# JustFiji

## Note on this Autobiography

This fascinating autobiography has been placed on the JustFiji page with the very kind permission of the author. It was a self-published book that is long out of print and no further copies are available, so I asked Mrs Freeman if she would like me to put it online. She responded positively and in August 2009 provided the MSWord and pdf files which have been incorporated into a single pdf file here. I understand her son-in-law Reg earned our thanks for having laboured away to produce the digital version of the text, and also scanned the photographs.

Mrs Freeman also provided a postscript entitled “Moments to Remember,” which I have attached at the end of the text.

Photographs are all together at the end, not interpolated as they were in the original book, because it would have been very time-consuming breaking up pdf files to do that, and in my opinion with little gain. I understand that there are some photos in the original volume that have been lost, but others have been added, including the colour photo which relates to the trip back to Fiji in later years.

I have not edited or amended this in any way. I am confident any ex-Fiji people will find this as nostalgic, and I am sure some others as interesting, as I do.



Rod Ewins
26th August, 2009

FOOTNOTE: On 8March2024 I was emailed a link by Taimud Ahmed, youngest son of late Zura Bi who was mentioned (as Zurabee) as Betty's first playmate (also in photo). I attach the article at the end.

# *FIJI – MEMORY HOLD THE DOOR*

By

**Betty Freeman**

**ISBN 0 646 28468 1**

**Also by Betty Freeman**

**A Time to Tell**
**1990**

**When I remember bygone days**
**I think how evening follows morn**
**So many I loved were not yet dead,**
**So many I loved were not yet born.**
**Ogden Nash**

# *CONTENTS*

# 1

# NA KENAI TEKIVU

In Nadroga way back in 1916 the birth of a European child was no everyday event. Abundant gifts and tranquil influences were available for infant senses to absorb. A velvety clime, and tangy sea breeze exchanged one titillating tropical fragrance for another: flowers, coconut-oil, spice and rank tobacco. A bejewelled night-sky might be strung with shooting stars, the luxuriant foliage tinselled with silver moonlight. This was a land bound by coral reef and palm-clad beaches where bure-clustered villages clung to picturesque headlands. A land of comely people endowed with languid grace, the gift of laughter and harmonious song, where young blades, potential warriors strolled hand-in-hand a hibiscus in carefully coiffured hair. A land where a villager unless commanded by the turaga ni koro, toiled only to fulfil a traditional task. A land where the pace was slow, the byword 'malua', the time of day marked by sun or turn of tide or arrival of a punctual trade-wind, where the lali on the Sabbath called a village in formal attire to church. A land where the passage of weeks might be counted in phases of the moon, the months by the flowering of certain trees or ripening breadfruit and uvi or the rising of bololo.

The sugar company settlement, a patch of red roofs some sixty miles by rail from Lautoka seaport and mill, hugged Cuvu Bay. Vunasalu, an influential native township, lay a further ten miles distant on the bank of mighty Sigatoka River. Here in early days, merchants founded trading posts and enterprising Europeans, under the patronage of the provincial chief, set up residence. And here my young father-to-be, surveyor and civil engineer, G. Fred Cradick, constructed the eighteen-span railway bridge which stands to this day. He had come to the colony in 1907 under contract to the CSR Company to survey and construct a

light rail which would open up the country between Nadi and the Sigatoka valley. The seven years of bachelorhood he devoted to battling tide and tangled teri, bridging torrents, taming hillsides, building causeways earned him legendary status in Nadroga. As the work progressed he moved his quarters into native townships and the gangs of untrained coloured labour recruited, he had to initiate and teach the required skills in their native tongue. Fijian custom and local dialects were essential in order to replenish this labour-force per favour 'na turaga ni koro'. Village stalwarts, normally engaged in spear-fishing or house-thatching were appropriated, to assist in pile-driving, plate-laying, handling girders. A treasured relic of these days is an enlarged photograph with caption in handwriting I know so well "Rail-head at Momi, Sigatoka-line 1911'. A coastal scene shows two slim young men dressed in white beside a curving rail-track that ends abruptly. My father, wearing a cabbage-tree hat and leggings, is distinctly recognisable. The 'roi' which the other figure handles is an artefact essential at a time when the land was plagued with flies.

My parents, already in their early thirties met only a few times before the engagement and marriage. Mother, from a large family, city bred, and the last to marry had scarcely come down from cloud nine when overtaken by the reality of life at Cuvu. Each day her new husband vanished from dawn until dusk conveyed by the perilous 'quod' 'somewhere along the line'. Fearing early widowhood, lonely, homesick, pregnant and domestically at the mercy of a jungli, non-English-speaking 'houseboy' my mother spent her days in tears.

Pregnancy had put an end to the occasional weekend sortie on horseback to outlying estates or the government station at Lawaqa. Although later friendship developed, for those first twelve months the other matron at Cuvu did not appear to welcome a new neighbour fortunate enough to be pregnant. A spinster acquaintance in Sydney was therefore enticed to come for an extended stay as 'companion' - and her fare paid. With midwife Nurse Marrinon in residence one month early 'to be on the safe side' and baby two weeks overdue, the father-in-waiting would regard supervising wet-season 'wash-outs' 'along the line' a heaven-sent deliverance from petticoat government.

By now Viraswami reigned in the kitchen. Quite by chance one day, this bright young man alighted from 'the passenger' at Cuvu. For five years he had undergone domestic training in a well established Nadi household. Now free of his term of indenture, he ungratefully bundled up his possessions and fled. My father's standing in that Nadi household

deteriorated further when Ungapa, the chokra, who had minded their children, followed to join Viraswami. Both houseboys understood kitchen English - Ungapa with ability to entertain me later with nursery rhymes. Furthermore either one or other would serve us as a household retainer until Dad retired.

Until my birth my mother had been slight and potentially delicate. An unduly prolonged labour brought Doctor Paley, a young medico late of Guy's London, on horseback from Lawaqa in tropical downpour to skilfully effect a difficult delivery. Rejecting the customary service of an Indian dhai, Mother had resolved to devote herself to my welfare. Each afternoon she accompanied the pram pushed by Ungapa down the rough hillside track, across the railway lines past the loco shed and Cuvu office to the beach - just a stone's throw from Yanuca Island. In those distant days, I'm told, the sight of such a strapping European youngster called for an appreciative 'sobosobo' and clicking tongues.

At this stage in Cuvu's history, passenger vessels servicing Pacific trade regularly nosed their way through the entrance in the reef to rendezvous at anchor in the bay. Tenders came down-river, laden with the magnificent bananas for which Fiji was famous. This export to Australia, which brought prosperity to agent and shipping company and which also paid for substantial churches in many villages, terminated not without considerable ill-feeling and bitterness towards Australia- in 1919.
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Sigatoka's link with civilisation depended on the timely advent of the 'passenger', alleged to be the only free passenger train service in the world! Daily during the 'crush' there would be hectic movement in cane transportation along the line; locos snorting, puffing, hauling chains of laden trucks one way or trailing empty trucks to the points. Here shuffling and clanking they awaited distribution to the sectors. The 'passenger's' weekly departure from Lautoka midst hustle and bustle at 7am each Friday promised not only transport for the public but also fresh meat and ice, stores, local and overseas mail, wages, and monies to be disbursed to districts where no bank existed. An enclosed portion of a carriage reserved for Europeans also held an iron safe - stacked, it was said, with cash bags. An uneasy junior clerk armed with a loaded pistol travelled as custodian. The string of open carriages which followed, swarmed with passengers accompanied by bundles, wrapped in cloth or Fiji matting and bearing gifts in the form of a goat, fowl, bunches of dalo, bottles of ghee - a veritable cornucopia. The loco stopped frequently to unload stores, to deliver mail, fresh meat and ice, to pass over cash at each sector and to take on coal and water. Passengers had time to duck

into scrub to relieve themselves or barter with local vendors for fragrant freshly roasted peanuts, spicy peas, garish Indian sweetmeats, sliced watermelon, or Fiji's plump green-skinned mandarins. When fields held ripening cane, travellers helped themselves, and chewed fibre was strewn along the track. Cuvu was reached about 2:30pm. Ongoing bogies carrying merchandise were uncoupled at Vunasalu before the train crossed the river to proceed to Kavagasau and the end of the line by 4:30pm. Next day by 5pm when the 'passenger' returned to Lautoka depleted of stores and cash, a weary junior clerk would alight, resentful of a Saturday lost.

At twelve months of age came my first voyage to Sydney. It was embarrassing that when confronted for the first time by another white child I trembled and screamed in terror. During this holiday, arrangements were made by my Church of England parents for my baptism. While the adults gathered at the font to be reminded of their vows and exhorted to prayer, I had the run of St. Andrew's Cathedral. When finally captured and delivered into the arms of the Very Reverend the Dean of Sydney, I promptly kissed him.

Following my second birthday my father was posted to Rarawai, a sugar mill in production since 1886 on the Ba river. The Sigatoka contract completed, my Dad had for a time considered joining the Colonial Service. While this might give his ability wider scope it could mean a far-flung outpost and unhealthy climate such as British Honduras or Nigeria. I think by now my father had grown fond of Fiji, and moreover, my unventuresome mother would have pleaded to remain with CSR, who granted generous leave with free passage to Sydney and the Pitt Street shops, and the security of superannuation and widows' pensions.

Europeans had attempted settlement in the Ba district since the 1870s. However, not until sea island cotton planting gave way to sugar cane and the successful introduction in 1879 of East Indian indentured labour, did 'the rich uncle from Fiji' syndrome emerge. My father was no stranger to Ba. Prior to undertaking the light rail project he spent the year 1907 in the district to become acclimatised and to familiarise himself with CSR methods and learn Hindi and the Fijian tongue. He left for the wilds of Sigatoka having made a number of friends.

The position he now stepped into was known locally as 'durabin (sic) sahib'. This entailed responsibility for the building and maintenance of all CSR company bungalows, buildings, railway bridges, and the

water-supply pipe-line and dam. When additional cane-lands were required, Dad would survey, map and construct the railway into these areas. Indian sirdars and farmers learned to revere his judgement in divining water and in sorting out complexities of a 'pukki line', laid down across a cane field during harvest.

# 2

# THE BABA

My earliest recollections focus on our Rarawai bungalow. It was here in the role of 'the baba' came self awareness. Bedtime always arrived before I was ready - with a soft pillow to cuddle instead of a hairy teddy-bear and because of fire no night-light allowed. I would often feel disoriented when awakened in the dark by squabbling flying foxes - the iron bars of my cot reassuring but cold against clammy flesh. My daytime arena, the wide timber verandahs, which brought bellows at bath time while splinters were removed and iodine or a poultice applied. From between the palings of the verandah rail I could watch the movements of delivery boys and hawkers and the cavalcade strung out along the two roads that bordered our compound. Field staff mounted on hacks passed regularly. Turbaned Indian farmers draped in dhoti or loin cloth goaded laden beasts. An everyday sight the peasant family filing by, hands free, huge bundles balanced on head and mother’s strident scolding. In country areas most Indian and Fijian males carried a cane knife and footwear on anyone other than a European, looked quite incongruous. During working hours a motor car seldom passed by. In a mill centre this luxury vehicle was for leisure activities - a spin in the late afternoon, a shopping expedition, a swim or picnic, for sport or social occasions. Regardless of bad weather, poor health or heat exhaustion the private car remained securely garaged while the man of the house, be he engineer or sugar chemist on shift relied on shank's pony to get to and from work.

After Daddy left in the morning I would clamber into bed with Mummy. Their brass four poster had a white cotton canopy with a gathered lacy valance. Bed-making was quite a ritual. The white sheets, preferably cool Irish linen were stripped off every day. Ungapa, summoned after breakfast, assisted in turning the horsehair mattress before Mother remade the bed, adding the white marcella counterpane, a long horsehair bolster, feather pillows and lace- edged embroidered pillowshams.

A spacious bathroom gleaming with jumbo-sized brass taps and seldom lit copper chip heater adjoined the back verandah. The septic tank WC screened by a granadilla vine, was reached via the back steps and along a covered way. Despite 'mod cons,' evidently local convention, decreed that a memsahib's morning toilet take place in the bedroom leaving the daily shower for sometime between 2pm and 3pm, when the houseboys were away. The marble topped wash-stand in the bedroom held a floral Royal Doulton duchess set - basin, ewer, soap-dish, toothbrush holder. A dainty etched glass carafe and tumbler provided facilities for teeth cleaning. Chamber pots sat on a lower shelf. A houseboy was expected to empty and rinse these receptacles and replenish water. Mother did not emerge from her bedroom until dressed. A laced-up, whale-boned corset took care of her now robust figure. White lisle stocking were attached to four suspenders. She still wore white knee-length lace-trimmed drawers and half- petticoat drawn into her waist with tapes. A camisole, daintily embroidered and ribbon-threaded was worn under a long-sleeved high collared blouse, with an ankle-length white pique skirt. Long wavy hair had to be unbraided, brushed, some strands lightly teased and pinned over each ear, the remainder coiled into a firm bun planted high above her collar.

The household chores would by now be well in hand. While Viraswami's interests kept him at Sigatoka, Ungapa promoted to cook, accompanied us here. To the 'outside' boy, Narien, fell the task of milking our two or three cows, manning the separating machine, attending to the 'tor tors' , firewood and the garden. Before breakfast Ungapa would have lit the stove, swept the verandahs, polished the brass table on the front verandah and removed kerosene lamps and set the breakfast table.

All meals in the Rarawai house were served on a corner verandah cooled by the prevailing breeze. By 8am my father, having walked at 6am down to the mill to set his labour their tasks for the day, had returned for breakfast. He was ready for a bowl of steaming porridge or boiled rice covered with raw sugar, milk and cream, followed by two eggs and usually bacon, several cups of tea with sugar and milk, thick toast made at the open fire and spread with Mother's home-made butter, and marmalade or her lemon, melon and ginger jam. The evening meal was accompanied by a horde of mosquitos. My parents nevertheless preferred to endure this and remain on the cool verandah until bed- time rather than perspire in the gauzed dining or mosquito rooms.

When World War 1 ended I was two years old, a hemisphere distant, and subjected neither to a radio news flash nor TV news-reels, yet 'THE FRONT' and all this implied remains firmly implanted in my memory. Song, flags, badges and Norman Lindsay's sketches in *The Bulletin* - bestial faces under spiked helmets, bayonets dripping blood, corpse-strewn battlefields made a tremendous impression. Each Armistice Day mother grieved and reminisced. At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the mill whistle boomed across the cane-fields. The district came to attention to observe in the privacy of bungalow, office or cane field a two-minute silence to honour the fallen in "the war to end all wars'! My childhood nightmares had some fearsome wartime settings.

There were no toy shops in Ba but 'peace' brought me unexpected responsibility in the form of a beautifully dressed, sleeping doll. She had jointed limbs, real hair and delicate porcelain features. The original mistress, interned with her parents, the Hochers, during war years had by now outgrown dolls. When their possessions were auctioned, the doll became mine along with her cot, lace trimmed mosquito net and beribboned bed linen. This must have been the doll my mother had longed for as a child but never had. 'Susie' she was named by Mother after her own mother and a niece - the two people she loved best apart from us. Susie was allowed to grace my bedroom but I must play only with Too-too and Girlie my rag dolls until old enough to be trustworthy.

At the same auction my father acquired a gramophone with a pile of records. I can never forget the tearful disappointment when these were thrown out. The moment a word spoken or sung in German issued from the big brass horn the machine was stopped and to my astonishment the record then removed and smashed. My parents both lost brothers in the Great War.

The pneumonic influenza epidemic Fiji just as Mother was summoned to Sydney because my Nan was dying. Dad remained at home in Rarawai to see each week a friend or workman die, and families lose a mother, a father or child. Labour was all but unavailable. Dad's closest friend actually buried his wife one day and next day followed her to the grave. I remember feeling important having to wear a white mask just like a grown-up in public transport and while shopping. The epidemic over, Dad joined us to see his mother, sadly, also for the last time.

I did not think a grown up could cry until, upon our return to Rarawai, a letter arrived for Mother edged in black. Unfortunately, I am unable to evoke recollection of either grandmother and only remember Nan for her gifts - the gold broach inscribed 'Betty' I wore pinned to my sash for some years and early editions of May Gibbs 'Gum-nut Babies' and 'Gum-blossom Babies' - still in mint condition. Mother dried her tears once she realised she faced a problem in Rarawai finding 'half mourning' attire. No time must be lost. Mail order catalogues were consulted and a heliotrope hat ordered to be sent 'by return' mail. Tintex duly purchased transformed white blouses and skirts to shades of lavender, lilac and grey.

As a newcomer to the district, Mother waited in approved style to receive callers. Fortunately when calls had to be returned the wife of the manager at Rarawai kindly offered to drive Mother in her sulky to outlying estates. From a card-case bound in tapa, two small cards in my father's name and one larger card in my mother's name were left at each bungalow.

White attire for men was almost uniform. In sugar areas away from Suva a neck-tie was seldom worn in the day time unless the occasion was social or official. And a tussore suit indicated a visitor or a Government official. When invited to an 'evening' at a private home it was customary for a gentleman regardless of the heat to slip on the immaculately laundered white jacket upon entering the front gate. Formality satisfied, a thoughtful hostess would then suggest it be removed.

Our two-bedroom weatherboard bungalow, was the CSR prototype, considered adequate as an officer's residence. The powers that be, spartan and Protestant, did not cater for large families. A pitched galvanised roof painted red covered four gauze-doored rooms, surrounded on three sides with reed-shuttered verandahs. The kitchen, bathroom and laundry under a separate roof was attached to the back verandah. All CSR houses in the mill settlement stood elevated between two to five feet above ground-level and bolted every six feet or so to sturdy piles. At this time interior walls were painted duck-egg blue - the colour of a mynah egg. Verandahs and the exterior of buildings were beige with darker trim. As staff were moved frequently basic furniture and two linoleum squares were provided. Our vintage bungalow had fittings on the ceiling for a punkah, a tropical luxury almost extinct by 1920.

European ‘mechanics’ houses, smaller in size, were located closer to the mill and ‘kai loma’ employees occupied villas in Newtown. The bachelor officers lived in ‘the quarters’, and ‘mechanic’ bachelors and part European single men were accommodated in ‘the barracks’ and ‘staff house’.

All CSR coloured labour, employed domestically or otherwise at a mill centre, were entitled to free accommodation - a singe room in one of several long, low buildings known in my childhood as ‘the coolie lines’.

Social structure at a sugar mill was clearly defined from 1 O’Connell Street, head office of CSR in Sydney. The tennis courts, the baths and later the billiard room and club house were exclusively for the use of officers and families. The CSR library however was available to all and the cricket club welcomed any player regardless of colour or rank who might strengthen the team. In later years men who became chief and inspecting engineers voiced resentment about the social segregation suffered during their youthful, lonely years at sugar mills.

Notwithstanding racial and social discrimination my first playmate at Rarawai was Zurabee. I never heard even a whispered explanation of how Zurabee came to live with the Wallace’s. Laurie Wallace, the hospital superintendent and a pharmacist, had been a bachelor friend of Dad’s since those earlier days at Rarawai. Lucy, his genteel old-maid sister, now kept house. And until Mother found tea parties boring, we exchanged visits frequently. Zurabee dressed in a tunic, trousers to her ankles, hair long, plaited and fragrantly oiled, wore a gold stud through one nostril, and bangles on wrists and ankles. We played with her doll’s tea set although she had no doll. She spoke in a whisper which I scarcely understood but gestures were used while threading garlands of flowers or making necklaces and bracelets with her collection of beads. Laurie, with more experience than many newly arrived government doctors, could make up an ointment or mixture that would clear up most local complaints. His love for horticulture brought to our garden some unusual plants. Unaccountably and possibly while we were away from the colony Zurabee slipped out of my life. Sixty years later I learnt that she was the beneficiary of Laurie Wallace’s estate and that she had lived her married life in Ra. The Wallaces’ had an island retreat off the Ra coast which I recall visiting in later childhood. Here they retired and lived until Laurie died.

A fall in the price of sugar and termination of the Indenture system brought change to the Ba lifestyle. Only a handful of once prosperous

sugar plantations remained in private hands. All unexpired indentures were finally cancelled by the government in 1920. Some planters who saw the writing on the wall and had 'got out' profitably, others who lingered walked away penniless and a number remained as salaried overseers for CSR. The few private planters who had sufficient means and chose to stay, continued during my childhood to live comfortably and could afford to send their children to expensive boarding schools in Australia. These homes retained the trappings of prosperity; the billiard room, the relics of a racing stable, a tennis court, summer house, extensive garden and the required water-hole in a creek for swimming and convenience of a dairy herd, piggery, poultry, vegetable garden and orchard. However grudges against CSR still festered and for years the very mention of 'the company' in the presence of a planter's family caused hackles to rise, followed by frosty silence.

The Ragg wedding in 1920 gave the district something to talk about and provided lively reminiscences for years to come. Hugh Ragg from an old Fiji family occupied a big house on the river alongside his general store. The mother of his seven children died in 'the flu' and now Hugh, later to become Sir Hugh was bewitched by Rene, currently nursery governess in a planter's household. Longstanding family friends shook their heads. This girl with witty retorts was an unknown quantity, perhaps even an adventuress! But Rene, in love with a 'wonderful guy', saw her difficult role and five stepdaughters as a challenge. Nevertheless, she took the precaution to forestall the possibility of sabotage on her wedding day by choosing Edna Southey and me, both aged four, to be her trainbearers. My mother with others who had befriended Rene undertook to deck the little Rarawai church. This non-denominal church was provided courtesy of CSR for staff and district. Perched on high concrete piles, the ecclesiastic architecture defined by steep roof-line, timber fretwork and Gothic windows, embellished with mauve and green transfers. Since the doors had been locked for months, a squadron of infuriated hornets had first to be removed. I remember that my mother, an early casualty, nursed a swollen and painful arm for the rest of the day.

Trails of pink antigonon and leafy pink and white bridal veil, traditional for Fiji weddings were arranged around pews and lectern, white violetina, eucharist lilies and fern filled the altar vases. A French priest with villainous black beard and gowned in ornate vestment officiated. Nuptial mass was sombrely, intoned in latin. Such solemnity and ritual, waving incense and resounding gong finally overcome my supporting train-bearer Edna who burst into tears and had to be removed. At the wedding breakfast back at the Raggs' house I took my place at the

bridal table with eyes impatiently glued upon the magnificent three-tier wedding cake. Eventually I joined other children on the swing under the mango tree and missed the legendary highlights - witty speeches, freely flowing brandy and champagne and merriment that knew no bounds until the priest's beard caught alight. Nor did Rene overlook to set aside for me one whole confectionery pillar, lots of thick icing, silver leaves and a dove. Once home I retreated up into the fork of a forbidden frangipani tree to demolish at this spoil

Not long after their marriage Morris Hedstrom Limited took over Raggs' store and the family moved up the hill to the Ba Hotel. In this setting Rene's talent and vision found plenty of scope. Walls were removed, rooms rearranged, verandahs added, furniture painted, bright curtains and cushions appeared and huge bowls of hibiscus became a feature in public areas. The grounds were landscaped, gardens extended, trellises covered pathways and a bure-style summer house was built. Accommodation annexes were enlarged. Menus also did not escape. The Ba Hotel catered for wedding receptions and the bridge afternoons indulged guests with ice-cream. Tourists who booked a bed overnight remained a fortnight. When Hugh's daughters returned home from boarding school Rene would have ready a mini trousseau for each girl. The hotel became a mecca then for local bachelors. Hugh and Rene were renowned for their generous hospitality and kindness, especially for those in need. Hugh's Irish gift of tongue which brought him fame as an auctioneer for the north west districts served him well when he represented the area in the Legislative Council. During this period Hugh and Rene moved to Namasau. On the site of the District Commissioner's former residence they built a complex of stately bures in a blissful garden setting and made this their home. By 1940 they had taken over the Lautoka Hotel and Raggs' Northern Hotel chain began to extend throughout Viti Levu followed after WWII, by Fiji's first tourist resort at Koro Levu. The small part I played on their wedding day was never forgotten. Each year until I married there came a Christmas present from Rene. She hand-smocked a nightdress for my trousseau and later sent a smocked party frock for my first little daughter.

Once of an age to dress myself I became rebellious and resentful about the underclothes my mother made and insisted I wear. Pyjamas buttoning up the back had infantile tailboards, so did the gingham rompers with neck and sleeve-edges, painstakingly scalloped in buttonhole stitch. My pants buttoned onto a bodice which also had to be buttoned up the back. Other children after a swim pulled up garments in a jiffy while I fumbled to find the correct buttonhole to attach to a certain

button. A mis-judged hook-up could cripple me. I also hated having a mushroom shaped straw hat firmly anchored with elastic under my chin and dreaded wearing the hand-knitted mercerised cotton socks which hurt tender toes. How I envied my countryfolk their bare feet.

The 1920s saw fashion and social standards change. I followed the trends closely when playing at 'dressing up'. Skirts were on the way up, hems soon to reach the knee. High collared blouses with long sleeves were discarded or exchanged with a marama for a Fiji mat. Belts dropped from waistline to hip, necklines plunged. Single girls referred to as flappers wore head-bands and gold armlets. Smoking by a war widow could be forgiven, but others who did so were 'fast'. Mother replaced her trousseau garments with 'undies' of pale silk. Stockings now also silk, were flesh coloured. Memsahibs returned from overseas leave with shingled hair.

I would have been about four years old when Dad bought E27, the Overland tourer, sold by a private planter leaving the colony. A dustcoat and overalls came with the purchase. When motoring, ladies hats were tied under the chin with gossamer veiling. A motor vehicle travelling at twenty miles an hour raised a cloud of dust, a danger when following or passing another vehicle. On country roads pedestrians, livestock and stray hornets were a constant hazard. I remember we pulled up for a considerable time on one occasion when a swarm of bees occupied the roadway. A sudden downpour meant stopping to dig out and wrestle into place the clip-on side curtains with mica windows. Needless to add, we were usually drenched to the skin just as the deluge stopped. E27 despite Dad's attention displayed spiteful and moody qualities. Mother's first driving lesson with accompanying marital flare-up was not repeated after the self-starter packed-in. Repair was impossible when motor mechanic and spare parts were unavailable. Henceforth, it took muscle power, infinite patience or a hill start to arouse the brute. So often I watched Dad dressed for a social occasion in long sleeved white shirt, knotted black tie under his starched collar approach E27, with crank-handle. Before the response of either a cough or a splutter Dad would be drenched in sweat, face scarlet, hand or forearm bleeding from the recoil. Eventually it became routine to station me behind the steering wheel and there, upon command, adjust the throttle or choke. At weekends clad in overalls Dad worked on and under the car, manual in one hand, a pot of grease or oil-can in the other. I would be there to hand to him a waste rag or spanner. Tyres needed painstaking attention. Punctures were frequent and tubes perished and had to be renewed or patched, and a final pump-up was obligatory before one set out.

Roads in country areas were narrow. After heavy rain ruts had to be straddled or cars wallowed axle-deep in mud. Roadways shared bridges with the light rail and this required caution. Each district in north western Viti Levu was divided by a range of hills. While the rail followed the mangrove lined coast, roads sought out a saddle in the hills - the Gap. During ascent and descent these narrow roads cut into slippery soapstone or clay, forming a series of hairpin bends which after rain became washaways. Sounding the horn was essential, meeting another vehicle scary and chains were necessary in the wet season. With sense of conquest one reached the Gap's summit, where a halt was required to allow a radiator at boiling point to cool.

On some occasions it was necessary when visiting an estate 'along the line' at the weekend to travel by 'pumper'. The four man crew for this rail vehicle were usually happy to earn extra 'paisa'. We brought along cushions for the rough decking. With legs dangling and swept by razor sharp grasses, we dodged protruding reeds, vivi and hornets.

During my Fiji childhood, children except during mealtime or at school never expected a chair. A Fiji mat, on verandah floor or lawn brought me into contact with other fellow creatures of nuisance value- soft green caterpillars, coiling pink millipedes, snails and the silvery trails of slugs, ants by the multitude, lizards grey and green whose eggs hatched in my hot hands, and spiders that my Dad taught me to respect. Black wasps, yellow hornets, bees and dragonflies were 'sa ca' but other airborne compatriots became a challenge. Yellow butterflies led me a dance around the garden, red-crowned bulbuls and Indian mynas teased, and, believing that a bird could be captured by putting salt on its tail, I hotly pursued tiny green and red finches at that time prevalent in our garden.

In order to save herself endless anxiety my mother took time instilling in me immediate obedience and absolute truthfulness. At the first sign of insubordination or slightest misdemeanour came a smack on the bottom and into the corner. Answering-back or 'playing up' meant the bathroom - to remain with door closed until I could promise to 'be a good girl'. Never being far from Mother's eye, has left little chance to enliven these pages with engaging pranks. On two occasions when Mother and I were alone in the house the punishment misfired. During one boring interval in the bathroom I cleverly succeeded in reaching up on tip toe and turning the six inch key which locked me in. Liberation came after patient instruction from one side of the door and concentration

on the other. Another time, the key safely removed, I stood on a chair I had pushed up to the dressing table and attempted to shave. Daddy's Gillette safety razor instantly drew a stream of blood. While I carry the scar on my chin to this day, the bathroom was never again used for punishment. These two early incidents appear to have cured me of trying to assert myself.

The strike by Indian labour during the early 1920s threw our household into disorder. Our two efficient, honest and loyal houseboys were obliged to stay away. Dad's native labour meantime found two Fiji maramas willing to lend a hand. They understood no English and mother spoke no Fijian so often the household chores remained at a standstill until Dad reappeared at mealtime to allot tasks or sort out a misunderstanding. Should Mother give vent to her frustration at the piano both girls would down bucket or broom and creep into the mosquito-room, sit cross-legged on the floor, hands clamped over beaming smiles and thoroughly enjoying the musical interlude. They needed little encouragement to sing-a-long, harmonising any familiar melody - 'Abe my Boy' a particular favourite. Some evenings, work done and with Dad's encouragement, they would happily sing for us.

When the strike was settled, weekend outings by car resumed. Wailili hill along the road to Tavua had been a meeting place for agitators. I remember a wide ring of posts implanted here, symbolically painted with a deep band of black above a narrow strip painted white. I seem to recall prior to the strike that one shilling and three pence had been the daily wage for a labourer. In fact ready money 'paisa' played little part in domestic life. Except for wages and 'charanna' to a hawker for a seasonal delicacy, cash seldom changed hands. Everything we needed went onto monthly accounts paid by cheque. The closest bank was in Suva two or three days distance by coastal boat.

A wet season Sunday afternoon when there was no rail traffic would present an opportunity to visit Pillay's store. This was located beside the railway line at Nasadi and inaccessible by road. At the age of three or four, I regarded the long trek a nightmare. Crossing the Ba River by the skeleton railway bridge could never be forgotten. Often Dad carried me over on the outward journey; however, returning laden with Benares brassware only obtainable at Pillay's, I was obliged to grip his hand tightly and stride out from one hardwood plank to the next, heart in mouth and eyes riveted on the debris racing below in the angry floodwater. The store was a dismal cavern where I stood at nose level to yawning jute sacks filled with dusty rice, dhal, coconut meal and yagona

root. My breathing grew snuffly while Mother chose as a forthcoming anniversary or birthday present another brass jardiniere, coffee tray or vase to add to a collection which in time, would equal any in the district.

From November until April Dad kept an eye 'on the glass'. The barometer hung on the wall just above his lazy-boy chair. His responsibilities increased when a hurricane threatened. A series of short shrill bursts of the mill whistle was the recognised official warning. We stripped verandahs of mats and furniture. Labour was sent from the mill to batten down the bungalows. A CSR house had hurricane bars ready to be bolted into place beside each pair of french doors. Wooden shutters stowed beneath the bungalows were fitted to cover gauze windows. However, should the wind loosen a single sheet of roofing iron and the whole house could be destroyed. CSR buildings were generally kept in good repair. The hurricanes that threatened and passed as 'blows', each year seldom did damage to the North Western districts although flooding and wind destroyed crops and bures.

For six days in the week the mill whistle ordered our lives. It awakened the district at 5am, sounded an hour later in a different tone to signal change of shift and for work to commence, announced the noon lunch break, boomed again at 12:50pm and 1pm, and again at 5:00, 5:30, and 6pm.

Long before our time the front garden had been laid out with a degree of formality. A wide grassy path between two long gardens beds brought one from the front gate to the front door , indicated by two fully grown royal palms. For some distance either side of the gate grew a high gerantha hedge. Each garden bed was edged along the pathway with a herbaceous border and planted according to season with a variety of annuals and perennials - sunflowers, balsam, snapdragons, plumbago, violetina etc. A thick belt of barbados lilies boarded the far side of each bed and beyond were two breynia hedges - variegated leaves in the softest shades of shell-pink, mottled white and grey-green and known locally as Bridal Veil. On one side of the front steps a reed bush-house held bulabulas with maidenhair and other ferns, begonias and staghorns.

Here above the front steps with the reed double doors flung wide I sat with my mother while she embroidered or knitted and entertained me with nursery rhymes, taught me the ABC and to count, and while reminiscing introduced her own childhood, her friends, ancestors and innumerable relatives. And sitting here she also sang to me or read aloud while I engrossed myself with collections of buttons, or cats-eyes,

catalogue cut-outs and a family of cowry shells. When I held the largest cowry to my ear the waves at Cuvu softly resounded.

Ungapa brought my evening meal, a boiled egg and milk pudding to a small yaka table set with bib and thumb-spoon and placed at the front doorway. He teased, threatening a baked rice pudding, well knowing, prunes and junket my favourite. From this position I could watch for my father, his solar topi recognisable above the cane field. Usually it could be the sixth time that day he tramped the half-mile road between his office and home and often in driving rain. Draped in heavy oil-skin, he arrived bathed in perspiration. Dad's lifestyle brought a regular income to the cobbler who called each week to take away for resoling or to return the custom made lace-up long tongued boots. Two shelves in the bathroom dressing table held an accumulation of footwear and pigskin leggings. Dad never left for work without buckling on a stout pigskin belt to which were attached leather cases containing pocket-watch, folding ruler and keys. A chitti pad, gold Eversharp pencil and pen knife went into his pockets.

Our 8 o'clock breakfast out of the way, the house boys retired to the 'dhobi gher'. I would plant myself at the top of the steps leading from kitchen to their domain. They settled in a squatting position on the concrete floor obviously finding this more natural than sitting on a bench or the steps to dunk thick slices of bread into bowls of heavily sugared and milky tea. They took pleasure enlightening me, in fluent English never used when speaking to the sahib or memsahib, on newsworthy household affairs. This could concern chickens hatched that morning, or the birth of a calf or an invitation to watch a trapped mongoose being drowned. Should there be poultry for dinner then a noisy cockerel or brace of matronly hens had to be killed. Would the baba like to watch and help with plucking and dressing? When verandahs were due to be scrubbed, on hands and knees with bucket and scrubbing brush I would be there to assist. 'Turning out' the seldom occupied mosquito room was an event not to be missed. This was a chance to delve among family treasures. A pair of tall red vases lived shakily on top of the piano, and a shelf under the writing bureau contained Pear's Encyclopedia, pages of flags, maps and charts of the stars. C.J. Dennis' 'Sentimental Bloke' that featured pen and ink sketches of nude figures stood beside Dad's Holy Bible. Mother's pictures in rich gilt frames, depicted loosely draped Grecian ladies and always attracted attention. This hot darkened room was also the repository for wedding present silver, hand painted vases, a Turkey wool carpet, and a sea-grass suite uncomfortably scratchy on bare skin.

Morning housework was continually interrupted by callers at the back steps. 'John' the Chinaman arrived at a springy trot, his two deep baskets filled with bunches of china cabbage, and long pale beans, smooth cucumbers, watery pumpkin and purple egg plant which sold for 'do anna' or 'char anna' equal to threepence or sixpence a bunch or per 'lb'. During the cool season John proudly produced and carefully weighed out, french beans and butter beans, mignonette lettuce, english cabbage and tomatoes. Morris Hedstrom Ltd. sent a 'boy' round the district early each day to collect order books. Unless advised 'out of stock' or 'coming next Keva', the delivery which took place the same afternoon might range from a reel of thread or one pound of tea or 'a dozen and one'. The latter, an indulgence that cost around twenty-five shillings, was about the limit a CSR officer's monthly account could stand.

Notwithstanding her two servants, Mother was fully occupied until lunchtime. Twice a week she made butter. Cream not required for daily use accumulated in the ice box until ready for butter making. A few turns of the wooden spoon and buttermilk drained off, several rinses with iced water, salt added and shaping with wooden paddles and there it was. Biscuit and cake tins were kept filled. Obligatory 'plates' accompanied a memsahib to tennis and any other community function - even to a casual dance. While suitable ingredients were in season marmalade, conserves, jellies, chutney and pickles were made and the cordials, lemon, orange and ginger-wine also. And should soap for household use be required, a four gallon kerosene tin filled with tallow arrived from the butchery. This was weighed and boiled up with other ingredients including caustic soda and poured to cool and harden in another kerosene tin cut horizontally before finally turned out and cut into bars. House linen in those days was expected to be long wearing and it was customary therefore, for a housewife to spend hours patching and darning. Mother also made her own underclothes, house frocks and 'every stitch' I wore until fourteen.

Lunches were always a problem. Mother missed the Sydney 'ham-and-beef' shops. When a visitor was expected Ungapa screwed the mincer to the bench and with steak, bacon and breadcrumbs made the old standby 'Aberdeen' sausage that had to be boiled several hours in a cloth. Should time be short, the store cupboard could produce a tinned tongue or camp pie. But usually if Dad was coming home for lunch there would be rissoles, macaroni cheese or curried eggs followed by bread, jam and cream and fruit. I also remember field mushrooms on toast, fricasseed

brains and on Saturdays invariably scalloped crab. Dad frequently set off after a 6 o'clock breakfast with sandwiches and thermos in his lunch basket. He had to mount the rail quod and get away before other rail traffic. When he did not return by nightfall, Mother became agitated, resentful that his job, and over zealous dedication to 'the company', caused her such anxiety. On several occasions over the years he did return with scratches and torn clothing when he met an untimely loco or an animal and had to hurl himself into the scrub.

After lunch each day the house boys departed for several hours. Mother would then remove her frock, corsets and stockings, wrap-on a kimono and relax in the hammock. At this hour no one entered our grounds except the 'topaz'. This tall copper coloured man with flowing garments, turban and long ringlets was undoubtably a Punjabi. His pockmarked face was decorated with gold nose and ear studs. Heavy silver bangles were clasped to wrists and ankles. He carried across one shoulder an enormous black broom. Muttering to himself he went from compound to compound to sweep down and, where necessary, lime the open concrete drains and lavatory floors.

. By 3:30pm memsahibs would have showered, dressed and possibly departed to tennis. However, if at home, I would hide under the house some distance from the dhobi gher and watch through the slatted walls our houseboys perform their ablutions. This they managed as if convent-trained. A cloth was held round the naked body while they soaped from head to toe and sluiced down from dippers plunged into a full washing tub. A freshly laundered dhoti then would be skilfully folded about loins and legs to form knee breeches. Regrettably, I never glimpsed more than a bare buttock. Teeth were brushed several times a day with a freshly plucked twig from a lemon or guava tree. This they teased then dipped in ash from the copper fire-place There was surely some unmentionable reason why an Eastern style 'chota gher' was not available on CSR hill for houseboys who were obliged simply to disappear into the bush with a bottle of water.

When the eggs were collected by the 'outside' boy and the white leghorns let out to forage they made a beeline for the front garden beds. It was always my duty to chase them off. The cows taken from our compound each morning by a herdsman were returned about 4pm. The chooks, responding to the call 'tor-tor, tor-tor', followed the dipper of ground maize into the fowlyard content to be locked up and on perches by nightfall.

As evening drew in a mule-train strung together with clinking chains and diffusing an aroma of filterpress mud and manure would amble wearily past our front gate, heads bowed. They had toiled all day in the cane fields. Herdsmen wielding staves prodded calling 'CHELLO CHELLO JULDI CHELLO' all the way to the stables.

Monday was washing day but everything was 'soaked-in' the day before. Heavily soiled garments were scrubbed on the corrugated wooden board. The fire under the copper was lit early for the first load, soap shredded finely, tubs made ready for starching and blueing, with a dipper at hand and broom-handle for lifting steaming articles from copper to tubs. At least seven pairs of white trousers and seven shirts went into the wash each week and usually either a white coat or a mess jacket in addition to white damask table linen, bath towels, white bed linen and personal garments. Both 'boys' together wrung-out the heavy articles which were then pegged to long wire-lines raised on high by props to catch the trade wind. Before sundown the laundry would have been sorted, folded or damped-down then rolled up and placed under old towels ready for ironing. On Tuesday the kitchen stove was stoked-up after breakfast and the top cleared to make way for Mrs Potts' irons which before use were touched-up with beeswax. The wide kitchen table covered with old blanket and sheet was preferred to an ironing board.

Houseboys took a pride in their kitchen. The black leaded stove shone brilliantly, and the wood box, neatly stacked, was kept filled. Open kitchen shelves were lined with long glossy pages of *The Bulletin*. The over-hanging edges were cut into scallops, each finished with a diamond cut-out. The unpainted deal dresser, kitchen table and gauzed-in food safe were kept well scrubbed with sandsoap. Ants could find a way into anything, even screw-topped jars and cake tins. Legs on the ice-box, food safe and storage cupboards therefore stood in bowls of water and in addition cloths treated with ant poison were tied around them.

At the age of five, bib replaced with a serviette, I took my place at the dinner table. Wielding a large brass tray, Ungapa in spotless dhoti, red cummerbund and turban, waited at table. At intervals Mother's little silver bell summoned him to remove plates and serve the next course. This substantial meal always included steaming vegetable or beef soup, a main course with vegetables and a pudding. When preparing for a guest or two Mother would open a tin of salmon and concoct an entree or perhaps make anchovy eggs. On a Saturday evening we could rely on either dahl soup and fried croutons or mock oyster made from egg plant or broth from chicken giblets. The instant a carving knife was applied to

steel, Sukey Puss our resident hunter bounded up to purr and wind himself around our legs hoping for a windfall. Ungapa who could neither read nor write had apparently digested a cookbook. The healthwise obligatory stewed mangoes and guavas were served in season but he could also whip up chocolate blancmange, lemon sago, every known steamed or milk pudding, banana fritters and our favourite, paper-thin pan-cakes served with lemon and sugar. Junket or custard often accompanied this course and always a jug of fresh cream.

In these days while urgent overseas communication was limited to cable in morse code, telephone lines had been recently installed to link one district with one another and with Suva. In sugar areas, estates were connected by 'party lines' to the mill centre where there was a small exchange. A telephone in a bungalow, went with the job - restricted to burra sahib, chief engineer, mill manager, 'cane inspector', doctor and rail-traffic officer. A ringing phone was usually answered with some misgivings for too often it signalled trouble. For social chatter it was a mischievous instrument and those listening-in on a party line seldom heard anything to advantage.

Should it be necessary to communicate with a neighbour, a houseboy would be dispatched with a 'chitti'. Bungalow compounds at this time were set well apart and it was just 'not done' to pop in on anyone before 4:30pm. The 'chitti', folded in a distinctive way requiring no envelope, might convey an urgent SOS, a request to borrow a cup of flour or an invitation to tea.

When Mother needed advice on domestic or medical matters she set off with me trotting at her side to see Mrs 'Snowie'. Matrons addressed one another as 'Mrs' unless they had been girlhood friends. However, it was not unusual for longstanding friends to use a shortened form of address such as 'Mrs Coz' or 'Mrs Crad'. We took a short cut through guava scrub confident of finding Mrs Snowie at home. This dedicated housewife with three of her five children at boarding school had no time for frivolous tea parties, tennis or bridge. Mrs Snowie, Fiji born and therefore no stranger to the Hindi and Fijian tongue, could deal with any local problem. She could advise in removing rust or mildew from fabric, on ridding a house of ants, silverfish, hornets and bees; and was more experienced than a recently arrived medico in dealing with childhood ailments: prickly-heat, hives, teething problems, ringworm, boils, splinters, ear-ache and thrush. She would provide recipes for native vegetables and fruit, advise on the specific firewood required for baking fruitcake, a sponge, scones or meringues, and explain adjustments

necessary for a wood-stove damper. Tropical horticulture and tension difficulties in a treadle sewing-machine also fell within her range.

The Snowsills' only daughter Jean could never forget that she was older and wiser than me. Yet while she sniffed at my incompetence we remained playmates. Jean could be relied upon to shoulder responsibility, and with a sense of duty would leave an absorbing game of hospital or cubby house to give her younger brother, George, a game of rounders. Many of my childhood hours were enriched with English newspaper cartoon characters *Pip, Squeak and Wilfred*, and with books borrowed from the Snowsills' - L. M. Montgomory romances, and annuals belonging to the elder boys, stirring adventures from the *Boy's Own* and *Chums* wherein I met blood-thirsty Carib, pirate and redskin.

When 'Head Office' sanctioned the proposed nine hole golf course at Rarawai the home estate labour moved into action. Portions of the stock paddock, undulating country up beyond the stables was cleared of guava scrub. Tees were built-up and levelled and patches designated for greens were ploughed, sown with couch grass, fenced with wires strands, and stiles erected. Local rules took care of wires and styles, worm casts and cow pats, and the deep fissures which opened up during the dry season. Handicaps were based on bogey. Grass seeds that infested fairways proved an additional handicap. Like an invasion by bull ants, the seeds that clung to socks and stockings, made their way up trouser legs, onto hems of skirts and inside petticoats, and took hours to remove. Players endured torture until from the depths of an Englishman's wardrobe came a pair of gaiters. These were copied as a golfing accessory by a Bombay tailor and dressed with boiled starch. A few scrapes with a knife could remove offending seeds in a few minutes. In 1921 my father with a cleek, baffy, mashie and putter won the prestigious 'Sweet-Escott Cup' donated by a current governor. An inscribed silver egg-cup replica remains in our family with another similar won in 1928. Diminutive bright-eyed Indian children pestered 'to caddie'. The 'char anna' earned was usually wagered on the game. Prior to hitting off it was customary for caddies to run ahead to a vantage point. Should a shot stray into the rough it was no surprise to find it nicely placed, courtesy of a dexterous toe. Golf also provided young fry of all races with a new pastime - unwinding endless gut that made up the innards of a golf ball.

The first sea voyage I remember clearly was when five. A shipping strike had curtailed overseas leave, so mother and I departed without Dad in the over-crowded replacement *Moana*. Memory does not record how we reached Suva but this would have been by sea. The

stopover at the Grand Pacific Hotel however was memorable and unusual as normally AUSN steamers sailed from Lautoka; moreover on this occasion Mummy was ill. To this day a whiff of Friars Balsam conjures up the word 'laryngitis'. I had the run of the ship while Mother spent the voyage in her bunk unable to speak. Her sick bed, a top bunk, she shared with me in a four berth cabin. The stewardesses helped me with a salt water bath each morning but left me to master a complex system of buttons and buttonholes. I wasted no time getting out on deck to watch the ritual hosing down and scrubbing, and although spellbound by the changing moods of the ocean each day I was, nevertheless, first at the breakfast table. At 11am stewards appeared on deck bearing trays laden with mugs of steaming beef tea. Limp figures draped, even in the tropics, with steamer rugs occupied a row of deck chairs. Despite open decks passengers preferred the windward side where odours from kitchen and engine room could not linger. Matrons unable to face the sustenance sent from the galley were persuaded to sip Schweppes Dry Ginger Ale, a shipboard luxury, obtained from the smoke-room bar. By the third day out, the sea like glass and deck games in full swing, lady passengers dug out and pressed evening gowns and men dressing for dinner struggled with wing collars, studs and black bow ties.

I recall awakening at dawn one day to realise the engine throb had stopped, and the port hole was no longer filled with the endless blue sea and sky. The stark terracotta hillside filled with brick and tile was Watson's Bay. A multitude gathered as we drew into the wharf, grim faced and angular compared with my graceful countrymen. The luggage was entrusted to an uncouth carrier while a horse drawn hansom cab took us to Dad's sister's cottage at Coogee. The impact of new sounds, smells and flavours are retained in my memory: gas hanging about front gates, the warm, stuffy fragrance of nasturtium and geranium leaves in gardens, the drowsy throb of doves, the rattle of trams and spluttering overhead wires, ice-cream in cones, purple muscatels Sargent's meat pies, the aroma of grilled lamb chops, and splashing clutching my father in the surf or trailing with my mother up and down in crowded 'lifts' and in and out the Pitt Street shops and arcades, dodging at eye level aggressive hips and elbows. From Ways to Horderns, to McCathies to Farmers and David Jones Mother sought out and planned a wardrobe to last her two years. She priced and tried on as she shopped, matching shoes with frocks and hats, dress material with ribbon, braid and beading. Purchases would be 'entered' to Dad's charge account and while on leave 'sent' to the Coogee address.

# 3

# RARAWAI SCHOOLDAYS

I was five and a half when Jean and I started school together. We met each day at the big white gate and made our way with heart in mouth up the road through the stock paddock - Billy the bull territory. The school had one teacher a New Zealander and one classroom and pupils ranging from five years to sixteen. Any child with a European surname could attend. I recall the small fee required each Monday was later discontinued. Primer One class regardless of age and size occupied a mat on the floor in front of the desks. We were given sticks to assemble in twos and threes, introduced to big cardboard letters of the alphabet and given stodgy lumps of plasticine to model as we wished. I treasured with great pride Primer 1 reader containing sentences made up of two and three letter words which we learned to spell. Primer Two had desks and a reader with big four letter words such as 'boat', 'fish', and 'girl'. The size of a slate indicated scholastic ability. One side was lined for writing and sums, the unlined side used for drawing with coloured chalk. Slate cleaning posed an age-old problem, overcome, at Rarawai school, when electricity was installed at the mill. Those boys whose fathers worked there brought to school discarded bulbs. These were put to use. An opening at the top could be created by careful grinding. Water was then forced into the bulb. Holes on our desks intended for an ink-well held the bulb from which water was sprinkled on the slate. Ink was not in use until Standard III brought us copy-books, relief nibs and long division.

Multiplication tables were chanted each day. Classes would repair in turn to the verandah out of ear-shot. When 'twelve times' was mastered we were burdened with pounds, shillings, pence, florins, half-crowns, guineas and then had to memorise yards and inches, chains, furlongs, and miles and move onto ounces, pounds, hundredweight and tons. Each day before lessons commenced we lined up to drill. Singing lessons with tuning fork and so/fa method were nevertheless relished by

our naturally musical classmates. We learned rousing patriotic and battle tunes dear to the Empire, part songs and rounds. Under the New Zealand educational syllabus, in addition to the three R's, the whole classroom did New Zealand geography in depth and was given glimpses of world wide historical events, famous deeds, important battles, explorations and inventions. During those years in the one classroom at Rarawai school I committed to memory the contents of all the school readers up to Standard VI. Unfortunately this did not further my ability to cope with sight-reading new story books at home. The school learned poetry that hopefully might interest the boys: 'There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight', 'Sherwood in the Twilight', 'Sea Fever' and 'The Pipes at Lucknow'. Mr Hoodless regarded as a ogre came from Suva each year to inspect the school.

Looking back to these days I know each of us instinctively understood that while we all played together during school hours many class-mates would not be happy or comfortable to visit our homes any more than we would be to visit Newtown. Some children spoke little English before coming to school and at first were desperately shy. Nor for that matter would our well regarded house-boys wish to mix with us socially. During play time and lunch time the big boys became cow-boys, galloping around the school grounds astride branches or palm fronds whipping steeds, firing from the hip. The older girls organised games for younger children. Along with tig and puss-in-the-corner we played 'French and English' and 'Three Jolly Sailormen', games I never met again after Rarawai school-days. In addition to children from our neighbourhood and the families from the Government station, the school role at this time was made up principally of Rounds, Underwoods, Campbells, Eyres and Murrays. I only once saw a boy caned and do not recall any bad language other than an occasional 'kai si' and 'kai colo'. The Hindu insult 'sewer ka bachcha' [sic] I never heard at school.

School life that I loved brought some disadvantages. I spent several months one year with fingernails anointed in bitter aloes in an effort to cure the current craze for nail biting. Another year I suffered torture when curls were systematically tooth-combed to remove ' munna-munnas'. The most painful affliction however was an outbreak of boils. These eruptions multiplied on our bottoms and thighs, a tender area when seated all day at a school desk. Despite poulticing and squeezing the infection took months to clear up.

By now I had become familiar with the whole district extending from the water supply dam in the hills to the river mouth, from Tavua

Gap to Lautoka Gap. The Ba Thumb, thrusting above knuckles of blue hills, distinguished our valley from other valleys that divided the island of Viti Levu into segments. Watercourses lined with rain-forest trees and bamboo meandered through a wide patchwork of cane fields. These fields usually feathery green became silver-plumed when in seed, or reduced to naked red clay when furrowed by plough and blackened after a trash fire. I still recall the hilltop setting of many estate bungalows:- Navatu, Etitoka, Vangeer, Navisa, Matgara, Koronubu, Vunisamaloa, Motu, Voroka, Narooku, Yalolevu, Sigawi and Nabatola.

The government station was located at Namasau, accessible from Ba township by a concrete vehicular bridge. The Namasau Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club established by private planters had a membership of few CSR people. During the dry season the Golding Cup matches, contested with keen rivalry at weekends between men's teams from Namasau, Rarawai and Lautoka tennis clubs were social highlights of the year. Namasau was also the venue for two annual race meetings. These gatherings provided the occasion for a ball. In the good old days 'before the war' (WWI), when planters were prosperous, the local matrons sent to Melbourne for their gowns, millinery, parasols and evening cloaks, often confections with a Paris label.

By the 1920s these Namasau Race Meetings, attended by people of all races and all ages were not quite the social occasions they had once been. It was here I made my debut aged, judging from an early photograph, about three. I was dolled up in frock and mushroom hat trimmed with ribbon and laces from mother's wedding gown. I remember later years dressed in more serviceable garb and the fun we children had. In Fiji at this time it was just not done at any time of day or night for European parents to leave children at home alone with a nurse girl or dhai. Therefore, with or without nurse girl, children accompanied mother even to a race meeting. We competed with one another collecting tote tickets, pink, lilac, green and yellow that littered the ground after each race. This was probably the only time in the year we had pocket money to spend on lemonade, cherryade, roasted peanuts and colourful paper fans and rattles, offered by Indian vendors. I recall 'owner riders' Victor and Jimmy Clark and races where Claude Gamson or Jock MacIntosh won on the favourites 'Cagi mai Ra' or 'Maltese Cross' or Sam Coffey's 'Lady Con'.

The ladies' committee catered lavishly for the supper at a Race Ball and worked for weeks filling huge baskets with handmade paper flowers to decorate the stark walls of a dance floor at the CSR hall. I

remember one year there was lattice, festooned with wisteria, another year the hall was transformed into a bower of cherry blossom and next year the motif, chrysanthemums. The supper-room, verandah posts and doorways were decorated with the customary palm fronds.

When not parked overnight at a neighbour's house I would be smuggled into the hall with two or three other youngsters whose parents were on the Ball committee. We sat along the edge of the stage dangling our legs, entranced by the scene and the nimble fingered pianist who beat out a foxtrot and waltz. Ladies in short flimsy, beaded georgette frocks, with diamante headbands, hankies tucked into armlets twirled on twinkling toes around the floor - their partners scarcely unrecognisable. White tie and tails or mess jacket, hair slicked down with brilliantine transformed an overseer or clerk. Each dancer carried a programme. These came in a pastel shade with a tiny pencil attached by silken cord. The dances were booked with special attention to the supper dance and to the last. It was unforgivable to cut a dance, and couples who 'sat out' in a parked car were not unnoticed.

If we children could manage to stay awake until after supper there were left-overs: delicacies such as oyster patties, asparagus rolls, anchovy eggs, cream-filled meringues and eclairs, jellies and trifle. Local matrons had a light touch with puff pastry and sponge cakes and decorated their culinary creations with marzipan, flowers, nuts and glace fruits.

These balls in the Ba hall touched off many a romance which often led to marriage. But unfortunately, sometimes an idle flirtation developed into a marital dilemma. By 3am due to heat, exertion and a 'wad' too many, the most immaculate collars would crumple and legs sag.

A room partitioned off the end of the hall verandah, the ladies powder room during a ball, became a surgery when a Suva dentist visited once or twice a year. Facilities were primitive. A portable drill was worked by foot and patients spat into an open bucket. As neither a nurse nor a receptionist was present and our dentist somewhat a 'ladies man' there was the alleged occasion, relished in local legend, when an instrument had to be retrieved from the cleavage of a patient.

At intervals an Indian barber was invited to set up a chair on the hall verandah and the small boys of the settlement were rounded up. The barber was feared more than the dentist and my playmates were not the ones to suffer a hair cut quietly. The same barber would be waiting on

the lawn beside the office on a Friday afternoon when the mill labour was paid. Midday Saturday found him stationed under the mango tree by the church eager to remind the quarters' sahibs with blighted hopes, that a haircut could work wonders.

A long gauzed-in end room at the hall held the CSR library. We would pull up in the car on a Friday evening, exchange Ryder Haggard for a Zane Gray or Raphael Sabatini before moving on to the local picture theatre. Before interval we saw , a 'keystone' comedy or two and always a serial with cliff-hanger episodes which brought us back next week. Freshly roasted peanuts were irresistible and after interval the theatre floor was inches deep in shells. Patrons were reconciled to outdated films. But whether one of the famous Talmadge or Barrimore family stared in a melodrama or Hoot Gibson or Tom Mix featured in a western, the coloured audience seated in the front rows were hugely entertained. When the pianist quickened the tempo and the chase on screen began the audience beat their thighs and cheered and responded with whistles and slow claps when the pianist played dreamily during a love scene. There were periodical blackouts while a reel was rewound and accidental blackouts when a film snapped only to reappear upside down or with an episode of high drama missing. Only then did we notice the mosquitos and heat. We children were often rewarded with discarded footage from a feature film.

We were startled one school-day when a posse of strangers from Suva tramped into our classroom. This would be our introduction to a hookworm campaign financed by the Rockerfeller Foundation. It meant that we must never venture out of doors without shoes; an alarming edict when 99% of the coloured population possessed no footwear. The rest of us saw a carefree childhood ruined. No more paddling in road-side drains in wet weather, no more mud-pies nor games of marbles in the dust or cubby houses scraped out amongst tree roots. During the following week, at designated times, the entire district was required to assemble at the local picture theatre. We were lectured to in three languages and shown a series of gruesome slides: seepage spreading around dunnies, worms working into the soles of feet, multiplying in intestines and finally people lying listless, emancipated, dying. We did not leave empty handed. Each person was given a small cardboard box on which we must write our name. Within was, a packet containing Epsom salts and a tin with a tight lid and instructions. These men threatened to remain in the district until all small tins had been returned. For several years to come, sneaking off undetected without shoes or sandals was regarded as a

triumph second only to lighting up and puffing a wooden cotton reef filled with dried leaves just like our houseboys did.

The Wesylan and Roman Catholic Mission Stations were located across the river from the Ba township. Nailaga native township supported ( if my memory is correct) a Roman Catholic Church and Namasau I do remember as a Wesleyan stronghold with a modern hospital and lady doctor. An agreement existed that the Anglican Church not compete in the mission field with the Wesleyan. The Anglican Bishop in Polynesia in appearance a handsome, ascetic celibate who lived at the GPH in Suva held a service in the little Rarawai Church once a year. I should add that ten years later Bishop Kempthorne surprised Suva when he married a fun loving American lady already twice married and who played the ukulele. But now back to the '20s. For a short time Miss Lapthorne from the Wesleyan Mission valiantly opened up the Rarawai Church to give us Sunday School. Tall, thin and a dowdy dresser, her wisp of hair was drawn back into a tight bun. She nevertheless exuded good humour and like other Fiji missionaries wore sandshoes. We enjoyed the novelty of Sunday School despite an occasional sting from a hornet and turned up each week with our threepences to collect cards with colourful pictures and a comforting message. Miss Lapthorne bravely peddled at the organ, dodging hornets while leading us through 'There is a Green Hill Far Away', 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' and 'Jesus Loves Me'. Following a Christmas party at Namasau Mission she returned to New Zealand and Sunday School in Rarawai did not reopen. This little church was a casualty of the devastating flood following the 1931 hurricane.

Each crushing season could bring a change of playmates to the district Those of us who accompanied mothers to tennis and bridge afternoons happily squabbled, played rounders, cubby house, hide-and - seek, tig. When there was opportunity we scavenged in the bush for lemons, passion-fruit or guavas and shied sticks and stones to bring down ripening mangoes. Should a stand of juicy Badilla be accessible, there were no poisonous snakes or spiders in Fiji canefields to deter us. We would brave hornets and the vicious purple sensitive grass concealed beneath 'mile-a-minute' creeper. Staves of cane retrieved would be bashed into segments against a rock, the fibrous purple covering then peeled off with teeth. The thin green varieties of sugar cane attracted no attention from locally born connoisseurs.

My playmate Peggy although three years older, did not attempt to boss or to mother me. Her favourite game was dressing-up for a make-

believe concert. When I brought out my basket of garments the first things she 'bagsed' would be what my mother's emerald satin opera cloak and her white kid wedding shoes with baby Louis heels. Swathed in curtains with close attention to fashionable skirt length we would sashay around and with hands on hips sing and dance.

In addition to the front garden already mentioned our grounds were wielded in trees and shrubs. A sky-high row of rain trees along the cow paddock fence formed a backdrop. Two flamboyant trees shaded the chook yards. A tall kapok tree, a lemon tree, an orange and mandarin, and several crepe myrtles also occupied the back premises. Self sown paw-paws sprang up beside the dhobi-gher and vale lie-lie. Granadilla vines covered a trellis beside the covered way. A hedge of red hibiscus marked out the perimeter of the front garden. Within this area grew two coconut palms, a mauve bauhinia, two jacarandas, two pink shower trees and two frangipanis. A purple bougainvillea wrapped rapturously across the reeded front verandah. There were also clumps of croton, a circle of red babbados lilies and one highly perfumed Indian rose bush. My favourite trees were the two weeping figs my father had planted to provide shade when we first came here. By the time I was old enough to climb trees, they were house-high with strong, wide spreading branches. A swing was rigged up for me on one tree. Between the boughs on the other I wedged boards to form a seat with ledges nearby to display my 'treasure' - highly prized pieces of broken china selected from a collection I amassed from scavenging. There on the swing or in the tree I whiled an hour away happily warbling all the songs I knew. Whenever I climbed, Sukey an abominable show off, came too. The flowering of the trees in our garden marked the months of the year. The pink shower tree bloomed in August, jacarandas in September, bauhinia in October, frangipani in November, flamboyants at Christmas, crepe myrtle for my birthday in January. Each year while I grew two inches, the fig trees added many feet.

The woodheap just inside our cow yard fence formed my Adventureland. One week I would pile up the contorted limbs of doga (mangrove) and shore up other logs to form a stockade, the next week rearranged this would be a pirate ship, the next week a post-chaise, or castle ramparts depending on the current story or film that had captured my imagination.

Saturday brought a change in routine. Dad would return at 11 o'clock and crank the Overland. Our first stop the bazaar. This market was held under the mango trees beside the 'coolie lines' shrill with

domestic argument and whining censure. Goods and produce were stacked or displayed on cloths spread out on the ground. Since day-break the countryside on foot, horseback and canoe had been on the move. Women in bright saris, their voluminous skirts well tucked in, squatted beside small stacks of garlic, red, green or yellow chillies or mounds of brown or yellow aromatic spices or betel nut. Old timers, with their fortune in gold sovereigns encircling their necks, attended sacks of rice. Maize or dhal was for sale and bottles of ghee, bamboo baskets, live chooks strung up by their feet, mountains of watermelons, cucumbers, eggplant and jackfruit. Flies hovered over Indian sweetmeats and dried fish. Silversmiths displayed adornments: headbands for a sari, bracelets, anklets, studs for nose or ear, rings for the finger or toe. Fijians usually arrived by canoe or cutter, adding shirt, singlet or pinafore to the traditional red and white or navy and white sulu. They brought to market bunches of bananas, strings of fresh fish, ketis of kai, crab, yam, taro or kumala and ropes of pungent locally grown tobacco.

We headed next for Morris Hedstrom's store. Mother at the grocery counter looked for imported delicacies: tinned oysters, peaches, lambs' tongue and anchovy sauce. While memsahibs replenished store-cupboards and sewing materials, sahibs gathered on the verandah corner where on a Saturday morning yagona was dispensed and news exchanged. We never left the store without a supply of 'honey kisses', or caramels and when available a large tin of Cadbury's chocolates. Nor could we return home before heading up town to cross the creek and visit the Chinese stores. Mother was a tireless shopper. Fuji, china and jap silk, crepe-de-chine and cotton crepe must meet the shade she required and be fingered for quality. Tennis shoes, slippers, lychee nuts and jars of preserved ginger known as 'chow-chow' came from these stores. Jang Hing Loong's long glass showcases were a treasure trove displaying soaps and perfumes gaudily packaged in India and Hong Kong, assorted colourful glass marbles and glass bangles, coloured chalks, lead pencils with rubbers, one, two or three tiered pencil cases, combs and hair clips trimmed with pieces of mirror, drawing books, mouth organs, folding paper fans, Chinese lanterns, parasols and scarlet bundles of deafening fire-crackers.

When a family was in residence bungalows were never locked, nor gauze doors latched at bedtime. Mother did however carry a key-ring with three keys One locked the store-cupboard, one the linen press where the liquor was kept and the other locked her wardrobe. As Mother preferred a curtain wardrobe, the oak wardrobe held Dad's possessions, his dinner suit, mess jacket, a white linen jacket, his binoculars, a

Malacca cane, a rifle, pistol, the three cell Eveready torch and a Cadburys chocolate tin containing petty cash. Mother would place her jewellery casket in the locked wardrobe before she left the house.

Mother's dressing table sparkled with silverware. Not only were matching brush and comb, hand-mirror, jewel casket, perfume bottle, powder and pin bowls silver but also the manicure set, button hook, vase and photo frames.

Electric lighting was installed in Rarawai houses about this time. With the flick of a finger any bulb would light up. There was now a serviceable white china shade dangling on flex from the ceiling of each room and at intervals along the verandah. This wonderous amenity was free of charge but the use restricted to lighting, an iron and fan. When we returned from the next leave mother brought back numerous wire lampshade frames, various coloured silks, gold lace and yards of silken fringe. Electricity would be the first casualty during a hurricane. Kerosene lamps were therefore retained including invaluable hurricane 'butties'. I still have a white enamel candlestick, a relic from this era.

When the sugar content (the P.O.C.S.) in ripening cane warranted, the crushing season commenced. Monster machinery roared into action day and night. The mill generated enormous heat and energy and noise. Smoke billowed from the chimney stack, steam issued from vents, whistles rent the air. The mill complex lit at night by a thousand electric bulbs resembled a huge ocean liner. A liner under considerable stress. Chains of cane trucks filled the mill yard, empty trucks waiting to be trundled off to a distant sector, laden trucks stood by to be drawn by a straining bullock to the weigh-bridge within the hour. During crushing season black bagasse which issued from the chimney stack distributed smudges willy-nilly to our hair, faces, clothes, laundry and outdoor furniture and a sickly caramelised aroma from the by-product molasses hung over the district. This 'fragrance', evocative of childhood, as ambrosial to me now as to Chanel No.5.

Indians in 1924 were encouraged to take up as tenant farmers a ten acre 'zamin'. This allowed a farmer a livable return from cane, land to grow vegetables, rice and to graze a cow. The rental was low, cash was advanced, implements loaned, seed came and technical advice given. The term 'lien' became a fact of life for many farmers. A farmer with a family would seek additional income, as a houseboy, a dhobi, cane cutter or as a labourer in the mill. Raw sugar could by purchased by employees from the company store at a give away price. A by-product of milling,

'filterpress mud', fertilised the fields. The Indian farm dwellings although constructed with materials similar to the native bure were nevertheless unmistakable, nestling beside a clump of trees, usually mango, tamarind and coconut palm. At the top of a bamboo pole attached to the highest tree a red pennant or more significantly a white pennant, according to Indian custom, brought protection to the property.

There appeared little necessity for garbage collection in these days. Everything was put to good use. Household scraps were consumed by poultry. Waste paper lit fires. Empty tins were invaluable for storage and as utensils. Broken crockery was simply tossed into the bush. Mother nature was bountiful. The coconut palm provided material for thatch and baskets, fibre for twine, filling for mattresses The dried kernel was fed to poultry and, when freshly grated, made nourishing stock for curries or replaced milk and butter for cake and scone making. Bamboo also in abundance was available as a building and basket material. A discarded jute sugar sack could become a bed covering, a hammock an awning or all-weather cloak. Kerosene and petrol were imported in four gallon tins - and a timber packing case contained two tins. An emptied tin had a thousand uses - a bucket, a boiler or storage tank. And opened out, could provide building material. The packing cases were also invaluable. My dolls house, for instance, was made from three such packing cases, the timber carefully planed and painted.

We all turned out on Tazia Day, gathering with the multitude down by the coolie-lines at the mill. For this Moslem Festival observance a number of elaborate towers with complex delicate turrets attached were constructed from bamboo and glossy paper. When mounted on long horizontal poles these were paraded through the district. Chanting and drum beating accompanied the procession. When a halt was called, men painted as tigers stripped to a g-string and wrestled to the applause of the crowd. At sunset came the ceremonial climax. When these fanciful, unimaginably beautiful towers were tossed into the river we children dissolved into tears. Once I remember my delight in finding next morning a three foot high turret, salvaged by an anonymous donor, propped up under the house.

At the end of November, the conclusion of a successful harvest and crushing season was acknowledged in a customary fashion. The last locomotive puffed into the mill yard garlanded with flowers. Palm fronds or boughs of flamboyant trees decorated the last cane truck. When the cane from this truck was finally tipped onto the mill rollers the mill whistle burst into a cock-a-doodle-do. The rejoicing was then taken up

by all locos in the mill yard. The slack season had commenced. The community could relax a while and await the rains. One half of CSR staff looked forward to leave, others awaited news of a posting or promotion. The remainder accepted their lot.

The wet season built up gradually. For a week or two the black clouds that gathered each afternoon brought a deluge by evening. In December we would be threatened by barometric depressions and have days of wind and rain. During January and February it poured incessantly, the rain drumming thunderously on the iron roof, driven by wind across verandahs. The north western sugar areas received only one third the rainfall suffered by the wettest areas in the island group. At least once each wet season a 'blow' wrenched away branches, shrubs cavorted like dervishes, flowers were beheaded, shutters slammed, the house shuddered and power and telephone lines, trees and birds' nests came down. We sank to our ankles in the sodden lawn, the roads became rivers, the ditches cascades. Two days later the sun returned and we mopped up.

I can never forget watching during the Christmas holidays one year, our school-house being uplifted and trucked away by my father's workmen. It moved awkwardly and slowly, midst shouting and warning cries, down the road to be relocated in the vicinity of the CSR hall. This was adjacent to the local sports ground and for the convenience of pupils and staff half way between the officers' bungalows and the part European settlement at Newtown. The freshly painted building now had two classrooms allowing the school an assistant teacher. There was also headroom under the building which gave us shelter to play during wet weather. An additional blessing was a toilet-block free of hornets. A thoughtful extra was the table with seating attached encircling the trunk of a huge mango. Here under the cool green canopy we girls gathered to eat lunch and chatter.

Now that alterations to the floor plan of bungalows had been sanctioned by Head Office our house among others underwent transformation. A wall partially removed, allowed an L-shaped lounge/dining room. Another wall moved and my bedroom became smaller. We now dined indoors, the electric fan rotating. After dinner our new His Master's Voice gramophone provided a nightly concert. Dad had bought the tall cabinet model in Sydney and spared no expense when selecting a wide range of records to fill the shelves. Arias from opera were sung by Nellie Melba, Galla Curci and Caruso, ballads by

John MacCormack, famous orchestral overtures resounded, some Franz Lehar waltzes and to my delight popular fox-trots were included.

Once a month the mail boat from Sydney brought us a mountain of mail: parcels, magazines, newspapers, catalogues and letters. The Sydney weekend newspapers forwarded by an aunt included for my benefit coloured comics featuring Ginger Meggs and Fatty Fin. A continual flow of letters kept us in touch with both sides of the family who, in our isolation, we particularly depended upon to find us suitable accommodation when we went on leave.

Each year a children's Christmas party was held in the hall. A noko-noko, the nearest tree in Fiji to a fir was implanted in the middle of the floor. Yule-tide decorations included cotton wool, tinsel, balloons and baubles. Santa perspiring profusely, handed to every child in the district who could claim a European surname a worthwhile present. School concerts were also held in the hall. One year Jean and I brandishing tambourines attempted a gipsy dance. Another year trembling alone on stage, I recited Kipling's 'If'. Jean and I were taking piano lessons. These must have been torture for Mrs Steward who came from Nasadi (by some means) one afternoon each week to teach us. She had grandchildren our age and despite the heat, dressed and comported herself with dignity, arriving on foot with parasol, hat fashionably perched on forehead and a veil knotted under her chin.

Looking back on childhood I recall frequent intervals spent in bed, bitterly disappointed to miss a launch trip or bathing picnic. Being the only child of a conscientious mother, a close watch was kept on my health via tongue and thermometer. If bilious attack was suspected my nose was held and caster oil slipped into my open mouth followed by a slice of orange and a boiled lolly. Bronchitis brought longer periods in bed; my chest was rubbed with hot camphorated oil and I was given doses of cough mixture. Mother who had spent many months during her own youth, first as a patient and later in training took a pride in nursing. Armed with several towels, a face cloth and warm water slopping round in a basin she sponged me in bed and insisted on an invalid diet. This meant bread and milk, arrowroot flavoured with vanilla served temptingly in a wine glass, and coddled egg. Angel's food was a delicacy made with gelatine which, in those days looked like cardboard and was sold by the sheet. Resigned to imprisonment in bed I occupied myself with cut-out paper dolls, picture books and my two boxes of building blocks. Dad's sore throats more frequently developed into life-threatening quinsy. Eventually the doctor insisted on sick-leave in Sydney where his tonsils

were removed. This was a popular, though dangerous, operation for an adult in those days.

A CSR officer was granted leave and free return passage to Australia or New Zealand every two years and a wife and children allowed a passage each year. Leave plus travelling time in those days might take us away from home for nearly three months. Our houseboys who continued to care for our cows and poultry went onto half pay. Whoever was appointed to relieve Dad usually moved into our house with Sukey for company.

During the days spent packing, prior to departure, Mother and I wore our oldest clothes. For the trip ahead we needed an ample supply of garments At least one large cabin trunk would contain dark suits and warm clothing smelling of camphor and moth balls. Suitcases were leather, initialled in gold leaf. A matter of pride was the number and diversity of pasted-on hotel, shipping line and destination labels a well travelled trunk or suitcase could collect. We also never set sail without two hat boxes, Dad's valise and a roll of rugs. This bundle, tightly secured with leather straps included a cushion, raincoats, umbrellas, and Dad's bag of golf sticks,.

The primitive facilities, and cramped accommodation aboard the A.U.S.N. 'tub' 'S.S.*Suva*' meant nothing to me. I found rough weather exhilarating. When the more comfortable 'S.S.*Mouraki*' replaced '*Suva*', the voyage took on the form of a South Seas cruise with ports of call, Suva, Lautoka, Noumea, Sydney. Vessels on this passage, were obliged, in case of an unreported shipwreck, to come within sight of Middleton Reef in daylight. The spectre of the two wrecks was a grim reminder of the perils of the deep. Seasoned travellers would recount how survivors from one shipwreck had resorted to cannibalism. Since then rations were stored on a portion of one wreck against such a disaster. At night leaning over the rails we would marvel at mercurial phosphorous rushing past in the waves.

In New Caledonia passengers stayed a night or two ashore in Noumea while the ship continued up the coast to load timber. These years when our pound sterling was worth two hundred and fifty francs, the normally penniless CSR families spent up like millionaires in Noumea. To be close to the shops we stayed at Montaignes' Hotel. This was adjacent to a park canopied by flamboyant trees seasonally ablaze with colour. The dining room at Montaignes' featured red checked table cloths and introduced us to French provincial cooking and complimentary

'vin ordinaire'. During our visit Mother purchased a life-time supply of Houbigant perfume. I scored a French doll - a dimpled minx, and also a straw hat shaped like a coal scuttle which I only wore under protest. Male passengers bought up a stock of cognac and several spent the night paralytic on a park bench.

During Sydney holidays Mother and I might stay a while with Coogee relatives before moving when Dad joined us into a Coogee guest house. In later years Kings Cross was 'the' holiday address. Furnished flats, luxury suites, private hotels, private hospitals, coffee shops, smart boutiques were all situated within one section by tram from city shops, theatres and the Macquarie Street doctors and dentists. Our Donnan relatives from Broadwater mill, northern NSW, would arrange their leave to coincide with our leave. We therefore enjoyed many Sydney holidays together at the same guest house; cousin Susie a little older and Carson a little younger than me.

We spent the year 1924 away from Fiji. Dad was sent by CSR to far north Queensland to sort out difficulties attending the survey and construction of a light railway extension for Hambledon Mill. Mother and I remained in Sydney for a time to share a flat at Centennial Park with Aunt Eva Donnan and Susie during Carson's serious illness. Susie and I attended school at the local convent. This, my first experience of winter, was also the first time I had ever seen my mother cope with cooking, housework and laundry. Halfway through the year Dad returned to Sydney to submit his plans to Head Office before construction began.. Carson was now well enough to travel home.

A reunited family, we boarded the '*Wyruna*' to sail up the east coast of Australia. The various ports of call and the beauties of the Whitsunday Islands unfortunately are not imprinted in my memory. However,I do recall that in comparison with the islands of Fiji, Townsville's Magnetic Island was a disappointment. After a week or two at Hides Hotel in Cairns Mother found a half house to rent out along the Mulgrave Road - at the time known as Hopwar Road. I was enrolled at the local public school along the Esplanade and piano lessons were arranged at the convent. Dad was camped under canvas in deep rain forest, in the vicinity of Redlynch and Freshwater Creek. Each weekend he returned to Cairns in his A model single- seater Ford. I remember we spent some days with friends at Hambledon Mill, and one Sunday explored with Dad the upper reaches of Freshwater Creek. Queensland houses were distinctive with gabled roofs, white fretwork trimming and lattice. They stood very high off the ground. Laundry, bathroom and

garage occupied the area beneath a house. Our house on Hopwar Road bordered a swamp filled with water lilies and home to noisy green frogs eager to leap into a room as soon as a door opened. The term lavatory or WC did not apply to our privy. As I sat enthroned one never-to-be-forgotten morning with my pants round ankles and legs dangling I watched terror stricken a long, black, unfamiliar creature slither out of the long grass and approach. The back yard was then hastily mown but future visits 'down the back' became a dreaded feature of Queensland life. Christmas week at Kuranda Hotel, the hair-raising rail journey, spectacular Barron Falls, rain-forest walks, butterflies and a week long journey by rail back to Sydney left lasting memories.

When we returned to Ba, Mother gave away tennis to take up golf. Auction bridge also had become an important social activity. Almost every week an 'afternoon' for three, four or more tables of bridge was held at an estate home or catered for at the Ba hotel. Some homesteads could offer tennis to non-bridge players and billiards for husbands who arrived by car in the late afternoon to collect wives. When other arrangements could not be made for me after school I accompanied Mother. Usually other children were present some with dhal or a nurse-girl. We made a point of exploring the wide-spread grounds yet be at hand to devour left-over cream cakes and sausage-rolls. A successful hostess needed discretion when arranging bridge tables. Standard of play had to be considered and it was crucial to know whether a coolness existed or worse, if any two were daggers drawn. Homemade delicacies, such as devilled nuts, fudge and coconut ice were nibbled all the afternoon but alcoholic refreshment never offered before sundown.

Boarding school, for so long a distant mile-stone, finally approached. The Girls' Grammar in Suva, where Mrs Spence, widow of a District Commissioner, was in charge of the hostel was highly recommended. Mother spent a busy six months borrowing paper patterns, choosing materials, cutting and sewing my trousseau. The uniform dresses and matching bloomers had to be navy trobalco with a white 'Peter Pan' collar, a pocket embroidered GGS in red, and worn with a red belt, and black shoes and socks. A starched white rag hat was required, and two white frocks for outings and church, worn with white socks and black patent leather shoes. As boarders always changed for dinner each evening, several coloured voile frocks were also necessary. The list included dressing-gown, slippers, pyjamas, petticoats, laundry-bag, sewing-basket, handkerchiefs and sachet, writing-materials, a toilet-bag, and swimsuit, a Cash's name tape stitched to each article.

While Mother, hand-worked button-holes, whipped lace and insertion, pin-tucked yolks she instilled upon me not only the privilege in being sent to boarding school but the sacrifice it would cost her in peace of mind. With me out of sight she could never stop worrying. Only by my being brave and sensible could her anxiety be eased and the hours spent sewing repaid. She took pride in my long thick curly hair. It was worn, as she wished, parted down the middle and tied either side with a bow. I remember my solemn promise to be happy at boarding school and never to allow my hair to be plaited.

# 4

# 'LOMAI LAGI', SUVA

Only now looking back do I realise that with the exception of birth, all other important steps in my life took place without my parents. On the eve of our departure for Suva, when the last hem was finally adjusted, for I was growing rapidly, Mother who had not spent a day in bed since I was five, landed in hospital. And although never known to take a step without footwear, a sewing needle had embedded in her foot Poulticing, bathing, lancing led to septicaemia which in those days before antibiotics could be fatal. There was no time to alter plans. Mother, brave under stress, kissed me goodbye and promised to visit me in Suva at Easter. The scene was typical in the wet season. Thirsty canefields and vegetation sponged up a saturated countryside. The Ba River was in flood, engorged with mud, swirling flotillas of waterlilies and uprooted clumps of bamboo. In teaming rain Dad handed me aboard the '*Adi Keva'* in the care of 'Mrs Snowie' putting Jean and George to boarding school also for the first time.

My letter home, the first of the subsequent thousands from my pen, only partly records the adventurous voyage which Mother was fortunate to miss. I was unaware at the time that 'hostel rules' required envelopes be left open. As promised I hid my heartache and did not dwell on the danger we had faced. *'Adi Keva'* came so close to foundering that Captain Low actually despatched his stalwart Fijian seaman to seek out for care the younger passengers should this befall. However, we made Levuka and whilst the vessel was repaired we all went ashore for an overnight stay at the hotel or with friends.

*Lomai Lagi*
*Suva*
*15th Feb*

*My Own Darling Mummy & Daddy*

*I am writing a very exciting letter. I like school very much only I would rather be at home. Every thing is nice and homely and I like all the girls. I have a rather nice teacher and I am in Std IV with Ella McConnoll and Pat Israel. The Mac. Connoll girls are all very nice. Ella, Jean and Molly and I are in a dorm with for beds in it. We had an awful trip to Suva. The second day out about 9'o'clock in the morning the boat started to roll most frightfully nearly everyone was sick but I was not. This rolling kept on untill 12 o'clock and then we go into Lavuka. Once the boat nearly went over. While the boat was rolling one of the Fijians asked Hamilton Ramsay if he could swim "very chearful was not it". The next day it was quite calm. But while we were watching the view going into the Wainabukasi a man took a fit and rolled on the deck kicking I hope your foot is quite better now Mummy Darling and you are able to walk soon and come round and see me soon. And Darling Daddy I hope you are quite well. I must end now with tons of love and kisses to you.*

*From*
*Your loving daughter*
*Betty*

*PS*
*Plenty of love to Sukey Darling XXXXXXXXXXXXXX*

My spelling always pained Mother. For years I would find my mistakes listed at the end of her next letter to me. These received only a cursory glance. My mind and pen would not wait for the dictionary.

An unexpected feature of the Girls' Grammar hostel was the garden. The weather-board cottage surrounded by wide verandahs was located at the corner of Des Voeux Road and Gordon Street. The sloping site lent itself to pathways, terraces, rockeries and a sunken garden surrounding pocket handkerchief lawn. Mauve and white flowering gerantha formed hedges. A clump of pink or red ixora here, a row of canterbury bells there, purple and white violetina, rambling roses, violets, forget-me-not, jasmine, and lilies flourished in the damp Suva climate. An area below the Des Voeux Road street-level, shaded over and lined with long shelving, formed a fernery. This haunt of chameleons, maidenhair fern, assorted palms, begonia and staghorn we looked onto

from the long verandah set up for dining and homework. Another verandah of similar length with a harbour view formed a sleep-out. Every square inch of the spacious cottage had a function. A front verandah held lazy-boy chairs, with a gauzed-in corner section curtained in pretty chintz allowed Mrs Spence a private sitting-room. The large double front room was the 'little girls' dormitory. On a Saturday evening beds were pushed aside to make space for parlour games, charades, a concert, fancy-dress party or play-acting. A hallway divided four other bed-cum-dressing rooms. The back verandah was partitioned off for a large kitchen, two bathrooms and lavatories, and space enough for clothes-presses and utility tables. An internal staircase led to a laundry beneath the house, the entire area enclosed with lattice also concealed clothes lines. In addition to the thirty-one bedsteads, their occupants and dining furniture, the cottage also found floor space for two pianos.

Jean and I were to share a dressing table which we did amicably for the next three years. During our first two terms we also occupied beds in this room before graduating to the sleepout verandah. A bed played a prominent part in the life of a new-girl at Lomai Lagi. These were wooden four-posters draped with mosquito netting. The mattress filled with coconut fibre rested on wooden slats. House-rules decreed beds be stripped each day before breakfast, mattresses doubled over, remade after the meal and on no account sat upon. An absent-minded new girl soon learnt that when this rule was broken the tell tale creaking slats could bring immediate chastisement. Bedroom seating took the form of cretonne-covered kerosene cases upon which neatly folded garments might remain overnight. New-girl initiation included finding one's bed short-sheeted, apple-pied or worse when slats were mischievously removed. This tested composure and character and brought trouble all round. New girls were quietly warned that as 'Lomai Lagi' meant heaven and trembling lips or tearfulness was just not acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, even new girls were expected to call Mrs Spence 'Dear'. This brought on a form of lockjaw and kept new girls at a distance for weeks. My first letter home described the hostel as 'homely' when really I meant 'home-like'. We had the customary Indian male domestics, to cook, wait at table, attend to the laundry and clean school shoes. 'Dear' however encouraged her girls to help with suitable chores. Lists were drawn up strictly according to seniority not only for the morning shower and piano practise but to take a turn in bathing the aged household dog Teenie, attending to the parrot and cleaning out the cage and watering the bula-bulas in the fernery. Dear's right hand, Mary, a Rotuman, also needed help before school in preparing the huge basin of fruit salad we demolished for lunch each day.

We walked in crocodile to the day school and returned to the hostel for lunch. The day school departments ranged from Kindergarten to matriculation and pupils were restricted to those with European surnames. There was one tennis court, an area for basketball and hockey was played at Albert Park.

Dear enjoyed laughter and encouraged fun but her values seemed more in keeping with the American Civil War era than the 1920s. Tidiness was an obsession. Surprise inspections of dressing tables and the drawers were frequent. Possessions and garments had to be arranged just so. Books or property left lying around were impounded until Saturday. Shoes had to be removed at the door step and replaced with slippers. Sunday's patent leather shoes we personally polished with vaseline. Hands and fingernails were inspected daily and hair had to be brushed until it shone Reading was encouraged. Eac boarder received an Everyman classics from Dear for a birthday or at Christmas. When Mother posted me my beloved English Tiger Tim comics and Ginger Meggs from Sydney papers I was mortified to hear Dear's outraged condemnation.

For weeks tears welled whenever I was alone. My heart ached whenever I opened a drawer to see garments my mother had lovingly made, as yet unworn and just as her hands had pressed and folded them. Eventually under pressure from home, I steeled myself to find my voice and approach Dear to arrange for Dr Paley to vaccinate me against smallpox. There had been no smallpox outbreak in Fiji since I was a baby and first vaccinated. The recent arrival of the *'Ganges'* bringing Indian immigrants, some with the disease, had turned Nukulau Island into a quarantine station. Mother always felt indebted to Dr Paley for my safe arrival. His daughter Pat was a classmate and after this encounter I was frequently invited to their home to play after school. Not only were bare feet permitted in the house and garden but there could be home grown granadilla and cream. Pat and I would occupy the dicky seat in the doctor's car when he made home visits.

The boarders this year were obsessed with jacks. Before and after school all vacant floor space at Lomai Lagi was occupied by groups in twos or threes bent on mastering the game. Each week additional innovations were introduced. I had to share or borrow jack-stones until Mother managed to procure from Rarawai butchery five matching knuckle bones which she boiled up, dyed and posted to me.

Those first weeks and months passed very slowly until Easter when my mother as promised arrived in Suva to spend the holidays with me. With some dismay I sensed we or perhaps I had grown apart. Now already one of 'Dear's' girls I felt out of step in Suva with my mother. We were staying at Mrs Allen Hunt's boarding house in Waimanu Road. She had been a friend of my mother's since their Ba planter days. Beryl, her daughter, was company for me. Being Easter and the shops shut there was little for Mother and me to do. We saw a 'picture' one night and window shopped between Renwick Road and Thomson Street. Walter Horne's emporium displayed household goods and drapery, Honson's had Chinese imports, Mrs Statham specialised in exclusive frocks, millinery, dress material and haberdashery. Brodziak's store and Sturt Ogilvie kept hardware and household effects; Swan's was the only pharmacy. The jeweller and watchmaker, Levy, also offered island souvenirs - tortoise-shell broaches, serviette rings, cigarette cases, bracelets, booklets covered in tapa-cloth, cats-eye cuff links, bracelets and rings. Stinson, the photographer, sold stationery and post cards of island scenes; Mr Allport Barker's office published '*The Fiji Times and Herald'*. Prestigious Brown and Joske was agent for CSR and other overseas firms. A picture theatre occupied one side of Pier Street, the Pier Hotel occupied the other. Both street and hotel later had a change of name to Garrick. In Suva heat, Mother was not interested in the boarders' haunts further afield which I had hoped to show her.

On the seaward side of Victoria Parade Suva's ice-cream parlour stood next to the fire station. The Carnegie Library and Boys' Grammar occupied reclaimed land further along Victoria Parade. On the opposite side stretched a row of shops, the Club hotel, some private houses tucked behind hibiscus hedges and the two, two-storeyed timber balconied hotels, Melbourne and McDonald's. At right angles to the grassy triangle which held Suva's venerable ivi tree, Pratt Street led past the Sturt Ogilvie store and up to the Catholic Cathedral and the convent. An arched bridge across Nabukulau Creek and Morris Hedstrom's colonnade, fringed with cutters and punts added an oriental odour and flavour to Suva. Cummings Street, known as All Nations Street, was an area to be avoided; the haunt of vagrants, 'vale ni kanas', Chinese dens, doss houses, Indian jewellers and bootmakers. Up in Toorak, the overcrowded Indian residential quarter, Dr Beatty a Anglican cleric and medico dwelt in a Greco-Roman mansion. His Palladian style Lilac Theatre nearby featured Indian films.

Each Sunday the boarders in lace trimmed, starched white finery and patent leather shoes attended Morning Prayer in the Anglican Pro-

Cathedral. For three years I chased elusive prayers, responses and collects through the pages of the Book of Common Prayer. Everything except hymns was 'Greek to me'.

The scarcity of coastal shipping and an irregular schedule due to the tides meant many boarders went home only twice a year. We from the north west had to wait until the September holidays. Ungapa welcomed me with my favourite steak and kidney pie and chocolate blancmange. But I found my bedroom occupied by visitors from Sydney. Mother sensibly had taken the opportunity of my absence to invite two nieces to winter holiday in Fiji and to my surprise she was now too busy entertaining them to miss me. She was warm and welcoming of course but absorbed with their love affairs. Each cousin was being courted by a quarter's bachelor, whom eventually she would marry. After all the tears shed, I found my school holidays taken up with picnics, beach parties, and dinners for all our guests. We had a new car, a Willys Knight tourer, a model popular in the colony at this time. E27 bad tempered to the end, decided one afternoon following a tea party at Veroka that it had had enough. With Rene Ragg at the wheel, my mother beside her and cousins in the back seat, it slipped into neutral and bounced down the hill. At the last bend all passengers were hurled into a ploughed canefield. They picked themselves up plastered in red clay, retrieved their hats, adjusted their clothing, shaken but unscathed.

During 1927 came the visit to the Crown Colony of the Duke and Duchess of York. We children stood in the school grounds for hours in the rain, awaiting their arrival, our sodden rag hats obscuring our vision. It was 'Dear' who made bouquets for the official receptions. And 'Dear' also saw to the floral arrangements for the formal dinner at Government House. On these occasions boarders were sent before breakfast to Mrs Henry Scott's to collect cut-flowers from her garden while Mrs Ellis left at Lomai Lagi baskets laden with blooms from her Tamavua garden. A car frequently came from 'G.H.' to pick up 'Dear' together with flowers or to take her as a guest to a formal function. When the new Government House was completed late in 1927, Sir Eyre and Lady Hutson in acknowledgment for 'Dear's' kindnesses put on a Christmas party just for the boarders. We were shown over the grand establishment and Sir Eyre joined us in a game of tig.

No birthday was overlooked at Lomai Lagi. Those that fell during the week were celebrated the following Saturday afternoon. The birthday girl or girls could invite a number of guests among boarders of suitable age. There would be an array of party hats which Dear herself made

from double crepe paper. Cook would bake a cake which was iced and candles added. The party fare included cordial, sweets, peanuts, iced cup-cakes and bread and butter covered with hundreds and thousands. Guests would contribute threepence each for a combined present. On Dear's advice this could be boxed note-paper, or a pencil case, autograph or birthday book, manicure set or tortoise shell broach. Dear's personal gift was usually a book - a classic and costing in Suva at the time two shillings and sixpence. Although I missed out on a birthday party at Lomai Lagi as my birthday fell during the holidays, I still have several Pocket Classics received at Christmas inscribed 'from Laura Spence'.

It was traditional that there be some form of entertainment at Lomai Lagi on a Saturday night The older girls took over these arrangements. Sometimes it would be a one-act play, another time parlour games, a fancy dress for dolls or ourselves and once or twice a year 'The Dwarf' (enacted by two seniors) entertained with spoonerisms and riddles. Always Dear would be there amongst us laughing at the antics, enjoying the fun. And when the annual midnight feast was secretly arranged, 'Dear' would expect to be invited.

The two or three day trips to and from Suva by '*Adi Keva'* or '*Adi Rewa'* are remembered as the happiest times in my childhood. Girls occupied the deck cabins while the boys slept on settees in the dining saloon or in chairs on deck. Upon leaving Suva it took several hours to cross the bay, chug up the Rewa River and then negotiate the tortuous Wainabukasi. This was only achieved by means of a deckhand diving overboard, a rope then thrown for him to attach to a post on the bank. With engine cut and the rope drawn in, the vessel swung around the horseshoe bend. This exercise was repeated many times. We tied up each night and whether at the wharf at Levuka or Ellington or in the shelter of a bay, before long our arrival would attract attention from village children. After a few giggles, one or two would start to sing and within minutes a number gathered to take up the tune and harmonise. If possible bags of peanuts were procured, if not a few pennies were scattered in appreciation. Usually at least one passenger in those days would produce a ukulele and many balmy hours underway and evenings at anchor were spent singing. The shallow water within the reefs round Viti Levu was never without drifts of mauve jelly fish. The sea bed abounded with slug-like beche-de-mer and blue star-fish. When we passed over the reef, outcrops of coral showed up in vibrant pinks, purple and citron. For several years after Falcon Island erupted, our turquoise waters disappeared under three inches of floating pumice. It invaded the rivers, covered the beaches and hissed when pushed aside by coastal

vessels. During these years when an unforseen problem overtook coastal vessels we school children could be temporarily stranded. On one occasion the CSR molasses tanker, *Rona*, came to the rescue. She took us on board at Lautoka and sailing via Momi passage had us in Suva within twelve hours. On another occasion the *Rani* normally servicing the CSR mill Labasa on Vanua Levu, picked us up on the Ba River and to our sorrow got us back to school in time.

At Lomai Lagi the youngest boarders, some but five or six years old were encouraged to believe in fairies. Older girls with the required talent delighted in sending letters from fairyland decorated with sketches in the style of Pixie O'Harris and Ida Rutoul Onthwaite. These were often found in a ring of petals on the lawn.

During one hectic period in 1927 more than half the boarding establishment came down with measles Dear took this in her stride. The sleep-out verandah was declared 'sickbay'. To protect our eyes from the glare of sky and sea, bedspreads were strung together and hung to curtain the unshuttered verandah. Dr Paley called each day. While we lay mottled, feverish, coughing and itching Mary came round every morning to sponge us down and bring us at nourishing eggflips. No sooner did one patient recover than another boarder would sicken and occupy the bed.

Each afternoon, weather permitting, the boarders escorted by Mary spent an hour or so at the Botanic Gardens. We therefore were quite mystified when asked to assemble one day after school to meet Mrs Ellis, and then, within half an hour find ourselves cast in a play. Several afternoons each week we now spent rehearsing an abridged version of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Despite the length of some parts, the complicated plot, the (to us) archaic language, most of us had no trouble memorising every role along with our own. The *Fiji Times and Herald* printed an appreciative account of the production.

*ENTERTAINMENT*
*'A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM'*

*A company of 250 or more witnessed the first performance of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' on Friday afternoon at the pretty residence of Mr and Mrs S. H. Ellis at Tamavua. His Excellency the Governor accompanied by Captain Symons M.C., ADC, His Honor the Chief Justice, Commander de Salis, Lady Hedstrom, Mrs Henry Marks, Mrs H.M. Scott, the Reverend Mother Superior,*

*Mr and Mrs Seymour, Mr and Mrs Alport Barker, and Mrs Willoughby Tottenham were in the audience which included a number of children from all the schools.*

*Ideal weather conditions prevailed, and the stage, with its natural grass and flowering ixora bush and tastefully arranged greenery, suggested a woodland dell, that might indeed be the haunt of fairies.*

*The play opened with the entrance of a dancing fairy scattering rose petals to the music of Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song'. The natural grace of movement of little Dorothy Kearsley in this part was admired by all. She was joined by thirteen other fairies in a dainty dance. Then the play proper began with the entrance of Puck, and thereafter mortals and fairies held the stage in turn and together, enacting the forest scenes of Shakespeare's play, until its ending with Puck's farewell speech that begins 'If we shadows have offended'.*

*The audience was warmly and deservedly appreciative, and many bursts of applause followed the exits of the actresses. Not only was the acting of a high standard, but the girls are to be complemented on their enunciation, and on being so word perfect - no easy matter in the rendering of Shakespeare.*

*Fay Sharp as Puck was the embodiment of elfish mischief; her performance was of outstanding merit. An especial burst of laughter greeted her famous sally 'Lord, what fools these mortals be'. Excellent character acting was shown by Joan Warren as Oberon - she did justice to the poetry of her beautiful lines - and by Betty Craddock (sic) as Bottom - she swaggered as any man and spoke her words in a deep voice most ungirlish - and by Katherine Warren as Demetrius - most convincing in the quarrel scene. Jean Dixon, as Titania was a graceful and gentle Queen of the Fairies and played her part sympathetically. The two Grecian maidens, Nancy McConnell as Helena and Jean Snowsill as Hermia, sustained the quarrel scene remarkably well and raised the hopes of the schoolboys in the audience when they set at one another with their finger nails. Nancy Hunt was a gallant Lysander.*

*The dainty colouring of the dresses fitted in with the green and red of the woodland stage. Most of the fairies were in forest green, except Peaseblossom (Marie Cozens), Cobweb (Margaret Carne)*

*Moth (Janet Cozens) and Mustardseed (Vuna McConnell), who were in the pastel tints suggested by their names. The other fairies were Pat Israel, The lma Sharpe, Peggy Cozens, Myra Warren, Sibyl Monckton, Betty Kearsley, Aileen Garnett, Marian McConnell and Joan McConnell.*

*The dances were arranged by Miss Neville Scott. The second dance to the music of 'Dvorak's Humoresque', which put Titania to sleep, was even more attractive than the first. So too was the rendering of Quilter's song 'Under the Greenwood Tree' in the same scene. Mr Trevor Johnson was the accompanist.*

*The brunt of the work of preparation fell on the shoulders of Mrs S.H. Ellis who has had considerable experience in such entertainments elsewhere, and the complete success of the play reflected greatly on her careful preparation and thorough organisation. Mr S.H. Ellis gave yeoman assistance and provided the scenery.*

*Some twenty six pounds were realised from the sale of tickets and programmes, so that the Cottage Home should benefit from a substantial surplus.*

*Another performance will be given on Saturday next, the 22nd October. His Excellency the Governor delighted the children on Friday, by telling them that he had so enjoyed the performance that he intended to come again on Saturday. We think that others will follow his example.*

The Suva Show was held annually in the Custom's shed at King's Wharf. Dear's enthusiasm in the handwork and flower sections inspired the boarders. Few of us had the talent to submit an entry in art nor had we the facilities for cooking. However, Semco doilies, tray-cloths and coloured threads were purchased from Mrs Statham's. We carefully worked lazy-daisies, button-hole stitched calceolarias, stem stitched stalks and leaves. Dolly Varden motifs were satin stitched and stem-stitched baskets filled with pink, blue and mauve grub roses. Then we hand-crocheted edgings. Year after year Dear was awarded prizes for hand embroidered handkerchiefs, for drawn-thread work and also for her dainty hand-rouched and be-ribboned organdie-muslin coat-hangers. On the morning of the Show we watched Dear surrounded by baskets of cut flowers create an exquisite Victorian posy, then a bridal bouquet and finally, upon our arrival at the Customs Shed, a floral arrangement for

dining table comprising a centre piece and garlands. She performed wonders with: ixora, violetina, gerantha, maidenhair fern, Dorothy Perkins roses, antigonon, forget-me-nots, frangipani and hibiscus.

Long curly hair had been a trial at boarding school. I returned to Suva in February 1928 after a family holiday in Sydney with it bobbed. School had already started. Jacks lay forsaken at the bottom of a drawer. This year I sent home for playing-cards and I recall a fascination with coon-can, euchre and 'snip, snap, snoram'!

A letter home dated 10th May 1928 records the events of the previous week in some detail and reminds me that at the age of twelve I had evidently graduated into stockings for some occasions. I am surprised that a concern about clothes, money and success in a school test outranked an eye witness account of the 'Southern Cross' landing in Suva during her historic Pacific flight. This was the first aircraft I had ever seen. My spelling, alas, had not caught up with my rapid pen.

*Lomai Lagi,*
*Des Voeux Rd.,*
*Suva*
*10th May 1928*

*Darlingst own Mummy & Daddy,*

*I received your ever welcome letter on Thursday by the Suva I suppose. You have know idea how I look forward to receiving them.*

*I think my pyjamas will do untill August & then you can take the pattern then, if I go home darling. May I get some elastic down town to renew my suspenders both pairs have perished. I can use one pair for a little while longer. May I put it down to you or will I pay for it with my own money.*

*The results of the monthly exams came out on Monday. I received an awful shock- guess- I came* ***First****. I will tell you my marks. Sums 100% Spelling 10/20 Writing 17/25 (I will send the paper home next week I forgot to bring it home) History 32/50 Geography 33/50 Reading 76/100 Poetry 43/50 Essay 70/100 English 35/50.*

*On Monday morning early, being a holiday we went down to see the Cadet parade at Albert Park. It was wonderfull. They also had shooting, One cadet after another fireing up & down the lines. That afternoon a carnival was held by the Y.M.C.A. in the Botanical Gardens. We all went. It was quite decent for Suva. The*

*procession was good. I sent you the programme last week. The B. G. S. drilling was very good.*

*I suppose you have read in the papers about some aviators coming to Suva well - we were given a half - holiday on Tuesday to see the plane land. It made a beautiful graceful landing as I will tell you in my letter next week because I forgot to bring the paper home on which I had to write an essay about the landing. The aviators names were, pilot Cpt Kingsford Smith, (Australian) navigator Cpt Lyons (Yankee) mechanic Mr. Ulme (Aussie) Mr. Warner (Yankee). The plane was blue with white wings & its name "Southern Cross" painted in white. It had three propellers. It looked like this,* [sketch omitted]

*If I only had a camera I would have snapped it. It met an awful storm on its way, fell from 1,000 ft to 30 f t so I heard and the two Yankees' climbed on to the wings & fixed things. They did the trip from Honolulu to here in 32 hrs. On Wednesday at 3.pm the senior school that is from Std V upward went to the town hall & listened to speeches given by Mr. Ulume ect. Cpt Smith was not there as he had other business to do.*

*On Thursday morning at 11.a.m. we were let out of school to see the aeroplane "hop off". It made just as nice a "hop off" as a landing. Afterwards it had to go to Naseli where a beautiful landing beach is & land, - pick up a lot of oil, - & make for Brisbane. It could not ascend from the park with a lot of oil or anything heavy, for there was not enough ground, so it had to go to Naseli where there was enough flat ground. I hope you understand my 'double Dutch". A dance was given for the aviators on Wednesday evening.*

*They met a storm on their way to Brisbane but arrived safely Saturday morning for they left Naseli on Friday afternoon. I suppose Uncle Auther saw the plane as they are in Brisbane now for I received a letter from Nancy & she told me they had left Sydney on Thursday week. I forgot to tell you that little Janet presented an American flag done in flowers to the Yankees on Wednesday night, Kathleen Ragg presented the "Southern Cross" done in flowers to the Australians.*

*On Friday evening a Ball was held at Government House so Joan Warren (who has left school & lives at Taveini came to Suva) & Kathleen Warren "came out". They both looked lovely. Kathleen was dressed in white taffeta & georgette I will illustrate it - long but she looked far better than Joan whose dress looked something like this. I know the drawings are frightful but they are that stile.* [sketches omitted]

*On Saturday evening we had a Dolls fancy dress. Ella, Lesley Anderson, & I went to gether. We dressed a kwupie as the "Southern Cross" the plane. I am not exagerating but the kewpie looked exactly the same as the plane in shape & everything. One of the girls took a photo of it this morning & if it turns out can I buy a negative & get it printed because I would adore you to see it. We got first prise for the most original 1/-. Mrs. Spence said it was wonderfull. Some of the girls went to the flicks, at least, ten of them. We had to pay for ourselves & I did not want to spend my pocket money so I did not go, but I did not mind. It was only the ones who wanted to go, so I did not tell the girls that. After church to day we went for a walk to the gardens. We are having lovely weather here at present. Our half-yearly exams are to be on Monday week.*

*I must close now darling Daddy & Mummy. I wrote to Mrs. Allen last week. Please give my meows to my darling son & tons & tons of love & kisses for you dears,*

*I remain*

*Your always loving kid*

*XX* *Betty*

*XXX*

*XXX*

*P.S Do excuse my writing Please dears but I have to write to Aunty Clare. I hope Susie writes to me soon I am dying to hear from her Betty*

*I am writing to Mrs. Gemmel Smith & as you said doing it as well as I can, Mum.*

Should a boarder's family, family friends or a school friend's relatives pass through Suva several of us might score an afternoon outing The conventional treat would ensure a drive by taxi to the Point or to the Reservoir to enjoy a panoramic view of the township and harbour, followed by afternoon tea at The Grand Pacific Hotel, Suva's Ritz.

The Matson vessels *Sonoma*, *Sierra* and *Ventura* now called at Suva. During this prohibition era in the United States, Suva was the first 'wet' port of call on the voyage south. Following visits to local pubs, American tourists bedecked in souvenir necklaces of shells and seeds regularly made spectacles of themselves. Tipping generously, they fell out of taxis, lipstick and hats awry and tripped up steps. Their loud voices, broad accents, two-tone shoes, horned-rimmed spectacles, bobby socks, scarlet lips and finger-nails shocked and astonished all races. At

Suva fancy dress parties, the prize for the most original costume now went to the 'American Tourist'.

On a public holiday and even during term holidays, excursions were arranged for those boarders remaining at Lomai Lagi. On several occasions it was MaKuluva Island or a 'charabanc' would be hired to take us out with picnic lunch. The destination might involve crossing the Rewa River by vehicular punt or visiting Nasinu Experimental Farm with notable fruit trees and a swimming pool in a creek. Another jaunt involving older girls was the walk by waterfront road to The Point. This area, sparsely vegetated with pandanus, was usually deserted. Despite no dressing shed, we could safely change, take a dip and then make our way back to Suva across the hills.

I had topped Standard 4 in 1927 and half way through Standard 5 was promoted to Standard 6 with whom Standard 5 shared the classroom. By now we could correctly pronounce all New Zealand's volcanoes, lakes and rivers, describe the flora and fauna, recount Maori legends, bemoan the loss of the pink and white terraces Lake Rotoarno, recite in order of importance that country's products, ports and exports. We also had a grounding in Tudor history, and had followed the journeys of intrepid explorers from Columbus to Bourke and Wills. We could draw from memory a map of every continent and were familiar with the influence of mountain ranges, trade winds and ocean currents. Each week we memorised a poem from our 'Mount Helicon' anthology. We grappled with compound interest, vulgar fractions, decimals and problems involving painting or wall-papering, timing a journey between X and Y and filling or emptying a tub of water. The Standard 4 sewing class had introduced specific methods of dealing with a seam. In painstaking backstitch I hand-sewed a cushion-cover designed for travelling with pockets to hold reading matter and a hand strap. Blood from my regularly pricked finger-tips blended into the patterned chintz.

A school magazine put out by the New Zealand Education Department that year opened my eyes to the colonisation of Australia. A chill ran down my spine when those pathetic verses *True Patriot all ..... we left our country for our country's good* were read aloud. At Noumea I had seen a gang of exiled Frenchmen in convict garb toiling in the heat on country roads.

Standard 6 took cooking instead of sewing. In keeping with a Fiji lifestyle where it was customary to employ a cook, we, the colony's future housewives were taught to make simple delicacies such as butterfly

- cakes, mock cream, almond fingers, cheese straws, scotch eggs and passionfruit flummery.

At the end of Standard 6 year we sat for the Proficiency Examination held at the Boys' Grammar School. The following year when I entered High School our curriculum included Latin, French, Maths II, and English literature which included Shakespeare with a dose of Milton.

The new boarding hostel erected directly opposite the day school was ready for occupation at the beginning of 1929. Compared with Lomai Lagi it was a palace with architecture similar to Government House and the Grand Pacific Hotel The huge airy dormitories had high ceilings and many windows. Long spacious balconies surrounded both ground and first floor. There were several sound-proof music rooms, multi-cubicle bathrooms, a boarders' locker room and also an activity room. Dear's touch could be seen in shoe lockers built-in under both staircases and a spacious servery off the dining-room with every facility for flower arranging. The huge recreation room furnished with a piano and bookcases was divided from the dining room by folding doors. The new hostel provided accommodation for an assistant matron and a matrons' drawing room. There were twin bedrooms and studies for prefects. A school tennis court was already conveniently located between the hostel driveway and the road.

The new hostel allowed a larger intake of boarders. However, in moving we left behind Lomai Lagi's time honoured traditions. Elves and fairy rings and the Dwarf did not survive the transition. The year 1929 brought new rules, new privileges and new interests. Personal lockers provided a place for us to store goodies sent or brought from home, cakes, tins of biscuits, sweets and also our sewing baskets and writing materials. The activity room became a popular venue now that the latest hobby was scrapbooks. Most of us specialised. One boarder collected pictures of animals, another birds, or gardens, or scenic wonders. But the majority of adolescent boarders were besotted by film-stars. Movie magazines were cut to shreds. Unaccountably I collected royalty. We swapped and bartered to fill our scrapbooks. A sensuous picture of Lupe Valez would be exchanged for a handsome polar bear, the Queen of the Belgiums exchanged for a volcanic eruption.

Garden beds bordering the pathways and drive were laid out, suitable saplings and shrubs planted and seedlings raised. Boarders were now encouraged to take on a garden. Those who wished to participate

were allotted a bed in the lower area of our extensive grounds. This location enabled us, on the pretext of watering or weeding to slip away unseen and explore a creek bed that wound along the gully between the hostel and Bishopscourt.

Suva's almost Olympic-sized swimming pool on the seaward side of Victoria Parade was opened that year. World champion Arne Borg, enroute to America treated Suva to an exhibition of his prowess. So here in crocodile the boarders headed after school instead of trailing with Mary clutching bat and ball or skipping rope to the old Botanical Gardens.

The new hostel allowed us space to practise ballroom dancing. Ballet classes began. Several new boarders played splendid ragtime. We spent the half hour after dinner and before 'prep' each evening mastering the 'grapevine' or perfecting a pivot either in slow time or at a whirl. The Charleston, banned by Dear, was practised furtively. Each year teenage boarders were invited to dances at the Boys' Grammar School In 1929 our headmistress, Miss Wills, returned this hospitality in the form of a Fancy Dress Dance held at the girls' day school. Cow-boys and pirates showed up, hula girls and gypsies, harem ladies, a Robin Hood and Peter Pan, a butterfly, and the inevitable missionary and American tourist. A rousing 'Jolly Miller' dance was intended to break the ice, followed by an 'Excuse Me'. Numerous prizes were awarded for 'The Spot Dance'. We girls spent the evening glued to the hot palms of fairly reluctant partners who pushed us in walking stride round and round the day-school assembly hall.

In Rarawai, during boarding-school days, Christmas was celebrated with evening parties at private homes. As there were few schoolboys of our age the younger bachelors from the CSR quarters, many away from home for their first Christmas, were invited to share family festivities When there was dancing they would partner the school girls. Accompanied by my parents I attended about three or four parties between Christmas and New Year's Eve. Following the plum pudding chairs were moved out onto the lawn. The young reclined on mats or danced on the verandah to the gramophone and invariably the evening ended with fire crackers.

The Rarawai manager at this time took an interest in children home from boarding school. 'Daughter', only child of the 'big house' was also back from boarding school in Sydney. During the week whenever time and circumstances allowed he filled his seven-seater tourer with children.

I remember one jaunt when we picnicked at Waikubukubu at the foot of Nadarivatu. Another day we were put down at Ellington wharf where a launch took us to picnic at Wallace's island. On several occasions we were deposited at Caboni Beach in the care of a parent while the 'burra sahib' went on to a meeting at Penang Mill which CSR had taken over in 1926. Evening parties for the young at the 'big house' specialised in parlour games such as blind man's buff and hide and seek with the lights out!

I did not know that these 1929 Christmas holidays would mark the end of an era for me. The 1930s decade meant boarding school in Sydney, but I was unprepared for the news broken to me with such delight by Mother as we rocketed along in a Sydney tram. Dad had been transferred to Lautoka - a move they both welcomed. I felt as if a rug was suddenly pulled from under me especially as I'd no opportunity to pack up the dreams and memories that made my childhood. I never did return.

# 5

# BOARDING SCHOOL SYDNEY

I stood for hours in a David Jones fitting room while the uniform required for boarding at SCEGGS, Darlinghurst was produced. For summer, navy trobalco tunics with box pleating, serge for winter, white cotton blouses for summer, vyella for winter, a navy sweater, a blazer, a school tie, navy gloves, a panama hat with school hatband for summer and a velour hat for winter, white fuji frocks for Saturday outings and church, a navy gaberdine frock for winter, a navy topcoat, raincoat, black stockings, white stockings, brogues for school, black patent leather shoes for best, slippers, sandshoes, a gym tunic, a swim suit embossed with SCEGGS mitre, winter singlets, dressing gowns for winter and summer, an eiderdown, a rug. Mother had made whatever she could; my summer pyjamas, vyella nightdresses and the frocks to change into for dinner each evening which in winter were velveteen with lace collars.

The school was at Chapel when I was shown into Remove A classroom and to a desk I would share with the only other boarder in the form. A 'homework' book lying beside me was headed up 'Marrion Scott 1st Term 1930'. The pleasant well-formed handwriting seemed promising. Conversely I realised when shown later that day to the second floor cubicle that any hope of finding my room-mate a kindred spirit appeared unlikely. We took turns week-about to occupy either a bed in the cubicle or one of the fifteen or so out on the long open balcony. This sleep-out overlooked the city, the skyline crowned at this time by the AWA tower and the out-reaching spans of the Harbour Bridge. Unaccustomed to the rites, rituals and pace of a city school, and aching with homesickness I lay awake night after night hearing the GPO clock in downtown Martin Place merrily chime each quarter then another doleful hour until finally rescued by sleep.

Boarders' misdemeanours were usually related to talking after 'lights out' or sky-larking on the staircase, in corridors or in bathrooms. When confronted by a 'Guv' or told by a prefect to 'report' a SCEGGS

girl was honour bound to ‘own up’, sign the detention book and take the consequences.

The influence and energy of our visionary headmistress, Miss Wilkinson, pervaded the school. As her nickname ‘Sticky’ implied, nothing escaped her notice. Nevertheless she tried to see life from a youthful point of view. With beaming smile yet pleated brow she endeavoured to share our delight in an ice-cream cone, a triumph at hockey or a rose in bloom. But mentally, however, she inhabited another plane, more erudite and spiritual than those in her care.

The repetitive chapel services attended twice daily provided boarders with valuable time to reflect. We became familiar with Prayer Book complexities, with the lilting old hymns, well-worn parables and to need and depend upon the comfort, and power of prayer. Chapel, while spiritually strengthening, continually reminded us to live up to school tradition as directed by the motto ‘Luceat Lux Vestra’. (Let your light shine).

During my SCEGGS years the world passed into the 1930 depression. To my knowledge, however, the sugar areas in Fiji appeared little affected. But in Australia businesses and manufacturers crashed, wages and salaries were cut and unemployment was pitiful. I recall that a moratorium was discussed; my stolid room-mate did not return after the first term holidays and the State Bank closure left me for a time penniless.

Despite being out of my depth with NSW country life, country people and their interests, Marrion became my friend through the pressure of schoolwork. At the same time Marie, also a new girl with a warm and outgoing personality became my congenial room-mate for the next two years. By the onset of winter I took for granted the daily cold shower but not the successive head colds and tormenting chilblains. There was no relief for fingers and toes that burned, swelled and itched day and night. Almost all the boarders came from country areas and several girls invited me home for term holidays. With homesickness forgotten I experienced many diverse aspects of country life: boundless dusty plains, lush lucerne paddocks, exquisite Batlow orchards, majestic river gums, kurrajongs, pepper trees, shearing, drought, flood and even a grasshopper plague. My sole claim to fame during school days at SCEGGS was the fact that I came from Fiji. A word or two in Hindi always slipped into my attempts at French conversation. Madame Dunn would overlook my frailties and, shaking her head murmur ‘La pauvre fille’.

The sea trip home at the end of each year was a reward. The Royal Mail Steamers and Matson Line with half the cabins due to the depression unoccupied now called at Auckland. While the university students kept to the smoke room we schoolgirls and the boys from Kings, Geelong College, Newington and Cranbrook made the most of our freedom. The boys poured money into the fruit machines, we all played deck tennis, danced each night and enjoyed a sing song on the boat deck whenever schoolboy rugby star Ratu George Cakobau could be persuaded to strum a ukulele.

My parents were well settled at Lautoka when I returned that first Christmas. Houseboys Ungapa and Kanaya with the responsibilities of farms and families remained in Ba. But, to the satisfaction of all, Viraswami after an interval of twelve years again was installed as the Cradicks' cook. Lautoka would have held tender memories for my parents. For it was here while Mother was winter holidaying with her brother and sister-in -law that they first met and within three weeks were engaged to be married.

The Lautoka township, port and CSR settlement were within walking distance. The mill, a 20th century enterprise established in 1903, was somewhat larger than at Rarawai. The immediate landscape prior to settlement had been dry, treeless savannah. Red-soil foothills bearing little but reeds and noko-noko, stretched back to sapphire ranges terminating in Mount Evans majestic escarpment. Namoli village set among a grove of breadfruit trees and coconut palms occupied a beach front less than a mile from the sugar mill.

Unlike Ba, Lautoka society entertained on a modest scale. However, thirty wet seasons had worked wonders upon the landscape. Gigantic weeping fig trees, enthusiastically planted by 'burra sahib' AMOF and known to local Indians as the Farquhar per formed canopies across bungalow gardens. Clumps of bamboo reached to the sky, royal palms and coconut palms were now gracefully tall and avenues of mango trees and rain trees shaded the roadsides. The lush Sigatoka and Nadi river valleys supplied the needs of Lautoka's colossal mill. The main road followed the tramline from the wharf past the mill, through Namoli township and on towards Ba. The township by the 1930s consisted of Burns Philp (SS) Co's store, a spacious new concrete construction, Jamnadas the draper, and innumerable Indian bootmakers, barbers, jewellers, Bombay tailors, vale ni kanas, Chinese merchants, an ice-cream parlour, and a pharmacy. Each toy size store was approached via

steps and open verandah. The Shamrock Hotel, a Convent School, a Sikh Temple, Moslem Temple, and the two cinemas, Globe and Regal, added diversity to the scene.

Our Lautoka bungalow had the advantage of a bedroom, the bathroom and part of the verandah gauzed-in, forming a suit. Fabric specifically chose and imported to curtain and recover furniture gave Mother a 'Green Room' where she rested on a couch after lunch. Here Dad had his lazy-boy chair beside a table piled with newspapers and magazines and here also the treadle sewing machine attempted fashionable apparel. Dad had only a two minute walk to his office and four minutes to his workshop at the mill, I a two minute walk to tennis. The CSR officers' bungalows were spread across a hill. Many, including ours, overlooking the port and off-shore islets Vio and Bekana caught the sea breeze. The CSR rest house a feature of Lautoka, probably predated any hotel. The memsahib, Miss Smythe, built like a Sumo wrestler kept an efficient establishment. She would ease her bulk into an austrian rocking chair beside a new arrival and winkle out the latest rumour in exchange for a juicy hint of local gossip. Visiting officials and CSR families in transit could convalesce from a rough sea passage or the hassle of moving house here in the deep shade of huge old weeping fig trees fanned by a sea breeze. Chintz bags were even supplied to protect ladies' ankles from tormenting mosquitoes.

With the exception of those residing at the government station Natabua, situated about three miles out, along the road towards Nadi, most other non-CSR Europeans lived in the vicinity of CSR hill. The Morris Hedstrom, Burns Philip and H.M. Customs staff bungalows, the government medico, Wesleyan Missionary's residence, a non-denominational Church and the European school were also clustered on or adjacent to the Drasa road. Beyond this perimeter no pocket of land that could grow cane remained uncultivated. Feathery cane-fields bordered the roadside ditches, hemlined the back yards of many bungalows and accompanied the tramline through Namoli.

An 'outside' boy was not required at the mill settlement. A CSR dairy supplied our milk, butter came from a Tailevu factory and at Lautoka we learned to survive without the luxury of cream. Virsawami also tended the poultry and Embu came once or twice a week to mow the lawn, trim the hedges, and rake up leaves and dispose of squelchy mangoes that dropped from the two trees in our grounds. The peach mango tree beside the garage, bore particularly delicious fruit. The other mango tree near the fence was regularly raided by native seamen and

wharf labourers when a sugar ship was in port. Two royal palms commanded the path to one doorway to the front verandah and two coconut palms less upstanding indicated the other doorway. Both grassy pathways were lined by hibiscus hedges. Another hedge marked the perimeter of our grounds which embraced two flamboyant trees, a silky oak and two picturesque white frangipanis. The soil was so poor Mother grew her annuals in tubs. The fernery plants were relegated outdoors to shelves shaded by the back verandah's reed shutters.

A summer-house in bure form which Dad had erected in the garden proved invaluable. Being open on all sides to any breeze and shaded by two thick mango trees, coolness was assured. Here Viraswami served our lunch and afternoon tea and here Mother had morning teas and an afternoon four for bridge or mah jong. At Lautoka, a large afternoon bridge party was simply 'not done'. Over the years I wiled away countless hours reading in a hammock strung across the corner of the bure.

Several families from Rarawai also with daughters had recently been transferred to Lautoka. At weekends I pestered Dad to take me to Saweni beach. If the tide was right, other young folk were offered a lift and we would set out with a full car either before breakfast or late afternoon. Sun-baking was unthought of in Fiji at this time. This beach some four miles out of Lautoka approached along a narrow track off the main road appeared completely unspoiled. Roofless palm-frond changing shelters did not detract from the coconut grove which fringed the shore line. sector overseer on Saweni saw that the swimming area and sandy beach was kept free from fallen fronds and bleached and broken coral washed up by the tide.

My parents had no regret leaving Ba. In Lautoka they already had made new friends. Saturday evenings were usually booked weeks ahead for dinner parties of about eight, followed by pontoon, slippery sam or crown and anchor. The golf club also provided social activity for their 'forties' age group. Golf teams from other districts visited at weekends. At New Year or Easter golfers from Labasa would charter the *Rani* and set out for a festive few days at Lautoka. If transport could be arranged Lautoka enthusiasts visited Vanua Levu the following year. Christmas with crushing ended was the time for speculation and rumour to circulate. Every CSR family had a secret hope or held an opinion regarding transfers and promotion. On rare occasions a colleague would be plucked from a mill centre and transferred unaccountably to 'a cushy job' in Head Office!

Mother accompanied me when I returned to SCEGGS early in 1931. Little did we know that within two months north western Viti Levu would be devastated by hurricane and flood. All one fateful day the barometer had continued to fall. A furious bombardment from wind and rain brought down telephone lines and electricity. There was no panic. This area had never been known to sustain the full force of a hurricane. Dad however, got word during the night that a neighbour's roof had 'gone' and help was needed. He stood six foot three, a strong man not yet fifty but upon venturing forth, wrapped in an oilskin, he was blown about as if thistle-down. He set out again clad only in a swim suit and literally crawled on hands and knees whiplashed by wind, rain and flying debris a distance of several hundred metres to help bring two young mothers with infants to the security of our house. Baby clothes, including napkins stored away since my infancy were put to use. Day dawned to scenes of complete catastrophe. Half the houses in the immediate settlement had been either demolished or badly damaged. Trees were uprooted, torn branches covered the ground, bungalows were up-ended, roofing iron hurled a quarter of a mile, chests-of-drawers were torn open, clothes festooned trees. One couple had cowered all night with a duck for company in the only shelter available, an overturned water tank. Another couple found refuge beneath their bathroom the only part of their house left standing. For days the sun remained obscured behind a leaden sky and Dad, always clothed in substantial duck or drill garments now found it necessary to wade out and about supervising essential services clad only in shorts and sandshoes. After twenty-five years of exposure to the sun he now found himself laid up with both legs painfully burned and blistered by treacherous ultra violet rays and furthermore was to suffer the complication of infection. Floodwaters sweeping across the Ba district took hundreds of lives. Farms and native villages were flattened, livestock drowned and all bungalows and buildings on low-lying areas within miles of the river were destroyed. The CSR part-European housing at Newtown, swept away with considerable loss of life was relocated on high ground along the road to the golf course. Of particular importance to the sugar industry and cane growers in the Sigatoka Valley, was the damage sustained by the railway bridge spanning this river. Mother hastened home from Sydney to accompany Dad and once again reside in Cuvu while the bridge was repaired. This work was accomplished within three months and on the occasion of the official opening acclaimed a triumph. It was important that Sigatoka growers would not now have to forgo, as feared, a return from their cane crop and also crucial that the mill receive the supply as forecast.

# 6

# CHOTA MEMSAHIB

The curtain rang down on my schooldays mid-year without warning or the customary emotive farewells. At the end of term each boarder gathered together possessions which were bundled into a trunk for storage during vacation. My hand luggage was packed ready for the overnight journey by rail to holiday with Marrion at 'Burroway', a 20,000 acre property fifteen miles out of Narromine in western NSW. Not until our final chapel service where the ritual hymn, 'Lord Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing', was sung with special fervour did I realise the stomach-ache niggling for the past two days had localised in my right side. This I knew could mean appendicitis, specially dreaded since my mother when young had twice, due to neglect developed peritonitis. Late that afternoon the school physician was called and I spent a fevered night in 'sick bay' instead of rocking along on the Western Mail.

The following morning Mother, on the eve of returning to Fiji arranged for an appointment in Macquarie Street. Within the hour we were driven in the surgeon's own car to Waverley War Memorial Hospital. The operation took place that afternoon. Towards evening as I drifted back to consciousness jubilant ward mates informed me that Premier Jack Lang had that day been dismissed by the Governor of New South Wales. It was Friday 13th May.

I spent the next twelve days suffering indignities, safeguarding my stitches by suppressing laughter and never putting a foot to the ground. When discharged my head, stomach and legs felt like jelly. The shock of my sudden illness, the narrow margin by which I had possibly escaped complications and the unexpected expense was all too much for my mother. She of course had postponed departure but now decided that I must return with her by the *Niagara* to convalesce at home. A carrier collected my trunk from Forbes Street. Many boarders and classmates I would not meet again for sixty years.

Mother decided that at sixteen I was too young to accept invitations from young men to the flicks or dances. This was disappointing. Time, however did not lag. There was tennis, reading and endless hours attempting to dress make for myself and Mother. The latter activity entailed pouring over and adjusting paper patterns, tacking, cutting, mastering the sewing machine, fitting and unpicking. When I obtained a driving licence for 'C6' I chauffeured mother and friends shopping, to golf and to cards. One afternoon each week I also spent on the golf course with a disciple of Bobby Jones. My golf tutor, a district magistrate and elegant bachelor in his mid-thirties, had an abundance of Irish charm and the patience of a saint.

Several young men from the nearby bachelor's quarters rescued me from mental stagnation. One introduced me to modern classics such as Thomas Mann's 'The Magic Mountain' and Proust's 'Remembrances of Things Past'. The other young man late of London, hearing me grapple with Debussy on the piano lent me his record albums, mainly modern compositions by Stravinsky and Ravel. This highbrow influence was offset by a junior officer just down from Cambridge who landed on our doorstep with the latest London hit tunes, records featuring the Andrew Sisters and Mills Brothers.

There was never any suggestion that I take a job. An only daughter in a family with adequate means in a country environment, was expected, after six years away at boarding school, to remain at home as company for mother. Mother told me she turned down Mrs McGusty's offer to arrange for me to 'come out' the following year with her daughter at government house in Suva. Mother was afraid I should 'meet someone' in the colonial service. Pat McGusty did just this and subsequently returned to Fiji as the governor's lady.

During these years the two or three Lautoka mothers with grown-up daughters would arrange to book the CSR holiday cottages at Cuvu for a week or so at the same time. We would set off on the 'passenger'. Sometimes Dad had our car transported on a bogie by rail for us to use whilst in the Sigatoka district. The road between Nadi and Sigatoka though completed by this time, was more suited to the four wheel drive vehicles of this day and age. The Queen's Road then under construction fizzled out at Sauvi Bay.

As long as I could remember Mother had looked forward to Dad taking up his entitlement to 'long leave'. She persistently urged this should be arranged some years prior to retirement or encroaching

disability. Many friends in the colonial service regularly took home leave to the U.K. Personal advice was therefore freely available regarding itineraries, shipping lines and which cities and sights were not to be missed. With this, 'long leave' finally granted, decisions made and bookings confirmed, 'the Gods'twice, attempted to thwart plans.

Whenever darkness fell and Dad not home from work, Mother became anxious, anticipating the accident she knew was bound to come. Not until 1933 did this occur but not as feared along on 'the line'. Dad fell unaccountably from a bridge under construction into a deep dry creek bed. Unable to walk he was taken to hospital for X-rays which disclosed no fracture. The medico's confident diagnosis was torn muscles; the treatment, exercising and massage with dilo oil. When discharged, Dad was still unable to walk, and malingering was mentioned. After weeks in the hands of a native masseur and able to move only with excruciating pain, he finally managed to stand. One leg had noticeably shortened. His native workforce who had provided the masseur now presented him with a stout walking stick and with the aid of this he valiantly attempted for a few months the daily five miles as advised by the doctor. The CSR recognised the accident and Dad's subsequent disability by allowing him use of a truck with driver during working hours. Golf days were over and lawn bowling though painful was nevertheless attempted. When a Harley Street specialist was consulted ten months later, the injury was immediately recognised as a pelvic fracture for which by that time, nothing could be done. Dad and his sturdy Fiji walking stick were inseparable until he died, aged eighty- three.

After two years away from city shops and fashion trends, apparel suitable for shipboard life in First Class posed quite a problem. However daywear for deck games in the tropics was not beyond my capability. Dinner, a black tie occasion in those days required a number of evening frocks and tested ingenuity. For months we frequented the legendary Makanji Bros. 'Gents Tailors' at Namoli. Although often hazey and unpredictable Makanji himself bravely undertook for Mother and me tailored coats and skirts in a fine wool known as 'Palm Beach' suitable for 'between seasons' travel. He also made us each a sports skirt and for me an unlined hip length jacket and a white crepe-de-chene shirtmaker, smart enough to wear when we lunched at The Royal Hawaiian in Honolulu. Dad was outfitted with tweed plus-fours, sports jacket and grey flannels. We heard so often Makanji's excuse 'all ready but the 'buttings'' that we expected to sail without these finishing touches. Mother knitted sweaters. Top-coats we intended buying in Vancouver.

Time sped by, with several months towards the end of that year devoted to rehearsing Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. The three-act matrimonial romp hailed as audacious by sophisticated audiences in the West End, could be expected to send shock waves through the sheltered Lautoka community. G.L. Windred late of London and currently a CSR entomologist proposed to personally produce and direct the play, design and construct the scenery and lighting effects, choose and provide musical interludes, and take the leading role. Rehearsals assured cast and production assistants of two hilarious evenings each week. Pat, a born actress played Amanda and I was Sybil. We were both seventeen. *The Fiji Times and Herald* gave a rave review. The playwright's treatment of modern marriage was 'intimate and sophisticated' and there was also praise for the dressing. Pat's glamorous imported evening gown and lounge pyjamas could have come straight off 5th Avenue. I remember for the opening scene and in keeping with the role I 'ran up' a billowing evening frock of cream spotted net, the cape sleeves edged with feathers. During Act Two regardless of heat generated by the footlights, I christened the beige Palm Beach suit tailored by Makanji.

> The review continues:
> *'The crescendos of Acts Two and Three reached at times an almost professional standard of excellence and possibly no greater compliment could be paid to the actors than the remark of one, who was so overwhelmed, that he fled during the performance saying he could not stand any more of it "Such a flippant treatment of marriage! God help the British Empire!".* The review continued *'Fine team work of the company as a whole, rendered criticism difficult'.*

The following year while I was 'abroad', 'G. L.' as he liked to be called, produced *The Barratts of Wimpole Street*. The cosy Victorian family setting and sentiments voiced by a large cast in period costume, uncovered none-the-less disclosures which surprised Lautoka patrons. In subsequent years Lautoka's thespian interest continued but only to the extent of play-readings; only two plays I clearly recall had a feminist theme, *The Twelve Pound Look* and Ibsen's *The Doll's House*.

By 1934 the north-western district of Viti Levu was linked to Suva by the recently completed King's Road. We therefore looked forward to covering the first leg of our round the world odyssey by car. The tortuous road between Ra and Tailevu penetrated a dense, fern-laden rain forest festooned with lianas. It followed twists and turns, the rapids and misty

crags of the Wainabuka River, and was a journey renowned for car sickness.

The second catastrophe occurred on the eve of departure. It was early April and the wet season officially over when a sudden landslide obliterated part of the King's Road. Roadboard officials, shipping agents and CSR managers were hastily consulted. With a decision necessary in a matter of hours, Dad accepted Harvey Griffith's solution to our dilemma. Griff was an old friend and currently manager at Penang Mill in Ra. He offered beds for the night so that we might set out from Ellington wharf early next morning. He had interviewed a reliable local launch owner who was prepared, under the circumstances, to undertake the trip around the coast to Wainibokasi. We did in fact dine that night with Griff but decided to sleep at Mrs Wood's rest house there at Ellington. I recall an uneasy night of gusty winds and driving rain. We had breakfast by lamplight before confronting at dawn Paul Miller's fifteen-foot launch with his crew of two. In teeming rain we piled aboard, conscious of peril for all and with a sense of guilt that our trunks and baggage contained holiday frippery such as boiled shirts and evening frocks. In order to keep dry we huddled under a tarpaulin. The stifling engine fumes were gratefully endured until in the middle of wide and exposed Viti Levu Bay the engine broke down. With conversation now possible the mate, Ted Davenport, pointed out for our interest, 'over there' but closer to the shore the much larger *Sitaram* foundered and all aboard had drowned. An oar manned at the stern attempted to control buffeting by running seas. Repeated efforts to restart were unsuccessful. One component after another was taken apart, examined, cleaned and replaced. Mother never a good sailor nor short of ideas remained calm and speechless. Time stood still but with physical discomfort mounting we became almost reconciled to a watery grave, when suddenly with a splutter we got underway. Hours behind schedule we nevertheless made for the nearest atoll and with little regard for the picturesque setting, waded ashore to spend a penny. Our anxiety however, was not relieved, until, in late afternoon we reached Wainibokasi. The taxi ordered was still waiting at the appointed landing to deliver us safely to the Grand Pacific Hotel.

We sailed the next day. *R.M.S. Niagara'*s passenger list made up of young Australian socialites and upper crust Britishers homeward bound read like a page from *The Tatler*. A fun-filled week at sea with new friendships made brought us to enchanting Honolulu, a city noticeably geared to tourism. A morning tour by car took us to points of interest in a breathtakingly beautiful island populated, so it appeared, by Japanese. A

sumptuous lunch at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel followed. Glimpsing the exquisite shops was too much for Mother. There was just time before we sailed for her to stop by and choose for me a slinky pink evening dress, cunningly cut-on-the-cross. This, the first evening frock I had not made myself, featured a high cowl neckline, modest cap sleeves, yet daringly bare to the waist at the back. A steel band throbbed 'Farewell to Thee' as we slipped away from the wharf and trustfully cast flower leis into the harbour.

In the Canadian cities, Victoria and Vancouver, parks and gardens were garlanded in spring flowers and the byways swathed in a mist of lilac blossom. Deep snow mantled the Rocky Mountains and covered the prairies and cities as far as the eastern seaboard of Canada. Those next four days aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway remain forever the ultimate in scenery and luxury. We stopped over at Toronto and Montreal, and saw a frozen version of Niagara Falls. Enroute to Halifax I was rewarded as a long time L.M. Montgomery fan, with a glimpse of Prince Edward Island. Sailing from chilly and quaint St. John's Newfoundland, the *Duchess of York* breasted the north Atlantic infested that early spring with rogue ice-bergs. But this was not the only worry. As we approached Britain's misty coastline and off-shore islands our ship was boarded mid-stream at ports both in Ireland and Scotland by security men and Interpol searching for the USA underworld gunman Dillinger. The band of saffron-robed Buddest monks travelling steerage was suspected of lending cover. We finally disembarked at Liverpool and took the train through the midlands to London. By then it was 6th May.

While the remainder of the year spent sightseeing had no bearing on Fiji, nevertheless, our travels were shared with Fiji friends also taking long leave. Three friends actually moved into 'our' hotel and then joined 'our tour' to the continent. For eight weeks one of these friends toured the British Isles with us by car and later joined us at Colombo.

I returned to Fiji in April 1935 and as arranged was accompanied by my cousin, Sue Donnan. Our car with Mother and Dad's driver, Abdul, had come from Lautoka to meet *RMS Niagara* in Suva. This was Fiji life in the fast lane.

A few weeks later at a morning tea in the 'burra memsahib's' bure we were introduced to her other guest, Captain Mullins. To my surprise within the hour and without a question Mother was persuaded to allow Sue and me to join *HMCS Pioneer* for a lighthouse inspection cruise to the Koro Sea. We sailed from Lautoka that afternoon.

With a sense of fairy-tale fantasy we awoke next morning in Suva Harbour when a Fijian steward brought to us in the VIP stateroom, breakfast in bed. That afternoon Captain Mullins invited us to meet his Suva friends. We had tea with Lady Scott. An hour later at the Mackenzie's of Burns Philp, daughter Valmai was invited to join the *Pioneer* trip. During drinks at the Willoughby-Tottenhams, the little Major was persuaded by Captain Mullins to arrange for us to be given instruction in the use of firearms before we sailed. Promptly next morning at Suva Rifle Range we were drilled in the correct method of handling the 202 and 303. *HMCS Pioneer* represented Fiji's naval strength and therefore carried weapons and a small mounted cannon. As a diversion from the risque Ronald Frankau records with which the young officers entertained us, the Captain for his part encouraged his passengers to become familiar with firearms. Rifle practise took place every day at sea. Tins supplied by the cook and cigarette smokers' tins of fifty were tossed overboard to provide moving targets. On the dizzy heights of a lighthouse, a 202 would be thrust into our trembling hands to fire with an unsteady eye at any large fish nosing round the reef below.

We put into Levuka, the port and township dominated by Ovalau's dark, malevolent mountainous spine. The one time commercial hub of the South Seas and the colony's original capital, had now fallen on hard times. A pitifully few native cutters rode at anchor or lay beached at low tide amongst myriad crabs. Only one in every three township allotments was still occupied. Stretching along the foreshore - there remained an hotel, a bowling green, playing fields, lichen encrusted stone churches, schools and government offices. Here and there a small store still traded. Crumbling steps and pathways overgrown with weeds led to the gracious bungalows of yesteryear clinging to the leafy, liana festooned emerald hillside.

We went ashore next day at Wakaya to swim and explore the island made famous by the capture of Count Von Luckner. The younger Watsons on vacation from New Zealand had 'varsity' house-guests. Whenever Captain Mullins met an old friend or as now, could gather together some young people, he liked nothing better than to arrange a luncheon or dinner aboard *Pioneer*.

The maze of hazardous reefs surrounding Fiji were renowned for discouraging early explorers, traders and vessels in need of provisions. Historic shipwrecks substantiate this. Yet upon visiting the lighthouses at Batiki, Koro and Nasalai positioned to indicate a safe passage or to warn

shipping we were poled or rowed across innocently limpid water. Beneath us lay coral gardens of unimaginable beauty and structure, a sanctuary for squadrons of minute fish, in brilliant array darting about in disciplined formation.

We returned to Suva to find three British men-o'-war, New Zealand based, anchored in the harbour. Captain Mullins would not hear of Sue and me returning to Lautoka before we had a taste of night life in Suva. As *Pioneer* had immediate duty elsewhere, accommodation was found for us downtown at the Metropole Hotel. Captain Mullins took care of propriety by asking a lady residing there to 'keep an eye on us'. He arranged an invitation for us to attend a ball being held that evening at the illustrious Fiji Club to honour our naval visitors and also an invitation to a ball the following night aboard, *HMS Dunedin*. For the latter occasion the cruiser was resplendently dressed, with flags and coloured lights. The gold braid and lively dance band added excitement. Sue did not waste this south sea interlude. She promptly lost her heart to an English naval officer, alas a married man, who sailed next morning. That evening a ball at the Grand Pacific Hotel, given to entertain tourists from a cruise ship in port, was an anticlimax

We returned to Lautoka by ten-seater bus, a slightly updated version of Suva schoolday charabancs. The experience was bone shattering and of endless duration but not wanting in local flavour. The surface of the winding roads, as of old, corrugated and pot-holed, the flimsy timber bodywork open to the swirling dust, and springs in the chassis and seating painfully inadequate. There were stops wherever necessary. A passenger cradling a 'bakri' [sic] destined for curry came aboard at Rewa and alighted at Raki Raki, another traveller for Ba clutched a brace of despairing 'murgi'. These roadside encounters were accompanied by a volume of high pitched strident dialogue. But whether an exchange of news, abuse, endearing messages or argument, it was too rapid for me to untangle.

The thirties brought the miracle of radio reception into our homes. Business houses did a booming trade importing 'wireless sets'. As Fiji had no broadcasting station for some years, high masts were erected in our gardens upon which an aerial wire was attached. When darkness fell, powerful stations in the USA, two weeks distant by steamer, brought yesterday's world news, in an American accent bombarded by violent static, into our Fiji 'mosquito rooms'. Later, when short wave became available, 'Radio Australia' and New Zealand stations surged in. Each morning Dad and the Lautoka manager, G.R. Robinson, compared news

bulletins, sometimes proudly boasting of a new station discovered on the dial. They kept an ear tuned to the Sydney Stock Exchange where an unforseen movement could make or mar the day.

Christmas 1935 cast a stranger upon our shore and into my life. Douglas Linford Freeman, a twenty-one year old fledgling, fresh from the South Island of New Zealand, was extremely tall and arresting in a willowy way. His sensitive features, alert eyes and shy mannerisms concealed, as I would discover over the next fifty-nine years, a range of contradictions. For instance, he took fifty years to mention the trauma of his first months in Fiji. The enervating interminable wet season heat, a stranger to typewriter and the secretarial duties required in the manager's office at a time when his previous capabilities were limited to cricket. The situation was all the more stressful with a mess bill owing and in debt to a tailor in Namoli who had outfitted him upon arrival with the customary six sets of white shirts and oxford bags. Was it any wonder in those early days his eye-brows said more than a laconic tongue. In time the shy reserve was replaced by a cryptic wit and the ready quips we knew so well.

In 1936, after a round of picnic race meetings and polo carnivals as guest of NSW country school-friends, I returned accompanied for the winter months by Marrion. We timed our departure to fit in with the sailing of one or the other of the Matson vessels - *Mariposa* and *Monterey*. These ships were new and offered a taste of Hollywood afloat. Compared with the conservative mahogany and brass decor of British shipping lines the new bleached-look furniture appeared insubstantial and chino murals were altogether unsettling at sea. On the other hand every meal was a potential feast. Each course offered six choices. The entertainment and facilities for sport and exercise were also infinite. The ship's shop was a treasure trove of goods Australia could not afford to import, such as highly prized American cigarettes, fashion jewellery, cosmetics and the first Hawaiian shirts available south of the equator. On one voyage I bought a rubber swim suit, another time beach pyjamas, and on one occasion my red transparent plastic umbrella with matching raincoat caused quite a sensation in Pitt Street, Sydney.

Our two berth stateroom on E deck had bedsteads instead of bunks, twin wardrobes with full-length mirrors, a dressing table, a shower and toilet en suite , air conditioning, a telephone, two chairs and a folding table. The furniture was simulated bamboo; a mural in a soothing pink and grey green depicted a frond or so of bamboo with ibis and orchid.

Our fairy-tale seven days from Sydney to Suva via Auckland cost twenty five pounds each.

On the high seas I would sleep until 10am, be on deck in time to attend the race-meeting where hot-dogs and coffee were served (shades of British beef-tea ) and then still do justice to luncheon at 1pm. We usually haunted the paddle tennis court on the boat deck until 4pm. The palm court orchestra entertained during afternoon tea in a lounge of oriental splendour. A number of dinner menus which I still retained list each night a choice of ten appetisers, three soups - one of these New Zealand's delicious toharoa, six entrees including the speciality of the day 'charcoal broiled Queensland lobster tails'. Although only one roast, there were seven vegetables (the jumbo sized 'Idaho potato' always irresistible). The cold buffet specified Westphalian Ham and 'stuffed avocado with sea food salad', 'smoked ox tongue and salami with dill pickles and peperoni'. Of the three salads, 'heart of palm' is seldom found on a menu today. Choosing from six piquant dressings could be a worry. By the time we came to a choosing one of the eight desserts discretion was needed. I recall the Matson 'parfait' my favourite. A selection of six cheeses with crackers followed, then six beverages and finally, fresh fruit in season. Wine at mealtime was seldom seen except occasionally at the Captain's table. Tumblers were continually replenished with iced water.

We joined friends in the lounge for coffee. Keno would follow. Single girls were invited to assist selling the cards which cost 'a quarter' This gave us an opportunity to move around and meet other passengers. A win at keno especially on the final game at fifty cents a card could amount somewhere between $50 and $100 US. Several wins during the voyage could therefore almost reimburse your fare. As soon as a saxophone in the dance band wailed we moved to the verandah cafe and sipped between dances a 'Tom Collins' until the oscillating coloured lights slowly dimmed and the throbbing strains of 'Goodnight sweetheart' died away. Passengers not ready for bed could be tempted by supper laid out in the smoke-room. A majestic chef crowned with cap and brandishing a carving knife defied one to resist a slice of pink Virginia Ham or succulent Tom Turkey with accompanying bowls of olives and crispy curling celery never seen in Fiji.

Shipboard travel in first class gave passengers the opportunity not only to meet world famous figures but the time to actually get to know eminent sportsmen, musicians, politicians, rich widows with homes at Bel Air, shrewd American businessmen, aircraft salesmen, millionaire funeral directors or parking station landlords - Republicans all. During these

years southbound voyages also carried refugees from Europe, reserved, unsmilingly encumbered with valuable jewellery and furs.

Soon after our arrival came Captain Mullins' invitation for Marrien and me to join another lighthouse trip, this time to Taveuni and the Lau Group. At the last minute when Marrion developed mumps we had to cancel. Regretfully, this opportunity never came again. However, by not being away we were fortunate to witness one of the most solemn native ceremonies ever enacted in our district. This took place at Viseisei, a picturesque and certainly historic village situated a few miles along the coast from Lautoka. According to legend recorded in Fijian song it was here at Vuna Point their ancestors were driven ashore in the canoe *Kaunitoni*. A group then went forth to explore hinterland and coast and as retold, some to settle in the hills of Kauvadra Range, others to migrate down the great rivers Rewa and Sigatoka and eventually, over the next three of four hundred years, to occupy other islands in the group. The currant occasion would not only commemorate the landfall and prosperity of the Fijians but also celebrate the spread of Christianity. *SS Katoomba* had been chartered by Wesleyans who once served as missionaries in Fiji and were now invited to attend the ceremony at Viseisei. Queen Salote of Tonga was aboard as guest of honour. But when the appointed day dawned and the feast prepared, unaccountably *Katoomba* had not arrived. The District Commissioner hastily rounded all available locals to fill the seating in the huge palm frond marquees erected on the 'rara'. Endless hours had gone into the production of lint white tapa cloth which was laid down to carpet official pathways and cover the ancient burial mounds at the village. Prominent chiefs were clothed in reams of this material arranged in voluminous folds around the waist and falling to a sweeping train.

The beating of lali summoned the gathering. Hour upon hour passed in sonorous oration interspersed by cupped hand-clapping and a chorus of deep affirmative 'dino'. One ceremony followed another. The yagona root was ceremonially prepared and kava partaken by distinguished personages. A tabua was presented with deep solemnity. Neatly stacked towers of yam, dalo and bananas were formally received. Wisps of steam escaped from earth ovens on the outskirts of the village during preparation of the feast that followed.

When the *Katoomba* finally arrived next day it was late afternoon. However we were amongst a group at the wharf. There at the rails I recognised our Sunday school teacher, Miss Lapthorne, looking no older than when I was six. Kev Moulton from the CSR quarters was honoured

to receive a sisterly kiss from Queen Salote. She had grown up a close family friend dating from the days when Kev's grandfather had been a missionary in Tonga. The Reverend Piper (whose sister-in-law also happened to be my aunt) was a *Katoomba* passenger. His daughter, Viwa, who accompanied him spent an hour or so at our home that evening.

Notwithstanding the discovery of gold at Vatukoula and the now established mining industry, inflation in the colony was not apparent. A CSR officer at a Fiji mill was considered well enough blessed financially to marry when his salary reached three hundred pounds a year. But marriage was not sanctioned until a vacant company house was available. Of course at mills there was the fringe benefit of a rent-free house and essential furniture, free lighting, free medical service and first class passages to and from Australia or New Zealand. My father thought nothing of working a twelve hour day, or if necessary a six day week. He retired in 1941 on an annual salary of six hundred pounds. Virswami known to be one of the highest paid house-boys in the district earned twenty six-shillings a week during the years 1930 until 1941. He appeared happily satisfied with conditions, enjoyed a little joke and took pride not only in his duties but the extra work occasioned by a dinner party. I am sure he bragged when possible to other senior cooks round the settlement and would consider himself an expert at household management.

I recall my alarm when I returned home towards dawn one Sunday after a ball in another district and saw sparks spiralling from our dhobi gher. There stood Virswami stripped to a loin cloth toiling with the weekly wash. Sunday was a slack day and this early start was entirely his own idea. The washing would be on the line before breakfast and damped down and rolled up ready for ironing before lunch. When the lunch dishes were done he then had the rest of the day off.

The 1930s saw the Lautoka and Rarawai sugar mills enlarged and a number of new bungalows constructed under my father's supervision for the increasing staff. The mid 1930s also brought Lautoka a pineapple cannery which meant employment for a number of young local women. Pineapples had been cultivated and canned in recent years by Mr Theo Riaz at Nadi. When the venture was taken over by CSR a modern cannery and three bungalows were constructed on 'Pineapple Hill'. This area not far from the cemetery had been, I am informed, in the vicinity of an original (circa 1903) CSR hospital, now long demolished. The

hospital superintendent's one time residence was now suitably located for a pineapple cannery officer.

The years 1937, 1938, 1939, blissfully cushioned by the Pacific Ocean from world events passed with no personal highlights of Fiji flavour worth recording. Meanwhile civil war raged in Spain, China was invaded by Japan, Italy annexed Albania and invaded Abyssinia and Germany annexed Austria, Bohemia and Moravia. Finally, when Poland was invaded came World War II.

My generation will remember the visits to Lautoka of two or three naval vessels annually. While these vessels were in port there were cricket matches, tennis or golf for officers and Lautoka danced to the rapturous strains of a live band instead of the usual apathetic panatrope. The manager usually held a dance for officers at his bungalow and another night there would be a hop for ratings at the CSR hall. Finally a section of society were entertained to cocktails aboard one of the vessels before the navy moved on to complete exercises and show the flag elsewhere in the Pacific.

I recollect it was April and dry coolness had crept back into the climate when Harry Gray manager of Burns Philp (SS) Company, Lautoka invited me to accompany his wife on their tour of the Yasawas. Early 1940, was a period known as the phoney war when Britain and outposts of the Empire, ears glued to the radio held its breath, awaiting

The pristine beauty of the little known Yasawa Islands stretching away from Lautoka to adorn the north western horizon suggested mystery and enchantment. Native cutters braved the distance and an occasional official vessel but seldom did Europeans have the opportunity to visit. The population I understood, was entirely native. Their livelihood was based on unprofitable copra plantations and the two or three stores stocking trade goods, were also in trouble financially and mortgaged to B.P.'s. This was therefore the reason for the coming inspection.

We expected to encounter primitive conditions. In addition to sunburn, sandflies and mosquitoes we therefore packed: sandshoes and tennis socks, a sun hat, long sleeved shirts and slacks, an ankle length frock, insect repellent, a torch, toilet paper, swim suit, bath towels and a bedding roll with mosquito net. We understood that some nights we would sleep on the floor of the village guest bure. I also took small change to purchase a twist of tobacco or yagona root - gifts Dad advised would be acceptable to natives.

Captain Giblin's *Vonu* classified auxiliary yawl carried a crew of four. Stripped of any comforts and exuding a powerful aroma of copra she had a robust engine and a capacious hold. The only cabin, the captain's, held a bunk, chest of drawers and a table. There was no loo and a bucket thrown over the side brought up water for a wash. With the assistance of a billowing sail we skimmed the forty odd miles across to Naviti Island at a speed suited to trawling. The engine was cut each time a superb walu, oqa or saqa was hooked. At Quelene we spent two nights in civilised fashion at the captain's comfortable house beside a cove studded with rocky islets. The captain's capable native wife helped him manage the adjacent store.

We were invited that first evening to visit a large native town nearby. The choir, percussion group, club wheeling warriors and village ladies entertained us on the rara with mekes they were preparing for a forthcoming important occasion. We were treated to similar rehearsals wherever we stayed. It was sad to see that in each important town pride of place had been given to a substantial concrete church, now windowless, unroofed and lichen encrusted. These hallowed ruins in a picturesque setting amongst palms and bures were evidence of religious fervour and grandiose plans thwarted by hurricanes and hard times.

Harry Gray with Captain Giblin departed early the second morning on *Vonu* to inspect plantations and stores. Eileen and I were invited to accompany the village women fishing. A punt was poled out onto the shore reef. Fijian women traditionally fished without net, spear or line. Before long the floorboards were strewn with a mass of entangled octopuses. These creatures were pulled by hand from rock crevasses, the body turned inside out before being dropped into the punt. Our discomfort and abhorrence brought peels of laughter from our companions. Several women submerged themselves completely to delve about the sand for shellfish. Their sulus when laden with spoil were then emptied into the punt. Reef fish between six and twelve inches in length were also deftly caught with bare hands. A swift bite behind the head despatched these and added to the booty. Later the village braves arrived to form a large circle and beat the water with clumps of leaves as they moved closer, splashing and shouting. In this way a number of large fish were encircled and speared. Upon reaching the beach the octopuses were laid out on hard sand to be beaten tender with iron bars prior to being cooked.

Fortunately the octopuses together with the day's catch went back to the village. However, that evening Mrs Giblin especially prepared for us an entree which I had never tasted before nor ever heard of since. She explained in not very fluent English that she came from another part of Fiji where unlike here this technicoloured delicacy found on the reef was considered edible. I think now in retrospect it may not have been cooked but marinated in lime juice. It tasted deliciously fishy but looked and felt like a fungus and evidently was not eaten by the local people.

Our next call, Nacula, lay on the western side of the group. As the tide was out and the shoreline jagged with dead coral Eileen and I were carried ashore in Fijian style by the crew. The turaga-ni-koro made us welcome and showed us into the guest bure. Village ladies kept out of sight. Although an enamel basin and jug of rain water were placed on a bench outside the bure doorway no vale lai lai was evident. Our problem therefore was to choose a clump of scrub at a distance from village activities. The evening meal was cooked in an iron lean-to with no chimney. When Eileen tried to lend a hand she backed out with streaming eyes and choking from dense smoke. The fish with yam and dalo was particularly delicious. We shared the floor that night with at least one resident rat which though curious was timid. A quick dip at high tide early next morning freshened us for breakfast prepared by our hosts. This consisted of tea with condensed milk and thick slices of the bread brought with us from Lautoka toasted and spread with jam.

Nanauya Lailai with silky white sand and crystal water where we dropped anchor next day is possibly the most exquisite nook in the Yasawas. While the copra plantation and cattle were inspected this was a useful and scenic 'comfort stop'.

We now proceeded to Tamasua village on Yasawa Island. The now much visited island, Sawa-i-Lau, lies in the bay. Formed of limestone, the underwater caves are thought to have inspired scenes described by Ballantyne in 'Coral Island'. Since the tourist boom which began in the 1960s Sawa-i-Lau has become a highlight of Fiji's Blue Lagoon Cruises. The *Vonu* crew accompanied us across to the island. We clambered up and over rocks to some height before finding the entrance to the lofty interior and descending into the water filled-cavern. Fifty-five years later I still remember the eerie atmosphere, the echoing walls riddled with passageways. A seaman would suddenly disappear underwater to reappear sometime later standing in an aperture high in the walls and rejoin us by leaping into the deep, clear water of the large cavern. A number of entrances to underwater passages were indicated by

carvings in the rock just above the water line. The hieroglyphic-like markings, remain to this day undeciphered. The great adventure for which we steeled ourselves lay in entering, via an underwater passageway, several grottoes. Despite a seaman's guiding hand, the swim underwater into the darkness felt endless though in truth only about seven feet in length. When our eyes became used to the dark we found ourselves in small crypt-like caves joined by rock. The Stygian passage we had come through now appeared a ribbon of pale turquoise.

Two days later *Vonu* headed south to Waya Island. Landing by dinghy proved difficult. A dangerous strand lined by surf and strewn with malevolent black rocks, effectively discouraged visitors. After a less than rapturous welcome by Waya's dour inhabitants we departed within the hour intending to make Lautoka before nightfall. But with wind and tide against us, this proved impossible. Two kedge anchors were put out onto the reef. Bobbing gently with the tide we prepared to spend the night aboard. The evening meal shared by all consisted of iron rations from the *Vonu* locker - ship's biscuit and a mug of tea. For our convenience an empty kerosene tin was produced, cut in half, raw edges turned down and placed in the darkest corner of the engine room. Sound effects were unavoidable. Eileen, not feeling well was given the captain's cabin. Harry Gray and I unrolled our bedding on either side of the boom which lay along the cabin roof. The idyllic setting; rocking gently to sleep under the stars on a warm tropical night, had one drawback. The cabin's sloping roof was edged with a diminutive three inch high rail. One restless turn could find me in the drink. With leather straps from the bedding roll I hitched one arm to the boom, and did not wake until dawn.

Long before the coral coast and off-shore islands became a tourist playground, the Viti Levu hill station, Nadarivatu, had been a time-honoured honeymoon and holiday resort. When first taken there to the CSR rest-house at two years of age we proceeded on horseback from the railhead at Tavua South. Our luggage and groceries were carried by a horse-drawn wagon. The road from Waikubukubu wound up the hillside in a series of hairpin bends. Until the mid-1930s there was a district commissioner in residence, a post office, court house and jail, one or two stores, several holiday bungalows, and several permanent residences. The settlement had government and CSR rest houses. The Catholic Church, and Wesleyan and Adventist Missions, also provided rest houses here for their people. During the 1930s a handsome bure was erected at Nadarivatu to accommodate H.E. the Governor. Over the years per courtesy of an enterprising magistrate, prison labour provided the resort

with a six hole golf course, and carved a swimming pool from a bushland glade fed by a freezing cascade. In addition, a number of well-defined bush walks through rain forest and skirting the craggy outcrop 'Lomai Lagi' also served vacationers. The bracing mountain climate meant local dwellings required a fire-place in every room. When late afternoon mist closed in plumes of smoke trailed, for at least six months of the year from Nadarivatu chimney pots.

By the time I had grown up and revisited Nadarivatu, the Fiji Kauri Timber Company had moved into the neighbouring forests. Timber was transported by lorry. The road was steep and treacherous but Nadarivatu was now nevertheless accessible by private car. The original residency, its stone walls of siege resistant stoutness, functioned as the government rest house. A reliable Indian cook was employed to prepare food provided by visitors. He made do with a wood stove and ice-box and lighting from kerosene or petrol lamps. Beer was available for rest house residents, otherwise the nearest source of liquor was at Tavua. In the garden of the old residency the touch of Laura (Dear) Spence's green fingers could be discerned. Azaleas, jonquils, violets, and snowflakes, plants seldom seen in Fiji enjoyed the hill climate. Here too grew a solitary eucalypt possibly planted by or to please, 'Dear's' husband, Frank Spence.

By September 1940 the Battle of Britain was raging. Germany, having overrun Denmark and Norway had invaded Holland and Belgium and France. The British army's massed evacuation from Dunkirk took place in early June. Many single men who left Fiji on overseas leave joined up and never return. In every district a squad of local men trained several nights a week on football fields. Women from all sections of the community attended Red Cross afternoons held each week at the manager's bungalow. Hanks of wool, needles and patterns for knitting socks, mittens and balaclavas were distributed. Cakes and scones contributed for afternoon tea and not eaten were raffled. Stalls were organised to sell needlework, cakes and chutney. Meanwhile, younger women throughout the colony undertook courses and obtained certificates in First Aid and Home Nursing.

One day to my surprise, my mother suggested I learn to type. She could picture me helping out in the CSR or a government office. Fortunately a qualified typing and shorthand teacher was a resident at this time at Natabua. Her charge for instruction was donated to the Red Cross. I was still quite incompetent when Harry Gray offered me a forthcoming vacancy in the Burns Philp office. Dad agreed to my use of

the car but a Namoli environment did not pass muster in Mother's eyes and for the first time in my life she would not speak to me. That Monday when faced with a mountain of dockets and a complicated machine that mercilessly added my typing errors into monthly statements I prayed for an earthquake or tidal wave. One session of instruction was enough for Bessie, the competent typist who had given notice, to change her mind and decide not to entrust me with BP's precious machine. My services were nevertheless retained so that Bessie's work-load could be lightened. I found out later when Bessie and I became friends that her eldest brother was none other than my father's right hand man, Vincent Mathias. Burns Philp closed its doors at lunchtime so I became useful as chauffeur to female staff who lived on CSR hill and also to the manager of the Bank of NSW who claimed a lunch hour lift.

The British Empire stood alone. From every quarter the war news spelled disaster. Europe had been torn apart and occupied. Bombs rained on British cities, her navy and Atlantic convoys. Defeat faced our armies in North Africa. Volunteers recruited locally left the colony to train and serve overseas. By mid 1941 New Zealand servicemen and equipment, mainly artillery and airforce began to arrive in Fiji. Government schools were commandeered for military encampments. Aircraft during the early war years in Fiji were limited to flying boats. Laucala Bay near Suva Point became an important base until aerodromes were laid down at Nausori and at Nadi. Artillery posts were established along the Nadi / Sigatoka coastline particularly wherever there was an entrance in the reef. Sector officers were charged with keeping an outlook on shipping

After innumerable farewell parties and nearly twelve months delay due to a legal land matter, Dad finally retired from CSR on 30th September, 1941. Mother decided to dispose of at auction every pot and pan, every stick of furniture and ornament. They would set up house in Sydney with everything new. Doug and I were engaged to be married and hoping fate would allow us to return to Fiji. A number of household effects which I retain and treasure to this day were set aside at this time and kept for us by one or two Lautoka friends. This includes our the piano, a now venerable cane easy-chair, the table from the bure at which I am now typing, the small round table where I took nursery meals, the ruby vases that had come down from Mother's Granny Harvey. A cabin trunk was also packed with brassware, kitchenware, books and embroidered table linen which represented my trousseau.

We left Fiji still under the delusion, via official handouts and the press that the Singapore base was impregnable. American fellow

travellers aboard *Mariposa* spoke scornfully about Roseveldt's *Lease Lend*. 'Why you mean "Fleece Spend!"' Pearl Harbour was bombed ten weeks later.

# 7

# THE MEMSAHIB

Time had moved along and it was 1943 when I returned to Fiji. Doug and I had been married a month. The pocket-sized *Matua* sailed from Auckland, a gun mounted on the bow, blacked out at nightfall and crammed with passengers. Accommodation was makeshift - sexes segregated and mattresses at bedtime strewn on floor space in saloon and cabins. A vacant seat on deck or in the lounge was a reward only for the early bird. Daylight on the 8th June found me dressed and on deck. Even before the hills of Lami or Joske's Thumb could be distinguished, a salty breeze laced with the essence of copra and spice assured me I was home.

Following 'Pearl Harbour' Fiji became a base for United States armed forces assembled for Pacific operations. Camps and depots mushroomed throughout the islands. Military paraphernalia occupied the choicest locations, especially beaches and headlands. Sleepy seaports throbbed to a tempo of urgent activity. Jeeps now hustled about raising flurries of dust which after a tropical downpour became a slippery quagmire. Convoys of camouflaged vehicles lumbered cross country distributing personnel, stores and lethal weaponry. Flying Fortresses received as little notice as a storm cloud. Shipping, a hush-hush topic managed to find passage through the reef. Smartly turned out G.I.s 'on liberty' loafed about townships bored, homesick and everlastingly chewing. Giant outdoor movie screens sprang up in areas that had been cane fields a month ago. Storerooms and vacant dwellings were transformed into canteens and PX stores. The 10pm curfew did not prevent parties. A constant stream of invitations came from service messes. Evening entertainment took place early, and transport was provided for lady guests who received a corsage or a 'favour'. Thanksgiving was celebrated with suitable trimmings. When US personnel were invited to a private home they arrived with riches from the PX: tinned turkey or chicken, a carton of Lucky Strike or Camels, Maxwell House coffee or nylons. This invaluable synthetic, born of World War II made a Pacific debut as parachute fabric.

While awaiting household effects shipped by sea from Sydney, Doug and I were given accommodation in the Inspector's room at Lautoka rest house. This anchorage which now accommodated temporary female staff was dubbed by a local wit 'the breast house'. The atmosphere of repose built up over fifty years had changed. No longer did venerable weeping fig trees cast deep shade and delicious coolness over the garden. Gone from bedrooms the drifts of white mosquito netting, the louvred french doors, the opportunity for whispered confidences and exchange of gossip. The present decor had all the sterile charm of an operating theatre

Crushing was about to commence. Local mozzies had not yet tracked down our fresh blood, when a strike paralysed the sugar industry. This also killed social activity in CSR households now deprived of domestic help. Such tasks as chopping firewood and lighting stove or copper fell to the sahibs. The situation was too much for our elderly memsahib who immediately resigned. Domestic chaos and malnutrition was averted in this quarter when Mary Gordon, a stranger to Fiji and currently a guest volunteered to take over the cooking and housekeeping. She had arrived with us by *Matua* with the intension of marrying Keith Hedstrom. The monstrous black fuel stove, alien country, tropical climate and large menage held no terror for Mary.

Meanwhile my personal concern before attempting to housekeep, was to acquire an ice-box. Local demand and the current strike left these prehistoric, custom-built mammoths unprocurable. Once positioned, and for purpose of drainage astride a hole in the verandah floor, they became immovable. Each sturdy leg stood in a bowl of water or was bound with a 'puttee' painted with ant poison. A heavy lid flung back revealed the dark cavernous interior. Whether by design or disposition a Fiji ice-box always appeared overly t reluctant to relinquish its contents. It was Vincent Mathias who eventually came to our rescue and procured us this necessity.

By the end of July when the strike was settled and our household effects had arrived, the next step was to find a houseboy. I was surprised and touched when Viraswami approached Doug to offer his services. Recalling his gentle teasing I knew I would remain forever in his eyes 'the baba'. We also would not be comfortable paying the wages a senior houseboy would expect. An additional problem was that until the strike Viraswami had been employed by another family at Lautoka mill. Pinching 'a houseboy' was just not done. The temptation to accept the easy life in Viraswami's capable hands was resolved when the chokra

from the quarters, a lad well known to Doug applied for the job. Johnny had been scrupulously trained in household duties by the quarters memsahib Miss Mary Rice. He now wanted to take on the responsibilities of a cook which would bring in higher wages. This was to be a learning experience for me as well as Johnny. As I write I realise with regret that I cannot recall any further contact with Viraswami.

Having duly unpacked I prepared to brave the wiles of a fuel stove, a bête noire that could make a memsahib's life sheer misery. This old timer, unused for years had by now developed vindictive habits and chronic ailments. An additional problem was that Johnny had no previous cooking experience and I had never even made gravy. Clutching a glossy new cook book I also produced that first day a notebook so that Johnny could jot down recipes. While expecting, as was customary, to be addressed in Hindi, I was astonished to discover that a young intelligent Fiji-born Indian understood so little English. Johnny even had difficulty in handling a pencil. Family circumstances, he explained had allowed only one year at school - a Hindu school. House work, waiting at table, setting tea-trays and dhobi work posed no problem but as the quarters memsahib was an Anglo-Indian they always conversed in pukka Hindi. Whenever my cooking instructions in pidgin Hindi were unclear Johnny sensibly consulted and verified recipes with an experienced cook. This was not difficult as local houseboys usually gathered beneath a convenient mango tree for a smoke or gossip before resuming duties in the early afternoon.

Our house was one in a row of three on the lower side of the CSR road, each bungalow well separated in those days, by wide lawns. Our back yard bordered a cane field which unfortunately obscured any view. In the front garden an arthritic hibiscus hedge and two spindly flamboyant trees fought a losing battle with several weeping fig trees. The branches of these luxuriant trees swept the ground shedding an ankle deep carpet of leaves. Between our house and the Hobbs' a towering clump of bamboo sighed or creaked whenever the wind changed. To my dispair this also took its toll of the soil for despite later attention, the croton shrubs growing along the front verandah remained listless, nor would the 'Lady Fletcher' I pampered, produce more than one or two pale blooms.

The week we actually moved in was a most inconvenient and embarrassing time to stage a miscarriage. Mary Gordon had arrived to spend a few days with us prior to her wedding and also a friend, both of Doug's and the bridegroom's, came from Nausori to stay with us for the

nuptials. Meanwhile after about twenty-four hours in hospital I returned home too weak and distressed to be any help with the festivities. Johnny's first week with us must have been a bewildering experience.

The war years had left shelves in local stores devoid of drapery, crockery and hardware. Fortunately the packing cases from Sydney contained our dinner service, glassware and cutlery. Precious clothing coupons had been relinquished in Sydney to obtain essential houselinen and furnishing fabric. The yards of net curtaining fabric I purchased however, did not attract coupons. Treasure packed away two years ago now came to light from various boxes stored beneath a neighbour's bungalow. In addition to beloved books and Mother's brassware were those trusty henchmen: the family mincer, cane knife, kitchen canisters, an iron kettle, spanner, hammer, screwdriver, primus stove, hurricane lantern, copper preserving pan, assorted gardening tools, galvanised buckets, brooms, a prized 'Turk's head' ceiling brush a 'store-size' set of scales. Local infant progeny had been regularly weighed in the scoop of these scales over a period of twenty five years. Our precious china and glassware fortunately survived the passage on the high seas. However, when I dropped several cups and saucers a few months later the loss was irreplaceable for years to come.

A fowl run ranked next in importance to the ice-box. Families moved to another mill either sold the structure to the incoming resident or had it carefully demolished for transportation with other effects. We had not had time to realise this when David Ragg brought us two settings of fertile eggs from his exotic woolly-booted Langshang stud. Neighbours immediately lent broody hens and coops. The 'Chief' (engineer) when approached, sent up from the mill yard a cart-load of building material, oddments such as sleepers, sheets of galvanised iron, lengths of rail and timber off-cuts. By the beginning of next month we would be in the financial position to order 'on account' from Morris Hedstrom several rolls of wire netting, one pound of nails and a dozen bottles of beer. Neighbours, to make sure their valuable advice was heeded, strolled across one Sunday morning. Fortified by a cold beer they lent a hand with post holes and trenches along the perimeter of the yard. In order to foil mongoose it was necessary to bury lengths of galvanised iron horizontally to a depth of eight inches - making certain each end overlapped. An iron water tank salvaged from the mill yard was cut to shape and anchored into the ground to provide the pre-fab hen house. This was furnished with perches and with kerosene cases lined with straw that had covered the bottled pilsener. A kerosene tin cut in half lengthwise with edges hammered over held drinking water. The yard

door required a precise fit. Our precious settings duly hatched into adorable chicks and a percentage survived hawks and mongoose. Coconut meal currently replaced maize as poultry food. This was mixed into a mash with molasses and hot water and kitchen scraps. Our hens gave sufficient eggs for daily requirement. Some eggs each week were put down in 'water glass' to tide us over the wet season.

Three essential additions to our household were purchased second-hand: a lawn mower, folding card table and a 'wireless'. The latter was custom built in 'the quarters' some years earlier by a young man with unplumbed ability frittering away his talent at a sugar mill. Unfortunately, furniture-wise this masterly work resembled a port-o-loo rather than Hepplewaithe. The huge speaker took in the four corners of our planet with maximum surging and static and in later years collected all-important cricket scores and commentaries.

Johnny soon came to terms with the kitchen range but the oven proved unsympathetic to my cakes. Our menu was always governed by food available. If there were no visitors we restricted our evening meal to two courses. Johnny could turn out a variety of soups and conventional desserts such as banana custard, apple snow (made with dried apple), chocolate blancmange, lemon delicious and chocolate sauce puddings. Seldom was there need to refresh his memory about any recipe. Within a few months a dinner for four or six posed no difficulty for him. I would whip up some special sweet or an entree and did not enter the kitchen again. Looking back upon those years Johnny was with us I do not recall any occasion for a reprimand, a harsh word or any instruction to be repeated.

My hand-operated portable Singer sewing machine had no rest for months. Eventually there were net curtains at the windows and covering the glass panels of the french doors. Chintz with a design of bright berries on a serviceable navy background rejuvenated the lazy-boy chairs and settees that came with the bungalow. All floors in the rooms were freshly stained - the living/dining room given the luxury of three Indian wool rugs purchased at Beard Watson, Sydney. Doug's mother's gift of her own handiwork - delicate water-colour scenes of New Zealand graced the walls. Cream parchment lampshades that had shared my bunk on the 'Matua' diffused the glare from the three naked electric bulbs that dangled from the ceiling.

The focal point in the living room was the long bookcase, from my old home. A pair of stately ruby glass vases that had survived four

generations with my mother's forebearers and, the benares-ware, carried much to my infant distress from Pillay's store, added colour and warmth. The piano placed near a gauze door benefited from Lautoka's evening breeze the 'cau cau'. Here when the day was wet and therefore cooler, I tried but alas with little success to do justice to Chopin waltzes and nocturnes.

In a climate where our rooms for most of the year were bearable only after sundown it was necessary to find a spot for the traditional midday 'rest'. On a verandah corner I recognised the iron bolts and rings had been fittings at one time for a hammock. Hammocks being unprocurable, I decided to make one. Canvas was bought, the Chief undertook to have two wooden battens made at the company workshop and from a Namoli cobbler, Champaneri, I obtained a sail needle and some thread which he advised be treated with candlenut. Each stitch of the hand sewn hems and sixteen eyelets through which cord had to be threaded was agony. A flounced cover of gaily patterned fabric and two red cushions completed the operation. Several bulabula holding maidenhair fern lent a semblance of coolness to the area.

No week passed without requests from stall-holders for help with raffles or for goodies to sell for the Red Cross and Comfort Fund. And Lautoka womenfolk worked all the year for the Bomber Fund carnival. As my cakes needed the support of a small ramekin dish and my jam was either runny or tacky, I contributed handwork. Senior memsahibs searched the bottom drawers for precious laces, ribbons and fabric which were donated to workers on the fancy stall. We made sachets, aprons, coat hangars, slippers, soft toys and playsuits for toddlers. At a time when gifts were unobtainable, even empty tins, boxes and jars painted and prettied up, sold readily.

In day-to-day domestic life the presence of US forces did little to alter conditions I had known all my life in mill settlements. Most European households still retained an Indian houseboy although Fijian women, usually ex-nurses, would occasionally be available for domestic service. Ice, meat, milk and bread was delivered daily, the CSR's market gardener called twice weekly and the two general stores collected order books and gave same day delivery. The Saturday bazaar held roadside under the rain trees near the 'lines', still offered sacks of rice, piles of cucumber, bagan, chillies, and spices. Our once plentiful, pawpaw, oranges, pineapple and in season uvi, duruka, breadfruit, tomatoes, and eggs were scarce and vendors no longer brought in crabs. A Fijian marama occasionally showed up at a bungalow with a keti of oranges or a

mat which at this time of fabric shortage, she would prefer to exchange for a 'pinafore' especially the frock currently worn by the housewife. Our menfolk, as usual, showered and changed before dinner but a memsahib no longer had a wardrobe of long frocks for evening.

When it became known that we were again expecting a baby the manager's wife mentioned a 'basinet' which, should I not already have, she would like to offer. This she would 'do up' for me. The concept of a basinet which of course would be a God-send, was new to me. I was actually too afraid yet to plan ahead. A month or so later the basinet arrived and with it a shell-like bath ideal for a new-born and mother with a 'P' plate. Additional treasure followed. Everything imaginable a baby might need was given me to use and in due course pass on to other mothers - pram, stroller, large bath, scales, full sized cot, changing table, measuring jugs, play pen and dinky. Each precious article, sadly set aside since Molly and Griff's little Peter died a few years earlier at the age of three.

Shelves in the drapery department of the stores remained bare while I grew stouter and plackets on frocks gaped. My fingers also itched to start a baby trousseau. The gift of some yardage of fine white tarantulae brought by a friend from Suva meant at least I could make baby clothes and bed linen. When in desperation I was just about to convert the flounced hammock cover into a maternity garment, a notice from Burns Philp sent me post-haste to Namoli. 'One dress length per customer' - but I was able to select a navy and white patterned slub-linen which made up into respectable camouflage.

There still remained weeks 'in waiting' with time to complete a piece of tapestry upon which I had splurged one week's salary when I worked at 1 O'Connell Street. Johnny was immediately interested when I showed him an illustration in a magazine of a long low stool which was needed to take my finished needlework. He agreed to find a carpenter in Namoli capable of making a replica. I mention this, because I never glance at my tapestry stool without remembering that Johnny's sortie to Namoli that day, lit the spark that would direct him to a successful and rewarding future. To my surprise six months later he offered to make me a similar stool to match our yakka dressing table. He explained that there need be no cost for timber. He could make use of a bundle of off-cuts from our four-poster which had been cluttering a verandah cupboard for some time. Both stools are still in use. A carpenter in our household proved a great asset. Johnny later made us squatter chairs, a doll's house,

day-bed, an additional dining table and ultimately a handsome writing desk for Doug.

Early in my pregnancy, and before I had time to hear horror stories about local confinements, a caring friend lent me a book on the subject. Her late sister, physiotherapist Barbara Thomas, compiled and edited *Childbirth, from a mother's point of view* just prior to losing her life when St Thomas' Hospital, London, was bombed. For the next six months I followed to the letter this quite avant-garde ante-natal advice and during labour quoted, much to the surprise and amusement of matron and doctor, 'the book'. The obstetric section at Lautoka Hospital stood apart on a hill just above the main buildings. The accommodation comprised two two-bed wards, a labour room and a verandah. The nursing sisters were European, and trained either overseas or in Suva War Memorial Hospital. 'Nursies' were mainly Fijian, moving in bare feet unhurried and quiet, unfailingly gentle and smiling.

Our dainty blond 'Baby Dear', Christine, gained the required weight, slept soundly at night but gave herself and me exhausting daylight hours. From 6am until 6pm despite all my devoted care she cried. Lautoka had of course, no baby clinic. I read every baby manual in sight, weighed her before and after each feed, tried three hourly feeding, introduced warm boiled water before and or after each feed and also dill-water. Stupidly, the much scorned dummy was not produced. During the morning her pram swathed in green mosquito netting was placed in the shade of a weeping fig. Our hound, Jimal, always accompanied the pram and lay stretched out beneath, frown deepening and paws covering floppy ears while the pram rocked and she grew scarlet. When numerous attempts to pacify and burp failed I would beg Johnny to pick her up. Willingly he left whatever he was doing to jiggle the pram, talk to her but, as if she were egg-shell china, would never pick her up. I confess that one day in desperation I pushed her pram into the cane field out of ear shot. When confined indoors by the weather I resorted to the piano hoping Brahms Cradle Song might soothe or a lively Chopin valse or polka, distract. My own frustration would be relieved but she responded to my endeavour with ever increasing vocal appassionato. Miraculously one day Chopin's nocturne in E flat quietened her and these magic phrases were frequently put to use. By May, when the weather became cooler Baby Dear enjoyed being dressed up with a flattering poke bonnet covering fine short hair to be wheeled accompanied by Jimal to tennis where she was passed from lap to lap and admired. I remember her amazement and delight when eventually she stood up of her own accord in the garden to reach for a bloom on a Lady

Fletcher surprisingly in flower. Once she had gained toddler status Johnny had no hesitation in popping her onto the kitchen bench beside him while he worked. Here she picked up the Hindi words that characterised her particular prattle.

Coinciding with the introduction of meat into Christine's diet came a notice from the CSR butchery announcing rationing of beef, the only red meat available at this time. An adult weekly allowance was one and three quarter pounds, (about half a kilo) with three quarters of a pound per child. In a land surrounded by reef and fish in abundance yet none was available. If by chance the resonant sound of the conch shell reached us, by the time Johnny arrived at the water-front, the day's catch would be sold. Fortunately Johnny was a Hindu and in any case the only meal we provided was breakfast. But Jimal expected meat daily and so did Joe the Solomon Islander who came one day a week to mow and rake leaves. That day Johnny boiled-up a quantity of vegetables, rice and a portion of beef knowing Joe would be joined for a midday meal by his 'gone' leading his blind statuesque Fijian mother, followed by their dog. Joe, a fiery little man, took exception to any instructions from me. As soon as Doug arrived home at midday and before I got a word in, Joe would rush out to voice his complaints. His particular grievance - tea served in the customary enamel bowl instead of in my now rather precious china tea cups.

I clung to the tenants of my childhood upbringing, so it never occurred to me to settle for vegetable curry several nights a week. However our beef ration went further when Johnny learnt to bake individual meat pies and Cornish pasties. Doug had a 6:30am breakfast, started work at the office at 7am, and was home at noon each day expecting a tasty meal. This called for ingenuity. When our hens obliged, eggs frequently featured - curried, in aspic or as egg and bacon pie - the quiche was unheard of in Fiji at this time. Rissoles were acceptably substantial until the day Doug encountered a piece of coconut fibre traced to a villainous frayed back door-mat. Another disaster was 'savoury supreme'. The recipe called for ham and walnuts for which I substituted corned beef and peanuts and poor Doug suffered hic-coughs all the afternoon. That year Christine was born we lived for some months on avocadoes. A case containing four dozen, delivered to us fortnightly and costing four shillings, we shared with our neighbours, the Bill Kings.

Conversation between Johnny and me was strictly limited to household matters. He still spoke little English and my Hindi did not improve. We knew nothing of his home life except that he was the eldest

of a family of boys. We were, however, aware that he had been brought up to observe Hindi rites. This he made clear by refusing to kill when the first of our cockerels was ready for the table. Doug had no stomach for this but keeping a stiff upper lip performed the deed. Some months later, thankfully, Johnny relented and decided he could do a neater job.

The cataclysmic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fifty years ago brought VJ Day. My memory, evidently wrapped at the time in a domestic cocoon, does not recollect any local celebrations which surely took place nor the withdrawal from Fiji of US forces. On the other hand the names and faces of those young men I knew who did not return are still remembered.

Doug, with other 'office wallahs' whose workday ended at 4pm, found nine holes of golf obligatory several afternoons a week. The working week except during 'the crush' ended at midday on Saturday. Sahibs devoted weekend leisure to either tennis or eighteen hole golf competitions. Inter-club golf matches with lunches provided by the ladies took place on Sundays. For Doug, in addition to golf there was inter-district cricket on a Sunday and matches at Drasa against Fijian youths undertaking a three year agricultural course at the Training Farm. To Doug's lasting regret, joining CSR to come to Fiji meant being prised from perhaps further cricket glory in New Zealand. While still a schoolboy at Nelson College he had made his name as a wily off-spin bowler playing for his province, and aged eighteen had represented New Zealand in Test matches against England during the 1932/33 'Bodyline' tour.

An infatuation with sport and his father's single-minded interest in horticulture brought Doug an ingrained aversion to gardening. During our first year of marriage he was persuaded with some reluctance to divert time and energy and dig a vegetable garden. Fertiliser was available from the fowl run and I competed with friend and neighbour Jean for contributions left by our milk-cart horse. Our feathered friends and slugs and snails loved the garden. Local custom advised that a hen with chickens should have the run of the compound all day. And senior chooks, given a few hours freedom in late afternoon also made a bee line to scratch for worms or dry-clean feathers in a freshly dug or weeded garden bed. This meant gardens needed protection with chicken wire and continually a watchful eye. Doug was right. The rewards from a garden were scarcely worth the effort. However, I do recall harvesting an astounding crop of peanuts. When finally washed and roasted, shelled and winnowed a quantity not required for eating were fed into the mincer.

A surprising stream of oil poured out. When mixed with pulverised kernel, this home-made peanut butter was especially delicious and unprocurable at the stores. Our grounds no longer retained any of the coconut palms traditionally planted to indicate the front entrance to a bungalow or to define a boundary. I was therefore obliged to keep a look-out for wayside coconuts that fell and conveniently rolled into a ditch. The kernel freshly grated gave rich stock for curry and other dishes or when grated finely and dried in a slow oven would make heavenly coconut ice and enhance cakes, biscuits and icings. Coconuts not required for the kitchen were split open and fed to the chooks. In Fiji, a memsahib had made the grade when she could confidently offer a neighbour a jar of her own home-made guava jelly. Part of the process included allowing the boiled up pulp to strain slowly overnight through butter muslin. With this fabric not immediately available and the guava season of limited duration I 'made do' using the tail of Doug's dress shirt and failed to make the grade.

When pregnancy or a babe put a stop to usual pastimes I spent lonely weekend afternoons walking. The weather had to be right; a leaden sky with clouds not too threatening. Alone or with Jimal and the stroller I would set out in one direction or the other following an unsealed main road until the chain of small Indian or Chinese 'dukans' finally petered out. These stores never closed. They harboured air laden with dusty dhal and trade tobacco but in the half light on a dingy shelf there could lurk a forgotten tin of pilchards or sweet corn a 'nice' change for a Sunday snack.

On the days Johnny had 'chhutti' the sulky old range was allowed to slumber and the primus, an impatient offsider came into use. This had first to be filled with kerosene pumped from a four gallon tin, then primed with meth spirit, lit with a match, delicately pricked, soundly pumped up and pressure carefully adjusted. The moment one's back was turned the milk or rice would boil over or the fat in a frying pan catch alight.

'European' women, newcomers to the way of life in Fiji would experience difficulties which I, Fiji born, would take for granted. The exile from family, friends, city lights and amenities, and plunged into an unaccustomed lifestyle and climate of a steam bath made neighbourly kindness and help truly valued. Time has proved friendships made under these circumstances remained life-long. We were fortunate that our neighbours nearest in age at this time were Jean and Bill King. Bill was shipping officer and their bungalow, perched on the ridge across the road, had a commanding view of the sugar mill, settlement and harbour. Jean a

highly competent stenographer in Suva before marriage was also an accomplished contract bridge player, a golf champion and a good cook. Jean and Bill's capacity for work and play, for friendship, generosity and hospitality, were boundless.

Neighbours Ena and Eric Snowsill were also the most caring of friends with whom Doug and I often enjoyed an evening at mah jong. As, overseer on the home estate Eric was entitled to a telephone and a horse His horse during breakfast and lunchtime was tethered under the weeping fig between our compounds. Their telephone was most convenient. I often lobbed on their doorstep not only seeking Ena's advice but to call Doug or the doctor in a crisis. Ena, always brimful of merriment had a deft touch with sponge cakes and her cut-shots on the tennis court were winners. Their two elder children then at boarding school put a strain on family finances which Ena carefully managed. Her dressmaking undertaken for grateful friends was perfection. At the time of our second baby Philippa's birth, Christine was elated to be told she would stay with Auntie Ena. During this visit, their youngest, Billy, then aged about nine taught Christine to peddle her dinky which she kept parked at great inconvenience under Uncle Eric's breakfast table.

When regular shipping resumed after the war, Doug undertook to reorganise the Lautoka library. An elderly lady living at the Rest House just across the road from the library volunteered her services several evenings each week when books could be exchanged and folk looked in for an hour to catch up on newspapers and magazines. Late afternoon each Thursday, Doug and I in turn or together spent a steaming hour at the library selecting , changing and parcelling up books and magazines for people on sectors 'down the line'. Our readers made their preference known and duplication was not appreciated. We conscientiously dug out, humour for Esivo, spicy novels for Saweni, 'who done it' for K'sau, biography and travel for Navo, westerns for Navakai and so forth. A meagre budget meant new books purchased must suit local taste. Book reviews were scanned, personal recommendations welcomed, catalogues from USA, Dymocks and the second-hand book list from Harrods pored over. By popular request we subscribed to *The Spectator*, *National Geographic*, the *Auckland Weekly*, *Life* and to *Pix*. A number of overseas newspapers were donated by local residents. Doug and I shared similar tastes in reading matter and between us undertook to read or skim through each book before putting it into circulation. A novel considered distasteful or too light , a biography or travel book too highbrow or too dry would be posted back with a request for refund.

Christmas 1945, when Christine was a year old, we spent at Nadarivatu. As a novice mother with a teething child I was less than enthusiastic when invited by the Harvey Griffiths to join a party of eight booked at the Government Rest House for the holidays. Undoubtedly this honour came because Doug and I were both bridge players. Molly regarded my excuses as without foundation. A Fijian girl would baby-sit Christine and there was room in their big car for us, the nursery equipment and luggage. Our accommodation would be in the annex until recently the district officer's residence, a distance from noisy social activities. Only then did I discover Doug was committed to playing cricket in Suva at Christmas where we were invited to stay with the Phillip Snows. A six hour trip to Suva by bus at the height of the wet season, landing with a teething infant on childless strangers and coping with endlessly wet napkins was also not my idea of a happy Christmas. The outcome as I recall - Doug had his cricket in Suva and joined us later at Nadarivatu. Bridge, potty training and mashing food left no time for a courtesy climb to Lomai Lagi, mantled as usual in cloud.

In March 1946 Doug was granted local leave. We booked a CSR beach cottage at Cuvu. Johnny was offered 'chhutti' but he indicated he would like to accompany us. This for me meant a real holiday without kitchen chores, the washing or coaxing a meal from a fuel stove. Doug, Christine and I travelled the scenic sixty miles by local bus, while Johnny who had arranged for a bed in the Cuvu labour lines rode accompanied by Jimal and our baggage on a bogey attached to the passenger train. We were delighted to find that Mary and Keith Hedstrom with twins, Ingrid and Gordon, the same age as Christine also were installed in a holiday cottage along the beach. While Doug accompanied Keith on fishing excursions in Cuvu Bay and to golf at Olosaru, Mary and I met on the beach with the children. Christine not yet walking sat rigidly on a towel never allowing finger or toe to touch sand, quite unimpressed with the Hedstrom twins who scuttled lemming-like into the frothing waves.

Not until 1947 were we able to take overseas leave. I was anxious to see my parents again after being parted four years and for them to meet their first grandchild. Knowing Johnny would look after Doug, I left by flying boat a few weeks ahead. The taxi, Suva bound via the Queen's Road, pulled up as now customary at Koro Levu to give passengers time for a sandwich and a cup of tea at Mrs McEwan's Rest House. We had an overnight stay at the GPH where the older retainers dressed as usual in immaculate livery, remembered me from childhood days.

As day broke over Laucula Bay I looked about hoping to recognise at least one or two fellow travellers. Only when finally seated in *Coriolanus* did I realise Christine and I were the only females aboard and that apart from the young man seated beside me, all other passengers were either Fijian or Polynesian. My companion explained that he was the officer in charge of these seamen bound for Hong Kong to man Fiji's new naval vessel *Viti II*. The engines revved up, and take-off was repeatedly rehearsed, first in one direction then the other. My young friend confessed that not having flown before he was feeling most apprehensive, in fact terrified. With only a single flight behind me I was obliged now to remain calm, confidently and smiling as an example to him as well as Christine. For a half hour we lumbered about flapping our wings like an over-fed pelican, assessing distance in one direction then another, our ears attune to engine splutters and our bodies to power loss. Miraculously, smooth as silk, we slipped away and only realised we were airborne when the reef and islands trailed serenely below. My companion released my hand and the steward hastened to spray the cabin with freshener, remove and redistribute the paper bags that in air travel replaced a ship's strawberry boxes.

We spent that night as scheduled in Noumea. Our hotel on the waterfront was too far from the town centre for me to venture on foot with a two year old on the off chance of revisiting M. Montaigne's hostelry. Our abode exuded Gallic piquancy, manifest by green louvred shutters, a formal courtyard featuring jardinieres, statuettes, wrought iron furniture and an undisclosed plumbing problem. We again awakened for a daybreak take off. Leading Christine with 'sang froid' to the 'his-and-hers', I was not impressed to find every bowl overflowing. It was still dark, fortunately, and a jardiniere in the courtyard proved handy. Christine's blue bakelite potty was eyed with envy by aircraft crew. Later that morning approaching the Australian coastline we encountered considerable turbulence. Christine and I repeatedly chanted 'See Saw Margery Daw' while the gallant seafarers cowered, turned pale and threw up. When we set down to refuel on the Brisbane River a battery of press photographers awaited. The evening paper featured, under the heading of the old nursery rhyme a photograph of tiny flaxen haired Christine surrounded by the crew of husky Islanders. Airborne once again Southport showed up as a mere sprinkling of iron roofs hugging the estuary and coastline while southward, scarcely any habitation encroached upon the endless sand-dunes festooned by rolling surf.

We had been home in Lautoka perhaps six months when Johnny, who never spoke about anything other than housework, told me in fluent

Hindi that he had dreamt that night we had another baby. He then added, that should this happen he would be of great help to me now as he understood the routine: how to prepare fruit juice, boil bottles and puree vegetables. Feeling self conscious I could only assure him in fractured Hindi that what his dream foretold might in six months come true. Johnny was there at the hospital with a bunch of zinnias to greet two day old Philippa and later the first to rush to her pram whenever she cried.

Philippa was ten months old when our next overseas leave fell due. This would be, Doug was informed, followed by a transfer to Labasa. While aware this promotion spelt exile, my immediate problem was clothes. The 'new look' had left me without a stitch suitable for Sydney. A waist must now fit snugly, and the shoulder line be extended with padding while skirts wide and flowing, reached nearly to the ankle. My fashion conscious mother chose dress-lengths and posted these to me with paper patterns which Ena agreed to make up. I could then face Sydney and meet relatives and friends without embarrassment. A Pan Am DC4 uplifted us from Nadi for the twelve hour flight to Mascot.

Labasa mill was situated on the remote northern coast of Vanua Levu. Until recently the only contact Labasa had with another settlement, any neighbouring copra plantation or Suva was either by sea, by wireless or bridle track. No road yet penetrated the mountainous spine of this island or attempted to encircle the coast. However, a flying boat service once a week now replaced the bucketing on small vessels former travellers had endured in all weathers when crossing the Koro Sea. And with young children, the picturesque coastal ports had added up to three or more uncomfortable days afloat. No one could deny a posting to Labasa still bore the stigma of salt mines. Old timers' reminiscences were spiced with fabled eccentricities and excesses fostered by isolation. However, visitors raved about Labasa hospitality and families who saw long service here wistfully remembered those days as their happiest. Consoled by such reports, we in fact almost welcomed the prospect of change especially when Johnny wanted to accompany us.

Upon our return from leave an armchair flight by Short Sunderland flying boat took us from Laucala Bay to Labasa's port o'call, Malau. A long jetty lapped by a pale docile tide led to a surprisingly deserted beach where a handful of locals, a few lorries and cars gathered at the road and tramline terminal. A colourful croton and one hibiscus shrub up in the scrub were the only evidence of an early European trading post and habitation at Malau. The mill, established in 1894, was situated eleven miles distant and like other early sugar mills erected on the bank of the

river which ensured transportation. Punts still serviced the overseas vessels which put into Malau.

While waiting household effects and Johnny's arrival by sea we spent a week or so at the hotel. The Great Eastern made no pretension to live up to the name either in size, architecture or accommodation. However the table Vera Marshall kept, was a plus. Two rivers edged with mangroves wound round mill and township areas to merge into a maze of channels through the teri and forming a delta. An undulating patchwork of cane fields extended in all directions, until ragged foothills and savage crags were enfolded by a series of forbidding onyx ranges shrouded in cloud.

Every CSR bungalow at Labasa could boast a spectacular view. The 'burra sahib's' picturesque domain graced the highest point along a sloping ridge. A 'burra mem' in the role of hostess and housewife at the 'big house' required stamina and competent domestic staff. Room after room of noble dimension opened onto well scrubbed verandahs with footage equal to the promenade deck of an ocean liner. Other bungalows of standard CSR proportion were aligned down the roadway and allocated according to rank in the mill hierarchy. Ours was located about half way where two dusty roads met. The view lived up to expectation. But for a new comer no day passed without feeling the chill of the salt mines.

The morning we moved in, came the first blunt reminder when the telephone was mindlessly unscrewed from the verandah wall. Obviously 'we' were not entitled to this luxury. A phone would have helped when I found a decaying wooden kitchen-bench alive with cockroaches and a rusty sink almost devoid of enamel. In addition, we inherited a plumbing problem, and a matrimonial bedstead with two deep indentations in the tired horsehair mattress which cost us sleep. A temperamental fuse box that threw sparks and fused lights was as unsettling as bedrooms that shook whenever the verandah was walked upon. Borers were not only reducing floorboards and joists to mere shells but tunnelling through the spindly eight foot high wooden piles to which the house was attached.

Doug and Johnny had spent a weekend erecting a chook yard on the site of the previous yard, when instructions came from the manager for this to be removed and rebuild a few paces to the left. We experienced further harassment when mongoose in great numbers and with Tarzan-like agility invaded and daily terrorised our well-bred and highly-strung hens. They even made off with the golf balls Doug

introduced as nest-eggs. Johnny knocked together a trap and caught eight mongoose within a few days.

While in Suva I was warned there was a problem in Labasa regarding food suitable for young children. This advice I nonchalantly disregarded. Being Fiji born, I did not expect Fortnam and Mason and, in any case Vanua Levu in the wet season would obviously shock my informant, a young dietitian from bountiful New Zealand. However, two weeks into housekeeping and before teeth started to loosen I prepared to battle scurvy. Vendors offering edibles or for that matter anything else, were never seen on the company hill nor I was told, did the CSR vegetable gardener appear, between December and the following July. With no car and no telephone to call a taxi, Johnny undertook each Saturday morning to search the market before breakfast for despised long beans and china cabbage, both vegetables elusive in Labasa, and also to procure whatever fruit he could carry. A local mother advised me to forage mid week amongst road-side scrub for a stray pumpkin vine. Plunging with bare legs into spiteful sensitive grass I sometimes was rewarded with a handful of tender young pumpkin leaves and tendrils to add to fourteen month old Philippa's boiled rice or if lucky mashed potato. At Labasa rain did not abate during these end-of-the-wet-season months. All cereal from local stores would be riddled with weevil. At least half the potatoes and onions delivered to us from the same stores were perished and stinking. My baby however, always ravenous, would declare everything within reach 'yummy'. This unfortunately included my Max Factor 'honeysuckle' moisturiser, a tube of Tineafax and even the salt water emetic subsequently ordered by the doctor.

Milk from the 'company' herd was no better quality in Labasa at this time than other staples and the method of delivery positively archaic. Two large cans were lugged on foot from house to house. When supply fell short of demand, the fluid poured into household billy-cans awaiting by the dusty roadside took on a pale bluish hue.

Locally grown beef of 'old boot' texture was a legendary feature of the Labasa CSR butchery. On occasion the gravy beef would be still quivering when parceled for hasty delivery. Well-established households were sustained by home bred poultry, a vegetable patch and clumps of fast maturing bananas and pawpaws. Surrounded as we were by numerous friends from Lautoka days, it was a worry when two months passed without a taste of Labasa's famous hospitality. Suddenly during one week came three invitations to dinner. A local hostess would not risk

her culinary reputation until the arrival of the molasses tanker *Rona* which brought frozen lamb for the company butchery.

Labasa had the usual recreational facilities for officers' families provided by 'the company' which certain government officials were invited to enjoy. Well attended were tennis days which also allowed an opportunity for news and views to be aired and invitations exchanged. Steeply sloping back premises of several bungalows adjoined the fairways of Labasa's scenic nine hole golf course presided over by The Three Sisters, a sapphire, onyx and emerald studded massif. After golf on Saturday, players (male of course) gathered at sunset for an hour or so at the Token Club, held in a bure in Jimmy Allard's garden. A lawn bowling rink situated just across the side road from our house was largely ignored in our day.

A function hall on 'the company' hill served a dual purpose as the 'European' school. Desks and blackboards could be removed, stacked away and a room with kitchen facilities unlocked. If required, seating materialised or should the floor be prepared for dancing then verandah railings, posts and doorways were festively decked with the inevitable palm fronds. During our day a new school house was erected and a residence made available for teaching staff. The site of the new school, land that had lain idle these many years had, I was told, a ghoulish history. At one time in the early days of the sugar industry there had been an unsuccessful attempt to introduce Japanese labour to Labasa. They perished victims of beri beri and were buried in this field.

Within a few months of our arrival a neighbour, and new-comer to Fiji and I undertook to restore the CSR library. Mill labour lent a hand to spring-clean the musty, dusty rooms festooned with cobwebs, one of which contained a neglected billiard table. Vociferous hornets with dinner-plate sized nests beneath tables and shelves had to be dispelled. Only then did Ruth and I armed with pins attack the grubs which in Fiji infest book-bindings and tunnel through volumes. A valuable Encyclopedia Britannia in this library was badly damaged. Worthwhile books received our particular attention and treatment with a special anti-grub potion. In some cases pages were reinforced with sticky tape and other books were given brown paper covers. Casualties went into a bonfire and new books avidly selected.

At Labasa a medical or dental problem could take on the proportion of a financial catastrophe. Although my teeth had been overhauled and X-rayed in Sydney recently, a huge back filling caved in

within a few months of my return to Fiji. Upon inquiry we learned the visiting , partly-trained Fijian dentist was not due here for six months. With toothache looming and extraction not even a possibility, Doug insisted I head for Suva. The only transport now available for women was the flying boat service. This meant a whole week at a hotel in Suva with the two children at a time when our bank balance had not recovered from overseas leave. With a toddler in tow I dare not risk staying in any other than the costly GPH, and well carpeted. This was the only Suva hotel offering a less than hazardous and well carpeted staircase, broken by gentle landings instead of one lofty space-saving precipitous flight. My joyful homecoming with the children unscathed, was short-lived. Off-loaded with us onto the jetty at Malau came a carton of hysterical day-old chicks, Doug's welcome home gift to me.

Monica Dickens has said it all in '*The Egg and I*'. Each morning for weeks I tearfully had to remove at least one tiny inert body. When the chicks were old enough to enjoy a scratch around our garden during daylight hours, they had to watch out for hawks and mongoose. Eventually a new yard was erected for them and only then did I realise that Rhode Island Reds reared without a mother did not take instinctively to a perch. Each evening I tucked them up in bed. Hitching up my ankle length skirt I set forth by torchlight up the hill to crouch in squelchy mud mixed with droppings to place each bird in turn onto the perch. Like a house of cards one would topple, and set the others squawking, flapping, falling about all atremble. The exercise was patiently repeated until a perfect balance was achieved. Johnny then served dinner.

It would have been the following year when 'Peepie' as she called herself, the chubbiest and happiest youngster contracted dysentery. The government doctor visited daily and advised she be nursed at home. It appeared his own little daughter while in hospital, suffering the same illness, had died. Utmost vigilance was necessary, nothing by mouth except boiled water with glucose and daily doses of cinnamol. The days seemed endless watching her listlessly waste away yet slowly respond to treatment. When she perked up enough to want to stand we moved her round the house in the stroller and even then the doctor forbade food until she actually cried with hunger.

At intervals whenever sea transport was available Johnny returned to Viti Levu. In his spare time with us he made a very handsome writing desk for Doug and took orders for chairs from local residents. There were two banks in Labasa but Johnny asked Doug to hold his wages until needed. It took sometime to accumulate a round sum from the six pounds

sixteen shillings a month he was paid! While surrounded by our problems, Johnny never mentioned his own difficulties in settling down in Labasa and finding friends. We had been here more than a year when Johnny asked if he could cook his meals in our kitchen. Arrangements at the 'lines' were unsatisfactory.

Overseas leave when first class travel was paid by 'the company' was taken for granted- and appreciated. Wives and children of officers could take advantage of this each year, the men every two years. Although Doug and I had parents to stay with, saving for overseas leave was the bane of these early years. Since we had one set of parents in New Zealand and the other in Sydney, we had to finance the additional travel. An old note book in my archives records our monthly cost of living while in Labasa. Freight charges on everything adding to the disadvantages of Labasa had prompted me to keep a record. Expenditure including domestic help varied from thirty- five pounds to fifty pounds and averaged out at about forty pounds sterling per month. Three pounds ten shillings per month was paid to Leylands in Suva for a meat order flown up from New Zealand, one pound ten shillings each month for a dhobi, six to seven pounds each month to the CSR store for milk, ice and meat, about one pound ten shillings to Kwong Tye at Nasea for bread, and Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp accounts totalled between twenty and thirty pounds per month. I notice that my week in Suva to visit a dentist had set us back twenty pounds.

Our next overseas leave came in November 1950. We left Laucala Bay for Auckland by Short Sunderland flying boat to take our little girls to meet their paternal grandparents in Wellington. From there we flew to Sydney to stay with my parents at Manly. Doug returned home by air while we waited a less costly passage per CSR molasses tanker, *Tambua*. This action packed voyage was to be our children's introduction to my great love - sea travel. We waited for some weeks with suitcases packed, ready to depart at a moments notice. Word came late one afternoon to be at Newcastle by noon next day. My father bundled us onto an early morning train. Here we were met and positively raced across to the wharf. *Tambua* had steam up and the children were entranced as we cast off. While she slid out of port we explored our accommodation and unpacked in a spacious cabin. The one other passenger was a young man, so once again Christine and I and with Philippa this time, were travelling in an all male sphere. We shared a table for the first 5pm evening meal with two young cadets. Alas we never again saw these promising seafarers. When we awakened next morning *Tambua* was behaving like a bucking bronco. Nevertheless we were soon up and dressed. When the

captain upon greeting us assumed breakfast would not be required our faces fell. Our cabins under the charthouse were forward of midships - and the engine room and dining saloon aft. In between stretched a long open railed uncovered deck now lashed and swept by angry waves and spray. Until guide ropes were in place and waterproofs found, the dining saloon was out of the question for us. Furthermore, the captain explained, stewards on a tanker only served meals in the dining saloon. He promised however, to return with a pocketful of dry biscuits and apples. Deck chairs were also out of the question so Fiji mats were laid out for us on the enclosed deck beside our cabin. The captain assured me we were only on the outskirts of the hurricane and although in for a dusting there would be no danger. Philippa not yet three, spent the daylight hours strapped into a harness on a lead and never left my side. At night the children protected on all sides with pillows shared a bunk. I must not forget to add, the table steward disregarded union rules and that first morning brought us a cooked breakfast - but nothing to drink. Henceforth our safe passage to the dining saloon was organised. We would assemble and an officer would pick up each child. When waves and heaving roll permitted, we clutched the guide rope and bounded along the deck. *Tambua* made port at Lautoka. While in Suva awaiting our flight to Labasa, a large cargo vessel, stripped of superstructure, life boats and paint limped into port.

The following wet season, when Philippa seemed never free from bronchitis, Doug organised a trip to Sydney for the children and me on *Rona,* the CSR's largest and oldest tanker. She sailed from Lautoka with a full complement of sixteen passengers on New Years Eve. Christine, disappointed to have to forgo a party at home for her seventh birthday was delighted and surprised to find the 3rd January celebrated on the high seas. Our 5pm mealtime included an iced birthday cake with candles, bread and butter with hundreds and thousands and sausage rolls. Mothers of other children travelling with us managed somehow to find amongst their luggage small gifts, such as a hair ribbon, handkerchief or sweets.

Labasa, to my surprise had a promising Anglican mission. An enthusiastic cleric, a European, accompanied by a young fashionably dressed wife, was principal at the non-European boarding school. His flock filled one half of the small church each Sunday. Our Anglican Padre ministering to a parish extending the length and breadth of Vanua Levu was a High Churchman of noble bearing and statue. From the hillside rectory on a still night the haunting strains of his flute would drift over the settlement. Twice yearly, with staff in hand, he would pass our house on foot and set out over the mountains to Savu Savu. No minister

of religion could conduct a service so movingly as the Reverend George Strickland.

Until our arrival a mild game of poker had been a popular diversion as evening entertainment in and around Labasa. On occasions I understand, even memsahibs revelled in an 'afternoon' game of poker. However recent shuffling of staff now brought to Labasa contract bridge devotees. A bridge evening might see three or four tables. But memsahibs however afternoon bridge had to be restricted to one table. Every crumb of cookie and cake baked that morning for the afternoon tea would be rapidly demolished by ravenous offspring who joined mothers after school. One four I played with overcame this problem by commencing play at 8am. After all, we had help in the house, the children were at school and a morning tea required only a scone or tea cake. We would be home again for lunch by noon.

The legendary days of high jinks at Easter or New Year when golfers and tennis teams from Viti Levu visited Labasa and vice versa were over. Comfortable inter-island vessels and the CSR's *Rani* that provided transport for these jaunts were no longer in commission and in cost and schedules, air travel was not feasible. New blood visiting privately, or staying at The Great Eastern, would be welcomed however with open arms. CSR inspectors and auditors dined out every night. When the Chief Justice and entourage arrived for Sessions there were drinks parties and dinners, and bridge evenings regularly arranged for the touring magistrate. When a team of Barnaban cricketers living on Rabi Island arrived for a test series they were regaled with yagona and feasting; and Nasea township was enfete during a Cook Island concert party's prolonged visit. Only on New Year's day or Easter Monday was there any opportunity for CSR families to escape from the confinement in Labasa and enjoy the magic of sea breeze and island beaches. The commodious heavy-duty company launch would take about forty of us for a day's outing along the coast.

Johnny had been at Labasa with us several years when he returned after one visit to Viti Levu to break the news that his family needed him. However, he assured us that he would not depart until suitable replacement could be found. I did not realise until then, that it had not been easy for him to make friends in Labasa. Local Indians, isolated on Vanua Levu for generations regarded Johnny as an outsider. In fact his only real friend here was a loco driver. When months passed and there appeared no possibility of finding a cook I decided to look for a Fiji girl, perhaps an ex-nurse like several neighbours employed or a dhai. Female

help could take care of housework and mind the children on occasions at night. I would undertake the cooking. With this in mind, Doug purchased a three-burner kerosene stove with oven and a 1940's version of today's microwave - a pressure cooker! During one of Johnny's temporary absences, the mill sirdar sent up to us a respectable looking dhai. Clad in persil white, the traditional raiment for a widow, she appeared just the answer to our needs. Much to our consternation upon Johnny's return a day or so later he insisted she be sent packing immediately. We just trusted his judgement for neither his English or Doug's Hindi was equal to the situation. By now while grateful for Johnny's concern we felt uncomfortable retaining his services knowing he wished to leave.

Finally, satisfactory arrangements were made with Bugello, an elderly retired houseboy and Johnny could happily depart. This man employed casually at the mill had frequently worked by the day for us in the past. He agreed now to come to us regularly five days a week from 8am until 5pm. Trained in the old school, Bugello bowed when addressed, touched his forelock when salaaming, was quick and unfailingly agreeable, indeed a treasure. His wife would call each day with a delicious vegetable curry and roti for his lunch. He took delight in setting half his meal aside for the children and me. This fostered at a tender age a family appreciation for a good curry.

Our life style now changed. Breakfast at 6:30am I served in the kitchen. Our evening meal could no longer be carried by tray up a flight of stairs from the kitchen and along a verandah the full length of the house to the dining room. The dreary kitchen had to be upgraded to an eat-in area. I bought a bolt of red and white checked gingham to make curtains for the two windows and to curtain a shelf hiding pots and pans under the sink. The kitchen table-cloth and napkins were also red gingham and the kitchen shelving sported gingham frills. The black iron and brick range was partly obscured by a large dried arrangement, freshened daily with red hibiscus blooms or croton leaves. Bugello asked if during school holidays I would permit his thirteen year old adopted daughter also come to lend a hand. He wished her to have domestic training but would not hear of wages. Minnie became one of the family and was persuaded to accept the occasional gift of a bath towel, dress material and toilet soaps.

Hindi festivals were upheld in Labasa. Clothing streaked with purple dye was evident for days after Holi celebrations. Dwili touched off a hundred lights flickering from saucers, on store-front verandahs all

along Nasea township. On one occasion I saw for the first time Indian firewalking. And the children and I also attended a Ram Lilla. This festival continued, a whole week. Bugello was so pleased to see us there amongst the crowd that night that he gave the 'babas' two shillings each to spend. Tents, thatched lean-tos and marquees covered about an acre of ground somewhere off a country road. The noise, garish art, bright lights and fairground tempo seemed alien to the Fiji I knew. There was a carousal, a ferris wheel; fervid drumming came from one direction and from another a cacophony of amplified Indian music. Stalls brightly lit, offered sweetmeats, hot peas, betelnut, lollies, and aromatic curry. Soft drinks came in all colours, as did glass bangles, and that particular style of paper fan and rattle I had not seen since childhood. Charcoal burners and rank tobacco teased our nostrils. The heart of the festival was a large open air stage where a week long saga unfolded day and night. A succession of players accompanied by chanting, sitar, drums and flute took the part of numerous animals and gods.

In the days leading up to Christmas 1952 we were reminder that the spectre of salt mines still haunted life in Labasa. Philippa began to limp, crying that her leg hurt. The government medico called to see her. He was new to Fiji, a young Englishman recently transferred from the Seychelles. An X-ray was arranged and bed advised until a few days later another X-ray was required. The doctor now found her temperature above normal and in the interval her leg had shortened. My own thermometer and tape measure did not substantiate these grave findings. However, TB was suspected and the X-rays went to Suva for a second opinion. After a delay of many days this reply was inconclusive. Doug was not due for overseas leave until early February but it seemed important that I get Philippa to a Sydney specialist immediately. Flights were booked for us and arrangements made for Doug to have meals at the bachelors quarters. Philippa nearly five years old was too heavy for me to carry so shoes were popped on and she set off delighted to be no longer regarded as an invalid. Christine, Philippa and I spent New Year's Eve at the Macambo on Nadi Airport. Per courtesy CSR's influential staff superintendent appointments were made to see Macquarie Street specialists a day or two later. The X-rays I brought with us showed normal condition for a four year old, and no shortening of her leg. However, further tests with another specialist did reveal a throat infection.

When we returned from overseas leave in early April 1953, Cousin Geoff, at this time manager at Labasa Mill, sent Retna to us. He, now a young married man, had grown up in Labasa where his family had a

zamin. As a lad he served as chokra with a local couple and when they were transferred to Viti Levu had accompanied them as cook. But now Retna had returned to Labasa and being well known to the 'burra-sahib', applied to him for housework. Cousin Geoff, concerned about my domestic difficulties, therefore directed him our way. Records show that we paid Retna eleven pounds a month which did however include our laundry. It was bliss to lie in bed once again in the morning and hear activity in the kitchen and to have dinner served in the dining room with the silver bell at hand. When I asked Bugello if Minnie would like to continue coming to us during school holidays he bowed deeply with regret. Under no circumstances could Minnie work in a bungalow where another Indian man was employed. However, any time Retna was away she could certainly return to us. Footnote: For sometime after we left Fiji Minnie wrote to us on behalf of Bugello and kept us supplied with curry powder. When told of her forthcoming marriage we sent off a wedding present from Sydney.

1953 was the year young Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited Suva. One of the festivities was to be a ball at the GPH. A representative selection of Fiji people from all walks of life were invited. Many of our friends, heads of a department, received invitations. Because of travel and accommodation expenses from Labasa I actually did not mind missing out. Position, however, was not the sole yardstick for an invitation. Bessie a friend since my days in Burns Philp office at Lautoka was living just down the road from us now - her husband Ted Hughes the 'company' electrician. Bessie called one day to show me their invitation to the Ball and to talk over what to wear for the occasion. She had decided regardless of cost to have her gown made by the local Indian tailor. We consulted pattern books and discussed material. I offered her a dress length of pink cotton lace and a paper pattern recently brought from Sydney which I thought would be ideal. The dress length she would not hear of taking, but she did borrow the paper pattern.

This year, when Philippa started school and I had full time domestic help and a kerosene refrigerator, I took up painting. Shapes and shadows I saw now through different eyes. My mother-in-law posted me Winsor and Newton water-colours with brush and paper. By November when flamboyant trees in flower begged for attention, I had tried my own portrait again and again, tackled a frangipani in bridal attire, the Three Sisters, the view from our house across to the mill and two scenes at Malau. On one occasion I took a taxi and paint box to at an Indian settlement, another day to a Fijian village. Unbelievably two landscapes sold. Later I found painting with oils more satisfactory.

As this year ended, cricket took precedence in Doug's life. He was invited and CSR granted him leave, to tour New Zealand during the following January/February as player manager of an all Fijian Cricket Team. Ratu Mara, later Sir Kamasesi, who served Fiji as Prime Minister, then Governor General, and is currently President was in the team. Palm trees were bowing and the 'glass' falling, when Doug bade us farewell. Fiji mats thrown up by the wind were already clinging to verandah walls. Vanua Levu now had a daily plane service but Doug's was the last local flight for a week as the blow intensified into hurricane force. Retna returned to his zamin early afternoon and I sat after dinner glued to the radio until the electricity failed. By torchlight I took down pictures and curtains from and packed away the ornaments and books in our exposed mosquito room. The children were bundled into my bed in an inner room while I kept one eye on the 'glass' until daylight. This fortunately had been but a side swipe from a hurricane centred elsewhere in the group. The cricket team we later learned had got away safely from Laucala Bay. For Doug this opportunity to revisit scenes of former triumphs and to meet old colleagues was particularly warming. Wherever the Fijian team played they received red carpet treatment, official receptions, evening entertainment and hospitality.

Doug had not been home long when word was received - D.L. Freeman to the Accounts Department, Head Office, Sydney, transfer to take place in early July, 1954.

# 8

# NI SA MOCE

In July 1981 Doug and I returned to Fiji. While Doug saw this as a golfing holiday my feelings were more profound. Our two daughters by now married and mothers had holidayed here to see for themselves the country that featured in family fable. I had been reluctant to return in case cherished memories and illusions be spoiled. The journey had shrunk to a few airborne hours jet propelled instead of five to seven exhilarating days gliding or wallowing across seventeen hundred miles of ocean. Nadi embraced us with traditional warmth, colgate smiles and surprisingly efficiency. The years of independence, education and tourism had brought prosperity and employment to women as well as men. We hoped to catch up with companions from the past but the one person we were most anxious to find was Johnny. It was embarrassing to realise that we did not even know his correct name.

To our surprise while still at Nadi airport an Indian came forward to greet Doug by name, recognising him, he said from Lautoka days over thirty years earlier. Doug followed up the exchange of greetings by asking if he also remembered Johnny. Yes he did. Tingles ran up my spine. 'Where does he live' Doug inquired. 'Mr Shiu Sahay is a very successful businessman. His name appears four times in the local telephone directory!'

The Macambo Hotel now held pride of place on Namaka plateau. Sabeto Valley's sapphire hills and quilted cane lands formed a backdrop. This site at one time occupied by an Indian boys' school was taken over during WWII, first by New Zealand military forces and later by US forces. We remembered the Macambo on Nadi airport with bare concrete floors, bedrooms partitioned off under raw beams supporting a galvanised-iron roof. By 1981 each bedroom suite at the Mocambo was accorded chiefly privilege - the steeply arched thatched roof a work of art. This grandeur somewhat offset when suspicious rustlings in overhead reeds suggested rodent or beetle intrusion.

Elated by our first impressions, we left next morning this fragrant garden setting of glossy crotons , frangipani and ginger to take the familiar tree lined road to Lautoka. We were prepared for shocks and changes. It was immediately apparent that all intrinsically picturesque bures had vanished from the landscape. A further surprise to see the present generation resigned to sandals or shoes and barefeet quite possibly demeaning. Another notable change - the graceful chains of cane trucks that had girdled the countryside were replaced now by ungainly motor transport, untidy monsters, that cluttered up and damaged roads.

When we consulted the telephone directory those words 'Furniture Factory' coupled with Johnny's name struck a chord. It was there we pulled up in Namoli township. Doug disappeared and returned a few minutes later with Johnny, absolutely beaming. The years may have slowed his step but success had not changed his demeanour or personality. We were shown into an air conditioned office. His beautiful, recently married second daughter, Anjila, was seated at a huge electric typing and accounting machine. Coffee was brought in and several of Johnny's seven brothers and their sons were summoned to meet us. Never, they confided later, had they seen Johnny so happy.

Looking back we were also aware when Johnny left Labasa that his capability in other fields could bring him a more rewarding and interesting future than continuing in household or even hotel service. I now recall the glowing reference that Doug gave Johnny refrained, at his request, from mentioning 'household service'. Johnny was ready for change and I think the seed of the future furniture factory was already sown. As our family grew Johnny had seen our need year by year for additional furniture. The standard of living for all sections of the community required more than the primitive packing case and jute sack. Indian people were no longer comfortable squatting on their haunches nor were Fijians content to sit cross-legged on mats.

I understand that upon Johnny's return to the family at Saru Creek some five miles from Lautoka his marriage took place. The bride a pretty girl from a nearby farm. Each morning he set off along a jungle track to reach the road and hitch a lift to work at Nadi airport. After a time, with money saved he departed for Christchurch, New Zealand with the intention of learning to use power tools. Evidently Doug had met Johnny briefly during a visit to Fiji in 1960. An old letter mentions "Johnny is employed as a carpenter for Fiji Builders. He has a six year old son and a daughter and harvested 200 tons of cane at Saru Creek the previous year".

Marriage eventually gave Johnny two fine sons and four lovely daughters.

In addition to a tour of the furniture factory we also visited that morning the two hardware stores in Namoli owned by Sahay Bros. Each store ship-shape, smartly painted and spotless - the merchandise, paint, building materials and tools methodically displayed. Johnny offered to lend us his spanking new car. For our own peace of mind there was no need to accept this kindness. However, as we already had a booking at a Lautoka hotel for two nights we could gladly accept his invitation to show us around the district in his car the next afternoon before going on to his house for an evening meal.

These arrangements made we set off as intended for Ba, my childhood stamping ground and where Doug as a young blade had played inter-district cricket and golf. Memories unfolded as the miles unwound. Drasa reminded Doug of cricket matches against Drasa Training Farm Fijians. Next came the once dreaded Gap. Today the climb and descent, a series of gently graded curves, brought us to Taurau. During the heyday of travel by 'the passenger', Taurau was the important halfway stop to replenish coal and water. And here surrounded by cane fields was evidence of an earlier attempt to grow sisal hemp and cotton. I recall wind tugging away at the bursting bolls. I had dreaded the occasions when Mr Theo Riaz joined 'the passenger' at Taurau. His lurching gait, piratical black eye-patch and hearty overtures sent me head first into my mortified mother's lap.

Familiar red hillsides clothed with lacy noko-nokos escorted the road through Veroka and thence to Nailaga, an important native township and mission stronghold. Sunday afternoon drives in the Overland to Fong Low's wayside store at Nailaga had happily replaced earlier Sunday outings across the river to Pillay's store. Dozens of tots in birthday suits would rush out to wave as we approached. In those days Fong Low specialised in silks imported from the East. In addition to serviceable Fuji silk, his crepe de chene, china silk and flimsy jap silk came in the most delicate shades. Passing Yalalevu and the turn off at Namasau Creek the road brought us to Ba River and the government bridge downstream from the rail bridge at Rarawai Mill. Without stopping today at 'Morris dukan' we pushed on, enticed by molasses-laden air, and the fervoured throb of a now gargantuan sugar mill. Even the chewed-up cane fibre littering the roadside, which would have incurred the wrath of long dead 'cane inspectors', filled me with nostalgia.

My memory holds preserved and intact every nook and cranny of our Rarawai house and garden. I had never even been back when fire brought tragedy to a family living there. The eldest little daughter was fatally burned playing with matches in the garden. Then again a few years later fire consumed the entire bungalow and all possessions. Subsequently 'company' tennis courts and a club house were relocated on the site. While Doug talked this day with the Indian caretaker I searched in vain for some relic of my beloved garden. Perhaps a wayward rain tree sapling survived or satiny foliage from one of the hundred red lily bulbs. However, there was not even a sucker from the once irrepressible pink bauhinia to be seen. Other nearby bungalows were still standing although these gardens where, over seventy years ago we built cubby houses, dressed up or played rounders were no longer recognisable. The road to the golf course was now a cosy suburban street. In my early childhood we entered this section of the road by a big white gate which guarded the guava-infested home estate cow paddock. Ten of us at a time would stop here to swing on the way to and from the old schoolhouse located on the ridge between the 'doctor's' bungalow and the 'cane inspector's'. A similar gate beside the fifth fairway led to up river estates: Koronuba, Vunisabaloa, Navisa and Nabutolo.

The golf clubhouse was open. While the well informed caretaker, who was possibly also the club professional or greenkeeper discussed golfing matters with Doug, several caddies, truants from school eagerly hung about. However, due to late arrival we paid our homage but passed up the intended nine holes in favour of a round at Lautoka that afternoon.

Our hotel in Namoli adjoined the sports ground. The fact that all this area had been a sea of cane fields in our day left us bewildered and disorientated. On the other hand, the familiarly modest standard of Lautoka's best circa 1981 accommodation restored our sanity. The cook, upon hearing we had once lived here came salaaming from the kitchen to greet us and reminiscence. Luncheon that offered nimbu pani, papeta, an obligatory curry, cold meats, boiled dalo, beetroot salad, banana custard or jelly and peaches, made me feel quite at home.

That afternoon at golf word spread by bush telegraph. As we moved from tee to green young Indians emerged from all directions claiming kinship with or descent from our one-time regular caddies, until we felt like the Pied Piper. Doug's long drives were applauded, the missed putts deplored. Our high spirited comrades were not backward in showing off their own mastery of the game. We waited at the club house to watch the sunset ritual, when the Yasawa Islands, opalescent on the

horizon arose from the sea to float airborne. Golfers we met urged us, in the interest of local atmosphere to dine that evening at the Northern Club. Doug had been a foundation member, and these men, current committee members, offered their names as reference.

Next morning we retraced footprints of our youth, to find sadly that the mind's eye and reality did not altogether agree. Naturally after thirty wet seasons, bamboo clumps and rain-trees had skyrocketed, but why had distances and buildings shrunk. Our first home where we embarked on our fifty year marriage, now crouched forlorn and tortoise-like beneath its red iron carapace, shutters down and verandahs barred. Yet I recall applying gallon after gallon of varnish to cover the floor space and stitching great widths of material to curtain innumerable windows. Further along the road, my girlhood home still commanded a wide view across to Bakana Island but the garden stripped of bure summer-house and hibiscus hedges had lost its charm.

Namoli had been greatly enhanced by a row of stately royal palms, planted, since our time, along the length of the main street between railway line and roadway. It was sad to see the words 'Burns Philp' now attached to a supermarket. For generations this legend had carried the spell of south sea venture and romance. Somehow it seemed quite appropriate that Jerry Adams onetime hospitable waterside 'hacienda' had become a Mens' Club. We received a friendly reception and were shown around. Every shop in Namoli was filled with bula shirts, sulus, mumus and duty free goods awaiting customers from cruise ships. Jamnadas's shelves and glass cabinets no longer displayed gold-threaded saris, hand-embroided linen, dainty sets of silk underwear or kimonos heavily embellished with dragon, stork and chysanthemun. Tables spilled out onto the verandah piled with cheap and gaudily printed 'table linen' and island souvenirs. All signs of Indian silversmiths and cobblers had vanished.

As arranged the afternoon tour of a Lautoka new to us, had been well thought out. Ashok Kumar, Johnny's eldest nephew, a chartered accountant drove. Prosperous new suburbs clothed hillsides up beyond the golf course. The grand new hospital a parting gesture from Britain also occupied a hilltop. Former cane fields beyond Drasa Avenue were now laid out as public parks and gardens. Doug had arranged a visit to the newly completed distillery. We were personally shown around by the manager Ratu Viliame Dreu-ni-Missimissi whom Doug had known previously in Sydney. Johnny was pleased to point out that Sahay Bros. supplied many materials used in construction of the building. A drive

around Natabua surprised and impressed us. The former government station that had included the goal and school now also featured health and welfare services and an old peoples' home. Four o'clock brought us to Johnny's house when his pretty smiling wife Dayawati had tea ready. The district known as Saru Creek was rural, although allotments, along the ridge ajoining the roadside were developing into a township. When our tour continued we first visited Ashok Kumar's home to meet his young wife, son and his mother. Ashok Kumar's father Ram Sahay - a farmer, and the brother next in age to Johnny, had sired six sons. Along the way we stopped to be shown some distance below a cluster of thatched bures nestling beside Saru Creek. This was the original farm where Johnny and his seven brothers were born and grew up. The road continued, twisting into rain-forest hinterland leading to the modern treatment plant for Lautoka's water supply. The manager, a high born Fijian, and obviously a friend of Johnny's showed us round the garden setting while explaining the use of chemicals in different tanks. Our final stop would be, at my request, Saweni Beach. Apart from war years when this was a US landing-craft base, Saweni provided the only worthwhile and convenient bathing beach between Lautoka and Cuvu (Natadola being inaccessible). How sad to find a place of such quintessential South Sea beauty in disarray.

On returning to Johnny's home we were shown round and gained a further insight into the extent of the Sahay family business activities. The compound enclosed by a high hurricane wire fence included the residence of brother Hari Sahay, father of six daughters and a son, a general store with a liquor licence and agency for, at this time, the Bank of New South Wales. The bulk liquor storage area was stacked to the ceiling. A long shed housed assorted heavy farm machinery such as bulldozer, tractor, forklift and lorries available for leasing. Johnny opened a bottle of Johnny Walker especially for the occasion and we met others of his family and clan. Their two elder married daughters were not present and the two younger girls we only glimpsed peeping shyly round a corner. However, Jainandra Kumar, their second son, was present. During this pleasant interlude seated in a breezeway at sundown with a drink and nibbles of spicy hot peas, the eldest son, Raj, returned. The handsome six-footer sported at this time the fashionable Afro hair-do. The Hari Sahay daughters, not as reserved as Johnny's family, came in from their adjoining home to meet us and gently ply me with questions. Following a meal of fragrant curries and then ice-cream we were entertained with a video of daughter Anjila's recent and elaborate Hindu wedding attended by several hundred guests.

We left Lautoka next morning for Cuvu surprised to find the road beyond Nadi Airport uncharacteristically silken. We sped across bridges with airborne grace - no longer the need to straddle the railway line. At the same time the highway scenery seemed bland, devoid of picturesque villages, and allowing few glimpses of coastline and reef. However my cradle Cuvu Bay, its people and 'The Fijian' resort lived up to expectations. Upon arrival a classic Fijian swept off with our keys, car and luggage while we were refreshed with a bilo of kava and signed in. Our room overlooked the beach where we swam each day before breakfast and again late afternoon. A brisk trade wind accompanied our heavenly nine holes of golf twice a day. Every evening we were entertained with traditional mekes and ceremonies. Restaurant menus satisfied our craving for island staples and delicacies. For old times sake we 'did' the Vunisalu stores and market. We agreed the Sunday church service at Cuvu village expressing for us the very essence of Fiji, was indeed the showpiece of our week.

We crossed the Sigatoka River by the same bridge built originally by my young father and passed through almost suburban Korotoga when the Queen's Road abruptly cast off its genteel grace. Admittedly the road passing through a village was sealed but elsewhere we encountered clouds of dust, corrugations and washaways. We leapt on and off rattling bridges, crept round hairpin bends and wound through miles of rain forest. Roadworks in Navua brought us mile upon mile of narrow sticky detour and only after Pacific Harbour could we again purr along. Walu Bay, the boat harbour new to us and a haven for overseas yachts, warranted a stop for refreshments at the Tradewinds Hotel before we met the surprisingly congested streets of Suva.

The Travelodge at this time Suva's top ranking hotel was built on land reclaimed from the harbour adjacent to the venerable Grand Pacific Hotel. While up to the minute comfort was provided at the Travelodge, the aura of spaciousness and colonial splendour the GPH had once generated was missing.

The Suva I had known was recognisable. Morris Hedstrom's venetian colonnade still enhanced Nabukalau Creek. Despite fumes and snarls from traffic which hemmed the Triangle, the landmark 'ivi' survived. Continuing reclamation along the harbour foreshore now deprived battalions of mud crabs of their livelihood. Suva was not yet a Honolulu but suburban sprawl claimed our old picnic spots, the Point, Nasinu and hillsides as far as Rewa. Our footsteps that afternoon led us to Cakobau Road, past the Domain (Thurston Gardens), to the museum

(new to me) and almost instinctively towards Des Voeux Road. The commodious villa known to us as 'Lomai Lagi' still occupied the corner block. Here all 'Dears' boarders from those pint size, still believing in fairies, to restless adolescents had been introduced within these walls to 'Dear's' values that would provide a yardstick for life ahead.

We reached Pacific Harbour in time for a morning round of golf on a course carved from rain forest. Years earlier Barry Philps had welcomed Doug and me when our taxi pulled in for lunch - the first guests at his embryo resort. Our vision of a golf cart providing a delicious zephyr during the round was unfulfilled. Recent unseasonal rain prohibited the use of golf carts. Caddies were unprocurable. We set out with a skeleton set of clubs in light bags slung over shoulder onto spongy fairways in sauna heat. Doug's tee shots driven a mile sank enbedded without trace. Within a few holes half a dozen new Topflights had been gobbled up. Visually the course lived up to expectation but after nine holes we gave up. A sandwich and several schooners later we found ourselves back on the main road with a flat tyre. Perspiring profusely Doug pulled luggage from the boot in search of tools when an Indian pedestrian stopped. A word or two exchanged in Hindi and our new acquaintance offered his services and only reluctantly was he persuaded to accept recompense for his innate kindness.

We had been advised not to miss the Cultural Centre. The reception area displayed a wealth of Fiji's plants, flowers and orchids. Stalls sold native artefacts and produce. Punts poled by guides carried groups of tourists along a series of canals, stopping here and there to view women demonstrating dexterous basket-weaving, and how fans and mats were plaited. Further along came wood carving, pottery, preparing kava and processing tapa cloth. An hour's entertainment took place when warriors arrived in war-canoes, staged a ferocious attack on a village, then enacted a victory meke. A witch doctor ceremonial followed then various club and spear mekes and finally a vaka ma lolo by village belles. Back at the resort by dusk, cruisers were tying up after a day big-game fishing. We watched international Zane Greys competing for an important trophy weigh in their catch.

On our day of departure Johnny and a number of his family gathered at Nadi Airport to bid us farewell. Only then did we have the opportunity to meet Ram Dulari a perceptive and gracious lady, mother of the eight Sahay brothers of Saru Creek.

We have since then kept in touch. When later that year Mr and Mrs Shiu Sahay with Lautoka friends undertook a tour of India, Doug and I were at Kingsford Smith airport to meet the flight. Upon their return, when Johnny and his wife remained a few weeks in Sydney we were able to show them round. Since then, phone calls and greeting cards have passed between Saru Creek and Balgowlah. The 'coups' in Fiji have caused the Sahays concern and led some of the family to emigrate. This now means that caring parents and grandparents, Johnny and Dayawati, visit at intervals relatives in New Zealand and Australia.

Our return to Viti Levu I found fully justified and revived those warm memories of Fiji, Fijians, the Fiji Indians and a lifestyle that had cushioned my childhood and Doug's and my youthful days together. Tourism continues to expand while established industries and new business ventures bring a comfortable living. Hopefully in time the country's benign environment and continuing educational enlightenment together with the fine qualities of the two races will help to resolve the difficulties - the needs and potential of one race supplementing the needs and potential of the other -

in Fiji, my Fiji.

With Bit and Kushla Sahai
and family at their home
Raiwaqa Suva 1981

1987 - MR SHIU SAHAY(JOHNNY) HIS WIFE DAIWATTI AND RELATIVES AT THE SARU CREEK RESIDENCE


View from our house Labasa

# MOMENTS TO REMEMBER

## 1997

A wake up call at 3:00am and away from 2 Jackson Street by 3:30am, 29 September 1997. Rob was already at Sydney Airport with Christine when Reg and Alex deposited Phillie and me. It was dark at 4:00am and shops still closed. Our flight eventually departed about 6:15am. Suddenly came breakfast, mixed grill, served 9:00am Fiji time. We arrived at noon. A stiff breeze greeted us at Nadi with the countryside very dry. It took hours to book in for our Savu Savu flight with stops at Rosie's Travel Agents, ANZ Bank and finally the Qantas Office for Phillie to try and arrange a later return to Sydney. They gave her little hope. Airborne again in a full plane with 25 passengers and much to our surprise landed at Nasouri Airport. Here after another long wait we boarded a 10 seater, flew over the Koro Sea to put down on a tiny grassy airstrip - Vuna Point. This scenic and unforseen diversion had brought us to legendary Taveuni – "the garden of Fiji" –a land of palm-clad hillsides and sparkling coastline fringed with graceful palms. In flight again we followed the south coast of Vanua Levu allowing a bird's eye view of inlets and islets, bays and mountain ranges. Green rivers gushed into a sea adorned with coral reefs, surf, lagoons and shallows in all shades of blue, green and grey. Half an hour brought us to our destination, breathtakingly beautiful Savu Savu Bay. Such scenic splendour a surprise and well kept secret. There followed a half hour wait beside the dusty main road for transport to the Cousteau Resort. The road took us down into historic Savu Savu township. The settlement was bigger than I had expected, but untidy, ugly - sprawling along the waterfront beside that enchanting bay studded with palm-fringed and fascinating islets, and small craft. A further 15 minute drive hugging the coast brought us to the Resort. Accommodation was bure style, each suite boasting a roof of chiefly rank, plus spacious,

ultra modern bathroom, a verandah and well-upholstered furniture. The ten-year-old lawns, garden and trees are now well established. Pathways leading to dining and reception areas encompass placid beach scenes or rainforest nooks filled with bird-nest ferns, palms and treeferns. We dined to haunting strains of steel guitars outside under the stars, each table lit by a familiar hurricane butti. Walu steaks and salad were followed by crepes served as in our Fiji childhood with lemon and sugar.

Tuesday 30 September. Savu Savu / Labasa.

After photos of bures and bay and a continental breakfast we set off at 9:30 for our "Eco Tour" to Labasa. This was organised before we left Sydney. It was a fine day, the scenery magical as the road followed the bay and up into the mountains that form a spine along the island. Our cameras recorded it all. Vanua Levu's mountainous rocky outcrops ferocious in contrast to the placid coastal tiri (mangroves) or hillside plantings of cassava and yagona and incongruous pine forest. Sad to say all native villages are now a jumble of hideous cottages of no standard architecture or design, and minus their traditional picturesque gardens. Mis-shaped outhouses detract from the well kept village church. We had passed the Hot Springs Hotel a hostelry synonymous with Savu Savu and the new Daka Resort and before taking the Labasa Road came local features, St Bede's College, a timber mill, the deep-water anchorage in the bay and a copra mill. Forest hugged the roadway on this wet side of Vanua Levu, clumps of palms and breadfruit trees, tree ferns, native canes and everything imaginable covered by vine. We saw a distant power station in the hills, passed-by the turn-off to the venerable Mt Kasi gold mines and came to Nababaki, a fine new village. Most noticeable and rewarding were the number of new schools and school children in bright uniforms. Later came Lomaloma village in the vicinity of a huge square-topped mountain that dominated the landscape during our flight yesterday. Here also were hillside pine plantations. A turnoff with

signpost "Nabawalu Road 92k" – "48.5k to Savu Savu" directed us northwards to "Waiqeli". Upon passing Seaqaqa a big new township with large Public Works Depot the road started to descend. Sugarcane fields appeared and well-painted farm-houses with pretty gardens. Lots of road-work every few miles. Near Tabia township came our first glimpse of the north coastline of Vanua Levu. We passed a timber-mill and pine-plantations and now on Waiqeli Road came a large poultry-farm and for miles goats and kids grazing roadside. We saw our first cane-loco and trucks laden with burnt cane. Another half-hour brought the turnoff to Labasa's Waiqeli Airport which saw so many of our own arrivals and departures. This area held memories for Philippa and Christine, glimpses of sector bungalows they had once visited as small children. Hindu and Moslem mosques and temples had sprung up and many schools. Then Tua Tua a modern housing-development and finally Nasea, no longer a scattering of sleepy stores.

Labasa had swelled to a prosperous township, with traffic bumper to bumper and a set of lights. Christine and Philippa were delighted to recognise places last seen in 1954. We paid a visit to the bathroom at the Takia Hotel then inched our way through the busy market-place filled with shoppers and bountiful produce.

The private road up Sugar-Company hill was familiar, the lower gradient lined with the mechanics' houses and bachelors' barracks. The mill below, three times the size it was in our day sported three enormous chimney-stacks at different heights. The completely chaotic mill-yard covered a huge area. Our old house was still there at the corner where two roads met. Cement steps led up to 'our' front garden. The old mango tree currently in fruit was showing its age, two of our fig trees had gone and the dwelling had been completely reclad. All verandahs were enclosed and barred and I noticed cement piles replaced the borer-riven timber-logs that supported the house in our day. The

flights of steps and entrance to the house were in a different position also, while the kitchen and bathroom block had been raised to the same level as rest of the house. Many trees my daughters fondly remembered had sadly disappeared. In a building along the road "our" library still functioned but an adjoining room which once held billiard tables is now a senior primary school classroom. Across the road an avenue of tall mature trees leads down a driveway to the school, now a complex of additional classrooms. It was lunchtime and Christine and Philippa would not miss this opportunity to meet the children and talk to the teaching staff - Fijian women and some Indian men, who were also interested to meet visiting "old girls". Visually, time had stood-still in the original classroom they once had known so well.

The view from our house down to the mill and the sapphire hills beyond we now found partly obscured by a deep fringe of tall nuka nukas that have been allowed to screen bungalows from that vista of heroic enterprise. We proceeded up the hill passing houses well remembered. "Chief Engineer" in same location, also the "Quarters", "Home Estate" bungalow, and "Field Superintendent" but alas not a soul in sight. We turned back at the Manager's citadel and headed down to the golf club. Labasa's sphinx-like Three Sisters appeared this day disappointingly benign and matronly whereas in my mind's eye they were threateningly cobalt and black. Down the road we came upon and passed the Fiji Sugar Corporation's mammoth administration building, crossed the river and looked in vain for Morris Hedstrom Ltd emporium and then turned off to pay our respects to Malau. The paradisal Malau we remembered is now a bulk sugar and woodchip terminal accompanying industrial buildings, enormous tanks, offices, and pipelines out along a new jetty. The old jetty remains but no longer would one want to swim here. We returned to downtown Labasa and lunch at Joe's. First-floor dining catered for the elete, Chinese décor and lengthy menu. Our driver accompanied us and wisely we all ordered chicken curry and rice – a good choice. Back

onto the shopping strip: Christine bought an exquisite sari, Philippa and I bought postcards and stamps and by then it was nearly 3:00pm. At our driver's insistence we saw the hospital - many new buildings now covering a huge hillside area. Then up another hill to a new suburb where the rich reside in gaudy opulence behind high fences but with lovely gardens, panoramic views and the full force of prevailing breezes. This glimpse of the country's prosperity was interesting, surprising, heart warming and our salaam to Labasa.

Where were the ominous black clouds of yore that accompanied every flight out of or into Labasa? Rain threatened today but the wipers were on for only for a few miles. Upon returning to Savu Savu we stopped at the new fish-farm enterprise and then to inspect the Hot Springs. In a grassy paddock below the hotel four or five steaming outlets bubble and trickle casually down a watercourse. The area a pedestrian hazard, uncared for by the local town council was hardly a tourist attraction. However, that evening someone's dinner wrapped in banana leaves was cooking. We were back at the Jean Michel Cousteau's Resort soon after 5:00pm. Dinner was vegetable curry with roti and Philippa and I added a creme brulee. We agreed the day had been memorable, scenic and exhaustingly nostalgic. To bed by 9:00pm.

Wednesday 1 October. Savu Savu.

I wrote a few postcards in bed this morning, hoping these would reach Sydney before our return. The girls knocked about 8:00am, they had been for a walk. We had breakfast at 8:30 am, paw-paw, pineapple, fruit juice, toast with paw-paw jam and coffee. Then we just sat about – the girls in and out of the pool all day. Phillie and I did an instructive medicinal walk with a marama who works here and knows all about native natural cures, leaves, bark, sap etc of plants growing round resort gardens. This resort is set up to be as environmentally perfect as possible. A talk with slides was

given by a marine biologist last night at 6:30pm - all about corals, shells, shell-fish, and reefs generally and asking tourists not to disturb anything on a reef – not even a dead shell as crabs live in discarded shells and coral and marine plants take a long time for any regrowth. A Mongolian feast was set out in the garden tonight. The menu included chicken soup, stir-fry vegetables, a selection of steak, chicken, pork, fish and sauces, and a sweet. It was a balmy evening with a soft breeze, no sandflies or mosquitoes, and tables lit by hurricane lamps around the pool.

Thursday 2 October. Lautoka.

We were up in good time for breakfast and ready for departure at 9:30 am. The resort manager (from USA), his wife and tiny daughter, and another couple joined us on a resort coach to the air field. Today's flight over the reefs and islets surrounding Savu Savu Bay was even more breathtaking. The pilot announced that due to a headwind we would fly low at 2000 feet (if I remember or heard correctly). Anyhow, we had a bird's eye view of the Koro Sea and the miraculous network of reefs and made landfall at Viti Levu Bay and Raki Raki. The landscape of Viti Levu with its higher but more gently contoured mountains was very different from Vanua Levu. No rain forest and few coconut palms were visible on this dry north west side of the island – canefields were clearly defined and settlement almost continuous. Roads or tracks cris-cross the countryside. The townships Raki Raki, Tavua, Vatukoula, the mines and rivers were laid out beneath us – Ba district was distinguishable by The Thumb outstanding above the knuckles of a range. Then came Lautoka a metropolis and seaport and huge, placid Nadi Bay, wide riverland covered by canefields up to the Sabeto hills. We were met by the Cousteau Resort hostess, passed on to Rosie's Travel and into a station wagon with our luggage. Well, I did not notice much change during the drive into Lautoka despite the 17 years I had been away, although a number of trees had been cut down along the roadside to allow for a dual carriageway. The picturesque native villages

and bure-style farmhouses have gone but the modern farmhouse is well built, gaily painted in a garden bright with shrubs and flowers. The huge road transports convey the cane neatly stacked. At Veisesei I find no longer a village but a budding metropolis and legendary Vuda Point now covered with resort buildings and ugly out-houses, has shed its mystique.

The Lautoka waterfront was unrecognisable with a mammoth woodchip industry cheek by jowl with sugar mill and all sorts of other installations. The mill-yard supports huge grey structures and a bulk-loading terminal. Namoli has trebled in all dimensions. Our hotel, The Waterfront, airy and comfortable is built on reclaimed land. A wide esplanade in front hopefully awaits lawns and gardens. We have spacious bedrooms with all mod cons, two easy chairs and a table etc. What more could we wish for than kokoda for lunch served on a verandah looking across the turquoise water to Bekana Island and a brisk tradewind to keep us cool. I got in touch with Johnny and he picked us up at 3:45pm with one of his brothers driving us to afternoon tea at his house at Saru. But first Johnny suggested that Philippa and Christine should see their first home, to take photos and then on to show them my parents' home. Although these houses remain in their original setting there have been changes. The verandahs are totally enclosed and windows and doors barred. No longer are roofs an obligatory red and the outside timber walls are now pale lemon. Flower gardens have disappeared and also hedges, shrubs and many, many trees. The trees that remain are enormous. We continued down the sugar-company road identifying different buildings long-remembered and the location of others now sadly missing. They drove us up and around Natabua hill now an important education centre as well as police headquarters and gaol. Then on towards Saru where a gigantic church is being built - dominating hideously the landscape and surrounding hills. The huge letters "21st Century" define it as one of the new religions Fijians have embraced. The Saru road remains as rocky as I remembered and the countryside dry and dusty. The district

supports a big school yet the roadside village does not appear to have developed any further than I remembered 17 years ago. We stopped at Johnny's old home to admire a supermarket stacked with everything imaginable. This has replaced the Sahay general store. Two Sahay daughters-in-law are employed here. A side road led down to Johnny's new house where they have resided two years. Johnny and Diawatti were proud of the front garden with zinnias in full bloom and the few marigolds so traditionally Hindu. Afternoon tea came accompanied by chocolate biscuits, pop-corn, spicy peas and peanuts after which Johnny suggested a walk in the garden. A fringe of trees and shrubs around the perimeter provided useful ingredients for family curries and chutneys etc and a tray 3' by 3' currently held the essential green mango sliced and drying in the sun. A Sahay daughter-in-law, Asha, pretty, plump, pale skinned had served our tea. She was gentle and smiling and seemed very capable as she firmly admonished young grandchildren. Christine and Philippa enjoyed her chatty company as much as she enjoyed theirs. Normally she was employed at the family supermarket. However, as she and her husband lived with Johnny and Diawatti today she dutifully acted as hostess. Asha has been married to Johnny's second son, Janin, for nine years. She told the girls they had had no other child following an eight month stillbirth many years ago. She had been to Brisbane twice to see doctors who could find no reasons for their problem. It was arranged that Johnny, Diawatti and Asha come back to our hotel for dinner this evening. At Asha's specially pressing invitation we would have dinner with them at Saru on the following night. It appeared that Asha aged 32 had never been in a hotel until tonight – so this was a special treat. She comes from Valley Road, Nadroga an area famous for vegetable gardens, fruit and food production. We phoned the hotel immediately to book and I think the Sahay family enjoyed the change of scene The girls showed Asha and Diawatti around the hotel – their room, pool etc. Christine and Philippa are really delightful travelling companions, love everything, no grizzles and very helpful to me. I am very proud of them and honoured to have their company for these two wonderful weeks.

Friday 3 October. Lautoka.

At 12:30am the trots began, 2:30, 4:30 6:00am x 2. All night long I boiled water, cooled it down in the fridge and quaffed. I broke this news to the girls at 7:00am. Johnny was to phone at 8:00am. He hoped to arrange that one of his nephews drive us to Ba that morning. Now my daughters decided no motoring this morning but instead an excursion to a local pharmacy for "dwai". I explained my problem to Johnny when he phoned that I hoped to be well again by 2:00pm. The hotel staff were very concerned and gave lots of advice and sent back from breakfast two slices of dry toast which during the morning I ate – and at lunchtime came a bowl of boiled rice. The girls did not feel entirely comfortable in the shopping area – lots of young Fijian men idling about and Asha had warned of bag snatching. Vitoga Parade, Naviti Street and a network of cross-streets are busy and wall-to-wall with shops, shoppers and traffic. Morris Hedstrom has moved to Namoli having abandoned its old site on the Nadi side of the waterfront. Industrial buildings and installations had sprung up everywhere. The Sahay Bros building-material and hardware enterprise was still located down beyond Namoli native village - this koro now surrounded by a network of streets. A marina nearby services craft awaiting repair and provides Sahay Bros with good trade. Johnny's original factory that Doug and I first visited years ago now contains timber and all types building materials along with of all types of machine tools. Johnny's air-conditioned office is still here and a huge hardware store is attached. Another Sahay Bros. store is also located nearby. This area we did not actually visit until our return from Ba. We had set off at 2:00pm in the four-wheel drive, a Sahay nephew driving. I was still able to recognise and point out to the girls long remembered points of interest. Little had changed since my visit 17 years ago although the hills did look bare and the roadside settlement now surprisingly populous and colourful. We crossed Ba River by a new bridge downstream from the old and could see in the distance the railway bridge by

the mill. The river flowed serenely, clear and free of flotsam. A turn hard-right brought us to the township. As in Labasa and Lautoka Morris Hedstrom's store, a huge concrete construction, had relocated but here not far from the former site. Ba metropolis busy, colourful and chaotic had become a little India. Up the hill and away from the river a hotchpotch of streets and buildings encompassed the Ba hotel. Sadly the present hostelry bears no resemblance to the family hotel I fondly remember. Fong Lee the silk merchant's name appears in big letters on two relatively highrise buildings in this area – one on the site of the original store. The flood-prone creek is still there and the township ends at the turn-off to the sugar-mill and company-settlement. The area where Newtown stood before lives were lost in the 1931 flood, has remained a wasteland. The road came suddenly to the now gigantic Rarawai mill. Roadside today was banked-up with laden road-transports the cane blackened by burning and certainly I did not see any tempting long stalks of purple bodilla. A little crowd, cane farmers and drivers, had gathered beside their trucks awaiting the weighbridge. Lines of rail-trucks also awaited the weighbridge. The sports ground was still there to the left –also the company-hall, library and baths. Sadly both the schoolhouse and church of youthful memory had disappeared in the 1931 flood. Across the road an ageing obelisk also remembered. A mental salaam as we passed the bachelors' quarters, a century-old cradle of youthful hope, desire and despair. The years had given the manager's house an aura of gracious antiquity. The Chief Engineer's bungalow was still there and so on up hill to the site where my old childhood home once stood. The company tennis courts and a club-house had moved here after the bungalow burned down many years ago. We sought out homes where I played as a child - the Snowsills', Snodgrass' (Millards) and then to where at one time the white gate indelibly featured giving entrance to the stock paddock – clothed with guava scrub. Company mechanic-housing replacing "Newtown", now lined this roadway of memories to the Ba golf course. And so goodbye to a 1997 Rarawai. Despite buildings well painted and structurally sound, the years and custodians

have not dealt kindly with the settlement. And beyond - even the trees, knolls and hills stoop, arthritic and weary.

Johnny's son, Janin, picked us up at 5:15pm and drove us to inspect Saweni Beach – still a very disappointing sight and almost devoid of coconut palms. In my youth a copra plantation occupied this area, palms fringing a lovely crescent of sandy beach. Yes, I forgot to mention during the early afternoon we were also driven up to see the big hospital at Lautoka – not on same site as the hospital where Christine and Philippa were born. Then we visited the original zamin where the Sahay family of eight sons and two daughters were born – a pretty setting, two creeks flowing through the property, the dwellings (thatched until 1981), now timber and iron roofed and in the distance ranges of blue hills and green canefields. Saru Creek occupies hinterland between Saweni and Lautoka. Dinner at Johnny's was not served until 8:30pm – this meant a long day for me but our spirit did not falter. I dared not touch the spicy nibbles offered with a cup of tea at 6:00pm which Johnny and Diawatti enjoyed. Then came cordial sipped warily. When beer appeared at 8:00pm the girls welcomed this nourishment and I changed my mind and sipped half a glass. Diawatti had been busy all day cooking a wonderful curry feast. The dinner table nicely set, with napkins, glasses, knives and forks was also laden – fish curry and chicken (the latter local-style complete with bones) dahl, roti, rice, tamarind chutney, pickled mango, spicy beans, spinach, egg plant and okra accompanying the curries. Christine and Philippa had a little more again and again of this and that. After we eased away from the dinner table a bowl with segments of fresh fruit, pears, apples and orange appeared on a coffee table before us. Janin, Johnny's son did not come in until 9:30pm for his dinner. He had been out supervising the burning of that portion of the family cane crop ready for cutting the next day. Harvesting is strictly timed, half of the crop cut on one date and half at a later date. About 20 neighbouring farms take part in this planned procedure –

gangs are employed for the actual cutting. We got back to the hotel about 10:30pm and the girls came to my room for a review of the evening. Philippa and Christine gave Asha and Diawatti each a gift hoping to show appreciation of the meal and hospitality.

Saturday 4 October. Lautoka / Sigatoka.

The girls escorted me to look around Namoli this morning – a lovely breeze helped us across the adjoining park. Morris Hedstrom has a huge general store, electrical goods of all sizes and description, also bicycles, prams, toys, books, frozen food, meat, groceries, drapery, everything except furniture. We looked, bought nothing and then crossed the street to Burns Philp. BP's store which I knew so well had alas been burned down. This new outlet was stacked with furniture, the lounge suites upholsted in hideous taste, which surely would never sell. We looked into the Desai Bookstore and we took several photos of Vitoga Parade and also the waterfront at the hotel looking towards Bekana which is surprisingly a very attractive island these days. We were called for by Rosie's transport at 12:00pm. Johnny phoned during the morning and we each spoke and thanked him and his very nice family for their kindness.

The drive through Nadi township showed us business and residential areas bright with gardens, tidy, clean, a kaleidoscope of fresh paint and grown beyond belief. The driver assured us that Nadi was the most prosperous area in the country. The town serves growing industries, the largest cane areas in the islands, tourism (hotels), and now a new gold mine (Loloma owned). We sped across a familiar landscape until Yako and then came a newer road crossing a plateau, the drive taking but 40 minutes from Nadi to Cuvu. A preview came just before the road descended to Cuvu Bay, - surf-fringed reefs and the Fijian Resort set amongst palms. A few miles on came the hillside bungalows where I was born. Another mile or so brought us to the Fijian Resort causeway.

Sparkling water, crystal clear turquoise and blue, lapped sandy beaches encircling Yanuca Island. We entered a paradisiacal garden; breadfruit, flamboyant and rain trees, shaded tropical undergrowth, dalo, cassava, passionfruit etc. The Fijian Shanghri-la Resort reception area, enlarged since our visit (Doug and mine) seventeen years ago now caters for tourists "en masse" mountains of baggage, staff and trolleys coming and going - a busy place. Our rooms, 407 and 408, luxurious and new, look out onto a lawn above the shore reef. The sea all shades of blue and turquoise, fringed with dazzling white breakers and surf booming. I had come home. Graceful palms, shrubs and lacy flamboyant trees cast shade across the lawn between our rooms and the water. The island is higher here so the beach and water-line lie below. A more perfect spot could not be found.. It is a long walk to food and reception but I have little else to do but enjoy the paths along the covered-way through fern and tropical garden to shops, cafes, craft centre, restaurants, pools and beach. After unpacking, Christine took us on a walking tour to show the points of interest ending at the famous Bilo Bar where we enjoyed a beer beside the beach - 4:00pm! Aussie schools were on vacation. Happy children were everywhere especially around the beach, pool and games areas. We changed for dinner but found most guests although casually attired were well mannered including little ones at Golden Cowrie restaurant where we dined after sipping a marguerita at the bar. Christine had lobster for dinner, I had pork, Philippa fish, accompanied by a bottle of Glass Mountain riesling. Christine feels quite at home as this is her seventh or eighth visit to the Fijian Resort – she knows so many of the staff and is greeted as a long-standing friend. It is Philippa's third visit. This place is completely different from Cousteau Resort or Lautoka's more homely Waterfront. Unfortunately, at the latter, Christine encountered two cockroaches. Whereas in my room I was up and down many times through the night but no sign of friendly livestock. The girls are enjoying the luxury of ordering meals, being waited upon, eating cooked breakfasts and sipping exotic drinks. There was Crab Racing at 9:30 –but Christine and Philippa decided not to attend and

I was ready for bed. All guests arrive as families or couples. Our only social involvement is with the friendly staff, "Bula" exchanged from all as we pass on a footpath or enter a restaurant.

Sunday 5 October. Cuvu.

Breakfast is fanned by the breeze off the reef, with a backdrop of turquoise seas and sky. Transport cramped into a four-wheel drive up to church at Cuvu Koro was sheer torture for me. I decided therefore we should walk back. This is a new church since my 1981 visit. It is a fine concrete structure, with a wide open verandah along one side. Large windows brought in the sea breeze, the coloured glass panes, mauve, green and yellow, lent an ecclesiastic touch. Seating is settee style with slats. The preacher's wife, took the first part of the service in Fijian tongue, long prayers, three hymns (no instrumental accompaniment) just the rich tones of male voices and high descant of female choir – the younger ladies dressed in white frocks and the older wore white pinafores. The male congregation as usual in Fiji very well turned out for church. We were warmly welcomed ("we" the Europeans attending) and accorded the privilege to photograph and look around or to visit the koro later. This traditionally is quite an honour. When I told their spokesperson that I was born at Cuvu he was surprised and delighted and I was then invited to say a few words. Normally I am nervous, in fact terrified of "speaking". But now I found myself upstanding, admitting my age and introducing my daughters, born also in Fiji and our fond thoughts of Fiji and memories of Cuvu in particular and how my father had put the rail through long ago and built the rail bridge across the Sigatoka River. Christine and Philippa said later this was well said and had brought tears to their eyes! Then the preacher took the pulpit. This week had been Women's Week and celebrated not only in the Methodist Church but also by the World Council of Churches –with special meetings, sermons and services held throughout the world. The theme of today's sermon in both Fijian and English tongue was "The Tree of Life" – seed planted on stony ground etc – roots, trunk, leaves,

flowers and fruit – applied to a family - spoken well and with great authority and clear diction - a good message. Then a final hymn. The service took one hour and a half. By then our bottoms were very numb and paralysed by slats. It was a welcome relief to stand for hymns and actually an inducement to give that short address. We received many handshakes and greetings and questions but only males came forward. They spoke good English. The spokesman, "mata-ni vanua", was named David. He had the air of a courtier, had travelled to many countries with the local netball team and was in charge of children's activities at The Fijian. The picturesque walk brought us back to the island and despite the breeze we were hot and ready for a beer before lunch. By the time I got back to my room it was 2:30pm. I rested and wrote up this diary. At 5:00pm the girls collected me and we went to the beach to listen to sonorous hymns and action songs by the children of Rukuruku Levu village. We ruminated over drinks, looking across the beautiful bay. This tourist mecca a far cry from the Cuvu Bay of my parents day.

The decor of our rooms is in reef colours, turquoise walls and floor-tiles, bed-spreads, chairs and cushions patterned in shades of pink, blue and sand. Writing this I recline on a turquoise banana lounge, my ground-floor porch overlooking the reef while a man, seated on a mower, clips the lawns. Tonight Christine had booked for a special "curry night" accompanied by Indian musicians and Fijian waiters in Punjabi dress! A great spread of dishes, plus exotic breads and chutneys and a huge table laden with Indian sweetmeats. These delicacies were eye-catching at the bazaar of yesteryears but never tasted as always over the trays hovered a cloud of flies. The assortment I sampled tonight were mysterious confections flavoured with almond, rosewater and possibly myrrh! We returned to my room about 10:00pm. Now as I write the mowing has stopped and I can hear the soft pounding of the surf on the shore reef.

Monday 6 October. Cuvu.

Once again perfect weather – breakfast in the restaurant nearest to our rooms. It is high tide and the surf booms on the reef, turquoise water sparkling beneath the balcony fringed by palms. The girls took me for a constitutional sightseeing walk to the farthest point beyond the golf course. We called first at the Pro shop which Doug and I haunted 17 years ago and where today Phillie bought a pair of joggers a brand in short supply in Canberra. So $100 later we skirted the island and golf fairways and finally reached the road and entrance from causeway to The Fijian. A strong breeze was blowing as we returned via the roadway dividing the golf course from the rain forest and the plant nursery. The girls departed for the beach while I found a banana lounge and read today's Fijian Times and write this up. I scavenged for lunch today, rolls and butter from snack shop (sandwiches had already sold out) but I did purchase there a huge, gorgeous Samoan basket – the size I've always wanted – but now I wonder how I'll get it into the plane! Wot a worry! I can't recall whether I recorded that to our great delight Phillie found she was able, after all, to return with us on Friday instead of Wednesday.

At 2:00pm my very kind and caring daughters returned from the beach to suggest a taxi to Sigatoka township to see the new bridge and shop at Vunasalu. We left at 3:00pm returning at 4:30pm – $25. We found the old bridge, 1913 vintage, which my father built is still used by the canetrains. The unspectacular new vehicular bridge has been named for a man, Melrose, who sponsored the Sigatoka's 7's team – winners that year of the worldwide rugby tournament. We took far too many photos, and did some shopping. I felt very much at home here, found the shopkeepers friendly, well-mannered and no one hastled us while offering cut prices!

Refreshment at the Bilo Bar was followed by Happy Hour at the Black Marlin Bar listening to the

local string band and caressing island songs. Dinner at the Golden Cowrie – I had a kokoda entrée and creme broulee - a drink before bed in my room and lots of reminiscing about frocks I had at one time made our teenaged daughters. It was rewarding to hear how well they remembered these frocks and the "occasions" recalled now with such pleasure.

Tuesday 7 October. Cuvu.

A big day for Philippa and me. We booked to travel by rail to Natadola Beach, leaving the hotel at 9:30am and boarding train just across causeway for 10:00am start (Fiji time). The loco was 1930s vintage but diesel-fuelled, with two carriages, one open the other enclosed. We set off slowly, bumpily and stopped frequently during the one and a half hour trip – a couple of tourists we later met had walked (along line?) in almost the same time. Being a single track we stopped to allow other traffic to pass. An attendant jumped off to adjust the points. The hauntingly scenic route hugged the coastline and reef, crossing rivers and tiri, entering deep stone cuttings with fern encrusted walls. At intervals a branch from wayside vegetation – breadfruit, tamarind or a palm frond covered in vines - brushed the carriage. The less said about the succession of sleepy koros the better. Only in name do they remain picturesque. Occasionally one single recently constructed bure held pride of place in company with a well painted timber church – but otherwise pathetic, grotesque housing and out-houses. Some "tetes" (vegetable gardens) remain but the traditional rara (area of open ground) has disappeared along with ornamental shrubs and crotons. Time and weather had not quite ravaged the trees, breadfruit, coconut, flamboyant nor the lovely coastal scene beyond. We passed cattle and horses, some with foals and calves but not in any number. At one stop a stick of sugarcane was cut for passengers and we each sampled a segment. We were fortunate today with only a handful of passengers - a family from South Africa, two couples from New Zealand and us. Travelling along the line my father so long ago as a young man had surveyed

and built took us through the heartland of our birth. The melodic sounding koro Rukuruku Levu on Cuvu Bay came first, later enchanting Naderi Bay and koro, then Sana Sana and Malo Malo - important milestones in my father's early days.

At Natadola surf pounded onto a huge crescent of fine white sand. A smartly flowing river discharged fresh water into the bay causing a break in the shore reef. Apart from the exuberant surf, a few pandanus palms and the Fijian almond-bearing tree the area was quite desolate. The only resort here is suitably designed - a Mexican style hacienda with walled garden. Bougainvillea gaily flowering at the time of our visit, surrounding a long, low building. Thoughtfully, the ladies and gents toilets provided space to change into swimsuits. The wide cool verandah had a bar one side, dining tables the other. Our package-deal for the day included a BBQ luncheon with salads and fruit and we also needed a beer. Philippa did not find the surf inviting- the waves appeared to dump quite viciously. I paddled but even then the waves were too rough. Six quiet nags awaited tourists and left droppings on the sand. This discouraged Philippa when she tried to sunbake. The tropical, midday sun and boisterous breeze tugging at hats and towels made the beach uncomfortable.

Finally back to Cuvu and ready by 6:00pm for Happy Hour at the Marlin Bar where tonight there was singing by the slender young ladies netball team from Rukuruku Levu. At 7:00pm we wandered across (miles) to a Lovo, this evening's special entertainment. The resort catered for a multitude with seating under the stars at long tables for about ten. Christine chose places (front stalls) for the Meke which would follow the feast. Large open-sided bures offered the different courses, the first had soups and entrees, the next fish, curries, poultry, pork and vegetables. The bure with desserts, held every delicacy imaginable; mousses, fruit, custards, cakes, many I had never seen before. Naturally 1997 food cooked in so-called "lovo" for tourists did not compare to

the delicious leaf-wrapped fish and root vegetables remembered in my youth.

On arrival at the feast fresh young coconuts were opened, Phillie and I clutched one each and found the "bu" delicious and refreshing. The first meke was a vaka malolo by women dressed in tapa motif fabric, the gracefully precise hand and arm movements significant to Fiji epics. A group of young men then hurled themselves into a ferocious and war-like club dance followed by a fan meke performed with military flourish. The meke party then broke into a congo line, tourists joining and the entertainment ended with all singing the haunting Isa Lei.

There were a number of young Japanese couples present. The evening had been cool and rather too breezy causing the lighting flares to bend alarmingly and candles on tables difficult to keep alight. For us, the evening had not ended–from the distant lovo area we returned to Marlin Bar and watched the Rukuruku Levu netball team inducing guests to dance under disco lights to "heavy metal". I could not call this thunderous racket music. However I was interested to watch modern dancing, suggestive of vigorous action exercises for the kindergarten. A few older couples took the floor to enjoy ballroom dancing, obviously couples with some expertise, maybe professional training and worth watching. Gradually the netball girls disappeared from the scene. That team was sponsored by the Fijian Resort hence the obligation to entertain guests on certain evenings. And so to bed.

Wednesday 8 October. Cuvu.

It is still exceptionally breezy and comfortably cool. I have not had the air conditioning on in my room at The Fijian since first arrival. There was little sunshine today – the cloud cover brought a hint of coming wet season. The girls spent the day on their banana lounges beachside while I

occupied my verandah – writing this up and reading today's Fiji Times which takes more than an hour. A really good newspaper and I even enjoy the ads for Fijian products – Koro Sea tuna, Rewa Long Life milk. Fiji I see exports ready-made garments to USA and also produces bed-linen. Coconut palm furniture is a flourishing local industry. The headland in front of our rooms is known as Sanctuary Point where many weddings take place –against a backdrop of sea, surf, reef and turquoise water, overhead the delicate tracery of flamboyant branches and in the foreground shrubs, bougainvilleas and croton. A resonant lali serves as church bell. The resort sets up an altar or table and arranges seating. For the wedding today at 2:00pm the bridal party arrived in the resort buggy. Champagne corks popped following kisses and signatures.

Tonight was a special evening for Dauvi Club members. Guests become a member after four or five visits to The Fijian and receive a broach or pin which must be worn at all times during their stay. Christine arranged for Philippa and me also to attend when a card came inviting Mr and Mrs Shute to drinks at General Manager's residence. As this is located at some distance from main resort area, guests are conveyed by resort buggies. Christine with other members was received by the manager at 6:00pm while Philippa and I and other specially invited guests arrived at 6:30pm for drinks and savouries on the terrace garden. The males members had gathered for a private get-together while ladies mingled until joined by their husbands/partners. We returned at 8:00pm to Kalevu restaurant and quaffed 'Glass Mountain' riesling as usual with dinner. A lovely evening.

The girls walked me to the northern end of Yanuca Island this morning after breakfast. I found the shell market I remembered no longer a sulu spread on the beach but a substantial thatched, bamboo hut and surprisingly also here the island now ended. The long northward stretching sand-strip, for decades attached to Yanuca has been severed by storms and now embraces the mainland. The rising

tidal flow this morning was racing into the lagoon through the channel beside the shell market. The sand bank where we used to swim and the nearby ivi tree along from Cuvu Rest Houses now lies a good half-mile distant along the beach. Todays picturesque lagoon is very different from the days of my youth when Rukuruku Levu vale lei leis, and the back premises of rail-side storekeepers houses were poised over that almost stagnant backwater.

Thursday 9 October. Cuvu.

Our last day. After breakfast Duncan, the waiter the Shute family knew so well, arranged for a group of three troubadours with ukuleles to farewell us with Isa lei – very touching. The girls took a bay trip on the Resort boat all around Yanuca Island while I walked up to the shell market to watch an advertised woodcarving demonstration. "Sobo sobo" they said regretfully – it was too windy – so I made for an alternative venue the craft shop. Ben the woodcarver when duly awakened from his moce gave me a personal demonstration, carving a cannibal fork of heroic proportion from a length of vesi. An hour of painstaking concentration saw an elaborate handle and one prong take shape by noon when the demonstration ended. But I had shared an hour's conversation with Ben a rugby player, aged 32 married and living five miles this side Korolevu. His art learned from his father.

I watched for the last time the sun sink into the western sea, the sky changing from orange to pink and blue and violet, remembering how many other Fiji sunsets had tempered my youth. (The photos I took, unfortunately failed.) I met the girls to visit Vosalagi Point and a Fijian storyteller entertained us with relevant legends. I have since found a photo of Doug taken at Vosalagi Point 17 years ago. Vosalagi means "voice from heaven" – and according to local legend this has always been regarded as a sacred place. We packed, called in for happy hour at the Marlin Bar and partook

of walu for our "last supper", and so to bed until the "wake up" call at 4:00am.

IN MEKE REGALIA

KARAWAI SCHOOL - 1925
back row- Molly Gerrard, Jean Snowsill
Peggy levick, Mavia Foster, Rosie Cuthbert
front row- Angela Jordon, Sibil Monkton,
Mary Campbell, Betty Cradick, Annette Levick.

AT LAUTOKA BAZAAR 1937

PAUL MILLAR'S LAUNCH ELLINGTON -1934

THE 'SOUTHERN CROSS'
ALBERT PARK, SUVA
1928

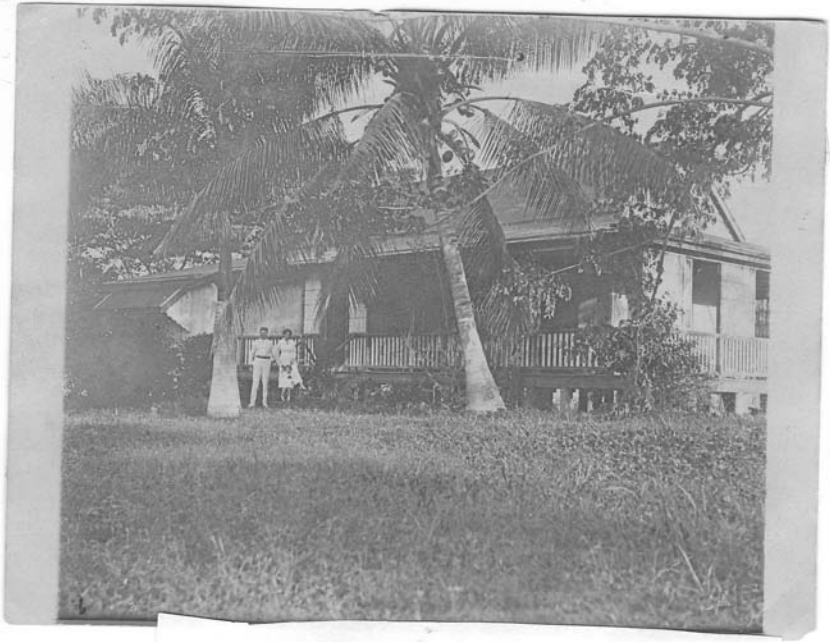
THE 'SOUTHERN CROSS'
ALBERT PARK, SUVA
1928

Our home Lautoka 1930 – 41

THE BOARDERS SUVA
1927

ZURABEE AND ME

TO KORONUBA BY PUMPER



Our Rarawai Home 1918-30

View of village Nasigatoka River, Fiji.

140698 J. W. Waters, Suva, Fiji. Copyright.

HARAWAI SCHOOL - 1925
back row- Molly Gerrard, Jean Snowsill
Peggy levick, Mavia Foster, Rosie Cuthbert
front row- Angela Jordon, Sibil Monkton,
Mary Campbell, Betty Gradick, Annette Levick

THE PASSENGER


Free Railway across Sigatoka River

Girls' Grammar Hostel – Suva
1939


Government Offices
Suva. 1926
48618

FIJI CRICKET TEAM FOR NEW ZEALAND TOUR 1954

standing l to r : MJ FENN,URAIA MOKU,PT RADDOCK (CAPTAIN),ERONI LOGANIMOCE, DL FREEMAN,ILIKENI BULA, RATU KKT MARA, NG ULUIVITI, ASAELI DRIU, NEIMANI KAVURU, M SIMMONS, MOSESE BOGISA

front row: HJ APTED, N TUIYAU, WW APTED

# From Fiji to Timaru: Grave site find ends 50-year search

Doug Sail

March 01, 2024, • 03:00am


Taimud Dean at the grave site of Lucy Wallace, his foster grandmother, at the Timaru Cemetery. Dean has spent 50 years searching for Wallace who spent most of her life in Fiji.
JOHN BISSET / THE TIMARU HERALD

- **Taimud Dean says he will be 73 in March and the grave site discovery is the best birthday present his foster grandmother could give him.**
- **The grave site discovery in Timaru is seen as providing some closure for a Fijian family.**
- **Taimud Dean says the Wallaces “were our real grandparents because we got brought up by them and played around them”.**

Tears flowed as a Fijian man's 50-year search for his foster grandmother ended at the Timaru Cemetery on Wednesday.

Taimud Dean has been searching since the 1970s for Lucy Wallace, who moved from Timaru to Fiji with her brother Dr Walter Laurence Wallace, in the early 1900s.

"I've been looking and looking and looking for so many years,“ the 72-year-old said as he wiped away tears.

"I found out about her about two weeks ago."

He said advancements in technology, and a cousin in New Zealand, had helped with the search which led him to Timaru where, thanks to some assistance from the

Timaru District Council, he discovered Lucy Wallace had died on January 4, 1974 and was buried in the town's main cemetery.

Dean said locating her would bring closure to his family and, he hoped, descendants of the Wallaces that he believed may still live in South Canterbury and his family would love to hear from.

"She never had any children, we are the only children. We grew up in front of them."

Dean, part of a family of seven boys and two girls, explained that neither Wallace had married and that his grandfather and the doctor were close friends.

"Because they didn't have any children, my grandfather said, so you can raise a daughter. This was my mother. They ended up with my mother."

Dean, who now lives in Sydney but makes several trips a year back "home" to Rakiraki on Viti Levu, said his search had been "a case of if I don't do this it will probably die away".

A time for reflection and prayer as Taimud Dean sits at the grave site of Lucy Wallace, his foster grandmother, at the Timaru Cemetery. Dean has spent 50 years searching for the grave of Wallace who spent most of her life in Fiji. DOUG SAIL / THE TIMARU HERALD

"I am 73 in March. This is the best birthday present that my grandma has given to me. It is very very important.

"They devoted all their lives to my mother. They were very kind-hearted people.

"I did not know she was buried here. I've been searching and searching all these years."

He remembers his foster grandmother as "a great cook".

"When she was baking, and we used to stay in the kitchen and bake with her and, she would say 'do this, do this', but when we were a bit naughty too and she would say 'don't come in my kitchen today'.

"We used to get beautiful Christmas presents from her as well."

He said there are "memories that I have in my heart all the time".

"A lot of fond memories. This is what brought me here. I've looked for her for 50 years.

"It is a big thing for my family ... it will be a good thing to share."

He has not been able to find out when Lucy Wallace returned to New Zealand, but knew it was after Dr Wallace died in 1968 and was buried in Fiji.

"I was excited to come (to Timaru) not knowing what I would find.

"This is closure for our family as well as we didn't know where she was and it is a big thing.

"When I came here and I saw the grave, that's when it really hit me ... and now I'm going away and I don't know when I'll be back, and I want to pass this on to another generation.


The headstone of Lucy Wallace, at Timaru Cemetery.
JOHN BISSET / THE TIMARU HERALD

"For us they were our real grandparents because we got brought up by them and played around them.

"I've got good memories, wonderful memories."

Dean said contacts with the Wallaces' relatives were lost when his mother died.

"I feel that my family owe them for my family's sake, they did so much for us.

"Every time I pray she's in my prayers."

- The Timaru Herald

https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/350195874/fiji-timaru-grave-site-find-ends-50-year-search