

Land of Wilderness and Mystery



Cover's picture: Sr Vivian SSpS and Sr Philip (Mary Jane) SSpS
off to New Guinea

Dear Reader,

The following pages are taken from the letters I wrote to my family and Religious Community from the time I left Techny to my return years later. Special thanks to my sister Ann for saving all those letters.

I wish to dedicate these pages to my Religious Community for allowing me to go to New Guinea: for their love and prayerful support and to the Most Rev. Leo Arkfeld, S.V.D. who has given fifty years of his life as Bishop of Wewak.

Last of all, to my loyal friends whose bond of friendship remains unbroken: Rev. Paschal Sweeney, C.P. (later first bishop of Vanimo); Fathers Gregory Kirby, C.P. and Anselm Turner C.P.; Marie Mole, Kath Sherry, Kathy Moore and Meg Duncan.

May you re-live these experiences with me and occasionally whisper a prayer for me and my beautiful Island in the South Pacific.

Sr. Vivian S.Sp.S.

1997

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Land of Wilderness and Mystery

In 1511 the first Europeans sighted the coast of what we now know as the Territory of New Guinea. Though explorations took place in the South Pacific as early as the seventeenth century, the wilderness of New Guinea made it one of the last countries in the world to be settled by Europeans. It was known as a hot, rainy land with high mountains and thick jungles. Mosquitoes and flies, carriers of deadly germs, were bred in the river deltas and swamp areas. Many white settlers, including our missionaries, died of malaria and other fevers. The people were fearful of the white men and often tried to kill them when they landed in the country.

The western half of New Guinea was under the care of the Dutch in 1928. Dutch New Guinea, as it was called, remained a Dutch colony until recently, when Sukarno proclaimed it to be part of Indonesia and renamed it "New Irian". After World War I, the League of Nations assigned certain countries to look after those which were unable to govern themselves. The northeastern part of New Guinea then became the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, under the care of Australia.

From 1942 to 1945 the Japanese invaded the Territory. After World War II, Australia agreed to administer New Guinea as a United Nations Trust Territory and in 1949 the two sections of Papua and New Guinea were amalgamated under one administration.

The total area of New Guinea is 342,915 square miles. Its length from northwest to southeast is 1,500 miles and its width from north to south is 430 miles. The mountains of New Guinea are part of the Himalayas, which begin the Southern Asia and run down through Malaya into the Pacific. Because of the mountains, travel into the interior is done either on foot or by plane. In the highland regions, temperatures often drop into the forties during the night and early morning hours. Along the coastal area, temperatures may drop to the seventies but not often below. Humidity averages between 75% and 85% during the dry season.

A frequent means of transportation and shipping is the Sepik River which is about 700 miles long. Because of "floating island" (floating masses of logs and vegetation which break away from the river banks) ships cannot travel during the night and must be guided with care during the day.

Contrary to our expectations, there are few dangerous animals in New Guinea. To be feared are the crocodiles and deadly snakes, including the "Tree Python" (which may be as much as 26 feet long), the "Taipan" (11 feet long) and the "Death Adder" (the Most dangerous). Other birds and animals either contribute to the diet of these people or to the beauty of nature.

The local people provide their own food by gardening, fishing and hunting. At the trade stores and shopping centers they can purchase other food and clothing as well as household articles.

Many of the men are employed by the government as teachers, male nurses, clerks, truck drivers and manual laborers on public enterprises. Many a man, however, does little of anything. Their life is so close to nature, which supplies them with necessities that they are happy just sitting, talking with their neighbor and chewing betel nut.

Homes and customs of the people vary with the district in which they live. Coastal people, for example, build their homes about two feet above ground. These homes usually consist of two rooms with a small porch, open and airy. In the interior lowland (swamp lands) the people build their homes on poles some ten feet high, because the rivers overflow and the villages stand three feet in the water. These homes are usually very large, but with only one room. Because of the nightly cold climate of the highlands, the homes are long and low, only about four feet, with a door so low that the house can be entered only by stooping or crawling in. A fire is kept burning during the night. In some mountain areas the homes may be round and higher.

Communication for a missionary or foreigner can be complicated by the fact that although the chief language in New Guinea is Melanesian Pidgin English, Motu is spoken in Papua and about seven hundred dialects throughout the entire Territory.

Education is one of the missionary activities of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters in New Guinea. The threefold aim of the educational program is: 1) the political, social and economic development of the people; 2) the blending of the best features of the

New Guinea culture with those of civilization that the people will regard themselves as one nation despite tribal differences; and 3) to encourage the acceptance of Christianity.

Despite the shortage of teachers and limited resources by 1963 over 220,000 children were attending primary schools conducted by the Department of Education and the Missions. The success of this work has led to the establishment of ninety secondary and technical schools. The Government and the missionaries work in close cooperation to provide both equipment and supplies.

One of the major issues of the Administration is the health program. Its primary aims are to develop the four fields of medicine: curative, preventive, education and research. By the end of 1963 there were 1,661 government hospitals and 433 Mission hospitals. The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters conduct six hospitals, including maternity hospitals, in the Territory.

The road ahead is long and difficult, but the work of the missionaries in the past, in cooperation with government officials, has proved successful. The land of wilderness and mystery is home to over two hundred and a half million people, and a missionary's dream.

It was to this land that I came in November of 1957.

The Journey

SAN FRANCISCO

Sat., Oct. 26, 1957

Greetings from sunny California! I am sitting on top of one of the seven hills of San Francisco. Spread before me is a magnificent view of the city with mountains and hills all around. On the train we had a double roomette, which was cozy and comfortable. No trains from the east go into the city itself, but all passengers get off in Oakland and take the ferry, San Leandro, across the San Francisco Bay. When we arrived Fr. Walter Maslanka was waiting for us and took us to the old St. Mary's church in Chinatown where he is stationed. After giving us Holy Communion and breakfast, he took us to St. Joseph's Hospital where we spent the remaining days. In the evening from my window, I saw myriads of lights on the opposite shore sparkle like a giant Christmas tree.

Sun., Oct. 27, 1957

We attended Holy Mass at six and another at eight in the hospital chapel. Forty Hours devotion began after this Mass. At 10:00 am. Sr. Philip and I ventured out to old St. Mary's Church where Father Walter served as sub deacon at the Solemn High Mass.

Mon., Oct. 28, 1957

The S. S. Orsova docked this morning and will leave San Francisco Pier #32 at twelve noon Tuesday.

At 10:15 Fr. Walter came to get us and showed us some of the sights of the city. The first place was across the Golden Gate Bridge. What a sight! Looking out west over the Pacific my heart bounced. That vast expanse of water was to be our home the next eighteen days. On the opposite side of the bridge we got out of the car and stood on top of Ft. Baker where we had a magnificent view of the city, Alcatraz, Angel Island to name a few. While we stood there, a navy cruiser passed under the bridge and out into the open sea. Later we drove to a spot nearer the water's edge. The dashing of the waves against the rocks made quite a deafening noise. On the way home, we passed through some of the wealthy districts.

The Divine Word Fathers have a Japanese mission in the city and we decided to try our luck in finding it. By riding several buses we finally found the place. Imagine my surprise when I learned that the priest was my former pastor in Vicksburg. I remember telling him once about my desire of going to New Guinea. He thought it a big joke and even promised me a horse if I should get the appointment. Now the joke was on him. "Well," he said. "I can't give you a horse, but I'll give you a harness if you need it." After a pleasant visit one of the Sisters drove us home, which I thought was very sweet of her.

Tues., Oct. 29, 1957

A beautiful bright sunny day! I'm going to stop now to make the last minute preparations. Also because my hand is a bit shaky and the butterflies too active. The boat leaves at 12:00 noon PST (3 pm CST), so until somewhere in mid-ocean GOODBYE and God love you all. Goodbye everybody! Goodbye America!

ABOARD THE SS ORSOVA

Oct. 29, 1957

Five months ago today, I received my appointment for New Guinea. Today we boarded the ship at 11:00 am and promptly at 12:00 noon, the Orsova began to move. I wanted to get a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge on our way out, but a heavy fog rolled in and made it impossible to see. Now, three hours later, and miles out in the open all we can see is sky and water. A flock of sea gulls kept following our boat, but suddenly we saw them no more. At intervals heavy fog enveloped the ship. The west wind was very strong and cold.

The SS Orsova is an English liner which makes its voyage starting in London then across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, Los Angeles, Vancouver, San Francisco, Hawaiian Islands, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia and back to London. The entire crew is English and practically all the passengers Australians with a handful of Irish, Scottish and Americans. We have five priests on board. This afternoon we had our first SOS drill. Each person had to take his own life belt and go to the deck assigned. The group numbers are marked on the decks. Ours are group 4 and deck B. We had to put the life belt around our neck and face the rail in two rows, women and children first and men behind. Then we were given instructions on what to do in case of an emergency.

At 7:30 pm we had had our dinner and afterwards we explored some of the ship and walked the deck until 9:00 pm. Then to bed. Still feeling fine. Clocks were moved back sixty minutes and we are five hours behind you.

Wed., Oct. 30, 1957

Woke up at five am. Dressed and went out on deck. The sun was just beginning to light up the west. I stood at the rail and thought about the greatness and majesty of God. This little bit of wood and steel is like a sliver in the greatness of these depths. At six and six-thirty we assisted at two Holy Masses. Breakfast at eight. The rest of

the morning was spent on deck walking, reading, writing and just relaxing. An announcement was just made: from San Francisco till noon today we had traveled 549 miles, temperature at sea this morning is 68 degrees. About five pm we passed a ship headed for the USA. It gives one a good feeling knowing that somebody else is nearby and it rather took the loneliness of the sea away.

This morning we received an invitation to a cocktail party at which all passengers are to meet the Captain and his officers. Somewhere on deck is a sign which reads: This deck is 293 feet long. If you walk this deck nine times it equals a mile. Each evening Sr. Philip and I walk the deck nine times. Time was moved back thirty minutes.

Thurs., Oct. 31, 1957

Both of us went out on deck at 5:30am. Beautiful clear morning and the weather is getting warmer each day. All the crew appeared dressed in white uniforms. From yesterday noon until noon today we made 568 miles. Temperature at sea is 72 degrees. I went to the bank this morning and changed some of my American money into Australian currency. That's one thing I'm going to have to learn: to use pence, shillings, and pounds. Tonight the time will be retarded another thirty minutes.

Fri., Nov. 1, 1957

Got up with the sunrise, dressed and went out on deck. We attended four Holy Masses today. Today for the first time we saw flying fish. They look small, are silver and have wings. They come up, skim over the water for quite a distance and then disappear beneath the surface. You could be deceived into believing they are birds. We are quite excited today because tomorrow morning we are to land in Honolulu for a day. That will be our first stop. All passengers received a pass or permit to leave the ship for the day. In the last twenty-four hours we have gained 570 miles, which makes a total of 1,687 miles.

We can already feel the tropical winds. This afternoon we had a lovely and refreshing shower. This will be the last letter under US postage. Greetings and lots of love to everyone. Thanks a million, Barbara and Jerry, for the telegram I found in my room. It was very sweet and thoughtful of you. Till we meet in Suva, Fiji Islands.

Sat., Nov. 2, 1957

I hope this letter finds you all in good health and enjoying your sea voyage with me. Greetings from paradise! This morning at five a beautiful sight awaited me. Against the faint light of dawn I had my first glimpse of the Hawaiian Islands. How welcome was the sight of the myriads of lights glimmering throughout the island of Oahu after looking at sky and water for five days. We were near the Island heading for the Honolulu Harbor. About 7 am, a group of girls came to meet us in a small tug boat, climbed aboard and gave us a half hour entertainment of Hawaiian Hula dances and songs which were accompanied by players with guitars and ukuleles. In the meantime other girls went among the passengers placing the customary leis around their necks. These were made of colorful fragrant flowers called plumeria blossoms.

The Hula dance is a lot more beautiful than we usually think it is. This dance accentuating sinuous movements of arms and body is one of the world's most expressive dances. Those who understand the dance "hear every movement just as if the dancer were speaking to us of joy, sadness, love and death." This entertainment gives the visitor a good picture of Hawaiian folklore. While all of this was going on we were gliding into the harbor. Alongside the ship a number of swimmers kept following us and shouting "Aloha". As we drew near the pier the Hawaiian Royal Band began to play and a choral group rendered a few selections. We received a wonderful welcome in a real American style. As soon as the boat stopped we took a hasty breakfast and then got off the boat about 8 am.

Since we knew no one there, the Fathers asked us to go along with them to their parish. Still wearing our leis we went to the church with the lovely name of "Star of the Seas". One of the Marist priests offered Mass but we couldn't receive Holy Communion since we had eaten breakfast. Just as we left the church a lady came up to us and introduced herself as Lavinia Spencer. She was born in Grand Rapids, had seen our Sisters in St. Louis and had lived in the Hawaiian Islands for twenty-two years. She immediately offered to take charge of the four of us for the rest of the day. So getting into her car we began the tour of the Island.

I wish I could find words to describe the beauty of this earthly paradise! Driving through the main street of the city one would think it was Chicago or any American city with its US mail boxes and the

familiar names, but looking towards the interior at the mountains, the palm trees and the Pacific Ocean on the opposite side one realizes one is on the Island.

We began by driving along the world-famous Waikiki Beach. Along the shore are beautiful hotels and places for tourists. At the southwest corner are two steep barren mountains – Diamond Head and Black Point. We kept driving along the southern coast along Mānālua Bay, five thousand years old, one of the youngest of the volcanic family in the world. There is a tunnel through it but unfortunately it was closed on Saturday.

All the while we kept climbing up into the higher altitude. At one point we parked our car, got out and looked down an awful precipice onto a rocky shore called the Blow Hole. It is an irregularly spouting hole in a reef near the edge of the sea. With about every third dashing wave the water comes through the hole sometimes shooting geysers up to heights over a hundred feet. Anything falling into the hole is never seen again!

Another interesting feature was Sacred Falls. Between Kahana and Hauula on the windward side of the mountain range are falls tumbling from high green cliffs into a deep pool. The Sacred Falls were supposed to be the home of the legendary pig-god Kamapūa whose wife, Pele, was the goddess of volcanoes.

Motoring upward along the eastern coast we reached Nuuanu Pali. This 1,200 foot high cliff overlooks the valley where in 1795 Kamehameha I routed the Oahuans and added the Island to his kingdom. High up on the left can be seen the “Up-side Down” Falls. This phenomenon is caused by the up draught of almost constant wind tunneled between the mountains. Somewhere up in this area we had luncheon at a delightful restaurant called Pali Palms.

Continuing our trip upward – ever upward - through winding roads along the edge of the mountains we reached Mt. Tantalus. From here we had excellent views of the valley and the ocean. The mountain rises 2,013 feet above sea level. Descending we came to the Punch Bowl, an extinct crater 500 feet high from which we had an excellent view of the city and the coast. We also could see our “Orsova” in the harbor. Nestled in the area is the National Memorial Cemetery for the Pacific Was Dead. Here is the grave of Ernie Pyle. Somewhere in the Nuuanu Pali the Marist Sisters have a convent and we stopped and visited with them for a while. Regretfully we did not

have time to visit Pearl Harbor. Driving back we saw some of the millionaire's mansions (Kaizer, Dole) but most of the houses are so hidden behind trees and foliage that they are not visible from the streets.

Our kind hostess took us to her home to show us what a typical average Hawaiian home looks like. Everywhere one looks one sees an abundance of tropical flowers – hibiscus, orchids, palmira blossoms and a great variety of others, the names of which I do not know. We reached home about 5 pm. The other traveling missionary priest offered Holy Mass at which we assisted and received Holy Communion. I remembered and prayed for all of you. After Mass the pastor took the two of us to the Notre Dame Sisters where we had supper and stayed with them until it was time to go – 9:00pm. All the Sisters sang the Hawaiian song “Aloha”. This is a song of friendship. Greetings and farewell, but not farewell forever, only “till we meet again”. After the song they gave each of us a lei which they had made from pure white palmira blossoms fresh from the garden.

At 9:15 the priests came for us and we headed back to the harbor. On the way we made a detour by driving up and around a mountain street called Wilhilmina Rise. From the highest point we had our last look of Honolulu all aglow in night lights. Finally at 10:45 pm we boarded the ship and at 11:00 the Hula dancers and musicians came on board and gave us another performance. Afterwards they remained on the pier and continued to sing and play until we pulled out. Sister Philip went to bed and I was left alone with my thoughts. I wouldn't have missed this departure for anything in the world. At precisely twelve midnight, the gangplank was removed, the anchor lifted and we began to move. It is at this time all the passengers throw their leis into the water. It is said that if your lei floats back and touches the shore, it is a sign you will return again. I couldn't see where mine went but I hoped it touched the shore somewhere. I must admit I shed a few tears as we left this beautiful island mostly because I was leaving American shores for the last time. You don't know how happy I was this morning when I saw the American flag hoisted aboard the ship. I stayed on and watched until the shore faded from sight, then I retired. At last my childhood dreams came true. I have been in the Hawaiian Islands! Aloha! We have now completed 2,098 miles from San Francisco to Hawaii.

Sun., Nov. 3, 1957

We had five Holy Masses this morning. Sr. Philip and I served all the Masses. It rained during the night but morning dawned bright and beautiful. Spent most of the day as usual – walking the deck, reading, talking with passengers, etc. Time retarded one hour. Miles gained in the past 24 hours was 249.

Mon., Nov. 4, 1957

Climate rather unsettled. During the evening we were in the midst of a tropical monsoon. The strong wind whipped across the waters causing the sea spray to deluge the ship so that it was impossible to stay on deck without getting a salty bath. However, the ship was not tossed about in the least. Time retarded last night 30 minutes. We gained 550 miles in the past twenty-four hours.

Tues., Nov. 5

At 6:15 pm the “Orsova” crossed the equator in longitude 170 25’ w and entered the southern hemisphere. Time retarded last night 30 minutes. Miles gained 552. Temperature at sea 84 degrees. Formerly they must have held initiations aboard when crossing the equator, but due to accidents these were discontinued. Instead each passenger was given a beautiful and ornate certificate from King Neptune exonerating everyone from these initiations. The picture and wording are the most clever thing I’ve ever seen. I may be able to send it home someday. King Neptune, as you may know, is the legendary king of the seas.

Wed., Nov. 6, 1957

This morning we are hundreds and hundreds of miles directly east of New Guinea. Instead of going there, however, we have to make a long detour via the Fiji Islands, New Zealand and Australia. But I don’t mind it in the least. Why not enjoy life while I have it? During the night at approximately 3:30 am we passed the Canton Islands. In the last 24 hours we gained 546 miles. Temperature was 84 degrees.

Thurs., Nov. 7, 1957

Early this morning our ship passed or crossed the International Date Line. The time is advanced 24 hours which means that we skip Friday altogether. It will be strange going to bed on Thursday and waking up on Saturday! No November 8, 1957 for me! Shortly after 1:00 this morning we passed the Unea Island. Such events are always told beforehand. The way everyone watched and looked through field glasses you would think we never saw land before. About 3:00 pm we will pass the Alofi Island in the de Hoorne Islands. Tomorrow at about 7:30 am the "Orsova" is expected to berth alongside Kings Wharf in Suva. Suva is the capital and chief seaport of the Fiji Islands. This will be the second of our stops. Since the mail must be in the post office by 6:00 pm, I will leave you here and continue my travelogue when we return from our excursion. Our pictures will be developed while we are in port so if they turn out okay you will be seeing us in the next letter. I hope I am not boring you with all this gossip, but I want you to know how much I am enjoying myself. Whoever says that nuns are kept locked behind high walls has another thought coming! I say, "Join the convent and see the world". Miles gained in the last 24 hours were 530. Sea temperature today is 81 degrees. We have now completed 2, 736 miles from Honolulu to Suva making a total of 4,834 from San Francisco. We are one day and eight hours from Flint. Greetings and lots of love to everyone in the dear USA.

I haven't told you anything about this big liner "Orsova", so I'll take the time and do it now. I'll start with the service first. Sr. Philip and I share a cabin on E deck #453. She sleeps in the upper berth and I have the lower one. Each morning from 9:30 to 11:00 we must vacate the cabin so that the steward can clean it. He even makes the beds. At 11:00 the cabins are inspected. In the evening, while we are at dinner (7:00 pm) he prepares the cabin for the night, i.e. opens the beds, brings fresh ice water, places fresh fruit (apples and oranges) on the dresser and has everything in tip-top shape. Our cabin is air-conditioned. Once we fall asleep we are dead to the world. The swaying of the boat rocks us to sleep, but the swaying is so gentle and slow that at times one can hardly feel the movement. I never dreamed it would be such smooth sailing.

The dining salon is a very large room, but because of the great number of passengers (over 1000) there are two sittings at each meal. Our sittings are: breakfast 8:00; luncheon 12:00; dinner 7:00. Each

waiter is in charge of only three tables. We picked up enough courage one day to ask our waiter his name. Sr. Philip was disappointed that he should be called 'Fred Robinson'. Being a typical English character, she thought it didn't fit him. We enjoy him very much and I believe he does us also. When we come to table he is right there, places the chair for us, spreads our napkin and serves us in a most delightful manner. When we are nearly finished he always stands behind my chair ready to move it out the moment I begin to rise. I can see he feels terrible when sometimes we slip in or out without him noticing it. We are the only nuns on board so I guess he feels privileged in having to care for us. He certainly is a pleasant fellow to speak to.

A liner of this type is like a hotel. It has a print shop where all menus, announcements, invitations, etc. are printed daily. There is a laundry and ironing room, hairdressers and barbers, general store, post office, bank, swimming pool, tennis and other game courts, children's play rooms, and just about anything else you would need. Each morning a printed announcement is placed in all the cabins telling the day's events. At 10:00 am these are announced through the loud speaker and at 12 noon the temperature, number of miles and other geographical news are told by the captain. Games, parties, dances of all sorts are held every day. There isn't a dull moment ever. The girl that I helped dress up for the masquerade party won the prize for the funniest character. In the large lounge we have our daily Holy Masses. What amuses me is the fact that the man who prepares the altars is a good Protestant, but a very likeable man just the same. He seems to like the job of sacristan. I have the privilege of washing and ironing the altar linens. A job voluntarily accepted because I couldn't look at the soiled linens.

We haven't explored the bridge of the ship yet, that's one thing I still must do. We can go there only with a guide and arrangements must be made beforehand at the office. We have a good-sized library and it is here that I am writing this. Down on the E Deck lobby is a large bulletin board on which are placed news and announcements of all kinds. Each morning wireless news of the world is placed there. Whenever we pass an island the Captain broadcasts some interesting information about its people and commerce.

This ship is a 29,000-ton liner painted tan and white. There are on board more than a thousand passengers not counting the crew of over six hundred. Sr. Philip and I are traveling intermediate first class

which is second best on board. A senior lieutenant (an Irish Catholic) told us that we are the only nuns he ever saw traveling first class. The only difference between first and intermediate first class is that the latter has two berths in one cabin instead of just one. I guess I had best put an end to this rambling otherwise I'd go on forever. Please excuse all the spelling mistakes and my very prosaic style of writing. I write whatever comes first into my mind.

Sat., Nov. 9, 1957

Went out on deck this morning at 5:00 am and saw that we have already passed by a number of small islands belonging to the large group called the Fiji Islands. The largest of these is Suva. At about 7:30 the liner began to drift into the harbor helped by tugboats. On the wharf a great number of Fijians were gathered and the Fijian band welcomed us with many selections. The players, all men, were dressed in red shirts and white skirts. Fijians wear skirts. At eight we stepped ashore and the two Fathers, Sr. Philip and I were met by a Chinese priest who took us over to the cathedral where we had Holy Mass after which the Sisters invited us for breakfast. We were then driven out along the beach road to the far end of the island where the Marist Sisters have their mission. Their convent is up on a hill overlooking the Pacific with graceful coconut trees, palm, banana, papaya, breadfruit and many other trees to add to its beauty. After a delightful lunch and visit with the Sisters we drove back to the city. Getting out in town we went to see the market place. These market places present a most animated scene. The stalls are heaped with a rich variety of tropical fruits and vegetables and in the fish section new and interesting species are seen. Many kinds of baskets, necklaces of local shells and colored seeds are also much in evidence. The happy Fijians and other Island races mingling with Chinese and Indians (of India) of various castes and creeds present a colorful scene. The people squat on the ground and have their goods spread out before them on the ground. We passed before a group of women selling beautifully made grass skirts. They were from India and I noticed all of them wearing medals about their neck. The moment they saw us they said, "We are Catholics, too" and each one in turn kissed our hand very reverently. They really do not kiss the hand but rub their nose lightly over the hand just where you would ordinarily kiss it. It is called "lulu". Then one woman gave each of us a gay grass skirt and begged us to take it as a gift. Of course, we couldn't

refuse but I never felt so embarrassed as walking down those streets with a grass skirt in my hand. Finally I managed to stuff both of our skirts into my handbag. The city is quite a busy place with its many shops, stores and commercial center. Each group of people wears its peculiar dress – the Indians their saris and Togo – the Fijians in their skirts – the Europeans in western style. These are a very friendly people. At about 4:30 pm we returned to the ship where a great number of people gathered to watch us depart. The band was there again to play the lovely song of farewell “Isa Lei” which expresses the hope that you had happy hours in Fiji and that one day you will return again to its green shores. Promptly at 5:00 pm the gangplank was removed and again we drifted out into the open Pacific. At 8:00 the same evening we passed another island. Tuesday morning we will dock at Auckland, New Zealand. I am mailing this in Auckland and our next meeting will be in Sydney. Until then, goodbye and best wishes.

Sun., Nov. 10, 1957

After leaving beautiful Suva we settled down for a further two-day voyage. Sunday, Nov. 10th was a beautiful day. Near noon we passed another boat sailing at a great distance from us. Must have been a freighter. From Suva we traveled 358 miles. Sea temperature is 74 degrees.

Mon., Nov. 11, 1957

In midmorning the temperature dropped to 66 degrees. I saw a whole school of porpoises this morning. Shortly before noon we received a radiogram from a certain Mr. Webber in New Zealand telling us he and his wife would meet us at the pier at 10:00 am. Getting a message like that from someone you do not know is quite a surprise. Later we learned that they had a daughter in our order in Australia and that they had just returned from a visit there. Knowing that we might just pass through Auckland the Sisters had asked them to meet us at the pier. We gained 469 miles in the last 24 hours.

Tues., Nov. 12, 1957

By 8 am we finally anchored at port in Auckland, New Zealand. The day was cold and foggy with periodical showers. At 10:00 Mr. And Mrs. Webber came on deck to meet us. They had the day all planned for us. Our first visit was to the Archbishop. They had told

him of our coming and had awaited our arrival. When we left after a delightful visit we drove about the city seeing interesting places; had hunch at the Webbers, then drove some twenty five miles through the hilly country-side to the dairy and sheep farm belonging to their daughter and son-in-law. At four pm we returned to the pier only to find that the boat would not leave at five but at seven. Having a bit more time, we went back to visit a nun at one of the hospitals. At 6:30, we were again at the dock, but the boat still was not ready. Finally at 9:15, we lifted anchor and began our final voyage across the Tasman Sea. Time was retarded sixty minutes.

Thurs., Nov. 14, 1957

The Tasman Sea was very rough all day. From Auckland to 12:00 noon we made 345 miles.

About eleven this morning, we passed the “Oronsay”, a sister ship of our “Orsova”. The ships gave a gun salute when they passed each other. Everything was being made ready for landing in Sydney. We are expected to enter the harbor at five-tomorrow morning.

New Guinea
Land of Wilderness
and Mystery

NOVEMBER 15, 1957



We arrived safely in Sydney and finally alit after a long inspection by immigration officers. A friendly officer saw us through customs. We were met by a member of the Grail, a religious order for laywomen. She took us to their convent. That evening we flew to Brisbane where we stayed with our Sisters until we left for New Guinea.

On Tuesday night at 11:45, we boarded the “Quantas” in Brisbane and began our longest but not the last trip by plane. This was spacious and very comfortable and the flight was smooth and pleasant. At 6:00 we were served breakfast. I spent most of my waking hours looking out of the window at the clouds beneath and the Coral Sea far below. At 7:00, we circled a few times and landed in Port Moresby. We were off the plane for one hour and then began our second lap of the journey.

This time I could see high mountains, deep valleys, waterfalls and dense vegetation. This flight lasted a little more than an hour and I was quite happy when we finally landed in Lae.

Little did I know that two years later I would be stationed here. Since we have a school here in Lae, I expected to see one of the Sisters, but they were in school teaching at the time. An airport worker called the rectory to say that we had arrived, and within fifteen minutes Father Anselm, C.P. came in his jeep and drove us up the hill to the convent.

Our stay was very brief for we had to be at the airport at 11:00 for our final flight to Madang. We boarded a smaller “Quantas” and within an hour we came in sight of this lovely coastal town. Waiting at the airport were our Sister Nazaria, Sister Richardine and Father Saiko, SVD. By the time we arrived in Alexishafen all the Sisters and girls were gathered outside to greet us.

Our first act was a visit to the chapel where we sang the Magnificat for a safe journey. After a light lunch, we freshened up and put on our light habits and veils. Our navy blue garb is not worn in the tropics. The rest of the day was spent touring the mission compound.

Our bedrooms are on the second floor and since the convent is only a stone’s throw from the sea, I have a wonderful view of the water and the surrounding islands from my window. At night I can hear the water splashing against the coast.

We are staying in Alexishafen until after the January retreat. Then we will go to Wewak, another coastal town in the northern part of New Guinea. Eventually, I will go to Timbunke, a village on the Sepik River.

The next morning, Sister Philip and I accompanied two Sisters to Maiwara where they each teach at the boarding school for boys. We drove in an old jeep. Every time we passed any people on the road, they called what sounded like “Ho, sista.” We passed acres and acres of coconut plantations, all belonging to the mission. Since coffee and cocoa trees need shade they are planted between coconut or casuarinas trees.

Coconuts, pineapples, bananas, papaya, grapefruit and scores of other tropical fruits and vegetables grow in abundance. The mission has cows and chickens which provide us with fresh milk, butter, eggs and meat. We are blessed with a refrigerator, so we can enjoy ice water and sometimes even ice cream.

There is a dear old Sister here who had been in New Guinea for forty-seven years. She is crippled with arthritis, but every day she

holds a catechism class with a group of little children who sit at her feet and listen to her words of wisdom. She told me that not for one moment of her many years in New Guinea did she ever wish to go back to her home in Germany. Life here seems to agree with everyone, for all our Sisters live to a grand old age.

The other day, Sister Nazaria took the two of us to see the whole mission compound including the sawmill, carpenter shops, boy's school and boathouse. We saw the large boats and small pinnaces. There are a number of men and women from the States, Europe and Australia who are working as lay-missionaries as nurses, teachers or manual laborers.

ALEXISHAFEN - PNG

Jan. 1958

My first Christmas in New Guinea! Words cannot express what my inner feelings were but I can say that I was filled with spiritual happiness. The absence of all artificial and commercial trappings makes Christmas become what it really ought to be. Of course, there was no sleep for me Christmas Eve before the midnight Mass and at eleven we were (supposed to have been awakened) by Brother Venantius' band playing carols in front of our convent. Then the choir sang Silent Night in Pidgin English and English. By eleven thirty we were on our way to the cathedral. The church was filled to capacity and as many people stood on the outside. Everything was so quiet and solemn. Our beloved Bishop celebrated the Pontifical High Mass. The congregation sang a simple Gregorian Mass, but the choir, consisting of small boys and girls, older man and women, sang the hymns. As a last hymn at the end of Mass, the entire congregation sang the Silent Night, which was accompanied by the organ, and band which stood just outside the church.

The strains of that singing will remain in my memory for a long time. The children have the sweetest, clearest voices when properly trained. It was only during the midnight Mass that I finally caught the Christmas spirit. Up until then, I could not bring myself to realize that the feast was approaching, it being so hot and right in the middle of summer.



One afternoon Sister Nazaria asked me if I would like to go to the Island Karkar. Oh, yes! When do we go? The Sister nurse goes there once a month to look after the sick, and was to accompany her this time. At 2:15 in the morning, Sister tiptoed to my room and told me it was time to go. In a few minutes we were on our way to the dock. By 3:00, we were on the boat PETRUS II and ready to start. One priest and five other men (the crew) came along. They are excellent seamen. Since the trip would take a little more than three hours, we stretched out on the deck and rocked and rolled with the waves. By six, we were nearing the island, beautiful and picturesque.



The mountains here are exceptionally high and the island boasts of having the second largest volcanic crater in the world. This volcano last erupted centuries ago, but it still puffs a little. About six-thirty we anchored quite a distance from the shore, then two of the men swam to shore, got a canoe and rowed each of us to land. The water was crystal clear and the beautiful coral underneath looked like a flower garden. I also saw starfish that were royal blue in color. After admiring all this, we walked over to the mission church where we assisted at two holy Masses.

During the Mass, I heard someone beat the village drum to let the population know that the Sisters had come. The drumbeat has a regular code which reminded me of the Morse Code with its long and short beats. After Mass we had breakfast which the cook had prepared.

By now the yard was full of mothers with their babies and all those who were sick or needed medications. Then we began our work. I weighed each baby while Sister did the other work. This took the entire morning and by noon we were finished. After dinner we were ready to start for home. At one o'clock our boat began to plough the sea.

By two-thirty, we reached Mogul, another mission on the coast of the mainland. The mission has a large coconut plantation. The men had to load the boat with copra which had to be delivered to Madang from where it was shipped to Australia. Copra is dried coconut which is used in making oil, soap and other products. Since the loading would take about three hours, we decided to go over to the sister's convent. The walk took us through the plantation which was about a mile distance.

It is a beautiful spot. The convent, church, school and hospital stand high up on a hill overlooking the sea. We took the Sisters by surprise and I was glad to get the chance to see this mission. Once I get to Wewak, I will not be coming back here, not even for retreat as we have our own there.

After a pleasant visit, we trekked back to the boat, which was ready to leave in a short while. On leaving Mugil, the men tied fish lines to the rear of the boat and it did not take long before they caught three huge king fish that I'm sure weighed from thirty to forty pounds each. They do not use worms or roaches for bait, but the inner bark of the banana tree which unrolls and looks like parchment. This sheet is tied around the hook.



We left Mugil at five-thirty. Occasionally, we saw groups of children along the shore shouting and waving to us calling, "God bless you, Sister." The water was very quiet that evening and the sunset was beautiful as it slowly disappeared behind the mountains. I did not want to miss anything, so I stood in the front of the boat holding on to the mast. By eight we were safely at home.

One Sunday while we were having our dinner, Father Saido came over for our nurse, Sister Richardine, saying that a woman in Rempi was having pregnancy problems. Sister Nazaria asked me if I would like to go along.

Rempi is quite a few miles drive through the bush. We found the woman up but having much pain. Sister told her to get ready and we would take her back to our hospital. In the meantime we drove up the hill to see the little church, school and cemetery. This church was one of the few buildings left standing after the war, although the roof still has a few shell holes.

Rempi is an entirely Catholic village and it has a bunch of nice kids. All of them tagged along after us and it does not take long to make friends with these youngsters. My greatest problem at the moment is that I cannot speak enough Pidgin English, although I can get along. We drove around for about an hour and Father showed us more villages, then back again to pick up the woman. The following week the premature twins were born but both died. Sister baptized both in time.

Going around to these different places one can see evidence of the war, such as crashed planes or parts of planes, trucks and jeeps. Occasionally the people still find live shells when digging in the gardens, and many are seriously injured.

WEWAK - PNG

Feb. 3, 1958

On January 20th, Sister Philip and I left for Wewak. We got up at 2:15 am, walked over to the cathedral for Mass, which was by candlelight. Immediately after, we went to the bridge where our “Fatima Star”, a 60-ton trawler, was waiting to take us to sea. We set out at 4:00 am. The sea was calm for about two hours, then King Neptune got angry. For over an hour we rocked and rolled, dipped, rode over and under waves. When a huge wave came up, poor little Fatima almost stopped, braced herself, jumped over then dipped her nose under, drenching the passengers with a briny shower. Later the sea quieted down and for the rest of the day it was quiet and calm. By 4 pm, we reached Bogia, one of the SVD missions. The next morning by seven we were back at sea.

Ten miles across the sea from Bogia is the famous Manam Island, whose volcano had been active for months. Before Christmas, the government ordered all the people (about 4000) to evacuate. We have two missions on that island. Heavy black smoke, lava, and rock comes pouring out of its mouth and all vegetation has been burned by hot ashes. No one remembers when this volcano was so active.

The sea was calm that morning, so I went to the front deck to write my diary. After a few hours, however, the sky got cloudy and the sea again became rough. The Brother Captain told me to pray for rain or sunshine, otherwise we would return to Bogia. I prayed and we got the sun. This calmed the sea.

After 1:30 pm, we entered the mouth of the Sepik River, the largest and longest river in New Guinea. It is like our Mississippi River “muddy”. The trip on the Sepik was calm and peaceful and the sunset was magnificent. After dark I kept seeing lights flashing on and off on both sides of the river somewhere behind the trees. These reminded me of neon lights in our big cities. I thought these lights were fires in the villages along the river, but later I found out that there were no villages, no fires and no neon lights, but the lights of millions of fireflies on the trees along the river. After seven and one

half hours on the Sepik, we finally arrived in Marienberg, our first mission along the river. Since the boat was not going directly to Wewak, we had to get off here and wait for further transportation.

The Sisters did not know we had come. Imagine their surprise to see two tired and weary nuns at the door asking for a night's lodging at that hour of the night. The next morning we had a tour of the mission compound which is situated up on a hill overlooking the Sepik. Down by the river, the Fathers run a sawmill which supplies lumber for all the missions.



It had been planned that Bishop Arkfeld would come for us in his little plane, but just when, we did not know. In the afternoon I walked down a hill to have a look at an automatic pump that forces water from a clear stream up to the buildings. I hardly got there when I heard a plane. It was the Bishop. We hurried up the hill, but by the time we reached the airstrip, the plane had already landed. After greeting the Bishop, we got our bags and in a few minutes we were in the air. Half an hour later, at 5 pm to be exact, we handed in Wewak. That day was exactly eight weeks since we arrived in New Guinea.

On Sunday, January 26th, our kind bishop had planned a surprise for us. He arranged for an excursion to Kairiru Island. At 9:30 am, we boarded our largest boat, the "Marova". There were some fifty persons aboard, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers, our lay people and the crew. Since the boat could not come close to shore, we had to row in

on one of the lifeboats. In two hours we reached the beautiful island. Mountains occupy the entire center and have a narrow coastline. The only flat piece is a short airstrip. There are some 2,000 people living here. It has only one mission station plus a seminary and the buildings on the compound. They tell me that there is a crater lake somewhere with fresh, clear water. The afternoon went by all too quickly and by 4:30 we were back on the boat ready to start for home. At 6:30 we reached Wewak harbor. It was dark by the time I jumped into the last boat.

On February 5th, our Bishop Arkfeld flew me to my new mission in Timbunke, a place far up the Sepik River, right in the heart of New Guinea's swampland. Besides this village, the priests have charge of forty other villages which they visit regularly to offer Holy Mass and administer the Sacraments. Our only means of transportation is by boat and all the missions are miles apart, something in the nature of a day's journey.

Here in Timbunke, we have a boarding school for boys and at present there are forty-three of them from many different villages. All of these boys started school late; therefore their ages range from ten to fifteen years even though they are only in the third standard. I teach the third standard, the highest grade in our school. All subjects are taught in English except religion, which I teach in Pidgin. All the little girls and boys of Timbunke also attend and are a lovable bunch.



When I first arrived in Timbunke, I knew only a few words in Pidgin. Since I had to teach only in English, I decided to have the boys teach me Pidgin without them knowing it. One day I told them the story of the “Three Little Pigs” in English. They were all ears. I purposely told them this story because the pig is a prized possession in this country and they would never forget it. The next day I had a boy recite the whole story in Pidgin. This time I was all ears. I listened very carefully how he constructed the sentences and what words he used. They understood the story very well (in English) and so did I (in Pidgin).

Each one of our classrooms is a separate building and these as well as all our buildings are situated along the Sepik River. Our only contact with life outside our place is the weekly visits by our Bishop when he flies in by plane or an occasional mission and/or government boat. That’s how our mail reaches us. The people have a very keen sense of hearing. They can hear the whirr of the plane or motorboat when it is still far out of sight and can even tell what plane or boat it is. Not so long ago both our priests and the Bishop went to one of our far away missions and took both of our boats, the “Joseph” and the “Korona”. One evening the boys came running, “Sister, My Lord is coming” (here the Bishop is addressed as “my Lord”).

I asked if it was the “Joseph” or the “Korona”. They replied, “Krai bilong Korona”, which means, “That’s the sound of the Korona”. After an hour I still couldn’t hear or see anything, but gradually, I saw a speck of light at a great distance and it proved to be the “Korona”.

February 1959

Our new school year began in early February. Until now we had only a school for boys, but this year we opened one for girls. There are girls from a number of villages from the Sepik area. Only eleven are boarders and the others are from this village which they attend as day pupils. How did this all happen? Last year whenever I had the opportunity, I mentioned a boarding school for girls to our Bishop and spoke in defense of girl’s education. It must have worked because by August His Lordship decided to begin one right here in Timbunke for the girls of the Sepik District. I was placed in charge of the school. I am now mothering a group of little girls. We don’t know the exact age of the children, but they must be between ten and thirteen, though most are small for their age. All of them are

beginners at school, are intelligent and doing excellently. None of them knew a word of English when they came and our object is to teach them only in English because the government wants English to be the national language. They love school. If they misbehave, I simply have to say “no school” and that does the trick.

We have a building of our own which has the laundry, sewing room, dining room and recreation room downstairs, and upstairs is a large dormitory with my own little room at one end. Normally the people sleep on mats on the floor, but we have small wooden cots for the girls. I warned them of falling out of bed, but they only laughed at me. During the night, I heard several thumps as one or the other found herself on the floor.

Among the people of New Guinea, there is a strong belief in the so-called Cargo Cult. They believe that by decorating their cemeteries their ancestors will send them whatever they want, especially food. All they have to do is sit and wait for it. Even our good Catholics cannot get this idea out of their heads. Just at present, our Timbunke people got possessed with this notion and spread the word up and down the Sepik.



TIMBUNKE - PNG

April 19, 1959

One month ago my dear father passed away. I received a telegram on Monday morning, March 23rd shortly after eight. Father Heinnemans wasn't home and it was up to me to work the wireless. After Brother Celestine made his usual announcements from Wewak the bishop came on the air and read the telegram to me. Since dad's death was sudden, this news came as a shock to me. I was happy, though, that I myself received the message from the Bishop. He promised his prayers and so did all the other Fathers in all our mission stations who were listening in. On Monday, April the 6th, the feast of the Annunciation, we had a High Mass for dad. Later, the Superior asked my little girls what feast it was. One answered, "The feast of Sister Vivian's papa".

The letter from home telling of his death almost didn't get here. A man from Australia, who is spending quite a lot of time in New Guinea exploring and collecting curios, was coming up the river in a double motor canoe. He was bringing with him all the mailbags for the stations along the river. One of the canoes sprang a leak, filled with water and the whole thing capsized. Someone who saw the accident swam out and saved the man. He lost everything he had, but only managed to save the mailbag. He arrived at our station late afternoon with a bag soaked mail. The letter telling me of dad's death was badly soaked but I managed to read it. Very seldom do we get our mail by boat. Generally, the Bishop brings it by air, and this one time when I was so anxiously waiting to hear of dad's death, this would have to happen.

This is the wet season now and all the villages along the Sepik Valley are standing waist-deep in water so that the people must use canoes to go anywhere. It is surprising that in spite of the high water, the Sunday Mass attendance has not suffered a bit. The village of Timbunke is a ten-minute walk from the mission and since we are on a slightly higher elevation, we are spared the flood. Last Sunday, Father took two of us sisters to the village in his motorboat to see

what the place looks like. All the houses in the villages along the Sepik River are built on ten-foot poles. Some that are not built too strong collapse. We circled the village a few times then continued our trip several miles up the creek which flows through some thick jungle and eventually leads to the mountains new Wewak.



Eels appear in the river every second year in the month of May. At the moment the river is filled with them. The people catch these with spears when the eel sticks its head above water. Eels come in different sizes. Some are small and thin and others two or more feet long and fat, but all of them resemble snakes.

Our mission buildings are situated along the banks of the Sepik, first the church, then the convent and finally all the classrooms. Each grade has its own little building. Sitting at my desk, I can see the river and watch canoes and boats sailing up and down, people fishing or government boats probably taking the district officer to some village. Behind the buildings is the airstrip, just a long grassy lane, and behind that nothing but miles and miles of flat swampland and tall grass called Kunai. After being surrounded by mountains in Alexishafen and Wewak, I found it disappointing to see nothing but flatland. Without realizing it, the first thing I said when I stepped off the plane upon my arrival was, "Where are the mountains?" On very clear days we can see mountains which are some seventy or eighty miles away.

Air-conditioning is not necessary here. The upper half of all the walls, inner and outer, of our convent is open with only screen to protect us from little stinging beasties. The eaves of the house are rather extended which keep the rain from coming in. Two nights ago we had a very severe storm come in from the southwest, *taleo*, they call it. Wind, rain, thunder, and lightning all at one time. My room is on the southwest corner of the house and guess who got drenched? I woke up to find rain pouring down on my bed. Where did it come from? I remembered – there was a hole in the ceiling just above my bed. Before I had a chance to pull it aside, it got soaked. I quickly threw my raincoat over the bed and got out as rain came pouring in from all sides by then. This was about midnight. Four more hours of sleep. Now where to go? I remembered our deck chair. It was wet, too, but I dried it the best I could, pulled it into the dining room, curled up in it and slept peacefully until the morning.

Let me begin today by telling you a snake story. I had always heard that New Guinea has its quota of snakes, but if it does, I have not come face to face with one so far. Of course there is always a “first time”. One morning just after breakfast, my little girls went down to the river to wash their clothes. This was the dry season and the water was down to about fifteen feet below ground level. I was standing up on the bank watching them when suddenly one of the girls shouted, “Sister, a snake!” I looked and saw a large snake coming across the water quite close to where the girls were. We could not see the entire length of it since it was partially immersed. The girls grabbed their soap and clothes and scrambled up to my side. We looked down to see where the creature had gone. There it was hanging across a small tree that grew from the side of the bank. We still could not see how large it was, but the part that hung over the limb was the size of my arm. I called to the boys to bring their spears and bush knives (*machetes*). One boy speared the snake, while the others worked on its head. When the snake was dead they pulled it out of the river. It proved to be about fifteen feet long – a python. Later, the young men of the village pulled it away and had a delicious steak dinner. God and our Guardian Angels were watching over us that day.

I had been here a year before I saw my first full-grown crocodile. One Sunday after Mass, all the people hurried towards the river. Being curious, I followed them. During the night a man from the village caught a crocodile on a huge hook that he set up the day before. This was a full-grown creature about fifteen feet long with an

enormous mouth and ferocious looking teeth. The building used by boarders contains the laundry, sewing room, dining room and recreation room downstairs and upstairs is a large dormitory with my little room at one end. One day I was up in my room while they were outside just below my window. The girls wanted to go swimming and called, "Sister". I answered, but they did not hear me. Calling again they said, "Sister, mama". This time they heard when I answered. Then I overheard one girl say to the others, "When we call her Sister she does not answer, but when we say Sister mama, then she answers".

They are just as sweet and naughty as little girls can be, but I love them. They like to go swimming, to play baseball, and do all the things that growing girls like to do. Father gave us a large canoe and sometimes on Sunday afternoons we ride up and down the river or during the wet season take a trip through the village.

Last January, while Sister Fabiana, our nurse, went for retreat, I looked after the hospital for her. One evening, Father Janssen brought a tiny infant and foster parents from his distant village. The little girl, weighing only two pounds and ten ounces, fitted very nicely in the palm of my hand. It is a New Guinea custom that when a child is sick the mothers rub mud all over its head and body and tie strings around the wrists, ankles, and neck. Because of a death in the family, the same thing happens. The first thing I did was to give the baby a bath and get rid of the strings.

Here is the baby's story. The mother, an older woman, was not at all well. The priest ordered her husband to take her to Timbunke where she would be properly cared for and warned that if he refused, he would report the case to the authorities. The man refused. Twin girls were born and the mother died. Both girls were immediately adopted. The priest wanted both children to come to the hospital but one party refused. Our little Theresa, in spite of her littleness was healthy and gained weight steadily. She stayed with us three months and when she reached five pounds, she was allowed to go home.

Not all babies are that fortunate. Only a few weeks ago in Tambanum, a mother and her twins died, unfortunately without baptism because the people were unwilling to call the catechist. In another, twins were born recently. The boy was strong and healthy but the girl was weak and scrawny so they simply threw her out. A woman from another village found the baby and brought her to our

hospital for treatment. She adopted the child and is very happy with the little girl.

Last year in a village down the river, I found newborn twins. The girl was normal and healthy, but the boy was sickly and very emaciated. Instead of bringing him to the hospital, the woman only held him in her arms and did nothing about it. Most likely she was just waiting for him to die. A young woman volunteered to adopt him. We did not only tell but ordered her to bring him to our hospital here in Timbunke. She did, and after a few months of treatment and care he improved greatly and was able to go home.

Some time ago a woman from our neighboring village brought her emaciated infant to the hospital. Actually she was nearly a year old and was unable even to sit up. During her stay, the mother took sick and died. We kept the baby at the hospital and the grandmother came to be with her. Then one day, without Sister's knowledge, she took the baby and went home. We worried about the little girl because we knew she would have no milk or nourishing food. Two weeks before Christmas, I went to visit the village and was anxious to see Justina (Tina). After making inquiries, a man took me to the house. There I found the grandmother sitting on the ground with the baby in her lap. Tina was a picture of misery and starvation. All the while she was at home she had nothing but sago water for food. Sago water is much like our potato water, starchy. Her eyes were sunken in, the cheekbones stood out, had sores behind her ears and pus was flowing from them. Her face and arms were covered with "grille", an ugly skin disease common in New Guinea, mostly caused from lack of certain vitamins. That evening I gave her the first bottle of milk she had since she left the mission hospital.

Since the District Patrol Officer was in Tambanum collecting taxes, I had an opportunity to help Justina. The next morning, I took the child to him and told him the whole story. He told me to take her to our hospital and keep it there until we saw fit to do otherwise. Furthermore, he forbade the grandmother or any other member of the family to go to the hospital to take her away. Later that morning when we got into the boat to go home, the whole village turned out to see the "American Kidnapper" sail away with one of their babies.

Back in the hospital, Sister weighed Tina. I believe she was only seven pounds and ten ounces. She was with us about three months always gaining weight and looking better. The ugly sores disappeared and her skin cleared up beautifully. About this time, the

same District Officer came by again to visit us and the first thing he wanted was to see the baby. When I showed her to him, he could scarcely believe this to be the same child.

All this while, we were looking for good foster parents. God answered our prayers. A young couple from the village asked to adopt Tina. We gave them the child with strict orders that she must be kept clean and be brought to the hospital each month for check-up. Each week when I go to Tambanum, I visit her. She is able to sit up by herself.

I'm not out for world records, but I made history. One Sunday in November, I told Father I would like to go to Suimbo, a village several walking hours distance. Such a rip means going through thick jungles, tall grass fields, crossing swamps, plus trudging more grass field and swamps. Father just laughed at my request and said that I could never make it. It simply was too dangerous. He never allows his assistants to make these trips, but always goes himself. Well, I never mentioned the subject again, figuring that Father knows what he is talking about. Maybe it is too dangerous. Naturally, I thought the whole matter was forgotten. Then one Wednesday morning he came to my classroom for what I thought as a routine visit. "Sister wants to go to Suimbo tomorrow. Who wants to go with her?" This announcement almost took my breath away. So he had not forgotten. Immediately all the boys volunteered to go. On Thursday morning at eight o'clock, thirty boys and I were ready to go. (At this time we still had only a school for boys). After we received Father's blessing and a last word to the boys to "take good care of Sister" we were off. The catechist walked ahead with rifle just in case we ran across a wild pig: some boys were in front of me and others stayed behind me. Those behind me felt that I was walking too slowly for them. One by one they passed by me to the front of the line (Indian-file), until only Niko was left. "Come on, Niko, let's go". But true to his promise he answered, "Father said we should take care of Sister and I'm staying here".

First we crossed a small creek in the village by means of a log, then came a thick jungle which at least was shady and cool. Next came a stretch of tall grass. The farther we went, the taller the grass was to a height of ten to twenty feet. It was impossible to see those in front of me. There was no path so we had to part the grass with our hands as we walked. Pat was ahead of me and I asked him to hold a stick which he was carrying high up so a least I would know where

the others were. Finally, we left the grassland behind us only to enter another stretch of jungle which was more swampy than the first one. Leaving this part of the jungle, we entered another grassland. The last part of our trek was the worst. I then realized why Father was reluctant in letting me go. We were in a jungle that got thicker, darker and swampier, the deeper we penetrated. There were logs across the swampy parts but they were very slippery. These people can walk across the slippery logs like flies on a ceiling, but with me it was different. I walked on these sideways holding on to the catechist with one hand and Niko on the other. In spite of all these precautions, I slipped. God and His Angels were with me that day. I fell on the log with my right foot under me and my left foot dangling in thick slushy mud. The boys had to lift me up, as there was no way that I could get my right foot from under me. At one time we measured the swamp with a ten-foot pole, but there was no bottom.

After two and a half hours of walking, we came to the village, but before entering we had to walk through water knee-deep. Finally we reached dry ground. The people greeted me with, "Sista, yu namba won. Yu namba won. Yu namba won white meri I kam hia long bus." (Sister, you are number one. You are the first white woman to come to this place.) We spent several hours there visiting with the people. They treated us with fresh kulau, that is, partially ripened coconut, which is more refreshing than coke. The chief's wife presented me with a delicious dish of taro soup.

Then started our trek back home. We reached our village around five. Father couldn't believe that I made the trip all the way to Suimbo, but when the boys verified it, he took off his sun helmet, bowed profoundly and said, "Congratulation." The next morning I got the Mass he promised me if I made it all the way to Suimbo.

One of the problems at our mission is to provide adequate food not only for the mission personnel but for the students attending the school. Meat is almost entirely lacking in their diet unless they are fortunate to find a wild pig or catch a crocodile. Our Bishop was anxious to find out if cows would thrive in this hot, swampy area and was willing to give it a try. One Sunday in September of 1959, we received word that our herd of heifers was arriving that day as the "Marova", our mission boat, was on its way. The cows had already received their injections on Friday and left for our station immediately, a two-day's journey. At nine that night, we finally sighted the boat coming around the bend of the river. Since the

children never saw cows before, they were all waiting at the dock for the great event. Unfortunately, the night was very dark and after being in the hold of the boat for two days and a night, the cows were quite wild and hungry. After they were hoisted off the boat and untied, they ran wild all around the mission grounds and the men had a hard time getting them into the corral. Two cows disappeared. A day later we found them in the bush. Around midnight, the cows were safely in the corral. Now the corral is next to the airstrip and the first few times that a plane landed, the cows went wild, broke through the fence and scattered. Not much later, they got used to the noise of the planes and would remain outside the corral placidly chewing their cud. Since the airstrip is simply a grassy lane, the cows spend most of their time on it eating the grass instead of wandering away. Sometime later, the Bishop brought a Holstein bull by plane to mix the breed (the others were Zebu). The people called this bull the “balus bulmacau,” the plane cow. We were excited when the first calf was born, a male, and my girls called it “Dickie.” The heifers grew well and multiplied their herd.

This is June, the dry season, and the precious little “beasties” went away on a vacation, giving us a wonderful, peaceful time. We could actually sit outside and not battle mosquitoes.

But as old saying goes, “There is no rest for the wicked.” We were not left without something to battle against. This time it was the old boy himself, Beelzebub.

On Sunday, June the 8th, we had our usual Corpus Christi procession. I know what a Corpus Christi procession is, but in New Guinea it must be different, so I just watched, waited, and wondered. On the preceding Saturday, we had no classes as all the children were busy decorating the road from the church to the village. We had only two altars outdoors, one in the courtyard of the hospital, which is half way between the church and the village and the second one placed in the village itself directly in front of the house tambaran, that is, the spirit house. The spirit house is a place where only the men of the village meet, hold their pagan rituals and keep all sorts of articles used in pagan worship. The house and the area around it is sacred territory forbidden to all women and children, but this one time they were allowed to tread its sacred dirt. The altar with its high background of flowers and foliage completely covered the dwelling of the evil spirits. It made me very happy to see the altar of the King of Kings cover up the temple of His adversary. Quite fitting in this instance

were the Lord's words: "Get behind me, Satan." This humiliation must have been too much for the "old boy" so he got busy right after that. Some weeks later the pagan leaders planned to build a new haus tambaran, since their old one was desecrated. We can always expect some of the Catholics to fall by the wayside. To prevent this, Father warned the people on Sunday that if anyone so much as brought a blade of grass to help build the house, they would be denied the sacraments. For some reason or other, the house was never built. Instead, the people held a tambaran ding-sing, a ritualistic pagan dance. In spite of all the warnings Father gave, most of our Catholics, men, women and children watched and some even took part in it. The following Sunday, Father told them that reparation had to be made and that all who attended the singsing had to attend Benediction in the afternoon and had to make an offering to the church. All that day we wondered what the response would be. Five o'clock came and so did the people. How the shillings were falling into the plates near the door! The collection brought in a tidy sum and the money was used to buy paint to redecorate the church.

Now about this time, the most influential man of the village built himself a new motor canoe. This kind of boat consists of two canoes placed side by side with a small hut built between to serve as a shelter from the sun and rain and is propelled by a regular engine. When this boat was finished, he had a number of men and women ride up and down the Sepik in front of the mission, performing an indecent sing-sing. On the following Sunday this was mentioned in church and during the week, a humbled man came to Father and asked to have the boat blessed. At one time this man served the church as catechist, but now he had two wives and is worldly-minded.

His lawful wife is a devout Catholic. Andreas Bevi does attend church nearly every Sunday and feels sad about not being able to receive the sacraments. He loves his wife, but she cannot give him any children, hence his second marriage. Having a male child means very much to these people. He told us that perhaps he would dismiss his number two wife.

Satan is still busy. One morning from my classroom, I saw a number of canoes filled with men rowing down the river. I asked my boys where they were going, but they were reluctant to tell me. Finally I learned the truth. The men were going to the half waypoint between Timbunke and the next village, Wombum. There the men of the two villages were to have a fight because one village accused the

other of moving the boundary line. Midway between the two places is a lake which both are to share. By moving the boundary, one village is excluded. Fortunately, a policeman who was just coming up the river commanded them to stop and return home. They did as ordered because they fear the law. However, Father had already notified the district Patrol Officer on the wireless and a day later he came first to one village, then to the other, lined up all the men and settled the boundary at the point of dispute.

Wombum is an hour's ride by motorboat down the river from us. Really, there are two villages; Tambanum to the left and Wombum to the right, and the Catholic Mission in the center. Every Wednesday afternoon Sister Mertia and I go to this mission and stay over until Thursday teaching religion, and visiting the people.

On August 15, our Bishop, the most Reverend Leo Arkfeld, came to Timbunke for Confirmation. The evening before, His Lordship blesses our new church and following morning some sixty persons received the Sacrament. Now it seems that the Bishop's visit stirred up the "old boy's" wrath. One evening a very sick young man was brought by canoe to our hospital from Tambanum. He was unconscious upon arrival. During the night he died. Our nurse was puzzled about this case. The only symptoms were vomiting, unconsciousness, but no fever, and then a quick death. A few days before, another young man died of the same illness. The next night the male nurse from Wombum canoed to Timbunke to report that two more young men were deathly sick of the illness. All the people were frightened by now. The next morning a little baby died just as mysteriously. I called Wewak by wireless and reported this to the Bishop. He in turn called the health department in Angoram and our District Officer and in two hours the Bishop flew them here to Timbunke. The two immediately motored to Wombum. That same afternoon the last two patients died. We were anxious to know what the doctor's verdict would be. He didn't say much when they returned, but whispered under his breath "sorcery". We were convinced they were poisoned with a certain plant used in sorcery. All evidence pointed to the chief of Wombum.

Once our pastor was on one of his regular visits to one of the bush stations. A young girl asked Father to take her back with him to Timbunke because the old luluai (chief) of the village wanted her for a wife and she wanted to become a Catholic. The man already had many wives and was terribly feared by everyone. When he heard that

Father would take the girl to the mission, he became furious. One good woman warned him to be careful when he went down the river because the Iulai and his men planned to upset his canoe. Yes, there they were, a large group, waiting to do their evil deed. When Father drew near, he quickly turned the motorboat and thus eluded their attack. This defeat was another humiliation for the "old boy". Now the Iulai's deeds became sacrilegious. In his village he began to mock Father by playing the Mass and giving coconut to the people for Communion. This went on for some time when he got ill very suddenly. He bought a pig to sacrifice to the devil in order to get rid of the sickness, but before he could perform this ceremony, he died. May God have mercy on his soul.

Our New Guineans are superstitious people. When it thunders, they say that the crocodiles up in the sky are making the noise. When a snake bites somebody, it is the devil that does it. In some places they will sit around a very sick person and moan and groan instead of seeking help from the hospital or aid post.

In Chambri, a village almost a day's journey up the river by motorboat, a young catechist was bitten by a poisonous snake about ten o'clock in the morning. The people didn't do anything for him but sit around and watch his life ebb away. They all know what to do for snakebites, but nobody cut and bled him. Father Jansen returned from the bush about three o'clock. Upon hearing of the accident, he immediately put the man in his boat and started the long trip to Timbunke, the nearest hospital. They arrived around nine o'clock and by that time the man was stiff and unable to move. Sister gave him an injection of anti-venom right away and followed by some more during the night. We didn't have much hope for him, but by the following morning he was alive and feeling better. On Tuesday, he was able to go back to his village.

A young man of eighteen from our village went to the bush with two of his friends to gather betel nut. It was only a short distance from the mission. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, he was bitten by a snake. At first he felt nothing, but after a little while pain set in. They got into the canoe and started for home, but he died on the way. This was a terrible blow to the whole village. A great number of the people were camping at the lake, fishing. The Iulai sent a message to them by way of the garamut, a large hollowed out drum made from a tree. By beating on it with a certain code they can send messages to other places within hearing distance. In a very short time,

we saw all the canoes returning to the village from the lake. Otto was a good young man and a model Catholic. The following Sunday, Father gave a beautiful homily about Otto, his exemplary life and death. He told about his work in the Legion of Mary and asked who would be willing to take Otto's place. At the next meeting of the Legion, five boys showed up. I felt happy and proud because most of them were my students.

In a village far up the river, a middle-aged man was building a house. He was up on a roof when the framework gave way and he fell to the ground. In his fall, he broke his left arm, six ribs pierced his heart. This happened about nine o'clock in the morning. He was immediately put in a canoe and brought to Timbunke. The trip took six and a half hours in the hot sun. After taking one look at him sister said he would have to be taken to the hospital in Angotam for x-rays. He begged the Sister not to send him away saying, "If I have to die, I want to die here with the Sisters." A few minutes later one of the nurses called Sister and told her to baptize the man as he looked near death. Sister Fabiane did so and exactly one half hour after his arrival at the hospital, the man went to his eternal reward. Later, I asked Sister how this man was able to endure such terrible sufferings and a long slow trip in the hot sun, then merited the grace of baptism and enter heaven. Sister said she inquired about this man from the people of his village. They said he was always a very good man, always helped others and never wronged anyone. Heaven was his reward.

Our luluai (chief) is a good man. Although he is not a Catholic, he comes to Mass every Sunday and cooperates in every way with the mission. He still has a couple of wives; hence he could not be baptized. Whenever a child plays hooky from school, we send word to him and in a few minutes he comes to school bringing the child with him.

One day the luluai called all the important men, Catholic and pagan, for a meeting at the haus tambaran. He told them that he had a "gud pella tinkink (a good thought), and wanted to discuss it with them. His good thought was to do away with the haus tambaran and all that was involved with it. It must have been a shock to all the men. Most of them were Catholics and the other few were pagans in the true sense of the word, and influential in the village. All week long the Legion of Mary and all the Catholics came to Mass and the Rosary in the afternoon. At the time, we Sisters did not know anything about

this, but Father told us to pray much because something was going on in the village.

Sunday morning came. Villagers were arriving in long processions and filling the church. As we entered the church, we noticed on the floor near the sanctuary a number of objects; spears, war clubs, masks and fetishes. As the pastor entered the sanctuary, the luluai, with a large cross suspended from his neck, the tultul and a few important men of the village marched to the front. Father then announced that the chief, the tultul and the men of the village have decided to discontinue their heathen practices, so away with their spirit house and as a sign of their sincerity, have brought these objects to church to have them exorcised and left there as a token of their surrender. Another victory for Christ.

That afternoon I visited the village. One leading man of the village invited me into his home. It was a rather long house with only one room. In the center was a long table, set with a banquet fit for a king; bowls of rice, meats, salads, fruit and cold drinks. This man was the owner of the village store. Right in the center was an oblong fetish taking the place of honor. He patted it gently and said, "Tomorrow I will take this to church, have it exorcised and offer it to the Lord." Anyone who understands the culture of these people will know that it was not easy for them to give up the age-old practices. Later Father had these objects hung on the wall near the altar of the Blessed Virgin.

Now the spirit house cleared of all fetishes was open to everyone and used mostly as a clubhouse or a community meeting place. In it are kept all the old garamuts (drums) and another object which I found very interesting. It was a pole about three feet long and perhaps three inches in diameter. All along this pole were protruding pegs at least five inches long and a hundred in number. Each of these pegs represented the ninety men and one woman who were killed by the Japanese during the war. They were accused of helping the allies. They had to dig a huge hole, made to get into it, and then shot to death. Today a large cross marks the massive grave. The memory of these brave dead will never be forgotten by the villagers.

Since I live in the land of down under, our summer vacation comes in December and January. It is very quiet here on the mission grounds. All the boarders, with the exception of five girls, have returned to their villages. For the last two years, I have watched boats go up river. Some were mission boats. Others were government boats,

lumbermen looking for certain hard wood trees, and then there were always anthropologists looking for local curios. On December 20th, our mission boat “Fatima Star” was making a trip up the river delivering supplies to different missions along the Sepik. What a wonderful opportunity to go along. There was Brother Januarius, the captain, five of my girls and myself. We left Sunday afternoon and sailed about 170 miles when darkness overtook us. Nobody sails the Sepik at night due to the danger of floating islands. We stopped at a village overnight and arrived at our destination by mid-afternoon.

Burui is a place about a half hours drive inland, where the Divine Word Missionaries have a boarding school for boys. When we docked, Father Shadeg was already waiting for us with his truck and small trailer. All the cargo was loaded on these. The girls and I seated ourselves on top of the boxes in the trailer and off we started towards the mission on the bumpiest and roughest road I ever saw. To the girls, who were used to paths only, a two-rutted road was astounding. They kept saying, “Sister, nice road, nice road.” They have never seen a real truck, except of pictures in their readers.

For the night, we used one of the empty classrooms. Electricity is unknown to the girls. The mission owned an electric generator which is used only during the evening. Before it got dark, I told one of the girls to turn on the switch when they were ready to retire. When the single bulb hanging from a cord in the middle of the ceiling lit up, they screamed with astonishment and fright. We take all these conveniences for granted, but for them it was a new awakening. We returned to Timbunke late Tuesday afternoon. Even though I sat on a covered deck, the reflected sunlight on the water burned by face so that I resembled a lobster. It burned for several days and then peeled off like onionskin.

I have completed two of the most interesting, exciting and happy years of my life, far out in the swampland district of the great Sepik River. Here I had mission life in the truest sense of the word. Living among these people, learning their language, customs and way of life was an experience never to be forgotten. We live in an old weather-beaten house with no electricity, running water or any modern indoor conveniences. But what does that matter? It is rather exciting to eat our evening meal by kerosene lamp; to travel by canoe because there are no roads; live with mosquitoes, snakes and crocodiles. Nothing can replace the joy in the heart of a missionary when she sees a little baby become a child of God through Baptism;

when little children come to school to learn to read and write; when young people are married before the altar or when the older generation finally surrenders the worship of false idols with all its superstitious rituals and accepts the Savior who redeemed them with His Precious Blood. The joys and satisfaction far outweigh the sacrifices, loneliness and heartaches that are part of missionary life.



ST MARY'S CONVENT, LAE - PNG

February 14, 1960

By the above address, you can see that I have been transferred from Timbunke to our mission in Lae. It is situated on the southeast coast of New Guinea. Lae is one of the lovely government towns on the coast having about 2,000 whites, some 700 Chinese and other Asiatics, and the rest native-born and those of mixed race. The whites are mostly government employees. Some are here temporarily and others are here permanently.

We have a lovely church, painted a light blue, as is also our convent. Just beyond the church is the shopping center. Our school is a small ranch-type building, but it is situated about a mile away from the mission compound because of lack of space. A mission bus transports us and the children to and from school. Our lovely house is built on a hill overlooking the aerodrome which is used by all commercial, government and private planes. This is where Sister Philip and I landed just two years ago. Beyond the airstrip, we have a beautiful view of the Huan Bay on the other side of which is a range of high mountains. We seldom see the tops of them as they are most always covered with clouds. The harbor is a little distance away which cannot be seen from here, but we pass by it every morning on our way to school. From our porch we can see the wreckage of a Japanese warship partly submerged in the water of the bay.

We have here one school for the children where one Sister and a priest teach. The other school where I teach has a mixture of races: Chinese, native-born, whites and children of mixed races. There are 125 children from kindergarten to the sixth grade. The majority of the white children are from families who are employed by the Australian government.

My appointment as superior of Lae came on the 27th of November, on the very day, when two years ago Sister Philip and I landed in Lae. Never did I dream that in such a short time I would be back in this place and in this position. Leaving Timbunke was very difficult for me. I left Timbunke on the 14th of January amidst the

tears of my little girls and the people who came out in bib numbers to the airstrip to see me off.

I made my retreat in Wewak from the 17th to the 24th of January and on the 26th, I and three other sisters flew to Madang. I stayed in Alexishafen only two days and then flew to Lae. The Sisters and Fathers were not expecting me in Lae until Saturday; consequently, everyone was surprised when I showed up ahead of schedule.

Some of you wondered if I had been informed of the recent elections in the United States. Yes, I have. One Australian lady, living in Lae was totally taken up with Kennedy. During the campaigning, she wrote telling him that she was praying for his success and good luck for the future. Not long after she came to me all excited and holding a letter from none other than John Kennedy. The Sunday after the elections I met her on my way to the church. "What do you think of the elections?" She said. "Wasn't it terrific?" Later she added, "and that is the first Catholic president we ever had!"

One Sunday after Mass, Father Gregory suggested we go for an outing to the bush. The two priests, we two Sisters, our three lay-missionaries and a number of our friends drove as far as the road went, then parked the cars and began to walk up a mountain along a narrow path. Up and up we went until suddenly looking down, we saw far below a beautiful lake. Our guide informed us that we were looking at a crater lake of an extinct volcano. The way to it was rather steep and we had practically to slide down. Once down we cleared a nice spot for our picnic.

That day I had my first practice in target shooting. Until then, I never dared so much as touch a gun. Father Gregory got me over the fear when I asked him to release the safety latch and he refused by telling me I must do it myself. I did. After a few safety lessons, I got quite good at hitting the target and rather enjoyed doing it.

Last Friday was the end of the second term and we are given a week's vacation in a gold-mining town called Wau. The two other Sisters did not want to come preferring to stay home. Our two lay-missionaries, Mrs. More and Miss Kathy Sherry came with me. Father Gregory, our pastor, drove us up in his station wagon. Part way up the road, we stopped in at the Zenag Dairy where we had tea with our good friends, the Leahys, the famous explorers of the New Guinea Highlands.

This road through the mountains is breath-taking; up and down hills, along narrow passes, through rivers and over bridges, climbing ever higher and higher. Just twelve miles before we reached Wau, we stopped in Bulolo, another gold-mining town. It also boasts of a flourishing plywood mill. We went through this Klinki Plywood Mill and saw the whole works from the time the log enters the mill until it comes out the finished product, ply-wood packed and ready to be shipped to Australia, United States and other countries. The hills are covered with the Klinki Pine, which is used for the plywood. There are hills and hills of gravel, where the ground had already been dredged for gold. Before leaving Bulolo, we stopped at the Pine Lodge Hotel for refreshments. Then on to Wau.

August 24th

This morning we had a peek at the gold hills of Wau. Driving up the mountains above 4,000 feet, we came to a gold mining camp nestled between hills. Over against the side of a mountain, men were busy loading a truck of alluvial soil, which is brought to a building where the process of purifying is begun. From there we followed the works until we came to the last building where the gold is finally extracted from the soil. It is a very complicated affair. In the afternoon we went to the home of the manager for tea and he showed us pans of gold still embedded in bits of rock and dirt. A handful of refined gold is worth about \$2,000.00.

The next day we visited the home of two very interesting persons. These are two elderly men, one a Frenchman, Peter Huet and the other and Englishman Dick Greatorex. Peter was a banker at one time and Dick a rather renowned British actor in his younger days. How these two got together I don't remember. They lived in Tahiti at one time and later bought an island off the coast of Australia. After selling that they came to New Guinea and settled in Wau. That was eleven years ago. The little spot where they settled was a jungle and they converted it into a little paradise of beautiful gardens and lovely home. The gardens are laid out in terraces with a stream of water gushing down the mountainside and through the gardens. Another stream is directed underground into a large rectangular pond where it enters in one way and escapes through an opening at the other end so that the water is always fresh.

It is amazing how these two old men live together. Peter, the older one, is a French Catholic and Dick is a British Protestant. They get along like father and son. After our visit to these two fine gentlemen, we went to a coffee plantation belonging to a fine Catholic family.

Coffee plants must grow under shade trees. When the berries are red, they are picked and put through a machine where the outer shell is removed. These are then put in water for a while to ferment after which they are put through a sieve where the inner shell is removed and the two beans separated. From here they are placed on large trays and set out in the sun to dry. After the drying process, the beans are placed in another machine where the beans are separated into three sizes, grade A,B,C. They are then put into bags and shipped to Australia.

We left Wau at 1:30 PM. Along the way, I saw a swinging bridge stretched across a deep, wide gorge. This type of bridge is made of a steel rope to hang on to with a bit of iron mesh to walk on. Being curious and daring, I asked Father Gregory to stop the car so that I could walk across the bridge. It was a thrilling experience.

Another school break and I'm spending it in Alexishafen on retreat. The weather is unusually cool. At the end of the retreat, we had a Pontifical High Mass outdoors at the shrine of our Lady of Fatima. After the Mass, the Bishop consecrated the whole Vicariate to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The evening before, we Sisters and all the schoolgirls had a private procession to our Lourdes grotto. The following Tuesday, I accompanied two other Sisters to one of our missions in Mugil up the coast in a small craft.

The sea was beautifully calm and the trip took two and a half hours. We would return the following afternoon. About two that afternoon, the sea got terribly rough and as time went on it grew worse. Still we had to go. When we started out at five, we knew we would have a jolly time on the sea. The huge waves rocked the boat from side to side and up and down and the only thing we could do was to hold on for dear life. To let go would mean to be thrown into the sea. As long as we could see, it wasn't so bad, but darkness fell very quickly and then there was nothing but blackness and the mad sea. Beside myself, there were two Australian young ladies, the three local men and the crew.

The craft had no cargo; consequently, it was very light and was being tossed like a leaf on water. One thing I learned. These people know the sea and can handle boats very well. At eight o'clock, we reached home stiff, wet and salty, but safe and sound. I never prayed so many rosaries, sang so many hymns and prayed so many prayers as I did that night.

I planned on returning to Lae the next afternoon which would give me time to pack up and get ready. However, Sister Elreda informed me to be ready at seven in the morning to go to Madang. The following day on my way to the airstrip, I felt a bit sick, but thought it was the result of the sea trip. By the time I reached Lae that evening, I came down with the flu, but was well by the time school reopened the following Monday. In spite of all these experiences, I had a good time during those two weeks. Only five more weeks of school and then the big break and the Christmas holidays.

We left Lae on the 22nd of December and flew to Alexishafen. It was nice being home with all the Sisters for Christmas, my first since 1957. Mother Nazaria asked me to go to Mugil to be with Sister Richardine while the other Sisters went to Alexishafen for retreat. This is the same mission up the coast where we had such a memorable sea trip. The convent is situated high up on a hill overlooking the sea and ten miles across the water is the large island Karkar. On it is the second largest extinct volcano in the world. Sister Richardine, a nurse, worked in the hospital all day and managed the work around the mission, cooking, laundry, garden and whatever else had to be done.

One night Sister was called to the hospital for an emergency delivery. Sometime later I, too, was called to help. After a very difficult delivery, the woman gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. He never gave a cry and after fifteen minutes returned to God after receiving baptism. The next morning, I went to see the bereaved mother. She told me that he was the tenth baby she lost.

After spending the holidays in Alexishafen, I was transferred to Wewak, a good-sized town on the northern coast. We left Lae permanently that year, hence my transfer. Sister Philip went to Alexishafen after spending four years in Wewak. It would be nice if we could be together for a little while, but it was not to be.

I am in charge of the girl's boarding school. At present we have thirty-seven girls from many different villages of the Sepik District. Incidentally, five of them are the girls I had in Timbunke when we

opened up there. We have a new dormitory and my room is at one end of it. We have classes from eight to eleven-forty five and then in the afternoon from two to four. After school until 5:30, the girls do a little manual work. After work, the girls go swimming either in the clear cool mountain stream which flows near the mission or in the sea which is half mile distance. At 6:00 we pray the rosary, followed by supper, study hour and finally to bed.

Every Tuesday, Sister Eurista and I have religious instructions for the Catholic children attending the public school given during released time.

On Easter Monday, the girls and I went for a picnic near the Hawaiian River. Hans, our lay-missionary and Brother Salvius accompanied us. There is no bridge over this river, but the water is not very deep. We waded across and found a good place to settle. The girls fished and swam and I had the opportunity to practice some more on a rifle.

A few Sundays ago, the girls and I went fishing in the mountain stream that passes the mission grounds. The water is cool and very clear so that the girls found it quite easy to hunt for crab, which they caught, barehanded. Along one side of the river, the bank was rather steep and here and there we found entrances to tunnels used by the Japanese during the war. In many uncleared parts of New Guinea are found relics of World War II, wrecked planes, bombshells and in the harbors half sunken warships.

The Islands are frequently shaken by earthquakes. Once in August, about two in the morning, we were practically thrown out of bed by a violent earthquake. This one was followed by three more tremors and again the next morning. In the mid-afternoon another strong tremor sent us running outside. This lasted longer and we could actually see the ground sway under our feet. Later we found out that it started ten miles out at Sea with strength of 7.25 on the Richter scale. This must have started the tidal waves that caused floods and destroyed the road near the sea. All night we could hear the thunderous roar of the waves which shot hundreds of feet up into the air.

During the Spring Break, three of us Sisters spent a week in a pretty little mountain town called Goroka. We thought a break in a cooler climate would be a good change from the hot humid coastal weather. We would stay with the Sisters of Mercy because we do not

have a mission in Goroka. We closed school on Thursday and early Friday morning, Father Reuter flew us in the mission plane. The greater part of the flight was over New Guinea's lowlands, first the Sepik and then the Ramu river valleys. As we neared Goroka, we could see houses which are built round and look like mushrooms from the air. The temperature in the mountain areas is mild, actually resembling spring, and the mornings are cold and crisp. The scenery is beautiful. A great variety of flowers grow in profusion, flowers not seen on the coast. The one kind that took my fancy is the poinsettia. Here they grow on large bushes and each stem will have anywhere from five to ten or more blossoms. It's like Christmas all year long. During our week in Goroka, we saw much of the area, and even had the opportunity to drive out to Mingende, one of our first missions in the highlands. The week went by only too quickly and I am back again in Wewak.

This term I am teaching first grade in Yarapos, a small village some eight miles from Wewak, where children from several villages come to school. The other classes are taught by two local Sisters, a lay-missionary, Miss Lucy Bruce from Scotland, and a local male teacher. We have some very bright children and our biggest problem is that we do not have enough teaching material for them, particularly books. All our instructions, except reading, must be done orally or written on the board. However, this shortage of books provides a great challenge for me to make my own flashcards and other audio-visual aids. In all my years of teaching, I believe this was the class I enjoyed the most. All too quickly the year came to an end with a sports day for the children. The next year I will be in Mingende, our mission in the Eastern Highland District.

On December 27th, I began a nineteen-day vacation which also included my retreat. At 6:00, I, together with several local Sisters, boarded our mission boat "Marova". At 9:39 when everything was ready we began our trip which would eventually bring us to Timbunke, my first mission in New Guinea. This would be my first visit since I left it four years ago. The sea was clam and after a good night's sleep, we entered the mouth of the mighty Sepik River. By 3:45 PM, we reached Marienberg, our first mission on the river. We spent Sunday and Monday with the Sisters and early Tuesday morning, we were again sailing upstream. Along those hundreds of miles there was nothing to be seen but jungle, swampland and wild sugar cane which grows profusely in this area. This was New Year's

Eve. By 7:00 PM, it was pitch dark, but the sky was studded with stars and a huge gorgeous moon rose beyond the horizon just above the water. A more beautiful picture I have never seen. To celebrate New Year, Father Jilik, our captain, went up near the mast and fired several of the boat's flares. By 9:00 PM, we reached Timbunke. It was so good to be back "home".

The next day, I visited the village and saw all my people, the people I grew to love so much. We made several trips to different villages along the river that I used to go to, but this time by motor canoe, because the "Marova" sailed up the river the day after we arrived. The following Tuesday, the mission plane arrived and took me back to Wewak.

CATHOLIC MISSION MINGENDE
P.O. KUNDIAWA - PNG

March 8, 1964

After enduring six years of perpetual summer heat, I am now enjoying the delightful and invigorating climate of New Guinea's Highlands. Here we have perpetual springtime, with temperatures anywhere between sixty to eighty. The nights and early mornings are really cold. Before I go any further, I will retrace my steps a couple of months back.

Two days after Christmas, December 27th, I began my holidaying trip which did not end until I reached Mingende, February 3rd. Since I missed out on the yearly retreat in Wewak, due to the fact that somebody had to stay out and help with the domestic work, I decided to go to Timbunke for a private retreat. Permission was granted and since the mission boat was going up the Sepik River soon after Christmas, I took the opportunity. At six o'clock in the evening, we boarded the "Marova" and at half past nine, we set sail. The night was beautiful and the sea very calm. About seven in the morning, we entered the mouth of the Sepik and didn't reach Marienburg until nearly four in the afternoon. After greeting our Sisters, Father Jilik celebrated Holy Mass for us.

We stayed in Marienberg until Tuesday morning when we resumed our trip around six. It was a long trip, but I spent my time in reading, working crossword puzzles, praying, or just enjoying the scenery. When we caught first glimpse of a tiny light in the far distance, we knew we were nearing Timbunke. Also mosquitoes began bothering us unmercifully, until we were forced to sit down on the deck, cover our legs and then fight like mad to keep our faces from being eaten up. It was 9:30 PM when we arrived. We took the Sisters by surprise, but they welcomed us anyway. So I spent the first day of the New Year in the place which I loved so much.

My first walk was to the village where I found my little pupils, quite grown up now. During the next two days we made some trips by motor canoe visiting villages along the Sepik. Sunday evening,

January 5th, I began my retreat and it was during that time that I received a letter telling me of my new appointment for Mingende, but I did not open the letter until the following Sunday morning when my retreat ended.



On Tuesday morning, January 14, I flew back to Wewak with the mission plane. During the next few days, I was kept busy getting my things together, putting the school things in order for my successor and attending to a hundred other little affairs. Finally on the morning of January 23rd, I said goodbye to Wewak and our mission plane took me to Nubia, a plantation fifty minutes away, which is close to Bogia from where I was to take a mission boat to Alexishafen. When I got to Bogia, the Sisters informed me that the boat would not be in until the following Wednesday. Nothing to do but wait. Here I was stranded and nobody but God in His heaven knew where I was. Here I spent my time helping the two Sisters, the others had gone to Alexishafen for retreat, reading, sitting at the seaside and walking a lot.

Finally we were informed by wireless that the boat “Petrus” would arrive Wednesday night bringing the Sisters back from retreat. It did, and the next morning it sailed to the Manam Island with the Sisters who lived there and then would return to Bogia. Seeing my chance of visiting this famous volcanic island, I hopped on and went

along with them. This island is made up of only one big mountain in the center and this is an active volcano forever smoking and periodically belching hot rocks and pouring out lava. The villages and the missions are situated at the foot of this smoker. The roads are covered with black cinders and the sand on the beaches is pure black. The year I arrived in New Guinea, Manam was erupting so badly that the government ordered all the people to evacuate and very much was destroyed by the burning lava and dust that covered the island. Later the government set up a seismograph machine at its base.

My visit to the island came to an end when the boat left late afternoon and reached Bogia at seven-thirty. The following morning at ten we set sail for Alexishafen. On board this little trawler were about forty people, myself and four other white people, all our baggage and the hold was filled with copra, so it was weighed down quite heavily and made the trip slower. In a way, it was good because it made the boat more stable when the big waves hit us. I found a secure corner in the cabin on top of a lot of cargo and there I sat most of the fourteen-hour trip. There was no room left for walking about. You just had to stay put. After praying, singing and taking naps in between, we came in sight of Alexishafen harbor it being exactly twelve midnight when we docked.

I, and the ten little girls I brought along with me for the boarding school, walked in the dead of the night through the plantation to the Sisters convent, all the while wondering how I would be received at this hour and unannounced. Very carefully, I called at the window of the Superiors room. "Who's that?" "Sister Vivian". "Where did you come from?" So I was admitted and had to explain details the following day. I spent all of Saturday and Sunday in Alexishafen and was told to be ready to fly to Mingende on Monday morning. Brother Gonzaga, our dentist, who had been treating my wisdom tooth in Wewak and was now in Alexishafe, decided to extract it the last minute Sunday evening and found it, had an abscess. So I left the relic in Alexishafen and the next morning early flew to my new home in the mountains. This was registration day in Mingende so there were lots of children everywhere. Sister Gerarda did not expect me that day and I gave her a surprise when I popped in like that.

We have over five hundred children in school with three classes of each kindergarten, first, second and third and one fourth. I have one of the third grades. I find the children here much brighter than those

on the coast and they seem to retain what you teach them. They're fantastic at singing. I can sing a new song to them only twice and the third time they can sing it without a mistake. The faculty is made up of two Sisters, three lay-missionaries, two young ladies from Australia and one from Austria and nine local teachers.

As for the school in general, it compares to any of our other schools, but now I would like to tell you of a Sunday morning. Each Sunday we have three Masses following one another. The first one is generally half filled, but the next two are filled to packing capacity, three thousand or more. I never saw people fill in a church so quickly as here. Before the people of one Mass empty the church, the others are already crowding in and before you can say "Robinson Crusoe" every space is taken. It always amazes me how one more will always squeeze in.

Most of the people dress in the very minimum and the old gents still come to church with faces painted, shells around their necks and a bone through the nose. To top it all, they wear a headdress made of bird of paradise feathers. These really are beautiful. Most will come carrying a big knife in one hand and an axe in the other.



The singing and praying is done in their own dialect and when the three thousand strong get going, I can almost see the corrugated iron sheets on the roof bobbing up and down with the rhythm of their chanting. I can understand now why the walls of Jericho fell when Joshua and his army began to shout. This morning I tried to follow along and was able to say a few words.

Every first Saturday of the month, we have a procession in honor of our Lady of Fatima. A statue of our Lady is carried by four girls and every one, men, women and children carry bouquets of flowers. During the procession we pray the rosary in dialect and on our return to the church, the statue is placed near the communion rail and everyone places his bouquet around our Lady's statue.

People in the highlands do not live in villages like the coastal people, but scattered over the hills and when you see thousands pouring in on Sunday morning, you wonder where they all came from. Many have walked for hours to come to church.

At the beginning of 1966, Australia and New Guinea will start using the new decimal system like ours, so instead of having their very complicated system of shillings, pounds and pence, they will have dollars and cents. It will be a complete change over, but a great relief and much simpler way of teaching these people about money.

When I was in Alexishafen for retreat last August, we used the English text at Mass for the first time and a few weeks ago, we began the Pidgin text with our children.

Every Friday afternoon Father Lorse, our young assistant, goes to one of the out stations for Mass, each week to another one. This Friday before he left, I promised him I would go out there on Sunday morning. At 7:00AM, I left, got a ride the first five miles and then had to walk on a narrow path, up and down hills, climb over six fences before I reached the little mission. It took me forty-five minutes. Going back, we took another road, which led through a bush, but this one was much muddier, though fewer hills to climb.

For us Christmas is over, but you are still in the early hours of the 25th. We had no midnight Mass but an early one at five followed by four others which lasted till past eleven. The first three were crowded to overflowing and we figured that approximately 4,000 Communion were distributed. I took care of decorating the altar and the crib but the people did the body of the church. In the morning of the 24th they brought loads of flowers, colored leaves and ferns and in no time they had fashioned long garlands which they hung the entire length of the church. The whole place looks like a flower garden. With such crowds of people in church there isn't much order and quiet, but a lot of distraction. However, you can't change the nature of these people. God loves them just the way they are. Most of the teenagers come dressed in all their fine feathers and paint and I must

admit they look quite nice. These people are still very much the children of nature. Sometimes I think I am living in biblical times. Certainly, the people in our Lord's time lived very much like these. Brothers and sisters may mean cousins, nieces or nephews and to find out who they really are, you must ask if they have the same father and mother.

Not too far from our mission is a mountain with a thirty-foot cross on it which was put there when the mission had its twenty-fifth anniversary. Now Katie, our Austrian lay-helper, who was born and raised in the mountains, was determined to get me to climb its height and stand next to the cross. I'm not a mountain climber, neither do I like heights, but I decided to go just to please her. Going up the first half wasn't bad. The climb was not steep and the vegetation was prolific. But then all of a sudden there was a definite change. The rest of the way was very steep with rocks and loose ground and few scrubby bushes to hang on to. I began to weaken and several times I sat down and said I couldn't go any further. Katie was determined to get me to the top. At one time she stopped and said she would wait for me to get to the cross and put my arms around it so that she could take my picture. With tears in my eyes, I struggled up, mostly on my hands and knees until I finally reached the cross and slowly, very slowly I put my arms around it. From that day on the place was renamed (by Katie) from Mt. Kunaubau to Mt. Vivian.

May 31, 1964

You asked once about our food and water supply. For most vegetables it is too hot on the coast. Beans and pumpkins grow well. Tomatoes poorly and others like lettuce, cabbage, carrots and peas nobody bothers planting. All these must be grown in the mountain areas. The climate is a perpetual spring and just suited for garden produce. Taro and yam (a starchy tuber like a potato but much larger) is what the people eat as their staple diet. And that grows well. Kau-Kau is a white sweet potato which is delicious when baked in its skin. Tropical fruit we always have plenty – bananas, paw-paw (papaya), passion fruit, tree tomatoes, oranges, lemons, tangerines, pineapples, custard apple and mangoes to mention a few.



All our stations now have cows, which supply us with fresh meat, milk and homemade butter. When I was in Timbunke, we had none then, so we used the tin opener and our only fresh vegetable was a vine-like plant which grows in the river called Konggo in Pidgin.

Our water supply comes directly from heaven, falls on our corrugated iron roofs, flows from the drain pipe into a water tank. And that's it. Too bad for us if we don't have sufficient tanks and we get a dry spell for about two weeks. We depend on this water supply for everything, e.g. drinking, cooking, laundering, bathing and septic purposes.

This morning we had our Corpus Christi procession. There were thousands of people and our large church could never hold all these people, so we had the Mass outside on the airstrip. It was quite orderly considering the throngs.

During Pentecost week we had a week's vacation. On Monday morning Father drove us out to one of our neighboring missions, Minj. We surprised our Sisters by arriving just during dinner time. We spent the night there and returned home the next day. Minj is in the most beautiful part of the Waghi Valley. There the land is flatter and the roads have long stretches of straight ground. On the way to Minj the road in one place goes over some rather high hills. We stopped at one of these places, climbed to the top and had a look at the magnificent valley. Here, they love flowers and the whole length of

the road from Mingende, a three-hour drive, to Minj had flowers growing on sides, marigolds, cosmos, nasturtiums, zinnias and many others of every color and description.

At the end of August, I am going to Alexishafen for retreat and to celebrate my silver anniversary. Officially, however, the real day is July 6th and we are going to celebrate here in Mingende on the day itself. My dear Superior wanted to have a little something here in Mingende for the sake of the people. On July 5th which was a Sunday, our Bishop himself came out especially and had the holy Mass. Our pastor Father Nilles gave the sermon, first in English and then in dialect telling the people all about a religious, while I sat in the sanctuary with my two little angels. After Mass I thought I would wait until the people left the church so that I could quietly slip out of the side door, when the Bishop came out of the sacristy and told me to kindly walk out through the aisle as all the people were waiting to see me. So they were, thousands of them.

The following morning, July 6th, all the school children attended Holy Mass offered for my intention after which they presented a program consisting of songs, poems, skits and short sing sings.



Shortly after Easter, an epidemic of flu broke out in the highlands, and took its toll of deaths especially among the old and the little children. It was heart-rending to see parents coming from the hospital carrying their dead infants in their arms. It reminded me of what the Scripture said of Rachel “bemoaning her children because

they were not.” The hospital was filled to overflowing so we did the next best thing. The Fathers, sisters and lay-missionaries went out every day in different directions to give out medicine to the sick to be healed and to the well as a preventive measure. I believe we saved many lives in this way. Wherever we went, some man would go along to call to the people so that we usually found groups of them waiting along the roadside. The attendance at school was less than half the enrollment during those weeks.

Two wonderful things happened as a result of the flu epidemic. Our faithful and staunch supporter, Aleons Karwagl, fell victim to the flu and fearing he might die, Father Nilles baptized him Alfons. This man was the one who brought Rev. Alfons Schaffer to Mingende some thirty years ago to establish the mission, but having many wives prevented him from receiving Baptism. Now fearing the worst for him, Father baptized him. However God is delaying his homecoming, so Karwagl is still with us and very proud of his new name. Ask him what his Catholic name is and he proudly says, “Alfons, number two.” Come to church on Sundays and you will find him in the sanctuary near the altar.

The other case concerns another man who was with Karwagl when Father Schaffer came. Goie was his name. He too, fell ill during this time, was baptized John and died on the eve of Pentecost. God was good to him because he was always good to the mission and served it as any Catholic would.

ALEXISHAFEN, PNG

January 26, 1965

I have been transferred to Alexishafen, our novitiate in New Guinea. I left Mingende on January the 6th and am settled now, but still trying to adapt myself to the coastal heat. I'll be teaching 6th grade at the village school. This school is rather a large set-up because we consolidated all the little village schools around here into one large school. There are twelve classrooms with grades from kindergarten to sixth and one building for demonstration classes for our teacher trainees. My students are boys and girls from the neighboring villages and seventeen girls who are boarders from far away villages.



SOGERI - PNG

January 5, 1966

When I first came to Alexishafen at the beginning of last year, I was asked to take over the Girl Scouts (Guides). I knew nothing about Guiding but went ahead anyway learning from books and other people's wise advice. Girl guiding is a very important activity in the territory. Those in charge of a company are called Guiders, which I am. I was officially enrolled during a campfire in Alexishafen by Miss Nancy Kemp, who is the Territory Trainer. This week from the third to the tenth of January, we are having a training session for Guiders of the Brownies and Guides in the Territory in Sogeri, a place about thirty miles out of Port Moresby up in the mountains. We are approximately a hundred people, mostly local girls, whites and nine Australian trainers who came from the south just for the occasion. We are learning all about Guiding. Each night we end up with a campfire, but unfortunately it rains most evenings so we have to have this inside without a fire.

After teaching there for six more months, I left for the States. Thus ended my sojourn in the beautiful South Pacific, leaving behind loving memories and dear and faithful friends. My life since has never been the same. Part of me was left behind and the most difficult thing to be reconciled to is "living home away from home."



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