

## POSTCARD FROM VANUATU

Greetings again from the South Pacific island Republic of Vanuatu. I have been living in Port Vila, the capital, for almost two months and continue to work at the State Law Office (formerly the Attorney General's Chambers).

There have been a number of important events and initiations since my last instalment in *Balance*, in particular, witnessing a mass firewalk to raise money for the people of South Pentecost and drinking freshly ground Pentecost kava at a family kava bar (nakamal).



Carolann Ngui and Britt Lardelli, Vanuatu

The fire walk was held on 15 August 2000 and people descended on the site near the Le Lagon resort and Erakor Lagoon to witness almost thirty men from the island of Pentecost walk across huge stones heated by a huge fire lit almost 13 hours beforehand. The event was organised and the firewalkers led by a well known Tahitian Prince. In 1999 approximately twenty people died as a tsunami hit a village in South Pentecost and the funds raised from the firewalk went towards rebuilding the village and assisting affected families. After several hours the crowd was invited to walk across the stones. There was a succession of people that participated with only several cases of scorched feet among them.

Only last week I attended the family nakamal of a colleague at the State Law Office. The nakamal is run by Bessie's father and Bessie's family are from the islands of Pentecost and Maewo, two

islands in the North of Vanuatu which are only separated by six kilometres of ocean. Upon arrival we were confronted with a choice of having freshly hand-ground kava, straight from the plant, or kava ground in a meat grinder. Choosing the former was a wise choice.

The physical effect of consuming only half a coconut shell of freshly ground kava lasted for two hours. In that time there was a constant ringing sound in my ears and the open sky (we were sitting outside) seemed bigger and brighter than usual. In any event, one is able to remain lucid and engage in important conversation (in Bislama) at the same time as drinking kava which makes it a sociable activity. Like anything, in excess, it is not good for you.

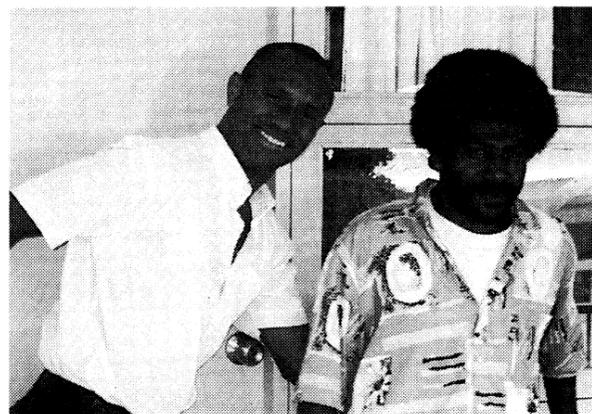
Perhaps the greatest and simplest of social activity in Port Vila is swimming and snorkelling. There are a number of options depending on the tide and whether you wish to be around tourists or on your own. Almost every weekend is spent snorkelling at reefs around Port Vila, some near villages and others at large and stylish resorts. The volunteer allowance does not permit indulgence in five star resort fare but one can always use the facilities (namely the local reef and fish population) for hours on end.

The most rewarding aspect of being in Vanuatu is learning Bislama, the local pidgin. Whilst it has many English words it has its own simplicity and in-built humour. For

example the word blong can mean a number of things; of, from, to. A phrase such as pipel blong Vanuatu means the People of Vanuatu in English. Even more interesting is the Bislama equivalent of bathroom; "haos blong swim". As time goes by, one's vocabulary increases and importantly one learns those words which can describe and offend others (swear words). One such insulting description I have learnt is "cranky bullock".

In an effort to make everyone exceedingly jealous I must inform you of everyday lunchtime activities. The most exciting lunchtime pastime is swimming across the Erakor lagoon. One can swim at a leisurely pace and enjoy the beautiful cool waters of the South Pacific. On the other side one can observe the beauty of different species of starfish and then commence the journey back again at the same leisurely pace. Ha Ha!!!! Lukim Yu!

*Britt Lardelli is in Vanuatu with the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Scheme. The Scheme was an initiative of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and is administered by AusAid, the international aid arm of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.*



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