

## *Chapter 11*

### *Following the Guide*

There is a marked contrast between the Highlands and Lowlands of PNG and we used to jokingly say that the Lord called the 'softees' to the Highlands. It is so beautiful with rich deep blue mountain ranges set against the clear blue sky and masses of cumulus clouds. The mountain peaks and valleys are highlighted by wisps of smoke from little mud and leaf houses. You see all of that on a good day, but unfortunately the day we arrived back, there was



Crater of Mt Bosavi

dense cloud and a fairly strong wind. The pilot kept singing and was unperturbed. Eventually he spotted a small break in the clouds and we dived down into that hole (which seemed very small to us!) and there we were flying over the Tari valley.

We had asked to come back via Tari to settle the girls into school. Miriam, although not quite eight, automatically wanted to start with her sisters but it didn't feel so good as it came time for us to leave. Our arrival coincided with a Leadership Course they wanted Murray to attend, so that gave us two weeks in Tari.



Huli man

Murray was experiencing a gradual move in his ministry to administration. How did he feel about that? In some respects it was good – certainly what is now called ‘Member Care’ was part of the gifting the Lord had given him. But his priority and particular gifts had always been ‘hands on’.

Having said goodbye to the girls, we settled back into Balimo with Deborah. At a station meeting it was felt that it would be good for us to relinquish the Guest House and let someone else handle that now. Whew! Added to other committees, Murray was on the Board of Management for the High School and sometimes attended Council meetings in Port Moresby for Pasuwe – the chain of Trade-stores that had arisen from the Mission Stations.

One of Murray’s personal projects was ‘Porky’. This was the name given to a piglet that he bought when up at Awaba one time. Porky was given first-class treatment and lots of food. This had the desired affect and she grew astoundingly. Part of her diet was left over rice and other food from the nurses’ home and we all looked forward to the day when she would be prepared for our Christmas dinner. That was quite an sad episode the killing of Porky. Then came the challenge of dropping her into boiling water to remove the hair. Don’t ask me who ended up the wettest. But the sad fact remained that Porky had eaten too much starch and not enough protein, she was nearly all fat.

Another of Murray’s projects was the ‘Ranee’. You may remember that some years earlier he had built a 17ft 6ins marine ply (fibre glass covered) launch to be used for village patrols. The ‘Ranee’ had been taken around to Wasua and used there. She was now brought back to Balimo but there were one or two difficulties in navigating the lagoon because of the wild rice which had become a weed. If the water rose quickly at the beginning of ‘the wet’ season the grass was killed and we had clear channels. But if the water came up slowly the weed grew and came with it. Propellers did not like this weed as it wound itself around the propeller and shaft until the motor stopped. When tightly wound someone would have to go overboard to cut it off. Murray eventually gave the ‘Ranee’ to Danaya the senior pastor for church work. Murray’s craftsmanship was amazing – although perhaps I am ‘one eyed’. But truly she was a beautiful boat

Just before our leave the mission had approved a new vehicle – a Mitsubishi Colt, which was a great relief. There were times when Murray just had to use the old Jeep as a 4WD, but for every day runs the Colt was great. At one stage, Sibiya had moved down to Daru looking for a job with more pay – for which you could not blame him, but the day came when he returned, feeling quite homesick. Sibiya looked after the servicing of the vehicle very well and this freed up Murray for other tasks.

The house that we moved into had been built some 14 years earlier for Ian and Ivy Lindsay. The rooms were lined with Sisalkraft paper which had been painted and was then showing bad signs of wear, plus holes chewed by the rats that come into the home. Sisalkraft is a bitumen laminated building paper and was used extensively as it came in rolls and was easily hung, as well as being cheaper than other options. So Murray decided to pull down the paper and re-line it with 3-ply. In a letter home he commented, ‘That should fool a few cockroaches and rats, as well as displacing the bats.’

Murray always enjoyed the school holidays when the girls were home. He went out of his way to plan picnics, BBQs, trips to a village and so on. I loved just sitting around doing crafty things, cooking with them and so on. One of the highlights would be a picnic out at the mouth of the lagoon where it met the Aramia River and anyone who was game could go water skiing. As they say: “You can take the boy out of New Zealand, but you can’t take New Zealand out of the boy.” Fortunately we were never attacked by a crocodile, which did happen to others from time to time.



Murray with Pastor Danaya

Just when we were planning for the girls to return to Tari word came asking if Murray and I could go up to there to relieve as Hostel Parents for a month or two. A new couple who were due to arrive for the next term were having difficulty with their entry permits and could be a few weeks before taking up the role. We were all overjoyed at the opportunity to spend more time with our girls.

Cooking and caring for 12 was nothing new and we would have extra time with our girls.

What we were going to need was the Lord's wisdom in handling other people's children, being impartial in all decisions and getting along with the Huli staff. The Hulis were known for their pride and being difficult to teach. Of course we would be the ones learning, not them. The other trick was that they spoke Huli and Pidgin – very little English. Despite all of this we set off most optimistically.

We know that things do not always go as expected but we had barely unpacked when unexpected news came from Frankston, Melbourne. We understood that my mother was having surgery for Gallstones the next week, but it came as a total shock to receive the message that they had found a large Abdominal Lymphoma. The church sent word to say that it was quite likely that she might only have one or two weeks to live. It all depended on her recovery from the surgery. The wheels turned quickly. Our representative in Moresby was able to get Deborah added to my Passport and obtain two tickets within 24 hours and the next day we flew to Melbourne and were driven from the Airport to the Alfred hospital and were sitting by her bed at 10pm the same night. In total, we were away for six weeks. Mother did recover and went on to Chemotherapy. As Deborah and I left Melbourne Alan Dunn our Pastor assured us that the members of the church would care for mum and let us know if at any time they thought we should be with her. What an amazing provision.

Now what about Murray? That could fill another book. About this time an old friend of Murray's from Te Awamutu, Clarrie Wellington had come up to the Highlands to do some voluntary work for the mission. Murray and Clarrie took over the running of the Hostel like veterans. It seems that everyone had a marvelous time – perhaps not quite so well disciplined but they certainly felt loved and cared for. One of the boys said, "Uncle Murray has a jokey mind." We know that Murray had become quite domesticated while working on the Power Board [SEC] so he was not fazed by thinking up a menu for 10 children plus the two men. The House Boys, or staff, were experts at bread making and would prepare any

vegetables you left out for a meal. They also did the clotheswashing which was a huge help.



Huli Feast

The local produce markets are one of the delights of going to the Highlands. It's just wonderful to be able to buy fresh vegetables – picked that very day. The women sit on the ground behind their merchandise and have it spread out in lots according to value – say one Kina (dollar) or ten Toea (cents). Produce might include: corn, beans, sweet potato, yams, pineapples, passionfruit, pumpkin, marrow and quite a lot of tropical stuff and greens that the local people love. We never got used to boiled pumpkin leaves and the children weren't too keen on chokos, although you would be amazed to see what can be done with some of these things.

Saturday began with all the children having jobs to do, such as cleaning out the school bus or the rumpus room, cleaning the toilets etc. I understand Murray had the knack of making some of these chores a bit of fun. In the afternoon they had an excursion somewhere – either down to the Hydro Dam (which included a swim) or perhaps out to the Teachers' College at Dauli. And so ended quite a pleasurable interlude. Back to Balimo.

Following quite a number of interruptions we both saw the need to concentrate on the church work. Murray put time into pre-

paring programmes for the Boys' Brigade and there were a number of conventions coming up. He would always go to the Men's Annual Convention out in a village along with about 1000 other men and have a great time talking all night (as they literally do) and consuming buckets of strong tea. We went as a family over to Kini for the Christmas Convention. That entailed a ride in a canoe part way



Arriving at convention

and then having to get out and walk through a foot of water before reaching dry ground. There were a good number of baptisms, which is always encouraging and that called for a feast to celebrate.

Murray had lived and worked amongst the Gogodalas now for 19 years and really loved them. One starts to feel old when you welcome the next generation and so know the parents and grandparents. These particular men at Kini he had worked with quite a lot, encouraging them with their carving and making of artifacts. One furlough, he was able to bring back some sets of carving chisels that were a great help to their enterprise.

Unfortunately for me I had picked up the Ross River Fever bug on that trip. Shortly after that, I started having joint pains and fevers which put me to bed for six weeks. This gave plenty of time to think, pray and consider things. The girls came home for the

Christmas holidays of 1979 and were going back to start Year 7. Normally 'down south' they would be at High School. The staff at the International School planned on teaching Year 7 up there to cater for a number of children of the same age. We were grateful for that but a decision about their future still loomed high on the horizon. We were increasingly concerned about my mother's health. She was still on regular Chemotherapy and Cliff my stepfather, was not well enough to drive into the Alfred and back.

When I was back on my feet, the next urgent need was for a Sunday School Teachers' Training Course. This was held at both Balimo, then Wasua. It's a joy and privilege to see these folk - some men, some women and a good number of young people so keen to learn and to teach others. They enjoy this calling and their faith grew with the experience.

Murray spent a lot of time talking to Pastor Danaya. The older men in this tribe were hurting as they saw their young people changing and becoming more worldly. A lot would go off looking for work and money. They knew it was not good to be living in Port Moresby unemployed with time on your hands. Some of these young men drifted into gangs and were called 'Rascals'. It had become a big social problem.

One day we were greatly moved to receive a letter from Alan Dunn on behalf of the church saying two things. The first was that they really felt the time had come for us to be at home and to care for mother. It was actually two years since her operation and the doctors had originally said that her prognosis was about 2 years. So in some ways we were not surprised. The second thing he was writing about was to invite Murray to join him on the staff at Frankston as the Associate Pastor.

On the one hand Murray was really shaken by this, on the other hand many things had been happening which made him question whether he was where God wanted him to be just now. He was very tired and although it is hard to explain, he felt pretty sure that God was calling him out of the work. There was a closing down process happening. Just as God had called him into Papua New Guinea, Murray was certain that God was calling him out of it. With this possibility came the best solution for the girls. After prayer the decision was made and the Holy Spirit confirmed to us

that this was the right thing to do. Murray shared with Pastor Danaya how God was leading him and the dear fellow was most affirming. “Yes, of course your family must come first. Your daughters need you, as do Lorna’s parents. You must go son.”

There were other changes happening politically in Papua. There were strong surges of independence around and in keeping with this, Murray felt it was the right time for nationals to be in charge wherever possible. It had always been mission policy to train local people with certain skills and to hand over to them where possible. It was a number of years since missionaries had taught in the Primary Schools and very few in the High Schools. The national teachers do a marvelous job. This flows over to most other areas. For example, a fellow from Daru had done training in Moresby on repairs and maintenance to outboard motors. How timely for us! He started his own business in one of the Pasuwe stores and had plenty of customers. So all things considered, you can imagine the peace that Murray had as he made it known that after our next furlough we would not be returning. He was now forty-three, having spent almost half his life in PNG.

There were numerous farewell feasts. It was decided that it would be wise for Lorna and the girls to go south in August 1980 to give time for interviews, shopping etc and then for the twins to attend High School for Term 3 that year. Miriam had one term in Grade 5 and Deborah one term in Kinder. That left Murray with 3 weeks to finish all the packing. He made his own crates out of the beautiful PNG Rosewood and Cedar timber, so that he would have some to work on later.

After many tears at the back door as folk came to say, ‘Goodbye’ he eventually took his leave out at the airstrip. It was raining and Pastor Danaya commented that even the heavens were crying. Missionaries, staff and friends were there to see him off and yet through it all there was a pervading sense of peace and anticipation as to what the Lord was going to do next.

The next step was to say ‘Goodbye’ to Port Moresby and so to quote one of his letters:



*“The sun was just setting as the plane took off and the coastline with its coral reefs stood out clearly. Many mixed thoughts and emotions flooded my mind at that moment. The sun casting its long evening rays told of the setting of an era in our lives, the close of a chapter in the Lord’s work as we left Papua New Guinea.”*



Sunset over Balimo Lagoon



*Murray Marx once said that he wore a hat in the tropical sun to protect his forehead “which of course goes much further back than most people’s”. As one MK put it, “Uncle Murray has a jokey mind!” He also has a mind set on “letting people know that they are wanted and loved”, to use his own words, and in this he is very successful.*

*He began his missionary career in 1960 as skipper of the mission boat, “Maino,” distributing stores, jokes and encouragement up and down the rivers to people in isolated places. It was immediately apparent that here was a people’s person with a spiritual ministry and it was no surprise when he was later elected to the PNG Field Council and the as Lower Fly Area Superintendent. He did not find leadership easy. Direct confrontations with people go against his grain, but his gift for loving partnership relationships made him God’s man for the time -*

particularly as adviser to the Gogodala church leaders with his capacity to stand beside them encouraging and contributing what he had without dominating. As a result he is loved and respected. Murray's response to the painful experiences of his life - in particular the devastating loss of his first wife, Lorraine Balme, within seven weeks of their marriage - has moulded him into a man of spiritual maturity whose counsel has been appreciated by many a national Christian and missionary.

His marriage to Lorna Ford in 1966 began a partnership that has enhanced and developed their individual gifts. As a couple they are generous, open-hearted and given to hospitality. Lorna, a capable well-organised person with gifts and training as nurse, teacher and in the Gogodala language, has achieved a remarkable balance between her wife/mother and missionary roles.

While being supportive of Murray, a devoted mother to their four daughters and maintaining "a nice place to come home to" despite many moves and a great assortment of houses over the years, she has at the same time had effective ministries in youth work, women's work, literacy, literature, language teaching, nursing and teaching in various combinations at different times. She's a bit of a marvel - in fact they both are.

Their decision to resign because of family needs at home was a costly one, taken with characteristic honesty, resoluteness and trust in the Lord. They are very much missed and held in the highest regard by their partners in the Gospel, both ECP and APCM.

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