

First Wave

A Bahá'í Pioneer Story



Leila Deighton

FIRST WAVE

A Bahá'í Pioneer Story

by

Leila Deighton

2020 ©

The copyright for this work is retained by the author. All rights reserved. No part of this book shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, E-book, or otherwise, without prior permission from the copyright holder or under the conditions of fair use.

ISBN: 978-0-6481091-5-0

Dedication

Dedicated to the Bahá'í friends in Papua New Guinea, and to
Bahá'í Pioneers the world over, present, past and future.

Acknowledgements

The Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Southern Downs in Queensland supports me in every way, and has always had faith that this phantom book, of which I spoke so often, would eventually be launched.

The Rose City Writers of Warwick, Queensland: members have given constant help, advice, and encouragement about the book I have been endeavouring to launch.

Graham Hassall, who did the first edits, providing advice, information and encouragement to the recurring question, 'what comes next Graham?'

Rob Marshman, who spent hours of work enhancing photographs, arranging them on pages. His help with anything and everything pertaining to Internet technology has been invaluable. Without Rob, this booklet would not have seen the 'Ink of Light'.

Dora Deighton, my sister, who has stood by me through thick and thin. She came to visit me in strange places.

David Leech, a true friend, who kept impressing on me the "importance of this work." In the end I half-believed him. In all sincerity, I really did need someone to say wonderful things like that to me.

The wonderful Bahá'í youth pioneers who took the photographs from the originals.

Jeffrey Leach, who kept travelling to Warwick to make sure everything was all right with me and my family.

Judith Light, who inspired me by saying, more than once, at last year's Festival: "Every Bahá'í should write stories about how they found the Faith." Prior to this, I was close to leaving out Part 1 of this story. But looking back more closely at my life after Judith's plea, I realised that every person, every incident, described in Part 1 of 'First Wave', led me to recognise the Bahá'í Faith. I have never regretted a second of it all.

Deborah Wheeler, who has always been there with advice on all things to do with writing and publishing. She has been my calming influence when I have been at my wit's end.

Lastly, **Dr Christina Houen of Perfect Words Editing**, who has tidied and edited this revised edition.

Allah-u-Abha!

Preface

“First Wave” is a love story. It depicts a love story between a young man and woman, and how they fell in love with a new country and its people, as well as the new religion they had embraced. It tells how they were a part of a team that helped establish the Bahá’í Faith in Papua New Guinea.

All the stories in this work are true. It is only the details that are suspect! This is because there is a regrettable lack of dates, names, times and places. One never jots down a date, or a small note, or scribbles anything useful on the back of a photo. One never seems to have time to write a diary, because it doesn’t seem necessary at the time.

It seems to me that nobody ever ends up as they planned. Growing up, I only dreamed of becoming an actor – all I wanted to do was attend NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art), when I heard about it. I never, never dreamed of leaving Australia to teach a religion, write a religiously based book, or, heaven forbid – be prepared to die for that religion if necessary. That last bit might sound a bit like ‘over kill,’ I realise, but thousands of Bahá’ís the world over are doing just that, today, as I write, or being persecuted in other ways. We are so lucky to be Australian in the current world.

Ten years ago, in 2009, I decided I wanted to write. Not only did I want to write, I wanted to write a book. In 2014-15, (some five years after making that decision). I joined Rose City Writers in Warwick, and without that group, I may never have finished anything. It is Invaluable for any first-timer to join a writers' club.

Now, in real-time, I find I have given birth to only the slimmest of volumes.

Writing is solitary, lonely, difficult and slow, but on days that one feels inspired, it gives the most wonderful feeling of joy and fulfillment.

First Wave is a story contrasting my life before becoming a Bahá'í with my life following that momentous decision.

Contents

1	A Whistle, a Wail, and a Baby	1
	RIVERVIEW.....	1
	GLENARA.....	6
	UNCLE GORDON –	
	THE WORLD’S GREATEST SWEARER.....	7
	THE BEGINNINGS OF SOMETHING SPIRITUAL.....	9
	MY BEAUTIFUL MOTHER.....	11
	DAD, MUM, AND COMMUNICATION.....	17
	THE CASE OF THE FLYING TELEPHONE	19
	BELOVED MENTOR	20
	QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS.....	22
	THE FEMALE RAKE.....	24
	FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS	27
2	Fulfillment.....	29
	DARWIN – MAGICAL CITY	29
	MELBOURNE, VIC. VIA YERRINBOOL, NSW, MURRAY’S BRIDGE, SA, AND AN	
	IMPORTANT TRIP TO ADELAIDE	35
	MELBOURNE – AMAZING HAPPENINGS	40
	EXTRAORDINARY	42
	BEYOND HAPPINESS.....	45
	ENDI BASIMBEK.....	49
	AMINIO ORAM BALE (BARLEY)	50
	EARLY DAYS IN DARWIN N.T. AND RABAU N.G.....	55
	KEREMA – FIRST TRANSFER OUT OF RABAU.....	56
	STORIES OF BECOMING “TROPP0”	56
	MANGAIA – OUR “DESTINY MAN”	61
	FIRST VISIT TO A “WHITE HOME”	65
	TRIP TO THE KOMBE ISLANDS.....	66
	THE MARVELLOUS MEN AND WOMEN	
	OF MANUS.....	73
	THE ELECTION.....	84
	BOUGAINVILLE – A TROUBLED PLACE	85
	THE CONCERN OF THE “HOLE”	88
	NEW GUINEA ON A PLATE	92
	THE ROAD TO PANGUNA	93
	GOUGH.....	95

	TEACHING IN BOUGAINVILLE - DIFFICULTIES AND TESTS	96
	GOROKA – PLACE OF JOY AND LAUGHTER	97
	HAND OF THE CAUSE, ENOCH OLINGA	100
	BACK AND FORTH.....	102
	HOME AGAIN IN PORT MORESBY	104
	PIONEERING – AT ITS MOST JOYOUS	106
	OF JAM AND TINNED FISH	108
	ANOTHER KIND OF ELECTION.....	109
	VISIT TO COUNCILLOR SISTER VI IN LAE, AND TO ENDI’S VILLAGE, IN AN OLD RICKETY BUS.....	111
	A TOUR OF CEMETRY AND CAVES.....	115
3	Thinking Back.....	118
	MACKAY, QUEENSLAND	118
	MELBOURNE REVISITED	120
4	Independence.....	126
	BIG DECISIONS AND BIG CHANGES.....	126
	KIKORI	130
	DECISIONS, DECISIONS	132
	MELBOURNE – CITY OF RECURRING DRAMA.....	133
5	Another Day.....	137
	BRISBANE	137
	MORNINGTON ISLAND, GULF OF CARPENTARIA – A HEARTBREAKING PLACE INDEED	138
6	Haifa and the Glorious World Centre.....	146
	A DREAM COME TRUE.....	146
	THE HAIFA FAMILY	148
7	The Bahá’í Permanent Institute, Lae.....	154
	ESTABLISHMENT IN THE DARK.....	154
	STORIES AT THE INSTITUTE	158
	THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST	160
	AN INSTITUTE QUESTION	164
	FAREWELL.....	167
	LIFE’S SURPRISES.....	168
8	The Local Man.....	177
	GEOFF	177
	LET THE PARADISE BEGIN	180

.....
*Love is the source of all the bestowals of God. Until
love takes possession of the heart, no other divine
bounty can be revealed in it.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

A Whistle, a Wail and a Baby

A Whistle, a Wail, and a Baby

RIVERVIEW

Late on that October night in 1930, a train came roaring into a Brisbane station and gave two piercing screams of its whistle, at which time I popped into the world. Whether my birth was a natural time-driven event, or the result of the unexpected scream of the whistle remains a debatable point. Two weeks later, my mother and I were back in our old Queenslander home, "Riverview," in south-east Queensland. Although the building is no longer standing, I still consider this my real home.

Riverview was situated just outside the town of Warwick, on a slight rise opposite the railway line. My mother and I always stood on our front veranda and waved when we heard a train coming. It was as if the driver expected us to be there, and he'd blow the whistle and wave. Consequently, this section of my story of early childhood is about youth's romantic dreams and hopes, formed at Riverview, and about trains, and where they could take one. Trains – old, dark red rattlers, puffing,

snorting, putting one off to sleep, with their gentle rocking backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

One night I was woken from my sleep by a cacophony of horribly loud clanging, grinding, screaming sounds coming from the railway line in front of the house, obviously from the train trying to stop. It started with the screaming of the steam whistle, the shrieking of steel wheels on the rails, and the crashing of trucks. Sounds ripping open the chill and calm of the Warwick night.

My Uncle Gordon, Dad's younger brother, enjoying his nightly chat with my father in our lounge, ran through my bedroom on to the enclosed veranda, out through the side gate, down the incline towards the railway line, taking the old-fashioned wooden fence in a single leap, so I heard later from Dad. He, meanwhile, had run to his mother's home, called the police on the Glenara phone, tore back to my mother, and watched proceedings from our veranda that faced the line.

I don't know the sequence of events after that, but much later, following the arrival and departure of the ambulance, I heard my father ask Uncle Gordon,

“Could they do anything?” and my Uncle's answer:

“No, the poor wretch threw himself under head first, and he's all caught up in the engine.”

Frozen with fear, I remained curled up in my mother's arms – she had rushed to comfort me, and to comfort herself I suspect, as she had pulled the eiderdown over us and held me tight. I could feel her body shaking.

We never did find out much concerning this poor man, but the newspaper reported he was *“a battler who had survived the worst of the depression, but had tumbled at the final hurdle.”*

This incident held such horror for me, an eight-year-old, I thought I'd never recover from it. Lying awake at night thinking about it, night after night, was the worst time. My imagination ran riot, and I tried to understand what happened to that man before he committed such an act. How had he felt in that split second when the wheels first touched his skin and then crushed his head? How did it feel when the engine sucked up the remainder of his body and wrapped it around the red-hot metal pipes and steel tubes of the engine?

The whole scenario constantly haunted me. I couldn't handle seeing a car accident, or any other sort of accident for that matter, in the anxious years ahead.

But I loved Riverview. My Dad would carry me on his hip to the edge of the train line and help me place pennies on the line, waiting until the expected train arrived to squash them into near plate size.

The greatest excitement of all came once a year, when a very special train came by. It was the train eagerly awaited by every child in Warwick. It was the Worth's Circus train. Carriages were made into cages, and animals could be seen moving about in the early morning light. The most important animal was, for me, the elephant, in an open carriage, back covered with leather cloth, trunk held high, and sometimes, if we were very lucky, making a loud trumpeting blast. At times there was more than one, and even some babies.

Once or twice, when a little older, and after heavy rains, I watched as my Dad stood at the side of the line and hailed down the fettlers on the trolley – usually two of them – bending up and down, non-stop, driving the trolley along, clearing the lines before the next scheduled train came by. They would stop upon seeing Dad standing there, and amidst much loud talk, laughter, and discussion about the weather, pick him up and let him off at Warwick Railway Station. At the end of the day he would pick up his car, left there overnight, and proceed to his business. The whole scenario would be repeated in reverse late in the afternoon.

But everything is subject to change, and I recall a very great change before I reached my teens. Trains were running all through the night and all through the day instead of only four times during the day and a few more at night, and they were

running just one way – to the north – not north and south as previously.

Passengers, too, had changed. These were all young men – boys in fact. And they were dressed in khaki. The train drivers blew the whistles and the boys lent out the windows and whistled and made wolf-calls at my Mum. They held up their fingers in the victory sign with big smiles on their faces.

All too soon, another change came about rapidly. The trains were coming south, not north, as they passed our home on the way to the Warwick Station. Gone were the open windows and the young boys, whistling and happy. Train windows were black now, and the red carriages were painted white. Large red crosses covered the top of every carriage. The train drivers didn't blow their whistles, and the look on my mother's face was no longer happy. She wore an expression of constant worry as she knitted sock after sock of khaki wool. I remember thinking she looked that way because she had trouble turning the heel.

At Warwick, the wounded men were carried to the large square ambulances and taken to the military hospital – the 2/12 Australian General Hospital (A.G.H), situated some three kilometres away. Now, so many years later, I can sometimes hear the rumble and rattle of a train in the distance – or was it

a dream? And I think, ‘O why do we keep having wars – have we not learnt that they are fruitless and settle nothing?’

GLENARA

Glenara was the home of Great Aunt Grace Coe, and her sister, my grandmother, my father’s mother, Ethel Deighton. Dora and I lovingly called Ethel “Gardy” – and guard us she always did. I adored Gardy. Uncle Gordon also lived there.

The Ford apparently frightened the horses tethered in the main street, Palmerin Street.

Glenara was “across the road” from Riverview. Actually it was some 200 yards away – down the hill, through Riverview’s front gate, along a short dirt road, turn right, over the ramp, (used by Great Aunt Grace in her Model-T Ford on her way to play golf) with a gate beside it for the horse and sulky (sometimes used when the sisters went off on a shopping spree to Warwick township).

My uncle, Gordon Deighton, my father’s younger brother, and my father, Noel Edward Deighton, were very close friends and business partners. Rarely an angry word passed between them,

except when Uncle Gordon, driving some old car home from work, would forget to put on the brake, and the car would slowly and gracefully roll down the incline and come to an abrupt halt through the railway fence!

UNCLE GORDON – THE WORLD’S GREATEST SWEARER

Uncle Gordon had a tiny bedroom in Riverview, but he had his meals with Gardy and Great Aunt Grace. After breakfast, he would pick Dad up at the bottom of the hill beyond our front gate in the sidecar of his old motorbike.

I remember the day they became airborne. Late one afternoon, when approaching the bumpy stoney entrance of our front gate, the bike hit a largish rock. Dad managed to protect a brown paper bag, containing six precious eggs by holding his right hand high above his head, as the brothers flew through the air and landed in a big bramble bush on the other side of the road.

Eggs were scarce in the coupon days during and after the Great Depression. The bramble bush probably also saved some

broken bones as, although it was extremely prickly, it stopped them from landing heavily on the stony ground.

Mum came running down the hill, calling out “are you all right?”. Dad muttered something, and Uncle Gordon swore for a long time, as he continued to pull prickles from his clothes, socks and skin.

Dora and I adored Uncle Gordon. When walking to Deighton Motors every afternoon to wait for the bus to take us home, we could hear Uncle Gordon swearing from two blocks away.

On our arrival, he would come out of the trench over which the cars would park to have their engines inspected, black with oil, put one black hand into his overall pocket, then bring out two bob, and hand it to Dora for our two malted milks from the small shop around the corner. Sometimes we cheated and bought ‘gumballs’ from the lolly counter – the big black and red striped ones.

THE BEGINNINGS OF SOMETHING SPIRITUAL

I remember, when I was about five, riding up and down the back veranda of Riverview, the home I loved and lived in for the first fourteen years of my life, saying to myself: 'Why am I here? Why am I here?' So intense and focused was I, that after a short time, I became giddy and fell off my tricycle.

Three years later, I became aware that most of my daily thoughts circled around Jesus, which, at eight, was somewhat spooky. I rode my new two-wheeler bike home, always avoiding individual ants and centipedes. I was full of thoughts about getting home quickly in case the end of the world happened before I got there. To my young mind, this happening could only be witnessed in my own home.

Dora, my little sister, had smaller two wheeler. On Sundays we rode to my special friend Monica's place, where we picked up Monica and her younger sister Dossy. The four of us would ride to Sunday School together. We all had special Sunday school hats. Mine was a large cream straw, with blue muslin pleats under the turned-back brim, and long blue sashes tied under my chin. Dora's was more or less the same, only smaller, and pink under the brim. White dresses and shoes and socks.

Later in her life, Monica was to earn notoriety in Warwick as

being the beautiful young woman who swam nude across a tropical pool in the film “Jeda”.

At Sunday school, our greatest joy was collecting the calling-card size cards with pictures of Jesus and Mary and donkeys, with some Holy Scripture written on them.

Our Mum and Dad were not religious. Dad used to grumble that the educated men of the Anglican congregation would hang their hats up before going inside, and they'd hang up their brains with them, then pick them up on their way out. Mum got all nervous – the Church somehow reminded her of death. Also, Dad didn't like the rector who visited us every so often. He always had dribbles of food on his waistcoat, and he relished Mum's hot patty cakes and tea cakes, washed down with three or four cups of tea. According to Dad, he also made a slurping sound when he drank. He didn't bring any particular message, only that the Church needed this or that and had no money.

MY BEAUTIFUL MOTHER

There was no doubt about it, my mother was a lady of beauty. Beautiful inside and out. My mother was nineteen when I was born. What a time in which to be born! 1930 – a time of wonder and astronomical change. I grew up watching the old way of life – dainty teacups and saucers, real serviettes, silver and damask, roses and ferns in crystal – I watched it all gradually fade away.

A young woman, referred to as “the maid” lived in at Riverview (another at Glenara) to prepare and serve meals. There was not much money around – the maid received ten to fifteen shillings a week. The Great Depression had taken care of that. But what did it matter? Breeding was the only thing that counted. Money, after all, did not make a gentleman.

When discussing marriage (my marriage), this is what my mother taught me, and this is what her mother had taught her, and no doubt her mother before that.

Girls were second-class citizens. They were never mentioned in Wills, never given their own money. They were, however, shown respect by their counterparts in many ways, such as opening the door for a lady, standing when one or more came into the room, and walking on the outside of the footpath

to shield them from dust or mud from passing horse-drawn sulkies. Rather like a watered-down version of Downtown Abbey!

For example, my Great Uncle Leonard Evans visited my grandmother and Great Aunt Grace for morning tea every Sunday. Freshly cooked biscuits, of his favourite kind, and many cups of strong tea, were rushed from the kitchen, brought to the veranda on a huge silver tray carried by “the maid.”

At the conclusion of his visit, he would hand an envelope, very quietly, (as though it were not happening) to my Great Aunt Grace. This was their weekly payment, from money left to him (the brother) by my Great Grandfather – all of it – not a penny for the two girls, my Gardy and Great Aunt Grace. It was assumed that the man of the family would be gentleman enough to look after the less fortunate female members of the family.

I wanted to scream, ‘unfortunate being female, or unfortunate because they no longer had a male to look after them?’

I wondered about these things, but did not ask the question. I was very young, and Great Uncle Leonard, tall, thin, stately, proudly striding with his silver-topped walking stick, was somewhat confronting. He would pat us two girls on the head, rather as if we were puppies.

Later, when old enough to be aware, I saw the inevitable changes that followed World War Two. Finely embroidered linen hankies gave way to boxes of tissues; dainty teacups, with matching saucers and small plates, became mugs and throw-away cups; a cobbler in Warwick went broke because there were no shoes to mend. Shoes with cardboard covered holes were thrown on the dump – the beginnings of a true ‘throw-away’ society. What's more, we didn't even mend our socks anymore!

Mum was over-protective, no doubt like many mothers of that time. She was fearful of losing Dora or me, even more so when my brother John arrived. One wonders whether this fear transmitted itself to me later in life, always remembering that there were no such things as antibiotics or any of the fantastic drugs we know today. Should one be unlucky enough to catch a cold, you were put to bed and given a basin of steaming water to balance on your knees, a towel thrown over your head, and there you coughed and spluttered until the cough ‘broke.’ Then out on the side veranda to rest on a cane lounge in the sun – out of any wind, of course – for anything up to two weeks. Thus preventing anything from settling on your chest. There was also much talk about staying out of draughts, and always putting on your slippers.

It must have been difficult for this mother of mine, going

abruptly as she did from being a teenage flapper to becoming a responsible mother. She had flown planes and dropped packets of flour on the businesses and houses of Warwick residents (all friends of course). Until one day Mum brought her plane down and swiped the branches of a small tree. She never wanted to fly again.

Before my father's return from the Middle East in WW2, our wounded troops started returning to the Australian General Hospital, which was situated a couple of miles from home. At this time, Mum started throwing garden parties for the troops in recovery.

Troops were delivered in hulking big ambulances to our garden and were there feted to an afternoon of festivities and culinary delights.

Mum must have cut hundreds of sandwiches - paper thin bread with delicious fillings. Off with the crusts, then cut into four. Miniscule, bite-sized sandwiches – those boys must have wondered what had struck them, compared to those coming from an Army kitchen! Then came the entertainment. Four dancing students and Dora and I. We didn't do too badly either, in our kilts, backed by bagpipes.

I did not get on well with my mother, although I realised after she had left that the things she taught me, that so enraged me,

enabled me to find that inner self of serenity and happiness – the mysterious, elusive ‘thing’ I had been looking for since the age of sixteen, things that I hadn’t found in the Church, even after my Confirmation into the Church of England.

I appreciate and love Mum now far more than I did during the growing-up years. She knew that I loved her for quite some time before she died. For this I am grateful, as I loved her dearly. We children never went hungry or cold, not even though money was scarce during the depression, and after, for a very long time.

It wasn’t until I was fourteen that the dearest precious little baby brother, John Douglas Deighton, came into our family’s lives. Mum, Dad and I walked around on a cloud of happiness and excitement. We still lived at Riverview, and I would nurse him and take him for walks in my arms, or in his pushcart. Unfortunately, this relationship only lasted until I was 18, as I left home then and joined the Navy.

In later years, John looked after me, being there when I needed him; there were many times when he pulled me out of scrapes. There was always a car waiting for me on return to Australia, accommodation, and other things if I needed them.

There are pictures of John and me, notably one at the War Memorial in Canberra. I was about twenty-one, John about

seven. I was in my naval uniform. That picture shows a mature woman looking down at the small boy she adored. Now this small boy looks after the mature woman – how things change, and so quickly. It seems such a short time ago that I looked after him, now he looks after me.



John continues to look after me and get me out of scrapes. I keep reminding myself that this was the five-year-old that sawed the leg off our mother's fine old silky oak table with his tiny toy saw. The resultant marks remain to this day.

John is now the man of our small family. He is the one who initiated and maintains the "family tree" through which I was able to get details about my great, great, great, great Grandfather, Rear-Admiral Augustus Fitzherbert Evans. Augustus was the topographer who charted the oceans of the Bermuda Islands, where a statue of him now stands in his honour.

DAD, MUM, AND COMMUNICATION

Some years after the war, our family needed to live in Warwick township, close to Dad's business, Deighton Motors. Dad owned a small house situated at 14 Palmerin Street, right around the corner from where Harvey Norman stands today, opposite what was then known as the Technical College, and is now the Warwick High School.

Deighton Motors stood opposite the High School. It consisted of two petrol pumps, a minute office, and a slightly larger workshop housing the two deep holes in which Uncle Gordon spent so much of his time fixing motors.

In what Mum called “the cottage” at 14 Palmerin Street, Dad would be the first up every morning and walk around the little house, singing out such things as,

“Leeeil. Dooorg! get up, get up! The cat's walking around the house with big pink cheeks and a smile on his face!”

Mum would be the next out of bed, and it was then she and Dad would have their first altercation of the day, after which Dad would then take off in a ‘huff’ without breakfast, in a kind of trot, down the side garden, out the front gate and around the corner to his office.

By 10 a.m., back would come Dad, again doing his little trot into the front gate, down the side garden and into the back door of the laundry. Mum would be taking out a morning-tea cake from the oven. It always smelt like no other cake I have ever smelt. Mouth-watering.

Then would start the big 'make-up' session. Dad would sidle up to Mum; Mum would pretend to brush him off; Dad would rub his bristly cheek up and down against her soft one, and his hand would go out behind her back and take a large piece of hot cake off the plate. Then he'd be off again, back to work, singing out over his shoulder,

"That cake's a sod!"

He would leave Mum in a giggling mess.

Mum and Dad argued a lot, but strangely, we were all pretty happy together. We had that important ingredient, a sense of humour, and we laughed a lot.

THE CASE OF THE FLYING TELEPHONE

I remember another one of many such arguments, but this one was of outstanding quality.

It all began when Mum told Dad she'd seen a flying saucer. Dad said she was mad. It really started with Mum's flying saucer and ended with Dad's flying telephone! Mum said a large object came down and hovered over the clothes line when she was hanging out the washing. Dad remarked something along the lines of,

“Why didn't they snap you up?”

Dad went to the office and Mum sat at the round table in the sunroom and began to draw what she said she saw. She then went into Dad's office to show him.

Red flag to a bull! Dad said something that made her return to the house very quickly. Some minutes later Dad followed her in. Dad told her she was a bloody pig-headed idiot, and Mum shouted back that she was going to ring the Warwick Daily News and have her story printed.

Dad's nose began to flatten, as it always did when he was about to blow a fuse. His face red, hair coming out of his nose because it was now flat and spread across his cheek bones, he

tore Mum's drawing out of her hand, screwed it up and threw it with great force across the floor. Mum ran to the phone and picked up the receiver to ring the newspaper. Dad, having completely lost the plot, snatched the whole phone off the wall and threw it on the floor with such ferocity that it bounced.

Mum fled out of the room in tears and Dad strode back to his office swearing all the way.

When Dad got there, his own business phone was also off the air, as the two were linked. Dad came back into the house and went and comforted Mum.

This was their way of communicating. The big altercation followed by the big make-up half an hour later.

BELOVED MENTOR

My father's mother, my Gardy, was dying. She lay in her bed at her home, just across the way.

I prayed to Jesus, a heart-breaking prayer, asking that I stop loving her, as I couldn't live without her.

Why did I not pray for her rapid recovery or her freedom from

pain? To this day, so many years later, I am as far away from the answer to that as I was then. I was 10 years old.

It seems an extraordinary prayer from one so young, that one cease to love. But it was answered swiftly. The following morning my feelings of love for Gardy were completely gone. I felt nothing.

Days later saw me no longer wanting to get home from school to visit her. I went swimming instead, never worrying that she might die during the night when I wouldn't be with her. I did not even think about her. My mother said:

“Gardy is wondering why you haven't been over to visit her. She has a little present for you.”

But I didn't go. Not until the day she died about ten days later, and when that happened, I didn't shed a single tear.

This was the lady who had shaped my early life, who, in her small sunroom off her veranda, had taught me the love of books, and who read to me for hours, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Wind in the Willows*, along with so many others. She let me turn the big churn of cream to make the butter and took me for long walks, picking up sticks for the wood fire in her bedroom.

“Can we go for a walk again tomorrow Gardy?” and she

would answer, “God willing.”

Much later in my life I found the Arabic word for “God willing” is “Inshā’llāh,” a word I now often use with Gardy's same sincerity.

One would think, after the experience of the death of Gardy, I would feel even closer to my Maker, when He had so clearly shown me that He had answered my prayer. I did not. But it made me think.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

At sixteen, I started asking serious questions. What would happen to me if I had been born in some far-distant land, say India or China, and had not been taught, even superficially, about my beloved Jesus? The answers I received were surprising and at times, hurtful.

My Dad, bless him, waving his arms in the air,

“You'll have to ask your mother.”

Mum, taken aback, said,

“You'd be a heathen.”

The Anglican Sister Margaret said:

“My dear. What makes you ask such a question? Of course, without Jesus you would be a heathen, and you'd be unhappy when you die.”

My Catholic friend said:

“You'd go to hell and burn forever!”

Everyone I asked – and there were many, including teachers at school and my friends – gave me the same answer. But by far the most impressive, and the one that kept ringing in my ears, was, “You'll go to hell and burn forever!”

Why? Why? Why? This wasn't the Jesus I'd loved all my life. To think that He would pick out only some people that would go to heaven, and leave the rest destined for hell – even if they hadn't the opportunity to hear about Him or to know Him, was not just, and was completely illogical to me; not to receive His forgiveness or compassion, His healing, His justice or His blessings, was unthinkable to me.

I was heartbroken. I believed I was a heathen.

I was furious with a hot, burning anger in the very core of my body. I decided that I hated anything to do with the Church and I didn't go there. I didn't believe in Jesus. He was a myth like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. I hated everything –

my home, my parents, my friends, my life, and especially my boring town of Warwick, where nothing ever happened. I would leave, go somewhere else as soon as I reached eighteen.

Meantime, I broke every rule in the book. I started with the Ten Commandants and worked my way through them systematically. (Not really true).

What was the point? As far as I was concerned there was no heaven, no hell, no God. If this life here was all there was, why not enjoy it?

THE FEMALE RAKE

It's strange that happenings in one's life that appear to be wrong or even horrible, sometimes bring forth amazingly positive results. For example, Mum taught me the most atrocious things, the like of which I passionately opposed.

“Leila, you must never marry below your class, money doesn't matter, only breeding matters; never marry a Catholic, never go near a person whose skin is not white, never speak, in public, to a divorced woman”; and if I fell over in the backyard prickles, as I often did, “the devil must

have pushed you.”

Although I accepted none of these things, I had nothing with which to replace them. I shouted and argued with her. I was rebellious and rude – the older I got, the more objectionable I became.

Unfortunately, I started to enjoy being a female rake. I imagined I was having a wonderful, fantastic time.

My father and mother frantically tried to handle such a wayward child. I now realise that the things I got up to then would now be considered very mundane.

I became extremely popular with my peers at school, of course. They liked everything I was – or was it because they liked to see one more bold, more incessantly gay, taking more risks, and generally making a more hideous mess of life than they were themselves?

At eighteen, had I been a man, I would have joined the Foreign Legion. Instead, I joined the Navy.

There followed four years of excitement I had never experienced in my small country town. I discovered I had a brain of sorts and topped my fellow students in Science and Morse. I enjoyed the discipline, and along with everyone else, enjoyed drinking and smoking with the sailors, male and

female, on days off.

Four years later found me discharged and heading for Darwin – reputedly an exciting outpost town – to find out more about life than could be found in Science and Morse.

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS



Admiral Augustus
Fitzherbert Evans
1842-1905



Ethel Maria Evans



Ethel Deighton
nee Evans



Noel Edward Deighton

The Evans-Deighton Family



Edna Eleanor Deighton



Leila Ruth Heard
nee Deighton



John Douglas
Deighton



Dora Ethel Clarke
nee Deighton

.....
*I want you to be happy ... to laugh,
smile and rejoice in order that others may be
made happy by you.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

Fulfillment

Fulfillment

DARWIN – MAGICAL CITY

Darwin, in 1956, was not just any town to me. It was the town where I found my passion in life, fulfilled all my longings, learned to forego and forget my hedonistic cravings and materialistic addictions, and eventually cured me of a seen and an unseen disease.

All dressed up, I went to the Darwin Show in 1959 with my best friend Noelene Williams, then from the Bagot Aboriginal Hostel. She was eighteen years old, and had to find her own way in the world.

At the show, we bought fairy floss and cups of coffee; we took the many pamphlets the missionaries were handing out; we moved outside to see the bull riding and other events, then walked back to the pavilion.

It was Saturday afternoon, and it was hot. Thinking we'd had enough, we decided to walk around that large hall just one more time, before going home. I believe it was 3.30p.m. that

Saturday afternoon when I saw it!

In the left-hand corner on the back wall, I saw something that irresistibly drew me towards it. A huge painted sign, saying: "Bahá'í Faith."

I had never heard of it. Under this sign, from ceiling to floor, was a colourful poster depicting the vivid sun in the upper left corner. The rays of the sun came slanting across the poster, and at the end of each ray was a name. I had never heard of some of them before. After all, I was a young woman from a remote country town in what was then regarded as "out west" Queensland, so how would I know about Zoroaster or Krishna, or especially those really foreign ones, the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh? Yes, I had heard about Buddha and, of course, Christ, and even Moses, but that was about all.

I stood there awestruck. I studied that poster, unaware of the loud noises going on around me. What was this poster really telling me? I became quite frightened as I studied it more deeply. It seemed to be saying exactly what I wanted to hear.

That the sun's rays were piercing the heart of the people with the strange names, and filling them with light; but that all were from one Sun, all from one God.

Nola was tugging at my arm and telling me it was time we went home. I turned to her impatiently and said:

“I have just found my new religion.”

She looked at me as though I were mad.

“I’m staying” I said, definitely, “until someone comes to this stand.”

It was not until the next day, Sunday, at around 5p.m. that someone arrived. The most handsome young man, wearing leathers.

‘Obviously a bikie,’ I thought, in surprise. I don’t know why I was surprised. Bikies and churches just didn’t seem to go together, even in those days. Then, realising he was heading straight to the Bahá’í stand, I stepped in front of him. He took a step back. Perhaps he could see how angry I was, having waited around for so long.

“Do you belong to this stand?” I almost shouted.

Thinking, perhaps, that I might be one of the many missionaries that had stands around the pavilion, and that I might be about to verbally attack him, he, too, stepped back.

“Yes, I do,” he politely replied.

"Well, I want to join this religion."

It was a statement. I didn’t shout this time, as his gentle reply had unnerved me somewhat.

"Then come over here," he said, again in a quiet and gentlemanly way.

He took my arm and guided me through the crowd; we moved towards a virtual counter beside the poster.

This was Aaron Blomeley. Such a young man, on a mission of the greatest importance. Aaron, newly arrived from Adelaide to tell people and to help them understand – the Bahá'í Faith.

Aaron had come late to the display stand because the Bahá'ís didn't wish to be seen accosting people and handing out pamphlets.

To explain the look on Aaron's face when I yelled I wanted to join the Faith, is to explain the unexplainable. Surprise, disbelief, and excitement – they were all there! One simply didn't find someone running around singing out they wanted to become a Bahá'í in 1954, not in Australia, anyway.

I had to know. Could this be the answer to what I had been asking myself for the past decade? That it did not matter where you were born, what language you spoke, what so-called class you were, whether you were well educated or illiterate, whether your skin was black or white or somewhere in between – it simply didn't matter. You were a child of God, and in whatever country you happened to be born – there was a Great Being

there, bringing a message to guide and look after you.

So, if you weren't born in Australia, and if you hadn't heard about Jesus the Christ, there was a Zoroaster, or a Buddha, or a Mohammad there for you, to love and to follow.

Bahá'u'lláh was the latest in a long line of Messengers renewing the spiritual message and bringing new Laws suitable for the time in which we live. Still in the pavilion, Aaron kept handing books to me. Big books, small books, from under the counter.

“No more, no more!” I kept saying.

“Yes,” he said, “take them home and read them, before you become a Bahá'í.” Aaron took me home on his motorbike that night. Aaron, the books, then me – hanging on for dear life!



FIRST BAHAI' GROUP IN DARWIN
L to R: Arron Bromley, Ruth Sinclair, Leila Deighton, Bill Washington,
in Darwin Circa 1962

Within a month, I was a Bahá'í, thirsting for its teachings and happier than I had ever been.

Introduced to the Faith by Aaron, schooled by the other pioneer in Darwin, Bill Washington, interviewed by the local Bahá'í group, Aaron, Bill and dear Ruth Sinclair, the only long-term Bahá'í resident of Darwin, what more could one want?

Ruth's home was always open, and the Nineteen Day feasts (Bahá'í gatherings) and meetings were held there.

Within days, I had learnt the teachings of the Faith and could recite the Seven Candles of Unity.

What an absolutely glorious time! While Bill was teaching me and answering my many questions, Aaron was telling my friend Nola about the wonder of it all. Nola became a Bahá'í sometime later, and married Aaron.

Nola and I remained Bahá'í sisters and close friends until she passed away, leaving behind a most wonderful Bahá'í family and many, many friends. Nola came from the Torres Strait Islands.

Previously, I had asked my Bahá'í mentor, Bill Washington, later appointed an Auxiliary Board Member in Hobart, Tasmania:

“Where are there no Bahá'ís in Australia?”

Bill and Aaron answered in chorus:

“Melbourne” they said.

Melbourne became my goal. I started planning to attend the Bahá'í Summer School at Yerrinbool, then proceed to Melbourne, as a home-front pioneer.

MELBOURNE, VIC. VIA YERRINBOOL, NSW, MURRAY'S BRIDGE, SA, AND AN IMPORTANT TRIP TO ADELAIDE

The plane from Darwin landed at Sydney airport on a delightful summer day. I made my way to the foyer to pick up my bag. A couple were standing there, among many others. What made them noticeable was that they were carrying a large bunch of vividly coloured flowers. They walked straight to my side and asked,

“Are you Leila?”

At my nod of assent, they handed the flowers to me.

“Welcome” they said, and put their arms around me, in such a sincere and loving way my eyes filled with tears.

This was Aubrey and Greta Lake, long-standing Bahá'ís from Sutherland, Sydney. Bill and Aaron had told me this was the couple who did so much in finding land on which to build the Bahá'í House of Worship which was to be erected in Sydney.

We drove into Yerrinbool amid laughter and much talk. On arrival, I felt we had known each other all our lives.

This feeling of family continued with everyone I met – introductions, hugs and kisses on both cheeks. Love was in the air and almost palpable.

I was shown to my cabin at last. Four poles, as big as telephone posts, once a tall tank stand, had been walled up and painted. Pine shelving had been added inside, making it a snug, small room. Folded clean sheets plus pillow sat on a small bed, inviting me to a good night's sleep.

A loud knock on the door startled me.

A tall dark shadow stood outside. A deep friendly voice said:

“So sorry to worry you. I thought this was to be my room. I’m Peter.”

“I’m Leila,” I said, shaking hands.

We laughed and talked, and realised some mistake had been made at the booking office. Then he was off. I heard later that

he had slept in a tent not far from the wood heap.

This was my first contact with the young, polite, and brilliant Peter Khan. Years later, when introducing friends who asked if we knew one another, he would answer:

“O yes. Leila and I are old friends – we first met in the linen cupboard at Yerrinbool in the early 60s!”

Over the years, of course, he went to other parts of the world, studying and teaching the Faith, on a journey that led to Haifa, Israel, when Dr Khan was elected to the Universal House of Justice, the Supreme governing body of the Bahá’í World.

It was at Yerrinbool that I also met Vincent and Stella Childs from Murray Bridge, South Australia. Stella knew I was on my way to Melbourne. She invited me to return with them and stay until I became more acclimatised to living in the south with its cold weather.

I had many such invitations, but somehow, I wanted to go with Stella and Vin, and I accepted their invitation. I kept asking myself,

“Who are these people? – People that accept you, open their arms to you, open their homes to you and never seem to stop being happy?”

In Murray Bridge, Stella looked after me like a mother. I got

myself a job at a small roadhouse for a few months, to bring in a little money. I think now I should have stayed at home and helped Stella, who ran a most comfortable bed and breakfast.

One memorable day, Vin bundled Stella and me into the car and took us to Adelaide. This trip was memorable, because we visited the Featherstone family. Perhaps Stella knew I was uneasy and needed some counselling.

Mrs Featherstone (Madge) welcomed me with tea and small cakes and asked me all about Darwin. Then her two girls, Joan and Mariette, arrived home from school. I didn't know then that Mariette would claim such a large part of my heart and life in years to come, when she and her husband Ho-San Leong were fellow pioneers in Papua New Guinea.

When recently appointed Hand of the Cause of God, Collis Featherstone, arrived, I was all settled in as part of the family. Madge and the girls withdrew, and I told Collis what was worrying me.

“I can't be a Bahá'í,” I blurted out.

“Can you tell me why?” was his mild question.

No surprise. No disappointment in me, no censure.

I explained that I couldn't live up to the teachings, and told him about my scatty past.

“Dear girl, the Bahá’í Faith is not in the least interested in what you have done in the past. Its only interest is what you will do in the future.”

Such relief. He went on –

“If everyone waited until they felt they were good enough to become Bahá’í, there would be no Bahá’í s!”

After further conversation and prayers, Madge and the girls came into the room bearing more tea and good things, and we laughed when Collis told us how he felt when receiving news from Beloved Guardian that he was to be a Hand of the Cause. Just one word – he felt ‘dumbfounded!’

I left the Featherstone household feeling both exhilarated and inspired, ready (I thought at that happy moment) to face whatever was necessary to strengthen the Cause in Melbourne. I also came away knowing exactly why our beloved Guardian had chosen dear Collis Featherstone to be the Hand of the Cause of God for Australia and the Islands.

With tears and great sadness, I left Vin and Stella’s to go by train to Melbourne, equipped with important information about who to contact should I ‘run into trouble.’

MELBOURNE – AMAZING HAPPENINGS

The train finally sped into the station, and at last there I was, in a big city on my own, and ne’er a Bahá’í to be seen!

I was lucky enough to find a room upstairs in a small townhouse close to the city and to get work that I loved as a Colour Consultant/Interior Decorator (untrained) with Hadrian Paints, which later became Walpamur Paints, then Dulux, working with beautiful wallpapers and paint colour charts.

I didn’t have to wait too long before the first Bahá’í arrival. Pam Ringwood decided she should come to Melbourne to help me.

We shared the small bedroom and tiny kitchen in my flat. After a short time, we obtained a really nice flat on the ground floor of an old Toorak home, from where we planned our activities.

Pam was working full time and was also carrying out a legal assignment for the National Spiritual Assembly. I think it was something to do with Incorporation of the National Assembly – I should really remember as I acted as her secretary and typed up the legal documents.

We were extremely busy – we told every person we could about the Faith; we advertised, we gave talks when requested

by various clubs, we held firesides every Saturday night, we prayed.

I changed my work at Hadrian Paints and went to work at 3AW Radio, where I met my future husband, Geoffrey Heard. Geoff was a journalist, and he was the first to join the Faith while Pam and I were in Melbourne.

Then Bahá'ís just seemed to come out of the woodwork. Colin Wasley arrived, then a young doctor whose name escapes me; Geoff joined the Faith, and these three rented a house in Prahran. Then, wonder of wonders, the Gabriel family arrived from Iran.

There was great excitement about this, being one of the first families to come from Iran to teach the faith.

Pam and I liked to think we helped the Gabriels settle into their new country, but I don't know that we did. Geoff kept them laughing of course, with his play on words and Australianisms. He told Manouchi and Malehei that, should they ever need to tell someone to 'keep quiet', they should say 'shut your cake-hole'. They were still laughing and repeating this to us and to each other until the day I left Melbourne.

We did carry out a small amount of baby-sitting for Mona and Bashir, the Gabriel children, who were quite small – especially

Bashir. He was a real live-wire. Once I saw Pam running after him – flat out – in a very large and dignified building, possibly a bank. Bashir streaked across the marble floor in red knitted pants complete with braces, with Pam, trying to look dignified, flapping along behind.

Maryanne McCloud (née Chance; Maryanne's father was a member of the Universal House of Justice) and her two children were the next ones to settle in.

Oh! it was a heady, exciting time! Was there ever a Bahá'í group so happy! As individuals, we were far from perfect – only endeavouring to lead a Bahá'í life can improve that, but we were young, and couldn't wait for the weekends so we could be together!

EXTRAORDINARY

At about then I had an extraordinary, life-changing experience. When at Yerrinbool and Murray Bridge, I had almost forgotten about my earlier experience when the man committed suicide by throwing himself under a train on the line in front of Riverview. However, the deep consciousness of the episode

came to the fore again in Melbourne.

After a singularly uneventful day at work, I boarded a Toorak train at Flinders Street station, as usual, and settled back to enjoy a quiet read.

I alighted at the Toorak station, and at the exit gate, turned in time to see another train coming in. To my utter horror, I saw a man fall between the platform and the incoming train wheels. I heard the horribly familiar loud clanging, grinding, screaming noise coming when a fast train suddenly puts on its brakes – sliding along the rails – that hair-raising, teeth-on-edge sound. I heard again my father shout, “Could they do anything?” and my Uncle's shouted answer:

“No, he threw himself under headfirst, and he's caught up in the engine.”

I fled from the station. I cannot describe the feeling of going through this incident – reliving my childhood experience all over again.

I cannot even remember getting to my flat, except for running – running as if life depended upon it – and dashing blindly across the wide, busy road amid a screeching of vehicle brakes and horns. Nor do I remember opening the old-fashioned gate, finding the key to unlock the door of the flat, or even reaching my room.

My first memory is throwing myself on my narrow bed, every limb in my body shaking so much that the bed rattled as though it was a living thing. Tears were rolling down my face.

For how long this continued I have absolutely no idea...

It was dark. The room was dark. It must have been well into the night when my first coherent thought came: "Why is this happening to me?"

I got out of bed. My pillow and hair were saturated with tears and the perspiration of my fevered body. I turned on the bed lamp. My legs felt like rubber. I held on to a pine chair as I tried to stand. By steadying myself with various pieces of furniture around the room, I prepared myself to take a shower then fell once more into bed, where my worn-out body and mind immediately dropped into an exhausted sleep.

The bedside clock said 4 a.m. when I again became conscious. A dim light filtered through the curtain covering the window which ran along the wall on the right-hand side of the bed. I lay perfectly still. Gradually, very gradually, I started to recall the things that had happened the afternoon before.

I compared them to my childhood experience. I remembered the sounds. I remembered the voices. I remembered the horror. And I was not frightened. I felt strong and calm. I was

strong. My body was strong! I felt I could cope with anything! After well-nigh twenty years of anxiety I was truly well again.

I went to work early that morning; I wanted to speak with someone in authority at the railway station. I was taken to the office of the Station Manager, who looked just like a Station Manager should look – glasses on the end of his nose, pen in hand. Everything seemed back to normal.

"Yes, how can I help you lady?" he asked politely.

I explained that I had seen the accident yesterday when a man had fallen under the train, and that I had come to enquire about his condition. He looked at me intently.

"Lady," he said, "there was no accident on this line yesterday, and no accident on any other line either, of which I am aware."

BEYOND HAPPINESS

At the end of 1963, Geoff, now working for Australian Associated Press Reuter, was transferred to Rabaul, New Guinea. He was the first AAP/Reuter Correspondent to be sent there. He had an extremely short time to get ready.

Geoff asked me to marry him, but there was no time to arrange a wedding, and I had made plans to holiday with my parents for Christmas. We decided that he would go to Rabaul, I would follow in January 1964, and we would marry up there. The next few weeks were hectic to say the least. My parents had not met Geoff and were disappointed about our forthcoming residence in New Guinea. Poor dears – they knew nothing about Geoff, nothing about the Bahá'í Faith, except that I had joined, and little or nothing about New Guinea. No wonder they were concerned!

I cannot believe this, the first of multiple mistakes. The thought of advising the National Spiritual Assembly that we were going, and wanted to be official pioneers from Australia, never entered our heads. Geoff had only been a member of the Faith for a matter of months, but I had been a Bahá'í for some 3 years and should have known better. I just believed in Bahá'u'lláh and that was all that mattered. The Administrative Order had not been of much interest to me, it was something someone else looked after, and there it was.

There was nobody to meet me at Rabaul airport, apart from Geoff. So the Bahá'í pioneers in Rabaul – Frank Wyss and Rodney Hancock – got quite a shock when we presented ourselves. Geoff and I were married by John Rolo Folley, District Commissioner, in Rabaul, in February 1964. Frank

offered to officiate at our Bahá'í ceremony, and his kind wife Louise invited us to have this in their home and said she would make the cake.

My mother had bought me a lovely short wedding dress, but every time she saw something she thought was even more lovely, she bought that as well. I ended up with three wedding dresses!

We rented a terrible flat over the baker's shop in Rabaul's main street. One really nice thing was that we could smell the bread being baked at 4.30 a.m., and Geoff would trundle down the narrow steps and pick up a hot loaf. We both agreed that this could not go on, and providentially, AAP recalled Geoff to go to Japan to cover the Olympics. Neither of us wanted to go.

We had fallen in love with New Guinea and its people.

Geoff and I remained in Rabaul. Geoff joined the National Broadcasting Commission, that was opening small radio stations in the small regional townships, in Goroka Southern Highlands and Keita in Bougainville. This was just what we wanted because it took us to many places – Kerima, Keita, Goroka, Port Moresby. While there, Geoff was able to visit surrounding villages to record village 'singsings' for future broadcasts and, in most cases, to tell the people about the Faith.

Geoff's was quite a demanding position, which involved the training of journalists and other members of the staff in programming and working the equipment. Meantime, the National Broadcasting Company had allocated us a delightful, if small, house in Rabaul. The house was high, with plank seats between the house posts. This was where most of our daytime teaching was done, as it was so much cooler than upstairs. Upstairs had a closed-in veranda where firesides were held at night.

Frank and Rodney came to give talks almost every night, and Geoffrey – who had learned to speak reasonable Melanesian Pidgin rapidly, within the first month or so – would translate and answer questions.

After the talks about the Faith, the visiting men wouldn't have the courage to ask a question, but that didn't last.

One night, two policemen appeared on the doorstep. The expatriate family next door had reported that we were drinking alcohol with the "natives" and making a loud noise. The only drinks that were consumed on these occasions were, of course, many cups of tea and/or Goroka coffee.

But admittedly, we were "high," on spiritual laughter and happiness, and we did make a noise! We invited those two policemen to stay, and they joined in the fun. We heard later

these policemen had become members of the Faith. Endi Basimbek, our wonderful “haus-boy” (our helper around the house and garden), was the first to join the Faith in Rabaul.

ENDI BASIMBEK

Endi was from the Lae District, and came to work with us in Rabaul. Endi made so many cups of tea they surely couldn't be calculated. It didn't matter who came to the house, whether Geoff or I were there or not, Endi welcomed them, offered tea – gallons of it, with piles of sugar and biscuits.



Geoff's work friends, my work friends, Endi's friends, or people just selling shell beads or bilums, they all drank Endi's tea. He told them it was “the Bahá'í way in this, the Bahá'í master's haus.”

It was decided to form a football team comprising Endi's friends. It was amazing how quickly the word spread. Dozens

turned up at the field, and Geoff divided them into two teams. The Bahá'í team became known as the Rabaul Lites. Geoff had played football when at school in Melbourne and was able to help them with rules of play and so on.

One day during the Fast, Geoff advised Endi not to play, because he was doing the Fast with us. But he would play. Three-quarters through the game he was knocked over and stayed down for a minute or two. One of his mates on the side ran in with a bottle of water. He put it to Endi's mouth but Endi brushed the bottle aside. Such was his calibre.

AMINIO ORAM BALE (BARLEY)

Not long after we had moved into our house in Rabaul, we went to the door and found an oldish man and a small boy about six years old, waiting to speak with us.

Speaking in Pidgin, the man explained that his wife had just died, and that he had ten other children. He said he had heard that we "liked his people" and wondered if he could give us his son. He said he had chosen this particular son to give away because, (pointing to the lad's head) "this one has brains."

Geoff and I were somewhat taken aback, and we asked him to return the following day to give us time to consult, and also to give him time to think about his decision to give his son, Bale (pronounced Barley), away.

We half expected him not to return, but he did, driving his old ute (called a half-car). In the back he had piles of vegetables for us from his garden.

We told ToPemea, “Yes. We will look after your son. We will make certain rules though. Come inside and we will talk about them.” (Endi brought tea). Geoff drew up the rules as follows:

1. Because his village, Vunacabe, was so close, Bale could return home at the weekend if he liked.
2. We would feed, clothe and educate him.
3. He would go to a Rabaul school every day.
4. He would be taught about the Bahá'í Faith but not forced to join it.
5. We would not take him away from N.G. at the finish of his schooling as this was where the educated were needed.

For his part, ToPemea, Bale's father, told us what he would like us to do: We:

1. Would go to Vunacabe and tell the people about the rules decided upon, otherwise the people would not believe any of it.
2. No shell money or Australian money was to pass hands.
3. Bale could be punished by Geoff when/if needed.
4. Bale could go home to Vunacabe at weekends and school holidays if he wanted.



And so it happened. At the village we sat with the people for a whole night. Bale's coming to stay with us was fully discussed; many questions were asked as to why Geoff and I were different to all the other white people, the Chinese and the German people.

The Faith was discussed in full, and Bale moved into our spare room. He became our adopted son, by village law, not Australian Law.

Unfortunately nobody from Vunacabi ever joined the Faith at that time, but the people spoke about it at the markets in

Rabaul and Kokopo for many months and years to come. Vunacabi villagers would bring freshly grown vegetables and fruits to our door every Saturday, early in the morning. They became our great friends.

Bale was a good little boy, very accident prone, quite a good scholar, but not as good as he could have been. He went off to junior school, Malabunga High, looking so crisp and cool in his carefully starched and ironed shirt and pants. We didn't find out until much later that as soon as he was out of sight, he would take off his shirt, crunch it up, sometimes rub it in a bit of dirt, then put it back on. We punished him for this, which we regret. We didn't understand that he only wanted to be like the other boys, not different because he had a white dad.

We took Bale wherever we went for our two-yearly breaks back to Australia. We had noticed previously that he was 'accident prone'. We had only been in Australia a matter of hours when Bale walked through a large plate glass door in my brother John's home in Warwick. The next thing that happened was that we lost him!

My sister Dora's home was in Carindale, and we had visited Garden City Shopping World the previous day. We got up the next morning and couldn't find Bale anywhere. Feeling absolutely frantic, we thought he just might have gone back to

Garden City early in the morning.

Sure enough, there he was in the first shop we visited, the Guitar store, listening to loud country music, surrounded by the store's assistants running around looking for things "he might like to hear"! Bale had that effect on people.

We then took off to Melbourne, Geoff driving our brand-new car from Deighton Motors Holden. Bale, in the back seat, played his new guitar all the way. We didn't mind in the least, we were so glad to have found him!

On arrival at Geoff's family home in Melbourne, we found that Bale's fingers were bleeding from the guitar strings.

On Bale's first night in Melbourne's winter, he nearly froze to death, even with a doona and electric blanket. We couldn't get him warm. He was probably frightened too. In the end he didn't want to go home, he loved the place so much. He won everyone's hearts as well.

Years later, Bale sat on the National Spiritual Assembly of Papua New Guinea for some six years, and his dear wife, Roselynn, was an Auxiliary Board Member for a similar time.

Bale married a young and lovely Tolai girl that he met at University of PNG in Port Moresby. They were married at Sogeri, at the home of David and Sue Podger.

Early days in Darwin N.T. and Rabaul N.G.



Pam (Nola) and Aaron Bromley and family, Darwin



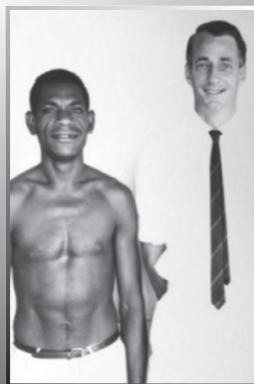
Knight of Baha' u' llah, Agnes Alexander, William Washington, and Hiroko, Japan



Dinyar and Mehro Mitrshahi, pioneers to Kwikila, N.G., signing enrollment cards with fingerprints.



Bumbu Endi's nephew in Rabaul



Endi Barsembek, first enrolled Bahá'í in Rabaul with Rodney Hancock

KEREMA – FIRST TRANSFER OUT OF RABAU

Stories of becoming “troppo”

This caused great excitement, being the first official transfer, but it was only a temporary one for six weeks or two months, filling in until a new Radio Manager, Kerema, arrived. We took Endi with us and we departed Rabaul in a flying boat.

We sat along the wall in a row and were served with outsize uncrusted jam sandwiches by a rather huge Papuan with a beard. I had only seen this type of plane landing on Sydney harbour in magazine pictures. They seemed to land and take off like swans – with such grace. This one took off all right, but landing was something else again! We hit the water with a loud bang, closely followed by a bump as we hit the river floor, which threw us hard against our seat straps.

Water covered the plane completely. Whether this was normal or not I didn't know, but when we rose to the top, even more surprises awaited. We had to remove our shoes to step into murky water up to our knees. I was surprised to see our brand-new suitcases being taken ashore on the heads of many Kerema lads. This was not a concern, as I thought of our carefully packed clothing folded and placed safely in cooking pots and other kitchen equipment. Whether I thought subconsciously

that our precious apparel would float away to the shore of its own freewill, I am not sure, but I wasn't in the least worried, as more important things needed our attention.

Between the river water and the landing point, we trod on hard, pointed roots growing profusely from the mangrove bushes and trees that lined the water's edge. We limped to our latest assignment with these ghastly roots sliding between our toes or digging painfully into our feet.

Our Kerema house was small, but almost new. The kitchen was adequate, but electricity only came on approximately two hours before breakfast, one hour before lunch, and two before dinner at night. During the day, one dared not open the refrigerator on pain of death, as everything it held would either melt or go bad.

Endi could not understand why my sponge cake, cooked as an experiment to supplement the taste of tinned meat and sweet potatoes, did not look, or taste, quite like the picture of the delicious sponge in the recipe book we had brought in our luggage. Endi's disappointment, and Geoff's roar of laughter, brought forth a few sharp well-chosen words from me!

Many things in Kerema made us laugh a lot – for instance, when we saw, each morning, lines of prisoners being marched down the dirt street, (which happened to be the only street)

headed by one lone, unarmed prison guard. Prisoners wore bright red laplaps tied at the waist, and carried long sarifs (knives) to clear blocks of mangroves. One wondered who was guarding who!

There were also some extraordinary, but extremely nice, expatriate families living in Kerema, including a school teacher and the corner shop owner.

While there, the schoolteacher left for a holiday in Australia. He wanted to raise hens for the fresh eggs, so before he left, he cleared a large block at the back of his house and surrounded it with pared down sticks from pawpaw trees, ready for wire netting to be placed around it for his chicken run.

On his return six or so weeks later he had a complete square of almost fully grown pawpaw trees growing around the back of his house! He had not counted on the rich soil, regular showers of rain, or the magic speed at which things (anything) grows in New Guinea! After all, they were only two-foot long sticks when he left!

Another expatriate of note loved fishing. He went to the beach for a walk every afternoon and watched as the native women caught many beautiful fish for their dinner. He ordered from Port Moresby, at some considerable expense, all the fishing gear required. On arrival, he proudly took his new fishing gear

to the beach and came home hours later empty handed. The following day, he went to where the women fished, threw in his expensive line and ended up catching one small fish bite-size long. This he took home, placed in the freezer and used as bait the next day.

His wife told us this happened day after day. In the end, he asked the local ladies what they used on their hooks. They said they used nothing and showed him their hooks – large open safety pins tied on the end of thin lines made of ordinary string!

Another man told us the story of why he had left Rabaul and come to work in Kerema. One day an earthquake occurred in Rabaul. Unbeknown to him, his wife was in the bathroom at the time and had locked the door. The water tank standing just outside that room collapsed and came down on the side of the house, just where the bathroom was situated. The water poured into the bathroom and his wife screamed out for her husband to help because she couldn't open the jammed door, but he had already taken off along the escape route by car.

We asked him if his wife was OK. He looked at us with a hard glint in his eye and said,

“Oh I don't know. She went back to Brisbane and divorced me after the earthquake episode, and I came to Kerema to get away from it all.”

The most amusing story involved both Geoff and me.

We had heard that the plane in which we had arrived was to be retired and that its next trip to Kerema was to be its ‘swan song.’

The old plane was apparently in very bad shape. We were not surprised! But Geoff wanted pics of its final descent. He placed his outsize tripod behind the kitchen door, ready for take-off. A day or two later we heard the low buzz of the plane coming in. Geoff sped from his office, grabbed the tripod from Endi, (who had been instructed to grab it from behind the kitchen door and run to Geoff’s office when hearing the plane). Geoff then ran down the road with it on his shoulder, erected it on the prearranged point, and finally got the desired pictures. I had followed Endi and Geoff at a somewhat slower rate!

On completion, we turned around, and were amazed to find at least a dozen men and women standing around us and behind us. From their various places of work, they had seen first Geoff, then Endi, then me, tearing down the road. They assumed I was going to beat Geoff up! They didn’t want to miss a fight – especially a “white’ fight!

MANGAIA – OUR “DESTINY MAN”

He was very black. He had soft black curly hair – more the type of hair we know – not the hard fuzzy-wuzzy type of hair we associate with people of New Guinea. He had a hole through his nose into which were placed bones for ceremonial purposes; his few teeth were black because of chewing beetle nut and, thankfully, weren't seen much; he



was pretty old and not what you might call pretty; his ear lobes had been cut so as to make large holes that hung down and into which he stuffed beetle nut, tobacco and even a box of matches, usually Pink Lady. He was the man of my dreams and I had been waiting to meet him all my life!

Mangaia came from the Kombe Islands, a small string of islands off the Talasea area of East New Britain. He was the Chief of the Kombi Islands.

Mangaia's story really started in Lae.

Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Sister Vi Hoehnke, was the Matron of the Lae Hospital and had apparently spoken about the Faith

to another old man named Jack. I never did know Jack's surname, nor did Sister Vi, which made us think that Jack never got to sign his enrolment card, but he certainly believed in Bahá'u'lláh.

Jack turned up as a carpenter employed at the Kokopo Catholic Hospital, just outside Rabaul, where Geoff and I were living.

Mangaia, together with his fourth wife and three of his many children, were patients at the Kokopo Hospital. In PNG, at that time, Australia looked after the health and education of its people, so should one visit the hospital for any reason, the whole family, or part thereof, went along to be checked over and treated without delay.

An earthquake hit the Kokopo region, soon after we returned from Kerema and one whole weatherboard wing of the hospital was moved to the right by some six feet, leaving a block of six or seven cement steps – front door steps – standing upright, entirely on their own, apart from the empty cement stumps on which that wing of the hospital had been standing.

It must have been quite a strong quake. Mangaia plus a new friend and family were extremely frightened. Mangaia, knowing it would be followed by aftershocks and perhaps further gurias (shakes), snatched up his tea, coffee and sugar, powdered milk and biscuits for the children, and they fled to

the bush area in the vicinity of the hospital. (In these times, the Government did not provide meals for in-patients, so it was up to the relatives to provide food and cook for them while in hospital).

Whilst fleeing into the bush, Mangaia and family stopped in surprise when they heard someone sing out.

“Poroman, yu kum” (Friend, come here).

There was Jack, the Bahá’í from Lae now working at the Kokopo Hospital, well settled under a large piece of corrugated iron, with a fire, a billy, and drinking tea from a large old enamel mug.

“Poroman, you come. Sit down and drink tea.”

Mangaia was very surprised indeed. This man was from a different part of New Guinea, a different tribe and a different language. Not that it mattered, both being Melanesian Pidgin speakers but strangers rarely spoke to each other like this.

Drinking tea together, Jack remarked that this was just like his religion where everyone “drank from the same cup.”

Mangaia asked for more information about this strange religion. Jack said he was a “man bilong bus” (a bush man) and “mi no gat save long olgeta samting.” (I don't know anything about anything).

So the conversation went on into the night – two old men who, by their own admission, didn't know anything, when in fact they were having a conversation about very deep subjects indeed.

Jack told Mangaia that Jeprey (Pidgin name for Geoffrey) and “Mrs bilong em” (his wife), lived in Rabaul, and, unbeknown to us, Jack actually came to Rabaul to show Mangaia our house.

Mangaia later came with his young son, (about seven years old) and sat under our high home, and spoke to Endi, who looked after all enquirers when we were at work. I remember coming down the front steps.

Mangaia and I introduced ourselves. He said he wanted to know about this religion that allowed Papua New Guineans and white people to sit down together and talk. After some preliminary conversation, I invited him to come up the twelve front steps and have a cup of tea.

Mangaia looked horrified. Both Endi and I tried to reassure him: “it's all right. It's okay,” we said. We led him to the bottom of the steps where he dug in his heels and absolutely refused to budge.

Providentially perhaps, there was an old worn-out soft broom leaning against the side of the house close by. I picked it up

and placed the soft end in the small of his back and pushed. Up we went, Mangaia, the broom, myself, the small son, then Endi – we were all laughing by this time, even Mangaia.

On departure, Mangaia gave us another surprise by requesting us to allow his seven-year-old son to sleep the night at our home. In wonder at this unusual request, Geoff and I agreed. We asked him why, and he said,

“If I myself stay, and if I get put in jail, in the morning there is nobody to bail me out. But if my boy stays the night, I will be here to bail him out.”

That’s logic, if ever we heard it! However it shows the great distance between the black and white worlds in PNG.

FIRST VISIT TO A “WHITE HOME”

Not long after this, very early one Sunday morning – about 5 a.m., if I remember rightly – Geoff and I were awoken by a loud noise coming from the region of the main road (Malaguna Road).

Geoff sprang out of bed, thrust his head out a window, and said,

“Oh my goodness, Leila! I think they are coming here!”

Sure enough, there was Mangaia, striding out in front like a band leader from some Scottish military tattoo. Behind came an extraordinary array of people. Women in brightly-coloured lap-laps, children, many men, some with tribal paint on their faces, talking to one another in loud voices, shouting for the dogs to get out of the way, and happily making great strides towards our home.

We ushered Mangaia and his Kombe Island friends under the house where planks had been installed as seats.

TRIP TO THE KOMBE ISLANDS

We went into the Kombe because Mangaia really wanted us to tell his people about the Faith, and of course we thought Baha'u'llah would want us to go. The small islands we planned to visit, under Mangai's supervision, were Kou, Vesse, Kalapai, Moputu, Poi, Makati, Somelani, Nukakau, Kapo, Muliagni, and Nutanawua (Nut).

Nutanawua was the last island in the string and was at the mouth of the Aria River. This was Mangaia's home island. This is where he has been laid to rest.

Mangaia's boat was a large single-hulled outrigger, perhaps eight to ten meters in length. One big hollowed-out log.

In it, there was a small platform made of limborn, which was similar, approximately four meters long and three to four meters wide. There was a piece of flattened galvanised iron in a front corner of the platform. A small circle of stones, in a bed of sand, encircled the iron slab. There was a canvas sail which was very old and rotting from continuous salt water and sun – as we learnt when well out to sea.

Halfway to the first island, we were becalmed. The wind dropped and we sat in the sun for what seemed to be an eternity.

We had no idea how long we would remain there. I stupidly remarked to Mangaia how I would “give anything for a cup of tea,” thinking of all the cups we'd shared and enjoyed together in Rabaul, and our wonderful conversations in the cool breeze under our house. On hearing this, Mangaia immediately sprang into action and chipped bits off the wood platform until the fire was roaring and the old black pot boiling.

That old man then brought a mug of tea, very black and very sweet, and handed it to me with his blackened and gnarled hands. I wanted to cry as I thanked Bahá'u'lláh for His bountiful mercy. And what a wonderful old man was Mangaia. It was

the most priceless cup of tea I have ever had.

Meantime, watching all this was Geoff, absolute horror on his face, seeing Mangaia happily chipping bits of wood off the platform, having visions of the whole canoe gradually being chipped away from under us.

Ha! At last a small buster arrived. Ripped the old sail right off!

After a short period of panic, Geoff remembered we had brought a pair of double bed sheets with us “just in case.” Of course, we couldn't have envisioned needing sheets for the boat's sails, but we had thought of sand-flies, should we need to sleep on the ground or on the sand.

Out the sheets came. Up they went! I think they were pink. So... we sailed into the Kombe singing “Pink sails in the sunset”!

The village we visited first was Garu, the starting point into the Kombe, and we were warmly welcomed.

We didn't get to all the islands, as we ran out of time, nor can I recall the order in which we visited them, but I'm pretty certain we went to Garu, Kou, Moputu, Poi, Makati, and possibly Somelani.

The teachings the people of the Kombe loved most were the

Oneness of Mankind and the Equality of Men and Women. At one of the islands, Makati, I remember Geoff and I sitting in a large circle, when a chipped enamel mug was passed around, from which everyone had to take a sip. This was because, dear Mangaia had told them, in his own language, Bahá'u'lláh had said “You must all drink from the one cup.” (Jack had taught him that during that earthquake scare in the bush at Kokopo).

The spiritual meaning was explained in great detail, until this was perfectly understood, in broken English, Pidgin, and in their own language.

I noticed that the local people of New Guinea loved and believed the spiritual teachings and quickly attributed them to Bahá'u'lláh. Thus, many people of the Kombe became Bahá'ís overnight, literally. I noticed this also when teaching at the Bahá'í Permanent institute in Lae, many years later.

There were two missions in the Kombe, one of which appeared to control the government aid posts, the other the government schools fulfilling educational needs. The missions always told the people the aid posts and the schools belonged to their respective religions, and never mentioned that the Australian Government supplied most of the money, if not all.

Neither mission was very happy about our trip. Many years later, our son Bale told us that pregnant ladies had been turned

away from the aid posts, and many of the children of the new Bahá'ís had been turned away from the schools in the Kombe.

Bale at that time was a kiek (patrol officer) and had been posted to the Kombe Islands to help and report. This intolerance was a lamentable situation. The Bahá'ís had few human or material resources with which to deepen or provide services. However, I know for a fact there are still many Kombe Islanders that identify with the Faith.

Over the years, the majority of Kombe youth left their homes and went to larger towns and cities. I know they are around still, as I have been back on a number of occasions to Port Moresby, Rabaul, Goroka, and Lae in particular, and always unknown men and women have pulled me up in the street and said, 'Mi bin lukautim yu long taim yu stap long ples bilong mi' (I looked after you when you came to my place) and, 'Mi stap insait long Lotu Bahá'í eit' (I am still a Bahá'í).

Allah-u-Abha !

**Extract from Jeff Leach's letter; he visited Makati island
some 15 years after Geoff and I had made that first trip
into the receptive, and very beautiful Kombe Islands**

... When the rest of the team of volunteers had arrived from Australia, we were welcomed by representatives of the National Assembly – Ros Cooper from Brisbane, Ken and Joanne Hughes from South Australia. We were briefed as to the nature and purpose of our task, being a request from the Universal House of Justice, to obtain factual data and feedback from these scrutineers, to ascertain the maturity and understanding of the believers in the process of electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies in Papua New Guinea. Previously, the election process had been heavily reliant on the assistance of pioneers who had to travel to these remote communities during the twelve day Ridvan period ...

A Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of Papua New Guinea had chosen me to be sent to Aminio Bale's home in Kimbe. (Leila and Geoff's adopted son).

Bale's house was a scene of joyous excitement. Many local youth... had gathered to meet the foreign visitor and have kaikai (food). ...Families rarely cook just for themselves, there is always expectation of sharing with extended family members.

...My destination was the Island of Makati, an unchartered sand atoll to the north-west in the Bismarck Sea.

By a strange twist of fate, I was heading to the same island opened to the Faith by my spiritual parents, Geoff and Leila Heard (Leila Deighton) sometime in the early 60s. I wondered how much of their efforts had endured over the traversing years. I was soon to discover that reality for myself.

...My guide sorted out a boat and we headed out to the sea. It took about 3 hours before we landed on Makati... The Makati people informed me that their neighbouring island community was a Catholic mission with a school, small medical centre and trade store. There was some friction between the two groups due to religious differences.

...The Chief welcomed us, and I explained the purpose of our visit... Next day we gathered all the youth to assist in a census of the island's population. There was only one male high school youth who said he was not a Bahá'í. Through enquiry we found there were a few old people too sick to participate in the election process. The youth visited each and explained the election process and helped them to vote in absentia. The rest of the village gathered in the village square. They formed a large circle. Each had been asked to gather nine rocks or pieces of coral to symbolize their vote. Prayers were again said, followed by the placement of rocks behind the members of choice. The youth helped record the results and the Local Spiritual Assembly of Makati Island was formed.

Jeff had a superb trip, which much relieved our minds as to what happened after we left Rabaul. Jeff, however, after such a brilliant undertaking, became extremely ill after eating a bad oyster.

On returning to the mainland by outrigger sail boat, the Bahá'í owner of the outrigger was able to land the very ill Jeff on Linga Linga Plantation. The manager of Linga Linga was most considerate and kind to him; he diagnosed the situation and remedied it with a large needle in the backside! Jeff later returned to Australia fit and well.

THE MARVELLOUS MEN AND WOMEN OF MANUS

On return to Rabaul, Geoff and I heard from Rodney, who had visited Manus previously, that there were two or three Bahá'ís living on Baluan Island, a small island (one could walk around it), situated off the east coast of Manus Island. With encouragement from Rodney, Geoff and I made plans to visit Baluan and find these Bahá'ís.

On our first trip, we flew to Lorengau, the largest town, where

small boats came in and out frequently, coming and going from Baluan and other islands. We ended up on a small boat with outboard motor going to an island close by Baluan. The captain said he would drop us off. We accepted his offer gratefully.

It wasn't an easy trip – rough open sea, and we seemed to be on that boat for a very long time before arriving on the beach at Baluan.

The first thing we saw on arrival were two men racing after each other at full speed down the beach. The second man was carrying a tomahawk (small axe).

We found out later that the second man was the manager of the Co-Op store, recently opened for business on the island. The Australian 'diddy man' (Agricultural Officer) had spent time explaining how the business was to be run and that everything now belonged to the Baluan Islanders. However, it seemed that some of the islanders had not understood that everything had still to be settled up in the usual manner, and this man had taken away lots of things for which he had not paid. Hence this scenario.

We eventually found Nat Kilangit, whose name had been given us by Rodney, along with that of Aywi Silakara. Nat's house was not far away, and as we walked towards it, children

playing on the beach rushed indoors to tell their parents that white strangers had arrived.

Nat came flying out, and after explanations, we were warmly welcomed by his wife, family and friends. We were somewhat of a curiosity, as it was school holidays, and we were the only whites on the island. The school teacher and his wife, the only whites that lived there permanently, were away on school holidays.

Soon, the whole island population seemed to be around us.

They took us on a guided tour, first stop the toilet! I am convinced the main thing that makes our cultures differ so much is the toilets.

The toilet on Baluan Island was certainly different, and quite ingenious. A small hut had been built over the sea. It had an old corrugated iron roof, and another sheet of iron placed along the front, thus creating a privacy barrier. The corrugated iron shielded the platform from the sight of those walking along the track that led around the island. I believe the corrugated iron had been left on Baluan when the American soldiers left the island after WW2.

This toilet hut was joined to the land by a single palm tree trunk, albeit an extremely long and apparently strong one.

This was fine, except that there was absolutely nothing to help any unfortunate person crossing without balancing skills. After dozens of human feet, both very small and very large, travelling to the sea-hut day after day, it had become extremely slippery.

The islanders waited for us to admire it – which we did in glowing terms. Those accompanying us then broke into gales of laughter, the children jumping up and down in glee, throwing their arms in the air.

Nat finally explained to us the cause of their mirth. Rodney, on his visit, had slipped half-way across and fallen into the sea. The retelling of the story sent them all off again.

By this time, the small children were hanging all over Geoff, on his shoulders, clinging to his legs, hoping to be carried. Geoff started to dance with them, while others fought over who would hold me by the hand.

‘Well,’ I thought, ‘they are probably waiting for Geoff and me to do the same thing.’

After the story of Rodney’s pole-dance, we all became firm friends. The people asked us to stay. Everyone loved Geoff, and the young women all wanted to have their hair cut like mine. I felt flattered.

But there's more. The following morning at sunrise, I decided it would be a good time to visit the sea-hut. As I came quietly down Nat's front steps, the sight I saw was breathtaking, stunning – crystal water lapping on golden sand. Palm trees lining the edge of the settlement, where the village houses commenced.

I walked, wrapped in a dream, overcome by the beauty surrounding me, to the sea-hut, and proceeded, very slowly, across the trunk of the coconut palm bridge. I stepped into the three-sided hut and gazed, once again, out to sea. The view this time was uninterrupted. Just beautiful sea in varying shades of blue, mile after mile.

I was rudely awakened from my reverie by a loud shout, "Good morning Missus!"

Then a chorus of, "good morning Missus!." I saw three fishing boats sailing towards where I was standing, looking out to sea! I could have shaken the hands of the fishermen!

It should be noted here that fishing was not carried out on this side of the island. The boats I saw were on their way to the other side. But I did wish the Baluans had put up that fourth wall, blocking out the sea activity.

During our two days and three nights we did very little

teaching, but we did make many friends. There was never a dull moment, and we never stopped talking. We hated saying goodbye. We returned to Lorengau on the boat carrying vegetables for sale on the mainland. Geoff was sick overboard from the strong smell.

Back in Rabaul, Geoff and I decided there was no way these dear people could be deepened in the Faith while they were lone believers on Baluan. We planned to bring Awyi and Nat over to stay with us in Rabaul for a couple of weeks.

I forget how we organized their flight tickets, but somehow we did, possibly helped by Rodney or Frank or both.

Awyi Silakara and Nat Kilangit told hilarious stories about how they managed to get to the airport, and how scared they were about boarding the balaus (plane) — especially Nat, as he had never flown previously. He described in Pidgin how he felt when he finally dared look out the window and saw the sea and islands below. I will not even try to repeat it in English or Pidgin, as I couldn't do it justice.

For two weeks we had firesides (informal gatherings where stories of the Faith were told), every night and over weekends, attended by Endi and friends, Awyi and Nat, and any other interested visitors.

Our beautiful audience sat and listened in rapture to the wonderful stories of the Faith. All were welcome. Frank and Rodney took turns to give talks, with Geoff translating.

Before Aywi and Nat returned home, Geoff and I took them to the movies, which amazed them, so the whole process of film making had to be explained! We promised to visit them again soon.

Geoff and I brought three lots of visitors to Rabaul over a period of approximately six months. Nat came on all visits because he was now a seasoned flyer and was well able to help others.

In all, about eight friends came from Manus and Baluan Island during that year. Endi played a large part in all this, as we were both away most of the day. Geoff, now Manager of Radio Rabaul, was working long hours. I was working ship/shore radio with the many small ships bringing in the copra from surrounding plantations.

I remember one particularly trying day when a small earthquake had hit one of the island plantations, and the shaking had locked the Manager's wife's small baby in a cot, with the baby crying inside. The mother could not undo the lock; I could hear the utter panic in her voice as I tried to calm her down.

All the household goods had to be ordered through this radio – food and chemist supplies; Doctor's advice was another responsibility I handled from time to time. I was employed to do this job because of my navy training.

While we were absent from home for long hours, Endi showed the visitors from Manus around Rabaul, fed them, with the pot always boiling for cups of tea.

Our second trip to Baluan was somewhat more dramatic than our first. On arrival, we heard a man had been murdered.

The policeman was on another island and wasn't able to get to Baluan for two or three days. The white school teacher was again absent – he was the only one that had a radio transmitter, and would have used this to contact Lorengau, had he been in residence. So, the request came: "Could Jepre please photograph the body of the man killed to show the Police, so it could be buried immediately?"

The burial, of necessity had to be quick because of the intense heat. This request was carried out, of course. The burial took place and the "haus-kri" (house cry) was opened.

For the next couple of days, the island was regaled with the sounds of the mournful crying coming from the haus-kri. It seemed to go on for a lengthy period, but was in fact one full

day, all through one night, then another half day. When they came out the people looked relieved, and there was no more crying.

At least half the people coming from the haus-kri had to pass in front of Nat's, walking home on the track around the island. They were very hungry, eating pawpaw and coconut. Nat and Geoff spoke with them, and many conversations were struck up. I felt sure that the island knew who we were, why we were there, and that they knew the name Bahá'í.

While there, we had a message from Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, who was living on an island reasonably close by. The message was she wanted to know about the Bahá'í Faith, and would one of us visit? Obviously, she had been told about us by someone from Baluan.

One of our newfound friends had an outboard motor, and took Geoff to visit Margaret. Geoff was somewhat disappointed when he realized two things. One was that she was only interested in things such as how we were married, were we baptised, and how bodies were disposed of after death. Obviously, she was not interested in anything of a more spiritual nature, at least at that time.

The second thing Geoff was concerned about was that he realised, after a long talk with the natives of this island, that

they were telling her untrue stories regarding traditional beliefs. In fact they were playing games with her and laughing their heads off about it. They thought it was a great joke, and had told her most extraordinary lies. However, they didn't think they were doing anything unethical or wrong. They were just having fun playing a few tricks on a white woman.

The third and last trip to Baluan was one I had to make on my own. The Baluan friends were to elect their first Local Spiritual Assembly. As most of them had no knowledge of the administration of the Faith, they needed a little help.

On my arrival, it was sundown, and many friends waited on the beach for my arrival. Something then happened that was repeated again and again, both during and after my stay.

The Australian teacher and his wife came down from their home on the hill. A nice-looking, polite young couple. The teacher welcomed me, and I explained that I was Bahá'í and had come to visit the friends on Baluan.

"In that case," he said, "you must come up to the house and stay with us for the time you are here."

I thanked him sincerely, explaining that my friends were expecting me and had prepared for me to stay with them. The teacher and his wife looked stunned and shocked. They

tried to persuade me to go home with them. Again, I tried to explain, and added that I would be delighted to have dinner with them the next night. Reluctantly, they left. This became a sort of legend, so I have been told!

One of the great differences between the Church missionaries and the Bahá'í pioneers was that I never observed a missionary to actually live with, or stay with, the villagers. In the case of Baluan, any missionaries would normally stay at the teacher's home.

The friends on the beach that night, hearing the conversation with the teacher and the rejected invitation to stay with him and his wife, were utterly delighted. They practically carried me to Nat's home. They wanted to carry me on their shoulders! I suspect the fact that I was on my own was another matter for the teachers concern.



Nat Kilangit, Baluan Islands

THE ELECTION

The following day was the big one, and we gathered on the beach just after sun up. What an honour to explain the election and responsibilities of their Local Spiritual Assembly!

Small sticks were gathered, and a circle formed of eligible friends. Later, the names of the nine members were announced and the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Baluan Island was born. (Note: today, Baluan people would probably not have a Local Assembly, but members would possibly be elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Lorengau).

That night on the 21st April 1964/5, a large celebration took place. Beautiful fish, papaws as large as footballs, bananas, and fresh bush eggs were on the menu. Also many other things, the names of which were unknown to me.

When I saw the bush eggs – larger than any eggs I had ever seen – I decided I would love a hard-boiled egg. I took one and started to dispose of the thick shell. There, right before my eyes, was a bush chicken, fully formed, with feathers.

I covered my feelings. Friends become hurt and perhaps insulted if you rejected the food offered. A chicken like this, I knew full well, was highly prized, so I held the chicken behind my back and with the other hand, beckoned the children to

come and partake. It was the only bush egg that contained a chicken at that Feast. The children loved it.

BOUGAINVILLE – A TROUBLED PLACE

Geoff and I were transferred to Kieta, Bougainville. Radio Bougainville was to be opened urgently. BHP was negotiating with the Australian Government regarding the opening of a large copper mine at Panguna, immediately over the mountain at the back of our house. The mine site was planned for the top of the mountain on the other side, and a road was to be built to get there, curving around the mountain and undergrowth like a snake. A large undertaking.

Our house was on the coastal side of the mountain where ships came in to unload. The house site had been cut into this mountain. The front was on high concrete poles, the back door at ground level. Small bougainvillea bushes had been planted along the front to cover and fill the large black space under the building and to hide the concrete poles. In no time the flowers came out and were a beautiful site to behold.

Almost immediately behind us, on the other side of the

mountain, was the Kobuan office, the mine's first staging camp.

Ships unloaded at the wharf, then cargo was carried by vehicles up the road behind our house. To get there, a small narrow dirt road needed to be traversed, passing a few yards above us. We could see every car, truck or conveyance heading to the staging post. They left a trail of dust and grit behind, which took up residence in my new kitchen and in the new Radio Bougainville studio and offices next door.

The mountain itself was natural rain forest, with fully grown trees and thick tangled webs of grey and green fungal growth, hanging like cobwebs, but forming heavy chain-like curtains between the trees. One would only have to walk a yard into this rich vegetation, and one would be lost forever.

I mention this because, later, we watched as huge vehicles, tied together by thick steel ropes, cleared the whole mountainside behind the road and left it flat and dirty. It was a horrid scar on the landscape, but necessary to widen the road for the diverse heavy vehicles that would be using it during the days and nights to come, whilst building the road to the Panguna mine site.

Radio Bougainville's mandate was to assure the people of what the mine would bring – the supermarket, the hospital and school, the swimming pool, the wonderful road, and of

course, the money it would inject into the economy. Further, the mandate required Radio Bougainville to play bright music the people loved.

This was a simple but clever ploy on the government's part, as it ensured that every man, woman, and child in Bougainville would be firmly tuned into the radio, especially at night, thus absorbing the messages the government wished to convey. Geoff ended up going into the villages and recording music for replay, which gave him the opportunity of telling stories and teachings of the Faith.

Unfortunately, Geoff did not agree with the government's mandate. He thought most of the promises were untrue, especially the promises about the water remaining clear and pure, if and when the mine commenced operation. This caused a serious conflict of interest. There was nothing much he could do about it – either leave his position, in which case someone else, possibly without foresight, would be sent along to take his place – or request a transfer to a less challenging situation.

Geoff's objections were mainly humanitarian and apolitical, and justified. But nothing could have been done to prevent the unrolling of events.

The villagers in the Panguna region were stirring up fear and

unrest. The traditional customs were being disregarded – customs that were pragmatic and fair. For instance, each family would put aside land for their children to secure their future, enabling them to feed their own children and grandchildren.

With whole villages losing their land, where were the people to go? Into the next village with the same traditions in place? Even the kindest heart could not welcome all these displaced persons.

THE CONCERN OF THE “HOLE”

One thing of great concern to us both was the business of ‘the hole.’ When you explained to anyone in the islands in those early days that the mine would make a ‘large hole,’ the village people would probably envisage something the size of the foundations of a European-style house. Most didn’t understand their whole mountain would be torn, ripped away and the river poisoned. No expatriate believed the mine tailings would not pollute the river’s beautiful water.

To make things worse, I was offered a position in the BHP Kobuan Office, and I accepted. At that time, expatriate

Bougainville consisted only of the school teacher, the hotel manager and wife, and the hospital with one doctor from New Zealand, plus the staff and families of the Government Office. All wives worked. Even Geoff said I should take the job, otherwise I was going to become extremely lonely, especially after the activity I was used to in Rabaul. So, I started working for BHP (later to become Bougainville Copper).

Another young lass was working with me. her name was Genene Mackillop, and though she was quite a bit younger than I, we became firm friends. We used to go swimming together off the end of the pier in front of the office in our lunch hour.

One day, Genene's mother, Mrs. MacKillop, had to go into Keita township to buy groceries. She would pass our office on her way. Meanwhile, her husband had rung the office and asked us to stop her, and give her the message that he needed something from town urgently.

Genene immediately flew down the front steps of the small office singing out, as she went, for me to come quickly to the side of the road to help flag down her mother as she passed. (Mrs. MacKillop was known throughout as a rather fast and furious driver!). We caught sight of the approaching car.

"Maa-mee! Maa-mee!" we sang out, very loudly. A great chorus

went up behind us, as some ten or so men from the office took up the cry!. “Maa-mee! Maa-mee!” they cried, waving tea towels from the coffee room and bits of white paper!

Mrs. MacKillop never realized she had such a large family!

Genene’s parents owned a large home and property some half a mile away. Genene’s father grew and cultivated orchids. The most beautiful orchids. Acres of them. All colours, shades and sizes. Sometimes Mr. and Mrs. MacKillop had cocktail parties for their expatriate friends, and an exquisite orchid would float on top of the drinks. It could also be eaten. I thought they tasted somewhat like raw cabbage, but everyone else thought they were great, especially after a few cocktails!

Genene’s father was also arguing against having the huge mine come to Bougainville. It would be the largest copper mine in the world. He thought it could only bring trouble to the villagers, and would endanger his orchids, which had taken years to nurture and develop to the stage of worldwide recognition.

Some time later, the orchids were, in fact, ploughed into the ground, although Mr MacKillop had already saved some by shipping them to Cairns. We were not there at the time, so have no facts.

Genene and I could hear, loud and clear, the discussions of

the many visiting overseas officials of the mine and the mine managers. Genene quite openly repeated their deliberations to her parents, but I was in a dilemma. Should I relate all that I heard to Geoff, or should I regard it as confidential information? I had not been asked to sign any security documents, but morally – I just didn't know.

Then, one night, we happened to look out the back door; there, walking on the road, outlined as the sun went down, black shadows, lines of men carrying spears, large bows on their backs, long sharp bush knives at their sides, walking, with obvious sinister intent, bound for Kobuan. The restlessness had turned into something far more dangerous – the threat of war.

It was then I broke my silence and told Geoff news from Kobuan, including that in the next couple of days, pre-built homes were being off-loaded from the ship in the harbour, and would be towed up the road behind our house and deposited beside the Kobuan office.

The road to the Panguna site was not yet complete. More men had been enlisted and would be living in the mobile homes, which would, when safe, slowly wend their way up the side of the mountain as far as possible. How long it would take for the road to be built was an unknown quantity.

NEW GUINEA ON A PLATE

Meanwhile life went on. Just normal things. The wet season arrived, and a huge mud-slide occurred a mile or two from where the road-building was going on; Geoff and I both had bad attacks of malaria; Bale caught so many sweet-lip fish after school that we made friends giving them away; Endi became frustrated because he didn't have people to feed with tea and biscuits; the new District Commissioner had every stray dog in Keita shot; Bale rowed his little boat out from the shore, caught a shark, and was pulled a nautical mile out – he wouldn't let go of the line because he'd lose the shark. We had to get the policeman to get him in his speed boat.

A German man had built a beautiful boat – work that took him months and months, before and after we came to Kieta. An insurance man was arriving the following day to insure it.

That evening, after he had taken his beautiful boat for a short run to check everything was alright, it blew up into pieces as small as matches.

The man from Germany just sat on the beach and cried. Then a large fire burnt down part of the Catholic College just out of town, and Geoff's smartest journalists jumped into the car singing out: 'holy smoke,' and went to help put it out. Just a normal day in the life of New Guinea.

THE ROAD TO PANGUNA

Well, the road to Panguna Mine was finally finished – but not really ‘finished’. It had reached the mine site, but was just a track – rough and unsealed.

Geoff was the first to be allowed to go up, along with a Catholic priest. Geoff and the priest were the first non-road workers up, and I was the first white woman (to my knowledge).

We went in an old jeep with a government driver. The priest sat in front with the two of us in the back. Two torturous hours followed. Some of the bends were so sharp the driver had to back and fill, again and again, to navigate them. Looking down the sheer drop on the left side of the road was something I only dared do once, at the start of the journey – after that I just prayed.

On arrival back at Kobuan we felt battered and bruised, both physically and mentally. I said to Geoff,

“I prayed the whole way,” he said.

“So did I.”

Then a weary, wry answer from the front seat,

“That makes three of us!”, said our priest friend.

The horror of the fighting in Bougainville that took place after our departure was caused by the coming of the Panguna Mine. The landowners were blamed. *Of course, the landowners wanted more money!* And they deserved it. The land had belonged to them and been inherited by them for eons.

By the time the fighting took place, it wasn't just the land for which they were fighting; it had grown much bigger and more serious than that. It was their independence from New Guinea for which they were fighting.

The kind of money resulting from the enormous copper mine would have resulted in Bougainville becoming the richest little island in the world.

Thankfully, Geoff and I had left by then. But at least two young men, one journalist and one announcer from Radio Bougainville were killed. It saddened us greatly when we heard.

GOUGH

Prior to leaving Kieta, Gough Whitlam visited to tell the people that, should he become Prime Minister of Australia at the next election, he would give New Guinea its independence.

Geoff and I were invited to a dinner party to welcome Mr. Whitlam at the new home of the District Commissioner.

The DC's home stood on the most beautiful site in the whole of Bougainville. High on a hill, overlooking the sea, it caught cool breezes at night, and twinkling lights from the small fishing boats out to sea could be seen. A wonderful seafood meal was served at this dinner party, followed by ice cream and delicious locally grown paw-paws and mangos.

Mr Whitlam must have been very hot, not accustomed to the heavy, humid weather, even though the party was held outside overlooking the sea. Following the first course, Mr Whitlam excused himself. Some minutes later, guests heard a muffled crash. Everyone was too polite to say anything.

Mr Whitlam must have decided to have a shower. The sight of the shower in that pale pink, architect-designed bathroom must have been too much to resist, so he jumped under the shower for a quick cool-down! Emerging, he put his foot up (not a small feat!) on the shell-like hand basin, presumably to

dry his foot (or feet), and pulled the whole thing out from the wall! A joyful time was had by all!

TEACHING IN BOUGAINVILLE - DIFFICULTIES AND TESTS

Our days and nights were busy. We received advice that we now came under the National Spiritual Assembly of the South West Pacific, based in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and no longer under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia to look after New Guinea – or the so-called Bismarck Archipelago and Area Teaching Committee.

There wasn't much time to teach the Faith whilst on Bougainville. The people were totally distracted by the mine. Solomon Islands asked that I choose some prayers for their newsletter and turn them into very simple English, as the friends didn't understand the pure word. Their Pidgin was also different from the language spoken in New Guinea, so turning the prayers into Melanesian Pidgin would not have helped. It made it so much easier for translation from simple English. Geoff continued to translate Mr Fathezam's book *The New Garden*, and write copy for the Nineteen Day Feast letter

Kundu (Drum) which had been started in Rabaul. Those two things were about the extent of our work for the Faith.

GOROKA – PLACE OF JOY AND LAUGHTER

Noel and Margaret Bluett were well established when we arrived in Goroka. Margaret and I became best friends and Geoff and I visited them for coffee on a regular basis. Delicious, oh-so-fresh Goroka Arabica coffee.

Noel and Geoff worked printing the nineteen day newsletter, *Kundu*. The Bluetts had an old-fashioned printing machine that worked with methylated spirits. It kept giving up the ghost, and when the methylated spirits soaked the sheets of A4, the print ran down in streaks to the bottom of each page, giving the appearance of a witch's copy. Each page was then pegged on the clothesline to dry, which only took a short time in that climate. The *Kundu* had to go out to all Bahá'ís, and it was expected to arrive under any circumstances.

Whilst printing the *Kundu*, one day Geoff somehow cut one of his fingers on the guillotine. There was a lot of blood. Margaret,

who had trained as a nurse, ran around looking for bandages and disinfectant. Noel could be heard misquoting upstairs, 'he who loses one drop of blood for this Cause, myriads of oceans will be his reward.' This may sound somewhat disrespectful, but at the time it was not, nor was it intended to be so. Poor Geoff thought he'd cut his finger right off owing to the amount of blood! Thank goodness for Margaret's nursing training!

Once, Margaret and I decided we would set up a coffee stand at the famous Goroka Show. We didn't realize at the time how tiring it would be standing for two days and serving cups of coffee continually. We spoke about the Faith to as many people as possible. We didn't make much money, but we certainly had lots of fun.

How impressive it was to see hundreds of highlanders, shoulder to shoulder, black bodies glistening, draped in brightest red and yellow Birds of Paradise feathers, beating their kundus in deep rhythm – thud, thud – slowly walking towards one across the whole width of the oval. It made the hair on our arms and legs stand up!

Then there were the mud-men. Small people, quietly sitting in their even smaller huts – their heads and faces completely covered by their mud masks, which were large and made their bodies appear even smaller, their dark eyes glinting

through small holes. The mud must have taken quite a time to masterfully smooth down their neck, then completely over their bodies - not one join between the mud and their skin showing. In their fingers, each held a dainty sprig of green leaf, which they waved slowly and gracefully in order to wave away any bad spirits. If you walked close, these amazing little people would gently flick you as well, thus keeping you safe. One truly felt love for them.

When we were still living in Rabaul, Geoff told me that one day a member of staff at his previous work at Radio Rabaul had come to him with a request for holiday leave to go to his village in the Highlands for a week. Geoff asked why he had to go, and he replied: 'I must go home to prepare my mud'. Now we understood what he was talking about!

While still in Goroka, Margaret and Noel had given permission for their haus-boy (home help) to bring his sick mother to live with him in his small house at the back of the Bluett's home. One could hear this rather strange sound coming from the 'boyhaus'. It was a gargling kind of noise.

The disease from which his mother suffered was commonly known as the 'laughing sickness', or the 'mad cow disease'. Its real name is Kuru, and it comes from eating human brains. It reached epidemic proportions in the 1950s in the Fore Tribe,

Okapa District, Eastern Highlands Province. People living there believed that eating the brains of those who had passed on would gain them the knowledge of the deceased. The last death was apparently in 2009.

HAND OF THE CAUSE, ENOCH OLINGA

While we were in Goroka, Hand of the Cause, Enoch Olinga, visited for a couple of days. One can only describe his presence as being ‘larger than life’ – such a wide smile, such big laughter, such warm eyes, especially when recounting stories of how the Faith was advancing around the world, and the wonderful Bahá’ís he had met at the places he had recently visited, thus inspiring us to even greater efforts.

Margaret, her eldest son, the late Michael Bluett, and Geoff and I picked up Mr Olinga at the Goroka airport. Just before we got into the car to leave, a Mission High School bus pulled into the airport, carrying teenage students, all young ladies.

The girls spilled out of the bus and caught sight of Mr Olinga. They stared at him – his skin was darker than their skin, but they knew he wasn’t from New Guinea, so where was he from?

They couldn't quite work it out. Then Mr Olinga started to speak with them.

The girls crowded around him, listening. We could not hear what he said, but we knew the girls did not want him to leave – they did not want to return to their bus. Mr Olinga got on that bus, and of course they followed. He spoke with them a little longer.

When we finally got him back home to Noel's and Margaret's, he looked tired but relaxed. What a blessing to have had these extraordinary people come to visit and inspire us.

Other memorable teaching experiences happened in Goroka. I know Mr Olinga got caught in a tropical downpour in a village, but really, other friends would best tell that story – memory plays tricks sometimes.

I remember mostly Noel and Margaret's hospitality, not only to me, but to all that came their way. Years later, when visiting Cairns, they allowed me to stay in their lovely motel while awaiting my visa to return to Lae. They asked for nothing in return. Such is the true Bahá'í way.

BACK AND FORTH

We'd had three lots of long leave since arriving in New Guinea – the first when our trip into the Kombe Islands was completed, the second when we took Bale with us, the third when Endi came with us. We did, however, take another trip – to Australia in 1970. This time we had decided to leave New Guinea for good. We decided to live in Brisbane, where Geoff had been offered a place with 4BH radio.

Almost as soon as we arrived in Brisbane, something wonderful happened. We met, through my work, Jeff and Jill Leach. They were really thirsting for something and they lapped up the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. They became sincere Bahá'ís, and in later years, Jeff came to New Guinea on a number of occasions to help with the teaching work. Where they could, they helped with everything going on in Brisbane, even though somewhat tied down with two beautiful children.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Brisbane had a goal to open Redcliffe to the Faith, a small seaside town not far from Brisbane. Geoff and I bought a small house there and moved to Redcliffe, thereby fulfilling that goal.

The Brisbane friends helped us by visiting often, especially Anne Moore, Madge Bourke, Jeff, Jill and family, plus many

other friends. Anne helped with a news magazine, and Marge brought her caravan and parked it on the beach. She then gave out, to those unsuspecting beach lovers, Bahá'í pamphlets and small talks about the Faith.

Hand of the Cause, Dr. Muhajir, visited Brisbane. Geoff and I were asked to meet him at the airport, which we did – in Geoff's silver sports car! Poor Dr. Muhajir sat in front with Geoff and they had to yell at each other because of the wind, no hood, and constant traffic.

At the airport, when we had introduced ourselves, Dr Muhajir said,

“Geoff Heard? Geoff Heard? What are you doing here? I have just sent off two thousand copies of Nupela Liaf* to Port Moresby for distribution throughout New Guinea, so why aren't you there?”

There was absolutely no animosity in his voice, only a little smile on his lips and a loving twinkle in his eyes.

Within the month we were packed up, in a state of excitement and joy, ready to return. Not surprising, because we didn't want to leave in the first place!

*Note: Mr Fatheazam's book *The New Garden*, translated as *Nupela Liaf* in Melanisan Tok Pidgin by Geoffrey Heard.

HOME AGAIN IN PORT MORESBY

Within weeks of our meeting Dr Muhajir, we were back in Port Moresby. What a joy!

We were allocated the smallest of houses in the suburb of Tokarara. It was, truthfully, the smallest house in which we had ever lived. This small apology for a house held Geoff and I, Bale and Endi, plus Endi's six-year-old nephew, Bumbo, whom we had semi-adopted. He had been mistreated by a brother-in-law, in the worst possible way, in his home village in Bougainville.

Sister Vi came to stay occasionally. I do not understand where we all slept, but somehow, we managed. Also, an Anglican missionary friend of Kaye Avera's, (a Bahá'í from England living in Moresby at the time) stayed for a week or so, read all our Bahá'í books, then left. He wrote in them all too, with such comments as: "Christ said that" and, "Jesus did that."

And, of course, the Lord Christ did say and do everything written, but our missionary friend obviously didn't feel that all God's messengers brought the same spiritual teachings, plus the laws and exhortations to suit the needs of a global society.

Another wonderful friend came to stay with us in Port Moresby – Tom Price. Tom needs no introduction because of

his fascinating talks on the Bahá'í Faith.

Tom and his friend Bob came to travel into the Mount Brown area and help the Bahá'ís there, and to deepen their understanding of the Faith.

Mount Brown is a very remote and formidable place which can only be reached by walking over mountain after mountain. Wonderful pioneers, Sue and David Podger, opened the Mount Brown area.

The first thing Tom did, almost immediately on arrival, was to come down with a bad attack of malaria, after which he was physically weak. We tried to persuade him to stay for a few extra days before undertaking such an enormously hazardous trip, but both Tom and Bob were so excited about getting there and undertaking the laborious, mountainous climb and meeting the isolated friends, we would have had to tie them to their beds to stop them. Mount Brown is the place where white men and missionaries have died in the past.

Other welcome guests while living in Port Moresby were my sister Dora Clark, and her young daughter Bronwyn.

PIONEERING – AT ITS MOST JOYOUS

Sogeri is a suburb just outside Port Moresby, not far from the Kokoda Trail turnoff. Sue and David Podger, whose names were synonymous with Bahá'í and Sogeri, were the wonderful Bahá'í pioneers there.

The Podgers were living in a large, rambling home with wide verandahs, leading into a huge lounge, where everyone was welcome and where most important Bahá'í events took place.

Our son Bale's marriage was performed there, Holy Days were celebrated there, and of course the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Port Moresby was conducted there over many years.

I remember one of these Local Assembly elections that turned out to be fraught with danger, anxiety, excitement and, overwhelmingly, with love, joy and laughter – in about that order. It was the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Port Moresby.

I set out for Sogeri in a half-car (small truck). Geoff was unable to attend until later in the day. I went to pick up the friends, and had never seen so many hopping into the back! I proceeded along the road and hadn't gone far when even more friends jumped in the back. This went on until we were well

out of Port Moresby.

On the road to Sogeri, there is a large hill that passes by a deep volcanic crater on the left-hand side of the road. Halfway up, the poor little half-car gave up the ghost and commenced to roll backwards.

My foot flat to the floor on the brake, my hand holding the hand brake as hard as possible, in a panic, I forgot to steer, so that half-car was rolling backwards towards the edge of the sleeping volcano.

Everyone in the back threw up their legs as they vacated the vehicle (I could see them in the mirror!).

Thank you, Baha'u'llah, they pushed and pushed the half-car back on to the road. My foot went to the accelerator, and the half-car took off at great speed with no weight in the back.

I arrived, on my own, at Sue and David's five minutes later, leaving my passengers to walk the remaining half mile to the house.

I entered via the back door to find dear Sue in the kitchen with her sleeves rolled up and sandwiches up to her elbows!

OF JAM AND TINNED FISH

I rushed to help Sue and commenced spreading butter. I asked her what we were putting on them,

“Oh,” she said “just plum jam and tinned fish.”

I finished buttering the bread, spread out on the large long kitchen bench, and held out my hand to take a big basin of plum jam from Sue.

Having finished with the jam, I commenced placing a piece of bread on top to complete the sandwich. Sue said,

“No, don’t do that Leila, you haven’t finished yet.”

She handed me an even bigger basin into which she had put many tins of salty tinned fish, finished off with oceans of tomato sauce!

I couldn’t believe this combination, even though I had been in New Guinea for years already.

As I continued with my work, I started to think seriously about jam and tinned fish. It didn’t seem so bad after the first shock. After all, my favourite Chinese dish was sweet and sour anything with rice on the side! Sweet and sour fish with bread on the side. This was just the local version.

ANOTHER KIND OF ELECTION

Sue and David were worried because some twenty friends had not yet arrived. They were people from the Mount Brown area living in the Port Moresby region, if I remember correctly. Sue had been waiting for them to arrive since early morning, and was surprised that some hadn't come on the previous evening. Here it was two o'clock, and the meeting and election due to start. Apart from the importance of the meeting, what were we going to do with all the sandwiches?!

We were just wrapping up the work and watching through the kitchen window, when we saw the first men walking slowly up the hill. Such a relief!

We found out afterwards, amidst much excitement, they had camped at the bottom of the mountain and had arranged a meeting of their own the night before. This sounded like a great initiative on their part, but had they elected, or thought they had elected, a Local Spiritual Assembly of their own?

We were very careful about asking. People can be hurt easily and these were relatively new Bahá'ís, and it was their first election.

Sue asked them gently about what the meeting had decided?

“Oh,” they said, “we decided to come”!

We realized that this was, indeed, a truly great initiative. They had misgivings about electing a body that would govern them, look after them as it were, for the next twelve months.

A momentous decision! Momentous because it was a matter of trust. These friends knew that other Bahá'ís would be on such an Assembly as this, and members would be from regions other than their own, including from Australia. What's more, they would not be wantoks (those who spoke the language of their home village).

They must have decided, after much discussion or consultation, which would have taken place well into the night, that even if no people from amongst them were elected to the Assembly, they trusted the Bahá'ís enough to go ahead and vote, regardless of who was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly for the following twelve months.

These people were good at consulting, for it is the way most things in New Guinea's culture are decided.

VISIT TO COUNCILLOR SISTER VI IN LAE, AND TO ENDI'S VILLAGE, IN AN OLD RICKETY BUS

Dora, Bronie, and I, flew to Lae to visit Sister Vi. Bronie stayed with Sister Vi for two or three days, while Dora and I went to Endi's village in an old rickety bus.

We travelled for what seemed to be miles and miles. At last the bus slowed down, and we were told by the driver that this was where we had to get off, this being the closest stop to Endi's village.

We had arranged that Endi would meet us at this stop. We got out with our small bags. Nothing had prepared us for what we saw at that moment.

The mountains around us were enormous and appeared to be black. Dora and I were used to seeing the Australian hills – beautiful soft blue mounds in the distance, which we loved. But these – these mountains were dark and towering above us, over us, surrounding us, and we were on our own. Ebony mountains, almost black in places because of the light, and bleak because of the heavy rain clouds over the sun. There was not a sound, not even a bird, just silence.

We felt like two small ants carrying backpacks. We were frightened, too, not that we ever admitted it even to ourselves.

Even the old worn-out bus, had it come limping down the track, would have been a happy sight, but the bus, we knew, would not return for three days, perhaps even four (New Guinea time)!

So Dora and I sat on the side of the dusty road, and waited. And we waited. We recited the Remover of Difficulties. Our voices were hushed, as though swallowed up by the mountains.

After a long quarter of an hour or so, a shout rent the air. We sprang up, and there was Endi, followed by six or seven villagers. They quickly picked up our belongings plus a few small bags of things to give the village chief and presents for Endi. We were on our way.

The village was beautiful. Neat huts in line on both sides of a wide track, surrounded by those great mountains, which weren't so unfriendly now, but rather warm and comforting.

Of course, the turkey was not. This village turkey was taller than any we had ever encountered before. He rushed to Endi as soon as he saw us, taking huge strides and kicking up little tufts of dust with every step.

Turkey apparently spent his days chasing and playing with the children. The villagers were very proud of him and the children loved him. But I don't think he took too kindly to

the two ‘invaders.’ Besides, he had never seen a white person before, and in fact nor had many people in the village, certainly not two women on their own.

Most men, women, and all the children stayed in their homes, and didn’t come out to meet us until the following morning. When they realised all had survived the night, and no one had been murdered, they plucked up enough courage to emerge from their huts.

Endi took us to the small hut where we set up our things. Luckily, we had brought a couple of rugs, as it got chilly at nightfall, and we were sleeping on the ground.

While we were doing this, Endi stood outside, cupped his mouth with his hands and made a loud call towards one of those huge mountains. The call was rather melodious. An answering call of equal beauty came back.

We asked Endi what it meant. He said his call was a signal to their friends that visitors had arrived. Apparently, the village situated halfway up that mountain was a friendly one, into which Endi’s people could marry.

High on a small ridge above the village, a sturdy outhouse had been built, overlooking the most amazing view – a picture-book view of magnificent mountains, a small waterfall, and

a pool where we could see small children playing, directly beneath us.

On our first morning, the villagers gathered, and we gave a small talk. Dora spoke in English, I translated that into Pidgin, then Endi translated the Pidgin into his native language. We just told them how beautiful their village was, how well they had looked after us with the sweet potato and the green abeka (this wasn't cabbage as we know it. But it was green and reportedly very high in nutrition). The meat was cuscus and very edible*.

Dora then spoke to them of a wonderful Prophet from God, whose name was Bahá'u'lláh, who had come to the earth when their old people were still living in the village; that His followers were called Bahá'í, like Endi, and one day another Bahá'í would visit and tell them more about Him.

A large marsupial, a species of possum.

A TOUR OF CEMETRY AND CAVES

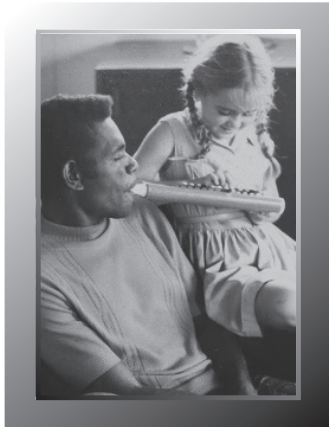
The second day in Endi's village was eventful and exhausting. Endi, plus friends, took us to see the village cemetery. Very early, we walked for an hour or so, to find where deep ledges had been cut into the mountainside. Sitting in an upright position, the white skeletons of generations of Endi's people sat, their hands neatly folded in their laps.

It was a strange, eery sight. Endi calmly told us that another body would soon be placed there; birds would eat its flesh, and the burning sun would soon whiten the bones.

Next, Endi assured us it was only a short walk to the caves he wanted us to see. We should have known better! Just a 'longwei liklik' he said. Well, well. It must have been at least a couple more miles along an overgrown bush path. Then we proceeded for another half hour or so.

Two enormous caves, with extremely small entranceways, greeted us. Only Geoffrey and Endi dared to enter. Endi said there were many ghost stories concerning the caves, stories which were repeated in the village to the children. Geoff said the caves went on and on, and they were full of thousands of bats, all hanging down from the ceiling of tree roots and all fast asleep.

It was so hard to leave these dear people without telling them more stories of the Faith, but we felt that perhaps, if they understood that Another, as well as Jesus, was looking



Bronwyn and Endi
“The Music Makers”
Photo by Geoff Heard

after them, it was enough for the present. Surely He, with His great compassion and love, will look after them.

The following day, we took the long walk back to the place of pickup. Everyone stayed with us until the friendly old rickety bus came down the road, picked us up, and returned us to Lae.

.....
*... strive that your actions day by day may be
beautiful prayers.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

Thinking Back

Thinking Back

MACKAY, QUEENSLAND

One understood more about how Endi must have felt when we took him to Surfers Paradise, on one of our holiday leaves, surrounded by people and a culture he had never known, never dreamed of. He was more at ease in the small town of Mackay, north-east Queensland, than the Gold Coast.

Dora and her family were then living in Mackay, where a wonderful stalwart Bahá'í, Muriel Shellard, arranged a meeting and invited her friends to hear about the Faith.



Leila and Eridi at Surfers Paradise.

Endi gave a short talk in Pidgin about the Bahá'í Faith. Afterwards, in question time, a middle-aged lady stood up and said, in a rather agitated manner –

“I lived for years in New Guinea as a missionary. Are you telling me that all my life has been wasted?”

Geoff answered her thus:

“Nothing you have done has been wasted. In fact, the missions in New Guinea have given the people hospitals in which to receive health, schools in which to learn, and the spirit of God, which made them happy. Missionaries such as yourself have paved the way for the people of New Guinea to progress.”

The questioner seemed happy with the answer.

I often ponder on the power and might of the Almighty, that He can take a young man from a bark and leaf hut, catapult him into the twentieth century, place him in one of the sophisticated cities in the world, then stand him in front of a sizeable, all-white, well educated audience and expect him to give a talk about the Bahá'í Faith! Only faith in Baha'u'llah can do such a thing.

MELBOURNE REVISITED

It was while living in Port Moresby, working at the university, that I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. We were extremely busy with the needs of the Faith at the time. Poor Geoff had to do everything – he rang my parents, rang his parents, made flight bookings, and arranged for our leave of absence from our respective jobs.

Geoff's parents were wonderful and comforting. Geoff's brother-in-law, Brian Smith, just happened to be the second-in-charge of the cancer department at the Prince Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, and I was booked in there immediately. Professor Masters was the head specialist, and was my surgeon.

My whole family came to the airport in Brisbane to see me on our way south. It must have been a hard time for them as they waved us off to Melbourne. And it broke my heart as well – they were all there – such worried faces, my darling mother with tears in her eyes, and her sister, my Auntie Ailsa.

It had all happened so suddenly and with such speed – that we were even able to get a flight out of Port Moresby at short notice, that the top cancer surgeon in Melbourne was able to perform the operation, that I was booked into the Alfred Hospital, and that I was convinced that all these things did not

‘just happen.’ Something far more forceful, more powerful, more wonderful, was in play here.

I have no memory of being taken to the operating theatre or seeing anyone around me. The first thing of which I became conscious was extremely loud thunder, and thinking to myself – it must be storming. Then silence.

A kind of stillness you can feel just before a large earthquake strikes. A kind of stillness that makes one feel that even the air is waiting, not even there, but just waiting... then the rushing of a wind.

Someone was standing by my bedside. A resonant, exquisite, majestic voice spoke: “The Most Great Physician has come.”

This voice went on chanting the Greatest Names: God is Glorious; O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious; O God of Power. Then I was floating gently through a narrow place, moving forward, hanging on to something like a long cloak or robe. It was extremely light, and I had to clutch it tightly to stop it slipping through my fingers.

The whole time this miraculous travelling was happening, I was asking questions. Hundreds of questions. But before I could verbalise them, the answers were already in my brain. It was like electricity or lightning; there was just no pause

between question and answer. The answer was on top of the question. It continued for a lengthy time, and I never wanted it to end.

I could see myself then, lying on the operating table. A man standing at my head said:

“The patient’s pulse is very slow.” Then a few minutes later, he said again, with some urgency:

“The patient’s pulse is very weak.” Again, a couple of seconds more, now, with great urgency and in a loud voice, he almost shouted:

“The patient’s pulse is very weak.” Silence. Then, excitedly, loudly:

“The patient’s pulse is now extremely strong!”

I woke up in the recovery room. I slowly opened my eyes, and there, bending over me, was (Dr.) Brian Smith, my brother-in-law, second in command of the specialist cancer ward.

“You’re all right Leila,” he said. “Professor Masters is very happy with you – you are quite OK.”

“Yes, I know, Brian” I answered, and went back to sleep.

This was all very vivid and very real. It remains so to this day. Should anyone wonder why it happened, I guess there were

many answers. But one is simply this – it gave me certitude. Certain of the love of God. Certain that Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, was His Messenger. Certain too, that I had no more cancer in my body.

I have no idea what my questions were during that miraculous, glorious time of moving through the night with my Beloved, and even less about the answers I received. All I knew was, it was extremely important that I had those answers.

This wonderous, transcendental experience had some strange and unexpected affects. Firstly, I did not want to be here in this world. My only desire was to be back with my Beloved. Secondly, I had no fear. Put these two things together, and you have a precarious position indeed.

On one hand, I was happy as never before. On the other hand, I compared everything with what I had experienced, which was, in reality, the World of Being. Even our beautiful pilgrimage, one year later, which was so illuminating and inspiring, was veiled in my mind by the thought:

“This place is holy and supreme, but it is not the indescribable Place I have seen.”

Other results were easier to explain – a deep, sincere, abiding love for God and His Manifestation on earth, Bahá'u'lláh, His Creation, His people, and especially His Animal Kingdom.

I no longer wish to leave this earth, but I am not afraid to die. Underlining all these bounties was a great, overwhelming feeling of happiness permeating my whole being.

I then had many years of perfect health – years full of joy and excitement, continuous activity, some small successes, and some large mistakes.

On returning home to PNG, I did not once have a post-operative check. Too busy, and too few facilities.

.....
*Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues
of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and
success in all the worlds of God are impossible ...*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

Independence

Independence

BIG DECISIONS AND BIG CHANGES

Within a month, following our talk with Dr Muhajir, we were back in our little house in Tokarara, suburb of Port Moresby. Not long after this Geoff and I did our pilgrimage to the Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, Israel.

At dusk one evening Geoff and I walked around Haifa. We were to start our actual pilgrimage the following morning.

We were about to return home to our hotel when we caught sight of a shop window that had small ornaments displayed – things that didn't weigh too much and were suitable gifts to take home to Australia and to New Guinea.

It was a long store with a narrow frontage. There weren't any customers inside and we got the impression that it was almost closing time, so we popped in for a quick look – and found a treasure chest of beautiful things.

We walked up and down the long isles picking up the things

we wanted to purchase. We took them to the counter and left them in a bundle.

An old lady was waiting for us to finish. She commenced to slowly ring up the things we wanted. Geoff pulled out his notebook, into which he had written the price of everything as we went.

I forget how much it totalled, but let us say it was 700 shekel. He handed the note paper with prices and total to the old lady. She smiled and took it, but went on slowly looking for the price hidden away somewhere and continued ringing everything up.

Just then a young man came from the back of the shop. He looked at Geoff's paper and said to his mother,

"You silly old woman, can't you see that these people are Bahá'í ? If they say the price is 700 shekel then it is 700 shekel."

He said all this in a jovial manner, without anger, then he smiled and winked at us, wrapped everything up quickly and put the things carefully into a big bag, then smilingly bowed us out of the shop.

On return, we didn't stop off in Australia but changed planes in Brisbane and flew straight home to Port Moresby.

The following year, Papua New Guinea became independent.

Geoff took a position as lecturer in journalism at the University of PNG and we moved onto campus.

I was called upon by Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Sister Vi, to be a member of the Auxiliary Board. It is such a great honour to be an Auxiliary Board Member, and Sister Vi rang me almost every day to give me encouragement and instructions. I just loved it.

Independence came to pass in 1975. We were able to stay in Papua New Guinea somewhat longer than most expatriates because of Geoff's position at the University, but most of the expatriates started to leave even before Independence was officially decreed. A very few expatriates stayed on longer and were those who wished to become PNG citizens.

Self-government had been granted one or two years prior to Independence, but who can learn politics in two years? Questions were asked: had Independence been given too soon? Opinions differed on the ground, but "yes" was the consensus. Perhaps change would have been smoother had all teachers been encouraged to stay until after they had one or two fully trained nationals to replace them. A war of words raged in all directions!

There are always many strange and amusing stories about things that happen when a country gains independence. One

that I definitely know is true: a general election had to be postponed as the ballot papers weren't ready – somebody had forgotten to print them!

Another less significant story is about when Sister Vi rang to ask me to contact a certain man she had told about the Faith. She said he was an extremely nice man, and that he was a poor fisherman. He used to deliver fish to her door, and he was coming to Port Moresby to try to get work with the Fisheries Department.

I rang the department and asked for this man, whose name escapes me. I rang about four times in as many weeks, but no, they didn't know of anyone by that name.

The fifth week I rang, the person on the other end said, "Please wait. I will put you through to the Director's office!"

Sure enough, the poor fisherman from Lae had been made the Director of the Department of Fisheries. He never did come to visit us. I guess he was just too busy.

KIKORI

Sister Vi asked me to do a teaching trip up the Kikori River, quite a large river just out of Kerema. This meant taking a single engine plane to Kerema, then going miles up the river in a canoe.

Vi asked me to speak with the women of Kikori village regarding the equality of men and women, and to encourage the men to start some kind of business that would generate income for the Kikori people.

This sounded somewhat beyond my capabilities, especially as Geoff had to work and couldn't be with me, but I knew Sister Vi wouldn't ask me to do anything she wouldn't undertake doing herself, and she told me she had been in touch with the village by mail for a lengthy time and they were expecting me. It would no doubt have taken many days to get mail in and out of a village like this.

I was met in Kerema by people I had never known. The distance to the village was, in Pidgin, 'longwei liklik.' In other words, "a fairly long way," and in my words "a very very long way!" (Remarked on previously in this book! I suspect it is because it always cost my body so much hard activity!).

These friends must have been taught by Sister Vi when one or two of them had been sent to the Lae Hospital while Sister Vi was the Matron.

The women and children of Kikori Village were lined along the bank of the river when we arrived. I felt humbled when I saw them. They led me into the village and greeted me with flowers and fruit. I spoke with them all that night and got to know them – such lovely, shy people!

Next day we talked about the laws of Bahá'u'lláh regarding equality, and then about things they could do in the way of business – did they have anything they could make and sell – thinking of baskets, beads etc.?

I'm afraid I rather outdid myself, because 'yes, they did have something.' Indeed, they did! Some distance away they showed me crocodile skins! Big ones! All rolled up and with an odour you wouldn't believe!

Could I take them back to Moresby and sell them for the village? O dear!

I wanted to help them so much, but there was no way I could. The airways wouldn't take them, they knew that. They would need to get them into Kerema and ship them. I explained this, but they already knew. As a Bahá'í, the men rather hoped,

without much conviction, that I may have some miraculous way of uplifting these huge, odorous skins. Even then, at that time, they would have been worth quite a bit of money.

I spoke to some Shipping Department official in Port Moresby, on return, but because of all the changes being made, and with Independence looming, that department was rather unhelpful.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Consultation was the most important thing on our agenda when I returned from Kikori. After much investigation and discussion, Geoff and I found that, if we decided to stay, house rent would double, our salary would be halved, all food stuffs would go up considerably, and we would not only become Papua New Guinea citizens, we would also become second class citizens.

All these things we could cope with, but Geoff had decided he wanted to go back to university. This made staying absolutely impossible. Uni fees would be incredibly high. Neither of us really wanted to leave, but we obeyed our heads in lieu of our hearts. When Geoff's term as lecturer in journalism finished,

we decided to return to Melbourne.

Melbourne, to me, had always been a city of great drama. It did not disappoint this time.

MELBOURNE – CITY OF RECURRING DRAMA

We bought a home in Wattle Glen, not far from Diamond Creek, outside Melbourne. Geoff's family lived in Plenty, so we stayed with them until we were able to move in.

Geoff enrolled in La Trobe University to study psychology. During the second year in Melbourne I went home to Warwick to holiday with my family, Mum, Dad, Dora and John. It was such a happy reunion – until, after three weeks, I rang Geoff to give him my arrival times. He asked me, did I really want to come back? I said, in some bewilderment, “Yes, of course I do.”

It was then that Geoff asked me for a divorce.

There were no cross words. No rantings or ravings. It was all perfectly clinical. I was speechless. Then heartbroken. Something within me died that night.

My mother thought I was never going to stop crying. I wasn't quite sure how all this had come about. All I knew was that, during that year, Geoff had left journalism, which had been his passion, to pursue another profession; he had left Papua New Guinea, also his passion; he later left his religion, for which he had worked so hard for years; then he left his wife. So many changes.

There are always two sides to every story. I can't recount his, but here is mine: I adored Geoff. He was the most loving, considerate husband. There were very few misunderstandings or altercations between us. We acted on the Bahá'í principle of consultation, and one didn't act without the agreement of the other.

Geoff was younger than I, and I had a jealous nature. I think I was always worried that he would leave me for someone younger than me. I'm sure he felt this – my possessiveness. In fact, I think I smothered him, and Geoff, of all people, could not have tolerated that.

There were other things of course. In Papua New Guinea, Geoff had always been the boss, in charge of his work and everything else with which he was involved. In Australia, he was just one in a city of thousands.

In Papua New Guinea, everything had been handed to us –

our accommodation, our airfare costs, our transfer costs, even our telephone costs, everything in fact. In Australia we had to become responsible. I think Geoff suffered from culture shock, and also from burn-out. Working too hard for too long.

I never did return to Melbourne. I didn't hear anything of Geoff for another thirty-three years. But that's another story.

.....
*Consort with all men, O people of Baha, in a
spirit of friendliness and fellowship.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

Another Day

Another Day

BRISBANE

“Grief is love with no place to go.” My sister Dora knew I was suffering. She said to me one day:

“Let’s go to Brisbane and buy a home there.”

Her tactic worked, because it was an exciting idea, to buy a lovely home for Dora and her children and for me. The idea certainly took my mind off my great unhappiness, nay, my depression, as we went around the real estate agents and looked at many homes for sale.

We found just what we wanted – a house at Carindale, a new estate in Brisbane. Mum and Dad, who were extremely upset when we left Warwick and because of Geoff no longer being in the family, soon packed up and bought another new home just across the road in Carindale. John was left to manage Deighton Motors Holden, which he did very successfully for many years until his retirement.

Meanwhile, now living in Brisbane, it was necessary that I

found work. A short time later I received a call from my great, long-standing friend, Elizabeth Hindson. Elizabeth, who was at the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement, rang to let me know the position of Liaison Officer on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria was available.

My heart leapt with joy, as there were quite a number of Aboriginal Baha'is there, and the National Spiritual Assembly had been looking for someone to go there and help them understand their faith.

MORNINGTON ISLAND, GULF OF CARPENTARIA – A HEARTBREAKING PLACE INDEED

My trip from Brisbane to Mornington was uneventful, apart from the fact that the planes seemed to become smaller and smaller as we went along! We landed at the so-called airport, which was an open field, and I seem to remember going through a wire gate in a wire fence. I was all dressed up, including a yellow wide-brimmed hat, just as I would be on the first day in a new job in the city.

My office was a small wooden box shared with the Welfare

Officer. Across the dusty unsealed road stood a row of small cottages, next to which was the Medical Centre, staffed by two Aboriginal nurses, and behind which stood the hub of all male activities, 'the canteen.' When the noise from the canteen became excruciatingly loud, one knew that the women of the island were also there.

In the row of huts across from my office was the true heart of Mornington Island. The older people who didn't venture to the Canteen spent their days sewing clothes for the men of the family, who came home drunk every night.

They cooked and did 'fancy work' with the few cotton colours they had, and spun human hair to make ceremonial hats – long pointed hats, very heavy to balance on heads, but impressive to look at. They ran out of human hair while I was there, so I wrote to hairdressers I knew in Warwick, and they sent up large boxes of hair cuttings from their affluent southern customers.

These dear old women told me stories of being taken from their parents when they were only small children. They were gems of humanity. They had been educated in their early years by the missions. They wrote beautifully, and their spelling skills were incredibly good. They spoke extremely good English, and I just loved visiting them and hearing the stories of their

sad lives. Some knew of the Bahá'ís and where they lived. They said they would tell them about the meetings I was trying to arrange and encourage them to attend.

While I was on Mornington, dear friend Nellie Burchill came to visit. She carried one large suitcase. When she opened it, out tumbled bottles of vitamin tablets. I had not been eating well and had lost weight, and this angel walked in and made me well again. Nellie had been to the island on many occasions and had carried on the teaching work done previously.

It took almost one year to gather the Bahá'ís together for a Feast. Fifty-four came, men, women and children. We sat outside in the soft moonlight. Mind you, I am not really sure whether they were all members of the Faith. What a wonderful thing that they came anyway. Sitting in a large circle, they played didgeridoos and danced around the fire they had prepared. There were prayers and singing. It went on for a long time.

I received a letter the following week from Head Office, saying there had been a complaint that I was 'disturbing the peace.' The following mail brought a further letter saying I was on transfer to Mt Isa and was to take up duties there immediately.

I was really upset at leaving my friends and all the children I had played with and had gotten to know and love. I felt, but didn't know, from whence that complaint had come. I assumed

the Pastor had seen/heard our Feast.

This Pastor came from Papua and spoke Motu. I could speak very limited Motu, but at first, this made us very close. We became good friends. After the Feast, he avoided me and never spoke to me again.

In 1979, I flew into Isa on the same day that the current Bahá'í home-front pioneer, Graeme Eldridge, flew out. Our paths had crossed.

Mt Isa was a challenge. Some of the friends from Mornington called at the office to visit me, but on the whole, very little teaching work was done. Graeme had left me the names of friends he had made whilst there, but nothing went forward. Also, my job in Mt Isa was dramatically different to work carried out on Mornington. I was asked to travel to different towns, which included far western places like Dajarra and Boulia, where I was required to contact the schools and police to ascertain the health and safety of the Aboriginal people.

These are not happy memories. The head of police in Dajarra was abusive; the school teacher told me he wouldn't have black children in his class as they smelt too much; and said that I should leave the town and stop wasting my time and his.

I went to find the children and found them living in a gully

behind the Police station. They were playing under their homes in raw sewage, owing to blocked toilets and a bad water supply. This situation had been reported many times, but apparently had never been rectified. I always had much reporting to do when I returned to the office! My answer was an acknowledgement only.

The Aboriginal nurses took me on their 'rounds.' They were not required to do this, in fact they may have been breaking rules to do so, but they were my friends and they consented to let me go with them.

They took me to places not marked on any map. To old car dumps, well away from small settlements and even smaller towns. This is where young girls had their babies – in the back of the dirty old cars. The nurses did their best to help them, and they did their own reporting. I wondered if they got 'acknowledgements' as well.

There are some amazing and wonderful people in this world!

The nurses took me to another place where an old lady lived in the home she had made for her old age.

In amongst the trees, a small bark hut with the addition of a few sheets of old tin she had gathered up from somewhere. A wall of wire netting, plaited with sticks and leaves from

growing plants, shielded one side of her hut.

The ground around her home was completely bare of any kind of growth. Every day she swept it without pity, until the hard earth beneath had a pale pink shine caused by the red earth beneath.

This was her protection and her pride. Any snake or animal could immediately be seen and swiftly dealt with if dangerous.

An old man lived in similar surroundings some half a kilometre away, possibly less. Each morning he walked to a nearby river and filled two large buckets of clean, clear water. He walked back to his home, leaving one bucket for the old lady. In this way, both existed happily.

In Dajarra township, a group of Australian Government workers were building small units, with kitchen, dining and bedroom, shower and toilet. All those living in the bush were required to move into these units. Eventually they moved, each to their own unit.

Three months later they were moved out again. The units were in a 'disgusting state,' according to official reports, and a 'danger to the health of those inhabiting them.'

I was instructed to go to Dajarra and inspect these units, and found my old lady friend and the poor old man next door who

had been bringing her water in a bucket every day.

The old lady was crying. She didn't know how to use the stove. She didn't know how to clean the sink. She didn't know how to wash her clothes, so she did this in a bucket on the floor of the so-called dining room. She didn't have enough money to buy a broom. She was frightened of living so close to those in the other units.

In her bush home, she needed only a slab of soap, a pouch of tobacco, matches and, occasionally, a bag of flour and a little salt.

Many reports about these things were written, but answers never did cross my desk.

.....
*The essence of faith is fewness of words and
abundance of deeds.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

Haifa and the Glorious World Centre

Haifa and the Glorious World Centre

A DREAM COME TRUE

Around this time, I applied to the Universal House of Justice for a position in Haifa. Whilst awaiting my reply, I returned to Sydney and worked for a couple of months at National Bahá'í Headquarters in Mona Vale.

My invitation from the House of Justice came in 1989, much to my utter delight.

I flew to Israel as soon as possible, arriving along the way at Athens, where I stayed overnight. Next day I checked into the airport and found the El Al Reception Office tucked away in a dark hallway some distance from the many other airline offices. It was gloomy and grey, and my impression was that it was constructed out of concrete and left unpainted.

I arrived at the reception office with one shoe off, owing to the fact it was torn off by the escalator on the way up. The man behind the counter looked at me with a peculiar look on his face as I handed him my shoe. He didn't want to take the shoe

from me, but I reminded him there may be drugs or a bomb in the heel!

If this had been an Aussie man, he would have laughed. I didn't know that Israeli men don't laugh, especially at airports. He was extremely cross with me and took me to a lady who sat me down and commenced asking me dozens of questions. When she got to the question,

“Why are you going into Israel?,” and I replied,

“I am going to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa to work,” her attitude changed completely.

“Oh” she said, “you are Bahá'í ?”

I answered in the affirmative.

She took away my shoe and returned it in minutes with the heel glued on. She assured me it was only a temporary fix, as it wasn't the correct glue, and that I wasn't to tread too heavily. They were my good red shoes, I remember.

This lady then spoke with another gentleman. I couldn't understand their conversation. He took me to his office and asked me some more of the same questions. He was so charming and brought me a cup of tea. He assured me I would be absolutely safe as El Al Airways had never been hijacked or fallen out of the sky.

THE HAIFA FAMILY

There are multitudes of wonderful accounts of pilgrimage in so many beautiful Bahá'í books, and many more accounts of working at the Bahá'í World Centre, so I will not attempt to explain the wonder of it all.

Seven hundred beautiful people, from so many different lands, living and serving, full of happiness, loving what they do; soaking up the history of their Faith. They shared stories about how they became Bahá'ís, their tests and hardships,



all under the loving gaze of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, beloved Guardian Shoghi Effendi, and at times, with the gentle assistance of the Continental Board of Councillors.

Imagine the honour of being in the position to visit the Shrine of the Bab every lunch break! Or again – as I did on my very first day – of bolting into the lift on the second floor, carrying a large number of books, and only other person in that lift was...

“Good morning Khanum,” I squeaked.

Should one become ill at the World Centre, one is referred to a specialist. Specialist offices are situated on French Carmel, a short bus trip behind the World Centre offices.

Whilst in Haifa, I suffered eye trouble, and so appointments were made with an eye specialist. The visit to this doctor was a real eye opener to me (please excuse the pun.)

Specialists in Haifa do not have receptionists. I heard that GPs also had no receptionists. They came into the patients waiting room on a small stool on wheels, which they manoeuvred by taking huge steps, then lifting their feet off the floor and gliding along at a fast rate, stopping directly in front of the relevant patient.

He/she would ask who had been waiting the longest. That

person was beckoned into the doctor's small consulting room.

One day while waiting to be called in, I noticed a small old lady. She had arrived well after me and sat down quietly in the last empty chair. I expected to be the next called, but the doctor, on shooting into the waiting room on his wheeled stool, looked around and wheeled himself towards the old lady, who had just arrived, held out his hand to help her stand, then led her to his consulting room.

Other patients were not in the least upset at being by-passed. As she stood up, I happened to notice her arm. Above the wrist was the tattoo of a large number. All became clear. That old lady was a survivor of the holocaust.

This is how every one of the survivors is treated in Israel – with the greatest respect and love. I had never encountered a survivor previously and was surprised that it stirred such strong emotion within me. I found I had tears in my eyes.

At the time I was at the World Centre, there was a war going on between Israel and Palestine, of course. A large supermarket was being built a few miles north of Haifa. Scud missiles flew overhead almost every night, and one fell on that supermarket. After that, it was known as 'The Scud' Supermarket.

At this wartime period, I call to mind the Bahá'í family in

Haifa and its father, the Universal House of Justice. When this war broke out we were lovingly told that anyone who felt they would like to go home certainly could, and the House of Justice would understand. Only one small family left. They had a tiny baby, born only a couple of weeks before, as I recall.

Then many things happened at once. Gas masks were issued; protective clothing – brilliant yellow plastic – was to be kept in our apartments close to hand; lists of tinned food were given out – such things as soups, baked beans, dried milk, and protein snacks were stacked in our cupboards; then the janitorial staff moved in and fixed our windows and glass doors, so breakages would be less likely to occur.

Could anyone be looked after better, more meticulously, more lovingly than this?

Having served four incredible years in Haifa, I requested to return to Australia to see my family en-route to Papua New Guinea. The House of Justice graciously gave consent and indicated they were especially pleased for me to return to my spiritual home, Papua New Guinea.



Leila in gas mask

.....
*The source of all learning is the knowledge of
God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be
attained save through the knowledge of His Divine
Manifestation.*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

The Bahá'í Permanent Institute, Lae

The Bahá'í Permanent Institute, Lae

ESTABLISHMENT IN THE DARK

Councillor Naraqi asked that I go to Lae and start up the Permanent Institute there. I was humbled by his request, and following a short course in IT, I returned. The government would admit only people who had skills that nationals did not, so even with scant knowledge of computers. I had no trouble getting a visa.

The Institute management and teaching work was what I'd been born to do. I loved it. With classes of approximately eight to sixteen students, the classes lasted for ten days, including two weekends, and on the second Monday they would go home to their various villages.

Students were housed in a dormitory holding approximately thirty, which was attached to a large schoolroom where children were taught. This was a Bahá'í school for children who were behind in their studies; most of them lived with their parents in Lae and no longer required accommodation

in the dormitory.

The Bahá'í Institute used the dormitory, and the classes were held in the Bahá'í Centre itself. It was a large, pleasant room with black boards and a long table comfortably seating eight, but able to hold twice that number. Each student had a notebook and biro, a red pencil, water, and so on, and as the days went on, pamphlets and pictures. Many stayed for a second Institute, and some returned to their village and set up small institutes for family and friends.

After the first year of the Institute running successfully, those who had attended, and others, allowed their wives and sisters to attend the Lae Institute. Thus, the women started to arrive.

My dear helper and friend, Vera, lived in the centre with me. Vera worked hard indeed, never complained, and looked after my personal needs. She cooked for the students, she cleaned the centre, bought the vegetables at the nearby market, did shopping in Lae, and cooked for all the students regardless of number needed.

Students came back to the centre at 7 p.m., going into the classroom for an hour and discussing what they had heard that day. This was unsupervised time; then, at my invitation, they came into the lounge with Vera and me, asked questions, told stories, had fun, and swapped jokes. I finally got the old

television I had brought with me to work. Some nights we watched for a time, students returning to the dormitory at 9 p.m.

One night I was woken by terrible moans and wheezing, not far from my bedroom window. I woke Vera and we found an old man who was so full of dust from the Highlands Road while walking to attend the Institute that he could barely draw breath.

I rang for an ambulance but was told in Pidgin that the ambulance had been stolen and had been driven to the airport. So, I contacted the Guard Dogs, which was used by the expatriate population in place of the police/ambulance. Very fast and efficient and very expensive. So, the old man was taken to hospital and came back three days later, fit and well, and ready to start at the Institute on the following Monday.

The women, who did not attend the Institute until after their men had returned, needed looking after as well, after a long walk from some of the more remote villages. Legs, scarred,



Vera

scratched and bleeding, some with long-standing sores and/or ulcers, were bathed in disinfectant and bound up. The patient would be put to bed in the extra bedroom in the centre where the women were housed.

One assumes the men came first to “check it out” as it were, to make sure it was not a fairy story, where all would be fed, looked after, and learn, without payment.

There is a rather nice story regarding the Guard Dogs. A bounty from on High I feel. The Guard Dogs was run by a man from my home town of Warwick, Mervyn Mangan.

Mervyn came to the Bahá'í Centre to find me. I hadn't known him when growing up, but knew of his family. He gave me a red alert button to press if I ever needed him, which I did on a number of occasions. I arranged to pay for his services, but neither the Faith nor I ever received an account from him.

STORIES AT THE INSTITUTE

Without the help of Bahá'u'lláh, I could not have done this. I had mapped out a program of sorts, but had no idea how much the students knew or didn't know. I started on the premise that they knew nothing. I found that Pidgin English was their second language, beside the language of their "place," or home. I believe there are over 800 such languages in New Guinea. My Pidgin was OK, but to teach the Faith is difficult at any time and this was stretching it to the limit.

The first Institute period was a 'getting to know you,' which was rather unnecessary, as most had already spent the weekend in the dormitory together awaiting the first day of the Institute lessons. It was more about me getting to know them.

The second period was understanding the meaning of the name Bahá'u'lláh, The Bab, Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice, and of course, the three Greatest Names and what each meant. This took quite some time: For instance:

What is the meaning of 'Glory'?

What is 'Justice'?

What is 'Shoghi'?

Where is Iran, from where words in this strange language came?

There were many unexpected questions also.

Who is Bahá'u'lláh's mother?

Did He have sisters and brothers?

Luckily, I had a copy of His lineage that students laboriously copied into their small notebooks from the white board. But then:

Who is Keturah? and Zoroaster'?

Much to my delight, these questions led straight into an explanation of Progressive Revelation. This session, without Progressive Revelation, usually ended the first day of the Institute. However, the second day had its challenges as well, especially when we came to the name of Jesus, so we went over the whole first day again, plus enlarging on the topic of Progressive Revelation.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

“How many man was Jesus?” one asked.

On delving further, apparently some of the missions had shown films about the life of Jesus in many villages, and in at least two of the films, sometimes more, the part of Jesus had been played by different actors. To make it even more complex, I had told them that all the Prophets of God were the same, as they came from one God.

So, films and actors needed explaining, which led, of course to the next burning question – ‘... all those stories about Jesus feeding those people with small food are gamin (false)?’ and, ‘that dead man that Jesus made alive, all false?’ Students went on and on about everything being ‘gamin.’

They became indignant and excited. I was doing some heavy praying. I wanted to explain Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that Scriptures should be read with a spiritual eye, but that would have led to even deeper waters explaining the word “spiritual.” So, I told them stories. I pray to God that I did right.

About the loaves and fishes, I told them many people came to hear this Jesus that people said was speaking wonderful things. Some of these people had walked a very long way, “as you students did.”

“Did you,” I asked them, “bring any food with you for the journey?.”

“Yes,” said one, “I brought a mango.”

They nodded and most said “yes,” and they told me what they had brought – mangos, half a cooked chicken from their place, some cooked potatoes with the skin, some saksak (cooked sago), some cold rice, pawpaw; many had brought some water, and many had bought soft drinks at small stores along the way, if lucky enough to be walking along the main road.

“Right,” I said. “All these people that came to hear Jesus talk to them did not know one another. They sat beside each other and didn’t speak to each other. Some of them even came from warring tribes. Sitting on the side of a small rise for hours whilst waiting, they had not become friends. Then Jesus started to speak.”

“Jesus told them about love – not the sort of husband and wife love, but another sort of love. He told them that He loved them all; He told them in such a beautiful and loving way that the hearts of those listening began to melt with a responding love for Him – they had never felt this kind of love and joy before. Jesus showed them how to show love by lifting up the loaves and two fishes, indicating that it was the only food was available.”

“He had inspired them with such love for their fellow men, that they turned to each other and shared their food; nobody was left out and no one remained hungry. This was the miracle, that Jesus turned hard hearts into loving, compassionate and happy hearts.”

This was only one Institute, the first, but to my astonishment on the third or fourth day of every Institute, something changed.

Something amazing and breathtakingly beautiful took place in that schoolroom of the Bahá'í Institute in Lae. The faces of the students changed. Their eyes, instead of appearing to be black pools, became sparkling black orbs of light and happiness. The whole atmosphere became one of friendship. No longer shy of the white woman in their midst, they put their arms around each other's shoulders, slapped each other on the back, they laughed and joked together.

With stories of Jesus sorted, the story of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh was the next priority.

There were tears when relating the history and martyrdom of the Bab, including my own. It was very emotional, but also happy at the same time. There were groans and gasps of disgust and anger when they heard the conditions endured by Bahá'u'lláh in the Siyah-Chal, the Black Pit in the slums of Tehran.

We would go outside then and have a cup of tea or a cold drink,

then come back into the classroom and discuss the Laws and Admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh. Not every Institute was the same, but the things mentioned were very general and happened in most, if not all, in one way or another, at varying times during the course.

I remember at one institute I was asked,

“Why is your skin white Leila?”

We had to discuss this for at least half an hour. We went to lunch then, otherwise heaven knows how long it could have gone on!

The two last days of each institute were extremely busy. It was the only time we had to study the Administrative Order, and usually didn't finish until well into the evening. We talked about how to form a Local Spiritual Assembly of nine members; if more than nine (and there usually were), then they were 'the community.'

The first of these days we discussed consultation in all its sections – listening to the subject carefully, discussing the subject fully; taking a vote on the subject if not unanimously agreed upon; and then, the last most important section, fully supporting the decision whether one had voted for it or against it, whether they agreed with it or not.

There follows one of the problems the Local Spiritual Assembly had to solve.

AN INSTITUTE QUESTION

A small village had a newly formed Local Spiritual Assembly. The uncle of one of members, Tomos, got a message to say Tomos's father was very sick; Tomos advised the LSA of his plan to go to Port Moresby to visit his father.

The Local Assembly needed to plant the community vegetable garden, but the seed was running out, so it asked Tomos to buy the seeds needed, and gave him money from the Treasurer.

Tomos went to Port Moresby and found his father was very sick indeed. He took him to the hospital where the doctor said his father, Tovat, would have to stay and have an operation. The cost of this would be K50 (Kina), and Tomos would have to buy the food for his father's stay in the haus sik (hospital) as well.

Now K50 was the exact amount that the Local Spiritual Assembly had given Tomos for the small plants and seeds for the community's garden.

Tomos was very worried. He didn't know what to do! Should he take his father home and let him be in more pain and then die, or should he obey the Assembly and buy the seeds?

Tomos went to his Port Moresby home with his Uncle Tovat that night. He was in a bad state of mind. His head ached,

because his family knew he had the money for the seeds, and his brothers kept saying he must give the hospital the money, and other members of this family kept asking where the money was hidden, so they could take it to the hospital, and give it to the doctor.

Tomos knew his extended family would spend the money on themselves if he let them have it.

Poor Tomos's head ached so much, he found an old razor blade and cut little cuts right across his forehead.

This is what many villagers do to take away any type of pain they are suffering. Pain from the small cuts is so intense it takes their mind off the original cause of the pain.

The following day, Tomos took the money to the hospital and gave it to the hospital.

One-month later, Tomos returned to his village, leaving his dear father well and strong after his operation, but with no money and no seeds.

On returning home Tomos went straight to the home of the Chairman, Jepry.

Jepry thanked Tomos for coming to him and said he would meet with the LSA. The Local Assembly would call him to meet with it later.

*Question: What did the Local Spiritual Assembly say to Tomos?
Did Tomos do the right thing?*

**The story was read four times over until everyone in the
Assembly understood.**

Consultation went on for an extended period. After two hours of extremely robust discussion, the chairman called for a vote, and reminded them that everyone would need to accept the decision of those getting the highest votes.

The vote was taken, and the decision was that Tomos did the right thing, because of the strong and urgent need of his father. However, Tomos was to remember that spending the Assembly's money was an extremely bad thing and,

1. Tomos would have to pay it back by working three hours in the garden every day, then:
2. When the vegetables grew he would take them to the market and give the money received to the next-door village, that had lent them seeds and plants for the garden while Tomos was away; then,
3. He would go to the Treasurer and pay the Assembly the K50 he owed.

This, the Assembly decided would take about six months, as everything grew so fast in the sun and rain in their place.

Tomos was so happy about the decision of the LSA, and then a strange thing happened.

Back in the School Room:

Those who had voted to send Tomos to prison sprang up and reached across the table and shook the hands of those who wanted to forgive Tomos – they called out things such as ‘You win! You win! We are happy that you won!’ and ‘Thank you Poroman!’ (friend). ‘Let us have more problems!’ Their faces were radiant.

FAREWELL

After four years at the Institute without a holiday or break, I was feeling unwell and rather burnt-out, I think. I loved and appreciated the opportunity to carry out such work for the Faith and found it difficult to leave. Saying goodbye to the friends, especially those that had helped me so much: Vera, the worker; Arbin, the teacher, Gregory, the groundsman; leaving them was all too much.

When Craig Volker, a Bahá'í from Japan, invited me to go to Japan and open his school 'English Vision,' I accepted.

After only one year in Japan I was still not well, so I returned to Australia in 2001.

LIFE'S SURPRISES

I did further teaching trips out in the west of Queensland and New South Wales with wonderful Bahá'í friends, Elizabeth Hindson, Florence Avent, Klare Kuolga, and went three times to Thursday Island at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly.

But the greatest surprise of all came in 2013 when I had an e-mail from Geoffrey Heard. The first in thirty-three years!

Then followed floods of e-mails, telling me how things were in PNG, the politics, mutual friends, village life in Rabaul, Kokopo and Bale's village of Vunacabi, where he was living at the time. Geoff was making money by creating web sites for new businesses, and some old.

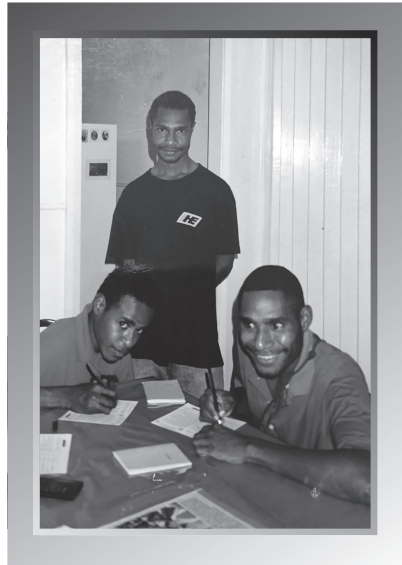
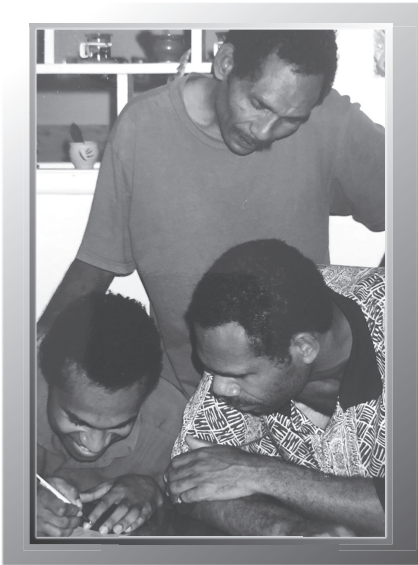


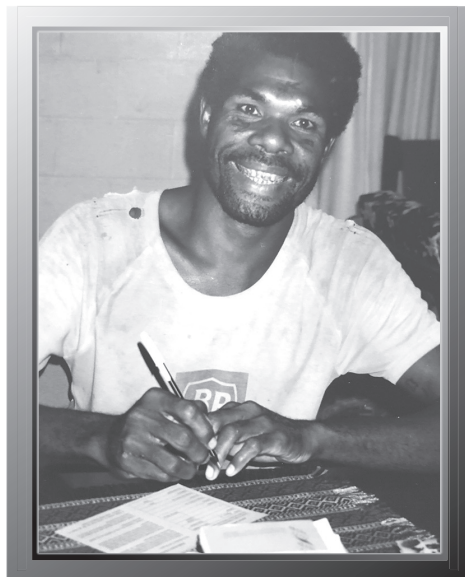
Fun at The Institute















.....
*The best beloved of all things in My sight is
Justice; turn not away therefrom ...*

Bahá'u'lláh
.....

The Local Man

The Local Man

GEOFF

Geoffrey moved from Vunacabe to a nearby village, where he settled down with a Papua New Guinean partner and her three children. He loved the children – he'd always loved the New Guinean children, and I think they were all very happy.

Later that year, Geoff said he was coming to Australia for a medical check-up in Melbourne. Could he see me, and could I come to Brisbane to meet him on his way back?

Of course I could – I had decided to write this book, and needed his input, as well as wanting to see and speak with him again. I still thought of him fondly in any case.



Geoff Heard, the last time
Leila saw him

Geoff came back to Melbourne three times after that first meeting. On these occasions he came every time to Warwick to see me and members of my family. My brother John and wife Diana really thought a lot of Geoff, as did my sister Dora and her family, Bronwyn and Stephen, who had been so young when they first met him.

After visiting Dora, I drove him back to his motel. I said:

“Well Geoff, you have more than one loving family in Warwick if ever you decide to return for good.”

“I know,” was all he answered.

On his third and last visit to Warwick, Geoff and I went shopping together, buying presents to take back for his PNG family. The following day we picked up his belongings from the motel and drove him to the bus departure point. I remember I had my little dog Skippy with me.

After he had boarded, I couldn't see him at any window. I knew he must have settled in a seat on the other side of the isle so I picked up Skippy and we walked around to the other side and looked through all the windows until we found him.

As I held Skippy up to the window and waved his paw, he turned his face away from me. I could see his face was wet with tears. He did not turn back or smile, though I waited.

Geoff and I had a mutual friend here in Warwick. His name is David Leech, and we had all met up in Melbourne many years before when we were at La Trobe University. A short time after Geoff's last visit to Warwick, David came to see me at the Warwick Base Hospital. He came with the news that Geoff had passed away.

Geoff apparently had a heart attack whilst shopping at Kokopo market. His body had been taken to Bale's home, and then on to the hospital. He had always said he wanted to go quickly and be buried in Papua New Guinea. His wishes were fulfilled, but it was a great shock to family and friends in both countries.

Geoff was buried in Kokopo Cemetery. His burial was attended by the people from many villages, some two hundred, plus some family members from Australia.

LET THE PARADISE BEGIN

On 1st August 2014 the Universal of Justice announced that a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was to be erected in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

The rejoicing that erupted in the hearts of believers in the Pacific was immense, and the hearts of the dear pioneers exploded with thanks to God for His great bounty, and for the intense joy that radiated their hearts.

This book is therefore dedicated to them, to the past and present pioneers – not just those I was privileged to know and love, but to all pioneers of the Bahá'í world who, on most occasions, knew little or nothing of where they were going, or what situations they were likely to encounter.

They sacrificed their family and friends, their privileged positions, and in so many cases went to third world countries. They made friends, they prayed to find the waiting souls, those that have eyes to see and ears to hear. They invited these precious ones to meetings, picked them up, cooked them meals of sweet potatoes and coconut milk, or cakes and biscuits for supper; dropped them home afterwards; washed up a multitude of cups and plates, then finally went to bed exhausted for a couple of hours sleep.

Some gave even more – one that I know gave their most precious possession of all – their baby boy, who died in New Guinea.

Pioneers are the prelude to a piece of the most great, the most divine music, sometimes joyful, sometimes sad, played by a beautiful, mystical orchestra. Its ending is a crescendo like unto the music of paradise.

And now the first wave is anticipated to arrive – wave upon wave of dear souls, tired of the hatred, the corruption and wars of present-day society. A new generation of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh (The Glory of God) is now arising across the globe like unto that great first wave – the generation that will commence to build Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, a world of Unity, Love, Compassion and Justice.



THE DREAM

At that time, between wake and sleep,
A wondrous vision my soul didst meet –
A pure, white temple, on a hill,
In a mist...

And when I gazed... and gazed again,
I saw the doors stood open wide
Inviting all to come inside – and stay –
In the pure, white temple, on a hill,
In a mist...

Then mighty waves of people did come
They called to me: “Mankind is One” –
“Mankind is One”

As they flocked towards
That pure, white temple, on a hill,
In the sun...

And then went up a mighty roar
As with a single voice they sung:
“Our God is One” – “Our God is One”
In that pure, white temple, on a hill,
In the sun...

Leila Deighton

NOTES

