FIGHTING FOR A VOICE
Philip Fitzpatrick

The Inside Story of PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize
For most Australians Papua New Guinea is a mysterious place somewhere north of Cape York and roughly between Bali in Indonesia and the resorts in Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia in the South Pacific. As a place it sits at the bottom of their consciousness.

Papua New Guineans, on the other hand, know a lot about Australia. Many of their goods and media come from there and the big companies exploiting their resources are often Australian.

There are, however, a small band of Australians who worked or served in Papua New Guinea before independence in 1975. For these people it sits permanently and warmly in their memory and consciousness.

For them and for many Papua New Guineans it is an enduring mystery why the two nations, so physically close together and with a shared history, don’t have a much stronger relationship.

That relationship is the focus of this short history. It details the attempts by some of those Australians and Papua New Guineans to broaden and expand the relationship.

It is still a work in progress but the story of PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize points to what is possible when the right people get together to make things happen.
FIGHTING FOR A VOICE

The Inside Story of PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize

Philip Fitzpatrick
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We give our best
To the rest of the world
We fight for a voice
That is to be heard
Tho’ we may not be many
   We are here
   We are writers

{Diddie Kinamun Jackson}
Introduction

When Keith Jackson asked me to put together a history of PNG Attitude I didn’t think twice about accepting. For me, like many other old Papua New Guinea hands, the blog had long been essential reading and, more importantly, a medium to express our opinions on a range of issues. More than that I had become complicit in Keith’s campaign to promote a home-grown literature in Papua New Guinea through a joint project we concocted called the Crocodile Prize.

Where I had reason to pause at Keith’s invitation was how I might write the history. A number of possibilities presented themselves. These included a purely academic approach, where I could place the blog in the context of regional social media and draw comparisons with other blogs operating in Australia and Papua New Guinea, eventually pronouncing on its relevance and value. There was an obvious problem with this approach because the rate of change in social media is moving at giddying speed and PNG Attitude is evolving with it.

Another idea was to produce a rollicking, good natured yarn, playing up the colourful and intriguing characters involved with the blog and the stories, tall and otherwise, they had to relate. There was always irreverence and a wry humour associated with the blog no matter what subjects it broached and expanding on this had certain appeal. But while this approach was attractive because, among other things, I am a writer of fiction, it didn’t seem quite right for a project that had a rationale of being more than entertainment. Always visible just beneath the surface of the blog was a serious intent.

I sat back and thought about the project for a while longer and
eventually asked the obvious question — who would read such an account? The answer, of course, was plain; it would be mainly the people who had contributed to the blog or who were amongst its ten thousand regular readers and who had made it what it was. Further, while needing to record and organise what had been written about I also needed to address the core purpose of the blog and that is the essence of the Papua New Guinea-Australia relationship as it exists in this century. What was this relationship — and what made it tick? In late 2012, when he renamed the blog *Keith Jackson & Friends: PNG Attitude*, Keith had acknowledged that this social media outpost was more than his work alone. The ‘friends’ in the title was apposite.

The problem for me was that those friends are an incredibly diverse and disparate group; as is the subject matter they write about and comment upon. To capture all those elements in a cohesive history would be next to impossible. The narrative would be too multi-faceted. That’s when I came to the conclusion that the best way to record the history of *PNG Attitude* was to let the contributors and commentators, along with Keith, tell their own story.

Beyond that, within the ten or eleven million words in 40,000 separate articles and essays and poems and commentaries they had written, lurked the makings of an historical snapshot of a crucial period in Papua New Guinea’s history. And it told of a country where there has been little effort to record, let alone pass on, the nation’s history. The book that I was structuring in my mind must not only be readable but it should be a source of information on an experiment to encourage a nation to write about itself in order to provide its people with the opportunity to read their own story.

So, while what follows is essentially a history of *PNG Attitude*, it was impossible to ignore the social and political issues that formed a vital part of its progress. Of course, I have not been able to cover all the issues the blog reported on, for this would blow the history out to several thousand pages. Thus it has been necessary to be selective and bring forward for examination only
those commanding issues that resonated within the blog and that PNG Attitude, in its own way, impacted upon. Therefore, while Papua New Guinea desperately needs its post-independence history recorded, the reader will not find it here.

The nature of the blog and the short ten-year span of its life so far, whichever way I tackled it, would require a rough chronology. With my background in academic writing and also in the complicated plotting of fiction, this seemed to be a bit of a cop out. But, then again, I didn’t want to make the story convoluted; it had to be easy to read and not too long and it had to cover the important bases. Whether I have been able to do this is up to you to judge. I have a feeling this won’t be the last thing written about PNG Attitude and its influence on a nation’s social and political – as well as literary – culture, but at least it’s a start.

Phil Fitzpatrick
Hervey Bay, Queensland
June 2016
Papua New Guinea Rediscovered

The *PNG Attitude* story begins in Mosman at Middle Head on Sydney Harbour in 1962. In late January that year, seventeen year old Keith Jackson arrived at the Australian School of Pacific Administration to begin a two-year Cadet Education Officer course designed to train him as a primary school teacher for service in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. It was the beginning of an unexpected journey.

ASOPA, as it was known, was established in 1947, replacing the School of Civil Affairs, to train officers for service in the civil administration of the then separate Trust Territory of Papua and Mandated Territory of New Guinea. After World War II the territories came under the joint control of the Commonwealth Minister of External Territories and were governed as a single entity.

Originally concentrating on the training of Patrol Officers, ASOPA expanded its remit and began training teachers in 1954, first at Bathurst Teachers College in mid-western New South Wales and, from 1958, in the middle of a military zone at Middle Head.

Although ASOPA’s main emphasis was on Papua New Guinea it also trained men and women for service in Australia’s other territories; mainly the Northern Territory. There was a minor focus on indigenous affairs within Australia; some officers of South Australia’s Department of Aboriginal Affairs were also trained there.
By the early 1960s, responding to the rapid global waning of colonialism accompanied by substantial pressure from the United Nations, the Australian Government realised Papua New Guinea would become independent a lot sooner than originally anticipated. The training of patrol officers, teachers and other professionals at ASOPA was accelerated to match the need for an increased pace of development.

In 1973, just before Papua New Guinea’s independence in 1975, ASOPA changed its name to International Training Institute and shifted its focus to training Papua New Guineans and other South Pacific professionals. Not long after, the institution broadened its scope to train middle managers from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. For a period in 1984-85, Keith Jackson became acting Principal of the International Training Institute. It 1997, after yet another name change to the Centre for Pacific Development and Training, the old ASOPA closed its doors.
for the last time.

But in its 26 years of existence as a colonial training institute, ASOPA saw hundreds of mainly Australian students educated in its old Army huts. Despite its modest appearance, ASOPA developed considerable prestige for the quality of its academic staff, its innovative approaches and the excellence of its teaching. Time there also engendered a lifetime sense of pride and camaraderie among its graduates.

Many of those young men and women, who later and often reluctantly drifted back to more mundane lives in Australia after independence, maintain a strong sense of this shared experience and a continuing interest in the affairs of Papua New Guinea. Service in ‘the Territory’ had somehow set them apart from the Australian populace, which these days is largely unaware of Australia’s previous role as a colonial administrator. Indeed, most Australians remain uninterested in the nation of eight million people that sits on Australia’s northern border.

While this sense of attachment to Papua New Guinea is often passionately held by the people who served there, it is a difficult feeling to convey to people in Australia who lack the rich experiences, and even dangers, involved. In essence, these young Australian nation-builders were exposed to and accepted the challenges of a very different culture, they grew to cherish the warmth of the Melanesian people and they fell in love with magnificence of Papua New Guinea’s landscape.

All these factors changed them, and those who served in Papua New Guinea came back as different people; and, in many cases, with dramatically transformed world views. Over the years this unique experience settled into a kind of nostalgia. The discomforts, deprivations and disappointments faded and it was predominantly the good things that were remembered.

One of the elements of nostalgia is a longing for ‘the good old days’. While it is not possible to re-create those halcyon times of sparkling youth, it’s possible to return to the places where those days were played out and to reunite with some of the people who were there.
Very few of these ageing colonisers have the inclination or the money or – increasingly – the robust health required to accomplish return visits to their previous outposts in Papua New Guinea, but reunions in Australia – generally at pleasant seaside resorts - have become popular among many and groups, especially the patrol officers (kiaps in Pidgin English), the teachers and the military.

The Papua New Guinea experience was so captivating that reunions of former expatriate personnel were relatively common. But the most ubiquitous over the last twenty years have been those of the kiaps and the teachers. For the chalkies, it really began in 2003 when Colin and Wendy Booth called a reunion of the ASOPA Cadet Education Officer Course of 1962-63 at Port Macquarie on the New South Wales mid-coast.

The rationale surrounding reunions is intriguing and complex. A desire to see how the others made out in life; an opportunity to restore a friendship with a once close pal; an excuse to revive the camaraderie of old times; an idle curiosity and a spare weekend.

For the egocentric and successful, the reunion can be something of an affirmation of perceived self-worth. Seeing the school bully or loudmouth cowed by a domineering spouse can be uplifting. Watching the guy who could run 100 yards in even time
struggling going up the steps likewise. However, for most of us, it is a chance to try to recognise old friends – with more kilos and less hair than they once had - and share stories in an atmosphere of non-judgemental conviviality. And this was the tone of the 2003 reunion in Port Macquarie.

Reunions require organisation. What started with a couple of old mates chewing the fat over a drink and wondering what had happened to old so-and-so develops into a major logistical exercise. Not least is the business of tracking down and drawing together former colleagues. The 1963-63 ASOPA class numbered fifty-eight and they were spread far and wide around the globe. The reunion needed people with good organisational skills, and the Booths and Brisbane’s Henry Bodman has those aplenty.

There was also a requirement for a communicator. They nominated Keith Jackson - at the time managing director of leading Australian public relations company Jackson Wells Morris - and he said fine.

Keith’s first posting in the Territory of Papua New Guinea as a newly-fledged education officer had been to Kundiawa, the administrative centre of what was then the Chimbu Sub-District. Soon after arriving there, he enrolled for a correspondence course in journalism and established a local newsletter. There were many other extracurricular duties that teachers took on and Keith was no exception, as the photograph shows, where he has been co-opted for electoral duty.

The *Kundiawa News* was a pretty crude affair written in Keith’s spare time (teaching and Chimbu Club duties proved onerous) and, with the help of fellow teacher and housemate Murray Bladwell, it was initially reproduced on a messy methylated spirit Roneo machine used by the Education Department. Later, when on leave in Sydney, the pair bought a second-hand ink duplicator with funds generated by the newsletter. The *Kundiawa News*, which was sold in clubs and pubs
in the Eastern Highlands District and by subscription, earned a modest income most of which went to the Gon Primary ‘T’ School in Kundiawa.

The home of the newsletter – which offered news, gossip and bar-room brawls triggered by news and gossip - was the Chimbu Club, one of only a couple of mixed race clubs in the Territory of the early 1960s. Given the multiracial ethos of Kundiawa, perhaps it was not surprising that the Kundiawa News contained stories and commentary from Papua New Guineans, mainly public servants.

The Kundiawa News was not Keith’s earliest exposure to the world of journalism. He had edited his high school magazine, been a 14-year old sport reporter for his home town Nowra News, served on the editorial committee which had founded the ASOPA magazine Vortex and also written scripts for the first ASOPA revue, The Natives Are Restless, performed at Mosman Town Hall on two nights in 1963.

The Kundiawa News – which eventually fizzled out after fifty issues when Keith was transferred to a more remote bush school – was to lead to greater things as, in rapid succession, he became a stringer for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (7/6d for a broadcast story and another 7/6d if it made the Australian news), the South Pacific Post (now the Post-Courier) and Pacific Islands Monthly (now defunct).

The then Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) asked him to write scripts for its Papua New Guinean schools broadcasts and, after teaching for something less than three years, Keith was hauled out of the bush and transferred to Port Moresby as editor of schools publications. The ABC continued to seek his scripts, then employed him as a casual producer and, in 1967, recruited him to its staff to produce educational broadcasts. His production skills were refined over two glorious weeks at the ABC’s Kings Cross training school in Sydney and what was to be a long career in broadcasting was underway.

After three years with the ABC he branched out into broadcasting management with the Administration’s Government
Broadcasting Service, first at Radio Rabaul in East New Britain and then at Radio Bougainville in Kieta. Then, in 1973 with the formation of what is now the National Broadcasting Corporation, he was promoted to head the broadcast policy and planning division in Port Moresby. He was just 28.

There were many more twists and turns in his career, including overseas assignments with Unesco, the establishment of two radio stations in Australia, a return to the old ASOPA and three years as general manager responsible for the ABC’s government, media and community relations. In 1991 he set up what came to be Jackson Wells Morris, heading what, in its time, was one of Australia leading public relations companies.

In 2004, Keith was awarded an AM (Member of the Order of Australia) for, as the citation had it, his “service to management and training in the media, communications and public relations fields, and to the development of non-commercial radio services”.

So, as members of the ASOPA class of 1962-63 decided upon their reunion, Keith seemed the obvious choice to run their publicity. He immediately started a newsletter, *Vintage*, to provide information about arrangements, encourage former classmates to tell their stories and inspire people to attend the reunion. It worked well and after 30 years, more than 40 of the surviving members of the original group of 58 found themselves together once again in Port Macquarie NSW.

Perusing the pages of *Vintage*, it is possible to see some of the elements that eventually became part of the earlier content of *PNG Attitude*. Amongst the organisational information were scattered reminiscences of life in pre-independent Papua New Guinea as well as some opinion and criticism of what had transpired since. It was all leavened by an air of bonhomie and levity.

Such was the enthusiasm for the newsletter that, after the reunion, Keith was persuaded to keep it going and it continued under a new masthead, *The Mail*, which eventually saw 133 issues, ending in March 2009. During that time its focus shifted to a more expansive view of Papua New Guinea affairs which slowly
engaged a more extensive readership. This was welcomed by most people, but a few of the diehards of the class of 1962-63 thought the publication should remain exclusively for them.

Meanwhile, the global social media revolution, known back then as Web 2.0, had taken off. In February 2006, Keith began the ASOPA People blog which overlapped and ran parallel with the hardcopy newsletter for the next three years.

It takes a certain type of character to become a journalist or writer. Not least a strong concern about what is going on in the world and how this impacts on people. This concern may be informed by liberal or conservative beliefs or something in between. It may not sit comfortably with others. It frequently develops into a kind of activism or advocacy; one sees things that don’t seem right and feels driven to do something about it; causes are taken on.

As The Mail newsletter and ASOPA People blog continued publication, Keith recognised that the relationship between the people of Australia and the people of Papua New Guinea – so close in World War II and colonial days – had weakened and frayed. Given their geographic proximity and shared histories, this seemed to him to be sad and undesirable. It was as if Australians had walked away from Papua New Guinea in 1975 and decided it could be ignored. Substantial aid – much of questionable benefit - continued to be provided by the Australian government and there were strong business and church connections but, on a personal level, Australians and Papua New Guineans had drifted apart.

By the mid-1990s, Papua New Guinea was receiving an increasingly bad press in Australia. All that seemed to be reported was news of political corruption, social upheaval and the breakdown of law and order. Many expatriates who had served there were forming the view that this was a dangerous country on a downhill slide. Quite a few said they would never consider going back to visit, let alone work.

To Keith and some others, this perception seemed to be one-sided and even self-serving - “Without us, you’ve wrecked the joint!” There was much that was still attractive about Papua New
Guinea, especially the people, but a balanced message was not getting out. What was being reported was unfair to Papua New Guineans and it was unfair on those friends they had in Australia.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, there were undesired economic and political repercussions affecting the prestige and future of Papua New Guinea’s citizens. There was no discernible move, either by the Australian government or private sector, to turn these perceptions around.

The only course open to the people who cared was to act at a personal level, although later, in a short term as president of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia, Keith was to take his concerns to Canberra. Keith and what seemed like a small group of others believed that, if Australians and Papua New Guineans could be encouraged to talk and interact more with each other again, there could be great benefits to both countries and, at the very least, those once close relationships might be rebuilt.

“I was very young and immature when I arrived in Papua New Guinea,” Keith would say. “The people schooled me, protected me and forgave my mistakes. I felt I owed them my friendship and as much support as I could provide.”

By the early 2000s, the social media revolution had taken off in Australia but Papua New Guinea was still struggling with an antiquated communications network. There was, however, an organisation in Australia that maintained an interest of sorts in Papua New Guinea and, most importantly, produced a quarterly journal with a substantial readership. If personal interaction and relationships between Australians and Papua New Guineans was to survive and grow, this organisation offered one of the few conduits available.

The Papua New Guinea Association of Australia had begun life in 1951 as the Retired Officers’ Association of Papua New Guinea. It was set up to represent the interests of retired ‘permanent’ public servants who had served in Papua New Guinea before independence. Its main objective initially was maintaining superannuation entitlements and retirement benefits affecting those officers and their dependants. Its membership was
disproportionately based in Sydney where many of the retirees lived.

As usual in these types of organisations, the core members met at annual general meetings and other events and produced a publication, in this case the journal, *Una Voce* (‘One Voice’), which served as a link between members and a few interested outsiders.

Over the years, and especially after independence in 1975 when many permanent officers took ‘golden handshakes’ as compensation for unfulfilled careers, the membership expanded and it became a forum for reminiscing about the colonial experience in Papua New Guinea. This interest was reflected in *Una Voce*, which attracted readers who were not recipients of retirement or redundancy benefits but who shared an interest in the colonial times. The broader scope was recognised in 1996 when the Retired Officers’ Association was incorporated in New South Wales as the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia.

Many original members regarded the new association as no more than a useful social outlet and jealously protected what they saw as their pre-eminent status. I experienced some of this bias in 2005 when I published the book, *Bamahuta: Leaving Papua*, in which I wrote in a realistic light about the *kiaps* (patrol officers) I had known and the experiences I’d had, warts and idiosyncrasies on display.

The book proved controversial and attracted the ire of an influential group of older association members who thought their honour had somehow been impugned. While this ‘Colonel Blimp’ attitude seemed strangely at odds with the general membership, these people had the ability to hold the association back from what it appeared it might usefully develop into – a powerful conduit between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

In 2008, with the long-serving and long-suffering president, former District Commissioner Harry West OAM, wanting to step down, West invited Keith to stand for election. The old guard stood its own candidate, who Keith defeated easily.

Keith had a firm view of how the Association might evolve and saw his election as an excellent opportunity to advance the
Australian and Papua New Guinean relationship. He proceeded to initiate changes he believed would redirect the association and make it more relevant. He initiated a membership drive, invited the first Papua New Guineans to stand for election to the committee and persuaded the membership to agree to a new Constitution that gave the PNGAA a more Papua New Guinean focus. He also instigated talks with federal government Ministers in Canberra to convince them to initiate programs to improve people-to-people relationships between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The intemperate and defensive criticism of my book had been a tell-tale as each step along the way Keith encountered staunch opposition from the old guard. A comment by the widow of a retired District Commissioner, whose son had stood against Keith in the election, summed up their feelings:

Some members feel that another association could have been created, perhaps taking over the members who were willing to accept the change and let the others be left in peace to enjoy their association and what it originally stood for - friendship amongst themselves.

There is an avenue for the president's ideas, but I feel they do not belong to our present association. Several senior members are disillusioned and are beginning to feel like 'outscasts'... My feelings are that the membership and finances of the PNGAA were hijacked, and ideas introduced that are unwanted by many of the original and long-time members of the association.”

As for the association facing extinction, once its purpose has been served, so what!

The view was also expressed that Papua New Guinea was a place that did not necessarily deserve the support of the PNGAA:

[The Association] was not created to provide a platform for politics or to interfere with welfare and external aid. I don't think people who have not had a real life affiliation with PNG are going to join an association to support what is now a foreign country, when knowing there are other places, our own Aborigines, and some of the South African countries, in more desperate need. A very long time senior and well-respected member said only recently 'but I wonder if the nation of PNG will appreciate any such venture on our part?
From Keith’s point of view this campaign of destabilisation culminated in December 2008 when the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Islands Affairs, Duncan Kerr, as guest speaker, was jeered at the Association’s end of year gathering. The hostile response was apparently not due to anything he had said but based on his political affiliation.

Keith understood that the PNGAA was divided between a minority of its older and original members, who saw it as a vehicle for nostalgia and socialising, and a different breed, the majority who wanted a strong and active relationship between the two countries.

With the solid support of most members, Keith knew he could have forced his views through. He had hoped to persuade people that there could be co-existence but this was not working out. To the surprise of many members and the delight of some, Keith resigned the presidency in January 2009. It was a fight he did not want to have.

In hindsight it is possible to appreciate the concerns of the Association old guard. They had developed a comfortable little social club that served their limited interests and offered support in their declining years. To have this seemingly appropriated by a newer and younger group that did not share their antiquated views was perceived as a threat and, imbued with the fear of change inherent to such conservative groups and blind to the positives, they dug in their heels. That the younger members form a new association, however impractical, seemed to them an obvious solution. As it turned out this is effectively what happened.

At about the same time, the Irish telecommunications company Digicel established a presence in Papua New Guinea and was rapidly expanding its mobile and internet services. Papua New Guineans took to this new development with enthusiasm and social media blossomed, in a very short time reaching almost every corner of the nation.

With the blog now three years old, Keith observed this
Fighting for a Voice

development with excitement, seeing an opportunity to achieve the personal connections and focus on the Papua New Guinea-Australia relationship that he felt he had been unable to do with the PNGAA. Social media and email now offered an effective means to spearhead and build an alternative internet-based mode of relationship. He recognised also that, over time, this had the potential to spin off more tangible projects.

He already had a foundation in his ASOPA People blog but this needed to shed the old connotations and considerably transform and expand its purpose. He decided to rebrand the blog as PNG Attitude and refocus its attention more determinedly on generating greater interaction with a broader readership in Australia and, more importantly, Papua New Guinea.

Why Attitude? Keith says he was “searching for a name to separate the blog from its past incarnation as an old colonial snifter, to strongly announce its PNG orientation and to make it sound like it could deliver a bit of a bite.

“I knew from past experience that, no matter what I called it, the meaning derived from what its contributors wrote – the ideas - would be what really defined it,” he says. “I could have called it PNG Asgras and that would be OK now.”

It is perhaps ironic that, in more recent years, the PNGAA has shed its colonial bias and, perhaps on the shirt tails of PNG Attitude, become a more open, albeit still conservative, organisation. Much of this has been due to the leadership of Andrea Williams and her colleagues. To Keith’s delight, in 2014 the PNGAA agreed to sponsor one of PNG Attitude’s most significant projects, the annual Crocodile Prize literary contest, and many of its members also embraced PNG Attitude as contributors and supporters. For the old diehard colonials, websites like the one maintained by the PNGAA and the Ex-Kiaps site apparently cater adequately for their needs.
2
Connecting with the new PNG, 2006

ASOPA People first appeared in February 2006 and, for some time afterwards, it followed a fairly standard blog format with most of the posts written by Keith. They were relatively short, sometimes no more than a paragraph or two. The subject matter was chatty and informal, typically reporting the current and past activities of people who had attended ASOPA. The first entry was a welcome to the blog:

Welcome to ASOPA PEOPLE - created for the men and women associated with the Australian School of Pacific Administration, which flourished between the latter days of World War II and the early 1970s.

ASOPA trained patrol officers, magistrates, teachers and other professionals who were assigned to work in the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea and Australia's Northern Territory. They were young and ready for a challenge and they contributed a great deal to the development of the indigenous peoples of the South Pacific and northern Australia.

A typical post concerned one of Keith’s old friends from Kundiawa. It was entitled Igo pinis longtaim liklik (‘he returned to Australia quite a while ago’):

I first encountered kiap Pat Dwyer as he was pushing a pedometer from Kundiawa to Chuave in early 1964. He’d committed some minor infraction of the rules, displeasing the District Officer, and was compelled to personally check the mileage between the two Highlands townships.

Pat later married Margaret McKenna, one of the great beauties of the 1962-63 ASOPA class, and - together with a bevy of children and
grandchildren - they now live in Perth where Pat has retired to the golf course and Margaret still teaches.
I look forward to Pat's occasional epistles from the West as they frequently bring news a person ought to know. For example, Pat's expecting former kiaps John Biltris (Kundiawa, Gumine etc.) and Chris Warrilow to hit Perth any day now. Pat famously remarked, when he first met Warrilow in 1959, that the pikinini kiap wouldn't last ten minutes in the Territory. "He's just given it away after 46 years," a chastened Dwyer admits.

This item didn’t attract any comments from readers but the first post introducing ASOPA People attracted seven responses. Most were of a congratulatory nature but it was possible to detect a sense of excitement and enthusiasm in them. This must have been encouraging for Keith because, at this early stage, the blog was experimental. Whether it would be sustainable was another matter. David Keating said:

Great initiative Keith. We are all approaching the age where looking back brings pleasure and sometimes the memories are sharper the further back we go. Caught up with Bob Schultz (CEO 61-62) yesterday at one of his two flower farms. One of his other guests was a former kiap, Doug McCallum, who spent time at ASOPA and Milne Bay.

Rev Neale Harvey was even more effusive:

What a host of memories your site has conjured up! This, together with Clarrie and Gail Burkes' book has made me very nostalgic. And Henry Bodman is doing his best to twist my arm out of its socket to have Barbara and I attend the reunion in October.

Henry and Janelle and Barbara and I caught up in person for the first time since 1968 (I think) when he asked me to conduct a brief service at Myrtleford Pioneer Cemetery on 19 December for his mother, who had a connection with St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, of which I am at present the minister...."

Of particular interest were two responses from Papua New Guinean readers resident in Australia. The Secretary of the PNG Wantok Community in Western Australia said:
Thanks ASOPA. Great initiative. Please allow us the younger generations of Papua New Guinea to share our few lines of acknowledgement. We owe you so much for your heart and will in serving our nation. Your love, passion and service in those hard times of the past paid off with birth of our nation and other nations around the Pacific. You have all the reasons to be proud of crafting nations all around you. We thank you, salute you and pray God will reward you accordingly.

The other response came from Anton Dennis Neinaka, who was seeking to link up with an Australian family for whom his mother worked. People tracking down long lost friends and associates popped up on the blog throughout its life. Anton wrote:

I hope you can be of help to me. I am looking for an Australian family who lived around Rabaul, ENB, PNG between 1960s and 1970s. The father must be Herman and the two daughters who were very young back then are Kitha and Curina (I am not too sure about the spelling of their names). My mum worked for the family back then, and wants a reunion.

A response from Henry Bodman (photo) promised ongoing help. It was the first of many expressions of good intentions expressed over the years, few of which ever came to fruition. The blog remained a one-man labour throughout its history. Henry, who contributed to the blog, said:

This had to happen after Jackson Wells Morris appeared among the stars of the Sunday program on the topic of blogs this morning. I'll see if I can get involved in this extension to my limited mastery of modern technology. Thanks for the advice and the time and effort you are putting into all of this. Cheers and beers.

In March, a month after the blog first appeared, there were posts in the same vein and also a hint that ASOPA People wasn’t averse to controversy in the post ‘ASOPA and ASIO’:
The following exchange of letters, drawn from the website of Australian historian, Humphrey McQueen, provides an interesting insight into the history of ASOPA.

Many years after the letter featured here was written, Jack Emanuel was murdered in East New Britain. There was speculation at the time that this was connected to his prominent role in the Territory government's efforts to contain the Mataungan Association, a nascent nationalist movement that flourished on the Gazelle Peninsula in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It's possible he had been engaged in intelligence activities.

It's worth observing that, in the early sixties, rumours were rife at ASOPA that ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) operatives were active on the campus.

CONFIDENTIAL REGISTERED LETTER

28 Balgowlah Road
Fairlight NSW
19th September 1950

The Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies
Prime Minister of Australia
Canberra

Sir,

The purpose of this letter is not a political matter, but to respectfully inform you that the opportunity has been given me to join the Communist Party, and it is intended that I do so. The sole reason for joining is to take the possible opportunity of informing the Government of the activities of this organisation. In view of the proposed legislation dealing with the dissolution of Communists I desire to respectfully inform you of my intentions.

Such a letter as this, however, does not convince that my intentions are bona fide.

My activities are open to investigation. My occupation is a Patrol Officer, Territory of Papua-New Guinea, and I am at present attending a two year course at the Australian School of Pacific Administration, Mosman, Sydney. Communist Party ideas are not and never will be part of my beliefs, but I have often spoken to members of the party lately without disagreeing with them, as I desired to deliberately form a friendship, for the reason mentioned earlier.

I respectfully request, Sir, that this letter be treated confidentially, and that the authorities address be forwarded so that I can inform them of anything I ascertain concerning this Communist Party, and its activities.
I have the honour to be, Sir,
yours respectfully and obediently,
Jack Emanuel

Emmanuel received a standard reply from Menzies secretary:

28th September 1950
Dear Mr Emanuel,

The Prime Minister has directed me to acknowledge a confidential letter which he received from you recently.
Mr Menzies has asked that I pass on to you the name of Colonel C.C. F. Spry, the Director-General of Security, to whom any information relating to subversive activities should be conveyed.
Correspondence will reach Colonel Spry if addressed to Box 4880, G.P.O., Sydney.

Yours sincerely,
(E. M. Wilkinson)
Private Secretary

Interestingly the post didn’t attract any comment from readers. It may have been that the limited readership at this stage mostly knew of Keith’s left-wing political leanings and distrust of organisations like ASIO. Then again, people might have just been wary of tackling such topics.

Another hint of Keith’s combative nature and dedication to principle came in April in a post, ‘Somare Still Strong at 70’:

Papua New Guinea’s Grand Chief and legendary leader, Sir Michael Somare, has just turned 70 and is showing no signs of slowing down. In 1976, when I was an executive in the National Broadcasting Commission, and despite a personal admiration for Sir Michael that continues to this day, I had a major fight with him which convinced me my time in PNG had passed and led to my departure after over 13 years.

The dispute surrounded my efforts – along with Phil Charley – to introduce advertising on the National Broadcasting Commission. Despite the NBC Act allowing advertising and the organisation’s parlous financial state commending this as a good revenue option, Sir Michael vehemently opposed the move. But, on this issue, he lacked the numbers in the House
of Assembly and a Bill to amend the Act was defeated on the floor of Parliament. Within days, commercial advertising began on the NBC.

A bit over a year later, opening some much-awaited mail in Male, the capital of the remote Maldives Islands, you can imagine my surprise when a silver medal with a ribbon in the PNG colours tumbled on to my desk from a beaten up brown manila envelope. It was an Independence Medal accompanied by a slightly torn and somewhat soiled citation – the whole package having been mistakenly routed through Mali in Central Africa. And, yes, after my stormy departure from PNG, it did make things okay.

In June it was reported that there was some movement towards preserving the old ASOPA site at Middle Head as a heritage area, an issue that preoccupied readers of ASOPA People and members of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia:

Things are beginning to happen down at Middle Head that will lead to a new lease of life for the former ASOPA and its later manifestations. The site is part of former defence land at Georges Heights/Middle Head handed to the newly established Interim Sydney Harbour Federation Trust in 1999. In 2001 the Interim Trust became the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust under its own Act of Federal Parliament charging it with opening various (now eight) sites to the public and conserving, protecting and interpreting their environmental and cultural heritage.

The Trust has just commissioned a Conservation Management Plan covering ASOPA and its neighbouring 10 Terminal Regiment. This is the beginning of a process that will gather relevant information for the production of a Plan of Management. The plan will outline the proposed future for the site and a draft will be provided for public comment and displayed on the Trust’s website.

The Conservation Management Plan will include an historical overview of the area, a survey the current condition of the buildings, an assessment of their heritage significance and recommend appropriate uses for the buildings and policies for their conservation and interpretation.

Also in June 2006, an issue that would become a perennial topic on ASOPA People and then PNG Attitude was broached in an article ‘PNG on the Brink’. Ten years later Papua New Guinea was still teetering on that same crumbling brink:
Today’s issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald* features an article on the current state of play in Papua New Guinea which is a ‘must read’ for any person with an interest in Australia’s former territory.

The article, ‘The other disaster on our doorstep’, was written by Allan Patience, professor of political science at the University of Papua New Guinea, who will win no friends in Port Moresby for his candid and even brutal political, economic and social assessment.

“The education system has all but disintegrated. Literacy rates are plummeting as schools close. Teachers are not being paid properly, or are not being paid at all. The higher education sector is fragmented and grotesquely under-resourced. It long ago ceased being the main builder of human capacity for PNG.

“Over the past two years the United Nations Development Program has placed PNG successively lower on its Human Development Index because essential services are failing and governance is stalling. Now the UN has warned that PNG may be downgraded from being a 'developing state' to a 'least developed state', ranking it among the poorest nations in the world.

“Canberra’s befuddled responses to the looming crisis in PNG have been as reactive as its responses to the Honiara and Dili catastrophes. Its aid programs over the three decades of PNG’s independence have, at best, held a shaky line between basic incompetence and total disaster.”

Towards the end of 2006, Keith and his wife, Ingrid, went on a month-long cruise which visited several ports in Papua New Guinea. It was the first time he had been back since leaving thirty years before. Stories about the decline of government services and the decrepitude of infrastructure, such as discussed in Alan Patience’s account, were coming out of the country but from the comfort of Australia seemed of diminished importance. Keith and Ingrid’s visit to ports in Milne Bay revealed the shock of witnessing the decline firsthand:

Earlier in the day, we walked around the decaying remains of Samarai. A fellow guest on *Orion*, retired planter Jim Grose, who was a member of Papua New Guinea’s first House of Assembly from 1964-68, told me he had last been here as a passenger on the *Malaita* in 1949. Samarai, along with Port Moresby, was one of Papua’s original towns. A busy trading post which later had the unusual distinction of being bombed by the RAAF in WW2 to prevent the Japanese making use of its buildings.

The 24 hectare Samarai Island is one of PNG’s heritage listed areas. Not that such nomination seems to counts for much. Many of the original
buildings and warehouses stand, but they have been allowed to deteriorate for lack of money. The once fine wharf is broken and unusable. People continue to live in Samarai, and the power station still runs, but – apart from the faint promise of an embryonic cultured pearl business, the place is fading away.

Samarai is somewhat symbolic of today’s Papua New Guinea. Removed from the aggrandising opportunities provided to the elite, bereft of readily extractable resources, almost beyond government, it is largely reliant upon itself for a meagre level of survival. It’s a real shame.

As the year came to a close, there were plans afoot for another reunion of the class of 1962-63 and Keith offered his readers a small present:

I wish all ASOPA People readers a merry Christmas and my hopes for a fulfilling 2007. Our Christmas present takes an unusual form. I’ve found time to develop a piece on ASOPA for the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia. Thus for the first time, we have a definitive article on ASOPA on the internet. Wikipedia is compiled largely by volunteers and has begun to rival its hard copy brethren in influence, having already exceeded them in size. Wikipedia is able to be edited by its readers and I’d invite you to add factual information to the ASOPA entry if you have something to contribute.

2007 promised to be a tumultuous year in Australia but in Papua New Guinea life drifted on as usual and most Australians’ lack of interest in the country seemed likely to continue.
3

The Arrival of PNG Attitude, 2007-08

Following the 2007 Papua New Guinea election, Michael Somare became Prime Minister for the fourth time and immediately announced that his government was embarking on an austerity drive. Unexpectedly, he lashed out at Australia, saying the Australian government had tried to interfere in the election process.

“I think there seems to be somehow some kind of interference,” said the Grand Chief. “We will be looking at that issue and I’m taking it up in the forum with Australia and New Zealand at my level as still the chairman of the Pacific Forum.”

National Alliance Party president Simon Kaiwi also alleged Australian interference in the elections. He accused Canberra of using political pawns within Papua New Guinea to try to determine the political leadership. “Australia wants a leader in Papua New Guinea that can say ‘how high’ when they order him to jump,” Mr Kaiwi said.

These suspicions and accusations were a reflection of the poor relationship that Australian Prime Minister John Howard had developed with Pacific island nations. He and his Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, were regarded as pompous, distant and arrogant by the region’s leaders. To make matters worse, Howard and Downer themselves always looked distinctly uncomfortable on their few Pacific forays.

Among the old Papua New Guinea hands, especially those who had revisited the country or who had never left, there was also a
view that Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and its aid agency AusAID didn’t understand Papua New Guinea and its people despite pouring half a billion dollars into the country each year.

Of particular concern were the contingents of ill-briefed consultants on high fees despatched to the country to act as advisors or to run aid projects. In Papua New Guinea this sort of activity was called ‘boomerang aid’ because most of the money spent invariably found its way back to Australia either as salaries or in contracts.

There emerged a few people, however, who were seen as notable exceptions to the view that a paternalistic Australia, with its patronising attitudes and poorly targeted aid, didn’t know what to do in Papua New Guinea. One of these people was Ian Kemish (photo), the Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea from 2010-13. Kemish had lived in the country as a young boy and, upon returning as a diplomat, was to make a significant contribution to Papua New Guinean literature, which we will come to.

The ineptness of aspects of Australia’s relationship with Papua New Guinea became a perennial topic on PNG Attitude and there is little evidence to the contrary that this has changed significantly in subsequent years. That said, during Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd’s second term in office and thereafter, Australia’s desire to outsource asylum seekers who arrived by boat and Peter O’Neill’s hunger for Australian dollars became nefarious reasons to bring both government’s closer. In the middle of the storm, the two bad men were friends, as the old adage had it. But this was a slender basis for a strong and sustainable partnership.

Overall, Australian government aid workers and public servants in Papua New Guinea were seen as a timid bunch who worked in air conditioned offices and lived in apartments in prestigious suburbs like Touaguba Hill behind razor wire and the protection of
security guards. In such suburbs, many Papua New Guinean politicians also lived in large houses under equally stringent security. These people never seem to venture for long beyond the capital, Port Moresby. The Australian High Commission at Waigani, near Papua New Guinea’s Haus Tambaran or Parliament House was commonly referred to as ‘Fort Shit-Scared’.

This bumbling presence of Australia in Papua New Guinea and other places in the South Pacific was brought home to Keith during his return in 2006. The Orion called in at the Solomon Islands, the now independent ex-British colony that was experiencing continuing political upheavals and was subject to an Australian led intervention from 2003-13. This intervention, known as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) or ‘Halpim Pren’ (‘Helping a Friend’) in Solomon’s Pidgin, was examined in an SBS Television television documentary in early 2007. Keith wrote of it, in his usual nuanced style:

When I was in the Solomons a bit under three months ago, talking a lot with the locals about the mercurial politics of the place, the common compliment to Australia was about how we were trying to give them a hand with their problems. And the common complaint was how some members of the Australian police contingent were stuffing this up. The nub always seemed to be that the police (or ‘agents’ as tonight’s SBS program grandiosely called them) seemed not give a proverbial about local culture, politics, society, sensitivities or much else except the local drop, Solbrew.

If ever a hypothesis got proven through the glory that is television it was tonight. Some genius chose a copper from the backblocks of Western Australia to go the Solomons weather coast and, at least when the camera appeared, act like a goose. His appreciation of local culture seemed limited. His talked childish gibberish when speaking with an educated, English-perfect Solomon islander. His understanding of Solomons Pidgin was of the, "You fellow must be understand with the justice system or democracy he no can get there" kind. And that’s flattery.

I can’t comment on his policing (I hope it was not of Poirot quality) except for noting the pain on the face of his sweet, competent and anguished Tolai woman copper boss whenever he opened his mouth. This guy would probably still be prancing around on the weather coast if it wasn’t for her.

When will the Australian government learn that, before despatching emissaries to foreign lands, we must educate them a little in the local ways,
teach them the elements of the lingua franca and prepare them properly for the task ahead?

As ASOPA People developed its focus widened. Along with the chatty news about ex-student doings and planned reunions, information extracted from other blogs and the Papua New Guinea media began to appear. The extracts were attributed but usually appeared with an introductory paragraph or two and the occasional critique. Other items include short opinion pieces and book reviews.

Also, about this time, contributions from readers became significant and were featured on the blog. One article by a Papua New Guinean which had a direct link to Keith’s time in Papua New Guinea appeared towards the end of May. A chuffed Keith wrote:

Jack Metta is a columnist and feature writer with The National in Papua New Guinea. More than that, he's one of the best English-language stylists writing in PNG today: acute in choice of subject; definitive in story execution; easy of prose. In his columns, Jack has recently covered debate that has been raging in PNG about whether some school day literary icons should be honoured with PNG's highest honour, the Order of Logohu. Front and centre in this debate are Yokomo and his dog Omokoy.

Now you may recall Yokomo as the fictitious hero of comic stories published in the PNG School Papers during the 1960s. I dropped a note to tell Jack that Yokomo was created by ex-Asopian [1957-58] Frank Hiob with John Lucas drawing the pictures. When transferred from my school in the bush to Konedobu in 1966 to edit the School Papers, I inherited Yokomo and, for a reason lost in obscurity, decided he needed a dog. So was created Omokoy. "I have often wondered where the origins of this duo lay," wrote Jack politely, "and now I know. There is practically nothing in the archives these days to follow up the past."

Here’s an extract from Jack’s column, literary icons deserve awards:

If Yokomo was to be awarded the highest Order of Logohu, would he be known through our history as Grand Chief Yokomo in honour of his contributions to the human resource development of PNG? Perhaps, but then his trusty dog, Omokoy would be as equally qualified to be
recognised as Grand Chief Omokoy, in honour of its canine antics which brought fun and joy to thousands of young Papua New Guineans.

By the same token, similar recognition would then have to be accorded to such characters as Raka, Ranu, Malot, Tabu, Kinobo and the rest of the cast, who, during a phase of our life, reigned supreme in the classrooms and our imaginations, and, continue to do so today....

The fact that this column is writing about them; their names continue to ride our airwaves in school broadcasts; and, the language that we are now communicating in, English, attests to the reality that these imaginary figments of some expatriate officer in the educational system of the pre and post-independence days, had never departed or erased from our memories.

Jack Metta’s more serious comment about the paucity of material in the archives was prescient because among the eventual attractions of PNG Attitude for Papua New Guineans were the reminiscences of expatriates who had worked there. Rather than react to these nostalgic pieces as reflections of colonial oppression, Melanesian readers embraced them and clamoured for more. They were among the few sources of historical material available.

In July 2007 there was a first indication of the number of people the blog was reaching. The readership was relatively modest but showed signs of steady growth. Keith wrote:

Seems the pace of visitation on ASOPA People is increasing as the Brisbane reunion draws closer. The blog had a 'day record' of 90 visitors yesterday and has averaged 50 people a day over the past week. Which isn't bad after a slack posting period due to your dear author being both tied down at work and moving house. Yep, I'm 62 and I've downsized. Not outsourced yet, though. No one has seen fit to right-size me. A redundee I am not. Nor a target of a management initiated outplacement. I find it helps if you own the company. And the economy is going gangbusters.

Keith was also encouraging feedback.

It's good to see some new names on the comment board of this site. You should feel free to fire off comments at will. Just hit on the 'Comments' tag at the end of each piece. And go for it. I assure you every contribution is
read and the interesting ones are turned into other blogs or appear in The Mail newsletter each month.

It is notable that the ‘Comments’ facility on the blog was, at this time, rarely used. In later years the section became a high activity area for debate with multiple posts on most subjects. Some of the comments, particularly the significant ones, were subsequently featured as articles in their own right. This also made the information in them searchable, as then as now the search engines did not penetrate to the ‘Comments’ level of internet discourse.

Many of the 2007 readers were eschewing comment in favour of corresponding directly with Keith by email or post. Undeveloped computer skills and a reticence to appear in print in a public document were later recognised as an inhibiting factor among potential Papua New Guinean commentators.

Also in July 2007, there was a report on the ‘extra-curricular’ activities of some of the ex-Asopians. The coverage of these ‘private aid’ activities became a regular feature in later years:

For the last couple of years a small group of Australians with a background in PNG broadcasting – Martin Hadlow, Phil Charley and me – have been working with Bougainvillean media people, including former journalists Carolus (Charlie) Ketsimur and Aloysius Laukai, to establish a community radio station on Buka Island in the north of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

An essential part of the exercise was to secure seed funding to purchase equipment to make the project a reality. UNESCO has now committed money and this week New Dawn FM will be granted a license to broadcast.

The name New Dawn really says it all. When the 10-year Bougainville war officially ended in April 1998, 20,000 people had died and there were 40,000 internal refugees in a population of 160,000. The island’s infrastructure was shattered: schools and hospitals destroyed; power and telecommunications installations devastated; airports blown up; towns and villages ruined; shops looted; transportation links disbanded or in disarray. The war had cut off the island’s main source of revenue, the Panguna copper mine, which has never reopened. Due to PNG’s own economic problems, there has been only limited progress in infrastructure renewal in the years since the end of hostilities.
As Bougainville slowly rebuilds, it’s vital that its citizens have access to the mass media, enabling them to participate in the democratic rebirth of the province and to share their views and opinions in a public forum. That’s why we’ve been working to establish a commercial community FM station on Buka to initially serve the north of Bougainville. The station will provide an independent news, information, educational and entertainment service to a population that is trying to rebuild its life, its livelihood and its sense of community. Here’s to a New Dawn.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Keith was inclined to support what he saw as worthwhile causes. The blog, with its expanding horizons and as it evolved beyond its original intentions was beginning to provide a useful mechanism to promote such causes. Projects included memorialising the tragedy of the Japanese ship, *Montevideo Maru*, which was sunk by an American submarine in 1942 resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 Australian prisoners-of-war being transferred from Rabaul in New Britain to Hainan in China to work as forced labour. At the same time Keith had begun his program to reform and reorientate the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia and was supporting the efforts of ex-patrol officer Chris Viner-Smith to have the pre-independence nation-building role of the *kiaps* formally recognised in Australia.

This latter project prompted a number of responses from Papua New Guinea. One came from Theodore Mawe of the University of Goroka:

Mr Viner-Smith states that the Australian government will be asked to honour the pioneering work of Australian patrol officers who brought development to Papua New Guinea’s tribes between 1949 and 1974. He says that after WWII and before PNG Independence in 1975, more than 8,000 Australian public servants administered PNG as an external Australian territory. Among those administrators, 2,500 were *kiaps* or patrol officers who endured hardships and risked their lives to bring development to PNG.

“The work of kiaps formed a glorious chapter in Australia’s history just as the Kokoda campaign has. And both share the remarkable heritage of being Australian and shaping a new future for PNG. I don’t know why we’ve been forgotten,” said Mr Viner-Smith.

I sympathise and support Mr Viner-Smith, just as others are doing in Australia. I support the movement here not in the sense that I am party to it
but as someone who values history and have great concern over especially for the destruction and loss of colonial buildings and property. What are colonial buildings and property?

I feel that these colonial buildings and sites located throughout the country should be preserved and studies on these things be carried out and publications related to these produced. And the kiaps whose efforts we now enjoy should be given the recognition they deserve when they are calling out loud for it.

The kiaps as well as PNG can benefit from doing this.... PNG can benefit in terms of tourism and historical education. The colonial and historic buildings and sites can serve very well as important tourist attractions to generate revenue for PNG.... An institution to cater for the work of carrying out studies as well as to coordinate the restoration, conservation, and preservation of colonial buildings and sites should be established.

When this article appeared on the blog, ex-kiap Paul Oates, who was to become a regular contributor, responded:

Dear Theodore - Thank you for your letter of support for ex kiaps that has been posted onto the ASOPA website. We continually think of the friends we had when we served in PNG and it's great to see we have not been totally forgotten. Many PNG nationals also served as kiaps and they should be recognised for the service they did in helping the country develop.

Contrary to the news article, the actual number of kiaps serving on outstations was never more than about 500 at any time. This was when PNG had a population of around three million. The average was around 15 to 20 per District as the Provinces were then known. The submission will hopefully lift the profile of PNG service in general and also help bring PNG onto the horizon of Australia's younger generation.

Towards the end of 2008 Michael Somare was experiencing increasing criticism in Papua New Guinea, mostly led by the PNG Post Courier newspaper, because of perceptions of political excess and corruption. Coverage of the issue on the blog prompted responses from Papua New Guinea. It was mostly journalists who put their names to these views but there was a fair smattering of posts by ordinary Papua New Guineans using pseudonyms. Among these early Melanesian contributors, there was clearly a fear of reprisal from the powerful ruling elite.

There was much to discuss as the media revealed that Somare
and his son Arthur had been asked to explain how they obtained a luxury inner-city unit and a new beach house in Cairns, Queensland. PNG's anti-corruption watchdog, Opposition Leader Sir Mekere Morauta and former finance minister Bart Philemon asked where the money had come from. Cairns builder Michael Case, who sold the house to Mr Somare, said: "He is a fabulous guy, everything was done above board." But Sir Michael himself, in Cairns for an historic address to Queensland Parliament, declined a request for an interview and failed to answer media questions.

Mekere Morauta said the Somare family owed it to the Papua New Guinean people to reveal their assets. "They should both publicly explain how they obtained this real estate," said Sir Mekere, who himself had recently purchased a $3.6 million riverfront mansion in Brisbane under his wife’s name. Mr Philemon said, “They have got to tell people in Papua New Guinea how they funded those properties, otherwise it smells like corruption.”

It had become clear that ASOPA People had expanded its purview significantly since its inauguration in 2006. Keith recognised this shift and took the big step of changing the name of the blog to PNG Attitude. In doing so, he revisited its origins:

In the beginning, in February 2002, there was a simple one-page newsletter entitled Vintage. I put it together in a hurry at the same time as a small group of people took on the considerable task of tracking down each and every member of the ASOPA Class of 1962-63.

After four decades, most of those people were found, a successful reunion was held and Vintage flourished through 26 issues. After the reunion, I decided to keep the newsletter going and it became The Mail, which continues to this day (this month we publish No 129).

Then, in February 2006, The Mail spawned the ASOPA People blog, which gave as its raison d’etre that it was “created for the men and women associated with the Australian School of Pacific Administration... They were young and ready for a challenge and they contributed a great deal to the development of the indigenous peoples of the South Pacific and northern Australia.”
By 2006, ASOPA reunions were more common. That initial 2002 event, its spirit maintained by subsequent reunions, close bonding and the monthly presence of *The Mail*, had stirred a mood of reflection amongst a generation of Australians who had served in PNG mainly in the fifties, sixties and seventies. These people, upon reconsidering what had become a distant personal history, the story of their youth - began to re-evaluate this story and to newly value it.

The circulation of *The Mail* reached 400, ASOPA People began to get over 100 visitors a day and, indirectly, the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia benefited from an influx of new members.

But *ASOPA People* was having trouble bearing the load. As I wrote thousands of words of personal histories, anecdotes, history, biographies of ‘ASOPA Greats’ and other information about the School, it became clear that, if we didn’t move beyond ASOPA, the storehouse would be depleted and there would be nowhere to go but repetition. There was only so much new knowledge.

So for this reason, and because this reflection on our PNG past made me even more acutely aware of PNG’s present, I began to focus more on PNG itself. It was a classic case of [ASOPA education lecturer] Harry Peake’s notion of how kids learn through “ever increasing circles”.

First the Class of 1962-63, then all the classes, then the ASOPA institution, then its history and finally PNG, where most of us ended up and – if it was to survive – where this project had to end up. I guess I noticed the problem and the opportunity first because I write the words.

So here we are – and now we’ve got to see what else we can make of it. There are some people, me included, who contain a nugget of regret that the cosiness of the past could not be maintained in a pristine state. But you will find it still here, embedded in the blog’s informality and its orientation.

However, you may have noticed that the names of the people who contribute to the blog are changing, and you may have noticed they include an increasing number of Papua New Guineans. We’ve added a new concentric circle. Thanks Harry.

The response to the new name was well received. A typical comment came from Martin Hadlow:

I like the new idea about 'Attitude' rather than ASOPA. There is a whole world of us former PNG hands (albeit only two years in my case, just a youngster) out there, and your site now opens the field for all and sundry. I think, for *PNG Attitude*, the best is yet to come.

In 2008, the blog published 399 stories, an average of more than one a day. There were also 214 comments from readers,
many of which made for interesting reading. The blog was averaging over 100 visitors a day.

During the year, a wide array of stories about Papua New Guinea and people associated with Papua New Guinea were featured. They covered the lives and deaths of many people who had made a great contribution and many who continued to contribute. The blog dealt with the more interesting news out of Papua New Guinea and the big issues affecting Australia’s relationship with that country. It also featured a host of new books related to Papua New Guinea and the art of people associated with the country. With its expanded coverage and increasing readership the newly named PNG Attitude seemed to have arrived at a very sweet spot indeed.

A spectacular increase in its scope and its readership was about to occur.
4
Smartening Up & Toughening Up, 2009

2009 began with the battle to redefine the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia coming to a head. Keith had been elected to the presidency in May 2008 and, with great support, modified its objectives and the way it operated so as to better promote the Australia–Papua New Guinea relationship. While there was general agreement that this was long overdue there was a vocal minority of older members, mainly in Sydney, who vehemently objected to the changes.

One notable innovation suggested by the progressive side of the argument was to encourage Papua New Guinean expatriates living in Australia to join the Association. This idea seemed to alarm the old colonials and it was suspected their obstructionism and stalling thinly veiled an innate racism.

The process of change was difficult going and took up a lot of Keith’s time and energy. The latter was in short supply, as he had been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME), which caused him to step down as managing director of Jackson Wells Morris and limited the amount of time he could spend at work.

But he continued with the reform of the PNGAA and the old guard increased its protestations that he was pushing the pace of change too hard and too quickly. As commonly happens in these situations, the opposition took to personal attack. Rather than representing the views of the membership, Keith was accused of
pushing his own ‘radical’ ideas. Early in 2009, he decided he’d had enough and tendered his resignation as president and committee member.

The old colonials’ victory was short-lived however because, by the end of January, the progressives in the association had regrouped under Brisbane’s Phil Ainsworth, who set out his agenda in a letter to the association secretary:

I am writing to advise the committee of the Association that I have been appointed to convene an informal group of PNGAA members from throughout Australia which is interested in reforming and stabilising the Association and ensuring that the proposed new objectives are adopted and faithfully implemented by the incoming PNGAA Committee to be elected next April.

The aims of the reform group, as they were accepted by members in late January 2009, were:

(1) To instil a spirit of reform in the PNGAA which will support the proposed objectives of the Association, especially the objective of strengthening the civil relationship between the people of Australia and the people of Papua New Guinea.

(2) To nominate a panel of candidates who will agree to give effect to these objectives and who will seek election to the national committee of the PNGAA at the April 2009 election.

(3) To ensure that the panel of candidates is representative geographically, demographically and vocationally of the broad membership of the PNGAA.

(4) To include on the panel of candidates some PNG residents of Australia or, if this is not possible, to ensure that as soon as possible following the next election such people are included.

I had personally experienced some of the vitriol that the old colonials were capable of dishing out and it was not pleasant. Keith was left with a sense of dismay and a number of dents in his reputation. He was unworried, time was a precious commodity to a man with CFS/ME and it had to be dispensed where it would have the greatest effect. Long meetings disrupted by shrill opponents were far from tolerable.

For the readers of PNG Attitude, his resignation was a gift in disguise. Without having to worry about keeping the old guard happy, Keith was able to devote more time to the blog and
develop it as a vehicle for furthering his objective to strengthen the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. It was in a spirit of new opportunity that PNG Attitude kicked off 2009.

In February there was a post from Barbara Short about a book she was writing about the history of Kerevat National High School in East New Britain. Barbara was to become one of the stalwarts of PNG Attitude and later took to campaigning on various issues related to the people of the Sepik River provinces, where she had also taught.

Another early loyalist, Paul Oates (photo), was now regularly posting quixotic stories about life on his farm at Boonah in Queensland and occasionally on his experiences in Papua New Guinea as a kiap and as an administrator in the Cocos Islands. Paul had taken to writing late in life and his delightful vignettes were unearthing a hitherto unsuspected talent.

Keith was still producing The Mail in hard copy and emailing it to over one hundred subscribers, getting appreciative responses. There were some noteworthy comments from readers:

It is up to date with current issues. It is forthright and puts all points of view. It is about the right length. It follows up issues. And it’s available to everyone on line - Chris Viner-Smith

For a volunteer effort which I suspect is almost 100 percent Keith Jackson’s work, The Mail is an astonishing publication. It is most professional in its compilation and production - Rei Fehlberg

I find it extremely readable and a way to keep a tenuous check on what my old friends are doing in their lives now. Also a way to see just how things are progressing in another country that was for so long a part of my life - and which helped to shape me as a person. And, to a lesser extent, it allows me to indulge in a little nostalgia - John Segal

It arrives regularly to keep me in touch with what’s going on in PNG and (unlike many other newsletters) it’s literate! - Jane Belfield
It’s a more balanced source of ex-PNG-expat news and interest than the others currently available. The emphasis on ex-chalky-talk is understandable seeing that the founder and most of his contributors to date are ex-teachers. It’s well-produced and it’s free - John Fowke

This most worthy monthly compilation has been through a few phases and changes of direction since its inception. We all know why The Mail started and I do not think we should ever lose sight of that. I am also aware that if you had to rely on personal contributions from Asopians solely then the publication would have starved to death long ago. I, for one, really look forward to receiving my monthly edition of The Mail. - Bob Davis

I like the read. I like the comments from the various people. I like the conflict that arises from time to time. I like following the journeys that people’s lives have taken. I gave the best part of 16 years of my energetic years to PNG and do not regret one minute of it. When I returned to Western Australia I felt I had made a contribution, even if it was as simple as teaching a Bena kid in the Eastern Highlands how to slot the Steeden over the black dot. The read gives me a sense of kin - Val Murphy

The Mail added to the blog’s workload but provided a bridge for many people still coming to terms with social media. It seemed that many people were reading The Mail but not necessarily PNG Attitude. Later The Mail’s usefulness would diminish and it would cease publication but this still lay in the future.

The Mail was distributed to mainly Australian subscribers but there were a few subscribers in Papua New Guinea, notably Governor General Sir Paulius Matane, himself a prolific writer.

Keith asked readers of The Mail if they wanted to keep receiving it. “About eighty readers were,” he said, “still stuck in the age of Gutenberg” and the desire to receive information in a newsletter was running at a ratio of better than 30 to one compared with people satisfied to get the same information on the blog. “Economists always knew that the trouble with free goods was their failure to force a choice,” Keith summarised. The workload was clearly becoming a concern and events during the following month increased the burden.

March was a significant month in the history of PNG Attitude.
Several things happened that would shape its future direction. The first was the appearance of articles written by Papua New Guineans Gelab Piak and Paulus Ripa.

Gelab was a student at Divine Word University in Madang; Paulus a paediatrician and a lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. Their contributions were well-composed, thoughtful and quite different from the usual short posts hitherto appearing on the blog.

Gelab wrote about the political and social situation in Papua New Guinea. Under the title, ‘PNG – sometimes enough is enough,’ he was critical of the government and suggested it was time for a change. He advocated a non-violent revolution as a solution to Papua New Guinea’s problems:

I have passion and love my nation. I love my country so much; I can’t even find the words to define it. I feel hurt when I see a young woman walking on the dusty road with three hungry crying children behind her.

Eighty percent of the population of PNG lives in rural areas, where the roads, bridges, infrastructure and school building are deteriorating and people have little or no access to government services. I see this as a violation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 21(2), where it states: ‘Everyone has the right to equal access to public services in his country’.

It’s like living in a fairy tale; each year we hear billion dollar profits announced by companies in PNG, but there is no tangible development. May I ask: where is our (the public’s) money going? Workers throughout the country are living in dire conditions: rotting houses, some condemned. Thousands of public servants don’t have a house provided by the government. They live in settlements....

Why is the PNG government hypnotising the world by announcing billion dollar kina budgets yet the country’s infrastructure is crumbling? The government is sensitive on issues relating to its corrupt practices. It uses its position to crush protesters (e.g., the 1997 UPNG protest in which several students were shot by police) because it realises that the educated elite, especially university students, know about these corrupt activities.

The government controls every department by abuse of power, using its discretion to appoint the heads of all departments. So when members of parliament misuse public funds, the agency heads do not comment or pretend not to know a thing, and the corrupt practice goes on until it adds up to millions of kina being stolen.
On Thursday MPs voted themselves a hefty 10 million kina bonus in perks. Who are these MPs to do this while the workers and public servants live in dire conditions on a K7 a fortnight housing allowance while MPs vote themselves a housing allowance of K1,720 a week? Ordinary citizens suffer and live in acute poverty while parliamentarians and their K12,000 drivers are chauffeured around in K50,000 tinted glass cars.

Should PNG have a revolution? Yes, why not. Many countries that are now well off (France, Russia, China, the United States) had revolutions. Change is a movement from one stage to another, it brings advancement and development. Revolution can be the mechanism of that change. PNG was given independence on a plate. We didn’t have to fight for it, that’s why we don’t appreciate our freedom and take it for granted.

I believe PNG can achieve a bloodless revolution. It only takes the will of the people. We are systemised by the Melanesian chief system, that’s why we respect the chief, but in order to change for the better, sometimes you have to gather up the courage to draw the line and say enough is enough. It’s now or never.

Paulus offered a more cautious approach and explained that not everything happening in Papua New Guinea was bad in a piece entitled, ‘It’s not all doom and gloom in PNG’:

As a Papua New Guinean who grew up during the pre-independence era and am now a public servant, I have enjoyed reading on this site for the last three weeks. From different sides of the fence we all remember that era with fondness.

As to the themes of PNG failing and imminent revolution, I have mixed feelings. I feel that all is not gloomy and lost. There are many dedicated people both in government and in the bureaucracy who are trying very hard to make things work. I am optimistic that in time a critical mass of like-minded people will bring about change but it will be slow and it will take several generations.

I trained for several years in Australian hospitals and could have stayed in Oz. I didn’t because the problems in this country have made it challenging to work here and try to find solutions. (Life is boring if there are no problems). My colleagues and I who form the Paediatric Society of PNG are slowly, and with help from many dedicated colleagues in Australia, beginning to observe small but improved outcomes due to some programs instituted with the aim of circumventing the obstacles presented by bad governments and inefficient bureaucrats. An example is the small but definite turnaround in infant mortality rates (in contrast to maternal deaths in childbirth).
At the village level there is also some room for guarded optimism. I go home to the village every year and, whilst services have not been effectively delivered in my area by the government or politicians, the people have slowly realised that they need to help themselves. The greatest lesson of not having external help is that the villagers now look after their resources with greater care than if they had aid or government help.

Most of the young men are now no longer seen loitering. They are working raising cash crops or engaging in small businesses such as running trade stores and at last count four of them with now sizable coffee plots and assets have gone back to finish high school as adults.

As to the idea of revolution, I am afraid it will not eventuate. If anything, there may be unorganised anarchy and violence but the possibility of organised revolution is now more remote than it ever was. Many young people are angry but that does not mean they have a shared vision and common purpose.

We all have to work hard. The tendency is to blame politicians. But all of us by omission of commission contribute to the state of affairs. The onus is on all Papua New Guineans to engage with politicians and local leaders in a constructive manner.

Accusations and name calling only make leaders obstinate. I have had to swallow my pride and engage certain individuals who may not be totally honest or scrupulous but I believe that the outcomes are more important. The road ahead will be extremely rocky but it is not the time for Papua New Guineans to run away; the ship is not sinking yet.

As to Australian aid much of it is now tied so that it is not likely to be squandered by politicians but linked directly to aid programs. However such a commitment frees the PNG government from funding these programs.

Finally to all of you, thank you for what you did for my people and for educating people like me.

The difference in these two articles, one calling for revolution and the other for calm, could be construed as simply the ideology of youth versus the wisdom of the elders or, less charitably, a conflict between those wanting change and a reaction from the ‘Uncle Tom’ brigade. Neither description would be accurate however. There was something deeper and considerably more complex at play. In PNG Attitude’s columns, a thoughtfulness about how to transform a nation was developing.

Although he occasionally reproduced extracts from articles from elsewhere, Keith never directly solicited material. The articles from Gelab and Paulus were a pleasant surprise because it
indicated *PNG Attitude* was being read more widely in Papua New Guinea. Both Gelab and Paulus would continue to write for the blog and enrich its content.

The second event occurred when Keith reproduced an article that had appeared in *The National*, one of Papua New Guinea’s two major national newspapers. Dr Kristoffa Ninkama from Simbu Province was blunt and straight to the point.

> The question I would like to pose is, ‘Is PNG better off now than it was 40 years ago?’ The simple answer is, ‘No’.” Dr Ninkama continued to point out the critical problems occurring with deteriorating infrastructure, declining general health, the downward spiral in education and literacy, resurgent cargo cultism and sorcery, escalating law and order problems, high level corruption, increasing malnutrition and failing government institutions. He concluded by writing: “I am sick and tired of hearing our politicians say PNG is a rich country. I have not seen one toea of these proclaimed riches filtering to my people in the villages. Is this something to be proud of?

The impact of Dr Ninkama’s article was apparent on Australian readers. When his views were set beside those of Gelab Piak, the effect was explosive. As amazing as it seems, the vast majority of expatriates who had worked in Papua New Guinea were unaware of the increasingly parlous situation.

For those of us who had been regularly visiting the country since independence and were aware of what was going on, it was difficult to credit this lack of knowledge among Australians who had once worked there. Just like the old colonials in the PNGAA, it seemed they were comfortably cocooned in their nostalgia and oblivious to what was happening in the real world.

Diane Bohlen asked, Does this mean the millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money the Australian government sends to PNG is being squandered by the politicians?” To which Gelab Piak responded, “Yes, that’s the truth. It's so plain. After 34 years of independence and Australian aid, PNG is still in the dark. Infrastructure falling apart, [there are] ineffective mechanism[s] of service delivery, and funding procedures that make funds prone to misappropriation. That’s how your money is being used. So you decide, does PNG really need aid?”
Bob Curtis was not afraid to face facts, “This is not a rumour, or if you like idle gossip; it is a serious wake-up call straight from the horse’s mouth. No amount of spin can conceal the facts, and I feel the day of reckoning is fast approaching. Dianne asked the awkward question, and the answer is yes. Of course elements of our work remain, but we should not be blind to the facts.”

Other readers acknowledged the problems but urged caution. Ross Wilkinson said, “I suppose too that I am sitting back and watching the comments before committing myself to print, but, what the hell! Some of the roads, airstrips and other service projects that I had a direct hand in surveying, designing, building and maintaining are no longer operational now that I and my ilk are no longer there. I despair that any assistance we may wish to render will be wasted away either through misdirection or fraudulent or corrupt behaviour.”

Ross also expressed concern about the tenor of Gelab Piak’s remarks. “I would hate to think that we may be linked to and support, violent radicalism…. “It is refreshing to see these observations being made, but I suggest some editorial discretion is required.”

He may have misconstrued Piak’s call for a peaceful revolution, which probably took its inspiration from the Philippines’ People Power revolution that began in 1983 and culminated in early 1986, seen widely as a victory of the people against the twenty-year authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos.

Cautioning against violence was also somewhat ironic because, in many parts of Papua New Guinea such as the highlands and the large cities, violence had become commonplace and was frequently carried out by the authorities, often the police force.

The suggestion that Keith refrain from running such material on the blog in the interests of not stirring up controversy was, of course, like waving a red rag at a bull. The veteran journalist, who in the early 1970s had contributed to magazines like Nation and the Sunday Review, was beginning to realise he had created a forum that could get people engaged, the first step along the road to creating action for change.
Other people responded in a more positive manner than Ross. Among them was Paul Oates who, with his wealth of administrative experience, submitted well considered and salient articles addressing the central themes and suggesting solutions.

These interventions by Papua New Guineans and the rejoinders changed the direction and tone of *PNG Attitude*. From a largely chatty blog concerned with the memories and doings of old Papua New Guinea hands, it had transformed quite rapidly into a thoughtful, albeit often robust and irreverent, forum centred round the inherent problems of the Papua New Guinea-Australian relationship.

When the blog had been established in its original incarnation as *ASOPA People*, there was no overriding plan that went much beyond entertainment and diversion but the intent that had emerged and driven Keith’s interest in what the PNGAA might become was being realised in another form. As the momentum gathered and the debate widened and heated up, Keith knew it was time to set a few ground rules.

By the end of April 2009, the old colonials in the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia realised they had been outmanoeuvred and conceded defeat on the issue of changes to the Association. Some didn’t even bother to vote in that month’s elections. In many ways it was the last gasp of Australian colonialism. There was almost something sad about the occasion. Those opposing the changes were mostly elderly and were hanging on to a way of life because it gave them a sense of camaraderie and friendship. Thankfully there was no gloating; it was as if an elderly and slightly embarrassing uncle had finally passed on.

“On the day after Anzac Day, at a special general meeting this morning, the PNGAA resolved by 231 votes to 7 to march forward to the future,” Keith wrote. “In doing so it has shunted aside the baggage of past disagreement and acrimony, got rid of the *après moi le deluge* mentality and given itself a fighting chance of being a great organisation that can make a significant contribution to the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. A hearty ‘well done'
to that overwhelming number of members of the PNGAA who have voted their belief in the greater engagement of Australia with Papua New Guinea. This is your day. It’s a good day for you. And it’s a good day for Papua New Guinea.”

*Après moi le deluge* is an expression attributed to Marquise de Pompadour, the lover of King Louis XV of France and literally means ‘after me the flood’, implying ‘I don't care what happens next, I'll be gone’, which was a sentiment expressed by one of the old colonials who opposed the change. Those who had voted for change, however, minded very much what came next. With its new aim of meaningful engagement with Papua New Guinea the PNGAA began to realign with *PNG Attitude* and opened up opportunities for collaboration on a range of future issues.

Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare visited Australia in April and seemed to get on famously with new Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. This was in stark contrast to his relationship with Rudd’s predecessor, John Howard. Meanwhile in Papua New Guinea there were serious and extensive anti-Asian riots. Both events were reported in detail on *PNG Attitude*.

The riots attracted a lot of reader comment. The often illegal takeover by Asian migrants of many small businesses supposedly reserved for Papua New Guineans had long been a gnawing problem. Frequently distinctions were made between the ‘Old Chinese’, who had been in New Guinea for more than one hundred years and were well accepted, and the new arrivals, many of whom had entered the country illegally. The riots demonstrated that Papua New Guineans were prepared to use violence when pushed too far, but the message seemed to be lost on the politicians.

Somare went out of his way to play down the issue when talking to the Australian media. In one notable speech, he claimed there was no poverty in Papua New Guinea, arguing that subsistence agriculture precluded such things. Terry Shelley, a long term resident and businessman in Goroka begged to differ:
Yes, things are simmering in Papua New Guinea. I think the big driver of the problems is poverty and frustration amongst the young. It is a fact that only ten percent of the population are in the formal economy while the rest are being left behind, with nothing but hardship and hunger down the track. This does not coincide with the Prime Minister’s comments of no poverty in PNG. There is - and a lot of hardship to go with it.

On my Sunday drives to Simbu (I worked out I have now made some 2,670 crossings of Daulo Pass, a lot of the early ones with blurred vision), I look at the people along the way and nothing has changed. The highland mommas are still washing themselves, their kaukau, their pikininis and these days their second hand clothes in the gutters beside the highway. And yet they are still smiling.

There is no future for them or their children. This has led to massive urban drift, where the only way to survive is crime or prostitution. And there’s another very important factor with huge future impact - the something like 80,000 kids leaving the education system each year with only less than ten percent having any chance of finding employment. The Government has totally neglected the most important asset of PNG - its youth.

We have had thirty years of slack government with the priorities all wrong. There is more money spent in Port Moresby than the rest of the country put together. Noa Badu of the National Economic and Fiscal Commission did a paper on the unfair distribution of wealth (taxes) which sums it up.

My home province of Simbu receives around K12.50 per head. Eastern Highlands K27 per head. Western Highlands K53 per head. These are the three coffee producing provinces that create wealth through coffee exports. The National Capital District, which produces nothing but empty bottles and full public servants, receives K250 per head. The madness of it all.

The Police Force is the same size today as it was at independence. Today the Police are nowhere near as efficient or disciplined as they were 30 years ago. And the rascals are not only better armed but also have mobile phones on their side. The actions and lifestyle of our pollies does not help either, with flash cars and gold bracelets. Their terrible choice in neckties is also unhelpful.

Youths are no longer hunter gathers or gardeners. They are unemployed, poverty-stricken urban mobs and, yes, there is more to come. Meanwhile, when I set out on my 2,671st trip on Sunday, I will think of you poor urban buggers in Oz and elsewhere as I gaze at the vision splendid from the top of Daulo and wonder at the beauty of it all. Where else could you possibly live?

In other articles PNG Attitude began to pay more detailed
attention to the deficiencies in the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. This article by Keith:

So now we know what Kevin Rudd was on about when he told a Canberra press conference late last month that AusAID was allowing “too much money [to be] consumed by consultants and not enough money … delivered to essential assistance … in the villages.” Documents obtained by AAP correspondent Ilya Gridneff and revealed this morning, disclose that 300 advisers working under Australia’s development program consume half of AusAID’s $400 million a year allocation to Papua New Guinea.

These consultants earn between $240,000 and $360,000 a year tax-free. If they bring along a partner they get $14,239 a month extra. And if they have children the allowance goes up by another $1,000 a month for each child. A company called Coffey International Development has been delegated by AusAID to hire these staff. Coffee International did not respond to AAP’s questions.

The $200 million a year spent on consultants contrasts starkly with the unavailability in village schools of history books that would cost a few thousand dollars and AusAID’s dismissive attitude to a project that would see these books in the hands of Papua New Guinean teachers and students.

Over the last few days PNG Attitude has reported the high drama of anti-Chinese riots throughout the PNG mainland and the low comedy of 300 AusAID consultants being paid astronomical salaries (amounting to half of Australia’s aid budget) to deliver indiscernible outcomes. At the same time, PNG Attitude has published comments from astute observers of PNG affairs analysing the reasons for the riots - grassroots neglect and social dislocation compounded by low and high level corruption....

There is an inescapable truth gradually emerging here. The Australian Government doesn’t seem to have a clue about how to respond to the complex political and social dynamics of its nearest neighbour. PNG abuts our nation and, with six million people, has real scale. It’s a saga waiting to unfold. There is high emotion here for Australians, too. PNG was once our territory and our people fought and died there in peace and war.

After years of serial neglect (occasionally peppered with offence) by the Howard Government, the Rudd enterprise decided to rebuild the relationship. Good thing and long overdue. But a relationship is more than warm words and polite handshakes. PNG is not an Australian marionette. Because it won’t say no to $400 million a year, even if half goes back whence it came, and won’t flaunt an important commercial relationship, doesn’t mean it’s in our keep.

When the political going gets tough and internal problems get overwhelming, when much more investment comes from the west than the south and when we remain supine, the real PNG may turn out to be rather
more individualistic than Australia thinks it is. There's evidence that the Australian government apprehends that PNG - especially in the approaching post-Somare era - is headed for an unpredictable and unstable period with outcomes that may be inimical to Australia's interests. But there's no evidence that our government knows what to do about it.

Keith is an inveterate and indefatigable campaigner and over the years he has taken on a multitude of causes. This is very much reflected in the material appearing in PNG Attitude and is an attraction for many of its readers. A high profile case was his campaign to reform the moribund Papua New Guinea Association of Australia.

The outcome of this was applauded by most people, especially the news that two Papua New Guineans living in Australia had been elected to its management committee. To all intents and purposes the PNGAA campaign was part of the bigger picture of fostering the relationship between the two countries. Such campaigns – whether it was building a memorial to dead soldiers in Canberra or assisting a blind bread-winner in Papua - drew in numerous readers, commentators and contributors, many of whom became benefactors of these various causes, knowing that they were doing someone a good turn in the interests of the mutual relationship.

In 2005 Pandanus Books had published my book, Bamahuta: Leaving Papua, about my experiences in Papua New Guinea as a kiap. Pandanus was the publishing arm of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. The book was factual but I changed some peoples’ names and rearranged some of the events to create a smoother narrative. Because of that, and as many of the people in the book were still alive, Pandanus decided it would be safer to publicise it as fiction. Despite that precaution, most people read it as fact.

In the book I described a three month stint I did on secondment to the Security and Intelligence Branch in Port Moresby. As is usual with these sorts of organisations, the branch was staffed by conservative types and I portrayed them as vaguely comical colonials pretending to be spies, which is what they were.
My account attracted the ire of the old guard in the PNGAA and they took me to task. The book was reasonably well-received elsewhere and had attracted positive reviews. One of these reviews, written for the PNGAA journal *Una Voce*, mysteriously didn’t make it to publication and the assumption was that this was the handiwork of the old colonials.

The book eventually sold out its print run but by then Pandanus had fallen victim to federal government funding cuts and shuffled off to publishers’ Heaven. So a small publisher in Cairns, home to many retired Papua New Guinea hands, republished it at about the same time as the PNGAA campaign was coming to a head.

The criticism the book received from the old guard, and its absence from the PNGAA journal, contrasted markedly with the reception it received from the progressives in the Association. The matter of the missing review made great fodder to demonstrate the minority backward looking view then current in the PNGAA. Keith made good use of the censorship to demonstrate their ‘take no prisoners’ approach.

I watched these exchanges from the sidelines with bemusement. I didn’t feel any animosity towards the critics of the book but reasoned publicity might be a good thing. However, when the whole saga died down, like many followers of *PNG Attitude*, I had been drawn into its orbit and began posting comments.

Some of the other causes Keith championed, such as gaining recognition for the kiaps and memorialising the people who lost their lives on the *Montevideo Maru* in World War II, were of interest to a smaller audience and not particularly relevant to Papua New Guinean readers who were more interested in reports and debate about what was going on in their country.

Kiap recognition and *Montevideo Maru* were big stories on the blog for a while and both also got play in the mainstream media. For *PNG Attitude’s* Papua New Guinean readers, however, they were not of such import. Getting the balance right between what appealed to both nationalities could be a tricky business.
Throughout the blog’s history, for example, Australian readers were enthusiastic commentators on Papua New Guinean politics but, to this day, the reverse is rare.

Getting a run for a story on Papua New Guinea in the Australian media was mostly hard going, although yarns dealing with violence and mayhem always met a ready market. For those Australians interested in Papua New Guinea affairs, PNG Attitude was emerging as an important source of information, although, even for some of those people who worked in Papua New Guinea, the continuing doom and gloom could be hard to bear.

For many of us who were interested and concerned, the narrative was frustrating and burdensome. We desperately wanted Papua New Guinea to succeed but felt it was letting us down badly. We were becoming tired of making excuses for it. Every story coming out of the country seemed to be worse than the last. Even the quality press in Australia indulged in the game of sensationalism.

An example of this occurred when the Melbourne Age ran an article otherwise informative and accurate but resorted to the sensational to attract attention. Until then I had contributed the occasional comment to articles appearing on the blog but had never written anything at length.

However, harbouring a sense of despair at what was going on in Papua New Guinea and increasingly angry at journalistic excesses, I submitted an article about the media in Papua New Guinea. It was somewhat overblown and laboriously argued but it was the beginning of my substantial involvement with PNG Attitude. In the piece, I argued that even the media in Papua New Guinea had abandoned objectivity and were mainly interested in catering for the obsessions of the elite:

There now seems to be middle-class elite in PNG which is big enough and powerful enough to dictate media content. These are the people who buy the newspapers and can afford television. They are not interested in grassroots issues like corruption and the collapse of rural infrastructure. The few dissenters among them seem to be mainly younger people, including students who have access to technology like the internet.
While I was fuming about the media, the hope Keith had entertained for the new Labor government in Canberra was evaporating:

This year I’ve been engaged in a number of worthy projects for which federal government assistance is required. We’re not talking large amounts of money. Some require little lucre indeed. National recognition of the Montevideo Maru tragedy. Cost: bugger all. Official recognition of the contribution of kiaps to PNG. Cost: bugger all.

Putting much-needed history books into PNG schools could be done for half the price of the annual fee of an average AusAid consultant. Cost: Not quite bugger all but, in the grand scheme of government budgeting, pretty much bugger all.

In each of these recent cases, and others I could mention, I have witnessed responses drafted in the interstices of the bureaucracy put into the mouths of Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries. I have read the weasel words. I have seen the eyes averted when reasonable action is sought. I have felt the negativity as if it were a physical affliction.

Negative, nay saying, disingenuous, uncooperative, hostile, responsibility-shifting words written by bureaucrats over the name of compliant Ministers to unnecessarily offend yet another constituency.

This government, despite Kevin Rudd’s inclusive rhetoric, is no more interested in engaging with rank and file citizens like you and me than it’s interested in flying economy class, staying in a three-star hotel and dining on a hamburger.

While Keith was railing against the chicanery of politicians and bureaucrats, another issue that would preoccupy PNG Attitude was emerging. This was the opportunistic intrusion into Papua New Guinean affairs of predatory carpet baggers intent on profiting from concerns about climate change and seizing the opportunities offered by carbon trading. It appeared that the politicians were deeply involved:

Sir Mekere Morauta, Leader of the PNG Opposition, has challenged the Somare Government over its putative carbon trading activities. He has expressed alarm at unusual agreements with a large number of companies to trade carbon on behalf of PNG “without proper scrutiny and without regulatory policy or legislation in place”.

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“If we are not careful, cowboys operating behind the scenes, using our name and wearing our cloak, will reap the lion’s share of carbon revenue,” Sir Mekere said. “It appears that the Prime Minister and his henchmen… have been hawking these potential assets around the world to all and sundry”. Sir Mekere went on to identify the firms involved and their key personnel.

“It is obvious that the whole situation in relation to carbon trading in our country is a complete and utter mess,” Sir Mekere concluded. “Instead of developing an appropriate policy and legal framework that ensures protection of the interests of landowners and the state, the Prime Minister, Ministers and the staff of the Office of Climate Change have been criss-crossing the globe, appointing ‘brokers’ on who knows what terms, and basically selling people’s and national assets at whim.”

Towards the end of 2009, the range of topics appearing on the blog broadened. They ranged across AusAID’s bizarre distribution of bookmarks to children across Papua New Guinea, allegedly to encourage literacy (Keith asked what they were expected to do with them when they didn’t have any books), the stumbling efforts of a Somare government under siege from the Morauta opposition, the antics of the ‘carbon cowboys’ and much else. The increased diversity of topics and issues motivated Papua New Guinean readers to engage and the contributions from them increased substantially.

In October 2009, Reginald Renagi posted his first article in what was to become an informative and fertile stream to PNG Attitude. Reg (photo) was a retired naval Captain (a PNG Defence Force Colonel), well respected in his community and an active promoter of Papuan interests. Keith sought more information about him, pointing out to readers that PNG Attitude was “a club with no membership fee other than a tolerant attitude, and no barrier to entry for anyone interested in the future of Papua New Guinea and its relationship with Australia”.

“Reg is an interesting bloke,” Keith wrote, “a well-regarded figure and a prolific contributor to the media in Papua New
Guinea, writing social commentary for the *Post Courier, Weekend Courier, The National* and the *Sunday Chronicle.*’ While Reg added: “I write about certain key strategic issues our government needs to address in PNG’s national interest. They don’t, so concerned citizens have to keep reminding them. I get invited to go on NBC talkback programs or give radio interviews on controversial issues in the public interest.”

Reg went on to have a significant influence in *PNG Attitude,* not just as a result of the articles he wrote but because he was one of a few Papua New Guineans prepared to stand up and be recognised, showing he was unafraid to use his own name in expressing his views. Through his example, many more Papua New Guineans began to announce themselves and join in the blog’s debates and commentaries:

Keith encouraged Reg to write a couple of biographical articles and the first dealt with his involvement in community advocacy, freely providing professional support mainly to ex-servicemen with no other recourse and who could not afford the high fees of those who, as Reg put it, “charge an arm and a leg for advice”.

Reg was also something of a Papuan nationalist, as his second article showed. “There is a growing groundswell of Papuans who desire autonomy in future,” he wrote:

The majority of Papuans feel Papua New Guinea is not really a united country; they feel marginalised and failed by the present political system. The system is corrupt to its core and politicians have let us down.... We want to see Papua on its own as an autonomous region to develop a secure and peaceful society for the next generation of smart Papuans.... Papuans think of the good old days under the Australian administration. Life then was good, secure and safe – but not now under the present political leadership, where insecurity and the threat from primitive non-Papuan groups have increased over the years.

This piece attracted what was at the time a record fourteen comments, mostly from Papuans. Only a few appended their real names. At the time I observed:
If my Motu serves me correctly there are a lot of pseudonyms attached to these comments [and] that tells me people are afraid of speaking out. That needs to be overcome; take Reg's lead, he's not afraid to put his name to his comments. As Keith says in his separate summary, it's getting hot in the kitchen. Now is the time for all the honest people in PNG to stand together, not split into factions.

Reg went on to submit many more contributions, often written from a Papuan perspective. He elicited much support for his intelligent and well-considered essays, not only from Papua New Guineans but from Australians who had worked in a Papua, which had always been the poor cousin of New Guinea.

The moveable feast that was PNG Attitude was also being noticed by many people and organisations beyond its regular readership. As Keith had long suspected, it was being monitored by various government agencies and private interests as a barometer of Papua New Guinean affairs and its relationship with Australia. Confirmation of this came from the National Library of Australia.

Keith announced that the Library had sought permission (“which I happily and quickly gave before it changed its bibliophilic mind”) to provide public access in perpetuity to PNG Attitude in its Pandora web archive. “[Pandora identifies] online publications, archiving those that we consider have national significance,” said senior librarian, Edgar Crook, who added that the library would take preservation action to keep PNG Attitude accessible even with hardware and software changes over time. Since 2009, the blog has been re-recorded in its entirety each year so significant additions and changes are archived. “We’re feeling very, very chuffed,” Keith annotated.

The first issue to be archived by the National Library was on 29 September 2009 and featured a satirical article written by Keith:

A boy child was born in Goroka Hospital in the Eastern Highlands just five minutes after a visiting dignitary happened by in March 2008. So impressed were the parents, Esau and Lina Kitgi from isolated Degi village, they named the baby in honour of the visitor … Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd.
And from time to time since, with the help of AAP correspondent Ilya Gridneff, we have kept track of Baby Kevin’s progress. Well he’s reached another milestone in his short life – first words have been uttered. “He’s growing up so quickly, talking now too,” says proud Dad, Esau.

Well, sort of. The 18-month old has managed “mum” and “dad” but, as Gridneff points out, “he struggles with his namesake’s favourite phrase ‘programmatic specificity’.” Baby Kevin is now quite a tourist attraction. Not yet Kokoda Track status, but five Australians this month made the pilgrimage to Degi, where Esau proudly held the toddler aloft in front of cheering villagers.

“I just had to see him for myself and my parents wanted to see him too,” enthused Matt Carr, a renewable energy expert, who brought his visiting parents Elizabeth and John from Toowoomba. “He looked like an Eastern Highlands Jesus – naked with local finery.” Well, that should get the tourists in – especially if a nappy’s discovered stained with a saintly image.

There’s much more of this story still to come. I’ll be urging Gridneff to seek solid evidence that Baby Kevin is emulating in some tangible way his better known (but “less tanned” as Silvio Berlusconi might put it) counterpart.

Is he about to adopt his first pair of round spectacles? Does he have the ability to dummy spit at tardy air stewards? Will he potty-mouth senators wanting more postage stamp money? And how soon will he be able to distinguish between the G20, the G8 and the g-spot? I, for one, can hardly wait.

The significance of the National Library’s intervention was recognised by many readers as a sign that PNG Attitude was coming to the attention of influential people and that, in Australia at least, it had been accorded some “national significance”.

As the realisation grew that the blog had emerged as a useful conduit to politicians, journalists and similar opinion leaders, its attraction to writers grew. In addition to its other functions, it was now seen as a sounding board for opinion pedlars of all persuasions.

In November 2009, AAP correspondent Ilya Gridneff wrote that “in a shock announcement, Papua New Guinea officials say they are prepared to reopen the Manus Island detention centre to help solve Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s asylum seeker problem.” Was this really Papua New Guinea’s idea or was it a stitch up organised by the Australian government? Even in 2016,
the jury was still out on that question. Gridneff wrote:

Foreign Minister Sam Abal told AAP the government is open to the idea of offering the facility, which Australia used for offshore detention of asylum seekers under the Howard government's 'Pacific Solution'. "If there is a request from Australia, our government will consider it," he said.

The Manus Island detention centre was closed in 2004. It is now used by the PNG Defence Force. "The facility is still there, we've done this before," Manus Island Governor Michael Sapau told AAP. "We are here, we would like to re-open and see the program continue."

Then, in early December, the long awaited announcement about the massive liquefied natural gas project being developed in the Southern Highlands was given the go-ahead. The politicians couldn’t wipe the smiles off their faces for weeks. Joint venture partners Oil Search and Exxon Mobil and the PNG government signed the deal at a ceremony at Parliament House. The project was estimated to cost $10 billion to develop, forecast to deliver $35 billion in revenue to Papua New Guinea and predicted to have a transforming effect on the Papua New Guinean economy.

Transforming? Well quite a few people were sceptical, including commentator Reginald Renagi:

LNG – another big bang project to taunt Papua New Guineans. Everyone is talking non-stop about the great benefits of the LNG project and what blessings it will bestow upon the poor people of Papua New Guinea. Yeah, big deal. As usual, it's all big talk from the government. As usual, there will not be any sustainable 'trickle-down' effect for the grassroots and resource owners.

Apart from little benefits to the resource owners and ordinary Papua New Guineans, as has happened many time before, everyone in the food chain (local, provincial, national governments; corrupt cronies; a dysfunctional public service; foreign investors; carpetbaggers and many special interests) will get a piece of the action (or fingers in the cookie jar).

This will further increase future prospects of political corruption on a grand scale. We will see more local member's pork-barrelling pet projects sprouting up all over the country. The greedy 'pollies' will continue to fill their pockets. More wanton plundering of the people's resources by those they mandate to lead and govern this country. Today’s typical Papua New
Guinean member of parliament has unfortunately and unashamedly become a greedy despot....

The fact is that people will suffer more from the negative effects of this mad rush to fast track the LNG project. This is being done at the people's expense and the real problems of PNG are not being addressed by the prime minister and his government.

All these years later, we can report that Reg was right in almost every respect; the government spent much of the revenue before it was accrued and by 2016 the Papua New Guinea economy was in trouble and the Papua New Guinean people were still waiting for the benefits.

But it was on a cheerful note that Keith wished everyone the greetings of the Season:

And a splendid Christmas to all our readers... with special thanks to regular contributors and commenters: Paul Oates, John Fowke, Phil Fitzpatrick, Reg Renagi, Emmanuel Narokobi, Richard Jones, Malum Nalu, Loch Blatchford, Terry Shelley, Graham Pople, Bruce Copeland, Don Hook, Ilya Gridneff, Ken Wright, Colin Huggins, Ross Wilkinson, Laurie Meintjes, Sir Paulias Matane, Brian Darcey, Roy Clark, Chris Viner-Smith, Robin Mead, Gelab Piak, Chris Diercke, Mari Ellingson, Bill Brown, Bernard Oberleuter and Barbara Short

2009 had been a tumultuous year for Keith and a big one for PNG Attitude. The blog was beginning to realise its promise. It had made the transformation into a public platform and was beginning to emerge as the joint Australia-Papua New Guinea enterprise that had been envisaged at the year’s beginning. The job now was to keep pushing forward.
Welcome to Controversy Corner, 2010

Two significant events marked the beginning of 2010. The first was the announcement of Ian Kemish as the new Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea. Later, Ian’s appointment would have important ramifications for PNG Attitude. Correspondent Don Hook wrote:

Australia has just announced its new high commissioner to PNG. He is Ian Ferguson Kemish AM, who spent several years as a schoolboy in Port Moresby. Ian Kemish, 46, was born in England but went to Papua New Guinea at a very young age. His father Len worked for Elcom in the 1960s and early 1970s and was a commissioned officer in the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles serving in Lae, Rabaul and Port Moresby.

Mr Kemish holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) degree from the University of Queensland and a Diploma of Education. He was a schoolteacher before joining the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1988. Fluent in Tok Pisin, Indonesian and German, Kemish served at Australian diplomatic missions in Vienna, Bander Seri Begawan and recently was Australian Ambassador to Germany. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia for managing the Australian government’s response in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings.

Ian stepped into what had become a very volatile Papua New Guinea and his diplomatic skills were immediately put to the test. Among other things Michael Somare, suffering ill health, was under pressure from his son Arthur to name an heir; and Arthur’s idea was that it should be Arthur. As PNG Attitude reported it:

PNG’s governing National Alliance is in crisis today as party heavyweights publicly express anger that Sir Michael Somare may be about to hand over
the leadership to his son, Arthur. The Post-Courier reports that members of the Alliance from Momase, Highlands, Southern and Islands regions – pretty much all of Papua New Guinea – are unhappy that Sir Michael is being pushed by Arthur, who wants to replace his father as Prime Minister.

It is understood Sir Michael has been ill and will soon announce a major cabinet reshuffle. This may bring the leadership issue to a head. Sir Michael’s media adviser and daughter, Betha Somare, has denied there is a leadership scuffle, saying Sir Michael’s preference for the next leader is his deputy, Sir Puka Temu.

Elsewhere the campaign to memorialise the Montevideo Maru was making headway but the campaign to recognise kiaps had hit a number of roadblocks. Contributor John Fowke (photo) and others were perplexed at this apparent quest for kiap glory.

Meanwhile back in Papua New Guinea, one of the biggest climate change swindles, in which Prime Minister Somare seemed to be involved, was unwinding. Paul Oates reported:

Well, it happened at lightning speed. Despite the Copenhagen debacle, carbon trading has started in Papua New Guinea. No surprise that it’s been hailed by Kirk Roberts, head of Nupan (PNG) Trading Co and self-styled ‘carbon cowboy’, who told the Post Courier: "This is a fantastic thing for Papua New Guinea, who [sic] has chosen to take advantage of commercialised carbon trading while the rest of the world talks and talks.”

An important question is whether the Papua New Guinea government recognises this arrangement, given that the department responsible for these matters was recently reorganised. It could also be asked if the payments to landowners are to be taxed and who is responsible and accountable for the distribution of these public monies. The critical issue is whether these agreements will actually stop timber companies from cutting down the forests and how this will be policed. This has never been explained.... Without further details, the potential for this to be revealed as yet another 'cargo cult' or win moni ikamap nating seems great.”

On a happier note, Keith was able to confirm a new development in the content of PNG Attitude. Readers’ comments, often offered in great detail and occasionally republished as
articles, had become a defining part of PNG Attitude. The comments were intelligent and well-thought out in stark contrast to the glib snipes and offensive *ad hominem* insults characteristic of much social media commentary:

When this blog kicked off nearly four years ago, on 26 February 2006, the first comment, from Henry Bodman in Brisbane, appeared the same afternoon. And Colin Huggins, who still chips in regularly with his two bob’s worth, put in a maiden appearance in Recent Comments two days later. But there wasn’t a helluva lot of commentary back then. I wrote the posts and people read them largely in silence.

It wasn’t really until regular commenters like Paul Oates (first post, 4 November 2007) got into their stride that the interactivity really blossomed. Back then, the site was entitled ASOPA People and it had a much narrower view of its purpose. Its evolution into PNG Attitude came over time and was largely driven by a growing and diversifying readership.

It was never in doubt that the internet could be a strong influence in bringing together Papua New Guineans and Australians who cared about the relationship between our two countries, and who wanted to strengthen it. But for that to happen, the blog had to be a real forum – it had to be interactive, it had to have a wide input from a range of contributors, and it had to be controversial and even irritating.

Well, we’re now getting around 250 visitors on a good day and on Monday, for the first time, the number of comments on this site overtook the total number of posts. It’s been said the comments are frequently much more entertaining than the posts. I’ll leave that judgement to you. Analysis shows readers go both places when they visit the site. Anyway, I think contributors and commenters should all take a bow this week. You’ve made PNG Attitude a valuable forum indeed.

This was interesting and significant because it indicated PNG Attitude had become a truly interactive blog. In short, there was a conversation going on and issues were being debated. For a blog that prided itself on championing the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship, it was a point of arrival after a lot of hard work. (By 2016, the blog had published 10,000 articles and more than 30,000 comments.)

Towards the middle of 2010, Keith changed the appearance of PNG Attitude and added a new strapline: ‘Committed to strengthening the PNG-Australia relationship’. It was another
subtle shift in direction and recognition of the blog’s increasing influence. Rather than simply reporting on issues it was itself becoming an agent of change, as Keith appreciated:

Given our professed intention to build stronger links between our two countries, it’s fair to ask why we take such a critical view of Papua New Guinean governance. And of Australian policy towards Papua New Guinea. As individuals, politicians are not a big concern of ours. Ordinary people - and how they are affected by politicians and bureaucrats - are a big concern. New reader Paul Ning commented yesterday “I personally believe PNG is a failing state.” Failing states and failed states do incredible harm to their citizens. We must do what we can, small though we are, to avert such an outcome.

What PNG Attitude can do, through a growing readership, now nearing 500 each day, is to apply pressure to people of influence who are not doing the right thing or not doing enough. We have a group of marvellous and knowledgeable contributors who - while occasionally voicing frustration at lack of progress - continue to press for positive change, rational policy, efficient administration and ethical government. The best thing you can do to assist, dear reader, is to recruit more dear readers. There is power in numbers. I have been a politician myself, and I know the inescapable truth of numbers.

An example of this kind of proactivity was the way PNG Attitude had been drawing attention to what was believed to be the poor performance of AusAID in its Papua New Guinean operations. An article from February of 2010 provided a good example:

In a revealing criticism of AusAID, an Australian academic has suggested that the process of appointing consultants has been corrupted. “Aid is an industry for profit. It's a business,” Dr Sinclair Dinnen of the Australian National University told AAP’s Ilya Gridneff.

“For many AusAIDers when they reach a certain age they switch over to consultancy. They know the AusAID system inside out. They know exactly what is required in order to win a bid,” he said “They know the people who are likely to be sitting on the tender board, so they are very well positioned.”

Meanwhile Gridneff reports that almost half of Australia's foreign aid budget goes back to Australian companies and Australian experts working tax-free as highly paid consultants. It’s a scenario in which aid givers and aid
receivers can be perceived as having stewardship of a corrupt process at both ends of the aid pipeline.

Gary Lee from Aidwatch said Australian aid money needs to be spent on communities not consultants. “Australians are not aware that such significant proportions of our aid budget goes to pay very high consultant wages, especially high, if you compare the rates to the average public servant in PNG or even Australia” he said. “Part of the problem is also because there is a lack of transparency and accountability within AusAID.”

There had been a half-hearted attempt by the Rudd government to address this issue but it had become bogged down in the internal politics of Australia and Papua New Guinea. For Rudd it was a way of highlighting the poor management of the Howard government and for Michael Somare it was a way of shifting blame for his government’s ineptitude. In the end neither seemed interested in derailing the gravy train. PNG Attitude would keep hammering the point.

Bringing issues of concern about what was happening in Papua New Guinea was a lot more problematic than tackling Australian agencies. While it was possible to address Papua New Guinean issues in general terms using print and social media, it was not possible to get much detail and neither was it possible to influence change to any great degree.

Publication also carried certain risks, not least being the propensity of the accused to take legal action or despatch thugs to intimidate informants. Litigation was a favourite tool of politicians in Papua New Guinea, they used it to delay action, obscure their involvement, threaten people and, if possible, extract disproportionate compensation. To make matters worse their legal costs seemed to be paid from the public purse.

I discussed this with Keith on a couple of occasions after he had deleted incriminating names from articles. As he pointed out, although physically removed from potential violence and undeterred by threats, he was still open to litigation. Without the considerable resources needed to fight defamation actions, he had to walk a fine line.

This was also why organisations like Transparency Papua New
Guinea were unwilling to publish the names of crooked politicians, public servants and business people. Much critical comment made in the media in Papua New Guinea was done under assumed names consistent with a culture of fear, intimidation and retribution. There had to be a way around this problem.

Taking inspiration from the ‘naming and shaming’ approach used by some media outlets in Australia, Keith, Paul Oates and I decided to try something similar in Papua New Guinea. However, rather than targeting the socially disadvantaged for ‘crimes’ such as traffic offences, petty theft and drunkenness, as was the practice of the Australian tabloid media, we decided to aim higher up the food chain. We weren’t holding out much hope but thought it worth a try. Here’s how the spiel went:

Here’s an important project you can assist with. It’s designed to reveal the names and wrongdoings of Papua New Guinean politicians who are not acting responsibly with taxpayers’ money or who are otherwise using their positions improperly. PNG Attitude has a large pool of well-placed and well informed readers who can provide information that may bring pressure to bear on corrupt politicians. But we need your assistance. You have to give us the information.

It may be information you know firsthand (facts); it may be information you know second hand (pointing us to people who know); or it may be information you can research on the internet, or elsewhere.

Then followed a ‘ten-point program’ detailing how readers could confidentially assist the project, which included these guidelines as to what we were looking for: “If you know of an MP you think is corrupt, taking bribes or otherwise doing the wrong thing with PNG people’s money, email us. We also want to know who the good guys are, that is, those politicians working hard and honestly but not getting the credit they deserve.”

We made it clear that we would need evidence, if necessary check with lawyers, publish under PNG Attitude’s name not the informant’s and share the information with appropriate agencies. The announcement ended with a rallying cry, “Let’s work together to get rid of corrupt politicians in the great nation of Papua New
Guinea.”

Good idea, perhaps, but the response from Papua New Guinea was muted at best. There were just two comments: one from the indefatigable Reg Renagi and the other from Effrey Dademo, head of Act Now PNG!, a recently established, ground-breaking and gutsy Papua New Guinean community activist organisation. “Way to go, I like this,” said Effrey while Reg wrote:

The three musketeers have done it again, and I take my hat off to them for this brave action. I have no real sympathy for these PNG pollies who are on the take. They are a total disgrace and should be behind bars with the keys to the jail thrown away. This is something the PNG Transparency International should have done a while back....

The Rudd government and other so-called do-gooder agencies like to pontificate, but won’t do anything at all to help a country that is daily bleeding to death on its doorstep. This bold and brave initiative must be given the strongest support and commitment required by all friends of Papua New Guinea who really care what my country is going through today, and in the future.

Otherwise, the response from readers in Papua New Guinea was deathly silence, which we had half-anticipated. We waited a while to see what might happen; nothing happened. We wondered whether the fear of reprisal was so great that no one was game to risk the possible consequences of being a whistle blower or informant. Or was it just ennui? Paul summed things up a few weeks later when we had agreed this was a project that was going nowhere:

To people like me, who regularly peruse the Papua New Guinean media and internet blogs, there seems a constant steam of queries as to why 'someone' doesn't do 'something' about the situation in Papua New Guinea? So perhaps the question should be posed: why is it that those who want something done aren't prepared to do it themselves?

At independence, Papua New Guinea had a governance system imposed on it that was never designed to cope with today's massive amounts of corruption and malfeasance. Clearly the present regulatory bodies are unable to grapple with the size and nature of the problem, otherwise it would not have been allowed to develop into what it is today....
The traditional Papua New Guinean practice of group discussion and consensus that was so effective in a village-based society seems to be exacerbating rather than helping the current impasse. Without a culture of individual leadership and decisive action, talk sometimes becomes the point beyond which people are not prepared to go. So is this quirk of human nature about to condemn Papua New Guinea to a period of collapse and social dysfunction?

The result of our experiment was disconcerting. It seemed that the people of Papua New Guinea were prepared to march to their fate without protest. I had ploughed my way through over one hundred pages of emails, press clippings, blogs and other sources collected as part of the project and identified a compost heap that merely smelled bad. Most of what I came across was dross, chaff, hearsay and piffle which wouldn’t stand up in a light breeze let alone the strong wind of evidence-based inquiry. Disappointed, I wrote:

It is all rather disappointing. There’s been much ranting and raving by commentators on this blog (and elsewhere) about corruption in Papua New Guinea, but no one seems to have firm evidence of actual citable cases. Either that or they are not game to share it with us. There is a distinct odour of PNG alarmism about the whole thing; the sort of noises you get when there are rumours of sorcerers about.

The maddening thing is that we all know corruption is rife. We’ve all seen the smoke, but no one seems to know where to find the fire. The usual comment about corruption is that the government must immediately do this or the government must immediately do that. Government is not going to do this or that when it’s holding all the cards. It has to be exposed for the corrupt fraud that it is and forced to make changes.

I went on to analyse what my desk research had revealed. I’d discovered, somewhat to my surprise, much of the impetus for corruption was coming from outside politics and the public service. A company or individual seeking special treatment, trying to do something illegal or just avoiding red tape, approached a public servant or politician offering a bribe, which was accepted and the desired outcome achieved. I was also dismayed to frequently find lawyers complicit in these ‘transactions’.
The vast majority of stories about corruption and misuse of public funds could be put down to ineptitude and stupidity. I found a plethora of stupid decisions made by people who didn’t know what they are doing. There was petty pilfering and nepotism along the way but, by and large, it was idiots wasting money.

Obfuscation was a method developed to a fine degree in Papua New Guinea. It started with half-baked report in the media, usually lacking useful detail and designed for sensation, and ended with the responsible politician or public servant not having a clue about what was going on in their area of responsibility. This was exacerbated by public cowardice: people sitting by and watching corrupt practices in action but not having the guts to do anything about it. I assessed that, until the public generated a bit of moral fibre, there was little hope of changing anything. The common dynamic one got from the public after the media hinted at yet another corruption debacle was outraged indignation which lasted a day or so and was then forgotten.

My conclusion was that Papua New Guinea desperately required three things: a well-resourced and trained police force; a top-notch training facility for public servants and administrators; and a really independent judiciary, including the Ombudsman’s Office. Something also needed to be done about the lawyers; experts at bending and subverting the legal system for their own and their client’s benefit.

While PNG Attitude’s attempt at using its readership to expose corruption had ended in abject failure, there was an exciting new voice emerging in Papua New Guinea who was using the authority of his office and the force of his character to do the same thing, but much better. A senior legal officer in the Solicitor General’s Office, Sam Koim, was to become a household name in Papua New Guinea as a bold corruption fighter, willing to put well-being and career at risk to try to clean out the Aegean Stables.

Paul Oates mentioned him in an appreciative article in May 2010 which told how Koim had stated publicly that Minister Moses Maladina may have misled Parliament and that Governor
Luther Wenge may have been in on the act. Koim’s comments related to the so-called ‘Maladina Amendment’, which was seeking to change the Constitution to weaken the powers of the Ombudsman Commission and protect members of parliament from criminal investigation for fraud and corruption.

On a lighter note, Keith published the results of a PNG Attitude reader survey. The outcome was positive and the breakdown of what most attracted readers illuminating. The top ten areas of interest were: news - 63 percent; issues – 60 percent; comments – 57 percent; people – 57 percent; and history – 57 percent. There was then quite a gap to the next three: obituaries – 43 percent; books & media – 40 percent; and true stories – 40 percent. The other sixteen categories lagged by a good distance.

Consistent with the blog’s dogged pursuit of deficiencies in Australia’s foreign aid to Papua New Guinea, when Foreign Minister Stephen Smith announced that AusAID would conduct a review of adviser effectiveness, Keith and Paul Oates published a joint article on the inappropriate allocation of resources by under-informed bureaucrats:

Many overseas advisers and consultants are reported to be paid half million dollar contracts by AusAID. So-called 'boomerang aid' has been around for years and refers to the giaman [deceitful] practice where AusAID pays contracting firms and Australian consultants lots of money which comes back to Oz bank accounts with Papua New Guinea not accruing any substantial benefit...

It is claimed that Papua New Guinean experts are not available and overseas consultants must be recruited. But why are local experts not available? Why, after so long and so much money, are they not there? In our day, we worked ourselves out of a job by effectively training Papua New Guineans. How else did PNG gain independence when it did? The present strategy seems to be having the effect of driving the PNG public service into greater dependence on aid.

Could it be that AusAID contractors (thoroughly conflicted, because for every new Papua New Guinean professional, less contractors are required) aren't highly motivated to train Papua New Guineans to take over their jobs? After all, working yourself out of a job is not consistent with
contracting companies' bottom line. These companies exist to have their consultants stay in jobs.

When you combine this conflict of interest with PNG government appointment processes severely corroded by the nepotistic and corrupt wantok system, many educated Papua New Guineans have nowhere to turn to build fulfilling, creative nation-building roles. They are cut out of the action both by 'boomerang aid' and wantokism. These people are a wasted resource to Papua New Guinea, and both Papua New Guinean and Australian governments have a lot to answer for in not creating an environment in which the nation's talent is fully and fairly deployed.

But let's get back to AusAID, when did you last read a story about a major Australian aid triumph in PNG? We fear the casebook is pretty much empty.... A recent inquiry into Papua New Guinea government finances revealed horrendous inefficiencies, and worse, in the management of most government departments. Giving more dollars to badly governed agencies is hardly likely to achieve the desired results.

[That] AusAID and partner governments are being asked to appraise their own programs is a disgrace. It is a bare-faced, grubby conflict of interest. Moreover, it is no recipe for change. It is a plan for dissembling, covering up and continuing a corrupted system that needs to be cleaned up quick smart. The corruption of aid processes exists on both sides of the Coral Sea, with the Australian government – as the aid giver - probably more culpable than anyone.

The article received twenty four comments, a good outcome at the time, but many came from just one person. He was an Australian ex-army officer living in Port Moresby who had been posting well-considered and entertaining posts on the blog. However these latest comments were homophobic and directed at what he considered the inappropriate staffing of Australian aid agencies working on HIV/AIDS programs. He accused these people of importing perverted sexual habits to Papua New Guinea and undermining family values in the guise of education:

A warning to Pacific nations. Beware of the AusAID Trojan Horse that is offered to nations as part of aid. It is not aid but sexual imperialism. It will offer women’s and children’s rights to weaken not strengthen families. Women are intended to control the world after rejecting the family and men.

Homosexuality and feminism were touchy subjects in
patriarchal Papua New Guinea and generated a lot of discussion in social media, much of it couched in vile language. The ex-officer’s comments didn’t let up and, after heavily editing them, Keith was tolerant for a while before putting a stop to the discussion. What followed was a tirade of abusive and defamatory emails, copied to scores of other people, accusing Keith of being a homosexual predator and worse. Keith had no choice but to block the ex-officer from the blog, an action he had never had to take previously.

*PNG Attitude* gave contributors a great deal of latitude and the blog was essentially very open and willing to entertain all sorts of diverse, critical and conflicting views. In ten years there have been only two other cases of a ban being imposed. The second case involved a self-confessed highly opinionated contributor who was an entertaining and popular writer. His problem was the drink that would inspire him to fire off comments, often in the middle of the night before rationality dawned. Keith was tolerant of this for a while, simply refusing to publish his *ad hominem* attacks, but he was eventually banned when he, like the ex-officer decided to take to mass emails to abuse and misrepresent Keith and popular Papua New Guinean writer Francis Nii. The third case, in 2016, also involved a contributor engaging in offensive and possibly defamatory personal attacks.

Before they were banned however the ex-officer and the opinionated contributor became embroiled in an online slanging match that involved Reginald Renagi, who was a good friend of the military type. It amused readers of the blog greatly but prompted Keith to reluctantly exert some editorial muscle:

> Over the last couple of days you may have been witness to a little family spat on *PNG Attitude*. It occurred between some of our most prolific – and, dare I say, most valued - contributors. The General, the Admiral and Moses.

> The General never attained such rank in his Army career. Major was as close as he got. When he puts his mind to it, he can write like a dream; but he can bore like a woodworm when he doesn’t put said mind to said it. As editor, I never know whether I’m going to be delighted or despairing. Life around The General is such a rich tapestry of verbal conflict.
The Admiral is Reginald Renagi – a family favourite of many of our readers. Reg never got to be an Admiral, of course, but in the Papua New Guinean Navy he got a lot closer to it than The General ever came to being a general. Reg writes about how things might be. Every society needs its Reg’s. Yes, they can frustrate because the goals they espouse are often beyond us; and because they rarely tell us precisely how to attain them. But we need people like Reg; people who are willing to write, to let us know what those goals ought to be. Quibble not with the idealist; it is a necessary role.

The curmudgeonly Moses had laboured up the mountain and, in doing so, had discovered some profound truths. And having discovered them, he now labours down the mountain - when he must have thought his labours might have been over - to share those truths and ensure they are heard. Heard just doesn’t mean listened to; it means acknowledged and acted upon. Few of our readers would appreciate just how hard Moses works at this. If all our aid agency workers laboured as conscientiously, as intelligently and as passionately, Papua New Guinea would be a far better place. So would Australia.

Over these recent days I have had to exercise the editorial axe with a gusto I profoundly dislike. I much prefer open debate, untrammelled by some so-called editor. But the conflict was getting a little close to the bone. A little too personal. What readers may not appreciate is how our contributors go offline – and use emails between each other – to resolve issues that may cause personal offence. I didn’t invent that recourse, but I think it’s a damn good system. However, sometimes it doesn't work. The public forum is too tempting.

Not that readers object to a bit of conflict (after all, the mass media thrive on it and yesterday readership on PNG Attitude surged to 30 percent higher than average), but there is a fine line in here somewhere – where personal conflict turns us off instead of switching us on. PNG Attitude is not a physical property. It is information. If you gave PNG Attitude a shovel, it could not dig a hole. If you gave it an SP beer, it could not drink it. If you gave it a million kina, it would probably waste it. Just like AusAID.

Do not expect PNG Attitude to solve many problems. But expect it to raise them, debate them and espouse solutions to them (which it cannot give effect to, even where they are half sensible). There is only one issue PNG Attitude, as an entity, ever wanted to – and continues to want to – address. The issue of the long silence that existed for too long between ordinary Papua New Guineans who live in PNG and ordinary Australians who live in Australia. People like us.

That silence (which denied a truly fraternal friendship and deep knowledge, one of the other) is beginning to recede - a little. Subscriptions to our free newsletter (now numbering well over 600) are evenly divided between the people of our two countries. And the readers of this website
are representative of our two countries (and also a significant representation beyond).

People who are in jobs where they can effect solutions also read this website and its accompanying PNG Attitude newsletter. But there are many of us who can only occupy the sidelines and cheer. Or wail. That said, we’re all vital to the task – as some patriot once said: They also serve who only stand and wait. But – General, Admiral, Moses – we particularly need you, and are in your debt. We thank you for your knowledge, strength and passion. And we thank you mostly because you give a damn.

There were, of course, contributions sent to PNG Attitude that were unsuitable by virtue of their subject matter (one Papua New Guinean writer was experimenting with erotic/pornographic writing for instance). In other cases articles was unsalvageable with poorly expressed ideas heaped upon confusing grammar and English that had crashed and burned.

Keith edited most contributions, a largely unseen and unappreciated workload attached to publishing. This was especially necessary with many Papua New Guinean writers. Literacy in English was a struggle for many writers and otherwise perceptive and creative contributions often required extensive editing before they could be published. Poor literacy may also have been one reason why it took so long to get Papua New Guinean writers involved with the blog; they may have felt embarrassed to even try.

Students at places like Divine Word University in Madang as well as other aspiring writers quickly cottoned on to what Keith was doing and, by their own admission, learnt a lot about writing by comparing what they had written to the version Keith published. Some even submitted course essays in the hope of having them edited before submission. These were obvious and Keith politely declined most of them. Other writers compiling collections or chapters for longer works did the same thing. They submitted their book one chapter at a time – as if proposing individual articles or stories - to gain the benefit of an experienced editor. When I began publishing Papua New Guinean writers, this tactic became very apparent and was freely admitted. PNG Attitude was, in effect, training new writers, not only in Papua
New Guinea but occasionally in Australia.

During the course of 2010, Joe Wasia, an Engan health studies student at Divine Word University in Madang, began sending articles to PNG Attitude covering a range of subjects mostly concerning governance. Joe was following in the footsteps of another DWU student, Gelab Piak, who was the first Papua New Guinean writer to regularly contribute to the blog.

As other DWU students emulated Gelab and Joe, writing for the blog became something of a university tradition and when some lecturers in literature, communication and politics, began using PNG Attitude in their courses and suggesting students write for it, contributions increased dramatically. Later some eminent winners of the Crocodile Prize came from Divine Word University. It was ironic that literature studies at the university were suspended in 2014.

In the middle of 2010, Peter Kranz (photo) published his first article in PNG Attitude, entitled ‘How the sangumaman made our life better’. While his identity was known to Keith, at first he preferred to sign his contributions simply as ‘Peter’. Several more entertaining pieces appeared over successive months under the same Christian name. This seemed strange to me; he was obviously an Australian, why was he being so coy? And, at the time, Keith was still gently trying to coax Papua New Guinean writers to use their real names rather than pseudonyms. So I chided Peter in a comment.

The response I got was hostile. He wanted to know what my motives were in trying to expose him. I tried to explain the benefits of transparency; if Australians weren’t prepared to attach their names to what they wrote, how could we insist that Papua New Guineans do it?

Later I learned that Peter was married to a delightful Simbu
woman, Rose (who was herself in time to write some splendid articles). Although the couple lived in Australia, Rose had relatives in Papua New Guinea who they thought might be exposed to retribution if someone took offence at something Peter had written. Peter’s caution was understandable and I backed off.

As time went by, Peter Kranz began using his full name and his entertaining articles are still frequently published. His clear and well-honed literary skills added flavour to *PNG Attitude* and have delighted readers since, especially his ‘Sherlock Holmes in Papua New Guinea’ parodies.

As 2010 tipped into its second half, politics in Papua New Guinea was reaching new levels of farce with an aging, ailing and increasingly grumpy Prime Minister Somare trampling democratic rights and pulling strings and levers every which way to stay in power. After a while, as I pointed out, it all became too predictable:

The sound you hear is heads being scratched. The Chief has again peremptorily bent the rules and jetted off in the family aeroplane to see his friends in Fiji in the secure knowledge that, on his return and with a bit more judicious tweaking, he may survive until the next election in 2012. In his wake he leaves a puzzled population staring at its toes and a disgruntled horde of PNG-watchers scratching their heads. What happened? Is that it? It’s suddenly become boring. So predictable – a PNG ground hog day....

I was tidying up my library the other day and came across a copy of Vincent Eri’s book, *The Crocodile*. Do you know that was probably the first novel published by a Papuan writer? I wonder if you can still buy it. What was it about anyway? And there’s Albert Maori Kiki’s *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*. And what’s this? Something called *Sana* which purports to be an autobiography of someone called Michael Somare. Wonder who he was? Looked like a nice young bloke. Bit thin though, but then again so is this copy of Paulias Matane’s *My Childhood in New Guinea*. I wonder if *PNG Attitude* readers would be interested in a review of these old books. After all there isn’t much else to do for a while. I suppose I could mow the lawn?

Those final throwaway lines about books were later to have significant ramifications. With regard to the growing obviousness of Papua New Guinea politics, Paul Oates, returned from a long
period of travel, agreed with me:

Just back from overseas and trying to cope with the jetlag, I switched on the computer. Opening *PNG Attitude* to see what's happening up north, I skimmed through the latest reports. Somare suspends PNG Parliament (again), Opposition moves for a vote of no confidence again thwarted. Somare threatens to kill Sam Basil outside Parliament (PNG politics can be so subtle).

Somare visits his old Fijian mate Bainimarama and maintains it's all in the interests of Melanesian brotherhood. Somare Jnr promoted and refuses to stand down when he is under investigation. People on both sides of the Torres Strait are still railing against the lack of democracy and accountability.

"Ho hum," I thought. What's new!

Meanwhile the Australian government and AusAID stood by gawking in helpless impotence. John Fowke added his two bob's worth and expressions of exasperation in trademark style:

I have been writing with an on-the-spot observer's critical eye about Australian aid-project implementation in Papua New Guinea since 1997. My scrawls have encompassed quite long papers, in one case published as part of his then newspaper column (with acknowledgement) by Governor-General Sir Paulias Matane, himself a PNG Attitude aficionado.

In another longish piece I evoked a response from the late Harry Jackman - "What's this, Fowke, preparing for a PhD?"- ignoring the fact, well known to the late HHJ, that my only paper qualification is a Class 3 truck-drivers licence. There have been emails and other communications, and opinion pieces published in Papua New Guinea and in Australia. And there were one or two face-to-face meetings with Oz-based consultants unfortunate enough to encounter an enraged Fowke in his natural environment: over a cold drink at the Bird of Paradise Hotel in Goroka....

In the course of this long one-way campaign, I encountered a small number of sensible, pragmatic and switched on Oz-based academics with interests in Papua New Guinea affairs. It was one of these who dubbed the AusAID-Department of Foreign Affairs complex as "The Citadel of Solipsism" - and this it most certainly is.

At about this time, there was some good news. The *Montevideo Maru* campaign had paid off with Australia’s Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Alan Griffin, delivered an historic statement
in Parliament honouring the men lost in Australia’s worst maritime disaster:

On behalf of the Australian Government I would like to express our sincere sorrow for the tragedy of the sinking of the Montevideo Maru, where 1,053 Australians lost their lives. I especially acknowledge the suffering of their families and friends. They endured many long and painful years waiting for news of their loved ones and they deserve our sympathy.

I’m pleased to announce the Australian Government has pledged $100,000 to assist the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society to build a national memorial in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial. Australia will always remember the service and sacrifice of those who perished on the Montevideo Maru.

On 22 June 1942, 1,053 Australian prisoners of war and civilians, who had been captured and held by the Japanese at Rabaul, boarded the Montevideo Maru. Unaware that the vessel was carrying allied prisoners, on 1 July 1942 the submarine USS Sturgeon fired torpedoes, sinking the ship and killing all those imprisoned on board and most of the crew. The efforts of Keith Jackson, the PNGAA’s Andrea Williams (who had two relatives die stuck in the hold of the ship) and their committee had met with success. After nearly seventy years the Australian Government had said ‘sorry’ and a permanent memorial was on the way.

One of the big issues in PNG Attitude in 2010 was a protracted debate on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), an educational methodology adopted with mixed results in some Western education systems, which had been adopted uncritically in Papua New Guinea. An article appeared in the Post Courier and, when Keith picked it up and wrote about it, vigorous discussion ensued. The piece attracted a record 103 comments and the debate was civil and lively. It was led by Corney Alone (photo), who was prosecuting a campaign for
the OBE initiative to be disbanded before it caused real harm in the schools. There would be other trademark debates about other issues in PNG Attitude but this one was the first of its kind and attained a longevity that persisted for many months.

Corney made a public call for a national debate on the merits of the methodology. He said he would debate the Education Department and anybody who favours this controversial model of teaching. Writing in PNG Attitude, he said: “The OBE story is heartbreaking, alarming and a serious cause for concern. Look at it this way. Give a select group of students a decent education for 15 years and you will produce intelligent and potential leaders for industry and government. Now, conversely, give another select group of students crap education for 15 years and you will produce mediocre and poor leaders wherever they end up. PNG introduced outcome-based education 15 years ago. Soon we expect to see mass production of a mediocre and poorly skilled workforce.”

Corney’s campaign was ultimately successful and the Education Department dropped Outcome-based Education. PNG Attitude had shown how it could link with important public issues in Papua New Guinea to provide them with exposure and energy. It wasn’t a bad way to end the year.
The First Crocodile Prize, 2011

During 2010, Patrick ‘Big Pat’ Levo, the Post Courier’s features editor, asked regular PNG Attitude contributors Paul Oates, Keith and me to provide articles for a special Independence Day supplement. Pat was a colourful character from Gulf Province and possessed a wicked sense of humour. His nickname is most apt, he is broad shouldered and lean and stands well over six feet tall. (The photograph shows him with fellow Post Courier journalist Alfred Kaniba).

When he asked me to write something there were no running orders so I had to cast around for a suitable subject. At the time, I had been re-reading a number of books written by Papua New Guineans in the 1970s, including Vincent Eri’s ground-breaking novel, The Crocodile. I thought the state of Papua New Guinean literature from those early days to the present might be a good topic for an Independence Day article, so I started a bit of research.

What I found shocked me, it was appalling. Papua New Guinean literature seemed to have died a quick death shortly after independence. There were a few brave souls trying to keep it going but, in the absence of interested publishers and decent bookshops, they were fighting a losing battle.

The fact that so very few Papua New Guinean writers had been published since 1975 seemed at odds with the contributions and comments coming in to PNG Attitude; which on the whole were
thoughtful, articulate and well-written. From my frequent forays into Papua New Guinea, I also knew that the people, especially in rural areas where there was no television, were avid readers.

In 2008 I had been at Kawito on the Aramia River in the Western Province doing some work related to petroleum exploration. I had brought with me a couple of copies of my book, *Bamahuta: Leaving Papua*, in case I met anyone who was interested. As it transpired one of the Gogodala ladies working in our camp kitchen asked to read it.

During the next few weeks I spotted the book all over the place. One morning when I went to the river for a wash, I came across an old man sitting in a canoe reading the now battered copy. I wouldn’t claim for a moment that it was my compelling skill or style as a writer that made people want to read the book. Rather, it was a dearth of reading material that made it popular. People in Papua New Guinea like to read. I wrote a short piece on this for the blog.

As I worked on my *Post-Courier* article on the sad disappearance of an indigenous literature in Papua New Guinea, Keith and I conducted a discussion by email on the same subject during which I suggested – half jocularly – that we should initiate some sort of writing contest using *PNG Attitude* as the promotional spearhead and seeking the support of the *Post-Courier* as a paper-based publishing outlet.

Keith responded quickly and positively and, when we shared our thoughts on *PNG Attitude*, readers also expressed enthusiasm and support for the idea. I said I’d kick in $100 towards an annual prize for an unpublished PNG novel. Robin Lillicrapp matched it and Keith doubled it. Reg Renagi suggested a short story prize. I began to talk of an anthology. “We would be looking to have that coincide with Independence Day in 2011 and hopefully every year thereafter,” I suggested. The concept of an embracing literary contest was beginning to develop. “The literature competition and the kindred publishing venture will, I think, answer some of the concerns raised about the lack of a body of available literature in Papua New Guinea,” wrote Robin Lillicrapp.
I followed up these ideas and comments with a fairly vague announcement of a competition: “We considered the best option to be a short story competition with a limit of about 1,500 words. A number of readers pledged contributions towards the prize, including yours truly and KJ. As a result, we’ll be able to offer $1,000 for the winning story.” That was quite a breakthrough. But there was more to come.

When I submitted my article for the Independence Day supplement to ‘Big Pat’ Levo of the Post-Courier, I also requested that the newspaper publish the winners of the competition. ‘Big Pat’ agreed. We had a local publisher. We had the promotional channel. We had the money. Now we needed judges.

But my efforts to recruit the University of Papua New Guinea litterateurs to this task came to naught. I had thought the university would be a starter because it was the institution that kicked off creative writing in Papua New Guinea in the 1970s and two leading writers from that period, Steven Winduo and Russell Soaba, were now academics there and also wrote literary columns for The National newspaper.

The university’s deafening silence led me to believe the competition should be for a popular story rather than anything too deep and literary. I knew Big Pat’s readers would prefer that. Meanwhile, the readers and contributors to PNG Attitude were continuing to augment the discussion Keith and I were having. A national literary contest was being designed although still not yet fully articulated.

“It is the intention to publish exceptional entries from time to time in the year leading up to Independence Day 2011 and the announcement of the first Crocodile Prize winners,” Keith wrote. “During this time we will also be working to increase the pool of prize money for Papua New Guinean writers.”

As the Prize gradually took shape, more Papua New Guineans become engaged. I finally heard from the distinguished writer Russell Soaba, who commented that it was “a grand idea [and] you can include us UPNG writers on your panel of judges if you like. I for one would support your program any day.” It was good
to see interest coming from the university, even if it was from just one individual.

Then a new voice was heard. “Nice literary competition; we need to keep the Crocodile Prize going for the good of all upcoming writers,” wrote Leonard Fong Roka (photo), a Bougainvillian student at Divine Word University. “This competition is actually a need for those of us who write but have no way to get ourselves established as authors. Big name Papua New Guinean literary artists are not a source of help for us who are struggling to enjoy what literature has in store for us. I'll be contributing a little bit of Bougainvillian taste of honey.”

It was an important and resonating voice that we were to hear much more from in the years ahead.

The first few entries came in steadily, but there were very few from women writers, which worried us. Keith, who with me was hunting down sponsors, persuaded one to fund a special writing award for women. This was added to the substantial cash prizes and trophies we had already assembled for short stories, poetry and essays. It also broke down a barrier and women writers gradually emerged.

Keith had suggested the competition be called the Crocodile Prize in honour of Vincent Eri’s ground breaking novel *The Crocodile* published in 1970. This met with great approval, including from the late author’s wife. With the contest now fully formed for its first year, contributions were flowing in.

The competition impacted greatly on *PNG Attitude*. Now there were many more articles, stories and poems by Papua New Guineans available for publication. The blog changed forever.

The honour of the first Crocodile Prize entry published on *PNG Attitude* went to Eva Kuson from Divine Word University. Here’s an extract from her short story ‘Country road, take me home’
Country road, take me home to a place I belong, west coast Nyada... These are not the original words of John Denver’s country hit, but a made up one by John Silas, an old singer in my village. My village Nyada is located on the western coast of Manus Province. So it would be fitting to mention ‘Nyada’ to convey a bit of pride among eager young listeners who flocked the beach to listen to John Silas sing.

He was an old, lean man with bushy eyebrows and moustache. He always tied a grey dusty laplap around his waist, wore a red cap and carried his small handmade ukulele in his worn out basket wherever he went. My granddad once told me that he made his name up because his real name meant excreta in the local language. I refused to accept that story because as far as I was concerned John Silas was a singing legend....

One legend had it that, in his young days in Australia, he used to sing with Slim Dusty. And the other was that he was an Aborigine who ran away and settled in Nyada. There were many tales about this wonderful, gentle singer. My grandma told me that they all grew up together and he later moved to Rabaul and worked on the plantations there. After several years he returned home with a Tolai lady, but due to ill luck, his wife died during child birth and his son died a week later. Ever since then he lived alone and his only company was his ukulele....

I remembered him quite well because he referred to me as Nadu Misis, meaning ‘small white girl’, whenever he saw me around the village, as I’m light in skin colour, different from the other children. Four years back I went for holiday in Nyada and met him. The singer had grown smaller and I noticed old age was catching up.

He glanced at me and said, “Oh the small white girl had returned”. He was still wearing his cap which had gone pink in colour and his laplap was cleaner. I was overwhelmed with sadness when I saw that he was not carrying his only company, the ukulele. “So you think I would sing forever?” he laughed....

He passed away a week ago and I was saddened by his death because he was truly a great singer. He will surely sing with Slim Dusty now in the pub up in the clouds where there is no beer. The country road has now taken him home to a place where he truly belongs. Heaven.

Any misgivings about the success of the Crocodile Prize were allayed as 2010 drew to a close; the entries were coming in and, by November, were being regularly published on PNG Attitude.

For many Australian readers, the quality of the writing was something of a revelation; as it must have been for Papua New Guinean readers. And the flow of good material was motivating a significant upsurge in the intellectual exchange between
Australians and Papua New Guineans.

This opportunity had not existed before *PNG Attitude* came along. Until then the dialogue had been confined to a few academics and politicians; groups that existed on a different plane, mostly irrelevant to rank and file citizens. What struck me at the time was the sense of equity in the exchange. This must have been apparent to many Papua New Guinean readers who had generally and hitherto been talked down to by Australia and its representatives.

*PNG Attitude* had been running for some time but the discourse had tended to be dominated by political and historical material. This new dialogue was broader and enabled the blog to build its readership, its influence and its role as a resource. Its articles were being cited elsewhere and journalists had begun using it as a point of reference. The blog was also becoming a focus of contrast between what was said to be occurring in the rarefied politics between Papua New Guinea and Australia and what was really happening on the ground.

For Papua New Guinean writers, *PNG Attitude* and the Crocodile Prize became sophisticated outlets for ideas and opinions. Many of the entries, especially poetry and short stories, used allegory and metaphor to allude to a wide range of social and other issues. These two literary forms were an extension of a much older oral tradition and the writers employed them with enthusiasm. A point made in a poem or a short story seemed to offer a better and more lasting impact than if it were made in a commentary or essay.

From an Australian perspective, another important aspect of these entries was the opportunity to better understand the people of Papua New Guinea. There was something ironic in this because, on the face of it, Papua New Guineans had a much better understanding of how Australians behaved and thought than the reverse; in the same way that Australians, through media and films, felt they understood Americans. That such an understanding was superficial and often wrong was another revelation provided by the blog.
For people like me, the entries opened up new avenues of understanding; this exotic country to our north was now open to a scrutiny that had not been possible before. As the dynamic toing and froing of blog discourse continued, it was possible to see real friendships developing between individuals despite their physical remove and cultural differences.

For Keith this was very satisfying and a vindication of his efforts. At the same time, it had the potential to be a burden. People now looked forward to turning their computers on in the morning and reading the newly updated blog. Stepping back from that expectation – Keith saw it as an obligation - would be difficult.

One of the newer contributors was Lydia Kailap, an Australian married to Peter Kailap, a musician and teacher from Gulf Province. They lived in the notorious Kaugere squatter settlement a couple of kilometres from the centre of Port Moresby where they ran a small school with a quixotic name, the Children’s University of Music and Art.

It had an imposing name but the school consisted of the couple’s open-sided shack to which a shelter serving as a classroom had been attached. Lydia and Peter ran the school using their own resources and any donations that were able to get and the other teachers were volunteers drawn from the polyglot squatter settlement, including some qualified but unemployed teachers and helpers who were reformed or semi-reformed raskols [petty criminals] hoping to make a better life for their children. Lydia wrote a piece for the blog called ‘Kaugere youth shows power of human spirit’:

Most of our young people in the Kaugere Settlement are uneducated, dirt poor and without a home. Many have lived a life of petty crime since they were small; if they hadn't they would be dead from starvation. This is not their fault; they never asked to be born into an environment of hopelessness and abject poverty. They didn't ask to be born in a country of great natural wealth that never finds its way to the grassroots. The dire situation that they are in was not one of their choice.

Having lived in PNG for a number of years, I have had the pleasure of meeting thousands of Papua New Guineans; the ones I love the most and
have the greatest respect for are the forgotten and neglected boys from Kaugere. They still have the heart of a child and a high degree of innocence; despite, and because of, what their life has been so far. They grasp every opportunity that comes their way that even remotely promises to improve their lives. Above all else, they willingly and passionately help to build a better life for "the shorties" in their lives - the small children who are exactly as they were a few short years ago.

These boys built The Children's University of Music and Art with their bare hands. They broke the ground and moved many tonnes of earth with a bugged wheelbarrow, two shovels, one mattock and one crowbar. It took almost a month of solid hard labour in the hot sun. They received cold water and a meal of rice and stew each day ... nothing else. They travelled out to Hood Lagoon and Kerema and went into the bush to cut the timber and biri for the school building; then spent many weeks constructing three classrooms and a kitchen at CUMA.

The handful who could read and write became teachers at CUMA and passed on what they knew to the shorties; once again without pay. They built rock walls and planted gardens around the school to make it look attractive. They guarded CUMA with their lives. Now they have started a small bakery in the kitchen they built and are baking and selling scones to help bring in money to keep the school going. They start baking at about 2 am and work until 6 am; then go out on the streets of Port Moresby to sell their scones until they are finished. Then they shop for more ingredients and start over again. Never a complaint of no pay; never a complaint of hard work; they joyfully work to make a difference in the lives of the small children in Kaugere. Their reward was to witness 360 little students getting the education that they themselves had been deprived of.

Many of them sleep in the classrooms at night because they have no home to go to. They are joined by dozens of younger children who also have no home. The big boys protect the small ones and share whatever little they have with them. We were not aware of the smaller children sleeping in the classrooms for several weeks until my husband Peter got up in the early hours of the morning to go to the toilet. He came back and woke me and led me quietly to the classroom. In addition to our big boys there were about 20 little fellows asleep on the ground with no mat or bedsheet, huddled together dressed in their rags. They had been coming to CUMA late at night to sleep and leaving before dawn. They sought the comfort and safety of "a home.

After this article was published, one of the donations CUMA received was for building materials from the Australian High Commission. Seeing this, the local ward councillor got it into his head that Lydia and Peter were profiting from the school. He saw
an opportunity to force them out and take over what he thought was a lucrative money-making opportunity.

He made life very difficult for the couple, including trying to get parents to withdraw their children. In frustration Lydia appealed to *PNG Attitude* readers for ideas about how to deal with the threat. Many suggestions were forthcoming ranging from the subtle to the bizarre, including offers to drop the councillor into Fairfax Harbour in a sack. It was one of *PNG Attitude*’s more direct associations with a problem and reinforced the idea of readers as a resource and a mutually supportive family.

I visited CUMA on one of my visits to Papua New Guinea. By then the councillor problem had been resolved; he had mysteriously tripped over one night and banging his head so hard that all thoughts of usurping the school seemed to have been shaken out. The story appealed to me and with Lydia’s help I began putting together a crime novel set in Port Moresby. It became the first of my Inspector Metau series of books. I had hoped to direct funds from the sale of the book to CUMA but, as it usually transpires for us novelists, we didn’t make anything out of it. It was a long time before the book took off and by then we had all moved on.

While writing the novel, I found that the material coming in to the Crocodile Prize was a great source of ideas and information. One of the characters in my book, for instance, was originally adapted from a short story by Bernard Sinai. Several years later, as I reviewed new Papua New Guinea themed books, I began to notice that I wasn’t the only one using prize entries as a resource. This didn’t really surprise me because I knew that all literature is in some way derivative and I was pleased that the prize was being used as a source of inspiration.

There was now a growing band of Papua New Guinean writers producing work of high quality, but the first year of the competition only offered four prizes and many people went unrewarded, Bernard Sinai being one of them.
One of the writers whose skills we quickly appreciated was the poet Michael Dom (photo). He worked as a scientist at the National Agricultural Research Institute. At first he was wary of publishing his name, instead opting to use the pseudonym ‘Icarus’. Michael went on to win the 2012 poetry prize and has since been recognised internationally for his poetry, along the way picking up the sobriquet of “Papua New Guinea’s Unofficial Poet Laureate”.

In more recent years, Michael has developed into a vociferous proponent of human rights and social justice in Papua New Guinea and is a fearless and astute critic of government inadequacies and incompetence. Others like him would emerge, perhaps emboldened by his leadership.

The first poem Michael submitted to the competition, and which was published on PNG Attitude, was a ripper:

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**Dear Honourable Sirs....**

**A Poem by Icarus**

*We are your loyal supporters, remember us*

*Your fellow Papua New Guineans*

*the honoured rabble who raised you up to lofty heights*

*We drink your poisoned brew*

*while we suffer your misspent fortunes*

*watch our heritage squandered*

*and our independence scorned.*

*In our National Parliament*

*where once walked wise men, proud and true*

*where once were just laws, written and defended*

*Foolishness now rules that house*

*where the Honourable vie for their own (rabble)*

*with their educated rhetoric, regurgitated oratory*

*sanctimonious as wallowing sows and as smelly.*

*In our Nation’s Capital*

*beggars loiter while wealthy loaded landowners’ loaf*

*pickpockets, thieves and informal street sellers roam*
as mountains crumble and trees topple
littering our rivers and seas
Our ancestral lands and siblings are divided over riches
money for dishonourable dignity in Port Moresby.
There Honourable Sirs you dwell
and celebrate our nations prosperity
which we apparently are yet to receive
There Honourable Sirs you play pernicious politics
you and your rabble, squabble, dribble, grapple
for position, power and prestige, PNG Big Man policies
Your slightest glance is our grace, Dear Honourable Sirs.
In our towns and villages
far, far from freeways, Fairfax and Finance ministry
we hear tales of civilisation, rumours of development
Our aging fathers idly reminisce
while their beloved sons seek other forms of bliss
Mothers and matriarchs do what their daughters should do
deny what their children have done, and for you.
We are the commoners from those rural towns and villages
those hamlets not seen on Falcon's flight
distant, and remote, you’ve forgotten our vote
Our sweat feeds this nation
Our blood/land bathes/fills your alters/coffers
Our tears are granted no remittance
Our fates are in your hands.
We are the unheard voices
disenchanted, disowned and denied
How long lived is your deception
schemes and dreams and fantasies
where are the promised fruits?
Your majestic visions
leave us in dearth and doom.
We are your people
we gave, glorified and grovelled for you
now disrespected, deceived and destitute
We are the infants you suckle on a flimsy future
the unborn cheated, betrayed and bartered
as your virulent greed robs our womb.
God save Papua New Guinea!

Michael added a footnote: “It has been my practice to submit sketches by pseudonym through personal email account, by which route a number have been published in The National newspaper’s
writers’ forum. I would prefer to remain anonymous. The importance of contributing to my nation’s development through literature outweighs this slightly divergent action. I would like to thank all those involved in establishing the Crocodile Prize. Righteous!”

Michael’s cloak of anonymity was soon shed without controversy or retaliation. Perhaps the targets of his sharp wit didn’t read poetry.

While *PNG Attitude* was educating many Australians about Papua New Guinea and Papua New Guineans were realising that their perceptions of Australians wasn’t necessarily accurate, the blog also continued to promote the evolution of literary skills. In later years many Papua New Guinean writers claimed that *PNG Attitude*, particularly Keith’s editing of their contributions, was a defining factor in honing their writing.

“I have been writing to *PNG Attitude* for a number of months and cannot believe how my writing skill has changed,” wrote Tom Kuligi. “This is partly the result of having letters edited by Keith Jackson and also by using other letters as models.... I used to write in *Tok Pisin* with short sentences. I tried to write longer sentences. Then I realised that short sentences - one idea only - is the way to write.... I recommend this blog to students particularly those who want to be journalists. I wish I had my life over again. But this blog can help me to inspire my children.”

But it wasn’t always Papua New Guineans who experienced Keith’s editing, Alex Harris (photo), a popular Australian contributor whose writing had been commended by Tom Kuligi, said: “I am humbled by your praise, as it is I who delights in reading your writings. Each story on *PNG Attitude* brings us closer; each comment shows the shared depth of feeling for the topics, for the country and builds greater understanding and a stronger friendship. And you should all know Keith hacks my work to pieces.”
By the beginning of 2011 the sophistication and reach of *PNG Attitude* had increased markedly. There was also a heartening evening of the balance between Australian and Papua New Guinean contributions and readership.

The blog was still spinning off a monthly e-magazine, which in December 2010 had registered its one-thousandth subscriber – a significant milestone. “In early February this year the magazine had 400 subscribers,” Keith wrote in his review of the year, “and it has been adding them at the rate of more than two a day. The *PNG Attitude* website has shown similar spectacular growth. In January, it averaged 250 visitors a day, which has now more than doubled to well over 500 a day.”

Keith recorded some of the notable achievements of the year as the blog’s *Comment* section “becoming a hot-bed of debate”, the inauguration of the Crocodile Prize, new Papua New Guinean readers outgunning new Australian readers three to one, and *PNG Attitude* “taking its message to Canberra and the heart of Australian politics.”

With the blog attracting so many new readers and contributors, the time had come for Keith to lay down some ground rules and guidelines for the blog. This he did in January 2011, updating them from time to time as new situations evolved. He placed these explanations and rules at the top of the website under a tab entitled ‘About PNG Attitude’ to make them readily accessible. They are also a useful summary of the philosophy that informs the blog, a product of wide experience and a useful guide for anyone considering setting up something similar.

Under the headline, ‘Stuff you need to know about PNG Attitude’, Keith wrote: “One of the main bits of stuff you should know is that some of the views expressed in *PNG Attitude* may be shared by the publisher whereas others he finds off beam or just plain silly. The bottom line is we publish material that is reasonably well-written and well-argued whether we agree with it or not. That, after all, is what freedom of expression is all about.”

Keith then reflected on the purpose of the blog:
PNG Attitude was established to address a major issue: the silence that, for too long after PNG Independence in 1975, existed between ordinary Papua New Guineans and ordinary Australians. The politicians still talked, the business people still traded, the missionaries still preached, but rank and file citizens - people like us - didn’t much communicate with each other. And this was after we’d spent 40 or 50 years thrown together by the winds of colonialism – a period during which many of us got to know each other very well indeed.

That post-Independence silence denied what was a great friendship and a close relationship. The purpose of PNG Attitude is to play a small part in ensuring that the silence is replaced by a mutual conversation between the people of our two countries. To a large extent we have managed to address this challenge. Just read our columns to find out how.

Then followed sections on the blog’s philosophy (“committed to strengthening the people-to-people relationship between Papua New Guineans and Australians - that's it”), its character (“our bias is towards Papua New Guinea and especially towards its people”) and its utility (“PNG Attitude is not a material entity. It is mainly information. If you gave PNG Attitude a shovel, it could not dig a hole. If you gave it an SP, it could not drink it. But, that said, it does do some good work”).

Other sections canvassed the blog’s historical connection to ASOPA, its organisational structure, its contributors, editing, censorship, anonymity, conflict, accuracy, fairness, criticism and plagiarism.

This statement by the publisher was essential reading for anyone who wished to contribute effectively to the blog. It codified the ground rules and offered useful tips for material which is worth publishing, avoids the worst excesses of vituperation – and can win prizes.

So as the Crocodile Prize settled into 2011, the first year in which awards would be made, the blog sounded a new note of maturity and responsibility.

There were also profound changes occurring in Papua New Guinea, mostly driven by the development of the huge liquefied natural gas resource in the Southern Highlands as well as projects
like the Ramu nickel mine in Madang Province. The changes were no more evident than in the nation’s capital, Port Moresby, where a construction boom was getting underway. Also the politicians seemed to be losing control of the country as multinational businesses were increasing their influence.

Former Papua New Guinea-based journalist Donald Hook described the changes for *PNG Attitude*:

PNG’s capital Port Moresby is growing bigger and wealthier…. The boom period, however, is not good for everyone. Many Papua New Guineans can no longer afford to live in what has become a very expensive city and have moved into settlement camps outside Port Moresby. And that raises the big question, constantly asked: Whether the people of PNG as a whole will benefit from the unprecedented economic growth from the LNG and mining projects?

Nobody I met during three weeks in PNG had a good word for Somare or his government. I found this hard to accept. I knew Michael Somare in the 1960s and 1970s and I admired his leadership and his determined campaign for independence in 1975. As a journalist we had regular contact and I regarded him as a good friend. Today, one hears many stories of corruption and nepotism involving the discredited Somare government. Somare himself is referred to as Michael Mugabe, and - instead of Grand Chief – he’s called the Grand Thief. It’s all very sad. It is time for a change.

These changes also seemed to have caught Australia’s politicians and bureaucrats on the hop, and again brought the focus back to the bumbling AusAID development assistance agency and the increasingly venal Papua New Guinean politicians. Peter and Lydia Kailap were particular concerned about AusAID’s direction:

Our little school (The Children’s University of Music & Art - CUMA) in Kaugere Settlement was the chosen charity for fundraising efforts by the Australian High Commission Social Club through the High Commissioner's Charity Ball in 2009…. On the night of the Ball, three Australian MPs from Canberra were present and stated "this is the sort of thing we should be supporting".

The true Aussies at the High Commission tried to get AusAID people involved and encouraged them to visit CUMA in Kaugere, but without
success…. We can attest from a grassroots level that AusAID is totally out of touch with Papua New Guineans and their plight.

We approached the AusAID "consultant" to the National Capital Development Commission long before we started CUMA. His reply was that our project (to educate settlement children and train raskols) did not "fit their criteria". We told him that his criteria should fit the needs of the community....

AusAID is a dinosaur, full of people with no connection to the communities they are there to help. And, quite frankly, not interested in them. They just want to ram their Western solutions down the throats of indigenous peoples and it does not work.

I added my own comments in a short article that attracted a strong response. Here’s a short take-out:

I’ve been following the doom and gloom in PNG as reported on PNG Attitude of late with a strange sense of misgiving. There’s something fundamentally wrong here but I can’t put my finger on it. The closest I get to crystallisation is when I read about the shenanigans of AusAID. What on earth are they doing, I wonder.

Isn’t it simple? There are basic things that human beings in this modern age need to survive with some sense of dignity. Why is it so hard? Why do we need all the meetings, the research, the overpaid consultants? Isn’t it fundamental? Isn’t that what AusAID and their cronies in government, both in PNG and Australia, need to be addressing?

Russell Soaba (photo), the great writer and poet, added his endorsement: “There is indeed something wrong with the people who run this country. Never mind AusAID and other entities, their agents merely take advantage of such situations…. We need a leader who must say, okay, fellas, enough of holidays, let’s get down to doing what is good for our people and our country by starting from the base up. None of the current leaders are willing to do that. You can't possibly make yourself become a sufficiently self-supporting country by ignoring the very basic of things that keep things up.”

Keith, who comfortably moved in circles that might intimidate
lesser mortals, decided to take the issue to the source and arranged a meeting with Australia’s Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Islands Affairs, Richard Marles, in Canberra.

First, though, he provided Marles with a written brief, part of which is reproduced here:

Dear Richard,

I recently mentioned on the blog that I was going to meet you in Canberra and asked interested readers to submit questions they would want to ask you if they had the same opportunity. As it turned out, there are far too many questions for the short meeting we will have, so I decided to summarise them in the hope that, under your auspices, they may be answered.

As you will see, most of the questions are relevant and astute. And I appreciate that a number of them will be difficult if not impossible to answer officially. Nevertheless, given that they do represent matters of current concern raised by a group of interested and well-informed people, I hope it will be possible - over the coming weeks - for you to address them in order that the responses may be subsequently published in PNG Attitude.

I realise you and your staff must have quite enough on your plate without this additional imposition, but I believe continuing dialogue between Papua New Guineans and Australians in the civil domain is of great importance in strengthening the vital relationship between our two countries. Addressing people's concerns, and dealing with their legitimate worries about a range of issues, is I think a purposeful and useful exercise. I hope you will agree.

After the meeting, Keith summed up his impressions of Richard Marles, which were largely positive, and shared them with readers. He was to revise these views when propositions Marles raised himself or seemed to agree with at the time were later shown to have fallen on barren soil:

He [Marles] is a young and affable man with a mature understanding of PNG. He's had some first-hand experience with PNG and it shows and stands him in good stead. Of importance to us, the inhabitants of PNG Attitude, he’s a firm believer in the importance – and indeed the necessity - of effective people-to-people relationships. Relationships that exist beyond government. Beyond commerce. Between people....

In his political role, he's working through a number of initiatives to improve connections between Papua New Guineans and Australians. And,
while I can’t disclose these ideas, to my mind they seemed both relevant and likely to have the desired positive effect. We agreed, I think, that if the relationship between our two countries is to go in the right direction, the Australian media will be need to be prominent.

As a result of this experience, I think it’s fair to assure readers that there is a senior figure in the Australian Parliament who will thoughtfully and judiciously assess what it takes to construct and maintain an appropriate relationship between our two countries. My bet is that Richard Marles will make a difference.

Keith’s optimism turned out to be misplaced and his judgement wrong. As time went by, nothing changed. The only footprints Marles left on the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship when he left for broader fields was as cheerleader for what Keith refers to as the “Manus asylum seeker concentration camp”.

But that lay in the future. In early 2011, in an article for PNG Attitude, Keith recorded his disappointment at what he saw as Marles’ lack of energy:

Readers have been underwhelmed by Parliamentary Secretary Richard Marles’ cautiously bureaucratic pronouncements about critical issues facing Australia in its relationship with PNG. Readers expressed disappointment and cynicism at Mr Marles’ anodyne responses to a series of astute questions they posed late last year and which, at a meeting with me, Mr Marles agreed to answer.

The Parliamentary Secretary’s statements were clearly cobbled together from that bland porridge that constitutes “information” in the bureaucratic mind.... Lies, damned lies and bureauspeak. Let’s face it, it would have been better for Mr Marles’ to say nothing rather than to engage in this pointless exercise of façade building and glossing-over that convinced no one, impressed no one and served only to reinforce the impression that the Australian government doesn’t have a clue how to manage its relationship with PNG....

Richard Marles has told me he’s interested in improving the Australian conversation about PNG. To achieve even that modest goal, he and his people will have to do a lot better than this.

Keith concluded his commentary with some comments from readers. “I have just transferred Richard Marles' reports to my JAW file, that is Just Another Wanker,” wrote Terry Shelley from...
Goroka. “Totally irrelevant to the vast majority of grassroots people in PNG.” And Peter Kranz, married to a Papua New Guinean from the highlands, said, “Another example of Australian government rhetoric being on another planet to reality.” “As someone who has had in the past to write responses to Parliamentary questions,” observed Paul Oates, “the old phraseology and use of percentages sounds all too familiar. With due respect to those who have to prepare benign yet seemingly positive responses for release by politicians, it's hard not to be a tad cynical.”

My own reaction, as someone who had fielded a few parliamentary questions in my day, was also cynical: “If [a tough question] happened to land on my desk the response was usually: (1) What's this crap? (2) Oh hell, why do they want to know that? (3) I'd better cook something up to make them happy; and (4) I hope that will confuse them enough to keep my job.”

One of Marles’ staffers later rang Keith to complain about these responses. Keith asked her to get Marles to enjoin a dialogue with PNG Attitude and its readers. Despite encouraging noises, nothing further was heard from the Parliamentary Secretary.

In another article, ex-kiap Graham Dent, saying he was a long-time blog reader, brought together the recurring PNG Attitude leitmotifs of Papua New Guinean corruption, inept administration by AusAID and the failure to create proper delivery systems for people who required vital government services:

Article after article has chronicled the growing problems of graft and corruption in government and administration and the subsequent collapse of service delivery to village level. Then there is the failure of Australian aid to effectively provide assistance where it is needed; and the Australian government’s continuing failure to publicly recognise that Papua New Guinea has a corruption problem.

We read of the growing frustration of Papua New Guinean correspondents – disillusioned with the level of corruption and lack of village services. One can feel for their growing cry of needing something done. What we read appears negative, but writers and readers have one
thing in common. We all have a deep and enduring love for this hugely complex, diverse and fascinating country. There is a continuing underlying feeling throughout – what can we do, where do we go?

Graham concluded: “We need PNG Attitude to continue to expose the problems; we need contributors continuing to voice their experiences and views; we need more Papua New Guinean contributors. As Keith Jackson has continued to encourage, we need to get this voice heard more widely.”

The following year, with the defeat of the Labor Party at Australia’s federal election, Richard Marles found himself in Opposition. His contribution to the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship seemed unlikely to disturb historians. Later, however, when he was appointed shadow minister for immigration and border protection, he was the architect of even more draconian changes to Australia’s asylum seeker policy. He may make the history books yet, for the wrong reasons.

Meanwhile, as 2011 got underway, the new Crocodile Prize competition was continuing to provide pleasant surprises, not least the discovery of more talented writers. A system had developed where I received entries, selected the most promising for the attention of the judges and passed to Keith those I thought worth publishing on PNG Attitude.

It wasn’t particularly hard work and I found it enjoyable. I was learning a lot about Papua New Guinea and honing my editing skills; later I would also learn much about the publishing game. The real pressure was some months away as the 30 June deadline loomed and we would be swamped with late entries.

The uncertain nature of the Papua New Guinean postal system made it inevitable that many of the hard copy entries arrived after deadline. So long as the postmarks showed they had been posted in time, they were accepted into the competition. Even so, some arrived after the judging was over and the awards allocated, the better ones being put aside for the 2012 contest. Strict rules sometimes don’t work that well, especially given the uncertain exigencies of life in Papua New Guinea.
I discovered I had to be careful not to eliminate entries that, at first glance, appeared poorly written. Some of them offered bold and colourful ideas, neat plots or great perceptions – the work of talented writers. What was letting them down was a poor educational experience at school. This was particularly pertinent to writers from Bougainville who had schooling short-circuited by the civil war.

Keith and I engaged with writers by email to help them polish and refine their work. This was a breach of normal competition rules but we both knew we were running more than a straightforward writing contest; we were, in our humble way, trying to rebuild a national literature. Our main role was to nurture and encourage creative writing in a country that had been badly let down in this respect.

Among the entries that arrived, there were occasionally entire portfolios of writing, especially poetry, some lavishly presented with eye-catching design and illustrations. This was how Lapieh Landu (photo), eventual winner of the 2011 prize for women’s literature, presented her exquisite poetry. Two years later, we suspended this award when we realised women could more than hold their own when it came to writing and didn’t need special help.

Jimmy Drekore, ‘PNG’s bush poet’, who won the poetry prize that first year, presented us with a large collection; much of it arriving only days from deadline. We already knew of Jimmy’s frenetic lifestyle. He’d had a well-paid job as a scientist with Lihir Gold in New Ireland but returned home to Kundiawa in the highlands to establish the Simbu Children Foundation – an organisation that looked after orphans and cast-out children. Jimmy was later to play an instrumental role in Papua New Guinea seizing control of its own literature and, for his many philanthropic efforts, become Papua New Guinea’s ‘Man of Honour’ in 2015.
Others writers, like Jeffrey Febi who won the inaugural short story prize, provided entries on a regular basis throughout the year. He was a poet at heart so winning the short story award surprised him as much as it did us.

One entry I received by post came from a young man who had been shown the Crocodile Prize advertisement in the Post Courier newspaper. He worked in the construction industry and had got his boss to write a letter telling me where to send the prize money. There was no entry. I wrote back explaining the competition was not some sort of giveaway but didn’t hear back. Maybe he was part of that echelon in Papua New Guinean society who sit back waiting for hand-outs on the basis there is no point working for them if, in time, you’ll get them anyway.

Checking my emails each day was a lucky dip. Sometimes there were entries that enthralled and at other times I had to wade through dross and banality.

On 5 March 2011, PNG Attitude published a piece from a writer who was unknown to me, Martyn Awayang Namorong. A reader had tipped off Keith about a blog called The Namorong Report published by a failed medical student now a buai (betel nut) street vendor. From the blog, Keith had plucked an article portentously entitled ‘The political economy of everything that’s wrong in developing PNG’. Unusually, Keith had provided a tribute line: “If there is only one article you read in PNG Attitude this year, let this be the one”.

It was a defining moment in Papua New Guinean political commentary. A very large talent had emerged. Upon reading it, I emailed Keith, “I think we’ve got a live one here!” Subsequently, the essay was entered in and won the 2011 Prize. Martyn ambled in to the evening awards
ceremony at the Australian High Commission just before his name was announced and the K2,500 cheque handed over. He’d been selling buai from his street-side stall all day and then queued outside the walls of the Commission with scores of visa applicants, not realising he was an honoured guest.

This extract from his essay provides a flavour of a writer who, even at this early stage, was a great thinker, analyst and stylist. We will hear more of Martyn Namorong as this history progresses:

My introduction to the phenomenon of neo-tribalism was at high school in Port Moresby during the last decade. The key question that arose was: “What does it mean to be a Papua New Guinean?” It is easy to identify a New Irelander, Sepik or Engan but who is a ‘Papua New Guinean’. The fact of the matter is there isn’t one. So every time someone asked me where I was from, I simply said ‘PNG’ although I knew they were inquiring about my home province.

Today, however, my notion of being from PNG is not as concrete as it used to be. Last year I dropped out of medical school because I had not performed well academically. I was hoping to return to university this year but, for reasons unknown to me, I haven’t been accepted to repeat Year 4 Bach Med Surg… Today, faced with the uncertainty about the future and the hardship of living in the city, I’m more concerned with being able to survive each day. I am more concerned about my own welfare than saving the world.

The system of education in this country is a failure trap. It is supposed to groom Papua New Guineans, but all it does is produce a lot of failures. In Grade 8, 10,000 get thrown out; in Grades 10 and 12, thousands more fall through cracks in the system. This is the failure trap. Students spend much of their lives learning about ideas in arts, science and mathematics and are not prepared for either the cash economy or the subsistence economy. In my case, I regret going to medical school because now I am just an unskilled person.

I am definitely not skilled to survive in the savannah of East Trans-Fly nor do I have formal qualifications to be recognised in the cash economy. Thus by default I sell betel nut on the street, like many other disenfranchised people. Hundreds of thousands of young people around this nation are trapped like me. For some, hopelessness and depression lead to suicide. I lost three of my colleagues from Year 12 who committed suicide within two years of dropping out… Many try to escape reality by resorting to drugs, alcohol and risky sexual practices. Others take out their frustrations on society through juvenile delinquency, petty crime, fights,
sexual violence and other indictable offences. I empathise with all of them because I now understand what it’s like to lose everything, including one’s dreams and ambitions....

The solution is not necessarily to ‘teach a person how to catch fish’, but to give them a net. I believe it’s now fair to comment that microfinance institutions in PNG have failed in providing people with that net. Politicians, churches, NGOs and business interests have been excellent distributors of free handouts instead of the net. The net is the ability to trade goods and services and/or labour. Our rural people need efficient and affordable transport networks to move goods to local and global markets and to access services. Our urban people need jobs or financial assistance to start small businesses.

Unfortunately, there is too much hypocrisy and tokenism from all parties involved in aid and development. People want to be seen to be trying to address issues without actually doing anything of substance. That is why news media are full of stories about conferences, symposiums, summits, workshops, forums where everyone spends huge amounts of money on stipends, venue fees, and accommodation of guests....

Self-generated change addresses the needs and aspirations of individuals and communities and is profound in how it inspires and motivates people.... I don’t dream any more. I am grounded in the reality. I grapple with the facts as they are. Perhaps there are too many visionaries and dreamers such that no one is there to deal with the reality of life in PNG.... There are so many well-meaning plans that are gathering dust on the shelves of state agencies. This nation is being governed on an ad hoc basis with decisions being made solely for perpetuating the survival of the ruling class instead of addressing fundamental issues that affect the nation.

The readers of PNG Attitude were quick to acknowledge Martyn’s acuity and perception as well as his incisive literary skills. “This is a great post,” wrote Gordon Taylor, “and, like a lot of inspiring writing, it leaves me with more questions than answers. If we can remain mindful of those questions as we go about our daily lives, then perhaps together we can improve things - not just for the people of PNG, but for the whole world.”

Kylie Butler-McIntosh emailed: “Martyn - You always thought you were destined to make a difference to humanity and I believe, for everyone that reads this article, you have. I will pass this on to as many people as I can in hopes that people who have the power to change things can keep your wisdom in mind. Thank you.”

And from the Children’s University of Music and Art, the school
for battlers at the no-go Kaugere squatter settlement, Lydia Kailap wrote: “The most valuable natural resource that Papua New Guinea has is going to waste on the street; like Martyn. These people have nothing left but the human spirit to carry on and survive; to make something of themselves against the odds. Because of their suffering they have firsthand knowledge of what is going on in PNG and know what they need. You are destined for great things Martyn. Believe.”

“Every day I see and talk to young people like Martyn in my neighbourhood and on my daily walks on the streets of Mosbi,” said Reginald Renagi. “Some of my urban nephews and nieces are similarly caught out in this vicious trap. They say their family and village kinship links have grown weak and relations with the homefolks have eroded over the years their parents have lived in an urban area... These people have nothing left but the human spirit to carry on and survive; to make something of themselves against the odds. Because of their suffering they have first-hand knowledge of what is going on in Papua New Guinea and know what they need.”

By the middle of 2011 PNG Attitude and its forerunner, ASOPA People, had been running for over five years. The balance of published material was about right; half from Papua New Guineans and half from Australians and other outsiders. With the advent of the Crocodile Prize the output from Papua New Guinea had increased by two-thirds. The monthly newsletter featuring the best of these offerings was circulated to more than 1,200 people.

With the influx of Papua New Guinean contributors, there had been a subtle shift in subject matter. Along with politics and governance there was now a strong emphasis on grassroots issues. The Australian commentators were still relying on their colonial experience and mining it for topics and possible solutions to Papua New Guinea’s troubles but the Papua New Guineans were not so sure and were offering home-grown ideas.

Contributors from both countries, and the world beyond,
acknowledged that Papua New Guinea seemed to be slipping into a self-induced malaise. This subject became a perennial issue for discussion along with corruption, inept politicians and Australia’s apparent inability to contribute any meaningful advice or solutions.

Other matters unrelated to government and politics that cropped up regularly included a continuing debate about the so-called “Melanesian Way”. This was a term coined by constitutional father Bernard Narokobi in the years immediately preceding independence in 1975 to describe traditional methods of social organisation and governance in Papua New Guinea.

The gap between traditional and Western forms of social organisation was a convenient way to explain the many shortcomings of government in Papua New Guinea. Some writers argued there had never been a cohesive and holistic system in Papua New Guinea and that the premise of the Melanesian Way was based on a convenient myth. The topic was bounced back and forth in PNG Attitude on a regular basis. It continues to resonate.

Another hardy perennial was cannibalism, which many Papua New Guineans, especially avowed Christians, find an embarrassing topic. The catalyst was usually the publication of an article in an overseas tabloid media outlet but, occasionally, more august journals like the National Geographic strayed into the field. Australian contributors either railed against what they saw as irresponsible journalism or offered sober accounts of their own historical involvement with the issue.

Reports on resource developments, especially mining and petroleum projects, were of interest to Papua New Guinean and Australian readers. With every new project there seemed to be a local protest, much as was happening in Australia and often with good reason. While Papua New Guinea had inherited sound environmental laws at independence, in many ways better than those in Australia, the big problem was lack of enforcement.

The Papua New Guinea government seemed to deliberately deprive environmental administrators of the resources they
required to make the laws work and, where the legislation conflicted with the government’s immediate interests, the politicians sought to dilute the laws with ill-advised amendments. It was not unreasonable for Papua New Guineans to think that some politicians were involved financially in these projects or taking kickbacks. By 2011 the resources boom was in full swing and there were many projects that angered the readers of PNG Attitude.

A related issue had to do with land and logging. Keith reproduced an article by the influential Papua New Guinean public affairs organisation, Act Now!, which published one of the few reputable blogs in Papua New Guinea at the time:

Papua New Guinea is almost unique in its Constitutional recognition and protection of customary land and, until recently, about 97 percent of land in PNG was controlled by local people under customary title. But over the last few years the government has been systematically taking control of land away from local people and issuing companies with 99-year leases that now cover more than five million hectares.

These 'Special Purpose Business and Agriculture Leases' (SABLs) give corporations the right to exclude local people from their land for three generations and, using Forest Clearance Authorities, the companies can clear-fell any forests in the lease area. There has been widespread condemnation of the leases.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has written to the government to express its concern and demand answers. But the Lands Minister this week revealed the government's intention to issue even more leases. The government says it wants to see 20 percent of PNGs total land mass given away in leases and a belligerent Minister for Planning has warned NGO's not to interfere. The leases are a human rights and governance disaster as they are being granted without the informed consent of local people and in defiance of constitutional and legal protections.

Five years later, this issue continues to burn hot because, despite many promises by the government to rid Papua New Guinea of illegal logging, there has been no action. An official enquiry was conducted and its findings ignored; buried by what many people suspect to be political malfeasance.

Keith occasionally ran surveys to gauge what was interesting the blog’s readers but the results were generalised in nature and
not especially enlightening. To shed more light on reader’s preferences, and to provide a review of each month, he began summarising the most popular pieces according to the number of people who had been drawn to comment on them during the month. This was useful for authors because they could use it to see what struck a chord with readers. And it was useful for readers because, if they’d missed a popular piece, a link was provided to enable them to catch up.

Another device Keith introduced later allowed readers to click a tick box to ‘like’ particular articles. This gave a good indication of people’s immediate reaction to what they had just read. Keith also began to use Facebook and Twitter to promote PNG Attitude and particular articles to a broader readership. The blog’s popular Twitter account now has more than 3,000 followers.

When an article resonated with readers, the comments and ‘likes’ came in thick and fast. Where comments were informative or especially intriguing, Keith often later converted them into an article. This both extended their readership and ensured that important contributions were registered by internet search engines whose algorithms took in main page posts but did not delve down to the next level where readers’ comments lay. Giving a comment the status of an article was preserving it online for posterity, although future researchers will still have access to the full blog through the National Library of Australia’s acquisitions.

Sometimes the lack of response was explainable because the topic was of narrow interest, for example, the articles appearing around Anzac Day each year. These reflected the annual Australian spurt of nationalism and were little commented upon.

A couple of times when working in Papua New Guinea and in places where the internet was available, I noticed that, while readers of the blog might read an article with great interest and even show it to friends and passers-by, there was no attempt to either comment or record a response. Keith reassured me that most people reading material anywhere in any form who choose not to respond didn’t mean they were necessarily inert and unmoved.
But some the articles were discussed for several days, or even months. Comments are still received on articles published several years before. Whatever the reason, natural reticence or a feeling there was nothing of substance to add, comments and ‘likes’ are not the perfect guide to readers’ tastes but, as Keith has said, they do provide an indication. What motivated the increasing number of readers of the blog remained a mystery to me, although Keith’s expert view as a communicator was that PNG Attitude was “pitching into the slot” and its appeal to people interested in Papua New Guinea affairs and its reputation for informative and lively writing was clearly growing.

As the content base of PNG Attitude broadened and its reputation spread, so the readership expanded. People in the United States became a significant component of the audience and over time they were joined by readers in New Zealand and the Pacific islands. As in Australia, these people were mainly expatriates who had worked in Papua New Guinea, academics and some professionals in media and government with a specific interest in the country.

This didn’t concern Keith. The statistics he received from the Typepad platform showed the blog was on a steep growth path. The Crocodile Prize was also helping build the blog’s Papua New Guinean readership and add to its expanding pool of regular contributors – whether they were focussed on issues, history, business or any other of more than thirty categories of information the blog covered and which Keith logged into a special sidebar.

And the readership was increasingly loyal – it kept returning. Keith’s policy was that the blog should contain at least one thought-provoking story each day and, even if there wasn’t a big story to offer, that it should never let a day go by empty of information.

PNG Attitude was an internet-based innovation and the Crocodile Prize followed suit so Papua New Guinean writers who lacked internet access were disadvantaged. The early adopters were people in urban areas who could access the internet at
home, during business hours or while at university. As a result, at weekends and during public holidays the traffic tended to drop. But as social media took hold, and its use grew across Papua New Guinea at a ferocious pace, so the blog and the Prize thrived.

There could be no disputing that the advent of the Irish mobile telephone company, Digicel, in July 2007 had greatly improved internet access in Papua New Guinea and, as its reach grew, so the influence of PNG Attitude extended into rural areas, often by means of a ubiquitous mobile telephone that was itself revolutionising communication.

But even as the possibilities offered by internet communications spread throughout Papua New Guinea by telephony and other means, the demographic reach of PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize would remain relatively narrow. Indeed, as the mass media were fragmenting their audiences globally, there was no point directing a specialised channel at everybody. This blog was for the intellectuals, the middle class, the movers and shakers, the actors. It was never going to be everybody’s cup of tea. And not everybody wanted to enter a literary contest either. And who might it be who would write, or for that matter read, an essay on the rule of law or some other subject that might seem too esoteric? I saw fit to pen some words on this:

PNG Attitude has been slowly and surely reviving a literary sub-species that had all but turned up its toes a few years ago. What I’m talking about is the journeyman essay; the common or garden variety of a form of comment that has everywhere now retreated to the rarefied pages of the broadsheets and struggling journals as jargon-infested obscurities pushing particular points of view and only read by the so-called intelligentsia….

As an old form that is now burgeoning on the internet, the blogs of Emmanuel Narokobi, Effrey Dademo, Steve Winduo and, latterly, Martyn Namorong are prime examples. Care should be taken to distinguish these blogs from sites like Facebook, which are trivial by comparison. This where PNG Attitude comes into its own…. If you want entertainment and you want to be told what you want to hear, you can watch television. If you want to know what’s going on in the world and Papua New Guinea in particular and you want fodder for your brain read PNG Attitude.
Martyn Namorong put all this into the context of a changing world of digital communications: “I find social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook essential for the whole blogging experience. They act as the first point of contact with my audience where I introduce them to my blog,” he wrote. It was a gentle rebuff to my put down of Facebook.

“This has been how I have been able to get a younger audience of university and high school students who read my blog posts and sometimes react like Justin Bieber's fans. They think it's cool and that sort of makes me cool as well. It’s a wonderful experience for everyone.”

Bernard Yegiora saw social media as an antidote to propaganda: “The media in PNG is a tool used by those with money to guard and seek their own interest. I have seen corrupt people in positions of power use it to assassinate the characters of genuine people who they consider as a threat or who stand to expose what they are doing, so they can continue to enjoy their corrupt activities.... At least on the internet you can speak your mind.”

Meanwhile, entries to the Crocodile Prize flowed to us in a steady stream and, towards the end of June as the contest deadline drew near, I offered a few summary words:

June is the final month when entries can be submitted to the Crocodile Prize literary competition. Come Thursday 30 June the judges will be receiving copies of all entries - unadorned and in chronological order - to peruse and deliberate. I don’t envy them their task.

We’ve designed a cover for the anthology which pays tribute to Vincent Eri’s novel, The Crocodile. We thought that was fitting for the first edition. At the moment we are still struggling with printing options. We would like to see the anthology printed in PNG if possible but are mindful of our limited funds. In September, when Keith and I are in Port Moresby, we hope to talk to the government about the competition’s future.

Back in the days of Ulli Beier, the formidable duo of Jack Lahui and John Kolia organised a national literary competition but it foundered through lack of funds. We don’t intend the Crocodile Prize to go that way....

This has been a huge and enjoyable learning curve for us but, touch wood, everything appears to be on track. And for those interested in
statistics: so far we have had over 200 entries - 156 poems from 13 people; 27 short stories from 14 people; and 21 essays from 14 people. All up we have had 32 separate entrants. And, when all that is sorted, edited and published, we will have a book that is about 190 pages long to distribute far and wide throughout PNG.

With an election scheduled for mid-2012 and Prime Minister Michael Somare in Singapore undergoing heart surgery, politics in Papua New Guinea was becoming torrid and pretenders to the throne were jostling for positions. Bill Standish of the Australian National University and a former lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea, speculated about the future. Rumours were rife in Port Moresby that Peter O’Neill had done some sort of deal that would secure him the top job if Somare was out of the way:

Papua New Guinea’s political dramas have intensified in the ten weeks that Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare has spent in intensive care in Singapore’s Raffles Hospital. Only on 22 June did Arthur Somare, the Minister for Public Enterprises, tell Parliament that his 75-year-old father had undergone a heart valve operation plus two further emergency operations.

Last Friday, 24 June, he stated that the family had decided he [Sir Michael] would be told he could not return to his job and should resign, and late last week the government made a snap decision to adjourn Parliament for five weeks till August, which will give it some time to resolve its internal divisions.... The current Opposition is not the main force here — it makes up only 21 of the 109 MPs, and a vote of no confidence is unlikely. Conflict has emerged both within and between the dozen coalition parties, most who have been together since 2002....

The political outcome of these struggles cannot be predicted at this stage. What we are seeing is a currently-muted return to the pattern of ‘horse trading’ between several candidates, with several parties already clearly divided. Some current ministers could also move to the Opposition....

The Peoples National Congress (PNC) is the third major party in government, having grown rapidly since July 2010. Its leader Peter O’Neill was close to PM Somare while leading the Opposition from 2004, and after 2007 he became Public Service Minister. Now reputedly a very wealthy man, O’Neill is the best parliamentary speaker and tactician in government, though he remains under a cloud from the 2002 National Provident Fund Commission of Inquiry.
Bill’s speculations came to fruition sooner than anyone expected. On 2 August O’Neill won the top job. It would create a sizzling political period in Papua New Guinea for years to come. Keith reported on the O’Neill coup:

Papua New Guinea has a new prime minister - and a new government of surprising composition - after senior government figures combined with the opposition to have the leadership thrown open this afternoon. The opposition successfully moved to have the prime minister’s office declared vacant because of Sir Michael Somare’s protracted absence due to poor health.

In what seems like a contrived move, opposition leader Belden Namah nominated former Treasurer Peter O’Neill for the top job when parliament resumed at 2pm today…. Other fractious government MPs crossed the floor in support to give the new prime minister a 70-24 majority. Works and Transport Minister Peter O’Neill - whose political career has had its touch of controversy - was then elected prime minister. He had been demoted from Treasurer about two months ago after now deposed acting Prime Minister Sam Abal took over from the ailing Sir Michael Somare.

Judging by reportedly unresolved issues in Mr O'Neill’s past, the current instability in PNG politics may still have some distance to travel. One thing is for certain - the new government of PNG is a surprising blend of ambition with a clear cut post-Somare complexion. In other ways, though, it looks like being more of the same, but with the former opposition now well and truly part of the main game. Land of the unexpected indeed.

Meanwhile, beneath Australia's dignified and diplomatic stream of congratulations to the new leader, there will flow a deep current of anxiety.

The anxiety Keith referred to was articulated in many comments posted on PNG Attitude. “Well, I am just scared because this is the sign of instability again in PNG politics,” wrote Steve Gallagher Darong. “Are we serving our nation's national interest or just individuals' interests? I don't want Papua New Guinea to repeat its old ways of instability.”

“I don't know what the tactic is behind the move,” said David Kitchnoge, “but, realistically, what can this new government possibly achieve in less than 12 months? Unless they know something about Abal and Co that we don't know, wouldn't it be a smart move for Namah and Co to prepare for the next general elections and bring in brand new people to lead our nation?”
“I always thought that [National Alliance] would remain in power forever despite their record, reputation, deeds and misdeeds,” commented John Par Kagl. “Why would Belden Namah nominate Peter O'Neill when he could have been nominated himself? He gave it away just like John Pundari who gave it away to Bill Skate. And John Pundari regretted this for the rest of his life.”

Peter Kranz, married to a Simbu and recently returned to Australia from Port Moresby, wrote: “Can I begin to tell you about the history of this man [O'Neill]? I better shut up. He's a 'friend' of my brother and a sometime wantok. I've met him several times at Boroko clubs, and talked about him many times with my brother. Don't mention Nasfund or maybe you will find yourself without a leg the next day. And what about the properties in Cairns? I better lock my doors now, as this man has a long reach.”

While this was going on, Keith and I were gearing up for the inaugural Crocodile Prize awards in Port Moresby. As an aside Keith also announced a slight change to the title of the blog:

I thought it was time to start depersonalising PNG Attitude a bit. And giving credit...to the seventy or so regular contributors who have made this blog so popular with so many readers. Hence the ‘PNG Attitude & Co’ – ‘Co’ standing for our splendid company of writers, contributors and commenters who breathe continuing life into this blog; who expose, explain, analyse and debate the issues; and who are helping build an important conversation between Papua New Guineans and Australians. It's impossible to squeeze all your names into the masthead, so I hope ‘& Co’ may serve as a continuing tribute. And I know you'll tell me if you think it's a lousy idea.

Keith and I were by now immersed in the intricacies and excitement of the first Crocodile Prize event. I’ll let Keith describe it:

To say that Port Moresby is, by and large, a bit of a mess is a proposition I believe to be beyond contention. That the city presents such an ugly gateway to the beauty of Papua New Guinea and the wonder of its people is more than a contradiction. It is a shame. But, even 40 years ago, when I knew the place so well, it was rather that way.
Fighting for a Voice

Whether it’s the shambles of the “members lounge” at Moresby International with beer cans overflowing from bins and an American sports channel blaring from the wall or the hit and miss nature of what happens when you order a meal or a coffee at the multiple-starred Crowne Plaza hotel overlooking Fairfax harbour, PNG’s national capital is a place of acquired seediness.

The traffic is dense, the vehicles ramshackle, the roads inadequate, pedestrian safety an oxymoron, the streets dotted with mounds of beer cans and coconut debris, the footpaths streaked with thin red trails of buai spittle. In short, Port Moresby could be a most unprepossessing place. Except for the people. And they are the exception that proves the rule. The rule that says it’s not as bad as it looks.

Before my arrival, as I planned the trip, I thought it might be like this. A city I didn’t hanker to visit (on my last trip to PNG I avoided it altogether) but with people I yearned to meet. Which is what this essay is about.

The Australian High Commission – located in a walled compound with an impressive security gate and enough AusAID SUVs (forty of them I was told) to mount a plausible attack on Tripoli – is known by wags as ‘Fort Shit Scared’. But the epithet is unjustified. The seven or eight embassy staff I spoke with on the day I spent there, including High Commissioner Ian Kemish, were anything but shit scared. They were on top of their jobs, solidly addressing the challenge, and engaged realistically and productively with the country and its people. They induced in me a high level of optimism and confidence.

Earlier in the day, in the lobby of the Crowne Plaza awaiting my transport, I observed various mining types maumauing the front desk, exhibiting the uncivilised manners of the worst type of colonial (I know of what I write, I was once president of an association that had more than its fair share of these). The expressions on the faces of the traduced employees told the story: downcast eyes, frozen faces, shame on the lips.

Every foreign company working in PNG needs to come down hard on this type of expat. Here’s a formula: thorough cultural orientation; interventionist management; and an effective complaints mechanism accessible to Papua New Guineans. Rip out the minerals by all means, fellas, but don’t exploit the country or its people…. And the people of Moresby themselves? On the street, friendly; on the road, risk-takers; in person, gentle; and, in our writers workshop, thoroughly endearing.

The workshop was due to kick off at 9 Thursday morning. Location: the Australian High Commission, which I had already learned, as we prepared for this day, was a generous and efficient host. Inevitably we started half an hour late, PNG Time having first call on proceedings. Some of the writers got caught in the visa queue lining the perimeter fence outside the high commission compound. To observe the line was discomfiting and demeaning, a real bad look....
The first 250 copies of The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2011 were delivered in a battered box, finessing a tight deadline. The book cut a swathe. Like the lucky pig, we all wanted to lay hands on it. The looks on the faces of the first-time published writers took me back to that wonderful day when I first saw my own name in print. I couldn’t stop staring, so great was the thrill – and these writers were the same. You then set about reading what you have written as if seeing it for the first time.

It was a stimulating and even inspirational workshop for the 25 of us. We had a program which we could vary to suit our mood and wishes; we experienced the soft warmth of friendship and sensitive conversation; there was wit and there was wisdom – a lot of it coming from Russell Soaba, the grand old man of PNG literature.

“I was famous too early,” said Russell, the tearaway Independence author with two books and two volumes of poetry to his credit way back then, “and I could not live up to it.” And later, answering a question: “What is a poem? A poem is no more than an expression of powerful emotion.” I should add ‘or words to that effect’, because I left my notebook on the lectern at the High Commission. But the words stuck.

The workshop discussion roamed broadly across the art of writing with thoughtful interventions from Jerry Henson, the blind children’s author from Wewak, and Francis Nii, the paraplegic from Kundiawa who had made the considerable trek to Port Moresby - on an air ticket wangled from the Simbu Governor - to participate in the day’s activities.

Francis had published a novel in 2005 on the impact of HIV/AIDS on Papua New Guineans. He’s had some bad luck in his life, including the road accident that laid him low, but he’s a calm and measured man whose nobly creased Simbu face tells the story of a land as old as time.

It seems unfair to mention some names and not others but I am trying to avoid book length. I could mention the Deloitte school of writing which took up a strong position on the left hand side of the meeting room; my UPNG classmate, the cultured Mari Ellingson whose ideas and sense of purpose are compelling; Act Now’s Effrey Dademo’s composed, direct style – asking the smart, hard questions; Alfred (“writing is thrill, thrill, thrill”) Kaniniba of the Post-Courier; the perspicacious Reg Renagi (and the respect and affection others have for him); Corney Alone’s pragmatism; Joe Wasia’s warmth; Jim Drekore’s sharp intellect; and Lapiieh Landu – with a spirit as beautiful as her writing….

The day moved smoothly to its end and the appointed hour for the awards ceremony was met, in PNG Time. No sign of the prolific Martyn Namorong (stuck in the queue outside the high commission) until, just as I was about to announce to the audience that he couldn’t be present to receive the essay award, our favourite buai vendor popped up from nowhere to accept his rampaging crocodile trophy and cheque for K2,500. “Give me a hug,” he said at the reception afterwards, and I did.
Ian Kemish welcomed the guests to the ceremony with some kind and motivating words and Lady Margaret Eri reflected upon her husband's significant contribution to PNG literature as the first indigenous novelist, the love she still feels for Sir Vincent, who died in 1993, and the fact that this was the first time since his death that he had been formally recognised. It was a poignant moment.

The awards were presented and received; the winning writers read extracts from their work; someone said ‘we are all winners’ and that someone was right; I paid homage to Phil Fitzpatrick because high tribute was so deserved by him; the book was launched and the high commissioner given a copy signed by all the writers present; then we retired outside into the cooling evening for two pleasant hours of conversation and celebration before making regretful goodbyes.

Port Moresby looked a little bit neater, a little bit brighter and a whole lot more agreeable as Phil and I made our way back downtown through the swirling traffic, reflecting on how totally satisfying the day had been.

In an article a few days later, Martyn Namorong summed up the significance of the prize:

Thanks Keith, for everything. Sometimes words can be shallow and, for me, a hug says everything about friendship. Because it is about letting down one's guard and defences and allowing a stranger to be in a very good position to strike one's heart. But the heart of the matter is that, in friendships, hearts rarely get hurt. And many thanks to Phil, who has truly been a great friend as well.

Without being too political, I believe this is what relations between our two countries should be like. It is not about a patronising rich neighbour giving handouts and solutions but of equals, of friends who share a common interest. We are the human faces of the friendship that should always exist between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

In my essay I talked about not necessarily teaching people how to fish, but to give them a net. Keith gave me that net and did not even have to teach me to fish. An understanding of what I was referring to can only come about if people treat each other as equals by not becoming patronising. I reckon this is what development assistance should be all about.

A couple of days later Keith and I were winging our way back to Australia and planning the 2012 Crocodile Prize. We could see, even at this early point that, if the prize was to be sustainable, it would need to be managed by Papua New Guineans. Keith had tagged it as Papua New Guinea’s national literary competition and
that’s where its future lay.

The discussions we’d had in Port Moresby gave us some hope for the future of the prize and we talked on the plane of working towards encouraging the Papua New Guinean government to engage with the prize, even establish it as part of the nation’s cultural calendar. Trade Minister Charles Abel (photo) had been enthusiastic, and was later to provide the prize with significant personal support. Over time other Ministers and senior politicians did the same – but these individual commitments could not be built upon: in the history of the prize, there was never official recognition.

Keith was seeking greater involvement from Australia through AusAID but faced an uphill battle as the development assistance agency never evinced the slightest interest in what we were seeking to achieve. A lot of paperwork was being generated but we were getting nowhere.

It was clear, after the success of the first year, the prize was going to get much bigger and probably grow beyond the capacity of two part-time individuals to manage. The logical thing to do was to establish a Papua New Guinea-based organisation to steer it into the future. We thought that sometime after the 2012 competition would be a good time to begin the transition.

One of the major obstacles was that the people with the necessary expertise and commitment were widely dispersed throughout Papua New Guinea and, without support, they were unlikely to have the resources to meet regularly. If a committee was to be set up it would have to operate virtually, using the internet. Keith and I had done this already in establishing and administering the prize, so it was not out of the question.

With these thoughts in mind, we decided to appoint a Steering Group to guide the future direction and operations of the Prize. “The goal,” said Keith, “is to embed the Crocodile Prize and its associated activities as a permanent part of the literary landscape of Papua New Guinea.”
We assembled what seemed to be a capable group of people to work with us on building the new organisation, transitioning the prize and developing the structures and processes required to consolidate and expand its reach.

In addition to Keith and me, the members of the Steering Group were: Amanda Donigi (Managing Editor, Pacific Islands Publishing); Blaise Nangoi (Editor-in-Chief, PNG Post-Courier); David Kitchnoge (Business Analyst, Deloitte Australia); Jimmy Drekore (Analytical Chemist, Lihir Gold Ltd); John Evans (Manager, University of Papua New Guinea Bookshop); Mari Ellingson (Director-General, Office of Tourism, Arts and Culture); Patrick Levo (Features Editor, PNG Post-Courier); Russell Soaba (Senior Lecturer in English, University of Papua New Guinea); and Ruth Moiam (Public Diplomacy Coordinator, Australian High Commission).

The appointments were designed to ensure the project’s sustainability and to maintain its significant and continuing cultural role. The Steering Group was to act as a planning, reference and implementation spearhead across the scope of activities relating to the successful conduct of the Crocodile Prize. It was also to advise on and manage activities such as mentoring, sponsorship, publicity, judging, the awards ceremony, writers workshops, publishing and institutional networking.

Under Keith’s guidance, the steering group began work. By the end of 2011 it was able to announce the formation and incorporation of the Papua New Guinea Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers Incorporated (SWEP) with the primary tasks of promoting a writing and reading culture in Papua New Guinea and developing the professional knowledge of its writers, editors and publisher members.

Its secondary aims were to nurture professional linkages between members and with relevant organisations within and outside Papua New Guinea as well as keeping members informed of professional developments in the literary world. SWEP was also opened up to members from outside Papua New Guinea as associates for a fee of $A50 a year.
By year’s end SWEP has adopted an interim constitution and appointed a committee to steer it to the first general meeting, which was to be held to coincide with the Crocodile Prize awards in Port Moresby in September 2012. It appointed Amanda Donigi as its first Executive Officer, responsible for working with Keith and me to supervise its operations in Papua New Guinea.

Amanda, born and raised in Port Moresby, was at the time managing editor of Pacific Islands Publishing, a magazine production house in Port Moresby. She had a BA and a graduate diploma in writing, editing and publishing from the University of Queensland. Amanda had taught English for three years in South Korea and Taiwan before returning home and directing her attention to books and the written word.

It seemed like we were getting somewhere and had found the right person to drive the initiative in Papua New Guinea.

Meanwhile, the process of developing the Crocodile Prize wasn’t without controversy. As Keith recruited companies to support the second year, British American Tobacco (PNG) said it would like to sponsor the Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement. “We feel privileged to be a part of such an important contribution to our nation’s culture,” said Ako Toua, the company’s head of corporate affairs.

There was a kickback. “Sorry Keith, I have a problem with a tobacco company sponsoring this,” wrote Peter Kranz. “I thought they’d been banned from sponsoring motor sport (or anything else) in many countries. Bit like a heroin drug lord sponsoring an addiction clinic. ”Papua New Guineans were more sanguine. “Peter, I’m not sure how to feel about BAT sponsoring a literary award, although I see your arguments,” wrote Michael Dom. “Then again, if SP sponsored us, those teetotallers and others with arguments on alcohol abuse may take offence. If Coca-Cola sponsored us, the medical doctors might cry diabetes! Interoil? Well, let's not get into that. Perhaps I'd better not go any further.” “BAT is another business company operating in PNG,” said Joe Wasia. “Would you argue with a lamb flaps importing company in PNG if they wanted to sponsor the Crocodile Prize? Lamb flaps are
one of the major contributing factors to lifestyles diseases like diabetes and colon cancer. Likewise BAT is a business operating under the laws of the country. We have nothing to argue with its support.”

David Kitchnoge, like Joe, was a pragmatist: “I see cigarette makers, beer makers and buai sellers as beacons of democracy. They represent a set of choices that people must make in their lives and face the consequences, good or bad. Everyone has a right to decide what they want to do with their lives no matter how deadly that decision might be, as long as they have all the tools to help them make that choice. And there are enough warnings about the dangers of smoking, drinking and chewing in PNG.”

Keith, at the sharp end of this argument and no stranger to controversy, knew first-hand how difficult it was to raise money for the prize and wasn’t to be deterred so easily. The following year, though, faced with pushback from the Australian High Commission which provided facilities for the annual awards, British American Tobacco (PNG) quietly retired its sponsorship.

Lending his support to the prize was the respected award-winning journalist and Pacific specialist, Sean Dorney AM OBE. “I would encourage all Papua New Guineans to think seriously about picking up a pen or thrashing your keyboard to turn out an entry,” he told PNG Attitude. “It is simply terrific that there is an avenue now for Papua New Guinean writers to see their work in print.

“I was fortunate enough to meet Sir Vincent Eri and The Crocodile was one of the first books that I bought and read when I first arrived in Papua New Guinea in 1974. Papua New Guinea is going through such an interesting time that I have no doubt that there are talented people there who can translate this constant, exciting transition into quality literature.”

If 2011 was a big year for PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize, then it was an even bigger year for social media in Papua New Guinea. People within and outside the country were noticing the burgeoning phenomenon and analysing what it might mean,
especially in light of the coming election.

Some well-read Papua New Guinea based blogs regarded the government and resource companies with suspicion and the bulk of opposition to mining and logging was expressed through these blogs. *PNG Attitude* and *The Namorong Report* were not silent on such issues but nor were their views extreme. In an article for *Mining News - PNG Report*, journalist Blair Price explored the issue, speaking to both Martyn Namorong and Keith Jackson:

While PNG’s media enjoys enviable freedom compared to most of its Pacific neighbours, some observers believe PNG’s press has always been light on editorial and commentary on the country’s more troubling concerns. Into this void a series of PNG blogs have emerged in recent years, and their popularity is escalating as PNG’s political situation becomes more complex.

Namorong, a former medical student who makes a living selling betel nut in Port Moresby, is perhaps the most controversial of PNG’s blogging scene yet he is clearly finding an audience which is also more international than one might expect. From the end of July – when Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare’s retirement due to medical reasons was prematurely announced by his son – to the beginning of September, Namorong had more than 15,000 visits to his blog.

About 200-300 regular readers are Papua New Guineans, compared to more than 1,000 Australian readers, while Americans make up the next biggest readership base. “Most of my PNG readers are high school and university students,” Namorong told PNG Report. “I think there is a growing tide of dissatisfaction amongst the youth concerning the state of affairs of this nation. Young people see my blog as their blog – my thoughts are their thoughts – my frustrations are theirs as well. I also know that the colonised elite of PNG are reading the blog. They have to because it is a blog that takes a swipe at their failure to lead.”

Namorong sees blogging as a form of protest and believes he is articulating the thoughts of millions in PNG. “We see the need for an alternative development path that differs from the current exploitative development model that is largely in favour of capitalists. We see the darkness of neon lights.”

Jackson, a former PNG-based journalist and a broadly-experienced media veteran, first got into blogging to maintain contacts between Australians who served in pre-independence PNG. In 2009 he decided to transform his blog into a more broadly-based site, PNG Attitude, aimed at building people-to-people links between Australians and Papua New Guineans. “I think this proved to be the right move at the right time,” he said.
In early September the blog had a record 1,700 hits on a single day, which coincided with the controversial news that the O’Neill coalition government had removed Somare from his East Sepik seat. Jackson said PNG Attitude’s page views had generally doubled from the previous year to more than 1,000 a day (by 2016 it was more than 2,000).

“We cover the big PNG issues with robust and independent commentary,” Jackson said of the growing popularity. He also credited the greater awareness of the blog to a rising presence of Papua New Guineans online and the inclusion of more stories from PNG nationals with his site featuring about 40 frequent contributors. “The PNG national contributors have not only become more numerous over the last year or so, but bolder - more willing to comment publicly and frankly on PNG affairs,” Jackson said. “I’m especially delighted at the growing willingness of PNG nationals to write analytically and with great insight on their own political and social issues.”

Namorong holds “strongly negative” perceptions of mining and oil and gas players in PNG, and is known for criticising the environmental damage caused by key mines in the country. “Because they act in remote areas out of reach of the media spotlight, they can hide their dirty laundry easily.”

Jackson wants operations that match international standards. “The best companies, and there are not enough of them in PNG, do not take advantage of a weak political and regulatory system to operate by Rafferty’s Rules,” Jackson said. “They need to apply the same moral and professional codes to their task as they would if, say, operating in Australia. All resource development in PNG should be closely aligned with national development goals. The rednecks and carpetbaggers should be weeded out.”

The promise to fight corruption forms a centre piece of the O’Neill government’s re-election strategy, yet such pledges are not new to PNG. When asked if he viewed that any of PNG’s politicians were genuine about fighting corruption, Jackson said he believed some are but they need to be braver and better organised. “Corruption, if not attacked - and it will be a long process to weed it out - will lead to continuing instability in what should be a great and relatively prosperous country.”

Namorong said the root cause of corruption in PNG was the absence of justice. “Indeed, in the land of the unexpected, the only consistency has been the absence of justice. Governance mechanisms that are supposed to maintain checks and balances are a monumental failure. Their failure gives free rein to every crook who wishes to plunder the state.”

But PNG is also burdened with inflation generated by the ongoing PNG LNG project construction activity. On these impacts in Port Moresby, Jackson is most concerned with how the urban poor will fare. “There is a large body of people, some into their third generation, of being effectively detribalised. These people are hit hard by inflation and urban crime levels,
already high, [and they] seem likely to intensify which is almost unimaginable.”

Namorong takes inspiration from the inflation-linked Middle East Spring. “Around the world we’ve seen the rioting and revolutions that have occurred as people found the cost of living unbearable. I see a window of opportunity posed by the inflationary pressures in Port Moresby. I see an opportunity for change as the middle classes start to feel the pinch. Currently, the middle class are too comfortable in their bubble. The recent protest by LNG workers in Port Moresby is a sign of the desperation people are feeling. Of all workers, no one expects LNG workers to go on pay strikes as the assumption has been that the LNG project was the real deal.”

On the ultimate changes they would like to see, Namorong’s list includes a slowdown in the activities of all extractive industries in PNG. He views that the mining, oil and gas, logging and palm oil industries are destroying the lives of many indigenous communities with many untold stories of hardships not reported by foreign-owned media outlets. “I see a lot of parallels between what’s happening on mainland PNG and what happened decades ago on Bougainville. PNG’s elite are tied in with many of these extractive industries. Some hold positions on boards or senior management. Change will thus have to come from the grassroots even if there has to be a revolution.”

Jackson would like to see one big change: “An improvement in governance at all levels, political and bureaucratic, which will trigger the kind of reforms that the country desperately requires.”

Using the ever expanding internet networks, mostly driven by Digicel, social media was becoming a significant element in Papua New Guinea’s public discourse. Television and print had limited reach and radio broadcasting was in decline, but mobile telephony and the internet were by now beginning to penetrate even the most remote villages.

While television and newspapers had tended to push the narrow views of their owners and advertisers, social media offered a much broader spectrum of opinion. More importantly it was a form of media that didn’t need extensive financial and infrastructural backing. It suited the people of Papua New Guinea right down to the ground and Blair Price was right to be alerting Mining News readers to developments.

At the same time Keith was finding it hard-going to publish the PNG Attitude newsletter, now called The Review, that he emailed
to subscribers monthly, as well as producing the blog each day and managing significant components of the Crocodile Prize. *PNG Attitude* had by now also embraced Facebook and Twitter taking more of his time. In December 2011, he decided to wind up the newsletter and announced this in ‘A message of farewell from The Review magazine’: 

*The Review* published its final issue earlier this month after nearly ten years of production that transformed it from telling the stories of the ASOPA Class of 1962-63 to telling the stories of ASOPA to telling the greater story of the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. The magazine reached its endpoint for the simple and compelling reason that it had become too great a burden for me to produce in a context where this *PNG Attitude* blog continues to be a demanding proposition, as does the Crocodile Prize (with its new website due to be launched early in 2012).

Something had to give, and unfortunately it was the magazine, which republished in refined form the best of this website. But *PNG Attitude* remains here to stay. In fact, the magazine nearly burned out in 2006 when this blog began. At that time, I asked readers if they wanted it to continue. Overwhelmingly they did, and thereafter its circulation grew steadily from 200 to more than 1,200, all but three subscribers receiving it by email.

So *The Review* says farewell, a necessary decision to ensure I have sufficient time to devote to *PNG Attitude* and to the Crocodile Prize literary awards and their many associated activities – which I think have been the crowning achievement of this internet-based project so far.

On 13 October 2011, an Airlines PNG Dash 8 aircraft was bound for Madang carrying the parents of students at Divine Word University on their way to attend a graduation ceremony. It crashed killing 28 people including the wife of one of the earliest and most prolific contributors to *PNG Attitude*, Reg Renagi. Keith and I had met Lulu at the Crocodile Prize awards ceremony at the Australian High Commission just a month before. Keith wrote about the sense of loss that we all felt:

It wasn’t quite by accident that I first met Reg Renagi in the flesh. On my recent visit to Port Moresby, we’d had a loose arrangement to meet some time after I arrived at the Crowne Plaza. It was one of those Melanesian sort of arrangements where a matter is generally agreed without being nailed down with final certitude.
So it was around 7.30 pm that, having checked in late, I was wandering around the hotel trying to get my bearings when a tall, good looking man approached me and said: “You must be Keith”. Reg had been hanging around for the best part of two hours, honouring a vague arrangement with far more loyalty than it deserved. And so we had a beer and dinner and talked about all the things good friends talk about.

Two days later, after the writers’ workshop and Crocodile Prize awards ceremony at the Australian High Commission – throughout which Reg was a diligent and active participant – I briefly met his wife, Myria (Lulu), an attractive woman in both looks and demeanour. From the way Reg deferred to her, I guessed that I was talking with a real anchor point in a relationship. A month later, Lulu was dead – killed in the Madang Dash-8 crash, along with 27 other innocents.

Reg Renagi is well known to readers of PNG Attitude. Three year ago he became the first Papua New Guinean to contribute regularly to these columns as both a feature writer and a commentator. And, in lending his name to all he wrote, he encouraged many other Papua New Guinean writers to do likewise - and if you don't know that that takes courage you don't know Papua New Guinea.

“I write about certain key strategic issues our government needs to address in Papua New Guinea’s national interest,” he told readers two years ago. "Concerned citizens have to keep reminding them." Through his writing – most frequently on matters of government, ethics and defence - he built up a strong and loyal following of readers, who felt here was a man they could have a conversation with – even though they had never met him.

In September 2007, Reg and Lulu had lost their beautiful daughter, Jeannie, after a long illness. And now tragedy has struck again with extraordinary cruelty – Lulu killed on the way to Divine University in Madang for the graduation ceremony of their son.

We have started The Renagi Appeal to give readers the opportunity, in the most practical way, to express their condolences to Reg, to assure him that we share his grief and to thank Reg for what he has done in the past and for all that he will do.

It was not the first or last appeal that would be launched on PNG Attitude. The readers responded with their customary generosity.

At the end of 2011, Keith reflected on the highlight of what had been a very busy year:

It is common, as Father Time moves hesitantly towards the end of another year, that we humans set our ideals and aspirations for the year ahead and
also reflect on the past 12 months. In accordance with the latter, I thought I might try to recapitulate what, for me, have been some of the highlights for PNG Attitude over the course of 2011. So here goes, in rough order of priority:

1. The Crocodile Prize - It always gives you a big buzz when an idea is transformed into a reality – and so it was with the Crocodile Prize national literary contest in 2011. Indeed, we did more than mount a successful competition (400 entries, 80 writers, four categories), we also produced an anthology of the best PNG writing in 2011 and a writers’ workshop to boot. It was a wonderful achievement in which we were assisted hugely by the Post-Courier newspaper and the Australian High Commission. And, as we move into 2012, with a newly formed group of sponsors and its own website, the Prize looks like being bigger and better.

2. Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers - Amanda Donigi and I had the same idea at the same time. If the creative writing resurgence in PNG was to be sustained, it needed a strong governance platform within the country to administer its activities. Hence, towards the end of 2011, the Society was incorporated, a steering committee (largely PNG domiciled) formed, and a constitution drafted.

3. The emergence of Martyn Namorong - When still a medical student, Martyn began The Namorong Report blog in 2009 with a point by point summary of one of his lectures. There was not much action on the blog until early 2011, when one of two posts, ‘The land of the disenfranchised’ was picked up by PNG Attitude. A wonderfully talented writer had emerged into public view. Martyn went on to win an inaugural Crocodile Prize award for the best essay and is now PNG’s most prolific blogger and one who has gained international recognition.

4. The great diversity of PNG Attitude contributors - The centrepiece of PNG Attitude was never intended to be its publisher and editor but its contributors. And to succeed, the blog had to maintain a steady input of reportage and creative writing from both PNG and Australia, and this writing had to focus in some way on the relationship between the two countries. This was an idea that managed to succeed and its continuing success depends on this unusual collaboration continuing.

5. Great commentary from knowledgeable commentators - We get our fair share of lunatics in the Recent Comments column, of course, but the feature remains a fantastic place for debate and revelation offered by our readers. The commentary is just as well read as the main articles provided each day and provides a wonderful interactive forum that adds great value to PNG Attitude.

6. The project to build a Montevideo Maru memorial - The Japanese prison ship Montevideo Maru left Rabaul in June 1942 with over 1,000 military and civilian prisoners in its hold. It was torpedoed on 1 July with the
loss of all prisoners, most of whom were Australian. *PNG Attitude* and its publisher played a crucial role in establishing and fund raising for the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society. The memorial will be dedicated in Canberra on 1 July 2012, 70 years after the tragic sinking of the ship.

7. The constitutional crisis live blog - An important first for PNG Attitude in 2011 was a ‘live blog’ – a continuing coverage of PNG’s *tupela wantaim [two of everything]* constitutional and political crisis drawn from published news sources and reader input. Page views soared from the usual 1,000 a day to 4,000 and many readers were introduced to the blog for the first time.

8. Charles Abel writes; Richard Marles gives up - Politicians generally have a hard time accommodating the social media in their communications, probably because the black arts of spin and propaganda don’t wash too well on media like blogs and Twitter. It was good to see, therefore, PNG’s trade minister, Charles Abel, appearing occasionally on *PNG Attitude* with some well nuanced observations. Not so Australia’s Pacific Affairs secretary Richard Marles whose failure to address issues full on led to mockery from readers whereupon Richard retired to the dressing room.

9. *PNG Attitude* establishes a presence on Twitter and Facebook - We were hardly in the first rush of early adopters but we got there eventually and now have a presence right across the main social media platforms.

10. Keith Jackson visits POM for first time in 35 years - I’d been to other parts of Papua New Guinea in the years since I’d *gon pinis [gone for good]* after independence but never Port Moresby.

The new SWEP, readers and contributors, and Keith and I could finish 2011 with a sense of genuine accomplishment.
Battling the Bureaucracy, 2012

There were very few topics Keith wouldn’t entertain publishing on PNG Attitude. This gave the blog a breadth of appeal most Papua New Guinean blogs didn’t have. There were a few regular idiosyncratic contributors to the blog and one of the most interesting was Peter Kranz. When readers were working their way through weightier posts they often came across whimsical articles darting in from left field and they were often authored by Peter.

Peter had a serious side too but, like all good commentators, he knew how to use humour and irony to make a point. Sometimes he could be prickly, such as when I queried him about using only his Christian name. (He still won’t use his surname; Keith has to type it in every time.) A surname-less Peter would head off on an obscure and seemingly irrelevant tangent in the middle of a serious debate. I assumed it was the result of an overactive mind.

Peter had an interesting background in Papua New Guinea and was married to a delightful woman from Simbu. One got the impression he wasn’t just married to Rose but to her entire extended family and clan. He had been on the administrative staff at the University of Papua New Guinea and, apart from his knowledge of IT and the intricacies of university bureaucracy, he also displayed more than a passing interest in Port Moresby’s nightlife, including the gay community. This was all the more puzzling because he came from a strong Christian background.

Nevertheless, Peter brought a refreshing breath of fresh air to some of the more laboured and po-faced debates that occurred on the blog. His knowledge of the picaresque and obscure was
remarkable and, while he must have spent long hours trawling the web, he also communicated an image of a cultured individual with a wicked sense of humour.

He was also the perfect counterfoil to some of the more staid and cynical contributors like the prolific Paul Oates – not that Paul couldn’t be funny when he wanted to be. Contributors seemed to be assuming particular personas when they wrote for the blog. Paul’s was the Professor and Peter’s The Artful Dodger.

Peter’s crowning achievement perhaps came with his series of Arthur Conan Doyle spoofs chronicling Sherlock Holmes lost adventures in Papua New Guinea. They were pitch-perfect with much fine and relevant detail. Curiously, they also appealed to many Papua New Guinean readers. People hung out for the next episode in these episodic sagas.

There were other stand-out contributors with various personas writing regularly for the blog, especially after the Crocodile Prize started. When Keith changed the masthead of the blog to ‘PNG Attitude & Friends’, these were the people he was thinking about. The appearance of articles by Joe Wasia, Francis Nii, Sil Bolkin, Francis Hualupmomí, David Kitchnoge, Gelab Piak, Ignatius Piakal, Leonard Fong Roka, Bernard Sinai, Mathias Kin and the many other regulars of those days was guaranteed to attract voluminous comments. Some writers had their own little band of followers. And you knew if their bylines appeared, the article would be worth reading.

There were also the disappointments, both from Australia and Papua New Guinea. Everyone was impressed when Loujaya Tony’s brilliant poetry began appearing on the blog. Here was an incisive voice full of wisdom and caring. Loujaya took this intelligence all the way to the 2012 elections when she stood successfully for the seat of Morobe, dislodging the veteran politician Bart Philemon and securing a Ministry. With a debate raging about whether Papua New Guinea should have reserved seats for women, her election was seen as a fillip for the case against. But after her victory Loujaya seemed to depart on a fundamentalist religious tangent and became involved in some mucky internecine politics.
The aficionados of *PNG Attitude* were left wondering what had happened, especially Keith, who had donated to her election campaign.

Following Peter O’Neill’s controversial ascendancy to the prime ministership and the sidelining of Michael Somare, Papua New Guinea entered unchartered waters and one of the most disruptive periods of its political history. Amongst the Machiavellian plotting and counter-plotting there occurred what looked like a mutiny in the military. Insiders watched the episode play out with increasing bemusement and outsiders were alarmed at what seemed at first glance to be a full-scale insurrection. Keith maintained an hour by hour account on the blog drawing down from Twitter, Facebook and other internet sources.

I was in Port Moresby at the time and I got the distinct impression that it was a Gilbert and Sullivan farce. The only thing that worried me was a rumour that roadblocks had been set up around Jackson’s Airport. That could prove difficult when I wanted to leave. As it turned out there were no roadblocks.

My take on the affair was shared by most of the citizens of Port Moresby, who simply got on with life as if nothing was happening. As far as they were concerned, it was just the political class playing more silly games.

Following on the heels of the Airlines PNG crash near Madang, there was another tragedy when *MV Rabaul Queen* foundered taking more nearly two hundred poor souls with it. The boat was apparently overloaded, had limited safety equipment and was probably unseaworthy.

Amidst this tragedy and political turmoil, in Kundiawa Jimmy Drekore was able to announce a good year for his Simbu Children Foundation. He thanked supporters – including a number of *PNG Attitude* readers – for their efforts in 2011 to make a difference in the lives of sick and disadvantage children in the rugged hinterland mountains. In Port Moresby, Martyn Namorong received an invitation to speak at Deakin University in Victoria. But he had no funds to get there, stay there or even pay the registration fee.
Keith saw Martyn’s invitation to speak at Deakin as a great opportunity to help fill the void that was Australian knowledge of its nearest neighbour. He began to think of other possibilities speaking engagements in other cities, a media program and meetings with senior federal politicians. Martyn’s good friend, law student Nou Vada, described the proposed speaking engagement as ‘taking the truth to Australia’ and Keith cottoned on to that – now he had a slogan.

As with most other endeavours of this nature in Papua New Guinea, getting Martyn to Melbourne turned out not to be as simple as it sounded. Keith reckoned readers could raise the funds but Martyn faced the problem of obtaining a passport at short notice. It was not to happen; the cash was not there to pay the bribe. Martyn never made it to that Deakin conference. Instead, two months later, a more extensive trip to Australia occurred under the auspices of PNG Attitude.

Funding the Crocodile Prize and other causes undertaken by PNG Attitude was always leavened by the knowledge that readers of the blog were remarkably generous. If the cause was seen to be just and important, people – mostly Australians - were prepared to contribute. Despite the relative impoverishment of most Papua New Guineans, however, there were always a few donations from there. Keith was always prepared to add his own contribution, often substantial.

The Crocodile Prize required funding at a level and with a regularity that was beyond other one-off causes. With its substantial prize pool and operational costs, especially for printing the annual anthology, it needed serious money. Although staffed by volunteers and not seeking to make a profit, it still took about K100,000 a year to run. Securing finance was always precarious and occupied a great deal of time. Each year when the competition began, the organisers had little idea how it would fare financially. Every year sponsors had to be approached and persuaded. But each year, more sponsors joined the list of regulars growing into an impressive slate of supporters – Ok Tedi Mining, the Cleland Family, Kina Securities, PNG Chamber of
Mines and Petroleum, Paga Hill Development Company, the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia and South Pacific Breweries.

After the great success of the first competition in 2011, it was hoped the road ahead might be easier, but this was not to be. Perhaps the biggest disappointment was the constant failure of the Papua New Guinean and Australian governments to support the Prize. Some individual Ministers and, for some time, the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby, contributed, the latter in kind rather than cash, but neither national government saw fit to offer substantial support for what was palpably an effective and valuable project.

This was difficult to understand although Keith, with long experience dealing with the bureaucracy, believed there was a deep-rooted suspicion and unwillingness to deal with individual as differentiated from corporate enterprise. After the 2011 competition, the organisers were able to say, “Here is a successful project with a proven track record and demonstrably huge benefits, how about supporting it?” On the government side, this was met with vague promises, prevarication, false hope and final rejection.

Each year, the private sector came to the rescue – but this hand to mouth existence was not creating the basis for a sustainable organisation. As each year passed, the sustainability of the Crocodile Prize was to be the biggest concern.

One of the major problems was fitting the competition into the ironclad and inflexible models governments use for granting funds. The Prize didn’t seem to fit any of the complex criteria of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs. Even when one bureaucrat, to whom we had been referred by the Australian High Commission with a lofty commendation, told Keith she believed the Crocodile Prize seemed certain to secure funding, he was farmed off to another bureaucrat, another “more appropriate” scheme and another set of forms. He was eventually driven into a tight, process-driven corner that had a notice saying, ‘You don’t fit’.
This might have been half acceptable if, right at the beginning, it was made clear that the Crocodile Prize was a non-conforming project, but in typical public service style people wriggled and squirmed all the way to dashed hopes, burning much time and energy which, for Keith and for me, was always in short supply.

Keith described a typical case in 2012:

Thousands of Papua New Guineans will not be able to read stories and poems written by their own writers due to a short-sighted decision by the Australian government not to provide funds for printing the Crocodile Prize Anthology 2012. And two workshops in regional PNG designed to provide skills to emerging Papua New Guinean writers have had to be cancelled for the same reason.

After the Cultural Diplomacy Section of the Australian foreign affairs department said that the $31,000 funding application to support the Crocodile Prize “clearly has merit” and offered “to assist with it”, the result was that we were fobbed off in a form letter from Amanda (“please note that I do not work on Wednesdays and Fridays”) Panayotau – of the same section.

Knock-backs are not uncommon to those of us who deal constantly with bureaucrats, but – given the nature of the project – this was an especially stupid and uncomprehending one. The funding proposal, accompanied by a comprehensive revenue and expenditure budget, sought a subsidy to produce 5,000 copies of the anthology for distribution through PNG schools, government offices and resources companies at minimal or no cost to the recipient.

The failure of the Australian government at a broader level to fund book production is a blow to Papua New Guinean writers and readers alike. The anthology is a unique compilation of the best writing in PNG, where a national literature is experiencing something of a revival after 35 years thanks to the initiation of the Crocodile Prize.

DFAT’s refusal to provide funds to print the book, despite manifestly having the means to do so, is a crime against PNG culture. And it makes a total mockery of parliamentary secretary Richard Marles’ professed commitment to the Australia-PNG relationship.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) had evolved a negative attitude to such projects, even where successful and accredited by their own diplomats. They seemed to believe that if a project was not their own initiative, it was of no interest.

Fortunately the private sector sponsors were quite different. With a real stake in Papua New Guinea and a keen eye on the
long-term, there wanted projects like this to succeed – and they wanted to have a strong association with such projects. There were some disappointments - Exxon Mobil was a major one. It had bureaucratic requirements that would have made DFAT proud with a sequence of form-filling, document submission and the usual positive communications that all ended in a big black hole from which no light emerged.

But, as Keith already knew, in persuading large organisations to sign up to something new, disappointments are inevitable. “We need a small number of big sponsors,” was his approach. There was neither the time nor the resources to deal with a large number of small ones.

It was a method that worked. One of the most unexpected was the eventual participation after a false start of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia (PNGAA). At first, under a particular prickly Treasurer, the PNGAA was guarded and made it clear, when it came to Papua New Guinea and money, there was a high level of distrust. It placed such onerous restrictions on its funding that we had to say we just couldn’t do the deal. The funding for the books would have come in after the anthology was distributed. But we couldn’t print it without the money. Catch 22.

A year later, with the officer in question gone and a more understanding and open-minded committee calling the shots, the PNGAA Publishing Program was initiated as a result of which, since then, more than 3,000 anthologies of original Papua New Guinean writing have been provided to Papua New Guinean schools and libraries.

The response of the PNGAA and the companies that supported the Crocodile Prize highlight the differences between government and private funding. With government it is a matter of dealing at length with rule-bound, risk averse and uncreative public servants who have an eye on their own careers and are reluctant to make decisions which have no precedent, especially involving money. With the private sector, there is a greater ability is to understand what the outcomes are likely to be and, where they are assessed
as positive and beneficial, to agree to an association that works to achieve them. Chalk and cheese.

One particular – and inexplicable - disappointment involved Steamships Trading Company, which had been the foundation sponsor of the short story prize but at the last possible moment in 2014 suddenly withdrew much promised continuing funding. No reason was given for the withdrawal and we were left scratching our heads. The previous year, the company’s finance director, Eddie Ruha, handing over a K10,000 cheque at a formal ceremony, had said: “I believe the Crocodile Prize is working to strengthen and enhance Papua New Guinea’s national literature. We understand how thrilling it is for writers to have the opportunity to be published and for readers to access stories that speak to the themes, issues and culture from Papua New Guinea.”

The change of heart and the silence that ensued seemed to be related to some internal dispute in the company. Fortunately for the short story contest an anonymous Australian benefactor stepped into the breach.

Meanwhile after a false start, Martyn Namorong’s *Take the Truth to Australia* tour was back on track: the itinerary including visits to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane for two weeks in April. After a bribe was paid, a passport had been produced and *PNG Attitude* had secured funding from its readers and Papua New Guinean law firm, Twivey Lawyers. Another promised benefactor, Victoria University in Melbourne, withdrew its pledged funding and mysteriously pulled out at the last minute. Was Martyn’s reputation as a radical voice playing on the minds of its senior staff? Keith was irritated but unworried – *PNG Attitude* readers had provided sufficient donations to cover such exigencies. Martyn’s plane tickets and expenses had been provisioned; his accommodation would be provided privately.

Gaining Australian visas was a chronic problem in Papua New Guinea and an issue which caused more anger towards Australia than all the others combined. There seemed to be a view in DFAT that Papua New Guineans allowed into Australia would overstay their visas and disappear into the countryside. It was another
example of the very poor understanding DFAT had of Papua New Guineans. It didn’t realise that, because of their cultural and social systems, they were safe bets and far more likely than many other visitors to return home on time. There never have been many Papua New Guinean visa over-stayers in Australia.

But getting an Australian visa for Martyn proved no problem. Nor was the fact that he was the spearhead of a feisty new breed of Papua New Guinean social commentators and activists who openly criticised the Papua New Guinean and Australian governments. There seemed to be an invisible hand at work in the Australian High Commission that was easing the way.

The program for the *Take the Truth to Australia* tour was now filling out. There would be media interviews, public meetings, discussions with senior politicians, campus seminars, socialising and sightseeing. Keith was coordinating Martyn’s visit in Sydney, Linda Koerner in Melbourne and Murray Bladwell in Brisbane. Ben Jackson, who worked in Keith’s public relations firm, Jackson Wells, would travel with Martyn as a facilitator and companion.

Meanwhile Martyn used a visit to Papua New Guinea by Richard Marles to draw a stark comparison between the Australians he was encountering through *PNG Attitude* and those in official positions:

When he was in Papua New Guinea last week, parliamentary secretary Richard Marles stuck to the "colonial" program of the Australian High Commission’s Australia Week celebrations, which really look like Australia imposing itself in Papua New Guinea's face as opposed to a genuine interaction between friends - which the Crocodile Prize truly represents.

The Croc Prize is the real deal. I might be too cocky in saying this but it beats all AusAID programs. Firstly you’re raising the profile of talented Papua New Guineans, as was the case with me. After you folks found me, everyone else did. In addition, there is the person to person interaction that is much more human than a ‘donor–aid recipient’ relationship that can be at times patronising and neo-colonial.

Keith, Phil and the Australian readers of *PNG Attitude* seem more human to me than any AusAID consultant. It’s all about people, friends, families, acquaintances - human beings.

Martyn’s *Take the truth to Australia* tour was a strategic and
carefully planned exercise to bring attention to the shortcomings of Australia’s attitude to Papua New Guinea and to serious governance issues within Papua New Guinea itself. During the visit, the influential newspaper *The Age* in Melbourne invited Martyn to write an opinion piece. It was a powerful, pungent and potent piece of writing which received prominent placement and attracted much media attention. It was entitled provocatively, ‘Australia not a good friend’:

I’m on my first visit to Australia right now - and what an introduction to your country. A two-week run of four major cities where I’m meeting politicians, journalists and ordinary Australians. I’m trying to help foster a relationship between Papua New Guineans and Australians beyond business, politics, diplomacy and academia. After all, PNG is a lot more than the Kokoda Track and birds of paradise. We’re a nation of seven million people who aspire to be better than we are.

The relationship between my country and Australia is complex. You were once our coloniser. You created institutions: Western democracy on our behalf - a Westminster-style parliament, a free press, a fairly robust judicial system, university education - and modern commerce and a working infrastructure. All on our behalf. And yours too, let’s be honest.

Campaigning is under way in PNG for the general election. When Australia thought the election might be delayed, it spoke patronisingly to us and got a telling off for its trouble. When the Papua New Guinean people thought it might be delayed, we marched in the streets and got an election. The message is clear - as a people, Papua New Guineans might just be a bit better and more effective than Australians think we are.

There are some other issues between Australia and PNG that need to be addressed. When you get to PNG and land at Jackson airport in Port Moresby, you can buy a visa at our front door and we let you in. When we want to come to Australia, we are regarded as potential absconders and the visa process is a torture. I know people who couldn’t even visit Australia for weddings and funerals of relatives.

Papua New Guineans do not present a major over stayer issue for Australia. We really do love the country we come from, despite its faults and privations. And we don’t like being treated like potential criminals when we want to visit your place. PNG is geographically closer than New Zealand and all other neighbours of Australia. Yet Australians don’t see boatloads of Papua New Guineans heading down south. We have a strong attachment to our ancestral lands and as such we prefer living on our land. Yet the treatment we get for wanting to temporarily visit Australia is perhaps based on a lot of Australian prejudice.
This sort of treatment of Papua New Guineans also extends to the arena of business. In my home of Western Province, BHP Billiton is responsible for the destruction of the Fly River by Ok Tedi mine, an environmental disaster of world-scale proportions. Australian gold miner Newcrest dumps mine wastes into the sea around the island of Lihir in the north-east of Papua New Guinea. Newcrest also has a 50 percent stake in Morobe Mining's Hidden Valley project that has been blamed for fish deaths in the Markham River.

Papua New Guineans are becoming increasingly weary of Australian attitudes towards us. As the Australian government pursues its trade agenda with PNG and other Pacific Island nations, we Papua New Guineans are concerned about the likelihood of further exploitation of our people by your government and businesses. We protected and cared for young Australian men during World War II. We have also developed many friendships with Australians. But we are not happy with Australia's attitude to us.

I don't know if you've heard the expression "boomerang aid" - it's got a real Aussie ring to it, hasn't it? A lot of the half-billion-dollar-a-year aid you give to PNG boomerangs right back to Australia - as consultants' fees or for the purchase of goods and services.

Australia's development agency, AusAID, has invested in training and equipping PNG police. While maintaining law and order is a critical issue in PNG, recently serious and credible allegations have emerged of police being retained by resources companies and acting inappropriately against protesting landowners. There have been some excellent Australian aid projects in Papua New Guinea but you need to know the truth - most of the aid money doesn't get to where it could do the most good: the provision of better health services; better roads; you know the list.

PNG's increasing engagement with China is in many ways a rejection of Australia due to Australia's failure to be a good friend since independence. I do not suggest for a moment that it is not possible for our land to be used for other than traditional purposes. But this must happen with our informed consent and approval.

Australia has been good to my country - and I think my country has been good to Australia. You are, by and large, a benign neighbour. But there is such a concept as benign neglect. We need a more understanding relationship with Australia. And that means you must adopt a more engaged and intelligent approach to Papua New Guinea and its people.

The *Take the truth to Australia* tour had been a resounding success. Keith hoped it might prove to be a forerunner of visits by other Papua New Guinean intellectuals and writers. He half-hoped the Australian government would see the virtue in such a program.
and come to the party. But an annual event was not to transpire. The Department of Foreign Affairs displayed its habitual truculence and was not keen on having legitimate Melanesian voices talking to Australians and Keith’s business commitments, his Crocodile Prize undertakings and, increasingly, his declining health were proving to be major obstacles to maintaining the pace of PNG Attitude’s broadening scope of activities.

By May Papua New Guinea’s on-again-off-again national election was gaining irresistible momentum. Peter O’Neill’s attempts to delay it had come to naught and the parlous state of governance and politics in Papua New Guinea creaked on. During this tempestuous period, other strange things began to happen and PNG Attitude wasn’t immune. In mid-May, in a brief message on the blog, Keith reported on one such event:

For some hours now PNG Attitude has been under a spam attack in our Comments zone. This takes the form of an automated device pouring down gobbledygook comments on 'Martyn Namorong', clearly to try to clog up our operations. Together with our Typepad service provider we are trying to come to grips with this. But should PNG Attitude fail in the next period, you will know why. And you may even work out why....

At around the same time, Keith reported to readers that he had received an email from an outfit called the Barracuda Central Reputation System. It was electronically generated and said: “Sorry, your email was blocked based on its originating IP address having a poor reputation.” The person Keith had been trying to contact was a colleague at The National newspaper; a journalist who Keith did not name “to protect his well-being in what seems like a pretty toxic organisation.” After Keith protested, Barracuda removed him from its block list for 30 days, while it “re-evaluated”.

Keith advised Barracuda that “it seems The National newspaper in Papua New Guinea has placed me on your list for a political, not for any ethical, reason.’ He continued:

I am dismayed that you should so list me without any attempt to ascertain my credentials. I run a blog, PNG Attitude, in which some writers
are occasionally critical of *The National*, and this probably explains the blocking. *PNG Attitude*, is one of the most read blogs on Australia-Papua New Guinea relations. The blocking of my emails to colleagues and friends of mine at *The National* is a malicious act which I hope you will put to rights.

Barracuda undid the block permanently and Keith later reported to readers:

It appears almost certain that someone at *The National* invoked the ‘poor reputation’ slur; probably a person senior enough to act officially on behalf of the newspaper. If this be the case, it was a low, sleazy and reprehensible thing to do.

Of course, *The National* is itself getting a bit of a name - for censorship. It recently banned Russell Soaba and Nou Vada from its pages and won’t even mention the name of Martyn Namorong. Perhaps we should judge the reputation of *The National* accordingly.

Barracuda is a legitimate company that blocks internet providers and users involved in illegal or dubious activities such as spam generation. It appears that the spam attack and the complaint to Barracuda were done in revenge for criticism of *The National*. Keith was entitled to be suspicious.

In mid-July there was a cause for celebration among many readers of *PNG Attitude* – the kiaps had finally achieved a recognition of sorts for their service in Papua New Guinea. Even the critics acknowledged their right to rejoice. Ian McPhedran reported the fact in *The Daily Telegraph* in July under the headline, ‘At long last, kiaps to be honoured by their country’:

Hundreds of former kiaps who served with the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary between 1949 and 1973 have become eligible to receive the Police Overseas Medal. The medal was first presented in 1991, but until now only officers who served in humanitarian emergencies or peacekeeping missions in places such as Bougainville and East Timor were eligible.

Ex-kiap Chris Viner-Smith of Canberra said the patrol officers were policemen, magistrates and jailers in some of the wildest and most isolated country on earth.... Mr Viner-Smith, who served as a kiap from 1961 when he was 20 until 1971, has been fighting for 11 years for recognition for the patrol officers. "This is acknowledgement of the job 2,000 young Australians
did in helping a stone age people to become a nation. We enforced a mixture of European and tribal law and we didn't rule by the gun, but by gaining the respect of the people," he said.

The funding of the Crocodile Prize had always been a tenuous affair and the uncertainty continued as the 2012 competition neared completion. The Prize had yet to attract a major long-term sponsor which would underwrite its sustainability. Where understanding and enthusiasm were expected from Papua New Guinean and Australian governments, there was invariably a letdown.

We had become philosophical about this; in some ways it was not such a bad thing. If the competition was sponsored in a major way by either government, there was always the chance it would lose its freedom to publish unimpeded and its independent decision-making may have been compromised.

Something similar might have happened if a large commercial interest stepped in to underwrite its funding. Perhaps the best way to go was through these smaller contributions from a range of sources. Unfortunately it meant that financing the Prize was something that constantly had to be worked on, and always the energy had to be found to drive it and PNG Attitude forward. Keith summed it up this way:

Don’t ask me how it happens. I’ve long since stopped worrying how PNG Attitude finds sufficient resources to keep itself going day after day, month after month. But it does. A combination of mainstream media reporting, gleanings from PNG-related stories that otherwise struggle to see the light of day, and – of critical importance – contributions from our own 100 or so more-or-less regular writers. Bless you....

So why is this? What drives readers to respond as they do? My guess is that PNG Attitude contributors tend to rise above the bland and go for the intellectual jugular: pointed commentary, shameless controversy, incisive analysis (calling a spade a wooden-handled, metal-bladed digging implement, er...) and the candid take-no-prisoners criticism. Which is just as we like it, and long may it continue. And when what we do is old hat, and everyone's doing it, we’ll go away. But that doesn’t look like it’ll be anytime soon.
While funding the Crocodile Prize was done on a wing and a prayer, some of Papua New Guinea’s prominent writers were also finding it hard to make ends meet. Paraplegic author Francis Nii’s (photo) attempts to get to the 2012 Crocodile Prize awards in Port Moresby was a case in point. It demonstrated, yet again, the generosity and commitment of PNG Attitude readers. Keith launched another funding campaign, headed ‘Let’s get this talented writer to the Crocodile Prize’:

The Francis Nii story is one of triumph, tragedy, and triumph over tragedy. And the PNG Attitude readers’ story is one far removed from the languid passivity of the supine web surfer. Our readers boast a notable track record of action – including medical equipment to Kavieng hospital, treatment for a Papuan villager confronting blindness, support for the Crocodile Prize and practical condolences to Reg Renagi, not to mention the recent successful Australian tour by Martyn Namorong. And now we’re asking you to stand up, put up and stump up again.

Picture a small room tucked away in the paediatric ward of the Sir Joseph Nombri Memorial Hospital in Kundiawa, Simbu Province. There sits a man in a wheelchair. He’s nearing 50 and his faced is etched by time, hardship and the heritage of his Salt-Nomane people in the south Simbu. This man has a degree in economics and was an agricultural economist and banker with Papua New Guinea’s National Development Bank until a car accident on 9 February 1999 left him paraplegic and laid him low. He’s been in hospital for the 13 years since.

Being thus disabled is a particularly tough gig in PNG, where welfare is self-provided and life with a disability is anything but easy. Most people die early. But Francis Nii has survived. A tough man from Yobai village, he has adapted to tough times. He writes verse and prose (see the Crocodile Prize Anthology 2011), has published a book on the scourge of AIDS (Paradise In Peril), set up the Simbu Association of Persons With Disability, and, recently, was appointed administrator of the Simbu Children Foundation.

We’ve invited Francis to travel to Port Moresby in September to be present at the Crocodile Prize awards and to participate in a discussion group of regional authors at the associated writer’s forum. Francis - who is not flush with funds - has been raising money to pay for his travel and accommodation but still requires another $800 to make the trip. I’ve
assured him I’ll obtain the money by hook and by the book (not by crook, no way), and I’m hopeful you may see fit to contribute a spare $20 or $50 to help out.

As always the money was forthcoming and Francis made it to the awards. By now the last entries had come in to the competition and I was able to summarise the just completed process:

The 2012 Crocodile Prize for Literature closed last Thursday and the final entry lobbed into my inbox at 11.53 pm following a deluge of stories, poems and essays during the day. If the 2011 competition can be described as ‘ground-breaking’, I think this year’s effort might aptly be called a ‘watershed’. All up we had 576 entries from 135 entrants.

By far the biggest category was poetry, with 353 entries. These ranged from free-flowing prose to closely-crafted and structured verse forms. I think Russell Soaba is to blame for the latter. There was also a smattering of very interesting experimental poetry and some which relied on visual effects. During the course of the competition we have uncovered several accomplished and significant poets. Papua New Guinea just might be one of the most poetic nations in the world. Why this is so still puzzles me.

There were 73 short stories. This is a category that seems to take off slowly and then build up as the year progresses. There were entries from our old 2011 favourites as well as a heartening batch of new writers. Several of the latter displayed remarkable talents. This is my favourite category and it pains me that there are no real outlets for these writers in Papua New Guinea. That is a national disgrace, not only for the government but for private enterprise too. I’m still scratching my head about what can be done about it.

We also had a diverse range of 61 essays. By far the most popular topic is politics and the failures of the Papua New Guinea government. I guess the politicians are playing their part in the competition by supplying bizarre background material for the writers. Coming a close second as a theme is the frustrating inability of the Australian government to come to terms with PNG. After that there is a range of topics related to the environment, rapacious miners, women and children’s rights, the lack of rural development, PNG’s place in the world, the ‘Melanesian Way’, the ethics of selling buai, sorcery, tribal warfare, Bougainville and so on.

The essay category, like last year, managed to surprise me by its contrariness and left-field expositions. I can very honestly say I’ve learned a lot from reading these entries and changed my views about PNG at several levels. One would be foolish to say that there is not a healthy political and
social debate going on in Papua New Guinea. One of the gratifying things about the entries, unlike social media in Papua New Guinea, has been the willingness of entrants to put their names to their work. A real name under the title of an essay gives it a clout unmatched by cowardly and silly pseudonyms.

There were 26 entries in the heritage category. This surprised me because I was originally sceptical about its appeal. During last year’s writers’ workshop it was noted that we needed to be wary of inviting people to send in all their boring old local legends and myths. This didn’t happen however. What we got, by and large, were entertaining and thoughtful explorations of traditional culture and its relevance to a modern nation. A couple of the entries were absolutely delightful. Some of the others I’ve filed away as possible sources for my day job as a social mapper.

Finally, there were 63 student entries. This has been a really interesting category, not the least because of my struggle over what is actually a student in PNG. We’ve had entries from 21 year olds doing Grade 9 at high school and we’ve had entries from 22 year olds doing post-graduate degrees at university. There have been entries from 13 year olds that read like the work of mature adults and there have been entries from 20 year olds that read like the work of nine year olds.

While there is some real talent among the entries, poets, story writers and essayists all, I came away with a distinct impression that there is something seriously wrong with education in Papua New Guinea. We had some appallingly bad entries from people who are actually teachers. The bright kids seem to be able to make their way through what must be a diversely dysfunctional system well, but how the average student copes is anyone’s guess. My conclusion, based on the entries in this category, is that they don’t.

One of the other gratifying elements in the 2012 competition, which was not so evident in 2011, has been the humorous and whimsical entries, especially in the poetry and short story categories. When I was bogged down in that final deluge of entries last week I came across Brigette Wase’s account of trying to take a shower in her 44 member, 11 family household and shortly after Charlotte Vada’s hilarious account of State of Origin night in Moresby. Gems like those brighten up the whole day.

I’m not a great believer in omens but just as a matter of interest there has been a 3.5 metre salty in the mouth of the Mary River near where I live in Queensland. So far it has eluded all efforts to capture and relocate it. Crocodiles are rare this far south. Maybe it is swimming back to Papua New Guinea as we speak.

I also added a comment to this article which introduced a major innovation to the competition. “We are at a very
preliminary stage,” I wrote, “of possibly being able to award publication as a prize for a book length entry in 2013 or 2014. Don't hold your breath but we'll keep you posted.” It was to happen. The Book of the Year Award was on the way and it was to mark a new maturity in the resurgence of Papua New Guinean literature.

By the middle of September, everything was under control and I set off for Port Moresby. Francis Nii, with the help of PNG Attitude readers, had raised his airfare and accommodation costs and would join me there. Keith couldn’t accompanying me this time; he was recuperating from spinal surgery. I paid for my own travel and accommodation and Keith elected to dedicate his unspent travel funds to the cause of printing more copies of the anthology.

I couldn’t get a flight out of Hervey Bay the day before the Crocodile Prize awards and the first annual general meeting of the Papua New Guinea Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers (SWEP). Instead I opted to fly from my rural Queensland home to Port Moresby on the same day. Not a good move. Getting up at 4.30 am, changing planes in Brisbane, lobbing into customs with people from three other flights from Australia and racing to the Australian High Commission hoping to be relatively organised and coherent is a physical and mental impossibility at my age. Frantically searching for the list of email votes for the SWEP election, which I found the following day exactly where I had packed it, and banging my laptop wondering why nothing would work, I thanked my lucky stars that Amanda Donigi, Jimmy Drekore and Ruth Moiam were there to smooth things over. Amanda was super cool and took everything in her stride. Jimmy was his usual bundle of energy exuding charisma every which way; if you could bottle it you’d make a fortune. And for me, an ex-kiap used to winging it, Ruth was so well, organised it was positively frightening. At the end of the afternoon it was gratifying to see the three of them elected, respectively, president, vice president and secretary of the new Society. Along with Gina
Samar, a professional accountant who won the treasurer’s position, the Society seemed to have elected a great team. After several red wines and a good night’s sleep, I handled the writer’s forum and the awards ceremony the next day a lot better. Indeed, I mostly sat in the background and listened to some fascinating speakers. At the forum I was impressed by an intelligent and edgy presentation by Martyn Namorong. Between coughs and the constant waving of his iPad, I listened to him talking about the power of social media. I wasn’t fooled by Martyn’s recent retreat to his home Western Province; I knew we’d hear a lot more from him after his period of reflection. Emmanuel Narakobi told us how he’d gone into social media hoping to make money and had got caught up almost accidentally in the “power to make social change”. Both he and Martyn made us aware that social media was the new, powerful communications genre in Papua New Guinea and it had unlimited potential to do great good.

In contrast to this discussion, Drusilla Modjeska and Russell Soaba provided an enlightening session on the craft of writing. Drusilla and Russell do what I do when writing; they eschew the keyboard and sit down with pen and paper. Together they explained how to write an opening paragraph. As every writer knows, this sounds easy but it isn’t. Russell revealed that it had taken him five years to write the first paragraph of his famed novel Wanpis. He went on to tell us about the distractions (“toads and trolls”) which can divert writers from their craft.

Then Francis Nii and Jimmy Drekore, aided by a Powerpoint presentation, explained how complex outcomes can be engineered using the most basic of means. To illustrate this, Jimmy traversed the history of the Simbu Children Foundation, which is entirely voluntary and non-profit, raising its own funds to help dozens of orphans and children with medical problems in Simbu Province. The Foundation recently funded research which found cause and treatment for a debilitating and painful bone disease affecting many highlands’ children. To cap it off, Francis explained the operation of the famous notice
board at Kundiawa General Hospital where he advertises, among other things, the work of the Foundation and news of the Crocodile Prize competition. Apparently everyone in Kundiawa consults the notice board. I’d wondered why we got so many entries from that province.

The awards ceremony was a glittering finale to the day. Russell Soaba gave Drusilla Modjeska’s novel, *The Mountain*, its Papua New Guinea launch. Bob Cleland’s book on the building of the Highlands Highway, *The Big Road*, was on display with a collection of books from John Evans and his team at UPNG, and Amanda Donigi’s new women’s magazine, *Stella*, was undergoing its first exposure. It was a mini-Papua New Guinean literary expo. Sales were made and proceeds of nearly K1,000 donated to SWEP.

The splendid 400-page *Crocodile Prize Anthology 2012* was then launched and two government ministers gave speeches; one off the cuff, the other scripted. Both were tentative and missed the mark and I came away with the view that this was a government cautiously feeling its way forward. Both men were open, dignified and humble; which at least was a marked contrast to the political antics of the previous few months.

Later, on *PNG Attitude*, the emerging Bougainvillean author, Leonard Fong Roka offered his unique perspective on the event in an article entitled ‘My Crocodile Prize story: so nice are these writing people’:

I have a dream and I am running after it at all costs. I am following it closely to improve the craft I am loving so much. In the middle of this month I attended this year’s PNG Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers’ event in Port Moresby. I wanted to meet established Papua New Guinean and Australian authors and listen to their inspirational words to help me improve in my writing. Interestingly, this great Crocodile Prize competition is supported by the Australian High Commission but not the Papua New Guinea government.

For me, the worst thing is my tight-lipped culture. I never freely utter a word in the midst of people I am not familiar with unless told to do so by someone in authority or the chair of the meeting. I silently hate myself for this. And this is exactly what I did at the Annual General Meeting and
Fighting for a Voice

Writers’ Forum. I uttered not a word! Not at all a social being, I guess. But from my perfect world I met great writing men and women from all over Papua New Guinea. Men and women who know me as I know them, only by name and not physically.

I was proud to be in the company of authors like Russell Soaba and Francis Nii; bloggers Nou Vada, Martyn Namorong and Emmanuel Narokobi; and Australian writer and big time Crocodile Prize editor, Phil Fitzpatrick. Our Keith Jackson was not present. Whilst in the midst of Australians and other Papua New Guineans with the common interest that is literature, spills did reach my wriggling ears that the high walking Papua New Guinean employees of the Australian High Commission had plastered lips.

They were to utter no word pressing Australian national interest or they would be fired, a Highlander whispered to me as a local girl passed us, poking the concrete with high-heels. But there we were, Australians and Papua New Guineans, sisters and brothers in the name of the ink or, in this age, the keyboard. Politics does not come into play in our part of the world; or it is suppressed somewhere.

So cool was I in a perfect world of writers.

More than anything else, I did sell off to my fellow men and women who I was in character or attitude. Many threw a light on that. ‘Mr LFR,’ they said, “Reading you and your world we thought you were somewhat a physically an imposing being. But you are really a small man with a big mouth…” Ha, ha!

While the 2012 Crocodile Prize had concluded successfully I couldn’t help but think that we still had a long way to go if we were to truly encourage a literary culture in Papua New Guinea. Surrounded by writers like Leonard at the workshop and awards night was reassuring but in many ways it was a false measure. Out in the boondocks the situation was still parlous.

Most people in a literate society understand the power of the written word. As well as books, journals and newspapers they know that almost everything they see on television, listen to on radio, watch in cinemas and read on social media begins with a writer. If the writers in a literate society ever went on strike many things in life we take for granted would grind to a halt.

Although they may not be familiar with their works, most people will more than likely have heard of their country’s significant writers. There is also a special national pride in home grown writers. Intelligent people read widely because they realise
the power of knowledge. They know that ideas shape a society and that the source of those ideas largely comes from writers.

In non-literate societies, appreciation of writers and the written word is nowhere near as strong. Because the written word is not part of people’s day to day concerns they do not appreciate the latent power that lies there. Once a pre-literate society begins striving to become a nation in its own right, it quickly realises the power of its writers. Conversely, despots in such nations will suppress writers to prevent them and their ideas emerging at the forefront of a mood for change.

Papua New Guinea is an example of a third world country that has yet to discover the power of the written word. While there has been no conscious effort to suppress its writers, the lack of assistance and encouragement by an uninterested government has had a similar effect to that of a worried despot.

Many contributors and commentators on PNG Attitude have written about the failure of Australians to acknowledge the existence of Papua New Guinea on their immediate northern border. One of the reasons this happens is because Papua New Guinea has not allowed its writers to develop a national narrative which would assist lift its profile in Australia and the rest of the world. What passes for a Papua New Guinean narrative in the Australian psyche is a distant memory of the battle along the Kokoda Track during World War II and a vague knowledge that Papua New Guinea was once one of its colonial territories. There is little else to inspire any form of recognition.

In the years before the Crocodile Prize, the writing of Papua New Guinea appeared mainly in the handful of newspapers and the rare academic journals. It tended to the bland and, in the case of the media, was often reproduced verbatim from statements and news releases provided by the government or commercial interests. There was little attempt at creative writing and certainly no bold investigative journalism.

The absence of a writing culture in Papua New Guinea became abundantly clear when the then Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture, Boka Kondra, addressed the awards ceremony. The
Minister read a speech that had been written by Dr Andrew Moutu, the Director of the National Museum and Art Gallery. It was a good speech – thoughtful and perceptive - but the Minister, who had once been a school teacher, stumbled and bumbled his way through it. Sitting at the back of the assembly I could see and hear the nervous and embarrassed reaction of the audience. Unfortunately the halting and bumbling presentation was managing to obscure the wisdom that lay within a well-crafted speech. Andrew Moutu’s words, however, rang true:

A deep and abiding relationship exists between a nation and its literature. There are two interconnected aspects to this relationship. The first uses literacy as a basis to talk about the educational and intellectual development of a nation. The assumption is that a literate population must also be one that is able to make informed and better judgments about issues and questions that are affecting their lives.

This aspect of the relationship between a nation and the need for raising the levels of literacy amongst our people has policy and budgetary implications. When cast in this light then we would have seen that so much time and money have been committed to the basic objective of making our population literate.

A combination of both methods and policies has been used to achieve such an objective including the introduction of vernacular education into our school systems around the country. All in all, literacy has been identified as an index that measures our general sense of economic growth and development.

The second aspect of the relationship between a nation and its literature comes from the assumption that the style, the themes, and the narratives that are canonised in its literature will come to define a country’s national character.

Thus for example, in the United Kingdom we find how Shakespeare’s volume of works has become such a pantheon of highly valorised and legitimated texts which has since, their appearance, have come to inspire a life time of scholarship and reflections.

The experiences of a country, of a nation, are marked by distinctive set of values, tensions, myths and aspirations, or psychological foci that are then inscribed in various forms of national literatures including novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and sometimes in other media such as films too.

In America and Australia, for example, the kind of national character that is revealed in a variety of its literature is the idea of rugged and self-reliant individuals who work hard to bring both individual and national prosperity.
These kinds of literature capture and portray certain cultural values that define a nation’s sense of national culture and morality. But this is not all that is to the relations between a nation and its distinctive literature.

As for Papua New Guinea, one can argue that the peculiar relationship between the nation and its literature become crystallised in the early 1960s when the spirit of nationalism was in ferment. Literature was credited with the ‘power of a pen that is mightier than a sword’ because of its ability to inspire and generate cultural and therefore national consciousness.

Much of this early literature was brought about by the intellectual and moral support of expatriate scholars such as Uli and Georgina Beier, whose generosity of spirit extends across the field of literature to cover the length of arts and theatre, textiles and sculptures, music and museums. It was in that period that we begin to find the appearance of Papua New Guinea’s definitive works of literature beginning with Albert Maori Kiki’s own autobiography, *Kiki: ten thousand years in a lifetime*, which was published 1968.

The following year Papua New Guinea’s first literary journal, *Kovave*, was launched and it spurred a growing corpus of literature which was emanating from the hands of Papua New Guineas who sought to capture a variety of issues in plays, short stories, poems, novels and biographies. From 1970 onwards there was a real and noticeable surge of interests amongst Papua New Guineans to write. Names of writers such as Kumulau Tawali, John Kasaiupwala, Russell Soaba, Paulias Matane, Bernard Narokobi, Rabbie Namaliu, Michael Somare, Norah Vagi Brash, Ignatius Kilage, Utula Samana, John Kolia, Peter Donigi, Josephine Abaijah – to name just a few – would ring echoes of familiarity.

By the late 1970s and into the 1990s we encounter works which are philosophically orientated and this is marked for example by Russell Soaba’s two novels, *Maiba* and *Wanpis*, Bernard Narokobi’s more politically engaged vision of *The Melanesian Way* and the searching rejoinder that came from Utula Samana’s *Which Way Melanesia*.

More recent theorists of PNG literature such as Steven Winduo and Regis Stella have sought to make us think more about the liberating power of literature to help us break from the yoke of intellectual colonialism. Others have chosen to write about deeper legal and philosophical issues affecting questions of ownership. This is exemplified most clearly in the writings of Peter Donigi in his *Indigenous or Aboriginal Property Rights* and the response from Bernard Narokobi on *Law and Customs and the Concept of Ownership*.

However, as far as PNG literature is concerned, there are two important setbacks to the story of literature and the PNG nation. The first is the noticeable decline in PNG literature compared to the earlier period of the 1960s and the 1970s. Less and less Papua New Guineans have the time to write and provide reflections. We however need to commend those who
continue to do so, including those in the field of journalism, some scholars and those who found it worthwhile to write using the more recent medium of blogs on the internet.

Although the National Cultural Commission, which comes under my Ministry, has prompted the creation of a Literature Board, more resources, along with clear methods and policies, must be made to spur the writing by Papua New Guineans. Although writing offers a special respite and pleasure to those who are able to write, it is not enough to just write only. This point announces the second problem which comes from the fact we are reading less and less of our literature.

There is less knowledge of Papua New Guinean literature, history and culture taught in our schools. If national character is to be bound up with national literature, then such material and syllabus ought to be developed and taught in our schools from primary schools, colleges and universities.

We know from history that Vincent Eri’s novel, The Crocodile, which was first published in 1970 is our nation’s first novel which uses the story of a young boy called Hoiri to dramatise the psychological tension that comes about as a result of the confrontation between ‘tradition and modernity’.

Hoiri’s story tells of the need to maintain a balance on the tight rope that runs from the bastions of tradition to the challenges and opportunities of modernity. Similar concerns about the tension of tradition and modernity appear to preoccupy later writers, such as Bernard Narokobi, John Kolia and Nora Vagi Brash who cast this tension in their own particular renditions.

Seen in this light and given that this occasion marks the second year of the Crocodile Prize, and given that the Crocodile Prize comes out of the interface between the traditional mode of writing using books and papers in contrast to the more modern innovations of writing using the advantages of the digital age, I wish to remind us of the problems that I have highlighted above concerning PNG literature: that there has been a sad decline in the proliferation of literature produced by Papua New Guineans; and that Papua New Guineans are not reading and engaging with our own literature.

I also hope that the modern convenience of digital revolution will not privilege a few of us only but that we might find ways to populate our classrooms and homes with the knowledge and a critical appreciation of Papua New Guinea’s national literature.

Partway through the speech the Minister came to a reference to pioneering writer Russell Soaba. Russell was sitting at the front of the gathering and was to be honoured for his lifetime achievement in literature. He was looking increasingly uncomfortable as Minister Kondra spoke. Then the Minister looked up and stared directly at Russell, to whom he had been
introduced before the awards ceremony began. Kondra looked back down at his speech and something must have clicked in his head because he grinned broadly, looked up again and pointed at Russell. “It’s him!” he said. It was as if he had turned over a rock and found a golden coin underneath. There was a distinct murmur in the audience while the Minister paused to absorb this amazing discovery.

That a Minister in the government and an ex-school teacher knew nothing about one of Papua New Guinea’s pre-eminent writers spoke volumes. The irony that he was reading a speech extolling and supporting Papua New Guinea’s writers but knew nothing about them was not lost on the audience. Neither was the fact that he was unlikely to heed his own counsel to apply more resources, along with clear methods and policies, to spur writing by Papua New Guineans and build a native literary culture. The fine words crafted by Dr Moutu had been rendered mute and meaningless. It was not unexpected.

The plight of Papua New Guinea’s writers was later highlighted in a humorous contribution by Francis Nii, who had struggled against all odds to publish his book *Paradise in Peril*:

Bushman likes reading and writing. Whenever he finds time, he collects half used scrap paper, writes on it and stacks it away. One day, Bushman retrieves one of his stories from the stacks of scrap. He starts reading it. There is not much sense there. It’s not a complete story; only a brainstorming. ‘I must complete the story’, says Bushman to himself. He finds some scrap paper and starts writing.

As he progresses, the story becomes interesting. He suspends his other activities for the time being. He gets stuck into writing. By the time he finishes, he’s covered a good amount of scrap paper. He is amazed. He smiles to himself. He has a complete story. Bushman stacks the scrap paper in the middle of an Air Niugini *Paradise* magazine and puts it away. He goes about his usual businesses.

Some days later, Bushman returns home from the *buai* market. He finds scrap paper lying all over the floor. His youngest daughter sits with her friends outside, all their eyes on *Paradise*. They are arguing which one of them is that pretty air hostess. Bushman shakes his head. He picks up the
paper and goes to his bed. Lying down, Bushman reads his story. It is full of mistakes. He makes corrections as he reads.

When he finishes, the scrap paper is full of crossings, asterisks and arrows pointing here and there. The whole is a mess. Only Bushman can make sense out of it. He is sick. He looks around and finds a plastic shopping bag. He puts his scrap paper in the bag and hides it in that place Bushman calls bedroom.

One morning, a friend of Bushman comes along. He tells him about PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize. Bushman goes to town and buys a writing pad and some biros. He goes back to his bed and painstakingly starts rewriting the whole story on the pad. After two hours, Bushman completes the rewrite. He is happy. He burns the scrap paper. The pad takes their place in the plastic bag.

Typing is Bushman’s next dilemma. On the following day, Bushman goes to town looking for a place to have his story typed. One typing shop charges K2.50 per page. The rest charge K3. He chooses the cheaper one. After two hours of waiting, his typing is ready - three pages in all. Bushman checks the typed story. As far as Bushman is concerned, he is the Microsoft Word 2007 proof checker. He is the grammar, the vocabulary, the tense and the punctuation. He finds mistakes. He gives the story back to the typist to incorporate corrections. The typist demands an extra K1 a page for the corrections and reprints. Bushman pays.

Scanning and sending the story to PNG Attitude is Bushman’s next double headache. He doesn’t give up. He searches and asks around. His good friend who introduced PNG Attitude to him helps. He sends Bushman’s first story to PNG Attitude from his work place. Thanks Mero. Bushman’s story gets published; his greatest delight and satisfaction. He is happy that he shares a piece of mind his with others. He wishes to write more stories. But how is Bushman is going to overcome the obstacles, or at least alleviate them?

The dilemma of bush writer is not an isolated issue of publication difficulty but it is a holistic problem of accessibility and affordability of modern communication technology. I’m talking about a town like Kundiawa in the middle of the Papua New Guinea highlands – still struggling in this time of communication revolution.

Everyone who wrote for PNG Attitude or read and commented on its articles was aware of the difficulties faced by Papua New Guinean writers. They were also aware there was little they could do about it. However, working on the assumption that small increments were better than nothing, Keith decided to float another idea that would, at the same time, reward some of the
more promising Papua New Guinean contributors to the blog, even if only in the short term. He wrote a piece seeking benefactors for a writing fellowship scheme:

It’s a thought that’s been buzzing around my mind for some time now. And I believe that, in this case, it’s a good thought. The idea is: how do we adequately recognise and reward those Papua New Guinean writers who – over the last 3-5 years – have made this blog the ‘go-to’ place that it is. Writers who have, I might add, contributed hugely to our readers’ knowledge and understanding of present day PNG.

The thought reached resolution at Neutral Bay's Oaks Hotel yesterday as I was having lunch with Ingrid and our son Ben, who's been an occasional contributor to these columns. So here’s the proposal. (And, yes, it involves money.) PNG Attitude wants to be able to pay Papua New Guinean writers who are regular contributors to this website. The point is this. We want to encourage and reward original, quality, Papua New Guinean writing and perspectives on this blog.

Here are the brief and easy guidelines for our new fellowships: You will sponsor a writer (who we will select on your behalf) for $500 a year. The writer’s task will be to provide at least two articles/poems/stories to PNG Attitude each month. The sponsor (you) will be credited (if that’s OK) alongside each published piece. We will pay each writer the $500 (no admin charges at the Attitude). The outcome of this project, we believe, will be the initial development of a system of paid-for freelance writing in PNG.

A short time later Keith was able to report that the fellowships were up and running. There were eleven writing fellowships provided and the scheme ran for about nine months. The writers were paid the $500 up-front on an honour system, since transferring smaller amounts would have invoked prohibitive bank fees. When four of the selected writers subsequently failed to produce anything like the agreed output, Keith discontinued the scheme. “It needed goodwill from both sides,” he said later. “I felt those Papua New Guinean writers who took the money and did not deliver had compromised the scheme’s integrity and let down the donors.”

While Keith was unsuccessfully trying to get a freelance scheme going, I was working with Sil Bolkin, a regular Papua New Guinean contributor to PNG Attitude, editing and tracking down a
publisher for his book, *The Flight of Galkope* - a significant historical and anthropological work. I thought it brought a new perspective to the study of Papua New Guinean society to complement the more academic works mostly written by expatriates.

Sil had collected the material for the book over several years by walking through his Galkope homeland in Simbu Province talking to the surviving elders from the men’s houses who would otherwise have taken their knowledge to the grave. Unlike many would-be writers, Sil’s main motive was not to make money but to record the information he collected and make it available to future generations.

When the text was edited, I approached Tony Crawford, who published books about Papua New Guinea, principally by Australian authors, under his Crawford House imprint. I had known Tony for many years and had spent time with him and his wife Jenny at Balimo in Western Province when he was researching material for his monumental work, *Aida*, on the Gogodala carvers of the Aramia River area. Tony read the manuscript and agreed to publish it.

Up to that point my experience in publishing had been limited to sending manuscripts to publishers, reading the proofs they sent back and letting them do all the hard work of preparing it for publication. The day writers send off the manuscript is the day they tend to heave a huge sigh of relief. Working with Tony, however, I became aware of the difficulties publishers in Australia experience, particularly in dealing with printers.

In those days, not really so far away, most book printing jobs went overseas to India, China or Singapore. Printers in Australia are prohibitively expensive, especially for books that would not command a large print run. Crawford House worked to a deadline of sorts but this was constantly being pushed back, much to the chagrin of Sil and me. The printers in China, where the book went, took their own sweet time knowing that Tony had no other real options. We managed a book launch at the Papua New Guinea High Commission in Canberra with only a couple of copies of the
completed book on hand, the rest delayed coming through Australian Customs.

We had experienced similar problems with both the 2011 and 2012 editions of the Crocodile Prize Anthology, which had just arrived at the awards ceremonies in the nick of time. On those occasions we had used Birdwing Publishing, one of the few publishers in Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately Birdwing also its books printed overseas, in Singapore.

In the process of investigating alternatives to this merry-go-round, I investigated Australian ‘vanity publishers’ specialising in self-published works and making their money charging authors rather than collecting profits from retail sales. They could charge outrageous fees ranging from $5,000-30,000 for a book. I discovered that many Australian authors writing about Papua New Guinea used them, as did a number of authors in Papua New Guinea.

From the sample books I obtained, it was clear that vanity publishers spent little time editing or helping writers to improve their work. Their mode of operation seemed to be to produce a visually attractive cover and binding but to ignore the quality of the content. The books I saw were full of typographical errors, inexplicably repeated paragraphs and grammatical and spelling errors galore. I thought that it might be wise to warn the PNG Attitude readers about these predatory publishers and wrote an article setting out the traps.

The article garnered a surprising response, many telling of unfortunate experiences at the hands of these publishers. But one of the emails was from Keith Dahlberg (photo), a retired American missionary doctor who had worked in Asia and Papua New Guinea and was now writing crime fiction. At the time I was reviewing his Papua New Guinea based novel The Samara Incident. Keith told me about a new Amazon.com project called
CreateSpace which would provide a book production template and then publish the book on Kindle without charge. The author could purchase hard copies at economical prices and in any quantity required, from one copy up.

Keith Dahlberg’s advice proved to be a revelation. I trialled CreateSpace then published the first of my Inspector Metau books using the system. I followed this up with a new edition of Francis Nii’s *Paradise in Peril*. It took a while to master the Createspace process but, when that was done, we had a cost effective way of producing the 2013 *Crocodile Prize Anthology* and enabling Papua New Guinean writers to get their work published easily and relatively cheaply.

The days of having boxes of unsold books mouldering away in sheds or on the remainder tables of bookshops looked like becoming a thing of the past. CreateSpace utilised the new print-on-demand technology that basically meant that books did not need to be stockpiled.

The Crocodile Prize had found a publishing breakthrough ideally suited for Papua New Guinea.
For the superstitious, the number thirteen is particularly ominous. Some hotels skip the number in sequencing their rooms, even floors. Linked with a Friday it is said to become highly dangerous. Fear of the number thirteen has a name - *triskaidekaphobia*. For the Crocodile Prize, 2013 nearly proved disastrous. How Keith and I escaped catching triskaidekaphobia was a minor miracle.

The year began well enough. Keith noted that many of the articles written by people awarded writing fellowships were being picked up by other media. Pat Levo of the *Post Courier* was using them in his weekend literary section and Amanda Donigi was doing the same in her new women’s magazine, *Stella*. We were not concerned by the thought they were exploiting *PNG Attitude* as source of free copy; we were just happy to see some good writers getting further exposure.

Another positive event in the year’s early months was a victory for one of *PNG Attitude*’s most loyal contributors and supporters, Corney Alone. Corney had campaigned long and hard to scrap the outcome-based education (OBE) system and return to a more traditional objective-based curriculum in Papua New Guinea’s schools. Finally, as student performance measurements vindicated his stance, the Education Department abandoned the poorly thought out and badly implemented scheme.

In February, *PNG Attitude* reported the impending departure of Australian High Commissioner, Ian Kemish, who, Keith wrote, “(had) proved to be the right person in the right place at the right time for both Australia and Papua New Guinea.” Indeed, Kemish –
who had been in Papua New Guinea as a school child - had also proved to be the right man on the spot for the introduction of the Crocodile Prize.

“His lack of arrogance, ability to go the extra mile, willingness to engage with ordinary Papua New Guineans wherever they were and coolness in crisis were all noticed and appreciated in Papua New Guinea,” Keith wrote. Within a couple of hours of the news spreading that Ian was about to depart, the expressions of regret had already begun to pour in to PNG Attitude. One of them was mine.

When we were working to get the Crocodile Prize national literary awards up and running at the end of 2010, we were in desperate need of a strong, credible and resourced supporter in Papua New Guinea. Ian Kemish stepped forward with a commitment of finance, materiel and personnel. We did not know what Ian had to contend with or argue against in throwing his weight behind a couple of blokes with no corporate or institutional backing who were trying to promote what they saw as a good idea. I can only assume that Ian sniffed the air, rubbed his hands, rolled his eyes and decided to back his own judgement.

The result was a successful Crocodile Prize and hundreds of Papua New Guinean writers conveying their experiences, creativity and views on public affairs from a distinctly Melanesian perspective in the process gaining public recognition, publication and funding. Many thousands of Papua New Guineans now had the opportunity to read about their own country and its issues and stories as brought to them by their own countrymen and women. Keith and I were proud of this achievement and that pride could certainly be shared by Ian Kemish who was an Australian who understood Papua New Guinea.

Ian’s successor was announced a short while later by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She was Deborah Stokes (photo), a senior career officer with the Department, most recently head of its
international organisations and legal division. Her time in Papua New Guinea proved unkind for the Crocodile Prize and eventually ended in Ms Stokes mysterious and premature transfer after an imbroglio involving a proposed Australian diplomatic presence in Bougainville.

From the beginning, there was a sense of unease about Ms Stokes, who apparently had had no past experience of Papua New Guinea. *PNG Attitude* readers wondered about the selection criteria behind such an appointment. To top this off, Richard Marles had been replaced as Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs by Senator Matt Thistlethwaite, who also had no experience of Papua New Guinea. Marles’ tenure had been a disappointment, but at least he knew the place. In one fell swoop in early 2013, Papua New Guinea had lost contact with anyone in the higher echelons of the Australian government who had any association with the place. Keith Jackson and readers were scathing in their assessment. It seemed that a myopic Australian government – now led by Julia Gillard - was demonstrating its lack of interest in the region.

While these changes were taking place the new Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers (SWEP), under the leadership of Amanda Donigi, seemed to have the 2013 Crocodile Prize competition in hand and Bob Cleland, an ardent supporter of *PNG Attitude* and the Prize, began an innovative series of writer’s *bung s* in Port Moresby. The *bungs* were small groups of writers who were to meet regularly to read short samples of their own work and receive suggestions and comments. This was a common *modus operandi* of many writers’ groups in Australia and seemed to be a concept that would work well in Papua New Guinea.

The venue for the first *bung* was the Moresby Arts Theatre and members of the SWEP committee, notably Ruth Moiam, Steve Ilave and Regina Dorum, had arranged the venue, invitations, advertising and a light lunch. The meeting attracted 25 attentive and passionate participants. “From where I spoke, sitting on the edge of the stage,” Bob reported in *PNG Attitude*, “the affirmative nods, the smiles and whispered comments showed that the idea
Fighting for a Voice

was being accepted. This was confirmed by several speakers in the open session which followed.”

Some participants spoke at length and raised interesting and relevant aspects of Papua New Guinean writing, including its linkages with social media. Bob was very happy with this first bung and impressed by the ability and “good Papua New Guinean common sense” of the writers. Bob Cleland (photo) is a fine man who is committed to Papua New Guinea. The son of a pre-independence Administrator, Sir Donald Cleland, and his wife Rachel, who had been a much loved and energetic force in colonial Papua New Guinea, Bob had served as a kiap for twenty-three years and was involved in the construction of the Highlands Highway, an experience chronicled in his book, *Big Road*.

While Bob was taking this initiative to promote and improve writing in Papua New Guinea, Martyn Namorong won an award for excellence for anti-corruption reporting. His success was reported by *Radio Australia*:

The winner of a media anti-corruption award says online media has the potential to inform and mobilise the people of Papua New Guinea. Blogger Martyn Namorong won the overall prize at the Excellence in Anti-Corruption Reporting media awards in Papua New Guinea. "Those of us who are willing to speak out, particularly online, have the spotlight on them such that people react more quickly," he said. Mr Namorong won the award for an investigative series into the hearings of the Commission of Inquiry into Agriculture Business Leases in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. He told Radio Australia’s *Pacific Beat* program that no mainstream media was covering the inquiry. "I was the only person reporting on the investigation," he said.

There were also positive things happening in the most unexpected of places. The Crocodile Prize was beginning to look as if it would sprout branches. Writer Jeff Febi wrote the
inspirational story of 38-year old villager Joe Yagama:

In 1991, while still in Grade 8, Joe dropped out of Kundiawa’s Catholic run Kondiu Rosary High School. Like many young and vulnerable people, he roamed the streets until 2005, when he got a job as a kitchen hand at the Airways Hotel in Port Moresby. After nine months and numerous secret lessons from other kitchen staff, he managed to grace his boss’s radar and was promoted to trainee pizza chef.

In 2008 his success at Airways enabled him to secure a new job at the Shady Rest Hotel in Moresby. But after only a few months he found himself on the streets again – thanks to workplace lies, deceit and jealousy. But fate wasn’t finished with Joe yet…..

He applied for and was offered a position with Kutubu Catering Limited – the company that fed the entire Oil Search Limited operations in Kutubu and the surrounding project areas. He was posted to drilling rig 103 where currently he is night chef – a position that requires him to manage the camp at night apart from his kitchen duties. He has handled things well despite the camp’s mix of international inhabitants and their demands for peculiar dishes.

What interests me about Joe is his recent revelation during a casual chat that he is sponsoring a literature competition at Giu Primary School in the Sina Sina-Yongomugl district of Simbu Province. Joe stated that through the competition he aims to “motivate and spark passion in students from this rural school to focus on achieving and aim high”.

It turned out that Joe was having trouble gaining internet access to PNG Attitude, which was sad to see. His dilemma reflected our concerns about many rural people missing out on what was an open and uncensored source of news, information and commentary. The consolation – for Joe and everyone else - was the rapid expansion of digital services, especially telephony, in Papua New Guinea.

Among the articles on the blog that drew more anguished responses, two types tended to attract the most: articles from the tabloid press canvassing subjects like sorcery and cannibalism; and hyperbolic reports of ‘stone age tribes’ written for the faithful by missionaries whose Christianity was of a fundamental disposition.

In 2012 there was an account of a so-called ‘ritual widow-
killing’ that angered many Papua New Guinean readers. The article claimed that this custom, of dubious authenticity, was alive and well in the New Guinea Islands. A perusal of church blogs, especially the American fundamentalist missions like New Tribes, gave the impression that hideous pagan rituals and customs were rife in Papua New Guinea.

A common claim was that church evangelists were venturing into areas where no European has ever been. These ‘pioneering treks’ were closely followed by the discovery of licentious behaviour that could be subsequently ameliorated through the power of prayer. One would be hard pressed to find anywhere in Papua New Guinea where Europeans have not been before and the only conclusion to be drawn was that the missionaries were very gullible or, more likely, lying. The motive for this deliberate deception was presumably to encourage recruits and to raise funds, most probably from the insular American bible belts.

Papua New Guinea is largely a Christian country and the mystical and colourful rituals inherent in Christian practise have wide appeal to a people traditionally saturated in magic, sorcery and ritual. Only among the educated elite does secularism reside, and even then there is frequently acceptance that traditional and modern religiosity can cohabit. Any writers who attack Christianity in Papua New Guinea do so at their own risk. The only other topic that assures such a virulent reaction is homosexuality.

However, these risks have not deterred everybody. A number of the most popular, innovative and influential writers on the blog, such as Martyn Namorong, Michael Dom and Leonard Fong Roka, are secularists, although they are rarely overt and don’t go out of their way to be offensive to Christians. Instead, they tend to point out inconsistencies and hypocrisies in a more gentle way. It is a wise approach that is informed by the Melanesian spirit of non-confrontation and acknowledgement of the right of people to believe whatever they want.

Religion can have great value as a support and guiding light in the troubled passage through life; and life can be exceedingly harsh in Papua New Guinea. An atheist might believe the world
would be a better place without religion and the seemingly never-ending and destructive wars that rage in its name. But, in a place like Papua New Guinea where the people have been failed so dramatically since independence, it must be acknowledged that, if anyone deserves to have the gift of hope, it is them.

The Christian churches do not have squeaky clean hands when it comes to corruption and greed. Some church leaders have been guilty of the same bad behaviour as many politicians and public servants. But it must be acknowledged that the churches, especially the large established ones, provide much-needed essential services such as education and health that the government has consistently failed to deliver. There are many dedicated church people who work hard, unselfishly and with great dedication in Papua New Guinea and, a contribution that tends to be inadequately acknowledged.

Until the government wakes up to its responsibilities to the people and establishes equitable services and opportunities, the established churches will fill a crucial void. One day Papua New Guinea, like many western countries, will be in a position to decide where religion fits into its society. The time is not now but PNG Attitude and other similar blogs have a role in exposing the unscrupulous religious carpetbaggers who ply their trade around the country. PNG Attitude also provides significant coverage of church issues and activities, especially where these are consonant with the people’s welfare.

In 2012 the blog ran a competition for a cover design for the Crocodile Prize Anthology. The winner was Joe Bilbu from Babakau Village just down the coast from Port Moresby. Joe was a graphic designer who lived in Fiji with his wife and three grown up children. He provided half a dozen designs from which the 2012 anthology cover was chosen. The quality of his work was so impressive he was asked to design each of the subsequent covers, presenting a fine body of art.

When I finished writing the first of my Inspector Metau novels, I asked Joe to design a cover using a photograph of Russell Soaba
as a model for the intrepid policeman, a bit of a joke between me and Russell who had offered advice on my manuscript and was embroiled in a strange literary mystery of his own - which I used as a theme in the second Inspector Metau novel.

I was delighted with Joe’s rendition of Russell and the cover design overall and used it for my first experiment with the Amazon online publishing service, CreateSpace. Despite my relative inexperience with computers, the result looked great. So, armed with this newly acquired skill, I then took on a reprint of Francis Nii’s highlands novel, *Paradise in Peril*, for which I designed a cover featuring a photograph of some young Banz men taken by Rose Kranz.

I also convinced Francis to rename the novel to differentiate it from the original, so it became *Fitman, Raitman & Cooks: Paradise in Peril*. The finished book presented well and, along with the Metau novel, received good reviews. Hot on the heels of these two books came the first of Leonard Fong Roka’s works, *The Pomong U’tau of Dreams*, a collection of his poetry. A *pomong u’tau* is a traditional clay cooking pot and it was a fitting metaphor for Leonard’s mix of raw and innovative verse.

Leonard (pictured with writer Agnes Maineke) followed his volume of poetry with a collection of short stories, *Moments in Bougainville*, and soon thereafter a stunning memoir of growing up in Bougainville during the bloody civil war. This book, *Brokenville*, won the inaugural Crocodile Prize book of the year award. Soon after, Leonard produced a political platform for an independent Bougainville entitled *Bougainville Manifesto*. The autonomous province is to have a referendum on independence from Papua New Guinea before 2020. While Leonard was writing and publishing this breathtaking output he was still finishing a degree at Divine Word University in
Madang.

Soon other books from other Papua New Guinean writers followed augmented by some Papua New Guinea-themed books by Australian writers. We published them using CreateSpace under the *Pukpuk Publications* imprint. The *Crocodile Prize Anthology 2013* and anthologies thereafter were also published under this imprint. Almost overnight we had embarked upon a Papua New Guinean publishing venture which, by the end of 2015, had published some thirty Papua New Guinea-themed titles. We felt the Crocodile prize had come of age.

One of Joe Bilbu’s cover designs for the 2012 anthology featured a mischievous crocodile lazily lounging around. When we asked *PNG Attitude* readers to choose their favourite design, this laid-back croc rated highly but was pipped at the post by another that, according to readers, conveyed more gravity. But I liked this laid back croc and adopted it as the logo for *Pukpuk Publications*.

As Papua New Guinean authors realised there was now a readily accessible, professional and free publisher for their works, the manuscripts came in at a steady flow. The authors were advised of the CreatSpace process and we suggested they try it themselves. We saw this as a first possible step in setting up a number of publishing hubs in Papua New Guinea. Some authors opted to go it alone but, in most cases, they chose to have their books produced under the *Pukpuk Publications* imprint.

This was a smart choice because it recognised the assistance they would be given in having their work edited and published as well as linking to the opportunity for publicity afforded by *PNG Attitude* to a now burgeoning readership. This had recently been registered at around 2,000 a day with up to 15,000 different readers a month. Pukpuk’s rigorous editing was particularly attractive especially for those writers with well-developed narrative skills but a poor grasp of English grammar and convention. It made up for the total lack of private, professional editors in Papua New Guinea.

A major drawback for Papua New Guinean authors using the US-based CreateSpace was that few of them had the credit cards
required to order wholesale copies of their books to on-sell. Unless they were relatively wealthy, and few were, such accounts were almost impossible to get. It was much easier to remit money to Australia and get us to order the books for them. But, despite these constraints, Pukpuk Publications opened up a new avenue for Papua New Guinean writers to gain access to publishing and a market.

It had crept up on Keith and me almost surreptitiously that our original goal of getting locally-authored books into the hands of Papua New Guinean readers was being achieved.

In addition to PNG Attitude’s growing readership, by August 2013 the blog’s Twitter account had accumulated over a thousand followers. Keith employed Twitter to provide headline versions and teasers of the best stories from that day’s PNG Attitude linked back to the blog, ensuring writers were publishing to the widest readership possible. As this book was nearing completion, the PNG Attitude Twitter account was delivering this service to more than 3,000 followers.

A major event that caught the eye of PNG Attitude and Twitter readers was the asylum seeker deal that prime ministers Kevin Rudd and Peter O’Neill had cooked up. Refugees were not going to be allowed to reach Australia by boat; they would be caught in a dragnet and shipped off to detention centres in Nauru or Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

PNG Attitude’s readers took issue with the Australian media’s coverage of this matter, which tended to disparage and mock Papua New Guinea. Keith summed up the reaction:

If there was a group (politicians aside) which drew readers’ wrath, it was the reptiles of the Australian media – whose hyperbole, ignorance and plain ill manners about Papua New Guinea and its people were, not to put too fine a point on things, excessive. Nowhere was this epitomised more than in Claire Harvey’s comment in the Sydney Sunday Telegraph that, ”Papua New Guinea is a shithole,... and now it’s our shithole.” This had our readers’ keyboards melting in ire and indignation.
Harvey’s words were an unattributed echo of US President Lyndon Johnson’s 1960s statement about right wing Latin American dictators - "They may be bastards, but they're our bastards." It was an ugly sentiment then and it was ugly now. The readers’ response demonstrated what a feisty bunch they were.

It was perhaps apposite that, at the end of September, Keith announced a new writing contest, the Write for Peace and Harmony Award. Val Rivers (photo), an Australian school teacher in pre-independence Papua New Guinea who had become a senior officer in the South Australian Education Department, donated K750 for the best piece of writing designed to promote a peaceful and harmonious nation. The theme she chose for the inaugural year was, ‘A good life for the people: Is there a Melanesian way?’

This new award evolved from an article Keith had published about Val, who had donated funds from the sale of her Papua New Guinean artefact collection support an annual writing event. Val, a contemporary of Keith, had taught in Papua New Guinea between 1964 and 1971. Today she is retired in Burra, South Australia, and remains a great fan of Papua New Guinean literature. She was and still is committed to supporting the Rivers Award, now worth K5,000, as a means of assisting literature to be directed to socially useful ends.

Val always insisted that her idea not be part of the Crocodile Prize and that her grant be spread among as many writers as possible (Keith restricts her to no more than ten). The Rivers Award is announced just before Christmas so as not to conflict with the Crocodile Prize. Its ‘peace and harmony’ message snuggles closely to the main theme of that special time of the year.

While the new award was good news, the realisation had dawned on Keith and me that the 2013 Crocodile Prize in its first
year administered by the Papua New Guinea Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers (SWEP) was floundering. From the distant vantage point of Australia it was difficult to follow progress and appreciate exactly what the crux of the problems was, but it was clear things were not proceeding according to expectation.

Keith and I were aware in general terms because Papua New Guinean writers who were trying to enter the contest wanted to know what was going on. We couldn’t elicit a response from SWEP but it became apparent there had been ructions among the organisers. What we understood, though, was that the failures were not just teething problems but more serious.

Stalwart efforts were being made by a couple of resolute people but there was a lack of leadership and some kooky ideas about spending money on writers’ social functions rather than on initiatives that would drive the Prize forward. There had been inadequate publicity and the number of entries had fallen far below that of previous years. Further, SWEP was unable to secure sponsors for some of the awards. The writers’ workshop, not requiring much money but significant organisation, also bit the dust.

Eventually, there were only four categories in which awards were offered: short stories, poetry, essays and heritage writing. But the publicity was so poor, no heritage entries were submitted. Without any communication to heritage sponsor Bob Cleland, the funds for this category were distributed to bolster shortfalls in the other three. It was a debacle. Nobody was taking responsibility and it looked like the entire contest would collapse.

That was when Keith and I quickly stepped back in – reluctantly and with more than a tinge of sadness. We were able to award only three prizes but announced that the Crocodile Prize Anthology 2013 would be published. At 170 pages (compared with 400 in 2012 and 500 in 2014) it was a slender volume. However, the Crocodile Prize had been rescued, some awards had been made and the anthology had been published. There was only enough money to distribute 200 copies but that was better than nothing and was available on Amazon and as a Kindle e-
book.

The winners of that 2013 Prize were Leonard Fong Roka (short story), Francis Nii (essay) and Lapieh Landu (poetry), each of whom had produced especially powerful work and all pre-eminent Papua New Guinean writers who brought with them a dash of high achievement that spared the year from its potential ignominy.

Close run thing that it was, the prize drew media attention with Leonard Roka and I interviewed by Radio Australia. Leonard tweeted at the time: “Oh God, just had my first media interview with Radio Australia PNG Service. Need lo harim later how voice blo mi bai kam out for listeners” ('I'll have to listen later to hear how I sounded'). I wrote, “Yu singaut switpela tru bro, osemp kakaruk, maski wari” ('You sounded real good bro, just like a rooster, don’t worry!').

Having overridden the dysfunctional SWEP committee and put the prize on life support, in early October Keith and I were able to announce the details of the 2014 competition. There were major changes to the way it would be run. First of all, SWEP was pushed aside and a group largely appointed by Keith was installed. It was designated as the Crocodile Prize Organising Group, or COG. Unlike SWEP, it was not democratically elected, it had no constitution, it was not incorporated and it was run from Australia. But it did have a majority of hand-picked Papua New Guinean representatives and it was committed to rebuilding a Papua New Guinea-based organisation. It was the necessary step sideways that had to be taken to save the Prize:

It had now become clear to Keith that, without the involvement of a major institution, the Crocodile Prize could not achieve its ultimate goal of becoming a sustainable part of Papua New Guinea’s cultural output. “Quite simply,” he said, “there is no capacity within PNG to achieve sustainability outside a specific government mandate.” And such a mandate was not forthcoming. It seemed that the government, at a very senior level, was running very cold on this project.

A few individual ministers were supportive, like the competent
but out of favour Charles Abel, but that wasn’t enough. Local institutions that might have taken responsibility were themselves under pressure. We had already seen the lack of capacity within the Office of Tourism, Arts and Culture, which Charles Abel, its Minister, had hoped would provide some motive force. In a cash-starved public sector, even the universities were struggling with maintaining their basic offerings. And the task of maintaining a nationwide literary institution was looking like it was probably beyond a voluntary organisation of writers.

Nevertheless, Keith and I decided to soldier on for another couple of years after which we’d have another go at transitioning from our management to a local Papua New Guinean body. But we both knew there was little prospect that the Crocodile Prize itself – without the backing of a major institution – would ultimately survive.

The initial members of COG, the Crocodile Prize Organising Group, were Keith and me with Sil Bolkin, Bob Cleland, Michael Dom, my son Luke, Steve Ilave Sr, Keith’s son Ben, who was to build and manage the website, Ruth Moiam, Francis Nii and Leonard Fong Roka. The new committee was able to announce that, for the first time, the competition would feature a Book of the Year Award, that all the awards would carry a cash prize of K5,000 and that 1,000 copies of the anthology would be distributed throughout Papua New Guinea at the end of 2014. Keith feverishly set about securing sponsors to contribute the funds to achieve all this.

The announcement set off a ripple of interest on PNG Attitude and Twitter, attracting the attention of the literary editor of The Australian newspaper, Stephen Romei, who committed to running a book review of The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2014 when it was published.

After the dust had settled on the problems of 2013 and the plans for the 2014 competition were being set in train, Jeff Febi, the inaugural winner of the short story prize in the 2011 competition, offered heartfelt appreciation of the organisers’ efforts and the value of the Prize to Papua New Guinea in a piece
entitled, ‘The Crocodile Prize: More than just a literary contest’:

I entered the Crocodile Prize literary competition in 2010 on the premise I could write and write well. Upon reading other contributors’ work, I immediately realised their superior inherent qualities. They knew how to use words, and did so eloquently. As I read their works, words manoeuvred seamlessly into beautiful phrases and these phrases began to dance to otherworldly tunes and conjure up memorable images.

This was the power of raw talent. The quality of work that appeared on PNG Attitude was astounding. I knew right away there was more I had to do to elevate my writing skills. Then it dawned on me: the Crocodile Prize presented a precious mine of literary work I could use to learn. Since then, I have been learning whilst contributing my own articles. It has been more than three years now and I have learnt a lot – about both the writers and issues they write on.

Enlightenment from poetry and short stories has been spellbinding. Other writing has offered additional insights into politics, diplomacy and some social issues I take for granted. Soon I began to judge the world around me with more caution and restraint. My awareness has taken a great leap thanks to the Crocodile Prize, PNG Attitude and the regular contributors....

Perhaps only a few can see the light of opportunity to learn which is beaming from the Crocodile Prize competition. If so, it will take a lot more to drive the message home. If this reluctance is any indication, it seems many Papua New Guineans may be reluctant to improve their apparent incompetence in English speaking and writing. The competition and PNG Attitude have been a revelation to me and I hope others will come to find their worth. The Crocodile Prize is more than a competition – it is a learning centre. So join us now to write and learn.

In early October, as we were beginning to turn our attention to getting 2014 off to a big start, long-time reader and supporter Robin Lillicrapp chanced upon something that disturbed him greatly. “Mi gat liklik sem (‘I’m a bit embarrassed’),” Robin wrote. “It is a remorse stemming from a recent encounter with an admired contributor to PNG Attitude, Francis Sina Nii.”

The previous week, on a whim and well aware of Francis’s paraplegia as the result of a disastrous vehicle accident some years before, Robin had picked up the telephone at his Melbourne residence and given the veteran writer a call.

“Despite the unpredictability of the phone service, I finally got
through to Francis’s mobile phone,” Robin related, “and, as we talked, I became aware that, since his return from the literary function in 2012, he’d been bedridden because of pressure sores, not even able to use his wheelchair.”

Robin was nonplussed because in regular email communication, Francis had never alluded to these problems.

“I was mortified to learn,” Robin continued, “that all his current writing is laboriously composed flat on his back using the tiny keys and screen of his mobile phone. Francis, with stoicism and courage, has a complete acceptance of his lot.

“I was full of remorse. How am I to love my neighbour? I knew that a few words of comfort sentimentally cloaked in philosophical overtones would not do. Francis would still be on his back with no certain prospect of improvement in sight. I had benefited mightily from his literary offerings. It did not seem like a fair exchange.”

In 2012 Francis had written a couple of articles for PNG Attitude outlining the difficulties writers in the more remote parts of Papua New Guinea experienced but at no time did he mention his own physical disabilities, it was as if they didn’t exist. I admired his determination, confined to a wheelchair and having to travel long distances, in attending the 2011 and 2012 writer’s workshops in Port Moresby. Francis, modest and humble, was not one to draw attention to himself. The random telephone call by Robin opened up a shocking perspective on his plight.

Thanks to Robin’s insight and compassion, Francis’s precarious state was brought to attention of the PNG Attitude family, which came together yet again to lend a helping hand. The generosity was overwhelming and very soon some thousands of dollars had been raised to purchase a special bed and mattresses and other equipment to halt and turn back the progress of the pressure sores. Medications and dietary supplements were purchased, and a new lightweight, more navigable wheelchair was soon on its way to Kundiawa.

The Sydney-based managing director of Seating Dynamics, Mal Turnbull, was also a paraplegic. He had established this Australian
company specialising in equipment for people with disabilities and, having been through the trauma and angst of disability, he understood Francis’ dilemma. He provided the equipment at close to cost, including a wheelchair and, in addition, struck up a relationship with Francis, providing him with much moral support:

I am working at my desk and I get an email from someone called Robin saying he knows a spinal cord injured person in Papua New Guinea who has health and equipment needs. I read the email thinking it is from Robin, a female bible translator I know who works in PNG. I respond with some thoughts. For a week I communicate with Robin until one day I get a call from a bloke saying he is Robin and he thought it would be good to touch base with me about his friend in PNG. So here I am, I believe through the providence of God, back to my South Pacific pedigree. Francis’s story is compelling, you don’t need me to tell you about the challenges he has faced. But the great thing is that we have an inbuilt spirit that strives to overcome adversity. I am often struck at the amazing frailty of the body and the incredible resilience of the spirit. The opportunity to be a part of someone’s struggle is a privilege, an opportunity for intimacy. I for one am too often not strong enough to let others know of my struggles.

To Francis, thank you for sharing your journey and the challenges you have and continue to face. I hope you will continue to be encouraged and touched by the support of your friends around you and by the good and loving God you have put your faith in. I sincerely hope the equipment you require and deserve will be provided and that, in a short time, you will be able to get out and enjoy the fresh South Pacific air, a just opened coconut and the company of your friends and family.

At the end of October, Francis told PNG Attitude readers about the trauma of his life as a paraplegic in an article, ‘Can I thank you for your human compassion?’

I cannot find the right words to express my heart’s gratitude for all my friends in Australia and PNG who have poured out their heart so compassionately to support and ease my physical condition … only silent tears say it all.
In my life as a paraplegic I have been confronted with all kinds of challenges, both physical and spiritual, and some of them are very painful but I don’t whine and cry. I have always asked myself: would whining and crying help me? And I find that they don’t. They only weaken my spirit and my strength and make my condition worse. So I have developed an iron-hearted approach to the challenges that come my way.

But I now realise that in every iron heart there is a softer part and, when you touch that, it can melt and the brooks of heaven burst forth. For the past few days I have been in mourning. The compassion that has been shown by my family of writers and readers in Papua New Guinea and Australia, and even as far as Nairobi in Nigeria, to ensure that my life not only continues but is changed for the better has been so overwhelming that I have been moved to tears. These very humane friends have touched my heart so much that every time I tried to write this thank you note, tears blurred my vision and I had to lay it off several times.

Being a paraplegic and unemployed, life has been very challenging. Many times, especially in the first two years of my disability, I prayed to the Lord God, the Author of my life, to simply take my life away. I refused to face the world in the completely different perspective of a man in a wheelchair. The thoughts about the numerous impediments I would confront daily were a nightmare. I just wanted to go away and be at peace in Heaven. But God did not take away my life. He has His own plan for my life and I have seen His hands many times in many ways.

The accident happened in February 1999 in Goroka. I was hospitalised in Goroka for about two months before obtaining a voluntary discharge because of the very poor service. I spent the rest of the year in Goroka setting up a home for my children with my final entitlement from the public service, which wasn’t much. In February 2000, I came to Kundiawa hospital for further treatment.

In early 2001, spinal fixation surgery was attempted but failed because of a secondary complication. While the operation was in progress, my right lung collapsed. My right diaphragm was cut open from close to the navel right around to the spine. When my right lung was exposed, it could not cope and collapsed. Although my whole body was numb as a result of the anaesthetic, my mind was still functioning at a certain degree of consciousness and I felt that my breath was going to stop at any moment. The doctors confirmed later that I told them my breath was going to stop - and I passed out. The doctors saw the lung had completely stopped working, did what they could to resuscitate it and immediately stitched it up. They did not do the spinal fixation.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in the surgical ward with infusion tubes, cannulas and drainage pipes all over my body. It was tormenting. While I was recuperating from the failed surgery, I developed severe pressure sores. These were caused mainly because I had to lie still in
one position for some days. The hardness of the ordinary mattress also contributed. My water mattress was too big for the hospital bed so I had left it back home in Goroka where it was stolen.

Several times I went under the blade of the surgeon’s knife for the removal of the necrotic tissue. There was also skin grafting. There are many scars around my buttocks and hips – the residual marks of pressure sores and surgeons’ blades. Sometime later my surgeon and priest, Dr Jan Jaworski from Poland, got me a second hand water bed which was very helpful. All the sores healed. I was able to move around in my wheelchair, be independent and do the things I wanted to, including writing stories and poems. But to get the writing published was hard. Then in 2011, Jimmy Drekore introduced me to *PNG Attitude* and The Crocodile Prize. Since then I have been writing and sharing my thoughts with my family of writers and readers from PNG and Australia in *PNG Attitude* and through the annual Crocodile Prize anthology.

My current condition developed from a mishap that occurred on my return from attending the 2012 writers’ workshop and Crocodile Prize award ceremony at the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in September last year. When I arrived in Goroka, my daughter Cheryl, who was supposed to be waiting for me at the airport, was stranded in Kundiawa. She was unable to catch a bus. Worse than that, my mobile phone battery went dead … total communication blackout. I had not charged it the night before. I waited at Goroka airport for two hours and still there was no sign of Cheryl. I couldn’t wait any longer because it was getting late. I offered some tips to a group of boys and they assisted me to the bus stop and into a bus that was almost crammed.

There were only three seats remaining and I sat in the one close to the doorway. There was plenty of cargo and it was very awkward for me but I refused to complain. In a way I had no choice. On the way to Kundiawa, my right tibia fractured below the kneecap. The road condition was very poor, riddled with crater size potholes. As the bus manoeuvred its way around them, I was tossed about and in one of those movements I must have hit something that broke my leg. I didn’t know, and I didn’t feel anything, until two days later when my leg became severely swollen. Of course I suspected something was wrong. I went for an x-ray and the picture revealed the fracture.

A back slab was wedged around my ankle for 12 weeks and it terribly impeded my mobility in bed. More woe, my second hand water bed developed holes and was rendered useless. Pressure sores started to develop. Although my leg was healed, the pressure sore under my left buttock got worse. I went under the doctor’s blade and the necrotic tissues were removed but the sores have not improved because of the hard mattress I am using, and other reasons as well. I have been confined to bed for more than a year now. I go out once in a while to get natural vitamin D.
from the sun because I am becoming a carrot. Otherwise I stay in bed all the time and do all my writing lying on my back.

I have never before discussed publicly like this the previous accident or the latest mishap, nor the consequent experiences and problems that I endured – except with other people like my family members and Jimmy Drekore, who is like a son to me.

When some of my friends asked me to write about it, I bluntly refused. I have been keeping everything to myself and battling on silently.

This is the first time I am sharing it all openly and I really feel obliged to do so in appreciation of the overwhelming support rendered to me by some beautiful and kind-hearted people. Their names are Liz Abel, im Ashton, Murray Bladwell, Sil Bolkin, Dan Claasen, Bob Cleland, Marlene Dee, Jimmy Drekore, William Dunlop, Jeff Febi, Phil Fitzpatrick, Tony Flynn, Trevor Freestone, Anne Griffin, Geoff Hancock, Lance Hill, Keith Jackson, Peter Kranz, Robin Lillicrap, Allan McKay, Phillip McGibbony, Rob Parer, Cath Porter, Terry Shelley, Barbara Short, Simbu Children Fund, Mal Turnbull, Bob Turner, David Wall, and Maureen Wari. Thank you so much for your compassion and benevolent support. The heart you have shown is awesomely inspirational and elating.

Like PNG Attitude’s readers, I felt a sense of relief as Francis slowly recovered and the bed sores were contained, but I also felt a savage anger at the leaders of Papua New Guinea who – in their deliberate neglect of the welfare of their own people - allowed things like this to happen. I didn’t hold back when I let fly in an article which I entitled, ‘The scum that they call politicians in PNG’:

Let’s not mince words. The politicians of Papua New Guinea are an international disgrace and the Papua New Guinea parliament is one of the biggest cabals of thieves, robbers and rogues on the planet. If you add up the completely unnecessary deaths and injuries in Papua New Guinea attributable to a dysfunctional health system and moribund hospitals, not to mention the horrendous infant mortality rate.

And add to this realities like the number of victims of violent crime due to the lack of law and order, successive Papua New Guineans prime ministers, with no exceptions, can well be equated to tin pot dictators like Idi Amin of 1960’s Congo infamy who was responsible for the genocide of his people.

These egomaniacs are also responsible for the nepotism, dishonesty, inefficiencies and downright stupidity which are defining characteristics of the Papua New Guinea public service. When they have finished selling off all the countries’ resources to the global multinationals and shonky and
rapacious Asian businessmen they will have completed the total destruction of a nation which once had such enormous potential for the welfare of its people.

One of the most incredible aspects of much of this is that the Papua New Guinean public not only meekly stands by while it is all happening but, time after time, vote for these disgusting individuals and return them to power. Their lunacy is absolutely mind-boggling. And PNG’s good mate Australia, through its successive and gutless governments, has aided and abetted the process by feeding vast amounts of its taxpayers’ money into this abysmal pit without the slightest hint of concern. In human terms what it has done it has been akin to feeding a drug addict with free and unlimited amounts of heroin.

So what has brought on this vitriolic assessment? I’ll tell you! It is my absolute disgust that a man of unusual and scintillating intellect, who I like to think of as a friend and fellow writer, has been reduced to the ignominy of having to accept charity from his friends to alleviate his unimaginable pain and mental torment that is, as far as I can see, no fault of his own and which has unnecessarily killed nearly a dozen of his fellow patients. If that can happen to an articulate and educated man in a country then it surely tells us that that poor country is one very sick puppy.

And for those uneducated, inarticulate and illiterate souls in similar circumstances of dire pain and need all over the country my heart bleeds. One can only hope that if there is an afterlife and a judgement and a hell for the evil ones that those arseholes who claim to run Papua New Guinea will be put through the same pain and anguish as our good friend the writer. May their god have no mercy on their pitiful souls!

There were many comments by readers who agreed with me but we knew our outrage was pointless; we were not going to change the feckless and irresponsible people who governed Papua New Guinea. Our only gratification was that through Keith’s blog we had been able to at help another individual. But we all knew that there were many thousands of others who would never receive the help they required.

While 2013 had been a tumultuous and tough year, it was ending on a positive note. The Crocodile Prize had survived by the skin of its teeth and the old croc, despite a few nicks in its hide, was swimming strongly into 2014. And, to top things off, the prize snared a writer notable in the canon of Papua New Guinean literature to headline its 2014 writer’s workshop and awards
ceremony the following September.

Trevor Shearston (photo) had been a full-time writer since 1979, “precariously at times” he would say. Many PNG Attitude readers remembered his first book, which was published that year; a collection of short stories about Papua New Guinea called ‘Something in the Blood’. It was a watershed work because it shattered many hoary colonial myths and presented Papua New Guineans to the world as fully-rounded actors, rather than as bit players.


After he completed an Arts/Law degree at the University of Sydney in 1967, Trevor had fled to Papua New Guinea as a teacher. His first posting was to Mendi in the Southern Highlands and his first job as a teacher was to build his school, including classrooms, mess and dormitories. He now lives with his wife and son at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

Asked whether he would be interested in coming to the Crocodile Prize writers’ workshop in 2014, he replied: “I’m honoured to be invited, and would be equally honoured to participate in the 2014 workshop in whatever capacity you can use me. I was at a workshop in Moresby some 10 years ago, and it was a thrill then to see so many writers trying to keep the torch alight. I know it’s a struggle, and it would be good to see how the struggle is going.”

Towards the end of 2013 it was announced that Milne Bay poet Doreen Bauloni had won the inaugural Rivers Award for Peace and Harmony Writing for a poem proposing a positive pathway for Papua New Guinea:
Contributing to a peaceful PNG

Pass a peppermint Colgate smile
Stretch a copper stained grin
Give it to a stranger without one
Wave your hands to a traveller
Say hello to a passer-by
Shake the hand of someone you meet
Call one another as wantoks
Regardless of the language you speak
Sound the conch of gathering
The feast of friendship be herald
Slaughter the disputes past
Melt the arrows of revenge
In a bonfire of forgiveness
Prepare a banquet of caring
Lay it on a table of sharing
Uniting all race in one accord
Let education not raise the foolish
Who trampled selflessness underfoot
Knowledge be embraced by the wise
Directing each man his path
Let status not shorten the sight
Letting glutton fill able bellies
Overlooks a neighbour’s dire need
The worth of their toil and penny
Chop down the trees of injustice
Clear the scrubs of partiality
Reduce to ashes selfishness
And ignorance be carried no more
Fighting for a Voice

Plant the seeds of equality
Let fairness sprout galore
In the fields of every path
That takes one to the humble roots
   Park that fifth element
   Gather the sixth sense
Walk down the seventh street
The people at the far corner
Be aliens to one no more
We are neighbours astride
Regardless of ethnic origins
In peace and harmony we strive

It seemed like a good omen for 2014.
By early 2014, it was clear the Crocodile Prize was back on track. The organising group was meshing well under Jimmy Drekore’s chairmanship with Keith as executive director and me as publishing director. Old and new sponsors had provided enthusiastic support for the awards. And, most importantly, well ahead of the 30 June deadline, the entries were flowing in at a remarkable rate with many new writers represented in the ranks.

From 2012, Gary Juffa MP (photo), the reformist Governor of Oro (formerly Northern) Province, had published occasional articles on PNG Attitude. The Governor Juffa demonstrated a delightful and malicious sense of humour and a marvellous talent for writing entertaining essays and short stories. Some of these were entered in the Crocodile Prize and more than a few have appeared in the Crocodile Prize Anthology.

What also interested readers were the reforms to governance and services that he was instituting in Oro Province. Before his political career, Gary Juffa had been an effective Chief Commissioner of the Papua New Guinea Customs Service, and he brought the same scrupulous zeal to the governorship. His reforms to the public service and his passion for fighting corruption were working in lockstep to transform the provincial administration and its employees into an efficient team. On top of that, unusual in Papua New Guinea, he was bringing high level perpetrators to account. Of all twenty-two provinces, Oro was
becoming a role model for the others to follow.

By 2014 Governor Juffa was aligning himself with other progressive and incorruptible politicians in the national parliament. They were few in number – less than ten, he told Keith in a conversation they had at Keith’s home in Noosa - but with them he represented hope for a better future for the people of Papua New Guinea. PNG Attitude recognised this promise and openly supported his corruption busting, community focussed actions. In early January, in a manifesto entitled ‘Tribe versus nation: observations on PNG’s critical challenge’, Gary summarised his experiences in office and set out what he believed should be the priorities for an honest, achievement-oriented Papua New Guinea. It was, in effect, a rallying call to honest and well-intentioned people.

If Papua New Guinea is to progress, and its significant potential for development harnessed, it needs to shift its leadership philosophy from tribalism to nationalism. This is one of the most significant observations I have made in my first term as an elected official, a political leader in the ninth parliament of Papua New Guinea. It is one of many concerns which, in due time, I intend to speak of. I like to think that concerned Papua New Guineans care what a leader thinks. Maybe I am kidding myself; maybe people do not care.

Last year was an interesting year in Papua New Guinea’s ninth parliament. There were good and bad outcomes but one particular lesson was most sobering for me. I have noted with dismay how, save for a very small minority, many of my fellow elected leaders remain quiet about national issues; they are reluctant to voice concern and opinion about the many issues that affect the nation, its people and its interests.

Seasoned politicians went about with confidence and, in some instances, boredom; the newly elected struggled to find their feet, some replicating the template of politicking associated with accessing funds, others learning through trial and error. As a leader, I was disappointed that many politicians who claimed to have entered parliament to address corruption and fight for PNG – some exceptionally passionately during the election period - shied away when presented with the opportunity to do so.

Last year there was certainly no shortage of opportunities to engage in either the fight for PNG or the fight against corruption. Instead I witnessed many instances of apathy by my colleagues towards the national interest and even disdain for any effort to address corruption. I noted, however, that many members were passionate about voicing concern about issues
affecting their electorates and this is of course commendable as well as necessary to prove to their electorate that they are active.

But I am of the opinion that Papua New Guinea’s elected leaders have a responsibility not only to their electorates but to their nation as well. The handing down of the 2014 budget brought upon me the realisation why leaders remain quiet and behave according to the unwritten laws of politics in PNG. Speak up and you will pay the price; be a good boy (or girl) and gain an affectionate pat and a beef cracker.

For my efforts, I have been penalized by a very unfriendly budget for my province, receiving less than last year’s allocation and losing funding for major infrastructure projects. In fact I had been warned by a particular Minister - yet I never dreamt that a people would be punished for their leader’s efforts to raise concerns about national issues. That fact was realised, when scouring the books of the 2014 budget, not a single major project submitted by my Provincial Government had been funded although all the meetings had been attended and all the appropriate processes and procedures of costing and justification diligently followed.

What a bitter pill and a lesson in the murky politics, played with such inconsideration in Papua New Guinea; although no doubt similar to other economies where political survival takes precedence over the well-being of the people. I understand the stance taken by my colleagues. I would like to say that I cannot blame them. But a part of me still believes that their behaviour ignores the collective expectations of the citizens of this great nation, with its vast potential and substantial resources.

But is it true that most Papua New Guineans are concerned? Or is it only a minority who are concerned about national issues and who are aware of what is going on. Certainly many people in Oro Province have been vocal about my efforts, urging me to be silent and focus on the province and its needs and advising me to ignore the interests of the nation as a whole.

I understand their concern but I am a Papua New Guinean first and foremost and I would like to think that I speak for the many Papua New Guineans, whether or not they are aware and concerned about national issues, who would like some effort made by their leaders to address these issues.

It is a given that tribalism is necessary for the preservation of cultures, languages, unique identities and customs but it need not be embraced as the only method of leadership. To allow this would be to suppress nationalism which in turn will ensure a status quo where political bullying of leaders allows inconsiderate decision making and corruption to prevail. Papua New Guineans and their leaders need to take that step towards developing a big picture: the country first and the tribe second, rather than the other way round.

So yes, I have noted that many leaders would rather quietly go about their business than be starved of much needed funds for their electorates.
That much is now crystal clear and no doubt many would perhaps promote this strategy of political survival: surviving to see another term by dishing out gifts and projects even if these are suspicious and not in adherence to the Finance Management Act and other laws of transparent procurement and expenditure of public funds: politicians choosing to work with a perverted system, rather than trying to correct it. I guess that, in this regard, they are correct to remain silent and behave accordingly. They have been granted their rewards, even if they are short-sighted.

Well, I will speak out and speak up, even if it is at the cost of my next election. If I lose, I will at least be able to say that I did exactly what I intended to do: represent my people, not just those who voted for me and my electorate but those from all over this great nation that I cannot but help feel for. These are the people in remote locations who cannot access basic services, who endure a harsh and oppressive taxation regime that promotes corporate interests and forces the ordinary to pay forgoing much needed income.

I will be indignant about sinister or dubious businesses that seek to exploit our resources and pay as little as possible, sometimes even forcing the people to pay. I will voice outrage about inconsiderate profit-driven exploitation that threatens our environment and our future interests. I will be vocal about land grabbing and the dishing out of illegal citizenship and refusal to prosecute those who pilfer and steal public funds through fraudulent tactics.

I may go down but I am satisfied that a group of Papua New Guineans who are increasingly aware and agitated will rise up and identify brave leaders who are not just brave at the ballot box but also in parliament and place them in parliament to make decisions that are not only in the interests of a tribe, a community or an electorate but for a nation.

It is a great nation that is so beautiful and so full of life, history, culture and great possibilities. In due time, leaders who can speak and act will come forward and take their rightful place and forge a path towards greater prosperity for all, improve health and education and transparent justice that is available to all and not just those who can afford it or have the right connections. A pat on the head and a beef cracker will no longer be able to contain those future leaders; they will be brave and vocal and compassionate and not easily convinced to sanction the sale of their nation piece by piece.

This style of leadership, where national interest is foregone for the interests of a tribe and an electorate, will no longer be relevant. I believe that day is coming soon and I predict that these are just the teething pains that we see and feel now. I am certain that greater good can come about when the people are no longer willing to be kept in the dark and begin to demand something better, not just as a tribe or an electorate, but as a people.
Our readers, as well as Keith and I, saw that these were the words of a true leader. In those years before, when PNG Attitude had morphed from appealing to the interests of a small group of expatriates who had worked in Papua New Guinea to championing the broader people-to-people relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea, one of its major concerns, and a most frequently commented upon apprehension of its readers, was the state of political governance in Papua New Guinea.

Keith’s lifelong political position was left-leaning as was the stance of many, but by no means most, of the contributors to the blog. Gary Juffa’s philosophy and robust approach to reform fitted well with Keith’s own ideology and tactics, and he and Gary got on well personally. As Gary began to establish a firm footing as Governor and increasingly began to speak out on national political issues, PNG Attitude articulated the ideals that underpinned this – as if to say, ‘this is the model’. That said, its alignment was not party orientated. The focus was always the interests of the much put upon people of Papua New Guinea. Its editorial judgements were always made, and explicated, with them in mind.

For Keith, Australia’s two main political parties, the Liberal-National coalition and the Labor Party, were deficient in their policies towards Papua New Guinea and, accordingly, were fair game. In Papua New Guinea, where there was no political left or right, the focus was always the tussle between incumbent government politicians, who were seen as plunderers, and their opponents, who were seen as frustrated plunderers.

The reformists - represented by Gary Juffa and a small band of colleagues - were no more than a rump. With the emergence of Gary as a national force and a possible national leader, PNG Attitude had without overt acknowledgement, taken a political stance. The standpoint was flexible and pragmatic but its intent was clear: the blog would support the aspirations of those politicians who were not robbing the place blind and who offered a better deal to the ordinary people of Papua New Guinea.

The fact that PNG Attitude was based in Australia gave it a
distinct advantage over the Papua New Guinea based blogs which tended to be stronger on rumour than fact and cavalierly defamed those they disagreed with but were also subject to threats and intimidation from vested interests including the government. As these interests began to push back, some social media started to tread more carefully while other sites, often published anonymously, charged on irrespectively.

This is not to say that *PNG Attitude* didn’t receive threats from time to time, including death threats and obscene and defamatory spam, but Keith had been working in the media for too long to take this stuff seriously. He made sure that what *PNG Attitude* published stopped short of defamation and was never over-the-top offensive. He was a keen-eyed editor and protective of his patch.

The more outspoken Papua New Guinean blogs like *The Namorong Report, PNG Exposed, PNG Blogs* and a number of Facebook sites were particularly vulnerable. Reflecting on blogging and other social media in Papua New Guinea, law student Nou Vada described some of the problems he and Martyn Namorong had encountered:

A few weeks ago, I, as well as many people in Papua New Guinea and abroad, read with unease and disgust at how one of PNG’s most prolific and bravest voices in social media was threatened into silence and submission. Blogger Martyn Namorong was told at knifepoint to cease and desist in his independent assistance of the country’s political Opposition in calling out the national government over a number of controversial dealings it has been involved in.

The story took me back two years; to a time when the social media landscape in PNG was very much different from now. I remember sitting on a creaky seat in the main lecture theatre at the University of Papua New Guinea one night, listening to the leader of the Australian Greens Party give a special lecture on the Party and its policy for environmental development in the region. I was writing freelance for the local newspapers at that time and had made the trip to hunt a story.

After the boring presentation and a pointless Q and A session dominated by Papua New Guinean tree-huggers asking stupid questions, the lecture came to an end, I noticed that the only other guy scribbling
notes of the atrocity was a skinny fellow, tall with small loud eyes and perfectly buai-stained teeth.

With notebook in hand, I walked over to him. He looked up from his own notebook probably the only other person in the room who realised he had wasted an hour of his life.

With notebooks closed we started chatting, and I learnt that this was Martyn Namorong, an acquaintance of mine from my Youth Against Corruption days in high school. He had been some kind of guru for us as I recall. Some kind of half Gandhi, half rock star. I was always too angry for Youth Against Corruption but this guy wasn’t. I remembered him floating into the discussion after the debate and there was some kind of electricity that surged through the crowd. “Uni student,” they whispered. And there we were chatting in 2012. “I dropped out of Medical School,” he told me. “I sell buai to make ends meet. I run a blog to pass time. Do you want a buai?”

One night in late 2011 I was in Madang, in the bush of the beautiful bay that is Rivo. I was at a late night informal meeting with my friends Scott Waide and Martyn Namorong. What we discussed on that night and nights before was the future of social media in Papua New Guinea and what kind of influence we could have in this phenomenon so new to Papua New Guinea....

Martyn Namorong came on to the scene at the height of these trends and did something very bold for blogging in Papua New Guinea. Namorong came out as an angry, disenfranchised young thinker who called out everything that was wrong in the country – and he did it without anonymity – if anything he was grinning like a jackass in the photo he uploaded in his blog’s About Me section.

Martyn was an anti-hero. His was the reverse-engineered rationale of the super hero who adorns a mask to protect the ones he loves. Martyn refused to wear that mask of anonymity. For those of us who were waiting for a voice to capture that anger, it was a beautiful moment when we saw him post links to his article, often raw and unedited. Martyn cursed and called names; he called out the people who needed to be called out. And he did this from within the breach itself. It was revolutionary.

At that time most of my own blogging was done through Facebook. I would upload memes and caricatures of things and people I wanted Papua New Guinea to laugh at. One of my efforts was getting a picture of Michael Somare and turning the colour of his black and red suit and tie to purple, yellow and green to resemble the outfit worn by comic book villain, The Joker. There were angry moments in these efforts. I remember going on rants against politicians and the corruption in the country – rants inspired by a conspiracy of silence in social media and the greater national discourse, on all the problems that were happening in the country.

I had attempted a blog on the Blogger service, after much encouragement from literature academics Steven Winduo and Russell
Fighting for a Voice

Soaba at the University of Papua New Guinea. The effort was supposed to be an outlet for poems and short stories I was writing during my second year at Uni while studying courses in Literature.

I arrived in Madang to meet with Martyn, Scott and other amazing people who shared parts of my philosophy. In our discussions I realised that social media defies the hierarchical dogma of information flow in ways that places much power in the hands of ordinary people. In this realisation, I saw just how much of this power was left in a state of suspended animation; that the people with the power to upset the status quo, to break the conspiracy of silence, were suppressed by ignorance.

Then and there I decided to start the Edebamona Blog. It would be everything I wanted it to be – with swearing, name-calling, two toea legal analyses, expository and investigative journalism and contributions from my collaborators in-country and around the world. I retired the Edebamona Blog after one year and 161 posts.

The decision was reached after I realised there was a likelihood of me jeopardising my chances of getting into the Legal Training Institute after law school. The blog upset some influential people in the country, including lawyers who could object to my competency to receive training for the bar.

In mid-2013, rogue PNG Defence Force soldiers stormed the UPNG Taurama Campus and over the course of three days assaulted students and staff and vandalised property. The story made national and international headlines. As Acting President of the UPNG SRC (students representative council) during the crisis, I put out a press statement condemning the actions of PNGDF personnel.

As a blogger I knew I had to make the information organic and responsive to subsequent commentary, and so I stayed up for hours in various discussion groups on Facebook, defending and compounding the press statement and keeping the commentary swung to my side.

My words upset some soldiers so much they decided to post a threat to me, saying that they would slaughter me like a pig and pull out my intestines. For the next few weeks I grew paranoid of Toyota ten-seater Land Cruisers whenever I saw one in the vicinity. I had lived through a similar paranoia during the 2012 political impasse when I was blogging about the constitutional crisis and organising student protests.

Another time I got pulled aside as I stepped out of a PMV bus, and an angry man told me he knew who I was and that I should watch what I write on the internet. For some reason, I was in a fighting mood and dared him to do what he wanted to do. Blogging in PNG is dangerous, especially if your endeavours mean calling out people and groups within the country.

I’ve found that marriage has actually changed my perspective on blogging. I fear for my own safety these days because I have a family that needs me and cares for me, and I realise I put them in unnecessary danger
every time I blog or tweet or post something scathing or upsetting to some people.

I recall the “suicidal” days when Martyn and I would post one tactically offensive and tacitly informative blog article after another as if we were racing against each other – and in some respects we were – to out-do each other in terms of blog traffic as well as rambunctious written and illustrative content.

What are my views of blogging and social media in Papua New Guinea today and what do I think will happen to the medium in the future... well, that’s for another day. I would have told you straight away two years ago but my wife wants me to log out and have some rest.

Nou’s article attracted a number of comments, some of them outraged. A response by someone called ‘Waigani Insider’ took him to task:

Nou Vada, there is something I don’t understand. When you realised that blogging under your real name could be dangerous to your future career, why didn’t you simply ease off the blog everyone saw you were doing, quietly set up a new blog under a pen name, and continue the sharp, sharp comment that you had been doing. Instead you gave up, or at least that’s what you lead us to believe!

I admire Martyn very much for what he’s doing and we should all aspire to the same level. If for one reason or another, we find we cannot be as sharp as him, we should not do what you did, Nou. Instead we should be going underground and going nameless if necessary if that is what is required to keep the voices sharp and cutting, chasing the corrupt off the internet altogether.

The comment from ‘Waigani Insider’ about ‘going underground’ missed a point unappreciated by anonymous bloggers and commentators in Papua New Guinea. And this was that anonymity greatly affects the credibility and lessens the impact of what is written. By using a pen name, writers make themselves unaccountable for what they write. There is no transparency. Their writing can be replete with disinformation and untruths, or hide some other agenda or motive, and there is no way readers can reliably tell. In short, it is not unreasonable to distrust an anonymous writer.

That said, anonymity may be necessary in some cases to
protect the writer from real harm. Keith’s policy on this was straightforward: if he was to publish an anonymous piece he would need to know the name of the writer and agree with the circumstances that demanded anonymity.

By early 2014 there were already four entries to the new Crocodile Prize book of the year award. Three of the books had been published under the Pukpuk Publications imprint using Amazon’s print-on-demand service and the other was one I had edited and for which I had helped find a publisher. The book prize created wide interest and was a sign of a new maturity in Papua New Guinean literature. It was also a considerable step up for the Crocodile Prize.

The halcyon days of Papua New Guinean literature leading to independence in 1975 and for a few years afterwards had seen a blossoming of book-length writing. Vincent Eri had published the first Papua New Guinean novel, The Crocodile, and books by writers like Albert Maori Kiki and Russell Soaba, John Kasaipwalova and many others appeared. These had been heady, optimistic and exciting days and the literature expressed this freedom mood.

But by 2014 not only had there been nearly 40 years of negligible literary output but people’s attitudes had become darker and decidedly pessimistic. I attempted to explain this in an article:

In thinking about how to promote a sustainable literature in Papua New Guinea it is useful to consult history. Those [times around independence] were the years when Papua New Guinean written literature was born and when it blossomed. At the same time there was a relative abundance of work by expatriates based in Papua New Guinea, both fiction and non-fiction. The elements that conspired to make all this possible are worth exploring to see if they have any relevance for literature in Papua New Guinea today.

One of those elements was the mood of the times; change was in the air. It was clear that independence wasn’t far off and this created a completely new atmosphere, both social and political. The old days of simply hanging off Australia’s apron strings were coming to an end and
people were filled with optimism for the future. People felt that they were no longer under the heel of the colonialists.

Most of all it meant that Papua New Guineans could take charge of their own future and would be able to express themselves in their own way. It was a fecund time for Papua New Guinea writers because they were the ones charged with imagining the future.

Another element was the presence of sympathetic and dedicated motivators; people like Ulli Beier (photo) and the staff at the University of Papua New Guinea. These people gave direction and rendered valuable assistance to the nascent writers. Without them the tide of literature would have foundered on a barren beach.

These people also created places where the writers could display their wares: magazines, journals and forums. The presentation of plays and other visual events brought oral traditions and literature together in a new and exciting nexus. Another crucial element in this mix was the existence of publishers willing to print Papua New Guinean material. Foremost among these was Brian Clouston’s (photo) Jacaranda Press but there were others like Lansdowne Press, Angus and Robertson and AH & AW Reed. Without them such works as The Crocodile wouldn’t have seen the light of day.

There was also a large book-buying public in Papua New Guinea in those days, mostly expatriate but including many educated Papua New Guineans. Without mass media like television reading was an important educational and recreational activity. Most big towns had a bookshop or two, the big stores like Steamships and Burns Philp sold books and there was a healthy mail order business between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Finally, there was proactive government encouragement and assistance for literature. The Department of Information and Extension Services funded and produced a range of publications using Papua New Guinean writers; it ran literary competitions and generated a sense in the schools and the general public that literature was an essential ingredient in the makeup of a successful nation.

How does this contrast with the situation in Papua New Guinea today? Let’s start with the atmosphere. In those days it was optimism that fed the cause of literature. Nowadays it’s pessimism. This doesn’t matter as much as you might think. Extreme pessimism works just as well as extreme optimism as a catalyst for writers, perhaps even more so.
There are plenty of writers around, just like in the old days. Nowadays Papua New Guinea's most elegant writers overwhelmingly occupy social media. Every blog publisher is a writer at heart. What about motivators? Well, the University of Papua New Guinea, except for a few diehards like Russell Soaba and Steven Winduo, seems to be a lost cause. Years of government neglect has rendered what was once a powerhouse of opinion and dissent effectively mute. None of the other tertiary institutions seem to be interested in taking up the batons and cudgels.

What about publishers and readers? There are no real publishing houses in Papua New Guinea, except for the Christian presses and they just churn out insipid dogma. The University of Papua New Guinea is trying to revive its publishing program but it is hamstrung by costs. Russell Soaba's classic 1977 novel *Wanpis* is again available but it costs around K50, that’s a lot of money for most Papua New Guineans. The number of readers is at an all-time low. There are also very few bookshops. In how many houses in Papua New Guinea will you find a bookcase filled with books?

And the government? This is one of the most frustrating aspects. There is a complete lack of interest. In fact, they seem to be more interested in suppressing writers than helping them. The conclusion is that literature in Papua New Guinea cannot even sustain itself as a cottage industry using social media and small-scale presses. If you take away the efforts of outsiders like *PNG Attitude* all that remains are a few scribblers penning diatribes on social media that is basically timid and has a limited readership.

The government has to get involved. It has to be a hands-off effort that is non-manipulatory and tough skinned enough to cop criticism. Literature in Papua New Guinea, if it is to have any hope of survival, needs to be nationalised.

Through the process of writing for *PNG Attitude* and helping Keith run the Crocodile Prize, I had developed conflicting views about the desirability of government assistance. On the one hand I knew that if literature was to go anywhere it would need financial and infrastructural support but on the other hand I knew that involving the government could lead to interference and possible censorship. Both Keith and I thought this might still be the case even if the money came through an independent trust or commission. At different times we lamented the lack of government interest but at the same time criticised the clumsy attempts of the government, particularly under Peter O’Neill, to nobble the media. There was no reason to suppose he wouldn’t extend this to published works.
That the pessimism gripping Papua New Guinea is a fecund environment for writers is a given. However, because of the innate reluctance of Papua New Guineans to be openly critical of others, because they have been socialised that way or are simply afraid of reprisals, the zeal of Gary Juffa is not evident in many others. Every writer in Papua New Guinea must be aware that no matter how fictionalised a situation and no matter how nuanced the poetic metaphors, the essential imagery of their work can make them a target; although PNG Attitude had demonstrated that to raise one’s head above the parapet need not result in becoming an actual target. There was power in numbers.

As PNG Attitude constantly sought to achieve its aim of fostering and facilitating the relationship between Australians and Papua New Guineans, it provided some sort of counterweight to the poor state of Australian media reporting on Papua New Guinea. However, the debate was usually much more about what was happening in Papua New Guinea rather than what was happening in Australia that had an impact on Papua New Guinea. Part of that was a marked reluctance by Papua New Guinean commentators, who would happily disparage their own government’s performance, to apply the same critical scrutiny to Australia.

The criticism levelled at the Australian government with respect to its Papua New Guinea policy tended to focus on its inept handling of the relationship, its support for the plundering activities of Australian resource developers and its incompetence in aid delivery. But the major basis of concern was what was perceived to be the failure of successive Papuan New Guinean governments to fulfil the promise and expectations that accompanied independence in 1975.

Papua New Guineans are not wont to criticise their friends. This is a topic much discussed on the blog and the consensus opinion is that it this reluctance has its roots in the communalistic nature of traditional Papua New Guinean society. Australia continues to make mistakes in its dealings with Papua New Guinea: taking advantage of what is perhaps perceived as a lack of
sophistication and riding roughshod over its sensibilities. The Manus Island detention centre is a case in point. But such matters tend to be highlighted by concerned Australians, not by Papua New Guineans themselves.

Australia as the dispenser of ‘wisdom’ and Papua New Guinea as the compliant receiver does not represent a healthy or sustainable partnership. It’s time there was more comment and analysis by Papua New Guinean intellectuals of the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. Papua New Guineans have a close familiarity with Australians and are well placed to assess our character. It is indisputable that Papua New Guineans know much more about Australia than Australians know about Papua New Guinea.

Contrary to what Papua New Guineans may feel, well measured criticism leads to respect. Indonesia has demonstrated it is not prepared to be bullied by an ill-informed racist and arrogant Australian government and, realising if not understanding this, Australian politicians and diplomats tread on tenterhooks when they deal with Indonesia. If Papua New Guinea ramped up a polished criticism of Australia and refused to bow to attempted Australian hegemony (which is not proving very effective in the rest of the Pacific), it would earn the same sort of respect. And the mirror the Papua New Guineans raised to Australia’s face could be very educational indeed.

2014 was evolving as a bounteous year for the Crocodile Prize. By April entries were teeming in each day and a full list of sponsors had long been secured. The quality of entries had once again taken a big step up and we already knew there would be enough great writing to support an anthology of around 500 pages when it was printed later in the year.

Among the many contributors, Gary Juffa, the Governor of Oro Province, was prominent, displaying wit, intelligence and a clarity of vision that seemed to escape Papua New Guinea’s other politicians. Here was a thinker and a writer with a clear mission. “Leaders are elected to serve, promote and protect the interests
of their people, those who elected them into parliament for that purpose,” he wrote. He seemed happy to accept the foibles of Papua New Guineans with magnanimity. His description of Port Moresby’s inept drivers revealed a sense of boisterous glee:

The number of idiots who sit behind wheels is unusually higher in Port Moresby than in any other town in Papua New Guinea, possibly the world. Turning with no indication and stopping anywhere to chat are apparently not traffic offences since so many motorists do it. Then there are the falling apart trucks driving and carting rubbish commanded by a character who looks like he could barely walk upright let alone speak.

This Captain of Chaos wears a filthy singlet and spits betel nut streams at will as he drives at snail’s pace strewing rubbish from his death mobile, oblivious to the carnage he leaves in his wake as he turns anywhere, anytime with no warning. Oftentimes this Major of Mayhem is accompanied by Neanderthals who are crammed into the cabin, hanging off the side of the truck or sleeping atop the pile of rubbish.

They are equally effective in painting the road and curb sides with copious volumes of blood red betel nut juice. Spitting is an art form – betel nut juice decorates road signs, unsuspecting young girls and stray dogs with amazing accuracy. I saw one such Colonel of Carnage driving haltingly to Motokea, sliding all over the road as if on ice. As I overtook, readying myself to spew forth a string of expletives, I was dumbstruck. This shirtless guy was eating a bowl of soup! With a spoon! He grinned as I passed and waved his elbow at me...

Another prodigious talent to emerge during the year was Marlene Dee Gray Potoura, a teacher and single mother originally from Bougainville and living in Lae where she ran a learning centre for three to twelve year olds. Marlene’s short stories and poetry communicated a wry sense of humour and a penchant for the mysterious. They added a nice touch to PNG Attitude throughout the year.

Writing for children received a boost during the year through the Buk Bilong Pikinini organisation, which had previously confined its activities to setting up small local libraries in the larger towns. Keith reported on the new venture:

Never have writers in Papua New Guinea had the opportunity to be recognised for such a wide range of creative work as in 2014. With the addition of the Buk Bilong Pikinini Writing for
Children Award to the six other awards, after some halting steps in 2013 the Crocodile Prize has re-emerged as a powerful supporter of writers in PNG. The latest award is making a bold statement that the Crocodile Prize is embracing a younger generation of readers and that the Buk Bilong Pikinini organisation is extending its reach from readers to writers.

During the year a dedicated website for the Crocodile Prize was launched. It was designed and managed by Keith’s son and co-director in Jackson PR Associates, Ben Jackson. While PNG Attitude remained the primary means of publishing entries in the contest, the new website contained in one place everything entrants and sponsors needed to know about the Prize – including news, history, contest rules, sponsorship guidelines and the entry form.

But even as PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize were enjoying a bumper year, Papua New Guinea based social media were coming under pressure from the O’Neill government. Martyn Namorong again publicly expressed his fear that the government was moving to exert control and crack down on critics like himself, telling his Twitter followers that “due to defamation cases being taken against several online blogs I have officially shut my own down as of 12 am tonight”.

This was the trail-blazing Namorong Report that had first elevated Martyn as one of Papua New Guinea’s most popular and respected political and social commentators. “I just saw activist Noel Anjo asking for K100,000 in contributions for legal fees and almost fainted,” Martyn wrote. “I am shut up now. Content my blog will no longer be publicly available.”

The PNG National Court had ordered activists Noel Anjo and Sonja Barry Ramoi to cease making defamatory statements against Prime Minister Peter O’Neill. Justice Ambeng Kandakasi also ordered they appear before the court to assist in the conduct of proceedings. O’Neill’s lawyer, Tiffany Twivey, filed court proceedings against Anjo and Ramoi alleging both had made defamatory comments against the prime minister. Twivey added
that the defamatory statements against O’Neill were getting worse.

Martyn’s anxiety was exacerbated by a statement by Charles Punaha, chief executive of PNG’s Information and Communication Technology Authority (ICTA), who said a cybercrime policy would be tabled in Parliament and passed into law as soon as it was endorsed by Cabinet. Punaha said ICTA would closely monitor the social media once the legislation became law and people guilty of misuse or abuse would be subject to penalties.

“It is not our intent to control the media but there must be some proper mechanisms in place that people have to be responsible when they are using the social media to attack others,” Punaha said. Amongst the new offences would be the use of pen-names or false names, attacking other individuals and making defamatory statements. “We are going to make it an offence for people - you have to be answerable for it.”

Not that the government didn’t have a point. A perusal of Papua New Guinea’s blogs revealed a disconcerting degree of abuse of social media. Under the protection of anonymity, bloggers published material that included savage and defamatory personal attacks. The language used was also unsettling and often downright obscene. The word “cowardly” springs to mind in describing some of the commentary. These lunatics and trolls were beginning to make life difficult for the majority of social media users who were just looking for an outlet for self-expression. Martyn had seen, however, that the government was exploiting these excesses and using them as an excuse to bring in laws to divert and quash criticism of itself and the prime minister. In that sense the new legislation was decidedly sinister.

Martyn’s comments were originally reported by Radio New Zealand International. Since the demise of the AAP office in Port Moresby, RNZI and its energetic correspondent Johnny Blades had stepped into the breach. This became more apparent as the year progressed when the New Zealanders appointed their own correspondent – a local Papua New Guinean journalist. If you wanted the most comprehensive information on events in Papua
New Guinea and the Pacific the go-to channel emanated from the land of the long white cloud.

A recurring theme in any discussion of Papua New Guinean culture, especially when the so-called Melanesian Way came into the argument, was the idea that the driving force in society was the group rather than the individual. A corollary was that decisions in Melanesia were reached collectively through a process of consensus rather than by individual fiat. This was part of the logic in setting up the Papua New Guinea Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers (SWEP). It was felt at the time that a group rather than individuals would have the best chance of promoting literature in Papua New Guinea.

There were two factors militating against this approach. The first was that writing, by necessity, is a solitary occupation and breeds introverted behaviour, incongruent with Papua New Guinean culture. The second factor didn’t become apparent to me until SWEP had failed. Its governing committee was ethnically diverse with membership from all points of the country. There was no common cultural adhesion apart from an interest in writing. It seemed the glue of literary interest was not strong enough to hold such a group together.

While Keith and I continued to ponder the challenge of building a sustainable governing body for the Crocodile Prize, in the mountains of Kundiawa in Simbu Province, of its own volition, a strong and active literary group had developed. Francis Nii, one of the progenitors of this initiative, outlined what happened:

Writers of the Simbu Province have come together to form a group to promote Simbu literature and the Crocodile Prize national literary competition in the province. The main objective of the Simbu Writers Association (SWA) is to collectively encourage and promote writing, publishing and the marketing of members’ literary works and arts. The meeting also decided to embrace the annual Crocodile Prize contest as the gateway for external exposure.

The writers met at the Mt Wilhelm Tourist Hotel and elected their first executive committee. Scientist and poet Jimmy Drekore was elected president and educationist and local publisher Eric Sinebare vice president.
Josephine K Bal (legal practitioner and factual writer) is secretary and Francis S Nii (economist and novelist) is treasurer.

Discussion at the meeting revolved mainly around formalising in-house matters including a constitution, Investment Promotion Authority certificate and logo. The highlight of the inaugural meeting was a presentation on the history of the Crocodile Prize national literature competition up to the present day.

A wild dream that transpired from the presentation was that SWA should bring the 2015 Crocodile Prize award ceremony to Simbu and celebrate the occasion the Simbu way. SWA members feel that “The Beast” should travel beyond Port Moresby up the Highlands Highway to the four corner town of Kundiawa. In the meantime, members have been encouraged to enter the Crocodile Prize, which closes on Monday 30 June.

This was an exciting development and I explained its significance in an article shortly after SWA’s formation:

Simbu writers are by far the largest provincial group represented in the Crocodile Prize. I don’t know why this is so. Perhaps they are closer to the writing gods up there. Maybe it’s got something to do with the rarefied air or the water in their sparkling streams. Whatever it is, we and Papua New Guinea should be grateful. This is not to denigrate the other provinces. Bougainville is hot on their heels and we have a good representation of writers from across the nation.

What is especially significant about the formation of the SWA is that it is home-grown. The SWA is talking about hosting the 2015 Crocodile Prize Awards in Kundiawa. I think this is a laudable goal. It is the sort of thing that demonstrates the importance of provincial writers’ groups. I also suspect that they have thrown out a challenge to the other provinces. Where that goes will be extremely interesting to watch.

SWA went on to fulfil all its aims and continues as a driving force in Papua New Guinean literature. Its promotion of literature in Simbu schools and production of anthologies of school writing have been particularly impressive. Another significant development flowing from the establishment of the SWA was the increase in the number of Papua New Guinean authors eager to publish their work. This occurred not just in Simbu but, by some sort of osmotic effect, throughout the country. Pukpuk Publications found itself inundated with manuscripts, presenting a workload well beyond my capacity.
Clearly help would be required, not just with new books but with the increasing size of the annual Crocodile Prize anthologies. To this end we sought to find mentors from suitably experienced people among PNG Attitude’s increasing readership. I sent out a plea:

> When entries come into the Crocodile Prize we read them carefully and mostly lightly edit them if they look good enough to run in PNG Attitude and are likely candidates for the annual anthology. If they are of great interest or show exceptional promise but have some sort of problem we do a heavier edit.

We don’t play favourites and treat each entry on its merits. It is part of the mentoring process that has become an integral part of the competition. Many writers have expressed appreciation that, in comparing their original version with the published product, they have been led to understand how their writing might be improved. This is one of the elements that differs the Crocodile Prize from other writing competitions. We are in the business of finding talent and nurturing it, not just rewarding it.

What also comes with our mentoring activities is a bond of sorts with many of the writers as we watch their work develop and mature. This is one of the great pleasures for Keith and me. But here’s the rub. It’s getting too big for us. We need some help. Not money; what we really need is conscientious labour. Free, unpaid and unstinting. We know a large number of readers have backgrounds in teaching and the arts, whether in Australia or Papua New Guinea. What we would like to do is match you up with some of the promising writers as mentors, advisors and general shoulders to cry on. Believe me, it will be a very rewarding experience.

We had a few expressions of interest but, as with most things like this, when it came to putting the idea into practise most people dropped out. We were pleased that a few remained and one of them who became an highly effective and successful mentor was Ed Brumby (photo).

Ed had completed a BA in English and Linguistics at the University of Papua New Guinea inspired by Ulli Beier, Elton Brash, John Lynch and Nigel Krauth. He had rubbed shoulders with future Papua New Guinean
leaders like John Waiko, John Kasapwailova and Renagi Renagi Lohia. When he left Papua New Guinea in mid-1974, Ed began a second career in higher education, lecturing in linguistics, editing distance learning materials and producing educational films and videos for an Aboriginal education program at the Perth College of Advanced Education.

Then, after 23 years at Deakin University where he ended up as Director of Learning Resources Services, he added a master’s degree in education technology and communications to his repertoire. Ed was ideally suited to be a mentor and took on Baka Bina, Marlene Dee Gray Potoura and Busa Wenogo as his associates. Baka and Marlene had both written books and Busa was working on his first.

At the same time, Michael Dom was nurturing some young poets as a kind of free-ranging mentor and a few other people helped out at odd times. Apart from Ed and Michael and the work that Keith and I continued to do, the mentoring program wasn’t a roaring success but it established a pattern of sorts that persisted over time. When an inspiring writer surfaced and wanted help, we usually found an appropriate mentor. Significantly, none of the people who professed to be editors when SWEP was formed came forward to volunteer their services.

As the 30 June 2014 closing date for Crocodile Prize entries approached, the prospects for Papua New Guinean literature looked good. There were more than 600 entries from 130 writers and an appeal to help finance author Trevor Shearston’s attendance at the writers workshop received the usual generous response from PNG Attitude readers. While Trevor was a well-known and highly regarded Australian writer with many fine books to his credit, he shared that characteristic of most authors in not being overwhelmed with riches. In 2014 the average income of a fulltime Australian writer was about $12,000 a year.

It was during the downhill run to what looked like becoming the best Crocodile Prize so far that Steamships Trading Company inexplicably announced it was withdrawing its sponsorship of the
short story prize. It was a disconcerting blow at a crucial time and was made worse by the company’s refusal to offer an explanation for its precipitate action.

Readers responded to this with ire and Steamships’ reputation suffered something of a blow. The short story award was rescued at the last minute by a private Australian donor who wished to remain anonymous. It was a response as heartening as Steamships’ decision was disappointing. Plans to cut back the print run of the anthology were thankfully shelved.

One of the things that concerned Keith and I when we set up the Crocodile Prize was the extent to which it could attract engagement throughout Papua New Guinea. While it could not have been established at all without the internet, in the early days even this opportunity had its limitations. But other possible conduits - newspapers, magazines, radio and television - had even more limitations. By 2014, however, social media reach through internet telephony was racing throughout Papua New Guinea at breakneck speed. The prize rode on its back.

As a broadcaster in Papua New Guinea prior to and after independence, Keith was aware of the value of radio in communicating information to remote areas. As a kiap I was also aware of its usefulness. In the Western District, where I had been posted, we issued free radios to villagers and supplied batteries wherever possible. In doing this we were following British experience in Africa and other colonies.

However, radio services in Papua New Guinea had deteriorated over time as a cash-starved National Broadcasting Corporation was unable to adequately fund its province-based network. When I was working in different provinces I occasionally got to talk to the local radio station about the competition but it was pretty hit and miss. Many young people were too busy with the internet to bother about radio anyway. And, with a change of senior personnel, our initial advertising support from the Post Courier had dried up.

The outstanding response to the 2014 competition showed that PNG Attitude’s reach was expanding and also provided a
good guide to where the writers were. One-quarter of the entries came from Simbu where the writers’ association – still the only one in Papua New Guinea – was doing effective work. Then followed the National Capital District (thirteen percent), Bougainville (nine percent) and the Eastern Highlands and Morobe (each eight percent). All the other seventeen provinces contributed with the lone exception of West New Britain.

It was no surprise to find that Simbu topped the list. There was clearly a fertile and productive creative environment spurred by some first rate writers and the Simbu Writers Association was fiercely active. In Bougainville, Leonard Fong Roka has drawn a constellation of young and talented writers around him. It was significant that the other three of the top five provinces possessed local universities.

The Crocodile Prize was beginning to attract interest from Australia. The prominent award-winning author Drusilla Modjeska (photo), who had lived in Papua New Guinea as a young woman, had published an article in the weekend arts pages of The Australian newspaper after the 2012 competition and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation had run the occasional radio interview with Keith, me and some of the prize winners. The ABC’s Liam Cochrane interviewed Keith Jackson:

JACKSON – [The Prize was initiated] to ensure there was some incentive and recognition for creative writing in Papua New Guinea. There had been, around the time of independence, a great burgeoning of literature in PNG – poetry, short stories, memoirs, history – but, over the years there was no structure to support it and there was no publishing industry, so it really faded away. In 2010, Phil Fitzpatrick, an Australian author and former patrol officer in PNG, and I got talking and wondered whether we might be able to do something to fix it.

COCHRANE – And since those early days, how have things developed?

JACKSON – This year has been a terrific year for the Prize. We’ve had well over 600 entries from about 130 writers from all across Papua New Guinea. We’ve got some good sponsors and are able to give prizes which
offer incentive to writers. But the best thing we can do for people is to encourage them to write, to recognise what they write, to publish their writing – which is very important. The big question still remains, what are we going to do in future to make sure this is a sustainable enterprise within PNG? That’s the real tough one.

COCHRANE – The question of sustainability I guess is interlinked with that of funding, I understand there have been some problems this year with one of the major sponsors pulling out. Can you tell us briefly what happened there?

JACKSON – It’s a bit of a mystery to me too. One of PNG’s big wholesale and retail companies, which had sponsored the short story award since the beginning and indicated they were sponsoring again for 2014, at the last minute pulled out. Fortunately we found an Australian, who wishes to remain anonymous, to quickly jump in and provide the funding, so the contest itself didn’t really miss a beat.

COCHRANE – For you personally, this is obviously a huge labour of love. What keeps you motivated to trawl through all of the entries, provide feedback and make this prize happen?

JACKSON – That’s a good question and it’s one I ask myself from time to time and have done so throughout this project. Basically the answer is the engagement from the writers themselves. Their enthusiasm, the reality that they want to write and they have not had the outlets to write for – which we are now able to provide both online and in the forms of books and anthologies.

Their response is one of gratitude and enthusiasm and passion; and also a huge improvement in the quality of the writing that is coming out of Papua New Guinea as we go through the processes of editing and publication and mentoring. We have a team of mentors who are working individually with particularly talented Papua New Guinean writers to produce material with them in a mentoring or editorial capacity.

So this whole enterprise has now spread its wings into being a wonderful bilateral program in which Australians are working with Papua New Guineans to ensure that they’re own literature is developed and consolidated. Increasingly my job is to look for those elements that will sustain it in a management sense for the future.

It was with great enthusiasm that everyone travelled to Port Moresby for the 2014 writers’ workshop and awards ceremony. Keith was unable to make the trip because of illness, and he was represented by his son Ben, who managed the Crocodile Prize website. We had published the winners’ names in PNG Attitude to make sure they knew who they were and would attend the event.
In 2012 we had left the announcements to the day of the awards and a couple of winners failed to turn up. We didn’t want this to happen again. As a further incentive Keith arranged to subsidise the winners’ travel costs from the Prize budget.

Despite a few hiccups, the workshop and the awards ceremony were a great success. “The warm reception from the Papua New Guineans brought home to me the importance of the Prize in preserving stories and building a literary tradition,” a senior Australian diplomat said, in what was a common reaction to the awards, which recognised seven Papua New Guineans for their exceptional writing.

The day began with a writers’ workshop in the American Corner of the National Library – where there had been no power and water for a fortnight due to electricity bills not being paid. The United States Embassy had offered the facility for the workshop and made various commitments to support the event, but its organisation was sadly lacking. Leaving everyone in the dark was not the United States’ finest hour. At the last minute, the embassy purchased a $3,500 generator which finally kicked into life midway through the workshop.

Despite the lack of electricity during the early part of the day, the workshop was a great event. With about thirty of us there, three from Australia, Trevor Shearston offered a riveting account of his life as an author and spoke of the fascinating background to his most recent book based on Papua New Guinea, Dead Birds. When Trevor had exhausted the many questions from enthusiastic writers, I weighed in with a talk about publishing opportunities since the advent of digital publishing and print-on-demand. A further flurry of questions took us through to a hamburger and chips lunch.

The workshop was handed over to Jimmy Drekore and his cohort of published Papua New Guinean writers, who related their literary journeys and the inspiration that drove them to write, often against great odds. I particularly enjoyed listening to the trials and tribulations of the published writers and their aspirations for the future. We filled the rest of the afternoon with
Fighting for a Voice

a discussion about the future of writing in Papua New Guinea.

The Australian High Commission organised the awards event for about one hundred guests. Former Governor-General Sir Paulias Matane arrived in sartorial splendour and duly cautioned us that he had a very early flight the next day and needed his sleep, so we’d better start on time. He then caught up with several of the writers who had drifted in and who in the past he had mentored in one way or another.

With Jimmy Drekore as master of ceremonies, the evening began with Charles Abel, Papua New Guinea’s Planning Minister, unexpectedly committing K10,000 to the Crocodile Prize Organising Group (COG) for 2015. There was another surprise when Governor Gary Juffa, the only serving Papua New Guinean politician to have had his work published in the anthology, matched Abel’s commitment with another K10,000.

And when Boka Kondra, Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture, handed a cheque for K5,000 for a new writing award bearing the name of his portfolio, it was the culmination of months of hard work by COG’s media manager Oala Moi. The audience could not have known that, less than 24 hours previously, Oala’s wife had a miscarriage and the family’s life was thrown into turmoil.

Among the writers honoured on the night was former Governor-General, Sir Paulias Matane, well into his eighties. Sir Paulias was presented with the Ok Tedi Mining Award for Lifetime Contribution to Literature by managing director Nigel Parker, who was one of a number of prominent business people at the awards.

Another of the major awards, also sponsored by OTML, was the inaugural Book of the Year, which went to Leonard Fong Roka’s *Brokenville*. It was a mark of the development of the Crocodile Prize and the renaissance in PNG writing that it was possible to initiate such an award, which secured six entries in this first year.

Australian High Commissioner in Papua New Guinea, Deborah Stokes, made special reference to the Heritage Writing Award sponsored by the Cleland Family and won by Arnold Mundua. “The stories that are passed down from one generation to
another help to preserve PNG’s rich history and culture and continue to be of great value today,” she said.

The inaugural Buk Bilong Pikinini award for Children’s Writing went to 25-year old health science graduate Iriani Wanma, who had flown from Brisbane for the event. Other awards were presented to Diddie Kinamun Jackson (Kina Securities award for Poetry), Kela Kapkora Sil Bolkin (PNG Chamber of Mines & Petroleum Award for Essays & Journalism) and Agnes Maineke (People’s Award for Short Stories).

The evening also saw the launch of the 500-page *Crocodile Prize Anthology 2014*, the fourth volume to be published since 2011.

I had enjoyed the day, especially the convivial companionship of Trevor Shearston and the arrival of the quixotic Lindsay Bond, one of *PNG Attitude’s* more lively readers. In a perverse sort of way, I also enjoyed the typical Papua New Guinean stuff-ups like the National Library having no electricity and the self-help catering we had to resort to.

There were, however, more serious undertones that Trevor and I picked up, not the least being – despite Ms Stokes’ positive words - the cooling of the Australian High Commission’s enthusiasm for the event. Whether this had occurred because of the departure of Ian Kemish was hard to tell. Most of the personnel who previously had been remarkably cooperative were still around but had seemingly changed their attitude.

The excuse of telling us that a meeting room previously used for the writers’ workshop was unavailable was patently untrue; as it remained unoccupied throughout the day. Instead of offering to assist proceedings, these erstwhile helpers had to be wheedled into it. Perhaps they were suffering under the new management in Canberra; perhaps *PNG Attitude* had got on their nerves; it was hard to tell. It was with great relief that we heard Jimmy Drekore, President of the Simbu Writers Association, offer to hold the 2015 events in Kundiawa. There was no joy being in a place where we clearly weren’t wanted.

With the Australian High Commission’s high-topped spiked
fence, razor wire and security screening, visiting was always a daunting affair but under former High Commissioner Ian Kemish the place was always friendly and courteous. When he left he seemed to have taken with him the innate Australian affability and kindness that we experienced during previous awards events.

What replaced warm acceptance was a wariness and guardedness among embassy staff that was quite disconcerting. We came away with the distinct feeling that we were an unnecessary imposition that had to be reluctantly humoured. This was a curious situation because the High Commission reaped great kudos for hosting the event. Maybe Papua New Guinean prestige had depreciated in value. It seemed more likely that Keith’s and readers’ criticisms of the Department of Foreign Affairs in PNG Attitude had got under its skin.

After the event, Trevor Shearston and I ventured into the night and the steady Port Moresby rain to hunt for a taxi to get us back to our hotel. As we splashed through the streets, I reflected that the heady days of 2011 and 2012, when the High Commission laid on a car and driver, were well and truly over. Jimmy Drekore’s promise that the Simbus would do better in 2015 resonated in my mind.

The next day, at the invitation of Russell Soaba, Trevor and I pottered out to the University of Papua New Guinea to meet with Russell, Prof John Waiko, the first Papua New Guinean to gain a PhD, and John Evans of the University Bookshop. John Waiko, who was effectively unemployed, having been cast aside by the university, and the others brought us up to speed on the woes of the university.

I must say that, apart from those gentlemen, the university was a dispiriting place. The physical condition of the buildings and amenities was disgusting. This was the nation’s flagship tertiary institution and its condition was a source of shame for every politician.

We then made our way to the National Museum which, the last time I was there, was in a similar state to the university. Now however, under new Director Dr Andrew Moutu, we entered well-
maintained and expanded galleries with an impressive display of material on show. In one gallery space, Andrew had installed a display of the severed and salvaged totemic and other carvings the Speaker had ripped from Parliament House. Andrew spared no niceties in the accompanying labels explaining the idiocy that provoked their removal.

The visit to the museum provided a salutary lesson that it only takes one strong and incorruptible man or woman to put right any one of the many things currently wrong in Papua New Guinea. The trick is to identify those people and ensure they are given authority. Right now, those prospect seemed far away.

At the end of each Crocodile Prize competition there was always a period of reflection. This was particularly so after the 2014 awards because the competition had risen like a phoenix from the wreckage of the disastrous SWEP-controlled event of 2013. Keith encouraged this reflection for a number of reasons. One was in terms of assessment: what had we learned and how should we try to do better next time. Another was a bit more basic.

In running a literary competition in a developing nation with no real history or tradition of written literature and publishing, we were pretty much flying blind. We might read something that seemed to Australian eyes to be good literature but it inevitably begged the question, is it good and acceptable Papua New Guinean literature?

This was an important distinction because what we were endeavouring to encourage with the Crocodile Prize was not only good creative writing but literature that would be read and appreciated by Papua New Guineans. When, with a few exceptions like Michael Dom, Papua New Guinean readers commented on a piece of writing they would try to be positive but not really critical in any beneficial way. Often people just hit the ‘like’ button: a useful indicator of popularity but not necessarily a gauge of the quality of the writing.

That aside, the writers themselves were learning from other writers. The bar was constantly being set higher across all forms
of writing. Many writers were surprising themselves with what they were achieving and, as they grew in confidence and became more adventurous, so quality was being driven through the entire tapestry of the work we received. Some of their writing was beginning to penetrate beyond the Crocodile Prize and PNG Attitude. Michael Dom was being recognised internationally for his poetry, as Martyn Namorong had been previously for his commentary. Michael summed up what the Prize meant to Papua New Guinean writers:

In perpetuity’, this legal term has a welcome sound to it. Perpetual, permanent, unending, eternal, and that’s just the start of it. At the tail-end of the fourth pukpuk prize presentations, I would like us each to reflect about the future of the Crocodile Prize and this word, perpetuity. It is a big part of what writers and poets wish to see for their literary contributions, no matter how small the work.

I was recently honoured to receive a request from the Commonwealth Education Trust, based in London England, to have a poem placed in their anthology A River of Stories, Tales and Poems from across the Commonwealth. The poem Lucky Little Lizard had been selected from the Crocodile Prize Anthology 2012 published by Pukpuk Publications on behalf of the Crocodile Prize Organisation.

After my partner managed to partially extract my head from the clouds, I took down my copy of the 2012 anthology from my bookshelf and flipped through the pages to have a re-look at the poem. It was a short piece I had penned in 2006, while sitting alone at my dining room table. At the time I thought I was alone in my house as an aspiring poet. But I was not. The poem describes an evening experience I shared with an unpretentious gecko, which must now be hanging from the ceiling of some heavenly hall hunting moths.

Lucky Little Lizard began as a small scribble on some note paper and went on to grace the pages of an old and dusty collection of works for another six years. When the anthology A River of Stories is published in 2015, Lucky Little Lizard will be read by young people in 54 countries across the Commonwealth; published in perpetuity.

Flipping through the 2012 Anthology, it occurred to me that, in order for my poem to be chosen, the selectors had had to read through the entire book, including thousands of other words from hundreds of other writers. They have a copy of our book. They have read our work. My poem was selected by an education trust based in London, England on the other side of the world from Labu, Lae. That represents a fair distance to travel, over eight years, from a dusty corner of my room. But this is where the vehicle of
the Crocodile Prize has taken me. This is where it will take Papua New Guinean writers and poets, to perpetuity and beyond.

In fact the crocodile is the perfect mascot for perpetuity, having existed and remained relatively unchanged since evolving 55 million years ago. We have a long way to go yet to match the old *pukpuk* but, to all those who have had faith, thank you on behalf of one lucky little lizard.

Michael’s knowledge of poetry and its craft had reached a point where both Keith and I were happy to defer to his opinion. When he offered advice to his fellow poets we hoped they were taking heed.

As Michael’s article revealed, what also greatly interested many writers was the perception of their work beyond Papua New Guinea. In terms of what can be loosely described as Western endeavours, there was a distinct cultural cringe in Papua New Guinea. This cringe was similar to the famous Australian one - that if something’s from Europe or America its better - but much wider in scope and also extending to mundane matters like how an English word is pronounced. The Papua New Guinean cringe has many psychological permutations, not the least of which is a misplaced sense of cultural or racial inferiority.

Of course, an appreciation of what outside ‘others’ think of their work is important to many writers. It can build confidence and motivation. To this end Keith used his contacts and called in favours from the Australian media to arrange several reviews of the *Crocodile Prize Anthology 2012* and he repeated this again in 2014. Drusilla Modjeska, who had attended the 2012 event in Port Moresby as guest writer and had written an article about it, wrote another article for the literary pages of *The Weekend Australian*. It was provocatively entitled ‘PNG voices raised in anger in new Crocodile Prize Anthology’:

The better part of a decade ago, Papua New Guinean writer Regis Tove Stella said what his country needed was writers, far more of them than there were, to claim, or reclaim, the role of “visionary” and witness…. So maybe Regis Stella, who died in 2010, would not have been surprised had he lived to see publication of the fourth *Crocodile Prize Anthology*, a celebration of PNG poetry, fiction, essays and heritage writing.
When I reviewed the second anthology, towards the end of 2012, I was celebratory, but also tentative — as were many of the writers. Two years later, in this anthology with 66 writers represented — among them writers from previous years and a heartening number of new, young voices — much of this tentativeness has gone. A new generation of Papua New Guineans is claiming the written as part of their storytelling, debating inheritance — theirs as surely as any technology that comes with a post-colonial modernity.

I write and write / Like my forefathers before me / My blood is the ink on my paper ...

This, from Diddie Kinamun Jackson’s Crocodile Prize winning poem, *As a writer*, opens a meditation on Melanesian expression that would have pleased Regis Stella. But for the most part the mood of this anthology is less meditative. Anger is a dominant emotion - anger and loss - which could hardly be otherwise for a generation living with high levels of urban dysfunction, violence and corruption.

There are tough stories to be told, and so we read short stories about children finding neighbouring children shot dead; a girl killing herself because she’s pregnant; a widow struggling to raise her children with no money for school fees; a girl in a green dress raped and dumped in a drain. The Crocodile Prize-winning story, Agnes Maineke’s, *While war raged in Bougainville there was a miracle at Haisi*, is about a woman giving birth in a remote hut during the civil war on Bougainville.

Bloodlines and dynasties / Disrespected and destroyed / Love, respect and honour / Erased by the power of rifles

With these lines, another Bougainville writer, Marlene Dee Gray Potoura, begins her story of a little girl woken at dawn during that vicious war. As men with guns surround the village she escapes the carnage that follows by running into the forest, the gun-toting ‘crawlers’ in pursuit. “The whole forest was angry,” Potoura writes, and in a smooth movement she takes us from the stark realism of the guns to a forest in which trees think, feel and act in unison. And so a “grandfather tree” uproots itself “in seconds known only to the secrets of the forest” and its “hard old trunk” falls on the crawlers and kills them. As it falls, its branches lift the girl to safety. The tree as a talisman for the power of an endangered inheritance.

“Your guardian trees,” writes Michael Dom, a previous poetry prize winner. “No more you flame.”

Gary Juffa’s poem on the “supposed concern” and “pockets filled” that accompany the widespread and often illegal felling of the forests, ends each stanza with the refrain: “And the trees keep falling.”

It is in the essays that the corruption and greed underlying the violence and the dispossession are named. Where the essays in the earlier anthologies hinted and gestured, here there’s a confidence, a refusal to
collude or be silenced. Blogger and social media activist Martyn Namorong writes of counter-corruption, of corrupting the corrupters.

Bernard Yegiora questions the voting system, the pork-barrelling, the “wari-vote” that can get a corrupt politician back into power when the voters want the handouts back. “The race within the race,” Bernard Witne calls it, as money outstrips policy, and everyone, in large ways and small, is out to “thicken their purse”. Is a Westminster system developed over centuries on the other side of the world the best model for a country of 800 languages and tribes? What would, or could, a Melanesian democracy look like?

And so the question is reopened, first raised in 1980, of whether there is, or can be, a “Melanesian Way” out of this mess. What system of government would, or could, give back to its people the resource-rich wealth of opportunity? Is it neo-colonialism that rules, as Namorong suggests? He ends one of his essays with the hope that his colleague Nou Vada, who appeared in the earlier anthologies, will one day be prime minister.

“The day a boy from Hanuabada becomes prime minister will be the end of colonisation,” he writes. Another frail hope? There’s been many a local boy, though not from Hanuabada, who have taken the role. Some of them did it well, but were too often replaced by those who fill their pockets from the coffers of state.

On the other hand, if anyone doubts change is possible, contemplate Gary Juffa, who has ten pieces in this anthology. His story of going on a picnic as a child with a saved packet of noodles, picking tomatoes and shallots in the gardens as the picnickers walked to the river, is one of the best in the collection. The clouds come over and the group scrambles up the rocks to the road. They make it home to discover two children shot outside their father’s trade store.

Juffa is now a member of the Papua New Guinean parliament and, since 2012, governor of Oro Province that takes in Kokoda and its famous track. One of his first acts as governor of a once deeply corrupt province was to put a moratorium on all land deals, logging and resource extraction pending audit and review. “The days of watching our resources be shipped out for whatever scraps have been thrown at us is over,” he said.

His essays are tough and fearless, impressive by any standard and from a politician remarkable. From a politician in Papua New Guinea, they could also be considered foolhardy. His first term in parliament showed him how reluctant his fellow members were to speak on national issues for fear of losing access to government funding needed to keep their electorates happy.

In *Tribe Versus Nation: Observations on PNG’s Core Challenge*, he writes of being warned “by a particular minister”, and it indeed proved the case that when this year’s budget was handed down, he saw that he and his
province had been well and truly “punished”. There are those who urge him to keep quiet, to think only of what he can do for Oro with the money silence buys, but he says he will not.

While tribalism “is necessary for the preservation of culture, language, [our] unique identities”, the future of PNG — the “core challenge” if there is to be any possibility of a better way, a Melanesian way — depends on a leadership willing to renounce the power of playing tribe against tribe, and speak for the wider collective consciousness. Even if it costs him the next election, he will continue to speak out, he says, because something has begun, “the stirrings of change” are afoot. “The concern is now a small seed, but it is growing and growing fast.”

We can only hope he is right. Change will not come easily, and it will not come fast. At the time of writing Juffa, halfway through his, was facing a vote of no-confidence, orchestrated, according to media reports, by corporate interests.

Another sign of PNG’s literary stirrings is that this year there were two new categories in the Crocodile Prize. One was for children’s writing, sponsored by Buk bilong Pikinini, the children’s library organisation that is growing apace, bringing books and stories to children from impoverished urban settlements. The other was an overall award for the book of the year, the inaugural winner of which was Leonard Fong Roka for his memoir, Brokenville, which brings a child’s eye view to the civil war on Bougainville.

The war, for him, began in class 2A at Arawa Community School. There was a commotion along his row of desks: the son of a policeman reported fighting in the mountains. There had been rumours and strange behaviour among the adults, and this time even the teacher stopped to listen. The division was right there in that classroom, between the dark-skinned children of Bougainville and the “redskin” children of parents from the mainland. At first it is clear enough for the young Roka. It’s us against them. Our island. Their government. Our land. Their mine.

The reality, of course, proves less clear cut for a boy whose father was a “redskin” from West New Britain and whose mother is from Bougainville. He has relatives on all sides. There are those who depend on the economy generated by the mine; there is his uncle, Joseph Kabui, a senior man in the militant interim government. Over the next years, before he can return to school, Roka will learn a great deal about war and tribalism, the contradictions of a nation drawn from colonial borders, about moral ambiguity, about betrayal and possibility.

“I owe much to [that] crisis,” he writes in his acknowledgments. “It made me who I am.”

It is in such writing from Bougainville, perhaps not paradoxically, that the pulse of change ticks most strongly.
While Drusilla Modjeska’s review highlighted the tempestuous environment in which Papua New Guinean writers were living and writing, Australian journalist Ben Packham, who lived in Papua New Guinea, wrote an article for the Lowy Institute enumerating some of the issues contributing to this situation and wondered why his fellow journalists didn’t regard Papua New Guinea as particularly interesting. It was the old story of ignorance and apathy told from a slightly different perspective:

An editor once told me, there are always more than enough stories to go around. It's a good rule for a reporter to live by. But some environments are simply flush with more stories than others. Papua New Guinea has a richness of news to match its mineral and cultural wealth. Australian journalists and editors looking for compelling stories should cast their eyes north.

The ABC's former veteran Pacific correspondent Sean Dorney told me recently, "When I was based in Moresby I often said the stories were so interesting that items that could only make it onto page four or five of the Post Courier would be front page stories in any other country. There were just better ones ahead of those."

The Australian's Rowan Callick, who's also had a long association with PNG, says sustained coverage of the country should flow from an understanding of the resources sector here.... And yet, PNG is also a largely ungoverned land where the rule of law is tenuous and extends only as far as the major highways; where the nation state is an amalgam of 800-plus tribal groupings, and ritualised conflict has been a way of life for generations.

Few realise that at current growth rates, Papua New Guineans will outnumber Australians sometime this century, and they'll be desperately trying to lift their standard of living. As one old PNG hand told me: "This is a state in transformation and we don't know what the end game is yet."

Most PNG Attitude readers, generous in their support and providers of laudatory comment, probably didn’t appreciate the relentless nature of the blog and the Crocodile Prize. As soon as the 2014 competition was done and dusted it was on with the next one, and securing sponsorships always took priority:

The fifth Crocodile Prize national literary contest will kick off on Monday 24 November for what promises to be a big year for Papua New Guinea’s writers. The contest will culminate in September 2015 when, for the first
time, the awards event moves outside Port Moresby for two days of activity at Kundiawa in Simbu Province.

The Simbu Writers Association is working in close cooperation with provincial authorities to ensure the success of the event and a budget of K110,000 has been targeted. Meanwhile the Crocodile Prize Organisation has its eyes on a sponsorship budget of about K100,000 to fund prizes, book production, publicity and other activities.

The Crocodile Prize website is to be revamped in readiness for the 2015 contest. Meanwhile, the Rivers Award for Peace and Harmony Writing, which closes on Monday 17 November, has attracted a record number of 50 entries with a little over a week remaining.

Each new competition was approached with confidence. We knew there would be disappointments and setbacks but now believed we’d always get there. The first disappointment for the 2015 Prize, as Keith recorded, came in early November 2014. And it was a stunner. The headline told the story, ‘Australian High Commission withdraws Crocodile Prize funding’:

There would have been no Crocodile Prize national literary awards in Papua New Guinea if it wasn’t for the steady hand of Australian High Commissioner Ian Kemish in 2010. Mr Kemish settled down some nervous nellies at the High Commission who counselled against involvement in a project that was not the brainchild of a team of consultants or an Australian bureaucrat trying to get some runs on the board. The then High Commissioner provided a stable platform from which an idea could grow.

So yesterday, when I received the briefest of emails from Andrew Gavin, First Secretary (Public Diplomacy) at the High Commission in Port Moresby, advising that the previous sponsorship of $3,000 would not be renewed in 2015, I felt disappointed that a relationship had been severed that was so instrumental in getting the Prize established. That there was no explanation – not even an “other areas of assistance have a higher priority” – was, in my view, discourteous.

To be fair, Mr Gavin did offer the High Commission as a venue for a future function “should the committee decide to have an awards night again in Port Moresby”. Next year’s awards event will be in Kundiawa – a triumph for the recently-established Simbu Writers Association and symbolic of how the Prize is maturing and beginning to penetrate the inner life of Papua New Guinea. It would have been benevolent for the High Commission to offer a helping hand to the SWA to assist it to stage this important national event. But this was clearly not in Mr Gavin’s mind.
The Crocodile Prize Organisation, COG, received $3,000 from the High Commission this year which was entirely spent on Crocodile Prize anthologies distributed free of charge mainly to schools and libraries throughout PNG. That $3,000 bought about 300 books. The PNG Association of Australia generously provided a grant of $5,000 (500 books). And COG itself found another $2,000 from its scarce funds for a further 200 books.

In all, we were able to distribute about 1,000 free anthologies so Papua New Guineans could read their own literature, described in last Saturday’s The Australian newspaper as “confident, tough and fearless”. In her review, author Drusilla Modjeska reflected on the influence of the Prize as it enters its fifth year: “Much of the tentativeness has gone - a new generation of Papua New Guineans is claiming the written as part of their storytelling, debating inheritance...”

This project – which has spun off a publishing house with 17 book titles to its credit and annual writers’ workshops - emerged from a group of Papua New Guinean and Australian writers. It is administered in their spare time with no reward but the satisfaction of knowing they are providing PNG with a substantive home-grown literature. It is a minor marvel that the Prize has sustained itself for five years on this basis.

And, of course, it couldn’t have been achieved without sponsorship funding that largely goes into awards and books: providing something for writers and something for readers. There will be more positive news on sponsors in the next few days as we move towards the launch of the 2015 Crocodile Prize on Monday. Most of the main awards are already funded; but it seems that many readers will miss out. That said, overall, 2015 promises to be another good year for the Prize and for PNG’s writers.

The Crocodile Prize Organisation regrets that, after five challenging years, the Australian High Commission no longer wants to be part of the story.

Neither Keith nor I were surprised at this crass and meaningless decision by the High Commissioner and her senior staff at Waigani. Since Ian Kemish’s departure as High Commissioner, the relationship with the embassy had been cooling. Perhaps PNG Attitude had been too critical of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian government in general; perhaps it was the abrupt ideological change in Canberra. We certainly didn’t know, and Andrew Gavin, First Secretary (Public Diplomacy), was refusing to tell us.

In any event it was a meaningless act. A meagre $3,000 was
not going to kill the Croc nor assist Australia’s budgetary woes. It did mean a couple of hundred books of Papua New Guinean writing would not see the light of day in Papua New Guinean schools; but the High Commission – still pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars into the Buk bilong Pikini program (which, as if in sympathy with the High Commission, had also seen fit to abandon the Crocodile Prize without a beg your pardon) - was deaf and blind to this.

All in all, it was something of a debacle of Australian diplomatic lead-footedness and thick-headedness. Keith and I remained very grateful for Ian Kemish’s unstinting help at the beginning - it had occurred in the right amount at the right time - but we now had our own motive force. PNG Attitude’s readers and the Crocodile Prize’s sponsors would see us through.

If happenings in Simbu Province were any indication, the writers of Papua New Guinea were also beginning to grasp control of their own destiny. Teacher and prolific PNG Attitude contributor Jimmy Awagl (photo) explained that students at the Ku High School had published an anthology of their writing, the first book of its kind in Papua New Guinea:

It was a struggle for students to write quality material as they had not been taught to systematically structure stories and essays. And the construction of poetry proved complex. The production process was a long one. I held special classes to explain to students how to write material, the handwritten entries were typed and formed into an acceptable style of writing.

The manuscripts were then forwarded to Francis Nii to edit the material ready for publication in book form. The artwork, introduction and foreword were prepared and submitted to Phil Fitzpatrick for final editing and design for publication under the Pukpuk Publications imprint.

Francis Nii followed up this report with more good news. Preparations for the Crocodile Prize awards in Simbu were going well and the organisers were receiving great support from local politicians and business people.
However the Simbu model for establishing a writers association and benefitting from its spin-offs was not being emulated elsewhere in Papua New Guinea as Keith and I had hoped would happen. There were lots of promises and expressions of admiration for what was occurring in Simbu but even well-attended preliminary meetings seemed unable to provide the organisational spark that would consolidate the birth of another writers association and strengthen the country’s pathway to an entrenched written literary culture. It was very frustrating. If organisation and management was provided as an exoskeleton, Papua New Guinea’s literature flourished. But, with the exception of Simbu, if self-reliance was required, the whole enterprise ground to a halt. We were experiencing one of the core problems of Papua New Guinea. Dependence.

In November 2014 the Australian national news bureau, Australian Associated Press (AAP) closed its office in Papua New Guinea. AAP had been in the country for nearly sixty years. The closure of its office was a reflection of changing times and the growing austerity in the media industry. Coverage of events in Papua New Guinea for Australian consumption would now be left to freelance reporters and photographers. Eoin Blackwell had the dubious honour of being the last AAP correspondent to serve in Papua New Guinea.

For PNG Attitude, whose stated objective was the nurturing of the relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea, it appeared to be a retrograde step and a further weakening of an already tenuous link. Conversely, however, it would strengthen the blog’s role as a bridge between Australian audiences and events in Papua New Guinea.

The day after the closure of the AAP office, another conclusion of sorts was announced. AusAID had been merged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The merger was part of the Australian government’s savage cost cutting of its overseas aid program as well as a reflection of AusAID’s historical incompetence in delivering that program. What this might mean
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for Australian boots on the ground in Papua New Guinea was not clear. In any event, and as Keith explained, the disappearance of AusAID would not be mourned in the way the loss of the AAP office would:

AusAID is no more; it has gone, been axed, daipinis, kaput. Yesterday the Australian government’s aid agency was merged with its parent Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). AusAID had been in operation for 40 years. Its record was mixed. It got the aid money spent all right, but how effectively it did it was often a matter of controversy. Boomerang aid; sloughing off huge amounts of money to consultants; funding fuzzy projects which never seemed to get anywhere; showing a disdain for little projects that might have a big effect because they were, er, little....

There’s more. A big one was early in AusAID’s history when it killed off the International Training Institute, the one organisation in Australia that was building great relationships with emerging managers in developing countries. I suppose AusAID will be missed by some – mainly the big aid contractors and academics, who found in AusAID a willing donor for conferences, studies and reports.

AusAID was first established as the Australian Development Assistance Agency (ADAA) in 1973, then it became ADAB agency became AusAID in 1995. Labor took it away from DFAT and made it an executive agency in 2010. But it was all alphabet soup really. Whatever it was called, it always seemed to struggle with its role.

The merger with DFAT seems likely to cost a lot of public servants their jobs and deny a lot of consultants their fees. It will also, some people reckon, strip the aid budget of over a billion dollars a year. You’d feel a lot worse about that if you believed AusAID was a fine organisation doing a good job. There are not many people who weren’t on its teat who’d be prepared to go that far. It will not be missed.

Val Rivers had always insisted that her baby, the Rivers Awards for Peace and Harmony Writing, should be conducted separately from the Crocodile Prize. As she was the benefactor, Keith gave her this privilege while he provided the organisation. So immediately following each year’s Crocodile Prize awards, the Rivers’ contest would be launched and, most appropriately given its theme, conclude just before Christmas.

In 2014 the prize money allocated by Val had leaped to K5,500 and eight writers shared the spoils. The winners of the first level
awards were John Kaupa Kamasua, Roslyn Tony and Arnold Mundua. Second level awards went to Charlene Nii, Agnes Maineke, Raymond Komis Girana and Mathias Kin. And there was a special award to Jimmy Awagl for diligence and consistency in writing.

This news was a good way to end 2014 and it was disseminated even as hundreds of Crocodile Prize anthologies made their way from CreateSpace in the United States to some of the most remote locations in the world. Overall, despite the truculence of the Australian High Commission, it had been a good year. The Prize had been rescued and re-emerged as the best yet. But in typical Papua New Guinean fashion, there was a one last surprise to come, as I wrote in an article called, ‘The book thieves of Papua New Guinea’:

There are unexpected drawbacks in running something like the Crocodile Prize national literary award in Papua New Guinea. Like some sponsors, who make all sorts of promises and lead you up the garden path and wait until you’ve made irrevocable commitments before pulling the rug out from under you. Or people who promise faithfully to do certain things and then blithely ignore them.

Then there are things that are a bit more inexplicable. A case in point is the delivery of copies of the anthology. Quite a few shipments have gone astray, enough to be a worry. In tracking these shipments we’ve discovered they all make it to Papua New Guinea before disappearing. CreateSpace uses a variety of freight companies, depending upon the size of the order. The shipments usually go to agents in Port Moresby before being delivered. Small shipments go by ordinary mail. Some of the agents collect GST and customs duties, others don’t; it’s quite unpredictable and mysterious.

Some of the lost books are traceable. A shipment of six copies of Diddie Kinamun Jackson’s poetry collection, Daddy Two Shoes, seems to have been sent to Indonesia by one of the shippers. Obviously someone in the USA thinks Papua New Guinea is part of Indonesia. That’s simple stupidity, but there are some other patterns emerging with more sinister connotations. I have some contacts in Port Moresby who have been checking shipments for me and what they report isn’t good. About two weeks ago, one of them reported seeing copies of the anthology on sale in one of Mosbi’s markets. The seller also had copies of books obviously stolen from the National Library and school libraries.

The seller wouldn’t say where he had got them. He did know, however, that they are a very marketable commodity. It’s not quite on a par with
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stealing and selling medicines from the hospitals but it’s still annoying. The market is fairly close to where a few shipments have gone missing, the Boroko Post Office. Shipments to Buka in Bougainville also rank highly in the missing and lost category. I haven’t said anything to date but I’m starting to suspect that some of the shipments have been stolen. This is particularly aggravating because we distribute the anthology free of charge.

It struck me in a perverse sort of way that the fact people thought the anthologies were valuable enough to steal and sell should be flattering. I just hoped people were reading them and not using them to roll *brus* (tobacco) for smoking.

The anthologies – 1,500 of them in 2014 - were freely distributed to Papua New Guinea libraries and schools through a wide network of *PNG Attitude* readers and contributors who received the books in bulk from CreateSpace. It proved a cheap and efficient mechanism and, as a reward, the distributors were told they could keep one or two books for their own use.

Meanwhile a considerably more bizarre story was unfolding in Port Moresby where parliamentary Speaker Theo Zurenouc and Clerk Vela Konivara had sanctioned the removal of some structures from the national parliament building, also known as the *Haus Tambaran*. This decision, labelled as “heinous sacrilege” by Dr Andrew Moutu, director of the National Museum, was made because the carved images and totemic poles were thought to have the powers of evil.

“The decorated lintel belongs to an assembly of cultural paraphernalia that was designed to induce discipline and respect through the psychology of fear and intimidation,” Dr Moutu said, adding that the National Museum resisted the implementation of these plans but its advice was rejected by the Speaker and Clerk. “Culture and history provide the soul and heart of any nation and to desecrate cultural symbols in this manner is to subject our national identity to an alien self-image,” Dr Moutu added.

The Speaker’s actions occasioned a huge debate on *PNG Attitude* which ran for many weeks. The half dozen articles on the same subject published on the blog each drew a record number of
comments. Several of the articles and many commentators supported the actions of the Speaker and defended him vociferously. The traditional spiritual fears and anxieties still ran deep in Papua New Guinea.

Then, just as this kerfuffle appeared to have died down, it was revealed that the government was going to buy an old but unauthenticated copy of the Bible, which, the evil carvings now removed, would be given a place of honour in the Haus Tambaran. Papua New Guinea was indeed the land of the unexpected.
While many of the Papua New Guinean writers who submitted pieces to *PNG Attitude* and the Crocodile Prize benefitted from Keith’s editing and applied what they had learned to their subsequent writing, authors aiming at longer works required more detailed help. As noted earlier, to cater for this we had established a mentoring system where practised Australian and Papua New Guinean writers mentored their aspirant peers. At the time we were not expecting momentous results but considered it a worthwhile thing to do.

After the initial partnership between mentor and writer was instigated, there was no reliable way of judging how successful these relationships were. In most cases the mentoring was conducted by email and skype and progressed in isolation. However, at the beginning of 2015 some success stories were becoming apparent. One of the most fruitful relationships was between Ed Brumby and Baka Bina (photo). Later Ed took on an equally productive mentoring role with Marlene Dee Gray Potoura. In January Ed reported on his experience:

Friendships come in many forms and from many sources. Many of my most lasting friendships were formed when I was training to teach in Papua New Guinea in the mid-1960s, and then during my nearly 10 years as a teacher and writer there until the early 1970s. Papua New Guinea remains, as was reinforced for me last year, a continuing source of friendship.

I have never met my newest Papua New Guinean friend. We’ve had several telephone conversations and share frequent email exchanges.
Through these contacts, and the power of a shared interest, I’ve come to know and admire Baka Bina as a true friend. I know, for instance, that he’s been a soldier, teacher, a village layabout (his own words) and a lawyer. Now he is a long-serving senior officer in the PNG National Court registry.

I also know that he is a true family man, committed to and supported by his wife (a teacher with multiple qualifications), four adult children and several grandchildren. He is an exemplary citizen of PNG who, while domiciled in Port Moresby, retains resilient connections with his home village in the Eastern Highlands.

Apart from his family and work, my newest friend has a great passion: to write. And there lies our shared interest and connection, and the source of our friendship. Baka Bina was writing well before the institution of the Crocodile Prize, but there’s no doubt it has served to inspire and encourage him, as it has with so many other Papua New Guinean writers.

It’s more than the Prize itself. The mentorships and other support that Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick have put in place provide a growing number of Papua New Guinean writers with access to experience and advice from other writers who help develop their writing and storytelling skills.

When I asked, in an email, why he writes, Baka told me he considers himself an introvert (with the implication that writing is an attractive solitary activity) and that it allows him to escape other obligations - which I don’t necessarily believe. He also told me that his stories seemed to entertain his family and friends – which they undoubtedly do.

What Baka didn’t mention at first, but which became apparent as our relationship developed, is that his wife, Emily (an Arts graduate) not only supports and encourages his writing but that she is his muse and best critical friend. It adds strength to the saying that “behind every good man, there’s a good woman.”

Emily was a prime mover and informant for Baka’s first novel, Man of Calibre, which has just been published on CreateSpace and is available through Amazon. The novel describes, in entertaining detail and through a cast of memorable characters, the processes of contemporary dispute resolution in an Eastern Highlands village.

It has been my great privilege and a wonderfully satisfying experience to accompany Baka and Emily on a six-month journey to bring Man of Calibre to fruition. The relationship between author and mentor or editor can be fraught with all kinds of difficulties. But that was certainly not our experience.

Baka, quite rightly, chose to accept my suggestions, or not, with admirable grace, and through our frequent exchanges of manuscripts and emails, and the occasional telephone call, we developed the kind of rapport that many editors and authors only dream of – a rapport that can be called, unreservedly, “friendship”. 
I had read some of Baka’s earlier books and recognised a considerable talent that showed even greater promise. With Ed’s sure assistance, *Man of Calibre* was honed and worked into a significant contribution to Papua New Guinean literature. The book went on to be the Crocodile Prize 2015 Book of the Year, joining Leonard Fong Roka’s much admired *Brokenville*. In a review of *Man of Calibre* I was confident enough to call it an instant classic.

Ed was also working with Marlene Potoura (photo) and, while her success was not as great as Baka’s, she was well along that road. Marlene was able to work across multiple genres ranging from children’s literature to heavy duty adult fare. Later in the year *Pukpuk Publications* helped her publish a book of short stories. During the year, her talent was recognised in an invitation to participate in a Commonwealth Foundation writers’ workshop in Fiji; one of three representatives from Papua New Guinea. Ed Brumby on Marlene:

Marlene Dee Gray Potoura is a remarkable and talented woman. She is a single mother who is raising two children. She also operates a private school. And, as readers of *PNG Attitude* know, she is a prolific writer of short stories, poems and stories for children.

This labour of love is undertaken almost every night after her children have gone to bed. Marlene often writes until three in the morning. As she says, “I love writing. It is truly my passion and I just wish I had more time to do it and to fulfil my dream of having my works published properly.”

As I have with my other PNG writer friend, Baka Bina, I’ve been privileged to accompany Marlene on her most recent writing journeys. Such is her energy and creativity, I’ve been hard pressed to keep up!

Marlene later wrote about her experience as a Commonwealth literary figure in Fiji:
There was the usual *sik blo air niugini* and, after I checked in, my 5:30 pm flight out of Nadzab was cancelled. I then had to wait two long hours after which we were told to queue again and rebook for an early bird at 7:30 am the next day. I was on my way to the Commonwealth Pacific Writers workshop in Fiji and, through the hullaballoo of stranded and angry passengers, I tried hard to be polite even though I was tired and fed up.

After sorting out things at the counter, I went home the 35 kilometres to Lae and was again up ready early next morning for the 4:00 am airport transfer bus back to Nadzab. We finally boarded the flight at 8:30 am. In Port Moresby I scuttled straight to the international check-in and, when I went to the departure lounge, fellow workshop participant Lorna introduced herself to me and we talked about family, writing and Fiji. Then we kept looking around for the third Papua New Guinean writer, Bomai Witne, and we kind of saw a man frequently looking our way and decided it was him. I asked him, ‘Excuse me, are you Bomai? He saw the humour in it and asked us, ‘Are you girls on a blind date?’ We started laughing and I explained that we were on the same trip but couldn’t locate Bomai.

Anyway, eventually Bomai introduced himself to me in the plane. We chatted and laughed like old friends. We were very pleased to have met each other at last. We transited at Henderson airport in Honiara and arrived in rainy Nadi. We went through customs and walked to the domestic terminal to get a flight to Suva. When we arrived in Nausori airport in Suva, we chatted with the airport police officers while we waited for the University of South Pacific driver to pick us up and take us to the Peninsula Hotel. The workshop was held at the Holiday Inn.

I had a fulfilling time, firstly meeting different writers from the Pacific Islands and then reading the different types of writing (I had only previously read Bomai’s excellent essays on *PNG Attitude*). Truthfully, I enjoyed all the writing and also the writers’ company. On the first day of introductions, Bomai and I talked about our writing and *PNG Attitude*. All the participants really envied the Crocodile Prize, but we told them it was open only to Papua New Guineans. I was astonished to see writers using their break time to go to *PNG Attitude* and read the work of our writers in Papua New Guinea. Peter Sipeli said, ‘Marlene, honestly, the *Attitude* is truly amazing. There are so many writers in Papua New Guinea.’

Sunila Gallapatti from Commonwealth Foundation and Patrick French, a biographer and historian, showed, directed and mentored each of us in our writing. They mentored me and helped me to talk about my nonfiction novel, *My beloved father and his land*. They showed me outlining, structuring, interview techniques and encouraged me not to worry about what people think because it is my story and I can write it. I have always struggled with writing real events because I am a fast fiction writer and my writing usually comes straight from my mind. Writing about real events is
always a drag for me but, since the workshop, I am jotting down real events in my life.

Towards the end of the workshop, we went to a poetry slam organised by Peter Sipeli our host from University of the South Pacific and Mere Nailatikau, a writer from Fiji, at the Onyx Bar. Mere, who was at the workshop with us, read my poem, *When rifles ruled*. It was sort of a hit and I got interviewed on Fiji TV’s breakfast show before we left to return to PNG. Since returning, *Mai Life* editor, Wame Valentine, has also asked to run a story on me for the April issue. So, since Fiji, as well as being a better writer, I’m feeling quite a celebrity!

While it was possible for Baka Bina and Marlene Potoura to publish books using Amazon’s CreateSpace and to market them on the Amazon website, neither had acquired the exposure needed to sell a lot of books and it was the same for all Papua New Guinean writers who used this method of publication to try to advance their careers.

Papua New Guinea has few bookshops, there were no reliable distribution systems (which is why we had set up our own in-house system for the Crocodile Prize anthology) and most people do not possess credit cards to take advantage of mail order. These drawbacks greatly distanced writers from potential readers.

Beyond marketing their own books (which many Papua New Guinean writers do at great expense to themselves) there are few distribution options they can tap into. This is another major stumbling block on that bumpy track that is Papua New Guinean literary endeavour. Whether there will be a breakthrough in the near future probably depends on a large international benefactor stepping into the breach. Certainly the Papua New Guinean and Australian governments are not interested. They see it as enough to spend millions of dollars building libraries for small children. But the bulk of the population, millions of people who could immediately turn knowledge into action, remained bereft. The reasoning behind such decision-making seemed senseless.

Prior to independence, kiaps and the teachers among other professionals were deployed throughout Papua New Guinea, often in the remotest areas. They had a great deal of personal contact with Papua New Guineans in the villages. By the time PNG
**Attitude** was established, most of these people were either retired or on the cusp of retirement. They had also reached the age of reflection and, for many of them, their colonial experiences as young men and women in Papua New Guinea emerged as one of the most important parts of their lives. As Trevor Shearston had put it, they had “something in the blood”.

In their later years, often many decades removed from Papua New Guinea, they were ready to make a different contribution. These people proved to be a core group within **PNG Attitude**’s expatriate readers and contributors. Many of them wrote their own memoirs; curiously, more kiaps than teachers although both groups had stories worth telling. Perhaps the kiaps’ experience had been more romantic and adventurous.

In any event, **PNG Attitude** hoovered up information from these erstwhile colonial officials, providing the historical information to the Papua New Guinean readers and helping fill the void caused by the lack of a detail, or even a summary, historical narrative in Papua New Guinea, even in the schools. Whenever an expatriate – kiap, teacher, missionary or other - described pre-independence life and events, their writing would always attract a large number of comments from Papua New Guineans and Australians.

Any gardener will tell you that well-fertilised soil bears a more bountiful crop and the same principle applied at **PNG Attitude**. I particularly enjoyed the role of the gadfly, writing about contentious issues which would provoke comment. Some other writers did the same and, in the selection of articles from other media sources for republishing, Keith often had the same thing in mind. It wasn’t a desire to sensationalise in the tabloid sense but an effort to engage readers in meaningful discussion and debate. **PNG Attitude** was a continuing debate and the contributors generally applied good quality fertiliser.

The Crocodile Prize was a huge stimulus and incentive for Papua New Guinean writers. On some days entries to the competition dominated the published fare on **PNG Attitude**. This
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worked very well, enlivening the pages of the blog and contributing greatly to its popularity and readership.

Meanwhile, social media was continuing to expand at warp speed in Papua New Guinea, fulfilling the role of a more radical news and current affairs service. Many of the Papua New Guinean blogs were threatened with harassment and censorship (although little ever eventuated) but PNG Attitude, based in Australia, largely avoided such problems. Freedom of expression was becoming an issue as the O’Neill government threatened to control and even silence dissident and critical voices. Rowan Callick of The Australian newspaper surveyed the media scene:

The Papua New Guinea government has moved to seize dominance of the domestic broadcasting market, buying via state-owned enterprise Telikom the most viewed free-to-air television station as the countdown begins for the next national election. The timing is immaculate, as highly politicised PNG moves past the halfway mark of its five-year parliament. Telikom also operates FM100, which claims the widest radio coverage and reach in the country, and is especially influential in current affairs, and music station HotFM 97.1. Last year it bought internet and data company Datec from Steamships.

The government owns the PNG National Broadcasting Corporation, which was established in the tradition of the ABC’s operations in PNG during colonial days. It runs Kundu 2 TV, which has been the major current affairs rival to EM TV, and radio stations throughout the country. The print market, in comparison, lacks direct government involvement.

The daily national newspapers are the Post Courier, chiefly owned by News Corp, The National, owned by Sarawak-based Tiong Hiew-king, a Malaysian billionaire who also owns newspapers in Malaysia and Hong Kong and PNG logging giant Rimbunan Hijau. The major Christian denominations, led by the Catholic Church, own the weekly Wantok, the only newspaper in Tok Pisin, the most spoken language.

The government has meanwhile sought to clamp down on PNG’s rampantly critical and often highly defamatory social media - or to shift its culture. But it has so far been mostly frustrated in such attempts. In a remarkably fluid and challenging media scene, the government is certainly developing a capacity to dominate broadcasting. But turning that capacity to its political advantage is a more challenging step - not least because of the still strongly independent ethos of PNG’s journalism profession.

In early 2015 Keith announced that Dame Carol Kidu DBE had
agreed to be patron of the Crocodile Prize, a significant appointment because Dame Carol (photo), a former Minister and Opposition Leader, was one of the most highly respected people in Papua New Guinea. Lending her name to the competition, even if she couldn’t be actively involved, was acknowledgement of the importance of the Prize. It also, in part, offset the lack of overt support for the competition by most politicians. Keith was trying to implant the Crocodile Prize within Papua New Guinean society and, if this was to occur, it now seemed it would have to be done gradually. Dame Carol joined a small but impressive group of other high profile supporters like Governor Gary Juffa, Minister Charles Abel and a number of leading business, academic and church figures.

In March 2015, John Kaupa Kamasua, an academic at the University of UPNG, announced the impending formation of a writers’ group in Port Moresby. A roll up of 21 people attended a meeting at the university and many others registered their interest. John told participants that the goal was to formally organise writers in Port Moresby through an association which would facilitate and promote their work, nurture their development, give them publicity and market their work.

John told the gathering there was a need to encourage a reading and writing culture, a literary culture, among the general population of the national capital and especially within schools and learning institutions. Four other practising writers spoke, gaining enthusiastic approval from the group, and business executive Corney Korokan Alone gave a powerful talk highlighting what the Crocodile Prize was doing to create interest among writers.

The next step, the meeting agreed, was to begin the process of formalising an entity for writers in Port Moresby. A year later, there was no progress to report. It was the same Papua New
Guinean story reprised: enthusiasm and aspiration were always defeated by the hurdles of implementation, except on those rare occasions when an outstanding leader emerged. And Jimmy Drekore was one of these.

Jimmy was well into the throes of organising the 2015 Crocodile Prize events in Kundiawa when he was named Papua New Guinea’s Digicel Man of Honour.

This was a great tribute to Jimmy – bush poet extraordinaire – and also to the people of Simbu who had supported him in his philanthropic work. “I am humbled and pleased,” Jimmy said accepting the award and one of his most enthusiastic supporters, Mathias Kin, said, “Yes, the man won the highest award in the land.”

After the announcement, Jimmy read a poem he had prepared for this moment. “After I was officially declared the 2014 Digicel Man of Honour,” Jimmy said, “the room was very quiet and, when I read the poem, everyone wanted a copy.”

To top everything off, Keith wrote about the establishment of yet another award in the Crocodile Prize competition:

It is unlikely the Crocodile Prize literary contest, now in its fifth year, would have got off the ground in 2011 without the support of then Australian high commissioner to Papua New Guinea, Ian Kemish. At a time when the Prize required financial and material support, and had no track record to point to, Mr Kemish came to aid of what has been a fruitful initiative. The Crocodile Prize project, run entirely on voluntary effort, has shown itself to be of real benefit to PNG.

During their stay in PNG, Ian Kemish and his wife Roxanne Martens were respected throughout the country for their willingness to go out of their way to support worthwhile endeavours. Ms Martens threw her weight behind a number of projects including Safe Motherhood Alliance of PNG, the PNG Cancer Council and the Port Moresby General Hospital Special Care Nursery. And now she has generously provided a $1,000 sponsorship so the Crocodile Prize can offer a special award for young writers.

All entrants to the Prize under the age of 20 will be eligible for the Martens Award for Young Writers, which is worth K1,000. The balance of the sponsorship will be deployed to providing copies of the *Crocodile Prize Anthology 2015* to schools and libraries throughout Papua New Guinea.

Young writers can enter any category of the Crocodile Prize, submitting the required entry form, and their work will be considered as part of the
Martens Award. The Prize receives many entries from writers under the age of 20 but they are disadvantaged in the competition by lack of life and writing experience. The Martens Award will motivate them and provide recognition to a new generation of PNG writers.

It was developing into a big year for Jimmy Drekore: Crocodile Prize, Papua New Guinea Man of Honour and now Keith reported his upcoming attendance at the 2015 Brisbane Writers Festival. Bob Cleland had been instrumental in brokering Jimmy’s participation with the aim of making the presence of Papua New Guinean writers an annual affair. Keith and Bob kicked in the dollars to ensure Jimmy could make it.

The festival is a great meeting place for people associated with literature in Australia and overseas – authors, journalists, administrators, supporters and readers. Its organisers told Bob they were keen to have Papua New Guinea officially represented in the festival in future years and informal discussions in 2015 would precede full Papua New Guinean participation in 2016. This seemed the best opportunity yet to initiate meaningful collaboration between Papua New Guinean and Australian writers.

As PNG Attitude had increased its readership over the years – it was now reaching an average of 2,000 readers a day and 10,000 different readers each month – so it was developing informal relationships with organisations that had an interest in Papua New Guinea. The blog was also a continuing source of information for journalists writing on Papua New Guinea-related matters and Keith was frequently asked for his views.

The Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank specialising in international policy, had picked up on the interactions between Australians and Papua New Guineans on PNG Attitude. It occasionally invited some of the more prominent blog contributors, like Martyn Namorong and Leonard Fong Roka, to speak at its events.

In early 2015 the institute’s Melanesia Program held a roundtable in Sydney to discuss and brainstorm the relationship between the two countries, Papua New Guinea in 2015 – At a
Crossroads and Beyond. Keith was invited to participate and, as he often did before important meetings, he asked PNG Attitude readers for their thoughts which, along with his own, he distilled into a presentation. In the case of the Lowy roundtable, the list of issues reflected the debates and dialogues that had been recurring on the blog for a number of years. Keith organised the readers’ contributions to match the roundtable agenda:

Education was a popular focus for readers, who noted some big hurdles to overcome including the lack of resources deployed to the education system, poor management skills in agencies and institutions and that most shocking of educational outcomes, the permanent transitional social and economic state of semi-educated school leavers. Australia should loom large in the future of education in Papua New Guinea by providing more teacher training and secondary education in Australia and offering many more Australian teachers under a secondment program. Twinning, student exchanges and faculty exchanges were also recommended to assist bring Papua New Guinea’s universities to international quality benchmarks. Given education had great inter-generational impact, it needed to be elevated significantly on the planning agenda.

Entrepreneurship was seen as critical especially for the 85 percent of Papua New Guineans in the informal economy where the task of transitioning to greater efficiency and productive growth had hardly started. This would be achieved through upskilling and providing greater access to financial advice, credit and micro-banking. It was proposed that a Chamber of Informal Economy be established to give a voice to informal economy participants and to deal systematically with the issues and challenges affecting them.

When it came to law and order it was impossible to go beyond the devastation inflicted by corruption, an issue on which the O’Neill government had very weak credentials: dismantling the corruption-busting Task Force Sweep; failing to implement the long-promised independent corruption commission; and subverting the justice system to circumvent allegations of high level graft. Given that relations between nations know no particular morality, corruption is not an issue likely to torpedo the relationship with Australia (that itself found it inconvenient to establish a Federal corruption commission) but it would contaminate, in one way or another, every other issue. If serious about the fight against corruption in Papua New Guinea, Australia should do more to prevent and expose money laundering through domestic financial institutions.

Food security is a global issue from which Papua New Guinea, given appropriate investment and management, could benefit greatly especially
in rural areas. But there needed to be more emphasis on agriculture (“the way forward for Papua New Guinea” many agreed) as a means of employment and as an export earner and import replacer. It was pointed out that farmers need skills, facilities and empowerment with the objective of developing the whole value chain to leverage activity in agricultural research, development and extension.

Gender-based violence was a live issue into which external aid donors were putting considerable resources. There needed to be better support networks for women suffering from domestic violence. But it was obvious that the roots of violence lay in much more complex problems of social dislocation, dissolution of traditional values and a lack of balanced economic participation.

Trade and investment. It was agreed Papua New Guinea should be a key business partner with Australia “but we (Papua New Guineans) lack lots of capacity to implement our development objectives”. One imaginative proposal was to establish a fully Australian owned and operated development bank specialising in micro-loans for people who ordinarily would not be eligible, especially women. If successful, the bank could later be sold to a private operator or to the Papua New Guinea government.

New influences. The controversial existence of the Manus asylum-seekers detention centre was a prominent issue and a cause of angst to many Papua New Guineans not because of any particular concern for the inmates so much as anxiety about their resettlement in Papua New Guinea, which was ill equipped to employ and accommodate its own people in urban areas let alone immigrants.

The predicament of West Papuan nationhood and the mistreatment by Indonesia of the native Melanesians was also raised along with what was seen as Australian “hypocrisy” and silence on what was described as genocide. This was a major issue amongst educated Papua New Guineans and one on which Australia was judged harshly and the Papua New Guinea government seen as being confused.

It was unavoidable that, given the blog’s intense coverage of this issue in the past, that the difficulty of Papua New Guineans getting visas to visit Australia would escape attention and this matter was raised under people-to-people connections. The harsh and bureaucratic visa processes was a burning issue which offended many Papua New Guineans and showed no signs of diminishing in intensity, even after retaliatory action by the Papua New Guinea government to make it more onerous for Australians to obtain entry visas – in any event, something of a self-defeating policy in a country which so desperately desired to build its tourism sector.

The overarching view of readers was that a free flow of citizens between Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand would bring many benefits - political, relational and economic. “Politicians need to start exploring how to include PNG into the arrangements that exist between Australia and New
Zealand,” a respondent said, a view that was shared by many others. “Quit patronising us; quit looking at us through the ‘cane hacker’ lens. Treat us as an independent country just like New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Indonesia,” said one Papua New Guinean; while another was more dismissive: “We should not worry about the patronising attitudes of some Australians - and our leaders should know how to handle those attitudes”.

While development aid was seen as a mixed blessing, there was support for the continuation and the current direction of the aid program. There was general agreement that it should be aimed at rural areas, that it required more effective coordination and that more effort should be directed through churches and NGOs. Where consultants were brought in, they should be familiar with Papua New Guinea and its people and willing to work in rural areas, perhaps attached to local level government, schools and health centres. As you might expect, there was a considerable shopping list of projects which readers said would benefit from aid funding and expertise.

Any of the contributors to this PNG Attitude dialogue could have comfortably joined Keith Jackson at the roundtable. They included: Prof Albert Schram; Bomai Witne; Brendan Duyvestyn; Busa Jeremiah Wenogo; Chris Overland; Jimmy Awagl; Mathias Kin; Michael Dom; Phil Fitzpatrick; Robin Lillicrapp; and Tanya Zeriga-Alone.

The PNG Attitude submission showed that important discussions and debates published on the blog were trickling into mainstream discourse. It was remarkable how the blog managed to find its way into all sorts of nooks and crannies. Here’s Raymond Komis Girana (photo):

I never dreamed of the existence of a place that promotes Papua New Guinea literature with an objective of breaching the so-called ‘culture of silence’; a place encouraging freedom of expression particularly for Papua New Guinean writers. But it just happened that one click on my mouse led me to a wonderful place that bears the name of my country and its way of life, PNG Attitude, with the intention of making friendships and building relationships through literature at national and international level. My experience previously was one of self-alienation, because the more I tried to get to know my world the more I seemed to alienate myself from it.

In mid-2014 I received an email from Fr Giorgio Licini, the former secretary to the Catholic Commission for Social Communications in the Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. It informed
me of a basic media course to be held at Divine Word University for 12 days in November. I immediately replied confirming I would like to fly from Bougainville for the course. “What an offer and great opportunity,” I told myself as I clicked the send button.

Fr Giorgio is there for my arrival at Madang airport and we head to Divine Word University where I am to write and edit articles for two weeks as part of my training. The two of us meet regularly to discuss stories and chat when, at the end of the first week, an important conversation breaks out. “Do you know Leonard Fong Roka?” asks Fr Giorgio in his Italian accent. “Yes, of course I know Leonard. He was my senior at Hutjena Secondary School in 2002,” I answer in my Buka accent. “And do you know Bomai Witne?” he continued while we had tea. “Is he a priest?” I asked. “Not a priest but he a lecturer and writer. He has just written an article about your Bougainville bishop’s homily. He is also coming to the media workshop,” he continued. “Well this is good news,” I told myself.

“These guys are very good writers and you should take some time to read and learn from their writings,” said Fr Giorgio. “If you have time, log in to PNG Attitude to have a look at how the articles are professionally edited. There you will also find many useful resources you may want to use in the future as references. “Who knows, one day you might find some of your articles getting published too.” “Sure I will when I have the chance,” I replied.

The next couple of days saw me surf through PNG Attitude. I found the names of people like Keith Jackson, Phil Fitzpatrick, Michael Dom, Bomai Witne, Leonard Fong Roka, Francis Nii, Garry Juffa, Fidelis Sukina and Marlene Potoura just to name a few of all the writers, the so-called architects of PNG Attitude. I was moved when I read through the articles and poems of different writers and authors. The diverse styles of writings captured my attention and the power of motivation steered my mind to what I might do.

So I wrote my first article, Tsuhana of Hope: the continuing relevance of traditional values, and got in touch with Keith Jackson who published it in PNG Attitude. I wish to tell the writers and authors of PNG Attitude that I have learned and grasped a lot from their wisdom, knowledge and creativity. I hope that one day I will meet them face to face.

PNG Attitude writers were becoming local celebrities and deemed worthy of public recognition and analysis by their peers. Reilly Kanamon (photo next page) wrote a fascinating profile of Leonard Fong Roka, ‘This is ours: PNG literature re-emerges in the 21st century’:
“If only each of us could go back to where we come from, sit by the evening fire and listen to a grumpy old orator once more, we could save the prehistory of this nation,” said Leonard Fong Roka. “I pay tribute to Papua New Guinea’s great writers who have taken up the noble profession of writing,” he continued, his voice ringing with inspiration and determination. It was September 2014, and Roka’s fourth book, *Brokenville*, had just been announced as the Ok Tedi Book of the Year, making him a two-time award winner in the Crocodile Prize.

The first publisher Roka approached had wanted to charge him K6,000 to get *Brokenville* published, a book that holds the untold raw story of the horrific experience of the Bougainville crisis. Working with Phil Fitzpatrick, Roka got the book published and it went on to win an important award. What encouragement this was for PNG writers. It made writing a more noble profession for upcoming Papua New Guinean writers starting from scratch.

After an email discussion with author Sil Bolkin, my hypothesis on Papua New Guinean literature emerges. Why would Papua New Guineans bow down the western paradigm instilled in the books of foreign authors that lack a reflection of Papua New Guinea’s unique heritage? “It was a bit of imperialism from the west aided by the Papua New Guinea government’s ignorance,” stated Bolkin, “until an old kiap and an old journo came along and PNG literature is taking off again through the Crocodile Prize.”

Bolkin made the sensible argument that Papua New Guinea has a vault of knowledge and information that can be recorded for the world to know and admire. But something has to happen first. “To the up and coming writers, write and write and remember that when you write and publish, you continue to live after you die. Everybody else dies and sinks into headless graves. Writers live on,” Bolkin said.

With the inception of the Crocodile Prize and its publications under the watchful eyes of experienced authors and publishers Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick, the enormous creativity in the minds of Papua New Guinean writers telling of the rich originality of the Papua New Guinea experience can be read around the world. I was amazed to read books about my own country written in a new era of writers that use blogging and other social media and have also tapped into traditional publishing with the aid of cutting edge technology. Young Papua New Guineans need to catch this inspiration and direct it to their home grown literature by taking up the noble art of writing.
Academic interest was also beginning to emerge. Dev Capey, a Masters student at Auckland University of Technology, focused his attention on Martyn Namorong’s Namorong Report and PNG Attitude in a 2013 research thesis entitled Blogging for social change in Papua New Guinea:

Nine of Namorong’s July posts were syndicated, or 'reblogged', on PNG Attitude. Almost all of them were his longer, more carefully developed posts: seven essays, one piece of political commentary, and one anonymous post featuring an environmental report, were all re-blogged on PNG Attitude in July.

Farrell and Drezner (2007) argue that within spheres of blogs with common interests, certain blogs become 'elite' blogs and subsequently become important nodes of activity in that blogosphere.... Elite blogs are often aggregators of content, and demand the most attention in a particular area of interest. In the PNG context, Keith Jackson's blog, PNG Attitude, fits that mould.

Jackson first went to Papua New Guinea from Australia as a teacher at aged 18, and eventually became head of planning and policy for Papua New Guinea's National broadcasting commission. He now operates his own public relations company, specialising in Papua New Guinea -Australia relations. Jackson is an important figure in the Papua New Guinean blogosphere and for Papua New Guinean writers in general.

He helped set up the Crocodile Prize for Papua New Guinea literature that Namorong won in its inaugural year. He recently initiated writing fellowships for young Papua New Guineans. Jackson's blog, PNG Attitude, operates with roughly half Australian and half Papua New Guinean authored content. Readers of PNG Attitude reportedly include politicians from Australia, Papua New Guinea, and further abroad, among other influential people.

Farrell and Drezner argue that a particular 'blogosphere' can benefit from a single, active 'focal point blog' like PNG Attitude; they say that such blogs often operate as filterers of other interesting blog posts thus creating "an important coordination point that allows bloggers and blog readers to coordinate on a mutually beneficial equilibrium". Furthermore, Farrell and Drezner argue that focal point blogs then become an important intermediary to the traditional 'mediasphere' as journalists and other opinion makers gravitate towards the consolidated atmosphere of focal point blogs that are constantly reiterating and reinforcing key ideas and issues:

The networked structure of the blogosphere allows interesting arguments to make their way to the top of the blogosphere ... the media
only needs to look at the top blogs to obtain a 'summary statistic' about the distribution of opinions on a given political issue.

Another feature of Namorong's syndicated content on PNG Attitude are the discussions that commonly ensue. Two of Namorong's posts were among the 11 most commented on articles on PNG Attitude for the month of July…. Nine posts were syndicated from The Namorong Report, and Namorong was mentioned by others in articles and comments in posts not authored by Namorong 11 times. He himself was also a frequent commenter, especially in response to comments on his own articles.

Namorong's presence on PNG Attitude is important because of the significant presence of PNG Attitude in the Papua New Guinea -Australia blogosphere. Importantly, he also appears in the minds of other readers as a key figure, as one commenter noted: "Real change in Papua New Guinea can only come from the people and Martyn Namorong and his compatriots are examples of this".

Another significant aspect of PNG Attitude is that whole blog posts are written in response to other writers' posts. A series of blog posts then come to constitute a whole discussion in itself, and in the comments section, further clarification, rebuttals and additional arguments are put forth. John Fowke, an "ex-colonial masta", wrote two entire posts in response to two of Namorong's syndicated essays: Fowke was explicit about challenging Namorong, addressing him directly in his opening paragraphs. For example: “, Martyn Namorong displays views which are penetrating and noteworthy, and which he expresses to great effect. Martyn has many friends and supporters but seems to have reached the end of the road of reading the entrails of Papua New Guinea's past and pronouncing upon the failures of the present.”

Fowke goes on to praise Namorong, but challenges him to take control, look to the future, and be among those enacting change in Papua New Guinea: “To achieve a result which will be both valuable and personally satisfying, Martyn, and the many others like him in Papua New Guinea, must look to the future and ponder upon it. You must link with each other across physical, tribal and occupational barriers on the basis of your common interest and your common level of education and understanding of the principles of change.”

Namorong's response in the comments section below this post is telling, as he defends and re-articulates his vision. In his comment, Namorong argues it is essential to consider the historical context, or the story of development, leading to the present situation. He also expresses a way forward: by realising Papua New Guinea 's National Goals and Directive Principles, as the template for development in PNG....

There is significant discussion in the form of not only comments, but debate through successive blog posts. PNG Attitude marketed itself on Twitter in this way, as Jackson tweeted: "See Namorong's response to an
ex-colonial Masta on tomorrow's *PNG Attitude*. The social dynamic of *PNG Attitude* is one of interaction and debate, whereas The Namorong Report is not, suggesting that different blogs, despite having the same capabilities, grow into different roles.

*PNG Attitude* is an aggregator of content and a significant site of discussion: a 'focal point blog' in Farrell and Drezner's terms. *PNG Attitude*, having a wide range of regular authors, is a key site of discussion for readers and contributors from Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Papua New Guineans abroad. Namorong's posts on the aggregate blog, *PNG Attitude*, are a significant component of his web presence. *PNG Attitude* is potentially the site where Namorong receives his largest readership. It is in his long, carefully constructed blog posts that Namorong's core ideas are fully expressed and most clearly articulated. And it was precisely these strong blog posts that were syndicated, or reblogged, on *PNG Attitude*.

One of the most satisfying spinoffs of *PNG Attitude* and the Crocodile Prize was the creation of the Simbu Writers Association (SWA) and the innovative ways it promoted literature. In an article, Bomai Witne and Francis Nii highlighted the sort of activities SWA was undertaking:

Rosary Secondary School at Kondiu in Simbu Province burst into life a week ago with students, teachers, a *singsing* group, local police and the community converging in the Bishop Cohill Auditorium. They were there for the 2015 Simbu Writers Association school debate, quiz contests and literary awards presentation. Normally, it is inter-school sports or athletic competitions that bring schools together. More rarely, schools get together for other reasons. This was one of them.

The event was made possible by the SWA through its pioneering endeavour, Simbu for Literary Excellence. The event attracted and united provincial high schools and secondary schools. Most SWA members do not have teaching qualifications or have experienced a stint in a classroom but lack of knowledge and experience has not deterred them from pursuing a cause they believe in. Simbu for Literary Excellence was initiated to remedy the problem of Simbu students in high and secondary schools always performing poorly in national English examinations. This was of great concern to SWA because, if students do poorly in English, other subjects will be affected because all school curriculums and examinations are in English.

So SWA members administered essay, poetry and short story competitions in Simbu schools with the papers marked at Kundiawa Lutheran Day High School and the winners announced at the award day at Rosary Secondary School, Kondiu.
The principal of the host school, Gabriel Aina, thanked everyone who came to participate in and witness the event. “Today is an important day in the life of high and secondary schools in Simbu Province,” he began. “We have always taught students in the classrooms but rarely find time and space to facilitate for students to expose or put into practice what they learnt. SWA is a group that partners with us to bridge this gap. They have even helped our students to produce books. They are facilitating debates and quiz competitions. We should give credit to SWA.”

The audience gave a roar of approval and applauded.

Ending his speech, Mr Aina commented, “We cannot become important people where our voices are heard on TVs, radio, newspapers or other public media. We can write and raise our voice from wherever we are.”

While the Crocodile Prize showed much promise in the task of reinvigorating Papua New Guinean literature, it was not an easy road and there were many disappointments along the way, not least being the failure of Papua New Guineans to assume ownership of it. In most cases an initial enthusiasm and vigorous planning dwindled and then petered out.

The significant factor about SWA was it endured and grew stronger. More than anything, it demonstrated that, given the will and dedication, it was possible to create the conditions for a sustainable literary revival in Papua New Guinea. Why it has been so difficult to extend this beyond the mountain borders of Simbu Province is an ongoing perplexity.

In 2015 the poet, Michael Dom, suggested that a petition to the Papua New Guinean government might spur some action. It was designed to persuade the national parliament to provide funding to get Papua New Guinea-authored books into Papua New Guinea’s 4,000 schools. It sought parliamentary approval for “an independence gift to the children of Papua New Guinea in the form of making the five annual Crocodile Prize Anthologies 2011-15 available to all Papua New Guinean schools”.

Again, some initial enthusiasm was there but in the end the petition died a quiet death. In all, Michael only managed to elicit just under three hundred signatures. This was disappointing because the Crocodile Prize was back in good health and going
from strength to strength; 2015 had been a watershed year and there seemed to be light at the end of the tunnel.

Keith’s belief was that broad gestures would never succeed in Papua New Guinea’s relationship-based cultural and political structure. The requirement was for legwork: personal representation to politicians such as SWA had undertaken and then gritty perseverance.

In 2015 Keith himself sought to engineer private discussions with prime minister Peter O’Neill’s wife, Lynda Babao-O’Neill. A high level contact of Keith’s had offered to act as an intermediary. “I’ve had a lovely response from Lynda and she is happy to do what she can to help,” the intermediary wrote. “No promises, but she can certainly put you in contact with the right people and her support will certainly be advantageous to the project. I hope this leads to some ongoing Papua New Guinean funding.”

After discussing the matter with Crocodile Prize Organising Group (COG) chairman, Jimmy Drekore, it was agreed that, following the introduction by the intermediary, Keith would follow up with a communication to Ms Babao-O’Neill. Here are the substantive extracts:

[Internmediary] has kindly made this introduction possible and I thank you for responding to her so positively.... After five years, the big challenge that COG has been unable to address is that of the sustainability of the Prize, which is very much guided by author Phil Fitzpatrick and me, both of us Australian-based old PNG hands and not getting any younger!

COG and the Prize really need to be embedded managerially and administratively in PNG. We tried to do this once before, in 2013, without success and we do not believe this will happen on the present voluntary basis. What is needed is substantial commercial and/or government support for a small professional body to administer the Prize and its associated activities within PNG.

This entity would continue to receive external support as COG does now but its main task will be to build, maintain and expand the Prize and its collateral activities as a wholly Papua New Guinean enterprise. We have not developed a detailed proposal on what budget this will take, but our best estimate is that it will require about an additional K500,000 a year for three years beyond which COG would be expected to have become self-supporting from sponsorship, grants and other revenue streams.
The likely alternative is that, with Phil and me both wanting to assume lesser roles, the project will wind down as a national event and perhaps even fail. So this is the dilemma we face. We have gone as far as we can with the present model, which is only partially embedded in PNG, and we really need to take it a step forward. I would greatly appreciate whatever assistance or advice you are able to offer to ensure the Crocodile Prize remains a vibrant part of PNG’s cultural output.

And, if you haven’t yet seen a copy the Crocodile Prize Anthology, let me know your postal address and I’ll send one to you. I’m sure you’ll be impressed at what Papua New Guinean writers have been able to achieve.

There was only silence from Port Moresby. Whatever initial enthusiasm Lynda Babao-O’Neill had evinced to her good friend the intermediary, it had dissipated.

When the time came for 2015 entries to close and after contributions flooded in as 30 June deadline neared, there were 827 pieces of creative work on the table – 200 more than the previous record of 2014. These came from 132 writers and illustrators, another record. These people represented 19 of the 22 provinces of Papua New Guinea. Once again Simbu excelled itself with one in five of all entries coming from the central highlands province. Next were the university cities and Bougainville: National Capital District (13 percent), Madang (11 percent), Morobe (9 percent), Bougainville (8 percent) and Eastern Highlands (7 percent).

Hela, Gulf and Southern Highlands provinces didn’t manage a single entry. Keith wondered what had happened to all those wonderful storytellers and poets of the Gulf.

The apparent success was tempered by wariness on our part. Keith summed up our feelings:

There is no doubt in my mind that the future of the Crocodile Prize - and the immediate future of a significant creative home-grown literature in Papua New Guinea - rests on the ability of Papua New Guineans to establish provincial or city-based groups of writers. In time, perhaps very rapidly, these could coordinate their activities to form an umbrella national association.
So far, despite positive murmurs from Port Moresby, Bougainville, Sepik, Madang, Eastern Highlands, Enga and Gulf, this has happened only in Simbu. The Simbu Writers Association is a wonderfully well-conceived and managed organisation but one successful project of this kind is not enough to sustain a national literary culture.

It will be a sad day if the splendid writers identified and nurtured by the Crocodile Prize find that, as early as 2016, there is no adequate mechanism to support their development and provide a forum for their writing.

Phil and I have been, and still are, enthusiastic supporters of Papua New Guinean literature. But it’s time, after five years, that this Australian old guard began handing over the reins. This we are keen to do, but there must be something tangible to hand them to. The alternative will be that Papua New Guinea’s second great foray into embracing its own literature will end the same way as the first.

I took this a bit further in an article a few days later in which I reflected on my own experience after leaving Papua New Guinea in the mid-1970s and not returning for over twenty years.

When I went back, I flew into Port Moresby and then on to Mount Hagen and Mendi and further to the border region between the Southern Highlands, Gulf and Western provinces. Putting it mildly, I was amazed and disheartened by the state of the country. Buildings, roads and other infrastructure had fallen apart. Law and order had gone to the dogs and everywhere there were razor wire and security guards.

Hospitals and aid posts didn’t have medicines, schools were falling apart and their teachers collected salaries but didn’t teach. The police were scruffy and finding a public servant at the office before 10 am was almost impossible. It was only the friendliness of the poor people out in the bush who softened the impact. The educated elite didn’t seem to care. They were too busy making money and robbing the country.

I had heard about these problems before my return but didn’t really believe them until I saw it for myself. How could this happen, I asked the people I met. “It’s the government’s fault,” they said. “They won’t provide the funding to maintain infrastructure and services. They are corrupt and keep the money for themselves.” I thought about that, but it didn’t make sense.

Here were roads now overgrown and eroded to the point of being impassable. Back in the 1970s, villagers would never let that happen. They would have been out with their sticks and spades fixing them. It would have been a matter of pride. Now they were sitting on spreading bottoms whinging about the government not doing the work. It was like some sort of terrible malaise had gripped the country. It was very sad.
Catapult forward to 2010 and Keith and I ponder the sorry state of literature in Papua New Guinea. We decided to test the waters by establishing a writing contest, the Crocodile Prize. Slowly but surely the writers started coming out of the woodwork. We published an anthology of the best writing in 2011 and then another each year. At workshops in Port Moresby we discussed options for the future with writers who flew in from all around the country. The participants were excited and enthused. Keith and I decided this was worth continuing, perhaps it could become permanent. The participants agreed. Passion abounded.

We discussed a future where Papua New Guineans would take over and manage the Crocodile Prize. They would grasp the nettle and make it happen. By early 2013, a national writers association was incorporated, funded, populated with over 100 members and an elected board. We handed over the Crocodile Prize. The enthusiasm continued to run high. Six months later the whole thing crashed. Recriminations flew left, right and centre. Keith and I salvaged the mess and, within two months, got a truncated version of the Prize back on track in time for September’s Independence Day.

The 2014 competition went well: more writers, more sponsors, new administrative arrangements, bigger budget and a gloriously enhanced anthology distributed free of charge to many schools and libraries throughout PNG. It was a lot of hard work but the enthusiasm had returned. “We mustn’t let that happen again, it is too important,” the writers told us. The Simbu Writer’s Association was born and made great strides. Nothing much happened in the other provinces, although there were lots of promises.

Keith and I reinforced to our colleagues that we wouldn’t be able to – and should not be expected to – bear the weight of the competition for much longer. People agreed. I wondered if perhaps we’d created a monster that would eventually devour us. I told myself guess it would be our fault if it did.

I was concerned that the malaise, or whatever it was, that saw Papua New Guinea literature go backwards in the years after independence see the demise of the Crocodile Prize. In my mind, there was that eerie feeling of *deja vu.* And yet there were so many good writers with an equally appreciative audience of readers. Would they make a difference? Could they engage institutional support within Papua New Guinea and sustain the project?

These thoughts elicited a range of responses. “I'm interested in how COG intends to run the Prize without Keith and Phil if there is only minimal support for the petition which was considered by many to be a very worthy cause,” said Michael Dom, still seething.
about the limp response to his effort to get parliamentary
engagement in the distribution of locally-authored books into
Papua New Guinean schools.

Ex-kiap and author Chips Mackellar (photo) was more soothing: “Remember, Phil and Keith, that big oaks from little acorns
grow. You have planted the acorn in Simbu, and from there it will grow. It takes 100 years for an oak to fully mature, so you will not be around to see the Simbu oak reach full maturity. But take heart that many will reap where you have sown.”

Meanwhile, in the Simbu, COG chairman Jimmy Drekore was looking for some positive injection from Papua New Guinean writers: “No one wishes to answer the daring question,” he asked, “who will lead after Phil and Keith?”

And Jimmy, who was in the process of organising the first Crocodile Prize awards to be held outside Port Moresby, had more to say. “May I also ask this question, who is willing to host the 2016 Crocodile Prize awards event? If regions are slow to get themselves organised how about institutions like the universities? I'm sure the institutions will fully back it up but it needs human beings to put their hands up to take the lead.”

“It's time more regional groups stepped up,” reiterated Ed Brumby. “What's happening with the Port Moresby writers group? Isn't there anyone at UPNG (or wherever) to take the lead? I can well understand Phil's and Keith's frustrations and fears regarding the future of the Crocodile Prize and of Papua New Guinean writing generally. It's time more people followed the excellent example of the Simbu writers.”

“Let Simbu lead the way in Papua New Guinea literary development,” said Daniel Kumbon (photo). “It can host the Crocodile Prize competition for some time until other centres are ready.” An irritated Keith
responded, “This is not a recipe for success, Daniel, it is a recipe for letting someone else do the work. The Crocodile Prize will be stone dead within three years unless writers in other provinces and cities in Papua New Guinea come to the party and replicate Simbu's efforts.”

Keith continued:

There's no doubt the Crocodile Prize is a slog - a hard slog but a good slog. You'd think after five years such a worthwhile initiative might have drilled down some strong roots. But our old Croc has yet to do that as it lumbers forward.

There will be a Prize in 2016. But it will be modified in its administration to displace more of the burden to Papua New Guinea. This will include an expectation that four or five other regions will emulate the bold and successful establishment of the Simbu Writers Association by forming their own groups.

The formation of strong regional writers groups will ensure the sustainability of the Prize and the many benefits it brings - recognition, reward, mentoring, training, publication, comradeship.... The SWA is not only about writers and writing but about education, project management, development, literacy and national and provincial pride.

If by 2017, there has been no significant progress to shape an effective Papua New Guinea-run Crocodile Prize, I would be pessimistic that it will continue in its present form or at all. This would be a great shame and a poor reflection on the institution-building capacity of Papua New Guinea.

The Crocodile Prize was certainly hard work and there was no doubt that Keith, who had other obligations and was plagued by ill health, was getting weary of the workload and carrying it without much help. In many ways I felt the same way.

We were both reaching the conclusion that, if something sweeping didn’t occur, we would eventually have to let the Crocodile Prize go and allow it to sink or swim on its own. Propping it up indefinitely was not an option. There was a need for regional leadership and the writers, through their silence, were admitting that they were incapable of providing it.
While Keith, I and others were contemplating the future of the Prize, Florence Jonduo (photo), a researcher and writer with Media Niugini Limited, reported on the appalling state of literacy in Papua New Guinea after forty years of independence. The statistics were heartbreaking and gave us another reason to lament the inexplicable failure of Papua New Guineans to take on the Crocodile Prize in their own right. Florence wrote:

As Papua New Guinea’s fortieth anniversary of independence approaches so does the twentieth National Literacy Week. With this in mind, we might turn our attention to the state of literacy in our country. Here’s the short story – the literacy rate is increasing at a snails’ pace. Last year’s national literacy report revealed that 23 districts in PNG have very low literacy rates, rates below 40 percent.

We have reached 40 years of political independence and to have 23 districts with very low literacy rates is hard to believe. From 2010 National Research Institute data, 83 percent of these districts are in the Highlands with Karimui-Nomane showing the lowest figure of just over 20 percent. This is not a trivial matter. Education is one of the critical priorities of our country yet we have the lowest literacy rate in the Pacific. Papua New Guinea has been identified by UNESCO as one of the 35 countries in the Asia-Pacific region that require urgent attention to improve the adult literacy rate. The eradication of illiteracy and innumeracy is not only the responsibility of the government, the education department or other authorities. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

The establishment of the Simbu Writers’ Association with its vigorous school literacy programs was a bright spot in an otherwise dismal outlook. Elsewhere in the country apathy reigned. Keith had been thinking that 2015 would be the last year of his involvement in the Crocodile Prize if things didn’t improve. In early August he set out the factors that might make him change his mind:

I was seeking three indicators that might keep me engaged for one more year. I had expected that writers’ groups would be established in three to five other cities or provinces (there were promises of this, each unrequited).
I was hoping to see energetic signs of productive engagement by more COG members with Papua New Guinean media, companies and politicians to generate broader support for the Prize. And I believed the annual awards event should be a Papua New Guinean affair. Thanks to SWA, number three got up - but not the others.

For much of this year, I have pursued alternative management and financing arrangements, including an approach at a high level of Papua New Guinea’s political firmament which, despite positive early indications, saw no traction. And I will forego further mention of the surly silence of the Australian High Commission under its most recent prematurely-departed leader or the going to ground of the well-endowed *Buk bilong Pikinini* which showed such enthusiasm a year ago and which has subsequently tracked the High Commission into obscurity.

It isn’t finance that’s the main problem - we have terrific sponsors and K120,000 is budget enough - it’s commitment. Phil and I hope the Prize will be an offer next year, and that Papua New Guinean COG members and other supporters will find a way to maintain it - to find the time - as a going national concern. How to achieve this should be a major topic for discussion next month in Kundiawa. But, for me, I know that, after five years, I need to take a big step away. My commitment to Papua New Guinea is great, but not inexhaustible. And there are other matters in my life I must attend to.

It will be a great shame if this resurgence of creative writing in Papua New Guinea fades away as did the first flowering in the late 1970s. It’s up to Papua New Guineans to show they value their own literature and are willing to struggle hard to promote it. I’ve enjoyed most of the last five years and have been thrilled by the successful participation in the prize of so many writers and supporters of Papua New Guinean literature. But I think the time has come to say “it’s your turn”.

In Kundiawa, arrangements for the Crocodile Prize events were well underway. Jimmy Drekore, after the usual hassles getting an Australian visa, flew south to Brisbane in early September to attend the Brisbane Writers’ Festival during which he collected the first copies of the 2015 anthology and the Crocodile Prize trophies he would hand to the winners. Along with Bob Cleland, who had arranged Jimmy’s visit and helped fund it with Keith, Jimmy and Joycelin Leahy met with the festival chief executive to discuss a possible future link with Papua New Guinea.

The idea was floated that Papua New Guinea might be the special guest nation at the 2017 festival. This was a positive development with much promise. At a working lunch on the
Brisbane River, Jimmy also discussed the transition of the main administrative functions of the Crocodile Prize from Australia to Papua New Guinea.

As it turned out the annual Crocodile Prize event in Kundiawa was a great success. Not only did the awards go well but a workshop to discuss the continuation of the Crocodile Prize in Papua New Guinean hands came up with some positive ideas and plans. In the aftermath Francis Nii recorded his impressions and hopes:

Looking back at the recent Simbu Writers Association’s successful hosting of the 2015 Crocodile Prize awards in Kundiawa and the previous unsuccessful Society of Writers, Editors and Publishers experience of 2012, I strongly feel the Crocodile Prize should have a permanent home where it can generate its own revenue to sustain itself in the long run.

Author and publisher Phil Fitzpatrick, in a comment on my earlier article, remarked that SWA made history by not only hosting the awards but for the first time paying the return air fares and hotel accommodation of the winners. Well done Arnold Mundua, Jimmy Awagl, Mathias Kin, Jimmy Drekore, Roslyn Tony, family members and stakeholders. You made writers, sponsors, friends, the Simbu Administration, teachers, students and the people of Simbu proud. I know that Keith Jackson and Phil Fitzpatrick, the founders of the Crocodile Prize, are proud too. Your sweat and personal sacrifice has paid off. I salute you all...

On the same note, a big thumbs up to Baka Bina and his committee of volunteers who will take charge of the administration and hosting of the Crocodile Prize awards ceremony in 2016. The committee members are Jocelyn Leahy (Australia), Bernard Yegiora (Divine Word University, Madang), Bomai Witne (University of Goroka), Daniel Kumbon (Wabag, Enga Province) and Rev James Mai (Chuave District, Simbu Province).

Unlike the SWA team, which is based in one location, the new team members are scattered and will be relying heavily on cyber technology for conducting meetings and organising Crocodile Prize activities. The world is heading in that direction and Keith and Phil have successfully administered the Crocodile Prize using the internet. Baka’s team will make it. However, looking back at the Society of Writers, Editors & Publishers (SWEP) experience, which was discussed at length by the meeting in Kundiawa, and comparing it with the SWA story, one significant difference is worth noting.

It is that the SWA team, based in one location, met face to face on an average of four days a week to conduct SWA and Crocodile Prize business while the SWEP executives were scattered. SWEP could have killed the Beast had it not been for a quick emergency rescue intervention by Keith
and Phil. A lot of personal sacrifices were made behind the scenes to save the Crocodile Prize which we did know about at the time. In the light of these experiences, I feel that the Crocodile Prize should have a permanent home where it can generate its own revenue to sustain itself come sun or rain. It has to establish its base somewhere. I don’t know how that can happen but the idea is now up for discussion.

In October Keith was able to celebrate another PNG Attitude milestone. He had been keeping tabs on the progress of the blog since its inception in 2006. By any stretch of the imagination, its growth was quite amazing. Nothing else with a Papua New Guinean theme even came close:

Pardon my indulgence, but we must surely mark this milestone – the 10,000th piece to be published by PNG Attitude since this blog kicked off in February 2006. Each of those 10,000 articles, essays, poems, stories, reviews and other writings has been duly archived both on the blog itself and by the National Library of Australia. Along the way, PNG Attitude has had some great successes and a few failures. Perhaps the highlight has been the achievement of the Crocodile Prize national literary contest, which has just concluded its fifth year. PNG Attitude was instrumental in its establishment and remains vital to its continuation.

Another success has been the emergence of Papua New Guinean writers of talent and calibre. When this blog began, one of its primary aims was to generate and maintain a written dialogue between Papua New Guineans and Australians. And to achieve that it required people who would write for public consumption. At first, this proved more difficult than you might think. There was a general reluctance amongst Papua New Guineans to attach their own names to their opinions and observations. But gradually this reluctance weakened, leading to a true flowering of that boldness of spirit we know is part of the Melanesian psyche.

Just a couple of years after this blog was established, social media emerged in full flower and captured PNG in earnest. There developed a profusion of PNG Facebook sites, Twitter accounts and other forms of internet connectivity. Sometimes this got out of control – and the internet was used to bully, harass, abuse, defame and deceive. There were attempts to exploit PNG Attitude in the same way but we maintained firm editorial control and an explicit policy that we expect contributors and commentators to abide by.

Play fast and loose with the demand for civilised debate and the editorial boom is lowered. In 10 years, however, we’ve only had to ban three people because of incurably vexatious behaviour. As it turned out
they were all Australians with long PNG experience. They should have known better. There have been a couple of other disappointments. The PNG government failing to take on board the Crocodile Prize as a worthy nation-building project has been one. And I have to mention the way in which, without explanation or warning, the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby turned its back on the Prize a year ago after, under a more enlightened High Commissioner, being instrumental in its creation in 2011.

So PNG Attitude has seen setbacks, yes, but we’ve also witnessed much that has been good and beneficial. The way readers rally to a cause – whether fund-raising to get something done that seems unlikely to be achieved otherwise or joining forces on major projects, like Murray Bladwell and Terry Shelley’s current effort to get a monster container of school books into Simbu.

The blog has also brought many people together who time and distance had driven apart. I’ve lost count of the number of reconnections … scores. There’s also the way we’ve managed to ensure good writers get recognised through the scholarships and fellowships we’ve been able to assist with. And there’s the constant email conversation between writers and me as we work to ensure that PNG voices are heard and that there is constant encouragement to improve the literary product. Which bring me to the growth of Pukpuk Publications and its increasingly impressive booklist – Phil Fitzpatrick’s awe-inspiring achievement which spun out of PNG Attitude and the Crocodile Prize.

So 10,000 published pieces (and nearly 30,000 readers' comments) later we have reached a great milestone. I don’t know whether PNG Attitude has another 10 years and 10,000 contributions left in it – that may be too much to hope for. But, meanwhile, we plug on with this long project that has already achieved its initial objective – to stimulate a continuing conversation between Australians and Papua New Guineans.

Adorning this 2015 milestone was the publication of a special children’s edition of material derived from the Crocodile Prize entries. The book, Trickery at the Crocodile Pool and Other Stories from PNG, edited by Ben Jackson, contained thirty-three stories originally entered in the competition. Its publication was made possible by a generous donation from the Paga Hill Development Company and over 600 copies were distributed to Papua New Guinean schools by PNG Attitude readers.

The success of the Crocodile Prize events in Kundiawa and the outcome of the workshop were encouraging and showed promise for the devolution of responsibility for organising and
administering the Prize to from Australia Papua New Guinea. Rather than the handing over of responsibilities in one move as had been attempted in 2013, a three-stage process was envisaged where specific elements would be handed over gradually.

In 2015 the prize money and other costs were raised from Australia (although most sponsors were Papua New Guinea-based). The judging of entries was done from Australia as was the editing and production of the anthology and the production of the prize trophies. The organisation of the writers’ workshop and the awards ceremony was handed over to the newly formed Simbu Writers’ Association. The arrangement worked well.

For 2016 it was planned that the workshop and awards ceremony would be handed over to an organising committee in Port Moresby along with judging and fundraising. The publication of entries on PNG Attitude would still occur and the anthology would continue to be edited and produced in Australia. It was hoped that by 2017 Papua New Guinea would take over the anthology and the transition would be complete and the competition become wholly a Papua New Guinean enterprise. As this book entered production, this transition was occurring but success was far from being assured.

As a prelude to Papua New Guinea’s fortieth Independence Day celebrations, Keith published a report from a Papua New Guinean focus group he had organised which had been asked for its thoughts on the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. There were no real surprises; much of what the respondents said echoed the debates that had occurred on PNG Attitude down the years. Nevertheless, the results were encouraging and seemed to bode reasonably well for the future. The report was entitled, ‘What Papua New Guineans really think of Australia’:

The general attitude of respondents was that Australia is a great country to live – “a place of great opportunity” – and visit. It’s a place where “people respect your privacy but are willing to assist you if you are in distress”. There was a strong minority view, however, that saw Australia tainted by unfriendly visa policies which made it tough for ordinary PNG citizens to enter.
Australians were seen as a generous and down to earth people who, in their interactions with Papua New Guineans, are friendly, open-minded, tolerant and courteous. “Most Australians are easy to approach and willing to engage in conversation – whether you’re acquainted with them or not.” There was particular mention of those Australian volunteers and missionaries who came to PNG to work and who “positively influenced the lives of many people”. A distinction was made between Australians in Australia and Australians living in PNG. Australians in Australia were not perceived as knowledgeable or very interested in PNG. Even Australians in PNG for the most part were seen as somewhat detached.

“On the whole I’ve found that Australians who live in PNG are there for the job rather than the cultural experience.... They tend to stick to themselves.” Another agreed. “From my observations, it’s usually special functions like Christmas parties that Australian families socialise with national families. But I’ve much admiration for the Australians who work with local charities and who work in smaller NGOs and come into contact with everyday PNGns on a daily-basis.”

Respondents felt the best things about Australia’s relationship with PNG were training, education, trade relations and aid, although there was some negative comment on the “boomerang” aid that returns funds to Australian firms. People reflected positively on the Australian government’s support and role in Papua New Guinea’s independence and continued to value the relationship. And there was the practical aspect: “I think Australia maintaining a relationship with PNG is beneficial for Papua New Guineans. It provides a link to a lifestyle and culture that many Papua New Guineans have experienced through work, study or holiday visits.”

Respondents tended to agree that in recent times the Australian government had changed its attitude towards PNG. “It’s not as it was in the 1980s,” said one. “Australia is less engaged with PNG as they focus more on Asia,” said another. And another: “Most definitely it’s changed.” The visa issue continued to put a dampener on the relationship. “The visa application process is a source of major frustration for many Papua New Guineans.” The Manus detention centre was also a problem. “I can’t help but feel that Australia has employed bully tactics to impose its wants upon PNG.”

Only one person felt the Australian government did not have a clear picture of the real issues in PNG. “There is a problem with the diversion of money from foreign aid programs. While some programs are conducive to national growth and development, I question the validity of others.”

We asked people if they thought the PNG government bore any responsibility for the current problems it faces. As you might expect, corruption loomed as a major issue. There was also a feeling that there was a lack of political will. “Key people and agencies are either indecisive or lack government support to get work done,” said a respondent. “Greed and
systemic corruption from the top down is crippling service delivery in this country.” Another observed: “I think the growing presence of Asian countries engaging in business could affect PNG’s attempts to move away from anti-corruption.”

People felt that, to strengthen its relationship with PNG, Australia needed to “treat PNG as an equal partner”. Another respondent commented on a need to “improve transparency of dialogue between the two governments where decision-making is concerned” suggesting that “social media could be used by both governments to keep Papua New Guineans well-informed of what is happening.” Other people suggested that money laundering in Australia needs to be cleaned up, that Australia should be more respectful of PNG and (again) that visa processing should be made more efficient and sensitive.

In the wash-up, though, most respondents were in the camp of the person who said simply: “I love Australia and Australians.” While another said: “I feel privileged to have been able to live, receive an education, work and start raising a family in Australia. Life can most definitely be enjoyed in PNG but is enhanced by the material, emotional, intellectual and social aid has provided and continues to do so.” And the last word: “My encounter with Australians as individuals is that they have and continue to contribute a lot to the development of this nation.”

As 2015 was drawing to a close, with another Crocodile Prize behind us and a successful year for PNG Attitude, things looked almost rosy. Keith and his wife Ingrid took a leisurely ocean voyage along the coast of Africa and everyone settled into the languid period in the run-up to the Christmas holidays. As he had done in the past Keith somehow managed to keep PNG Attitude running from whatever exotic place in the world he was visiting.

But we both knew there were serious pitfalls ahead. The main one was whether the new Crocodile Prize organisers could operate as a cohesive and active force. It soon became apparent that the good intentions expressed in Simbu for the future of the Prize were coming apart at the seams. The committee formed in Kundiawa was failing to interact and Baka Bina in Port Moresby was trying to struggle on unaided. There was a distinct feeling of déjà vu in the air.

Keith and I offered to step into the breach and administer the Prize until the committee had time to form, norm and perform. That didn’t happen and instead there was an immediate storm. A
key member quit, others simply disappeared from view and, understandably, Baka Bina was beside himself with despair. Gradually, the committee got back some mojo, but continued to limp along.

These ominous signs, coupled with ongoing health problems, prompted Keith to make a surprise announcement on his return from overseas in a blog post headlined, ‘PNG Attitude – a long journey and a short goodbye’:

*PNG Attitude* first appeared under the masthead *ASOPA People* in February 2006 and its mission soon evolved to be the creation of a dialogue between Papua New Guineans and Australians who were interested in the well-being of Australia’s former colony. Over its 10 years of publication it has not only presented news, information and commentary but offered insights into the colonial period and PNG’s history and heritage; all of this material preserved in the archives of the National Library of Australia.

The blog also has brought together people separated by distance and time, encouraged the emergence of many new PNG writers, provided funding for a host of worthy causes in PNG and, most eminent of all, innovated, incubated and driven forward the Crocodile Prize national literary contest in collaboration with author and ex-kiap Phil Fitzpatrick. The Crocodile Prize has now evolved as a PNG entity and we will see what becomes of it.

We’ve achieved all this – and probably more – in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation, critical only of institutions, authorities and individuals who have adopted untruth, incompetence, hypocrisy or corruption as their *modus vivendi*. There are a number of reasons why I believe this is the right time for *PNG Attitude* to be allowed to reach its terminus. I am 10 years older and 10 years more weary; a process which is gathering pace. *PNG Attitude* has occupied much of my waking life, often to the abandonment of other important or pleasurable things; and a rebalancing is in order.

And Papua New Guinea has changed. Under Michael Somare it was far from perfect but 10 years later its leadership is venal. In 2006, social media was in its infancy and Papua New Guineans lacked a public voice. That is not the case today. Now it is necessary for middle class Papua New Guineans to pivot their disappointment, frustration and anger into tangible, protracted and coherent action. So far this has not been evident. Perhaps the corrupting of the Big Man culture has diluted a sense of purpose.

And, while the middle class fails to organise and act, so the leaders will continue to misbehave and fail to deliver and we will continue to see a great people – a wonderful almost magical tribal people - held back. The
Fighting for a Voice

Papua New Guinean people do not deserve this. To the outsider, especially those of us who have known and loved PNG, this is incredibly, almost unbearably, disappointing.

I feel I’ve done my bit. From a naïve, excited, enthusiastic 18 year old making my first PNG landfall to a wiser, beaten up, pragmatic 70 year old, ready to pull up stumps. It’s been an intensely intriguing and often exciting journey. Our contributors and readers, to whom I am very grateful, have made it so much better. The final edition of PNG Attitude will be published some time in February, so keep those articles, stories and poems flowing until then.

The outpouring following this unexpected announcement, particularly from Papua New Guinean readers, was overwhelming to the extent that, within two weeks, Keith felt compelled to change his mind. By the year’s end he was able to reassure everyone he had relented and that PNG Attitude would continue into the foreseeable future.

“My early December statement had proven painful to write,” Keith said, “but your consequent comments were even more painful to read. To paraphrase the Song of Solomon, ‘They captured my heart/They held it hostage.’ I was moved by kind and generous words. There were many of them; some written with an anguish that greatly discomfited me.”

The comments from readers, some extracts of which are here, seemed to sum up the range of reasons why PNG Attitude had managed to accumulate such a large and loyal readership:

Your blog inspired me to put pen to paper and I believe many others as well - Raymond Sigimet

You guys brought me some hope for PNG's tomorrow - Arthur Williams

Your contribution has been immense. Will there be life after u go? Frobably! - Slim Kaikai

PNG Attitude and its predecessors were a personal commitment to PNG and her people from Keith and the community he caused to create - Paul Oates
It is through *Attitude* I could freely express my thoughts on issues of concern to PNG and Australia; it is through *Attitude* I can now confidently edit other people's writing - Francis Nii

I count myself as one of the beneficiaries of *PNG Attitude*'s remarkable range of writings. As an outsider and student of Melanesia, I've found them frequently fascinating, informative, challenging and gritty. An amazing body of work that still has the power to effect change - Johnny Blades

I just want to thank you for helping me make my writing grow. Thank you for being who you are and the heart you have for PNG writers - Marlene Dee Potoura

This news spoilt my day. *PNG Attitude* has to press on - Sil Bolkin

*PNG Attitude* has been a sanctuary and platform where I've sloughed away at topics about which I've felt, in equal measure, opinion and passion. I am somewhat inconsolable. There goes the history lessons, the poetry, the debates, the giggles - Rashmii Bell

Diamonds are more valuable after they have been cut and polished - that requires a master jeweller - Michael Dom

The rightful kudos should be for lighting the fire for Papua New Guineans to write. I could still have been wandering around with my manuscripts had it not for the kindly assistance through *PNG Attitude* and Phil - Baka Bina

Through *PNG Attitude*, you and Phil have impacted the whole country. Gentleman, the two of you have touched the hearts and minds of a young generation of working-class men, women and students who have been lacking fatherly advice, awareness, insight, guidance, encouragement, self-esteem and a chance to think and express themselves critically. You provided them with a platform and a voice to argue and express themselves not only through comments but through literature - Daniel Kumbon

Keith and Phil, you have inspired many in PNG through *PNG Attitude* and the Crocodile Prize. Our discussions on issues have been enlightening. I have learnt so much from everybody who has taken part here in this forum - Mathias Kin

As I have said previously, you have achieved more for PNG than the two daily newspapers and the universities - and all done offshore. What a mighty effort - Rob Parer

While I was happy that Keith had changed his mind, I was worried in the back of my mind that his succumbing to popular demand would still be a strain. For my part I knew that involvement in the Crocodile Prize was hard work. We exchanged a few emails and, I think, came to a tacit understanding that the Crocodile Prize must go into Papua New Guinean hands no matter
what. Without that burden, Keith could get on with running *PNG Attitude* and I could concentrate on publishing Papua New Guinean authors. These were both tasks we could comfortably handle. In this sense the process of devolution had to be a one-way street. There would be no more rescues. If the Crocodile Prize failed in 2016, that would be the end of it.

By early 2016, it was becoming apparent that the long and exciting story of *PNG Attitude* might be reaching its final chapters. The withdrawal would be gradual and graceful and occur sometime after the Papua New Guinean national elections in 2017. Administratively, the blog had now detached itself from the Crocodile Prize literary contest, although it continued to provide a publishing outlet for entries. *Pukpuk Publications* would also continue to bring Papua New Guinean writing to the world.

There had been a retreat, a strategic rebalancing, but not a withdrawal. The destination was now visible, but the journey’s end had been pushed away. Not for nothing has Papua New Guinea been called the land of the unexpected, and who can tell what the remaining years may bring. One thing’s for sure, many adventures still lie ahead.
Appendix 1 - Prominent PNG Attitude Contributors

"Fighting for a Voice" is not the complete story of PNG Attitude because there is more, let us hope much more, to come. It is, however, a record of an important ten years in the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship. Over those years, little has changed in the macro-relationship: Australians and their politicians still largely ignore Papua New Guinea, and Papua New Guineans observe this with perplexity. It is hard to see this changing any time soon unless some profound political trauma afflicts Papua New Guinea which, in turn, provides problems for Australia. Only an event like that would place Papua New Guinea in a position where it would be more front of mind. At the time of writing there are stresses over the Manus Island Detention Centre but it is not envisaged that it will be significant enough for a rethink.

At a person-to-person level, however, the relationship is much healthier now than it was in the mid-2000s and this is nowhere more apparent than on the pages of PNG Attitude. I think it is fair to claim that the blog has done more for the relationship than all the official government initiatives on both sides combined.

Central to this success has been what I have referred to as the PNG Attitude family. In my own case, as an example, I have made lifelong friends in Papua New Guinea and Australia. That I have never met many of them doesn’t seem to matter. And the kind of rapport I have established has been replicated by many other contributors and readers.

People on the blog operate on a friendly first name basis with each other. In some cases they have met and helped one another. There is the easy, laid back camaraderie of people who are
comfortable with each other. If this could be reproduced at a national level, the Australia-Papua New Guinea relationship would be assuredly a most successful one.

Some of the closest connections are those that have been forged between the most regular and prominent contributors to PNG Attitude. These people ‘talk’ to each practically every day by email. It is a wide and deep sub-stratum of communications that exists beneath the often tumultuous surface of the blog.

On two occasions Keith asked these people to write short autobiographies to enable the majority of readers to understand better who was writing for them. In telling their own stories, the authors demonstrated their eclecticism, revealed their personalities and opened up their lives to provide readers with a more intimate experience. These profiles, reproduced here in alphabetical order by first name, illustrate the underlying human dynamics that formed the PNG Attitude family.

Both Keith and I appear in the list; we are, of course, simply part of the PNG Attitude family.

Barbara Short

I was born on Anzac Day 1939, near the start of World War II, in the Poplars Private Hospital Epping, in the northern suburbs of Sydney. If I had been a boy my father said he would have called me Digger. My mother was glad I was a girl. I grew up in a nice old Federation house in Epping with a big garden full of vegetables and flowers. I was surrounded by loving parents and relatives. My Dad’s sister, Aunty Emm, looked after her mother, my Neasmith grandmother, and ran a nursing home in a fine old house with large gardens, some bush and near a creek, not far from where we lived in Epping. We spent most weekends there.

We all belonged to the Epping Presbyterian Church and Mum’s brother was one of the elders. Mum’s mother, whom I called Nana, lived with us until she died, when I was about twelve years
old. I had one brother, Donald who was born three years after me and we became the best of friends.

My Dad was a marine engineer and repaired the ships that came into Sydney Harbour. During the war he repaired all the Burns Philp ships that were damaged by the Japanese and also the American liberty ships, so he was able to live at home and not be drafted overseas.

In 1944 I started at Eastwood Primary School and enjoyed my seven years there and my great love was singing in the choir and helping the teachers. In our spare time Don and I often explored the bit of bush left down in the gully opposite our house, now called Hunt’s Reserve. There was a lovely creek full of tadpoles which we collected and watch them turn into frogs. We kept chooks for eggs and for eating and Don had a pet duck. We also had pet cats and cubby houses and read lots of books and played lots of games with other neighbourhood children.

In 1951 I started at Hornsby Girls’ High School, where the top academic students studied a rigorous academic curriculum designed to equip them to become future nurses and doctors and teachers. I loved high school and my teachers (well, most of them) and was very involved with the choirs and the dramatic society and art. I wasn’t good at sport, except swimming, as I had a bad knee that used to pop out of place and cause much pain.

After I did my Leaving Certificate in 1956, I really wanted to be a primary school teacher but Australia was short of high school teachers so I got talked into going to Sydney University to do an Arts degree which I started in 1957. I studied Geography, History, Economics, Psychology and Education and graduated with a BA in 1959 and a Diploma of Education in 1960.

I had a wonderful time at university. I worked hard and joined the Sydney University Musical Society and ended up being its librarian and, later, secretary, and in 1960 its president. I was involved in the production of many concerts, helped to run a large Intervarsity Musical Festival in 1959 and helped to put on the opera *Fairy Queen* by Purcell in 1960, as well as organise many fine concerts of classical music in the Sydney University Great Hall,
my second home. We also put on Gilbert and Sullivan’s *HMS Pinafore* at the Intervarsity concert. I was Buttercup.

During my early years my father would bring home captains and chief engineers from the various ships he repaired and I soon developed an interest in the world and got itchy feet. But I had attended university on a Teacher’s College Scholarship so was bonded to teach for a few years. After university I taught at Auburn Girls’ High for two years and Gunnedah High School in the country for a year. I then spent a year working for the Presbyterian Church training Sunday School teachers and youth leaders. Then I was off to explore the world on the *Himalaya*.

I spent two years (1965-66) with London as my teaching base, bought a small mini-van and drove myself and various friends 24,000 miles all over Europe, mostly staying in camping areas where I slept in the van. I also joined the local Ealing Choir in London and kept up with my singing and later attended a wonderful Music Camp in Dorset where I met many of the great musicians of the time and made music with them.

I returned home to Sydney in 1967 and spent the next four years teaching at Pymble Ladies’ College and also sang with various choirs including the new Philharmonic Choir (the old Hurlstone Choral Society Choir) in Sydney Town Hall with the Sydney Symphony orchestra. The performances were conducted by some great conductors of the time with many great singers as our soloists.

I loved teaching and I loved singing. I also wanted to go and help a developing country. At Pymble Ladies’ College (PLC) I taught many children of planters and other expatriate businessmen of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

Then in 1969 I was invited to spend a holiday with my cousins who were working in Port Moresby and in 1970 took a group of PLC students to Papua New Guinea for a trip. We had a great time and had many good contacts amongst the expatriate community to show us around.

Later in 1970 I saw they were advertising for teachers in the high schools of Papua New Guinea so I applied, was interviewed
by Vincent Eri and chosen. So began the next thirteen years of my life, in Papua New Guinea.

In 1971, at the age of thirty-one, I set off to work as a teacher in Papua New Guinea. After a short training course in Port Moresby I was posted to Brandi High School just outside Wewak, where I was to teach Geography, Music and Art to Years 7-10 for four years. I also became involved with running a Girl’s Club and getting the girls involved in various forms of community service with the women of the nearby villages. We taught them cooking and hygiene and played various forms of sport with their women’s clubs. One of my classes also taught people from a nearby village how to read Pidgin.

At the school we put on interesting plays, many of them written by the teachers or the students or famous writers. One year we put on *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dream Coat* and I helped in the running of choirs and wonderful days of traditional dance. I collected traditional Papua New Guinean songs from the Sepik area and taught them to my music students. We also made traditional musical instruments and the students were able to perform them in the school concerts. I joined the Sepik Drama Group and over the four years helped in the production of various musicals including *Salad Days, Trial by Jury, South Pacific* (parts of) and *The Threepenny Opera*.

I also explored the Sepik. I have written about my adventures in a book, *Four Years in the Sepik*, which can be found in the National Library in Port Moresby and in the hands of numerous ex-Brandi teachers and students. From time to time I contribute stories from this book to *PNG Attitude*.

To sum up, I had four wonderful years at Brandi and grew to love the Sepik region and its people. I had many exciting journeys by canoe, travelling up and down the Sepik River between Ambunti and Angoram in a dug-out canoe with outboard motor, holding up my umbrella for shade like the Queen of Sheba floating down the Nile. I stayed in many villages sleeping in the native houses and learning much about traditional Sepik culture.

My Brandi students did very well in their final exams and many
went on to the University Preliminary Year or, if they were younger, to the Senior High Schools for Grades 11 and 12. Over the years many of them have held very senior positions in the Papua New Guinean public service, teaching, nursing, as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and important roles in the Defence Force, as well as working in private industry and running their own businesses. I am very proud of them and still keep in touch with a number of them by email.

In 1972 Keravat Senior High School started with Year 11 students and in 1975 I was asked to join the school to teach Year 11 and 12 students. So began a new exciting seven-year (1975-1981) episode of my life.

I started off as a teacher in the Social Science Department and taught Geography but in 1976 I became the curriculum development officer for Social Science and taught Economics to many students. I was involved with the development of the various courses within the Social Science Department, History, Geography, Economics and Politics but in 1978 was made Deputy Head of Keravat and served in that role until late in 1981 when I was acting Head for that last few months.

Keravat was a very dynamic, exciting school in which to work with top academic students from every province of Papua New Guinea. I became involved with many extra-curricular activities; a Community School in Napapar Village for Year 6 leavers, the Scripture Union, served on Mess Committees trying to improve the food, and Social Committees trying to make the week-end social activities more enjoyable and entertaining, helping the Sepik Club, and working with all the teachers and students to improve staff-students relations.

We had a lot of new staff members coming into the school from all over the world and I spent much time trying to get them to understand PNG culture and to slowly adapt to the isolated situation of Keravat, many miles from Rabaul, the market and shops, and all the other expatriates.

I have written a book on the history of Keravat. It is called *Tuum Est – The early history of Keravat National High School and*
its students, 1947-1986.

My last two years in Papua New Guinea, 1982-83, were spent as headmistress at Manggai United Church High School in New Ireland. Manggai was a very successful school, self-sufficient in many ways. We grew all our vegetables and fruit, ran a herd of beef cattle, pigs and poultry for our meat supply, had our own generator, produced our own buildings from blocks of korunas which we made ourselves, made all the furniture, desks, beds, meat safes etc.

The students spent time in the villages setting up business projects with village members. I had hoped that the Manggai model would have been extended to the rest of PNG but for some unfortunate reason that was not to be.

I left Manggai at the end of 1983 and returned to Australia to look after my aged mother after the death of my father. I went back to teaching at Pymble Ladies College, Pacific Hill Christian School and Abbotsleigh Girls’ School.

I also went back to singing and joined the Philharmonia choirs and was fortunate to be able to sing all the great choral works with great orchestras and great conductors, mainly at the Opera House in Sydney. After Philharmonia I went on to sing with the Taverner Consort and had my voice trained and ended up singing a few more solos at times.

After I retired from teaching I have been involved with many forms of volunteer work and in 2001 I finally married a lovely man, Colin Short, whom I had known for many years through the Presbyterian Church, and we now help each other through life’s ups and downs. I have enjoyed contributing to PNG Attitude. When I was writing Tuum Est I was able to renew my friendship with many of my old students from my Keravat days and I know they too now hold many responsible jobs. I think the type of comments that occur on PNG Attitude should be a help to all Papua New Guineans today when they have to face up to all the changes taking place in their country. They can also see that their old teachers are still interested in their doings and are proud of their many achievements.
I was born in Kundiawa General Hospital on the 29 September 1983. I believe the night I was born was just an ordinary night: there was nothing significant, meaning no bright moving stars or fireworks. At the time of my birth my father was working as a senior business development officer with the Commerce Department in the Simbu provincial government. My mother was a high school teacher who taught home economics and science. My father was of mixed origin. His father was from Harua in the Kubalia District of East Sepik and his mother was from the Nimai tribe who lived in Koge in between the Tabare, Kere, Dinga, Dom, and Gunagi people in Sinasina, Simbu.

My grandfather joined the police force during the colonial days. He was able to see the evolution of the force. Under the colonial administration, he was part of a team led by the kiaps who brought civilisation to the highlands of Papua New Guinea. That was where he met my grandmother and spent all his days moving around helping the kiaps to build government stations in Sinasina, Chuave, Gumine, Gembogl, Kup, Minj and the Western Highlands where he retired and returned with his wife to her village.

Still living in his small hut next to a creek called Agle in the north of Kundiawa town is my grandfather, my mother’s father. He is from both the Kamenuku and Enduga tribes who share Kundiawa town with the Yongumugl people who live in the east. He was a former aid post orderly who worked in different Health Centres from Kainantu to Minj. My grandmother, God bless her soul, came from the Gena and Naruku Tribes of Simbu. She died a few years ago and was laid to rest in the family cemetery. I was privileged to get her blessing before she died.

I have spent most of my life in Simbu, where I began my journey in education. From preschool I moved to Gon Primary School to do Grade 1. I stayed there for three years and moved to
Grade 4 at Kundiawa International Primary School. The International Education Agency private school was small but had a very interesting learning environment made up of both expatriate and national teachers. The five years I spent there was worth the money my parents paid because I absorbed different skills and knowledge which helped me to be where I am today.

I have fond memories of my teacher Anne Meredith who introduced me to Roald Dahl, CS Lewis, Ignatius Kilage and other great authors. She was British and had a strong English accent that brought the books to life. It was like watching an English movie. Ms Meredith read a chapter a day from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Big Friendly Giant*, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* and many other wonderful books.

Kundiawa Lutheran Day High school was my next stop after I graduated from Grade 8. In Grade 9, I got to know other interesting people, who, in 200 when I was in Grade 10, decided to elect me as their class captain. I was an an average student but graduated without fuss and moved on to Grades 11 and 12 at Rosary Secondary School, Kondiu. In Grade 11, I decided I wanted to be a communication engineer. Around that period my father was into two-way radio communication and I saw this as an opportunity for me to find later employment.

Based on my marks in the first two terms, I selected Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics (Calculus), Language and Literature including my optional subject geography to prepare me to apply to the University of Technology in Lae to study communication engineering. All those who majored in Physics were placed together in one class of only 26 students, but the competition for ranking and grades was tough. My low grade in Physics affected the choice I made when filling out my school leaver form. I decide to give Geography a go, so I applied for the Bachelor of Arts foundation program at the University of Papua New Guinea.

At UPNG in 2003, I instantly fell in love with Political Science and History. During the orientation week for Arts foundation students when I heard about Political Science and the possibility of serving Papua New Guinea as an ambassador or high
commissioner in a foreign country, I forgot about Geography. I spent the next few days dreaming about my life as a diplomat, driving around in a car with a diplomatic license plate and so on. During registration, I got the form and without hesitation pencilled in political science as my major sequence of study. I spent six years studying political science, four years at undergraduate level and another two year as an honours student.

I did my honours research on the Chinese economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping arguing that the ‘fusing together of different ideologies’ model the Chinese followed was a way forward for a backward country like Papua New Guinea. In essence, I argued that the way forward for Papua New Guinea was a guided form of democracy; the government needing to limit certain rights and liberties of citizens in order to achieve change.

During my time at UPNG from 2003 to 2008, I was privileged to be taught by people like Dr Alphonse Gelu, Dr Henry Okole, Dr Oruvu Sepoe, Professor Jan Kee Van Donge, Dr James Chin, Professor Allan Patience, Anthony Sil and Dixson Susub from the political science strand. Others who helped with my knowledge in history and philosophy were Dr Peter Yearwood, Dr Anne Dickson-Waiko, William Ferea, Biyama Kanasa, Alphonse Shaun and Associate Professor August Kituai.

After completing my honours research, I sought a job and was given a part-time tutorial fellow position. This was not in any way related to my dream job, but over the years I came to understand the catch phrase ‘Land of the Unexpected’ and viewed the opportunity as a launching pad for me to gain experience and chase what I really wanted to do.

My honours research about the Chinese economic reforms influenced me to take my chance in applying for a Chinese government scholarship. I wanted to know more about China and the economic transformation that was happening. Also I had a wife and a son to look after, so I had to find ways to make myself employable and to move up the ladder. After seven months of tutoring, I got a memorable call from the Chinese Embassy in PNG followed by the PNG Office of Higher Education. I cannot describe
the emotions I felt that day.

My research and knowledge about China was on display as fifteen of us competed in interviews for the five places in the scholarship program. I was able to make it into the top five and got the green light to depart for Jilin University in Changchun in the north-east of China.

While in China, I was asked by Mathew Yakai, who has a column called Asia Pacific Perspective in the Sunday Chronicle, to write some articles for him. His column provided an avenue for students studying in China to share their experiences. As writing for his column was in line with my masters’ research on Chinese soft power, I grabbed the opportunity and used this public diplomacy tool to enlighten my fellow citizens about China and its intentions and how Papua New Guinea could gain from China’s rise.

Upon my return from China after two years with a master’s degree in international politics, I was given the opportunity by Divine Word University to showcase my skills, talents and knowledge in their bid to build Papua New Guinea’s human resources.

In 2012, a few months into my job as a junior lecturer in politics and international relations, I got a very interesting call from then Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ambassador, Michael Maue, who offered me a position as a foreign service officer in the Asia branch of the Political, Security and Treaties Division. I weighed the offer but decided to stick with academia. I know it was my dream to serve my country as a diplomat, but I have learnt from life, and from my current mentor Associate Professor Jerome Semos, that “there is more than one way to skin a rat”.

I accidentally came across PNG Attitude when I was doing my research in China and have since written comments and published articles thanks to Keith. I hope to continue my association with PNG Attitude in order to help myself and help other people elsewhere to know a little about my country every day.
Fighting for a Voice

Bob Cleland

I was born in 1931 in Perth, Western Australia, and into the Great Depression of the 1930s. My brother Evan was born in 1935. Life was tough, I’m told, but as a youngster, I thought it normal – it was all I knew. When I was old enough to know a bit more about life, my father, Donald Cleland, went away to the Middle East in February 1940, with all those other Aussies of the Seventh Division, 2nd Australian Imperial Force, to help our ‘mother country’ Great Britain fight a war against Germany. I was just nine years old and I didn’t really understand Dad’s words to me just before he left – “You have to be the man of the house now. Look after your mother and your brother.”

I grew up a bit then, but it wasn’t until I was about eleven or twelve that I started being the responsible ‘man of the house’. I learned a lot during the war about the values and principles that my Christian upbringing and my parents were on about – responsibility, honesty, loyalty, love, integrity.

When Japan came into the war, the Seventh Division was pulled back to Australia early in 1942 and sent to Papua New Guinea to reinforce the militia 39th Battalion on the Kokoda Track. Dad, by now a Brigadier, was with them and became the effective chief of ANGAU, the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. That’s another story.

In 1942, Perth was the closest city to the Japanese advance down the Malaysian peninsular. Dad insisted that Mum, Evan and I evacuate to the small bush town of Leonora, 830 kilometres north-east of Perth. We lived there in a small, three-room, unlined, corrugated iron, miner’s shack for eight months. Several other Perth families did the same. Why Leonora? Dad’s brother managed a very large sheep station nearby. It must’ve been hard on Mum, but I enjoyed new friends and the adventures in the dry, flat desert country. I hated school though.

Back in Perth, life was great: sailing in small dinghies on the
Swan River, swimming in the Indian Ocean, moving into secondary school, riding around on pushbikes with friends. Still didn’t like school. The good teachers were all away at war; only oldies were left, pulled out of retirement. They did their best to keep order amongst us rowdy kids.

Dad, home after the war, soon got a job in Sydney, so we moved there in January 1946. Yet another school. I boarded there for the final three years of secondary school and only just matriculated into Sydney University.

Study – well no, that was the problem. I attended lectures in Engineering, played a lot of billiards and enjoyed a very social life, girls and cars and things. I’m not sure what had happened to my sense of responsibility. No ‘free’ education in those days – Dad paid for the lot.

I wasn’t going as well as I should when he said, “OK, if you don’t pass this year, there’ll be no more finance.” I failed, and found myself no longer an undergraduate. What to do? Serendipity came to the rescue. I saw an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for Cadet Patrol Officers (CPO).

I knew a little about Papua New Guinea from Dad’s (censored) letters during the war. Despite this knowledge, working there hadn’t occurred to me. I applied and survived a particularly intense interview.

Dad, by now, was back in the Papua New Guinea he had come to love during his ANGAU days. He was the Administrator. The interviewers wanted to make sure this wasn’t the Administrator’s son looking for comfortable nepotism. Apparently, I satisfied them and was duly appointed a CPO on 17 April 1953.

The Port Moresby heat and humidity hit us hard when we stepped down from the DC4 Skymaster after an overnight flight from Sydney. The 34 of us were the first CPO intake not to go first to the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA). We were squashed together, each on an old iron bedstead and coconut-fibre mattress in one of Konedobu's World War II, tar paper-walled houses.

We were bombarded daily with information from every
department in the Administration. We were given assignments to complete and, finally, we were examined. No-one was sent home, though some were given an appointment with the Director, Allan Roberts, after several nocturnal escapades.

I was posted to the Eastern Highlands where the highly regarded Ian Downs was District Commissioner (DC). He told me, and he said the same to all staff new to the District, ‘If you botch a job you’ll get my wrath. I expect you never to repeat that error. If you do repeat it, I don’t want you on my staff. Okay?’

Downs was tough and direct, seldom liked but universally respected in both Administration and commercial circles. He carried no baggage of pre-war colonial attitudes. His administration and outlook were enlightened and his planning thorough. I could not have had a better DC as a role model in my early years. And I believe he was instrumental in setting the development path for the whole district, which then included today’s Simbu Province. The evidence of his foresight and relations with village people is still apparent today.

I went on leave to Australia in January 1955, where I became engaged to Julie. We married in Port Moresby and I brought my new bride back to Watabung to live.

Our daughter, Susan, was born in Goroka early 1956, and she too lived in Watabung – for a short time only. I think the DC wasn’t happy with the idea of the Administrator’s infant granddaughter living in such a remote place so he posted us to Kainantu. We spent a year there before I was sent to the 1957 long course at ASOPA in Sydney.

All those first four years of my career is related in my book Big Road which was published in 2010. I am planning a second edition which I will make sure is available as widely as possible in Papua New Guinea.

Over the next eighteen years I served in the Western District where our second daughter was born, Morobe, East New Britain, Simbu, and finished up where I started – in the Eastern Highlands. Mipela go saut pinis in August 1976.
My father arrived in Port Moresby in torn short pants with not a single penny in his pocket but full of hope and determination for what lay ahead of him. He also came with a dream. My father came from a line of great dreamers. It was said that both my paternal grandmother and grandfather foretold the time of their passing through their dreams. My grandfather, I was told, was not particularly fond of the hornbill because it had some sort of connection to his death. My paternal grandmother told her family that if she gave birth to a male child she would die. But if the baby died, she would live. As it turned out, she died a week after giving birth to my father.

With such a background, my father is no ordinary dreamer. When he dreams about something or someone, we take heed of the messages that lie within them. In the same vein, my mother told me that her mother, after chewing and swallowing the bark of a special tree, was able to use her sixth sense to clearly see the spirits of people who are about to die and would make pronouncements of their deaths to her family beforehand.

My father’s difficult journey to Port Moresby is a testament to his perseverance in pursuing his dream for a better life for himself and the family he intended to create. He was determined that, through his children, he would turn his own failure in education into success. And he was relentless in pursuit of that dream.

I was therefore brought up strictly and told to focus only on my education and nothing else – which meant that during my school life I was disciplined and reprimanded whenever necessary. As a consequence, I established a standard and a reputation that I had to live up to. Although it created pressure on me at a very young age, it eventually became part of me and underpinned my endeavours to be the best both in my academic performance and social conduct. My father’s dream became my people’s dream when I realised that I was one of the very few individuals from my
When that realisation became more pronounced, I made every effort to ensure I became my parents’ and my people’s champion. Their dream became my dream: to create a brighter future for all of us. Even now, at his advanced age, my father remains determined to see his dream of having all his kids get an education come true. My two younger siblings are continuing their education. At the time of writing, one is in Grade 12 at Caritas Secondary School while the ‘baby’ is in Grade 3 at New Erima Primary School.

My mother also embraced my father’s dream and did everything she could to make it a reality. She started off marketing boiled eggs but, when that was not profitable, sold candies, buns and cordials from our house to make money to support my sister and me in our education.

Her efforts prepared me well to take on the task that currently occupies me within the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC) - an independent body established by the government of Papua New Guinea in 1998 to facilitate dialogue between the government and non-state actors for the purpose of policy development.

Initially, my passion in pursuing issues associated with the informal economy in PNG seemed isolated. However, as time went by, it became a part of me as a person, a part of family, community, society and nation. I came to a point where I concluded that the informal economy is part of who we are as Papua New Guineans. For so many people like me, it is interwoven into our lives. Ignoring or neglecting the informal economy can only be done at the expense of the nation’s prosperity.

If my mother had not ventured into the informal economy, I would not have made it to where I am now: fighting for justice for those people in the informal economy by urging the government to recognise their plight and their rights. This has become my lifelong ambition and dream.

My father reminds me in many ways of God. God is a being...
with an unchanging character and an unwavering dream. Once He sets out to accomplish something He never gives up until He accomplishes it. In a lot of ways, my father possesses that tenacious characteristic. This could explain why, when I encouraged him to quit work, he asked me if I was prepared to take care of my two younger siblings when he retired. His hope was that once my sister and I were able to get good jobs, we would support our younger siblings. However, he reckons that we are not able to do that because we are now both married and have so much on our plates. Although I disagree with him, I concede to his view. Having to pay for the mortgage and take care of my wife and kids as well as the rest of my family is a tough ask.

When my father first arrived in Port Moresby in 1977, he lived with one of his brothers in a boi haus (servant’s quarters). At the time, his brother was working with Monier, a company which manufactured construction and building materials. Facilitated by his brother, my father obtained employment as a casual employee at Monier for six months. After that he was laid off and immediately began searching for another, hopefully permanent, job. During that period he had a dream in which a white man offered him a job.

Shortly after that dream, when he was on his way to town one day, he met one of his friends who was a driver with Morobe Transport (now Fletcher Morobe). His friend offered him a ride and, just as they were about to exit the compound gate, Peter Wix, one of the managers at Monier, saw him. Mr Wix had been impressed by my father’s work ethic during his short stint with the company and offered him a job in the pipe section.

My father could not believe his luck and gladly accepted the offer. He started work the very next day. As he drove out with his friend, it dawned on him that what had just happened was exactly what he had foreseen in his dream.

My father is a true blue collar worker. From the moment he accepted the offer to return to work with Monier as a welder in the pipe section, he has never looked back. He has been a one-company man all his life. During 38 years of service he has worked
in various capacities in various sections. He spent much of the first fifteen years as a leading hand in building fibreglass dinghies and water tanks. Because of health issues, he then moved back to the pipe section where the working environment was less dusty. There, he worked as a pipe spinner, which involved him and his colleagues removing the concrete pipes from their moulds after they came out of the boiler.

Towards the twilight of his career, and until he was made redundant in June 2015, he took on a much lighter role patching broken pipes. During those 38 years he saw several changes in the management and ownership of the company, the most recent of which was in 2003 when the Constantino Group of Companies acquired Monier from the Steamships Group.

My father has always told me that patience and loyalty are key virtues to a successful life no matter how low in terms of position or pay a job may be. One thing he said that sticks in my mind is how one should treat the very first pay received. He said that how one uses their first pay will determine what they will do with the pay they receive throughout their working life. If one uses the money to go drinking or clubbing, then they will go on doing that for the rest of their working life, even when they are married. I have always accepted that wisdom because I can see what has happened to most of my friends who have gone down that other road.

As I grew up, I craved to go with my father to his workplace. Worried that his boss may reprimand him, he always discouraged me and told me to stay at home. I began to yearn to follow my father to his workplace, especially at weekends. When it rained, I sat in the house wondering what my father was up to while it was raining. Given that we were living in the company compound only a short walk from his workplace, I would be tempted to go and see him, but did not out of fear he would be cross with me.

My father was a brilliant man even though he was limited by his lack of education. This did not hinder him from doing some of the things I considered odd. Even today, as an educated person, I consider his ideas extraordinary. He was always driven by the
desire to maximise his small income for the sake of our education. So he was always on the lookout for opportunities. He invested money with the former Investment Corporation and took out insurance with Kwila Insurance.

Seeing my parents struggle made me determined to pursue a career in management or labour rights. I envisaged myself being a company manager doing everything to protect the rights of workers like my father, rewarding them for long hours of work during the weekends and providing decent accommodation for them and their families. Growing up, my life was coloured blue.

As I stepped deeper into my father’s world I began to discover nothing but sweat and determination. The air I breathed was made heavy by the diesel odour that permeated from the pipe moulds, from my father’s clothing and my father’s and his colleagues’ flesh. I would go home not disgusted by its smell but feeling a sense of peace.

In my father’s world, I saw nothing but men who would do anything to make sure they put food on the table for their families. Men who had dreams just like me, but who would rather trade that for the sake of their families. Through that experience my father became my motivation and my true blue hero.

My father, like my mother, is a Christian. For many years now, they have practised their faith within the walls of our house and not in the hallway of the church.

Nowadays, my mother is frail and does not like to move around a lot, while my father does not seem interested or ready to be welcomed back into the church after a long self-exile. My parents don’t pray much and rarely do we share biblical stories which used to be the norm in our family when I was growing up. My wanting to share something from the Bible frequently leads to wars of words between my parents. Often caught in the middle, I find myself trying to bring some sense and control into the situation. When one of my parents shows interest or tries to explain something, the other quickly become judgmental and criticises. This not only puts me off but discourages them from pursuing and building their own faith.
Regardless, in the midst of this tempest, I find the sincerity in their faith a beacon of light in my search for the truth. Furthermore, the experiences we shared together at the church when I was a kid are some of the best and most vivid memories of my life. A visit to the old church in Korobosea-Gabutu still brings back a lot of those wonderful memories. My decision to seek God was a direct result of my experience with my parents. Clinging to them and following their footsteps in their walk of faith during my childhood built a strong foundation which would, in later years, lead me to seek a much deeper understanding of the truth.

My frequent reminiscing about those experiences leads me to ask them why they no longer attend Sunday church service. Initially, they blamed each other for turning away from church and distancing themselves from pursuing their faith. For each of them there is no point in repenting when the other remains unrepentant.

My father believes, particularly, that this creates a volatile environment for building one’s faith because there is potential for differences and clashes to arise when one is outside of God’s grace. Thus he reckons that both will have to make a real commitment in order for both of them to go back and pursue their faith in church.

However, I get the feeling that the more they wait, the chances are that they may never go back to God. As a son, I feel it’s my responsibility to help them find their way back. I can’t bear to see the walls of my heaven in tatters.

One of the things that my parents dislike is seeing churchgoers doing things that are contrary to what they are expected to do as Christians. My parents are not pretenders and don’t like pretenders. They really do hate the gossip that circulates throughout the congregation.

Even worse for them is the sight of church leaders and clergymen living a double life. To my parents, one should be sincere and humble with their faith rather than merely acting out one’s faith in public because there is no way one can avoid the all-seeing eye of God and subsequently, His wrath if he or she is just
pretending for whatever reasons known only to themselves.

Furthermore, my parents’ church, like the other older churches, has experienced a great deal of fragmentation and division in its history as disgruntled leaders break away to establish their own churches, thereby dividing the congregation into small sects.

This is another factor discouraging my parents from taking an active interest in the church. So now my mother attends Sunday services whenever she feels like it while my father spends most of his Sundays somewhere else aside from the church. Yet, deep down, I can see that they are both conscious of their faith. Their kindness, generosity and unconditional love and sacrifice towards us, their children, and those they know indicates that they still revere God.

According to my father’s recollection, the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG) was born out of the Asian Pacific Christian Mission and first went into the Southern Highlands Province in Kutubu during the 1950s and later made its way into Erave. The church then expanded into Sembirigi and, finally, into Tiri Village around the 1960s.

The Catholic Church also came into Erave around the same time and established one of the largest Catholic seminaries in PNG at that time. The seminary attracted students and budding theologians from all over the country and from other Pacific island countries.

My father was introduced to the ECPNG by his father who was one of the earliest converts of the church from our village. Since then my father was an active churchgoer until he decided to depart from his faith around the early 1990s.

When he arrived in Port Moresby, he joined the ECPNG Church chapter in Koki. When my mother came down to Port Moresby to be with my father, she accompanied my father to Koki Church for Sunday service. During that time there were only two ECPNG church chapters in Port Moresby. Both the Koki and Hohola churches had a mixture of congregations from Erave, Western and Southern Highlands Provinces including people from the newly
established Hela Province. After some time, the Gerehu Church was built and used to host combined fellowship during special events like Easter and Christmas. As the church grew, so too did the bickering and disagreements between various members of the congregation. This led to the Erave congregation eventually breaking away to start their own ECPNG church at Kaugere. It was there that I would come to know the ECPNG Church and develop a yearning to seek the truth about God, the bible and the meaning of life.

However, the greatest slice of heaven I experienced was following my parent’s every step. It was heaven when I sat in the bus with both my parents sitting on either side of me. It was heaven when it rained in the night and I was cuddled up in my parents’ arms. I imagined that the tiny stream flowing through my parent’s garden was the river that flowed through the wonders of the Garden of Eden. Even today I can sense that these magical sensations are still active somewhere in the corner of my mind - a reminder of the infinite beauty of my childhood innocence. That could explain why, even today, I have always liked going to Gerehu Church whenever there is a combined church service to try and rekindle and reconnect with some of those glorious spiritual experiences of the past.

My father, as I said, is a somewhat prolific dreamer and his dreams often come true. So much so that when he has a bad dream or nightmare it usually sends chills down our spines. He would wake up in the morning and tell us about his dreams. From the tone of his voice and his facial expression, we could deduce whether the dream foretold something good or bad.

My father had a dream heralding my birth in Port Moresby on 24 April 1985. In it, my father was climbing up a red coloured hill when, from behind the hill, he heard people wailing and screaming in agony. In the midst of this despair he heard a strange sound. It was as if something was coming to take him away. He felt as if death was approaching him. Caught in a state of confusion and panic, he somehow ended up meeting his dead sister who scolded him for coming and quickly advised him to
head back to where he came from. Still feeling lost and confused, he turned back and found himself riding on a bike. He rode until he came to a certain place. There, just as he took off an axe that was tied to his waist and prepared to dispose of it, an uncle of mine who had passed away several years before appeared. He told my father not to throw the axe away because it belonged to him.

My father told my mother that the dream concerned my birth and that he foresaw two possible scenarios. One was that he could have died, but came back to life thanks to his dead sister. The other was that the unborn child in my mother’s womb would have died if he threw the axe away, but, thanks to my uncle, the baby would survive. Furthermore, he was convinced that the unborn child in my mother’s womb was going to be a male child. In our custom, a father’s dream about an axe usually symbolises a male child. A dream about a *tangent*, a purple greenish plant whose leaves are normally used to cover the front and back part of our womenfolk during traditional times or singsings, symbolises a baby girl.

My father has never stopped dreaming about me, especially at critical junctures in my life. Before I started my schooling he had a dream in which he saw me standing on one side of a river trying to cross over to the other side. After a while I jumped into the river and began to swim against the flowing current. People who had gathered alongside the river screamed and barracked my name, urging me along until I got to the other side where my father grabbed hold of me.

From this dream my father got the inspiration that I should go to school so that I could excel and then one day become someone influential. He also felt that, if he did not put me in school, I would end up on the streets indulging in bad habits that would get me into trouble. My father’s dreaming and dreams have been an important and integral part of my life’s progress.
Chris Overland

I was born in a small country town in 1951. Both my parents were born and raised in the country and both neither liked nor felt comfortable in the city. Dad had been in the RAAF during World War II, flying a full operational tour in Beaufort Bombers. He was based in PNG, mainly at Vivigani on Goodenough Island. He had several terrifying experiences, surviving three crash landings, but counted himself lucky because 20 percent of RAAF aircrew died in training or operations. The war changed but did not break him.

Like many veterans, Dad found it difficult to settle down in post war Australia and as he moved from job to job, Mum and I went with him. Eventually, he found a job in his home town of Murray Bridge in South Australia and I spent the whole of my school years there. Murray Bridge in the 1950's and 60's was, like most of rural Australia, a small, conservative and inward looking place. It was a comfortable and sheltered place to grow up. While it lacked most of the facilities and entertainments found in a large city, it also lacked the noise, pollution, bustle and crime.

I was a fairly bright student but indifferent to the charms of mathematics. My first and continuing love was and remains books, especially those dealing with history and adventure. By all accounts I read constantly from an unusually early age, encouraged by my parents, who provided a steady supply of books. My schooling progressed well up to Year 11 but faltered in my Matriculation year. The joys of editing the school newspaper totally over shadowed those of study, with predictable results. I failed the year rather spectacularly, despite writing an epic poem for the mathematics examiners which, strangely, attracted no marks at all.

My ambition was to go to Duntroon Military College and I joined the Reserves as soon as I turned seventeen. Despite meeting the essential requirements for admission to Duntroon, I missed out through the very competitive entrance process.
Instead, I was offered admission to the eighteen month officer training course at Portsea. I rejected this, knowing that Duntroon graduates invariably won promotion to the highest ranks, which was always my objective. Employment choices in rural Australia were severely limited so I knew my future lay beyond Murray Bridge. At a loss as to what to do, I went back to school.

Then fate took a hand. I spotted an advertisement for Assistant Patrol Officer positions and the idea of working in Papua New Guinea immediately gripped me. My parents, especially Dad, were appalled but hid their dismay, comforting themselves that I would never get the job. But I did. I arrived in Port Moresby in mid-1969 and undertook about 2 months initial training at Kwikila, before being posted to Kerema in the Gulf District, along with an even younger colleague. We were the youngest of our intake, both being barely 18 years old. Our older colleagues confidently expected the pair of us to be going home fairly soon, unable to handle the remoteness and rather severe conditions thought to prevail in the Gulf.

My colleague lasted six weeks before fleeing home but I was made of sterner stuff and, over my first two years in Papua New Guinea came to love the people, the place and the job. After two hard "training" patrols in the mountains between Kerema and Kaintiba, I was posted to Kikori and then Baimuru. Patrolling in serpentine rivers of the Gulf of Papua was fascinating and I revelled in the autonomy that came with the job, despite the sometimes exceedingly unpleasant and risky aspects of it. From the Gulf I was posted to the Southern Highlands, firstly to Koroba (all too briefly) and then to Kagua. Unhappily, I fell out with the Assistant District Commissioner at Kagua and decided to resign, but was offered a transfer instead. I was moved to the Northern District, based initially at Popondetta and then, to my great joy, at Kokoda.

As Papua New Guinea moved closer to independence, it became evident that a long term career as a Patrol Officer was out of the question. Consequently, in mid-1974, when I was offered the post of officer-in-charge at Ioma Patrol Post, I
declined and opted to resign instead. I left Papua New Guinea in August of that year.

Back in Australia I soon found that almost no-one was even faintly interested in my time in PNG, nor was much value attached to my experiences there. After several months of looking for a job I was somewhat unexpectedly appointed as a Regional Clerk in the South Australian Education Department, based at Whyalla. Over the next few years I progressed through the ranks of the South Australian public service at a steady rate including finally acquiring a university degree. In 1989 I was appointed into the executive ranks where I held a succession of increasingly senior positions, culminating in that of Chief Executive of a large metropolitan hospital. Due to a combination of frustration with the politics of the Department of Health and the impact of a life threatening illness, I retired earlier than planned.

Papua New Guinea had been very much thrust into the background over my working life in Australia. Family, career and study had consumed most of my time and energy. After retirement, however, I had both the time and inclination to interest myself again in what was happening in Papua New Guinea and this is how I came to stumble across PNG Attitude. Like many, perhaps most, former kiaps, didimen, tisa, masta mak and missionaries, I have never really got over Papua New Guinea. It exerts a fascination over me today that baffles and bemuses my family and friends. I think they suspect that I may have a benign type of post-traumatic stress disorder. They may even be right.

I feel incredibly lucky and privileged to have seen Papua New Guinea at a critical moment in its history. I remember the country and its peoples with affection. It deserves to be and should be a moderately wealthy country with good basic public services and facilities. That this is not the case is a cause of sadness for me. My hope is that PNG Attitude and other forums like it will become catalysts for long overdue change within Papua New Guinea, to the benefit of its peoples. I am somewhat comforted that there are signs that this might be beginning to happen, with intelligent, educated, literate and thoughtful Papua New Guineans beginning
to express their ideas and opinions in increasing numbers. In them lies the best hope for the country and I wish them well.

**Corney Korokan Alone**

If there was a competition for the best *arse tanget*, I would have taken the prize year after year. My *arse tanget* always had the best leaves, shined to perfection, with small pieces of cloth in front. That was the way it was until I received my first pair of shorts in Grade 7. The shoes followed in Grade 9. You can be forgiven into thinking that this is a story set in the 1950s or 1960s. But it was between the years 1975 and 1989 when I became old enough to wear *tanget* just like my father and older brothers.

My childhood was spent in Mulilam Village (situated approximately 22 kilometres north of Wabag town) in the Upper Ambum-Kompiam District of Enga Province. The province was opened up to the world by the Leahy brothers in the 1930s. The Edie Creek gold rush had attracted a good number of entrepreneurs from Queensland, some of whom went further inland in search of more Edie Creeks. But instead they became mesmerised by fertile valleys and high mountains – and warriors with their humble bows and arrows which were soon found to be of no match to the white man’s magic sticks.

I love to recount this time in my life, especially now that I have a jacket and matching trouser that I wear to work in my role as a senior manager with Telikom PNG. I like to make the point that anything in life is possible. It is not where you came from or how you started out but what you do with what you have that makes you who you are today. And you can be anyone you choose to be if you set your mind to it, stay clear from a herd mentality and avoid the inferiority complex so common to many Papua New Guineans.

My mother told me that I was born during the daytime – a rare event. Studies show that high proportions of births happen under
cover of darkness - an evolutionary adaptation to enable the protection of the female and her offspring from enemies at the time when they are most vulnerable. I was aptly named Korokan – a man of sunlight in Enga tokples. Perhaps it was the name, perhaps it was the warmth of the sun, but I was born with a will to survive and shine.

I am the fifth of seven children born to Aaron Alone Waion from the Sakalin tribe, Kapupin clan and Tuik sub-clan of the Kupin Local Level Government area. My mother, Theresa Sampepon, and her people, according to Engan tales, originated from an eagle bird (yaka kambi) – a Kii Kunalin who fought with his brother, Sambe, over a dog neck collar made of dried bamboo stick, left his brother behind at Laiagam and headed to the Ambum valley. That’s where my great-great-grandfather, Pereyap, settled, raising Enkoy, my great-grand father. Enkoy’s only son, Ipari (my grandfather), looked back to the Lai valley and married Marina Tondopale – a Magin lady from Aiyoklam village. Ipari’s mother, Tukii (my great-grand mother), is an Ilyope -Kambale lady. Her only sister, Kakii, married into the neighbouring Kea sub-clan of Kepalipos village.

Around the time I was born, the Society of Divine Word (SVD) priest, the late Fr Anton Crasi from the great state of Illios USA, was running the Londol Catholic Mission Station. Fr Crasi extended the health extension efforts of the government to the upper Ambum Valley which was in his parish. I was named Cornelius after one of the saints when I got baptised into the Catholic faith as an infant. My uncle Mathias Miukpipae would have some clue on this as he was the local priest’s right hand man at the time.

When I was old enough, I bawled my eyes out to attend school. In retrospect, I probably was allowed to go to school even when quite small - a privilege accorded to me because my father, the late Aaron Alone, initiated the Naiepelam Community School. Previously my elder brothers had to walk a long distance to attend Londol Community School. My father saw the need for a school closer to home.
Dad was not a big man, either in status or stature, nor was he a man of many words. He never had a clue about the alphabet either. And he had only one wife. But he was a man with a vision bigger than the confines of the Ambum Valley. To him gaining an education was a means to a better life. He had to bring education to the village where the people were. He made his intentions known to an educationist - Paul Takila, a Bougainvillian married to a local Loalep lady, who had been the headmaster at Londol Community since the late 1970’s. Mr Takila liaised with the Catholic Education Agency at Sangurap (Enga’s Catholic Head office where the Bishop sits and oversees missions work in the province), and I remember well, the day my father invited Mr Takila and his whole class at Londol Community school to my village. He killed a pig and made a feast to declare our family garden the site for the community school.

About two to three years later the news came from Sangurap through Londol Catholic Mission, and the school was built at a nearby and more approachable spot – Naipelem. The school’s official opening day came two years later in 1982. My father killed a cow, a gift to him from his cousins (from Lyau Tukisanda) to declare the school open. True to his vision, dad supported the school’s activities, teachers and other government workers like aid post orderlies until his dying day in December 2002. I was in the second lot of intakes for the new primary school in 1981. I was seven years old when I sat among teenagers and a few adults to get educated. We were attempting to learn English for the first time, most of us did not even speak Tok Pisin yet.

I was the smallest boy in class but an exceptional student - taking out prizes every year from Grade 1 to 6 at the Naipelem Community School, and again from Grades 7 to 10 at Anditale High School. My first shorts and shoes in the late 1980s were given courtesy of the SVD Priest. Since my parents could not afford my school fees after Grade 7 in high school, this duty was taken up by my cousin, Leonie Samben. Leonie was a haus girl for the late Fr Anton Crasi. My clothes, pocket money and school fees were from the priest via my cousin Leonie.
The beginning of the 1990s brought a lot of firsts into my life - my first plane ride, my first time to Port Moresby, my first time to sleep in a hotel, first time to use a flush toilet and my first time to go so far from the safety of home. Keravat National High School was my home from 1991 and 1992. Initially I was nervous because I had heard so many stories about people from this part of the world and their *kambang puripuri*.

It was during my time at Keravat that I received Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour. We attended Keravat Local Church (a member of the Association of Local Churches of Papua New Guinea, started by Finnish missionary Kari Harri and others) and got baptised there as well. Eternal thanks to my Tari brother, Dickson Ango, who encouraged me to make a personal commitment for the Lord. I wrote a letter home to break the news of my new found faith and was met with an upset cousin who stated in the strongest terms that I would incur the wrath of the priest back home for losing my faith. After that, I shortened my name from Cornelius to Corney. It was not in defiance of my Catholic roots; rather Corney was shorter and easier to spell. Plus, Cornelius reminded me of my old life, where I had to go through intermediaries to reach out to God.

It was also at Keravat that I befriended the Wartovos (Arthur and Lolo) from Navunaram village in the Gazelle District who became my spiritual parents and provided me with a home away from home during term breaks and at times when I felt sick. Their continuing commitment (and that of all congregation members at Navunaram local church) was to take care of Pentecostal students from other parts of Papua New Guinea, pray for them and send them back home as missionaries to reach their own family members and tribesmen for Jesus Christ.

The selflessness of the Wartovos showed me what Christ’s unconditional love was and deepened my newfound faith. My late father and mother both confessed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, got baptised and passed on – the greatest satisfaction and fulfilment I cherish in my walk with the Lord. The relationship with the Wartovos and Navunaram local church is ongoing.
My parents were getting older and I felt a need to get a job that could pay so I could look after them. At the end of Grade 12, while the rest of my friends were considering their three choices of tertiary institution, I only had eyes for the Telikom College in Lae. The college was paying a very good stipend for the City & Guilds Telecommunications cadet training they had started running the previous year. In retrospect it was quite rash when I put the Telecommunications School as my first, second and third choice.

It was with great elation when I received my acceptance letter to the Telikom College. My training lasted four years. Under the disciplined and brilliant military-like training of Irish gentlemen like James O’Rourke, Bill Hurley and others, I learnt a great deal of all facets of telecommunications before I moved to Port Moresby, specialising in Data Communications & Computer Networking. I have been here since 1997, with most weekends embracing creamed *kalabua* banana, fish and tulip leaves.

Together with my siblings, we threw a party for our dad two years before he passed on. My dad always insisted that his passing should be celebrated with songs and praise to God for his departure to be with his Maker and not be encumbered with traditional mortuary obligations. We celebrated his life when we hosted his feast which he shared with his family and friends. I remember the beaming smile he wore that day. I am sure my dad would have been impressed if I had introduced him to my wife but that did not eventuate, however, my mum did have that honour. I met Tanya Zeriga from the Zia tribe of the Morobe Patrol Post in 2007.

She impressed me so much that I had to claim her before anyone else did. I proposed to her in November 2008 and we got married April 2009 – witnessed by my church pastors and closest and best friends from the Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship days at College like Brian Sam and Yando Nimbo. Though she was brought up in a town setting unlike mine, we share similar opinions. Together, our motto has been, if not me then who? That’s why we founded the Renbo Smile Club – a family club that
collects smiles of thanksgiving as an offering to God. We do charity exclusively for health-related cases. We mostly choose people who cannot repay us so that the only thing the recipients will naturally do is to thank God for His unrequited mercy and grace. And yes, I grew up a Catholic, converted to a Hallelujah singing Pentecostal believer and am married to a grand-daughter of one of the pioneer Morobean Lutheran Missionaries to the Highlands, the late Basawec Zeriga.

My campaign against the Outcome-Based Education system (OBE) was fuelled by my experience. I am who I am with the education that I received. It worked well for me but OBE watered down the standard of reading, writing, problem-solving and maths. Education also needs a bend towards moral-ethical uprightness and radar for compassion and sensitivity towards community needs. My take was that OBE was a convoluted and resource-intensive system.

It lasted much longer in PNG than it deserved. Both the southern and the northern hemispheres who tried OBE were dropping it faster than hot cakes and moving on with proven and workable approaches to creating a knowledgeable and intelligent workforce to find their niche in the borderless 21st century workplace. I felt vindicated and elated when the O’Neill-Namah government decided to scrap OBE in 2011.

My life so far has been good and I am thankful to God for my success. I owe my beginnings to my parents, especially my dad and his unwavering support to education and books – even if I was reading a scrap of newspaper, dad encouraged me and my brothers. I also owe my beginnings to countless people along the way. Mrs Maria Lakain, my grade 7 English teacher at Anditale high school –who was a brilliant and smart. My Sepik-Morobe brother and colleague at Telikom, Brian Sam, who others came to realise we’re like the thunder and rain brothers – inseparable over the last twenty years. Kone Kula who injected business acumen into me and who encouraged me with continuous coaching and mentoring to become a high-flying, commercially savvy technocrat. There are also many pastors and missionaries
throughout the country who have encouraged me greatly. God be praised for these great men and women.

I acknowledge my faith in a fair and just God who still performs miracles when least expected. I live my life daily always with expectation that there is something good just around the corner if I just remain optimistic; keeping an open eye for opportunities in challenges. In my spare time, I make use of the internet to educate myself about the world and its leaders. I am an avid supporter of soccer – an intelligent game. I root for the Gunners (Arsenal) in the English Premier League. I am interested in world politics and am an Obama fan and am even on Obama’s email list. Probably a green card is not too far off.

**Daniel Kumbon**

In 1960 a government patrol post was established in Kandep. All the people were rounded up to clear the land and build bush material houses for the patrol officer, his servants, policeman, teachers, health workers, a new primary school, a clinic etc. I remember my father getting up early every morning to walk several kilometres to help build the new government station and the Kandep-Laiagam road. It was an order from the government that every man had to follow. Those who did not turn up were rounded up and beaten or put in jail. From time to time I joined my mother who went to barter bags of sweet potatoes for salt, cooking oil, bars of soap, beads and other goodies at the government station.

At about this time I remember getting very sick. My parents, as well as relatives who came to see the progress of my illness, were alarmed when my condition worsened. I could hardly move and my breathing became difficult. Eating was impossible. My relatives agreed this was no ordinary illness and they were fearful I might die. They called the village magician to find out what was the cause of my sudden illness. The magician, Yambaou Piui was
summoned. First, he had me sit up. Then he spat and breathed into some special leaves called ‘kapaon yoko’ he had brought along, and chanted some magical words into them. After a few seconds, he yawned hard and seemed to be in a trance.

A few minutes later, the magician came to his senses and delivered the diagnosis. He said that the cause of my illness was an uncle, whose name was Peruwa. He had been killed in tribal warfare. The magician said that my uncle wanted my father to sacrifice our pregnant sow. Further, the pig was to be killed at the mouth of a small spring that had sprung up in the middle of a new garden my father was clearing. “If the pig is not offered by the spring as Peruwa wants, then the child will surely die,” the magician said grimly. Terror gripped me when I heard those words. I felt paralysed. “Okay, we will kill the pig my brother wants. I just hope that Peruwa stops making my son ill.” My father said. His words relieved me and a sudden peace descended on me. My mother had miscarried a son before me and my father was understandably worried he might lose me as well.

Meanwhile the pig was untied and brought out from the pig pen into the living room of our house. The final part of the magician’s ceremony was now to begin. The magician cut some hair off the pig with a bamboo knife, and tied the hair into a bundle. He then burnt one end of the bundle. This gave off a terrible smell. The magician looked me in the eye and gave me the bundle of smouldering, smelling hair. I took it in my hands. “There that’s it. That’s the signal. Peruwa is satisfied,’ the magician said. “The child will be alright if the pig is killed now.” The pig was immediately led to the new garden, where the spring had sprouted out of the ground. Stones, fern leaves called tambo and vegetables were hastily collected on the way.

When all the ingredients were ready, the poor animal was slaughtered. The blood oozing from its nose was allowed to drip into the mouth of the spring. This was the actual offering to the spirit. The head and other parts like the liver of the pig were cooked in a mumu near the mouth of the spring to further appease my late uncle. The rest was cooked in a bigger mumu.
nearby. When the two *mumu* pits were uncovered, I was encouraged to eat some of the pork. This I did, to the obvious delight of my father. This was an indication that the spirit had let go of me and that I would recover fully in the next few days.

After this incident, I went to school. I enrolled to do preparatory class at Kandep Primary ‘T’ School in 1964. When a primary school was established by Fr Gerald Jerry Theis SVD at Mariant Catholic Mission near my village, I absconded for convenience sake. In 1967, my Grade 2 teacher told us to dress up smartly the next day. He said a ‘Radio Man’ from the state-run National Broadcasting Commission, Radio Western Highlands, would be coming to record our songs.

I was up front singing with much enthusiasm into the microphone. I watched the ‘Radio Man’s every move as he went about turning knobs and switches, changing batteries, signalling us when to sing and when to stop. To watch the two spools on the machine spin round and round was awesome. With a primitive background, I could not possibly comprehend operations of the portable recording machine. Before he departed, the man told us to listen to our songs in a special children’s radio program transmitted over Radio Western Highlands the following week. But I never heard the songs because nobody had any radios in my village in those days.

Twelve years later, I met the ‘Radio Man’ when I myself signed up as a broadcast officer with Radio Western Highlands. That was mid-1979. He was the late Paul Lare, who became my best friend and an inspiration as I began my career in the media industry. But I never dreamt I would ever be a broadcast officer or train as a journalist. There were careers and guidance officers in high schools but I am sure I needed inspiration, advice and perhaps role models from my village or tribe – people who could have helped me or influence me to choose my career properly when it came to filling our School Leaver Application Forms.

There was nobody from whom I could seek help. I was among the first people from my area to do Grade 10 in 1975. I was alone at Idubada Technical College in Port Moresby far from Kandep. I
grew up with the understanding that people only worked as policeman, aid-post orderlies, interpreters, drivers and possibly kiaps when they left school. When it came time to actually filling in the School Leavers Application form – I just jotted down further studies, cadet police and army officer training in that order of preference.

In January 1976, I received several letters. One contained my Grade 10 Certificate which showed good grades with a high grade point average rating. The other letters separately advised me that I had been selected to study Chemical Technology, Electrical Engineering and Communications Engineering – all at the University of Technology. The Education Department had definitely made a mistake to offer me three courses instead of one. I didn’t have a clue what these courses offered. But I knew the word ‘communication’. I thought maybe ‘Communications Engineering’ involved people talking on the radio so I chose to do the course. Believe me, the radio played a huge role in those days and impacted very much on the lives of rural PNG. And many members of parliament were former radio personalities. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare is one of them.

In my third year at the University of Technology, I performed poorly when the course became more technical. I could repeat the subjects at my own expense. But I could not raise the funds. My parents were poor and lived a subsistence life in the village. But lucky for me, I had been sponsored by the National Broadcasting Commission to study Communications Engineering hoping I would work for them as a technical officer when I graduated. At the time, Sam Piniau, who was the Chairman of the National Broadcasting Corporation kindly allowed my request to work as a broadcast officer to raise some funds and then return to my studies. People like Ian Dunn, Don Penias and others provided the guidance I needed.

I was posted to Radio Western Highlands where I met Paul Lare – the announcer who came and recorded our songs. I worked under late William Kundin who was the Station Manager and other radio personalities like late Michael Namba, Paul Piel, Paul
Ray, Jennifer Pahun, Anna Pundia, Paul Yane, Mathew Tenia, Michael Mekela, Michael Mel and many others. Two former radio announcers, Kindi Lawi and Raphael Doa were now my members of parliament. Very soon, I was popular particularly among crazy girls, some of whom came to the studio door when they heard me ‘on air’ with their ‘letters of request’ asking me to play their favourite song during *Laik bilong Wanwan* (Listeners’ Choice) late night music shows. A colleague, the late George Kagle, was my partner in crime during that time. I did not think to go back to complete my studies.

After about three years in Mt Hagen, I went and joined the staff of the late Danely Tindiwi from Kandep. He was the first person to be elected Premier of Enga Province under the new provincial government system. I was his press officer. But soon, I realised I had no future working for a politician who could very easily be voted out of office at an election. So in 1983, I joined a World Bank sponsored provincial development project called *Enga Yakaa Lasemana* as an Information Officer. Communication development was one of the project components. Of five staff recruited to man the newly established Media Unit, I was under-study to a British volunteer, the late Archie Markham.

The two of us started *Enga Newsletter* produced on several sheets of A4 paper folded together – and type-written. We sat at a light table with glue, scissors, letter sets, rulers, rubber etc to prepare our news pages. That was the beginning of the now popular provincial news magazine, *Enga Nius*. But I had no proper training in journalism so I asked to be released to study Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Papua New Guinea. The rest is history. The UK-based Thomson Foundation, The US-based Alfred Friendly Press Foundation and The National Press Foundation offered me scholarships (1989, 1991 and 2008 respectively) in recognition of my efforts to remain in my province and publish a worthwhile newspaper. I also contribute news and feature stories to the *Post Courier*, the *National, Sunday Chronicle* and *Paradise Magazine*.

Papua New Guinea has a free press, much like in America,
Great Britain and other free democracies – but only in the sense of the word. It just means that the government has no control over what is published or broadcast. But many people in Papua New Guinea do not have the capacity financial or otherwise to run their own media outlets. In reality, it is only Port Moresby which has a fully functional press. Consequently, almost all journalists live and work in the city – one of the few capitals in the world cut off from the rest of the country and accessible by air or sea at huge cost.

Our two dailies, two weeklies, two commercial TV stations, one commercial FM station and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) are all Port Moresby based. Almost all these organizations are foreign owned. Except for the NBC, not many of these media organizations have any regional or provincial representation. Only recently have the Post Courier and The National begun to establish regional bureaus in Lae, Mt Hagen and Rabaul. Given this scenario, I have been privileged to enjoy support from the Enga Provincial Government to publish a newspaper that is as free as any other. I am sure it is the only publication of its kind produced outside Port Moresby, at provincial or regional level.

Cold-blooded murders, pack-rapes, violence against women, tribal warfare, corruption, nepotism, HIV/AIDS, drug and child abuse – the type of stories that make headline news anywhere, happens here. I have reported on these issues without fear or favour with the hope that one day, my province and country will struggle free from these social woos. Perhaps, the biggest accomplishment in my career has been for me to live and work among my own 300,000 people opening their eyes and ears to the outside world. And alert them to dangers like HIV and AIDS that threaten their very existence.

My crowning achievement has been the scholarships I won which gave me the chance to travel around the world. And I thank PNG Attitude blog for showing me the way to publish my travel experiences in my book ‘I Can See My Country Clearly Now’ published through Pukpuk Publications.
I was born at home in Melbourne, and the doctor looking after my mother was not present. Not that it mattered much, as my father – also a doctor - stepped into the breach, as it were, and delivered me. According to Mum, he was joking with her throughout the process. Not long after, my family moved to the Riverina region of New South Wales – first to Narrandera and, after a number of years, to Leeton. In both towns my father practised medicine until he died in 1965.

My full name is David Andrew de Bérigny Wall. After leaving St Ignatius’ College Riverview in 1954 I worked on plantations and for the Department of Health in Papua New Guinea for eighteen years. On returning to Sydney I qualified as a teacher librarian and worked for the NSW Department of Education until retirement in 2005. I live in the inner Sydney suburb of Newtown, with my wife, Deborah. I have two sons, Andrei and David Augustus, and one granddaughter, Hala.

I managed to leave Riverview without getting the Leaving Certificate and, after doing a few odd jobs here and there, decided I wanted to get the hell out of Australia and seek my fortune abroad. I thought I’d achieved this when I was offered a job on a plantation in Fiji with Morris Hedstrom, but in the last minute the deal fell through. An old family friend came to the rescue and gave me the name of a contact in Port Moresby. Reg, the contact, vouched for me and guaranteed my accommodation in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. This satisfied the Department of Territories, and so I flew to Moresby in a DC4 in 1955. I was nineteen.

On arrival Reg introduced me to Alan Willis, the plantation inspector for Steamships Trading Company. The outcome was a
position as an assistant at Mamai Plantation. I worked for Steamships for two years on various plantations and subsequently for the New Guinea Company on New Ireland. Looking back, I should never have been let loose on the unfortunate Melanesians who came in contact with me. I was an immature, callow greenhorn. I picked up the worst of the appalling plantation culture with its overtones of racism. On one plantation, I got my just deserts and was beaten up.

From my point of view the beneficial result of my plantation experience was that I saved enough money to embark on a world journey. This matured me, and made me into a half decent human being. I journeyed throughout a good part of Africa, a bit of Europe, Canada and the United States and returned to Australia via Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The highlights were meeting a variety of people: black, brown and white, colonials and independence fighters, and just ordinary people in an Africa of contrasts. Climbing the 5,895 metre Mt Kilimanjaro was a remarkable experience, reaching the highest point in the old German Empire – then known as Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze. Also drinking gin and tonic in the Star Bar, Mombasa in the company of an attractive Ugandan woman had a lot to recommend it.

I was privileged to see a bit of the Belgian Congo towards the end of 1958 before the riots in Stanleyville and its total collapse in terms of law and order after independence. In Goma, on Lake Kivu, I met up with a Belgian medical doctor, DeCosta. He was driving around parts of the Congo, and was happy to take me along to practise his English. This was fortunate as I had very little French. We drove from Goma to Uganda and back to the Congo, on the way seeing the beautiful Ruwenzori Mountains basking in their snow-capped whiteness in the reflection of a full moon. On the drive to Stanleyville in his old Opel car, DeCosta mentioned that if we were unfortunate enough to run over a Congolese to never stop as one would be likely to experience réaction animale from the locals and be beaten up. He said go to the nearest police station or hospital and report the accident. I couldn’t help but think of the road near Koki Market in Moresby and the roads of
the Papua New Guinea Highlands.

In my travels in Africa I also visited South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda. From the Congo I eventually made my way back to Mombasa and got a steerage class passage on a *Messageries Maritimes* ship to France, and hence to the UK. From there I emigrated to Canada. In Canada I worked at various jobs, ending up with Canadian Pacific Railway as a labourer in British Columbia. This job gave me enough money to purchase a fare back to Australia. The period December 1959 until 1961 saw me again working on plantations in New Britain, New Ireland and Karkar Island.

Then in 1962 I took a position with the malaria control eradication unit run by Dr Jan Saave. My first posting with Malaria Control was to the East Sepik. Here I was to remain more than ten years before, in 1973, moving to West New Britain and then to Moresby. My job was ‘localised’ (terminated) just prior to independence. I won’t write much here about my time with Malaria Control, only to say that I must have been successful in terms of my relations with the Papua New Guineans judging by the impromptu farewell given to my wife Deborah and me when the word got around Angoram that we were leaving.

Oh yes, in my time in Angoram I married a Filipina. Deborah had been initially intrigued with the impression I had given in a letter I had written to the press in which I said, quite wrongly, there was a shortage of women in Papua New Guinea. Deb equated this with a shortage of rice in the Philippines. As the letter appeared in the editorial section in the *Daily Mirror* on 14 February 1970, St Valentine’s Day, she thought it worth a reply. Two years later we were married in Manila. I thought I was saving Deb, an active journalist, from martial law, just declared by Ferdinand Marcos. I suspect Deb thought she was saving me from a life of debauchery. I got the better end of the deal.

For a brief time we continued to live in Papua New Guinea after we were married and Deborah got the job as press secretary to the leader of the opposition. It was through Deb’s insistence on our return to Australia that I enrolled at Wollongong University.
and did an honours degree in history and later obtained qualifications in education and librarianship at other universities. From 1980-2005 I was employed by the NSW Department of Education as a high school teacher and teacher librarian.

Since retiring from being a mentor of high school students, I’ve enjoyed writing, and the visits I’ve made back to the Sepik seeing my many friends. It has been said before that you can get the man out of PNG, but you can’t get PNG out of the man. It is true.

David Wall died on 26 December 2013, his passing greatly saddening his many PNG Attitude friends - PF

Ed Brumby

In 1950, when I was five years old, my family escaped the bleak prospects of post-war England and migrated to Australia, setting up home in the distinctively parochial and conservative city of Townsville in north Queensland. My father, a gifted pianist who had left school at fourteen, took a sales job with a chain of music retailers where he parlayed a highly successful career selling pianos, organs, sheet music and records. Until my brother came along in 1953, my mother worked as a cook at the local migrant hostel to help make ends meet.

While both of my parents had left school at fourteen, they were avid readers and interested in the world of ideas so that our dinnertime conversations and debates ranged across politics, current affairs and music and the arts. (Unlike me, my father was no fan of contemporary or country and western music, or sport.) This instilled within me an abiding interest in these matters, a spirit of inquiry and non-conformity and respect for alternative lifestyles and beliefs. Thanks to their example and encouragement then, my voracious appetite for reading, and learning, began before I started school.

During my primary and high school years I read two or more
books a week, mostly about history: the ancient civilizations, the British Empire and America, early Australian explorers, World War II and, especially, the war in the Pacific – which was how my interests in PNG and a desire to explore the world at large were first piqued. Playing basketball became my major preoccupation during my high school years, along with a sustained interest in the science of the weather – from which I decided to become a meteorologist and, hopefully, spend time as a researcher in Antarctica. Regrettably (at the time), but fortuitously (in the longer term), despite a grade average of A throughout high school, I failed the matriculation physics exam.

My meteorological dream dashed, I was nevertheless determined to leave the parochial atmosphere of Townsville and so accepted the offer of an education cadetship at the Australian School of Pacific Administration – for which, fortunately, I had applied as a fallback position prior to the matriculation exams. Two marvellous years later, in that heady idealistic era of change in the mid-1960s, I arrived, a naïve, skinny and young (in every sense) twenty year old, at my first posting, Angoram.

Despite two years of specialist training, I was still affronted by the realities of small settlement life in 1960s PNG: the segregation (black from white, white public servants from white private enterprise operators); the overt racism (no Papua New Guineans allowed membership of the Angoram Club, with schoolboys allowed to cut, but not play on the grass of the club’s tennis court – until I banned that practice), and the all-pervading pressure to conform to the colonial norms. And did I mention the mosquitoes?

A further shock came when the newly-appointed head teacher resigned rather than accept his transfer to Angoram – such was the reputation of the place. So I was left, with five other Papua New Guinean teachers, to manage a school of around 300 children in seven grades, with four of us fresh out of teachers college. For the first two months we muddled on, with me teaching fifty plus children in Standard 6 in the mornings and another fifty plus Standard 5 children in the afternoon, learning
the ropes of school administration, without mentoring or support, as I went – and losing a stone in weight as a consequence. Relief came when the Sepik River flooded the school upriver at Moim and the teachers and many of the children relocated to Angoram, thus providing the school with a full complement of staff and me with an experienced mentor and friend, Michael Hatch.

Following an incident involving the head teacher’s wife at Maprik in mid-1966, I was posted, in a three way transfer, to idyllic Passam where I had the best of both worlds: the working week in the quiet of the ‘bush’, and the weekends in the social, sporting and surfing whirl of Wewak – and where, at last, I had the opportunity to socialise with and get to know Papua New Guineans. At the end of 1968, having honed my teaching and administrative skills and completed thirty percent of a University of Queensland education degree, via the light of a Tilley lamp and a battered portable Olivetti typewriter, I was transferred to the Publications and Broadcasts Branch at Konedobu to take over Keith Jackson’s role as editor of the school papers and custodian of Yokomo.

With two other writer/editors and four graphic artists we produced, each year for the next five years, ten editions of two 16-page supplementary reading magazines (Garamut and Kundu) and a social studies magazine (Our World) which were distributed, in total, to more than 150,000 primary school children every month. These were the halcyon years. I immersed myself in the Port Moresby basketball scene: playing, refereeing, administering and writing twice weekly reports for the Post Courier and the then ABC and building a coterie of friendships with ordinary Papua New Guineans – and falling in love with a fellow educator from Hula in the process.

where, as part of Ken McKinnon’s innovative policies, I was assigned a very smart young Tubuseranian as my associate and understudy. He soon took over my role, more or less completely, and I was left, literally, with little of consequence to do, and with no indication from the bosses that they wanted to exploit the fruits of my Edinburgh studies and other experience, I realized that it was time to seek other opportunities.

With great (and continuing) regret I left Papua New Guinea in mid-1974 and began a second career in higher education: lecturing in linguistics, editing distance learning materials and producing educational films and videos for an Aboriginal education program at a Perth College of Advanced Education and then 23 years at Deakin University where I ended up as Director of Learning Resources Services – and added a master’s degree in education technology and communications to my repertoire. In between, there was a two year secondment as an education technologist at a Hong Kong university, several research/teaching assignments at Shiga University, Japan and an extended research fellowship the Japanese National Institute of Multimedia Education. Then followed twelve years with the ANZ Institute of Insurance and Finance where I designed, developed and sold accredited and specialist risk and insurance education programs to companies in China, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia – accruing nearly 2 million frequent flyer points in the process.

As Trevor Shearston has said, Papua New Guinea leaves something in the blood and I’m delighted that, in retirement, I’m back there in spirit through having the great privilege of collaborating with the likes of Baka Bina, Marlene Potoura and Busa Wenogo with their contributions to PNG literature. As Douglas (The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy) Adams said: “I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”
Emma Wakpi

I was born on 19 April 1979 at Angau Hospital in Lae where my father was a civil engineering student at the University of Technology. My mother worked for the Evangelical Brotherhood Church in its small print shop. Having waited with suppressed hopefulness that his first born would be a boy child, dad was keenly disappointed to hear that a healthy baby girl was to be his. However as soon as he saw me (so he tells me now), he wouldn’t have had it any other way.

I was three when dad graduated and was hired to work with Ok Tedi mine. This meant that mum and I, along with my younger sister (who joined our family the previous year), relocated to dad’s village near Minj in Jiwaka Province. Because the small mining town of Tabubil was just being built and dad was only beginning his career, our family was not able to be together for two years. I remember being with my mum in our kunai house, but our living style was communal, with our doors always open and family members popping in and out at random.

Our family was very small for a highlands family as my grandfather only ever married my grandmother and they had just four children - the oldest my aunt, then dad, followed by a brother and after him a sister who was still in primary school when I was born. My earliest recollection of dad is of him driving up to our village in a hire car laden with gifts and hugs. He was able to come home twice each year for one-week breaks and we had a full three weeks of him at Christmas. My early memories are not really of my parents but my grandparents and extended family, mingled with the excitement of waiting for dad to come home.

When I was five, in 1984, dad was given a house and we moved to Tabubil with him. My family still resides there. Tabubil is home. I love the people, the geography, the climate (mostly wet) and consider myself an honorary Western meri. I grew up in an over-
protective environment which cocooned me from the realities of life in Papua New Guinea. Tabubil itself was a gilded cage where one was lulled into a lifestyle unrealistic of Papua New Guinea.

Power, water, housing and health care were free and security was not an issue. Added to this, our holidays were mostly spent in our own village where we were picked up by private transport and kept close to our family, only joining in communal activities with the express permission of our parents and under their supervision or of others they approved. I found this irksome as I entered my teenage years but, upon reflection, I am thankful to my parents and extended family for providing me with good memories - memories I recall fondly and from which I draw my values.

There is a particularly vivid memory that makes me smile. Dad returned from work one afternoon and walked into the house in a playful mood. After greeting mum in the kitchen he walked to the living room to chat and play with us, but my brother (we had adopted an older brother by then), sister and I were too engrossed with a show on television to pay him any heed. He tried chatting and got only grunts in reply. He went to our sister to toss her up and ended with her wailing in his arms as she wanted to watch the show. He put her down and sat looking at us rather perplexed. After a while he got a determined look on his face and we watched in disbelief as he marched to the big old television set and yanked it angrily away from the power socket, staggering as he carried it out to the verandah (our house was on posts at least two meters high) and hurled it over the balcony.

We were glued to our seats in wide-eyed awe as we heard the almighty crash and the splinter of broken glass and wondered what on earth had possessed our father. We were almost fearful as he huffed his way back to where we were and then with a grin flopped himself upon the couch and asked us how our day was and what did we do in school.

With furtive glances at each other we hesitantly informed him of our day. Mum, who had taken in all this coolly from the kitchen, couldn’t contain herself any longer and laughed at the comical vision before her thankfully breaking up the tense
situation; thus followed a year’s sabbatical from television with strict guidelines thereafter about television time.

I enjoyed school and was an average student. I have fond memories of every teacher in my primary and high schools. They were dedicated to their profession and I am grateful to each one for the influence they have had upon me. My primary education was in Tabubil International School. After the sixth grade I moved to Port Moresby and attended Port Moresby International High School from Grade 7 to 9. Due to housing problems my sister and I were then sent to Warwick in Queensland where I completed high school at the Scots PGC College. I then went on to do my Bachelors in Management at Southern Cross University in Coffs Harbour NSW. I deliberately chose the smaller campus in Coffs rather than the main campus in Lismore because of friends and church ties.

Although I had grown up in a Christian home, I had made my own decision to follow Christ only in Grade 11 and wanted to be at a place where I had boundaries and where I could get good mentors in the faith. My parents' counsel was appreciated in making this decision. My rosy world turned upside down on 29 November 1999. Our family lost mum to breast cancer and the devastation and grief were intense. I felt I couldn’t continue university and wanted to stay with my dad to help take care of my two younger brothers who were nine and eleven at the time, but dad wouldn’t even consider it and sent me back to school along with my sister and other brother who was fourteen.

Our father did a great job in getting us all through school and settled in life whilst holding down a full time job. Not easy for a single parent in Papua New Guinea, but he refused to have other people take care of his children. During the time of grieving our faith as a family was tested when we took mum home to the village. Talk of sanguma and poisin were rife and we could choose to delve into that further or know that cancer happens and there’s nothing one can do about it. We chose to rest in God, accept that nature would take its course and that eternal life was ours and we would meet her again one day.
Toward the end of my university course I had many questions about my future career and plans. I was encouraged by my pastor in Coffs Harbour to consider working for our church in Papua New Guinea. He told me that, although there were many pastors in the field, there weren’t too many administrative people. At first I was loath to even consider this option because I knew how much the church paid and I had my life goals (travel the world, build a house and buy car all before I was thirty) but after much prayer and talking with dad and receiving his blessing, I moved to Goroka in June 2002 and started work with the Evangelical Brotherhood Church.

When I started work, the harsh realities of life in rural and remote Papua New Guinea really bothered me and I realised what a privileged life I’d had. Visiting remote places and seeing the aching beauty that blankets the grim truth of everyday life gave me a lot of food for thought and helped redirect my life goals.

These past ten years have been very exciting as I have experienced many aspects of the church’s work which has seen me become heavily involved with health services especially in administration and public health coordination. I have found that the satisfaction and contentment gained from this work is payment enough and I have had the privilege of working with some amazing people from all walks of life whose main concern is service to the people so that all can enjoy the “abundant life” that Christ speaks of in John 10:10.

As reprieve from work, I write. I find it soothes and comforts and, while others turn to art or music as emotional outlets, I write. I happened upon PNG Attitude whilst researching information about the Crocodile Prize and enjoy reading and contributing to this blog. My aim in contributing articles is to counter the negative generalisations of Papua New Guinea by presenting glimpses of every day realities, to show that people are people anywhere you go with their own unique problems that they are trying to work out. Amidst the seemingly impossible chaos, things are being done, improvements are being made and hope must be kindled to create a better future for our people.
An isolated and shattered journey is probably the best way to describe my life. As a child, I was rarely allowed to go out to public gatherings on my own or go out and play with other children. My parents would allow other children to come to my home and play with me. Whenever I sneaked out, I had to return early. If I didn’t, my parents would look for me. If it was my father, a slap was the pay.

Well, it is natural for parents to have concern for their children but it was a bit too much on the part of my parents, particularly my father. Even when I was old enough, he was still exercising control over my life until I went to school. I often argued with him about why he didn’t give me the freedom that other village children enjoyed. Dad never explained why. I was to find out myself at a later stage. My grandfather Duma Sina was the paramount chief. The colonial administration appointed him to become bosboi (headman or supervisor). He came to be known as Duma Bospe in my Yui language. He worked extensively with the kiaps in the construction of roads, bridges and outposts, undertaking censuses and other tasks in my area. One of the road constructions he was involved with was the Gumine-Kundiawa highway.

Although grandpa was the paramount chief, he never practiced polygamy. He had a concubine. His brother died at a very young age leaving behind his wife with two young children, a boy and a girl. Grandpa took them under his wing and looked after them. They become part of the Duma family. Grandpa lived to very old age and died peacefully in his sleep in 1984. My father was the last born in a family of two males and two females. Although he was the last born, he inherited the chieftainship of his father. He was appointed Tultul (deputy headman) by the colonial administration. He worked with grandfather and helped the Kiaps in their work. He still carries the title Tultul today.

I was born to become the first and the last child of Niigrus
(Nicholas) Duma and Erkina Tinegiring in the Sina-Duma lineage of the Moiwo-Buba clan of Yui-Yobai, Salt Local Level Government, Karimui Nomane District of the Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea. From the stories I learnt, my mother almost died of delivery complications and haemorrhage while delivering me in the *kunai* thatched family home at Mountain Yobai. She passed out from excessive bleeding and the local midwives thought she was dying. They called my father and the traditional medicine man and they administered all the traditional medication they knew and saved her life. As a result, mum and dad vowed not to have another child.

True to their vow, they did not give me a brother or sister until mum passed on in 1992 of illness. Dad is still rolling his favourite tobacco and puffing it away at Mountain Yobai, the place I have dearly missed and have been longing for fourteen years. Father knew he would not be having another child and I became the apple of his eye. He took great care of me, the disposition I took wrongly as excessive restriction and isolation.

My education was tough but I managed to make it through. In 1973, I attended Grade 1 at the age of 10 at Diani Primary School, three kilometres from home. I walked to school and back every day for six years. *Kaukau* roasted in the ashes of fire and cold water was my lunch for each of those gruesome years. The school was newly established and I was one of the pioneers. We had to do a lot of physical work like constructing the playing field and building classrooms and teachers’ houses with bush materials. With my totally illiterate background, classroom lessons were new and difficult. But as time progressed, I got the hang of it and passed the Grade 6 examinations.

I progressed to Yauwe Wauwe Moses Secondary, then, in 1979, Chuave Provincial High School more than 100 kilometres away from home. Mark Rosen, an Englishman and a veteran educationist, was the headmaster for those four years. Apart from the nationals, I was privileged to have been taught by expatriate teachers Alfred Kaethler from Canada, Miss Smart from Great Britain and Barry Bollinger from Australia who was married to a
Simbu woman. Miss Smart was my English teacher and guidance 
officer. She was the one who encouraged me to read a lot of 
books. Very strict school regulations and discipline at Chuave 
helped to shape and mould my general behaviour and approach 
to schooling.

Apart from schoolwork, I was also involved in sports. Soccer 
and volley ball were my favourites. Rugby league was banned in 
schools during my time. At weekends I went swimming with my 
friends at Mai River or scaling mountains including Mt Elimbari. I 
visited Baiyer River Zoo in the Western Highlands Province and 
the underground central switchboard of the Yonki Hydro Power 
during school excursions. The hardest part of high school was 
finding school fees. My parents were typical subsistence farmers. 
But they sold pigs and paid my fees. Many times food was 
insufficient and I would go hungry. Eventually I learnt to accept 
hunger as a normal part of high school life.

Towards the end of the Grade 10 academic year in 1982, I 
wanted to go on to national high school to do Grades 11 and 12. 
Miss Smart wanted me to go direct to the University of Papua 
New Guinea and attend the one year matriculation course. I 
disagreed but, after a long discussion, she eventually convinced 
me that I could do it. I heeded her counsel and I made it to UPNG 
the following year. One of Papua New Guinea’s prolific writers, Dr 
Steven Winduo, was my matriculation course mate. Again it was 
tough but I managed to get through to full matriculation. I could 
go into any faculty. I chose to take up arts majoring in economics.

The freedom I had been deprived of for all those years I found 
at UPNG. There was total freedom. I was the boss of my own life. I 
could spend the day in class or join my wantoks and have beer 
parties at Two-Mile Hill or Six-Mile Settlement and no one would 
question me or punish me. But I had to get my priorities right. So I 
put my studies first, rugby league second and boozing with my 
wantoks third. My life at UPNG revolved mainly around these 
three activities. I also became involved in writing poems and in 
poetry recitals as part-time activities. I was a founding member of 
the PNG Writers Union which became defunct after few
Some of my best friends have become the best political brains in the country. They are William Duma, Anderson Agiru and Powes Parkop. The five years of university student life came to an end in 1987. Fifteen consecutive years of student life, I felt, was too much. With a bachelor’s degree in economics in hand, my desire to find a job and earn money was strong. My first choice was the PNG Defence Force. For three Christmas breaks, I had worked for the PNGDF in the registry and finance sections at Murray Barracks and I really enjoyed the environment. I had been given a room at the single quarters rent-free with three meals a day for only five kina a fortnight at the privates’ mess.

I had a discussion with the human resources manager on the prospect of joining the PNGDF and he promised me that I could start at the rank of Captain in the Policy and Planning Division. From there I could work my way up to Brigadier-General. I fell for it. When I sought my father’s consent, he disagreed outright. He gave me no room for negotiation. My dream of priding myself with three golden pips shining on my shoulders was shattered. My next career choice was banking. I approached Westpac and the Rural Development Bank. My enquiry with the Rural Development Bank turned into an interview. I was told that I could commence work the next day. So I started working for money the very next day at the bank’s head office at Waigani. That was in February 1988.

I worked for the Rural Development Bank, now the National Development Bank, in various positions spanning eleven years. I was ambitious and I worked in places like Rabaul, Kimbe, Bialla, Namatanai, Manus, Madang and Kainantu. I was more or less a trouble shooter deployed to fix, diffuse and soothe problems. My first daughter Cheryl was born at Nonga Base Hospital in Rabaul. My second daughter Maggie was born at Bialla in the West New Britain Province and the third girl Charlene was born at Manus Hospital in the Manus Province.

My experiences in Manus were memorable. My family and I had lovely times picnicking at the white sandy Salame beach or
boating up the Kari River. I would go fishing in the crystal blue waters of Andra and hunting for *kapuls* up in the highlands of Tingou. There would be no intrusion. It was free and peaceful. My last destination was Goroka and that was where I had an accident that left me paralysed. My highly successful career ended. My dreams and ambitions were shattered at the very prime of my career and life.

The accident happened in February 1999. After spending one year in Goroka, I came to Kundiawa General Hospital. After a spinal fixation attempt failed, I was located in the Isolation Ward. I have been living there ever since. So many things have happened since the accident and most have been for worse and not for better. There were times that I have smelled death, and thank God for not taking my life away.

While living in the hospital, I published my first novel *Paradise in Peril* in 2005. It was an amateur’s work at its best. However, surprisingly there was demand for it. I wanted to publish a second edition but I couldn’t find a cheaper publisher until I got connected to Keith Jackson’s *PNG Attitude* blog courtesy of Jimmy Drekkore. And that’s where the door has opened for me. Their kind support and contributions have ignited the fire in me to keep writing and reading the writings of fellow crocodiles and all the other beasts and Attitudiners.

**Fr Garrett Joseph (Garry) Roche**

I was born on 28 January 1946 in Ballinahown near Fermoy town in County Cork, Ireland; the third born son of Garrett Roche and Margaret O’Toole. I was named Garrett after my father. I attended Grange National Primary School, a two-teacher country school, from 1951 to 1958. Between 1958 and 1963 I attended the secondary school run by the Christian Brothers in Fermoy town. After completing the Leaving Certificate examination in 1963 I worked as a laboratory assistant at the nearby Agricultural Research Institute.
at Moore Park. However, in September of that year I left and joined the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) at Donamon, Roscommon, Ireland.

I was ordained a priest for the Society of the Divine Word on 6 January 1970 and appointed to what was then the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Ten months later, on 8 October 1970, I arrived in the Western Highlands. After an introduction to my role with Fr Arnold Steffen at Kumdi, I was sent to Togoba to take the place of Fr Paul Ksiazek, who was going on leave to Poland. In the middle of 1971, the parish of Karap in the Jimi Valley became vacant and I was asked to go there. Karap was about two hour’s drive from Banz. The government station at Tabibuga was another one hour’s drive from Karap.

While at Karap I got to know the kiaps at Tabibuga. Jack Edwards was in charge, Ken and Lois Logan and Rod Cantlay were also there. Another kiap, Harry Nash, was based at Kol for a while. I got on well with the kiaps and we met on patrol in the bush a few times. I would go to Tabibuga for a second mass on Sundays and often call in to the kiaps after mass. Tabibuga had an airstrip and businessman Brian Heagney would sometimes fly in at the weekend. He never came empty-handed, bringing a supply of SP beer and other delicacies. (If I remember correctly, Kevin Cantwell worked with Brian Heagney, and he was married to a sister of Jack Edwards’ wife, both fine ladies from the Yule Island area.)

During this time I also got to know the late Sir Thomas Kavali and the late James Kuru Kupul, both members of Parliament for Jimi. They were political rivals but both fine gentlemen in their own way. Pastoral work took me all over the middle Jimi and my visits to Ambullua took me through Kol and parts of upper Jimi. There was no road to Kol in those times. We walked everywhere. After a year in Karap I was asked to move, as Bishop Bernarding wanted to give that area to a group of Spiritan priests who had been in Nigeria. So I moved to Ulga in the Nebyler valley and took over the parish from Fr Krimm who was going on leave.

Fr Krimm had a coffee plantation and would fully process the
coffee and sell it to Australia. He did not expect me to do the same, he just arranged that I would sell the newly picked coffee ‘cherry’ to Danny Leahy whose Korgua plantation was not far off. This was ‘Korgua’ Danny Leahy who, together with his brother Mick Leahy and Jim Taylor, was in the first group of outsiders to explore the Highlands. He features in the documentary film, First Contact. There was another Danny Leahy in Goroka - a younger nephew of the older Danny.

I did what Fr Krimm told me. In the coffee season in the afternoon I would load the truck with bags of coffee cherry and drive down to Korgua. Danny Leahy’s workers would weigh it and give me a docket which I would bring to Danny in his house. Danny was glad of some company. He was a bit deaf and had poor eyesight. He would call me into his office and we would have a drink or two or three before he paid me there and then and I headed back to Ulga. I got to know several of his family and still have contact with many of them. On Fr Krimm’s return from leave early in 1973, I was appointed Parish priest of Rebiamul with Fr William Ross as pastor emeritus. Fr Ross died on 20 May 1973 and I was officially nominated to take his place.

In 1977 I took a year out from Papua New Guinea and worked in London with drug addicts. These addicts were all registered and would pick up their legal doses of methadone and other medications from various clinics. It was a different experience. In 1978 I returned to Papua New Guinea and ended up in Hagen again. Then in 1981 I was asked to study Church Law (canon law) and was in Ottawa, Canada, for two years.

In 1983 I returned to Hagen and was there until the end of 1986. From 1987-1990, I taught at the national Seminary at Bomana near Port Moresby before, in 1991, travelling to Rome for doctoral studies. After completing them, I returned to Papua New Guinea early in 1994. Coming back to Hagen I was somehow appointed as a community representative on the Hagen Hospital Board and remained on that, and later on its replacement the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority, until 2016. I was also chaplain at Holy Trinity Teachers College.
Several Catholic dioceses that together had started Holy Trinity Teachers College, had a combined investment in Salamaua Holdings to support the College and I was asked to be their representative on the Salamaua Board (Lae International Hotel). In that capacity, I got to know Sir Bob Sinclair and John Atherton, both very interesting characters. Attending meetings of these bodies gave me a good experience of government and business boards and was a fine preparation for being appointed Chair of the Board of Trustees of Divine Word Institute in 1998.

In the same year I was involved with the legal drafting of the new 1999 Act for Divine Word University and continued as Chair of Council (Chancellor) when the new Act came into force. I remained as Chair of Council of DWU from 1999 until 2013 when I resigned the position. Also in 1999 I was also appointed to St Paul’s Parish in Mt Hagen where I remained until 2005. This was a very busy but also a very enjoyable parish. After helping in various parishes in Mt Hagen diocese for several years, in 2014 I moved to Divine Word University in Madang as Human Resource Director. If all goes well I will finish here in April 2016 and take home leave in Ireland before possibly returning to Papua New Guinea for a new position.

John K Kamasua

My parents were illiterate and were unable to write any of my story, or even have photos of my early life. Now, of course, I do have photos of school, college, and university life. The life I have now today really when I started school. But I had an earlier life which I can only recollect in patches.

My mother tells me I had a pretty typical childhood. I was born in the former Kundiawa General Hospital and a day later spent the night in Sikewake, near there. Mother tells me I cried all night and nothing they did could make me go back to sleep. They thought I was going to die that night. And so I was introduced to life on
For a brief period, I succumbed to all sorts of minor ailments and frequently visited the nearby Koge Health Centre with my mother. It was an accumulation of the penicillin from injections that caused a deep-burrowing sore on my right hip. The sore caused my young legs to be weak, so that for a long time I could not walk and had to be pushed around in a wheelbarrow. Two outcomes awaited me if nothing was done: death or permanent inability to walk. Mother was frantic. I was her first child and she was not going to let circumstance dictate the outcome.

She swung into action and took me to all the doctors in Simbu who had an opinion or advice. She did this carrying me in a bilum and walking for the most part because there were few PMVs then. My mother told me that a particular doctor saved me by applying a treatment not known in medical science at the time. So I have a scar to show my children. I am convinced that, though life did not favour me above others, it did keep me safe within its palms. For that I am thankful every day.

After I began primary school in the early 1980s, many of the boys and girls I went to school with left after a year or two. School to them appeared gruelling and punishing. They got caned for coming late and for fighting, for not bringing lunch and sometimes for not washing. They would be made to stand on one leg in front of class and they were made to pick leaves or clean a classroom if they were up to any mischief on school grounds. But I survived because I liked listening to the stories of the teachers and the radio programs about Yokomo, Raka, Ranu, Noka, Tabu and other personalities.

School was also a place where my character was shaped. I did not always have lunch money and sometime missed breakfast. Mum did her best but she had another five mouths to feed. Although we never went to bed hungry, there were times when I did not have food to eat for breakfast or lunch. I did not have a pair of shoes until I was in high school.

Yet somehow life did not push me away, it kept me in. I grew up not expecting much from my parents but making the most out
of the things that were in front of me.

I sometimes tell my own children, who now go to school, to appreciate the things they have that I lacked back then: running water, a secure roof, power, school uniforms and clothes, lunch money, shoes, books and access to technology and information. And I have always taken them to the best doctors in town if they felt sick. I want them to appreciate the things they have now and how they can become better people in a holistic sense. Not just through wealth, possessions or fleeting success.

I am very pleased that my two daughters are doing well in secondary school in Port Moresby. Both have strong inclinations to careers in the natural and physical sciences.

During the final year in primary school, I began to develop a liking for reading. I read anything I came across. I think this did more than anything to improve my performance in other subjects. I slowly gained confidence but doing something with this confidence would wait a few years down the line.

I read notes, books and anything with words during the day and beside the fire or by candlelight at night. I am certain this habit contributed to my bad eyesight. The obsessive reading habit followed me into high school. By the time I reached Grade 10, I had to sit in front and squint to see the board clearly.

I have always considered myself lucky, which is not quite the same as being successful. I was among the many students from Muaina High School who went to national high schools in Papua New Guinea. We set the record for the most number of students going to national high schools and other colleges. A record I believe still stands today.

Back then there were only four national high schools. We were on a government scholarship called Natschol. I was supported by this until I completed my studies at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1996. We were among the last group of students to be awarded national scholarships, since then things have changed.

I consider myself lucky to have travelled widely within Papua New Guinea and abroad, including Australia and England and countries in Asia and the Pacific. I have discovered that
confidence is an important ingredient to realising one’s potential.

Two things happened at high school that cemented my conviction to pursue a life of knowledge and the development of human capability. The first was in Grade 7 when I offered the correct meaning for the word “comprehend.” I knew exactly what it meant as I had earlier studied the word and its meaning.

The second incident was after I scored the highest mark in the written expression examination in Grade 10 at Muaina; it was one of the highest marks in Simbu Province at that time. I scored 19/20. I have written about both incidents in a piece I wrote for the Crocodile Prize in 2015, *If you can read this, thank a teacher.*

In my own life, I have seen in the power of reading and writing. I have been promoted these gifts and encouraged people, especially young people, to read and write. I realise now that to say that some aspects of my life have been bad and others good would be unfair to life itself.

Life has always presented itself to me simply. It did not colour one day different from another. Nor did it value one event in my life more importantly than the rest.

However, the events I prefer to remember as important include: getting selected for high school which started this life of learning; attending Passam National High School; receiving a government scholarship to attend UPNG; walking up to the podium to get my degree with my mother looking on; working with an international NGO for four years; receiving a European Union Scholarship for post-graduate studies at Reading University in the UK; and working for a time with Australia’s development assistance agency, AusAID.

A few other events that should be added to this list have facilitating the development of plans and fundraising that resulted in Muaina High School becoming a secondary school in 2010. The recognition and blessing for this came from then Education Minister James Marape.

I see myself in a privileged position now to impart knowledge in my own field and also instil in students the desire and belief to realise their potential. Becoming an academic was not my dream
job or intention, but I have come to thoroughly enjoy it. It presents me with the opportunity to impart some of the wisdom I have accumulated over the years. And the fun part is that I am always learning new ideas and taking on new challenges.

While teaching, I have been presented with many opportunities to provide consultancies, views and perspectives to international and national organisations. I have developed the Career Development and Employment Enhancement Program on UPNG Waigani campus to assist students to develop a sense of career and enhance their employment prospects.

Three years ago I partnered with Michael Esop of the Psychology Strand at UPNG to introduce into the program career tools or psychological tests. I am thrilled that Dr Leo Marai, a specialist in industrial psychology, is lending his support. Together we are building a very strong team around a vibrant program. This is what excites me, since it is doing something different that is appreciated and needed by the students.

I have received many positive testimonies from students and young people who have attended our workshops on how they have applied the learning in their job applications and career choices. Many have secured jobs after attending the workshops.

Because of my human service background and involvement with young people, I have been invited to apply to be a mentor in the Queen’s Young Leaders Program through Cambridge University in the United Kingdom.

If selected, I will mentor a young leaders program in Papua New Guinea or the Commonwealth for a year. These are young people who have been recognised by the Queen herself. Of course I will do this without payment. And I have made up my mind to continue to promote writing and reading on the University of Papua New Guinea Waigani campus, in Port Moresby and in Papua New Guinea. This will be an important part of my future life.
The early morning sun crept across the brown room, eventually arriving at a bed upon which slumped a skinny ten-year old boy with a weak chest and bad eyes. He was staring glumly at a sprung mousetrap on the floor, which he himself had set off thinking, in the gloom, that it might have been a gift unexpected. He had hoped it was something more than the contents of the pillowcase hanging at bed’s end. Striped handkerchiefs, grey school shorts, a book by Robert Louis Stevenson and a packet of raisins and muscatels, already consumed. Another Christmas Day had dawned in Nowra.

My first decade of life was a time of bemusement and disappointment, whereas my second was a time of growing hope followed by a triumphal awakening in what was then the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The 1950s world, the contradictions of which I did not understand in the least, seemed to promise a lot but deliver so little.

My life story began in January 1945 on the second floor flat of a mean building near the centre of the struggling but once-flourishing silk town of Macclesfield in northern England. My mother was in labour and my father was at war. My paternal grandfather, a retired wastrel who had managed to squander the entirety of his father’s fortune, had taken to hawking matches to smokers on the street. My maternal grandfather had been a silk weaver who, by the 1940s, was reduced to a modest life due to depression, war and technology. My mother sold ladies clothes at Marks and Spencer in Manchester. She was a formidable saleswoman - pretty, vivacious, persuasive and tempestuous.

The money that had come into the family in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was due to the efforts and talent of my paternal great-grandfather, Robert (Bob) Jackson. Talent, first, on the cornet and then in the organisation of people and affairs. A photo of Robert, taken in his 1880’s prime, shows a man of direct mien who does not appear to tolerate fools. As its manager, Bob
twice led the Besses o’ th’ Barn Band on Empire tours of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. These were the years before football became entrenched and when competitive brass banding held sway as the passion of the masses. And so Robert accumulated the wealth that his son, my grandfather Walter, also briefly a bandsman, managed to dissipate fecklessly and wholly.

Walter and his wife were silent people who lived in silence in a small terrace house at the end of a street that turned into a hillside. When my father’s younger brother, also named Walter, died of diphtheria in the early 1920s, he was whisked from home while his siblings were at school and his name never mentioned thenceforth. Great-grandfather Robert died at Walter’s funeral while paying the undertaker.

My father, Stanley – a strong, silent, self-centred type who died aged 98 and who possibly suffered a form of what we now call Asperger’s Syndrome – was the first of his line to go to grammar school (as a scholarship boy) and the first to go to university. He and my mother Joan were smart enough after the war to understand that Britain had lost its Great and, in 1949, along with my sister Susan and me, they migrated to Australia on the battle-battered migrant ship *Georgic*. After some weeks at Bradfield Park migrant camp in Sydney, my father was appointed as a Geography and Commerce teacher at Nowra Intermediate High School and the State government found accommodation for us in a disused schoolmaster’s house at Beaumont in the beautiful but then isolated Kangaroo Valley.

My mother, acculturated to city life, felt abandoned, and sometimes frightened and bewildered. When itinerant Aborigines knocked at the door for “a bit of grub, mussis”, they were given the week’s grocery box in the hope they would go away. Which they did up the steep hill and at accelerating pace. Meanwhile, twice a day my father and I traversed Cambewarra Mountain to Nowra in the Austin 10. My schooling had begun.

One fateful afternoon in Grade 1, I became upset and then ill, wheezing and panting for breath. I was placed alone in a room and given paper to tear. “Don’t give him scissors,” a teacher said.
A puzzle I had to get used to. It was my first asthma attack and it would be many years before the disease was properly understood. It dogged me all my school days. School for me was always a matter of conflict with authority and “could do better” report cards. Despite the asthma, however, I made the school soccer, basketball and debating teams and played competitive cricket, tennis and rugby league.

And I developed an urge to write. At age nine, I published the Worrigee News (circulation ten) using a paint-on-gel printing process and funded by house-to-house sales and an advertisement for his watch repair business by family friend, the landscape artist Leonard Long. I studied piano at a nearby convent under Sister Agatha, a rotund, florid, pie-faced nun adorned with round spectacles and a three-foot ruler. Sister Agatha did not so much teach piano as enforce it. It was not a love of music she induced but a fear of Sister Agatha and her brutal knuckle-searing responses to ill-conceived notes, ill-timed pauses and ill-struck pianissimos.

It sort of worked. My playing was exemplary. I achieved high scores in the annual Australian Music Examination Board examinations in both practice and theory. Sister Agatha made us pray in the Catholic Church beforehand; which as a committed Anglican I did with trepidation. Anyway as it happened, that fat nun left me a lifelong legacy – a hatred of playing the piano. Meanwhile at home, following some bizarre medical advice, my bed was put out to the open verandah so I could sleep with the spiders and moths as therapy for my asthma.

When I was fourteen, American evangelist Billy Graham visited Australia and I went to listen to him on landline at my local church, where I was a Sunday School teacher. I was converted to card-carrying Christianity on the spot, a decision that, when announced to my family, was greeted with a snort by my father. It was a faith that would be tested and which collapsed agonisingly three years later after I moved from home to Sydney as a student and experienced a time of great personal turmoil.

At fifteen, in my penultimate high school year, it was with a
sense of excitement that I realised that liberation from home and school and Nowra was looming. I edited the school magazine and, under the pen name Jumpshot, reported basketball for the *Nowra Leader*. I had also learned the value of mateship and its role in socialisation and sex education. Empowered, I took myself off to a church-run Father and Son night to expand my knowledge, my father refusing to attend.

Then the recruiters from the Department of Territories came to town. Papua New Guinea seemed to be as far away from Nowra as a young bloke might aspire to and it was a prospect I relished. If I could beat the selection process, I could detach myself from the conflict of my family life and the existential emptiness of a small town. So I took the train to Sydney, bought some patent medicine to fight off an incipient asthma attack and faced the selectors.

When the letter in a brown envelope dropped into our mailbox in November 1961, it advised that, dependent upon my results in the Leaving Certificate, an education cadetship at the Australian School of Pacific Administration awaited. I scraped through the exams, and the Territory of Papua and New Guinea was at hand. It was to change my life.

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**Kela Kapkora Sil Bolkin**

At the Kundiawa provincial hospital on the 9th of August 1973, the morning dawn had stagnated, as the Simbus say, in the half light of dawn'. The small township was soaked with drizzle. The crystal white clouds had astutely sought refuge on the adjoining peaks of Dee Pek, Argol, Porol Scarp and Tokma. Seen from the air the junction of the Simbu and Wahgi Rivers, (Murane and Uwai) seemed as if they were in a scene from the Antarctic. All in all, the vicinity of the four cornered Kundiawa town was soaked and submerged in a cold hard white landscape.

In the Kundiawa provincial hospital labour ward, timid but stout Simbu mothers were strolling anxiously around with skirts,
laplaps and a couple with grass skirts awaiting what had turned out to be a marathon delivery. Erkina couldn’t execute a normal delivery so a Caesarean was needed to deliver the 4kg child now wrapped in a cloth and left in her arms. The husband asked whether the child was male or female.

‘Ah, if I can remember correctly, it is a boy.’

Bolkun smiled as if suddenly there was sunshine.

“I was the only male in my family but now I have this many sons,” Bolkun said and folded four of his fingers on his right hand.

I was born to Bolkun and Erkina. My biological mother Erkina was the second wife of my father. Bolkun’s hamlet was at Ulwal in the Bari land. He slaughtered a prized pig to sanctify me and to thank my mother. Sweet potato, taro and other vegetables were thrown on top of the pork on the hot stones of the earth oven. In an hour’s time the aroma of the food was oozing out of the earth. The women gathered and uncovered the oven and the steam vaporized.

“Duagau Kapkora visited Erkina every single day at the Kundiawa hospital with food. Therefore we will name the child Kela Kapkora,” said Bolkun.

The first name Kela was given to me for the simple reason that I didn’t have an iota of hair on my head at delivery.

At the same dinner speech that day I was officially given to Apikan as her son. Dama, her husband was sterile and so he had not been able to have children with either Apikan or Makan, his second wife. Apikan was my father’s sister.

“He is no longer our son. He is now your son. He will fetch water and break firewood for you and Dama during your old age,” said Bolkun.

Apikan cried and yelled all together as she crossed over to Erkina to take me. I was sleeping on a pandanus mat inside a bilum. I then officially became the child of my aunty and her husband.

On the 17th of September 1975, the sun emerged early and was showing a third of its face at the top of Dee Pek. The people in the smoky hut at Ulwal didn’t know that Papua New Guinea had got
its independence the previous day. I didn’t know either.

Apikan decided to follow her husband and his second wife Makan to Ganige in the north west of the Simbu Province to settle. Ganige is some 45 kilometres northwest of the Bari land and is the entrance to the Wahgi Valley and is along the Okuk Highway.

Apikan and Erkina wrapped some roasted sweet potatoes in some banana leaves and were talking leisurely while Bolkun was still dozing on his log bed close to the door. He joined in the conversation occasionally.

“Which road will we take to reach Mingende?” asked Apikan.

“Follow the Welamur-Gor-Mingende road to Ganige. In case it rains you can call in at Banake or Dik Daka,” replied Bolkun.

Two of Bolkun’s sisters were married to the Erula Nauro tribe so if we need help when we crossed the Nauro country, we could call into their huts.

Apikan, when she adopted me, did not anticipate that in the years to come the entire population of the Galkope would succumb to western cultural I would largely adopt the white man’s culture. Apikan only coached and imparted to me the skills to be a productive man in the traditional way of life.

We used to have a long kunai hut that was divided in the middle. We slept in one half with our pigs in the other. Whatever we ate, the crumbs and other rubbish were thrown to the other side for the pigs. Sometimes, I used to invite the small piglets to sleep with me on my dirty mattress. To this day, I still remember the names of every one of those piglets. Pigs were an important asset in our life. Socio-economic shocks to the traditional Simbu life was cushioned with pigs. To this day, I still have pigs. I have a pigsty in Port Moresby and still have pigs in Simbu too.

I was raised by a couple who had no formal education and that meant there were no children’s books or any other books for that matter at home. We didn’t have lights at night to even read the pamphlets distributed by the Catholic Church. In the family home there was no other language spoken. In fact I didn’t learn to speak English or Pidgin until I stepped into a classroom for formal
I lived happily with my adopted mother and father at Ganige. I had great childhood experiences like floating on rubber tubes down along the Ganige River headwaters to the Wahgi River, looking for birds’ nests, fishing in Goramara Creek and the Ganige or the Wahgi Rivers, roasting kaukau on the river bank, mock battles in the bush, Cowboys and Indians games and much more.

On most evenings, we were told bed time stories in our dialect and I used to enjoy that and looked forward to it every evening. My adopted parents saw priests and kiaps with shorts and white socks rolled up to their knees occasionally in the tribal lands and they wanted me to be like them when I grew up. They wanted me to work for the white men even though they couldn’t read or write themselves.

On a chilly afternoon in January 1980, Bolkun arrived at Goglmugl from the Bari land where he lived with his second wife Erkina. He made regular visits to Ganige because he now had a third wife, Ukueveh and her two children to tend as well.

“I came to ask if you could allow Kela to attend school this year. There aren’t any schools here. The nearest are at Kup, Moruma or Gau! but they are far away and in foreign tribal lands,” Bolkun said. “As such I thought he could come back to the Bari land and attend the school at Neragaima.”

Apikan was lectured on the benefits of sending me to school and she was convinced. In February 1980, I returned to the Bari land and attended Neragaima Primary School, leaving behind my childhood friends and my adopted mother at Ganige.

Fr. Paul Steven from Germany had turned a small abandoned aid post into a library when a new and bigger clinic was built in Neragaima. He stocked the library with children’s books, Reader’s Digests, a few encyclopaedias and some magazines. I used to frequent this small library and flip through the books but look mostly at the pictures. Later, when I was able to read, I read the children’s’ books. Eventually, the habit of reading sprouted and grew roots in me.

I was selected to go to a boarding high school. My parents
bought me some new clothes and shoes for the first time in my life. They escorted me and left me at the school. My father stressed some important rules that I had to strictly follow during the four years of schooling.


When I read Achebe’s book, I realized that what my biological father told me in the dusk of night regarding his experiences in Lae, when he went to Bulolo and Finschhafen with his shot gun looking for Bird of Paradise feathers, marrying his third wife at Finschhafen, working with the army at the Moem Barracks, and so on, were reflected there in Achebe’s novel. Later in life I thought about writing a similar novel. Part of that work was published on the PNG Attitude blog as ‘Seduction at the Hotel Cecil’.

In late January, 1991 a small group of family members gathered at the family hut at Goramara. They contributed towards paying my fees to do year 11 at the St. Fidelis College, minor seminary. St. Fidelis College was situated at the western end of Alexishafen near Madang and is isolated in the midst of coconuts and mangroves.

I arrived at St. Fidelis College from Simbu around 9:30 pm in the night. Some ten metres away from the dormitory was the sea and I heard the waves crashing onto the coral and smelt the sea coming in through the windows with the breeze. I chose a bed in the corner of the dormitory and went to bed immediately. At dawn some other new Simbu students joined me and we briefly surveyed the coastline and felt and tasted the salt water. It was our first time to see the ocean.

St. Fidelis tradition required that at 4 pm during weekdays we had to read aloud for 20 minutes concentrating on pronouncing words properly and hearing them as we read aloud. We also had
speech classes where we chose a topic and talked to the class for 5 minutes. These all contributed to reading, writing and improving our English. I owe the priests, brothers and sisters for moulding me and instilling in me the discipline to develop a reading habit.

In early August 1995, I applied to do a Bachelor of Law at the University of Papua New Guinea. In mid-January 1996, I attended the university. However, I dropped Law and re-streamed and studied Social Science.

My family was not rich. My adopted parents and Bolkun were all growing grey hair and becoming frail. None of them had coffee plots or big portions of land at Ganige. It was only a settlement. All our assets were back in the Bari land. Ukueveh, the third wife shared her gardening plots with Erkina in order for both to plant enough kaukau to feed the pigs. Pigs were the only income for the family. Makan and Apikan also shared plots.

Up in the highlands a party is not a party unless they have pork and beer. Hence, there was a good market for pigs during the Easter and Christmas festive seasons. Our family took advantage of this and raised extra pigs to sell and pay for my tuition fees.

At UPNG I read a few more books written by Papua New Guineans and also read about the adventures of Karo Ararua who has been jailed and hanged in Badili. I also read publications such as Okobondo and Yagl Ingu. I had developed a liking for PNG literature and read as much as I could.

I attended a course taught by Dr. Winduo and later showed him my first manuscript. I had finished my first book but publishing opportunities were scarce in PNG. Even now most of the opportunities available are only through PNG Attitude and such non-profit organisations as Pukpuk Publications, which uses Amazon as a publishing platform. I therefore struggled to find a publisher for my book in PNG.

After many years I eventually got a mention in the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia’s Una Voce journal in Sydney regarding my plight. Word spread among former kiaps and teachers who worked in PNG and eventually Phil Fitzpatrick found me a publisher. Crawford House Publishing in Adelaide wanted...
my manuscript. It was owned by a former South Australian Museum researcher and publisher who had worked in the Southern Highlands and then the Western Province in the 1960s-70s. Phil did the edits and I eventually launched the book at the PNG High Commission in Canberra while studying at the Australian National University.

I am one of the pioneers of the PNG Attitude blog and have contributed articles since 2011. Phil Fitzpatrick has motivated me to continue to write through occasional emails and has been the chief editor of my articles since 2011. I owe him a life pig as a symbol of sipuu (thank you).

I will write about anything at all for all audiences. I get a lot of positive comments and compliments from readers but occasionally I get threats and derogatory names from the supporters of bent bureaucrats and fat cats for writing objectively. These have become one of the motivations that have enabled me to continue to write. I believe we can become change agents from objective writing.

When I compare my first article with my recent articles on the PNG Attitude blog I can see a lot of difference. I have improved a lot since then. I am sure I will continue to write since reading and writing are now a part of my daily chores. I am thankful to the PNG Attitude blog for nourishing the writing talents in me and others like me. I have been working on a couple of other books for a few years now. The delays are a killer but hopefully I will get them through to publication soon. Wakai wo!

Leonard Fong Roka

My father was from Unea (commonly referred to as Bali) Island in the Witu Island group of the West New Britain Province. As an auto-mechanic apprentice at the Panguna Mining School and in his work in the Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) light vehicles workshop, he had many Bougainvillean friends.
Dad met my mother, an Arawa High School student and a blood niece of Bougainville leaders, the brothers Martin Miriori and Joseph Kabui, in the late 1970s. They married and I was born in 1979 at Arawa General Hospital. My father, Leonard Fong from Hoskins in West New Britain, decided I should inherit his name.

In the early 1980s, my nuclear family left our home hamlet, Kavarongnau, in the Panguna District’s Tumpusiong Valley and resettled in the mountainous Kupe area inland from Bougainville’s then capital, Arawa. At Kupe, Bougainville’s first gold mining operation had flourished in the early 1930s. My family reclaimed a piece of land my grandmother had previously purchased from her in-laws, the family members of my grandfather.

In the mid-1980s my father resigned from BCL and adopted a religious life at Kupe. In 1986, I began my formal education at Piruana Village Tokples School, a pre-school located between Arawa and the Kupe Mountains. While in school an illness attacked and nearly paralysed and killed me. My grandmother and others declared it was an attack from our spiritual masters for having missed a required initiation, so I was taken to live with an old woman relative at Parakake on the Loloho Port- Panguna Mine access road.

While there for the whole of 1986, my father did his catechist training at Mabiri Ministry School some twenty kilometres north of Arawa. Then he began working as a catechist in the developing Arawa Parish with the American priest, Fr Gerard Palettea. After completing my traditional healing process, I resumed schooling in 1987, this time at Peter Lahis Community School in Arawa.

As part of his church work, dad was also a member of a community group known as Matau Nerinaving that was pressuring the North Solomons (Bougainville) Provincial Government to remove New Guinean squatter settlers. This was a group had been created by the people inland from Arawa whose land was being overtaken by urbanisation and slums. On weekends I attended Matau Nerinaving meetings with my father.

I was in Grade 2 in 1988, when PNG police brutality began against my Bougainville people. The backdrop was increasing
tensions surrounding the impact of the big gold and copper mine at Panguna. In 1989, with the Bougainville crisis intensifying, dad left Arawa to be close to the rest of the family in the Kupe Mountains. My brother and I were then transferred to Kaperia Community School, dwelling with our relative, Joseph Kabui, then premier of the North Solomons. In late July 1989, the Kupe villagers were evacuated to Kaino village and my brother and I attended school there until 1990, when the Australia-backed PNG blockade on my island was enforced and services shut down.

I witnessed the whole Bougainville conflict. I lost my father in 1993 when he was executed by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). My father and his religious life had tended to deny me exposure to my people and culture. But his death opened me to learning our way of life and to be a man. I mingled with my people and learned skills like building houses.

In 1994, after hearing that the PNG Defence Force would establish schools in Arawa, where a civilian ‘care centre’ was being built, my mother led us out to Arawa at midnight in order to evade BRA elements. We arrived safely and a month later the PNGDF attempted to recapture the Panguna mine. The next year, with Theodore Miriung leading a peace-building effort in Bougainville, I resumed school at what was formerly the Bovo International Primary School, remaining there until 1996. By this time, my religious mother had remarried another religious man from Panguna.

From 1997 to 2000, I was at Arawa High School. In Grade 7, teacher William Mania from the Eastern Highlands ordered us to write poems every day and Kiwi author and ornithologist Don Hadden was my English teacher for three consecutive years. In 2001 and 2002 I was at Hutjena Secondary School where the freedom got me drinking and womanising and in 2003 I attended the University of Papua New Guinea with a dream to study literature. Here I had my first piece of poetry published by University News.

My studies were interrupted by my unofficial departure from university in 2004 due to a personal financial crisis. Taking part-
times jobs, I remained in Bougainville for almost seven years
before. This period saw my family return to the the deserted
hamlet of Kavarongnau in the Tumpusiong Valley since our former
hamlet, Kupe, and its gardens had been looted and destroyed. I
purchased second hand roof ing iron in Arawa, hired a chainsaw
man and built a semi-permanent four-room house. My Arawa
family then headed to Tumpusiong and we added more houses to
my creation.

We also planted a cocoa plantation of 3,000 trees on other
land in the Bana District of South Bougainville. Leaving this to the
other family members, I then created a plot in another part of
Tumpusiong where I erected my second house. I was to expand
this new site to 500 cocoa trees but I enrolled at Divine Word
University in Madang, interrupting this work.

My desire to go to university was not generated by my will to
study but by a book that carried the words ‘Published by the DWU
Press’. Having written a collection of eighteen short stories and
over one hundred poems during my seven years at home (I had
exchanged letters with author Dr Steven Winduo at UPNG who
advised me to write one hundred poems but I later lost contact
with him), I thought if I went to DWU as a student maybe it could
help my urge to write.

It did not work out the way I thought, but my 2011
communication skills lecturer, Mrs Aiva Ore, mentioned blogging
as an avenue of self-publishing and that captured my attention.
After her lecture, I went to the internet and conceived a blog that
bore my name, Leonard Fong Roka. In the course of that same
fortnight, looking for support information for my blog, I
discovered the Crocodile Prize that eventually led me to PNG
Attitude.

Writing for PNG Attitude since 2011 has made me feel a lot like
a writer; and there has also been much improvement in my
writing. But more is yet to be done. PNG Attitude is a venue
where I decant my thoughts, stories and dreams to a wider
audience. I have confidence in myself that before I die I will caress
a book with ‘by Leonard Fong Roka’ on the cover and leave behind
a legacy of a pile of writings – in PNG Attitude’s words - being a ‘lonely Bougainvillean voice’ for Bougainvilleans to love or hate.

Since this was written, Leonard had published five books and won two Crocodile Prize awards – the first for short stories in 2013 and the second for Book of the Year, ‘Brokenville’, in 2014

Martyn Namorong

Life is full of stories that may never be told. So, as Keith asked me and some other writers to tell our own stories, I was quite lost about where to start. So here’s a superficial version of My Story. I was born in Baimuru 27 years ago. My mum and dad met at that muddy outstation where it rains six hundred days a year. My mum was a community school teacher and my dad a forest officer. My mum’s from the Western Province and my dad is from Madang. I don’t remember much about Baimuru except for the rain and the mud. Oh, and I should mention the hospital. I was this really good kid who didn’t have a foul mouth like I do today, but the only time I was moved to say the ‘f’ word was when the nurses at Baimuru were sticking a needle in my backside. I had a deeply religious upbringing so it’s sort of ironic that I don’t do God the way I was brought up.

My earliest memory of an election was the 1992 elections whilst in Baimuru. I remember how my friends and I used to fill the front of our shirts with newspapers and march around the house pretending that we were candidates. It’s funny because, until I was old enough to think sensibly, I thought in order for anyone to be a politician they first had to grow a pot belly. By December 1992, my family had moved to the Western Province and lived at Raroge Community School near my mum’s village in the South Fly District. My dad remained at Baimuru as a forester whilst mum taught at Raroge. I suppose my identity as a Western Province man comes out of those years. Although my dad is from Madang, I have little cultural connection there.

When I think of home (or peles blong mi), I think of the wet
season in the trans-Fly savannah woodland, when all the creeks are flooded and deer and wallaby get caught in floodwaters. I think of the rain clouds and the thunder and lightning flashes and the sounds of cockatoos and parrots screeching as they head home. It is this same sense of going home that the birds have that I have for Malam village. There’s an innate beauty of the savannah, with its light green foliage interspersed with palms, swamp grass and billabongs that fill up with water during the wet season and dry up during the dry season. The jacaranda tree dominates the savannah, and when it flowers, the nectar attracts birds, insects and humans too.

The key community event that dominated my childhood was the construction of an airfield at Malam. I remember how obsessed the villagers were with trying to get it completed. But since its opening in 1994, it has been little used. However there still exists pride that aeroplanes have landed at Malam, and I suppose that’s ‘development’ for the villagers.

My family moved to Kamusie logging camp in 1994 and my dad joined us there. Kamusie was great except for the mud, rain and isolation in dense tropical rainforests. I’d say I grew up and learnt most of what I know at this bush camp. The school had an excellent library with books that I enjoyed. Today I do not read as much as I used to at Kamusie. Even the Aid Post was quite good, staffed by nurses and a general practitioner from the Philippines. Whilst other Papua New Guinean health facilities still administered chloroquine to malaria patients, Kamusie aid post was dispensing artesunate.

At Kamusie, I learnt how to paddle a canoe and swam across the Guavi River on several occasions. During my High School years in Port Moresby, it was difficult for me to criticise Rimbunan Hijau like my classmates, because the school and aid post at Kamusie received enormous support from the company and helped to create the successful person I am today.

From Kamusie my family moved to Daru, except for my dad who remained at Kamusie. I did Grades 7 and 8 at Karakara Primary School. My experiences on Daru were horrible. Relatives
from home kept filling the house and there wasn’t enough space to sleep or food to eat. I was also bullied by people at school, in the neighbourhood and by half the town. When my family got news that we were moving to Port Moresby, I was relieved. But life in Port Moresby was stressful. I would frequently wish I was still a kid back home or at Kamusie.

I attended Port Moresby Grammar School, then Jubilee Catholic Secondary. I believe my strong socialist tendencies were developed at what was a conservative catholic school on issues such as condoms but with very strong emphasis on issues of social justice. At Jubilee I got involved with the Youth Against Corruption Association and was its chairman during my first year at university. Reflecting on my university years, these were perhaps the most horrible times of my life, although I really did enjoy parts of university life, especially the movie nights and the Ms Taurama Quest.

I could write a book about what happened after I dropped out of university, sold betel nut on the street and became a famous blogger but I won’t bore you. One thing is certain, I don’t dream anymore, I grapple with the facts as they are. Perhaps there are too many dreamers in Papua New Guinea, there’s no one to deal with the reality of life in Papua New Guinea.

**Michael Dom**

I am Simbu. My parents were born in the foothills of Yoba Kogul, at Ninal Village, Sinesine. Yoba Kogul is part of the massive limestone structure that dominates the entrance into the Simbu from its Eastern Highlands border all the way to Kundiawa town where it falls steeply before the mighty Wara Simbu. The modern Okuk highway has tried for decades to wind its way around this immense geological formation, but so far has had poor success in straddling the cliffs. The earth slides and shifts beneath the machinations of man. Strangely enough, I am proud.
of this.

My ancestors harvested the great trees that towered above those white topped cliffs and hauled them down from the rugged slopes to serve as the massive centre posts for our *hausman*. Our fathers have for centuries planted *karuka* trees (*Pandanus jejunum*) in its foothills for their sons to harvest. These days the dust from the highway, which is right along the edge of our *karuka gaden*, often covers the vegetation in thick blankets. My people have received the usual compensation money for the road construction but I wonder how much longer we will plant the *karuka*. I have yet to plant mine.

My father, Kuri, was the fifth son in a family of the Bulagau Clan, whose numerous sons are renowned for their skills in *pait bilong tumbuna* and at *tanim het singsing*, for which they are called to perform far and wide. They are warrior poets. My grandfather was a warrior of a kind not known today. He was a well-respected man of few words. It is because of my grandfather’s words that I have become who I am today. It was Dom Oganpewa who sent my father to school when it was considered that he was far too young and that it was not his place in the family to become educated.

It was Dom Oganpewa who returned my family to Port Moresby city with my mother, when tradition dictated that we three children be divided among the brothers after my father had passed on. It was my grandfather who granted me the namesake of a giant red headed Scotsman by the name of Michael Guinea, rather than follow the tradition of me taking his own name. Dom Oganpewa and Michael Guinea were good drinking mates although neither could speak a word of any language to the other. They had some mysterious understanding between them.

The day my grandfather passed away, my faithful old companion dog Dusty died at my bedroom doorstep. It may have been less painful losing a distant relative in my life, but the loss of my dog brought home to me the passing of my grandfather. I was 16 and had met Dom Oganpewa only two times in life. But he has been with me ever since.
I am also a Mosbi mero. Twenty years of my life have been spent in Port Moresby, although for six years my family lived in the United Kingdom where my father pursued a PhD in anthropology and sociology. Before that he was a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Naturally, I have become a scientist. I graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea with a bachelor’s degree in science. My major was in chemistry and, when I graduated, there were only two options – work in the mining sector or become a teacher. But after uni I spent a year or two bumming on the streets, where I learned some hard lessons that were to help me later on in life. Hindsight is a real shit!

My first paying job was as a laboratory assistant, a glorified dishwasher, in the National Agricultural Research Institute’s (NARI) chemistry laboratory. I eventually turned professional, i.e., graduated to assistant pig keeper, and started doing animal nutrition experiments at NARI’s Labu Station in Lae. Right now I’m pursuing postgraduate research at The University of Adelaide under an Australian fellowship. It’s a challenging chase but with rewards further down the road.

Although my father was a university lecturer, it was my mother, who had herself barely finished primary school, who taught me how to read, write and speak English. She would read to me every night and on Sundays we would read and re-read from a big Bible story book. My favourite reading books were The Hungry Little Caterpillar and Where the Wild Things Are. I must have had good taste as a kid because those books are children’s classics. When I could read for myself I loved anything by Dr Seuss and Roald Dahl. I still remember the smell of that picture book Bible, when I used to fall asleep with my head between the pages. I may be more secular now but I’m not a complete loss to Christendom. My mum still has that Bible and I see it whenever I visit her. Perhaps I’ll read it again one day, but the words on those pages are fused to my soul no matter how bad I may be sometimes.

One person who had an indirect but strong influence on my interest in writing was a former Principal of Gordon’s Secondary
School (1991-95), Mr Christopher Leete. He was an inspiration to the entire school. He called my graduating class the “creme de la crème” and was so proud of us it was fortifying. In my 1995 interview with Mr Leete for an article in the school magazine, I asked him what he saw in Papua New Guinea’s future. He said to me, pointing towards Gordon’s industrial centre and Waigani government offices, “Michael, you see those buildings over there? Well, in a few years there’ll be many more of them, and that’s just for starters”. When I asked him what he thought about the nation’s prospects he said, “You know Michael, Papua New Guinea has a bright future but you have to be willing to work and fight damn hard for it”. Back then I did not fully understand his words.

Mr Leete had taught at Iarowari High School and, before that, at Holy Name Secondary School at Dogura in Milne Bay. Early one morning when I woke up on the shore of Dogura bay, where I had spent a few cold hours trying to sleep on the shingle beach curled around a tiny fire, I recalled the funny story books he used to read to us in class. But that’s another tale.

I have journeyed quite a distance as a poet. My first ‘real’ poem was written while I was in Grade 11, but I had used some words that I had been toying around with since Grade 9. I had read a few poems, some classics, but had never really bothered to develop an interest in poetry. Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence* were two that were early favourites. Of course being a teenager changed many things and much of my own early writing favoured romantic lyric. But I published two poems in the Gordon’s Secondary school magazines and recited one for my 1996 Year 12 graduation, which for my age at the time, were mature pieces of work.

Gordon Secondary School had some exceptional teachers while I was there. And the English department was a critical component of that active staff strength. One of the key projects Mr Leete established was building and stocking a school library. Unfortunately for me I only had about a year’s access to it before leaving, but even before then I had always loved going to the
National Library to tend to my addiction. At the National Library I had read all three books in JRR Tolkien’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* from the beginning to ‘there and back again’ seven times over the course two years, and a few times more after that.

During those two years I was the first and only person to borrow them. I don’t know whether that says anything about my own obsession, Papua New Guineans reading habits or just that the author was ‘unknown’. At the time I thought it was sad that no one else around me seemed to know of this other world, but in 2001 some people in Hollywood finally agreed with me and the other Tolkien readers and made a pile of money by turning it into a movie. Apart from Tolkien I’ve read CS Lewis, Alexander Dumas, Shakespeare, Henrik Isben, Henry Lawson, Jules Verne, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C Clarke, Wilbur Smith, Stephen King, Tom Clancy, Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mad Magazine, Phantom comics, National and Canadian Geographic, Readers Digest, Women’s Weekly (when my sister had copies), Vogel’s Organic Chemistry, the Oxford Learners Dictionary and Webster’s Thesaurus. And that’s just the fun stuff. I can’t remember them all. With reading I’m a voracious omnivore!

I have the same attitude to poetry. I read whatever catches my fancy. This is mostly rewarding, although not all poetry I come across is appealing. Most poetry I’ve read has come in collections from different poets, so getting to know an individual poet has been challenging. But some poets I enjoy reading from are DH Lawrence, Rabindranath Tagor, Kenneth Slessor, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Stephen Edmund Winduo, Russell Soaba, Jeffrey Mane Febi, Jimmy Drekore, Lapieh Landu and Leonard Fong Roka.

Every literary work I read adds to me and influences and challenges my own poetic vision. In my early writing days I avoided reading other poets because I did not feel enough control over my own work to maintain the originality of it in the light of what I may have read. Nowadays, I read other poems as a source of inspiration and companionship on what can be a lonely journey. And my work has improved markedly from this reading. (The same may be said of my technical writing.)
It was my own misunderstanding of what writing poetry was about that drove me to write the series of articles entitled *A poet’s journey* after winning the 2012 Crocodile Prize for Poetry. I wanted aspiring poets in Papua New Guinea to appreciate and understand better what they were doing and how they could progressively improve their writing. Chance and inspiration will only crystallise a good work when your talent is prepared for their arrival. There is no luck involved in winning the Crocodile Prize.

I began sharing my poems through *The National* newspaper’s writer’s forum in 2006. But long before that I had had one published in a local newsletter in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, by a family acquaintance, who later told me that the poem had helped a friend who was feeling down. So I was given an early experience of how much people valued poetry. In 2007 a senior colleague from New Zealand had a published poet friend of his read one of my pieces and commented that I “had real talent and should go on writing”. These responses revived my feeling that what I was doing was valuable and worth sharing with other people. Then in 2011 the Crocodile Prize was created and the rest is a history that I am very proud to be a part of writing.

I now have a collection of poems being prepared for publication by UPNG Press, another selection of poems is in progress and I’ve interacted with a few web-based poetry organisations. But mainly my focus is on sharing my work freely for other Papua New Guineans to read on the *PNG Attitude* website. If there’s one single piece of advice I can offer to aspiring poets and writers, it’s something that my postgraduate bridging program lecturer reminded me of recently, “Writing is ninety percent reading and ten percent actually writing”. There must be more than a grain of truth in that, because my mother always used to say, “Read, son. Read. Read first and then you can play”.

Michael is now working on his third volume of poetry, due to be published late in 2016 or in 2017. His poetry has also been published in international collections - PF
Paul Oates

When I was young and lived in the outer suburbs of my Australian city, most of our requirements except meat were delivered by horse and cart. It was only in the mid-1950s that the first supermarket opened. Refrigerators were either not obtainable or too expensive. Most of my primary school days were spent at the local school my mother also attended which, during World War II, doubled as a casualty dressing station.

My mother made her way as a Voluntary Aid Detachment person when the Japanese attacked Sydney Harbour. She met my father during the war. He was a country boy, an officer in the Army. The high school where I obtained my Leaving Certificate was the semi-modern equivalent of a 19th century English public school. We wore a 19th century military uniform and cadet service was of course obligatory. There I learned to use a .303 rifle which was handy later working with the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary.

I had no real idea what I wanted to do when I left school and, as many my age did, joined a bank as a lowly paid junior. Each year the work seemed to get more boring and mind numbing. During my first year, 1966, decimal currency was introduced and that proved very confusing to some senior people who found it almost impossible to adapt from the old pounds, shillings and pence. I joined the local Citizen Military Unit, a voluntary force affiliated with the Black Watch Scottish infantry regiment. I also spent many a weekend hiking and hunting. One day the bank showed a free film about the first Mt Hagen Show. I was totally hooked on the idea that I might be of some use working in a challenging job which had a purpose.

It took over a year before the Department of External Territories conducted a recruitment campaign for Assistant Patrol Officers and I was lucky enough to be selected. To those who maintain that the department only recruited society’s misfits, I’d
suggest it’s quite possible as most of those recruited as Assistant Patrol Officers seemed to ‘march to a different drum’. My training at the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) at Mosman in Sydney started with a presentation by ex-District Commissioner Fred Kaad. He had been injured in a plane crash in PNG. Glaring at us ‘newbies’ from his wheelchair with bright blue eyes, a brick red face and flaring sideburns, he told us in no uncertain terms what to expect. There would be no frills he inferred, just hard work.

During our training, we learnt Melanesian, Law, Geography and Government. We also explored the old military fort at Middle Head during lunch times. After our ASOPA training, we were flown to Port Moresby and bussed to Kwikila for our bush training. We learned police drill and training, local government and office administration plus the more interesting aspects of public works including making culverts and learning about explosives. It was then off to our districts and field postings. I had been selected to go to the West Sepik but wanted to be where the cattle industry was located. I swapped with another bloke who was dead keen on surfing and knew there was some good surf on the Sepik coast. He was sent inland to Telefolmin and I ended up in the middle of the Huon Peninsular where very few cows ever trod the limestone karst terrain.

Most of my first two years as an Assistant Patrol Officer was spent on patrol or stationed at a base camp that I had to build out of bush materials. During that time, I had to become totally familiar with Melanesian, understand law and order issues, supervise the building of an airstrip and connecting roads and cope with whatever I could at my junior level of the everyday myriad duties most Kiaps dealt with. In this I was assisted by one policeman rostered on a rotational basis from the Patrol Post five hours walk away or a ten minute flight if I got lucky. A kiap’s duties were so different from what most people in Australia would experience, it’s no wonder the vast majority of Australians failed in any way to comprehend just how Papua New Guinea was being prepared for nationhood.
Returning from my first leave after two years and being promoted to Patrol Officer, I conducted a courtship over the radio telephone with a young lady I met during my time in Australia. We married when I next went on leave and returned to Papua New Guinea for my third two-year stint. My time in Papua New Guinea was enormously rewarding. I enjoyed the challenges it brought and the discussions with the local people about what development was possible. After agreement was reached, you could then just stand up and start without the cloying and annoying necessities of metropolitan bureaucracy. I attended my Magistrates Training in Moresby in 1972 and was gazetted a magistrate of the Local Court in 1973. My postings in the Morobe District, as it then was, were Pindiu, Mindik, Kabwum, Aseki, Wau, Sialum and Finschhafen.

After six years on field outstations, I applied for a training officer’s job in Moresby, given we now had a small baby and might need the resources a big city could offer. Whether this was a good move in hindsight is debatable as soon after we moved into our accommodation it was broken into and almost everything we had was stolen. I decided we would have to move back to Australia and left Papua New Guinea with mixed feelings.

After attempts at working in television and the commercial industry I found, for some reason, the skills acquired in Papua New Guinea were of little use. Furthermore, I had no idea at the time that I was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after a friend was involved with an air crash and I had to go to the crash site. Eventually, I rejoined the Commonwealth public service and moved around a number of departments. I finally ended up in Brisbane after a two year stint on Cocos (Keeling) Islands where I found my Papua New Guinea experience very useful.

After leaving the Commonwealth and joining the Queensland Department of Emergency Services, I am now semi-retired and look after a small cattle stud. Every two years, many of the former Papua New Guinea kiaps gather to say hello to each other. While some have done very well it is noticeable that our service in Papua New Guinea is a common bond that will never be broken.
We were changed by the experience and many found it very hard to return and settle down in the society we came from. We will never forget our time in Papua New Guinea or the Papua New Guinean people.

Peter Kranz

I was born in Brisbane in 1953, at the Women's Hospital. Don't worry - I was a boy. The next year, after a brief time at Strathfield, my Dad was asked to work in England, and off we went (I was too young to remember). So I grew up in Blighty, settling first in Greenford, then Finchley. My first memories are of watching the milkman arrive with his horse-drawn cart and Dad rushing outside with a shovel to collect the dung for the garden. I always remember the garden, smelling of roses and geraniums and hearing the blackbirds singing. Dad paid me one penny for each snail I could collect (we waged wars against snails).

My uncle bought me ice-creams each Sunday from the van and Grandma came to live with us. She was from Scotland via Western Australia and MV Rangitoto. I remember seeing bomb craters, watching Tony Hancock and exploring the old theatre where Dad worked in Regent Street. I got a Triang train set for Christmas one year and looked out of my bedroom window as the snow fell. There was also much fog, and we crawled home all the way to Finchley from Central London one night with my uncle walking in front of the car waving a lamp; you couldn't see ten yards in front of you. At age five I was sent to the local primary school and on the first day ran all the way home five minutes after Mum left me as I was scared out of my wits. But I got used to it.

Then it was back to Australia in 1961. This was exciting as we were on a great ship leaving Tilbury on the grand eastern journey via Gibraltar, the Suez, India, Singapore, Perth, then Sydney. Probably one of the last of the old Empire Orient voyages. As we crossed the line, there was a ceremony with King Neptune
ducking us. I was dressed as an Arab Sheik with a huge cardboard bottle of milk around my neck. The caption was *Drinka a Pinta Milk a Day*. I was the Milk Sheikh and won second prize.

Then it was off to Brisbane. Dad bought a Falcon from a dealer on Parramatta road and, as it was summer, we sweated like pigs in a sauna driving up the Pacific Highway, the journey broken by several ferry crossings across the northern rivers. After two years in Brissie (where my main memories were of Milton State School, a girlfriend who let me see her naked and the weekly dunny man, as we had an outside dry toilet), it was off to Perth. Dad decided to save money by driving us. In January. Across the Nullarbor with 300 miles of unsealed road and no aircon. I survived, just, but suffered heat exhaustion as we pulled into the John Eyre Motel. They gave me a can of chilled pineapple juice to help me recover, which is the best drink I have ever had - bugger your chardonnays!

Two years in Perth (beautiful place). We lived near the airport and I remember watching the first 727 jets practising take-offs and landings over our heads. Then back to NSW (another trip across the Nullarbor) where we settled into the Central Coast for four years and where I started high school, explored the bush, swam in the creek and discovered girls. What amazing creatures! One winter it snowed in the Watagans (1966 I think) and we drove up there to play and throw snowballs, which reminded me of England. I built a small sailing boat with the help of the best teacher I ever had (woodwork class), sailed and fished on Lake Macquarie, and was as happy as Larry.

I was friends with the boy next door who had been given a Papua New Guinean bow and arrow as a present from a missionary. We explored the local bush pretending to be Robin Hood and once managed to shoot a twelve-foot black snake, but ran away as we were too scared to finish it off. Then Dad got moved back to England, so off we went again, leaving my first loves and dear memories behind. I had two girlfriends - one from Tonga, the other from Australia - and was heartbroken to leave them.

I was in Year 10 and we had a first taste of the South Pacific as
we sailed westwards via Rarotonga, Tahiti, Acapulco, Panama and the Azores. I had the run of the ship and had a great time; but we arrived in England in January - miserable, cold, wet and lonely. I was sent to a boys’ grammar school where a master with a 52-inch waist used to enjoy teasing me because of my accent, "Maybe our Antipodean friend can tell us what this hill is at Sydney cricket ground!" I quickly lost my accent and lost myself in building another sailing boat - I had brought the plans from Australia. But launching it in the depths of winter in a Devon estuary was not quite the same as summer at Lake Macquarie.

Then it was university, a first marriage, saying goodbye to Mum and Dad who returned to Australia and having three boys. I got a job teaching for four years, but got fed up with the cold winters and decided to return to Oz with my fledging family. We moved to Albury, probably the most beautiful place I have ever lived, and spent four years exploring the Snowies in our spare time, camping on the banks of the Mitta Mitta, trout fishing, trying skiing with the kids and sailing on the Hume. But then dad-in-law got sick so we reluctantly returned to England.

I worked in west London, Surrey and Kingston, got involved in information technology, but mum got cancer so I came back to Australia. My first wife decided this was the right time to divorce me. I got the letter two weeks before Mum died. There's got to be something better than this I thought, so I decided to stay in Oz. I worked in Sydney, then the Central Coast and applied for a job at the University of Papua New Guinea. To my surprise, after a telephone interview they offered it to me. That was where I met Rose. We were married in Simbu beras in the botanical gardens and I learned to love Papua New Guinea despite all its problems.

I was privileged to be able to travel around the country, and this became something of an inspiration for what feeble efforts I have managed to write since then. We spent a great time with the relos in Kundiawa - as I said to Rose, this is Switzerland in the tropics. But I think my favourite place was Madang. Utterly gorgeous. Tropical paradise, a languorous lagoon, distant volcanoes, coral reefs and beautiful people. Then after the end of
my contract, it was off to Darwin for two years (crocodiles, steamy heat and cyclones), then I decided to take early retirement and moved back to New South Wales to be with as Dad, as he was very old and frail. There's a lot more of course, there always is.

Phil Fitzpatrick

My father came from Waterford in the southeast of Ireland. He was a bootmaker and cobbler in the family tradition. My mother was a country girl from Suffolk in England. They met and married in England at the end of World War II. I was born in Oxford in 1948 where my father was working at the Morris Motor Factory. We then moved to Suffolk, where my maternal grandparents were farming. We migrated to Australia in 1956, partly because of my poor health and after a brief stint in a migrant hostel settled in Elizabeth, a new ‘satellite’ town just north of Adelaide in South Australia. Elizabeth was full of ‘ten-pound poms’ who were encouraged to live there to provide workers for the new factories like General Motors Holden.

I grew up in Elizabeth. It was a reasonably pleasant place in those days with a strong community spirit. My best mate and I spent our time wandering in the nearby Mount Lofty Range collecting snakes and lizards, which we kept at the bottom of the garden. We had a great collection of sleepy lizards, bearded dragons, brown snakes and red-bellied black snakes. Today Elizabeth is pock-marked with ghettos of low income and unemployed families and is unofficially classified as ‘Indian Territory’ which you enter at your own risk - so much for the idealistic dreams of town planners in the 1950s.

I went to the Elizabeth Boys Technical High School, not so much because I was dumb but because I thought it had better art classes, a subject in which I was then interested. They had a small matriculation class and I attended that in 1965, winning the
school prize for literature, which wasn’t too hard at all. I also learnt technical drawing, woodwork and metalwork, all of which served me well in later life. Sometimes I think it would be a good idea to bring back the old technical schools.

My first job was with the National Bank, which I joined in 1966, the year Australia changed to decimal currency. I wasn’t very good at banking and instead of being promoted at the end of the year from junior clerk to ledger clerk I was put on the relieving staff. That enabled me to see a lot of rural South Australia but after a few months I was pretty sick of it. I did come away with a good collection of pre-decimal coins however.

My best mate and I were outdoors types and we both applied to come to Papua New Guinea as Cadet Patrol Officers in 1967. We arrived in late November after three months at the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) in Sydney. After a month out at Kwikila doing practical training we were both posted to the Western Highlands, just in time for Christmas. After two years in Mount Hagen, Tambul and Mul Local Government Council I transferred to the Western District, serving at Kiunga, Olsobip, Nomad River and Balimo and managing to get involved in arresting cannibals and exploring new country along the way.

I began a degree through the External Studies Department of the University of Queensland in 1972 doing a double major in English. It took me nine years to complete the degree studying part time. Working and bringing up kids makes study hard. I more or less took subjects that interested me so I ended up with a very ordinary and patchy degree. I later did a post-graduate major in Government. I left the Department of District Administration in late 1972 to work for Sinaka Goava’s Commission of Enquiry into Land Matters. I returned to Australia the following year after my six-year contract had expired.

In Australia I got a job as an Aboriginal Site Recorder with the South Australian Museum (they were short of anthropologists in those days). I went to work in the North West Aboriginal Reserve, which is now the Pitjantjatjara Lands, with people who were still living a largely traditional lifestyle. All the old traditional men that
I knew then are now dead but when I meet their children and grandchildren they call me *wati tjilpi*, which means something like ‘knowledgeable elder’ because I know where many of their dreaming places are and can tell them the stories. My totem is *waiuta*, the possum.

I eventually worked my way up to be the Manager of the South Australian Aboriginal Heritage Branch before getting heartily sick of the politics and repeatedly failing to save important places from rapacious developers. I set myself up as a private consultant in 1994, mainly doing research and surveys for Native Title claims or for mining companies wishing to avoid damaging sites.

In 1997 I returned to Papua New Guinea to work intermittently for Oilmin Field Services where my best mate and now brother-in-law was employed. I would also do social mapping in Papua New Guinea through a company called Firewall Logistics set up by an old kiap friend. I mixed that with Aboriginal heritage work in Australia. A couple of years ago my son and I ran a large site recording survey on Fraser Island (K’Gari) working with young indigenous Butchulla rangers.

I married in 1976 and my wife Sue and I ended up on a small farm in the Adelaide Hills near the Barossa Valley, where our two children, Luke and Jessica, were born. My son went to Duntroon and spent ten years in the Australian army, serving in Europe, East Timor and Iraq. He left the army a few years ago and have worked together on various projects, including some in Papua New Guinea. My daughter manages a hotel in Tumby Bay in South Australia. Jessica has got a daughter and Luke has got two sons. My wife and I moved to Hervey Bay in Queensland a few years ago and we now live in a small wooden Queenslander built in 1948 which is a few hundred metres from the beach and coffee shops and restaurants, all of which we visit a lot.

I published my first story in *Pacific Islands Monthly* in 1970 and I’ve been writing ever since. I published my first book in 2005 and am now working on numbers five and six. I’ve never managed to make anything more than pocket money out of writing. Either I’m not good enough or I write the wrong stuff. I find occasionally
writing for *PNG Attitude* very satisfying. Getting involved in the Crocodile Prize in 2011 and mentoring Papua New Guinean writers has been a real honour. It gives me a feeling of giving something back to a country that had such a huge influence on my life.

**Rashmii Bell**

I was born in late March 1981 at ANGAU Memorial General Hospital in Lae, Morobe Province. Twenty-nine years later I returned as a *bel mama* (pregnant woman) to give birth to my second child; a beautiful, healthy girl with a crop of loosely curled hair, mixed African-Melanesian and as black as night. The photographs I’ve seen of how ANGAU hospital was way back then and my own memories of my younger years clash with how it was for the birth of my child in 2010. It’s an inconsistency that tells of an institution that continues to do what it can despite the abhorrent neglect of the government. But, as it will be with my daughter, I have a feeling of lifetime connection, deepest affection and hopes for a more promising future for this hospital and for the people of Papua New Guinea, who deserve so much better.

Call it privilege, call it luck, but it is a blessed life I have lived so far. I believe in God the Father Almighty and His son Jesus Christ who is my Lord and Saviour. I was baptised into God’s family, instructed in the Word of God and Martin Luther’s catechisms to receive my first Holy Communion. Later I had my marriage witnessed and blessed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea and Australia. In my times of difficulty and despair, I have thanked God for his unfailing presence. And for all my prayers received and achievements enabled, to Him be all praise and glory.

I am from *liklik ples* (hamlet) Matangala in Sio village of the Tewaii-Siassi Local Level Government District which is tucked neatly into a bay along Morobe’s coastline between Finschhafen.
and Madang. In my childhood, all visits were made via Lae wharf in an overnight trip on MV Totol or MV Simbang. Since then no cruise ship, whether offering discotheque-bowling alleys on or all-you can eat lobster and champagne buffets, can be sold to me. All I experience in my dreams are rows of orange-canvas foam mattress bunks and the putrid nausea brought on by the incessant rocking and swaying of maritime journey that seemed would never come to end.

In later years, as Sio’s jetty eroded, we took larger ships and disembarked into family-owned banana boats to make the short journey across to Matangala. I treasure the fading memories I have of the sensation and taste of saltwater spray on my face and the beautiful, wide smiles of relatives receiving us on the shoreline, a few metres from our village home where our family’s story began and where my maternal bubu man (grandfather) was laid to rest soon after being murdered on a New Year’s Day in the early 1980s.

I dreaded the early morning wash from the well’s icy-cold water. I recall the overwhelming tiredness after arriving home from the day-long harvesting of saksak (sago), me as an observer. And spending time frolicking in the turquoise lagoons and playing along the white, sandy beaches. And being cursed for unnecessary use of the hand actuated water pump; such a novelty for a child of the town. I last spent time in the village in 2000 and, am deeply regretful about missing my bubu meri’s (grandmother’s) funeral in 2006.

But I remember the long walks between neighbouring villages underneath the towering coconut palms. I miss the taste of freshly caught rainbow-coloured fish smoked atop an open fire. And I recall the nights sitting on the rickety verandah looking up at the clarity of stars on the vast blanket of sky. I miss the playful teasing of my elders when reprimanding me for not speaking tok ples (vernacular language) when living ‘in town’. In hindsight, I wish I’d paid more heed to their insistence that I demand my parents speak to me in tok ples and educate me about village custom and practices. These matters, today, I have such limited
knowledge and understanding of.

It is impossible for me give an overview of my life without acknowledging an outstanding gentleman and exemplary humanitarian to whom I am no relation, but extremely privileged to have known and spent time with in my childhood, the late Sir Brian Bell. I think of myself as a legacy of his kindness, compassion and immeasurable love for Papua New Guinea; people and country. Sir Brian was a shining example of what Papua New Guinea can be if it puts foremost the best interests of the people. From him a most important life lesson learnt is that of the undeniable beauty one possesses when genuine humility and generosity is maintained despite increased wealth, power and influence.

Both my parents are university-educated and have fulfilled solid careers; one in mathematics, the other in agricultural science. From that, I am fastidious in cross-checking reports for statistics and I have twice-too-many failed attempts at cultivating orchids. I have also been instilled with the importance of good manners, strict discipline and whole-hearted perseverance to be excellent with whatever I set my mind to do. For the past seven years, that has been motherhood. But what I consider of most significance, particularly in how it’s influenced my views on life, is that I inherited the opportunity to live in two worlds. The have and have-nots of life in Papua New Guinea and living in Australia as a Papua New Guinean.

My maternal grandfather was a postmaster during the time of Australia’s colonial administration and was allocated a small house in the government administration compound in the heart of Lae. It has maintained its original shell but has endured multiple DIY renovations at the hands of overly-confident uncles and cousin brothers but that family place still stands today. It is home. From early childhood until the time I married, I lived at varying intervals and roamed freely within the compound or ‘ADCO’ as some call it. I observed daily at the compound that Papua New Guineans, however marginalised, have innate powers of resilience, initiative and self-determination to endure and
overcome the inequalities imposed on them.

But I must add that I loathe the boisterous provincialism often displayed by Papua New Guineans to pump up the achievements of a particular region over another. We are one people subjected to the same injustices by a powerful minority. If we are to ever achieve national progress as equals, we must be willing to share our individual blueprints of the journey, the accomplishments, successes and methods of improvement.

Sir Brian Bell acknowledged my mother for her intellectual and commercial brilliance and provided our family with the opportunity to access international schools (Ela Beach International School and Lae International Primary School), enjoy an exceptional standard of living and have regular interaction and exposure to lifestyles beyond PNG’s borders.

I received my upper primary, secondary (in both public and private schools) and tertiary education in Australia. I have no hesitation in attributing my socio-economic, political and environmental interests as a direct consequence of the breadth of topics cultivated, promoted, debated and critiqued in the Australian education curriculum and the broader society of a developed land. My only regret is that little mention was ever made of Papua New Guinea beyond the Kokoda Track and the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Instead, I was expected to retain and regurgitate the histories of the Cold War and the Vietnam War and undertake eight-minute oral citations in Bahasa Indonesia, my selected compulsory Asian language in high school. Yet nothing about my homeland - Australia’s nearest neighbour with whom it has a significant history and continued association to the present day.

I contemplated a town planning career after a semester of senior year Geography. I pondered also the life of a music teacher – for I had learnt and enjoyed playing the flute and reading music scores through childhood and young adulthood. But my passion to work with and help marginalised people prevailed. My tertiary qualifications and professional background is in psychology and criminology, having worked in adult community corrections,
youth justice and secure-care prison settings, predominantly with men and boys.

I strongly believe that through well-funded evidence-based case management that utilises a holistic approach, individuals who have engaged in criminal or other anti-social behaviour can be rehabilitated and go on to lead a productive and pro-social life. This is still a large gap which the Papua New Guinean government needs to efficiently and effectively address.

When I feel I have accomplished enough in my full-time role as a stay-at-home mother, I plan to return to the paid work force and pursue post graduate studies. I have a deep interest in research and design in the area of psycho-social case management; developing an assessment tool and therapeutic programs specific to identifying and addressing the significant risk factors experienced by Papua New Guineans. In the meantime, I’m determined to continue writing about issues that I believe are of significance and must continue to receive attention in the public conversation between Papua New Guinea and Australia: mental health, elimination of violence, youth advocacy, gender equality, increased participation of women in politics, feminism and a strong literary culture.

I strongly believe that through written expression, the women of Papua New Guinea can have their voices heard where other avenues in our society have not been facilitated. My writing is a long-harboured desire borne out of relatively awkward and quite isolating teenage years that became even more definitive through university and my early working life. Reading just about everything (but favouring the classics and memoirs) has long been the solace I’ve sought to cope with exclusion and bullying - the ugly behaviours practised by too many people. To this day, I much prefer my own company to socialising with others.

So at this point, it is important I pay tribute to three individuals whom only twelve months ago not only encouraged me but, set my writing journey in motion: the renowned PNG-based international artist Nathalie Le Riche, the editor of Lily PNG Magazine Margo Nugent and Keith Jackson. In early 2015, I sent
two handfuls of emails to women, both Papua New Guinean and non-Papua New Guinean. None of the Papua New Guinean women acknowledged or responded to my emails. Ever. However Ms Le Riche and Mrs Nugent swiftly acknowledged and responded to my enquiries about writing magazine articles. If you ever hear either of these two women expressing support for Papua New Guinean women in their endeavours, believe them. Their words and actions are solid.

Of course, the opportunity to share my story with PNG Attitude readers would not be possible had Keith Jackson not acknowledged my initial correspondence with him. The writing from me you’ve seen evolve on PNG Attitude is quite different to the initial sample I sent Keith. Along with words of encouragement, Keith’s advice to me was “the secret of really good writing is to do a lot of it and to spend a lot of time in revising and refining it until you get it as perfect as you can”.

Along with Keith’s editorial guidance and feedback and commentary from the PNG Attitude family, the past year has propelled the breadth and depth of my reading and writing skills. I can only improve. A while ago I read somewhere that it is often those who are best at their craft who are generous with their time for others. This is most certainly true of the aforementioned trio to whom I will forever remain grateful in inspiring this Papua New Guinean women to have her voice read.

Raymond Sigimet

My full name is Raymond Muso Sigimet. I am now in my mid-thirties and I grew up away from my province and village. Half of my life was spent in the New Guinea Islands. I am the third born in my family of nine siblings. Five blood sisters, two blood brothers and one adopted brother. We were a crowded lot and very close when growing up. We fought, argued, got punished, rebelled, forgave, and did all that stuff that families and siblings do. And we still do
some of these things today.

My father spent some twenty years of his life as a career officer in the Papua New Guinea Correctional Service. During those years, the family moved around with him to different parts of the country where he was transferred to. His transfers around the country resulted in me and my siblings being born in different parts of the country.

My father, came to know my mother while he was stationed at Buimo Corrective Institution near Lae in 1975 and they got married in the customary way but without the bride price obligation. My mother was working as the travel clerk with the Department of Agriculture, Stock & Fisheries at Top Town, Lae. It was her first job after completing Grade 10 at Busu High School in 1974.

My father, Joseph Sigimet, is from Umanep village while my mother, Regina Yalamen, is originally from Riwo village. Both villages are part of the big village of Woginara #1 in the hinterland of Dagua, East Sepik Province.

I was born in mid-January 1981 in the once famous gold mining town of Wau, Morobe Province. My maternal grandfather came to Wau from Madang in 1949 and worked with New Guinea Gold at Nami, panning gold along Edie Creek. My maternal grandfather, Alexius Morosime Yalamen, was one of the first Sepiks to settle and work in the goldfields of Wau with the early colonial gold prospectors after the World War II.

During the war, he and the local people assisted Australian soldiers evade capture by the Imperial Japanese Army in the Woginara Mountains of East Sepik, showing them safe passage to the coast. After the war, he left for Madang where he worked as a barber for the expatriate community.

He heard of Wau from the expatriates’ conversations and decided to travel there in 1949 making contact with the white men he had come to know in Madang. In 1950, he went back home and returned with my maternal grandmother, Emma Utomen Niwas. Between them, they had 12 children including one adopted. My mother and her siblings were all born and raised in
Wau.

My first name was given to me by my mother’s younger sister. My maternal grandmother wanted me to be named after my paternal grandfather. My aunt disagreed, arguing that she had the naming rights because she assisted my mother when my mother was heavy with me. She gave me the name Raymond because it started with the letter “R”, the first letter of my mother’s name.

When I was born, my aunt came with baby stuff and my first baby clothes were bought at Kivung Trading where she worked. Kivung Trading was operated by Chris and Donna Harvey-Hall. The late Chris Harvey-Hall was a good friend of my maternal grandfather. When he came to Wau from Australia in the early 1970s as a young man, my grandfather took him in as a son and gave him food from his garden, taught him how to pan for gold and also taught him how to speak Pidgin.

In 1983, when my father was serving at Laiagam Corrective Institute, Enga Province, my mother affectionately gave me the baby name “Awi” which stuck with me until I left home for boarding school. Awi translates as “uncle” in the Engan language I was told by my mother that, during shopping trips or outings, whenever I saw Engan tribesmen in their traditional bilas [decorative dress] I would cry my eyes out for my mother to dress me up like an Engan warrior. To quieten me, she would improvise by placing tanget leaves to cover my front and back. I would then proudly strut around the house with my very own arse tanget.

My earliest memories as a child growing up was of my maternal grandparents’ Banis Donkey camp in Wau. Banis Donkey was a piece of land given to my grandfather in 1974 by New Guinea Gold after he retired from the company. He settled there, building a house and panning for gold. It was where I played hide and seek, explored the kunai beside the camp, slid down slopes, and collected the corn bead plant (Job’s tears) to make necklaces.

We would visit my grandfather’s garden, negotiating a path down the steep cliff face crossing Kunai creek to go to Wau town and observe my grandfather’s ol wok boi [workmen] and their families playing cards under the bamboo patch at the camp. They
were originally from Chuave in the Chimbu Province.

In 1998, I started community school. All my primary and secondary education was completed in East New Britain. At Keravat Community School, my teacher was Ms Rachel Lote from East New Britain. She taught me from Grade 2 until term one of Grade 6 when I left to complete the year in West New Britain where my father had transferred, resigned and settled with the family. Some of my classmates had parents who were public servants working at LAES research station, Keravat Corrective Institution, Keravat National High School, PNG Forest Service, Keravat Police station, Vudal Agricultural College, and Public Works. It was a fertile environment for learning because of our different social and cultural backgrounds.

After community school, I returned to East New Britain for high school at Vunabosco Agro Technical High School, a Catholic boarding school for boys near Kokopo. In 1994, I witnessed the twin volcanic eruption that destroyed Rabaul. A significant national event that happened during my final year in high school was the Sandline Affair which made everyone perceive the Bougainville conflict in a different way.

In 1998, I found myself at Keravat National High School, a completely new experience for me. From a sheltered, disciplined Catholic boarding school I stepped into the freedom and excess of national high school life. I had to grow up quickly during my two years at Keravat. I tended to pay more attention to and get good grades in Geography, Language & Literature and Visual Arts.

When the time came to fill my school leaver form, my Geography teacher took me aside and informed me she wanted me to put my first choice as Geography at the University of PNG. She assured me that if I did, she would make sure I gained entry into UPNG. Because of personal reasons I had been grappling with for some time, I declined her offer and opted for technical college.

In early 2000, when the Y2K computer bug hysteria was on people’s lips, I boarded a plane out of Hoskins for Madang and spent a year doing a course in painting and sign writing at Madang Technical College. Before graduation, one of my teachers
informed me the college planned to retain students from some of the trade departments. The school would provide on-the-job training as an apprenticeship for the next four years. My teacher wanted to recommend me. Again, for personal reasons, I declined the offer. After graduating at the end of the year with a Certificate in Painting and Signwriting, I returned to Kimbe and looked for a job. Unfortunately I was unsuccessful as many of the companies had sign writers.

I decided to spend the time helping out my parents at the family’s oil palm block. Formal employment was not easy to attain. It was all about who you knew. It was then and it still is now. I found some work in a hardware store for a few months doing signwriting. I also worked for a local woman who operated a small arts and crafts shop painting traditional designs on her shop walls.

In 2005, I was selected as a non-school leaver for the four years education program at the University of Goroka after being persuaded by my brother-in-law to apply. When I graduated with a teaching qualification in 2008, I was offered a position in East Sepik and spent the next seven years teaching in the Maprik District.

I finally saw the need for a helpmate and God brought into my line of vision my lovely wife and partner; blessing me with two beautiful headstrong daughters. They make life complicated and fulfilling for me.

In 2015, I decided to put on hold my teaching duties to pursue post-graduate studies at my alma mater, the University of Goroka. I believe that our life is a reflection of the influence of the people we meet and the decisions and choices we make as we face the challenges life throws at us.

I am grateful to many people who have contributed to my life and to where I am now. My elder sister and brother-in-law, my immediate and extended families, my teachers and mentors in all the schools I’ve been to and finally, the Good Lord for His blessings and stewardship.
Robin Lillicrapp

I was the first-born of dairy farming parents and my childhood years were spent in northern Victoria in a generation recovering from the rigours of World War II. From an early age, we children were engaged with many workaday tasks. Our district was populated with returned soldiers and their families eking out a living from former wheat and sheep lands adjacent to the Murray River. This source of irrigation water eventually transformed the area into a virtual food-bowl.

Books were an outlet for me in those pre-television times. I loved reading and entered readily into the world presented by each author. I think I was a precocious child. As I entered my teens, my elders were conspiring with relatives and the area Bishop to send me away. It was a successful venture and, at an appointed time, I was consigned to boarding school in the mountains of central Victoria. There, with over one hundred other boys, a discipline of study, work and bushwalking was maintained. It must have been good for me for a few years later the headmaster asked if I would work there, which, for a time, I did and greatly enjoyed the experience. I recall a comment on an end of term report in my last year of high school. It was penned by an obviously insightful fellow for he wrote: “…will never be led by any man.” Oh dear!

So how did I get to Papua New Guinea? It was like this: While I was a trainee manager at a department store in Toowoomba, Queensland, I attended an evening launch of the new model Vauxhall Viva. My Apex Club mate worked at the dealership and invited me to the event, which was well attended, and I found myself helping visitors to explore the new vehicles. A day later I received a phone call from the sales manager and had lunch with him. He had observed me assisting at the launch and offered me a position with his sales team. Out of loyalty to my employers, I refused.
A year later, my aspiring employer had relocated to be sales manager at Boroko Motors in Port Moresby. By now I was ready to make a move and my enquiry to him elicited a quick response accompanied by a letter of offer. Within weeks, I was treading the steamy streets of Mosbi. Initially, my duties included unloading and receiving new vehicles from the ships, and liaison between management and customers regarding registration and delivery of their shiny new treasures. I forged a good working relationship with a formidable expat lady in charge of the Motor Vehicle Registration Department. The price I paid for swift and expedient processing of paperwork was to give her a spin around the streets of the city in the latest Mercedes. Both our illusions of grandeur were satisfied at the prospect of being seen tooling about the town in a bikman’s toy.

Occasionally I used to drive the bus for the Cheshire Home for handicapped people. There was a dear old sister in charge in her seventies and she had never had her own personal transport. The Apex club bought her a new Datsun 1000 sedan but she didn’t have a license and had never driven. With great trepidation, and a flurry of near-misses designed to end my tenure in this exotic land, the goal was achieved and my first driving instruction launched an elderly soul on a thousand journeys. Hmm, maybe that’s why Mosbi traffic became so chaotic.

My boss relocated to head the Lae Branch Manager’s position and asked me to accompany him. There I began to work as a field rep. This gave me the opportunity to travel widely by air, land, and sea. I met some marvellous people and have renewed contacts with some over the past couple of years. In the Simbu on the last day of March 1971, a gentleman at breakfast in the Kundiawa Motel presented me with a solution to a dilemma I had been wrestling with. This resulted in a handshake, a bowing of the heart and the head and a concession to serve the Creator and Saviour, Jesus Christ. My thoughts were now attuned to new horizons. My precocity, so to speak, yearned to understand more of what lay before me in life. On a trip to England and the USA, I was moved to enrol in a Bible School training program.
On return to Papua New Guinea, my last major project was to visit regional authorities and present the wisdom of utilising the range of Ford tractors adapted to industrial and construction use as a cheaper solution to the more expensive alternatives favoured by developed economies. I later learned that significant orders for this equipment were made. Oh well, I had at least the satisfaction, if not the commission, of making those sales.

I returned to Australia in mid-1971 and commenced religious studies in Chattanooga Tennessee in 1972. I later met my lovely wife to be, Charmaine, from Dallas Texas, who was also studying. Besides, she had this marvellous 1969 Pontiac Catalina. It was a no-brainer. We flew back into Melbourne in 1977 on the day Elvis died. My brother’s first words to my wife at the airport were to ask if she had heard the King had died. “Does Australia have a king?” she quizzed me. Back in 1977 news didn’t travel as fast as it does today, especially while you were in flight.

As the years rolled on, we engaged in various pastoral roles in Melbourne, Sydney and rural Victorian locations. Choosing to work for the maintenance of family has seen me in pursuits in industry, transport, mining and construction. I am currently a contractor to Telstra working on their mainframes in selected telephone exchanges in Melbourne. Charmaine and I have raised seven children, and currently enjoy fourteen grandchildren.

It has been a privilege to have engaged with PNG Attitude in these past couple of years. I enjoy the unfolding history of events in Papua New Guinea. And it has been gratifying to see the enthusiasm of Papua New Guinean writers participating in the Crocodile Prize competition.

**Rose Kranz**

I was born in Goglme in the Simbu, my birth father being Otto Kuman Omba. He died when I was a baby and my mum married another man, Peter Daka. I owe my life to this man. I had a difficult childhood in Simbu. And I
remember the days of Australian kiaps and the excitement of seeing the small planes land on our little airstrip. As a baby, I was very sick and had scabies, a skin disease. Neighbours told my stepfather that he should leave me under the trees to die. But Peter Daka said, "No - I will look after her. God has given her to me". And so he did.

Working as a carpenter (he built several churches in Simbu), he would carry me with him to work in his carpenter’s bag with the hammers and chisels. He fed me on coconut milk and tinpis wara. So I survived and was sent to relatives in Banz where I attended the Catholic Primary School. Then my step-dad, Peter Daka, got sick and there was no one to care for him, so I left school and went to Kundiawa to look after him. I brought him food in the hospital and he would rub my head and tell me stories. The Catholics were good to us during that difficult time, and I particularly remember an African priest, Fr Sakito.

My step-dad died and I was sent to live with cousins Foreman and Mana Kuman in Kundiawa. I went to a school in Kundiawa. One of my teachers - Mr Singaden - had daughters there who now have good careers. I was despatched to Port Moresby to be a child minder for a Big Man, a traditional leader. I became ill and some of the neighbours started rumours. "She's got AIDS!" they would say. “Burn her!"

But a good family, the Bemus, took me in to their house at Bomana and looked after me. I found jobs at hotels and later the Gerehu Country Club, which provided the worst moment of my life when I was raped by a relative. I have got over that and am now married to a strange white man called Peter Kranz. We were married in Simbu bilas, so he can't be all bad. He tells me stories and listens to music. I have been through cancer and am recovering. Peter still tells me stories.
Appendix 2 - Winners of the Crocodile Prize, 2011-2015

2015
Book of the Year - Baka Barakove Bina for *Man of Calibre*
Short Story - Hazel Kutkue for *When Life Gets Tough in January*
Poetry - Philip Kaupa Gena for *We Are Poets*
Essay & Journalism - Busa Jeremiah Wenogo for *The Shadows in My Eyes*
Heritage Writing - Konetero (Ronnie) Dotaona for *Suau: The Sons of Seafarers*
Young Writers - Hazel Kutkue for *Papa*
Tourism, Arts & Culture - Daniel Ipan Kumbon for *From the German Doctor’s Idea a Great Project is Born*
Writing for Children - Joycelin Kauc Leahy for *The Song of the Turtle*
Illustration - Emmanuel David Landu for *Coffee Tree*

2014
Book of the Year –Leonard Fong Roka
Short Story – Agnes Maineke
Poetry – Diddie Kinamun Jackson
Essay & Journalism – Kela Kapkora Sil Bolkin
Heritage – Arnold Mundua
Children – Iriani Wanma
Lifetime Contribution – Sir Paulias Matane

2013
Short Story – Leonard Fong Roka
Poetry – Lapieh Landu
Essay & Journalism – Francis Sina Nii
2012
Short Story – Charlotte Vada
Poetry – Michael Dom
Essay & Journalism – Emma Wakpi
Heritage – Lorraine Basse
Women’s – Imelda Yabara
Student – Angeline Low
Lifetime Contribution – Russell Soaba

2011
Short Story – Jeffrey Mane Febi
Poetry – Jimmy Drekore
Essay – Martyn Awayang Namorong
Women’s – Lapieh Landu

The 2011 Winners – Martyn Namorong, Lapieh Landu, Jimmy Drekore and Jeffrey Febi
Appendix 3 – Pukpuk Publications Titles

A Bush Poet's Poetical Blossom – Jimmy Drekore
A Contemporary Voice – Jimmy Awagl
A Kiap's Story – Graham Taylor
Bougainville Manifesto – Leonard Fong Roka
Brokenville – Leonard Fong Roka
Daddy Two Shoes – Diddie Kunaman Jackson
Dee's Longs & Shorts – Marlene Dee Gray Potoura
Drugs and Their Dangers in Papua New Guinea – Philip Kai Morre
Fitman, Raitman & Cooks: Paradise in Peril – Francis Nii
I Can See My Country Clearly Now – Daniel Kumbon
In Search of Heritage in the Midst of Change - Bomai Dick Witne
Inspector Metau: The Case of the Angry Councillor – Philip Fitzpatrick
Inspector Metau: The Case of the Missing Professor – Philip Fitzpatrick
Ku High School Anthology 2014 – Francis Nii
Lost in His Land – Winterford Toreas
Moments in Bougainville – Leonard Fong Roka
My Journey – Jimmy Awagl
My Struggle – Jimmy Awagl
Reading Comprehension Texts – Francis Nii
Remember Me and Other Stories From Enga Province – Daniel Kumbon
Saidor Story – Norma Griffin
Sibona – Emmanuel Peni
Simbu High & Secondary School Anthology 2015 – Francis Nii
Sivarai – Chips Mackellar
The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2011
The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2012
The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2013
The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2014
The Crocodile Prize Anthology – 2015
The Crocodile Prize Anthology - 2016
The Floating Island – Philip Fitzpatrick
The Pomong U'tau of Dreams – Leonard Fong Roka
The Resonance of My Thoughts – Francis Nii
Walk My Song – Francis Nii
When the River Destroys – Samantha Kusari