

Farewells and the Journey Out

April 2012

We're on the home straights now and have just been through a series of humbling farewells.

Kirokai School farewell to Rosie.

Just to recap on the background, Kirokai School is a private school fully funded, at some considerable personal sacrifice, by parents who are not satisfied with the education provided by the local government schools (apparently with some justification). Facilities are basic but the staff are enthusiastic and dedicated.

Rosie has been helping with English several days a week, mainly with spoken English. All education at the school is delivered in English, because the feeling is this will give the kids an advantage. The teachers themselves do not speak English as first language, so there is room for mistakes to creep in, and having a native English speaker would clearly be a help. Rosie filled the role and Pamela a new VSA volunteer who is an early childhood teacher and who has just moved to Arawa will be taking over from her, so things should be going from strength to strength!

Rosie had also provided individual tutoring for much of 2011 to three youngsters at the school who were battling with literacy.

When Rosie started at the school there was no library, so she also set about organising one with the help of friends around New Zealand and the *Mr Pip* film crew who kindly transported free seven apple boxes of books. As a consequence the school has a 1500 book library, apparently the only primary school in Arawa that has a library.

The school had organised this farewell function for Rosie that took up from 9am to 1pm. School was abandoned for the day. The programme included kids dancing and singing to us, kids reading poems or narratives, speeches by teachers and board members, and we had to respond with speeches of our own, and the presentation of gifts, followed by a delicious feast. I was generously invited to be part of the celebrations and also received a couple of unexpected gifts.



New Entrants singing



Chairman of Board



class singing



Poem



Poem



Group photo



The feast!



The gifts!

Their gratitude and generosity was overwhelming! Highlight? It had to be 15-year-old Amos who at the beginning of last year could barely recognise letters and even earlier in the year wouldn't open his mouth to take part in the Mr Pip sound effects. He was one of the three Rosie had given individual tuition and at the function he stood up in front of us and the whole school and read his poem, thanking Rosie. After the proceedings a slightly 'weather worn' woman came up, shook Rosie's hand and thrust a gift of three cakes of soap carefully wrapped in newspaper into her hand- it was Amos' mother.

I was so moved I forgot to take any photographs!

Oxfam and Arawa Urban Council



Speeches



The Oxfam team



Mark Sivutare of AUC

The Oxfam team also laid on a feast for lunch on our last Friday, with the field crew joining us for speeches, presentation of gifts, including personal gifts from members of the team, followed by another feast! Again they seemed to appreciate my efforts.

The Arawa Urban Council organised a sit down meal at a local guesthouse and said nice things about how I had helped them, and also presented more gifts.

Rosie's after school "daycare"

There always seemed to be kids around the house in the afternoons, where they found Rosie something of a "soft touch", getting her to teach them to bake or to bake for them, to play cards, colour pictures and watch movies on the laptop!

They too brought gifts during our last few days in Arawa. We hadn't seen much of the parents but it seems they appreciated what Rosie had done for the kids. Two



Rosie's Afterschool Care movies

special items were a beautiful headband made from cowrie shells and a handmade "bilum" (handbag) beautifully decorated with feathers. Ebony's grandmother made it especially for Rosemary –I'm not sure how it will go with the NZ agriculture border controls but hopefully we can get it treated to the extent that it will be allowed in- it is quite a work of art – too good to be used for everyday use but a beautiful display item. It was clearly a great honour to receive it.



Rosie and her feather bilum

VSA

We had two VSA farewell functions – potluck dinners at our place and in Buka on the way out – great times to share memories and tell the final stories before heading out. We will miss these folk whom we got to know pretty well!

All in all they were humbling experiences. The two years of sweatiness and stickiness and limited choices suddenly seemed a small price to pay!

The Journey out

Thursday 5th April was the day we left Arawa for good (?). Alison, the new Bougainville VSA Country Programme Manager loaded us and Norah, who was heading out for her 18month break, and our bags and boxes for the final time into the VSA Landcruiser, and we headed off for Buka in fine weather – not quite so important now as all sixteen bridges built so well by the Japanese as an aid project



New Japanese built bridge

are now operational - so no more heart-in-mouth river crossings! Sad in some ways as it takes some of the adventure out of the journey but a significant improvement for Bougainvillians.

The BSP Bank (built around shipping containers) is progressing well in Arawa so soon there will be much less reason for going to Buka for many. This will hit the PMV business carrying people back and forth daily so there are big changes coming.



New Bank in Arawa

Then it was the final crossing of the Buka channel, a night in Beryl's place in Buka and the morning flight out (only 1 hour late)



loading the banana boat

crossing the channel

Buka Airport departure lounge



Buka and the Channel

Bougainville- reef and final views

In Port Moresby we joined the hour and a half snaking queue for the Virgin Blue Checkout (the computer system was down) and left about 10 minutes late from Port Moresby for Brisbane - where my suitcase failed to appear on the carousel! It was fortunately delivered the next afternoon to Paul and Carmen's house on the Gold Coast where we were staying, after a trip via Auckland!

Next it's a few days with Trish and John in Anstead before the final leg of our journey to Auckland on Friday 13th.