

# *ONE MOMENT IN TIME*

## *A series on our PNG experience.*

*By Dennis Catchpole*

June and I are often asked what it is to be a volunteer and live in a third world country, we hope that you find our story of interest.

I have called this experience for June and I as “One Moment in Time” as often this is what events in our lives are.

Way back in the seventies I had the opportunity to go with the Fairfield Rotary club to the Kingdom of Tonga on a volunteer basis, to build some class rooms at a school in the village of Mua.

I was at the time a member of the Putaruru Rotary club, and I was taken by the idea of going to another country to find out what the experience would be like.

I talked two mates into joining me as the Fairfield club was short of people to go. The project took a month and we lived in the village with the people.

I remember the culture shock, as we dealt with living in a house with dirt floors, and eating different foods. For us this was the first time we were surrounded by people who were a different colour and spoke very little English. The Tongan people are a beautiful people, or they were then anyway, always ready to laugh.

The experience was so enjoyable that it stayed with me for many years, and I tried many times to get involved in a two-year project but with five kids no one would risk us.

Until the year 2000 when June came into my life, and I asked her if she would like to go to a

Tropical Island, where we could have our honeymoon when we got married, you know - romantic sunsets, sitting on the Beach with a tropical drink in our hand.

She said she would love to go back to Hawaii. I then had to tell her that what I really had in mind was Papua New Guinea for maybe three years, as Volunteers. June said “But isn’t it dangerous?” “Well”, I said “It can be, but where we would be going seems OK.”



So began an experience of our lifetime. We took Junes youngest Daughter Cherie, and set sail for the unknown.

At the time we had a song which pretty much summed up what we were about to do.

**Galilee Song.**

I am going to repeat some of the words, because when you make a decision to change your life like this you do need a certain amount of faith in the future.

The words in this song say it very well.

**Deep within my heart, I feel voices whispering to me**

**Words that I can't understand, Meanings I can't clearly hear.**

**Calling me to follow close, least I leave myself behind.**

**Calling me to walk into evening shadows one more time.**

**The verse:**

**So I leave my boats behind**

**Leave them on familiar shores**

**Set my heart upon the deep.**

**Follow you again my lord.**

And there are a number of verses in a similar vein.

As expected, the culture shock was difficult especially for June and Cherie as I had some idea of what we would find. We had a bottle of brandy with us and that lasted a couple of days as we dealt with the change.

The house we were given was large but rather dirty and the stove was gas and faulty, and we had to contend with cockroaches and geckos, and of course mosquitoes.

We had single beds, with a mattress about two inches thick.

We got the impression that they had had some failures with volunteers before, who couldn't handle the change, so they were waiting to see if we would stay before spending too much time on us.

So, the second day I met with the Financial Administrator who was a German Priest, and made it clear if they expected us to stay then things had to change.

He realised we were serious and allowed me to buy what we needed to improve our situation, living-wise. He also took me down to the car dealer and purchased a ute for our use.

We were not Missionary's, there is a difference, volunteers use the talents that you have developed over many years to assist the people normally in a third world country. In our case we signed a contract to work for the Catholic Archdiocese of Rabaul in a place called Yunopepe, based on a very large Mission, with great views of the sea. The island was called East and West New Britain Population of about 600.000.

And so, the adventure began.....



*Dennis*