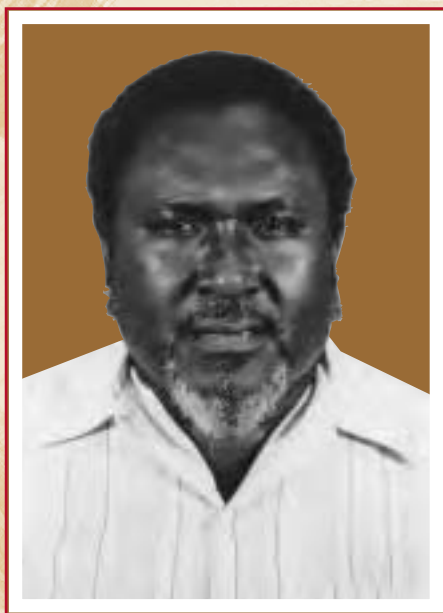


JOURNEYS IN A SMALL CANOE

The life and times of a Solomon Islander



LLOYD MAEPEZA GINA

Edited by Judith A. Bennett with Khyla J. Russell

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Published in association with the
INSTITUTE OF PACIFIC STUDIES
The University of the South Pacific

PANDANUS BOOKS
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Cover: Lloyd Maepeza Gina in 1979

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Published in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies,
The University of the South Pacific

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Typeset in Goudy 10.75pt on 14pt by Pandanus Books and printed by CanPrint, Canberra.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Gina, Lloyd Maepeza

Journeys in a small canoe: the life and times of Lloyd Maepeza Gina of Solomon Islands

ISBN 1 74076 032 8

1. Gina, Lloyd Maepeza. 2. Politicians — Solomon Islands — Biography. 3. Solomon Islands — Politics and government. I. Bennett, Judith A., 1944-. II. Russell, Khylla J. III. Title.

995.930092

Editorial inquiries please contact Pandanus Books on 02 6125 3269

Published by Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies,
The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200 Australia

Pandanus Books are distributed by UNIREPS, University of New South Wales,
Sydney NSW 2052 Phone 02 9664 0999 Fax 02 9664 5420

Production: Ian Templeman, Duncan Beard and Emily Brissenden

To my dear wife Olive, my children and grandchildren, and the young people of Solomon Islands. And to my long-deceased mother and father also. How I wish they were alive to read this book.

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Preface

Writing one's own life is not a simple task. There are always ideas flowing in from all sides. When thoughts unfold they demand to be said, yet there are reservations, too! In other words, writing is controlling the unfolding of thoughts in a sequence, but taking care not to let your readers fall by the wayside out of boredom. This was my first concern before I set to writing. Once the writing starts, it continues, like setting off into a wide sea of interesting and sometimes unexpected challenges, but then facing the difficulty of maintaining progress. Once over this part, the beginning, I had to be patient with the long process that was to follow. The journey was longer than I expected, but it has been an interesting one.

The urge to write something of my own life, how it progressed as I grew up! My various experiences up to adulthood had been bubbling within me way back in 1978, the same year as our country's independence. But I did nothing after that. I had never written a thing at all, though I had collected various information like parliamentary writings, journals and names of various expatriate personnel in the Government. In 1985 I was very conscious that I would one day put work into some serious writing. In 1987 I sounded out my intention with a friend of mine, Dr Ron Crocombe, who met up with me in Honiara. He pointed out to me that the Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, the Hon Tomasi Vakatora, had written his autobiography and had been published. He impressed on me that I could do the same,

but could cover wider experiences of my earlier life. There was the early Methodist establishment and my childhood days at Munda and elsewhere in the islands. There were also the memories of World War II. Much later, I had my firsthand experiences working in the colonial administration, leading to this country attaining its independence. The times after independence have been interesting too.

When he reminded me of these, I was so stirred up with determination to get on with the writing of a book. I felt, however, that my friend Dr R. Crocombe was a very busy man himself. I avoided bothering him with extra work. I, however, benefited from his wise advice, his indications to areas to tap for funding assistance, like in New Zealand and Australia, or a contact with Professor Asesela Ravuvu of the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. Dr Asesela posted me Tom Vakatora's autobiography. Vakatora was my former Fiji Speaker colleague and I really admired his book.

In April 1990, at a time when I thought about sitting down to write at my wife Olive's home at Pazaju on Vella Lavella Island, a consultant for Shedden Agribusiness Pty Ltd of South Melbourne, Australia, asked me to join his team of consultants. Their task was to carry out a study of the Allardyce forest land on Isabel Island at the request of the Isabel Province. The Solomon Islands Government had given to the Australian Development Aid Bureau, which was funding this project, my name as a contact for the Australian consultants. So I met with the leader of the group, Mr Bob MacKillop. I helped him mostly on the social aspects of the communities that would naturally move in to populate the Allardyce area when it became a centre of future development activities. Kia village and its neighbouring villages would be the first of the many communities around Isabel Island to be attracted to participate in projects on the Allardyce land. So our social study was concentrated on the men and especially the women of Kia village. Bob MacKillop and I then developed

an agreement that he, on his return to Australia, would make contact with those close to possible funding assistance for my writing of an autobiography, such as the Department of Pacific and Asian History at The Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. I left that part with him.

After he had returned to Australia, he wrote to me that he had made contact with someone and informed me to expect a letter of inquiry soon. In January 1992, I finally received a letter — 'Mr Bob MacKillop wrote me a letter regarding your interest in writing your life history'. This came from a woman lecturer in history at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. And she was none other than the historian who had already published a book, *Wealth of the Solomons* (Honolulu, 1987), as a result of her great interest in the history of the Solomons — Dr Judith Bennett. Judith, in this way, had come into my world. I could now begin to achieve my hope, to write these recollections of experiences and thoughts of my life.

Fortunately, for this kind of project, Judith happened to be the Inaugural Senior Visiting Fellow at the College of Higher Education in Honiara. Having known of her presence there, I willingly travelled to Honiara to have a meeting with her. At that meeting, I asked her if she could assist me in writing my autobiography. She agreed most willingly which was very kind of her. So on her next visit, she and her friend, Khyla Russell, came to my home, Pazaju on Vella Lavella Island, and spent two weeks talking with me, my wife Olive and some members of my family. We talked of my personal family histories, which I've written down, and continued the rest of the time taping my recollections of public service days in the British Protectorate and my years as the first Speaker of the Parliament of Solomons at independence. As they left to return to New Zealand I entrusted to Judith the various documents which I had started to write plus others related to my life.

Judith was widely known in administrative circles in the Central District, at Honiara. I knew of the research visit of

a group of two geographer professors with some students from the East-West Centre of the University of Hawaii back in the early 1970s. I was then AAO (or Assistant District Officer as the people have known me) of Central District based in Honiara. I didn't meet any member of the group, but, well after that time, in the home of a friend, I happened to watch a documentary film made during the visit of that group, on their visiting of Chief Moro's village at Makaruka, Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. It had been a huge occasion when a big crowd of Chief Moro's adherents gathered and some important cultural events took place there. It culminated in a feast and mass dancing around a heap of pigs ready for slaughtering and mounds of garden crops — taros, yams, panas and potatoes and local cabbages and vegetables. To follow the custom of that event, everyone was asked to dress in cultural fashion, thus all expatriate visitors had to be attired in the *kabilato* garment (a dress called 'masi' or 'tapa' in Fiji and Tonga). And what took my attention most was a white female who danced around with her local female counterparts and who, like them, wore a *kabilato* garment around her hips and another covering her breasts. It aroused anxiety in us Solomon Islanders at that time as we hardly could dictate to a white woman what she should wear. But to comply with special cultural norms such women are at liberty to choose to follow suit by the invitation of the local women. The white menfolk were a hilarious lot! Likewise they all wore *kabilato* on their hips and only bare chests and hanging bellies at top. A chap among us watching said that the white lady was Judith Bennett. So, if that was true, I had seen Judith for the first time in that documentary film. The first time I met Judith personally was at Kira Kira where I was the Government Agent of the Eastern District. Judith was travelling along the Arosi localities on Makira Island and she ended up at the Eastern District headquarters at Kira Kira, where we met.

In 1993 the funding for getting together with Judith and Khyla to continue writing was still a problem, despite my having solicited their enthusiasm. They already had started transcribing the tapes back in Dunedin, New Zealand. Unfortunately some of the tapes were old ones which we taped over and they had not recorded properly, so my recollections on these needed to be done all over again. I therefore expressed to Judith my desire to redo this part and to begin the long process of answering the many questions formulating in Judith's mind related to the other material. She had thought the same, too, and was anxious to discuss the structure and organisation of the manuscript. And so we planned for me to visit New Zealand for two months, preferably in late 1994, so as to avoid the worst of the winter there.

While I applied for the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund through the Australian High Commissioner's Honiara office, Judith also submitted her application to the Macmillan Brown Centre at Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand, for support. The Australian funding was approved, so was that from the Macmillan Brown Centre.

In writing this autobiography, I see the benefits as follows:

- Solomon Islands does not have much writing by Solomon Islanders, especially for the young to read, and this book may be of interest because it is set in our islands and discusses things of concern to us.
- I see my life as a part of Solomon Islands history, as I have lived through the changes from the colonial period to independence. We should be aware that half of the population of this country is fifteen years and under and these young people know little about what life was like during the colonial days.
- I believe people outside Solomon Islands may also be interested in the life experiences and views of a Solomon Islander who has played a part in his

country's history. Judith, for one is no exception, she is very interested in the Solomons and its history. I have asked her to help me arrange the book and draw out of me the information and ideas I have.

In the course of writing this book, I had my share of discouragement. When in Christchurch, a long-time friend outside New Zealand passed a message to me that Judith would treat me only as a university student and would even pressure me to write a book for her which in fact belonged to me. Secondly, it was said that her securing funding from the Macmillan Brown Centre was really to her advantage for the writing of a book on forest history of Solomon Islands.

Concerning this apparent white blackmail, we talked the matter over quite intensely. I found it to have no truth and, as things turned out, it proved just to the contrary. We shared the same firm commitment to the goal. Later in Honiara, in 1998, I was informed by a close friend that most editors of books try to delay publication until the owner or writer passed away so that the editor would get all the benefits of praises and commendations for the book. But similarly I saw through this as an outright blackmailing tactic from someone who had intended, but failed, to start to write a book himself.

The trust I have in Judith and Khyla remained tantamount in this book project. With effort and persistence, we overcame all difficulties and finished the long journey of book-writing. I hope the reader will find the book as interesting to read as it was for me to write.

Lloyd Maepeza Gina
Pazaju, Vella Lavella
Solomon Islands

Editor's preface

This began a long time ago. Sir Lloyd Maepeza Gina discussed writing his life story with Bob MacKillop who contacted me. Like many things to do with my work in Solomons history, this project was not planned and not sought after, as I had other work to do. Once I met Maepeza in 1992, however, the canoe was in the water, but neither of us thought the journey would take so long.

Maepeza and I think we met much earlier in 1977, when I was on my way to Heuru in Makira to do some oral history relating to pre-war plantations and trade. He is right when he says in this book about being known as the 'black DC' (government agent), because that is what someone called him before I met him very briefly at Kira Kira, the district headquarters. I also knew his late brother, John (everybody knew John or, more correctly, John knew everybody!), and later met his father, Belshazar, in Roviana. The Gina family, it seems, had ways of popping up in my life. About 1991, in Warrington, Otago I was at a dinner and mentioned the Solomons; one of the dinner guests, an old gentleman, recalled Belshazar's visits on Methodist deputation work to New Zealand before World War II. Now, Belshazar's granddaughter and Maepeza's daughter, Mariga, is studying landscaping at Lincoln University near Christchurch, following the path of her elder sister, L'Amour, who did university studies in New Zealand, too. More recently, in October 2001, I met Maepeza's son Lloyd in Canberra where he went with his Australian wife

after fleeing Honiara during the civil war and coup of 1999–2000. How the world has turned!

I agreed to take on this work because I believe that Solomon Islanders need to know about their own, a conviction that Maepeza shares. In the first flush of independence in 1978 and the years that followed, there has been a loss of memory of the complexity of the colonial experience. Some want to forget it, some know very little about it, and some want to blame it for everything that has gone awry since 1978. My interest has been in those who lived their lives as colonised people and how they trod the path from colonisation into regained, but transformed, sovereignty and independence.

The logistics of the task have sometimes been formidable. It started off easily enough, but only after one of those 'all's well that ends well' transitions in the Solomons. Delayed with shipping in Vanikoro in mid-1992, I sent a message to Maepeza to say I could not make our appointed meeting at Barakoma, Vella Lavella. The message got as far as Honiara and was lost. When eventually we got to Gizo, by prior arrangement we went across to Choiseul to meet Rev Lesley Boseto at Mboemboe. On our return to Gizo after a day at sea in an open motorboat, we looked forward to a shower and a rest at the Gizo Hotel. That was not to be because Maepeza knew we were in town and was all ready to take us to Vella. Another journey for us all, but in a large canoe! After a hot bath, a meal and a rest, we had regained our wits. Khyla Russell and I spent the next two weeks at Pazaju taping Maepeza's recollections and stories and enjoying the hospitality of his family.

All went well until we had used our dozens of tapes. We re-used old tapes only to find later that some of the new material was inaudible. Much later, I was to ask Maepeza to write an account of this lost material. In doing the tapes, sometimes Maepeza would just start talking about something; other times we would ask questions. When questions arose from

what Maepeza said, often we were off on a tangential story, but still a significant one. There was no grand order of events, except that we focused on childhood first. We moved in and out of *Tok Pijen* (Pidgin) and English; so much of this sounded better in *Pijen* than English. I am sure it would have been even better if it could have been written in Roviana, Maepeza's first language, one of about 85 languages of the Solomons. Once the transcription began, how we wrestled with language when the structures of Roviana ordered things differently to the conventions of that rich, but agglomerated language, English! Maepeza and I were bemused by its strange demands. Consider the question, 'John, haven't you washed that dirty hat of yours, since I have growled at you this morning?' As Maepeza said to me, the literal, correct meaning to the Solomon Islander in answering this question is, 'Yes' (which is wrong in English). The Solomon Islander answers 'Yes' because the questioner gave him the leading statement of 'have you not washed'. To him it is right to say, to satisfy the questioner, right on the spot, 'Yes, I have not washed it!' Another thing that I noticed was Maepeza's tendency to use the passive voice. I think this may be a pattern in Roviana of putting others and other forces in the forefront. It is really a sign of respect for others and of humility. But I leave this to the linguists to determine.

Although Maepeza's story has a unique value for Solomon Islanders, I believe it has universal aspects that people outside the Solomons will find of interest, hence the choice of English, rather than *Tok Pijen*. Even that choice was fraught. The Solomons has a dialect of English, just as America and New Zealand have. *Tok Pijen* influences English in Solomons and vice versa and the English language is continually being created. The Solomons dialect is a lively one and has less standardisation pressure on it than in countries where the population is literate in English. Literacy rates in Solomons are only about 20–30 per cent in any language. We had many discussions right to the end about the use of a word or phrase

— we both knew what it meant, but always I had to ask, will a speaker of English in Africa, Australia or the US know what this means? At the same time, as editor I have tried to keep the sense of what was said and the quality of expression. Anyone who has heard Maepeza telling a story will know that gesture, facial expression and countless little inflections often convey far more than the actual words. It has been my task to attempt to retain much of that meaning. (The post-modernists will have ample to deconstruct in this text!)

Our project received a great boost in 1994 when the Macmillan Brown Centre, University of Canterbury, in Christchurch assisted Maepeza's visit to New Zealand where we worked on the first transcriptions of the tapes. I had been there for several months working on a book manuscript on Solomons forests — later published as *Pacific Forest: A History of Resource Control and Contest in Solomon Islands, c. 1800-1997* (Cambridge and Leiden, 2000) — when Maepeza arrived. Khyla's contribution at this stage was very significant, as she had transcribed in longhand much of the original recordings. She worked closely with Maepeza, clarifying meanings, sequences and always asking for more detail. After Maepeza returned to the Solomons and I to my teaching at the University of Otago, our work on the manuscript became more sporadic. I assigned revised materials to a chapter structure then would send two or three chapters up to the Solomons for Maepeza to vet. He would often reorder material, correct mistakes and sometimes elaborate with a few more typed pages. This process went on with three to four drafts, but with frequent long intervals when neither he nor I were able to get back to the work. I had teaching, marking and other research to attend to and he, I believe, had family matters, business and projects commissioned by the Government. Our times of work rarely could be synchronised. Our only contact was by mail — no emails and wonderful attachments to speed off a chapter in a matter of seconds!

We both had our share of discouragement and I think it is important for people, especially Solomon Islanders, to know this; Maepeza tells of his. Even as we were at the Macmillan Brown Centre, a colleague passed on a message to me from a noted academic: in the good old Pacific way, an enigmatic, 'Tell her she is going about it all wrong'. Needless to say, he never bothered to elucidate the correct way! Another colleague told me I would not get much credit for such a publication in the university promotion stakes. Too bad, that was not why I took on the work. Through these trying times as well as the good, Maepeza and I each have had to make a leap of faith with and in the other. It has not been easy — we have very different backgrounds, different gender, different religious affiliations and different homelands. I am an Australian who once worked for the Australian Colonial Government in Papua New Guinea and he is a Solomon Islander who often felt humiliations at the hands of colonial officials. The main thing we did have in common was the conviction that his life story was important as a record of a wider experience. What kept me going was the commitment I had made and the goal we both shared. I also felt I owed Solomon Islands, those wonderful islands and their people, a debt. As time went on and as I drew more and more from Maepeza in letters via interminable questions and requests such as, 'Can you just write a *little* more on who has helped you in your life?', my respect for this man and his life and times has increased. I hold it an honour to have been part of this work and to have been for a short time a guest in his family home. I hope I have done justice to Maepeza's life story and his trust in Khyla and me.

From the little I know of the history of Solomons, I feel Maepeza's story distils so much of it: the importance of family and genealogy; the web of connections mediated by marriage, adoption and even abduction; the identification of people with land; the exciting days of inter-island raiding and head-hunting along with the horrors for victims; the labour

trade, threading its way into Maepeza's great grandfather's life; the coming of Christianity and missionaries like the great Goldie leaving a lasting impression on the faith of the people; traders like Frank Wickham whose blood flows in Olive Gina and in her and Maepeza's children; the suffering that the Japanese invasion induced and the material prosperity and mental stimulation that the Americans injected into a colonial outpost; the resistance to accommodation by Solomon Islanders of the colonial power and its officials; the attraction and repulsion of the colonial order; the sometimes ambivalent connections with other Pacific Islanders; the challenges of independence, its hopes and disappointments; island-based jealousies and insecurities; the friendships that transcend place and nationality and the opportunities of the wider world are all embodied in one life.

Sadly, the events of 1999–2001, which saw localised civil war and a coup in Honiara, have come as a great disappointment to Maepeza. I am angry that this man, who has given of his best to his country in public service, has now lost his pension because of the greed, selfishness and mismanagement of those in government. They have so raided the coffers of the state that provident and pension funds are virtually exhausted. They have much to answer for, as do those who put them in power. It is a tragedy that this chaos and injustice, like so much of recent Solomons history, is also etched on this one life.

If you want to know not only about the man, but about his homeland, then climb aboard this small canoe.

Judith A. Bennett
Okaihau, Warrington,
Otago,
New Zealand

Acknowledgements

Many have assisted the writing of this book: some have helped Judith, some Maepeza, and some both of us. As editor, I thank Khyla Russell for her continuing support and her work in the tedious, demanding task of transcription of the tapes. Her insights as a Pacific Islander, a Maori of Kai Tahu descent, in the initial phase were useful in developing our questions and creating a sense of shared colonial experience with Maepeza. The Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies supported the concept of this book in the early stages. We both thank Garth Cant, Kate Scott, Ann Parsonson and Bill Wilmott for their encouragement. The board of the centre has been incredibly patient with my yearly report of 'Almost finished, but not quite' — at least until now. My own University of Otago, the School of Liberal Arts in the Division of Humanities, and the Department of History have been supportive and open to 'things Pacific'. I thank them for that and I thank various typists who tidied some transcripts: Justine Camp, Liz Malthus and Frances Couch. I thank Bridget Waldron for her work on the index. We both thank the publishers, Pandanus Books, The Australian National University and the Institute for Pacific Studies, The University of the South Pacific for their support. Neither the editor nor the author will receive any royalties on this book as we wish to keep costs to a minimum in order that Pacific peoples have wider access to it.

Above, Judith Bennett has extended her thanks to the many kind people who've helped on this book project. And may I, Maepeza, endorse here my appreciation to all of them also.

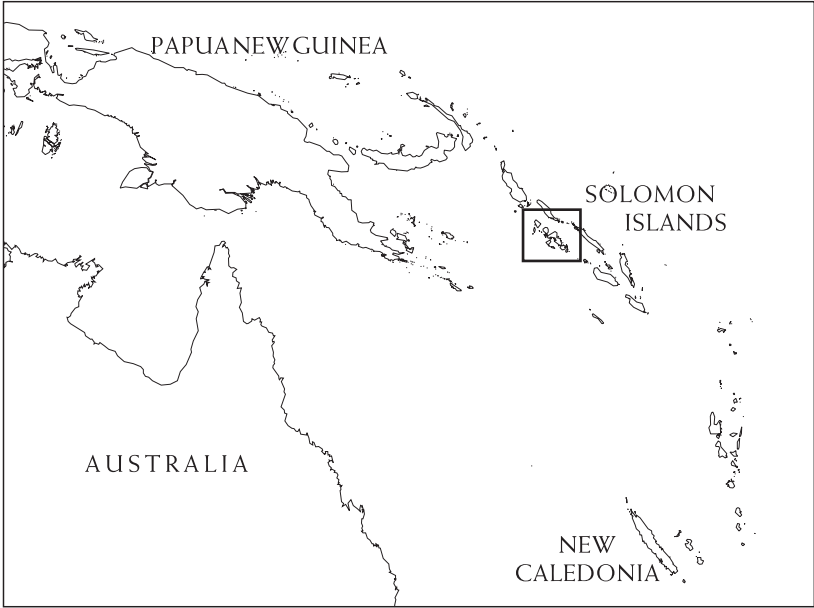
To two individuals particularly, my foremost thanks go to very special and important friends — Judith Bennett and Khyla Russell. Khyla, right from the beginning, transcribed my reflections on to computer from the tapes and from my handwritten notes. Judith has done the final editing of all the chapters of my autobiography and is responsible for the thinning of some things and, with all her questions, the expanding of others, as well as the shaping of this book. They both have given considerable skill and patience to the work.

Without the funding assistance of the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund, and of the Macmillan Brown Centre, Canterbury University, New Zealand, this book would still be unfinished, so I thank you all. I am most grateful for the kind assistance of the Australian High Commission in Honiara for transmitting my application to the board of the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund. My thanks also must go to Mr Dennis Lulei OBE, the then Minister of Education and Training, for his endorsing support to the Australian High Commissioner in Honiara for my request for financial assistance. As always with books, there are a great many people to thank who don't get a mention between the pages: my four sons, Ian Roni, Lloyd Jnr, Adrian Sinabule (SIBC announcer), Errol Maepeza and my adopted son, Boti Savanga; my three daughters, Lois Sera, L'Amour Ketavuru and Mariga Imatako; and my granddaughters, Lily Maly, Aukeni Zimaduri, Lavita Mary, adopted grandchild Lisa, Imatakopate, and Zamela; and grandsons, Reuben Tamalea, Denyel Maepeza, Kerebangara, Aniri and Uluta Qoliti. Thanks for your encouragement in the way you made me laugh in my darker times of brooding over how to put difficult ideas into my pen and typewriter.

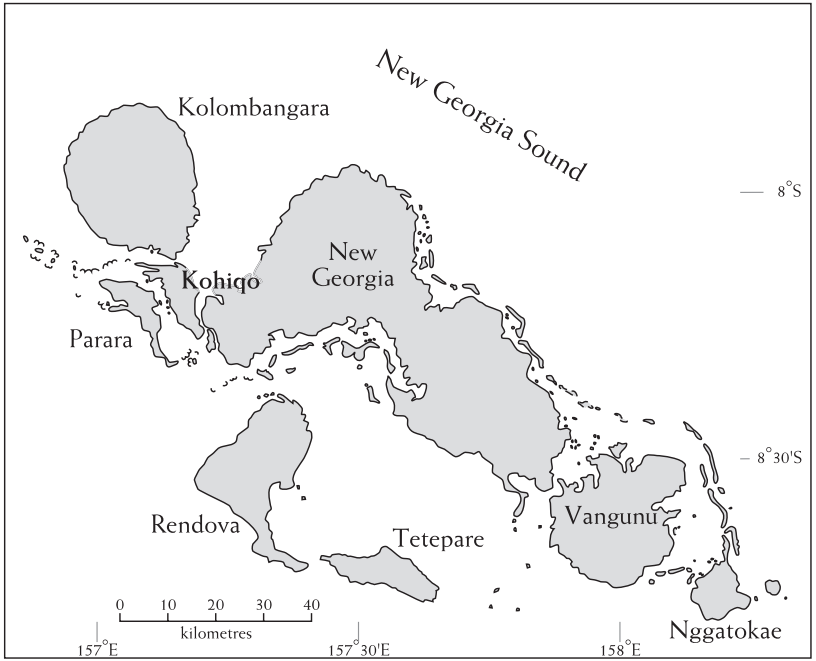
My sincere thanks go to those people who supported my great dream of this book: Dr Ron Crocombe of Rarotonga, Dr Asesela Ravuvu of USP, Suva, Mr Tom Vakatora, formerly of Fiji Parliament, Mr Bob MacKillop of Shedden Agribusiness

Pty Ltd, South Melbourne, Australia — thank you. And last but not least, I give my thanks to my wife, Olive, for her patience and her understanding. She gave me time to sit down to attend to tasks Judith would send me. Olive willingly gave me undisturbed periods to work on the manuscript by not asking me to go out with her to our garden to help as usual. She did not bother me with finding food for dinner, like going out in my canoe to fish or calling me to carry cooking items closer to her kitchen. I really appreciated her through this and am very grateful to her for her intimate, uncomplaining cooperation. Thank you very much, Leana!

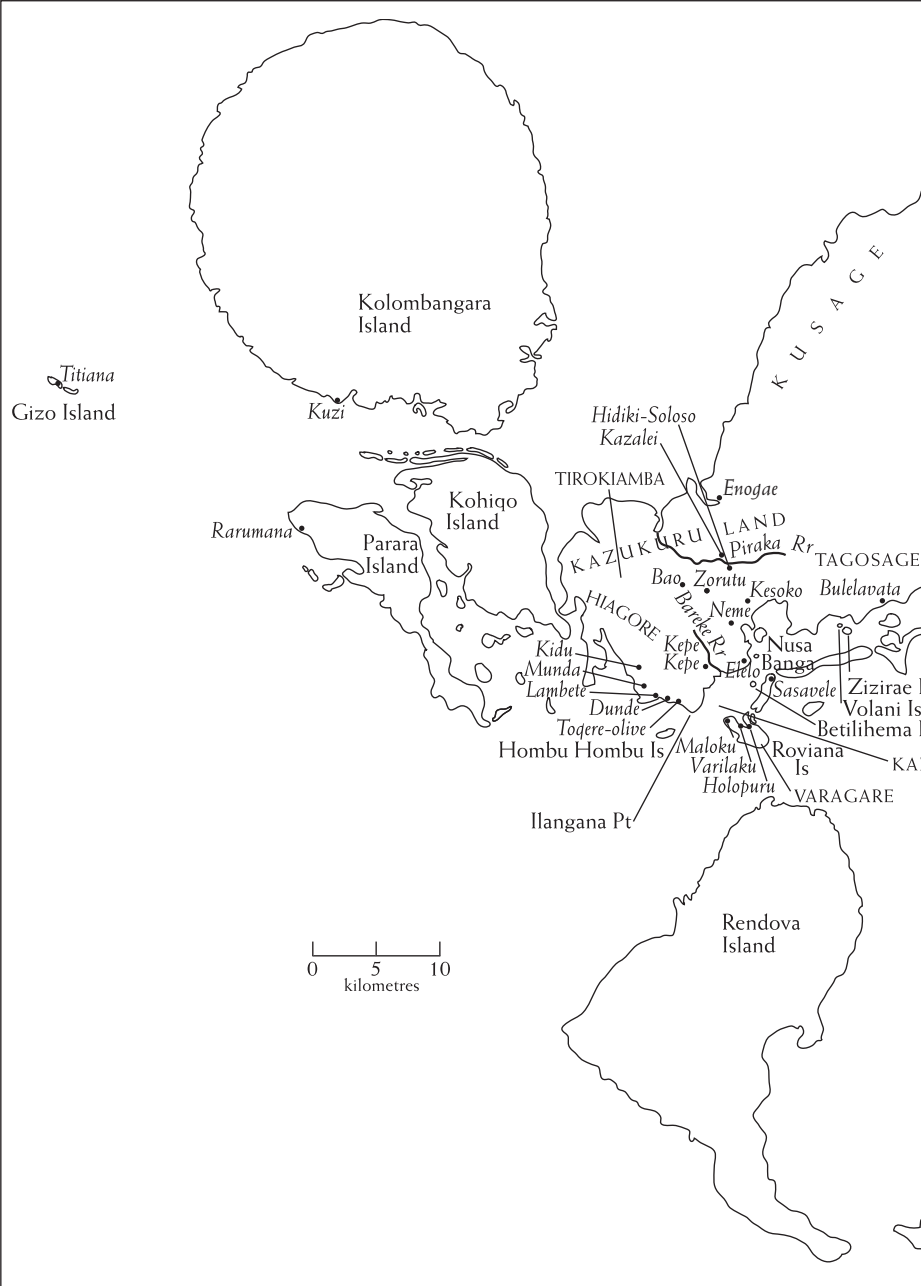
Lloyd Maepeza Gina



Solomon Islands and its neighbours

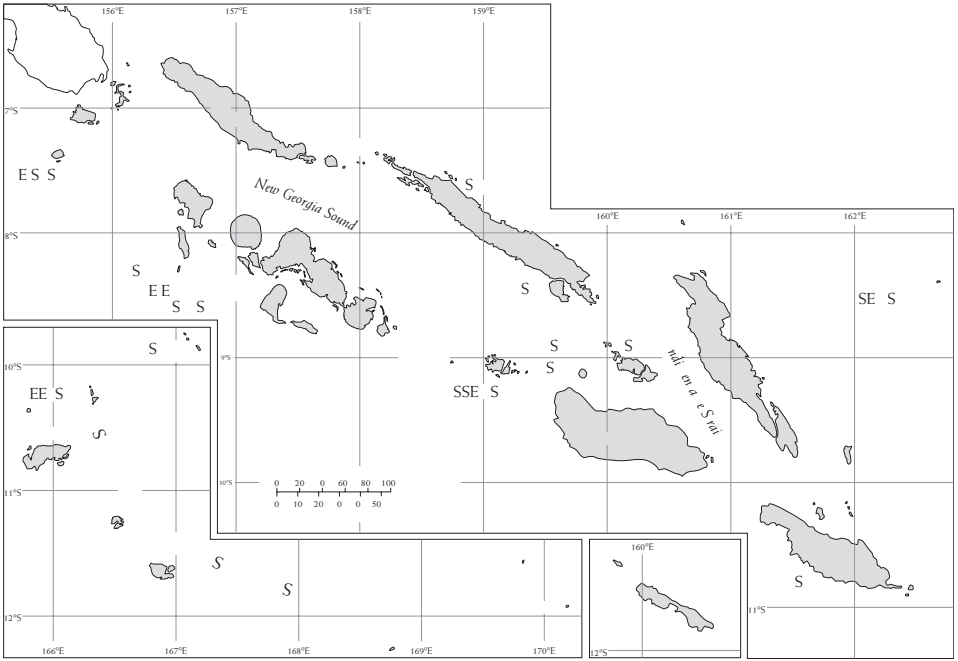


New Georgia Islands



Detail of New Georgia Islands





Solomon Islands

CHAPTER ONE

Families, childhood and home places

MY MOTHER'S SIDE

My mother was born in Roviana in the Kalikoqu side, which is on the inner Roviana lagoon. We came down from the inland area of the New Georgia Island in the long distant past. This was through a chiefly woman named Roviana. She then traditionally bestowed the continuous chieftainship status upon her son named Luturubangara. He became a chief of the Bao tribe. Luturubangara's sister was named Sogaduri and she married a Vinakiki chiefly man named Kabasanakana. Their mother, Roviana, then divided the land in two. Luturubangara was given the area from the Bao village cutting straight down to where it meets the Bareke River and to its mouth on the coast. It continued along the coast to the mouth of the Piraka River and followed that river northward to Enogae. Before reaching Enogae, it curves around Pasua hill down to Kiso island then along the coast to the mouth of the Baeroko at Labete-kopi side, then inland passing Boro-boro hill back to Bao village. It ends at Sogaduri's land, round the Tunguivili part of her given land. The Kalikoqu people are now the main

descendants of the Bao tribe. Sogaduri, Luturubangara's sister, was given the western part from Bao, called Hiagore, at Zorutu and Patukuti. It is now known as Kazukuru land, named after the only son of Sogaduri and Kabasakana who was Kazukuru.

Chief Luturubangara had a son, an only child named Ididubangara. It was this succeeding Bao chief who travelled down to the coast after Luturubangara died. Ididubangara made his way down to a coastal point called Kepe Kepe. Before reaching Kepe Kepe, Ididubangara stopped and made camps in different areas, moving very slowly over a long period, leaving village sites and *tabu* places.¹ These are at Kazalei, Kesoko, Hidiki, Soloso, Neme, Holopuru and Tirovena. They finally arrived on the coast at Kepe Kepe. At Kepe Kepe they made rafts and travelled across the lagoon, landing at Haratana. From there to Maloku at Raqo Point, then finally settling at Varilaku on the Kalikoqu side of the Roviana Point. It was here where Ididubangara spent his old age and died.

One day when Ididubangara had at last settled in his final place at Varilaku, he climbed to the top of the hill above him. While standing there he was able to survey the whole of the lagoon. To the eastern and western sides, he gazed at blue water and yellow reefs and the calm lagoon waters, which looked very beautiful to him. He was so enthralled at this beautiful sight, that in order not to forget his grandmother, he named Roviana after her. He also built a monument of stones at the spot on which he stood. Roviana Island has been known by that name from then until today. The lagoon derived its name from this.

The Bao people were the first to arrive and settle on that island, now known as Roviana (or in Bao, now Roviana language, *Nusa Roviana*, 'Nusa' meaning 'island'). The succession of male chiefs, derived from the woman chief, Roviana, were Luturubangara, Ididubangara, Pepeu Bangara, Qorabele, Hipombangara, Hipiri, Taebangara then Qutu, who had 10 wives. These were the same people from whom the head-hunters emerged. In the long-ago past, they had lived at

Vinakiri in the mountainous interior of New Georgia and were never a coastal people. It was chief Ididubangara who brought that big tribe down to the coast to settle at Roviana Island. His sister, Sogaduri, also left Bao to live with her husband, Kabasakana, at Tirokiamba. This place is just above Noro around the Noro Point area. Their son and only child, Kazukuru, married Turudonga and they begat three children—two sons and a daughter named Vakorige. They started the big tribe called Kazukuru. It is from this tribe that the present people around Munda are continually contesting who the primary owners are of the Kazukuru land, however, they all come from Kazukuru's three children, Vivisi, Turana and Vakorige. So the people of Kidu, Munda, Kokorapa, Dunde and some of the Kalikoqu tribes were all of the Kazukuru or Hiagore tribe, originating from Sogaduri, sister of the chief Luturubangara of Bao.

Qutu was a man who wanted peace. By arranged marriages he had 10 wives so that rivals could remain at peace. It was a point of reconciliation for all wrongs done by all these tribes. It was Qutu who made a lot more generations of the people around Munda from these 10 wives. After Qutu died he had given title to Pilo, then to Mesesi, Mesesi to Soga then to Nona to Roni, who was my grandfather. From Roni the title went to Soni, who was his cousin, Soni to Goldie Sakiri, my uncle. Sakiri died so it went to John Roni, the present chief. Sakiri and John Roni were brothers to my mother, Mary. We don't know who will take it after John Roni because my brother, John Gina, died. That's how the succession of chiefs in my line goes. So at John Roni's death the whole of Kilokonga will get together and choose who takes over. It could be his first-born son or one of his nephews. People will sit together and agree on one. It is quite a process looking around, so they wait until things settle down after his death. It is a big meeting at which other chiefs from around Roviana will attend, to witness the enthronement. I am of course talking about my Kalikoqu side only.

MY FATHER'S SIDE

The story about my father called *In His Service* written by the late Rev George Carter is accurate, as he went through time-consuming research. He went through it carefully with my father personally and with many people of the Western District.² The only misprint is the date of birth during World War II of my deceased brothers. But that was not important enough to complain about. I won't touch that book, but will leave it as it is because that is what Rev Carter got from his research.

My father's grandfather was Hebala from Mahaga on Isabel and, as a wee baby, he was brought back by Roviana warriors from a head-hunting raid on Isabel Island. The warriors, as a rule, would take back to Roviana a healthy baby boy or girl. When they arrived home, before unloading the human heads from their war canoes, the normal exercise was to form a long line from the canoes to the shore. The main canoe where the baby was the first to be unloaded. The first thing to be done was to pass the baby along the line, until it reached the other end up on the beach. As they threw or passed this baby from one pair of hands to another, each man gave him or her a strong cracking pressure on its body. If it could survive these hard pressures and cried at the end of the line, this was taken as an omen and the chief would have it cared for in his household to become one of his children. Thus, the Kidu chief Mategua adopted this baby boy Hebala, then, when he grew up, he became a warrior. The chief then gave Hebala a Kazukuru wife named Tomoavara. Tomoavara was to give birth, but as the baby, a boy, was born, the mother died. In accordance with our customary rule at that time, the surviving child must be buried alive along with its dead mother. In this case, the same chief saved that baby boy and included him in his household. So a second baby boy was saved. The first saved was Hebala my great grandfather, the second baby saved was Dulu Hebala, my father's father, therefore my grandfather. So indeed, through my ancestors, I have had a few 'close shaves'. I have thought

honestly about it and I believe that the Almighty God must have wanted me alive to have a role to play in my country.

My father's side of the hereditary system is also dependent largely on his mother's side. His hereditary strength lies heavily towards Simbo, since his grandmother came from there. Today, there are properties on Simbo in which he had a say, such as land and coconut groves. Properties personally owned by him at Kidu in the Munda area come from his uncle Siope Mia, on his father's side. The Kidu chief who had originally adopted his grandfather, Hebala, the baby captured from Isabel, gave them to him. That gives me blood connections on Isabel Island.

DUAL CHOISEUL AND ISABEL BLOOD

My other blood connection to Isabel is through my mother's side, from whom I also have Choiseul connections. The story of this is as follows: there was a man called Oleboso who was the child of a Choiseul father from Kuboro. That included all the area which stretches around the Vagena Island groups. Oleboso's mother was a Kia woman from Isabel Island. Kia area is that of the western tip of Isabel, and includes all the scattered little islands that are almost joined to the Vagena Islands. Kuboro Point of Choiseul and Kia Point of Isabel are facing each other. The numerous little islands between these are the beautiful, coral, sandy Vagena and Kia Islands. The Choiseul people practice patrilineal descent while Isabel is matrilineal.

This man Oleboso from a chiefly line of Kuboro also happened to be from a chiefly line of Kia. He therefore became a man of dual lineage strength on both sides. Thus he had lands and islands at Kuboro on Choiseul and also at Kia on Isabel.

During the time when Roviana people frequented Isabel on their head-hunting trips, they met up with Oleboso at Kia village, where the present village is today. They became

friends. The other raiding groups had also known him well. He used to take them out to enemy areas and he became a very helpful man to them. On one raiding trip they decided to ask him to go with them to Roviana, to which he agreed. Among other reasons, and not just merely to produce new strong family stock, the intention was that blood ties would eventually be connected to areas which Roviana warriors had once regarded as their main supply (hunting ground) areas for heads during their raids. Through doing this, however, they were to become part of the most hunted people. He was taken back to Roviana and was made to marry a Roviana lady called Seporega. She was also part Nono and Tetepare, an island now empty near Rendova Island. Nono is part of New Georgia towards the Marovo area. The Seghe airstrip is near the Nono mainland. Seporega was the daughter of Madevuru, a chiefly line of Nono.

Oleboso and Seporega begat a daughter named Tagorade. She married Tabukevu of Roviana and they begat a son called Soga, a chiefly Isabel name. Soga became a very strong Kalikoqu warrior. He had such great leadership qualities that the Kalikoqu people wanted him. Because of these qualities the people of Kazukuru named Vuto as a wife for Soga. Soga and Vuto begat a daughter, their only child named Edumali. Edumali married a Simbo man named Itusasa. Itusasa and Edumali begat a son called Voda and two daughters, Takopate and Zimaduri. They had Zimaduri marry a Roviana-Kalikoqu chief, Roni. Roni and Zimaduri begat two sons, Goldie Sakiri and John Roni and one daughter named Mary Roni, who begat me, along with nine others, after she married our father, Belshazah Gina. Thus, through my mother I came down from Oleboso the dual warrior, from a Choiseul father of Kuboro and an Isabel mother from Kia. He was taken then to Roviana and married to Seporega. In our *butubutu* (clan) genealogy, which I have now put into written record, our chiefly successions have passed down from the memorised word through the woman, Roviana, by a line of men through women. From Luturubanga to my uncle John Roni, this

chiefly line has passed down 15 generations. That side is of a chiefly descent, which involves front-line warriors and land owning from my mother. But on my father's side it comes from a baby being saved and not eaten by Roviana head-hunters. And from a second baby being saved from the customary norm of live burial after his mother died in childbirth. I have therefore all-round connections to the whole of the Roviana area. I am a man of Vinakiki, Bao, Tagosage, Kalikoqu, Vuragare, Buni, Koloï, Munda, Kidu, Parara, Kohiqo, Kusage, Tadoki, Nono-all on New Georgia and of Lolobo on Kolombangara, of Ughele on Rendova, of Simbo, of Vella Lavella, of Kiboro on Choiseul, and of Kia and Mahaga on Isabel. I am surprised myself at all these connections, but all are indisputable and they are my roots, the records of my father's and mother's sides.

I am twice connected to Simbo through my father's and mother's sides. Such a network of intermarriage was common because of our strong matrilineal system. In former days, the Ranonga people were the kind of people who Roviana people liked to have married into — also Vella Lavella. Through the matrilineal system, women are strong. Therefore there were often arranged marriages between them, our women, and men from Simbo, Ranonga, Vella Lavella, Choiseul and Isabel. This was because when they begat children, they were stronger, but they had to live in Roviana. This practice served the purpose of making a better stock of people than when the women were marrying men inside their own tribes and places. Not many Roviana men married outsiders, because their offspring often had lineal strength on their mother's islands. Even today men from Malaita, Guadalcanal and other islands have married Roviana women for the same reason. We are very conscious of our land rights and ownership systems. It would not matter if a woman married a Vella Lavella man, as the children would remain strong in Roviana. For example, even though I am part Isabel and part Choiseul, I am still strong here because my mother was responsible in seeing to this.

My children also are connected to Bougainville through my wife, Olive. Her grandfather, Harry Wickham was the only son of a Bougainvillean woman who married an early trader, the first Frank Wickham.³ Frank brought her with him to Roviana where they settled at Hombupeka.

The word-of-mouth system of passing on stories, histories, lineages and family trees has long been inherited through our generations. It comes from the elders in the families, for example, grandfathers, grandmothers, great uncles, aunties and other related elders. On my mother's side, my grandmother, grand uncle, two uncles and my mother passed it on to me, and I've made written records of it. On my father's side, the same is true, especially of my uncle and my father, who also made written records. My old people on both sides, so many of them dead now, told me these family histories at night as I fell asleep in their dim, one-room houses. There were stories of great warriors who the people adored in the old days. I was born from such people and I often imagined that if Christianity had passed us by, I might have been one of those warriors. That was not to be, because the outside world came to our islands. Some of my old people comforted me as a child by telling me, 'You will be a warrior indeed, but in a different way, in the days yet to come.'

CHRISTIANITY ARRIVES

It was during my grandfather Roni's reign, as chief of Kalikoqu, when in 1902 the Rev John Francis Goldie brought Methodist Christianity to Roviana.⁴ Chief Roni was very cooperative and accommodating in implementing the establishment of the church among his own Kalikoqu tribe when he was finally converted into a renewed life of Christianity. He was baptised with a new name — that of Solomon Roni. He helped bring his people of Kalikoqu into Christianity, and together they

established their headquarters on an island in the central part of Kalikoqu. It was called Betilihema⁵, and it was at this place where they all lived. At the height of his new-found life in the church, Roni was also one of the leading chiefs who was responsible for the destruction of a few custom shrines. At one stage he sent a group of women to destroy a certain shrine of the Roviana-Kalikoqu people. The women did this and when Rev Goldie heard, he was so furious he called up other chiefs. They were equally disturbed on hearing this. Rev Goldie also called up Chief Solomon Roni. There was a kind of inquiry at the mission headquarters at Munda. My grandfather Solomon Roni arrived late. As he entered the main meeting door, the Rev Goldie said, 'Is that Roni, just arrived?'

Chief Roni said, 'Yes, what are you talking about at this meeting? I heard that you are talking about my shrines.'

Rev Goldie replied, 'Yes, I think it is not good to do that to them.'

Chief Roni answered, 'Well, they are mine, not yours. None of you here owned them, they were mine and I have demanded that they be destroyed. I said so in my own words, so they've destroyed them.'

After this, the Rev Goldie asked the chiefs not to be too extreme with the destruction of their shrines, as they were part of their own culture. The inquiry stopped there. It was a clear and classic example of how ambiguity caused a clash and misunderstanding between Western religion and cultural religion. Many such happenings occurred, especially through the chiefs who had been converted. The reason why some of those traditional shrines were destroyed was because the Bible said you will have only one God with whom you abide. Therefore, the only thing to be done was to destroy the shrines in order to discourage people within the new Christian community from continuing with these as their alternative god.

MY BIRTHPLACE AND MY MOTHER

I was born in the mission clinic, situated on a beautiful hilltop called Toqere-olive or Olive Hill, which was located within the mission headquarters at Munda. We still have a family home in the Munda area where my sister lives. During World War II, the Americans flattened Olive Hill and the original mission location is around the western end of the present runway of Munda airfield. The date of my birth was 5 May 1935. We were a family of 13. The first-born was a girl who died of cerebral malaria after only a few weeks. Her name was Nancy. During their first missionary posting, my parents were living at Sasamunga on Choiseul, so she was buried there.⁶ Next came John Holden Lianga Gina, who was born at Vonunu mission health centre on Vella Lavella. I was born next when my parents were posted at Simbo Island. The girl after me was named Nancy after our deceased sister.

Naturally, in the beginning of life is the mother. She was my very first comforter, friend and defender. She was my ever-present security in the small and confined world I lived in. Everything that she brought from the gardens was from 'Mama's garden'. Fish or shellfish from the reefs and seas were special because 'Mama fished them, Mama got them out of the rocks from the reefs'. Mama was everything. She was my champion in everything. Whatever she got by her efforts was for me and I felt very special and loved by her as a small child.

Yes, my mother, to whom I clung so closely in my tender years, was my most immediate protector. I did not want to be far from her caring hands. I would cry my belly out, and struggle hard, if ever she tried to leave me alone for even a couple of minutes. Just the sight of her and the sound of her voice around me were enough to make my world safe and secure. Even up to when I was eight or nine years old, she told my father I was very dependent upon her as well as being mischievous to other little children. I was my mother's 'best'

boy, handy at her side, because a mother with a boy at her side would be seen to have good company. The mother has someone to chat with and neither of us would feel alone.

I spent more time around her love and care than I'd spent with my father because of the war. During the war years I was with my mother hiding away along the lagoon coasts infested with malarial mosquitoes while my father, Belshazar Gina, was engaged in war scouting duties most of the time with Donald Kennedy at Seghe, in the Marovo Lagoon.⁷ My mother and all of us in our family and our clan's extended families suffered because of the mode of semi-nomadic living, and consequent hunger, fright and diseases during the war. At times, my mother would go without food just to let my younger sister Nancy and the two boys born after her, Zamakevu and Bireke, and me have enough to carry us through the night. Sometimes, she would look at us lovingly, but weep due to the hardship she was suffering, especially when our father was not there with us to help her.

It was towards the end of the war when these two little brothers, Zamakevu and Bireke, died, one after the other, through an epidemic of blackwater fever which swept away many young lives through the Roviana and Wana Wana Lagoons. Blackwater fever and malaria were prevalent during the height of the battles on Guadalcanal and the New Georgia group. This was a very hard blow, a disaster for our mother, but she faced it with unwavering bravery and managed to keep the remaining two of us safe and strong. Our elder brother, John Holden Lianga, was staying with another group, in the safekeeping of our mother's first cousin, Anasama, who adopted him. Our second sister, Shirley, was adopted by my grand aunt at Nusa-Simbo, on Simbo Island. So those two were not with us, thus lessening mother's concerns.

BROTHER JOHN

As the second-born boy, I was a kind of novelty to my father. This was because John, the first-born boy, would by custom inherit his mother's strengths, most especially in the leadership role within her tribe. That left me free for my father to have me more inclined towards his side in many things. That kind of understanding went very well indeed. I felt much freer in many ways as I could stay away with my grandfather much longer than John could. I could follow my father to a village for some days away from home, longer than John was allowed. Our 'big' auntie, Anasama, adopted John and she and her husband thoroughly petted him, which he enjoyed. He almost never walked their ground because he would be sitting on the shoulders of my auntie's husband! He had the best of everything — food, bed, small canoe and paddle — and many good things in their house were for him. My aunt and her husband had no other children and gave much of their affection to John.

When John grew to the age of about 12, my father wanted him to go to New Zealand for his education at Wesley College, Paerata. He had been there himself and especially wanted John to start early and go through a better education than he had. He and Rev Goldie began to embark on the necessary arrangements, however, as soon as their intentions came to the notice of our uncles and elders on my mother's side they sent a delegation to visit Rev Goldie at his temporary headquarters.⁸ My uncles and elders said to Rev Goldie, 'We're not letting our young boy John go anywhere else. He is going to be next in line of chiefly succession and therefore he is going to stay here with us to start to learn his duties.' That ended my brother John's golden opportunity. It was not fair, as John was always the smartest one of those in his age group in all the local schools we had attended after the war. After the failure of their plan to provide John with a bright future, my

father and Rev Goldie turned to me. My father saw me as his alternative hope and said to my mother and her two brothers, 'Very well now, as my son Maepeza is left and is not strictly bound by your side, I will now send him away for his education.' There was apparently no undue resistance to this new proposition. So, again with Rev Goldie, he made arrangements for me to go to a Methodist mission school in Fiji.

John was reared differently, towards a special warrior status. For example, in the old days, a chiefly warrior would have tasted the front-line battles, while being carefully watched over by his expert warriors, for protection. The understanding was that a bigger role was still ahead of him, as one day he would be enthroned as the chief. In pre-Christian days, men were the most profitable sex, heralded at birth as the people regarded it as the arrival of another warrior for the tribe. In this sense, the matrilineal system was important because lineage succession was continuously secured through the women. The men were more expendable warfare items in the head-hunting raids, and many might not live to return. Normally, a man would be given a wife once reaching a mature appearance, or about 40 years of age (according to one recent age measurement). Thus the treatment of John was made along the lines of those bygone days. My auntie Anasama, who adopted my brother John, was my mother's first cousin and was the only woman among her five brothers. Because Anasama was barren, my mother and her two brothers, along with Anasama's five brothers and the older men of the tribe, decided that John was to be adopted by her and her husband Timote Ngina.

ADOPTION

Generally speaking, adoption was very common in the Solomons for many reasons. For a couple to have a lot of children would have meant an uncontrolled birth rate on their part. This was purposely done. A mother could have, say, 10

children even while she was still young. Of those 10 children, perhaps only six might survive through diseases such as malaria and dysentery, the two most prevalent ones. Six surviving children would suffice for a couple. When the adoption system was used, the couple would agree to have two or even three adopted to other villages or islands for their close relatives. It became a very convenient method of keeping their blood ties alive and well. Whenever the birth parents visited one of their children who had been adopted out to a far distant island, on their arrival there, they would feel at home.

One of my sisters was adopted to Simbo and one younger brother to Kolombangara by our very close relatives. My mother was not happy, but she could not do anything about it, as this was a customary practice. She had to leave my sister when she was two, but the boy who went to Kolombangara was only one year old when they took him away. He came to know my mother only when he was 12. He got the shock of his life when they said, 'That's your mother.' They told him when he was a big lad, 'Your father and mother are at Roviana.' The father and mother decide on the adoption when people come to ask. There have to be many discussions which take place before the 'giving away' can happen. It does not involve presents of any sort. The advantage of it is that when you go to Simbo or Kolombangara, you would still feel very close to one another due to relationship ties. You would never be in any danger of starvation because your relatives at those places where your adopted children live would assist you with food, etc. Thus, if you go to Choiseul, you have a home and likewise in Kolombangara. It is the kind of system that enforces your cultural values and relationships with far-away relatives. This practice has unfortunately died out today due to the realisation of the need to keep and educate one's children in one's own family home. It has displaced that old system of convenience, which was suitable only in bygone days.

The need for education reversed those happenings for my parents. They in turn adopted many children from relatives on both sides, who wanted their children to be educated in Honiara. My father was a pioneering headmaster of the former Honiara government primary school. He adopted a good number of children of differing ages into his family home. Today those young boys, have become very important people in their various jobs. My nephew, Wilson Gina is the present general manager of ICSI (Investment Corporation of Solomon Islands, which is the investment arm of the Solomons Government). Another, Gina Tekulu, was one of the first government Permanent Secretaries. A third, of Wana Wana Lagoon, is now the treasurer of the United Church at Munda. He was adopted as a child of about four by my parents. His name is John Sasabule. Before his father, a government ship's captain died, he left John in the full care of my parents. We all took him as a dearly loved brother.

I have personally been opposed to this practice. When my own or my wife's relations began to ask if they could adopt any of our children, we said no. This was on account of the provision of education for our children. We have certainly come to a different world today. It would, however, be a different case if someone from an overseas country wished to take someone's child for adoption. If, say, that new environment was best for the child's educational opportunities, there would be very little opposition to that kind of proposition. It would not, however, be a formal legal adoption of the Western type. This has partly happened already and may happen increasingly in the future. The point being that he/she could still come back home under special arrangement made between the two parties.

Under the old practice, there had never been any special rules attached to the adoption. The adopted children were free to move around between the two lots of parents.

He/she would always be provided with properties by the adoptive parents. He/she could opt to live with the adoptive parent for life, having married there also. It was a customary right to move around until one finally decided which side he or she would finally settle with. Even the right to land would be unrestricted on either side. One might well have been given a bigger portion of land on the adoptive side. Yet still he/she could return to the real parents' side. If the parents said, 'You go back, you have a lot of land on your other side', he or she could return to the adoptive parents' side and settle there.

In Roviana custom, inheritance from the adoptive side is exactly the same as by birthright. If given inheritance to certain things, he/she is boss there. Many people nowadays have contested that inheritance, but were not successful, as it is still strong. Except for written attestation by the two parties under law, it is very much like the Western system of adoption. If you are adopted, you are a full child of your parents, but by custom the adopted has the right to own properties on both sides.

We are not hard on adopted children as they might run away. It is always taken as abusive to tell off the adopted one — that the parents' home is no part of him or her as perhaps happens in the Western system. He or she must have equality with the rest of the family. It is other groups of our relations such as the cousins, nephews, or nieces who have to be watched out for. They are usually the ones who would contest their strengths or closeness of ties to us against an adopted boy or girl. They tend to show no concern with a boy or girl who has been adopted. Their actions show this even today. It may happen that, say, one of our brothers' or sisters' children might say, 'You are bringing him/her in and he/she is not one of us.' In the past and still so far today, that had not and has not happened.

EELS AND TABUS

The eel is *tabu* to us and we revere or respect its presence as a guardian of our tribal land and our crops because its protection will yield very good food vegetation, harvests and thus prosperity. I do not know how this came to be, but it is said eel fish can travel underground and make networks of little holes. As they bore in the soil core, this brings the water from the river, so that spreads right under our gardens throughout this land. That is the myth, therefore the eels are not to be killed or disturbed when we come across them. We regard them as our *tabu* or *kokolo*, which simply means 'dependable — *tabu*'. People nowadays refer to it as our 'defender — devil' or in short just 'devil', our immediate security to our land, and so to our food gardens.

This eel fish *kokolo* comes through my mother. It has become so much feared as food, we reserve it as something *tabu* for us. If I were to eat it then get a cut it would go watery on top and would not heal. If anyone outside our tribe gets a cut or wound the manner of cure for us is to spit on the wound it causes. Anyone from outside us it won't cure! That is the way we heal people, which also comes from the eel. My boys will not bring any eels to be cooked in my pots, saucepan or oven. It is *tabu* and my children know this. My children have fear and respect for it and must not eat it as the charm came through me to them. It is not so for their mother, but she does not encourage them, so they may have opted not to eat it. Even if it was served to me in an outside country, if I am told, I will not eat it. If I was served it and I ate it without knowing I would still suffer the consequences.

We do not touch it or kill it for someone else. The big red ones in the salt water are very dangerous. When I dive and I see them I go around them and they do not hurt me, which surprises me. Different lineages have different *tabus*. Some have the turtle, some eagles, to some like my wife Olive, it is the clamshell; to others, it is the coastal white pigeon.

If those people eat white pigeon, their hair is plucked out or just drops off. Within village communities these little *kokolos* are well observed by those who are directly related to them.

My grandmother had very strong healing powers from the eel fish. People who got wounds came to her. She had a special custom with children. At an early age, she gave us a mixture of special leaves to chew. If this ritual is specially performed the hereditary curing power will be continually strung down the line. When I was a small child my cousin and I were given that curative power, so my children can perform that cure — that is, spitting on to the wound. My son here has healed many people's wounds, which were thought of as being hard to heal.

My father's *kokolo* is the shark from his mother's side. Some *kokolo* are called upon immediately one gets into trouble. If my father did that, the 'defender power', 'devil' or *kokolo* would respond by protecting. This story is an example. During World War II, Kennedy and his coast watchers, including Billy Bennett and my father, were travelling in their small ship the *Dadavata*.⁹ They were crossing the strait between Isabel and Morovo, heading for Seghe, when their dinghy broke loose in the rough sea. My father climbed up the ship's mast and called, '*Kiso pa tadoki*' (meaning, 'Oh shark of Tadoki'). Then splash, he went into the water and it took him a long time to reach the dinghy. He saw sharks were around him, but rather than eating him, they protected him. So the *kokolo* is a protecting agent.

WITH MY FATHER

What of my father? When I was a toddler, I felt his warm love and care. I soon got to know him better as I got older. I then depended on him for his support and security. He was the one who taught me about the white man's things and got them for me. At Gizo, when the cargo ship called in, and we would be

there, it would be apples and pears. Lollies soon became available in the Chinese shops. He was a great influence during my adolescent years. I saw him as a perfect friend, as well as my teacher, who gave me hidings when things between us went wrong. Both our parents brought us up with good manners. They taught us to know our family trees, our connections to our close and distant relations within our tribes, and outwards to allied tribes.

Immediately after the war, I spent about four months away, when my father left me with my grandfather (his father), at Miho Barasipo, in the Wana Wana lagoon. There, after a while, they admitted me into a newly started local school, most likely only to keep us naughty children from being mischievous at home. I got bored with reciting after the teacher the figures — 1, 2, 3, up to 7, and then A, B, C up to G — then there would be some singing, then to the bush playing 'hunting-pig'. No one bothered about us much, so we were left to find our way back home before sundown. These figures and letters were to be repeated until each individual, all within three school days, could recite them without looking at the board. We then moved on to seven more numbers and another seven more letters for the next three school days. The school days were from about 8am to 12. I did not find those tasks difficult at all because I had gone through them in my Kokenqolo kindy days at Munda, before the war came¹⁰.

I did not get back to see my mother because my father decided we had to leave my grandfather at Miho, Wana Wana lagoon, and go straight to Simbo Island. Thus I left the numbers and letters exercise, but my other naughty friends took care of them! In later years, I met some of those boys and they told me with much delight that they had tried their best to the end, and had benefited, moving to higher classes and schools after that.

We moved to Simbo Island and lived at Nusa-Simbo village with my father's aunt and her children. At Miho, Wana Wana Lagoon, I had lived with my cousin-brother named Alec

Alekera. His father came next to my father of the children of my grandfather, Dulu Hebala. My father took the two of us on this trip visiting his aunt at Nusa-Simbo on Simbo Island. After only two months with us there, however, he left us behind, and he returned to Munda. Once again, we were admitted to the local school. This was the third school I'd entered within a year. The one at my mother's place, then the Miho one, then this Nusa-Simbo one. I was bored with the same church school structured syllabus. I kept at it and topped my class and Alex came second, in class four. In those days the lower classes were four and five, the highest one was one. We stayed up there for almost two years, so we could speak the language fluently. We had to be returned home because Alec was very sick, suffering with blackwater fever. He died three weeks after he rejoined his parents at Munda. I was back at my mother's home when, much later on, I received the news. I felt very sad and ended up very sick and thin due to much grieving for him. We were such very great friends. I learnt then how deeply one can feel sadness and pain at the loss of another person.

Through this, I had changed much. My long separation from my mother meant I was no longer so dependent on her as in the past. I think my father wished to wean me from my growing habit of dependency and claiming ownership of all things of my mother's. He would balance this out by taking me with him or putting me with someone from his side.

REVEREND GOLDIE

There was to be another separation, when my father left me with Reverend John Francis Goldie. Rev Goldie came back to the Solomons immediately after the war. It was found to be best for him to be stationed at Patutiva, because it was isolated from the war activities. Munda was so barren and desolate at

that time and people had not yet come back to stay at Kokenqolo. At that time the airfield was still quite large.

While Rev Goldie was at Patutiva in the Marovo Lagoon, my father was making a trip that way by ship. My mother and I were travelling with him. I remember we went to see an old man named Ngatu and we stayed overnight, then we went to see Rev Goldie. I did not know what the conversation was about, but it turned out that Rev Goldie called my parents and me, and they talked about me staying with him. It was agreed, so I stayed with him at Patutiva, Marovo. The boat by which we travelled was called the *Dadavata*, the one Donald Kennedy had used for coast watching.

The purpose of my stay with Rev Goldie was to be his guide as he was very old. I had to hold his hand and lead him, especially to the church on Sundays. He would sit on a chair at the front and I would be sitting at his side. The congregation would be looking at us and I was a little bit frightened, but I was there to do a job, as I was told to.

During the daytime, I would be playing around the house. The major part I had to play was to stand beside him at the table and wave away any flies that may come to the table during breakfast, lunch and dinner. One morning I was doing my job when a large blue fly came and landed on the pawpaw. I was chasing it away; I waved very strongly — a little too strongly. As a result my hand hit everything on the table. I slapped away spoons, the sugar and the tray, the milk bottle and butter went over Rev Goldie's front. He said, 'Oh goodness.' I stood there motionless because I had done something I should not have. I felt guilty, but it was an accident. He called the cooks who came and told them, 'Look this silly boy has slapped away all these things. I am splashed all over with them. Goodness'. He looked at me. I didn't talk; I looked back at him. He laughed and said, 'Silly little boy. You cooks talk to this boy on how not to do it again.'

I was taken to the kitchen and the two cooks, Timothy Otata and Lazarus Mae gave me a big lecture on how to chase the flies away. 'But it was an accident,' I said.

'Oh boy,' they said, 'you don't do that again.' They did not say anymore, because if they talked strongly or at length, they knew I would be homesick and would ask to go home. That particular task was one that all previous cooks did not want to do, so those two were very careful when talking to me that morning, but I started feeling homesick. I cried in my bed at night and they could hear me because I slept with them. One morning they went to Rev Goldie and told him I had been crying in bed the past couple of nights. He asked me why and I said, 'I want to go home.' Rev Goldie had told them to break open a box, out of which they pulled little toys. These were donations from New Zealand. They took out two tip-trucks, beautiful ones, nicely coloured, which they took to Rev Goldie. He said to me, 'All right boy, you can play around with these.' To get these trucks to roll properly you had to use a timber floor, they were not so good outside. So every day I would roll them everywhere, all around the house up to where Rev Goldie was, making lots of noise. He again called the cooks and said, 'Look at that naughty boy, making all these noises near me. I cannot sleep, I cannot read.' So I was called back to the kitchen where the cooks told me what Rev Goldie had said. I asked, 'Where shall I go? This is the best place to roll these trucks.'

They replied, 'OK. You come to Rev Goldie.'

I went with them and he said, 'You've made lots of noise. You can take the trucks outside.' (He understood Roviana, but he kept speaking to me in English. I could hear some of it, but I replied in Roviana to him.) So he said, 'You can go outside, get some of your friends and play with them.'

I said, 'All right.' The next day, I took the trucks outside, called the boys and played with them underneath the house. The first day was all right; the second day the number

of boys grew larger and larger. When one pulled the truck, everyone shouted. A lot of noise again. So the Rev Goldie called the cooks and said, 'Goodness these little kids are making a lot of noise.' The cooks said, 'Well Sir, he wanted to play with his trucks inside the house, but you moved him out. You said it was better outside, now he is playing with them and his friends outside and you now say it is again too noisy. What shall we say to the boy now?'

Rev Goldie answered, 'All right, tell them to go to the other side of the church. There might be good flat areas there.' They told me to find a better place near the church, where we could make a lot of noise and it would be all right to do so. In the meantime, the old man could not stand our noise near him. We went by the church. But in a few days, I came back with only pieces of the little trucks. A lot more boys came there, got very excited as they held the trucks and pulled the wheels and trucks to pieces. There was nothing I could do, so I brought the broken trucks back to the cooks who said, 'Goodness, I don't know what the old man will say to you. These trucks have been damaged.'

'Well,' I said, 'if I'd played with these trucks here it would have been better.' They took the trucks to Rev Goldie who was very surprised and said, 'All right, we will have to do something else. Meanwhile, let this boy know I am not cross with him.' That was a kind of dispensation. A few other things were given to me: biscuits and lollies — all these things to try to get me to stay on because I'd been asking to go home. That is a small account of my stay at Patutiva with Rev Goldie.

EARLY EDUCATION

My first years were spent at Narovo mission on Simbo and I have many memories of the place, and the boats and ships we travelled on. One such was the *Clera*. This ship was donated to my father when he left New Zealand to do mission work back

here in the Solomons. There is a certain lady, now in her 60s, who could not help reminding me every time I met her of those days. She would say, 'Goodness, I can't help remembering how your old father used to throw you out of the *Clera* into the sea to get the coconuts that were floating nearby.' Such were the ways of my father. Every time he went out, I wanted to follow him. So he would say, 'OK, I'll make you a strong man.' We used to put out on the *Clera* each windy day. When there was no wind, his schoolboys used to row with large long oars.

Sometimes it was very hot and there would be coconuts floating on the sea. My father would say, 'Let's turn that way.' He would be holding the rudder and as we came close to a coconut he'd say, 'Watch this lad here, come on.' When I wouldn't jump out, he'd take me and throw me into the sea and splash! I knew exactly what he was doing. I saw that coconut out there, so I'd swim and get it back to the boat. That was appropriate for lunch for a boy to eat. Another fellow I met very recently said, 'You know, when your old man threw you out, I used to follow because I got very hot in the sun and wanted to swim, too.' Sometimes all the crew jumped into the sea! There were other things he did perhaps to make me strong. One had to dive into deep water. He would drop a certain item like a cup, then say, 'Watch it boy, you go, dive in and get this cup.' He would throw it into the sea and I would have to dive quickly into the water, get the cup and when I surfaced again, everyone would be clapping. Even some elderly men whom I've met in Gizo have said, 'You know, you used to sit on my shoulder, even when you'd been playing on the ground and were very dirty. You were a very naughty boy in those days!'

On one occasion, my father had me travel back to Simbo Island from Gizo Island. This young man was quite an expert at sailing. His canoe was small, narrow, handsomely streamlined and was made to swoop fast into the waves, as it travelled at high speed. When the water got into it, it emptied

itself again, due to its design. This type of sailing canoe was at its height before the war, so they say. The sailing of it turned into a type of sport. In fact, someone who had been to Sydney, Australia, brought back the idea. He had seen the yachting in the strong winds there and introduced to Roviana a specially shaped canoe. It then spread to the other islands in the New Georgia group. Some of these canoes had big sails, out of proportion to the canoe's size. They ran very fast and were subject to capsizing if not skilfully handled. Anyway, off we went, sailing to Simbo on a very windy day. We arrived safely at Masuru, which was then the mission headquarters there. Later that man told my father how I felt confident in him throughout the rough journey, enjoying the rushing of water away out at the rear of the canoe. We were about an hour faster than they were on the *Clera*. It was a very hazardous form of travel, needing very skilful people to do it.

Another habit I got into was when my father used to stand out the front of the church and conduct the choir. I'd be given a small stool to stand on beside him. I would imitate exactly what he did. The congregation would rather watch me than my father because my conducting went exactly like his. Some choir members had a choice — some followed my hand and some his. The choir experienced no problems at all with two conductors performing! There were certainly some laughs from the people, but I took no notice. I was only about four or five years old. Most of these things happened during our time on Simbo Island.

We travelled around Ranonga, Vella Lavella and Gizo Islands from Simbo. I was liked and popular around those areas during our preaching travels. Even today when I meet old people around Gizo, these are the stories they usually speak of. They add that they thought I was quite unusual doing such things at that age, in those early days. Probably that was when my father started identifying my abilities for much later on, when he sent me away to Fiji.

Back when we were at Masuru, the mission station on Simbo, I remember I attended probably the first kindergarten school there. My father told me that he created the kindy school and in that way my attendance kept me away from my mother and Aunt Mina as I was quite a nuisance to them. Aunt Mina was from Kolombangara. At a certain age, I was with my mother at Munda, while my father remained at his post at Simbo. This was probably so I could attend kindergarten there, which was situated at the very top of Kokenqolo Hill at Munda. A sister from New Zealand called Sister Effie Harkness ran it. This lady at the time of writing is still alive and well in New Zealand. I remember we were in a very large building where there were classes in each corner of the building, one of which I was in. We all sat on the floor talking away and writing on slates, doing little sums. My proper schooling started on that floor. We also wrote with chalk on the blackboards, which were nailed on the walls around the building. This school was very noisy with much loud shouting, some children fighting, others crying in high pitches. At times Sister Effie would hit the floor with a very strong loia-cane, so that everyone would be silent or perhaps when she was making an announcement. I remember it was really deafening at times. The break-up bell would ring about 11 o'clock in the morning.

After school was always an exciting time, a time of seeing young boys rushing out to snap at each other, breast to breast, struggling hard to win. There was an old favourite sport called *varingaza*, which at first was a simple wrestling kind of game. When the wrestling part is taken over by the *varingaza*, we onlookers would be expecting that one of the two would end up crying and be a loser.

In *varingaza* there are two main choking areas, both require great pressure being put into them to choke the opponent. One is on the belly area, which is at once pressed hard against the diaphragm area. At the time the opponent exhales, he will be stopped from inhaling properly. This is

repeated at each exhaling and, if done well, the opponent will choke quickly and will open out his hands and give a loud cry. He would usually cry all the way back home. The other choking area is the neck. While one of the opponents is busy with the belly, the other must quickly snap back the other's neck and choke off the wind passage to the mouth and nose. Whoever quickly started the choking process, be it to the belly or the neck, if skilful and efficient, could always win the game. The belly choking was always strongly contested as to who got hold first, and both could lead to deaths in serious tribal fighting. I had a few bouts of this game. I had won on three occasions, but on the fourth I ended up crying. I cried from the school building and on my walk all the way home to Qurasai, about half a mile away. To me my opponent was exactly my size and height, but my friends found out he was in fact two years older than I was. He choked my neck so easily and I just burst out crying. Indeed, I had picked on the wrong guy. It was bad luck for me, and kept me away from this game for a long while. This was playing, but it was also an education!

Most of my early years of learning, playing and travelling around were happy, even the privations of the times we were hiding from the Japanese seemed more like an adventure for me because I was a child. My family and especially my mother made that time a lot easier for us children than it was for the adults. Looking back, I realise that I grew up with a strong sense of who I was and where I belonged. That was their gift to me. The love of my family and my belief in God were to be my strengths in life.

Footnotes

- 1 *Tabu* and cognates 'Tambu' and 'Tapu' have a range of connotations, including 'set apart', 'sacred', 'respected', 'restricted' and 'forbidden'.
- 2 The British organised the islands on a district basis. Soon after independence in 1978, provinces replaced districts.
- 3 Ameriga from Bougainville was Wickham's first wife.
- 4 The Methodist Mission was based in Sydney until the early 1920s when it was transferred to oversight and funding from New Zealand. Goldie remained chairman until after the war, a powerful figure within the Western Solomons.
- 5 A transliteration of 'Bethlehem'.
- 6 Belshazar Gina was a Methodist preacher and was ordained as a minister in 1938.
- 7 Kennedy was a District Officer who had served in the Gilbert and Ellice Protectorate and later in the Solomons. He gained a reputation during the war as a coast watcher and leader of a local guerrilla force that not only rescued downed American pilots, but killed several Japanese. Many Solomon Islanders feared him because of his rough manner and often-violent behaviour. A controversial figure, after he left the Solomons he was treated for alcoholism in New Zealand.
- 8 This was immediately after World War II and the headquarters were situated on a little island just opposite the Dude Coast of Munda at Zizirae. The original mission area around Munda had been evacuated during the war. Goldie spent his war in Australia, as he was not allowed to return until after the conflict had ended.
- 9 Billy Bennett's mother was a New Georgia woman and his father a European. He and Kennedy often argued during the war. Bennett admitted at a public seminar in Honiara in the 1980s that he once tried to kill Kennedy during a fight with the Japanese. He failed.

¹⁰ 'Kindy' is a common shortened version of 'kindergarten' in Solomons and Australasia. The Methodists were the first to set up a kindergarten in the islands.



Lloyd Maepeza's parents, Mary Niua Roni and Belshazah Gina, on their wedding day, February 1932.

CHAPTER TWO

Extending my education

In my childhood, I learned so much from my parents and relatives about the important things of family, tribe and place. My early schooling and my religious training were important to me and they were natural to us as everyone I knew in my own age group did these things. I was soon to find there was more to be learned when the modern world pushed in on our islands and later when I left my home and journeyed out far beyond these familiar places.

DURING THE WAR

When the Japanese were heard to be arriving in the Solomons, all mission schools were closed and the villages around Munda area evacuated. The only form of education for us children during the process of moving here and there to avoid being seen by the enemy while getting well away from the battleground was learning by heart Bible verses for text nights. Sunday evening services had been maintained as text nights. Like the older people, we children we would stand up and recite little Bible verses in Roviana. In order not to miss

another text night, we would prepare ourselves by learning the Bible verse that the other boys had recited on the previous nights. In doing this we literally trained our brains, perhaps without realising it. Although the war denied us a long period of time with formal education, that process was maintained to some degree through the learning of Bible verses.

From Munda, we had moved to Elelo. By night we had travelled through to Bulelavata and finally to a mainland point beyond Nusa Hope Island. This was the point we had reached when the Americans passed through the Sasavele Passage on barges; they landed and then started the big war at Ilangana Point, Munda. For two long weeks we could hear the banging, rattling of guns, shells firing and bombs exploding. I can still hear them now, today, in my ears. The point where we lived was swampy, but we lived there for a good period of time during the Munda battle.¹

It was a bushy area when we first arrived, as no one had ever lived there before. We made huts and some gardens. Our menfolk would return to our old gardens, but only at night. We had left these behind at Munda, and they would go to them and get food from them. Some people who moved with us were from the Vona Vona side and some were from the Lambete and Dude villages. Many times we were right below where the planes were busy fighting just above us. One night, some Japanese came around from Viru Harbour after the Americans had bombed it. They found their way through another passage, right opposite us and into the lagoon. As they fled, they caught two of our men who they took with them. We never saw them again. The Japanese found their dinghy at the last village of that lagoon, which is situated towards the Viru Harbour area. The Japanese paddled past us that night. Luckily, it was our prayer time when they came past us. They did not hear us because they were talking and making a lot of noise themselves.

Once there was a shell shot from a warship out in the open sea. Maybe it had been aimed in our direction, however,

it landed right in the waterfront of our village, but it didn't explode. It is still there, I think. I learned later that day was the D-Day of the Munda battle. The atmosphere all around us was one of confusion, of bombs, shells and guns — just one long rattling sound. The women especially, some of the older men as well as some of us children were almost frozen to death with fright. But some of the children were not frightened; rather, they enjoyed watching the planes that were fighting above us. When hit, some planes fell into the thick forest and some into the sea and lagoon. During the combat their bullets sprayed all around us, while we hid under large fallen trees. Throughout that particular day the flying bullets hit not one of us, and we survived that D-Day or landing day. During all this time, I travelled with my mother and my uncles. I have already told of the sufferings and courage of my mother at this terrible time.

Because of food shortages, we children survived on just coconuts for many days. We repeatedly visited the coconut groves just near us and if we got a coconut we were happy. We used to go spear fishing on the coast and what we caught we roasted and ate there. This was all right for us children. It was the men and women who were worried about how we might survive. If we found food we ate it. For water, we sipped and drank that which had collected in the hollows of tree stumps or tree branches. At times, we chased away snakes that lay cooling themselves in those tree hollows. We would have contests as to who could sip the water first since the snakes were found in those places. We children believed that snakes liked the cooler places to lie around in, but we could have been wrong. We also drank from the brackish water near our village, not far from the toilet areas.

The Japanese never returned to our area after the dinghy incident. If the Munda battle had gone on for much longer, we wouldn't have survived. There were diseases surrounding us, adding to our misery: malaria, pneumonia and blackwater fever were the most rampant in those days. Yet

there were also children born during those hard days. The mature, old ladies with traditional skills took care of that. One brother and two sisters of mine were born during this time.

After the Allies drove out the Japanese from the New Georgia area and it was safe again, I got to know more about the Americans. My first experience of them was when they came to our village and attended church service in the morning at Novele Island. They used to come in their barges, neatly dressed in their brown-khaki uniforms. To our delight they handed us children packets of chewing gum, lollies and sweet biscuits. And we held high expectations of their coming visits on the next Sunday!

We — men, women and children alike — gained a lot of new foreign things from the presence of the American soldiers. We heard, then we saw at first hand, aeroplanes of different kinds. We saw warships, cargo-carrier ships, huge transport barges, small barges, trucks, lorries, jeeps, motorcycles, bulldozers, Caterpillar tractors, road-graders, loaders, hauling/hoisting winches and other equipment. There were all types of white men and the blacks: some good men, some rough and bad men; some were high officials, some were cooks, bakers, drivers, from all walks of life. In the final analysis, what the war provided was like a huge theatre, which gave all of us a very significant form of adult education, for almost three hard years. What we gained were new perceptions and perspectives of how far the wider world had come and what achievements the human race had made and was still making. We could observe all things. Some saw contradictions to the Bible teachings, as there were times when one had to kill a neighbour for stealing, looting and destroying. This all happened during the war. The conflict also brought into our backyard all the heavy equipment of war as well as various good things and the infrastructure that makes life more convenient. The ideas behind these things and the logic of how they operated were there for us to see. There was

no need to go overseas to see and learn about them. We did not need to be highly educated to read about them, how they were manned, their functions, and how they saved human labour. They were in front of us. All the war equipment and the different machinery were wonders to us. All that we saw in this huge theatre made such an impression that every individual remembered it all their life. This has been true and very significant to me, personally.

Soon after the war, we travelled back and settled at Volani Island, Zizirae. We were not allowed in the battle areas because of bombs lying around. Much later on, a government station was established at Hombu Hombu Island, just off Munda Bay. We started visiting the government station while the Americans were still living around Munda. It was about nine years after the Americans had evacuated Munda before people started to move back to their former village sites around Munda and within the lagoon. But after three years it was thought safe to do so. The war had indeed set back our formal education. I did a little bit of schooling at Zizirae, before my parents had me stay with Rev Goldie at Patutiva in the Marovo Lagoon. As a matter of fact, while staying at Patutiva, I attended a village school there each day from 7am to 10am. The year was late 1945. After my two months at Patutiva I went back home for some time. One day my father came by ship from Hombu Hombu to where we were living in the lagoon at Nusa Banga. He was on his way to Honiara. My uncle at Nusa Banga, Goldie Sakiri, was a headman. He had my mother and I taken there where we had been living with his family for some weeks already. Not knowing this, my father had stopped only to say hello to his brother-in-law, my uncle, and he saw us there. When I saw him I said, 'I am going with you, Dad.' And that was it. No one could say no because I was the one who usually travelled with him. So he said, 'OK. You are coming with me.'

TO HONIARA AND ON TO SUVA, FIJI

That was in early 1946. The ship we travelled on to Honiara was the *Veronica*. We landed at the site of the present yacht club, which was the usual loading place for all government ships in those early days. I stayed with my father in Honiara, where he became a clerk at the 'Number Nine' hospital, one of the earliest buildings in Honiara to be used by the public after the war.² The last of the American forces were still closing down their base and disposing of equipment, such as the LST (landing ship tank) vessels. There were also numbers of Fijian artisans brought into the country to work on the new government quarters and to renovate some of the old American buildings as the new capital took shape. Around me, I had many relatives because people from the West filled positions as clerks, carpenters, drivers and boat crews. They took me to different places around the town and stopped me getting bored in the hospital compound. I also got to meet different people from other islands who were working at the hospital and joined in their games of soccer, cricket and baseball, as well as indoor games such as table tennis, card games and chess.

While we were in Honiara, my father arranged for me to be educated in Fiji, having written to the headmaster there. Mr S.G. Andrews was then the headmaster of the Lelean Memorial School, a Methodist school at Davuilevu. After everything was properly organised, my dad wrote home to my mother saying I was ready to go to Fiji. We first took a trip back home so I could say goodbye to my people. My mother met us at the government station at Hombu Hombu. From there we went back to my Uncle Goldie Sakiri's place at Nusa Banga. All my relatives came and we stayed there for about two weeks, then they made a big farewell party for me, where many speeches of goodbye were said, at which I cried. All my aunts and uncles sobbed and my mother hugged me close as though her heart would break.

I was to travel on a ship named *MV Kurimarau*, a government ship that serviced the Solomon Islands and Fiji at

that time. This was because the Governor of Fiji was also the High Commissioner of the Western Pacific. *Kurimarau* was the only connection between these two countries serving them all year round. The ship landed alongside the small wharf at Hombu Hombu so the time had come for me to leave all my relatives. That was about September of 1947.

We left Hombu Hombu and the ship spent two weeks loading bags of copra from most of the copra stations, near and around Honiara. A small American warplane, a Red Cross truck and an American jeep were loaded on to the ship for Fiji. It took us about two weeks to arrive in Suva. On our way we stopped at Vanikoro Island. There we picked up 12 American Samoans who had gone adrift. One, their leader, had one of his eyes bulging out. The salt water caused this during their long period adrift. They spent between three and four months at sea in their little boat, which had engine trouble. They finally came ashore at Vanikoro, where the people at Buma village had rescued them in the period before our arrival. They had been with the people there for three weeks before we arrived.

The story goes that the Samoans stole that little ship for fishing, but it had engine trouble and they just drifted out and away from Samoa. At Paeu on Vanikoro, we picked up 10 Tikopians. They were also castaways on Vanikoro and we dropped them on Tikopia at night, but the Samoans we took to Suva.

On the *Kurimarau* I had a very nice friend, an old man from Sikaiana. He was one of the ship's crew, and he used to cheer me up, so that soon I was no longer feeling so homesick. I felt at home on the ship, but one day I made a mistake. Because we were such good friends that we could do anything together, we sat at the rear of the *Kurimarau*. It had a window-like opening so one could look behind the ship. On this voyage we were towing the *MV Myrtle*, another government ship that was going to Suva for an overhaul. The voyage therefore was a very slow one. The old man and I sat there talking and enjoying giving sign-talks and waving at the crew

of the *Myrtle*. There were two stools that we sat on. This particular day, however, while he was carried away with his laughing at the *Myrtle's* crew, I stealthily removed his stool a little distance away from him. As he was going to sit down, still laughing, he fell right to the deck. He got up in pain and great fury and said he was going to throw me into the sea. I started running all over the ship. I went to the ship's steward named Gege and told him what had happened. Gege called the Sikaiana man's boss-boy and they talked the matter over. The boss-boy then called the old man and with Gege and me, had a peace talk, after which everything was all right again. After that I was so frightened of the old man that I did not want to sit with him anywhere on the deck. I found an opportunity to make peace when we were by ourselves and gave my old friend two American dollars, out of some money that my father had placed in my box. We became good friends again for the rest of the voyage.

Because I was then only 11 years old, many people asked me who was taking me to Fiji. The story was simple. The chief steward, Gege, from Choiseul, had some distant blood relationship with my mother. My father had also helped him in many ways in his earlier days. So my father and he had mutually agreed that I would sleep in his room, which had ample space for me. He supplied me with surplus food from his kitchen. Gege gave me his utmost support during my journey to Fiji for my education. It was only through my father's teachings that I could travel alone on such a big ship while still a young boy. He began teaching me about life when I was a little boy. At that time we also talked about going to school outside Solomon Islands. We children would say, 'Oh I'd like to go to school in New Zealand.' This was the only place we knew of as children. When someone said, 'You are going to school in Fiji,' I replied, 'Yes, I am going.' I thought that it was further away than New Zealand and that was sort of my hidden encouragement, which urged me on to travel alone to Fiji.

When we arrived at the wharf in Suva, the chairman of the Methodist Mission was waiting at the wharf to meet a New Zealand missionary sister, Sister Lina Jones, who was also travelling on the ship. The headmaster, Mr Andrews, was there to meet me. Before my father and I left Honiara for home to bid farewell to my mother and other relatives, my father had organised all the arrangements with the High Commissioner's office in Suva and an education official in Honiara talked to me about going. Was I willing to go and not be forced? Things like that. Anyway, in Suva, we were taken to the customs shed where Sister Lina was very helpful to me in getting cleared. We were then taken to the residence of the Methodist Mission chairman, Rev Green, and had lunch. Afterwards, Mr Andrews and I walked down to the mission office, somewhere in Clark Street. That's when I saw new and many different things. I had seen big trucks and lorries at Munda and Honiara, but in Suva there were all these funny little vehicles, cars, and taxis. I asked what these things were. Lots of cars, it was an exciting time, a real eye-opener. All the Indians! I had never seen Indians before. I walked to town with Headmaster Andrews who bought me an ice cream. Buying regularly with money to get something was a new concept to me. There was a government trade scheme store at Hombu Hombu, but unlike the ones I began to see in Suva. Back in Honiara there were only a few Chinese trading stores, which I'd never been to, but none at Hombu Hombu, because most of the Chinese who came after World War II, were carpenters. In the Western District, only after the Government moved to Gizo did they start their shops. Suva town was indeed a different environment altogether.

SCHOOLING IN FIJI

Because I arrived in Fiji sometime near the end of September, I spent only two months in school before the Christmas holidays started. When the year of 1948 began, I started my

formal primary education in class two. A very kind teacher, Helen Cavu, took it. The Lelean Memorial School was co-educational, catering for many areas of education — primary, secondary and technical. Some students were boarders, but most attended as day scholars. Those of us who came from outside Fiji were a Tongan, nine New Hebrideans (now Vanuatuans or ni-Vanuatu), one Gilbertese, and me, from the Solomon Islands. The first two New Hebrideans attended carpentry in the technical school and later another two came for primary and secondary schooling, then of the last group of five, three went to the technical school and one each to primary and secondary. Included in that group was Ati George Kalkoa, who had his name changed before New Hebrides independence to Ati George Sokomanu. So George Sokomanu, the first President of the Republic of Vanuatu, was my early classmate.

When I started in class two there were two of us boys who were bigger and older than the others — he was 11 and I was 12. I very much enjoyed school in Davuilevu, which was near the Nausori River Bridge. I probably enjoyed it more than most, because my early schooling had been so disturbed by the war. I found there were many new interesting experiences. We were taught in English, while outside my friends spoke to me in Fijian, especially in the dormitory. I quickly learned Fijian and still speak it quite well. I have since met most of my schoolmates from the Lelean and Queen Victoria schools in 1971 during a course at the University of the South Pacific and at various times whenever I visited Suva.

When Rev Goldie was asked to leave the Solomons because of his ill health and old age, he made his journey home via Fiji, mainly to see me at Davuilevu. I was called to the principal's home. Though he was old and lean, Rev Goldie sat me on his lap like a child. He gave me some fatherly advice, telling me, 'Always go forward, my lad.' I never forgot those words. He was very happy that I had gone to Fiji for my

education. It was mostly due to Goldie, along with my father, that I was educated in Fiji while still quite young.

I was five years at Lelean and four years at Queen Victoria, so I was about 19 years of age when I came back to the Solomons. Since I had left home in 1947, I had never had a chance to return home for a break. In 1952, something happened that really shocked me. During my years at Lelean Memorial School, as time went by, I thought of myself as a Fijian. This was because I spoke that language and had adopted their attitudes; I played and joked like them, but blurred in the back of my mind I was still a Solomon Islander. During my five years at Lelean Memorial School, no one ever told me, 'You must go back home for a holiday in the Solomons.' Therefore I thought I was going to stay on in Fiji for the whole of my education.

At the beginning of 1952, my father came to Fiji to train as a schoolteacher for one year at Nasinu. At that time, he started telling me about the old people and my mother back home. He gave me some advice that quickly altered my thinking — that I was certainly *not* a Fijian. It was a firm claim, laid upon me that I was the property of someone else, who lived somewhere else and not in Fiji. My home was really somewhere far away out there. This then urged me to think, 'Yes, I belong there. I must go back to my Solomon Islands. I do not belong in Fiji anymore; I belong to another country.' These were the dominant thoughts that flew around in my head. It really affected my habit of easily taking in new knowledge during the process of my schooling. I had been happy just to be left to tread the road to higher achievements. I had been happy not thinking of home. If that had not been spoilt, I would have been in the same category as my Fijian classmates, who worked very hard in order to further their studies. My thoughts after this disturbance were, 'Oh it won't matter if I don't do well, I have a home out there' — those sorts of things. If I had been left alone to be adopted into the Fijian

way of thinking during their transitional period towards independence, that the harder you work in school, the higher job you will be given, I could have become a high achiever in school. There was no such mentality in the Solomons at that time. One could just go into a government job, or just stay around the village, where one could still eat, drink and be housed. In Lelean and Queen Victoria schools, there were many sons of chiefly families and high-ranking rural and provincial elders. Their level of thinking about the benefits of a good education was what I had grown used to.

In Lelean, there was a Christian background as it was a Methodist mission school. I attended classes in Sunday school conducted in Fijian, because I had learned Fijian vernacular in class and outside. I did my Sunday school examinations one Sunday morning. Mr Andrews asked, 'Are you sitting this Fijian Sunday school exam, too?' He was surprised that I could do it. I used to be well above some of my classmates with my language. I mixed well with the Fijians. I was the only Solomon Islander when I arrived there as a boy. If you went to Fiji now, somebody would ask for me, 'Mapesa'. Once or twice when I have been back, they have been happy to see me again. They regarded me more as a Fijian than as a Solomon Islander. In fact, I was sort of adopted at the Lelean School by the station officer of the Tuvanga-ni-koro's household. The first school holidays in 1947, I spent with Headmaster Andrews in his home, while the Tongan and the two New Hebrideans remained in the school, where they worked each morning. I had been with the Andrews for more than two weeks when the old man, the Turanga-ni-koro (overseer-manager), came. His name was Asaeli Mata and his wife, Sera, was the staff nurse of the school. They decided to take me for holidays into their house. Mr Andrews kindly allowed it after talking with me and when I said 'all right' I joined Aseli and Sera's household where I stayed for the whole of the holidays.

From then on they treated me as a son. Only when school started did I go back to the dormitory. On weekends, I would be called to stay with them. So in many ways, I was brought up with that family. The lady was very good, she taught me like a real mother. They had only one child, a daughter called Mereseina Fugawai, so I was regarded as their son. I helped in the kitchen and in the garden with Asaeli Mata. They accepted me and made me 'feel at home'. Old Sera told me of all the Fijian virtues and what was good manners in their culture. I learned how to behave even when meeting the important Turangas and the Adis around the villages in the Rewa area. Twice I went with Sera on her nursing inspection duties; the first was to villages above and inland from Sawani village, near what is now the government secondary school for girls; the second was to visit Indian and Fijian villages near the old Wanibokasi rural hospital. Asaeli Mata taught me manual skills in the family gardens and how to do maintenance of buildings around the school, as part of his duties as Turanga-nikoro there.

One Christmas holidays, we spent Christmas Day and New Year's Day of 1949, plus another a week and a half, at his place at Laqere. Here I helped him build the family house. I first learned carpentry from him, on a real practical basis at that time. My duties were: sawing up the timbers he had measured; hammering nails at spots he indicated; handing him timber and tools when he was up high; holding one end of the timber as he nailed the other end. This couple had accepted me not only into their home, but into their life.

My being transferred to Queen Victoria in 1952 was a sad day for them. The Solomon Islands Government took me away from Lelean. They, the Government, realised only when my father attended the teachers' training college that he already had a son schooling in Fiji. They were then looking for Solomon Islanders from either Pawa School (Anglican) on Makira or from Munda School (Methodist) on New Georgia

to attend schools in Fiji. Once the Government learned that I was at the right stage of education, they came to satisfactory terms with my father saying, 'We will refund all you have spent on him at Lelean if you send this young man up to Queen Victoria.' This was how I was transferred. The cost was a burden to my father, which the Government then lightened. When I went to Queen Victoria School I met up with some traditional leaders' sons. Queen Victoria was like an English public school with high standards of discipline.

The other Fijian school, which had a similar emphasis on military discipline, was at Lodoni. It was called Ratu Kadavulevu Provincial School and was about one mile away from the new Queen Victoria School site. Queen Victoria was annexed at Lodoni for three years during the building of the modern school. After this was completed in 1952, the school was moved to its new site at Matavatuou, about 48 miles from Suva City. I was one of the pioneers of the new school site. Queen Victoria was moved three times. It started at Nasinu, quite near Suva, the first move was to Nanukuloa, second to Lodoni and the third and final to Matavatuou where it is today.

I finished at fifth form there, because, as I said, my earlier education ran aground. On my entry to Queen Victoria I started to write letters to the chief secretary of the former Western Pacific High Commission in Suva, requesting a trip back home for the 1952–53 Christmas holidays. These letters began with all sorts of artificial attitudes, excuses or something like 'people think this way, so I should, too'. He wrote back saying, 'You have to finish your sixth form and you must try to pass your university entrance. That will enable us to have you sent to your home for Christmas, then to an overseas country for further studies', or along those lines. That was really too long for me to endure. I could have done so if I had been left in peace in the first place, undisturbed by thoughts of whether I was a Fijian or a Solomon Islander, because I had been bright

all through my years at Lelean. I think, in a way, my father spoiled my first year at Queen Victoria School. I eventually gained the support of the government through my declining performance in the fifth form. At the close of 1955, I was returned to Honiara where I said, 'I don't want to go back to Fiji', and that was the end of my golden school days.

Footnotes

- ¹ This fighting occurred in 1943.
- ² The Americans built this hospital, Number Nine Field Hospital, and the name remains.



*Olive Eaduri and her
Chinese girlfriend, the
daughter of a Gizo trader,
1957.*



*Harry Wickbam, grandfather
of Olive Gina and son of trader
Frank Wickbam and Ameriga
of Bougainville, at his home,
Hobupeka, Roviana Lagoon,
New Georgia, in 1950.*

CHAPTER THREE

My career begins: District administration

GIZO DAYS

When I arrived back in Honiara, I felt so refreshed because I saw my mother again after a gap of nine years. My parents were in Honiara, as my father was just starting a new government school for the working people's children there. It was originally called the Honiara Government Primary School. I spent some time in Honiara looking for a job of my choice in the Government. I was not sure where to go — there were posts available in several departments. My father and I had a long talk one night and he suggested I think seriously about District Administration. There were several people from the Western Solomons in service in this department and the prospects for promotion seemed good. He encouraged me by saying that before the Europeans knew of us, our ancestors had produced fine men and women who gave leadership to their people. He said that I could do the same in government service as I had the blood of leaders in me and that I was capable of learning new things. So I applied. What good news it was when the government accepted me for a District Administrative post in the office at Gizo, Western District. My effective date of commencement was 5 May 1956, after

spending three weeks meeting my many relatives around Munda and the lagoon. I made this visit to my home places to see all my relatives I had left so long ago. I found some of the old people had died while I was in Fiji and at different places we all wept as we shared the sorrow of this.

I had to start my new career from the very bottom, but I didn't mind that, knowing I had a good educational background. It was indicated that there was a chance for me to return to Suva for medical studies, but I had no interest in that field of work, nor did I feel I was moulded for it. I thought as long as I had a job, I had become a man — those were the immature thoughts of my youth. Medicine was not in my mind. I was just so happy to be joining the District Administration Department. They said, 'You will have to relieve an old man who is retiring soon.' This was Willy Paia, the first clerk of all Solomon Islanders to be accepted by the Government in the early Tulagi days.¹

As early as 1952, more government offices had begun to open in Honiara, the post-war capital. That was the year in which a separate High Commissioner, Sir Robert Stanley was moved from the Western High Commission in Suva. He was based in Honiara to look after the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, the Condominium of New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. Most of the offices in Honiara were manned by the dark Western people. Even the early company offices there had high numbers of Western people employed. Because most of the Westerners started in the Government very early on, they then had to retire early; in the 1960s and early '70s, the retiring age was 45, and, by 1958, it moved up to 50. If you began working from 1958 onwards, you would retire at 50. The reason behind this, the British colonial officials said, was that you had to help the economy of the rural districts. Therefore, while you were still quite young and strong, you could go back home and plant your coconuts, etc., and still be helpful in the

rural communities. Some, who retired at that time, went home and planted coconut plantations or ran trading stores. They worked very hard. Others, however, did not do very much at all.

I counted myself lucky to have Willy Paia because of his long experience. After my two months with him, he retired and I started taking on the responsibilities of a customs officer. That meant looking after all customs affairs.

In the district office, we did almost everything in those days. We looked after the customs side, the treasury side, even performed banking duties as an agency for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. On the day I commenced my government service at Gizo District Office, the District Commissioner, Western District was John Maxwell. He had just finished working in one of the African colonies, and came to the Solomons. The District Officer was Tom Mitchell and not long after was replaced by Mr A.G. Cross. I spent about seven years in the Gizo office. My early years at Gizo were very much during the colonial period. I found the European officials were perhaps at the height of their activity. That is, they acted as if they were still working in Africa or India or Malaya. Where they were or what they did didn't make any difference to them. They just looked on us as part of their administrative work, as they had in Africa and India. Therefore, they tried to bring about many changes along the lines of those they knew to have been workable in other countries: such things as local government councils, native court systems, and district headmen became part of the administration. I think local government councils happened because after World War II, the Malaita people wanted to adopt their own style of government called 'Maasina Ruru'². To quickly eradicate the people's opposition, the Government established the first local government council, quite hastily for the Malaita people, at Auki — the first local government council in the Solomons.

The local government system spread to all the islands, without much consultation or local consensus. Such

systems were forced upon the country. This was the main type of work which the District Commissioners (DCs) and District Officers (DOs) were involved in. The setting up of local councils and local courts involved difficult processes. They depended on the willing involvement and proper understanding of the people before they could be workable. How to initiate them to become workable was a problem because the concept was an introduced one. It was an English concept from that of the county system, which they had taken, modified and designed to be suitable in the African and Asian colonies. They then introduced it to the Solomons as well.

All the time we met difficulties, because what they thought to have worked well in those other parts of the world, did not appear to work well here. It took much time and effort to rectify the faults. This involved lots of touring, talking, discussions and instructions. On the whole, however, these introduced concepts did some good for the people, but only when people were willing to make them work. What intelligent alternative did they have? What the DC and DO said had to be done. Some people grumbled, then their relations and their headman would report them to their DC. So the people just followed the Government's policies. Once the district headman held that post, he immediately became a government man himself. He therefore talked on behalf of the Government — I held the same kind of attitude when I worked with the Government. When the administration introduced new government proposals and policies often the people asked many questions. In the Western District I found that the people were a little bit reserved. I found things much more difficult on Malaita, Guadalcanal and Makira and the other islands. At times, these people didn't want to quickly accept matters that were being explained or discussed.

During my seven years at Gizo, I was involved in many changes that took place there. For example, the sub-account system within the district office was moved to a separate office and became the sub-treasury, which came directly under the

main Treasury Department in Honiara. All customs affairs also came under the main department in Honiara. The main offices in Honiara were unable to man these new offices in Gizo so, by arrangement, as I was the only one performing customs activities in the district, I was moved along with my work into the new Gizo sub-treasury office. I shared rooms with the former sub-accountant who became the new sub-treasurer. Therefore all financial and customs matters were dealt with in this new office. This released the DC and DO and their staff from the more specialised functions of the Government.

Other noticeable changes were that district departmental heads started to flow to Gizo. These were the district agricultural officer, works officer, sub-postmaster, district marine officer and many more. All depended on the Government for their housing and the offices that their respective headquarters in Honiara made available. The sub-treasury office was the doorway to these expansions, because it was able to process everyone's monthly salaries. My moving into the sub-treasury office with my customs duties was, in a way, a transfer for me to the Treasury Department, but on special duties in customs matters, from the District Administration Department. I didn't mind this outcome. It was an adventure where I got to know more government work from much wider and deeper experiences. That mattered a lot in those years. There had at first been differences expressed by my DC about my transfer, because I did most of the translation, interpreting in registration of marriages and in the Magistrate's Court duties. I also organised most social activities like the celebration of the Queen's Birthday. Even when I was working in the sub-treasury office, the DC asked me to assist in performing some of these roles at times.

While still in the district office, before being transferred, I used to tour with either the DC or DO and did a lot of work as touring clerk and as interpreter, either Pidgin to English or Roviana into English and vice versa. I enjoyed those

duties because they provided opportunities for me to build up my interests in administrative work. I liked working on new things so when the transfer was explained to me, I gladly took it. While I was confined mostly to customs, I would be available to perform financial duties too. In my customs role, I normally cleared all overseas ships that entered or departed from Gizo. Since I had no one to assist me, I did them myself. I collected import duties, especially for goods that arrived with the cargo ship *Tulagi*, which called to Gizo every six weeks. Also I collected export duties for copra and shells which were loaded into large copra ships bound for Europe. When there were no ships, I switched to treasury duties, helping with the balancing of the day's transactions in the main cashbook. I felt my salary was adequate as I was looking to gain knowledge and understanding of government functions. I had a lot of enthusiasm for these things.

When I started to work in the government service at Gizo I felt that I could learn many things, right from the bottom up, from scratch. As a learner clerk I started off on quite a low salary of eight pounds a month. My early days in the office were so exciting, because at times I would find myself switched from the work of a simple orderly to an interpreter. On the whole, I tried to put my hand to any kind of work that confronted me. Certain things that I had experienced in school I put into practice in those early working days. It was new to wake up early in the morning to have a morning bath. One had to be spick and span, with well-ironed khaki trousers and a white shirt to wear. Being properly dressed was one very important thing that the colonial people brought to us as being part of our working life. I have always thought that those ways benefited us, too, for they were a discipline for minds and bodies. In those days one experienced a hard start when going to work for the Government. Climbing up the work and salary ladder was far from easy. When one had been promoted to a certain level after so many

years, it would take more years to reach the maximum scale, depending on good reports from one's boss. Perseverance was a very important value, which lived alongside loyalty and commitment. This, one must hold on tight to, until one reached retirement. If one's perseverance falters then one leaves the Government to do something else at home.

With me, it was perseverance that had taken me through many adventurous and varied duties in the district office in those early days. At times my superiors used me at their convenience as an orderly boy, sent me off to distribute certain unofficial letters to a trader or just to buy cigarettes in the store. When I returned I would have to stand to attention and say, 'Sir, these are your cigarettes.' In our office we had an official messenger man. His title was 'orderly'. Our orderly was an old man and his age naturally meant that he walked very slowly when sent on errands. Because of that I filled in for most of his duties when the need arose. Whether or not I was misused at times, it didn't bother me. As long as there was work to do, I obeyed. When touring with my superiors on the ship, I had to help the 'cook-boys' carry the plates of food to the bosses, an unusual extra to my job. Those little tasks involved discipline. In those days when you went to a white man you had to be disciplining yourself, or he disciplined you. Therefore one must say to one's superiors, 'Good morning, Sir.' 'Sir' was always used in those times — and it was also accorded to the bosses in the plantations, exactly the same way. I grew up with these kinds of teachings and lived with them then.

Off an island once, for example, with my superior and his wife, my services were used as an assistant to their cook. We anchored between the island and the mainland for the night. There were swells that rolled the ship about, though we were well sheltered by that island from the open sea. That was the only place for the ship to anchor along that long Tabatana coastal stretch on Choiseul Island. The ships then were not as comfortable as the ones of today. The ladder up to

the top bridge of this ship was perpendicular to the wheel room and it was very difficult to get a tray up there. Still one had to try to manage. I had been doing this only during the days of this tour. That evening I was carrying the same tray, loaded with a teapot, two cups and saucers, spoons, a glass container of sugar and some biscuits, to the foot of the ladder. Then, with the tray in my right hand and my left hand holding on to the rail opposite, I was moving slowly up the ladder. As soon as I was about to reach the top of the ladder, a big wave came and it raised the ship while I was rolled along with it. The tray went 'whoop!' The lady said to me in an un-nice way, 'Oh you naughty boy, why did you do that? You've spilled my tea, my glass of sugar. Ooh, dear how silly this all is.' But the gentleman said, 'No, it was not his fault. It's the sea, it's obvious that it is not him — you can see the ship is rolling.' Indeed they had a heated little talk. That superior attitude was in the ladies, too. When on the ship at that time, something was very obvious to me; it was not part of my job to be doing this kind of thing. I was paid as a clerk and not as an assistant cook or steward.

NEGOTIATING A PATH

In those days, when we Solomon Islands people looked at ourselves sheltered under the great umbrella of the British colonial administration, we felt that those colonials looked upon us as servants, as black people. As they did in Africa, so too they did in the Solomons. We knew that all along, because of the gossip around the public service we could quickly identify the new comers. When they arrived we said, 'Oh, probably this man has come all the way from Africa or India.' We could feel the kind of attitudes they held. They had probably been the same way in the places they had come from. We were sometimes displeased and would say, 'Oh, be very

careful, this man is probably a little bit rough, you know.' We also had our own attitudes towards them during those times. For example, I have said that some of the things they did and said were not always acceptable. On the other hand, to me, those experiences were still exciting ones, perhaps because I was probing deeper into their world, due to my love of learning more. Part of that was that I even had to learn how to carry a tea tray up to my boss or how to run and get some cigarettes from the shop for him. Those little things and experiences, as they came around, spurred on my willingness to perform a duty right at all times.

One thing that never occurred to me was to wonder what it would be like to be a white man. I've never regretted being a black man. I was as proud of it then as I am today. The only concern I had in those days was the inadequacy of having not learned many of the 'on the job' working skills. Therefore, it didn't bother me at all, my being enslaved to all sorts of 'work', due to being a black man. The more they showed me of that attitude, the blacker a man I was. I've shown them, too! This is a funny world. The white man thinks that he's the most superior animal in the whole world. Because he believes he created the world, he therefore feels he rules over everything: the black man, the rest of the animal kingdom and all things. If the biological factors were such that the white man did not die, but the black man did, then truly the black man should regret being black, and remain being a servant of the white man. In that colonial world, black people tended to efface themselves or be reserved when in the midst of white people. It was this feeling which Solomon Islanders wanted to rid themselves of quickly, during the presence of the colonial people. Getting rid of this difference based on skin colour was for us like fighting an enemy. It became a goal for people in the Solomons — trying to quickly achieve it. The longing to get away from the reign of human differentiation, discrimination and degradation was the goal. If it hung on too long, it was felt that the populace would become slaves for some

length of time as happened in other parts of the world. That was the attitude of many Solomon Islanders then.

It became obvious to me that while some DCs or DOs arrived one after another in succession, poor me, I still found myself struggling hard to get to know things. No one cared much or took a genuine concern in teaching me how or when to do things — they merely threw them out at me and I had to learn how to cope. That's how I came to know them. If I did not, I remained as a junior; I could not go any further. I reasoned that the system is: you go in there and you try hard, or you go in there and sit — and you sit all alone in that room where you'll be treated accordingly and only end up frustrated. I was lucky because at least I had the education and could speak out for myself, even tell them what I thought from my perspective. I suspect that they might have thought that I was an impediment at times to them. Sometimes, I would speak critically of their ideas for the future. I did this so they would know that some Solomon Islanders were ready to tell them these things — that what was right was right, but also what was wrong. We had to at least say it!

As time went on and I went higher up in my job I would be asked to dinners by my superiors. In the ordinary conversations on those occasions, they would hear my views on things concerning the country. I used to explain things well and clearly. I don't know though, they might have thought that I was the kind of person who might one day be a force, someone to start an uprising or something. I also knew that there were times when, from their way of looking at things, I was cheeky: 'This man is a bit out of order', or something like that. I think I grew to be that way. Such attitudes normally came from a person who was always left alone to do his work and to give of his best.

It was only in the mid-Sixties that the Government introduced in-service and manpower training for civil servants. Government intakes in the 1950s were preferably those of class

seven leavers, or those who were able to perform simple tasks in a government office. Those 1950s starters were the most persevering, loyal and totally committed people to work with. Their English was not very well spoken, yet they worked hard, cleanly and efficiently. Though Roviana-speaking people may not have spoken English fluently, they could write it. They, however, did have the common problem that they had to sort out in their heads what they were going to say in English from its literal meaning in Roviana. It was therefore sometimes very difficult for them to converse with a white man. For some, it resulted in their becoming 'yes' men all the time. This was because they could not easily converse in English. All they did was sit and do the job, especially bookwork, filling in return forms and reports, which they did with great efficiency. People like me were moved here and there, ready for any new tasks. That was probably why the administration used me as an interpreter or a touring clerk, because if I interpreted matters clearly, problems could be resolved easily and quickly. There were difficulties that certain people met with in interpreting. That's why some people preferred me. They had me interpret for them when I accompanied them on tour and when we were in the villages. Whenever villagers came in to the district office at Gizo with complaints they would ask for me to do the interpreting, whether in Roviana-English or Pidgin-English; this was so their complaints would be reasonably well understood. In other areas of work one had to be inquisitive enough to inquire of one's superior how to fill in forms, reports or returns. Once taught, it would become a routine job for whoever was dealing with these. In key administration centres, there were times when the bosses would give us only a few minutes saying, 'Please answer this letter to this man.' Many letters were answered in garbled or mixed-up English. We would not really know what to do, but those letters did go out to the people. Those instances encouraged many of us to learn how to write official letters, from the files.

The first people who were recruited as government clerks at Tulagi were people like Willy Paia, Ben Kevu, Alex Maena, Nelson Pule and Jonathan Leve — all came from Munda, New Georgia. The Government recruited them, so the sense of paying high esteem to officialdom persisted in Munda. In the Western District office, as long as one was in an office even though one was only a young man, one was a respected government man. Most people would look at you with pride as a sort of people's man, someone who had been elevated out of their primitive villages. Sometimes, though, my own people or other communities might not hold me in high esteem. That meant I had to make an assessment of the immediate situation at that moment, depending on the kind of people I had to face. One's approach on government messages or policies and how to impart them was important. It should never be 'My boss says that you must follow it.' I gained much respect from my own people and other islands' communities by the use of a two-way system, 'I respect you and you respect me'. This is the way people would want to come and listen to me talk about new things in government policies.

Working for the Government did pose some cultural difficulties. When a local government officer retired, after so long away from his home area, he would find that life became a totally new experience for him. He could immediately meet a long series of problems that always reflected his former treatment of the people. For example, the village people always regarded us officers in the Government as rich. The attitude was that immediate relatives could visit his brother who was working in an office to eat a tin of corned beef, fish and rice and have some good times there. They did not realise what difficulties their visit could cause to the working brother. In our cultural norms, this was just a normal responsibility on the part of the working brother so when one day he retired they will look after him and his family reciprocally. He had to be good to his own people and his wife's people during his official working

days. I had a lot of extended family in my house, but that was one of the responsibilities that working people had — to please everybody, though it was a miserable experience, especially for low-paid workers in towns. Some didn't care to do that and when they got back home they were so lonely, because the people said, 'Oh that man, I have marked him, he didn't like me when I visited him in town.' He would then find it a very difficult task indeed trying to get things done all by himself. He had become unpopular and therefore lonely. One has to be good on custom observations. Here I can ask my people to help me do something because I have been good to them in the past. They accept me and occasionally invite me to their homes. That was the kind of traditional role we played during our time working with the Government or business houses.

By tradition, if someone got married I would give \$50 or more to the parents of my side of the marrying couple to help with the usual ceremony preparations like food, etc. The parents wouldn't ask. Even just giving help for the preparation activities would be enough. It's a kind of insurance, because, one day, people will also come and help you in many different problems you and your family may have. The present young generation of boys and girls are normally familiar with this type of traditional behaviour. When they live in their villages they regard working people as more well off than they are. They certainly will do the same to their working brothers and sisters, but in a better, more intelligent way than their old people. If they have the opportunity of getting a job in town, they have to comply with that attitude, too. It will be a long time before this kind of thing dies out. That's a real problem with an extended family, in cities and towns.

GILBERTESE SETTLE IN SOLOMONS

A new community in Solomon Islands is a Micronesian race that the former colonial administration brought into the

country. They were from the Fanning islands, which are within the Gilbert Islands group. This occurred back in 1956–57.

I was one of the officers closely involved in resettling them in their new environment at Titiana on Gizo Island. A second settlement followed at Vagena between Choiseul and Isabel Islands. On their arrival our involvement became one of rehabilitation. I must mention that during the preliminary stages of this resettlement drive, two of their leaders came, direct from Tarawa in the Gilberts to Gizo, where we worked together. We needed to see if the chosen site at Titiana was the most suitable for them or not. Indeed they loved the Titiana site very much, because of its beautiful sandy beach. They said it was typical of the scenery they had back in their Gilbert Islands. Later, in 1986, when I went to Tarawa in Kiribati, I realised that by comparison, Titiana was better and a more beautiful place to live for these former Gilbertese and their descendants.

A big lot arrived in 1959 by the ship *MV Tulagi*. This was a general cargo vessel, which formally served the Solomons six-weekly on its normal route that ran from Sydney to Honiara, Gizo, Buka on Bougainville, Rabaul and other Papua New Guinean ports, then back to Sydney. This particular trip by the *Tulagi* was a special one. The Gilberts government vessel, the *MV Ninikoria*, brought the last group in the same year, 1959. Their well-known leader, who had arrived with the very first settlers in 1957, was named Karibangara Toma. He was a retired police inspector from the Gilberts and was a real leader to his people at Titiana, until he died of old age. He was buried beside the house where he had first settled.

The Gilbertese at first certainly faced difficulties, especially having to adjust to a new environment and climate. They found a great language barrier between them and us, a people who were totally new to them. They also discovered that their culture was completely different from ours. They had to start planting their gardens on hill slopes. They did not

know high hills back in the Gilberts. In the beginning they first eked out their living by just fishing around the place. At that time, the shore and the sea were full of fish, so they were blessed with abundant fish to start with. Misunderstanding arose between them and the Gizo people due to cultural differences. One example concerned sanitary matters. Their settlement was just beside a Gizo Island village called Pailoqe and the Pailoqe people could not cope with their toiletry freedoms. The Gilbertese of both sexes squat unconcealed at any water level along the sandy beach. This was *tabu* to all of us alike in the Solomons. The Pailoqe villagers, because of that particular custom of theirs and other similar culture clashes, laughed at the Gilbertese.

There were also their own family rivalries, where the menfolk fought over their women. That could spark a fierce struggle between two male rivals for a particular woman. I actually saw two Gilbertese fellows slashing each other's bodies with short sharp knives. They did this on a public road in Gizo; so many people witnessed this unbelievable event. There was blood all over them from the deep slash and stab wounds. The police arrived at the scene only when both were suffering from lack of strength due to their life's blood draining fast away. They were restored to life easily because they had been fighting just outside the Gizo hospital, where the doctors attended to them. It was a dreadful sight indeed, for all those who witnessed it. It served the purpose of showing to Solomon Islanders that when Gilbertese fight they use knives.

There were also some labour clashes between the Malaitans and Gilbertese. This happened when the cargo vessel, *Tulagi*, which was in Gizo Harbour, was being unloaded of its overseas cargo. The *Tulagi* belonged to the Burns-Philp Company in Sydney. Its agent, the Gizo Trading Company, employed many casual workers whenever the ship docked in port to off-load. The Gilbertese group were always employed on a 'daily cash' basis, while the Malaitans were permanent

workers of the trading company. As was usual, they had to work together. In this particular instance, there was an argument that arose between a Malaitan and a Gilbertese. As customs officer, I was around then. The argument gradually grew until, at its height, fists began flying and a fight started. I quickly sprang to the scene and asked both sides to stop and not to join in, but instead to calmly have the two instigators stop their struggling. Loud shouting arose from both sides, but I held my ground amid the high tension, hoping during those moments that a policeman would arrive, but none did. They then struggled and moved on to the wooden part of the wharf. The Malaitan's leg slipped and, as they were holding fast to each other, they both went 'splash' as they fell into the water. For some time neither of them surfaced. I became alarmed and broke out in sweat all over my body. Thoughts flashed through my mind that had two or three people from the opposing sides got hold of and separated them, the fight would have finished. As I watched and neither of them surfaced I knew I would be target for blame, if one or both died in the deep water! Suddenly both surfaced and continued to throw punches in each other's face. I then asked for an empty dinghy to come alongside and called for four men from either side to go and fetch them in. Three Malaitans and one Gilbertese jumped into the dinghy and held the two men who were by this time exhausted. That was how the fight ended. At times, I would think back to that fight and what a close shave it had been for me. The news I heard later was that each had held the other trying to choke him and prevent him from surfacing. Both had taken the opportunity to inhale deeply as they fell into the water and were attempting to hold their breath longer than the other. The Malaitan was himself a reef and deep-water diver, as was the Gilbertese. They became exhausted at the same time, so each struggled to the surface to regain his breath. The battle seemed to be quickly forgotten once they were separated from one another.

Inter-marriage between Western District people and the Gilbertese has begun. There have been increasing numbers between Marovo men and Gilbertese women, also between Choiseul men and Gilbertese women. It is also occurring in the Roviana area. The general indication is to encourage the intermingling of the two races, thus creating a common Solomon Islands people. The right way to achieve this is for Gilbertese males to marry women of Roviana, Simbo, Rononga, Vella Lavella, Marovo, Kusage and Duke as these are people who normally practise the matrilineal system. Their immediate offspring would automatically be inclined towards the mother's strength rather than that of their Gilbertese fathers. As Malaitan and Choiseulese practise a patrilineal system, these men should marry Gilbertese women. Thus the offspring off all these mixed marriages would feel comfortable as indisputable Solomon Islanders. This would not be as difficult as mixed-race marriages between Fijians and Indians. Fijians are Pacific Islanders, while the Indians are Asian, so that kind of intermingling has never come near to being a reality. As Solomon Islanders and Gilbertese are Pacific Islanders, this proposition could work quite well, given that it has already started. It requires only encouragement from both sides.

THE CHINESE

Another community in Gizo and in most centres in the protectorate were the Chinese. The Chinese traders did very well. They made good money as far back as before World War II. In the period after the war, they earned very big money from the village people. Immediately after the war, villagers demanded to have new things, the result of their interaction with the American troops. The Chinese traders seized those opportunities. They built new shops and two or three ships each, on which they traded and bought copra from around the islands. The Government was also prosperous then through its

revenue collections from the trading licences, import and export duties and income taxes.

Nearly all of these Chinese were in their early twenties when they arrived in the Solomons well before World War II. Some came to Gizo as traders, some as shipwrights building the early government ships, and some were carpenters who built most of the government houses in pre-war Tulagi. As well, at Gizo, Auki, Kirakira, Vanikolo, Tataba on Isabel and Faisi on Shortlands they built the substations.

When the war came, they were not sent back to mainland China.³ The Solomon Islanders took them and hid them in the bush with their own people. The Solomons people did this so well that no Chinese were ever caught by the Japanese. After the war, they quickly started business in shops throughout the Solomons. Thus, their earlier desire on leaving their villages in China, to try their luck and make a new life in a Pacific archipelago, became a reality.

Most went back to Hong Kong in the early 1960s, got married and brought their wives with them. Some didn't return, but those who did bred new stock who they sent overseas to be educated. Most of these are now running their elderly parents' businesses, which have been developed and improved. As a result, these have become the most reputable commercial houses in Honiara at present.

The best thing about this community is that they worked very hard and never became involved in any of the political affairs of this country. A few have been interested recently, but most know to keep their distance from the politics of the country. Only one of the early arrivals got married to a Roviana woman. They are presently living a pleasant family life in the truest sense. They had children, all of whom are working. The greatest contribution that Mr Sze Tu Ho gave back to the Government of his country was through his son Dr John Sze Tu, who became a medical doctor.

I should think that about six of those who started their business in Gizo before and soon after the war, after

returning to Hong Kong, did not come back. Their children, however, came here and took over their businesses.

The Chinese are good people, but maintain limitations on friendship — they are business people! As I've already said, they usually don't take a direct part in politics, they keep busy with their stores and trading. Now though, you hear how some of the younger Chinese have accepted appointments as members of some of the statutory authorities, and are contributing to them very usefully indeed. For example, one has only recently ceased his term as the manager of Solomon Islands Airlines.

LAND DISPUTES

During my posting to Gizo, the problem of 'land disputes', not uncommon before World War II, became even more of an issue. If the DC's or DO's court did not settle a dispute, the Deputy Commissioner of the Western Pacific Court was called. Later when the native local court system was introduced, it had the legal power to deal with land disputes, simple larcenies and misdemeanours. Land during the early days was everyone's. Division of people over land rows was hardly noticeable. All land is owned by a tribe and usually the chief governs this tribal possession. It was rarely accepted that land could be owned individually; that could happen only when it was given for a marriage present or on compensating someone for some special task or event performed for the tribe by someone of another tribe. Just by merely asking for a piece of land it could be given without payments or without consultation made with the whole tribe; but only with a handful of the chief's family circle (the sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, etc.) knowing.

The land transfer came into play and was accepted as an alternative culture only in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The agriculture subsidies scheme was introduced in the mid-'60s

and you can now see land disputes in its wake, because farmers were subsidised on the number of new coconut plantings they had made. Thus, many people just started clearing land and planted their new coconuts there, though the land was far from being within his tribe's ownership. They obtained land and cash out of the subsidies. If a person won a land dispute in the local courts, he became an outright individual landowner, logically and legally.

THE REAPPEARING MAN

Fortunately, not all problems were such serious ones. Once, the DC and I started our tour at Munda with the plan to go through the Roviana Lagoon. At Lambete, the government station at Munda, a certain gentleman met us. His home village was on our tour and was to be the last stop in two days time. At Lambete, this particular gentleman came to the DC and talked through me as the interpreter, to say how the people in the lagoon were ready to see him. The DC replied how pleased he was about that and said, 'We'll see you later.' We left at midday that day to visit each lagoon village. At about three o'clock that afternoon we walked around the first village, meeting its villagers outside their dwelling houses. The village was quite a large one. They took us to see certain community works, completed and still in progress, including a war canoe. It had just begun and was in its early framework. At the final 'goodbye' time, the villagers came with gifts of potatoes, fruits and vegetables and shook hands with the DC and some of us. Suddenly the gentleman who had been told 'see you later' appeared among the others as we were leaving.

We hove anchor and continued on to the next village. The same village exercise took place and the same goodbye expression of 'see you later'. Again, the same gentleman joined the line and went past the DC, who said the same once more. At the third village, after the usual walk around, this gentleman

appeared, joining the shaking hands line-up. At the fourth village we anchored for the night. The DC called to me and said that he had noticed for the fourth time that the same gentleman had been shaking hands with him and he was a little worried about it. The DC said, 'The man who came and talked to me at Lambete, I've seen him and shaken hands with him at the last three villages and this evening I've seen him standing for the fourth time down there. Is there something he wants or are there many "look-alikes"? If they were twin brothers, we would have seen them twice only. But there are four of them now!' I replied, 'Maybe, there's more than one, exactly like him.'

I had thought of just brushing this matter aside, thinking that this day would most certainly be the last of his reappearances. We pulled anchor the next morning and travelled towards the first village for that day's visit. It was the second-last to be visited in the lagoon, and then we would sail across to another island to continue with this two-week tour. As we arrived on the shore, who should first attract our attention, but him again? He stood right at the front of the crowd singing the Queen's national anthem. His village was to be the last one. After our look around and when we were ready to leave, I said to him, 'You've been travelling, following us. What is happening?' He said, 'Oh, I just want to join in welcoming you people, so that when you finally visit my village I will know exactly what to tell my people. I know exactly what to do now!' At last we arrived at his village. As usual we rowed in our dinghy. The worst part of this was, as soon as the DC stood with both feet in the shallow water beside the dinghy, the national anthem was always sung. It was so funny to see this time, as one of our boys had his right leg out in the water on one side of the dinghy. Unfortunately, the other one was still inside the dinghy as the singing started, and so he had to hold them in those positions. Each time the wind shifted the dinghy out to deeper water, that left leg of his stretched further out with it. He said to me, 'Ooh, hurry up

and finish with that singing, man — I've got my legs now fully stretched out and it's hurting me. Ooh!' The moral of this is, don't ever step out with only one leg on the shore when *God Save the Queen* is being sung. In the first place one must be standing very straight without moving during the singing of the anthem. Here was this poor man, loyal to the rule, who though in much pain held on with his right leg in the shallow water, while his left leg was still stuck firmly in the dinghy.

After the anthem, we met with the dignitaries of this village and as usual we walked through it. On the hilltop we inspected a council water tank that had been recently installed. We spent some time talking to the gathered crowd and as usual the last thing was shaking hands. The DC came to the man whom we'd seen in all the other places. He said, 'Oh it's good to see how you've given up your time over these past days to follow us to all the villages. We have finally arrived at your village and I'm pleased to have seen you throughout the places so I'll see you later, old chap.' Then this gentleman asked the DC, 'Yes DC, but where is my letter?' He had thought during all this time that the DC had a 'letter' for him. His words in Pidgin went like this, 'Yes masta, but wea leta bilong mi, long taem nao, iu no givem?'⁴ I've been travelling around trying to get my letter from you.' The DC laughed and turned to me and said, 'Oh tell this man I'm extremely sorry. I do not have any letter for him with me.' I turned to the gentleman and said, 'Were you talking about a letter?'

He said, 'Yes, I thought he was going to hand it over to me at the second village yesterday, but still he was telling me, "see you later". He should hand it over to me sometime, so I think he'll give it to me here now.'

I said, 'No, no, it doesn't mean a letter, it means after it, *later*, not *letter*.' After my deliberate, clear explanation, he said, 'Oh yes? Oh goodness, I spent all my time trying to get a *letter* from the DC. OK, let's stop this nonsense.'

MEETING AND MARRYING OLIVE

At Gizo, it was very difficult then for young men to see any young girls because it was only a small township, re-occupied immediately after the upset of World War II. You could see only a couple of canoes coming in, most days. The shy, simple girls did not have much to do with Gizo, except to come to sell their copra at the trading company's wharf there. They might spend about three hours in the main shops buying their goods before they left. They had no time to talk to us, the young working men at Gizo. My case was a little different because the father of my future wife was there, too, and sometimes she, Olive, had to stay for a couple of days or weeks. Many young, handsome men used to go around to their place, too. But I remained, from the first sight, her favourite and turned out to be the only successful contender.

My father-in-law, as he was to become, Reuben Kerabangara, had worked as the chief steward for the Resident Commissioner in Honiara. He retired in 1947 and returned to his home in Malosova, on Vella Lavella Island. The Government, however, arranged with him under contract to bake bread for the prison, the police and the hospital at Gizo. This was agreed to, so the Commissioner of Lands allocated a plot of land to him. That plot stood where the present Gizo post office now stands. He supplied bread to the three government departments at Gizo from the bakery. Kerabangara was a very kind, very sociable man who had a rich sense of humour. His enterprise prospered well since his market was constant and he had no rival. It was simply a matter of saving the profit margin from his daily bread supplies to the Government.

Kerabangara's daughter, Olive Eaduri, lived with her grandmother Serah Aniri at Kuzi village on Kolombangara Island during her father's residence at Gizo. For a period of time, she also stayed with her uncle, Frank Wickham, at Kenelo Plantation on Rendova Island. As old Kerabangara's bakery was on the inland side of the Gizo road that ran

between the police station and Chinatown, I used to see him occasionally as I passed by. I came to establish a very cordial acquaintance with him. Some evenings, on my way to and from Chinatown, I would stop for a while to chat with this happy gentleman. When Frank Wickham came to Gizo for business Olive came along, taking the opportunity to visit her father. I first saw her talking with her father outside the bakery when I was walking down to Chinatown. I turned to my friend beside me and asked, 'Who is that pretty girl there?' He said, 'That's Kerabangara's daughter.' However, she left Gizo that evening. I started making frequent visits to Kerabangara. Some evenings we would just sit and have tea together. Other times my friends and I would play cards with him until midnight before dispersing.

Most of Kerabangara's friends and relations would give him fish whenever they went fishing on weeknights. I was no exception and on some weekends I would take one or two of the best to him. It delighted him! One Saturday, two good friends of mine turned our fishing trip into an unusual one. They had some bottles of beer in a bag and hid it among our fishing gear in the canoe. We arrived at a little island and they got the beer out. There were more than a dozen bottles that they had got secretly from someone — I don't know who. After some arguments on whether or not to start drinking before fishing, we finally agreed to anchor off the reef edge and fish on the deeper side and to drink just one bottle each. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was hot! The first bottles were soon empty. We agreed that after the second bottle we must stop and do some fishing. After we each finished our second bottle, the third was just automatically handed around and no one cared to question it. And then the fourth, the fifth and the sixth! Our voices got louder. By the time we were on our fourth, only two of us, Pati Ada and myself, had caught two fish each. We made jokes at our friend, Rone Naqu, who had not pulled any in yet. When the eighth

round was finished we had caught seven. Now Rone was in the lead because he had caught three, and Pati and I had two apiece. At this stage we were singing and swaying to the tune which rocked the canoe all about. At one point we almost rolled to one side and capsized. That decided us to abandon our fishing trip for the day and return to shore. We left the little island near sunset.

On the way home, we decided to go directly to Kerabangara's landing to give him the two best fish and then proceed to our place at the sandy point of Gizo station. We also discussed how I would tell the old man that I had fallen in love with his daughter at first sight. Rone came up with the approach of saying, 'Your daughter is very beautiful indeed!' We agreed to this. Pati said, 'We'll see his reaction.' Soon we arrived at old Kerabangara's place and I handed him the two fish. He was really delighted. He laughed at our drunken state although we tried to behave normally because the police, either in uniform or plain clothes, were usually walking along the road, alert for people who were unlawfully drunk. Our intimate conversation was going well. While the old man was laughing away, I broke in and said, 'Your daughter is very beautiful indeed!' Then I watched. The old man suddenly went into a great rage and held up his right fist and said, 'See, I can land this hand on your face right now. But, my young friend, I think you do not know what you are doing. Anyway, I must be reasonable; this must not spoil our friendship. We have time to talk again.' I quickly said good night to him and hid myself in the darkness. My two friends had suddenly disappeared as soon as I made the stupid statement to the old man. They had hidden in the shadows at the side of the house and were laughing. I was annoyed at this, but they insisted that I had done very well. We paddled in the dark back to our place. We all agreed that at least the old man would understand me when I visited him in the coming days.

I met Olive occasionally and we kept our friendship for almost three years with the approval finally of her father,

Kerabangara, her grandmother, Serah, and her uncle. We got married in February 1959. During the period of our friendship my parents were indifferent to my idea of getting married. My father's people eventually felt that way, too. At first, my father objected a lot because Olive and I were very closely related within the same tribe on my father's side. But he had talked it over with Olive's grandmother. They found that a couple of people within this line had already broken this tribal observance.

We were not married in the church, but in the district registry office, by the registrar of marriages, District Officer Robert Spivey. This happened because of the continuing opposition by my mother and her side of the family, but the marriage could not be delayed as our first child was on the way. Because of this rush, my parents, who were in Honiara, did not attend the marriage, but many of our friends at Gizo did. Despite the fact that my parents were unable to attend, I had no hesitation in going ahead with the marriage. I was used to being alone in Fiji during my schooling. I also still felt quite alienated by my long absence in Fiji and having felt like a Fijian. I came to the conclusion that every young man at a certain stage of his early life must face life's difficulties and challenges like a man. I had a feeling that they needed me at Gizo and Gizo was to be my place of work for a long period. It would be different if I was at work in Honiara because I would be living with my parents there to look after me. But Gizo was different; I wanted someone to look after me, to cook and wash for me.

Just like my mother, my sisters, cousin-sisters, uncles and aunties objected as they had their own ideas about who I should marry. Even my elder brother, John Gina (since deceased), opposed the marriage, but my father was a very kind-hearted man and he smoothed things over for us. During our early married life, however, we continued to experience indifferent receptions from my sisters and women cousins (my *tabu* cousins). Only as we started our family were they good to us, as they loved our children.

After we got married at Gizo we lived in the single boys' quarters, then we moved into separate married quarters. We found it quite difficult at first. My office colleagues often talked about me because I had only a small salary and had married. They murmured among themselves, 'How's this man going to feed his wife?', and other such talk. We survived these early reactions from my colleagues and my friends from the other government departments. We were determined to show these people that we could run a family as well as they could or even better. Indeed, one or two of them have had unfortunate fates in married life. Their wives ended up despising them or they had kids by other women. But we have run a fine family for more than 40 years.

When our first daughter, Lois, was born my parents changed completely. They turned out to be very proud grandparents. They dearly loved her. She was only about three years old when my mother came and took her away to Honiara. When they left the Gizo wharf on the government ship, *Coral Queen*, Olive and I cried our guts out that whole evening! What happened was that my mother came to live with us for the first time, for about two weeks. As she was getting ready to return to Honiara, she said that she'd love to take Lois with her. Lois had become very fond of her grandmother. It took us some days before we gave our agreement. The worst part of it was, as the ship was slowly pulling out from the wharf, Lois waved cheerfully and smiled at us as they moved out to sea. It was a truly heart-breaking experience. Lois lived for two long years with them. During that period, one of my younger sisters was running a kindy school owned by an English lady, the wife of a government officer in Honiara. She started this very first kindy school and took my sister on to look after these kids. That was the reason why my mother came and took Lois, so that she could attend it, playing with the other kids there. It was only when we came through Honiara for our posting to Auki in 1963 that we got our daughter Lois back with us. We found it difficult to ask for her, but, Olive asked in a very calm manner, 'Please can

we take Lois with us to Auki?' My parents felt very sad indeed, but accepted that we were taking Lois with us.

Olive had a problem of her own. Olive's mother died when she was little, so when Olive started to grow to be a big girl, she had to leave her father and go to Kolombangara to stay with her grandmother who was old, in her seventies. She lived with her through the war years and then went back to her father. After her father returned to Vella Lavella in about 1949, Olive spent a lot of time with her uncle Frank and auntie Dorothy. Though Olive had decided to leave her uncle Frank's family to rejoin her grandmother, Serah, she felt also that she would miss her auntie Dorothy who had been so kind to her. She had learned cooking and the sewing of dresses, shirts, even men's shorts, as well as flower gardening, baby feeding, table manners and the like from Dorothy. This was such an opportune upbringing for Olive for it profoundly influenced the success story of our lives together as a family. Her father, Kerabangara felt comfortable in having her live with Frank and Dorothy. As well, Olive was a great help in their home with their growing children. Olive faced only grumbling for minor reasons from her grandmother, Serah, but accepted and understood that because of the old lady's age.

We once got into a fix with Serah when Lois was already one year old. Olive and I have had some misunderstandings. A row exploded between us, resulting in Olive and little Lois catching a local launch and going to their grandmother, Serah. I then got the silly idea that I ought to write a strong letter to grandmother Serah. The letter was to tell her that she had failed miserably in the way she had brought up her granddaughters, Olive and her sister, Ida; that Olive had a bad habit of arguing unreasonably and of not listening when reasons were explained to her. The aim was, in a sense, to annoy her so that she would turn on Olive to reprove her and send both back to me.

However, it did not work that way. Olive and Lois went to her aunt Mather and stayed with her family before

grandmother Serah received my letter. Serah read it with great dismay. Before she could see Olive again, I managed to get Olive and Lois back to Gizo by writing an apology to my wife. They came back on the same launch they went away on. Anyway, about two weeks later, I met up with Serah and her husband, Aniri, at Chinatown. She spoke to me quite strongly. I did not talk, except to say how sorry I was and to give my apology. That evening was a celebration of the reconciliation that took place down at Chinatown. I took them to our home. They stayed with us for two nights and then returned to Kuzi on Kolombangara Island. We were all good friends again.

Olive and I have faced various hardships throughout our married life, but we have sailed our canoe along quite nicely up till now. We have not forgotten our determination to show our early colleagues and acquaintances how different our life together would be to what they predicted. We brought up our children quite differently, too. We had them educated; all have gone to secondary school. Our desire was that they ought to be able to face their own particular problems and that they become aware of what was going on in their country. Our last born girl, Mariga Imatako Pate, went to King George VI Government Secondary School and Whangarei Girls High and is now at Lincoln University in New Zealand doing a degree in Landscape Architecture. She will be my last problem, because one day a man will ask me for my approval to marry her, like the other two who are already married — Lois and L'Amour. I have some understanding now though, from having made that first approach to Olive's good old father, Kerabangara.

THE DIFFICULT PATH OF A CUSTOMS OFFICER

In the early part of my working life in the administration, I was a customs officer at Gizo. Assuming the duties of customs officer was one among the other duties in the 'handing over

notes' of my predecessor. I found this part of my duties very challenging and interesting indeed. I met with difficult and exciting events in this job. Because I was the only government person in the whole of the Western District doing this job, I felt it involved my trying to develop abilities in decision making and the performance of my duties during my many difficult times. I found that it was the central point of the many roads along which I might be headed. Yet I suddenly found I had become a most attractive person to the business houses in the country! The calls from every direction, which sounded the loudest, were, among a host of others, those of cheating and lying. But also there were calls of resistance, honesty, perseverance, loyalty and commitment. These called just as persistently.

When a cargo ship would arrive from Sydney every six weeks, I knew I would receive free apples and oranges from the Chinese traders. For Christmas, I would get a box of chocolates or packets of sweets from each shop that I walked into — and spirits! Those were the days when I started to touch drink. For some traders, to quickly clear their import customs entry forms could mean some nice presents of a bag of rice or tinned foodstuffs, etc., for a helpful officer.

There would be times when I would be lured into transferring, say, an extra bag of rice from one consignment by simply notarising those five rice bags as 'short-landed' against the victim's consignment list (or manifest). This poor consignor would then pursue with great effort the processes required for insurance payment on the short-landed bags of rice. It is no wonder after all that the container system was introduced — a much better system for counteracting constant pilfering, mis-delivering and damage to exposed consignments which occurred in the past.

At Gizo, the policing of the operation of unloading the cargo from the ship into small boats and down alongside the wharf was very difficult indeed. At night, unknown outside

boats or canoes would intercept cargo boats between the ship and the wharf and take off with the goods. Any such stolen goods would be appropriately entered as short-landed items. Importers normally claimed refunds from the suppliers in the overseas countries and insurance from the insurance companies.

I began to feel unsafe as I moved little by little into this compromising behaviour. It was becoming a bigger and more tempting habit. I always maintained I was not brought up with this sort of thing. So, when in 1963 an advertisement came from the Secretariat for an Assistant Administrative Officer (Cadet), I went for it. I affirmed in my inner self that this was my area. Run for it and away from a job I was not moulded for. Even my superior, the sub-treasurer, an Australian, said, 'Neither treasury nor customs is your future.' He had to say this because I performed well all the tasks in the office. When given a task I got busy and completed it promptly. At one stage, he had said, 'Maepeza, I think you have to find another kind of job. The district office is the best place for you.' I said, 'Well, that was where I started off in the first place.' At the same time the Accountant-General, head of Treasury, notified me that he intended to send me overseas to undertake a period of accounting studies. Before this transpired, however, I was accepted on transfer to my new job. There were 12 of us short-listed to be interviewed, out of which only two were successful in attaining promotion to the post of Assistant Administrative Officer (Cadet).⁵

Two weeks later I received an official letter to say that I had been accepted and that it was a promotion for me. The DC of the Western District then was a tall, deep-voiced Englishman named John Field. He'd also received a copy of the letter and was equally happy when he came to congratulate me on my promotion. He said, 'This is where you should be.' I was pleased and relieved to be leaving work in customs.

Footnotes

- 1 Tulagi in the Florida Islands was the pre-war capital.
- 2 This was a resistance movement that started on Malaita after the war ended. It espoused self-determination and cultural recognition. In time, it became anti-government and the Government arrested its leaders. Eventually, these were released and the Government gave greater consideration to the wishes of the people, particularly through extending local government councils, though not all Malaitans were satisfied with this. Europeans often called the movement 'Marching Rule'. 'Maasina' means 'brotherhood'. There were some small councils operating before the Japanese invasion, but most were a post-war innovation.
- 3 Japan had invaded China earlier, so return to China was not possible and probably not sought by the Chinese.
- 4 'Masta, where is the letter that you were going to give me?'
- 5 AAO, Assistant Administration Officer, is next to the DO (District officer) who is an Administrative Officer Class B, while the DC (District Commissioner) is an Administrative Officer Class A. AAO positions were manned usually by Solomon Islanders.



John Holden Lianga Gina, elder brother of Lloyd Maepesa, after a church service in Honiara, 1979, holding the baby of friends.

CHAPTER FOUR

Meeting the big men

AT AUKI AND BEYOND

I had to leave Gizo in 1963 because of my promotion to a Cadet Assistant Administrative Officer, which saw me transferred back to the District Administration Department. From Gizo, I went to Auki, in Malaita District. As the years passed by my experience deepened. I felt most work performances became easier for me. Moving up to my new post meant increasing challenges. One problem raised quite frequently by the people I met was tax money. What exactly it was used for was becoming a common question. Tax money was another introduced concept. Tax was the one thing most people were opposed to, especially on Malaita. When the benefits of it were understood, they didn't talk anymore about it. What came out at times was that they did not know what the council was doing with it. They were always told that the tax money gave people their water supply and improved their clinics. We had to tell them to be patient because the tax was only a small amount of money and we would certainly get around to them in the not-too-distant future. That is still a big

headache, which has gradually influenced election strategies, especially by Members of Parliament.

At Auki in the office of the Malaita District, I joined District Commissioner Derek Cudmore. He had been posted there from the Secretariat not long before my arrival. I found him instructive in my new job; he was like a teacher to me. He was one of those good Englishmen. He even gave me a book, *ABC to English*, to study. That was when I started to brush up quite well on bits and pieces of my English for official writings and still kept on with the usual learning from general files.

Derek Cudmore was responsible for the first island-wide voters' roll registrations for all Malaita's people, 18 years and over. This was followed by the first suffrage voting in 1964, from which came the first-ever elected Malaita Council members. There was another DC named Dick Turpin, who replaced Derek Cudmore. It was during his time that I was sent to stay for six weeks at Sikaiana Island to conduct the election of the Member for Sikaiana and Ontong Java Islands to the Malaita Council. (Both Sikaiana and Ontong Java were situated within the former Malaita District.)

AAOs need not necessarily have been people who had received formal education outside the Solomon Islands; they need only to have been very experienced government clerks. Once identified, they were trained on the job and grew up in the system. They were people who were educated in the workings of the early pioneering administrators. They were used to build bridges between the administrators and the local people and were usually solid and dependable in this role. Most of those early people in their various official duties performed sincerely in often-difficult situations. Most did not reach anywhere near Administration Officers proper due to illness and the inability to continue. Some were diverted to other official capacities as times changed and some simply reached retirement. They were actually involved, at one level or another, in the duties of Assistant Administrative Officers

and worthy of mention. The following are the names of those I wish to acknowledge and honour: Willie Paia, Alec Maena, Daniel Pule, Jonathan Leve, Silas Sitai and Nathaniel Kwanairara (at Tulagi in the 1930s); during World War II and post war — Temieus Teioli, Frederic Osifelo and Benjamin Kevu (Auki); Esau Hiele, my dad, Belshazah Gina, and Alec Tozaka (Hombu Hombu/Gizo); from the 1950s to independence — Oliver Itebela, Francis Talasasa (through his academic attainments), Alfred Alesasa Bisili, Francis Waleilia, Bobby O. Kwanairara, Emelio Bulu, Solomon Mamaloni, Moses Pitakaka, Mrs Lily Pozananski, Peter Kenilorea and Baddley Devesi. I was fortunate enough to know and work with these people. Only some of the above held on in the period between 1950 and independence in 1978 and actually reached the post of Administrative Officer proper. After independence, the AAO and AO posts were absorbed into the present ministerial system.

During my time as an AAO cadet, I worked under the guidance of an old-time experienced AAO named Timeus Teioli, in the district office at Auki. On two occasions, the areas of responsibility were changed. When I first arrived, I worked under the DO who was looking after North Malaita, although he was the DO for South Malaita. For training purposes, I was switched over to work under South Malaita and he worked on North Malaita. He was most helpful to me and I was fortunate because he was nearing retirement and in his last years of service, which he was looking forward to. He imparted to me much very useful advice about the job and his experiences of it.

My two years at Auki, Malaita, from 1963–65, were memorable also. Before I took up my new posting there, I had heard so much about the Malaita people that I had certain preconceptions. To my great surprise, I found that when I worked there the Malaita people were very good to me. They are law-abiding people. What I mean is that if you go to their villages, they have their chiefs and they maintain their

customs. You find a great difference between the Malaita people actually living on Malaita and Malaitans living elsewhere. You hear other people say, 'A Malaita man did this, he did that, he spoke like that.' That is because Malaitans, when out of Malaita, have come away from their tightly restricted environment and they suddenly have the freedom to do, more or less, what they like. On Malaita, however, they certainly respect their chiefs and womenfolk. I found living there very easy. One is not frightened as I had imagined because the people do not do any harm unless one spoils their customs. My stay was most enjoyable. I found the headmen and chiefs were very cooperative and the village people were accommodating during my various tours around the island. These people were always ready to offer help when ever and wherever needed. My wife, Olive, liked Auki because we found the vegetables and other items sold in the market there were cheap compared with the Gizo market. There were very many people coming from the bush on market days to sell their vegetables and fruit and other things. Competition in the Auki market was quite high. You went to one heap of sweet potato to ask the owner the price, but another fellow saw that you wanted potatoes and would say, 'Eeh, you come here, boss!' He gave a better deal. He sold his things more cheaply. When travelling around their places they let me sleep in their houses, giving me the best beds and pillows they had.

My tours were for various purposes, like visiting the sub-district clerks to check that their revenue collections had been made. I would then bring their receipts and the money back to their council headquarters at Aimela, inland of Auki township. District Officers and AAOs on tour had to endorse the clerk's books to indicate that, at that date, they had inspected them and had taken over the cash and the receipts. This was to make sure that the clerks were not misusing the money and that it was properly handed over to the main clerks at council headquarters to finance the various services. Misuse

of funds by the district clerks never happened on Malaita. There was neither a history of this, nor an occurrence of it during my time there.

In other places, when there was suspected misuse or theft of funds, the DO or AAO concerned always carried out the initial investigation. Next, the police would be informed to proceed with the case or not. If the case was taken to the Magistrate's Court and the clerk found guilty, he would be imprisoned.

One tour in 1964 was undertaken for registration of every Malaitan of 18 years and above for the electoral roll. In fact, this exercise was carried out throughout all districts of the Solomons. It was the first registration undertaken so that the general populace could then start voting in their representatives in the local councils and the new national legislature. For this exercise, I had to walk to every single village within the Kwara'ae area. It involved three of us walking up to hill villages, down to villages in the valleys and along to coastal villages for two whole weeks. The registration form that we carried with us was called Form 'B'. We in the district office did not ask the people to come in to us because they did not know that concept. So we had to go out ourselves to explain to them what it was all about and what would come after registering their names. We said that through registering their names they would be able to choose their desired member of the Malaita Council and member of parliament by slipping a piece of paper into a box. The questions always asked were, 'What is Parliament?' and, 'Who are Members of Parliament and what do they do?', and others relating to the registration. We had to explain precisely to them. As well, we had to tell them about the Parliament and council elections and the different roles the elected members were to perform. Before this, the local government council members were appointed, not elected. The people had their worries about registration. Some of the womenfolk expressed the fear that if

they gave their names they would get into some kind of unexpected trouble with the Government.

We went to each village or we had two or three adjacent villages meet together at the middle one, where we had them register. We arranged for meetings at night where we would speak to people from villages nearby. The next morning we would walk to their villages to get their names registered. In doing it this way, they would already know the procedure from the talk the previous night. We spoke or lectured on what the registration exercise was about, and of government and local councils. The aim was to spread these matters around first, so that they understood them. Our work was made simpler as they just waited around for us. When we arrived, we went from house to house registering them. There were no complaints about this exercise. In fact, they were very happy, as they were personally involved in choosing their members whom the Government then appointed, rather than having outsiders make the choice. They agreed that this was fairer. We spent weeks going around villages and into the bush — a time-consuming exercise indeed.

TAXES AND ROADS

People were often suspicious of the Government's intentions. An example of deeply felt suspicion concerns the Remnant Church on Malaita. One day in October 1964, the DC called me up and said, 'Maepeza, I'm sending you on a special mission to Saufura village.' Saufura was somewhere in the middle of the Kwara'ae sub-district. Some difficulty had arisen there when the people, led by a certain man, had broken away from the Seventh-day Adventist church and regarded themselves as the Remnant Church. The bad thing was that they did not want to pay their local rates to the Malaita Council. The leader was saying, 'Don't pay the tax. All our money will go towards

carrying out our new teachings.' So the previous DC, an expatriate Anglican (Church of Melanesia) priest, and some policemen went up there one day, but when they arrived, to their surprise, there was not a soul to be seen in the village. The people had all run away into the bush and hid in their garden houses. Therefore, that party failed their mission. Since that time, the policemen had been trying to catch a man named Sisimia, for he was the ringleader, but they couldn't get him because he would always hide away in the bush. Each time a police patrol went up there, Sisimia would already have got the news through his strong spy network. Anyway, I was sent there. The DC hoped that I would succeed, at least, in getting Sisimia into a conversation and to the root of his refusal to pay the council tax. 'I hope that you will do it,' he said. I had only two people to accompany me — a council messenger and a carrier.

I started off from Auki about 9.30am with these two men. We travelled on bush tracks, up the hills and down the valleys, towards Saufura, which was a long way up in the hills. We met people on their way down and some young men even overtook us because they were used to the track. We arrived at Saufura village about five in the evening, only to find the place empty. We could not see a single person, so we went into a house, the leaves of which were all rotted so one could see through the roof to the sky. We sat on the front verandah part. After having a good rest, we then started to walk around, looking for people. The houses were set out in rows with a main walkway down the centre, like a street. I was walking alone down this street when I became conscious of eyes peeping at me from one of the houses. I turned quickly, went straight to that house and suddenly pushed open the door. There were women and young children scattering and tumbling against one another, screaming as I moved further into the dark interior of the enclosed kitchen house. Suddenly, they all stopped and a long silence followed. The three

women, four young girls and several small children all started giggling among themselves as they looked towards me. I made the first move and I said, 'Oh, hallo, iufela stop long here?'¹ No one said a thing. I again said, 'Mi like sleep long one fela haus bilong iufela for tonight. So which way, you save soum me one fela haus for mi sleep tonight?'² There was still no reply. Again, I spoke, 'Where now Sisimia this time?'³ I hardly got any reaction. So I said, 'Mi like sleep long that haus there',⁴ and I pointed at the almost roofless house where we had first sat and rested. Suddenly, the strong voice of a woman broke the silence, 'Yes, iu save sleep long there,'⁵ she said. It was an old, dilapidated house, which they considered fitting for representatives of a government for which they had little regard.

After receiving that uncooperative offer, I went back to my two friends. They related to me how they had been standing beside the bush, well away from the village compound when an old woman walked past them and said, 'Iu go long bush, iu no smoke long there!'⁶ They opted against replying. So she walked on, into the village. Evening was quickly coming on, but still we could see no men. We just sat there and talked, surveying the old building to find the best sleeping place for the night. Suddenly, a man appeared from behind our backs and joined in the conversation. We were all quite taken aback with the way he appeared as if from nowhere. He was a slim, light man, middle-aged at about 40 years. As he came and sat beside me he said, 'Where are you from?'

I said, 'I'm from the West.'

He said, 'And what do you come here for?'

I replied, 'I'm from the district office. I come here to try to find Sisimia, so can you tell him that I just want to have a friendly talk with him, please?'

He said, 'Oh, Sisimia's not around.'

I asked, 'Where have all the people of this village gone?'

He answered, 'Oh, they are all in the gardens.'

'But it is almost seven,' I said.

He said, 'Yeah, they always come back quite late.' The conversation went on and then he asked, 'What are your purposes in coming to see Sisimia?'

I answered, 'I came here because I want to explain to Sisimia about what the group who came here before wanted to see him for. Because he was unavailable to meet them they had to go back to Auki.'

Then he said, 'We understand these people; they came with guns, you know.'

I explained, 'Well, I don't come with guns. I only want to have a nice talk with Sisimia. I have only this policeman and this carrier, no guns, no anything. If you kill us, we will die here. So, can you get Sisimia for me so I can have just a friendly talk with him?'

He asked, 'What's your name?'

I replied, 'My name is Maepeza Gina.'

He said, 'Oh, I know your brother, John Gina, yes!'

I inquired, 'How do you know him?'

He answered, 'He was a policeman. I went to prison some time ago and he was good to me, you see.' He turned to me and happily offered his hand to me to shake. We shook hands and he stated, 'Good, so you are a lone Solomon Islander DO and you came by yourself. Very good, that's just what I wanted. And do you know what? I am he. I am Sisimia, the very man you wanted to see!'

I said with surprise, 'Oh, my goodness!'

He gave me his hand again and said, 'Mi, mi Sisimia ia!'⁷

I said, 'Very well, my good friend Sisimia, I am happy indeed to be able to meet you face to face here in your own village. Now we can continue with our talk and discuss some things that need to be discussed.' I then asked him, 'Why do you not want to pay your tax?'

Sisimia explained, 'Well, we have been paying our tax for many years now and we have not received anything out

of it from the Malaita Council. All these clinics, all this material for schools have all gone to bigger schools, to bigger communities.'

'Now how much tax money can you collect here at Saufura?' I asked.

'Well, we have paid a lot by now as many years have passed and there are quite a few taxpayers here. There could be enough to build our own cement water tank. Still we have not received anything. We only received some educational material from the SDA mission. What is the council doing for its part here? Well, that's all, that is the reason we don't want to pay tax to the council. We can spend the money for tax ourselves to buy books'.

Sisimia asked a lot of questions about government. He talked about how he moved into the church activities and how he wanted to be a Remnant along with his people and so they had formed a Remnant group. He then said, 'OK, I'm very happy because you came in peace, you didn't come with guns, so I will ring the bell to assemble the people. But we will have *kaikai* first time and then we will have the big meeting that you want. I'll give you a big meeting!⁸ First, we have to move you three fellows into my beautiful house. You know the old bush house has only a dirt floor. Mine has fires and nice beds that are warm.' And they gave the three of us nice, clean beds and clean soft pillows. Sisimia was good to us. After he gave us a very appetising meal of chicken, taro and yam, he invited his entire executive — the old people. They came to hear me talk first. I explained what the Government was doing. So they said, 'That's good, you are the first person to tell us much about these kind of things. And we understand you well.' They rang a bell and a big group of people arrived and sat outside Sisimia's house. Sisimia introduced me to them and I gave them a long and detailed talk. I then said, 'You can now ask me any questions on anything you want to know about. Go ahead.' They asked me some highly intelligent questions, mostly

about their local council and the work of central government. The meeting was a great success. Sisimia, his executive and the people were all happy to support the Malaita council. I said to Sisimia, 'I want you to come to Auki.'

He said, 'Yes, I will come with my executive, my old people.'

They did come to Auki on the day we had arranged and met with the DC. They also went to the Malaita council headquarters and paid their tax. All this was done that day. Thus, the Saufura affair was over from the beginning at the village to the end at Auki with the DC who was very pleased with the outcome.

There were other places to visit as well as Saufura and other tasks to be done. Beyond Saufura, a further hour's walk up the mountains in the middle of the island, was a village called Busugwaugwau. The people here had a different problem with the Government. The Government was putting in a trans-insular road from Auki to Kwai. The difficulty was that the people in the very middle of the bush refused to allow the road to go through their land. Certain Department of Agriculture workers had commenced rough cutting to mark out the possible area for the road through the bush. These workers were attacked by the landowners with knives. Of course, the Government had stopped the work and had tried to approach these people to talk things over. They refused to come near the Government and threatened any government people who tried to come near them. So, as well as the tax matter, the DC had said to me, 'When you have finished with Sisimia at Saufura I want you to talk with the people of Busugwaugwau regarding why they have refused allowing the road through their land.'

When I arrived at Busugwaugwau I noticed that their custom house was on a small hill above the village.⁹ The traditional priest or custom man was there waiting for us. Just as at Saufura, the news of our coming had gone before us. The

people had all scattered out into their bush hiding places when they heard that the black DO was coming to talk about the proposed road. They were all ready for us. The only place they would allow us to sleep was in their custom house. We arrived at Busugwaugau at about 5.30 in the evening. Every kind of custom item, herbs, leaves and even skulls, were in the custom house. We shared our evening dinner with the custom man. Some of the men came to talk with us. Later, lying in my touring camp-stretcher and looking up at the dark ceiling, I could observe many strange kinds of things hung around the house. I did not want to continue turning my head anymore in case I saw another unusual item that would frighten me further, so I just looked directly ahead. After dinner, I had strong coffee, in the hope I would stay awake for a good length of time lest something terrible happen to us. I even told my two friends to keep alert. They said everything seemed all right. I kept awake for a long time, yet without being aware of it, I floated into a very deep sleep. We had had such hard travelling and I felt very tired. As I turned during my sleep, I suddenly realised that I was supposed to be trying to keep awake. To my surprise, I was looking straight through the doorway into the bright sunlight outside the house. 'Daylight!' I exclaimed and jumped out of bed. I had never before experienced delight in my heart and entire being such as on that morning. I was so thankful to my God to find I was still alive. I realised, too, that my imagination had over-reacted because we had slept in that frightful-looking custom house.

We had breakfast and waited. A meeting had been organised for about nine o'clock with the men who visited us the previous evening in the custom house. At 8.30, the custom man blew the conch shell several times. We could hear the sound of people coming up the slopes and then they appeared, forming a big group around the custom house. Everyone was interested to know what the black DO had come to do and whether he was any good. Maybe they were thinking that if

I had been by myself, they could easily kill me. Anyway, when I looked at this large group, I got a little bit frightened. I said to the policeman, 'Soldier, today, taem belong iumi die.'¹⁰ He laughed my words away, saying that no such thing was likely to happen.

I was standing there quite frightened, but looking calm and firm, and said boldly, 'Today I have to do something for the Government that will affect your lives for the better in the long run. I have come here, knowing that the Government is having difficulty getting on to your land. As you all know, the Government is willing to cut one long road across to the other side on this Malaita Island. After it is built, you will find it very useful to you because on each side of this road you can develop your area. You can have gardens here, a truck or a tractor to go to Auki and sell your potatoes, cabbages and other items, instead of going around the valleys and mountains, walking with your market goods and arriving after a two- or three-hour walk.'

I went on and talked about what the Government was doing in the Solomons, what it does with local councils, that it would become our own one day. 'But before that happens, these are some important things the white-man government is trying to give us,' I said.

I went on, 'We just have to look after them and improve them so that we can make use of them for ourselves. I think it is good for us to understand this government help and not be suspicious of them. This road, for example, can benefit you people here and the whole of Malaita. To get development projects done on the other side of this island always involves travelling by ship around this big island and too much time is wasted.'

My speech went on and I think I covered many of the aspects that they needed to know. I knew what they wanted to question me about so I talked about the road, and the need for their permission to use their land.

It was always done like that to satisfy people — Solomon Islanders were not easily convinced of the Government's good intentions. Thus, I had to cover the many areas they might ask me about. I finally said, 'OK, I'll give you time to ask me questions now. But I may not know all the answers of the many questions that you'll give me because I do not know everything. However, I will not tell you lies.' The questions then began. One person asked about the local council: 'Why is it that even in Auki itself we have not seen any Malaita council trucks carrying people's produce to the market place? Why is that? You think only the people near the market place have their produce carried by trucks? We have asked the trucks of the Public Works Department [PWD] and they refused to carry our market produce.'

I said, 'But you are concerned about the present time. When this road is built and in use, your wealthy children, your own people will be using this road, not PWD trucks only. There are people who, say in five or six years time, will have trucks as businesses that will get across here. I should think that we must look a long way ahead.'

One bearded and wild-looking man got up close by. He was holding a long sharp knife. He walked up to me and said, 'Oh, mi too, mi carrim wan fala question.'¹¹ I could see the shiny glitter of its sharp edge. He walked towards a tree quite close to me and 'swished' his knife deep into the side of this tree. It produced a sharp sound and shook the tree, and then he pulled it out again and placed it at the base. He said, 'Now my question is in the form of a parable and you will make up your answer from it. I learned it from a storybook in school. There was a man who was sitting by the side of the road near a house. Not long after there was a big elephant travelling on the road, when it started to rain. In the house, the owner was sitting on the verandah. The elephant stopped and said, "Oh please sir, can I just shelter my trunk in a little space in your house, for it is raining." The man said, "Oh no you might break

my house." "Oh no not my whole body, just my trunk," said the elephant. "OK, well just put your trunk in, it's all right," said the man. The rain began pouring. "Oh can I just move my trunk a little more inside, I'm getting cold?" said the elephant. "Oh no, the house is so small," said the man. "Just a little bit more of it please, please," said the elephant. The rain began falling even heavier and the elephant said, "Can I move in just a little bit more, so my eyes can also be sheltered?" The man said, "Well, all right." When the elephant pushed his body in a little bit more the house broke and collapsed! And that's what the Government is.' The bearded man said, 'The house is our land and we are born to live in the house, our land. The elephant is you, the Government. You are trying to get your trunk into our house, our land. Slowly your whole body, you, the Government, will come and take our land. So what's your answer?'

I said, 'OK, you know we have not yet got this elephant here, but in a big place. There were many of these animals here thousands of years before we came. Do you know why they died slowly? Because their food died, so they had nothing to eat. The elephant has a very big body, but one thing I will tell you today, it has a very small brain. If it had a big brain in its body, it would not have asked the man for shelter in his small house — that is a silly way of doing things. Our government is not like that. It has a brain with a good-sized body, is fit and very wise. Not a big body like the elephant. It is very well trained. It uses its brain to look and try to do things for the benefit of all, so it is very different. I am sorry I probably may not have answered you, but I tell you that the Government is not like your elephant. Government has a wise brain and a light body so is therefore very fit, like a soccer player.'

'Oh boss you tru too mas,' he said and went on, 'Oh, DO thank you very much for answering me. Fest ansa mifela likem. [That's the kind of answer we want to hear from the white man. Now you as a black man answer it in a way we fully

understand.] OK hemi orait DO. You tell the DC we can talk things over now. We want you to join us and talk to the DC when we come to Auki in two different groups.¹² First, the Saufura, then this one. '

Everything went well after the Auki groups' decisions, so that now there is a road running across almost the middle of Malaita Island. It goes from Fauabu on the southern coast to Kwai on the northern one. That was one of the kinds of difficulties I had to face and deal with. I had to tackle important matters with the people from which they would benefit. From my tour report, I received an excellent confidential report from the DC that went to the Secretariat. The DC called me up one day and said, 'My word, you did a good job, well done. You've made a near-perfect written report. I think you'll get something out of it.' I was then picked out as a kind of mission-solving loner and was used when such problems arose.

MISSION TO MORO

Another mission was with the leader of the Moro movement, in 1966, after Auki. The news spread around that I could do things like this. After my Auki post, I went to work with the DC Central, Mr Jim Tedder, and the only Australian DC in the Solomons. He sent me on a mission to talk with Mr Moro personally. The main problem as I was given to understand it, was that Mr Moro had wanted to buy his freedom for 2000 pounds from the Government. This was so that the Government would not interfere with him in his work with his people. He had set up his organisation and therefore insisted that there should be no interference coming from the Government. Jim Tedder called me and said, 'I want you and Fred Osifelo to go to Avu Avu and survey the airfield site there, then negotiate with the owners for the land. After three nights you will part; Fred is to go to the western side and walk around

one half of Guadalcanal back to Honiara. You go around the eastern side and see Mr Moro. Get some information about him, then walk the other half of the island from Marau Sound and back to Honiara. You are both to try to be back here in two weeks.'

A touring ship named *MV Kwai* dropped us at Avu Avu village. Within the two days given we had completed the negotiations and signing of forms for the airfield land with the Avu Avu people. We left a new VSA officer from England there to continue working with the leaders and to tell them how to clear the area for the airstrip.¹³ I started walking along the coast to Makaruka and arrived at Moro's small village. I said, 'I come here to see Moro.' Some people like David Valusa knew me in Honiara. So I said, 'DC tellum mi foa cum lookem big man Moro. I have a special word for Moro from DC Jim Tedder.'

'Oh he's up in his house, right up there,' David Valusa said. So I went. Moro was in his house. He was sitting there. You'd hardly ever find Moro waiting for somebody. He would usually be in the bush, looking at the pigs, or the people may refuse to tell you where he was. That time he was there inside the house, so I went in and introduced myself. 'Oh mi save, I know that you are coming,' he said, 'That little bird there, that parrot told me. A black DO is coming,' and we both laughed. At that time the parrot was laughing and talking away in Moro's language. And my goodness, I was sure that Moro was telling me the truth! I started to get the conversation with him going, very intimate talking, asking about his experiences 'long taem bifo'. He was saying he was on Russell Island on a plantation. He told me about how he started the movement. He liked the old customs and was very sorry they were dying away. He just wanted to revive them and keep them going.

At his home in Makaruka, we had a good long talk for about an hour. During it I said, 'What happened with this paying off for your freedom?' He said, 'Ae, this talk is different, young people got things twisted. What I was in fact saying is

that government does its job administering people — with my people, I do the same with my people.'

I said, 'Well that's good, don't do something that will spoil your organisation. Don't do something bad against the Government, I advise you!'

'Oh that's good advice, I'll remember that,' he said.

'You don't do these funny things like it's said in the news,' I said.

'No, I think my people spoil it for me, but I'm only doing something good for them,' he replied.

I asked him, 'What have you been doing now?'

He said, 'Oh making a lot of pig fences. Agriculture people help us. I want to make the Government pleased.'

I didn't spend much more time with him, just enough for my report. He had been very open and kind to me and so I left him. 'I like you because you are a very simple Solomon Island man. You come to talk about government, white man's government, which some people are much more able to explain. I am pleased you came. I won't forget you and sometime I will give you a pig,' he said with a smile. When I went back I made my report, a firsthand account of the Moro movement.

A very simple man, Moro was, and I liked him. He is a good friend now. In the year that the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh came, we needed people to come around. Moro came with a big shipload of bananas and yams, to feed all the people of Honiara who attended the ceremony. That was his gesture of kindness. He gave me a pig on that occasion when we met in the district office. He said, 'That one bilong you,' because he saw me busy with the organisation of all the outside visitors coming into town.¹⁴

Footnotes

- 1 'Hello, is there anyone here?'
- 2 'I'd like to sleep in one of your houses. What about it, will you show me a house where I can sleep to-night?'
- 3 'Where is Sisimia now?'
- 4 'I'd like to sleep in that house there.'
- 5 'Yes, you can sleep there.'
- 6 'Go into the bush if you want to smoke, you can't smoke here.'
- 7 'I am Sisimia.'
- 8 'We will eat first.'
- 9 A building used as a religious and cultural centre, usually for men only.
- 10 'Constable, I think we are both going to die.'
- 11 'Oh, me too, I have a question.'
- 12 'Oh, boss, you are right ... That's the first real answer we have had ... So it is fine now.'
- 13 Volunteer Service Abroad is an organisation of volunteers, paid by its home government.
- 14 'That one is for you.'



Olive Gina with her daughters, first-born Lois sitting and L'Amour on Olive's lap, Honiara, 1964.

CHAPTER FIVE

Touring and training

FIRST POSTING TO KIRA KIRA

Even after nine months in the Central District based at Honiara, I hadn't been able to settle, as there was no house for me, so I had left my family at Gizo. They went and stayed at Rarumana with their grandmother. I stayed on trying to get a house, but couldn't. About the same time the sub-accountant at Kira Kira had stolen some money from the office till, which he used for beer drinking. He was sent to prison. There was no DO there at that time as he was on leave. Also I had received a promotion from Cadet AAO to AAO proper. The Government thought that being a new AAO, I would be the right officer to join the DC at Kira Kira, who was by himself. Also my previous Treasury experience enabled me to supervise the sub-accountancy which had been left vacant by the officer imprisoned for his embezzlement. As I had the background of sub-accountant at Gizo and also had worked with Treasury, it was thought that I might as well man that centre. So I was transferred to Kira Kira. I did two jobs there — doing the DO's work and looking after the sub-accountancy. The DC then was

an Englishman, Ian Cawte. About two years earlier my close relative (from the same tribe), Francis Talasasa had been there as a DO while Robin Lowe was DC. At the time I was posted to Kira Kira, our first boy, Ian Roni Gina was about three years of age. Olive and I also had two girls by then. This was my first posting to Kira Kira from 1966 to 1968. There would be a second several years later.

I was still doing my duties as the AAO and those of us who were eligible were going for promotions. No matter what the duties were, I did them so I could get my promotion, whether or not they were within the pay range accorded to the duties. There were many heavy duties I did, such as the DO's work. There was a big gap between the work of the DC and the DO. As there was no DO I was acting officer. I also did touring and election work in the Eastern Outer Islands.¹ In one small village on the island of Utupua down by the shore, there is a cement marker. It split that village into two wards that went both ways, back to another village further round. I spent six weeks just going around the island and I had to complete the whole exercise, reporting all the results to the DC.

During that period I was doing many administrative duties; overseeing the clerks; lecturing them on how to look after their cash books; rate collection; seeing local court clerks; reviewing their new cases and their civil cases; advising them on how to do this. They mostly wanted to ask about the procedures and I had to know these. Sometimes the appointment of local court clerks would have been quite recent and these people wanted to know what they were supposed to be doing. I spent a lot of time helping them out during the period of the election process, which takes a long time. That election work was for local government. We were doing that all the time and still are today.

I was there once, anchored at Graciosa Bay on Santa Cruz (Ndeni), and the radio schedules were usually always in the afternoon. We would be listening out for when the DC

would call us. One afternoon he said, 'Now Tinakula is about to erupt and Mr Grover, the geologist, is very worried about the people around there. I'd like you to take off straight away. Go straight to Tinakula and pick up those people from Nukapu who live there.' These Nukapu people have gardens there on Tinakula. The DC said, 'Evacuate them.'

So I asked the skipper, who said, 'I think we'll have to leave early in the morning. We can't do anything now. If anything happens we will all be dead.'

We left very early the next morning for Tinakula, which is a little volcanic island, cone-shaped. The way the sea comes in there it bounces back and creates a lot of turbulence, so we could not land. I asked the skipper 'How can we manage?'

He replied, 'We can go around further to a little bay.' That, however, was where red-hot stones were coming out of a geyser. By that time Tinakula was erupting frequently and we were very frightened. We went round and round and I remarked to the captain, 'We'll have to do something at least,' as he was insisting we return. He didn't think we could do anything. I said, 'No, let's try and get a dinghy down and someone go in with it.' He could not see my reasoning, that if we had gone there and done nothing it would not have looked good on our part, we would not have been doing our duty. So I insisted! He was really mad, but I again said, 'We must put a dinghy down.'

He then said, 'OK,' so we did that. I then called, 'Any volunteers?' but the crew didn't move. 'Very well,' I said, and went around the side of the ship where I jumped into the dinghy. 'OK, will anyone come with me? I can go down myself if no one will come.' Then three of them jumped down. 'Oh sapos masta go nao, iumi go nao ia, no matter die.'²

We then pushed away in the dinghy. Oh, the waves were really high; they just tossed us around. We rowed towards the island where the people had gathered on the shore. They

wondered what we were doing. When we were a little closer, we waved to them and I called out, 'Iu traefo swim come.'³

They replied, 'OK,' and three of them swam out. We had tried to get closer to the island, so it was not long before they reached us. I then said, 'Right listen, we've come to get you out of this place this taem nao⁴ because this island is going to blow up. It is very dangerous for you to stay here. How many people are here?' To which they replied, 'Fifty.'

'All right,' I told them, 'we have a ship here now for you.'

They answered, 'Oh no, no, we can leave by our own canoes.'

I said, 'But this ship is here to take you now!'

To which they answered, 'OK, you go and wait there.' They told us to go around a bit further and wait at a quieter place than where the rumbles were going on. I agreed by saying, 'All right, we'll wait there. In one hour's time, please paddle your canoes and come. We will go there now and wait for you.' The three crew members and I rowed back towards the ship, but it was very hard to get into it again. We did, however, manage it. When the ship came rolling on the waves we all jumped aboard it with the dinghy's rope which they then tied to the ship, and off we went. We steamed further around the island to where we had arranged with the men to wait. While floating just off the shore, we could see pieces of stone which, being hot still, splashed with steam into the water, making a sound like that of machine guns! A few fell very near our ship. We waited there and when one hour had passed, no one had come. After a second hour had elapsed only three had come. The dinghy went down for them and they told us, 'Only three of us are coming, the rest will all get on their canoes and paddle back to our island, Nukapu.' I do not know what happened after that, but as we went past where they were all gathered, we saw them push out three very full canoes that slowly moved out in the rough waves. I guess that

was to show us that they were leaving Tinakula. In fact, they did not. They just wanted to be rid of the Government and had the attitude of, 'Go away, leave us alone.'

We went back to Graciosa Bay, Santa Cruz and all that night some of us kept watch for the expected 'big burst' of Tinakula Island. While at anchor at Graciosa Bay I reported to the DC at Kira Kira via the ship's radio, that the warning to the Nukapu people at Tinakula had been carried out as directed; that the government ship had been offered to assist in returning them to their island; that we had waited there for about three hours and, despite these offers of assistance, they had insisted on returning to Nukapu Island by their own canoes. Only three had chosen to travel with us on the ship. I felt that we had done all that was asked of us on that day. Just as we had on the ship, so, too, had many other people watched and seen the fire and stones thrown out of the top of Tinakula cone. Many said it was just normal, it was like that most of the time. The Tinakula people were not and have not been wiped out, even up to the present time. They were and are used to it, but one day it could happen.

Six weeks after this we were travelling from island to island meeting the people. One matter I was following up was to inspect places for the proposed Lata government station. I walked around the area where the present station is now situated. At that time, however, very little thought had been given to that particular spot. I was merely giving some words of advice to those seeking out where might be the best areas to choose. A couple of places were mentioned, even the same tableland was mentioned as an airfield site. Yet I discouraged many of the suggested sites that the people considered.

We came back to Kira Kira after the election operations were completed. Kira Kira was a beautiful little town. We went out from there to Ulawa and the outer islands. Local councils there were growing at the time. Mr Jack Campbell was the president of the Makira Council when I was

there and we took to one another very well indeed. I also acted as their advisor and as a clerk. Ugi was nearby and this island was very significant during my time there because it was then the seat of the Melanesian Mission's Selwyn College. This is now situated at Maravovo on Guadalcanal Island. The former Alangaula Primary School was also there then. The former Archbishop, Norman Palmer, now retired, was once the principal of the Alangaula School. I visited and stayed overnight with him and his family there during one of my administrative tours of the Makira Islands.

There were also the normal local council difficulties on Makira; the difficulties of money and services shortages and the usual land problems. The Makira people are good, somewhat reserved people. They don't go into your private life. When in your official status they respect you. I think this is because the churches encouraged this behaviour, which has evolved. Priests and pastors are always respected as 'big men' who are trusted and looked upon as giving the best advice people can possibly get.

I know Solomon Mamaloni's father, Mr Sunaone, who was like an uncle to me, as he knew my father very well.⁵ He had also served terms as president of the Makira Council in the years prior to my arrival there. He was a very notable person in the Eastern District in his time. There were many mature people of that district in former days, who held many of those positions of elevated status. They performed their respective responsibilities very well. The most outstanding of them was Jack Campbell.⁶ Geoffrey Kuper also had his turn as president of the council. He was a kind and easy-going man. He lived in retirement in his island home at Santa Anna. Three times I made stopovers on Santa Anna Island and on one of them we anchored there for the night, when I had dinner with him and his family. He kept a most exemplary home. Custom ornaments lined the pelmets, while mostly spears and adzes lined the walls.⁷ It was the first time I had seen most of those Santa Anna and Makira artefacts.

TRAINING COURSE IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW GUINEA

After I finished at Kira Kira, I went to a course in Australia. At that time, 1966–68, there was an Australian aid arrangement called ASPTAP (Australian South Pacific Training and Aid Program) which was open to the Pacific Island Territories. In South East Asia, the Australian aid program was called the 'Colombo Plan'. This admitted Islanders among the Asians to take 'Intensive English Courses' in Australia. In Honiara, civil servants of supervisory level had to apply to the Education Department, and then each year the best were picked to attend. In any year, four or five would be sent and I was among those selected. I had decided to learn more English in a white man's country.

I had been still out touring when my name was announced over SIBS radio, saying that my application had been accepted and that I must attend an interview soon on Honiara.⁸ Mr Russ (Rusty) Russell, an Englishman and my boss, was the DC of the Eastern District at the time, after Glynn Cochrane, also an Englishman. I told Rusty, who knew that I had applied, that I had been accepted. He was equally thrilled with my news. I proceeded to fill in the forms for the Australian education course, which had been sent on to me from Honiara. *MV Komaliae*, our district ship, was due for an overhaul that July, so I travelled on her to Honiara for my interview. I cannot remember exactly how many had been selected, but there were about 15 of us sitting outside the interview office. After a duration of about two weeks, my name was again mentioned over the radio, before I received my official reply, that I was to go to Australia. The Education Department in Honiara had approved my application, though it was still subject to Australia's final approval.

While still awaiting final confirmation to the course, a telegram arrived from the Secretariat in Honiara stating that

the Chief Secretary was coming over to Kira Kira for a visit. Among other things for which he was visiting, he wanted to speak with me. His name was B. (Bim) Davies, an Englishman. He flew over for a day's visit and had discussions with the DC on other matters, and then I was called in to see him. He said, 'Look young lad, I want you to go and do some worthwhile work in Australia. You have been accepted for this English course, however, I do not consider such a basic level of English suitable for you. I want you to go and do some really hard work, so I have changed your course. You are to take a Senior Public Administration course for three months in Canberra instead. I'd hate to think that you would only want to go and walk around Sydney.' So my course was changed. The Canberra administration course was approved and I was told I was going to leave Kira Kira for Canberra in two weeks time, in July 1967.

I sent my family home first, back to the West to my parents. While still in Kira Kira I organised for my salary payments to be paid to my family, as I would be paid course allowances in Canberra. I left Kira Kira, spent one day in Honiara, then continued to Munda where I spent one week with my family, since I had already applied for that. The plane route then went through Munda, Buka, Rabaul, Port Moresby, Brisbane (where I first felt the cold of Australia) and I arrived in Sydney in the early evening. The trip was all in the same day.

On my arrival in Sydney, after all the necessary checks were completed, I stood there alone for some 10 minutes, for no one had arrived or was around to meet me. I had an awful feeling indeed at that time. Suddenly one fellow came towards me and said, 'Are you Mr Gina?'

I answered, 'Yes.'

'Oh, I'm the liaison officer from the Education Department,' he replied. He then took me to a hotel at Bondi for that first night. I was so cold that I slept with my long pants and my coat still on — poor me, shivering throughout the

night. Next morning, as I was looking from my window, I was amazed to see some people who had got up early were swimming in the sea and lying on the beach on that very cold morning.

The other course members, 13 from Africa, nine from the South-East Asian countries, two from Fiji and one from the Gilberts, had already arrived in the same hotel. We met one another at breakfast time. We had to stay in Sydney for three days to attend some induction lectures about the whole of Australia. The Fokker Friendship was a popular plane in use during those days and we flew to Canberra in one of them. It was a very comfortable plane.

In Canberra, we first lived in the Members of Parliament's rest house, just beside the former parliament buildings. We were accommodated there for two weeks because there were no Parliament sittings at that time. Our course centre was not very far, so we walked to it each morning. The centre was called the International Training Centre, which was located on the parliament side of Lake Burley Griffin. We had academic lecturers from The Australian National University in Canberra. It was during term break, so the lecturers were available to participate in this course. It was a very interesting course and we indeed gained a very broad scope of administrative, managerial and human relations skills and understanding.

I have to make mention of one of the lecturers in Canberra. He was a mature gentleman who had been a DC in Papua New Guinea. He was our lecturer on local government councils about Papua New Guinea; his name was Mr Card. He had been paralysed while in Papua New Guinea, yet he was very experienced in local councils there. He in fact had introduced that system into Papua New Guinea. Out of curiosity, the two Fijians, the Kiribati (Gilbertese) man and I happened to ask him one day if we could visit Papua New Guinea to observe what their local councils had experienced

since their inception. This would be after we had finished the course and before we returned to our homes. He said, 'Oh yes, gladly,' and proceeded with all the necessary arrangements. The officials in Port Moresby agreed.

After our time in Canberra, we spent eight days touring the Snowy Mountains Scheme, the great project that was being carried out by people of many nationalities.⁹ You had to visit Cooma township where many international flags could be seen flying. Beyond Cooma, there was snow and it was very cold. It was so amazing when we were shown the huge valleys of the past which were now flooded. As the snow melted and was caught in them, they became large lakes for the scheme. We travelled by boat in some of these lakes and were shown the mouths of each tunnel that connected to each lake. We were shown these tunnels right to the Murray River side of the Snowy Mountains. After this, we returned to Sydney where we were attached to the University of New South Wales. There we stayed and spent two weeks visiting a number of state ministries and also a number of Sydney municipal offices. There we observed and spoke with officials. We heard how they ran their ministries and offices, especially in relation to administrative, managerial and human relations bases.

While in Sydney we were split into pairs to be attached to the local government councils, within the state of New South Wales. This was for a duration of two weeks. The other half of my pair was to have been the Kiribati man, Mr Naboua Ratiata. However, he did not join me. He became very ill and was admitted to a Sydney hospital and when discharged, he spent his attachment period with the Sydney municipality. I spent two weeks in the Gundarimber Shire near the boundary with Queensland. It did a lot to serve its community and was a typical shire council, like those we had learned about in Canberra. They were sufficient models to those of us who have since established local government councils back in our own countries. I must also mention

Gosford Shire Council. This is some 90km from Sydney, along the coast going north to Brisbane. When we were in Canberra we took a coach trip from there to Gosford. It was a clean and beautiful city that attracted many tourists, even from the outside world. We spent about five days there visiting the many and various projects of interest to us. We all agreed that it was the best, most prosperous council. Its citizens enjoyed prompt and superior services. Their hospitals, water supply, sewerage purification system that recycled water into lakes for the residents and tourists to swim in, were superbly done. Through its own sources of revenue, it was almost self-sufficient and within Gosford there was an independent River Water Council. This was solely responsible for supplying electricity to Gosford city and its surrounding suburbs. It obtained the power from the main cables that ran from the Snowy Mountains hydro-power complex. This was for all cities and was distributed to all users, especially at peak hours.

After the final two weeks in Sydney we were handed our tickets to visit Papua New Guinea. This was for a further eight days. Once our evaluation was over, we visited various local Papua New Guinea councils. Before leaving Sydney, however, we had to spend a week at the Australian School of Pacific Administration at Mosman, somewhere near old Manly. Here we had a week of lectures through which we learned many things before our arrival in Papua New Guinea.

A PACIFIC WAY?

In Port Moresby we were briefed in the Administrative Centre in Konedobu, Hanuabada. We stayed only overnight at Moresby and were then flown over to Mount Hagen. This was a new, growing town which sits high up in the Highlands and, at that time of year, it was as cold as Sydney in Australia. We spent one full day around Hagen visiting council projects,

markets, the coffee plantations, etc. The people were very different — they looked unpredictable. The next day we travelled down towards Goroka. That long ride was really tiring as the road meandered up and down the steep mountainsides. The steep drops from the height at road level to the valleys made one breathe an inner 'Oooh!' in exclamation at the unbelievable sight of the depth below. I admired the wonders of modern engineering competency in constructing such a road! Most importantly, this road enabled huge trucks to travel from Lae through to Mount Hagen and back, carrying goods. The drivers got their bonuses by seeing how many times they got their cargoes from Lae to Mount Hagen, while they indeed travelled at very high speeds. Thus smaller vehicles and land-rovers had to be very alert! Each time one came from either way, it would be safer to park at the side of the road because, as a rule, the truck dominated the middle of the road. What an experience! We arrived at Goroka in the early evening. The next morning we visited the town market. We were shown the council's activities, some were well outside the town, and all this happened in just one day.

The next day a small plane took us to Madang. After a discussion with the council president in his chamber, as at Mount Hagen and Goroka, we were accorded the same exercise of being shown around their project areas. I was convinced that each of the local councils which we visited had developed and evolved in almost the same way as Solomon Islands local councils developed.

In the course of our visit an unforgettable incident occurred. It taught me that the word 'hospitality', or that sense of meaning, cannot be taken for granted as a common characteristic in all Pacific Islands people. Our liaison officer thought that we ought also to have the chance of seeing what the 'copra industry' meant in relation to a single family working together for their livelihood. On the roadside, he introduced us to a man, the head of the family. The man answered many of

our questions and, while we were still talking away, I picked up one little piece of cooked coconut kernel and ate it, trying to taste whether it was well cooked yet or not. To my surprise, there was a rattling sound coming from the bush. A woman was talking away to her husband who was with us and as she was talking she pointed at me. She was complaining that I was eating their coconut, that little piece. The man turned to me and said, 'You no sapos to kaikaim coconut copra bilong mi fala.'¹⁰ He made such a fuss about it. It took us some time to settle him down. The woman came closer with her piccaninnies and kept staring at us. 'What you think you're doing here and now? Want to eat our copra?' the man insisted. Even the DO had a difficult time trying to get things settled. I then said, 'lume finis, mi tok sore finis plenty time ia.'¹¹

The Fijian said, 'You come to Fiji, we can gladly allow you to bite much bigger pieces of copra, just for free.'

The Gilbertese said, 'A wee piece of copra does not merit half an hour talking like this at home. We don't consider it as serious as this.' That was an experience for us. As to the gesture, it was a valid indication of the importance of an industry not to be taken lightly. There needed to be an alternative; something which would remedy this misunderstanding, since it had implanted in us a bad impression which we'd hate to relate to the whole of Papua New Guinea. By comparison, when you meet people in town or in villages in the Solomons, they will start by looking at you, by standing around you and then talk to you, while they may take a great interest in you.

I felt lost in Goroka, as people you meet just didn't want to be bothered to speak. In the Goroka Hotel I went for a cold drink. The people looked at me, but took no notice of me, not even a 'hello.' After all, Bougainville is part of Papua New Guinea and I could have been a Bougainvillean by my skin colour. I took my glass and sat on a chair at a nearby round table. From a corner I saw two black men, who approached me. The said, 'Hey wontok, you from Solomon?'¹²

I said, 'Yes.'

They replied, 'Mi tu fala from Solomon tu ia!'¹³ I inquired from which islands and they said, 'Oh, from Bougainville.' From that time onwards I came to sense that something big was going to erupt one day. They said that they and Papua New Guineans did not go well together socially. They told me in plain English about what was going on during that time, 'You know we are not liked in this place, we're sort of different, another kind of coloured people here, we are not accepted.' I understood it, too, for from my perspective I felt the atmosphere there was not very good. I asked if they had friends around. They said, 'We have friends, but they hardly stick — friends today, no friends tomorrow or the next day, but we survive this.' They said they wanted to join the Solomon Islands one day. I stressed that there might have been some real mistakes made concerning boundaries, but not culture. I said I believed some things could be ironed out in the future. I did not stay too much longer with the two men, but I moved away quickly to avoid trouble for all of us. Having actually seen problems at that time, I believed some real trouble would be forthcoming in the years ahead.

After Madang we flew to Lae, where we spent only half a day, then flew on to Rabaul, where we spent two days. We noticed that Rabaul was a very neatly planned town though it looked deserted, unlike its princely days when many Australians were there. It was once the centre of activities well before World War II. The name Rabaul was famous around the Pacific during those days. It has a beautiful harbour. During our two days there we went around its local council areas. We then spent a pleasant evening having a meal with the DC on the hilltop. This had me thinking back to Gizo and Auki, for they were also overlooking their harbours and their towns below. I met some Solomon Islanders who went to colleges in Rabaul, and we also had a lot to see of their council activities. It was at Rabaul that the four of us parted. The three of them

went back to Sydney, then on to either Nadi or Tarawa. I went back to Munda, then a week later I arrived back in Honiara.

Those were my visits to Australia and Papua New Guinea, which helped me a lot when I came back home. This tour had helped my training. I had developed tremendously in my understanding about the particular roles of local councils in relation to the communities that they are responsible for.

There was another lesson, too, that the *Pacific Way*, a term loosely used to imply the Custom or *Kastom Way* common among our own tribes and clans, cannot be readily applied to the entire Pacific region. It was just a clever creation that sounded nice and stylish to its creator. The white man's way, the legal and economic systems that have been introduced do not fit with the so-called *Pacific Way*. None practise it at the national and international level. The Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, turned his back on the concerns of the small Pacific Islanders when he would not support cutting back green house gas emissions at the 1997 Pacific Forum meeting. The killing of thousands of Bougainvillean men, women and innocent children occurred just because the Papua New Guinea Government did not like having its sovereignty questioned. Neither of these actions reflects the respect and support implied in the term *Pacific Way*. The meanness we saw at Madang over a scrap of coconut and the unfriendliness at Goroka revealed that the *Pacific Way* is often a myth even in everyday social life among different Pacific Islanders. The only part of the *Pacific Way* that we all can still honour and strive for is that we control time for people, not as the white man does, allow time to control people. We can foster our own Custom Way among our own tribal and clan people because this gives meaning to our lives and relationships.

Footnotes

- 1 The 'outer islands' once comprised the Santa Cruz district of the pre-war years. Today, it is called Temotu Province.
- 2 'Well if the master is going, we will go, too, no matter if we die.'
- 3 'Try to swim out.'
- 4 'At once.'
- 5 S. Mamaloni was Prime Minister of Solomons on three occasions. He was from Arosi area on Makira.
- 6 Campbell's father, F. M. Campbell, was at one time the head of the native constabulary and a district officer. He settled as a planter on Makira and married a local woman.
- 7 Geoffrey Kuper's father, Henry, was a German trader and planter who married a high-born Santa Anna woman. He was one of the first from the Solomons to complete his education in Fiji as a Native Medical Practitioner before the war.
- 8 Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service.
- 9 This was a scheme to divert the waters of the rivers flowing from the Great Dividing Range eastwards into the sea back through the range to flow westwards into areas of lesser rainfall. It also used this water to generate hydroelectricity.
- 10 'You are not supposed to eat our copra.'
- 11 'Let's not argue, I am very sorry about this.'
- 12 'Hello friend, are you from the Solomons?'
- 13 'Yes, we are from the Solomons too.'



Lloyd Mapeza Gina in 1979.

CHAPTER SIX

The Western District again

HONIARA

When I arrived back in Honiara they told me they wanted me to be posted again to Auki and be involved in a land resettlement scheme on Malaita. I said no and refused to go back to Auki. I had left some work to be completed at Kira Kira, which had only a DC and no DO. At the same time it began to dawn in my mind that, with movements from here to there, it was good, but only for my own sake. It might give me future promotions, for my being loyal and committed to the call of duty. On the other hand, I thought that I was not at all helping my children and my wife. Olive had been dragged about here and there. I'd also gained some wisdom from my courses, that a person who has been moved about is not often very much liked by his colleagues. I even questioned my own values — whether I was giving good enough performances to the Government, to the people and did I do the right thing? Therefore, these people who wanted to keep me did so, but only because I would always do the job for them. These were the disturbing areas. I placed much importance in my family

and I wanted them to stay longer at one place, so they could settle in a school. I had realised that the more we moved about, the more the frequent changes of teachers affected my kids. I had two of my brightest children having to repeat a year's study before they entered secondary education as a result of this.

I presented this case to the Secretary of Protectorate Affairs, when I arrived back. These were my reasons. I maintained that there were certain officers in the Secretariat who had never been posted out to the districts. In my case, I was treated like a football, kicked from here to there. I asked if I had any worth in the service. I complained that there had been many of us high executive officers, yet I was the only one to be treated that way. I stood on this against Mr Bill Wright who was then the Secretary of Protectorate Affairs. He was my former boss as DC at Gizo, Western District, as DC at Auki, Malaita District, and at Honiara, Central District. He understood me only too well. He asked me, 'Now what happens if you don't go to Auki since you are to proceed there to do this resettlement scheme? You must understand that all administrative officers can be either District Officers or Land Officers. Whenever there is a need, a District Officer may be transferred to the Lands Department as a Lands Officer. That's so he is there to deal with the people in implementing these schemes. We've proposed that working as an assistant DO at Auki, you could also do that Land Officer's job for the benefit of prospective promotion.' I said that though I would like going there, I still felt it was not fair having me frequently moved about. On feeling that I could lose my battle, I finally presented them with an ultimatum, that I would resign if they insisted. I said, 'It would merely cost the Government a few pounds to send me back home in Western District, but it would cost much more when sending an officer back to England. I do not care at all what you might do with me for my refusal.' They informed me to call back in two days time, which I did. Mr Bill Wright said, 'Well, we have carefully

considered your complaint and it may be possible to shift somebody else, then fit you in somewhere here in Honiara.' After being given two more days, I went back and the news was good. He said, 'OK, you won the game. You are to work in Honiara as a High Executive Officer in the Central District. You are posted here so that you can stay a bit longer in Honiara with your children.' That was why I spent almost seven years in the Central District office in Honiara. I got my kids into schools there and I wasn't transferred again. It was the longest period I had ever spent in any district.

In the Central District I was assigned to hold administrative responsibilities over Florida (Gela), Russell and Savo Islands. Just returned and fresh from my administrative course in Australia I worked extra hard with much clearer confidence for my goal. The 1950s had been different times. There were hardly any openings for quick promotions for us local officers. The ceiling was difficult to reach, except by serving loyally for a good number of years. Once, in 1967, I had applied for a post as a Senior Executive Officer after a vacancy due to the promotion of the third Solomon Islander to Administrative Officer, Mr Fred Osifelo (now Sir Fred). Although I understood well that direct applications, such as mine, for vacant posts were not often considered for us Solomon Islanders, I tried my luck at it. I was confident that with my years of on-the-job-training, I could perform equally well in that post. They informed me that my application was not successful, so I merely braced myself and confidently thought, 'I'll just work extra hard'. I had never given up trying and it seemed to have paid off because there I was Executive Officer, Central.

I toured the islands of Florida, Savo and Russell very extensively. I found the Florida (or Gela) people most difficult of all. You tell them something today, they would say 'yes' and acted nicely to your face. But when you returned to check a week later there would be nothing done yet, they would merely

start finding excuses to tell you. The late Francis Bugotu was then one of the government Education Officers in those years. I met him up at Halavo, the former Gela Council headquarters. He had come there during one of his tours around Florida and the council members had wanted him to speak to them about the education policy of the country. We two then had a discussion and he told me, 'You know, these people are a bit hard.' Father Charles Fox of Taroaniara often said that, too.¹ 'The people are hard to deal with, you have to be inventive in trying to introduce some new ways and attitudes.' I thought that if Father Fox had found them hard, then what could I do? I at least improvised one thing for them. There was a big, uncollected arrears of local council taxes, going back three years. I wrote one circular letter. In it, I said that anyone who did not pay his tax rate up to and by a certain date would be fined or imprisoned or both. And I quoted certain sections within the local government ordinance. That really caught them. The council clerk distributed this letter around the island, and the news spread like a big epidemic throughout Gela.

Every man of the tax age got this letter. They went around to the priests, even to Father Fox and asked to have the meaning of this circular letter explained. They had to pay up including the three years arrears. Within a six-week period, the council clerk was in great demand to visit all the villages for the collection and payment of dues. He was even intercepted at sea while travelling in his canoe by men who handed in their tax money to him. As a result, there was a great surplus of taxes collected in that year, 1968. My boss, the DC, was equally happy with this achievement.

FIJI REVISITED

It was in May 1971 that I left Honiara and attended a senior course in public administration in Suva, Fiji. In January that year, I had been one among seven who were promoted to

become proper administrative officers, a substantive post for all DCs and DOs. There are separate classes, class A for the DC and class B for the DO. However, the administration selected only four among the seven of us promoted to attend this three-month course at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. We were: Peter Kenilorea (later, Sir Peter), who became the first Prime Minister of Solomon Islands after independence; Baddley Devesi (later, Sir Baddley), the first Governor-General after independence; Mr Bobby Kwainarara, OBE, first Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs after independence, and myself. With the four of us from Solomon Islands there were also two Fijians, five Gilbert and Ellice Islanders, (later called Kiribati and Tuvalu) and two New Hebrideans (later Vanuatu). It was generally a worthwhile course, a kind of crash course and the second after an earlier Fijian one that was run before they had their independence in 1970. Thus, we were the second lot. It was more than 15 years since I had left Fiji after my secondary school days. I noticed Fiji had altered a great deal. The face of Suva especially had changed very fast. The course was interesting, however, we all felt it was not particularly geared towards the needs of the Pacific Islands context. It was more like the type of course that I had attended in Canberra in 1967. The subjects were geared mostly towards general administration at Australian and New Zealand levels. Therefore, in our evaluation period we suggested that the course should be geared towards Pacific Island officials. The course director was John Banks of the USP Administrative Centre; the lecturers were two men and one woman.

Our accommodation was in a motel outside the campus near a Catholic secondary school because the dormitories in the USP compound were not completed. Flagstaff was the name of the small town where the motel was. By arrangement, there were special cars that came each morning and picked us up and in the evenings they returned us

to our motel. During this time, of course, I was able to meet many of my schoolmates, some on campus, many in the streets of Suva, and some I spoke with by phone. Philip Bole (a Member of Parliament and later Foreign Minister) took me to his own house one Sunday. He had been a great friend of mine at Queen Victoria School.

I also went to see the old lady, Sera Mata, who was my foster mother during my school days. She cried when I arrived at her home, at Laqere, near Suva. She was living in the same house that I helped old Asaelito build. After he had completed it, both moved into it when they retired. After some years old Asaeli passed away. The old lady Sera wept her heart out as I arrived. It was a very touching moment indeed. She looked at me and pointed at the house, and said, 'This is the same house which you helped the old man build before you left us. He would have been so happy to see you here again, if he were still alive.' She bade me enter the house. It was a Saturday, the old lady had gone to the market earlier in the morning and most of what she had bought was Sunday special food (as usual in Fiji for Sunday Sabbath specials). She went to cook the best like she used to do for us in the old days. I enjoyed her very best style of cooking for lunch, sharing it with her and her grandson, Tukai. Fugawai, her daughter, came on the next Saturday, picked me up at Suva Apartment in Kaunikuila Street and took me back to Laqere again. I stayed for the whole day there. I could sense the old familiar, welcoming family atmosphere and love in her home again. The day before we were to leave Fiji, I went to bid farewell to her. We shared once again the feelings of two broken hearts. What a very good mother she had been, so rare and so special to me!

After my schooling in Fiji, when I was back in the Solomon Islands, many people talked and asked if I knew about the descendants of the Solomon Islanders who had been there in the early days.² I always said, 'Yes,' because I had actually been to their place called Wailoku. Some were living

at Karekara³ near Flagstaff near where our motel was, and some at Newtown, a new settlement near Nasinu, an old teachers' training institution. I visited their homes and they were living more like Fijians now. From what I was told, most of their ancestors came from Guadalcanal, Gela or Malaita Islands.

I learnt from my father that those from the West came back after the abolition of this slave trade in 1911. My great grandfather was one of those who was indentured at Levuka, on Ovalau Island. His name was Kuba. He was my father's grandfather on his mother's side. My father said that on his return home, he told his people that with his other friends he was locked up in the ship's hold or kidnapped! On his arrival in Fiji he was sold to a Levuka trader. He therefore stayed and worked in the plantations there for about 12 years. The Fiji plantation workers were properly returned to the Solomon Islands after the labour trade ceased. It was said that my great grandfather Kuba somehow got married there. Only those who were known to have married like the Wailoku faction were permitted to stay in Fiji, but all declared single men were to be returned. Kuba's brother was preparing to leave, but Kuba, having been married, had to stay, then suddenly changed his mind at the very last moment and he said to his brother, 'You sleep by the hole of the anchor chain. I will swim and climb up the chain.' This he did and his brother and others hid him. The ship then left for Suva and he was well hidden away. Only when it was about two days out from Suva did he show himself. They couldn't throw him overboard, so he travelled safely back home. Both brothers, Kuba and Rutu, arrived safely at their village at Kidu, Munda, in the Roviana Lagoon, after having gone through those great, but miserable adventures together.

There are still certain places around their locality that they named after places they went to. One place was named and still is Levuka, one is Sinei (Sydney). Not long after Kuba returned, he got married to a woman named Oloduri, who

became my grandmother, for she was my father's mother. If Kuba had remained at Levuka in Fiji, most certainly there would not have been any me, but perhaps somebody else!

DISTRICT OFFICER, GIZO

On my return from the course in Fiji, I was posted direct to Gizo. I didn't mind that, for after quite a long while in Honiara, it was a good break for Olive, the children and me. Their transfer to the Gizo Primary School had been arranged earlier.

The British spread the four of us who had been to Fiji around the administration. The postings of my three colleagues went something like this: Peter went as Assistant Finance Officer in the Secretariat; Baddley went to the Local Government Committee of Governing Council Legislature with Tony Hughes; Bobby went to Malaita as DO there; I went to Gizo for another term as the new DO. This was my third posting to Gizo.

I found my new position was similar to what I had performed in the Central District. Because I was already trained in that kind of work, when I became a real DO, nothing was new. I just took a little extra authority with the status of DO. I started to work under the DC, Western, whose name was Tom Laing. He was a bachelor and a hard-working man. During his time, he was the one who initiated the idea of amalgamating all the individual local councils in the Western District. I came at the height of this proposal and carried this job through. Because the DO, Michael Cartland from England, had initially prepared all the paperwork, I, as his replacement, merely continued with the exercise. When Cartland's term in the Solomons expired, he left for Hong Kong and worked there.

The original local government councils that were amalgamated in the Western District were: Marovo Council, Roviana Council, Vella Lavella Council, Choiseul Council and

the Shortland Islands Council. Initially, proper consultations were carried out with each council about the proposal. It involved talks about how difficult it was to look after each council. Therefore many services were not functioning very well because each council was so small. The revenue derived through their tax money was very small compared with their respective areas. On the question of aid money, as it was divided for the individual councils, the smaller ones suffered greatly, because they did not have the resources to obtain revenue. Also in terms of materials — when small councils like the Shortland Islands ordered its materials, by the time they arrived there, the costs would end up being much higher, because of having to add extra for freighting. In the end there was not enough money left to complete a project. The transportation of project materials was a real problem. Therefore, the idea of amalgamation was to build a strong central council so that all the individual aid that was received was pooled. Thus all the materials could be properly collected, sorted out, then transferred to the various former councils' project areas. That proved to work quite well. Most important projects were processed through one central local council, were easily decided with little delay and more council projects were executed quickly and effectively; for example, building new village clinics, roads and water supplies, etc.

After amalgamation of the five councils, election arrangements were prepared. A new DC named Eddie Brooks arrived to replace the out going Tom Laing. He took over election and preparatory works. The elections turned out to be a great success from which we had a new single council to go to sub-district centres to hold its full meetings. The first full council meeting was held at Vagena on Choiseul Island. The district ship, *MV Waisisi*, took all 32 members, the Choiseul sub-district clerk, the DC and myself to Vagena. The people there looked after us very well. They were the Gilbertese community from Fanning Island who had been resettled there

in the 1950s. At this meeting the full council resolved that this new body be called the Western Council.

After three days meeting there, we then travelled along the south Choiseul coast and stopped at each project area. We also saw what a previous cyclone had destroyed, especially some villages and coconut plantations. We carried on to the Shortland Islands to see the projects that the new council had approved. From there we travelled to Mono (Treasury Island) and talked with the people, after which we sailed across to Vella Lavella. On this first roving council meeting, many of the members could see at first hand the various project areas and even how the Choiseul people lived. Some had never been to the Shortlands. This roving meeting provided them with a chance for a kind of real education about other places and their problems.

The second full council meeting to take place was held at the Vella Lavella sub-district headquarters. The new local courthouse for this island opened at the same time. We then had the use of the new courthouse for the council meeting. After two days of meeting, we inspected the East Vella coastal road from Vonunu to Lambu Lambu, a distance of about 50km. The Americans first built this road in World War II. The council was upgrading it and reconstructing wooden bridges across a number of flooding rivers there. Towards the western side at Vanunu from the airfield, there was a council project road, which stretched for a distance of about 10km. The Central Government provided the council with a bulldozer and a loader from its road pool to assist in building the road. The council had already commenced work on it by employing people who did only manual work. Thus most of the road building was done by hand. The roads were made for tractors, which were especially good for carrying copra or even transporting sick people to the central clinic at Vanunu.

For our inspection of these roads and bridges, we used two agricultural tractors from a demonstration farm

nearby. On the eastern side we travelled right up to the end of the 30km road at Lambu Lambu. To the eastern coast, we travelled only as far as the Malosova River, where the long wooden bridge construction was still in progress, so we turned back from there. We spent an extra two days just moving around the project areas, and then we sailed across to Koriovuku on Ranongga Island where we opened a new council clinic. The people were very happy as in all the other places we visited, for having the opportunity of meeting the various members of the new Western Council. The people at Koriovuku put on a big feast for the council members. We then sailed back to Gizo.

The third annual meeting of the full council was held at Munda in the council sub-district headquarters. Like the first two, many people attended the meeting as observers. It was a chance for them to see their members in action and talking in the meeting. They also observed who did not speak much and those who did not make any sense in their talks.

I was thus personally involved in the making of the former Western councils into a combined central one, having been the first council clerk from its inception for almost two years. Because of my colleague Baddley Devesi's transfer to be DC of Malaita District, I had been shifted back to Honiara in September 1973 into the Secretariat. I replaced him as the secretary of the Local Government Committee of the Governing Council Legislature. However, knowing well the functions and the strengths of the new Western Council, I was really concerned as I travelled to Honiara about the need to strengthen its economic bases. If this council should one day have these bases weakened, it could mean chaos for it. Because this council was standing on the most prosperous footing in the whole country it would need only to secure its various ongoing avenues of high-yielding revenue sources. Still, these had come relatively easily through the Chinese, island trading,

stores, ships and copra licences and others. The council earned a lot of money from issuing licences through which the Chinese operated their businesses. I was aware of this due to my experience in collecting most of them before. Thus I could visualise that if the Chinese were forced to leave Gizo or the district, there would be a vast decline in the council's strength and ability to serve its communities. This is the case today. The province's revenue has declined because the majority of Chinese have left Gizo.

With the centralised council system, the method of acquiring capital aid from the Central Government was much better than before, so, too, was the distribution of it to the various projects, to the former individual council areas. However, aid money was not to be taken for granted. My wish before I left Gizo was that the council must find other areas for earning money like exploiting wisely its host of natural resources such as forests, fish, water and minerals.

In my time I experienced the unfortunate situation that when aid money for a road was requested, approved and sent by the Central Government, the roads decided upon by that government were 'political roads'. These were often gimmicks to appease the constituency of a particular politician, to show his people he could get things done before the next general election! As a council we had built those roads, but many had little real benefit economically; they were roads to nowhere. After the first enthusiasm died down, they were never effectively used from their completion until today. Rain, erosion and regrowth soon ruined these roads because they were unused. Certainly, after some were completed some useful services were derived from them, so they were maintained. But after a while the river flooded and washed away one or two main bridges. So ended the benefits and usefulness of these 'political roads'. A classic example of the sort of road that has lost its usefulness for a long time now is the one just outside our

verandah here at Pazaju on Vella Lavella Island in the Western Province. No form of vehicle could use the road from 1972 since another district local council had the Central Government's equipment. Presently its only use is as a path winding along for foot traffic. This part of it has nil use. Only the part of it that ran from the Barakoma airfield through a government agricultural demonstration farm to a certain village was usefully employed. The Hyundai Timber company, which in the early 1990s was situated further west from here where I am presently living, upgraded this old council road for its logging use only. The wooden bridges that they put along that stretch were only temporary. This road was to be useful for a certain period only; for, once the logging bridge went, it was certainly the end of the road. Unless the provincial government maintains it, it will just go back to the bush.

A NEW LEGISLATURE AND A NEW LIQUIDATOR

Chief Minister Solomon Mamaloni, then at the end of his four-year term in 1976, had introduced a new kind of legislature in 1972. Peter Kenilorea abolished it. Kenilorea was elected to Parliament and became the second Chief Minister until two years later at independence on 7 July 1978, when he became the first Prime Minister. The Governing Council Legislature worked effectively during its lifetime. It was a bit awkward in certain situations, but its system had kept some members working when called upon, though not during its full-time sittings. At times, they spent more time attending their various committees. These included local government, natural resources, medical services and others. It was like the ministerial system, except that each committee had their part of the debate over their respective affairs, then they were brought into the main legislature sitting for general approval. A bill may have ended up only in its committee deliberation

and never enter the main legislature, the 'Governing Council' body. Members were away from their people and constituencies. It cost the Government a great deal of money having to bring the members in and out of Honiara to attend their respective committees. This was among the reasons why it was discontinued. Its introduction into the country was made during the time when Tom Russell was the chief secretary. Indeed, many people had supported it in its early stages. In fact, Peter Kenilorea had worked in it as a secretary of the Finance Committee. But whether he was in support of it was another matter once he became a politician. No particular person can be said to have introduced it — it was rather a trial, put forward by the new foreign bureaucrats. They wished to see whether it would be the type of government system that would suit this country, however, the politicians discontinued with it, so that was it.

As I mentioned earlier, I worked in this system as the secretary of the Local Government Committee. These committees each had a chairman, like ministers in the ministerial system. Every committee had a senior secretary (like permanent secretaries) for the whole committee meetings. I can say here that sitting working in the Secretariat was a new environment and experience, especially the air conditioning that cooled the entire building. At first it was sickening, because I was not used to it. The Secretariat was the first model for many other offices that followed suit with air conditioning. Working in the Secretariat, I could sense that I was one of the few nationals to really work closely among my foreign counterparts. It gave me a clear signal that our independence was just around the corner. So I was part of such a group during the last hours of that delicate area of policy formulation and distribution in readiness for our total independence.

Once, my superiors reprimanded me for not giving adequate attention to a job while I was in the Secretariat, after

I left Gizo to take over from Baddley Devesi as the assistant secretary to the Local Government Committee. The previous year, a new political party had been formed through the voluntary financial contributions put in mostly by the labouring or manual-work sector, like the logging companies, wharf workers, etc. But as soon as the main initiator of the party got his seat in Parliament, there was no longer the same impetus to keep this party moving along. So, it went to pieces. Then some of the labourers complained because they had paid their membership contributions. There were no receipts and the situation had to be rectified. I was just told briefly that I was soon to be appointed the liquidator of this organisation.

I went through various dictionaries to find the meaning of the word 'liquidate' and 'liquidator'. I then received appointment to be the liquidator in this party affair. I was not very happy about it, because I had come to the stage where I believed that specialised jobs needed specialised skills. It was a case of learning about it by trial and error, just as I had done in my earlier days. For those of more mature age, however, responsibilities had to be handled in a more systematic, professional manner. Had I handled such a duty in my district days, I would have been happier about this appointment. Such work easily could have been included in the district office routine, as it required touring to the various centres, such as Viru Harbour, Ringi, Auki and other scattered areas, where most of the contributions had been collected. My superiors set me a completely new task. So here I was a junior servant, not taught about it, but I was expected to do it professionally. So, I didn't do a great deal about it. I carried out a couple of investigations. I rang up people at Viru Harbour where a lot had paid out their money, but without getting receipts. I tried to find out who held the book, so I rang up Auki and spoke to a particular man mentioned in the bundle of papers related to the affair. He told me that the particular receipt book was no longer with him. I spent time with the Port Authority wharf

workers who had the same complaints and still I could not retrieve any further documents that might have led to some findings. Everything had been lost, just as I was lost in trying to track down the necessary information. What further areas could I explore? I had hit a brick wall. I assembled the little information I had managed to collect for the report in a file. There were still some unexplained matters because of the non-availability of certain people when contacted and because of some missing important documents that had kept the work in abeyance.

In the midst of all this, the country moved to self-governing status, one step away from independence in the British model of decolonisation. Everything was moved around to start the new ministries located in different venues in Honiara. The Secretariat was split up. On the day of the main split into the ministries system, I had been moved into the Ministry of Health and Medical Services with an administrative officer who was in the Secretariat then, Jim Michie. I was his assistant secretary. We were, in a sense, looking into how this ministry was to start in a new and different way. Meanwhile, the file on the liquidation went somewhere other than the appropriate new ministry. After almost a year, I was moved from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to the Ministry of Finance, first to the aid application section and then to a new section that had only three of us to start with, called the budgetary section. Here we prepared the annual national budgetary estimates. The three of us were an expatriate, a junior local officer for general duties and me. So much of my attention went into these many changing matters that I completely forgot the 'liquidator' affair. One day, I received a letter from the establishment secretary in the Chief Minister's office that asked reprovingly, 'Where is the report on your being appointed a liquidator?' I went personally to the establishment secretary and explained frankly the unfortunate situation that had arisen, that the matter had been unavoidably set aside. I further expressed my disappointment in not having

been given any advance knowledge of the work of a liquidator; that I considered it more of a professional's task that I had never come across before in my entire career in district administration. It needed someone who had done it before or who was knowledgeable in company law or accountancy. As I knew little about it, it was hardly fair to reprove me for failing to do it properly. I also impressed upon him that what I had done was phone people and I should really have found these people and talked to them face-to-face. However, the money for travelling was not within the provision of the budget in the local government office. So, I had yet to apply for travel funds. The move to the ministerial system occurred meanwhile; so the matter was taken out of my hands. Nonetheless, I was told I had failed to follow orders. Later, someone was appointed as a new liquidator to complete that particular task.

That is an example of the kind of difficulties that faced local officers in the Government. Sometimes you were plunged into a novel task and expected to complete it promptly. Of course, there were some overseas officers who a local man could easily approach and be helped by a bit of on-the-spot teaching or advice. We all felt sensitive about doing this, some for one reason, some for others. It might, for example, mean one was frequently seeking advice and the superior would become annoyed because he was being disturbed while working. Some local officers felt embarrassed to be sitting at their desk where they felt they were working men and then had to become students again and be taught or lectured by the overseas officer. Some were just too shy to ask for help. Some did not fully realise they needed help. There was a need for more proper in-service training courses, not just on professional subjects, but on systems and procedures. In my case I had been to a number of courses, even overseas, but I had never come across the subject of 'liquidator' in all this, much to my regret.

Footnotes

- 1 Charles Fox was an Anglican (Melanesian Mission) priest of many years experience in the central and eastern Solomons. The author of ethnographic works and a dictionary of the Arosi language, he also wrote a short history of the islands, *The Story of the Solomons*.
- 2 During the period c. 1860 to 1911, about 30,000 Solomon Islanders, along with other Melanesians and people from the Gilbert Islands, left their homes to work as indentured labourers mainly in Queensland and Fiji, but also in New Caledonia and Samoa. The initial phase of the labour trade was lawless and many recruiters kidnapped potential labourers. Melanesians made retaliatory raids on recruiting ships, further adding to the trade's sordid reputation. Though in time colonial regulation and experience made the trade less infamous, incidences of kidnapping and other fraudulent actions continued well into the 20th century, particularly in the French colonies of New Hebrides and New Caledonia. In the Solomons, the bulk of the labourers came from Malaita and Guadalcanal. Very few came from the western islands.
- 3 This is a transliteration of the word Guadalcanal.



A friend of Lloyd Maepesa, Francis Talasasa Aqarao, was the first university graduate from the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. He died suddenly in 1976.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Laughter and loss

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER, EASTERN DISTRICT

In 1976–77, I took over from Peter Kenilorea, who was DC at Kira Kira. I became a DC for a short time only, as we switched to a ministerial system not long after. I liked Kira Kira very much. Of all my time working for the Government, I enjoyed Kira Kira the best. It is a very pleasant place and I believe I had maximum opportunities there to extend my capabilities. I was aware I was not acceptable to all my superiors in the service — partly because of the ‘liquidator affair’ and because some officers didn’t like me, especially in the establishment office. I had a couple of talks with them as they tried to discipline me saying, ‘This man is not capable.’ However, somewhere in the mind of the Deputy Governor, Trevor Clark, was the belief that I would do things the best I could. I think this was because he had seen me at my second posting to Gizo in 1971. As I have mentioned, I was involved then with the DC and DO in getting five little councils to amalgamate and form a single Western council. As its first clerk

in 1972, I was responsible for organising the first 'Western Sea Festival'. I got everybody involved; there were *Tomokos* (war canoes); a big long house was built and partitioned so that you had a passing parade of things as you walked by the enclosure. It was most enjoyable. People were doing different activities in each partitioned area. It was like having window-shopping activities. It was well organised and I masterminded the whole thing. We had applied to and received some funding from the Secretariat for the festival. Trevor Clarke made a special visit to see this festival. He was very surprised and said to me, 'Who organised all these things?'

I said, 'I put most of the ideas out and all of us took part in it.' As deputy governor, Trevor Clarke was also my boss, immediately responsible for the transfers of all classes of administration officers working in the Secretariat or districts. Not long afterwards, he called me up to transfer to the Secretariat and join Tony Hughes in the local government office. During that time of movement to self-government, the House was the 'Governing Council' where there were committees. There was a chairperson for each committee and Solomon Mamaloni was chairman of mine. Tony Hughes and I manned the local government things and formulated office policy.

Tony had been a DO at Gizo when he first arrived in the Solomons during the 1950s. He was Lands Officer and became Commissioner of Lands. He had rich experience, was conversant in local matters and rural people's perspectives towards new concepts introduced by government. Perhaps it was because of his long experiences of the country that he was made the secretary of the Local Government Committee.

Before I went to Kira Kira in 1976, I was in the Ministry of Finance, in the budget section. I worked under an English expatriate who I thought was harsh. However, the next who came to take his place was a real misery to me. He seemed to be fond of causing me to make mistakes and we would sit and talk only of them while doing very little on the actual

budget. As we toured around each ministry and their divisions, I was hardly asked to participate at all. When back in our office, if I suggested ideas other than his he would say, 'No that's not the way.' It dawned on me that I wouldn't work well with this kind of man and, coupled with the 'liquidator affair' letter I had received, I was not very happy, but frustrated. At that particular period, however, they were also trying to identify someone to replace Peter Kenilorea at Kira Kira. He was going to stand for election in his East 'Are'are constituency, so I was chosen to go. When they called me to the interview, they said that I was not too popular within the inner circle in Honiara, perhaps because I had talked too much at some stage with the expatriates. I certainly expressed my views when I disagreed with certain things they raised. I spoke out with open, direct and honest expressions, against and about ideas and new concepts, as viewed by Solomon Islanders. I simply talked as I had at an evening public talk at the Solomon Islands Museum hall. On that occasion I was not popular. A lecturer from a university talked about land tenure in the Solomons and I was quite annoyed with some of what he said. At question time, not one of the Solomon Islanders attending dared to raise a question, so I stood up and asked the lecturer how he could really know about land tenure in the Solomons, since he had not been known or seen to have actually undertaken any length of time researching or studying in the field. Yet he spoke as if he really knew better than we who were born here and knew our land tenure systems. It appeared that he was talking from other researchers' books. I said I believed it couldn't be as he said, because my Roviana system may be found different from that of the Santa Cruz, Makira or Ulawa systems. Therefore to say that the Papua New Guinea system was the same as the Solomon Islands system was just a 'fake'. Had he ever lived and studied on particular islands in the Solomons or was he merely telling us lies? These were my questions. A reputable politician of the day was also present.

He stood up and said as he pointed to me, 'This man is telling the truth. I think you outside people do tell us lies.' The lecturer, however, did go on to answer my questions with a knowledgeable reply. The question time, however, did not go down so well with some others who were present. I had far from pleased the expatriate officers, including the Deputy Governor, Trevor Clarke.

The next morning the Deputy Governor called me up and asked, 'Do you know what you were really doing last night?'

I said, 'Yes Sir, I am sorry Sir, but I was only expressing the thoughts of Solomon Islanders who could not say them. They had no chance of being heard because of the language barrier, Sir.'

He warned me not to do likewise in the future and said, 'Take care, don't do anymore of that. I know you get over-excited, but be careful, you have other people around you. Other Solomon Islanders can catch up and jump over you very quickly if you do more of this kind of thing.' He really helped me. Those were the little things that rippled and displeased some of the people below the Deputy Governor. Tony Hughes was there, too, at the talk — he didn't mind, he just said, 'That was a very good meeting.' He also gave me much good advice.

Our second transfer to Kira Kira did not give us much concern as our first three children had entered secondary education. Kira Kira's Campbell Primary School was well staffed with good teachers, so we had our next three boys attend there. Our last child was three years old then. When I was called into the establishment secretary's office and told that I could be transferred to Kira Kira to replace Peter Kenilorea, I was happy. In fact, my subconscious mind had always said, 'Find a new place, for you'd better get out of here. Do something better by yourself, for it will disprove these people's thoughts about you, especially as far as the senior officers are concerned.' I was also aspiring to the post of permanent secretary before I reached my retirement. Thus,

given the chance to return to Kira Kira, I jumped at it. I went immediately and stayed for two weeks with Peter during which time he handed over duties. I was to be the last to carry the long-known traditional name of District Commissioner as, soon after, the new title of 'Government Agent' came into being. I was at Kira Kira for almost two years as Government Agent, during which I organised the elections of the whole district, including what is now Temotu Province. To do that I had to travel much, visiting as far away as Tikopia and Anuta.

FACING THE CHIEFS OF ANUTA AND TIKOPIA

My first visit to Tikopia was interesting, though not always comfortable. The year was 1976. The Secretariat (former colonial government) in Honiara had given me instructions to have another go with Tikopia and Anuta Islands to get them attached to the Eastern Outer Islands constituency. An MP of that constituency in the Parliament could then represent them. Earlier DCs had made previous attempts, but these were in vain. As a first step, these two Polynesian islands ought to join the Lata District Council (which was comprised of the amalgamated individual local councils, namely those of Santa Cruz, Reef Islands, Vanikoro and Utupua). In doing this, they would then have the franchise and take part in running the affairs of the country.

To carry out this task, I, being the Government Agent (formerly called the District Commissioner), joined the last voyage of the *MV Belama* (the only big ship in the government fleet) before it was to be sold to a company in Fiji, on its routine round tour of the Eastern Outer Islands. A young British District Officer who was stationed at the Santa Cruz government station (now known as the Lata station) joined me. His name was Mr Philip Smiley. The Police Commander of Lata station and the Anglican priest, whose parish took in

Lata, were included in our party for this special mission. As the priest was a Tikopian, DO Philip Smiley recruited him to be our interpreter.

The number of days allocated by the Marine Department in Honiara was four days on top of the normal routine round the islands (for copra and marine-product bags) for the ship. Our first day was spent at Anuta Island. As we approached the island at 10am, we were being forced to slow down about a half a mile off the island by three strong young men who were floating on the surface of the ocean, waving their hands at us right in front of the ship. The skipper had explained to some of us well in advance that he was on the look out for such a group of people who would already be well out in the deep ocean purposely to stop any visiting ships. They usually delivered the island chief's message to the skipper before a ship dropped anchor. To us the first message from the chief was:

Except for the doctor, priest and teacher [if any in our ship] everyone must pay a 'landing fee' of \$2 direct to the chief first before they can be allowed to do their business on the island.

On hearing this the young English DO Mr Smiley turned to the policeman, the priest and me, and said, 'You see, I told you this last night.' Looking straight at me he went on, 'I already sent a news item of this visit through you and you relayed it and it was broadcast over the Honiara radio station a week ago.' I confirmed that this was so, and we just would have to talk it over seriously with the chief as to its legality. We agreed that it would be the way to approach the topic of the setting up of a local government council because a council has the legal power to make by-laws and this landing fee could be one such by-law. This logic could well appeal to the chief and so we might succeed in our mission.

The four of us went ashore. Before walking to the village our interpreter explained to the men that we were going

straight to the chief to pay our due respects, and then to pay him our fee. We were escorted to the chief's residence. The entrance was so low and small that one and all must crawl. On entering all chiefs' houses on Anuta and Tikopia, one is supposed to come in on one's knees. Since we had to crawl anyway to get in, we automatically offered a sign of respect to the chief who was sitting immediately on the right-hand side of the entrance. It was a little startling when he suddenly spoke his welcome. He indicated to the first visitor that he wanted him to get closer to him for a rubbing of noses as a greeting.

We went to business straight away. We raised the question of his imposed 'landing fee'. He claimed that he, being the only entirely traditional ruler of his island, had the right to impose the rules. We said that we did not question his kind of sovereign rule over his entire island. We said that to impose such a rule as a 'landing fee' on his neighbouring Solomon Islands citizens would be unfair and wrong, since Anuta Island was a part of the nation of Solomon Islands. Anuta had never been an independent nation itself in international terms.

He seemed quite indifferent to our reasoning, however, we patiently clarified to him that the rules he wanted to impose could be called 'by-laws' that can be legally made. If any Solomon Islanders visiting and living on Anuta Island do not follow these, they can be punished. Only a local council, however, can make any kinds of by-laws on a single island, which is under the protection of a local council. Just as we had hoped, he raised the question as to what local council his Anuta Island, and even Tikopia for that matter, could be protected under. We explained to him that the Eastern Outer Islands Council, being the nearest to Anuta and Tikopia Islands, was ready for them to join it. He seemed positive and open to the idea, but he said that the final decision now rested with the four other chiefs on Tikopia Island. As far as Anuta Island was concerned, he saw no problem. If the Tikopian chiefs said yes, he would gladly go along.

The subject of the 'landing fee' in relation to the three of us (not the priest) seemed to have disappeared during our initial discussion, as the chief had not raised it again during our talks. He then gave a concerned glance at us, and said, 'I think you, my friends, are feeling hungry at this time as it is midday now.' We confirmed that it was well past midday already. He said, 'I have some very nice foods, so soon they will be brought in for you.' We all accepted his kind offer. A young woman brought in a large woven coconut-leaf basket. The chief took the basket and placed it right in front of me, and said, 'OK, Boss you statem now, you takim what piece you holem go inside, then you movim go long next man olsam.'¹

I placed my right hand into the basket and, as there was not a lot of light in this type of house, I did not attempt to examine the contents in the basket. My hand merely groped about trying to feel what pieces I could get out. I retrieved my hand from the basket grasping a piece of bird meat together with a piece of potato. I quickly put them in my mouth and started chewing them together. Then suddenly I felt a problem — the bird meat was sour though the potato was quite normal. The meat dominated the taste of the aggregated food I was chewing to such an extent that I found it not easy to swallow quickly. I then turned to the DO. He was very eager to be passed the basket. He asked how was it. I said, 'Very nice, perfect.' As I passed on the basket his right hand was already groping about in it. I understood later from him that he took a fragment of taro, a piece of vegetable and a piece of the frigate bird meat. He slowly munched this mouthful; in a moment he swallowed it. However, I observed that both his eyes were bulging and his face went totally red. He was scowling at me for his predicament with the food! I turned instead to the chief and courteously remarked how the DO and I really enjoyed the food very much! On the other hand, looking to the police inspector, I noticed that he was even worse, as he was almost choking in the swallowing process. Though he eventually

succeeded, he made an anguished kind of a groan at the end. The priest had no problem. He ate normally. He enjoyed all that we had partaken so little of in this midday lunch because he was a Tikopian-Anutan himself. The chief had told us at the start that the frigate bird had been kept warm in the ground oven for some days. Our main problem was that we were new to this kind of diet.

The chief then turned again to me and complimented my choice of shirt and how it suited my body. I thanked him for that. But then he asked if he could try wearing it. I hesitated for a moment, but I took it off and handed it over to him. It fitted him very well. He said, 'Good, we are very good friends from today, so I'm sure you will give me this shirt as a souvenir.' It was a surprise to me and a loss, but thinking about it as a goodwill gesture towards our mission, I replied, 'Him OK chief, you takim fo suvania.'² Soon, he gave a friendly glance at the DO next to me. He said, 'Oh my friend from England, me lukim T-shirt blong you, luk hem barava fitim me tu. Which way, me save traem fastaim tu?'³

Then I joined in, 'O chief, this fala DO everything belong hem I spesol tu mus, because everything i come from Egilani ia. Green colour hem barava bae luk gut long you ia chief!' ⁴ The DO took off his T-shirt. He slowly handed it across to the chief with much misgiving as to the nature and the direction of our mission. It fitted the chief very well; he even looked much younger in it. He said, 'DO, me hapi tu mus fo me kakem one fala gud fren long England des time. Me tagio tu mus, waswe me laikem tu mus des fala shirt fo me from you. lumi tufala gut fren nao ia DO?'⁵ The 'yes' expected from the DO just wouldn't come out straight away. Eventually, he managed to say, 'OK, OK chief, hem alrite nomoa, T-shirt ia i belong you nao hem suvania fo you from me.'⁶ The chief replied, 'Tagio tumus, DO.' While still folding the T-shirt, the chief said, 'Des taim tufala big man i been gut tumus fo givim suvania blong tu fala come fo me, so mi for ask tu suvania long

side long policeman come long me. How? Shirt blong iu i nice, an mi ting hem fittim me tu. So me save traim tu.⁷

The answer came, 'O chief, me small man ia, an hem i tight long me tu, so me no tigim bae hem fittim you ia.'⁸

Chief: 'Nomatta mi mas traim fastaim.'⁹ He took off the shirt and passed it on to the chief. The chief put it on and said to the policeman, 'Maewat! Iu rong fo sa hem small ia, hem barava fitim mi ia. But hem nao barava size blong ia, so how, hem suvania tu?'¹⁰ In spite of the flash of displeasure across his face, the policeman politely responded, 'Kan se nao Chief! Tu fala big man blong me I givim suvania blong tu fala long iu finis, so mi mas givim shirt blong mi tu. Hem OK chief, shirt ia mi givim fo iu nao. So hem suvania blong iu tu.'¹¹

Chief: 'Tagio tumas, brate [brother]. Maewat, des taim me karem three fala suvania nao.'¹² His last remark to us had a touch of sarcasm: 'Your two dollars landing fees — i dae nao long suvania shirt blong iu three fala!'¹³ We put on bold faces, made the best of it and laughed. We then thanked the chief for our initial discussion and said goodbye to him. As customary, we had to crawl out through the doorway bottom-first. The three of us felt the fresh ocean wind a great relief to our entire bodies. Our eyes hurt with the glare of the sun though, because there had been so little light in the dark house.

We soon realised how strange a sight we must have been: three high-level government officers wearing no shirts, only short trousers (a 'half-naked' in Solomon Islands saying). We must have looked odd to the villagers and the other passengers, because they stared at us inquiringly as soon as we marched from the chief's house to the landing place. At the shore, Ms Anna Craven, an Englishwoman, greeted us. She was the first curator of the newly established Solomon Islands National Museum. In fact, she was the person who established it. On this trip, she had been collecting a number of old artefacts from the people of villages she visited. Anna Craven

called, 'Hey! Hello! O what has happened to you, you were well dressed when we all came from the ship on the dinghy? Why, where have you been? Why, you look very silly, big government officers without your shirts on! Hey, Hey!' She went on laughing away at us, almost non-stop. I turned to her and said, 'Well madam, it was fortunate that you did not join us because you could have lost the top portion of your frock just as we have lost our tops.' She stared at me sternly and blushed all over her face. She stopped laughing.

Some crew and passengers brought the news back to the ship and many of them felt that it was a pity that we lost our shirts on Anuta. We departed for Tikopia Island at 9pm. The three of us also felt pretty disgruntled because we were no nearer to finding a way to convince the four remaining Tikopian chiefs of the local government council plan, and we, or rather our shirts, had been easy pickings for the Anuta chief.

We met the four Tikopian chiefs in a rather large house, very airy and with plenty of light. There was no walling around it, and all four sides of its roof ran down to about two and a half feet about the ground. The first day seemed to be wasted. Nonetheless, we enjoyed some fresh fish, taro and potato hot from the ground oven. Another full day, then a half a day were spent with the four chiefs. The fourth chief was apparently the talker for them all. The three elder ones would only nod to agree with what the fourth one explained to us. It seemed that the three of them understood most of what we said and appeared in agreement, but the fourth one seemed to be the bottle-neck, and he appeared to be the sole decision maker. Our interpreter seemed uneasy in his role, as they were his chiefs so they had his loyalty. Thus, though we could guess there were some inevitable digressions at certain points with our interpreter during the discussion, we simply had to press on the best we could. We regretted, however, not having someone as interpreter who was more on our side, to confirm that the discussions made were totally clear and fair to both parties.

We stopped further discussions, lest we started to repeat ourselves. The chiefs seemed content with what they had and not keen on having an outside system interfering with their internal affairs. We drew some conclusions from what they said and took careful notes of the discussion. The main points they raised were: 1) That they were content with what Dr Raymond Firth of England had devised and set for them, for the best form of governance within their social system. No problems had emerged so they wanted to retain that system; 2) That Solomon Islands Government directly handle all their affairs within the country in the aforementioned way.

In fact, for years after our visit there seemed to be a good understanding between the Government and the chiefs. But it may well be that in spite of the best plans of the chiefs, the benefits they initially derived from their priests, teachers and doctors have not been enough to boost the general life of their social structure. So slowly, they have turned to other government professional services. In fact, we took care and time in explaining all these services to them! It is very comforting to know now that these two islands are currently included within a new constituency (the Lata Outer Islands, or Vatu constituency) and their MP in the 1997 general elections was none other than a Tikopian! (This might have displeased the designer of the model of the social structure on Tikopia!) But ours was a long-term plan. Thus, though we lost our shirts, our mission had not been a waste after all!

Years later, when I was in Government House, I read a lot of the files from that time. My report on the election and our tours had reached Trevor Clarke, but others did not always like my style. There was a minute in one that said, 'Yes well I think it is the stage where we know this man is capable, that despite all suspicions, this is a fact.' Seeing these indications, I realised that I had really struggled to fight my way up throughout my career. Trevor Clarke and I met at a reception once in the Chief Minister's residence and we had a good talk,

including about the election work in the Eastern District. He was very surprised, as according to reports he'd received frequently in files from some other colonial officers, I was the least promising, most aggressive and uncouth man in the service. He said, 'But I can tell you, you have a promising future which will lead you to further successes in life'. He was very pleased with my term of office at Kira Kira. The whole period I was there I managed the place very well, so they said. Trevor Clarke's encouragement is something I will not forget. The Deputy Cabinet Minister, Win Jones, came to visit once and said good things to me about my activities. Francis Bugotu was my boss too and wrote letters to ministries while in Kira Kira about them at headquarters lowering the morale of their departmental staff and some of these were effective!

MAGISTRATE ON MAKIRA

I have described the Makira people as 'very good'. Jack Campbell and his brother Patrick were very well known around Makira Island. Jack was the big man in that area, especially at Kira Kira. Though he lived two miles away, he was a very helpful man. Once you were good to him, he was very helpful and cooperative in return. I also worked with the council. During my first time there, in 1966–68, I had worked in the capacity of clerk to the council — not day to day, but during their meetings where I wrote the minutes. Jack was president then. We understood one another and followed up on projects together. As president, he supported the installation of water supplies in villages around the Weather Coast of Makira. The rural people there were good also. I always found that in places where I went, the people were very kind to me, as I was to them when they came to the office. I attended to their questions or complaints. It is very difficult for the public to understand how, a DO or a DC, you give friendly advice on the affairs and general health of the people, but that you also sit on the Bench

as magistrate and have to give out punishments. 'Ah, disfela man hem bad man nao!'¹⁴; their thinking was. 'How is it that this man was very kind when he came to visit us — now he is putting our brother in prison?' I had to explain this to them.

As a magistrate I would emphasise what and who they were to the community or as a citizen of Solomon Islands. Therefore anybody who breaks the law must be told what their punishment is here, for the good of the community. I ended, 'So you have to improve — therefore I am going to penalise you for the wrong that you have done. It's like whipping you on your backside.' Many would say 'thank you' even though they went to jail. 'Big boss nao ia hem straight no more hem tallem, iu mi nao i wrong!'¹⁵ Some very bad criminals who I put in jail and later met on the road have said, 'Hey, yes boss, I'm a good man now. I hate those ways of before.' I said, 'You best be careful.' I met a lot like that, even today as I go around Honiara. Some would come up and shake my hand although I had forgotten them. We might have met only once during my tours in the villages, yet they would still remember me and say, 'Oh you've forgotten me — you came to my village in 19 — so and so.'

I'd reply, 'Oh I see,' but had forgotten all about it. Later, when I was to become Speaker of the first House of representatives at independence in 1978, they were all happy because they knew me. 'Oh mifela save this man. Hem DO cum long taem bifo.'¹⁶ It seemed that I was reasonably popular with the people when Speaker because at least they had met me somewhere in past years. Whenever I received those sorts of compliments, they gave me moral support in my work. This was very encouraging for me.

MY FRIEND, FRANCIS TALASASA

Working under the umbrella of the British Colonial Administration, it was the norm that one had to be very

careful. Francis Talasasa found it a difficult situation and had an unfortunate fate because he spoke out. This occurred in the clubs where he was the only Solomon Islander admitted due to him being a DO, the first of us to achieve this. He had a BA degree, so the expatriates admitted him. He still shouted at the top of his voice that things were not fair — things like practising discrimination and he would name the offenders. We were told to be very careful when talking in public about government policies and departmental activities and to remain loyal workers. I did not quite know what the loyalty covered, so for the benefit of my future and my family I was loyal. I could not really decide to whom I owed this — to the Government or to its officials. I knew this word 'loyal' was distorted somehow. If you spoke badly to just an official or in a club, you got a red mark in your file. We were frightened of that one, you know. Once you publicised yourself by doing the unusual, not necessarily against the Government or its policies, you would surely be the talk of every expatriate's table, in the clubs or pubs. 'Oh, that man is like that now.' They sort of kept eyeing you. Those who needed 'loyalty' most in those days were the expatriates, and poor Francis suffered much as a consequence of his actions. I also think he saw the position as one where we locals were not given any arena in which we could discuss these things openly. He was a man sort of like John the Baptist in the field: talking away to try to straighten things out. He also stirred things up, making the Government think about quickening things to get us somewhere better, such as making policies, moving us into the right places, localisation and training people for responsible positions. Not many Solomon Islanders dared to emerge and follow the precedent he had set. I was one who almost came to that stage in the fight, because I agreed with his thinking, but I was quickly technically knocked out.

Francis's character was portrayed often as being a consequence of his excessive drinking, but I maintain that it was

not so! His rear-guard fight was, that to be loyal to the Government meant formulating good policies by a good government, representative of the whole population and not merely to suit a few opportunists. The bureaucrats knew what he was on about. To blame his outspoken behaviour on drunkenness was simplistic in explaining him to the populace. He was a 'lone warrior' and found that difficult, for only he felt able to act for us in that way. Only he had the degree of strength to manipulate and pressure the government bureaucrats. I believe still that he was wrongfully and unfortunately identified in a negative way. He influenced my thinking and he was a close relative of mine. We were to be the first Roviana men to have overseas training in our childhood years. He was a little older than me when he went to Fiji and, later to New Zealand. The Administration believed that I would follow suit. Had I passed my university entrance, I would have gone straight to New Zealand for university studies, however, I stopped short of that. The influence of higher studies and equality for all was already in Francis and we seemed to have the same attitude. Each time we met we would talk about things like Solomon Islands independence, how we were treated. We had our own plans for things in the future, but then he died. Had he lived, we could have done something better, something different — maybe formed a political party, which was his vision. He was just beginning to succeed in making a stand in the political arena when he died and all his vision was a waste. After his death I completely left all those things since the originator and mastermind had gone for ever. There was then no one to back me up if I'd chosen to continue with it. I just sat down and slowly decided to go back to the old loyalty and commitment in the service. This I did and finally ended up becoming the Speaker. At times I thought that I should not have been a Speaker, but a politician, however events have changed dramatically since then. I always came to the simple conclusion that my Almighty God had changed my direction.

I never did find another person like Francis. I regretted this very much and grieved for him. That was why I quickly got hold of those two sons of his. I hoped his thoughts might be transformed into a finer vision through them for a better government of their generation. They might do the things we had talked about, but with different perspectives. The highest tribute Olive and I could pay Francis in his now spiritual nature, was to take his two sons, open-heartedly, into our family. I have not yet seriously talked with them of my real involvement with Francis. I don't want them to experience our difficulties. I want them to stick to their jobs, but never to lose sight of how the government machinery works and to study it. Their generation is different and that's why I am careful.

Footnotes

- 1 'Oh, Sir, you start, take what you want from inside then pass it along to the next man.'
- 2 'It's all right, chief, you have it as a souvenir.'
- 3 'Oh, my friend from England. I see your T-shirt. It looks as though it would fit me too. Can I try it on as well?'
- 4 'Oh chief, everything this DO has is really special because it comes from England. Green will look really good on you.'
- 5 'I am so pleased to have a friend from England. I thank you very much. I really like this shirt from you. So, are we now good friends, DO?'
- 6 'It's all right, this T-shirt is yours, a souvenir from me to you.'
- 7 'Thanks very much, DO. Two important men have been very kind in giving me souvenirs so now I would like one from the policeman as well. Your shirt is so nice and I think it fits me, so I will try it on.'
- 8 'O chief, I am just a small man and the shirt is already tight on me so I don't think it will fit you.'
- 9 'Don't worry, I will try it on first.'
- 10 'My word! You are wrong about it being small, it fits me very well. But it is not the right size for you, so will you let me have it as a souvenir too?'
- 11 'I can't refuse chief. Two of us have each given you a souvenir so I must give my shirt as well. That's fine, chief, I give you my shirt now. It's a souvenir, too.'
- 12 'Thanks brother. My word, now I have three souvenirs.'
- 13 'About your two dollars landing fee — forget it, the souvenir shirts will cover it.'
- 14 'This man is a bad one.'
- 15 'The boss man talks straight and tells us we are in the wrong.'
- 16 'Oh, we know him. He was once the DO.'



Family connections, Honiara, 1973: Olive Gina, daughter of Mali Kerabangara (formerly Mali Wickham), holding her son, Errol Gina, with her two first cousins. Kattie, in the centre, is the daughter of Eddie Wickham. On the right is the eldest of the three cousins, Adrian Wickham, son of Frank Wickham.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Working in the colonial administration

By 1977 we were on the eve of independence.¹ It was a time of looking forward, but also a time of taking stock. I have mixed feelings about the colonial world that I experienced, particularly since, in many ways, I was part of it.

COLONIALS OBSERVED

In the first year the colonial servants' biggest experience was in their coming away from their own countries. In the first three months of their posting, because of their long travels by different planes, they would be talking very much about their trips. In the office they would start to tidy up their accounts of what they'd spent on the way to claim for reimbursements and so on. The second three months would be just observing what was going on in the office, reading material and files about this country to familiarise themselves with the area. In the third three months they would start to take familiarisation tours around the district. The last three months then would be to start braving the challenges of their new responsibilities. The second year would be the time of some consolidated and very

productive work. At the same time, however, it would be a year of planning their trip back home. Whether to travel through America or through the Far East, by air or by ship or to take a plane to Australia, then join a ship from there to England? Those were the sorts of common things they said and laughed about. Certainly, we were all not always fully aware of these things, but they happened.

Another interesting thing about them especially our colonial bosses, was that they made things look and sound very difficult to do. But, as it happened, when the local people took them on, things were not as hard as one first thought them to be. All along, I knew we must grow with this complex system, which applied only in those days, such things as, 'It's a hard job, only I can do it. You fellas, you'll never manage this.' Such things have happened in a lot of institutions and were not uncommon. They could puff themselves up a bit with these thoughts. With that type of mentality one could be really frightened to take up any job and perform at one's best. If a local could overcome this then he might have ended up having good reports about his work performance. One criterion was always highly regarded: that so-and-so was 'being intelligent'. I found out those mysteries myself, while most Solomon Islanders thought the same thing. I'm sure other Pacific Islanders also felt like that in those days in their own countries because they happened to be the same kind of people in a similar situation.

Two kinds of oddities that were prevalent during those days were discipline and obedience. There would always be a disciplinary air that surrounded the colonial officials, especially the DCs and the DOs. There would always be that kind of military discipline present, whether the DC was in his district office, on the ship touring, walking along the town road or walking through the villages. It was made customary and became a habit that people would stand up and at attention whenever a DC or a DO arrived at a village. The

people would stand very still at attention and the headman and chiefs would walk up and meet him. One could talk only when the DC spoke directly to him and must always answer with 'Yes, Sir.' Obviously it was like a military kind of set up in a primitive, developing country. If at certain moments the DC was speaking and was being spoken to and we did not say 'Sir' to him or his subordinates did not stand up straight, they would be very properly rebuked and be very embarrassed indeed. The inadvertent negligence could also badly affect one's performance in his assessment reports. Anyone would have felt frightened and some would be 'spoken to' in front of people and no one likes that. So everyone must be very observant of the 'Masta-Boy' rules.

As with the ship's crew, each time we approached a village during a day's touring, and at each stop at each village, the crew had to wear their uniform and of course have a disciplined air about them. There were certain DCs who preferred to have the oar exercise in the dingy, like in the navy ships. As soon as the DC stepped into the dinghy, the oars would be turned up perpendicularly. Someone would then say 'down' then 'row'. On arrival at the shore, the crew would carry him on to the dry land, because he would still be wearing his shorts, long socks and shoes.

Another thing you would meet in the village would be that as soon as the DC stepped ashore, the British National Anthem — *God Save the Queen* — would, as a rule, be sung by the waiting crowd. Everywhere the anthem was very well sung, since the villagers practised it for days having known well in advance of the DC's tour program. A welcome speech by the village chief followed, or by any educated man living there. These usually began 'Your Excellency, the DC', etc., and some were very nicely composed, but in broken English and the DC would reply.

The relationship gap between the DC or DO and Solomon Islander officials, even counterparts, was miles apart — very wide. So if any expatriates, especially DOs, were found

to be in close, full working relationships with their Solomon Islander Junior Officers, it would not be too long before that particular expatriate official would be leaving the district or the country. This applied equally to expatriates of other departments or of very high offices. Repatriation has occurred on certain occasions. Being very friendly with the indigenous people was not encouraged in those days. So mutual relationships between the two races could exist only in official work interactions. The fear here was that certain DOs and others, even though they were hard-working ones and the people liked them, at times had talked against the Government to the people. This was contrary to the rules that they had vowed to uphold when they were appointed.

Another very serious oddity was the idea of obedience that could have involved bad repercussions for the people. Working on obedience, the Government had to seek to identify certain active and able men, who would be easily obedient to it. When these men were identified, it appointed them to serve as headmen, area constables, court justices and others. The Government then vested in them some legal powers, in order for them to carry out their respective functions. But culturally this concept destroyed the real rural governing system of the people. The administration (government) had created some new 'big men' among the communities in the district or villages. Many of these new 'big men' had no blood or hereditary powers to speak openly to and for the community, so most were sorely despised by their own people. The government-made 'big men' were the most loyal 'yes Sir' men and, up to the present time, this is still prevailing. In fact, it has become a vital organ in the life of the democratic world of today's Solomons!

The Government then did not really bother to consider much what the people actually thought about the actions it took. People looked more to the real activity side of their daily affairs, and considered all outside activities as some

temporary works of the administration. There were no proper consultations, and that was the core of the people's displeasure with the government activities then. Consultation was at times very selective, only with the 'yes men'. Government spoke only with 'their' people for the convenience of continuing its workflow. Those methods have passed now, though it's good to mention them, as they were vital ingredients of that colonial system. I must emphasise here that the village people were taught to be obedient. Such new outside rules were usually introduced especially when a policeman accompanied a DC. He wore bushy hair, a lap-lap with red sash, a thick black belt tied around his belly, and carried a .303 soldier's rifle.² So who would dare defy those rules? When the Government said that every dog must have tax paid on it each year, it must be done. Used as they had been to the old head tax, the people could not easily understand this because the dog cannot cook copra or dive for trochus shells, so it cannot pay the tax for itself.

Improper consultations also involved certain native lands that were acquired quite unscrupulously by the early white settlers including government. This was with the assistance or direct involvement of some early government officials. The people were surprised to hear the Government say that there were 'vacant lands' to be declared under white man's law.³ If that law had been made on 'vacant lands' many areas would have been alienated without consulting the landowners. Because there was the sense of obedience as a rule, who would dare speak out in those days?

I came across that same mentality and grew up with it in my early career. During my early working years in the 1950s, I found some DCs to be more hard-working in comparison with previous ones. Some most recent ones were merely 'file pushers'; they didn't do much touring. They simply sat in the offices and imagined their outside projects, yet they wrote very long, complex and convincing memoranda about them to the big bosses in the Secretariat in Honiara.

As we grew and developed in the services, most Solomon Islanders began to feel irritated about the various earlier rules that prevailed in our midst. It became obvious that they had evolved into cross-cultural norms. In the 1960s and 1970s they were delicate areas, that can aid quick promotions. When, for example, the boss or a very senior expatriate officer was speaking, or being spoken to, one must stand still to attention. Usually one could sit down only when he was told, but this was hardly ever done. As I said earlier, it was a military kind of discipline. If I merely called in to talk something over with my superior I would still have to be standing up straight all the same. If he came into my office, he would not sit, but he would be speaking to me by my door, or he called me into his office. In fact, through this habit, even now, I often forget the courtesy to quickly invite my visitors to sit down.

In the offices we had a table, but hardly ever extra seats where people could sit. Obviously, it was thought or feared that if someone sat down, he might stay there far too long. There were instances like when someone called in to say 'What time do you want me at the boat?' and it was three o'clock I would still not say, 'Sit down and we'll talk it over.' This was because I was afraid, yet it was such a small thing. However, if there were things that a member of the public needed to have explained in more detail, usually he or she would be referred to the boss. The boss then would take that person with the complaint to the responsible subordinate to promptly deal with him or her. He or she would be made to sit down so their complaint could be quickly attended to. Many a time, people would leave the office very dissatisfied or disappointed. In the early days certain people would be waved or pushed out of the office, with inadequate attention paid to them, usually by a junior clerk, who had meagre knowledge of how to deal with people's complaints. In the first place, they could not have people sitting down for any length of time, in order to go through their complaint and attend to it quickly. The 'come

back later' habit originated in those days, as junior clerks would have to check through the various information which a person would want to be furnished with. While we were not permitted to disturb the bosses at their work in order to get the information needed, they could freely do so to us.

That sense or mentality of their being superior to another race is not an uncommon phenomenon even in present times. The white masters believed they stood higher than we did and, because of the long-established cross-cultural norms, we knew we could not get close to them in most work situations. An expatriate may say 'Hello' when he was met on the road, but usually, hardly more than that. I have had to learn to build my own inner confidence as I forced myself to be a little different from my colleagues. I did this by smiling ceaselessly and talking with my expatriate counterparts and others I met whether at work, or on the ships, in clubs or on the sports fields. For me, that was a kind of a socialising which came into play quite later on, but only if an officer was very friendly from the beginning and we worked closely together in our office. Therefore if we met anywhere else we would talk much longer together, though he was still a very much higher person than I was.

This was also happening in the church circles. And the traders were no exception. While government officials had servants in their kitchens, so, too, did the white missionaries. In those days they were very particular with their cooking and eating styles. Some table utensils were often flashy silverware, as well as delicate glassware. I first observed this as a small boy while staying with Reverend Goldie, then as a schoolboy in Fiji. The wife of the deputy principal there used to say to a couple of us, 'You clean these up.' Then I came back here to work and saw the same kind of people doing the same things. Some of the more recent DCs and other high officials, however, did not maintain the 'Elizabethan' identity. The older people who had experienced the pre-World War Europeans usually recalled this.

Some very old cooks who were re-engaged by the newer, younger officers, said, 'When the new officers of the 1960s came, those old ways we were used to of preparing their tables aren't wanted now.' When looking at their attitudes in relation to their way of living, many also observed that it differed greatly from the English colonials before the war. This was because World War II had changed the whole outlook and attitudes or at least the primitive behaviour of our people. A classic example was Munda village. The Americans had dug out white gravel and buried the old Munda, making it into a huge wartime airfield. It seemed that the slow and ignorant fashions of the people were buried, too, under that white gravel. Thus they started to realise that the bare hands of the white man did not in fact create this world. Their understanding during the war of things like transportation, communications, kindness, free-giving, building new roads and friendships, etc., had drastically changed their outlook. I think some of the colonial people might have regretted all this. In a sense, the colonials blamed World War II for opening these new horizons to the local people. It spoilt the easy and cheap exploitative system of employment that the traders and church leaders had benefited from. It broke their hopes of trying to identify, develop and exploit the resources, which the Solomon Islands could produce as raw materials for England. Raw materials in its former African colonies and India, for example, were not to remain under their colonial control as these countries were progressively attaining independence. These, among others, were some regrets that were observed to be emerging in the British colonial class.

COLONIAL RURAL ADMINISTRATION

In the District Administration Department the most vital duties were checking on the performances of the local courts

and the local clerks, and to check and collect all court revenues of court fees and fines. The local court justices and clerks were periodically given training in their duties. Also local government council clerks were visited for inspection of their budget controls and area projects. Touring by DCs and DOs and assistant or trainee DOs, such as I was, were frequently made in those days. It was very important that we show ourselves to the communities during these tours. Our presence among the people was far more frequent during the colonial days compared with now. Today, you hardly ever see government or provincial officers travelling to villages themselves or getting interested in the people and their affairs. The provinces are very far away from that practice now, though devolution has placed power in the hands of local governments, which they were happy about. Yet, since the inception of the provincial government system in 1980, many villages within a province have still not received any share of the benefits received by their province. Worse still — and many voters have complained about this to their provincial members each year — their members never visit them much before their two-year terms expired. During the colonial days, the Government had frequent contact with the rural people. The main projects we gave especially close attention to were: rural water supplies; building and maintenance of sub-district staff houses, negotiation for and acquisition of new land for council uses, such as the building of schools and clinics; plus a host of other duties. I would remain in the office for about two weeks at times. For special matters requiring major attention we had to make trips out for about two to three weeks, particularly for registration of voters and census and election expenses, etc. I can remember in 1959 the very first census that was conducted in the Solomons, when we worked very hard. The whole exercise involved identifying and then appointing census officials; the production of, then positioning of, the enumerators at their respective posts; then the final exercise,

the collection and return of the census forms. The election duties also involved a lot of personal intelligence, dedication, self-sufficiency, perseverance and indeed a lot of travelling time. At first, we met various resistance from people, but we had given very intensive and tactful explanations, propaganda in the villages and a lot of campaigning over the radio, so that people would understand our deliberations very well. I have briefly mentioned some roles in our administrative duties. I wish now to dwell a little on our touring around our districts.

For one tour in a month, we had to make our own programs, setting out our times, what modes of travel and dates. That meant having to stay about two weeks in the office, then spending two weeks outside, sort of an alternating method. We averaged about four separate outings of three or four days each time in a month, about 48 times in a year. It was quite regular; we didn't just sit in the offices. Although I got used to my touring I did not always enjoy it. At times I got fed up; it all depended on which place I toured. In the Russells, I spent a lot of time travelling by outboard canoes, because the villages were located all around the islands. On Savo and Gela (Florida) Islands it was easy, because I just walked to the villages around the coasts. This involved being dropped on one side of the island, walking along the coast and at the last village at sundown, I would spend the night. It didn't really involve much ship travelling. I had outboard-motor trips in certain areas on Gela, where some parts were rather difficult to walk over. While the land travel was at times hard, I found the outboard equally so, when it ran out of fuel! Often there were only empty drums at the nearest petrol station. During those days, the Seagull engine was very much in use and could be hired from owners in the villages. When I came back to Honiara from touring, I enjoyed being with my family, meeting friends again, and had to do a lot of report writing, then prepare again for the next trip out.

Worst of all was when cyclones had come and destroyed villages, and we had to get busy distributing food

around the affected areas. We would supply food only to the worst-affected areas after very official assessments had been made. We distributed essential food like rice and biscuits. In any district in the '60s and '70s there was usually a main ship which department officials would use in an alternating system. The DC, based on the dates submitted to him by each department head, would draw up a monthly shipping program. At times, two or three would be on a ship touring together. They would speak at a village meeting, taking a turn each. The district medical officer would attend the sick people; the agricultural officer walked to see cocoa plantations; the DO went to see that a council clinic was under construction and so on.

One could feel that the villages were very energetic, interested, cooperative and accommodating in their behaviour. This was because, in their understanding, the Government was concerned with the village affairs.

Regarding the training of local court judges and clerks, in each district the DOs and assistant DOs would see that every two years, courses were conducted for all local court judges and clerks. They would be brought into perhaps a local council headquarters and given formal instruction daily, for up to two weeks. Mock cases were given and these were usually very effective. Local courts had minimal jurisdiction over stealing, for example, which had a ceiling on its fine and a limit for imprisonment. If the seriousness of certain criminal cases involved much higher fines or longer imprisonment, these cases would be transferred to the Magistrate's Court. The normal everyday cases for the local courts were land disputes and civil cases. Adultery laws, which the local courts had formerly dealt with, were repealed by the legislature and were finished with completely throughout the whole country in the early 1950s. Pigs that were roaming around the villages were dealt with under respective council by-laws. Owners had to keep their pigs within properly made fences. Indeed, people obeyed these rules because they became part of their council's

by-laws. The courts dealt with whoever was slack, so when the DOs were touring, the people had to be very quick at putting their pigs back behind their fences before he arrived. But they were caught and punished sometimes for doing that.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Sometimes while touring I was very lonely. I am a family man and I loved my children. Olive and I did our best to bring them up very nicely, so I was always thinking of them and how well my wife was looking after them. An absence from the family of up to a month was not good, a week was long enough, but if it was two weeks or more, it was a bit too long. There were many reasons for this. For example, if I went away when one or more of my kids were sick, it was a heavy burden on my wife. These thoughts were my real worries. All along my wife was very efficient with our kids. She was such a very good mother, keeping our children very well indeed. When I returned home, I tended to make up for my absence with my children. I certainly joined friends drinking, but have never been a drink addict or really got wild with it. One thing I used to tell young beer and spirit drinkers was that, during my whole period of time of drinking, I never made my family go hungry. I always maintained that I must store up essentials first — food, the required clothing, paying up electricity and water bills, school fees — then I can get my beer. Those were my priorities. That's why my wife was usually agreeable when on occasions I joined with my friends in the clubs for drinks. I'm seeing people nowadays who don't really care about their families. They go out with their friends and would not return to their homes and children for two or three days, sparing no money for them.

In colonial times, Solomon Islanders weren't allowed to drink alcohol, but this restriction was changed in 1965 by the first elected legislative council. Before that, any form of

alcohol was obtained secretly, especially from the Chinese traders. There was also a permit system in practice in those days. Only if a person was accepted and issued with a permit could s/he drink, and only beer. The permit was for a carton of 24 bottles or cans only for one month. To get one was difficult, because it asked for the state of earnings and, for villagers, maturity of character, while, for public servants, it asked for salary, experience, as well as maturity and character. It was the DC who issued the permit.

Many people were heavy drinkers at that time. When the permit system was abolished the people drank normally and wisely. Local members in the House heatedly debated that restriction. They had argued that through this restriction many had died from taking methylated spirits. It also involved bribing government copra traders for beer and spirits by giving in return first-grade and added weights to their copra bags on the wharves. The bill to change this went through the legislative council without much difficulty. At the start, the unprivileged majority during the permit system did drink heavily, madly and carelessly. After that, they slowly eased down, as it became part of their social life style.

A number of clubs for the local working people emerged after this. They were flourishing nicely in the beginning, but gradually weakened and eventually became lifeless. In Honiara, near the main market place, there is a brick house called 'Market Shop', which was once a flourishing 'Honiara Club' which operated from the 1960s to the mid-1970s. In that club, the normal 'big' drinking time was from Friday evening after work and many would go throughout the whole of Saturday. Sunday was then the rest day ready for Monday. Drinking was not very much done during the week because people were busy with their jobs.

I did go too far once because of drink. I had been drinking in the back bar of the Matanikau Hotel. I got into a fight and ended up in the Magistrate's Court with a fine of two

pounds. That incident found its way to the desk of my district commissioner, Bill Wright. I paid my fine and was off touring around Florida Island when it came to his attention. A few days after my return he walked up to my desk and directed me to come into his office immediately. As I knocked and walked in to his office, I felt shaky. He pointed to a chair for me. It was placed directly opposite where he could look right into my face. He went straight to the point: 'Gina, you have made me very, very cross. Though I am very sorry for you, especially for your wife and very young children, I am now to tell you that I am considering withholding support for your promotion. Up to now your prospects have been very bright. You must know there are others of similar talents. I have known you well in Gizo, then at Auki, and now here, and I am so sad that the conduct with which you've involved yourself was most unbecoming for an officer. You are being watched and there are hopes for you to achieve a higher attainment in the future! Gina, do you see where I am sitting now? I want to see or hear one day that you are sitting here! But you cannot sit on this chair if you choose to continue with conduct like this, brawling in bars. It is entirely up to you. I want this to stop or you really will be sorry, and your wife and young children will suffer. I hope I've made myself clear to you, OK?'

I only said, 'Yes, Sir!'

'All right, back to work!' he said.

I've talked much against how bad the colonial expatriates were, but Bill Wright was not a rarity in trying to help; some others did, too. What Bill Wright did was a normal procedure: subordinates must be informed and reprovved for bad behaviour. What he said steadied me down and made me see what I did could hurt my chances and thus my family.

My wife Olive was so good with the children. She was very reasonable about the nature of my job. She knew that it involved much touring, a lot of talking with people in the villages, sorting out their problems. She never tried to make a

fuss about it, because that was my job, and she didn't want to be involved in distracting me from concentration on my job. In this way she helped me a lot; I was left alone by her to go ahead with my work. This caused me to grow tremendously in my work. This is not to say we always agreed with one another. We argued and often had long talks about our life together and what each of us valued. Often we saw things a little differently. I remember what I call our 'loyalty' discussion.

To Olive, our family was always to be first, then our children and then our house and daily chores, and the rest after all these. At one time of serious discussion, I said to her, 'But I think that when you talk like that you must be referring to your "loyalty".'

'But what is "loyalty"?' she asked

'Well, it is a hard word to explain,' I said. 'How it relates closely to us is simply like this. My loyalty to you and my own family goes: God above is first, you, and the children are second, and who else? I think that is all, because our home ties up you and the children together. That is my loyalty to us in our home here, this time.'

'But what about those, say, parents, brothers and sisters at home?' she asked.

'Now we come to the second hard word "responsibility",' I said. 'When I come to think of my parents [when they were alive], brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and my relations — they are all part of my responsibility. I am a married man now, and have since moved my loyalty to you, who are my new family,' I paused, then went on, 'But I can send money to my sisters, or a brother maybe every now and then, but not like how I am looking after you and the children who are right here with me. In times past, I took with me a 10-kilogram rice bag for my uncle, a carton of biscuits for my sister and packets of chewing gum, sweet biscuits and lollies for my little nieces and nephews. And what I did was my

"responsibility" to them. If I am single then my loyalty will continue to go to my parents, my responsibility, however, is still extended to the others, the rest of them. Or whoever I may meet in the street or in the village, and if I touched my pocket and held out five dollars and gave it to him as an example, that is still within my responsibility.'

She asked again, 'But what is this loyalty that you give to God first, as you've said?'

I replied, 'Oh, well, I am not too sure, but it may be something that goes like this. You see, both you and me, our church told us to "fear" God. So we don't have to say and share with others bad talk about our Almighty God. It is our respect of God that shows our loyalty. I go to church, I joined in church groups and church activities. I respect all the workers of all the churches: our moderator, bishops, ministers, pastors, sisters, nuns and down-the-line workers. I also respect appointed leaders of our people like the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, Speaker, ministers, Members of Parliament, premiers, their ministers, assembly members, the village chiefs, elders, and even our next-door neighbours. But though my list swells big, I will continue to worship God in our family fellowship, and in my personal prayer of praise and Thanksgiving to Him. So therefore before we have breakfast, lunch and evening meals on the table, I have to say the "Grace" for us, for the foods, as our thanksgiving to God for He has provided us abundantly with foods for the sustenance of our lives.'

'And what especially is your loyalty to me?' she asked.

'Well, my loyalty to you is to maintain my smooth relationship with you, for a start.' I continued, 'To you, as my wife, I must be encouraged with God's assistance by your unflinching trust in me, for things you deserve from me, like: my talking nicely to you — and say "dear", "please", "thank you", etc.; not to encourage an argument to arise between the two of us; to help, in giving you my hands as much as I can, in the

kitchen, around our house, etc.; to help you in organising the kids, in making them have a wash, feeding them and so on; to give you the money you need to buy foods with, and things for little maintenance in the house, or for new items required in the house; to give you money separately for your personal requirements — clothes, etc., and for your bank passbook;⁴ to take you to parties that we both are invited to; to invite and meet socially our friends and share prepared foods with them.'

'Hei, wait, wait!' she butted in. 'I've counted all of those that you've said to add up to eight. OK, let me see how many of them you are complying with? N-N-N-N Ah — NOTHING ever! You have not as yet tried your very best, my dear husband, on most of them! But let's work with *at least* three of them, and that will be very kind of you: 1) to talk nicely to me, 2) to lend a hand in the kitchen, and with the children, and in the fields, at home, 3) to really practise giving me the money for fresh foods in the markets, and for other items for the home, and some for my necessities and savings. I can cope well enough with the three above — thanks.' She then asked, 'OK, tell me more about your loyalty to the children and the home.'

I replied, 'Please, you must know and accept what I have tried to outline to you, about the word "loyalty". All this is common and underlying all the everyday happenings in everybody's family life. You must try to consider and accept that I am also the working man here. My loyalty to you is because you are next to my side. When I talk, I talk to whom? To you, for all our home concerns. I have plenty of reasons to give my loyalty to my wife. You live next to me and with me.'

My loyalty towards our children was still on Olive's mind. 'Yes, my loyalty towards our children was in seeing that they had their basic education as much as possible in a school near to us. Our home is their first learning area and the foremost for them. Then, the important part for me is to see

that they at all times have access to the schools and higher institutions which suit their achievements, and I cannot deny them my financial support. It was and will be my personal effort to see what I can do to help them in their aspirations in life. I will discuss with them anything that is on their minds concerning their futures, if they want. My standard fatherly advice to the children has been: "Whatever task is given for you to do, work on it with due genuine consideration so the final product must be of a good QUALITY to the satisfaction of whomever it was done for".'

Because of this close family relationship, my wife and I are reaping the intimate sense of cohesiveness with our children. My wife and I have taught and put in their reach church involvement. On the cultural side, we taught them many vitally practised norms. This is so they will not be alienated from their own people and can mix freely among their relations and the community they live with. We saw to teaching them our family trees so they know how and where they stand in relationships within their own community. In our own times past, we have exposed them to experiences of our cultural virtues, of extending 'your sadness' and support to those grieving over their *lost ones*, by visiting and helping them in whatever little tasks might arise in their time of grief. We are both happy to see that they have followed suit on such occasions as well as in the happier times of marriages of their close relatives and friends. Culturally, we *offer* our friends our hands to help them, which is entirely contrary to the Western cultural norm, for only if one is invited will he attend or give a hand at time of preparation for the marriage.

Our 'loyalty' discussion, however, melted away into our everyday calls of the nitty-gritty duties of home. So such things were usually discussed conveniently at times when the incidents arose, to be learnt and abided with. We have been doing this, and our marriage is enduring remarkably long, for 30 years at our retirement in 1989 and still today.

Our successful family owes so much to Olive. Her persistence to undertake competently the multitude of chores each day has been great. At times, when the normal activities in the day have ceased and she discovered some still not attended to, she would continue to stay up even after 11pm before going to bed. She would be baking or sewing or mending family clothes in the day, and may not have done the mopping up of our verandah or the kitchen floor. Late at night I would be disturbed in my sleep by the moving of chairs and tables when she did such 'overtime' work. Even today in our rural, permanent-materials house she takes pride in keeping it properly. She says that her aunt, Dot Wickham, the wife of her uncle Frank Wickham, had brought her up to do this. Dot told her, 'Nothing is more pleasant in life than to live in simplicity, and pleasantly', and she lives by it. She certainly has been my inspiration during my whole working life. We at times have argued heatedly, but I still would consider it being my fault each time, for I should have simply avoided this in the first place, for it is the husband's duty to persist and support at all times. I've experienced this to be true. I have been posted to the various districts, but these postings were all made possible by cooperation on Olive's part.

Because she seemed often indifferent about my career, but trusted my judgement, I could have resorted to normal work out put rather than trying to improve my own promotion prospects. I was always 'chasing the bait' to promotion and concerned with staff movements within the administration. I found Olive was always neutral to all these official intricacies and the politics of the promotion game. Yet, wherever we were shown the house to occupy, Olive went straight into organising and establishing a neat and healthy home environment appropriate to my official status and, most of all, a pleasant family environment for our children. It was this, her part, that has encouraged in me positive hopes to take whatever came and to struggle persistently towards a better

future for us all. So our endurance in facing trials in the system proved to be worthwhile. When we had to stay longer in Central District, we gained more privileges, such as being qualified to move into higher government quarters, having provisions of gas stoves and ice-boxes (all based on salary scales), and being able to obtain a government-guaranteed loan in a local bank for the purchase of, say, a family car. While in Honiara, first in 1971, I bought a small Daihatsu car for my family. It was one of the first new cars to be owned by Solomon Islanders in Honiara alongside the existing privileged expatriates who mostly had two cars per couple.

In the period from 1966–71 in Honiara, we already had four children, two girls and two boys. The youngest then was Lloyd, who is my namesake, also Lois, our first-born, L'Amour and Ian were attending the Honiara government primary school. My own father, Belshazah Gina, earlier established that school. It is near the Red Cross Society office on the northern part of the Mataniko River in the New Chinatown area. Pre-independence, I had been posted twice in Honiara, the second time being during our self-governing period from 1973–75 when the ministerial system was introduced. I was in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, then in the Ministry of Finances. My third posting in Honiara was post-independence for 10 years, when I was Speaker of the National Parliament from 1978–89. So I knew how hard and expensive it had become to live in Honiara. In the late 1960s I was one of the few Solomon Islanders who had moved to a near-senior position and my wife and I had to budget for things, which we did quite adequately.

At that time there was much mixing with other Islanders, especially Fijians. As I have said, I could manage my drinking with them reasonably well. When rugby was introduced in Honiara, I played it. That was the game I played very often during my early schooling days in Fiji. I never played soccer there — the Indians adopted soccer, we played

rugby, cricket, ping-pong and tennis, but rugby, cricket and hockey were my favourite games.

The Fijians came to the Solomons in large numbers as artisans especially during the 1960s. As artisans, they mostly worked in public works departments, some were doctors and some agriculturists. During 1963–65, when I was at Auki in the Malaita district office, I met up with many of these Fijians. So with them, a few Solomon Islanders and European expatriates, we formed a rugby team. We did this because we'd heard that Honiara had formed two teams. At that time, King George VI High School was still on Auki, so we were privileged in using their playing ground for training, and had two of their masters coaching our team — one English and one Irish. Both were very good rugby players. We practised three times a week. I was very fit at that time, as I used to go touring. This of course meant walking up and down hills and valleys and along winding coasts on Malaita Island. The two Honiara teams came across to Auki. We played so very hard and well that they got the shock of their lives when we won both the games. They returned to Honiara with very sour bellies. Once, we sailed across to Yandina on Russell Islands and our two teams won both games. Rugby became very popular at that time. But in 1970 my wife insisted that I stop completely as an extreme result of rugby playing was that a young Malaita boy was killed — he had a hard bang on his head during a game. The particular game he had been playing was against GPL (Guadalcanal Plains Ltd.) team. In the GPL team they had some tough, solid Australian farmers. They trained up and included some crude Guadalcanal and Malaita bush people. They played wildly like mad bulls and, not too long into the game, the accident happened. It affected the boy's neck and his head. He lived for some months and died in the Honiara hospital. So I retired from rugby and switched over to cricket. In my school days in Fiji, I was good in wicket-keeping and fielding. However, I didn't continue with cricket since they

started to play it on Sundays. In Methodism, sport was restricted on Sundays. For that reason I quit. Another favourite game given up, because I considered that I was supposed to be in church and at rest on Sundays, and not staying out.

MONEY MATTERS

Throughout the colonial period there was a common kind of dissatisfaction occupying the minds of many Solomon Islanders and it was what was called the 'pay differential'. We were told that this had to be exercised as an incentive, especially to the British, since they had to leave their country and relocate here. Their higher scale of salary, here or through a behind-the-scenes 'home payment', had to compensate for this and be commensurate with the rates within their home economy. This was quite reasonable to us as the usual explanation. What was an unsatisfactory excuse was that because we worked in our own country we were expected to still be able to survive on the meagre pay structures of our employment. It was said that we could ask for a bag of sweet potatoes from home, or make our own gardens, or go fishing and, through these means, survive comfortably. However, many foreign goods, such as tools, clothes and certain food items had become virtual essentials to us, yet they had comparatively high import duties on them. At the same time, most of the food the expatriates wanted, as well as certain luxury goods, were regarded as basic items and the duties on them were low. So, the excuse seemed lame to us. Our wage structure was unreviewed for years and eventually caused the civil servants to resist because the more we kept silent the better it was for the colonial administration. The Civil Servants Association was thus formed to counteract the discriminatory attitudes towards the local civil servants and other recruited foreigners, such as Fijians, Australians, Gilbertese and so on. Through the efforts of the Civil Servants Association, we saw

three main salary revisions and civil servants back-paid for certain approved periods. Through the fine efforts of the most senior Solomon Islanders, like Silas Sitai, Frederic Osifelo, Belshalzah Gina, Alphonse Daga and others, all in Honiara, the association was formed. I can well remember the first general meeting for the formation of the association. One of the local senior officers stood up and, looking towards the Financial Secretary, who was in attendance, said, 'If you could only be within my skin today and live in the quarters I live in, you would understand what we are talking about: poor housing, water, yet we are paying ever-increasing rents on that housing, water, electricity, as well as our income-tax deductions. Yet you don't feel like we feel because you have another undisturbed salary payment back in London. So the saying, "Solomon Islands is the white man's paradise" is very true.'

We noticed that the Financial Secretary's face became flushed — a mixture of anger and embarrassment. However, the message was clear and received by these most senior expatriate officers who had been invited to be present at this first large gathering of local civil servants, senior and junior. The local Civil Servants Association started to make a positive difference for both sides. It helped us, the Solomon Islanders, and the expatriates, to understand each other better, especially from the mid-1960s to independence.

THINGS MISSED FROM COLONIAL TIMES

After saying all that I have about the colonial administration, I think what I miss very much in comparison with the behaviour of the present system is discipline. In the past we used to be at work on time at 7am and work until 4pm. The morning break was at 10am, lunch at midday and you started again at 1pm. Some departments had different start and finish

times, but all would do an eight-hour day and those times would be maintained and adhered to. Comparing the past with today, all government employees are very slack indeed. They don't go to work on time. When you call in to an office to see an officer for a particular purpose, you won't find him there. It is not unusual to find the whole lot of them missing. This can happen from the smallest office to the biggest. It is also not unusual to find that, even having made an appointment to see an officer or permanent secretary, when you arrive, he will still be in a meeting. So you'll wonder what the point was in making a prior appointment. At other times you may call in a couple of times in one day and still not find the person you wish to see; the same can happen when you go in on consecutive days. These things are markedly different from before. You go to a counter today and you'll be standing there for about five minutes and there is no one at the desk to come to see you or ask, 'What do you want?' politely. Before, we were trained to attend to our customers politely. Thus he or she would be a satisfied customer as he or she left the counter. In those days when you walked into the office and stated your needs or complaint, you would normally be a satisfied customer when you left the office. Nowadays they say, 'Oh you come back tomorrow,' or 'Come back in two days time' or 'Next week'. The discipline, good manners, the personal tidiness and efficiency are not seen. Even when using the telephone system — you phone up an office to speak to so and so and the officer or the secretary there will have no sense of courtesy in answering the phone. At the receiving end you will get, 'Hello — yes hello, what do you want?' loudly spoken. You will want to suddenly finish and not go any further. These are the little things that I notice are missing, that have gone away — have passed away with the colonial masters. Worse still is the slackness from the bosses in failing to give adequate instructions to the junior officers. My experiences of these things took me back to the little notices that would be received

from the Secretariat in the form of a circular. These would be addressed to the senior officers talking about the lateness of staff to their offices. The message here was a reminder that lateness should at all times be minimised. As a rule, in every office there was an officer whose job description included the monitoring of these instructions, that they should be kept up to date and that all such instructions were followed.

Another missed thing from those colonial days is that we used to have general orders, financial instructions and we had to sit and pass exams on these. Presently, there are no exams so nobody cares about observe the ruling provided in these instructions. If officers continue arriving late for work, no one there will care to refer to the matter or draw the offender's attention to the observation of the ruling as stated within the general orders. It appears that the slackness comes down from the boss, to the senior officer and on to the junior officers. No attempt at any sort of monitoring method seems to have been adopted in order to counteract this unprofitable habit.

There were once certain colonial officers who tried to impress on junior officers that they were servants of the people; that this attitude be uppermost in their dealings with the public at large; that they must show the public that they were committed to their job; and that they have loyalty in their work. I think that these are very important values that are missing today. I know that Solomon Islanders thought, as soon as we got independence, 'Everything is ours now. We can please ourselves; these people who could tell us off before are all gone. Now we can do things ourselves. We can do it in our own way, what some have called part of "the Pacific Way". I don't believe the 'Pacific Way' in government offices can work well. I think it is very wrong: the 'Pacific Way', 'the cultural way' and 'the *Kastom* Way'! If we continue to misplace and misuse our own cultural ways into Western ways, then we are bound not to be able to run our government efficiently.

Our government is being run in the Western democratic system way, so the only way to make it really work well is to strictly adhere to the tried and set rules of that system.

Footnotes

- 1 Independence from Britain came in July 1978.
- 2 A 'lap-lap' is a piece of cloth, about three to four feet wide and six feet in length, for wrapping round the lower half of the body. In other parts of the Pacific it is called a 'lava lava' or 'sulu'.
- 3 The idea of 'vacant lands' came from Colin Allan's report on land tenure in 1957. This was non-alienated land, which the Government deemed 'vacant of interests' because it had not been occupied or cultivated or leased for 25 years prior to 1958. The Government had believed that huge tracts of land that appeared unoccupied could be the basis for large-scale development, such as plantation forestry. Though 'vacant land' passed into law in 1959, Solomon Islanders' growing resistance to this claim on their lands soon became evident. The Government ceased to promulgate the law in 1961 and revoked it in 1964.
- 4 In these passbooks, bank tellers recorded deposits, withdrawals and interest payments at the time of each transaction.



Lloyd Mapeza being decorated with the order of Commander of the British Empire by Sir Baddley Devesi, the Governor-General, at Rove, Honiara, in 1980.

CHAPTER NINE

Independence and its challenges

After being in Kira Kira the second time, from March 1976 until 1977, I went on my annual leave. I did not go back to Makira because the Government appointed me a Chief Administrative Officer in the Ministry of Natural Resources. Interest in the environment and conservation was in its early stages, but I was sent to attend a UNESCO-sponsored workshop on biosphere reserves that involved visits to three sites, one in the scrubland near Adelaide, one in the rainforests of Lamington National Park, near Brisbane, Australia, and one in the New Zealand high country and alps, near Christchurch. Soon after I returned, the Government posted me to the Western District as government agent in December 1977.

There were two issues worrying the people of the West on the eve of independence from Britain. They were not directly connected, but they had similar origins to some extent because they were legacies of British policy, into which we Solomon Islanders had very little real input and limited choice. One concerned the Gilbertese and the other, more significant at the time, the move for the West to be more a state than a district. My job was to combat this, the 'breakaway' movement.

THE GILBERTESE LANDHOLDING IN THE WEST

At the March 1978 Western Council meeting, one very important issue was up for discussion, so the Western Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were invited by the council president to join. That issue was the political future of the West. The Hon Billy Hilly (MLA for Ranogga-Simbo and the Minister of Home Affairs), Hon Dr Gideon Zoleveke (north Choiseul), Hon Andrew Kukuti (Vella Lavella), Hon Lawrie Wickham (Gizo-Kolombangara) and Hon Geoffery Beti (Roviana-Rendova-Tetepari) were in attendance.

There were groups of Western people who had been affected by the resettlement of the Gilbertese. They were very dissatisfied with the British colonial administration. They felt that the Government, in terms of the status of land ownership given to the Gilbertese over their Solomon Islands native land, discriminated against them. What the Western people wanted was that the Gilbertese and the Solomon Islanders should be treated equally within the country's law regarding entitlement to the lands in the Solomons. The issue was aired in a very heated debate among the councillors, the MLAs and even the invited district representatives present.

After a long, heated discussion, the Home Affairs Minister, Hon Billy Hilly, crystallised the issue into a statement of policy which finally met with the agreement and support of the councillors and district representatives present:

That central government could work on a principle that the allocation of areas of lands in the Shortlands, Wagina [Vagina] and Gizo in freehold title to original Gilbertese settlers had the endorsement of the people of those areas and the Western Council. In return, the Government could undertake in future to grant freehold title to indigenous Solomon Islanders in respect of 'settlement schemes' and certain plantations. Similarly it

could convert current leasehold titles under fixed-term estates held by indigenous Solomon Islanders to freehold titles [perpetual estates]. Priority should be given to the original owners of the land in question and secondarily to current occupants of land under fixed-term estates, if the original owners could not be determined or relinquished ownership of the land. It would be a principle in the determination of original ownership that no area of land could have rightfully been owned by any person, group, tribe or line from outside of the Western District.

THE BREAKAWAY MOVEMENT

The Gilbertese question, though it made clear the feelings of the people, became overshadowed by discussion about the West separating from the rest of the group. This movement was the most explosive issue as we were on the brink of independence. Though some of the Western MLAs were not directly against this idea, they did very well in the discussion and in clarifying the issue. They made sure that the council members presented their arguments with facts rather than emotional generalisations in order to arrive at clear decisions. For this, the MLAs were accused of not being supportive of the council's demands. The Western MLAs then removed themselves from the meeting.

To the end, the councillors remained very determined in their plans. They were intent on following through with their decisions. This 'follow-through' concept was to be their dominant strength, the keynote of their demand to the Central Government:

That the Solomon Islands Government should give serious consideration at the forthcoming Legislative Assembly meeting to grant 'State Government' to the Western Solomons with full control over finance,

natural resources, internal migration, land, legislation and administration before independence; and if this is not granted the Western Solomons will not be participating in the national independence celebrations; and may declare eventual unilateral independence.

During the week before Independence Day, the Gizo police had prepared a simple program, significant enough for that morning. The exercise was made as low key as possible, consisting of: a small guard of honour for the Government Agent to inspect, the raising of the new Solomon Islands flag and the lowering of the British flag. No further particular celebration activities, such as these for the Queen's Birthday were programmed.

However, the news of the low-key program had quickly sped around the Western public at large. The Malaitans at Ringi Cove Station and Poitete Forestry Station (both on Kolombangara Island) heard this news and had arrived at Gizo by outboard-motor canoes in the early morning of Independence Day, and were joined by the Malaitan Taiyo fishing-boat crews whose boats were all at anchor in the Gizo Harbour. They were all waiting for this day to join in the hoisting of the new Solomon Islands flag. The first Prime Minister was a Malaitan, Peter Kenilorea. In a sense he was the Malaitans' man, certainly not a Westerner and the flag-raising to some symbolised Malaitan dominance; the desire of the Westerners not to take part in the ceremony could seem a rejection of Malaita. Having heard of the Malaitans' intention of being there in numbers at the flag-raising, young and old Ranonggans, Simboes, Vella Lavellans, Kolombangaras, Rovianas, Rendovans, Choiseulese and Shortland Islanders had also made it to Gizo by the eve of Independence Day, purposely to counteract even this low key observance of the raising of the new flag at the Gizo playing field. As had already been decided by the Western Council, the Westerners objected to any flag raising.

My own special informants had failed miserably to get me news of the plans of both sides. But the Gizo Police had got the information some days earlier, so on independence morning the behaviour of the incoming men and a few women, in comparison with that of past celebration days, merely confirmed it for them. Two days beforehand, with Inspector John Matita, a Gilbertese Solomon Islander, we decided to call off the prepared low key commemoration exercise for the morning. The inspector nonetheless alerted his men to be ready. He had chosen a particular spot which was right opposite their administration building and outside there he had drawn a line across the main road and warned the general public not to walk across it. Inspector Matita had armed a group of his men with .303 rifles with tear-gas cartridges and they faced the already swollen crowd on both sides of the main road which runs up along the main Gizo waterfront towards the Chinatown area, and around the front of the PWD (Public Works Department) workshop.

As for my family on that particular morning, we had no bread for breakfast. In fact, at 4.30pm on the previous evening, the bread supply was exhausted at all the Chinese bakery shops. So on this morning, I had to drive down from my residence, which was on the Gizo hilltop, to Chinatown to buy bread. My three young children — Adrian Sinabule, Errol and Mariga Ima — were with me in our car.

Along the main Gizo waterfront we began noticing that the number of people walking up and down along both sides of the road was growing. We spent sometime waiting outside the main Chinese baking shop, as the bread was not quite ready to be put out for sale over the shop counter.

It was on our way back that we noticed along the main road a crowd of people, in groups, walking towards the Gizo Police Station and provincial administrative offices area. And arriving right opposite the Gizo (then called Kasola) Hotel, I could sense that I was driving through a large crowd

— of black men (Western men) on my right and on my left side light-coloured men (Malaitans). Many of the men on both sides were standing and leaning against trees and walls, but some were sitting down and seemingly looking across at each other. The road wound past the hotel, and then turned right along a little stretch that leads up the hill towards my residence. Before I could accelerate enough before ascending the hill, right opposite the police station, I was motioned to slow down and then to stop by none other than Inspector John Matita.

By the look on his face, he was very displeased. I soon sensed that there seemed to be a crisis imminent. He said, 'Sir, I phoned up to your residence some 20 minutes ago, and your wife said that you'd driven down to Chinatown for bread. Then five minutes ago you still were around down here. And so I stood here all after that just waiting for you.' I quickly responded, asking, 'How serious do you think the situation is now?'

He replied, 'It's getting to be very serious now, as you can observe all around us. The people on both sides have started shouting across each other. Sir, I need you to come with me please round to the front of our main building.'

He agreed that first I could move my car a bit further away from the vicinity of the crowd. I did this and I instructed my three children to start walking quickly back up to our house to be safe there with their mother. They left, and I quickly walked back to the police station. (I was wearing only a singlet and no shirt!) As I entered the main police building through the back door, I could sense that the officers were at full alert looking out towards the growing crowd. Inspector Matita met me at the main entrance as I stepped down on to the pavement. Already taking their places, a pace behind the already designated line, were eight to 10 officers armed with .303 rifles with tear-gas cartridges, ready and alert for the oncoming crowd.

I looked towards the huge crowd and I was rather stunned. The crowd on both sides grew bigger and greater. The policemen who were watching them wondered what was going on. There were mostly men in the crowd, but unfortunately there were some women and children also, which made things much worse. I could see people holding pieces of iron and some knives, thick pieces of wood, daggers hanging on belts, and many other sharp instruments. From the situation, it was obvious that there could be bloodshed.

At that time, I really did not know what I could say to the crowd. Inspector Matita gave me one last opportunity to speak to them. At that very critical time I had to shut up. I shrouded my mind in order to focus completely on the best and most sensible words to deliver at that very minute. Those people's lives were at stake, on the edge between life and death. I saw that there were women and kids and it made me so sad. The Police Commander handed me a walkie-talkie and I asked him for the second time, 'What shall I talk about?'

He said to me, 'Talk to them, warn them first not to come over the line marked where we are standing. If they do they will get tear gas shot at them. The rest is yours, to say what you want.'

I said, 'Oh goodness, OK.' I hadn't thought of the right words, so I stood there stuck, blank and motionless for some moments. Thoughts came whizzing across my brain such as, 'How can I choose the right words at the right time with these people?'

Suddenly I had a clear picture of the situation and I finally said, 'Well we have a problem here today. At this time, who has the problem? The Western District has it. You all know what the problem is — it is that the Western District wants to break away from the rest of the Solomon Islands. Many of us in this crowd, also many people in other districts, do not agree that the West should break away. So it has grown into a big national

problem. I think that you will understand at the same time, this trouble is the problem of all. And right here, that problem is with all of us, with you and me personally. It is a "this time" problem now. Right now I don't know why you poor women and children should have come here; aren't you frightened with all these rifles pointed at you? In these rifles is tear gas and it's very poisonous. You little piccaninnies here and there — if this tear gas is fired at you, you could get hurt. You'll have a very hard time trying to get it out of your eyes. It has certain poisonous stuff in it. If you stay a little bit longer, this gas will certainly affect your women and children. So you women, you should not have come here with your children.

'To all you men here, I need only to emphasise that all of us here are adults and sensible people. We are big people and not piccaninnies. It's a big worry now. It's my worry and your worry. That's why I have to talk first, because after I have talked to you, I don't know what is going to happen. But I'm telling you now, that people might get wounded, even get killed. If we do that, then we can say that we are only piccaninnies. You and I are all big people; we must all know that. I know that many of you out there have children, you have mothers and fathers at home. Those of you here on this side, if something happened, what will happen with your children? And you people there, your parents, your children and relations at home, what will happen suppose we all stand and kill each other here? Baebae him benefitim des country? I think no moa ia. [Will this benefit the country? I don't think so.] We are only increasing the burden on the new Prime Minister, especially at this time.'

I impressed upon the 'Are'are men who were standing there that Peter Kenilorea, the new Prime Minister, was an 'Are'are man. I went on, 'Please don't make ourselves think like children — let's be thinking men, big men — that's why we have to stand for independence this day. I know you men from Malaita — mi save why you cross. But I can tell you, too, that Malaitan people — they don't behave like you are doing right now. I have been to your places. I've known your headmen; I've

worked there for two years. I know that the people in those places are very different from you who have stayed around in this province. When you arrived here today, you decided to change the clean name of your sub-district or the "big" name of Malaita. I don't know who gave you all these attitudes. You should be a humble people. I've been there and know your people are really humble and law abiding. This idea, this moving — if your headmen knew about it — they wouldn't agree with you or support you.

'And I'm very surprised with you Western people here. Just because these Malaita people wanted to have their voices heard by the authority here, you quick rush over to oppose them. I'm very surprised! We are known to be simple, very gentle, easy-going and intelligent people. Suppose we start behaving like this now. *Iu mi babae baggarup stret!* [We will spoil our reputation!] We will be regarded as real children or child-minded people. So today, still our one and the same problem comes out — misunderstanding. I know you don't realise it, but let me tell *iumi stret* — we are like children *stret*. So let's not act ourselves like children, *iumi finis nao*. We'll just finish this misunderstanding and let's go back home.

'Don't come past us here, because women and little piccaninnies will suffer with you, while you're doing your business of hating and struggling with each other. Finally, I just have to humbly ask of you can you think of yourself as a man, a big man, not a small man: a thinking man, a thinking Solomon Islander, thinking Malaita man, thinking Western man or whoever you are in and around this crowd. Let us all stand and face each other in a good, peaceful, loving and friendly way out there. If anything now happens, I have done my duty and told you what is best, what we should do. So if anything happens here, *saed bilong iu fala*. [So if anything happens here, it is up to you.] Now I want to hear from this side — who is your leader there — of the Malaitans?'

For about three minutes, no one moved, nor was there any talking. You could hear a penny drop. Then one man from

the Malaitan side moved a short distance out and said, 'Mi nao alketa askem mi to reply to you boss. We are all agreed to say that we are very sorry. Thank you very much for talking to us. We understand very well what you mean. We do not know about that side. They might still take things strongly and differently. As far as we are concerned, we are finished, so thank you very much Sir!' I looked over to the Western group and asked, 'And what have you decided?' One chap jumped up and said, 'Well, thank you so much, those are the kind of words that we have to follow. Thank you for clarifying things about what people are and what a man is. We are sorry, too, to have thought this way.' I then said, 'All right, I want you two to come together and shake hands.' They did so and laughed at each other. I said, 'OK, let's clap hands,' then everyone was clapping. The Police Commander was stunned. He said, 'Goodness Sir, iu fixim, finis nao ia. [Goodness Sir, You have stopped it.]' Another policeman said, 'Iu fala, takem alketa geas back, iu finis nao. [Take back the riot gear to the station. It's over]'

Everyone walked together in a charitable way. No toktok, or anything. They all just said, 'Tank iu, very much, mi fala go back home' to wherever they came from. It was all fixed at that time. I don't know, but I think I was talking better than I was thinking. Afterwards I turned to a police officer and asked, 'Officer, did you understand what I was talking about at that time?'

He said, 'I only wondered Sir, who was really speaking in you!' So I went back home. My wife Olive was not there, she had already walked down from our home, having waited for me, but I did not arrive; though I had miraculously made it through the risky incident.

She, however, had walked in the direction of the courthouse and education office, to the Western Council president's office. She knocked. No response from within. She knocked again, stronger. It was opened. There she saw every big breakaway leader sitting. In a calm, confident voice she said, 'I don't like this kind of thing iu fala duim and I want it

stopped. I don't want my husband to get killed. All these things are causing problems and my husband is right out front to be hurt. Anything could happen to him anytime now! Lu ting this is just nothing! Soon some people bae dae long this move you are doing. Mi askim you fella big-man for please please stop now!' Warren Paia, Olive's first cousin, in his status as their advisor, was among them. The president and all his supporters were silent. She closed the door and went. So both of us did our part very well at different venues that day.

At home, I rang up all the Chinese shops which were selling beer, because I was the chairman of the Western liquor licensing board. I said, 'You're closing your beer for today and the whole week of independence — no more beer.' They replied positively, 'Hem good no moa ia boss, plenty trouble this time.' They understood well, that Gizo town could be in big trouble, so they were really cooperative. That night nothing happened — all those who made up the crowd had gone back home.

At two o'clock that afternoon, two Solair planes came from Honiara. They brought down some officers of the police mobile unit. They came at the request of the Western commanding officer, who had given them an urgent message that morning, not knowing that we'd fixed the whole thing up. I said, 'Oh well that's all right, just let them observe how things will be today, tonight. Just in case, they are good to be around here.'

'Oh that's very good,' he said. So, that was it. When at times I think about it I get emotional, because bloodshed and some loss of life could have happened. It was the worst incident that could have happened at Gizo. Because people were prepared to do something silly, something dangerous could have happened.

I just couldn't believe it myself. With only a few brief words and talking, it was like a miracle. I had fixed a bad situation. I felt that if I told somebody this, they wouldn't believe me about what happened that day. Afterwards, when I looked back on that situation, I felt as if I was in a war. I can't

be sure whether or not the police were scared, too — they should not have been! Yet one or two were a little shaky, as was seen and heard when talking among themselves. At least I have done one thing in a lifetime in that very rare situation. I stopped something tragic.

When I arrived back home, Olive was already there. She said, 'My goodness, you know I've roused those big men down there in the president's office. They were sitting inside planning, talking about their moves, while people were about to get wounded or killed!'

'Were they all sitting inside?' I asked.

'Yes, they were all in there. They were not down there when you got busy with the people.' She explained that they could overhear my talking to the crowd through the walkie-talkie. She had the courage to directly deal with the president and his group in a straightforward way. I admired her for that part, a brave act. Because of the brave acts we had both taken, Independence Day celebrations each year mean much more for both of us. Our actions in saving people from injury and perhaps saving lives are remembered for that day, 7 July 1978. The Western people officially celebrated Independence throughout the province a year later on 7 July 1979.

I need to recap here. About a month before independence in 1978, Peter Kenilorea and his private secretary Francis Saemala, with five other non-Western legislature members, came to Gizo to meet with the full Western Province assembly. As an officer at that time wearing two hats, that of the government agent and that of provincial secretary, I made the arrangements accordingly, to get all provincial members to Gizo. It was a very special meeting at which members could clearly express to the visitors those things that led to the 'breakaway' moves. It was decided that the Western Province would celebrate Independence Day a year late. Certain other things to do with the 'breakaway' movement and the meeting in March of that year were discussed and clearly resolved. A poem

called *The West Wind* had been printed in a local paper well before independence and was highly abusive of Western people. The insult this caused was resolved. Custom compensation of 2000 pounds was to be paid by the Central Government to the council, since an amateur poet in a government weekly paper published it. Such were the very important matters discussed at this meeting and everyone was happy.

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

In August 1978, after some weeks and independence had passed, about nine o'clock one morning I received a telephone call from Prime Minister Peter Kenilorea. He said, 'You know my Cabinet and I have been considering whether you would agree to stand in the election for Speaker's seat. If you agree, we could nominate you.' I said, 'Why, so I can try to settle rows among the parliamentarians? I don't know what the job is like. I have no idea.'

He said, 'Hey, I tell you, it's just like a district magistrate's duty. You sit there behind the bench and just look at us, that's all. By references to the Parliament Rule you just keep us in line. Just try,' said Peter, 'you may perhaps get in.'

So I said, 'OK, go ahead, you may put me in.' I saw very little chance for me in this contest because I was told there were six other candidates put up. I therefore held almost nil excitement about it.

I went out shooting pigeons (a hobby of mine) one day with my four young boys and my youngest daughter. It was a Saturday. When we arrived back some time after 12 o'clock, I had missed the midday news which used to be on in the 1970s. My phone rang, it was the council president who said, 'You know what has happened? You have been elected as the Speaker of the National Parliament. Why didn't you ring me up after you heard it?' I replied, 'Oh, but you are the first one to tell me. Sir, I arrived from the bush about 10 minutes after the news. So I missed it.'

'Well. it's all over the country now, my big congratulations to you. You have been elected as the first Speaker of our new Parliament today!' They rang him up because when the parliament office had rung my home, no one was there. As it was Saturday even my wife had gone downtown. Not very long after I'd spoken with the president, the phone rang again, and this time it was the clerk to Parliament. 'Congratulations Mr Speaker,' she said, 'were you expecting to win this election?'

I said, 'Not really. I only know I was put up as a candidate because the Prime Minister rang me up one day asking me if I would accept nomination and I accepted.' She went on, 'Well you easily won in the election. What I'm trying to tell you is to get across to Honiara today. That is this afternoon. You are going to be sworn in first thing on Monday morning so Parliament can begin after that.' I was still in my house getting ready when the plane touched down at Nusa Tupe Airfield. My third son, Adrian Sinabule Gina, then five years old, accompanied me to Honiara. Only the two of us went because it was a charter flight made by the parliament office. The clerk had told me that it was to be a two-week meeting, then I would be back in Gizo to prepare for a total shift to Honiara. Meanwhile, a Speaker's residence would be made ready for us.

On arrival in Honiara, I was accommodated in the Hibiscus Hotel. In the early evening the clerk to Parliament came to give me all the briefings, especially the procedures of each meeting day. I looked into papers I would normally receive in my office, like motions, Bills and how to handle them in my office and in the House as they came, to be dealt with therein. We didn't go further than into a few of these. The swearing-in of the Speaker was usually done at Government House, so that was done first thing by the Governor-General. I was in the Speaker's new gown and wig. Then about 9am a guard of honour was mounted outside Parliament. This is a traditional English sign

accorded to the opening of a new session of Parliament. The Governor-General inspected it. It was most impressive. Certainly, it was a new world for me for there were no such things as this for me to be part of before.

One ironic side for me personally was this: a filmmaker had been engaged by the Government to make some films in the Solomons about the work of the police, especially on law and order in the country. He came to Gizo two weeks prior to the opening of this session. At Gizo, he happened to be filming a court scene while I, as the magistrate, was holding some traffic hearings. He happened, however, to be back in Honiara during the time that His Excellency the Governor-General opened the new session. Given the chance, he was filming from the guard of honour ceremony to some short segments of the House in session. He did not know I was the new Speaker and said to my clerk, 'That man, the Speaker, I've seen him somewhere before.' I met up with him one day and he said, 'My goodness, of all the surprises of my life, I have you in my film TWICE. Surely that was the most rapid promotion I have come across — from a magistrate to the Speaker's post!' That was for me an experience, too.

Well, Monday morning was over for me. It was my first day and my first taste of the parliamentary environment. In the evening I was given additional instruction on procedures for coping with that week's meeting. After this, I would have more than enough time to study things thoroughly. It was only a week and I seemed to be reading from notes, doing all these things — it was very awkward indeed.

MY OWN CHANGES OF HEART AND SPIRIT

During my entire 10 years as the Speaker of Parliament, we lived in a government house on the hilltops above the Kukum area. When we were first in Honiara, from 1966–71, we had lived in one of the new government quarters, class four, above the present

Kukum Police Station. The house was on the flat hilltop overlooking the sea. In my second period in Honiara, 1973–75, we had lived in a large class two house on the hill slope at the town-ground area. This improvement in our housing represented, in a sense, a closing of the gap between expatriates, who once had all the better housing, and me, a Solomon Islander. My son Lloyd was then able to enter primary school, so I enrolled him at St John's, which was close to our house. Education and improving our standard of living were both important, but other forces were at work within me as I faced my new position.

As Speaker of the House I slowly began to realise that I had a wide responsibility to everyone around me; that what I did could influence others. My father had been a churchman, but it was not until 1980 that I began taking part in church activities seriously. In the later part of 1980, I had a strange dream and it changed my life.

I had been among my usual drinking friends in a colleague's home. We were in a serious sharing session about how responsive to us was our Almighty God when we individually asked for help. Two of us had been a bit boastful about how God's favours had fallen well on us. This caused us all to raise our voices in wanting to be heard. And the confined space in which we crowded together just could not hold our uncontrolled chorus. So passers-by peered in, as they were curious about what was happening inside the house.

Among the shared sentiments expressed, I told of my inability to meet my bills for vital domestic necessities. Though when this happened, I had been fervent in reverently asking Almighty God to be patient with me. And I had placed my trust in him in all my difficulties, troubles and frustrating situations. But it was evident to me that my earnest submissions to God seemed all in vain. Therefore, I said to my colleagues that I had started to brood over revolting against God, because he did not seem to be listening to me. My friends were of little assistance as they all boasted of how they had the ear of God,

unlike me. In the midst of our making so much noise among ourselves there suddenly appeared none other than the United Church pastor who was superintendent of the Honiara circuit of the eastern church division.

He came and stood right in our midst. So we all came to a very abrupt silence! And each glanced upon one another in astonishment. It seemed so sudden that each of us just behaved like normal men. The drunkenness, so well under way earlier, seemed to simply vanish. Instead, all became totally quiet. It was the pastor himself who first broke the silence when he said, 'All I've come here for, is to ask who of you can find within his Bible a New Testament scripture in St John's gospel, chapter 14. And please read out to me from verse one, up to verse 14.'

We looked at one another's perplexed and puzzled faces. How much more puzzled I was since all gazed sternly at me! Dick, who sat next to my right hand, bent over to my right ear and mumbled directly into it, 'Maepeza you have to answer the pastor, being the more educated of the whole lot of us. Tell him that we have no Bible within our own reach around here, only empty bottles. And at least you explain to him about the idea the Bible scripture has to say to us so he can leave us.'

So, I raised my right hand and said, 'But pastor, Sir, we must first find a Bible within our reach around here.'

The pastor replied, 'All right, stand up each of you and find one from anywhere near you. And be quick about it please. Move!'

We all stood up suddenly. But although we moved quickly we only staggered about the half-lit room. It was illuminated from the security light outside the main verandah. It was well after 2.30am. I stumbled off to bed.

It was here that I actually got up in my sleep and walked. In my sleepwalk, I got out of my bed, walked across and opened the door of our main master bedroom. I walked

out and followed the main corridor that was about 30m away from the main verandah. I entered the verandah. And I reached the bookcase in which I kept all four of my Bibles, together with various scripture magazines, pamphlets and any scriptural readings. When I reached this bookcase I awoke.

The drinking incident and the request of the pastor were still fresh in my mind. Trying not to forget or have the Bible scripture reading quickly slip away, I got myself busy skipping through the new Bible translation, particularly of St John's gospel chapter 14: 1–14. I soon found this. So I read it aloud at somewhere about 3.30am, just as the pastor had requested of us. As I read it through, and through again the second time, and again the third time, I felt frightened while the inner part of my whole body experienced a kind of funny chilling, and my heart became light. My mind seemed enlightened. That feeling! I felt delighted over something. This delighted feeling seemed to emerge and stay focused around the first line of verse one: 'Don't let your heart be troubled, if you believed in my Father, believe also in me.'

It was such a great relief to me. As I examined each line of the verses to verse 14 the more I realised, while worrying and complaining so much, that I was in this very strangest way being directly spoken to. Realising this, I spent time in prayer, thanking my Almighty Father for doing this to me. I went back to sleep most delightfully. That morning air and sunlight felt different for me. After this occurrence, I wanted to be different. Quickly, my once very close friends noticed this change in me, but those who were the more surprised were my new friends in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Many a time since, I have read through this same scripture and I heard it spoken about in a Sunday morning sermon by a preacher some time ago. It has popped up on many different occasions, so it has never been a novel Bible

scripture to me. Since that first reading of the verse it has made a significant change to my whole life's journey in my work and, in particular, in my family lifestyle. I only realised then that I should have more time with my family at home after work. I started to realise that most essential links between my wife and me had really been missing. And Olive, I felt so sorry and very much regretted that for so long she was playing alone a kind of unrecognised 'slowly, slowly, catchim monkey silent conflict' against my hard-core general attitude towards her, our children, or for that matter towards our general family affairs. All along I had been hardly aware of this until the impact of that significant incident. And I think many other women have experienced and are experiencing similar hardship and frustration in their lives, just as Olive must have. But I tell you, you will win in the end. You're not alone at all!

In talking about changes that happened to me that pastor's presence at a drinking party was the most significant and important one to me. Since then, I became an approved layman (allowed to preach in church congregation) in my church (United Church) and that cannot be forgotten with God and me. Among other things, after this change in my life, I've learned not to revolt against God when my prayer was not heard and answered positively or quickly or when a sudden problem or adversities arise like in the past. God has shown his revelation of these things to me in Psalm 139 in the Bible: that he knows me, and is with me everywhere I may be. This is very comforting to me. Another comforting revelation to me is God's 'Sonship' relationship with the human race; I am God's inherited son and not a mere servant. In the Prodigal Son case, the father has two sons. They are both his true sons so he would not despise the naughty and wasteful one and only love his domesticated and rule-abiding one. At one point in time, each has his own story to tell his father. The bad one confessed, yet the good one rebelled. But the father stuck to

his family and rebuilt and restored the union again. This inheritance system came down as from Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David and up to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This happened before my father died and he was such a very happy man after this change in me. I completely turned away from my usual drinking habits and manners and began in a new direction. I lost my many friends who I used to drink with. I came to join a new community of people in my own church. I undertook to attend two afternoon classes after working hours, receiving instructions on basic preaching and I passed my trial sermon at one Sunday evening devotion in that year, 1982. I preached in the main Honiara United Church in some Sunday morning radio broadcasts. Even until today, each main church takes a turn in church sermon broadcasts each Sunday.

During my period as the Speaker of Parliament, I joined and took active roles in the men's fellowship group of the church. In my spare time, I translated some very well-known English hymns in the Methodist hymnbook into my language, Roviana. Reverend Riti, before he became the Bishop of the United Church, was the secretary of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) based in Honiara. He was active in the men's fellowship and was a colleague of mine. Each time I translated a hymn, we would sing it in church.

In Honiara there are two church buildings. The main church is in central Honiara; the smaller one is at Kukum. The big central church can now accommodate a large congregation. We were still in Honiara when every able man and woman gave honest voluntary work in building the new central church. I was among the first men and boys who dug the foundation pits for its huge circular posts. Each island community within the church did a variety of fundraising activities towards the enormous cost of this building. Olive and I had already left Honiara for our retirement when this

central church building was completed and officially opened. We were so sad at not attending its opening celebrations as in the past we both committed ourselves to the various activities concerning it, from its early development and construction days, during our years living above Kukum.

When I took to heart the direction of the pastor in 1980 I also took a new leap in life. I joined and met completely new friends at home, and plunged into a new perspective of the things surrounding me. This also greatly enhanced my association with international church fellowship peers in America, England, Australia, New Zealand and from other countries. I've met and made new friends in Christ of them — for example, at the US President Ronald Reagan's Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC in 1981. On his way to the breakfast inside the Washington Hilton Hotel, along a corridor lined with representatives of the Pacific nations we were introduced to President Reagan and his Vice President, George Bush, and their wives as they walked passed us. It was a great honour indeed to me that day. It was a time when all the Christian congressmen of the Government and opposition and many state parliamentarians also attended to worship and have breakfast with us. About 500 people sat side by side at round tables and listened to introductions of people who took part. As well there was a welcoming speech, prayers, scripture readings, a youth choir singing, a short sermon from the scriptures taken by Pastor Billy Graham, and lastly President Reagan gave his speech, then a final prayer after breakfast for all who had partaken of the breakfast feast. At each round table, as one was shown his or her place, he or she introduced himself or herself to the rest who were already seated. And so, by this process, we got to know one another on the spot, within the hour. We broke up and were directed into smaller groups to partake of prepared subjects in short discussion sessions. The event did not occupy us for a full day. Many foreign dignitaries and many leaders of religious faiths from

around the globe normally attended this function, it being a national day throughout the US. A gentleman of another faith assured me that he had attended three consecutive events previously, and was so delighted about the spirit of friendship during each event or occasion that he took the prayer breakfast as his special annual event also, all the way from his home in Japan.

So, doubtless to say those of us who've attended this great event from different countries and religions indeed felt it a very vital and genuine means of enhancing a global relationship for peace. Those who had met for the first time were building new friendships and those who were meeting again were strongly renewing their old friendships. So the prayer breakfast is one vital prescription this very, very troubled world needs! I here wish to acknowledge and extend my hearty compliment to my special and God-given friend, Mr Douglas Coe, who even up to this time of my writing this page has been a constant letter writer to me, so desirous of enhancing my lifeline with God, keeping me ever warm always. Ever since we met in Washington for the prayer breakfast in 1981, our connection with one another has been kept very much alive! Together with scripture words, he kept me encouraged. As soon as he found the clear meaning of them he sent them to me. He encourages the work of renewed Christian life of the members of the US Congress, extending also to the state parliamentarians. He is a vital man in the organising of the annual prayer breakfasts.

Another prayer breakfast I attended was held in Honolulu, Hawaii, in March 1984. For this one, it was the Governor of the State of Hawaii who extended invitations to Sir Peter Kenilorea and me to attend from the Solomons. On 'transit' in Brisbane we met in the same motel Justice Amett of Papua New Guinea, who was also heading to Honolulu for the same event. So we travelled together to Honolulu.

Once again here we met and renewed friendships. We arrived from a number of Pacific Island nations. We shared

and participated in a number of activities, discussions, testimonials and singing. And what we all took part in had a deep impact in enhancing the courage of all leaders in attendance: church leaders, professional leaders, politicians, women's group leaders, youth leaders all in their difficult roles in leading their respective fields within their own communities.

This fellowship also occurred within the Christian communities in England, Australia or within this region, whenever an international conference was convened within their region. We would collect together with our Christian brothers and sisters, with their friends of different religions who attended that particular conference, and at least came into a short Christian fellowship interaction of prayers, scripture, sharing in discussion and singing, always at most convenient times outside the main conference activities.

I've experienced occasions like these during our Commonwealth Conference in the Isle of Man in 1984, another one in London during a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) gathering which coincided with the 500-year jubilee celebration of the English parliamentary system. Another time was in Tarawa, Kiribati, during our regional presiding officers and clerks conference in 1988.

There were also occasions of Christian retreats which I've attended and renewed and made new friends at them. I valued them so much indeed as these small meetings or gatherings also enhanced my capacity of valuing the different levels of people's attitudes and knowledge and understanding towards the Bible scriptures in relation to Jesus Christ's principles and his work among the people of his time. One particular occasion was in a country town outside Sydney, Australia, where I stayed for three days. This was after the Tarawa, Kiribati, conference in 1985. After that conference, because of travel connections, I was dropped off in Sydney while my clerk continued back to Honiara. A pastor and Sir Peter Kenilorea, who had arrived two days earlier, came and

picked me up from the airport terminal and took me up to the country town. I met again the familiar friends who I had met in Washington and Honolulu, and some were my presiding officer colleagues of the CPA and retreat colleagues from PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Tonga. There were also some Australian politicians and government ministers. Two similar retreats were also staged in Vanuatu in 1982, organised by the first President, Mr A. George Sokomanu, and the founding Prime Minister, the late Hon Fr Walter Lini. It took place in a tourist hideaway island outside Port Vila. The other was organised by the first Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Sir Peter Kenilorea. This took place at Tabea Resort, some 48km from Honiara. in October 1981. The Pacific Island Leaders Fellowship was formed and Sir Peter Kenilorea was officially appointed the first chairman of this particular Christian fellowship body. Rev Maika Bovoro of Fiji was appointed its general secretary.

Those Christian interdenominational fellowship interactions helped significantly, as did interactions with my colleagues, in the process of changing my life behaviour and my total family lifestyle. The programs at such gatherings focused on leadership, stewardship and loving your neighbour and they produced lively debate. Having interacted with these people and been involved in many public occasions, I could feel fairly competent in taking part. Many years back I certainly would not have had this confidence! So that has been a change, too.

I also here have to give a sincere compliment to our kind-hearted brother, the late D. Gilbert (Gil) McArthur, OBE, for being the key man working tirelessly behind the scenes in all the above mentioned Christian fellowships. He contributed so much to the enhancement of leadership potential within the Pacific region. He was honoured with an OBE and I am sure he lives in honour with his Almighty Father. May he rest in peace. Who will carry on his work? We

need people like this to give good example and guidance in the international and local scene.

THE FOIBLES OF POLITICIANS

When I first became Speaker of Parliament, I had to be the guide of others to keep them on track within the conventions of the House. Yet the environment was completely new to me. It took a real effort to formulate a strategy of how to assess and speak about the behaviour of the Members of Parliament. An MP's behaviour in the House and how effective he could be for the voters within his constituency were two different things altogether. Some members were sincere, ordinarily normal in their behaviour and talked usefully in the House. Yet they were sometimes useless members for the people of their constituencies. I have varying impressions of each member during my time as Speaker. Most of them did not really have much understanding of the government machinery. Their background experience of it was quite inadequate especially as to how one may contribute in various areas of its activities. They depended mostly on the officials. They could not clearly relate what they wanted to express; they leaped here and there; they talked about matters distortedly. They dwelled repeatedly on the fact that not only did politicians have the mandate to cause things to move, they had virtually the sole prerogative to speak about them. Yet some of them could hardly open up and speak well. These were the sorts of things that would be experienced during Parliament sittings. New members' impressions were that when they got in there, why not get busy talking like the others? They really longed to get in there and have things passed in Parliament. My impressions were that some were obviously not sure of what they were doing and saying and should not have been there at all. Even when they were fluent in Pidgin English, the sense of things being clearly expressed was still not there. The fault lay in the lack of

education, actual organisation and work experience. They were without experience of supervisory roles in business or in government; wide experience of national and world affairs; as well as being conversant in economic, political and developmental matters.

I was the Speaker from 1978 and continued until March 1989. That was a total of more than 10 years. In the present constitutional system of this country, the first duty of the new Parliament is to elect the Speaker. The next person elected would be the Prime Minister. The Speaker under the Constitution was identified and nominated from outside the Parliament, by the Members of Parliament who then elected him. The first, foremost and hardest thing in my experience was surviving the re-elections I went through. The first election in September 1978 was not a real worry to me. It was during the last half of the term of the old House. Each House was normally a four-year term. When the new general elections were on in 1980, it became a worry for me, because the new members were unknown to me. For many reasons, however, most of which only the MPs could explain, I survived two more elections for the Speaker. Yet, in my case, they were re-elections for me. In 1989, I was nominated once more, however, 10 years is a long time to have been in that role. I therefore withdrew my nomination. I was not indispensable. I thought it was now time for someone else to take on that role.

Another of the hard things was sitting there in the House, listening to the politicians and seeing that the rules were followed at all times. If not, I would correct them where they had gone wrong. One could find that it was a hard job. At all times I had to be trying to follow what they said, because politicians naturally had many simple excuses within themselves. It was obvious to them that the special man sitting up there who wore the gown had the business of correcting them if they were out of order. So they would take the liberty of saying anything at all, while keeping alert of course. If the

Speaker missed correcting a member, he would go on as if he was not bound by the House orders. He sometimes insisted that it was not his job to see that he continued within the rules. Many members when they became aggressive behaved like that. The Speaker had to be very attentive and careful at all times, because if a member got into that habit, he would certainly run the dignity of the chair down. You have to train them early. The Speaker while sitting there has to make split-second decisions in relation to a number of rules within the standing orders of Parliament. When you tell them that something is not right, it could cause very difficult moments indeed.

On one occasion, I came to the stage of having to send a man from the West out. He was so aggressive and intentionally and repeatedly refused to listen to the chair, so I had the serjeant-at-arms march him out of the House. His leader, the Leader of the Opposition came to my office and straightened things out with me. After that, the man rejoined the meetings. He was out for three days.

During a meeting that involved a heated debate, I was asked to resign by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Throughout the debate he repeatedly interjected with remarks. He also asked repeatedly if he could talk again, but I avoided him, then finally said, 'Honourable member, do sit down please! You have talked once already. According to our rules, I have to give other members a chance each to speak!'

He was so angry that he just stood up and said, 'Mr Speaker Sir, I want you to resign. If you cannot do the job just resign.' That was Ben Kinika, the most vocal politician of his time.

I said, 'Thank you honourable member, but that is just what you think now. It is so very easy at this moment to tell me, to ask me to resign. We have to sort out other things first, for now you are not in good form!' We came to our morning 10 minute adjournment and outside the Parliament

two members were struggling with each other, and they were both on the ground. Of all the members there, some stood out for the side which they supported, but the well-behaved ones intervened in the struggle and discontinued it. The two involved in the struggle were the Makiran, Ben Kinika, who told me to resign, and Mr Peter Salaka, the most competent and versatile member of them all. He was the member from the Shortland Islands.

I called Ben Kinika into my office where we had a good talk about everything that had happened, for which he apologised. Old Peter Salaka was there. I also had a good talk with him. Although I was strict, I was good with my members. Anything I ruled which would have embarrassed a member in the House during the meeting, once out of the House, I would call whoever it was into my office. There we would talk things out. 'I am aware there is a problem, this is why I have to talk to you like that,' I would say. He would say, 'Oh thank you, I am happy that you understand, and I am sorry.' All MPs are the same. They all think that they know everything. That is what the politician should be, they know it or they do not.

In my first two years of the old House in 1978, I can remember the member for East Fataleka on Malaita. He was kind of a custom man and at the opening session he entered the House in his custom dress. He could speak only Pidgin or his own language. He had only one term in the Parliament. By that stage, the people had come to be choosy; once their MPs were ineffective that term would be their last. That was why as time went by we began to see more new members who were better-educated people. Some who left the public service for Parliament were knowledgeable, some were quite religious. Around this period new members came in who were of the elite kind. Some of them really turned out to be the worst, though they were the most educated ones. Education is just one of the important backgrounds for a man who is to become a politician. With that alone he wasn't yet a good whole

politician. Even Pidgin is not an essential requirement. It was also allowed in the House. If it was spoken intelligently like English that would be just fine. Many a time those who could ably contribute in Pidgin did so, but when they switched into English, they used some of the worst English vocabularies that have ever been heard. The late Jonathan Fifi'i of Kwaio was a fluent Pidgin speaker and contributed better in the debate than most English speakers because the bones of the matters he was discussing made what he said able to be followed, they were sensible and understandable. I always wondered why one who seemed a less able English speaker would not stick to Pidgin only. He could be understood better in Pidgin than if he spoke in English. Some members would use both the English and Pidgin and went round and round. When they thought of a big word it would be wrongly placed and the whole sense of it was out of place. If it had been a simple word, it would've been fine, but it would be something like 'amalgamation', etc. Most times, new vocabularies would pop out from some such people. In recent years, one or two have been around in the House. They were so good in Pidgin, but at times they made up their own English words. Since I left, I have not been able to sit and observe the proceedings in the new parliament building to see how they are behaving today. The new parliament house was built and completed in 1991 on a hill slope. As in past years, members of the public are normally allowed to go in and listen when the House is sitting.

Many times, roars of laughter were heard in the House as some funny things happened. For an example, a member of the Central Islands constituency rose to speak. He was excited and therefore talking very fast. As usual he turned to address the chair and said, 'And Mr Sparker Sir.' There was a roar of laughter in the House. In the first House that I came into, the Member for South Malaita was quite a funny man. As soon as I heard him say, 'My dear Mr Speaker Sir', I would know without a doubt that he'd taken excessive

amounts of alcohol the previous evening or he had taken some beer at lunch-time. I had to ask him once to leave the House and come back the next day. He was well warned about it. There were no similar recurrences from him after that.

EVOLVING CONVENTIONS: GREAT AND SMALL

With some members, it was obvious to me when they had consumed beer at lunch-time. They, however, behaved very well, could still converse and take part, so I just left them. In one session, Parliament may meet more than two times a year, but not less than two. In a sitting, the time could vary from two days up to six weeks. Parliament started at 9.30am and went until noon. It resumed at 2pm and finished at 4.30pm. During my time I once allowed the meeting to continue at night-time, after evening dinner. This was in the Budget meeting. It did not turn out well, however, because most members got drunk. There was so much unnecessary shouting, while some went to sleep. What an experience! It happened only on that night and from then on I disallowed it. This has remained the practice even until today.

Our meetings went live on air, in order that the rural people could hear their members talking. The people at home would sit around their house radios listening to the debates. Some even took their small transistors to their gardens or out fishing so they could still listen to the debates. The people love to hear the debates over Bills and motions. They want to hear what their members have to say and whether he was talking sensibly or talking rubbish. As time went by, people began to get used to and so follow the proceedings quite well. In the past only an hour-long summary was broadcast each evening of the week. That did not work very well because not many people listened to it. Then they tried the full-day

broadcasting and this was felt to be better and was enjoyed by all. Thus the evening summary was replaced by live broadcasts every day.

In the Solomons Parliament, the first reading is only the tabling or preamble of the Bill to the House. It is the second reading in which a Bill is introduced by its minister in detail. This covers its purpose, its needs, benefits, etc. It is then moved in order to occasion a general debate. The third reading is when the minister is reporting that it has been scrutinised in detail in its committee of supply or by the whole House. At this stage the minister begs it to be formally resolved by Parliament. If the third reading is approved, then the Bill is passed and becomes an Act, if not it is defeated.

There are certain words that are not allowed to be used in Parliament — swear words and others regarded as ‘un-parliamentary language’. If a member refuses to apologise and his un-parliamentary word is not withdrawn when asked, he can be called upon to leave the House immediately. Interjections by members are always minimised. If they weren’t helpful though, they were disallowed. Heckling unreasonably during Question Time is restricted by rules. Members of the public are not allowed to talk to any member during the meeting. I can remember one kind of incident that happened. Someone in the gallery wrote something and passed it on to his member. I observed this, so I had to ask the serjeant-at-arms to tell the man not to do that again. Those things can creep in at any time. Thus careful observations are equally important to the whole exercise of maintaining good order.

My being elected as Speaker in the election was on account of it being a transitional period in our country, but more especially in relation to how I had quietened down the situation of the ‘breakaway’ movement. I was also keeping alert; to be right there and to smother any unexpected or aggressive behaviour that may arise from the Western Province

Members of Parliament, as there were uncooperative gestures coming from them at first. They didn't respect other members. My presence there was effectively felt as a reconciliatory one. Besides that, it was also because I had been posted in all the former districts and seemed to have some up-to-date experience of every member's island home. I saw very limited advantages of what the 'breakaway' movement could meaningfully give to the Western people. I could sense the time was not yet ripe for the Western people to break away then or, for that matter, at any foreseeable time, if that could be reasonably prevented.

Though Peter Salaka appeared indifferent to people's concerns and alienated many because of some of his involvements, he never got too difficult with me. He respected me. Just before I left Honiara for retirement I was told he had been admitted to hospital very sick. I think he has diabetes. He is a gentleman. He knew well there would be those 'for' and 'against' his ideas and he was good at facing up to these. You could not go around him easily, because he was a perfect negotiator. If you did not listen to what he was saying, he would not waste time on you. He bulldozed his big ideas and, whether one liked them or not, one must not abandon all of them, as there was good in many. He could be an unpredictable man at times in Parliament, where he occasionally lowered the dignity of the Speaker. When I would ask him to withdraw certain undignified remarks, or I stopped and asked him to discontinue speaking on unnecessary matters not related to the topic of the debate, he would do so, with no ill feelings. He was one of the men who most understood our political system. I said earlier that I disagreed with the 'breakaway' movement. Peter Salaka was one of the top motivators or pillars of it. I also said there were a lot of good things in the 'breakaway' movement. Part of that move was very effective, since it was almost always Malaita people who got through to almost all of the top jobs before the protest. In government and business

circles, many equally able people from other provinces were passed over. Malaitans could easily be identified in various high-level positions, which was made worse due to the fact that the colonials during their time took no care to rectify this situation. The Western people thought that this was most unfair. It was due to that movement that things were sorted out, from that time, up to 1998. That practice became the foundation of 'one-in-common' for all Solomon Islanders. Equal distribution of all kinds holds the secret to peace and friendliness for the people of these 'Happy Isles'. It simply means that if there is a Malaita man at a certain job, there will be a Makira man at another, a Western man and an Isabel man at others. Where possible it would mean the Prime Minister would be anything other than from the West, someone from another province. If this is properly maintained then life will be good. This must always come from the leaders, whether in the private sector, the churches or government. This practice should be encouraged as a new culture and tradition. It is a sensible thing, otherwise we can have one group of people feeling oppressed or hurt. That is why I had to decide to retire as Speaker of Parliament because the Governor-General elected at that time was a Western man, who was to serve for a five-year term, after which one may seek re-election for a second term, but one cannot serve for more than 10 years at one time. If the next Prime Minister after an election was a Western man, the Governor-General would most certainly be from another province — he could be from Temotu, who knows! It became an accepted code.

I said previously that I had to retire because I felt I was not indispensable. It was also appropriate that I left because of the unwritten code. What all must understand is that there must be an even distribution, where at all possible, of people from all the provinces, in the top posts, so that things do not disintegrate. The point is that code must remain intact. It is in the hands of Solomon Islanders to see that it is not disregarded.



Lois, the first-born of Lloyd Maepesa and Olive, at her wedding to Noel Mamau in St Banabas' Cathedral, Honiara, in 1981.

CHAPTER TEN

Participation in the community of nations

When I was Speaker I went to various conferences and meetings of international bodies overseas. Some people may think these are just sort of holidays and a waste of time, but they were not like that. Of course, these were always an adventure, sometimes interesting, but sometimes not so comfortable. Mostly these journeys were for what I call in-service education where we all shared and we all learnt from one another.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Our National Parliament was first admitted into official affiliation with the World Anti-Communist League in September 1984. As Speaker of our parliamentary body, I was invited to attend the meeting of the league in San Diego in the state of California, in the US.

The invitation was inclusive of my wife Olive's return airfares. All related in-transit expenses from Honiara to the conference were borne by the league.

We travelled through Los Angeles. San Diego served as the main fishing base for all America's fishing fleet operating in

and around the Pacific waters of the massive American continent. Although I was there for a conference, I was aware that the area had a direct connection with our own Solomon Islands. In 1984, a particular tuna fishing vessel named *Jeanette Diana* was to become well known in the Solomons and in many world newspaper headlines. She was initially based on the San Diego coast. *Jeanette Diana* was involved in violating international law because she fished illegally within the Solomons' internationally recognised territorial waters. The Solomons Government fined her owners heavily and confiscated the vessel. The company was able to retrieve her only in compliance with certain other conditions imposed by the High Court in Honiara. Since this very controversial foreign-ship incident, there have not been further serious intrusions occurring into our waters.

It was at this 1984 league conference that the Solomons was admitted, but with observer status only. Only later did we become a full member. After that, full affiliation fees and all travel costs to and from conference venues were borne by the league. Solomon Islands valued such a world body as it helped us to be aware of the Soviet Union's missiles/warships increasingly infiltrating our regional waters during those years. One result of this was New Zealand's ban on all Russian warships being tied at its wharves.

Attending such a conference made me more aware of the importance of foreign relations and of gaining an understanding of them. It was also a political education for our MPs who attended and participated in plenary and committee discussions.

TIME FOR FAMILY

Although this helped me understand the family of nations, I also attended to my own wider family of Solomon Islanders as well as that woman, Sera, who took me in when I was a lonely little boy and made me like a son of her family. On our

way to the conference in San Diego, we stopped off in Nadi, Fiji. We had ample time to travel to Suva by taxi and back to Nadi flying from Nausori near Suva for the San Diego plane. At our own cost, of course! It worked out marvellously well. We made a surprise call on the following people at the USP campus: John Sasabule, his wife, Laehang and their two young boys, Bill and John Milton Aqarao, Alec Makini, David Mamupio and certain others from the Solomons. They found us rare visitors at such a time in the year. We all took a very pleasant walk-about (by bus) into Suva. Olive was able to buy little things as souvenirs for our little ones back in Honiara. It was a joyous time together indeed!

Before we flew back to Nadi, we called in and met my Fiji foster mother, Sera, at her home at Laqere, outside but near Suva city. The aged Sera was so delighted in my taking Olive to meet her. Olive loved her very much indeed, too. The last visit I paid to her was about a year later, in June 1985, with my clerk, John Tuhaika, on our way to Tarawa, Kiribati for the annual regional Parliamentary Speakers and Clerks Conference. I learned some years after my last visit that old Sera passed away peacefully from old age. She was a mother who I had in the innermost part of my heart. Both my mothers have passed away. Now I have one woman whom I largely depend on for so many things, including the role of the mother — she is my wife, Olive.

MY DAUGHTER'S MARRIAGE

Olive has loved and helped me and all our family. Because she is the mother she can see into the hearts of her children, even when sometimes I could not. One day I overheard my first daughter Lois talking to her mother. Lois told her she wanted to get married. I was very angry at this sudden news. My anger boiled up, but I managed after a while to control my temper. When I came back to my senses, I deeply regretted the incident. Lois had just finished fifth form at King George VI and was then

taking a two-year stenography course at the Honiara Technical Institute. She subsequently obtained her International Steno Certificate there. The man she wanted to marry worked in the administration at Buala on Isabel Island, but I was still not pleased with the idea until Olive made me see reason.

I agreed and said, 'Yes, OK, I now want THE man to come and let's talk about things with both of them.' So, one day Lois brought Noel Mamau with her. We had a down-to-earth conversation. I questioned them in a very parental manner. They each spoke of the same desire, that they wanted to get married. I said, 'OK, we have to set a date.' We set the date and then started to proceed with all the necessary arrangements. That was after I was re-elected as Speaker of our National Parliament for a full term up to 1984. I had quite a bit of money then. I think Olive and I invited more than 1000 people to the wedding reception. Most Solomon Islanders who came remarked that it was the largest party they had attended. There was a Chinese wedding reception some 16 years ago with 5000 guests. It was put on by Mr and Mrs Kwan How Yuan for the marriage of their son. This took place in the former Joy Biscuits manufacturing compound in the Kukum area. But for a Solomon Islander, many agreed that the occasion of Lois's wedding was the largest ever. Everyone helped, too — my side of the tribe's people living in Honiara, and Olive's side. Traditionally, people are obliged to give help, because when they as parents prepare for a child's marriage they, too, will be assisted in preparations for it by others. This is the strength of the family.

PACIFIC PARLIAMENTS

The Commonwealth is a kind of family, too, and all can play a part. It has set up an organisation known as the Commonwealth Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference to exchange ideas and discuss problems. This parent body meets every two years. The venues varied, but were in the bigger

countries, depending upon the availability of cities and facilities. This much larger conference was not hosted in the Islands. The Pacific region's parliamentary presiding officers, presidents and speakers and their clerks normally meet annually and the venues are shared on an alternating basis. One year the Pacific region conference meets in a mainland country (Australia or New Zealand) and the next year in one of the Island states. This system enabled the presiding officers and clerks to visit each neighbour's Parliament and observe their functions at first hand and get to know the general public who established them. This regional conference has been found to be very useful indeed.

Regional conferences were very exciting especially in the Pacific Islands, which also benefited from the extra money they brought into the country, mainly from the Australian states, the Australian Federal Government and New Zealand. The Asian countries also had their own meetings annually, just like ours. That's how I was invited once to Kuala Lumpur among people from Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. We were invited as observers. During my time as Speaker, however, there was no one from other Commonwealth regions who came to observe our Pacific regional ones. During my time, Solomon Islands Parliament had not accommodated a regional conference. One had been looked forward to then Cyclone Namu came in 1986 and it was called off. Western Samoa came to the rescue and hosted it.

We learned the areas of difference in our respective rules. We also recognised the common areas within our respective standing orders. We could thus view and consider individually our problem areas and ably and easily deal with them. The general exchanging of experiences and how certain rules, if suitable to Parliament, could best be adopted, we felt was very helpful indeed. We always found ourselves to have problems and would exchange experiences at length, on how one approached those problems.

My wife Olive travelled with me to one of these conferences. On one particular occasion I was invited by the Australian Federal Parliament, together with the Clerk of Parliament. My wife's return airfare was borne by my government, and the Australian Federal Government met all our expenses while in Australia. This visit was conveniently arranged so that after our Canberra visit and observing the state parliamentary functions in Victoria, we were then to attend the usual annual regional presiding officers conference. That year it was hosted by the New South Wales state in Sydney. Olive was able to explore Canberra. She visited more of its suburbs than I did, as she followed a prepared program and was accompanied by the wife of the Speaker of the Lower House. My clerk and I meanwhile were engaged in speaking with the many staff of the Federal Parliament. I was even led into the house of the Senate by the president. I sat in and observed it in session after the president had introduced me. We were shown the new parliament building that was still in the early process of construction. After two days in Canberra, my clerk and I were accorded tours within the Victorian Parliament while Olive managed her large program of visits where she met with women in their voluntary domestic activities. It was her first visit to Australia, and I indeed envied her, for she visited a lot more places and saw a lot more things in Canberra and Melbourne than I did. We flew to Sydney for our two-day annual conference. Members from the various states and Islands had arrived. Being colleagues, we met up with each other in the Sydney Travelodge Hotel and renewed happy acquaintances. Usually the host Parliament provided the agenda, which included its own discussion papers and those from other Parliaments that had been sent in well before the conference. We focused our discussions on each paper presented. As I've said earlier, in the discussions we shared our different experiences of parliamentary problems that arose in our various situations. Usually after the main meeting days, observation tours were arranged by the host country to various places of interest. The

spouses, as our wives were normally called, were also provided with their own program for the whole period of the meeting. Our visit to Australia was a very successful one, which for Olive particularly was a wonderful experience indeed.

THE MOTHER OF PARLIAMENTS

The visit to London in 1986 was to the usual Commonwealth Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference, which was held every two years. However, it was arranged in such a way that it coincided with the quincenarian celebration in London. It was 500 years since the daughter of King James (who was beheaded) was made to marry Prince William of Holland. He was then enthroned in London as the new King of England. Parliament first began then and it took over most of the power that had previously been held by the monarchy.

I found London very expensive and the only non-expensive place to eat was McDonald's.¹ In the Savoy Hotel, where we were accommodated, the food was very expensive. Most Solomon Islanders who have been to London said this too. They said it was very hard because, for example, in 1992, you got 30 pence for one New Zealand dollar, and so much less for a Solomon Islands dollar. At the Savoy, we had to reflect on our finances and budget our money because, for example, one plate of food at dinner cost between 40 and 50 dollars. And that was far too much really.

Before we went into our two-day plenary or main meeting, we were first all to attend the big ceremony that was opened by Her Majesty the Queen. We entered this big hall with our Speakers gowns and wigs. The hall was fully packed. Certainly, it was a special day. There were all the Members of Parliament of England, who sat in the rows immediately below us, with all the important guests. There were even two invited representatives from the Parliament of Philadelphia in the US.

It was there that the first Parliament was established in the state of New York.

Her Majesty opened this spectacular ceremony and the Speaker of the English Parliament took over most of the activities. This was because the anniversary was related to the Parliament. We, the Commonwealth presidents and speakers, sat on a raised platform. All presidents of the Senate sat on the left of Her Majesty as she faced out and we, the Speakers, sat on her right. I was sitting there and a chap from Africa touched my elbow and said, 'Look at all those British people sitting there looking at us.'

I said, 'Yeah, I just wonder what they are thinking about us?' I continued, 'I think they are happy and are saying, "Here they all are sitting up there, people we have brought out of their primitive states up to the Commonwealth".' They looked at us as if to say, 'Here are the people we have developed from right below to their best.'

It was the first time I had ever seen trumpeters all in their beautiful costumes. After the impressive ceremony we were presented individually to the Queen for a brief audience, on our way to the reception. The reception room contained most of the royal families and their wives — dukes and princes. When I met some of them, they cast their minds back to the time when they had visited Solomon Islands. I was asked, 'How are the sharks in the Solomons?' I said, 'Well they still bite if one is not careful.' We all burst out laughing. It was a terrific time. In the evening we were welcomed at a dinner hosted by the Mayor of London to celebrate this occasion. We met many big people. Then we had our two-day meeting. After the conference we toured around parts of Windsor Castle. On our return journey via New York, British Airways cordially offered us the trip flying on a Concord. We accepted their offer, which had no additional cost. It was a marvellous experience indeed! And that ended my memorable trip to London.

NEW YORK

Our Concord flight from London to New York was marvellous. As we left England it was exhilarating as the plane took off with a 'vroom'. At this stage it shook with the vibrations caused by high speed, by which time we were already right above Ireland. We then levelled off at a great height. When I gazed out of the window I could see the curve of the world below, which was not, I believe, simply my imagination. In the midst of the flight an announcement from the pilot said that we were about to go through some turbulence, but it would only be for three seconds. Well we felt it as we went through it. In a normal 747 flight, we were told, it would have taken three minutes.

From a long distance out, we began our descent and flew close to the Canadian and American coasts. We glided downwards and finally touched down on the runway. The Concord needs a long runway. Again it went 'vroom' and the brakes were applied, but it took quite some distance to slow down. We parked at its special terminal and, after leaving the plane, a Mr Robert Sisilo, who manned the Solomon Islands office in New York, met us. He had been informed by London that we would arrive in New York at 9am. He said he was a little confused, because the 747 flight from London to New York normally took six hours. The Concord cut the time down to a mere three hours. When he had questioned the arrival time, the London people said, 'Well you see, they are travelling on the Concord.' He got ready the old bomb, the car being used by our office there for a long time. He had not yet driven it, so he had to solicit the help of a Fijian driver from his embassy to collect us from the airport. The rest of that day, the two gentlemen took us around New York City. We visited the United Nations headquarters and went up to the top of its 40 floors. The next morning we left for Los Angeles.

In America and in London, people did not notice how black my skin was. In London they often asked me when

I was in a shop if I came from the West Indies. When I told them 'no', that I came from the Solomons, they would become very interested. In America I suppose they just thought we were Afro-American. There are so many blacks in San Francisco, I think we were not any different and melted into the scene.

In China and Korea they were interested. While in China the Asian Pacific Parliamentary Union (APPU) was concerned about what Japan, Taiwan or South Korea could do to improve their nations after World War II. This was why the APPU was formed. When I was a guest at their conference in 1985, held in Guam, we were talking about economies of the islands: plantations and how they might help us to develop or with development assistance — how best to channel that. We were in fact talking about prosperity.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

Under the Solomon Islands Constitution, the Speaker of the House, in the absence of the Governor-General, acts in his place. So I had been acting Governor-General from 15 August to 12 October 1978. Baddley Devesi, the first Governor-General of the independent state, was taking a holiday at that time, so I stood in for him. I was in that position when the Ambassador from Chile came to present his credentials. I also received the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia when he paid a courtesy visit to Government House. Captains of warships also paid courtesy calls during that time. As part of those duties, one held functions where people from different sectors of the community were invited to Government House. Other duties included: signing certain documents as required by government; receiving the Prime Minister for an audience once a week, to be informed what he and his Cabinet were doing. Normally Government House receives the conclusions that are the minutes of the Cabinet meetings for His Excellency's information. Government House also received

complaints from prisoners who may have been sentenced unfairly and therefore asked for reduced sentences or pardons.

His Excellency has a committee called the Prerogative of Mercy Committee. When such submissions came, the Governor-General normally passed these applications to this committee for its attention. In that sense, the committee does the work for him. The composition of the committee includes the chairman, a doctor and a person appointed by the provincial assembly from the province of the prisoner who is submitting his application. Each province must nominate its choice to His Excellency of whom it wishes to be a member of this committee. If a prisoner from the West has applied, then only a Western member goes on. The only standing members are therefore the chairman and the doctor. They advise the Government what to do, whether to reduce the sentence or not. I was the chairman for a three-year term up to 1983, during which time no precedent had been set of giving a life-imprisonment prisoner a pardon. At the end of the term of the out-going Governor-General, Sir George Lepping, in July 1992, His Excellency gave pardons to more than 10 lifetime prisoners under a new committee.

The public service commission normally channels its approval of pensions to His Excellency for final endorsement, before a retiring public servant can be paid his pension. This has now declined and is not common these days, because many public servants have joined the National Provident Fund Policy. The job in Government House was interesting, requiring a lot of patience. Even reasonably mature people have to accept being in such a role and adopt a mature mentality that is required in Government House. This job could be boring and maddening to any young person — having to sit and be confined to that role. I tasted it for six weeks; I was not actually appointed to it, I had no choice but to be there. It's like being in a big house on a lonely island where, after you've been given all the luxurious amenities which keep you warm and happy, you are then binded securely by its rules. What I am saying may be

wrong, but that's what I felt. Being the representative of the Queen, one is expected not to degrade that status. One must accept and adapt to an image that is expected of that dignified status. To walk alone around the market and the streets is not acceptable for the post. The protocol is very much alive for the Governor-General. That status is not easy, it involves self-sacrifice because if a person who is too openly social is elevated to it, he must bear the changes and undergo a totally different style of life and environment. I think he would really miss the outside world freedoms of his many social activities and his friends. At first his only happy times are when guests are invited to Government House for an official dinner or special occasion. He again feels the pleasure of meeting and talking with people.

Under the Constitution, the Governor-General has certain limited powers. He is the figure-head and ceremonial head, representing Queen Elizabeth II, as the Queen of Solomon Islands. I still maintain that Solomon Islands should remain loyal to the Queen as its head for some while, and not be in such a rush to replace her with a presidential system of government. But the Mamaloni Government produced a report, which was done by a group of people who were appointed to look into a constitutional change. That report, which I read, was talking about having a president as a figure-head and ceremonial head, similar to that in the Republic of Vanuatu. He is a figure-head and a ceremonial head, but not an executive head like that of the Kiribati Republic. However, this rests with the politicians. I do not know any good reasons for a president or what the differences would be. One thing I think is that we should still be a member of the Commonwealth, even if we become a republic, and not act as Fiji did at the time of their coup in 1987.

A PARLIAMENT OVERTHROWN

I was on my way to the Cook Islands for the usual annual Speakers and Presiding Officers Conference when the Fiji

coup happened in May 1987. I was in the plane and we were about to land in Vanuatu when I was informed of it. The pilot kindly invited me into the pilots' room and there I heard the news that had spread all over the world. It did not really surprise me. I knew that one day that kind of thing would happen in Fiji. I grew up with many Fijian boys during my school days there. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who masterminded the coup, was from the same school, Queen Victoria, which I attended. It was the only Fijian government secondary school then. Soldiering was an integral part added by the Government to the syllabus and was only for that particular Fijian school. The only other government-run secondary school that did soldiering was the boys' government school, for the Europeans and part-Europeans. So most of the army products of Fiji were derived from Queen Victoria School. For example, a former Minister of Finance in Fiji (1992), a Rotuman, Manueli, was our head boy and dux of the school. As soon as he finished at Queen Victoria, he was sent to Sandhurst in England, where he was trained. Later, there was a flow of men of that calibre who became interested in the army. Many were sent to military institutions outside Fiji.

Dr Timote Bavadra, who became Prime Minister after Ratu Mara with the backing of the Fiji-Indian party, and the cause of the coup, was born out of Queen Victoria. He was a sergeant then. I went as far as a lance corporal while I was there. In fact, Dr Bavadra was in the Solomons, too, for most of his career years. I can freely say that he incubated most of his political upheaval spirit here in the Solomons. Politics stirred him. He developed much more in the way of political ego here in the Solomons than in Fiji. This was because politics to the ordinary Fijian populace then was so much withheld by the strongly maintained Fijian chiefly system. That strong tradition was vested only in the chiefs and only performed hereditarily throughout their generation. While in the Solomons Dr Bavadra had been a strong founding member of the Civil Servant Association in Honiara. Many Fijian officials

who came here could freely and openly speak their minds, within the Solomon Island Government rules of course, with Solomon Islanders and against the colonial department bureaucrats, so all benefited from efficient running of the government machinery. Dr Bavadra, in fact, had his early practise here on how to speak and express clearly his thoughts with or against his expatriate counterparts. This was so on matters of 'rights' and 'truths' within his medical department or in the civil service association. He could talk at length. We talked about salaries, salary revisions, housing, etc. They did most of the big talking, while the rest of us gave them our utmost support. The Fijians certainly took great interest in our problems, because they had come from a system of colonial rule running here in the Pacific.

In my days, I knew Queen Victoria was to be a preparatory school for Fiji's future leaders. Colonel Rabuka, who led the group and was current Prime Minister of Fiji, was no exception to this. So up until today, its benefits have been tremendous for the nation. It has provided leadership through ministers of the Crown, permanent secretaries, doctors, lawyers, directors and managers in all forms of work in Fiji.

When I got back to the Solomons from the Cooks, our people, as I sensed it, regarded the Fijian coup simply as a kind of short trade-union matter or an inter-group conflict. But to me, who had been educated there from 10 years of age, I cared much more about observing the development of this coup, unlike people who paid short visits, were there for short courses, or knew it only in diplomatic circles. However, the more the results of the coup affected the livelihood of the Indian community there, the more seriously Solomon Islanders looked at it as a problem for their Melanesian island neighbour. They were concerned because Fiji had been a relatively prosperous country and the coup threatened to undermine this prosperity.

At the Cook Islands conference, we missed the presence of the outgoing, energetic Speaker of Parliament from

Fiji, Tom Vakatora, and the learned president of its Senate, Mr Falvey. The conference did issue a statement saying that the Fijian Speaker's and the president's role (whoever may be holding the positions) had been denied by the act of this coup. The function of Parliament had been eroded and undermined in its proper course. We were very sorry about the situation and this came out openly in that news conference direct to our regional representatives at the main Commonwealth Parliamentary Presiding Officers Committee in London.

Personally, I've highly valued attending these various types of conferences. For example, the Parliamentary Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference (the Commonwealth one and the regional one) were venues where we could share experiences of how Speakers applied the different Standing Orders to their different Houses of Parliament. These orders varied according to the size and maturity of the Houses (all including their presiding officers, clerks and administration staff). We shared the pros and cons of Speakers selected from Members of the House and Speakers who were not a Member of the House. We all valued the different applications of certain Standing Orders, but saw we could apply these with modification to items in one's own Standing Orders. These conferences continue to enhance relationships among mutual colleagues under the English democracy.

ANOTHER TRIP TO EUROPE

In 1988, I had a second trip to Europe and the last before I retired as Speaker. This was to Geneva in Switzerland and took place towards the end of the year. Our Parliament was affiliated as an observer member to the World Anti-Communist League, whose headquarters were in the US. I was invited along with my clerk to attend the conference in Geneva. Return airfares and conference expenses were all borne by the league. We arrived in Geneva very early in the

morning. The tube system is not used at Geneva airport. Instead passengers disembark on to the tarmac and walk to a nearby gatehouse. There are several of these around. After disembarking one enters a gatehouse and walks down a tunnel. After descending into the tunnel, one eventually arrives inside the terminal building proper. When you board your plane before leaving, you do so by entering the tunnels and coming back on to the tarmac through the gatehouses, where it is only a short walk to your plane. No one sees you as they look above you on the pavement.

Geneva is historical in many ways; we met a Tongan there, named Mr S. Tevi, who works with the World Council of Churches. He is married to a Fijian lady, Lorain Tevi. He took us around the city and to the church, which has a historic background. We went to the United Nations building. The top story has a restaurant, where we met some international people working there, while we sat overlooking Lake Geneva.

We spent three days there meeting and talking. The venue was three stories below ground in our hotel. This is a conference hall for many purposes, which has tight security. That morning, before the conference actually started, we had a problem. There was a demonstration by young people outside the hotel. They were protesting about how the League was against communism, when it gave aid to many non-profit, voluntary, charity and youth organisations. Yet the only assistance the conference provided was speaking against communism. The young people threw stones at the hotel and broke two big parlour windows. So everyone was told to go by another route, then by elevator to the conference hall below. The problem was soon over and the demonstrators dispersed.

On the final day, we were split into committees. I chaired one, relating to communist infiltration from the Chinese mainland, down through to the Pacific regions. In talking, I introduced myself and my job as a Speaker. In the

committee's deliberations I would allow each paper's subject to be introduced, with a limited time for participants for discussion and questions related to each paper. We did well, because all our discussion papers were dealt with promptly and within the time limit I allowed. I kept the procedure orderly. Our reporter/recorder even had enough time to run through with the committee the things we had done, which had to be presented at the final plenary session.

The liaison officers who came to occasionally observe our committee were pleased with us, because we had some time left before the session ended. One participant from Asia complimented me and said, 'I think you are the best chairman', and nearly all of my members came and congratulated me. Our committee went well because I told them beforehand most firmly, 'I am the Speaker of our Parliament and I am very strict in my rulings there. I don't allow people to stand just because they want to. I'll give these people their times.' Some there got a little displeased and complained, but I said, 'No, you had your chance, now please sit down, and allow somebody else the chance to speak. I am the chairman and whether you like it or not, I'm controlling the meeting at this time.' I said, 'I'm sorry you may go on.' I allocated our speakers' time. I said, 'You people who are speaking must try to speak to your paper. Then I will tell you when to stop.' So they tried to keep to the rules and did very well. One was an Australian who said, 'I know the chairman's job is very difficult, so I'll try my best to speak within the time allocated.' And he did; he did just a summary of the paper and it went very well. After this, I said, 'We may now continue with the time from the floor.' When all papers had been completed, I said, 'Thank you very much everyone for your enormous cooperation. Our meeting is now closed.' Everyone stood and clapped and said, 'Hooray.' Geneva was yet another memorable occasion.

THE FUTURE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

Before the instability of the overthrow of our elected government in June 2000, I had hopes that our parliamentary democracy in Solomon Islands could continue to prosper in growth and maturity if every citizen knew the value of the monarch, i.e. the queen, of this country. This is still possible. There must grow within every person of this country the recognition that the Queen of England, and of the Commonwealth is the same Queen of Solomon Islands. So what is due to Her from the British Parliament shall also be due to her from the Solomon Islands National Parliament. We must know that the British Parliament is now more than 500 years old. If the British Members of Parliament could bring that monarchical government to this time, then we here in our islands must appreciate one simple message, and that is that they (the British politicians) have held the monarchy in respect. Though they have their own party differences, they have upheld that system with great pride, honesty and loyalty to their sovereign — be it a queen or king who is reigning. They all have at the back of their minds an understanding of the democracy they are operating under. That is the most significant understanding that can make all the difference. Not understanding it means the ruin of 'daughter' democracies following the same basic pattern as Britain.

Look at some African countries which were used to the British democracy and, immediately after they took to a republican system with a presidency, they flop! Why? Because the president was often only a local man, perhaps from a much-hated a tribe, or from tribe thought to be inferior or formerly notorious. These democracies adopting a presidential ruling system, alien to the British monarchical one, can only expect to experience rebellion, ethnic tensions, revolt, then tribal or civil wars. Look at Australia. It still is finding it hard to find a way to adopt the best type of system and the best person

to have as the president. This is just a classic example of trying to adapt the English monarchical system and its democracy into one's own local system. There is no simple, comfortable mechanism for this, because a democratic system must come forth from its own people's identity, nurtured by time and experience so that it can stand apart from intruding influences. Even our troubles in 2000 can be seen as part of our coming to terms with democracy and how we use that power. It is not all smooth sailing.

America has adopted its own democracy from the same mother British democracy for centuries, and has undergone up and down experiences, as it grew with its generations, and it is now a democracy with its own entity that suits its particular place and people.

In my personal view, Solomon Islands should continue with the British-style democracy. Every future politician must observe how the English are managing their democracy so while learning more with our own growth, they still respect our head of state with loyalty and pride, and support her with dignity and honesty. Only then can we learn to work in earnest to find our own particular way of adapting our own democracy for the far distant future. That is what Australia, Canada and New Zealand are aiming to achieve and are coming closer to their goal.

Footnotes

- ¹ McDonald's is an American fast-food company with outlets in most countries. It sells mainly hamburgers and chips.



Lloyd Maelpeza meeting US President Ronald Reagan at the annual Prayer Breakfast at the Hilton Hotel, Washington, DC, in 1981.



'Arise Sir Lloyd ...' Lloyd Maelpeza being knighted as Knight Commander of the British Empire by the Queen's representative, the Governor-General, Sir Lloyd Lepping, at the Queen's Birthday celebrations at Rove, 1990.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A retrospective: Learning from the past for the future

Having worked in various parts of the public service and as Speaker, I experienced many things and I think I have learned a great deal. I also am a family man and I have grown in that role to appreciate my family and my ancestors. This is part of the way I see the world and understand my place in it. I believe that while we must think about the future and work towards it we must remember our rich past to learn from it and to look to our extended family for the foundation of our lives, our strength as individuals and as a young country.

PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY

I have always maintained that there are certain areas that we must be very vigilant about in upholding the continued betterment of this country. The very KEY to the successful running of the country is equal distribution of wealth and opportunity. This can be seen in matters of wealth and the opportunities for Solomon Islanders who hold important positions in various areas of work and walks of life. The uneven spread of these was the main reason why the Western Province wanted to break away in 1978.

At that particular time the rich resources of the province were much exploited, which greatly enriched the country. Yet the bulk of the economic-cake distribution did not go to the West — only a wee portion of it came to the apparent 'bread-earners'. Most of the earnings went to Malaita to help with the construction of one of the longest roads there. 'Why has our money gone to that?' was a question raised. Things were smoothed over regarding that. Next came the question of the distribution of people working in the Government and that was balloted some time ago.

The Western Province was the producer of many good young officers and yet the Government, influenced by certain factors, had apparently made sure that they were bypassed when it came to better jobs or positions. Some were voluntarily pushed out. The Westerners were saddened because the Government should have been grateful, as in the history of the civil service; the Westerners were the first Solomon Islands clerks to be employed. In Tulagi during the 1930s, then immediately after the war in the 1950s, the majority were also Westerners. Most who filled the various new government departmental offices in Honiara were from Munda. This was no coincidence. Those early government workers were trained and there was no government favouritism in those days. When Methodism arrived, it established a substantial turn-out of teacher-missionaries from its Ministry Institution. The training of able young men for specialised employment was part of its industrial mission policy. Many of the young men who came through these training programs became government ship captains, wireless operators, carpenters, clerks and the like.

Since the 1960s there has been a flow of people from most island groups into the various sectors of employment. In the early '70s, a silent exercise was introduced, displacing the Westerners who had started earlier into retirement. It was a period in which many young men and women gained

employment in government services. More expatriates and Solomon Islanders retired leaving vacant positions. People of the many islands, except the Westerners, however, filled many of the senior positions. The Westerners seemed to have been avoided or had washed out of the system. The unfair distribution of people in employments was another reason for the 'breakaway' movement. Only after this action did the Government resume the position of proper distribution again. Since then, Solomon Island leaders have generally upheld this code, which is now widely recognised. I think it should be maintained. It will then bind people together and, as you go around various fields of employment, you are sure of this.

In choosing people to go overseas, unless it cannot be avoided, it should be based on selecting people from the different island groups of the Solomons. Thus when they meet each other, they can meet on intimate terms. This would demonstrate that the use of this code greatly fosters Solomon Island relationships and interaction. So this should be maintained by the Government.

Another code to be fostered after the equal distribution code, is that provincial assembly members, Members of Parliament and their spouses where possible, should make exchange visits to each province, e.g., Western Province assembly members and MPs could visit all other provinces and be visited by all others in turn. For a start, the Central Government should provide the financial base. By fostering these kinds of exchanges, much could be done to make it work for the good of the country.

The churches could do it, too, going around other churches. They have indeed given a very good lead through the Solomons Islands Christian Association cooperative involvements. They've participated together in many inter-church activities for some time. Provincial assembly members should start the visits, followed by parliamentarians. Even small statutory commissions and committees could convene

their meetings in the provincial capitals. Although financial constraints would determine such a program, there are financial benefits. Through this system, the circulation of money would improve, through the injection of cash into the hotels, resorts, resthouses and bungalows used by these official visitors. I think that by making such codes or systems and maintaining them well, they will become the pillars that will help make and hold strong the running of the country.

ON POLITICIANS

Today our politics are still not that good, even before the events of June 2000. I can say our politics are still very young. I'm sorry to have to admit this and pay due respect to those present versatile, vocal and hard-working politicians. I say this because we are only a little more than 20 years old since independence. With progress we are improving remarkably. Those young men and women who have had years in overseas countries have learnt a lot about politics, many of them have joined politics. When they are more mature, our politics will mature also. I very much believe that the man who has matured can be the most trusted Member of Parliament.

Many young, half-hearted and frustrated men want to thrust forward to become Members of Parliament. They can be wrong and embarrassing. I just don't believe in that. In my inner self, even though I have been a Speaker of Parliament, in my more than 10 years there, my feeling was that I should have had more maturity in politics and before I became a member. Only then could I really loyally perform profitably for my people and for the nation. Through maturity I would have already secured most of my needs. Therefore I would not be hunting for wages from which I can build a house, a shop or something I should already possess. So when such a mature man, like the example above, gets into politics and becomes a Member of Parliament, he is serious and not aiming to buy a

motorised canoe and house, and so on. I think this has become a common drive in many politicians. They should be people who already possess those material things. Then all they have to do is sit there and think, and speak of what the country should do and have; not be there for self-esteem or be self-centred for their own sakes. If that happens there will be a change in the kind of politicians we have.

In the foregoing pages I've dwelt at some length suggesting certain qualifications best possessed by people desiring to become Members of Parliament. I stated my preference for a mature man rather than a young and inexperienced man. If the argument expands from there to a question of the participation of both, then we cannot but enter the precinct of what is commonly called the Western Democratic System. This system with its many angles has probed deep into and immensely eroded many of our customary democratic systems. It has therefore made many realise that one eats or devours the other, or that Western democratic influence is the enemy of the customary system.

In our past, the village meeting was normally composed of chiefs and what I call eldermen. Maturity played an integral part here. A young man is out of place there at meetings. He is given a very long while to test his skills and experience and to face all kinds of difficulties first. As he grows in confidence among his people, firm in deciding the right things to do and reaching maturity, he will be admitted as a member to these meetings. Discipline in our customary democratic system is vital to the life of this system. We are now realising and talking outwardly about our 'culture' and the need to hold firm to that and to our identity. But how far can that go against the invader of the 'Western democratic' kind? When election time came, young highly educated though inexperienced men, some of whom were lazy, with notorious backgrounds, were elected. They became the most useless at meetings, not necessarily as

Members of Parliament, but at all meeting venues — in clubs, associations, cooperatives, etc. They were elected to them because this new system had opened up to them many areas of 'freedom'. They even accepted working with bribery. Since bribery is the strongest invader of both these democratic systems, the result will be nothing but a mixing up or frustration of everything and can finally kill either one of these systems or both. It kills the meeting, the community and perhaps even the whole nation. With this realisation, it is best to measure Western democracy's influence against our customary system, and then we will be on safer ground. It therefore must be talked about with emphasis placed on the need to include places for mature chiefs and eldermen, as a good proposition in the Solomon Islands Parliament, in days to come.

It is no excuse for politicians to say, 'I need money from the Parliament so that I can survive.' People who are Members of Parliament can still eat their potatoes and buy cheap fish in the market. There is no poverty in Solomon Islands. I can remember it being said to me by a very high-level businessman in Taiwan, 'You know that you have gold in your country.' I thought so, too, because the Spanish discoverer of our islands had thought that we had gold. We are named from the Biblical 'King Solomon', who had obtained his riches from gold mines. That's why our islands were called the 'Isles of Solomon' or Solomon Islands. The Taiwanese man said, 'No I don't mean that, I mean that the gold in your country is the people. As they work they are your human resources, they are your gold, out of which you get many things for your country.' Indeed we already have a lot of gold on the surface of our land and that is people. If everyone is working we can develop and grow quickly. In Taiwan I found out that the only export they have is their mineral resource — their stone. They cut their marble and export it and nothing else!

I have gone on at length about certain central factors that are the strengths of our country: such things as equal

distribution of financial expenditure and human resources; interacting participatory visits for all sectors — politicians, churches and the private sector; and political competence. I have gone through the most marked weaknesses in relation to our political development. I have dwelt on some of the current performance weaknesses. Unless they can improve through genuine concern for others and our country, we may still be well behind in the running of a better and more dignified Parliament. Rich natural resources are another of our strengths. These should be exploited only using the best and most cautious methods, unlike the current 'cannot-be-helped' political reasoning of today. There must come a time when it is realised that good legislation must be enforced.

Well-established foreign relations are another strength. The current trend with our various governments is that different foreign policies are followed, depending on which government is in power. A government would do one thing, then another the opposite. We need a consistent policy. We cannot expect other countries to assist us if we do not make the effort to help them, too, particularly with the raw materials they need.

We can readily assist in the Bougainville issue and perhaps make some much better approaches. Perhaps the problem should be approached in a humanitarian way. The problem persists for many difficult and different reasons. Papua New Guinea's central government, at least until 1999, has been just playing a political game. There are two prizes — economic, in the form of Panguna's mineral wealth, and national unity, if Bougainville goes so might other provinces.

ABOUT BOUGAINVILLE

My ideas on Bougainville were formed partly by my experiences in Papua New Guinea and in the Western Solomons. I was told in 1967 by some Bougainvilleans about

Papua New Guineans, 'We don't mix, if we do, we at times end up fighting. That happened when we decided to settle down at Port Moresby. They chased us in the streets. Many of us said, "One day we will join the Solomon Islands".' That was more than 30 years ago, before independence. So I have known all along of the Bougainville problem, well before it happened. I was not surprised at all. Our connections to Bougainville these many years past are that it is very much closer to Solomon Islands than to mainland Papua New Guinea. On my first visit to the Shortland Islands, which look towards Bougainville, it gave me a shock — it was so close! It was this sense of nearness that had me say then, 'Goodness, that place should be ours.' That was the thought that sprang to mind instantly, at my first sight of it. It was not that it had been a long-existing or continuing aspiration of the Western people, or the Solomons as a whole. (Naturally, its geographical situation is only one part of the continuing problem.)

For the eastern portion of the Solomons, Bougainville obviously does not have much in common with the people there. This is because they are so many miles away from it. As far as the Western people are concerned, however, we are part of this archipelago with Bougainville. Church-wise, we are commonly associated, with priests and pastors sent to assist from the Solomons. Our Roman Catholic and Methodist (United Church) missions and missionaries are centred on Bougainville and the Western Solomon Islands.

Culturally we are the same because those Shortlands people who are now mostly local came from Bougainville. They came to Mono and Alu on the Shortlands. Their features and their skin-colour are the same as the people from Alu, Mono, the Choiseulese and those of us from the New Georgia group — we are all black or dark-skinned.

The Bougainville crisis should have been given far more 'down to earth' scrutiny by the Papua New Guinean Government and the Bougainvillean leaders. Can they, for

example, sit together and allow their discussions to be based on purely 'human feeling' and reason? I would have thought that the shifting of the Bougainvillean boundaries could be done with the tip of a pen on paper and not by real intelligent consultation from a good majority of the indigenous people of Bougainville. Bougainville Island was originally and is foremost the property of the Bougainvilleans themselves. There was no shedding of blood by them when Australia or Papua New Guinea ruled them in the early days. Far from it! If Papua New Guinea remains indifferent to the 'human feeling' reasoning which I mentioned above and sticks to the 'economic and cohesion' reasoning as its basis in all its discussions to solve this crisis, it will remain far from being solved. In my opinion, what would be born out of a 'humanistic' solution is that Papua New Guinea should grant Bougainville independence. It seems likely to come from the current negotiations on increased autonomy.

On the possibility of Bougainville joining Solomon Islands after attaining an independent status, my opinion is that it should be an independent nation and not part of our country. We can foster our commonality because of our closeness to each other. My fear is that if Bougainville ever joined Solomon Islands, in all probability there would arise internal conflicts in these islands. For if Bougainville could break itself away from Papua New Guinea, it is evident that it could easily dominate the whole of the Solomons and ruin our peace-loving island identities. Therefore it would be best for Bougainville to be left as an independent nation.

At the time of the Western 'breakaway' movement, there was wishful thinking that the joint forces of the Western District and Bougainville would form into a new nation. The Bougainvilleans, however, never saw the idea as attractive, so it never happened. John Talasasa was one of the main movers of this kind of thing, but I can say he and others thought that way because 'breakaway' was one of many possibilities for resolving the Westerners' anger at that time. The Bougainville crisis is

altogether different from the 'breakaway' movement. If this district had intended to stretch its hand out to someone to form some kind of alliance with the Western District then it could have come to some arrangement with Bougainville at the time of the uprising. The Western District acted in advance of Bougainville. Their respective problems arose at two separate times, and the Westerners' problems were solved amicably internally.

THE ECONOMY

Although our people are an economic resource themselves, Solomon Islands has never been a country where there is huge natural wealth. The economy now is growing and yet sometimes I hear on the radio these days that our economy is going down. I would say no; our economy is going up, comparing it with before. When we had only copra for export it was never up. If you ask the older people today to compare it with before, they will say that the economy was better when the colonial administration was here. That administration had only meagre resources to begin with. Its revenue was merely derived from taxes and export duties, especially on copra, trochus shells and *bêche-de-mer*, to run its administration.

It wasn't really until the late 1950s that Britain started pouring in big grants. We then started to see Honiara's change of face. While spending some grant money on export earning commodities, our economy was helped to grow, but not very strong. Our problem now is that we have not yet intelligently tapped our existing natural resources, created more revenue-earning sources, or developed them properly to their maximum potential. This is why I maintain that we have not as yet seriously tapped our many resources in the right way. At the moment many Asian companies are exploiting our trees. It should be the other way round: we should exploit our forests, not be exploited. The law should be made firm, so that there

are officials present at all logging operation sites, to police their activities.¹ The present problem exists because no one can pay them, as the economy has remained static, with not much of an upward move having been seriously explored or encouraged. It seems to be the reason that some logging companies, after saying or agreeing with the landowners that they must not disturb the *tabu* sites, they must not cut the smaller trees, but the bigger ones only, there was no one there to ensure that this was obeyed, or to police logging activities. At the moment no one has cared to improve this area and to say, 'OK, we'll do this and we'll change that rule into an Act, which all timber companies must comply with.' At the same time, there could be a kind of commission formed, or a body that would look into this matter. Probably, our forestry department should be split from the Government and become a statutory body, which would police these things. At least such a body, which would be concerned in this way, could have two or three officers there when a logging company operates to see that they obey the rules. This would be some improvement.

Here then are certain areas of impediment to our economic growth. These areas have not been properly or promptly organised and controlled. By comparison, control was maintained during the colonial administration days. We felt we did not get enough salary, but the money was properly controlled AND spending was kept within the country's means. If our poor economy was the hindrance to our salaries and public service, we were kept in the dark or not told of this, which was not good enough because we in turn became complacent in our ignorance and grumbled unnecessarily. We thought that it was reasonable that we should have been adequately directed in relation to the poor state of our economy. Our administration was so poor that we could not maintain an efficient public administration and public works, so each and every one of us has to work hard and cooperate in running this country. It hurts, to say the least, that the people

in power had suspected the profitable raw materials, which were required for the sustenance of the European industries, and even our improving services, were scarce in the Solomons. The emphasis of 'economy' was not the particular concern of the administration in those days.

Why I say this is because the colonial administration, in the 1950s and even the 1960s, did not often enough try to communicate well with the people. Nor had any real mode of communication been established between the two. For example, if you explain to a group of people, 'A B C is what it is going to cost people' — or — 'You can't have this money because' — etc., this cannot be clearly explained to other people. So that information ended up with a small group of people only. Those who did receive it might have it in their minds perhaps, but they were either unable or unwilling to communicate it or pass it on to anyone else and that was the problem. Likewise, our superiors knew what they were doing, but we didn't because they never told us. These were areas that needed improvement in those days. Another thing, which was commonly noticed by the people in the 1950s and 1960s, was that the colonials thought they would remain here for a long time.

In the same context, the kind of tactic that emerged in the early 1970s was that our localisation program was relaxed. It encouraged the placing of our people in new and higher job positions. For example, I was discussed on a page of a floating and important file along with one of my friends in such terms as choices, possibilities, suitability, etc. Both of us, being administrative officers, were clearly being scrutinised as two of the probable choices to the cadre of some government secretary when left vacant by an expatriate. When I read those minutes I laughed. The minute went on, 'This chap is all right, but this man could be a problem. He's not well prepared.' On the next page, another commented saying, 'Oh but we should make use of the local people.' The other said, 'Oh yes, but we have some professional people around in the other department

whom we can employ, that would be easier.' However, someone insisted that, 'The local people must be taken, since they have had training and their form and performances have been geared towards those posts.' The other replied, 'OK, I am just saying that there are professionals who might not leave too soon, they are available, so we can make use of them.' And indeed, certain 'ready-for-retiring' expatriate officers were moved to occupy ministerial secretary and under-secretary posts. In the late 1970s, senior officers who were quite old and merely awaiting their retirement within three or four years in agriculture, lands or marine were preferred, moved into and occupied those posts. As the localisation program gained more force it frightened the older expatriate people, in that they might well be pushed out before their time came. However, some well-meaning people nonetheless discriminated against Solomon Islanders. Officers in the Prime Minister's office held on to their jobs for some time, for the sake of attaining the required age for retirement. Also from as far back as the late 1960s and into the 1970s, in relation to retirement benefit concerns, some officials started trying to avoid being pushed out. The method usually resorted to was to create certain tasks within their division which made sure that only these particular professionals could handle or were the most qualified to complete these tasks for the Government. No Solomon Islander could handle it. Therefore, when the contracts would normally have ended, the officers had to be kept on so that the task or project would continue.

AID: NOT ALL IT SEEMS

The handling of aid projects suffered similarly. A large sum of money had been poured into the country to complete some of these tasks. If one walks just six miles from Pazuju on Vella Lavella, following the provincial road to Barakoma airfield, one

will walk right into an agricultural demonstration farm. It sits on a flat piece of land that was bought by our government from the landowners. The expatriate field officer who ran it was an expert in the total running of it, from its inception and for the duration of his contract. Something went wrong and not according to plan, he did not return and another officer took his place. The way the new officer ran the farm was unlike the way the first officer had handled it. Then the project money was exhausted. Now the farm and the flash class-three house, built using a lot of the project money, became relics — white elephants in the area, a most pathetic sight to see. Had the original officer been re-engaged for another term or more to continue with the project, he would have had a good record and received further funds. The farm would then have run for a long period of time, as long as he was there. Lack of continuity can mean disaster. The result in this instance was that the first officer took with him all his tools, skills and professional know-how back to his home. The farm as it is now is left with some very expensive assets: coconut trees that have borne little good fruit, a house and other buildings in ruins and a lot of rusted farm implements. The aid donors were happy, assuming that their aid was being used properly and thinking that Solomon Islanders were benefiting fully from the farm and its usefulness. Since there was no assistance money available from inside the country or outside of it, the farm cannot be fully maintained so the once thought of 'usefulness' has declined to nothing again.

Some aid-money projects have turned out very useful indeed when their continued existence was well looked after by recurrent financial provisions from the country's purse. I was working in the budgetary unit of the Ministry of Finance in 1974. I had firsthand experience in the writing up and submitting of all aid applications. This included the actual terms required by London for requesting the moneys needed for the various project proposals in the Solomons. This was

before independence. I worked with a young Englishman and I found the job was tedious, required great patience and the great skill of clear and descriptive writing. It was he who helped me and it was in this job that I was forced into making better sentence construction. I had been a poor writer before that. In this position we had to be descriptive about each particular project: its location, who needed it and why, its benefits, etc. Some of the most useless applications were approved from London because of the clear descriptive skills of the writer. A number of them, which I've since come across, have made me sad. Even the Auditor General would at times inspect them; the whole point being that the people in England would not come such a long way to have a look at them. That would have been a very expensive exercise for them. On the other hand, we in Honiara would not dare to inform London how bad the projects had become.

Usually the politicians were the ones who raised the ideas for the projects for which money or aid assistance would be sought from our traditional aid donors. I do think that asking for aid assistance, especially money, should be stopped. To me it has become the sole yardstick for continuing good foreign relations, but not by our contributing to the betterment of other people in the Pacific region or to other aspects of international relations.

In earlier times, in the 1950s and 1960s, aid money was more meaningful to this country. In those years the state of the economy was raised and improved. The most effective of all aid money that came into the country was the farmers' subsidy scheme. It was well spent, for its benefit went to the majority, who made use of it and consequently more coconut plantings have grown to maturity. Whether or not these coconuts are cooked today, they are still an integral part of this country's economy. All Aid money I think should be directed to this area only. People should also be subsidised by the Government for the planting of trees for timber forests in the

years to come. The meaning of aid money and assistance today has been distorted from its real intention. It has turned away from its original purpose. As far as the Solomons is concerned it must at all costs be stopped or at least minimised. Aid money is purely a 'hand-out'. It can discourage people's 'earn your living' motive.

I have observed during my visits overseas that some countries began with great hardship. The Republic of China and Taiwan is a classical example. Taiwan started from scratch after she left mainland China, with most inadequate capital. Yet she has really made something of herself today. Taiwan has now developed into a strong country that has no mineral resources except its marble stone. She merely imported raw materials from outside countries and manufactured them into exportable goods, thus creating an enormous turnover for her 'well to do' economy. I paid visits to some of the industrial centres and I have seen the kind of work involved. I can only say there is no excuse for any small country, not even Solomon Islands for under-development. We can develop our economy like Taiwan.

Solomon Islands has very rich natural resources. While we have these, we should do better than some countries with fewer human and natural resources.

Today even war canoes and custom houses are being built with aid money. If people really want to revive these with real pride, through their genuine customs and effort, these should be built under the old custom of voluntary community effort. During my visits to other countries I certainly listened and learned to look at things. I always asked, 'Who did this?' or 'Who helped you to do that?' The reply, 'We did it ourselves,' sounded very nice indeed. It has become a habit which is heard now, 'Mi laikim eid from ovasi ia'.²

At times a voice could be heard saying, 'Our Member of Parliament will soon be going to Japan [or other countries] to find some assistance funds for us.' When I was in Japan in 1986 I said, 'Give money to us in Solomon Islands in the form

of a grant and finish with it, because you have severely spoilt our country,' as a result of the Japanese invasion in the war. It was not aid that I asked for, it was a form of rightly deserved compensation. 'Aid-in-kind' is another form of aid, but is a 'joint venture' — a better alternative to receiving aid. This is when two groups put in equal amounts and do the work together. Both then learn each other's skills and when one is away temporarily, the other can carry on and keep the venture going. Often when aid money runs out, no one knows how to keep the project going. Everyone receives the money from someone, but no one cares to learn any skills training, so the project flops. Even though in some joint ventures one side has only a small amount of money to invest, at least they can contribute by learning how to maintain a project. One such venture is that at Gizo by a voluntary Canadian organisation, which clearly shows the value of training its workers. When the leader leaves, the joint venture will carry on because one worker, who was trained, has taken over.

A woman in Honiara who ran a business magazine, *Bisnis Nuis*, in the early 1990s was training a journalist who could take over the job. A Canadian woman volunteer in Gizo introduced a young man as 'my counterpart'. He was learning all the procedures of what the job was in that area. When she leaves he'll have the skills to take over and run the venture. That seems to have been done in the Solomon Islands Development Trust. For instance, one SIDT man said, 'A cartoonist came in and showed us how to do it, then we found one among us who knew how to draw and away we went.' They knew what to do because they were shown how on the job. This form of aid used in a 'joint venture' manner is a more productive one.

When I was working in the Ministry of Finance, I understood that the aid we applied for had conditions attached to it. When conditions are attached this is 'tied aid' and the conditions had to be conformed to. It meant that if the tied-aid

was from Britain, all the materials must be bought and sent over from Britain. Likewise from Australia — you had to buy certain things from a certain company and it must be an Australian company. However, we normally received most of our aid from Britain and this method was advantageous to them because much of the aid money went back to them.

ON INCOME SOURCES

In the mid 1970s, I spoke out strongly against the introduction of timber companies into this country. Because of some general opposition raised, the intending companies' proposals did not get off the ground. In the early 1980s, however, I came to the stage where I felt things were always going wrong. It seemed that the country was plunged into more diverse areas of developmental activities caused by a world trend and it was bound financially to cope with them. It was then that my thinking changed. There was a need for the country to accept that her own natural resources had to be tapped. The Government should receive financial returns from this in order to run its services and to develop the country further.

Forest exploitation was one activity that I hated because, when I was in the Ministry of Natural Resources, it was on my desk where I also looked after the conservation portfolio. This was because it was not a division on its own at that time. It was in this period, 1977, that a request to the Government to send a representative to attend a UNESCO workshop on 'Techniques for the Selection of Biosphere Reserves' fell on me. I have given an account of the workshop elsewhere in the book.

Certainly there are realisations of the disadvantages of forest logging, especially the long-term effects on the forest and the land. However, there is also the important fact that we have been beggars for a long time. On the other hand, while

the Government enjoys plucking the money returns from logging, it is hopelessly neglecting its part in policing the disastrous logging activities. Nowadays the forest owners have been blamed for allowing logging operations to take place on their lands, but the central and provincial governments should be taking the first steps. They issue the appropriate licences to these logging/timber companies. They should have due concerns in seeing that the required and necessary control measures are adhered to. Today the nature of logging operations is much more disastrous than expected as far as the timber industry is concerned.

Another newly encouraged industry is the tourism industry, which was gaining a footing in this country, at least before the so-called ethnic tension and coup in 2000. It is another form of quick money earning, but, like timber/logging, it must be carefully controlled at all costs. On the other hand, I do favour almost all available resources of this country being appropriately exploited by overseas companies. Solomon Islanders, too, must be open-minded about what will benefit the country as a whole. For example, if I, as a landowner, had gold, silver or iron that could be mined on my land and could benefit the whole country, but I flatly refused to allow the Government or a company to take it, then I am not doing good for this country. In giving permission I would certainly put strong conditions and measures on the companies, so as to minimise the dangers that can affect the lives of the trees, rivers, animals, birds and people so these should not necessarily be damaged by normal company activities. What I am saying, which has worried so many people of this country too, is that we have to build up the economy, as money has been a scarce commodity. Therefore people must be open-minded and cooperate in the building up of the economy. First and foremost, however, the Government should make improved, tough legislation, which will accommodate tight control on the operation of the various industries. We also have to stop begging for aid all the time.

When various governments came to power they would blame the previous one, then when another took over it behaved the same way as its predecessor. A new government may appear to operate a new plan of action. The wording was different, but the exercises taken to carry out new plans were the same. They were a mere succession of the same things, government after government, before and after independence. For years, governments spent a lot of money on agriculture, but even today you don't see the amount or type of production that was expected. So it is time to study crops that can be produced commercially. We also need to study the fruits we can and do grow commercially. I went to Taiwan and saw guava trees. Through studies, they developed their size and improved their taste. They are selectively bred and are produced in huge numbers, thus becoming one of the commercialised fruits of Taiwan.

Now we like tourism, but how are we going to feed our tourists? There are no people as yet who can grow enough vegetables and up to now no one has cared to teach people how to do this. Here tourism has been taken as an industry that can happen overnight. I would have thought they should start by clearing new grounds for vegetable gardens so that when the resorts and hotels are built there will be the crops and vegetables to feed the visitors, instead of bringing in all those crops from outside and draining the country's money. Surely many of the tourists will want to try some of the food from this country. They may go without ice cream because it is not part of the diet of this country, but they may well want mangoes, pawpaws, bananas, fresh green coconuts, reef fish, crayfish, mud crabs and other kinds of food we have here. In Honiara now you see a lot of fresh green coconuts for sale in the shops and at the markets. I think the agriculture people got a shock to see this, because they never thought about doing it. They never thought about encouraging people to do this, yet it is seen in the shops today. People by their own initiative have included them on the menu.

When I was in Tonga I said, 'These watermelons are so huge, do you grow them in seasons?' The man answered, 'Perhaps they have a season, but here in Tonga we grow and harvest them throughout the year. We know how to breed the best simply by getting rid of the bug that is its common enemy.' This they do by harvesting especially in November and December just before the bugs hatch. Once hatched they allow the bug to eat the leaves, which kill it. Solomon Islanders do not know this biological process so we still cannot grow watermelons as commercial products. Pineapples grow well on Malaita and could be improved on in order to be commercialised, as could watermelons. Both could become a constant commodity available to the hotels and guesthouses just for the tourist industry, rather than be depended on as seasonal fruits. However, they do need to be improved to become fruits of a constant supply.

TOWN AND COUNTRY

When I first entered Parliament as its Speaker, I made inquiries as to whether Parliament meetings could also be moved nearer to the rural people and to move around the provinces. The constitution, however, does not allow it, but in the capital, it could meet in other venues. This idea was thought of by some as a good idea, but there were perhaps certain reasons behind the Constitution that would support this thought. The idea behind this was a good one. It was to let the people see the members and what they were talking about and it would make the members be more on their toes, too! This would be along the same lines as Canada, which is televising Parliament each day and perhaps now too in Australia and New Zealand sometimes. Thus the members can be seen and they don't fall asleep. In the Solomons at debating time, the ones right up the back did the snoring. And usually the ones in front were the better dressed. They sat up straight and looked intelligent. In

Canada it was said that because they were being televised, some of the members became like actors in their behaviour. In fact at a Presiding Officers and Speakers Conference in Quebec, Canada, 1972, we exchanged ideas about this.

Radio has had a great impact on our people in the rural areas. It is their main source of information about the functions of the Government and news from home and overseas. It also brought the people closer to the work of the Parliament during sittings. People have become educated on how Parliament meetings are conducted — rowdy or quiet. Radio plays a wider role in the people's political education, so that they can consider whether or not to re-elect their particular Member of Parliament. This growing awareness, through the radio, applies equally in the people's selections for church conferences, community meetings and workshops.

COUNCILS: GAINS AND LOSSES

The meetings of what were formerly local councils occurred at least twice a year, in March and about November, but their organisation varied from what the more recent area councils have had. Area councils are deemed to be similar to the former local councils, or at least they are beginning to be like that. They are answerable to the province, or could be better said to be the servants of the province and not the Central Government. The provincial members do the business for what are called wards. But the area councillors' areas of influence cover two or three wards so they have different areas to look after. A council member covers a much bigger area than a provincial member does. A provincial member does not travel as constantly as we government officers did before. Here now we have a huge difference. The people are now feeling that their government has moved too far away from them, unlike the times of the colonial administration. It could be money. These days in the provinces there are now far too

many politicians to pay — the provincial members and the area council members.

The people are now talking about this more. They are complaining that their politically appointed provincial and area council members do not often pay their supposed duty visits to them for very long periods of time. In the present set-up the provincial assembly posts an Assistant Administrative Officer at its sub-district stations to oversee all provincial affairs. At the same time, he attends to duties the area council clerk would normally perform where there was an outpost. The area clerks, as they are usually called, collect the council rates and taxes. Slowly their total taxes would be collected for the direct use of each area council. Presently, after the tax is collected, it goes into the provincial assembly's purse first. Then to assist the area councils, it takes out 20 per cent of the total tax collected and splits this between each area council to assist their very meagre budgets. Certain revenues such as levies, etc., are being collected directly by each area council. However, area councils are still at the adolescent stage of directly managing any of their council projects. The solution is obvious: strict budgetary controls and therefore careful spending, with strictly prescribed revenue-earning areas like import duties and rents. These must be reasonably assessed so that they do not impose a big burden on local civil servants who rely on a wage for their livelihood. For a total comparative perspective, I think the colonial budgetary control measures were still more significant than the control has been in recent times.

If we look at various gaps and differences, the District Commissioner's role was comparable with the role of the premier today. The District Officer's role has been taken over by the provincial secretary. Before, however, there were three or four DOs, yet we can see that presently there is only one provincial secretary. But this is not an unusual system compared with other committee systems. As the DO's duties were phased out, they slowly devolved some into the provincial secretary's

role and, in turn, some he then delegated to his assembly staff, known as Assistant Administrative Officers. Some roles have even evolved into the responsibilities of the provincial members themselves: those of taking the wishes of the people to the assembly, being right there to assist the chiefs in solving tribal or rural affairs of the people, etc. So the people's government or provincial assembly and the area council can only be much closer to those they represent if the AAOs, provincial and area council members make frequent visits and are seen often by the people. Just in the same way as we did before. I have been observing that this gesture so long expected of these two governing bodies by the people has been badly misused. When Choiseul became a new province in September 1991, it was reported on the 'Radio Happy Lagoon' that the new province was going to start its roving provincial meetings. They said it was a new idea and was the first of its kind. It cannot be true because, as I have already explained at much length here, the former Western Council had done it all before, but people don't always know even their recent history.

Since a provincial assembly can normally meet four times a year, the full assembly could go on to adopt the roving meetings, going out to the people. They could have the meetings in different places so it would give the people a good, firsthand look at what concerns the assembly has for them. Assembly members are elected for a term of four years, they are paid sitting allowances and are privileged to free accommodation and travel to assembly meetings and touring.

LAND AND POPULATION

In the future people will be inclined to think about the increasing scarcity of lands, and many good custom ways will be subject to twisting in many different ways. Doubtless there are already some such invading events, especially as the force of the population explosion increases. In the future, such

increases and therefore land scarcity may drastically influence and make way for insincere modes of ruling by future tribal chiefs. Practically speaking, these present land disputes are a strong indication of what is coming in the not too distant future. Today, if 10 children are born to a couple, they will likely survive due to advanced medical technologies and drugs which are available to keep people alive. All 10 of them will need land. Thus begins the long chain of land allocations by chiefs, who could find great problems sorting things out for their tribes. Even present tribal chiefs are having difficulties, because everyone wants to live along the coast. It provides easy access to the sea and reefs for fishing; it does likewise for the planting and transportation of coconuts, especially cooked copra; it is easier also for growing crops and getting them to market to sell the excess. These continuing developments, which are emerging in rural areas are establishing and taking firm root in the people today.

The present Roviana-area people have found government roads or company roads made inland, but now abandoned, to be advantageous for them. They have opened up new areas of land for them for their gardens and even residential plots. For example, the government road access to the Noro industrial area has seen full allocation of lands on both sides. Some has been completely occupied, some has seen further development and this continues in the various customary allocated areas by respective chiefs. This new trend of occupancy has as yet not been totally realised by the people of other islands, especially where abandoned logging roads or tracks are situated. These logging tracks, however, could well determine the location of new land development.

SOLOMONS: IN OUR HANDS

Today, or at least before the fighting in 1999–2000, the thing people complain most about is their salary. Take the doctors,

for example. In some countries doctors are the highest paid people in the government service. In the Solomons the highest paid are the administrators or administrative officers in the various ministries. The professional cadre is not well regarded by the Government and so doctors, lawyers and technical people are unhappy. I don't know if this is a colonial hangover. Most professionals have left the public service and have gone into private practice. I noticed two doctors in Gizo are in private practice. Too much emphasis is being given mainly to the administrative cadre. But now, through better knowledge, everyone is capable of his or her own specialised area of work. Presently, professionals are complaining because they spent a lot of time and money in the universities getting their degrees while the practical, on-the-job trained ones did not obtain knowledge and experience overseas, yet are on the top of the salary scale! I don't blame them complaining!

At our present stage of development, we are still in a state of mix-up or frustration. Everything has already come into our hands, yet we seem not to have really got a grip on things. After our teachers, the English people, had gone, they left us with many things to look after. We are just gripping them tightly with our fingers and hoping for the best. One day it will eventually come. Perhaps when our children have returned from their overseas universities, they can make better many things which we cannot make the best of today. It will all depend on whether they can make themselves better than we have become to date. They will certainly be more 'aware citizens' than those of my generation.

These are some of my thoughts about my country, my beliefs, my own family and my life with them. I can see that our islands until 1999 had many things I loved, but some things I would like to have seen improved. All this was in a real sense put on hold and into deeper questioning when two large sections of our nation went to war on north Guadalcanal,

a conflict that some might have anticipated, but who, like me, did not imagine it would so hurt our country. I turned from thoughts of my own life and times in a more peaceful era, to what must be done to rediscover or recreate our 'Happy Isles'.

Footnotes

- ¹ The Government of Bart Ulufa'alu introduced a sweeping new Forests Act in 1999 which addressed the major problems of the logging industry, including timber control and local involvement. One of the first acts of the Sogavare Government brought in by the coup in June 2000 was to dismantle this Act.
- ² 'I want some overseas aid.'



The retirement home of the Gina family at Olive's village of Pazaju.



Olive and her first-born son, Ian Roni, at Pazaju, 1990.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Closing thoughts

Editor's note

For some years, but more so in the late 1990s, quarrels over land, employment opportunities and customs continued to occur between Guadalcanal (Gwale) people on the north coast around Honiara and Malaitan settlers living in these areas. Many commentators believe that in the long term much of this sprang from the mismanagement and wastefulness of successive governments since about 1980. Fighting broke out in 1999 on Guadalcanal and many people were killed directly or died as a result of the unrest. Various notable people tried to mediate, but with limited success. The crux of the issue then became compensation for deaths and loss of property, especially for the Malaitans, most of whom had been driven out of Guadalcanal by the Gwale or Isatabu Freedom Fighters militia. Many felt Prime Minister Bart Ulufa'alu was too slow in resolving the complex issues of compensation. On 5 June 2000 a group of Malaitan Eagle Force militia, with Malaitan lawyer Andrew Nori, captured the then Prime Minister and took over Honiara. The Prime Minister's erstwhile supporters in Parliament melted away and, with Nori's support, M. Sogavare quickly stepped in as unelected Prime Minister. During the next few months people were very frightened, most expatriates

moved out, along with hundreds of non-Guadalcanal people, and many businesses ceased to operate. Law and order in the capital, under the so-called protection of the Malaita Eagle Force, ceased to exist. This localised civil war has been called 'ethnic tension'. Various attempts at reconciliation were tried. A measure of peace came as a result of talks facilitated by Australia in Townsville in October 2000, with a small, unarmed peace-keeping force from Australia and New Zealand assisting planned disarmament of the militias in Solomons. Even so, Honiara and the National Government have ceased to function in an effective manner. The Government continues its fall into debt, compensation payments have been unfair, many public servants and most politicians feather their own nests and the ordinary people suffer under the arbitrary lawlessness of young men still toting guns. In 2001 the militias split into factions. The few health and education services that survive are financed by NGOs or controlled allocations made by Australia and New Zealand. Outside Guadalcanal, there is less lawlessness, but the cost of imported food has skyrocketed while the country's exports have plummeted.

ETHNIC TENSION

The ethnic tension that is practically crippling Solomon Islands exists between the Guadalcanal and Malaita Provinces. The impact of this is not just on those islands and peoples because, without exception, the rest of the provinces have felt, in one way or another, the serious side effects of this terrible upset. The core reasons of this tension have been breeding for some time and were left unaddressed until they burst forth like pus from a boil, so that every citizen of this nation had to consider them, like it or not.

Every Solomon Islander has the freedom of expressing his own opinion on the core causes of this current tension, and so I have mine. I consider these are some of the major reasons for this tension:

- 1) **The uncompromising, competing political standpoints of the two most versatile leaders of the modern Solomon Islands. They created two schools of thought.**
 - a) The school of thought of former Prime Minister, the late Hon S. Mamaloni¹: he believed Solomon Islands is to be developed, but only commensurate with a good, but basic standard of living. Any major developments were not to be hurried. Mamaloni was not in favour of military force to solve social or political problems. He did not favour the immediate use of a show of military strength against any rebellious group of this nation. He negotiated culturally and across the table instead. Lack of money retarded rapid and major development around the provinces, but still Mamaloni was the champion in supporting major development in Honiara and in a few of the willing and resourceful provinces. I see this policy as having been like a boil that had begun to slowly form and one day was to burst and ooze out everywhere. Mamaloni's life ended short of a genuine route out of our development problems. His successor was Bart Ulufa'alu.²
 - b) The last Prime Minister before the coup of June 2000, the Hon Bart Ulufa'alu: his school of thought is to overturn Mamaloni's style. His idea was initiating more intensive and aggressive development around the suitable areas in each province. He is an economist (by degree) and in his time as prime minister he proved capable of reducing internal and external debt and could collect long-by passed revenues internally to the highest level this nation has seen in years through the government ministries. But his reforms were not always welcome by those who had done well out of the Mamaloni Government. For example, Ulufa'alu tightened control on the Constituency Development Fund, which had been introduced some years ago to help members deal

with demands on them by their own constituents. Instead of just being a vote-buying instrument or a sort of retirement package for the member's relations, with sitting members doling out the money to be used and not accounted for, as had happened under Mamaloni, each member had to produce what was called a profile project analysis which required all the necessary planning verified in detail. This profile proposal was then submitted to the Minister of Finance who in turn scrutinised its viability, importance, benefits, etc., to the community. The funding could then be approved for that project. The concept here is largely one of financial control, and of benefit to the community of the member who initiated the application. All members alike would have to struggle hard individually in all future general elections! Better for the nation, but not perhaps for some individuals. This is only one example of changes that some did not like. Ulufa'alu, however, was less patient in negotiating with those who opposed his policies and those who were at odds with each other. When the troubles came between the Gwales and the Malaitans, for example, he reached out to the peace-keeping force, a form of military, through the United Nations, which engaged personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu in 1999. He also stopped short on other issues. He didn't dig quite deeply enough into the cultural core of the Guadalcanal problem and so he also failed.

2) **Lack of political will of all politicians.**

In the former legislative assembly system of government before independence, the political will of Solomon Island members had been in moderate discipline. Each member of the assembly worked together towards any national goal and carried it out quickly! This is unlike today, when each politician merely goes on his own way. As a result very little had been put into action for Ulufa'alu by his government.

The main point is, if, say, all politicians of Malaita Island could really put their heads together they could ask the Government in Parliament to undertake to establish a number of central points as commercial meeting places or towns at convenient localities all around Malaita Island. What is required first, of course, is that the Malaita Members of Parliament solicit the voting support of the other islands' members, and if the matter were approved then we would see that the political will was really at work. Malaita Province could have had a number of commercial centres or towns growing all around the island based on factories and industries, through the ready availability of the labour of the people or the wealth of the province. The politicians could then give their attention to each province in turn. To what effect? Things could have been done that added to the happiness of the people! Something would have been achieved to help our people. The concept of the political will to do good for the country would be seen in such achievement. Yet what we see is the opposite, that is, the great absence of any such will since the independence of this country.

The fact, in my view, is that the Malaitan is not only very handsomely and solidly built, but is also the most industrious person in the whole of this nation. These characteristics can even be observed, in our many neighbouring countries where Malaitans are living. For wherever there is a locality that holds employment opportunities, from the lowest up to the top, he can be found there. That may not be to the pleasure of others already there, but he is there just the same, there to seek any form of employment available, he takes anything for a start. If he is a clever one, he'll soon find his way to the top!

You can certainly prove this to yourself, because there are part-Malaitans living today in Queensland in Australia, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Why are they there now? Taken by recruiters, their forefathers were indentured to those places as cheap labour to work on the white man's sugar or coconut plantations or as domestic servants. Many refused to be returned to the Solomon Islands when the law that affected their being moved from Malaita by labour recruitment or by means of illegal 'blackbirding' was repealed in the British colonies in the early 1900s. So, it is not or never was the Malaitans' fault in having to travel across to Guadalcanal. It was the nation's governments or, better still, all the politicians' fault. The Malaitan rides or roams the seas, rides the clouds searching for wherever there is employment available, for he joyfully goes for it!

When the Malaitan moved to Guadalcanal for work and more opportunities he was out of his home environment and some felt, for a time, free of his old customs of respect. He was still trying to grasp the new cultural norms on Guadalcanal, and in this period of adjustment the cultural diversities between him and the Gwale often led to bad feelings between the two groups. The way the Malaitan improved a little portion of land he had asked for from the Gwale for gardening aroused the suspicion of the Gwale because the Malaitan often encroached on to more land than what was first allowed. Very much later, the political will of the Gwales' Members of Parliament was questioned, but there was no collective reaction to the boiling bellies of the Gwale people upset by the Malaitans!

As time moved on, the Malaitan who had often married locally also felt insecure about his permanent home and growing children of a Gwale mother on Guadalcanal. He also questioned the Malaitan politicians' political will, wondering if the Bina Harbour Commercial Centre (like

Noro in the Western Province) was to be off the ground soon, so he could pack up and start to establish himself and his family there by acquiring a plot of land for a more peaceful future.

The common 'uncured pain', a problem for the Gwale and Malaitan, is none other than the half-hearted performance of one government after another. They failed to efficiently distribute services to the people. It is apparent that all Members of Parliament for a very long time hadn't put their heads together to sort this out, for the pleasure of all the citizens of this nation.

In the beginning of the year 2000, the behaviour of both political levels of provinces and central government began to shift into unpredictable dimensions. These are some simple examples:

At the end of November 2000, the annual conference for all premiers was held at Buala on Isabel. The premier of each province represented their own people's wishes, which were:

- a) Temotu, Makira-Ulawa, Rennell and Bellona Provinces requested the Central Government allow them full separation from the present unitary Government of Solomon Islands, or total independence from the nation, Solomon Islands.
- b) The rest — Guadalcanal, Malaita, Central Islands, Santa Isabel, Western and Choiseul Provinces — strongly preferred not to break loose from the common Solomon Islands bond, but requested the Central Government allow them a change from the present unitary system to a federal system of government, which means a turn from their provincial system into state entities.
- c) In fact, the Western and Choiseul Provinces had, on 7 July 2000, an Independence Observance Day. The Western Premier, Hon Reuben Lilo, publicly announced their 'unilateral' statehood. On the same evening, this was announced also on SIBC Honiara and went into print in the *Solomon Star*.

3) 'Unity in diversity'

This term does not really fit our Melanesian cultural reality. It merely serves as a term advantageous to the Western culture.³ This popular phrase does not show consideration for the Melanesian people's culture where 'respect' for another is the essential ingredient for a peaceful co-existence. In other words, the phrase inclines too much to the perspective of Western culture. This has been shown well and clear in this current ethnic tension. The concept has caused disunity and therefore is most disastrous!

Certain people boasted in the past that our Solomon Islands were a sort of showcase; that we were unique among the Pacific Islands in maintaining peace and unity. Pushing this line, this false concept, made national unity a tool for exploitation by dominant groups against passive and humble groups of this nation. This false supposition should be examined and uncovered critically. Now one can say that 'unity in diversity' is more truly likened to a 'demon in the angel's gown'. 'Unity in diversity' has proved wrong for this nation and we can well claim it as 'dangerous'. Much more serious focus must be given to our 'diversities' before we can start talking about 'national unity'.

The Western and Choiseul leaders have been more perceptive of the reality, looking to the future, and are certain that their own states' Constitutional Acts, unlike the present national constitution, will be indigenised in terms of culture, customary practices and traditions, and will be moderated by Christian principles.

4) Changing of attitudes

This has been a long-existing indigenous difficulty, prevailing in all pockets of rural communities in the whole of Solomon Islands. This involves a range of things in such areas as:

- a) Intermarriage of two people within the country from different islands and now from outside the country: many parents refuse to accept this.

- b) People think it is embarrassing or humiliating to take up humble forms of employment — such as street cleaning, cleaning up of drains and public roadsides, grass cutting, etc.
- c) Some people think that sitting on market tables and selling vegetables, crops and fish, etc., is also embarrassing or below them.
- d) Landowners refusing to give up their piece of land for public use, such as for clinics, schools, buildings for community centres, allocating areas for shops, market houses, airfields, roads and wharves. Few will sell or lease land for a rural township or a commercial business.
- e) Church leaders refusing to allow the smaller church communities to conduct church services in their adherents' village church buildings.

So the list goes on. Some of these things may seem small, but they are often the cause of conflict and lack of progress. So they, too, will need some hard thinking and discussion before the rural leaders will let go their grip on them. However, some strong outside forces have managed to intrude on them. Number d) on this list, the landowners' hold, is still the most powerful barrier. Large numbers still fold their hands, as we say. They will not allow outside developers to walk into their forest, into areas of mineral potential, seas, reefs and islands for the beautiful sandy beaches. Some would not be happy with attempts to break through this. It would be like hitting thick brick walls to try to persuade them.

On Malaita, this attitude of refusing access to many good things long has been a great impediment to any major development. People and landowners are still very suspicious of many major projects which governments past and present, through the Members of Parliament, were desirous to get off the ground, but proved unsuccessful. In some provinces, negotiations have brought about beneficial developments in certain areas at the present time. This is

where a 'change of attitude' for a break through could be achieved in other areas — by the example of these successful developments.

We can sympathise about how the changing of attitudes exercise has become backlogged in Malaita, Temotu, Makira-Ulawa and Rennell (Rennell and Bellona) Provinces and even some parts of the in Central Islands Province, an attitude which the Central Government could not easily overcome. I think the Central Government tried to get development in these places and the people were uncooperative. Their faults are bouncing back at them. But the most hardcore island regarding this unwilling attitude is Choiseul Province. Reflect on her successfully acquired separation from the Western Province in September 1991. In spite of this, for a start she hardly moved away from Gizo, the capital of the Western Province, in order to create and establish her own headquarters, on a solid foundation, other than to develop the small, sandy Taro Island, at Choiseul Bay. Unbelievable! Until recently, the chiefs, the landowners of the only part of Choiseul that could accommodate the provincial headquarters were impervious to the idea of allowing the land to be used for a real centre. Lately, however, things have looked brighter for moving the headquarters down to the mainland, adjacent to Taro Island.

Today still, people on Choiseul will not easily open up land for development. The most prosperous businessmen in Gizo town are the Choiseulese. Yet they are still far from thinking to move back to Choiseul because where would they go? There is nowhere on Choiseul where they are prepared to go. They are a bonus to the Western Province for their business licences and their shops helping the cash circulation within the province, however, this could be helping their own province if they were based there.

Maybe because the Western people and perhaps the Guadalcanal people, too, had the burden, but also the

opportunity of being in the main battle grounds where part of World War II was staged, there was the earlier 'changing of attitudes' by their people and landowners. It was not so much a problem for their governments to be able to push development activities in these regions. What played a greater part, perhaps, were the people's experiences of seeing on their home ground the war-time working utilities, and all the very new things that arrived with the troops e.g., ships, aeroplanes, new types of foods in tins, deep-frozen fruits and vegetables and white and black personnel with their United States English language freely spoken to the indigenous people for the duration of their stay. All this greatly influenced the brain-storming processes of the minds of the people and their chiefs, the landowners. Perhaps, too, it was the earlier establishment of coconut plantations on land acquired by the white men. The bulk of were around in the Western, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Isabel and Central Provinces, while very few were in Malaita, Makira-Ulawa and Renbell Provinces.

I could be wrong here and some hard-thinking Solomon Islanders might have further thoughts on this. This is what I believe were the long-term origins of the angry, throbbing bellies of the Gwale and Mala and of their one common boil that burst and oozed its septic pus in the current ethnic tension.

It goes back to basic attitudes deep in our Melanesian culture to ideas about land, identity and respect for diversity, as well as our more recent history and experiences since contact with the white man. It goes back in recent times to the unwillingness of our politicians to work honestly for the greater good and happiness of all in the country. It goes back, too, to the initiative of industrious Malaitans when out of their own province, but also to their reluctance, along with certain other provinces, to give up land for development in their own place. In these past few years, too,

there was also a division between the Mamaloni and the Ulufa'alu schools of thought. Mamaloni tended to focus development projects in and around Honiara; he was in no hurry, and many people liked his style of politics. This suited some Gwale and certain businessmen in Honiara, but it also drew the Malaitans across for work and they resented the lack of opportunities on their home island. Ulufa'alu wanted to extend development projects to the provinces, he managed the budget better than most others and had many reforms under way, but in doing this he made enemies and he did not really pay enough attention to the cultural sensitivities of the contending parties on Guadalcanal. He was in a hurry for change, but was not allowed the time to do all he planned.

THE ROOTS RUN DEEP

The problems that emerged in the ethnic tension have deep roots, often far deeper than some can imagine. And some of them lie with our contact with outsiders. I do not blame the colonial regime for all today's ills. Some are inherent in our cultures and what I would call localised patriotism — love of our own place or island. It would mean over-simplifying things if we blamed colonialism for such things. Many are of our own creation, but we need to examine those negative features that colonialism in all its guises has left us with and try to rid ourselves of what is not going to enhance the lives and happiness of our people.

The colonial influences provided us with only the facilitating stage in growing as a country. This political model left to us by Britain may not have been the very best for us. There have been many alternative models already tried by many African and Asian countries and we hardly know of them. The fusion of Marx and Mao in China opens as an

attractive alternative transformation of the Chinese society. We should explore a socialist-model system. We seemed to have been existing along these lines in the dim past. Our path towards a better reshaping of our destiny is still a challenge. We must try to explore again the frontiers of our earlier human experiences.

Certainly in our very early days we were merely regarded by outsiders as savages, but everybody was at some time, being natives of their own places. In those old days we lived in the liberty of our small, rural communities. The villages were once the centre of the good life, because there we lived the simpler and more human life in the forest and food gardens. I say this because today we are missing the balance of the warmth of a oneness with nature. We were once a community of self-sufficiency in the way of subsistence living. We achieved considerable degrees of independence and had the satisfaction of the results of our labours. We had a oneness with our land and the world of nature. We were satisfied with our communal land rights and collective responsibilities within the framework of kin groups for the young, sick and elderly. We had collective decision making by consensus. Once the Colonial Government came, we had the wisdom to transform our own social and political organisation (e.g., Maasina Rule and the Christian Fellowship Church). Both from below and upwards we could change ourselves. The early rulers, instead of encouraging good models of culture and society, condemned such new ways as impediments to progress and development. It is therefore Solomon Islanders, we the people, and the educated elite together who should re-design the pattern of a future that should serve our interests, and not serve the interests of the white man's or anybody else's strategic political and economic ends.

So we must be suspicious of all forms of external controls. We must be mature and aware of the after-effects of colonialism. There is danger in how some independent

countries bloom quickly in the bright sun of independence. In fact, whatever we do, Solomon Islanders will not 'get rich', as some of us have believed, but we will be rich only in the way we choose to live our lives. And to live life like the white man lives, will be to make ourselves truly poor.

The dark side of colonialism is that it offered alternatives which did not suit the Solomons' way of thinking, but instead a host of disruptions and the loss of the people's faith and their culture. These were eroded away by decades of racism and paternalism from traders, missionaries, planters and administrators.

These are some of the disruptions that are the darker side of colonialism in Solomon Islands:

1. Admittance of evangelism, racism, paternalism. These led Solomon Islanders to despise and ruin their own cultural heritage, and ultimately wither their pride and identity.
2. The Solomon Islands elite, as it was created, has divorced from their culture, their people and their village life and instilled with alien ideas, values, goals and visions.
3. A new society came in which the new elite became the exploiters of their own people.
4. Colonialism produced in the country an economy of exploitation and underdevelopment characteristic of the tropical Third World, though on a small scale. In this we see some business networks spread all over the country gaining dishonest profits, then they left this country and established anew to do the same thing in other countries.
5. The strengths of traditional Solomons' society were eroded in the colonial time, and are further eroded by the present strategies of development.
6. Melanesian patterns of a real specialisation and trade have been weakened or destroyed, not developed.
7. Solomon Islands Pidgin (Pijen), the language of the people, largely has been ignored. It has a legitimate place in education and public life.

8. Maasina Rule, the Solomon Islanders' dramatic attempt to transform their own society, was torn down, not built upon by the Government.

It is now our responsibility to keep the best from our culture in front of us while we keep examining the conditions that led us to the problems we have today. I am not clear on how this is to be done, but we still must seek changes and answers among ourselves and from other newly independent countries to the negative aspects of our colonial legacy.

LOOKING BEYOND ETHNIC CONFLICT

Much of what I wrote about my views in the foregoing chapters was written before the fighting and the coup of June 2000. My perspectives and hopes for some things have altered because of these events. The effects of the ethnic tension (or civil war as some call it) have been really bad and have damaged our people and our nation. There is no doubt about that. I still do not visit Honiara for fear of a bullet around the corner, even now with seeming peace. From all this pain and sorrow maybe we can learn. I've always maintained that Solomon Islands people do have our own kind of democracy. In the past, that understanding was troubling in a way because I felt we never quite attained it in our independence. I also thought we would evolve our own system of democracy gradually and that we had a lot of time in which to do this.

Basically I think we must consider what is fundamental to all our societies in Solomons and incorporate that into our respective state governments and any constitutions developed for them. Our national constitution gave us passage to independence. Now we need to rethink the basis of our political life. We have to keep in mind that our people are more than just citizens — they are the indigenous

inhabitants of this land, they live in families and relate to each other through their families and the connection these families have with each other. We must have the same humane and human basis for any new political order. This must be uppermost in our planning for states and finally how these states will relate to our national government.

I have reached the end of this book. And my story does not come to a neat or a happy conclusion, but is left open and unfinished. In one way it saddens me that now, after more than 24 years of independence, my country is enduring trials as great as or worse than when Japan invaded, and that is the war among ourselves. The democracy that we had and of which I was proud to be a part was and is still under threat. For it to survive, the gradual evolution I had envisaged for it (see chapter 10) will have to be done with much greater speed so we can find a democratic path that is founded more on our own finest Melanesian values and less on systems that grew out of different physical and cultural environments.

A word of general encouragement to all Solomon Islanders who have left their country for reasons of further education: please come back and take your part in the development of this our apparently shattered nation. Your various expertise will bear fruit here. This is the place, these still-lovely islands that bred you and now it is time to look after your mother country. Perhaps the current bad management of our Solomon Islands government has discouraged you from returning to our beloved country. But please, you should start to think of coming back home to your families who miss you. We do have resources and they can sustain us if they are used wisely and not for the benefit of the few. Any government may fall due to changes, but there will always be work for you. Only we can build the country; it is not fair to leave this as the responsibility of others from the outside, nor is it fair to expect village folk to have the capacity to do the specialised work that your education has trained you for. It will be hard work, but it

will be our work for ourselves and for our children. This will be our true independence — to build our Solomon Islands anew.

My journey is not over yet, like all life journeys, this one has brought me home, back to my beginnings in my thinking. I have ranged over much of the Pacific and over the world, seen and learned many things from outsiders. I have had a small part to play in our emerging government and politics, but I see now that it is to the families of the Solomons that we must look for a model of our political life. And it is my family, all the dead and the living, spread over several islands and even in foreign lands, who have called me now to reassess how we as a people should live. They have every right to do so, as they were the ones who gave me life and taught me what is important to the good life. I believe it is this learning, this way of knowing, this wisdom, that must form the basis of our future in the modern world. It is my strength and, along with Almighty God's help, it will always be the wind in the sails of my small canoe.

Footnotes

- ¹ Solomon Mamaloni from Makira was Prime Minister for three periods, 1981–84, 1989–90 and 1994–97.
- ² Ulufa'alu, a long-serving politician, was a Member of Parliament in the first independent government. He is from Malaita.
- ³ Readers need be aware that often the term 'the West' is used in Solomon Islands to mean the western islands, usually Western Province. This term can also mean the Western world, that is Europe and America, as it does here, but can also include countries that have adopted technology that originated largely in Europe–America and capitalist values, such as Japan.

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An Australian who has lived in New Zealand since 1980, Judith A. Bennett is Associate Professor of History at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, where she teaches courses on Pacific Island history and environmental history. She first went to Solomon Islands in 1970 as a Masters student attached to the University of Hawai'i and worked on the Tasi Mauri, the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, under the direction of Professors Murray Chapman and Peter Pirie, talking with village people to learn why they moved their villages.

She returned to Solomons in 1977 and spent months talking with old people on several islands about their experiences of the trading and plantation days before World War II. A consequence of this and extensive archival research was the award-winning book, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, Solomon Islands, c. 1800–1978* (Honolulu, 1987). In the late 1980s, working closely with Solomon Islands teachers, she wrote two history texts for high schools. Judy then thought her

Solomons work complete but the problems arising from commercial logging drew her back once again, when in 1992 she was the inaugural Senior Visiting Fellow at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. Though her research was focussed on forest history, she took time to make contact with Lloyd Maepeza Gina to see how she could help with the writing of his autobiography. Assisted by Khyla Russell, the initial work began on Vella Lavella. In 2000 her book, *Pacific Forest: A History of Resource Control and Contest in Solomon Islands, c. 1800–1997* (Cambridge and Leiden), was published. Now that editing *Journeys in a Small Canoe* is complete, she devotes her research time to writing a book to be titled *South Pacific Environment: Natives and Invaders in World War Two* and, in this, Solomon Islands and their people will also feature.

At home, Judy grows organic vegetables and roses and enjoys walking on the beach.

KHYLA RUSSELL

Khyla Russell was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, the second of nine children. From her father, Khyla is a descendant of Kai Tahu, Kati Mamoe and Waitaha people as well as English sealers and whalers. Her maternal grandmother was Polish and her grandfather Irish. Khyla has worked for most of her life in education, which is one of her passions. This includes working towards more equitable educational outcomes for all Māori children, regardless of their *iwi* (tribal) affiliations.

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Outside of work, Khyla enjoys gardening, gathering seafood and working towards self-sufficiency. She has a son, daughter and granddaughter.