 2002:196).

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1 While both Lavongai and Lovongai are used in writing, I prefer Lovongai given this is the closest approximation to how it is said by most people.

2 It is highly likely that he was instructed here by Rev. Thomas Nevison Simpson, or 'Simpson of Ranmelek', who had established the Ranmelek mission station in 1937. See Henderson (2000).

3 By the 1970s, the association had planted over 100,000 coconut trees.

John Ma'o Kali (1954–)

Public service reformer, sports personality and Papua New Guinea high commissioner to Australia

By Geoff Elvy

My name is Geoff Elvy. I am an Australian who has worked for many years in PNG in various capacities to support the PNG government in building governance capacity. This has included running the Economic and Public Sector Support Program and holding various senior advisory roles in the Department of Health, the Department of Personnel Management (DPM), and the Department of Prime Minister and National Executive Council. I first met and worked with John Kali when he was secretary for DPM.



His Excellency John Kali. Courtesy of the High Commission of Papua New Guinea, Canberra.

John Kali was born on 24 November 1954 in the village of Keapara in the Hood Lagoon, today's Central Province. He was one of 10 children and the fourth born to parents Kali Vele and Ma'o La'a. When he was born his placenta was buried under his parents' Levaolo house by his father's younger brother, John Vele, and that is how John Kali got his name. It should be noted that John has always used his mother's maiden name as part of his surname — a sign of his honour, respect and love for her.

John's father, Kali Vele, aged 16, had served in World War II as a Morse code operator in Abau, Central Province, under the guidance of PNG icon (Sir) John Guise. His father learned many trade skills while working for the Allied Forces, such as carpentry. On return to Keapara after the war, Kali Vele utilised these skills and became a well-respected builder. He had been courting John's mother, Ma'o La'a, before leaving for his war duties. Both coming from chiefly families, they were married in early 1947 and settled into village life as a happy couple. In those days, marriages were prearranged between young people of chiefly descent.

John's parents had their first child, a boy, in 1948, and a girl in 1950, but both passed away early in their infancy. John was led to believe that both his elder siblings were killed by sorcerers from the inland villages, because they did not want his grandfather, Vele Kali, a well-known sorcerer, to have any descendants who would

carry on his legacy and power. Therefore, when another son was born in early 1953, his parents were told to wrap him up and give him to an old lady, Naomina Pala, who would take him into the bushes and call out that she had found a newborn baby. His mother would then claim the child and rear him as though he were an adopted child and not a biological descendant of Vele Kali. To add weight to the intrigue, John's eldest brother was named after his maternal uncle, Amini La'a's eldest son, 'Ilamanuwale, to give him spiritual protection, as Amini La'a was training to be a missionary.¹

In mid-1956, during the months of the south-easterly trade winds, the family sailed in a double-hulled canoe from Keapara village along the coast to Port Moresby. John was only two or three years old at the time, but he recalls that his mother was pregnant and that his family lived off the sea during the multi-day voyage. On arriving at Koki Beach, John and his family made the double-hulled canoe their home. His father, who was by then a highly skilled carpenter and builder, along with some young men he had recruited from his village, started working on construction sites in the burgeoning postwar capital. An energetic child, John would accompany his father to help at 3- and 4-mile worksite areas where some of his dad's work still exists today (e.g. the Port Moresby General Hospital and the Murray Barracks mess halls). John would also accompany his father on fishing trips to the reefs outside Ela Beach. The catch would be used to supplement his father's sole income, and some would be sold by his mother to the Wanigela settlers who were making Koki their home. There were two further additions to the family while they lived at Koki Beach: a sister, Kepi, and a brother, Happiness.

In late 1961, John's chiefly grandfather, Vele Kali, visited the family at Koki and instructed his father, as the eldest son, to return to Keapara to manage traditional obligations. On encountering their powerful grandfather, 'Ilamanuwale, now about eight years old, changed his name to Vele 'Ilamanuwale Kali. By this point, his father had purchased an outboard motor, an 18-horsepower Evinrude, which meant that the family could motor their canoe back to the village rather than sail, making the voyage much easier, especially with the aid of north-westerly trade winds. John would accompany his father on many ocean voyages in their motorised double canoe, ferrying people from nearby coastal and inland villages to Port Moresby to sell smoked seafood, fresh garden vegetables, woven mats and baskets, and wooden carvings. John's father remarried in 1964, leaving John to take on a leadership role

for his family at a very young age. From this second marriage, his father would have nine children. (John grew up in a family of 18 siblings in total.)

Formal schooling began for John in the village at Keapara in 1962. He remembers that they still used slates and chalk-ash to write. An aptitude for learning meant that John was able to skip a few classes; in 1965, when he was in Grade 4, he was taught by white teachers for the first time. These were young Australians, Richard Clarke and Jeff Chapman (the headmaster) (Nalu 16/2/2018). John benefited from being taught over three consecutive grades by the pair. In 1967, John and his cousin, Numa Alu, topped the Grade 6 national examinations, which led to selection at Iarowari Secondary School on the Sogeri plateau (Kali 29/4/2022). The pair were placed in the same class as some of the most brilliant students from Central Province, including the late Morea Vele and Koiari Tarata who, like John, would become national departmental heads in their working careers.

As a cadet at Iarowari, John learned many new skills, including how to do his own laundry, polish his own boots and iron creases into his clothes. Most importantly, he learned discipline. He became a champion swimmer and learned to play cricket and Australian rules football ('Aussie Rules'), two sports for which he would represent his country. After four years at Iarowari, he went on to complete Grades 11 and 12 at the famous Sogeri National High School in 1972 and 1973. At Sogeri, he captained the school's Aussie Rules team and was selected to represent the National Capital aged just 17.

Interested in understanding his genealogy and culture, John enrolled at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1974 to study history, sociology and anthropology. It was from his grandfather that he had learned the importance of understanding history and his family's origins. He was taught that this knowledge would be useful not only in charting his future but also in solving disputes and contributing to peace and harmony in society. At university, John pursued his love of Aussie Rules with the legendary Koboni Football Club, and cricket with the Hoods, University, Colts and Raukele clubs. From 1974 to 1994, he became a household name in PNG for his sporting success, captaining and coaching the PNG national Aussie Rules team and representing the National Capital in cricket (Thomas 13/2/1979). By the end of 1977, he had completed his studies and, after a strenuous series of tests, was selected from a competitive field of 120 graduates to start work for the Public Services Commission (PSC).

On 5 December 1977, John commenced work in the five-year public service industrial officers career stream, starting at the base grade and undertaking on-the-job training while also attending outside training programs in Port Moresby and Australia. The culmination of his career stream in 1982 was an 18-month placement with the South Australian Public Service Board in Adelaide. The union movement was still strong in PNG and Australia, and industrial relations had a high profile. His placement helped hone skills in case preparation, negotiations, mediation and industrial advocacy in tribunals against tough union advocates. He returned to PNG in 1983 to resume his career with the PSC, now as an industrial advocate with the hope of improving the PNG Public Service.

John was not alone in wanting to implement change in the public service. (Sir) Michael Somare had won the 1982 election and immediately set about implementing public sector reform following concerns that the public service was overly centralised and unresponsive. A key reform saw the PSC's executive powers devolved to the DPM secretary and to other departmental heads. John was transferred to the newly created DPM in early 1986, where he served out the rest of his public service career, rising rapidly through the ranks until his appointment as departmental head in 2009. The period from 1986 to 2002 was one of the most destabilising periods in the history of PNG politics and confidence in the government administration system was eroded. This period truly shaped John's vision for the future; he strongly desired to build a more competent and resilient public service, in which appointments to posts would be based on merit.

John's time at the top of DPM (1999–2019) made him the longest serving departmental secretary in the PNG Public Service. He became known as an expert in industrial relations and human resource management, also earning respect for his no-nonsense approach to public administration. John promoted the mainstreaming of gender equity and social inclusiveness and set the pace for gender balance through a positive anti-discrimination agenda that resulted in an increase in the number of female officers in management and executive ranks in the public service. DPM, where two out of the three deputy secretaries were women and almost 80 per cent of middle management were women, served as a model for other government departments. John also started the Male Advocacy Network — a network of men trained to advocate for the rights of women and raise awareness among men. Because of these initiatives, all government departments now have a GEDSI (gender

equity, disability and social inclusion) Office, with monthly departmental activities. This is unique to PNG and in advance of most developed countries.

In view of his passionate support for the professional and personal development of women and girls in PNG, John was approached by the chair of Femili PNG, Stephen Howes, to serve as its inaugural patron. John accepted the offer in 2020, as this was an important partnership with a local non-government organisation (NGO) to promote the interests of PNG women and girls. John also accepted an offer from the founder of the Queensland-based NGO LiteHaus International, Jack Growden, to be its patron, providing refurbished laptops and computers to primary school children in support of PNG's agenda for digital education.

John served continuously as DPM secretary until his appointment as PNG head of mission and high commissioner to Australia, which role he took up on 4 February 2019. From Canberra, he has been instrumental in initiating programs and activities that have elevated relations between PNG and Australia (Ma'o Kali 9/4/2020a, 9/4/2020b). Chief among these is the Comprehensive Strategic Economic Partnership (CSEP), signed in August 2020. The CSEP is designed to accelerate strategic and economic cooperation between the two nations, and deepen bilateral cooperation with Australia across security, trade and investment, governance, development cooperation, health, education, gender equality, climate change, and people-to-people and institutional links. It is underpinned by a commitment to achieving concrete outcomes by 2030, and incorporates John's emphasis on joint design, joint development and joint delivery of projects and programs in PNG, with visibility, transparency and accountability to benefit both countries.

A notable CSEP achievement was the historic visit by Prime Minister of Australia Anthony Albanese to PNG in January 2023, in which he became the first overseas head of government to address the PNG parliament, and the first head of government to visit the Wewak burial site of PNG's founding father, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. In February 2024, Prime Minister James Marape visited Canberra, becoming the first head of government from the Pacific region to address the Australian parliament. John was reappointed high commissioner by the Marape government in early 2023 for a further term of four years. He was awarded an OBE in 2008 and a CMG in 2016, both in recognition of his dedication and strong leadership in the public service. Aside from his UPNG qualifications, he has a master of business administration from Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

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1 It should be noted that John's cousin, 'Ilamanuwale Amini, after whom his elder brother was named, became the first Papua New Guinean to serve overseas as a United Church missionary in far north Queensland in 1974 and later became an Australian citizen.

Winnie Kiap (1948–)

Trailblazing female public servant and diplomat

By Reilly Kanamon

My name is Reilly Kanamon Polau. A journalist by profession, I come from Bundrou Island, Manus Province, PNG. I belong to an ethnic group of Manus people known as the Matangol, the original custodians of the outer atolls that span the eastern part of the province. In response to the resurfacing of issues such as traditional identity conflicts, value systems and tribal governance systems, I have developed an interest in our rich oral histories and narratives that define us as a people. Originating from Baluan Island, an atoll inhabited by both the Matangol and Titan ethnic groups, Winnie Kiap is an exceptional Manusian. Though I am from a different island, Baluan is important for all Manusians because it was at the forefront of decentralisation efforts spearheaded by (Sir) Paliau Maloat in the 1940s (Schwartz and French Smith 2021).



Her Excellency Winnie Anna Kiap.
Courtesy of the Commonwealth
Foundation.

Winnie Anna Kiap, now a distinguished diplomat, was born in 1948 to mother Nakop Ansila Kisel from Lipan village, Baluan Island and father Kiap Stepanus, a former indentured labourer to Rabaul and one of the few individuals with written-language literacy on the island. In addition to Winnie, the couple had a son and another daughter.

According to Winnie, her father's exposure to work had an influence on her early years and education. After returning from Rabaul in 1940 and starting a family, he established a coconut plantation and cultivated cocoa, both activities that served as an economic safety net for his son who would eventually inherit the family land. Kiap expected his daughters, Winnie and her sister, to have the means to survive on their own without needing to rely on their future husbands for support. Hence, the family emphasised the importance of education from a young age.

Winnie benefited from this family encouragement. Aside from primary school teachers and typists in the administration offices at the provincial capital, Lorengau,

there were few formally educated and gainfully employed role models for young girls during this time. Winnie undertook her primary education at Baluan before moving to a post-primary school at Lorengau, today's Manus High School. Her strong performance in Grade 7 earned her a government scholarship to attend Catholic secondary schools in New South Wales in 1963, first at Mount St Mary's College, Katoomba, then St Vincent's College, Potts Point. After college, Winnie enrolled at the University of Queensland and lived at International House from 1969, eventually earning a bachelor of arts, with a major in sociology and a minor in anthropology.

Winnie married Tevita Holo of Tonga, whom she had met at university, and soon took up a range of high-profile public service positions in the Kingdom of Tonga, such as senior executive officer in the Prime Minister's Department, assistant secretary in the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and assistant secretary for trade in the Department of Labour, Commerce and Industry. After her time in the Tongan government, she moved to Sydney and worked in the migration section at the PNG Consulate General from the late 1980s before returning to PNG in 1992.

In PNG, Winnie quickly integrated into the public service and gained several important positions over the following two decades, including first assistant secretary in the Department of Trade, Commerce and Industry and director of corporate services at the Investment Promotion Authority. In the late 1990s, she made history as the first Papua New Guinean woman to attain the position of secretary to the National Executive Council (or Cabinet secretary), serving three prime ministers (Sir William Skate, Sir Mekere Morauta and Sir Michael Somare) over a record-breaking 10-year and nine-month period. During this time, as she later commented, she earned the trust of Cabinet, which put her 'in a unique position to know a lot about what's going on in the country' (*The National* 10/01/2023). In 2008, she became acting secretary of the Prime Minister's Department during Somare's third term in office.

Upon retiring from the public service at the end of 2008, Winnie dedicated two years to freelance consultancy work, primarily with AusAID and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Following Nahau Rooney in 2005, she became only the second Papua New Guinean woman to be nominated for governor-general in 2011, although her nomination did not progress to the final rounds of voting. She subsequently embarked on a new career in diplomacy, most notably as high commissioner to the United Kingdom (with accreditation to Cyprus, Egypt, Israel,

South Africa and Zimbabwe). As well as strengthening PNG's relationship with the United Kingdom and building relationships with palace officials, she represented PNG before multiple international bodies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation, as well as the United Nations' international cocoa, coffee and maritime organisations. From 2016 to 2018, she was chair of the Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors.

In recognition of her public service in PNG, Winnie was bestowed the title of Commander of the British Empire in 2015 and, in 2018, she was celebrated for her outstanding contribution to the Commonwealth by the London-based *Diplomat* magazine (*Diplomat* 24/4/2018). She told reporters back home that the latter award made her 'feel relevant' (Kep 4/5/2018).

In December 2022, Winnie was again nominated as the sole female candidate for the position of governor-general. The nomination pitted her against the incumbent governor-general, Sir Bob Dadae, and prominent lawyer and academic Stephen Pokawin (also from Manus). While hopes were high that Winnie would win the parliamentary vote and that PNG would have its first female governor-general, she was defeated in the second round of voting by Sir Bob with a final vote of 71 to 33. Many PNG locals perceived the result as a setback for gender equality.

More than a decade earlier, in a 2008 interview, Winnie had said that Papua New Guinean women seeking 'higher positions' were confronted with three main obstacles (Paine 2008:45). First:

decision-makers are men beginning from department or agency level to the political level. If the woman is not promoted easily and on merit through the ranks in the department/agency, she is not likely to reach the position of visibility.

Second:

if you know you merit promotion but tend to be continuously overlooked, then you either conform to the idea that you do not deserve promotion, or you lose interest in the job and your performance deteriorates.

And third:

the culture of marriage in PNG. A working husband will require his wife to put him and children above her own self development. Man is the common denominator in the failure of women to hold high office. Like minority groups elsewhere, women have to strive hardest and jump many hurdles in order to attract the attention of liberal-minded men in decision-making positions.

(Paine 2008:45)

The 2022 parliamentary vote reinforces Winne's point that there are numerous normative and structural barriers to overcome before PNG will see more women in senior positions of political leadership.

Guided by the strong values and principles instilled during her Manus upbringing, Winnie continues to serve on numerous boards and devotes her time and passion to social causes. In 2023, she was invited by the Special Parliamentary Committee on the 2022 General Election to provide technical and advisory input for the committee's final report to parliament. More recently, she was appointed chair of the Commonwealth Foundation Board of Governors, an intergovernmental organisation that supports civil society and aims to enhance participatory governance within Commonwealth nations. Prime Minister James Marape called the latter appointment a 'historic achievement' (PMNEC 2025).

Finally, in October 2024 Winnie was appointed, as foundation member, to the Global Existential and Security Threats Board established by the InterAction Council, an international network of former national leaders aimed at creating a safer world for all. In the same month, she was installed as a honorary college fellow at the University of Queensland's International House where she once lived as a student.

As a pioneering woman of our time, Winnie has maintained a sense of humility and patriotism in her endeavours. She serves as a beacon for women breaking barriers in male-dominated professions. During a May 2025 keynote address, she revealed her secret to success, parting with the words:

'Always work with integrity, with sincerity — and always with humility'

(Kalinoe 30/05/2025).

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Rev. Ray Lahui-Ako (1944–2018)

One of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force's original spiritual guides

By Lahui Ako

My name is Lahui Ako. I come from the Motu-Koitabu village of Hanuabada in the National Capital District. My professional qualifications are in international relations and development. I am the author of five books and a recent article in *Australian Historical Studies* about growing up in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) (Ako 2024). For this volume, I chose to write about Rev. Chaplain (Major) Ray Lahui-Ako, my father, because he was one of the first six PNGDF chaplains to take over from the departing Australian Defence Force after independence. Chaplain Ako, as he became known, served the PNGDF from 1976 to 1989, contributing significantly to the development of our nation's forces through rigorous training and spiritual guidance.

Ray Lahui-Ako was born on 20 March 1944 in the coastal Motuan village of Manu-Manu, roughly three-hours drive west of Port Moresby. He was born to Lahui-Ako Arua, a medical orderly, and his wife, Henao Raka Mou, soon after they had evacuated their Hanuabada village in 1943 due to the disturbances of World War II. Besides being an obvious target of Japanese bombers due to its proximity to Port Moresby, a good part of the village was razed to the ground by a fire purportedly started by a carrier.

In 1955, at the age of eight, Ray was enrolled at the London Missionary Society (LMS)–run school up on Metoreia Hill. It was the only school in the area until the colonial administration opened Hagara Primary School nearby. So, he completed Grades 1–4 at the LMS school before moving to Hagara in 1959 to complete Grades 5–6. From Hagara, he went to Iarowari Intermediate, another government-run school, on the Sogeri Plateau, over 40 kilometres north of Port Moresby in the hinterlands. That year he passed a scholarship examination to study in Australia; however, he was later disqualified for being too old. As an alternative, he was sent across the road to the Territory's premier educational institution, Sogeri Secondary School.

At Sogeri from 1961 to 1965 during a period of educational transition, Ray completed parts of both the Queensland and New South Wales syllabi (Taylor 2002:105–6). He was a strong student; however, family priorities meant that he did not

continue straightaway to the newly opened University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). He was recently engaged to Kari Boio Nou, a Koitabu woman of the same village and, worried about his ability to support his future wife and family, opted instead to seek employment. This he found in the Department of Public Health's finance section as a chief examiner of claims. He kept himself busy outside of paid work, completing an adult matriculation course at the Papua New Guinea Administrative College,¹ becoming an original member of the Sogeri and Koboni Australian Rules Football sides² and, in 1967, marrying Kari. Their eldest son, Lahui (myself), was born in 1968.

Ray worked also for the Department of Public Health and the Department of Treasury before resigning from the public service altogether in response to a deep-seated call to join the Christian ministry. In January 1971, together with his wife and three-year-old son, he moved to Rarongo Theological College on the shores of Ataliklikun Bay, East New Britain, to commence his training as a minister of the newly established United Church in PNG and the Solomon Islands.³ This training took the family to Adelaide for most of 1973 as part of the college's twinning program with the South Australian Methodist Church Association, and also Port Moresby, where Ray was encouraged to complete a Lahara session (run over the summer break) at UPNG to fast-track his progress. It was upon his graduation in 1975 (with a diploma in theology rather than a bachelor of divinity) that Ray was told he had been earmarked for the PNGDF chaplaincy and was needed urgently for training in Bougainville. His planned thesis would have to wait.⁴

Appointed in early 1976 to the Ruhaku Circuit in rural Siwai, Ray's family — which had grown to four with the birth of another son, Nou Ako — lived at the Hurai Community School while Ray undertook the necessary training to become an ordained minister. Conditions were basic at Hurai, and Ray was often required to spend long periods away from his family visiting his congregation members who lived in villages and hamlets scattered throughout the area. Methodist missionary Rev. Joe Duvuloco and his family were based at the Tonu mission station, a good half-day's walk away. Upon hearing of Ray's ordination, Motuans living and working in Arawa town made the arduous 12-hour drive to witness the ceremony.

Ordained as a reverend of the United Church by Bishop Leslie Boseto on 5 December 1976, Ray was commissioned as a chaplain of the PNGDF early the following year. He and his family moved to Manus Province, where he was to take

over the work of the outgoing Australian Army chaplain, Rev. Ossie Dale, at the Lombrum Patrol Boat Base. Chaplain Ako's PNGDF service had begun. For the next two or so years, he never missed accompanying the patrol boats on their annual exercises to the outlying islands of this maritime province. He would return home with tales of visits to the islands of Pak, Lou, Rambutcho, Baluan and others. He thoroughly enjoyed his time and camaraderie with the sailors and officers of the patrol boats.

Chaplain Ako, and the other men of God who were tasked with similar roles — such as Elenos Diop, Patrick O'Connell, Alois Pomelong, Taumomoa, James Singi and David Piso — can be credited with drafting the PNGDF's Character Development and Character Guidance curriculum. They then used these guidelines to spiritually guide and nurture the rank and file of the PNGDF in its formative years.

In 1979, Chaplain Ako was transferred to Moem Barracks, home to the 2nd Royal Pacific Islands Regiment of the PNGDF. The barracks lie on the cape, not more than 10 kilometres along the eastern beach from the township of Wewak. Chaplain Ako attached himself to C Company, and would sometimes accompany the men on their border patrols during their rotation. A major experience during his time at Moem Barracks was becoming involved in the successful PNGDF operation to subdue and capture secessionist rebel leader Jimmy Stevens on Santo in 1980: the so-called Kumul Force. Given an audience with Stevens while under PNGDF guard, Chaplain Ako formed a relationship with the man, finding him considerate, courteous and a surprisingly good conversationalist. Chaplain Ako also used his time in Vanuatu to meet with Rev. Pakoa Boua, secretary-general of the New Hebrides Presbyterian Church and an old classmate at Rarongo. The two of them, along with other ex-Rarongo students (all reverends and future politicians), shared kava and Ray joked that:

*'when the British and French finally tire of baby-sitting you ... I will be there
in person to provide you comfort'*

(Ako 2007:268).

Following his time at Moem Barracks and Vanuatu, Chaplain Ako was posted to the Defence Academy at Igam Barracks in Lae. Located at the foot of the Saruwaged Range in Morobe Province, Igam Barracks is where the Defence Academy (now the Joint Services College) is located. Ever since the establishment of a cadet school in 1968, Igam has been the place where potential officers are trained in military skills, discipline and moral character. Chaplain Ako became an integral member of the academy's Board of Studies, contributing his fair assessment of the officer cadets as they went through their rigorous training programs. As part of this, Chaplain Ako ran the annual seven-day 'Character Development' course for all officer cadets at the secluded St Joseph's Technical School outside Lae. He would often say that 'if an officer graduated under his watch without the right character, then he had failed in his duty as chaplain'.

In 1988, during the twilight of his career, Chaplain Ako was posted to the First Pacific Islands Regiment at Taurama Barracks, Port Moresby. For the first time in 16 years, the family had finally returned home. After 12 years in the PNGDF, plans were being made to replace him with another United Church minister. The man they chose was Rev. Patrick Gau, one of the Motuans who had travelled 12 hours to witness his ordination on Bougainville in 1976.⁵

Leaving the military in early 1989, Ray returned to Hanuabada and continued contributing to the United Church. After a stint at the Lifeline crisis support centre as director, the Synod approved him to commence as the superintendent minister of the United Church Urban Region's North Port Moresby circuit based at Waigani in 1992. In 1995, he became the mission secretary of the United Church Urban Region and then, from 2002 to 2005, superintendent minister for the Poreporena circuit. After unsuccessfully running for moderator of the PNG United Church in 2004, he prepared for his retirement from the church as a serving minister, which he did in 2005. Throughout all these years, Kari not only assisted her husband in his ministry but also served the Women's Fellowship Group with devotion (she was elected secretary for eight years and treasurer for two).

Ray Lahui-Ako was called to rest on 8 December 2018, aged 74, survived by his wife, Kari, sons Lahui (b. 1968) and Nou (b. 1975), adopted son Makis (b. 1975), daughter Henao (b. 1982) and 10 grandchildren. His parting message and words to live by were:

‘A man is measured by his courage, his devotion to family, and his willingness to recognise and grab his destiny. If he misses the opportunity to do so, he threatens the very livelihood of his family.’

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1 Today’s Somare Institute of Leadership and Governance.

2 Ray excelled in this sport as a rover and became a regular Port Moresby representative player right up to the time he left to become a missionary.

3 Following the formalisation of the United Church in 1968, the Rarongo Theological College became the key training site for what were once LMS and Methodist mission students. Since 1996, there has been a separate United Church in Solomon Islands.

4 Ray continued to labour on his thesis until 1980. Titled ‘The Relationship between the Biblical Understanding of Marriage, and the Motuan Marriage Custom’, its completion led to the award of a bachelor of divinity.

5 In 1972, 17-year-old army school cadet Patrick Tau Gau survived a horrific plane crash in the Wau area of Morobe Province. The RAF *Caribou* was returning to Port Moresby from Lae ferrying him and 24 others who had attended the annual gathering of school cadets at Lae’s Igam Barracks. Nineteen of the 25 passengers in the RAF *Caribou* did not survive the crash. Patrick led and cared for three of the survivors until help was found. He was awarded a George Medal for his bravery.

Muriel Larner (1929–2019)

The woman behind Kainantu Potteries, Eastern Highlands Prints and the Eastern Highlands Cultural Centre

By Rosalie Everest (née Larner)

I grew up on a coffee plantation in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea and later worked for many years as an English and expressive arts teacher at Aiyura National High School and then as a PNG Department of Education curriculum officer in Waigani, before moving with my family to Australia. I am now retired and in possession of the diaries of my late mother, Muriel Larner (née MacGowan), as well as photographs, news clippings and unfinished memoirs. I have been asked to write about my mother's life achievements and her

contribution to the traditional and modern arts and culture of PNG. Her life spanned the whole arc of modern history from prewar Rabaul, through the development of the young nation in the lead up to, and gaining, of independence, and onwards to 1996 when she finally (but reluctantly) left the shores of the country that had been her beloved home since birth.

The first of four children, Muriel Lesley MacGowan was born in Rabaul on 6 September 1929 to Scottish and Tasmanian parents William and Beryl MacGowan. William, an architect employed by the Australian government, had been transferred in 1927 to work in the Public Works Department in Rabaul, then the capital of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. Muriel's memoirs describe the prewar life of her and her three little brothers as 'a paradise of salt water, pumice dust and sulphur fumes', where, 'every day, when not at school, [they] were either under or on the water'.¹ On weekends, the family explored the northern coastline of the island 'where waves pounded black volcanic sand' and 'huge bamboo fishing baskets suspended from overhead branches were enveloped by the sea and filled with fish at high tide. Large, delicate, pink spiky blossoms would drop onto the sand' from the branches. The 'light impact broke their spines ... one was never able to pick them up whole again'.



Muriel driving the Arau Plantation vehicle during the mid-1970s. Muriel's grandson, Michael Pratt (centre), and two children of plantation workers (names unknown) are at the back of the vehicle. Courtesy of Muriel Larner.

The MacGowan family's happy and wondrous life in Rabaul (against the dramatic backdrop of fire-spewing volcanoes) ended abruptly on the eve of the Japanese invasion. The order to evacuate Australian women and children came suddenly. On 23 December 1941, after a last supper consisting of 'a sausage and a cup of tea', each of them — carrying one small bag of belongings and thinking wrongly that they would be leaving for a short time — had to secretly and quietly make their way under cover of darkness to the MV *Macdhui*, which was waiting in the harbour. William had to stay behind in Rabaul with the other male civilians as he watched the ship carrying his wife and children disappear over the horizon. Beryl and the children were evacuated to Adelaide, South Australia, where they had to adjust to a new temporary life not knowing for some time whether William was alive or dead.² Muriel attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Adelaide where she studied art and ballet (both of which she excelled at) and came to terms with her congenital hearing disability, which forced her to carry bulky hearing aid batteries.

In 1946, after the war ended, Muriel did not hesitate to return to the Territory, but this time as a young woman to Port Moresby. She continued her passion for dancing at Moresby Arts Theatre and worked as a town librarian before taking up a position as a geological draftswoman for the Australasian Petroleum Company (APC). She briefly met her future husband, returned serviceman Wally Larner, but it was not until he had finished a further 18 months' military service in Korea and returned to Port Moresby in 1952 that they courted and married. Their first daughter, Bronwyn, was born in 1953. A second daughter, Carol, only lived for a few days and now lies at rest with her grandfather, William, in Badihagwa Cemetery, Port Moresby.³

In 1957, Wally and Muriel were ready for a new challenge. Muriel was expecting again and, having lost one baby already, made the decision to give birth in Sydney. Meanwhile, Wally resigned his position with APC and flew to the Eastern Highlands to start a coffee plantation and build a house on a portion of land near Arau No. 1 Village (Southeast of Kainantu). In September, Muriel and her two daughters (Bronwyn, aged four) and baby Rosalie (myself, just four-weeks old), joined Wally at Arau Plantation to begin their pioneer Highlands life. Wally had already recruited a labour line and begun planting the coffee nursery while his Papuan foreman and carpenter, Gegesa Simalobe, constructed a *kunai* house out of *mambu* and *pitpit* as temporary accommodation for the family while the main homestead was being built over the next couple of years.

Muriel quickly adapted to the domestic arrangements and embraced the daily hardships resulting from their remote location and lack of roads, transport and supplies. She raised her daughters and taught them correspondence lessons until they left for boarding school in Queensland. At the same time, she was involved in maintaining the coffee nursery, distributing and transplanting seedlings, pruning young trees and providing basic medical aid to plantation workers, their families and local villagers. In addition, Muriel, who was always called 'Misis Lana', founded trade stores at Arau and in other nearby villages so that local people could purchase imported tinned goods, such as fish and bully beef, and rice, sugar, matches and colourful *lap-laps* and *meri* blouses, all sewn on Muriel's Singer treadle sewing machine.

Muriel loved her busy life at Arau. For her, 'the most beautiful time of day was just prior to sunset when the hurricane and Aladdin lamps were refuelled ready to light up, the girls were bathed and fed' and the family sat together on the verandah listening to 'the wailing tunes of bamboo pipes wafting from the jungle around us'. In her journal, she described seeing 'hand-held grass flares moving slowly between the labourers' huts' in the distance, but her family 'never, never felt any fear. Everyone was watching over and caring for us. We were theirs; only theirs, not to be shared with any other village'. However, on 16 July 1967, Muriel's life changed cataclysmically with the sudden death of Wally from a heart attack.⁴ As a nine-year-old, I was sent in the dark to rouse Gegesa for help; by morning, the word had spread to Arau village and environs and to the Arau labour line that 'Masta Wally' was dead.

After a large funeral in Kainantu town, Muriel was advised by friends that, as a 37-year-old widow, she should leave the Territory and take her young daughters to live in Australia, a notion she outright rejected. Instead, she resolved to take over Wally's work and run the isolated and debt-ridden plantation herself. Even though she had been told that the plantation workers 'won't take orders from a woman', she found that they 'were wonderful, and funnily enough [they] were proud that they had a woman boss'. She learned to repair the diesel generator, run the factory and manage the labour lines; she became a skilled driver of the treacherous roads, continued stocking the trade stores, and — supported by Gegesa and his family — eked out a living for herself and her daughters who travelled back and forth to boarding school. Importantly, she did this without financial assistance from the

Australian government, even though her late husband had served that nation at war for eight years and had died young due to his war service.

In 1969, Muriel rekindled her previous interest in ceramic sculpture and pottery after discovering rich seams of high-quality clay on the plantation. A kiln and pottery wheel were quickly installed, and she took on apprentices from the local community to teach pottery and screen-printing. The guesthouse was converted into a bustling art studio and this creative enterprise would be the precursor for what would eventually become the Eastern Highlands Cultural Centre (EHCC) in Kainantu town, for which, years later, Muriel would be awarded an MBE. In 1973, the Department of Commerce and Business Development heard of Muriel's burgeoning studio at Arau and offered her a job in Kainantu with the promise of expanding the workshop. However, it was not until she found a manager for the plantation the following year that she could take up the offer and move to Kainantu where she purchased some houses situated very close together.

One of her houses became the workshop and showroom of Kainantu Potteries, and she lived in the neighbouring house. The potters and their families resided in basic accommodation at the back of Muriel's home. By the end of 1974, the government's promise of a workshop, a wage for Muriel and housing for the staff still had not eventuated, so Muriel continued to use her own limited resources to accommodate, support and provide transport for the potters. Despite these challenges, she also managed to establish Eastern Highlands Prints, where more young trainees learned printing and dressmaking. At the same time, she continued to assist her manager at Arau with fortnightly trips to inspect the coffee and factory and to carry out stocktakes at the trade stores. It was a gruelling and busy life, but Muriel was devoted to developing the unquestionable talent of her trainees, and to keeping the plantation running.

Finally, there was some action from the government when, in 1979, a vacant block of town land was leased as a suitable site for an amalgamated craft centre. Kainantu Potteries and Eastern Highlands Prints were moved into the adjoining tin shed, and the building of staff quarters began. With help from the architect Paul Frame, the vision of an elegant, timber, purpose-built Eastern Highlands Cultural Centre, with a soaring roof and colonnade of carved pillars, started to take shape. The centre had already expanded its operations to include weaving and metal sculpture and was

officially opened to great acclaim in November 1981. Muriel's dream was finally a reality.

Due to her own experience of having a lifelong hearing disability, Muriel became inspired when she heard that 1981 was to be the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons. She immediately launched a campaign to recruit disabled artisans and trainees to work at EHCC. It was an extraordinary initiative and those workers became very skilled and successful artisans under the instruction of the 'able-bodied' potters. Other initiatives at EHCC included the encouragement of local craftspeople to bring their wares to sell directly to the public, and the installation of a coffee shop and a small museum of precious artifacts from the Kainantu area. EHCC flourished, becoming an icon of Kainantu, the 'Gateway to the Highlands'. Muriel was also a key promoter and organiser of the local contribution to the 1980 South Pacific Festival of Arts hosted by PNG.⁵

Muriel ran EHCC for several years until she was able to train a national director to take over the reins. The plantation had been sold in 1984 and, in 1996, Muriel reluctantly made the decision to retire to Queensland to be closer to family and medical care. She passed away at the age of 89 in 2019. She had requested that her ashes be returned to PNG, where they now lie interred next to her husband Wally's grave in the Kainantu Cemetery. EHCC continues to operate, and Muriel is fondly remembered by the people of Eastern Highlands Province, not only for her contributions to the arts, but also for her demonstrated advocacy for small business, the development of the coffee industry, national women's rights and the rights and welfare of the disabled.

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1 Muriel's unfinished personal memoirs and her hand-written diaries are in the possession of her daughter, Rosalie Everest, and have never been published.

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- 2 William would escape over land and sea to eventual safety in Milne Bay, where he recovered from his ordeal in Australian-controlled territory. He documented his escape in his diary (written and illustrated by hand in a stenographer's notebook). He was briefly reunited with his family but soon sent to work on building wartime airstrips in Townsville. In 1946, he returned to the Territory in a public works role.
- 3 Badihagwa Cemetery was also known as the 'European cemetery'; see Peake (2019).
- 4 He was just 47 years of age.
- 5 Carrying the theme of 'Pacific Awareness', the third South Pacific Festival of Arts was held from 29 June to 12 July 1980 in Port Moresby and regional centres and involved 22 participating Pacific territories.

David Linge (1948–)

Papua New Guinea's first doctor of science

By Gelinde Narekine

My name is Gelinde Narekine. I am a lecturer in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). My professional interests lie in HIV and AIDS research and education. I believe good education is the way forward for PNG, and that through it we can train and mentor the next generation of decision-makers and professionals. I have chosen to write about David Linge for several reasons. First, he can claim the honour of being the first Papua New Guinean to obtain a PhD after receiving his doctorate from Imperial College, University of London, in May 1982. Second, he has served PNG as a doctor, clinical specialist, teacher and mentor for over four decades. And third, his extraordinary humility and simplicity have left a lasting impression on many, both within and outside the health sector. For these reasons, I believe his story deserves a prominent place and space in our national narrative.



David Linge. Photo by Gelinde Narekine.

David Sangavalin Linge's story is one of extraordinary determination, humility and academic excellence. Born on 10 January 1948 in the small village of Kono in central New Ireland, he was the third child and second son of the Reverend Hosea (or Osea) Linge and his wife Rodi Mangin. David grew up in a family deeply rooted in education and ministry. His father, Hosea — named Ligeremaluoga¹ by tribal and customary rites — was the son of leader Amamap and destined himself to become a tribal leader of the Ngeat Lagong Kolagunon people. However, Ligeremaluoga's life took a dramatic turn when he became one of the early converts of the Methodist missionaries who had arrived at Kono in 1902. He was given a new name by his new teachers,² gave up his hereditary rights and eventually became the first ordained minister of the Methodist (now United) Church from the island provinces just prior to the Japanese invasion (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 1982:41). He was also the first Papua New Guinean to write a book, publishing an autobiography in 1932 (Ligeremaluoga 1932). Hosea's

decision to embrace Christianity and become a teacher profoundly influenced his children, instilling in them the values of service, education and humility. David was to take his father's legacy to a whole new level.

David attended Kimadan Community School in New Ireland before moving to George Brown College at Vunairima in East New Britain in 1965. Remarkably, this school was built on land his father had helped to clear decades earlier as a tutor. David's academic promise was evident early on. He consistently excelled in his studies and graduated as the dux of his high school in 1968, an achievement that foreshadowed future success.

In 1969, David enrolled at UPNG, embarking on a journey that would define his life. After completing two years of preliminary university studies, he transferred to the medical faculty at the Taurama campus with the goal of becoming a doctor. However, some years through his medical studies, Professor Peter Sinnett suggested that he should switch to the sciences to explore research opportunities. Despite objections from some faculty members, David accepted the decision and transferred to the science program in 1974, graduating top of his class with a bachelor of science. He was awarded a teaching fellowship in biology at UPNG and began an honours degree, which he completed in 1976. His main area of research at this time focused on root-knot nematodes (parasitic worms that damage crops).

In 1977, David was awarded a Commonwealth postgraduate scholarship to study at Imperial College, London, in the Department of Zoology and Applied Entomology. Moving to London without his new wife, Anne Kisarang, whom he had married on 24 December 1976, he nonetheless gained a master of science in biology along with an Imperial College diploma in 1978. His exceptional performance during this period led to an invitation to pursue a doctor of philosophy without having to apply. This rare offer underscored the high regard in which he was held by his mentors and peers. His doctoral research focused on root-knot nematodes affecting the winged bean, a nutritious crop with the potential to combat malnutrition in PNG. In 1982, he was awarded a PhD, the first Papua New Guinean to achieve this distinction. Dr Linge's 344-page thesis not only advanced scientific understanding but also held practical applications for agriculture and food security in his homeland.³

Upon his return to PNG in 1982, David was appointed a lecturer in UPNG's Department of Biology, his expertise and leadership propelling him into the position

of department chair in 1985. Yet despite his success in biological sciences, he remained committed to his initial dream of becoming a medical doctor. In 1986, he re-enrolled as a student in the medical faculty to pursue a bachelor of medicine and bachelor of surgery. Entering directly into the third year of the program due to his prior qualifications, he graduated in 1988 and completed his residency at Nonga Base Hospital, Rabaul, and his internship throughout East New Britain and New Ireland provinces. He returned to Port Moresby in 1992 and was engaged to teach in clinical medicine while pursuing postgraduate studies. He graduated in 1997 with a master of medicine from the medical faculty, which allowed him to become a medical consultant at the Port Moresby General Hospital.

With requisite qualifications in hand, David's medical career flourished for over 20 years. Working as a senior specialist in internal medicine, he dealt mainly with diseases and infections of the lungs and respiratory tract. Over the years, he contributed significantly to medical education and research, mentoring countless students and professionals. In 2012, he was appointed chair of clinical sciences at the UPNG School of Medicine and Health Sciences, a position he held until 2023. His work as associate professor at UPNG further solidified his impact on the nation's healthcare system, enabling him to shape the curriculum and inspire future generations of medical professionals.

Throughout his career as a senior specialist doctor and lecturer, David has taught, trained and mentored hundreds of students, many of whom now serve as doctors and health workers across PNG and even abroad. His influence has extended beyond his immediate profession, as his children have also achieved academic and professional success. His second daughter, Matilda, became a specialist in radiology, while his son George pursued a career in internal medicine. Both have carried forward their father's legacy of excellence and service.

Known for his gentle nature and quiet demeanour, David's humility is central to his character. Despite his numerous academic and professional achievements, he remains approachable and down to earth. His friend, Associate Professor David Mowbray, once remarked:

*'If I have ever known a Papua New Guinean so humble, I know David Linge, whose level of humility puts to shame even the word humility.'*⁴

David has never sought recognition, accolades or rewards. He is a quiet achiever in every sense of the word: an exceptional teacher and mentor, brilliant clinician and researcher, and a true role model, not only in the medical field but also more broadly. He continues to encourage and inspire young Papua New Guineans to be interested in research, believe in themselves and work collaboratively to improve their country's health outcomes.

As the first Papua New Guinean doctorate holder, and one of the nation's top medical specialists, Dr David Linge has set a powerful example of integrity and simplicity. His legacy of academic excellence and leadership remains a beacon of inspiration for current and future generations. His contributions have left an indelible mark on the nation's history and progress.

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1 The name meant 'Speech of an orator'. See Johns (2002:7).

2 He was named after the Fijian missionary teacher, Osea Naivalu.

3 Possibly originating in New Guinea, there were high hopes at the time that the winged bean would become a significant source of vegetable protein. See Griffin (26/10/1985:13).

4 David Mowbray 2004. Interview by author.

Tamo Mai (1942–2020)

Public service, social welfare and women's rights

By Alan Donigi

My name is Alan Donigi and I am a Papua New Guinean lawyer with a deep respect for the trailblazers who helped shape our nation's identity. In this entry, I reflect on the life and legacy of Tamo Mai Diro, a pioneering advocate for women's rights in PNG and one of the earliest voices for gender equality in government. As an advisor to the prime minister on women's affairs during the formative years of independence, she played a central role in establishing institutional support for women's participation in national development. Her vision for a more inclusive public service and her commitment to empowering women across the country laid the groundwork for many of the advances we see today. Her legacy continues to inspire those who strive for equality and representation in all areas of public life.



Tamo Mai. Courtesy of Venigo Diro.

Hailing from Uritai and Isapeape in Gulf Province (then called Gulf District), Tamo Mai was born on 15 January 1942 to the famous pastor Mai Moralave and his wife Morihova Lele, both of whom were early Papua New Guinean missionaries with the London Missionary Society. Growing up in a close-knit and grounded community, Tamo was deeply influenced by the traditions, values and faith of her village. Her parents, respected for their missionary work and community leadership, instilled in her the importance of education, hard work, service to others and a strong belief in equality between men and women.

Tamo attended primary school in Kerema, where she excelled in her studies and developed a passion for learning. After completing her primary education, she attended Kerema Coronation High School. Her determination and perseverance paid off and she was awarded a scholarship to attend Blackheath and Thornburgh College in Charters Towers, North Queensland, from 1957 to 1960. In 1961, she returned to Port Moresby, where she pursued a career in teaching, eventually becoming a

teacher in 1963. That same year, she travelled to Fiji to undertake training with the South Pacific Commission (now Pacific Community) focused on raising women's living standards in developing countries through education. Returning from Fiji, she worked briefly for the Department of Education before becoming a welfare officer attached to the Department of Native Affairs.

In 1964, Tamo's life took a turn when she met Ted Diro, then a rising star in the military. He would later become the first Papua New Guinean commander of the country's defence force and a seasoned politician. The couple married in 1965 at Wewak; they would have six children: Eddie, Venigo, Arlette, Margret, Navu and Patrick. Tamo's family was her anchor, providing her with the strength and motivation to pursue her dreams. Although Tamo and Ted separated in the early 1980s, she remained committed to her children, her work and her values; she also remained a close supporter of Ted in later life.

Tamo became actively involved in women's affairs, advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Rather than gender-specific roles, she believed that men and women played equally important parts in both the household and society. Her son Venigo recalls that she taught her children that both men and women should help out in the kitchen and do the laundry. The man's role, according to Tamo, was to support all women and foster growth in the community. An early advocate for gender mainstreaming in social development, she believed that women were a revolutionary force at the village level. It was women who grew the food, educated the children, promoted family life and, on top of it all, influenced politics and the economy through their participation in market activities.

Tamo's progressive attitudes crept into national politics with her appointment, in December 1974, as an advisor on women's affairs to Chief Minister (Sir) Michael Somare. In this role she was instrumental in establishing a women's unit within the Department of Social Development and Home Affairs. That same year, Tamo broke new ground once again when, with Tess Chan, she became one of the first Papua New Guinean women appointed to the board of the Papua New Guinea Development Bank. Both appointments reflected the government's trust in her judgement and her growing influence on national affairs. Her commitment to improving the lives of women in her community led to further work with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA); she was appointed to the YWCA board of directors in March 1975.

Prior to achieving national recognition, Tamo was respected for her grassroots work with the Community Development Group (CDG) in Port Moresby. In the years leading up to independence, the CDG became the nerve centre for efforts to improve conditions in the city's growing number of squatter settlements. Tamo and her team met regularly to discuss the needs and ideas of settlers. She interpreted bureaucratic processes, guided residents to available resources and encouraged them to come up with strategies for self-empowerment. At the same time, the group's work was instrumental in raising awareness about the plight of settlement dwellers and pushing for systemic change.

As Somare's advisor on women's affairs, Tamo made headlines by boldly calling for more women than men in the Chief Minister's Department (*Post-Courier* 24/3/1975). Using the International Women's Year seminar as a platform, she argued that women should be treated as equal partners in development — not just in rhetoric but in practice. She articulated her position firmly but politely, stating that, since 'there were no mentality and ability differences between men and women ... there were no grounds why women should not be treated as equals in every sense' (*Post-Courier* 24/3/1975).

In addition to her grassroots and national-level work, Tamo represented PNG on the international stage. During a visit to Europe in 1974, she encountered firsthand the prejudices and misconceptions that many outsiders still held about her decolonising country. Rather than being discouraged by condescending and stereotypical remarks portraying PNG as a land rooted in the 'Stone Age', she saw it as opportunity to highlight the resilience, progress and cultural richness of her homeland. The editor of the *Post-Courier* (11/11/1974) agreed:

'It is sometimes said of Papua New Guinea that it has a long way to go in catching up with the rest of the world. But the reverse is equally true — in some respects the world has a long way to go in catching up with Papua New Guinea.'

In typical Tamo fashion, she was more concerned with insults from grassroots Papua New Guineans than the Europeans she encountered overseas (*Post-Courier* 7/11/1974).

On the legal and policy front, Tamo served as a commissioner for the PNG Law Reform Commission. In 1979, she supported calls by its chairman, William Kaputin, for the appointment of more Papua New Guinean judges to the bench, arguing that they could more easily consider the customs and traditions of PNG in handing down sentences, and help to develop the underlying law (*Post-Courier* 14/9/1979). In addition to these roles, Tamo somehow found the time to become a keen golfer. She accepted a leadership role with the PNG Ladies' Golf Association and actively promoted the sport among young Papua New Guinean women.

In 1987, Tamo made a bold decision to stand for parliament, contesting the National Capital District electorate seat, as she believed there should be more women in politics and that women's voices needed to be heard at the highest levels of government (Maeaoka 11/3/1987). An independent candidate — albeit with the support of the Women in Politics group and the National Council of Women — Tamo campaigned on a platform emphasising the importance of women's input in national decision-making and the need for a gender-balanced approach to governance. Although she did not win the election, her campaign was groundbreaking and inspired a new generation of women to consider standing for politics (Wormald 1989).

In later life, Tamo remained active within the Port Moresby branch of the YWCA, mentoring and supporting women until her passing in June 2020. In recognition of her lifelong work in policy development and the advancement of women, she had been named a Companion of the Order of the Star of Melanesia in the 2013 New Year Honours List. It was not in her nature to seek recognition or fame; to the contrary, she remained humble about her achievements — not even her own children knew the half of what she achieved. This humility was a defining character trait. She carried out her work because it was the right thing to do.

Tamo traversed significant personal challenges during her lifetime, but remained steadfast in her values. Constantly challenging traditional gender norms that placed women in inferior roles, she called for full and equal participation of women in all aspects of society. A firm believer in Christian principles, she instilled these values in her six children and seven grandchildren, all of whom fondly remember her as a gentle soul and hold her values of love, forgiveness, equality and respect. Her legacy is one of resilience, equality and service. She showed that with education, support and a strong sense of purpose, women can overcome barriers and achieve great things.

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Sir Koitaga Mano (1926–2016)

One of the first highlanders elected to the House of Assembly

By David Gonol

David Gonol hails from Tambul-Nebilyer Electorate, Western Highlands Province, PNG. He is a prolific author, court registrar, talk show host, video editor, publisher and lay preacher. He currently serves as the deputy registrar of the Supreme Court of Justice at Waigani, Port Moresby. Gonol has published eight books and numerous papers, with his primary research and publications focusing on the development of indigenous jurisprudence. Among his notable works are *The Underlying Law of Papua New Guinea: An Inquiry into Adoption and Application of Customary Law* (2016) and *Time, Eternity and God Enarr* (2022).



Sir Koitaga at Parliament House, 2010. Courtesy of David Gonol.

The political leader (Sir) Koitaga Mano was born around 1926 in Palnol village (also known as Palinol), at the base of the towering Mount Giluwe in the Tambul District of Western Highlands Province. His father, Mano, had two wives; Koitaga was born to his second wife, Sukupu, a situation that led to some hardships growing up.

Sukupu was a strong and courageous woman, and she warned her sons never to return to their father's clan. She named her youngest son Koitaga, meaning 'dislodged from the parent rock', symbolising their separation from the Mano clan. She reminded them repeatedly that they had been driven out by their father, and this instilled a deep resolve in Koitaga and his brothers to make a life for themselves away from their paternal clan.

The challenges Koitaga faced growing up shaped his character. He was dedicated to helping his mother, whether by collecting firewood, tending to their garden or looking after their pigs. He often ventured into the bush to gather wild pandanus and hunt for animals. Despite these hardships, he remained obedient and peaceful. Possessing a curious and independent mind, he was always eager to learn more about the world around him.

After World War II, Koitaga learned that young men from nearby villages were being recruited to work at the Mount Kuta gold mine near Mount Hagen. Intrigued by the opportunity and eager to provide for his family, Koitaga, along with his friends, decided to go and work at the mine. This marked the beginning of Koitaga's journey towards building a future beyond the hardships of his early life.

Over the next six months, Koitaga worked in the mine and learned Tok Pisin. Later, his proficiency in Tok Pisin would play a significant role in shaping his life and leadership. As more patrol officers and colonial administrators explored the Kaguel valley in the early 1950s, they sought influential local leaders to assist with road building and translation. Koitaga's growing reputation as a leader and his fluency in Tok Pisin made him an ideal candidate for such roles, resulting in his appointment as a 'boss boy'. However, this appointment, made without his consent, was not what he wanted. Despite his objections, a European magistrate insisted that he retain the role, noting his good judgement and leadership on earlier occasions. Left with no choice, Koitaga accepted the appointment and diligently followed the orders given by the policeman/magistrate and colonial administrators.

As a boss boy, Koitaga's responsibilities included rounding up villagers to build infrastructure such as roads, bridges and airstrips. His role resembled that of a foreman, as he supervised the work. The villagers feared and respected him because he was the one enforcing the orders of the colonial authorities and had close relationships with them. However, he expressed his desire to leave the position and work with the carpenters who were building houses near the airstrip at Tambul Station. The carpenters, impressed by his interest, informed the kiap, probably Bill Benham (1934–2019), who allowed Koitaga to join them. He was provided with accommodation and began working as a carpenter, a role he enjoyed far more than being a boss boy.

In 1956, when a new patrol post was established at Tambul, Koitaga was recruited as an interpreter for the kiap. His honesty, commitment and leadership in this role earned him widespread recognition among both the colonial authorities and his own people.

As preparations for the 1964 general elections began, Koitaga's popularity grew. The kiap encouraged him to stand for election, and, with the support of the people, Koitaga was elected to the House of Assembly, representing Tambul-Nebilyer, Ialibu

and Kandep. He was one of the first uneducated politicians to be elected to the House of Assembly. His first official speech reflected his surprise, as nobody had ever told him that Port Moresby was a part of PNG. Despite his lack of formal education, he played an important role in national discussions leading up to independence. The discussions among the early members of the House of Assembly were simple but significant. They focused on gaining independence and building a unified and prosperous nation. Although lacking in formal education, these early leaders were instrumental in laying the foundations for PNG's future.

As a parliamentarian, Koitaga earned the equivalent of AU\$150 per fortnight, which was a significant amount of money at the time. He recalled that some members would gather to gamble their earnings, a foretaste of modern issues with leadership and financial mismanagement. Among Koitaga's many notable achievements was his work on the Highlands Highway (later renamed the Okuk Highway after highlands politician Iambakey Okuk), which he extended in 1966, connecting Nebilyer in the Western Highlands to Ialibu in the Southern Highlands. He also played a role in proposing several key legislative changes, including the introduction of the five-year parliamentary term and the design on the 50 kina note. Regarding the latter, he said:

‘Taim ol memba toktok planti long wanem piksa bai stap long nupela fifty Kina, mi askim wanpela askim ino gat pepa na tok, “Papua Niugini husait i lukautim? Ol animal or man? Sapos man i lukautim, orit putim pes bilong Somare long hap, em Prime Minista bilong yumi”’ (“When the members debated about who to feature on the new fifty Kina note, I interjected and asked a question without notice and said, “Who looks after PNG? Is it animals or man? If man, then feature the face of Somare, our Prime Minister”).¹

After serving PNG for more than 50 remarkable years at both the national and local levels, Koitaga resigned in 2008. During his active years, he held three consecutive terms in both the House of Assembly and the House of Parliament (1964–68, 1968–72, 1972–77), representing the people of Tambul-Nebilyer. His political career extended beyond national politics. From 1964, he also served as the ward councillor for his Komolgam tribe, continuing in this role until his retirement in 2008. His tireless commitment to his community and country earned him widespread

respect and admiration. In recognition of his lifelong service to the nation, Queen Elizabeth II knighted him as a Member of the British Empire in 2008, a prestigious honour that cemented his legacy as Sir Koitaga Mano.

Known for his integrity, wisdom and humble leadership, Koitaga was instrumental in guiding his people through periods of great change, both at the village and national levels. His leadership, particularly in the formative years of PNG's political landscape, set a benchmark for others to follow. Throughout his career, he was a beacon of light for Tambul-Nebilyer, often advocating for peace, order, development projects and political stability in his constituency.

After stepping away from politics, Koitaga spent his remaining years in peaceful retirement in his village, Palnol, in Tambul, Western Highlands. He lived a quiet life until his passing on 13 March 2016, aged 90. His death marked the end of an era for his people and the nation. He was survived by his wife, children and many grandchildren, who are a testament to the strong family and leadership values he held throughout his life. His funeral was a grand event lasting nearly two weeks, drawing in prominent leaders from across the nation. Among those who attended was former prime minister Paias Wingti, who, along with others, spoke highly of Sir Koitaga Mano's enduring contributions to the country. They lauded his exemplary leadership and the high moral standards he upheld throughout his life. His ability to bring development and progress to Tambul-Nebilyer, a region once shrouded in obscurity, was a defining aspect of his legacy. Koitaga's name will forever be synonymous with the rise of leadership in the highlands, and his memory will continue to inspire future generations. His life and legacy reflect values of dedication, selflessness and visionary leadership, and serve as a guiding light for those who aspire to bring positive change to their communities.

1 Sir Koitaga Mano, in discussion with the author, 2010.



Annlyn Mota (1955–)

Services to religion, women's rights advocate, war diarist (Bougainville)

By Julie Mota Kondi

I am a freelance author and visual artist based in Kimbe, West New Britain Province, PNG. I am currently working on a community language revitalisation project with the Bebeli language speakers of West New Britain Province. *Na Nunda gagara bego Kiki itako ere gemberena*¹ — I am Annlyn Mota's eldest daughter who will make brief words about her life story here.

The second of six children of McDonald Burauba and his wife Brinda Mesani, Annlyn Mota was born on 10 May 1955. She came from a close-knit group of Mokorua language speakers in Sine, a rural village in the Tufi subdistrict of Northern District (now Oro Province). She was raised within a patriarchal Junga Raufusi paternal clan within the Korafe political landscape. She is now married to retired army officer Captain Tony Mota of Baga Village in Tufi.² They have eight children and 20 grandchildren.

Annlyn was among the first women from the Mokorua language group to obtain tertiary education qualifications and enter the formal workforce after 1975. She has a diploma of business administration from PNG's Institute of Business Administration and has been actively involved in the real estate industry. For a long time, until her retirement in 2004, she was a staff member of the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby. However, it is through her community service involvement in the church and grassroots women's mobilisation and empowerment throughout PNG and the Pacific region that her services were acknowledged and recognised. On 16 September 1997 she was awarded the National Logohu Medal for services to religion and community through the Anglican Church Mothers' Union. Later, in 2007, she was included in PNG's Independence Day honours list.

Throughout her education and formal career, Annlyn has been an active supporter of the rights of Indigenous peoples. Her war diaries from the decade of civil conflict in Bougainville (1987–97) contribute to PNG's postcolonial women's literature and wider national and regional human rights discourse. The diaries, written in her public role as a leader within the Anglican Church Mothers' Union, provide insight into the lives of women at that time and should be recognised as part of our historical cultural heritage record.

Annlyn's official involvement in the Anglican Church Mothers' Union began in 1987 at Murray Barracks, Port Moresby. After earlier being involved with military women's fellowship at Moem Barracks in Wewak,³ she became one of the pioneering members in the Port Moresby diocese. She was part of the second group of women admitted as full members of the organisation by the incumbent diocesan bishop, the late Reverend Isaac Gadebo. During the annual Lady Day service at St Paul's military chapel at Murray Barracks, she and her cohort made their religious vows to promote a worldwide Christian concern for families and married life. At first, she could not commit herself to group activities due to her real estate work and parental responsibilities. However, she assumed greater leadership duties within the military barracks during the decade-long Bougainville civil conflict.

Like many military wives, Annlyn managed her family alone. But, through the Mothers' Union, she gained and provided support to other families affected by the Bougainville conflict. Despite military curfews, media blackouts and court martials, life went on. The Mothers' Union filled the gap in institutional support left by the military, which lacked the technical, cultural and social knowhow to assist affected families. Branch reports and other correspondence held in the Niugini collection of the PNG National Library show that families facing adversity due to the conflict were prioritised by the Mothers' Union, which never failed to support those in need.

During her several decades of involvement with the Mothers' Union, Annlyn served in various roles, from branch treasurer, to branch, diocese and national president. She began keeping diaries as the branch links secretary in the 1990s. These were printed in the organisation's publicity materials as calls for prayer, and, from there, distributed worldwide.⁴ As well as fostering international solidarity at the time, Annlyn's diaries are valuable historical records that provide rare insight into the personal lives of families affected by the civil conflict, recording the impact of the conflict away from the frontline and within domestic spaces at home. As such, they serve as important documents for researchers interested in PNG women's history, the Bougainville civil conflict, the Anglican Church in the post-independence era and grassroots women's history. There is a dire need for such documentation in PNG, especially of national and grassroots women's movements and the impact of urbanisation and conflict in towns and communities across the country.

Through her work with the Mothers' Union, and as reflected in her writing, Annlyn re-imagined the domestic spaces of Indigenous families. She and others helped

families to navigate their lives during challenging times, finding a Melanesian way to support, advocate and strengthen national unity through worship and friendship that recognised cultural diversity. Her leadership role was acknowledged not only within the church community but also by the national government.

Annlyn's diaries need to be protected for current and future generations. Beyond their inherent value as historical documents, they raise pertinent questions about contemporary issues, such as the role that the husbands of women leaders can play in supporting their wives. Further, by exposing readers to real women's stories, they help to increase the social awareness of women's private life revealed in print. They also expose the different layers and dimensions of the roles that women and families have played and continue to play in PNG nation-making, thereby potentially inspiring future women leaders.

By focusing on Annlyn's diaries in this brief biographical entry, my intention has been to demonstrate how the lives and words of women can powerfully intersect with the divergent layers of PNG's post-independence nation-building narratives. My hope is that through showcasing her unique archival records — diaries, journals, reports and official correspondence — we will inspire modern students and readers to navigate with greater confidence the shifting landscapes of the post-independence years.

Before ending this biography, I would like to sincerely thank Retired Captain Tony Mota for his meticulous documentation of family records and photographs. I also need to thank Annlyn Mota for her patience and cooperation in allowing this short entry to proceed and Terry Mota who assisted in Baga village over the Christmas holiday in 2024.

Aiyakoe Beka Resena — with heartfelt gratitude.

1 The Korafe language is my mother tongue and that with which I speak to my parents.

2 Captain Mota is a retired PNG Defence Force servicemen, two-time war veteran (Vanuatu peacekeeping Kumul Force, 1981; Bougainville Civil War, 1987–97). He was awarded a Member of Logohu medal by the PNG government in 1999 for services to the community in religion and to people living with HIV/AIDS through Anglicare Stop Aids and Igat Hope Inc.

3 Her time at Moem barracks is notable for her association and friendship with the Australian expatriate Deaconess, Sister June Armstrong, who established the first Anglican parish in East Sepik. Based at Kreer heights in Wewak town, Armstrong's weekly fellowships at the Mota family residence were a catalyst for the establishment of a formal Anglican community and a permanent pastoral position based in the barracks thereafter.

4 Her letters and reports were published in international journals and magazines and were broadcast on radio. Copies can be accessed through the records of the headquarters of the Mothers' Union, Mary Sumner House, Westminster. See [Archive of the Mothers' Union, Lambeth Place Library](#). Unfortunately, due to time constraints, these records, which include details about Annlyn's visits to London and a meeting with Queen Elizabeth II, were not consulted.

Bernard Mullu Narokobi (1945–2010)

‘A finger’ in the constitution and author of *The Melanesian Way*

By Vergil Los Narokobi

My name is Vergil Los Narokobi. I am now a judge of the National Court and Supreme Court of PNG. I have been inspired by the life of my late father, Bernard Mullu Narokobi, who was a village boy. He came of humble origins, but through dedication, integrity and commitment was able to make a meaningful contribution to shaping the foundation of our country. My father was my personal role model; for my PhD thesis in constitutional law, I chose a topic my late father had a hand in — the drafting of the National Goals and Directive Principles and Basic Social Obligations within the preamble of PNG’s constitution. I have authored three books and published several academic articles, including one in the *Journal of Pacific History* that celebrates my late father’s contributions to shaping an indigenous legal system. Simply put, I believe that his life and works can inspire many more Papua New Guineans today and into the future, which is why I wrote this article.



Bernard Narokobi, c. 1969–73.
Courtesy of Roger Southern (Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Photo 125–149).

Bernard Mullu Narokobi was born on or about 20 August 1945. He was a trained lawyer, jurist and politician who, due to his many writings, became widely regarded as a philosopher, and he also played a significant role in shaping the political, constitutional and legal landscape of PNG in its formative years. He was, perhaps, the first Papua New Guinean to have served in all three arms of government: in the judiciary as an acting judge (1981), the legislature as a member of parliament (1987–2002) and in the executive branch as a government minister (1988–92 and 1993–94). Narokobi contributed to the Catholic Church in various capacities as well, including his writings on interpreting theology through a Melanesian lens. He was a prolific writer, authoring books and articles on a wide range of law, religion, politics and philosophy topics. His most often cited work is *The Melanesian Way* (1980), which posits the existence of a Melanesian philosophy. *Two Seasons* (2002), a novel, and

Death of a Muruk (2013), a play, add to his list of influential publications (Golub et al. 2020).

The Narokobis came from Wautogik Village in Dagua, which is part of the larger group of coastal Arapesh-speaking people of East Sepik Province (Dobrin 2020). Narokobi's parents, Anton and Maria Narokobi, were both subsistence farmers, but his father was also a catechist of the Catholic Church, who instructed his fellow villagers in the faith. Narokobi was born in the village during a time when accurate birth records were not kept. The date of birth provided here is from his passport, but it is likely that he was born earlier. For instance, a story is told of Narokobi and his parents escaping into the jungle during World War II to avoid the attention of Japanese soldiers who suspected him of being a mixed-race child due to his fair complexion.

Narokobi's early education was undertaken in his home province, but he moved to Kerevat National High School in Rabaul to complete his final two years of secondary school.¹ After finishing Form 6 (Year 12) in 1966, he was accepted to study law at the University of Sydney, commencing there in 1967. It is believed that he was persuaded to study law by his adopted Australian father, Sir William Prentice, PNG's first deputy chief justice and then chief justice (1978–80).² Narokobi graduated with a bachelor of laws in 1972 and qualified to practise law as a barrister in New South Wales and the High Court of Australia. However, with PNG on the cusp of independence, he returned home soon after graduation and commenced his career as a lawyer in the Office of the Public Solicitor.

In June 1972, the PNG House of Assembly established a committee to work on a homegrown constitution, aptly termed the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) (Ritchie 2020). Despite Narokobi's relative inexperience, he was recommended by Father John Momis, the deputy chairman of the CPC, and subsequently endorsed by the House of Assembly as a permanent consultant to the committee. From the time of his appointment in November 1972, Narokobi worked tirelessly with committee members, including Momis, (Sir) John Kaputin, (Sir) John Guise, Paulus Arek, (Sir) Tei Abal and (Sir) Sinake Giregire, to recommend, debate and, eventually, witness the adoption of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea by the National Constituent Assembly in 1975.³

While once joking that he only ‘had a finger’ (Narokobi 2001:25) in the formation of PNG’s constitution, as recollected in his 1983 book *Life and Leadership in Melanesia*, the highlight of Narokobi’s time at the CPC was the role he played in drafting the constitution’s extensive preamble. He was responsible for the inclusion of the National Goals and Directive Principles (NGDP) and Basic Social Obligations (BSO), although he did not succeed in making these enforceable (Narokobi 1983:91–9). Because of Narokobi, the NGDP and BSO provisions were extended to include social justice, wise use of natural resources and the recognition of ‘noble traditions and Christian principles’ in PNG’s development trajectory. Reflecting on 20 years of the constitution, he said that the CPC was not concerned with political power, but with the ‘building up of the “the right kind of society”’ (Narokobi 2001:29).

Narokobi was appointed inaugural chair of PNG’s Law Reform Commission in May 1975 (Golub 2020:260), in which capacity he sought to indigenise the mostly Western laws adopted at independence. He left the Law Reform Commission in May 1978 as he felt parliament was more interested in building ‘roads and bridges’ than in legislative reform (Narokobi 1982:20).⁴ In May 1980, he was appointed acting judge of the National Court. One of his decisions, *Acting Public Prosecutor v Aumane, Boku, Wapulae, and Kone*,⁵ in which he took custom into account and ordered compensation — a more lenient sentence — which was subsequently overturned on appeal in the Supreme Court. This decision — and the general apathy of the courts towards developing the underlying law concept in the constitution — left him disillusioned and questioning the effectiveness of judges in shaping an indigenous Papua New Guinean jurisprudence.⁶

Narokobi served the court for one year before running, unsuccessfully, for National Parliament in 1982 against (Sir) Michael Somare.⁷ After several years practising as a private lawyer (1983–87), he again contested the national elections in 1987, this time for the smaller Wewak Open electorate, and this time he was elected. He held the seat for 15 years. In politics, he was minister for justice and attorney-general, minister for agriculture, opposition leader and speaker of parliament. As minister for justice and PNG’s inaugural attorney-general (1988–92), he oversaw the passage of the Criminal Law (Compensation) Act 1991, providing for payment of compensation as a mitigating factor in sentencing. The other major intervention Narokobi is known for is *Haiveta, Leader of the Opposition v Wingti, Prime Minister, Attorney-General and National Parliament*,⁸ when, in response to Prime Minister Paias

Wingti's September 1993 resignation and rapid re-election (aimed at avoiding a possible vote of no confidence), Narokobi represented the opposition leader, Chris Haiveta of the Pangu Party, at the Supreme Court pro bono and had the outcome of a National Court ruling supporting the actions of Wingti overturned. This resulted in a vote of no confidence being moved against Wingti and the elevation of Sir Julius Chan to prime minister in August 1994.

Nobody could deny that Narokobi had a colourful career in politics. A favourite family story is that he was once asked if he was a socialist, to which he replied, 'No, I am a peopleist'. After playing a key role in Chan's rise to the top office, Narokobi was then sacked from cabinet when he voted against his own government-initiated provincial government reforms (the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments) in June 1995.⁹ When sacking Narokobi, along with John Momis, Bart Philemon, Paul Pora, Jerry Nalau and Michael Laimo, Sir Julius was reported to have told him that 'men of principles are few and far between' (*Canberra Times* 15/7/1995:8). In 2002, Narokobi unsuccessfully ran for a fourth term, losing to Kimson Kare of the relatively short-lived Nation Transformation Party. Two years after his defeat, he was appointed high commissioner to New Zealand and spent the years 2004–08 in Wellington. The government then appointed him to the board of the PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission, his final public engagement. This appointment in the evening of his life was a full circle for him, after beginning public life in that role following his stint with the CPC.

Consistent themes in Narokobi's life were the centrality of human dignity and Melanesian identity amid the complexity of Christian principles, and Western ideas adopted and adapted to Papua New Guinean circumstances and noble traditions. An example of his belief in Melanesian identity was his support for the plight of the West Papuan people.¹⁰ His focus on understanding Melanesian identity found a natural outlet outside his legal life. For example, Somare appointed him to the Board of Trustees of the National Museum and Art Gallery in 1977, soon after independence. The National Museum now has a section named after him. He lectured in philosophy at the University of Papua New Guinea in the early 1980s and was appointed honorary professor of Melanesian philosophy and awarded an honorary doctorate in law by the university. A year before his death in April 2009, *The Guardian* described him as one of 'Papua New Guinea's living national icons' (*The Guardian* 23/4/2009). In 2020,

the *Journal of Pacific History* devoted a special issue to the legacy of his thinking, in particular, ‘the Melanesian way’ (Dobrin and Golub 2020).

Narokobi died on 9 March 2010 from diabetic complications. His brother, Camillus, also a lawyer, is the only surviving sibling, his three sisters having passed. Narokobi’s wife, Regina, predeceased him in 2007. Of their seven children, three currently work in the public sphere: Vergil Los (myself), a serving judge in PNG; Ottonia, a parliamentary political staff member; and Bernadine, a civil servant with the Department of Labour. His daughter Annaiola is a private lawyer, and his son Daniel, who passed away in 2021 from Covid, spent time working with him as a political staffer and had begun a late career in law.

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1 Established in 1947, Kerevat, in East New Britain Province, was the Territory of New Guinea's first high school.

2 Sir William was succeeded by Sir Buri Kidu, the first PNG national to serve as chief justice.

3 Michael Somare was the committee's ex officio chair but left most of the work to Momis. Advice was also provided by expatriate legal and political experts J.W. Davidson, David Stone, John Ley, Tony Voutas, Barry Holloway, John Yocklunn and Ted Wolfers.

4 Narokobi also wrote: 'Development in PNG, contrary to the great vision of the constitutional fathers, is no longer to be a preoccupation with total human development, with justice and national integrity, equality and participation, national sovereignty and self reliance. It is to be roads and bridges, aeroplanes and airports, vehicles and wharves and so on' (Narokobi 1982:23).

5 [1980] PNGLR 510.

6 However, two of the projects he worked on were eventually enacted as legislation once he became a parliamentarian and was able to push for their passage. The Fairness of Transaction Act 1993 allowed economically weaker parties to challenge a contract's validity on the basis that the transaction was unfair, while the Underlying Law Act 2000 provided a methodology to develop PNG's indigenous jurisprudence.

7 Somare won the seat for East Sepik Provincial with 62,000 votes. Narokobi, who would later describe running against Somare as 'the Everest of PNG', polled second with a still considerable 27,000 votes (Narokobi 2005:17, 42).

8 [1994] PNGLR 197.

9 Narokobi was one of the policy's most outspoken critics (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 9/1995:17).

10 Between 1983 and 1987, Narokobi took on cases of West Papuan refugees crossing into PNG who faced deportation. He also criticised the 1986 Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Co-operation signed with Indonesia, pointing out that it limited the ability of Papua New Guineans to question the treatment of Melanesians residing in West Papua.

Cecilia Sapue Nembou (1953–)

Beating the odds all the way to the top of higher education governance

By Leonie Baptiste

My name is Leonie Baptiste. I am a Papua New Guinean who takes pride in seeing the potential and strength in fellow Papua New Guineans. My career began in academia, but I have since transitioned into the mining and petroleum sectors. I maintain a strong commitment to research, particularly in the areas of customary landownership and genealogy and am engaged in multiple research collaborations. As a Papua New Guinean woman, I have a deep appreciation for those who rise above challenges, especially women who break barriers while staying grounded in our cultural values. Professor Cecilia Nembou is one of these women. I am grateful to have worked with her. In my opinion, she exemplifies the kind of leadership, strength and humility that PNG needs. We need more people like Cecilia — women who inspire by simply being true to themselves, their purpose and their people.



Photography by Benberth Kadum.
Courtesy of UPNG Public Relations
and Events Management Unit.

On 20 January 2016, Professor Cecilia Nembou made history in PNG as the first Papua New Guinean woman to become vice-chancellor of one of our universities. In doing this, she became the first layperson to be appointed president of Divine Word University, succeeding the founding president, Father Jan Czuba. The news the following day read: 'Divine Word University in Madang has a new president — a woman' (Albaniel 21/1/2016). This is the story of Cecilia Sapue Nembou, a woman of remarkable perseverance.

From Baluan Island, Manus, Cecilia Sapue Nembou was born on 7 January 1953 to a single mother, Namet Samalol Sorove. When she was three years old, she was fostered by her maternal uncle, Otto Nembou Pokut, and his wife, Joanna Puakop Solok. When asked about her siblings, Cecilia made sure to include everyone on both her parents' and foster parents' sides, indicating the strong connections and bonds she has kept with all her siblings. On her mother's side, she has two brothers

and one sister. Her sister and a brother have passed. On her biological father's side, she has seven brothers and three sisters. She is the eldest of her biological father's children. On her foster parents' side, she has three brothers, all of whom are also adopted, though two are biologically related.

Cecilia's academic journey began at St Mary's Primary 'T' School on Baluan Island, soon followed by St Paul's Primary 'T' School on the Catholic Mission Station at Patu Parish on the Manus mainland, and then to Christ the King Girls' High School, also at Patu Parish. After relocating briefly to another parish, Papitalai, near Lombrum Naval Base, she was awarded a scholarship by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to complete Grade 10 at Marianville Girls' High School at Bomana, outside Port Moresby. Cecilia not only finished Grade 10, but also graduated with flying colours, being named dux of the school and taking first prize for English.

After secondary school, Cecilia won a National Government Scholarship (Natschol) allowing her to stay in Port Moresby and enrol in a bachelor of science, majoring in mathematics at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1970. However, finding the supporting allowance too low, she applied for a further scholarship, a UPNG cadetship, which she also won, providing her with much needed support throughout her degree. She concentrated on her studies, and performed well, sharing the foundation mathematics prize with a young man from Gaire in Central Province in her initial year. Cecilia's daughter Amanda¹ was born during her third year at UPNG, and, after taking a semester off to care for her newborn, Cecilia returned to complete her degree the following semester.

Graduation came in 1975, the year PNG gained its independence. Cecilia's first job was a graduate assistant position in staff administration at UPNG's central administration department. A year later, she was awarded a teaching fellowship in the Department of Mathematics, marking the beginning of her academic career.

As was the case with other talented PNG teaching staff in this era, UPNG encouraged Cecilia to pursue further study and, after winning a United Kingdom (UK) Commonwealth Scholarship in 1977, she moved to the UK to undertake a master of science degree at the University of Sussex, graduating the following year.² Australian government scholarships brought her first to the Canberra College of Advanced Education (today's University of Canberra) in 1981 for a graduate diploma in statistics and then, in 1987, to the University of New South Wales, Sydney, for her

doctorate, which she obtained in 1992.³ She was the first Papua New Guinean *and* the first Papua New Guinean woman to obtain a PhD in mathematical sciences. Her thesis focused on the problem of Port Moresby's electricity generation planning (Nembou 1991).

Following the conferral of her doctorate, Cecilia returned to her teaching position at UPNG, climbing the ranks of university leadership relatively quickly. Her growing interest in higher education governance was confirmed after a five-week study tour of universities across seven states in the United States in 1995. She became UPNG's first woman pro-vice-chancellor and was acting vice-chancellor for seven months in 1999. During this time, she dealt with a student strike over the university's planned restructuring and fee increase (Albaniel 2/2/2016). Coming out of that experience with more confidence, Cecilia applied for the vacant position of vice chancellor of UPNG but was unsuccessful. After 25 years at UPNG, she resigned and was later recruited by the University of Wollongong as the academic registrar at its Dubai campus in 2003. For close to two years, she lived in the United Arab Emirates, working as the registrar for two semesters and teaching mathematics and statistics for a further semester.

Cecilia returned to PNG in August 2005 to take up what would become a decade-long position as associate professor of higher education management and deputy president of Divine Word University (DWU), first at the main campus in Madang and then to DWU's Port Moresby campus, which she established in 2006. She achieved many things as deputy president, including introducing a Master of Business Administration program in partnership with Macquarie University. As chair of both the DWU Amalgamation and Affiliation Monitoring Committee and member of the National Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee, she successfully amalgamated Wewak Campus (Kaindi, East Sepik Province), Kabaleo Campus and Vunapope Campus (East New Britain Province), and established the Tabubil Campus (Western Province) under the Port Moresby campus (Nembou 2013).

After 10 years as deputy president, Cecilia had only one place to go if she was going to stay at DWU. Fortunately, there was no barrier to a woman becoming vice-chancellor, nor a layperson for that matter. Her promotion to president in 2016, just the second in DWU's history, was welcomed by the staff of the university, her family and all who knew her. Unlike the inaugural president, Father Jan Czuba, she operated directly from the Port Moresby campus. As a national university with

campuses throughout the country, it was logical that the university's president should be based in the nation's capital. Indeed, this had always been Father Czuba's vision. Being in Port Moresby allowed Cecilia to establish and maintain contacts with the university's multiple stakeholders, relying on her vice-presidents at the main campus in Madang and directors of the amalgamated and affiliated campuses to support her in carrying out the day-to-day running of the university.

In her five years as president, Cecilia managed to implement a number of Father Czuba's initiatives, including the University 10 Student Management Software System, the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery program, and equipping the Centre for Learning and Teaching to undertake an online- and blended-learning initiative. She wrote the first complete governance manual for DWU, also started by her predecessor, and created the Office of Mission and Identity to be led by a Society of the Divine Word priest, which has had a significant impact on the Catholic focus of the university.

Cecilia's long academic career and successful tenure as president of DWU led to her appointment as an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in October 2021, the citation recognising her services to higher education and influence as a role model for other women. Her entire career demonstrates her strength and perseverance in what is still a male-dominated society, for which she is greatly admired. In March 2024 she was appointed UPNG's acting vice-chancellor – a further testament to the high regard in which she is held in the university sector.

It seems appropriate to conclude this short biographical essay with some words of wisdom from Cecilia herself. When asked about the challenges she faced in her lifetime, she referred to two miracles:

'Beating all odds and creating my own life from being an unwanted child is my life's miracle story. Then bringing a child up as a single mother is my second miracle story.'

When asked what advice she would give to young Papua New Guineans, she replied:

'Have a dream and work hard to achieve your dream. Have faith, hope and love. Turn the lows in your life into highs with sheer determination.'

Her words remind us that anything is possible, no matter what the odds. Cecilia Sapue Nembou has shown the way forward for women and other Papuan New Guineans, overcoming many obstacles in the process.

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1 Amanda works for a large payroll software company and is married to Douglas Miles. The pair reside in Brisbane, Australia, with two children Yasmin Samalol Miles and Darren Savou Miles. Amanda and her children are all Australian citizens.

2 While Cecilia went to the UK, the other Commonwealth scholarship winner from UPNG, Goru Hane from Gaire, Central Province, went to the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. See *Post-Courier* 5/10/1977.

3 The PhD scholarship was provided by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau, which became AusAID in 1995. In 1983, Cecilia also had the opportunity to spend six weeks at Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts.

Ipul Powaseu (1962–)

Pioneering disability advocate and change maker

By Mercy Masta

My name is Mercy Masta. I am a research fellow at The Australian National University, originally from Manus and West Papua. My scholarly interests are in gender, masculinity, peacebuilding and development practices. I chose to write about Ipul Powaseu because her leadership and advocacy work on disability rights in PNG and the region have motivated me in the roles I play in this space.

Ipul Powaseu is a renowned disability advocate from Manus Province in PNG, whose lifelong dedication to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities has made her a key figure in both national and international advocacy circles. Born and raised in PNG, Ipul's story is one of resilience, empowerment and tireless work to address the significant challenges faced by people with disabilities in her home country.

Ipul's journey began in a small village called Timoenai in Manus Province where she was the second of three children born to parents Herman Powaseu Molean and Antonia Niandrauan Potuan. Growing up in a close-knit community, she was surrounded by strong family values and a sense of collective responsibility. Her parents were her first role models, instilling in her the importance of education, hard work and compassion for others.

After contracting polio as an infant, Ipul faced societal and physical barriers early on. Her parents were fearful about how people outside their community might treat her because of her disability. However, they never stopped her from pursuing her education. Ipul's primary school teachers recognised her potential and supported her and her family to allow her to pursue higher education outside of Manus. Her higher educational journey took her first to the University of Papua New Guinea, where she graduated with a bachelor of science in 1985, and later to Queensland University of Technology, where she completed a master's in business (communications management) in 1992–94 on an AusAID scholarship.



Ipul Powaseu, 2018. Courtesy of the Australian High Commission Papua New Guinea.

Returning to PNG, Ipul was the only female researcher at the Coffee Research Institute. Later, with postgraduate qualifications in hand, she contributed to various research programs at the National Agricultural Research Institute and the National Research Institute, and spent 12 months in Fiji with the Pacific Community.¹ Winning an Australian Postgraduate Awards scholarship was a further pivotal moment in her academic and advocacy journey. It allowed her to pursue a doctorate on PNG disability inclusion policy at Deakin University in Melbourne. Although her studies are currently on hold, her passion for this field remains and she is committed to returning to Deakin to complete her doctorate and see meaningful change in disability inclusion policy.

Ipul's advocacy work gained momentum in 2006 when she began to focus on the rights and empowerment of persons with disabilities. She was encouraged by Minister for Community Development Carol Kidu to seek out leadership positions and, with Kidu's support, was instrumental in the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Assembly of Disabled Persons (PNGADP) in 2009, now known as PNG's peak disability inclusion body. Ipul served as head of PNGADP for nine years. Under her guidance, the organisation grew into a robust body that advocated for the rights of persons with disabilities at both national and international levels. While continuing her successful career in agricultural and information systems research, Ipul held several disability leadership and advocacy roles. These experiences ultimately led her to leave her formal scientific work and dedicate herself to disability advocacy full time. It was one of the toughest decisions she ever made.

Ipul vividly recalls the cries of three women and two young girls that motivated her to embark on her journey of disability advocacy. These women and girls shared with her their experiences with PNG's inadequate services for women with disabilities. One of the women, a mother, shared her struggles with the inaccessible transport system that hindered her ability to find food for her children. Another woman spoke about the discrimination she faced in health services, where mothers with disabilities would often hear comments such as:

'Let us treat the normal people first, then we can come to you.'

The third woman described the challenges she faced in the marketplace: if she arrived late, there would be no stall for her, yet being in a wheelchair made it difficult

to reach down to the floor to display her garden produce. The two young girls spoke about the security issues they faced that had led to their impairments. The lack of basic water and sanitation facilities at their college had forced them to bathe in nearby streams. One of them was pursued by a *raskol*, resulting in a brutal attack that left her with a severed leg. Such stories fuelled Ipul's determination to advocate for better services and security for women and girls with disabilities.

One of Ipul's most significant achievements was her role in advocating for the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the PNG government in 2013. PNG was the 136th country to ratify the UNCRPD, marking a significant step forward in the recognition and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. Ipul also played a key role in the development of a standalone disability bill, which was drafted and presented to the National Executive Council by the Department for Community Development.

Ipul's work has extended beyond PNG's national borders, as she has actively participated in regional and global discussions on disability issues. She has held positions on various global committees and groups, including co-chair of the Pacific Disability Forum (2012–13). Her advocacy interests include the intersectionality between gender and disability, the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities and the empowerment of women with disabilities. As dean of women at Pacific Adventist University in 2014, Ipul travelled to Auckland to provide advice to a UN seminar on 'Restorative Justice, Indigenous Juridical Systems and Access to Justice for Indigenous Women, Children and Youth and Persons with Disabilities'.

In addition to her advocacy work, Ipul has been a strong proponent of community development. She has led programs that provide literacy training, business skills, and income-generating opportunities aimed at reducing poverty and building resilience among persons with disabilities. Her efforts in establishing agricultural programs and food gardens have contributed to local food security and empowered individuals to sustain themselves and their families. Her holistic approach to community development reflects her belief in the importance of nourishing the community — a value instilled in her from an early age.

Ipul's leadership and advocacy efforts have not gone unnoticed internationally. Her passion and dedication to improving the lives of people with disabilities led to her being awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2020, such recognition

solidifying her reputation as a leading disability advocate in the Pacific region.² A significant moment in her career, the award acknowledged her lifelong commitment to fighting for the rights of disabled people.³ Her OBE can also be seen as a symbolic moment for PNG, where disability rights have historically been under-represented. The award signalled global appreciation of her work, especially her work in highlighting the needs of people with disabilities in remote and underserved regions of PNG.

Ipul has been involved in numerous grassroots campaigns aimed at raising awareness and promoting inclusive policies. She has worked closely with government bodies, NGOs and other community organisations to develop programs that address the systemic challenges faced by people with disabilities. Whether through advocating for better accessibility in urban areas or supporting disabled students in accessing education, Ipul's contributions to the broader disability rights movement in PNG have been immense. She currently advises on disability inclusion.

Ipul's efforts have been especially focused on improving education and employment opportunities for disabled people. One of her key initiatives has been advocating for the inclusion of disability studies in PNG's educational curriculum, ensuring that young people, teachers and policymakers are informed about the rights and capabilities of disabled individuals. She emphasises the importance of accessible infrastructure, such as buildings and transportation, which is essential for creating inclusive communities.

Ipul's advocacy has also had a significant impact on disability-related policy in PNG, paving the way for more inclusive policies, including passage of the Disability Rights Policy, which aims to protect the rights of disabled individuals and promote equal opportunities. Her tireless lobbying for better healthcare services, including rehabilitation facilities for disabled individuals, has contributed to increased awareness among government officials about the need to prioritise disability issues. Vocal about gaps in government's approach to disability, Ipul has urged officials to do more to create a society where people with disabilities can thrive. One of the major challenges that she and her peers have faced is the lack of disability data. She has consistently pushed for better data collection to inform policies and improve resource allocation for disability-related services.

What sets Ipul apart in the disability advocacy field is her personal commitment and the authenticity with which she carries out her work. She is not just a spokesperson for others; she has lived experience as a disabled person. This, together with her understanding of the challenges faced by disabled individuals, has shaped her approach to advocacy, making her a powerful voice for a community that has long been silent and ignored.

Ipul's work is deeply rooted in her personal belief that every person deserves respect, dignity and an equal chance to succeed. This belief drives her to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding disability. Her persistence and determination have made her a role model within PNG and beyond for those who are passionate about creating a more inclusive world for people with disabilities.

As a disability advocate, Ipul's impact will endure. She has helped to lay the foundation for future generations of disability activists in PNG. Through her mentorship and leadership, she has inspired many young people with disabilities to become involved in advocacy and social change. She finds inspiration in witnessing young and emerging leaders stepping up and moving forward courageously, and believes the future is bright for them. At this stage of her career, she is happy to step back and provide advice when asked, but she is always by their side, whispering and charting the way forward when they face crossroads in decision-making.

Looking forward, Ipul's vision for the future of disability advocacy in PNG includes increased representation of disabled people, especially women, in leadership positions, greater societal acceptance and the development of infrastructure that supports disabled individuals. She remains committed to ensuring that people with disabilities are not only recognised but also empowered to take control of their own lives and futures.

Further reading

Ritchie, J. 4/9/2014. [Interview with Ipul Powaseu](#). Deakin University.

1 Known as the South Pacific Commission until 1997.

2 Ipul received her OBE at the same time as Cecilia Nembou (this volume).

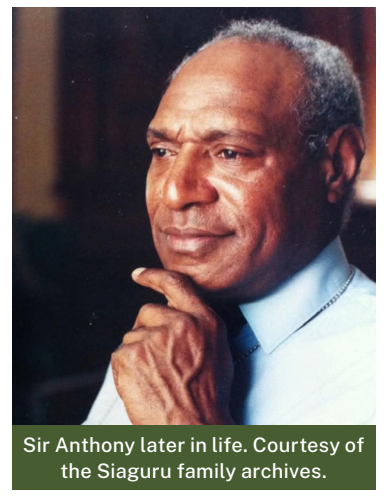
3 The citation reads: 'For services to the Community, especially to the Disabled.'

Sir Anthony Michael Siaguru (1946–2004)

Civil servant, lawyer, diplomat, politician
and anti-corruption advocate

By Yuambari Haihuie

I am currently a Somare–Whitlam Australia Awards Scholar from PNG, studying for a master’s in public policy at The Australian National University. Prior to this, I had worked for a decade with Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) as an anti-corruption advocate. I chose to write about Sir Anthony Siaguru as I have been inspired by his personal integrity and legacy as a statesman contributing to national development across multiple domains. I encourage those who would like to learn more to read his collected newspaper columns. The incisiveness and wit of Sir Anthony’s writing is unmatched. I am grateful to TIPNG and the Siaguru family for archival material used in producing this entry.



Sir Anthony Michael Siaguru, civil servant, lawyer, international diplomat, politician, sportsperson and influential anti-corruption campaigner, was a defining figure in PNG’s post-independence history. Born on 4 November 1946 in a coastal Arapesh village in East Sepik Province, his parents were Petrus Siaguru and Maria Krake.

Siaguru’s early education spanned both PNG and Australia. He attended Marist College Ashgrove, Brisbane, and was a member of the first law class to graduate from the University of Papua New Guinea in 1971. He was admitted to the bar in 1972. He later attended Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, first in 1979 for a short educational exchange and then in 1980 as a Fulbright Scholar and Edward S. Mason Fellow (*Post-Courier* 6/8/1979, 16/1/1980). A keen athlete, he played university rugby, eventually captaining and coaching PNG’s national rugby union team. He married Wilhelmina (Mina) Lady Siaguru, an educationalist and sportsperson, in 1972, and they had three sons.¹

Siaguru was among the first Papua New Guineans to join the nation’s Foreign Service as a cadet diplomat. His early diplomatic training took him to Canberra and then Geneva, where he worked with the Australian Mission to the United Nations,

before returning to PNG in 1973. Appointed PNG's first secretary for foreign affairs and trade in preparation for independence in May 1975, he guided key negotiations that led to SPARTECA (the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement), to PNG's associate membership of the European Union's Lomé Convention,² and to foundational treaties over postcolonial borders with Australia and Indonesia. He was a key member of the influential 'Gang of Four' — four young technocrats who coordinated policy in the early post-independence government.³

In 1982, Siaguru entered politics, serving as the member for Moresby North-East Open in the National Capital District and holding ministerial portfolios during Sir Michael Somare's second term, including public services (1982–84), in which he undertook significant reforms.⁴ Although recognised as 'the key strategist' of the Pangu Pati, he resigned as minister for public services in December 1984 after what the media described as a bout of 'bitter brawling' with Deputy Prime Minister Paias Wingti (*Canberra Times* 22/12/1984). He resigned from the party in mid-1986 to create a new political party that departed from what he called the 'Somare-style' of leadership: that is, leadership characterised by 'charisma, consensus, compromise and patronage' (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 7/1986).⁵ However, after this new party, the League for National Advancement, failed to secure seats in the 1987 election, he transitioned to private law practice, specialising in commercial law with Blake Dawson Waldron. Nonetheless, his commitment to public life continued. Appointed KBE in 1990 for his public service, Sir Anthony was chair of the South Pacific Games Foundation in 1991.

From 1990 to 1995, Siaguru served as deputy secretary-general for political affairs at the Commonwealth Secretariat, based in London. In this role, he championed the Commonwealth's fundamental political values: democracy, human rights, the rule of law and just government. He oversaw programs strengthening democratic institutions across the Commonwealth, and provided critical assistance and election observation to numerous member countries transitioning to multi-party democracy, including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia. Notably, he contributed to South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, supporting the 1994 elections.

Returning to PNG and Blake Dawson Waldron in 1995–96, Siaguru became increasingly concerned with issues of ethics and governance. In a notable 1996 speech, 'Ethics in Business — Let's Make It Our Business', he identified a core problem:

'There is very little or no openness. There is no transparency and therefore no accountability on the part of leaders'

(Siaguru 1996:53)

He argued strongly that the private sector needed to take the lead:

'If we are ever going to be able to convince our public sector counterparts to lift their act, then the private sector must lead by example.'

And he called on business leaders to:

'devise and voluntarily agree to abide by a code of ethical behaviour'

(Siaguru 1996:54).

In the same speech, he proposed inviting Transparency International to form a national chapter in PNG, and was instrumental in making this happen, becoming the founding chair of TIPNG in January 1997. Launched just months before that year's national election, one of TIPNG's first major initiatives was the National Integrity Pledge that urged candidates to commit to transparency and accountability. With Siaguru as chair (1997–2003), TIPNG advocated strongly against corruption: it pushed for the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption; developed anti-corruption educational materials; and represented PNG's anti-corruption efforts internationally, such as at the Anti-Corruption Conference in Seoul in 2003.

Siaguru's leadership extended to the corporate sector. Alongside his work with TIPNG, he continued his private consultancy and served on numerous high-profile boards, including Lihir Gold, Pacific Reinsurance, Pacific Rim Plantations, PNG Water, South Pacific Post, Steamships Trading Company, the Port Moresby Stock Exchange (as founding chair from 1998) and APEC's Business Advisory Council. He used his influential weekly column, 'In House', printed in the *Post-Courier* newspaper, to condemn corruption, analyse political issues, and propose constitutional and electoral reforms. *In-House in Papua New Guinea with Anthony Siaguru*, a collection of his writing, was published in 2001. His work continues to guide anti-corruption advocates in PNG today.

Siaguru passed away on 16 April 2004 in Brisbane, Australia, at the age of 57, after battling liver cancer. He was survived by his wife, Lady Mina Siaguru, and their

three sons. His legacy as a foundational leader, diplomat and, significantly, tireless champion for integrity and good governance in PNG endures. He is commemorated through the *Post-Courier's* 2004 Sir Anthony Siaguru Investigative Journalism Scholarship, the TIPNG Siaguru Endowment Fund and the annual Sir Anthony Siaguru Walk Against Corruption. He remained committed to anti-corruption to the end, writing to friends shortly before his death that PNG needed people with the courage 'to stand up for what they believe to be right when confronted with a sea of silence and quiet consent' (Feizkhah 2004) — courage that his own life vividly embodied.

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1 Mina Siaguru was appointed director of the Office of Higher Education in 1981 after returning from her own course of study at Harvard University (*Post-Courier* 23/3/1981).

2 See Alan Donigi's entry on Peter Donigi, this volume.

3 The other three so-called 'members' were Charles Lepani, Rabbie Namaliu and Mekere Morauta (Lepi 28/12/2018).

4 Siaguru was also minister for youth and development (1985).

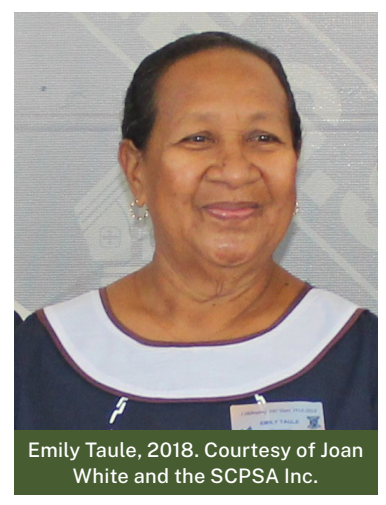
5 Wingti served as prime minister from 21 November 1985 to 4 July 1988.

Emily George Taule (1955–2023)

‘If we love PNG, then we can make it a better country for our children and the future’ (Taule 10/12/2012)

By Yuambari Haihuie

I am currently a Somare–Whitlam Australia Awards Scholar from PNG, studying for a master’s in public policy at The Australian National University. I have worked with Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) for a decade as an anti-corruption advocate. I worked under Emily George Taule in her final professional role as chief executive officer of TIPNG. I wanted to write this entry to recognise her contribution to public service, to industry, to civil society and to sport. Those of us who knew and worked with her miss her warmth, candour and community spirit. I am grateful to her son, Troy Taule, for providing the archival material used in producing this entry.



Emily Taule, 2018. Courtesy of Joan White and the SCPSA Inc.

Emily George Taule was born on 13 April 1955 aboard a traditional double-hulled canoe in Koki harbour, Port Moresby. The youngest child of William and Nancy Kilakupa George, her early years were spread across Port Moresby, Buka and Wewak, where she developed a natural curiosity and adventurous spirit alongside her siblings.

In 1962, Emily began her education at Wewak International Primary School. By 1968, she was enrolled at Goroka High School, but quickly earned a scholarship to attend St Catharine’s, an Anglican school operated by the Sisters of the Sacred Advent in Warwick, southeast Queensland.¹ During her high school years abroad, she was known for her creativity and expression through poetry and writing. She also captained St Catharine’s A-grade netball team through their undefeated 1968 season (White 2023:18). Upon returning to PNG, she completed her Higher School Certificate at Sogeri National High School in 1974.

Emily graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea in 1977 with a bachelor of arts, majoring in anthropology and sociology. That same year, she began a long and impactful public service career with the National Investment Development

Authority, now the Investment Promotion Authority, working there for over 22 years, including as acting managing director in the mid-1990s.

Parallel to her civil service, Emily's athletic career went from strength to strength. She first represented PNG's national netball side, the Pepes (Keapara for 'butterfly'), as a teenager in the 1970s. She played competitive netball until the early 1980s before making the transition into coaching and administration in 1981.² In 1985, she became the inaugural president of the PNG Netball Federation and established the City Pharmacy Rebels Netball Club, which nurtured generations of female athletes and became a hallmark of women's sport in PNG. She married Jacob Taule Sr that year, and together they built a vibrant family and home, which, reflecting Emily's enduring capacity to give and guide, they expanded through adoption. Among her many contributions to sport, she chaired the Sports Awards Committee for over 12 years. In 1994, her loyal service to sport and community was recognised with the award of the British Empire Medal (BEM). From 2003 to 2006, she served as deputy commissioner of the PNG Sports Commission, her leadership influencing sports policy at a national level.

There was broad demand for Emily's expertise and leadership skills across multiple sectors. Her career expanded into finance in 1999 when she joined the Port Moresby Stock Exchange as listings manager. Promoted to general manager in 2000, she helped to shape corporate governance at a time of institutional growth. That year, she was one of several members of the National Council of Women to receive a Silver Jubilee Commemorative Medal from Acting Governor-General Bernard Narokobi. In 2003, she was appointed executive director of the Mama Graun Conservation Trust Fund, working to support biodiversity and sustainable development. She also served on the Board of Governors for Port Moresby International School, supporting educational development and youth leadership.

In 2006, Emily began what would become her most publicly recognised role: executive director of TIPNG. Over the next 13 years, she led the organisation through major anti-corruption campaigns, strengthened civic engagement programs and became one of PNG's foremost voices for integrity and accountability. Under her leadership, TIPNG commenced a series of flagship activities, including the Sir Anthony Siaguru Walk against Corruption, an annual fundraising drive that began in 2007; the Mike Manning Youth Democracy Camp, which also began in 2007, bringing together 50 young people from across the country to learn about democracy and the

rule of law; the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre, which, since 2010, has provided free confidential legal advice to victims and witnesses of corruption; and, in 2013, the Open Parliament Project, which seeks to make the work of parliament more accessible through online resources and evaluate the performance of legislators. As Emily said at the time:

'Parliament belongs to the people ... therefore parliament information belongs to the people'

(Nanol 6/12/2012).

From 2010 to 2015, Emily used her role as head of TIPNG to pressure the PNG government to ratify the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2010), join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (2013) and become a member of the Open Government Partnership (2015). Each of these international undertakings continues to underpin good governance reform in PNG.

Even after her formal retirement in 2019, Emily remained a mentor and advocate for youth, women and transparent leadership. She was Netball PNG's longest serving member and a fixture at the Rita Flynn Netball Courts. Her influence spanned public service, sports, community leadership and advocacy — each chapter a reflection of her belief in building a better PNG.

Following a diagnosis of diabetes (type 1) in 2018, and ongoing kidney dialysis treatment, Emily passed away on 26 September 2023, leaving behind a legacy of deep national impact. Her funeral was held on 7 October 2023 at Port Moresby's Rev. Sione Kami Memorial Church. She is survived by her husband Jacob Taule Sr, their six children, 12 grandchildren and one great-grandchild, each carrying forward her passion for purpose, resilience and community.

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1 Emily returned to Warwick in 2018 for the school's centennial celebrations.

2 Emily coached the PNG national netball side to a silver medal at the 1991 South Pacific Games in Port Moresby.

Dame Meg Taylor (1950–)

Daughter of the Highlands and citizen of the Blue Pacific

By Jonathan Siba

My name is Jonathan Siba. I am from Morobe and Madang, and I am an undergraduate student at the Divine Word University. My interests lie with policy analysis, particularly service delivery and public policy. I was inspired to write about Dame Meg Taylor for two main reasons. First, because she is a trailblazer: becoming the first woman lawyer in the nation is an incredible feat that stands as a significant achievement in our country's history. Second, and most significantly, because she has consistently used her professional standing and position to champion social justice and to insist that Pacific peoples shape their own future. Writing about her life has allowed me to explore law, politics and culture through a Pacific lens and honour someone whose courage and service continue to shape my own thinking and ambitions.



Dame Meg Taylor and daughter, Christmas 1987. Photographer Unknown. Courtesy of Bill and Jan Gammage (Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Photo 46-195).

Meg Taylor was born to parents Yerima Manamp Masi and James (Jim) Lindsay Taylor in the magnificent Wahgi Valley in what was then known as the Western Highlands (today's Jiwaka Province). Her mother was the daughter of Masi Pinsinga of the Baiman Tsenglap tribe from Nangamp, and her father was a patrol officer from Sydney, New South Wales. Jim Taylor was famous for having been one of the first Europeans to explore the inner highlands following his arrival in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea in 1926. Pragmatic and self-reliant, he possessed an unconventional mindset for his time and was known among his colleagues for his humane and sympathetic approach to dealing with the communities he encountered (Gammage 1998). His admiration and respect for the raw beauty of the country and its people is something that he instilled in his daughter, who grew up being able to run and play at will.

One of five children raised by Jim and Yerima, Taylor spent her childhood between family homes in Manginagato, near Goroka in the Asaro Valley, and in the Wahgi

Valley. Growing up in a rural setting surrounded by her mother's family, she became immersed in the traditional way of life, which played a significant role in forming her identity as a proud Melanesian woman. Her successful plantation-manager mother was a clear inspiration. Taylor once quipped that her mother was her 'chief protocol officer' — always ready to give her advice on how to navigate the complex maze of highlands cultures. Taylor has profound respect for the way her mother 'broke racial barriers' and 'withstood a lot of the difficulties of being snubbed by white people' in Goroka (cited in Eggins 2004:17).

Taylor's first encounter with formal education occurred in around 1957, when she was educated by Catholic nuns in Goroka. She was sent to Australia, aged 11, to attend boarding school, first in Adelaide, then Sydney. She described these years as challenging, particularly at first, as her strong will and free spirit was constrained in such an environment. Fortunately, she found an outlet in sport, which she excelled at. Playing sport helped her to develop a level of self-confidence that she channelled into her schoolwork.

After completing secondary school at Sydney's St Scholastica's College in 1969, Taylor elected to move back home, where she received a Territory scholarship to become the first woman to study law at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). Her original plan was to study agricultural economics. The change to law was influenced by a friend of her father's, Hal Wootten, a legal academic, lawyer and judge, who was the founding president of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Australia. At UPNG, Taylor became a student member of the Pangu Pati; she met its leader, (Sir) Michael Somare, after being selected to serve on the board of the Papua New Guinea Museum and Art Gallery, which he chaired.

UPNG at that time was a 'mecca' for people interested in decolonisation. Taylor encountered academics from all over the world and young Papua New Guinean activists. Notwithstanding her growing interest in the political life of PNG, she was mainly known for her athletic achievements at this time, representing Port Moresby at the Territory championships, and PNG at the 1971 South Pacific Games held in Ma'ohi Nui (French Polynesia). At the latter event, she won a silver medal in the pentathlon and bronze as part of the women's 4 x 100 metre relay.

In 1972, two years into her law degree, Taylor received a Commonwealth scholarship to finish her studies at the University of Melbourne (Hilli 2022). Towards

the end of 1973 she successfully applied for a position in Somare's chief ministerial office alongside fellow graduates Rabbie Namaliu and Austin Thomas Sapias (*Post-Courier* 20/9/1973). After finishing her degree, she returned to PNG as Somare's private secretary (1974–76), accompanying him on district tours across the country in the lead-up to independence. This was an extraordinary and exciting time to be involved in politics, and Taylor recalls being inspired by Somare's passion, commitment and belief in the future. From him, she learned 'how you build something, how you consult, how you listen to others' — a formative experience.¹

Taylor left Somare's employ in 1976 to work as a political officer and consultant assisting in the formation of the provincial government of Western Highland Province (*Post-Courier* 14/12/1976) but resigned almost immediately due to challenges by young (male) opponents. She asked the Hagen public solicitor's office whether they needed a lawyer (they did), and so began court work all over the Western Highlands, Enga and Southern Highlands. In August 1977, she was admitted to the Bar at a sitting of the national court in Goroka, putting herself in the history books once again as the country's first woman lawyer (*Post-Courier* 15/8/1977).

The 1980s heralded a new chapter in Taylor's life after the birth of her daughter to district officer and archer Keith Winchcombe whom she had earlier married in the Wahgi Valley. She moved first to the Rai Coast, Madang, and then to Port Moresby where she spent several years working for the private law firm Gadens. In 1985, she gained a Fulbright Scholarship to study a master of laws at Harvard Law School, United States (US).² Returning to PNG at the completion of her studies, she undertook a two-month trek with her sister Daisy from Western Highlands to East Sepik in 1988, following their father's footsteps from 50 years prior. Using her father's journal entries and field reports, she and a small film crew documented the journey, released under the title *My Father, My Country* (1989). The following year she became PNG's ambassador to the US. Among her many achievements as ambassador, she helped to facilitate Prime Minister Namaliu's visit to the White House in 1990 — the first Papua New Guinean prime minister to do so. She served as ambassador for five years.

Returning to Port Moresby in the mid-1990s, Taylor received a message from the Center for International Environmental Law in Washington, DC, suggesting that she help the World Bank establish an office to provide a voice for people impacted by World Bank private sector projects. She was initially reluctant to leave PNG again,

but she accepted a three-year contract with the Office of the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman as founding vice president. This would turn into 15 years of service. She revelled in her position, leading a team of mediators and auditors, between large multinationals and local communities in developing countries, handling over 150 cases between 1999 and 2014, which involved environmental and social impact.

In 2014, Taylor was identified by former PNG Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta as the leading candidate for secretary-general of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat in Suva, Fiji. Her subsequent appointment made her the first woman to hold that position in the organisation's history, but there was more at stake than her gender. As Greg Fry (3/5/2021) observed:

'she took up the role at a particularly challenging time for the organization, and for the region. The Forum's political legitimacy was in question.'

Fiji was leading a spirited push for rival regional organisations that did not include Australia and New Zealand, and Sir Mekere had just released a critical review of PIF's development record that called for more inclusivity for Pacific people and more political ownership by its leaders.

Taylor, alongside PIF chairs, Prime Ministers Peter O'Neill and Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, took both challenges seriously and strove to promote regional priorities and regional self-determination. Together with deputy Cristelle Pratt, she played a crucial role in formulating and introducing the 'Blue Pacific' narrative in 2017 and, in 2018, encouraging the forum to recognise climate change as the biggest threat to the region with the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. In 2020, she set the foundations for the development of the '2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent', an initiative that set goals for sustainable development, climate change action and geopolitical engagement.

Taylor served two terms as head of PIF, moving back to PNG in 2021. Her years as head of PIF gave her insight into the various positions taken by Pacific islands governments and the extent to which the Pacific is 'hamstrung' because of the compromising relationships some member states have with non-Pacific Island actors, and she continues to use this insight to advocate for change. As she explained:

*'I write a lot on that [subject], and I do say a lot on that, and some people don't like what I say, but that's okay, because what the Pacific people have to understand is that we have to talk about these things and we must not be afraid. We have to determine our future, and not have our future determined by others.'*³

Her current role as a legal advisor to Blue Ocean Law and the case on climate change and state responsibility before the International Court of Justice allows her to pursue her passion for social justice. She also continues to play a pivotal role in shaping PNG. In 2024, she, along with other accomplished individuals, was placed in charge of drafting the nation's first foreign policy white paper since 1981.

Once described as a 'softly-spoken woman with some strongly-voiced ideas' (*Post-Courier* 16/10/1973), Taylor has blossomed into a powerful voice and authoritative figure in PNG and the region. She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 2002 in recognition of her citizen's contribution in engaging with the PNG Defence Force during the Sandline Affair in 1997. Having long traversed the plains of nation-building, she continues to influence PNG and global politics, impacting the lives of millions. A daughter of the highlands who loves the coast, the natural wonders of her country and its people, she is the embodiment of a true Melanesian. Her strong-willed determination and self-belief have been fundamental pillars in establishing her as a 'big woman' in a culture of 'big men', ensuring that she never shies away from sharing her perspective on issues of importance to the country and the region.

Reflecting on her life, she stated:

*'I think everything has a time and a place and I think I've been blessed with a tremendous amount of energy to be able to give the most to everything that I've been asked to do and make the most important contributions I can make at the time.'*⁴

Despite leading a colourful life filled with notable achievements and accolades, she insists that her greatest accomplishment is her family. In common with many other mothers, she takes great pride in her daughter; she cherishes the meaningful role she has been privileged to play in the lives of her daughter, grandchildren, and

other family members. Beyond her family, she has worked continuously and tirelessly for self-determination and identity in the region, advocating for sovereignty for all Pacific Island nations and Indigenous peoples.

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1 Meg Taylor 29/7/2024. Interview by author.

2 Her thesis investigated the legal structure of community benefits created by the PNG mining industry.

3 Meg Taylor 29/7/2024. Interview by author. See also Taylor and Middleby (2023).

4 Meg Taylor 29/7/2024. Interview by author.

‘Sir’ George Telek (1959–) Musician and cancer survivor

By David Bridie

My name is David Bridie. I am a Melbourne-born musician and artistic director of Wantok Musik Foundation, a not-for-profit music label that records, releases and promotes music from Indigenous Australia, Melanesia and Oceania. I founded the ARIA-award winning band Not Drowning, Waving in 1983 and have also performed with My Friend the Chocolate Cake and as a solo artist. I have produced records for artists such as Archie Roach, Paul Kelly and Christine Anu. In 2025, I received an honorary doctorate from Deakin University for my contributions to music, especially Papua New Guinean music. My decades-long collaboration with George Telek has been fundamental to this work and I am privileged to call him a friend. Thanks to Sir George, I have shared a stage with many amazing Papua New Guinean artists and learnt so much from all of them. My musical acquaintances in Australia will all agree that sharing a stage with George is priceless and that their hearts smile whenever they do.



‘Sir’ George Telek. Courtesy of
Wantok Music.

George Mamua Telek is a grassroots man, yet there is nothing ordinary about his contribution to his people and country. His music showcases the depth and beauty of village life, as well as making observations about the nation. In taking Papua New Guinean sounds and stories to the world, he has been a rock star, a serious artist and a much-loved ambassador — all undertaken in his uniquely Papua New Guinean and idiosyncratic way.

George sings cultural songs and he sings rock’n’roll. He plays string band music. He performs vibrant shows alive with incredible visuals, depicting life in Raluana and the Tolai Gunantuna people’s Tubuan belief of deep connection to their ancestral spirits.

He paints a *narapela kain piksa long PNG* — a different picture of PNG — to tropes of crime, corruption and dysfunction. His songs explore serious issues, from the

importance of respecting ancestral ways, to West Papua, to logging, to gender-based violence. And everyday things, like family, gardening and village romance.

He has earned global acclaim and the admiration of world musicians including Youssou N'Dour, Salif Keita, Archie Roach, Peter Garrett and Peter Gabriel, all of whom have sought out George to play and record with. From the humblest beginnings, he has forged a pathway for other PNG artists to follow.

George was born in 1959 in the village of Raluana, near Rabaul, on the island of New Britain. He still lives there with his wife Bridget and their six children, in the shadow of the volcanoes that destroyed their community in 1994.

George was the youngest of seven with siblings many years his senior. His mother, Ruruk, died when he was just 9 or 10, and his father, Mamua, passed a few years later. George was cared for by his sister Rubie and other family, who feted him like the rock star he would become. He attended Raluana Primary School but did not immediately continue to high school because Mamua could not afford the fees. When his father made enough money from fishing, he was able to complete Forms 1 and 2 in Rabaul.

Helping Mamua plant cocoa in his early teens gave George a window onto what his life might have been. A recruiter from Bougainville Copper Ltd visited, and George went off to work as a heavy equipment fitter. 'I try it for a week', he says. 'I wasn't fit to do that. I went back home to my father.'

The village was his classroom. George's childhood was filled with dancing and music, played on guitars, ukuleles, bamboo flutes and percussive instruments, including the *kundu*, *garamut* and *tinduk*. He was drawn to their symbolism as well as their sound. 'Our people in the olden days used those instruments', he explains.

George grew up with traditional songs about daily life, songs the people would sing as they picked bananas, collected coconuts or cast out nets and lines for fish. In a portent of the breadth of music he would create, his early musical influences included The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Slim Dusty, The Black Brothers, and PNG artists like The Kopy Kats, April Sun Band and Sanguma.

Local legend has it that, as a child, George chewed the sacred *buai* or betel nut, which opened his dreams to his ancestors and inspired his songs. In Tubuan society,

the *buai* has a magic realm and can impart artistic gifts — like becoming a famous musician.

George began singing in the late 1970s with large acoustic bands, often with up to 15 members playing guitars, ukuleles and percussion. His days were spent tending the family cocoa plot, his nights with the Moab and Jolly Roger string bands. A passion for rock led to his first drum kit when he joined the Kagan Devils. His first guitar soon followed, a gift from relatives working in Bougainville. He started writing his own songs after joining the Unbelievers Revival Band. One of his earliest, ‘Talaigu’, remains a highlight of any Telek live set.

There was not much of a recording industry in PNG before 1977. That year, George turned 18 and the National Broadcasting Corporation began producing cassette tapes of local talent. By 1983 a small number of independent labels had sprung up, and George was making a name for himself with the rock band Painim Wok (which means ‘looking for work’). Painim Wok sang in the Kuanua language of Rabaul, yet they were big all over the country.

George came into my life on my very first trip out of Australia in 1986. I had heard about the legendary Rabaul music scene, with its two recording studios — Pacific Gold and Chin H. Meen; range of live venues; and distinctive Tolai rock, string band and Lotu choir sounds — not to mention the iconic Tubuan dances, Tapialai songs and volcanoes. Rabaul was not called the jewel of the Pacific for nothing. I was blown away.

I was staying near Vimy Plantation and caught crowded PMVs (public motor vehicles) to Rabaul every day. Each time, I heard the same string band song and fell in love, especially with the lilt and catch of the vocal and the belting bass line. The song was ‘Abebe’ by the Moab Stringband — a song about a butterfly spirit, a dream song, a *malira*.

I found the cassette (*kaset*) in the Pacific Gold Studio shop, was told Telek was the singer, and that he also fronted a successful rock band called Painim Wok that featured one of Rabaul’s top guitarists, John Warbat. I was invited to a picnic the next evening at Pila Pila beach and told that George and John would be attending.

That was the first evening George and I spent together, looking towards Watom Island, eating *kakaruk* and sharing a six pack of SP (South Pacific lager).

We spent hours comparing notes about recording and working in bands. What we had in common was far greater than our differences, and those differences had to be celebrated. Forty years later, we have never stopped finding common ground, collaborating and providing opportunities for each other. Our friendship has lasted for life.

Painim Wok had released about 15 *kaset*s by the time we met. George had enjoyed considerable success locally and within the broader Pacific music community, where he was well known and admired. I remember walking with him through the old market in Rabaul, past colourful stalls selling vegetables, and hearing a chorus of whispers: ‘Telek! Telek! Telek!’

Our first collaboration — with my band Not Drowning, Waving — brought George the beginning of the global acclaim he deserved. Featuring Australian, Rabaul and Manus musicians, the resulting album, *Tabaran*, came out in 1990. David Byrne, the lead singer of Talking Heads, declared it his favourite album of the year. When George left PNG to perform for the first time, supporting Not Drowning, Waving on an Australian tour, his music reached Peter Gabriel. When Gabriel co-founded the world music festival WOMADelaide in 1992, George was on the inaugural bill.

‘Music is a universal language’, Gabriel is wont to say. George’s music embodies this, and he was soon playing at WOMAD festivals in the United Kingdom, Aotearoa New Zealand, Germany and Seattle. He played at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London in his traditional Tolai leaves and markings, and at the Sydney Opera House with the Moab Stringband. He headlined at the iconic Jean Marie Tjibaou amphitheatre in Noumea. In typical fashion, after landing in London for the first time, George made a beeline for Abbey Road Studios and its famous pedestrian crossing. In Seattle, he visited the grave of another personal hero and pop culture icon, Bruce Lee.

His eponymous album *Telek* won *Rolling Stone* magazine’s best world music release in 1997. *Serious Tam*, recorded at Gabriel’s Real World Studios in 2000, was hailed a folk classic. According to one reviewer, it was what The Beatles would have sounded like had they lasted until the twenty-first century. George was chuffed with that review. His most recent album features the poignant ballad ‘Noken Paitim Meri’, a vitally important song imploring PNG men to take responsibility for lowering the rate of domestic violence.

George won an ARIA (in 1997 — for *Telek* in the category Best World Music Album), has been nominated a further four times and is celebrated in PNG as a national treasure. His music and story have drawn international attention, with profiles appearing in *The Times*, and *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. His songs have featured in television, movies and art. In 2016, he, along with the late Gunantuna historian Gideon Tobeovaira Kakabin, was commissioned to create a *Bit na Ta* by the Queensland Art Gallery. Telling the story of Gunantuna in film and song, a *Bit na Ta* travelled with the *No.1 Neighbour: Art in Papua New Guinea, 1966–2016* exhibition to Taiwan, Germany, Melbourne and throughout PNG.

In 2000 George was appointed MBE for his services to music in PNG. Grassroots Papua New Guineans call him ‘Sir’ George Telek. His 2005 Solomon Islands performances at the one-year anniversary of the Regional Assistance Mission (RAMSI) drew a phenomenal response, with people walking 100 kilometres through jungle to attend his concerts, and PNG fans from Bougainville journeying by boat from their homeland to see their compatriot play. The crowd at Honiara hit 12,000, breaking all attendance records. The response to his hit, ‘Happy Island Girl’, sung in Solomon Island *Pijin*, was something to behold. The significance of the genuine collaboration between Melanesians and Australians, particularly when developing and expanding traditional material, was hugely appreciated and inspiring to the local population.

George has overcome great challenges. The twin volcanoes of Tavurvur and Vulcan that frame Raluana erupted on 19 September 1994 destroying his home and the island’s music industry. The people rebuilt, the volcanoes entering their stories and music.

In 2018, when George and I played again at WOMADelaide, he had a small sore at the side of his mouth. When he returned to Australia three weeks later (for a Commonwealth Games performance on the Gold Coast), the sore had grown into a nasty, squamous cell carcinoma. An aggressive mouth cancer was diagnosed, a result of having exposed his mouth to too much *kumbang*, the crushed coal lime that is one of the three ingredients in chewing *buai*. The *buai* that legend has it gave George such musical gifts threatened to silence his voice.

The generosity of people in PNG and Australia was humbling. In response to a public appeal for help, A\$80,000 was raised for surgery and treatment, after which

George returned to the stage, his voice still managing to grace the high notes, his ability to compose breathtaking melodies unhindered.

George often tells me that we are planting the seed for future generations to pick the fruit. He observes the success of younger Gunantuna artists like Anslom Nakikus and Danielle Morgan; sees the brilliance of other PNG artists like Patti Doi, Richard Mogu, Mereani Masani and Sprigga Mek; and is emboldened that this musical pathway for his people is just as he had hoped.

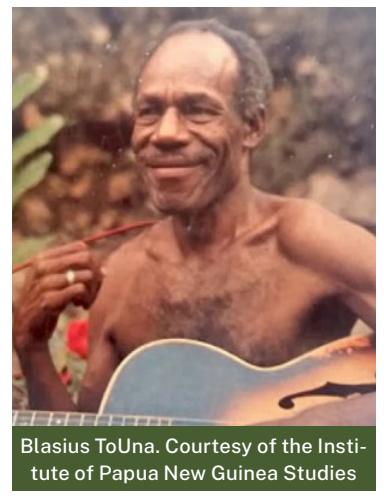
I am proud to see the impact George Telek has had on other people's lives. I have toured with him all around the globe and watched him share his artistry and culture. Music lovers internationally hear his wonderful Tolai songs — Tapialai, Apinpidik, Lili and Malira songs. They learn a little more about *kastom* life inside the Gazelle Peninsula and garner greater respect for this proud nation. They smile when hearing the joyous string band tunes, and dance when he rocks out loud and fast.

On this celebration of 50 years of independence, George Telek stands tall, perfectly embodying his country's proud independent achievement.

Blasius ToUna (1922–2004)

By Steven Gagau and Michael Webb

I, Steven Gagau, was born in East New Britain. I am an Indigenous Tolai Gunantuna man of PNG and am now living in Australia. I am an electrical engineer by profession, currently engaged with the University of Sydney as a cultural consultant and researcher on archives and museum projects such as PARADISEC (the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures). My connection with Michael Webb, an Australian ethnomusicologist who grew up in PNG in the 1960s and 1970s, was motivated by his PhD research in Rabaul (Webb 1995). Michael also taught at Sogeri and trained music teachers at Goroka. We first met in 2018 and are now collaborators in PNG music history research. We recently co-authored an article in *Australian Historical Studies* (2024) and are co-authoring a book about Rabaul with the working title 'Music between the Volcanoes'. Blasius ToUna was an iconic Tolai man, a prolific songwriter and raconteur from Rabaul, whose creative forces inspired many across the nation via the medium of radio.



The Tolai musician and artist Blasius ToUna was born on 2 February 1922 at Paparatava Mission, Toma, on the Gazelle Peninsula at the tip of northeast New Britain.¹ Two months later, his mother Lusia laPadinur died. After being raised at the mission nursery at Vunapope, Blasius attended Milmila Catholic Mission School in the Duke of York Islands from age 11 to 17. In the late 1940s, he took up the guitar and, over the next 40 years, produced an impressive body of songs. ToUna made his name locally in the early 1970s through performances at the annual Tolai Warwagira festival held in Rabaul. He came to national attention in 1977 when the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies released an LP record of his songs — *Guitar Songs of Papua New Guinea* (ToUna 1977). This was the fruit of a national recording and documentation project to which, in the space of one and a half weeks, he contributed more than 70 songs.

ToUna's family was devoutly Roman Catholic. His father Lukas ToVurtabu was a catechist and his only sister, laMuria Klara, became a nun. According to Tolai custom, youths who show artistic promise undergo a series of initiations into a *buai* or magical school of music and dance; however, as a boy, ToUna's father made him promise to never become involved in customary magic. Auspiciously it seems, at his baptism he was given the name of a fourth-century Armenian saint, St Blaise of Sebaste, who was known to bless and heal those with throat ailments. ToUna served an unofficial musical apprenticeship with Father Josef Reischl (1911–1998), a Viennese priest who arrived on the Gazelle Peninsula in the 1930s. It was under Reischl's tutelage that he first found his voice — as a composer of European-style liturgical music.

In January 1942, the Japanese Empire captured Rabaul. Aged 20 in October that year, ToUna was conscripted to serve as an interpreter for a Japanese officer. He learnt some Japanese during this time and later composed a song based on a Japanese tune the officer frequently played on his phonograph. Accused of spying for the Allied forces in 1943, ToUna was imprisoned on two occasions. On the first, he was interned with a downed US airman; he later told of his miraculous escape from his tunnel cell following an angelic visitation. The second time he was held at Vuvu on the Gazelle north coast. His mentor Father Reischl was also captured and held at Ramale for the duration of the war. ToUna felt a deep, lifelong affinity with the priest and, years later, following Reischl's retirement to Vienna, remained in correspondence.

After the war, ToUna was recruited to work as a medical orderly at the Army Hospital at Nonga. In early 1948, Dr Bruce Sinclair taught him how to drive and he received his driver's licence. For the next 40 years he was employed as a hospital driver. In 1953, he married laTane of Nodup, near Rabaul. They had eight children: two daughters, laPadinur and laPrisca; and six sons, ToRominus, ToWomola, ToWada, ToRaisel, ToTurnava and ToAntonius. His marriage, his discovery of the guitar and the opportunity his new government job provided in meeting a cross-section of people sparked a richly creative period during which he discovered his modern voice. This he makes overt in a song he wrote in 1960 titled 'My golden voice'.

In postwar Rabaul, a new medium was required for the new era as the Tolai people looked forward to greater political autonomy. Hillbilly and country music was new and exciting: representing modern 'Western' culture, and delivered via the latest technologies of film, radio and recording (*The Courier Mail* 31/7/1953), it was

the ideal medium through which to reinvent the self. Experimenting with the new medium, ToUna developed what might be termed the ‘song-skit’ — a multilingual (English, Tok Pisin, Kuanua) humorous ballad that alternates sung and spoken passages.² He populated his song-skits with character types: the cheating lover, the bombastic policeman, the slow-witted villager, the heavy drinker, the show-off, the religious sceptic, the imperious white man, and so on. That his depictions rang true to people’s experience was clear from the popularity of his songs on local and national radio in the 1970s and 1980s.

ToUna’s musical output is unparalleled in PNG. It provides glimpses of everyday life as it was experienced by ordinary people at a time when they were confronted with novel ideas, social practices, technologies, employment, entertainment, regimes of time and authority, and means of communication. It is significant for what it reveals about people’s desires and aspirations, their patterns of speech and idioms, what they did for a living, how they felt about their jobs, how they spent their leisure time, how they came to feel that they belonged to a nation, how they responded to new musical forms and the cultural specificities of humour.³

Blasius ToUna died at Nodup in 2004. Over the course of his long life, he produced a corpus of over 200 songs, almost exactly half of which are religious — hymns and Mass settings. Of the secular half of this output, the majority are in Tok Pisin (with some English code switching), although a significant portion are in Kuanua. Most of the secular songs are composed with guitar accompaniment, with a small number being scored in cipher notation, for SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) choir. One of his last songs, composed in 1992, was ‘Bougainville, bringim bek bel isi’ (‘Restore peace in Bougainville’). This was a plea for peace during the civil war that had erupted in the province in 1989 and ended in 1997 with a permanent truce (though the PNG Defence Force did not leave until 2001).

Blasius ToUna was also an artist, his best-known public work being a mural that decorates the ceiling of Nodup Catholic Church. This depicts the arrival of the first Roman Catholic priests in the Bismarck Archipelago, which took place near Matupit in 1882. The images are featured on a postage stamp series issued in 1982 commemorating the centenary of that historical moment. ToUna was committed to documenting his individual history. He wrote several biographical sketches, kept a list of significant dates in his life, maintained a catalogue of his songs and their dates of composition, and kept lyric sketchbooks, which provide insights into his

compositional process. As a musical pioneer he created a priceless historical archive and will be remembered as an important Melanesian and Pacific creative artist.

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1 Information in this entry is based on interviews with Blasius ToUna conducted at Nodup, PNG, on 24 February 1993, 30 March 1993 and 11 August 1993, by Michael Webb. See MW6-016, MW6-017 and MW6-029, with annotations by Steven Gagau, at <https://catalog.paradisec.org.au/>.

2 For a detailed analysis of one such song-skit, see Webb (1993:15–27).

3 As part of the Pacific History Association Conference session, Papua New Guinea Voices from the Colonial Past, held online on 20 November 2021, Michael Webb and Steven Gagau presented the paper 'Tuning in to ToUna: Songs as documentation of colonial experience in Papua New Guinea', which comprised an overview of ToUna's output of secular songs.

Linda Voyorite (1967–)

The mother of business incubation in Goroka

By Bomai Witne

My name is Bomai D. Witne and I am from the Yuri and Bari tribes of PNG. I recently completed a PhD at Queensland University of Technology titled 'Indigenous Response to Sorcery Accusation Related Violence: Peace Building by the Yuri People of Papua New Guinea', and I am now a senior lecturer at the University of Goroka. I was first introduced to Linda Voyorite by one of her in-laws, Binel Voyorite. She is well known in Goroka for having successfully integrated local and modern business knowledge and expertise to create real opportunities and change. Speaking to her, I discovered a strong, committed and visionary woman who has broken cultural and economic barriers to find her way in modern PNG. Linda's story resonates with many, and I am fortunate to have this opportunity to honour her life as part of our nation's 50th anniversary celebrations.



Linda Voyorite. Courtesy of Linda Voyorite.

On 13 March 1967, Linda Nunu came into the world through the hands of skilful midwives in a small and remote *kunai* bush hut in Kami village, situated in today's Yagaria Local Level Government, Lufa District, Eastern Highlands. She was the first daughter of coffee and tobacco entrepreneur Apatove Bagarufa of the Somito clan and his third wife, Wavo Nunu. Linda's father had five wives and desired more. He also wanted a son, so when Linda was two years old and her mother became pregnant again, she was taken to live with her maternal grandparents, Nunu Hogade, a chief from Atra-hapa clan, and Kavepu Nunu, the first of Nunu's two wives. While this kind of adoption was not unusual, in agreeing to it, Nunu and Kavepu were aware of the particular challenges facing Linda's mother. She was not only pregnant and needing to work hard, but also had to fight her husband's other wives to protect her space and earn respect from his family. From this point on, Linda's biological mother was regarded as her big sister.

Linda grew up in a safe environment with her grandparents, who she described as ‘protective, caring and loving’, and wider family.¹ Nunu’s son, Poli Nunu, embraced Linda and provided strong leadership for her within the clan.² As the only child living with her adopted parents, Linda was the centre of attention. She was taught gardening skills and how to raise pigs and told night-time stories. She helped the family with domestic duties but also had time to roam free, collecting cicadas and frogs and playing childhood games with other children. After watching children in uniform walk past her house every day, Linda decided that she wanted to go to school too. However, her family knew little about modern education; they were more interested in perpetuating the family line and legacy within the community by preparing her for adulthood and marriage.

Taking matters into her own hands, Linda gathered her strength and followed the village children to Oliguti Primary School and enrolled herself in February 1976. She adapted quickly to the school environment, learning Tok Pisin and English in addition to her native Kami language. The long walk to school and back did not bother her, but in 1977, when she was aged 10, one of her teachers invited her to live with her at the school.³ Linda describes this moment as a turning point. Residing at the school allowed her to devote more time to her studies and her grades improved as a result. Linda remained a top performer in all subjects until Grade 6. Hearing about their daughter’s success through village stories, her adoptive parents changed their attitude towards her education. Nunu even threw parties for staff and students at the end of every school year, often bringing Wavo (her big sister/biological mother) along with him.

Linda’s biological father passed away in 1981 while she was preparing for the Grade 6 national examinations. She grew up hearing next to nothing about him so was stunned to encounter one of her paternal uncles — drunk and armed with a sharp knife and iron rod — threatening to take her back. ‘You know your father?’ her uncle asked. ‘Yes, Nunu Hogade’, Linda responded. At this, her uncle became enraged, yelling that Nunu was her grandfather and not her father. Hearing the beginnings of the altercation, which quickly became physical, Nunu rushed into the house allowing Linda to free her hands and dash into the bush. Only later did Linda discover that this uncle had arranged a husband for her. She lived in fear of him until her Grade 6 exam results earned her entry to Bena Bena High School in Benimeto, close to 30 kilometres north of Kami, in 1982.

Bena Bena was the furthest Linda had ever travelled. Her mother cried, not wanting her to leave home. However, others were proud of her and the two other students from Atra-hapa village, Hogade Isapi and Jonas Poli, who had been selected to attend the high school that year. Linda travelled to her new school carrying a broken suitcase held together by rope that contained her few items of clothing. A separate bag held an old blanket, a mat and a *lap-lap* that her parents had bought her. It was only once she settled into the girls' dormitory that she realised she was materially poor. Initially embarrassed, she quickly adjusted her attitude and focused on her schoolwork. The classroom was a neutral playing field for rich and poor. Linda outperformed her peers in most academic subjects, but she especially shined in commerce. It was around this time that she promised her mother that she would become an accountant.

Linda's four years of high school were transformational. She grew from a timid village girl in her first year to school president in her final year. She balanced her academic work with leadership roles and engaged in odd jobs around campus to earn money.⁴ Her parents were old and could not support her financially to attend a national high school for Grades 11 and 12, so she enrolled in a business development course at the PNG Institute of Public Administration (PNG IPA) in Port Moresby, where students received a fortnightly allowance of 13 kina.

Like her move to Bena Bena, Linda's decision to go to Port Moresby in 1986 was received with mixed emotions from her family. Some were excited that she had won a scholarship while others would have preferred that she remain in the village and marry. However, as one of only two students in her cohort to gain entry into a college without a Year 12 certificate, Linda was determined to further her education. She maintained her high level of academic performance while engaging in extra work to earn money. Setting aside some of her fortnightly allowance, she purchased a sewing machine to sew blouses and dresses for herself and for sale.

While at the PNG IPA, Linda met up with her pen pal, Abel Vovorite, a mechanical engineering student from the next village in Lufa District with whom she had been corresponding for two years. Despite only meeting briefly, Linda soon fell in love with Abel. The highly educated son of a missionary, he possessed all that she wanted in a marriage partner. She was devastated when her family did not endorse their relationship. Not waiting for her family's consent, she moved in with Abel and soon fell pregnant with their first child. Abel's family, on the other hand, were

supportive from the start and were proud to have an educated woman in their family. In 1992, their families formalised their union by hosting a big wedding ceremony. The couple remained married until Abel's passing in June 2025 and together they had four children.

Linda started her career as an accounts clerk for SAE SADELMi Ltd, an Italian company providing electricity throughout the Eastern Highlands. She later moved to the Eastern Highlands Provincial Administration's division of commerce, where she worked as a business development officer carrying out baseline studies in local communities. Her proudest achievement was establishing the Yagaria Women's Association to empower women by enriching them with skills to improve their livelihood. Her participation in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Start and Improve Your Business program further equipped her with the skills needed to promote small business development in the Eastern Highlands. In 2003, she became an ILO-certified master trainer, the only woman among five male counterparts.

After years of training other people to build their own businesses, and a short but challenging period supporting her husband's national election bid in 2007, Linda started her own fast-food business in 2010. The business flourished but was unfortunately consumed by a fire in 2014. Linda returned to her role as a business trainer, this time with the Ok Tedi Development Foundation. In this capacity, she trained landowner groups. Community-based organisations that have undertaken her training include Kundiawa-Gembogl Wan, an eco-forestry group; Individual Reformation Restoration Movement, a Simbu onion-farming venture; and Tanorama Ltd, a Central Province-based organisation. Working with Tanorama, Linda trained over 600 men and women in different businesses between 2015 and 2016.

In 2017, Linda started her own consultancy company, Jabez Business Services, based in Goroka. She also founded the Eastern Highlands Sister Helping Sister Association (or Sister Helvim Sister) with Steakhouse Restaurant-owner Rita Karre. This association built networks of over 500 women farmers who supplied produce to urban women. In 2019, Linda travelled to remote parts of Eastern Highlands and Simbu provinces with the Coffee Industry Corporation, training and building business models for coffee farmers. These firsthand experiences, and her belief that grassroots entrepreneurs needed greater understanding about government policies on small and medium enterprises (SME), prompted her to focus on SME incubation. Through Jabez Business Services, she initiated Start and Improve Your

Business training to empower local entrepreneurs to be more competitive against foreign-owned businesses.

In 2023, Linda established the Villages Saving and Loan Facility. A microfinancing initiative in partnership with church, youth, women and community leaders, it has over 100 financial members. Its focus is on landowners making the most of their land. This has always been a key priority for Linda, as she explained in a 2018 interview:

It is good to do business on customary land because it cuts many unnecessary costs, like rentals and all kinds of bills. Customary land enables us to do business because it reduces cost of production so it's cost-effective. Oh, and we are not beggars. This is the land of our ancestors. We are developers and we understand the challenges we face. Our land is our life and an important asset. As long as we have our land, our food is coming.

(Voyorite, cited in Steven 2020:179)

Today, Linda lives beside a river at Komiufa village in Goroka. Having experienced her fair share of adversity, as well as success, she is content with her life. She continues to engage in community work, as motivated as ever to reduce unemployment and poverty among her people. When I spoke to her, she sat happily on a chair in her office, counted her four children and five grandchildren and introduced me to her daughter's braiding shop in the nearby Gouna building in Goroka. Her efforts have been recognised by local business owners and foreign observers, including the United States Embassy (Munaup 2014). Given that two-thirds of PNG's SME sector consists of micro enterprises (Tebbutt 2024), her grassroots work is essential to the continued economic development of provinces like the Eastern Highlands. Her training programs based on gaining knowledge and remaining connected to customary land have shown the way for others to succeed.

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1 Linda Voyorite 28/3/2025. Interview by author.

2 Poli passed away on 29 March 2025 while Linda's story was in progress. She expressed gratitude for her uncle's significant contribution to her personal growth.

3 The teacher was Ms Anet Angri from Oro Province.

4 One of her social science teachers, the late Aita Ivarato (future governor of Eastern Highlands Province), would often give her 5 kina (or 2 dollars) for gardening and feeding animals at his house.

John Dademo Waiko (1945–2024)

A Binandere man, champion academic and historian

By Keimelo Gima

My name is Keimelo Gima and I am an academic at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. I have taught courses on labour history, colonisation and nation-building in PNG, as well as on PNG in the world economy. As a historian, I have been involved in writing and marking the country's national Grade 12 history exams for the last 15 years and have collaborated on various projects with colleagues at Deakin University and The Australian National University (ANU). As a co-investigator on the Revitalising the PNG Dictionary of Biography project, I am conscious of the fact that I am retracing the footsteps of Professor Waiko who pioneered the first iteration of this project in the 1980s. It is an honour to work on a national project of such significance in the lead up to the golden jubilee celebrations.



John Waiko, 20 Sept. 2005. Courtesy of Bill and Jan Gammage (Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Photo 55-870).

John Dademo Waiko was a proud Binandere man from Oro (Northern) Province and, according to records, was born in 1945 in his parents' village of Tabara.¹ Like other parents of the time, his mother, Maria Dai, and father, Benedict Dodemo, did not want their son to gain a formal education out of fear that he would leave them behind. Well, that is exactly what happened. Seventy-nine years later, Waiko died not in his birth village of Oro but hundreds of miles away in his adopted home in Port Moresby, the national capital. Over his lifetime, he achieved much as a distinguished scholar and leader of the nation as well as a proud son of Binandere.

Waiko's education took him well beyond the world of his parents and enabled him to reach the summit of the Western formal education system. With every step, he seems to have moved further away from his parents and beloved Binandere people, yet, in spirit, he remained firmly rooted to his village origins. This is reflected in the many ways his Binandere people, their traditions and history appear in his notable scholarly works and achievements.

Waiko began his education in Tabara village at the age of 12 or 13, later moving to Martyrs' Memorial School in Popondetta before finishing at Baitabag Lutheran High School near Madang. In 1967, he enrolled at the newly established UPNG for preliminary year studies. Although interested and diligent, he did not stand out from his peers as an undergraduate student in the early years. His intellectual achievements on behalf of the Binandere, and indeed of PNG, would come later. Nor was he the first Papua New Guinean to publish a book favourably noticed beyond his country. That distinction belongs to Vincent Eri, whose 1970 novel *The Crocodile* is often regarded as bringing Papua New Guinean writers to the attention of the world. But there is no doubt that Waiko built on this acclaim, and more comprehensively, in the years ahead.

Waiko gained a bachelor of arts with honours in history in 1972. The following year he completed a master of arts in African history at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, writing a thesis on so-called cult movements. Ten years later, in 1983, he attained a PhD degree from ANU, making him the first Papua New Guinean PhD holder in social sciences. In 1986, he was appointed professor of history at UPNG, again a first for a Papua New Guinean. At UPNG he would go on to serve as dean of the Faculty of Arts until he was seconded from UPNG to become the first Papua New Guinean director of the National Research Institute (1988–90). Waiko's time at UPNG ended in 1992 when he contested and won the Sohe Open seat in Oro Province in that year's national election. He was re-elected in 1997 but was unsuccessful in his third attempt in 2002. As a member of the National Parliament, he held several ministerial portfolios, including education (1999–2002) and, briefly, foreign affairs (2001–02).

Waiko was a filmmaker too. He participated in making two important autobiographical films, *Man without Pigs* (1990) and *Minister without Money* (2006). The former explored the efforts of an Indigenous high achiever in the Western world who returns to his village home, ostensibly to celebrate his PhD award, but once there discovers that he is missing the most important item of traditional wealth, the pig. This was the price of being away from home for so long. *Minister without Money* told the story of PNG's emerging tradition of money politics in elections — in particular, Waiko's unsuccessful electoral campaign in 2002 — offering insight into the ethnic hostilities and high stakes present in a Melanesian culture striving to balance traditional values with Western democratic principles. Waiko also had

potential as a playwright. In 1969, he wrote *The Unexpected Hawk*, a popular play that was performed in various countries in Europe and in Australia.

Waiko was simultaneously a scholar and an activist. He was well aware of the exploitative and destructive aspects of foreign extractive projects and led one or two peaceful protests against them.² But it was with his academic accomplishments that he made his mark internationally. As a distinguished and renowned national and Pacific historian, he published articles in international journals, contributed book chapters, presented papers at international conferences and authored two important books: *A Short History of Papua New Guinea* ([1993] 2007) and *Papua New Guinea: A History of Our Times* (2003). However, Waiko's highest academic achievement was to produce his PhD thesis — 'Be Jijimo: A History According to the Tradition of the Binandere People of Papua New Guinea' (1982) — not only in English but also in his own Binandere language.

His academic work contributed to the decolonisation process, preserving and presenting an important Papua New Guinean perspective on tradition and history. His work exemplified the two main approaches to writing PNG history. The first is particularistic, focusing on the fate of one of the many hundreds of language and identity groups that populate the country. That was the approach he adopted in his PhD. Waiko's insistence that he be permitted to submit his doctoral thesis in both English and his native language was a symbol of his attachment to particularistic history. In his thesis, he described much that was familiar to other Papua New Guineans speaking different languages in other places, for example:

'Chapter Two discusses Binandere origins and the stages of their migrations and settlements over a considerable distance and time. It is argued that Wawanga, the area around the watershed of the Kumusi River, is probably the centre of dispersion. Then the Binandere moved in a southeast direction until they reached the river systems of the Bareji and the Musa. There, they emerged as an entity with their own identity as a people. Leaving the Musa they followed the rivers to the coast and migrated along the seaboard towards the north. They settled on the lower plains of the Kumusi before they occupied their present territory.'

(Waiko 1982:vi)

Origins and identity are matters of great concern to Papua New Guineans: where they came from, where they moved to and where they settled as a recognisable group. Waiko's description could more or less apply to any self-identifying group in the country, and speaks for PNG as a whole, which is, in effect, the Binandere multiplied a thousand times.

Waiko's published books, on the other hand, belong to the second category of PNG historiography. These depend for their analytical structure on the fact that PNG is a European invention, brought into being by European statesmen who drew lines on maps to create colonies. This second kind of history begins and ends with the colonial story, from exploration, annexation, the missionaries and the extension of village administration, to decolonisation and independence: in other words, the making of a state where none existed before. Waiko was one of very few historians of PNG (the other was Hank Nelson, Waiko's PhD supervisor) to write history in these two registers — one intensely local, the other broadly national, each complementing the other. It was a remarkable achievement.

Waiko died on 17 November 2024. He was a patriotic Indigenous scholar and historian who both inspired and provided a beacon of hope to many young Papua New Guinean academics. Rest in eternal peace champion, man of Binandere and the most distinguished and patriotic Papua New Guinean scholar and history professor, John Dademo Waiko. We, the later comers, thank and salute you for giving us that hope and inspiration.

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1 Despite the formal record of his birth, Waiko was fond of claiming that his mother had carried him on her shoulders when the Japanese first landed on the beaches of Gona and Bona in July 1942. See John Dademo Waiko, 13/4/2018. [PNG Speaks](#), interview by Jonathan Ritchie and Ian Kemish.

2 With two other UPNG students, Waiko formed the Sikuru Boe group to help oppose the establishment of a timber processing plant alongside the larger Komge Oro movement (Komge is an acronym referencing the five rivers in the region; *oro* is the Binandere word for traditional men's house). See May (2004:67).

Ume Wainetti (1954–)

Women's icon: Faith, values, and resilience

By Toviraka Amona

My name is Toviraka Amona. I am currently the acting director for Bel isi PNG, a public, private and civil society partnership program in PNG that provides support to organisations in addressing family and sexual violence (FSV), including supporting employees and providing public access to FSV support. I chose to write about Ume Wainetti for two reasons. On a professional level, Ume's incredible contributions in social work and women's development have allowed younger women like me to navigate a journey already cleared. On a personal note, Ume is my shining beacon. While generations apart, her upbringing was similar to mine, and her values and sentiments are also similar to my own. I wrote about her so that her story will be remembered and her legacy celebrated.



Ume Wainetti speaking at the ANU, 2013. Courtesy of the Development Policy Centre at Crawford School of Public Policy.

Sibaio Ume Wainetti was born on 2 August 1954 in Sewerimabu, a village close to the Fly River Delta in today's Western Province, to Bessie Morris and Wainetti Anagogomo. She grew up on Daru Island where her father worked as a medical orderly. Known widely as Ms Ume Wainetti, she is a pioneer in social work and currently serves as an advisor to the PNG Counselling Association (Pilotti 2021). Most of her early life was spent in rural villages with her close-knit family. The sixth of 12 children, she credits her successful social work career to her faith in God, to the resilience gained through the simplicity of her upbringing and to the values instilled by her family.

Wainetti's childhood was simple. She was surrounded by siblings and extended family and there were always communal activities in which to participate. After school, she would join her brothers and sisters or cousins at the beach to collect seashells, smoke oysters on the rocks, catch prawns and cook bananas or cassava.

With five older brothers and a protective father, Wainetti lived a sheltered life with few outside friends. However, the presence of her siblings and cousins ensured that she did not lack company. From her father she learned that household chores did not have to be gendered. He would often wash clothes or clean the kitchen — chores thought by many in society to be women's roles. Meanwhile, Wainetti's mother Bessie, being more educated than her husband, guided her children into education. In this, Wainetti was also encouraged by her maternal grandmother, Daina Mapa Daborr, who had trained as a pastor and teacher with the London Missionary Society on Murray (Mer) Island in the Torres Strait.

Wainetti completed her early education at Chalmers and Karakara primary schools and Daru High School. She noticed the decreasing numbers of girls in her classes when she got to high school. By the time she reached Form 4 (Year 10), she was the only girl left. Incidentally, this would not be the last time that Wainetti would find herself the only female in a class or room. She became the first girl from Daru Island to earn a scholarship to the prestigious Sogeri National High School for her final two years (Years 11 and 12) and, after excelling there, won a full scholarship to attend the University of Papua New Guinea, beginning in 1973. For a young girl who had never lived away from home, high school and university life proved difficult, especially the transition to an environment of independence. However, having older brothers who were already working meant that the family could afford to pay for her airfares back to Daru during term breaks.

Inspired by her father's career as a medical orderly and her older brother, who was a doctor, Wainetti initially decided to study medicine at university. However, she soon began to doubt her aptitude for medicine and, recognising that her talents lay in other areas, namely compassion and helping others, she opted for social work instead. In hindsight, Wainetti believes that her self-doubt enabled her to pursue her true calling — social work, a field that requires intelligence, empathy and dedication, and build a career that she is passionate about. In 1976, she became the first female to graduate with a bachelor of arts in social work, completing the four-year course in three-and-a-half years.

After graduation, Wainetti joined the Central Province Welfare Office. She was there for a month before joining the Prime Minister's Office of Village Development as a project officer, where she was tasked with looking after development projects in the Papua region. She then became a coordinator for the informal sector and

was transferred to the Community Development Office under the Provincial Affairs Department. It was at this time that Wainetti decided to purchase a house; however, as a working-class woman without a husband, she was technically barred from home ownership. To overcome this barrier, she had to convince the Public Services Commission that she was the head of her own household and so deserved the same privileges as a man. Fortunately, the person responsible for her case at the housing commission was also a social worker and he enabled her to purchase a home in Gerehu, Port Moresby, for K5,000 (which she still owns to this day).

In the late 1970s, Wainetti met her future husband, Philip Kiwalema Ula, a civil engineer and keen sportsman from Balimo in the Middle Fly District of Western Province; they would marry in 1984. When their children were born, Wainetti left formal employment to raise them, not having the help of a babysitter. The family moved to Queensland, Australia, for a few years after Philip received a scholarship to undertake a postgraduate engineering qualification. Upon their return to PNG in 1983, Wainetti decided against rejoining the public service and instead found work with the National Council of Women (NCW), kickstarting her civil society career. By 1988 she had worked her way up to becoming the general secretary of the council, eventually serving under four NCW presidents.¹ In 1989, following a request from Dame Josephine Abaijah² and other Papuan leaders such as Susan Setae,³ Wainetti co-founded the Papua Hahine Regional Women's Council (now known as the Papua Hahine Social Action Forum).

One of Wainetti's most important contributions during this time was her visit to Buka with Dame Josephine to help re-establish the Bougainville Provincial Council of Women in response to the blockade being lifted by the PNG Defence Force in 1994. On this historic occasion, the women of Bougainville came together for elections, and convinced their sons, brothers, husbands and other male relatives to lay down their arms and stop fighting, enabling the appointment of district leaders and the resurrection of the dormant council. Further milestones achieved during Wainetti's tenure with the NCW include the decision to have at least one representative of womens' organisations in local-level governments in both urban and rural areas, as per the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments; guaranteeing equal pay for men and women doing the same jobs; negotiating the right to paternity leave for men; ensuring female public servants have the same rights as their male counterparts when studying overseas; and, in 1995, working to

have the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ratified by parliament.

Wainetti's work for the NCW did not go unnoticed. Immediately upon leaving the council, she was approached by James Isorua and Susan Setae to help Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta mobilise women in the North-West Electorate of the National Capital District during the dramatic 2002 PNG election (Laveil 5/5/2021). Morauta won his seat, but his party lost out to Michael Somare's National Alliance Party, which left Morauta out of government and Wainetti out of work. However, later that year she was appointed national coordinator for the Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee (FSVAC) chaired by Dr Lawrence Kalinoe.

Established in 2000 as a sectoral committee of the Consultative and Implementation Monitoring Committee, the FSVAC helped to progress important legislative and social change, such as the Criminal Code (Sexual Offences and Crimes against Children) Act 2002, which included provisions against marital rape; the Family Protection Act 2013; a review of the Criminal Code under which accusers of sorcery were criminalised, and the development of a Sorcery National Action Plan; the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 2013, which added human trafficking and smuggling; and the development of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence (2016–2025) and interim protection orders. Wainetti was also on the committee that developed the Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015 to protect the wellbeing and rights of children, and was closely involved in creating a viable range of gender-based violence (GBV) referral pathways for survivors, including the creation of family support centres for medical treatments, and psychosocial counselling and family sexual violence units.

Wainetti's work in advancing women's rights was not limited to the GBV and political spheres. In 2007, she was approached by Ok Tedi Mining Ltd to represent the interests of women and children in negotiating royalty payments. Here, she was able to secure 10 per cent for women in affected Fly River areas under the Community Mine Continuation Agreement and 20 per cent for women in Special Mine Lease areas. These outcomes were the first in the world for women. More broadly, she helped to establish structures to enable women to participate in future decision-making in the mining sector. Her services to the community and women's development were recognised later that year when she was appointed MBE in the Queen's birthday honours.

In 2011, after reports of the rape of women in Enga Province by security and police personnel at the Porgera Gold Mine emerged, Wainetti and Dame Carol Kidu⁴ assisted victims to receive appropriate support, including compensation from the Canadian mining company, Barrick Gold. In 2013, Wainetti called for proper case management to address the gap in the FSV referral pathway during a lecture at The Australian National University (Wainetti 22/5/2013),⁵ prompting the establishment of Femili PNG, a non-government organisation, to provide case management services, advocacy and training. She was deputy chair and served on the board of Femili PNG from 2013 to 2018. Wainetti was also instrumental in the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Counsellors' Association (PNGCA). This group was officially registered in 2016 because Wainetti paid K500 from her own pocket to register it with the Investment Promotion Authority.⁶ Created to support and regulate the accreditation of counsellors, provide counselling training and counselling services, PNGCA has trained and accredited countless PNG counsellors and provided counselling services to various organisations.

Wainetti resigned as national coordinator of FSVAC to contest the 2017 PNG national elections, one of only two women candidates among 49 men in the South Fly Electorate of Western Province, but her election bid was unsuccessful. She discovered that, while she had carved out a name for herself on the national stage, her work was not well known in her own electorate, where mass media, such as radio, was less popular than elsewhere in PNG. She returned to Port Moresby post-election to continue her work in the social sector.⁷

From humble beginnings on Daru Island to national and global recognition, Wainetti's life demonstrates what one can achieve through faith, resilience and values instilled at a young age. Although currently at retirement age, she is still active in various community groups and initiatives, including the PNGCA, and shows no sign of slowing down. As she told me:

'you can never really retire in this space'.

Despite her career achievements, and iconic status for her work on GBV and women's rights in PNG, her priority has always been her family: her husband Philip, who died in 2020; their six children; and 16 grandchildren.

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1 Bungtabu Brown (1988), Maria Kopkop (1989–91), Dame Josephine Abaijah (1991–95) and Susan Setae (1995–99).

2 Dame Josephine Abaijah was the first woman to be elected to the PNG House of Assembly in 1972.

3 For more on Susan Setae, see Laumaea (2013).

4 Former PNG politician serving as member for Port Moresby South Electorate 2002–12. Dame Carol was the lone opposition member and was the first female opposition leader in 2012.

5 A shorter version of the presentation was published in blog form. See Wainetti (7/6/2013).

6 The idea for the PNGCA came from a FSVAC meeting at Bluff Inn, Sogeri, in 2009.

7 As noted, Wainetti is currently serving as a board advisor to PNGCA.

